



COLUMNISTS

Over the Horizons

Stefan Bucker



CHESTHEATRE

Play through and download
the games from

Lower Life in the Latvian Gambit Part 1

When Gerhart Gunderam's *Neue Eröffnungswege* [2] appeared in 1972, the booklet inspired my brother Peter to adopt the Latvian Gambit, **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5**. To learn more about it, he bought a copy of the old *Handbuch* ("Bilguer"), a volume of more than 1000 pages, only because seven of these pages covered his new pet line. The improbable mixture of sources was rounded up by Keres and *Schacharchiv* (Pachman), and in some cases Peter added a strong improvement of his own. In the next ten years he sometimes chose this surprise against an unsuspecting opponent, who had only prepared for his usual Caro-Kann. In those years the Latvian Gambit still meant a challenge. Everybody believed that 2...f5 was a mistake, but nobody knew exactly which of the four alternatives 3 Nxe5, 3 Bc4, 3 d4 or 3 exf5 was best. - In a simultaneous exhibition, Peter beat a grandmaster:

Hans-Joachim Hecht – Peter Bucker
Solingen 1975 (simul)

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Bc4

Today most books regard 3 Nxe5 Qf6 as the main line. 3...Nc6 is sometimes mentioned as an unusual alternative, but there is a clear refutation: 4 Qh5+ g6 5 Nxg6 Nf6 6 Qh3 hxg6 7 Qxh8 Qe7 8 Nc3! Nb4 (Perez Cruz – Acosta, corr. 1994; Massow Memorial) 9 d3 +-.

3...fxe4 4 Nxe5 d5

Visit Shop.ChessCafe.com for
the largest selection of chess
books, sets, and clocks in
North America:



Chess Informant 82

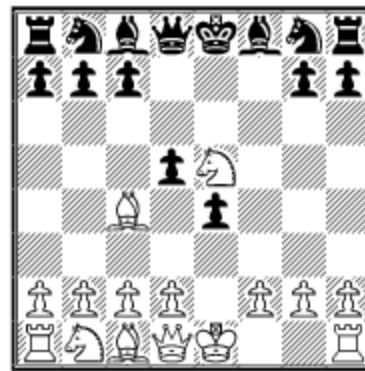
Only \$9.95!



NIC Yearbook 82

Only \$9.95!

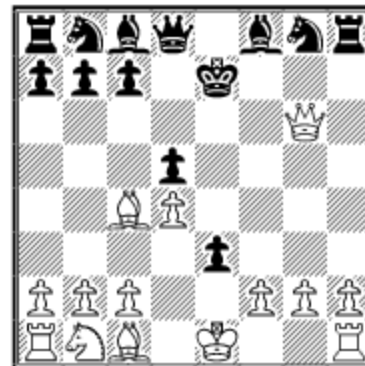
**The Complete
DGT Product Line**



Svedenborg's variation.

5 Qh5+ g6 6 Nxb6 hxb6 7 Qxb6

Many sources regard the safer 7 Qxg6+ as the main line. According to [9], Svedenborg introduced 7...Kd7 (when White is only slightly better) in 1970 as an improvement upon George Brunton Fraser's analysis of 1875, 7...Ke7 8 d4! (if 8 d3 Bh6, unclear). For example: 8...Qd6 9 Bg5+ Kd7 10 Qf5+ [9] etc. However, the surprising 8...e3! (instead of 8...Qd6) seems to have been overlooked:



At first, the idea looks strange. Didn't the e4-pawn provide valuable shelter for Black's king? But the continuation 9 Bxe3 Qd6 10 Bg5+ Kd7 explains why Black sacrificed the pawn: 11 Qf5+ Qe6+ gives check and forces the exchange of queens: 12 Qxe6+ Kxe6, with an unclear situation: White has three pawns for a knight.

7...Kf7 8 Be2

Perhaps 8 Qd4 was better.



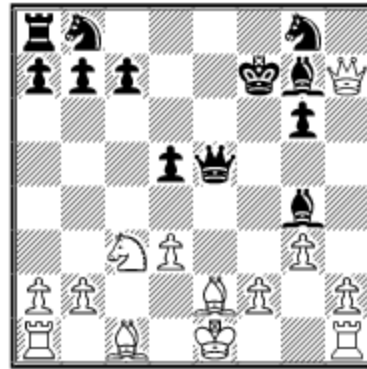
Chess Informant 85

Only \$9.95!

