



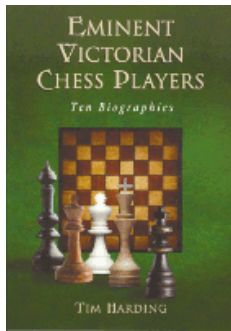
COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



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Misadventures in the Aviary

Victorian chess master Henry Edward Bird had a highly idiosyncratic approach to chess openings. Today he is probably best remembered for his championing of the move 1 f4, known worldwide as Bird's Opening. While working on my book [Eminent Victorian Chess Players](#), which includes a chapter about Bird, I decided to play several games with his favourite openings in order to obtain a better feel for his approach to chess.

Another opening variation named after him, and which he also played throughout his fifty-year long career, was Bird's Defence to the Ruy Lopez (Spanish Opening), 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nd4. Bird's aviary of chess variations also includes his line in the Italian Game (slow build-up with c3, d3 and an early b4) but I have not tried that recently. I did play 1 f4 in some correspondence games (and have also met it as Black), but spent only a little time on analysing it. I spent rather more time on Bird's Defence and played it both over-the-board and by correspondence, although I now think it is too risky for the latter mode of play.

For that purpose of my Bird chapter, I think my experiment succeeded to some extent, but my results and rating have certainly suffered! Nevertheless, I did have some interesting games (mostly draws and losses) which I shall now share with readers. Clearly Bird understood his openings better than I do, but he also had the advantage that opponents did not have the benefit of modern databases and theoretical works.

In this month's column, I shall look at Bird's Opening and then my December column will deal with Bird's Defence. I shall start with two illustrative games played by Bird himself.

Henry Bird – Max Judd
Sixth US Congress, New York, 1889 (Round 7)
Bird's Opening [A02]

Notes by Steinitz in the tournament book, page 330, unless otherwise stated.

1 f4

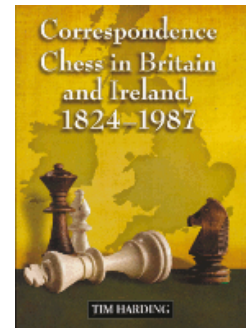
TH: This move was not original with Henry Bird, who probably first played it during his match with Ernst Falkbeer in 1856. It had been tried in the 1830s and 1840s by De la Bourdonnais, Staunton, and St. Amant among others. Bird's last tournament game with 1 f4 was a loss to Steinitz at the London 1899 international, the final competition that either of them played.

1...c5 2 e3 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 b3

TH: Bird often combined 1 f4 with a queen's fianchetto, although against some formations he adopted a Stonewall formation. In all cases his idea was to take firm control of e5.

4...d5 5 Bb2 Be7 6 Be2 Nc6 7 0-0 0-0 8 Qe1

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by Tim Harding



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by Andrew Martin



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/pp2bPPP/2n1pn2/2pp4/5P2/1P2PN2/PBPPP1PP/RN2QRK1 b - - 0 8"]

8...Ne4

A development of the Q side was more in order.

9 d3 Bf6 10 Ne5 Nd6 11 Nd2 Bxe5 12 fxe5 Nf5 13 Bg4 Nce7

13...d4 would have isolated the adverse front KP [i.e. the e5-pawn] and blocked the hostile QB with better prospects for Black's game.

14 Bxf5 exf5 15 Nf3 Be6 16 a4 a5 17 Nh4 Rc8 18 Rd1 b6 19 Qg3 Kh8 20 Rd2 Rc6 21 Rdf2 Rg8 22 Qg5



[FEN "3q2rk/4nPPP/1pr1b3/p1ppPpQ1/P6N/1P1PP3/1BP2RPP/5RK1 b - - 0 22"]

22...Qf8

The K side was better guarded if he had not crowded his heavy pieces on that wing and tried a diversion on the other flank by the advance of P-B5.

23 h3 g6

Unnecessary and weak.

