



COLUMNISTS

The Openings Explained

Abby Marshall

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The Ruy Lopez, Marshall Attack [C89]

This column's topic is the Marshall Attack. How could I resist?

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5

This is the Spanish or Ruy Lopez. It is one of the oldest chess openings, dating around 600 years old. 3.Bb5 makes a lot of sense. This move attacks the knight guarding the e5-pawn.

3...a6

This is the most common way to proceed. The threat to win the e-pawn is more important than actually capturing the pawn, which does not work right away. With ...a6 Black maintains flexibility. The bishop is forced to decide on a plan of action, and if it retains the pull on the knight with 4.Ba4, then Black has the option of ...b5 at some point.

4.Ba4

4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.Nxe5 Qd4 and Black wins back the pawn.

4...Nf6

Black develops and attacks the e-pawn.

5.0-0

Like Black, White is also not concerned with directly defending the e-pawn. Black could capture the pawn, but it gets complicated since White has more development and the e-file would become open.

5...Be7

Black develops the bishop and prepares to castle.

6.Re1

White defends the e-pawn now. Black was probably threatening to take the e-pawn since Black is better developed than on the previous move.

6...b5

Black in turn defends the black e-pawn indirectly and gains space on the queenside.

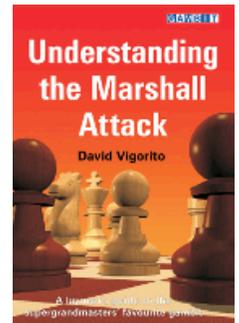
7.Bb3

White sensibly retreats.

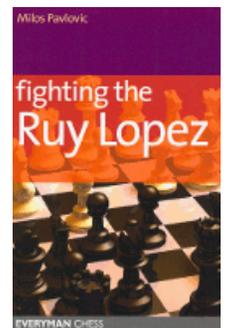
7...0-0

Black develops and prepares to unleash the Marshall Attack. 7...d6 8.c3 0-0 9. h3 would be the start of the main position in the Ruy Lopez. Black has several choices and play is usually more positional than in the Marshall Attack.

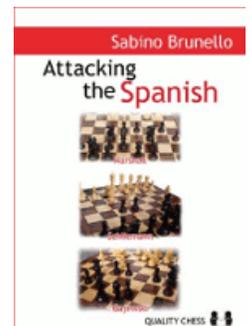
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[FEN "r1bq1rk1/2ppbPPP/p1n2n2/1p2p3/4P3/1B3N2/PPPP1PPP/RNBQR1K1 w - - 0 8"]

8.c3

This leads us to the Marshall Attack or Marshall Gambit. However, there are also alternatives, called Anti-Marshall Variations. I have to include them, because they are important and a strong reason that many players avoid the Marshall since there are several sidelines. Let's take a quick look.

A) 8.a4 is the main Anti-Marshall system. It jostles the queenside up, restraining Black's idea of ...d5 since Black must contend with queenside concerns. 8...b4 GM Alexander Grischuk has been a big proponent of this move. He recently played in the Candidates Matches for the World Championship so it seemed good to recommend his system against 8.a4. 8...b4 keeps the position closed on the queenside and impairs development of Nb1-c3. Worth noting is that I have not seen a top game where Black ever played ...a5 after ...b4. Probably it is considered a waste of time and not a big deal if White gets in a5.

A1) 9.c3 White immediately challenges Black's advance. With 9...Rb8 Black moves on the open b-file and does not capture on c3 right away, which would dissolve the pressure on White's queenside and allow bxc3-d4. 10.d4 d6 11.h3 h6 12.Nbd2 Re8 13.a5 bxc3 Black resolves things on the queenside to make a break in the center. 14.bxc3 exd4 15.cxd4 d5 16.e5 Nh7. This looks okay for Black. Black is not looking at breaking on the kingside, because White's d4- and e5-pawns point there, so ...f6 is not good, but the open queenside files and the possible weak pawn on a5 make for an interesting game.

A2) 9.d4 White challenges the center immediately. 9...Nxd4 Black immediately simplifies in the center rather than holding back with 9...d6. 10. Nxd4 exd4 11.e5 Ne8 12.Qxd4 Bb7 Black is sitting on the back rows for a moment but will be able to get out in a few moves. 13.Bf4 c5 14.Qe3 d5. Black equalizes with this simplifying thrust. 15.exd6 Bxd6 16.Nd2 Qc7 17. Be5 Bxe5 18.Qxe5 Qc6 19.f3 Nd6 20.Nc4 Nxc4 21.Bxc4 Rae8 22.Qf4 a5 23. Bb5 Rxe1+ 24.Rxe1 Qd5 25.h3 Bc8 26.Bc4 Qf5 27.Qc7 Be6 28.Bxe6 fxe6 29. Re4 Qd5 30.Kh2 h6 31.c4 bxc3 32.bxc3 Qd2 33.Qxc5 Rxf3 34.Qc8+ Kh7 35. Qxe6 Rf2 36.Rg4 Qxc3 37.Qe4+ ½-½, Grischuk,A-Beliavsky, Tripoli 2004.

A3) 9.d3 This is another reasonable, natural looking decision. 9...d6 Black follows suit and develops simply. 10.a5 Be6 11.Nbd2 Qc8 This move is interesting. The queen can either go to the queenside or stay in the middle, and the black rook may come to d8. 12.Bc4 (12.Nc4 has been getting a bad rap recently. 12...Rb8 13.h3 h6 14.Be3 Nh7



[FEN "1rq2rk1/2p1bppn/p1npb2p/P3p3/1pN1P3/1B1PBN1P/1PP2PPI/R2QR1K1 w - - 0 15"]

15.d4 (the usual response to opponent's play on the wing) 15...exd4 16.Nxd4 Nxd4 17.Bxd4 Rb5 18.f4 Bf6 19.f5 Bxc4 20.Bxc4 Bxd4+ 21.Qxd4 Re5 22. Qd3 Nf6 23.Bxa6 Qa8 Black won later playing a great game. 0–1, Hou Yifan-Harikrishna, V, Gyorgy Marx Mem 2007) 12...Re8 13.b3 Bf8 14.Bb2 h6 15.h3 Rb8 16.Nf1 g6 17.Ne3 Bg7 Black is very solid and White always has the a-pawn to worry about in an endgame.

