

Chapter Three

Not so Dim on the Rim

Richard Palliser

1 d4 f5 2 Nh3!? (Diagram 1)

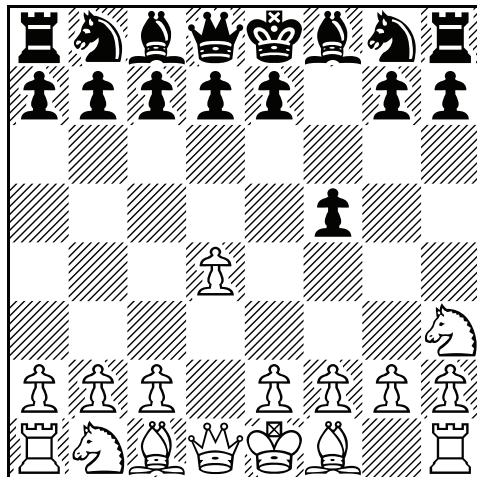


Diagram 1 (B)

Not everyone who wants to surprise the Dutch player will want to do so with an early g4-gambit. For such players help is at hand in the unexpected 2 Nh3!?. We

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are taught that knights on the rim are dim (or grim depending upon which version one learnt), but here the knight doesn't plan on stopping on h3 for long. This form of development is far from unknown in the Dutch in general, but is extremely rare at this stage. It may appeal most to those with some experience of g3 and Nh3 systems, but can be picked up without difficulty by just about anyone.

I've only managed to locate 23 games with 2 Nh3, which is a refreshingly low number in these data-laden modern times. Moreover, a startled Dutch player can easily respond a little too solidly and so give White an easy edge as in the following encounter.

□ **A.Bezgodov** ■ **A.Panchenko**

Voronezh 2002

1 d4 f5 2 Nh3!? Nf6

Almost invariably played, but a sneaky Leningrad player might well consider 2...g6!?. Some readers will then be happy to transpose to quite a popular line against the Leningrad with 3 g3 Bg7 4 Bg2 Nf6 followed by 5 c4 or 5 Nf4.



ROLL THE DICE! White isn't forced to transpose to the Leningrad, though, and I quite like the totally uncharted 3 Nc3!? Bg7 4 Nf4 (Diagram 2), intending to make good use of the early development of the knight to f4 with 4...Nf6 5 h4!.

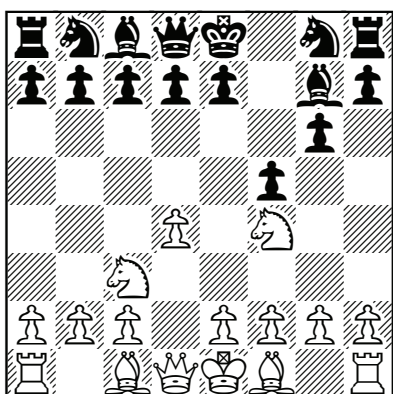


Diagram 2 (B)

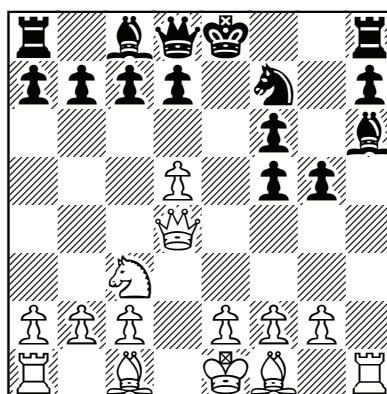


Diagram 3 (W)

Black too is allowed to be creative and I wouldn't be surprised if some opponents

weren't so keen on allowing White an early kingside initiative. Thus 4...Nc6!? springs to mind, although 5 d5 Ne5 6 h4!? remains playable. Indeed, quite possibly White's kingside demonstration is once again not so easy to meet, as shown by the possible continuation 6...Nf6 7 h5 g5 8 h6! Bf8 9 Qd4! Nf7 (9...d6 10 Ne6 Bxe6 11 dxe6 Qc8 12 Bxg5 Qxe6 13 0-0-0 gives White the bishop-pair and much the easier position to handle; note the cramping influence exerted by the little guy on h6) 10 Nh5 Bxh6 (Black can also win a pawn after 10...Nxh5 11 Rxh5 Rg8, but 12 Bd2 Bxh6 13 0-0-0 followed by e2-e4 gives White fantastic compensation) 11 Nxf6+ exf6 (Diagram 3).



