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## 4 Modern Exchange Variation: White Plays f3

On the basis of games from the 1920s, the development of the knight to f3 was for many decades considered inferior, because the knight is subject to pin and possible exchange by ...g4, and thus cannot play a full part in the struggle for d4. To put it another way, it allows Black to use his light-squared bishop in the fight for the dark squares in a way that was not available in the lines we examined in the previous chapter. White has a similar resource in that ...c6 can be met by b5, but this is less potent since an exchange on c6 brings another pawn to the c-file which can be used to fight for the d4-square.

We should consider the question of why White is so preoccupied with maintaining a pawn on d4. After all, a game cannot be won by merely reinforcing the centre and admiring it from a distance. It is only natural that sooner or later the pawns must advance, but for the advance to be effective it must be supported by a fully mobilized army, and it is desirable to keep open the option of beginning the advance with either centre pawn. And if Black does manage to force the premature advance of one of them, it would be nice to obtain compensation in the form of other positional or material concessions.

The rebirth of the system began around thirty years ago and it fairly quickly gained a dominant place in modern practice. One of the key points is that at the cost of allowing ...g4 ideas, White is able to develop his pieces to more natural squares where they are better able to support the advance of the pawns. And the ...g4 idea itself turns out to have its dark side, as it leaves the b7-pawn unguarded, a factor that is highlighted by the move b1. This idea is important in many of the f3 lines at some stage, while the main line with an immediate b1 is discussed in the next chapter. This short chapter forms an introduction to the f3 Exchange and its major ideas, while also examining two other development plans for White. Note that in many cases the move c1 is important, with ideas of penetrating to c7 if Black opens the c-file, or as a preparation for the d5 advance if Black instead maintains the tension.

**Game 11** (Nayer-Khamrakulov) is devoted to the most natural placement of bishops on e2 and e3. White castles quickly and is ready to drive the c6-knight away by playing d5.

In **Game 12** (Vitiugov-Zhao Jun) White immediately develops his queenside pieces, removing all possible objects of attack from the firing-line of the g7-bishop. White meets the black queen's sortie with a standard pawn sacrifice.

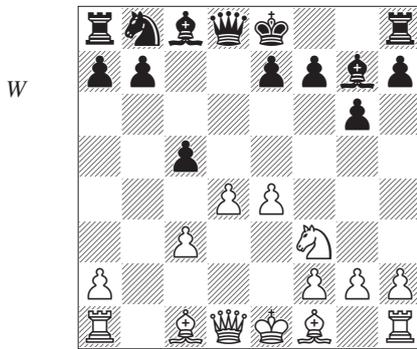
### Game 11 [D85]

#### Evgeny Nayer – Ibragim Khamrakulov

*Ubeda 2001*

1 d4 f6 2 f3 g6 3 c4 g7 4 c3 d5 5 cxd5  
xd5 6 e4 xc3 7 bxc3 c5 (D)  
8 e2

Let's examine the prophylactic continuation 8 h3. Despite the loss of a tempo, this move enables White to hold the centre for a while. After



8...0-0 9 ♙e2 Black has two reasonable options:

a) 9...♗c6 10 ♙e3 cxd4 11 cxd4 ♖a5+ 12 ♙d2 ♖a3 and now 13 d5 is forced if White does not wish to repeat moves or give up the right to castle. Black rarely accepts the exchange sacrifice; compared to Game 9, the differences favour White, but after 13...♗e5 (or 13...♗d4) 14 ♗xe5 ♙xe5, 15 0-0 ♙d7 gives Black his fair share of the play. If the offer is limited to a pawn, it should be taken – 15 ♖b1 ♗xa2; the potential value of the connected passed pawns constitutes a reserve that allows dumping some material if necessary.

b) The search for a set-up where the move h3 looks the least useful leads to the selection of the fianchetto of the light-squared bishop 9...b6 – with standard play and practically an extra tempo.

