

*Research notes from the unpublished archives of IM Nikolay Minev*

## **The Rare Rxf7! Sacrifice in the Opening**

Everybody knows that in the opening stage of the game, the weakest spot in Black's position is the f7-pawn. Sacrifices on that square are feasible in any opening and with any piece. However, if the history and the most recent practice show hundreds possibilities for tactical blows with Knights, Bishops and even Queens, a sacrifice of the Rook at f7 in the first twenty moves is a quite rare occurrence. As a matter of fact, Rxf7 in the opening is so rare – and at the same time so impressive and surprising – that we usually memorize these patterns once and for all.

Here are some of my favorite examples. They are presented in the following groupings:

**Before Castling by Black**

**After Castling by Black: With a Rook Protecting f7**

**After Castling by Black: With f7 Protected Only by the King**

### **Before Castling by Black**

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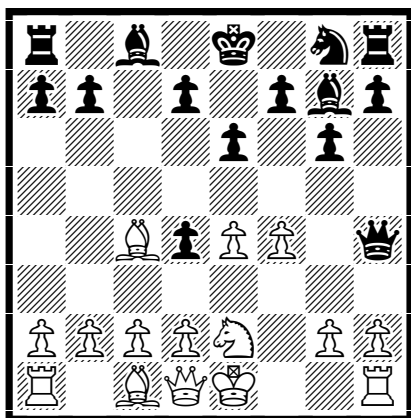
**B23 N. Gaprindashvili – A. Blagidze**  
Tbilisi 1963

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**1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.f4 g6 4.Bb5!?**

Usual is 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Bc4.

**4...Nd4 5.Bc4 Bg7 6.Nge2 e6 7.Nxd4 cxd4 8.Ne2 Qh4+**



**9.Ng3!?**

A bold decision! Sacrificing the f4-pawn White is hopping for attacking chances along the open f-file, while 9.g3 Qh3 creates some problems.

### 9...Qxf4

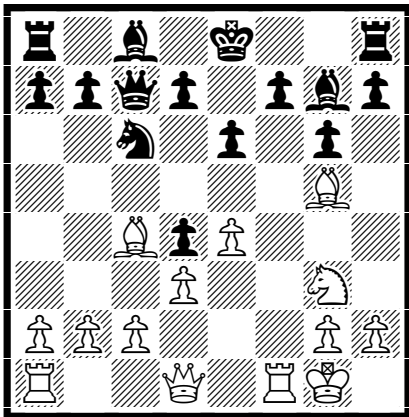
If 9...Nf6 or 9...Nh6, then not 10.O-O? Ng4, but 10.Qf3! with better game.

### 10.d3 Qc7?!

Perhaps 10...Qh4 offered better resistance.

### 11.O-O Ne7 12.Bg5 Nc6?

This overlooks White's attractive tactical possibility. Necessary was 12...d6.



### 13.Nh5! gxh5 14.Rxf7!! Qe5

If 14...Kxf7 15.Qxh5+ Kg8 (15...Kf8 16.Rf1+) 16.Qe8+ Bf8 17.Rf1 and wins.

### 15.Rf5! 1-0

Because of 15...exf5 16.Qxh5+ Kf8 17.Qf7#

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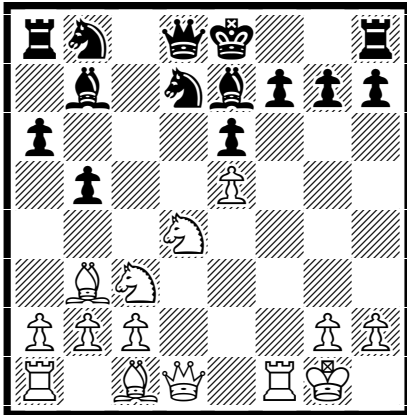
## B87 C. van den Berg – Dahl

Ybbs 1968

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1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 d6 3.Nge2 Nf6 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Be7 8.O-O b5 9.f4 Bb7 10.e5!? dxe5 11.fxe5 Nfd7?

Critical is 11...Bc5!? with a sharp position that is still not clear.



