

Winning Chess Strategies: Exploiting a Space Advantage

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POPULAR CHESS

About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 40 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the US.

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Introduction

The Thing was a movie about an alien that absorbed its victims and became the perfect imitation, turning itself into a copy of the person it killed. Gaining space in chess operates on a similar principle. We don't always need to threaten overt violence to endanger the opponent. Our opponent's precariousness can arise from the slow creep of our annexation of territory past our fourth rank into the opponent's turf.

At club level chess, as in politics and religion, the human tendency is to entrench our minds in alignment with our existing biases. Club-level players fear the opponent's attacks and tactical threats while often underestimating the steady encroachment of their opponent's growing space. This book aims to shift this mindset, teaching us how to hold our ground, claim space, and maintain it when possible.

What Exactly Is Space in Chess?

Space signifies entry past our fourth rank demarcation zone into enemy territory. The vast majority of the time, this means pawn entry into the opponent's zone, although sometimes it can be achieved with pieces alone, as demonstrated in the Kling and Horowitz study at the end of the first chapter.

This book is a manual on how to seize space, nurture and maintain it, then convert it into victory. Conversely, the book also teaches how to combat the opponent's attempts to grab space. When they do so, we must be masters at making them overextend.

Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego,
June 2025

Chapter Three

Space Leads to an Attack

One benefit of having a space advantage is that our most advanced pawn often serves as a guide for our coming attack on the enemy king. An advanced pawn creates available squares behind it, and having more available squares can quickly translate into bringing more pieces into the attack than the opponent can muster for defense. If this seems unclear, don't worry – I believe the examples in this chapter will clarify things.

In this epic game, Kasparov's attack arrived in multiple waves. It was the space he seized on the kingside that enabled him to launch the attack in the first place. Remarkably, this was not a one-on-one game, but a simultaneous exhibition against the Czech national team. The former world champion won the match with a score of 2½-1½.

Game 19

Garry Kasparov – Sergei Movsesian
Prague (simul) 2001

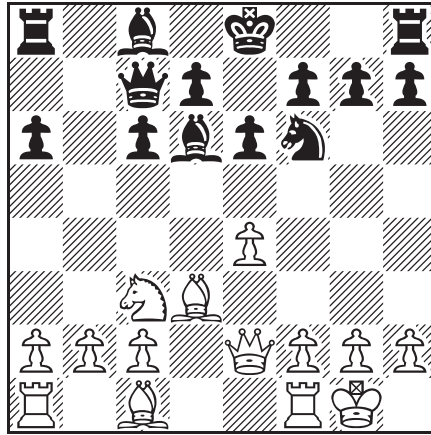
1 e4 c5 2 f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 xd4 a6 5 c3 c7 6 d3 c6 7 xc6 bxc6

It's slightly more popular to recapture with the d7-pawn.

8 0-0 f6 9 e2 d6!?

Too much talent? I don't believe Black can equalize after this artificial move.

9...d5 is a better try for equality.



10 f4 e5 11 ♔h1 h6?!

Black doesn't have the luxury to make such a move when already behind in development. Even though it looks scary, having said 'A', Black should have said 'B' and played 11...exf4.

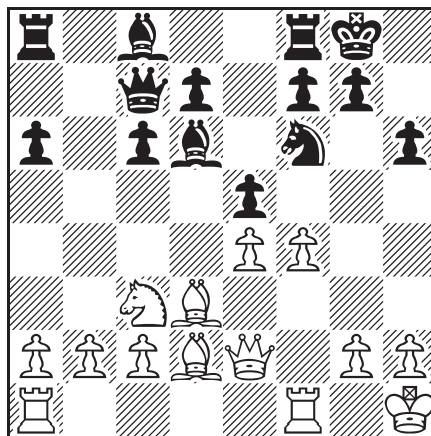
12 ♕d2

This is not White's most forceful continuation, as recapturing on f4 will cost a tempo. Better was 12 ♘a4!, intending c2-c4 and c4-c5.

12 ..0-0?!

A decision Black will immediately come to regret.

He should have once again captured on f4, accepting the inferior ending after 12...exf4 13 e5 ♕xe5 14 ♕xf4 d6 15 ♕xe5 dxe5 16 ♖ae1 ♕e6 17 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 18 ♖xe5.



13 f5!