A4) 9.a5 d5 This is Marshall-esque with the moves a4-5 and Black's b5-4 inserted. 10.exd5 e4 This is an interesting twist here. This was played in a game between Ruslan Ponomarev and Levon Aronian. Aronian is such a talented guy, who, although he was knocked out of the Candidates Matches, has been having tremendous results. 11.dxc6 exf3 12.d3 (12.Qxf3 Bg4 13. Qg3 Bd6 14.Qh4 Re8 and White is having problems with development.) 12... fxg2 13.Qf3 Rb8 14.Bc4 Ne8 15.Bf4 Bf6 16.Nd2 Bxb2 17.Rab1 Bc3 I like how unbalanced the position has become. 18.Bg5 Bf6 19.Rxe8 Rxe8 20.Ne4 Rxe4 21.Bxf6 Qxf6 22.Qxf6 gxf6 23.dxe4 Kf8 24.Kxg2 Ke7 25.Rd1 ½–½, Ponomarev, R-Aronian, Moscow 2006.

B) 8.h3 This move takes the bite out of the Marshall Attack. If Black goes ahead with ...d5, since now a future ...Qh4 would not threaten checkmate, as we will see in the actual Marshall Attack. 8...Bb7 9.d3 d6 10.a3 Na5 11.Ba2 c5 12.Nbd2 Nc6 There are a few systems where Black does this maneuver: Na5, c5, Nc6. 13.Nf1 Bc8 14.c3 Be6 Black is solid and may even be a little better because of more space. 15.Bxe6 fxe6 16.b4 Qd7 17.Qb3 Rfb8 18.Ng3 a5 19.bxc5 dxc5 20.a4 b4 21.Be3 Ne8 22.Red1 Nc7 23.Qc4 Na6 24.d4 cxd4 25.cxd4 exd4 26.Nxd4 Nxd4 27.Bxd4 Rc8 28.Qb3 Bf8 29.f4 Bc5 30.Nf5 Qf7 31.Ng3 Bxd4+ 32.Rxd4 Rc3 33.Qd1 Rxd3 34.Rc1 Rc3 0–1, Shomoev, A-Smikovski, Novokuznetsk 2008.

C) 8.a3 White waits and provides a square for retreat for the b3-bishop. 8... Bb7 9.d3 Re8 10.c3 h6 11.Nbd2 Bf8 12.Nf1 d5 13.exd5 Nxd5 Black is fine after this freeing break.

8...Bc5 is another choice that leads to a sharp game. 9.c3 d6 10.d4 What makes 8...Bc5 a little edgy is that 10.d4 comes with tempo. Black does have pressure on the center now however. 10...Bb6 11.h3 Re8 12.Bg5 h6 13.Bh4 exd4 14.cxd4 g5 15.Bg3 g4 16.hxg4 Bxg4 17.Bh4 Nxd4 18.Nc3 Bxf3 This was a tense game between Carlsen-Aronian Morelia/Linares 2008. Aronian lost but he had improvements that would have at least equalized (18...c6 keeps the knight out of d5 and is less crazy than what Aronian played.)

D) 8.d4 This is one of the sharpest Anti-Marshall systems. 8...Nxd4 I like this active move the best. 9.Nxd4 exd4 10.e5 Ne8 11.c3 (11.Qxd4 d6 This move is very logical, attacking the pawn that is crowding Black. 12.c3 Bb7 13.Nd2 c5 14.Qe3 dxe5 15.Qxe5 Bd6) 11...dxc3 12.Nxc3 d6 13.Qf3 Be6 14.Nd5 Rc8 15. Bf4 dxe5 16.Nxe7+ (16.Bxe5 Bd6) 16...Qxe7 17.Bxe5 Nd6 White has definite compensation for the pawn but Black is fine. Let's see how a top level game ended. 18.Qc3 Qg5 19.Bxe6 fxe6 20.b3 Qg6 21.Qc6 Nf7 22.Bg3 e5 23. Rac1 Qf6 24.h3 Rfd8 25.Rc2 h5 26.Qxf6 gxf6 27.Rc6 Kg7 28.f4 Rd3 29.Kh2 Rd6 30.Rc5 Re6 31.a4 bxa4 32.bxa4 Kg6 33.fxe5 Nxe5 34.Bxe5 fxe5 35.Kg3 Kf6 36.Kf3 c6 37.Rec1 Rd6 38.R1c4 Kf5 39.g4+ hxg4+ 40.hxg4+ Kf6 41. Ke4 Rg8 42.Ke3 Ke6 43.Rxc6 Rxc6 44.Rxc6+ Kd5 45.Rxa6 Rxd4 ½–½, Leko, P-Aronian, ARM 2009.

9.Bxf7+ is another option that Black needs to be aware of. 9...Rxf7 10.Nxe5 Rf8. Black has no choice since moving the knight on d4 does not work. (10...Nc6 11.Nxf7 Kxf7 12.e5 Ne8 13.Qd5+ Kf8 14.Re3; 10...Ne6 11.Nxf7 Kxf7 12.e5 Ne8 13.Qf3+)



[FEN "r1bqn3/2ppbkpp/p3n3/1p2P3/8/5Q2/PPP2PPP/RNB1R1K1 b - - 0 13"]

11.Qxd4 c5 12.Qd1 Bb7 13.Nc3 Qe8!? 14.h3 d5 15.exd5 Rd8. I like opening the position and having the bishop-pair.