DANGEROUS WEAPON! Here Black's kingside creates rather an ugly impression, and with the h-file open and the e4-break White must have good compensation. Moreover, he might begin by gumming up further Black's development with 12 d6!?

Leningrad players might also try 2...d6, as I dare say could Classical Dutch fans, but once again 3 Nc3! looks like a good response. Indeed, after 3...Nf6 (neither does 3...g6 4 Nf4 e5 guarantee Black easy equality in view of the little trick 5 dxe5 dxe5 6 Qxd8+ Kxd8 7 Be3!) 4 Bg5 Black might decide that moving his e-pawn is best in any case. The ambitious alternative is 4...Ne4 (4...Nbd7?! 5 Nf4 is best avoided), but after 5 e3!? (5 Nxe4 fxe4 6 Nf4 can't be a bad option either) 5...Nxg5 6 Nxg5 e6 7 h4 White's active kingside play leaves him with the initiative.

3 Bg5! (Diagram 4)

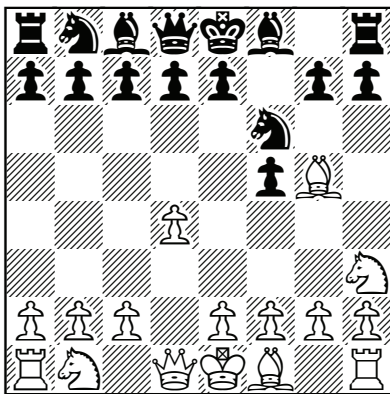


Diagram 4 (B)

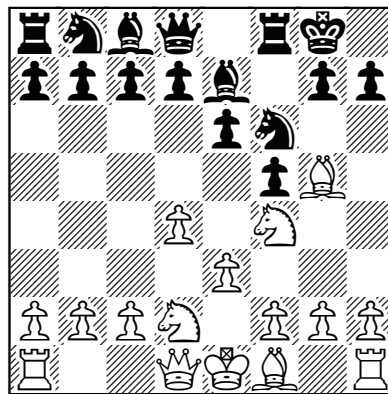


Diagram 5 (B)

The key follow-up. Fans of g3 and Nh3 set-ups against all of the Stonewall, the

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Classical and the Leningrad might, though, prefer 3 g3, content just to have worried Black for a move.

3...e6

A solid reply and one played in 75% of all the games which I could find with this position. However, that's only 12 games – we are very much in virgin territory here. Black's alternatives will be considered in the Looking a Little Deeper section.

4 e3

Those keen to avoid our next note should give thought to beginning with the more forcing 4 Nf4!?, only going 5 e3 after 4...Be7. The point is that 4...h6?! 5 Ng6! Rg8 (5...hxg5?! 6 Nxh8 doesn't give Black enough for the exchange; White's knight is a long way from being trapped and h2-h4 will at the least give it an escape route) 6 Bxf6 Bb4+ isn't a little trick to completely solve Black's problems on account of 7 c3 Qxf6 8 cxb4 Qxg6 9 Nc3 when I would argue that the double b-pawns are more of an asset than a weakness. After all, both d4-d5 and Nb5 are high on White's agenda, along with Rc1.

4...Be7

Black might consider taking his chances in the unclear position which arises after 4...h6!?! 5 Bxf6 Qxf6 6 Nf4 g5 7 Nh5 (7 Qh5+?! Qf7 8 Qxf7+ Kxf7 9 Nd3 Nc6 is extremely comfortable for Black with his bishop-pair and extra kingside space) 7...Qf7 8 Nc3 Be7, not that White should be too unhappy here either. He has easy development and that advanced knight might well come in handy on h5 after a later h2-h4 or g2-g4.

