



COLUMNISTS

From the Sidelines

Hannes Langrock

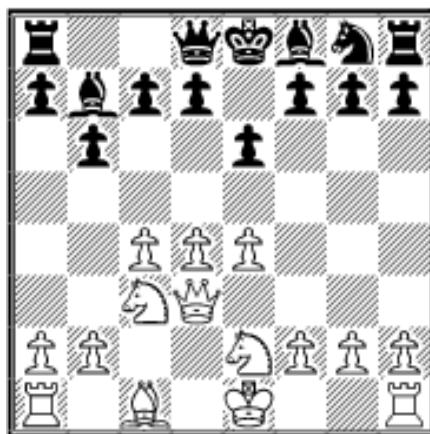
*The Modern
Morra Gambit*

by

Hannes Langrock

The Enterprising English Defense
Part Six

Last [month](#) we looked at the line: **1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 Bb7 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.Nf3**, which is quite satisfactory for Black. However, nowadays **5.Ne2!** is correctly considered the critical continuation, and our investigation of it will conclude this series on the English Defense Main Line. The main advantage of 5.Ne2 over 5.Nf3 is that it doesn't block the f-pawn. The advance of the f-pawn is dangerous in many lines, and Black better know what he is doing. **5...Nb4** Grabbing White's bishop, of course. **6.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7.Qxd3**



Here Black has tried several different approaches. Our first game [A.Maric-P.Cramling](#) illustrates that Black can easily get into a difficult position. For instance, Black would happy to play a double fianchetto, if she could calmly develop with ...g7-g6, ...Bg7, ...Ne7, ...0-0. But this turns out to be difficult to achieve as White has annoying direct answers; for example, 7...g6 8.h4! or 7...Ne7 8.0-0 g6 9.Bg5!? with an unpleasant pin or even 9.Qh3!? with the idea to exchange dark-squared bishops with Bh6. In the game Cramling played a comparatively popular line: **7...Ne7 8.0-0 d6 9.d5 Qd7**. But here the game continuation **10.Be3**, as well as the more direct **10.f4!? g6 11.Nd4**,

look promising for White.

Therefore, Black has a choice between two solid lines:

I. The game [V.Chuchelov-H.Teske](#) discusses **7...Bb4!?**. If White plays a2-a3, Black is going to exchange on c3. This surrenders the bishop-pair, but on the other hand exchanging pieces is generally not bad for Black, who has less space. The game saw the logical **8.0-0 Ne7 9.a3 Bxc3 10.Nxc3 0-0**, when it is not easy to see how White can make use of his space advantage. Black had good counter chances after 11.Bg5 f6 12.Bh4 d5. Instead of 9.a3, an interesting try is **9.Nd1!?**, which has been played by Ehlvest. White leaves Black with his bishop-pair and instead tries to play against Black's bishop, but with correct play Black looks OK here, too.

II. [J.Lautier-V.Ivanchuk](#) looks at **7...d6 8.0-0 Nf6**. This line has been revived by Ivanchuk, who played it in two rapid games in 2002, against Kramnik and Lautier. By placing his knight on f6, Black keeps the e7-square free for the bishop. In praxis White has most often played **9.d5 Be7 10.Nd4 Qd7**, when Black has the equalizing idea ...c7-c6. In the game Lautier played aggressively with **9.f4 Be7 10.e5 Nd7 11.f5**, when, as shown by Stohl, **11...dxe5!** would have been the correct answer. Ivanchuk hasn't found any followers for two reasons: he lost the game against Lautier and Black's position looks rather passive in the opening and therefore unattractive to many players. However, passive doesn't necessarily mean bad and Black argues that White doesn't have anything real and that he can equalize in the middlegame. Despite being slightly passive, Ivanchuk's line is

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definitely playable and deserves further testing.

