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And as always, my heartfelt thanks to my parents for all their love and support over the years. I didn't quite manage to accomplish everything I wanted to in chess, but I had a wonderful time trying...and years later, chess is still one of the most rewarding things in my life. Nothing of that would have happened without them.

Matthew Sadler,
Netherlands,
July 2012

Introduction

Despite my best efforts, I haven't been able to escape chess. I decided to stop as a professional chess player just after the Tilburg Category 18 event of 1998, and after some months of job searching, I joined the ranks of the respectable working population on 1st October 1999 when I started work at the Hewlett-Packard helpdesk for mobile computers in Amsterdam. In the years that followed, I still played some chess for my Bundesliga club until 2003, but after that, apart from a yearly outing in the Dutch Team Championship for companies, I was chess-free!

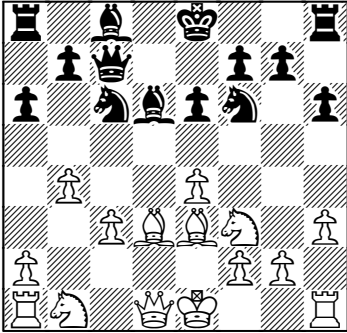
But things change in your life, and at some stage I got the urge to play chess again. More importantly for me, I got the urge to play *well* again. That was easier said than done. Even though I was still capable of playing decently, I was extremely inconsistent. I decided at some stage that I needed to relearn a few skills and think again about all the hard-earned knowledge I had won as a professional. It took me quite a while, but in the end I felt I had managed to get the most important things in my game working again. The thought that these skills and lessons might be useful and interesting to other amateurs as well was the inspiration for this book.

In this book I try to explain the most important skills for success as a practical chess player, and how you can train and develop these skills. In a nutshell, these skills are:

- a) How to find new ideas in openings.
- b) How to adopt new openings confidently and quickly.
- c) The various ways of solving practical middlegame problems.
- d) How to think in the endgame.

I suppose you could call this book a collection of my personal 'Eureka!' experiences, those wonderful moments when something complicated suddenly feels as natural and as easy as breathing. Some of those insights needed a lot of hard work, and some only came after the sorrowful analysis of heart-rending defeats. Hopefully this book can spare you both the midnight oil and the traumas, and set you off on the right path from the very beginning!

Game 28
C. Van Oosterom-M. Sadler
Haarlem 2010



10...g5!

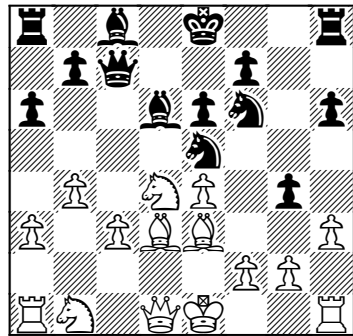
This move was successful because it wasn't just a wild lunge: there were some serious positional ideas behind it. Just as in a Queen's Gambit Accepted structure, Black wants to gain control of e5 so that he can place a knight there. From e5 the knight attacks the bishop on d3 and stops a white knight from coming to c4 (which would be curtains for Black). Moreover, once the knight moves from c6, the black queen is attacking the backward pawn on c3.

Black can achieve this goal either by chasing away the white knight from f3 or by attacking e5 with more than one knight. I did spend a little time considering 10...d7 with ...de5 to follow, but that felt much too slow. It would be much more active to play ...g4 of course as White would then need to do something about his bishop on e3...but

there's the little matter of that pawn on h3. It was then that it struck me that ...g5-g4 might be an extremely effective idea. Once Black gets in ...g4, either the knight has to move from f3, or after hxg4 xg4, the bishop on e3 has to take cover while the knight on g4 comes into contact with the e5-square.

I'm making this sound like Black is in complete control here, and of course that's not the case. Objectively, Black only has some vague, temporary activity for the central pawn he has sacrificed and White should have many good possibilities. But that's no reason for Black not to play good active positional chess!

