



C O L U M N I S T S

The Kibitzer
Tim HardingTwo Knights Defence Part 3:
Berliner Variation Busted?

THIS MONTH I CONCLUDE my survey of the 4 Ng5 d5 lines in the Two Knights Defence (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6) by looking at the Fritz Variation, which was featured (for example) in the famous game Estrin-Berliner. Early in the article there will be one digression, to present an important extra game in the 5...Na5 6 Bb5+ Bd7 line which concluded recently.

This mini-series has attracted even more interest than the average *Kibitzer* article, which is gratifying. I am little worried that some readers may expect to me to present important new analysis in this final part, which could overturn theory. It is doubtful that is the case, however, partly because of the inherent complexity and imbalance of the positions arising: thinking of a new move for White or Black is one thing, proving it to be correct or otherwise is quite another.

Moreover, as I stated already in parts 1 and 2, my principal objective in this series of articles is to give an overview of the Two Knights Defence of value to readers of all playing strengths. As I said in part 1 (March), it can be so hard to see the wood for the trees once you undertake detailed exploration of any particular path in the 4 Ng5 d5 lines. You should imagine instead that I am in a fire service helicopter, skimming over the forest just above treetop level, looking for any significant breaks or signs of conflagration or maybe hunting for an elusive escaped prisoner.

There is just one place in the article, near the end, where I swoop down to a clearing at ground level and maybe capture that fugitive!

If you want other detailed examples of the Two Knights to analyse, you can then download the games from my website and study them. This revised file now contains material of the variations discussed this month in addition to the games already in the file in relation to the March and April *The Kibitzer* articles. Here is the URL: <http://www.chessmail.com/freegames.html>.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5



This has been the starting point of the series. The March *Kibitzer* 59 dealt with various Black replies in this position while the April column covered the most popular move, and theoretical main line, 5...Na5.

Since I wrote that article, Robin Smith from Colorado was declared 13th United States correspondence chess champion and he sent me all his games from the final with notes. One of these turned out to be in the Two Knights

and followed my recommendation for White for a few months. With Robin's permission, I am now presenting this previously unpublished game, with just a few extracts from his notes.

Smith-Gach began **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ Bd7.**

Now Smith followed Morozevich-I.Sokolov, Sarajevo 1999, with **7 Qe2 Bd6 8 Nc3 0-0 9 Bxd7 Qxd7 10 a3** but here instead of the usual 10...b6, to give the a5-Knight a retreat square, Andrew Gach played **10...Be7** indirectly protecting the Knight, due to the threat of ...Nxd5. Previously Black has played b6, to give the Knight an escape square.



Smith indicates: "White still must be careful." If 11 b4? Nxd5 12 Nxh7 or 11 Qxe5? Bd6 12 Qd4 Rfe8+ or 11 d3?! Nxd5 matters are not clear and White probably only obtains a small advantage with 11 Nf3!? or 11 Nxh7!?. So from the diagram he played:

11 0-0 The next few moves are critical. The game continued: **11...Nxd5 11...Rfe8 12 d3 Nxd5 13 Qxe5** would give White the advantage, with a position similar to the game. **12 Qxe5**

c6 If 12...Nxc3 13 Qxc3 Bxg5 14 Qxa5. As I said last month, the loose Knight on a5 is a recurring target for White in the 5...Na5 lines. **13 d3 Rfe8**

Smith mentions these alternatives: (a) 13...Nxc3 14 Qxc3 with advantage; (b) 13...f6 14 Qe6+ Qxe6 15 Nxe6 Nxc3 16 Nxf8 Ne2+ 17 Kh1 winning, since Black cannot take the f8 Knight without losing one of his Knights too; (c) 13...Bf6 14 Qe4 Bxg5 (only move as Qxh7 was threatened) 15 Bxg5 Nxc3 16 bxc3 again with a clear advantage to White.

14 Bd2 Smith: "Again developing while threatening the Knight on a5. It looks risky for White to keep the Queen on the e-file, but one of the advantages of postal chess is that risks can be thoroughly evaluated.

Actually the Queen and Knights are all quite safe.”