5 Nf4 0-0 6 Nd2 (Diagram 5)



BEWARE! Black is yet to commit his d-pawn, so White should remain as flexible as possible. His queen's knight is well placed on d2 for a Stonewall response, remaining en route for f3 and e5, but it would be less well placed in the event of 6 Nc3 d5!.

6...Ne4

A natural-enough attempt to free Black's game, but exchanging the bishops does not enable him to equalize. We must thus return to this position in Line C, below, to see if he can do any better.

7 Bxe7 Qxe7 8 Bd3 Nxd2

Criticized by Neil McDonald when annotating this game for the ChessPublishing website, but I'm not too sure what else Black should do. After 8...d5 9 c4 (9 Bxe4 fxe4 10 0-0 followed by a rapid f2-f3 and/or c2-c4 also looks promising) 9...c6 10 0-0 Nd7 11 f3 Nxd2 12 Qxd2 (**Diagram 6**) White has taken control of e4 and enjoys a pleasant advantage, especially as 12...e5? 13 dxe5 Nxe5 14 cxd5 g5 (horrible, but otherwise Black loses a pawn) 15 Ne2 cxd5 16 f4 would be horrendous for Black.

I dare say Black could try 8...Nf6, but after 9 Qf3!? one has to slightly prefer White with his freer development. Not only is the e4-break a possibility, but he might also be able to arrange h2-h3 and g2-g4.

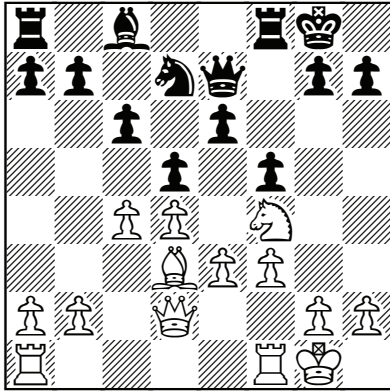


Diagram 6 (B)

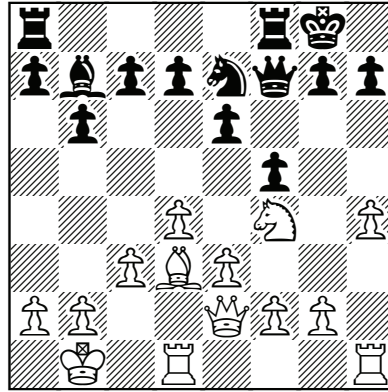


Diagram 7 (B)

9 Qxd2 c6?!

Panchenko wants to break with ...e5, but his unnatural choice only makes matters worse. Unsurprisingly Black did better on the two subsequent occasions that this position was reached:

- a) 9...b6 10 0-0-0 Bb7 11 h4! (White increases the grip generated by his well-placed knight and introduces ideas of a possible rook-lift; I quite like this simple approach, but angling for a rapid g4-break with the direct 11 Rhg1!? also deserves consideration) 11...Nc6 12 c3 (*Rybka's* 12 a3!? Qf7 13 Qc3 is actually quite a Karpovian choice, preventing both ...e5 and the black knight from regrouping to e7) 12...Qf7! (good defence; Black isn't going to allow e3-e4 without a fight) 13 Qe2 Ne7 14 Kb1 (**Diagram 7**) was a little better for White in P.Petran-T.Wiley, Budapest 2005. Black remains slightly cramped and the attempt to do something about that before 15 f3 still left White with a pull after 14...Be4 15 f3 Bxd3+ 16 Nxd3 d6 17 e4.
- b) 9...d6 10 0-0-0 Kh8?! (moving off the a2-g8 diagonal in preparation for ...e5, but I suspect that Black does better with the more solid 10...Nd7; note too that Black was at least correct to avoid 10...e5? on account of 11 Bc4+ Kh8 12 Nd5 Qd8 13 dxe5 dxe5 14 Qa5!) 11 g4! e5 (White is for choice too after 11...fxg4 12 h3 g3 13 fxg3 Nd7 14 g4) 12 dxe5 Qxe5 saw Black rather ignoring his queenside development in P.Petran-M.Galyas, Budapest 2008, and now I like the simple 13 g5! followed by ramming the h-pawn down the board.

