

John Cox

# The Berlin Wall

**The variation that brought down Kasparov**



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# Chapter 1

## Positional Introduction

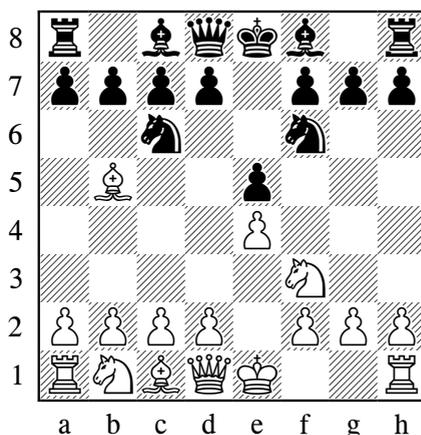
The heart of this book is the position which is reached after the moves 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♞xd8† ♕xd8, the so-called Berlin Wall. Chapters 4-9 attempt to provide comprehensive analysis of this position from both sides, while Chapter 2 deals with typical endings arising, and Chapter 3 with typical middlegame themes. After 3...♗f6 this sequence is usually considered White's only serious try for advantage, and Chapters 10 and 11 provide repertoire coverage only from Black's point of view of the various deviations White has between moves four and eight: with the exception of 4.d3 these are more common at club level than international level.

Let us go through the initial eight moves and see why this might be so.

### 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6

It was Morphy who first proposed that Black ought to insert 3...a6 in order to give himself the option to break the pin quickly. Basically the great man was right: the only variations of the Ruy in which Black does not benefit from having ...a6 ♙a4 thrown in are those in which the bishop is at some moment attacked on b5, the Bird (3...♗d4), the Schliemann (3...f5), the

Classical (3...♙c5) and the present debut, and those in which Black does not intend to fight against the formation of the c3/d4 pawn centre and does not want to push the bishop towards its ideal spot on c2, the Cozio (3...♗ge7) and the variously-named 3...g6 lines (Pillsbury? Smyslov?).



### 4.0-0

4.d3 and 4.♞e2 are respectable ways to avoid Black's main idea and are dealt with in Chapter 10 and Game 55 respectively. The former envisages either the old Steinitz plan with d3/c3 ♗bd2-f1-g3 before castling or else a build-up with c3 and d4, the latter perhaps 0-0/♞d1/c3/d4 along the lines of the Worrall Attack in the normal Closed Ruy. However from a

logical standpoint 4.d3 should not be the most critical test: if the game had gone 3.♔c4 ♖f6 4.d3 then most people would not think that White was opting to press Black particularly in the opening, while if he isn't going to exploit the pressure created on the e-pawn by 3.♔b5 to force the concessions (queenside weaknesses or surrender of central space, basically), which are typical of the main lines of the Ruy, then it's not clear why White put his bishop on b5 instead of c4 at all.

4.♖c3 is the Spanish Four Knights, which could of course have arisen by 3.♖c3 ♖f6 4.♔b5, and is not covered in this work: readers are referred to grandmaster Mihail Marin's recent *Beating the Open Games* for (excellent) coverage.

4.d4 (game 56) is the Central Attack, and is not so effective before Black is committed to ...d6 and can still go ...d5 in one, as the traditional reply shows: 4...exd4 5.0-0 a6 6.♔a4 ♕e7 7.e5 (after 7.♞e1 b5 8.♔b3 d6 White's tragedy is that 9.♖xd4?? falls into the Noah's Ark trap with 9...♖xd4 10.♞xd4 c5 and ...c4, so he has either to gambit a pawn for vague compensation only with 9.c3, or else give up the bishop with 9.♔d5) 7...♖e4 8.♖xd4 0-0 9.♖f5 d5.

4.♔xc6 (game 57), like in the Exchange Variation (3...a6 4.♔xc6) is not so bad, but obviously Black would rather have played 3...♖f6 than 3...a6.

