



COLUMNISTS

Over the Horizons

Stefan Bucker



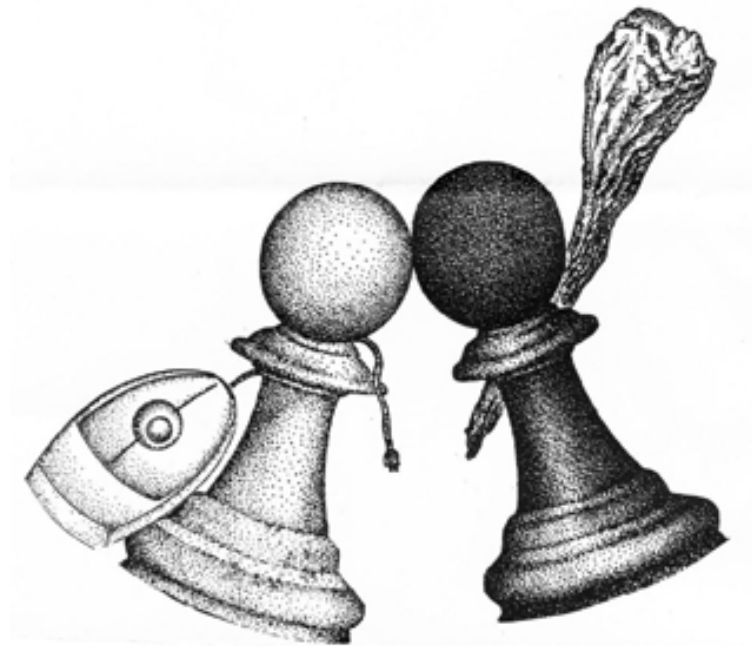
Finding Your Own Approach in the Second Ice Age

In his book *Exploring the Chess Openings* (1978), the American theoretician **Hugh E. Myers** expressed his opinion that under certain circumstances an early g7-g5 should be fully playable. My article “Impoliteness of Ice Age Openings” ([January 2006](#)) had already discussed an example for the Myers Defense 1 c4 g5, which is slightly more popular, but not necessarily stronger than the related lines. Here we’ll look at another member of the “Ice Age” family: **1 Nf3 h6**, followed by **g5**.

Myers wasn’t sure about the playability of 1 d4 h6 or 1 e4 g5 (which were later happily adopted by the British IM Mike Basman), but for 1 c4, 1 Nf3 and 1 g3, Myers claimed that Black’s reaction g7-g5 (or h6 and g5, if 1 Nf3) was justified for concrete positional reasons:

- **1 c4 g5**, because 1 c4 weakens square d4, and c7-c5 has become more effective.
- **1 g3 g5**, because 1 g3 reduces White’s active possibilities (e.g. to play Bc4 or Ne2-g3).
- **1 Nf3 h6**, followed by g5, because Nf3 can become a target.

For the last situation – h6/g5 vs. an early Nf3 – the database knows only 49 examples (either in the move order 1 Nf3 h6, or by transposition), which could be a warning. But the picture gains some charm when you consider that Black has scored an impressive 64 percent.



Ice Age Chess (c) by Zygmunt Nasiolkowski, Lüdenscheid

These defenses have a few things in common – e.g. Black doesn't have to fear the direct Bc4, Ne2-g3 – and often they will even transpose to each other. After 1 g3, White's knight usually goes to f3, so the reply 1...g5 borrows some motivation from 1 Nf3 h6. In most games with an "Ice Age" strategy (g5), Black attacks the center by means of c7-c5, which already belonged to Myers' concept after 1 c4 g5. However, in some cases the c5 setup doesn't work too well, e.g. against the formation e4, d4, c3, and I have begun to prefer another interpretation.

As so often, if you have found something new, it leads to other ideas. Thus, Myers created several openings with a "delayed" g2-g4, such as 1 Nc3 c5 2 g4!? (inspired by the weakening move c5). By the way, Myers later developed an analogous philosophy for the other side of the board: against 1 f4, 1 b3 or 1 Nc3, the American says, Black can safely reply 1...b5 (or 1 Nc3 a6 followed by b5). This might be the topic of another article.

