

## 4. IN THE BEGINNING...



**I**n the opening chapter, *The King Must Die!*, we looked at different ways to ensure that we reached positions out of the opening that suited our aggressive style of play; steering positions, gearing our openings and interfering with opponents plans.

These were, however, relatively general ideas – extremely useful, but not all-encompassing. In this chapter we are going to look more closely at the opening and find ways to increase the chances of our preparation hitting our opponents where it really hurts!

## Streetfighting Chess

It is very important to realise that preparing for specific opponents need not be the preserve of the IM or GM plying their trade around the globe, Fritz-powered laptops constantly searching for specific tactical weaknesses in the opening repertoire of their next opponent.

While the likes of Fritz and ChessBase are a fact of chess life nowadays – and extremely useful tools to have on occasion – at the less-exalted level of the weekend congress, club championship or local league match there is still plenty of scope for the Streetfighter in us to hatch devious plans!

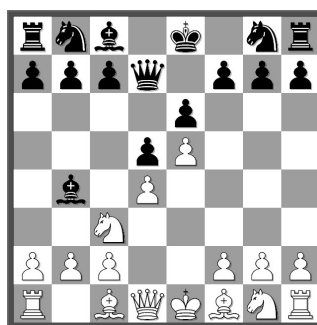
To this end one of my favourite 'hobbies' during tournaments is to take a quick-but-close look around the other boards about 20-30 minutes into a session. It is usually around this time that the opening is coming to an end and the players sink into thought, planning their middle-game strategies, quite unaware that beady Streetfighting eyes are watching them, scanning score-sheets for move-orders and taking (mental!) notes for future reference.

It may seem of little importance that Joe Bloggs plays 2.♘c3 against the Sicilian and enters the Closed Variation, whereas Jane Bloggs plays 2.♘c3 followed by 3.♖f3 hoping to trick you with her move-order and enter one of the mainlines, but little nuggets of information such as these are incredibly useful. Given that most of us play our chess within a limited pool of opponents, there is a distinct possibility that we will meet the same players time and again in congresses, local leagues, national club competitions, etc. and knowing where to begin our preparation is half the battle. To wit:–

## Burnett, A – Buchanan, W French Defence

*Grangemouth Premier 1992*

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘b4 4.e5  
♙d7!?



Petrosian's patent I believe, which has enjoyed sporadic bouts of popularity but has never gained widespread acceptance, probably because of the good-standing of the main-line alternatives 4...c5 and 4...♗e7. However, we know already that uncommon or unpopular cannot be readily equated with bad or dubious, so it won't do to play just anything against it.

Nor do we really wish to delve into the most popular response to this system, namely 5.♗g4, because that would be fighting on our opponent's territory where they will doubtless be well-versed in whatever theory there is and likely have a good few (or even a few good!) ideas up their sleeves.

Remember, they will probably be playing 4...♗d7 almost every time they meet 3.♘c3, whereas we will normally meet with ...c5 or ...♗e7 as mentioned, so they will also have experience on their side.

Instead, having noted Walter's predilection for this side-line on one of my walks a few

months previously, I had prepared an unusual reply which I hoped would throw him out of his usual stride.

### **5.h4!**

If Black can take a few liberties with his development (4...♖d7 hardly follows the natural rules of opening a chess game) then surely White can also?

The idea behind the thrust of the h-pawn so early is two-fold; a general attempt to gain some extra space on the king-side being the first idea, and the second more specific aim will soon be revealed. Where do such ideas come from in the opening? Well, this one I noted from a game of Nigel Davies which I happened upon in an old magazine and decided to borrow. I prefer to fill my chess memory with odd snippets from newspapers, magazines, etc. rather than cram it with vast reams of theory which are often out-dated as soon as they are played.

Such is the speed of travel in the information age that, for example, a novelty employed by Judit Polgar, can be analysed and transmitted automatically to your home computer before her opponent has had time to consider a reply!

