

# About the Author

**Cyrus Lakdawala** is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 30 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the US.

## **Also by the author:**

*1...d6: Move by Move*

*A Ferocious Opening Repertoire*

*Capablanca: Move by Move*

*Play the London System*

*The Caro-Kann: Move by Move*

*The Four Knights: Move by Move*

*The Slav: Move by Move*

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# Series Foreword

*Move by Move* is a series of opening books which uses a question-and-answer format. One of our main aims of the series is to replicate - as much as possible - lessons between chess teachers and students.

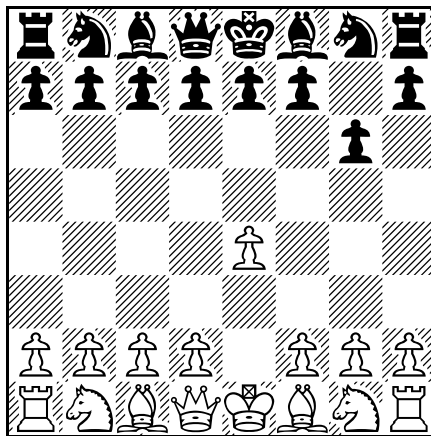
All the way through, readers will be challenged to answer searching questions and to complete exercises, to test their skills in chess openings and indeed in other key aspects of the game. It's our firm belief that practising your skills like this is an excellent way to study chess openings, and to study chess in general.

Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation of *Move by Move*. We're really excited by this series and hope that readers will share our enthusiasm.

John Emms  
Everyman Chess

# Introduction

I recall a game I played during a lunch break in seventh grade against one of the history teachers. He opened with 1 e4. At the time I read *Canadian Chess Chat* magazine, which was permeated with the games of Canada's chess god, Duncan Suttles, who opened 1...g6! on every white first move.



Now from my rudimentary understanding, I reasoned that there was no higher chess authority than Suttles, so like a faithful acolyte I dutifully followed suit and played 1...g6!. The history teacher closed his eyes and nodded wisely, as if confirming some long-held suspicion about my intelligence level. Then he issued this ominous prediction: "You have just lost the game!" "Why!?" I whined vehemently. The wise teacher went on to explain: "Both players should fight for the centre of the board, therefore 1...g6 is a weak move which hands White central control."

Even then, intuition warned me that something was off with the teacher's bogus assessment. Forty years later, I confidently assert that the teacher was wrong, and the Modern Defence is sound, and the stats are there to prove it. Luckily, I didn't believe him and play the Modern to this day.

The Modern is indeed a scary, counter-intuitive opening and the rules which govern are quite distinct from those in other, more orthodox openings. We Modernists view life on the chess board with extraterrestrial, alien perception. After all, as the teacher pointed out,

Black, in hypermodern fashion, cedes White central control without a fight. But giving away the centre is not done with a motivation of generosity or trepidation. The plan is to later chip away at White's centre from the sides and tear it down.

The second scary issue people have with the Modern (as John Watson once pointed out) is the fact that many of the lines look similar, except for some minute, imperceptible shift, and that one tiny shift may completely alter your strategy from the other look-alike variation. The structure alters in astonishingly disorienting ways, like some alien shape shifter, who appears differently each day. Both we and our opponents walk theoretical corridors on unsteady legs, but this is not such a big problem if you think about it.

Have you ever eaten a curry so hot that there actually is no taste except for the all-encompassing bonfire in your mouth (I am Indian and have endured this experience many, many times)? The Modern is a bit like this: it is so complicated that it is easy to play! If chaos and complexity increase past the limits of the understanding of most club players – or even GMs for that matter – the participants basically tend to play by feel. This in turn means that the Modern player is accustomed to such chaos, while White encounters it rarely and is often left groping about for the right plan.

If you just go through the games of this book and study the great Modernists and post-Modernists, like: Duncan Suttles, Ray Keene, Jon Speelman, Nigel Davies, Colin McNab, Tiger Hillarp Person, Zurab Azmaiparashvili and Peter Svidler, I bet you will not be overwhelmed and boggled by the complexity, unlike many of your unfortunate opponents, who don't encounter Modern all that often.

### **The Mechanics of the Modern Defence**

Unlike classical, solid opening lines like 1 e4 e5, the Caro-Kann, or the Queen's Gambit Declined, the Modern doesn't fight for central control, or solidity, or even seek to equalize. We begin asymmetrically and challenge White from our very first move. For years I endured from lower-rated players playing White, the Exchange Slav and the Exchange French, both with the intent to take the life out of positions, and allow my lower-rated opponents to deaden the position and draw.