24 e4



[FEN "5qrk/4np1p/1pr1b1p1/p1ppPpQ1/P3P2N/1P1P3P/1BP2RP1/5RK1 b - - 0 24"]

24...d4

4 g3

TH: This was Bird's last idea against the From. 4 Nf3 is more usual:

a) 4...Nf6 (or 4...Nh6 transposing next move) 5 d4 Ng4 6 Bg5 f6 7 Bh4 occurred in (at least) two earlier games between Bird and Blackburne, who also tried 5...Ne4.

b) 4...g5 5 d4 g4 6 Ne5 Bxe5 7 dxe5 Qxd1+ 8 Kxd1 Nc6 9 Bf4 Be6 10 e3 Nge7 11 Bb5 0-0-0+ 12 Kc1 Bd5 13 Rg1 a6 14 Be2 Be6 15 Nc3 h6 16 Bd3 Ng6 17 Bxg6 fxe6 18 Rd1 Rde8 19 e4 g5 20 Bg3 Rhf8 21 b3 h5 22 Rd2 h4 23 Bf2 Nxe5 24 Be3 h3 25 Bxg5 g3 26 hxg3 Rf1+ 27 Kb2 Rxa1 28 Kxa1 h2 29 Rd1 Ng4 30 Rh1 Bf7 31 Kb2 c6 32 Kc1 Bg6 33 Kd2 Rxe4 34 Nd1 Rd4+ 35 Ke2 Rxd1 36 Rxd1 Be4 37 Rd8+ Kc7 38 Rd1 Bxg2 39 Bd8+ Kc8 40 Bb6 Bd5 0-1, Bird-Em. Lasker, Newcastle upon Tyne 1892.

4...h5

TH: Bird-Lasker, also at Hastings 1895, went 4...f5 5 d3 Nf6 6 c3 Nc6 7 Bg2 Ne5 8 Nd2 Qe7 9 Nf1 Bd7 10 Bf4 0-0 11 Bxe5 Bxe5 12 Qc2 Kh8 13 Bf3 Rab8 14 Qd2 Rfe8 15 h3 Qd6 16 Kf2 c5 17 e3 Bb5 18 Rd1 Rbd8 19 c4 Bc6 20 Qe2 b5 21 b3 bxc4 22 bxc4 Ba4 23 Rb1 Rb8 24 Nd2 Bxg3+ 25 Kg2 Bh4 26 Rh2 Bc2 27 Rxb8 Rxb8 28 d4 cxd4 29 exd4 Re8 30 Qf1 Re1 31 c5 Qxd4 32 Qxe1 Bxe1 33 Nb3 Bxb3 34 axb3 Qxc5 0-1.

5 Bg2 Nc6

Apparently 5...h4 would be stronger.

6 Nc3 h4 7 Ne4 hxg3 8 h3 Nf6 9 Nxd6+ Qxd6 10 d3 Be6 11 c3 0-0-0 12 Qa4 Nd5 13 Bd2 g5



[FEN "2kr3r/ppp2p2/nqb3/3n2p1/Q7/2PP2pP/PP1BP1B1/R3K1NR w KQ - 0 14"]

The beginning of a pretty combination.

14 Bxg5 Nxc3 15 Qf4

After 15 bxc3 would follow 15...Qc5 with a triple attack on c3, g5, and f2.

15...Qxf4 16 Bxf4 Nd5 17 Bxg3 Rdg8 18 Kf2 Rh6 19 Bxd5 Bxd5 20 Nf3 Nb4 21 Be5 Rh5 22 d4 Nd3+ 23 Ke3

23 exd3 Rf5 regaining a piece, with a strong attack.

23...Nxb2 24 Rag1 Rxb2 25 Rxb2 Rxb2 26 Kf4 Nd3+ 27 Kf5 Bxf3 28 exd3 Bd5



[FEN "2k5/ppp2p2/8/3bBK2/3P4/3P3r/P7/6R1 w - - 0 29"]

29 Kf6 Kd7 30 Rc1 Rh6+ 31 Kg7 Rg6+ 32 Kh7 Rc6 33 Rb1 Rc2 34 Rb5 Kc6 35 Ra5 a6 36 a3 Bb3 37 Bf4 Kd7 38 Kg7 Rg2+ 39 Kf6 Be6 40 d5 Rg6 + 41 Ke5 Bh3 42 Rc5 Bg2 43 Kd4 c6 44 d6 Bd5 45 Rc2 Rg4 46 Rf2 b5 47 Kc5 a5 48 d4 Rg8 49 Re2 Re8 50 Rh2 b4



[FEN "4r3/3k1p2/2pP4/p1Kb4/1p1P1B2/P7/7R/8 w - - 0 51"]

51 a4

If 51 axb4?? Rb8 and mate next move.