Dangerous Weapons: The Dutch



DANGEROUS WEAPON! Black might be able to do better than Panchenko, but in any case it is clear that White should emerge from the opening with a pleasant edge.

Quite simply Black lacks any way of countering the cramping influence exerted by the knight on f4, as it's far from easy to arrange a successful ...e5-advance.

10 g4!? (Diagram 8)

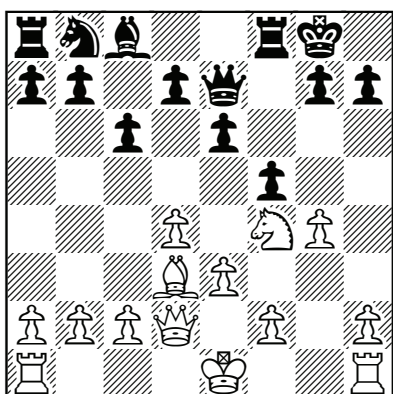


Diagram 8 (B)

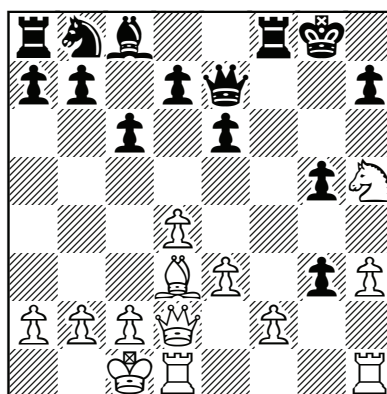


Diagram 9 (B)

The Russian Grandmaster wastes no time seizing the initiative. White might also have played more simply and 10 0-0-d6 (10...e5 11 dxe5 Qxe5 is the alternative, but then Bezgodov points out 12 h3! d5 13 g4, opening the kingside with some advantage) 11 h4 e5 12 dxe5 dxe5 13 Bc4+ Kh8 14 Nh3 followed by Ng5 and/or playing down the d-file would have retained a pleasant pull.

10...fxg4 11 h3!

White continues to try to open lines.

11...g3

And Black in turn sensibly refuses. Indeed, 11...gxh3? would have lost on the spot to 12 Bxh7+! Kxh7 13 Rxh3+ Kg8 14 Ng6, winning either queen or rook.

12 0-0-0!

In true *Dangerous Weapons* style White is very happy to remain a pawn down in return for a strong attack.

12...g5?!

This spirited try doesn't really help, but 12...gxf2 13 Qxf2 would also have left White firmly in the driving seat: for example, 13...d6 14 Qg3! Nd7 (White's last prepared to meet 14...e5 with 15 Bxh7+! Kxh7 16 Ng6, opening lines for his rooks and leaving him with a near-decisive attack after 16...Qf6 17 Nxf8+ Qxf8 18 dxe5)

15 Rhg1 and it's far from easy for Black to unravel, as 15...Nf6? 16 Qh4 creates a rather awkward pin and an immediate threat on h7.

13 Nh5 (Diagram 9) 13...g2?

Black is pretty much dead after this. For better or worse he had to try 13...Rxf2 14 Qe1 d6 15 Rg1 e5 16 Rxf2 Rf8 17 Qg1 g4 18 hxg4 or 13...gxf2 14 Rdf1 Qf7 15 Ng3 d5 16 Rh2 Nd7 17 Rhxf2 Qe7 18 h4!, not that there can be any doubting White's large superiority in either case.

14 Rhg1 Qf7

Black's only hope is to get the queens off, but Panchenko will soon discover that even that won't save him.

