

opening repertoire

the modern defence

Cyrus Lakdawala

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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 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

Larsen: Move by Move

1...b6: Move by Move

Bird's Opening: Move by Move

Petroff Defence: Move by Move

Fischer: Move by Move

Anti-Sicilians: Move by Move

Opening Repertoire: ...c6

First Steps: the Modern

Caruana: Move by Move

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Introduction

“The fight is won or lost far away from witness, behind the lines, in the gym and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights.” – Muhammad Ali

With 1...g7-g6! we agree to enter a lightless place, where only cockroaches, earthworms and Modern Defence players dare enter. The Modern Defence is a job from which I have clocked in and out of for five decades, with my first day on the job in 1969. I have no plans to retire either. The experience of five decades has given me some inside information on the lines which I plan to share with you in this book.

Old is New and Past is Present

Our opposition frantically studies the latest theoretical trends to remain relevant. My question is: how many of them study the past? Evolution implies an improvement over the old. Anything but that and it is considered devolution. This does not apply to chess openings. What is old is not necessarily bad, but merely forgotten, and therefore to our advantage if we studied the lines, while it's highly unlikely our opponents do the same.

Our repetitive openings these days turn us into the factory assembly line worker who feels as much a machine as the machines he or she works with. In this book, I do everything possible to avoid this fate. How? By advocating out of fashion Modern Defence lines which were in fashion in the late 1960's and early 1970's. There is absolutely nothing unsound or wrong in playing the Old School way. It is just simply out of fashion.

The great benefit we receive from playing the Old School Modern is that our theory-loving opponents will most likely not be up on the old theory and ideas which were popular five decades ago. So in this book we plan to weaponize the old to ambush the current. Those who play the Modern with a ...c7-c6-based repertoire (rather than the currently more popular ...a7-a6 versions) lead a lonely life, since it's unlikely anyone you know plays it.

Today's popular ...a7-a6 Modern systems share a common ancestor with the old ...c7-c6 lines, which we study in this book. In our era of long, forcing opening lines we go through our busy/mindless motions the way an insect understands its job in a hive, without seeing the overall picture. Unlike my two other Modern Defence books, in this one we transpose to the Pirc many times, at least in the first half of the book. In the second part against queen's pawn openings, we set up in Benoni-like fashion. Now what is the 'like' part of the equation? We reach Benoni positions, but with our g8-knight on e7, rather than the traditional f6-square.

The construction of this repertoire is twofold:

1. Warning: This book traffics in contraband ideas. By playing a currently unfashionable repertoire, which was popular half a century ago, we force our opponent out of familiar lines and force him or her to actually think early in the game. Our philosophy in this book is: when we can see in the dark and our opponent can't, then turn off the lights of current theory and let your opponent grope in the darkness, which is our friend.

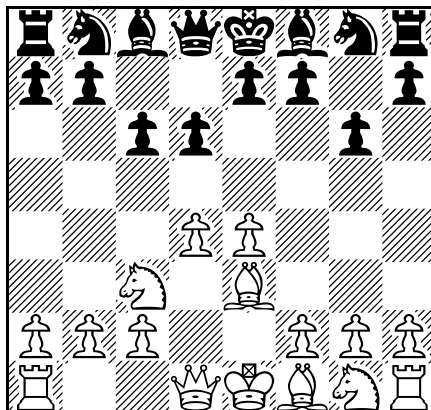
2. When I was a child, I desperately searched for chess materials the way a starved beggar seeks a crust of bread. Today our problem is theoretical abundance, rather than deprivation. Our all-knowing comps watch over our opening moves closer than Big Brother or even God over all creation. Are we still human in the opening stage of a game, or have databases and powerful engines turned our species into a new hybrid of robosapiens?

In this book, unlike my two other Modern Defence books, we try and avoid comped-up lines and force positions which rely on our strategic judgement. We created AI to help us, not to be its slaves. We robosapiens of the chess world tend to be afraid to make a single move in the opening, if that move lacks the green light from our overlord comps/databases. Most of the lines in this book are conceptually – rather than mathematically – based and therefore easy for us (who purchased this excellent book!) to play. We will also be relatively safe against our opponent's comp preparation, since the lines in the Modern/Pirc section of the book are solid.

3. I bear good news: The Intergalactic Council finally approved interspecies marriage, which was formally punishable by death. In this book I decided to poke one of the purist Modern Defence player's (I used to be one of them) most sacred cows: Thou shalt not *ever* transpose from the Modern to the Pirc. In this book we do, over and over, in the king's pawn section. Unlike my two other Modern Defence books, in this one there is extensive crossover to Pirc lines.

Let's take a look at some of the lines we cover.

Pseudo-Dragon Lines



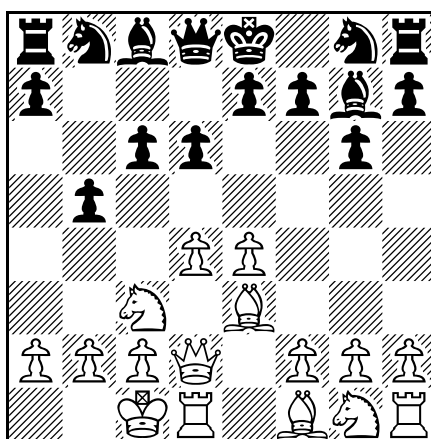
Opening Repertoire: The Modern Defence

White can set up with three different plans from this position:

Plan 1: White plays ♞c3 , ♙e3 , ♚d2 , 0-0-0 , f3 and then begins pushing pawns on the kingside, after which the position becomes rather Sicilian Dragon-like. In such positions we as Black usually keep our king in the centre for as long as possible – which is virtually a preexisting medical condition for us – to keep our opponent guessing as to where we will eventually place our king.