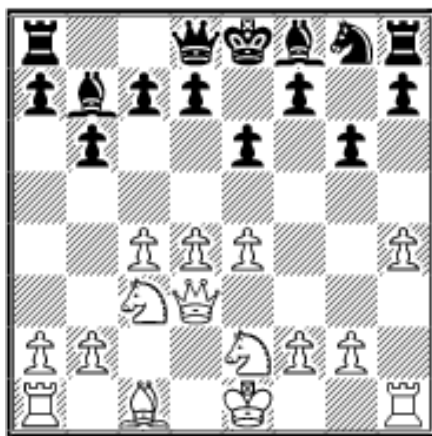
Finally, White occasionally plays **6.0-0** instead of 6.Nbc3. This has the advantage of avoiding the line 6.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7.Qxd3 Bb4, but it also gives Black an extra possibility. Now the double fianchetto **6...g6!?** is playable, see the game [N.Clery-E.Bricard](#).

Alisa Maric (2460) – Pia Cramling (2520)

Groningen, 1997

1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 Bb7 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.Ne2 Nb4 6.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7.Qxd3 Ne7

Black has also tried 7...g6, when 8.0-0 Bg7 would transpose to 6.0-0 g6 7.Nbc3 Nxd3 8.Qxd3 Bg7, which is a good double fianchetto for Black. But as White hasn't castled yet, he can play the unpleasant 8.h4!



8...h5 (8...Bg7 9.h5 with the initiative; 8...h6 9.h5 g5 10.f4 gxf4 11.Bxf4 d6 12.0-0-0 and his huge lead in development gave White the advantage in E.Bacrot-N.Short, Sarajevo 2000.) 9.Bg5 Be7 In I.Stohl-A.Czebe, Slovakia 2004, White now sacrificed a pawn with 10.d5 Bxg5 11.hxg5 Qxg5 12.Nb5. The game saw 12...0-0-0 13.Nxa7+ Kb8 14.Nb5 Qxg2 15.Rg1 Qh2 16.0-0-0 and White went on to win, though according to Stohl's annotations in [Mega Database](#), Black could have kept the game unclear with correct play. Instead, according to Stohl, the simple 10.Bxe7 is sufficient for an advantage: 10...Nxe7 (10...Qxe7 with the idea ...Nf6+)=) 11.d5 d6 12.0-0-0 Qd7

+ =.

8.0-0 d6

This is played often and Black scores well, but I like White's chances. 8...g6 As with 7...g6, Black tries to play a "normal" double fianchetto with balanced chances; for example, after 9.Be3 Bg7, which would transpose to 6.0-0 g6 7.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 8.Qxd3 Bg7 9.Be3 Ne7. However, White has two interesting ways to try to destroy Black's plans:

A) 9.Qh3!? White's intention is to exchange dark-squared bishops, thus halving Black's bishop-pair and leaving his opponent with weakened dark squares on the kingside. 9...Bg7 (9...d6 10.Bh6 Bxh6 11.Qxh6 Now if 11...Qd7, White can go for the greedy 12.Qg7 0-0-0 (12...Rf8 13.Qxh7) 13.Qxf7 Rdf8 14.Qg7 h6 This threatens 15...Qe8, followed by 16...Rf7, but White can play 15.d5 e5 16.f4±) 10.Bh6 0-0 11.Bxg7 Kxg7 12.Rad1+ = B. Kohlweyer-B.Gulko, Geneve 1997.

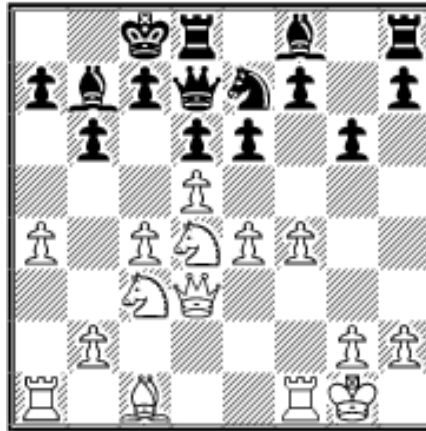
B) 9.Bg5!? Bg7 10.f4 f6 11.Bh4 0-0 12.d5 was also not easy for Black in E.Arlandi-I. Efimov, ITA 1995.