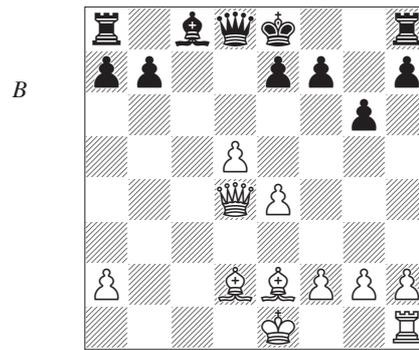
If the right to move is conferred to the f1-bishop, it has two reasonable options, one of them the text-move, and the second 8 ♙b5+, when Black has two main replies:

a) 8...♙d7 9 ♙xd7+ (in case of 9 ♙e2 Black often chooses the aforementioned plan with the transfer of the bishop to c6) 9...♗xd7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♙e3 cxd4 12 cxd4 ♗c6. The bishop exchange has simplified the position, and Black has no problems finding good posts for the remaining minor pieces, while the open file facilitates the reduction of the number of major pieces.

b) 8...♗c6. Now 9 d5 ♖a5 10 ♖b1 a6 fails to disturb Black, while the endgame after the relatively forced sequence 9 0-0 cxd4 10 cxd4 0-0 11 ♙e3 ♙g4 12 ♙xc6 bxc6 13 ♖c1 ♖a5 14 ♖d2 ♖xd2 15 ♗xd2 ♖fd8 16 ♗b3 a5 is not considered to be problematic for him.

**8...0-0**

The immediate inclusion of another piece in the attack upon d4 by 8...♗c6! gives White the opportunity to offer yet another version of the exchange sacrifice: 9 d5 ♙xc3+ 10 ♙d2 ♙xa1 11 ♖xa1 ♗d4 12 ♗xd4 cxd4 13 ♖xd4 (D).



Nevertheless, Black's chances are not worse whether he intends to keep the gift with 13...f6 or agrees to return it after 13...0-0 14 ♙h6 f6. The attempt to hold the centre by 9 ♙e3 ♙g4 forces White to play 10 e5, which can be considered a positional concession.

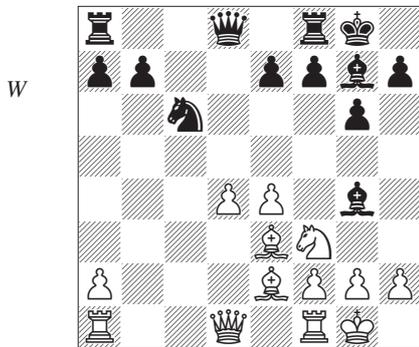
Of course, having read the introduction to this chapter, you will be wondering what happens after 8...♙g4, a thematic way to increase the pressure on the centre. Then White can strive for a minimal advantage based on the bishop-pair: 9 ♖b1 (this move should not come as a surprise either) 9...♗c6 10 ♖xb7 0-0 11 0-0 ♙xf3 12 ♙xf3 cxd4 13 cxd4 ♗xd4 14 ♙g5.

**9 0-0 cxd4**

If he wishes to avoid mass exchanges, Black can prefer 9...b6 here as well, even though this gives White a respite from the defence in the centre for one move, and allows him to arrange his forces more actively: 10 ♙g5 ♙b7 11 ♖d3 ♖d7 12 ♖ad1 and the future passed d-pawn promises White the better chances. Two other standard continuations can transpose, though White acquires the extra option of d5 (at once in reply to 9...♗c6, in case of 9...♙g4 after 10 ♙e3 ♗c6). With a pawn remaining on c3, the g7-bishop has nothing to treat itself to on the long diagonal, and this renders White's d5 advance extremely potent. The exchange in the game clears the diagonal.

**10 cxd4 ♗c6 11 ♙e3 ♙g4 (D)**

Black has succeeded in including all his minor pieces in the attack on the d4-pawn, and its



defence has no reserves left. White must either advance one of the pawns or counterattack b7.

