



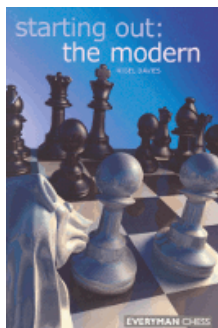
## COLUMNISTS

### Middlegame Motifs

Nigel Davies



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## Back Rank Weakness

The potential weakness of the back rank is known to all of us, both young and old alike. Yet that doesn't stop it being an issue at every level of the game. I remember pulling off a back-rank mate against the family dentist when I was just starting out, which was a pretty good result for me as he played in the local chess club. There again I now wonder if I really needed all those fillings, so perhaps this was something of a Pyrrhic victory!

It's unlikely that you'll pull off a back-rank mate against a top grandmaster, but that doesn't stop it from being an important consideration. Back-rank vulnerability might cause them to create room for their king by moving one of the pawns in front of it. This in turn can lead to other problems and needs to be done with care. Some players, especially juniors, will routinely make 'luft' for their king but I think this is a bad habit to get into. A player needs to judge when such measures are necessary and this is part of the process of becoming a good player.

The following likely spurious game could have been one of the back-rank classics. Edwin Adams allegedly brings off a famous victory over the famous Repetto Torre; however, the game is probably the result of postmortem analysis to an offhand game. Still, not many of us will ever get the opportunity for such a combination:

**Adams, Edwin – Torre Repetto, Carlos**

New Orleans, 1920

Ruy Lopez [C62]

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 exd4 4.Qxd4 Nc6**

Black might also consider preparing this with 4...Bd7; or 4...a6 so as to prevent the following pin.

**5.Bb5 Bd7 6.Bxc6 Bxc6 7.Nc3 Nf6 8.0-0**



[FEN "r2qkb1r/ppp2ppp/2bp1n2/8/3QP3/2N2N2/PPP2PPP/R1B2RK1 b kq - 0 8"]

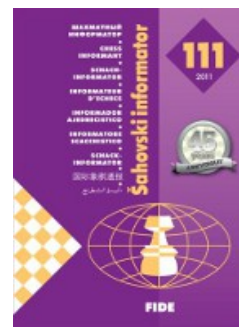
Objectively speaking it's probably better to play 8.Bg5 Be7 9.0-0-0, with far more pressure than the game.

**8...Be7 9.Nd5 Bxd5 10.exd5 0-0 11.Bg5 c6**

Black can probably steer the game towards equality by carefully conducted exchanges; for example, 11...Re8 12.Rfe1 h6 13.Bh4 Nd7 14.Bxe7 Rxe7 15.Rxe7 Qxe7 16.Re1 Qf6 17.Qxf6 Nxf6 18.c4 Kf8 looks dead equal to me.

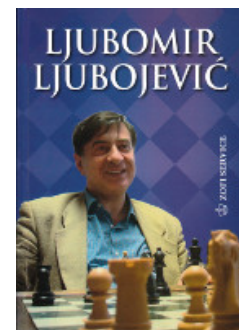
**12.c4**

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And White in turn should probably weaken his opponent's pawn structure with 12.dxc6 bxc6 13.Rad1, with what looks like a slight edge.

**12...cxd5**

12...Nxd5 13.cxd5 Bxg5 14.Nxg5 Qxg5 15.dxc6 bxc6 16.Qxd6 is a bit better for White because of his superior pawn structure.

**13.cxd5 Re8 14.Rfe1 a5**

14...h6 15.Bh4 Qb6 looks fine for Black.

15.Re2 Rc8?



[FEN "2rqr1k1/1p2bppp/3p1n2/p2P2B1/3Q4/5N2/PP2RPPP/R5K1 w - - 0 16"]

And here he should play 15...h6. After the move played, White gets a strong initiative.

**16.Rae1! Qd7**

This loses in spectacular style but I don't see a good alternative.

**17.Bxf6! Bxf6**

17...gxf6 probably qualifies as Black's 'best', but this doesn't say much about his position.

**18.Qg4!**

The first queen sacrifice. Of course Black dare not take because of 19.Rxe8+ followed by mate.

**18...Qb5 19.Qc4!!**

Even better than the last move! Black still needs both his rook on c8 and the queen on b5 to defend e8, so the White queen is still immune.

**19...Qd7**



[FEN "2r1r1k1/1p1q1ppp/3p1b2/p2P4/2Q5/5N2/PP2RPPP/4R1K1 w - - 0 20"]

## 20.Qc7!!

And this is magnificent, Black having the same problem about how to defend e8.

## 20...Qb5 21.a4!

And not 21.Qxb7? because of 21...Qxe2 22.Rxe2 Rc1+, etc.

## 21...Qxa4 22.Re4! Qb5 23.Qxb7! 1–0

The coup de gras and the end of some amazing pyrotechnics by White's queen. Black no longer has a decent square for his queen. It is said that Torre invented the game as a means of presenting this beautiful finish to the general public.

The following game shows that back-rank issues are still very much with us, though they tend to be hidden under the surface. In this game it is Gregory Kaidanov who falls victim to a back-rank combination, limping his way to defeat after having to jettison material:

### Felgaer, Ruben (2636) – Kaidanov, Gregory (2608)

FIDE World Cup Khanty Mansiysk (1.2), 28.11.2005

Ruy Lopez [C81]

## 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0–0 Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.Be3

This, together with 9.Nbd2, is one of the most dangerous lines against the Open Spanish.

