



COLUMNISTS

Over the Horizons

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Grob's Attack: Not for Beginners

A more debatable issue would be Mike Basman's advocacy of 1 g4 and related moves. Is this creative? I would say that Mike's whole treatment of the opening is definitely original. To my knowledge, no master strength player has ever played quite like him before. In this case, the second criterion is the tricky one. Does the 'killer Grob' work? ... My opinion is, I am afraid, that 1 g4 wastes White's advantage and an early ...g5 by Black could very well be a losing move. In other words, it does not work and I would not call it 'creative'. Original and interesting, yes, but not creative.
 – Jonathan Levitt: *Genius in Chess*, London 1997

Few people claim that 1 e4 or 1 d4 are winning, but GM Jonathan Levitt and many others believe that against 1 g4 Black can equalize, while 1 e4 or 1 d4 are better and sometimes can even give you a +=. For an omniscient player this += would still make no difference to other drawish positions, but fortunately there are thousands of titled geniuses who have developed a sense for subtleties that the omniscient player will never have. Here I should perhaps modestly insert that I don't play 1 g4 myself (only 1 g4 Nh6, but that's serious). So in this article I am just a neutral observer. The next game illustrates the equalizing tendency of 1 g4 criticized by Levitt:

M. Basman – J. Levitt

Lloyds Bank Open, London 1982

1 g4 d5 2 h3 e5 3 Bg2 c6 4 d4 e4 5 c4 f5 6 Nc3 dxc4 7 gxf5 Bxf5 8 Nxe4 Nf6 9 Ng3 Bg6 10 e4 Bd6 11 N1e2 0-0 12 0-0 Nh5 13 f4 Qh4 14 Nxh5 Bxh5 15 e5 Bc7 16 Qc2 Nd7 17 Qxc4+ Kh8



18 Nc3 g5 ½-½

It was 18 Nc3 rather than 1 g4 that wasted the advantage. 18 Bd2! avoids Black's pawn break (18...g5?? 19 Be1 +-), then White has an extra pawn and a clear plus (at least +=). In his book [1] on 1 g4, Henry Grob doesn't say that 1 g4 guarantees White an advantage, but he claims that Black has to follow a consistent defensive plan to avoid a disadvantage. At first sight this seems to be a more relaxed attitude as compared to Levitt's idea that you should strive for the

maximum from the first move. But Grob also writes [1]:

My score in these [1 g4] correspondence games is close to 90 percent.

Which Michael Basman counters [4] in Killer Grob style:

The Grob was first played regularly by Swiss master Henri [sic] Grob, but not too successfully...

In Michael Basman's book elementary questions like "Has White an advantage after 1 g4?" or whether there are better moves are not touched. For Basman the move has a logic of its own, and on the first introductory page the reader only learns that "White ... ignores the firmly held dogma that one should open the game with a move by a centre pawn" [4]. The book [4] is excellent, but demanding. Many years ago Henry Grob had written about his own book [1]: "This work is not meant for beginners," and perhaps the same warning should appear in Basman's *Killer Grob*.



Henry Grob

Source: *Grob's Angriff* 1. g2-g4, Zurich 1969

Let's continue our seminar for advanced 1 g4 players with a discussion of a key position:

1 g4 d5 2 h3 e5 3 Bg2 c6 4 d4

Grob preferred the dubious 4 g5. The text move at least follows a straightforward plan.

4...e4 5 c4 Bd6 6 Nc3 Ne7



Since Basman had serious problems with this position at Manchester 1981, the setup is often recommended for Black: cf. [5], [6] and [7]. White has done his best to attack d5, but Black's flexible knight on e7 is not only defending that pawn, the knight e7 might also attack via Ne7-g6-h4 or support a later f7-f5.

7 Qb3

There are several examples where White forgets to fight for the d5-square: 7 g5?

Be6 8 h4 Nf5 9 Bh3 0-0 10 cxd5 cxd5 11

Nxd5 Ng3! (0-1, 20) Basman – Keene, Manchester 1981. Other illogical moves are 7 Qc2?! or 7 Bd2.

But 7 Bg5 deserves attention:

(a) 7...0-0 8 Qb3 transposes to the main line, 7...0-0 8 Bg5.

(b) 7...Be6 8 Qb3 b6 (8...f6 9 Bd2 Qb6 10 cxd5 cxd5? 11 Nxe4 or 10...Qxb3 11 axb3 cxd5 12 Nb5 =) 9 Bxe7 Bxe7 10 e3 0-0 11 Nge2. This position isn't bad for White: 11...Na6 (or 11...Bd6 12 a3, or 11...dxc4 12 Qd1!?) 12 Nf4 Nc7, e.g. 13 cxd5 cxd5 14 0-0 Qd7 15 f3, about =.