### 12 d5

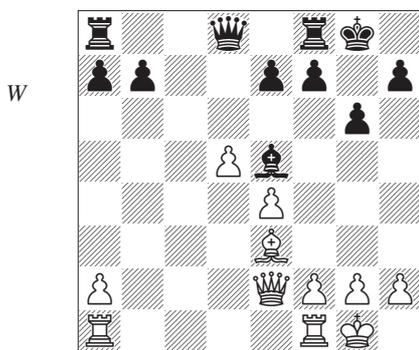
This thematic response is also best.

12 e5 locks the g7-bishop out of the game for a while, but the price seems exorbitant – the light squares are weakened, and the centre is deprived of the prospects of further advance. Black's hopes of wresting the initiative from White appear well-founded, although the d4-e5 pawn-wall is hard to breach. It is also not clear what advantage there is to hope for in the line 12 ♖b1 ♙xf3 13 ♙xf3 ♙xd4.

### 12...♘e5

White's previous move doesn't really sacrifice the exchange, as after 12...♙xa1 13 ♖xa1 ♙xf3 14 ♙xf3 ♘a5 15 ♙h6 f6 he can win it back at once. However, the position is simplified too much then, so more interesting is 16 ♙g4 ♖d6 17 ♙e6+ ♙h8 18 h4 ♘c4 19 ♖c3 b5 20 ♖h3 with a strong initiative, Mastrovasilis-Chuchelov, European Ch, Warsaw 2005.

### 13 ♘xe5 ♙xe2 14 ♖xe2 ♙xe5 (D)



Both sides have played logically and consistently, but White has achieved his main aims. Despite the significant simplification, he retains

a certain initiative, and his central superiority looks a more weighty factor than Black's two-to-one queenside preponderance. Moreover, the black king's cover is weakened, especially if the bishops are exchanged. However, if White fails to make use of his dynamic trumps, the assessment will change.

Now White must decide where to place the rook. The immediate occupation of the open file is a routine decision that promises further exchanges, yet each side needs to keep the open line constantly under control in order not to cede it to the opponent. In a situation where there is only one open file, control over it constitutes a serious advantage. The most natural placement of the rooks is on b1 and d1 or on d1 and f1.

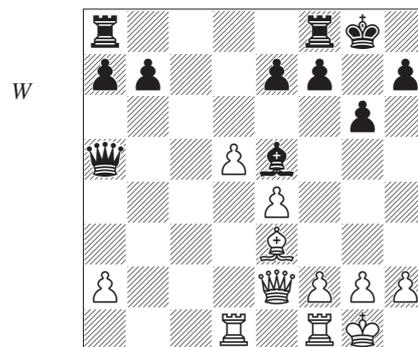
### 15 ♖ad1

Here the rook supports the creation of a passed pawn and prepares the bishop exchange, so this is a logical decision.

Picking 15 ♖ab1 creates the opportunity to offer a queen exchange on b5 after 15...♖d7, while 15...b6 weakens the c6-square, and White will try to use it to seize the c-file. After an exchange of queens, the passed pawn may prove more dangerous on c6 than on the d-file.

### 15...♖a5 (D)

Along with 15...♖d7, this is the most natural reply. Black connects rooks and trains his queen's sights on the enemy pawns on a2 and d5, several squares on the c-file and, as a prophylactic measure, protects a7, freeing the rook from that duty.



### 16 h4

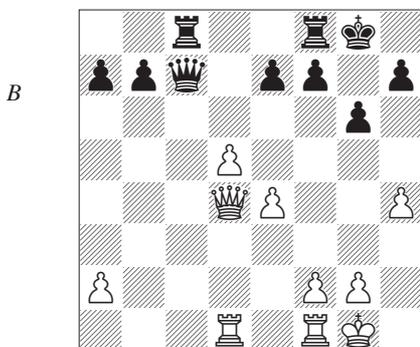
The idea behind this move is clear – the h-pawn is destined either to weaken the enemy king's cover or, should it be allowed to reach

h6, to take direct part in the attack. However, White's follow-up doesn't create the impression that these are elements of the same plan. 16 f4 ♗g7 posed more problems, with the choice between 17 f5, 17 e5 or 17 ♖f2, tying one rook to the defence of the a7-pawn and the other to the f-file.