A few years back I got tired of this weasely strategy from my more cowardly opponents and added my childhood favourite 1...g6 against any first move. I noticed with shock that after a year my stats were actually equal to or better than with the Slav, the Caro-Kann, the French and the Sicilian. The number of draws went way down, and my losses in turn thankfully did not increase (too much at least!). I am normally associated with super-solid lines like the Slav and Caro, but now add 1...g6 (and the Modern's introverted brother 1...d6) as one of my main openings as Black.

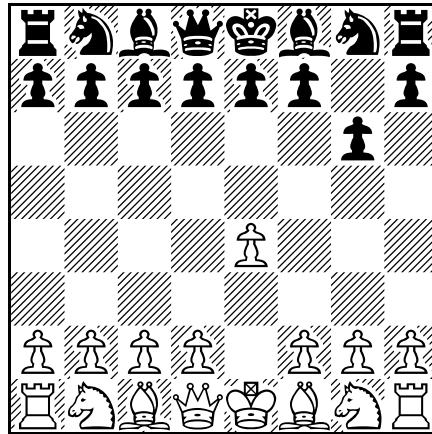
### **1...g6 Against Everything!**

The Modern represents a one-size-fits-all line. We play it against virtually every (well, okay, maybe not against 1 b3!) main white first move choice: 1 e4, 1 d4, 1 c4, and 1 ♘f3.

Here is an old school Modern, one of my all time favourites:

*Game 1*  
**D.Janosevic-D.Suttles**  
 Belgrade 1969

1 e4 g6



Enter the rabbit hole, my friend. I still remember the initial shock I received when first going over the game in 1969; a mind-altering experience.

2 d4 ♗g7 3 ♘f3 d6 4 ♘c3 c6

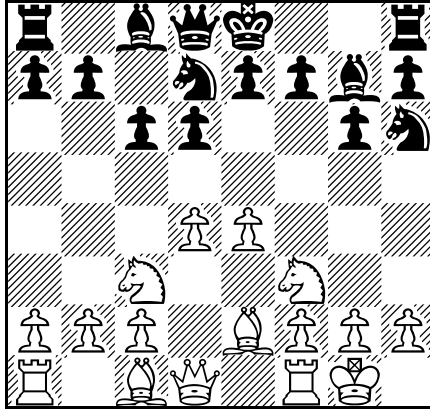
Back in the old days we all played ...c6 Moderns since it never occurred to us to play 4...a6!.

**Question:** What are the differences between ...c6 and ...a6?

**Answer:** I think 4...a6! is an improvement for this reason: in the ...c6 lines Black often plays ...b5, ...a6, ...♗b7, and ...c5 later on. Well, in the ...a6! lines we cut out the single redundancy of the ...c6 middle man, and gain a tempo by simply eliminating an often unnecessary move.

5 ♗e2 ♘d7 6 o-o ♘h6!?

Hallucinogens are optional. As always, Suttles imposes his anarchistic Suttleszian world view upon the board. You must keep in context that in 1969 Yoko hadn't yet messed everything up with The Beatles. We all dressed outlandishly, all the while thinking aberrant, odd thoughts and doing groovy, psychedelic, perplexing things!



**Question:** Black's move has to be bad, right?

**Answer:** Good and bad, virtue and sin go out the window in these 60's Modern dreamscapes. Black's eccentric last move keeps open possibilities of ...f6 and ...g7 or even ...f5. Normal would be something like 6...Qc7 7 a4 g6 8 h3 0-0, V.Topalov-R.Rauschenbach, Frankfurt (rapid) 1997, but Suttles never ever played Moderns like this one.

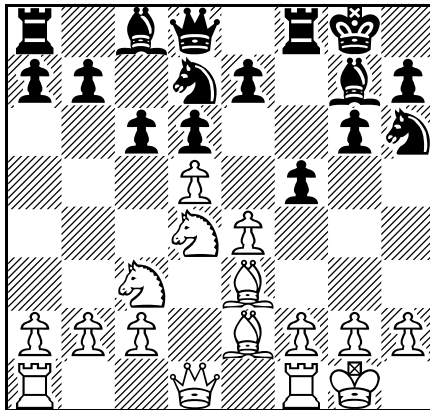
7 g5

Provoking ...f6. The trouble is Suttles probably intended to play the move anyway. Better was 7 e1 c7 8 a4 0-0 9 h3 h8!? 10 c4 e5 with an edge to White, E.Jimenez Zerquera-D.Suttles, Palma de Mallorca Interzonal 1970.

