

# How to Play the Dilworth Attack

by Eric Schiller

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Moon Township PA

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## **Introuduction**

The Dilworth Attack is one of the most interesting variations of the Spanish Game. Black gives up a bishop and knight for a rook and one or two pawns, and then launches an attack against the White King. If White plays correctly, then a rich and complex endgame arises. From Black's point of view, this has great practical advantages. After all, anyone who plays the Dilworth regularly as Black is going to have much more experience with the particular endgame strategies and tactics which are part of the Dilworth environment. Theory already considers those endgames to be about equal, and the added advantage of experience really gives Black a significant advantage. In addition, the experience of playing these endgames is instructive, and the lessons learned can be applied in other endgame situations. Therefore the Dilworth, with both attacking chances and endgame strategy, is an ideal opening for the aspiring chessplayer as well as the professional player. Among the top players who play the opening as Black are Open Spanish Guru Artur Yusupov, Eugene Torre and mega-theoretical Lev Polugayevsky (in rare excursions outside Sicilian territory). And how has the opening held up against superstars? Well, look at the dismal results Bobby Fischer, Boris Spassky and Nigel Short have as White!

This book contains everything you need to know to play the exciting Dilworth Variation of the Ruy Lopez from either side, though it does examine most material from Black's point of view. What sets this monograph apart from most opening books is the thorough examination of the typical endgames which arise. Many opening books simply end a variation with a symbol indicating an advantage for one side or another, or worse yet, the omnipresent "unclear". The Dilworth defies such a treatment, because the endgames are so complicated that only a great deal of experience can lead to correct evaluation of the positions. So almost all of the games cited in this book are presented in full.

## Theory I: Early Deviations

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4**

The Open Variation is an aggressive system which has appealed to such diverse talents as the dogmatic Siegbert Tarrasch, the creative Viktor Korchnoi, the dynamic Bent Larsen and World Champion Max Euwe. It is quite different from the solid maneuvering lines of the Closed variations, and not nearly as thoroughly investigated.

**6.d4**

White almost always plays this move, since after 6.Re1 Black can follow theory with 6...Nc5, or even 6...Nf6!? which is better than its reputation.

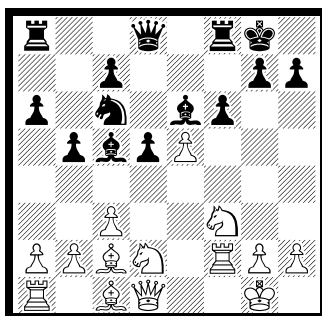
**6...b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.c3**

The most popular move for White, from an historical point of view. Karpov, in his 1981 Merano match against Korchnoi, explored some of the alternatives, and he still prefers 9.Nbd2 which lies outside the scope of this book. But current theory suggests that Black is holding his own in those lines.

**9...Bc5 10.Nbd2 0-0 11.Bc2 Nxf2!?**

Here we go! Vernon Dilworth popularized the opening in the 1940's in England, and now these lines bear his name. Kevin O'Connell points out a precursor from 1924, but in fact the opening was actually played in the 19th century. No surprise, really, since the Open Ruy was quite in vogue then. By the way, O'Connell's 1978 book *Spanish (Ruy Lopez): Open* was a landmark in the history of the theory of the line, and contains massive amounts of well-researched material and original ideas, many of which remain valid.

**12.Rxf2 f6**



### How to Play the Dilworth Attack

White almost always captures at f6, and the few examples of alternative plans do not inspire confidence. After 13.exf6 Black usually plays 13...Bxf2+. This is not forced, and the lines with 13...Qxf6 are perhaps playable, but even if there is no refutation, there is little point in capturing with the queen and giving White additional options with 14.Qf1. So after 13...Bxf2+ 14.Kxf2 Qxf6 we reach the positions discussed in the next chapter.

### Schrump&Mehrten-Goetz

Postal 1887

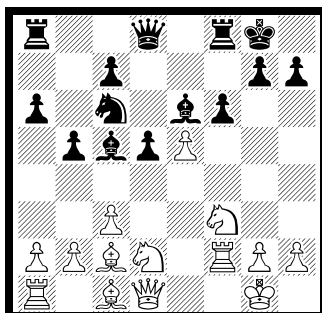
**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Nxe4 6.d4 b5  
7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.c3 Bc5 10.Nbd2 O-O 11.Bc2 Nxf2**

As far as I have been able to establish, this is the first game featuring the Dilworth attack, and indeed, were it better known, perhaps the line would bear the name of Alphonse Goetz!

