

**CHESS DEVELOPMENTS**

# **the Grünfeld**

**DAVID VIGORITO**

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# About the Author

**David Vigorito** is an International Master from the United States. He is a former state champion of New Hampshire, Nevada, and Massachusetts and New England co-champion in 2009 and 2013. He's an active chess coach who teaches students of all ages and levels. His books have received great praise and he is firmly established as one of the world's leading chess writers.

**Also by the author:**

*Attacking Chess: The King's Indian, Volume 1*

*Attacking Chess: The King's Indian, Volume 2*

*Chess Developments: The Sicilian Dragon*

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# Introduction

I have been playing tournament chess for more than 25 years, and I have two observations to note about the subject of this book, the Grünfeld. Firstly, I have almost exclusively played the closed openings as White, and have always found the Grünfeld to be quite annoying to play against. I know I am not alone in this feeling. Secondly, the Grünfeld has never been in such excellent theoretical shape as it is as I write these words.

Most of the top players in the world include the Grünfeld in their repertoires, including Carlsen, Anand, Aronian, Topalov, Kamsky, Caruana, Grischuk, Ivanchuk, Gelfand, and Giri. A special mention should be made of Peter Svidler, who has played the Grünfeld with great consistency at the highest level for 20+ years. Of course, Kasparov, and Fischer before him, played the Grünfeld successfully as well.

Here in the United States GM Sergey Kudrin employs the Grünfeld exclusively against players at all levels. I realized the theoretical problems White faced when I faced Kudrin with White a few months ago. Despite my work on this book, I struggled mightily to decide where to look for an advantage. After choosing a line I had little experience in, I messed up my move order within a dozen moves and had to struggle to draw.

Writing this book was a very different experience from my previous *Chess Developments* book on the Sicilian Dragon. The Dragon is very narrow and important games are played only periodically. In contrast, the Grünfeld is an opening where almost every line is important and in a constant state of flux. Add to that its popularity at grandmaster level, and one will find that there are important games played every week and sometimes every day.

The explosive popularity of the Grünfeld required me to be rather strict in the lines that I covered. When I started this project the Exchange Variation with 7 Bc4 was very popular. Black has several ways to counter that, so this is by far the largest chapter in the book. The Exchange Variations with 7 Be3 and 7 Nf3 are also

covered. The latter was considered to be absolutely critical at the turn of the millennium, but interest has subsided a bit as Black has worked out several reasonable defensive schemes.

At the time of this writing the Russian Variation is very popular. In fact this chapter was rewritten only a few months after it was completed to reflect the on-going developments in the fashionable lines. Lines with Bf4 and Bg5 have never been considered the most critical, but they are nevertheless important so they have their own chapters.

The chapter on the Fianchetto variation is the one where I had to be the most ruthless. I have focussed exclusively on the main lines with ...Nxd5 which have shown the most *developments* in the last few years. Another highly fashionable line is the Anti-Grünfeld with 3 f3 which is covered in the last chapter. Here too I had to narrow the coverage to games with a 'true' Grünfeld approach with 3...d5.

I would like to thank my wife Heather for all of her love and support as I locked myself in my office to work on this project; IM Joe Fang, for his proof-reading; and GM John Emms, for never giving me a stern word as this book became more and more overdue.

David Vigorito,  
Andover, Massachusetts,  
June 2013

# Chapter One

## Exchange Variation: 7 Bc4

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 7 Bc4 (Diagram 1)

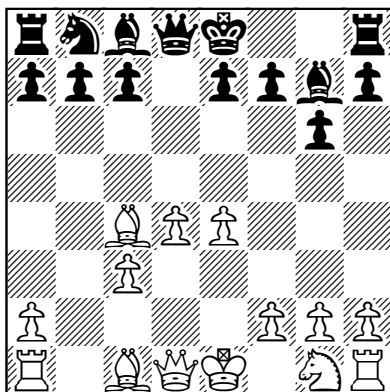


Diagram 1 (B)

This is the classical main line. For a long time it was overshadowed by 7 Nf3 c5 8 Rb1, but 7 Bc4 has now been back in the limelight for many years. Modern interest was rekindled when new ideas for White were found in Bronstein's exchange sacrifice (Games 11 and 12). Although Black has repaired his defences there, white players are still playing 7 Bc4 regularly, with top practitioners including Topalov, Carlsen, Aronian, Nakamura, and Ponomarev.

