

David Smerdon

Smerdon's Scandinavian

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About the Author

David Smerdon is a Grandmaster from Australia. He has represented his country at six chess Olympiads, and played board one for the Australian team at the 2012 and 2014 Olympiads. In 2009, he won the Oceania Zonal Championship and qualified for the World Cup. He's a regular contributor to the popular chess openings websites ChessPublishing.com and Chess.com, as well as writing several opening articles for New in Chess Yearbooks.

Dedication

*To my parents, who taught me to play well, and
to Manuel, who taught me to play whatever I wanted.*

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Acknowledgements

This book has been quite a mammoth undertaking, largely because I underestimated the significance of a lack of good source material. Quite a lot of the theory has had to be developed from scratch; the positive side of this is that you are in possession of a mass of high-calibre analysis of which your opponents are very unlikely to be aware. Nevertheless, despite having only my name on the cover, there are many people I must acknowledge, without whose help this book would probably not be in front of you.

Special thanks to Guy West, a lifetime gambiteer, for his very useful analysis and insights on many lines; you'll see his name appear several times throughout the book. Thanks also to others for analytical comments, including Stefan Bücken, Ian Rogers, Vasil Vasilev (and others from the ChessPublishing forum), Manuel Weeks, and the whole team from Club Bullwinkle. Thanks to my editor John Emms for allowing me to skirt several deadlines, and for allowing me to include his loss as an illustrative game! Thanks to Paul Chalupa for inspiring in me a love of gambits, and a big thanks to my good friends Andrew Fitzpatrick and Tristan Stevens for both their genial encouragement and for agreeing to be my chess experiment 'guinea pigs'. Finally, I cannot thank Sabina enough for her unwavering support and indispensable motivation. My appreciation for you is unbounded.

Preface

Way back in 2000, my high school chess team unexpectedly qualified for the final of the World Schools Chess Championships. This was quite an astonishing achievement for an unassuming school from Brisbane, Australia, and even more so given that our team's board two to six had an average rating of around 1800. As the only experienced player, it was my job to come up with a complete opening repertoire for both colours to teach my teammates before the final. The criteria were that it had to be narrow enough that it was guaranteed to get my teammates into 'our' book from the first move, easy to learn quickly, and also tricky enough that there were decent chances our much higher-rated opponents might fall into a fatal opening trap.

This was a tough ask for only a month's preparation, but at least against 1 e4, I thought to myself, there seemed a worthy candidate. I decided on an offbeat sideline in the Scandinavian that I knew as the 'Portuguese', starting with 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♖f6 3 d4 ♗g4!?. As time was of the essence, I completed the repertoire against 1 e4 with the Icelandic Gambit (3 c4 e6), as well as the unnamed 3 ♖f3 ♗g4. Before I could teach these variations to my teammates, though, I had to learn them myself, and so I began an intense study of these obscure gambits.

Unfortunately, our crusade in the final was unsuccessful. (Incidentally, the Norwegian school that defeated us had just acquired a new student who, at the time, was too weak to make the team: a certain Magnus Carlsen.) On the positive side, the preparation had inspired me that there was more to these so-called dubious gambits than met the eye. I was particularly attracted to Black's straightforward, almost barbaric strategy: sacrificing material from move one in exchange for quick piece activity and an unshakeable pursuit of the initiative.

After finishing high school, I started playing 1...d5 in tournament games, and in 2002 I used it as my main weapon against 1 e4 in the World Junior (U20) Championships, with reasonable success. As my knowledge of the lines grew, I discovered that there were dozens of dangerous traps within the gambits, even though I had to develop most of the theory on my own. It amazed me that I couldn't find any chess books or articles about this exciting system; after all, who wouldn't want to play an opening that gives Black the chance to checkmate White in under twenty moves?

Fifteen years later, surprisingly little has changed with regard to the chess literature on

these gambits. My own experience with them, however, has grown tremendously. I have played almost seventy classical games and over three hundred blitz games with the opening system, with a score of over 70%. But to be honest, I haven't kept playing this way because of the score; rather, I just enjoy the style and the philosophy that complements these gambits. To play such a repertoire is to declare that we play chess for fun, for the joy of the fight, and for the beauty of wild tactics and romantic attacks. If it earns us points along the way, so much the better.

During this time I have also come to understand that there are many other players who share both this philosophy and the love of these gambits. After many requests, and noting that a serious book on this opening system still didn't exist, I decided that it was time for the theory I have developed over the years to finally reach a public audience. I thought that this might coincide with me slowly retiring the opening from my repertoire in tournament play, but in fact, this project turned out to be much more than just a reworking of old analyses. During the course of writing this book, I have discovered so many new ideas and improvements for both sides that this book has rejuvenated my enthusiasm for the gambits, as I hope it does for you!

Introduction

This Opening is Unsound

Make no mistake about it: from any fundamental mainstream chess perspective, the repertoire I am offering in this book should be, *has* to be, unsound. After all, I am proposing to sacrifice a pawn with the black pieces on the very first move. If you're after a correct, classical repertoire with Black against 1 e4, then you'd best look elsewhere.

On the other hand, if you are the sort who likes to attack no matter what the risks, if you enjoy coffeehouse gambits and highly unorthodox tactical skirmishes, if you revel in adventure in each game or want to unsettle your opponent and get the fight onto your home turf from move one, then this just might be the book for you.

After 1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♟f6, we plan to certify the sacrifice on the very next move, whether it be after 3 d4 ♟g4, 3 ♟f3 ♟g4, 3 c4 e6 or even 3 ♟b5+ ♟bd7. In exchange for one lousy foot soldier, Black gains a lead in development, fantastic piece activity and immediate, dangerous attacking chances against the white king. These gambits are characterized by brilliant sacrificial assaults and spectacular miniatures that have cast fear into the hearts of players who sit behind the white pieces. Gradually, over the years, the theory has developed whereby a well-prepared opponent can successfully navigate the opening pitfalls, but this system still catches out plenty of adversaries, particularly at club levels.

