



COLUMNISTS

Hoisting the Hippopotamus

Lev Alburt &
Al Lawrence



Kings Without Castles

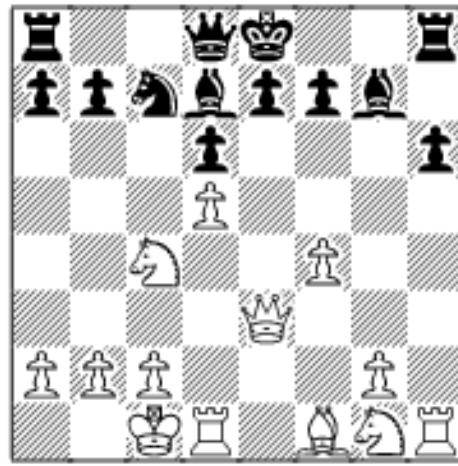
Does every king long to barricade himself in his castle? As beginners, we learn to avoid keeping our king in the center. We read how His Highness' dallying in the middle files with the common folk inevitably brings about the chessic equivalent of the guillotine (not the cutting edge we have in mind when we study theory). Like many "rules" learned at an early stage, this generalization, though helpful, doesn't apply in all cases. In fact, this particular dictum has many exceptions—in positions where the center can't be effectively pried open.

When your authors and GM Alex Chernin brought out *Pirc Alert!*, we promised to keep readers of this column apprised of important ideas and developments in the defense. This month we discuss, using Chernin's ideas and analysis from key games, the principles of placing the king in the Pirc Defense. The ideas we discuss can apply to many openings.

There's hardly any decision more important than where to place your king. Your choice of royal residences shouldn't be automatic in the Pirc—due to the closed character of many Pirc variations. Actually, even in semi-open debuts such as the Sicilian, your choice of spots to pitch the king's campaign tent is not automatic—His Majesty is sometimes best placed on the queenside, or even left in the center. But in the Sicilian, the decision to leave the monarch in the middle is frequently made by necessity, not choice.

In the Pirc, however, keeping the king in the center is often simply a reasonable choice. In these cases, it can be protected just as effectively by center pawns as solidly as it could be on the flanks. One natural drawback to the king's living in the center is the separation of the rooks and sometimes the queen. But sometimes in closed positions, a player is fortunate to have meaningful work for even one rook! The "lack of coordination" that is a danger in a position with open lines is not a major drawback in many Pirc, and other closed, positions.

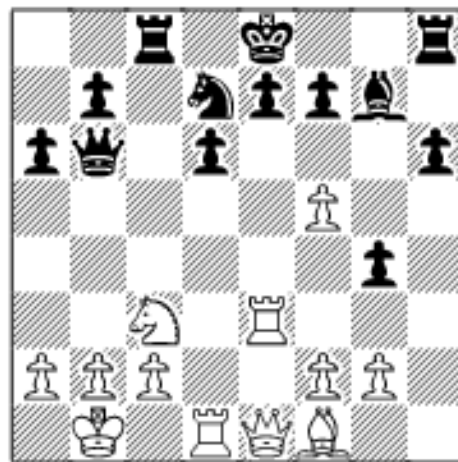
Let's take a look at three positions in which Black played the star move ...Kf8!.



Anand—Chernin
Paris, 1995
17...Kf8! =/+



Leko—Chernin
Budapest, 1997|
12...Kf8! -/+ (12...Bd7=)



Beliavsky—Chernin
Portoroz, 1997
19...Kf8 =/+

Why is ...Kf8 so strong in these positions?

First of all, the lack of a dynamic mobile center for White is an important factor. In Anand—Chernin, d5 is blocked and its natural ramming partner, the e-pawn, is missing. In Leko—Chernin, the d4 pawn is absent and e4-e5 is prevented. In Beliavsky—Chernin, White has neither e- or d-pawn. The second reason that makes Black's king-in-the-center defense so strong is the effective offensive-defensive actions of the bishop on g7. While Black's king is safe on f8 under the protection of his g7-bishop, Black has a free hand in using this bishop. The third reason in favor of ...Kf8 is that Black's kingside is compromised. Otherwise, ...0-0 would be an even better move. As for ...0-0-0, it's impossible. It would put the king into the area of Black's own expansion—his monarch has no royal business to conduct there.

In all three cases, the positional result of the move ...Kf8! is the same—the rest of Black's pieces, with the possible exclusion of the rook on h8, take an active part in the play.

Here is an example of a different kind. In contrast to the previous positions, the situation in the center is very tense.