14...b6 Smith gives: (a) 14...Bf6 15 Qg3 Nxc3 16 Bxc3 Bxc3 17 bxc3 with advantage; (b) 14...Bxa3 15 Qd4 and Black's pieces hang on the a-file, e.g. 15...Bxb2 16 Rxa5 Qd8 17 Qh4 Qxa5 (17...h6 18 Nxd5 hxg5 19 Qb4 and wins) 18 Qxh7+ Kf8 19 Qh5 winning.

15 Qg3 Nb7 Smith comments: “White has avoided all the pitfalls and emerged a clear pawn up. Now White sets out to trade down into a won ending.” I give the rest of the game with only the

lightest of notes.

16 Rfe1 Bd6 17 Qh4 h6 18 Nf3 Nc5 19 Nxd5 cxd5 20 Bc3 Rac8 21 Rxe8+ Rxe8 22 Qd4 Ne6 23 Qg4 Qc7 24 Re1 Re7 25 g3 a5 26 Nd4 Nxd4 27 Rxe7 Bxe7 28 Qxd4 Bf6 29 Qxd5 Bxc3 30 bxc3 Qxc3 31 Qb3 Qd4

Smith: “The trading down strategy has been a success; but Queen endings can be very tricky. Back on move 28 I had examined the position now on the board long enough to convince me it is won. First I need to immobilize Black's b-pawn.”

32 a4 Kf8 33 Qb5 Ke7 34 Qc6 Qd6? “The game is probably lost anyway, much better for Black is to sit tight with ...f6, ...f5 or even ...h5, and see what White does.” **35 Qxd6+ Kxd6 36 Kf1 b5 37 Ke2 bxa4 38 Kd2 a3 39 Kc1 Kc5 40 Kb1 Kb4 41 Ka2 f5 42 d4 Kc4 43 c3 g5 44 Kxa3 1-0**

After that digression, I return to the main topic of this article. What is Black to do if the main line with 5...Na5 is good for White? Maybe Dr Hans Berliner is right and the answer could be the Fritz Variation.

5...Nd4!?



First let me clarify that the name “Fritz Variation” attaching to the move 5...Nd4 has nothing to do with the computer chess program called Fritz! The move is in fact about a hundred years old.

The original suggestion appears to have come from one A.Fritz after which the move was analysed by Schlechter in the *Deutsche Schachzeitung* (1904), to which unfortunately I do not have

access. A friend who has a copy of Freeborough & Ranken’s *Chess Openings Ancient and Modern* 4th edition (circa 1910) could find no mention of the move 5...Nd4, and nor is it in Steinitz’s *Modern Chess*

Instructor (1885) which probably preceded the first suggestion of the knight move.

A. Fritz was a minor German master who played in such tournaments as Nuremberg 1883 and Düsseldorf 1908 (in which he came last; the event was won by Marshall). I am not certain, but this may be the same Alexander Fritz (1857-1932) who was mentioned in the 1880 *Deutsche Schachzeitung* as having played a 12-board blindfold simultaneous.

The earliest source I have which analyses the Fritz Variation is the 8th (1922) edition by Schlechter of the *Handbuch des Schachspiels* (i.e. “Bilguer”) which sums up the state of chess theory shortly after the end of World War I. This has coverage of the Fritz Variation on pages 245-247 in which analysis from the Swedish periodical *Tidskrift för Schack* (1907 p.62) seems to be quoted extensively. Some of this analysis will be cited below, but as can be expected with analysis done prior to practical master examples, it is not particularly pertinent on the whole.

I fear that I shall find it hard to maintain my “wood not the trees” approach so easily when dealing with the Fritz, which is almost pure tactics. However, I will try.

Before proceeding to look in detail at White’s possible replies, let me just remind you of a point from the March *Kibitzer*: Black could also (instead of 5...Nd4) play 5...b5 when 6 Bf1 Nd4 7 c3 brings about exactly the same position as in the Fritz Variation main line below, 5...Nd4 6 c3 b5 7 Bf1. One issue for Black, therefore, is whether is happier with the alternatives when White diverges after 5...b5 (as discussed in the March column, i.e. 6 Bxb5 or 6 dxc6) or with White’s alternatives following 5...Nd4.

