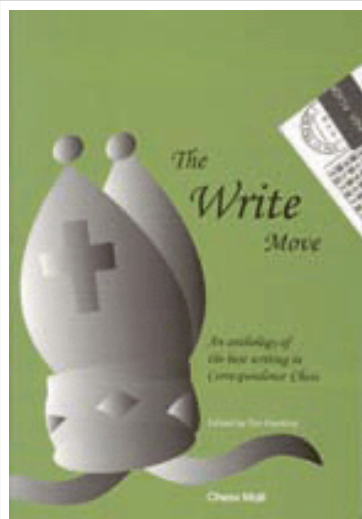




C O L U M N I S T S

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding



The Write Move
by Tim Harding

The Giuoco Piano Revisited

This article deals with the Italian Game, which arises from **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5**.



It is a follow-up to the mini-series of November and December last year, in which I re-examined the Two Knights Defence. Previously, I wrote on this opening in *The Kibitzer* #[64-65](#), and #[69-70](#), and on the Evans Gambit in #[89-90](#) (with respect to Chigorin's use of it). Next month's column will update my Evans Gambit coverage.

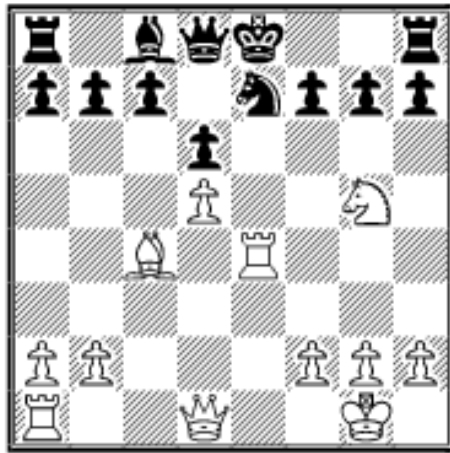
In the diagram position, each player has developed two pieces, but White is one move closer than his opponent to castling. Also note that all of Black's three moves exert some pressure on the d4-square, which soon becomes the focus of the struggle. As it is White wants to play d2-d4 to open the position and develop his queen's bishop.

The Italian Game is sometimes known as the Giuoco Piano ("quiet game" in Italian), but that is rather a misnomer as it is often not at all quiet. It is true that the opening can be extremely quiet and boring, when played by novices who proceed symmetrically: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc3 Bc5 4 d3 d6 5 Nc3 Nf6 6 0-0 0-0 or 4 Nc3 or 4 0-0, with a similar outcome. Evidently the moves 4 d3, 4 0-0 and 4 Nc3 do nothing to fight for control of d4, which is left as neutral territory until later in the game.

In the fighting versions of the Italian Game, White usually plays **4 c3**, intending to follow up with d4, even if Black has one more piece attacking that square than White does. This leads to a sharp clash, where both players fight for piece activity and central control, with White sometimes offering a gambit pawn. In the Evans Gambit, White plays 4 b4 and gives up a wing pawn to gain time; some of the most fascinating tactical positions in chess can then arise.

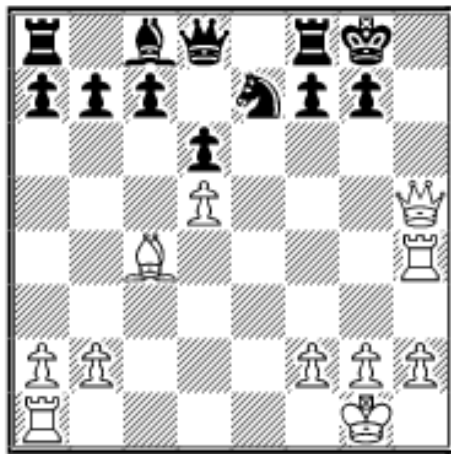
This article will deal in turn with 4 c3 and 4 b4; quiet lines will be disregarded. There are also lines with an early d4 gambit by White, but I dealt with these in a Kibitzer quite some time ago and there is nothing new to add. My main reason for examining these lines this month is to review the recent book [*Italian Game and Evans Gambit*](#) by Polish IM Jan Pinski (Everyman Chess 2005; ISBN 1-85744-373-X). Incidentally this book also includes a final chapter on Black's third move alternatives (the Hungarian Defence and lesser moves.) Apparently Pinski chose not to give any general opinion about whether he prefers 3...Bc5 or 3...Nf6, nor an overall view of how he thinks theory on 3 Bc4 stands now; rather a pity (and a cop-out.)