In 2006 Konstantin Sakaev produced a hefty book focused solely on 7 Bc4, *An Expert's Guide to the 7 Bc4 Gruenfeld*. A lot has happened since then, but this book is still very relevant today, especially in the less fashionable lines.

In this chapter we will only concentrate on the main lines that arise after:

7...c5 8 Ne2 Nc6 9 Be3 0-0 10 0-0 (Diagram 2)

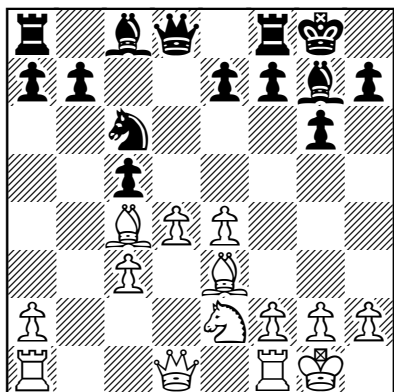


Diagram 2 (B)

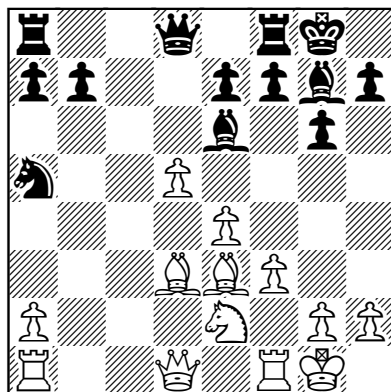


Diagram 3 (B)

There are a few deviations that are possible for both sides along the way, most notably 7...0-0 8 Ne2 Nc6 (or even 8...b6 or 8...Qd7), 9...cxd4 10 cxd4 Qa5+, and 10 Rc1. These lines are all considered less critical and have not seen the *developments* that the main lines have, so they will not be covered here.

Game 1 covers 10...Na5 11 Bd3 b6 with a quick ...cxd4. This is an old way of playing and although it is not very popular now, having a grasp of these positions is important for understanding the 7 Bc4 variation, and the Grünfeld for that matter, as a whole. The immediate 10...b6 has experienced a bit of a revival and this is considered in Game 2. A modern way of playing with ...b6 is to play 10...Na5 11 Bd3 b6 with a quick ...e5. This system has been very popular and is examined in Games 3 and 4. The next couple of games examine the system with 10...Qc7. After 11 Rc1 Rd8 we only consider the main move 12 Bf4 in detail. Game 5 covers 12...Qd7, and the odd-looking deviation 12...Be5 is considered in Game 6.

Another popular positional system for Black is the simple move 10...Bd7 (the related 10...Bg4 11 f3 Bd7 is covered in Game 10). Here we only cover the main line with 11 Rb1. Then 11...a6 is well met by 12 dxc5! as given in Game 7. The flexible 11...Qc7 is covered in Games 8 and 9.

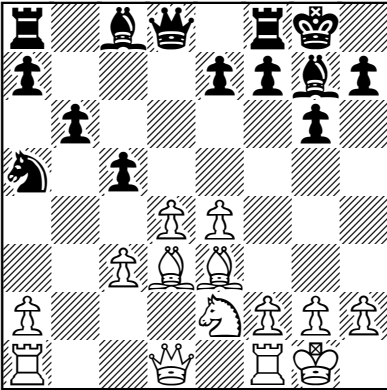
Lastly, we consider the most theoretical line with 10...Bg4 11 f3 Na5 12 Bd3 cxd4 13 cxd4 Be6 and now Bronstein's aforementioned 14 d5 (**Diagram 3**). Black still seems to be doing fine here, but the practical issues seem to have put off black players. The details are in Games 11 and 12.

