

The Rarest Sacrifice in the Opening: ...Rxf2

By IM Nikolay Minev

It is well known that the weakest square on the board in the initial position is at the King Bishop pawn. For this reason, this square is frequently the focus of mating attacks by various pieces. However, it is very rare for a Rook to be one of the pieces involved in an early attack on f2/f7.

If the sacrifice Rxf7 by White is a relatively rare opportunity in comparison with other pieces, statistics convincingly show that the mirror sacrifice ...Rxf2 by Black is rarer still. It is one of the rarest tactical opportunities in all of chess! The reason is that in opening stage of the game Black has fewer opportunities to open f-file, which is the necessary condition to make this sacrifice possible.

Some typical instructive examples of this extremely rare Rook sacrifice are presented below. They are arranged in two characteristic patterns, either before or after castling by White.

BEFORE CASTLING

A01 B. Larsen – L. Portisch

Siegen (ol) 1970

1.b3 e5 2.Bb2 Nc6 3.c4 Nf6 4.e3 d6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Nf3 Bg7 7.d4 Bf5

But not 7...e4? 8.d5! with advantage to White - Portisch.

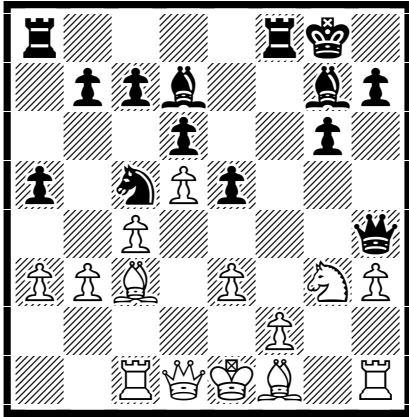
8.d5?!

8.Be2 =

8...Nb4 9.Rc1 a5 10.a3 Na6 11.h3 O-O 12.g4?

More than risky. Now White will not have shelter for his King, and this practically decides the game. 12.Be2! followed by 13.O-O, should be played.

12...Bd7 13.g5 Nh5 14.Ne4 f5! 15.gxf6 Nxf6 16.Nfd2 Nxe4 17.Nxe4 Qh4 18.Ng3 Nc5 19.Bc3



19...Rxf2! 20.Kxf2 Ne4+ 21.Kg1 Qxg3+ 22.Bg2 Qxe3+ 0-1

A26 Dashinimaev - Motylev
USSR 1973

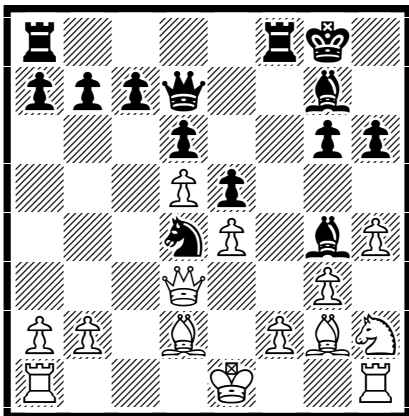
1.Nf3 g6 2.g3 Bg7 3.Bg2 e5 4.d3 d6 5.c4 Nc6 6.Nc3 Nge7 7.Bg5!? h6 8.Bd2 f5 9.h4 Be6 10.Qb3 Qd7 11.e4?!

Better is 11.e3 or 11.O-O.

11...O-O 12.Nd5 fxe4 13.dxe4 Bg4! 14.Nh2 Nxd5 15.cxd5?

15.Nxg4!?

15...Nd4 16.Qd3



16...Rxf2!? 17.Kxf2 Rf8+ 18.Ke1?

Overlooking the surprising tactical point behind the Rook's sacrifice. Instead 8.Nf3!? offers White defensive chances.

18...Qb5!!

If 19.Qxb5 Nc2#!

19.Bf1 Nc2+! 20.Qxc2 Rxf1+! 0-1

For if 21.Rxf1 Qe2#

C43 Dunkle - Schooling

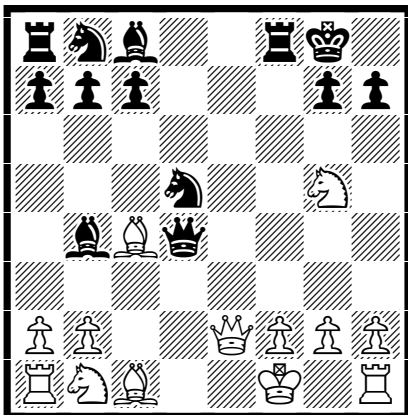
Corr. 1971

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.d4 Nxe4 4.Bd3 d5 5.Nxe5 Bd6 6.c4 O-O 7.cxd5

The theory recommends 7.O-O.

