

TEASING YOUR OPPONENT'S KING AT ALL TIMES – A MODERN APPROACH TO MIDDLEGAME PLAY

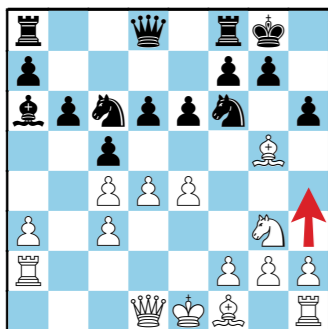
Dangers on the open h-file

Many contemporary games see early pawn thrusts such as h2-h4 or ...h7-h5, which have made a significant impact on the development of opening theory. However, the key to the success of such a treatment of the opening lies in the conduct of the middlegame, where the open h-file often proves to be extremely important when combining positional play with attacking ideas.

By GM Eduardas Rozentalis

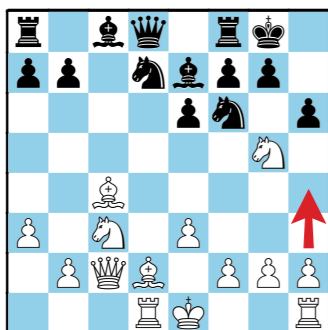


GAME 8



12.h4

GAME 14



13.h4

giving his opponent a chance to attack it with the h-pawn, which can be advanced h2-h4-h5 or ...h7-h5-h4. Such openings are the Pirc Defense, the Grunfeld Defense, the King's Indian Defense and some others.



My attention was attracted by two positions from the games of the latest World Championship Match between Ding Liren and Ian Nepomniachtchi.

In both of these games, the newly crowned World Champion, Ding Liren, advanced a piece to g5. And when his opponent attacked that piece with a pawn, he simply protected it by advancing his h-pawn. We will not analyze these games here, as they are annotated on other pages. We might just mention that in one case Nepomniachtchi accepted the sacrifice, whereas in the other he declined it. In both cases it was a justified decision!

The idea of this sacrifice, often just temporary, is to open the h-file and initiate threats against the exposed king. Let's discuss how dangerous it is to have an open h-file right next to your king. How promising is it for the side who is launching an attack? First of all, how can it be opened at an early stage of the game?

In many openings, one of the sides wants to develop his kingside bishop to g2 or g7. To do so, he plays g2-g3 or ...g7-g6 immediately

The Grunfeld Defense is one of the openings which we can say provoke White to play h2-h4 at a very early stage. The reason is that Black plays ...g7-g6, followed by short castling, and that gives White a desired target. First we'll analyze a game between two Canadian players in a GM-norm tournament, the first in a series of fine chess events organised by the new Toronto Excelsior Club.

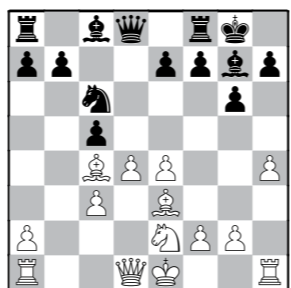
D87

Bator Sambuev	2434
Zachary Dukic	2238

Excelsior GM March, Toronto 2023

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♘g7 7.♗c4 c5 8.♗e2 ♘c6 9.♗e3 0-0 White has a choice – either to castle short or start an attack on the kingside.

10.h4 Another option is 10.0-0. In this case, White completes his development and is ready to make use of his strong pawn center.



Hailing from Vilnius, Lithuania, Eduardas Rozentalis is a celebrated chess Grandmaster and coach. He has held a key role in the global chess scene, representing Lithuania on the primary boards at eleven World Chess Olympiads. His prowess is reflected in his more than 50 victories at international chess tournaments held in various countries, including the US and Canada. Besides his success on the chessboard, Rozentalis is also a published author with five chess books to his name.



Eduardas Rozentalis Photo by David Llada

After the text move White takes aim at Black's king and also his pawn on g6, deciding to commence his attack immediately without castling himself, because his rook is still on h1. Pushing the pawn to open the h-file is quite natural and it's quite a popular line – even among the world's best players.

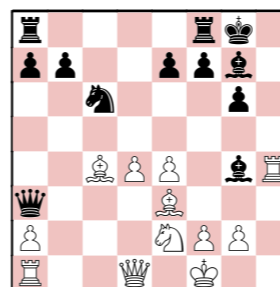
10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♖a5+ 12.♗f1! ♖a3 At first sight, this looks like a strange move. The idea is not to allow White to obtain good squares for his pieces – for example, the b3 square for the queen – or maybe go for f2-f3, followed by ♗f2.

Black also has other options. 12...h5?! gives White a comfortable position after 13.f3 ♗d8 14.♖b3 e6 15.♗d1, with good prospects in the center.

Also 12...♗d7 13.h5 ♗ac8 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.♗b3 ♖a6, pinning the white knight and freeing the a5 square for his own knight, seems okay for Black.

13.h5 From here the pawn will probably be traded to open the h-file or else pushed further to h6.