Moreover, even against the trusted main lines this sacrificial Scandinavian has held up remarkably well, as my years of experience support. This book will not demonstrate the definitive refutation of the 3...♟g4 system, but only because I don't know what it is. If you're just browsing this book in order to find one – shame on you! – let me save you some time by directing you to the chapter of Section One entitled 'The Correspondence Refutation', which is a good start. However, as you will see, it is far from simple for White to gain an advantage even in this most testing of variations, while the perils for the first player are very real indeed. The consequences, if White wants to try to take advantage of Black's audacity, are an early exposure to treacherous traps and insidious incursions, as well as a precarious stumble into a mire of tactical lines with which you will be familiar, but your opponent will most likely not.

I've been playing this system for well over a decade now against well-prepared masters without a convincing repudiation, which, as a practical player, is good enough for me to keep going. Over the years, many refutations have been claimed in various texts and com-

mentaries, and I will address them all in this book. Some of them lead to equality, some of them are based on tricks that are quite easily navigated, and some of them are downright bad. We'll look at all of them, and you will be well armed to face any opponent who naively feels they deserve to 'smash' your insolence on move one. We don't mind this aggression. In fact, we revel in their arrogance – and we'll use it to our advantage. As Black, we know the terrain better than our opponents, we are better equipped to deal with the characteristically unorthodox structures and, most importantly, we get to have far more fun!

This book is, above all, a practical guide. I've written it as a complete repertoire for Black against 1 e4, and as such I haven't ignored any lines just because they are objectively inferior. Instead, I have concentrated on all of the alternatives you are likely to encounter at the board, no matter what their merit. I will regularly tell you how often you can expect to encounter specific variations, and which of our replies pose the most practical difficulties. However, I've also tried to be as honest as possible in my evaluation of the positions, and the lines in this book have all been exhaustively checked by the strongest chess engines in the world.

From the black side, I've chosen the most aggressive, enjoyable and, above all, practical variations to complete the repertoire. Often, you will be given a choice of different options to suit your taste or workload, which means that you don't have to learn everything in this book if you don't want to (if you are especially lazy, see *How to Use This Book* to find out how you can really cut down on the amount of theory you need to learn). For example, I have comprehensively covered both 3 c4 e6 and 3 c4 c6, but both lines are styled with a view to Black's most attacking options. You will also find that I have proposed strong improvements and new ideas for both sides in many variations; there's no point learning how to deal with the current theory just to be blown off the board with a new move in a year's time. But the majority of the juicy new novelties in this book – and there are loads of them – are for Black. Within these pages lies a treasure trove of new ideas and unplayed improvements just waiting to be released on an unsuspecting victim.

In composing this repertoire, my choice of variations has been guided by three fundamental considerations:

1) Practicality

One of the key advantages of playing this system is that most 1 e4 players have never given these lines any detailed study. The idea that proponents of the black side know the resulting positions better than their opponents is one of the key weapons behind the repertoire, and this practical edge has also guided my choice of variations. The suggested system generally leads to positions where Black has dangerous attacking chances that are very difficult to defend against over the board, or to positions where it is far easier for White to go wrong than Black. Moreover, as I've mentioned, you will often be able to choose between different lines for Black to suit your situation.

2) Theoretical soundness

Playing a practical, unusual system is all well and good, but it counts for nothing if a well-prepared opponent can blow it out of the water. To that end, I have usually steered away from recommending the more dubious subvariations that, while being tricky and dangerous in blitz, are refuted. Our repertoire, to the best of my extensive computer-aided analysis, is theoretically sound in the sense that I have found no clear way for White to get anything beyond a slight (but manageable) advantage, and only after profound accuracy. Moreover, in the very few lines in which I have concluded that White stands marginally better, I have devoted extra attention to the resulting positions in order to guarantee that the diligent reader can be confident of at least securing a draw, while posing White substantial practical problems.

3) Enjoyment

Finally, when all else is equal, I have tried to remain true to the spirit of the system in choosing lines that are rich in complex, unorthodox and fighting potential. Of course, if White is staunchly dedicated to blunting every attacking opportunity we prepare, she can do so – at the cost of giving up any chance of an advantage. However, when given the choice between two options of relatively equal merit, I usually opt against safe, passive equality in favour of double-edged murkiness with counter-attacking chances for both sides.

Before we get into the best way to make use of this book, let's break up the chatter with some real chess to give you a feel for why I and so many other devotees are addicted to this opening system. I have chosen three inspirational games to get you started on your journey. The first two were of great historical importance to the development of the repertoire, while the final game gives a sense of the modern interpretation.

Inspirational Game #1

For many people, this opening is known as 'the Portuguese', a misnomer that is a little unfair to earlier exponents of the gambit, in particular the Belgium IM Michel Jadoul. Nevertheless, the legend behind the misnaming is quite captivating. In 1996, Portugal and China met for a round-robin match in Macao. On the Portuguese side of things was the creative IM Rui Damaso, who was drawn to play with Black against two of China's strong grandmasters. The following game was played in round three, in which Damaso unleashed the outrageous 3...♟g4! and earned a brilliant tactical victory against his fancied opponent. The story goes that the Chinese team spent the next few days studying this crazy 'new' opening, eventually concluding that such a cheeky, unprincipled concept should be simply met by taking all of Black's proffered material. In round seven, GM Zili Wang confidently confronted Damaso's 3...♟g4 with 4 f4 ♟f5 5 c4 ('the Banker') ...and was duly checkmated in only thirteen moves!

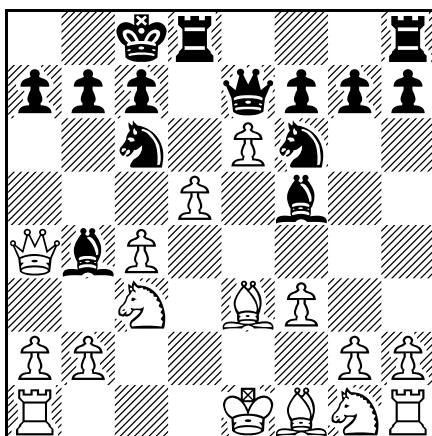
With all credit to Jadoul for inventing the opening, the following game is of great historical importance, as the inspirational way in which Black conducts the attack ignited what could be called the modern wave of popularity for 3...♟g4.

Ye Jiangchuan-R.Damaso
China-Portugal match, Macao 1996

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♘f6 3 d4 ♙g4 4 ♙e2

The 'Wuss', a solid but unambitious variation that you are likely to encounter quite often in practice.

