

The Exchange Grunfeld: An old sacrifice revived

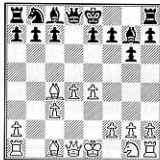
by Malcolm Pein

Luke McShane has taken up the Grunfeld Defence as one of his main defences to 1 d4. As an aficionado of the opening myself, I took a particular interest in his games as I reported his great run of success in my *Daily Telegraph* columns this year. In general Luke has not been getting great positions with the opening and he lost twice with it at Malmo or rather once at Malmo and once at Copenhagen because the tournament moved countries halfway through.

He was defeated by the Great Dane Peter Heine-Nielsen in the first round who thus got a measure of revenge for his 20-move defeat at Hastings this year (see April *CHESS* p.4). Then he lost to another Dane, Curt Hansen in the last round. In both games the position on the board was the same after move seven-teen.

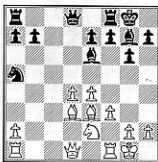
The line is one of the sharpest in the Exchange Variation and takes the theory back to the fifties before anyone had thought of playing 7 d3 and routinely went 7 e4 and 8 e2. It was only much later that players realised that 7 d3 and 8 b1 was a strong idea or 8 e3 and Black suffered consistently until his defences were rebuilt to such an extent that players began to re-examine 7 e4.

1 d4 e6 2 e4 g6 3 e3 d5 4 exd5
e5 5 e4 e3 6 bxc3 e7 7 e4



The main line of 7 e4 runs 7 ... e5 8 e2 e6 9 e3 0-0 10 0-0 (10 e1 and 11 h4 has also been tried) and now Black always used to play 10 ... e4 or 10 ... e7 11 e1 e8 which is attributed to Smyslov. In view of what follows a lot of players including Peter Svidler moved to 10 ... d7 and it was interesting that Ivanchuk chose to play this move against Heine Nielsen at Malmo and drew.

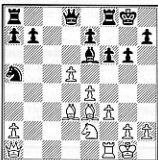
After the older line 10...e4g4 the pressure on d4 is at a peak 11 f3 e5 and the trail splits again between Karpov's 12 e4f7+ which he used to great effect against Garry Kasparov in their title match at Seville in 1987 or the more popular 12 e3 exd4 13 exd4 e6



Now White is pretty much forced to sacrifice a pawn with 14 e1, but that has been analysed out to equality, or sac the exchange with 14 d5 e4 15 e4.

For the exchange White has threats on the long diagonal but note that Black's e6 is indirectly protected because of the pin along the d file. Also Black has retained his queenside pawn majority and until recently it was thought the line gave White nothing because in many cases Black could even allow e6 x f8 and just play the position, having defused the attack by returning the material.

It seems odd that in the tabiya position after 15 ... f6



White has eight different lines at his disposal:

16 d2, 16 e1, 16 b1, 16 b1, 16 d4 or 16 h6 and 17 d4, or 17 f4

...yet, 16 h6 followed by the unassuming and prophylactic 17 h1 is looking the most dangerous at present and so that is what we will concentrate on.

I first noticed there may be some life in this line last September after seeing a game between Russian GM Andrei Kharlov and David Sands who was playing for Barbican in the European Club Cup.

I did not find a forced win for White but it seemed too dangerous and in practice very hard to defend for Black. This conclusion was later born out by the game Heine-Nielsen v McShane. Fritz reckons the position is a draw but a strong human player appreciates that Black has huge difficulties in practice if White slowly improves his position.

The amazing sacrificial idea of 21 e6 appears to have been hidden for over thirty years. It was first played in a game between Bannik and Novotelov at a team tournament in Tbilisi in 1951. Perhaps because White went wrong and lost quickly, the idea was ignored. Larry Christiansen discovered it independently and lost quickly with it to Viktor Korchnoi in 1987 and indeed I wonder if Viktor's defence might not be a better try for Black than the main line. Of course the 1951 game is not in ChessBase although Korchnoi's game is.