9.d5 Qd7

9...e5?! 10.f4! is promising for White, the only practical example finished quickly: 10...exf4 11.Nxf4 Qd7 12.Be3 0-0-0 13.b4 c5 14.bxc5 dxc5 15.a4 Kb8 16.a5 bxa5 17.Rxa5 Nc6 18.dxc6 Qxd3 19.Nxd3 Rxd3 20.Bf4+ 1-0, Z.Dub-G.Jamrich, Budapest 2000.

10.Be3

The direct 10.f4!? may even be stronger: 10...g6 11.Nd4 0-0-0 (11...Bg7 12.f5! gxf5 13.exf5 Bxd4+ 14.Qxd4 0-0-0 15.fxe6 fxe6 16.Bg5 Rhg8 17.Ne4 gave White the initiative in G.Miniboeck-G.Schroll, Austria 2004.) Now the game B.Gelfand-N.Short, Novgorod 1997 went 12.b4 Bg7 13.b5?! Bxd4+! 14.Qxd4 f5 and Black had good counterplay. Instead, 12.a4! is dangerous for Black.



For example, 12...c5 (12...a5 13.b4 axb4 14.Ncb5 King) 13.dxc6 Nxc6 14.Nxc6 Qxc6 15.a5.

10...Ng6

10...g6 11.Qd4!? Rg8 12.b4 0-0-0 13.a4 with the initiative, M.Stein-C.Paci, Bad Zwesten 2002.

11.f4 Be7 12.Rad1

Here White's space advantage gives her a small, solid advantage. Note, that in the variation 7...d6 8.0-0 Nf6 (J.Lautier-V.Ivanchuk) the knight's placement on f6, instead of g6 in similar positions, gives Black better chances to eliminate the pressure, particularly by attacking the white center with ...c7-c6.

12...0-0

12...Bf6 was well met by 13.Ng3 (with the possibility of Nh5) in Hoang Thanh Trang-W. Paschall, Budapest 2004.

13.Qc2

In the following course of the game Black never entirely gets rid of the pressure and finally breaks down.

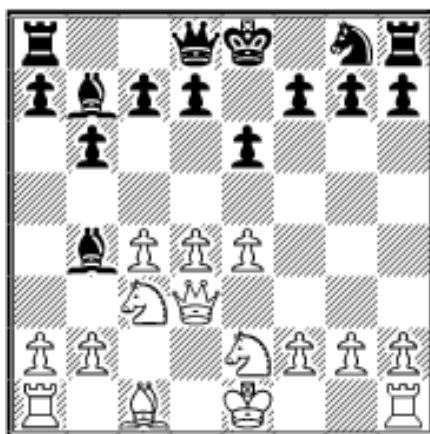
13...Rfe8 14.b3 Bf8 15.Bc1 c5 16.Ng3 exd5 17.Nxd5 Ne7 18.Ne3 Nc6 19.Bb2 Nb4 20.Qb1 h5 21.Nd5 h4 22.Nf5 Nxd5 23.cxd5 g6 24.Ne3 Bg7 25.Bxg7 Kxg7 26.f5 f6 27.fxg6 Re5 28.Nf5+ Kxg6 29.Rf4 Kf7 30.Rxh4 1-0



This game showcased White's dream scenario in the 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.Ne2 line: controlling the game using her space advantage, keeping Black passive and finally breaking through her opponent's defense.

Now let's see what Black can do against these ambitious intentions.

1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 Bb7 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.Ne2 Nb4 6.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7.Qxd3 Bb4!?



A solid variation. Black is ready to exchange his bishop for the opponent's knight if White plays a2-a3. The positional "justification" for giving up the two bishops is that it is generally a good idea for Black to exchange pieces as he has less space. In the similar line, 5.Nf3 Nb4 6.Nc3 Nxd3 7.Qxd3 Bb4!? ([Part Five](#)), we have seen that White's space advantage does not guarantee him an automatic advantage, even if Black gives up the advantage of the two bishops.