***Miladinovich—Istratescu
Castoria, 1996***

Here the move **18...Kf8!** is once again very strong. Why? As we discussed in *Pirc Alert!*, such a two-on-two pawn press in the center is momentary. Captures will soon clear both central files. In these conditions, of course it would be good to evacuate the king from e8 in order to

use the square for a rook to assault the enemy. But if Black castles short, White has the ready-made attacking plan of Be3-h6 and h4-h5. Additionally, playing ...0-0 would remove the rook from the semi-open h-file. Castling would then put Black's king in a dangerous position and at the same time give up the good offensive position of the h8-rook. Compelling reasons to look for an alternative!

18...Kf8! 19. Bg5 Re8 20. 0-0

The pressure on the center from 19...Re8 forces White to castle

into an unsafe position.

(Castling long is even riskier for White.)



20...Nh7 21. f4

On 21. Be3 or 21. Bh6,
21...Qd8 is a very strong
rejoinder.

**21...Nxe5 22. hxg5 dxe4 23.
fxe5**

If 23. dxe5, then 23...Ne5! 24.
Ne4 Nc4 -+.

After **23. fxe5**, we've reached
the following interesting

position.

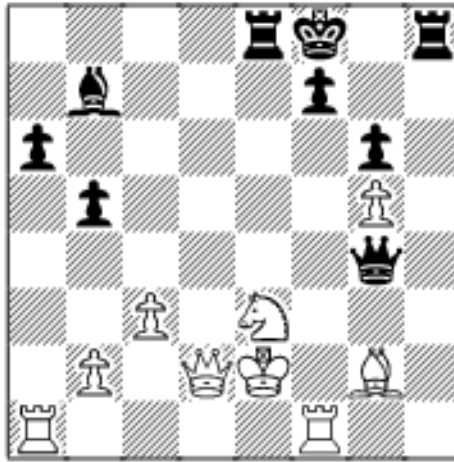


Here White would not stand
so badly if there were no
tactical solutions for Black.
However ...

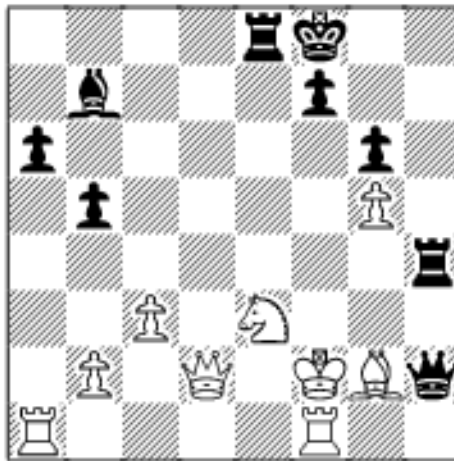
**23...Nxe5! 24. dxe5 Bxe5 25.
Ng4 Bh2+ 26. Kf2 e3!+**



**27. Nxe3 Bf4 28. Nxf4 Qxf4+
29. Ke2 Qg4+**



30. Kf2 Qh4+ 31. Kg1 Qh2+
32. Kf2 Rh4!



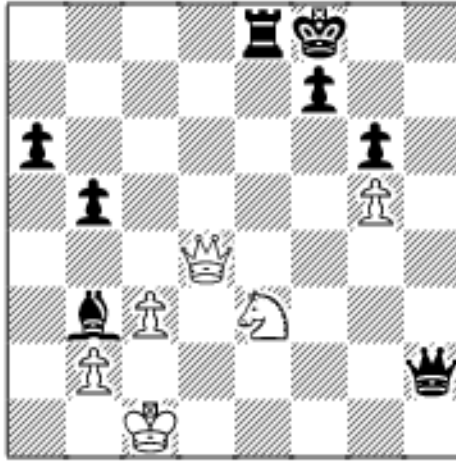
Black has a winning attack.

33. Rh1 Qf4+ 34. Ke2 Bxg2
35. Rxh4 Qxh4 36. Qd4 Qh2
37. Re1



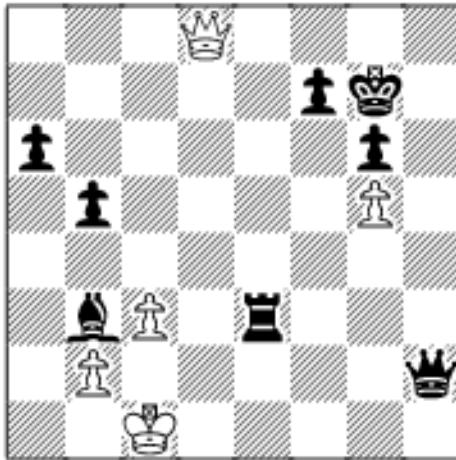
37...Bd5+! 38. Kd1 Bb3+ 39.
Kc1

39...Rxe3! 40. Qd8+ Kg7 0-1



White is helpless against mate.