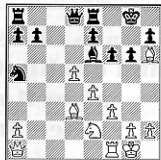
The more recent games were played by GMs Andrei Kharlov and Mikhail Kobaliya who were on Garry Kasparov's analytical team for his title match against Vladimir Kramnik in London in 2000. Perhaps the world number one had a hand in this.

21 e6 had never appeared in books on the Grunfeld, starting with Botvinnik and Estrin, then Bill Hartston or my book on the Exchange Variation for Batsford in 1979. More recently Davies, Rowson and Lalic were all ignorant of it as well.

So let's see the stem game Kharlov-Sands:

Andrei Kharlov (2609) White
David Sands (2246) Black
European Club Cup, Halkidiki 2002

1 d4 e6 2 e4 g6 3 e3 d5 4 exd5
e5 5 e4 e3 6 bxc3 e7 7 e4
0-0 8 e2 e5 9 0-0 e6 10 e3 e4
11 f3 e5 12 e3 exd4 13 exd4 e6
14 d5 e4 15 e4 f6 16 h6 e8



17 h1

17 ... ♖c8

This seems the most accurate move because it forces the ♖c2 to go to f4.

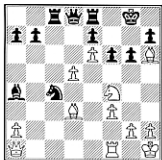
17 ... ♔d7 18 e5 ♖c8 is Nielsen-McShane below.

18 ♔f4 ♔d7 19 e5 ♖e4

19 ... e6 20 dxe6 ♔xe6 21 ♔b5 f5 22 ♔xe8 ♖xe8 23 ♖d4±

20 e6 ♔a4

20 ... ♔e5!? has been tried against Nielsen but White was better after 21 exd7 ♖xd7 22 ♖b1 ♔xd3 23 ♖xd3 e5 24 ♔e2.

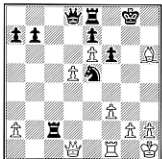


21 ♔xg6!! hxg6 22 ♔xg6 ♔e5 23 ♔e4 ♔e2

The main response but Korchnoi's typically robust 23 ... ♖a5 deserves attention as well, see below.

24 ♔xe2 ♖xe2 25 ♖d1

Tricky stuff, the queen is on the way to g7.



25 ... ♖c5

a) 25 ... ♖h7

a1) 26 ♖xc2+?! ♖hx6 27 f4 ♔g6 28 ♖f5 (the only move is 28 ♖b3) 28 ... ♖h8 29 g3 ♖a5 30 ♔d1 ♖xa2+ and 0-1 in 37 moves Bannik-Novotelnov, Tbilisi 1951;

a2) 26 f4! This is the big improvement over the stem game 26 ... ♖hx6 27 fxe5! C.Hansen-L.McShane, Malmö 2003, see below;

b) 25 ... ♖c7 26 f4

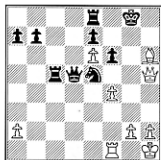
b1) 26 ... ♖h7 27 fxe5 (27 ♔g5 fxe5 28 ♖h5+ ♖g7 29 fxe5 ♖f8 and White must give a perpetual) 27 ... ♖hx6 28 exf6 looks like another of those positions that Black will struggle with in practice;

b2) 26 ... ♖c1?! 27 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 28 ♖xc1 ♔g4 29 h3! ♔hx6 30 g4 ♔d8 31 ♖c7 ♖f8 32 ♔d7!± and White won in Kobalija-Zakharstov St Petersburg 2001.

26 f4 ♖xd5

Unfortunately 26 ... ♖xd5 27 ♖h5 ♔h7 28 fxe5 ♖xe5 29 ♔g5+ ♖g8 30 ♖g6+ ♖h8 31 ♔d2 blocks the d file and prepares the decisive entry of the ♖f1 via f3 or f4.

