

Cyrus Lakdawala

**The Colle**

**move by move**

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# About the Author

**Cyrus Lakdawala** is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 30 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the US.

**Also by the Author:**

*Play the London System*

*A Ferocious Opening Repertoire*

*The Slav: Move by Move*

*1...d6: Move by Move*

*The Caro-Kann: Move by Move*

*The Four Knights: Move by Move*

*Capablanca: Move by Move*

*The Modern Defence: Move by Move*

*Kramnik: Move by Move*

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# Series Foreword

*Move by Move* is a series of opening books which uses a question-and-answer format. One of our main aims of the series is to replicate - as much as possible - lessons between chess teachers and students.

All the way through, readers will be challenged to answer searching questions, to test their skills in chess openings and indeed in other key aspects of the game. It's our firm belief that practising your skills like this is an excellent way to study chess openings, and to study chess in general.

Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation of *Move by Move*. We're really excited by this series and hope that readers will share our enthusiasm.

John Emms,  
Everyman Chess

# Introduction

## An Orphaned Opening

If you go back in time to the Palaeolithic age and accidentally step on a resting prehistoric dragonfly, would the world be completely altered when you returned to the present? The Colle System's tragedy is that its founding father, Edgar Colle, died very young, only in his thirties, and with his passing the artery of our opening's lineage and pedigree was mortally severed. I can't help but speculate that perhaps his beloved system would be more popular today had he lived a long life, producing many more Colle System masterpieces for the opening's portfolio. For something to reach a level of greatness, there must correspondingly also be history behind it. With Edgar Colle's premature death, our opening lost a chunk of its history, its potential obliterated with his passing.

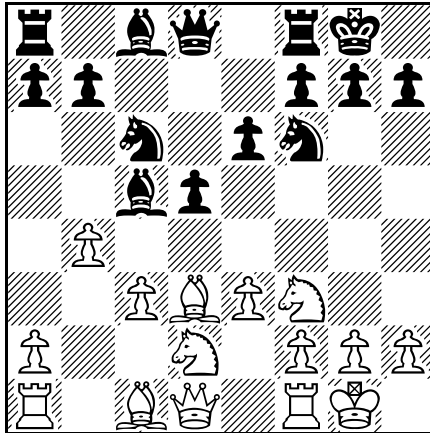
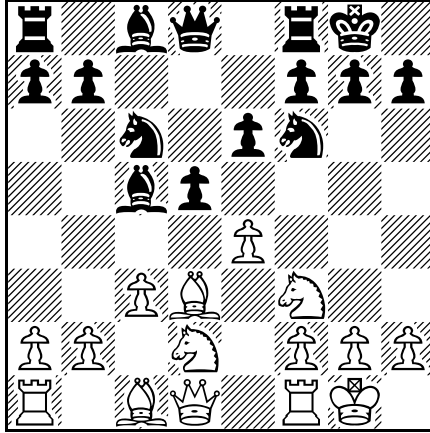
My old friend and student of Colle himself, the late IM George Koltanowski, faithfully kept his teacher's opening barely alive – on life support – realizing it needed a strong GM advocate to truly popularize the system. This is how our opening earned such low-brand recognition and why so many consider it no more than a by-product of chess history's rubbish bin. I wrote in *Kramnik: Move by Move*: “The Colle and its cousin, the London System, tend to be scapegoated as second rate, milquetoast openings, when in reality, they are not.” The Colle is anything but a spontaneous friend with an amusing personality. Instead, we meet a companion reliably straightforward, loyal and comfortably uniform in temperament, arriving at solid Semi-Slav positions a move up.

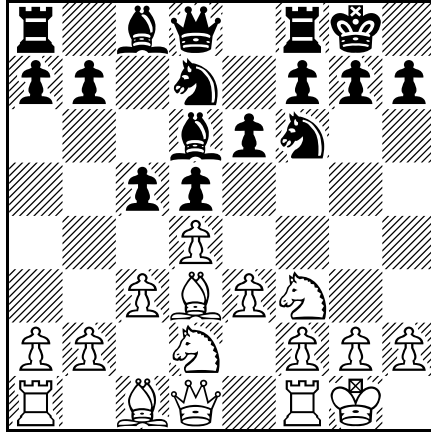
The secret to mastering the Colle is to learn to see the opening through alien eyes – namely, the vastly popular Semi-Slav triangle formation. How is it, I ask, (quite rationally!) that an opening a move down (the Semi-Slav) is well respected and popular, while the other, the same position a move up (our beloved Colle) is often the object of contempt? I hope to impart to you the hidden understanding that the Colle is actually a powerful opening weapon, which arguably should be on par with blue-blooded counterparts such as the Ruy Lopez and Slav. The tale of the three diagrams is tabiya positions from Chapters One and Two. In both we play White in what is normally a Black opening – the Semi-Slav – but up a full move. These are specialty positions, which may be honed even further by studying traditional Black Semi-Slav variations. So we may be tricking our opponent into a Semi-Slav (which he likely doesn't know or play with the black pieces) and get this position a full move up over normal, since we arrive here with White, not Black.