**12.Rxf7!!**

The same idea is realized two moves later in Silva-Macles, Strasbourg 1972: 12.Be3 Nxe5? 13.Qh5 Ng6 14.Rxf7!! Qd6 (14...Kxf7 15.Nxe6 Qd6 16.Rf1+ Ke8 17.Nxg7+ Kd8 18.Rd1 and wins) 15.Nxe6 Nd7 16.Nxg7+ Kd8 17.Rd1 Qe5 18.Qxe5 Ngxe5 19.Bb6+ 1-0

**12...Kxf7**

Or 12...Bc5 13.Rxg7 Nxe5 14.Rxb7 or, maybe even stronger, 14.Be3

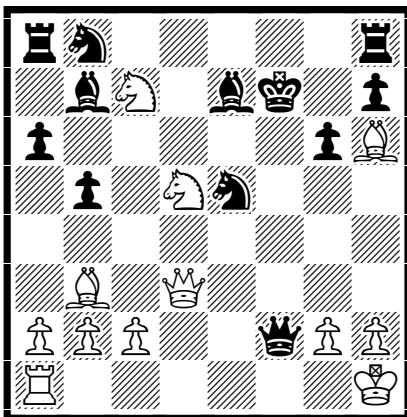
**13.Nxe6! Qb6+ 14.Kh1 g6**

If 14...Qxe6, then 15.Qf1+! first, and after that 16.Bxe6.

**15.Nd5! Qf2**

Or 15...Qc6 16.Qf3+! and wins.

**16.Bh6 Nxe5 17.Nec7 Nc4 18.Qd3! Ne5**



## 19.Qd4??

Searching for spectacular win, White missed 19.Nxe7+ Kxe7 20.Bg5+ Kf8 21.Qd6+ Kg7 22.Qxe5+ and mate next move.

**19...Qxd4 20.Rf1+ Nf3! 21.Rxf3+ (Time) 1-0**

However, 21...Bf6! is unclear!

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## B01 R. Mainka - M. Olbrich

Wurzburg 1997

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**1.e4 d5 2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3 Qa5 4.d4 Nf6 5.Nf3 c6 6.Bc4 Bf5 7.Bd2 e6 8.Nh4 Bg4 9.f3 Bh5 10.g4 Qd8?!**

Black wins a pawn, but fails well behind in the development, which is always a risky business in any opening!

## 11.Ng2

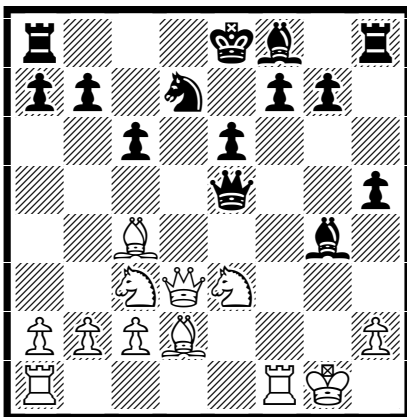
If 11.gxh5 Qxd4 with a double attack on c4 and h4.

**11...Qxd4 12.Qe2 Nxc4!**

Best at this juncture. In case of 12...Bg6 13.O-O-O Black's position is ready to collapse.

**13.fxg4 Bxg4 14.Qd3 Qe5+ 15.Ne3 Nd7 16.O-O h5?**

Black is careless about the time and the notorious f7-pawn. Correct was 16...Nc5 17.Nxc4 Nxd3 18.Nxe5 Nxe5 19.Bb3 Bc5+ unclear.



### 17.Rxf7! O-O-O

If 17...Kxf7 18.Qxd7+ Kg8 19.Nxg4 Bc5+ 20.Kh1 hxg4 21.Bxe6+ Kh7 22.Re1 and White wins. For example 22...Qd6 23.Re8+ Rxe8 24.Qxe8+ Qf8 25.Be6+ Kh7 26.Qh5#.

### 18.Nxg4 hxg4 19.Bf4 1-0

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## D18 Sjoberg – Rubene

Stockholm 1999/2000

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 dxc4 5.a4 Bf5 6.e3 e6 7.Bxc4 Bb4 8.O-O Nbd7 9.Qb3 a5 10.Nh4 Bg4 11.f3 Nd5

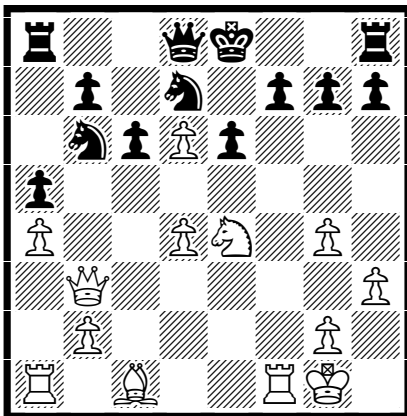
11...Bh5!?

