

Boris Zlotnik

Zlotnik's Middlegame Manual

Typical Structures and Strategic Manoeuvres

New In Chess 2020

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Foreword by Fabiano Caruana

Boris Zlotnik was my coach in Madrid, Spain, from the Fall of 2004 to the Spring of 2007. It was during this period that my Elo rating increased from less than 2200 to more than 2500, thereby completing my transition from a serious junior player to a very serious adult player.

Zlotnik's *Middlegame Manual* is a book with a highly didactic, explanatory character, in which all evaluations and conclusions are supported by deep computer analysis. The book is a thorough study of three important types of pawn structures and three main motifs that return in many openings. Together, these are six essential themes that form an integral part of modern chess, and they have been very thoroughly investigated by Boris. The result is an interesting and productive study for chess players of all levels, including coaches.

Today, practically all players use computer analysis mostly for their opening preparation, but also to analyse their middlegame and endgame play. The analyses in this book are much more comprehensive than such lines given by engines, and in many places the assessments of the computer are compared with decisions human players would take in a practical game.

Since the study of chess is a practical activity, this book also contains a large number of interesting exercises on a theme-by-theme basis.

Finally, although the book is primarily devoted to middlegame study, all the games have been completely analysed from beginning to end, with modern opening evaluations, topical game statistics, and surprising endgame discoveries.

Zlotnik's Middlegame Manual is a must-have for all serious players, especially those who desire to improve their middlegame and to further uncover the mysteries of our ancient game.

August 2020
GM Fabiano Caruana

Preface

In 1986 and 1987 in the former USSR and in West Germany respectively my book *Typische Stellungen im Mittelspiel* (in German) was published. The 50,000 copies of the Russian edition sold out in two weeks. I have no information about how well the edition in German fared, both because of the sudden death of the editor (Rudi Schmaus) and because of the close secrecy of the Soviet regime. The book was also printed without my express permission in Italian and Serbo-Croat, which is a good indication that it was quite well accepted in the world of chess.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian editors asked for my permission to reprint this book, even offering to correct and update it themselves. However, this approach did not seem very serious to me, for what was of value in the middle of the 1980s, in the last century, was not necessarily of interest to the 21st century reader. In addition, I was aware of the fact that the changes in chess due to the influence of search engines and large databases would demand a great deal of work on my part to create a book which would meet the standards of the present time. When the president of New in Chess, Allard Hoogland, asked me last year if I wanted to publish anything, adding that he had liked the German edition in its time, I began to think again about updating this book. I think that my decision was also influenced by a number of other things, in particular the three following matters: firstly, a GM resident in Spain told me he earned quite a lot of money using this book in Russian in his classes; secondly, a well-known Spanish trainer gave the opinion that mine was the best book written about the Carlsbad structure; and finally, I found several parts of my book, usually without any acknowledgement or reference to me, copied in other books.

When I began the work, I decided first to expand the contents considerably; but in this case it would go beyond the limits set by the publisher both regarding the agreed size and the agreed deadlines. So I restricted myself to a few important additions and a quite sizable collection of exercises.

As a result, in the book there are two large sections, each one divided into three chapters. In the first Part, dedicated to typical structures which can occur in various openings, as well as the first two chapters: 'The isolated queen's pawn' and 'The Carlsbad structure', there is a new chapter on 'Symmetrical pawn structures', which are very fashionable in modern

chess. In the second Part, devoted to typical methods in various openings, in addition to the first two chapters: 'Restricted mobility in the King's Indian Defence' and 'Should we exchange the fianchettoed bishop?' there are also three chapters, instead of the two in last century's edition; the new chapter is 'The d5-square in the Sicilian', which is a forever topical issue in one of the most popular defences. Each chapter in the book illustrates the topic with a number of model games, and corresponding exercises, 162 altogether, are presented in Part III.

My main idea was to keep what was good from the previous edition, to bring up to date and expand the content, and to check it all using current analysis engines. It was precisely this last factor that gave me a dilemma to resolve: many classical games containing interesting ideas do not always stand up to scrutiny with an engine, and thus it was not at all easy to establish that in some cases these ideas were not correct. However, I must admit that if forced to choose between 'computer truth' and the human idea, I have preferred the latter.

We must add that every country where chess is especially popular has a national chess hero, such as Capablanca in Cuba, Euwe in the Netherlands, Olafsson in Iceland, Gligoric in the former Yugoslavia, and so on. I am a representative of the famous Soviet/Russian school of chess, whose founder was the 6th World Champion, Mikhail Botvinnik. It is no coincidence that all the World Champions after the Second World War and until 2006 were representatives of that school, except for the great Fischer.

State support for chess, the abundance of talent and the rigour of the internal championships were the fundamental pillars of the success of this school. It seems to me that contemporary chess players do not know much about Botvinnik and therefore I want to say that he displayed an extraordinary talent for chess. Only two years after first playing in tournaments he gained the 'Soviet First Category' title, which is at least the equivalent to a current Elo rating of around 2100. Two years later he drew for 5th-7th place in the Soviet Championship of 1927, which corresponds to a modern Elo of around 2500. In other words, it took him only four years to go from beginner's level to that of a modern GM. He kept the title of World Champion for many years, without ever being a professional player, as he was a research professor in the field of electrical and electronic engineering and was the manager of a research laboratory. As Tal said, 'We all began to play chess and developed thanks to M. Botvinnik'.

Botvinnik's legacy and contributions to chess are enormous, and what is more, they remain as valid as ever. It is, therefore, no coincidence that his name can be found in practically every chapter of this book. However,

in addition to Botvinnik, in this book I wish to pay tribute to several classical players, beginning even with a reference to Philidor, passing through almost all the World Champions and arriving at examples from 2020.

Whenever it makes sense for the logic of the book I also mention trainers, such as Igor Bondarevsky for Spassky, and Yury Balashov and Yury Razuvaev for Karpov.

In the book there are also examples of games played by graduates of the chess department of the Central National Institute of Physical Education (known by its Russian initials GZOLIFK), where I worked from 1975 until 1991 and was its director from 1983 to 1991, as well as games by some of my pupils after I moved to Spain in 1992.

