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Introduction

Within chess literature there is a huge amount of publications dedicated to different openings. It goes without saying that every opening, system or variation has its specific characteristics, but even so there are a few general concepts which can claim validity in most opening positions. Which are these concepts? Let's see a few quotes from Artur Yusupov's *Build Up Your Chess 1, The Fundamentals*:

- ♠ *"The first principle of opening play is rapid development of all the pieces."*
- ♠ *"The second principle of opening play is to struggle for the centre."*
- ♠ *"The third principle of opening play is to struggle against our opponent's ideas, in order to make his development more difficult and to prevent him from achieving control over the centre".*

Moreover, in his earlier work *Opening Preparation* co-written with Mark Dvoretsky, Yusupov also outlines a few simple rules regarding opening play, such as *"don't move the same piece twice"* and *"don't bring the queen out too early"* etc, unless there is a serious justification.

The present book is structured around these principles and rules, in the following way:

- ♠ Chapter One investigates the role of **development** in the opening.
- ♠ Chapter Two touches upon some of the most typical **dubious actions** in the opening phase, such as early pawn-grabbing, moving the same piece twice etc.
- ♠ Chapter Three takes a look at some different ways of fighting for **the centre** and its role as such.
- ♠ Finally, Chapter Four is dedicated to the concept of **restriction** in its different facets.

What, then, is the need for studying these concepts, if we can already find in books and electronic publications most of the specific opening information that we need? Well, on the one hand it will be easier for us to grasp the contents of existing opening theory if we already have a basic understanding of the general concepts that underlie opening play. On the other hand, in every game we leave the territory of our opening repertoire at some point, we are surprised by a "new" move from our opponent, or we simply forget or mix up

Mastering Opening Strategy

something. In any of these cases, knowledge of opening strategy will help our orientation in the new or unfamiliar position that arises.

In terms of style and format, this book is quite similar to my preceding work *Mastering Chess Strategy*. I have not tried to cover the intricacies of every game by extensive analytical variations in *Chess Informant* style, despite the fact that you can easily achieve that nowadays thanks to the chess database programs and engines. In contrast, my emphasis has been on explanatory text, combined with some key variations and assessments. The space gained by such a priority has permitted me to include quite a large number of games, thus adding to the variety of topics, structures and opening lines featured in this book.

In each game I have dedicated a few words to the specific line involved, while also mentioning other options, main lines etc. You could use it as a first step to further investigation, if there is something that catches your eye. Some openings, such as the Sicilian, occur more frequently in this book than others, let's say the Scotch. This might seem unfair but, after all, the aim of the book is to cover the general concepts already mentioned, independently of the opening in which they occur.

At the end of each chapter there is a section with related exercises, where the reader should try to find the best continuation, usually 1-3 moves, sometimes together with a short plan. The time required oscillates roughly between 3 and 15 minutes, depending on the exercise (they are presented in order of difficulty) and the level of the student. The exercises are also mostly complete games so any lazy reader could just treat them as such.

As for the sources used when writing this book, I have mainly relied on *Chess Informant*, *ChessBase Megabase 2011* and *Chess Today*. Among the written publications that have assisted me, I would like to emphasize *Winning Quickly With White* and *Winning Quickly With Black* by Iakov Neishtadt, which contain a lot of instructive and, at the same time, entertaining games. My technological tools have been *Chess Assistant 11* and *Deep Rybka 4*.

Most games in the book are from the modern period, let's say from 1990 and onwards, but I have also included a number of "classics" when their instructional value justified it. Some of my own games are also featured, for the simple reason that these are the games that I know best.

I should mention that the concepts covered in this book are often intertwined in one single game, so you can easily find games in Chapter One that illustrate, say, the principles of Chapter Four, and vice versa. Nevertheless, the chapters are rather independent, even if I sometimes make references to earlier games. Chapter Two is probably the lightest in content and could even be examined before Chapter One. The book ends with a short discussion about opening preparation, building an opening repertoire and other practical matters.

I hope and think that this book will help you in improving your skills within opening strategy, and at the same time provide you with some entertainment.

Thanks to my students in Riobamba for all the valuable input to this book.

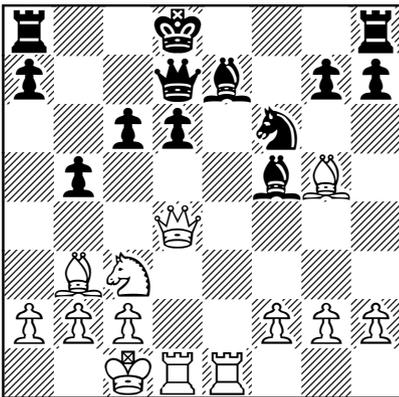
Johan Hellsten,
Riobamba, March 2012.

