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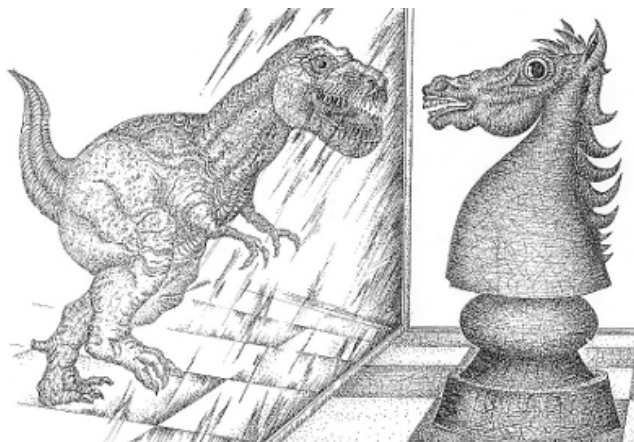
Rook with a View, for Two Knights

The adventures in the Max Lange Attack, **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 0-0 Bc5 6 e5!**, are as fascinating today as they were a hundred years ago. It is still possible to discover new ideas, and, according to analyses by Lev Gutman, the first player seems to have a small advantage. Even by King's Gambit standards, the Max Lange Attack has an excellent rate in creating sharp positions. But the merits of the Max Lange Attack itself are only one side of the coin. It has become almost impossible to recruit new followers for this gambit. The reason is the well known Anti-Max-Lange **5...Nxe4!**, called "a cautious offshoot of the powerful Max Lange Attack" by Tartakower in *Die hypermoderne Schachpartie*, Vienna 1925. **6 Re1 d5 7 Bxd5 Qxd5 8 Nc3 Qh5**



Equally frustrating for White is **8...Qa5**, recommended 1911 by J. Möller in *Tidskrift för Schack*. In both variations, many attempts to find an advantage, or a kind of initiative, have failed. The text move adds boredom to equality, with the possible exchange of the queens after **9.Nxe4 Be6 10.Nxd4 Qxd1**. However, fast simplification isn't the exclusive feature of the text variation. In his book [Play the Open Games as Black](#) [4], John Emms stopped his analysis of **8...Qa5** only on move twenty-six, after reaching a king and pawn ending. His attempt to raise some interest in the position was admirable: "As king and pawn endings are the most complicated of all, I'll have to sit on the fence here and say that all three results are still possible!" However, a closer analysis shows that it is only another draw.

9 Nxe4 Be6 10 Neg5



Two Knights, by Zygmunt Nasiolkowski, Lüdenscheid/Germany

This liquidation, more common after **8...Qa5**, seems even less promising under the present circumstances, with the black queen on h5. Thus, for many

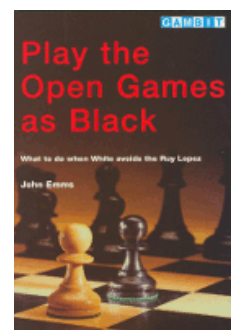
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decades the books have preferred 10 Bg5 Bd6 (in the tricky, but weaker line 10...h6 11 Bf6 Qg6 12 Nh4 [1], [2] John Emms recommended 12...Qg4 [4], yet 13 Qd3! +/- Sedov – Sulskis, Swidnica 1998, is a clear refutation) 11 Nxd6 + (Chris Baker avoided this simplification and gave 11 c4 [2], but Emms's reply 11...h6 12 Nxd6+ cxd6 13 Bf4 Qc5 [4] made clear that it was no improvement) 11...cxd6 12.Bf4 Qd5 (Emms: "this is objectively level, even though Black's practical results have been quite good" [4]) 13 c3 Rc8 [4]. This is also John Nunn's main line in [3]. It is difficult to dispute his assessment "=". The chances to win this position are close to zero: 14 b3 0-0 15 Nxd4 Nxd4 16 Qxd4 Qxd4 17 cxd4 d5 18 Rac1 Rxc1 19 Rxc1 Rc8 20 Rxc8+ Bxc8, and even the most inventive players will agree to a draw.



10...0-0-0

Not a new position, its first appearance in print was in *Neue Berliner Schachzeitung* 1867. Black returns the pawn (no big deal: there wasn't a way to hold it).

11 Nxe6 fxe6

Now after the common 12 Rxe6 Bd6



"White is struggling to equalize", as John Emms writes [4]. John Nunn [3] correctly assesses it as =+. Some examples follow:

(a) 13 Qd3 Nb4 14 Qe4 Na6! 15 b4 Nxb4 16 Rb1 Qd5 17 Bg5 Qxe4 18 Rxe4 Na2 and Black is better.

(b) 13 Qe2? d3! 14 cxd3?? Nd4 and wins.

(c) 13 Qe1 Rhf8 14 Qe4 (to avoid Rxf3) 14...d3! +/- Danneck – Pütter, Aachen 1982.