The main idea of this book is to pass on to the reader some strategic ideas which will broaden his knowledge of the middlegame, giving him a number of typical patterns which can serve as guides during competitive games. I have to say that the knowledge that these patterns require is more extensive than one might think at the beginning. Here is a striking example: it was in 1969 that the young Anatoly Karpov began his training with GM Semyon Furman, a great expert in opening theory. But very soon there arose a big problem. Furman had an encyclopedic knowledge of the closed openings, but in his games he had practically never opened with 1.e4. At that time, Karpov always opened with that move and he was above all concerned about this question, 'What to play in the Spanish Opening?'. Furman found a clever solution. He advised the future World Champion to close the centre by means of d4-d5, which bears a certain similarity to positions in the King's Indian, of which the GM had a deep and wide knowledge. In this book the reader will find several such examples of one topic leading on to another. For example, in positions of the Carlsbad type, isolated queen's pawn structures frequently occur, while the latter can evolve into symmetrical structures.

I have decided to explain these patterns by making use mainly of classical games, especially by World Champions and other great masters. A large number of these are not modern games and, therefore, the notes on the openings have been updated with references to recent games and in this way they have direct links to the chess of today. I must admit that I had never previously thought that I might include rapid and even blitz games in this book. Yet the level of play of the likes of Kramnik and Carlsen, even in games of this type, is so high that the reader will find more than one game with these time controls in the book.

At present, the influence of analysis engines is very great and nowadays nobody has any doubts that their ability in concrete play is clearly superior to that of any human being. However, this very ability can also help in the solving of positional, strategic problems, and some of these can be seen in this book, such as, for example, the move 17...fxg6!! in the Shirov-Illescas game in Chapter 6 (No. 124). At other times the engine's recommendations are surprising, such as, for example, placing all its pawns on squares of the same colour as its bishop, as can be seen in the note to the move 16...♘b6 in the Botvinnik-Smyslov game in Chapter 5 (No. 101).

It is important to point out that there is a significant difference between a quick analysis, when the engine is left to think about a move for only a few minutes, and a deeper one, when several hours of computation with sufficient processing power are employed. In the first case the computer's conclusions are similar to human thought, but in the second a different way of making decisions is seen. Precisely because of this deep analysis I have been able to find a number of errors in commentaries by famous grandmasters, including Kasparov. Most striking in this respect have been the mistakes in endgames. In many games, classical as well as modern, often the ending is hardly analysed at all. The problem, apart from the analytical complexity for a commentator, is that in many cases a human being has no desire to delve into a position which according to chess logic looks bad, for example with a pawn down, and only an in-depth analysis can reveal that quite frequently these positions have a drawish character.

In the book the reader will find many cases of comparison between human thought and the conclusions of the computer. And there are some very surprising cases, such as the Botvinnik-Smyslov game itself and also the Topalov-Carlsen game (No. 105 in Chapter 5), on the subject of exchanging the fianchettoed bishop, where the engine gives the same evaluation both to exchanging this bishop and to retaining it. I think that all these cases tell us something about the need to make changes to the classical human understanding of chess.

I should say that all the games and all the exercises in this book were checked using Stockfish 11 at a sufficient depth to guarantee the reliability of its analysis. In this verification process I was greatly helped by my nephew Andrey Zlotnik, to whom I am extremely grateful. However, I am aware that even the in-depth analysis of the computer is not free from mistakes, owing to its heuristic character.

I recently saw on Facebook a comment by Emil Sutovsky, a famous GM and the Director General of FIDE, about the huge imaginary book that the world of chess needs. According to him, this book should comprise

analysis of structures, in other words typical middlegame positions, with an explanation of the plans and the various finer points which are hidden in these structures, always relating these to the computer's analysis. Emil said that, unfortunately, nobody would write such a huge book. He wondered if, at least, someone would be bold enough to write a part of it. I believe that this present book, which covers six strategic themes, is indeed one of those books which can serve as part of this great imaginary book covering all the themes of the middlegame.

Boris Zlotnik

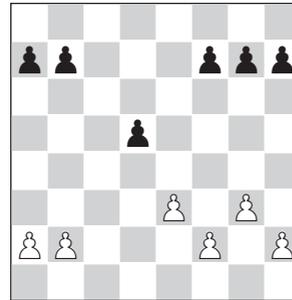
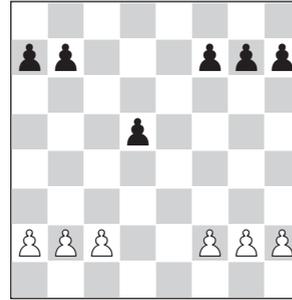
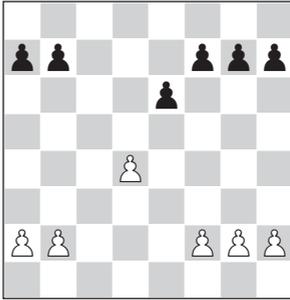
Madrid, June 2020

CHAPTER 1

The isolated queen's pawn

1.1. Introduction

'He who fears an isolated queen's pawn should give up chess' – Siegbert Tarrasch.



This position-type, usually with the isolated pawn on d4 (which we shall refer to as an IQP), seems to be the earliest such to appear. As early as the 18th century it was analysed by Philidor. It is curious that it has appeared in several matches for the World Championship and in some cases, e.g. Steinitz-Zukertort (1886), Botvinnik-Petrosian (1963) and Petrosian-Spassky (1969), the winner of the match demonstrated his superiority in handling positions with an IQP and this more or less determined the outcome of the whole match.

