

Simon Williams

Black Lion



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About the Author

Simon Williams is a Grandmaster, a well-known presenter and a widely-followed streamer, as well as a popular writer whose previous books have received great praise. He is much admired for his dynamic and spontaneous attacking style.

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Preface

I first stumbled across the mythical 'Black Lion' around about 12 years ago. It all began when a follower of Ginger GM persistently messaged me, singing the praises of this aggressive opening. After ignoring many of his pleas to research the opening, I had a choice to make: block this Black Lion advocate, or spend five minutes taking a glance at the opening?

Luckily I made the correct decision and took some time to have a look at this opening, one that I had never encountered before. The first thing that struck me was how could I have not heard of this opening? Surely it must be rubbish if it is an opening that I have not encountered in my many years of being a professional chess player?

The more I looked, the more I fell down the Lion rabbit hole. What a way to start the game! Black avoids castling and aims to checkmate White on the kingside from the get-go, which is just my style. There was no going back from that point.

I then researched the opening and started to play it on a regular basis. My results were great and the most attractive thing about the opening is that it is so much fun to play. And surely that is why we play chess? To have fun, and to win!

I must also thank the real heroes of this opening, Jerry van Rekom and Leo Jansen. It was their book *The Black Lion* that got me started on one of the most fun openings that I have ever played. I must also thank the aforementioned 'Mr. X' for being so determined in turning me on to this opening. Let me now share with you my main aims of this repertoire:

1) To teach you a fun and exciting opening that will guarantee you an aggressive way to go for the attack, with Black and from move one.

2) To explain the main ideas of the opening, ideally in an enjoyable way that you will remember and without you having to memorise too many variations. This is why I have included so many common ideas at the start of this book, ideas which will help you understand the main concepts behind our set-up.

3) Be as truthful as possible. That means not being biased in my assessments of positions. I must warn you now that the computer frowns upon many of the aggressive ideas given – that does not mean that they are unplayable though. For those of you who are concerned about being, for instance, '-0.45', I have always given you a 'Tame Lion' alternative suggestion. That sub-variation is often not quite as fun, but sounder in the eyes of the computer.

Through this updated and expanded version of my Chessable course, I fully hope that everyone will enjoy this journey into one of the most exciting of all openings: the Black Lion.

Simon Williams, Godalming, May 2022

Introduction

The Opening Moves

1 e4

The Black Lion is mainly an opening against 1 e4. That is what we are concentrating on throughout this book. You can experiment by also playing it against 1 d4, but the set-ups there are very different. We'll discuss this more a little later on.

1...d6

An unpretentious move, taking some control of the centre, especially the e5-square.

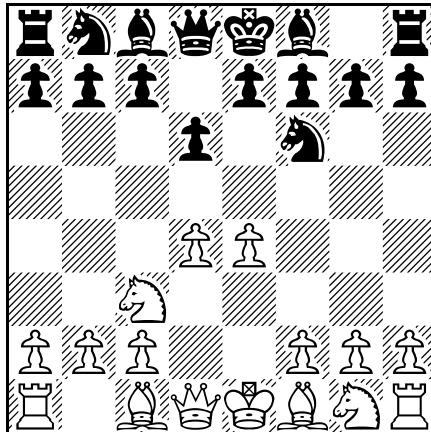
2 d4

The most logical and best move. White takes control of the centre with two large pawns.

2...Nf6

Developing and attacking e4. You can see that our pawn on d6 does a good job of stopping White from advancing with e4-e5.

3 Nc3



The most sensible option. Now Black must make a decision and we can see here how I have organised this book for the rest of our journey. There are two moves, one more risky than the other. I aim to cover both options, giving you a choice of how to play depending on your style.

3...♗bd7

The 'Risky Lion'. Throughout this book, at critical moments, Black often has a choice between an aggressive and a solid move. The former is a move that White may be able to take advantage of with correct play, the latter a safe but more boring option. I have coined the terms for them, the Risky Lion and the Tame Lion.

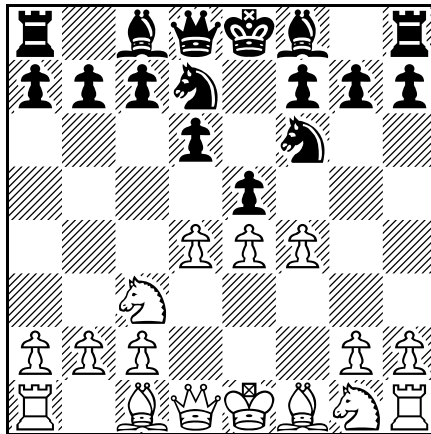
This move is much more aggressive compared to the alternative 3...e5. With 3...♗bd7 Black avoids the exchange of queens, yet still prepares action in the centre with ...e5. There has been a lot of discussion whether this is playable or not. The main concern that this move faces from a theoretical point of view is some sharp variations where White plays f2-f4. Personally I would always want to start the game in this way as I do not like exchanging queens too early.

Instead, 3...e5 is the Tame Lion. This move offers a very early exchange of queens, but is considered to be theoretically superior. The resulting positions after 4 dxe5 dxe5 5 ♕xd8+ ♖xd8 should be equal, but may not be to everyone's taste. We will though take a look at this approach later on.

4 ♖f3

This is White's main move and most commonly played option, but there some other important ideas.

4 f4 is the most critical continuation. White grabs space and aims to simply push Black off the board. The negative side of this plan for White is that he will feel a bit exposed behind his advancing pawns and with active play, Black can create some very interesting counter-chances. 4...e5! is a key move: Black must take some central space.

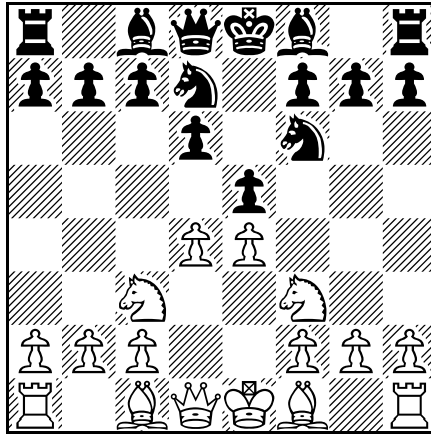


The critical line, which we will look at in detail later, continues 5 ♗f3 exd4. With this capture Black opens up the centre and aims for active piece play. Black's idea against 6 ♕xd4 is to sacrifice a pawn with ...c6, ...d5 and then go ...♗c5. This is the most critical variation. Against 6 ♗xd4, Black changes plans and aims to put pressure on White's e4-pawn with ...g6, ...♗g7, ...0-0, ...♗c5 and ...♖e8. The theoretically more important recapture is the

former, 6 ♖xd4, when Black must go active with 6...c6 with ...d5!? and ...♗c5 to follow. This line leads to very exciting play, but the question that needs to be answered is: does Black have enough compensation for the pawn? We will answer that later!

4 g4!? is another interesting move that aims to take advantage of the point that Black can no longer play ...♗xg4. White gains space on the kingside and aims to push Black back with g4-g5. The downside of this plan for White is that his king can become exposed on the kingside later on.

4...e5



Black must take some space in the centre. I would say that this completes stage one of Black's development strategy in the Risky Lion, the full stages for the Risky Lion being:

- 1) Develop the knights and take some control of the centre with ...e5.
- 2) Consolidate the centre with ...c6, ...♖c7 and finish kingside development with ...♗e7.
- 3) Start the Risky Lion approach with the following kingside manoeuvres: ...h6, ...g5, ...♘f8, ...♘g6, ...♘f4, ...♗g8, etc.

I am concentrating on the Risky Lion so far, as let's be honest: that is what we all want to play!