12.fxg4 Qxh4 13.e4 Bd6 14.h3 N5b6 15.e5 Nxc4 16.Ne4! Qd8

If 16...Bxe5? 17.dxe5 Nxe5 18.Bg5, or 16...Be7 17.Qxc4 h5 18.Bg5! Bxg5 19.Nd6+ Kd8 20.Rxf7 Rf8 21.Qxe6 Rxf7 22.Qe8+ Kc7 23.Qxa8 with a strong attack.

17.exd6 Ncb6

Also unsatisfactory is 17...Ndb6 18.Bg5 Qd7 19.Rac1.



18.Rxf7! Nd5

If 18...Kxf7 19.Ng5+ and wins.

## 19.Rxg7 1-0

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### B40 Martius – Vathauer

West Germany 1954

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1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Bb4?! 6.e5 Nd5 7.Bd2

One of oldest examples of this now modern line, which is used instead of 7.Qg4.

7...Bxc3

It is doubtful that 7...Nxc3 8.bxc3 Ba5 offers any better possibilities for Black.

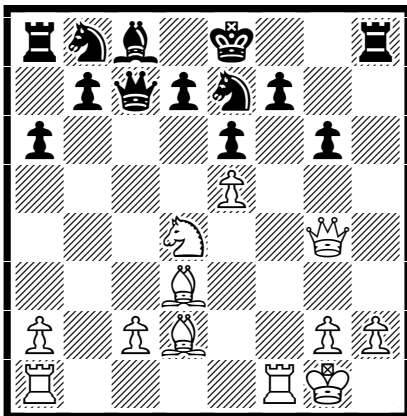
8.bxc3 Qc7 9.f4 a6 10.Bd3 Nxc3 11.Qg4 g6

The alternatives 11...O-O and 11...Kf8 are no better remedy against the forthcoming White attack.

12.O-O Nd5 13.f5! Ne7

If 13...gxf5, then 14.Qg7 is decisive.

14.fxg6 hxg6



15.Rxf7! Kxf7

If 15...Qxe5 16.Rxe7+! Kxe7 17.Bg5+ Kf8 18.Rf1+ Kg8 19.h3 (or 19.h4) and Black is lost.

**16.Bxg6+! Nxg6 17.Rf1+ Kg7 18.Rf6 1-0**

In all examples till now Black King is posted at its original square and also is the only defender of the f7-pawn. Next, we will see examples where the Black King is not at his original square or has lost its right of castling, as the following attractive game.

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**B72 B. Zlotnik – Gik**

USSR 1968

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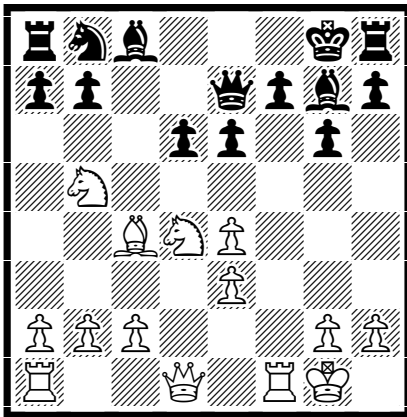
**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.Bc4 Ng4?**

Correct is 7...O-O.

**8.Bb5+! Kf8**

Only move! If 8...Bd7? 9.Qxg4!

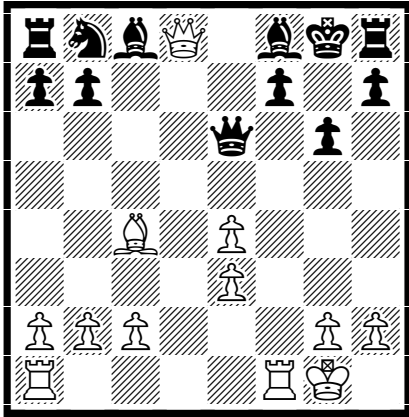
**9.O-O! Nxe3 10.fxe3 e6 11.Bc4 Qe7 12.Ncb5! Kg8**



**13.Nxd6! Qxd6 14.Nxe6 Qxe6**

Or 14...Qxd1 15.Raxd1 Bxe6 16.Rd8+ Bf8 17.Bxe6 and White wins.

