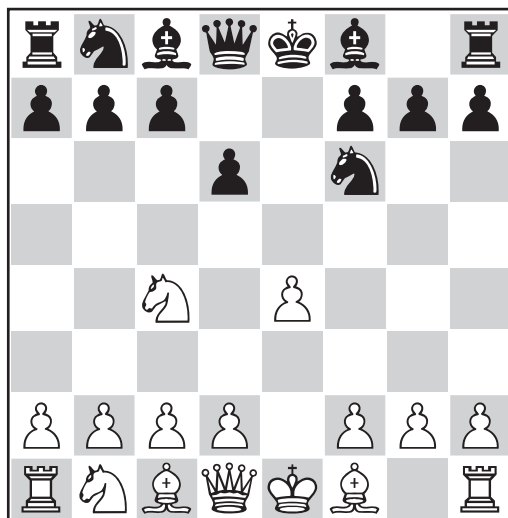


CHAPTER 5

David Navara

The Paulsen Attack in the Petroff



Play 4.♞c4!? en route to e3

Introduction

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♞c4

According to my database, Louis Paulsen was the first player who played this line. He played it twice in 1887. Let us start with comparing the surprising knight move with the familiar 4.♘f3. White's knight is exposed on c4, so subsequently White often has to play ♗e3. Surprisingly, the knight might be very well-placed here. It attacks the d5-pawn, especially in combination with ♗d3 and c4. In comparison to the classical variations, the pieces of both sides are in worse places. Clearly, the positions that arise from Paulsen's Variation are far more unusual. To be honest, objectively I think that 4.♞c4 allows Black to

equalize at some point. However, let us not forget that in the main line White must make a big effort to reach a slightly better position. It is for this reason that I employed this variation against GM Alexandra Kosteniuk. She reacted well and reached equality in the early stage of the game. A few months later, GM Shirov played the Petroff defence against me. He told me he was looking forward to meeting 4.♞c4. Be that as it may, let's look at (and play) Paulsen's 4.♞c4.

Naturally, the move

4...♗xe4

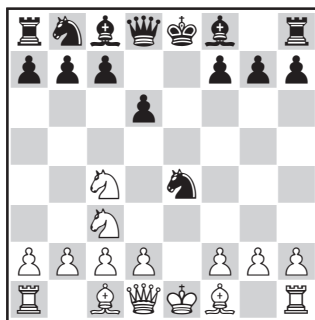
is practically forced, as 4...♔e7 5.♗e3 ♗xe4 6.d4 is advantageous for White. Now White has three normal continuations:

- 5. ♖c3
- 5. d4 d5 6. ♗e3
- 5. ♖e2

Other moves are not very good, e.g. 5. d3 ♗f6 6. d4 d5 7. ♗e5 is a transposition into an exchange variation of the French Defence. 7. ♗e3 does not seem very dangerous, either. In my opinion, the black knight is more vulnerable on e4. So more logical is 5. ♗e3, when 5... d5 (5... g6=) 6. d4 is a mere transposition, whereas 6. ♗e2 ♗e6 is too passive.

Old Main Line

1. e4 e5 2. ♗f3 ♗f6 3. ♗xe5 d6 4. ♗c4 ♗xe4 5. ♗c3



This move caused a revival of this variation in the 1990s. However, this line is not very dangerous for Black.

5... ♗xc3

Black has satisfactory results with 5... ♗f6 (I find this retreat a bit strange, but the knight on c4 is not placed ideally) 6. d4 ♗e7 (6... d5 7. ♗e5± looks like a strange version of the Exchange Variation of the French Defence. White's chances are only slightly better) 7. ♗e2 (7. ♗d3 ♗c6 8. d5 ♗e5 9. ♗xe5 dxe5 10. 0-0 0-0 11. ♖e1 ♗d7 12. ♗f5 ♗b6 13. ♗xc8 was played in a game Khairullin-Bezgodov. According to Bezgodov, both ♖xc8 and ♗xc8 should be sufficient for equality as Black has enough compensation for the pawn after 14. ♖xe5 ♗f6) 7... 0-0

8. 0-0 d5 9. ♗e5 (9. ♗e3 ♗e6 followed by c5 is OK for Black) 9... ♗f5 with equal play.

