



## COLUMNISTS

### Over the Horizons

Stefan Bucker



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## Not the Aleppo Gambit

For a chess writer, it is easier to find good lines for Black than for White. An analysis ending with an equal sign is a success for the second player and an equal/plus is a triumph. Recent attempts to draft promising repertoires for White therefore deserve respect. Powerful chess software can help, but to find an attack or at least some initiative for White is still hard work. And often the engine ruins our concept in a flash, by seeing an idea for the wrong side. The collateral damage of Fritz and friends can be frustrating.

The fashionable repertoire books are pretty useful, if you don't expect more than repertoire proposals. The disadvantage is that background information, about the origin and further development of key ideas, is generally missing. In a typical bibliography, the oldest of the twenty-five works listed is from 1999. It is poor to see a detailed analysis of 1 d4 e5, but no mention of the name Englund Gambit. Personally, I prefer books that put ideas into a context, which warn you that an old idea is now considered risky, and that Short's choice may be superior to Louis Paulsen's. Many of these old variations are better than their reputation.

The choice of your openings also depends on individual factors. Thus, I have reservations when asked to suggest a repertoire. Such a thing as "the strongest opening" simply does not exist. However, a week ago I received this message from **Lex Jaffe**, USA:

"I have greatly enjoyed your column over the past several years. I was curious if it would be possible for you to suggest a fun, offbeat repertoire based on 1 e4 in the future. I would be interested in reading your recommendation of which lines the readers should investigate. - P. S. The Mouse Trap Gambit works every time."

It could have been worse, at least it was 1 e4 and not the Aleppo Gambit. What finally convinced me to break with my convictions and outline a few ideas for an offbeat 1 e4 repertoire, were the last two sentences. Someone who is successful with the Mouse Trap Gambit (**1 e4 b6 2 d4 Bb7 3 Bg5!?**) would not be prejudiced against riskier ideas. Equally important was his willingness to invest his own work. Someone who merely follows my analyses, but doesn't develop his own ideas, misses the point in an offbeat repertoire.

There will be a recurring motive, a main reason why I try to cover 1 e4 e5 in two or three columns, to invite you to study old lines, popular around 1900 or even older. It will be quite a challenge to find an offbeat idea against 1...c5, but if I fail, the ongoing 2 b4 series in *Kaissiber* might be a good replacement. In fact, I am unsure whether I can deliver in all cases. Look at it as an experiment with an open end. In any case the surprise element should be a main factor. Whether it is "fun" mainly depends on your preferences. If you like to sacrifice pawns for a dubious attack, you'll be happy in every opening. My description of an ideal 1 e4 e5 opening for White would be similar to the one in the poem "My Opening":

*Ruy Lopez was too slow for me,  
 And Evans far too frisky;  
 I sought an opening that should be  
 Brilliant and yet not risky;  
 I sought, and found it, I believed;  
 Analysis laborious  
 Proved my attack, howe'er received  
 Was bound to be victorious.*

However, in this act of opening creation something must have gone wrong. In

Purchases from our [shop](#) help  
 keep [ChessCafe.com](#) freely  
 accessible:



[Starting Out: Scotch Game](#)  
 by John Emms



[The Scotch Game](#)  
 by Nigel Davies



[The Scotch Game](#)  
 by Alexander Beliavsky  
 & Srdjan Cvetkovic

the club the opening inventor didn't score as planned, and the third verse of the poem (by C. C. P., in *The British Chess Magazine* 1903) ends in total failure:

*I taught my office boy the game;  
He learnt the moves, and – dash it! –  
Saw at a glance my little aim,  
And found a way to smash it.  
To me still sound my opening seems,  
But since the critic chortles,  
I'll cast off all ambitious dreams,  
And play like other mortals.*

Instead of starting from scratch, the easier way to develop your own opening fun is to use a standard system and find an unusual twist in a well known position. This is the approach that I'll use here. Although it begins with **Alapin's Opening**, not to be confused with the Aleppo Gambit, my recommendation is the Scotch Game. **Simon Alapin** (1856-1923) was aware of this possibility. After 2...Nc6, he used to continue with 3 f4, but when Max Lange in *Deutsche Schachzeitung* harshly questioned the soundness of 2 Ne2 ("not better than 2 Ke2") and challenged Alapin to a correspondence game (1892-93), Alapin suddenly dropped all his eccentricity, continued 3 d4! and won in a strong, positional way, as his opponent was practically compelled to avoid the natural 3...exd4 and chose 3...Qh4?!



