John Shaw

Playing 1.e4

Sicilian Main Lines



A GRANDMASTER Guide

QUALITY CHESS

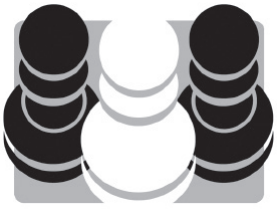
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Sicilian Main Lines

– *a grandmaster guide*

By

John Shaw



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Playing 1.e4 – Sicilian Main Lines

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Key to symbols used

⩲	White is slightly better
⩱	Black is slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+–	White has a decisive advantage
–+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
⩳	with compensation
⇄	with counterplay
∞	unclear
↑	with the initiative
→	with an attack

?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate

Preface

The purpose of *Playing 1.e4* is to supply a top-class repertoire for White. The first volume covered the Caro-Kann, 1...e5 and minor lines. The second volume covered the French Defence and some Sicilian sidelines. The repertoire is completed by the present volume on the Sicilian Main Lines. My original intention was to create a two-volume complete repertoire, with the French and Sicilian in just one volume, but the material grew to such an extent that a split was essential.

Our idea in creating this 1.e4 repertoire was to choose serious lines for White, but ideally not to the same level of theoretical depth as a Grandmaster Repertoire book. But the main lines of the Sicilian challenge that approach – we had to make a choice between a repertoire that is promising but complicated, or easy-to-learn but unthreatening to Black. We chose the former.

I recommend the Open Sicilian, as I feel the anti-Sicilians are not aggressive enough to form an ambitious repertoire. And some of the major Open Sicilian lines, particularly the Sveshnikov and Najdorf, must be met by heavy-duty lines if White is to threaten them. So a significant effort will be required from the reader in some places, but that is the nature of being an ambitious 1.e4 player. Given the amount of original analysis and new ideas in this book, I am confident that the reader's efforts will be well rewarded over the board.

Arguably the four biggest defences met in this volume are the Najdorf, Sveshnikov, Dragon and Taimanov. We target the Najdorf with the English Attack, when Black must thread his way through a narrow path to avoid disaster, and even then we have many dangerous innovations. Against the Sveshnikov our positional main line with 9.♘d5 gives nagging pressure. We meet the Dragon with the modern main line 9.0–0–0, while against the Taimanov we are also on-trend, with dangerous 7.♕f3 ideas.

As with my previous books for Quality Chess, my name is on the cover, but creating the book was a team effort. I had the final say on words and analysis, but I was aided by GM Jacob Aagaard, IM Andrew Greet and Nikos Ntirlis.

I hope you enjoy reading this book, and that *Playing 1.e4* leads you to success.

John Shaw
Glasgow, May 2018

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Encyclopedia of Chess Openings
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New in Chess Yearbook (up to 125)

Introduction to the Repertoire

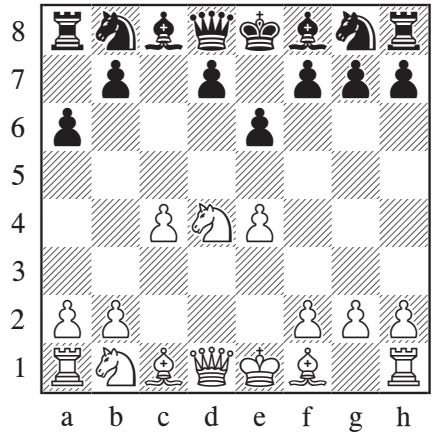
After 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 we shall deal with Black's three main second moves roughly in the following order: 2...e6, 2...♘c6 then 2...d6. Admittedly some defences – such as the Four Knights, Taimanov or Classical – could use two different second moves, but that should not trouble us unduly.

Chapter 1 Four Knights

After **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6** we select the direct and effective **6.♘xc6**.

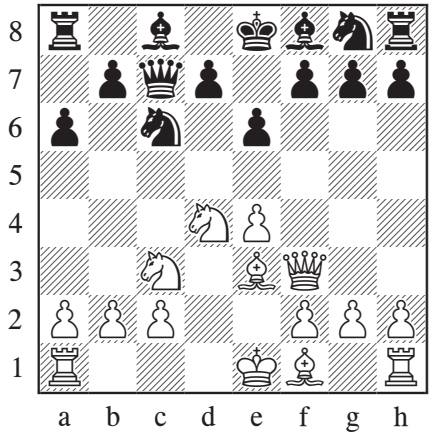
Chapter 2 Kan

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 reaches the flexible Kan, when we go for the space-gaining **5.c4**. This will be a common theme throughout the repertoire: when we can play c2-c4, we usually do.



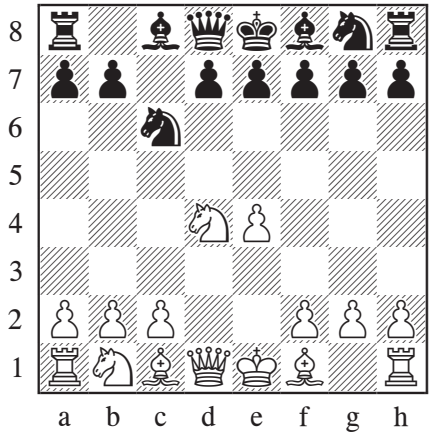
Chapter 3 Taimanov

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♕c7 is the main line of the Taimanov, when our line is the active and trendy **6.♗e3 a6 7.♕f3**.



Chapters 4-6
Lowenthal, Kalashnikov and Sveshnikov

These three chapters branch out from the position after **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4**.



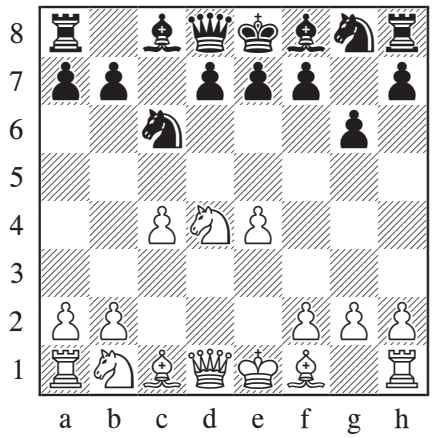
4...e5 5.♘b5 a6 is the Lowenthal, which of course we meet with **6.♘d6† ♗xd6 7.♕xd6**.

4...e5 5.♘b5 d6 is the Kalashnikov, which allows our standard advance **6.c4**.

4...♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 is the Sveshnikov, one of the toughest tests for a 1.e4 player. I recommend the positional main line **6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5**.

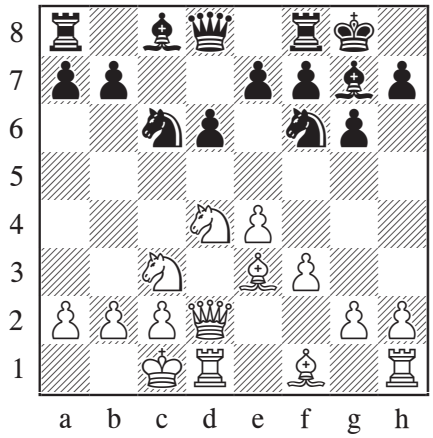
Chapter 7 Accelerated Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 g6 allows our favourite space-gainer, so we go **5.c4**.



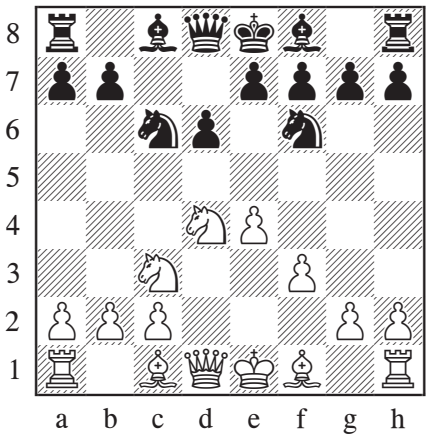
Chapter 8 Dragon

I recommend meeting **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6** with the main line **6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 0–0 8.♕d2 ♘c6** and then **9.0–0–0**, which gives more controlled play than the hair-raising ♗c4 lines.



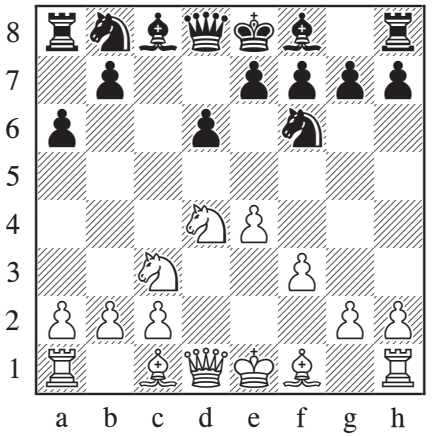
Chapter 9 Classical

After **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6** we go for **6.f3**, which is essential to keep our repertoire complete, as will be clearer when you see our line against the Najdorf-Scheveningen.



Chapters 10-11 Najdorf

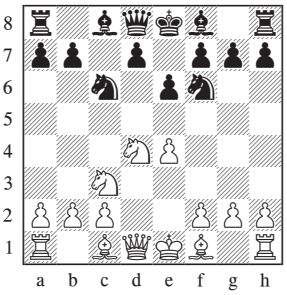
Against the mighty Najdorf **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6** our line is **6.f3**.



Chapter 10 covers lines with ...e7-e6, including Scheveningen lines which can reach here using many move orders.

Chapter 11 covers ...e7-e5 lines.

Chapter 1

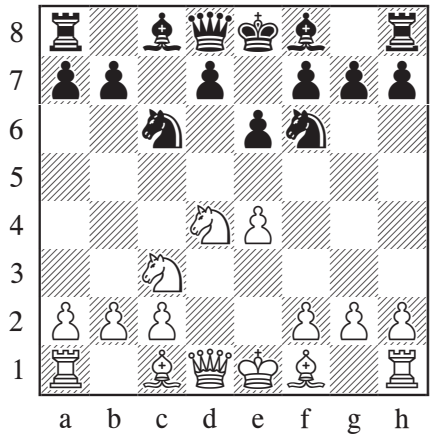


Four Knights

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6!?

6...bxc6 (6...dxc6?!) **7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4** **10**
A) 8...♗b7!? *Game 1* (8...♗a6?) **10**
B) 8...f5 **15**
C) 8...♕a5† **17**
D) 8...♕c7 9.f4 **19**
D1) 9...f5 *Game 2* (9...c5?!; 9...♗e7?!) **19**
D2) 9...♖b8 *Game 3* **21**
D3) 9...♕a5† *Game 4* **24**
D4) 9...♕b6 10.c4 **28**
D41) 10...♘e3 11.♕d3! **29**
11...♘f5 *Game 5* (11...♘xf1?!; 11...♕b4†) **29**
11...♗b4† 12.♗d2 *Game 6* **32**
12...0–0 (12...a5; 12...♗a6; 12...♖b8) **32**
D42) 10...♗b4† 11.♔e2 **35**
11...f5 (11...♗a6?!) **12.exf6 ♘xf6 13.♗e3** **36**
13...♕d8 *Game 7* (13...♕c7) **35**
13...♕a5 *Game 8* **40**

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6



There are of course various ways to reach the above position, including starting with 2...♘c6, but the 2...e6 order given above feels the most natural. Why? Because the Four Knights appeals to Sveshnikov players who are fed up facing the Rossolimo when they play 2...♘c6. The downside for Black is that White has a non-Sveshnikov option that is more potent than the Rossolimo, and we shall use it.

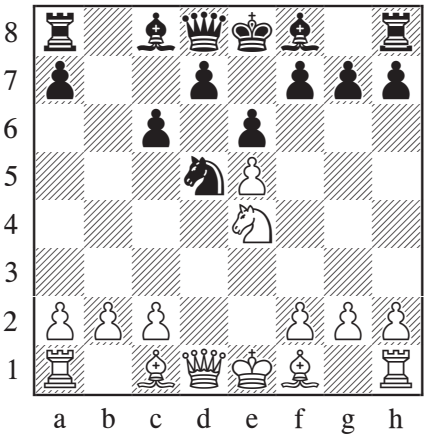
6.♘xc6!?

One of two principled choices.

The other is 6.♘db5 when there is a possible transposition to the Sveshnikov after 6...d6 7.♗f4 e5 8.♗g5, but also independent lines such as 6...♗c5 and 6...♗b4. 6.♘db5 is covered in the repertoire books of Negi, Illingworth and also the old '...According to Anand' series. There are two main reasons we selected 6.♘xc6. Firstly, it is useful to offer something fresh, and we have tried especially to avoid overlap with Negi's lines. Secondly, I believe 6.♘xc6 is the best move in the position. I am more confident of White securing an edge in this line than I am against the mighty Sveshnikov – although as you will see in Chapter 6, we make a serious effort.

6...bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4

The positional features are becoming clearer. White has a grip on the d6-square, and plans c2-c4 at some point to evict Black's knight. If nothing dramatic happens over the next few moves then White will have a significant advantage, so Black is duty-bound to try to stir up trouble. This limits Black's options and makes White's preparation less arduous.



The main options are **A) 8...♗b7!?**, **B) 8...f5**, **C) 8...♕a5†** and **D) 8...♕c7**. Variation D is overwhelmingly the main line, and quickly leads to a further branching point that I shall explain later in this chapter.

A) 8...♗b7!?

GAME 1

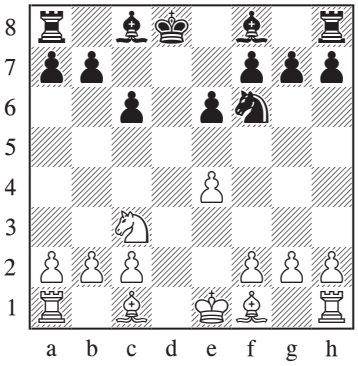
Peter Leko – Veselin Topalov

Dortmund (1) 2002

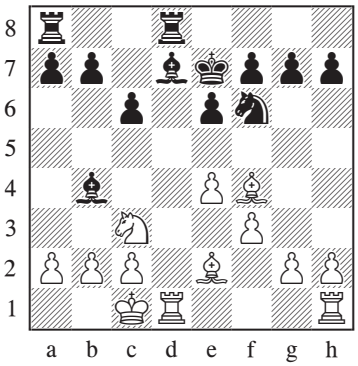
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6!? bxc6

The only sensible move.

6...dxc6?! 7.♕xd8† ♔xd8 is an ugly concession.



8.♗f4 (8.e5 is also good) 8...♗b4 (An important point is that Black cannot achieve ...e6-e5: 8...♘d7 9.0–0–0 f6 10.e5! Otherwise Black's position might make more sense. 10...g5 11.♗e3 fxe5 12.♗xg5† ♔c7 13.♘e4± Abergel – T. Nguyen, Malakoff 2009) 9.0–0–0† ♔e7 10.f3 ♖d8 11.♗e2± White is certainly a little better, and Black's position is not easy to play, as the following example illustrates: 11...♗d7?!



12.a3! ♗xc3 13.♗d6† ♔e8 14.bxc3± Polgar – Amura, Benidorm (rapid) 2002.

7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4 ♗b7!?

This was introduced at the elite level by Leko against Kasparov, and was buried by Leko himself a few years later. Like so many variations, Black is a bit worse with no prospects of playing for more than a draw.

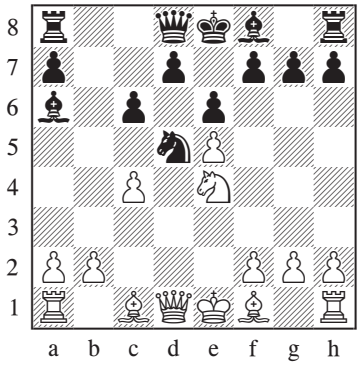
8...♗a6?

This fails to challenge White's bind, and so leaves Black facing strategic disaster.

9.c4!

The most punishing response.

Also decent is: 9.♗xa6!? ♕a5† 10.♗d2 ♕xa6 11.b3± With c2-c4 likely to follow soon.



9...♗b4†

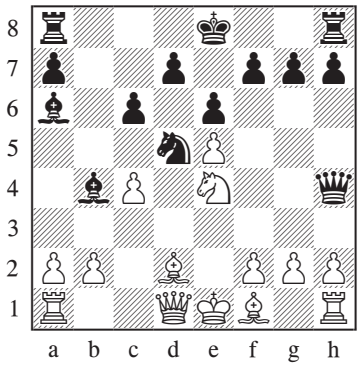
Probably the best chance of confusing the issue, but objectively it does not work.

9...♘b6? 10.b3± White is close to winning; Black's queenside minor pieces are dead, while the gaping hole on d6 remains.

9...♕h4? 10.♕d4!+– wins a piece.

9...f5 allows a forcing line that strongly favours White: 10.cxd5 ♗xf1 11.♘f6† ♔f7 12.♔xf1 gxf6 13.♕h5† ♔g8 14.dxe6 dxe6 15.exf6 ♕xf6 16.h4± Black has an exposed king and many weak pawns, while ♖h3-g3 is a nasty threat.

10.♗d2 ♕h4



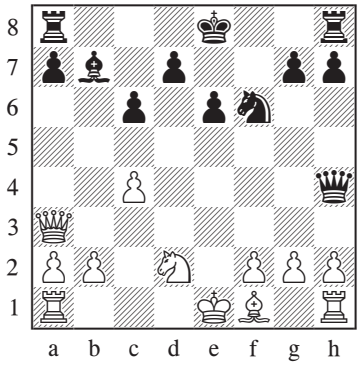
11.♕f3!

Not the only way, but forcing and effective.

11...f5

Or 11...♗xd2† 12.♔xd2 ♕f4† 13.♕xf4 ♘xf4 14.♔e3 ♘g6 15.f4 ♖b8 16.b3± gave Black a repulsive endgame in Gashimov – J. Bennet, Dubai 2000. A Scotch player dreams of reaching such a position.

12.exf6! ♗xd2† 13.♘xd2 ♘xf6 14.♕a3 ♗b7



In Narciso Dublan – I. Almasi, Budapest 2001, the simplest way was:

15.♗e2!N

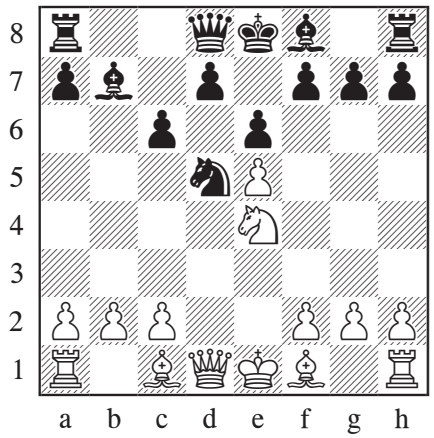
Instead 15.0–0–0 ♕xf2∞ was not so convincing in the game.

15...♕g5

The only way to try to stir up trouble.

16.♘f3 ♕xg2 17.♖g1 ♕h3 18.♖xg7 0–0–0 19.♕xa7±

White has active pieces and an extra pawn.



9.♗e2!

Emphasizing the point that White already has most of what he wants positionally, so simply castling and consolidating is good enough.

Previously White tried needlessly dramatic lines such as 9.c4 ♘b4 10.c5.

9...c5

Opening up the bishop is standard.

The untested 9...♕a5†N could be met by 10.c3 ♕c7 11.♘d6† ♗xd6 12.exd6 when the d6-pawn is poisoned, which is a key point in our main line. After 12...♕b6 13.c4± White has the bishop pair and more space, which is common in this line.

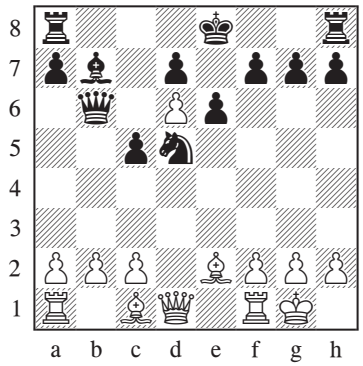
10.0–0 ♕c7 11.♘d6†

This is the move I prefer, but also decent is: 11.c4±

11...♗xd6 12.exd6 ♕c6

Almost universally played.

12...♕b6 was played in Sadkowsky – Hajenius, Antwerp 2011, and no other game ever.

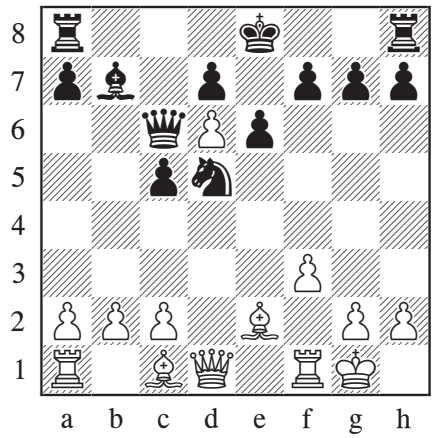


A logical response is: 13.a3!? 0–0 14.c4 ♘f6 15.♗e3±

13.f3

Let's not get mated on g2.

13.♗f3?! is misguided as after 13...c4 14.♕d4 0–0 Black has everything covered, while d6 is loose. We need our bishop hitting c4.

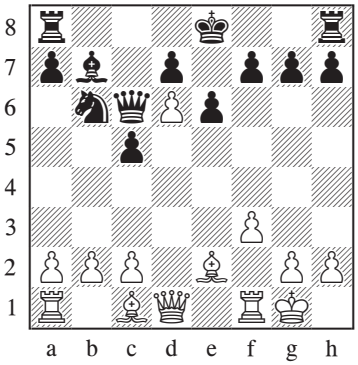


13...c4

The usual move, preparing to take on d6 without allowing c2-c4.

13...♘b6

A shamelessly greedy try to win the d6-pawn with ...♘c8.



14.a4!N

Creating ♗b5 ideas, but also options of a4-a5-a6.

The standard line has been 14.c4 ♘c8 15.♗f4 f6 16.♗g3 e5 17.♗d3 ♘xd6 18.♕c2 g6 when White has decent compensation, but the new way is clearer.

14...♘d5

Retracing the knight's steps is the best try, as White is ready for the materialistic options.

For example, trying to grab the d6-pawn with 14...♘c8 is well met by: 15.♗f4 f6 16.♗b5 ♕b6 17.♕e2 ♗c6 18.♗c4±

14...♘xa4?! White gets far too much play after this naive capture. 15.c4 ♘b6 16.♖a5!↑ One plausible continuation is: 16...♘c8 17.♗f4 f6 18.♕b3 e5 19.♗e3 ♘xd6 20.♖xc5 ♕a6 21.♖d1 ♘f5 22.♗f2± Black's position is on the brink of collapse.

15.a5 a6 16.♕d2 c4 17.♕d4 0–0 18.♗xc4 ♕xd6 19.b3±

The play is similar to the game, though the space-gaining advance to a5 is a gain for White.

14.♕d4 0–0 15.♗xc4 ♖fc8

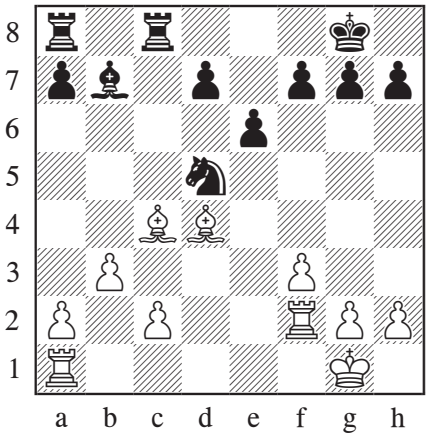
Also common is 15...♕xd6 when 16.b3 or 16.♖d1 are equally good, and similar to the game.

16.b3 ♕xd6 17.♖f2

White has various ways to achieve an edge, as the main factor is the bishop pair.

For example, 17.♖d1 ♕b6 18.♕xb6 axb6 19.a4± was Shirov – Westerberg, Skopje 2015.

17...♕b6 18.♗b2 ♕xd4 19.♗xd4±



We are well past opening theory, into an ending where Black must suffer endlessly with a draw the most he can hope for. This line is not a refutation of ...♗b7 in the sense of winning by force, but it does lead to a position no strong player would wish to play with Black.

19...♘b4 20.c3 d5

Or 20...♘c6 21.♗e3 d5 22.♗f1 transposes.

21.♗f1 ♘c6 22.♗e3 ♘e7

Black could also try 22...a5 but it changes little. For example 23.♖c1 ♗a6 24.c4 ♘e7 25.♖fc2± and in Uusitalo – Troia, email 2013, White had the usual endgame pressure.

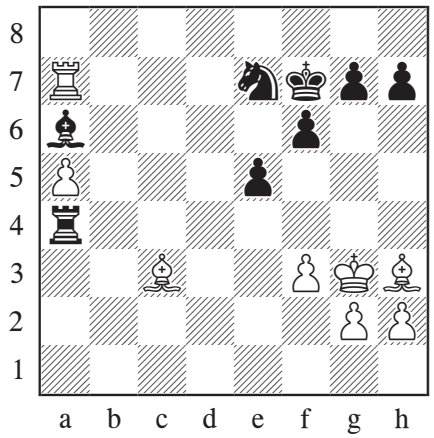
23.♖c1

I will include the rest of the game as Leko plays beautifully, but we do not need full annotations of this endgame, so I will simply point out a few highlights.

23...a5 24.♖fc2 e5 25.c4 f6 26.cxd5 ♖xc2 27.♖xc2 ♘xd5 28.♗d2 a4 29.bxa4

An interesting decision, as 29.b4!?± also looks promising.

29...♖xa4 30.♗b5 ♖a8 31.a4 ♔f8 32.a5 ♗a6 33.♗a4 ♖b8 34.♔f2 ♖b1 35.♖c1 ♖b2 36.♖c2 ♖b1 37.♔g3 ♘e7 38.♗d7 ♔f7 39.♖c7 ♖b2 40.♗c3 ♖a2 41.♗h3 ♖a4 42.♖a7



42...♗b5?

42...♗f1! was essential, with the point that 43.♗f5 can be met by 43...♖a2.

43.♗f5!+–

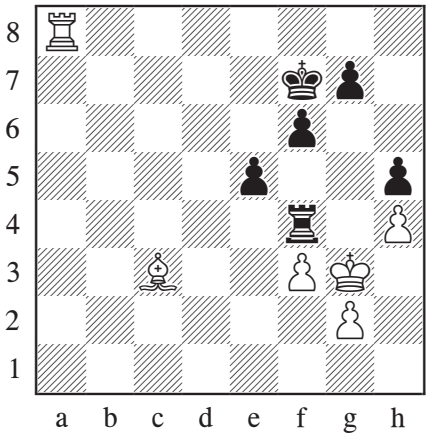
Now White's bishops can combine to chase the black rook off the a-file, when the a-pawn is running wild.

43...h5 44.h4 ♔f8 45.♖a8† ♔f7 46.♗c2 ♖f4 47.a6 ♗c6 48.♖d8 ♘f5† 49.♗xf5

It's tough to criticize a move that wins a piece, but Leko could have shortened his task with 49.♔f2. For example: 49...♖c4 50.♗xf5 ♖xc3 51.♖c8! with ♗e4 one of the threats.

49...♖xf5 50.♖c8 ♗d5 51.a7 ♖f4 52.a8=♕ ♗xa8 53.♖xa8+–

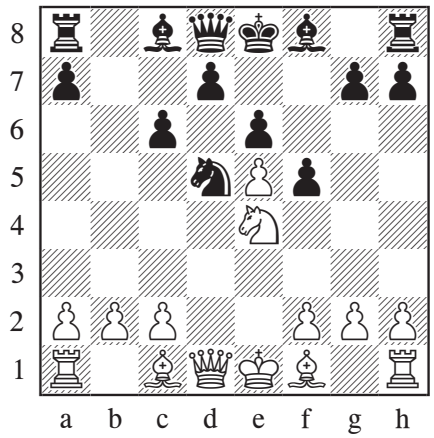
With all the pawns on the same side, and Black solid, it takes some time to convert the extra piece into a win.



53...♖c4 54.♗d2 ♔g6 55.♖a7 ♖d4 56.♗e3 ♖c4 57.♖b7 ♖c3 58.♗d2 ♖c2 59.♗a5 ♖a2 60.♗d8 ♖a8 61.♗b6 ♖c8 62.♖c7 ♖b8 63.♗c5 ♖e8 64.♔f2 ♖h8 65.♔e3 ♖a8 66.♔d3 ♖a4 67.g3 ♖a8 68.♔e4 ♖h8 69.♔d5 ♖d8† 70.♔e6 ♖a8 71.♗d6 ♖e8† 72.♗e7 ♖a8 73.♖b7 ♖a6† 74.♗d6 ♖a8 75.f4 exf4 76.gxf4 ♖a6 77.♖d7 ♖a8 78.f5† ♔h7 79.♔f7 ♖a4 80.♗f8 ♖g4 81.♗xg7!

If 81...♖xg7† then 82.♔e6 will soon be a winning pawn ending.
1–0

B) 8...f5



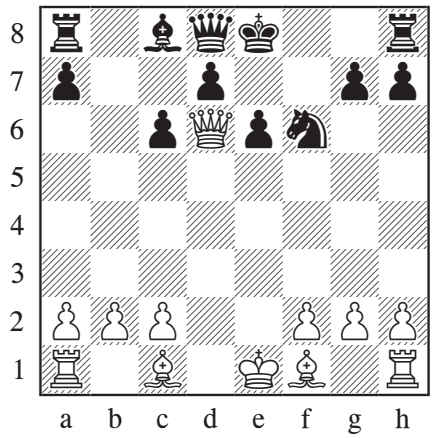
The second most common move in the position, but a long way behind 8...♕c7.

9.exf6 ♘xf6 10.♘d6†

As a general rule, White does not take on f6 when Black can recapture with the queen.

10...♗xd6 11.♕xd6±

This position has been tested over 300 times, with White's advantage no longer in dispute; the top players shifted to other lines many years ago.



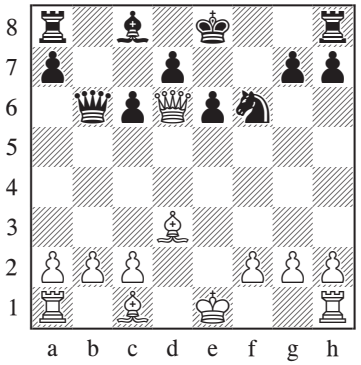
We shall consider three moves: i) 11...♕e7?!, ii) 11...♕b6 and iii) 11...♗a6.

i) 11...♕e7?! Exchanging queens without improving Black's structure is exactly what White wants. For example 12.♗f4 ♕xd6 13.♗xd6 ♘e4 14.♗e5 0–0 15.f3± In Savchenko – Lavendelis, Riga 2014, White had an ideal endgame for this line, with the bishop pair and better structure.

ii) 11...♕b6

Threatening ...♕xf2† and eyeing the b2-pawn, trying to freeze the bishop on c1. Sounds good so far, but White's best developing move stops the first threat, while White can invariably leave the b2-pawn en prise for more than ample compensation.

