



## COLUMNISTS

## From the Sidelines

Hannes Langrock

The Modern  
Morra Gambit  
by

Hannes Langrock

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The Enterprising English Defense  
Part Five

In this and next month's column we will discuss the line **4.Bd3**, which is considered a critical test of the English Defense:



Although 4.Nc3 appears more often in tournament praxis, 4.Bd3 can be seen as the main line qualitatively. It's widely regarded as the most dangerous continuation for Black, and strong grandmasters usually play 4.Bd3 when they encounter the English Defense over-the-board.

Black usually plays 4...f5, 4...Nc6 or 4...Bb4+.

**4...f5** is tempting, as with his last move White left the g2-pawn unprotected. However, it is well known that White can sacrifice the rook: **5.exf5!**

**Bxg2 6.Qh5+ g6 7.fxg6 Bg7 8.gxh7+ Kf8.** Now taking on g8 makes Black's defensive task easier. Instead, it is critical to develop and keep the pressure up by **9.Ne2 Nf6 10.Qh4 Bxh1 11.Bg5**. This is all well known and has been analyzed and played often. I believe that White has a dangerous initiative and that Black should avoid this. Instead of taking the rook, Black can fight for the initiative by sacrificing material and play **5...Bb4+ 6.Kf1 Nf6**. This variation has been tested in more than a hundred of games. Instead of 7.c5 or 7.Be2, White can go for the natural **7.Nf3! 0-0 8.a3 Bd6 9.Nc3**. I don't see how Black can prove sufficient compensation for the pawn in this position. Also, White's amazing score of 13/16, according to [Mega Database 2007](#), is indicative of how things stand in this line.

Instead of the risky 4...f5, **4...Bb4+** is a rather solid continuation. After the critical **5.Bd2**, it becomes clear that dark-squared bishops will be exchanged, which is generally not bad for Black who has less space. There are several ways to play this variation as Black. In [Secrets of Opening Surprises, Volume 4](#) (2006) Glenn Flear recommends **5...Nc6**, which has been played by Short and Speelman. Another possibility is to exchange **5...Bxd2+ 6.Nxd2** and now play **6...Nh6**. In this complex positional line, I recommend studying the games of grandmasters Speelman and Bischoff. Black will often put the pawns on dark-squares, thus improving the chances of the bishop and restricting the opponent's. Generally, I think that after 4...Bb4 5.Bd2, White should be able to prove a small advantage because of his space advantage, but he has to play precisely and show plenty of positional understanding.

However, the move I recommend for Black is **4...Nc6**:



According to [Mega Database 2007](#), this was first played in 1983 by French GM Eric Prie against Ivan Farago, it then became rather popular in the 90s.

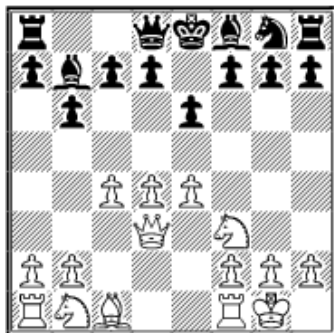
In *English Defence* (1999), Daniel King wrote: "4...Nc6 has rightly taken over as the main response to 4.Bd3." In contrast, 4...Nc6 is underrepresented in more recent works. However, it is a solid variation that gives Black good chances to equalize.

The main idea behind 4...Nc6 is simple. Black threatens to take on d4 and if White protects the pawn (say, by 5.Nf3), Black plays 5...Nb4 and grabs the d3-bishop. In the resulting positions Black has the bishop-pair, while White counts on his space advantage.