5 ♗c4

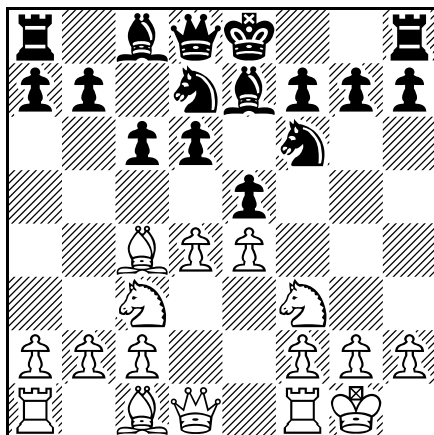
As soon as this move is played, we must be aware of captures on f7 followed up with ♘g5+, or just ♘g5 straight away.

5...♗e7

It is best to play this first, as Black can now give extra defence to f7 by castling kingside.

5...c6? would be a serious mistake due to 6 ♘g5! when Black has no good way to defend f7. Move orders are important for us and we will look at this position in more detail soon.

6 0-0 c6



Continuing with stage two. This move has a couple of ideas in mind:

- 1) Consolidation of the centre.
- 2) Given a chance, queenside expansion with ...b5.
- 3) Making room on c7 for the black queen. From c7, the queen gives extra defence to the central pawns on d6 and e5.
- 4) More control of the key central square, d5.

7 a4

Stopping Black from gaining some useful space with ...b5. Against other moves, Black would play this advance.

7...♔c7

Stage two is now over. There are a number of ways that White can develop here and we do need to pay attention.

Risky Lion or Tame Lion?

I, for one, always prefer risky attacking chess, but this approach doesn't come without some risk: the risk of overextending the black position and creating critical weaknesses. That is the danger of playing the Risky Lion and an early ...g5.

When I started creating this repertoire, I wanted to suggest only the sharpest attacking lines for Black, lines where Black always plays ...g5 and avoids exchanging queens. The problem with this, on some occasions, is that it is just not sound. White can get an advantage and I really do not want to suggest an opening that puts you on the back foot.

To overcome this dilemma I have done the following:

- 1) Broken up some of the more dangerous variations into two sections: the Risky Lion and Tame Lion.
- 2) When I believe the Risky Lion shouldn't be played, I suggest you take a look at what I have recommended in the Tame Lion section. This is when the computer really doesn't like the attacking plan with ...g5: for example, after White plays an early b3 in the main line

(more on this later).

3) I have still included the dodgy variations as you might want to risk them anyway, while trying to make these lines as playable as I can, but I always mention in these cases when the best approach is not to play ...g5. And in these cases, you should look at the Tame Lion.

I hope things will become clearer as we move on with the repertoire. As a general pointer, the above is mainly relevant for the mainline positions. So, in some cases, you have a decision to make: take a risk and go for the attack, although perhaps not an entirely sound one, or play it safe and wait for another day.

The computer often frowns upon Black's position in the Risky Lion. I believe this is because it doesn't see the long-term attacking danger that the opening creates. This is similar to a very established opening, the King's Indian Defence. In most of the mainline positions there, the computer is of the opinion that Black is clearly worse. Again, it underestimates the attacking chances that are always lurking within Black's position. So, do not always fear the computer! Try to see past it in some positions, instead concentrating on Black's fun and attacking potential. Let me explain with the help of some moves.

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♗c3

Again, time for the first decision: offer an exchange of queens or not? This is one of two main times when we have to decide between the Risky Lion and Tame Lion. The other is in the mainline positions.

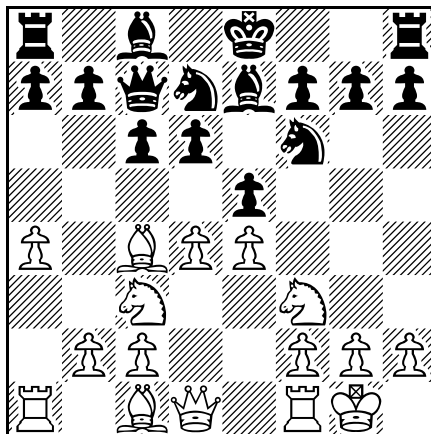
3... ♗bd7!?

The Risky Lion approach. Black blocks the d-file and avoids the exchange of queens, but allows White some aggressive options that would have been stopped by playing 3...e5.

4 ♗f3

Going with the standard set-up, but White could have tried to take advantage of 3... ♗bd7 with either 4 g4 or 4 f4, as we saw above.

4...e5 5 ♘c4 ♘e7 6 0-0 c6 7 a4 ♔c7



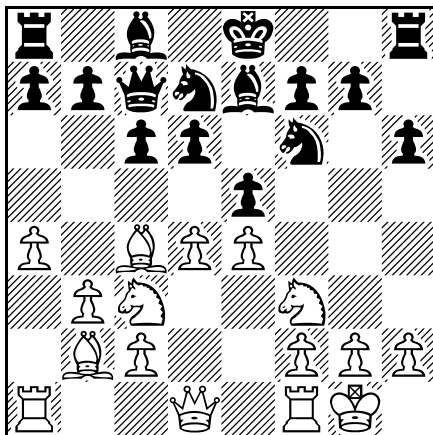
Opening Repertoire: Black Lion

Decision time is approaching. As a general rule, we will try and wait as long as possible to see what White does. If White plays h3, then we will go ...g5 – if not, I would say that the ...g5 idea is rather unsound.

8 h3

Now ...g5 becomes much more tempting as Black can open up White's kingside with ...g4. Against h3, I will always be tempted to play the Risky Lion.

Instead, 8 b3 is one of the best ways to play against a Risky Lion player. White develops his bishop in a sensible manner, increasing his pressure in the centre and preparing some nasty tricks based around ♗xe5. After 8...h6 9 ♖b2 I feel it is best for Black to give up on ideas of ...g5 against this development of the white bishop.



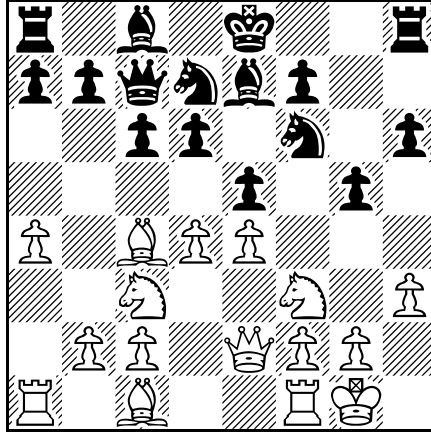
Instead, we should concentrate on getting a knight to f4. This is one of our main plans when we do not feel that the Risky Lion is going to work well for us, i.e. 9...0-0 (the Tame Lion) 10 a5 ♖e8 11 ♖e1 ♗f8!, heading for g6.

There's also 8 ♖e1, a very flexible move. White improves his centre and waits. I would recommend we do the same for one more move with 8...h6. Will we play ...g5 or not? If White goes h3 then yes, if not then I would say it is very risky and not sound, hence other plans are suggested in the Tame Lion coverage later on.

8...h6 9 ♖e2

White has a number of other possibilities, but the scene has been set: White has played h3, so we have a target to attack. For this reason, ...g5 is a much more playable option for us. In actual fact, 9 ♖e2 has little independent value, as the brave among us will now play 9...g5 against everything here.

9...g5!?



And we are off! In this book, I am generally suggesting this advance before ...♘f8. With ...g5, Black gets ready to push ...g4 at the right moment. This move is normally not to be rushed. We can spend some time first increasing the power of the ...g4 push by playing ...♘f8, ...♘g6 and ...♗g8. We will look at these attacking plans in more depth later on.

A History of the Black Lion

Game 1

J.Cochrane-M.Bonnerjee

Calcutta 1850

1 e4

The Philidor Defence (I have nicknamed it the Tame Lion to run alongside the Black Lion) has a long history dating back to the 18th Century and is named after François-André Danican Philidor. The move order that I advocate is 1...d6: this means that after 2 d4 ♘f6, the pawn on e4 is en prise so White cannot enter the traditional Philidor lines with 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4.