#### 4...♖xe4

Were Black to play 4...♕e7 now, analogous to the normal Chigorin defence with ...a6/♔a4 added, he would quickly find out the wisdom of Morphy's advice: White continues with 5.♞e1 defending his own e-pawn and so threatening to win a pawn by ♔xc6 and ♖xe5, thus forcing 5...d6 6.d4 renews the threat and

forces 6...♔d7 if Black wants to maintain a pawn on e5, and now after 7.♖c3 Black finds that 7...0-0 loses material after 8.♔xc6 ♔xc6 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♞xd8 ♞axd8 11.♖xe5, and if 11...♔xe4? 12.♖xe4 ♖xe4 13.♖d3 f5 14.f3 ♔h4 15.g3, the famous Tarrasch Trap, and so he is forced to cede central space to White with 7...exd4, transposing to the old Steinitz defence.

4...♔c5, the Classical Berlin, is another reasonable line which is not covered in this book, but by omitting ...a6 Black usually telegraphs his intention to play the text. Black plays in a way akin to the Open Defence (5...♖xe4 with the inclusion of ...a6/♔a4).

#### 5.d4

5.♞e1 (games 58-59) is possible and is in some ways the most natural move. In the normal Open Defence this move is rubbish because 6...♖c5 attacks the bishop on a4 and simply trades it off with a slight edge for Black. Here Black has to go 5...♖d6 to gain the same tempo, which of course blocks his development and gives White possibilities, but even so it turns out that Black's difficulties can be fairly easily surmounted.

5.♞e2 is also possible and is dealt with in Game 60.

#### 5...♖d6

This move, the trademark of the Berlin Wall, was the whole point of leaving out ...a6. Both here and in the Open Defence proper 5...exd4 is frowned upon because of the hair-raising sequence 6.♞e1 d5 7.♖xd4 ♔d6 8.♖xc6 ♔xh2† 9.♖h1 ♞h4 10.♞xe4† dxe4 11.♞d8† ♞xd8 12.♖xd8† ♖xd8 13.♖xh2, so in the Open proper Black normally plays 6...b5 to enable ...d5 (in fact he can try to reach the same position here by 5...a6 6.♔a4 b5 7.♔b3 d5). The text move however hits b5 and threatens to

consolidate Black's gains with ...e4, so White is forced to concede the bishop.

Black can also try the strange 5...♙e7 6.♞e1 ♟d6 7.♙xc6 bxc6 8.dxe5 ♟b7, known in some circles as the Rio de Janeiro variation (although properly this refers to a Black plan later on). This book does not cover this option.

### 6.♙xc6

Since 6.♙a4 allows Black easy equality after 6...exd4 or 6...e4 White doesn't seem to have much choice, but in fact 6.dxe5 ♟xb5 7.a4 (or 7.c4) is possible since the knight is trapped. In either case Black has the choice between returning the piece with equality or accepting a risky pawn sacrifice: see Games 61 and 62. White actually has still another try in 6.♙g5 (game 63), which again gives Black a choice between steady play with 6...♙e7 or accepting the challenge and the piece sacrifice with 6...f6, when White probably does not have enough compensation.

### 6...dxc6 7.dxe5

7.♟xe5 (game 64) is utterly feeble White should obviously translate his d-pawn to the kingside to obtain a working majority there compared to Black's crippled one, as in the Exchange Variation, not to mention displacing Black's king by the forthcoming queen exchange.

### 7...♟f5

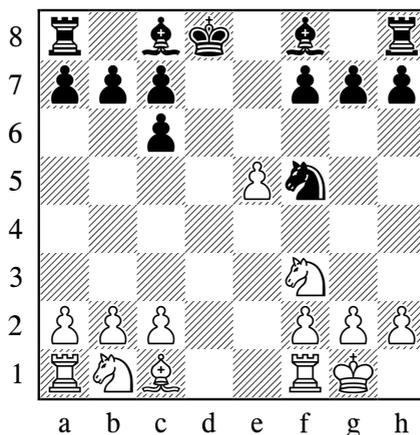
7...♟e4 is a dubious alternative virtually refuted by 8.♞e2 ♙f5 9.♞d1 ♞c8 10.♟d4 ♙c5 11.b4 ♙b6 12.f3 ♞d7 13.♙e3 0-0-0 14.a4 and is not covered.

### 8.♞xd8†

Nothing else makes a lot of sense. 8.♞e2 is often played by White players with Oedipus complexes, but the whole point of 7...♟f5

(as opposed to 7...♟e4) was to meet that with 8...♟d4 9.♟xd4 ♞xd4, when Black can trade the queens anyway if he wants to after 10.♞d1 ♙g4, and obtain comfortable play (game 65).