In current practice, positions of this type are encountered quite often and furthermore they can arise from a variety of different openings, with both white and black, which accounts for their popularity. The main such openings are:

1. Queen’s Gambit Accepted: 1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6 5.♙xc4 c5 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♚e2 cxd4 8.♚d1 ♙e7 9.exd4;
2. Queen’s Gambit Declined, Tarrasch Defence: 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.g3 ♘f6 7.♙g2 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.dxc5 ♙xc5;
3. Queen’s Gambit Declined, Semi-Tarrasch Defence: 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 c5 5.cxd5 ♘xd5 6.e3 cxd4 7.exd4;
4. Nimzo-Indian Defence: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♘f3 c5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.a3 cxd4 9.exd4 dxc4 10.♙xc4;
5. Caro-Kann Defence: 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e6 6.♘f3 ♙e7 7.cxd5 ♘xd5;
6. French Defence: 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♙b5+ ♘c6 6.♘gf3 ♙d6 7.dxc5 ♙xc5;
7. Sicilian Defence: 1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5 3.exd5 ♚xd5 4.d4 e6 5.♘f3 ♘f6 6.♙d3 ♙e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.♚e2 cxd4 9.cxd4;
8. Italian Game: 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙c4 ♙c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 ♙b4+ 7.♙d2 ♙xd2+ 8.♘bxd2 d5 9.exd5 ♘xd5;
9. Petroff Defence: 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♙d3 ♙e7 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.♚e1 ♙g4 9.c4 ♘f6 10.♘c3 0-0 11.cxd5 ♘xd5.

The above are the four most frequently encountered IQP structures. It should be noted that in the fourth type, two variants are possible: one with the white king’s bishop fianchettoed on g2 and the other with a pawn on e3 and with the bishop generally developed along the f1-a6 diagonal.

It is interesting that almost two centuries ago, in a series of matches between the two best players of the day, the theoretical debate focused on the theme of the IQP.

Game 1 Queen’s Gambit Accepted
Louis Charles de la Bourdonnais
Alexander McDonnell

London match 1834 (6)

It is evident that the same IQP structure can arise from different move-orders and from various openings. The ECO code assigned to this game is that of the Petroff Defence.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 e5 4.♙xc4 exd4 5.exd4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♙e7 7.♘f3 0-0 8.0-0 c6!



It is curious that this move was already recommended by Philidor in the 18th century and Stockfish considers it to be the best move,

awarding it 0.15. According to Megabase 2020, the main line is 8...♔g4, with a lower evaluation for Black of 0.46. It should be said that the text move can also be seen in modern games.

9.h3

9.♖e1 ♗bd7 10.♙b3 ♗b6 11.♙g5 ♗bd5 12.♗xd5 ♗xd5?! (12...cxd5) 13.♙xe7?! (13.♖xe7! ♗xe7 14.♞e2 ♙e6 15.♙xe6 fxe6 16.♞xe6+ ♖f7 17.♗e5 ♞d5 18.♞xd5 ♗xd5 19.♗xf7 ♗xf7 wins a pawn, although realizing it is not easy in view of the strong position of the ♗d5. However, the engine is optimistic and evaluates it at about 1.30) 13...♗xe7 14.♗e5 ♗d5, with equality, Artemiev-Ivanchuk, Huai'an 2017.

9...♗bd7 10.♙e3

Modern players prefer 10.♖e1, as in the following game, which began with the Petroff Defence: 1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗f3 ♗xe4 5.c4 c6 6.♗c3 ♗f6 7.d4 ♙e7 8.h3 d5 9.♙d3 0-0 10.0-0 dxc4 11.♙xc4 ♗bd7 12.♖e1, reaching the same position, but with two moves more, due to the tempi lost with this order of moves. For clarity we are not going to count these two extra moves: (10.♖e1) 10...♗b6 11.♙b3 ♗fd5 12.♙c2 ♙f6 13.a3 ♙e6 14.♗e5 g6 15.♗e4 ♙g7 16.♙g5 ♞c7 17.♙h4 ♖ae8 18.♗c5 ♗d7 19.♙g3 ♙xe5 20.♙xe5 ½-½ Movsesian-Wang Yue, Wijk aan Zee 2009.

10...♗b6 11.♙b3 ♗fd5 12.♞e2 ♗h8?!

The start of an aggressive but mistaken plan. Stockfish prefers the black position following 12...♙e6!?

13.♖fe1 ♖e8 14.♙d2 a5!? 15.♞d1 h6 16.a3 ♙f8 17.♞c2 ♗c7.

13.♖ae1 ♙d6 14.♙c2 f5?

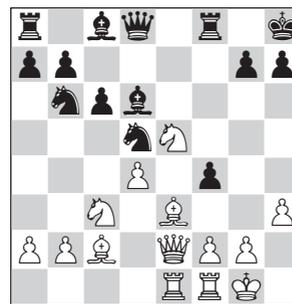
This advance, which McDonnell also tried unsuccessfully in the 17th game of their first match, is a positional blunder, probably based on a miscalculation on the following move. Correct would have been 14...♗xe3 15.♞xe3! (15.fxe3 ♙e6 16.♗e4 ♙e7 17.♗e5 g6 18.♗c5 ♙xc5 19.dxc5 ♞g5 20.♗xf7+ ♙xf7 21.cxb6 axb6, with a slight advantage to Black) 15...♙e6 16.♗e5 ♗d5 17.♞d3 g6 18.♞d2 ♙c7 19.♗e4 ♙f5 20.a3 f6 21.♗f3 ♙f4, with approximate equality.

15.♗e5?!

It was more accurate to play 15.♙g5! ♞c7 16.♗e5 ♙e6 17.♞h5 ♗g8 18.g4!, with a white initiative.

15...f4?

Correct was 15...♙e6 16.♗xd5 ♗xd5 17.♙d2 ♙g8 18.♞h5 ♙xe5 19.dxe5 ♙f7 20.♞e2 ♙e6, with equality.



16.♞h5! ♗f6 17.♗g6+ ♗g8 18.♙b3+ ♗bd5 19.♗xd5! cxd5

If 19...♗xh5? then 20.♗f6#.

20.♙xd5+ ♗xd5 21.♞xd5+ ♖f7

22.♗e5 ♙e6 23.♞xe6 ♙xe5 24.dxe5 fxe3 25.♖xe3

The white position is winning (**1-0, 35**).

Let us now turn our attention to one of the games from the first ever match for the World Championship, which provides a good illustration of some modern aspects of play in IQP positions. This game was annotated by various illustrious players of the past as well as the present, including World Champions, although, as we shall see, their annotations are not free of errors.

