

Defending the Smith-Morra

IM Mark Ginsburg

October 19,

2008

Thanks to IM Alex Lenderman for publishing some Chess.FM videos showing ideas from the white perspective. I will call these “ALCF” material for short. I used it often to extend the position and turn the board around from black’s point of view. I have also recorded some Chess.FM material on this gambit, and its estimated release date is November 2008.

Please comment or ask questions at my Smith-Morra dedicated site

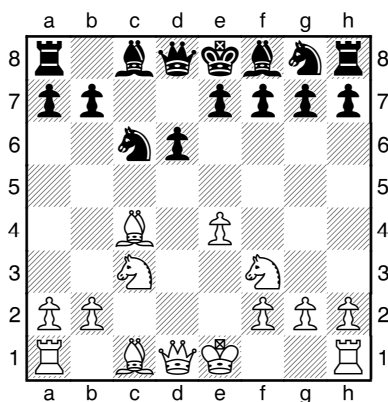
<http://nezhmet.wordpress.com/2008/10/18/the-fabulous-00s-chessfm-and-handling-the-smith-morra/>

1. e4 c5 2. d4 cxd4! 3. c3 dxc3!

It’s cowardly to refuse with 3...Nf6.

4.Nxc3 Nc6 5.Nf3 d6 Sticking to the straight and narrow, I will not analyze 5...e6 here.

6.Bc4 Diagram



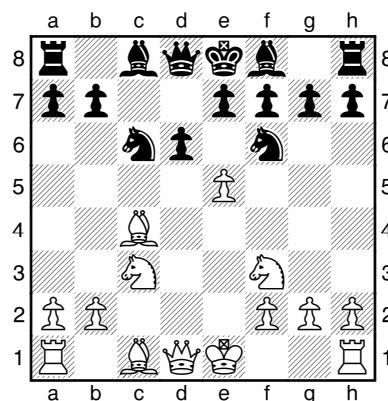
Position after 6. Bc4

An important juncture.

6...a6 ! What I consider to be the best move. It prepares Ng8-f6.

It’s very important to know this preparatory move avoids the elementary trap 6...Nf6?? 7.e5 Diagram. In a serious game between good players this wouldn’t happen, but it’s good to mention it so you the reader

can see some pitfalls awaiting black. The careful text move prepares Ng8-f6. Knowing why 6...Nf6?? fails is important. Let’s take a look at the position:



Position after the trap 6...Nf6?? 7. e5!

Needless to say, this trap is covered well in the ALCF videos. Promulgators of this gambit for white love analyzing 6...Nf6??

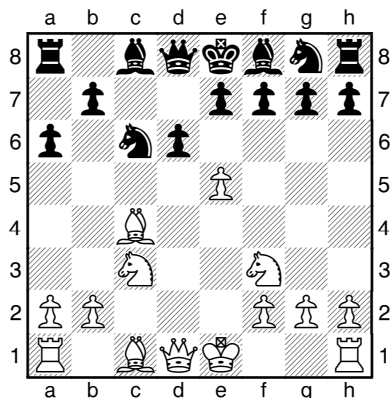
For example, 7...dxe5 8.Qxd8+ Nxd8 9.Nb5 Rb8 10.Nxe5 e6 and black has a bad game. But let’s not dwell on that blunder – just remember not to do it!

In passing we should point out that ALCF labels 6...e6! a good move. It is certainly part of the standard old-school “Soviet training” because I have met many graduates of that program that play 6...e6!. [See Appendix A for some more material on the divergence 6...e6.](#) It’s just a matter of taste, but I like 6...a6 to keep options open of Bc8-g4 in many lines.

Lenderman’s Idea 6..a6 7. e5

The interesting but not developing lunge **7.e5!?** wasn’t on my radar until the ALCF videos. ALCF labels this a testing move. I don’t really think this is so, but we have to look at it closely After all, why logically should black be in danger? He’s up a pawn and has no weaknesses.

I think it’s a good blitz surprise but no more than that. Let’s have a detailed look because this is important.