A few days later, the aforementioned infamous miniature continued with the greedy 4 f3 ♙f5 5 c4. It would make an interesting trivia question to find out whether a grandmaster has ever been checkmated in fewer moves – and playing with White, no less! The game continued 5...e6 6 dxe6 ♘c6 7 ♙e3 ♙b4+ (7...♖e7 is more accurate, as we shall see) 8 ♘c3 ♖e7 9 d5 0-0-0 10 ♖a4?



10...♘xd5!! (Boom!) 11 cxd5 ♖h4+ 12 ♙d1 (12 g3 ♙xc3+ wins the queen via a deadly discovered attack; 12 ♙e2 ♘d4+!! 13 ♙xd4 ♖xd4 14 ♗d1 ♖e5+ 15 ♘e4 ♙xe4 16 ♖xb4 ♙c2+ wins in a more prosaic fashion) 12...♗xd5+!! 13 ♘xd5 (sportingly allowing a fitting finale) 13...♖e1 mate, Wang Zili-R.Damaso, Macao 1996.

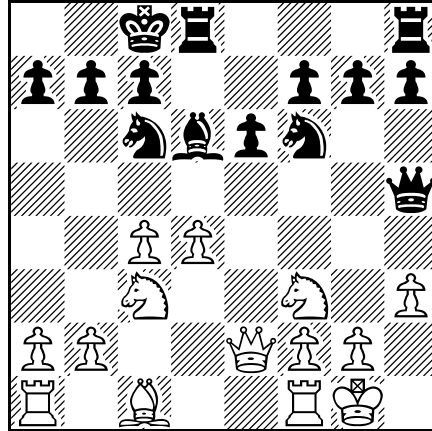
4...♙xe2 5 ♖xe2 ♖xd5 6 ♘f3 e6 7 0-0

7 c4! is the only genuine try for an advantage in this variation.

7...♙d6 8 c4 ♖h5!

Threatening ...♙xh2+.

9 ♘c3 ♘c6 10 h3 0-0-0!



Opposite-sided castling is a feature of the Wuss variation and also the best way for Black to liven up proceedings. The game now turns into an attacking race, and Black already has running shoes on.

11 ♗e3 g5!?

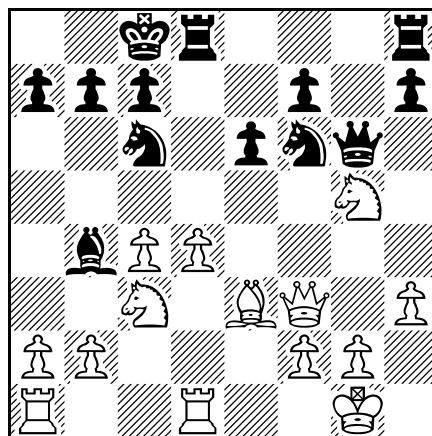
Points for attitude, though objectively Black should have first prepared this by ...♖hg8, with excellent chances. I can only imagine White's reaction to this second outrageous pawn sacrifice in the first eleven moves of the game.

12 ♘g5 ♕g6 13 ♖f3?!

13 ♗f3! ♖hg8 14 ♘h4 ♕g7 gives Black a dangerous initiative on the kingside, but White should have chanced this defensive approach.

13...♗b4! 14 ♖fd1?

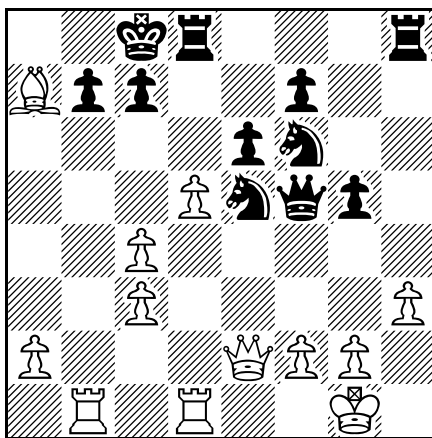
Black's courage is rewarded. Better was 14 ♗ce4! ♗e7! with excellent compensation for Black.



14...♙xc3 15 bxc3 h6!

Suddenly, White's knight is short of squares.

16 d5 ♞e5 17 ♚e2 hxg5 18 ♙xa7 ♞f5 19 ♖ab1



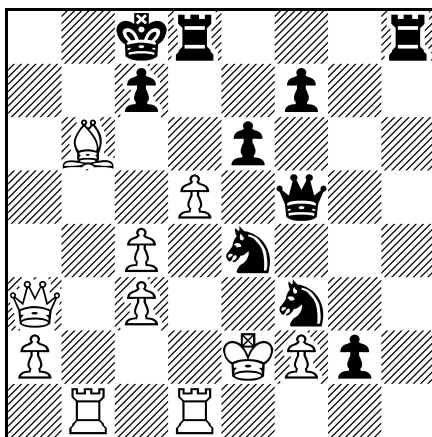
19...♞e4

Already winning on material, Damaso could have crowned his historic outing for 3...♙g4 appropriately with the explosive 19...♖xh3!! 20 gxh3 ♜h8! with an unparryable attack.

20 ♙d4 g4! 21 ♚b2 b6 22 ♚a3 gxh3 23 ♙xb6 ♞f3+ 24 ♙f1

Or 24 gxf3 h2+ 25 ♙g2 ♞h3+ 26 ♙h1 ♞xf3 mate.

24...hxg2+ 25 ♙e2



25...♞g3+!

These knights have had quite a day out. And one of them will soon produce a rather unexpected reincarnation...

26 f×g3 ♖e4+ 27 ♙e3 g1♘+!!

He's back!

28 ♖f1 ♜xc4+ 29 ♔g2 ♜h2 mate

Perhaps now you can appreciate why this game is credited with sparking the 3...♙g4 craze!

