

# Cyrus Lakdawala

**1...b6**

**move by move**

**EVERYMAN CHESS**

[www.everymanchess.com](http://www.everymanchess.com)

# 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 U.S.

## **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*

*The Colle: Move by Move*

*The Scandinavian: Move by Move*

*Botvinnik: Move by Move*

*The Nimzo-Larsen Attack: Move by Move*

*Korchnoi: Move by Move*

*The Alekhine Defence: Move by Move*

*The Trompowsky Attack: Move by Move*

*Carlsen: Move by Move*

*The Classical French: Move by Move*

# Contents

About the author	3
Series Foreword	5
Bibliography	6
Introduction	7
1 Owen's Defence: Lines involving ♖c3	25
2 Owen's Defence: ♖d2 Lines	100
3 Blatny's 'Ruy Lopez'	188
4 Hippopotamus Lines	210
5 The English Defence	232
6 English Defence: Non-Critical Lines	313
7 Odds and Ends	373
Index of Variations	412
Index of Complete Games	415

# 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 and to complete exercises, 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

*“You never understood that it ain’t no good, you shouldn’t let other people get your kicks for you.”* – Bob Dylan

Was Bob Dylan talking about chess players in the lyrics to *Like a Rolling Stone*? I gape in disbelief when I see non-professional level players online vehemently arguing some ultra-fine point of some sub, sub-variation of a line which is truly understood by about a dozen or so people in the world, and which in all likelihood, they may get once over the board in an entire lifetime – if they are lucky.

What most theory-obsessed players fail to understand is that problem solving and planning ability are infinitely more valuable than knowledge of some novelty on the 17th move of a topical line. Yet, I would say most of my students spend 90% of their study time in the openings alone, when they could get so much more from the study of Capablanca’s or Lasker’s (or any great player) games.

Sometimes when we learn a new opening, we harbour the false belief that we understand the line, simply because we memorized key variations of it. Without true understanding, our grasp remains merely intellectual and therefore superficial. The proof: we reach the end of our analysis and soon after, our position degrades from equal to busted in the space of a dozen moves.

The study of complex lines in some opening books makes preparation for the college SAT exams look like pre-school. As children, we played the opening phase with fresh eyes, as if for the first time. Later, as adults, we bang out our first 20 moves in under a minute in some fashionable line of the Ruy Lopez, Najdorf or King’s Indian. When we open with 1...b6, we seek a return to those childhood eyes of wonder. Some openings have been rendered so homogenous and faceless through overuse, that we tend to see right through them, shutting off our mind until move 21 or later. Habit takes the place of thinking. It kind of reminds us of the robotic letters we wrote when we were seven years old (those dreaded Ernest Hemingway-like ‘thank you’ notes our mothers forced us to write):

“Dear Grandma,

Thanks for the baseball glove for my birthday. I hope you are well. Mom is well. Dad is well. I am well, as well.

Love, Cy”

But don't for a moment believe that 1...b6 is a study-free zone. Many who take up our opening equate 1...b6 with a concert pianist giving up the piano and taking up the banjo. We chess players study the past as intensely and as obsessively as historians, since theory, like history, and the law, is based upon precedent. When we take up 1...b6, we partially avoid precedent since the opening's unpopularity virtually negates the theoretical past – virtually, but not completely. It's easy to incorrectly assume that an opening as flexible as 1...b6, which creates an idiosyncratic tear in theory's veil, is less an opening and more simply a platform for undomesticated creativity and self-expression.

The Owen's and its queen's pawn counterpart, the English Defence, may be a realm of imagination more than mathematical precision, yet there are still many cut-throat lines which we must play with great exactitude, or we risk the humiliation of a quick and memorable loss. Our brains (well, at least mine) have limited abilities to absorb the scale and scope of the positions which arise after 1...b6. Still, we must know and understand the critical lines as best we can.

Scholarship means different things at different times. The Roman physician and scholar, Serenus Sammonicus, was reputed to recite the magical incantation "Abracadabra!" to ward off sickness and evil spirits. Strangely enough, in the modern era, my doctors tend to discard spells and rely entirely on pharmaceuticals, surgery and lengthy admonitions.

1...b6, from the very first move, seeks to distort by disobeying classical boundaries, making no attempt to occupy the centre with pawns. 1...b6 isn't merely opening fast food, consumed for convenience, rather than long-term health benefits. You will discover that play in some of the lines feels like we are love-struck garden snakes attempting to kiss a Cobra. I don't expect this book to gain a mass following (in all probability I will likely drop dead of a massive heart attack brought on by sudden shock if the mailman brings to my door a royalty check from a 1...b6 book), since we who play it are misfits in the theoretical world, and our quirky opening will likely never be granted entry into the much desired 'acceptable' theoretical opening canon. In choosing our opening, we embrace the normality of that which is in essence aberrant.