11 a3 g4! 12 d4 e5



Got it! Black won 10 moves later (see Chapter One for the remainder).

Sacrificing a pawn

It can't just be coincidence: I always seem to end up sacrificing a pawn for counterplay when I play unorthodox systems. We saw examples of this already against Grover and against van

Oosterom. The point is: you don't play these types of systems and take those sorts of risks just to end up in a dull and slightly worse position! That feeling really motivates you to delve deeper into the position and find ways of generating activity. In the games above, you couldn't really say that Black had 100% compensation for the pawn, but you could also imagine the practical difficulties that White faces. I have another example here:

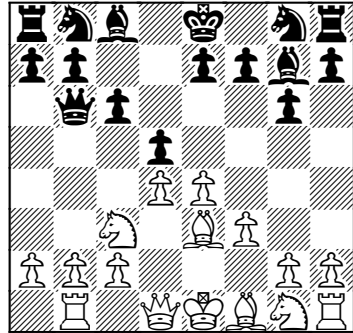
Game 29
A.Arribas Lopez-M.Sadler
 Barcelona 2011
Modern Defence

This was an important game for me in the fight for first place. I was in joint first place with 5½/6 and had received a rather fortunate pairing: Black against an FM rated 2443. He was playing rather well to reach his score – he'd beaten Smeets with Black and should also have beaten Iturrizaga – but of course it was still an excellent opportunity for a point.

1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 ♘c3 c6

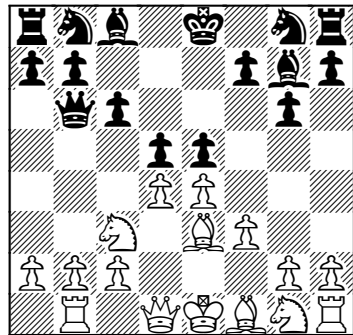
I remembered Dave Norwood and Julian Hodgson playing this sort of stuff in the good old days, so playing it gave me a nice nostalgic feeling. It does show the depths to which my opening knowledge has sunk when I start relying on Dave's openings in crucial games!

4 ♙e3 d5 5 f3 ♜b6 6 ♖b1



I had thought my opening might be a surprise for my opponent (I'd never remotely come close to playing this before), but he whacked out his moves extremely quickly. And here I went into a deep think. So much for gaining time on the clock with the element of surprise!

6...e5



I spent a lot of time on this position: 6 ♖b1 was really tempting me! It's a completely normal move of course, but it has a significant drawback: White cannot castle queenside any more. This changes the dynamics of the position

in two ways:

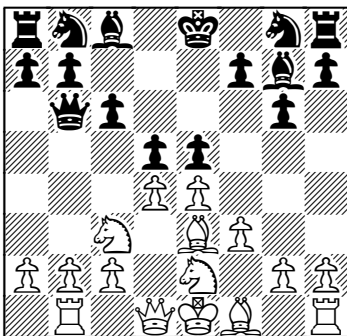
a) Reduced attacking possibilities for White. If the centre is opened quickly, White doesn't have the option of castling queenside and sacrificing lots of pawns to get at the uncastled black king.

b) White's king as a possible weakness. To get his king out of the centre, White will need to go kingside which isn't as easy as it looks: structures with a pawn on f3 often combine better with queenside castling than with kingside castling (where are you going to develop your g1-knight?).

These general considerations led me to look for ways of clearing the centre at the cost of a pawn or two. I don't think I found the best way of doing it unfortunately – as you will see, I could have got into some trouble – but I do think that the basic idea was correct.

7 $\text{d}2\text{ge}2$

All played a tempo.