Now it may seem rather crazy that White *can* develop his dark-squared bishop, yet de-

*The Colle: Move by Move*

liberately spurns the opportunity and insists on burying it on c1 instead, a bit like a hungry person at a buffet, who only chooses raw carrots and celery rather than sample the eighteen-course fare laid out in front. If we exercise patience, the bishop always finds a way to poke his head out of the hole eventually.





## Unplug and De-theorize with the Colle

Perhaps you are like me and loathe our theoretical McWorld of fashionable, computer-generated, binary openings? Personally, I am sick and tired of force feeding raw data down the memory hole. The Colle is anything but a set of collective algorithms to be memorized and altered, only when Anand or Radjabov unearths a shocking theoretical novelty which radically alters the assessment. Instead, the Colle is an opening system to be understood and absorbed. For example, you buy a book which advocates the glories of some topical Najdorf, Dragon or King's Indian variation which ends in the stunningly atonal move 23...a5!!, but a week later it reads 23...a5?!, since some GM with a newer version of *Fritz* or *Houdini* unearths an improvement for the other side, promptly flipping a "-+" into a "+=".

In this book we enter the safe haven of the Colle, cushioned from the terrors of snot-nosed 10-year-old theoreticians who up-end you through parrot-like memorization, eradicating our advantage of years of experience. Our "V" (okay, maybe upside down "V"! ) formation on c3, d4 and e3 remains our celestial constellation guiding us, a set-up squarely antithetical to all which is "book".

When I want to play it safe with the white pieces, I turn to my old friend, the Colle, an opening often derisively touted as a system for beginners – training wheels if you will – to avoid getting slaughtered by stronger, more experienced club players – and in a sense this is absolutely true. But even an International Master can use it to avoid loss versus a fearsome Grandmaster opponent. I essayed the Colle eight times versus GMs (I wish now I had done it a lot more often!) with a score of two wins, a loss and five draws. So I accrued a plus score against eight superior players by leading them into my familiar realm, certainly not through superior talent or skill levels on my part. In my experience the *nature* of the positions you force matters almost as much – if not more – than the attainment of a theoretical edge. We thought-mapping chess-writers are compelled by some mysterious instinct to categorize, label, divide, parse and sub-divide every opening. In this book we try and avoid

the technical as much as possible. Instead, we view the Colle as a set of shuffled concepts to be understood – not a nest of variations to be memorized. Just play over the games of the book and you are ready to face your booked-up opponents, whose data-driven book knowledge wilts into an ineffective, obsolete weapon when they face our system.

*Game 1*  
**E.Colle-E.Grünfeld**  
Berlin 1926

Colle considered this game the finest of his life.

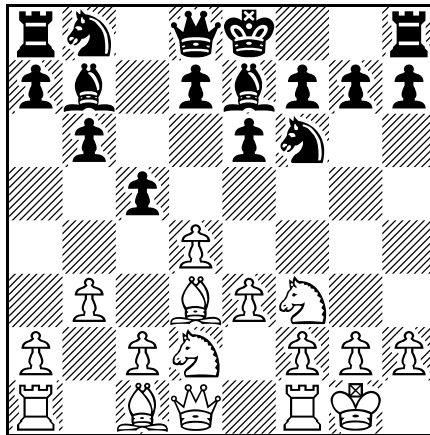
**1 d4** ♘f6 **2** ♗f3 e6

Grünfeld avoids his own defence.

**3 e3** b6

The Queen's Indian versus Colle, a line we cover in Chapter Three.

**4** ♕d3 ♕b7 **5** ♖bd2 c5 **6** 0-0 ♗e7 **7** b3



**Question:** I thought Colle was the c3/d4/e3 pawn triangle, correct?

**Answer:** Correct, that is the mainline Colle which we cover in the bulk of the book. White's last move converts the position into its more aggressive, mean-spirited cousin, the Zukertort Colle, which we cover in Chapter Four. 7 c3 is the Queen's Indian versus Colle, covered in Chapter Three.