The following two games will not supply you with a complete repertoire against 1 Nf3. My main goal is to demonstrate that there are still some relatively unexplored openings where you can find your own approach.

Hans Hornung (2211) – Stefan Bückner (2349)

Bad Wiessee, November 2005

1 Nf3 h6 2 d4

Black's plan could have been avoided by 2 h4, but many will find the cure more dangerous than the disease. In some games 2 b3 has been played, when the London formation 2...d5 3 Bb2 Bf5 would be a solid

reply. The move h6 fits well into Black's plans. Moreover, there is an entertaining alternative in 2...g5 3 Bb2, when both 3...Rh7 and 3...Nf6, in spite of their strange appearance, seem okay for Black.

2...g5 3 e4 Bg7 4 c3



The immediate 4 h4 comes into question: 4...g4 5 Ne5 d6 (5...h5 6 Bc4 was better for White in Gireada – Taga, Tusnad 2000, but 5...Nf6!? 6 Nc3 d6 7 Nd3 Nc6 8 d5 Nd4 is interesting) 6 Nxg4 Bxg4 7 Qxg4 Bxd4, White has the two bishops. Nevertheless it seems that Black can castle long and get enough play on the g-file, e.g. 8 Bc4 (8 Qd1 Bc5, about =) 8...e6 9 c3 Nf6 10 Qe2 Bb6 11 Bf4 Rg8!? 12 Bxh6 Rxd2 or 12

Nd2 Ng4 13 f3 Qf6.

4...d6

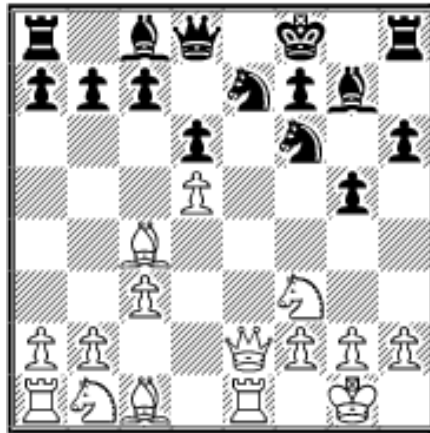
White's last move was directed against the thematic advance c7-c5. In similar situations, Basman's book *The Killer Grob* (Oxford 1991) recommends a different continuation, d7-d5. True, I don't find this concrete position, with a knight on f3, in the book. Anyway, over the board, I didn't like the analogous 4...d5 at all: 5 exd5 Qxd5 6 Nbd2 must be better for White, and the "aggressive" 6...g4 7 Bc4 Qf5 8 Ng1 b5 9 Bb3 Bb7 10 Nf1 Bxg2? 11 Ne3 Qe4 12 Bd5 +- even loses on the spot. The modest 4...d6 looks like an auxiliary solution at first sight, but I think it is more. Black's setup is rather sound, even without immediate central action. Moves like c5 or d5 can be useful; at least they deflect White's attention from Black's weaknesses on the kingside. But they are also committal, and altogether I see more disadvantages than advantages for Black in such maneuvers. The position is opened, and White can find active squares for his pieces. I am not sure that the text move acquires full equality, but very probably it is Black's best continuation.

5 Bd3

In the post-mortem, Dr. Hornung agreed that he had missed the right moment to attack Black's pawn chain. According to him, the right moment came on move 7. Of course h2-h4 is a critical option at any moment, after Black has played g7-g5. At this stage there could follow: 5 h4 g4 6 Nh2 Nf6 7 Bd3 c5 8 d5 h5 (8...g3?!) 9 Nf1 Nbd7 10 Ng3 Ne5 =.