(c) 7...f6 8 Bd2 0-0 (but neither Adorján's oversight 8...Ng6 [7] nor 8...h5?? 9 Qb3 Bc7 10 0-0-0, J. Johansen – M. Reichardt, e-mail 1998 – where does Black put his king? Other options: 8...b6 9 Qb3 transposes to 7 Qb3 b6 8 Bg5 f6 9 Bd2, and 8...Na6 9 Qb3 = leads to the main line) 9 Qb3 (9 e3 Kh8! 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 f4 exf3 12 Qxf3 or 12 Nxf3 don't look reliable either) 9...Kh8



A critical position:

(c1) 10 Rc1 Na6 (10...f5!) 11 e3 f5 12 Nge2 Nb4? (12...Ng6! 13 cxd5 Nh4 -/+) 13 Nxe4 Nxa2 14 Nxd6? (14 Qxa2 dxe4 15 Qb1 unclear) 14...Nxc1 15 Nxc1 Qxd6 16 Bb4 Qc7 17 cxd5 cxd5 18 Nd3 Be6 and Black won in Basman – Kudrin, Manchester 1981.

(c2) 10 cxd5 cxd5 11 Nxd5 Be6 (11... Nbc6 12 Nxe7 Qxe7 13 d5 Nb4 unclear) 12 Bxe4 Nbc6! (12...Bc7? 13 Qxb7 Bxd5 14 Bxd5 Qxd5 15 Qxd5 Nxd5 16 Rc1 Na6

17 e4! Rfe8 18 f3 Rac8 19 a3 Bg3+ 20 Kd1 Nb6 21 Ne2 Bd6 22 Rxc8 Rxc8 23

Bc3 unclear) 13 Nf3 Rc8! 14 Nxe7 Bxb3 15 Nxc8 T. Sawyer – T. Just, corr. APCT 1996, 15...Bf7 –/+.

(c3) 10 0-0-0 (10 e3 a5!; 10 a3 f5 11 0-0-0 b5!) 10...a5 11 c5 (or 11 a3 b5) 11... Bc7, followed by f5, and White is in trouble. While I don't trust the main line 7 Qb3, this line "c" may still contain a hidden improvement.

7...0-0

There are numerous alternatives:

(a) 7...dxc4? 8 Qxc4 Be6 9 Qa4 and pawn e4 falls: (1-0, 33) in De Jong – Aaldijk, corr. 1994.

(b) 7...h6 loses time: 8 Bd2 0-0 9 cxd5 cxd5 10 Nxd5 is slightly better for White, and 7...h5 8 Bd2 is even worse, because it ruins Black's option to castle.

(c) 7...Bc7 8 Bg5 f6 9 Bd2, and again Black has difficulties with the safety of his king.

(d) 7...a6 8 Bg5 f6 9 Bd2 Bc7 10 0-0-0? b5! and Black stood well in G. Welling – R. Biedekoepper, Garmisch Partenkirchen 1991. 10 Rc1! += prevents b7-b5 and refutes the idea.

(e) 7...b6 8 Bg5!

(e1) 8...f6 9 Bd2 Be6



10 c5! bxc5 (10...Bc7 11 Nxe4) 11 Nxe4 cxd4 12 Rc1 Kf7 13 Nxd6+ Qxd6 14 Nf3 and White is slightly better.

(e2) 8...Be6 9 cxd5 cxd5 10 Qa4+! Qd7 (10...Kf8 11f3; 10...Bd7 11 Qb3) 11 Qxd7+ Kxd7 12 Bxe7 Kxe7 13 f3 =.

(f) 7...Na6 8 Bg5 f6 9 Bd2 Qb6 (Narciso Dublan – P. Cramling, Linares 1991) 10 Qxb6! axb6 11 cxd5 cxd5 12 f3 f5 13 Rc1 unclear.

(g) 7...Qb6(!) is solid: 8 Qxb6 axb6 9 Bg5 f6 10 Bd2 f5 11 gxf5 0-0 12 a3, about equal.

8 Bg5

Better than 8 Bd2 Na6 9 Rc1? in Basman – Singh, London 1989, when 9...dxc4! Adorján [7] 10 Qxc4 Nb4 would have been strong.

