

recently was in the backwoods of theory. It was employed by the Swedish grandmaster Jonny Hector; other players regarded it with scepticism.

And it was only when the outstanding (and highly authoritative) Armenian grandmaster Rafael Vaganian began playing it, that the variation went sharply up in the world. Now it can be confidently called one of the most popular in the Veresov Opening.

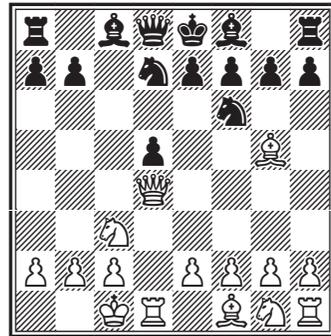
The advantage of 4. ♖d3 over 4. ♖d2 is that when White advances e2-e4, at no point can Black threaten the tempo-gaining ♜f6xe4.

#### 4. ... h7-h6

In the theoretical section the position after 4...e6 5.e4 de 6. ♜xe4 ♙e7 7. ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 8. ♜f3 0-0 9.0-0-0 b6 is analysed. It is very similar to a corresponding variation of the French Defence: 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3. ♜c3 de 4. ♜xe4 ♜d7 5. ♜f3 ♜gf6 6. ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 7. ♙g5 ♙e7 8. ♙d3 0-0 9. ♖e2. However, the

placing of the queen on e2 and the bishop on d3 looks more natural than what we have now, in the Veresov Opening: queen on d3, and bishop on f1. Incidentally, in the 'French' Black cannot play 9...b6? in view of 10. ♙xf6 ♙xf6 11. ♖e4, but in the Veresov Opening this is perfectly possible.

Nevertheless, if the move 4. ♖d3 interested Vaganian, it means that all is not so simple... As, incidentally, is indicated by the variation 4...c5 5.0-0-0 cd 6. ♖xd4, in which White now stands very well:



6...e5 7. ♖a4 d4 8. ♜d5 ♙e7 9. ♜xe7 ♖xe7 10.f4!? 0-0 11.fe ♜xe5 12. ♜f3 ♜c6 13. ♜xd4 ♜xd4 14. ♖xd4, remaining a pawn up (Vaganian – Adamski, Copenhagen 2006);

6...e6 7.e4 de?! (7...♙c5!?) 8. ♜xe4 ♖a5? (the lesser evil was 8...♙e7 9. ♜d6+ ♙xd6 10. ♖xd6 ♖b6) 9. ♙xf6 gf 10. ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 11. ♖xf6 ♜g8 12. ♙b5+!, and Black

resigned a move before mate (Hector – Kirkegaard, Copenhagen 2006).

5. ♖g5-h4 e7-e6

The theory of the branch 5...c6 6.0-0-0 ♖a5 7.♗b1 b5!? 8.e4 b4 is developing rapidly. For the moment, alas, not in White's favour:

9.e5 bc 10.ef ♘xf6 11.♙xf6 ef 12.♘e2 cb 13.♚e3+ ♗d8 14.♘f4 ♙d6 (Velicka – Dydyshko, Czech Republic 2004) or

9.ed bc 10.dc ♘b6 11.♙xf6 gf 12.♘e2 cb 13.♚c3 ♚d5 14.♘f4 ♚d6 15.g3 e5 16.♙g2 ef 17.c7 ♘d5 18.♞he1+ ♙e7 (Vaganian – Ruck, Mainz 2006). In neither case did White gain sufficient compensation for the sacrificed material.

6. e2-e4 d5xe4

7. ♘c3xe4 ♙f8-e7

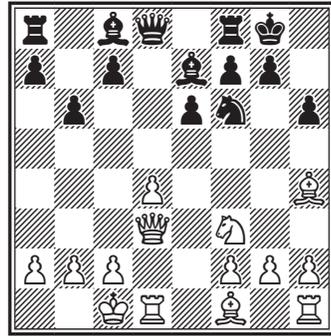
8. ♘e4xf6+ ...

This exchange is obviously necessary. In the event of the immediate 8.0-0-0 White has to reckon with 8...♘xe4 9.♙xe7 ♘xf2 (Lalev – Espig, Varna 1983).

8. ... ♙e7xf6

8...♘xf6 is more natural, and then 9.♘f3 0-0 (9...♚d5!?) 10.0-0-0 b6. This position differs from the *tabiya* (cf. the note to Black's 4th move) only in the inclusion of the moves h7-h6 and ♙g5-h4. New possibilities, new temptations... (Diagram.)

The chief of which, of course, is the g2-g4-g5!? breakthrough. But



it cannot be crudely carried out: 11.♞g1 ♙b7 12.g4? ♚d5 with a double attack on f3 and a2.