### **1...b6, the 'Joke' Opening?**

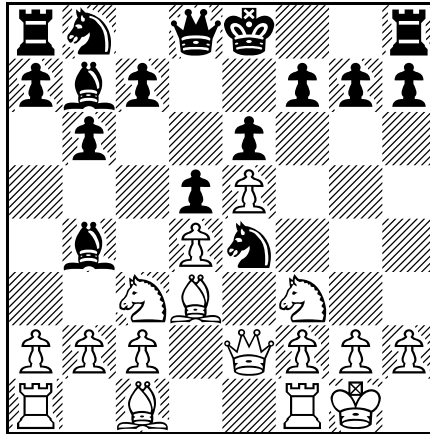
In a recent analysis session at my house with IMs John Watson and Keaton Kiewra, John declared: "Keaton, Cyrus uses a lot of humour in his books, and the funniest joke in this one is 1...b6!". And then he proceeded to rudely laugh, at your humble writer's expense. John was joking, having completed several 1...b6 videos for the Internet Chess Club. Most chess players, however, don't consider John's declaration a joke and believe 1...b6 to be a second rate, or outright unsound opening. We can use this false assumption to our benefit and weaponize it against our amused, overconfident opponents.

All writers, like songbirds, love to sing, but even more importantly be heard by an appreciative audience. As I mentioned, I don't expect this book to be a big seller, since many chess players assume that the Owen's is unsound. In fact, I know of at least one unin-

formed and tragically misguided chess writer who bashed the Owen's. Wait. I formally retract my statement about the writer being "uninformed and tragically misguided", since I just realized that it was me who was the 1...b6-bashing culprit in *A Ferocious Opening Repertoire*. So now you see why 1...b6 has such a bad reputation? Even people who write books on the opening (i.e. your now deeply repentant writer) still trash it.

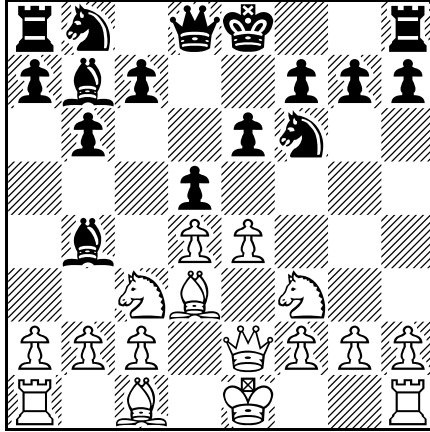
Here are some of our battle grounds reached from 1...b6:

### c3 Lines



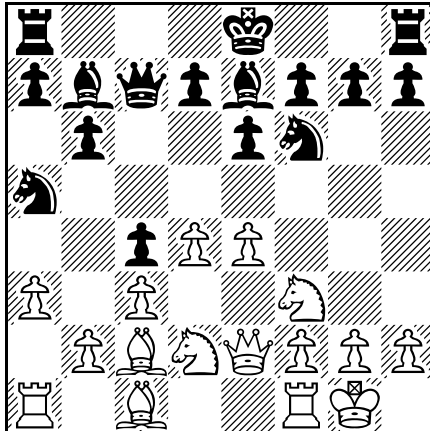
As all attacking addicts understand, an opening gambit is nothing more than a gateway drug to future sacrifices (our version of heroin). This position arose in Pavlovic-Minasian, Moscow 2008. White just ignored Black's 'threat' to win a pawn on c3 and simply castled. In the chapter, I attempt to show you how to grab the pawn and survive the coming ordeal. In this position we require Petrosian's or Carlsen's leech-like ability to hang on, where others would collapse under the defensive strain. I assure you that our position is sound. We can place faith on the fact that such tempting environments tend to overstimulate a natural attacker's imagination.

1...b6: Move by Move



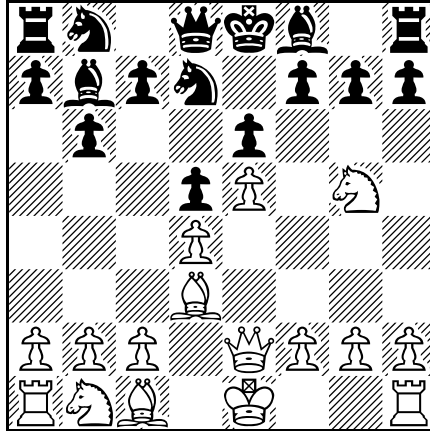
This is our key position from the first chapter. I believe Black gets dynamic equality, no matter how White plays it.

The next two diagrams are from Chapter Two, where White develops his knight to d2 to back up the pawn centre with c3.



This is Tony Miles' treatment. Analysis of the position has convinced me that Black's resources are fully adequate.





Our second position is a cause for concern for our side, and may be our single greatest threat in the entire Owen's. White threatens  $\text{♞xe6}$ , followed by  $\text{♜h5+}$ . We can respond in three ways:

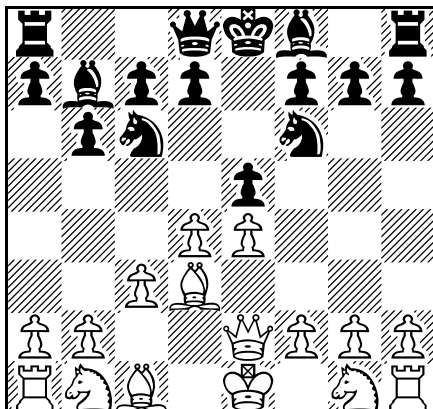
- a)  $7...g6$ ;
- b)  $7...♙e7$ ;
- c) IM Filipovic's pawn sacrifice  $7...♜e7$ .

We must be prepared, having studied and comp'ed the diagrammed position, or else we may be going home early that evening!