Plan 2: White sets up with ♞c3 , ♙e3 , ♚d2 , ♜f3 , ♙d3 , h2-h3 and then castles kingside. The positions resemble a Closed Ruy Lopez, more than a Modern, since White then plays ♞e2 , ♜g3 and c2-c3 .

Plan 3: White plays ♞c3 , ♙e3 , ♚d2 and then suddenly switches to an Austrian Attack formation with f2-f4 .

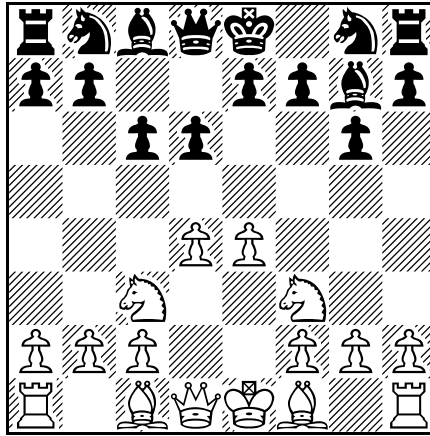


The Modern – an opening which thrives on the principle of negation – is a defence constructed to thwart attackers, since it's hard to attack a person when you have no idea where they live. In this line White often castles queenside early in preparation for opposing wing attacks, but who says we must cooperate? We can simply attack White's king, while leaving ours uncommitted in the centre. Then later we are given the following choices:

1. Castle kingside.
2. Castle queenside.
3. Leave our king where it stands in the middle.
4. Walk our king over to the kingside.
5. Walk our king over to the queenside.

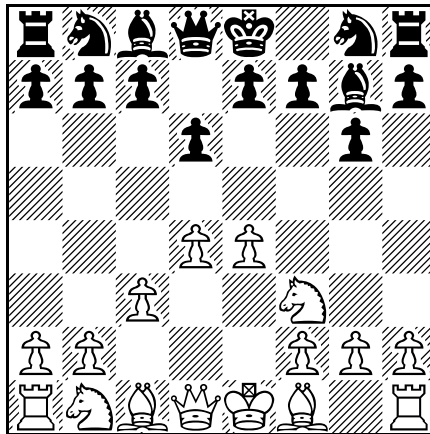
Faced with so many bewildering options, only a clairvoyant opponent will be able to catch our king.

Classical Main Line



If our opponents are looking for an opening which meets our Modern with a sense of rapturous, powerful exaltation, then I suggest he or she look elsewhere. The Classical line is for the blue collar chess player, rather than one seeking art. I won't repeat everything I said above. In this book we favour the ...c7-c6 formations over the more currently popular ...a7-a6 set-ups, including against White's mild-mannered Classical line.

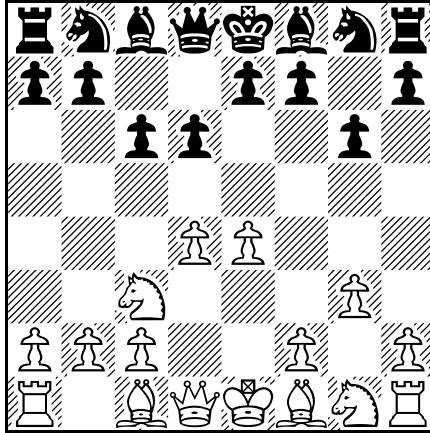
Coward's Variation



Some people go through their drab lives with the false belief that it has meaning. It was GM Tiger Hillarp Persson who called White's set-up the 'Lazy line', and for good reason, since it dodges theoretical work. This is that time when my wife Nancy is vacuuming and I am forced to lift my feet from my seated position to allow the nozzle to get under the sofa. And then she glares at me for being so lazy. So it's no wonder I favour this line when I play

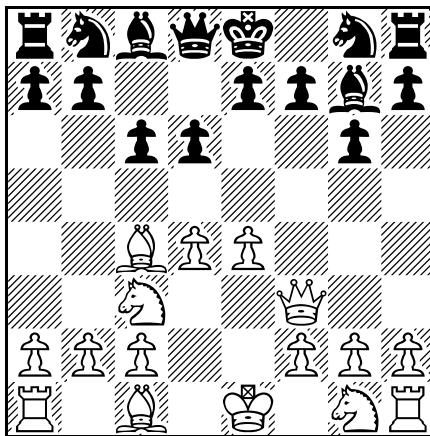
White against the Modern. With the insertion of c2-c3 White pops a Valium and forces you to take one as well. Our opponent hopes to continue the discussion in subdued voices. The game is going to be a strategic battle with many structural decisions to come.

Fianchetto Line



People who play the Fianchetto line are the aspiring novelists who rely on their strong grasp of grammar, rather than imagination, or the ability to weave a story. This is actually a dangerous line for our side, since White is without pawn weaknesses and if left alone, may build space on the kingside with a slow pawn storm. I wouldn't call it war, but I wouldn't call it peace either. If we study the lines carefully, we are rewarded with balanced chances.

