

**Neil McDonald**

# **The King's Indian attack**

**move by move**

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# About the Author

English Grandmaster **Neil McDonald** has firmly established himself as one of the world's leading chess writers, with many outstanding works to his name. He is also a respected chess coach, who has trained many of the UK's strongest junior players.

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*Rudolf Spielmann: Master of Invention*

*Starting Out: 1 e4*

*Starting Out: Queen's Gambit Declined*

*Starting Out: The Dutch Defence*

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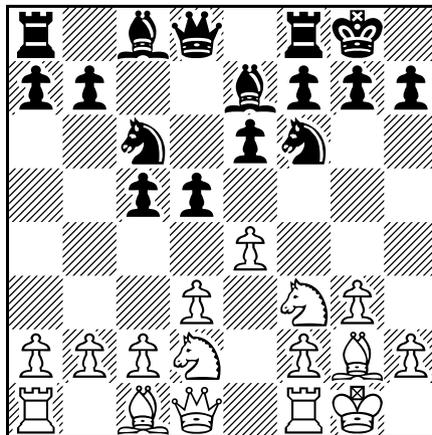
*The Ruy Lopez: Move by Move*

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# Introduction

The King's Indian Attack (or KIA) is a flexible opening system that can be employed by White after 1  $\text{Nf3}$  or against the French, Sicilian, and Caro-Kann if he chooses to begin with 1  $\text{e4}$ . A typical opening sequence is 1  $\text{Nf3}$   $\text{d5}$  2  $\text{g3}$   $\text{Nf6}$  3  $\text{Bg2}$   $\text{e6}$  4  $\text{O-O}$   $\text{c5}$  5  $\text{d3}$   $\text{Nc6}$  6  $\text{Bbd2}$   $\text{Be7}$  7  $\text{e4}$   $\text{O-O}$ , while the same position could be reached via a Sicilian or French move order after for example 1  $\text{e4}$   $\text{c5}$  2  $\text{Nf3}$   $\text{e6}$  3  $\text{d3}$   $\text{Nc6}$  4  $\text{g3}$   $\text{d5}$  5  $\text{Bbd2}$   $\text{Nf6}$  6  $\text{Bg2}$   $\text{Be7}$  7  $\text{O-O}$   $\text{O-O}$ .



The characteristic features of the King's Indian Attack are the fianchetto of the bishop on g2 and the setting up of a d3 and e4 pawn chain. White will develop his pieces in support of the strongpoint on e4.

In the King's Indian Attack there is no immediate clash between the two armies. Both sides are on the whole left undisturbed during the opening phase: only when White threatens to encroach on space in the centre does the game begin to develop its individual character. For this reason it is possible to describe the typical piece and pawn deployments by White and Black without becoming bogged down in detail or having to point out too many exceptions.

As we see in the example above, the two sequences that begin with 1  $\text{Nf3}$  or 1  $\text{e4}$  could well transpose into each other. However, this isn't always the case. Whether to start 1  $\text{e4}$  or 1  $\text{Nf3}$  is the eternal dilemma of the King's Indian Attack player. If you play 1  $\text{e4}$  you aren't guaranteed to get a KIA opening system: for example, after 1  $\text{e4}$   $\text{d5}$  there's no good way to

## *The King's Indian Attack: Move by Move*

maintain a pawn on e4. This lack of universality might make you veer towards 1 ♘f3. Here a possible drawback compared to 1 e4 is that you have to face the solid Slav line after 1 ♘f3 d5 2 g3 c6 in which Black puts his bishop on f5 or g4 in the near future. Facing the Dutch after 1 ♘f3 f5 might also not appeal to some players.

I have standardized the move order in the games for the sake of clarity. However, I should mention that there are other ways besides 1 e4 and 1 ♘f3 to reach the familiar KIA set-up. For example, Nakamura played 1 g3! in his game with Navara in this book. That's probably the ultimate in flexibility, though of course if he chooses Black can avoid the KIA with 1...e5.

The power to force the opponent into an opening scheme that you have carefully worked out is an advantageous use of the white pieces, even if objectively speaking it is about equal. I hope this book helps you understand the King's Indian Attack and that you win many games with it.