The analysis in the *Handbuch* almost exclusively dealt with such alternatives, viz. 6 d6, 6 Nc3 or 6 c3 b5 (if 6...Nf5 7 d4!) and now 7 cxd4. However, Schlechter found these lines to be better for White, though modern opinion may not concur.

Only in his final row of analysis did Schlechter arrive at 5...Nd4 6 c3 b5 7 Bf1, giving an ! to White’s 7th and remarking that this move is the safest way for White to get an advantage. As we saw in the March *Kibitzer*, the paradoxical-looking move Bf1 is also reckoned to be the best answer to Ulvestad’s 5...b5, because it keeps the Bishop out of danger and protects g2, and that is why the two variations can transpose.

Fritz Variation Sidelines

I shall look first at White’s alternatives to 6 c3 and then at the main (Ulvestad/Fritz) line.

Unlike Black’s other main moves (5...Na5, 5...b5 and 5...Nxd5) Black does not threaten any of White’s pieces, although the follow-ups 6...b5, 6...Nxd5 and 6...h6 are all prepared.

So essentially White has a free move now. However, if he just castles then Black can play any of the aforementioned moves, and soon regain his pawn with a lead in development. József Pálkövi gives 6 0-0? b5 7 Bb3 h6

8 Nf3 Bg4 with advantage to Black; if White avoids the pin by 8 Be2 instead then White stands passively and loses the d5-pawn.

So the onus is on White to do something positive. From the diagram above, White has tried:

(A) **6 Nc3**; (B) **6 d6**; and (C) **6 c3**.

(A) **6 Nc3** is a weak move. Black replies 6...h6 (not 6...Nxd5? 7 Nxf7! Schlechter) and stands well after either 7 Nge4 Nxe4 8 Nxe4 Qh4 or 7 Nf3 Bf5! (The book line 7...Bg4 8 Be2 Bxf3 is only equal.) 8 d3 Bg4 (Now Be2 impossible for White) 9 Be3 Bb4 10 Bd2 Qd7 e.g. N.Xavier-H. Van Riemsdijk, Fortaleza 1990: 11 Ne4 Bxf3 12 gxf3 Bxd2+ 13 Nxd2 Nxd5 14 c3 Ne6 15 Qe2 f6 16 0-0-0 Ndf4 17 Qf1 0-0-0 18 Ne4 Ng5 19 Nxc5 hxc5 20 Rg1 Rxh2 21 d4 Qc6 22 dxe5 Rxd1+ 23 Kxd1 Qxf3+ 24 Kc1 Rxf2 25 Qe1 Ne2+ 26 Bxe2 Rxe2 27 Qd1 Qe3+ 28 Kb1 Qxe5 29 Rh1 b6 30 a3 g4 31 Rh8+ Kb7 0-1.

(B) **6 d6** looks obvious because it revives the threats of Bxf7+ or Nxf7, but the move has drawbacks. It was played in the “locus classicus” for the Fritz Defence, the game Bogoljubow-Rubinstein, Stockholm 1921.

After **6 d6** Black plays **6...Qxd6!**.



Now if 7 Bxf7+ (7 Nxf7? Qc6!) 7...Ke7 (threatening ...h6) Black should be at least equal, but of course these lines are complicated and either player can go wrong. I don't intend to go any more detail because I have already analysed this line in the February 1999 *Kibitzer* (a column which examined various opening topics) and you can look it up in the [ChessCafe.com Archives](http://ChessCafe.com/Archives).

(C) It follows that White must play **6 c3**, which is logical anyway as it challenges the central black Knight. Since the retreat 6...Nf5?! is not in the spirit of the variation (it can be well met by either 7 d4 or 7 0-0) Black must play the counter-attack **6...b5**, bringing about the next diagram, which is a minor crossroads.

Now if 7 Bf1 (the main line) we have, as already mentioned, the same position as arose via 5...b5 6 Bf1 Nd4 7 c3 in the famous Estrin-Berliner postal game.

Other 7th moves for White do not really hack it. If 7 Bb3 then Black obtains the bishop pair by 7...Nxb3 and after 8 Qxb3 Qxd5 he gets his gambit pawn back without risk.