In any event, 5.h4 may not be brand new, but it is definitely aggressive, less-well investigated, and by no means inconsistent with the general aims of White in many lines of the French Defence.

### **5...b6**

Black could consider the response 5...h5 here, but it is unappealing because after

6.♗c2 he won't really want to play the further ...g6 (since his dark-squares on the king-side would be very weak) and otherwise he must sacrifice the h-pawn.

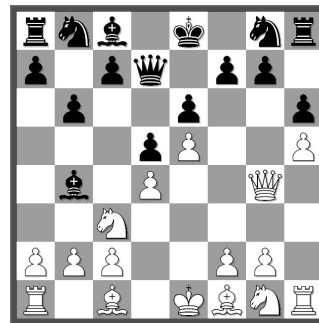
### **6.h5**

Now Black must ponder whether he should get on with his own plan of exchanging the light-squared bishops immediately with 6...♗a6, but in doing so allow the disruptive 7.h6, or take a move out to prevent this audacious advance?

### **6...h6**

Opting for the safer response since 6...♗a6 7.h6 would present Black with yet another decision; to play 7...g6 leaving a serious hole on f6, or to try 7...gxh6 or...♗xh6 when both the h-pawns might well fall in the long run.

### **7.♖g4!**



If the advance of the h-pawn seemed slightly extravagant early on, then this delayed version of the ♖g4 idea shows its merits more clearly.

Now the reply 7...f5 (which is how Black

## Streetfighting Chess

regularly answers 5.♖g4) would leave a glaring weakness on g6 which the white knight's natural routes e2–f4 or h3–f4 would seek to exploit.

It is practical problems such as these which are so difficult to meet over the board, and which we should be aiming to set our adversaries in every game.

Already we have asked questions of Black on moves 5, 6 and 7, rather than allow him to follow the theoretical recommendations under–pinning Petrosian's system.

### 7...♗f8!?

So the bishop has been forced to declare its intentions without White having spent a tempo on the usual a3 – the first small victory in the game.

### 8.♗d2 ♗a6 9.♗e2!

And with this move White aims to prove that Black will run out of constructive ideas first, and will be forced at some point to re–develop White's knight towards the king–side for him by exchanging on e2.

### 9...♘e7 10.b4 c6 11.♘f3 ♘f5 12.♖b1!

Envisaging the opening of the b–file (as Black will probably have to play ...c5 eventually in an attempt to relieve his cramped position), when the rook will be well–positioned.

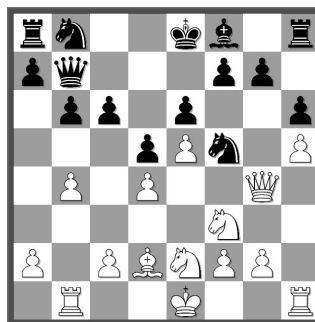
Never forget how important it is to seek out your opponent's possible plans for counter–play, no matter how difficult their position

may appear at first sight, and see if you can find a way to increase the activity of your own pieces in response.

### 12...♗xe2

What else? If 12...♗c7 then 13.a4 (intending b5), or 13.♖h3 (threatening to win the knight with g4) puts the ball firmly back in Black's court.

### 13.♘xe2 ♖b7?

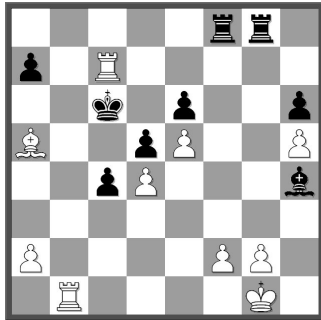


This is a serious misjudgement, but Walter had already used an hour on the clock to this point dealing with White's opening plan.