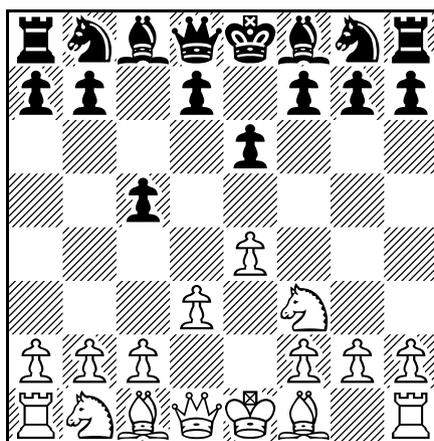
Neil McDonald,  
Gravesend,  
May 2014

# Chapter One

## KIA Versus the French

### Fischer's old favourite

The King's Indian Attack (KIA) has the honour of being the first game in Bobby Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games*. The US Maestro remarks of the position after 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d3:



“This used to be my favourite at the time [of his game with James Sherwin, New Jersey 1957]. I thought it led to a favourable variation of the King's Indian reversed, particularly after Black has committed himself with ...e7-e6.”

Of course, Fischer went on to become a massive openings expert after 3 d4 in the Sicilian and the rest is history. However, for those of us with less time (not to mention originality and genius), when it comes to the study of the opening phase, the King's Indian Attack remains an especially effective choice once Black has played ...e7-e6. In fact, some very strong players only have the KIA in their repertoire after 1 e4 e6 or 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6.

## Black's committal ...e7-e6 move

**Question:** Why is 1 e4 e6 2 ♖f3 c5 or 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 so committal?

**Answer:** We need only compare the situation with that after 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 d6 3 d3. The move ...e6 is committal in that firstly it shuts in the bishop on c8, thereby limiting the chances of generating counterplay with ...♗g4. As a consequence there will be less pressure on White's centre. In fact developing the bishop to any reasonable square will take time and effort.

Secondly, if Black responds to the KIA by building a centre with ...d6 and ...e5 he has lost a tempo by having to move the e-pawn twice. And, thirdly, the move ...e6 has loosened Black's centre somewhat. After the alternative 2...d6 3 d3 he can just get on with developing his kingside with ...♖f6, ...g7-g6, and ...♗g7, thereby not weakening his dark squares.

## Black doesn't fianchetto on g7 in this chapter

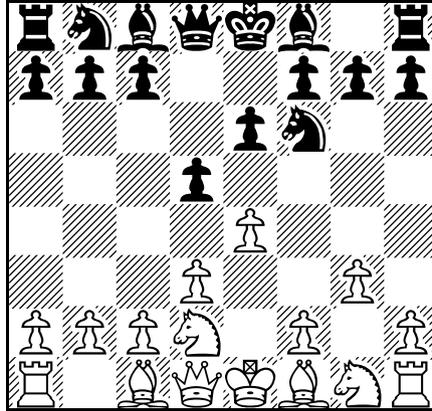
Whether Black answers 1 e4 with 1...e6 or 1...c5 there is a strong possibility that an identical position will be reached after a few moves. Technically speaking, we might say something like "the game started as a French, but transposed into a Sicilian set-up" or vice versa. For the sake of clarity, in this chapter we look at lines in which Black plays his pawns to e6 and d5 versus the King's Indian Attack (KIA), and puts his dark-squared bishop on e7, d6 or even c5 according to circumstances. In the next chapter we look at all variations in which Black puts a pawn on c5 and fianchettoes the bishop on g7 – he may play the French ...e6 move as part of the process or he may avoid it, preferring ...d6 for example.

This means that if Black begins the game with the moves 1 e4 e6 2 ♖f3 c5 (or 1...c5 2 ♖f3 e6) 3 d3 ♗c6 4 g3 g6 5 ♗g2 ♗g7 6 0-0 ♖ge7 you need to look for this set-up in Chapter Two.

## An important note on move order

If variety is the spice of life, then the King's Indian Attack is very rich in experiences. Its basic structure can be reached through all sorts of move orders, with 1 g3, for example, being the way the first game in this chapter started.