7...f6 8 e3 0-0 9 d5 f5!?

IM Andrew Martin suggests 9...c5, keeping White's knight out of d4.

10 d4



White wins a pawn after 10 dxc6 bxc6 11 ♖d4 ♗e5 12 ♗xc6! ♗xc6 13 ♚d5+ ♖f7 14 ♚xc6 ♗d7, but those two open files should give Black some Benko Gambit-style compensation.

10...♗xd4!?

**Question:** What the hell!?

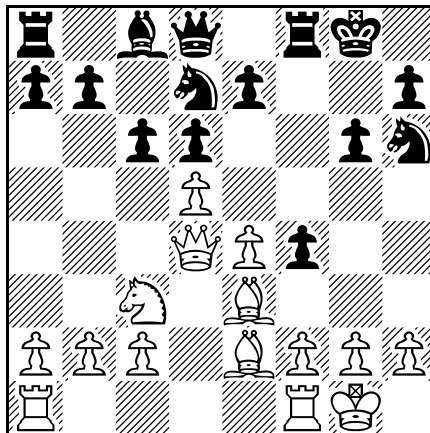
**Answer:** No, this isn't a dream, or a move played on the theory that a few bitter greens enhance the salad. We are reminded of the lyrics of the Gordon Lightfoot song: "Carefree Highway, let me slip away, slip away on you." Are you confused yet? I'm not sure if this move deserves a '??' or a '!!', so I hedged my bets and gave it one of each. Who knows if Suttles' win was the result of a mindbendingly deep strategic plan, or simply an accident of grace which fell before his feet.

I realize Black's last move looks as out of place as Hulk Hogan at the library. It certainly feels like Black pushes his position far past tolerable limits of endurance by casually handing over his monster dark-squared bishop for no visible compensation, the original sin in the Modern. Keep in mind, though, every religion cherishes its dogmas, which unbelievers like Suttles reject. In this case Black does indeed accrue a subtle gain in exchange for the trade: he takes control over e5. The rest of humanity would go for 10...♗e5.

11 ♚xd4

White's bishop gets the double boot after 11 ♗xd4 c5 12 ♗e3 f4 13 ♗d2 ♗e5.

11...f4!



Black's idea: create an artificial hole on e5 for a knight.

12 dxc6 bxc6 13 ♗c4!?

White chickens out.



**Question:** Why didn't White go for the c6-pawn with 13 ♖c4+?

**Answer:** This jittery rendition of his previous idea was probably White's best plan. He was probably nervous about Black's initiative after 13... ♘f7 14 ♖xc6 ♜b8 15 ♙c1.

**Question:** Is Black's sac sound?

**Answer:** Who knows? But clearly Black gets all sorts of practical chances after the sac:

1. He owns the e5-square.
2. Tricks with ...f3 are in the air.
3. He may get Benko Gambit-like pressure down the queenside files.

13... ♘f7 14 ♙xf4?

"White has been suitably confused", writes Martin. White sacs a piece for three pawns, but in doing so loses the initiative. Perhaps he didn't like his position after 14 ♙c1 g5!.

14...e5

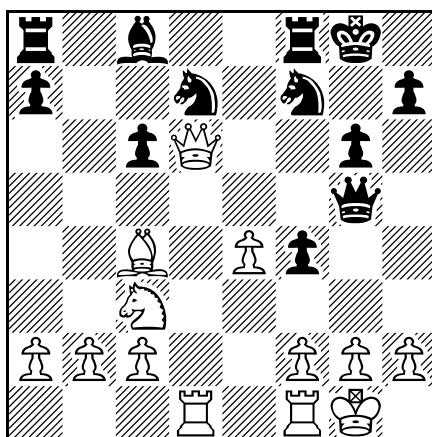
Thanks!

15 ♖xd6 exf4 16 ♜ad1?!

I would remove that nasty f-pawn with 16 ♖xf4.

16... ♖g5

The immediate 16...f3 also looks strong.



17 ♙xf7+

He cuts Black's Siamese twin knights surgically free of one another. Instead if 17 ♖xc6 ♘de5! and now if White bites with 18 ♖xa8?? he gets mated after 18... ♘f3+! 19 ♙h1 ♖h5!.

17... ♜xf7 18 ♖xc6 f3

Leaving an ugly scar around the White king's face.

