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a6-knight). When Black was forced to exchange off his dark-squared bishop, the end was already in sight in view of his crippling dark-square weaknesses. Even though Aseev missed the quickest win, it was only a matter of time before he found a way to break open Black's position and finish the game off.

The lessons here are:

1) Control of the centre is an important objective of opening play.

2) It is unwise to allow your opponent too free a hand in the centre.

3) A well-supported centre is often the springboard for a flank attack against the king.

4) A firmly-entrenched knight on the sixth rank usually exerts a paralysing effect on the enemy forces.

## An Over-Extended Pawn-Centre

If a player occupies the centre with pawns during the opening, he is taking on a significant responsibility. If he can maintain the pawn-centre intact, and support it adequately with pieces, then he is likely to gain the advantage. If, however, the support is inadequate, then, like any rickety construction, the pawn-centre is likely to collapse if given a good shove. The most common reason for poor piece support is lack of development. Erecting a pawn-centre consumes a certain number of tempi, which cannot also be used for developing pieces. Thus it is only natural that a large pawn-centre and a lack of development go hand-in-hand. The big question is whether the opponent has a way of exploiting the lack of development quickly, since otherwise the occupier of the centre will catch up with his development and gain the advantage. It is often extremely difficult to judge what the end result of such a contest will be. Indeed, there are whole opening systems that are based on allowing the opponent to construct a large pawn-centre; even after decades of analysis, nobody knows whether some of these systems are correct. In the following game Black adopts precisely such an opening. White duly builds up his centre, and battle is joined.

### Game 4

## J. van der Wiel – R. Vaganian

*Ter Apel 1993*

Alekhine Defence, Four Pawns Attack

1 e4

See Game 3 for comments on this move.

1 ... ♖f6

This is one of the most forthright defences to 1 e4 in that Black's plan is plain from the very first move. By attacking the e-pawn, he restricts White's options. The only two natural moves are 2 ♘c3 and 2 e5. However, at the very least 2 ♘c3 allows Black's to transpose into an innocuous King's Pawn Opening by playing 2...e5 (this opening, called the Vienna Game, usually arises after 1 e4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♖f6). Therefore, the only real test of Black's first move is 2 e5. At first sight White should display no hesitation in advancing his pawn, because he not only gains space in the centre, but he also apparently gains time, since Black must move his knight again.

However, the basis of Black's idea is that in order to support the advanced pawn on e5, White will have to play further pawn moves – d4 at the very least. In this game White decides to go the whole way and plays c4 and f4 as well. This gives White a broad centre, but in the meantime he falls behind in development. As mentioned in the introduction to this game, it is very hard to tell whether the centre will prove strong or just collapse – indeed, Alekhine's Defence has been the subject of theoretical debate for around 80 years, with no clear conclusions being reached.

2 e5 ♘d5

The best square. 2...♘e4 really would be too provocative; after 3 d4 the knight is stranded on e4.

3 d4

White supports his advanced pawn, while reserving the option of chasing the knight further by c4.

3 ... d6

As always, you should not allow your opponent to erect a broad centre unchallenged. Here Black already starts to exert pressure on the e5-pawn.

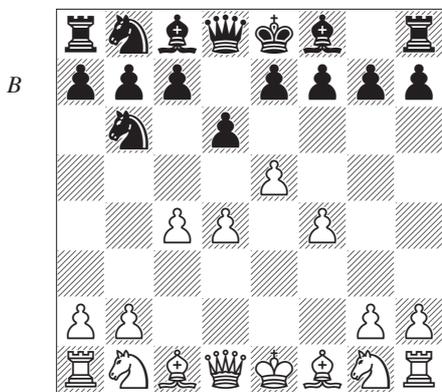
4 c4

White decides to push another pawn. Black again has to move his knight, so this isn't really a loss of time by White. However, White has taken on the additional responsibility of defending the c4-pawn. The feeling today is that these further pawn advances do not benefit White a great deal, and currently the favoured strategy is for White to content himself with the two pawns he has also already advanced and concentrate on supporting those. The best way to achieve this is by 4 ♘f3, followed by ♗e2 and 0-0.

4 ... ♖b6

Exerting pressure on the c4-pawn and thereby limiting the activity of White's light-squared bishop.

5 f4



We met John van der Wiel in Game 1 and are familiar with his direct and aggressive style. Here he adopts the most ambitious, but also one of the most risky, lines against the Alekhine Defence. This so-called Four Pawns Attack is based on staking out a massive swathe of territory in the centre, in the hope of developing the pieces behind it by ♘c3, ♘f3, ♗e3 and so on.

5 ... dxe5

This exchange opens up the d-file for Black's queen and prepares to exert pressure against the d4-pawn.

6 fxe5

After 6 dxe5 ♖xd1+ 7 ♔xd1 ♘c6 Black's lead in development will become serious, as White must lose further time with his king. In any case, it makes no sense to play an aggressive line such as the Four Pawns Attack and then offer the exchange of queens.

6 ... ♘c6

Attacking d4.

7 ♗e3

White makes his first piece move. Had Black not wasted some time himself, the luxury of six consecutive pawn moves would surely have been fatal for White. However, Black has spent three moves having his knight chased to b6, so White's lag in development, while real enough, is not so serious as to cause an immediate disaster.

