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Lesson 4 7 ♖f4

Those are my principles, and if you don't like them... well, I have others.

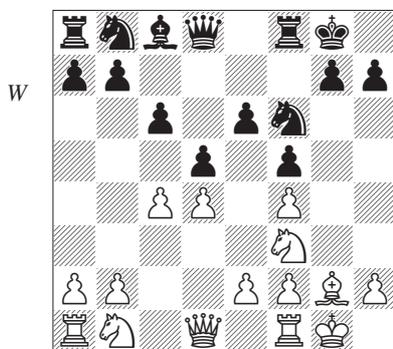
GROUCHO MARX

The 7 ♖f4 variation was the main reason why Botvinnik and his contemporaries preferred to develop their dark-squared bishop to e7 rather than to d6. It leads to an immediate sharpening of the struggle but we shall try to demonstrate that Black should not fear this line if he doesn't mind a sharp tactical battle.

Lesson Overview

(1 d4 f5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 g3 e6 4 ♙g2 d5 5 0-0 ♙d6 6 c4 c6 7 ♙f4)

After 7... ♙xf4 8 gxf4 0-0 (D) we have an important juncture:



The main continuation is 9 e3 (9 ♘e5 – Game 18; 9 ♖b3 – Game 19) and now after 9... ♘bd7 10 ♘bd2 (10 ♖e2 – Game 20) 10... ♘e4 (10... ♙h8 – Game 22) White can choose between 11 b4 (Game 21), 11 ♖c1 (Game 23), 11 ♖c2 (Game 24) and 11 ♘xe4 (7A). In 7B we deal with positions in which Black delays ... ♘e4, thus excluding the (early) exchange of knights on e4 and leaving the central pawn-structure intact. In general, there will be a lot of pawns in the centre in this lesson!

First we shall take a look at 9 ♘e5 and some pawn-structures that can arise after a knight exchange on e5.

Game 18

Adrian Mikhalchishin – Alexei Dreev

Pavlodar 1987

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 g3 c6 4 ♙g2 f5!? 5 ♘f3 ♘f6

Yet another move-order – this time the game starts out as a Catalan. Our move-order would be 1 d4 f5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♙g2 e6 4 ♘f3 d5 5 c4 c6.

6 0-0 ♙d6 7 ♙f4!?

If there is a drawback to Black's bishop development to d6, this most probably is it.

7... ♙xf4

Logically weakening White's pawn-structure as compensation for the exchange of dark-squared bishops.

8 gxf4

This pawn-structure (but arising from slightly different move-orders) shall also be the subject of our next lesson. In certain respects it offers less room for improvisation than the more balanced main lines:

- There is no ...f4 lever (unless White's f4-pawn continues its march to e5).
- The ...e5 advance is also more or less ruled out.
- It is even more likely than in the quieter lines that Black should seek his chances on the kingside and White on the queenside.

On the other hand it's quite likely that both sides will have one of their knights exchanged on their central outposts (e5 for White, e4 for Black). This will most likely lead to further changes of the pawn-structure, and we shall see some unique central pawn-configurations. Some actually look more like the game Othello than chess!

8...0-0

"Indeed the standard strategy is to transfer the bishop to h5, the knights to e4 and d7, tuck the

king away to h8 and open the g-file. Obviously White has to oppose this plan” – Kramnik.

9 ♖e5

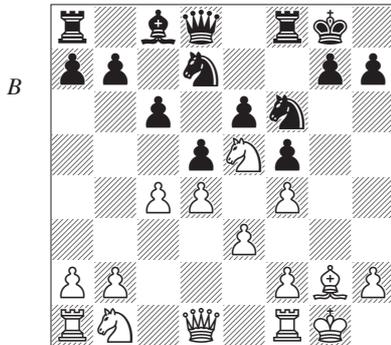
This move and also 9 ♖bd2 (4A) will usually transpose elsewhere – normally to 9 e3 lines but occasionally to 9 ♖b3 lines. Lines with an early ♖b3 are relatively independent as White will frequently omit e3 so that the queen can be transferred along the 3rd rank, and will be discussed in the next game.

We consider 9 ♖c2 and 9 ♖c3 in Lesson 5, as they more frequently occur from 7 ♖c3/7 ♖c2 followed by 8 ♖f4.