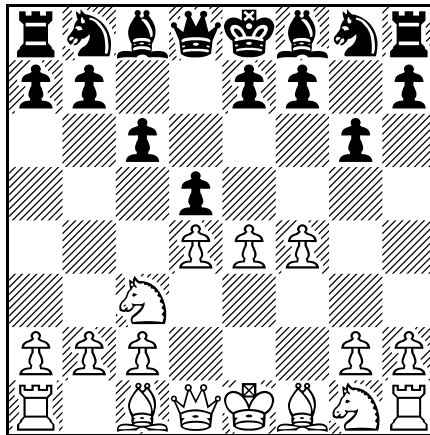
The Monkey's Bum and Cro-Magnon Lines



Look, don't blame me. I didn't make up the name the Monkey's Bum, where White's queen slides out to f3 and, in conjunction with the c4-bishop, threatens f7. We easily gum up the works with ...e7-e6 and often follow with a break on d5. I equate the decline of civilization by just how many players in it choose to move their queen to f3 in such positions. This chapter covers White's lines involving ♗c4. Our ...c6 set-ups are ideally suited to deal with them since at some point we can either gain a tempo on the c4-bishop with ...d6-d5 or ...b7-b5.

4 f4 Anti-Austrian Attack

In this chapter I'm going to share with you some classified information. It was the great Bent Larsen who wrote: "Most of all I like 'bad' lines, that is those considered bad, in my opinion unjustly, by theory. The reason for the last quotation marks is that most so-called theory is only a collection of examples from master play." Let's take Bent's advice and deliberately defy some long-held traditions against the Austrian Attack. In this book we examine some lines which the majority of players would consider unworthy of scrutiny. We respond with 4...d5.



Okay, brave new world, here we come! Black's last move scores an above average 50% in my database. We just lost a tempo in a main line of the Gurgendize Variation of the Austrian Attack, by playing ...d7-d6 and then ...d6-d5. And when I say 'lost', what I really mean is gain. The law is meaningless when there is no punitive apparatus to back it up, when someone is in violation. Prepare for immersion into an inverted truth, where White's Mongol hoard is met by our mongrel hoard.

Your writer's holy mission in life is to illuminate the darkness and banish misunderstanding, thereby making the chess board a less scary place. So let me explain the motivation behind Black's seemingly inexplicable last move:

1. Black's last move is not an act of intellectual treason. By 'losing' a tempo with ...d6-d5, it appears as if we declare: "I am both for and against this plan!". In response White gener-

ally pushes e4-e5 and we reach a move-down Gurgenzidze line. We must reorder our perception of correct and incorrect.

2. In the Gurgenzidze Black's 'extra' tempo is our bishop on g7.

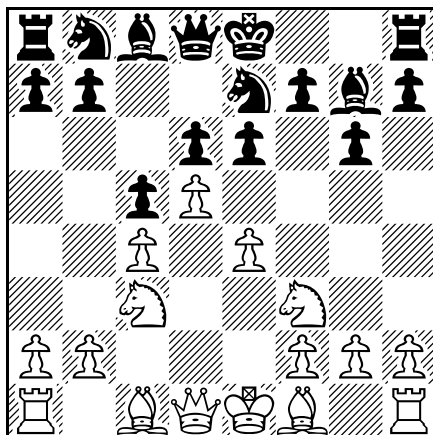
3. The thing is, invariably in the normal Gurgenzidze Black later plays the g7-bishop back to f8.

4. We don't have that problem since our bishop never moved and is already on f8.

5. So by losing a tempo, we in effect, gained one.

6. Principle: *If you are unprepared to fight, then hide and camouflage yourself.* With our last move our opponent's horizon narrows, rather than widens. Here is our bonus: our opponents who choose to meet our Modern with the Austrian Attack are generally aggressive attacking players. With ...d6-d5, in a single move we thrust them into a blocked strategic element, generally completely foreign to their stylistic capabilities.

The Maybe Benoni



Each book I write is essentially a research grant. This can be a bit of an issue when the grant is given to a mad scientist, who insists on scary experiments like this opening, the Maybe Benoni, which is our main choice in the queen's pawn section of the book. My feeling is that a good chess book should feed the hunger of the mind with unfamiliar ideas. When our opponents play their openings over and over, their minds have a way of becoming calloused from endless repetition, to the point where it is thrown into confusion with a fresh, unorthodox idea.

Please understand that first impressions don't always reflect the truth. In the Maybe Benoni, by playing our knight to e7, rather than the traditional f6-square, we attempt to do just that to our opponents. We enter a double helix of confusion:

1. Why does Black delay playing ...e6xd5?

2. Why as Black do we develop our knight to the 'inferior' e7-square, rather than the more central, traditional f6-square?

In this book we reject the agitprop theory that the knight must be posted on f6 in all Benoni lines. This is the Modern Defence and we make the rules. Here is the Maybe Benoni's Magna Carta explanation:

1. Black delays ...e6xd5 to keep White guessing on each move, just if and when it will happen. This tends to take a toll on our opponent's clock and nerves. In some cases, we may even later opt for...e6-e5, if we believe we can reach a favourable King's Indian formation.