8.0-0

The direct 8.Qg3 has also been tried 8...Bxe4 9.Qxg7 Qf6 and now:

A) 10.Bh6 Qxh6 11.Qxh8 0-0-0 12.Qe5 Nf6 (Or 12...Bxg2 13.Rg1 Bd6 14.Qe3 Qxh2) 13.Qf4 Bxc3+ 14.bxc3 Qg6 15.f3 Bd3 16.Qg3 Qh6 17.Qf4 Qg6 18.Qg3 Qh6 19.Qf4 Qg6 20.Qg3 ½-½, V.Erdos-J.Kraai, Budapest 2003.

B) 10.Qg3 Qg6 11.Qxc7 (I.Efimov-M.Caposciutti, Monte Carlo 2000) 11...Qxg2 12.Rg1 Bxc3+ 13.bxc3 Qf3 unclear (Stohl).

8...Ne7

This forces White to lose a tempo with a2-a3 if he wants to have Black's bishop. 8...Bxc3 9.Nxc3 Ne7 10.b3!? 0-0 11.Ba3 Note, that this square is not available for the bishop in the line 8...Ne7 9.a3 Bxc3 10.Nxc3. 11...d6 12.f4 c5 (According to Stohl, it would have been better to stop the f-pawn with 12...f5+)= 13.f5 Nc6 14.f6! gxf6 15.Rf4 Nxd4 16.Rh4 and White went on to win a nice attacking game in E.Bareev-K.Chernyshov, Sochi 2005.

9.a3

An important alternative is the tricky 9.Nd1!?:



White tries to play against Black's bishop on b4, the direct threat is 10.a3 Bd6 11.e5+-. Black has several possibilities:

A) 9...Ng6 clears the e7-square for the bishop, but doesn't solve Black's problems, as 10.f4 gives White the initiative as in J.Ehlvest-J.Kraai, Philadelphia 2003.

B) 9...f5 was given by Daniel King in *English Defence*. The point is that if White plays 10.e5, then 10...Ng6 (preparing 11.a3 Be7) is OK for Black, because White can't advance his f-pawn

as after the immediate 9...Ng6. Another possibility is 10.Qb3 c5, when White can win a pawn with 11.exf5 Nxf5 12.a3 Ba5 13.dxc5, but after 13...Qc7 14.cxb6 Bxb6, Black's well placed pieces compensate for it. So

far, so good, but I would be worried about the simple 10.f3!. This renews the threat of 11.a3 Bd6 12.e5 and seems to leave 9...f5 rather pointless. Black could play 10...fxe4 11.fxe4 Ng6, but then the new factor of the open f-file gives White the initiative upon 12.Ndc3.

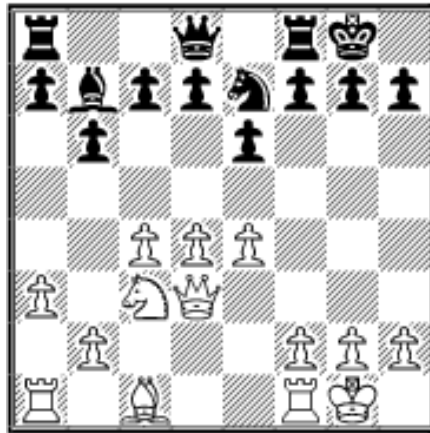
C) I recommend 9...c6, with the idea to meet 10.a3 Bd6 11.e5 with 11...Bc7. 9...c6 blocks the b7-bishop for the moment, but with two bishops and a solid position, Black has good equalizing chances. Instead of 10.a3, White can play:

C1) 10.Qg3 Apart from attacking g7, this also controls d6, thus threatening 11.a3+-. However, Black can play 10...Ng6 11.f4 f5.

C2) On 10.e5 Lindinger suggests 10...Ng6 11.f4 0-0 12.Ne3 Be7, with the idea to follow up with ...d7-d6; for example, 13.f5 (13.g4 d6 14.f5 Nh4) 13...exf5 14.Nxf5 d6.