8...Bg7 9 Qh7 Qg5 10 g3 Qe5

More precise: 10...Nf6, Melchor – Kozlov, corr. 1985 [9].

11 d4 exd3 12 cxd3 Bg4 13 Nc3



13...Bh5

13...Nc6 14 f4 Qe7 15 f5 gxf5 16. 0-0 Nf6 17 Rxf5 Bxf5 18 Qxf5 Nd4 with sufficient compensation for the pawn.

14 d4?

Still engaged on many boards, GM Hecht overlooks an emergency door for his queen: 14 f4! Qe7 (14...Qe8 15 f5 Nf6 16 fxg6+) 15 f5 Nf6 16 fxg6 + Bxg6 (16...Ke8? 17 Bg5) 17 Qh4 +/-.

14...Qe6 15 f4 Nf6, White resigns.

Leonhardt's Variation

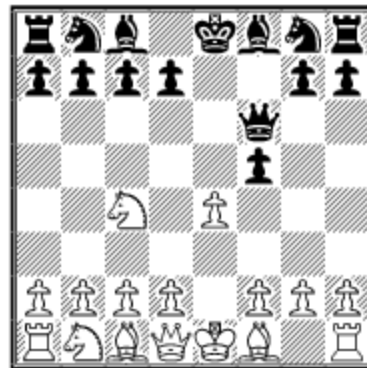
Paul Saladin Leonhardt's 1928 article [1] mentions the new ideas and practical successes with 2...f5, achieved by Behting, Mattison and others, while a clear White concept was missing. The author reasons that the Latvian Gambit can't be correct, when the King's Gambit is incorrect. For him, 2...f5 belongs to the group of unsound systems which "are not revealed by Caissa".



Paul Saladin Leonhardt
(1877-1934)

Only the last quarter of the article gives his recommendation for White:

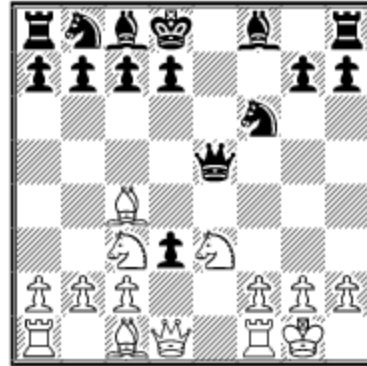
(1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Nxe5 Qf6) 4 Nc4!



Leonhardt [1] attributes two exclamation marks to this novelty (instead of 4 d4) and he continues: “In my opinion this is the decisive improvement [...]” Today it is clear that 4 Nc4 is in fact strong. Jeremy Silman [10] published analyses which usually end with White being a pawn up in a better position. Alejandro Melchor [11] also expressed his doubts whether Black’s play can be significantly improved. Tony Kosten, author of the reference work on the Latvian Gambit [9], writes on www.chesspub.com: “I think [4 Nc4] would be my preference in OTB play nowadays as White gets a nice lead in development in an open position.”

4...fxe4 5 Nc3 Qf7

(a) *Kaissiber* 11 (1999) propagated 5...Qe6 (!), for example 6 Ne3 Nf6 7 Bc4 Qe5 8 d3 exd3 9 0-0 Kd8



My analysis continued 10 Qxd3 c6 11 f4 Qh5 12 Bd2 Bc5 13 Na4 Ng4, about = (0-1, 34) Borrmann – Kozlov, corr. 1986-88 (Atars Memorial) [8]. However, in the diagrammed position 10 Ned5! is unpleasant for the defender and clearly better for White (+/-).

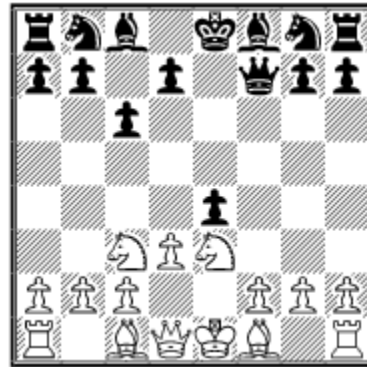
(b) Leonhardt's main line was 5...Qg6 and now the inaccurate 6 f3 (6... Be7! Behting) was soon replaced by 6 d3! Bb4 7 Bd2!. In this situation 7... Bxc3 8 Bxc3 Nf6 9 Bxf6 gxf6 10 Ne3! +/- was often played. But now it seems that 7...Nf6!, suggested by TopNotch and discussed in [12], is Black's best chance: 8 Nxe4 (8 Nb5!?) Bxd2+ 9 Qxd2 (9 Nexd2 was given in [5] and [9], but after 9...0-0 Black is not much worse) 9...d5 (so far Ginzburg – Perez Pietronave, Argentina 1995 [12]) 10 Nxf6+ (avoiding the line found by TopNotch [12]: 10 Ne5 Nxe4! 11 Nxg6 Nxd2 12 Nxh8 Nxf1, which is almost equal) 10...Qxf6 11 Qe3+.