## 9...Bc5

There is a major alternative in 9...Be7, avoiding simplification for the time being.

## 10.Qe2 0–0 11.Rd1 Bxe3 12.Qxe3 Na5



[FEN "r2q1rk1/2p2ppp/p3b3/np1pP3/4n3/1B2QN2/PPP2PPP/RN1R2K1 w - - 0 13"]

A typical move for Black in the Open Spanish, preparing to secure the d5 pawn with ...c7-c6.

## 13.Nbd2 Nxd2 14.Rxd2 c6

Intending to gradually activate his queenside pawn majority.

## 15.Re1

Attempting to improve on earlier games with simple development. After 15.c3 Qc7 16.h3 Rae8 17.Re1 Bf5, Black had a reasonable game in Socko,B-Mamedyarov,S, Warsaw 2005.

## 15...Qc7 16.c3 Rad8 17.Rd4!?

A good old fashioned rook lift, looking to drum up some play on the kingside.

**17...c5 18.Rh4 Bf5 19.Rf4**

Possibly White should have played this on his previous move. Now Black should have played 19...Qc8!, keeping the e6 square under control.

**19...Bg6?! 20.e6**

Threatening 21.e7, which denies Black the time he needs to take the bishop on b3.

**20...Rfe8 21.exf7+ Bxf7?**



[FEN "3rr1k1/2q2bpp/p7/nppp4/5R2/1BP1QN2/PP3PPP/4R1K1 w - - 0 22"]

A mistake which sets up a decisive back-rank combination. Black should have played 21...Qxf7 when 22.Ne5! (22.Rxf7 Rxe3 23.Rxg7+ Kxg7 24.fxe3 Kf6 would not be easy for White to win) 22...Qb7 (22...Qc7 loses to ...23.Nxg6 Rxe3 24.Bxd5+!+-) 23.Qxc5 Nc4! gives Black some compensation for the pawn, for example 24.Bxc4 bxc4 25.b4 cxb3 26.Rb4 Rxe5! 27.Rxe5 bxa2 28.Re1 Qd7 29.Qa5 Bb1 with compensation for the sacrificed exchange.

**22.Qxe8+!**

Exploiting the weakness of Black's back rank to win material.

**22...Bxe8**

After 22...Rxe8, there follows 23.Rxe8+ Bxe8 24.Bxd5+ Bf7 (24...Kh8 is met by 25.Rf8#) 25.Rxf7 Qxf7 26.Bxf7+ gives White an extra pawn in a relatively simple endgame

**23.Bxd5+ Bf7**

Of course 23...Kh8 allows 24.Rf8#, one of those back-rank variations which lies below the surface.

**24.Rxf7 Qxf7**

24...Qd6 might have been slightly better; for example, 25.Rd7+ Qxd5 26.Rxd5 Rxd5 leaves Black's rook on a better square than in the game.

**25.Bxf7+ Kxf7 26.Ng5+ Kg6 27.h4 h6 28.Re6+**

White's initiative continues into the endgame.

**28...Kf5 29.Rxa6 Nc4 30.Ne6 Rd7 31.b3 Ne5 32.f3 h5 33.Nxc5 Rd1+ 34.Kh2 Rd2 35.Kg3 Ng6 36.Ne6 1-0**

**Exercises (solutions next month)**



[FEN "rnb1r2k/pp3ppB/8/1Pp5/6P1/PPQ1qP1P/R1B2RK1 b - - 0 16"]

Black to play has a way to win on the spot, what did he play?



[FEN "2r2k1r/pp1Qnppp/8/q3p3/4p3/4B2P/PPP2PP1/2KR3R w - - 0 18"]

White to play has a winning move which exploits the weakness of Black's back rank. What is it?

### Solutions to last month's exercises

**Tackacs, A – Gruenfeld**  
Vienna, 1927



[FEN "3rr1k1/1pqbb1pp/p4pn1/2pP4/2P1N3/1P4P1/PBQ3BP/4RRK1 w - - 0 1"]

White to play. How did he convert his space advantage and active pieces into a decisive attack?

**1.d6!** The key move, distracting Black's e7 bishop from the defence of f6. **1... Bxd6 2.Nxf6+! gxf6 3.Bd5+ Kg7 4.Bxf6+ Kh6 5.Rxe8** The immediate **5.Qd2+** was also good. **5...Rxe8 6.Qd2+ 1-0**

**Davies, Nigel (2505) – Lyrberg, Patrik (2400)**  
Stockholm (9), 1995



[FEN "1r1qnrk1/1b1n1p1p/pppp2pQ/8/P1PNP3/2N3PP/1P3PB1/3RR1K1 w - - 0 20"]

White to play. I had a nice space advantage in this position but needed to break through somehow. How did I do it?

**20.e5!** The decisive breakthrough. White has numerous threats now including 21.e6 and 21.Nxc6. **20...Nxe5** After 20...dxe5 21.Nxc6 Bxc6 22.Bxc6 Nef6 23.Ne4 Nxe4 24.Rxe4, the knight on d7 falls. **21.Rxe5! dxe5 22.Nxc6 Qc7 22... Qf6 23.Nxb8** leaves White a piece up. **23.Nd5 Qxc6 24.Ne7+ Kh8 25.Qxf8# 1-0**

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