### Blatny's 'Ruy Lopez'

*"Hybridization, of course, represents a deliberate violation of the isolation of the gene pools on a virtual island."* – Richard Dawkins

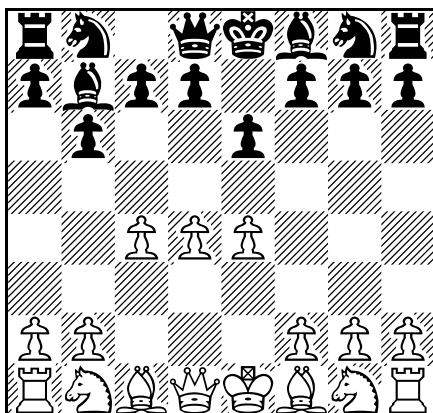
$1...b6$  is subject to a vast degree of stylistic interpretation, and that which was once an Owen's Defence may quickly morph into some indefinable genetic mutation. When our opponents are led into an unfamiliar opening set-up, it's as if we force them to visit another planet, with its inexplicable laws and customs. The following position is Blatny's (my friend GM Pavel Blatny is a creature of unorthodox habits, who is occasionally impelled to excess by the force of his imagination) seminal insight: he shifts the position to something resembling a Ruy Lopez. The meme replicates into a strange new pattern.



This is an example of humanity meddling with the forces of nature. Everyone is familiar with the warning themes of *Frankenstein* and *Jurassic Park*. We may have tricked White into a strange, hybrid Ruy Lopez.

### The English Defence

If natural selection kills off the weaker genes of the species, then how on earth did Chihuahuas emerge from their ancestor, the wolf? The answer, of course, is that it wasn't natural selection. Human meddling was the selective agent. In the diagrammed position we get yet another example of 1...b6 hypermodern meddling. In the latter queen's pawn section of the book, this may be our critical position:



We allow our opponents to blatantly express territorial greed, rather than just allow them to skirt metaphorical corners with merely hints of it. Study of the line once again has convinced me that Black has excellent chances of breaking up White's imposing centre, or overextending it.

## The Glorious Saga of Venkat

Advertising is “the science of persuading people to buy what they do not want,” wrote Upton Sinclair, in *The Jungle*. Here is this book’s advertisement for 1...b6: I began coaching Venkat three years ago, when he was 14 years old, and rated around 1850. In the course of a single year, he rocketed to 2150. Then, inexplicably, he froze in stasis for a full two years, his rating unable to budge even a millimetre from the mid to high Expert level. At the time, he played fashionable theoretical opening lines. Soon, the San Diego Masters adjusted and caught on to Venkat’s weakness, either outfoxing him in the opening, or forcing him into dull positions (poison to Venkat), where Venkat’s strength dropped to the approximate level of a kindergartener who isn’t sure how the pieces move.

In desperation, mingled with a fit of pique, I had him trash all his white openings and open with 1 b3 (I was writing my Nimzo-Larsen book at the time and was therefore guaranteed the sale of at least one book). The miracle occurred. Venkat almost immediately began beating masters and his rating rocketed past 2200. Then we began work on 1...b6 and his rating continued to sail. At this writing, it stands a shade below the 2300 mark. I actually proposed to Everyman that I write this book, mainly because I studied 1...b6 with Venkat. In an unsolicited testimonial, Venkat describes 1...b6 (and also 1 b3) as “magic.” If you are like Venkat, who revels in murky, non-theoretical tactical positions, then 1...b6 is right for you.

## Our Founding Father

According to the Chessmetrics rankings, the Reverend John Owen, the founding father of our opening, was ranked fifth in the world in 1862. Here we see him give the number one ranked player, the great Paul Morphy, a painful lesson on overextension:

### *Game 1*

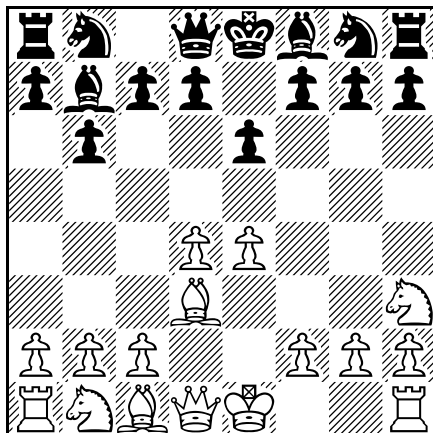
**P.Morphy-J.Owen**

2nd matchgame, London 1858

### **1 e4 b6**

Hypermodern players at their core are nature’s outcasts. As we note, our opening has been played for a long time. John Owen along with Louis Paulsen and Howard Staunton were the first great hypermoderns, whose play may have inspired Nimzowitsch and Réti to create the hypermodern school in the early decades of the 20th century.

**2 d4 ♗b7 3 ♗d3 e6 4 ♘h3!?**



**Question:** It feels to me like Morphy isn't exactly according his opponent and the Owen's Defence due respect. What is his idea?

**Answer:** Believe it or not, Morphy's last move was theory at the time the game was played. I agree with you though, Morphy – no hypermodern – probably considered the Owen's Defence a heretical affront, since it failed to stake out a pawn centre for Black. Morphy undoubtedly played his last move to allow for a future 0-0, f4 and possibly ♖g5 attacking plan.