**7...cxd4 8 exd4 d6**

**Question:** What is the point of holding the d-pawn back?



**Answer:** By playing the pawn to d6, Black restrains White's pieces from occupation of e5. On the downside, it doesn't challenge the centre, which allows White to seize space.

9 ♖b2 ♞bd7 10 c4

Why not? White grabs space since Black allows it.

10...0-0 11 ♜c1 ♝e8 12 ♞e1 ♚c7

This move is actually inaccurate if Black is to follow the plan he did.

**Question:** How so?

**Answer:** If Black plays the manoeuvre ...♜c8, ...♜c7! and ...♚a8, he saves at least one tempo over the game. For example: 12...♜c8 13 b4! (White doesn't always play for a kingside attack in the Colle; sometimes he may just try and accumulate space in centre and queen-side) 13...♙f8 14 ♚b3 ♜c7 15 a3 ♚a8, C.Lakdawala-D.Aldama, San Diego (rapid) 2012.

13 ♚e2 ♜ac8 14 ♞f1

**Question:** Why the knight retreat?

**Answer:** He redeploys the knight to g3, massing for a future kingside assault.

14...♚b8 15 ♞g3 ♚a8

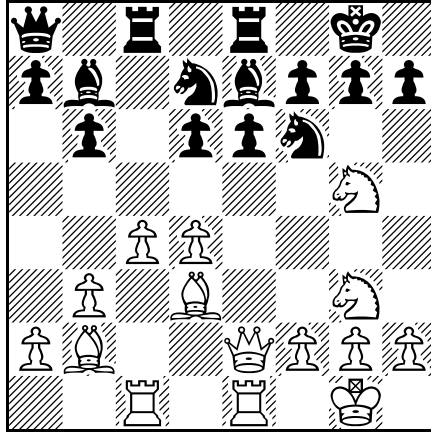
"Mirror, mirror on the wall..." Black's powerful queen gazes lovingly into the mirror to satiate her growing vanity. Soon we discover there are many others in the kingdom more powerful than her. Black follows with the hypermodern Réti scheme of pressure down the h1-a8 diagonal. He also threatens to damage White's structure by capturing on f3.

**Question:** Is ...♙xf3 an actual "threat"? It also hands White the bishop pair and an open g-file for his rooks to launch an attack.

**Answer:** Good point. In fact, you may want to skip forward to Chapter Three and take a look at Hoi-Gulko (Game 28), where White did just that and went on to win brilliantly, but in that case, the weakening ...g7-g5 was first provoked. I suppose optically at least it is a threat, but in reality ...♙xf3 may actually benefit White.

16 ♞g5!

The devil doesn't only tempt with apples. Suddenly, Black's king feels the presence of hidden, watching eyes upon him. Colle embarks on a fanciful – one could say Aladdinish – plan, plunging into dark, swirling waters without fear of consequence, yet somehow through access to ancient, arcane magic, manages to pull it off. The knight eyes sac targets on e6 and f7. White's roving knight, having spent an uneventful childhood in greys, blacks and whites, now itches for the flash of colour, adventure and the pleasures of the world.

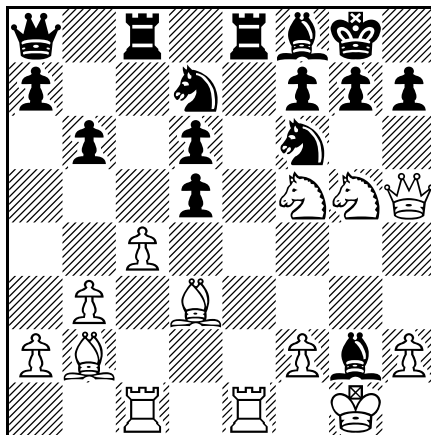


**16...g6?**

Black fails to conduct himself in consonance with the sinuous flow of events.

**Question:** But doesn't g2 hang?

**Answer:** Here is Colle's analysis on your line: 16...♙xg2 17 d5! (much stronger than 17 f3 – Black's bishop is trapped, so this in turn forces Black's next move – 17...h6 18 ♘5e4 ♙h3 19 ♘f2! ♙f5 20 ♘xf5 exf5 21 ♙xf5 d5 22 ♚d3 where White's bishop pair compensates for his inferior structure) 17...exd5 18 ♘f5 (the move Colle had planned; *Houdini* improves with 18 ♙xf6! ♘xf6 19 ♙f5 ♚c7 20 ♙xg2 and a clear advantage for White) 18...♙f8? (this follows Colle's analysis; but *Houdini* gives 18...♙e4! and claims equality for Black) 19 ♚h5!! (a mind-bending shot)



19...g6 (19...♘xh5?? 20 ♘h6+! gxh6 21 ♙xh7 or 20...♙h8 21 ♘gxh7 is mate) 20 ♘h6+

♙xh6 21 ♖xh6 with a nightmarish attack along the dark squares.