7...Bb4+ 8.Kf1 Qxd5 9.Qe2 Nf6 10.Bc4 Qxd4 11.Nxf7 Nd5 12.Ng5??

Black should play 12.Bxd5 Qxd5 13.Ng5, but his position remains much worse.



12...Rxf2! 0-1

Because of 13.Qxf2 Qd1+ and mate next move.

AFTER CASTLING

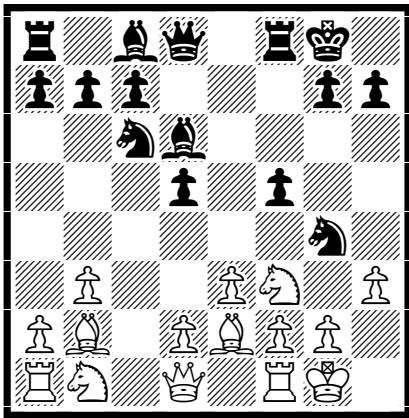
A13 Janovsky – Turczanyi

Corr. 1949/50

1.Nf3 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.b3 d5 4.cxd5?!

This exchange in the center is only in Black's favor.

4...exd5 5.Bb2 Bd6 6.e3 O-O 7.Be2 Nc6 8.O-O Ng4 9.h3 f5!?



A quite original introduction to our tactical idea, the sacrifice of a Rook on f2.

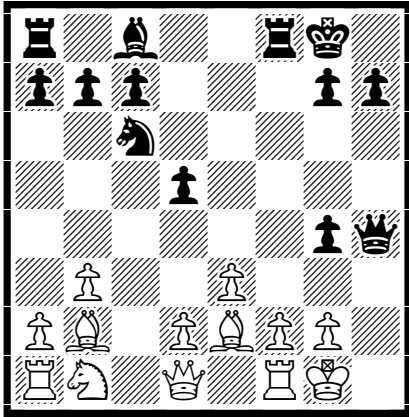
10.hxg4?

Not necessary. Black should play 10.Nc3 or 10.d4, threatening to capture later the Knight.

10...fxg4 11.Nh2

Perhaps 11.Ne1 offers more defensive chances.

11...Bxh2+ 12.Kxh2 Qh4+ 13.Kg1



13...Rxf2!

The point of the whole combination.

14.Rxf2 g3 15.Rf8+

The only move against the mating threat.

15...Kxf8 16.Bf3 Bf5

The threat is 17...Bd3 and inevitable mate.

17.d3 d4 18.e4 Bg4! 0-1

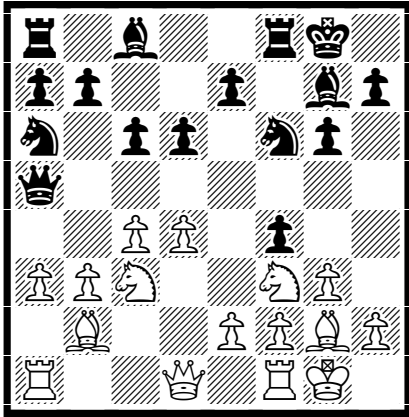
For if 19.Nd2 Qh2+ 20.Kf1 Qh1+ 21.Ke2 Qxg2+ 22.Ke1 Qf2#

A88 **O'Connell – Danner**
Europe (ch team) Batumi 1999

1.d4 f5 2.Nf3 g6 3.g3 Bg7 4.Bg2 Nf6 5.c4 O-O 6.O-O c6 7.b3 d6 8.Bb2 Na6 9.Nc3 Qa5 10.a3

Instead 10.Qd2, followed by 11.Rad1 is considered better.

10...f4!?



An attacking idea introduced by IM Bhend.

11.gxf4 Qh5 12.e4 Bh3 13.Ng5?

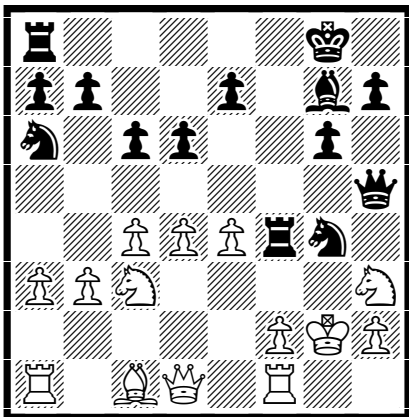
Better is 13.Bxh3!? Qxh3 14.Ng5.

13...Bxg2 14.Kxg2 Ng4! 15.Nh3

If 15.h3 Rxf4! 16.Bc1 Qxg5 17.Bxf4 Ne3+ 18.Kf3 Nxd1 19.Bxg5 Nxc3 20.Bxe7 Bxd4 21.Bxd6 Nc5 with advantage to Black.

