

The Modernized Marshall Attack

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move	±	White stands slightly better
?	a weak move	≡	Black stands slightly better
!!	an excellent move	±	White has a serious advantage
??	a blunder	∓	Black has a serious advantage
!?	an interesting move	+−	White has a decisive advantage
?!	a dubious move	−+	Black has a decisive advantage
□	only move	→	with an attack
N	novelty	↑	with initiative
⊙	lead in development	↔	with counterplay
⊙	zugzwang	Δ	with the idea of
=	equality	△	better is
∞	unclear position	≤	worse is
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material	+	check
		#	mate

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Preface

I think that nowadays it is pretty much common knowledge that the inventor of the Marshall Attack was the legendary grandmaster Frank Marshall. He famously played it for the first time in a game against Capablanca in Manhattan in 1918. Capablanca was able to pick his way through the complications and win that game, but despite its inauspicious beginnings the idea has not only survived but thrived in tournament play. The former world champion, Boris Spassky, reinvented the opening in his match against Mikhail Tal in 1965, and since then the Marshall Attack has been a key weapon in the Black arsenal against the Ruy Lopez. Indeed, today it is commonly considered as one of the top three best openings against 1.e4, along with the Berlin Defence and the Najdorf Sicilian.

The list of famous players who have used and continue to use the Marshall is long indeed, with notable names being Nunn, Leko, Aronian, Svidler, and many others. I have noticed that Ding Liren is including the Marshall in his repertoire at the very highest levels. On a personal note, my knowledge of the Marshall helped me to become a grandmaster and has allowed me to play some of my best games.

This book is about the Marshall Attack and the lines which can be grouped together under the banner of the so-called Anti-Marshall. The theory has developed so much in the last decade that there is more than enough material to be going on with just in those areas, but I also decided to include a detailed look at an important line in the Exchange Variation.

Black's key concept in the Marshall is giving up a central pawn in return for activity, and I have tried to give as many lines as possible which adhere closely to this principle. Why is this so significant? Well, for starters, usually in the Ruy Lopez Black is looking for long, slow games in solid, closed positions. The Marshall flips this on its head and Black tries to accelerate the play and radically change the character of the game at an early stage.

Let's briefly discuss the material of the book itself and the lines that I have decided to give. First of all, I started off with the standard Marshall Attack, after the initial moves: 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♙b3 0-0 8.c3 d5. I have given direct analysis wherever possible and I have tried to cover all the essential lines. Of course, with the passing of the years and the continual development of theory we can see how the popularity of some positions has shifted

and, in some cases, how certain lines have simply been rendered obsolete. I also discovered, to my surprise, that there are still new, unexplored, and interesting paths for further analysis.

Let's have a look at some of the key positions for getting to grips with this system.

A1) After 9.exd5 ♖xd5 10.♗xe5 ♗xe5 11.♞xe5 c6 (the modern move order did actually originate with Frank Marshall, even if he used 11...♗f6 in the stem game) we have a number of options.

A2) 12.d4 ♘d6 13.♞e1 ♗h4 14.g3 ♗h3 15.♞e4!? g5 16.♗f1 ♗h5 17.f3 White is simply looking to maintain the position of the rook on e4 for as long as possible.

A3) 12.d4 ♘d6 13.♞e1 ♗h4 14.g3 ♗h3 15.♘e3 ♘g4 16.♗d3 ♞ae8 17.♗d2 ♗h5 This is the so-called main line and is another important set-up to know.

A4) 12.d3 ♘d6 13.♞e1 ♘f5 14.♗f3 ♗h4 (there is also the less popular 14...♞e8) Today this is considered to be a critical test and Black needs to be aware of the ideas and subtleties.

Obviously, this does not encompass the entirety of the book, and many other ideas are presented. Taken together, the lines in this book give a clear and up-to-date picture of the state of contemporary chess theory on this entire system.

It is important to be aware of one key point, namely that in the lines mentioned above you simply have to know exact moves, it is not enough to just have a vague grasp of the ideas. This level of precision is not required for the other parts of the book, except for one other line, which is: 1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♘b5 a6 4.♘a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♘e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♘b3 0-0 8.h3 ♘b7 9.d3 d5. There are many forced lines in this variation as well, so exact knowledge is important in order to successfully navigate the complications.

The rest of the lines in the book tend to be more typical and well-known, and White generally tries to adopt slower set-ups in order to steer the game into calmer waters. These lines can be said to have more of the "traditional" Ruy Lopez characteristics.