**15.Qd8+ Bf8**



**16.Rxf7!!**

Fantastic!

**16...Kxf7 17.Qxc8!**

Instead 17.Bxe6+ Bxe6 18.Rf1+ also wins, but the continuation in the game is more attractive.

**17...Qxc4 18.Qxc4+ Kg7 19.Qd4+ 1-0**

For if 19...Kg8 20.Qd5+ Kg7 21.Qxb7+ and wins.

**A15 Krstic – Pete**  
Yugoslavia 1957

**1.c4 Nf6 2.f4 d5 3.cxd5 Nxd5 4.g3 Nc6**

Probably 4...c5 is better.

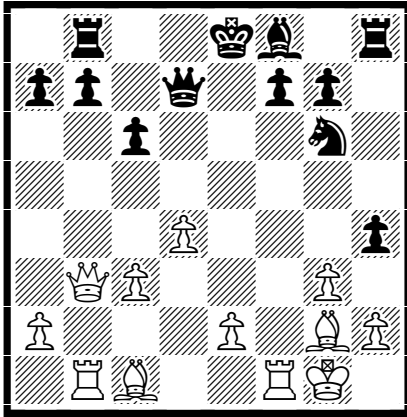
**5.Nf3 Bg4 6.Bg2 Bxf3 7.Bxf3 e5 8.fxe5 Nxe5 9.Bg2 Qd7 10.Nc3 Nxc3 11.bxc3 c6  
12.O-O h5?! 13.d4 Ng6 14.Qb3! h4?**

14...Bd6!?

**15.Rb1! Rb8**

Black is already lost. If 15...O-O-O 16.Bh3! or 15...b6 16.Rxf7!





**16.Rxf7!! 1-0**

For if 16...Qxf7 17.Bxc6+ Ke7 18.Ba3+.

**B03 M. Tal – Amateur**

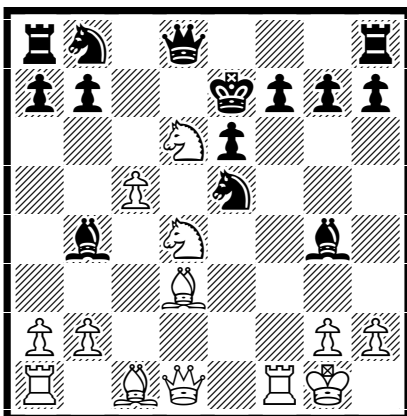
England (Simul) 1974

**1.e4 Nf6 2.e5 Nd5 3.d4 d6 4.c4 Nb6 5.f4 dxe5 6.fxe5 Bf5 7.Nc3 e6 8.Nf3 Bb4?! 9.Bd3 Bg4? 10.O-O c5?**

After 10...Bxf3 11.Qxf3 Qxdd4+ 12.Be3! White wins, while in case of 10...Nc6 11.Be3 White retains the advantage.

**11.Ne4 cxd4 12.c5 N6d7 13.Nd6+ Ke7? 14.Nxd4 Nxe5**

If 14...Bxd1 15.Rxf7#



**15.Qxg4! Bxc5**

If 15...Nxg4 16.Rxf7#

**16.Rxf7+! 1-0**

For if 16...Kxd6 17.Qxe6#, or 16...Nxf7 17.Qxe6+ Kf8 18.Qxf7#

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**B18 Mileika - Nevitsky**  
Riga 1963

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**1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bf5 5.Ng3 Bg6 6.Nf3 Qc7?!**

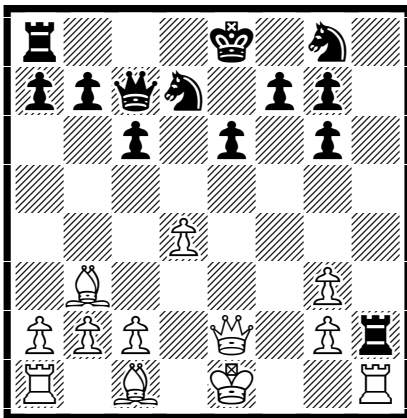
Nowadays 6...Nd7 is considered the obligatory reply.

