

Lorin D'Costa

# The Panov-Botvinnik attack

**move by move**

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# About the Author

Lorin D'Costa is an International Master and a full-time chess teacher. He coaches some of the top chess schools in the UK, some of England's very strongest juniors, and also the England team at World and European Youth Championships.

**Also by the Author:**

*Who Dares Wins!*

*The Sicilian Scheveningen: 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, 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.

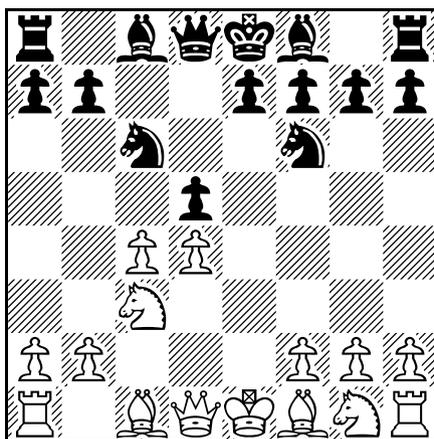
Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation of *Move by Move*. We're really excited by this series and hope that readers will share our enthusiasm.

John Emms,  
Everyman Chess

## Chapter Four

# The 5...♞c6 Variation

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♞f6 5 ♞c3 ♞c6



This variation is advocated by the Danish GM Lars Schandorff in his recent repertoire book *Grandmaster Repertoire 7: The Caro-Kann*, as well as by other Caro-Kann repertoire books, and therefore deserves serious attention. In Chapters Two and Three, we saw how against simple development from Black, White is able to carry out quick developing moves himself with ♟g5, ♟d3, 0-0 etc. With 5...♞c6 Black attempts to prevent White from obtaining a typical IQP position and goes for an early attack on the d4-pawn. Play can become ultra-sharp straight from the opening moves, and so I suggest careful study of this variation.

White's options in this position are:

- 1) 6 cxd5 ♞xd5 7 ♟c4!? as a surprise weapon.
- 2) 6 ♟g5 is my sharp, main recommendation.

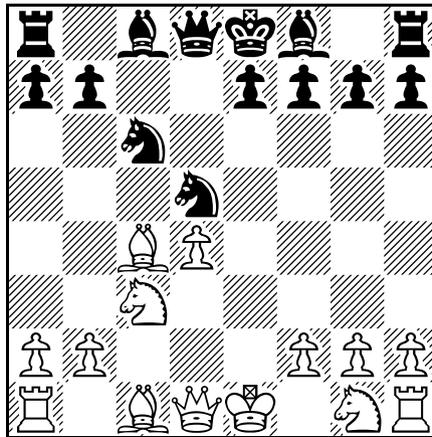
3) 6 ♘f3 ♙g4 7 cxd5 ♘xd5 8 ♖b3 is the line I am avoiding despite being given in many books. The main line leads to an endgame and I feel Panov players should be keeping pieces on the board.

**Game 29**  
**V.Kramnik-G.Meier**  
 Dortmund 2012

**1 e4**

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 c5 3 ♘f3 ♘c6 4 e3 e6 5 d4 d5 6 cxd5 ♘xd5 7 ♙c4 cxd4 8 exd4 ♙e7 9 0-0 0-0 was actually how the game began.

**1...c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 cxd5 ♘xd5 7 ♙c4!?**



This continuation makes a lot of sense, in comparison to other lines we have studied so far. White puts immediate pressure on the black centre, in particular the d5-square, and d4 is defended tactically.