**12.Rxf2 f6**

The basic idea of the Dilworth Attack is quite simple. Having weakened the defensive barrier surrounding the White King, Black attacks quickly and vigorously, exploiting the fact that White's queenside pieces are not properly developed. By contrast, the Black forces are well-placed to converge on the enemy king. With this move Black pries open the f-file, and the attacking formation will involve rooks at e8 and f8, minor pieces aimed at f3 (the bishop at c5 will be exchanged for the rook at f2 at an early opportunity), and the queen will work from f6 or h4. Such a simple plan rarely succeeds, however, because White, by giving up the pawn at f3, can usually arrange the exchange of queens and one pair of rooks. That means Black plays an endgame with rook and a pawn or two against two minor pieces. Such endgames are by no means clear, especially when one takes into account the awkwardness of White's queenside, which prevents White from getting pieces, especially the rook at a1, into the game. So in most cases, the Dilworth comes down to an endgame, and the study of the endgame structures which arise is critical. We discuss a variety of examples in the chapters on Dilworth Endgames.

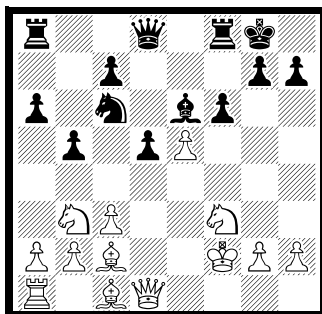
## How to Play the Dilworth Attack



### 13.Nb3

The Dilworth Attack has roots back in the 19th Century, as this game shows. But the fact that it was played in a correspondence game kept the idea from widespread circulation, despite considerable interest in the Open Variation in general. The capture on f6 is considered mandatory now, but over the years there have been a number of attempts to do without it. The problem is that the strong pawn center Black obtains if allowed to play f6xe5 is very solid, and the f-file gets opened in any case.

### 13...Bxf2+ 14.Kxf2



### 14...fxe5 15.Kg1

For 15.Nc5 see Daniels-Farrell.

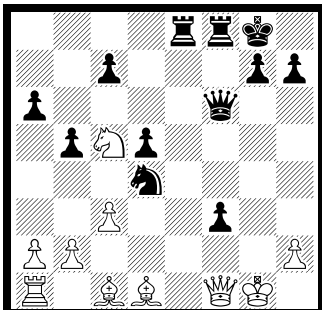
### 15...Bg4 16.Qe1

White does not gain anything by attacking the bishop with 16.h3. See Farooqui-Corden.

### 16...Bxf3 17.gxf3 Qf6!? 18.f4 exf4 19.Nc5 Rae8 20.Qf1 Nd4 21.Bd1 f3

Some sources give 21...c6 here, but that is likely to be a mistranslation of descriptive to algebraic notation.

### How to Play the Dilworth Attack



**22.Nd3**

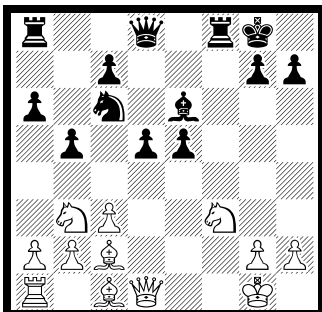
This allows a pretty finish, but White was obviously busted anyway.

**22...Qg6+ 23.Kh1 Qxd3!! 0-1**

### Farooqui–Corden

**British Ch 1970**

**13.Nb3 Bxf2+ 14.Kxf2 fxe5 15.Kg1**



**15...Bg4 16.h3 Bxf3**

The retreat to h5 is better, as the following analysis from O'Connell (with a few additions) shows.