15 Qe2 Qxf2 16 Rxf2 Qxe2 17 Rxf2 Kf7 18 Bxe2 (Diagram 10)

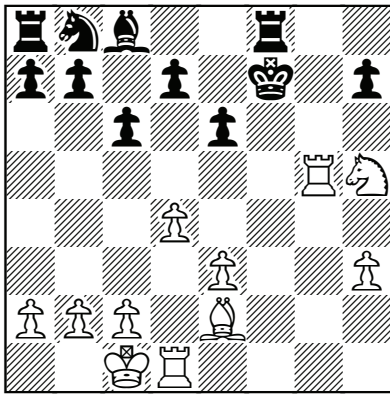


Diagram 10 (B)

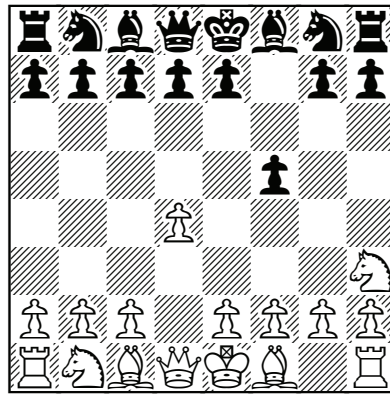


Diagram 11 (B)

White has regained his pawn while retaining a huge attack. Unsurprisingly with his queenside sound asleep, Black's days are numbered.

18...Ke7 19 Rf1!

Even more straightforward than first going for the h-pawn as White exchanges off Black's only developed piece.

19...Rxf1+ 20 Bxf1 d5 21 Rg7+ Kd8 22 Rxh7 Nd7 23 Nf4 Nf6 24 Rf7 1-0

There's no point in continuing with White's h-pawn primed to storm forwards.

Looking a Little Deeper

1 d4 f5 2 Nh3!? (Diagram 11)

One advantage of 2 Nh3 is that there is no real theory on it. Indeed, one's opponent is already likely to be on their own and to choose from:

A: 2...e6

B: 2...d5

C: 2...Nf6

Line C is by far the most important option, not least because it is likely to be the choice of a Leningrad player. Such players might also go 2...g6 or 2...d6, but neither promises Black too easy a game as we saw in the notes to Bezgodov-Panchenko.

A) 1 d4 f5 2 Nh3 e6!?

This strikes me as a better alternative than both 2...g6 and 2...d6, but it is, of course, unlikely to be employed by a Leningrad exponent.

3 Bg5

Once again White can follow up his choice of second move with this active bishop development.



TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: Just like throughout this chapter, though, fans of fianchetto set-ups with Nh3 might prefer 3 g3 Nf6 4 Bg2.

3...Be7 (Diagram 12)

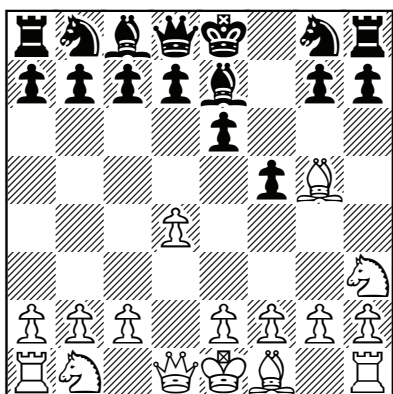


Diagram 12 (W)

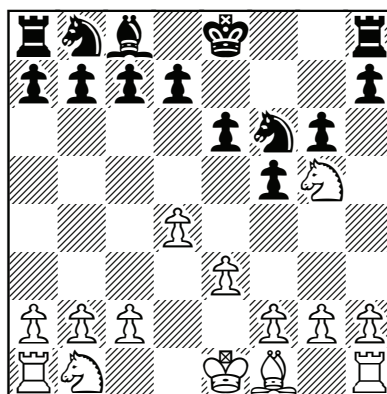


Diagram 13 (W)

Black hopes to free his position through his exchanges. He might also, of course, take play into the main line (Line C) with 3...Nf6.

4 e3!?

An attempt to make good use of the early move order by exploiting the check on h5. White might also play more simply with 4 Bxe7 Qxe7 and then 5 Nc3 Nf6 6 e3 b6 7 Nf4 Bb7 8 Be2 0-0 doesn't have to be so dull if White tries 9 Bf3!?, angling to castle long.



ROLL THE DICE! White doesn't have to obstruct his c-pawn in this variation and might also try 5 e3!?, intending 5...Qb4+ 6 Nd2 Qxb2 7 Bd3 Nf6 8 0-0 with a handy lead in development in return for the pawn.

4...Bxg5

Yet again 4...Nf6 would take us back into Line C.