Defensive technique has come a long way since this game was played. Undoubtedly, today's grandmaster (or even club player) would play the simple and cold-blooded 16...♙f8!, eliminating White's sacs and ruining his fun as well. Then 17 f3 looks like approximate equality.

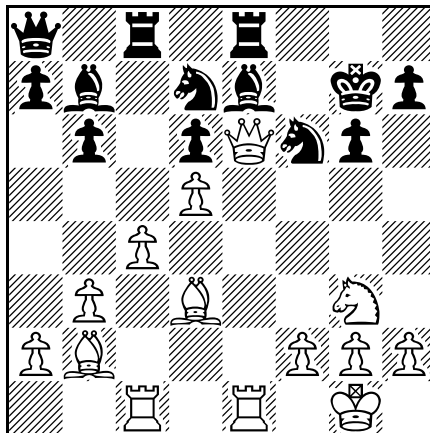
17 ♖xf7!

Devo would agree: "Whip it good." Colle wasn't the kind of person who believed only in what he saw or touched. He speculated, placing trust in intuition, with a promise of glory as the only immediate return on his investment. There is in a sense a charming predictability to Colle's unpredictability.

**Question:** Is the sac 100% sound?

**Answer:** Most likely it is. One doesn't necessarily require full empirical evidence as back up for the go-ahead in such sacs. For most experienced players, the "gut feeling" is good enough. Perhaps unpredictability is the opiate to which we are drawn. Moral: Relativism exists in chess. There are few absolutes, unless you are a comp.

17...♙xf7 18 ♖xe6+ ♙g7 19 d5!



**Question:** Did White get enough compensation for the piece?

**Answer:** More than enough. Multiple factors, when clumped together, bode well for White:

1. Two pawns.
2. An enduring attack.
3. He shuts down Black's queen/bishop duo and places them badly out of play for now.

In fact, Black's somewhat homely queen, quite self-conscious of her looks, insists on dim lighting in the palace. Her slightly nasally admonition betrays her annoyance at the unto-

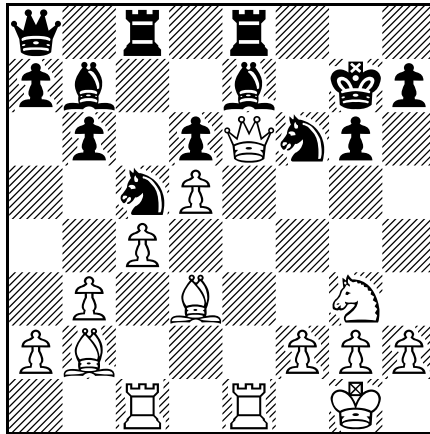
ward intrusion created by White's last move.

4. The b2-bishop eyes Black's nervous king on g7.

5. In general, White's forces expand while Black's shrivel in contracted deprivation.

19...♘c5?

Black's woes, far from dissipating, get caught in a trap of self-perpetuation and soon we glimpse the true magnitude of the catastrophe.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black's last move removed a key defender, which allowed a thunderous shot. Let's see if you can duplicate Colle's greatest attacking combination.

**Answer:** Lightning spatters across and illuminates a once dark horizon.

20 ♘f5+!! ♕f8

Black's forces evacuate in a half-bent run, like routed soldiers retreating from a losing battle. The erratic flailings of Black's king at least have the single benefit of presenting a constantly shifting target. 20...gxf5?? 21 ♕xf5, threatening h7 as well as ♖xe7+, leaves Black shy of a reasonable defence.

21 ♕e3!

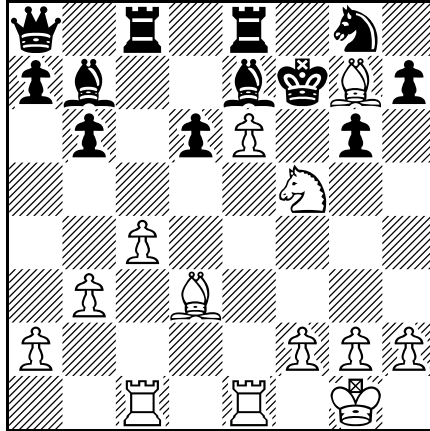
Target: h6. Colle's queen ascends and descends with predatory grace.