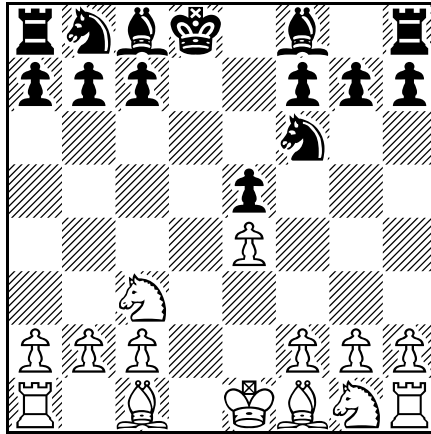
1...d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 e5

This is a solid set-up for Black. In many openings that begin with 1 e4 e5, the pawn on e5 can come under pressure. By setting up with ...d6, Black aims to maintain his pawn on e5. He will allow White space, but intends to retain a solid position and gradually push White back after completing his quiet development.

4 dxe5

This move order allows an exchange of queens which may not be to everyone's taste, but I felt it was important to give a sound alternative to the Risky Lion. Depending on factors such as your style, your opponent and your desire to change your move order, this should sit nicely as an alternative to the riskier lines.

4...dxe5 5 ♖xd8+ ♔xd8

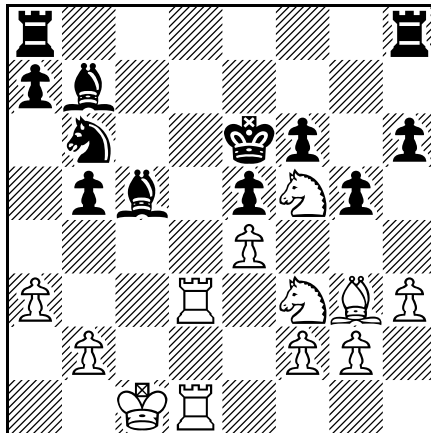


I found this game from the 19th century and as this is in part a history lesson, I thought a game from over 150 years ago might be entertaining.

6 ♗g5 ♗e7 7 0-0-0 ♔e8 8 h3 h6 9 ♗h4 g5!?

I am generously calling this move interesting. Chess has come a long way since 1850. Sometimes we should enjoy the game without over-thinking or over-analysing. That said, the overall standard of this game is not unimpressive.

10 ♗g3 ♗d6 11 ♘f3 ♘bd7 12 ♗b5 ♔e7 13 ♗xd7 ♘xd7 14 ♘d5+ ♔e6 15 c4 c6 16 ♘e3 f6 17 ♘f5 ♗c5 18 ♖d3 b5 19 cxb5 cxb5 20 ♖hd1 ♘b6 21 a3 ♗b7



A classic middlegame position has arisen from the Philidor after the exchange of queens. Black has unwound his pieces and now sets about making aggressive intentions. White's next is a blunder and Black ruthlessly takes advantage.

22 b4? ♗xe4 23 bxc5 ♗xd3 24 ♖xd3 ♖ac8 25 ♘e3 ♖xc5+ 26 ♔b1 ♖hc8 27 ♘d2 ♖c3 28 ♖xc3

♖xc3

This position, which could reasonably be described as an endgame (or nearly there), favours the rook over the two minor pieces as the rook has open lines and the bishop on g3 does not.

29 ♖c2 f5 30 f3 a5 31 ♕f2 ♞d5 32 g4 b4 33 axb4 axb4 34 gxf5+ ♔xf5 35 ♚b2 ♜d3 36 ♕e1 ♙f4 37 ♚c1 b3 38 ♞a1 ♞e3 39 ♕f2 ♞e2 0-1

Next we'll see the first game I could find on my database which features the Risky Lion set-up. The game was played in 1929 and it looks like we should be thanking Herr. Brinckmann!

Game 2
E.Canal-A.Brinckmann
Rogaska Slatina 1929

1 e4 e5

We see a different move order being used here. Move order concepts will be discussed soon. 1...d6 2 d4 ♞f6 3 ♖c3 ♞bd7 4 ♞f3 e5 is our way of doing things.

2 ♞f3 d6 3 d4 ♞f6?!

Rather dubious.

4 ♞c3

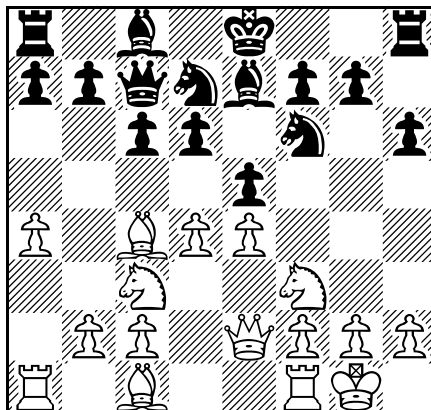
4 dxe5! is much more critical.

4...♞bd7 5 ♕c4

We are now back in normal territory.

5...h6

This is another possible move order, but I feel that it is slightly more precise to first play in the centre with ...♕e7, ...c6 and ...♚c7.

6 0-0 ♕e7 7 ♚e2 c6 8 a4 ♚c7

Opening Repertoire: Black Lion

Here we are in our main Black Lion set-up.

9 ♖e3 ♜f8

As White has not committed to playing h3, this way of playing is quite crafty. We do not commit to ...g5 either, keeping options open. The only real threat to an early ...♜f8 move before castling is ♜h4, as we will soon see.

Black could have also considered 9...♜g4, a possibility White often avoids by playing h3 first.

10 ♜e1!

Aiming for f2-f4, so now it feels natural to stop that move.

10...g5

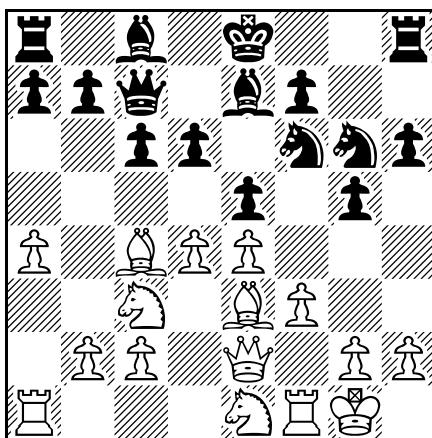
Here we go, and with the move we often want to play anyway.

A safer approach would have been 10...♜g4!? winning the bishop-pair, as if White moves the bishop we can win a pawn by capturing on d4. With 10...♜g4 Black has gained instant equality and we can now appreciate why White often feels the need to play h3.

11 f3

Reinforcing the centre.

11...♜g6



The standard plan. Black moves the knight around to attack White's king, normally from the f4-square.

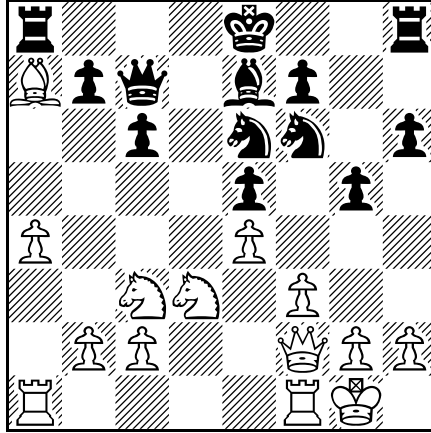
12 ♜f2 ♜f4

Getting nearer to White's king. This is where we see all the pieces diving towards that target. In actual fact, 12...exd4 was better and would have led to an equal game.

13 ♜d3 ♖e6

Black could even have castled here, with ideas like ...♜h8 (or ...♜h7), ...♜g8 and later on ...g4.

14 ♖xe6 ♜xe6 15 dxe5 dxe5 16 ♖xa7



White is doing very well here, but Black fights and manages to complicate matters enough to get a draw.