Chapter One

The Nature of Development

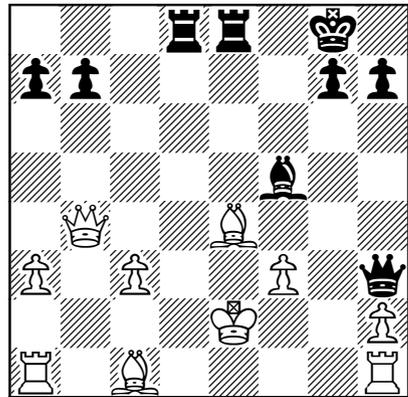
Introduction

Quick development of the pieces is a key condition in the opening, in order to exploit their power to the maximum and secure the king. Leaving aside other positional factors such as material, space and structure, the time factor plays a crucial role in the initial phase of the game. A player left behind in development might face serious problems when some of his pieces, such as the rooks, can't easily take part in the battle. Consider the following positions which we will soon come back to in this chapter:



White to Play

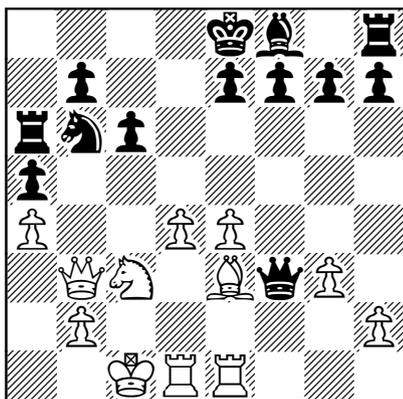
White has already brought all his pieces into the battle; in contrast Black still hasn't mobilized either rook and he has failed to secure his king. Take it for sure that he will have a hard time defending this position.



White to Play

Nominally White is a piece up, but the difference in activity between both sides' forces is simply overwhelming. When teaching young players, who tend to have big respect for the nominal value of the pieces, in such a position I make them observe that White has ten points out of the game! For

example, the rook on a1 hardly has the same value as the one on e8, and this is, after all, what development is all about.



Black to Play

This position is actually from the next chapter, but it suits our discussion. Black has won a pawn, but his poor kingside development will leave him suffering badly once White achieves d4-d5, and that will come on the next move! In contrast, if Black had an extra tempo, i.e. if ...e7-e6 was already on the board, then after ...♗b4! his chances would increase dramatically. One single tempo makes a huge difference in the opening battle, as we will often see.

So who suffered in these depressing positions? Dolmatov, Topalov and Timman, in games contested in 2004, 1999 and 2002 – which makes it clear that the concept of development is present in battles even at the highest level. By the way, observe the importance of the queens' presence in the above positions – if these are removed, then Black would probably be okay in the first one, White would be winning in the second one, and his compensation for the pawn in the third one would be much less convincing.

A few principles to bear in mind:

- ♣ The imbalance between attacking and defending pieces is a key factor in any attack, and this certainly applies to positions where one side is better developed than the other, as in the three positions above.
- ♣ The opening or sharpening of the position almost always favours the better developed side, which makes this a key method when exploiting a lead in development.
- ♣ The conversion of a lead in development into a more stable advantage often requires a heavy usage of tactics, sacrifices etc. Throughout the book I often use the term “punishment” when referring to such actions, including such standard methods as opening the position, attacking weak points in the enemy camp, keeping the opponent's king in the centre, swapping his active pieces, etc.

The king and other weak points

One typical consequence of a delay in development is that the king becomes exposed to an attack. When the enemy pieces start gathering around the monarch, and his fellow forces remain immobilized, the battle usually turns into “play against one goal” (to use soccer language).

Game 1

Ma.Carlsen-S.Dolmatov

Moscow 2004

Reti's Opening

1 ♖f3 f5 2 d3!?

Instead of entering the Dutch Defence with 2 d4, White prepares e2-e4, striking at the light squares.

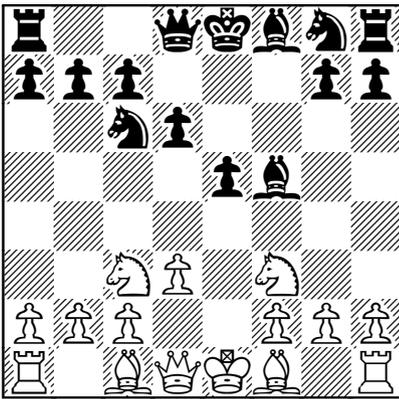
2...d6

The natural 2...♘f6 can be met by the gambit 3 e4! fxe4 4 dxe4 ♘xe4 5 ♙d3 ♘f6 6 ♘g5 with attacking prospects.

3 e4 e5 4 ♘c3 ♘c6

Black appears to be in a safe position; however...

5 exf5 ♙xf5



6 d4!

A key move that clears the centre before Black gets castled. Now the king's bishop can be developed actively to c4 or b5.

6...♘xd4?!

6...e4 seems preferable, trying to keep the position closed when behind in development. Here White can choose between 7 d5!? and 7 ♘g5 d5 8 f3!, hitting the black pawn chain, with interesting prospects in both cases.

7 ♘xd4 exd4 8 ♚xc2?!

The greedy 8...♙xc2?! probably wasn't even considered by Dolmatov, since 9 ♙c4 followed by 0-0 and ♚e1 looks extremely dangerous for Black.

9 ♙c4!

The best diagonal for this bishop, where it complicates Black's short casting.