Schlechter had long ago observed that “7 Bd3 would be weaker because of 7...Bf5”; the Bishop on d3 is unprotected so Black gains a tempo. Morozevich-Timman, Amsterdam 1996, nevertheless took this path but after 8 Bxf5 Nxf5 9 Qf3 Black could have got some advantage by 9...Qd7 according to Timman.

So far, we have not seen anything to make Black prefer 5...b5 to 5...Nd4, unless you are not convinced by the analysis of 6 d6.

However, another possibility for White is 7 cxd4!? bxc4 with an open position where both sides' pawns are shattered but Black has the bishop pair. Theory says Black is doing well here; however, there is some doubt about how convincing the published analysis may be. The critical line seems to be 8 dxe5 (if 8 Qa4+ Nd7! attacking the g5-Knight) when Black has to decide which way to capture on d5.

After the normal move 8...Qxd5 (8...Nxd5!? comes into consideration.) authors of books tend to concentrate on 9 exf6 (or 9 Nf3 Nd7) 9...Qxg5 (not 9...Qxg2?? 10 Qe2+ and 11 Qe4) 10 Qf3 Rb8 11 0-0 (After 11 Qe3+ Qxe3 12 dxe3 gxf6 Black's pawns are terrible but his pieces are mighty.)

However, the postal game Binder-Mueller, 38th European Corr Ch 1988, suggests that 9 0-0 Bb7 10 Nf3 (instead of 10 Qf3 in Pálkövi's book) might be a sterner test of Black's idea. Black has a latent threat to give checkmate on g2 but it is not so easy to make something of this: 10...Nd7 (10...Ng4!? also comes into consideration.) 11 Nc3 Qc6 12 d4 cxd3 13 Qxd3! (improving on 13 Re1 which got an ! from Schlechter) 13...0-0-0?! (Black plans to open kingside lines and focus on g2 but this doesn't work out. 13 ...Nxe5 14 Re1 isn't entirely satisfactory for Black either.) 14 Rd1 Bc5 15 Bg5 Black was a pawn down and could not justify it (1-0 in 39 moves).

If White wants something to play against the Fritz variation, he could study this further but then he will also need something against Berliner's 5...b5 move order.

It is understandable that White will often consent to play the main line, 7 Bf1 Nxd5 (Black has no other move really) because then instead of having to learn two variations (one against the 5...b5 move order and another against the Fritz) just one piece of preparation should suffice.

From now on, I am looking at variations that can arise from either move order to the next diagram position.

After **7 Bf1 Nxd5** we reach the next diagram, a big crossroads. It is

noteworthy that the modern move 8 Ne4 was not considered by Schlechter, who only analysed 8 cxd4.



The move 7...Nxd5 unveils a threat from the black Queen to the white Knight and asks White what he is going to do about this. Possible answers are:

(a) Exchange Knights: 8 cxd4; (b) Defend the Knight: 8 h4; (c) Sac' the Knight: 8 Nxf7; and (d) Move the Knight: 8 Ne4.

(a) Exchanging the Knights is the oldest variation. Schlechter, in the *Handbuch* gave 8 cxd4 Qxg5 9 Bxb5+

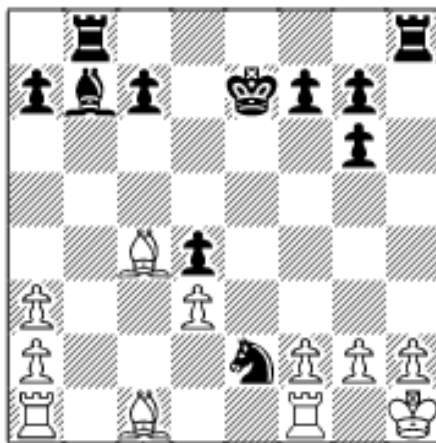
Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Kxd7 11 0-0 leading to White's advantage, following the *Tidskrift* analysis. In a note, he mentions the improvement 9...Kd8 (Black avoids unnecessary piece exchanges) but reckons White is better here too after 10 0-0 exd4 11 d3 Qf5 12 Nd2 and Ne4.

However, 10...exd4 (maybe best if White's 10th move is Qf3 instead) here neglects development and opens the e-file at the cost of a tempo; 10...Bb7 (Grünfeld) is better. This gives rise to a very complex position where, in practice, Black has done quite well.