51...Rg8 52 Kb6 Rg4 53 Bd2 Rxd4 54 Kxa5 c5 55 Be3 Rc4 56 Kb6 Kxd6 57 a5 Be4 58 a6 Rc3 59 Rd2+ Rd3 60 Bxc5+ Ke5 61 Re2 Rd8 62 a7 b3 63 Kb5 Kf5 64 Kb4 Bc2 65 Ka3 Ra8 66 Re7 Kg6 67 Rb7 Be4 68 Rxb3 f5 69 Kb4 Kf7 70 Kc3 Ke6 71 Rb8 Ke5 1/2-1/2

I do have vague memories of opening 1 f4 way back in the 1964 British Under-16 Championship and drawing with a strong opponent, but that game is not preserved. On a few occasions I have met the Bird, the following being the most recent.

Guy Chouraqui – Tim Harding
 ICCF Veterans World Cup2 semi-final, 2011
 From Gambit [A02]

1 f4

Unfortunately, the From Gambit, in correspondence at least, looks like a poor way to give up a pawn, but I was playing for fun in this event, and saw it as good practice because I was thinking of playing Bird's with White.

1...e5 2 fxe5 d6 3 exd6 Bxd6 4 Nf3 Nf6

I do not trust 4...g5.

5 e3

5 Nc3 was recommended by GM Bent Larsen and in an article by Vigus in one of the "[Dangerous Weapons](#)" volumes.

5...Ng4 6 d4 Qe7 7 Qd2

Very much a computer move, I think!



[FEN "rnb1k2r/ppp1qppp/3b4/8/3P2n1/4PN2/PPPPQ2PP/RNB1KB1R b KQkq - 0 7"]

7...0-0

7...Bf4 would regain the pawn but White has no problems after that and gets an edge in development and space.

8 Nc3

Probably White's only good move; otherwise 8...Re8 regains the pawn safely.

8...c5

The pawn centre needs to be challenged although Black's queen can be driven back.

9 Nd5 Qd8 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 h3 Nf6 12 Nxf6+ Qxf6 13 Bd3 Nc6 14 0-0

Black has to take an important decision now.

14...Ne5

This move came out best in deep probing with the Deep Rybka-3 program. 14...Nb4!? was also examined but seemed less flexible. Apparently 14...Be6 is insufficient as it has no real threat.

15 Nxe5

White played this quickly although it is by no means obviously best. The game might have developed in a more interesting way if my opponent had not been so clearly satisfied with a draw.

15...Qxe5 16 Qf2

The queen must move before the c1-bishop can be developed. Qf2 seems the most obvious choice since it prevents ...Re8.

16...Bd7 17 Qf4 Rae8 18 Qxe5 Rxe5 19 b4 Bxe3+ 1/2-1/2

In my games as White in the Bird, I twice tried a Leningrad formation (reversed Leningrad Dutch), and twice played the "true" Bird involving an early e3. My experiences would lead me to definitely prefer the latter on any future occasion, as both my games with the king's fianchetto were disastrous. Please do not judge me by these next two exhibitions of rank patzterdam.

Tim Harding – Boris Gorokhovsky

ICCF 9th European Team Championship semifinals, board 2, 2011-12

Bird's Opening [A03]

1 f4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 0-0 0-0 6 d3

When playing the early stages of these games, I often consulted Timothy Taylor's book *Bird's Opening*, which has been reviewed in this column in the past. It did not prove very helpful at critical moments but I cannot blame Taylor for these losses – well, maybe just a little bit.

6...c5



[FEN "rnbq1rk1/pp2ppbp/5np1/2pp4/5P2/3P1NP1/PPP1P1BP/RNBQ1RK1 w - - 0 7"]

My opponent spent over a week on this. By analogy with Leningrad Dutch White is a tempo ahead (since Black has yet to play ...Nc6) so the choice is between 7 c3 (to which 7...b6 is perhaps a good reply), 7 Nc3 or 7 Qe1.

7 Nc3?!

I definitely will not play this again. In the Leningrad Dutch, the ...Nc6 lines are probably inferior and having the extra move as White does not seem to improve matters. If anything, it means Black can react according to what his opponent plans.

7...d4

My opponent took a long time on this well-judged move. If 7...Nc6 8 e4.

8 Ne4

I doubt that 8 Na4 is any better.

8...Nxe4 9 dxe4 Qb6!