Inspirational Game #2

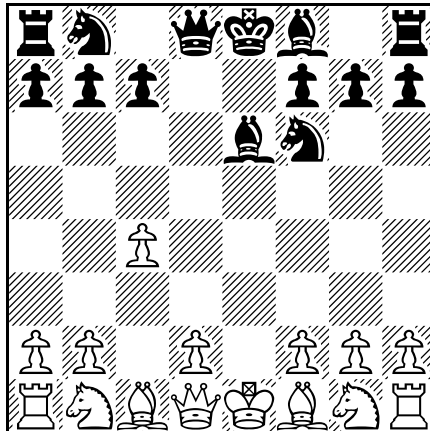
This was one of the first classic victories from the dangerous Icelandic (or 'Palme') Gambit, after which both the opening and its talented English proponent earned a deservedly dangerous reputation.

M.Kuijf-J.M.Hodgson
Wijk aan Zee 1989

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♘f6 3 c4 e6!

The start of the gambit.

4 d×e6 ♙xe6



5 d4?!

The most natural move, but not the best. White underestimates the speed at which the black forces will develop.

5 ♘f3 is the main line, after which I recommend Black continue 5...♜e7! 6 ♜e2 ♘c6 7 d4 ♙f5! with excellent compensation.

5...♙b4+ 6 ♙d2

6 ♘c3 ♘e4! is also uncomfortable for White.

6...♜e7 7 ♙xb4

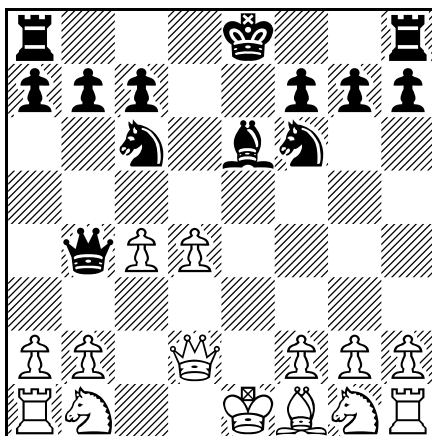
White should have preferred returning the pawn with the tamer 7 ♙e2, although pre-

sumably he was still out to punish Black for such impudence in the opening. Then 7...♖e4 8 ♗f3 ♗xd2 9 ♗bxd2 ♙xc4 is equal.

7...♖xb4+ 8 ♖d2

8 ♗d2?! ♗c6! 9 d5 (or 9 ♗gf3? 0-0-0 10 d5 ♗xd5! and wins) 9...0-0-0! leaves Black with an incredibly strong attack.

8...♗c6



9 ♗c3?

White's only chance was to walk the tightrope with 9 d5 0-0-0! 10 ♗c3!, when Black can unleash the powerful novelty 10...♗e5!!, after which White remains in big trouble.

9...0-0-0!?

Here 9...♙xc4! was simple and strong, when Black has a clear advantage. However, Hodgson is known for hunting the big game, and simply regathering the pawn wasn't on his radar.

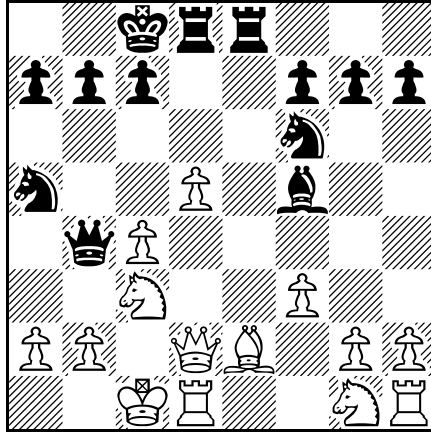
10 d5 ♙g4

The bishop finds its way to our favourite square after all, preparing to bring the final rook into the attack along the e-file. While the text is objectively not the best, it certainly presents White with the most opportunities to go wrong. As we saw in the note to White's eighth move, 10...♗e5!! is a valuable and unplayed improvement.

11 f3 ♖he8+ 12 ♙e2 ♙f5 13 0-0-0!

The only chance, although White's king remains desperately short of air.

13...♗a5



The black pieces create a menacing force around the white queenside. Several threats are in the air, including the cute ...♖b3, followed by ...♖xa2 and ...♘b3 mate.

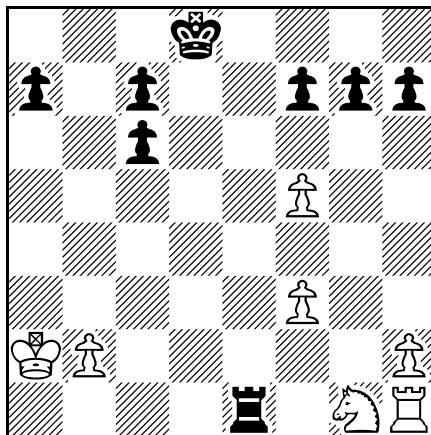
14 g4?!

14 ♘b5? loses brilliantly to 14...♖xe2!! 15 ♘xe2 (or 15 ♖xb4 ♖c2+ 16 ♔b1 ♖xc4+) 15...♖xc4+ 16 ♖c3 ♖xb5 17 ♘d4 ♖xd5 with a decisive material advantage.

14 b3! was White's only hope. Despite an imposing position, it's not clear how Black can break down White's defences, although 14...c6!? is probably a good place to start.

14...♙g6?!

14...♘xc4! 15 ♙xc4 ♖xc4 16 gxf5 ♘xd5! was the clearest route, threatening the deadly ...♘e3. It requires some deep and precise calculation, but there aren't many branches to consider. After the forced 17 ♖d4 ♖c6 18 ♖a4, Black can simply swap down to a winning endgame with 18...♘c3 19 ♖xd8+ ♔xd8! 20 ♖xc6 ♘xa2+ 21 ♔b1 ♖e1+ 22 ♔xa2 bxc6.



Despite having an extra piece, White's forces are completely helpless. Black is winning.

15 ♖h3?!

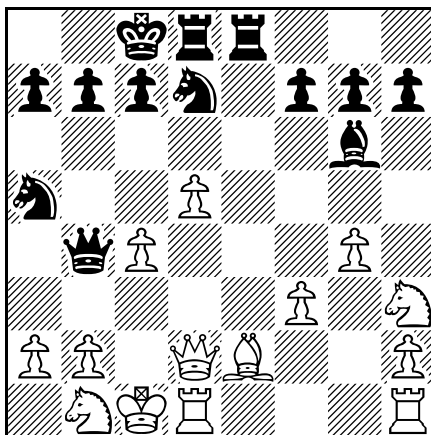
15 b3! was again White's only resource, after which 15...c6! is unclear.