### 8...♟xd8



And here we are. I hope the above preamble has convinced you that this position is critical for 3...♟f6, so it makes sense to take a long look at it, especially since in my opinion most texts fundamentally mis-state where Black's advantages lie. White's assets are fairly clear.

One, he is ahead in development (and also in space). Two, if all the pieces but the kings were magically removed from the board Black would have to resign. And three, Black's king is stuck in the centre of the board and will almost always block at least one of his rooks from entering the game along the back rank for some time to come.

These considerations suggest that White will win games in this opening in two ways: first by obtaining the initiative, perhaps by opening the centre with a pawn sacrifice, and exploiting his active pieces to force decisive gains, secondly by slowly and carefully exchanging pieces, advancing his majority, creating a passed pawn and winning the ending.

This impression is more or less correct and,

# Chapter 2

## Typical Berlin Endings

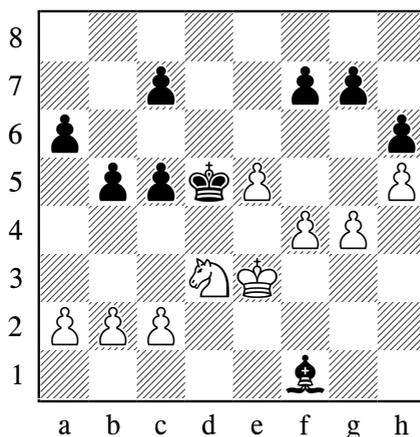
In this chapter I want to start by looking at the opening backwards. You can't learn any opening without considering the typical endings it gives rise to, and this is more true of the Berlin than most. Let's start at the end with pawn endings with the typical Berlin Wall pawn structure.

### Pawn Endings

There would be many good reasons to call David Bronstein back to life, but one small question I would have for him would be why he wrote, in *200 Open Games*, "If you have time, check whether the pawn ending is won. That's a very difficult problem, but there is a solution." I have a feeling I must be missing the great man's point. In any case according to me the pawn ending is generally hopeless for Black. White creates a kingside passer, decoys the black king with it and wins on the queenside in classical Ruy Exchange style. The only thing he has to be a little careful about is to ensure there isn't a kingside pawn left after the decoying process, but this isn't hard. Here's Kasparov showing that even having his king well placed on d5 doesn't help Black.

### Kasparov - Bazan

Simultaneous, Germany 1992



30...♙xd3?!

Truly a horrible move. Black was worse of course but with the bishop he still had some chances to defend.

I think probably 30...b4 was best: the bishop is in some danger of being trapped.

31.♙xd3

Simplest although I think 31.cxd3 does win as well, and makes quite a nice finish: 31...a5 32.b3 a4 33.bxa4 bxa4 34.a3 c6 35.♙f3 ♖d4

36.♔f2! c4 (36...♖xd3 37.f5! c4 38.♔e1 c3 39.♖d1) 37.dxc4 ♕e4 (37...♖xc4 38.g5 ♕d5 39.f5 ♕xe5 40.f6 gxf6 41.gxh6 is the point, a typical trick with this kingside structure.) 38.♕g3 c5 39.g5 hxg5 40.fxg5 ♕xe5 41.♔g4, and White wins, e.g. 41...♕e6 42.h6 gxh6 43.gxh6 ♕f6 44.♕h5

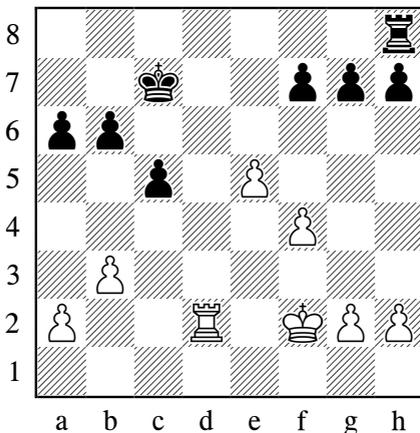
31...c4† 32.♕e3 c6 33.c3 a5 34.a3 a4 35.♕f3  
1-0

With this queenside structure Black can play ...c5 and ...b4 if he likes, but White just keeps tempoing his king and in the end Black has to let it in to e4, and the rest is easy.