[FEN "rnb2rk1/pp2ppbp/1q4p1/2p5/3pPP2/5NP1/PPP1P1BP/R1BQ1RK1 w - - 0 10"]

There is no example of 9...Qb6 in Taylor's book. What I found in databases and Rybka's analysis was unpromising for White and I did not find a solution. After eight moves White is already close to lost.

9...Nc6 10 e3 would be a standard Leningrad reversed with extra tempo.

10 Nd2?!

This idea of mine seemed at the time to make a lot of sense as it prepares to occupy c4 with tempo, so cutting across his plan. However the sequel proved

it to be too slow and a mistaken concept. I found a lot of alternative sharp lines which computers assess as slightly better for Black, although he does not get it all his own way and could go wrong.

10...Nc6

10...Rd8 could be met by 11 e5!?

11 Nc4

11 e3 can be met by 11...dxe3 12 Nc4 e2 13 Qxe2 Qa6! 11 b3 also came into consideration.

11...Qc7 12 b3 b5 13 Nb2 c4

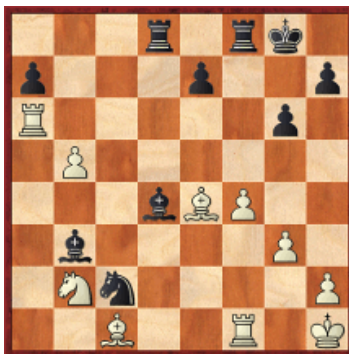


[FEN "r1b2rk1/p1q1ppbp/2n3p1/1p6/2ppPP2/1P4P1/PNP1P1BP/R1BQ1RK1 w - - 0 14"]

Black wins material in all variations.

14 e5 Be6 15 e3 Rad8 16 Qe2 f6 17 a4 cxb3 18 axb5 Nb4 19 exf6 Bxf6 20 exd4 Bxd4+ 21 Kh1 Bf7 22 cxb3 Qc2 23 Qxc2 Nxc2 24 Ra6 Bxb3 25 Be4

Hoping to play Nd3.



[FEN "3r1rk1/p3p2p/R5p1/1P6/3bBP2/1b4P1/1Nn4P/2B2R1K b - - 0 25"]

25...Rf5!

The R cannot be captured because of ...Bd5+ mating with his B pair.

26 Nd3 Rxb5 27 Kg2 Bb6 28 Ne5 Rc5 0-1

Tim Harding – CC-GM Tony Barnsley

ICCF 9th European Team Championship semifinals 2011-12

Bird's Opening [A03]

1 f4 d5 2 Nf3 g6 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 Nh6!? 5 d3 d4 6 c3 Nc6 7 Bd2 0-0 8 Na3 Nf5 9 0-0 e5!

Probably a good move, not expected by my computer program Rybka.

10 fxe5 Nxe5 11 Nxe5 Bxe5 12 Nc4 Bg7!

12...dxc3 13 bxc3 would of course give White a predominance in the centre, enabling Black's minor pieces to be driven back.



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/ppp2pbp/6p1/5n2/2Np4/2PP2P1/PP1BP1BP/R2Q1RK1 w - - 0 13"]

13 cxd4

13 e3 should perhaps have been preferred. One line from my notes goes 13... dxe3 14 Bxe3 Nxe3 15 Nxe3 Re8 (15...Qg5 16 Qf3) 16 Qf3 Be6 17 d4 c6 18 d5 cxd5 19 Nxd5 Qa5 20 b4 (20 Nf6+ Bxf6 21 Qxf6 Rad8) 20...Qa6 (20... Qxd5 21 Qxd5 Bxd5 22 Bxd5 is a probable draw with bishops of opposite colour.) 21 Nf6+ Bxf6 22 Qxf6 Rac8 (22...Qb6+ 23 Rf2) 23 a4 which is maybe about equal.

13...Qxd4+ 14 Kh1 Be6 15 Bc3

This is inconsistent. Although it appears the safer move, White will be left with weaknesses. So perhaps I should have been braver and risked 15 Bxb7!? with very unclear possibilities arising after either of Black's plausible replies, 15...Bxc4 and 15...Rab8. At any rate, I should have done deeper analysis before selecting my move.

15...Qc5 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Rc1 c6 18 Qb3 Qe7 19 Qc3+ f6 20 e4?!