It is significant that the immediate advance **5.d5** doesn't promise White much, as Black gets good counterplay by **5...Ne5 6.Be2 Qh4! 7.Qc2 7.Nc3 Bb4 8.Qd4 d6 9.Nf3 Bxc3+ 10.bxc3 Nx3+ 11.Bxf3 e5 12.Qd3 Nf6= King. 7...f5** Black is putting pressure on the opponent's center in typical English Defense fashion. **8.Nc3 8.exf5 exd5. 8...Bb4 9.Nh3**

Also, in case of 9.Nf3 Nxf3+ 10.Bxf3 fxe4 11.Bxe4 Nf6-/+ Black wins a pawn. **9...Qxe4 10.Qxe4 Bxc3+ 11.bxc3 fxe4** and White didn't have enough, if anything, for the pawn in T.Bosboom Lanchava-A.Stefanova, Groningen 1999.

Thus, White usually decides to protect the d4-pawn with his knight. The topic of this column is the most natural **5.Nf3**, while the more critical 5.Ne2 will be discussed next month. You can expect your opponent to play 5.Nf3 if he is unfamiliar with 4...Nc6 (which is quite likely at lower levels). **5...Nb4 6.0-0 Nxd3 7.Qxd3**



In this position Black can choose between two continuations that are both played about equally often. A logical approach is **7...Ne7**, followed by **...Ng6**. On g6 the knight will be placed rather comfortably as, with his knight on f3, White can't quickly push his f-pawn (this is the main disadvantage of 5.Nf3 compared with 5.Ne2). After **8.Nc3 Ng6**, White has tried many different moves, but Black's position is fundamentally sound and chances are about equal, see the game [D.Ruzele-E.Kengis](#).

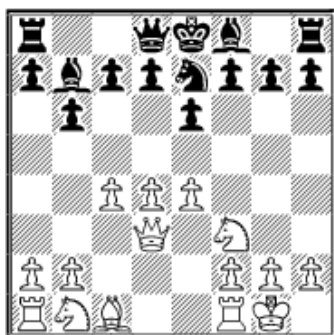
Black's other continuation is **7...d6**. Then, after **8.Nc3**, Black most often plays **8...Be7** to continue with **9...Nf6**, while he has also been doing well in the few examples of the double fianchetto **8...g6**. For both, see the game [M.Turov-J.Kraai](#).

Finally, White can also delay castling short by playing **6.Nc3 Nxd3 7.Qxd3**. After **7...Ne7**, the Russian grandmaster Ruslan Sherbakov has successfully tried **8.d5 Ng6 9.h4!?**. Instead, entirely playable is **7...d6**, most likely transposing to M.Turov-J.Kraai after 8.0-0. An interesting way to make use of White not having castled is **7...Bb4!?**, pinning the c3-knight. In the ensuing variations Black often exchanges his bishop against White's knight in order to attack the white center quickly with **...f7-f5** or **...c7-c6** (after d4-d5 by White). For 6.Nc3, see the game [R.Sherbakov-K.Bischoff](#).

All in all, 5.Nf3 doesn't look too dangerous for Black, who gets good chances if he knows what he is doing. Therefore, it is no surprise that attention has now shifted to 5.Ne2.

**Darius Ruzele (2520) – Edvins Kengis (2560)**  
Bonn, 1996

**1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 Bb7 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.Nf3 Nb4 6.0-0 Nxd3 7.Qxd3 Ne7**



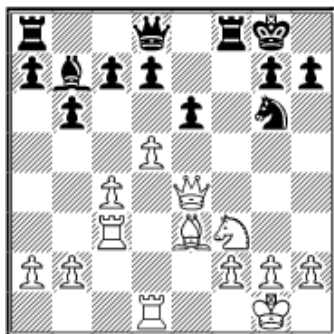
This logical continuation has been quite successful in praxis. Black develops his knight to g6, as White can't quickly push the f-pawn with his knight on f3.