9...c6 10 ♙g5 b5

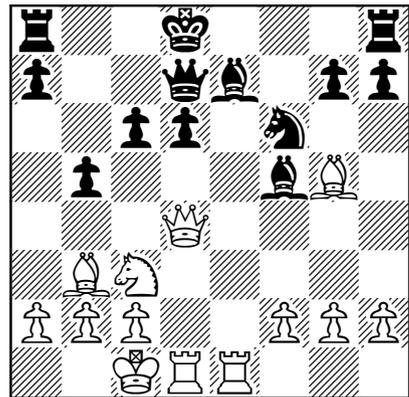
Thanks to White's previous move, he can now meet the logical 10...d5 by 11 0-0-0! intending 11...dxc4? 12 ♚e5+. Black is also in trouble after 11...♙e7 12 ♚he1 0-0?! 13 ♚e5!.

11 ♙b3 ♙e7 12 0-0-0 ♚d7 13 ♚he1!

Carlsen's play in this game reminds me of Morphy's simple but effective treatment of the opening phase. In just 13 moves he has mobilized all his pieces and now creates the concrete threat of 14 ♙xf6 gxf6 15 ♚xf6. On his part, Dolmatov would be fine if his king and h8-rook changed places, but that will never prove possible.

13...♙d8

An awkward place for the king, but 13...0-0-0? was impossible due to 14 g4! ♙xg4 (or 14...♙g6? 15 ♙e6) 15 ♚xe7 ♚xe7 16 ♚xg4+ with material gains.



Throughout the book we will see many positions where a lead in development has to be exploited by concrete means; i.e. by tactical blows, sacrifices etc. Here is a first case.

14 ♚xe7!

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Initiating a decisive combination towards the king on d8. In positions with unbalanced development we should get used to considering the relative value of the pieces. The bishop on e7 is Black's key defender, covering vital squares such as d6 and f6. Conversely, White has so many pieces in action that losing one of them, even one having a greater nominal value than the enemy piece being captured, isn't really a big deal. With such rooks on a8 on h8, how is Black supposed to save his king?

14... ♖xe7

Or 14... ♔xe7 15 ♕xf6+ gxf6 16 ♖e1+ followed by 17 ♖xf6+.

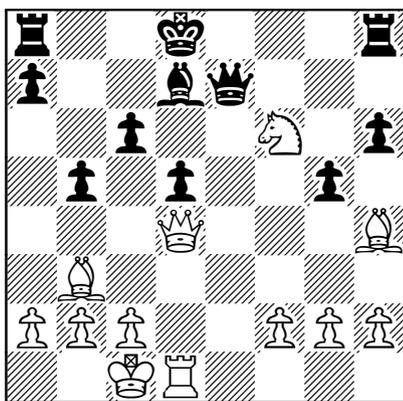
15 ♖f4! ♕d7 16 ♖e4!

Intensifying the attack. In contrast, 16 ♖xd6?! ♕c8 lets Black hang on for a while.

16...d5

Or 16... ♖f8 17 ♖xd6 with ideas like ♖b4-a5+. With such an exposed king Black can hardly resist the attack.

17 ♖xf6 h6 18 ♕h4 g5 19 ♖d4! 1-0



A nice final touch directed at the rook on h8. Now if 19...gxh4, then 20 ♖xd5 cxd5 21 ♖xh8+, while other 20th moves run into 21 ♖f6, in both cases with an easy win for White. Not much better is 19... ♖f8 20 ♖xd7

♖xd7 21 ♕g3 with an overwhelming advantage, so Black resigned.

In closed or semi-open positions, a lead in development tends to make itself somewhat less felt. In such positions, a key idea for the better developed side is to identify a weak point in the enemy camp, on which he can focus his attacking efforts.

Game 2

M.Tal-G.Tringov

Amsterdam Interzonal 1964

Modern Defence

1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♕g7

Launching the Modern Defence, characterized by a flexible development of Black's minor pieces. However, at some moment he will have to bring them out; otherwise he can end up as in this game!

3 ♖c3 d6 4 ♖f3 c6 5 ♕g5!? ♖b6?!

A risky attack on the b2-pawn. A better reply to White's unusual fifth move is 5... ♖f6, transposing to the Pirc, or 5... ♕g4, fighting for the dark squares.

6 ♖d2!

Tal doesn't care about the pawn and just continues development. In fact, modern opening theory is full of similar cases, where the b2-pawn is sacrificed for the sake of rapid development. Now 6... ♕g4 is less effective due to 7 0-0-0, so Tringov accepts the challenge.

6... ♖xb2 7 ♖b1 ♖a3 8 ♕c4

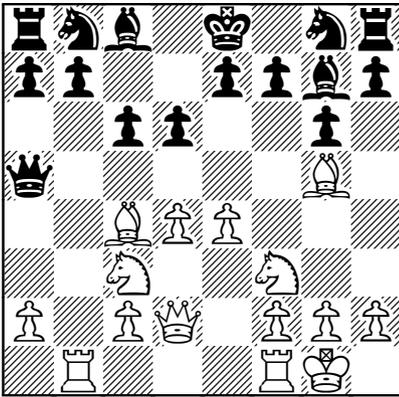
The best diagonal for the bishop, where it eyes the sensitive f7-pawn.