*Game 1*  
**M. Carlsen-V. Ivanchuk**  
 Linares 2007

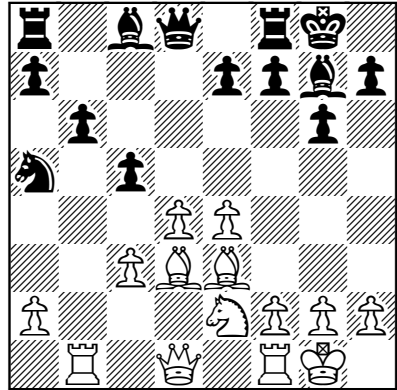
**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 7 Bc4 c5 8 Ne2 Nc6 9 Be3 0-0 10 0-0 Na5**

Another move order that Black can use is 10...cxd4 11 cxd4 Na5 12 Bd3 b6 13 Rc1. This is less flexible, however, especially considering that capturing on c5 is not so dangerous, as we shall see in 'a' in the note to White's 12th move.

**11 Bd3 b6 (Diagram 4)**



**Diagram 4 (W)**



**Diagram 5 (B)**

**12 Rc1**

White generally chooses between this move and 12 Qd2 in order to be ready for either ...e5 (see Game 3), or the exchange on d4. White does have other options, however:

a) 12 dxc5 bxc5 13 Bxc5 snatches a pawn and looks critical, but it is not dangerous. After 13...Qc7 one recent example went 14 Bb4 (14 Bd4 is more common, but after 14...e5 15 Be3 many games have shown that Black has good compensation after either 15...Nc4 or 15...Be6) 14...Rd8 15 Qc2 Nc6! 16 Bc4? (Black has a strong initiative after 16 Ba3 Qa5 17 Bb2 Ne5, so White should probably play 16 Rad1 Nxb4 17 cxb4 Qxc2 18 Bxc2 Ba6 19 Rxd8+ Rxd8 20 Rd1 Rb8 when Black is only a little better) 16...Nxb4 17 cxb4 Be6 18 Rac1 Rac8 19 Bb3 Qxc2 20 Bxc2 Bb2



21 Rcd1 Rxd1 22 Bxd1 Bxa2 with a huge advantage for Black in J.Markos-J.Le Roux, Olbia 2008.

b) 12 f4 cxd4 13 cxd4 e6 14 f5 is a typical plan, but Black is well prepared for it here. After 14...exf5 15 exf5 Bb7 16 Qd2 Rc8 17 Rf2 Nc4 18 Bxc4 Rxc4 19 Raf1 Qd5 he had sufficient counterplay in T.Nyback-N.Grandelius, Malmo 2009. Even stronger, however, is 15...Re8! with the idea of 16 Qd2? Bxf5! 17 Bxf5? Nc4.

c) 12 Qa4!? Bb7 (Black could consider 12...e5!? here) 13 Rad1 cxd4 14 cxd4 e6 15 Nf4 Rc8?! (instead 15...Qe8!? 16 Bb5 Bc6 17 Bxc6 Qxc6 18 Qxc6 Nxc6 19 d5 exd5 20 Nxd5 Rac8 with a solid position is given by Van Delft and Ris) 16 d5 exd5 17 Nxd5 Bxd5 (better was 17...Qe8 18 Qb4 when White is only a little better) 18 Ba6! and with Rxd5 coming White was much better in V.Laznicka-D.Navara, 5th match-game, Novy Bor 2011.

d) 12 Qd2 cxd4 (the modern 12...e5 will be covered in Game 4) 13 cxd4 Bb7 (after 13...e6 White could play 14 Rac1 transposing to the main game or consider 14 Bh6!?) and now:

d1) 14 Bh6 Bxh6?! (instead 14...e6 would transpose to the main game after 15 Rac1, while 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Rac1 Qe7 would reach the note to White's 15th move) 15 Qxh6 Nc6 16 d5 Ne5 17 Rad1 Qd6 18 Nd4! Rac8 19 Be2 Qf6 20 f4 Nc4 21 Bxc4 Rxc4 22 e5 Qg7 23 Qh4 and White had the initiative in A.Goldin-P.Eljanov, Calvia Olympiad 2004.

d2) 14 Rac1 Qd7 (14...e6 would reach the main line) 15 Qb4!? (15 d5 e6 is fine for Black, while 15 Bh6 could be met with 15...Rfc8!?, intending ...Bxd4, and after 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 d5 e6 again Black looks okay) 15...Nc6?! (15...e6) 16 Qa4 Qd6 17 Bb5 Na5 18 e5 Qd8 was T.Nyback-M.Krasenkow, Antalya 2004. Here Krasenkow gives 19 Bd7! a6 20 e6 b5 21 Qb4 Bd5 22 Nf4 with the initiative.