A very interesting course was taken by Hall – Jones (Gothenburg 2005), in which White first played 11.♘e5 and only in reply to 11...♙b7 12.♞g1 ♚d5 (12...♘e4!?) 13.c4 ♖a5 14.a3 (14.♗b1? ♙e4) 14...♞fd8 did he advance: 15.g4!? Black did not put up a tough resistance: 15...c5 16.d5! ed 17.♚h3 (the immediate 17.g5!? is also interesting, hoping for a queen sacrifice – 17...dc 18.gf!, with mate in all variations: 18...♞xd3 19.♞xg7+ ♗f8 20.♞xf7+ ♗g8 21.♙xd3 cd 22.♞g1+ ♗h8 23.♘g6+ ♗g8 24.♞g7#, or 20...♗e8 21.♞xe7+ ♗d8 22.♞xd3+ cd 23.♘f7+ ♗c8 24.♙h3+ ♗b8 25.♙g3#) 17...d4 (it appears that 17...g5!? 18.♙g3 ♙f8 would have rescued Black, but such moves are easier to recommend than to make yourself) 18.g5 hg 19.♞xg5 ♞d6 20.♙d3 ♙f8 21.♞dg1. As soon as the queen joins the rooks on the

g-file, the attack will become irresistible.

Manea – Grunberg (Baile Tusnad 2005) also deserves to be mentioned. White did not tempt fate in an attack, but took play into an endgame: **11. ♖xf6 ♖xf6** 12. ♖e4 ♖d5 13. ♖d3 ♖xe4 14. ♖xe4 ♖b8 15. ♗e5 c5 16. f4 cd 17. ♖xd4, where he was also successful.

**9. ♖h4xf6 ♖d8xf6**

The alternative is 9... ♗xf6. In Ansell – Whiteley (Newcastle 1995) White responded with the quiet 10. ♗f3 0-0 11. g3 b6 12. ♖g2 ♖b7 13. 0-0 etc. Knowing the enterprising playing style of grandmaster Stuart Conquest, one can be in no doubt that he would have chosen 11. 0-0-0!

**10. ♗g1-f3 ...**

This position was reached by transposition in Miles – Gheorghiu (Surakarta 1982). Black forced exchanges: 10... c5 11. 0-0-0 cd 12. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 13. ♗xd4 ♗c5 14. ♖b5+ ♖e7 15. ♖he1 and was able to hold the draw.

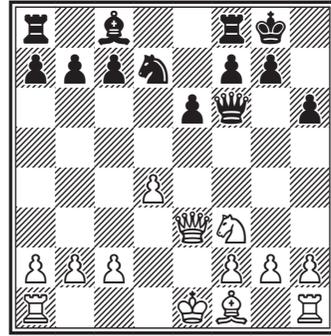
**10. ... 0-0**

With this move Andrey Sokolov shows that he is aiming for more complicated play.

**11. ♖d3-e3 ...**

Well-known prophylaxis. After 11. 0-0-0 White would have had to reckon not so much with 11... c5, as with 11... e5!?. (Diagram.)

The game began in the Veresov



Opening, but it continued – again in the French Defence. This position is known in theory. Only, in the French version the queen goes to e3 not from d3, but from d2.

But it is something else that is more important: how to assess the position? If Black can complete his development normally (b7-b6, ♖c8-b7) and advance c7-c5, he will have no visible difficulties. The only question is with which move order to carry out this plan.

For White it is fundamentally important to try and forestall this plan. For the moment his own play with g2-g4-g5 is kept in reserve; what is important is to hinder Black's development. But it is one thing to want to, and another to be able.

One thing is clear: a crisis will arrive in the next 4-5 moves. Either Black will freely develop his pieces, when it will be equality, and perhaps an immediate draw. Or White will succeed in imposing his

will, and directly on emerging from the opening he will gain a marked advantage.

### 11. ... c7-c5

This is possibly an inaccuracy. Black played more convincingly in Felgaer – Bruzon (Buenos Aires 2005): **11...b6** 12.♔b5!? (White tries to prevent Black's development; 12.0-0-0 ♔b7 etc. is harmless) 12...♖d8 13.♙c6 ♖b8 14.0-0-0 ♔b7 15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.de ♗e7 17.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 18.♖d1 ♗c8 19.♗e4 ♔xc6 20.♗xc6 ♗a6! 21.♗xc7 ♖f8. Draw agreed, since if 22.a3 Black has 22...♗e2, when he restores material equality.

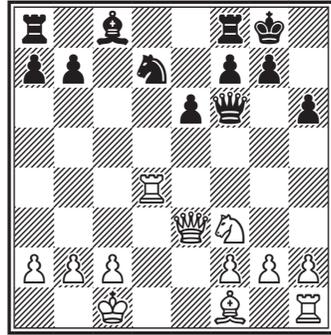
**11...♖d8** is less concrete: 12.0-0-0 (12.♔d3 c5 13.dc ♗xb2 14.0-0 ♗b4 15.♖fd1 ♖f8 – 15...♗xc5 16.♔h7+! – 16.c6 bc, and Black is at least equal, Hector – Gausel, Oxford 1998) 12...b6, but there too White has not yet managed to achieve anything real:

13.♗e4 ♖b8 14.♔b5 ♔b7 15.♔c6 ♔xc6 16.♗xc6 ♗f4+ 17.♔b1 ♗d6. Draw. (van der Wiel – Nunn, Lugano 1987);

13.♔d3 ♔b7 14.♔e4 ♔xe4 15.♗xe4 c5 16.d5 ed 17.♖xd5 ♖e8 18.♗d3 ♘e5 19.♘xe5 ♖xe5 20.♖xe5 ♗xe5. The position is completely equal (Hector – Speelman, Roskilde 1998).