16...c5 17 ♖b5 ♜c6 18 ♗e5 ♜a6 19 ♗c4 ♜xa7 20 ♗xa7 ♜xa7 21 b4 ♗d7 22 e5 ♜b8 23 b5 ♗xe5 24 ♗xe5 ♜xe5 25 ♜ad1 ♜c7 26 ♜g3 ♜xg3 27 hxg3 ♙d8 28 f4 ♙a5 29 ♜d5 0-0 30 ♜d7 b6 31 ♜d6 ♙g7 32 c3 gxf4 33 gxf4 ♜d8 34 ♜xd8 ♗xd8 35 ♜f3 ♗e6 36 ♙f2 c4 37 ♜g3+ ♙f6 38 ♜h3 ♗xf4 39 ♜xh6+ ♙e5 40 ♜c6 ♙d5 41 ♜f6 ♗d3+ 42 ♙e3 ♙xc3 43 ♜xf7 ♗c5 44 g4 ♗xa4 45 g5 ♗c5 46 ♜f5+ ♙e5 47 g6 ♗e6 48 ♜h5 ♗g7 49 ♜g5 ♗e6 50 ♜h5 c3 51 ♜f5 ♗g7 52 ♜g5 c2 53 ♙d2 ♗e6 54 ♜h5 ♙d6 55 ♙xc2 ♙f6 56 ♜h1 ♙e5 57 ♜f1 ♙d4 58 ♙d3 ♙d5 59 ♜f7 ♙e5 60 ♜d7+ ♙c5 61 ♜e7 ♙d6 62 ♜f7 ♙a1 63 ♜f1 ♙b2 64 ♜b1 ♙f6 65 ♜f1 ½-½

The Correct Move Order

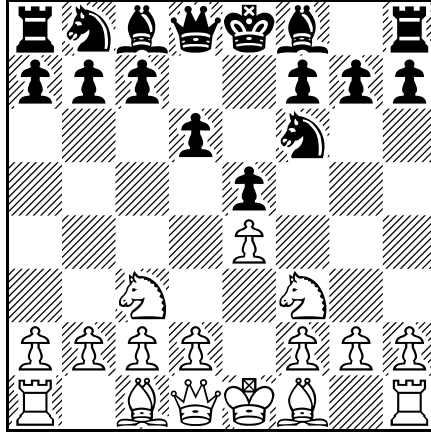
I would just like to point out the correct move order after that pioneering game, as lots of different moves orders have been tried and it is easy to go wrong as Black.

1 e4 d6

This seems best. 1...e5 has been tried, but the one main issue we have is how to meet an early ♙c4 with pressure against f7. By going 1...d6, we keep options open of ...e6 as a last resort for us. This will block White's bishop on c4.

2 d4

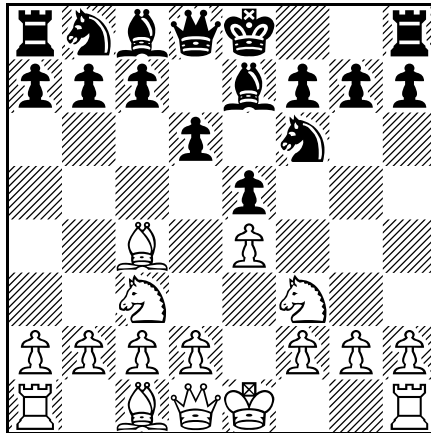
The main move, but we must be a bit careful against 2 ♗f3: 2...♗f6 (gaining a tempo against e4) 3 ♗c3 e5!.



This is more accurate than 3...Bd7. Here that could get us into trouble (the difference with this and our main move order is that White already has a knight on f3), i.e. 4 e4 e5? 5 g5 and we are already lost, as we are not in time to play ...0-0. Worth remembering!

The one rule to remember and always think about is: how do I deal with e4 and g5? The general answer to this is to be able to castle kingside, so that f7 can be defended by a rook on f8. For example, after 3...e5 4 e4 be aware of the threat to f7! What should we do now? Of course we need to be able to meet g5 with ...0-0, so 4...e7! is correct.

2 e4 is like 2 f3. We shouldn't be worried, but we should be aware of dangers to our f7-pawn: 2...f6 3 f3 e5! (3...Bd7 doesn't fit our system due to 4 f3 when again 4...e5? is a blunder due to 5 g5! and Black is in serious trouble) 4 f3 e7!.



It's very important that we need to be able to meet g5 with ...0-0. Here 4...Bd7? would be a horrible move due to 5 g5, but after 4...e7 5 g5 0-0 our position is safe. In actual fact, 5 g5 is just a waste of time for White.

Returning to the normal 2 d4:

2... ♖f6

This is correct: develop with tempo.

3 ♘c3

White's main and best move. This is where you have your first choice: ...e5 now or later? It really is a matter of style, which is why I have analysed both 3... ♖bd7 and 3...e5.

3 ♘d3 is also sometimes played, but the bishop is really quite badly placed here.

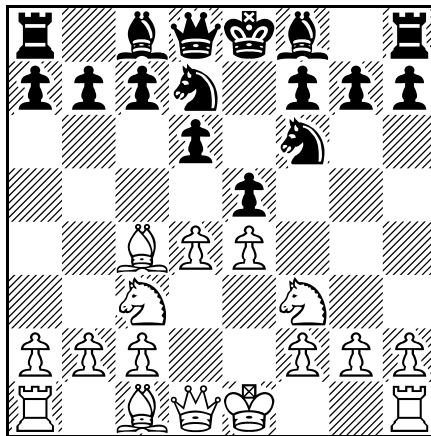
3... ♖bd7

This has always been my choice, just for the fact that it avoids a queen exchange. Instead, of course, 3...e5 is the Tame Lion approach and may suit some of you. Then 4 dxe5 is the only move that gives this line independent value. Other moves will transpose back into our main line.

4 ♖f3

We must also be aware of 4 g4 and 4 f4.

4...e5 5 ♘c4



Another key moment that I must discuss, just to ensure you do not go wrong already. It's ever important that when ♘c4 has been played, we must keep an eye on f7. As a rule: *we must be able to meet ♖g5 with ...0-0*. For that reason, Black's next move should be easy to find.

5... ♘e7

Yes! This is safest, whereas 5...c6?, for example, is a big mistake due to 6 ♖g5.

6 0-0

Now 6 ♖g5 is simply met with 6...0-0.

6...c6

With this, we create a mini-threat of 7...b5 which we should play given a chance. 6...h6 is also fine, but 6...c6 somehow seems more logical to me.

7 a4

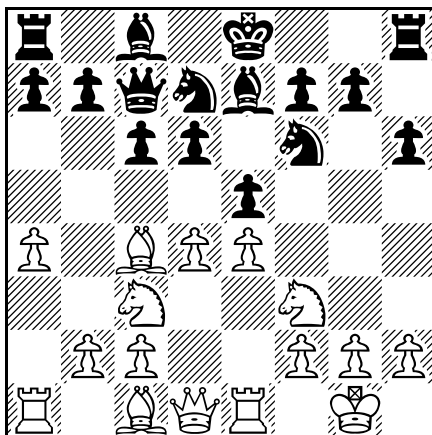
Opening Repertoire: Black Lion

Stopping 7...b5. Against nearly everything else 7...b5 is good, while the unsound 'tempting' move 7 ♖xf7+?! will be analysed later.

7...♔c7 8 ♚e1

Holding the centre.

8...h6



We have our mainline position, which is examined at in-depth later on.

An Opening against 1 e4 or both 1 e4 and 1 d4?

1 d4

As a rule, this repertoire is only designed against 1 e4 and not against 1 d4. For 1 d4 buy my coverage of the Dutch Defence! You can try experimenting with the Black Lion against 1 d4, but it is not something I will look at here. The reason for this is that the positions you get are very different to those we'll look at after 1 e4. With 1 d4 in, White can play c4 quickly which changes things a lot.