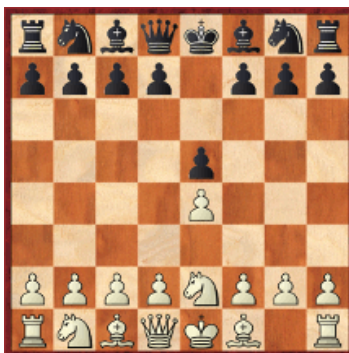
Simon Alapin (1856-1923)

Gerard Welling's fifteen-page article on Alapin's Opening [\[1\]](#) shows how Alapin himself played the system. The continuation 3 d4 appeared only once in the games of the Vilnius-born master who spent the later decades of his life in Germany. Although the following treatment largely ignores his work on 2 Ne2, I uphold another Alapin tradition:

#### Attakinsky – Defendarov

Alapin Opening. Sub-section: Scotch Game [C45]

1 e4 e5 2 Ne2



[FEN "rnbqkbnr/pppp1ppp/8/4p3/4P3/8/PPPPNPP/RNBQKB1R b KQkq - 0 2"]

The normal path heading for the Scotch is 2 Nf3. But this Autobahn is available only to those who are well versed in the Russian Defense 2...Nf6, the Latvian Gambit, and 2...d5. Not to mention the Philidor Defense 2...d6. The latter move may be just as good in the diagrammed position. But there is a chance that a Philidor player would modify his set-up, when he sees the knight appear on e2. You don't have to be an octopus to predict that in the case of 2...d6 White will castle long, followed by f3 and g4. This systematic pawn storm against the Philidor structure is in no way handicapped by having a knight on e2, rather the opposite. From e2 the knight can easily go to g3-f5. In a standard Philidor, White's knight usually sails to f5 via h4, but g3 is a more natural square for the knight.

## 2...Nc6

On the main alternative 2...Nf6, Alapin's continuation was 3 f4 [1], but I much prefer 3 d4! Nxe4 4 f3 (the more complicated 4 Qd3 d5 5 f3 Ng5 6 dxe5 Ne6 7 f4 may be even better; e.g., 7...Nc6 8 a3!) 4...Ng5 5 dxe5; for example, 5...Nc6 6 f4 Ne6 7 Nbc3 d6 8 exd6 Bxd6 9 Be3 0-0 10 Qd2 Nc5 11 0-0-0 Re8 12 h3, with heavy complications. It is a nice position particularly if you like attacks after opposite castling.

Minor continuations like 2...Bc5 3 c3 (or Na4) or Hugo Süchting's 2...f5 3 exf5 d5 4 d4, with a reversed version of King's Gambit, are advantageous for White. More details in [1].

## 3 d4 exd4

Accepts the invitation to the Scotch Game, perhaps in the belief that a 2 Ne2 player would feel uncomfortable in a standard opening. By the way, the text move may well be Black's best option in Alapin's Opening, provided he doesn't like the unclear situation after 2...Nf6. The solid set-up 3...d6 wouldn't be the Philidor proper, but White's plan would remain similar (cf. my comment above after 2 Ne2). Another possibility is 3...Nf6 4 d5 Bc5 5 Ng3! (avoiding the mean trap 5 dxc6? Ng4 6 Be3 Bxe3 7 fxe3 Qf6 -/+ ) 5...Ne7 6 Nc3 +=.

## 4 Nxd4



[FEN"r1bqkbnr/pppp1ppp/2n5/8/3NP3/8/PPP2PPP/RNBQKB1R b KQkq - 0 4"]

In the twelve years from 1990 to 2001, Garry Kasparov created new interest in this ancient opening by playing the Scotch with great success. According to the database, the sixteen wins and eight draws (no losses) show a "performance rating" of 2923. Several new books on the Scotch are available, but generally they lack information on older ideas. The three books by Lev Gutman, though a bit dated, remain the main source for the serious student of the Scotch. Two are listed in the bibliography, the third book covered 4...Qh4.

## 4...Nf6

The next column will discuss the alternative 4...Bc5, focusing on a main line from the nineteenth century that didn't make it into Kasparov's practice, probably because he read the wrong (new) books. However, I am not yet sure whether 4...Qh4 will get a column. What does the database say? 14,000 games with Nf6, almost 20,000 with Bc5. Only 2,900 games with 4...Qh4. Well,

maybe.

