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NO PASSION FOR CHESS FASHION

Fierce Openings For Your New Repertoire



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Chapter 3

The Ruy Lopez

The Alapin Defense 3...♗b4

There's little doubt that The Ruy Lopez opening has stood the test of time. As far as chess fashions go, 3.♗b5 has outlived all of its rivals for attention. Black needs a reliable defense, but how is it possible to avoid all of the long theoretical lines?

In the 20th century the continuation 3...a6 gradually supplanted all the other defenses. Enthusiasm for the classical Chigorin systems was replaced by interest in the Open variation, and most recently overwhelmingly by the Marshall Attack. Alternatives to 3...a6 were thus left by the wayside of theory. Only one branch of the Berlin Defense was lucky – a test of the stability of one particular tabiya was done at the highest level, playing in a big part in Vladimir Kramnik's successful title challenge against Garry Kasparov in 2000.

We have in mind a surprise for the opponent, which may nevertheless appear somewhat familiar in some respects...

1.e4 e5
2.♘f3 ♘c6
3.♗b5 ♗b4

The black bishop copies the position of the white one. The d-pawn is instantly pinned, and on ♘c3 the bishop can be exchanged for the knight when necessary. David Bronstein noticed the similarity of 3...♗b4 to the Evans Gambit, with the favorable difference for White that there's no need to sacrifice a pawn to create the pawn center (c3 and d4). The comparison falls short, though, as the saved pawn

prevents active play on the b-file and the a3-f8 diagonal.

The idea of bringing the bishop out comes from the Russian master Alapin, who stood up for Black's interests virtually single-handed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. So 3...♗b4 has rightfully been named the Alapin Defense.

Even in a number of forgotten and discarded defenses on the third move, Alapin's child turned out to be a Cinderella. Opening books brushed it off with very truncated variations, and a harsh verdict for Black came in positions where

the theory should have only just begun. Strong practitioners avoided the variation, although the tests from the pen of Mark Taimanov and Ratmir Kholmov are well known, and the Swede Jonny Hector was seriously interested in 3...♘b4.

White's preference has been given in roughly equal proportions to the continuations 4.c3 and 4.0-0, often interwoven with each other. Other possibilities aren't likely to refute 3...♘b4 such as the expanded fianchetto in the game Kupreichik – Chetverik (St. Petersburg, 2000): 4.a3 ♘a5 5.b4 ♘b6 6.♘b2 d6 7.d4 ed 8.♗bd2 (in the case of 8.♗xd4 ♗ge7 9.0-0 0-0 it's difficult to bring the queen's knight into play) 8...♘d7 9.♘xc6 bc 10.♘xd4 ♘xd4 11.♗xd4 ♗f6 12.♗2b3 ♗e7 13.0-0 0-0 14.♖e1 ♖ae8 15.♗f3 ♗g5 16.♗g3 ♗h5 17.♗c3 (winning the pawn instead of repeating moves puts the white king in danger) 17...♔h8 18.♗c4 ♗g6 19.♗xc6 ♗f4 (19...♗h4 is even more energetic) 20.♖e3 (it's more solid to return the knight to the center first: 20.♗cd4 ♖e5 21.♖e3) 20...♗g4 21.g3. Black's initiative soon hit a wall. I hadn't noticed that after 21...f5! 22.♔h1 ♗h3 23.f3 ♗g5 24.f4 ♗h5 my opponent couldn't stabilize the center – 25.e5? ♗f7!, an unusual deflection, winning material.

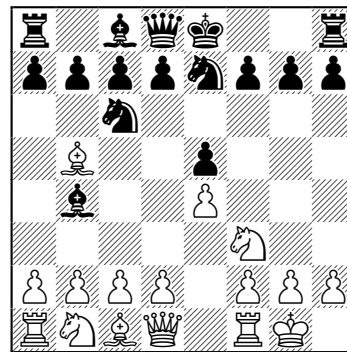
1. R. BYRNE – J. HECTOR

London, 1991

1.e4	e5
2.♗f3	♗c6
3.♘b5	♘b4
4.0-0	♗ge7

The knight absolutely must support its colleague. Weak players have placed

the knight on f6, and on 5.c3 they've naively continued 5...♘c5 (although 5...♘a5 6.♘xc6 already leads to the loss of a central pawn without any particular compensation), switching to the system 3...♘c5 a tempo down.