19 g3 ♘b6 20 ♘d5 ♙d7 21 ♖d6 ♘c4!?

As always, Suttles takes the complicated route over the simple one. The comps say 21...♖c8! is stronger.

22 ♖b4 ♜c8 23 b3 ♞e5

Now there are just too many attackers around White's king.

24 ♞e3 ♖h6 25 ♜d5 ♞g4!

Removing the defender of g2, the mating square.

26 ♞xg4

White's knight proves a dismal flop in his capacity as king's guard.

26...♙xg4

Threat: ...♖h3.

27 h4 ♜xc2 28 ♜fd1 ♜c8

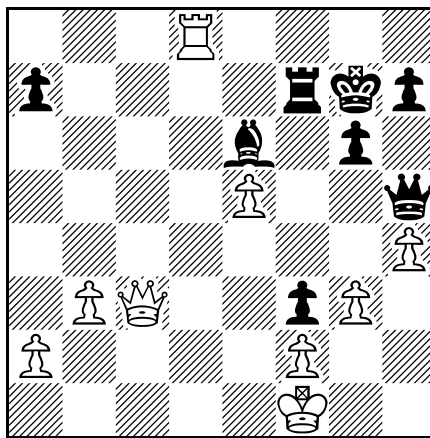
*Houdini* gives the bizarre comp line 28...♞e3!? 29 ♖b8+ ♙g7 30 ♖e5+ ♙h6 31 ♜f1 (31 fxe3?? f2+ mates in three moves) 31...♞e2 32 ♖g5+ ♙g7 33 ♖e5+ ♜f6! 34 ♖e7+ ♙h6! when Black suddenly threatens ...♖xf1+!, mating, and if 35 ♜dd1 ♖a6!. But this line is even too weird for Suttles!

29 e5

White can force queens off in the line 29 ♜d8+ ♜f8 30 ♜xc8 ♙xc8 31 ♖c4+ ♙h8 32 ♖d4+ ♖g7, but he can't save the game after 33 ♖xg7+ ♙xg7 34 ♜c1 ♙b7.

29...♙e6 30 ♜d8+ ♜xd8 31 ♜xd8+ ♙g7 32 ♖c3 ♖h5 33 ♙f1?

33 ♖e1 is necessary, but Black is winning since White gets tied down to his first rank and Black's king is safe from perpetual check.



**Exercise (combination alert):** Black to play and win.

**Answer:** 33...♖f5!

Double attack. Black's threats grow numerous and omnidirectional as he menaces

deadly checks on h3 and b1. White can only stop one of them. After this cruel shot, White's king gets yanked from its reverie and tossed carelessly into a netherworld of tormented spirits.

**34 ♖d6**

Walking into a mate. Marginally less hopeless was 34 ♖c1 ♖h3+ 35 ♔e1 ♖g2 36 ♖e3 ♖g1+ 37 ♔d2 ♖c7! when White's king gets hunted down.

**34...♖b1+ 0-1**

A yawning chasm opens up before White's king, who slumps over like a gunshot victim. 35 ♖e1 ♗h3+ mates.

**Summary**

Perhaps the Modern allows Black greater creative leeway than any other opening.

**Acknowledgements**

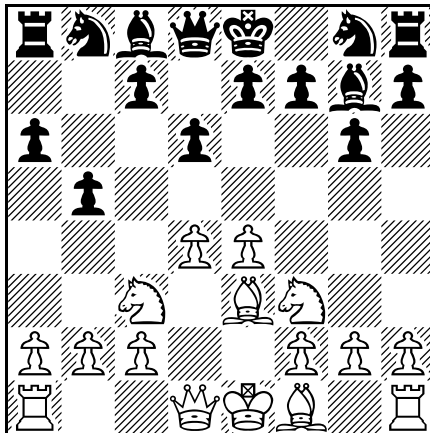
Many thanks to Grandmaster John Emms, who always makes each book better. Thanks too to International Master Richard Palliser for the final edit. Thanks also to proof-reader-in-chief and soy-tea-latte-maker-extraordinaire, Nancy, and head comp-file-backer-upper, Tim.

May all your opponents overconfidently close their eyes and nod wisely upon seeing you play 1...g6!.