The old main line of the Italian Game is the so-called Møller Attack, proceeding **4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4** (In this article, I shall not consider the inferior moves 6 0-0 and 6 e5.) **6...Bb4+ 7 Nc3 Nxe4** (7...d5? was dealt with in [Kibitzer 64](#).) **8 0-0 Bxc3** ([Kibitzer 69](#) discussed other moves for Black here and later.) **9 d5 Bf6 10 Re1 Ne7 11 Rxe4 d6 12 Bg5 Bxg5 13 Nxg5.**



There was a time when this sequence might be bashed out by two players in just a few seconds, as many of the moves are forced or clearly best, but that is probably not the case. In fact, Pinski gives White's seventh move a “?!” mark, and it is generally agreed that 7 Bd2 is safer. Paul Keres liked 7 Nc3, though, and played it frequently in his teenage years, so it is worth another look. For now let us concentrate on the exciting play from this second diagram.

In Keres's day, Black could be relied upon to play 13...0-0, whereupon White sacrifices a knight by 14 Nxh7!. This gives a very dangerous attack if White knows what he is doing, although objectively a draw is the right result. The main line is not so simple, and Pinski devotes some space (pages 28-30) to discussing it. After 14...Kxh7 (he says 14...Bf5 is also equal, but only considers 15 Rxe7, and not 15 Rh4!? which is more critical) 15 Qh5+ Kg8 16 Rh4 Black must move his f-pawn to avoid being checkmated.



On 16...f6 Pinski gives “17 Bd3 f5 18 Be2 Re8 19 Re1 Kf8 20 Bb5 Bd7 21 Re6 Bxb5 22 Rf6+ with equality according to Perez.” But who is “Perez”? That is a very common surname, so why doesn’t Pinski give more details? What about the well-known alternatives 17 Qh7+ and 17 g4, which is supposed to be best here? There is much more that could be said about 16...f6 and I haven’t tried to establish best play, but I wouldn’t rely on this Perez variation with either colour.

Pinski devotes the most space to 16...f5!, which I did not cover in detail in my earlier articles. In [Kibitzer 65](#) I wrote:

“The bottom line is that if White tries too hard to win, then he can lose, but if White settles for a draw there is nothing Black can do about it. The main line goes 14...Kxh7 15 Qh5+ Kg8 16 Rh4 f5 (16...f6 probably leads to a draw too.) 17 Rh3 (Several other moves have been tried but this is White’s safest.) 17...f4! 18 Qh7+ Kf7 19 Qh5+ Kg8 20 Qh7+ with an early handshake and head for the bar.”

As Pinski shows, this is wrong; he gives computer analysis starting 19...g6! and leading to a position which Black should win – just another instance where computers have overturned long-held beliefs. Heyken and Fette, for example, in their edition of Euwe’s opening series, had said after 19 Qh5+ “with perpetual check” and Estrin’s book cites a 1935 postal game Bäcker-Schiniawski, 1935, ending that way. Estrin, who described 17...f4 as “the only move enabling Black to rescue a half point,” discussed other 18th moves for White that also fail. The point about 20...g6 is that White seems to have nothing better than 20 Qh7+ Kf6! 21 Qh4+ g5 22 Qh6+ Ng6 23 Rh5 Rh8 24 Qxg5+ Kg7 25 Bd3 Qxg5 26 Rxg5 Rh6 27 Rc1 Kf6 28 Rxg6+ Rxg6 29 Bxg6 Kxg6 30 Rxc7. Although he now has two pawns for the bishop and Black hasn’t developed his queenside, it is hard to see how White can avoid eventual defeat against sensible play by Black starting 30...Kf6.