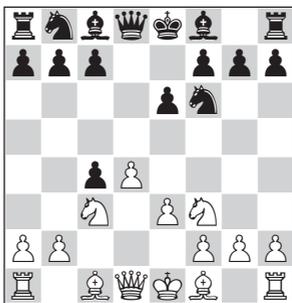
Game 2 Queen's Gambit Accepted
Johannes Zukertort

William Steinitz

St Louis Wch m 1886 (9)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♙f3 dxc4 5.e3

This move vies for first place in popularity with 5.e4, which modern theory considers slightly better, as the statistics confirm: 51.2% and 58.4% respectively.



5...c5

Here 5...a6!? 6.a4 c5 7.♙xc4 ♘c6 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.♖e2 cxd4 10.♞d1 e5 11.exd4 exd4 12.♗xd4 ♗xd4 13.♖e5

♞d6 14.♖xd4 ♖xd4 15.♞xd4 ♙c5, Eljanov-Caruana, Douglas 2016, leads to complete equality.

6.♙xc4 cxd4

The capture on d4, opening a path for the ♙c1, is somewhat premature. It was more accurate to play 6...a6!? or 6...♗c6!?. It should be said that although Stockfish awards a more or less equal assessment to both of these moves and the one in the game, the human evaluation of the capture on d4 is more accurate.

7.exd4 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0

Annotating this game, Garry Kasparov asserts that 8...♗c6 would hinder ♖e2. However, after 9.♖e2!? (9.♞e1!?) 9...♗xd4? (9...0-0) 10.♗xd4 ♖xd4 11.♞d1 ♖b6 12.♙e3 ♖c7 13.♙b5+ ♗f8 (even worse is 13...♙d7 14.♙xd7+ ♗xd7 15.♞ac1) 14.♞ac1, White's attack is very strong. The engine gives equality after 8...♗c6 9.a3 0-0 10.♞e1 b6 11.d5 ♗a5 12.♙a2 ♗xd5 13.♗xd5 exd5 14.♖xd5 ♙e6!.

9.♖e2 ♗bd7?!

An inaccuracy. Two better options were 9...a6 10.♞d1 (the engine prefers 10.♙g5 h6 11.♙xf6 ♙xf6 12.♞ad1 ♗c6 13.d5 exd5 14.♗xd5, although it sees no more than equality) 10...b5 11.♙b3 ♙b7 12.♙g5 ♗bd7 13.d5 exd5 14.♗xd5 ♙xd5 15.♙xd5 ♗xd5 16.♞xd5 ♙xg5 17.♗xg5 h6, with equal play, Vidit-Vallejo Pons, Riyadh 2017; and 9...♗c6 10.♞d1 ♗a5 11.♙d3 b6 (Stockfish indicates 11...♗c6 12.♗e5 ♗xd4 13.♖e3 ♖d6 14.♗c4 ♖d7 15.♖f4 ♗h5, with equality) 12.♗e5 ♙b7 13.♙g5 ♗d5 14.♖h5 f5, with

chances for both sides, Enchev-Pulvett Marin, Sautron 2018.

10. ♖b3

The engine considers this to be the best move, with an assessment of 0.87.

10... ♜b6



Black controls the square d5, which is normally used to block White's isolated pawn, preventing its advance. However, after the somewhat premature exchange 6...cxd4 White has a free hand to develop various plans of attack.

11. ♕f4?!

Other plans were better, for instance 11. ♖d1, with the idea of ♖d1-d3-g3/h3, e.g. 11... ♜bd5 12. ♜e5 ♖d6 13. ♖d3 ♕d7 14. ♖h3 (14. ♖g3!? ♖fc8 15. ♖f3 ♕e8 16. ♕h6 g6 17. h4) 14... ♖fd8 15. ♕c2 g6 16. ♕g5, with advantage to White, Suba-Bareev, Leon 2008.

11. ♕g5!? was also better than the text move, e.g. 11... ♕d7 12. ♜e5 ♕c6 13. ♖ad1 ♜fd5 14. ♕c1 a5 (14... ♖c8) 15. ♖d3 a4 (15... ♕g5!?) 16. ♕c2 g6? (16... ♕e8!?) 17. ♕h6, with the better game for White, Aleksandrov-Laxman, Mumbai 2011.

11... ♜bd5 12. ♕g3

Stockfish indicates that even here 12. ♕g5!? was better, with a slight advantage to White after 12...h6 13. ♕h4 ♜xc3 14. bxc3 b6 15. ♖d3 ♕b7 16. ♜e5 ♕e4 17. ♖e3.

12... ♖a5

It was more accurate to play 12...b6! 13. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 14. a3 ♕b7 15. ♜e5 ♖c8, when the engine gives -0.40.

13. ♖ac1

Instead, 13. ♜xd5!? ♜xd5 14. ♜e5 ♕f6 15. ♖fe1 ♖d8 16. ♖ac1 ♕d7 17. ♕xd5 exd5 18. ♜xd7 ♖xd7 19. ♖c7 deserved attention, when Black has to play accurately to neutralize White's initiative.

13... ♕d7 14. ♜e5 ♖fd8 15. ♖f3

Even with the bishop on g3 instead of g5, it was better to advance f2-f4, as played by Botvinnik in his famous game against Vidmar, Nottingham 1936, which can be seen in the notes to the game Botvinnik-Tolush; 15. f4 ♕e8?! (or 15... ♜xc3 16. bxc3 ♕b5 17. c4) 16. f5!.

15... ♕e8

The best square for the queen's bishop in positions of this type. Here it defends the vital f7-square and clears the d-file for the black major pieces.

16. ♖fe1 ♖ac8 17. ♕h4



The position is in a state of dynamic balance, but Black’s following move, which in those days was considered a novelty, leads to a transformation in the pawn structure.

17...♟xc3!? 18.bxc3

As tournament practice has shown, the fact that the ♖d4 is now protected by another pawn is balanced by the weakness of the ♖c3, which is often easier to attack. Furthermore the exchange of pieces initiated by the capture on c3 reduces White’s attacking potential.

18...♞c7 19.♞d3

Better was 19.♞g3!, e.g. 19...♞d6 (19...♞b6 is even worse) 20.c4 ♟d7 21.c5! ♟xe5 22.♞e5! ♞xe5 23.♞xe5 ♞e7 24.♞g4 f6 25.♞xe6+, and Stockfish gives 0.49.