# Chapter Two

## Classical Lines from White

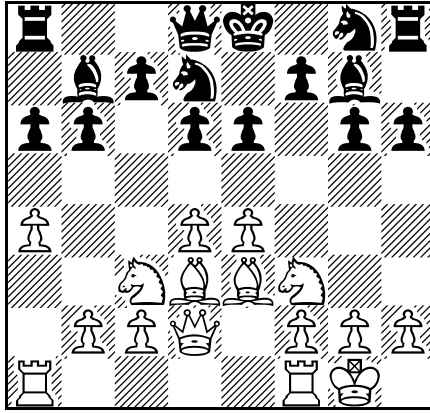
1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 ♘c3 d6 4 ♙e3 a6 5 ♘f3 b5



Study this chapter carefully since this is a very common set-up for White who begins exactly as in Chapter One. However, then, sooner or later, he chooses to develop his knight to the f3-square, and not necessarily on the fifth move, as in this diagrammed position.

Usually White plays a4 loosening up our queenside pawn front, and follows with a later c3, engaging us in some heavy duty strategic manoeuvring. The positions reached remain flexible with multiple possible set-ups, and I would flood the intro to this chapter with diagrams if I pasted every position you need to know! In Wizard of Oz-like fashion, the positions tend to begin quietly in black and white, and only later may burst into brilliant colour.

We also look at the elusive Hippopotamus formation, as in the next diagram, which normally drives the aggressive white player crazy with frustration, mainly because we refuse to provide him with a target.

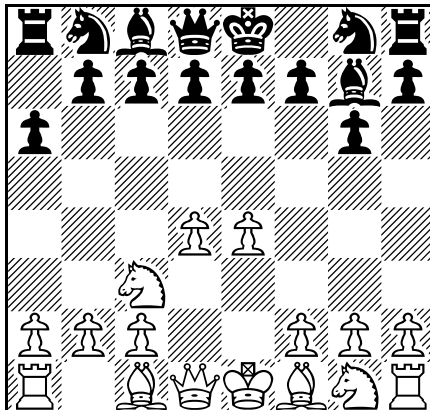


Whichever way he tries to open the position, we sidestep and close, laying in wait for our proper time to engage him.

And, finally, we examine the somewhat milquetoast and fading Old Classical set-up for White with 4 ♘f3 and 5 ♙e2. In this case Black has nothing to fear, as we enter an extinct volcano. Our plan ...b5, ...♘d7, and ...c5 is quite effective.

*Game 8*  
**T.Kulhanek-K.Chernyshov**  
Chrudim 2004

1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 ♘c3 a6



**Question:** What is going on with Black's move order?

**Answer:** This is a move order tweak which increases Black's options to muck things up, mainly against the Austrian Attack, and possibly takes White out of his theoretical comfort zone.

4 ♗e3

Here is one benefit of the 3...a6 move order: If 4 f4 d5!?, and then:

a) 5 ♗xd5 e6 6 ♗e3 ♖xd4 7 ♗d3 ♗c6 8 ♗f3 ♗c5 9 0-0 ♗f6 10 ♖h1 ♗d7 11 c3 was V.Kotronias-A.Wohl, Cutro 2004. Now Black can try 11...0-0-0! with a very sharp position.

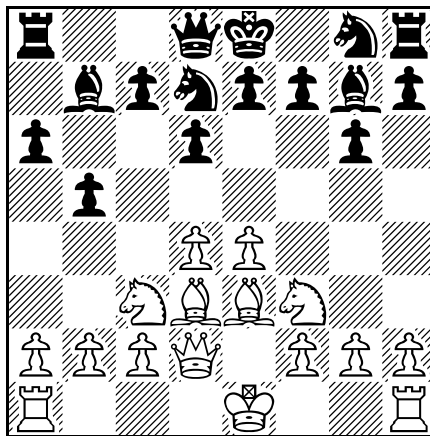
b) 5 e5 leads to a bizarre Gurgeni-like Modern, where Black plays for a pure light-square strategy: 5...h5 6 ♗e3 ♗h6 7 ♗d2 ♗g4 8 0-0-0 ♗xe3 9 ♗xe3 ♗g4 10 ♗f3 e6 11 ♗e2 ♗c6 12 ♗dg1 ♗e7 13 h3 ♗xf3 14 ♗xf3 h4! and I suspect Black can engineer a successful ...c5 break later on, J.Dorst-K.Chernyshov, Pardubice 2010.

c) After 5 exd5?! ♗f6 6 ♗c4 ♗bd7 Black will eventually regain the lost pawn with a favourable looking ...♗f6 Centre-Counter position.