This decision was over-optimistic and taken too hastily, playing into Black's hands.

20...Bxc4 21 exf5



[FEN "r4r2/pp2q1kp/2p2pp1/5P2/2b5/2QP2P1/PP4BP/2R2R1K b - - 0 21"]

21...Bf7!

Black correctly rejected the offer of the a-pawn, here and later, when White can combine kingside threats and exploitation of the bishop's insecure position. Now White is left with long-term weaknesses and has a positionally lost game.

22 Rce1 Qd6 23 Rf4 Rae8 24 Be4 g5 25 Rf3 Re5 26 a3 Rfe8 27 Rfe3 Rb5 and Black soon won material and the game. (0-1)

Now for the games in which I played e3 rather than g3. Though I won neither,

the positions that arose were fascinating and I should have at least obtained a draw from the first of them.

Tim Harding – Trevor Brotherton

BCCA 2011/12 Candidates D
Bird's Opening [A03]

This game was played in a tournament where computers could be used for database searching but not engine analysis. Hence some of the blunders I made later! So I won't reproduce much of my analysis of side-variations, as it was all done without benefit of Rybka or Fritz.

1 f4 Nf6

1...g6 2 e4 occurred in two one of my games, transposing to a form of the Modern Defence. One of these I drew and the other I won, so my results with 1 f4 were not entirely ghastly, though, in view of my second move, Bird's Opening can hardly take the credit.

2 Nf3 d5 3 e3 g6

For 3...Bg4 see the next game.

4 b4



[FEN "rnbqkb1r/ppp1pp1p/5np1/3p4/1P3P2/4PN2/P1PP2PP/RNBQKB1R b KQkq - 0 4"]

I sent my opponent the message: "Wide wingspan on this Bird!"

4...Bg7

He replied: "Can it fly I wonder? Bent seemed to think so," showing he was aware of Larsen's games.

5 Bb2 0-0 6 Be2

Larsen played this in at least two games (versus Spassky and Dely), which can be found in Taylor's book.

6...a5 7 b5 a4 8 0-0

After 8 Na3 c5, I found White was scoring 0.5/3 in my database.

8...Nbd7

Not in Taylor's book. 8...c6 9 Na3 occurred in Ivkov-Cuellar, Sousse interzonal 1967 (discussed by Taylor). 8...c5!? came into consideration.

9 Na3 Nc5 10 Ne5!?

There are two snags with this innovation. One is the temporary closure of my bishop's diagonal (which Black immediately exploits) and the other is that the QN never has anywhere to go. I decided, however, that I was unimpressed by 10 c4 dxc4 11 Nxc4 Nce4 12 Qc2 Nd6 as in a Bronstein-Ciocaltea game in my database.

10...Nfe4

10...Nfd7 is perhaps well met by 11 c4 though that is not what I calculated at the time.

11 Bf3

This prepares d2-d3 and the bishop's latent pressure against d5 forestalls ... Nd6 for time being. 11 d3 Nd6 12 Qd2 (idea Qb4) was also considered but 12...Nf5 is good enough. 11 Bd4 threatens to win a piece by d2-d3, but 11... Ne6 seemed a good reply to that.

11...f6

I had noticed this was possible but had not paid much attention to it.

12 d4!?

I hoped Black might have overlooked this and the point was to free up d3 for my N and to exploit his interlinked Ns.

12...Nd7

He spent several days on his move, while I analysed complicated possibilities such as 12...Ne6 13 c4!?

13 Nd3

I had visions of getting my N into play with lines like 14 Bxe4 de 15 Nc5. 13 Nxd7 Bxd7 14 c4 would be simpler.

13...c6

13...Nb6 can be met by 14 c4! dxc4 15 Bxe4.

14 Qe1!?



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/1p1np1bp/2p2pp1/1P1p4/p2PnP2/N2NPB2/PBP3PP/R3QRK1 b - - 0 14"]

At the time, I thought this was a clever "creeping move," à la Kotov, heading for b4, but I was now drifting into fantasy and losing control of the position. Activating the QN should probably have been the priority.

14...f5!?

Unexpected, this anchors his N and tries to revive KB but may have negative points also. I was analysing things like 14...Qb6 15 Qb4 (threatens a pawn win by 16 bxc6) but overlooking lots of other possibilities.