13...♗g4 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.♖h4



15...♗xe2+ Normally it's not good to exchange a bishop for a knight and give your opponent the bishop pair for free. But here Black reduces White's attacking potential and also quickly brings his queenside rook into the game.

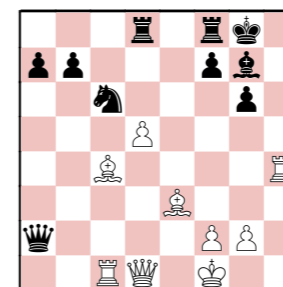
16.♗xe2 ♗ad8 The tactical way to win the central pawn doesn't work: 16...♗xd4? 17.♗xd4 ♗ad8 18.e5! ♗xe5 19.♖d2 and White wins.

17.d5 Central pawns should advance!

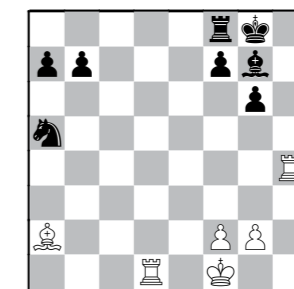
17...e6 Black has to attack the pawn center. 17...♗xa1? 18.♖xa1 is bad for Black, because of troubles along the open h-file.

18.♖c1 exd5 19.exd5 ♖xa2 Black takes a pawn and, at the same time, attacks the d-pawn.

20.♗c4 White also doesn't waste any time. He protects the pawn while improving the positions of his pieces.



20...♖b2 A new move. Earlier 20...♖a5 had been tried in an online game when White should have replied 21.♗d2 (instead of the sharp and unclear 21.♗g5 ♗d7) 21...♗xd5 22.♗xa5 ♗xd1+ 23.♗xd1 ♗xa5 24.♗a2+



The exchange is more important than two pawns due to the open files for White's rooks.

21.♗e4 The rook leaves the h-file and comes to the central file. However, if needed, White's heavy artillery can return to initiate threats against the black king.

21...♗a5 The knight remains active here, in spite of the fact that it is far away from the center.

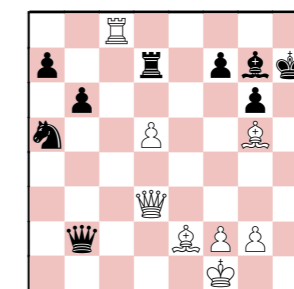
22.♗e2 b6 Probably too slow. However, after 22...♗d7 23.d6 ♗f8 24.♗f4 ♗c6 25.♖b1, White would preserve his initiative.

23.♗g5 ♗d7 24.♗e7 We can see now what was the purpose of the rook transferring from the h-file to the e-file – it was to penetrate to e7.

24...♗fd8? And this is the decisive mistake. Black forgot that his king is vulnerable as the h-file is open. 24...♗d6 was necessary. Nevertheless after 25.♗f4 ♗f6 26.♗e3, White preserves his dangerous passed pawn and better chances.

25.♗xd7 ♗xd7 26.♖c8+ ♗h7 26...♗f8 27.♗h6 is also losing for Black.

27.♖d3 Suddenly there is no defense against mating threats on the h-file!



27...♖a1+ Or 27...♖b3 28.♖e4!.

28.♗c1 Black resigned as there was no defense against 29.♖h3.



The Catalan is a very solid opening for White. If Black wants to obtain his own chances he can go for play on the h-file, as White plays g2-g3 at a very early stage.

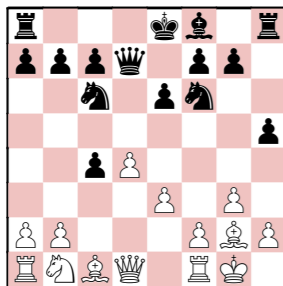
EO4

Gabor Papp 2583

Eduardas Rozentalis 2567

2nd Bundesliga Ost 2017

1.c4 e6 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 d5 4.d4 dxc4 5.♗f3 ♗d7 6.♖e5 ♗c6 7.♖xc6 ♖xc6 8.0-0 ♖d7 Black defends his knight and introduces the option of castling long. 9.e3 h5!? But this is what we want to see – Black looks for counterplay by pushing his pawn up the h-file. 9...♗d8 is the most popular move when Black gives up the idea of castling long in favor of the possibility to attack White's center by ...e6-e5.



10.♖d2 h4 Advancing without further delay. The black king can wait a while longer on e8.

11.♖xc4 0-0-0 Finally. Black preserves both options for his h-pawn: capturing on g3 or pushing further to h3 with an attack on the white bishop. Trading pawns on g3 was possible at once. However, after 11...hxg3 12.hxg3 Black cannot immediately exploit the open h-file, as White's light-squared bishop controls the key squares h1 and h3. This is why White was not afraid to allow an open file right next to his king.

12.b4 White sacrifices a pawn in order to open the b-file and get his own attack going against the black king. Personally, I wouldn't be in such a hurry and would play something natural, probably preferring 12.♗d2.