4...b5 5 ♗d2 ♗b7 6 ♗d3 d6 7 ♗f3

As stated above, in this chapter we cover lines where White avoids f3 or f4 and develops his g1-knight to its most natural square.

7...♗d7



8 a4

**Question:** What if White refuses to disturb the queenside and just castles kingside?

**Answer:** Then we disturb it for him, with our thematic ...c5 break: 8 0-0 c5. Now in both lines White ends up in a passive-looking Dragon position which gives Black no trouble:

*The Modern Defence: Move by Move*

a) 9 ♖fe1 cxd4 10 ♙xd4 9 ♗gf6 11 a3 0-0 12 ♜ad1 ♚c7 was V.Onoprienko-A.Shchekachev, Paris 1996.

b) 9 dxc5 ♗xc5 and Black already has a pleasant Dragon position; White's pieces are too passive to extract an edge, J.Meister-E.Inarkiev, Moscow 2004.

**8...b4 9 ♗e2 a5**

Black can also hit back and cover b4 with his c-pawn: 9...c5 10 c3 ♗gf6 11 ♗g3 bxc3 12 bxc3 ♗g4 which picked off the bishop pair with equality at a minimum for Black in S.Krylov-Z.Azmaiparashvili, Istanbul Olympiad 2000.

**10 ♗g3 c5 11 0-0**

White prefers to play in Open Sicilian style. Most players support d4 with a pawn with 11 c3, although after 11...♗gf6 12 h3 h5!? 13 ♙g5 cxd4 14 cxd4 0-0 15 0-0 e5 Black achieved a decent Closed Ruy Lopez position in A.Kinsman-H.Hamdouchi, Toulouse 1996.

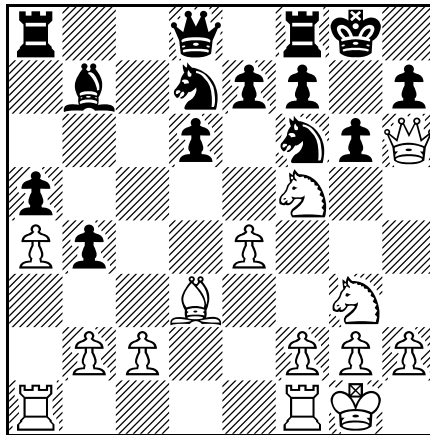
**11...cxd4 12 ♗xd4 ♗gf6 13 ♙h6 0-0 14 ♗df5!**

White begins a dangerous looking attack, but as we shall soon see, Black's resources are more than adequate to the defensive task ahead.

**14...♙xh6**

It's easy to see that the knight is poisoned: 14...gxf5?? 15 ♚g5 ♗e8 16 ♙xg7 wins, since 17 ♗h5 follows on the recapture.

**15 ♚xh6**



**Exercise (critical decision):** What about now? Can Black get away with taking White's hanging knight on f5, or should he submit to caution and retreat with 15...♗e8, to cover the mate threat on g7? Think carefully about your decision. Only one of them works!

**Answer: 15...♗e8!**

The Modern is not an opening for the haughty of spirit! Black must decline, bend and defend the mate. He can't get away with 15...gxf5?? 16 ♖xf5 ♖e8 when 17 e5! unleashes the d3-bishop, igniting White's unstoppable attack.

16 ♖e3 ♖c5

A good central counter to White's attempt at a wing attack. Black adds pressure to both e4 and the attacking bishop on d3.

17 f4

**Question:** Isn't Black likely to get mated!?

**Answer:** Please strive to remain calm. We need excellent defensive skills and good nerves to survive White onslaughts against the ...a6 Modern. Have faith in the inherent soundness of Black's position. We can't be blown away so easily.

17...d5!?

Principle: counter in the centre when attacked on the wing. I prefer the destabilizing (but nerve-wracking!) line 17...b3! 18 ♖f3 bxc2 19 ♖gf5 f6! 20 ♗xc2 ♗xe4 21 ♖g3 ♖f7. Perhaps White has full compensation for the pawn in the form of attacking chances, but intuition tells me Black is solid enough to survive and hang on to the extra pawn.

18 e5

The human move. *Houdini* likes 18 ♖ad1 ♖c7 19 exd5 ♖xd3 20 ♖xd3 ♗a6 21 c4 ♗xc4 22 ♖xc4 ♖xc4 23 ♖f5! ♖c5+ 24 ♖h1 f6! with a sharp, unclear position. If Black survives the coming attack, his superior structure is money in the bank for old age.