2. We play our knight to e7 for the following reasons:

i. When we later play ...e6xd5 and if White recaptures with the e4-pawn, our e7-knight suddenly has access to the f5- and, later, d4-squares; if White recaptures with the c4-pawn, then we have access to an eventual ...f7-f5 break, chipping away at White's centre.

ii. White often tries for a pawn break on f5 in Benoni positions. With our knight on e7, we make our opponent's task that much more difficult.

iii. If we later decide to play ...e6-e5, then our knight isn't blocking on f6 and we generate counterplay with a quick ...f7-f5.

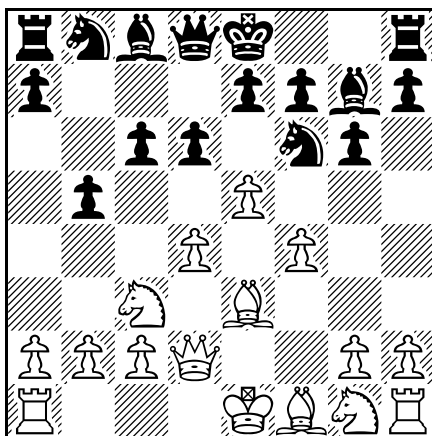
Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Richard Palliser for the edit and to Nancy for her proof reading and non-censorship to the jokes in this book. Repeated study is embedded a magical property which contains the power to transform bewildered ignorance into the clarity of full comprehension of an opening's most closely guarded secrets. May we bewilder our opponents with this repertoire.

Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego,
September 2019

Game 10
A.Udeshi-T.L.Petrosian
Bhubaneswar 2011

1 e4 d6 2 d4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 ♙e3 c6 5 ♚d2 b5 6 f4 ♞f6 7 e5



In this version White refuses to defend e4 and, instead, pushes to e5, attacking Black's knight.

7...b4

In case you fear that Black's position smothers from lack of space, keep in mind that our territorial conquest is on the queenside. I would be more inclined to pick up White's valuable dark-squared bishop with 7...♘g4 8 ♙d3 0-0 9 ♖f3, as in S.Forman-L.Voloshin, Czech League 2004. I would be happy to play Black's side after 9...♗xe3 10 ♚xe3 ♞a6! 11 a3 (preventing ...♗b4) 11...♞c7 12 0-0 a5. White's central space and slight attacking chances are easily counterbalanced by Black's bishop-pair and dark-square potential.

8 ♞d1 ♞d5

This move accomplishes the following:

1. Black protects his b4-pawn.
2. The knight occupies the artificial 'hole' on d5.
3. White's valuable e3-bishop is attacked, and if it moves to f2 then White must watch out for ...♙h6, going after f4.

9 ♞f3 0-0

This is a rather confident move since it gives White the green light to go berserk with h2-h4 and h4-h5, playing directly for mate.

10 h4!?

No gifted young player can resist such a lunge. Older heads might prefer:

- a) 10 ♙e2 ♞d7 11 0-0 ♙b7 12 a3 a5 and if White attempts to preserve the dark-squared

bishop with 13 ♖f2 then Black wins a pawn with 13...♗h6! 14 ♘g5 dxe5 15 dxe5 ♕xg5 16 fxg5 ♘xe5. White has dark-squared compensation for the missing pawn, but no more.

b) 10 ♖f2 ♘d7 11 ♕e2 was tried in T.Fomina-F.Velikhanli, Moscow Olympiad 1994. Black looks fine after 11...f6! intending to dismantle White's central space.

c) 10 a3 ♘xe3 11 ♘xe3 was M.Feygin-K.Beckmann, Recklinghausen 1998. Here Black should play 11...bxa3 12 ♖xa3 ♘d7 13 ♕c4 dxe5 14 dxe5 ♘b6 15 ♖c3 ♘xc4 16 ♘xc4 ♕e6. White's space and superior pawn structure may balance out Black's two bishops.

10...h5

Petrosian clamps down on h4-h5, while fixing g4 as a hole.

11 ♕d3 ♕g4 12 ♕e4 ♖c8

More accurate was 12...♘d7! so that White's a2-a3 can be met with ...a7-a5.

13 ♘f2

White should seize the opportunity to play 13 a3! bxa3 14 ♖xa3. Then he can later play c2-c4, ejecting the d5-knight, although even here Black looks fine after 14...♘d7.

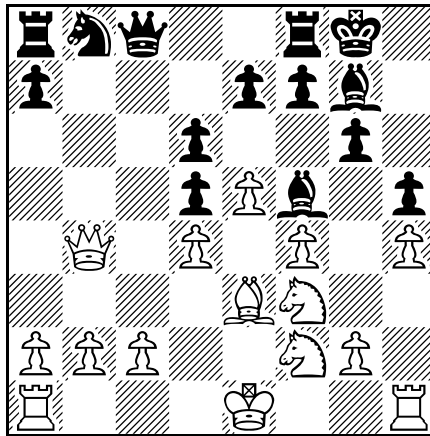
13...♕f5

This pawn sacrifice was the point of ...♖c8. Black wants to swap away his light-squared bishop for White's, while retaining control over f5 and g4. Petrosian tempts the young Indian player into ♕xd5 and ♖xb4.

14 ♕xd5?!

The material-loving comp thinks this pawn grab is okay, while your altruistic bodhi-sattva writer feels it is too greedy. I think White would be better off playing 14 0-0.