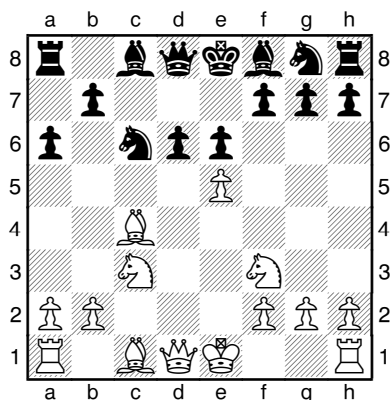


Position after Lenderman's 'Challenge': 7. e5

In other chapters, we will cover thoroughly the more normal 7. O-O where white plays with the simple-minded idea of Qe2 and Rd1 to induce e5. The divergence 7. Bg5, to double the black pawns after 7...Nf6 8. Bxf6, is covered in Appendix B.

Other divergences on move 7 are covered in Appendix C.

7...e6! Diagram



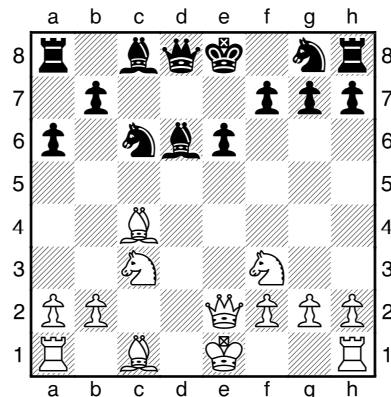
Position after 7. e5 e6

ALCF calls this response the safe move. Weak is 7...dxe5? 8.Qxd8+ Kxd8 (8...Nxd8 9.Nd5 Good for white. 9...Ne6 10.Nb6 Rb8 11.Nxe5 Nf6 Manest discovered a novelty here.) 9.Ng5! and black loses. I like 7...e6; it is safe and sound.

8.exd6

See Appendix D for divergences 8. Bg5! (playable) and 8. Bf4?! (ineffective).

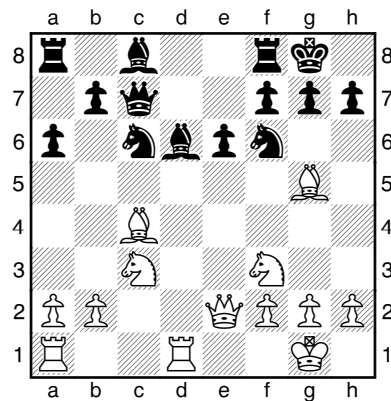
8...Bxd6 9.Qe2



ALCF Labels this 9. Qe2 an accurate move.

Even so, I think black is fine here. I checked with Rybka and amusingly Rybka found some attacking and sacrificial ideas for black(!).

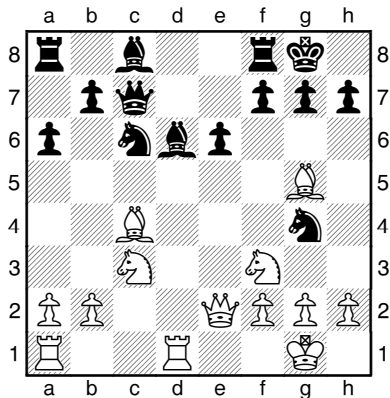
9...Nf6 10.0-0 0-0 11.Rd1 Qc7 12.Bg5 Diagram



Position after 12. Bg5

ALCF says this is great for white, but it doesn't look like an edge. Indeed, computers prefer black.

The right response is to avoid the doubling of the kingside pawns and play the counter-attacking move 12...Ng4! hitting the h2 pawn and preparing a strong regrouping to the e5 square. Even a cursory glance shows that black is happy. And why shouldn't he be – he has retained the extra gambitted pawn and has no difficulties developing.



Position after 12...Ng4!

I don't want to be bothered to get into the complications of 12...Ne5 13.Bxf6 gxf6 14.Bb3 Nxf3+ 15.Qxf3 Bxh2+. The text is very safe and good.