White achieved a small advantage after 5 Bc4!? g4 6 Ng1 (6 Nh4!?) Nf6 7 Qc2 d5 8 exd5 Nxd5 9 Ne2 c6 10 Nf4 h5 += Astl – Kroell,

Austrian Team Cheampionship 2003 (0-1, 45). Instead of 5...g4, I'd prefer 5...Nc6 6 0-0 e6!?!; for example, 7 d5 exd5 8 exd5 Nce7 9 Qe2 Nf6 10 Re1 Kf8!



The situation is difficult to assess. White could sacrifice his pawn d5 for rapid development. Another plausible alternative is 11 Qd3 Kg8.

5...Nc6

5...c5 is dubious because of 6 Be3! (6 0-0 g4 7 Nh4 cxd4 8 cxd4 Nc6 9 d5 Ne5 10 Bb5+ Kf8 11 Bf4 Bf6 12 Bg3 Qb6 13 Na3 a6 14 Be2 Qxb2 15 Nc2 Bd7 16 Ne3 Rb8 =) 6...Qc7 7

Na3 a6 8 0-0 Nf6 9 Re1 0-0 10 e5 +=.

6 0-0

6 h4 is hardly more dangerous than one move ago: 6...g4 7 Nh2 (7 Ng1) 7...Nf6 8 Nf1 e5 9 d5 Ne7 and Black can be satisfied with his position; for example, 10 h5 c6 11 c4 b5 12 b3 bxc4 13 bxc4 cxd5 14 cxd5 Nfxd5! =+, intending 15 exd5 e4.

6...e6



7 a4

Perhaps more drastic measures were required. In the post-mortem, my opponent suggested the original 7 Kh1! Nge7 8 Ng1 Ng6 9 Ne2 (not 9 f4? gxf4 10 Bxf4 Nxf4 11 Rxf4 e5 =+). After careful preparation, White now threatens f2-f4, and this advance must not be taken lightly. Nevertheless, I believe Black can equalize: 9...e5 10 d5 Nce7 11 Ng3

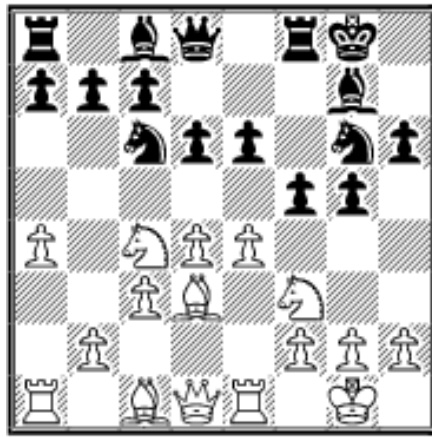
Nf4 12 Nh5 0-0! =. The main alternative is to play 7 d5 or to prepare this move, say, by means of 7 Re1. At this stage, White underestimates his opponent's plan and shrinks away from immediate aggression.

7...Nge7

To combine the "aggressive" g5 with the "passive" setup e6 and Nge7 looks a bit strange. But the idea follows its own radical logic. Black feels that g6 would be the best square for his knight, to control the important squares h4, f4 and e5. Moreover, the knight isn't in the way of his other pieces (Bg7, Rf8 and Qd8). To achieve his aim, Black is

willing to invest three tempi: e6, Nge7 and Ng6. The obvious drawback: it costs plenty of time. That said – it still requires a sharp eye to find a refutation!

8 Na3 Ng6 9 Re1 0-0 10 Nc4 f5



Black hastens to demonstrate that White has played too slowly. With a pawn on g5, it looks attractive to push your f-pawn, but at the same time the advance creates weaknesses on the e-file and gives White concrete targets. In hindsight, I am no longer sure that 10...f5 was the correct decision. My “solid” kingside formation may even allow the calm 10...b6!? 11 g3 Bb7 12 a5 b5 13 a6 Bc8 14 Ne3 Rb8. Food for

thought.

11 exf5 exf5 12 b4?