Let's assess the effects of this intimidating push, which seizes a significant amount of

kingside space. White has access to two dangerous plans:

1) A pawn storm with g2-g4, intending to continue with g4-g5 and overrun Black on the kingside.

2) An attack with the pieces by lifting a rook to f3, planning to shift to g3 or h3 later on.

Meanwhile, Black struggles to engineer a central break with ...d5, as the d6-bishop obstructs the move. On that topic, White can also play ♖c4, discouraging the break while targeting f7.

13...♖e8?!

This meek move could have already been the decisive mistake. Black should have played 13...♗e7!, unblocking the d-pawn while preparing ...♘f6-h7 to fight against the upcoming pawn storm.

14 ♗c4?!

White would have obtained a decisive attack by going for the immediate 14 g4!.

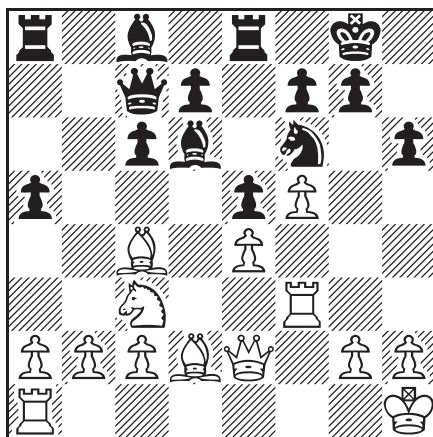
14...a5?

This is way too leisurely. Black underestimates the force of White's coming attack.

It was once again crucial to go for 14...♗e7.

15 ♖f3

Kasparov's instinct is to opt for the piece-play attack. This is strong, but a pawn storm would have been even better.



15...♗b4?

Black likely aimed to reinforce ...d7-d5 by pressuring the c3-knight, but moving the bishop to c5 was crucial.

16 ♖g3

Threatening ♗xh6.

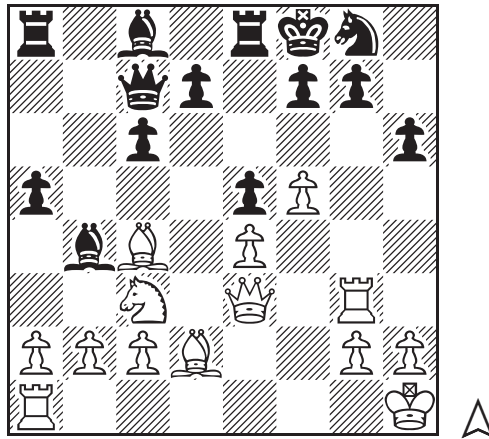
16...♔f8 17 ♗e3!

This deceptively powerful move highlights why Black's bishop should be on c5. White threatens a devastating rook sacrifice on g7, followed by ♔xh6+. The accuracy of this move is crucial, as Black was prepared to break with ...d7-d5, either with or without capturing on c3 first.

17...♘g8

There was no other way to prevent the capture on g7. Movsesian desperately reinforces h6, though at this stage, nothing can stop the attack.

Note that 17...♔a7 also fails, since White can sacrifice the rook with 18 ♖xg7!. If Black exchanges queens on e3, White has the deadly intermediate capture on f7 with check.



Exercise: The shareholders are unlikely to be pleased with this new business model for Black. How should White continue the attack?

Answer: Overload the black knight, creating chaos around the black king.

18 f6!

Annihilating the defensive barrier. This move is an ominous prelude to what is to come.

18...gxf6

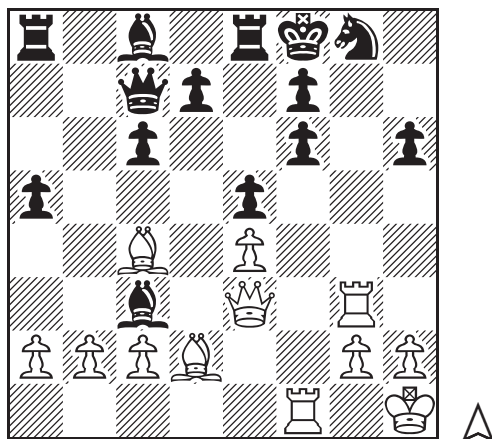
A sad necessity.