**7.Ne5 Nd7 8.Nxg6 hxg6 9.Bc4 e6 10.Qe2 Bd6 11.Bb3!?**

Setting a clever hidden trap.

**11...Bxg3?! 12.fxg3 Rxh2?**

Falling into the trap!



**13.O-O!! Rh8 14.Rxf7!**

After this blow the game is practically decided.

14...O-O-O 15.Bxe6 Ngf6 16.Bf4 Qa5 17.Qe5! Qxe5 18.dxe5 Nd5 19.Bg5 Rhe8  
20.Bh3 1-0

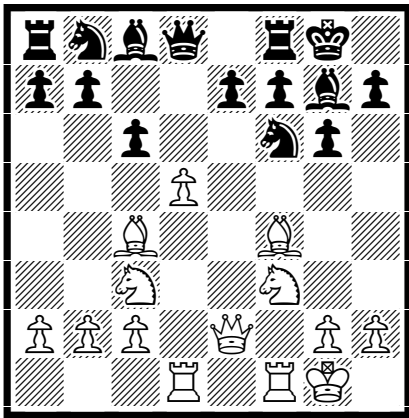
### After Castling by Black: With a Rook Protecting f7

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**B00 A. Kapengut – Pavlenko**  
Riga 1975

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1.e4 Nc6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.d5 Nb8?! 5.Bf4 Nf6 6.Bc4 g6 7.f3! exf3 8.Nxf3 Bg7  
9.O-O O-O 10.Qe2 c6 11.Rad1!!

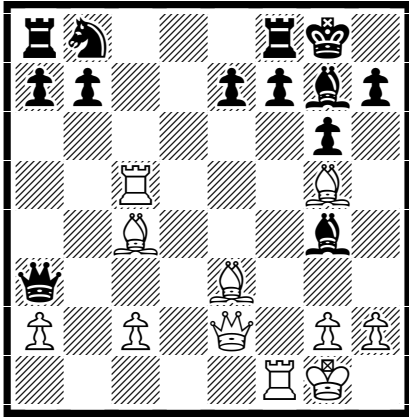


**11...cxd5**

If 11...Qb6+12.Kh1 Qxb2 13.d6! and White wins in all variations.

**12.Nxd5 Nxd5 13.Rxd5 Qb6+ 14.Be3 Qxb2 15.Rb5 Qc3 16.Rc5! Qa3 17.Ng5 Bg4**

If 17...Bf5 18.Nxf7! Na6 19.Rcxf5! gxf5 20.Rxf5 and Black has no defense against the threat 21.Ne5+ Kh8 22.Nxg6+ hxg6 23.Rh5+!



### 18.Rxf7!! Rxf7

Black cannot take the Queen 18...Bxe2 because of 19.Rxf8+ Kxf8 20.Rc8 mate. No better is 18...Qxc5 19.Rxf8+ Kxf8 20.Qf2+ Qf5 21.Ne6+ and Black loses his Queen. Finally, if 18...Nd7 19.Rxe7+ Kh8 20.Rxg7! Kxg7 (20...Nf6 21.R5c7!) 21.Bd4+ Nf6 (21...Kh6 22.Nf7+ Rxf7 23.Qd2+) 22.Bxf6+ and mate follows.

### 19.Qf2 Bf5

Also 19...Bf6 does not help, for if 20.Nxf7 Nd7 21.Rc7 etc.

### 20.Rc8+ Bf8 21.Bxf7+ Kg7 22.Bd4+ 1-0

## B45 Melnikov – Luchin

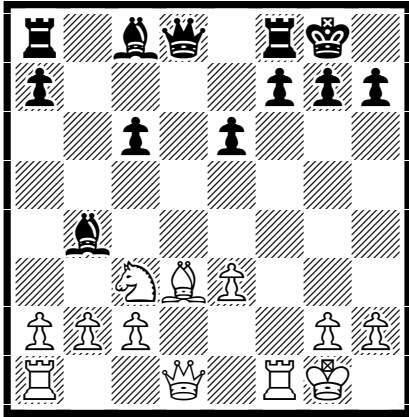
USSR 1967

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6 6.Be3 Bb4 7.Bd3 d5 8.exd5 Nxd5 9.Nxc6 Nxe3?!

Correct is 9...bxc6 =.