5 Qh5+ g6 6 Qxg5 Qxg5

An ambitious Dutch player might prefer 6...Nf6?!, but after 7 Nc3 0-0 8 Nf4 there can be no doubt that White has the initiative; h2-h4 is on its way.

7 Nxg5 Nf6 (Diagram 13)

It's hard to believe that Black should have too many problems here, but his king-side might turn out to be a little fragile and White has the greater central space. Play might continue 8 c4 h6 9 Nf3 d6 10 Nc3 Nbd7 11 Be2 b6 12 Nb5, fractionally displacing Black's king and so possibly enabling White to claim a small edge.

B) 1 d4 f5 2 Nh3 d5

Just like 2...e6, this move takes us pretty much into virtually unknown territory. Of course, 2...d5 is only likely to be employed by fans of the Stonewall, but there is something to my mind a little suspect about such an approach here.

3 c4

Taking play into standard lines with 3 g3 cannot be bad, but I quite like the idea of heading for a set-up based around e3 rather than a fianchetto.

3...e6 4 Nc3 Nf6 (Diagram 14)



TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: We've now reached a position which usually comes about via either a 1 d4 f5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nh3!? d5 or a 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 f5?! 4 Nh3 Nf6 move order.

5 Bg5!

Developing the bishop as actively as possible makes a lot of sense. White has also tried 5 Nf4, but 5...c6 6 e3 Bd6 7 Be2 0-0 8 g3!? (the less-creative 8 0-0 possibly followed by a queenside pawn-storm is the alternative) 8...Qe7 9 h4 Ne4 10 Qb3 Nd7 11 Nxe4 fxe4 12 Bd2 a5! gave Black sufficient counterplay in T.Szekeres-A.Stehr, Budapest 2004.

5...Be7

Black appears better advised to develop his bishop to e7 than d6. Indeed, 5...c6 6 Nf4 Bd6?! 7 e3 (7 Nh5 must also be a little better for White) 7...0-0 8 h4 Qe8 9 Bxf6 Rxf6 10 Qf3! Nd7 11 cxd5 exd5 12 Bd3 left White well co-ordinated and slightly for choice in J.Skrivanek-S.Cheyney, Las Vegas 1995.

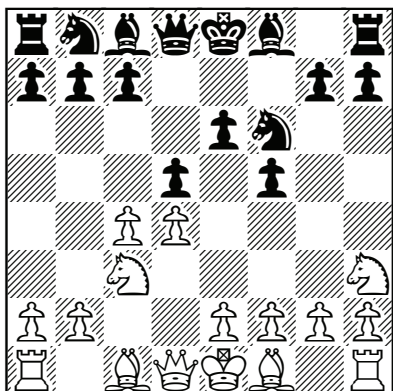


Diagram 14 (W)

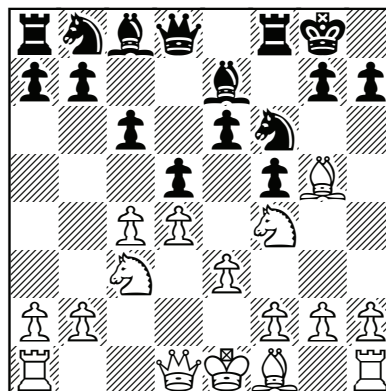


Diagram 15 (W)

6 e3 0-0

After the immediate 6...c6 White might move his knight to f4, just like in our main line, but he can also play in the style of the Exchange Queen's Gambit: 7 cxd5 exd5 8 Bd3 0-0 9 Qc2! Ne4 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 11 Nf4 and the simple plan of 0-0 followed by arranging f3 gave White an edge in S.Irwanto-Z.Fadli, Singapore 2004.