18...♘xf6 allows the crushing 19 ♖xg7. We should also examine: 18...g6? (the devil revels when his victim refuses to believe in him; this attempt to close the lines is swept aside with a spectacular sacrificial sequence) 19 ♖xg6! fxg6 20 ♔xh6+!. The assassin's motto: If you're sent on a hit, be sure to eliminate all witnesses. It's checkmate next move.

19 ♖f1

Another instructive moment: Kasparov uses every piece in the attack before delivering the final blow. Immediately sacrificing the exchange on g8 would have also been devastating.

19...♙xc3



20 Rf8+!

A critical defender is eliminated, creating the impression of a Stone Age tribe being attacked by a modern army.

20...Kxg8 21 Qg3+! Kf8 22 Rxf6!

Threatening mate on f7.

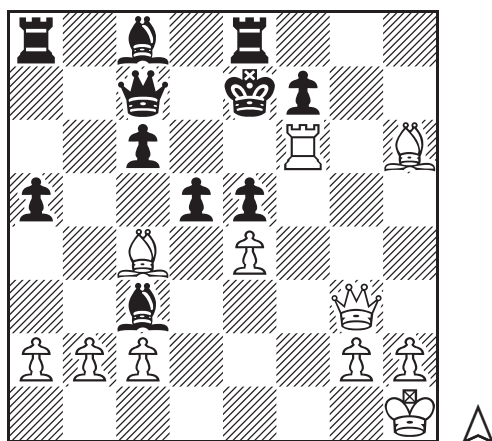
22...d5

22...Re7 clogs the e7 escape square for the black king and allows 23 Qxh6+ Ke8 24 Qg8 mate.

23 Qxh6+

This forces the win of Black's queen.

23...Ke7



24 Rxf7+!

The barrage of sacrifices continues.

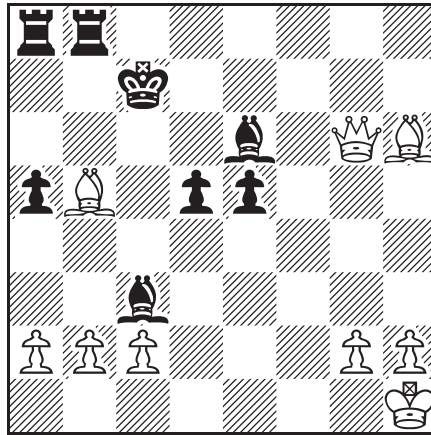
24...♔d6

24...♔xf7 is met with 25 ♖g7+ followed by ♖xc7.

25 ♖g6+! ♕e6

Forced, since a block with 25...♖e6 is met with 26 ♕f8+.

26 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 27 exd5 cxd5 28 ♕b5! ♖eb8



29 a4!

The black bishops hang simultaneously, and White wins. What is even more astounding is that Kasparov must have foreseen this position on move 17, when he initiated the forcing sequence.

29...♕d7 30 bxc3 ♕xb5 31 axb5 ♖xb5 32 h4

With his last move, White creates luft for his king while racing the h-pawn closer to its promotion square on h8. White's win is complicated by one factor: Black's passed a-pawn, which is about to storm down the board. Therefore, White must try to combine threats against Black's exposed king with an attempt to blockade the a-pawn, using either the bishop or, as a last resort, the queen.

32...a4 33 ♕g7 d4

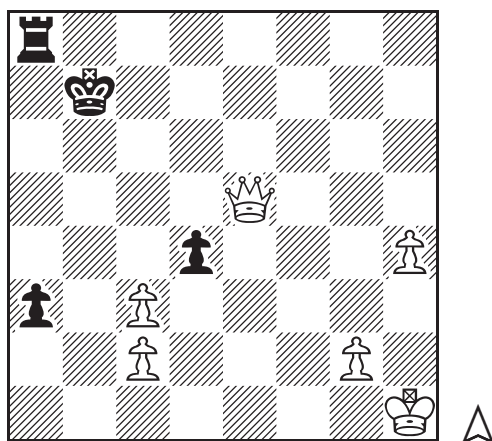
Movsesian desperately tries to cover e5.

33...a3 is also hopeless, as after 34 ♕xe5+ ♖b7 35 ♖d6! Black cannot push the a-pawn further: 35...a2 36 ♖c7+ ♖a6 37 ♖c6+ ♖a7 38 ♕d4+. The b5-rook is falling with check and Black will be checkmated in a few moves.