**7...e6**

Natural, but Black does not have to echo his play in the previous chapter:

a) 7...♘b6 8 ♙b5 ♙e6 9 ♘f3 g6 10 h4! (we first encountered this interesting thrust of the h-pawn against the fianchetto structure in the Introduction; is it reckless or, as I would claim here, the prelude to a lovely attack?) 10...♙g7 11 h5 ♙d5 12 ♙e3 a6 13 ♙d3 ♘c4 14 ♖e2 ♙xf3 15 gxf3 ♘d6 16 0-0-0 ♖a5 (16...♘xd4 was risky, but might be an improvement, as now the king on e8 comes under heavy fire) 17 ♙e4 ♘f5 18 ♙b1 ♘cxd4 19 ♙xd4 ♘xd4 20 ♖c4 ♘b5 21 ♙c6+ ♙f8 22 ♙xb5 ♙xc3 23 hxg6 fxe6 24 ♙a4 ♙g7 25 ♖d5 b5 26 ♖c6 ♖b8 27 ♙b3 ♖b4 28 ♖b6 ♖e8 29 ♖d8 1-0 L.Vajda-P.Michalik, Slovakian League 2011.

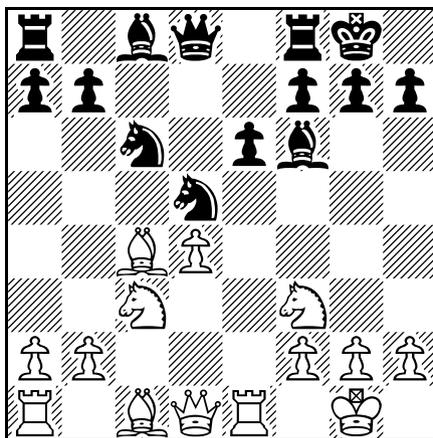
b) 7...♘xc3 8 bxc3 e6 is also possible, with the usual change of pawn structure in the centre. After 9 ♘f3 ♙d6 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♖b1 ♖c7 12 ♙d3 ♘e7 White went for the Greek Gift

## The Panov-Botvinnik Attack: Move by Move

sacrifice and 13 ♖xh7+ ♔xh7 14 ♘g5+ ♔g8 15 ♗h5 ♜d8 16 ♗xf7+ ♔h8 17 ♗h5+ ♔g8 18 ♜b3 was a mess in M.Klichev-I.Losev, Zaraisk 2009.

c) 7...♗e6 8 ♗b3 g6 9 ♘f3 ♗g7 10 0-0 0-0 is also a playable line from Black's point of view, but needs further tests than it has so far received.

8 ♘f3 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♜e1 ♗f6



**Question:** What is Black's threat and what should we be doing?

**Answer:** The threat is 10...♘b6 attacking c4 and d4, so White must respond. There are two real options.

11 ♗b3

The most natural, as the bishop sidesteps Black's plan.

11 ♗e4 is the main theoretical continuation, but in general I believe White should try to put pressure on Black's knight on d5 if he wants to fight for advantage in this structure. After 11...b6 (11...♗e7 12 a3 b6 13 ♗d3 ♗b7 14 ♗a2 ♜e8 15 ♗d2 ♜c8 16 ♜ad1 g6 17 h4! ♘b8 18 ♘eg5 ♗f6 19 h5 ♜c7 20 ♗b1 ♜d7 21 ♘xh7! ♔xh7 22 hxg6+ ♔g8 23 ♗h6 was winning for White in D.Gormally-J.Lopez Martinez, European Team Championship, Gothenburg 2005) 12 a3 ♗b7 13 ♗d3 ♜c8 14 ♗d2 (14 ♘fg5?! was the high-level encounter M.Tal-T.Petrosian, Moscow 1966) 14...♘ce7 we've reached a very complicated position that is standard enough for the IQP.

11...♘de7 12 ♗f4!?

"I was not sure that this continuation is entirely correct, but it seemed to me to be the only way to complicate matters and to play for a win" – Kramnik. That's the spirit!

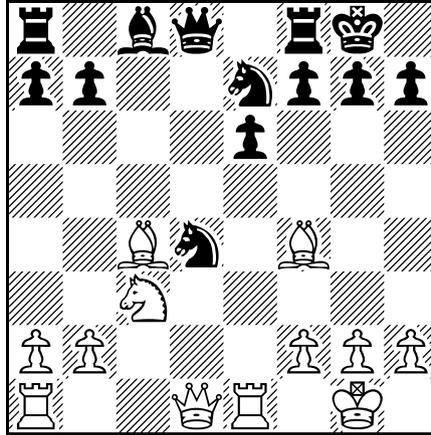
Instead, 12 ♗e3 ♘f5 13 d5 ♘xe3 14 ♜xe3 exd5 should be roughly equal and 12 ♜e4 b6 does not feel like the correct way to play this position.