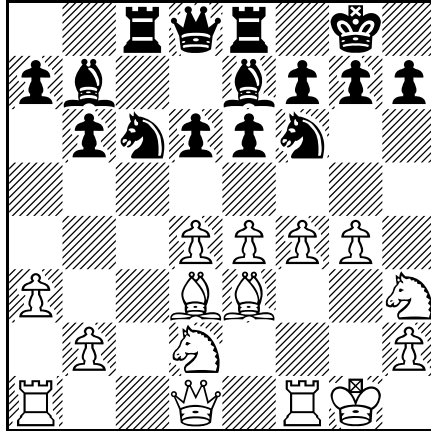
**4...c5**

Similar play occurs after 4...♖f6 5 f3 c5 6 c3 ♖c6 7 ♗e3 and then:

a) 7...cxd4 8 cxd4 was J.Zukertort-H.Bird, Paris 1878. Here Black can consider 8...e5!? 9 d5 ♖d4 when he is ensured of strong dark-square play if White takes the knight with his dark-squared bishop.

b) 7...d5 8 e5 ♖d7 9 0-0 ♗e7 10 ♖d2 cxd4 11 cxd4 ♖b4 12 ♗e2 ♜c8 13 ♗f2 was L.Paulsen-G.Neumann, Berlin 1864. Play enters French-like channels after 13...a6 14 a3 ♖c6 and now if 15 b4 b5 intending ...♖b6, ...♖c4 and ...a5, with queenside counterplay to offset White's kingside build-up.

c) 7...♗e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 a3 ♜c8 10 ♖d2 cxd4 11 cxd4 d6 12 f4!? ♜e8 13 g4!?



**Question:** Hmm. Do you sense that White may be another Owen's disrespecter?

**Answer:** The thought did cross my mind. After 13...g6 14 g5 ♖h5 15 f5 (logical, in an illogical way; White is intent to either force mate or overextend in horrible fashion) 15...exf5 16 exf5 ♙f8 17 fxg6 hxg6 18 ♜f3 ♜d7 19 ♘e4 ♙g7 (according to *Houdini*, White is horribly overextended here and losing, no matter how he continues) 20 ♙b5? ♜xe4! 21 ♜xe4 ♜xh3 White's position crumbled, H.Suradiradja-M.Chandler, Wellington 1978.

**5 c3**

Morphy backs up his holy pawn centre with pawns.

**5...cxd4!**

This looks premature, since it allows White a future ♘c3. But if we play it out a couple of moves further, we see Black's intent. He picks up White's valuable light-squared bishop for this knight.

**6 cxd4 ♘c6!**

So Owen plays the very first Alekhine's Defence, except on the other side of the board.

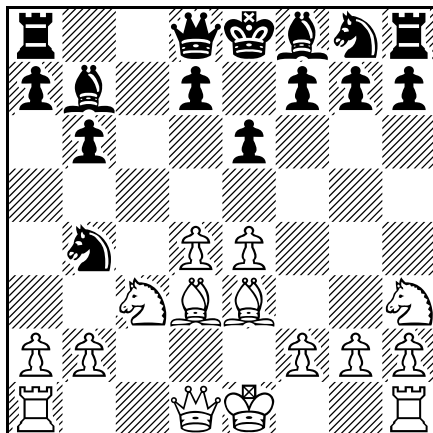
**7 ♙e3**

7 d5 ♘e5 merely loses time for White.

**7...♗b4!**

This clever idea is seen in Chapter 5 on the English Defence. Black attacks White's light-squared bishop, who must remain where it stands to secure e4. Owen's move is much stronger than 7...♙b4+?! 8 ♘c3 ♗f6 9 0-0 ♙xc3 10 bxc3 ♘a5?! 11 e5 ♘d5 12 ♜g4. White enjoys multiple strategic trumps, like the bishop-pair, dark-square control, extra space and kingside attacking chances, G.Mackenzie-H.Bird, Paris 1878.

**8 ♘c3**



8...♖xd3+

Now Black rules the light squares for the remainder of the game.

**Question:** Are you saying that Black's bishop-pair and light-square control outweigh White's strong pawn centre and development lead?

**Answer:** Maybe it's stylistic, but it feels that way to me. I would take Black since I don't see an obvious way for White to immediately open the game to exploit his development lead.

9 ♖xd3 ♗b4

Black can play for pure light-square strategy with 9...f5!? 10 f3 (10 exf5 ♗xg2 11 ♗g5 ♗e7 12 ♖g1 ♗xh3 13 ♖xh3 ♗xg5 14 ♖h5+ ♗f8 15 ♖xg5 g6 16 fxg6 hxg6 17 ♖xg6 ♖f6 18 0-0-0 ♖xg6 19 ♖xg6 ♖xh2 looks okay for Black) 10...fxe4 11 fxe4 ♖h4+ 12 ♗f2 ♗f6 13 0-0 ♗b4 14 e5 ♗g4 15 ♗xg4 ♖xg4 (threatening mate on g2) 16 ♖f2 ♗xc3 17 bxc3 ♖e4! 18 ♖d2 ♗a6! with dynamic equality at a minimum, since Black's domination of the light squares looks more potent than White's control of dark. Of course your annotator had the knowledge advantage over Owen by having studied Nimzowitsch's theories when I was a kid.

10 0-0 ♗xc3!?

Introducing a new factor: opposite-coloured bishops.

11 bxc3 ♗f6 12 e5

Forward. Morphy's honour demanded it. But seizing space isn't for free, since it enhances Black's power on the light squares, a theme we see recurring over and over throughout the book. Of course nobody in 1858 would play the more circumspect 12 f3 which is the move your cautious writer would play.