## 5 Nxc6

Going into the Scotch Four Knights by means of 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 Nxc6 bxc6 is also popular, when 7 Bd3 is now the main continuation, covered in detail by Abby Marshall in her [latest column](#) for [ChessCafe.com](#). In the 1880s, Louis Paulsen's 7 Qd4 Qe7 8 f3 was regarded as the main continuation.



[FEN"r1b1k2r/p1ppqppp/2p2n2/8/1b1QP3/2N2P2/PPP3PP/R1B1KB1R b KQkq - 0 8"]

It offers many complex and interesting variations after both 8...d5?! and 8...c5 (Berger). In *Play the Open Games as Black*, London 2000, John Emms recommended 8...Bc5 9 Qd3 a5, as in Tartakower – Prins, Venice 1949. In my opinion, 10 Be3 (instead of Tartakower's 10 Bg5) 10...Ba6 11 Qd2 leads to equality. In *Starting Out: The Scotch Game*, London 2005, Emms only says: "Black can try 8...Bc5" and offers more details on lines where White has an easier life.

## 5...bxc6

Black's split pawn formation means that almost every ending will be slightly better for White. In particular after a further d7-d5 and some pawn exchanges, Black will often be handicapped with the inferior pawn formation. A threat to exchange queens may worry White in other forms of the Open Games – but hardly in the Scotch!

## 6 Qe2!?



[FEN"r1bqkb1r/p1pp1ppp/2p2n2/8/4P3/8/PPPIQPPP/RNB1KB1R b KQkq - 0 6"]

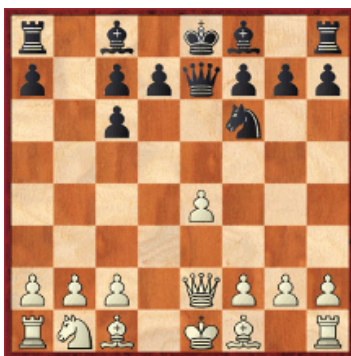
An interesting alternative, which is surprisingly rare (the database has eleven human games) in comparison to the "Mieses Variation" 6 e5 Qe7 7 Qe2 (6,600 games), to which it can transpose (which happened in two of those eleven games). Preferring the text move in the context of our "repertoire" doesn't mean that I advise against 6 e5, which is a fascinating topic. What I like most in 6 e5 is the possibility to adopt old variations that your opponents will probably never have heard of.

Edward Winter's online article "Kasparov, Karpov and the Scotch" [\[4\]](#) gives an impression of what you can find in old sources, if you are willing to dig in sources from the nineteenth century. Many old books and magazines have

become accessible today via "Google Books" and are only a few mouse clicks away. In his article Edward Winter in particular looks at 6 e5 Qe7 7 Qe2 Nd5 8 c4 Ba6 9 b3 0-0-0. The last move is "old," while other options like Anand's 9...g5 used to attract most followers nowadays. Winter's conclusion: "Although many of the above Scotch Game variations still occur in modern games, the great labor of these giants from another century seems to have been virtually forgotten."

The picture may change. In one of the latest books on the Scotch, [\*The Scotch Game for White\*](#), Sofia 2009 [7], Vladimir Barsky often gives a +/- in the fashionable lines, while in the old 9...0-0-0 line he only claims a slight advantage (+=). On page 176, Barsky writes on the position after 9...0-0-0 10 Bb2: "It is amazing, but I will have to mention – this position was tested in practice as early as the end of the 19th century!" Perhaps someone should have informed Mr. Barsky about the rich history of the Scotch. Barsky's bibliography consists of mere two books (Marin, 2007 and Emms, 2005).

## 6...Qe7



[FEN"r1b1kb1r/p1ppqppp/2p2n2/8/4P3/8/PPP1QPPP/RNB1KB1R w KQkq - 0 7"]

Black wants to reach the main line by a transposition of moves. Several alternatives deserve attention:

(a) 6...Bc5 (6...Bb4+ 7 c3 Bc5 8 e5 Nd5 9 c4 leads to the identical position) 7 e5 Nd5 8 c4 Nb6 (or 8...Ne7) 9 Qg4 g6 (the exchange sacrifice 9...0-0 10 Bh6 g6 may be playable) 10 Bg5 Be7 11 h4 with complications; e.g., 11...d5 12 Qg3 h6 13 Be3, unclear.