12...♗xd4

12...♘xd4 13 ♘e4 (if 13 ♘xd4 ♗xd4 14 ♗f3 ♘g6 15 ♗g3 ♗f6) 13...♘xb3 14 ♘xf6+ gxf6

15 ♔xb3 is very unclear. These variations show that despite Black's extra pawn, the position is nice and open. Moreover, White's pieces are better developed so there is some compensation. No definitive answer can be given on positions like this; they are just fun to play!

13 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 14 ♙c4



**Question:** Why did White play this?

**Answer:** White gets to keep the two bishops as now ...♘xb3 is ruled out. His compensation is based around his lead in development. Still, there are no concrete variations as yet to prove this compensation, so let's just see how it pans out.

14...♘ec6 15 ♖c1

A good move, keeping the tension. 15 ♗h5 looks tempting, but after 15...♗a5! White has to exchange queens: 16 ♗xa5 ♘xa5 17 ♙d3 ♘ac6 and with the queens off Black can breathe a little easier.

15...♗f6 16 ♙c7!

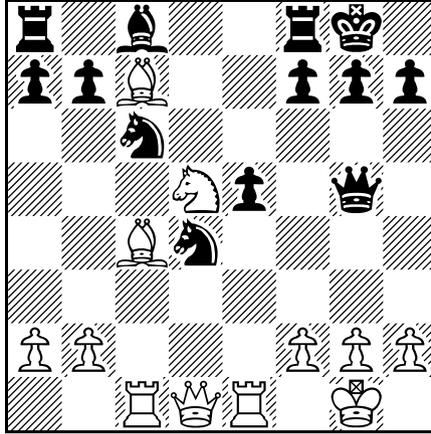
The sort of move to throw the opponent off guard. The idea is to play ♘e4 and not allow a queen retreat to d8.

After 16 ♙d6 ♖d8 17 ♘e4 ♗g6 suddenly ...f5 is a threat, undermining the bishop on d6.

16...e5

Probably it was better to play 16...♗e7 17 ♙g3 ♖d8 18 ♗h5 ♘f5 19 ♙f4 ♙d7 with an unclear and complicated position, where Black is rather solid, but White has definite play for the pawn.

17 ♘d5 ♗g5



**Question:** How can White open up the position and continue attacking?

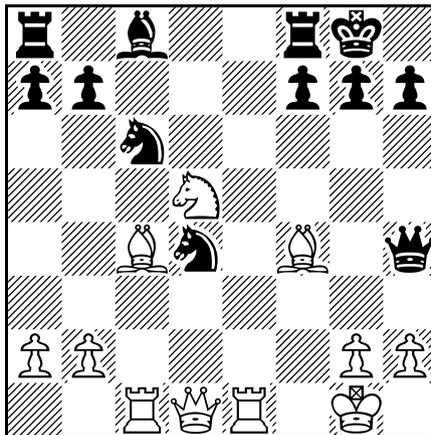
**Answer:** If we allow Black to play ...♗h3, he will be better, so White needs to be quick. Let's open lines!

**18 f4! exf4 19 ♖xf4 ♜h4**

Alternatively:

a) 19...♜g4 20 ♗e3 (20 ♗d6!?) 20...♜xd1 21 ♜exd1 ♘e6 22 ♗b5 and White has more than enough play for the pawn.

b) 19...♜g6 is not an option: 20 ♜xd4! ♘xd4 21 ♘e7+ ♗h8 22 ♘xg6+ hxg6 23 ♗d6 ♜d8 24 ♗e7 and f7 falls, giving White the clearly better position as all his pieces are far better placed than their counterparts.