B) The line that begins 1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♘b5 a6 4.♘a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♘e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♘b3 0-0 8.a4 is both a significant try and also a very popular choice at all

levels. This set-up has always been an attractive option for White players who want to avoid the sharp theory battles. There are not so many forced lines in this variation and the game takes on a much more positional edge. A careful study of these lines will reveal many interesting positional elements that are definitely worth knowing.

C) Another important set-up is the one after 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♙b3 0-0 8.d4 d6 9.c3 ♙g4. This line can also be seen against the regular Ruy Lopez, and many players with the white pieces prefer to explore the more open type of play that generally results. There are two main ideas, 10.d5 and 10.♙e3. Both lead to interesting positions that merit (and reward!) deep understanding.

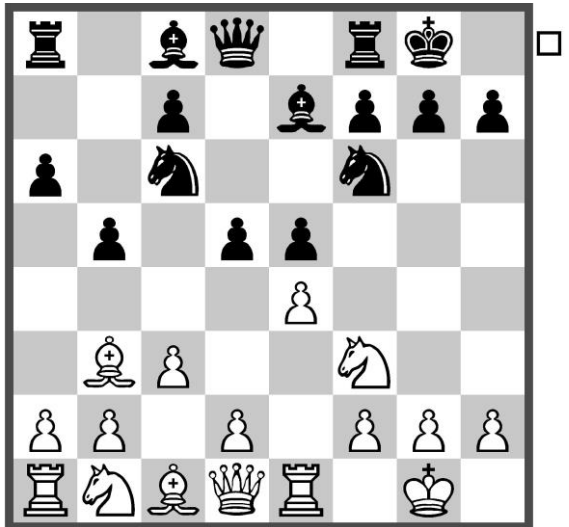
The learning material presented in this book will undoubtedly help players of practically all strengths to really get to grips with the Marshall and the Ruy Lopez in general.

Milos Pavlovic
Belgrade 2020

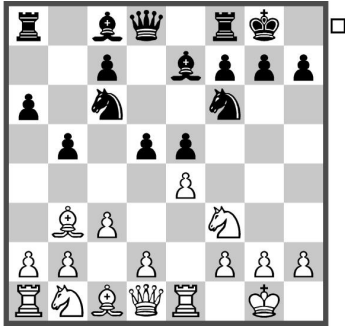


Alternatives after 8.c3 d5

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6
3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6
5.O-O ♙e7 6.♖e1 b5
7.♙b3 O-O 8.c3 d5



1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6
 4. ♙a4 ♘f6 5. 0-0 ♙e7 6. ♖e1 b5
 7. ♙b3 0-0 8. c3 d5

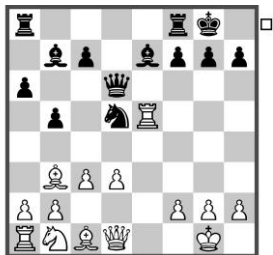


Position after: 8... d5

In this chapter we will deal with some of the less-played lines which seek to avoid the complications and dynamic counterplay of the Marshall.

9. d4

- A) 9. exd5 ♘xd5 10. d3 ♙b7! 11. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 12. ♖xe5 ♙d6!?N



Position after: 12... ♙d6!?

13. ♖e1 [13. d4 ♙f6 14. ♖e1 ♖ae8 Black has good compensation.] 13... ♖ae8 14. ♘d2 c5 When we compare this position with the one that arises after 8.h3 ♙b7 9.d3 d5, we can see

that Black has obtained an improved version. 15. a4 c4 16. dxc4 ♘f4 17. ♘f3 ♘xg2!?



Position after: 17... ♘xg2!?

An enterprising sacrifice. 18. ♙xd6 ♘xe1 19. ♙c7 ♘xf3+ 20. ♙f1 ♙e4 21. ♙e3 ♙d3+ 22. ♙g2 ♘h4+ 23. ♙g1 ♙d8 24. ♙b7 bxc4 25. ♙d1 ♖e7 26. ♙d5 ♖fe8 Black has very strong play for the sacrificed material.

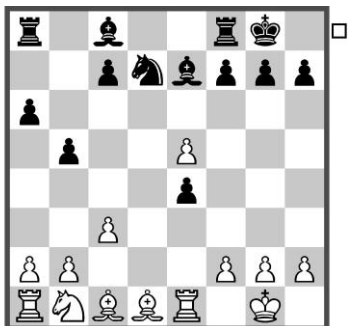
- B) 9. d3 dxe4 10. dxe4 ♙xd1 11. ♙xd1 h6 12. ♘bd2 ♙e6 13. ♘f1 ♘d7



Position after: 13... ♘d7

14. ♙b3 [14. ♙c2 ♖fd8 15. ♙d2 ♘c5 16. b4 ♘d3 Black achieves a good endgame. ½-½ (74) Bryant, J (2401) – Sevan, S (2185) Freemont 2012] 14... ♙xb3 15. axb3 a5 16. ♙e3 ♖fd8 17. ♖ed1 ♘f6 18. ♘g3 ♙f8 19. h3 g6 Again, this leads to a balanced endgame.