Now white has two main moves. The weakening g3 and the more solid h3.

A. **13.g3** I don't like the looks of this move at all since it is obviously weakening.

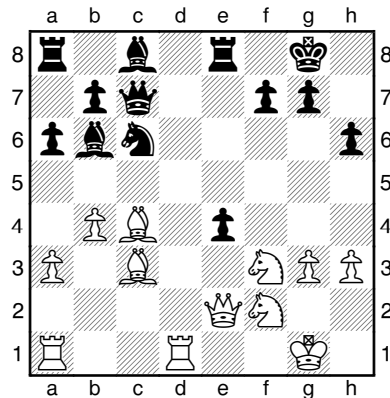
Here 13...Nge5 is possible but I recommend 13...h6!? **14.Ne4 Bb4 15.a3 Ba5 16.b4 Bb6** and black preserves this important piece. Black is totally fine here.

For example, here is how incautious play by white is punished.

17.Bd2 (17.h3?? Nxf2! 18.Nxf2 Qxg3+ 19.Kf1 hxg5) **17...e5** Gaining a nice foothold in the center and opening up the queen bishop line from c8.

18.Bc3 Re8 19.h3 Nxf2! 20.Nxf2 e4! Suddenly white is busted. He is really regretting these g3 and h3 moves in front of his king. A very nice variation to illustrate black's possibilities.

See diagram.



Position after the rapid attack 20...e4!

21.Kh2 Bxf2 22.Qxf2 exf3 23.Qxf3 Nxb4 24.Bxf7+ Qxf7 25.Qxf7+ Kxf7 26.Bxb4 Re2+ 27.Kg1 Bxh3 and black should easily win this ending.

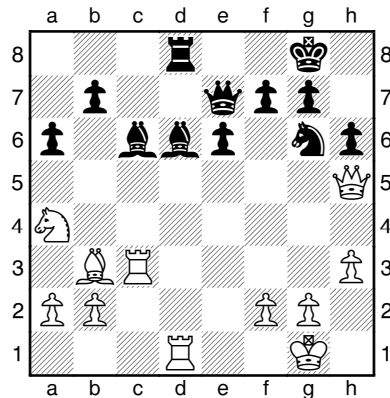
B. **13. h3 Nge5!** The thematic regrouping. Black has no problems.

14.Bb3 Nxf3+ 15.Qxf3 h6! Careful play avoiding the weakening f6. Note in all these lines black doesn't give the slightest positional concession while retaining the pawn.

16.Be3 Rd8 17.Rac1 Bd7. White has zero here. And if he gets greedy:

18.Na4 Ne5 19.Qh5 Bc6!! A beautiful exchange sacrifice.

20.Bb6 Qe7 21.Bxd8 Rxd8 22.Rc3 Ng6 Diagram



Position after 22...Ng6 - A Pure Positional Sacrifice.

With the bishop pair pointed at white's kingside, black is the sacrificial aggressor. A very cool sacrifice.

Example line: 23.g3 Be5 24.Rxd8+ Qxd8 25.Rc1 Bd4
26.Nc3 Qf6 27.Qe2 Qg5 28.Rd1 Qxg3+ 29.Kf1
Qxh3+ 30.Ke1 Ne5 and black wins, a nice Rybka line.

Conclusion: ALCF's 7. e5 offers white nothing.

In the next installment we'll examine 7. O-O, with the idea of Qe2 and Rd1, the Smith-Morra "Main Line."

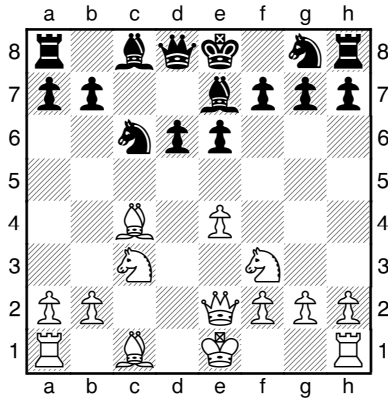
Future of This Document

When the document is complete (it is about 35% done right now) I will convert it to PDF and offer the book to readers for the nominal cost of \$5 USD. MC and Visa will be accepted. ☺ as well as chekels.