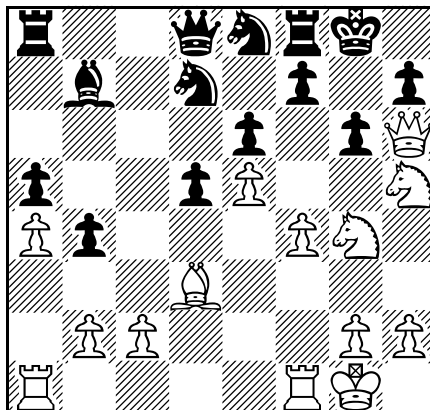
18...e6

This kind of position arises from Scheveningen Sicilian and also Classical French lines.

19 ♖g4 ♖d7

Black can also eliminate a key white attacker with 19...♖xd3 20 cxd3 f5! (the central counter) 21 exf6 ♖xf6 22 ♖e5 d4! and Black goodifies his bad bishop! Chances look equal.

20 ♖h5!





Visually scary stuff, but keep in mind: for now White has no threats to speak of.

20...♙a6 21 f5!? ♟xd3

The comps like 21...gxh5!, a move no human in his or her right mind would play! After 22 fxe6 ♟xd3 23 exd7 hxg4 24 dxe8 ♖xe8 25 cxd3 ♗xe5 it's advantage Black.

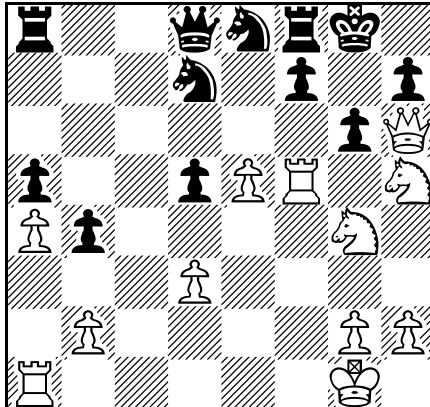
22 cxd3

**Question:** Shouldn't White have a mate after 22 f6?

**Answer:** You can't attack purely through intuition. Your suggestion may look scary, but it fails to generate a single threat. Black wins after 22...♗b6+ 23 ♔h1 gxh5 24 cxd3 hxg4 25 ♖f4 ♘xe5.

22...exf5 23 ♖xf5!

Here comes another wave. White attacks with gusto, as he dangles bait on f5 and h5, hoping Black bites.



**Exercise (planning):** Both hanging white pieces are immune. He also threatens to bang down a knight on f6, winning on the spot. How does Black defend?

**Answer:** Cover the sensitive f6-square.

23...♖a6!

So far so good. Still, aversion of a disaster is no cause to celebrate a victory.

Instead 23...gxf5?? fails to 24 ♘hf6+ ♘dx6 25 ♘xf6+, while 23...gxh5?? 24 ♘f6+! ♘dx6 25 ♖g5+ mates.

24 ♖g5!?

White goes all in and refuses to back off, while Black's nervous king sits still on g8, like old bones in the forest.

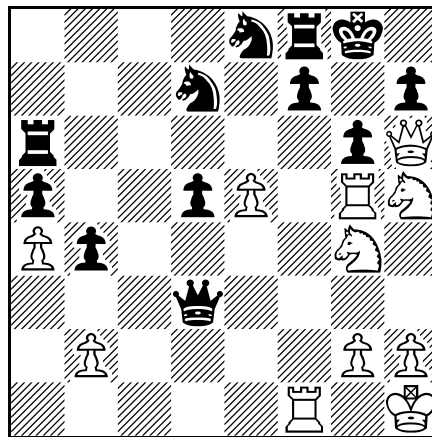
**Question:** How is it possible that Black can hope to defend with so many attackers around his king?

**Answer:** Demonstrate the specifics. The comps (and I) prefer Black, whose king, you leave for dead. Yet he has a knack for not being so. I agree that White's attackers, ominous as they may appear, clot the kingside. But in reality they are neutrals, like the Swiss. An attack doesn't succeed on looks alone. Analysis must back up the claim.

24...♖b6+! 25 ♔h1 ♖d4!

Principle: counter in the centre when attacked on the wing. Black's defensive meanderings appear starkly antithetical to White's purposeful, straight-line intent to deliver mate.