12 Ne3! keeps Black’s queen away from f6, with unclear consequences: 12...g4 (12...Nce7 13 h3; 12...d5 13 b4 g4 14 b5 Nce7 15 Ne5 Nxe5 16 dxe5 c5 17 bxc6 Nxc6 18 e6! +/-) 13 Nd2 Nce7 (or 13...Nf4 14 Bc2 Ne7 15 Ndf1 Nfg6 16 g3 b6!?) 14 g3 (14 Bc4+ d5) Qd7 15 Qb3+ Kh8 16 a5 f4 17 Nd5 Nf5 with complications.

12...Qf6 13 Ra2

13 Ne3 Nce7 14 Bc4+ Kh8 comes into consideration. After the text move, White lacks effective counterplay, and Black begins to control the position.

13...g4 14 Nfd2 Be6 15 Rb2 Nf4 16 Bf1 Nd5 17 Nb1 f4 18 b5 Nce7 19 Ncd2 Ng6 20 Ne4 Qf7 21 a5 b6 22 a6 Rae8 23 c4 Nde7 24 d5 Bd7 25 Rb3 Ne5 26 Nbc3 Qg6 27 Kh1 Qh5 28 Kg1 N7g6 29 Na2 Nh4 30 Kh1

Missing both the elegant execution
 30...Nhf3! 31 gxf3 gxf3!
 (threatening Ng4), and the simpler
 30...f3! 31 Ng3 (31 g3 Ng2 —+)
 31...Qg6 —+.

I had spoiled my fine attacking position and now the time trouble

35 gxf3 Nxf3 36 h3?

36...Be5? 37 Nxd6? cxd6 38 Rxe5 dxe5 39 d6 Qg5 40 d7 gxf3 0-1

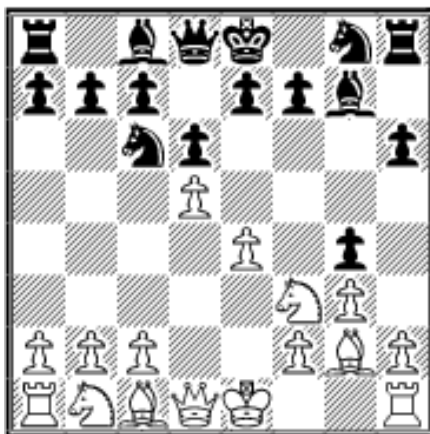
1 Nf3 d6 2 g3 h6

According to Myers' thesis both Nf3 and g3 invites an early g7-g5. So I couldn't resist. My opponent had probably expected a Leningrad Dutch.

3 Bg2 g5 4 e4 Bg7 5 d4 Nc6!?

After White has combined the moves g3 and e4, it is a natural reaction to provoke the advance d4-d5 and to conquer the weak square e5. For this purpose 5...c5 has been played: 6 dxc5 Qa5+ 7 Bd2 Qxc5 8 Bc3 Bxc3+ 9 Nxc3 Nf6 10 Qd4 Nc6 and a draw was agreed in Vogel – Welling, Dieren 1987. The text move is a lively alternative.

6 d5 g4!



A typical “Ice Age” motif. If White’s knight moves to h4, g1 or d2, the reply 7...Ne5 will freeze White’s pawn structure. Instead, my opponent prefers to exchange the knights. The resulting position is roughly equal.

7 dxc6 gxf3 8 Qxf3 bxc6 9 Nc3 e6?

9...Rb8 was the correct continuation.

10 0-0?

Both players overlooked the horrible combination 10 e5! Ne7 11 Bf4 Bxe5? (the lesser evil would have been 11...d5 +=) 12 Bxe5 dxe5 13 Qh5! +/-, followed by Rd1 and Ne4. Black’s king is in serious trouble.

10...Qf6 11 Qh5 Qe5 12 Qe2 Ne7 13 Be3

13 Rb1 was slightly more promising.

13...Qa5 14 Qd2 Ba6 15 Rfd1 Qh5 16 e5!??



An astonishing idea, for which White only spent too much time.