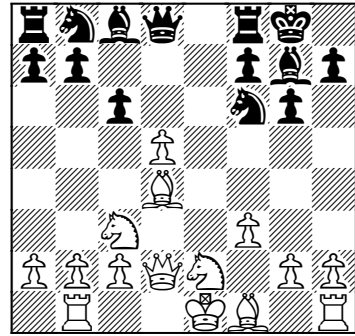


7... $\text{d}2\text{f}6$

7...exd4 8 $\text{e}2\text{xd}4$ $\text{e}2\text{xd}4$ 9 $\text{c}3\text{xd}4$ $\text{c}3\text{xd}4$ 10 $\text{b}3\text{xd}4$ dxex4 11 $\text{a}3\text{xe}4$ is a good ex-

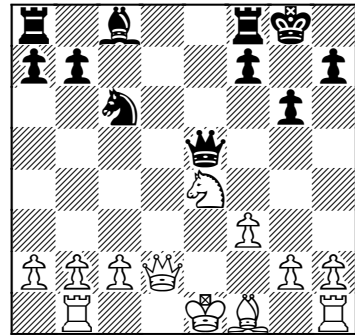
ample of what you don't want to get from one of these systems!

8 $\text{c}3\text{d}2$ exd4 9 $\text{e}2\text{xd}4$ $\text{c}3\text{d}8$ 10 exd5 0-0



This is it! Get that centre open!

11 $\text{c}3\text{f}4$ cxd5 12 $\text{c}3\text{fxd}5$ $\text{c}3\text{c}6$ 13 $\text{e}2\text{xf}6$ $\text{e}2\text{xf}6$ 14 $\text{c}3\text{xf}6+$ $\text{c}3\text{xf}6$ 15 $\text{c}3\text{e}4$ $\text{c}3\text{e}5$



I'd assessed these types of position quite optimistically from afar – I thought I was bound to be able to get a pawn back somehow, especially considering the fact that a2 is undefended (... $\text{e}6\text{xa}2$ wins a tempo against the rook on b1!) – but now I got a little tactical shock.

16 $\text{c}3\text{d}6$?!

A bad move after which Black is do-

ing very nicely. While my opponent was thinking, I suddenly spotted 16 ♖c3 ♜d4 17 ♜d1 ♜d8 18 ♙d3! f5 19 f4! which wins for White after 19...♞xf4 20 ♙c4+ ♚f8 21 ♞xd4. I was starting to look at ways of having a tiny bit of play for my pawn after 16...♞xc3+ 17 ♜xc3 ♙f5 and mentally girding myself for a long struggle. I was so happy to see 16 ♞d6! However, it's an example once again of how even strong white players can go astray when faced with non-standard situations.

16...♞a5+ 17 ♚f2 ♙f5 18 ♞a3?! ♞xa3 19 bxa3 ♙xe4 20 fxe4 b6 21 ♙c4

If 21 ♙a6 ♞ae8.

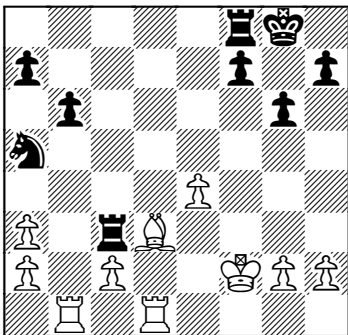
21...♞ac8 22 ♞hd1 ♜a5!

To stop White from playing ♙b3.

23 ♙d3

23 ♙b3 ♜xb3 24 cxb3 ♞c2+ 25 ♚f3 ♞fc8 is very good for Black.

23...♞c3



This is a very pleasant position for Black which I converted many moves later:

24 ♞b3 ♜xb3 25 axb3 ♜d8 26 a4 ♚f8 27 ♚e3 ♚e7 28 ♞a1 a5 29 ♞b1 ♞c5 30

♞f1 ♞h5 31 h3 ♞g5 32 ♞f2 ♜d6 33 ♙c4 ♞f6 34 ♜d2 h5 35 c3 h4 36 ♞f2 ♞c6 37 ♚d4 ♞cc5 38 ♞e2 ♞g3 39 ♞f2 f6 40 ♞b2 ♞cg5 41 ♙f1 ♞c5 42 ♙c4 ♞cg5 43 ♙f1 f5 44 e5 f4 45 ♞f2 ♞f5 46 ♙e2 ♞e3 47 ♙d3 ♞fxe5 48 ♞xf4 g5 49 ♞e4 ♞3xe4+ 50 ♙xe4 ♚d6 51 ♙f3 ♞e1 52 ♚c4 ♞c1 53 ♚d4 ♞c2 54 ♙a8 ♞f2 55 ♙f3 g4 56 ♙xg4 ♙xg2 57 ♙c8 ♞g8 58 ♙f5 ♞g5 59 ♙c8 ♜d5+ 0-1