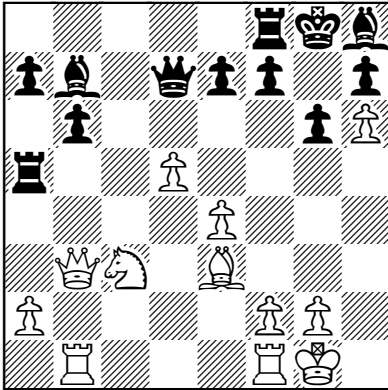
e) 12 Rb1 (**Diagram 5**) is a typical move, but this looks like the right time for Black to implement his plan, as the rook will not be especially active on the b-file. Thus 12...cxd4! 13 cxd4 and then:

e1) 13...e6 and now:

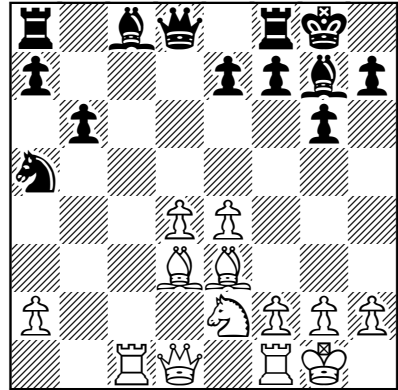
e11) 14 Qa4 Bb7 15 Rfd1 Rc8 16 Bd2 Nc6 17 Bc3 Qh4 18 Be1 Rfd8 19 f3 Qe7 20 Bb5?! a6! 21 Bxa6 Bxa6 22 Qxa6 Nxd4 is already comfortable for Black, and after 23 Bf2? Ra8 24 Qd3 (24 Qc4 b5) 24...Ra3 he was winning in V.Korchnoi-G.Kasparov, Reykjavik 1988. A classic example.

e12) 14 Qd2 Bb7 15 Bh6 Bxh6 (this is hardly forced) 16 Qxh6 Rc8 17 Rfd1 Nc6 18 e5 Qe7 19 Be4 Rfd8 20 Ng3! f5 (20...Rxd4 21 Nh5!) 21 exf6 Qxf6 22 h4 and White had some initiative in A.Beliavsky-V.Topalov, Dresden Olympiad 2008.

e2) 13...Bb7 14 h4 (after 14 Qa4 Qd6 15 Bf4 e5 16 Bd2! Bc6 17 Qb4 Qxb4 18 Bxb4 Rfc8 19 d5 White had the advantage in A.Korobov-A.Areshchenko, Kharkiv 2010, but 14...e6! was better) 14...Rc8 15 h5 Nc4 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 Qd3 Ra4 18 h6 Bh8 19 Qb3 Qd7 20 Nc3 Ra5 21 d5 (**Diagram 6**) has been seen a few times in practice.



**Diagram 6 (B)**



**Diagram 7 (B)**

Both sides have achieved some of their goals, but Black can seize the initiative with 21...Ba6! (21...Rc8 22 Nb5 Rxb5 23 Qxb5 Qxb5 24 Rxb5 Ba6 was only level in Wang Yue-A.Shirov, Sofia 2009) 22 Rfd1 Rc8 23 Rbc1 Bc4! (improving on 23...Qg4 from E.Porper-A.Shirov, Edmonton 2009, played a few months earlier; here 24 d6! is possible) 24 Qb4 Be5 25 a4 Bd6 (25...Qd6 also looks quite good) 26 Qb2 f6 27 f4?! Qg4! 28 e5 fxe5 29 Ne4 Rxa4 (after 29...Rxd5 30 Rxd5 Bxd5 31 Rxc8+ Qxc8 32 Nxd6 exd6 33 fxe5 White is fine) 30 Nxd6 exd6 31 Qf2? (White could have created counter-chances with 31 fxe5 Ra2 32 Rd4!) 31...Rf8! 32 Rd2 g5 0-1, E.Porper-G.Antal, Edmonton 2009.