**20 ♗g3**

Kramnik said he considered 20 ♖e4!? and that it was “a mess”. After 20...♙g4 21 ♗d2 (21 ♙d6!?) 21...♘f3+! 22 gxf3 ♙xf3 23 ♙d3 ♗g4+ 24 ♚f2 ♗g2+ 25 ♚e3 ♗h3 who is supposed to be attacking who?

20...♗d8?

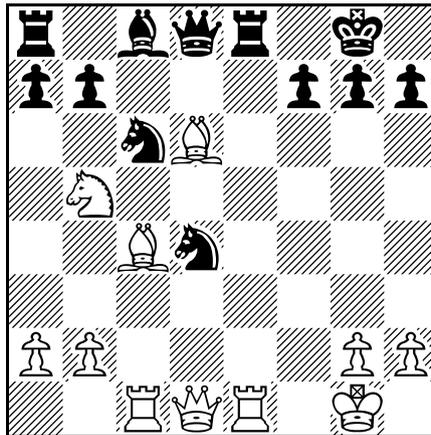
20...♗g5 was best. Following 21 ♖e4! (White has a draw if he wants, of course, with 21 ♙f4 ♗h4 22 ♙g3) 21...♘f5! (if 21...♙f5 22 ♖xd4 ♘xd4 23 ♙f4!) 22 ♖g4! ♗h6 23 ♙f4 ♗e6 24 ♘c7 ♗e4! 25 ♘xa8 ♘e3 all hell has broken loose.

21 ♘c7 ♖b8 22 ♘b5 ♖a8 23 ♙d6!

“Now Black is in trouble all of a sudden”, as Kramnik pointed out after the game.

23...♖e8

23...♘xb5 24 ♙xf8 ♗b6+ 25 ♚h1 ♚xf8 26 ♙xb5 ♙e6 (26...♗xb5? 27 ♗d6+) 27 ♙xc6 is just an extra exchange for White.



**Exercise:** What do you think the best continuation is here? Think about White’s active pieces and his lead in development, and how to make them count.

24 ♙xf7+! ♚xf7 25 ♗h5+ g6

25...♙g8 26 ♖xe8+ is game over straight away.

26 ♗xh7+ ♚f6 27 ♘xd4!

The best and the simplest.

27...♘xd4

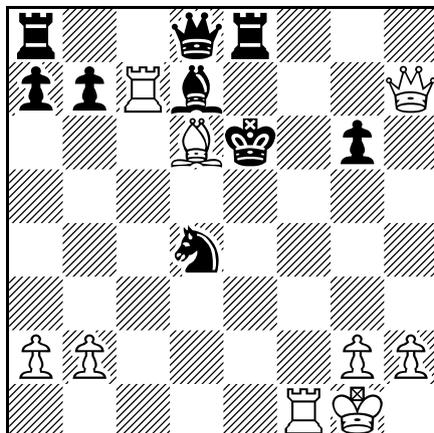
White wins too after 27...♖xe1+ 28 ♖xe1 ♗xd6 29 ♖f1+ (29 ♗h8+ ♚f7 30 ♘xc6 also wins) 29...♚e5 (or 29...♙f5 30 ♘xf5 ♗c5+ 31 ♘e3+) 30 ♘f3+ ♚d5 31 ♖d1+ ♚c5 32 ♖xd6.

28 ♗h4+ ♚f7 29 ♖c7+

29 ♗xd4 is also winning, of course, but the text is more precise.

29...♙d7 30 ♗h7+ ♚f6 31 ♖f1+ ♚e6

If 31...♘f5 32 ♖xd7 ♗b6+ 33 ♚h1.



**Exercise:** Finish off the king hunt by spotting the checkmate in two moves.

**Answer:** 32 ♖xg6+ ♔d5 33 ♜c5# 1-0

A very complicated game, but one that Panov players should not shy away from. Again, White made all the running, and Black was constantly having to try and find the best defensive moves, which is never an easy task with the clock ticking.