**8.Nc3 Ng6 9.d5**

Praxis has also seen:

**9.Be3 Be7** (Black usually moves the bishop to e7 in this variation, but 9...Bb4 is also an option, Black wishes to continue with **...0-0** and **...f7-f5**, which works out well in the game: **10.Rac1 0-0**

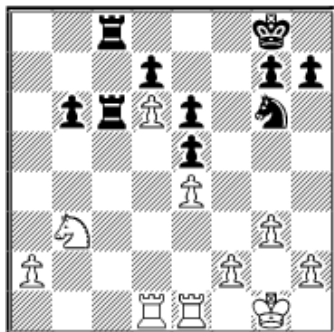
**11.Rfd1 Bxc3 12.Rxc3 f5 13.d5 fxe4 14.Qxe4**



**14...c5!** A motif worth remembering. Now, after the sequence...exd5/cxd5, Black won't have a weakness on c7 and he controls the d4-square. **15.Qg4 Qf6 16.Ng5 exd5 17.cxd5 Qf5 18.Qh5 h6 19.g4 Nf4 20.Bxf4 Qxf4-/+** G.O'Connell-T.Luther, Elista 1998) **10.Nd2 e5 11.d5 0-0 12.Rab1 a5 13.Nb5 d6 14.a3 a4 15.Qc2** White's simple plan is to win the a4-pawn by moving his rook away from b1 and then playing **Nd2-b1-c3-xa4**. The obvious disadvantage is that it is rather slow and gives Black time to create play on the kingside: **15...Be8 16.Rbc1 f5 17.f3 Rf7 18.Nb1 Bg5 19.Bxg5 Qxg5 20.N1c3 Nf4 21.Kh1 h5 22.Rcd1 h4** with counterplay, Z.Takac-J.Barle, SLO 1998.

9.Re1 Be7 10.d5 0-0 11.Be3 e5 12.Rac1 Bc8! Not only a useful move, but also a clever finesse. By delaying ...d7-d6, Black wants White to prepare the advance of the b-pawn with a2-a3, instead of playing b2-b4 directly. 13.Nd2 a5 14.a3 d6 15.b4 f5 with counterplay in E.Mednis-D.King, Stavanger 1989. For detailed annotations of this game, see King's book.

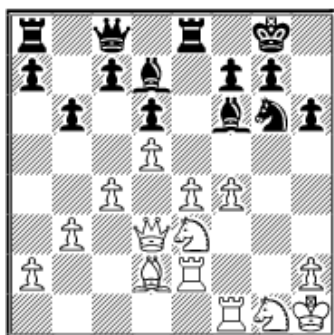
9.Bg5 Be7 (Black doesn't have to agree to the exchange, he could also consider 9...f6, followed by 10...Bb4.) 10.Bxe7 Qxe7 11.d5 0-0 12.Rfe1 (12.Rad1 c6 13.d6 Qf6 14.c5 e5 15.Qe3 Ba6 16.Rfe1 Rfb8 Black has good chances. 17.b4 Bc4 18.Nd2 Be6 19.b5 Re8 20.bxc6 Rxc6 21.Nd5 Qd8 22.Nc7 Rb8 23.Nxe6 fxe6 24.Nb3 bxc5 25.Nxc5 Rbc8 26.Nb3 Qb6 27.Qxb6 axb6 28.g3



28...Nh8! It turns out that White's far advanced pawn only causes him problems. In A.Dreev-J. Speelman, Geneve rapid 1996 White finally managed to draw, but he had to survive a rook endgame in which he was two pawns down.) 12... d6 13.b4 e5 14.Qe3 Bc8 15.Nd2 f5 16.exf5 Bxf5 17.Nde4 h6 18.c5 Nh4 19.f3 Bd7 20.Rac1 Rad8 21.Qe2 Bc8 22.Qb5 Qf7 23.Re2 Ng6 24.Rd2 a6 25.Qc6 Now in V.Rao-J.Ehlvest, Philadelphia 1993, Black mysteriously decided to give up his c-pawn: 25...Ne7? 26.Qxc7 bxc5 27.bxc5 dxc5 28.Qxc5+- (but 0-1 in 52). There was no reason to panic, Black should have played 25...bxc5 26. bxc5 Nh4 and now winning the d6-pawn with 27.

exd6 cxd6 28.Nxd6 is dangerous because of 28...Nxf3+! 29.gxf3 Qxf3 with unpleasant threats such as ...Qe3 and ...Bh3. If instead White defends against the sacrifice on f3, Black can play ...Nf5, protecting d6 and approaching d4.