(b) 6...d6 prevents the advance e4-e5, but White achieves good play: 7 Nc3 Be7 8 Qc4 d5 9 Qxc6+ Bd7 10 Qb7 dxe4 (10...d4 11 Nd5) 11 Bf4 with an excellent position; for example, 11...Rb8 (11...0-0 12 0-0-0 c6 13 Bc4 is a bit better, but still +/-) 12 Qxa7 Rxb2



[FEN"3qk2r/Q1pbpppp/5n2/8/4pB2/2N5/PrP2PPP/R3KB1R w KQk - 0 13"]

13 Bxc7 Qc8 14 Ba6! +- suddenly traps Black's queen; e.g., 14...Bc5 15 Qxc5 Qxa6 and now the crowning 16 0-0-0! +-.

(c) 6...Rb8 comes into consideration.

## 7 Nd2



In the correspondence game Van Kempen (2565) – Umansky (2700), Pappier Memorial 1998, White finally accepted the invitation, played 7 e5 and won in twenty-eight moves. Follow this example, but only after you have done your homework. Objectively, the text move is probably equal. In a 1 e4 repertoire it may serve as a good place-holder, until you are not satisfied with the results and feel ready to study the immediate 7 e5.

There is another alternative for an offbeat, but solid repertoire: 7 Nc3. The clearest path to equality then seems to be 7...Qe6! 8 a3 (maybe 8 f3) 8...Bc5 9 Be3 Bb6 10 f3 0-0 11 0-0-0 d5! =. However, in a tournament game many opponents will not be so rational to take this safe course. The open b-file, together with White's king on c1, is a strong incentive not to exchange queens, but rather attack White's king. And in this case, White's attack on the other side of the board may well come first.

### 7...g6

Black is still hoping for e4-e5. Since g6 is fashionable in the main line, it will be a common choice under the given circumstances. But there are alternatives:

(a) 7...Qe6 (or maybe 7...Qe5!? 8 g3 a5 9 f4 Qe6) 8 e5 Nd5 9 a3!? Be7 10 Nf3 f6 (10...d6 11 Nd4!? +=) 11 Qe4 fxe5 12 Bd3!? is an interesting gambit, based on the idea that 12...d6 fails to 13 c4. For example, 12...Bf6 13 Ng5 Bxg5 14 Bxg5 h6 15 Bd2 Nf6 16 Qg6+ Qf7 17 f4!? with compensation.

(b) 7...d6 8 Qc4 Bd7 9 Bd3 d5 10 Qd4 c5 11 Qe3 Bc6 12 0-0 dxe4 13 Bc4 +=



[FEN"r3kb1r/p1p1qppp/2b2n2/2p5/2B1p3/4Q3/PPPN1PPP/R1B2RK1 b kq - 0 13"]

Black has an extra pawn, but won't be too happy with it.

(c) 7...a5!? is another attempt to lure White into a version of the Mieses Variation: 8 e5 Nd5 9 c4 and here 9...Nb6 is the usual continuation, for which you'll need a book (190 games are in the database). But 9...Ba6!? is also interesting; e.g., 10 b3 g6 11 Nf3 Bg7 12 Bb2 0-0 13 Qd2 Nb6 14 Be2 Bb7 15 0-0 c5, the chances seem roughly balanced. Gutman in his *Gewinnen mit Schottisch* had believed (p. 64) that 10 Qe4(!) Nb6 was good for White. However, the computer boldly sacrifices a knight: 10...Nb4! 11 a3 d5 12 Qb1 Qxe5+



[FEN"r3kb1r/2p2ppp/b1p5/p2pq3/1nP5/P7/1P1N1PPP/RQB1KB1R w KQkq - 0 13"]

13 Kd1 (or 13 Be2 dxc4!) 13...0-0-0 14 c5 (what else) 14...Bxf1 15 Rxf1 Na6 +/- with a strong, lasting attack on White's uncastled majesty. Lev Gutman's three books on the Scotch are important, because he has studied many old sources and checks them without prejudices. But the occasional computer surprise happens to the best authors. Instead of 8 e5, White can play 8 Qe3!?, either followed by calm development after 8...g6 9 Bd3 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Nf3 Re8 12 Re1 =, or an interesting pawn sacrifice after 8...Qc5 9 Qg3! g6 10 Be2 Qxc2 11 0-0 Qc5 12 Nc4 Nxe4 13 Qxc7 Bd6 14 Nxd6+ Qxd6 15 Qxd6 Nxd6 16 Bf4 Nf5 17 Bd3. White has sufficient compensation for the pawn, but whether he can hope for more is an open question.