34 ♖f7+ ♖b6 35 ♖e6+ ♖b7 36 ♕xe5 ♖xe5

Black's precious passed a-pawn won't be enough to save him.

37 ♖xe5 a3



38 ♕d5+ ♖b8 39 cxd4!

Kasparov is in no rush to blockade the a-pawn. Instead, he calmly recaptures on d4, accurately calculating that the queen has time to reach a1.

39...a2 40 ♕b3+ ♖c7 41 ♕c3+ ♖d7 42 ♕a1

The a-pawn won't move any further.

42...♖d6 43 c4! 1-0

There are several winning plans for White, the simplest of which is to walk the king over to b2 and then simply capture the a2-pawn.

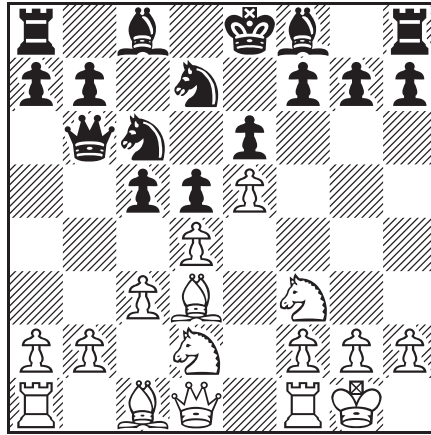
As we saw, 13 f4-f5! grabbed kingside territory and assured White of a strong attack. The presence of the pawn on f5 guaranteed that White would be able to bring more forces to bear on the area of the board from the f-file to the h-file, and that is exactly what Kasparov used to ensure the success of his attack. Black's cause wasn't helped by the bishop on d6, which obstructed the central counter. As we know from the previous chapter, that is the only antidote to a flank attack.

In the next game, just a single advanced pawn on e5 was all Kasparov needed to build up his winning attack.

Game 20

Garry Kasparov – Evgeny Bareev Cannes (rapid) 2001

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 c5 4 ♘gf3 ♘f6 5 e5 ♘fd7 6 c3 ♘c6 7 ♘d3 ♕b6 8 0-0



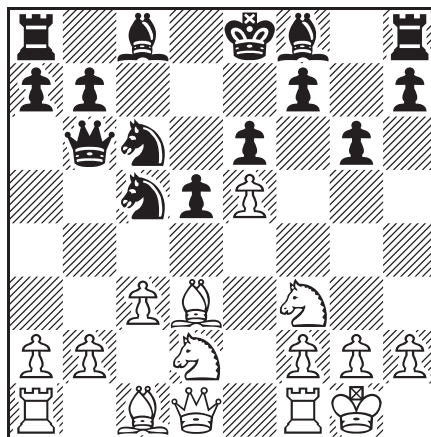
Do you have a friend with an addiction, who swears they are not addicted and can quit any time they choose? “What nonsense! I’m not addicted to nicotine. I smoke three packs a day because I interpret making smoke rings as a creative outlet!” Anyway, I have a bunch of young students who are addicted to shady gambits. But not all gambits are unsound, like this one, where, if accepted, White gets full compensation.

8...g6

The critical test is when Black accepts with 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 ♘xd4 10 ♘xd4 ♙xd4 11 ♘f3. If this is what I get with White in the gambit, then sign me up. Opening theory deems White’s pawn sacrifice completely sound.

9 dxc5 ♘xc5

9...♙c7 10 ♘b3 is another line. White offers the e5-pawn, banking on a development lead and the tactical possibilities offered by clearing the e-file.



10 ♘b3!

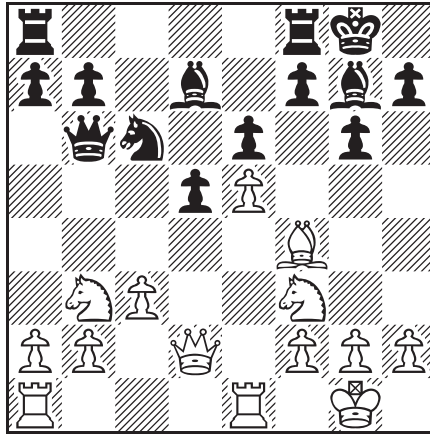
A necessary move, but an excellent one at the same time. Black's bishop pair will be of less value than White's control over d4 and the dark squares in general.