9.b3 Be7 10.d5 e5 11.Ne2 0-0 12.Ng3 d6 13.Nf5 Most often in this structure, White plays on the queenside and Black on the kingside. In this game White tries to build up an attacking position in the center and on the kingside. But this strategy turns out to be risky: 13...Be8 14.Bd2 Re8 15.Rae1 Bd7 16.Kh1 Bf8 17.g3 Qc8 18.Ne3 h6 19.Ng1 Be7 20.f4 exf4 21.gxf4 Bh4 22.Re2 Bf6 White's center pawns are more weak than threatening now.



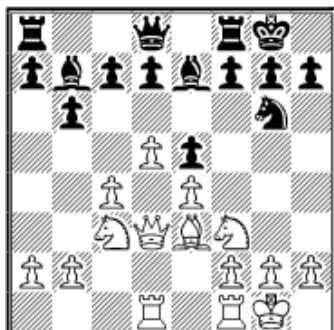
23.Ng2 b5!? Black is willing to give up a pawn in order to open the position on the queenside. 24.c5 (On 24.cxb5, King gives 24...a6 and 24...Qb7 25. a4 a6 26.bxa6 Rxa6, with the idea of ...c7-c6. ) 24...dxc5 25.e5 Bf5 26.Qxb5 c6 If the white queen leaves the b5/c4 squares, Black can play ... Bd3, winning the exchange. 27.dxc6 Be7 28.Re3 Rb8 29.Qa4 Rb6 30.c7 Ra6 31.Ba5 Bd7 32.Qa3 Bc6 33.Nf3 Qg4+- Everything went wrong for White. His extra pawn is meaningless, even though it is placed on c7. Most of his pieces are neutralized because of pins and Black's light-squared bishop is a monster. Specifically, Black threatens to take on f4 and there is not much that

White can do about it. 34.e6 fxe6 35.b4 cxb4 36.Qc1 Bb7 0-1, E.Magerramov-J.Ehlvest, Moscow 1992.

## 9...Be7

In E.Artinovsky-J.Ehlvest, World op 1993, Black played 9...e5 immediately, which probably doesn't make much of a difference. However, he managed to provoke White into playing too ambitiously: 10.Ng5 White is aiming for a quick f2-f4. But then he should have played 5.Ne2 instead of 5.Nf3. 10...d6 11.Nh3 Be8 12.f4 exf4 13.Bxf4 Be7 14.Qe3 Bxh3 15.Qxh3 Qd7 16.Qf3 Bf6 17.Bg3 0-0 18.Rae1 Bd4+ 19.Kh1 Ne5 20.Bxe5 Bxe5 Black has a positional advantage and White's e-pawn fell on move thirty-six.

## 10.Be3 0-0 11.Rad1 e5



As some of the examples in the above variations have already shown, this is a common approach for Black in this variation. He closes the center and plans to continue similar to the King's Indian; for example, ...Bb7-c8, ...d7-d6, ...f7-f5, etc.

## 12.Ne2



White moves his knight to the kingside, which can be seen as a prophylactic measure against Black's intentions on this wing.

12...d6 13.Ng3 Bc8 14.h3 Nh4 15.Nxh4 Bxh4 16.Nf5 g6

Perhaps Black starts to go a bit wrong here. I'd like to refer to King's suggestions of 16...Bg5 and 16...Bf6!? with the ideas to "either capture on f5 and break out with ...e5-e4; or to kick the knight out with ...g7-g6, retreat the bishop to g7 and play for ...f7-f5." (King)

17.Nxh4 Qxh4 18.b3 Bd7 19.f3 f5 20.exf5 gxf5 21.f4 exf4 22.Qd4

Instead of this peaceful move, 22.Rxf4 looks good. White's bishop could become quite a strong piece on the a1-h8 diagonal.