### Game 30

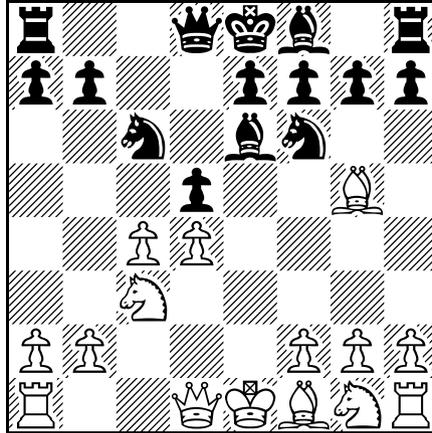
#### K.Kulaots-A.Fauland

European Championship, Aix-les-Bains 2011

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♙g5

6 ♘f3 is the other main variation, but I have no intention of recommending the endgame in this line after 6...♙g4 7 cxd5 ♘xd5 8 ♖b3 ♙xf3 9 gxf3 e6 10 ♖xb7 ♘xd4 11 ♙b5+ ♘xb5 12 ♖c6+ ♙e7 13 ♖xb5 ♖d7. Whilst many strong players have said that both sides have chances to win here, I feel it is not in the spirit of the Panov. Let's play some sharper stuff with 6 ♙g5!

6...♙e6



**Question:** What's this? Another surprise line, but this time from Black?

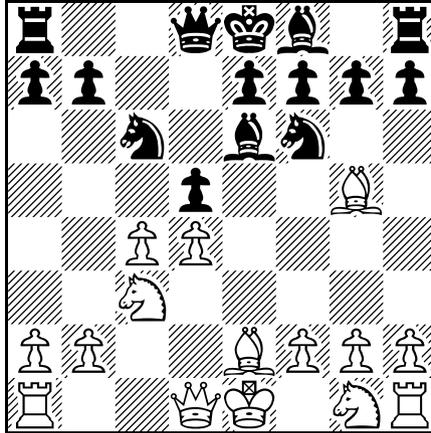
**Answer:** This move looks strange, but has some plus points: d5 is strengthened and Black puts the question to the c4-pawn, since ...dxc4 is supported by the bishop on e6. The f8-bishop can come out via a fianchetto with ...g6 and ...♗g7, so that is not a problem. There are a few lines here, but I quite like the following line which is a nice counter-surprise weapon.

**7 ♗e2**

7 a3 is another popular weapon against this ...♗e6 variation: for example, 7...♞d7 8 ♗e2 0-0-0 9 c5 ♘e4 10 ♗f3 ♘xg5 11 ♘xg5 h6 12 ♗f3 g5 13 b4 g4 14 b5 gxf3 15 bxc6 ♞xc6 16 ♗xf3 ♗f5 17 0-0 ♜g8 18 ♞e1 e6 19 ♞c1 h5 20 ♘a2 h4 21 ♞c3 f6 22 ♘b4 ♞b5 23 ♗e2 ♞e8 24 c6 ♗xb4 25 axb4 ♗e4 26 f3 ♗f5 27 ♞a4 ♗h3 28 ♞xa7 ♞xg2+ 29 ♘h1 1-0, M.Adams-I.Nikolaidis, French League 2006.

Note too 7 ♗f3 h6 8 ♗xf6 exf6 9 a3 ♗e7 10 ♗e2 0-0 11 0-0 f5 12 ♞c2 ♗f6 13 ♞ad1 g6 14 ♞fe1 ♘g7 15 b4 a6 16 ♗f1 f4 17 h3 dxc4 18 d5 ♗f5 19 ♞c1 ♘a7 20 ♘d4 ♗d7 21 ♘e6+ ♗xe6 22 dxe6 ♞c8 23 ♞d7 ♘h8 24 ♞xf4 ♗g7 25 ♞xf7 ♞c6 26 e7 ♞xf7 27 ♞xf7 ♞e8 28 ♞e6 ♞d7 29 ♘d5 1-0, V.Ivanchuk-V.Topalov, Nice (rapid) 2008.