14...cxb5!? 15 Qb4 e6 was also possible. 14...e5!? would have required careful analysis if he had played it, but may be all right for White. 14...Qa5 could have been met by 15 Nb4 (one point of my last move) although I am not sure that was my plan at the time.

15 Qb4

Obviously the consistent continuation: eyes e7 and a4, prepares c2-c4 and links Rs. My QB and QN are slight worries but his development is worse. But I underestimated the reply so maybe this sortie should have been delayed.

15...Ndf6



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/1p2p1bp/2p2np1/1P1p1p2/pQ1PnP2/N2NPB2/PBP3PP/R4RK1 w - - 0 16"]

16 Nc5?!

16 c4 was crying out to be played before it was too late.

16...g5!?

Highly unexpected and very aggressive; objectively 16...Qd6 or 16...Qa5 may be better. Even if this had been a tournament with engine use allowed, I am far from sure that the computers would have come up with 16...g5 as a high-tariff option. No doubt Black counted on my having two queenside minor pieces inactive. The crucial point that I missed will be revealed later on.

17 Bxe4

This was based on a miscalculation. Probably I should just have taken on g5.

17...fxe4 18 bxc6 bxc6 19 fxg5 Ng4 20 Rxf8+ Bxf8!



[FEN "r1bq1bk1/4p2p/2p5/2Np2P1/pQ1Pp1n1/N3P3/PBP3PP/R5K1 w - - 0 21"]

21 h3

Desperation; this admission of error doesn't win a piece but does at least buy some time and makes him calculate accurately.

21 Qe1 had been my original intention; I saw too late that after 21...Qd6 22 g3 (defending the mate and threatening h2-h3 to win the N) Black just plays 22...Ne5! since the c5-N hangs. Meanwhile, he threatens ...Nf3+ and after 23 dxe5 (23 Nxe4 Nf3+ 24 Kf2 dxe4) 23...Qxc5 White's position is a wreck. To avoid this, I needed to have seen the trick before making my seventeenth move.

21...Nxe3

Black now finished off efficiently, avoiding traps.

22 Bc1 Nf5 23 Bf4 Bg7 24 c3 e5 25 dxe5 Bf8

25...Qa5!?! should also win.

26 g4 Ra5 27 Nb7!

This try offers some swindling chances; it might have worked in an over-the-board game.

27...Bxb4 28 Nxd8 Bc5+! 29 Kg2!?! Ne7! 30 Nc2 Bb6 31 Nxc6 Nxc6 32 Rb1 Bc7 33 Nd4 Rc5 34 Nb5 Bxe5 35 Bxe5 Nxe5 36 Nd6 Nc4 0-1

Tim Harding – Nicola Latronico

ICCF 9th European Team Championship semifinals, board 2, 2011-12
Bird's Opening [A03]

1 f4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 e3 Bg4 4 h3!?

This led to my most exciting game in the opening. A more conventional treatment is 4 Be2 Nbd7 5 0-0 Bxf3 6 Bxf3 e5 (Taylor calls this the "recipe variation".) 7 d4:

a) 7...e4 8 Be2 Bd6 9 b3!, intending c4, was Larsen-Smailbegovic, Game #19 in Taylor's book.)

b) 7...exd4! 8 exd4 Be7 9 Nc3 Nb6 10 Qd3 as discussed on page 68 of the aforementioned book.

4...Bxf3 5 Qxf3 Nbd7



[FEN "r2qkb1r/pppppppp/5n2/3p4/5P2/4PQ1P/PPPP2P1/RNB1KB1R w KQkq - 0 6"]

We have transposed to Danielsen-Luther, Petermännchen GM 1999, which is illustrative Game #22 in Taylor's book. There the early move order was 2... Bg4 3 e3 Nd7 4 h3 Bxf3 5 Qxf3 and now Taylor thinks that the natural 5... Ngf6 could already be a mistake and suggests 5...e5!?, which was not an option in the present game.

6 g4

6 Nc3 is an alternative discussed by Taylor, which he says is inferior because of 6...c6 7 g4 e5. Actually Black seems to be able to get into that line after the text move also. Instead 6...e6 7 g4 Bb4 8 g5 was played in the famous game Nimzowitsch-Kmoch, Kecksemet 1927.

6...c6

Luther got into serious difficulties after 6...e6 7 d3 Bb4+ 8 c3 Bd6 9 e4 dxe4 10 dxe4 e5 11 g5 Ng8 12 f5 h6 13 h4 Be7?! when Henrik Danielsen, one of the leading exponents of the Bird in recent years, hit him with 14 Qh5!