27 ♖h5



27 ... ♖xe6

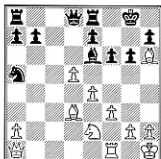
27 ... ♖c2 28 ♖g1 ♖xe6 29 ♖xe8+ ♖h7 30 ♖f8 ♖g4 31 fxe5 ♖c8 32 ♖xe7+ ♖hx6 33 exf6 wins, as in Van Wely-Kovchan, Aeroflot Open 2003.

28 ♖xe8+ ♖h7 29 fxe5 ♖hx6 30 exf6 ♖xf6 1-0

31 ♖xf6 is check but Black was lost anyway.

Then the line was taken up, among others, by the Hastings Premier winner Peter Heine Nielsen and we move on to the Malmö tournament 2003. Here, in the first round, the Danish grandmaster was paired against McShane with the White pieces and out to get his revenge for that horrible defeat at Hastings...

Peter Heine-Nielsen (2625) White
Luke McShane (2592) Black
11th Sigeman & Co, Malmö 2003



17 ... ♔d7

Luke was probably unfamiliar with the ancient 17 ♔h1 and does not find the best response. In general Black does not retreat his ♔d7 until he has to and 17 ... ♖c8, as Luke played later in the tournament, is critical.

18 e5 ♖e8 19 ♔g3!

19 ♔f4 ♔e4 20 e6 ♔a4 21 ♔xg6 would transpose to the main line but this is stronger.

19 ... ♔e4

19 ... ♖e7 20 exf6 ♖c3 21 ♔e4 ♖xa1 22 ♖xa1 and White has only one pawn

for the exchange in the endgame but threatens 23 d6 and 23 ♔g5. I would prefer White here.

a) 22 ... ♔f5 23 d6 ♔xe4 24 ♔xe4 exd6 (24 ... exf6 25 d7+) 25 ♔d5+ ♖h8 26 ♔g7 mate;

b) 22 ... ♔e4 23 ♔g5;

c) 22 ... ♔f7 23 fxe7 ♖xe7 24 ♔g5+ ♖f8 25 ♔d6.

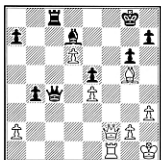
20 ♔xe4 ♖xe4 21 ♔e4 ♖b6 22 ♔d1!

A strong move preventing the exchange of queens on d4. Now Black has to return the exchange and suffer long term pressure on the dark squares

22 ... ♔xe4 23 fxe4 fxe5 24 ♖xe5 ♖f6 25 ♖g3 e6 26 d6 e5 27 h3 b5 28 ♔g5 ♖e6 29 ♔e7 ♖c8 30 ♔f1

All Black can do is push the queen-side pawns and hope for the best because it's a hopeless task defending the kingside.

30 ... ♔e4 31 ♖f2 b4 32 ♔g5



32 ... ♔b5?

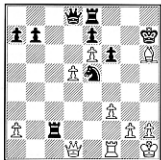
32 ... h5 33 ♔h2! a5 (33 ... ♖e6 34 ♖xa7 ♖c2 35 ♖c3 ♖xa2 36 ♖f3 ♖c8 37 ♔d8! ♔f5 38 ♔e7 ♔d7 39 ♖g3 ♔h7 40 ♖f6 ♖g8 41 ♔f8 ♖c4 42 ♖g5) 34 ♔d8 ♔xd8 35 ♖f6 wins.

33 d7! ♔xd7 34 ♔h6

Threatening ♖f8+ and mate.
34 ... ♔f5 35 exf5 ♖f7 36 f6 a5 37 ♖b6 ♖a8 and Black lost on time.

After his problems against Heine-Nielsen, McShane varied in the last round against Curt Hansen and played the recommended line—but it is flawed. After a forcing sequence a position is reached in which White has given up a rook to smash the Black king's defences and establish two passed pawns on the sixth rank.

Curt Hansen (2610) White
Luke McShane (2592) Black
11th Sigeman & Co, Malmö 2003



26 f4! ♖xh6 27 fxe5!