Appendix A: The “Soviet Defense” 6...e6

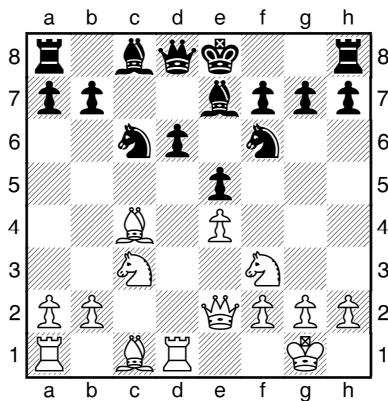
.0–0 12..Bxc6 Rc8 13.Qa4 bxc6 14.Qxa7 d5 black was better and won.

Indeed, after 7. Qe2 Be7!?! Gulko won a game against Lenderman and it’s a solid treatment. Let’s see it:



Lenderman-Gulko 7. Qe2 Be7!?!

After the natural follow-up moves 8.0–0 Nf6 9.Rd1 e5 Gulko had asserted himself in the center at the cost of giving up control of the d5-square. Nevertheless, with an extra black central pawn, this defensive system deserves very careful consideration.



Position after 9. Rd1 e5.

Black is operating with the idea Bg4. White normally plays 10. h3.

In Lenderman-Gulko, 10. Bb5? was tried and after 10..Bg4 11. Qc4?

Appendix B: 6....a6 7. Bg5

6...a6! 7. Bg5 Black has nothing to fear in this divergence. White's 'idea' of giving up his dark squared bishop actually helps black.

7.Bg5 Nf6 8.Bxf6 gxf6 9.Nh4 e6 10.Qh5?
Coffeehouse play (weak and trappy) but I've seen it in master-level games.

If the more sedate 10.0-0 Qb6 11.Qd2 Ne5 12.Be2 Rg8 13.Rac1 Bd7 14.Nf5 Rc8 15.Nd4 Nc6 16.Nf3 Rg6 17.Na4 Qd8 18.Nh4 Rg8 19.Nf3 b5 20.Nc3 Ne5 21.Qe3 Ng4 22.Qd4 Bh6 23.Rc2 Rc6 24.Rd1 Bf4 25.g3 Ne5 26.a3 h5 and black has an edge.

10. Qh5 is just weak and it's met by the following nice sequence:

10...Ne5 I won a game in the Swiss "A" Leagues, 2000, after 10...Qa5 11. Nf5 (white is not threatening anything) but the text is even clearer.

11.Bb3 Nd3+! 12.Kd2 Nc5! A very nice maneuver to remember. Black is well on top. White cannot castle and his forces are in disarray.

13.Kc2 Bd7 14.Rac1 Qb6 15.Qf3 Nxb3 16.axb3 Rg8 17.g3 Bh6 18.Rcd1 Rc8 19.Kb1 Bg7 20.Qd3 Bf8 and black is winning.

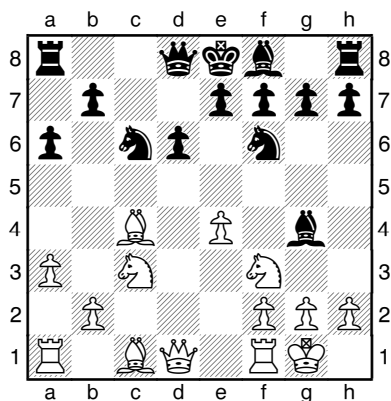
Appendix C: Other 7th Move divergences for white

C-1. 7. a3?!

7. a3?! (Slow not helping develop, building an a2 'nook' for the B/c4 is not called for right now) Nf6 8. Qc2 Bg4 9.Ng5 Moving same piece twice cannot be good. 9...Ne5! Very safe, refuting white's antics. 10.Qb3 Nxc4 11.Qxc4 Bh5 12.Qb3 h6 13.Nh3 g5 14.Qxb7 Qc8 15.Qxc8+ Rxc8 16.f3 Bg7 17.Be3 0-0 and black is happy.