Trying to preserve the bishop pair would be a large mistake, since after 10 ♖c2? ♗g7 11 ♜e1 ♘d7! White can no longer protect the pawn on e5.

10...♘xd3 11 ♚xd3 ♗g7 12 ♖f4 0-0 13 ♚d2!

Kasparov prevents ...h7-h6, while preparing ♗h6.

13...♗d7 14 ♜fe1



The position is Nimzowitsch's dream, with an iron blockade of the d4-square. Life won't be easy for Black:

- 1) White's e5-pawn cramps Black's position.
- 2) Black is potentially weak on the kingside dark squares.
- 3) Number 2 on the list means Black's king is in some danger.
- 4) Black's bishop pair is worthless in the rigid position.

5) If White plays ♗h6 and exchanges bishops, Black's remaining bishop will be a bad one, with so many central pawns fixed on its color.

6) If Black attempts a bid at freedom with ...f7-f6, then it becomes a case of swapping one problem for another. White exchanges on f6 and then controls the hole on e5. Moreover, Black's e6-pawn becomes backward on an open file and therefore a serious target.

14...a5

Bareev seeks a distraction on the queenside.

15 ♗h6

Removing the defender of the kingside dark squares and depriving Black of his bishop pair.

15...a4 16 ♖xg7

It was also possible to retain the tension between the bishops with 16 ♖bd4.

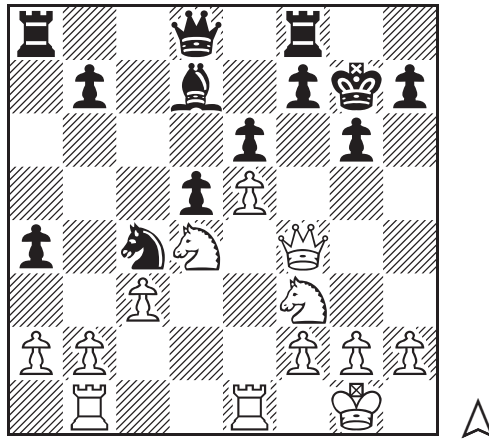
16...♗xg7 17 ♘bd4 ♘a5

A knight swap on d4 leaves Black with a classic bad bishop against White's good knight.

18 ♖ab1 ♘c4 19 ♗f4 ♗d8

Bareev wisely covers the weakened kingside dark squares.

19...♘xb2?? is misguided. A possible refutation is: 20 ♗f6+ ♔g8 21 ♘f5! gxf5 22 ♘g5. White threatens ♗h6 and Black can resign.



20 h4!

Grabbing more space, hinting at h4-h5-h6, and vacating the h2-square to facilitate a future ♘f3-h2-g4.

20...h6

This way h4-h5 can be bypassed with ...g6-g5.

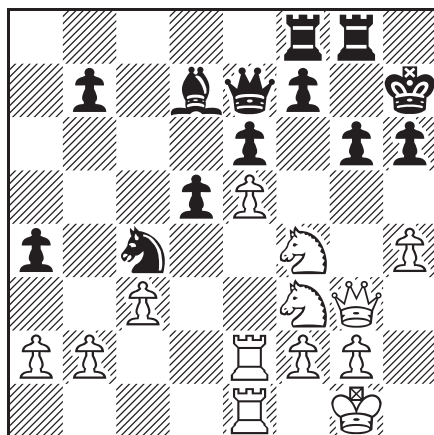
21 ♗g3!

Kasparov's idea is to clear the f4-square to transfer the well-placed d4 knight to f4, where it moves closer to Black's king, who is short of reliable defenders.

21...♗e7 22 ♘e2 ♗h7 23 ♘f4 ♗g8 24 ♗e2 ♗af8 25 ♗be1

Black's problems grow as he faces a doomsday scenario:

- 1) White is ready to invade the kingside dark squares with ♘h2! and ♘g4.
- 2) There is no way for Black to escape with ...f7-f6, with so many of White's forces trained on e6 and d5.
- 3) Point 2 automatically means that Black is unable to apply the principle of meeting the opponent's wing attack with a central counter.



25...Rc8

The counterplay arising from ...a4-a3 is too slow, yet Black has nothing better.