He had to try the immediate 13...c5 here, but the following game shows that even with an extra tempo in this position Black is struggling:

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 ♖d7 5.h4 b6 6.h5 h6 7.♖g4 ♗f8 8.♗d2 ♗a6 9.♗e2 ♘e7 10.b4 ♘f5 11.♖b1 ♗xe2 12.♘xe2 c5 13.bxc5 bxc5 14.♘f3 ♘c6 15.0-0 ♗e7 16.♘g3 ♘cxd4 17.♘xd4 ♘xd4 18.♖xg7 0-0 19.♖xf7 ♗h4 20.♖g6 ♖hg8 21.♖d3 ♖c6 22.c3 ♗xg3 23.cxd4 ♗h4 24.♖h7 ♖d7 25.♖c2 c4 26.♖b2 ♖c6 27.♗a5 ♘d7 28.♖b7+ ♖xb7 29.♖xb7+ ♘c6 30.♖fb1 ♖df8

31.♞c7# 1-0



*Burnett, A – Farrell, N  
(Edinburgh 1994)*

Back to the main game, where Black threatens to go a-hunting for pawns on the queen-side. With the majority of his forces still undeveloped this is tantamount to suicide, however facing pressure both on the board and the clock often leads to the adoption of dubious plans – a key idea behind the Streetfighting ethos.

**14.0-0 ♖a6 15.♘g3 ♘xg3**

15...♘e7 presents White with a simple plan of 16.♘h4 with the intention of f4–f5 cracking open the black king's cover, while the text move obviously hands White the open f-file.

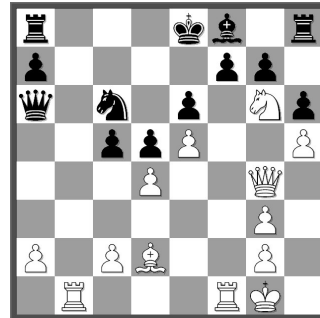
It is already hard to offer Black any advice as 15...♞c8 would be a rather ignominious retreat in light of his previous 2 moves.

**16.fxg3 c5**

The alternatives are less challenging; 16...♘d7 puts the knight on the wrong circuit as it must attempt to reach d8 to be

useful in defence, while 16...♞xa2 17.♘h4 ♞xc2 18.♞f4 shows exactly why 'pawn-grabbing with a queen' gets such bad press.

**17.bxc5 bxc5 18.♘h4 ♘c6 19.♘g6!**



With Black planning the aforementioned ...♘d8 manoeuvre defending the vulnerable e6 and f7 squares, it is imperative that White strikes while the iron is hot.

As I have said before (and doubtless will again in the future!) there is no need to be scared of giving up material in positions where your opponent's pieces are languishing at home and contributing nothing to the cause.

White could even consider an immediate 19.♞xf7 here, such is the relative superiority in activity his pieces hold over Black's, but a sacrifice of lesser value is often safer if both alternatives look equally promising in other respects.

**19...fxg6**

Black may as well accept the proffered knight as the alternatives (after 19...♞g8 20.♘xf8) of 20...♞xf8 21.♞xg7 or 20...♞xf8 21.♞xc6 are in any event extremely unappealing.

## Streetfighting Chess

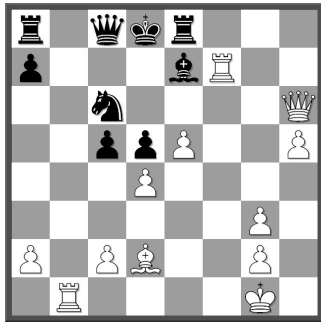
### 20. ♖xe6+ ♕e7

If Black tries 20...♖d8, then 21.♕a5+! either wins the queen or mates.

We should learn to always consider such moves (despite the bishop being en-prise to two pieces) when we are attacking.

Almost all manuals on tactical chess state that 'checks and captures' should top the list of candidate moves in any given position and it is important that we incorporate this into our way of thinking at the board.

### 21. ♖f7 ♖c8 22. ♖xg6 ♖d8 23. ♖xg7 ♖e8 24. ♖xh6



White has gained several pawns for the sacrificed knight, a useful safety net should things go awry. It should, though, only take a few prods and pokes in the right places to expose the black king and finish the game with a mating attack.