C3) 10.e5 bxc5 11.a3 Ba5 12.dxc5 Bc7 Black must be careful that his weak d7-pawn and d6-square don't become major factors. I think he should activate the bishop (...a7-a5,... Bb7-a6) and then decide how to continue depending on what White does. In certain circumstances, Black can play ...Qb8, ...d7-d6 or ...f7-f5. One sample line is 13.Ne3 a5! 14.Rd1 Ba6 15.Qc2 0-0 16.Nc4 (16.Nd4 Qb8) 16...f5 with counterplay.

9...Bxc3 10.Nxc3 0-0



The games of GM Henrik Teske in this line indicate that Black is doing well here. White has a space advantage, but it is not easy for him to make use of it, especially as two pairs of minor pieces have already been exchanged. We will see that Black can effectively play ...f7-f5 or ...d7-d5, in reaction to White's plans.

11.Bg5

Three months later Teske was confronted with 11.d5 d6 12.Bg5 Qd7 (King also gives 12...f6 13.Be3 e5, with the idea ...f6-f5.) 13.Rad1 Rae8 14.

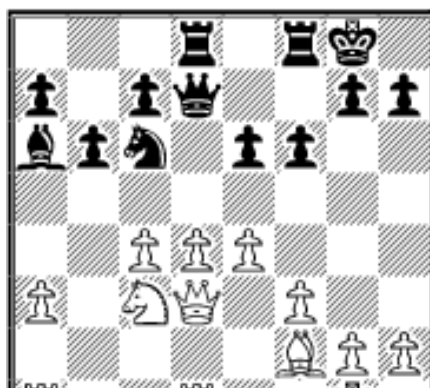
Nb5 a6 15.Nd4 ½-½, Z.Franco Ocampos-H.

Teske, Havana 1998. 15...e5 16.Bxe7 Qxe7 17.Nf5 Qg5 "followed by ...Bc8; when the knight retreats, ...f7-f5 comes." (King).

11...f6 12.Bh4 d5 (with counterplay) 13.f3 Qd7 14.Rfd1 Ba6 15.b3 Rad8

The white center comes under pressure.

16.Bf2 dxc4 17.bxc4 Nc6



It seems that White is already losing a pawn because of the threats of ...Ne5 and ...Na5.

18.Nb5 Ne5 19.Qc3 Nxc4 20.Qxc4 Bxb5 21.Qc3

White doesn't have sufficient compensation for the pawn, but luckily for him the game is drawn only three moves later.

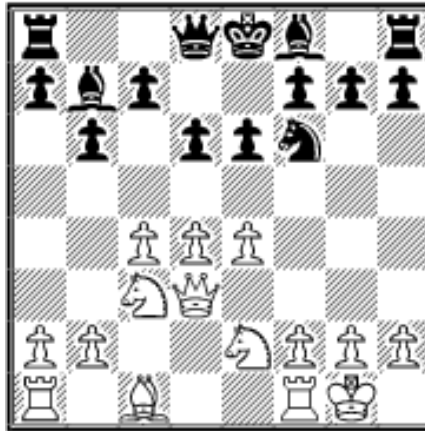


21...Rf7 22.Rdc1 Qe8 23.h3 h6 24.Qb4 Bc6 ½–½

Joel Lautier (2687) – Vassily Ivanchuk (2717)

Dubai rapid, 2002

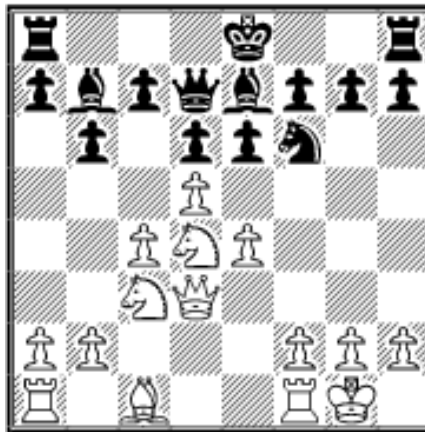
1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 Bb7 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.Ne2 Nb4 6.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7.Qxd3 d6 8.0–0 Nf6



Black intends to continue with ...Be7 and ...0–0. This slightly passive, but solid variation has been played twice by Ivanchuk. Practically no one has followed suit, but when a 2700+ player endorses a line, one should usually take notice.