14...cxd5 15 ♖xb4



For the bargain price of only one pawn, Black obtained the following compensations:

1. Bishop-pair.
2. Domination of the light squares.
3. Benko Gambit-like future pressure on the now open b- and c-files.

Conclusion: Black got the better of the deal.

15...♘c6

Continuing in unmaterialistic fashion is wise:

a) 15...♖xc2?? 16 ♜c1 ♘c6 17 ♗a3 and Black can resign.

b) 15...♙xc2? 16 ♜c1 ♗f5 17 ♗b7 ♘d7 18 ♜xc2! (overloaded defender) 18...♗xc2 19 ♗xd7 ♗xb2 20 ♗xe7 dxe5 21 fxe5 ♗xa2 22 0-0 and White's two minor pieces are worth more than Black's rook and extra pawn.

16 ♗d2 ♜b8 17 c3!?

Now White's king gets stuck in the centre. More accurate was 17 ♘d3 ♙e4 18 0-0 f6!, although even here Black exerts strong pressure for the pawn.

17...♗a6!

White's castling is prevented on both sides of the board.

18 b4

Perhaps White was hoping to play ♗e2 to castle.

18...♜fc8

Also worth consideration is to open the e-file with 18...f6! 19 exd6 exd6.

19 a4!

White's best defensive move. 19 ♗e2?! is met with 19...♗a3! 20 ♘d1 a5! 21 ♙c1 ♗a4 22 ♘b2 ♗c2 23 ♗xc2 ♙xc2 24 a3 ♘a7! 25 ♙d2 ♘b5 and Black's pressure continues.

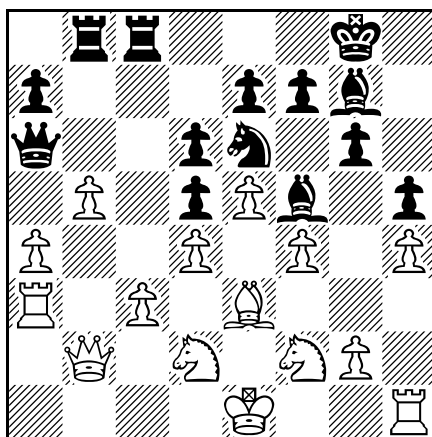
19...♘d8 20 ♜a3!

White defends well, increasing protection of c3.

20...♗c4 21 ♗b2

21 ♘d1! looks better, since it allows White to bring the h1-rook into play with ♙f2 next.

21...♘e6 22 ♘d2 ♗a6 23 b5?!



White feels that his ramshackle fortress, constructed by flimsy materials, isn't going to hold forever. So he gets aggressive, which in turn allows Black to later open the queenside. Perhaps White was better off playing 23 ♘f3, intending ♗e2 next.

23...♙h6! 24 ♗b4?

White had to try 24 0-0 ♖b6 25 ♘d1 a6 26 ♚b3 axb5 27 axb5 when the pressure continues.

24...♖b6 25 c4!?

The human psyche rationalizes a suicidally risky action the following way: 'I must engage in this outwardly wrong action, for the greater good, and for those members of society who are too weak to understand its necessity.' White's last move turns his centre into chutney. The trouble is White has no way to fix things: for instance, 25 g3 a5 26 ♖b3 dxe5 27 ♗xd5 ♘xf4! 28 gxf4 exf4 is hopeless for White.

25...♘d4!

Is it stealing if you steal from a thief? White grabbed a pawn earlier, so Black does so in the present. Threat: ...♘c2+. White will not be able to exploit this pin.

26 ♙f1 dxe5 27 ♗xe7

After 27 fxe5?? ♙xe3 28 ♚xe3 ♘c2 White is massacred.

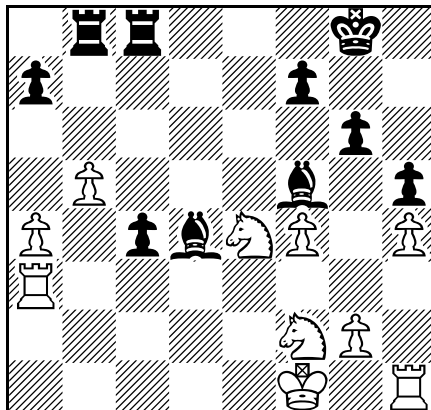
27...dxc4

Missing 27...exf4 28 a5 ♚xc4!! 29 ♘xc4 ♗xb5 30 ♙xd4 ♗xc4+ 31 ♙g1 ♗xd4 with a crushing attack for Black.

28 ♗xe5 ♙g7 29 ♙xd4 ♗xd4 30 ♗xd4 ♙xd4

White is dead lost in the ending, since the passed c-pawn is unblockable.

31 ♘de4



Exercise (planning): The scale of White's coming troubles is far greater than even he imagined. What is Black's winning plan?

Answer: Pawn promotion. The passed c-pawn heads for the c1-promotion square and there is nothing White can do about it, except hand over material.

31...c3! 32 ♙e2 c2 33 ♙d2 ♙b2! 0-1

Double attack. 33...♙b2! 34 ♚aa1 ♚c4! soon leaves White materially down the equivalent of a full queen.