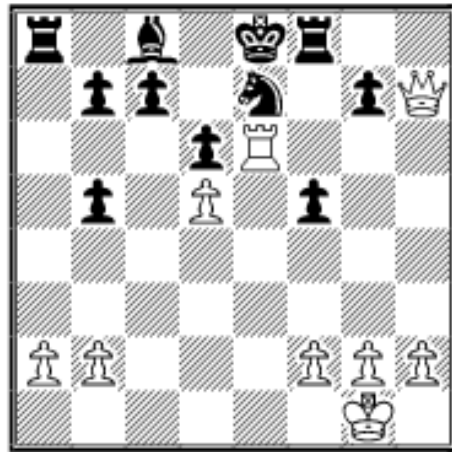
Pinski also rejects 17 Re1 on account of 17...Ng6 18 Rh3 Rf6!, which has indeed been known for several decades to refute 17 Re1. Should White then play 19 Rg3, I am unsure why he suggests the second-best, though adequate, defence 19...Ne5 (citing a correspondence game in which Black was rated about 2050), instead of Nenarokov’s 19...Bd7 20 Rxg6 Be8 as recommended by Estrin.

Returning to the position after 16...f5, Pinski says “the best option by far is 17 Qh7+ Kf7 18 Rh6 Rg8 19 Re1.” Now Pinski agrees with old analysis that

shows 19...Bd7? losing to 20 Ree6!, and 19...Kf8 leading to a draw, so he gives 19...Qf8!, just as both Estrin and Heyken & Fette did. Then comes 20 Bb5! (Pinski also analyses the inferior 20 Rh3, answered by the computer move 20...Kf6!!) when:

a) Keres found the drawing line 20...Rh8 21 Qxh8 gxh6 22 Qh7+ Kf6 23 Rxe7 Qxe7 24 Qh6+; here Black cannot play 23...c6 because of 24 Rc7! cxb5 25 f4! with the deadly threat of 26 h4, 27 h5, 28 Qg6 mate.

b) 20...a6 is Black's last winning try, but then 21 Ree6! axb5 22 Rhf6+ Ke8 23 Rxf8+ Rxf8 and now the authorities disagree.



b1) Pinski gives 24 Rxe7+! Kxe7 25 Qxg7+ Rf7 26 Qg5+ Kf8 27 Qd8+ Kg7 28 Qg5+ Kh7 29 Qh5+ Kg8 30 Qg5+ Rg7 31 Qd8+ Kh7 32 Qe8! “and there is seemingly no way to escape the perpetual check.” This seems true.

b2) Both Estrin and Heyken & Fette cite analysis by I. Sek instead: 24 Re1 Rxa2 (best?) 25 Qxg7 Rf7 26 Qg8+ Rf8 27 Qg5 Rf7 and now, instead of taking a draw, 28 h4 “and White wins” – but this

occurred in a 2002 IECG email game W.Traczewski-T. Nyholm and Black won in 116 moves! The claim of a win at first looks highly implausible, although in the game after 28...Ra4 29 f3 (to stop ...Rg4) 29...Kf8 (29...Kd8 30 h5) White missed at least one drawing line, e.g. 30 Re2?! (possibly 30 Qh6+ draws) 30...b6 31 h5 Bb7 and now 32 h6= instead of 32 Re6?. But why not 30 h5! at once; maybe White really is winning in that line? I suppose that Pinski never saw Sek's analysis as he does not comment on it.

That concludes my discussion of 13...0-0. Now let's look at the critical line.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 Bb4+ 7 Nc3 Nxe4 8 0-0 Bxc3 9 d5 Bf6 10 Re1 Ne7 11 Rxe4 d6 12 Bg5 Bxg5 13 Nxg5 h6



As Pinski says, 13...h6! (rather than castling) was the move which more or less put 7 Nc3 out of business. This move became known to me in the late 1960s, but it was not for a few more years before its strength became generally recognised. Even so, is it clear that White's cause is hopeless? A reader recently sent me a game he played in this variation, which we shall come to in a minute.