In the endings after 11...Be6 12 Ne5 0-0 13 d4 Nc6 14 Bd3 Bf5 15 0-0 Bxd3 16 cxd3 or 11...Kd8!? 12 Ne5 Re8 13 d4 (13 f4 g5) 13...c5 14 c3 Nc6 15 f4 cxd4 16 cxd4 g5 17 fxg5 Qg7 18 Bb5 (18 0-0-0 Nxe5) 18...Nxd4 19 0-0-0 Qc7+ Black has active pieces and reasonable drawing chances.

The text move (**5...Qf7**) was Gunderam's proposal in [2].

6 Ne3 c6 7 d3!

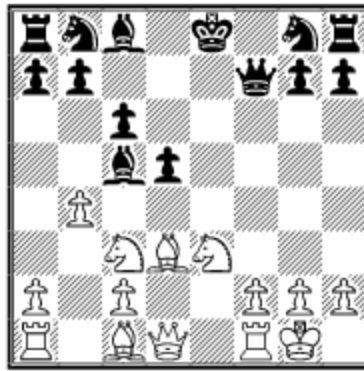


Budovskis' idea is a refinement over Gunderam's 7 Nxe4 d5 8 Ng5 which was extensively studied by Pachman, Nunn and many others (including my brother).

7...exd3 8 Bxd3 d5 9 0-0 Bc5

The tactical sequence 9...Bd6 10 Re1 Ne7 11 Nxd5 cxd5 12 Nb5 0-0 13 Nxd6 Qxf2+ 14 Kh1 Bg4 15 Qd2 Qh4 is equally bad after Strautins' idea 16 b4! (if 16 Nxb7 Nbc6, Black has sufficient compensation), for example 16...Nbc6 (16...Qf6 17 Qg5! Qxa1 18 Qxg4 +- Strautins – Clarke, corr. 1998; 2nd Latvian World Ch.) 17 Bb2 Rf2 18 Qc3 Qg5 19 Rf1 Raf8 20 Rxf2 Rxf2 21 Qe1! Qf4 22 b5 Bh3 23 Bc1! Qf6 24 bxc6 Qxa1 25 cxb7 Nc6 26 gxh3 1-0, Strautins – Destrebecq, corr. 1997/98; 2nd Latvian World Ch. [8].

10 b4!



This novelty detected by Magnus Rosenstielke (Sweden) refutes 9...Bc5, as detailed analyses on [10] and [11] show. For example:

10...Bxb4 11 Ncxd5 cxd5 12 Nxd5 Bc5 13 Bf4 Kf8 14 Qf3 Nd7

Or 14...Nc6 15 Nc7 Rb8 16 Bc4 Qf5 17 Rfe1 Nf6 18 Qg3 g5 19 Bxg5 Bxf2+ 20 Kh1! Kg7 (20...Bxg3? 21 Bh6 mate) 21 Bxf6+ Kxf6 22 Nd5+ Qxd5 23 Qxf2+ Qf5 24 Qh4+ Kg7 25 Rf1 1-0 Rosenstielke – Melchor, corr. 2005 (5th Latvian G. World Ch. final).

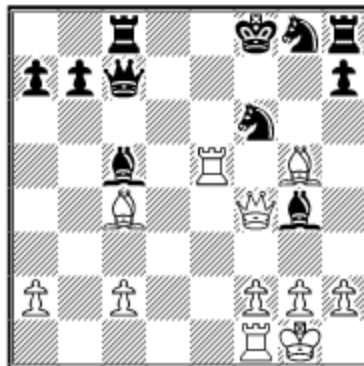
15 Nc7

Or 15 Bc4 Ne5 16 Bxe5 Qxf3 17 gxf3 Bf5, analysis by Matemax and MNb [11].

15...g5 16 Rae1 Ndf6 17 Bxg5 Bg4 18 Qf4!

Stronger than 18 Qxb7 (analysis on chesspublishing.com).