### 12...cxd4

This looks strange with White's rook already on c1, but the approaching position can be reached in various ways. The alternative 12...e5 is considered in Game Three.

### 13 cxd4 (Diagram 7)

This position looks good for White, and perhaps it is, but matters are not so simple. Black can develop easily and aim to exchange rooks on the c-file. White's centre is strong, but Black may be able to chip away at it. White will generally seek chances on the kingside, while Black will look to exchange pieces when his queen-

side pawn majority may count for something.

### 13...e6

This looks better than 13...Bb7 14 d5! (**Diagram 8**) when White gains space in the centre and it is hard for Black to equalize:

a) 14...e6 15 dxe6 fxe6 16 Nf4 pressures the e6-pawn.

b) 14...Qd7 15 Nd4 Rfc8 16 Qd2 is a typical position where Black has to be wary of Bd3-b5.

c) 14...Rc8 15 Qd2 Qd7 leaves White with a pleasant choice:

c1) 16 Nd4 Rxc1 17 Rxc1 Rc8 18 Bb5 Rxc1+ 19 Qxc1 Qd6 and here both 20 Bf1!? and 20 Nc6!? are possible.

c2) 16 Qb4!? Rxc1 17 Rxc1 Rc8 18 Rxc8+ Bxc8 19 Nd4 and White holds some edge.

### 14 Qd2

This is the most natural move. It is a little early to play 14 e5 Bb7 15 Nf4 Qh4!? 16 g3 Qe7, but 14 Qa4 Bd7 (or 14...Bb7 15 Bd2) 15 Qa3 also looks pleasant for White.

### 14...Bb7

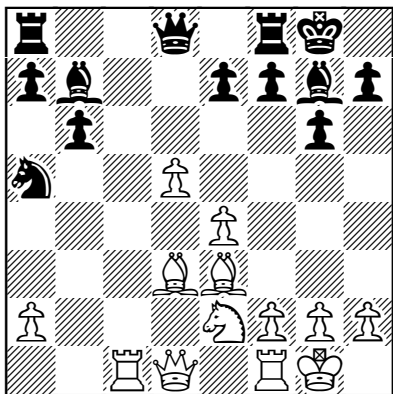


Diagram 8 (B)

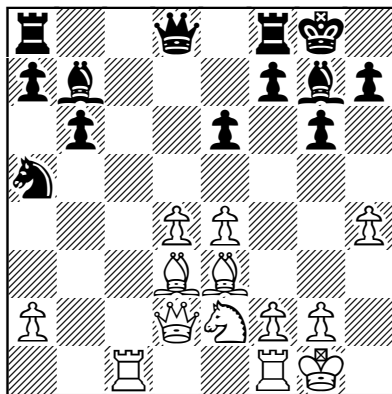


Diagram 9 (B)

### 15 h4!



**TIP:** This move looks surprising at first, as White has castled so there is no rook backing up the pawn. However, this is an excellent way to increase the pressure. White brings another attacking unit into the fray and does not hurry to exchange pieces.

Instead 15 Bh6 is very direct, but Black has not done badly here:

a) 15...Bxh6 (it can be difficult to judge if inviting White's queen to the kingside is a good idea; of course, doing so can be risky, but White's queen can also prove to be offside if Black can fight for the initiative in the centre) 16 Qxh6 Qd7 17 h4 Nc6 18 Rfd1 Rfd8 19 Bb5 a6 20 Bxc6 Bxc6 21 d5! (this looks even better than Sakaev's recommended 21 Nc3) 21...exd5 22 Nf4 Qe8 23 Nh5! Qe5 (23...gxh5 24 Rd3) 24 Rxc6 Qxh5 25 Qxh5 gxh5 26 exd5 and White had a large advantage in the end-game in H.Gardarsson-R.Knobel, correspondence 2006.

b) 15...Qd7 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Qf4!? (17 h4) 17...Rac8 18 h4 Qe7 19 h5 Nc6 gives Black sufficient resources. Instructive was 20 e5?! Nb4 21 Bc4 Bd5 22 Bxd5 Nxd5 23 Qf3 Qg5 and Black took over the initiative in I.Labensky-A.Zubov, Alushta 2007.

c) 15...Qe7 looks even more sensible, as the queen should probably end up on this square anyway: 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Qf4 (17 f4!?) 17...Rac8 18 h4 Nc6 19 h5 and here both 19...Rfd8 and 19...e5 give Black sufficient play, as shown in several games.

