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Middlegame Motifs

Nigel Davies

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The Advanced Isolated d-Pawn

Whereas chess literature is replete with discussions of standard isolated d-pawn positions, not much has been said about those in which the pawn gets to the fifth rank. This is what we're going to look at in this month's update.

Positions like this can arise from a number of different openings but are most common in the Tarrasch Defence. In particular the line **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.g3 Nf6 7.Bg2 Be7 8.O-O O-O 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Bg5 d4** gives rise to this structure and you can get something very similar after 9.dxc5 d4. Another common way of reaching them is via a fianchetto line of the Grünfeld Defence; for example, **1.c4 Nf6 2.Nc3 d5 3.cxd5 Nxd5 4.g3 g6 5.Bg2 Nb6 6.Nf3 Bg7 7.O-O O-O 8.d4 Nc6 9.d5 Na5 10.e4 c6 11.Re1 exd5 12.exd5**. The main feature of such positions will be the greatly enhanced cramping effect of the d-pawn, which in turn will lead to pressure along the half-open d-file. There's also a good chance that the pawn may charge forward to the sixth rank. On the other hand, it no longer supports a strong point along the half-open file (usually the e-file), because one of the opponent's pawns will almost certainly be defending it. This contrasts with a isolated d-pawn position in which a white pawn on d4 would support the e5-square.

These features are best illustrated by examples, so here are two great players in action. In the first game Paul Keres provides us with a superb demonstration of White's attacking chances, whilst in the second we see Vasily Smyslov deftly transpose into a favourable endgame.

Keres, Paul (2600) – Byrne, Donald (2470)
San Antonio, 1972
Grünfeld Defence [D94]

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.e3

Although thought to be an innocuous line, this leads to positions that Keres liked. The way that he plays it, we get a position that is akin to the Tarrasch Defence with colours reversed.

5...0-0 6.cxd5 Nxd5 7.Bc4 Nb6 8.Bb3 c5 9.0-0 cxd4 10.exd4 Nc6 11.d5

Defining our pawn structure in which the isolated d-pawn has a cramping effect. That's not to say that Black is without his chances, as he can set up a blockade on d6 and get play along the c-file.

11...Na5 12.Bg5 h6 13.Be3 Bg4 14.h3 Bxf3 15.Qxf3



[FEN"r2q1rk1/pp2ppb1/1n4pp/n2P4/8/1BN1BQ1P/PP3PP1/R4RK1 b - - 0 15"]

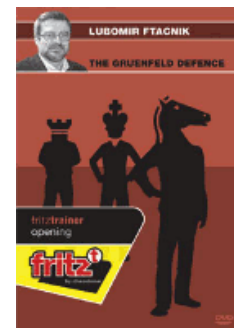
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The Gruenfeld Defence
by Lubomir Ftacnik

15...Nbc4 16.Bc1 Nxb3 17.axb3 Nd6 18.Re1 Re8 19.Be3 b6 20.Bf4 Qd7 21. Ra4

Preparing to swing the rook over to the kingside.

21...Rac8 22.g4 a5 23.Be5 Rc5 24.Rf4 Bxe5 25.Rxe5 b5 26.Qe3 Qc7 27.Rf3 b4 28.Ne2 a4?

Underestimating the danger to his king. Black should have tried to simplify via 28...Nb5 29.Nf4 Rc1+ 30.Kg2 Qc5, after which 31.Nd3 Qxe3 32.Rfxe3 Rd1 should hold for Black in the endgame.

29.Qxh6 a3

After 29...Ra5 30.Nd4, White would be threatening to launch a mating attack with 31.Ne6!, and there's not a whole lot Black can do about this. For example, 30...Rxd5 (30...Rc8 31.Nc6 Re8 32.Rg5 sets up the deadly threat of 33.Rxf7!) White wins with 31.Rxf7! Kxf7 (Or 31...Nxf7 32.Qxg6+ Kh8 33. Rxd5 with the deadly threat of 34.Rh5+ 32.Qh7+ Kf6 33.Re6+ Kg5 34.Qxg6 + Kf4 35.Ne2+ Kf3 36.Re3# mate.