16... Bh5 17.g4 e4 18.gxh5 and now:

a) 18.Nfd4 Qd6 19.gxh5 Qg3+ 20.Kh1 Rf2-+ ;

b) 18.Bg5 Qd6 19.Nh2 Qg3+ 20.Kh1 Rf2 21.Qg1 Qxg1+P 22.Rxg1 Rxc2 23.gxh5 Ne5 ;

c) 18.Nh2 Ne5 19.gxh5 Nf3+ 20.Nxf3 Rxf3 21.Qe1 Qd7P) 18... Rxf3 19.Qe1 Qd7 20.Bxe4 dxe4 21.Qxe4 Qxh3 22.Qxc6 Qg4+ 23.Kh2 Rh3#

**17.gxf3 Qd6**

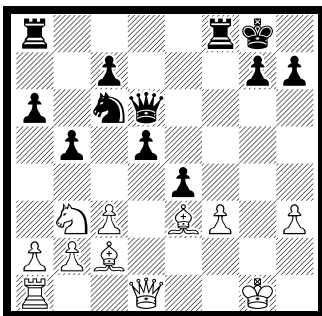
17...Kh8 comes into consideration, just to free the queen from defensive duty for the weak pawn at d5. Then the queen can move and



## How to Play the Dilworth Attack

the pawn does not fall with check. On the other hand, 17...Qh4 doesn't seem to get the job done, see both Devos-Lupi and Suares-Borrello.

### 18.Be3 e4



19.f4

White keeps control of f5 and the h2-b8 diagonal remains closed. Here Black might well simply bring the other rook into the game with 19...Rae8, and then Re6-g6. Another advantage of that move is that the e-pawn is defended so that if White ever does get to Qxd5+, the e-pawn won't fall as well.

**19...Rf6 20.Qd2 Qe6 21.Kh2 Raf8?!**

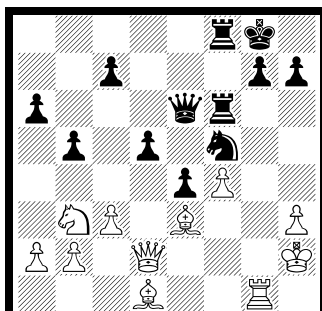
This seems entirely beside the point. The f-file is not where Black is going to break through White's defenses. White's pieces really aren't doing anything, though the rook is finally ready to leave home and take up a useful post on the kingside. Though it looks a bit artificial, I prefer 21...Qf5!?, using the mighty queen as a mere blockader for the moment, so that the rook can transfer to h6 without worrying about the advance of White's f-pawn. Black seems to be in too much of a hurry, even though White's minor pieces have no easy path to a position from which they can provide significant assistance with the defense of the king.

**22.Rg1 Ne7 23.Bd1!?**

Since the bishop has no future in the center, why not let it help out on the kingside?

**23...Nf5**

## How to Play the Dilworth Attack



### 24.Nd4!

An important move, exchanging a piece which is doing nothing for a potential attacker. White's defense is beginning to gel.

### 24...Qd6 25.Nxf5 Rxf5 26.Rg3 c5

It is obvious that Black will not get anywhere by a direct attack. At the very least White can defend the king with rook, queen and bishop, and all Black can throw into the fight is a queen and two rooks. But if the White pieces can be tied down in the center or the queenside, perhaps something will turn up.

### 27.b4!? cxb4 28.cxb4 R8f7

Black can play 28...Rc8, but it doesn't seem to be particularly effective, since there is no entrance square on the c-file. Nevertheless, Black's move and the next one seem rather defensive.

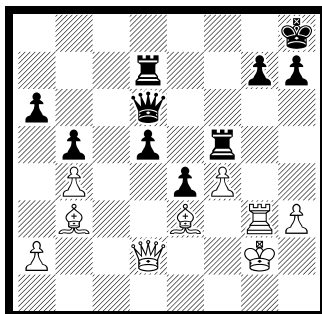
### 29.Kg2

What is the point? Did White fear some sort of exploitation of the b8-h2 diagonal?

### 29...Kh8

Hard to see what the point is, unless it is simply to get off the g-file so that the g-pawn can advance.

### 30.Bb3 Rd7



### 31.Qd4 Rxf4?

### How to Play the Dilworth Attack

There is simply no justification for this sacrifice. White's task is now much easier.

**32.Bxf4 Qxf4 33.Bxd5 Qf5 34.Bxe4**

Perhaps Black simply miscalculated, assuming that this would win the piece and lead to an endgame with two extra pawns and some attacking chances. But even if this were the case, the endgame would still be difficult to win.

**34...Rxd4 35.Bxf5 Rd2+**

35... Rxb4 36.Ra3+-

**36.Kg1 Rxa2 37.Rc3 g6**

Black is now fighting to hold the draw.