19...♟d5!?

Kasparov awards this move an exclamation mark, in recognition of its strategic intent: ‘Forcing the immediate exchange: the fewer pieces there are, the weaker the pawns will be’. However, the engine points out another, equally good, continuation: 19...b5!?, blockading the ♖c3, e.g. 20.f4 a5 21.f5 a4 22.♞d1 exf5 23.♞xf5 ♟d5.

20.♞xe7 ♞xe7



21.♞xd5?

Zukertort, a brilliant attacking player, overestimates his position. White could maintain equality with an obvious pawn advance: 21.c4 ♟f6 22.♞e3 a5 23.♞b1 ♟d7 24.♟f3.

21...♞xd5 22.c4 ♞dd8 23.♞e3?

The start of a suicidal plan of attack: after the exchange of three pairs of minor pieces it is very difficult to create any serious threats against the black king. White could still have maintained equality with 23.♞e3 b6 24.h3 ♞b4 25.♞c3 h6 26.♞ec1 ♞d6 27.♟f3.

23...♞d6

Underlining the weakness of the ♖d4.

24.♞d1 f6 25.♞h3 h6 26.♟g4



26...♞f4!?

Kasparov gives this move an exclamation mark and there is no doubt that it is a good one from the practical viewpoint. However, according to Stockfish, the strongest move was 26...b5! 27.♟xf6+ (27.cxb5?? ♞xd4!) 27...gxf6 28.♞xh6 ♞e7 29.cxb5 ♞g7 30.♞e3 e5 31.♞h4 f5, with a clear advantage to Black. It was more prudent, albeit less strong, to prepare the advance ...b7-

b5: 26...e5!? 27.d5 b5 28.♖g3 ♘h8
29.♗e3 bxc4 30.♗xc4 ♜c5, with the
better game for Black.

27.♗e3 ♙a4!

‘To force the rook from the first
rank, which will soon be seized by
Black’ – Em. Lasker.

28.♖f3?

According to the engine, the white
position would not be so bad after
28.♖d2! b5 (28...♙e8!? 29.♖f3 ♜d6
30.♞b3 b5 31.cxb5 ♜c1+ 32.♗f1
♞d5 33.♜c3) 29.g3! (Kasparov gave
29.♖f3?! but Black is better after
29...♞d6! 30.♞g6 (30.c5? ♜xc5)
30...♞f8 31.♗g4 ♜xc4! 32.h3 ♘h8)
and now:

- A) 29...♞f3? 30.♖xh6! gxh6
31.♞g6+ ♘h8 (31...♞f8 32.d5!)
32.♞xh6+, with perpetual check;
- B) 29...♞d6? 30.♞g6 ♘f8 31.d5!
♞e7 (31...bxc4?? 32.♖xh6) 32.♖d4
♞f7 33.♞b1, with a white initiative;
- C) 29...♞c7 30.c5 b4 31.♖h4 a5
32.♗c4 ♙c6 33.♞e2, with the evalu-
ation -0.61, i.e. White can still resist.

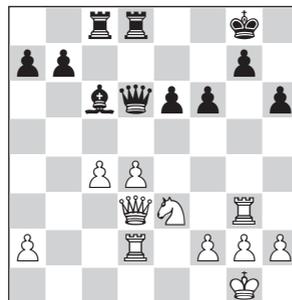
28...♞d6 29.♖d2 ♙c6?

It was necessary to prepare the
thematic pawn break ...b7-b5 with
29...f5!, e.g. 30.g3 b5 31.♞c3 bxc4
32.d5 ♜c5; also good was 29...♘h8!?
30.♞b1 b5 31.cxb5 ♜c7 32.g3 ♖b7
33.d5 ♜xb5 34.♞d3 ♖b4. Kasparov
mistakenly gave an exclamation
mark to the immediate 29...b5?
30.♞g6 ♞e7 but after 31.♗g4!
♜xc4 32.h3 White’s advantage is
overwhelming.

30.♖g3?

A decisive error, at a moment when
White could have maintained

equality. In the variation 30.d5!
Kasparov did not mention two
important replies: 30...♙e8!? (or
30...b5!? 31.♖xf6 bxc4 32.♞g6 ♙e8
33.♞g4 c3 34.♜c2 ♖b8 35.g3 with
equality, but not 30...exd5? 31.♗f5)
31.♖g3 ♖d7 32.♞c3 ♘h8 33.♞b2
exd5 34.♖xd5 ♞b6 35.♞b3 ♞c6
36.h3 ♙f7, and according to the
engine the position is equal.



Black’s next move tips the balance
in his favour and is a typical
defensive resource in IQP positions:

30...f5! 31.♖g6?

31.c5!? offered greater resistance, e.g.
31...♞e7 32.f4 (32.♗c4!? ♙b5 33.♞b3
♙xc4 34.♞xc4 ♜xc5 35.dxc5 ♖xd2
36.h3 ♞d7 37.♖e3) 32...♙e4 33.♞e2,
although after 33...b6 Black’s
advantage is clear.

31...♙e4 32.♞b3 ♘h7!

32...f4? led to a draw after 33.c5!
fxe3 34.cxd6 exd2 35.♞xe6+ ♘h7
36.♖xh6+ gxh6 37.♞f7+ ♘h8
38.♞f6+, with perpetual check.