12...♗d5 13 c4

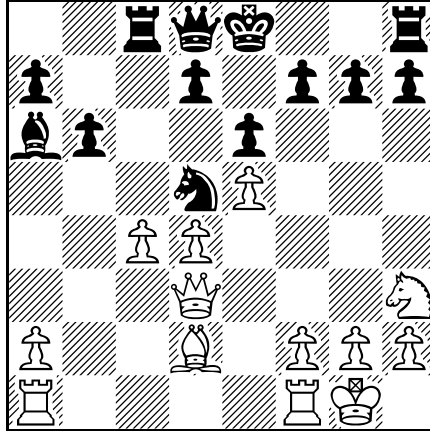
13 ♗g5 only helps Black after 13...f6 14 ♗d2 (14 exf6!? is dangerous since Black opens the g-file for his major pieces with 14...gxf6) 14...0-0.

13...♗a6?!

Pinning c4, but the move smacks of the artificial. Black should just play 13...♘xe3 14 fxe3 0-0 which looks just fine for him.

14 ♙d2 ♖c8?!

Correct is 14...♘e7.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black's last move overlooked a tactic. White to play and secure an advantage:

15 ♖ac1?!

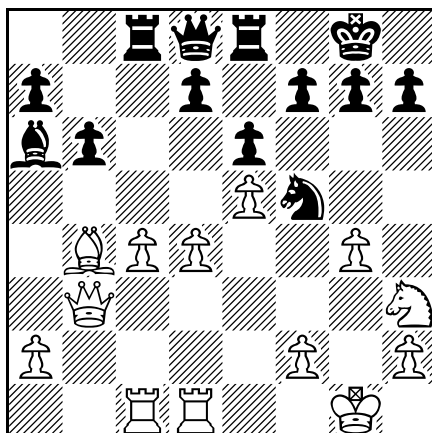
The normally hyper-alert Morphy almost never missed a combination and had the ability to see around corners. Here he uncharacteristically does so. This allows Black to escape.

**Answer:** Instead, Black is in trouble after 15 ♖g3!. Double attack. White simultaneously threatens g7 and d5. Black has no choice but to enter 15...♙xc4 (15...g6?? 16 cxd5 ♙xf1 17 ♙g5 ♖c7 18 ♖a3! d6 19 ♖xf1 is completely hopeless) 16 ♖xg7 ♖f8 17 ♙h6 ♖e7 18 ♖fc1 f5 19 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 20 ♙xf8 ♙xf8. Black's light-square domination doesn't fully make up for the fact that he remains down an exchange in an ending.

15...0-0 16 ♖b3 ♘e7 17 ♙b4

17 ♖a4 ♙b7 18 ♖xa7 ♖c7 19 ♖a3 ♘f5 20 ♙b4 ♖fd8 21 ♖fd1 d6 22 exd6 ♘xd6 23 ♙xd6 ♖xd6 24 ♖e3 ♖c6 25 c5 bxc5 26 dxc5 h6 when c5 falls and Black stands at least even.

17...♖e8 18 ♖fd1 ♘f5 19 g4?!



My mother's advice: only spend that which you can afford. The nature of genius is that it thinks unfathomable thoughts, which are clear only to itself. We have knowledge of 'then' and 'now', but we can only guess at 'tomorrow'. In this case White's attacking wishes are constrained by a thousand self-inflicted difficulties. The g-pawn is the person who buys lottery tickets he can't afford, yet soars with optimistic hopes for success, even when the statistical analysis says otherwise.

As we all know from those faces of saints, the Virgin Mary, Buddha, Krishna, Muhammad and Jesus embedded into the surface of grilled cheese sandwiches, the human brain tends to project patterns from that which is essentially random patternlessness. In this instance, Morphy imputes 'attack' from a move which only weakens. Why is it that so often the delivery of checkmate is just a fanciful land, whose reality is of our own imagination's making?

**Question:** Isn't this terribly loosening?

**Answer:** My top priority is to build a time machine and send myself back to around 1850, where I would be a world championship contender, rather than the present day IM in 2014, where even small children beat me. To answer your question, yes, the move creates a dreadful loosening of the light squares around White's king, and I think an average club player today comprehends this instantly. In Morphy's chivalric Golden Age, such honour-driven 'attacking' pawn stabs were the order of the day.

The trouble is all lines work in Black's favour, even the defensive ones. For example:

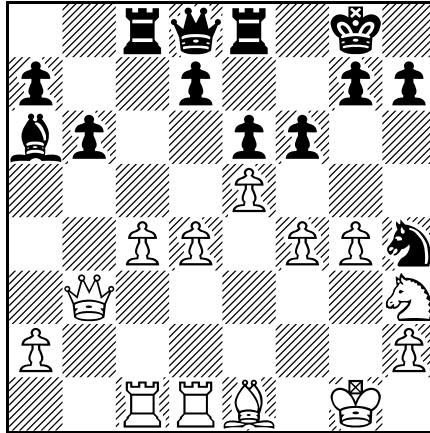
a) 19 ♖f4 ♔g5 20 g3 h5 21 ♜d3 h4 22 ♙d2 hxg3 23 hxg3 ♔g4 24 ♙e1 d5! 25 exd6 ♜xd6 26 ♜dc3 ♜ed8 27 ♔a4 ♙b7 28 d5 ♜e4 29 ♜e3 ♜g5. Now if 30 ♔xa7? ♙xd5 gives Black a winning attack.