9.f4

The more popular alternative is 9.d5 Be7 10.Nd4 Qd7



Black would like to play ...c7–c6 quickly in order to eliminate the pressure caused by White's space advantage. If White then exchanges on c6 (dxc6 Bxc6), we reach a hedgehog-structure (without ...a7–a6). White has tried three different moves:

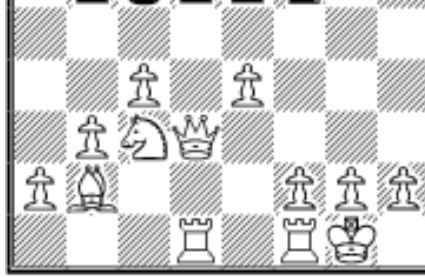
A) 11.a4 c5 12.dxc6 Bxc6 13.b3 0–0 14.Ba3 Bb7 15.Ndb5 Rfd8 16.Rad1 Qc6 17.Qg3 Nxe4 18.Nxe4 Qxe4 19.Nxd6 Bxd6 20.Bxd6 Qg6 21.Bc7 Rxd1 22.Rxd1 Rc8 23.a5 b5 24.Qxg6 hxg6 25.Rd8+ ½–½, V.Kramnik-V.Ivanchuk, Monaco rapid 2002.

B) 11.b3 0–0 (Castling first is safer than the immediate 11...c6, though this may be OK as well: 12.dxc6 Bxc6 13.Ba3! This gives Black some practical problems to solve. 13...a6 (13...0–0? 14.Nxc6 Qxc6 15.e5 Ne8 16.Rad1 Rd8 17.Qe4 Qd7 18.Qf3± and White wins a pawn.) 14.Rad1 Bb7 15.Qg3 Qc7 (Again Black can't castle 15...0–0? 16.e5) 16.Rfe1 g6 (But now 16...0–0! was possible: 17.e5 dxe5 18.Ndb5 (18.Bxe7 Qxe7 19.Qxe5 Rfd8 20.Nf5 (20.Na4 Qd6) 20...Qc5 21.Qxc5 bxc5=) 18...axb5 19.Nxb5 Qc6 20.Bxe7 Nh5 and this looks far from clear.) 17.e5 Nh5? (17...dxe5) 18.Bxd6!± /+–, V.Epishin-J.Ehlvest, Novosibirsk 1993.) 12.Bb2 c6 13.dxc6 Bxc6 14.Nxc6 Qxc6 15.Rad1 Rfd8



16.Rd2 a6 17.a4 Ne8 18.Rfd1 Bg5 19.Rc2 Rab8 20.h3 h6 21.Ne2 Qb7 22.Bc1 Bxc1 23.Rxc1 Nf6= I.Jelen-A.Grosar, Ljubljana 1997.

C) 11.f4!? This appears to be the most ambitious, as now White can answer 11...c6 with 12.e5. 11...



c5 12.Nde2 (12.dxc6 Bxc6 13.e5? dxe5 14.fxe5 Bc5 would be good for Black.) 12...exd5 13.cxd5 Now we have reached a Benoni structure. 13... h5?! This looks risky and might be the reason for Black's problems in the middlegame. (Instead, the normal 13...0-0 (Lindinger) looks about equal. Black's standard ideas are to put pressure

on e4 and make progress on the queenside with (...a7-a6), ...b6-b5, etc. It is important that the direct 14.e5? works well for Black; for example, 14...dxe5 15.fxe5 Nxd5 16.Rd1 Rfd8 17.Nf4 c4 18.Qg3 (18.Qxc4 Bc5+ 19.Kf1 Qg4) 18...Bc5+ 19.Kh1 Nxc3 20.Rxd7 Rxd7 21.Be3 Ne4 and Black has more than enough for the queen.) 14.a4 h4 15.h3 0-0 16.b3 Ne8 17.Bb2 Nc7 18.f5 Bf6 19.Rf4 Qe7 20.Rg4 Kh7 21.Qd2 Ne8 22.Kh1 g5 23.Ng1! Rg8 24.Nf3± and Black was under pressure in A.Anastasian-E.Kengis, Katowice 1993.