33.c5 ♜xc5 34.♖xe6 ♜c1+ 35.♗d1 ♞f4 36.♞b2 ♖b1 37.♞c3 ♜c8

38.♖xe4 ♞xe4 0-1

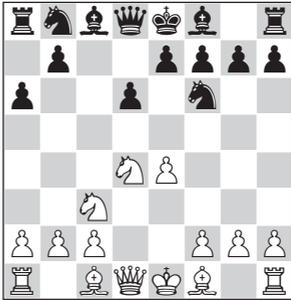
Even from this single game the
fundamental strategic ideas of the
typical positions with IQP are clear:

Game 116 Sicilian Defence

Robert Byrne**Robert James Fischer**

Sousse 1967 (12)

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4
♘f6 5.♙c3 a6**



One of the most popular positions in modern chess. It is curious that, in search of an advantage in this position, White has tried eighteen (!) moves, i.e. every reasonable move. I think that on the one hand this is a sign of the richness of the game of chess, while on the other hand it indicates that in the opening stage of the game the concept of 'best move' is often a relative one. The move played in the game was a favourite of Fischer himself, together with 6.h3:

6.♙c4 e6 7.♙b3 b5 8.f4

The modern main line is 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.♗f3 ♗c7 10.♗g3 0-0 11.♙h6 ♘e8 12.♞ad1 ♙d7 13.f4 ♘c6 14.♗xc6 ♙xc6 15.f5 ♖h8 16.f6 gxh6 17.fxg7 ♗xe7 18.♗f2 ♘g7 19.♗b6, when White has an initiative for the sacrificed pawn, Kasimdzhanov-Gelfand, Tashkent 2014. Second in popularity, and also seemingly

more promising than the text move, is the line 8.♙g5!? ♙e7 9.♗f3 ♗c7 10.e5 ♙b7 11.exd6 ♙xd6 12.♗e3 ♙c5 13.0-0-0 ♘c6 14.♙xf6 (14.♗xe6+!? fxe6 15.♗xe6 ♗e5 16.♗xg7+, Ivanchuk-Karjakin, Nice 2008) 14... gxf6 15.♗d5, with very sharp play, Radjabov-Topalov, Shamkir 2017.

8...♙b7



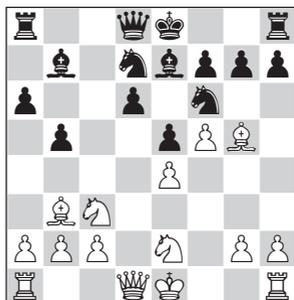
9.f5

Byrne's plan is to occupy the d5-square, so he provokes the advance of Black's king's pawn. However, as the game shows, this plan is not very fruitful. It is striking that the engine already evaluates this position as -0.42. Black also has no problems after White's other options, as shown by the very advantageous statistics. It is curious that apart from 9.0-0 the engine recommends a rare sideline as the best option to maintain equality: 9.e5!? dxe5 10.fxe5 ♘fd7 11.♗h5 g6 12.♗h3 ♘c6 (12...♙g7? 13.0-0 0-0 14.♞xf7! ♞xf7 15.♗xe6, with a winning attack, Mikalsen-Nordquelle, Kragero 2020) 13.♗xc6 ♙xc6 14.0-0 ♗e7 15.♗e2! ♗xe5 16.♗d4 ♞d8 17.♗xc6 ♗xc6 18.♖h1 ♗d4 19.c3 ♗xb3 20.axb3 ♙g7 21.♞xa6, with an equal game.

9...e5 10.♟de2 ♞bd7

In the event of 10...♞xe4 11.♞d5 (11.♞xe4!?) 11...♞xc3 12.♞xc3 ♞xd5 13.♞xd5 ♞d7 14.♞g5, White has enough positional compensation for the pawn.

11.♞g5 ♞e7



12.♞g3

Fischer himself with white played the more accurate 12.♞xf6!? ♞xf6 13.♞d3 ♞c8 (13...♞b6!?) 14.0-0 15.♞g3 ♞c5?! (15...h5!!) 16.♞d5 ♞xd5 17.exd5 a5 18.a4 b4 (18...bxa4! 19.♞xa4 ♞b6) 19.♞e4 ♞xe4 20.♞xe4 ♞b6, Fischer-Zuckerman, New York 1965, although he gained nothing out of the opening, not to mention that 20...♞c8! was even better. However, the most important point here is that the revolutionary idea played against Byrne on move 13 was perfectly valid on move 15 here and Fischer probably found it when analysing his game against Zuckerman.

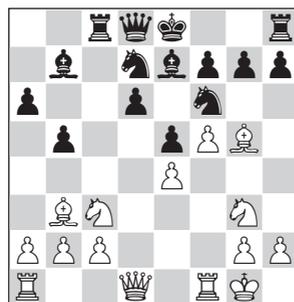
12...♞c8

There are twelve games in the current database in which Fischer's idea was played a move earlier: 12...h5!! 13.h4 b4 14.♞d5 ♞xd5 15.♞xd5 ♞xg5 16.hxg5 ♞xg5 17.♞xb7 ♞xg3+

18.♞f1 ♞f4+ with a clear advantage to Black, Sigurjonsson-Tukmakov, Ybbs 1968.

13.0-0?!

It seems that the best defence was 13.♞e2!?, e.g. 13...h5! (13...♞xc3?! 14.bxc3 h5 15.h4 ♞c5 16.♞xf6 ♞xf6 17.♞xh5 ♞xh4+ 18.g3 ♞a5 19.♞e3 ♞xh5 20.♞xh4 ♞xh4 21.gxh4 ♞xe4 22.0-0-0 ♞xc3 23.♞g1 ♞a3+ 24.♞d2 ♞e4+ 25.♞e2 ♞c5 26.♞xg7 ♞c3+ 27.♞d2 ♞b1+, and Black has no more than perpetual check) 14.h4 b4!? (14...♞a5!? 15.0-0 b4 16.♞d5 ♞xd5 17.exd5 ♞xg5 18.hxg5 ♞c5 19.♞ad1! (19.♞xh5? ♞xb3 20.axb3 ♞xd5) 19...h4 20.♞e4, with a tenable position) 15.♞d5 ♞xd5 16.exd5 ♞xg5 17.hxg5 ♞xg5 18.♞e4 ♞e7 19.♞d2!, and White can resist.



13...h5!!

This position should be inscribed in the memory of every Sicilian player! By advancing this flank pawn Black fights for the central d5-square!

14.h4

Blocking the advance of the ♠h5 with 14.♞h4 can be answered with 14...♞g4 15.♞xe7 (15.f6?! ♞b6+! 16.♞h1 ♞xf6) 15...♞b6+ 16.♞h1 ♞xe7 17.♞d5+ ♞xd5 18.♞xd5 ♞cf8

19.♖d2 h4 20.f6+ ♜dxf6 21.♟f5+ ♟d7 22.♖e2 h3, with a clear advantage to Black.

14...b4! 15.♙xf6

The ♖e4 is lost after 15.♟a4 ♟xe4 16.♟xe4 ♙xe4.