21...gxf5

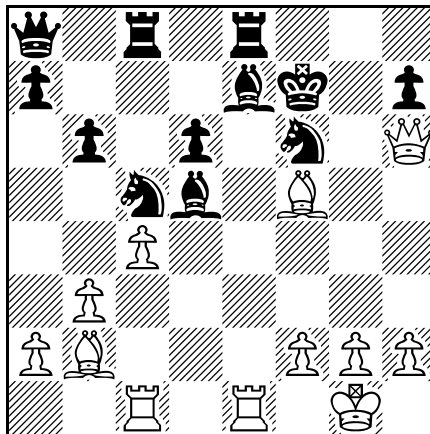
Black's dismal non-choices:

a) 21...♘g4 22 ♕f3 is crushing.

b) 21...♘g8 22 ♕g7+ ♖f7 23 ♕e6+! ♘xe6 24 dxe6 mate.



Behold, the unimaginable bliss of delivering checkmate with a pawn!  
 22 ♖h6+ ♔f7 23 ♙xf5 ♗xd5



**Exercise (combination alert):** Corrosion and the passage of time render Black's defenders worthless tools, unfit for the given task. Do you see White's shot?

**Answer: 24 ♜xe7+!**

The eternal sentinel on e7, like patience itself, now evaporates. The easy camaraderie which previously existed between Black's knight and bishop now lies in shards on the ground. Black's position transforms into a triage unit, with patients sorted by degrees of urgency to their given wounds. The first name on the list: his grievously wounded king!

24...♜xe7 25 ♜xf6+ ♔e8 26 ♜h8+ ♔f7

The king hopes to dismiss his previous questionable decisions as a prelude to his present crisis, but it isn't easy to outrun your past – it has a way of catching up at the most inopportune moments.

**27 ♖xc8 1-0**

**Summary:** The Colle isn't as stodgy an opening as many believe. We often generate deadly attacks which tend to arise magically from the depths of initial tranquility.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks as always to my editor, GM John Emms, for his help and guidance throughout the book, and also to Jonathan Tait for the final edit. Thanks to Grammar Czar Nancy for proof-reading and Tim for his computer vigilance. May your opponents sigh in frustration upon seeing you play the Colle System.

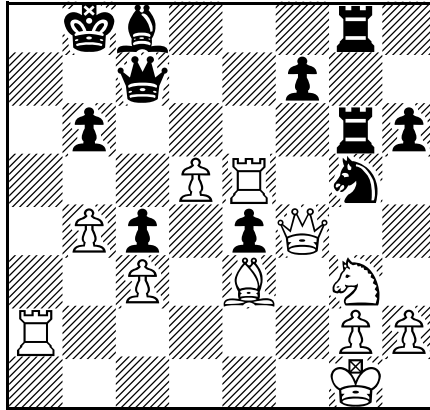
Cyrus Lakdawala,  
San Diego,  
January 2012

32 ♖a2+ ♕b8 33 ♘g3

The fundamentally inept burglar's expectancy of a clean escape is dashed when he trips and sprains his ankle by hooking his foot in a croquet wicket. In time trouble, I miss the sparkling shot 33 ♖e7!!.

33...♗c8 34 ♖f4! ♖g6?

The Roman emperor on b8 misjudges the danger of the conspiratorial plebeians who casually circle his royal litter.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Find one strong move and you force Black's resignation.

The bride on f4 appears radiant, while the ill-fitted groom on b8 frowns and bites his lip. As the now clichéd Zen koan about “the sound of one hand clapping” so mysteriously tries to elucidate: an absence of a thing exudes its own particular beauty. In this case Black's missing dark square defenders become a non-object of beauty for White.

**Answer:** 35 ♖e7! 1-0

35 ♖xg5 ♖xg5 36 ♖a8+! also works.

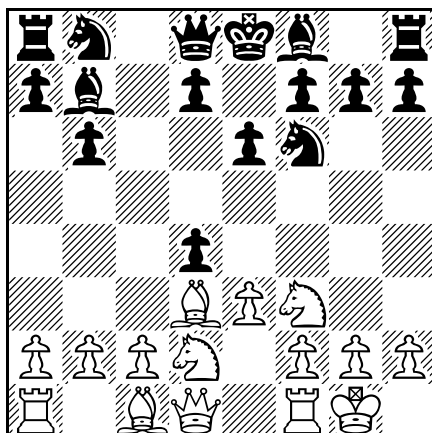
**Summary:** The reversed Stonewall Dutch formation can arise from the early ...d7-d5 move orders from Chapters One and Two, or from the Queen's Indian variation, as in this case.