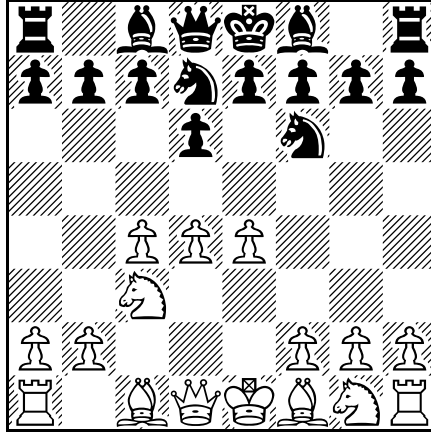
1...d6 2 c4

This is not really a Black Lion position in my eyes.

2...♘f6

2...e5 here can be met with 3 d5 which is outside the scope of our course.

3 ♘c3 ♘bd7 4 e4

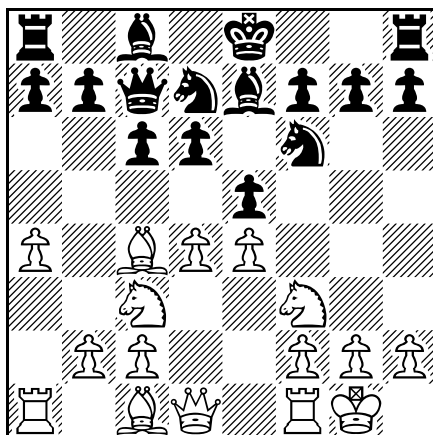


And things are different. This opening is actually the Old Indian and if you are interested in this, you can research it elsewhere. Who knows, if there is enough interest I may one day cover that opening, but not here! We have too much to look at anyway.

Chapter Three

The Standard Set-up with ♖c4

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 ♘bd7 4 ♘f3 e5 5 ♙c4 ♙e7 6 0-0 c6 7 a4 ♚c7



The main line of our Black Lion repertoire and a position you'll reach pretty often as White's moves so far have been very natural and normal. Before moving on to the theory, let's see three inspirational and instructive games, two with the Risky Lion and then one showing when the Tame Lion can be the more appropriate choice.

Game 17
S.Collins-S.Williams
 British League (4NCL) 2013

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♗c3 ♘bd7

The Risky Lion move order, as opposed to 3...e5 and the Tame Lion, and now we will see the most common set-up that White will play.

4 ♗f3 e5 5 ♖c4

The bishop is much more actively placed here, compared to e2.

5...♗e7 6 0-0 c6

6...0-0 is fine, but is not a real Black Lion move, so we won't be looking at it. Likewise, the immediate 6...h6 can also be played, but 6...c6 gives us more flexibility to advance on the queenside with ...b5.

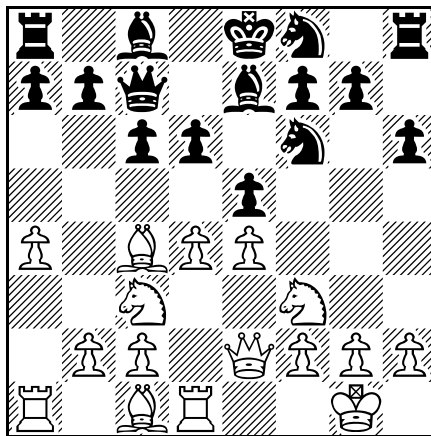
7 a4 ♖c7 8 ♖e2

This is a very logical move. White clears the back rank and prepares to place a rook on d1, where it is ready for the opening of the d-file. On the plus side for Black, any plans or tricks that White has with the standard idea of ♗e3 and then dxe5 ♘xe5; ♗d4 are not as worrying, because the bishop on d4 will now not be defended. So, for example, after a sequence like ♘xe5 ♖xe5, ♗d4 will often not work as the queen on d1 is not defending the bishop, meaning Black can simply play ...♗xd4.

8...h6 9 ♗d1

Keeping the tension, since Black has easy development after 9 dxe5 dxe5 (9...♘xe5 10 ♘xe5 dxe5 11 h3 0-0 is also possible) 10 ♗h4 g6 (taking advantage of the fact that White has played dxe5 with 10...♗c5!? looks logical also) 11 f4 exf4 12 ♗xf4 ♘e5 13 ♗b3 ♗d6 when White has failed to invade on f5 and Black has firm control of the e5 point.

9...♗f8



Opening Repertoire: Black Lion

I used to prefer playing this move, before advancing with ...g5, but 9...g5 is more consistent with the Risky Lion plan and does stop ♖h4 as Sam played in the game. This will be my main suggestion in the theory section below.

10 ♖h4!?

A common theme.

10 h3?! prepares to play ♕e3 without worrying about ...♗g4, but this creates a target for Black to attack with ...g4: 10...g5! 11 ♖h2 ♗g6 12 b4 ♜g8! 13 a5 ♖f4 14 ♕xf4 gxf4 15 ♜h1 ♕d7! 16 b5 (or 16 ♜ab1 ♜f8!) 16...♞c8! keeps the queenside secure before looking to exploit the half-open g-file.

10...g6?!

This is interesting, but it does seem a bit strange, as it is now going to be very hard to ever play the standard ...g5 move.

10...♗e6! is sensible now that the white queen is on e2. The queen can be a target that can be attacked and, for example, 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 ♖f5 0-0 13 ♕e3 ♖f4 14 ♜f3 ♕b4! leaves Black actively placed.

11 g3?!

This is not entirely necessary and even gives me some light squares to attack on the kingside.

11...♗e6!

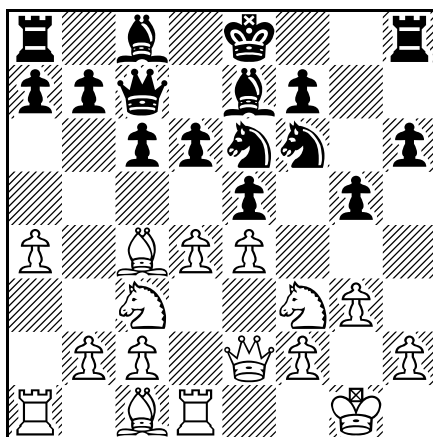
Now that the knight cannot go to g6 anymore.

12 ♖f3

White holds his centre together.

Instead, 12 d5 ♖d4! is a lovely square for the knight and after, for instance, 13 ♜d3 ♜f8! 14 ♕e3 g5 15 ♖g2 ♖f3+ 16 ♜h1 ♕g4 Black has good play on the light squares.

12...g5!?



Consistent with the Risky Lion.

12...♖xd4 is an easier equalising move when 13 ♖xd4 exd4 14 ♜xd4 ♖g4! is the key fol-

low-up. The knight re-routes itself to e5 and prepares ideas with ...♗g4.

13 d5

Closing the position, but gaining some useful pressure in the centre.

13...♘f8

Insisting on obtaining a typical Risky Lion set-up.

14 b4

14 ♗e1! would have been clever, stopping any nasty pins with ...♗g4.

14...a6

Trying to hold up White's play on the queenside, but 14...♗g4!? was much more sensible, creating a tricky pin.

15 ♗e3 ♗g4

A nice pin that the move g3 has made even stronger. We really have a race situation here, with White pushing on the queenside and Black on the kingside. Who will prevail?

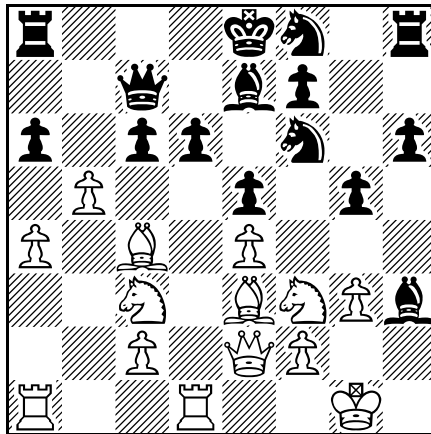
16 h3!?