6. bxc3

The alternative is 6. dxc3 d5 7. ♗e3, when after 7... c6 8. ♖d4!? the lines fork:

- Black's queen would be misplaced after 8... ♖b6 9. ♖f4.

- 8... ♗d7 9. c4! (9. ♗d3 ♖f6!?) 9... ♖f6 10. ♖xf6 ♗xf6 11. cxd5 cxd5 12. c3 (12. ♗b5+ ♗d7 13. ♗xd7+ ♗xd7 14. 0-0 ♗c5 and the white knight is misplaced). I do not know whether White objectively stands a bit better or not, but 12... ♗c5 13. ♗c2 ♗f5 14. ♗e3 is preferable for White.

- 8... ♗e6 9. f4 (otherwise would Black play ♗d7) 9... f6 10. c4 c5 (10... dxc4 11. ♖e4 ♖e7 12. ♗xc4 ♗xc4 13. ♖xc4 ♖b4+ 14. ♗d2±) 11. ♖d3 d4 12. ♖e4 ♖e7 13. ♗d5 ♗xd5 14. ♖xe7+ ♗xe7 (14... ♗e7!? 15. cxd5 ♗d6 16. g3 ♗d7 17. c4 f5=) 15. cxd5 ♗d7 16. c4, Sulskis-Zulfugarli, Bydgoszcz 1999, seems to be equal.

Instead of 7... c6 Black can also play 7... ♗e6!?, as the game is equal after both 8. ♗d3 ♗c5, and 8. ♖h5 ♖d6 9. ♗d2 ♗d7 10. 0-0 0-0, Benjamin-Lev, London 1987.

6... d5 7. ♗e3 c6

This move, which prepares 8... ♗d6, seems to be the best reaction to White's set-up.

8. d4 ♗d7

After 8... ♗d6 9. ♗d3 (9. c4 dxc4 10. ♗xc4 0-0 11. 0-0) 9... 0-0 10. 0-0 f5 11. f4 ♗e6 Black has equalized. In Mochna-Sudakova, St Petersburg 2002, White continued 12. g4?!, but Black was better after 12... fxe4 13. f5 ♖h4 14. ♗xg4 ♗f7 15. ♗f4 ♗xf4 16. ♖xf4 ♖g5 17. ♖f1 ♗d7 (17... h5 18. h4!).

9. ♗d3 ♗f6 10. 0-0 ♗e7 11. ♗f5 ♗xf5 12. ♗xf5 0-0

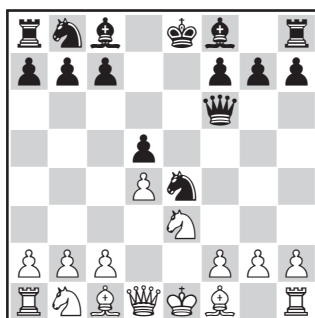
White has the bishop pair, but his pawn structure gives Black enough counter-chances, Velickovic-Mikhalchishin, Cetinje 1992.

Paulsen's idea

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗c4 ♗xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♗e3

This is Paulsen's idea. GM Smagin played it until 1990.

6...♖f6



We will treat this as the main line, because Black has terrible results with many of the normal moves, including 6...♗e6, 6...♗e7 and so on. Let us investigate, for, objectively, they cannot be all that bad:

● **6...♗e6** 7.♗d3 ♗d6, with two options.

– 8.c4 ♗b4+?! (8...c6 9.♖b3 ♖c7=) 9.♕f1! 0-0? (9...c6 10.cxd5 cxd5 11.♗xe4 dxe4 12.d5 ♗d7 13.♖d4 and the arising complications seem to be in White's favour) 10.a3 ♗e7 11.cxd5 ♗xd5 12.♗xd5 ♖xd5 13.♖e2+– ♖c6 14.♖xe4 ♖xc1+ 15.♕e2 ♖xb2+ 16.♗d2 f5 (16...g6 17.♖hb1) 17.♖xe7 ♗c6.