12...♗xb4 Black has no choice. Otherwise that pawn will advance to b5 with great force.

13.♗b1 The rook immediately comes to the b-file, exerting pressure on Black's king position.



▲ Gabor Papp

Photo by David Llada

13...♖d5 The knight is heading for b6 to cover the b7 pawn.

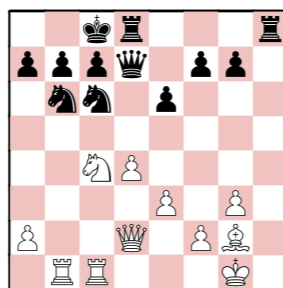
14.♗d2 Maybe it was better to retain the bishop by playing 14.a3 ♗c3 15.♗b3 with complex play.

14...♗xd2 15.♖xd2 hxg3 16.hxg3 Finally Black goes for a trade of his h-pawn – and White agrees to open the h-file.

But, why not 16.fxg3? Actually, in this particular case it is quite playable. However, it will provide Black with a target – the pawn on h2. Another drawback for White is that his pawn center is no longer that strong, as the d- and e-pawns cannot be supported by another pawn.

16...♖b6?! Black covers his b-pawn, but opens the path of the white bishop. Maybe it was better to move the king to a safer place – in the corner. 16...♖b8 17.♗fc1 ♖a8.

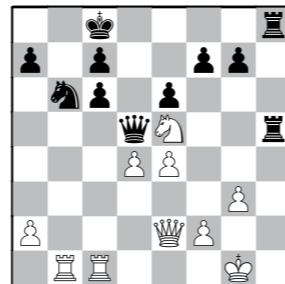
17.♗fc1



17...♗h5 Finally Black starts to make use of the open h-file – but not for a direct attack on the white king. He needs it to transfer the rook along the fifth rank.

18.♗f3?! White forces the rook to go where Black would probably go anyway! Instead, there were two other options.

The sharp one: 18.♗xc6, exchanging the main defender to break Black's pawn structure. Then 18...bxc6 19.♖e2 ♗dh8 20.♖e5 ♖d5 21.e4, when...

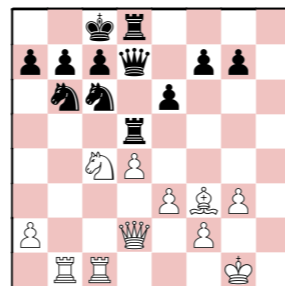


A) In the event of 21...♗h1+ 22.♖g2 ♗h2+ 23.♖f3, White's king is quite safe on f3.

B) 21...♖a5 22.♗c5 ♖a3 23.♗b3 ♖a4 24.♗bc3 ♗h1+ and it seems that White's pieces will soon destroy the black king. But fortunately for Black, he has a forced draw: 25.♖g2 ♗h2+ 26.♖f3 ♗xf2+ 27.♖xf2 ♖d1+ 28.♖g2 ♖h5 and White can't avoid a perpetual check. For example: 29.g4 ♗h2+ 30.♖g1 ♗h1+.

I would consider the second option – the natural 18.a4!, preserving all the threats on the queenside, while Black can hardly achieve anything on the kingside in spite of the open h-file. As already mentioned, the bishop controls the key squares, and will not allow Black's rooks to penetrate.

18...♗d5! Black sacrifices his rook to cover his queenside from the raking white bishop! He now threatens 19...♖xc4, followed by 20...♖e5.



19.♖xb6+ Again White hurries unnecessarily. He should have refrained

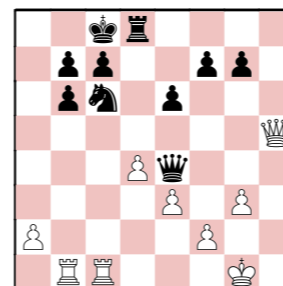
from trading pieces and played 19.♖c2±.

19...axb6 20.♗xd5 ♖xd5 In return for the sacrificed exchange Black has gained access to all the light squares on the kingside. He is now ready to play 21...♗h8 with an attack on the h-file.

21.♖e2 ♖e4? When you have to shoot – shoot. Don't talk! When you have a chance seize the open h-file – do it. Don't wait! Black wanted first to threaten ...♖xd4, but missed White's response.

After the correct 21...♗h8, 22.f3 is the only move, after which Black has the strong 22...e5! 23.dxe5 ♖xe5 24.e4 ♖e6. Here it is White who has to be careful of Black's threats on the h-file.

22.♖h5! White's queen is first to come to the h-file. Black is late and so White takes advantage of that!



22...e5?! This natural move loses. 22...g5! was the last chance. This pawn would effectively be a shield between the kingside and the center and, although White would retain a slight edge, it wouldn't be easy for him to break down Black's solid position.

23.d5! Ending the black knight's dream of coming to d4 or e5 and forcing Black to take the pawn. In addition, the d-file will be opened, and it is next to the black king! However, not 23.♖xf7? ♗h8–+.