8... ♖a5?!

Too many queen moves. 8... ♖f6, preparing 9...0-0, looks like a better choice, waiting

with the queen retreat until White plays ♖b3. A long time ago Znosko-Borovsky observed that, in positions of this nature, the queen should stay as long as possible in enemy territory. At this moment 9 e5 dxe5 10 dxe5 ♗g4 is quite okay for Black, e.g. 11 ♖b3?! ♕c5, so the flexible 9 0-0 is probably White's best choice, with ample compensation for the pawn.

9 0-0



9...e6

Now 9...♗f6?! 10 e5 dxe5 11 dxe5 ♗g4 fails to 12 ♕xe7! ♖xe7 13 ♗d5+, winning the queen, so Tringov intends developing the knight via e7 instead.

10 ♖fe1 a6

Unfortunately for Black, 10...♗e7? runs into the same trick: 11 ♕xe7 ♖xe7 12 ♗d5+ etc.

11 ♕f4!

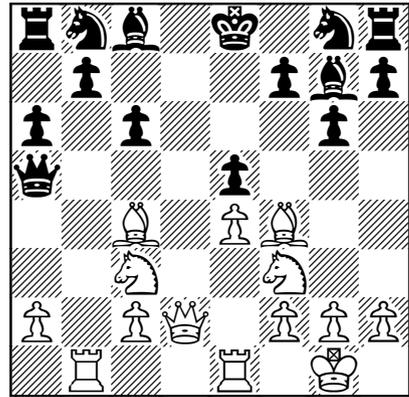
Hitting the vulnerable d6-pawn. As I mentioned before the game, the attack at weak points in the enemy camp is a key method when exploiting a lead in development.

11...e5?

When you are behind in development, the more closed the position the better for

you, so don't even think about opening it! After that, it will be much easier for the opponent to make use of his more active pieces. For better or worse, 11...♕d8 or 11...♕c7 had to be tried, when 12 e5 can be met by 12...d5 and 12 d5 by 12...e5, respectively.

12 dxe5 dxe5



13 ♕d6!!

A terrible blow that again exploits the sensitive d6-square. Now 13...exf4 runs into 14 ♗d5!, when 14...cxd5 15 exd5+ ♕e6 16 dxe6 is disastrous for Black, while other 14th moves let the knight reach c7. On the other hand, 13...♕d8? fails to 14 ♕xf7+, and 13...♕f8 14 ♖xe5+ ♖xe5 15 ♗xe5 is decisive as well, since 15...♕e6 runs into 16 ♖xb7. As for the knight on c3, Tal has a simple reply prepared...

13...♖xc3 14 ♖ed1! ♗d7

Covering the mate on d8 but weakening the light squares, a fact that White immediately exploits. Then again, after 14...♖a5 15 ♗xe5 Black is completely helpless, e.g. 15...♗h6 16 ♕g5.

15 ♕xf7+! ♕xf7 16 ♗g5+ ♖e8 17 ♖e6+ 1-0

In view of the quick mate, Black resigned.

Here is a more complex case of exploiting the weakest point in the enemy camp when ahead in development.

Game 3
S.Movsesian-R.Tibensky
 Slovakian Championship,
 Kaskady 2002
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6

A rather slow reply to the Advance Variation. Black prepares ...♗a6 in order to exchange his “bad” bishop, but also loses some time and activity compared to the usual 3...c5, hitting the white pawn chain.

4 c3

Strengthening the pawn chain and preventing the immediate 4...♗a6?? on account of 5 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 6 ♖a4+.

4...♞d7 5 h4!

At first sight a rather surprising move, why not just 5 ♖f3, 6 ♗d3 and 7 0-0, simply bringing out the pieces? Well, closed positions have their particular nature. Since nothing is really going on in the centre White can spend a few tempi on this flank advance, which gains space and enhances future kingside actions, in particular the knight manoeuvre ♖h3-f4.

5...♗a6

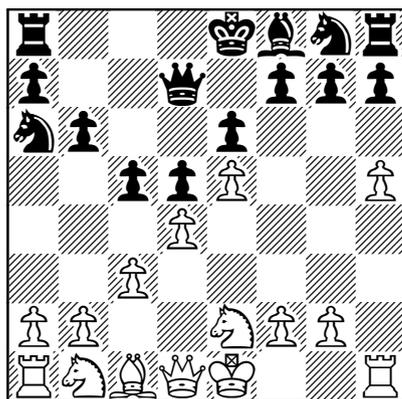
Perhaps the restrictive 5...h5!? was better, when White could consider 6 ♗e2 g6 7 ♗g5 preparing ♖d2-f3 and ♖h3-f4 – Movsesian.

6 ♗xa6 ♘xa6 7 h5 c5

Black finally launches this standard advance, although the absence of a knight on c6 makes it less powerful than in the main line with 3...c5.

8 ♖e2

Leaving the f3-square for the other knight.



8...f6?!

A risky attempt at counterplay, since White can complete development much sooner, after which the opening of the e-file will turn to his favour. Besides, the earlier exchange of the light-squared bishops left the e6-pawn more exposed. Safer was the developing 8...♖e7, followed by ...♖c6, before taking further actions.