7 Nf4 c6 (Diagram 15) 8 h4!?

White wants to cement his knight on f4 and make good use of the power it radiates. He might also develop more simply and 8 Bd3 Ne4 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 cxd5 exd5 11 0-0 (11 h4 has been seen here too, although after 11...Nd7 12 Bxe4 fxe4 I suspect that 13 g4?! was a little too optimistic and 13...Nb6 14 g5 Nc4! certainly gave Black decent counterplay in N.Stanec-H.Kaenel, Biel 1991) 11...Nd7 might be followed by up 12 Qc2, intending Rab1 and b2-b4 with a typical Minority Attack. Indeed, it's far from clear that White should overly fear a ...g5 counter-push, but if he is worried by such things then 12 Re1 followed by 13 f3 is a sensible alternative.

8...Ne4 9 Nxe4 fxe4 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 11 Qd2 Nd7 12 0-0-0 (Diagram 16)

Having gone h2-h4 White's king belongs on this side of the board. The plan is now to either push the g- and h-pawns or to open lines with the f3-break. I slightly prefer the latter plan, but in any case White appears to have emerged from the opening with a small edge. In Y.Salaun-P.Blazkova, Paris 2008, Black now tried to break

out with 12...e5?!, but White was ready for this very break and 13 dxe5 Nxe5 14 cxd5 Bg4 15 Be2 left Black with a chronically weak d-pawn.

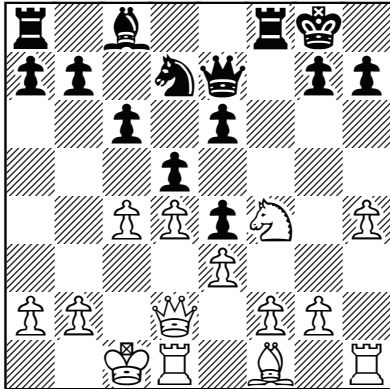


Diagram 16 (B)

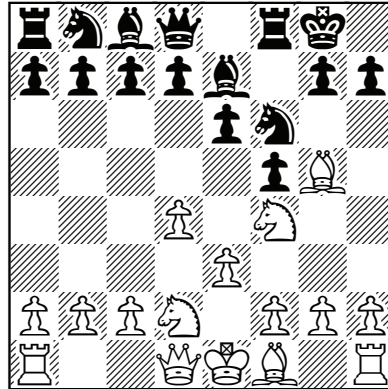


Diagram 17 (B)

C) 1 d4 f5 2 Nh3 Nf6 3 Bg5 e6

The choice of leading Dutch practitioners Vladimir Malaniuk and Valeri Beim when they have been surprised by 2 Nh3. Black can also play more actively, though:

a) 3...Ne4 4 Bh4 d5 (Black preferred a Leningrad approach with 4...g6 in A.Gnidenko-D.Melnikov, St Petersburg 2005, and now I would be tempted by 5 f3 Nf6 6 Qd2 Bg7 7 Nc3 followed by going long; instead 4...c5 echoes the Trompowsky, but then 5 f3 has been endorsed by Bezgodov, and after 5...Nf6 6 Bxf6 gxf6 7 d5!? Qb6 8 Qc1 Bh6 9 e3 White should be a little better) 5 e3 c6 isn't the most convincing of Stonewall approaches, as White will kick the knight back with f2-f3. Indeed, he might do that immediately, but the more restrained 6 Be2 was preferred in S.Yuferov-A.Minasian, Moscow 2006, and after 6...Qb6 7 Qc1 e6 8 0-0 Bd6 9 f3 Nf6 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 c4 White was better.

b) 3...g6 4 Bxf6 (4 Nc3!? Bg7 5 Nf4 angling for h4-h5 is also quite tempting) 4...exf6 5 e3 is also not without its similarities to the Trompowsky, and after 5...d5 6 Nf4 c6 (A.Gomez Fernandez-D.Flores de Paco, St Cugat 1998) 7 Nd2 Bd6 8 g3 I would slightly prefer to take White (c2-c4 is the plan).