Black has more flexibility in the French specific move order than in the Sicilian move order. For example, after 1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 ♗d2 ♖f6 if White plays the natural 4 ♗gf3 the reply 4...♗c5 is a real nuisance if you want to fianchetto on g2. The reason why this is so will be explained in the analysis to 3 ♖e2 in Game 6. Suffice to say here that I've tweaked the move order in the French line so that after 3...♖f6 White plays 4 g3 straightaway.



Then 4...c5 5 g2 c6 6 gf3 e7 reaches the standard position.

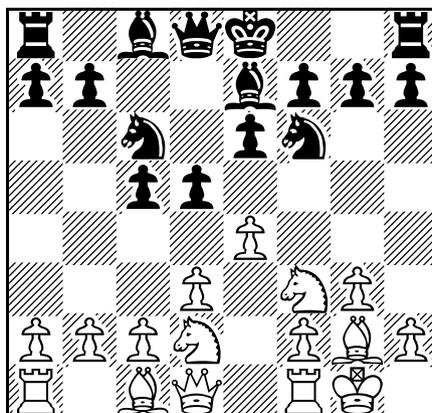
Of course if the game has started with 1 e4 c5 2 f3 e6 3 d3 then the idea of ...c5 is never an issue – there is a pawn on c5 stopping the bishop going to the square.

### White's choice between Nd2 and Qe2

After 1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 White can support his pawn on e4 with either 3 Nd2 or 3 Qe2. Both are equally good moves, with advantages and drawbacks relative to each other. Thus putting the knight on d2 is a valuable developing move, while leaving it on b1 for a while gives an additional attacking option in the main line if Black castles queenside. On e2 the queen not only defends e4, she supports an e4-e5 thrust, but she might also become a target of a ...a6 move in the future (that is, if Black plays ...d5xe4; d3xe4 b6 and ...a6 as in Game 7).

### How this chapter is divided up

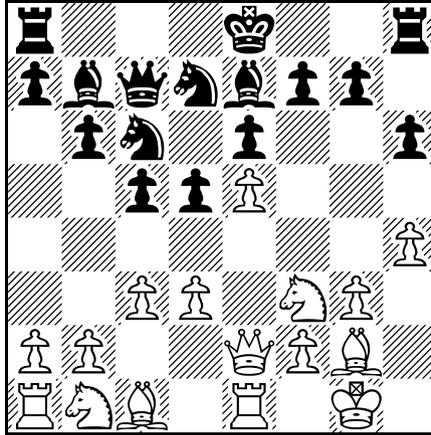
In Part One we examine the main line with 3 Nd2, when after 3...f6 4 g3 c5 5 g2 c6 6 gf3 e7 7 0-0 Black has a big choice to make.



## The King's Indian Attack: Move by Move

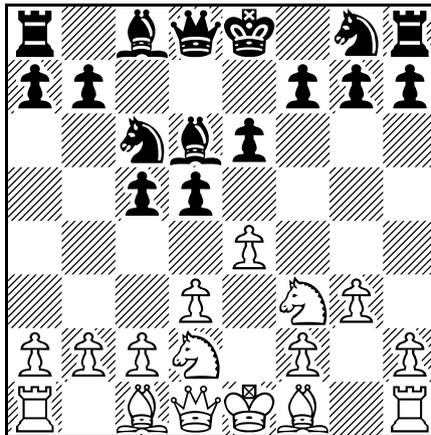
Should he castle kingside or play 7...b6 to fianchetto his queen's bishop, which is normally followed by queenside castling?

The subject of Part Two is White's important alternative 3 ♖e2. The main line is similar to that in Part One, with a key moment being reached in Game Four after 1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 ♖e2 ♟f6 4 ♟f3 ♙e7 5 g3 c5 6 ♙g2 ♟c6 7 0-0 b6 8 e5 ♟d7 9 h4 ♙b7 10 c3 ♖c7 11 ♚e1 h6.



Here White can try to benefit from the delayed development of his knight with 12 ♞a3!