A drastic way to break the pin. 16 a5 made a lot more sense, but the position is not without danger for White: 16...♗g6! (standard stuff, but now also setting up sacrificial ideas on f4 and sometimes even h4) 17 ♖b6 ♗c8 18 ♗d3 when Black can now even play 18...0-0!?, with ...♗h7, ...♖g8 and some sacrifice like ...♗f4 to come. The position certainly seems very dangerous for White.

16...♗xh3

OK, thanks!

17 dxc6 bxc6 18 b5!



White cannot hang around anymore.

18...♗g6

18...♗g4 was possibly even stronger.

19 bxc6 ♗xc6 20 ♗d5 0-0!?

Relying 100% on a kingside attack.

Opening Repertoire: Black Lion

20...♖xe4!? was playable, but I did not want to defend. That I might have ended up doing after 21 ♖d3 ♗c3!? 22 ♗xc3! ♜c8 (22...♗xf3? fails to 23 ♙d5) 23 ♙xa6 ♗xf3 24 ♗e4 when White is better.

21 ♗xf6+ ♙xf6 22 ♙d5 ♖d7 23 ♗d2?!

23 ♙xa8 ♜xa8 24 ♗d2? ♜c8 certainly supplies some compensation for Black, with ...♗f4 always looming.

23...♜ab8

Well, if you do not want my rook...

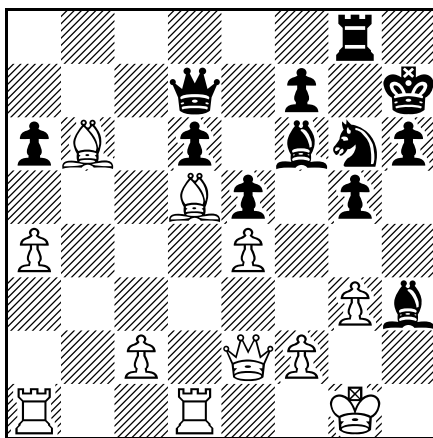
24 ♗c4 ♙h7!?

Very ambitious. My aim? Simple! I just wanted to go ...♜g8, sacrifice and checkmate.

25 ♗b6 ♜xb6!?

Gaining time to attack. I'm going all in now.

26 ♙xb6 ♜g8



Indeed, I must now checkmate or lose.

27 ♙e3 ♗h4!?

Crazy stuff.

27...♗f4 was the other option, and if 28 ♙xf4 (28 gxf4? gxf4+ 29 ♙h2 ♜g2+ 30 ♙h1 ♙g4! would be winning for Black) 28...exf4 29 ♜ab1 fxg3 30 fxg3 ♙g4.

28 f3

28 ♗h5! was the best defence, but it is not easy finding the way through an impending storm. After 28...♜g7 29 f3 (29...♙g4 was a big threat) 29...♗g2!? 30 ♙d2 ♗f4 31 ♙xf4! gxf4 32 g4 White has successfully defended and reached a winning position.

However, 28 gxf4? was not a good idea due to 28...gxf4+ 29 ♙h2 ♙g2.

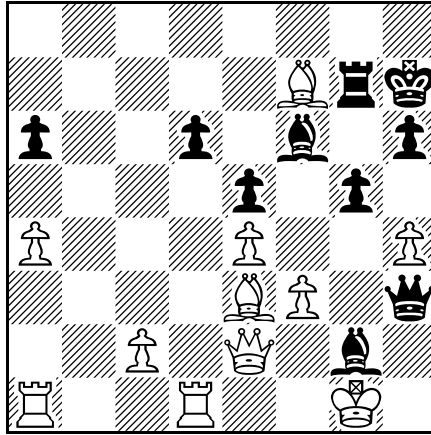
28...♙g2?

Too much and simply 28...g4! was just very unclear: for example, 29 f4 exf4 30 ♙xf4 ♗f3+ 31 ♙h1 ♙xa1 32 ♜xa1 ♖c7.

29 gxf4 ♗h3 30 ♙xf7

30 ♖xg2! was simpler, as Black is running out of pieces: 30...gxh4 31 ♖xg8+ ♔xg8 32 ♜d2 ♖xf3 33 ♜g2+ ♔h7 34 ♖b6 h3 35 ♜f2 and White is winning.

30...♜g7



31 h5??

In an extremely complicated position, White goes wrong. 31 ♖e6! was the winning move, distracting my queen from the attack. After 31...♖xe6 32 ♔xg2 gxh4+ 33 ♔h2 ♜g3 the key defensive move is 34 ♖f1, which is easy to miss in advance.

31...♖xf3

All of a sudden, Black is better.

32 ♖g6+ ♜xg6 33 hxg6+ ♔xg6 34 ♖h2 ♖g4+ 35 ♔f1 ♖xd1 36 ♖g2 ♖xg2+ 37 ♔xg2 ♖xc2 38 ♖f3 h5 0-1

Game 18
A.David-S.Williams
French Team Championship 2013

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 ♘bd7 4 ♘f3 e5 5 ♖c4 ♖e7 6 0-0 c6 7 a4 ♗c7 8 ♜e1 h6 9 b3

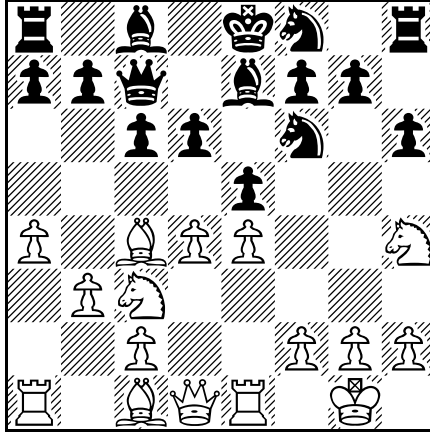
As we saw back in *Game 14*, 9 a5 ♘f8 10 h3 g5 11 d5 g4 12 hxg4 ♖xg4 was Karpov-Jansen, Rotterdam (simul) 1976.

9...♘f8

I prefer playing this manoeuvre first here as it does not commit us to playing ...g5.

Instead, 9...g5 10 ♖b2 just looks too risky with very dangerous sacrifices imminent on e5, but 9...0-0! looks best against these b3 plans as Black can play ...♜e8, ...♘f8, ...♘g6 and ...♘f4. This plan becomes stronger when White's dark-squared bishop moves off the c1-h6 diagonal.

10 ♘h4!



A number of strong players have played this move against me in reply to ...f8.

There's also 10 g6, which sets up a nasty trick: 10...g5? (10...g6! is correct) 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 exf5! – very much one to avoid as we saw in the last chapter.

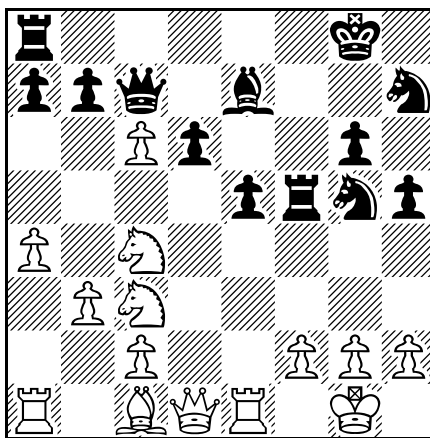
10...g6

Maybe there's 10...e6!?, but then White can push forwards with 11 dxe5 (not 11 d5 d4) 11...dxe5 12 f5 b4 13 f3 d4 14 exd4 exd4 15 e5!.

11 d5 f6h7 12 f3 g5?!

12...g5! is much more in the spirit of the opening, and if 13 a5 g6 14 d3 (or 14 a6?! b5!) 14...f6 15 a6 cxd5 16 exd5 exd5 17 axb7 bxb7 18 exd5 f4 with a complex position.

13 d2 h5 14 e2 f5?! 15 exf5 exf5 16 c4 fh7 17 d3 0-0 18 exf5 fxf5 19 dxc6



19...dxc6

It's all gone wrong for Black in view of 19...dxc6 20 d5!.

20 ♘d5 ♙f8 21 ♘ce3 ♚f7 22 ♚d3 e4 23 ♚c4 ♚c8 24 ♙b2 ♚d7 25 ♚e2 ♙g7 26 ♙xg7 ♙xg7
 27 h4 ♘f3+ 28 gxf3 exf3 29 ♚f1 ♚e8 30 ♚b5 ♚c8 31 ♚xe8 ♚xe8 32 ♘f5+ ♚xf5 33 ♚xe8
 ♚xd5 34 ♚ae1 ♙f6 35 ♚1e7 ♘f8 36 ♚e3 1-0

Game 19
P.Koykka-P.Ponkratov
 European Club Cup, Plovdiv 2010

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 e5 4 ♘f3 ♘bd7 5 ♙c4 ♙e7 6 0-0 c6 7 a4 ♚c7 8 a5

White could also have played 8 ♚e1 followed by 9 a5.

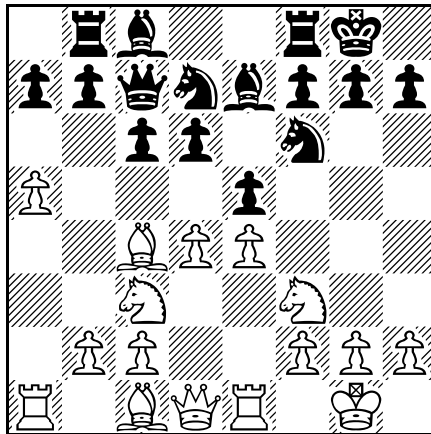
8...0-0

The Tame Lion, a choice perhaps made easier as White has not committed to playing h3 yet.

9 ♚e1

Another typical position. Now clearly 9...b6 or 9...b5 would both be mistakes, as they would be met by White capturing en passant and due to the pin down the a-file, Black would be unable to recapture with his a-pawn. What to do, you may ask? Well, hopefully even if you have not seen this position before, you can work out my recommendation. Need I remind you that I feel a consistent approach to opening plans is highly beneficial, particularly for players looking to adopt new openings.

9...♚b8



Hopefully, you guessed this move. Black has no intention of allowing White's a-pawn to prevent his plan of queenside expansion. The rook removes itself from the potential pin down the a-file and supports the b-pawn's advance. Now if White captures the b-pawn, Black will recapture with the a-pawn to maintain his structure and support further pawn advances. Note that recapturing with the rook to claim a half-open file would not cause

Opening Repertoire: Black Lion

White concerns as the pawn on b2 is defended and can always advance to b3 if required.

10 h3 b5

Black has actually found a way to take advantage of a5 by making the b-pawn two-square thrust in one go. This would not be possible if White had the pawn on a4, which, as we've seen, requires Black to prepare this advance with ...b6, ...a6 and only then ...b5.

11 axb6 axb6

By far and away the best recapture.

12 b3 b5

Black continues in line with our plan, expanding on the queenside and pushing White's bishop back to a less dangerous square.

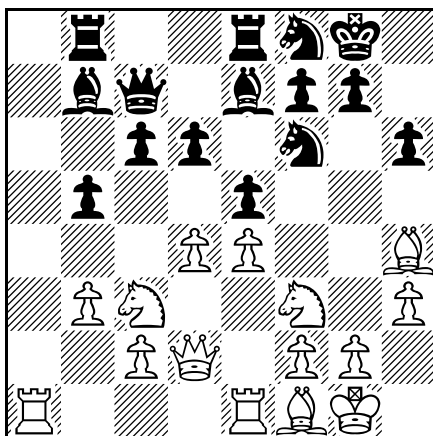
13 ♖f1 ♜e8

Having made progress on the queenside, only now does Black focus on improving his pieces and turning his attention to the centre.

14 ♗g5 h6 15 ♗h4 ♗b7

The natural square for the bishop, eyeing up White's centre.

16 ♖d2 ♞f8



A classic Lion manoeuvre and a well-timed one here. The white bishop on h4 is targeted. I really do like how from a seemingly defensive position, Black's pieces spring to life. There are so many games Black wins which are not just logical, but deceptively strong. Beware the Lion, even the tame version!

17 ♗g3 ♞g6 18 ♞h4?!

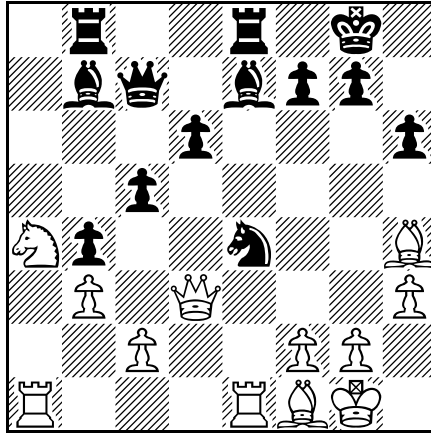
White feels under pressure and does what many a player has done before: seeks exchanges to make life simpler. The search for ease and clarity will come at a heavy cost as White has removed a knight from the key defensive f3-square. Black immediately seizes the chance to attack the white centre with devastating effect.

18...♞xh4 19 ♗xh4 b4 20 ♞a4 exd4

A similar approach to the last game. Black has beautiful coordination, whereas two out

of three White's minor pieces occupy squares on the side of the board.

21 ♖xd4 c5 22 ♖d3 ♗xe4!



23 ♗xe7

23 ♖xe4? ♗xe4 24 ♖xe4 ♗f6 wins material due to the discovered attack on the white queen.

23...♖xe7 24 ♖ad1 d5

Black is a pawn to the good and in complete control.

25 ♗e2 ♗c6 26 ♗f3 ♗xa4 27 bxa4 ♗c3 0-1

Once again, it may seem too early to throw in the towel, but the Lion has demoralised another victim. I will just show a few moves that could have happened, in case people need convincing of Black's overwhelming advantage: 28 ♖a1 c4 29 ♖d2 ♖xe1+ 30 ♖xe1 ♖d8 31 ♖a1 ♖a5 32 h4 d4 33 g3 b3 and the queenside pawns will prove decisive.

Theory of the Risky Lion Against the Standard Set-up

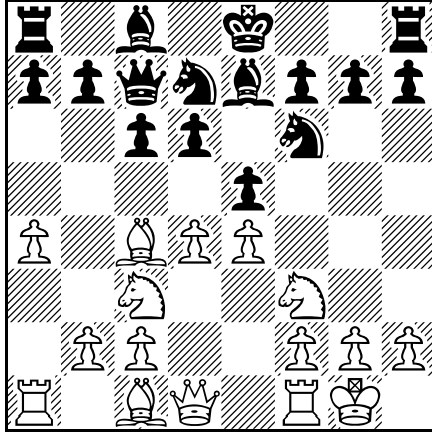
1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♗f6 3 ♗c3 ♗bd7 4 ♗f3 e5 5 ♗c4

Clearly the best square for the bishop.

5...♗e7 6 0-0 c6 7 a4

White should stop Black from gaining useful space with ...b5.

7...♖c7

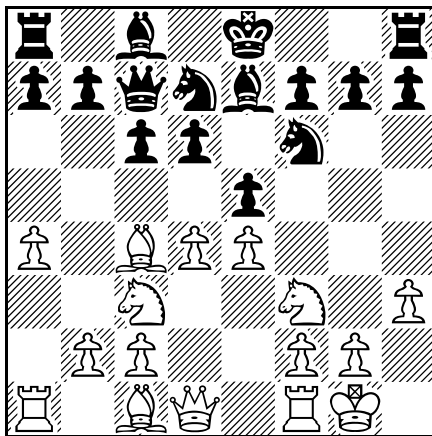


This is the position that you will most likely find yourself in when playing the Black Lion. For that reason, it is a very important one and a position that we need to study in some depth. I have looked at a lot of lines in this part of the course, to give us a good feeling as to what you should be playing. In this section, Black is going to try and play ...g5 in all situations, whereas in our next section we'll see Black preferring a Tame Lion approach without ...g5.