15...Rxf4! 16.Bc1

If 16.Nxf4 Qxh2+ 17.Kf3 Rf8! 18.Nce2 Qh3+ 19.Ng3 Nh2+ 20.Ke3 Rxf4!



16...Rxf2+!! 17.Nxf2

Or 17.Rxf2 Qxh3+! 18.Kxh3 Nxf2+ 19.Kg2 Nxd1 20.Nxd1 Bxd4.

17...Qxh2+ 18.Kf3 Rf8+ 19.Ke2

If 19.Kxg4 Qg2+ 20.Kh4 Bf6+ 21.Bg5 Bxg5#

19...Rxf2+ 20.Rxf2

If 20.Ke1 Rxf1+ 21.Kxf1 Qf2#

20...Qxf2+ 0-1

For if 21.Kd3, then 21...Ne5+ 22.dxe5 Nc5 mate, or 21...Nc5+ 22.dxc5 Ne5#.

C45 H. Mesing – G. Forintos
Yugoslavia - Hungary 1968

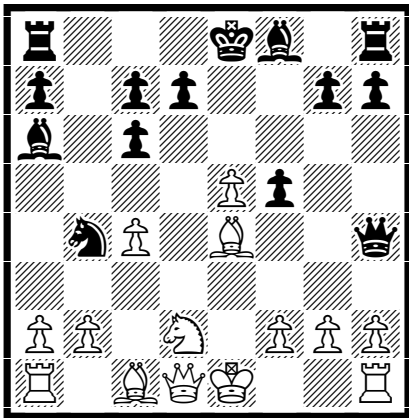
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nxc6 bxc6 6.e5 Nd5 7.Nd2

Most of the opening guides prefer 7.c4 Nb6 8.Bd3.

7...Qh4

7...d6!? (Matanovic), is untested.

8.Bd3 Nb4 9.Be4 Ba6 10.c4 f5!?



11.Bxf5

If 11.exf6 d5!? unclear.

11...Bc5 12.Bxd7+ Ke7 13.O-O Raf8 14.Nf3 Rxf3 15.Qxf3

If 15.gxf3 Rd8

15...Kxd7 16.Qf5+ Ke8 17.Bg5?

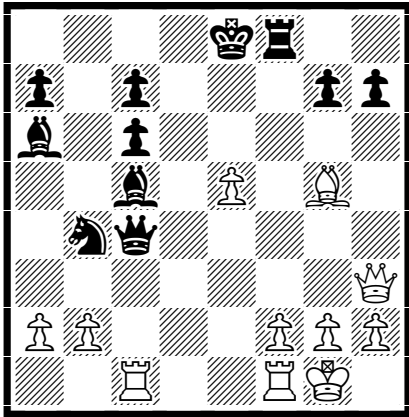
Instead, according to Matanovic, after 17.Rd1! White's counter-play should prevail.

17...Qxc4 18.Rac1

Maybe 18.Rfd1!?

18...Rf8 19.Qh3??

The decisive blunder. Correct is 19.Bf6! and if 19...Qd5, then not 20.Rfd1 Rxf6!, but 20.Rxc5! and wins – Matanovic.



19...Rxf2!! 20.Rxc4 Rf3+! 0-1

For if 21.Rxc5 Rxf1+, or 21.Rf2 Bxf2+ 22.Kh1 Rxh3 23.Rxb4 Rd3 and Black wins.

**1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.Bd3 c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ne2 cxd4 8.cxd4 f6 9.exf6 Qxf6
10.Nf3 Bb4+ 11.Bd2 O-O**

A novelty, instead of 11...Bxd2+ 12.Qxd2 O-O 13.O-O e5 etc.

12.Bxb4?

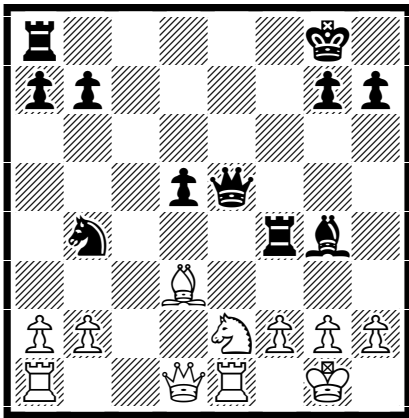
Perhaps 12.O-O is better.

12...Nxb4 13.O-O e5 14.dxe5 Nxe5 15.Nxe5 Qxe5 16.Nd4?

16.a3!?

16...Rf4! 17.Ne2 Bg4! 18.Re1

If 18.f3 Qe3+ 19.Kh1 Rxf3!



18...Rxf2! 0-1

For if 19.Kxf2 Rf8+ 20.Kg1 Qe3+ 21.Kh1 Nxd3 and Black wins.