– 8.0-0 0-0 9.c4 c6 10.♗c3 (10.♗xe4 dxe4 11.d5 cxd5 12.cxd5 ♗d7 13.♗c3 ♖h4 14.g3 ♖e7 15.f3 exf3 16.♖xf3=) 10...♗xc3 11.bxc3 ♗d7 equal.

Instead of 7.♗d3 I played 7.♗d2?! ♗xd2 8.♗xd2 c5! when Black had easily equalised in Navara-Kosteniuk, Lausanne 2004: 9.♗b5+ ♗c6 10.♗c3 (10.c3=) 10...♖b6 11.♗xc6+ bxc6 12.0-0 and now White has to be careful. After 12...♗d6 13.♖d2 0-0 14.dxc5 ♗xc5 15.b4 the game was equal.

● **6...♗e7** 7.♗d3 (after 7.♗d2 ♗xd2 8.♗xd2 White has at best a tiny edge) 7...0-0 8.0-0 ♗f6 (8...♗c6 9.c3) 9.♗f5 (or 9.♗d2 c5!? 10.dxc5 ♗xc5 11.♗b3 ♗b6 12.♗f5 ♗e4=) 9...♗xf5 10.♗xf5 with a minimal advantage.

● **6...c6** and again White can consider both 7.♗d3 and 7.♗d2.

– 7.♗d3 ♗d6, and now:

– 8.c4 0-0 9.cxd5 ♖h4 10.♗xe4 (10.g3 ♗xg3 11.fxg3 ♗xg3∞) 10...♖xe4 11.♗c3 ♖h4 with good compensation.

– 8.♗d2 f5 is also good for Black. In Tigran L. Petrosian-Nasri, Fajr 2003, White played 9.c4 f4 10.cxd5 ♗xd2 11.♗c2, but Black reached a good position after 11...♖e7+ 12.♖e2 (12.♕xd2 0-0∞) 12...♗f3+! 13.gxf3 ♖xe2+ 14.♕xe2 cxd5.

– 8.0-0 0-0 9.c4 ♗e6 (for some strange reason, this move has not been played so far) 10.♗c3 (10.♗xe4 dxe4 11.♗c3 f5 12.d5 cxd5 13.cxd5 ♗d7 looks like an equal position, especially since 14.♗c4 fails to 14...♗xh2+) 10...♗xc3 11.bxc3 ♗d7 with equality.

– More chances for an advantage are offered by 7.♗d2 ♗xd2 (7...♗d6 8.♗xe4 dxe4 9.♗c4 0-0 10.0-0 with an idea f2-f3 is a bit unpleasant for Black. Perhaps simply 7...♗e7!?) 8.♗xd2 ♗d7 (White's pieces are a bit better placed, but Black has no major problems) 9.♖e2 (or 9.♖f3!?) 9...♖e7 10.0-0-0 ♗f6 11.♗b4 ♖e6 12.♗xf8 ♖xf8 planning ♗d7, 0-0-0.

● **6...♗c6** 7.c3 ♗e6 8.♗d2 (8.♗d3 ♖h4!? 9.♖f3 0-0-0 10.♗d2!?) 8...f5 9.♖b3!?.

● **6...g6** was twice played by Mikhailchishin, but White was better in Smagin-Mikhailchishin, Russian Championship Riga 1985, after 7.♗d2 ♗g7 8.♗xe4 dxe4 9.c3 0-0 10.♗c4 ♗d7 11.0-0 c5 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.♖c2 ♗e6 14.♖d1! (Smagin).