12.♗d3



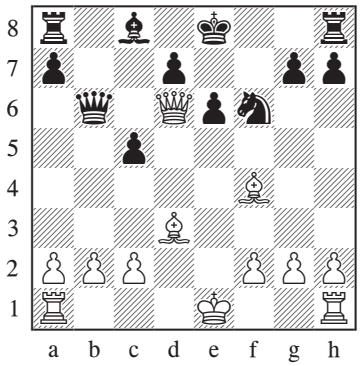
12...c5

If White were to exchange on b6, Black's structure would improve markedly, but we will not be so obliging.

Or 12...♗a6 13.♗e3! shows White need not worry about b2. For example: 13...♕xb2 14.♗d4 ♕b7 15.c4 ♕b8 16.♕a3 ♕f4 17.♖d1 ♗b7 18.♕b2 ♕c7 In Krnan – Langner, Tatranske Zruby 2016, White took twice on f6 and was only a little better. Stronger was: 19.c5!N Securing the bind by preventing the b7-bishop firing into life with ...c6-c5. A plausible continuation is: 19...0–0

20.0–0 ♕c8 21.♖fe1 ♗a6 22.♗c2± White remains a pawn down, but his dominant pieces are obviously far more significant.

13.♗f4

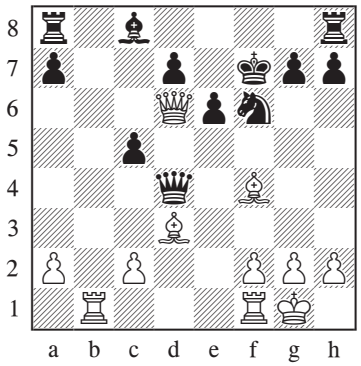


13...♕xb2

Black may as well grab the pawn; White can win it back, but Black at least has the consolation of damaging the queenside structure.

After 13...♗b7 14.0–0 ♖c8 15.c4 Black can choose a grim ending or a grim middlegame: 15...♕xd6 (Or 15...♖c6 16.♕e5 0–0 17.f3± was Bezemer – Muetsch, Tegernsee 2017.) 16.♗xd6 ♖c6 17.♗e5± Over 24 games White has scored 75%, which is a convincing stat.

14.0–0 ♕d4 15.♖ab1 ♔f7

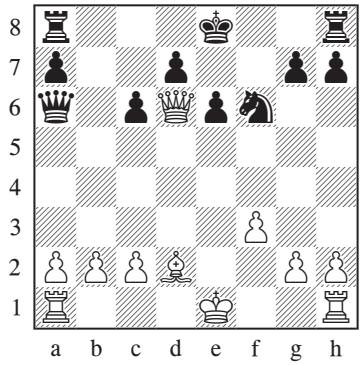


Razumichin – Kruk, email 2010, continued 16.♖fd1 which was enough for an edge, but just as strong was 16.♕xd4!?N cxd4 17.♗e5± regaining the pawn at once, when the bishops will be powerful.

iii) 11...♗a6

At least this move removes White's bishop pair, but the edge endures.

12.♗xa6 ♕a5† 13.♗d2 ♕xa6 14.f3±



White is planning b2-b3 and c2-c4, so the best test is:

14...♕c4

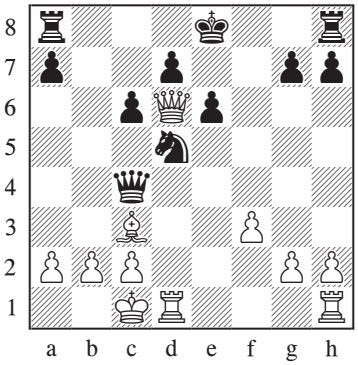
As in Milos – Rosito, Sao Paulo 2003.

14...♔f7 The most common move, and also a sensible try. 15.b3!? e5 16.0–0–0!N Activating the rooks is more significant than the a2-pawn. 16...♖ae8 (Or 16...♖he8?! 17.♗g5! is similar, except weaker as the a8-rook hangs at the end of the line; 16...♕xa2?! 17.♗c3 ♖he8 18.♗xe5 ♖e6 19.♕c5 d5 20.♗c3±) 17.♗g5 ♕xa2 18.♗xf6 gxf6 19.♕xd7† ♖e7 20.♕xc6 It is here in the 16...♖he8 line that the rook on a8 costs Black a tempo. 20...e4! 21.♕c4† ♔g7 22.♕a4 ♕xa4 23.bxa4± White is a pawn up, but the drawish nature of rook endgames gives Black hope; as a position to reach while still in prep, White can have no complaints.

15.♗c3!N

This provokes forcing play and seemingly leaves the bishop vulnerable to the knight, but all the tactics work in White's favour.

15...♘d5 16.0–0–0



16...♘xc3

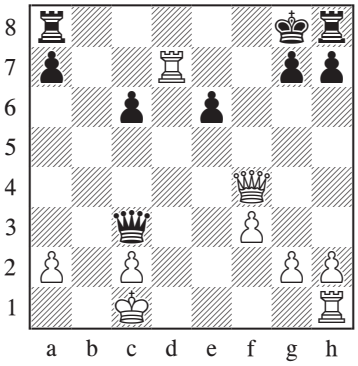
It looks weird to move this pawn so it drops with check, but Black needs the later option of ...♖h6.

For example, even worse is: 21...h6 22.♕e4!+–

16...♕f4† Bailing out to a bad endgame. 17.♕xf4 ♘xf4 18.♖d2±

16...♕xa2 17.b3 It might not be obvious at first glance, but White's king is far safer than Black's, and that's a decisive issue. 17...♘xc3 (No better is: 17...0–0–0 18.♗e5 ♔b7 19.♖he1+– The rook will step up to e4, then turn left, with deadly effect.) 18.♕xd7† ♔f8 19.♕d6† ♔f7 20.♕c7†! ♔g8 21.♖d7! Despite the proximity of Black's queen and knight, the white king is perfectly safe. The best Black can do is: 21...♕a3† 22.♔d2 ♕f8 23.♔xc3+– Material is temporarily level, but the gap in piece activity is decisive.

17.♕xd7† ♔f8 18.bxc3 ♕xc3 19.♕d6† ♔f7 20.♕f4† ♔g8 21.♖d7



21...h5

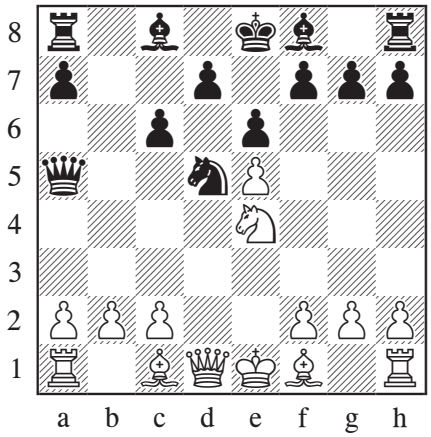
It looks weird to move this pawn so it drops with check, but Black needs the later option of ...♖h6.

For example, even worse is: 21...h6 22.♕e4!+–

22.♕f7† ♔h7 23.♕xh5† ♔g8 24.♕g4 ♕a1† 25.♔d2 ♕f6 26.h4 ♖d8 27.♖xd8† ♕xd8† 28.♔e2±

White is simply a pawn up.

C) 8...♕a5†



Not just a spite check; Black plans to exchange his bad bishop via a6.

9.c3

The simplest option.

White can also try 9.♗d2 ♕b6 then sac the b2-pawn, but it's not wholly convincing, so let's keep all our pawns.

9...f5

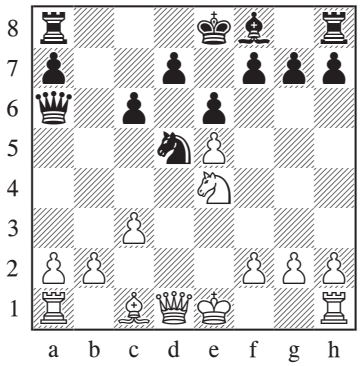
This move is almost mandatory at some stage, as the e4-knight is too strong to be tolerated, but Black can choose when to make the ...f5-thrust.

9...♕c7 10.f4 ♕b6 is most simply met by 11.c4, transposing to the main variation D4 on page 28, with one extra move played. (11.♗d3 is also promising, but we should save our energy and be happy with one good line.)

9...♗a6 10.♗xa6

The direct choice, but also promising is 10.♗e2.

10...♕xa6



11.b3!

Keeping the queens on is the most promising option; Black must play ...f7-f5 at some point, so he will have the weaker king.

Instead 11.♕e2 ♕xe2† 12.♔xe2 f5 gives Black a more pleasant version than usual of a Four Knights endgame; Black has exchanged the correct pair of bishops, and can gain space on the kingside against White's usual tries. For example: 13.♘d2 g5 looks comfortable.

11...♕a5

The main purpose of this move is not to attack c3, but instead to prevent a check on h5 after the inevitable ...f7-f5.

The immediate 11...f5 allows the black king to be kicked after: 12.exf6 ♘xf6 13.♘xf6† gxf6 14.♕h5† ♔d8 White has various options, but one shamelessly greedy line is: 15.♕f7 ♗e7 16.♕g7 ♖e8 17.♕xh7 f5 18.♕g7 ♔c7 In Sabadell i Ximenes – Ramirez Moyano, email 2010, White could have tried 19.c4N ♗b4† 20.♔f1± when both kings are safe, but White has an extra pawn that is passed with a supporting rook ready to punt it.

12.♗d2 f5 13.exf6 ♘xf6 14.♘xf6† gxf6

With no check on h5, White must keep it simple:

15.0–0

There are many ways the game could continue, but White's safer king and fewer pawn islands are worth an edge. For example: 15...♗d6 16.c4 ♕e5 17.g3 ♕f5 18.♗c3±

In Souleidis – Bousios, Aghia Pelagia 2004, Black's loose king was a continuing nuisance.

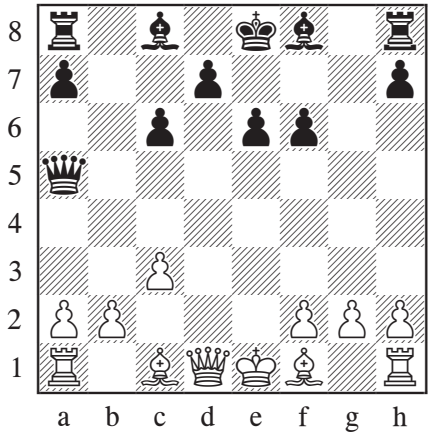
10.exf6 ♘xf6 11.♘xf6†

This is usually the right call when Black does not have ...♕xf6 as a reply.

The alternative is 11.♘d6† ♗xd6 12.♕xd6 but after 12...♗a6 13.♗xa6 ♕xa6 Black is close to equality.

11...gxf6

Black's king position will always be shaky, so White's task is to castle and complete development while avoiding an exchange of queens. There are a few promising ways to do so:



12.♕f3!?N

Simple and appealing; White will castle kingside and keep on the queens.

12.♗f4!? ♕f5 13.♕a4 also looked highly promising in Szymanski – Kosirog, email 2016.

The move I suggest avoiding is the one that is by far the most common:

12.♗e2 ♕d5!

To keep the queens on, White must let g2 go.

13.♗h5† ♔d8 14.♕e2 ♕xg2 15.♗f3 ♕h3 16.♗e3 ♗a6! 17.♕xa6 ♕xf3

Both kings are unhappy. Play may continue:

18.♖g1 ♖b8 19.b4

The position is sharp, as 19...♗d6?? 20.♖d1+– showed in Oll – Mellado Trivino, Oviedo (rapid) 1991, but 19...c5!N creating the option of ...♖a8, looks balanced.

12...♕e5†

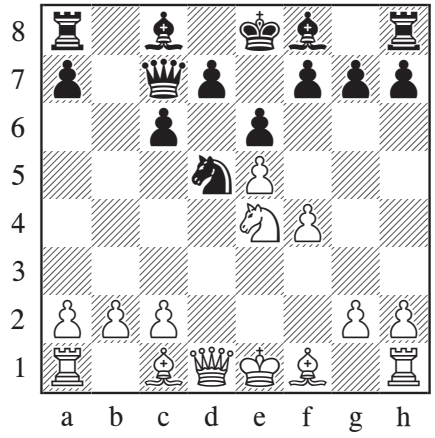
Trying to disrupt White's development, but in the end Black spends a tempo to cost White a tempo.

After 12...♔f7 13.♗e2 ♕d5 White should of course duck the exchange with: 14.♕h3±

13.♗e2 ♗a6 14.♗e3 ♗xe2 15.♕xe2±

White is preparing to castle long, then target the black king.

D) 8...♕c7 9.f4



This is a huge branching point. The main lines we will consider are **D1) 9...f5**, **D2) 9...♖b8**, **D3) 9...♕a5†** and **D4) 9...♕b6**, with the final line by far the most important.

D1) 9...f5

GAME 2

Deep Sengupta – Vahe Baghdasaryan

Al Ain 2015

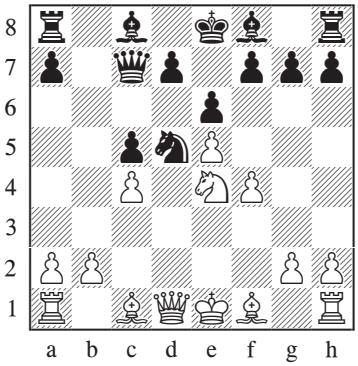
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4 ♕c7 9.f4 f5

A normal move in the Four Knights, but an odd moment for it, as the queen has just moved away from d8, ending the possibility of recapturing on f6.

9...c5?!

This line illustrates once again that Black cannot afford to leave White's bind unchallenged.

10.c4



10...♘b4

Heading for the d4-square, but it's slow going.

Instead 10...♘b6 is an ugly passive square. White has many good options, including: 11.♗d3 ♗b7 12.b3 d5 13.exd6 ♗xd6 14.0–0 ♖d8 15.♕e2± In Macieja – Starczewska, Warsaw 2008, White had the better structure while Black's b6-knight was still a problem.

11.a3 ♘c6 12.♗d3

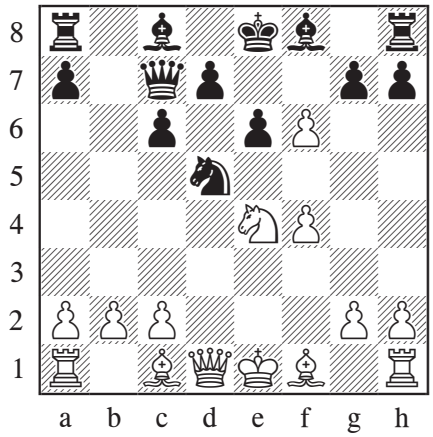
Simple play: develop and castle short.

But White is spoiled for choice; for example, 12.♗e3 is logical.

12...♘d4 13.0–0 ♗b7 14.♗e3 ♘f5 15.♗f2±
L. Schneider – Rosenlund, Roskilde 1978.

9...♗e7?! is just silly: 10.c4 ♘b6 11.♘d6† ♗xd6 12.exd6 It's all gone wrong.

10.exf6



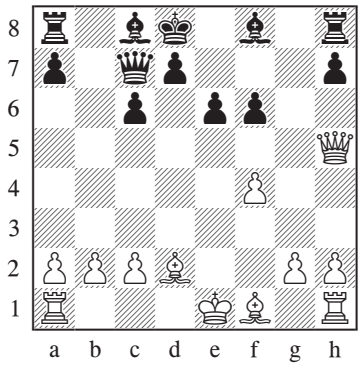
10...gxf6

The less usual recapture, but it at least tries to make some sense of Black's strange move order.

10...♘xf6 11.♘xf6† gxf6

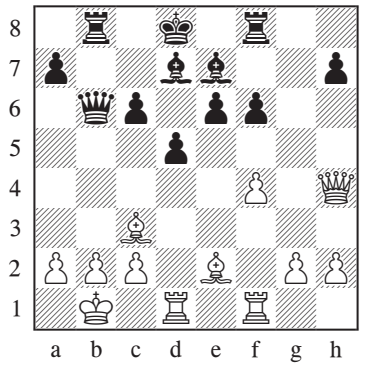
This is a straightforwardly bad version of a normal Four Knights.

12.♕h5† ♔d8 13.♗d2±



As simple as that; White castles long and it's plain to see who has the safer king. An old game is worth seeing in full to illustrate the theme:

13...d5 14.0–0–0 ♖b8 15.♕h4 ♗e7 16.♗c3 ♖f8 17.♗e2 ♕b6 18.♔b1 ♗d7 19.♖hf1



No real notes are needed: White develops, then opens the centre and mauls the black king. Admittedly it's not quite as easy as Unzicker makes it look, but it's a nightmare to play with Black.

19...c5 20.f5 d4 21.fxe6 ♗xe6 22.b3 ♔c8 23.♗b2 ♗g8 24.♗g4† ♔c7 25.♖de1 ♔d8 26.♕h3 ♕a6 27.♖f2 ♗d6 28.♕h6 ♗e7 29.♕g7 ♕d6 30.♖fe2

1–0 Unzicker – Lehmitz, Weidenau 1947.

11.♗d2!

The most common move, and also the best.

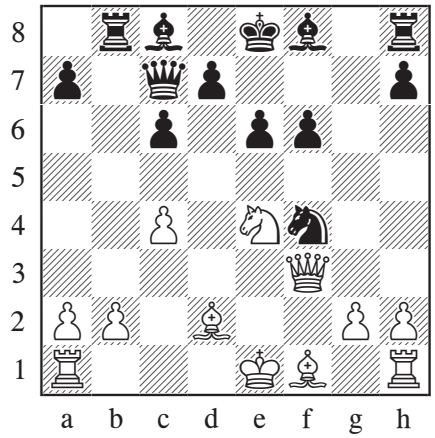
The tempting 11.♕h5† is not so clear after 11...♔d8, as the white queen belongs on f3 if Black grabs on f4. So for example 12.♗d2 ♖b8 13.c4 ♘xf4 14.♕f3 ♘g6 is not so convincing as the related idea in the main line.

11...♖b8

Certainly not 11...♘xf4? 12.♘xf6† ♔d8 13.♕f3 ♘g6 14.0–0–0 when Black's position is a wreck.

12.c4 ♘xf4 13.♕f3±

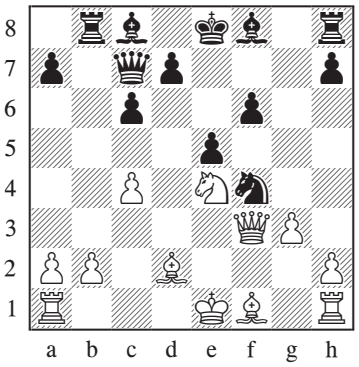
White will win the pawn back, then castle long, with much the safer king.



13...♘g6

The usual try.

After 13...e5 then 14.0–0–0 was perfectly sensible in Popilski – Baghdasaryan, Groningen 2014, but the immediate 14.g3! was simpler and totally effective.

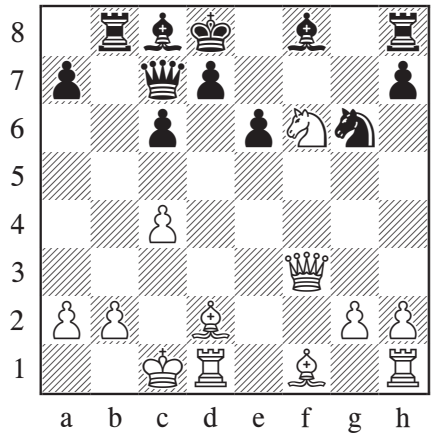


For example: 14...♘g6 15.♘xf6† ♔d8 16.0–0–0± Normally White would have to sacrifice some material to get such an attacking position.

13...♗b4 is a sneaky way to save the piece, but Black faces the same problems as in the other lines: 14.♘xf6† ♔f7 15.0–0–0 ♗xd2† 16.♖xd2 ♔xf6 17.g3± Next will be gxf4 (the queens stay on of course) followed by target practice on the black king.

14.♘xf6† ♔d8 15.0–0–0±

Thus far is enough for preparation, but we can blitz through the whole game, as it does not last long and White gives a flawless display.



15...♗g7 16.♕c3 h6 17.g4 ♘f4 18.h4 d5 19.♖g1 c5 20.g5 hxg5 21.cxd5 exd5 22.♖xg5 d4 23.♖xg7 ♕xg7 24.♗xf4 ♗d7 25.♕a5† ♖b6 26.♘d5 ♖xh4 27.♘xb6
1–0

D2) 9...♖b8

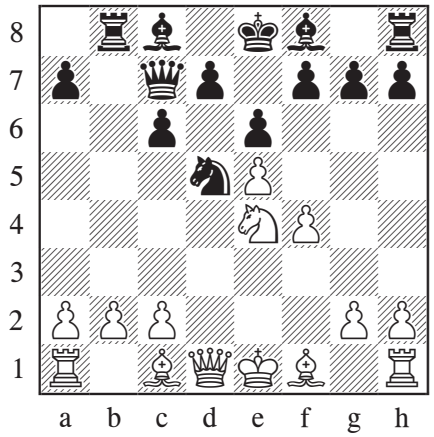
GAME 3

Barry Sheppard – Elio Troia

email 2008

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4 ♕c7 9.f4 ♖b8

Moiseenko has twice used this line to win quick sacrificial games, so it is worthy of care, but I believe a precise move order effectively refutes it.



10.c4 ♗b4†

Black has no choice.

10...♘b6? was Barlovic – Podravec, Zagreb 2009, when after the simple 11.♗e2N White is strategically winning.

11.♔e2

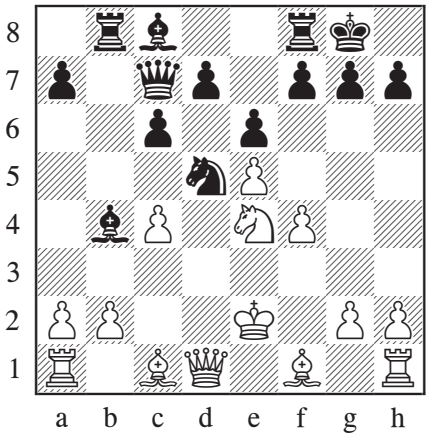
As in the main line (see variation D42 on page 35), White must step forward.

11.♗d2? fails to: 11...♘xf4 12.♗xb4 ♕xe5! (But of course not 12...♖xb4?? 13.♘d6† ♔e7 14.♕d2+– forking two pieces.) The line continues: 13.♕d6 ♕xe4† 14.♔d2 ♖xb4 15.♕xb4 ♘xg2 16.♗xg2 ♕xg2†∓ Bishop and three pawns, with an exposed king to shoot at, are far too much for a rook. Black will castle easily after a few checks lands the queen on a square that covers the ...c6-c5 advance.

11...0–0

This piece sacrifice is the only way to try to make sense of Black's position.

11...♗a6? 12.♔f3+– is a strategic fiasco.



12.a3!

This accurate nudge messes up Black's coordination.

To understand the point, let's see the more obvious 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♘d6 f6 14.♘xc8 when, with no bishop hanging on e7, Black was free to play 14...fxe5⩱ in Kurmann – Moiseenko, Tromso (ol) 2014. Also note that after 15.a3 Black replied 15...♗c5, an option unavailable after 12.a3.

12...♗e7

The most obvious option.

12...♗a5N

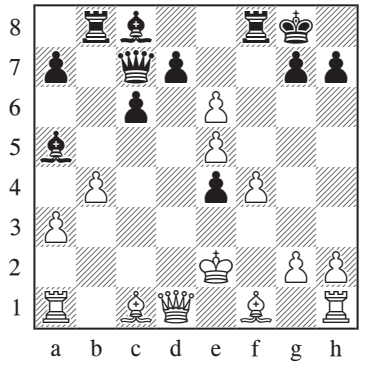
Untested, but at least as good as the game move.

13.b4 f5

Black must try this, as 13...♗b6? 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♘d6+– is hopeless.

14.cxd5 fxe4 15.dxe6!

15.bxa5 cxd5 is not so clear.



15...dxe6

Giving up the bishop looks like the best practical chance.

After 15...♗b6?! 16.e7! ♖e8 17.♕d6± White has an excellent bind; e7 will drop, levelling the material, but e4 is also vulnerable. For example: 17...♗a6† 18.♔e1 ♗xf1 19.♖xf1 ♔f7 20.♗b2!? ♖xe7 21.♕xc7 ♗xc7 22.♗d4 ♗b6 23.♗xb6 axb6 24.♔e2±

16.bxa5 ♕xa5 17.♕d4±

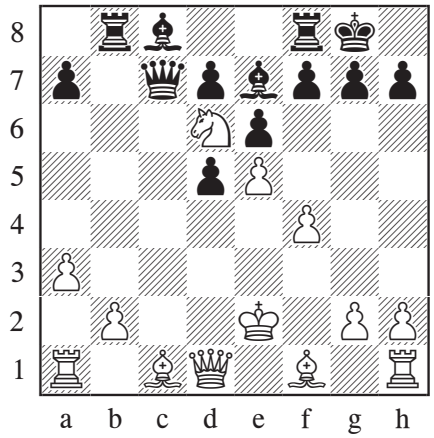
Black does not have enough compensation for the missing piece. One plausible variation is:

17...♖b3 18.♔f2 ♖d8 19.♕xe4 ♖d1 20.♗c4 ♖xh1 21.♗xb3 ♕c3 22.♖b1 ♖xc1 23.♖xc1 ♕xc1 24.♕e3±

Material has miraculously levelled, but Black cannot afford to exchange queens due to his feeble bishop. So White can press for a win after a line such as 24...♕b2† 25.♔g3.

13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♘d6!

Eliminating a bishop is well worth a pawn.



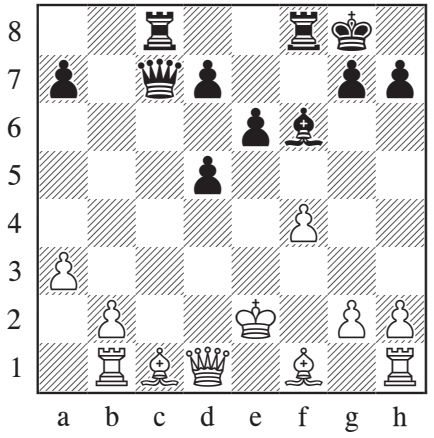
14...f6

This allows the c8-bishop to be taken, but the alternative is no better:

14...♗a6† 15.♔e1 ♗xf1 16.♖xf1 f6 17.♕e2 fxe5 18.fxe5 ♗xd6 19.exd6 ♕xd6 20.g3± Black has only two pawns for the bishop, and there's no attack. Certainly White will have to do some wriggling to develop while securing his king. Let's follow one game for an example of how it can be done: 20...e5 21.♖xf8† ♖xf8 22.♗d2 ♕g6 23.♗b4 d6 24.♖d1 d4 25.♕c4† ♔h8 26.♔d2 h6 27.♔c1 ♖f2 28.♖d2 ♖f3 29.a4 In Langer – Grammatica, email 2014, White was well on his way to victory.

15.♘xc8 ♖bxc8 16.exf6 ♗xf6 17.♖b1±

It is only one pawn for a bishop, so White should win, but it's not trivial enough yet for a simple plus-minus verdict.



17...♕c6 18.♕d3 e5

Black opens lines at the expense of weakening his structure.

Instead Black can try to create a central pawn roller, as Black tested in a later game:

18...d6 19.♔f2

Black has a few tries, but nothing works.

19...g5

19...e5 20.♗e2 is winning for White.

19...♗d4† 20.♕xd4 ♕c2† 21.♗e2 ♕xb1 22.♕d3 ♕xd3 (22...♕a1 23.♕d1) 23.♗xd3 e5 24.♗b1!+–

20.♗e2!

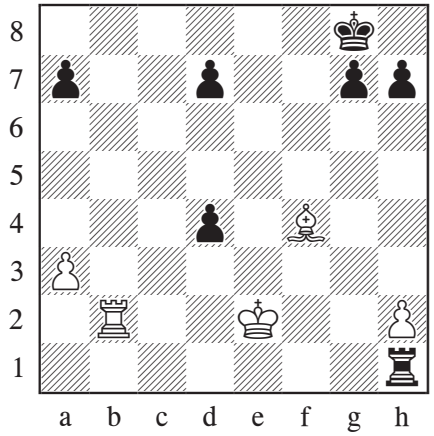
Developing is more important than worrying about one pawn.

20...gxf4 21.♖d1+–

In Shpakovsky – Troia, email 2010, the white king was escaping while Black's pawns were no threat.

19.fxe5 ♗xe5 20.♗d2 ♖ce8 21.♔e1 ♗xb2† 22.♗e2 d4 23.♖f1 ♕xg2 24.♖xf8† ♖xf8 25.♖xb2 ♕g1† 26.♗f1 ♕f2† 27.♔d1 ♕xf1† 28.♕xf1 ♖xf1† 29.♔e2 ♖h1 30.♗f4+–

Black has three pawns for the piece, but it's White who has made great progress in ensuring the win: the white king no longer need fear an attack, while none of Black's pawns are a threat to promote, so the extra piece easily mops up.



30...g5 31.♗e5 ♔f7 32.♔d3 ♖a1 33.♖b3 ♖d1† 34.♔e4 ♔e6 35.♗xd4 d5† 36.♔e3 ♖h1 37.♖b2 ♖e1†

This leads to the a7-pawn dropping, but 37...a5 38.♖b6† was equally hopeless.

38.♖e2 ♖h1 39.♗xa7 ♔d6 40.♗d4 h5 41.a4 ♔c6 42.♖f2 ♖e1† 43.♔d2 ♖h1 44.♖f6† ♔b7 45.a5 ♖xh2† 46.♗f2

Bishop and wrong-coloured rook pawn is only a drawing problem when there are no rooks left. As is, Black is mated by force.

46...d4 47.♔c1 ♖h1† 48.♔b2 ♖h2 49.a6† ♔a8 50.♔a3 ♖h3† 51.♔a4 ♖d3 52.♖d6 1–0

A beautifully controlled game by White, with many of his moves to convert the extra piece being far from the engine's first choice, yet perfectly logical with hindsight.