14 Qe2

Pinski dismisses 14 Bb5+ very briefly here. After 14...Bd7 15 Qe2 Bxb5! 16 Qxb5+ Qd7 he only gives 17 Qe2? Kf8! 18 Nf3 Nxd5 and does not mention the 17 Qxb7! complications, as in my drawn game with Lindblom, analysed in [Kibitzer 65](#). I still am not sure whether Black could safely play for a win in that line, but he also had to avoid many traps that could have given Black a worse game.

14...hgx5 15 Rae1

Black is forced to return the extra piece, but should still have some advantage.

15...Be6! 16 dxe6 f6 17 Re3

17 f4 d5 18 fxg5 Qd6! is good for Black.

17...c6

The only move Pinski gives. In my earlier article I wrote that "While ECO recommends 17...g4!?, the best of all is perhaps 17...Kf8, which has not been played much; Black will follow up with ...c6 and eventually ...d5."

Attempts to find compensation for White in the position after 17...c6 have usually failed in the past.

18 Rb3

A novelty, played in the recent ICCF webserver tournament game A. Herrera-V.V. Popov, WS/M/039 2005-6. The main line, as given by Pinski, runs 18 Rh3 Rxh3 19 gxh3 g6 20 Qd2 and now:

a) 20...d5 21 Bd3 (instead of 21 Qc3 d4 22 Qf3 Qa5 23 Re2 Qf5, as in the

game Pinski cites, Fang-A. Ivanov, USA 1999) 21...Qd6 22 Qc2 0-0-0 23 Bxg6 White has regained his pawn, but it's still very messy. A Czech correspondence game J. Binas-R. Vicenec, 1996, continued 23...Rh8 24 Bf5 Qf4 25 Bg4 f5 26 Qc3! Rh7 27 Qd3, Black should probably win this, but he managed to lose in the end.

b) 20...Kf8 is an alternative treatment for Black.

18...d5

The point of Herrera's last move is that if Black plays 18...b5, he weakens his queenside and 19 Rh3 then follows. After 19...Rxb3 20 g3 he planned the spirited sac 21 Bxb5. Mr. Herrera sent me many long and complex variations, not all of which I can vouch for, but readers may like to examine the possibilities for themselves. Computers at first think the idea is obviously bad, but sometimes after quite long forced sequences they change their minds. A typical line is 21...cxb5 22 Qf3 (the point of the bishop sacrifice is that Black does not have ...Qa5 because his rook hangs) 22...Kf8 (22...Nf5 23 e7) 23 Qxf6+ Kg8 24 Qf7+ Kh8 25 Qf6+ Kh7 and now 27 h4. It's hard to believe, but Herrera's analyses end in a draw:

a) A sample variation is 27...Nf5 28 e7 Qe8 29 hxg5+ Kxg5 30 h4+ Kh6 (not 30...Nxh4 31 Qd5+) 31 Qf6 Ng7 32 Rd1 (threatening Rxd6) 32...Nf5 33 Re1 (threatening Re6) 33...Ng7 34 Rd1 etc. with repetition; Black's rook is unable to render any assistance.

b) The critical line is 27...gxh4 28 Qf4+ g5 29 Qf6+ Ng6 30 e7 Qg8 31 Re6 Re8 32 f4 gxf4 33 Qxh4+ Kg7 34 Qf6+ Kh7 35 Qf5 Qg7 36 Qh5+ Qh6 37 Qf5 f3 (37...d5 38 h4 f3 39 Kf2 Qxh4+ 40 Kxf3) 38 Kf2 Qg7 39 Qh5+ Qh6 40 Qf5 Qxh2+ 41 Kxf3=. Can you find an improvement for Black?

19 Rxb7

Herrera comments: "Only this zesty sacrifice has any sting, if it's refuted then the whole concept is without value."

19...Qd6! 20 g3

Weakening h2, but denying f4 to Black. (The computer program Fritz actually thinks that 20 h3 is superior, and roughly equal.)