**38.Bc8 Rb2 39.Bxa6 Rxb4 40.Rc7 Rc4 41.Rb7 Rc3 42.Kg2 Rb3 43.h4 Rb4 44.Kg3 h5 45.Bxb5 Rg4+ 46.Kf3**

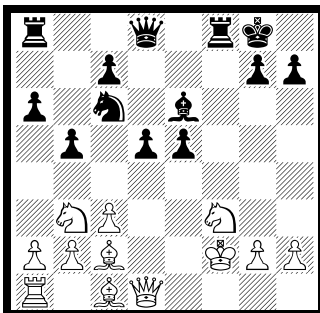
This looks strange, but it does not matter, since one way or the other the h-pawn is going to leave the board.

**46...Rxh4 47.Bd3 Rg4 48.Be4 Kg8 49.Bd5+ Kh8 50.Be6 Ra4 51.Bf7 Rg4 52.Bd5 Rh4 53.Be4 Rg4 54.Ke3 h4 55.Kf3 Rg1 56.Kf4 h3 57.Rb3 Kg7 58.Rxh3 Kf6 59.Ra3 g5+ 60.Kf3 Ke5 61.Ra5+ Kd4 62.Rd5+ Kc4 63.Kf2 Ra1 64.Rxg5 Kd4 1/2**

### Daniels-Farrell

England 1943

**13.Nb3 Bxf2+ 14.Kxf2 fxe5**



**15.Nc5**

This is a logical move as an alternative to 15.Kg1 (Schrump & Mehrlen-Goetz). But Black can obtain the advantage easily with proper play. The correct plan for Black is to pin the enemy knight at f3, drop the friendly knight back from c6 to e7, and then bolster the center with c7-c6.

**15...Bg4 16.Bb3 Ne7**

## How to Play the Dilworth Attack

16... Qh4+ 17.Kg1 Bxf3 18.gxf3 Ne7 19.Bxd5+ Nxd5 20.Qxd5+ Kh8 21.Be3±

### 17.h3

This is better than 17.Bg5, where 17...c6 gives Black a better game, according to Shamkovich & Schiller.

### 17...Bxf3

There are some options worth pursuing here:

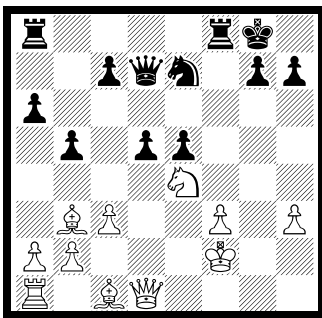
a) 17... Bh5!? 18.Ne6 Qd6 19.Nxf8 Rxf8

b) Magar suggests 17...Qh4+ e.g., 18.Kg1 Bxf3 19.gxf3 Qg3+ 20.Kh1 Qxh3+ 21.Kg1 Qg3+ 22.Kh1 c6 which is clearly better for Black.

### 18.gxf3 Qd6

18... e4 19.Nxe4 ; 18... c6 19.Ne6 Qb6+ 20.Be3

### 19.Ne4 Qd7

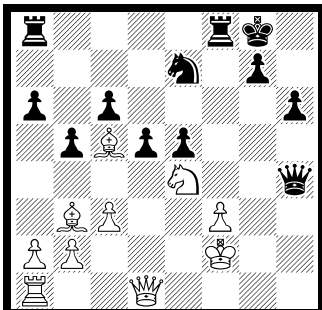


### 20.Ng5 h6!?

There is nothing happening on the kingside at the moment, but the center has not yet been consolidated. So instead of forcing the knight to retreat, it would be wiser to simply play 20...c6 and let White figure out what to do. In my opinion, Black is still better here. White can, of course, play 21.Bc2 and try to play on the kingside, but this releases the grip on the light-squares, and in particular the e4-square. After 21...Nf5 Black will play h6, and the knight can no longer retreat to e4 comfortably, for example: 22.Kg1 h6 23.Ne4 (taboo because of the pin on the queen) 23...Nh4! with threats at h3 and f3, and the added bonus that if Black plays Qxh3 the knight at e4 is suddenly en prise.

**21.Ne4 c6 22.Be3 Qxh3 23.Bc5 Qh4+**

## How to Play the Dilworth Attack



### 24.Ke2 Rxf3!!

After 24...Qh2+ and 25...Rae8 or 25...Kh8, Black's advantage is beyond dispute. But the temptation to end the game with a flashy combination proves irresistible.