18...Rc8 19 Bc4 Qxc7 20 Re5!



20...Be7

Or 20...Bxf2+? 21 Rxf2 Qxc4 22 Bh6+ Kf7 23 Qg5 +-.

21 Bxg8 Rxc8 22 Bxf6 Rg6 23 Bxe7+ Kg8 24 h4 +- and White wins.

Melchor's Three Suggestions

In his web article "Another Look at the Latvian Gambit" (2002), Jeremy Silman wrote: "I'm left wondering why people choose to play the Latvian in the first place. Isn't this kind of gambit all about having fun and fighting for the initiative? If so, why would anyone wish to play a gambit that forces them to defend various pawn-down endgames where they can make a draw at best? It seems clear to me that the Latvian Gambit is refuted as a practical tournament choice." Though an ardent defender of the Latvian Gambit, **Alejandro Melchor** (Spain) was almost inclined to agree with Silman, considering the strength of the variations arising from Leonhardt's 4 Nc4. But instead he started a thread [11] to discuss the remaining alternatives for Black. When it became clear that the main line of the Leonhardt Variation was almost hopeless for Black, Melchor proposed three possible solutions. Is one of them good enough to replace the Leonhardt?

(A) (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Nxe5 Qf6 4 Nc4 fxe4 5 Nc3 Qf7 6 Ne3) **6...d**

(B) (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Nxe5 Qf6 4 Nc4 fxe4 5 Nc3) **5...Na**

(C) (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Nxe5) **3...Nf6**

A. The Atars Variation 6...d5!?

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Nxe5 Qf6 4 Nc4 fxe4 5 Nc3 Qf7 6 Ne3 d5!?



Black hurries to castle and to develop his pieces. The move is missing in the books; only Diepstraten [5] has two games. His oldest example is 7 Nxd5 Bf5 8 Be2 Nc6 9 0-0 0-0-0 (0-1, 35) Jimenez – Atars, K. Betins Memorial 1971/72. But apparently the variation is now coming into fashion. Melchor writes [11]: “Latvian Gambit experts are currently trying this relatively unexplored line. IMs I. Oren and I. Budovksis in the past, and French C. Deneuve in our days, have drawn some games in easy way.” Melchor’s overview based on 22 games looks encouraging. In any case White has to make some unusual decisions.

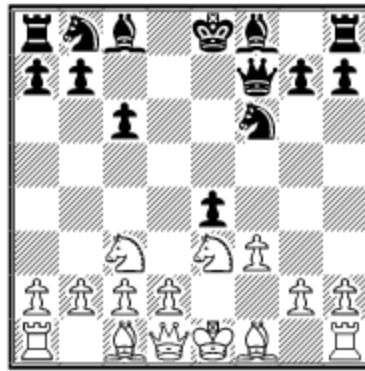
7 Nxd5

7 Nxd5 Be6!? (7...c6 8 Nc3 transposes to the main line) 8 Bc4 Na6 [11] is also interesting. 9 Bxa6?! bxa6! gives Black attractive play, but after the flexible 9 b3, it might be difficult for Black to achieve full compensation.

7...c6

I’d prefer 7...Be6! 8 Bc4 Bd6 (8...Na6 9 Bxa6 Bxd5 10 Nxd5 Qxd5? 11 c4 [11] or 10...bxa6 11 c4 is better for White) 9 0-0 c6!? 10 Nc3 Bxc4 11 Nxe4 Bxh2+ 12 Kxh2 Qc7+ 13 Kg1 Bxf1 14 Kxf1 “with compensation”, analysis by Melchor [11]. This position should be playable for Black.

8 Nc3 Nf6 9 f3



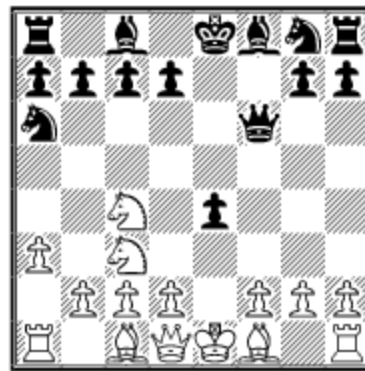
White tries to avoid weaknesses on the d-file. This approach seems more convincing than the examples with 9 d3 presented in [11]. 9 g3 also comes into consideration. – In the diagram situation there could follow: 9...Bc5 (perhaps intending 10 fxe4 Bxe3!?, to blockade White's two extra pawns on the square e5) 10 Be2! exf3 11 Bxf3 0-0 12 0-0 +/-, White is clearly better.