If you don't like one of these additional possibilities for Black, go into the Mieses Variation without the delaying tactics that I propose here. The following game continuation would still be of interest for you, since it can be reached by a transposition.

**8 e5!**

Finally, White goes into the main line. At least it seems so.

**8...Nd5 9 c4 Ba6**



[FEN"r3kb1r/p1ppqp1p/b1p3p1/3nP3/2P5/8/PP1NQPPP/R1B1KB1R w KQkq - 0 10"]

The alternative 9...Nb6 is worse. On p. 64 of *Gewinnen mit Schottisch* [2] Gutman discusses Mieses' specialty (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6 6 e5 Qe7 7 Qe2 Nd5) 8 Nd2!?, coming to the surprising conclusion that this knight move was White's best continuation, not the overwhelmingly more popular 8 c4. The reply 8...g6!?, he writes, is unsatisfactory for Black because of 9 c4 Nb6 (here we are) 10 Ne4! Bg7 11 Bg5 Qb4+ 12 Kd1 +/- Tatai. Gutman overlooks the text move, which transposes to an important line in his book on page 94 (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6 6 e5 Qe7 7 Qe2 Nd5) 8 c4 Ba6 9 Nd2, and now 9...g6!, which Gutman calls the "only correct reply". His alternatives to 9...g6! were: 9...f6, 9...Nf4, 9...Nb4, 9...0-0-0 and 9...Nb6 [2]. I am only mentioning this to show how much we have avoided by our innocuous move order!

But am I not cheering a bit early? Gutman continues in the diagram with 10 b3 and after two pages of analysis ends with "slightly better prospects for Black". Is this really what we want? The theory-firm Defendarov is still enjoying his position. It is time for a surprise.

**10 Ne4!?**



[FEN"r3kb1r/p1ppqp1p/b1p3p1/3nP3/2P1N3/8/PP2QPPP/R1B1KB1R b KQkq - 0 10"]

The two games in the database scored an impressive 100 percent. Admittedly, one of them went 10...f5?? 11 exf6 Nxf6?? 12 Nxf6+ and 1-0. Even worse would be the direct 10...Qxe5?? 11 Nf6+ and wins.

### 10...Bg7

(a) In the correspondence game Ulrich Beyer – Dr. Peter Schaaf, Bundesliga II 1997, there followed 10...Qb4+ 11 Kd1 Bg7 12 f4 0-0 13 Qd2 Qxd2+ 14 Bxd2 Nb6 15 b3 d5 16 Nc5 Bc8 17 Rc1 a5 18 cxd5 cxd5 19 Bb5 +=, and White had a pleasant position (1-0, 46). A tougher nut to crack could be 12...Rb8!

(a1) 13 Qc2 f5 14 a3 Qb6 15 cxd5 fxe4 16 Bxa6 (or 16 dxc6 Qd4+) 16...Qxa6 17 dxc6 fails to 17...0-0 18 cxd7 Bxe5! 19 fxe5 Rf1+ with a draw by perpetual check.

(a2) 13 b3 0-0 14 Qd2 Bc8 15 Qxb4, White obtains the better position: 15...Nxb4 16 a3 Na6 17 b4 d6 18 Nf6+! Bxf6 19 exf6 +=. The knight on a6 is a problem for Black that will return in the present main game.

(b) The computer found a hidden resource: 10...0-0-0!? 11 Qc2 Qxe5 (or 11...Nb4 12 Qc3 Qh4 13 Ng3 Qd4 14 Rb1 c5 15 Qxd4 cxd4 16 a3 Nc6 17 f4 =) 12 cxd5 Bxf1 13 Kxf1 Re8, winning back the piece; about equal. Since 14 Qa4?! Qxe4 15 Qa6+ Kb8 (15...Kd8? 16 Bg5+ Be7 17 d6! =) 16 Be3 c5 17 Qb5+ Kc8 is good for Black, White has to exchange queens: 14 dxc6 Qxe4 15 cxd7+ Kxd7 16 Qxe4 Rxe4 17 Be3. The resulting ending is equal and does not permit either side much of a winning attempt.