Taylor suggested the gambit 6...e5!? 7 g5 e4 8 Qe2 Ng8 9 Qb5 c6 10 Qxb7 Ne7 but I can understand why this might not appeal.

7 Ne3

Maybe 7 g5 is possible but I was doubtful about it, so play returns to Taylor's recommendation.

7...e5 8 g5 Ng8 9 d3 Qb6!?

9...Bb4 was played in Vigus-Pert, Witley 1999, with Taylor criticising the move and suggesting 9...h6 as an improvement. My Italian opponent prefers to go his own way. Indeed 9...Qb6 looks strong as Black prepares to castle queenside and catch the white king in the centre. Moves like ...d4 are also in the air and what is White to do with his queen's bishop?



[FEN "r3kbnr/pp1n1ppp/1qp5/3pp1P1/5P2/2NPPQ1P/PPP5/R1B1KB1R w KQkq - 0 10"]

10 Bd2!?

I was very pleased at the time with this solution which I eventually found, although there may be other possibilities. Now I don't have to worry about ... Bb4 and if Black castles queenside then I do too, and my king position will be the more secure. Of course this move could only be played after careful calculation of the b-pawn sacrifice.

In an over-the-board game, I would expect one player or the other to go wrong in the complications and lose, but in a correspondence game with an average of five days per move, and engine use allowed, gross blunders are unwise speculations are far less likely to occur.

10...d4!?

Black decides to decline the pawn and plays a reasonable alternative, which in the main line is a pawn sacrifice of his own. After 10...Qxb2 11 Rb1 Qxc2, the key move is 12 Be2! when White's threats include e3-e4 (so that my queen defends d3) followed immediately by Bd1 to trap the queen. The main line that I analysed went. 12...Ba3 (not 12...0-0-0? 13 fxe5 and he cannot play 13...Nxe5 because of 14 Qf5+ Nd7 15 Bd1) 13 Bd1 Qxd3 14 Rb3 (This is very wild as I am *three* pawns down but have various threats, starting with the attack on his B.) 14...e4 15 Qg4



[FEN "r3k1nr/pp1n1ppp/2p5/3p2P1/4pPQ1/"]

And Rybka thinks this is about equal!

Now if 15...Bf8 16 Be2 or 15...Bd6 16 Be2 Qc2 17 Bd1 Qd3 18 Be2. The critical line seems to go 15...h5! 16 gxh6 Be7:

a) 17 Be2 Nxb6 (He must play this sooner or later, else I have a draw; if 17... Qc2 18 Bd1) 18 Qxg7 Bf6 19 Qxh8+ Bxh8 20 Bxd3 exd3 21 Rxb7 Bxc3 (If 21...Nc5 to guard d3 then 22 Rc7 or 22 Rb1.) 22 Bxc3 Nc5 23 Rc7 is about equal.

b) 17 Rxb7!?:

b1) 17...Nc5 leads to a draw after 18 Be2 Qc2 19 Bd1 Nd3+ (19...Bh4+?! 20 Qxh4 Nd3+ 21 Ke2 Nc1+ 22 Kf1!) 20 Ke2 Nc1+ 21 Ke1 Nd3+, etc.

b2) 17...0-0-0 18 Be2 Kxb7 (18...Nxb6 19 Bxd3 Kxb7 transposes; probably not 19 Rxd7?! because of 19...Nxb4.) 19 Bxd3 Nxb6 20 Qe2 (20 Qxg7 Bf6) 20...exd3 21 Qxd3 and White has Q against R, N and pawn in a permanently unclear position.

Now we return to the actual game with the position after 10...d4.



[FEN "r3kbnr/pp1n1ppp/1qp5/4p1P1/3p1P2/2NPPQ1P/PPPB4/R3KB1R w KQkq - 0 11"]

11 exd4 exd4 12 Na4 Qa6 13 Qe4+ Ne7 14 Qxd4

I may as well grab the pawn, as the sequel makes clear.

14...0-0-0 15 Nc3

The knight must retreat but his queen has been driven to an inferior square. 15 Qc4? b5 16 Nc5 Nxc5 17 Qxc5 Nd5; 15 Qe4 looks too slow.