D3) 9...♕a5†

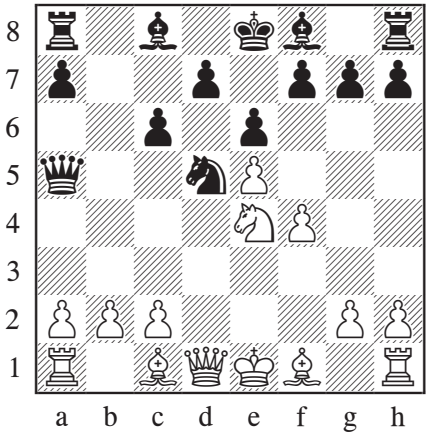
GAME 4

Ivan Cavajda – Jan Lounek

email 2016

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4 ♕c7 9.f4 ♕a5†

The second-most popular move after 9...♕b6, but a long, long way behind. And understandably so, as 8...♕c7 provoked a weakness on e3, which 9...♕b6 eyes, while the check on a5 leaves the potential that the addition of f2-f4 will be a useful gift.



10.♗d2!

Also possible is 10.c3 but if I can develop with tempo, without fearing material loss, then I will. I mentioned after the immediate queen check line, 8...♕a5†, that I was not convinced by White's potential compensation for the b2-pawn after 9.♗d2 ♕b6, but it's a different story here when Black has given us f2-f4 for nothing.

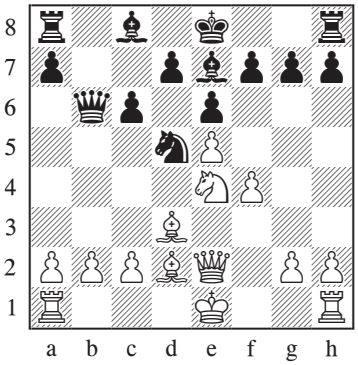
10...♕b6 11.♗d3

Now Black has various options.

11...♘b4

Removing the dangerous d3-bishop is the critical test.

11...♗e7 12.♕e2

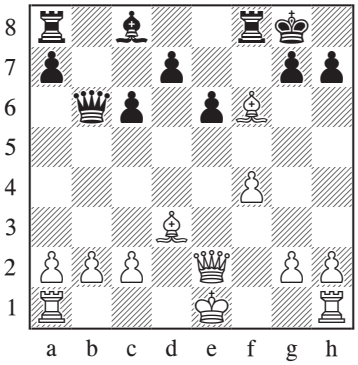


12...f5

This leads to a normal Four Knights position where Black has wasted time on queen moves for no gain.

However, this is a bad time to get greedy, as 12...♕xb2?! 13.0–0 0–0 14.♖ab1 ♕d4† 15.♔h1± gives White an initiative that is close to decisive. I will offer one sample line as inspiration: 15...a5 16.c3 ♕a7 17.c4 ♘b4 18.♗e3 ♕c7 19.♘f6†! ♗xf6 20.♗xh7† ♔xh7 21.♕h5† ♔g8 22.exf6 With a quick mate.

13.exf6 ♘xf6 14.♗c3 0–0 15.♘xf6† ♗xf6 16.♗xf6



16...gxf6?!

A slight improvement was 16...♖xf6 though after 17.0–0–0± White's position is certainly preferable.

17.0–0–0±

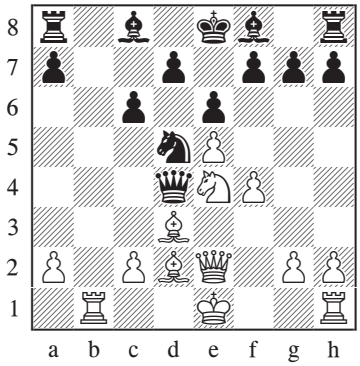
Black's king was exposed in Emms – Sutovsky, Gausdal 1995.

11...♗a6 offers White an easy endgame edge, but it is still one of Black's better options. 12.♗xa6 ♕xa6 13.♕e2 ♕xe2† 14.♔xe2 f5 15.♘f2± At some point the impressive-looking knight on d5 will be kicked by c2-c4. A recent example was Giri – Lupulescu, Antalya 2017, where Black managed to hold, but White has a pleasant two-results position.

11...♕xb2

Taking the pawn is always worth checking, but White has far more than enough compensation.

12.♖b1 ♕d4 13.♕e2±



White's likely plan is c2-c3 followed by c3-c4. We have seen enough for our prep, but the following game is worth seeing in full, as it is high quality and great fun.

13...a5 14.c3 ♕a7 15.c4 ♘b4 16.♗e3 ♕c7 17.0–0 c5

Perhaps 17...♗e7 was tougher, but Black is still struggling.

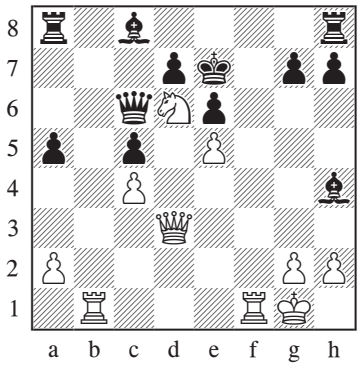
18.♗f2 ♘xd3 19.♕xd3 ♗e7 20.♗h4!!

A flashy way to get our knight on its dream square.

20...♗xh4 21.♘d6† ♔e7 22.f5

In addition to trying to mate the king, White also has ♕e4 ideas.

22...♕c6 23.fxe6 fxe6



24.♕d2!

White wishes his queen on the f-file, and f3 is covered, so it heads for f4.

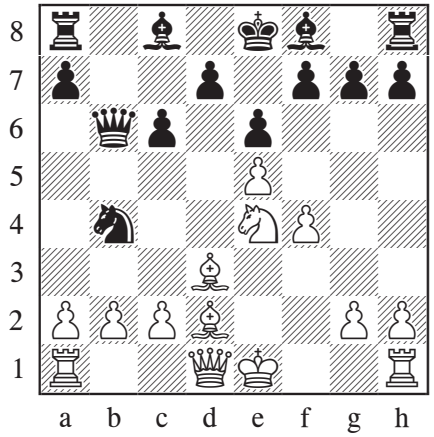
24...♗f6 25.exf6† gxf6 26.♖xf6! ♔xf6 27.♖d1!

Inhumanly precise; the knight is defended in advance to allow a queen-checking rampage.

27...♖f8 28.♕h6† ♔e7 29.♕g5† ♖f6 30.♕g7† ♔d8 31.♕xf6† ♔c7 32.♘b5†

1–0 Oates – Kopelevich, email 2004.

After 32...♔b7 White could win in many ways, but one efficient way is 33.♖d6 ♕e4 34.♖xd7† ♗xd7 35.♘d6†.



12.♕e2 ♘xd3† 13.♕xd3 ♕xb2

Black must grab the pawn, or else suffer under the usual bind for nothing.

14.0–0 ♕a3

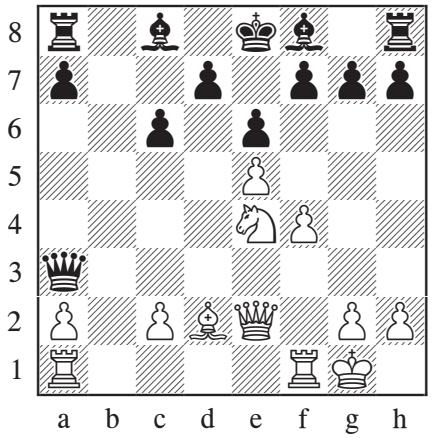
Almost universally played.

14...c5 was tested in Mezera – D. Fischer, email 2016, when a promising forcing line is: 15.♕f3!?N ♗b7 16.♗c3 ♕b5 17.♖ab1 ♗xe4 18.♕xe4 ♕c6 19.♕xc6 dxc6 20.♖fd1± This last move, among other things, stops Black from castling long! White may be a weak doubled pawn down, but his rook activity means Black is facing an unpleasant struggle for a draw.

15.♕e2!±

Black's king faces long-term problems, so we want queens on the board.

Kotronias and Semkov mentioned only 15.♕b3, leading to equality.



15...♕b2

The only move to have been tried, but 4/4 for White is a convincing stat.

Instead 15...♗a6 16.c4± does not help Black at all. At some point the black king must castle kingside, but then f4-f5 is an instant

attack, with Black unable to funnel pieces to defend his kingside. I will offer a sample line: 16...♗e7 17.f5 ♕b2 18.♖ac1 Making sure ...♗xc4 is impossible. 18...♕d4† 19.♔h1 exf5 20.♖xf5 0–0 21.♕g4 c5 22.♗h6 g6 23.♘f6† ♗xf6 24.♕xd4 cxd4 25.♖xf6+– White wins an exchange, and should win the ending.

16.♖ad1

Whatever Black plays, White has a fearsome initiative.

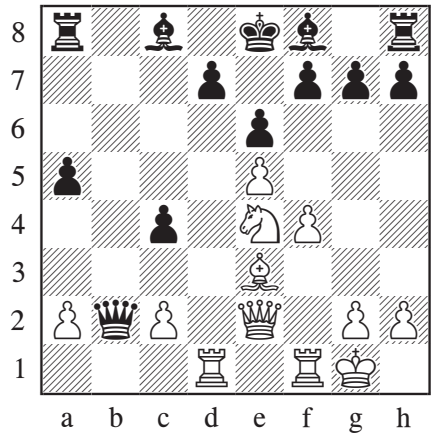
16...a5

Creating the threat of ...♗a6, c4 ♕d4†, winning c4, but it's easily parried.

16...♕xa2?! 17.c4 ♗a6 18.♖c1+– leaves Black two pawns up, but defenceless against the coming attack. For example, Podvoysky – Rychkov, email 2013, concluded: 18...♕b2 19.♔h1 ♕d4 20.♖fd1 ♗c5 21.♖c2! 1–0

16...♕xc2 is untested, and likely to remain so, as 17.f5! is close to winning. One point is: 17...exf5 18.♘f6†! gxf6 19.exf6† ♕e4 (better is 19...♔d8 20.♗a5# at least losing in style) 20.♕f2+– Followed by ♖fe1.

17.♕d3 c5 18.♗e3 c4 19.♕e2±



Black has tried to wriggle, but White follows the same general path: develop, then correctly time an f4-f5 advance. This plan's repeated success in various games is due to the black king's lack of a safe haven.

19...♕b7 20.♕f3 ♖a6 21.♖b1 ♕c6 22.f5!

Like clockwork.

22...exf5 23.♕xf5 ♕g6

'Please exchange queens.'

24.♕f3

'No thanks.'

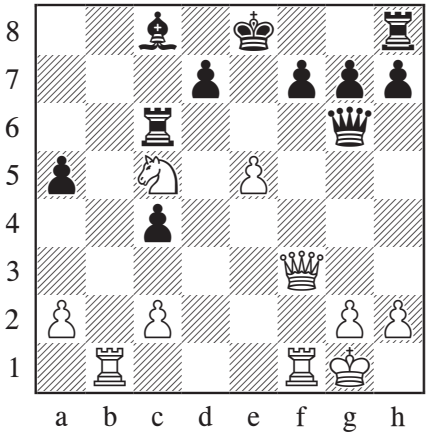
24...♗e7

Developing the bishop to b4 or a3 would meet the same reply.

25.♗c5!

Exchanging a key defender creates beautiful tactical opportunities.

25...♗xc5† 26.♘xc5 ♖c6



27.e6!

Blocking the black queen from the queenside leaves the rest of Black's pieces vulnerable. That includes the undefended rook on h8.

27...0–0

Black knows his opponent was not bluffing with 27.e6. After 27...fxe6 28.♘xd7!+– Black is routed after either recapture:

28...♗xd7 29.♖b8† ♖c8 30.♖xc8† ♗xc8 31.♕c6† ♔d8 (or 31...♗d7 32.♕a8† wins the rook) 32.♕d6† ♔e8 (32...♗d7 loses to everything, with the fastest mate being 33.♖d1 ♕f7 34.♖b1) 33.♕c7! To delay mate, Black must lose all his pieces.

Or 28...♔xd7 29.♖fd1† ♖d6 30.♖b7†! ♗xb7 31.♕xb7† ♔e8 32.♖xd6 and Black's position collapses.

28.♕d5!

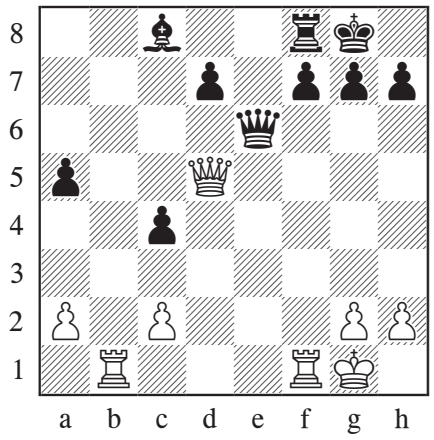
Even stronger than the also promising 28.♘xd7 ♗xd7 29.exd7±.

28...♖xe6

Giving up the exchange to delay the end.

After 28...fxe6 29.♖xf8† ♔xf8 30.♘xd7† ♗xd7 31.♕xd7 mate is not far away.

29.♘xe6 ♕xe6



30.♕xa5

Exchanging queens was also good enough, but the game continuation is simple, as the passed a-pawn is decisive.

30...♕e3† 31.♖f2 d5 32.a4 ♗d7 33.♕b4 ♗f5 34.♖e1 ♕a7 35.♖e7 ♕d4 36.a5 g6 37.h3 ♔g7 38.c3 ♕d1† 39.♔h2 ♕a1 40.♕c5 ♕xc3 41.g4

It's another case where a correspondence player calculates a forcing line that a cautious OTB player might be nervous about.

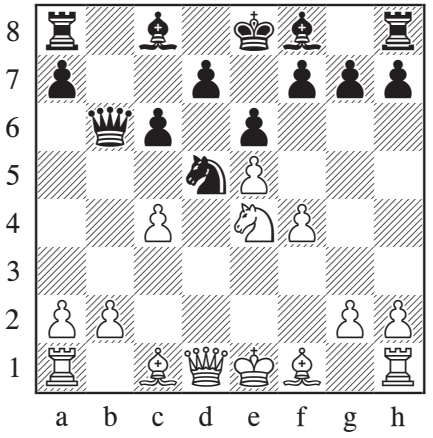
Queening the pawn with 41.a6 keeps the white king well covered, but the game continuation shows that Black dies before White's newly-exposed king feels a chill.

41...♗e4 42.♕c7

Black resigned as after 42...♗f3 43.♕f4 the cobbled-together defence breaks down.

1–0

D4) 9...♕b6 10.c4



We need a further split: **D41) 10...♘e3** and the main line **D42) 10...♗b4†**.

D41) 10...♘e3

GAME 5

Sergey Glukhovtsev – Sergey Kruk

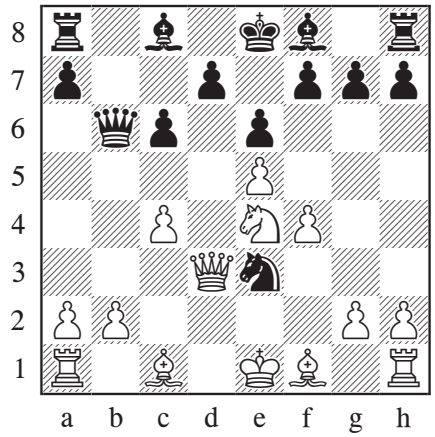
email 2014

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4 ♕c7 9.f4 ♕b6 10.c4 ♘e3

In correspondence chess this had been the main line for a few years, but the correct way for White has been found.

11.♕d3!

An important branching point.



11...♘f5

One of two main options.

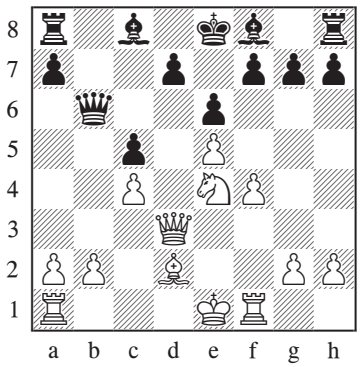
The other is 11...♗b4† see Game 6 below.

We should also consider two minor options:

11...♘xf1?!

This line is yet another illustration that if Black allows White to consolidate, then the hole on d6 will tell.

12.♖xf1 c5 13.♗d2!



13...♗b7

Correctly assessing that b2 is poisoned: 13...♕xb2? 14.♖b1 ♕xa2 15.♘c3 ♕a6 16.♘b5+– Black is routed after either 16...♕c6 17.♗a5 or 16...♔d8 17.f5!.

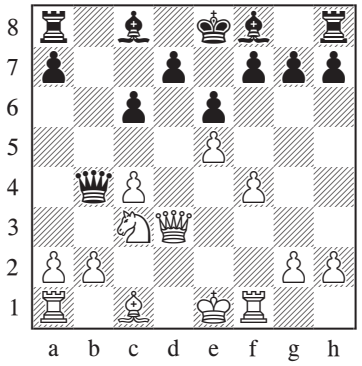
14.0–0–0±

In Karjakin – Nepomniachtchi, Moscow (rapid) 2010, White had the sort of bind we seek against the Four Knights.

11...♕b4† 12.♘c3!?

Played just once, but far simpler than the usual move: 12.♔f2 ♘g4† 13.♔g3 f5 14.exf6 ♘xf6 15.♘xf6† gxf6 White should have an edge, but it's not so easy to play with a king wandering on g3.

12...♘xf1 13.♖xf1±



White's usual plan will be b2-b3, ♗b2, 0–0–0 and take on d6 if Black pushes his d-pawn. For example:

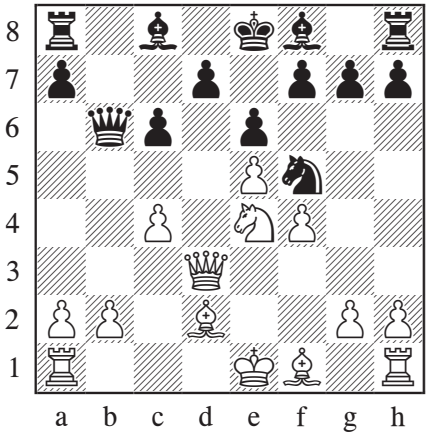
13...♗e7

A more testing line is: 13...♗a6 14.b3 d5 15.exd6 ♗xd6 when White should vary from autopilot with: 16.♗d2! (instead 16.♗b2 0–0–0 forces a queen move) The point is 16...0–0–0 17.♘e4 ♕a3 18.♘xd6† ♖xd6 19.♕c3± when White has the better bishop.
14.b3 0–0 15.♗b2 a5 16.0–0–0±
Zeman – Gray, email 2010.

12.♗d2!

Rare, but active and best.

By far the most common move is 12.g4 but it's needlessly messy.



12...♕xb2

The critical test. It's the same old story: if White completes development with his bind intact, then Black will suffer.

For example: 12...♗b7 13.♗c3 c5 14.g4! ♘d4 15.♗g2 ♖d8 16.♗xd4 cxd4 17.0–0–0 d5 18.exd6 ♗xd6 19.♘xd6† ♖xd6 20.♗xb7 ♕xb7 21.♖he1± In Ljubicic – João, corr. 2012, to escape the bind, Black had to accept a position where White has the more mobile pawns and the safer king; Black must castle kingside soon, despite White's pawn storm being already on the way.

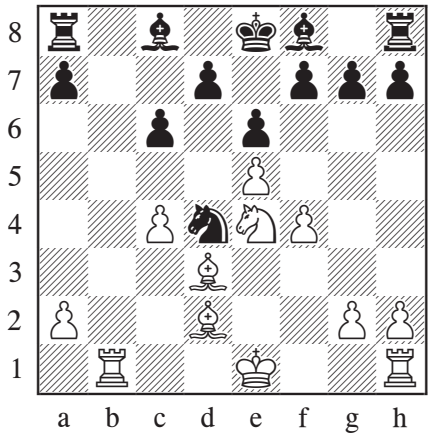
13.♖b1 ♕d4

Universally played, and for good reason.

13...♕xa2?! is met most simply by 14.♗e2± when White plans 0–0 followed by ♖a1 and ♖fb1; plus g2-g4 kicking the knight can also hurt. To save his queen, Black must grovel. For example: 14...♕a3 15.♗c3 ♕e7 16.0–0 h5 17.♖a1+– Black is two pawns up, but he has no sensible moves.

14.♕xd4 ♘xd4 15.♗d3±

White is a pawn down, but the difference in activity more than makes up for it.



15...♗e7

Since the bishop must take on d6 whenever the knight checks, it is tempting to leave the bishop on f8, but the h8-rook would not like that; bad positions lead to unpleasant choices.

15...♗a6N is untested but as good a try as any, using the a6-square before c4-c5 can seal the clamp forever. 16.♗c3 ♘f5 17.♔f2± Black cannot break with ...f6, while pushing the d-pawn would hang g7 at the end. A sample line is: 17...h5 The immediate threat was g2-g4. 18.♖b3 ♗e7 19.♖d1 with the point that 19...0–0 20.♗e2 hits two pawns.

15...h5 gains some kingside space, but allows a vicious central bind: 16.c5! ♗e7 17.♘d6† ♗xd6 18.cxd6± Black had a nightmarish position in Glukhovtsev – Zlotkowski, email 2013.

16.♗c3 c5

Slightly sturdier was 16...♘f5 when the simple 17.♔f2 covers e3 and thus prepares g2-g4. After 17...h5 18.c5± the bind should be fatal.

17.♘d6† ♗xd6 18.exd6 f5

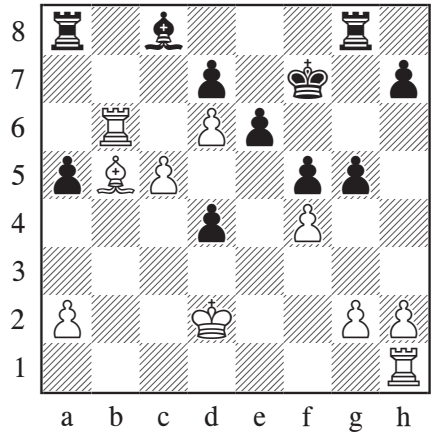
Now the c8-bishop will never emerge, but note that even after an exchange of light-squared bishops, Black is still doomed. For example: 18...♗a6 19.♗xd4 cxd4 20.♔d2 0–0 21.c5 ♗xd3 22.♔xd3+– The positional point is the c8-bishop may be awful, but even with it gone, the cramping effect of the d6-pawn is still decisive.

19.♔d2 ♔f7 20.♗xd4 cxd4 21.c5 a5 22.♖b6+–

The result is inevitable; you cannot play a sensible game of chess with a bishop frozen on c8.

22...♖g8 23.♗b5 g5

This may accelerate the end, but Black's situation was already hopeless.



24.g4!

Pretty but not difficult; the theme is a ♗c4 skewer.

24...♖g6

As good or bad as any. For example: 24...fxg4 25.f5 exf5 26.♗c4† or 24...gxf4 25.gxf5.

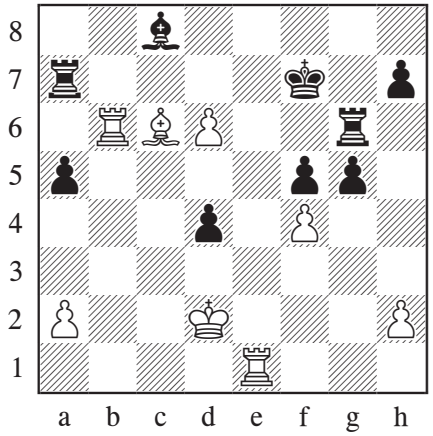
25.c6

One of many winning paths.

The most direct was 25.gxf5 when Black has little choice in the following line: 25...exf5 26.♗c4† ♔f6 27.♗d5 ♖a7 28.♖b8 ♗a6 29.♖f8† ♔g7 30.♖f7† ♔h6 31.♖e1 With ♖ee7 next.

25...dxc6 26.♗xc6 ♖a7 27.gxf5 exf5 28.♖e1!

White's two rooks, bishop and pawn have enough firepower to overwhelm the defence.



28...gxf4

Allowing one of the more obvious threats, but there was nothing better. For example: 28...♖h6 29.fxg5 ♖xh2† 30.♔d3 f4 31.d7 ♗xd7 32.♗d5† Black will lose lots of material, then get mated.

Or 28...♗e6 29.fxg5 ♖xg5 30.♖b8 ♔f6 31.♖e8 ♗xa2 32.d7 and the pawn costs a rook.

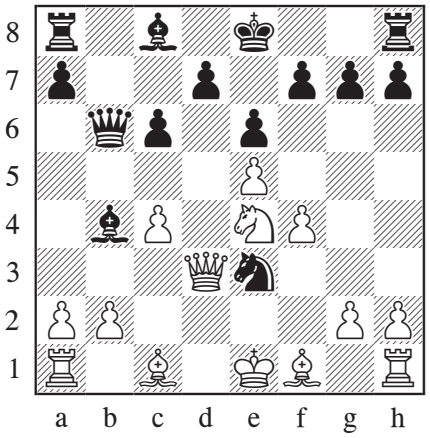
29.♗e8† ♔g8 30.♗xg6 hxg6 31.♖b8 ♖d7 32.♖xc8† ♔f7 33.♖c7
1–0

GAME 6

Ales Borstnik – Marcio De Oliveira

email 2010

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4 ♕c7 9.f4 ♕b6 10.c4 ♘e3 11.♕d3! ♗b4†

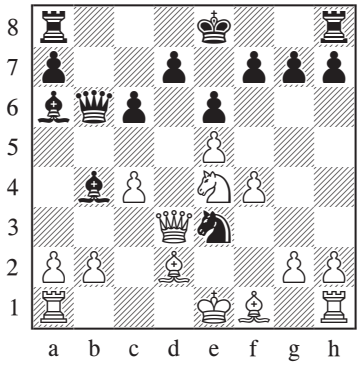


12.♗d2 0–0

This is by far the most common move, with 12...♗a6 also well known. All the other options are rarely seen.

12...a5 13.c5 ♗xd2† 14.♕xd2 ♕b4 15.♕xb4 axb4 16.♔d2± Nogga – Folk Gilsanz, corr. 2013.

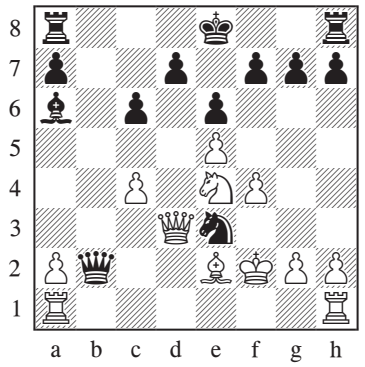
12...♗a6



13.♗xb4!

Also sensible is 13.b3 but the text move is forcing and effective, so let's control the play.

13...♕xb4† 14.♔f2 ♕xb2† 15.♗e2

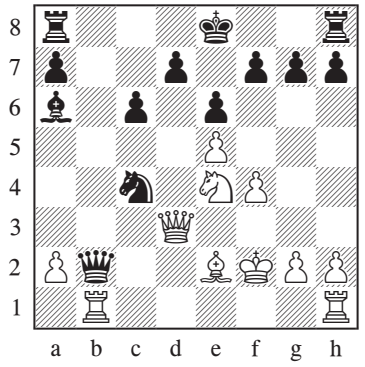


15...♘xc4

Instead after 15...♘f5 16.♖ab1 ♕d4† 17.♕xd4 ♘xd4 18.♗d3± White will soon have another version of the wonder knight against lousy bishop ending. For example 18...f6 19.♘c5 ♗c8 20.♔e3 fxe5 21.fxe5 ♘f5† 22.♗xf5 exf5 23.h4 was heading for a quick crush in Solodovnichenko – Abdulov, Ordu 2016.

16.♖ab1!

The far more common 16.♖hd1 allows Black to wriggle with 16...♕b6†.



16...♘xe5

Black must give up the piece now.

16...♕xa2? 17.♖hd1! wins a piece even more favourably, due to the threats of ♕xd7† or ♖a1.

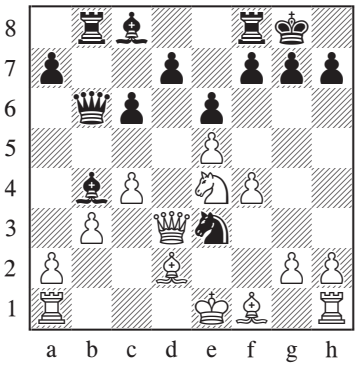
16...♕a3?? 17.♘d6†+–
17.fxe5 ♕xe5 18.♕xa6 ♕xe4 19.♖hd1 0–0 20.♗f3±

In R. O'Toole – Morcin, email 2013, Black had plenty of pawns, but no activity, so pawns will start dropping soon.

12...♖b8!?

A very rare move, but played by some distinguished players, so worthy of a brief look.

13.b3 0–0



14.c5!N

A strong but obvious novelty.

Less powerful but still promising was 14.♗xb4 ♕xb4† 15.♔e2 ♘f5 16.g4± as in Tringov – Hübner, Lucerne (ol) 1982.

14...♗xd2†

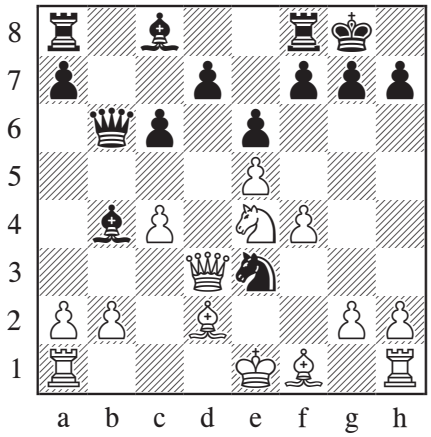
The only move, as 14...♗xc5?? loses a piece to 15.♘xc5 ♘xf1 16.♘a4 which is a common trick in the Four Knights.

15.♔xd2 ♘xf1† 16.♖hxf1±

White's minor piece is dominant, while his king position is no cause for concern. For example:

16...♕a5† 17.♕c3 ♖b4 18.♘d6 ♗a6 19.♖f3

Ideas such as 19...♖d4† might look scary at first, but after 20.♔c2 it's obvious Black is just exchanging into a bad ending.



13.♖c1

The direct threat is c4-c5, but we shall see the rook also has other ideas.