Make use of unexpected structural options

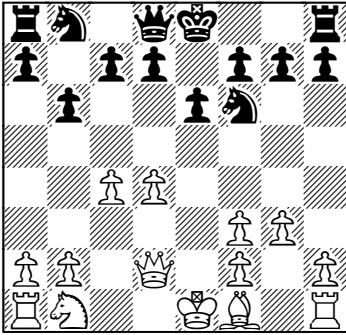
Unorthodox systems usually seem to involve the early development of bishops, often on long diagonals. This introduces a number of early opportunities for damaging the opponent's structure. This technique can be particularly effective when White tries to stick to a standard development scheme and tries to ignore the weird things that Black is doing. An example here from Jon Speelman who has had a lot of success with these types of positions.

Game 30
P.Tolozá Soto-J.Speelman
Bled Olympiad 2002
English Defence

1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 ♜f3 ♙b7 4 g3

White tries to play a solid g3 Queen's Indian structure as if Black was just playing normally. The early fianchetto of the bishop on b7 gives Black an extra idea however.

4...♙b4+ 5 ♙d2 ♙xf3! 6 exf3 ♙xd2+ 7 ♚xc2 ♜f6



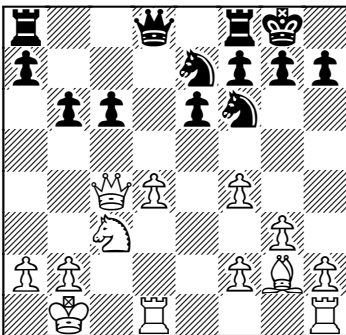
Black has managed both to inflict a structural weakness in White's position and to eliminate White's bishop-pair. Jon now follows his tried and trusted method of handling these positions:

a) Play ...d5xc4 to isolate the d-pawn.

b) Play with the knights on the central light squares d5 and f5.

c) Wait for your chance for queen-side expansion.

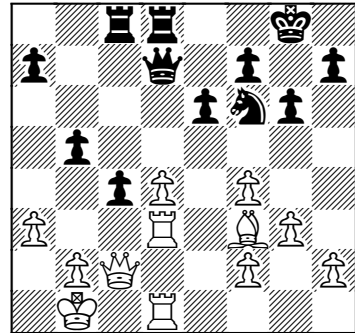
8 ♜c3 0-0 9 0-0-0 d5 10 ♚b1 ♜c6 11 f4 ♜e7 12 ♙g2 c6 13 ♚d3 dxc4 14 ♚xc4



Part 1 accomplished; now it's time

for parts 2 and 3 of the grand plan.

14...♜c8 15 ♜he1 ♚d7 16 ♙f3 ♜ed5 17 ♜e4 ♜xe4 18 ♙xe4 ♜fd8 19 a3 g6 20 ♜d3 ♜f6 21 ♙f3 c5! 22 ♜ed1 b5! 23 ♚c2 c4



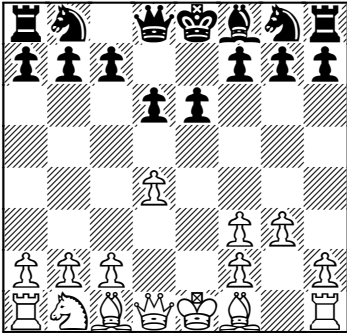
Black stands very well and soon won.