This variation in which Black sacrifices material and plays for an attack with his own King stuck in the middle of the board, on d8, is clearly not to everyone's taste! It is no wonder that more players prefer the 5...Na5 line in which Black normally manages to get castled, but in the Fritz Variation it is also true that White often does not achieve king safety and "normal" piece placements. Even if White does manage to castle, his King can come under attack. One of the earliest master games in the Fritz was a miniature win for Black.

Leonhardt – Englund Stockholm, 1908

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Nd4 6 c3 b5 7 Bf1 Nxd5 8 cxd4 Qxg5 9 Bxb5+ Kd8 10 Qf3 Bb7 11 0-0 Rb8 12 d3? Qg6 13 Qg3 exd4 14 Na3? Black already stands better for if 14 Nd2 Nf4! 15 Qxg6 hxg6 or 14 Bc4 Bd6 15 Qh3 Re8 with threats of ...Re5 and ...Re2. 14...Bxa3 15 bxa3 Nc3 16 Qxg6 hxg6 17 Bc4 Ne2+ 18 Kh1 Ke7



This was the final position. White resigned because of the threat 19...Rhx2+, 20...Rh8 which cannot be defended. If 19 h3 Rxh3 mate.

(b) Instead of 8 cxd4, White can defend his Knight by **8 h4**, which threatens cxd4.



This move is superficially attractive because it makes it hard for Black's Queen to get into the game on the queenside, i.e. White avoids the Berliner line mentioned below.

On the other hand, after 8...h6! 9 Ne4 (For 9 Nxf7?! compare the next line.) 9...Ne6 10 Bxb5+ Bd7 11 Qa4 (Here 11 Bxd7+ is ineffective because of the reply 11...Qxd7.) 11...Ndf4! 12 d4! Nxg2+ gives Black equal chances, as the theoretician Yakov Neishtadt

showed in the 1960s. Compared with the main line 8 Ne4 Ne6 below, the insertion of the h-pawn moves is to Black's advantage because h4 weakens White's kingside.

(c) White might be tempted into sacrificing the Knight on f7. **8 Nxf7?! is** a desperado move rather than a true sacrifice but even so it is not dangerous.



After 8...Kxf7 9 cxd4 exd4 10 Qf3+ Nf6! White must grab material because otherwise he has nothing, but what should he take? The greedy rook-snatch 11 Qxa8 is asking for trouble after 11...Bc5 (threatening ...Re8+) but is it playable. Gut feelings say Black must have a very strong attack.

One example is M.Goihl- C.Petersen, World Under-12 Ch, Duisburg 1992: 12 Bxb5 Re8+ 13 Bxe8+ Qxe8+ 14

Kd1 Bg4+ 15 Qf3 Bxf3+ 16 gxf3 Qc6 17 Rf1 Qxf3+ 18 Kc2 d3+ 19 Kb3 Qd5+ 20 Ka4 Qc4+ 0-1.

So White should settle for just a pawn ahead, but after 11 Bxb5 Be6 12 0-0 Rb8 Black probably has enough piece activity to compensate.

(d) Finally, we come to the principal continuation, **8 Ne4**. White moves his Knight, creating the double threat of cxd4 and Bxb5+.



There are two major continuations here, neither of which can be seriously tackled in an article of this type. I shall just indicate the areas where readers can usefully do some investigations.

(d1) The Berliner line, 8...Qh4 (committing Black to a piece sacrifice); and (d2) The traditional line, 8...Ne6 (which is just a pawn gambit and so less of a risk).

It is noteworthy that Pálkövi, in his recent book, gives 8...Qh4 a ?! mark and recommends 8...Ne6! which he considers gives Black sufficient compensation. I certainly agree, at least to the extent that 8...Qh4 is not a move to be played without a considerable amount of knowledge and confidence and tactical ability. It is easy just to end up a piece or two down for nothing before move 20.

Rather than attempt to analyse the Berliner line in any detail here, which would anyway be contrary to the aim of my series, I shall just indicate a couple of ideas that readers have sent in, and briefly comment on them. Then I shall likewise summarise the state of theory on 8...Ne6.