4 e3 Be7 5 Nf4 0-0 6 Nd2 (Diagram 17)

White's simple-to-play set-up is not without bite as we saw in Bezgodov-Panchenko. There Black failed to equalize with the simplifying 6...Ne4 and we must also consider:

a) 6...h6!? bags the bishop-pair, but after 7 Bxf6 Bxf6 White's strong knight cer-

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tainly compensates for that. Annotating in *Informant 86* Bezgodov supplies the instructive line 8 h4!? d6 9 c3! (played not so much to bolster d4 as to introduce ideas of Qb3) 9...e5? (Black's ideal break, but he is not ready for it) 10 dxe5 dxe5 11 Ng6! Re8 12 Bc4+ (**Diagram 18**) when White either wins the exchange with 12...Kh7 13 Bf7 or an important pawn after 12...Be6 13 Bxe6+ Rxe6 14 Qf3.

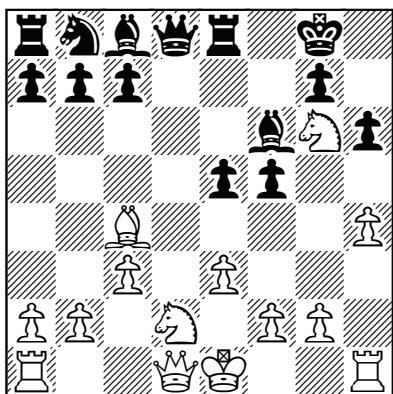


Diagram 18 (B)

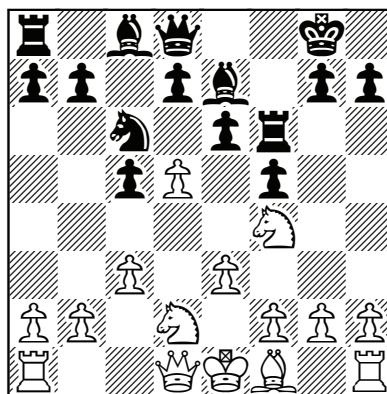


Diagram 19 (B)



DANGEROUS WEAPON! Challenging the f4-knight with ...e5 is undoubtedly a very natural plan, but as we've just seen Black must time such a break most carefully. Indeed, his vulnerability down the a2-g8 diagonal should never be underestimated in this variation.

b) 6...b6 7 Qf3! (I prefer McDonald's disruptive idea to 7 h4 Bb7 8 c3 Ng4 9 Nf3 Bf6, which wasn't so clear in D.Holemar-A.Potapov, Pardubice 2008) 7...d5 (McDonald points out that 7...Nc6? 8 Nxe6 nets a pawn) 8 h4! (8 0-0-0 Ne4 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 doesn't seem so clear) 8...Ne4 9 Nxe4 fxe4 10 Qg3 gives White the initiative; 0-0-0 and f2-f3 being the active plan.

c) 6...c5 looks quite active, but White can easily maintain his centre. Indeed, after 7 c3 Nc6 (Black might do better with 7...cxd4!? 8 exd4 Nc6, although again White can then consider 9 Qf3!?) 8 Bxf6! Rxf6 9 d5 (**Diagram 19**) Black was probably regretting advancing both bishops' pawns in D.Holemar-T.Wiley, Frydek Mistek 2004, in which 9...Ne5 10 Nc4 Ng6 might have been met by 11 d6!? Bf8 12 Nxg6 Rxg6 13 Qa4 followed by 0-0-0 with a bind.

d) 6...Nc6!? is suggested without further analysis in Johnsen and Bern's recent *Win with the Stonewall Dutch* (they also strangely endorse 6...Ne4), but it had already been played and by Beim no less: 7 Bc4 (I wouldn't be too put off 7 Qf3!? by 7...Nb4

on account of 8 Bd3, and White can also consider the sensible 7 c3) 7...a6 8 c3 d5 9 Bb3 Na5 (Black strives for counterplay) 10 Bc2 b6 11 Nf3 c5 12 Ne5 Qe8 13 g4!? saw White trying to make good use of his well-placed knights and led to a rather unclear struggle in D.Holemar-V.Beim, Austrian League 2007.

Conclusion

Meeting the Dutch with 2 Nh3 will certainly get your opponent thinking from a very early stage. Moreover, it's far from a bad move! The limited practice thus far has shown that 2...Nf6 3 Bg5 gives White decent chances to obtain an edge. Perhaps Black will begin to experiment with his second-move alternatives, but of these only 2...e6 looks a little problematic for the creative first player.