26 Nf2! g5!?

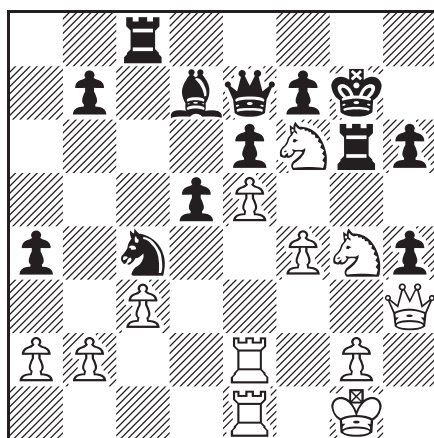
Most of us consider the mugger's knife at our throat a greater danger than global climate change, for a single reason: the mugger's blade is the more immediate peril. Such a self-inflicted strategic wound is a sign of desperation.

26...h5 leads to a slow death via the effects of global climate change: 27 Nf3 Qh8 28 Ng5 a3 29 b3 Nb2 30 Rd2. Black is strategically lost. White's next moves could include Re3, Rd4, Wf3, Nh3, Wf6 and so on.

27 Nh5

Kasparov gladly accepts the invitation to slip his knight into f6.

27...gxh4 28 Wh3 Rg5 29 Nf6+ Qg7 30 f4 Rg6 31 Nh4



Black leaks dark squares on the kingside as White's attackers ooze their way in.

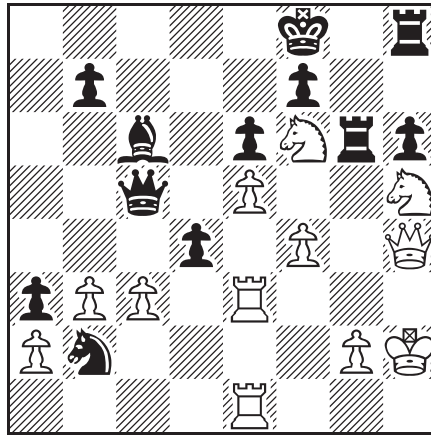
31...♖h8 32 ♘h5+ ♕f8 33 ♘gf6 ♙c6

Bareev dreams of counterplay on g2.

34 ♕xh4 a3 35 b3 ♘b2 36 ♙h2 ♕c5 37 ♖e3!

Again, 37 f5 is also good and pretty straightforward.

37...d4!

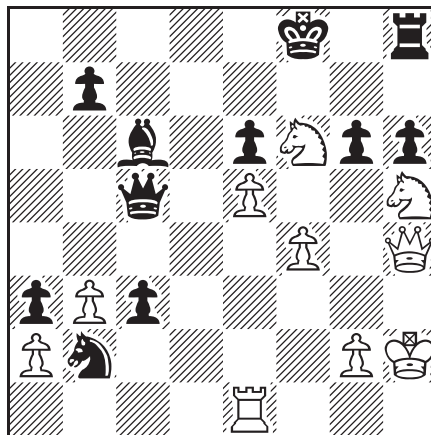


Appearances suggest that Black has generated a serious counterattack, but Kasparov has everything under control.

38 ♖g3

The g2-pawn is protected, while Black's only reliable defender is about to be eliminated.

38...dxc3 39 ♖xg6! fxg6



Exercise: The defense slumps like a bar patron who has had one too many drinks. Work out Kasparov's forced win:

Answer: White's queen needs to be given access to f6 and d8.

40 ♖d7+! ♙xd7

This allows mate, but moving the king to e8 and hanging the queen isn't much of an improvement.

41 ♔f6+ 1-0

Black resigned a move before checkmate.

Kasparov's progression was instructive:

- 1) The e5-pawn assured White of the potential for a kingside attack.
- 2) White swapped away the dark-squared bishops, which in turn created punctures around the black king.
- 3) Kasparov's knights began to seep into the hole on f6, via h2 and g4.

In the following game, the majority of Kasparov's central space was chipped away at by Black, but not without making serious concessions, which led to a winning attack for White.

Game 21

Garry Kasparov – Vladimir Chuchelov Rethymnon 2003

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 ♔c2 c5 5 dxc5 0-0 6 a3 ♙xc5 7 ♘f3 b6 8 ♙f4 ♘h5!?