In Part Three we investigate the alternative deployment of Black's bishop to d6 in the sequence 1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 ♟d2 c5 4 ♟gf3 ♟c6 5 g3 ♙d6.



Rather than straightforward development with 5...♟f6 and 6...♙e7, Black uses the bishop to oppose White's space gaining e4-e5 advance.

Part Four features variations in which Black plays (in either order as appropriate) ...d5xe4 and ...e6-e5 to equalize the space balance. This approach is possible against both the 3 ♟d2 and 3 ♖e2 scenarios, and so they are discussed together in Game 6 which begins

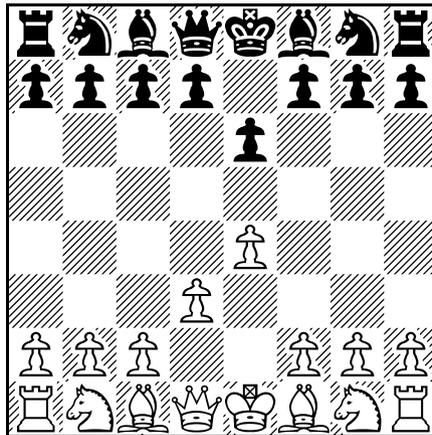
1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 ♖e2 ♜c6 4 ♞f3 e5 5 g3 dxe4 6 dxe4 ♞f6 7 ♙g2 ♙c5.

Finally, in Part Five we look at 1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 ♖e2 dxe4 4 dxe4 b6 in which Black hopes to profit by harassing the white queen with ...♙a6.

## Part One: The main line with 3 ♞d2

*Game 1*  
**T.Hillarp Persson-P.Vas**  
Oslo 2011

1 e4 e6 2 d3



**Question:** is it necessary to play this quiet pawn move so early?

**Answer:** We have to take measures against an attack on the e4 point at once if we wish to play the main line of the King's Indian Attack against the French move order. After 2 ♞f3 d5, for example, it's too late to revert to 3 d3 as 3...dxe4 4 dxe4 ♚xd1+ is an unwelcome exchange of queens. The only real alternative is 2 ♖e2 which is mentioned in the notes to Game 7 below.

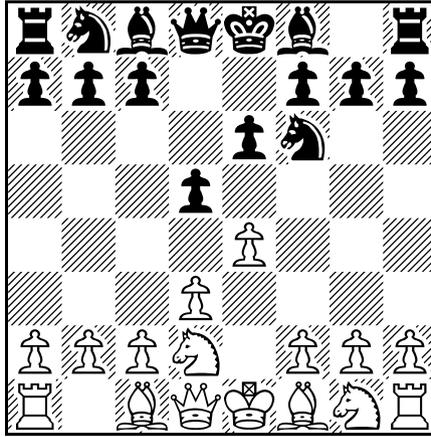
2...d5 3 ♞d2

**Question:** I guess everyone plays this move? White develops a piece and avoids the queen exchange after 3...dxe4.

**Answer:** Yes, 3 ♞d2 is very natural. But as a matter of fact, lots of players prefer 3 ♖e2. The knight move has the drawback that it shuts in the bishop on c1 and deprives White of cer-

tain attacking ideas that are discussed in Part Two.

3...♘f6



4 g3

Now White clears the way to develop his bishop to g2. A kingside fianchetto is the trademark of the King's Indian Attack. It is more promising than putting the bishop on e2 where it would be shut in by its own pawn on d3. As we shall see, the bishop has an important aggressive/defensive role on g2.

**Question:** But isn't 4 ♘gf3 ♙c5!? when the fianchetto on g2 becomes problematical. Hence he starts with 4 g3 – a completely valid move order.

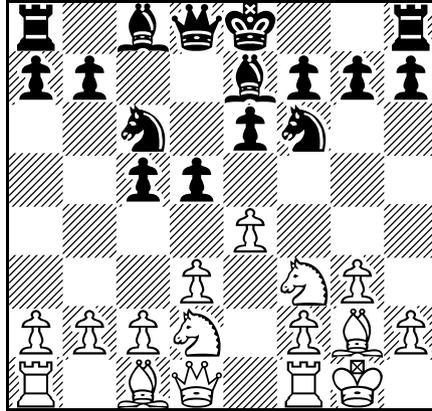
**Answer:** As explained in the introduction above, White is keen to avoid 4 ♘gf3 ♙c5!? when the fianchetto on g2 becomes problematical. Hence he starts with 4 g3 – a completely valid move order.