9...♗bd7 10 e3 (D)

Alternatives include:

- 10 ♖c3 – see Lesson 5.
- After 10 c5 ♖e7 11 e3 ♖h8 12 ♖c3 ♖xe5 13 fxe5 ♖e4 14 ♖e2 ♖d7 15 ♖e1 ♖g5 16 ♖h1 ♖f7 17 f4, as in Mensch-Doettling, Leopoldsborg 2000, Black can probably equalize with 17...b6 18 b4 ♖c8!.
- 10 ♖c2 ♖e7 11 ♖d2 ♖e4 12 e3 transposes to Game 24 – as we shall see, Black can achieve a comfortable game by exchanging all the knights.
- 10 ♖d2 ♖xe5! (10...♖e4 11 ♖df3 ♖f6 is also playable) 11 dxe5 ♖e4 is equal according to Aagaard.



This position could just as well have arisen from the more common move-order 9 e3 ♖bd7 10 ♖e5.

10...♖e4!

Inferior options:

- 10...♖e7 11 ♖d2 ♖xe5 12 fxe5 ♖e4 13 f4 b6 14 ♖c1 ♖b7 15 ♖xe4 dxe4 16 c5 b5 17 ♖e1 h6 18 h4 ♖f7 19 h5 ± Hebden-Moiseenko, Lausanne 2000.
- 10...♖xe5?! 11 dxe5! is instructive:

b1) After 11...♖e4?! 12 b4! Black must worry about his knight's retreat options.

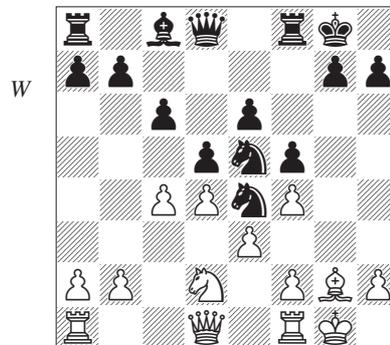
b2) 11...♖g4 is playable, but not really an attractive option.

b3) 11...♖d7 lost instructively in Beliavsky-Van der Wiel, Amsterdam 1990: 12 ♖d2 ♖e7 13 ♖c1 ♖d8 14 ♖c2 ♖f8 15 ♖b3! ♖g6 16 cxd5 exd5 17 ♖d4!. White won by combining an attack on f5 with a minority attack on the queenside: 17...♖h4 18 ♖h3 g5? 19 ♖h1 g4 20 ♖g1 h5 21 ♖f1 ♖f8 22 f3 ♖f7 23 ♖f2 ♖g6 24 ♖d3 ♖g7 25 b4! and Black resigned 10 moves later. The lesson is that you don't want a white knight on d4, and the safest way to avoid that is to exchange all the knights. Thus Black started inserting ...♖e4 before taking on e5.

11 ♖d2

To avoid the exchange of all the knights, White may try to chase away the intruder with either 11 f3 or 11 ♖c2 ♖e7 12 f3. These options will be discussed in 4B. For now we just mention in passing the line 11 f3 ♖d6 12 c5 ♖xe5 13 fxe5 ♖c4!? 14 ♖c1 f4! 15 exf4 b6, when Black has counterplay.

11...♖xe5! (D)



12 dxe5

12 fxe5?! is met by the thematic 12...♖xd2! 13 ♖xd2 f4! 14 exf4 ♖h4. Now if Black gets to take on f4 with the rook, it will exert pressure along the 4th rank as well as the f-file, so Zamora-Morales, Las Villas 2002 continued 15 f5 ♖xf5 16 f4 ♖d7 17 cxd5 cxd5 18 ♖f3 ♖af8 1/2-1/2, but Black clearly should have played on.

Q: Are there any guidelines for how to recapture after a knight exchange on e4 or e5?

After a knight exchange on e4, Black usually responds ...fxe4 vacating f5. The common follow-up from White is to play f3 and exchange

this pawn for Black's e4-pawn. In this case f5 is the ideal square for Black's bishop.