I am presently preparing a book of 64 Great Correspondence Games, in which Estrin v Berliner will certainly feature. In that work I shall try to come to some conclusions about the soundness of Berliner's sacrifice, but I think it would be premature to do that as yet. Readers comments on the two following ideas are welcome, however.

(d1) **8...Qh4 9 Ng3 Bg4!** This was Berliner's innovation in the 5th Correspondence Chess World Championship, specially prepared for Yakov Estrin. Other moves don't work. **10 f3 e4** The idea is to crack open the kingside with this pawn, in conjunction with opening a diagonal for the dark-squared Bishop coming to d6. **11 cxd4** This is invariably played but reader Milan Hruby asks me why not 11 fxg4 here? Most books (including those by Berliner and Estrin themselves) just don't mention the possibility at all; it is not mentioned in Berliner's own home-produced monograph *From the Deathbed of 4 Ng5 in the Two Knights Defence*. I think the grandmasters must have rejected **11 fxg4** as obviously bad after **11...Bd6**, and so should you.



Hruby has done a lot of analysis on 11 fxf4 and came up with the following main line: **12 Kf2 Qf6+! 13 Nf5?! (13 Ke1 Qh4 repeats the position.) 13...Nxf5 14 gxf5 Qxf5+ 15 Ke1 0-0! 16 d4 exd3 17 Qxd3 Rfe8+ 18 Kd1 Qf2 19 Be2** I set Fritz6 to analyse this overnight on a 366 MHz computer and it found a win for Black. Would a faster computer or different software find something different?



19...Rad8 20 Qf3 Qc5 Unclear said Hruby; Fritz6 thought alternatives clearly good for White. 21 Rf1! This is Hruby's suggestion, which needs examining. If 21...Bxh2 his idea is 22 Kc2. Instead of this, Fritz6 analysed **21 Bd2? Bf4 22 Ke1 Qd6 23 Rf1 Nb4** and the huge threats to d2 and c2 seem to be decisive: (a) 24 cxb4? Bxd2+ 25 Nxd2 Qxd2+ 26 Kf2 Qd4+ 27 Ke1 (27 Kg3? Re3) 27...Rxe2+ 28 Qxe2 Qxb4+ 29 Kf2 Rd2 with a winning Q v 2R ending as Black has several extra

pawns; (b) 24 Bxf4? Nd3+ 25 Kd1 Nxf4+; 24...Qc5+ 25 Ke1 Nc2+ 26 Kd1 Ne3+ 27 Kc1 (27 Ke1 Nxf1 28 Bxf4 Qg1! 29 Qxf1 Rxe2+ 30 Kxe2 Re8+ wins the white Queen) 27...Rxd2 28 Nxd2 Qf5 and the threat of mate on c2 recovers Black's large material investment with interest; (c) 24 Kf2 Qc5+ 25 Ke1 Nc2+ 26 Kd1 Ne3+ 27 Kc1 (27 Ke1 Nxf1 28 Bxf4 Qg1! 29 Qxf1 Rxe2+ 30 Kxe2 Re8+ wins the white Queen) 27...Rxd2 28 Nxd2 Qf5 and the threat of mate on c2 recovers Black's large material investment with interest.

After the normal continuation **11 cxd4 Bd6 12 Bxb5+** (For analysis of Walter Muir's 12 Qe2, I refer you to Dr Berliner's controversial book *The System*) **12...Kd8** another critical position arises.



Now Estrin-Berliner continued 13 0-0 exf3 14 Rxf3 Rb8 15 Be2? and Black's attack eventually led to a winning endgame after 15...Bxf3 16 Bxf3 Qxd4+.

There has been a lot of debate since about what White should play instead, mostly focusing on 15 a4 in this position or the 14 Qb3 line suggested by Estrin later. Some people think 14 Qb3 is good, but Berliner violently disagrees. After 14...Nb4! 15 Rxf3 he

now suggests 15...Rb8 instead of 15...c6 which he previously advocated.