The importance of the e4-square in these pawn endings is great. If White establishes his king there, even having dissolved his doubled pawn may not be enough to save Black.

### Janev - Marcelin

Bois Colombes 2003



1...♖d8

The game actually continued with 1...h5 2.♕e3 ♖h6 3.f5 ♖c6 4.♖c2 b5 5.♕e4 ♕b6 6.♕d5 g6 7.fxg6 ♖xg6 8.♖f2 ♖c6 9.♖xf7 c4

10.e6 c3 11.e7 ♖c5† 12.♕d6 ♖c6† 13.♕d7 c2 14.♖f1 1-0.

But couldn't Black have just opposed rooks? The answer is no. White wins quite simply after:

2.♖xd8 ♕xd8 3.♕e3 ♕d7 4.♕e4 ♕c6 5.g4 b5 6.h4 a5 7.h5

For example:

7...g6 8.h6 c4

Letting the king to d5 is hopeless.

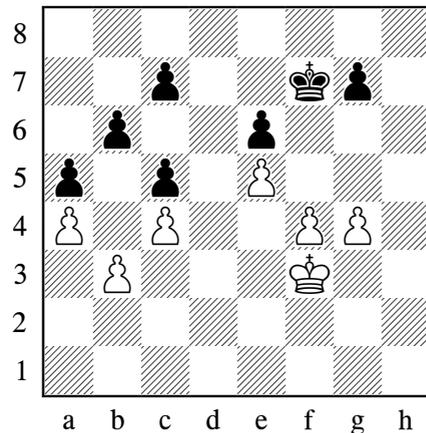
9.bxc4 bxc4 10.♕d4 c3 11.♕xc3 ♕d5 12.♕d3 g5 13.♕e3 a4 14.a3 ♕e6 15.♕e4 gxf4 16.♕xf4 f6 17.exf6 ♕xf6 18.g5† ♕g6 19.♕g4 ♕f7 20.♕f5 ♕g8 21.♕e6

And so forth the white king crosses at once to the queenside.

But there is one important pawn ending which is a draw and which has turned up quite often in practice.

### Korneev - Fontaine

Cap d'Agde 2002



White has just exchanged Black's active rook on f3, but now he finds that he cannot win.

# Chapter 4

## ...♞e7 Systems without h3

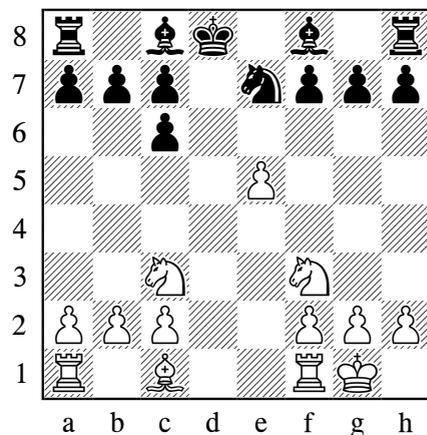
The various systems Black can adopt in the Berlin are recalcitrant to exact classification, since the fact there is no direct clash of the forces means that Black can play his moves in various orders. Almost always though White will start off with the simple developing ♘c3, and by far his most usual move at his next turn is the flexible semi-waiting h3. After that White's play tends to be defined most by where he develops the queen's bishop: any of b2, d2, e3, f4 and g5 may be appropriate. The next three chapters deal with Black systems where he begins his play by regrouping the knight from f5 to g6, sometimes in conjunction with an early ...h6, sometimes with ...♔xd8, sometimes ...♙f5. In this chapter I deal with White reactions which do not include the move h3 at an early stage. Usually with these systems White's idea is to open the game before Black is ready with his baroque manoeuvres.