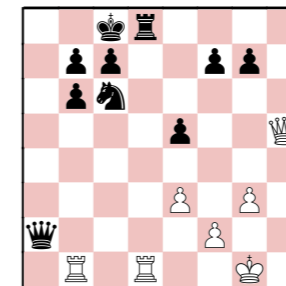
23...♖xd5 After 23...♗xd5 White can already grab the pawn: 24.♖xf7+–.

24.♗d1 White's rooks have been waiting a long time for some open files to work on. The time has come!

24...♖xa2 Black tries to pay the same price. White has survived despite having an open file right next to his king. Maybe Black can achieve the same thing?

Instead Black could probably have put up more resistance after 24...♖e6± 25.♗xd8+ ♖xd8 26.♗d1 f6 27.♖h7 ♖e7

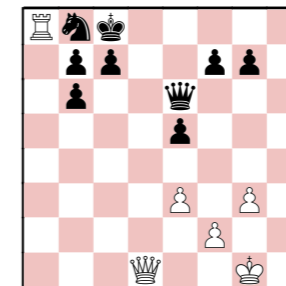
28.a4. However the rook is much stronger than the knight and in the long run White should be able to exploit his material advantage.



25.♗a1! Unfortunately Black cannot survive! White clearly wins. 25.♗xd8+? would be a mistake, as after 25...♖xd8 White cannot seize the a-file.

25...♗xd1+ 26.♖xd1 ♖c4 27.♗a4 27.♗a8+ ♖b8 28.♖h5 was also winning.

27...♖e6 28.♗a8+ ♖b8



29.♖h5 The white rook has penetrated to the black king's camp via the a-file. Now the white queen is finding its way in as well.

29...♖e8 30.♖h3+ Black resigned

And what about the case when a piece comes to g5 supported by a pawn on h4? Is it a good idea to attack like that? And is it worth accepting such a sacrifice? Let's take a look at the next game.

C07

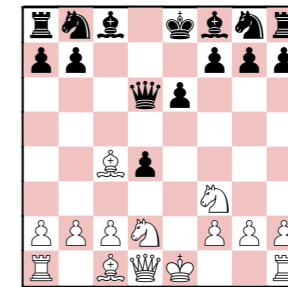
Eduardas Rozentalis 2588

Thomas Luther 2604

European Team Cup, Panormo 2001

This is a game in which White places his bishop on g5, protected by a pawn on h4, and Black decides to take it.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♖d2 c5 4.♖gf3 cxd4 5.exd5 ♖xd5 6.♗c4 ♖d6

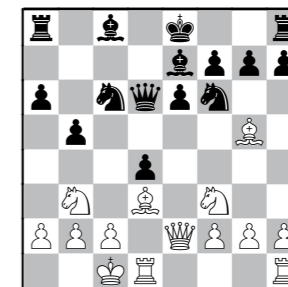


7.♖e2 Not the main move. However, it has given me several nice wins. The idea is quite simple. White wants to develop his queenside pieces quickly and castle long. Only after that will he regain the sacrificed central pawn.

7...♖b3 is not good because of 7...♖b4+? That's why White has to first protect his bishop. Normally White chooses 7.0-0.

7...♖f6 8.♖b3 ♖c6 9.♗g5 a6 Black can also play 9...♖b4+ 10.♗d2 ♖b6 11.0-0-0 ♗d7 12.♗g5 ♗c5, in an attempt to keep his central pawn alive.

10.0-0 b5 11.♗d3 ♗b7 11...♗e7 is probably more precise.



A) After 12.♖b1 ♗b7 we have the position from the game. However, 12...♗d7 saves the d4 pawn.

B) Or 12.♖bx4 ♖xd4 13.♖xd4 ♖d5! and Black gains the advantage. For example, after 14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.♖xb5 ♖g5+ 16.♖b1 axb5 17.♗xb5+ ♖f8, White doesn't have sufficient compensation for the piece.

12.♖b1 The immediate 12.♖bx4 ♖xd4 13.♖xd4 ♖d5! leads to a forced sequence after 14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.♖xb5 ♖xa2 16.♖c7+ ♖e7 17.♖h5 ♗h6+ 18.♖xh6 ♖a1+ 19.♖d2 ♖a5+ 20.c3 ♖xc7, when both kings are exposed and the position is pretty equal.

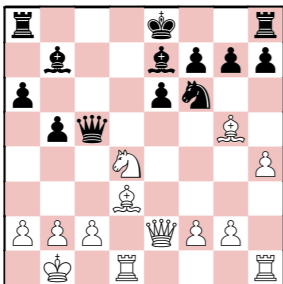
12...♗e7 13.♖bx4 ♖xd4 14.♖xd4 White has regained the pawn and completed his development. But Black just



needs to castle to be ready for the fight. The position is equal.

14...♖c5 Of course the knight can't be taken because of the discovered attack: 14...♗xd4 15.♙xb5+, but the natural 14...0-0 would be the most logical option.