A knight exchange on e5 can result in two different pawn-structures:

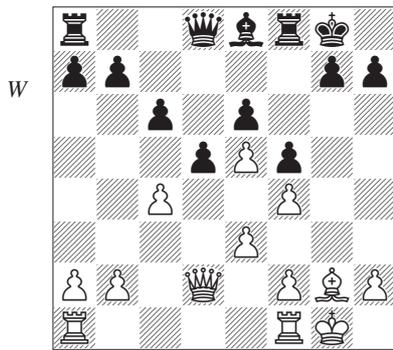
a) If White recaptures with the f-pawn, Black often gets the opportunity to push ...f4 immediately – sometimes temporarily sacrificing a pawn.

b) Recapturing with the d-pawn 'Belavsky-style' is usually better. This vacates the d4-square for White's remaining knight.

12...♙d7

The redeployment of the light-squared bishop to h5 was one of Black's original ways of completing his development in the Stonewall and in the 7 ♖f4 lines it's still Black's most common route for his bishop. 12...♗e7 is a serious alternative; e.g., 13 ♖c2 ♜xd2 14 ♗xd2 ♙d7 15 ♗fd1 ♙e8 16 ♙f3 ♗d8 17 ♖ac1 ♖h8 18 ♖h1 ♗g8 19 cxd5 cxd5 20 ♗g1 ♙c6 ♚ Mancini-Moskalenko, Val Thorens 1990.

13 ♗e2 ♜xd2! 14 ♗xd2 ♙e8 (D)



15 cxd5?!

It's hard to see what White achieves with this capture. Placing a rook on the c-file seems more flexible. 15 ♖b4 led to a quick draw in Blodig-Kordts, Miercurea Ciuc 1999: 15...♗b6 16 ♖xb6 axb6 17 cxd5 exd5 18 ♙f3 1/2-1/2.

15...cxd5

15...exd5 also looks very playable but then White would have a protected passed e-pawn and there is little reason to open the way for Black's bishop when it has already arrived on e8.

16 ♖fc1 ♙c6!

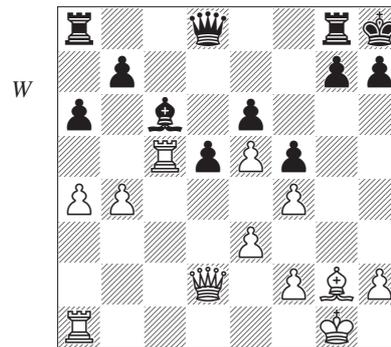
Flexibility of mind is the key! Black blocks the c-file and covers b7. The long diagonal may well become useful in the attack if Black succeeds in creating pressure down the g-file.

This is a very natural move if you are able to forget that the bishop was on its way to h5!

17 ♖c5?!

Hindsight suggests that this natural move may be inaccurate. Aagaard proposes 17 ♖h1, planning ♗g1, but then 16 ♖fc1 was hardly White's most useful move.

17...♖h8 18 b4 a6 19 a4 ♗g8 (D)



Play is fairly slow, and Black has all the time he needs to prepare play on the g-file.

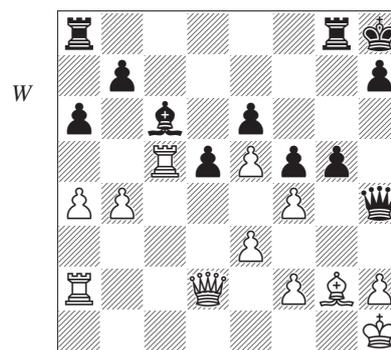
20 ♖h1

The king is starting to feel uncomfortable on the semi-open g-file. But as we shall see, there is also danger on the long diagonal.

20...♗h4 21 ♖a2

Now the rook is protected and b5 is becoming an option. But White's first rank is also weakened.

21...g5 (D)



Black's kingside play flows naturally and is strengthened by the fact that White's heavy artillery is occupied on the queenside.

22 fxg5

22 b5 loses to 22...gxf4!! intending 23 bxc6 ♖xg2! 24 ♖xg2 f3+! and mate in two. Black

also wins after 23 exf4 axb5 24 axb5 ♖xa2 25 ♗xa2 ♗g4 26 f3 ♗xf4! 27 bxc6 ♗e3 as White cannot defend against the threats of ...♗e1+ and ...♗xc5.