(d) The main line 13 Bd2 Rhe8 is no pleasure either. White has to exchange his most active piece, thereby conceding the e-file: 14 Rxe8 Rxe8 15 h3 =+.



The last variation looks highly suspicious. If White cannot hold the e-file, it is obviously a mistake to enter such a forcing liquidation, with White losing all his active assets, while Black gains a clear superiority, often even a winning attack on the e- and f-file or tactical threats against h2.

To play the Max Lange Attack, White's pressure on the e-file is a must. It was the impression that 12 Rxe6 feels wrong (winning back the pawn, but losing everything else), which led me to consider whether White has a better move. In fact, we should be magnanimous and let the pawn stay on the board:

12 Bg5!?



The database provides four games in which this idea has been tested, though not very successfully: White earned a meager half point. If we include two similar games against 8... Qa5 (starting 8... Qa5 9 Nxe4 Be6 10 Neg5 0-0-0 11 Nxe6 fxe6 12 Bg5), we have six examples (+ 1, = 1, - 4). After introducing the Bg5 move in the 8... Qa5 variation, its inventor Dusan Cepon was rewarded with the only full point (Cepon – Potocnik, Slovenian Championship 1991). In spite of these bad results in a handful of unconvincing games, I believe that the bishop move is better than 12 Rxe6 and deserves attention.

12...Re8

A natural reaction, since it protects the extra pawn. Black is willing to pay the price: his rook is now in a passive position. There are four alternatives:

(a) 12...Be7? 13 Bxe7 Nxe7 14 Rxe6 loses time.

(b) 12...Bb4? 13 Rxe6 Rd5 14 Bd2 Bd6 can lead to the same position as in variation "c", but there are additional options for White, such as 13 Bxd8! Bxe1 14 Qxe1 Rxd8 15 Qxe6+ Kb8 16 Re1, and White controls the e-file, in sharp contrast to the position after 12 Rxe6?!

(c) 12...Rd7. Since Black's rooks are no longer connected, White can now take the pawn, without fearing the loss of the e-file: 13 Rxe6 Bd6 14 h3?! (to avoid Bxh2+) 14...Rf7? (14...h6! 15 Bd2 Qf5, when 16 Qe2 Qxc2 fails and 16 Re2 g5! gives Black a significant advantage) 15 Bd2 Rhf8 16 Ng5 Qxd1+ 17 Rxd1 Rxf2 18 Ne4 R2f5 19 Rxd6 cxd6 20 Nxd6+ Kc7 21 Nxf5 Rxf5 22 c3 dxc3 23 Bxc3 (=, 50) Sambuev (2498) – Barbeau (2357), Montreal 2009. It would have been better to retreat immediately: 14 Bh4 with an unclear situation.



For example, 14...Bxh2+ 15 Kxh2 g5 16 Nxg5 Qxh4+ 17 Nh3, with chances for both sides.

(d) 12...Rd5 has been played twice, but White erred early:

(d1) 13 Bf4? Bd6 (13...Qf5!) 14 Bxd6 Rxd6 15 Qd2 Rf8 -/+; (0-1, 31) Guezennec (2152) – Schuermans (2251), Charleroi 2006 (Open).

(d2) The second game was more interesting: 13 Qe2 e5 14 Qe4 Qf7 (14...Rb5 15 Rab1 Qg6 should be fine for Black – after the exchange of queens, a strategy such as in the text becomes pointless) 15 Rad1 h6 16 Bh4 g5 17 Bg3 Bg7 18 a3 Rhd8 19 b4 a6



20 Rd3 R5d7 21 Rb3 Qd5 22 Qd3 Qb5 and Black slowly converted his advantage (0-1, 61) Sunzhukhanov – Makarkin (2147), Doroshkevich Memorial 2008. In the diagrammed position, obviously the white rook belongs on e4, to exert pressure on the pawn e5, and not the queen.

(d3) The correct solution must be the sacrifice 13 Rxe6!, when 13...Rxc5?! 14 Nxg5 Qxg5 15 Re8+ Kd7 16 Qe2 offers White more than enough for the small investment. The absolute control of the e-file after 16...Qf6 (16...Ne7? 17 Rb8 is too cooperative) 17 Re1, which is unknown after the old 12 Rxe6?!, deserves another diagram:



17...g6 is almost forced (17...Qf5 18 Ra8), when White can either force a draw (18 Re6; 18 Qg4+), or continue his attack (18 Ra8; 18 c3). Considering the consequences of 13...Rxc5?!, Black should certainly prefer 13...Bd6! 14 Bh4 g5 (or 14...Bxh2+ 15 Kxh2 g5 unclear) 15 Bg3 with roughly equal

chances.