4...c5

Black gains space and increases his influence over the d4-square which White has declined to occupy with a pawn. He could instead play 4...♙c5 which is analysed in the notes to 3 ♖e2 in Game 6.

5 ♙g2 ♗c6 6 ♗gf3 ♙e7 7 0-0

White now has his basic King's Indian Attack deployment, which he will adopt against various Black set-ups. It's fair to say you can't go too far wrong if you stick to these moves as White.



**7...0-0**

A critical moment which will define the middlegame strategy. Black has a major alternative in 7...b6 which could well lead to him castling queenside – see Game Three.

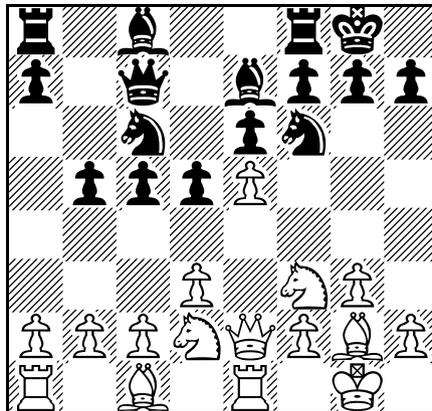
**8 ♖e1**

Putting the rook on e1 immediately seems slightly more flexible than 8 e5. The move order in the game was actually 1 g3 d5 2 ♕g2 ♖f6 3 ♗f3 e6 4 0-0 ♕e7 5 d3 0-0 6 ♗bd2 c5 7 e4 ♗c6 8 ♖e1.

**8...♗c7**

Trying to oppose the e4-e5 advance only loses time. He should have advanced his queenside pawns immediately, as occurs in Game 2.

**9 ♗e2 b5 10 e5**



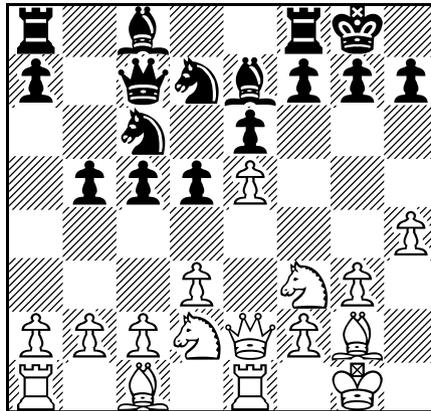
**Question:** What are the advantages and possible dangers for White in advancing the pawn to e5?

**Answer:** White's pawn is very well protected on e4, whereas it will have many enemies on e5 – after Black's reply his queen and two knights are eyeing it malevolently. The black pawns might also play a part in the demise of the e5-pawn. For example, White has to be certain that the pawn can't be dissolved in a way unfavourable to him by a future ...f7-f6, or that the knight on f3, the staunch defender of the pawn, can't be undermined by a ...g5-g4 pawn lunge.

Here Hillarp Persson has taken adequate precautions to ensure that the pawn won't get eaten on e5 by the black pieces: his queen, rook and knight on f3 are all defending it, and as we shall see, the bishop on c1 will also soon play a part in guarding it. Thanks to 11 h4 next move, and the fact that the black king is on g8, a plan to undermine the knight on f3 with ...g5-g4 would not be feasible. Nor could Black realistically hope to arrange ...f7-f6 in a way that didn't leave him with a weak pawn on e6.

So much for the safety of the pawn. Its value in advancing to e5 is that it drives the black knight away from f6, its best square, and fixes White's space advantage on the kingside. Having more space basically means that your pieces have more room to manoeuvre than the opponent's pieces, as your pawns don't get in the way so much. White is able to use the extra squares to bunch all his minor pieces together on the f-file and g-files, where they become a formidable attacking force. Once the energy of the white pieces reaches a certain level, we see another role for the e-pawn: a support for possible sacrifices on f6.