Or, 7. a3?! Nf6 8. O-O Bg4 and black is doing just fine.

Diagram



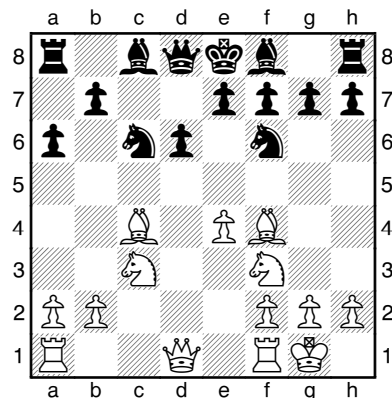
Position after 7. a3 Nf6 8. O-O Bg4

9.Qb3 This lunge leads nowhere. (9.h3 Bxf3 10.Qxf3 Ne5 11.Qe2 Nxc4 12.Qxc4 e6 13.f4 Be7 14.e5 Rc8 15.Qa4+ Nd7 16.exd6 Bxd6 and black is great.

9...e6 10.Qxb7 Na5 11.Qb4 Nxc4 12.Qxc4 Bxf3 13.gxf3 Be7 14.Qc6+ Nd7 15.Bf4 Qc8 16.Qxc8+ Rxc8 17.Rfd1 Ne5 18.Bxe5 dxe5 and black has no problems.

C-2. 7. O-O Nf6 8. Bf4

7. O-O Nf6 8. Bf4 Diagram This can get a little tricky but the bottom line is that both 8...b5 and 8...Bg4 are fine.



8. Bf4 Hauge-Wells, 2006.

An oddball move to tempt black into pinning with Bg4 then hit f7 with Qb3. But it leads to nothing; black can and should go ahead and pin the f3 knight.

8...Bg4! 9.Qb3 e6 10.Ng5 (Why not 10. Qxb7? – see below). 10...Na5! The safe way. Wells didn't want to be surprised. (10...b5 Fully playable. 11.Nxb5 Na5 Avoiding a rather transparent trap. (11...axb5?? 12.Bxb5 Rc8 13.Rac1 Be7 14.Bxc6+ Kf8 15.f3 Bh5 16.Be3) 12.Qa4 axb5 13.Bxb5+ Nd7 14.Be3 (14.h3 Bh5 15.g4 Bg6 16.Rfd1 h5! 17.Bxd6 Bxd6 18.Rxd6 Qxg5 19.Bxd7+ Kf8 20.Rb6 hxc6 21.Rb5 Qd8 22.Rd1 Qc7 23.Qb4+ Kg8 24.Rc5 Qf4 25.Rxa5 Rxa5 26.Qxa5 gxh3 Black is too fast in the race on the king.) 14...Bh5 15.Rfc1 Be7 16.Nh3 Nc6 17.Qc2 Nce5 18.f4 Ng4 19.Bd4 0-0 20.Qc7 Nc5! 21.Qxd8 Rfxd8+) 11.Qa4+ Nd7 12.f3 Nxc4 13.Qxc4 Bh5 and black was better and duly won, Hauge-Wells, Sunningdale BCF Ch T (4NCL) 2006

Note in this line that 10. Qxb7?? loses: 10...Na5 11. Qb4 e5 12. Bd5 Rb8 13. Qa4+ Bd7 and white is just losing a piece.

C-3 we'll look at a Lev Milman blitz try, 8. Be3.

8. Be3 Bg4 9. Qb3 e6 10. Bb6 (after 10. Qxb7 Na5 11. Qb4 Nxc4 12. Qxc4 Bxf3 black is OK) Qb8 11. Nd2 Be7 12. h3 Bh5. White has gotten the black queen bishop "offside" a little, but black is fine.

13. f4 Nd7! 14. g4 Bg6 15. f5?? In Milman-aries2, blitz ICC, this move was met by 15...d5 but even stronger is 15...Nxb6 first and then ...d5. For example, 15...Nxb6 16. fxc6 hxc6 17. Qxb6 d5! and black is much better.