Game 28

C.Hoi-B.Gulko

Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988

1 d4 e6 2 ♘f3 c5 3 e3 ♗f6 4 ♗d3 b6 5 0-0 ♗b7 6 ♘bd2 cxd4



A no-nonsense approach. Black immediately breaks the central tension and alters the pawn structure.

**Question:** In whose favour?

**Answer:** Nobody's so far. White benefits from the opening of the e-file, while Black gets long-term benefits with the potential for a queenside minority attack – a fair negotiation.

**7 exd4 8 e7 8 e1**

White can also play without this move. For example: 8 c3 0-0 9 ♕e2 d6 10 ♖c4 ♗bd7 11 ♙f4 ♜c7 12 h3 ♜fe8 13 ♙h2 ♗f8 14 ♖fd2 (instructive; White prepares f2-f4) 14...♗g6 15 f4! ♙f8 16 ♜f2 ♗e7 17 ♜ae1 ♜ad8 18 g4! (only a very strong, confident player or a very weak one would make such a move!) 18...♜c6 19 ♗f3 g6 20 ♙g3 h5 21 ♗e3 hxg4 22 hxg4 ♗ed5 23 ♖xd5 ♜xd5 24 ♙h4 ♜xf3?! (24...♗xg4 25 ♜g3 ♜h5 26 ♙xd8 ♜xd8 was a superior method of sac'ing the exchange) 25 ♜xf3 ♙xf3 26 ♙xf6 ♙xg4 27 ♙xd8 ♜xd8 and Black fell short on full compensation, M.Krasenkow-B.Macieja, Polish Championship, Warsaw 2001.

**8...0-0 9 c3**

**Question:** Can White opt for a more traditional queen's pawn opening with 9 c4 - ?

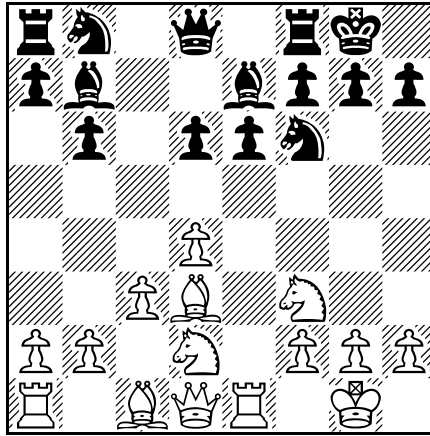
**Answer:** You can; and you may end up in a hanging pawns situation after 9...d5 10 b3, similar to those we look at in the next chapter on Zukertort lines.

**Question:** Can White just transpose to a Zukertort Colle with 9 b3 - ?

**Answer:** Yes again; there is no problem veering away into the Zuke. For example: 9...♗c6 10 a3 (halting ...♗b4 ideas) 10...♜c8 11 ♙b2 ♜e8 12 ♜c1 d5 13 ♜e2 with a normal Zukertort position, A.Yusupov-L.Polugaevsky, USSR Championship, Moscow 1983.



9...d6



**Question:** Why not go all the way to d5 with the pawn?

**Answer:** Playing to d6 is perhaps more accurate, since it denies White use of the e5-square and also keeps Black's pawn formation flexible. For example, White must remain vigilant about ...e6-e5 breaks.

10 ♖e2 ♜e8 11 ♘f1

The normal plan. White builds up his forces on the kingside, similar to the way he plays in reversed Queen's Gambit Declined Exchange lines.

11...♞bd7 12 ♞g3 ♙f8 13 ♙g5 h6 14 ♙d2

Having induced a target on h6.

14...♞c7

Gulko is content with the status quo. 14...e5!? 15 dxe5 dxe5 16 ♙c4 sharpens the position.

15 ♙c2

Keeping ♞d3 options open.

15...♙d5

Once again Gulko holds back on his break with 15...e5 16 dxe5 dxe5 17 ♜ad1.

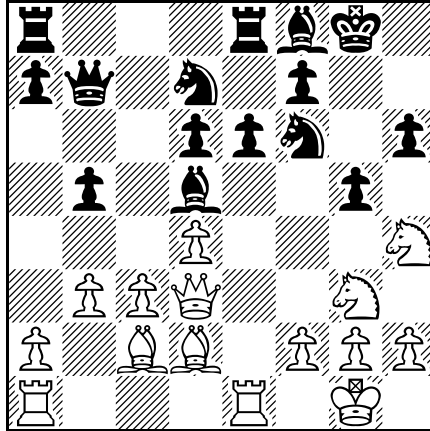
16 b3 ♞b7

Loading up on f3.