10...♘d7 11 h4



**Exercise:** Can you think of a couple of reasons why this is a good move?

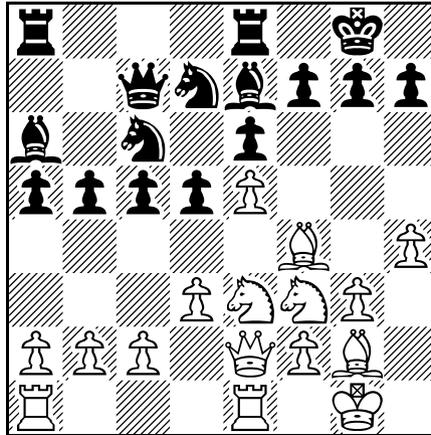
**Answer:** White is planning a kingside attack. With 11 h4 he:

- 1) Clears the h2-square for the knight on d2, allowing it to join in the assault with the sequence ♖f1, ♖h2 and ♖g4.
- 2) Creates a base on g5 for his other knight on f3, making possible an attack with ♘g5 and ♗h5.

3) Prepares the further advance h5-h6, when ...g7-g6 leaves Black with weak dark squares around his king.

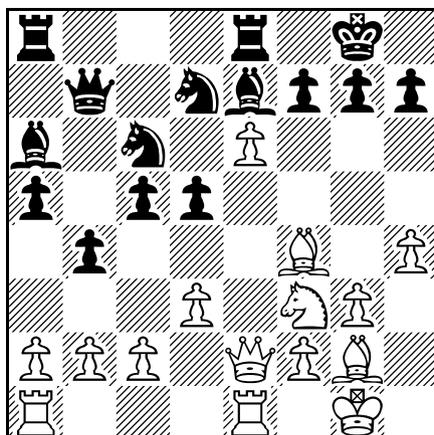
In scenarios where Black has left his king in the centre, or castled queenside, the move h2-h4 is often useful to restrain a possible ...g7-g5 flank attack by Black, especially if White has a bishop on f4 which can be hit by the advancing black pawn. You will see examples of this in Games 3 and 4. Of course, having castled with 7...0-0 in this game it is doubtful that the plan of ...g7-g5 would do anything other than wreck the black king's defences.

11...a5 12 ♖f1 ♜e8 13 ♙f4 ♚a6 14 ♘e3



**Question:** What happens now if Black plays 14...b4 to continue his queenside advance? And, secondly, can he capture the pawn that's hanging on e5?

**Answer:** On his last move White could have played 14 ♖h2 and then 15 ♘g4, but it's better to combine the implementation of a strategic plan with a tactical threat. This is because the opponent has to lose time dealing with the threat – or even better, he might miss it. After 14 ♘e3, let's see about 14...b4: 15 ♘xd5! exd5 16 e6 (uncovering an attack on the black queen) 16...♙b7 and now we have to avoid the routine recapture on d7.



Instead, 17 exf7+ ♔xf7 18 ♖e6+ ♔f8 19 ♘g5! (threatening mate on both f7 and h7) 19...♙g5 20 ♙d6+ and Black is obliterated whichever minor piece he interposes on e7: 20...♙e7 21 ♙xd5 and mate follows on f7 or g8, or 20...♘e7 21 ♙xd5 when the black queen is lost to the mate threat, or 20...♗e7 21 ♙xd5 ♔e8 22 ♙xe7 ♙xe7 (if 22...♘e7 23 ♙xb7) 23 ♙xc6, threatening the queen as well as mate on e7 (or g8, due to the double pin on d7 and e7). In these variations we see the triumph of White's light-squared bishop.

We also have to consider what happens if Black grabs the pawn on e5: 14...♗xe5 15 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 16 ♗xd5! exd5 17 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 18 ♙xe5 and Black has no good way to defend the d5-pawn. If 18...♗ed8 19 ♙xg7 wins a pawn as e7 hangs, while if 18...♗ad8 19 ♙c7 ♗c8 20 ♙xa5 picks up a pawn. That leaves 18...♙b7 when 19 c4 bxc4 20 dxc4 ♗ad8 21 ♗ad1 exploits the pin on d5 to win a pawn. It's curious that in this sequence Black has the choice of losing a pawn on the queenside, in the centre or on the kingside. Such is the global nature of White's pressure.