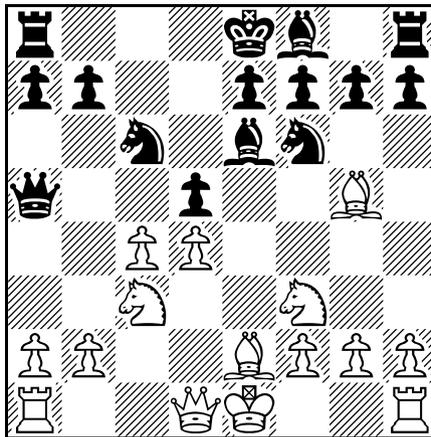
Both these games are well worth playing through to see some of White's strategies.



**7...Qa5**

7...g6 8 f3! is the trick when Black is in trouble. Similar is 7...h6 8 xf6 exf6 9 f3. Black can escape, but White ends up with a nice position anyway after 9...b4 (9...dxc4 10 d5 is the key point of this e2-f3 idea) 10 ge2 0-0 11 0-0 e7 12 b3 xc3 13 dxc3 dxc4 14 xb7 b8 15 xa7 b2 16 c5, as in T.Oral-F.Langheinrich, Pardubice 2002.

**8 f3**



**8...dxc4**

8...e4 9 0-0 dxc3 10 bxc3 dxc4 gives rise to another sharp position. Black has won a pawn, but is again behind in development. Play could go 11 b1 0-0-0 12 a4 (or 12 d2 h6 13 e3 g5 14 b2 c7 15 d2 when the black set-up is a little bit artificial; after all, Black hardly ever castles queenside in the Panov) 12...a6 13 h4 f6 14 c2 with the easier play for White in A.Hoffmann-M.Boehnisch, German League 2003.

**9 0-0 d8**

Keeping tabs on the d5-square, which is even more important than getting the kingside pieces out.

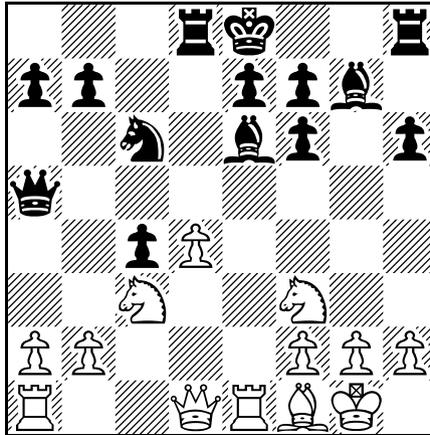
10 ♖e1 h6 11 ♙xf6 gxf6

11...exf6 12 ♙xc4! demonstrates the perils of keeping the king on e8 for too long.

12 ♙f1

12 ♘e4 ♙g7 13 ♘c5 ♙c8 14 ♙xc4 0-0 looks pleasant too for White, with chances to play against Black's weakened kingside structure.

12...♙g7



**Exercise:** What move would you play here as White?

**Answer:** Kulaots came up with a thematic sacrifice.

13 ♖xe6!?

We saw this idea in the Introduction with the game Tal-Karpov.

13...fxe6 14 ♙xc4

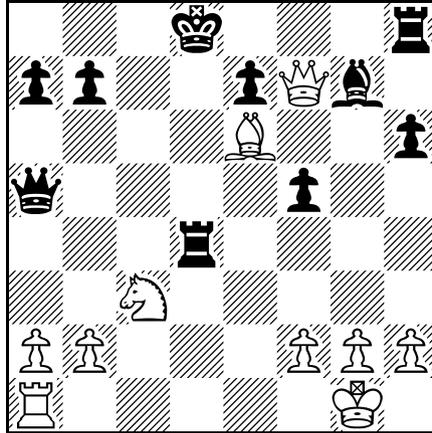
**Question:** What does White have for the exchange?

**Answer:** The light squares are now generally in White's possession, and if moves like ♖e2 and ♖e1 can be played then White can drive straight through the centre. The bishop on e6 was holding Black's position together, so why not just remove it?