What follows is a new move. I don't believe (after the text move 12...Re8) in 13 Bf4? Bc5 (13...Qd5!) 14 Be5 Rd8 15 Bxg7?, which led to a disaster in Krogulski – Toczek, Polanica Zdroj 1999: 15...Rhg8 16 Be5 Bb4 17 Bg3 (17 Re4 Qg6 -+) 17...Bxe1 18 Qxe1 Qf5 19 Qe2 e5 20 Nxe5 Nxe5 0-1.

13 Re4!



A rook with a view: on Black's pawns e6 and d4, and on the square h4 (Qd3 followed by Rh4 is an option). With the text move, White prepares to double his heavy pieces: Re4, Qe2, maybe even Rae1, to increase the pressure against Black's e-pawn. Hopefully, the attacked pawn will proceed to e5, nurtured by Nc6, Bd6 and rooks behind the pawn. White's bishop g5 will often retreat to g3. Of course, blockading the e5-pawn would only be a first step. If everything goes according to plan, Black should remain passive, watching his own center pawns. White's further plan usually involves an attack with b2-b4, or there may be a chance for c2-c3 or h2-h4, disrupting Black's pawn formation.

At first sight White's strategy seems illogical – why ignore the hanging pawn e6, but later try to win it, once it has become Black's best protected unit on the board, or even in the whole tournament? Couldn't Black simply return the pawn and get a good position? However, there is a big difference between 12 Rxe6?!, when White afterwards is forced onto the defensive, and the new idea 12 Bg5 Re8 13 Re4, to win back the pawn in better circumstances: on move twelve White wasn't ready to conquer the e-file. After White has caught up in development, to win the e-pawn with all his pieces active might allow him to turn his attention to the next target: Black's important pawn on d4.

However, for the time being Black still possesses his extra pawn. It will require concrete analysis to prove that White is fine. I have studied the sacrifice since 2006 and believe that it is correct. But it would be pointless to bury the idea under a hill of variations. A few sample lines will have to suffice:

(a) 13...Bd6 14 Bh4 Qd5 (an active queen, but also a target for an eventual c2-c4) 15 Qe2 Rhf8 16 Bg3 Bxg3 17 hxg3 a6 18 a4 (18 c4 dxc3 19 bxc3 seems premature) 18...e5 19 Rd1 Re7 20 b4!, White has excellent play for the pawn.

(b) 13...h6 14 Bh4 g5 15 Bg3 Bg7 16 Qe2 Qg6 17 Re1 h5 18 Qc4 and White is better.

(c) 13...Be7 is one of Black's best options. In my opinion, Black should avoid the formation Bd6 plus pawn e5, which only adds to Black's problems. For example, White might open the d-file by c2-c3, and in such a case the bishop d6 would only hamper Black's counterplay along the d-file. 14 Bxe7 Rxe7 15 Qe2 (or 15 Qe1, about equal, while both 15 b4 Nxb4! or 15 Nxd4 Qxd1+ 16 Rxd1 Rd8 17 Rd3 Nb4 are less advisable) 15...Qd5 16 b4 a6 (16...Nxb4 17 Rxd4 Qc5 18 Rc4 Qa5 19 Rd1 with chances for both sides) 17 h3 Rf8 18 a4!



18...Nxb4 19 Nxd4 (or 19 Rxd4), White has sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

The whole concept, controversial as it may be, has an additional advantage. It can be played, without too many changes, also against the second main line 8...Qa5. This fact had already been mentioned in the article, in the notes to 12 Bg5. The two existing games went as follows: 8...Qa5 9 Nxe4 Be6 10 Neg5 0-0-0 11 Nxe6 fxe6 12 Bg5 Re8



(a) 13 c3? Bd6 (13...dxc3) 14 cxd4 Rhf8 15 Bh4 e5 16 Qd3? Nxd4 -/+ (but 1-0, 32) Cepon – Potocnik, Slovenian Championship 1991.

(b) 13 Bh4 e5 14 a3 Bd6 15 Re4 (the "rook with a view"!) 15...h6 16 Qd3 Qa6 17 Qxa6 bxa6 18 Rae1 Rhf8 19 Bg3 Re7, Marek Kawulok (1567) – Magdalena Miturova (1535), Kuncice pod Onrejnikiem 2006 (Open). A good game, unfortunately White spoiled it with 20 Nxe5? (20 b4! Kb7 21 Nd2 =) 20...Rfe8 21 f4 g5!, which cost him the exchange (0-1, 27).

(c) 13 Re4! is more flexible and therefore preferable (to 13 Bh4, above). Often the play will be similar as in the 8...Qh5 version. One difference should be noted, though. In case of 13...Be7, White can reply 14 Bxe7 Rxe7 15 Nxd4, without fearing the exchange Qh5xd1. But again I'd prefer 15 Qe2!, to exploit the strength of White's rook on e4.

Sources

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- [2] Chr. Baker: *A Startling Chess Opening Repertoire*, London 1998
- [3] J. Nunn *et al*: *Nunn's Chess Openings*, London 1999
- [4] J. Emms: *Play the Open Games as Black*, London 2000

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