15.h4! An important move and at that time a novelty. White protects his bishop and also shows his readiness to attack the black king should it decide to castle kingside.



15...0-0 16.♖he1 Why that? We were just talking about the attack on the h-file. But White needs to take control in the center. In fact he now threatens ♖f5 and possibly ♖xe6.

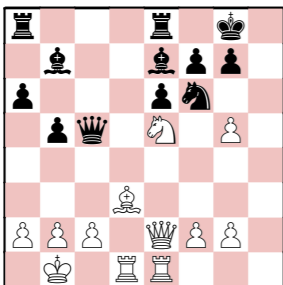
16...♗fe8 Protecting the bishop. In case of 16...♗fd8 White gets a slightly better rook endgame after 17.♖f5 exf5 18.♗xe7 ♗xe7 19.♗xe7 ♙xg2 20.♗g1 ♖f8 21.♗e5 ♙e4 22.♙xe4 fxe4 23.♙xf6 gxf6 24.♗xe4±.

17.♖f3 The knight has done its job on d4 and now reroutes to the more active e5 square.

17...h6 18.♖e5! White plays ♖e5 in spite of the fact that Black has just attacked the bishop. The sacrifice is only temporary.

18...hxg5 I would have refrained from accepting the sacrifice in favor of the natural 18...♗ad8.

19.hxg5



19...g6 The knight is hanging, but what is important for us is that the h-file is now open and White can quickly bring up his pieces to attack the black king. For example: 19...♖d5 20.♙h7+! with a quick mate.

Or 19...♙d6 20.f4 ♙xe5 21.fxe5 ♖d5 22.♗h5 with a strong attack.

20.gxf6 White still doesn't have any tactical decision at his disposal. After 20.♖xf7? ♖xf7 21.♗xe6+ ♖g7 22.gxf6+ ♙xf6 23.♗g4 g5 24.♗h5 ♖f8, Black's king looks safe.

Or 20.♙xg6? fxe6 21.♗d3 ♖e4 22.♗xe4 ♗ad8 23.♗d4 ♗xe5. Again Black is able to protect his king.

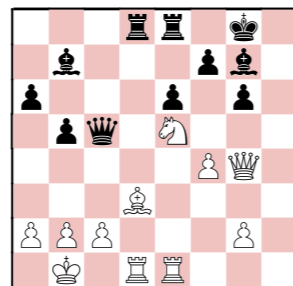
20...♙xf6 Black has given back the piece but in return brought the bishop closer to his king, hoping to cover the dark squares.

21.f4! White should still control the center! An exchange of the dark-squared bishop gives Black enough time to protect his kingside. 21.♖d7 ♗e7 22.♖xf6+ ♗xf6, followed by ...♖g7 and ...♗h8, and the h-file is covered.

21...♗ad8 After 21...♙xe5 22.fxe5 White would obtain a good target on f7 and a nice outpost on f6. Black's position would then be strategically lost.

22.♗g4 After this move we can see another problem with the open h-file. The fact that Black doesn't have a pawn on h7 makes his pawn structure more vulnerable.

22...♙g7 Losing immediately. Black's last chance was to play 22...♗f8 23.♗h1 ♗g7. However, after 24.♗de1, White's threat of ♖xg6 is a big problem for Black.



23.♖xf7! Now this sacrifice wins.

23...♖xf7 Black also loses in the event of 23...♗xd3 24.♗xd3 ♗f2 (24...♖xf7 25.♗d7+ ♗e7 26.♗xe6+) 25.♖h6+ ♖f8

26.♗xe6 ♗xe6 27.♗d8+ ♖e7 28.♗e8+! ♖xe8 29.♗xe6+ ♖d8 30.♖f7+ with a quick mate.

24.♙xg6+ ♖f8 25.♗xd8 Black resigned, because after 25...♗xd8 26.♗xe6, there is no defence against ♗f7 or ♗e8.

From the games we have just analyzed we can draw some general conclusions:

1. For the attacking side there is a good chance of getting to the opponent's king.
2. Even if there is no immediate decisive penetration, that can come later.
3. The king and the pawn structure are exposed and vulnerable. For the defending side it is quite dangerous because of the above-mentioned reasons.
4. The defending side can feel relatively safe if in possession of a strong bishop (on g2 or g7) or other pieces which can control the key penetration squares (h1+h3 or h6+h8).

To show that practical chess is much more complicated than these conclusions I would like to show you the next game.

A08

Kassa Korley 2432

Tiger Hillarp Persson 2514

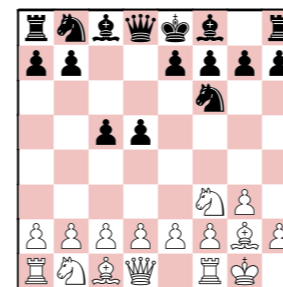
OBRO International, Copenhagen 2022

This is the most complex game in this article, where control of the open h-file passed several times from one side to the other. It was played by two very creative players – the Danish-American IM Kassa Korley and the Swedish GM Tiger Hillarp-Persson.