13...a5

Keeping the tension is Black's most testing line.

Instead 13...♘xf1 14.♖xf1 ♗e7 15.♗c3± is a typical bind, which Black must avoid at all costs.

13...f5 14.exf6 ♘g4 was highlighted by Kotronias and Semkov as a tricky try, while also showing the email game that solves it: 15.c5! (as K&S say, the hope is 15.fxg7?? ♖xf4) 15...♕b8 16.♖c4 ♗xd2† 17.♕xd2 ♘xf6 18.♘d6± In Garus – Kienel, email 2012, Black was out of tricks, and facing the usual scary beast on d6.

14.♗xb4

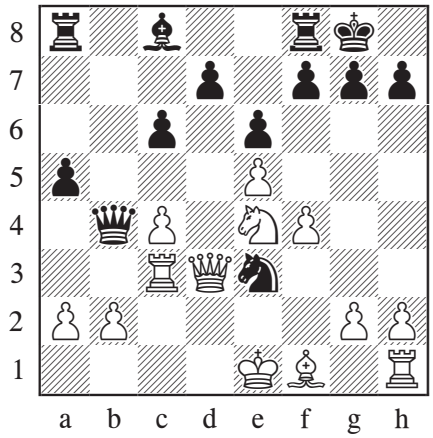
Direct is best.

After 14.c5 ♗xd2† 15.♕xd2 Black's 13th move created the resource 15...♕b4 when Black is OK; his bishop can emerge via a6, and both sides will have great knight outposts.

14...♕xb4† 15.♖c3!

This active move is the key idea; White has no need to defend b2.

Far more common, but less clear, is 15.♕d2 f5 16.♘d6 ♖b8.



15...♘xf1

This is almost always played.

15...♘f5?! can be met brutally: 16.g4 (White does not need an improvement, but 16.♕d2N± is easy and strong, planning ♗d3 and 0–0. The positional point is that when Black retreats without inflicting damage, simple development is enough to secure a lasting advantage.) 16...♘h4 17.♘g5 ♘g6 18.h4→ Savchenko – Krasenkow, Helsingor 2008.

16.♖xf1 ♕xb2

Black must take the pawn, as he needs something to compensate for his awful position.

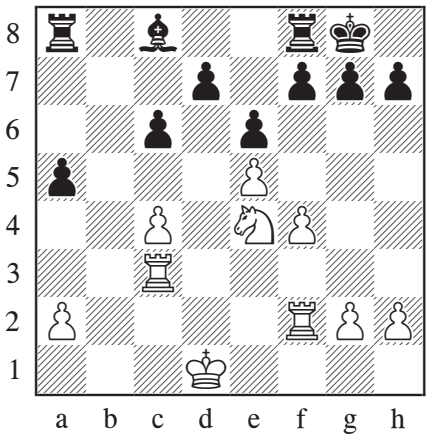
17.♖f2 ♕a1†

Once again Black has no choice; if the queens stay on, he is in danger of getting mated.

For example, 17...♕b4? 18.a3 ♕b6 19.♖b3 ♕d8 when 20.♘g5 or 20.♘f6† are both good enough to force Black to give up material to avoid mate.

18.♕d1 ♕xd1† 19.♔xd1±

Black is a pawn up, but let's compare the minor pieces: from d6 the knight will dominate the puny bishop.



19...♗a6

Theoretically a developing move, but the bishop is just as bad on a6 as it is on c8.

19...a4

Preparing ...♖b8 by preventing the response ♖b3.

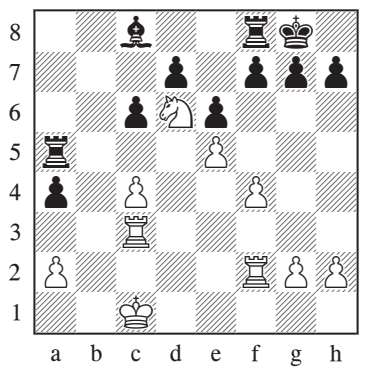
20.♔c1!±

Simple prophylaxis. This endgame is close to lost for Black.

20...♖a5

Or 20...♖b8 21.♖b2 shows the point of White's last move.

21.♘d6



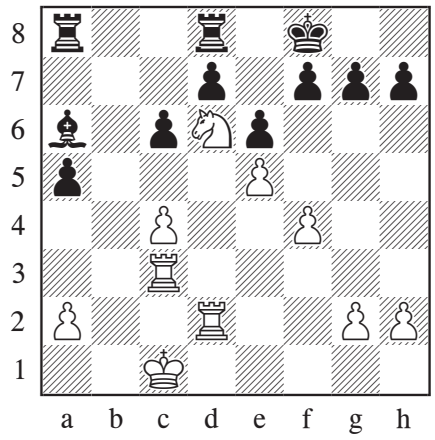
The minor pieces speak for themselves, but we can follow one game to see how play might go:

21...♖a8 22.♖a3 f6 23.♖b2 fxe5 24.♖b4 ♖xf4 25.♖bxa4 ♖xa4 26.♖xa4 ♖f1† 27.♔c2 ♖f2† 28.♔b3 ♖xg2 29.♖a8+–

The extra piece and passed a-pawn eventually proved decisive in Babic – Drugda, corr. 2014, despite tough defence by Black.

20.♖d2 ♖fd8 21.♔c1 ♔f8 22.♘d6+–

A dream position against the Four Knights variation.



22...♖db8 23.♖a3 ♗c8

An ugly move, but Black had no choice. With admirable bluntness, White plays to open lines against the enemy king.

24.♖f2 g6 25.g4 ♖b4 26.f5 exf5 27.gxf5 ♔g8 28.f6!

The white rooks must wait a little longer for more open lines, as closing the net around the king is more important.

28...♖ab8

Dropping the a5-pawn, but the only way Black can get any play.

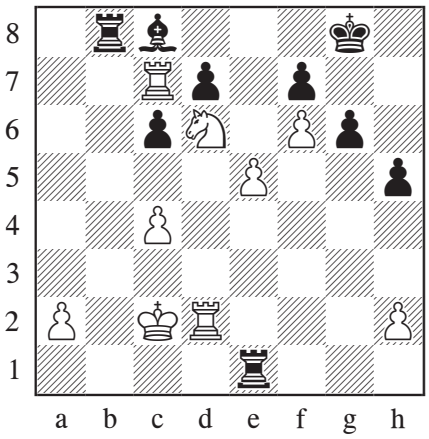
Instead after 28...c5 29.♖b2 a4 30.♖xb4 cxb4 31.♖d3 Black must play waiting moves while White lifts his rook to d5 then c5 then c7 then...

29.♖xa5 ♖b1† 30.♔d2 h5 31.♔c3 ♗b7 32.♖d2 ♖c1† 33.♔d3

Black's counterplay amounted to two checks.

33...♖b1 34.♔c2 ♖e1 35.♖a7 ♗c8 36.♖c7

The poor bishop has been bullied all game.



36...♗a6 37.♖xd7 ♖xe5 38.♖xf7

Now we see the value of the f6-pawn.

38...♖e6 39.♖a7 ♖d8 40.c5

Understandably, Black had seen enough, as 40...♗f1 41.♖g7† ♔f8 42.♖xg6 is easy and convincing.

1–0

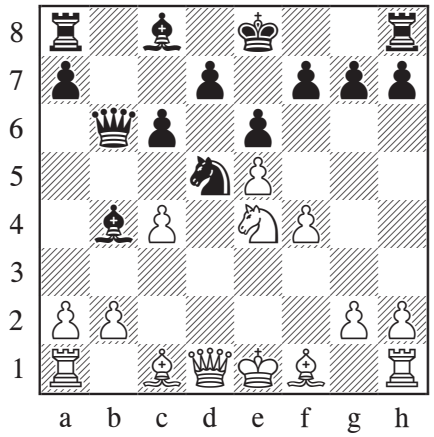
D42) 10...♗b4†

GAME 7

Santosh Gujrathi Vidit – Michal Krasenkow

Wijk aan Zee 2018

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4 ♕c7 9.f4 ♕b6 10.c4 ♗b4†



11.♔e2

This is essential. Any awkwardness in White's position is only temporary, as he can easily neaten up his king position. In contrast, Black's weaker pawn structure tends to be a game-long problem.

11.♗d2? blunders a pawn to 11...♕e3† 12.♕e2 ♗xd2† 13.♘xd2 ♕xe2†∓ followed by ...♘xf4.

11...f5

The only respectable try.

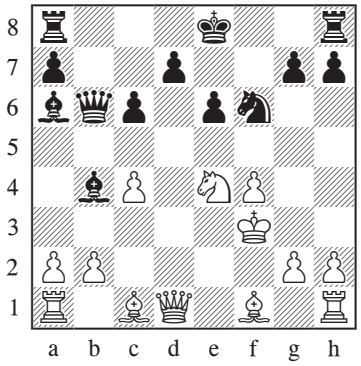
11...♗a6?!

This used to be a main line, but then it was hit hard by a forcing line.

12.♔f3! f5

Black has no choice as 12...♘e7?? 13.a3 is fatal. For example: 13...♗c5 14.b4 ♗d4 15.c5+–

13.exf6 ♘xf6



14.c5!

This is the punch that killed the line.

14...♕a5

What else?

14...♗xc5 15.♘xc5 ♗xf1 16.♘a4! ♗xg2† 17.♔xg2± leaves Black a piece down for just two pawns.

15.♘d6† ♔e7 16.♗xa6 ♕xa6

Again the only chance.

16...♗xc5?? 17.♘b7 and 16...♕xc5?? 17.♘b7 both lose to the same resource.

17.♗e3±

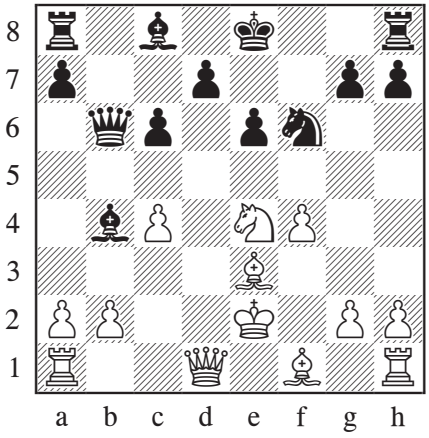
White is close to winning, with a beast of a knight on d6 and an insecure black king to harass; his score in the database is 7/8 and it should have been more. A key point is that the apparently active 17...♘d5?! is crushed by 18.♕d4!+– with the idea 18...♖hg8 19.f5!.

12.exf6

A forcing and effective line.

12.♘f2 is a common alternative.

12...♘xf6 13.♗e3



13...♕d8

One of two commonly played moves.

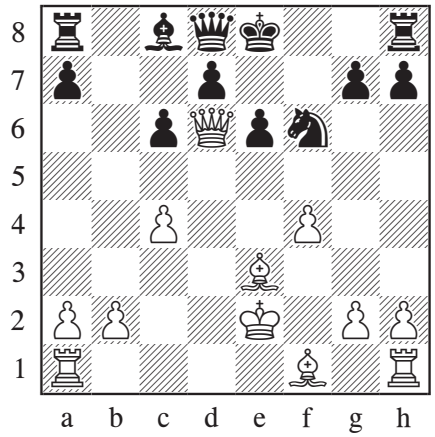
13...♕a5 is another important option which we will see in the next illustrative game.

13...♕c7 is rare. 14.♘xf6† gxf6 15.♔f2± is similar to the next game, though the queen is more passive on c7 than a5.

14.♘d6†

Of course this is the right path, rather than allowing Black's idea of 14.♘xf6†?! ♕xf6.

14...♗xd6 15.♕xd6



15...♕e7?!

Krasenkow is a Four Knights expert, so his choice should be taken seriously, but the more common alternative seems stronger.

15...♗b7 16.♖d1

White's plan of development is ♖g1 and g2-g4, gaining space and clearing a path for the f1-bishop; the white king is fine where it is.

16...♖c8

Preparing ...c6-c5 to free the bishop.

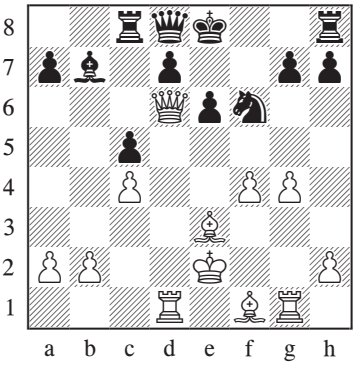
The same advance as a gambit is unconvincing: 16...c5 17.♕xc5 For example: 17...♗e4 18.♔e1 ♖c8 19.♕a3± Sanz Algarrada – Troia, email 2013.

17.g4

17.♖g1 transposes after 17...c5 18.g4.

Instead 17.c5 stops one of Black's plans, but allows another: 17...♗a6† 18.♔f3 ♗xf1 19.♖hxf1 ♘d5= As a general guideline, c4-c5 becomes an effective plan only after there is no black knight to settle on d5.

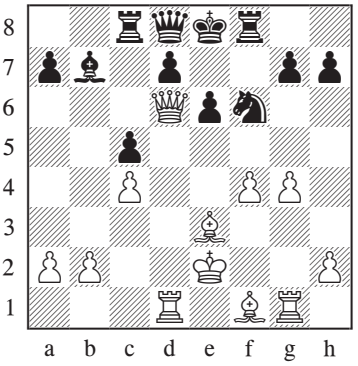
17...c5 18.♖g1



Black has many possible plans, so I would not suggest trying to anticipate and memorize every possible line. I will however give a few important lines.

a) 18...♖f8

A rare move, but chosen in a high-class encounter, so worth a look:



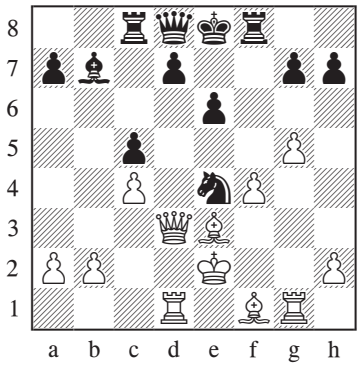
19.g5!?N

I like recommending a consistent plan, unless there is good reason to vary.

19.f5∞ was interesting but messy in Karjakin – Yu Yangyi, Baku 2015.

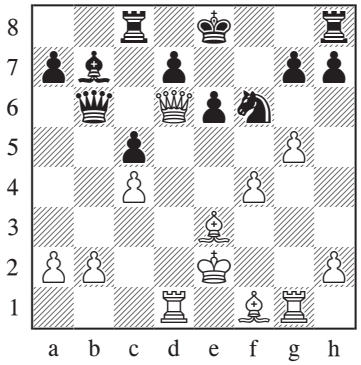
The white king could become exposed if we go pawn-grabbing, so avoid 19.♗xc5? when 19...♖f7 renews the threat of ...♘e4. And following 20.♗xa7 ♖xc4∓ the previously passive rook on c8 is now hyperactive.

19...♘e4
The critical test.
19...♘h5 20.♗h3 ♕c7 21.♖gf1 ♕xd6 22.♖xd6± gives White a pleasant endgame edge.
20.♕d3



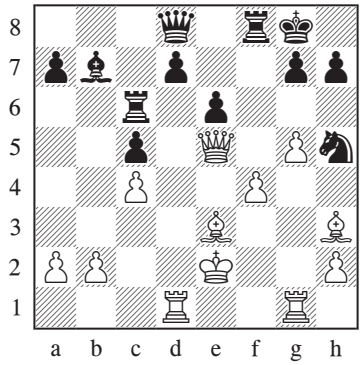
20...♖c7!
Preparing a defence to White's idea of ♗g2.
Instead 20...♕e7?! 21.♗g2 d5 22.♗xe4 dxe4 23.♕c3± leaves Black with a deadened bishop and a weak structure.
21.♗g2!? ♕a8 22.♖de1 ♔e7 23.b3!?±
A generally useful little move; White retains some pressure. For example: 23...♘d6?? 24.♖d1+– wins, with the point 24...♘f5 25.♗xc5†.

b) 18...♕b6 19.g5
White is happy to exchange queens, just not on b6 when Black can recapture with ...axb6.



19...♕xd6
Also pleasant for White is 19...♘d5 20.♕xb6 ♘xb6 21.b3± as in Martin Sanchez – Soltau, email 2013; the hanging knight meant Black could not recapture with the a7-pawn.
20.♖xd6
The bishop pair should give White a edge. For example:
20...♘e4 21.♖d3 d5 22.♖a3±

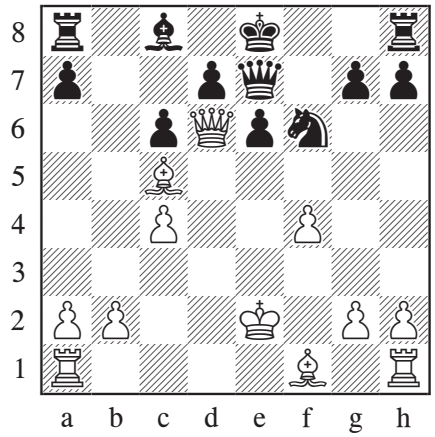
c) 18...♖c6
Forcing, and the usual choice; this is one line White certainly should remember.
19.♕e5 0–0 20.g5 ♘h5 21.♗h3!
Threatening ♗g4 or the less obvious g5-g6, which is a common theme.
The immediate 21.g6? fails to 21...♖f5∓.



21...d6!
This excellent move has been played in all four games in my database, which tells you they were all correspondence games.
Instead 21...♕c7?! allows White to show his idea with 22.g6 when the g1-rook springs to life.
22.♗xe6†!
Instead 22.♕xe6† ♔h8 23.♖gf1 may look tempting, but Black has irritating counterplay after: 23...♖b6 24.b3 ♖a6∞
The following line leaves Black little choice along the way:
22...♔h8 23.♕c3 ♘xf4† 24.♗xf4 ♖xf4 25.♖df1! ♖e4† 26.♔d1 ♖xe6 27.♖f7±

Recovering the sacced minor piece, leading to a major-piece ending where White has greater activity. My engine and I had this line ready, then Kotronias & Semkov published their book first, with exactly the same line; such things happen in forcing lines.

16.♗c5



16...♕f7?

Keeping the queens on and threatening ...♘e4, but White has superb resources in the middlegame.

The endgame after 16...♕xd6 17.♗xd6 is grim for Black. For example: 17...♘e4 18.♗a3 (18.♗e5!? is equally good) 18...d5 19.♔e3 a5 20.♖c1± In Martin Gonzalez – Li Zunian, Biel 1985, White had the bishop pair, the initiative and an active king.

17.♔e3

The funny thing is that any king move that covers ...♘e4 is good enough. So 17.♔d3 or 17.♔f3 are both winning.

17...g5?!

This does not work, but the desperation is justified.

17...♘g4† achieves nothing after 18.♔d2 ♕f6 19.♔c2+– when White can simply complete development with a crushing bind.

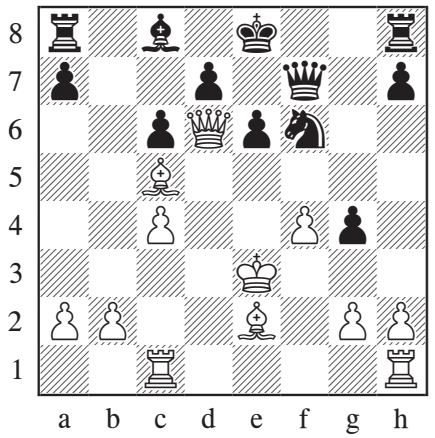
18.♗e2

Logical and effective, but also strong was 18.fxg5 ♘g4† 19.♔d2 ♘f2 20.♗d3! with the idea of 20...♘xh1 21.♖xh1 then ♖f1, when Black is finished.

18...g4

Now the advance of the g-pawn has achieved nothing other than weakening Black's kingside, but instead after 18...gxf4† 19.♕xf4 the open f-file helps White.

19.♖ac1+–



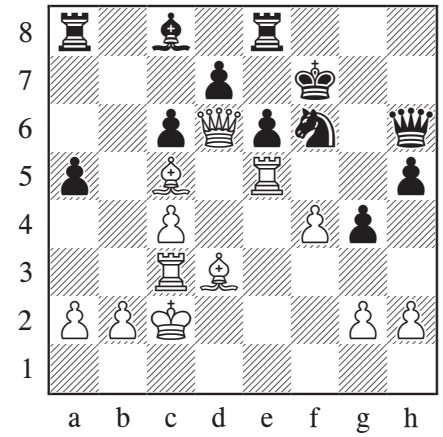
White simply needs to shuffle his pieces towards the exposed black king; it takes a few moves, but there is no rush as Black lacks any counterplay.

19...h5 20.♖c3 ♕g7 21.♗d3 ♔f7 22.♔d2 ♖e8 23.♖e1 ♕h6 24.♔c2

Taking his time.

The immediate 24.♖e5 was possible, as 24...♕xf4† 25.♗e3 ♕xh2 loses to the same tactic we shall see in a moment.

24...a5 25.♖e5!



25...♘h7

Taking the pawn loses the queen: 25...♕xf4? 26.♗e3 ♕xh2 27.♗g6†! ♔xg6 28.♖g5†

26.♖f5† ♔g8 27.♕e5

Black's position is collapsing; it's notable that his c8-bishop and a8-rook never moved – the frozen bishop in particular is a sign of a Four Knights gone very wrong for Black.

The game was a disaster for Black, so 15...♕e7 is unlikely to become popular. The critical line is 15...♗b7, but with precise play White keeps the better chances.

1–0

GAME 8

Juergen Buecker – Andrey Sheretyuk

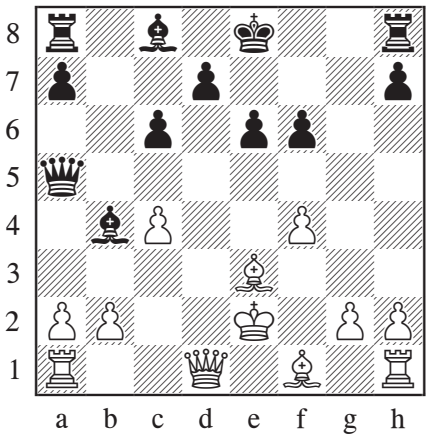
Correspondence 2010

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4 ♕c7 9.f4 ♕b6 10.c4 ♗b4† 11.♔e2 f5 12.exf6 ♘xf6 13.♗e3 ♕a5 14.♘xf6†

Naturally we take on f6 when the black queen cannot recapture.

Instead 14.♘d6†?! ♔e7 15.♘xc8† ♖axc8 helps Black to develop, with bothering his king at all; as we shall see below, Black often voluntarily places his king on e7.

14...gxf6



15.♔f2

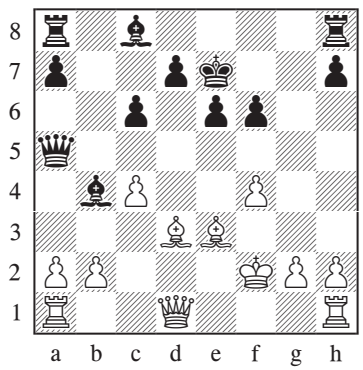
Making way for the f1-bishop.

Instead 15.a3 has scored well, because Black has usually retreated his bishop, but I believe the correct response is: 15...♕h5†! 16.♔f2 ♕xd1 17.♖xd1 ♗e7 White might have an endgame edge, but it's tiny. The a2-a3 advance means Black might find counterplay along the b-file, now that b2-b3 is not a solid roadblock.

15...0–0

The most common choice, but Black can also choose to keep his king in the middle:

15...♔e7 16.♗d3±



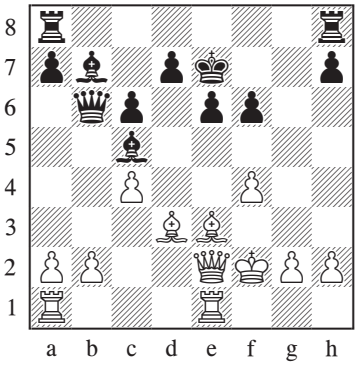
Both sides often have several decent options on each move, so this is a position to start playing. In general, White should probe while keeping the queens on, as the black king is not secure. Having said that, White may also have better prospects in some endings, as Black's isolated rook pawns can be targets.

16...♗b7

Far from the only move.

16...♗c5 17.♖e1 ♕b6 18.♖b1 ♗b7?! (Instead Black needed to play 18...h5± to prevent the move White plays in the game.) 19.♕h5! The queen is too strong on this square. 19...♗xe3† 20.♖xe3 ♕d4 21.g3± In W. Watson – A. Jones, Eastbourne 1990, White has played the last required defensive move. The plan now is ♗e2 and ♖d1, against which there is no effective defence.

17.♕e2 ♗c5 18.♖he1 ♕b6



19.♗xc5†

Keeping the queens on, though Mekhitarian mentioned that White has an edge after: 19.♖ad1 ♗xe3† 20.♕xe3 ♕xe3† 21.♖xe3±

19...♕xc5† 20.♔f1 h5 21.♖ad1

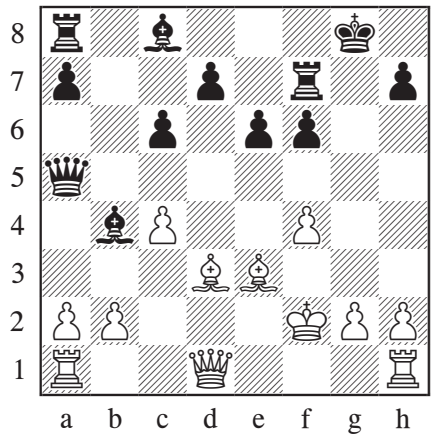
In Mekhitarian – Choma, Rio de Janeiro 2016, the position was not clear, but White's practical chances are better; Black is always one slip away from disaster, which is what happened in the game.

16.♗d3

One of White's ideas is ♕c2, hitting h7 while also preparing c4-c5 enclosing the b4-bishop.

16...♖f7

Almost universally played.



17.a3

The most direct of many options, preparing to gain space on the queenside while allowing ideal development with ♖e1.

Now that h7 is covered, 17.♕c2 can be comfortably met with 17...♗c5.

17...♗c5

A tough decision; by going to c5 Black provokes the rook to an excellent square on e3, when the black king is rather bare.

But instead 17...♗f8 is rather passive, although the black king will be grateful for the help. White has many interesting tries, with 18.♕f3!? remaining flexible with our rooks and pawns.

18.♖e1 ♗xe3†

Once again Black has various moves, but no equalizer.

18...♖g7 19.b4 ♗xe3† 20.♖xe3 ♕c7 21.g3 is similar to the game. Let's follow a few more moves of a high-class correspondence game.

21...d6 22.♗e2 ♖e7 23.♗g4 ♗d7 24.♕e2 ♖ae8 25.♗h5 ♖d8 26.♖d1 White had continuing pressure in Moll – Bennborn, email 2009, and Black could not hold the game.

Another option is 18...d5 19.b4 ♗xe3† 20.♖xe3 with a similar verdict; White is pressing.

19.♖xe3 ♖g7 20.♕c2 ♕c7!?

A tricky move, trying to provoke White into immediate action.

I suspect most humans would have chosen 20...♕h5 when Black remains under pressure after 21.♔g1.

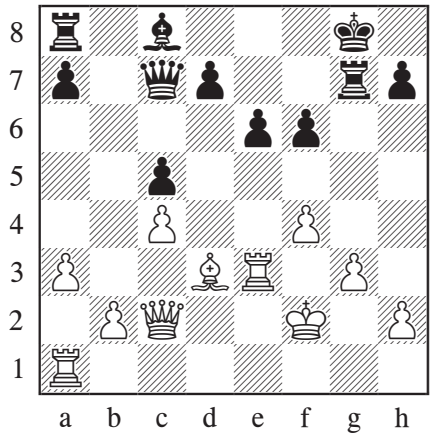
21.g3

White is happy to keep the style of the position unchanged.

The line White rejected was: 21.♗xh7† ♔h8 (of course not 21...♖xh7?? 22.♕g6† winning at once) 22.♖h3 ♕xf4† 23.♔g1 White may well still be better, but Black gains some activity. For example: 23...♕d4† 24.♔h1 ♖b8 25.♖d1 ♕e5

21...c5

I will not annotate the rest of the game in great depth, as we are well past opening preparation.



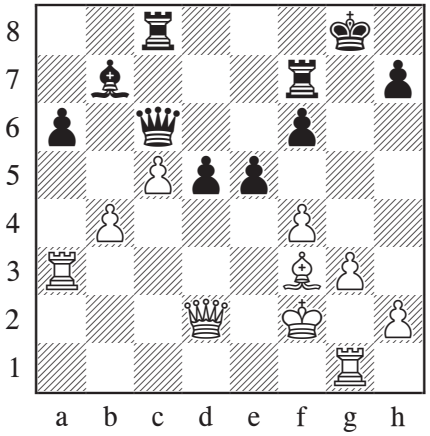
22.♕c3 ♖f7 23.♗e2 ♗b7 24.♖d1 ♖af8 25.♕d2 ♖b8 26.b4 cxb4 27.axb4 ♕c6 28.♖g1

It certainly does not feel as though White is making progress, but Black's problems are not over yet.

28...♖c8

This feels like a good moment for 28...d5 although White has various testing responses, including: 29.f5!?

29.♖a3 a6 30.c5 e5 31.♗f3 d5



32.♖d1!

Provoking the pawns onto light squares, where they are easily blockaded.

Instead 32.cxd6?! allows Black to escape after: 32...♕b6†=

32...e4 33.♗e2 ♖e7 34.♕d4 f5 35.♔g2 ♕g6 36.♖c1 h6 37.b5 axb5 38.♗xb5 ♕g7!

A fine cold-blooded move; now the c-pawn will cost Black a piece, but every other move was even worse.

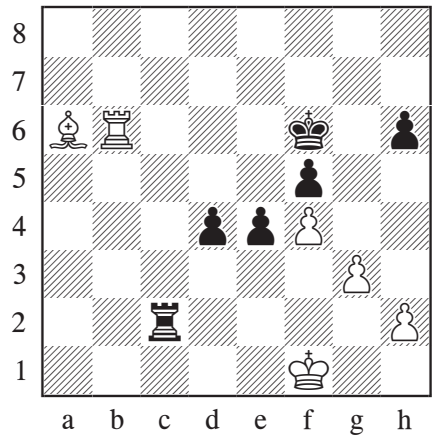
39.♕xg7† ♔xg7 40.c6 ♗a8 41.c7 ♗b7 42.♖a7 ♖cxc7 43.♖xc7 ♖xc7 44.♗a6 ♔f6 45.♖xb7±

Black's connected passed pawns are a fine resource, but they don't quite match a bishop, at least not without the possibility of time trouble or tactical blunders to help them. With all White's pawns on the same side of the board, it's not yet a clear win, but it's a tough defensive task.