### Game 1

Shirov - Z. Almasi

Tilburg 1996

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.0-0  
♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5  
8.♙xd8† ♔xd8 9.♘c3 ♗e7



'A move which conforms to no recognized chess principle', according to Nigel Short, but is nonetheless the most popular way of handling the opening today. The knight was not in fact so well placed on f5. By obstructing the bishop it hampers Black in the fight against g4, and it cannot be made stable there by ...h5 for various reasons, perhaps most of all that this would allow White to establish a knight easily on g5, supporting the e6 break and making it impossible to obtain stability for a bishop on e6. Meanwhile on g6 the knight is surprisingly useful in the fight against White's majority by attacking e5 it makes it hard for White to move his f3-knight and gear up for f4-f5. It isn't particularly convenient to defend e5: to

put the bishop on f4 and then g3 has obvious drawbacks, and to play either rook to e1 allows ...♙b4, threatening to unload the bishop, while the choice of rook is also tricky if White uses the queen's rook then he has to watch out for ...♙c4, and if he uses the king's rook then he has to find another way to cover f4. By retreating the knight at once Black gains space to deploy his c8-bishop actively and postpones the choice of a home for his king until he sees a little more of White's hand. Two other merits of the knight on g6 are that it helps towards establishing security for the bishop on e6 by controlling f4 against the manoeuvre ♜e2-f4, and it may also enable the further trip ...♞f4-e6, where the knight is very well placed as long as it can sustain itself against an f4-f5 push. It is not so easy to get directly to e6, since to do so Black either has somehow to control d4 or else to move the g-pawn, which he usually doesn't want to do at an early stage of the game, for fear of ♜e4-f6 if for no other reason.

Usually Black's ideal plan is ...♜e7-g6, ...h6, ...c5, covering all the approaches for White's knights to e6, and then ...♙e6, establishing the bishop on its ideal square.

### 10. ♞d4

White's normal set-ups begin with h3 and we shall look at those in the next chapter. The text however is one of White's oldest tries, and was recommended in Khalifman's *Opening for White According to Anand, Volume 1*, and for that reason I cover it more extensively than perhaps it deserves. White keeps his rook on f1 to lend support to the f-pawn, and prepares for f4-f5 at once. Black has two ways of dealing with the threat: 10...♞g6 and 10...c5.

### 10... ♞g6

This is not well regarded these days, although it's not clear that there is anything wrong with it except the fact that 10...c5 seems to be stronger.

### 11.f4

White could play other moves but this is his idea. Shirov wrote that the position after 11.♙g5† ♜e8 12.♞ad1 ♙d7 'didn't appeal to him', although in fact this is the position reached in Game 9 (Volokitin – Vallejo Pons). Black could also consider 11...♙e7.

### 11...♙c5 12.♙e3 ♙b6

13.♞xc6† was threatened. It looks natural to defend against the threat by creating opposite-coloured bishops, but 12...♙xd4 13.♙xd4 ♙f5 14.♞d1! ♙xc2 15.♞e3 ♙d3 16.♞f2 'was what I was hoping for', said Shirov, 'White's attack is extremely strong for just one doubled pawn'. Black's trouble is that he cannot prevent the advance of the f-pawn because 16...♞e8? 17.♞d1 ♙e4 18.f5 ♞xe5 19.♙xe5 is check, so the best defensive try seems to be 16...♜e8 17.f5 ♞e7 18.♞d1 ♙e4, but after 19.♞e1 White's initiative continues.

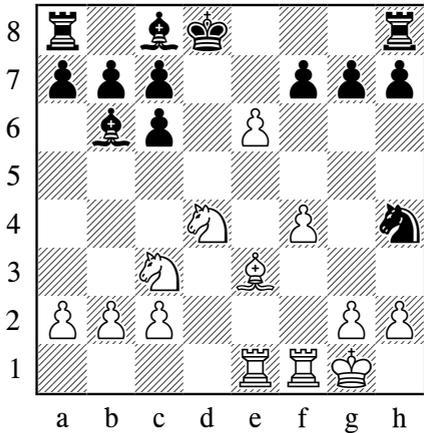
### 13. ♞ae1 ♞h4

After the game Almasi preferred 13...♞e7, and Shirov agreed, giving 14.e6 c5 (14...fxe6? 15.♞xe6† ♙xe6 16.♙xb6 ♙c4 17.♙xc7†!) 15.♞b3 ♙xe6 16.♞xc5 ♙c4 17.♞d1† ♜c8 18.♞fe1 ♙a5 19.♙d2 ♙b6 20.♙e3 with a draw (20.♞3a4 might be a last try to maintain an edge). Khalifman disagreed with this and proposed 16.♙xc5 ♙xb3 17.♙xb6 axb6 18.axb3 with a position which is deceptively difficult for Black, but the simple 16...♞e8 seems to solve all his problems. 13...♞e8 is another possibility which Shirov does not mention, but at least prevents the tactic employed in the game. It isn't clear to me how White would seek to refute that move.