16...Bxe5

(a) 16...dxe5?? 17 Qd7+ Kf8 18 Qd8+ Rxd8 19 Rxd8 mate.

(b) 16...Qxe5! is probably best. But when I calculated this line, I foresaw a nasty surprise: 17 Ne4! Nf5 (17...Bc4!? is also good) 18 Bc5 (not 18 Nc5 Nxe3 19 Bxc6+ Ke7 20

Nxa6 Nxd1 21 Bxa8? Nxb2!, nor 18 Bf4 Qd4 19 Qe1 Qxb2 20 Rab1 Qa3 21 g4 Nd4) 18...0-0 19 Rab1 dxc5 20 Qa5!. Out of the blue, White suddenly threatens to win my queen by 21 f4!. At this point I stopped my calculations, but home analysis showed that Black still has an advantage after 20...Nd6.

17 Ne4 d5

(a) More entertaining complications: 17...f5 18 f4 Bxb2 19 Rab1 Bg7 20 Qa5 Be2 21 Qxc7 0-0 22 Qxe7 Bxd1 23 Qxe6+ Kh8 24 Nxd6 Bxc2 25 Rf1 Bd3 26 Bf3 Rf6, about =.

(b) 17...0-0 18 Bxh6 Rfb8 19 Rab1 Rxb2 20 Rxb2 Bxb2 21 c3 Nd5 22 Bf3! Qg6 23 h4 Ba3 24 h5 Qf5 25 g4 Qe5 26 Re1 +/-.

18 Nc5 Bc8

I had intended 18...Be2 19 Re1 Bf3, but here I saw 20 Bd4 Bxd4 21 Qxd4 Rg8 22 Na6! +=.

19 Bd4?!

For his creative play, White now should have earned an advantage: 19 Nd3! Bd6 20 c4! +=. But he was already suffering from *zeitnot*.

19...Bxd4 20 Qxd4 e5?!

20...0-0 =.

21 Qa4 e4

21...0-0 22 Qa5 Bg4 23 Re1 Rfc8 24 Qc3 d4 25 Qa5 f6 26 c3 dxc3 27 Qxc3 +=.

22 Qd4?

Time trouble. 22 Qa5! Bg4 (22...Qe5 23 Nxe4) 23 Re1 0-0 24 h3! with an advantage for White.

22...0-0 23 Qf6? Qg5 24 Qc3 Rb8 25 Nb3 f5 26 Qe5?!**26...f4! 27 Qxc7 Rb7 28 Qd6 Bg4**

Or 28...e3! 29 Qc5 f3 30 Bh1 exf2+ 31 Qxf2 Ng6 -/+. But the text move is also sufficient. In spite of a few inaccurate moves, from this point the result was hardly in doubt.

29 Re1 Rd7 30 Qc5 e3 31 gxf4 exf2+ 32 Qxf2 Rxf4 -/+ 33 Qe3? Bf3 34 Qe6+ Kh7

34...Kf8! 35 Re2 Rg4 -+.

35 Re2 Bg4 36 Qe5 Bxe2 37 Qxe2 Nf5 38 Nc5 Re7 39 Ne6 Qg8 40 Nxf4

40 Qd2 Nh4!.

40...Rxe2 41 Nxe2 Ne3 42 Ng3 Nxc2 43 Rf1 Ne3 44 Rf6 Nxg2 45 Kxg2 d4 46 Kf3 Qd5+ 47 Ne4 Kg7 48 Kf4 Qxa2 49 Rxc6 Qxb2 50 Rc7+ Kf8 51 Rd7? Qxh2+ 52 Kg4 Qe5 0-1

I shouldn't hesitate to repeat 1 Nf3 h6. The opening in the second game, 1 Nf3 d6!? 2 g3 h6, is an interesting waiting concept. With his bishop on g2, White's prospects of refuting Black's setup are even smaller than in the first case. There is still plenty to explore. With a little patience, everybody can find his own approach.

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