30.bxa3 bxa3

Trying to back out with 30...e6 runs into 31.Nf4!; for example, 31...Nf5 (31... bxa3 32.Nh5! wins on the spot) 32.gxf5 Qxe5 33.fxg6 Qg7 34.Qxg7+ Kxg7 35.gxf7 Kxf7 36.Nxe6+ Kg8 37.Nxc5 bxa3 38.Kh2 Re1 (38...a2 39.Rg3+ Kf7 40.Rg1 stops Black's a-pawn) 39.d6 a2 40.d7 Rh1+ (40...Rd1 41.Nd3) 41. Kxh1 a1Q+ 42.Kg2 Qd4 43.Rd3 and White wins.

31.Rg5 a2



[FEN"4r1k1/2q1pp2/3n2pQ/2rP2R1/6P1/1P3R1P/p3NP2/6K1 w - - 0 32"]

After 31...Rc1+ 32.Kg2 Qc2, White has 33.Nxc1 Qxc1 34.Rxg6+, etc.

32.Rxf7!!

The point of White's play, which had to have been seen well in advance. White has a mating attack despite the fact that Black's a-pawn is queening with check.

32...a1Q+ 33.Kg2 1-0

There is no defence; for example, 33.Kg2 Kxf7 (33...Nxf7 34.Rxg6+) 34.Qxg6 + Kf8 35.Qg8# mate.

This next game is slightly different in that Black has a c-pawn rather than an e-pawn. White's d-pawn still exerts a cramping influence, but it's in a different sector of the board.

Smyslov, Vassily – Lilienthal, Andor
Moscow Championship Moscow, 1942
Grünfeld Defence [D76]

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 d5 4.cxd5 Nxd5 5.Bg2 Bg7 6.Nf3 0-0 7.0-0 Nb6 8.

Nc3 Nc6 9.d5 Nb8

Too passive. These days it is widely accepted that Black's best move is 9... Na5.

10.Nd4 e6 11.e4 exd5 12.exd5

This pawn structure is different to the one in the previous game in that Black has a c7-pawn rather than one on e7. Accordingly, the half-open file is now the c-file rather than the e-file, it is Black's queenside that is cramped rather than his kingside and the main target is the pawn on c7 rather than the one on e7. The net result of these differences is that White does not have the same kind of attacking chances on the kingside, it's more a case of positional pressure. And this kind of play was very much to Smyslov's taste.

12...N8d7 13.Bf4 Ne5 14.h3 Nbc4 15.b3 Nd6

Black's pieces look nicely placed, but the knight on e5 lacks pawn support.

16.Re1 Re8 17.Rc1 a6 18.Na4

Unveiling pressure against c7 from the rook on c1, and this creates a sense of urgency in Black's mind.

18...Nb5?



[FEN"r1bqr1k1/1pp2pbp/p5p1/1n1Pn3/N2N1B2/1P4PP/P4PB1/2RQR1K1 w - - 0 19"]

Black tries for some activity, but misses a powerful reply. Perhaps the best chance was 18...g5!?, weakening Black's kingside, but at least making his knight on e5 more secure. After 19.Ne6, there might follow 19...Bxe6 20. Bxe5 Bg4+/- 21.Qxg4 Rxe5 22.Rxe5 Bxe5 23.f4 Bd4+ 24.Kh2 Qe7 25.Qxg5 + Qxg5 26.fxg5 b5 27.Nc5 Be3 28.Rc2 Bxg5, and Black gets a more hopeful endgame than in the game.