20 h3 dxc4 21 Qxc4 a5 22 Rd7 Qb4 23 Qe2 Kf8 24 Red1 Re8 25 Rd8 Qb6 26 Rxe8+ Kxe8 27 Rd7 Despite his extra knight, it is perhaps impossible for Black to free his game. Analysis would have to go much deeper to establish whether or not he can do so.

20...dxc4 21 Rd1 Nd5

If 21...Qe5 22 Rdd7 Ng6 23 Qxc4= or 21...Qc5 22 Rdd7 favors White (Herrera).

22 Rxc7!**22...f5?**

This loses; Black collapses completely.

If 22...c3 23 bxc3 Nxc3 24 Qh5+! Rxh5 25 Rxd6 Rh8 26 Rxc6 Nd5 27 Rc5 Nb6 28 Rcc7= (Herrera).

The critical defence is 22...Qe5! 23 Qxe5 fxe5 24 Re1, which is a probable draw according to Herrera, who writes: “Black has the better prospects, but maybe not

enough to win.” He then analyses:

a) 24...a5 25 Rxe5 Rb8 26 Ra7 Rf8 (Fritz8 prefers 26...Rg8 27 Rxa5 Ke7 here, with an edge to Black.) 27 Rxc5 Rxb2 28 Rgg7 Rb8 29 Ra6 Ne7 (29...Rc8 30 Rxa5 c3 31 Rc5=) 30 Ra7=.

b) 24...c3 25 bxc3 Nxc3 26 Rxe5 Nxa2 27 Rxc5 Nc3 28 f4 a5 29 f5 Nd5 30 g4 a4 31 Rh5 Rxh5 32 Rg8+ Ke7 33 Rxa8=.

c) 24...Ne7 25 Rxc5 Rb8 26 Re2 Rb5 27 Rgxe5 Rxe5 28 Rxe5 Nd5 29 Re4 Rh6 30 f4=.

d) 24...Rb8 25 Rxa7 Nf6 26 Rxe5 Rxh2 27 Rf5! and now:

d1) 27...Rh7 28 Ra4 Ke7 29 Rxc4 Rb5 30 Rxb5 cxb5 31 Rc5 Kxe6 32 Rxb5=.

d2) 27...c3 28 Kxh2!! cxb2 29 Rxf6 b1Q 30 Rff7 (“= Amazing Position!”). If Black tries to avoid perpetual by 30...Qb4? then Herrera gives 31 Rg7 Qf8 32 Raf7 Qh8+ 33 Rh7 Qxh7+ 34 Rxh7 Rb2 35 Kg2 Rxa2 36 Kf3 and “only White can win.” (Though it may still be a draw.)

23 Rd7 Qb8

If 23...Qf8 24 Qe5 Qh6 (24...Rc8 25 R7xd5 cxd5 26 Qxd5 Rh7 27 Qb5+ or 24...Qf6 25 Qd6 Rc8 26 Rf7) 25 h4! gxh4 26 R1xd5! cxd5 27 Qxd5 0–0 28

e7+ winning.

24 Qxc4 Qb6 25 R7xd5 1-0.

Black resigned in view of 25...cxd5 26 Qa4+ Ke7 27 Qd7+ Kf6 28 Qf7+ Ke5 29 Re1+ Kd4 30 Qg7+ Kc5 31 Rcl+.

Before moving on from 7 Nc3, I note that Pinski also devotes his Game 7 to **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 Bb4+ 7 Nc3 Nxe4 8 0-0 Bxc3 9 d5 Ne5.**



Of which he remarks, “not as well known in the West as 9...Bf6 ... Nevertheless, it is quite safe and gives Black a very slight edge without any risk at all.”

Actually, I do believe strong players who employ this opening with either colour are well aware of 9...Ne5, but have just believed that 9...Bf6 is better. Thus, in [Kibitzer 69](#), I wrote:

“After 8...Bxc3 9 d5 the other plausible move for Black is 9...Ne5 when 10 bxc3 Nxc4 11 Qd4 f5 (11...Ncd6? 12 Qxg7) 12 Qxc4 d6 13 Nd4 0-0 14 f3 Nc5 may be just about playable for Black but White has excellent compensation for the pawn. He does not have a huge advantage but it is enough to work with.”