22...Rae8 23.Qxf4 Qxf4 24.Bxf4 ½-½

*Maxim Turov (2531) – Jesse Kraai (2454)*  
Budapest, 2003

1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 Bb7 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.Nf3 Nb4 6.0-0 Nxd3 7.Qxd3 d6 8.Nc3 Be7



This line was played by Edvins Kengis in the early 1990s, while the American IM Jesse Kraai has employed it more recently. Black intends to develop his knight to f6 instead of e7.

Black has also experimented with the double fianchetto 8...g6, which looks like another playable option. Here are two examples: 9.Bg5 (9.a4 Bg7 10.a5 Ne7 11.d5 h6 12.Nd4 e5 13.a6 Bc8 14.Nc6 Nxc6 15.dxc6 0-0 16.b4 Be6 17.Be3 f5 with counterplay, as in K.Chernyshov-J.Kraai, Budapest 2003.) 9...Qd7 10.Rad1 Bg7 11.Rfe1 h6 12.Bc1 Ne7 13.b3 Now in W.Paschall-A.Ivanov, San Felipe 1998, the normal 13...0-0 would have been equal, but Black successfully tried the more adventurous 13...0-0-0.

9.d5!?

This looks like the critical test of Black's setup. White has also tried: 9.b3 Nf6 10.Bb2 (The game J.Bick-J.Kraai, Connecticut 2004 developed interestingly: 10.Nd2 0-0 11.Qe2 a6 12.Rd1 d5 13.cxd5 exd5 14.e5 Ne8 15.f4 f5 16.Nf3



16...g6 The knight belongs on e6. 17.Be3 Ng7 18.Rac1 Ne6 19.Na4 Qd7 20.Rc2 a5 21.Nb2 Ba6 22.Nd3 a4 23.Qe1 axb3 24.axb3 Bb5 and Black had the advantage.) 10...0-0 11.d5 e5 12.b4 a5 13.a3 Nh5 14.Rfe1 Nf4 15.Qc2 f5 16.Nd1 (16.exf5 Bc8 17.g4 h5 King) 16...fxe4 17.Rxe4 axb4 18.axb4 Rxa1 19.Bxa1 b5!-/+ J.Barkhagen-E.Kengis, Gausdal 1991.

In case of the illogical 9.Qe2 Nf6 10.e5 dxe5 11.dxe5 Nd7, Black has good chances with his strong light-squared bishop. 12.Ne4 0-0 13.Bf4 Nc5 14.Nxc5 Bxc5 15.Ng5 h6 16.Rad1 Qe8 17.Ne4 Qc6 18.Rde1 Qxe4 19.Qxe4 Bxe4 20.Rxe4

Rad8=+ 21.h4 Rd3 22.Rfe1 Rfd8 and Black went on to win the endgame in T.Cmiel-E.Kengis, GER 1991.

9...Bf6

Kraai comes up with a novelty. This move is surprising, as Black's intention in this line has always been to develop his knight to f6. However, from Black's point of view, one can argue that the move 9.d5 has changed things. The bishop is now quite well-placed on the open diagonal and Black plans to continue with ...Ng8-e7-g6. Black has two alternatives:

9...e5 was played in A.Shirov-E.Kengis,Gausdal 1991. 10.c5! Nf6 11.Qb5+ Kf8 12.c6 Bc8 I am not sure if one should repeat this as Black. The position is highly difficult, but White may well have an advantage because of his further increased space advantage. Kengis,