5.d4 ...

5.c3 ♘a5 is in the same category as the line 4.c3. Here White decides not to create a pawn center, reserving the c3 square for the knight.

5...	ed
6.♗xd4	0-0
7.♘g5	...

On 7.♗c3 most often it's been suggested that the bishop establish itself – 7...a6. In the example variation 8.♘c4 b5 9.♗xc6 dc (9...♗xc6 10.♘d5 is evidently in White's favor) 10.♘d3 ♗g6 the activity of Black's pieces compensates for the defects in his pawn structure.

7... **f6**

It's unseemly for "true Alapiners" to fear this insignificant weakening. It's useful to break loose with a tempo and keep the e5 square under observation.

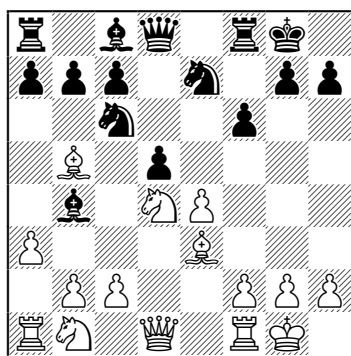
8.♘e3 **d5**

Release in the center is the best reaction to any bishop retreat. But more

Chapter III

modest behavior isn't criminal either: 8...♔h8 9.a3 ♘a5 10.c4 d6 11.♙xc6 bc 12.♞b3 ♘b6 13.c5 dc 14.♙xc5 ♚e8 15.♚c2 ♜f7 16.♞1d2 ♞g6 (Isonzo – Bobras, Chania, 1994). Black's queenside is disfigured and blocked, but overall the position remains robust.

9.a3 ...



After 9.ed ♚xd5 White has the ingenious possibility of exploiting the strongest enemy pieces on the a2-g8 diagonal. An immediate 10.♚d3 doesn't work because of 10...♞e5, but in the case of 10.♞c3!? ♘xc3 11.♚d3!? ♞e5 the queen happily hits the bishop. Of course, 11...♚xd4 12.♙xd4 ♘xd4 is stronger, with three minor pieces for the queen and a very decent position.

9... ♞xd4
10.♚xd4 ♘d6
11.ed ♘e5
12.♚c4 ♔h8

There's nothing wrong with winning the pawn back immediately. Black postpones the measure by one move, as 13.♞c3 a6 14.♚a4 ♘f5 15.♙e2 ♘xc3 16.bc ♞xd5 can't suit White.

13.♚b3 ♞xd5
14.♙c5 ♜g8
15.♞c3 c6

Black doesn't want to exchange on c3, allowing the creation of an isolated pawn. A strange but not very significant moment.

16.♙c4 ♚c7
17.h3 ♘e6
18.♜ad1 ♞xc3
19.♙xe6 ♞xd1
20.♙xg8 ♞xf2
21.♙xf2 ♜xg8
22.♙xa7 ...

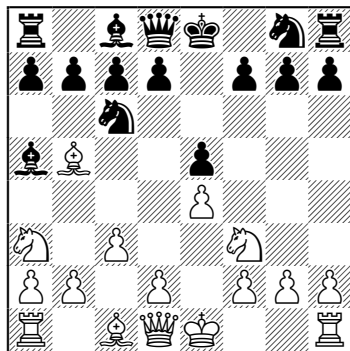
The mutual destruction of forces has led to a cloudless endgame for Black. But the imagination of the inventor Jonny Hector ran dry here and the technique of the very experienced Robert Byrne prevailed. On the 42nd move White celebrated his victory.