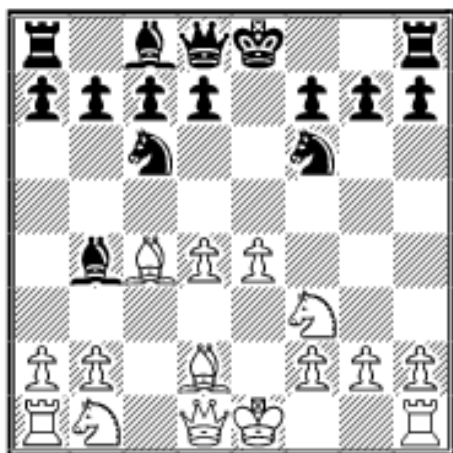
In the Computer versus Anand game in Pinski’s book, the Indian grandmaster won with 11...0-0, which proved a good move against a machine, but Pinski thinks 11...f5 is best. He doesn’t agree with my final assessment, however. This is another case where computers have shown a better defence against a pawn sacrifice. It was possibly first played by Norman Tweed Whitaker (subject of a [biography](#) by John Hilbert). Many old books cite the game Karaklajic-Alexander, Belgrade 1952, where White seemed to have good compensation for the pawn after 15 Ba3 b6 16 Bxc5 bxc5 17 Nc6 Qf6 18 Rfe1 Bd7 19 Re7 Rf7 20 Rae1, but now 20...Rxe7 (instead of 20...Kf8 as in Whitaker-Fajans, Fort Worth 1951, and 20...Bxc6 as C.H. O’D. Alexander played) 21 Rxe7 Rd8 seems to be solid for Black. Not only do Fritz8 and Pinski like this line for Black, but in G. de Coninck-I. Firnhaber, World Ch. 25 semifinal-2 ICCF email 2001, Black duly won.

There is an alternative for White, as given in several books including Estrin’s, namely 15 Re1 (Romanov-Kotikov, corr 1963-4). This is not mentioned by Pinski and should be investigated

Heyken and Fette's book actually prefers the line played by Anand for Black. Anyway, I am inclined now to think that Pinski is right. Black certainly has far fewer variations to analyse and learn if he opts for 9...Ne5 rather than 9...Bf6.

Let's see take a new look at the most critical variation of the Italian Game, the 7 Bd2 line. (That is, it gives slightly more hope to White than 7 Nc3, though it is less interesting, analytically.)

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 Bb4+ 7 Bd2



Black now can choose between:

- a) The main line that everyone knows, simplifying and leaving White with an isolated d-pawn.
- b) The attempt to force an immediate repetition draw.
- c) The capture on e4 at move 8.
- d) The capture on e4 at move 7.

These were mostly discussed in detail in my earlier articles, but I shall review the lines briefly.

a) The old main line.

7...Bxd2+ 8 Nbx d2 d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Qb3 Nce7 11 0-0 0-0 12 Rfe1 c6



This position has been discussed in my earlier articles, but I concentrated on the main line move 13 a4, which is not even mentioned by Pinski. That is rather a flaw in his book, but it's a general problem with opening books that are based on recent annotated games; they do tend to omit lines for which there is no good example from current praxis.

After 13 a4:

- a) [Kibitzer 64](#) gave Rossolimo-Reissman (a famous brilliancy where Black lost after 13...b6?).

b) Later Kibitzers' discussed the most critical continuation 13...Qb6 14 a5 Qxb3 15 Nxb3 when:

b1) Harding v Montecatine Rios, where Black got into some difficulties with 15...Bf5.

b2) Rossolimo-Unzicker, Heidelberg 1949, went 15...Rd8! 16 Nc5 Rb8 17 Ne5 Kf8 18 h3 b6 and Black was OK, but in Peter Boll - J. Thorn Leeson, Netherlands corr, 1978, White improved on the Rossolimo game with 18 Ra3! and won quickly. The continuation was 18...b6 19 axb6 axb6 20 Ne4! f6 21 Rf3 Bb7 22 Nd3 Ra8 23 Ng5 Bc8 (if 23...Kg8 24 Rxe7) 24 Nxb7+ Kg8 25 Nxf6+ and Black resigned (25...gxf6 26 Rxe7).