9...Be7 10.e5

In his annotations Lautier gives 10.d5!? and 10.f5 0-0 11.fxe6 fxe6 12.d5 Ng4 (12...e5 13.Bd2 Bc8 14.Rf2+=) 13.Nd4 (13.Nf4 Ne5 14.Qe2 exd5 15.exd5 Qd7 16.Be3 Rae8) 13... Ne5 14.Rxf8+ Qxf8 15.Qe2 exd5 16.exd5 Qf7 17.Be3+=. However, White doesn't seem to have too much if Black changes the bishop's diagonal with 17...Bc8!?!; for instance, 18.Rf1 Qg6 19.b3 Bg4 20.Qd2 (20.Qc2 Qxc2 21.Nxc2 a6) 20...a6 21.Nce2 The knight is heading for e6, but Black's queen gets a square on e4. 21...Rf8 22.Nf4 (22.Rxf8+ Bxf8 23.Qe1 Qe4) 22...Qe4.

10...Nd7 11.f5



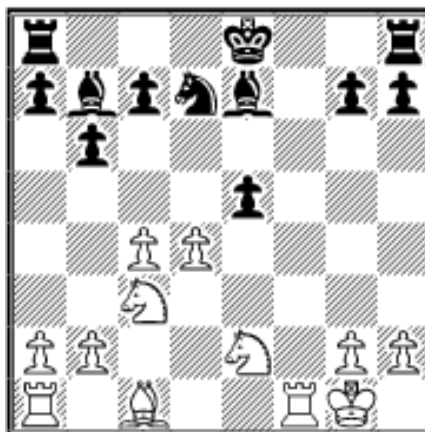
11.Qg3 0-0 is unclear according to Stohl, who still gives 12.f5?! dxe5 13.dxe5 Bh4! 14.Qf4 exf5=+.

Now the game went **11...exf5?! 12.Qxf5 0-0 13.exd6 cxd6 14.Bf4 a6 15.a4+=** and White had a solid advantage (1-0 in 63).

Instead, as shown by Stohl, Black should have played **11...dxe5! 12.fxe6 fxe6 13.Qh3 Bf6! 14.Qxe6+**

14.dxe5 Nxe5 works for Black: 15.Bf4 (15.Nf4 0-0 16.Nxe6 Bc8) 15...Qd6 16.Rad1 Qc5+ 17.Kh1 0-0 18.Qxe6+ Kh8.

14...Qe7 15.Qxe7+ Bxe7



White temporarily has a slight initiative, but Black (with the bishop-pair) should be able to equalize by making a few precise moves.

16.Be3

16.Nb5 Bd8 17.dxe5 Nxe5 18.Bf4 Nxc4 19.Bxc7 Bf6 20.Rac1 a6 21.Nd6+ Nxd6 22.Bxd6 Rd8= Stohl.

16...0-0-0 17.Rf7 Bf6 18.d5 Rhf8 19.Rxf8 Rxf8



20.Ne4 Be7

Black can further simplify the position with ...Nf6 and/or play...c7-c6 at the proper moment.

Nicolas Clery (2327) – Emmanuel Bricard (2434)

France, 2005

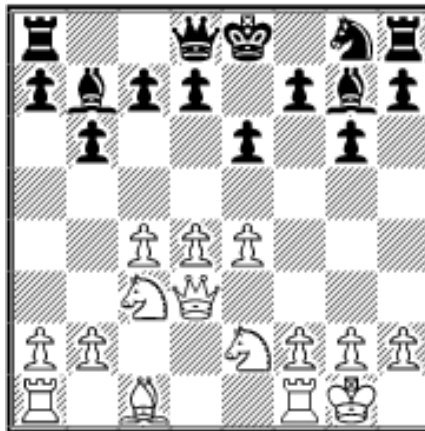
1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 Bb7 4.Bd3 Nc6 5.Ne2 Nb4 6.0–0

Often the game just transposes into lines that can also be reached via 6.Nbc3, but there are also differences. One benefit of 6.0–0 is that it avoids the line 6.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7.Qxd3 Bb4!?. One disadvantage is that Black can now play a good version of a double fianchetto.