45...♖c2† 46.♔f1

Instead 46.♔h3 looks tempting to me, but after 46...d4 47.♖d7 d3 it's still tough to see a winning plan, as the endgame with rook and three versus rook and two feels drawish.

46...d4 47.♖b6†



47...♔f7?

Making it easy for White.

47...♔g7 would have challenged White to demonstrate a winning plan; it's not obvious to me that there is one.

48.♖xh6+– d3 49.♔e1

The only winning move, but not so tough to spot.

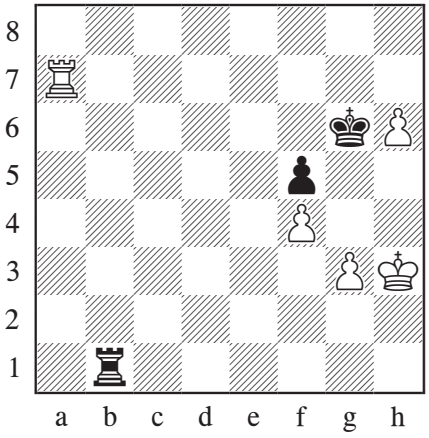
49...♔e7 50.h4 ♖g2 51.♖g6 ♖e2† 52.♔d1 e3 53.♖c6 ♖g2 54.♗xd3 ♖d2† 55.♔e1 ♖xd3 56.♔e2 ♖d2†

The pawn was dropping anyway, after say 56...♖a3 57.♖c5 ♔f6 58.♖e5.

57.♔xe3 ♖g2 58.♔f3 ♖h2

The ending is hopeless; drawing a rook ending two pawns down requires there to be something badly wrong with the pawns, and that's not the case here.

59.♖c1 ♔f7 60.♖e1 ♖a2 61.♖e2 ♖a6 62.♖e5 ♔g6 63.h5† ♔f6 64.♔g2 ♖a2† 65.♔h3 ♖b2 66.♖e8 ♔g7 67.♖e7† ♔f6 68.♖a7 ♖b1 69.h6 ♔g6



70.h7

Good enough, but every OTB player would have gone for 70.♖a6† ♔h7 71.♔h4, avoiding the need to calculate any variations.

70...♖b8

The line White had to be prepared for was 70...♖h1† 71.♔g2 ♖xh7 72.♖xh7 ♔xh7 but the pawn ending is of course winning after: 73.♔f3 ♔g6 74.♔e3 ♔f6 75.♔d4 ♔e6 76.♔c5+–

71.g4 ♖b3† 72.♔h4 ♖b8 73.gxf5† 1–0

Conclusion

The Four Knights tabiya is reached after 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6!? bxc6 7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘e4. In this position White has already made major gains – a beautiful knight and a cramping e5-pawn hitting a hole on d6 – so the onus is on Black to try to shake off the bind.

A) 8...♗b7!? used to be trendy until it was discovered that simply 9.♗e2! and then castling gives White a pleasant edge. This illustrates the point made above – if nothing dramatic happens to change the position after move 8, then White is happy.

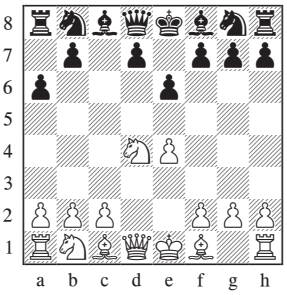
B) 8...f5 is another line whose popularity has faded. After 9.exf6 ♘xf6 10.♘d6† ♗xd6 11.♕xd6 many games have been played, but White's edge, with the bishop pair and better structure, is well established.

C) 8...♕a5† is met most simply by 9.c3 when White has better chances after both Black's main options, 9...♗a6 and 9...f5. In both lines, Black tends to have the weaker king, so it is generally in White's interest to keep the queens on.

D) 8...♕c7 is the main line and leads after 9.f4 to a vital branching point, with four main options, of which the last is the most important. D1) 9...f5 is a standard advance in the Four Knights, but this is a poor moment for it. D2) 9...♖b8 can be the prelude to a fascinating piece sacrifice, but, as we saw, a precise move order by White defangs it. D3) 9...♕a5† leads to markedly different play than the related 8...♕a5† line. The free addition of f2-f4 means White can play actively with 10.♗d2 ♕b6 11.♗d3, offering to sac the b2-pawn for superb compensation.

D4) 9...♕b6 is the absolute main line of the Four Knights and after 10.c4 we saw the two branches starting with 10...♘e3 11.♕d3! and 10...♗b4† 11.♔e2. The early play is forcing, so White should remember the move orders with care. But with that work done, White should face the Four Knights confidently, expecting to exit the opening with slightly the better chances.

Chapter 2

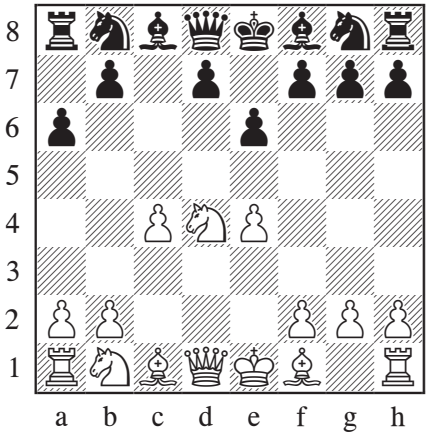


Kan

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4

A) 5...b6 47
B) 5...g6 48
C) 5...♘f6 6.♘c3 49
C1) 6...d6?! 7.♗e2 ♗e7 8.0–0 0–0 9.f4!? 50
C11) 9...♖e8 51
C12) 9...♕c7 53
C2) 6...♕c7 7.a3 55
C21) 7...♘xe4?! 8.♘xe4 ♕e5 9.♕c2! 56
C211) 9...♕xd4 56
C212) 9...f5 58
C22) 7...b6 8.♗e3 ♗b7 9.f3 62
C221) 9...♘c6 63
C222) 9...d6 65
C23) 7...♘c6 8.♗e3 69
C231) 8...b6 69
C232) 8...♗d6!? 71
C233) 8...♗e7 74
C3) 6...♗b4 7.♕d3!? 77
C31) 7...♗xc3†?! 78
C32) 7...d5 78
C33) 7...0–0 81
C34) 7...♕c7 82
C35) 7...d6 *Game 9* 83
C36) 7...♘c6 *Game 10* 87

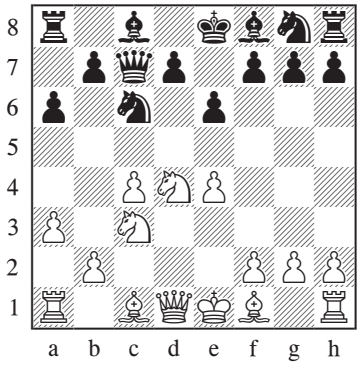
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4



One of the themes of our repertoire is that, given the choice between alternatives of roughly equal value, we will usually opt for a set-up with c2-c4. In the case of the Kan, the text move ranks well behind 5.♘c3 and 5.♗d3 in terms of popularity, but I believe it offers at least as many chances for an opening advantage.

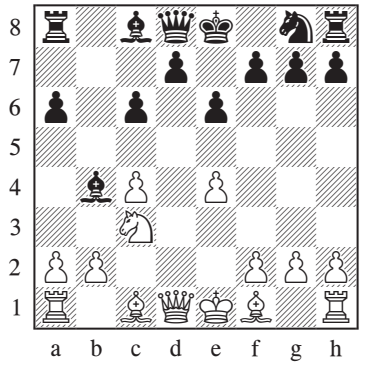
We will consider the sidelines **A) 5...b6** and **B) 5...g6**, before moving on to **C) 5...♘f6**, which is the main line by far. I also checked a few other oddities:

5...♕c7 has been a frequent choice but it almost always transposes to one of our main lines after a subsequent ...♘f6. After 6.♘c3 ♘c6 7.a3 I don't see any advantage to Black's chosen move order, for instance:

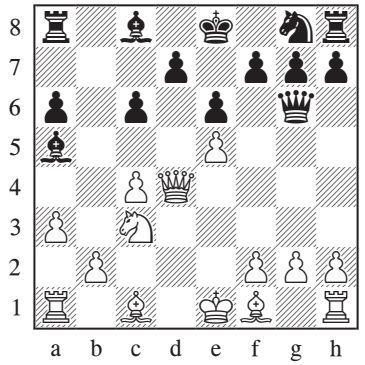


7...♘e5 (Black should prefer 7...♘f6, transposing to variation C23) 8.♗e3 ♘xc4? 9.♗xc4 ♕xc4 10.♖c1 and White is winning.

5...♘c6 6.♘c3 ♗b4 (6...♕c7 leads to the note above) 7.♘xc6 bxc6



8.♕d4! ♕f6 (8...♘f6 9.e5± was also no fun for Black in Sprotte – De Oliveira, Sao Bento do Sul 2013) 9.e5 ♕g6 (9...♕e7 occurred in Grabarczyk – Siebrecht, Germany 2013, when 10.a3!N ♗c5 11.♕g4 f5 12.♕g3± would have been strong) 10.a3 ♗a5 In Geenen – Marte, Charleroi 2013, White should have continued:



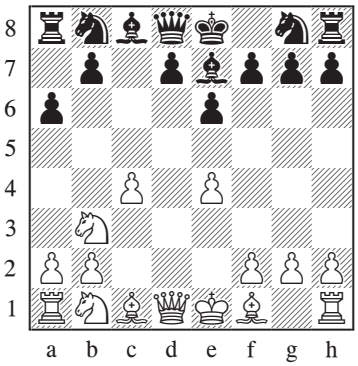
11.♗d2!N ♘e7 12.0–0–0 0–0 13.h4!± Starting an attack while exploiting Black's misplaced queen.

5...♗c5

This isn't a bad move, but White can reach a comfortable position with simple development.

6.♘b3 ♗e7

6...♗a7 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.♗e2 ♘f6 9.0–0 0–0 has been played in an engine game. No one has really played like this yet, so it's not that important. My choice from here would be 10.♗g5N±, setting up an unpleasant pin.

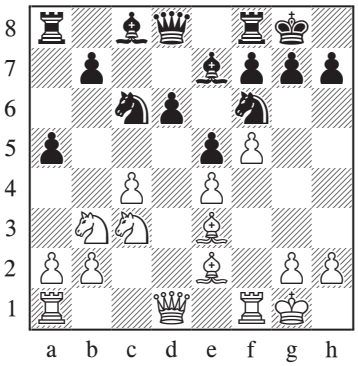


7.♘c3 d6 8.♗e2 ♘f6 9.0–0 0–0 10.♗e3 ♘c6 11.f4 e5

11...♕c7 12.♖c1 b6? 13.♘d5± gave White an easy advantage in Claisse – Ernouf, Fontenay le Fleury 2003.

12.f5 a5

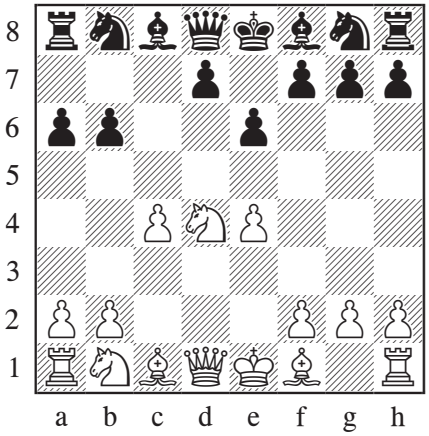
This position was reached in another engine game. I think the right way for White to continue is:



13.♖c1N ♗d7 14.♘a1! ♖c8 15.♘c2±

White simply improves his pieces while waiting to see how Black is going to deal with his obvious positional problems.

A) 5...b6



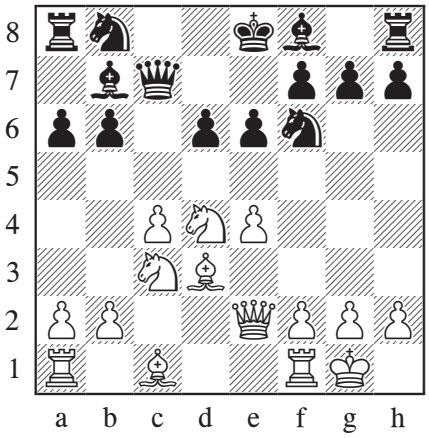
When you look at the statistics in the reference database, you will notice that this move gives Black a plus score. Don't let this bother you, as White has excellent prospects.

6.♘c3 ♗b7 7.♗d3!

We will often see the bishop go to e2 in this chapter. However, taking into account the early development of the bishop to b7, it is logical to give the e4-pawn extra support. A natural and popular continuation is:

7...♕c7 8.0–0 ♘f6 9.♕e2 d6

This position has arisen via several move orders, totalling over a hundred games in my database. Amazingly, I can present a stunning novelty:



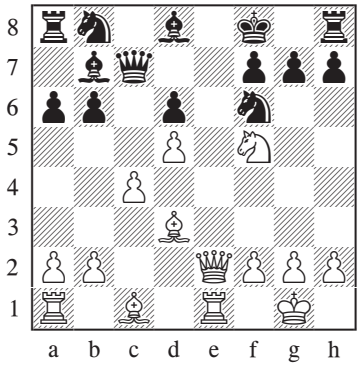
10.♘d5!!N

This sacrifice is too tempting to ignore.

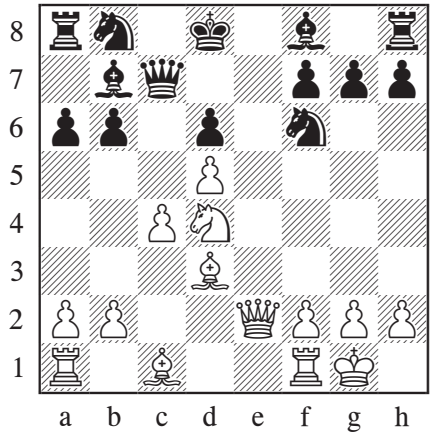
10...exd5 11.exd5† ♔d8

11...♕e7 12.♕f3± makes things easier for White.

11...♗e7 12.♘f5± is also nasty for Black, especially as 12...♔f8? loses immediately: 13.♖e1 ♗d8



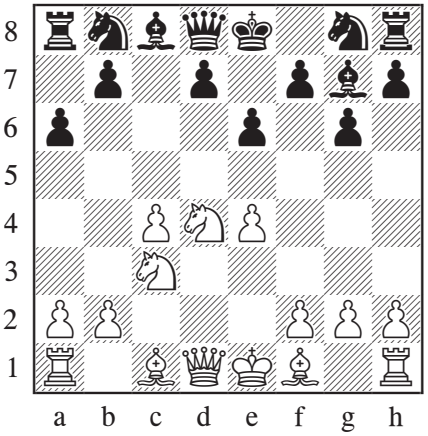
14.♗h6!! gxh6 15.♕e3+– and mate is near.



12.♖e1 ♘bd7 13.a4!⩲

White has a lasting initiative, and will develop his attack with moves like ♗f4, a4-a5, b2-b4 and so on. Black has an extra piece but he will not be able to use it for quite some time.

B) 5...g6 6.♘c3 ♗g7



Black resorts to a kingside fianchetto in several Kan lines, but here White is well placed to meet it.

7.♗e3 ♘e7 8.♕d2!

8.♗e2 0–0 9.♕d2 is also somewhat better for White, but it gives Black a chance to simplify matters: 9...d5 10.exd5 exd5 11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♕xd5 13.0–0 ♘d7 14.♖fd1 ♘e5 This was Bogner – Prosviriakov, Hastings 2014, when 15.♗h6N looks like the right way to maintain some initiative. Still, White's edge could easily evaporate.

8...♘bc6

I also considered 8...0–0, when 9.♖d1!N is an important measure to discourage the ...d5 push. Play may continue 9...♘bc6, when 10.h4!± looks rather unpleasant for Black.

9.♗e2 0–0 10.♘xc6!

This seems objectively strongest.

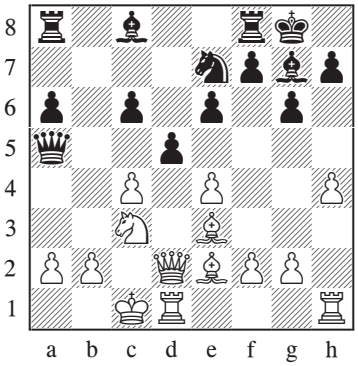
That said, some players may be attracted by the following possibility:

10.h4!?

This certainly looks like an interesting way to create problems for Black.

10...d5 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.0–0–0 ♕a5

12...♖e8N± looks like a better try, although I still prefer White's chances.

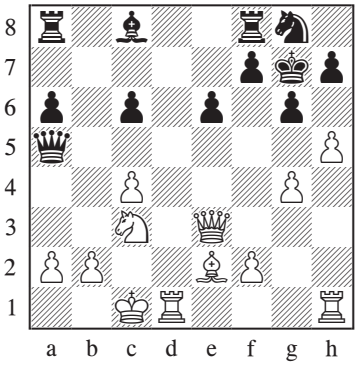


13.♗h6 dxe4?

After this Black is torn to pieces on the kingside.

13...♗xc3 was Black's best chance, although 14.♕xc3 ♕xc3† 15.bxc3 ♖e8 16.♗f3± reaches a rather unpleasant endgame for him.

14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.h5 ♘f5 16.g4 e3 17.♕d3 ♘e7 18.♕xe3 ♘g8



19.hxg6 fxg6 20.c5 ♕c7 21.♖d6 ♕f7 22.♖xc6 ♗b7 23.♕e5† ♘f6 24.♖c7 ♗xh1 25.g5+–

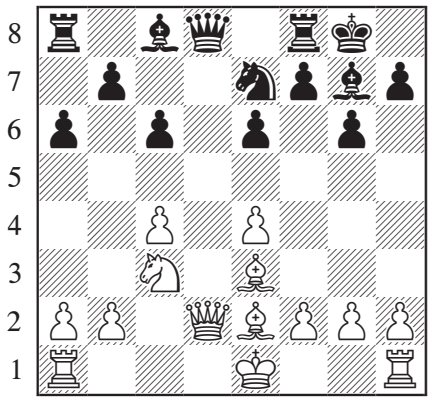
White won easily in Salokangas – Franssila, Tampere 1989.

10...dxc6

Black opted for 10...♘xc6 in B. Andersen – B. Petersen, Faxe 2015, when 11.c5N± would have established a nasty bind on the queenside.

10...bxc6 11.♕d6± is also unpleasant for Black.

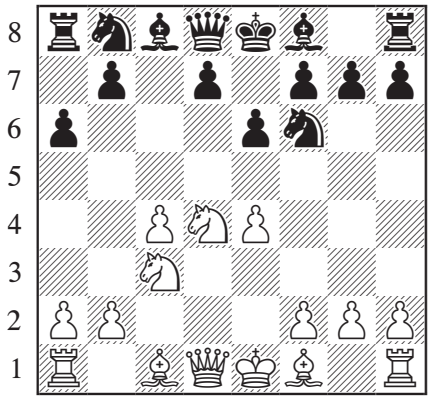
We have been following McKellar – Gray, San Francisco 2016. A simple improvement is:



11.♖d1!N ♕xd2† 12.♔xd2

Black finds himself in a dire situation, as his dark squares are too weak.

C) 5...♘f6 6.♘c3



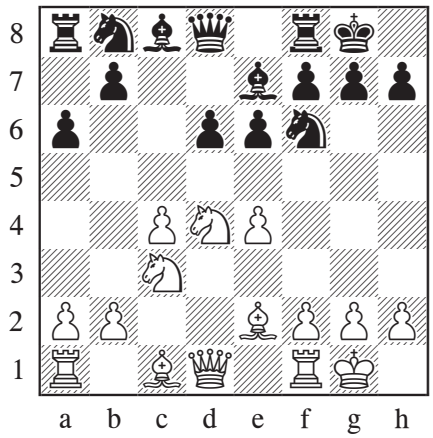
This is the main tabiya for the 5.c4 line. Black must deal with the threat of e4-e5 (since ...♕a5† is no longer available), so he almost always opts for one of **C1) 6...d6?!**, **C2) 6...♕c7** or **C3) 6...♗b4**.

C1) 6...d6?!

This move is not altogether bad, but it restricts the dark-squared bishop and gives White the freedom to build a powerful attacking position straight out of the opening.

7.♗e2 ♗e7 8.0–0 0–0

It is worth comparing this position to a well-known variation of the Taimanov, which occurs after 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘b5 (rather than 5.♘c3 as I recommend in Chapter 3) 5...d6 6.c4 ♘f6 7.♘1c3 a6 8.♘a3 ♗e7 9.♗e2 0–0. For a long time, this was one of White's foremost tries for an advantage against the Taimanov. White suffers from a misplaced knight on a3, but the reasoning behind it was that it was worth making this concession in order to provoke ...d6 and establish a space advantage with c2-c4. In the present variation, White enjoys those same benefits without having had to waste two tempos moving his knight to an inferior square, so his prospects are excellent.



9.f4!?

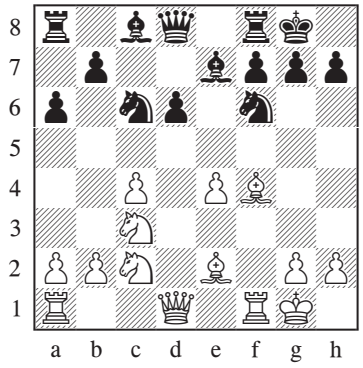
White has a great deal of freedom against Black's solid but passive set-up. Another decent approach involves solidifying the e4-point and aiming for queenside pressure, as seen after: 9.♗e3 b6 10.f3 ♗b7 11.♕d2 ♕c7 12.♖ac1 ♘bd7 13.♖fd1 ♖fc8 14.b4 ♖ab8 15.a3 ♘e5 16.♘a4± Karjakin – Yu Yangyi, Heixiazi 2015. White won this game and generally does well in this type of position. If this appeals to you, you can play it with minimal preparation, as there aren't really any forcing theoretical lines to remember.

Ultimately though, I believe it is even more promising to play actively on the kingside and in the centre. True, it takes a bit more work to understand the tactical motifs which may occur, but it's worth the effort – in many lines, White can achieve a substantial advantage with forceful play.

We will focus on **C11) 9...♖e8** and **C12) 9...♕c7**.

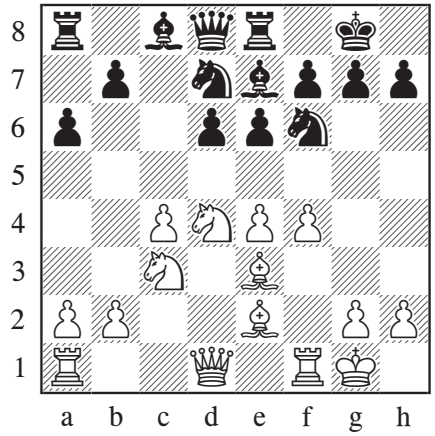
9...♘bd7 10.♗e3 will either transpose to one of the ...♘bd7 set-ups covered under the two main lines, or lead to a similar situation where White gets a fine game using the same ideas.

9...e5!? is playable, if rather committal. 10.♘c2 exf4 11.♗xf4 ♘c6 occurred in Borrell – Incze, corr. 1994. A normal continuation would be:



12.♕d2N ♗e6 13.♖ad1 ♖e8 14.b3± White can strengthen his position with ♘e3, while Black will find it hard to create counterplay.

C11) 9...♖e8 10.♗e3 ♘bd7



11.♕e1!

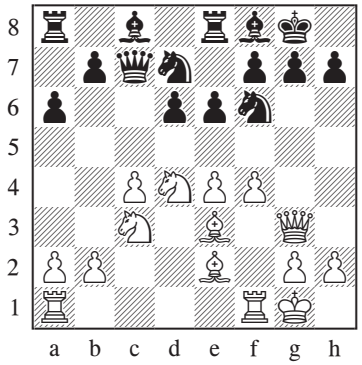
The queen will be perfectly placed on g3, menacing the black king and supporting the e4-e5 push.

11...♕c7 12.♕g3 ♖b8

Here are some other lines which demonstrate White's extensive resources.

12...♗f8

In Nunn – Szmetan, Biel 1982, White played 12.♖ad1 and stood better, but he missed something even stronger.



13.♘f3!N ♘c5

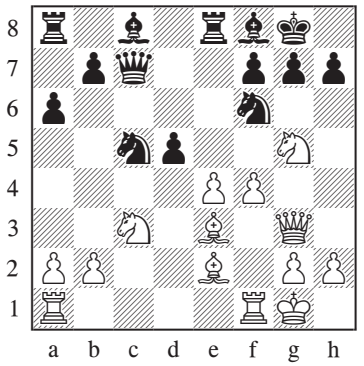
Black seems to be ready to meet e4-e5, but White's next move creates huge problems for him.

14.♘g5! d5

14...h6 15.e5 ♘h7 16.♘xh7 ♔xh7 17.♖ad1+– gives White a decisive initiative.

The engines suggest the text as Black's best try, but White keeps up the pressure after:

15.cxd5 exd5



16.♖ac1! h6

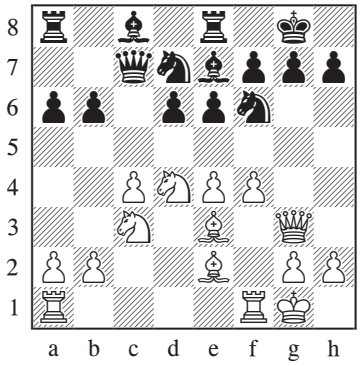
16...dxe4? runs into 17.♘a4 b6 18.b4 ♕c6 19.♗d1 and White wins a piece.

17.e5! hxg5 18.exf6 ♕d6 19.♖fd1±

Another logical try is:

12...b6

I only found one game from here, Kast – Heinemann, Oberhof 2010. White's play can be improved with:



13.♗f3!N

Once again, White just has to choose the right way to threaten e4-e5.

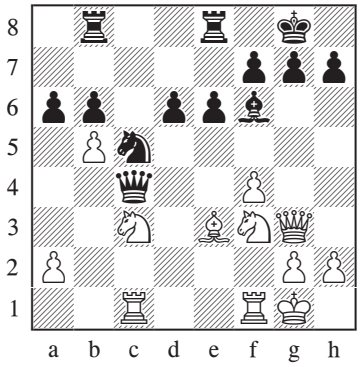
13...♖b8

13...♗b7? is impossible as 14.e5! wins a piece.

14.♖ac1 ♗b7 15.b4!±

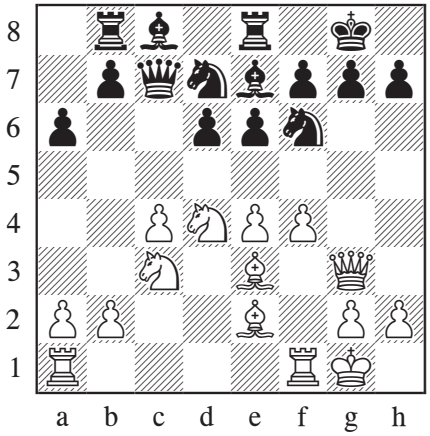
White has a promising position after preventing ...♘c5. The critical line continues: 15...♕xc4 16.b5! ♘c5 17.e5 ♗xf3 18.exf6 ♗xf6 19.♘xf3±

Black does not have enough compensation for the missing piece. An important tactical point is:



19...♗xc3? 20.♖xc3! ♕xc3 21.♗d4

And White wins.



13.♖ad1!N

Improving on 13.♔h1? b6 14.♖ad1 as played in Nunn – Sunye Neto, Wijk aan Zee 1982.

I can vaguely remember reading in John Nunn's xenophobic-sounding work from the 1980s, *Beating the Sicilian*, that White should move his king to h1 when the black queen goes to c7 in such positions. However, in this instance it merely loses a tempo without adding any value to White's position. White went on to win the above game in good style, but Black's play could have been improved. White's advantage is much more significant when he avoids wasting time on the unnecessary king move.

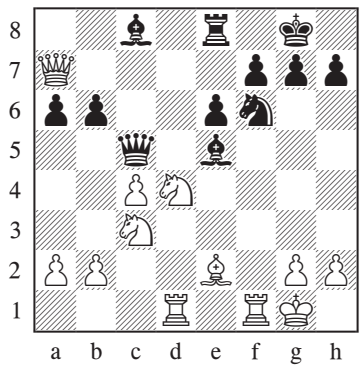
13...b6

13...♘c5 14.♗f3± hardly seems like an improvement for Black.

After the text move, White can utilize the saved tempo and strike immediately with:

14.e5! dxe5 15.fxe5 ♘xe5

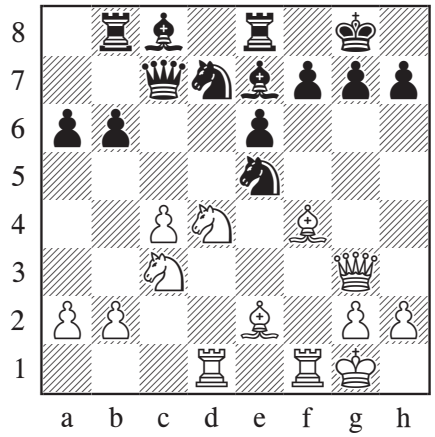
15...♕xe5 is not too difficult to refute. 16.♗f4 ♕c5 17.♗xb8 ♘xb8 18.♕xb8 ♗d6 (18...e5 19.♖xf6 ♗xf6 20.♘e4 wins) 19.♕a7 ♗e5 Black seems to be staying in the game, but White can fatally weaken his kingside with:



20.♔h1 ♗xd4 21.♘e4! ♕e5 22.♘xf6† gxf6 23.♗h5! ♖f8 24.♖f3+– Black is material down and his king is too exposed.

16.♗f4 ♘fd7

16...♗d6 runs into 17.♘b3! and White wins a piece.

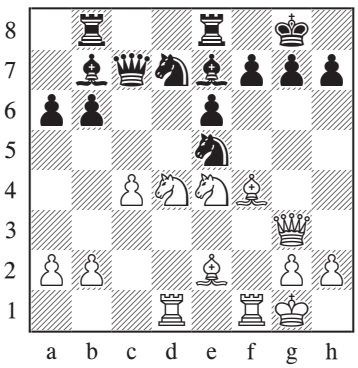


17.♘e4

White has a decisive initiative, as the following lines demonstrate. Your goal here should not be to memorize every detail, but rather to notice the main tactical themes and combinations in order to add them to your mental library.