15...Nf5



[FEN "2kr1b1r/pp1n1ppp/q1p5/5nP1/3Q1P2/2NP3P/PPPB4/R3KB1R w KQ - 0 16"]

16 Qg1!

16 Qc4 devalues the extra pawn and opens the d-file for him. Black probably

has the better prospects in the ensuing queenless middle-game where White loses the right to castle. 16...Re8+ 17 Ne2 (17 Be2 Qxc4 18 dxc4 Ng3) 17... Qxc4 18 dxc4 Nd6 19 b3 Ne4 and my analysis continued to above move 30 without finding anything very consoling, though no clear advantage for Black either.

16...Bc5

Rybka preferred 16...Bb4, perhaps seeing the game continuation through to the end, while, I to be frank, failed to predict his next move.

17 d4!

The point of my capturing his d-pawn earlier is that this move threatens Bxa6.

17...Qb6!



[FEN "2kr3r/pp1n1ppp/1qp5/2b2nP1/3P1P2/2N4P/PPPB4/R3KBQR w KQ - 0 18"]

This was an astonishing move and a totally unexpected piece sacrifice. My opponent must have examined the position deeply.

Now 17...Rde8+ should be better for White. I had expected 17...Rhe8+ (or 17...Bxd4 transposing) 18 Kd1 Bxd4 19 Bxa6 Bxg1 20 Bd3 (Two black pieces hang, so...) 20...Ne3+ 21 Kc1 Bf2 22 Ne4 (Black must give up the exchange.) 22...Rxe4 23 Bxe4 Nc5 24 Bd3 (24 Bf3 looks unclear but may favour White?) 24...Nxd3+ 25 cxd3 Rxd3 26 Bxe3 Rxe3 27 Kc2 Re2+ 28 Kd3 Re3+ 29 Kd2 and White has R v B+P in an ending (with extra pair of rooks). This must give winning chances.

Also 17...Nxd4 was playable. Then my K gets safe by 18 0-0-0 because his queen is still en prise. After 18...Qa5 (18...Nb3+? 19 cxb3; 18...Qb6 19 Na4) my queen moves up the g-file and there is still much play left.

18 Na4

I decided that 18 dxc5 was too risky, since after 18...Qxb2 (18...Rhe8+!?) 19 Rc1 Rhe8+ 20 Be2 Black certainly has compensation for the piece.

18...Rhe8+ 19 Kd1

This is forced; not 19 Be2?? Qa6.

19...Qc7



[FEN "2krr3/ppqn1ppp/2p5/2b2nP1/N2P1P2/
7P/PPPB4/R2K1BQR w - - 0 20"]

White now has another big decision. I decided to take the material and allow him to force perpetual check, rather than risk the 20 Qg4 against a high-rated opponent. Also 20 dxc5 enabled me to reduce my game-load.

20 dxc5

20 Qg4!? was the only way to play for more. Then 20...Nxd4 21 Nxc5 h5 seems critical, to get my Q off diagonal and release the pin. There follows 22 gxh6 f5 (Black will regain the piece but White stays a P or two up and gets Qs off.) 23 Qxg7 (23 Na6 messes Black's pawns but squanders a tempo.) 23...Nxc5 (only move) 24 Qxc7+ Kxc7 when White has the B pair but no development; the QR is out of play and K not in good position.

For example, if 25 Bd3 Rh8 (equal according to Rybka), Black regains one and maybe both pawns eventually, though I could try 26 Be3 Rxh6 27 Kd2.

On the other hand, if 25 Kc1, to release White's dark-squared B for action, 25...Ne4 is probably best, to rule out Bc3. Maybe White can play on with 26 Bd3 though.

20...Nxc5

The end is forced now; either side loses if they try to avoid the perpetual check. Thus 20...Ne3+ 21 Kc1 (even 21 Bxe3!?) 21...Qxf4 22 Bd3 or 20...Re4 21 Bd3 Rxf4 22 Nc3.



[FEN "2krr3/ppq2ppp/2p5/2n2nP1/N4P2/
7P/PPPB4/R2K1BQR w - - 0 21"]

21 Nxc5

Not 21 Bd3? Nxd3 22 Qxa7 Nxb2+.

21...Rxd2+ 22 Kxd2 Qxf4+

If 22...Rd8+ 23 Nd3.

23 Kc3 Qe5+ 24 Kd2! ½-½

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