### 11 Bg5! Qxe5

He takes the pawn – a natural, but risky decision.

(a) 11...Qb4+ 12 Qd2! Bxe5 13 0-0-0 Qxd2+ 14 Nxd2 +=, when White has very active pieces, in effect more than compensation for the pawn.

(b) 11...Bxc4!? 12 Qxc4 Qxe5 is the kind of "computer" sacrifice that is rare in human OTB-play: 13 Be2 0-0 14 Rd1 Rae8 (or 14...Nb6 15 f4 Qxb2 16 Qb3 Qxb3 17 axb3 unclear) 15 f3 Qxb2



[FEN"4rrk1/p1pp1pbp/2p3p1/3n2B1/2Q1N3/5P2/Pq2B1PP/3RK2R w K - 0 16"]



Black has collected three pawns for the piece, the position is unclear. In a practical game, not against the computer, White should have fine chances: when the board is still "full," it is generally easier to play with the piece than with the three pawns.

## 12 Nc5 Qxe2+ 13 Bxe2 Nb4 14 0-0-0

14 0-0 can become just as complicated. White seems to have sufficient compensation for the pawn. I wasn't able to find a win in the jungle after 14... Bc8 (and don't forget 14...Bxb2) 15 Bg4 f5, but if you like the first thirteen moves in this article, with a little independent analysis 14. 0-0 could be a good practical weapon.

## 14...d6 15 Rhe1

After 15 a3? Na2+ 16 Kb1 Rb8 17 Rd2 Nc3+ 18 Kc2 dxc5 19 bxc3, we have an unusual case with five pawns on the c-file. Objectively the text move must be stronger.



[FEN"r3k2r/p1p2pbp/b1pp2p1/2N3B1/1nP5/8/PP2BPPP/2KRR3 b kq - 0 15"]

## 15...0-0?

The wrong decision. Not the losing error, perhaps, but Black is getting into difficulties. The alternative 15...dxc5 16 Bf1+ Kf8 17 a3 Nd5 18 cxd5 Bxf1 19 Be7+ (or 19 Rxf1) 19...Kg8 20 Rxf1 leads to an equal position.

## 16 Nxa6 Nxa6 17 Bf3 Rab8 18 b3 Be5!

The pawn on c6 is taboo (19 Bxc6? 20 Nb4), and Black hurries to shut the e-file.

## 19 Bd2

19 Kc2 Nb4+ 20 Kb1 a5 21 a3 Na6 22 Kc2 a4 23 b4 at first looks reasonable, until you see that Black sacrifices the knight with gusto: 23...Nxb4+ 24 axb4 Rxb4 with über-compensation.

## 19...c5 20 Ba5!



[FEN"1r3rk1/p1p2p1p/n2p2p1/B1p1b3/2P5/1P3B2/P4PPP/2KRR3 b - - 0 20"]

Black's knight is stranded on a6, and if the Rb8 moves, there may follow Bb7, winning the pawn c7. The whole black structure on the queenside is close to petrification. Nevertheless, it is not easy to find a good plan for White. The key idea may be to play f2-f4 at an appropriate moment, to invade on e7. Black's answer is prophylaxis: he brings his own f-pawn to f4.

## 20...f5 21 Kc2

Protects pawn b3 and threatens 22 a3, but in reality it is only a little maneuver to gain the tempo Kc1-b1.

## 21...Nb4+ 22 Kb1 Na6 23 Bc6!

Another plan was 23 Bd5+ Kg7 24 f4 Bxf4+ 25 Re7+ Kh6 26 Bc3 Be5 27 Bd2+ f4; for example, 28 Rf1 (other moves like h4 or g3 are possible, but apparently not better) 28...Nb4 29 Be4 Rbe8 30 Rd7 d5! 31 cxd5 Bd6 32 Re1 Rxe4! 33 Rxe4 Nxd5 34 h4 Nb6 35 Rxd6 cxd6 36 Bxf4+ Kh5 37 Bxd6, this ending is equal.

## 23...Nb4 24 Ba4

24 Bb5 c6 25 Ba4 Rbc8 only helps Black to reorganize.

## 24...Rb7 25 Re3!

25 a3 Na6 26 Kc2 (threat: Bc6) 26...Nb8 27 f4 Bxf4 28 Re7 Rf7 29 Re8+ Rf8 is a draw.

By placing his rook to the third rank, White protects the pawn b3, so that 26 a3 Na6 27 Bc6 becomes a deadly threat.