13 Ne4!?

This is a move that I have also played, but not for thirty years.

13...Qb6

Pinski illustrates this variation with the game E. Van den Doel-I. Sokolov, Dutch ch 2004, in which Black played 13...Nb6 14 Bd3 Ned5 and was slightly worse at first. 14...Bf5 may be better, as in some recent correspondence games, but I shall show you a different way for Black to meet the line.

14 Nc3 Qxb3 15 Bxb3 Be6

Pinski gives 15...Bg4 16 Nxd5 Nxd5 17 Bxd5 cxd5 18 Re7 with some advantage to White according to Makarichev.

16 Ng5 Bd7 17 Nxd5 Nxd5 18 Ne4

Or 18 Bxd5 cxd5 19 Re7 (rather like the Makarichev line?) 19...Rad8 20 Nf3 f6 21 Rc1 Rc8 22 Rc5 Bc6 23 Rc3 Rce8 24 Rxe8 Rxe8 25 Re3 Rc8 26 Rc3 Kf7 27 Kf1 Re8 28 Re3 Re4 29 Ke2 g5 30 Kd3 Ke6 31 Nd2 Bb5+ 32 Kc3 Rxe3+ 0-1, 36 in S.Keshav-N.Babu, Raipur 2002.

18...b6 19 Bxd5 cxd5 20 Nd6 Rfd8 21 Rac1 Kf8 22 b3 Be8 23 Nf5 Rac8 24 Ne3 ½-½, M. Bley -T. Hamarat, corr. chessfriend.com, 2003-4. Maybe White is slightly better here but Black is an ICCF world champion (who wasn't taking this event very seriously). As 13 Ne4 has not been as deeply investigated as 13 a4, it's still possible that White could have a small edge, but the next variation makes it irrelevant.

b) the attempt to force an immediate repetition draw:

7...Bxd2+ 8 Nbxd2 d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Qb3 Na5

Pinski says this move is stronger than 10...Nce7, but, of course, it is only playable if Black is willing to shake hands on an immediate draw. It is no good if you have to play for a win.

11 Qa4+ Nc6



The knight must go back and invite White to choose a move other than 12 Qb3 if he wants to play on.

12 Bb5!? Bd7! 13 0-0 0-0 14 Rfe1

[Kibitzer 65](#) gave Lyne-Harding, in which 14 Qb3 (not mentioned by Pinski) 14...Nf4 (probably best) led to a balanced fight and eventually a draw. In that article, I wrote that 14 Rfe1 “should not be dangerous to Black.” Pinski includes a

game where White subsequently tried it.

14...a6 15 Bf1 Bf5= J. Marsden – J. Sutton, 24th Australian CC Ch., 2001, continued **16 Rac1 Nb6 17 Qa3 Nxd4 18 Nxd4 Qxd4 19 Nb3** (Pinski suggests that “maybe there was more play in 19 Nf3!? Qd6 20 Qc5 with compensation.”) **19...Qd6 20 Qxd6 cxd6 21 Rcd1 d5 22 Nc5 Rfc8 23 Nxb7 Rc2 24 Re2 Rc7 25 Na5 Bd7 26 Nb3 Bb5 ½-½**

It is chiefly this 10...Na5 possibility that makes the whole opening unattractive to White at high levels.

c) the capture on e4 at move 8.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 Bb4+ 7 Bd2 Bxd2+ 8 Nbxd2 Nxe4?!



I tried this move in a local league game last year. It would be good if it worked, but probably it cannot be recommended.

9 d5

This is the objection according to Pinski (and other authorities). Black is happy after 9 Bxf7+ Kxf7 10 Nxe4 d5 as the dangers are not real; I have won a game from that position. Also 9 Qe2 d5 should be fine for Black.