17 ♞h4!?

So the question for Black is: ...g7-g5 or not? White tempts his opponent with luxuries beyond imagination, while secretly planning to deliver on the promise with holographic simulacra, the chess version of worthless monopoly money. He is willing to allow ...♙xf3, only as long as Black is willing to weaken his king with ...g7-g5 first.

17...b5 18 ♞d3 g5!?



Gulko, who feels constrained by rules and regulations, decides to chuck them away on a whim and weaken his king's guard, to do the same to his opponent. Yet he may be underestimating the force of White's attack, while overestimating the strength of his own. Clearly, eventful times lie ahead for both sides, neither of whom hold back on their zealotry.

**19** ♘f3 ♙xf3!?

Consistent and possibly dubious. It isn't too late for something like 19...e5! 20 ♚f5 ♙e6 (20...e4?! 21 ♘xg5! gives White a powerful attack for only a small initial investment) 21 ♚d3 ♙d5 may lead to a draw by repetition.

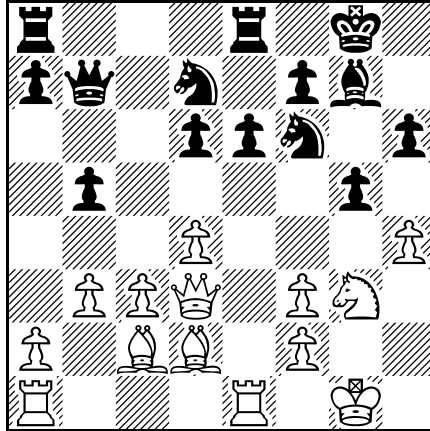
**20** gxf3

**Question:** Didn't Black get the better of the deal? Just look at White's pawn structure.

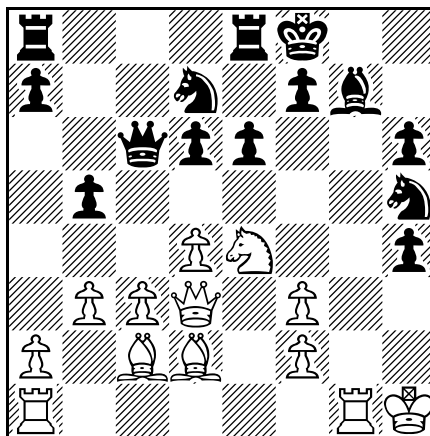
**Answer:** I admit White's structure looks awkward, like a man who inadvertently and loudly passes gas while on a first date with the woman of his dreams. But the attacking chances White receives down the open g-file more than compensate.

**20...♙g7 21 h4!**

The black king's self-contented smile crumples abruptly, as he comes to grips with the fact that all is not well in his kingdom. Now White manages to pry open the g-file.



21...gxh4 22 ♖e4 ♜c6 23 ♔h1 ♗h5 24 ♖g1 ♚f8?!



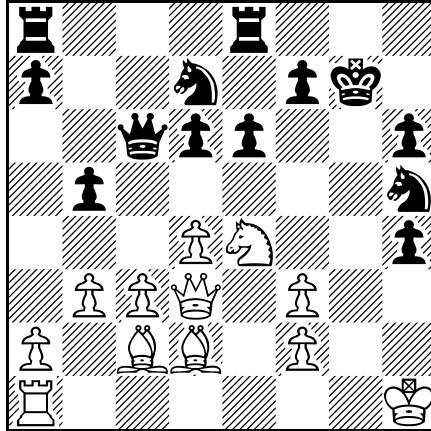
**Question:** Doesn't 24...f5? trap White's knight?

**Answer:** It does, but once again he gets a ferocious attack for it after 25 ♗xh6 fxh4 26 ♜e3! ♜e7 27 ♗xe4 d5 28 ♗g6, when Black will have a tough time surviving the coming assault. All the same, your suggestion may be Black's best, since what he got in the game looks even worse.

25 ♖xg7!

Powerful play, waving aside Black's best defender. The g7-bishop guarded his doomed king the way a nesting mother bird continues to protect eggs which will never hatch.

25...♚xg7



**Exercise (combination alert):** White has more than one powerful continuation which blows Black away. Can you find them?