9... dxe4 10. ♖xe5 ♘xe5 11. dxe5 ♙xd1 12. ♙xd1 ♘d7



Position after: 12... ♘d7

This is an interesting line which has been given the stamp of approval by Aronian. The opening decisions of all top players should be given credence, but especially when they are experts in a particular system, like Aronian is in the Marshall.

13. ♖xe4

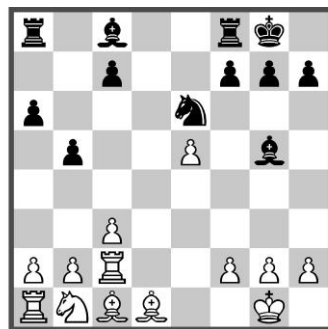
Taking the pawn is critical, of course.

13. ♘d2 ♘xe5 14. ♖xe4 ♙f6 15. ♘f3 ♘c4 Black is fine in this endgame. 0-1 (54) Daly, C (2340) – Hebden, M (2540) Kilkenny 2012

13... ♘c5 14. ♖d4

14. ♖e2 ♙g4 15. f3 ♙f5 16. ♙e3 ♖fd8 17. ♘d2 ♙d3 18. ♖f2 ♙g6 19. f4 ♘d3 20. ♖f1 ♘xb2 21. ♙f3 ♙d3 22. ♖f2 ♖ac8 Black achieved adequate counterplay in ½-½ (48) Ponkratov, P (2632) – Aronian, L (2775) Moscow 2019.

14... ♘e6 15. ♖d2 ♙g5 16. ♖c2

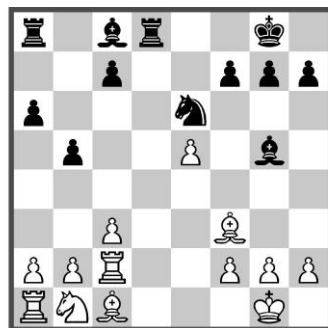


Position after: 16. ♖c2

16... ♖d8

16... ♙xc1 is also possible. After: 17. ♖xc1 ♘f4 18. ♙f3 ♖b8 19. ♖d1 ♘g6 20. ♘d2 ♘xe5 21. ♙e4 ♘c4 Black regained his pawn and reached a favourable endgame. ½-½ (81) Kurnosov, I (2649) – Khalifman, A (2614) Nakhchivan 2013

17. ♙f3



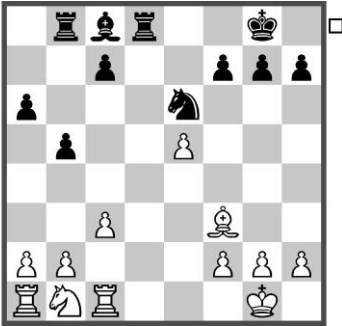
Position after: 17. ♙f3

17... ♙xc1!

It would be imprecise to play: 17...

♙b7 18. ♙xg5 ♜xg5 19. ♞d2 ♞xf3+
20. ♞xf3 ♜d3 21. ♜d2 ♜xd2 22.
♞xd2 ♜e8 23. ♜e1 as White emerges
a pawn up. ½-½ (83) Halkias, S (2583) –
Melkumyan, H (2642) Hersonissos 2017

18. ♜xc1 ♜b8



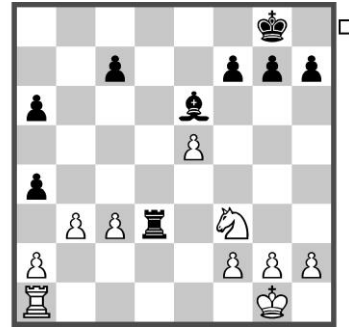
Position after: 18... ♜b8

19. ♜d1

19. ♞a3 ♞f4 20. ♜d1 ♙f5 21. ♜xd8+
♜xd8 22. ♜d1 ♜xd1+ 23. ♙xd1 ♞g6

Black will regain the pawn on e5 and
has nothing to worry about.

19... ♜xd1+ 20. ♙xd1 ♞c5 21. ♞d2
♙e6 22. ♙c2 ♞a4 23. ♙xa4 bxa4 24.
b3 ♜d8 25. ♞f3 ♜d3



Position after: 25... ♜d3

White is technically a pawn up but the
black pieces are far more active than
their counterparts, and the white
queenside is under heavy pressure.
Black is doing just fine.