**16...♗ac8 17 ♗d4 ♖c7**

Taking advantage of the opportunity to seize the file or centralize the queen. Black agrees to allow the creation of a passed pawn on the d-file after the exchange of the queens, as long as that is not accompanied with an attack on his king.

**18 ♖e3 ♗xd4 19 ♖xd4 (D)**



**19...♖c5**

Now White manages to neutralize Black's control of the open file while keeping the queens on the board. 19...b6 is more accurate.

**20 ♖b2 b6 21 ♖c1 ♖d6 22 g3**

Nevertheless, White has nothing concrete, so decides to maintain the position largely unchanged, hoping for an inaccuracy on Black's part. The primary purpose of the text-move is to deny f4 to the black queen, while at the same time consolidating the kingside pawn-chain.

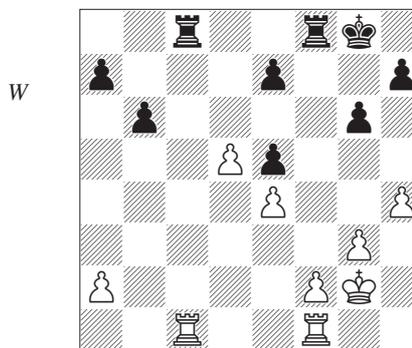
**22...f6 23 ♖g2?!**

Stepping into the line of a possible capture with check on d5 is not the best idea.

**23...♖e5?!**

Inexplicably, Black voluntarily spoils his own pawn-structure. He could have taken the favourable opportunity to play 23...f5 24 f3 e6. After 25 ♖xc8 ♖xc8, 26 ♖d1 fxe4 27 fxe4 exd5 leaves the white king as exposed as his black counterpart, while 26 ♖f6 fxe4 hands Black the initiative.

**24 ♖xe5 fxe5 (D)**



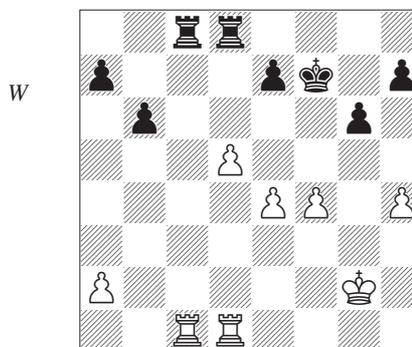
It is possible that there are real drawing prospects in this endgame too. However, the number of black weaknesses has increased, while his chances for counterplay have diminished.

**25 ♖fd1 ♖f7 26 f4?!**

In his hurry White helps his opponent get rid of the weakness on e5. It would be more expedient to bring the king into the centre first and only then start active operations.

**26...exf4 27 gxf4 ♖fd8 (D)**

There are good drawing chances in the line 27...e6 28 d6 ♖xc1 29 ♖xc1 e5 30 ♖c7+ ♖e6 31 fxe5 ♖xe5 (but not 31...♖f7? 32 ♖g3, as all pawn endgames are won for White).



**28 ♖f3 ♖f6 29 ♖e3 e5?!**

Why help White to create a pair of passed pawns? White has no clear-cut plan of realization of his positional advantage, and in the coming play the drawing tendencies characteristic of rook endgames leave Black some hope for salvation. For the moment Black could adopt a waiting policy, for example with 29...♖f7.

**30 ♖f1 h6 31 ♖d3**

White covers the c-file and, after exchanging on c8 and e5, plans to drive the king away from

the blocking square with the other rook (infiltrating via f7 or after gaining control of the f5-square with the help of the h5 advance) and set the pawn-pair in motion. Therefore Black himself takes on f4.