E) 8.Bd5 This is an odd choice though it tops the list of alternatives to the main Anti-Marshall systems. 8...Nxd5 9.exd5 Nb4 10.Nc3 Bb7 11.Nxe5 d6 12.Ng4 f5 The founder of this opening plays aggressively. 13.Ne3 f4 14.a3 fxe3 15.dxe3 Bh4 I won't say that Frank Marshall did not have games where he crashed and burned, but he also had many nice attacking games. 16.Rf1 Bxf2+!? 17.Rxf2 Rxf2 18.Kxf2 Qf6+ Keep in mind that the knight on b4 has no escape. Marshall's attack is not so easy. 19.Ke2 Qg6 20.axb4 Qxg2+ 21.Kd3 Bxd5 22.b3 Bf3 23.Qe1 c5 24.Bb2? Rc8 (24...c4+! 25.bxc4 bxc4+ 26.Kxc4 Qxc2 The bishop on b2 is now under attack.) 25.e4? cxb4 26.Qg3 Rxc3 + 27.Bxc3 Qe2+ 0-1, Black,R-Marshall,F, New York 1918.

F) 8.Nc3 This move looks like it can't really be bad, but it is hardly ever played because it doesn't address White's usual ideas of playing c3-d4, Nbd2-f1 and so on. 8...d6 9.d3 Bg4 10.h3 Bh5 11.Be3 Na5 Black is easily equal.

8...d5!?



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/2p1bPPP/p1n2n2/1p1pp3/4P3/1BP2N2/PP1P1PPP/RNBQR1K1 w - - 0 9"]

The start of the Marshall Attack, named after Frank Marshall.

9.exd5

A) 9.d4 is White's last chance to avoid entering the Marshall Attack. 9...exd4 This is the best way to resolve the center tension. 10.e5 Ne4 (11.Nxd4 Nxe5 12.Bf4 [12.f3 does not win a piece because Black can play 12...c5 and threaten 13...c4. 12...c5 13.fxe4 cxd4 14.cxd4 Bg4 15.Qd2 Nc4 Black is much more active and developed.] 12...Bf6 13.f3 [13.Bxe5 White quickly went down after this move in a game between two 2600+ players. 13...Bxe5 14.Nf3 Bg4 15.Qxd5 Bxf3 16.Qxe5 Qh4 17.Rxe4 Qxe4 18.Qxe4 Bxe4 19.Nd2 Bb7 0-1, Belov,V-Akopian,V, Moscow RUS 2007] 13...c5 14.fxe4 cxd4 15.Bxd5 Bg4 16.Qd2 dxc3 17.Nxc3 Rc8



[FEN "2rq1rk1/5ppp/p4b2/1p1Bn3/4PBb1/2N5/PP1Q2PP/R3R1K1 w - - 0 18"]

Black has an outpost on e5 and the open c-file.) 11.cxd4 Bf5 12.Nc3 Nxc3 13. bxc3 Qd7 Black is going to play on the queenside. 14.Bc2 h6 15.Be3 Na5 16. Nd2 White wants to cover the c4-square. 16...Rab8 17.Bxf5 Qxf5 18.Nf1 Nc4 19.Bc1 c5 Black is starting to walk all over White, and not playing particularly revolutionary moves. 20.Ne3 Nxe3 21.Bxe3 c4 Black is better. It is instructional to see how Jakovenko finishes White. 22.g4 Qd7 23.f4 f5 24. exf6 Bxf6 25.a3 Bh4 26.Rf1 Rbe8 27.Qf3 Re4 28.f5 Rfe8 29.Bf4 Bf6 30.Ra2 Qe7 31.Kg2 Kh7 32.h3 a5 33.Rb2 Qxa3 34.Rxb5 Re2+ 35.Kh1 Rc2 36.g5 Rxc3 37.Qg4 Bxg5 38.f6 Bxf6 39.Rxd5 Rxh3+ 40.Kg2 Rh4 41.Qf5+ Kh8 42. Be5 Bxe5 43.Rxe5 Rb8 44.Rfe1 Rf8 0–1, Nijboer,F-Jakovenko, Sabadell 2008.

B) 9.d3 This is not a serious choice. 9...dxe4 10.dxe4 Qxd1 11.Bxd1 Bb7 White has five pieces on the back row so Black is better.

9...Nxd5

Black recaptures and gets a knight in the center.

10.Nxe5

Black would have a great game were it not for the hanging e5-pawn. Even so, by taking the pawn, White is not developing any pieces and leaves the rook on e5 open to attack.

10...Nxe5

Black takes the knight as not to lose any time.

11.Rxe5

White now has a rook in the center, which is not where rooks usually belong.

11...c6

Black keeps the knight in the center and prepares to play ...Bd6. 11...Nf6 was Marshall's original idea but it is not as good as 11...c6 and he soon switched. 12.d4 Bd6 13.Re1 Ng4 14.h3 Qh4. The attack looks fairly strong but it does not seem to work. 15.Qf3 Nxf2 16.Bd2 (16.Qxf2 is also pretty good. 16... Bg3? 17.Qxf7+) 16...Bb7 17.Qxb7 Nd3 18.Re2 Qg3 19.Kf1 Nf4 20.Rf2 Qh2 21.Bxf4 Bxf4 22.g3+- .

12.d4

White has to get out some pieces.

A) 12.d3 is also a choice. 12...Bd6 13.Re1 Bf5 Black focuses on the pawn on d3 as a target.



[FEN "r2q1rk1/5ppp/p1pb4/1p1n1b2/8/1BPP4/PP3PPP/RNBQR1K1 w - - 0 14"]

A1) 14.Nd2 Nf4 (14...Bxd3 Black could recapture the pawn and make the material even, but it might be better to keep up the pressure. 15.Nf3 Bg6) 15. Ne4 Nxd3 16.Nxd6 Qxd6 17.Be3? This lets Black basically take over. 17... Qg6 Now material is even and Black is just much better. 18.Rf1 Nxb2 19.Qd2 Nd3 20.f4 c5 Black is dominating.