Returning to 15 h4 (**Diagram 9**):

### 15...Qe7

Black has not fared so well with other moves either:

a) 15...Qxh4? cannot even be considered, because after 16 Bg5 Qg4 17 f3 Qh5 18 Ng3 Bxd4+ 19 Rf2 Bxf2+ 20 Kxf2 Qh2 21 Rh1 White wins material.

b) 15...Nc6 gives White a pleasant choice between 16 Bb5 Rc8 17 h5 and 16 e5!?.

c) 15...h5 16 Bg5 (if 16 Bh6 Bxh6 17 Qxh6 Qxh4, but 16 e5!? was possible) 16...Qd7 17 Bh6 Rfc8 (with the h-pawns advanced, Black's kingside looks shaky after 17...Bxh6 18 Qxh6) 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 Qg5 Qd8 20 Qg3 Rxc1 21 Rxc1 Rc8 22 Re1!? was J.Timman-D.Baramidze, German League 2007. White also looks better after 22 Rxc8 Bxc8 23 Qe5+ intending d5, and if 23...Qf6 24 Qc7!.

d) 15...Qd7 and now:

d1) 16 h5 Rfc8 preserves the g7-bishop. Now 17 e5 (17 Bh6 Bxd4!?) 18 e5 was Z.Hracek-S.Christensen, Rogaska Slatina 2011. Here Black could consider 17...Nc4!? 18 Bxc4 (or 18 Rxc4 Rxc4 19 Bxc4 Qc6) 18...Rxc4 19 Rxc4 Qd5.

d2) 16 Bh6 Rac8 (16...Bxh6 17 Qxh6 would transpose to 'a' in the notes to White's 15th move, which also looked good for White) 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 h5 Rxc1 19 Rxc1 Rc8 20 h6+! Kg8 21 Rxc8+ Qxc8 22 Qg5 has been seen in a few games. Black faces serious problems as his king is vulnerable, his knight is on the rim, and White's d-pawn is quite dangerous.

### 16 h5 (Diagram 10)

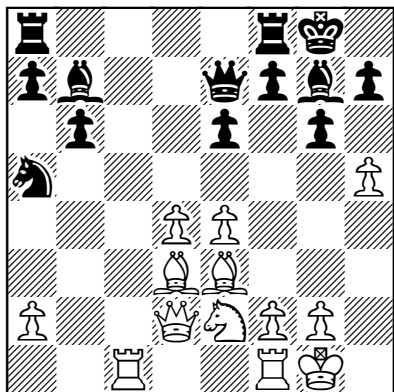


Diagram 10 (B)

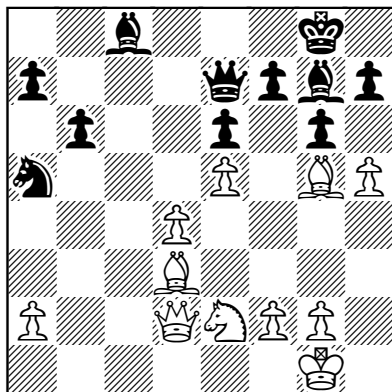


Diagram 11 (B)

Also promising is 16 Bg5!? f6 (16...Qd7 17 Bh6 would transpose to 'd' above) and then either 17 Bh6 or 17 Be3.

**16...Rfc8 17 e5!?**

Again 17 Bg5 is a decent alternative:

- a) 17...f6 18 Bh6 Bxh6 19 Qxh6 g5 20 Rxc8+ Rxc8 21 f4! opens up the black king-side.
- b) 17...Qa3 18 e5 Qa4 19 Bf6 Qd7 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Qf4 Qe7 was P.Lukacs-A.Schneider, Hungary 1984. Here 22 Nc3 would give White a very promising position.
- c) 17...Qd7!? is untried but looks relatively best.