Before white's 15th move, though, black is fine

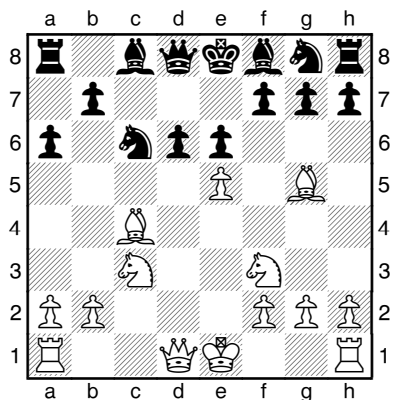
anyway. If 15. Be3? Nc5! 16. Qc2 d5! is great for black.

Conclusion: 8. Be3 Bg4 is harmless for black.

Appendix D. 7. e5 e6! 8. Bg5 and 7. e5 e6! 8. Bf4?

8. Bg5

White can try the primitive lunge 8.Bg5 Diagram



Position after 8. Bg5 Divergence

But black is OK after 8...Qd7, 8...Be7, or even 8...Qc7 or 8...f6.

For example,

a) 8...Qd7 A little awkward and not my first inclination. Nevertheless, black will get his pieces out.

b) 8...Be7 9.Bxe7 Ngxe7 10.exd6 Nf5 11.Ne4 Qa5+ 12.Qd2 0-0 13.Qxa5 Nxa5 14.Be2 Rd8 15.0-0-0 b5 16.g4 Bb7 17.gxf5 Bxe4 and black is fine.

c) 8...Qc7 9.exd6 Bxd6 and no obvious problems are to be seen.

d) The radical and ambitious 8...f6!? 9.exf6 gxf6 10.Be3 d5 11.Bd3 Nh6 12.h3 Nf7! A nice regrouping.

8. Bf4?

A weaker divergence is 8.Bf4? which simply allows black to get a protected passed pawn with tempo after 8... d5! – black just looks clearly better now.

For example,

8. Bf4? d5! 9.Bb3 9...Nge7 10.Bg5 h6 11.Bh4 Qc7 12.Qe2 Nf5 13.Bg3 Ncd4 14.Nxd4 Nxd4 15.Qd1 Nxb3 16.Qxb3 Bd7 17.0-0 Bc6 18.Rac1 Qd7 19.Rfd1 Be7 20.Ne4 Ba4 21.Qe3 Bxd1 22.Rxd1 Rc8 23.Nd6+ Bxd6 24.exd6 0-0 25.Rd4 Rc4 26.Rd3 Rfc8 27.h4 R8c6 28.Bf4 Rxf4 29.Qxf4 Qxd6 30.Qd2 Qc5 31.Rc3 Qb4 32.g3 d4 33.Rd3 Qxd2 34.Rxd2 e5 35.f4 f6 36.fxe5 fxe5 37.Kf2 Kf7 38.Kf3 Ke6 39.Ke4 Rc1 40.Rf2 Re1+ 41.Kd3 Kd5 42.Kd2 Rg1 0-1 [Horata,H-Derlich,M/Waldshut 2002/EXT 2003]

8. Bf4? d5! 9.Bd3 Nge7 10.Bg5 Qc7 11.Qe2 Ng6 Black is simply better in nik100 - aries2, 5/0 icc. 12.Bxg6 hxg6 13.0-0 Be7 14.Bf4 g5 (14...Bd7 15.Rac1 g5 16.Bg3 Qa5 17.h3 Kf8 18.Rfd1 Rc8 19.a3 Kg8) 15.Bg3 Kf8 (15...g4 16.Ne1 Qb6) 16.h3 g6 17.Rac1 Kg7 18.Rfd1 Qb6 19.b3 Bd7 20.Qd2 Rh5! and black has a dream position and won shortly.

Conclusion: 8. Bg5 is possible but black has numerous acceptable defenses. 8. Bf4, mentioned in ALCF, just looks bad.