1.♖f3 c5 2.g3 ♖f6 3.♙g2 d5 4.0-0 White employs a very flexible setup. Quite a lot of players have a similar approach with the white pieces – particularly so in the earlier 'London system era'. Here White first develops his kingside, castles short, and only then decides whether he wants to attack Black's center by c2-c4 or d2-d4. Of course he can also simply play d2-d3 or b2-b3.



▲ Tiger Hillarp Persson Photo by David Llada



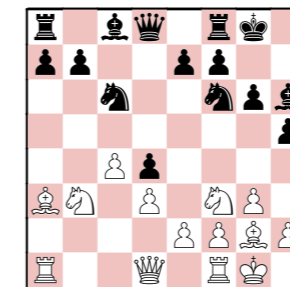
4...h5! It is Black who first demonstrates his uncompromising style. Note that he wants to immediately push his pawn further to h4, which means that an attack on the white king can start at any moment. Instead, Black has a lot of logical options: 4...g6, 4...e6 or 4...♖c6.

5.c4 d4 6.b4 You do what you want, I am playing the Volga Gambit! However a natural way of playing with 6.d3 ♖c6 7.e3 e5 8.exd4 exd4 9.♙f4 could seriously question Black's 4th move choice.

6...cxb4 7.a3 bxa3 Maybe 7...b3, keeping the a-file closed?

8.♙xa3 ♖c6 9.d3 g6 Black wants to retain his dark-squared bishop to ensure a more complicated game. Otherwise nothing is wrong with the natural 9...e5.

10.♖bd2 ♙h6 11.♖b3 0-0



12.♙c5 The central pawn is under attack. To save it Black has to sacrifice the exchange.

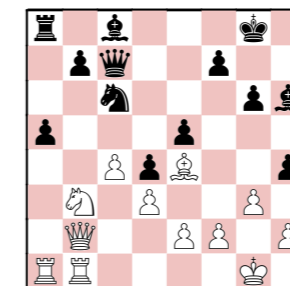
12...e5 No problem! For the exchange Black retains his strong center and obtains control of the dark squares.

13.♙xf8 ♖xf8 13...♙xf8 looks more natural.

14.♗b1 If White had realised what was going to happen a few moves later, maybe he would have played 14.h4.

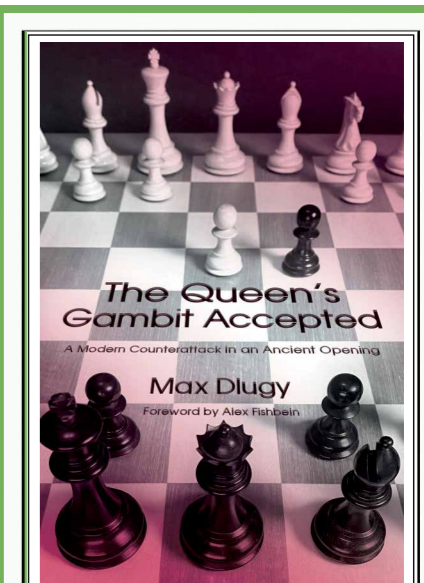
14...♖g8 15.♗b2 ♗c7 16.♗fb1 a5 17.♖fd2 h4! The time has come for this advance. Black seizes the first possible moment. Another interesting option was to advance on the other side of the board: 17...a4 18.♖c5 a3 and this pawn can become a very strong passer - or a serious weakness. Who knows?

18.♖e4 ♖xe4 19.♙xe4 What should Black do now? He has already carried out his plan of advancing the h-pawn as it has reached the h4 square.



19...♙f8 Persson decides to first transfer his bishop to b4. It's a good idea. However, first of all it was necessary to decide the fate of the h-pawn. 19...h3 or 19...hxg3 were both good alternatives.

20.♗d2 20.gxh4!? This pawn can sometimes be taken! Then 20...a4 21.h5!± and White closes the h-file to open the g-file, which he will be able to exploit for his attack.



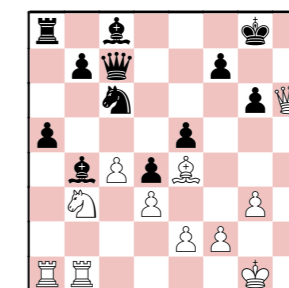
The Queen's Gambit Accepted
Max Dlugy

The Queen's Gambit Accepted is one of the oldest known openings in chess. It was first mentioned in chess literature in the late 15th century. In this book, the American grandmaster presents new analysis in established lines and rehabilitates many variations, turning existing theory on its head. Whether you play the QGA as White or Black, this creative, cutting-edge treatment of the Queen's Gambit Accepted will be indispensable.

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20...♙b4 21.♗h6 hxg3 22.hxg3



The h-file is now open. But who will profit from it? Maybe White, as his queen is already there?



22...♙f8 23.♖h1 ♗b4? A tactical mistake. 23...a4 24.♘d2 a3 or 23...♗b4 were more precise ways for Black to continue.