### 10.fxe3 bxc6 11.O-O O-O?

If you are not familiar with the emerging tactical pattern shown on the diagram below, it is very easy to overlook the surprising blow that follows. Black should play 11...Bxc3 12.bxc3 Qc7.



**12.Rxf7!! Kxf7**

If 12...Rxf7 13.Bxh7+ winning the Queen.

**13.Qh5+ Ke7 14.Qh4+ Kd7 15.Qxb4 Qe7**

If 15...Kc7 16.Rd1. The exposed King makes Black's position practically untenable.

**16.Qd4+ Kc7 17.Qe5+ Kb7 18.Be4! Qf6 19.Qb5+ 1-0**

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**B93 J. Kupper – F. Olafsson**

Zurich 1959

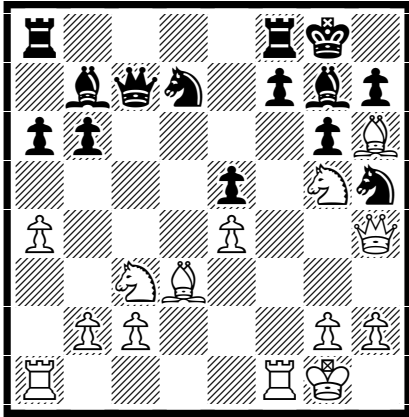
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**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f4 Qc7 7.Bd3 e5**

Many players prefer 7...e6, transposing into the Scheveningen Variation.

**8.Nf3 Nbd7 9.a4 b6 10.O-O Bb7 11.Qe1 g6 12.Qh4 Bg7 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.Bh6 O-O 15.Ng5 Nh5?**

Correct is 15...Rae8, intending 16...Nh5, but, in my opinion, after 16.g4! followed eventually by Rf3-Rh3, White keeps strong attacking chances.



**16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.Rxf7+! Kg8**

If 17...Rxf7 18.Ne6+ winning the Queen.

**18.Rg7+! Kh8 19.Rxh7+ Kg8 20.Rg7+! 1-0**

For if 20...Kh8 21.Rxg6.

**C65 Kozlov - Gorshkov**

Moscow 1955

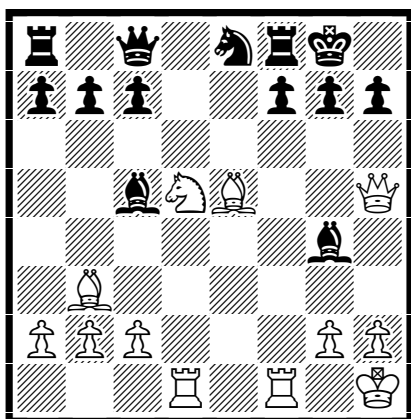
*Notes by P.H. Clarke*

**1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 Be7 4.Bc4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nxe4 6.Ne5 Nd6 7.Bb3 Nc6 8.d4 O-O  
9.O-O Nxe5? 10.dxe5 Ne8 11.Bxf4 d6 12.Qh5 dxe5**

Relatively better is 12...Be6.

**13.Bxe5 Be6 14.Rad1 Qc8 15.Nd5! Bc5+ 16.Kh1 Bg4**

The attempt to drive White back by 16...c6 meets an overwhelming refutation in 17.Rf4!  
cxd5 18.Rh4 h6 19.Bxg7!



### 17.Rxf7!!

Brilliant! All White's major pieces are en prise, but none may be taken, for example:  
 17...Bxh5 (or 17...Bxd1) 18.Ne7+ Bxe7 19.Rxg7+ Kh8 20.Rg8#, or 17...Rxf7 18.Ne7+ Bxe7 (18...Kh8 19.Qxf7 Bf6 20.Nxc8) 19.Qxf7+ Kh8 20.Qg8#

### 17...Be6 18.Rdf1 c6

The Rook is still taboo, e.g. 18...Rxf7 19.Rxf7 c6 (19...Bxf7 20.Ne7+!) 20.Ne7+ Bxe7 21.Rxe7 Bxb3 22.axb3, and Black is defenseless against the threat of Qf7+.

### 19.Rxf8+ Bxf8 20.Bxg7! cxd5

Black has three ways of taking the Bishop, yet none is good: 20...Nxg7 21.Nf6+, or 20...Bxg7 21.Ne7+, or 20...Kxg7 21.Qg5+.