A2) 14.Qf3 Qh4 15.g3 Qh3 16.Bxd5 (16.Nd2 Development is too slow in this situation. 16...Rae8 17.Ne4 Bg4 18.Qg2 Qxg2+ 19.Kxg2 f5 This does not actually win a piece because the knight on d5 is pinned after White recaptures dxe4. However White has weakened his king position and kingside pawns very much. 20.h3 Bh5 21.Bf4 Now the rook on e1 is protected and the pin on the e4-knight is broken. 21...Bxf4 22.gxf4 Bf7 23.Nc5 Nxf4+ 24.Kg3 g5) 16... cxd5 This is similar to the position in the main line except for the pawn on d3 and bishop on f5, targeting the pawn.

A2a) 17.Bf4 This is a developing move but it gives the pawn back. 17...Bxf4 18.Qxf4 Bxd3 19.Nd2 Rfe8 with equality.

A2b) 17.a4 This was a novelty by Hikaru Nakamura. 17...b4 18.Qxd5 Rad8 This transposes to the main line with the moves a4, ...b4 thrown in. ChessPublishing says this doesn't make a difference for the main line.

A2c) 17.Be3 This developing move makes more sense than 17.Bf4. 17...Bxd3 18.Qxd5 So White did not actually give back the pawn. However Black is more active and White still has not developed on the queenside. 18...Rad8 19. Qg2 (19.Qf3 Rfe8 20.Nd2 Qf5 Black no longer holds out for an attack but goes to an endgame where the bishop-pair are enough to offset the pawn deficit. 21.Qxf5 Bxf5 22.Bd4 f6 23.f3 b4 24.Ne4 Bc7 25.Kf2 bxc3 26.bxc3 Rb8 27.Re2 Kf7 28.Rd1 h5 29.Bc5 Kg6 30.Bd4 Magnus Carlsen as White decided not to press for a win. ½-½, Carlsen,M-Anand, Leon 2005) 19...Qf5 20.Nd2 Rfe8 21.Nf3 Be4 22.Nd4 Qd7 23.f3 Bd5 I feel okay with the bishop-pair and the possibility of ...b4.

A2d) 17.Qxd5 Rad8 White has won another pawn at the cost of leaving the queenside undeveloped. We will look at this position in the first illustrated game.

B) 12.Re1 This transposes after 12...Bd6 13.g3 Qd7 14.d4 Qh3.

C) 12.Bxd5 This is the main alternative to the alternatives to the main line. White seeks to trade material immediately since White is a pawn up. Black gets the bishop-pair. 12...cxd5 13.d4 Bd6 14.Re3 (14...f5 15.Qf3 Bb8 16.Nd2 g5 Ivanov tried this violent approach and it worked out alright. 17.Qh5 g4 18. Nb3 f4 19.Re2 Bf5 20.Bd2 Bd6 21.f3 gxf3 22.gxf3 Qf6 23.Rae1 Ra7 24.Kh1 Rg7 25.Nc5 Qf7 (25...Rg6 26.Nxa6 Kh8 If I was White, I would be scared of this attack. As well, Black can play ...Ra8-xa2 and get in on the queenside.) 26.Qxf7+ Kxf7 27.Ne6 Bxe6 28.Rxe6 Rg6 29.R6e2 Rfg8 30.Rf1 a5 31.a3 a4 32.Be1 Re8 33.Rxe8 Kxe8 34.Bd2 h5 35.Rg1 Rxg1+ 36.Kxg1 Ke7 37.Be1 Ke6 38.Bh4 Bc7 39.Kf2 Bb6 40.Ke2 Bc7 41.Bg5 Bd6 42.Kd3 Bc7 43.Kc2 Bd6 44.Bd8 Kd7 45.Bg5 Ke6 46.Kb1 Bc7 47.b3 Kf7 48.Ka2 Ke6 49.Kb2 Kf7 50.bxa4 bxa4 51.c4 dxc4 52.Kc3 Bd6 53.Kxc4 Ke6 54.d5+ Kf5 55.Bd8 Bxa3 ½-½, De Firmian,N-Ivanov, Seattle 2002) 14...Qh4 15.h3 Bf5 Black seems about equal here too. The bishop-pair count for a lot.

D) 12.g3 This preemptive move is also a choice. It was played by none other than Fischer. 12...Nf6 13.d4 Bd6 14.Re1 Bg4 15.Qd3 c5 16.dxc5 Bxc5 17. Qxd8 Raxd8 18.Bf4 h6 19.Na3 g5 20.Be3 Bxe3 21.Rxe3 Rd2= 22.Nc2 Re8 23.Rxe8+ Nxe8 24.Ne3 Bf3 25.Bc2 Nd6 26.b3 Kf8 27.a4 Ne4 28.Bxe4 Bxe4 29.axb5 axb5 30.b4 Rb2 31.g4 Kg7 32.Kf1 Kf6 33.Ra5 Rb1+ 34.Ke2 Rb2+ 35.Kf1 ½-½, Fischer,R-Spassky, Santa Monica 1966.

12...Bd6



[FEN "r1bq1rk1/5ppp/p1pb4/1p1nR3/3P4/1BP5/PP3PPP/RNBQ2K1 w - - 0 13"]

Black naturally takes aim against the white king. This is after all an attack.

13.Re1

A) 13.Re2 This is awkward. 13...Qh4 14.g3 Qh3 The problem for White now is that the queen is blocked from getting out, for instance to f3. 15.Nd2 Bf5 16. a4 Bd3 17.Re1 Rae8 18.Nf3 Rxe1+ 19.Qxe1 b4 20.c4 Nf6 21.c5 Bb8 22.Qd1 Be4 23.Qe2 h6 24.Bd1 Re8 Black is already a little better. 25.Qf1 Qf5 26.Nh4 Qd7 27.Be3 Nd5 28.Bb3 g5! 29.Ng2 Bxg2 30.Qxg2 Nxe3 31.fxe3 Rxe3 32. Qc2 Kg7 33.Rf1 f6 34.Qc4 Qe8 35.Qxb4 Bxg3 36.hxg3 Rxg3+ 37.Kh2 Rg4 38.Bd1 Qh5# 0-1, Kotronias,V-Vouldis,A, Greece 2002.