24.♖h6? White misses 24.♙xc6 bxc6 25.♘xd4! with a great advantage, as the knight can't be taken in view of 25...exd4 26.♙xb4.

24...♙f8 25.♖h4 ♗e7 26.♖h1?! White is trying to avoid the perpetual attack on his queen. But he should go to h2 followed by ♘g2 and ♖h1.

26...♘g7 Black is getting ready to fight for the open file, after moving his light-squared bishop and bringing his rook to h8.

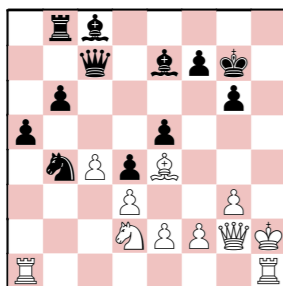
27.♘d2 ♗b4 27...♙d7! ♖ was natural and strong.

28.♖g2 ♖b8 Black has to waste time on this move as the pawn on b7 is unprotected.

29.♘h2? This is a big mistake which allows Black to seize the key file. It was necessary to block Black's light-squared bishop by 29.g4.

29...b6 Black could already seize the h-file by 29...♙h3 or 29...♙g4.

30.♙h1



30...♙h3! An unexpected blow!

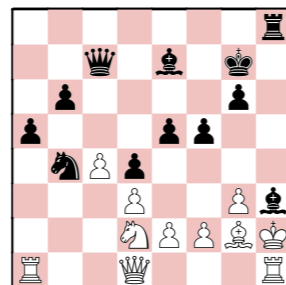
31.♖g1 A major concession. 31.♙xh3? would lose by force after 31...♖h8+ 32.♘g4 f5+ 33.♙xf5 gxf5+ 34.♘f3 e4+ 35.dxe4 fxe4+ 36.♘xe4 ♖f8+ 37.♘f6 ♖c6+ 38.e4 ♖xf6+ 39.♙e2 d3+ 40.♘d2 ♖b2+. But 31.♖xh3 ♖h8 32.♖xh8+ ♙xh8 33.♘g2+ leads to an unclear position.

31...♖h8 Threatening ...♙f1.

32.♖d1 f5! Black has now seized both the h-file and the initiative. He will now

endeavor to increase his advantage.

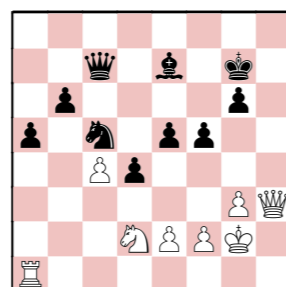
33.♙g2 In the event of 33.♙f3 e4! 34.dxe4 d3, Black opens the center and dark squares for his queen and bishop, as ...♖e5 and ...♙c5 will follow with great force.



33...♘xd3! Winning a second pawn for the exchange.

34.♘g1 The knight can't be taken because of the discovered check: 34.exd3 ♙g4+.

34...♙xg2 35.♖xh8 ♙xh8 36.♘g2 ♘c5 37.♖h1+ ♘g7 38.♖h3 So it's White who again controls the open h-file. Does it mean he stands better again? Well, there have been some changes. Fewer pieces are left on the board and by now Black has two pawns for the exchange, which represents a small material advantage. However, White preserves some chances of launching an attack on the open file.



38...♖b7+ 39.♘f3 39.f3 was another and probably better way to continue. White prepares a pawn attack with g3-g4 and after 39...♙f6 40.♖h1 ♘g8 41.g4 ♘e6 both sides have their chances.

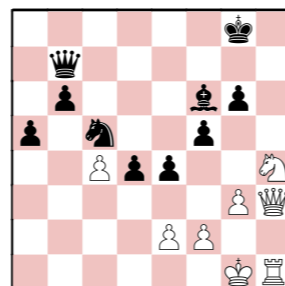
39...♙f6! The bishop transfers to the long diagonal, where it will be able to control the important g7 and h8 squares.

40.♖h1 ♘g8! A nice king retreat. White's pieces are stationed on the open h-file, but Black controls both the h8 and h7 squares. Any attempt to infiltrate by ♖h6 can be met by ...♖g7.

41.♘g1 An understandable attempt to free the knight and reinforce the attack. However White should play 41.♖b1, followed by ♖h6, in order to attack Black's pawns.

41...e4! Black is not afraid of the attack. He advances his central pawn and obtains a decisive advantage.

42.♘h4

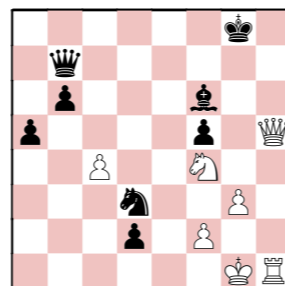


42...d3! There is no need to protect the g-pawn. It's more important to quickly create a passed d-pawn.

43.exd3 exd3 44.♘xg6 d2 45.♖h5 White has brought three pieces into the attack. Nevertheless Black remains confident as his king is safe!