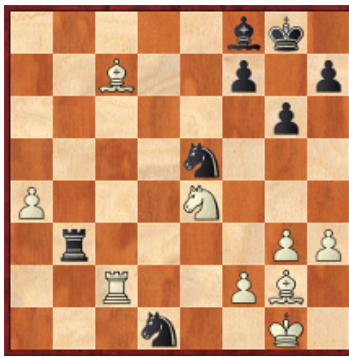
19.Ne6! Bxe6 20.dxe6 Rxe6 21.Nc5

White will win back the pawn and at the same time have two powerful bishops and a weakened enemy pawn structure. In Smyslov's hands these advantages add up to a winning position.

21...Qxd1 22.Rexd1 Rd6 23.Nxb7 Rxd1+ 24.Rxd1 Rb8 25.a4 Nc3 26.Rd2 Re8 27.Nc5 a5 28.Rc2 Nd1 29.Bd2

Black's a-pawn is too weak here and White soon captures it to obtain a powerful passed a-pawn.

29...Bf8 30.Ne4 Rb8 31.Bxa5 Rxb3 32.Bxc7



[FEN"5bk1/2B2p1p/6p1/4n3/P3N3/1r4PP/2R2PB1/3n2K1 b - - 0 32"]

With a good passed a-pawn up White just needs to play accurately.

32...Nd3 33.Bf1 N1b2 34.a5 f5 35.Nd2 Ra3 36.Nc4 Nxc4 37.Rxc4 Ra1 38.Bb6 Ne5 39.Rc3 Bb4 40.Rc8+ Kf7 41.Kg2 1-0

Black will lose the exchange after 41.Kg2 Bxa5 42.Bd4 Re1 43.Rc5 Rxf1 44.Kxf1 Bb6 45.Rd5, and in a position which would be hopeless for him.

Exercises (solutions next month)



[FEN"8/p1R2ppk/1p5p/3Rn1rP/1P1pr1q1/6P1/P2QPPK1/6N1 b - - 0 32"]

Black to play set in motion a winning attack. What was the key move?



[FEN"3rr1k1/pp3ppp/8/q3n3/3p1Nb1/P5PP/1P2PPB1/2RQR1K1 b - - 0 20"]

Black to play uncorked a ruinous blow to his great adversary, what was it?

Solutions to last month's exercises

Teichmann, Richard – Schlechter, Carl
Karlsbad (18), 14.09.1911



[FEN "r3r1k1/1bq1nppp/p1np4/1ppBpN2/4P3/2PP1N2/PP3PPP/R2QR1K1 w - - 0 19"]

How did White to play launch a decisive attack?

19.Bxf7+! Kxf7 20.Ng5+ Kg8 20...Kf6 would have been more tenacious, but then **21.Nxh7+ Kf7 22.Ng5+ Kf6 23.Qg4** must surely be good for White. A sample line is **23...g6 24.Ng7! Rg8 (24...Kxg7 25.Ne6+ wins the queen) 25.N7e6 Qb8 26.f4!** opening the f-file with a winning attack. **21.Qh5 Nxf5 22.Qxh7+ Kf8 23.Qxf5+ 23.exf5** was also good. **23...Kg8 24.Qg6 Qd7 25.Re3 1-0** There's no good defence to the threats of Rf3 and Qh7+.

Davies, Nigel (2476) – D'Costa, Lorin (2395)

BCF-chT 0708 (4NCL) Sunningdale (3), 10.11.2007



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/pp3pbp/2n3p1/2pn2N1/2N2B2/1QPP2P1/PP4BP/R3R1K1 w - - 0 16"]

This position is more tactical than the previous one featuring some decisive cross pins. White to play and win.

16.Nxf7! Rxf7 16...Kxf7 17.Bxd5+ Qxd5 18.Nd6+ wins Black's queen. 17.Nd6 c4 After **17...Rf8 18.Qxd5+ Kh8**, White can even play **19.Re8!**; for example, **19...Rxe8 20.Nf7+ Kg8 21.Nh6+ Kh8 22.Qg8+ Rxg8 23.Nf7# 18.Qxc4 1-0 18.Qxc4 Qb6+ 19.Be3 Nxe3 20.Qxf7+ Kh8 21.Qe8+ is followed by mate.**

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