9 ♗f4 ♖e7 10 ♖d2 ♖c6

Another effect of White’s early h2-h4-h5 is that ...♖e7-g6 proves impossible. Moreover, as the typical... ♖e7-f5 plan cannot be supported by ...h7-h5, the knight can be dislodged easily by g2-g4.

11 ♖f3

Just like in the old games of Nimzowitsch, White gives maximum priority to the e5-square.

11...♞c8

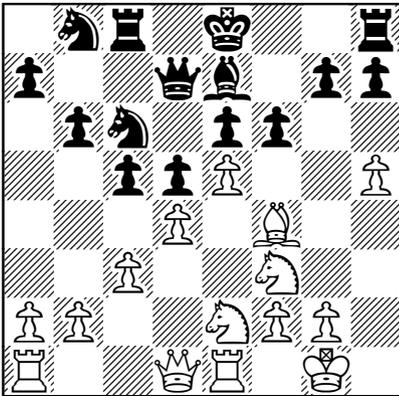
Perhaps 11...0-0-0!? followed by ...♗b7 was a safer choice – Psakhis. In this case the knight on a6 would prove useful in the king’s defence, whereas in the game it will struggle to find a proper destiny.

12 0-0 ♖ab8 13 ♞e1

13 exf6 gxf6 14 ♖e1 might have been even stronger, forcing the kind of play that occurs in the game.

13...♗e7?

Tibensky doesn't sense the danger. After 13...f5! 14 ♗g5 ♗e7 15 ♘f4 White keeps a pleasant advantage, but at least the position remains closed, which gives Black time to conclude development.



14 exf6!

Initiating an attack on the e6-pawn, just before Black gets castled.

14...gxf6

With hindsight 14...♗xf6 should have been preferred; e.g. 15 ♗xb8 ♖xb8 16 ♘f4 O-O! 17 ♘xe6 ♖fe8 18 ♘f4 ♖e4 with some compensation for the pawn.

15 ♗xb8!

White has no objections to swapping the passive knight on b8 if this helps his attack in the centre.

15...♖xb8

Or 15...♘xb8 16 ♘f4 ♖c6 17 c4!, intending 17...dxc4 18 d5 with strong pressure.

16 ♘f4 ♘d8 17 ♖e2 ♗f7

If 17...cxd4 then 18 ♘xd4!, when 18...e5 19 ♖f3! exf4 20 ♖xf4 leaves Black helpless against the threats at b8, f5 and f6.

After the text, how can White step up the pressure?

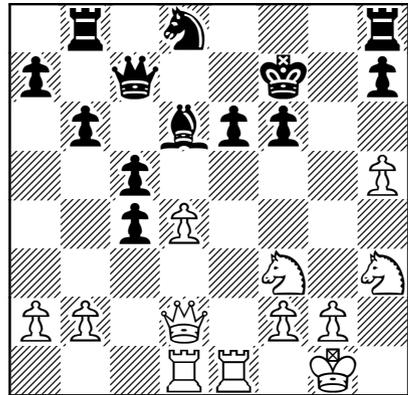
18 c4!

An intuitive advance that further opens the position towards Black's vulnerable king.

18...♗d6 19 ♖d2 ♖c7 20 ♘h3

The idea of ♖h6 is added to White's menu.

20...dxc4 21 ♖ad1



The last piece joins the battle, which makes Black's position very difficult to defend, since virtually any tactical complications will favour White due to his superior development.

21...♖f8 22 ♖e4!

Heading for g4, before Black achieves an artificial castling with ...♗g8-h8.

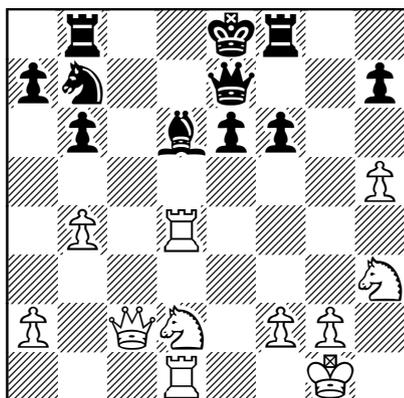
22...♗g8 23 dxc5 ♗xc5 24 ♖g4+ ♗f7

Unfortunately for Black, after 24...♗h8 25 ♖h6 f5 (the threat was ♘f4-g6+) 26 ♖xc4 the tactics work in White's favour; e.g. 26...♗xf2+? 27 ♘xf2 ♖xc4 28 ♖xf8 mate, or 26...♖g7 27 ♖xg7+ ♗xg7 28 b4 ♗e7 29 ♖d7 ♗f6 30 ♖cc7 winning.

25 ♖c2! ♗e8 26 ♖xc4

With the black king back on e8, the rest is easy.

26...♖e7 27 b4 ♘d6 28 ♖cd4 ♞b7 29 ♞d2!



The knight's reaches e4 or c4 with great effect.

29...♞d8

This makes no sense but the alternatives were hardly better; e.g. 29...f5 30 ♞c4 ♘c7 31 ♖a4+ or 29...♗d8 30 ♞e4 ♘b8 31 ♖c6+, in both cases followed by a fatal 32 ♗d7.