17...g6

17...♗b7 allows an immediate breakthrough:



18.♘xe6!! fxe6 19.♖xd7 ♕xd7 20.♗xe5 ♗d8 (20...g6 21.♗c3!) 21.♖d1 ♕e7 22.♘f6† and White wins.

18.♗g4!

A great idea, setting up possible sacrifices on e6.

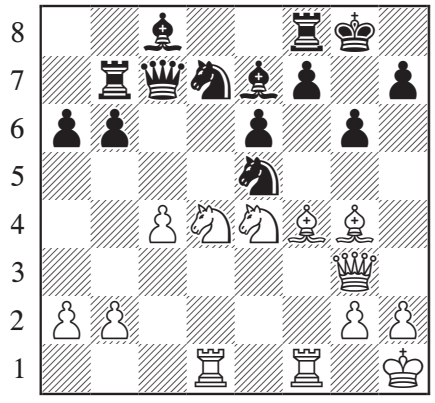
18...♖b7

18...♕b7 19.♘f2! ♘xg4 20.♘xg4 also gives White a winning attack.

19.♔h1!

On this occasion, it is useful to tuck the king out of harm's way before breaking through.

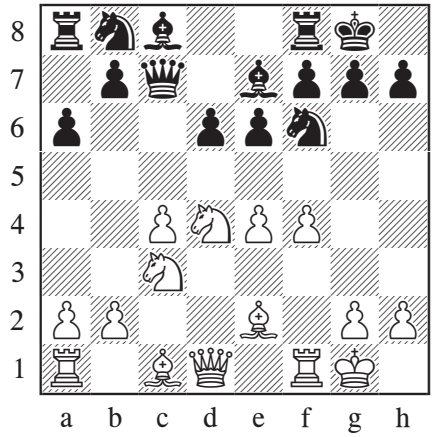
19...♖f8



20.♘xe6! fxe6 21.♗xe6† ♔h8 22.♘g5+–

The black position is collapsing under the many threats.

C12) 9...♕c7



This looks similar to the previous line, but it's more popular and can lead to some different

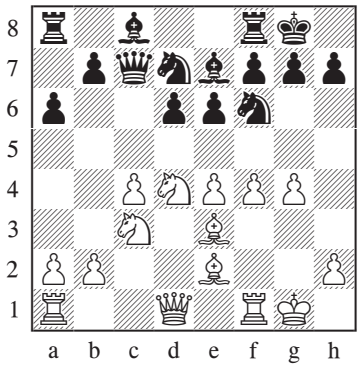
set-ups, especially involving the knight going to c6 rather than d7.

10.♗e3 ♘c6

Naturally I checked some other possibilities as well:

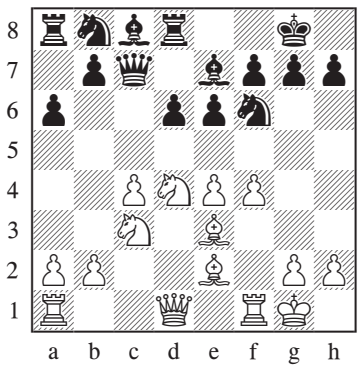
10...♖e8 11.♕e1 ♗f8 could be handled in much the same way as variation C11 with 12.♕g3, but I find 12.g4!N an even more attractive way of meeting Black's passive set-up.

10...♘bd7 11.g4! is crude but effective, for instance:

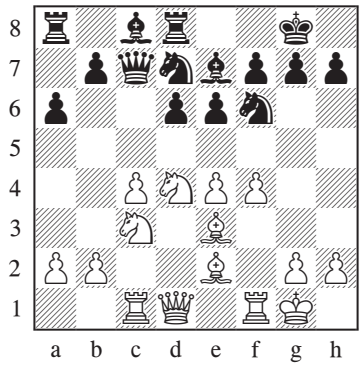


11...♖d8 (11...♘c5 12.♗f3 e5 13.♘f5 ♗xf5 14.exf5 is also great for White) 12.g5 ♘e8 13.♖c1 White had a huge advantage in Erwich – Mullon, Belgium 2008.

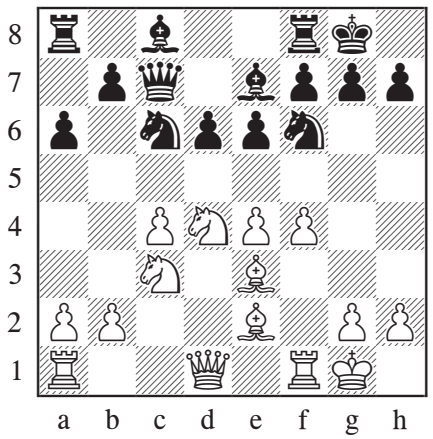
10...♖d8



11.♖c1 (I also like 11.g4!?N d5 12.cxd5 exd5 13.e5 ♘e4 14.♖c1 ♘xc3 15.♖xc3 with a pleasant advantage. King safety is not a concern, as Black is not active enough to create any threats.) 11...♘bd7?! (11...♘c6N± should be preferred)



12.g4! This is even stronger now. 12...♗f8 (12...♘c5 13.♗f3 e5 14.♘f5 ♗xf5 15.exf5 e4 16.♗g2±) 13.g5 ♘e8 14.f5 ♘e5 15.b3 ♕d7 16.♕e1 ♘c7 17.♕g3 ♘c6 18.g6 White had an overwhelming attack in Prill – Adler, Ottenau 2005.

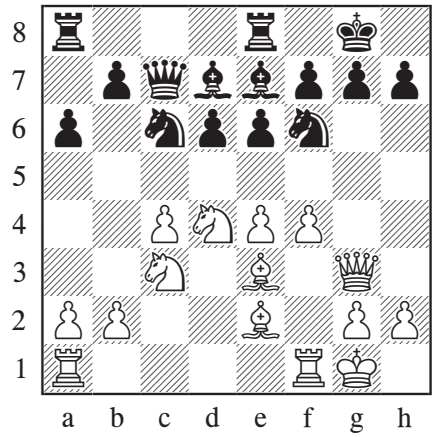


11.♕e1! ♗d7 12.♕g3±

Just as in the earlier variation C11, the queen is superbly placed on the g3-square. White has much the easier game and has achieved a huge score from this position. Let me show you an interesting discovery I made.

12...♖fe8?

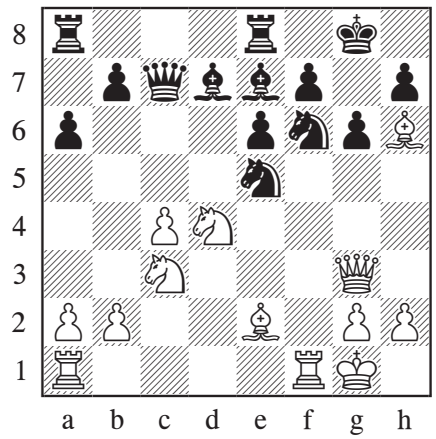
This was played in Akhrouf – Maa El Ainin, Rabat 2001, and a few subsequent games. White has good prospects after any sensible move, but he can actually gain a near-decisive advantage with the following forcing continuation.



13.e5!!N dxe5 14.fxe5 ♘xe5

14...♕xe5 drops a piece to 15.♘xc6 ♕xg3 16.♘xe7†.

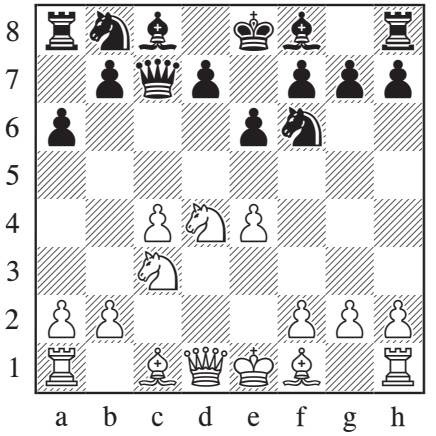
15.♗h6! g6



16.♗f4 ♗d6 17.♖ad1+–

Black will lose material in the near future.

C2) 6...♕c7



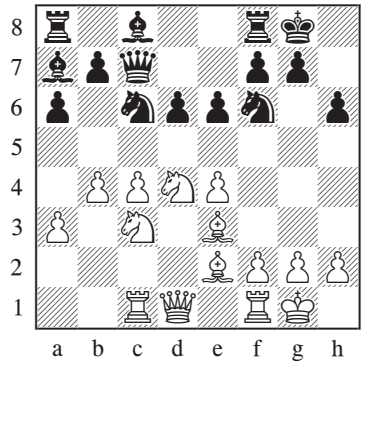
This has been Black's most popular choice so far, and is fully in keeping with the flexible character of the Kan.

7.a3

Many other moves have been tried but I think it's worth investing a tempo to prevent ...♗b4.

We will start by checking **C21) 7...♘xe4?!**, which is ambitious but objectively dubious, before moving on to the sounder options of **C22) 7...b6** and **C23) 7...♘c6**.

7...♗c5 has been played a few times but after 8.♗e3 0–0 9.b4 ♗a7 10.♖c1 Black's bishop just seems misplaced. A good example continued: 8...♘c6 11.♗e2 d6 12.0–0± h6?!



13.♘d5! exd5 14.cxd5 ♘xe4 15.dxc6 d5 Now in Dolana – Manolache, Alba Iulia 2016, the improvement 16.b5!?N bxc6 17.♖xc6 ♕d8 18.bxa6 ♗d7 19.♖c1 would have been clearly better for White.

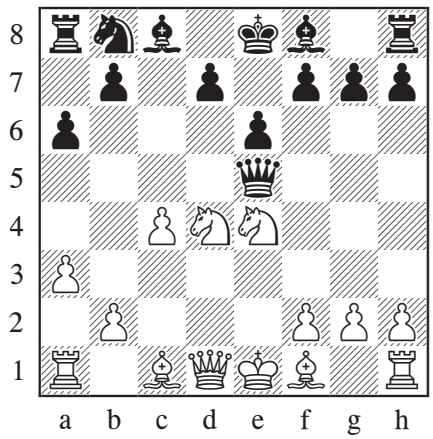
C21) 7...♘xe4?!

This was once recommended by Taimanov but it brings great danger for Black, as he grabs a pawn but falls too far behind in development.

8.♘xe4

8.♘xe6 is given as slightly better for White by Emms, but after 8...dxe6 9.♘xe4 ♗e7 I think Black should be fine.

8...♕e5



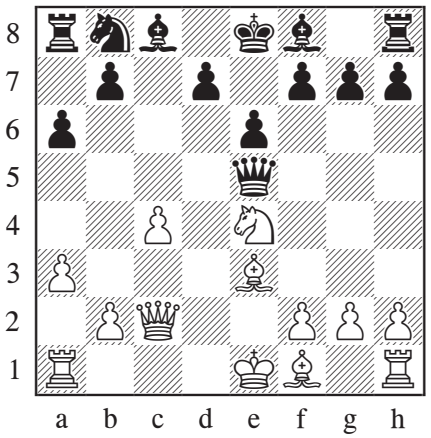
9.♕c2!

White has a few ways to get decent compensation for the pawn. However, after analysing the position deeply, I concluded that the text move is the only way to get an advantage against the most stubborn defence.

9.♗d3 ♕xd4 10.0–0 is the main alternative. Here are just a few brief lines I analysed: 10...f5 11.♗e3 (11.♘c3!? ♗e7 12.♗e3 ♕f6 13.♘a4 is the best attempt at an advantage, but matters are more complicated here than in my recommended line) 11...♕xb2 12.♖b1 ♕e5 13.f4 ♕c7 (13...♕a5!?) 14.♗b6 ♕c6 15.♖e1 In Swinkels – Martens, Netherlands 2012, the best defence would have been 15...♗xa3!?N 16.♕h5† g6 17.♕h6 ♗f8 18.♕h4 ♗e7, when I was unable to find anything more than a draw by repetition.

Black now has a choice between **C211) 9...♕xd4** and **C212) 9...f5**.

C211) 9...♕xd4 10.♗e3 ♕e5



11.c5!

An excellent move, clamping down on the dark squares and inhibiting the development of Black's queenside pieces. Given the chance, White will follow up with f2-f4 and 0–0–0 in one order or another. A secondary plan is ♘d2-c4, aiming at the hole on b6.

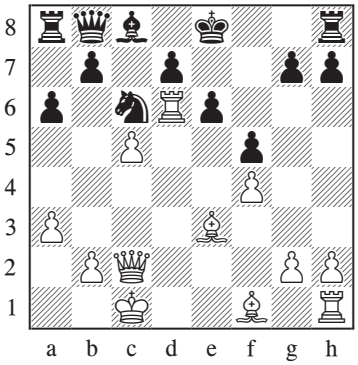
It is worth noting that the immediate 11.f4?! allowed the disruptive 11...♕a5†! 12.♔f2 f5 13.b4 ♕c7 when White was unable to find enough compensation in Khismatullin – Pantsulaia, Riyadh (blitz) 2017.

11...f5

This is virtually forced. If Black does not drive the knight away from the centre, he will be smothered on the dark squares.

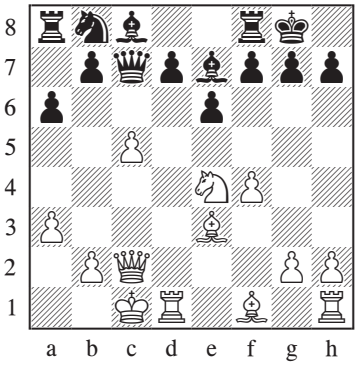
11...♕c7 12.♕d2 ♘c6 13.♖d1 is a positional disaster for Black. For instance, 13...♗e7 14.♗e2 0–0 15.♘d6 ♗xd6 16.♕xd6± and Black's extra pawn hardly matters, as he cannot get his pieces out.

Similarly, after 11...♘c6 12.f4 ♕b8 13.0–0–0 f5 14.♘d6† ♗xd6 15.♖xd6 White is all over his opponent. For example:

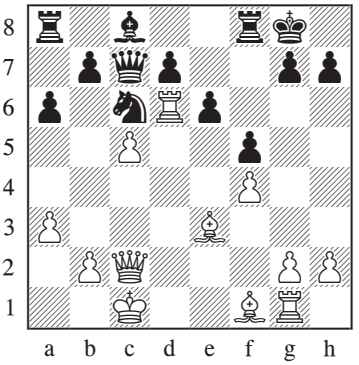


15...b6 16.♖xc6! dxc6 17.cxb6 White dominates the dark squares and has great play for the sacrificed exchange.

A final alternative is:
11...♗e7 12.f4 ♕c7 13.0–0–0 0–0

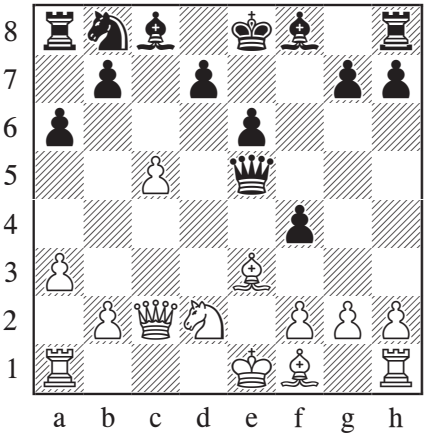


14.♖g1!?
It is worth noting that 14.g4? would be a mistake, as 14...b6! 15.cxb6 ♕xc2† 16.♔xc2 ♗b7 offers Black counterplay and perhaps even the advantage.
However, the simple 14.♘d6 leads to a pleasant edge as well.
14...f5
The following line shows White's attacking potential: 14...♖d8 15.g4 b6!? 16.g5!? bxc5? 17.♘f6† ♗xf6 18.gxf6 g6 19.h4 and Black is dead lost.
15.♘d6 ♗xd6 16.♖xd6 ♘c6
16...b5 17.g4 also gives White a big attack.



17.g4 ♘e7 18.♗d3 g6 19.h4±
Black will do well to survive the attack.

12.♘d2 f4

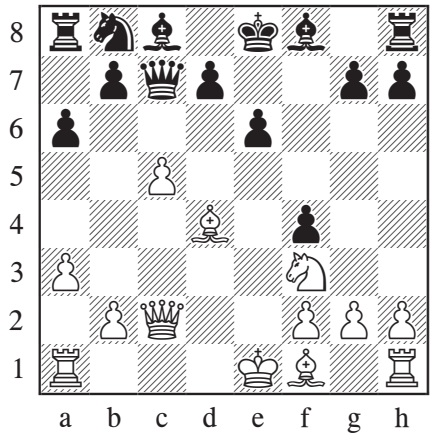


13.♘f3!N
13.♘c4 ♕f6 14.♘b6?! fxe3 15.fxe3 ♕e5!∓ turned out well for Black in Zambrana – D. Cramling, Santos 2008.

The text move is a strong novelty, although not a difficult one when you know what happened in the above game.

13...♕c7 14.♗d4

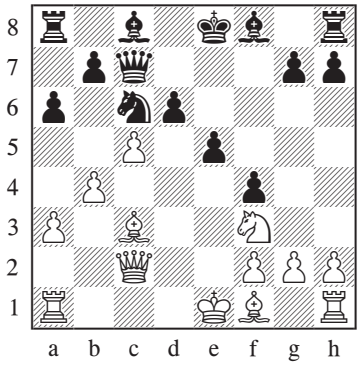
White has more than enough compensation for the pawn, as the following lines demonstrate.



14...d5

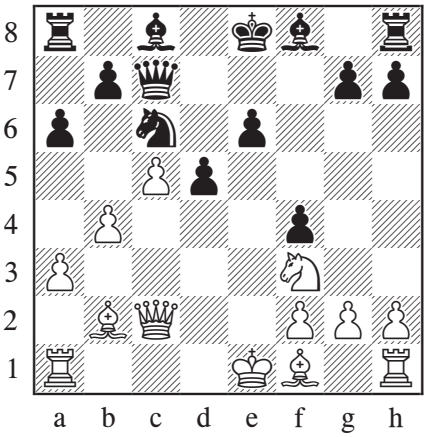
14...b6 runs into 15.♗d3 bxc5 16.♗xh7 d6 17.♗c3 and Black's king is in trouble.

14...♘c6 15.♗c3 e5 16.b4 d6 is also dangerous for Black after:



17.♗c4!⩱ White increases his lead in development while ensuring that Black's king will not escape to the kingside. A sample continuation is 17...♗d7 18.0–0 0–0–0 19.a4! dxc5 20.b5 ♘d4 21.♗xd4 cxd4 22.bxa6 with a deadly attack.

15.b4 ♘c6 16.♗b2⩲

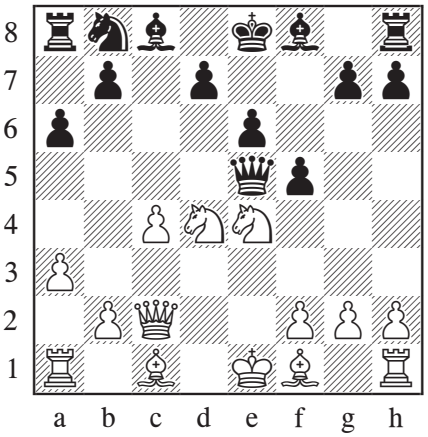


White has virulent compensation and will improve his position with ♖d1, ♗d3 and so on. An important tactical point is:

16...e5?! 17.♘xe5! ♘xe5 18.♕e2

With a clear advantage for White.

C212) 9...f5



This is more complex and critical than the previous variation.

10.♗e3!

I find this the most convincing solution.

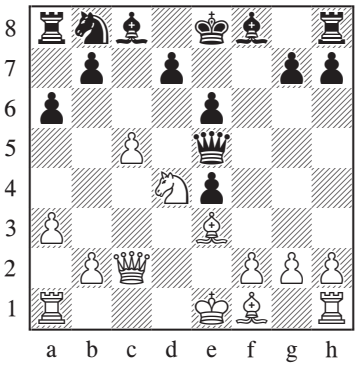
10.♘e2 ♕xe4!N (only 10...fxe4 has been played so far) 11.♕xe4 fxe4 12.♘c3 was evaluated as slightly better for White by De la Villa, but after 12...♗e7 (12...b5!? is interesting but riskier for Black) 13.♘xe4 d5 White's advantage is minimal.

10...♕xe4

This seems most logical.

Nevertheless, I still find it important to check the alternative:

10...fxe4N 11.c5!



In this line we are constantly playing against the bishop on c8, which means restraining the pawns on b7 and d7. Advancing either pawn here will cause a serious weakening of Black's position.

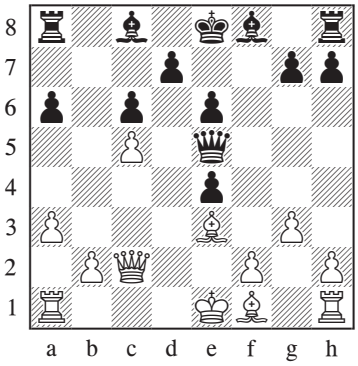
11...♘c6

I cannot see any other sensible moves.

11...♕xc5? 12.♕xc5 ♗xc5 loses a piece to 13.♖c1.

12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.g3

We could easily stop here and say that White has a positional advantage, as he will pick up the pawn on e4 and have a better structure. However, it is worth checking Black's possible attempts to free himself.



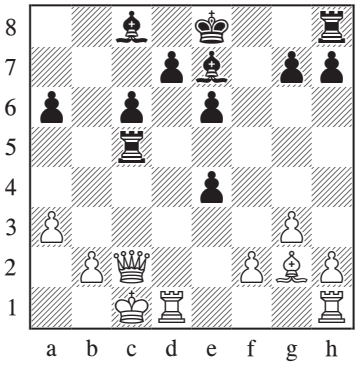
13...♖b8 14.0–0–0 ♗e7 15.♗g2 ♖b5 16.♗d4!

This is an important detail.

16...♕xc5

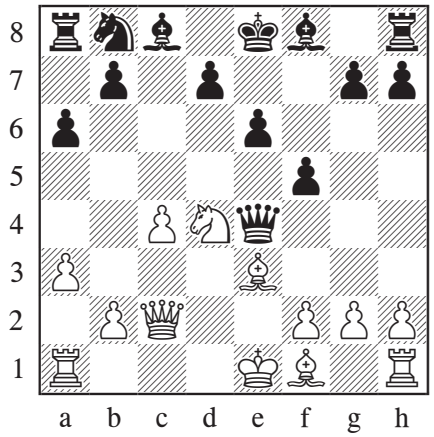
16...♕h5 17.♗xe4 is better for White on account of 17...♗xc5?! 18.a4! ♖a5 19.♗c3±.

17.♗xc5 ♖xc5



18.♗xe4 d5 19.♔b1! ♖xc2 20.♗xc2±

With only one pawn for the exchange, Black faces a long struggle for a draw. Some engines says he is close to equal, but they fail to see beyond a certain horizon. White will most likely spend the next ten to fifteen moves coordinating his forces, and will only then look to make inroads.



11.♗d3!

White should sacrifice a second pawn in order to increase his lead in development.

The positional approach is less successful here: 11.♕xe4 fxe4 12.c5 ♘c6 (12...♗xc5? 13.♖c1 would drop a piece; even with three pawns for it, Black has no real survival chances) 13.♘b3 ♘e7! Black has decent counterplay.

11...♕xg2 12.0–0–0

At this point, engines do not understand that White has a big advantage. However, when you play some moves and give them time to think, you will see the evaluation shift.

12...♘c6

I also considered:

12...♕h3 13.♘xf5!

An excellent move, with the following justification:

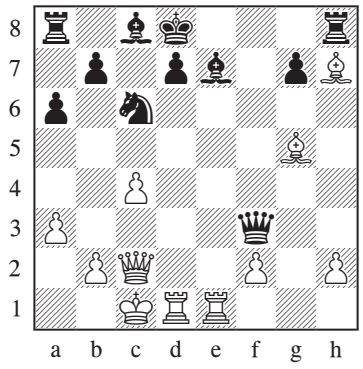
13...exf5?

Black should instead settle for 13...♘c6 and be prepared to suffer for a long time.

The text move leaves Black's king too exposed, with his undeveloped pieces unable to assist in the defence.

14.♗xf5 ♕f3 15.♖he1 ♘c6 16.♗g5† ♗e7 17.♗xh7 ♔d8

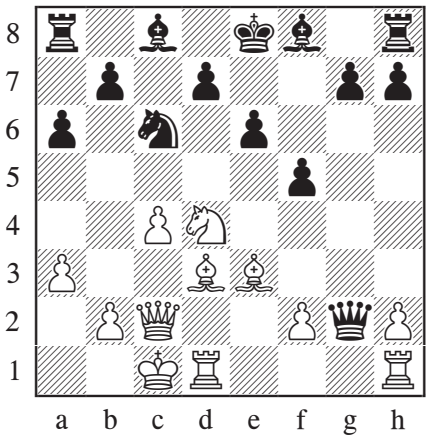
There are other moves, but none that hold.



18.♖xe7! ♘xe7 19.♖e1

White's attack should be winning with accurate play.

Up to this point we have been following a game where White was playing well, but here an improvement is needed.



13.♖hg1!N

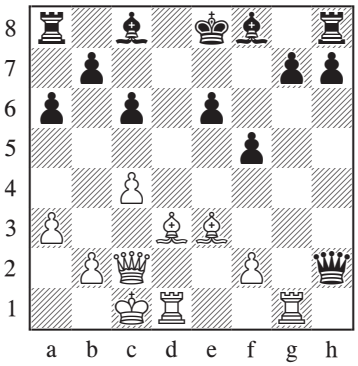
Bringing yet another piece into play.

13.h4? led to an eventual win for White after some further inaccuracies on both sides in Guerra Costa – Perez Fungueiro, Pontevedra 2004. White certainly has some initiative for the two pawns here; however, instead of 13...♘xd4 14.♗xd4, when White's bishop became more active, I think Black should have continued 13...♕g6!?N followed by ...♕f7 with unclear play.

13...♕h3

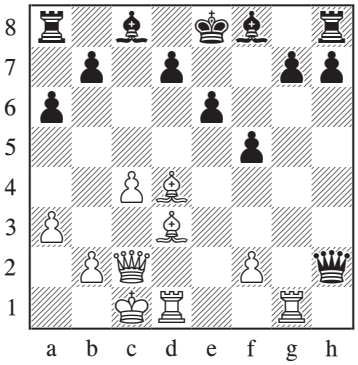
Black can also capture the h2-pawn of course. There are two such possibilities:

13...♕xh2 14.♘xc6 dxc6 and now an accurate move is needed:



15.♗e2! Threatening ♖h1 followed by ♗h5†, as well as ♕d2. 15...g6 16.♕c3 ♖g8 17.♕a5 ♕b8 18.♖h1! h6 19.♗xh6 ♗e7 20.♗e3± Black will not be able to get his queenside pieces into the game.

13...♘xd4 14.♗xd4 ♕xh2 runs into a nice idea:

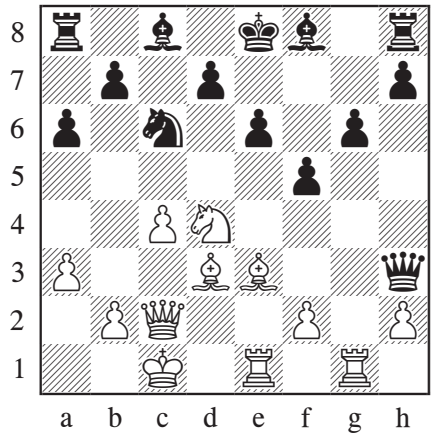


15.♕d2! Threatening, among other things, to take on g7 without allowing a check on h6. White has a huge lead in development and a great initiative for the three pawns. The game goes on, but in a practical game Black's chances of surviving the middlegame would be slim.

14.♖de1±

White has more than enough compensation, as will be confirmed by a strong engine, if given sufficient thinking time. Here is a nice illustrative line.

14...g6



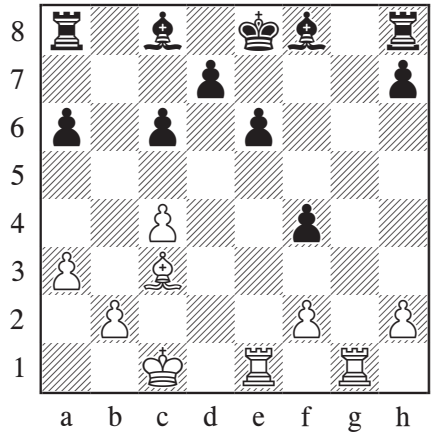
15.♗xf5!! gxf5

After 15...exf5 16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.♕b3 Black has no way to avoid a deadly check.

16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.♕c3

White looks to be completely winning, but the engine comes up with an absurd-looking way to stay in the game.

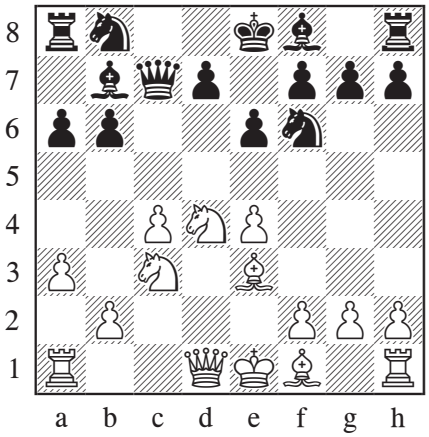
17...f4!? 18.♗d2 ♕xc3† 19.♗xc3



19...♗b4!? 20.♗xb4 a5 21.♗d6

Despite the machine's defensive heroics, White keeps a massive advantage in the ending and should win with good technique.

C22) 7...b6 8.♗e3 ♗b7



This time Black goes for safety with some version of a Hedgehog formation.

9.f3

In variation A at the start of the chapter, I suggested putting the bishop on d3 in response to an early ...♗b7. In this instance, however, 9.♗d3?! is not as good, for more than one reason. First of all, 9...♘c6 gives White more to think about than in our main line below, due to possibilities such as ...♗c5 or ...♘e5. Secondly, Black could switch to a ...♘bd7 Hedgehog set-up, where the bishop is not so well placed on d3. It blocks the d-file, making the ...d5 break easier to accomplish, and might also be a target for ...♘c5 or ...♘e5.