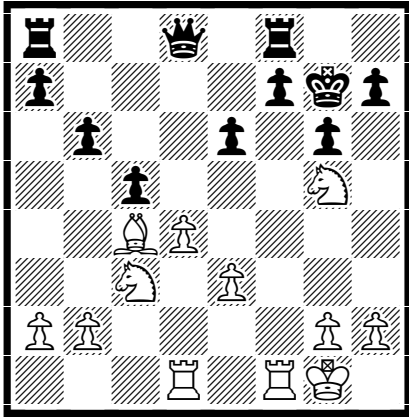
### 21.Bxf8 Qc7 22.Bxd5 Bxd5 23.Qxd5+ Kh8 24.Bh6 Nd6 25.Bf4 1-0

**D97 H. Kmoch – L. Prins**  
 Amsterdam 1940

**1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Qb3 dxc4 6.Qxc4 O-O 7.e4 b6?!**

Probably the worst of many possible answers.

**8.e5 Be6? 9.exf6! Bxc4 10.fxg7 Kxg7 11.Bxc4 Nc6 12.Be3 Nb4 13.O-O Nc2 14.Rad1 Nxe3 15.fxe3 c5 16.Ng5 e6**



**17.Rxf7+! 1-0**

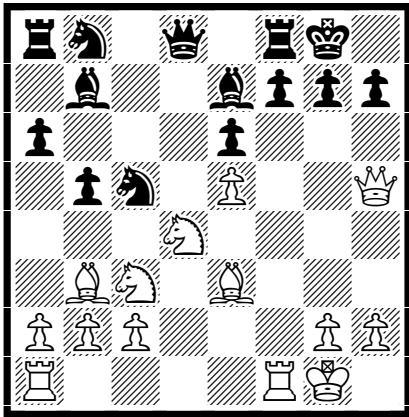
A simple and pattern that we have already seen in the game Kupper – Olafsson.

**B87 Y. Bednarski – K. Pytel**

Lublin 1972

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 b5 8.O-O Be7 9.f4  
O-O 10.e5 dx5 11.fxe5 Nfd7 12.Qh5 Nc5 13.Be3 Bb7?**

Necessary was 13...Nxb3.



**14.Rxf7!! Rxf7 15.Nxe6 Nxb3 16.Nxd8 g6 17.Qd1 Nxa1 18.Nxb7 Nc6 19.Nd6 Rd8  
20.Bb6 1-0**



If 20...Rd7 21.e6!

### After Castling by Black: With f7 Protected Only by the King

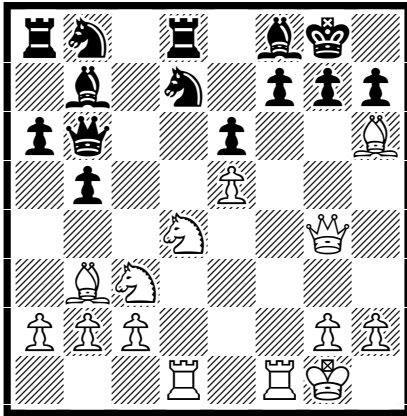
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**B87 K. Honfi – N. Padevski**

Cacak (Yugoslavia) 1969

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1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6 6.Bc4 a6 7.Bb3 Be7 8.f4 O-O 9.O-O  
b5 10.e5 dxe5 11.fxe5 Nfd7 12.Bf4 Bb7 13.Qg4 Qb6 14.Rad1 Rd8 15.Bh6 Bf8



16.Rxf7! Kxf7 17.Bxe6+ Ke8 18.Bxg7 Rc8 19.Bxf8 Kxf8 20.Rf1+ 1-0

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**B86 Seppelt – Jorg**

Bad Meinberg 1961

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1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Be7 8.O-O O-O  
9.Be3 Qc7 10.f4 Re8 11.Qf3 b5 12.e5 Bb7 13.Qg3 dxe5 14.fxe5 Nfd7 15.Rxf7 Kxf7  
16.Nxe6 Qxe5 17.Ng5+ 1-0

The next game is one of my favorites with the pattern.