26 ♜f1 ♖xd3



A new dynamic appears: White's weak back rank. The embezzler siphons off a little cash from the office fund, hoping the larceny goes unnoticed. There is but a slim distinction between intent and action. White desperately wants to deliver checkmate, but has no clear method of implementing the desire. All his fragmented attacking ideas swirl up in an impossible dream of a sparkling final combination which will never be. Now we witness that White's pieces are simply stuck, like the mammoth in the ooze of the tar pit which kills it.

27 ♘g3 f6

Another central counter. 27...♞e6 also looks strong.

28 ♘f2

White's attack also looks out of gas in the line 28 ♜f3 ♖c2.

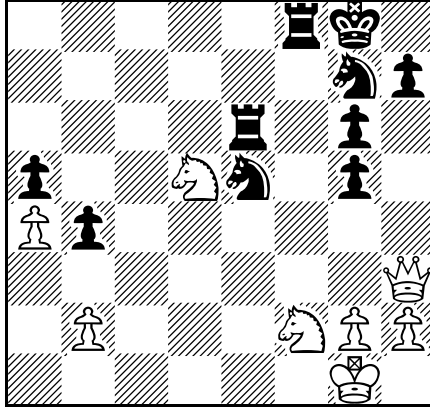
28...♖xf1+!?

The queen attempts to get White's notice, the way a respectful butler tries to get the master's attention by clearing his throat. The comps prefer 28...♖c2.

29 ♖xf1 fxg5 30 ♔g1 ♖e6 31 ♕h3?!

The takeoff is always scarier than the landing. White puts up a better fight after 31 ♕xg5 ♗xe5 32 ♕d8.

31...♗g7 32 ♗e3? ♗xe5 33 ♗xd5



**Exercise (combination alert):** Look for a way to exploit White's weak back rank.

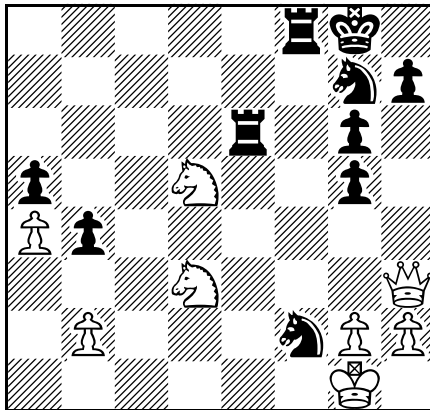
**Answer:** 33...♗g4!

Likewise, 33...♗c4! also works.

34 ♗d3

He must cover e1.

34...♗f2!



Overload. Another sweet back-rank shot.

35 ♔xe6+

If 35 ♔g3 ♖xd3 and White is unable to recapture due to the deadly rook check on e1.

35...♗xe6 36 ♖xf2 ♖c5 0-1

### Summary

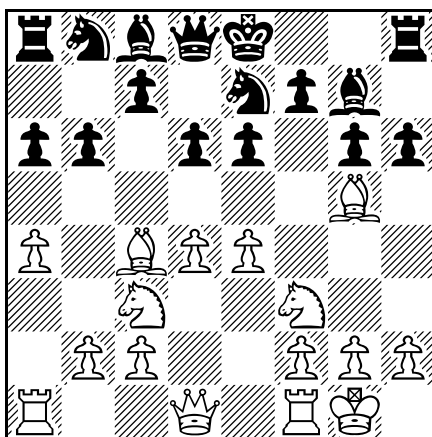
If White refuses to play c3 after our ...c5, we simply play ...cxd4, with an equal Dragon-style position.

Game 9  
**A.Shirov-Z.Azmaiparashvili**  
 Dubai (rapid) 2002

1 e4 d6 2 d4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♗g7 4 ♗e3

**Question:** Are there positions in the 4 ♗f3 move order where White's bishop doesn't post on e3?

**Answer:** It's rare, but here is one possibility: 4...a6 5 a4 b6 (we enter the Hippo, which we look at later in this chapter) 6 ♗c4 e6 7 ♗g5?! (I think this move actually hurts White, who wants to provoke ...h6; the trouble with this plan is Black actually wants to play the move anyway, and gets to do so with a free kick on the bishop later on) 7...♗e7 8 0-0 h6.



Now White saw nothing better to retreat to e3 anyway, when the free ...h6 move constituted a gain of time for Black in E.Sevillano-C.Lakdawala, San Diego (rapid) 2004. Instead 9 ♗h4 ♖d7 10 ♖e1 ♗b7 11 h3 was tried in A.Mirzoev-K.Solomon, Cappelle la Grande 2011. Now, instead of castling, more enterprising is to fight for the dark squares