### 24...cxd4

24...♗xd4 is inadvisable because of 25.♕a5+ and 26.♖d6 mating, while 24...♖b8 allows 25.♖xb8 ♗xb8 [25...♖xb8 26.♖xc6 also wins] 26.♕a5+ again with mate on d6.

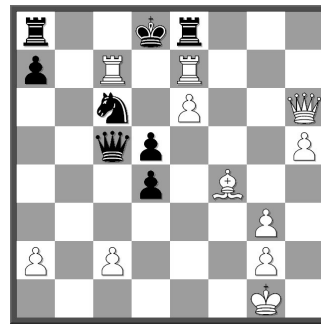
Now the b1 rook enters the fray, intent on

leading the black queen on a merry dance away from her protection of the king.

### 25. ♖b5 ♖d7 26. e6 ♖d6 27. ♕f4 ♖a3 28. ♖b7

Taking on d5 was also possible, as was the computer-inspired mating sacrifice 28.♖g5!

### 28...♖c5 29. ♖d7+ ♖c8 30. ♖c7+ ♖d8 31. ♖fxe7



and now Black resigned since 31...♖xe7 is mated by 32.♖f8+ ♖e8 33.♖d7+ ♖c8 34.♖xc8+ and 35.♖xd8, so he must give up his queen after which the white queen, bishop and h-pawn are an unstoppable force.

## 1-0

Of course, this type of prepared surprise in the opening isn't immediately winning (as opposed, for example, to a 'Fritz-found' refutation of a sharp line in the Sicilian or Benoni) but its advantages are clear: firstly, the opponent has to deal with immediate problems at the board, with the clock ticking and an opponent (us!) who has already discovered some or many of the tactical and positional threats.

Secondly, these ideas can be re-used several times before anyone cottons on to their worth (the 5.h4 system has so far brought me 6 wins and 2 draws against very decent opposition).

We obviously won't necessarily re-use the **same** idea next time we meet the **same** opponent, which brings me on to the important concept of '**re-cycling**'.

Using the game just shown to highlight this idea, imagine that a few tournaments later we are paired again as White against the same opponent. Now, what do we play against his French Defence?

We have to assume he has in the meantime found an interesting counter to the 5.h4 plan and is looking forward to playing it and gaining revenge, so we switch from 3.Nc3 to 3.Nd2 and use the sharp 6.c4 idea we will encounter on page 56.

A couple of months later we meet again and our opponent is ready to meet both these ideas, but in the meantime we have prepared 4.Qd3 in the Winawer (featured on page 61). This constant wrong-footing of an opponent in the opening works excellently in practice – think about it, 3 pieces of preparation recycled against 3 different players of the French can cover 9 games, and is the chess equivalent of 'hit and run'.

And whatever we may lose, with respect to playing and knowing a system inside out, we more than make up for in the experience gained playing these variations on a theme. And of course this idea is not exclusive to the French Defence – these sharp sidelines exist in all openings and for both colours.

How much more effective and practical does this approach sound compared to trying to

learn, remember and update all the mainline theory?

Time to move on to some even more specific preparation now.

At some point in their chess career everyone will have been caught out by an unusual or quirky opening (that is, even more quirky or unusual than the ones the Streetfighter will be employing!).

This is only to be expected since we can't possibly learn everything, but it's not enough to simply write-off openings such as the Sicilian Wing Gambit (1.e4 c5 2.b4?!) or the Grob (1.g4?!) – we have to prepare an answer for when we next meet these dodgy variations.

The amount of time we can spend studying chess at home may well be limited, but its preferable to invest a comfortable hour or two there, rather than a nervy 15 minutes or so over the board if we get caught unawares in the opening! The following game highlights the practical value of this approach to less-well-charted openings.

### **Burnett, A – Minnican, A** Sicilian Defence

*Glenrothes Premier 1998*

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6?!