Game 36
P. Carlsson-V. Akopian
 Gibraltar 2006

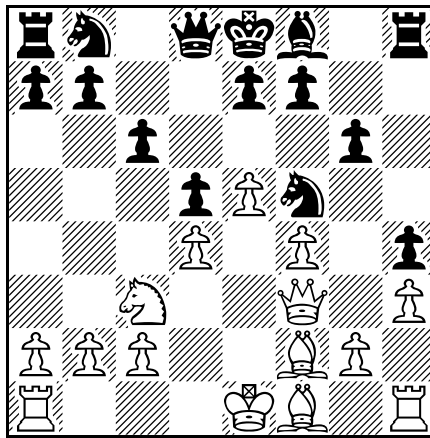
1 e4 d6 2 d4 g6 3 ♘c3 c6 4 f4 d5 5 e5 h5 6 ♙e3 ♘h6 7 ♗f3

White gives his dark-squared bishop room, at the cost of allowing Black his thematic ...♙g4 plan, in preparation for elimination of the bad light-squared bishop.

7...♙g4 8 h3

Likewise, after 8 ♙e2 ♗f5 9 ♙f2 e6 10 0-0 ♗d7 11 ♖d2 c5 12 dxc5 ♙xc5 Black looks just fine, R. Bellin-C. McNab, British League 1999.

8...♗f5 9 ♙f2 ♙xf3 10 ♖xf3 h4



Thematically suppressing g2-g4. Please ignore the comp's misassessment here of '0.75', almost a pawn up for White. The comp is fooled by White's space and bishop-pair. In reality I think Black's position is very playable, since the structure is very much in our remaining bishop's favour and we are the only one with a viable future pawn break on c5.

11 ♙d3

11 e6 is not to be feared. Black stands slightly better after 11...fxe6 12 ♙d3 ♖d6 13 0-0-0 ♗d7 14 ♖he1 ♙h6! 15 ♗e2 ♗f6. The doubled e6-pawn isn't not much of a boost for Black's bank account, but, hey, it's extra and I don't really see much compensation for White.

11...e6 12 0-0

Castling kingside is perhaps wiser than 12 0-0-0!? ♗d7 13 ♗e2 b5 14 g4 hxg3 15 ♗xg3 ♗h4 16 ♖g4 ♖b8 17 ♗b1 c5. The comp says even, but I don't believe it since Black achieved a favourable French-like position, J. Franke-R. Kasimdzhanov, German League 2000. If 18 ♙xg6!? ♗xg6 19 f5 ♖h4 20 ♖f3 ♖f4 21 ♖e2 exf5 22 ♙e3 cxd4! 23 ♙xf4 ♗xf4 24 ♖f3 ♗e6 25 ♗xf5 ♗xe5 when I like Black's chances, despite the comp's insistence on its '0.00' assessment.

12...♞d7

Preparing for a break on c5 at some point.

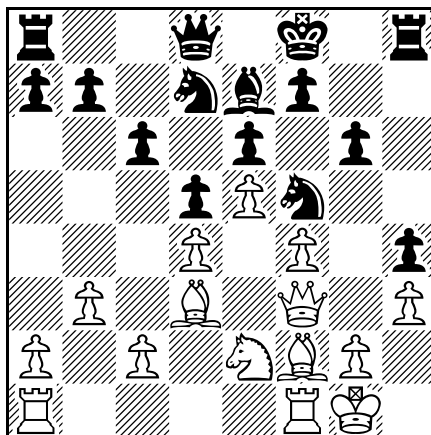
13 ♞e2!

I like this move, which prepares to meet ...c6-c5 with c2-c3, after which White retains a central space advantage.

13...♙e7 14 b3

Now he wants to break with c2-c4.

14...♙f8



Black's king will be safest on g7, with the rook left on h8. 14...b5 15 c4 a6 16 c5 ♙f8 is somewhat similar to our game, 'yeahyeahyeah'-C.Lakdawala, Internet (blitz) 2005.

15 c4 a5

He wants to start staking out space on the queenside, himself.

16 ♜ab1

This move was new:

a) 16 c5 b6 (chipping away at White's space) 17 cxb6 ♜xb6 18 ♜fc1 ♙g7 19 ♙xf5 exf5! 20 ♞c3 (intending ♞a4, fighting for c5) 20...♜hc8 21 ♞a4 ♜b5 22 ♜e3 ♞f8! was P.Smironov-J.Ehlvest, Panormo (blitz) 2002, when e6 was a nice blockade square for Black's knight. Chances look balanced here.

b) 16 ♜fc1 ♙g7 17 ♜ab1 was A.Kovchan-G.Matjushin, Evpatoria 2003. White has an edge on paper, due to his bishop-pair and extra space, but we Moderners who understand this structure realize that Black's chances are no worse.

16...♞b8

This move plays on the principle: *A development lead loses its potency in closed positions.* So Black can get away with this blatant loss of time. He re-routes the knight to a6, where it eyes b4.

17 c5

White gains even more space.

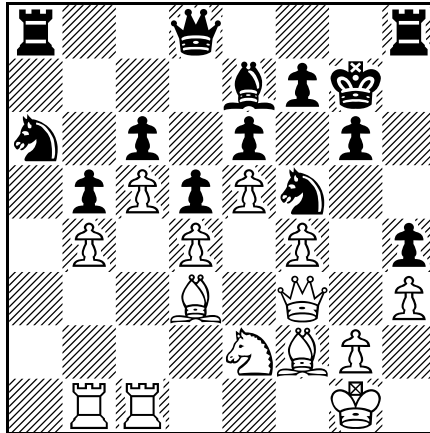
17...b6

At some point Black must challenge White's space.