### 25.Nf2!

25.Kxf3 Qxe4+ 26.Kg3 Nf5+ 27.Kh2 Qh4+ 28.Kg1 Re8 =

### 25...Raf8

Everybody's gotta get into the act! Actually, this is yet another instructive example of a successful attack requiring the participation of the entire army. Often the key to Black's success is the inclusion of Rae8 or Raf8 at an appropriate moment, when more direct attacking methods seem to be available. A key point to remember is that while the extra firepower might not seem necessary now, it may be needed later in the battle.

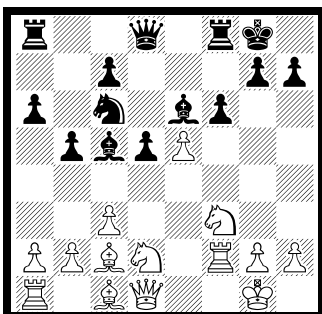
### 26.Qg1 e4 27.Qg2 Ng6 28.Qf1 Nf4+ 29.Kd2 Nd3 30.Nxd3

There is nothing better.

### 30...Rxf1 31.Rxf1 Rxf1 0-1

## Tocanita-Ofstad

Postal 1986



## How to Play the Dilworth Attack

### 13.Qe2

The queen does not do much here, except that it can be used to recapture at f2 after Black picks off the rook.

### 13...fxe5 14.Nf1

For 14.Nb3 see Kluger-Szabo.

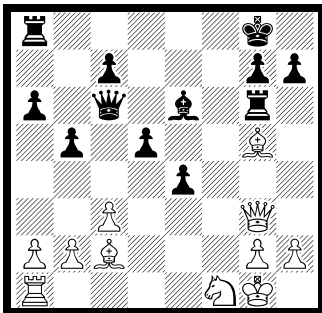
### 14...Bxf2+ 15.Qxf2 Qd7

Black is already better, with a solid pawn center.

### 16.Qg3 e4!

This cuts off the Bc2 and makes the g6-square available to a rook.

### 17.Nd4 Rf6 18.Bg5 Rg6 19.Nxc6 Qxc6



### 20.Qe3

The queen is overworked, even though all it is doing is defending the bishop at g5.

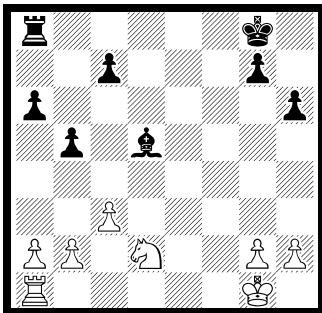
### 20...d4 21.Qxe4 Bd5 22.Qh4 h6

The convergence of Black's pieces on g2 is lethal.

### 23.Bxg6 Qxg6 24.Qxd4 Qxg5 25.Qd2?

25.Qf2! Rf8 26.Qg3 Qxg3 27.Nxg3 Re8 ♠

### 25...Qxd2 26.Nxd2



### 26...Re8 27.Rf1

### How to Play the Dilworth Attack

White has a great deal of difficulty holding such endgames, because the bishop is much stronger than the knight. Here White gives up a pawn in order to get a more active position. But notice that if the knight were at g3 rather than d2, this could have been accomplished more effectively by placing the rook at d1 and then heading for d7.

**27...Bxa2 28.Kf2 Bd5 29.Rd1 a5 30.Ra1 a4 31.c4 Bc6! 32.b3 Rd8!**

The rest is easy.

**33.Ke3 axb3 34.g3 bxc4 35.Nxc4 Bb5 36.Nb2 Re8+ 37.Kd2 Re2+ 38.Kc3 Rxh2 39.Rg1 Rf2 0-1**

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The Dilworth Attack is one of the most interesting lines in the Ruy Lopez. Black gives up two pieces in return for a rook and two pawn, with excellent attacking prospects. In most cases, White weathers the storm but must then play a complicated endgame. This works to Black's advantage, since Black is more likely to be familiar with the typical endgame structures and strategies. The Dilworth continues to be seen at the highest levels of chess, especially in the hands of Artur Yusupov.

In this, the first ever monograph devoted to the line, noted author Eric Schiller explains all of the critical ideas in the opening and endgame, and provides many examples of each from tournament play. With this weapon in your arsenal for Black, the Spanish Inquisition can prove to be a most unpleasant experience for White!

*Eric Schiller is a National Master and author of over 50 books on opening strategy. He holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Chicago, and is the owner and manager of Chessworks Unlimited, which develops and markets software. Dr. Schiller lives and works in El Granada, California, on the Pacific coast near San Francisco.*



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