

Introduction

As Black is going to fix all his centre pawns on light squares, first of all he gets out his bishop from c8 before all exits are closed. In the previous chapter we looked at the bishop's adventures on f5 and back at home on c8. Now we shall see what happens if Black pushes the bishop one square further to g4. As always, the key question is: does the bishop do more good than harm in abandoning the defence of b7 to become active on the kingside?

A typical sequence is 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Bg4 (**Diagram 1**), but the bishop can also go to g4 on move three, such as with 1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 c6 3 Bg2 Bg4.

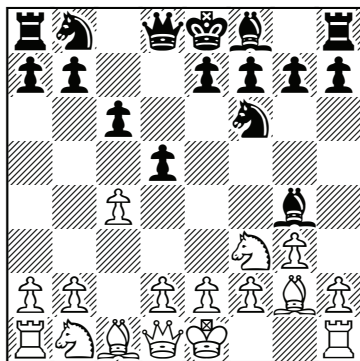


Diagram 1 (W)

Capablanca's set-up

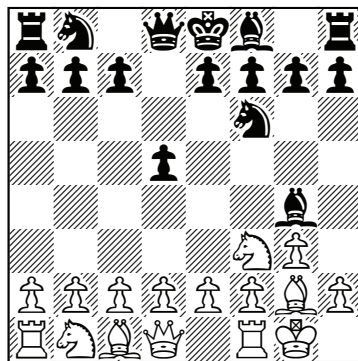


Diagram 2 (B)

White may prefer e2-e4



NOTE: In this chapter we won't just assume that White has played 2 c4 – variations with 2 g3 will also be examined.

This is because some of the most interesting plans against ...Bg4 involve playing for an e2-e4 advance rather than a c2-c4 advance, and it would be a pity to ignore them just for the sake of sticking to a rigid move order. A lot of strong players choose the sequence 1 Nf3 d5 2 g3 Nf6 3 Bg2 c6 4 0-0 (**Diagram 2**).

Then after 4...Bf5 they can play 5 d3 e6 6 c4, while against 4...Bg4 the alternative plan of 5 d3 Ngf6 6 Nbd2 and 7 e4 is feasible. Thus it is possible to keep the option

open of c2-c4 or e2-e4 until after Black's bishop has gone to f5 or g4. Furthermore, White might even dispense with d2-d3 altogether and play d2-d4 with the aim of gaining a spatial advantage with e2-e4.



TIP: I can't resist mentioning the miniature game A.Schmitt-J.Pribyl, Altensteig 1990, which went: 1 Nf3 d6 2 c4 Bg4 3 Qb3 Qc8 4 h3 Bh5?? 5 Qb5+ 1-0. So watch out for that loose bishop!

White Launches a Quick Attack with 5 Ne5

If White has played 2 c4 then he can try to vigorously punish his opponent for moving his bishop away from the queenside. He can gain a tempo by hitting the errant bishop with Ne5, and his queen can quickly enter the fray on b3 or even more strongly on a4, thereby reaching an open diagonal after the exchange of pawns on d5.

Here's how it begins: 1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Bg4 5 Ne5 (Diagram 3) and now leaving aside 5...Be6! which we shall look at below, Black has two entirely natural moves that deserve a question mark: 5...Bf5? and 5...Bh5?, as both of them allow 6 cxd5 cxd5 7 Nc3 e6 8 Qa4+!. Indeed, Black has suffered some unpleasant setbacks here as you can see from the following games.

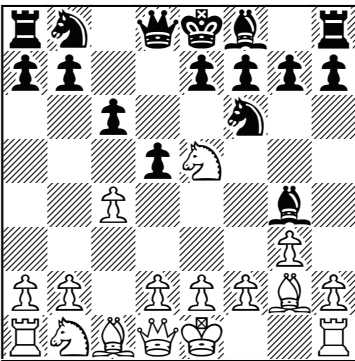


Diagram 3 (B)

Fighting for the initiative

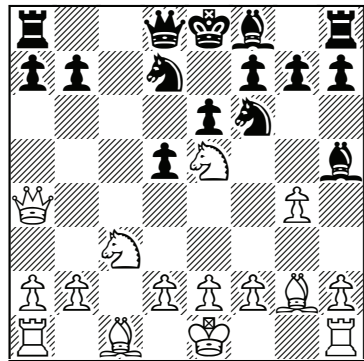


Diagram 4 (B)

Black is already in trouble

Scenario 1: A disaster for Black after 5...Bh5

Game 16

□ E.Miroshnichenko ■ A.Mammadov

Baku 2006

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2 Bg4 5 Ne5 Bh5?