however, shows the potential of Black's position by going on to defeat Shirov: 13.a4 a5 14.Qe2 g6 15.Ne1 Kg7 16.Nd3 Ba6 17.f4 exf4 18.Rxf4 h5 19.h3 h4 20.Be3 Nh5 21.Bd4+ Kg8 22.Rf2 Rh7 23.Nb5 Ng3 24.Qf3 Bg5 25.Re1 Bxb5 26.axb5 Qe7 27.e5 Re8 28.Bc3 Qd8 29.Qg4 dxe5 30.Nxe5 f5 31.Qd1 Rhe7 32.Nc4 Rxe1+ 33.Bxe1 Kh7 34.Bc3 Ne4 35.Rf3 Be7 36.Be5 Bc5+ 37.Kh2 Rxe5 38.Nxe5 Qd6 39.Rxf5 gxf5 40.Qh5+ Kg7 41.Qf7+ Kh6 42.Qxf5 Qxe5+ 0-1.

Finally, there is not much wrong with the simple 9...Nf6, when 10.Nd4 somewhat surprisingly transposes to 5.Ne2 Nb4 6.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7.Qxd3 d6 8.0-0 Nf6 9.d5 Be7 10.Nd4. After 10...Qd7, Black has a solid position with good equalizing chances; we will take a closer look at this line in the next column about the critical 5.Ne2.

### 10.dxe6

White has a positional pawn sacrifice in mind; however, this doesn't promise much more than compensation. More critical is 10.Rd1!?:



The idea is that if Black plays the natural 10...Ne7, then 11.dxe6 fxe6 12.e5 is strong: 12...dxe5 (12...Bxf3 13.exf6) 13.Qe2 Qc8 (The difference with the immediate 10.dxe6 is that now Black cannot play 13...Bxf3 because of 14.Rxd8+) 14.Nxe5.

Instead, possible is 10...Bxc3 11.Qxc3 e5, though this probably favors White somewhat in variations such as 12.Be3 Ne7 13.Nd2 0-0 14.b4 f5 15.f3, when it seems easier for White to create something on the queenside than for Black on the kingside. Maybe 10...Qd7 is Black's best option, with the idea of meeting 11.dxe6 with 11...Qxe6.

10...fxe6 11.e5 dxe5 12.Qe2 Bxf3 13.Qxf3 Ne7 14.Rd1 Qc8 15.Be3 0-0 16.Rd3 c5 17.Rad1 Nf5 18.Qe4 Nd4 19.f3 Qe8 20.Bf2 Rd8 21.Bg3 Qh5 22.Re1 ½-½

*Ruslan Sherbakov (2565) – Klaus Bischoff (2520)*

Linares, 1996

1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 Bb7 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.Nf3 Nb4 6.Nc3

White delays castling short, and thus keeps the option open of castling queenside. But he also gives Black the extra option of ...

6...Nxd3+ 7.Qxd3 Bb4!?



Black agrees to give up the bishop-pair, if White wants, for example in the line 8.Bd2 Ne7 9.a3. At first this might seem illogical, as the main idea of 4...Nc6 was to play with the bishop-pair as compensation for a disadvantage in space. However, it turns out that when the c3-knight is removed, Black can more effectively attack White's center. We will see Black coming up with ...f7-f5, as well as ...c7-c6 (after d4-d5 by White).

I think 7...Bb4 gives Black reasonable chances, but of course he is not forced to play it.

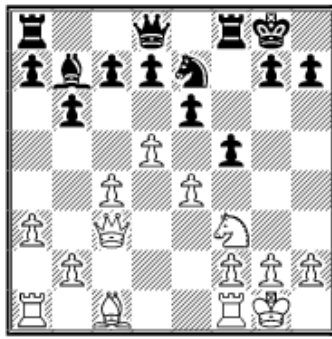
In case of 7...Ne7, White players most often chose 8.0-0, which transposes to 6.0-0 Ne7 7.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 8.Qxd3. But White can try to make use of having delayed castling short by playing 8.d5 Ng6 9.h4!? The only practical example went well for him: 9...Bd6 10.Nb5 Bb4+ 11.Bd2 Bxd2+ 12.Qxd2 a6 13.Nc3 d6 14.h5 Ne5 15.Nxe5 dxe5 16.h6 g6 17.0-0 0-0 18.dxe6 fxe6 19.Qe3 Qe7 20.f3 Bc6 21.Ne2 a5 22.Kb1 a4 23.Nc1! Ra5 24.Qc3 Qf6 25.Nd3 and Black had problems in R.Sherbakov-A.Gorbatow, Decin 1996 (1-0 in 40).