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**A34 F. Koeberl - A. Ozsvath**  
Budapest 1955

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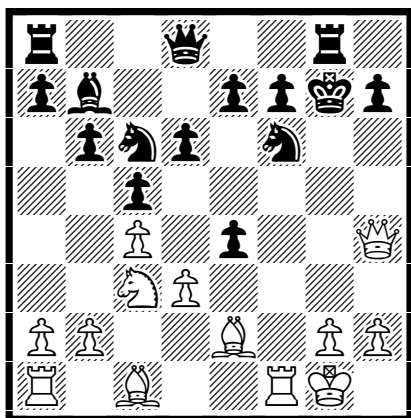
**1.c4 Nf6 2.Nc3 g6 3.e4 d6 4.Be2 Bg7 5.f4!? O-O 6.Nf3 c5 7.O-O Nc6 8.d3 b6?!**

The wrong plan!. Better is 8...a6 and 9...Rb8, or 8...Ne8, intending Nc7-Ne6.

**9.Qe1 Bb7 10.f5! gxf5**

Otherwise 11.Qh4, 12.Bh6 and 15.Ng5 and White's attack is irresistible.

**11.Nh4! fxe4 12.Nf5 Kh8 13.Nxg7 Kxg7 14.Qh4 Rg8**



**15.Nd5! Nxd5 16.Rxf7+!! Kxf7 17.Qxh7+ Ke6**

If 17...Rg7 18.Bh5+

**18.Qh3+ Ke5**

Or 18...Kf7 19.cxd5 Nd4 20.Qh7+ Kf6 (20...Rg7 21.Bh5+) 21.Qh4+ Kf7 22.Bh5+ Rg6 23.Qxe4 Qg8 24.Bg5 and White wins.

**19.cxd5 Kxd5 20.dxe4+ Ke5**

If 20...Kxe4 21.Bd3+.

**21.Qf5+ 1-0**

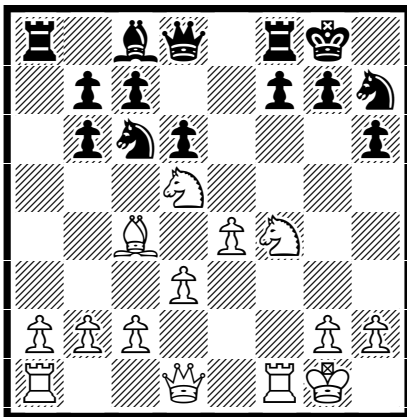
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**C26 G. Barcza - Tibor**  
Budapest 1938

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**1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Bc5 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.d3 h6?! 5.Be3 Bb6 6.Nge2 d6 7.O-O O-O 8.Bxb6 axb6  
9.f4 exf4 10.Nxf4 Nc6 11.Ncd5 Nh7?**

Better is 11...Nxd5 12.Bxd5 Ne7.



**12.Ng6! Re8**

If 12...fxg6 13.Ne7+ Kh8 14.Nxg6#

**13.Rxf7! Kxf7 14.Qh5! Be6 15.Nge7+ Kf8 16.Rf1+ Nf6 17.Rxf6+ gxf6 18.Qxh6+ Kf7  
19.Qxf6# 1-0**

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**C29 E. Znosko Borovski - Amateur**  
Paris (simul.) 1948

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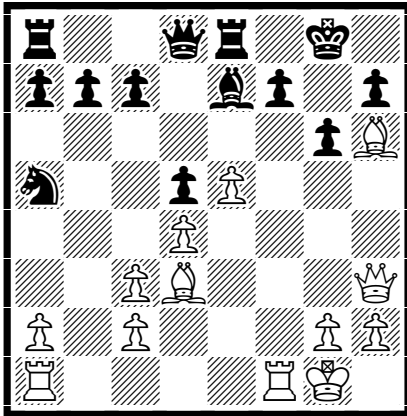
**1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.f4 d5 4.fxe5 Nxe4 5.Nf3 Bg4?!**

5...Be7!?, 5...Bc5!? 6.d4 Bb4.

**6.Qe2! Nxc3 7.bxc3**

Spielmann recommended 7.dxc3, followed by Bf4 and long castling, and was successful in practice with this plan.

**7...Bxf3?! 8.Qxf3 Nc6 9.d4 Be7 10.Bd3 O-O 11.O-O Na5 12.Qh3 g6 13.Bh6 Re8**



**14.Rxf7! Kxf7 15.Rf1+ Kg8 16.Qe6 Kh8 17.Bg7+! Kxg7 18.Rf7 Kh6 19.Rxh7+ Kg5 20.Qxg6+ 1-0**