15...♗d7?!

Another inaccuracy, but one can certainly understand the cute idea that tempted Hodgson into this relocation. 15...♗xc4 is clearly better for Black.

16 ♗b1??

16 ♗e4! was the only try, blocking off the sharp-shooting black bishop, when White has good chances to escape the onslaught.



16...♖b3!

Very nice. It's all over.

17 ♕d3 ♖xa2! 18 ♖b4 ♗e2! 19 ♕xe2 ♗b3+ 20 ♖xb3 ♖xb3 21 ♗d2 ♖e3 0-1

Inspirational Game #3

In recent years, the popularity of 3...♕g4 has waned at top levels, so much so that only two grandmasters still regularly play this opening with the black pieces. You're listening to one of them, and the other is the talented Filipino GM Darwin Laylo. The following is a good example of his uncompromising handling of our favourite weapon.

K.Goh Wei Ming-D.Laylo
Manila 2008

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♗f6 3 d4 ♕g4!?

Usually this move is at least a mild surprise to White, although Laylo is something of a 3...♕g4 devotee.

4 f3!

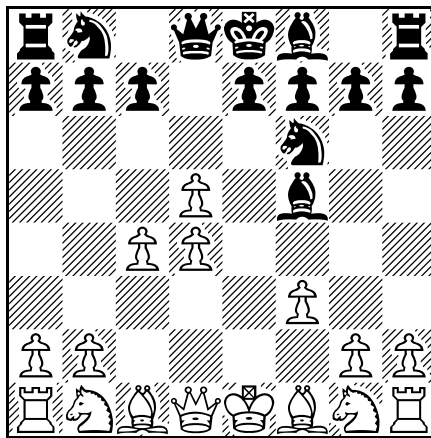
Kevin, a noted theoretician, plays in the most principled fashion. If Black decides to

Chapter One

The Banker

Introduction

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♘f6 3 d4 ♙g4 4 f3 ♙f5 5 c4

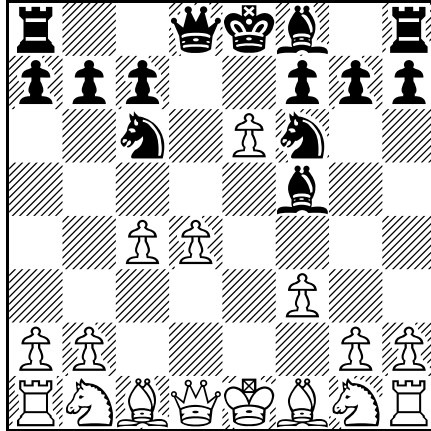


This is the most natural and (at first glance) critical continuation, securing the extra pawn on d5. However, for her troubles, White is falling dangerously behind in development. Play now becomes extremely sharp, with excellent chances for Black to execute dazzling checkmates and score brilliant victories without White ever escaping the opening.

5...e6!

Continuing to develop. This chapter will analyse the greedy 6 dxe6, White's most popular move, which I have thus christened 'the Banker'. It will also consider White's other alternatives, none of which should worry us to any great extent.

6 dxe6 ♘c6!



A lovely move to play. Black offers yet another pawn, as well as volunteering to give up the right to castle, all in the name of rapid, targeted piece development. Should White capture on f7 (now, or on the next move), Black's pieces will spring into action to optimal locations. Typically, Black will endeavour to put a rook on e8 as soon as possible (either after ...♙b4 or ...♚e7), after which she can immediately look for tactics. The c6-knight has a natural route into White's position via b4, where it eyes d3 and c2, but quite often it can instead sacrifice itself on d4 to allow for a quick ...♙c5. Black's queen will usually find herself on e7 for a lethal doubling on the e-file, though occasionally she causes havoc on other squares on the d8-h4 diagonal. As for our knight on f6 – always be on the lookout for ...♘g4 ideas!

White will almost certainly be forced to play ♙e3 (to guard d4) and ♖f2 (to diffuse the pressure on the e-file) at some point. We will typically answer this with an explosive ...♜xe3 sacrifice, the key theme for the Banker variation. This is usually followed up with either an immediate ...♘xd4, or else doubling on the e-file. In fact, as a general rule of thumb, ...♜xe3 is almost always the right move when it is available, even if you cannot see an immediate forced win. White's dark squares, critically weakened by both the pawn on f3 and the loss of her queen's bishop, will be ripe for exploitation.

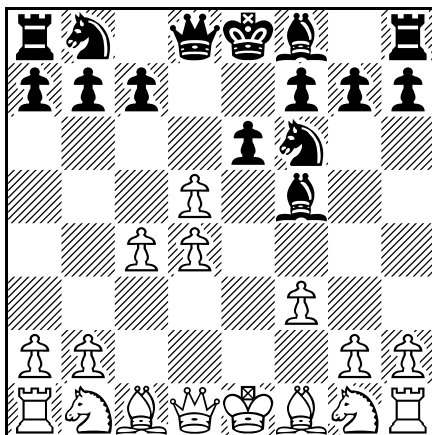
This has to be one of the most enjoyable variations of the Scandinavian for Black to get at the board, and it's not surprising that the statistics are heavily weighted in Black's favour. But before we examine the theory, let's have a look at how easy it is for an unsuspecting opponent to get into trouble with the white pieces in this deliciously exciting variation.

Game 1
C.Onyekwere-D.Smerdon
 Internet (blitz) 2013

Yes, this is only an online blitz game, but it gives a very good illustration of the pitfalls

awaiting White in the Banker. My opponent, one of Nigeria's strongest players, is certainly no patzer, and yet, the hazards of our favourite opening proved deadly in under twenty moves.

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♘f6 3 d4 ♙g4 4 f3 ♙f5 5 c4 e6



White's scepticism of our unprincipled gambit can often inspire a strategy of greedily going for the maximum – after all, a pawn is a pawn, right? But to do this entails making five pawn moves in a row and usually at least one more by 6 dxe6. The loss of time, combined with the weaknesses created by 4 f3, gives us all the justification we need to launch an immediate assault on White's position. It's not surprising that Black's score in practice is extremely impressive.