A good choice is 7...d6, when 8.0-0 transposes to 6.0-0 Nxd3 7.Qxd3 d6 8.Nc3.

### 8.Bd2

8.d5 Ne7 9.a3 (For 9.Bd2, see 8.Bd2 Ne7 9.d5.) 9...Bxc3+ 10.Qxc3 0-0 11.0-0 f5





finishing development. The game went: 20.Ne2 e3 21.fxe3 (21.Bxe3) 21...Nh4 22.e4 Bxe4 23.Ng3 Bxg2 24.Bg5 Nf3+ 25.Kxg2 Nxg5-/+ I.Polovodin-A.Miles, Los Angeles 1991.

**8...Ne7 9.d5**

For 9.a3 Bxc3 10.Bxc3 0-0 11.d5, see below.

**9...0-0 10.a3 Bxc3 11.Bxc3 c6!?**



This provocative move is quite typical of Bischoff's style. Black attacks the opponent's center not being afraid of playing the complex position after 12.d6 Ng6. In this particular situation 11...f5 appears risky, as it runs into 12.Qd4 (F.Levin-H.Teske, Bad Wörishofen 1998). Possible is 11...f6 closing the diagonal of White's bishop. After 12.0-0-0, King gives: "12...e5 (12...exd5!?) Black not only has a very solid position, but there are also chances to attack on the queenside."

**12.h4?!**

This pawn sacrifice shouldn't worry Black too much.

**12...cxd5 13.cxd5 exd5 14.e5 Ng6 15.Ng5? h6!-/+**



**16.Qf5**

This is insufficient. White had nothing better than to retreat the knight. Maybe he originally planned to play 16.Nxf7 here (16...Kxf7 17.Qf5+), but this loses to 16...Nf4!; for example, 17.Nxd8 Nxd3+ 18.Kd2 Ba6.

**16...hgx5 17.hgx5**

White doesn't have enough attacking chances for the piece. Black defends coolly and comes out of it with a decisive material advantage.

**17...Re8 18.Qh3 d6 19.f4 d4 20.0-0-0 Bxg2 21.Qh7+ Kf8 22.Bxd4 Rc8+ 23.Kb1 Bxh1 24.exd6 Be4+ 25.Ka1 f6 26.d7 Re6 27.gxf6 gxf6 28.f5 Bxf5 29.Be3 Rxe3 30.dxc8Q Qxc8 31.Qh6+ Kf7 32.Qxe3 Ne5-+ 33.Rf1 Qe6 34.Qc3 Bg6 35.Qc7+ Qe7 36.Qc3 Kg7 37.Rc1 Bf7 38.Rg1+ Ng6 39.Re1 Qd6 40.Kb1 a5 41.Rf1 a4 42.Rh1 Qe6 43.Rg1 Qe4+ 44.Kc1 Qc4 45.Kd2 Qxc3+ 46.Kxc3 b5 47.Kb4 Bc4 48.b3 Bxb3 49.Kxb3 f5 50.Kc5 Kf6 51.Kd4 f4 52.Re1 Kf5 53.Rc5+ Kg4 54.Ke4 Nh4 55.Rc6 Nf3 56.Rg6+ Ng5+ 57.Kd3 Kf5 58.Rc6 Ne6 59.Rc1 Ke5 60.Rc6 Kd5 61.Rc8 Ne5+ 62.Ke2 Kd4 63.Rc7 Bd5 64.Ra7 f3+ 65.Kf2 Nd3+ 66.Kf1 Bb3 0-1**

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