b) Relatively best is 19 f3! ♜c6 20 c5 ♙e2 21 ♜d2 ♔h4! 22 ♔c3! (22 ♜xe2?! ♜xd4 and the problem is 23 ♜c4 ♜xe2+ 24 ♙f1 ♔h5 25 ♔e3 bxc5 26 ♜xc5 ♜xc5, and if 27 ♙xc5 ♔g6 28



♖xe2 ♗b1+ 29 ♖f2 ♜c8 30 ♙e3 ♜c2 31 ♙d2 ♗b2 32 ♖e1 ♗a1+ 33 ♖f2 ♗xa2 when White's bishop is too tangled to save itself) 22...♙b5 23 ♖f2 ♗e7 24 ♗b2 ♖d5 25 ♗e4 ♜b8 when White still hangs in there.

19...♗h4 20 f4 f6 21 ♙e1!



Wow. A defensive move. Unheard of in 1858.

21...fxe5

21...f5! 22 g5 ♖g6 23 ♗a4 ♙b7 24 d5 (the greedy 24 ♗xa7?? is punished by 24...♙f3 when Black threatens both the d1-rook and ...♜a8, trapping White's queen; after 25 ♗a4 ♜a8 26 ♗b3 ♙xd1 27 ♜xd1 ♗c7 White's position is way too loose for any real chance for salvation) 24...♗c7 25 ♙f2 exd5 26 c5 ♜e6 27 ♙e3 bxc5 28 ♜xc5 ♜c6 with a clear advantage to Black, who has an extra pawn and attacking chances.

22 dxe5 ♗e7?!

Transferring the bishop to the h1-a8 diagonal with 22...♙b7! may have been more accurate.

23 ♖g5!

Threatening the h4-knight and preparing to transfer the g5-knight to d6, via e4.

23...h6!

Owen, unlike most of the other top rivals of his day, was a savvy defensive player – a necessary skill to survive 1...b6. Instead, after 23...♖g6 24 ♙b4 ♗d8 25 ♗h3 h6 26 ♗e4 ♗xf4 (Black can't survive 26...♜xc4?? 27 ♖f6+! gxf6 28 ♜xc4 ♙xc4 29 ♗xh6 ♗xe5 30 fxe5, and if 30...fxe5 31 ♗g6+ ♖h8 32 ♙d6 forces mate) 27 ♗e3 ♖g6 28 ♖d6 ♜c7 29 ♗xe8 ♗xe8 30 ♜d4 when it is Black who struggles down an exchange.

24 ♗e4!

Threatening to pick up the exchange. Morphy hopes to offset and dilute the black bishop's authority on the h1-a8 diagonal by planting a knight on d6. Not 24 ♙xh4?! hxg5 and if 25 ♙xg5? ♗c5+ 26 ♖g2 ♙xc4 when the opposite-coloured bishops give Black a powerful attack.

**24...♟b7!**

Enterprising. Owen offers an exchange to rid himself of White's powerful knight. After 24...♟f8 25 ♟g3 ♟b7 26 ♚e3 ♜c7 27 ♜c2 everything is covered and White's space gives him the edge.

**25 ♚d3**

Alternatively:

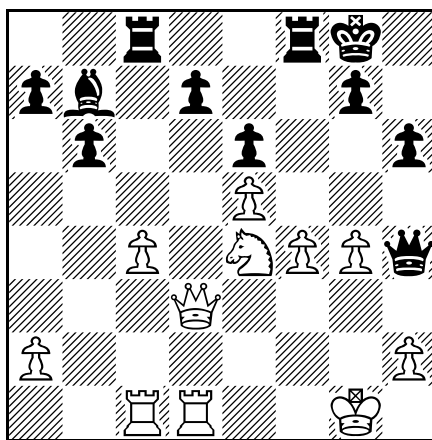
a) 25 ♞d6?! ♞f3+ 26 ♚f1 ♞xh2+ 27 ♚f2 ♟f8! 28 ♞xb7 ♟xf4+ 29 ♟g2 ♞xg4 30 ♟g3 ♟fxc4! 31 ♟xc4 ♟xc4 32 ♞d6 (the c4-rook can't be touched due to the fork on e3) 32...♟c5. Four pawns and White's insecure king ensure that Black remains better, despite White's extra piece.

b) 25 ♟xh4 ♚xh4 26 ♞d6 ♟f8! 27 ♚g3! (27 ♞xb7 ♟xf4 28 h3 ♟cf8 29 ♟f1 ♟xg4+! 30 hxg4 ♚xg4+ 31 ♚h2 ♚e2+ is drawn by perpetual check) 27...♟xg3+ 28 hxg3 ♟b8 29 ♚f2 ♟c6 30 ♚e3 g6 and I would take White if given a choice, since his knight is at least equal to the bishop, and he controls more space.

**25...♟f8**

Pressuring f4.

**26 ♟xh4 ♚xh4**



After much bereavement, anguish, exhaustion of resources, and the shedding of blood, White's attack has yet to produce the hoped-for yield. All outward indicators point to Morphy's position being on the verge of collapse:

1. g4 hangs.
2. As does f4.
3. White faces the wrath of Black's light-squared bishop down the h1-a8 diagonal.