6 dxe6

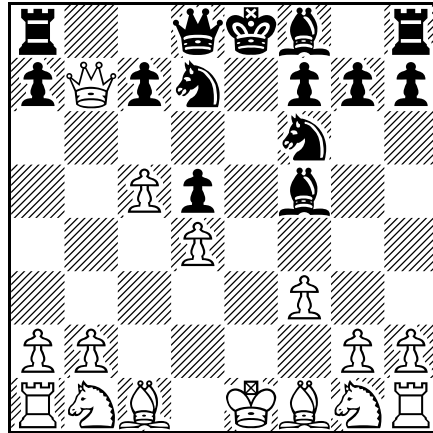
In for a penny, in for a pound. Having weakened the kingside, White has no real choice but to carry on and at least grab some material.

Instead:

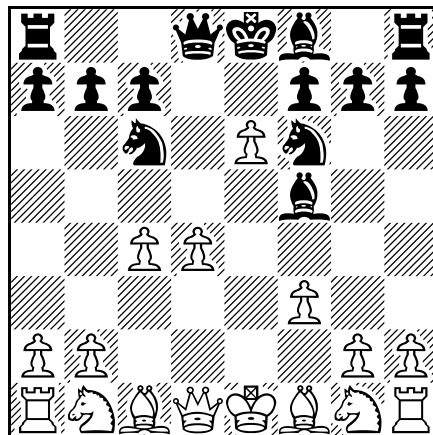
a) 6 g4? is an unfortunate attempt to transpose into the *Correspondence Refutation*, but it really doesn't work here: 6...♘xg4!! 7 fxg4 ♖h4+ 8 ♔d2 (8 ♔e2?? ♙xg4+ 9 ♘f3 ♙xf3+ 10 ♔xf3 ♖h5+ wins the queen) 8...♙e4 9 ♘f3 ♖f2+ and Black is clearly better.

b) 6 ♘c3 exd5 7 g4 ♙e6! is very promising for Black.

c) 6 ♖b3?! exd5! 7 ♖xb7 ♘bd7 8 c5



8...♙xc5! gives Black a decisive attack. For example, 9 dxc5 ♖b8!! 10 ♚xa7 0-0 11 ♚a3 ♜e7+ 12 ♘e2 ♘xc5! and White's king will not survive much longer, because 13 ♙f2 ♙xb1! 14 ♖xb1 ♘ce4+! leads to a winning endgame for Black.
6...♘c6!



This is the position that inspired me, and I'm sure many other club players, to take up the Portuguese. Black shows a complete disregard for material, initiating this double pawn sacrifice to prioritize rapid development. Engines already evaluate our compensation as being completely sufficient, Black has a tremendous score in practical play, and you're actually likely to get it about once in every 25 outings against 1 e4. Furthermore, it's incredibly fun to play. Need I say more?

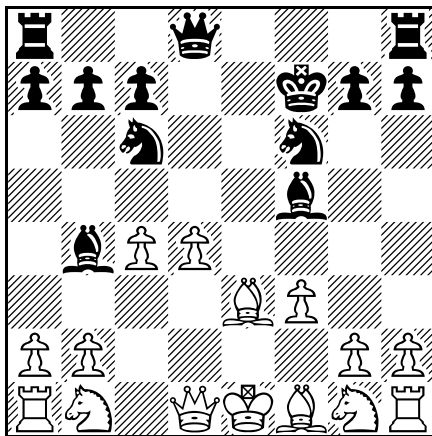
7 exf7+

Taking greediness to a whole new level.

7...♙xf7 8 ♙e3?

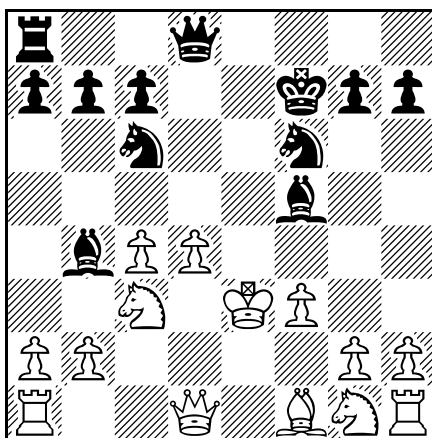
As often happens in this variation, a seemingly natural developing move for White can equal an immediate loss.

8...♙b4+



9 ♖f2

9 ♘c3 is best, but still losing: 9...♞e8 10 ♖f2 (or 10 ♞d2 ♞xd4! and White's position collapses) 10...♞xe3!! (the standard treatment) 11 ♖xe3



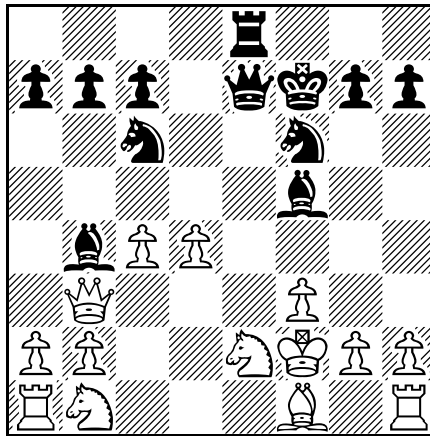
11...♙c2!! (the strongest and definitely the prettiest, but it's worth noting the two other ways Black could win, as they represent common tactical motifs for this variation:

11...♞e7+ 12 ♖f2 ♘xd4! 13 ♞xd4 ♙c5 wins the queen; and 11...♘xd4 12 ♞xd4 ♞e7+ 13 ♖d2 ♞d8 is another way to pick up the dame) 12 ♞d2 ♘g4+!! 13 fxg4 (or 13 ♖f4 ♙d6+ 14 ♖xg4 ♙f5+! 15 ♖xf5 ♞h4 and mate in two) 13...♞g5+ 0-1 Ge.Sergeev-D.Saulin, Tula 2005.