8 ♖e1

The main line. White sensibly overprotects e4 and lines up against the black king. He has a great number of alternatives, not least:

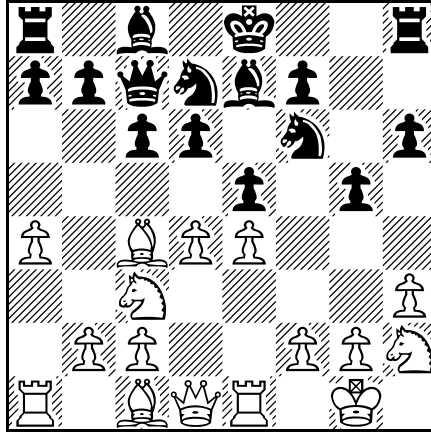
a) 8 h3 is the second most important move and one that is often played by White. However, we now have a 'hook' to attack with our g-pawn.



This is my personal rule with the Risky Lion: *in these mainline positions, once h3 has been played we go full steam ahead with ...g5-g4.* However, if h3 hasn't been played, then

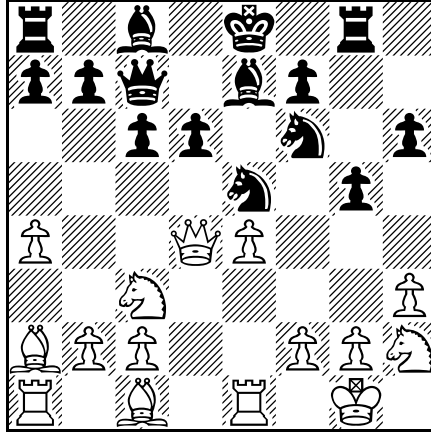
more care is needed. After 8...h6 we have a further parting of the ways:

a1) 9 ♖e1 might even be seen as the main line. I now recommend 9...g5 (there's also 9...♘f8!? 10 ♗h4 g6 and after 11 ♗f3?! g5! 12 b3 ♗g6 13 ♖a3? g4 14 hxg4 ♖xg4 I had taken over on the kingside in Faizrakhmanov-Williams, Internet (blitz) 2022, but after the calm 11 a5! it's not so easy for Black to advance) when 10 ♗h2 seems quite logical.



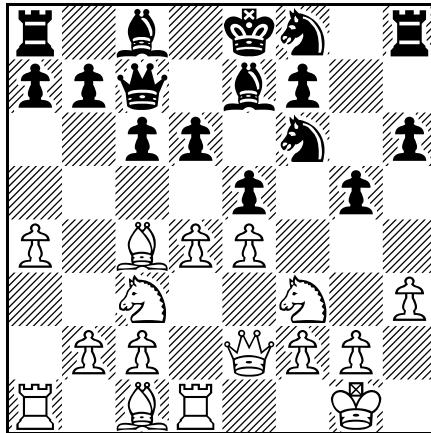
I often face this move online. Black now has quite a unique way of playing: 10...exd4!? (of course Black can continue in normal fashion with 10...♗f8, but the central exchange works well now that the white knight cannot recapture on d4) 11 ♖xd4 ♗e5 (the point of Black's play is to embarrass the knight on h2) 12 ♖e2 (the bishop comes back to defend against ...g4, which must be the best try for White) 12...♖g8. This insists on ...g4, with a very interesting position ahead. It seems clear to me that Black has great practical chances on the kingside. This, like many other lines in this book, has never been seen before, but let's take a look at some likely moves here: 13 a5 g4! (of course!) 14 hxg4 (14 h4 doesn't keep things closed due to 14...g3!) 14...♗fxg4 when Black is having a lot of fun. Some ideas to consider are ...♖f6, ...h5, ...♖e6 and ...0-0-0. In short, it's a messy, double-edged position which is just what any Risky Lion player wants.

Here 12 ♖a2 is another option, but this feels wrong as the bishop has now deserted White's kingside. Black has the makings for a great attack after 12...♖g8! with ...g4 to follow.



White has a number of moves here, but let's see what happens if he continues with normal development: 13 ♗e3?! (oblivious to Black's plan, which is pretty strong; a defensive move such as 13 ♖e3 was better, but Black would still be doing fine) 13...g4! (with a big attack and advantage for Black) 14 hxg4 ♖fxg4 15 f4 ♗f6! is a lovely move and suddenly White is in real trouble. The tactics are working in Black's favour.

a2) 9 ♗e2 aims to occupy the d-file with ♖d1 and sometimes send the queen to c4. After 9...g5 (9...♖f8!? 10 ♗e3 g5 is similar and 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 a5 ♖g6 13 ♖d2 ♖f4 14 ♗xf4 gxf4 15 ♖h2 ♗g8 left me looking to castle long and double on the g-file in Guliev-Williams, Internet (blitz) 2020) 10 ♖d1 ♖f8! the knight heads over in the normal way and Black aims to play ...g4 and ...♗xg4 in some situations.

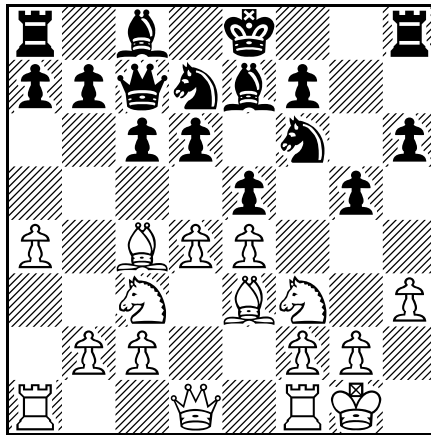


Here 11 dxe5 was played in a Prasad-Asylguzhin game from 1999, which ended in a shock rating win for Black after 11...dxe5 12 ♖h2 (standard, and now that White has exchanged on e5, Black can no longer play the thematic idea ...exd4 followed up with ...♖e5,

...♖g8 and ...g4) 12...♗g6 13 ♗g4?! (a normal but bad response by White; other moves though would have allowed ...♗f4 when Black has the initiative) 13...♙xg4! (this is often the best way for Black to meet ♗g4) 14 hxg4 ♗f4 15 ♖f3 h5! (very thematic; Black has the advantage and a big attack on the kingside) 16 gxh5 (otherwise White would simply lose this pawn) 16...g4 17 ♖g3 ♖xh5. Black now went on to win with the very convincing plan of ...♙d6, preparing the crushing ...0-0-0 and ...♖h8.

As we've also seen before, 11 ♗h2 ♗g6 12 ♖f3 was preferred in Vyparina-Rahl, Slovakian League 2002. Black now played 12...♗f4 which was OK, but let's not forget our other plan: 12...exd4! (as a rule: this works well when White has a knight on h2 and Black can continue with ...♗e5 and ...♖g8) 13 ♖xd4 ♗e5 14 ♖e2 ♖g8. Black is ready to play ...g4 with an advantage and big attack.

a3) 9 ♙e3 reveals why White often plays h3, to allow ♙e3 without worrying about ...♗g4. Here I am suggesting 9...g5 instead of 9...♗f8.



The push is more to the point and gives us more options compared to 9...♗f8. We might, for instance, do without the manoeuvre ...♗f8 and save some tempi by immediately playing ...g5-g4. There is now a further divide:

a31) 10 ♖e1 is a crafty waiting move and this position can be reached via a number of different move orders. Black should now play 10...g4!, which gives him a very good game: 11 hxg4 ♗xg4 (the knight finds a dynamic square) 12 a5. The following piece of analysis is *Leela* on the case, looking at some 900,000 positions... It came to the conclusion that Black is fine after 12...♗xe3 (it may look a bit strange exchanging off our strong knight, but the attack continues) 13 ♖xe3 h5, but this is where *Stockfish* and *Leela* differ.