15...♙xf6 16.♟d5 ♙xh4 17.♟xh5?

An error in a difficult position.

Slightly more tenacious was 17.♞f3 ♟f6 18.♟xf6+ gxf6! 19.♖e2, although after 19...♖b6+ 20.♟h2 ♟e7 Black's advantage is decisive.

17...♖g5

A good alternative was 17...♙xd5!? 18.♙xd5 ♖g5 19.f6 ♞xh5 20.fxg7 ♞h7.

18.f6 g6

Now the game is essentially over.

19.♟g7+ ♟d8 20.♞f3 ♙g3 21.♖d3

♙h2+ 22.♟f1 ♟c5 23.♞h3 ♞h4

24.♖f3 ♟xb3 25.axb3 ♞xh3

26.♖xh3 ♙xd5 27.exd5 ♖xf6+

28.♟e1 ♖f4 0-1

In the next game, this time in the Sveshnikov Variation, Carlsen (then just fifteen years old) enables us to take another step forward in our understanding of this type of position, showing that even in the case of an impregnable white knight on d5 vs a passive black bishop, matters are not so clear.

Game 117 Sicilian Defence

Jan Smeets 2550

Magnus Carlsen 2625

Wijk aan Zee 2006 (2)

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4

♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 6.♟db5 d6 7.♙g5

The text move is the main line, while 7.♟d5!?, which occurred several times in the Carlsen-Caruaena match, London Wch 2018, is the second in frequency, although with many fewer games.

7...a6 8.♟a3 b5 9.♟d5



The ♟a3 can be brought back into play more easily than the ♟b3 that we saw in the first two games of this chapter. It is curious that the engine gives absolutely the same evaluation of 0.48 both to this move and the alternative line 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♟d5 f5 11.♙d3 ♙e6, etc.

9...♙e7 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 11.c3

The engine prefers 11.c4!?, which also has a better score than the text.

11...♙g5 12.♟c2 ♟e7

The main line nowadays is 12...0-0 13.a4 (according to Stockfish White is better in the event of 13.h4 ♙h6 14.g4, although the statistics contradict this) 13...bxa4 14.♞xa4 a5 15.♙c4 ♞b8 16.b3 ♟h8 17.0-0 f5 18.exf5 ♙xf5 19.♟ce3 ♙g6, with a slight advantage to White, but with a favourable score for Black, Kasimdzhanov-Gelfand, Tashkent 2012.

13.♟cb4

13.h4 ♖h6 14.a4 bxa4 15.♗cb4 is played more frequently.

13...0-0



14.a4

After 14.♗xe7+ ♜xe7 15.♗d5 ♜b7 Black has no problems.

14...bxa4 15.♞xa4

Two years later Magnus equalized against his future opponent for the world title following the other capture on a4: 15.♞xa4 ♗xd5 16.♗xd5 ♖d7 17.♞a2 (17.♞c2!?) 17... a5 18.♖d3 ♖c6 19.0-0 ♜b8 20.♖c4 ♗h8 21.b3 f5 22.exf5 ½-½ Anand-Carlsen, Morelia/Linares 2008.

15...a5 16.♗xe7+

Interesting complications arise after 16.♖b5 ♖h3!? (16...♖d7) 17.♗xe7+ ♜xe7 18.♖c6 ♞ac8 19.♞xa5 ♖xg2 20.♞g1 ♖h3 21.♞h5 ♖h4 22.♞h6 g6, Korneev-Shirov, Pamplona 2006.

16...♞xe7 17.♖c4 ♖d7

This seems better than 17...♖e6?! 18.♖d5! (18.♗d5!?) 18...♖d7 19.♞a2, Carlsson-Soltau, cr 1994.

18.♗d5 ♞e8 19.♞a2

Of course 19.♗c7?? loses to 19...♖xa4 20.b3 ♞c6 21.♗xa8 ♞xc4!.

19...♖d8

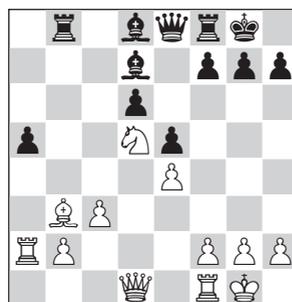
It is curious that from this modest square the bishop controls both

wings and forms the basis of the future black attack.

20.0-0 ♞c8 21.♖b3

21.b3 deserved attention, e.g. 21... a4 22.♞a3 axb3 23.♞xb3 ♞c5 24.♞a7 ♖e6 25.♞fa1, and the white position is slightly better.

21...♞b8



Formally White has several small advantages: the ♗d5, supported by the ♖b3, more space and the potential weakness of the pawns at a5 and d6. However, Black's position also has its resources: the pressure along the b-file, the pair of bishops and the possibility of the ...f7-f5 break.

22.♞c2

It seems better to deploy the pieces in another way, e.g. 22.♖c4!? a4 23.♗e3 ♖c7 24.♞d3 ♗h8 25.♞b1 ♞d8 26.b4 axb3 27.♖xb3.

22...♗h8 23.♞fa1?!

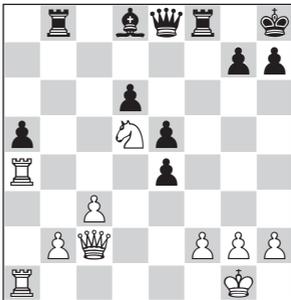
23.♖c4 was better, e.g. 23...f5 24.exf5 ♖xf5 25.♞e2 ♞g6 26.b3 ♖g4 (26...♖h3 27.f4!?) 27.f3 ♖e6 28.♞d1 and White's pieces are well coordinated.

23...f5 24.♖a4

Obsessed with the image of the ♗d5 versus the ♖d8, Smeets exchanges the light-squared bishops

without paying attention to the dynamic elements in the position. Once again a good alternative was 24.♙c4!?, e.g. 24...fxe4 25.♖xe4 a4 26.f3 ♙c6 27.♗d3 ♙h4 28.♞d1, with chances for both sides.

24...♙xa4 25.♞xa4 fxe4



26.♞a2?!