9...♞e8 10 a3

Or 10 ♘e2 ♞xe3!! (you should be getting used to this by now!) 11 ♖xe3 ♞e7+ (11...♘xd4

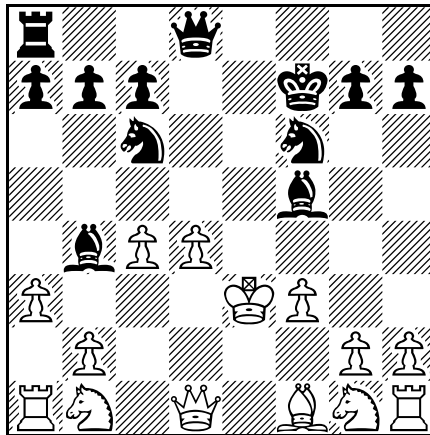
and 11...♘e5!? also win) 12 ♖f2 ♜e8 13 ♗b3



13...♗xd4! 14 ♗xd4 ♗e1+ 15 ♖g1 ♘c5 and mate in nine more moves.

10...♜xe3! 11 ♖xe3

11 axb4 ♜d3!! finishes the game.



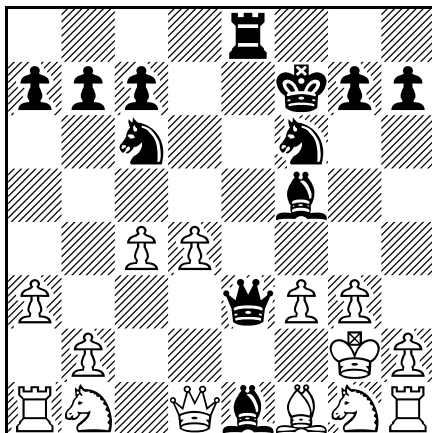
11...♗e7+?

Black had a choice of attractive wins; I failed to find the most convincing continuation. 11...♘e1!!, delivering mate in 18 (!), was definitely the most aesthetic finisher. Just gorgeous. 11...♗xd4 and 11...♘c5 would also win swiftly.

12 ♖f2 ♜e8 13 g3?

13 ♘e2! would make Black's conversion attempts somewhat problematic, although the attack is still very powerful.

13...♗e3+ 14 ♖g2 ♘e1!!



Another common theme to remember.

15 ♖h3 ♗xd4 16 ♜c3 ♗xf3! 17 ♕e2 ♖h4+ 0-1
 Mate follows.

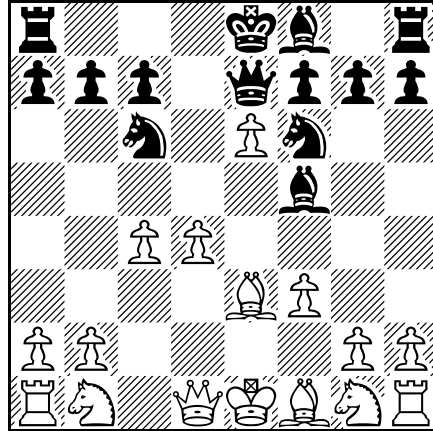
Game 2
L.Dworakowski-A.Moll
 Groningen 1997

This game is one of early 'classics' of 3...♕g4, back in the days when White was often taken completely unawares by Black's system. Here the white player, over 200 points stronger than his opponent, decides to refute Black's opening by taking all of the offered gifts. I bet you can guess how that turned out...

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♖f6 3 d4 ♕g4 4 f3 ♕f5 5 c4 e6 6 dxe6 ♗c6 7 ♕e3!
 Much better.

In addition to the suicidal 7 exf7+? (as in the previous game), White often tries 7 d5?. However, after 7...♗b4 8 ♗a3 fxe6, Black is already clearly better. For example, 9 ♕d2 exd5 10 ♖a4+ ♕d7 11 ♖b3 ♖e7+! 12 ♖f2 0-0-0 13 ♖e1 ♖c5+ 14 ♕e3 d4! and White only lasted a few more moves in *MickMagpie* (2313)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2014.

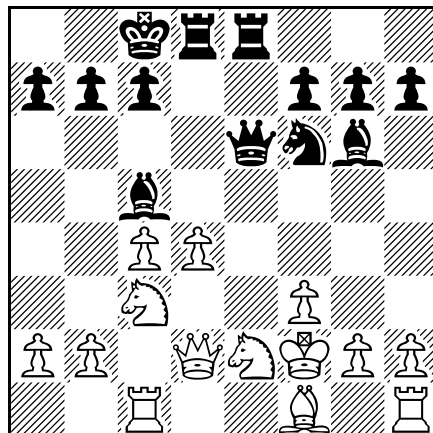
7...♖e7!



Not as popular as 7...♙b4+, but definitely better. Black's queen takes aim at White's king along the dangerous, soon-to-be-opened e-file.

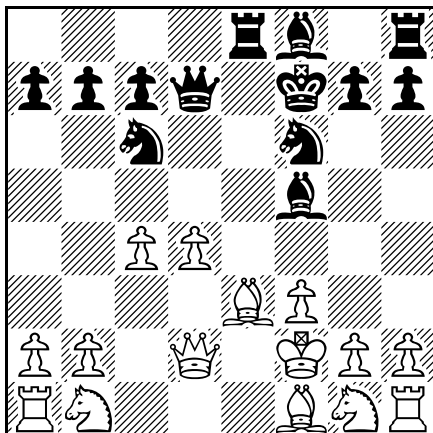
8 exf7+

8 ♖c3 0-0-0! also gives Black a handy initiative. One blitz game I played just a few weeks before finishing this book continued 9 ♗ge2? (an obvious developing move, but, as so often in this opening, White can find that the natural move can easily be a serious mistake; 9 ♜d2 is a better try, though Black retains a dangerous initiative after 9...♗b4! 10 0-0-0 ♜xe6; e.g. 11 a3?? ♗c2 12 ♙f2 ♗a1!, winning) 9...♗b4! 10 ♖g3 ♗c2+ 11 ♙f2 ♙g6 12 ♜c1 ♗xe3 13 ♙xe3 ♜xe6+ 14 ♙f2 ♙c5! 15 ♗ge2 ♜he8 16 ♜d2



16...♗g4+!! (an easy move to play, even in blitz – the position is just calling out for this sacrifice) 17 fxg4 ♜f6+ 18 ♙e1 ♜xd4! 19 ♗d5 ♜h4+ 20 g3 ♜xg4 21 ♜a5 ♜xd5! and Black soon won in *Jartorio* (2298)-D.Smerdon, Internet 2015.