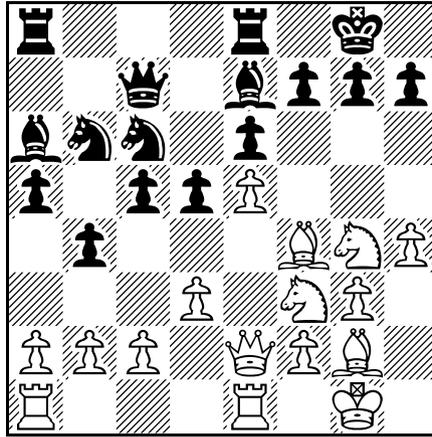
**Question:** Well, those variations would have taken me a lot of effort to work out during the game. I don't like leaving the e5-pawn hanging. And in any case, Black didn't fall for the traps, did he? I might have settled for the simple 14 ♗1h2.

**Answer:** But if you want to be a good player you can't duck calculating variations. There won't always be a safe move like 14 ♗1h2 available; you need to get into the calculating habit. And besides, Black didn't fall for either traps, but look what he played to prevent them.

#### 14...♗b6

The black knight has been dragged over to b6 to defend d5, but now it is unavailable to defend the kingside. That means that our knight manoeuvre to g4 becomes more powerful. If we had played 14 ♗1h2 the knight could have stayed on d7 and helped defend the king with ...♗f8 in the future.

15 ♖g4 b4



**Exercise:** What's the way to add energy to our kingside attack?

16 ♕d2!?

Sometimes an elegant little sideways shuffle by the queen can be more effective than overtly aggressive moves. Here she takes up position on the dark-squared diagonal. On the other hand, good old fashioned aggression is still effective.

**Answer:** 16 ♖f6+! when if 16...gxf6? 17 exf6 ♕d6 18 ♖g5!! is decisive: for example 18...♕xf4 (or 18...♖d7 19 ♕xd6 ♖xd6 20 ♖h5 ♖f8 21 ♖xf7+ and mate next move) 19 ♖h5! when the threat of mate with 20 ♖xh7+ and 21 ♖h8 can only be stopped by 19...♕xg5 allowing 20 ♖xg5+ and 21 ♖g7 mate. So after 16 ♖f6+ Black has to make do with the highly unpleasant 16...♕xf6 17 exf6 ♕d8 18 fxf6.

These variations indicate Black should have played 15...♕f8, when 16 ♕d2! would be the best reply.

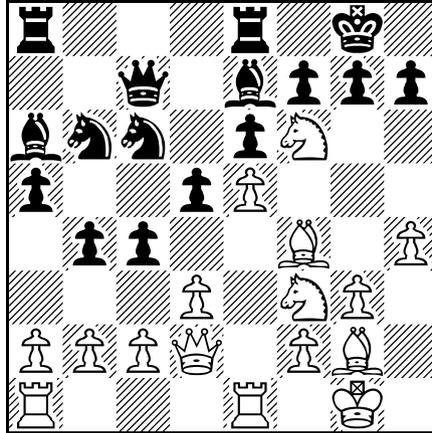
16...c4

Upon 16...♖b7, getting the queen off her unfortunate square, we see the strength of the h-pawn in ramming the black kingside: 17 h5 h6? (a remedy worse than the disease, though otherwise 18 h6 will be strong: for example, 18...g6 19 ♕g5 ♖d7 20 ♖f4 and the dark squares around the black king are shaky) 18 ♕xh6! (beginning a decisive tactical sequence) 18...gxf6 19 ♖xf6 ♖d7 20 ♖g5 ♕xg5 21 ♖xg5+ and if now 21...♖f8 22 h6 when the passed h-pawn marches through, or 21...♖h7 22 ♖h6+ ♖g8 23 ♖f6+ ♖xf6 24 exf6 with a standard mating device of queen and pawn on f6.