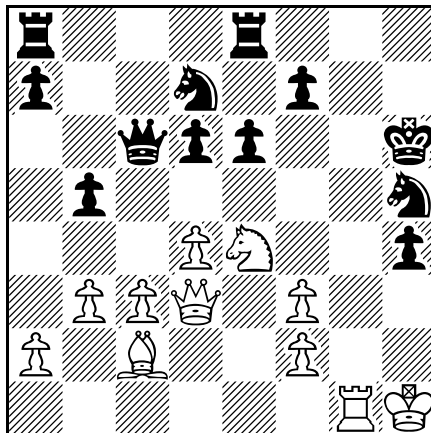
**Answer: 26 ♖xh6+!!**

26 ♖g1+ ♔f8 27 ♜e3 ♚e7 28 ♜xh6 ♜h8 29 ♙g5+ f6 30 ♙xf6+! ♞dx6 31 ♖g7+! was also winning.

**26...♙xh6**

The king continues to run and dodge, as a spray of bullets sink into the ground all around him. 26...♙h8 27 ♞xd6! is no help to Black.

**27 ♖g1!**



A quiet move after the initial deadly one. White's rook reaches its primary goal without

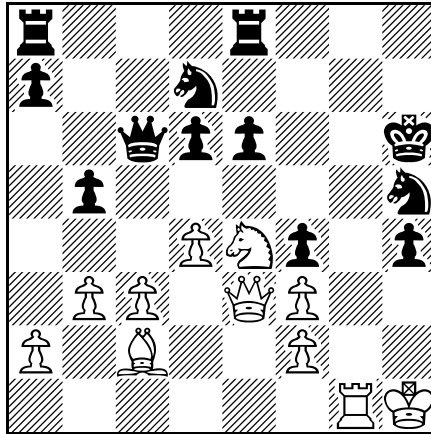
challenge: to cage Black's king.

27...f5

27...♖g8 28 ♖e3+ ♔h7 29 ♗f6+ ♔h8 30 ♖h6 is mate.

28 ♖e3+ f4

Defeated rulers suffer haunted dreams of ancient glories and victories, which torment them when they awaken and come to the shuddering realization of their newly found powerlessness. The contrast between the two armies is the evolvement differential between an adult sabre-toothed tiger and a domesticated kitten.



**Exercise (combination alert):** White has access to a beautiful finish. Do you see it?

**Answer:** The ordered mind of a military leader loathes disarray in his own camp, while fostering it in the enemy's.

29 ♗xd6!

Visually stunning. The threat is mate on the move.

29...♖xd6

When diagnosed as terminal, the patient lives on infinitely precious, borrowed time.

The dismal alternatives:

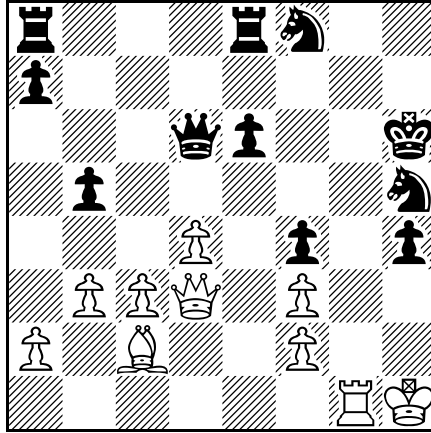
a) 29...fxe3 30 ♗f7 mate.

b) 29...♗g3+ 30 ♖xg3! and nothing is altered in the least.

30 ♖d3

The creature, once en prise on e3, thought to be a shattered bloodied thing destroyed into a thousand pieces, suddenly reorganizes, re-forms and reanimates to its original terrifying form. It isn't often that a 2390 player gets the opportunity to offer not one, but two queen sacs versus a strong GM. Distressingly, we reach a heightened state of anguish where the attack feels simultaneously close by and far away. In a sense it is just that.

30...♗f8



**Exercise (combination alert):** Find the correct move and glory is yours; miss it and you blow an opportunity the way disembodied cigarette smoke curls up to the ceiling. Do you see the finish?

**Answer:** Even a plain Jane can be blandly pretty. She knocks on the door of apartment h7, but there is no answer.

**31 ♚h7+! 1-0**

Black's king, helplessly in love, proposes to White's queen, who believes she is merely involved in a one-night stand. 31...♘xh7 32 ♖g6 is a very unusual double-knight epaulette mate.

**Summary:** When Black tosses in an early ...c5xd4, White can go for a normal c2-c3 Colle set-up, or even switch to the Zukertort Colle.

Game 29

**A.Yusupov-E.Rozentalis**

Elista Olympiad 1998

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 e6 3 e3 b6 4 ♙d3 ♙b7 5 0-0 c5 6 c4