**Exercise (combination alert):** Yet if you find Morphy's next move, it is White who stands slightly better. What would you play here?

**Answer:** Interference/annihilation of king's cover.

**27** ♖f6+!

"It seems we have a mutual enemy. Perhaps we may profit from our association," the knight tells his queen. The two thugs grin in mutual understanding at the black king's discomfort. The knight, uttering contempt to gravity itself, leaps about in a manner which appears to violate the laws of physics. Intimidation is often the precursor of outright extortion. When we get away with what was initially a high-risk plan, we must admit to a kind of acquisitive thrill a criminal feels in the successful perpetration of a crime.

**27...♗xf6!**

Black's still solid position is the house on Halloween with all the lights turned off. The implication: no candy for you! No choice, since 27...gxf6?? is crushed by 28 ♖g6+ ♔h8 (is it just me, or do you also see that Black's haggard king bears a striking resemblance to Keith Richards, after a particularly gruelling night of partying?) 29 ♗xd7 ♖xg4+ 30 ♖xg4 ♗g8 31 ♖xg8+ ♗xg8+ 32 ♔f2 and Black can resign, down an exchange.

**28 exf6 ♖xg4+ 29 ♖g3**

By forcing queens off the board, Morphy reduces Black's attacking clutter and debris.

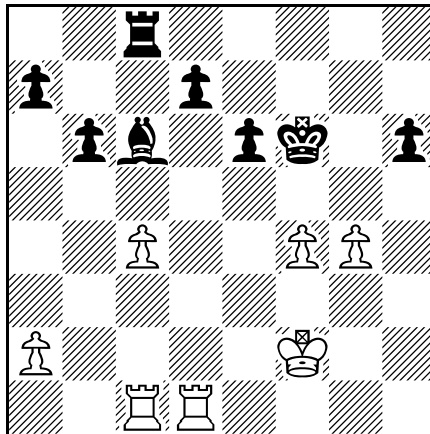
**29...♗xg3+ 30 hxg3 ♔c6**

The d7 base must be secured.

**31 fxg7 ♔xg7**

In the aftermath, White is up an exchange for a pawn. However, Black has decent chances since White is burdened with a loose structure.

**32 ♔f2 ♔f6 33 g4**



**Exercise (planning):** Owen found a powerful defensive plan. What would you play here as Black?

**Answer:** 33...h5!!

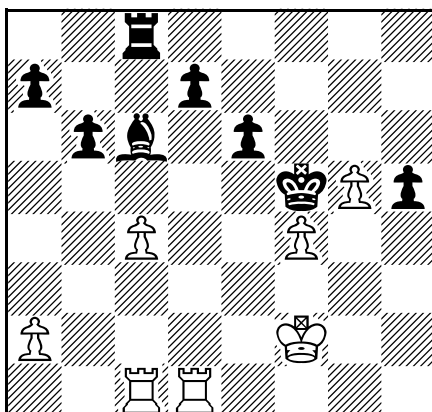
## 1...b6: Move by Move

Owen continues to inflict light-square erosions with ominous deliberation. After this move all of Black's apprehensions are removed. A brilliant strategic decision for the time. We must remember that Nimzowitsch wasn't even an embryo at the time and his theories of weakness of colour complexes were a void in the chess world. This temporary pawn sacrifice creates deep fissions in White's light squares. Today, I think the majority of club players would spot 33...h5, which I would downgrade to just one exclaim, because we all read Nimzowitsch.

### 34 g5+!?

When we are nauseous, we are unable to eat the food in front of us, no matter how appealing it may be for others. The position is clearly no more than a lukewarm peace accord, to be broken by one party or the other, on the flimsiest of pretexts. Morphy goes for the full point. White creates a passed pawn, at the cost of giving Black a dangerous passer as well. 34 gxh5 appears headed for a draw after 34...♖h8 35 ♜c3 ♜xh5 36 ♙g3 ♜h7 37 ♜a3 d5 38 ♜c1 dxc4 39 ♜xc4 ♜g7+ 40 ♙f2 ♙d5 41 ♜c8 ♜g2+ 42 ♙e1 ♙f5 43 ♜xa7 ♙xf4 when Black stands no worse and the logical end result is probably a draw.

### 34...♙f5



### 35 ♙e3?

**Question:** Why would you give Morphy's last move a question mark, when it followed the principle: centralize your king in an ending?

**Answer:** This is why chess is an infuriatingly difficult game. In this case, following principle is incorrect since White's king must help halt Black's passed h-pawn with the counterintuitive 35 ♙g3! e5 36 fxe5 ♙xg5 37 ♜d6 ♙b5 38 ♜d4 ♜c5 39 ♜d5 h4+ 40 ♙h2 ♜xd5 41 cxd5 ♙f5 42 e6 dxe6 43 dxe6 ♙xe6 44 ♜c7 a6 45 ♜b7 ♙d5 46 ♜xb6 ♙c5 47 ♜f6 ♙b4 48 ♜f3 ♙c4 49 a3+ ♙a4 50 ♙h3 ♙b3 51 ♜f6 ♙c4 52 ♜xa6+ ♙xa6 53 ♙xh4 ♙xa3, and it's a draw.

### 35...h4

Now the passed h-pawn is a force to be reckoned with.