B) 13.Re4 This does not make sense here. 13...Bf5 14.Re1 Qh4 This is the same as the main line except Black has an extra ...Bf5 in.

13...Qh4

The queen enters the attack and targets h2.

14.g3

This is the only move to defend. 14.h3 is too much of a target. 14...Bxh3 15. gxh3 Qxh3 16.Nd2 (16.Re5 Bxe5 17.dxe5 Rad8 Black is better because of White's exposed king.) 16...Bh2+ 17.Kh1 Bg3+ 18.Kg1 Qh2+ 19.Kf1 Qxf2#.

14...Qh3

Black gets closer to the white king and takes over the weakened light squares. It is nice that White's light-squared bishop is over on the queenside.

15.Be3

This is White's chance to breathe a little before Black starts throwing pieces at the king, so this decision point is very important.

A) 15.Re4 is a main move as well. 15...g5! A move that has to be memorized. It prevents Rh4 and provides ammo for a possible ...f5-f4. (15...Bf5 16.Rh4)



[FEN "r1b2rk1/5p1p/p1pb4/1p1n2p1/3PR3/1BP3Pq/PP3P1P/RNBQ2K1 w - g6 0 16"]

A1) 16.Qe2 f5 17.Bxd5+ cxd5 18.Re6 f4! This was Anand's big novelty. It's tough to see because it apparently gives up a bishop for nothing and allows the trade of queens. The threats around the white king prove to be formidable enough. 19.Rxd6 Otherwise Black gets the diagonal open for the c8-bishop for nothing. 19...Bg4 20.Qf1 Qxf1+ 21.Kxf1 Rae8 Mate in two is threatened. 22.Bd2 Bh3+ 23.Kg1 f3 At this point Black can only get a draw, but a thrilling game nonetheless. Very imaginative play. 24.h3 Re2 25.Be3 (25. f4? This loses. 25...Rfe8 26.Rh6 g4 27.Rxa6 Rg2+ 28.Kh1 Ree2 White can delay mate by seven moves.) 25...Rxe3 26.fxe3 Rf1+ 27.Kh2 g4 28.Rxd5 ½-½, Ponomarev,R-Anand, Linares 2002.

A2) 16.Bxg5? Qf5 The double attack is winning.

A3) 16.Qf1 White quickly tries to trade down. 16...Qxf1+ 17.Kxf1 Bf5 18. Nd2 White can actually do this because if Black takes the exchange, White first gets the g-pawn, makes Black have weak pawns, and completes development easily. 18...h6 19.Re1 Rae8 20.Nf3 g4 21.Ng1 Development is a little awkward for White. 21...Bd3+ 22.Ne2 Re6 23.Bxd5 cxd5 24.Be3 Rfe8 25.Red1 Be4 26.Nc1 h5 27.Nd3 Bf3 28.Re1 h4 29.Bf4 Be4 30.Ne5 Bf5 (30... f6!? 31.Nxg4 Bxf4 32.Rxe4 Otherwise Black will play ...Bd3+ 32...dxe4 33. gxf4 Maybe Black felt that the knight and two pawns are stronger than the rook.) 31.f3 ½-½, Motylev,A-Onischuk, Biel 2007.

B) 15.Qf3 White tries to run over the kingside and defend. 15...Bg4 16.Qg2 Qh5 17.Be3 Bh3 18.Bd1 Qxd1 19.Rxd1 Bxg2 20.Kxg2 f5 I like the black knight. 21.c4 bxc4 22.Nd2 c3 23.bxc3 f4 24.gxf4 Rae8 Nice and active. 25. Nc4 Bxf4 26.Rd3 Rf5.



[FEN "4r1k1/6pp/p1p5/3n1r2/2NP1b2/2PRB3/P4PKP/R7 w - - 0 27"]

Black has ideas on the kingside.

C) 15.Qe2 Unlike 15.Qf3, there is no threat of winning a pawn on d5. 15... Bd7 Black has an interesting idea of bringing the queen to f5. 16.Qf1 Qf5 17. Be3 h5; we have seen the f-pawn and g-pawn get pushed, but this is the first time the h-pawn is part of the action. 18.Nd2 h4 19.Qg2 Rae8 20.Rac1 Qh5 21.Ne4 Bb8 22.Bd2 Bg4 23.Ng5 h3 24.Qf1 Rxe1 25.Rxe1 f6 26.Ne6 Re8 27. Nc5 Re2 28.Bc1 Bxg3! 29.f3 Rg2+ 30.Qxg2 hxg2 Black ground out the win. 0-1, Banikas,H-Melkumyan,H, Kavala 2009.

D) 15.Nd2 A normal move like this is not so good. 15...Bg4 16.Nf3 Qh5 17.

Kg2 Rae8 It's easy for White to drift and let Black take over.

15...Bg4

Black develops with tempo.

16.Qd3

White prepares a possible Qf1 defense and gets the queen off the back row.

16...Rae8!

Black brings another piece into the game and prepares a rook lift.

17.Nd2

White also develops. We are nearing the critical stage.

17...Re6



[FEN "5rk1/5ppp/p1pbr3/lp1n4/3P2b1/1BPQB1Pq/PP1N1P1P/R3R1K1 w - - 0 18"]

The rook can either swing over to the kingside or double up with ...Rfe8.

18.a4

White touches Black's queenside and opens the a-file for the rook. Keep in mind that White is up a pawn and will be playing conservatively. The pressure is on Black to prove something of value for the pawn. Otherwise, White will cruise into an endgame a pawn up.

A) 18.c4 is tactically wrong. 18...Bf4! A great interference move. 19.cxd5 (19.gxf4 Rh6) 19...Rh6 20.Qe4 Qxh2+ 21.Kf1 Bxe3 22.Rxe3 Rf6 White is finished.

B) 18.Bxd5 White gets rid of the black knight while giving Black the bishop-pair. As we will see, White will dearly miss the light-squared bishop. 18...cxd5 19.Qf1 Qh5 20.Qg2 Rfe8 21.a4 b4 22.Rec1 Bh3 23.Qf3 Bg4 24.Qg2 Rf6 25.Re1 Bh3 26.Qh1 Qf5 27.f4 Qd3 28.Qf3 Rfe6 29.Nf1 Bxf1 30.Qxf1 Qxf1+ 0-1, Naranjo Moreno,A-Fernandez Siles,L, Ronda 2007/EXT 2008 (30).

C) 18.Qf1 White challenges the nest the black queen has made on h3. 18...Qh5 19.a4 (19.f3 Nxe3 20.Qf2 Nd5 21.fxg4 Qxg4 Black has regained the pawn with a good position.) 19...Rfe8 20.axb5 axb5 transposes to the main line.

18...Qh5

Black seeks to do some reshuffling. The bishop may come to h3, the queen to f5, maybe Rf6 putting pressure on f2. 18...Bf4 does not work here. In the other line with 18.c4, the c-pawn blocked the light-squared bishop from taking on d5. 19.Bxd5 Rh6 20.Bg2 Qxh2+ 21.Kf1 Bh3 22.Bxh3 Qxh3+ 23.Ke2 White is up a piece.

19.axb5

White opens the a-file.

19...axb5

After nineteen moves we have reached the main battleground position of the Marshall Gambit.

20.Qf1

White guards the king.

A) 20.Nf1 This move, defending e3 and h2, will be covered in the second illustrative game.

B) 20.c4 White tries to mix things up on the queenside even more. The danger is that it distracts the white pieces from the queenside. 20...bxc4 21.Nxc4 Bb4 22.Rec1 Be2 The kingside looks suddenly abandoned so White opts for a trade of queens although giving the pawn back to Black. 23.Bd1 Qxh2+ 24.Kxh2 Bxd3 25.Ne5 Bb5 26.Bb3 Rd8 27.Ra7 f6?! This allows a tactical sequence. 28.Nxc6 Bxc6 29.Ra6 Kf8 30.Raxc6 Rxc6 31.Rxc6 Nxe3 32.fxe3 Bd2 33.Bc4 Bxe3 34.d5 Bd2 35.Rb6 Ke7 36.Re6+ Kf8 37.g4 ½-½, Tal,M-Spassky,B, Candidates, Tbilisi 1965.

C) 20.Ne4



[FEN "5rk1/5ppp/2pbr3/1p1n3q/3PN1b1/1BPQB1P1/1P3P1P/R3R1K1 b - - 0 20"]

Rather than retreat White moves the knight forward, attacking the d6-bishop and leaving open the chance of an irritating fork of Ng5 if a bishop goes to h3/f3. 20...Bc7 21.Bd2 Rfe8 22.Bd1 Bxd1 23.Rexd1 f5 24.Ng5 Re2 25.Qf3 Qg6 This is a complicated position. Unfortunately Black has lost the light-squared bishop. On the other hand, the rook is on the seventh rank and the knight on d5 is strong.

20...Bh3

The bishop takes over the light squares on the white kingside.

21.Bd1

White gets the light-squared bishop over to defend the kingside.

21...Qf5

Black continues to guard the h3-bishop and prevents the queen from going to d3.

22.Qe2

It looks to me like White is under pressure on the e-file.

22...c5!?

This is an unexpected break. The idea seems to be that is White's tied up. Since the kingside is reasonably guarded at this point, Black targets the center.

23.Nf3

White is trying to get organized.

A) 23.dxc5 Nxe3 24.fxe3 Bxc5 25.Nf1 Rfe8



[FEN "4r1k1/5ppp/4r3/1pb2q2/8/2P1P1Pb/1P2Q2P/R2BRNK1 w - - 0 26"]

Black has open lines and plenty of pressure.

B) 23.Qf3 White can try to get out of the pin on the e-file. 23...cxd4 24.Qxf5 Bxf5 25.cxd4 Bb4 26.Bb3 Nxe3 27.fxe3 Bxd2 28.Bxe6 fxe6. Two bishops are much stronger than the rook.

23...Bf4

Black keeps up the pressure by attacking the pinned piece. I will show the rest of a game between two elites, Peter Leko and Vladimir Kramnik, Monte Carlo 2007, but I am stopping detailed analysis here. When researching the attack I was surprised at how many top level players have assayed it at one time or another. Look in the databases and you will find Aronian, Shirov, Jakovenko, Grischuk, Spassky, Bacrot, Kramnik, and other top level players are on the black side of the Marshall Attack. Even if they are only using it to draw, having a drawing weapon as Black against top players is not a bad thing. I included more complete games than I usually do because the variation itself is long: the main position starts at move nineteen. So if a game goes thirty-five moves, we are already more than halfway through. More importantly it is helpful to see how strong players play the position. The Marshall Attack is tough for both sides because White has to deal with the attack while Black has to justify being down a pawn. Both sides have chances for interesting chess and I recommend the Marshall Attack if you are willing to put in the work to study it.

24.Qd2 Nxe3 25.fxe3 Bh6 26.Qf2 Rfe8 27..Ne5 Qxf2+ 28.Kxf2 f6 29.Bg4

29.Ng4 This is better when Black should move the bishop to g5.

29...Rxe5 30.Bxh3 Bxe3+ 31.Kf3 cxd4 32.Rad1 dxc3 33.bxc3 Bb6 34.Rxe5 Rxe5 35.Rd5 Re3+ 36.Kg2 Rxc3 37.Rxb5 Rc2+ 38.Kh1 Be7 39.Be6+ Kf8 40.Bb3 Rc3 41.Kg2 g6 42.Bd1 Ke7 43.Rb2 Rd3 44.Be2 Re3 45.Bf3 Ra3 46.Re2+ Be5 47.g4 Ke6 48.Be4 h5 49.gxh5 gxh5 50.Rf2 Bd4 51.Rf3 Ra2+ 52.Kh3 Bg1 53.Bf5+ Ke5 54.Kh4 Rf2 0-1

Smeets, J (2573) – Bacrot, E (2700)

Corus B Wijk aan Zee NED 2008

Ruy Lopez, Marshall Attack [C89]

This game featured a great tactic. And like the other tactics we have seen, it did not end just then and there. Black combined the tactic with positional pressure and squeezed out a win.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 0-0 8.c3 d5 9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Nxe5 Nxe5 11.Rxe5 c6 12.d3

This is not the main line, though still a major alternative.

12...Bd6 13.Re1 Bf5 14.Qf3 Qh4 15.g3 Qh3 16.Bxd5 cxd5 17.Qxd5 Rad8



[FEN "3r1rk1/5pp/p2b4/1p1Q1b2/8/2PP2Pq/PP3P1P/RNB1R1K1 w - - 0 18"]

So here we are from the theory section. White is up two pawns with no queenside developed. Black has the bishop-pair and control of the light squares, and is down two pawns. Black has definite compensation.

18.Qg2

White flies immediately back to defend the kingside and avoids the ...Bxg3 discovered tactic.

18...Qh5

Black can better exert pressure with the queens on the board. 18...Qxg2+ 19. Kxg2 Bxd3; this is a pretty classic mistake. Black gets distracted by a chance to win material, forgetting that one, pressure is worth more than a pawn, and two, Black was down two pawns! So Black still has a material deficit with greatly decreased pressure.

19.Be3

Here we have development. White does not defend the pawn because of the same reason Black does not take the pawn: it would take time and lessen the pressure. White can afford to give one pawn back.

19...Bh3

19...Bxd3 I like Bacrot's move so much better. As I was told by my coach and as I tell the kids I coach, play forcing moves! 20.Nd2 Bf5 21.Qc6 Bh3 22.a4 (22.Qxa6 Bxg3 23.hxg3 Rxd2)



[FEN "5rk1/5ppp/Q7/1p5q/8/2P1B1Pb/PP1r1P2/R3R1K1 w - - 0 24"]

22...Bb8 23.axb5 axb5 24.Ra5 Bd7. Now Black is the one who is scuttling backwards.

20.Qh1

White chooses this ugly square over other choices because of light-square problems. If 20.Qb7, White has to keep an eye on f3. 20...Be6 21.Nd2 Bd5 This would be scary if I was White without the cold computing power of [Fritz](#).

20...f5

Another example of piece play working with pawn play to attack.

21.Bb6

White stopped ...f4 from coming with tempo and gained a tempo by attacking the rook on d8. 21.f4 g5 is violent. The open lines against the king and the bishop-pair make this a good choice.

21...Rd7

At this point Black may have been preparing the surprise. The rook may also swing over to f7.

22.Qd5+

This looks good because White gets the queen out of the corner with tempo and prevents ...f4. However...

22...Kh8

Black moves and avoids pinning himself.

23.Nd2



[FEN "5r1k/3r2pp/pB1b4/1p1Q1p1q/8/2PP2Pb/PP1N1P1P/R3R1K1 b - - 0 23"]

White has the bases covered. The maneuver ...Bg4-f3 is no longer good. If it weren't for Bacrot's preparation, the two pawns may have prevailed.

23...Bxg3!

For the exchange Black gets open files and murderous play on the light squares.

24.Qxd7

White hardly has a choice.

24...Bf4

A double attack: the threat Qg4-g2 checkmate and the attack on the d2-knight.

25.Qb7

White defends on the long diagonal. If 25.Kh1 Bg4! 26.Nf1 Bf3+ 27.Kg1

Bxh2+ 28.Nxh2 Qg5+ 29.Kf1 Qg2#.

25...Bxd2

Black gets a piece and removes a defender.

26.Bd4

White centralizes and starts a counterattack.

26...Rg8

Black needs the other pieces to attack. This is what was amazing to me: Black has to play moves like this while down material with no direct threats (he is threatening the rook but that would not even balance material), and he is still at least equal.

27.Re7

This puts White's position in jeopardy. 27.Qd5 doesn't work well. 27...Bf4 (27...Bxe1 28.Rxe1 Black could win back some material but it distracts focus from the main goal of attack and decreases pressure.) 28.Be5 White can barely keep the balance. 28...Bg4 29.Kf1 Bh6 Black has secured his king, how is White going to strike back now? (29...Bf3? 30.Bxg7+ Rxg7 31.Qd8+ Rg8 32.Qd4+ Rg7 33.Re7 Qg6 34.Rxg7 Qxg7 35.Qd8+ Qg8 36.Qd4+=).

27.Qc6!? I like this move. It keeps the defense and starts creating threats around the black king. 27...h6 (27...Bg4 28.Bxg7+ Rxg7 29.Re8+; 27...Bf4 28.Be5 Bg4 29.Bxg7+ Rxg7 30.Re8+ Qxe8 31.Qxe8+ Rg8 32.Qxg8+ Kxg8 33.a4 A bizarre ending that is unclear, though the two extra White pawns make me nervous in the endgame.) 28.Re3 Bxe3 29.fxe3 Kh7 This is around equal and unclear because of the opposite-colored bishops and open lines.

27...Bc1!

The second tactic of the game!

28.Re1

White has to defend the first rank. 28.Bxg7+ Rxg7+ This is check!; 28.Rxc1 Qg5+ 29.Kh1 Qxc1+.

28...Bf4

Now the bishop-pair are going to wreak havoc.

29.Re3

The bishops must be neutralized. If 29.Qc6, White can try to hang on to material at any cost. 29...Bxh2+ 30.Kh1 Be5 31.Re3 Bxd4 32.cxd4 f4, but Black is crushing.

29...Bxe3

Black removes a defender with the light-squared bishop still in reserve.

30.Bxe3 Re8

Every piece must enter the attack.

31.Bd4 Qg4+ 32.Kh1 h6

Now the black rook is free to roam around.

33.f4



[FEN "4r2k/1Q4p1/p6p/1p3p2/3B1Pq1/2PP3b/PP5P/R6K b - - 0 33"]

I believe I have seen this position in a tactics book. If 33.a4 f4.

33...Re7

Classic deflection.

34.Qa8+

White cannot leave the mate threat on g2.

34...Kh7 35.Be5 Qe2 36.Rg1 Bg4 37.Rxg4 f4 38.d4

38.Qe4+ Qxe4+ 39.dxe4 g5 Black will break through with a winning advantage.

38...Qf1# 0-1

This was a nice tactical kill.

Shirov, A (2730) – Aronian, L (2773)
Second Grand Slam Masters, Bilbao 2009
Ruy Lopez, Marshall Attack [C89]

Here is a game in the main line where a 2700+ player quickly went down.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 0-0 8.c3 d5 9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Nxe5 Nxe5 11.Rxe5 c6 12.d4 Bd6 13.Re1 Qh4 14.g3 Qh3 15.Be3 Bg4 16.Qd3 Rae8 17.Nd2 Qh5 18.a4 Re6 19.axb5 axb5 20.Nf1

Besides 20.Qf1, this is another main choice. White protects the squares around the king. As we will see, White becomes too cramped.

20...Bf5

Black may want this square for the queen later, so Black kicks the white queen away from defending this square.

21.Qd2

21.Qe2 This would let Black repeat moves, and a draw is not in the white player's interest. 21...Bg4 22.Qd3 Bf5.

21...Bh3



[FEN "5rk1/5ppp/2pbr3/1p1n3q/3P4/1BP1B1Pb/1P1Q1P1P/R3RNK1 w - - 0 22"]

Black has taken over the light squares and now the knight on f1 is out of moves, crowding the white king.

22.Bd1

White has to defend the light squares. 22.Qd1 Bg4 is the same kind of repetition.

22...Qg6

Black did not play here 22...Qf5 because of 23.Qc2

23.Bf3

White brings the bishop around to guard the light squares.

23...Qf5

Black moves to a more aggressive post now that it cannot be challenged by the white queen.

24.Bh1

24.Bg2 This came to my mind first. 24...Bxg2 25.Kxg2 Rfe8 The position looks about even. Black is thinking not only attack but also positional pressure down the e-file.

24...Rfe8

Aronian has not had to do anything fancy so far.



[FEN "4r1k1/5ppp/2pbr3/1p1n1q2/3P4/2P1B1Pb/1P1Q1P1P/R3RNKB w - - 0 25"]

25.Re2?

Now Black does have serious pressure on the e-file and White was forced to retreat back a couple moves later. 25.Qd1, With the idea of going to f3, looks better.

25...h5

Here is another example of pieces plus pawn play in the attack. This move softens up the white king and opens the h-file.

26.Qc2

White tries to trade queens and gain more control over the light squares.

26...Qg4

The threat now is pushing h4-xg3, Bxf1, and Bxg3, opening everything up.

27.Ree1

White makes way for the white queen to guard the light squares.

27...h4

Black continues the plan of breaking through.

28.Qd1

White is a tiny bit worse since he wasted time with Re1-e2-e1 although the end is not inevitable yet.

28...Qf5



[FEN "4r1k1/5pp1/2pbr3/1p1n1q2/3P3p/2P1B1Pb/1P3P1P/R2QRNKB w - - 0 29"]

Aronian sets a nasty trap.

29.Qf3?

Such a natural move that is also somewhat forcing! It is hard at first to see why this is a mistake. It is the cramped pieces that make White's move an error. 29.Qb1 Qh5 30.Qd1 The White queen may be better off doing this. 30...Bg4 31.f3 hxg3 This is still critical for White. 32.fxg4 gxh2+ 33.Kg2 Qg6 This is really cold-blooded.

29...Qg6 0-1

White resigned. The threat is ...Bg4 and ...h3 winning the queen. If White retreats, Black plays 30...hxg3 31. hxg3 Nxe3 32.Rxe3 Rxe3 33.fxe3 Bxf1 and it is curtains. This game made an impression on me because it was over so fast. All White did was drift for a move or two, and it was over.

Lessons Learned

- The Marshall Attack is a game of imbalances: White has an extra pawn, and Black has more time and the white king as a target. Most of Black's moves (Bd6, Bg4-h3, Rae8-e6) are for attacking the king. We saw Black put pressure on White down the e-file, on the h2-square, and on the light squares. Know these pressure points.
- The Marshall Attack is not all about pieces. On occasion Black pushed f5-4, g5, and even h5-4. However, if you have played a rook lift to e6,

take care not to block off files for the rook by pushing the kingside pawns.

- The Marshall Attack hits positionally, since White is forced to create weaknesses on the kingside and delay development, and also hits tactically. Tactics are often what make the attack work: recall ...Bf4, ...Bxg3, and Anand's ...f4!.

Practitioners

Many strong players have the Marshall Attack as part of their repertoire:

- Levon Aronian – The Armenian grandmaster is number 3 in the world.
- Alexander Onishuk – He is a well-known American grandmaster and is number three in the United States.
- Alexander Grischuk – The Russian grandmaster recently played in the Candidates Finals match, narrowly missing a chance to play Anand for the World Championship.
- Etienne Bacrot – He is a French grandmaster who has won the French championship six times.
- Frank Marshall – Marshall was an American grandmaster who held the U.S. Championship title for twenty-seven years: 1909-1936. He also founded the famous Marshall Chess Club in Manhattan.

Further Reading

- ChessPublishing.com – This site offers a great wealth of information on the openings being employed by top players.
- [Understanding the Marshall Attack](#) by David Vigorito – The author has a good reputation as teacher, trainer, and writer.
- [Attacking the Spanish](#) by Sabino Brunello – This book discusses three gambits against the Ruy Lopez, including the Marshall Another, and was well received by [ChessCafe.com](#) reviewer Carsten Hansen.

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