18 a3 ♖a6

18...bxc5 19 ♗xf5 gxf5 20 dxc5 ♖a6 21 b4 ♖c7 22 ♖d4 ♗e8 23 ♗c3 is in White's favour.

19 ♗fc1 ♗g7 20 b4 axb4 21 axb4 b5!



The comp gives White an edge, while I claim Black is equal. White owns more space, but so what? There isn't anything useful he can do with it. Also White's dark-squared bishop may turn into a problem later on, due to so many of his pawns being on its same colour.

22 ♗h2 ♗d7

Connecting rooks.

23 ♖g1

White may be dreaming of ♗e2, ♖f3 and ♗e1, where Black is a bit tied down to the defence of h4. But is he really, since White uses the same number of pieces attacking it without benefit?

23...♖a7 24 ♗e2 ♗ha8 25 ♖f3 ♖c7! 26 ♗e1

After 26 ♗xf5?! exf5 27 ♖hx4 ♖e6 28 ♗e3 ♖a3 29 ♖c3 ♗xc3 30 ♗xc3 ♗d8 31 ♖f3 ♖xf4 Black favourably regained the sacrificed pawn.

26...♗d8 27 ♖a1

Black's domination of the a-file must be challenged.

27...♖a3 28 ♗c2 ♖a2 29 ♗d3 ♖2a3 30 ♗c2 ♗h8!?

GM Akopian plays for the full point. 30...♖a2 31 ♗b3 ♖2a3 32 ♗c2 is a repetition draw.

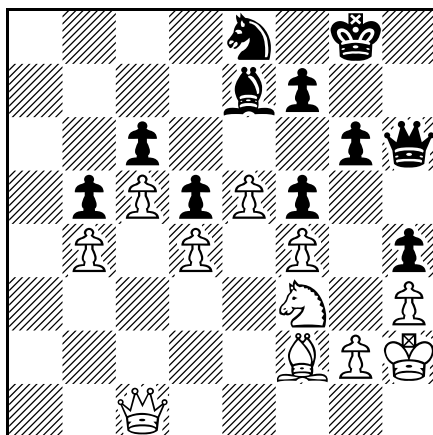
31 ♖xa3 ♖xa3 32 ♖a1 ♖xa1 33 ♗xa1 ♗h6

Now f4 must be attended to and White's queen isn't allowed to wander into Black's position down the a-file.

34 ♗c1 ♗g8 35 ♗d3 ♖e8?!

35...♗g7 is still even.

36 ♗xf5! exf5



Exercise (planning): Find a strong plan for White to seize the advantage.

37 ♖e3?!

Answer: White misses his opportunity with 37 e6! (pawn breakthrough) 37...f6! (not 37...fxe6?? 38 ♗e5 when c6 falls and Black is lost) 38 ♜a1! ♜xf4+ 39 ♙g1 ♜c7 40 ♜a8 ♗d8 41 ♗xh4 ♙h7 42 e7 ♜xe7 43 ♜xc6 ♗c7 44 ♗f3 and Black is fighting for the draw.

37...♜f8?!

It seems that Akopian is still unaware of how strong White's e5-e6 plan is. 37...♗c7! is even after 38 ♜a1 ♜f8 39 ♜a7 ♜c8.

38 ♜e1?!

It was Bob Dylan who sang: "How many times can a man turn his head and pretend that he just doesn't see?" The players continue to underestimate the power of White's e5-e6 push. After 38 e6! ♗f6 39 ♗f2! ♜e7 40 ♜e1 ♗c7 41 exf7+ ♙xf7 42 ♜xe7+ ♙xe7 43 ♗xh4 ♗xh4 44 ♗xh4 ♙f6 45 ♙g3 ♗a6 46 ♙f2 ♗xb4 47 ♙e2 ♗a6 48 ♗f3 White stands clearly better and Black is fighting for the draw.

38...♗c7!

Akopian lets his h4-pawn go for a strategic price to White.

39 ♗xh4!?

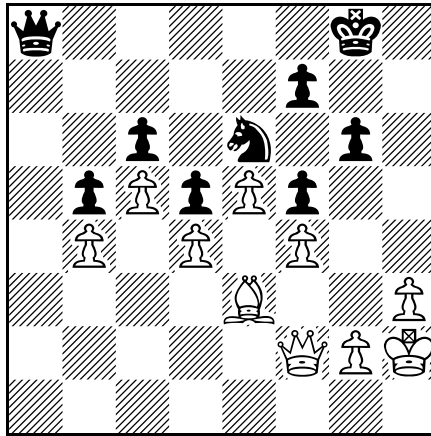
Ambition's goal is to ruthlessly acquire, while Aspiration, its gentler cousin, merely seeks to achieve something without the infliction of harm. This pawn grab is the chess version of the 50 cents off coupon: the trouble it takes to cut it out is worth at least as much as the half dollar you save. White gets ambitious and wins a pawn at the cost of allowing Black the superior remaining minor piece. There is nothing wrong with choosing to remain silent on the issue with 39 ♜a1 ♗e6 40 ♜a6 ♜e8 41 ♜b7 ♙h7 when the game is equal.