The position of the bishop on b4 does nothing less than provoke White to attack it with the help of 4.c3, when the response 4.c3 ♘a5 is encountered in the majority of games played with the Alapin Defense. They then continue 5.♞a3 (to conclusively hunt down their prey after 6.♞c4) and 5.0-0 (to determine their plan on the next move). 5.♙xc6!? has also been used. After 5...dc 6.♞xe5 the c3 pawn prevents the reply 6...♚d4, and Black chooses between 6...♚e7 7.d4 f6 and 6...♚g5. In both cases White gives the pawn back, but constrains the a5 bishop and gets a stable advantage. There's nothing terrible for Black here, but it isn't very pleasant to play, especially when you're trying to win against a lower-rated opponent. So it's worth thinking about 5...bc!? For example, 6.♞xe5 ♚e7 7.d4 f6 8.♚h5+ g6 9.♞xg6 ♚xe4+ 10.♙e3 ♚xg6 11.♚xa5 ♚xg2 12.♜f1 ♚d5, and in the event of

13. ♖xc7?! ♕a6 the light squares fall. Or 6.0-0 ♖f6 7.d4 ed 8.b4 ♕b6 9.cd ♗e7 10.♗c3 h6 11.♕e3 0-0 12.♗d2 d6, with views to counterplay (Glek – Veselovsky, Moscow, 1980).

2. A. IVANOV – B. LUGO
San Diego, 2004

- | | |
|-------|-----|
| 1.e4 | e5 |
| 2.♗f3 | ♗c6 |
| 3.♕b5 | ♕b4 |
| 4.c3 | ♕a5 |
| 5.♗a3 | ... |



To exchange off the bishop and then show off the bishop pair in an open game. Bilger, Suetin (in the monograph *The Complete Spanish*) and some other theoreticians considered the development of the knight a refutation of the Alapin Defense, without troubling themselves with weighty arguments. It isn't easy for Black to play this, but he can – and should!

- 5... ♗ge7

The more flexible move 5...♕b6 is the main one here and is examined below. 5...♗f6 is similar to the move-order 5...♕b6 6.♗c4 ♗f6. With 5...♗ge7, Black reinforces the queen's

knight and then plays to keep the bishop on a5.

- 6.♗c4 a6

I tried 6...0-0 in a game with Zagrebely (Harkany Tenkes Cup, 1991). After 7.♖a4 ♕b6 8.0-0 d5 9.ed ♖xd5 10.♗xb6 cb 11.♕c4 ♖d6 12.♖e1 a6 13.♖a3 White's advantage gradually disappeared, and after an exchange of queens 13...♖xa3 14.ba b5 15.♕b3 ♗g6 the opening problems should be considered solved. However, after castling White can win a pawn. And if 7.♗cxe5 ♗xe5 8.♗xe5 d5 9.♕d3 ♖d6 10.♗f3 ♗g6 promises Black reciprocal chances, then 7.♗xa5 ♗xa5 8.♗xe5 d5 9.d3 ♖d6 10.♗f3 de 11.de ♖g6 12.0-0 ♖xe4 13.♖e1 ♖d5 14.♖a4 ♗ac6 15.♕f4 (Howell – Lach, Germany 1991) threatens disaster for the c7 pawn and the entire line 6...0-0. By the way, the Austrian Willibald Lach, who was playing Black, is the author of a good pamphlet on the Alapin Defense.

- 7.♕a4 ...

Grandmasters Bruzon and Ivanov in their duels with Lugo retreated the bishop, disregarding its exchange in vain. In the example variation 7.♕xc6!? ♗xc6 8.d4 d5 (8..b5 and especially 8...♕b6 are even less attractive) 9.♗xa5 ♗xa5 10.de de 11.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 12.♗g5 the compensation for the pawn is indiscernible.

- | | |
|--------|------|
| 7... | b5 |
| 8.♗xa5 | ♗xa5 |
| 9.♕c2 | ♗c6 |
| 10.d4 | ... |

Against Lugo (Dominican Republic, 2003) Bruzon embarked on play in the center a little later: 10.0-0 d6 11.h3 0-0 12.d4 ♗g6 13.a4 ♖b8?! (why not 13...