The best defensive move was 16...♕f8, though 17 h5 keeps up White's initiative.

17 ♖f6+!

Better late than never. Hillarp Persson continues to exploit Black's unwise queen move.



**17...xf6**

If 17...gxf6 18 exf6 attacks the black queen. Then 19 fxe7 recovers the piece with a big attack, seeing that 18...d6? 19 exd6 ♖xd6 allows mate in two.

**18 exf6 e5 19 g5 ♗d6**

Of course, if 19...h6 20 gxh6! gxh6? 21 ♖xh6 mates on g7. Material stays equal, but White has a powerful dark-squared bishop and a strong initiative on the kingside – and no wonder when Black has a queen, rook and all three minor pieces on the other side of the board.

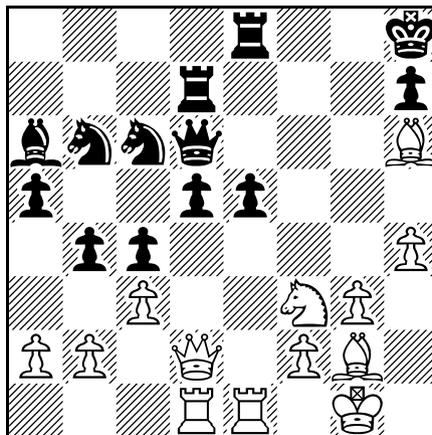
**20 fxg7 ♔xg7 21 d4**

Continuing the procedure of softening up Black on the dark squares.

**21...f6**

21...e4 22 g4 then 23 e5 is horrible for Black.

**22 g4 h6+ ♔h8 23 dxh6 fxe5 24 c3 ♖ad8 25 ♖ad1 ♗d7**



White has developed all his pieces and is now ready to exploit Black's dark-square weakness and denuded king.

26 ♖e3! bxc3 27 bxc3 ♘a4 28 ♗xe5! ♗xe5

Or 28...♗xe5 29 ♖d4. The pin on e5 is murderous because f2-f4 is looming.

29 ♖d4 ♗c5 30 ♗g5 ♗de7 31 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 32 f4 ♗d3 33 fxe5 ♗e6 34 ♗f1 1-0

### Game 2

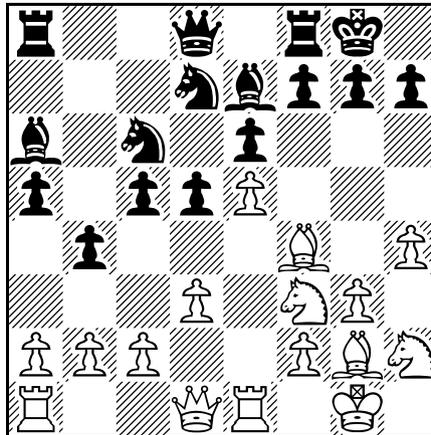
### A.Naiditsch-D.Brandenburg

German League 2012

1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 ♗d2 ♗f6 4 g3 c5 5 ♖g2 ♗c6 6 ♗gf3 ♖e7 7 0-0 0-0 8 e5 ♗d7 9 ♗e1 b5

No frivolous 9...♗c7 moves. Black gets his queenside counterplay going straightaway.

10 ♗f1 a5 11 h4 b4 12 ♗1h2 ♖a6 13 ♖f4



I hope you are starting to see a pattern in White's play. His queenside minor pieces have reached the kingside and are ready to take part in a concerted attack on the black king.

Whilst objectively speaking Black might be OK, it's not much fun for him to watch his opponent lining up all his pieces against his king, with only some queenside play as compensation.

13...♗c8 14 ♖h3

**Question:** What is the purpose of this move?

**Answer:** After 14 ♗g5 ♗d4 Black has nothing to fear. For example, if 15 ♗h5? h6 16 ♗g4 hxc5 17 hxc5 White might hope to strike a decisive blow with ideas of ♗f6+ or ♖e4, ♗g2 and ♗h1. But this is all a mirage as 17...g6! kills off the attack.

The general idea behind 14 ♖h3 is to put pressure on e6 and introduce the motif of