## 25...f4 26 Rf3 g5 27 Rh3!

It was tempting to exchange two rooks, when the embarrassing placement of Black's remaining pieces would be even more obvious: 27 g4 fxg3 28 Rxf8+ Kxf8 29 hxg3 Kg7 30 a3 Na6 31 Kc2 Nb8 32 Bd2 Bd4



[FEN"1n6/prp3kp/3p4/2p3p1/B1Pb4/PP4P1/2KB1P2/3R4 w - - 0 33"]

In spite of the greater activity of White's pieces, it appears doubtful whether he can win.

## 27...f3!?

The only alternative to prevent 28 a3 (with disastrous consequences) is 27...g4 28 Rh4 g3 29 Rg4+ Kh8 30 hxg3 fxg3 31 f3 +/-, but Black's position would be almost hopeless. The advance of the f-pawn at least includes a devilish trap.

## 28 gxf3!

Much stronger than 28 Rxf3? Rxf3 29 gxf3 Bxh2 30 a3 Na6 31 Bc6 (31 Kc2 Nb8) 31...Rxb3+ 32 Ka2 Rb8 33 Bb5 Be5 34 Rb1, which only wins a piece:



[FEN"1r4k1/p1p4p/n2p4/BBp1b1p1/  
2P5/P4P2/K4P2/1R6 b - - 0 34"]

There goes the knight, but now the whole White armada is misplaced. To queen his pawn a3, White would need about eleven moves. How fast the single pawn h7 is in comparison! Black plays: 34...Rf8! 35 Bxa6 Rxf3 36 Be1 Rd3 37 Bb7 h5! 38 Ba5 h4 and holds the draw.

### 28...Kg7 29 a3 Na6 30 Bd2 h6

In several variations the valuable rook h3 plays the main role, often White can start a mating attack: 30...Kg6 31 f4! Bxf4 32 Bc6 followed by 33 Be4+, and Black's defeat is near.

30...Rf5 31 Kc2 Nb8 32 Rh5 Rxf3 33 Rxc5+ Kf6 was more stubborn, but 34 Rh5 Rxf2 35 Rxh7 +/- offers good winning chances. – The next move opens a file for White's rook d1.



[FEN"5r2/prp3k1/n2p3p/2p1b1p1/B1P5/  
PP3P1R/3B1P1P/1K1R4 w - - 0 31"]

### 31 f4! Bxf4 32 Bc3+ Kg6

Or 32...Be5 33 Bxe5+ dxe5 34 Rd7+ Rf7 35 Rxf7+ Kxf7 36 Rxh6 Rb6 37 Rh8 Rb8 38 Rh7+ Kg6 39 Rd7 +/-.

### 33 Re1 Be5

33...g4 34 Rg1 or 33...Nb8 34 Re6+ Kf5 35 Rexh6 are equally hopeless.

### 34 Bxe5 dxe5 35 Rxe5 Rb6 36 Be8+!



[FEN"4Br2/p1p5/nr4kp/2p1R1p1/

This breaks Black's defense.

**36...Kg7 37 Re7+ Kg8 38 Rd3 Rxf2 39 Bh5 Rff6 40 Kc2 Rbd6 41 Rde3 Rd8 42 Kc3 Rfd6**

For a long time Black was suffering from the tragicomic position of his knight on a6. The time has come for its execution.

**43 b4! cxb4+ 44 axb4 c5 45 b5 Nb4**

45...Nb8? fails to 46 Re8+ Kg7 47 R3e7+ Kf6 48 Rf7 mate.

**46 Rxa7 Rd3+ 47 Rxd3 Rxd3+ 48 Kb2 Rh3 49 Bf7+ Kf8 50 b6**



[FEN"5k2/R4B2/1P5p/2p3p1/  
1nP5/7r/1K5P/8 b - - 0 50"]

Black resigns, as the b-pawn will cost him the knight.

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[6] J. Emms: [Starting Out: The Scotch Game](#), London 2005

[7] V. Barsky: [The Scotch Game for White](#), Sofia 2009 (not too bad, but the bibliography lists only two sources: Marin's [Beating the Open Games](#), and Emms' Scotch book)

[8] G. Flear: [Starting Out: Open Games](#), London 2010 (Scotch section: poor)

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Send your games or comments to [redaktion@kaissiber.de](mailto:redaktion@kaissiber.de).

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