39...♗xh4! 40 ♜xh4

For the extra pawn, White trampled his remaining minor piece's activity. The game re-

mains even, but I can only see Black winning at this stage. The best White has is a draw.

40...♘e6 41 ♖f2 ♗a8



The loss of a pawn is inconsequential for Black. For it, he got:

1. The superior minor piece. White's bishop is imprisoned and pending further evidence brought up against him.

2. Black's queen owns the a-file.

3. White's fixed pawns are vulnerable.

Now saying this, Black doesn't have the advantage and White should hold the game.

42 ♗d2

After 42 g4 ♗a3 43 gxf5 gxf5 44 ♗d2 ♖h7 it is doubtful that either side will make progress.

42...♗a1 43 ♙f2

43 g4 ♗b1 44 ♙g3 ♙g7 is still even.

43...♗f1 44 ♙e3 ♗b1 45 h4!?

He wants to knock out Black's ...g6-g5 ideas. The trouble is that it further weakens White's kingside light squares. White should hold the draw easily with the non-weakening 45 ♙g3!.

45...♙h7! 46 ♙f2 ♗f1 47 ♙e3 ♙h6!

Black's king may enter one day via h5 and g4.

48 ♙f2 ♙h5! 49 ♙g3 ♗h1

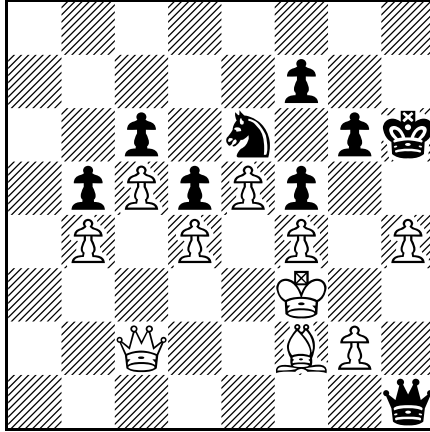
Threatening h4.

50 ♙f3

50 ♗e2+ ♙h6 51 ♗d2 also maintains the balance.

50...♙h6 51 ♗c2??

Much worse than our opponent undermining us is when we do it with a self-inflicted wound. When we lose what should have been a drawn position, our gleeful opponent is an unwanted witness to our failure. 51 ♙g3 was necessary.



Exercise (combination alert): What did White overlook?

Answer: 51...Qxh4!

Attraction/knight fork. The position's truth is no longer elusive: Black wins back his pawn while retaining all his previous strategic advantages. White is completely busted.

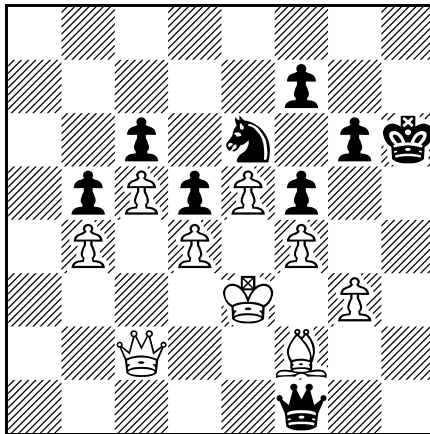
52 g3

Instead, 52 Qxf5?? loses on the spot to 52...Nxd4+, while after 52 Qxh4?? Nxd4+ 53 Qf2 Nxc2 next b4 falls and it's time for White to resign.

52...Qh1+

More accurate is 52...Qg4+! 53 Qe3 (forced, since moving to e2 allows ...Nxf4+) 53...g5! 54 fxg5+ Nxc2 when White's position crumbles.

53 Qe3 Qa1 54 Qd3 Qf1+ 55 Qe3



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

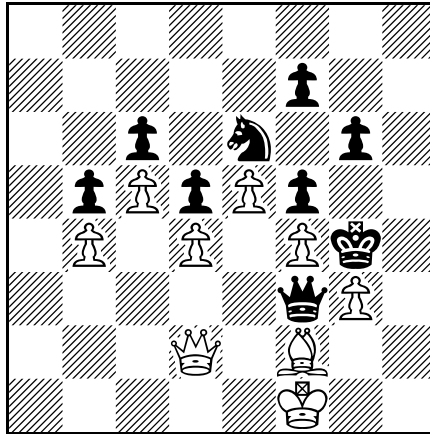
Answer: Infiltrate the light squares with the king, via h5 and g4.

55...♔h5! 56 ♖d2 ♜b1

Threatening mate on e4. 56...g5! is even stronger.

57 ♕e2 ♔g4 58 ♜c3 ♜e4+ 59 ♔f1 ♜f3! 60 ♜d2

A queen swap is of course totally hopeless for White.



Exercise (planning): Black has two ways to force the win. Find one of them:

60...♘g7! 0-1

Answer: Transfer the knight to h5, after which White's g3-pawn is left for dead. Black also wins easily after 60...g5! 61 fxg5 ♘xg5 and White's position is unable to tolerate the black knight's transfer to e4.

Game 37

D.Jakovenko-V.Akopian

Russian Team Championship 2002

1 e4 d6 2 d4 g6 3 ♘c3 c6 4 f4 d5

Once again we take on the role of Han Solo, flying his ship directly into the path of the meteorite shower to evade Vader's minions.

5 ♘f3