In this game the question ‘is the black bishop better out on g4 or on c8 defending the queenside?’ is answered emphatically in favour of the latter.

Instead 5...Bf5? transposes after 6 cxd5 cxd5 (here Black doesn’t even have the ‘luxury’ of bailing out with 6...Nxd5 as White forks with 7 e4) 7 Qa4+ Nbd7 8 Nc3 e6 9 g4 Bg6 etc. The only divergence from this transposition is 9...Bc2, which is the subject of the next game.

6 cxd5 cxd5?

Compounding his error on the previous move. Black should recapture with 6...Nxd5, although his opening play has clearly gone awry as White has an extra centre pawn. For example, 7 Qb3 Qc7 8 d4 (but not 8 Bxd5?? cxd5 9 Qxd5 Qxc1 mate) 8...e6 9 e4 Nb6 10 g4 Bg6 11 h4 Qd6 12 Be3 Qb4+ 13 Nc3 Qxb3 14 axb3 f6 15 Nxc3 hxc3 16 d5! and White had the two bishops and a powerful central breakthrough in D.Hausrath-J.Alhuwar, Biel 2008.

7 Qa4+ Nbd7 8 Nc3 e6 9 g4! (Diagram 4)

An essential part of White’s tactical build-up involves harassing Black’s bishop with the kingside pawns. As we shall see, the further advance g4-g5 can also cause problems for the black knight on f6.

9...Bg6 10 h4!

This puts Black in a quandary as if he meets the threat of 11 h5, trapping his bishop, with 10...h5 then his kingside can be wrecked by 11 Nxc3.

10...Qc7 11 d4 h5 12 Bf4!



TIP: If you see a strong move you shouldn’t play it at once – always have a look around for something even stronger.

Of course, ruining Black’s pawns with 12 Nxc3 fxc3 13 g5 would give White a fine game, but Miroshnichenko sees that he can strengthen his game even further by

keeping up his initiative. The positionally-good move can always be kept in reserve – let's see how Black meets the threat of a discovered attack on his queen first.

12...Qb6

After 12...Qd8 13 g5 Black loses the knight upon 13...Ng4 14 Nxg6 fxe6 15 f3, while if 13...Ng8 it's not surprising that a tactical combination appears with 14 Nxd5! exd5 15 Bh3 when d7 is indefensible.

13 g5

Undermining the defender of d7. Now White is going to win a piece, so Black tries to stir up counterplay but makes things even worse.

13...Qxb2 14 Rc1 Bb4 15 0-0! (Diagram 5)

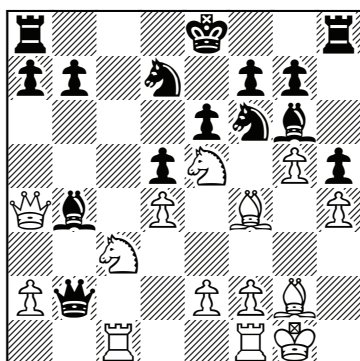


Diagram 5 (B)

White wins material

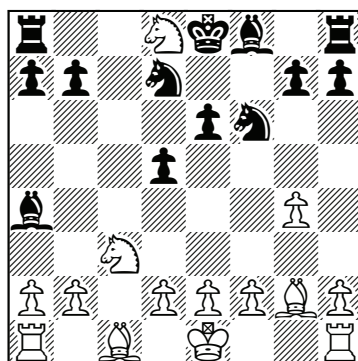


Diagram 6 (B)

Not a great start for Black



NOTE: Castling isn't often as dramatic as this in the Réti!

15...Bxc3

If 15...0-0 White can win a piece with 16 Nxg6 fxe6 17 Rc2! Qa3 18 Qxa3 Bxa3 19 gxf6.

16 gxf6 Rd8 17 Nxd7 Rxd7 18 Rxc3! Qxc3 19 Rc1 Qxc1+

The queen can't be saved as if 19...Qb2 20 Rc8 mate.

20 Bxc1 gxf6 21 Ba3 a6 22 Qa5 Rg8 23 Qc5 Be4 24 f3 Bb1 25 Qc8+ Rd8 26 Qxb7 Bxa2 1-0

I'll let you try to find the next move.