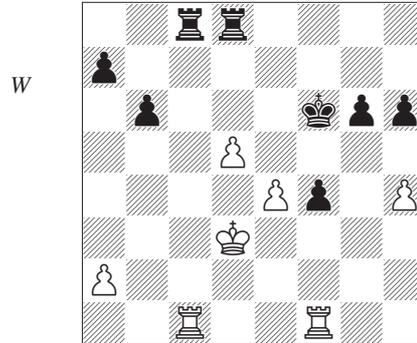
**31...exf4 (D)**

**32 ♖d4?**

White returns the favour. There was an easy win after 32 ♖xf4+ ♕e5 and now 33 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 34 ♖f7 or 33 ♖cf1.

**32...♖xc1?**

This should settle the result, whereas the immediate 32...g5 would level both sides' chances with a probable draw: 33 e5+ ♕f5 34 hxg5 hxg5 35 ♖xc8 ♖xc8 36 e6 g4 37 e7 f3 38 ♖e1 g3 39 d6 f2 40 ♖e5+ and one of the kings will succumb to a perpetual check.



**33 ♖xc1 g5 34 ♖c6+?**

Now 34...♕g7! would salvage a draw; 34 e5+! wins.

**34...♕f7? 35 e5 ♕g7 36 h5 f3 37 ♖g6+ ♕h7 38 e6 g4 39 ♖xg4 ♖f8 40 e7 1-0**

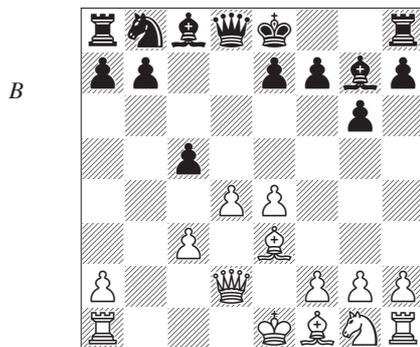
## Game 12 [D85]

### Nikita Vitiugov – Zhao Jun

World Junior Ch, Erevan 2006

**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 e4 ♘xc3 6 bxc3 ♘g7 7 ♗f3**

The desire to develop the queenside first is often fulfilled with the immediate 7 ♘e3 c5 8 ♖d2 (D).



In most games this comes down to a transposition of moves, but we should note the independent continuation 8...♖a5 9 ♖b1. White wants to force the queen exchange early, while Black hasn't castled and the king's rook is far from the events in the centre, plus after the exchange the b1-rook controls the b4-square and attacks the pawn on b7. If Black obliges by 9...cxd4 10 cxd4 ♖xd2+ 11 ♕xd2 0-0, then

White can play 12 ♘d3, when instead of retreating to the first rank the king has a post on e2 ready for him. However, there are problems with the centre here as well: 12...e6 13 ♗f3 ♖d8 14 ♖hc1 ♗c6 and now 15 ♖c4 looks clumsy, while 15 e5 f5 (but not 15...f6 16 ♕e2) gives Black counterplay. Instead of the exchange, Black can play 9...b6 or 9...a6, when White usually reckons that he has succeeded in weakening Black's position and moves the rook to c1. This move-order also grants the d4-pawn the freedom to advance, and the c-pawn can later support its neighbour, but building the pawn wedge c4-d5-e4 takes time (unless Black helps by developing the knight to c6) and hasn't received general acclaim. Black gets ahead in development and successfully counterattacks the centre with the undermining ...e6 and ...f5.

If Black doesn't reply with concrete threats, then White can initiate the bishop exchange on h6.

**7...c5 8 ♘e3 (D)**

The plan is ♖c1, clearing the long diagonal of potential targets and securing the c3-pawn. This grants White more freedom in the centre but delays castling.

**8...♖a5**