30 ♖d3 ♞b7 31 ♞e4 1-0

In view of 31...♘e5 32 ♖b5+ ♔f7 33 ♗d7 Black resigned.

Pawn advances

Another key method for the better developed side is a pawn advance, if necessary in the shape of a sacrifice, that opens the position and clears new lines towards the enemy camp. Actually *Movsesian* did just that with 18 c4! in the previous game. Here are a few more examples.

Game 4
V.Topalov-V.Ivanchuk
Linares 1999
English Opening

1 ♞f3 c5 2 c4 ♞c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♞xd4 e6

In this variation of the English, White enjoys more space but Black is ready to create counterplay with his queen and king's bishop on the g1-a7 and e1-a5 diagonals.

5 g3

More common is 5 ♞c3. The text keeps the option of meeting 5...♘b4+ with 6 ♘d2, although *Topalov* never makes use of this idea in the game.

5...♘b4+ 6 ♞c3 ♖a5

As beginners we are taught not to bring out the queen too early, but here it helps Black in interfering with White's development.

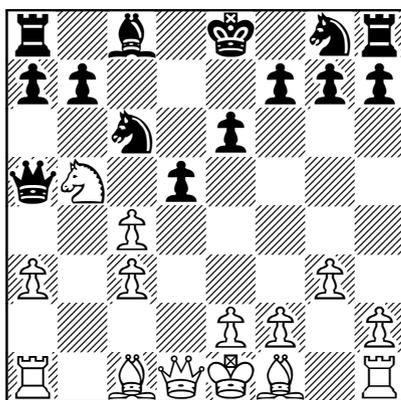
7 ♞db5 d5!

Ruling out the knight check on d6 and fighting for the centre.

8 a3

Consistent with White's previous play, if rather slow. *Stohl* suggests 8 ♘f4!? e5 (or 8...d4 9 a3) 9 ♘d2, when both 9...d4 10 ♞d5 and 9...dxc4 10 a3 ♘xc3 11 ♞d6+! ♔f8 12 ♘xc3 ♖c5 13 ♘g2 lead to an interesting battle.

8...♘xc3+ 9 bxc3



In the event of 9 ♞xc3 Black may choose between the simple 9...dxc4, now that the knight check on d6 is no longer possible,

and the riskier 9...d4!? 10 b4 ♖xb4 11 axb4 ♜xa1 12 ♖b5 with unclear play.

9...♖f6!

Ivanchuk quickly brings out the pieces, unworried about 10 ♖d6+ ♜e7 11 ♖xc8 ♜axc8, after which Black already enjoys a significant lead in development.

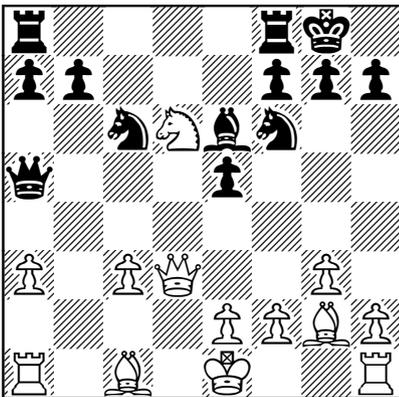
10 ♜g2 0-0

Now White's dilemma is that 11 0-0 dxc4 loses a pawn, while 11 cxd5 ♖xd5 leaves his pieces hanging on b5 and c3. Topalov finds a third option: safeguarding his queenside with the queen, at the cost of delaying development.

11 ♜b3 dxc4 12 ♜xc4 e5!

Simple and strong: now 13...♜e6 is coming up.

13 ♖d6 ♜e6 14 ♜d3



By tactical means White has managed to stay above water. Here 14...♜ad8? and 14...♜fd8? fail to 15 ♖xb7, but Ivanchuk has a much stronger move in reserve...

14...e4!

Another typical punishment method when the opponent has delayed his development: open the position. Now the e-file will be of great use in the attack towards White's king, and the annoying knight on

d6 leaves the board.

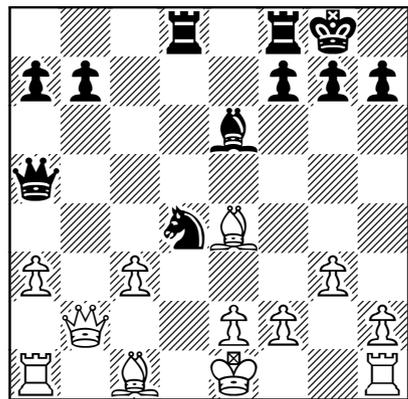
15 ♖xe4

Queen moves all had their drawbacks: 15 ♜c2 ♖d4! or 15 ♜e3 ♖g4! or 15 ♜d2 ♜ad8. As for 15 ♜xe4, Black can reply 15...♖xe4 16 ♖xe4 ♜ad8 with a strong initiative just like in the game – Ivanchuk.

15...♖xe4 16 ♖xe4 ♜ad8 17 ♜c2

After 17 ♜e3 ♜fe8 White is also in big trouble.