After 9 Nxe4 d5 10 Bd3 dxe4 11 Bxe4, Black has:

a) 11...0-0?! 12 0-0 Bg4 (Still 12...Ne7 maybe) 13 Rfc1 requires Black to be somewhat careful. After 13...Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Nxd4 15 Qd3 I managed to draw my game with 15...f5?!, but returning the pawn by 15...Ne6 (as in Bredewout-Honfi, Wijk aan Zee B, 1969) is much safer.

b) 11...Ne7! is correct, leaving White no target. This was analysed by Zukertort in a theoretical article in the City of London Chess Magazine 1875 p.170. He reckoned White had to play for a draw. There are a couple of fairly recent games by the Belgian master Etienne van Leeuwen where he failed to overturn that assessment.

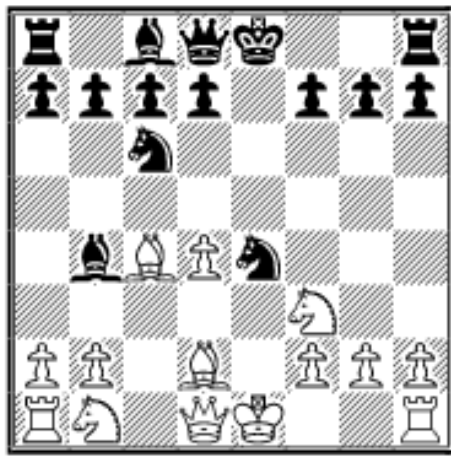
9...Nxd2 10 Qxd2 Ne7 11 d6 cxd6 12 Qxd6

This has been suggested by Makarichev and others. (In fact, I found that Gunsberg had considered playing 9 d5, in a game from 1882, though he actually chose another move.) I believe Estrin also thought Black's defence is now difficult. The alternative 12 0-0 had been suggested in the old Swedish *Larobok i Schack* by Collijn.

So I shall not be playing 8...Nxe4 again.

d) the capture on e4 at move 7.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 Bb4+ 7 Bd2 Nxe4



If Black wants to snap off the e-pawn, this is the right time.

Pinski also mentions that 7...d5 is “a little-known, but decent alternative.” After 8 exd5 Bxd2+ (8...Nxd5 is dubious) 9 Nbx d2 we are back to the variations with 7...Bxd2+ 8 Nbx d2 considered above. Instead White has 9 Qxd2 Nxd5 10 0-0 0-0 11 Nc3 Nce7 12 Rfe1 which older books thought gave White the edge, but Pinski says Black can equalize by 12...c6

13 Ne4 h6 14 h3 Bf5, as in Schwenck-Krasikova, Baden-Baden 1993.

8 Bxb4 Nxb4 9 Bxf7+ Kxf7 10 Qb3+ Kf8!

Surprisingly Pinski gives this equalizing move only in a brief parenthesis on page 32. Please refer to [Kibitzer 70](#), which discussed this variation in detail.

Pinski gives 10...d5 11 Ne5+ Ke6! 12 Qxb4 c5 13 Qa3 cxd4 14 Nf3 Qb6 15 0-0 Kf7 16 Ne5+! Ke6 (16...Kf6? 17 f3!) and now 17 Nf3= or 17 Nd3 with compensation.

To conclude, maybe Black's best reply to 7 Bd2 is 7...Nxe4 in conjunction with 10...Kf8, but he is also quite safe in the 7...Bxd2+ line with 10...Na5. He can even have some winning chances in either line if White is not careful, but in the latter case White has a forced draw if he wants. The lines with 7 Nc3 are enormously complex, but theory shows White struggling to prove even equality.

A few years ago, readers of *The Kibitzer* voted in our “trial” of this opening that it is still playable for White. I was quite surprised at that result. Today, with new computer analysis improving the defence rather than strengthening the attack, that verdict has been overturned on appeal, at least so far as the classic 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 lines are concerned. Next month we shall see if the Evans Gambit has a better fate.

Order Italian Game and Evans Gambit

by Jan Pinski

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