To conclude our review of kings in the center, let's look at a choice other than ...Kf8.



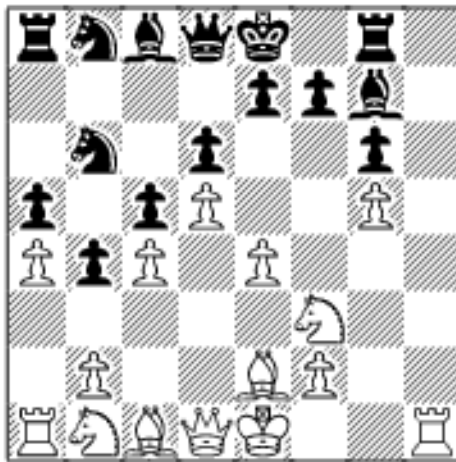
Vlatko Kovacevic—Yasser Seirawan Wijk aan Zee, 1980

14...Kd7!

In order to take advantage of this rare king maneuver toward the queenside, actually crossing the d-file in front of his queen in the opening, Black has to be absolutely certain that the center is locked. In this position, Black

reaps big dividends with **14...Kd7!**. His united queen and rook quickly take part in the fight for the important h-file. In a few moves, Black will be effectively castled queenside “by hand.”

What's more, the reader can see that this “castling long” maneuver is accomplished without the necessity of ...Bb7, because the bishop is effective on the c8-h3 diagonal.



15. Nbd2 Rh8 16. Rg1 Kc7 17. Rb1 Rh3 18. b3 Qh8 19. Nf1
N(8)d7 20. Bf4



20...Ne5 21. Nxe5 Bxe5 22.
Bxe5 Qxe5



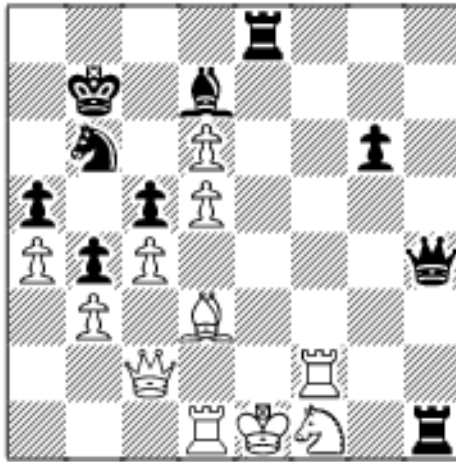
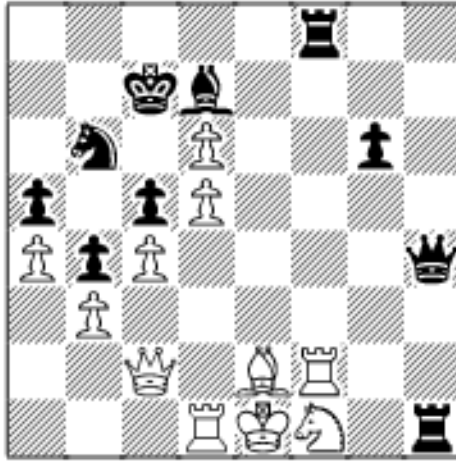
As a result of his king's
maneuver, Black's queen
reaches the center in an
economic way.

23. f3 Bd7 24. Qc2 Qd4 25.
Rg2 Rh1 26. Rf2



26...Qh8! 27. f4 Qh4 28. Rd1
f6 29. gxf6 exf6 30. e5 fxe5
31. fxe5 Rf8 32. exd6+

32...Kb7 33. Bd3 Re8+ 0-1



If 34. Be2, then Black smashes through with 34...Rxf1+.

Black's king maneuver in this last game is, of course, an advanced technique—in fact, one that belongs to the highest level of difficulty. However, a player who wants to master the subtle Pirc or, indeed, other closed positions, should (and can) acquire these

techniques. We hope this article will help you do just this.

And there's always the joy of "thinking out of the box"—and, when it works, into the center!

Alex Chernin (former world champion candidate, Soviet co-champion and author of *Pirc Alert!*) is recognized worldwide as an opening expert and top trainer. Chernin will be available to help you build a new, strong and up-to-date opening repertoire in just a few lessons. World champion candidate GM Alex Beliavsky says, "Chernin gives you theory as it *will* be in 10 years!" **ChessCafe.com** columnist Carsten Hansen writes, "Chernin has the ability to prepare players to play an opening using ...ideas rather than memorized lines."

Chernin will be available for lessons from July 25 to August 15. To schedule a lesson, please call 212-623-0377 or 201-833-1741. Or email Alex at achernin@elender.hu

Please Email suggestions for future columns and other comments to AlForChess@aol.com. We enjoy your comments and learn from your criticism.

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