B. The Dreiberger Variation 5...Na6

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Nxe5 Qf6 4 Nc4 fxe4 5 Nc3 Na6

Diepstraten's work [5] names the variation after **Leonied Dreiberger** (1908-1969), who was born in Riga, but immigrated into the USA after World War II.

6 a3!



Neither mentioned by Diepstraten [5] nor by Melchor [11]. Denying the knight the b4-square is perhaps the simplest reply. The knight is stranded on a6. Some alternatives:

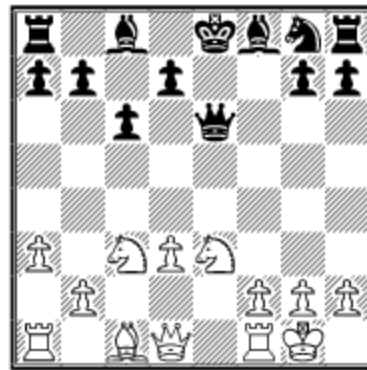
(a) 6 Nxe4 Qe6 7 Qh5+ g6 8 Qe5 Qxe5 9 Nxe5 Nb4 Destrebecq – Kozlov, corr. 1981/83, but maybe 9...Bg7 10 d4 d6 slightly improves Black's chances.

(b) 6 d3 Bb4 7 Bd2 (Dravnieks – Svendsen, corr. 1987/89) 7...Ne7! 8 dxe4 0-0 9 Qe2 c6 10 0-0-0 b5 is anything but clear. However, White should rather choose 7 dxe4 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 Qxc3+ 9 Bd2 Qf6 10 Bd3 Ne7 11 0-0 0-0 12 Qh5, when Black is in trouble.

6...Qe6

Or 6...d6 7 Ne3 Nc5 8 b4 Ne6 9 Rb1 Qf7 10 Nxe4 +/-.

7 Ne3 c6 8 d3 exd3 9 Bxd3 Nc5 10 0-0 Nxd3 11 cxd3! +/-



To exchange the knight on d3 seemed to be a good idea, but the loss of time will show. For example: 11...Kd8 12 Re1 Nf6 13 h3 d6 14 Bd2 Qf7 15 Nc4 Be6 16 Qa4 Bxc4 17 dxc4 Kc8 18 Rad1 Be7 19 b4 followed by 20 b5, and there is no defense.

I don't believe in 5...Na6, but the Atars Variation deserves attention. If you want to know more about it, don't miss Alejandro Melchor's valuable theoretical overview in [11]. We reserve the third of Melchor's suggestions (**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f5 3 Nxe5**) **3...Nf6**, the "Löwenthal Variation" [5], for our next column.

Sources:

- [1] P. S. Leonhardt: "Das Königsgambit in der Rückhand", in: Kagans Neueste Schachnachrichten, suppl. issue 1928, pp. 50-55.
- [2] G. Gunderam: Neue Eröffnungswege, Berlin 1972 (2nd ed.)
- [3] St. Bücker: "Am Krankenlager des Lettischen Gambits", in: Gambit

59, Nuremberg 1984

[4] K. Grivainis: The Latvian Gambit, Davenport 1985

[5] L. C. M. Diepstraten: Lettisch Gambiet. Deel 1, Venlo-Antwerp 1993.

[6] A. Lein, S. Pickard: The Latvian Gambit. A Grandmaster View, Dallas 1995

[7] St. Bucker: "John Nunn's lettische Ansichten", in: Kaissiber 10 (1999)

[8] St. Bucker: "Von Caissa nicht geoffenbaret", in: Kaissiber 11 (1999)

[9] T. Kosten: The Latvian Gambit Lives!, London 2001

[10] J. Silman: "Splat the Lat" and more on the Latvian Gambit, on www.jeremysilman.com.

[11] "Latvian Gambit Refuted"; thread on www.chesspub.com.

[12] "Latvian Encounter"; thread on www.chesspub.com.

Send your games or comments to redaktion@kaissiber.de.

 [TOP OF PAGE](#)

 [HOME](#)

 [COLUMNS](#)

 [LINKS](#)

 [ARCHIVES](#)

 [ABOUT THE
CHESS CAFE](#)

[\[ChessCafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Review\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Study\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About ChessCafe.com\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

© 2009 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.
"ChessCafe.com®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.