22...♗xg5 23 f4?

This loses by force but it's hard to find a satisfactory alternative. After 23 ♗d4 ♗g4 Black wins at least a pawn as 24 f4 is forbidden because of the check on e1.

23...♗xg2!

There is no need to calculate long variations in order to play this, but White has two ways of recapturing:

24 ♗xg2

After 24 ♖xg2 ♗g8+, both 25 ♖h1 and 25 ♖f1 are met by 25...♗g4, winning quickly and prosaically.

24...♗e1+ 25 ♗g1 ♗xb4 0-1

The pins and discovered attacks on the long diagonal decide the game immediately.

In the next game, White delays e3, hoping to benefit from the open third rank.

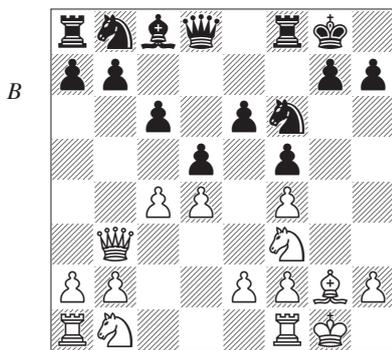
Game 19

Marc Narciso Dublan – Viktor Moskalenko
Badalona 2001

1 d4 e6 2 c4 f5 3 g3 ♖f6 4 ♗g2 c6 5 ♖f3 d5
6 0-0 ♗d6 7 ♗f4 ♗xf4 8 gxf4 0-0

Given White's weakened kingside, Black may also toy with delaying castling. See 4A for some examples.

9 ♗b3!? (D)



White makes the development of Black's light-squared bishop harder and may delay e3 in order to leave the third rank open for the queen.

9...♗e4

This is not, strictly speaking, a developing move but it is very flexible as Black should almost certainly play it at some stage.

The main line 9...♗bd7 10 ♗bd2 ♗e4 11 ♗ad1 is covered in 4A.

9...♗b6 has been played twice by Iliushin, but the queen is somewhat misplaced on b6 when White withdraws his queen to c2. Black will lose a tempo if he transfers the queen to e7 – which is usually its best square. However, the position is rather slow so probably one tempo isn't too important.

10 ♗a3?!

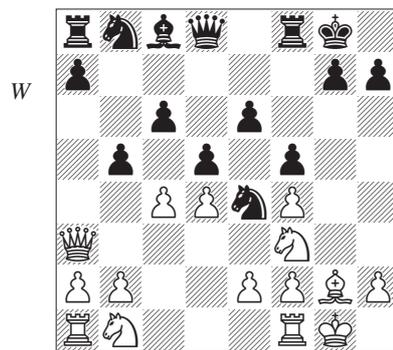
White fights for the dark squares but we doubt that this decentralization can be his best try.

a) 10 ♗bd2 – 9 ♗bd2 ♗e4 10 ♗b3 (4A).

b) After 10 e3, the 10...b6 of Kiseleva-Bosch, Amsterdam 2000 may not have been best but after 11 ♗e5 ♗b7 12 ♗xe4 fxe4 13 cxd5 cxd5 14 f3 ♗d7 15 fxe4 ♗xe5 16 dxe5 d4 17 ♗d2 Black would have had reasonable compensation for his pawn after 17...dxe3 18 ♗xe3 ♗c8.

c) 10 ♗c3 ♗d7 11 ♗fd1 h6!? was A.Rychagov-Moskalenko, Moscow 1994. After 12 ♗ac1 ♗e7 13 ♗a4 ♖h7 14 ♗e5 g5 15 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 16 fxg5 ♗xg5 17 ♗c5 ♗g7 18 ♖h1 f4 19 ♗d3+ ♖h8 20 ♗g1 ♗f6 21 e4 b6 22 e5 ♗f7 23 ♗b3 f3 24 ♗f1 Black could have played 24...♗e4! 25 ♗c2 ♗f4, which looks very dangerous.

10...b5!? (D)



Moskalenko points out that this idea is typical for the Chebanenko Variation of the Slav Defence: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♖f3 ♗f6 4 ♗c3 a6.

11 cxd5 cxd5 12 ♗e5 ♗b6 13 ♗e3