**17...Rxc1?!**

Ivanchuk hurries to exchange rooks, but this brings him no relief. Instead Carlsen suggested the immediate 17...Nc6, while Ivanchuk gave 17...Qd8 18 Bg5 19 f3 Rxc1 20 Rxc1 Rc8 21 Rxc8+ Bxc8 22 Qf4 Nc6! with counterplay. Perhaps here White could try 22 Bf6!? or 22 Kf2!?

**18 Rxc1 Rc8 19 Rxc8+ Bxc8 20 Bg5 (Diagram 11) 20...Qc7?**

This natural move is quickly punished. It is natural to bring the queen to the open c-file, but Black's knight remains out of play and he runs into tactical problems. Instead 20...f6 21 exf6 Bxf6 22 Bxf6 Qxf6 23 hxg6 hxg6 24 Qc2 wins material, so Ivanchuk suggests 20...Qd7 21 Bf6 (Carlsen commented that Black could hardly survive this position) 21...Nc6 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 Qf4 Qd8. Black is, however, still un-

der serious pressure after 24 Be4.

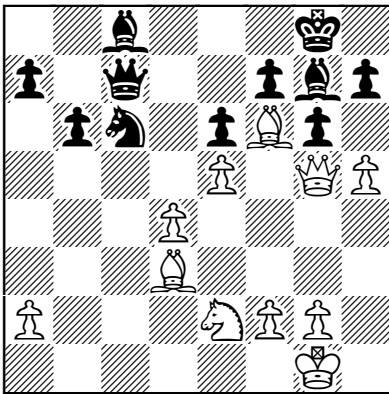
**21 Bf6**

Also possible was 21 Nc3!? with the idea of going to b5 or e4, but Carlsen's direct attacking move is probably strongest.

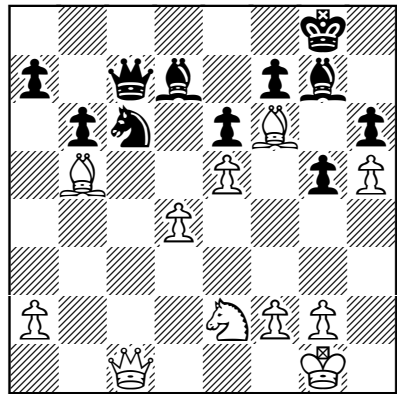
**21...Nc6**

White's attack is too strong after 21...Bf8 22 Qg5 when Nf4 is coming and Black faces an impending tragedy on g6, while 21...Bxf6 22 exf6 wins quickly: for example, 22...Qd8 23 Qg5 h6 (or 23...Nc6 24 hxg6 fxg6 25 Bxg6) 24 Qxh6 Qxf6 25 hxg6.

**22 Qg5 (Diagram 12)**



**Diagram 12 (B)**



**Diagram 13 (W)**

**22...h6**

Black also loses after 22...Bf8 23 hxg6 fxg6 24 Bxg6 or 22...Nb4 23 Bxg7 Kxg7 24 Qf6+ Kf8 (24...Kg8 25 h6) 25 Bxg6! hxg6 26 h6.

**23 Qc1! g5**

This leaves Black in a fatal pin, but 23...Qd7 24 hxg6 fxg6 25 Nf4! (even stronger than 25 Bxg6 Ba6 (25...Nxd4?) 26 Bh5 Bxe2 27 Bxe2 Nxd4 28 Bh5) 25...Nxd4 26 Nxg6 gives White a tremendous attack.

**24 Bb5 Bd7 (Diagram 13) 25 d5!**

This simply wins a piece.

**25...exd5 26 Nd4 Bxf6 27 exf6 Qd6 28 Bxc6 Qxf6 29 Bxd7 Qxd4 30 g3 Qc5 31 Qxc5 bxc5 32 Bc6 d4 33 Bb5 Kf8 34 f4 gxf4 35 gxf4 1-0**