6...g6!?

In the 6.Nbc3-line, Black's attempts to play the double fianchetto can always be met by unpleasant replies; for example, 6...Nxd3 7.Qxd3 g6?! 8.h4!. But here it is entirely reasonable for Black. Even though I recommend 6...g6, it should be mentioned that 6...Nxd3 7.Qxd3 d6 8.Nbc3 transposes to 6.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7.Qxd3 d6 8.0-0, and 6...Nxd3 7.Qxd3 Ne7 8.Nbc3 to 6.Nbc3 Nxd3+ 7.Qxd3 Ne7 8.0-0.

7.Nbc3 Nxd3 8.Qxd3 Bg7



9.Be3

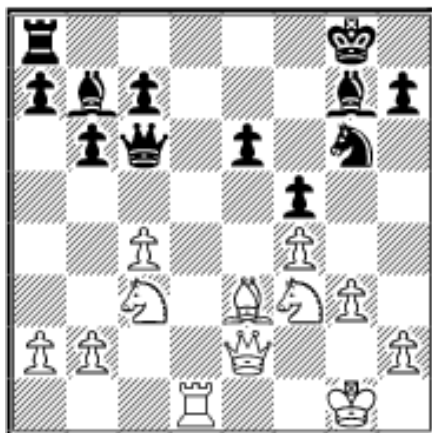
Or 9.d5 Ne7 10.Bg5 h6 11.Be3 0–0 12.Rad1 d6 13.f4 Qd7 14.Bd4 This provokes Black to play ...e7-e5 and ...f7-f5, which leads to a complicated fight. The only practical example went 14...e5 15.fxe5 dxe5 16.Bf2 f5 17.Qh3 Rad8 18.Be3 Kh7 19.b4 Bc8 20.exf5 gxf5 21.Bf2 Ng6 22.c5 Qe7 23.Qd3 e4 24.Qd2 f4 25.d6 cxd6 26.cxd6 Qe6 27.Qc2 f3 28.gxf3 exf3 0–1, V.Kachar-A.Czebe, Balaguer 2003; 9.f4, intending f4-f5, should be met by 9...Ne7 (King). Instead, 9...f5?! 10.exf5 gxf5 11.d5 gave White the initiative in A. Anastasian-R.Dausch, Cappelle la Grande 1996.

9...Ne7

Now, as Black hasn't played ...d7-d6, he has the option to play ...f7-f5, without leaving the e6-pawn unprotected.

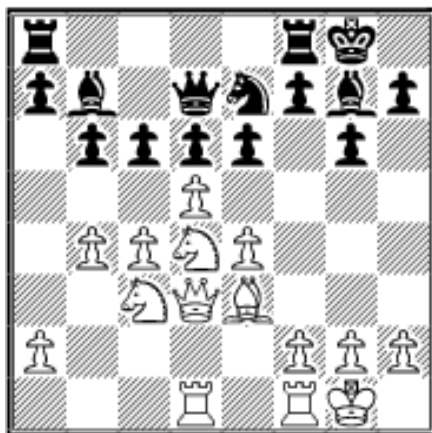
10.Rad1

10.f4 (J.Gilbert-J.Hammer, Gausdal 2005) 10...f5 11.e5 d6 with counterplay; 10.d5 f5!? 11.Nd4 0–0 12.dxe6 dxe6 13.Rad1 Qc8 14.exf5 gxf5 15.f4 Ng6 16.Nf3 Rd8 17.Qe2 Rxd1 18.Rxd1 Qe8 19.g3 Qc6 H.Van de Werken-S.Conquest, Gent 2004.



For attacking and breaking up White's center, Black is rewarded with a monster bishop on b7, which gives him the advantage.

10...d6 11.d5 Qd7 12.b4 0-0 13.Nd4 c6



14.Nde2 cxd5 15.cxd5 exd5 16.exd5 Nf5 and Black had solved his opening problems. White later blundered the d5-pawn and Black went on to win in sixty-three moves.

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