8...♙xf7 9 ♙f2 ♜e8 10 ♜d2 ♜d7!



A key move. Black's queen has done an excellent job, causing far more mischief than the temporary inconvenience to her own kingside. Nevertheless, now is the time to make room for the bishop and rooks to join the attack. Black is all set to unleash the typical motif ...♖xe3 and ...♘xd4.

11 ♘c3

The novelty 11 c5! is best, though 11...♖xe3! 12 ♗xe3 ♘xd4 13 ♙c4+ ♙e6! still gives Black a very dangerous attack for the material.

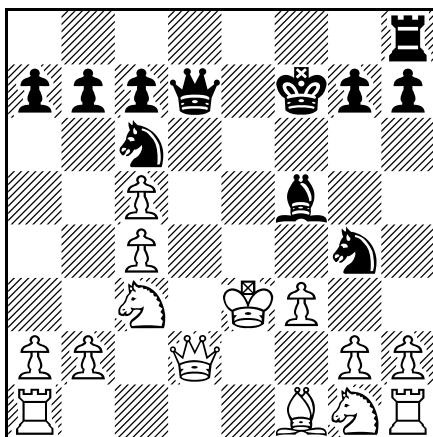
11...♖xe3!!

Of course!

12 ♗xe3 ♙c5

Admirable, but not best. 12...g6! 13 ♗f2 ♘xd4 was crushing.

13 dxc5 ♘g4+!



Every black move is with tempo, a feature of this opening. White is never given a mo-

ment's rest to develop.

14 ♖e2

14 fxg4?? ♜e8+ wins the queen.

14...♞e6+?

14...♞e7+! 15 ♖e4 (15 ♖d1?? ♖e3+ 16 ♖c1 ♖xf1 is winning) 15...♞d8 would force White to find 16 ♞f4! ♖d4+ 17 ♖e1 ♖c2+ 18 ♖e2 and the game should end in a draw.

15 ♖d1 ♖e3+ 16 ♖c1

Already White's fifth king move!

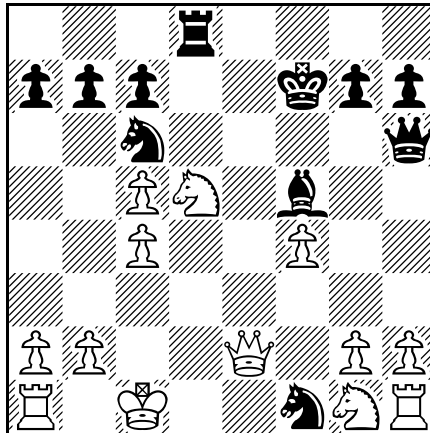
16...♞d8

16...♖xf1?? 17 ♖h3! is why 14...♞e7! was preferable.

17 ♖d5 ♖xf1 18 ♞e2?

White buckles under the pressure. Again 18 ♖h3!! is a lovely winning shot. But alas, now the white king is in mortal danger.

18...♞h6+! 19 f4



19...♞xd5!!

Another cracking sacrifice, ripping away White's last defensive bastion.

20 ♞xf1

Or 20 cxd5 ♞xf4+ 21 ♖d1 ♖e3+ and it's all over.

20...♞d4! 21 ♖e2 ♞xc4+

21...♞e6! wins on the spot and would have been a fitting end to a highly energetic performance. Instead, the ratings of the players begin to show (Black was only 2115) and the game takes a few entertaining twists and turns, before Black eventually walks away with a well-earned victory.

22 ♖d1 ♖g4 23 h3 ♞d4+?!

23...♞xf4! was still winning.

24 ♖e1 ♖xe2 25 ♞xe2 ♞g6 26 f5?

White collapses. Black had let his opponent off the hook somewhat, and now 26 ♖f2!

would have even given White the better of things.

26...♖g3+ 27 ♔f1 ♜f4+ 28 ♔g1 ♞d4! 29 ♜h5+ ♔f8 30 ♜f1 ♜h4?

30...♜e4! and 31...♞e2+ wins quickly.

31 ♜d1 ♜e4 32 ♜f2 ♜e1+ 33 ♜xe1 ♞f3+ 34 ♔f1??

34 ♜xf3! is unclear, after all of that!

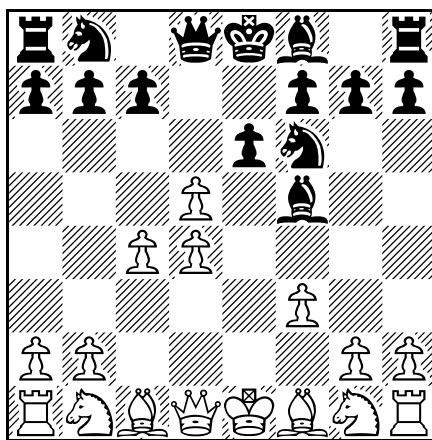
34...♞xe1 35 ♔xe1 ♜e3+ 36 ♜e2 ♜c1+ 0-1

A fitting final result to an inspiring performance by Black, despite a rollercoaster of mutual errors along the way.

With that, we move into our first 'Theory' section. About two-thirds of this book is made up of theory, but remember that I have written the chapter introductions and illustrative games to be enough by themselves to give you all the essential knowledge about each variation in order to get you started. If this is your first read-through, you may wish to skip ahead to the next part of the 'mini-book': the introduction to Chapter 2.

Theory

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♞f6 3 d4 ♟g4 4 f3 ♟f5 5 c4 e6!



Capturing on e6 is the most popular move by an overwhelming margin, but in my opinion it is already a mistake: White will have to walk a tightrope of tactics just to stay alive. This is White's last chance to try to bail out with the rare 6 ♞c3! (played roughly 5% of the time, according to my database), though here, too, life is hardly peaceful for the white monarch.

6 dxe6

Other moves:

a) 6 g4? ♞xg4! is an immediate disaster. After 7 fxg4 ♜h4+ 8 ♔d2 (not 8 ♔e2?? ♟xg4+ 9 ♞f3 ♟xf3+ 10 ♔xf3 ♜h5+, winning the white queen) 8...♟e4! 9 ♞f3 ♜f2+!, Black regains all of the sacrificed material, while keeping her other advantages.