### 12. 0-0-0 b7-b6

Possibly it was time to exchange – 12...cd 13.♖xd4 – and switch to the idea of e6-e5:



13...a6 14.♔e2 ♗e7 15.♖hd1 b5 16.g4 e5 17.♖d6 ♖e8 18.h3 ♘f8 19.♔b1. There is no impression that Black has equalised. Nevertheless the players agreed a draw (Wolff – Lputian, Tilburg 1992);

13...♗e7 14.g4 e5 15.♖e4 ♗d6 16.g5 h5 17.♔c4 ♘b6 18.♔b3 ♔e6 19.♖d1 ♗c7 20.g6!? ♔xb3 21.♗xb3 with a colossal advantage (Gashimov – J. Gonzalez, Bled 2002);

13...e5!? (a radical measure, and perhaps the most correct) 14.♖e4 ♖d8 15.♔c4 ♘b6 16.♘xe5 ♘xc4 17.♖xc4 ♔e6 18.♖f4 ♗g5 19.g4 ♖e8 20.h4 ♗e7 21.♘f3 ♗c7. Black is a pawn down, but he is full of optimism (Hector – Korchnoi, Hamburg 1995).

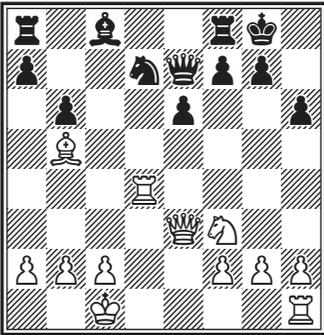
The move order chosen by Sokolov (first c7-c5, and only then b7-b6) allows Conquest to delay the development of the c8-bishop. For just 'five minutes', but this five minutes is sufficient to advance his pawn to g5.

13. ♖f1-b5 c5xd4

14. ♖d1xd4 ♗f6-e7

Here it is – an important tempo, which Black will be so lacking!

The last theoretical branch is the game Hector – C. Hanley (Jersey 2003): 14...♗c5 15.♗e5 a5?! (a strange move: it is though Black was planning 15...a6 and, misjudging the movement of his hand, advanced the pawn one square further than he should have done) 16.♖d6 ♖b7 17.♖xb6 etc.



15. g2-g4!? ♗d7-f6

The computer disapproves of this move, suggesting that the knight should be played to c5. The point is not to block the queen's access to the g5-point.

In fact, there is no particular difference. In any case White's attack is very strong. For example: 15...♗c5 16.♖g1 ♖b7 17.g5 ♖xf3 18.gh! (18.♗xf3 hg) 18...♗f6 19.♖xg7+! (but not 19.hg ♖fd8 20.♖f4 ♗g5!) 19...♗h8 20.♖f4

♗xh6 21.♖g3! ♖h5 22.♖h4!

♗xe3+ 23.fe. Even after agreeing to the exchange of queens, with his rooks alone White announces a linear mate.

16. g4-g5 h6xg5

17. ♗e3xg5 ...

Had the bishop been on b7, White would not have had this move.

17. ... ♖c8-b7

18. ♖h1-g1 ...

The game is decided. Already here Conquest could have won the queen: 18.♖d7, but he sensibly judged that the attack was more important.

18. ... g7-g6

19. ♖d4-d7 ...

But here White can be reproached for lack of restraint. The queen is good, but mate is better! Mate could have been achieved in a simple and pretty way: 19.♗e5 ♗c5 (19...♖ad8 20.♖h4) 20.♖d3! ♗xd4 21.♗xg6!

19. ... ♗e7xd7

20. ♖b5xd7 ♗f6xd7

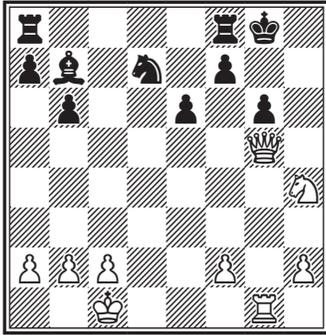
For an instant it might seem that White has made it much harder to win. There is no mate, and for the queen Black has rook, bishop and some hopes of setting up a fortress.

But these reasonings are a mirage. And it disappears after one precise move.

21. ♗f3-h4! ...

(Diagram.)

Threatening to capture on g6. To



save his king, Black is forced to part with his bishop. And without it there can be no question of a fortress.

21. ...                    ♖b7-e4

22. ♖g1-g4            ♖e4-f5

22... ♘c5 23.f3 is also hopeless.

In general everything is hopeless.

23. ♘h4xf5            e6xf5

24. ♚g5xf5            ...

Black resigned on the 35th move.

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