24 ♜e3 ♚c7 25 ♜e5 ♚b6 26 d5 exd5 27 ♙xd5 a5 28 f5 ♜xd5 29 ♜exd5 ♜xd5 30 ♜xd5 b4 31 fxg6 hxg6 32 axb4 axb4 33 ♚d2 c3 34 ♚d4 ♚c7 35 ♚xb4 cxb2 36 ♚xb2 ♚c4 37 ♚a5 ♚e4+ 0-1

Tony Miles was another great player of unorthodox openings who, especially towards the end of his career, really enjoyed just taking a structural advantage and sitting out the opponent's activity until the structural advantage became the defining factor.

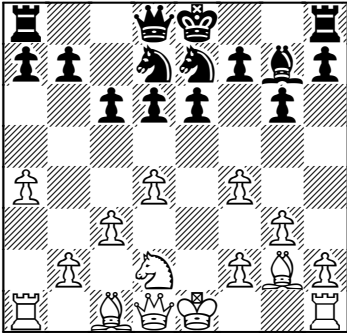
Game 31
L. Polugaevsky-A. Miles
Biel 1990
Wade Defence

1 d4 d6 2 ♜f3 ♙g4 3 g3 ♙xf3 4 exf3 e6



Will White's bishops compensate for the long-term disadvantage of the doubled pawns?

5 f4 c6 6 ♖g2 g6 7 ♞d2 ♙g7 8 c3 ♞d7 9 a4 ♜e7



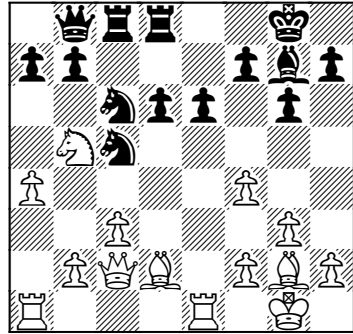
You'll also notice some similarities with Jon Speelman's play in the previous game. The key point is the development of the knight to e7. f5 is a very good outpost for the knight just in front of the doubled f-pawn. It's not easy for White to drive the knight away as g4 would seriously weaken White's kingside dark squares.

10 0-0 0-0 11 ♜e1 ♞c7 12 ♞f3 ♜ac8 13

♙d2 ♜fd8

Black's position is under no danger so Tony prepares the ...c5 break unhurriedly.

14 ♞c2 c5 15 dxc5 ♞xc5 16 ♞d4 ♞c6 17 ♞b5 ♞b8



Black has obtained an excellent position which Tony won very nicely:

18 ♙e3 a6 19 ♙xc5 dxc5 20 ♞a3 ♞a5 21 ♜ad1 c4 22 ♞e2 ♞c7 23 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 24 ♙f1 ♞c8 25 ♜d1 ♞c6 26 ♞c2 ♙f8 27 ♞b1 ♞b3 28 ♙g2 ♞xa4 29 ♙xb7 ♜b8 30 ♙f3 ♞c5 31 ♞xa4 ♞xa4 32 ♞d2 ♞xb2 33 ♜a1 ♙g7 34 ♜xa6 ♙xc3 35 ♞e4 ♙d4 36 ♜c6 ♞d3 37 ♙e2 ♜b1+ 38 ♙g2 ♞e1+ 39 ♙h3 c3 40 ♞xc3 ♜b2 41 ♙a6 ♜xf2 42 ♞e4 ♜b2 43 g4 ♙g7 44 ♙c4 ♙g1 45 f5 ♜xh2+ 46 ♙g3 ♜g2+ 47 ♙h3 exf5 48 gxf5 g5 49 ♜c7 g4+ 50 ♙h4 ♞f3+ 51 ♙h5 ♜h2+ 52 ♙xg4 ♞e5+ 53 ♙g3 ♜c2 54 f6+ ♙h6 55 ♞d6 ♙h2+ 56 ♙h3 ♙f4 0-1

Tony also did pretty much the same flexible development scheme when playing the Trompowsky with White, as did Julian Hodgson. Here's an example: