

On the Marshall Attack

C89

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1. e4 e5; 2. ♘f3 ♘c6; 3. ♙b5 a6; 4. ♙a4 ♘f6; 5. 0-0 ♙e7; 6. ♖e1 b5;
7. ♙b3 0-0; 8. c3 d5; 9. e×d5 ♘×d5; 10. ♘×e5 ♘×e5; 11. ♖×e5 (1)

11. ... ♘f6

Marshall's original game of 1918 against Capablanca went 11. ... ♘f6. The Cuban master completely refuted the attack over the board, finding the precise moves at every point: 12. ♖e1 ♙d6; 13. h3 ♘g4; 14. ♗f3! [14. h×g4 ♗h4; 15. g3 ♙×g3; 16. f×g3 ♗×g3+; 17. ♖f1 ♙×g4 △♙f3, ♗g2-+]; 14. ... ♗h4; 15. d4! [15. ♖e8 ♙b7!]; 15. ... ♘×f2; 16. ♖e2?! [16. ♗×f2? ♙h2+ (16. ... ♙g3??; 17. ♗×f7! ♖×f7; 18. ♖e8#) 17. ♖f1 ♙g3; ◁16. ♙d2±]; 16. ... ♙g4?; 17. h×g4 ♙h2+; 18. ♖f1 ♙g3; 19. ♖×f2!±.

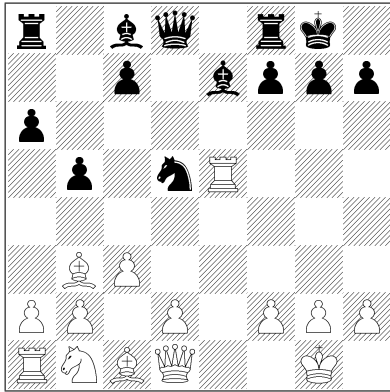
According to ECO, Marshall's 16th move is a mistake. Better is 16. ... ♘f4; 17. ♖e8 ♘g6; 18. ♖f8 ♖f8=. But even then, 17. g3!?△17. ... ♙g3; 18. ♗f7 or 17. ... ♗h3; 18. ♗a8 ♙g3; 19. ♗g2.

So maybe the Knight sacrifice at f2 itself is wrong. And in fact there is a nice move by Shamkovich: 15. ... h5. Now (2):

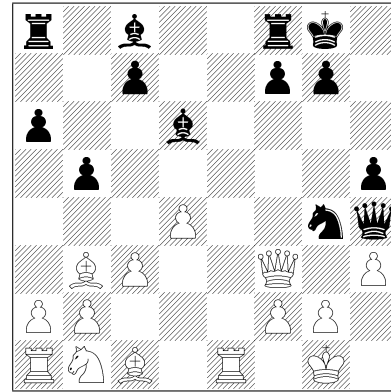
a) 16. h×g4? [16. ♙×g4? g3]; 16. ... ♗h2+; 17. ♖f1 ♙×g4-+.

b) 18. ♙f4 ♘×f2!; 19. ♙×d6 ♘×h3+; 20. ♖f1 [20. h×g3? ♗×e1+-+]; 20. ... ♙g4; 21. ♙g3 [21. ♗g3 ♗f6+]; 21. ... ♗g5; 22. ♖e5 [22. ♗e3? ♗f5+; 23. ♙f2 ♖ae8; 24. ♗d2 ♖×e1+; 25. ♖×e1 ♖e8+-+]; 22. ... ♗c1+ [22. ... ♙×f3!?!; 23. ♖×g5 ♘×g5; 24. g×f3±⊕]; 23. ♖e1 ♗g5=.

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- c) 24. ♖d2 ♙h2+; 25. ♖f1 [25. ♖h1? ♗×f2+; 26. ♖×h2 ♗g4+-+]; 25. ... ♙d6! △♗h2+; 26. ♖f1 [26. h×g4? ♙×g4; 27. g3♙ ♖h2; 28. ♖c6 ♙×g3+-+]; 26. ... ♙h2+=.¹
- d) 27. ♙e3 ♗×e3 [Suetin proposes and analyzes 27. ... ♗f2!?!; it's dangerous for White, but if answered well, it loses. Note 81 to C89.]; 28. ♖×e3 ♖f4; 29. ♖×f4 ♙×f4. I can't see enough compensation for the pawn.

It is in a), and in the last in-text variation of b), that h5 is relevant, indeed necessary. The Queen can leave the Bishop at g4.

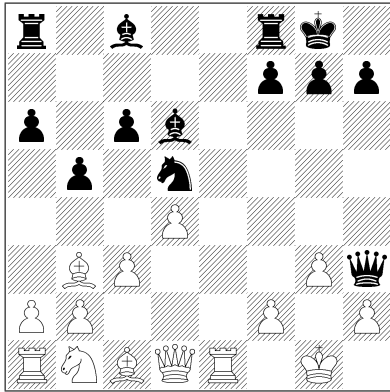
11. ... c6

How to even start disentangling the jungle of theory on this variation? In the last US Amateur Team Championship (West) I was actually bold enough to play the Marshall Attack without having (ever) study it. That game is actually what convinced me to prepare and play it. And now it comes as a good way of finding my way in its theory.

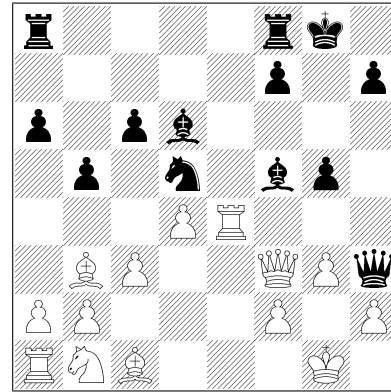
My opponent knew the basic theory of one of the lines up to move 17. Or perhaps it was 16, and he found move 17 over the board. A later game at ICC also followed this line, so it's safe to assume that that is a 'main' line, although not 'the main' one.

¹b) and c) come from ECO's note 80 to C89.

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11. ... c6; 12. d4 ♖d6; 13. ♗e1 [Also eventually to consider here is 13. ♗e2. And back at the previous move, 12. d3.]; 13. ... ♜h4; 14. g3 ♜h3 (3)

Some sidelines

Here I was expecting the only move I remembered having seen, 15. ♗e4 △♗h4, to which I wasn't sure I should respond with 15. ... g5. It turns out that is the accepted reply. The game then follows 16. ♜f3 (16. ♜f1 ♜×f1+; 17. ♞×f1 f5; 18. ♗e1 f4±; or 16. ♞d2 f5!; 17. ♗e3 f4; 18. g×f4 ♜h6; 19. ♞e4 g×f4; 20. ♗e1 ♖c7± Konstantinov) 16. ... ♖f5 (16. ... f5?; 17. ♗e1!±) (4), and now White can give up some material to force a draw: 17. ♖c2 ♖×e4; 18. ♖×e4 ♜e6 (Why is this the only option given? It does seem, though, that anything else is too risky. A pawn is falling anyway, either the c6 or the g5, unless something radical is done like 18. ... g4, which leaves the Queen out of the game.) 19. ♖f5 ♜e1+; 20. ♞g2 ♜×c1; 21. ♞a3 ♜×a1; 22. ♜h5 ♗fe8; 23. ♜h6 △♖×h7+, ♖g6+=.

Anyway, the exchange sacrifice by 17. ♖c2 is not likely to be found over the board, so I need to prepare against other options. 17. ♞d2 ♗ae8; 18. ♖c2 ♞f6; 19. ♗e5 ♖×c2±. Amazingly, these all *are* forced moves. This is quite in the stratosphere of loftiness... I hope I don't get lost in the immensity. Also possible, in any case, is 17. ♖×d5 c×d5; 18. ♗e3 ♖e4; 19. ♗×e4 d×e4; 20. ♜f6 ♜g4!; 21. ♜×g5 (I can only speculate that 21. ♖×g5 would be followed by 21. ... ♗fe8 △♖d7 and then if 22. h3 ♜d1+; 23. ♞g2 ♖d7; 24. ♜h6 (24. ♜f5 ♜f3+-) 24. ... ♖f8; 25. ♜f6 ♜×f6; 26. ♖×f6 ♖h6,

with what seems to be better for Black, but so complicated...) 21. ... ♖×g5; 22. ♜×g5 f5̄. This is all line 23 and note 124 of ECO, which also has 17. ♜e3!? Not a mention of saving the Rook! Let's see: 17. ♚e1. It must be a matter of White losing a vital tempo. For example: 17. ... ♜g4; 18. ♚d3 (18. ♚e4? ♚ae8!; 19. ♚×e8 ♜f3—+) 18. ... ♚ae8; 19. ♚f1 ♚×e1; 20. ♚×e1 ♜f4!; 21. ♜×f4 (21. g×f4 ♜f3; 22. ♚f1 ♚g4+—+; ; 21. ♚f1 ♚×f1+; 22. ♚×f1 ♜h3+; 23. ♚g1 ♜e2+—+) 21. ... ♜×f4; 22. ♜a3 ♜d2; 23. ♚e4 ♚h5; 24. ♚×c6? ♜f3; 25. ♚f6 ♜f4!; 26. g×f4? ♚g4+; 27. ♚f1 ♚g2; 28. ♚e1 ♚e8+; 29. ♚d2 ♚×f2+—+. But there are ways for White to get out.

But let's go back to the game. Later on we will treat White's other option at move 15, namely 15. ♜×d5. My game against Bill Cohen went on with a move that is not the main line, but is still theory. From here on, I was just playing the natural moves. 15. ♚d3 ♜f5; 16. ♚f1 ♚h5; 17. ♜e3. The mentioned game at ICC continued 17. ♜d1? ♚g6; 18. ♜d2 ♜f4—+, like in Byšev–Sidorov, SSSR 1950. 17. ... ♜h3; 18. ♚e2?. Here it is that Cohen gets out of the book.

The theoretical move is 18. ♜d1 and then 18. ... ♚f5; 19. ♚f3 ♚ae8; 20. ♜d2 (20. ♚h5? ♜×e3; 21. f×e3 ♚×e3—+. If I had known this variation, I might have found the similar sacrifice that I missed at move 21 of the game. In any case, I should have found it.) 20. ... c5. Klass, in a 1960 correspondence game with Zagorovskij, followed the plan of doubling Rooks: 20. ... ♚e7; 21. ♚h5 ♚d7; 22. ♜f3 ♜f5; 23. ♜×d5 c×d5; 24. f3 ♚fe8̄. In the main line, Black's threat is c×d4 and ♜b4, and with everything pinned there will be material gain. A way to cope with this would be 21. ♜f3, but then Bronštejn points out that (and again, all moves are forced, for both sides!) 21. ... ♜f4!; 22. ♜h4 ♚f6; 23. ♚f3 c×d4; 24. c×d4 ♜×e3; 25. ♚×f4 ♚×f4; 26. g×f4 ♜d5̄. Thus the only way is: 21. a3 c×d4; 22. c×d4 ♜f4; 23. ♚f3 ♜×e3; 24. f×e3 ♚×f3; 25. ♜×f3 ♜×e3 and the pawn is back. In fact, Boleslavskij and Bronštejn agreed to a draw in this position in Moscow, 1950 (a match game). It is simply impossible that somebody of my level finds all this over the board...

My game continued (for the sake of completeness) 18. ... ♚g6; 19. ♜c2 f5; 20. ♜d2 ♚ae8; 21. ♜f3 ♜g4? [21. ... ♜×e3; 22. f×e3 ♜×g3!; 23. h×g3 ♚×e3!—+]; 22. ♜h4 ♚h5; 23. ♚f1 f4; 24. ♜d2 f×g3; 25. ♚×e8? [Overlooking the reply, but anyway: 25. h×g3 ♚×e1; 26. ♚×e1 ♚e8 and the attack is irresistible.]; 25. ... g×h2+—+.