7.♖e2

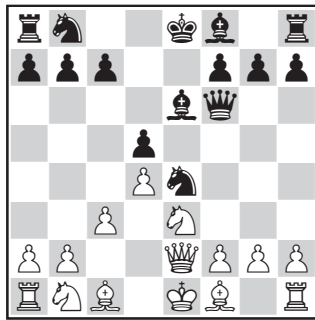
More spectacular is 7.♗b5+ which was once

played by Smagin: 7...c6 8.0-0 cxb5 (accepting the challenge, 8...e6 leads to an equal position) 9.dxd5 ♖d6 10.♞e1 ♜xd5 11.♟c3 ♜d8 12.♞xe4+ ♟e7 13.♟g5 (in the game happened 13.♞e2, when Black could have played 13...f5 14.♞e5 ♟c6). However, Black transposed to the main line after 13...♟c6 14.♟g5) 13...♟c6 (13...f6 14.♟xf6 gxf6 15.♞h5+ ♟f8 16.♞ae1 ♟c6 17.♟d5 probably leads to a draw) 14.♞e2 – 14...f6 15.d5 ♟e5 (15...♟f5 16.dxc6 ♟xe4 17.♞xe4=) 16.♟xb5 is about equal, as White has enough compensation after 16...a6 (16...0-0 17.d6 ♟xd6 18.♞d1) 17.♞xe5! fxe5 18.♟xe7 ♟xe7 19.♞xe5+. – 14...♟e6 15.♟xe7 ♟xe7 16.d5 ♟xd5 17.♞d1 is equal according to Smagin.

– 14...♟f5 15.♟xe7 ♟xe7 16.♞e5 0-0 17.♞xe7 ½-½ Smagin-Makarichev, Moscow 1987.

7...e6 8.c3

But not 8.g3? ♜xd4 (Sulskis-Mamedyarov, Dubai 2002) 9.♞b5+ ♟d7 10.♞xb7 ♞b8 11.♞xc7 ♟d6 12.♞c6 0-0 (12...♞xb2?).



8...c6!

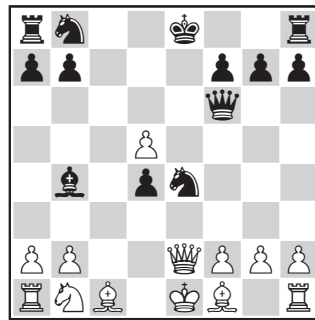
Less accurate is 8...c6. White should not play 9.g3, as this allows Black to play 9...0-0-0 10.♟g2 ♞g6 (10...h5 11.♟d2 ♟xd2 12.♟xd2 h4 is about equal) 11.♟d2 f5 12.♟xe4 fxe4 13.f3 (13.♟d2 h5!?) 13...exf3 14.♟xf3 ♟d6 with equality.

Stronger is 9.♟d2 0-0-0, when:

– 10.♟xd5 cannot offer White any advantage. The following continuation seems to be the simplest way to equality: 10...♟xd5 11.♟xe4 ♟xe4 (11...♞g6!? 12.♟g3 ♟d6 promises Black full compensation, e.g. 13.♞h5 ♞e6+ 14.♟e3 g6=) 12.♞xe4 ♟xd4! 13.♟d3 (not 13.cxd4?? ♟b4+, after 13.♟e3 ♟f5 Black has no problems) 13...♟c5. The game is equal. Therefore, stronger is

– 10.g3 ♟xd2 (10...♞g6 11.♟xe4 dxe4 12.♟g2 f5 13.f3 seems to be slightly better for White as Black's knight is not placed very well) 11.♟xd2 h5 12.h4± (12.♟g2 Smagin-Makarichev, Moscow 1990, 12...h4 13.0-0-0 is also playable) and White has better prospects owing to the weakness of the d5-pawn. White intends 13.0-0-0, ♟g2, ♟f3, ♟g2, ♟f4.

8...c5 was played only once, in Jansa-Volkman (Austria tt 2002), but it deserves serious attention. After 9.c4! (9.dxc5 ♟xc5 and White's knight is placed pretty badly) 9...cxd4 10.♟xd5 ♟xd5 11.cxd5 ♟b4+



Not dangerous is 12.♟d1: 12...♞e7 13.f3 (13.♟d2 ♟xd2 14.♟xd2 ♟d7=) 13...♟f6 (13...♟d6?! 14.a3 ♟a5 15.♟f4) 14.♞xe7+ (14.a3 ♟d6 15.♞xe7+ ♟xe7 16.♟c4 ♟bd7 does not cause a big difference) 14...♟xe7 15.♟c4 ♞c8 and Black has equalised. Therefore, Jansa played 12.♟d2, when after