7 ♘f3 is a mistake because after 7... ♗g4 8 ♗e3 e6 Black effectively gains a tempo over the game continuation. It is more accurate to wait until Black plays ... ♗f5 before continuing ♘f3, since then Black will have to spend an extra tempo if he wants to pin the knight.

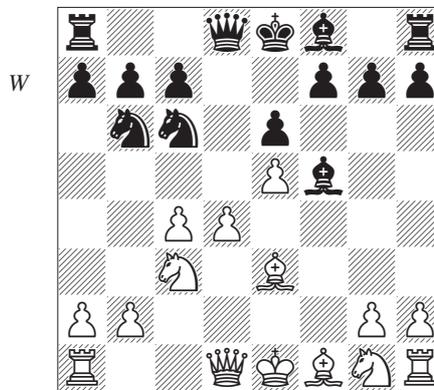
7 ... ♗f5

Preparing to free his last minor piece by ...e6. At this stage it is not clear whether Black will aim for kingside castling or play for quick pressure against d4 by means of ...♖d7 followed by ...0-0-0.

8 ♘c3

White is eager to make up for his deficit in development.

8 ... e6



The f8-bishop can be developed to e7 or b4, according to circumstances.

9 ♖f3

Both sides have spent the past few moves concentrating on piece development, but now Black must decide how to step up the pressure against White's pawns before White develops his remaining pieces and castles. One idea is 9...♗e7, aiming to play ...0-0 and ...f6. This plan is quite effective, so White usually meets 9...♗e7 by 10 d5, aiming to rip open Black's position before he can castle. This book is not the place for a detailed discussion of opening theory; suffice to say that 10 d5, although very complicated, is considered satisfactory for Black. However, Vaganian decides to adopt another plan, which also appears to give Black a comfortable game. The fact that Black has a range of satisfactory options is the main reason why the Four Pawns Attack is rarely seen in contemporary grandmaster play.

9 ... ♗g4

Yes, Black has voluntarily moved the same piece twice, but with a definite purpose in mind. The elimination of the f3-knight will weaken White's defence of d4, and after ...♞d7 and ...0-0-0 White may have real trouble defending it.

10 ♗e2

10 ♞d2 is another idea, intending to defend the d4-pawn by 0-0-0. One possible line is 10...♞d7 (10...♗b4!? 11 a3 ♗e7 is interesting; after White plays 0-0-0, the reply ...♗a5 will not only attack c4, but also threaten a fork at b3) 11 ♗e2 0-0-0 12 0-0-0 ♗a5, when White can no longer maintain his pawn-centre intact and must attempt to escape tactically by 13 ♗g5, with unclear complications.

10 ... ♗xf3

Thanks to the pressure against c4, White has to recapture with the pawn, which breaks up his pawns and exposes his king. 10...♞d7 11 ♞d2 would transpose to the previous note.

11 gxf3 ♞d7!?

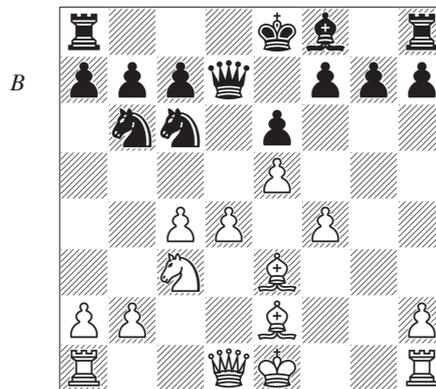
This move appears slightly odd in conjunction with the exchange on f3, although in view of its success in this game it is hard to criticize it. Black normally prefers 11...♞h4+ 12 ♗f2 ♞f4 13 c5 ♗d7 14 ♗b5 ♗e7, a theoretical line usually given the verdict 'unclear'. Indeed, the motivation for exchanging on f3 is precisely

with the idea of checking on h4. The text-move leads to positions similar to those arising in the note to White's 10th move, but where Black has voluntarily exchanged on f3 (i.e. without being forced to by White playing h3).

12 f4?!

White seeks to exploit the early exchange on f3 by reinforcing the e5-pawn, and thereby setting up a possible thrust d4-d5. However, this plan is too ambitious given that White's king is still in the centre and his development is rather poor. The result is that he soon ends up in trouble.

12 ♞d2, followed by 0-0-0, is better. Then White's king is relatively safe and he has reinforced d4. In that case the position would be roughly equal.



12 ... ♞d8!

Van der Wiel may well have overlooked this unexpected move. At first sight 12...0-0-0 seems more natural, but this allows White to play 13 c5! ♗d5 14 ♗xd5 ♞xd5 15 ♗f3 ♞d7 16 d5, when he has achieved his central breakthrough. Black cannot play 16...exd5 because of the pin 17 ♗g4, while otherwise White plays d6, driving a massive wedge into Black's position and holding up the development of Black's king-side. By playing ...♞d8 rather than ...0-0-0, Vaganian cunningly side-steps the pin ♗g4, and now this line, on which White had been pinning his hopes, no longer works. This is an interesting example of how, when making chess decisions, the specific should always override the general. In principle, Black would rather castle than not, but when concrete analysis shows the latter to be superior, Vaganian shows