Danish reader Per Arnt Rasmussen sent me some games in these lines and claimed to have found a "TN". After 14 Rxf3 Rb8, his game with Max Nielsen, Lovfaldsturneringen Ringsted, 1993, continued 15 a4 a6 16 Bf1 f5? 17 Nc3 Nf6 18 d3 Re8 19 Qd2! This is Rasmussen's "TN". 19...Bxf3 20 gxf3 f4?? 21 Nge4 Nxe4 22 dxe4 g5 23 e5 Bb4 24 Qf2 Qh5 25 Ne4 Be7 26 Bc4! g4 27 Bxf4 gxf3 28 b3! Qg6+ 29 Ng3 1-0. He comments: "This was our 3rd encounter in this variation, and at last White had found the right plan! Black has never played the variation since then!" What puzzles me about this is why Black's 16th move? Berliner's monograph (see p.24) gives the correct move as 16...Re8 and after 17 Nc3 Black is supposed to play 17...Nf6, rather than 17...c6 as played in two games Rasmussen sent me. So I don't see this Danish line as critical.

Berliner himself has changed his mind a few times about Black's correct play in the main line. In his corrections to the 1998 edition of his *Deathbed* monograph, he admits that best play after (13 0-0 exf3) 14 Rxf3 Rb8 15 Bf1 (either now or after the intervening 15 a4 a6) "has been very difficult to find". He now rejects 15...Re8 and recommends 15...Rb4. If he is right now, most of the analysis published in older books and articles is irrelevant. He said he originally thought 15...Rb4 was refuted by 16 d3 Rxd4 17 Nd2; "however, 16...Rxd4 is a bad mistake, instead of which 16...Re8! leaves Black in a very much superior position." This remains to be proved, I think.

If you want to look at this line in detail for yourself, examine the game Lane-Fabrizi (with 15 Bf1 Rb8 16 Nc3 Rxd4) which was published in *Chess Mail* and is in my download file. I think Dr Berliner would reckon both players made serious errors in the latter part of this game, but at least it provides a starting point for investigation.

Instead of looking at the 13 0-0 line any further, my "helicopter snatch squad" is going to focus on **13 Qb3** from the last diagram.



This move is the reason why Pálkövi rejects the Berliner line. he doesn't go nearly deep enough but maybe this is the right direction, so this is where our "helicopter" must sweep down lower.

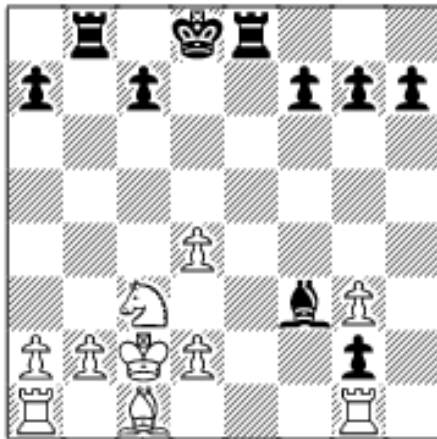
13 Qb3 Bxg3+ 14 Kd1 Be6 15 Bc6

This sequence is recommended by Pálkövi as if it was new analysis by him, but Berliner already discussed this on page 22 of his monograph. **15...exf3** Berliner recommends this move, which is only a sideline for Pálkövi who

obviously hasn't seen the *Deathbed*. **16 Bxd5!** 16 Bxa8 fxg2 17 Rg1 Qg4+; 16 gxf3 Ne7 17 Qb7 Rc8 18 d5 Bf5. I have only seen games with 16 gxf3 and believe there is no practical experience of 16 Bxd5! yet.
16...fxg2 17 Qxg3

The Hungarian theoretician stops here, claiming clear advantage to White. That might not seem unreasonable as White is a piece for a pawn ahead and the Queens are coming off. However, it is too early to evaluate the line, i.e. we haven't descended to ground zero yet.

Dr. Berliner continues: **17...Qxg3 18 hxxg3 Bxd5 19 Rg1 Re8 20 Nc3 Bf3+ 21 Kc2 Rb8** This is now a (the?) critical position of the Berliner variation.



22 d3! Maybe some other moves can also be considered but this is the most plausible. **22...Rb4** Black's hopes rest partly on winning back a pawn or two, but principally on supporting the outpost on g2 and trying to break the blockade. My computer prefers 22...h5 but still thinks White is better after 23 Bd2 Rb4 24 Rae1 Rxd4 25 Ne4 Rd5 26 Bc3 f6 27 Re3 Rf5 28 Kd2 Re7 29 a4 a5 30 Nc5 Rxe3 31 Kxe3. I haven't had time to look into this any further.