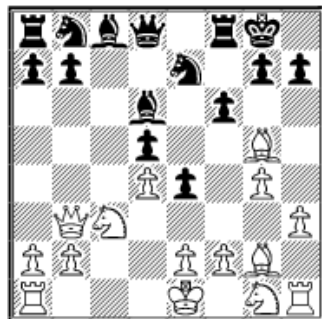
8...f6

8...dxc4!? 9 Qxc4 Be6 10 Qa4

(a) 10...Qb6 11 0-0-0 f5 12 gxf5 Rxf5 (G. Stuber – L. van Damme, corr. 1997) 13 Bxe7 Bxe7 14 Bxe4 unclear.

(b) 10...f6! 11 Be1 f5 12 gxf5 Nxf5 13 Bxe4 b5 14 Qc2 is extremely dangerous for White, e.g. 14...b4 (14...Nxd4) 15 Nb5 exb5 16 Bxa8 b3! 17 axb3 Na6, and Black has a strong attack.

9 cxd5 cxd5



Another plausible continuation is 9...Kh8 (but not 9...Qb6? 10 Qxb6 axb6 11 Nxe4 Bb4+ 12 Bd2 +/- Simmelink – Engbersen, corr. 1991) 10 dxc6 Nbx6 11 Be3 f5, and Black has sufficient compensation for his sacrificed pawn.

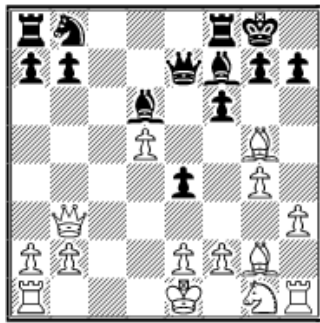
10 Nxd5

Basman's new proposal in *ECO A* (1996) [5]. Because of this different move order, White is now able to avoid the disadvantageous 10 Bd2 Kh8 (see 7 Bg5 f6 8 Bd2 0-0 9 Qb3 Kh8 10 cxd5 cxd5) 11

Nxd5 Be6 12 Bxe4 Nbc6! 13 Nf3 Rc8! 14 Nxe7 Bxb3 15 Nxc8 T. Sawyer – T. Just, corr. APCT 1996, 15...Bf7 –/+.

Unfortunately, his new attempt is also unplayable.

10...Be6 11 Nxe7+ Qxe7 12 d5 Bf7! -/+



After the strong text move, White's extra pawn hardly counts, while Black's pawn e4 locks White's king's wing, e.g. 13 Be3 Nc6 14 Kf1 Rfe8 -/+.

Michael Basman's original intention was 12...fxg5 (instead of 12...Bf7!) 13 dxe6, when his assessment "unclear" in [5] seems correct: 13...Na6 (13...Bb4+?! 14 Kf1 Nc6 15 Bxe4 Nd4 E. Dumalo – S. Hansson, corr. 1993, 16 Qc4!) 14 Bxe4 Nc5 15 Qc2 Nxe4 16 Qxe4 Rf4 17 Qd5 Rd8 18 Qb3 Rb4 19 Qc2 Be5 20 Rb1 Qxe6 21 Nf3 Qxa2 22 Nxe5 Qa5 23 0-0

Qxe5 24 Rfd1 Rf8 25 e3 a5 26 Rd7 Qf6 27 Qd2 Qf3 28 Rd8 Rxe4+ ½-½, C. Bologni – E. Loschi, corr. 1993.

Sources:

- [1] H. Grob: *Grobs Angriff*, 2nd ed. Zurich 1969.
- [2] H. Grob: *Die Eröffnungen in der Schachpartie*, 11th ed. Zurich 1979.
- [3] St. Bücker: *Groteske Schacheröffnungen*, Stuttgart 1990.
- [4] M. Basman: *The Killer Grob*, Oxford 1991.
- [5] A. Matanovic (ed.): *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings A*, 2nd ed. Belgrade 1996.
- [6] E. Schiller: *Unorthodox Chess Openings*, New York 1998.
- [7] A. Adorján: *Schwarz ist super in... Seltene Eröffnungen*, Kecskemét 1998.

Corrections

Last month's [article](#) on the Döry Defense, after 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 Ne4 3 Nfd2, recommended "3...Nf6! 4 e4 d6 5 Nf3 e5 with a Philidor Defence, or 5 f4(!) e5 (or perhaps g6) 6 Nf3 with an original, but fully playable Pirc Variation." In this line White's pawn e4 was hanging. What I meant to say was: "3...Nf6! 4 e4 d6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Nf3 with a Philidor Defence, or 5 f4(!) e5 6 Nf3 Nbd7 7 Nc3 with an original, but fully playable Pirc Variation."

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