45...♘d3 Black's knight has to prevent its counterpart from accessing the f4 square.

46.♖h4 Nor do other moves save White. For example, 46.♘f4 is met by a spectacular blow.



46...♖xh1+! 47.♙xh1 d1♖+ 48.♖xd1 ♘xf2+.

46.♖h3 is the most stubborn defense, although after 46...♗b2 47.♘e7+ ♖xe7 48.♖g6+ ♙f8 49.♖h6+ ♙g7 50.♖xd2 ♘xc4, Black has a decisive material advantage.

46...♗b2 Black is ready to promote his d-pawn so **White resigned.** ■

THE MAGNIFICENT 3

Remarkable Recent Games

By GM Sarunas Sulskis

Recent U.S. events have provided me with plenty of candidate games for this column, but Saint Louis Chess Club tends to stand out if distinctions among the numerous chess contests on U.S. soil have to be made. The American Cup 2023 has been extensively covered by my ACM colleagues, therefore I will focus on the Spring Chess Classic 2023. (The crosstables can be found on page 95 -Ed.)

Despite trailing the American Cup in terms of the competitors' status and average rating, the Spring Chess Classic nevertheless distinguished itself by staging a classic style closed tournament in which the losing player is not threatened with elimination from the contest, but continues on equal terms with the rest of the field. Moreover, in contrast to the American Cup, the Spring Chess Classic featured a greater international mix of players representing such countries as the Netherlands, Hungary, Uzbekistan and others. This added a flavor of diversity to the field and ultimately, I believe, served as a high-quality masterclass for the array of up-and-coming, often teenage American talents.

1

LIANG'S HEROIC KING WALK, A DORMANT ROOK AND A MONSTER KNIGHT!

I will start off with a Group B tournament game between a Hungarian GM Gergely Kantor and an American junior Jason Liang. Out of the Noteboom Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined, Kantor achieves a promising position with a nice pawn center, supported by a bishop pair. Kantor declares his intentions with four consecutive middlegame pawn moves, 19.e4, 20.e5, 21.f4, 22.c5, only to soon discover his invasion has stalled badly. After installing his bishop proudly on d5, Jason proceeds to squeeze White's threats dry by consecutively trading the light-squared bishops and then also the queens. By that stage White's position must have certainly lost all its appeal for Kantor. Nevertheless he could hardly have believed his eyes as young Liang escorted his king across the board on a breathtaking circuitous journey ...♙e8-d7-c6-b5-c4-d3-e4!

D31

Gergely Kantor	2532
Jason Liang	2529

Spring Chess Classic - B, St.Louis 2023

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗b4 6.e3 b5 7.♙d2 a5 8.axb5 ♙xc3 9.♙xc3 cxb5 10.b3 ♗b7 11.bxc4 b4 The players are walking along the path of the Noteboom Variation, which is quite old and famed for its middlegame complexity. 12.♗b2 ♘f6 13.♙d3 0-0 14.0-0 ♘bd7 15.♘d2 A well-known line in the Noteboom, but it allows Liang's knight jump. 15.♖c2 and 15.♙e1 are the most frequently seen alternatives.



15...♘c5!? Up to now this knight jump

hasn't been too popular. Players normally prefer 15...♖c7 or 15...e5. However, as a consequence of the present quite spectacular win by Liang, 15...♘c5 may increase in popularity.

16.♙c2 ♘ce4 17.f3 In terms of stopping Black's queenside pawns from advancing, the white queen does not feel out of sorts on d1. The direct 17.♘xe4 is therefore also worth considering. For example, 17...♘xe4 (or 17...♙xe4 18.♙a4 ♖c7 19.f3 ♙c6 20.♖b3) 18.f3 ♘f6 (18...♘d6 19.c5 ♘c4?? runs into a double attack 20.♖d3+-.) 19.♖f2 ♙a6 20.♗b3 ♖c7 21.♖c2 is better for White.

17...♘xd2 18.♖xd2 ♖e7 Liang demonstrates fine strategical vision. Instead of immediately pouncing on c4 with 18...♖c7, he connects his rooks and defends b4 in advance so as to enable the Noteboom trademark ...a5-a4 advance once an opportune moment arrives.

19.e4 Kantor, typical for any young player, now embarks on an ambitious central and kingside expansion, consisting of four consecutive pawn moves. Surprisingly, though, it also activates Liang's bishop on the long diagonal



Sarunas Sulskis is a nine-time champion of Lithuania and a regular member of his country's national team. As a teenager, he studied at the Botvinnik-Kasparov Chess Academy and later graduated from the Kaunas College of Management and Law. He qualified three times for the knock-out World Championship, and his most notable recent result is a victory at the traditional 2022/23 Hastings Chess Congress. In addition to his achievements as a player, Sarunas is a FIDE trainer, arbiter, writer, and passionate chess promoter.



◀ Jason Liang, Spring Chess Classic, St.Louis 2023. Photo by Austin Fuller