17...♖d4! 18 ♜b2



Topalov has defended well and is just one move away from the desired 0-0; however...

18...♖xe2!!

One more sacrifice to force the white king to stay in the centre. Less promising was 18...♜c4 19 ♜b4! or 18...♜fe8 19 0-0! ♜h3 20 cxd4 ♜xf1 21 ♜f3. In both these short lines White applies a common method when behind in development: return the material invested in order to bring out the pieces.

19 ♜xe2

If 19 ♜b4, trying to apply the method described in the previous note, then 19...♖xc3! with heavy material gains thanks to the mating threat on d1.

19...♖fe8!

A flexible move typical of many attacks. If we look at the two pieces on f8 and e6, it is obvious that the rook is heading for e8, whereas the bishop has so many possible destinies that it shouldn't be committed yet. Less promising is 19...♙c4+ 20 ♖f3 f5 21 ♙xb7 ♙d5+ 22 ♖e2 ♙xb7 23 ♗xb7 ♗xc3 24 ♙e3 ♗c4+ 25 ♖e1 ♗c3+ with a draw – Ivanchuk.

20 ♗b4

After 20 f3 f5 White is also in deep trouble, while 20 ♖e1 is met by 20...♗h5+! 21 ♖f1 ♙h3+ 22 ♖g1 ♖xe4! – Ivanchuk.

20...♗h5+ 21 f3 f5!

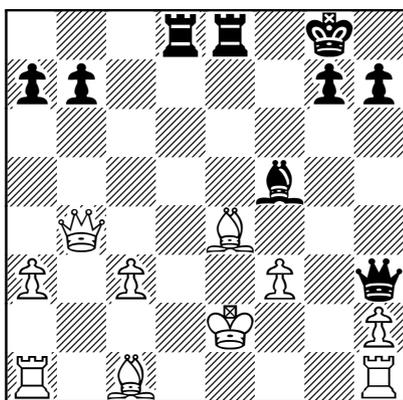
Finally crashing through White's defence, who can only resort to desperate moves.

22 g4 ♗h3

The threat 23...♗g2+ is added to the menu.

23 gxf5 ♙xf5!

Another option was 23...♗g2+ 24 ♖e3 ♗xh1 25 fxe6 ♖d1, but a direct attack on the white king is more tempting.



A typical pattern in games with unbalanced development: the attacker has less material but overwhelmingly more activity.

With his king stranded on e2, there is no hope for White.

24 ♗c4+ ♖h8 25 ♖e1 ♖xe4+! 0-1

The most elegant finish. White resigned in view of 26 fxe4 ♙g4+ 27 ♖f2 ♗xh2+ with mate on the next move.

Game 5
R.Nezhmetdinov-A.Chistiakov
 Kharkov 1956
French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♙g5 ♙b4 5 e5 h6 6 ♙d2 ♘fd7?!

Very passive. Nowadays, adherents of the McCutcheon Variation play 6...♙xc3 and 7...♘e4 without much thinking.

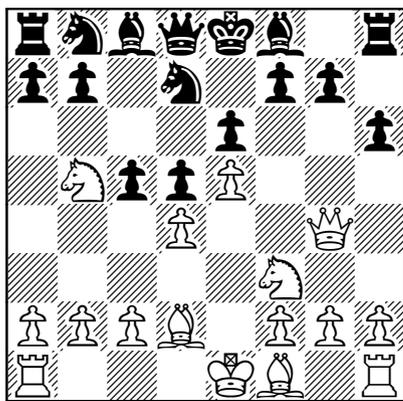
7 ♗g4 ♙f8

In closed positions like this, such retreats are usually justified. In contrast, 7...g6?! 8 ♙d3 would have yielded White a target on g6, just as later occurs in the game.

8 ♘f3 c5

A standard advance in the French, but 8...a6 first was safer in order to prevent White's next move in the game.

9 ♘b5!



Apart from threatening d6+ , this move comes with a more long-term idea – can you spot it?

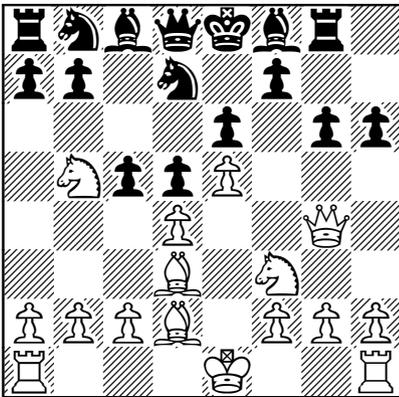
9...g6?

Too slow. $9...c6?$ $10 d6+ \text{exd6}$ 11Wxg7 was very bad for Black, but $9...cxd4$ $10 d6+ \text{exd6}$ 11Wxg7 ex5! $12 dxe5 \text{Wf6}$ looks quite okay for him. White should probably try 11exd6 instead, with some initiative.

10 e3!

Development with tempo, as 11exg6 is threatened.

10...g8



Black managed to cover all the enemy threats but now suffers a serious delay in development. Thus White's next move suggests itself.

11 c4!

A key advance in order to open the position before Black closes it by $...c5-c4$, making White's lead in development a less relevant factor.