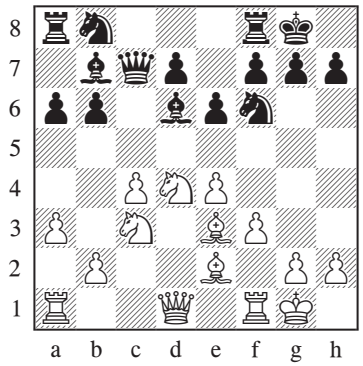
After the text move, Black has to make an important decision regarding the development of the b8-knight. We will analyse **C221) 9...♘c6** and **C222) 9...d6**, with the latter preparing to develop the knight to d7.

9...♗e7 10.♗e2

This is likely to transpose to one of the two main lines after a subsequent ...♘c6 or ...d6; occasionally, however, Black tries to get creative.

10...0–0 11.0–0 ♗d6?!

Losing a tempo with the bishop is too optimistic. It turns out that White can ignore the threat to the h2-pawn.



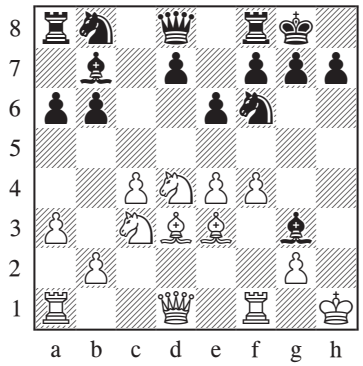
12.♔h1! ♗xh2 13.f4 ♗g3 14.♗d3

Black's extra pawn comes at a heavy price, as his bishop is short of squares and White will gain a lot of time to start an attack.

14...♕d8

14...g6 is well met by 15.♖f3 ♘h5 16.♘de2 ♗h4 17.g4!N (17.♖h3!? ♗e7 18.♖xh5 gxh5 19.♘g3 gave White a dangerous attack in Havasi – C. Horvath, Zalakaros 2015, but the text move is simpler) 17...♘g7 18.♖h3 followed by ♕g1 and White has a huge initiative for a pawn.

After the text move, we should look to improve over Dambaev – Khantuev, Ulan Ude 2014, as follows:



15.♔g1!N

This is the most convenient way to avoid ...♘xe4 (or some other knight move) threatening ...♕h4† and mate.

15...e5

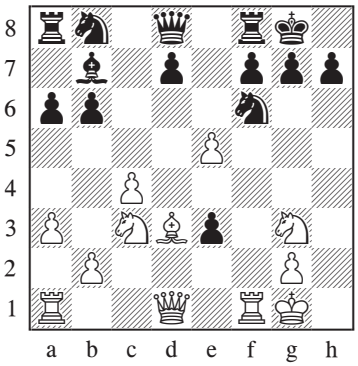
15...♗h4 16.♕f3 gives White fantastic attacking chances.

15...g6 16.♖f3 ♘h5 17.♘de2±

16.♘f5 exf4

Or 16...♗xf4 17.♗xf4 exf4 18.e5 ♘e8 19.♕h5+– and White's attack decides.

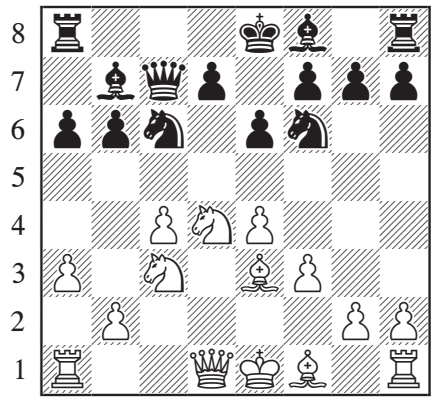
17.♘xg3 fxe3 18.e5



18...♕c7 19.exf6 ♕xg3 20.♗e4!±

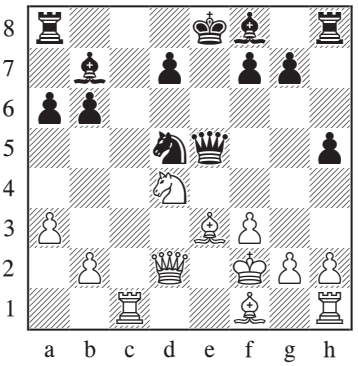
The game is not yet over, but Black is under heavy pressure.

C221) 9...♘c6



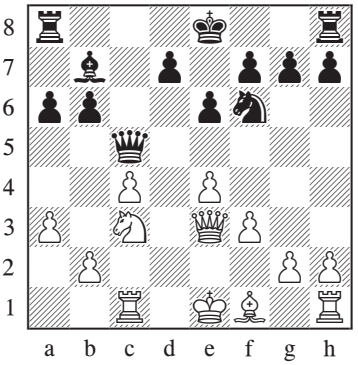
10.♖c1 ♘e5

10...h5? was refuted in the following game: 11.♘d5! exd5 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.exd5 ♕e5 14.♔f2 ♘e7 15.♕d2 ♘xd5



16.♗g5 ♘e7 17.♗c4 f6 18.♗f4 ♕a5 19.b4 ♕a4 20.♗b3 ♕xa3 21.♖a1 1–0 Gelfand – Ponomariov, Khanty-Mansiysk (blitz) 2009.

10...♘xd4 is a more sensible way to play, but at the same time rather uninspiring for Black, as he will soon find himself in a slightly worse position without much counterplay. 11.♕xd4 ♗c5 12.♕d2 ♗xe3 13.♕xe3 ♕c5



This occurred in Ganguly – Kamsky, Philadelphia 2005, and now 14.♕xc5!?N bxc5 15.e5± would have given White an enduring edge.

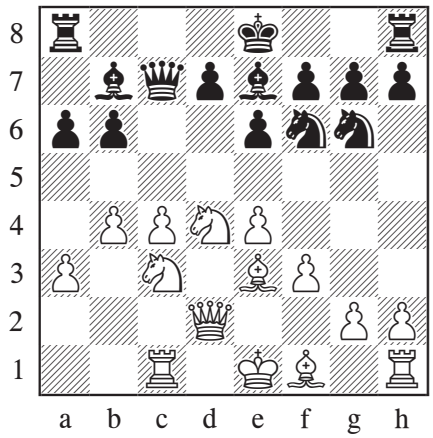
11.b4 ♘g6

11...♖c8 12.♘a4 d6 13.♗e2 ♗e7 14.0–0 leads to similar play.

12.♕d2

This stops any nonsense connected with ...♘f4.

12...♗e7



13.♘b3!N

White's plan for the next few moves is to attack the b6-pawn, and I believe this is the most accurate move order. We will aim to transpose to an existing game, while reducing Black's options.

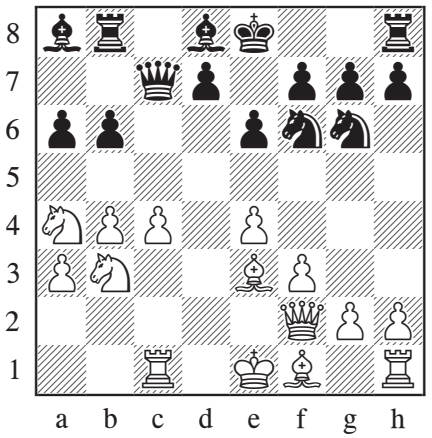
The game continued 13.♘a4 ♖b8 (13...d6? 14.♘xb6 ♕xb6 15.♘xe6+– and 13...0–0 14.♘b3± are simply bad for Black) 14.♘b3 and now 14...♗c6!?N (the game continued 14...♗a8 15.♕f2 ♗d8, reaching our target position) 15.b5 ♗xe4! 16.fxe4 ♗xa3 would have led to complications which we may as well avoid.

13...♖b8 14.♕f2 ♗a8

14...♗c6?! 15.c5 b5 16.♘d4± is excellent for White.

15.♘a4 ♗d8

This looks awkward but Black has no other way to defend b6. We have now transposed to the desired game, which we will follow for a few more moves before improving.



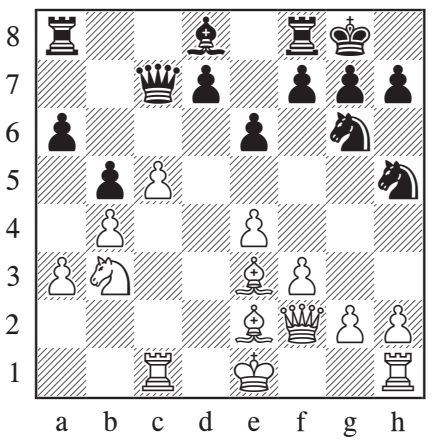
16.c5

It is also worth considering 16.♘xb6!? ♖xb6 17.♗xb6 ♕xb6 18.♕xb6 ♗xb6 19.c5 ♗c7 20.♗xa6 when White has clearly better chances with his two queenside pawns; the only real question is the extent of his advantage, as Black has some chances for counterplay with his active pieces.

The text move leads to a safe edge in a more stable type of position.

16...b5 17.♘b6 0–0 18.♘xa8 ♖xa8 19.♗e2 ♘h5

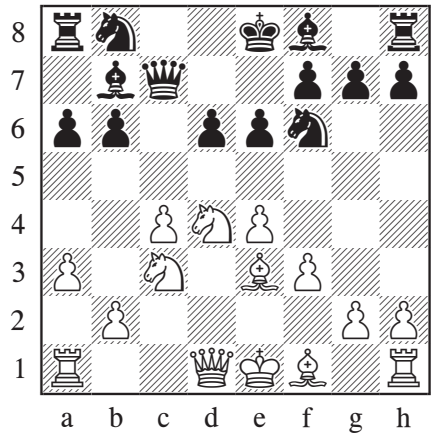
Now a simple improvement is:



20.g3!N

With better chances for White, as pointed out by Marin in *Chess Informant* 103. (The game continued 20.0–0?! ♗h4! 21.g3 ♘xg3! 22.hxg3 ♗xg3 23.♕g2 ♘f4 when Black had strong compensation and went on to win a nice game in Garcia Roman – Marin, La Massana 2008.)

C222) 9...d6



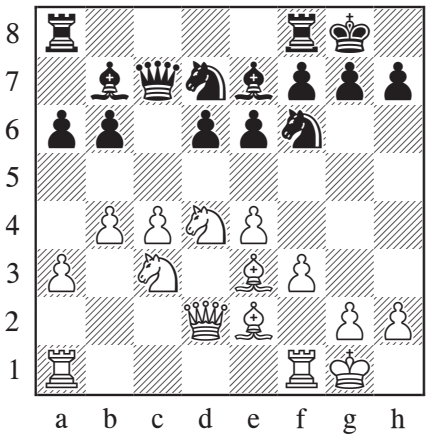
By playing this move early, Black signifies that he probably intends to develop the b8-knight on d7.

10.♗e2 ♗e7 11.0–0 ♘bd7 12.♕d2 0–0

Having made a number of natural moves, we need to ask ourselves where our rooks would be most purposefully placed, and what our plan for the middlegame should be.

13.b4!

White could continue 'on autopilot' for a few more moves with 13.♖fd1 ♖ac8 14.♖ac1 ♖fe8 15.♗f1 and keep some kind of small advantage. However, I'm not convinced that the rooks are best placed in this way, so I have something else in mind. Before we commit the rooks though, I like the idea of advancing the b-pawn. This will be essential to our active plans on the queenside later, and it has no downside as the c4-pawn is not really weak.



13...♖ac8

13...♘e5 does not accomplish anything: White simply plays 14.♖ac1, when taking the c4-pawn would cost Black his queen.

14.♖ac1 ♕b8

Many move orders are possible. Black may, for instance, start with 14...♖fe8, when either 15.♖c2 or 15.♔h1 should transpose to our main line in a few moves. Black will almost always move the queen back to b8 at some point in order to escape the X-ray vision of White's rook on the c-file.

15.♔h1

This is a useful precaution. White may play a prophylactic ♗g1 at some point, tucking the bishop out of harm's way and guarding the h2-pawn. The importance of this will become clear in the note to Black's next move below.

White could also play 15.♖c2 first; as I said before, the exact move order doesn't matter too much. We will see the idea of the ♖c2 move shortly.

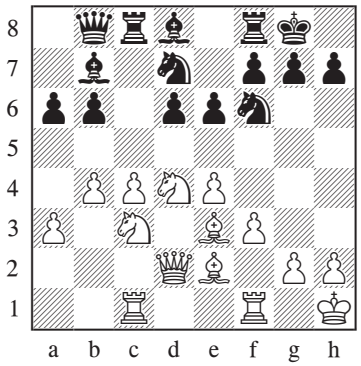
15...♖fe8

Somewhere around here, Black usually commits to one plan or another. The text move keeps things flexible for the moment though.

A popular alternative is:

15...♗d8

The idea is to put the bishop on c7 to add force to a subsequent ...d5, but White is well placed to deal with this plan, as Kasparov showed against Kramnik in 2001.



16.♖c2 ♖e8 17.♘a4 ♗c7 18.♗g1

Now we see why it was useful to make the g1-square available for the bishop.

18...♖cd8

18...h5 19.♖b1! places the rook menacingly opposite Black's queen. If Black continues his plan with 19...h4, then 20.c5! turns out to be extremely powerful.

18...♗a8 19.♖b1 h5 was mentioned by Kasparov as a possible improvement, but 20.b5! seems to me to be highly problematic for Black.

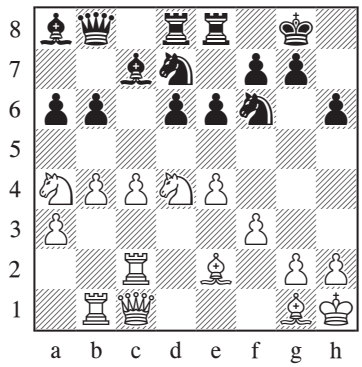
19.♖b1!

This is the usual follow-up to the earlier ♖c2. 19.♖fc1 was possible as well, but I like the idea of placing the rook opposite Black's queen, setting up all kinds of ideas involving c4-c5 or b4-b5.

19...♗a8

19...d5 20.exd5 exd5 21.c5! is excellent for White; in the event of 21...b5, White simply replies with 22.♘c3 followed by a3-a4, as Kasparov points out.

20.♕c1 h6



21.♘b2!

Rerouting the knight to d3 is an effective way to improve White's position.

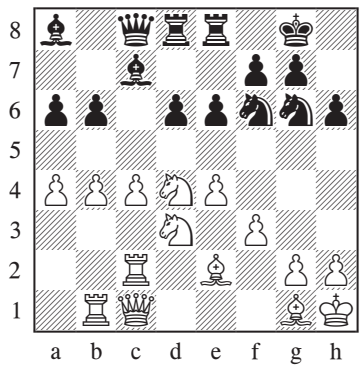
21.c5 b5! 22.c6 ♘e5∞ is not clear at all.

21...♘f8

Kasparov suggests 21...♘e5 in order to exchange the knight when it lands in d3, but 22.c5! is an improvement which poses difficult problems to Black.

22.♘d3 ♘g6 23.a4 ♕c8

So far White has done an excellent job of strengthening his position and preparing for action on the queenside. At this point, Kasparov missed the strongest continuation, which he subsequently pointed out in his annotations:



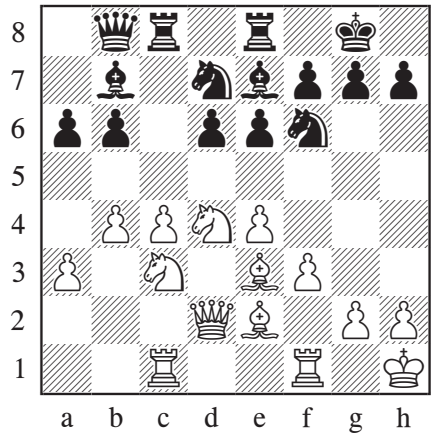
24.a5!N

The game continued 24.b5 a5 25.♘c6 ♗xc6 26.bxc6 e5 27.♗xb6 and White was somewhat better in Kasparov – Kramnik, Moscow (2) 2001.

24.♕a3!? and 24.♘b3!? are valid ways of preparing a4-a5, but it turns out that they are not needed.

24...bxa5 25.b5±

Black is in trouble; b5-b5 is a major threat, and 25...♗b6? would be refuted by 26.♘xe6!±.



16.♖c2!

Once again, this is a useful move to prepare ♖b1 or perhaps ♖fc1.

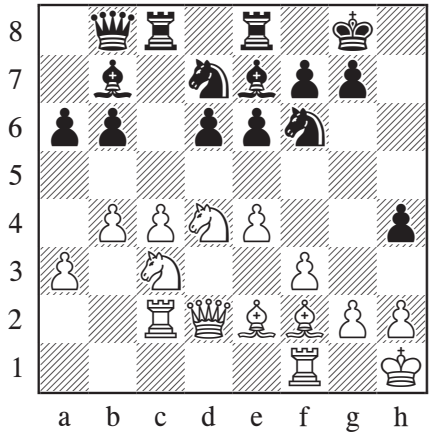
16...h5!?

16...♗d8 transposes to the Kasparov – Kramnik game noted above.

The text move is recommended by Johan Hellsten in *Play the Sicilian Kan*. The Swedish GM does not seem to be a fan of the ...♗d8-c7 manoeuvre, and points out that the bishop is useful on e7 in supporting the pawn when it reaches h4. Although the idea of advancing the h-pawn is enterprising enough, I firmly believe that White stands better.

17.♗f2! h4

17...♘e5N 18.♘a4 ♘fd7 is another option mentioned by Hellsten, who points out that 19.f4?! is inadvisable due to 19...♘g4. That's true, but White can instead continue strengthening his position with moves like ♖d1, h2-h3, ♗e3 and so on. It's not clear to me what Black can achieve with his advanced h-pawn, and he has to worry about the fact that f3-f4 might come at any turn.

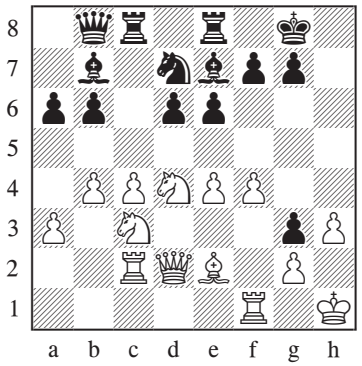


18.h3!

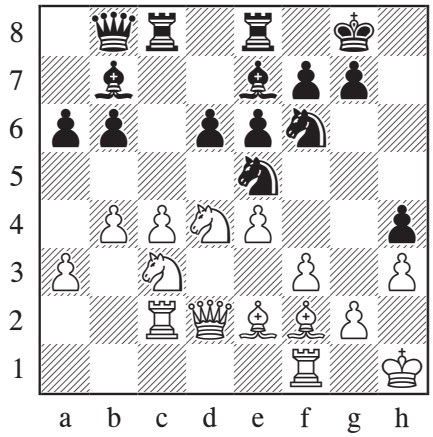
Fixing the h4-pawn as a target. Besides, I would rather not allow the pawn to get to h3. Objectively, White may still be able to fight for an advantage in such a scenario, but just look at our king on h1, standing opposite the bishop on b7. To allow the g2-pawn to disappear would be to invite a future tactical trick involving the long diagonal.

18...♘e5

Black has also tried targeting the dark-square weaknesses with 18...♘h5 19.f4 ♘g3† 20.♗xg3 hxg3, as given by Hellsten. Here White's play can be improved with:



21.♕e3!N (Hellsten focuses on 21.f5?!, as played in Shabalov – Macieja, Bermuda 2004) 21...♗f6 22.♗d3 ♕c7 23.♘de2 ♕d8 24.♖d1 Having consolidated his position, White is ready to pick off the g3-pawn. The game remains complicated and Black can strive for counterplay on the dark squares, but he does not have full compensation and White's chances are higher.



19.♘a4 ♘fd7 20.♘b2

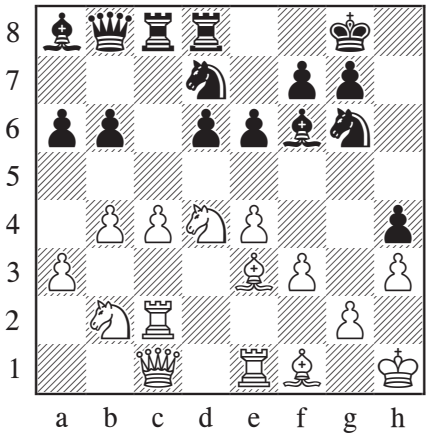
Once again, Kasparov's knight manoeuvre works well in this structure. The c4-pawn is securely defended and the knight may come to d3 later if circumstances permit – although White will not be in a hurry to do this while the enemy knight is on e5.

It would be reasonable to end the line here with a 'plus equals' evaluation, but I will show a few more moves of an illustrative game.

20...♗f6 21.♖e1

21.♖fc1 also looks fine.

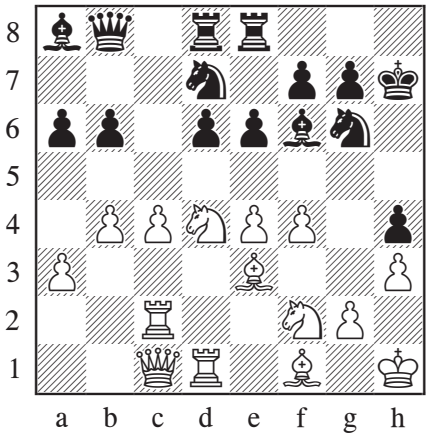
21...♘g6 22.♗f1 ♖ed8 23.♕c1 ♘de5 24.♘a4 ♘d7 25.♗e3 ♗a8 26.♘b2



26...♖e8

26...♘de5 would challenge White to come up with a plan. My suggestion for the next few moves would be 27.♖d1 followed by ♕d2 and ♘b3. From there, White could consider ♕f2, menacing the b6-pawn while supporting a possible f4-f5. Another idea is to attack on the queenside with a4-a5. For Black, keeping an eye on the sensitive b6- and h4-pawns while restraining White's plans on both flanks will be no easy task.

27.♘d3 ♘de5 28.♘f2 ♖cd8 29.♖d1 ♔h7 30.f4 ♘d7



All this was played in Vuckovic – Grandelius, Sarajevo 2010. The notion of a theoretical novelty feels rather absurd here, as the chances of anyone reaching this exact position again are minimal. Nevertheless, I will present an improvement on the basis that it illustrates an important positional theme.

31.f5!N

It is easy to overlook such moves on the basis of being 'anti-positional', but the decision is justified by the fact that the h4-pawn is short of defenders. This shows a clear strategic risk of Black's ...h5-h4 plan.

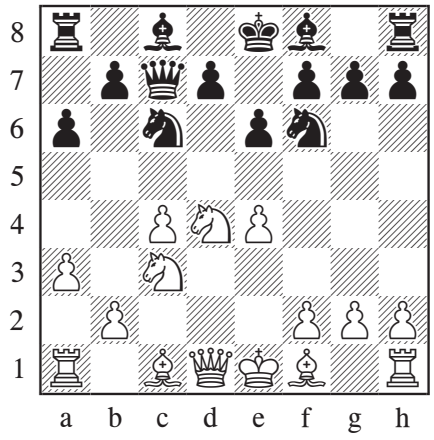
31...♘ge5

31...exf5 gives White a pleasant choice between 32.exf5 ♘ge5 33.♗g5, with similar play to the main line, and 32.♘xf5, with an excellent knight and attacking chances on the kingside.

32.♗g5 ♔g8 33.♕f4±

White will win the h4-pawn and will also have some attacking chances, taking into account the remoteness of the black queen on b8.

C23) 7...♘c6



This time Black opts for the early development of the knight, often with the intention of moving it to e5. The other idea is to exchange on d4 at some point, although in that case Black may struggle to create counterplay due to a lack of firepower.

8.♗e3

We will analyse three main options: **C231) 8...b6**, **C232)**, **C232) 8...♗d6!?** and **C233) 8...♗e7**.

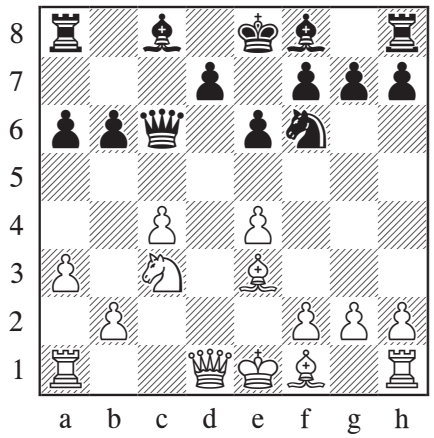
8...♘e5 is a popular choice but it doesn't have much independent significance. White simply plays 9.♗e2 and Black will likely develop his bishop to e7 in the next move or two, reaching one of the lines covered under variation C233 where ...♘e5 is played. Note that the threat to the c4-pawn is illusory: 9...♘xc4? 10.♗xc4 ♕xc4 11.♖c1 leaves Black without a good way to prevent a nasty discovered attack on his queen.

C231) 8...b6

I am not particularly impressed by this move, as it feels as though Black has not decided which type of position he is aiming for.

9.♘xc6! ♕xc6

9...dxc6 seems less logical to me, although it might be the lesser evil. White can play 10.♗e2 with a pleasant game, but 10.f4 e5 11.f5± gave him a promising position in Kovacevic – Strikovic, Vrnjacka Banja 1999. I do not think we need to prepare for this line seriously, as White is just better in a somewhat closed position. If you are unsure about how to exploit a space advantage, I would suggest that your top priority should not be opening preparation, but instead should be to read Boris Gelfand's superb book *Positional Decision Making in Chess*, which explores this topic in detail.

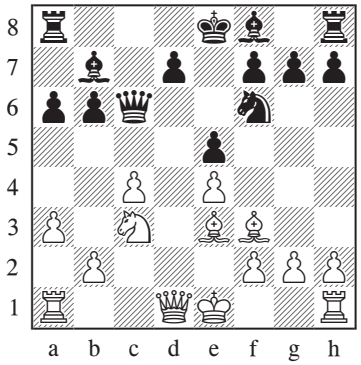


10.♗e2

10.e5N is a good alternative: 10...♘e4 11.♘xe4 (11.♘e2!? can also be considered) 11...♕xe4 12.♕d4 and White has the more pleasant endgame, as De la Villa points out. However, it seems more ambitious to avoid simplifications for the time being.

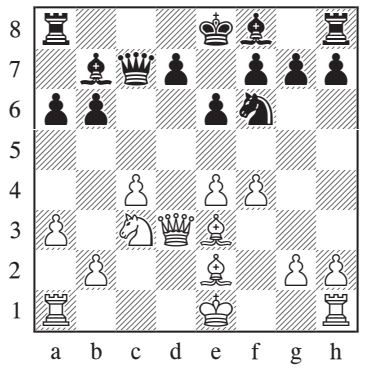
10...♗d6

Black has a few obvious alternatives which should be checked:
10...♗b7N 11.♗f3! e5



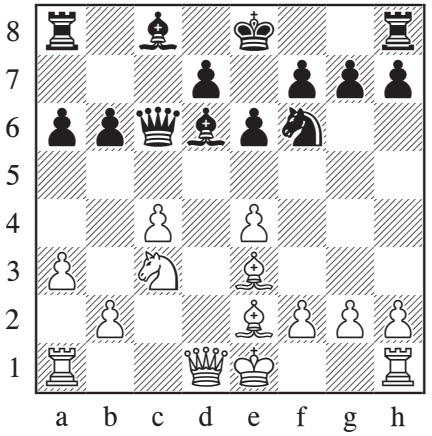
12.♘d5 ♗c5 13.♗xc5 bxc5 14.0–0 White has a significant advantage. He has more space, a better structure and active pieces, as well as a small lead in development. True, Black will not be checkmated quickly, but he will have to make positional concessions, which will be painful enough.

10...♕c7 11.f4 ♗b7 12.♕d3 is also promising for White, for instance:



12...♗c5?! (12...d6N± undoubtedly favours White, but would still have been the lesser evil for Black) 13.♗xc5 bxc5 14.e5± White already had an overwhelming position in Kosenkov – Boey, corr. 1975.

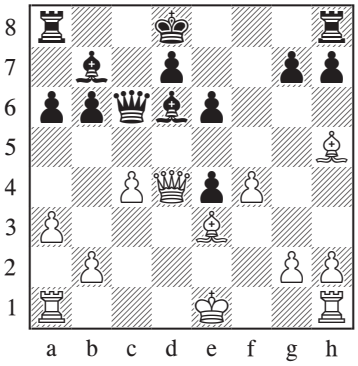
The text move is the ambitious option, played by a top Kan specialist, but here I want to improve over his opponent's play in Velimirovic – Miladinovic, Arandjelovac 1993.



11.f4!!N e5

I cannot see another defence.

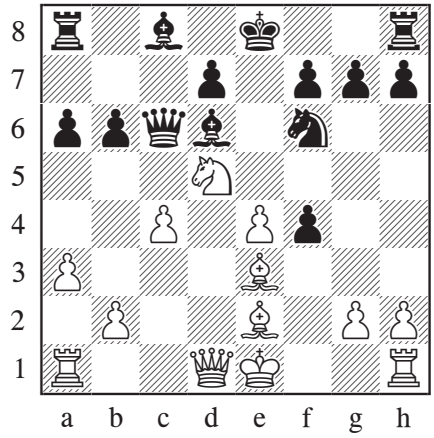
11...♘xe4 must of course be checked, but it runs into concrete problems: 12.♗f3 f5 13.♕d4 ♗b7 14.♘xe4 fxe4 15.♗h5† ♔d8



16.♖d1 ♔c7 17.b4+– Black has a miserable position with no coordination amongst his pieces. White will castle, mobilize his rooks and then slaughter his opponent as if re-enacting a low-class pulp fiction novel.

12.♘d5! exf4

12...♗b7 13.0–0 does not change the situation much.

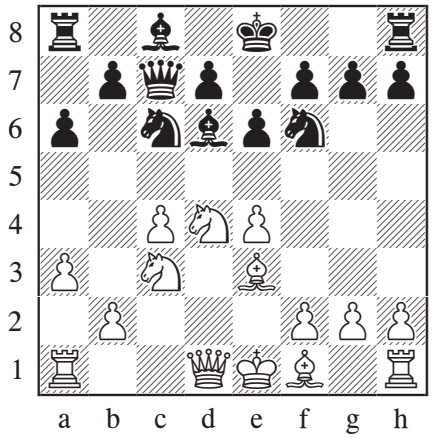


13.♗d4! ♗c5 14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.♖f1!