Not 27 ♖xc2+ ♕g6, transposing into the stem game, Bannik- Novotel'nov.

27 ... ♖c4

And this is where any theory had ended with the computer-like assumption that the game is a draw by perpetual but I had already decided this was too dangerous. Hansen's approach shows the true extent of Black's difficulties—the 23 ... ♖c2 line is still in trouble.

28 ♖d3 b5 29 exf6 exf6 30 d6

exd8=♖) 37 e7 ♖d7 38 ♖e1! wins.

35 ♖d5 ♖h8 36 h3

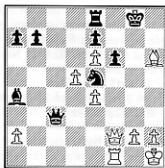
Calmly securing the back rank and preparing to move the rook in.

36 ... a6

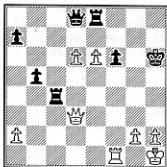
A sure sign the game is over.

37 ♖d3+ ♖g7 38 ♖g3+ ♖h7 39 ♖f5 ♖e8 40 ♖xf6 ♖g8 41 ♖d3+ ♖g7 42 ♖f5 ♖c5 43 ♖f7+ 1-0

So is Korchnoi's defence, mentioned above, any better?



Larry Christiansen (2575) White
Viktor Korchnoi (2630) Black
Reggio Emilia 1987/88

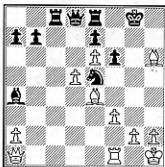


30 ... ♖g7

30 ... ♖xc6 31 ♖h3+ picking up the rook; 30 ... ♖g8 31 e7 ♖d7 32 ♖xf6+ ♖g5 33 ♖f1 ♖cc8 34 h4+! ♖xh4 35 ♖f4+ ♖g4 36 ♖xg4+ ♖xg4 (36 ... ♖xg4 37 ♖h3+) 37 d7 ♖c1+ 38 ♖h2 ♖f4+ 39 g3+.

31 ♖g3+ ♖h7 32 ♖h3+ ♖g7 33 ♖g3+ ♖h7 34 ♖f3 ♖g6

34 ... ♖c5, to prevent ♖f5 or ♖h5+, looks sensible but 35 ♖b7+ ♖h6 36 ♖f7 f5 (36 ... ♖f8 37 e7! ♖x7 38



23 ... ♖a5

Korchnoi's alternative to the main line 23 ... ♖c2.

24 ♖d4 ♖c4 25 ♖f2 ♖xe4

Forced.

26 fxe4

26 ... ♖g3+ is still threatened.

26 ... ♖c3

27 h3

White goes down meekly after this but there is an improvement.

a) 27 d6! ♖d3 28 d7 ♖d8 29 ♖f4, unclear (29 ♖c3!? could lead to a better version of 27 ♖c3 below. There is a danger ♖xa7 and ♖b6 could happen):

a1) 29 ... ♖xd7! might hold on: 30 exd7 ♖xd7 31 e5 (31 ♖e1!? ♖c6 32 e5 ♖g6 33 exf6 exf6 34 ♖g3 a6) 31 ... ♖xf1+! 32 ♖xf1 ♖d1 33 ♖g1=;

a2) 29 ... ♖g4 30 ♖f3! ♖xf3 31 gxf3 and the knight is short of squares again, see the Kobaliya game: 31 ... ♖e5 32 ♖xe5 fxe5 33 ♖c1 ♖c6 34 ♖g1+ ♖f8 35 h4±.

b) 27 ♖c3?! ♖g4 28 ♖g3 ♖xc3 29 ♖xg4+ ♖g5 30 ♖xg5+ fxg5 31 ♖f5 ♖c2 32 ♖xg5+ is quite hard to assess but Black's queenside majority looks dangerous and his pieces are ideally placed to stop White's pawns.

27 ... ♖d3 28 ♖f5 ♖c8 29 d6 ♖xd6 30 ♖f4 ♖e8 31 ♖b1 ♖d3 32 ♖b3 ♖xb3 0-1

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