The first problems begin to appear, e.g. 26.♞xe4? fails to 26...♗b5, simultaneously attacking the ♘d5 and the ♖b2; however the continuation 26.b4!? ♗c6 27.c4 axb4 28.♞xb4 ♞xb4 29.♘xb4 ♗b6 30.♘d5 ♗d4 31.♞a8 ♗d3 32.♘e3 ♗xc2 33.♘xc2 ♙g8 34.♞a6 would maintain equality.

26...♗f7 27.c4 ♞b3! 28.♞e1?!

After 28.♞a3?! ♞d3 29.♞f1 ♗g6 it is hard to see how White is going to regain the pawn; correct was to reduce the pressure by means of 28.h3! ♞d3 29.b4 axb4 30.♘xb4 ♞d4 31.♘d5 ♙g5 32.♞a7 ♗f5 33.♞a8 ♞d2 (33...h6!? 34.♘e3) 34.♗xe4!, and Black's advantage is minimal.

28...♙h4?!

Here Black could have increased his advantage with 28...♞d3! 29.♞aa1 ♙g5 30.♞ad1 ♗a7! 31.♞e2 ♗d4.

29.g3!?

A good move, although a few other moves also maintain equality, e.g. 29.♞f1!? ♞d3 30.♞xa5 ♙xf2+ 31.♙h1 g6 32.♞a3 ♞xa3 33.bxa3 ♗a7 34.♗xe4 ♗xa3 35.♘c7, with full compensation for the pawn.

29...♞f3! 30.b3 ♙d8 31.♞xe4



White has achieved his objective, with an impregnable ♘d5 versus the apparently passive ♙d8. However, with his next move the future World Champion shows his claws, starting an unusual plan of attack:

31...h5!! 32.♞e2!?

32.h4? merely increases Black's initiative after 32...g5! 33.hxg5 ♙xg5, with a strong attack, e.g. 34.♗e2 (34.♙g2? h4 35.gxh4 ♗e6, winning) 34...h4!? (34...♞xb3) 35.gxh4 ♗h5 36.hxg5 ♗xg5+ 37.♙f1 ♗h6, with a decisive advantage for Black.

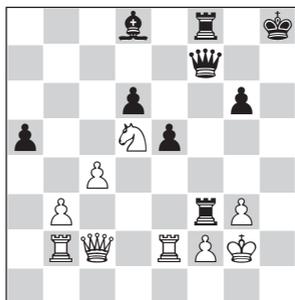
32...h4 33.♞b2

Here 33.♗e4 was safer, centralizing the queen, e.g. 33...♞xb3 34.♞xa5 hxg3 35.hxg3 ♞xg3+ 36.fxg3 ♗f1+ 37.♙h2 ♞f2+ 38.♞xf2 ♗xf2+ 39.♙h3 ♗f1+ 40.♙g4 ♙xa5 41.♘f4, with an inevitable draw.

33...g6 34.♙g2?!

Smeets cracks under the pressure and commits a decisive error. He

could still have kept the game more or less balanced with 34.♔d2! ♖g7 35.♖e3 hxg3 36.hxg3 ♜f5 37.♔c2 ♜h5 38.♖e4 ♜fh8 39.b4!? axb4 40.♜eb3 ♖f5 41.♖xf5 ♜h1+ 42.♖g2 gxf5 43.♜b1! ♜8h2+ 44.♖f3. **34...hxg3 35.hxg3**



35...♜xg3+!

This sacrifice destroys the defences of the white monarch.

36.♖f1

The following variations demonstrate that there is no longer any satisfactory defence: 36.♖xg3 ♖f3+ 37.♖h2 ♖g7, followed by 38...♜h8+ and 39...♜h1 mate; 36.fxg3 ♖f1+ 37.♖h2 ♖g7 38.♜e4 ♜h8+ 39.♜h4 ♖xh4 40.gxh4 ♜xh4+ 41.♖g3 ♜h3+ 42.♖g4 ♖f3+ 43.♖g5 ♜h5#.

36...♖f3 37.♖e4 ♖h5 38.♖e3 ♖g5 38...♖b6!

39.♖e1 ♜gf3 40.♖f1 ♖c1

40...♜8f4!? 41.♖a8+ ♖g7 42.♖c6 ♜d4.

41.♜a2 ♜xb3 42.♖g3 ♖h6 43.♖g4

Or 43.♖d1 ♖f4!.

43...♜xg3 44.♖xg3 ♖h1+ 0-1

Several times in 2019 Carlsen had to face a move-order that prevents the Sveshnikov. It is curious that the World Champion left the hole on

d5 under even greater white control than in the previous games, but each time he emerged victorious.

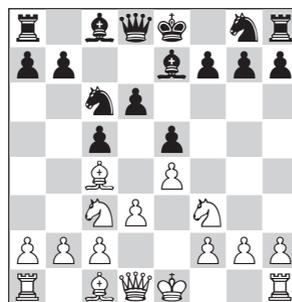
Game 118 Sicilian Defence

Peter Svidler 2735

Magnus Carlsen 2845

Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden 2019 (8)

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 ♖c6 3.♖c3 e5 4.♖c4 ♖e7 5.d3 d6



6.♖d2

This move prepares the manoeuvre ♖d2-f1-e3, taking control of the d5-square without spending a tempo on castling. The most common move 6.0-0 aims to attack as quickly as possible on the kingside, e.g. 6...♖f6 7.♖g5!? 0-0 8.f4 exf4 (8...♖g4!? 9.♖e1 exf4 10.♖xf4 ♖d4 11.♖d2 ♖d7 12.a4 a6 13.e5 dxe5 14.♖xe5 ♖f5, with an equal position, Robson-Swiercz, St Louis 2019) 9.♖xf4 h6 10.♖f3 ♖e6 11.♖d5 ♖d7 12.c3 ♜ae8 13.a4 ♖d8 14.♖d2 a6 15.♖f2 ♖xd5 16.♖xd5 ♖xd5 17.exd5 ♖e7, with chances for both sides, Navara-Krasenkow, Poland tt 2018. Stockfish suggests the standard plan of exchanging the ♖c1 for the ♖f6: 6.a4 ♖f6 7.♖g5 0-0 8.♖xf6