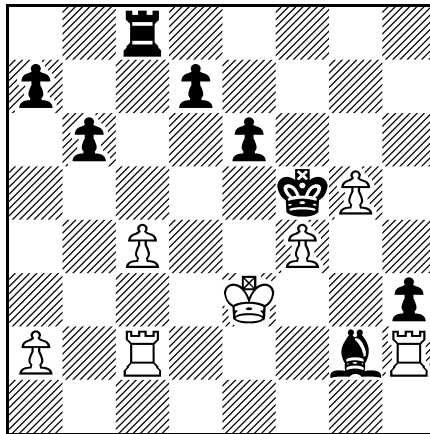
**36 ♖d2 h3 37 ♖h2?**

In the frenzy of a long game (Morphy and his contemporaries didn't always play with clocks; I remember reading that Morphy began to shed literal tears of frustration when Paulsen refused to move for over an hour, and when Morphy finally overcame his well-mannered aristocratic upbringing and asked Paulsen to move, Paulsen replied: "Oh! Is it my move?") fatigue makes our disjointed thoughts and impulses flow in a welter of multiple directions, any and all of which may mean our defeat. How are we to know that West draws, while Southeast loses on the spot?

The text entombs the rook. White's last hope lay in a second-rank defence, with the in-human computer miracle defence 37 ♖e1!! ♗h8 38 ♖ee2! ♕g4 39 ♖f2 ♕g3 40 ♕d4 d6! (40...h2?? 41 ♖xh2, and if 41...♖xh2?? 42 ♖xh2 ♕xh2 43 g6 leaves Black embarrassed by the fact that his bishop is unable to halt the promotion of the g-pawn) 41 ♕e3 ♕g2! 42 ♖d3! ♖c8 (42...h2 43 ♕e2+ ♕g4 44 ♖xg2+ ♕f5 45 ♖d1 h1♔ 46 ♖xh1 ♖xh1 47 g6 ♖h8 48 g7 ♖g8 49 ♕e3 ♕f6 50 ♖d2 ♕e7 51 ♖g2 ♕f7 52 ♖d2 and the game is drawn by repetition) 43 ♖dd2 ♖xc4 44 g6 ♖c8 45 f5 exf5 46 ♖xf5 ♖e8+ 47 ♕d4 ♖e4+ 48 ♕c3 ♖g4 49 ♖d3+ ♕h2 50 ♖xd6 ♕e4 51 ♖f7 ♕xg6 52 ♖xa7 b5 53 ♖g7 b4+ 54 ♕d2 ♖g2+ 55 ♕e3 ♕b1 56 ♖b7 ♖xa2 57 ♖d2+! ♖xd2 58 ♕xd2 ♕g2 59 ♖xb4 ♕f5 60 ♖h4 h2 61 ♖xh2+ ♕xh2, with a draw.

**37...♕g2**

"I am the intermediary between laity and Divinity," declares the bishop, self-importantly.

**38 ♖c2**

**Exercise (combination alert):** Black to play and win.

**Answer: 38...d5!**

Pin. Black wins another pawn and wins the ensuing rook and pawn ending.

**39 g6**

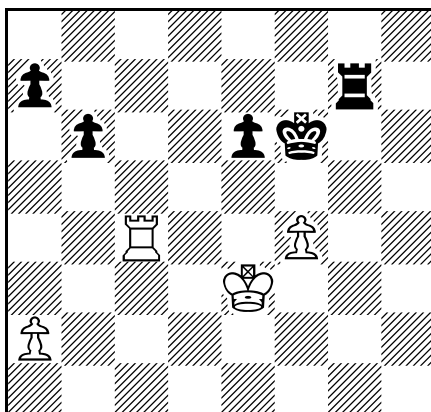
Desperation. 39 ♖cxg2 hxg2 40 ♖xg2 ♖xc4 41 g6 ♖c8 42 g7 ♖g8 43 ♕f3 ♕f6 wins.

1...b6: Move by Move

39...dxc4

And most certainly not 39...♖xc4?? 40 ♖xc4 dxc4 41 g7 when the g-pawn promotes.

40 g7 ♖g8 41 ♖cxg2 hxg2 42 ♖xg2 ♔f6 43 ♖c2 ♖xg7 44 ♖xc4



**Exercise (planning):** Come up with a concrete winning plan for Black:

**Answer:** Step 1: Activate the rook, swinging it over to a3, where it attacks a2 and defends Black's only weakness on a7.

44...♖g3+! 45 ♔e4 ♖a3!

Step 2: Attack a2, which follows the endgame principle: *tie your opponent's rook down to a pawn weakness if possible.*

46 ♖c2

Step 3: Push White's king back and pick off either f4 or a2, with the help of Black's king, who is now allowed entry to f5.

46...♖a4+! 0-1

Black picks off a second pawn after 47 ♔e3 ♔f5 48 ♖c7 ♖xa2. "I believe wholeheartedly in the concept of 'sharing', where each party gives freely, without holding back," declares the rook, as he seizes his 100% 'share' of the loot.

**Summary:** The Owen's Defence has a poor theoretical reputation, but is this based in fact? Having studied the line in this book, I think it is a fully viable defence.

Many thanks to my editors at Everyman for the final edit. Thanks also to Nancy, Associate Regional VP in charge of commas and semicolons. May our opponents raise their eyebrows at least a quarter inch in polite yet confused inquiry at the sight of our first move, 1...b6!

Cyrus Lakdawala,  
San Diego, November 2014