14...f5

Alternatively, 14...0-0 15 ♙xe6+ ♙h8 16 d5 followed by ♘h4 or ♘d4-f5, and just look at that bishop on g7, while after 14...e5 15 ♖d3 exd4 16 ♘b5 a6 17 ♖g6+ ♙d7 18 ♖f5+ ♙e8 19 ♙e6! the light squares prove fatal for Black.

15 ♙xe6 ♘xd4 16 ♘xd4 ♖xd4 17 ♖h5+ ♙d8 18 ♖f7



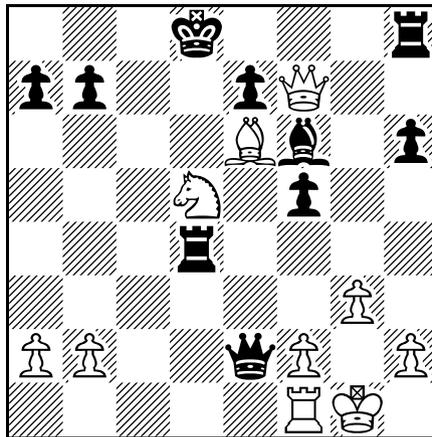
Continuing to attack.

**18...♙f6 19 ♘d5 ♖d2 20 ♖f1!**

20 ♗xf6? ♕d1+ 21 ♖xd1 ♖xd1# was one to avoid.

**20...♗e2 21 g3**

21 ♗xf6? ♖d1 also wins for Black. It may appear that Black has found counterplay, but this is just a temporary situation.



**21...♖xd5**

21...♖d1 22 ♖xd1 ♖xd1+ 23 ♔g2 ♖d4 24 ♙xf5 ♖e5 was probably the best hope, but maybe Black was somehow playing for a win?

**22 ♙xd5 ♖xb2**

Having won the exchange back, Black emerges a pawn up, but with serious problems for his king.

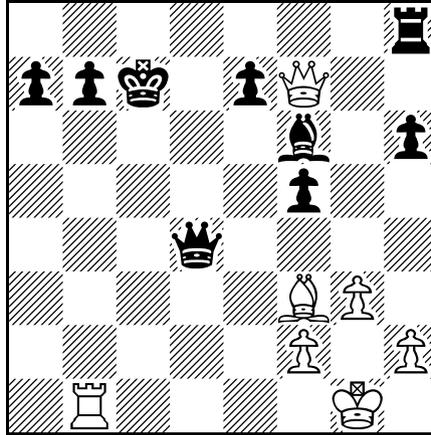
**23 ♙f3**

Clearing the d file for a future ♖d1+. The immediate 23 ♖d1 was obvious and good, and if 23...♙d4 24 ♗xf5.

23...♙c7 24 ♖d1 ♗b5

24...♙d4 25 ♗c4+ nets the bishop.

25 a4 ♗xa4 26 ♖b1 ♗d4



**Exercise:** What is the best way to round off proceedings?

**Answer:** 27 ♗e6! 1-0

Black resigned as 27...b6 allows 28 ♖c1+ ♙b8 29 ♗c6! with mate on b7 or a8. It's ironic that after the ♗xe6 sacrifice, Black was, indeed, cooked on the light squares after all.

### Game 31

**A.Morozevich-A.Minasian**

Istanbul Olympiad 2000

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♙g5 e6

The most natural move. Black decides simple development of the f8-bishop and castling might be the safest.

6...♗a5 is an older variation, but just so you are aware, here is one way to play against it: 7 ♙xf6 exf6 8 cxd5 ♙b4 9 ♗d2 ♙xc3 10 bxc3 ♗xd5 11 ♘e2 0-0 12 ♘f4 ♖e8+ 13 ♙e2 ♗d6 14 0-0 ♙f5 15 ♖fe1 ♖ac8 16 ♙f3 ♖xe1+ 17 ♖xe1 ♘a5 18 ♗e2 ♙e6 19 ♙d5! ♙xd5 20 ♘xd5 ♘c6 and now a lovely tactic, 21 ♘xf6+ and 1-0 in B.Gulko-L.Gonzalez Perez, Las Palmas 1996.