23 Ne4 This could be a key move. Dr Berliner's line goes instead 23 Bf4 Rxd4 24 Bxc7+ Kd7 (not 24...Kxc7? 25 Nb5+ but Fritz thinks 24...Kc8 is slightly better) and now he gives: (a) 25 Bf4 h5 26 Rae1 Rxe1 27 Rxe1 h4 28 Be3 h3 but the placement of the Bishop on f4, encouraging this ...h4 tactic, is obviously faulty; (b) 25 Rae1 Rxe1 26 Rxe1 Rg4 27 Bf4 h5 (Here we go again). It's very hard to follow the analysis in Berliner's monograph and he doesn't give assessments, but I think a deep skepticism on both his conclusions and those of the computers would be justified.

23...Rxd4 If instead 23...h6 (to stop Ng5) Fritz6 found the long-winded but possibly effective knight manoeuvre 24 Nd2 followed by N-c4-e3 and finally capturing the pawn on g2! I don't think a computer can plan such a manoeuvre; it finds it by brute force.

24 Bg5+ Kd7 25 Be3 and a possible continuation given by Fritz6 is **25...Rb4 26 a3 Rb5 27 Bxa7 f5 28 Nd2 Bd5 29 Rge1 Rxe1 30 Rxe1 c5 31 Nc4** which it assesses on my computer as +/- 1.41/11. However, I shall soon be testing these lines on a much faster computer and will not be surprised if quite different lines and conclusions emerge.

Nevertheless, 13 Qb3 does seem to be the cutting edge of the Berliner variation at present, and will quite possibly turn out in the end to be a bust of the whole idea.

(d2) To round off this article, we must now look briefly at **8 Ne4 Ne6**.



Berliner, in his 1997 interview with Allan Savage for *Chess Mail*, said he had examined and rejected the old move 8...Ne6 in his preparations for the Estrin game. White goes a pawn up again by 9 Bxb5+ and “the full compensation is in some annotator’s etc., it’s not there on the board.” However, I don’t know what precise lines Berliner had in mind, and anyway they have probably been improved for Black.

Pálkövi is recommending **8...Ne6** in his book on the Two Knights Defence, published last year. The main line goes **9 Bxb5+ Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Qxd7 11 0-0 Be7!** (better than 11...f5 played by Walter Muir against Estrin, in an interesting draw) **12 d4 exd4 13 cxd4**



Now Black seems to have two playable continuations: (a) 13...Nb6 14 Be3 Rd8 when Black usually regains his pawn at d4 with approximate equality; (b) 13...0-0!? 14 Nbc3 Rfd8! 15 Be3 (Spassky-Shamkovich, Leningrad 1960) 15...Nxc3! 16 bxc3 (16 Nxc3 Nxd4) 16...f5 17 Nc5 Bxc5 18 dxc5 (White’s extra pawn is now seriously devalued) 18...Qc6!? (also 18...f4 is playable.) 19 Qh5 f4 20 Bd4 Nxd4 21 cxd4 Rxd4 = (Pálkövi).

Of course these variations are not as exciting as the mad lines after 8...Qh4. They offer Black far fewer winning chances than Berliner’s line, but also far fewer losing chances. “You pays yer money and you takes yer choice”.

Next month, *The Kibitzer* will leave opening theory behind for a while to consider a topic proposed recently by a reader: Desert Island Chess Books. If readers wish to propose titles for the castaway to bring to his desert island, please email them to me, c/o ChessCafe.com, not later than May

31. I hope to receive some interesting suggestions, but only books that have been published in English please.

Finally, my new MegaCorr2 CD-ROM includes (thanks to permission from **ChessCafe.com**) all the *Kibitzer* columns from the start to the end of last year, in HTML format. You can order this CD, which has a database of over 350,000 correspondence games (ChessBase, PGN and Chess Assistant formats) from <http://www.chessmail.com/mega2cd.html>. The price is \$39 or 42 Euros or 27 pounds sterling. Airmail is 5% extra to European addresses; 10% extra to the rest of the world.

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