11...cxd4 12 cxd5 d5

Or $12...a6$ $13 dxe6 \text{axb5}$ 14exf7+ exf7 $15 e6+!$ with a fierce attack.

13 Wxd4 exd5?

Black omits the intermediate move

$13...c6!$, when 14We3 dxd3+ 15Wxd3 exd5 yields him a slightly superior version of the game.

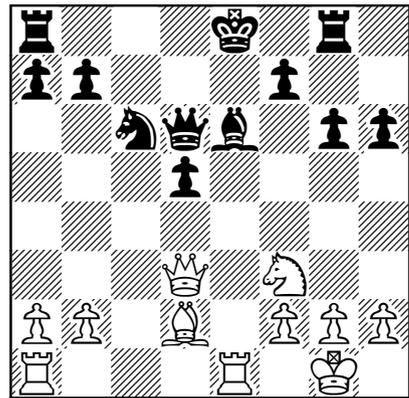
14 d6+!

White had this option for several moves, but only uses it now when the centre has been cleared, which makes Black's dark-squared bishop a key defender. The pawn invested in this operation is irrelevant.

14...exd6 15 exd6 Wxd6 16 0-0

White's position plays itself.

16...dxd3 17 Wxd3 dxc6 18 ffe1+ e6



19 d4!

In chess strategy, exchanges can be carried out for a variety of reasons. One of them is facilitating an attack, as in this case, where White aims at eliminating one of the defenders on e6 and c6. Note that after $19...dxd4$ 20Wxd4 the presence of opposite-coloured bishops favours White, since the opponent will have a difficult task covering the dark squares.

19...g5

After $19...0-0-0$ 20Wac1 the black king is in big trouble. In the game he tries to hide it on d7, but White has enough material for a successful attack.

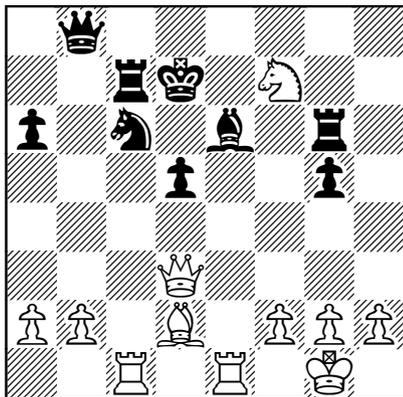
20 Wac1 e6 21 d5!

Mastering Opening Strategy

After mobilizing all his pieces, White initiates concrete actions.

21...♖f8 22 ♜b5! ♜c8 23 ♜xb7+ ♜c7 24 ♜b5 a6

Obviously 24...♙xf5 runs into 25 ♜xd5+.
25 ♜d3 ♜b8 26 ♘hx6 ♜g6 27 ♘xf7!



The final blow which destroys the black king's shelter.

27...♙xf7 28 ♜f5+ ♔d8

Or 28...♔d6 29 ♙xg5 with decisive threats.

29 ♜xc6! ♜xc6 30 ♙a5+ ♜c7 31 ♜xf7 1-0

Game 6
K.Miton-J.Sammour Hasbun
 Stratton Mountain 1999
Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e3 a6

The Chebanenko Slav became very popular in the nineties, thanks to its flexibility and great room for creativity. One merit of this system is that Black can play 4...a6 against virtually any white move order.

5 ♙d3

Development and at the same time re-

striction of Black's ...♙f5. Other options are 5 ♘f3, 5 ♜c2 and 5 a4.

5...♙g4

Perhaps 5...b3 6 b3 ♙g4 is a more precise move order, avoiding White's queen sortie to b3.

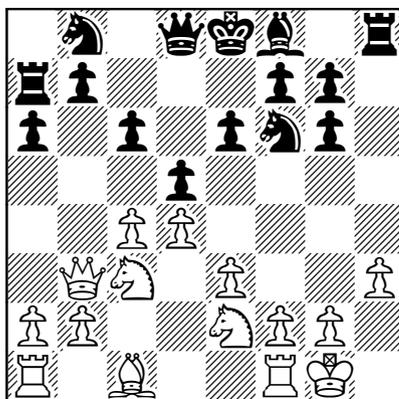
6 ♜b3 ♜a7

The safest way of dealing with the threat at b7. The rook is temporarily out of play but can later return to the eighth rank once the b-pawn has been protected by another piece, e.g. by ...♜c7.

7 h3 ♙h5 8 ♘ge2 ♙g6

Black is anxious to exchange the opponent's "good" bishop, but loses precious time. 8...e6 seems preferable, speeding up development; e.g. 9 ♘f4 ♙g6 10 ♘xg6 hxg6 11 0-0 ♙d6 followed by ...0-0.

9 ♙xg6 hxg6 10 0-0 e6



At this point it is not clear how to exploit the slight lead in development, but Miton finds a surprisingly simple solution.

11 e4! dxc4

The safest reply. White's idea was that both 11...♘xe4?! 12 ♘xe4 dxe4 13 ♙e3! and 11...dxe4 12 ♙e3 would leave Black struggling to find a defence against d4-d5.

12 ♜xc4 b5 13 ♜b3! b4?!