### 14.e6

White has to move quickly before Black is ready for ...♙xd4, and the alternative Shirov gave was 14.♞e4 ♞f5 15.♞xf5 ♙xf5 16.♞g3 ♙xc2 (Can White win the rook ending which

arises after 16...g6 17.♖xf5 gxf5? I would rate Black's chances of holding as quite high.) 17.♞f2, although after 17...♙a5 18.♞c1 (18.♙d2 ♙b6=) 18...♙a4 I don't think Black will have too much difficulty in equalising.



**14...fxe6?**

Essentially losing: 14...♙xd4 15.♙xd4 ♖f5 16.e7† ♗e8 17.♙e5 isn't much better.

But 14...c5 is more controversial: Shirov gave it as equal based on 15.♖b3 (15.e7† ♗xe7 16.♖b3 ♗d6! is equal, for example 17.♖xc5 ♙xc5 18.♖e4† ♗c6 19.♖xc5) 15...♙xe6 16.♖xc5 ♙xc5 17.♙xc5 ♗d7 18.♙f2 ♖f5 19.♞d1† ♗c6 (Khalifman disagreed but for some reason gave only the weaker 19...♖d6) 20.g4 ♖d6 21.f5 ♙c4 22.♞fe1 ♞ae8 23.b3 ♙a6, when Black is more or less out of danger.

**15.♖xe6† ♙xe6 16.♙xb6 axb6**

A sad necessity, since both 16...♙h3 17.♙d4 ♖xg2 18.♞d1 ♗c8 19.♞f3 and 16...♙c4 17.♙f2 ♖g6 18.♞d1† ♗c8 19.♞fe1 see White consolidating his material.

**17.♞xe6**

Black has nothing better than exchanging rooks along the e-file and transposing to the knight ending, which as we have seen is usually losing.

17...♗d7 18.♞fe1 ♞ae8 19.♞xe8 ♞xe8 20.♞xe8 ♗xe8 21.♗f2 ♖f5 22.♖e4 c5 23.g4 ♖h6 24.♗f3 ♖f7 25.h4 ♗e7 26.♖g5 ♖d6 27.♖xh7 ♖c4 28.f5 ♖xb2 29.g5 ♖c4 30.h5 b5 31.♗f4 ♖a3 32.h6 gxh6 33.g6 ♖c4 34.f6† ♗e6 35.f7 ♖e5 36.f8♖† 1-0

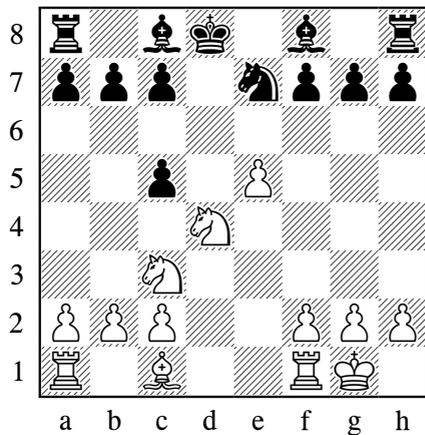
**Conclusion:** there are some unanswered questions here but unless the Black reply to 10.♖d4 covered in the next game is shaken, this line is likely to remain unimportant.

**Game 2**

**Shirov - Sargissian**

Gibraltar Masters 2005

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♖c6 3.♙b5 ♖f6 4.0-0 ♖xe4 5.d4 ♖d6 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♖f5 8.♞xd8† ♗xd8 9.♖c3 ♖e7 10.♖d4 c5



This move, first played by the Dutch GM Harmen Jonkman, is more or less a refutation of 10.♖d4. White can either reply as in this Game 11.♖de2, pursuing the original idea of freeing the f-pawn, or 11.♖f3 as in Game 3, claiming that Black's ...c5 was such a weakness