

Opening shots

ONE OF the major problems for an international chess player is how to go about a systematic study of the subtleties of chess openings. New ideas are constantly being experimented with in complex variations, and in such a fashion-orientated chess world, lines fall in and

out of favour for no apparent reason. Opening variations as a whole are probably nowhere more closely scrutinised than in the Soviet Union, where the top players unceasingly search for the most minute finesses of move order and plans to equalise or wrest the

initiative in their next games. The Soviet methods of study are shrouded in secrecy however, and little is known about how exactly they explore the openings or even if indexes are kept. In the Western world the development of theory depends much on the personal creativity of individuals — often meaning that players are individually required to maintain comprehensive up-to-date libraries and study variations that may have already been refuted (or 'discovered!') by a

countryman down the road. Examples of the extremely specialised material a professional must study are several of the latest ideas in the Grunfeld defence, one of Black's most popular defences to the queen-pawn opening.

1. d4 Nf6
2. c4 g6
3. Nc3 d5

These are the initial moves that comprise the Grunfeld. The idea of 3... d5 is to prevent White from obtaining a large, cramping centre by

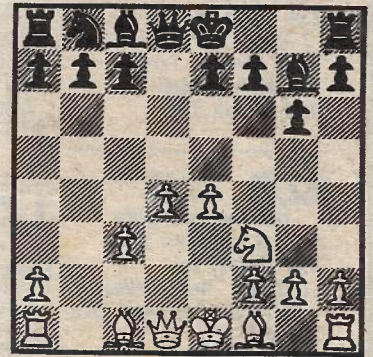
playing 4.e4. Against the Grunfeld White can try a variety of plans but the most direct is to obtain the big centre anyway, which Black then must play vigorously to undermine.

4. cxd5! Nxd5
5. e4 Nxc3
6. bxc3 Bg7

In this well-worn position White usually now plays 7.Bc4 c5 8.Ne2 with a major line running 8... 0-0 9.0-0 Nc6 10.Be3 cxd4 11.cxd4 Bg4 12.f3 Na5 13.Bd3 Be6. Although there is a considerable amount of theory from this position, Black is thought to be all right.

The trouble with this line is that White's knight on e2 is rather passive. Recently a number of top Western and Soviet players have been experimenting with putting the knight on f3 instead, in a more aggressive post.

7. Nf3!



Black now has 7... 0-0 and 7... c5 (!) which I will examine next week.

7. ... 0-0
8. Be2

Stationed here the bishop makes Black's ... Bg4 less effectual.

8. ... c5
9. 0-0 b6

After 9... Bg4 White can seize the advantage with 10.Be3 Nc6 11.d5!

10. Bg5!

Here 10.Be3 is less troublesome, and Black can choose between 10... Bb7 immediately or 10... cxd4 11.cxd4 e6.

10. ... Bb7
11. Qd3 Qd7

Here we are following two games (that I know of!), which are Hartston-Sax, Tallinn 1979, and Hartston-Chandler, Alicante 1979. In fact though, the move 11... Qd7 is probably not the most accurate. Correct is 11... h6! forcing White's bishop to make a decision, for example 12.Be3 cxd4 13.cxd4 e6 14.Rad1 Nc6 15.d5 exd5 16.exd5 Ne7 17.Qa3 Nxd5 18.Bc4 Qe7 19.Qxe7 Nxe7 20.Rd7 Bxf3 21.gxf3 Nf5 22.Rc1 Rae8 23.Bd5 Be5! 24.Rxa7 Nxe3 25.fxe3 Bb8 with equality. Alburtt-Tukmakov, Decin 1977, or 12.Bh4!? cxd4 13.cxd4 Qd7 14.Rad1 e6 15.d5! Na6! 16.Qb1 exd5 17.Bb5 Qd6 18.exd5 f5! with an unclear position, Alburtt-Jansa, Decin 77.

12. Rad1 e6

13. d5! exd5
14. exd5 c4!

Black must not allow White to consolidate with 15.c4. Now of course 15.Qxc4 fails to 15... Ba6 16.Qe4 Re8 and the bishop is lost.

15. Qd2

Now we come to a parting of ways. Sax here played the inferior 15... Rc8?! and got smashed by Hartston after 16.Bh6 Bh8 17.Qf4 Na6 18.Bxc4 Re8 19.Ng5 Be5 20.Qh4 b5 21.Bb3 Nc5 22.f4 Bf6 23.f5! with a winning attack.

15. ... b5!
16. Bh6 Bxh6
17. Qxh6 f6

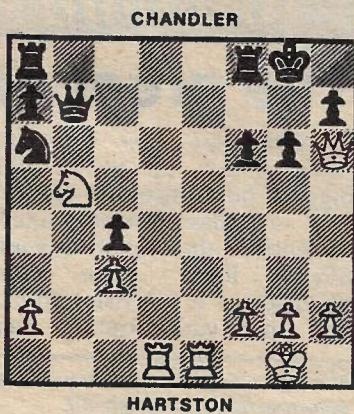
White stands better, but luckily Hartston's blunt attempt to smash me as well just falls short.

18. Nd4! Qxd5
19. Bf3 Qf7
20. Bxb7

Hartston had calculated 19... Qd7 20.Ne6! but if 20.Ne6 now then 20... Bxf3 throws a spanner in the works.

20. ... Qxb7

21. Rfe1 Na6
22. Nxb5!



A nasty move I could do nothing to prevent — if 22... Qxb5 23.Re7 Rf7 24.Rxf7 Kxf7 25.Qxh7 ch Ke6 26.Re1 ch mating. Meanwhile if 22... Rad8 23.Nd6 Qc7 24.Qf4 wins the c-pawn, so...

22. ... Nc5
23. Nd6 Qc7
24. Nxc4 Draw agreed

After 24... Na4 the position is level. But did White have something a few moves back? After the game we discovered the possibility of 23.Qh4! again leaving the

knight en prise when Black is virtually forced to capture it. Essentially Black has gained a vital defensive tempo but I still dislike the position after 23... Qxb5 24.Re7 Rf7 (24... h5 25.Qg3 g5 26.Qc7) 25.Rxf7 Kxf7 26.Qxh7 ch Ke6 27.Qxg6! when 27... Nd3 is not possible because of 28.Qe4 ch. Black can squirm on with 27... Rf8 but such positions are not to my taste, with the king so exposed and pawns dropping off.

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