White will follow up with ♖xf4 and taking on f6, with a winning attack.

C232) 8...♗d6!?

This is not the most common move but it's one of Black's more interesting options. At first, it looks as though Black wants to use the queen-bishop battery for some kind of activity along the b8-h2 diagonal. If White prevents this (as occurs after our next move), Black can revert to a secondary plan involving ...♗e5, followed by taking on d4 twice, and then ...d6, ...e5 and ...♗e6. It is hardly a spectacular plan, and some might consider it a little passive, but White still has to come up with a way to make the game interesting and avoid ending up in a quiet position with a bad light-squared bishop.



9.g3

I find this the most logical reaction to Black's last move.

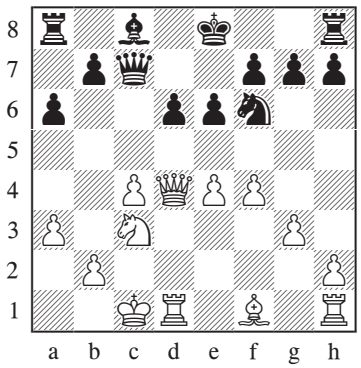
9.♕d2 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♗f4 leads nowhere.

9.c5!?N is an interesting new idea which I analysed quite a bit. Best play continues 9...♗e5 10.g3 ♘xd4! 11.♗xd4 d6 12.cxd6 ♕xd6 13.♗xe5 ♕xe5 14.f4 ♕c5 15.e5 ♗d7! 16.♗g2 ♗c6 when Black should gradually equalize. Nevertheless, some readers may find this unexplored continuation appealing: there are chances for Black to go wrong; and even if he finds the best continuation, you still end up with a marginal advantage.

9...0–0

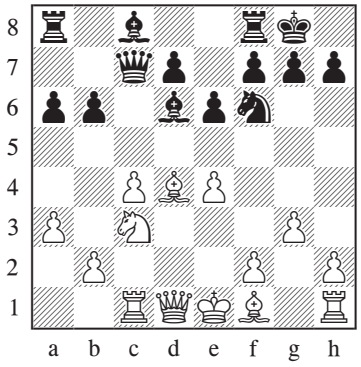
9...♗e5? is poor. White responds with 10.f4! ♗xd4 11.♗xd4 ♘xd4 12.♕xd4 d6

13.0–0–0! with a winning position, thanks to the following point:

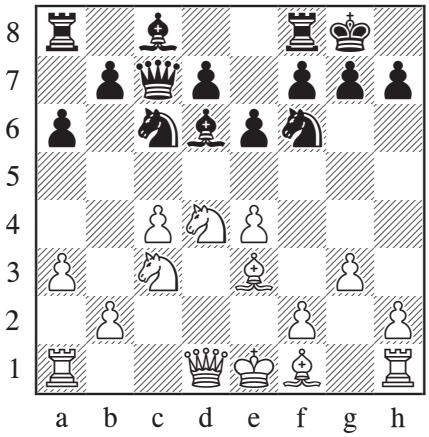


13...♔e7 14.e5 dxe5 15.fxe5 ♘d7 16.♕h4†+– Black's king is stuck in the centre and he is too far behind in development.

The premature 9...♘xd4 was the choice in Gobleja – Kurpnieks, email 2011, when the correct recapture would have been: 10.♗xd4!N 0–0 11.♖c1 b6 Otherwise c4-c5 would have been unpleasant.



12.♗g2 ♗b7 13.0–0 White is better. For example, the plausible 13...♗e5 can be met by 14.♘a4!±, exposing the big weakness. Play may continue 14...♗xe4 15.♗xe5 ♕xe5 16.♖e1 ♕f5 17.♘xb6 and White has a sizeable positional advantage.



10.f4!?

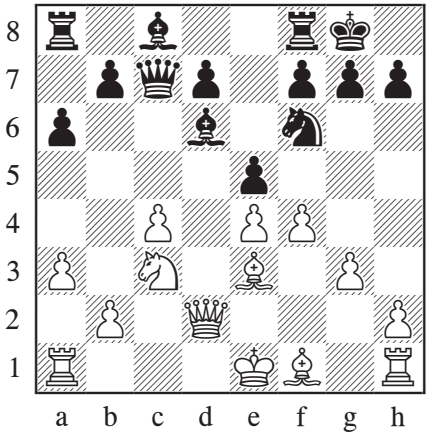
This makes things interesting, as the play becomes rather concrete.

10.♖c1 has been played in a number of games, but I am not convinced that this improves White's position as much as 10...♖d8!N improves Black's.

10...♘xd4

10...♗e7 is my engine's initial preference. However, if Black has to resort to such a move, then White has won the opening battle. 11.e5!? looks like an interesting way to play, if you fancy a change from the typical continuation of 11.♘xc6 followed by ♗g2.

11.♕xd4 e5 12.♕d2



12...♗c5!N

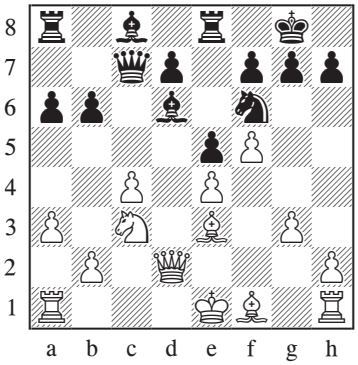
This is certainly Black's most challenging move.

12...♖e8?

This has been tested in correspondence play, but is a classic example of an engine failing to get to the essence of the position. A human thinking logically could easily work out that White intends to play f4-f5 followed by a pawn storm on the kingside. This renders Black's move entirely redundant; there is simply no positive feature to it.

13.f5! b6

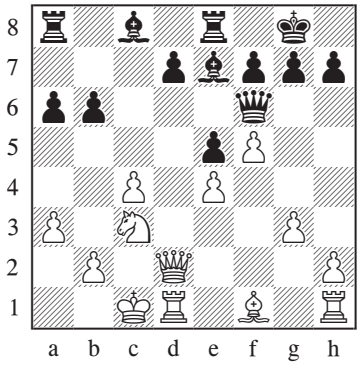
13...♗e7 is the recommendation of an engine which clearly does not excel in closed positions.



14.♘d5!?N

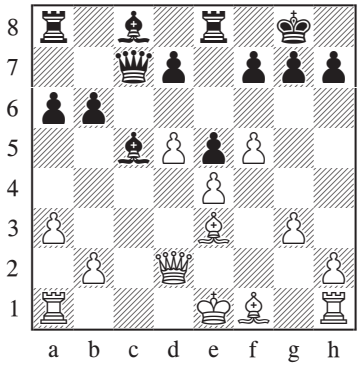
I find this to be the most logical move, especially in over-the-board play.

The game continued with 14.0–0–0!?, which would indeed be quite attractive for a correspondence game, where the engine helps safeguard against spoiling a better position and getting mated. Play continued 14...♗e7 (14...♗c5 runs into 15.♗xc5 ♕xc5 16.♕e2! ♗b7 17.g4± and White's attack is faster) 15.♗g5 ♕c6 16.♗xf6 ♕xf6 and now the most accurate would have been:



17.♔b1!N (17.♘d5?! looks appealing but is rather superficial, and after 17...♕c6 18.g4 ♗b7 19.g5 ♗c5 20.f6 ♗d4! 21.♔b1 b5! Black had counterplay in Alonso Gonzalez – Baron Gonzalez, corr. 2007) 17...♗b7 Otherwise Black will find it hard to develop. 18.♕xd7 ♖ab8 19.♘d5± White has an extra pawn.

14...♘xd5 15.cxd5 ♗c5



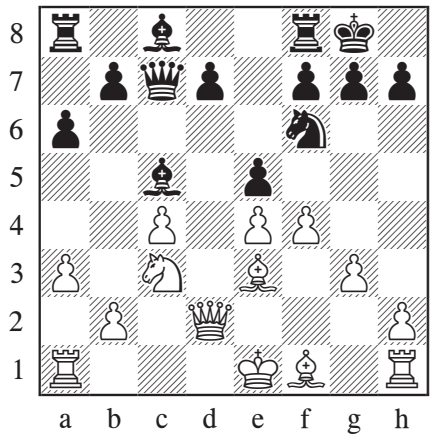
16.♖c1

The most natural, although 16.f6!?± is also attractive.

16...♕d6 17.♗d3±

White has lots of space, better pieces and a lead in development. I would be quite optimistic, although good chess still has to be shown.

Let's return to Black's improvement on move 12, upon which the evaluation of the whole line hinges.



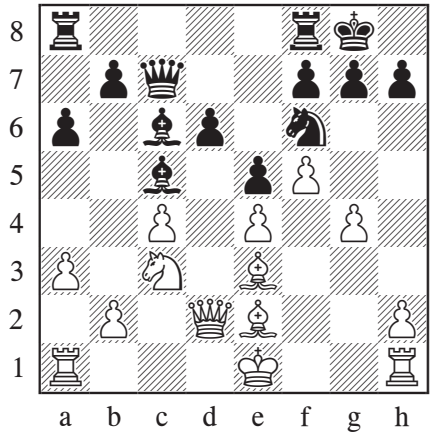
13.♗e2!

13.0–0–0!? is interesting here too. However, 13...♗xe3 14.♕xe3 b5!? leads to a sharp game where, no matter the objective evaluation, I would find Black's position easier to play.

13...d6

13...b6 14.♗xc5 ♕xc5 15.b4 ♕c7 16.♘d5 ♘xd5 17.cxd5± is somewhat uncomfortable for Black, although not completely one-sided.

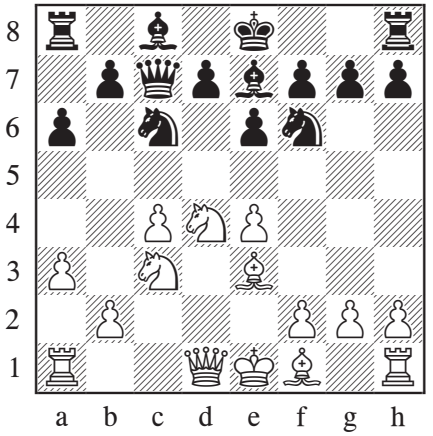
14.f5 ♗d7 15.g4! ♗c6



16.♗xc5 dxc5 17.♕e3 ♖fd8 18.g5 ♘e8 19.♘d5±

There are some positive things about Black's position; nevertheless, White's space advantage is the most important factor.

C233) 8...♗e7



9.♗e2

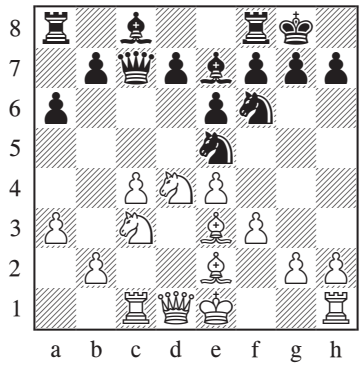
9.♖ac1 leads to similar play, and White obtained a slight plus in Kasparov – Ivanchuk, Linares 2002. However, I see no reason to rush with the rook move, as this piece may be better placed on d1 in some lines.

9...0–0

I also considered:

9...♘e5 10.♖c1 0–0 11.f3!?

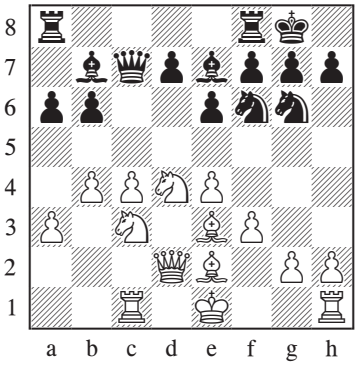
The more obvious idea would be to gain space with f2-f4. However, I would like to point out that a solid approach should also lead to a pleasant edge. I will show a few more moves from a high-level rapid game, which arrived here via a slightly different move order.



11...♘g6 12.♕d2 b6?!

Black should prefer 12...d6N 13.b4 ♗d7 to prevent ♘a4. However, White is obviously better after 14.0–0± followed by ♘b3, when the positional threat of c4-c5 will force ...b6 anyway.

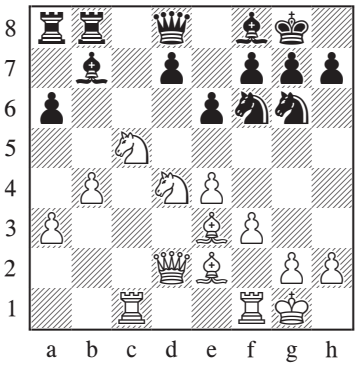
13.b4 ♗b7



14.♘a4! ♖fb8

Black is in trouble. At this point he probably realized that 14...d6 would allow 15.♘xb6!? (the simple 15.0–0 is also strong) 15...♕xb6 16.♘xe6 ♕c6 17.♘xf8 ♘xf8 when White has a slight material plus, and after 18.c5! d5 19.e5 ♘6d7 20.♗d4 ♘e6 21.0–0 he has a clear advantage.

15.c5 bxc5 16.♘xc5 ♕d8 17.0–0 ♗f8

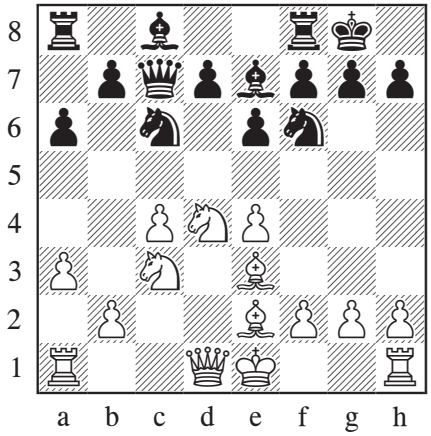


In Dominguez Perez – Svidler, St Petersburg (rapid) 2012, White failed to make the most of his advantage, and Black somehow used his great skill to survive the difficult position.

A clear improvement is:

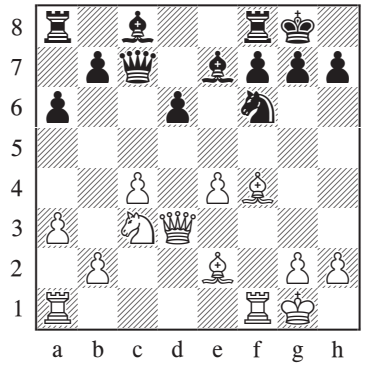
18.♘db3! d5 19.♘a5 ♗xc5 20.bxc5

White maintains a huge advantage.



10.0–0 ♘e5

10...d6 has occurred in lots of games but it gives White freedom to do whatever he wants. One game continued: 11.f4!? (the more restrained 11.♖c1 is simple and good) 11...♘xd4 12.♕xd4 e5 13.♕d3 exf4 This was seen in Eisenbeiser – Epishin, Werther 2003. A simple improvement is 14.♗xf4N, when I like White's position. A possible continuation could be:

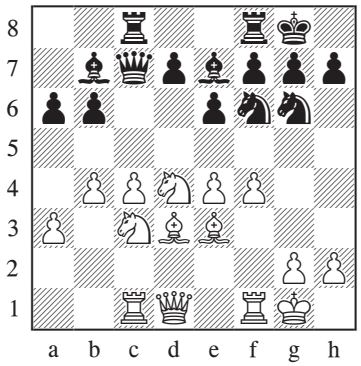


14...♗e6 15.b4 ♖ac8 16.♘d5 ♗xd5 17.exd5 As in many other lines in this chapter, the only debate is about the size of White's advantage.

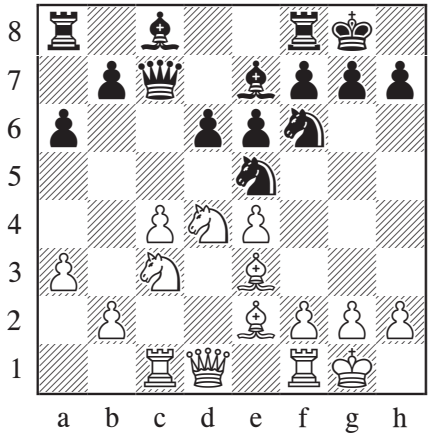
11.♖c1 d6

11...♘xc4? is impossible as usual: 12.♗xc4 ♕xc4 13.♘a4 ♕a2 14.♖a1 and White wins.

It is also worth considering:
11...b6 12.f4 ♘g6
We have arrived, via transposition, at a game involving the then reigning World Champion sitting behind the black pieces.
13.b4 ♗b7
13...d6 14.♕e1 ♗b7 15.f5±
14.♗d3 ♖ac8
In Torre – Karpov, Bad Lauterberg 1977, White played 15.♘b3?! and ultimately lost after further mistakes.
Instead, he could have taken full advantage of Black's speculative play with:



15.e5!N ♘e8 16.♕h5
With excellent attacking chances.

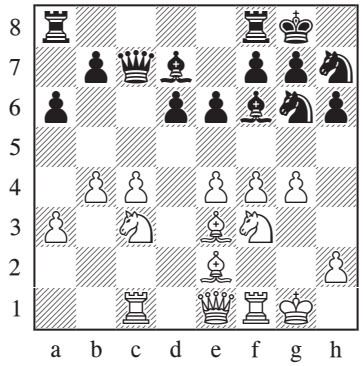


12.f4
This feels like the most ambitious choice, although White could also consider 12.f3 in the spirit of the Dominguez Perez – Svidler game.

12...♘g6
Black resorts to this knight manoeuvre in quite a few of these lines; but yet again, it fails to impress.

13.b4 ♗d7 14.♘b3!?
White proceeds cautiously, avoiding any ...e5 attacks and preventing a possible ...a5 break.

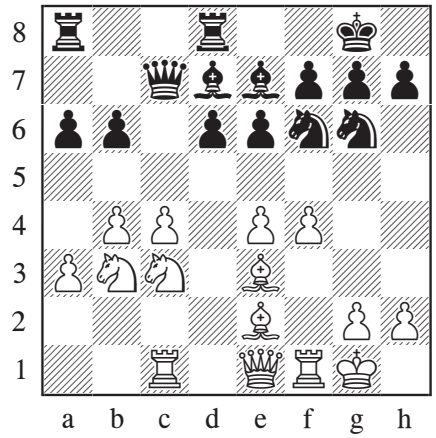
A more aggressive continuation is:
14.g4!?
The 'five pawns attack' is a bit extravagant, but objectively it seems justified.
14...h6 15.♕e1 ♘h7 16.♘f3 ♗f6
Should you wish to follow this path, I recommend the following improvement:



17.c5!N
17.h4!? gave White a promising attacking position and an eventual win in Svetushkin – Epishin, Werther 2011, but the text move is a simpler route to a big advantage.
17...dxc5 18.e5±
Followed by ♘e4.

14...♖fd8 15.♕e1 b6

In Netzer – Sulava, Port Barcares 2005, White missed a strong idea:



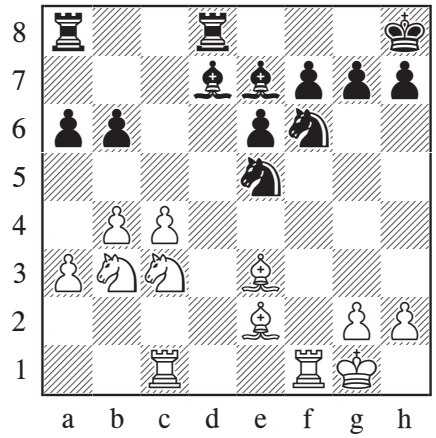
16.♕g3!N

Threatening f4-f5 followed by ♗h6, with a deadly attack.

16...♔h8

This seems like the most sensible reaction. However, White has an interesting, concrete continuation – not that he needs one to prove an advantage.

17.e5!? dxe5 18.fxe5 ♕xe5 19.♕xe5 ♘xe5



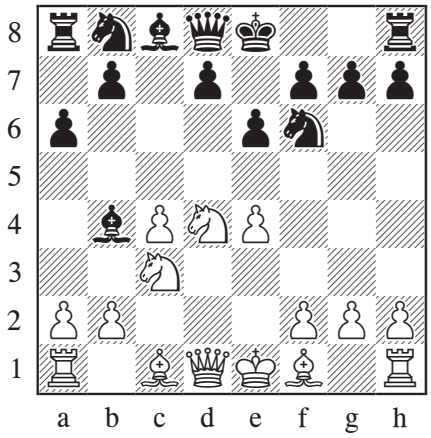
20.♗d4!

Before restoring material equality, White takes the opportunity to drive Black's knight to an inferior square.

20...♘g6 21.♗xb6 ♖dc8 22.♗c5

The endgame has the makings of a disaster for Black.

C3) 6...♗b4



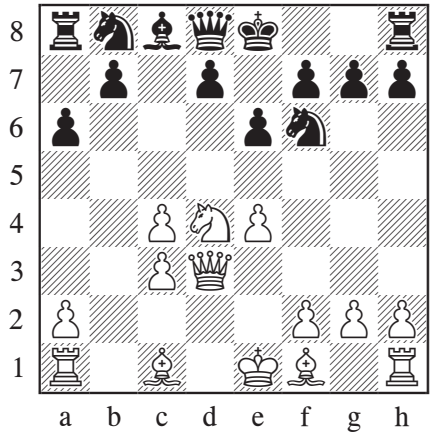
This is perhaps the most critical response. If White's c2-c4 set-up was to have a serious downside, it would surely be this.

7.♕d3!?

Several other moves have been tried but the text has emerged as the most promising in recent years. Putting the queen on d3 may appear artificial, but it actually fulfils several objectives: it supports c3 and e4, and may switch to a great outpost on g3.

Black has tried several ideas; we will consider **C31) 7...♗xc3†?!**, **C32) 7...d5**, **C33) 7...0–0**, **C34) 7...♕c7**, **C35) 7...d6** and **C36) 7...♘c6**.

C31) 7...♗xc3†?! 8.bxc3



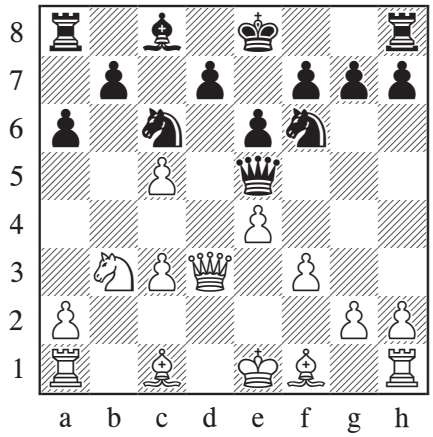
White's pawn structure has been damaged, but that's the end of the good news for Black. He is behind in development and he has several holes on the dark squares.

8...♕a5

8...0–0 9.e5 ♘e8 10.♗a3 is also problematic for Black.

9.f3 ♘c6 10.♘b3 ♕e5 11.c5!

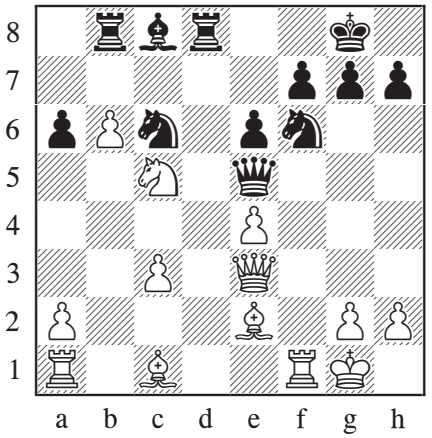
Black is heading towards a positional disaster.



11...b5!? 12.cxb6 d5

This is a reasonable attempt to change the course of the game, but White remains in control.

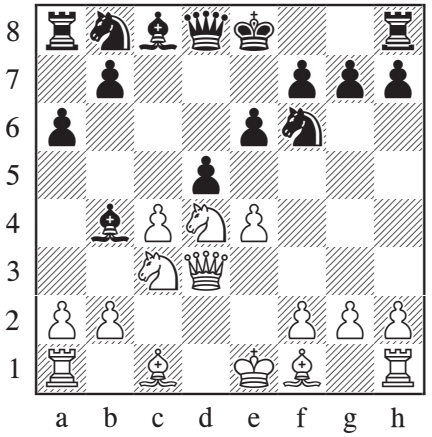
13.♗e2 0–0 14.0–0 ♖d8 15.♕e3 dxe4 16.fxe4 ♖b8 17.♘c5



17...♘b4 18.♕f2 ♕xc3 19.♗f4 e5 20.♖ac1 ♘c2 21.♗g5 ♖d4 22.♘b3 ♕b2 23.♗d1

Black resigned in Belikov – Gorbatov, Alushta 2009.

C32) 7...d5

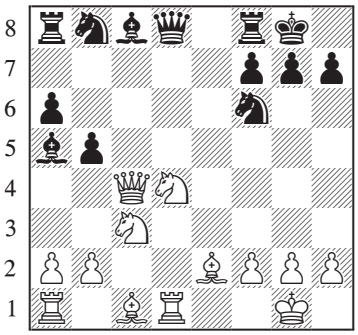


This is a reasonable attempt to liquidate the centre and play for a draw, but White should be able to keep some initiative.

8.exd5 exd5 9.♗e2 0–0 10.0–0 ♘c6

I checked a few other possibilities:

10...dxc4 11.♕xc4 ♗a5 12.♖d1 b5?! (12...♕c7N 13.♗g5 ♘bd7 14.♖ac1±) In Kramnik – Ivanchuk, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 2005, White should have continued:



13.♕d3!N ♗b7 14.♗f3 ♖a7 15.♗g5± White is much more active, the symmetrical pawn structure being of little comfort to Black.

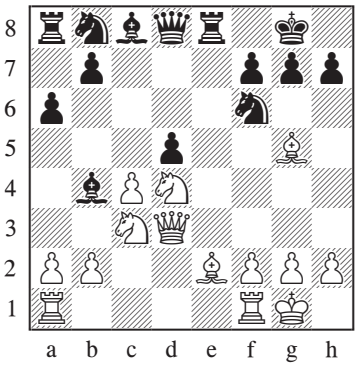
10...♖e8

This sensible move has only been played in one game, Popov – Andreikin, Olginka 2011.

11.♗g5!?N

A natural novelty.

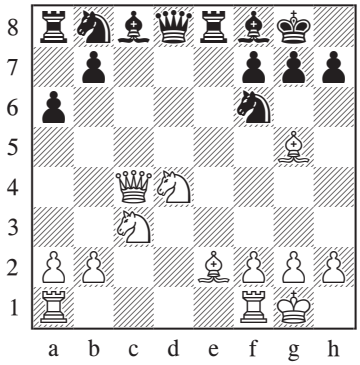
11.♘xd5!?N ♘xd5 12.cxd5 ♕xd5 13.♗e3 is another good idea, with a risk-free edge for White.



11...dxc4 12.♕xc4 ♗f8?!

12...♗xc3 13.bxc3!? (13.♕xc3 is also decent) 13...♘bd7 14.♖fe1 ♕a5 15.♗h4 leaves White with a mighty pair of bishops.

The text move is a natural attempt to avoid giving up the bishop pair, but Black loses time and risks falling into even greater difficulties.

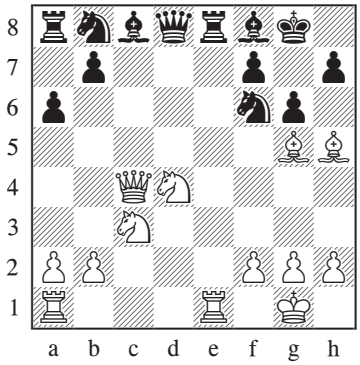


13.♗h5!

Flashiest and possibly strongest.

13.♗xf6!? ♕xf6 14.♘d5 is also promising: 14...♕e5 (14...♕h6 15.♘c7 ♗d6 16.h3 ♗xc7 17.♕xc7 ♘c6 18.♘xc6 ♕xc6 19.♕xc6 bxc6 20.♗f3 ♗b7 21.♖ac1±) 15.♖fe1 ♘c6 16.♗f1 ♕xe1 17.♖xe1 ♖xe1 18.♘f3 ♖a1 19.♘g5 ♗e6 20.♕e4 g6 21.♘xe6 fxe6 22.♕xe6† ♔h8 23.♕f7 ♘d4 24.g3 ♗g7 25.♕xb7 ♖f8 26.♔g2 ♖xa2 27.♗c4±

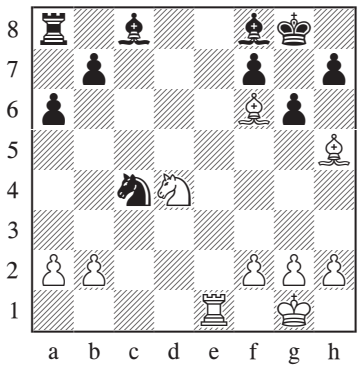
13...g6 14.♖fe1!



14...♘bd7

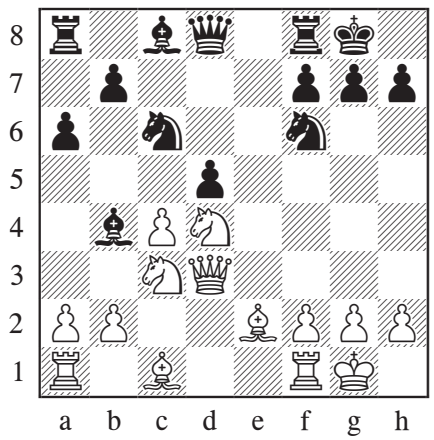
The tactical point of White's play is revealed after 14...♖xe1† 15.♖xe1 gxh5? (Black's only chance is 15...♘bd7 16.♗f3±) 16.♗xf6 ♕xf6 17.♕xc8 ♕xd4 18.♖e8 ♕b4 19.♘d5 and White is winning.

15.♘d5! ♖xe1† 16.♖xe1 ♘b6 17.♘xf6† ♕xf6 18.♗xf6 ♘xc4



19.♖e8 gxh5 20.♗e7 ♘b6 21.♖xf8† ♔g7 22.h3 ♗d7 23.♖xa8 ♘xa8 24.♗d8±

Black faces an unpleasant defensive task in the endgame.



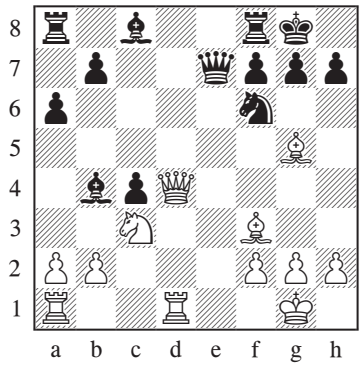
11.♖d1!?

Keeping the tension is the most ambitious approach.

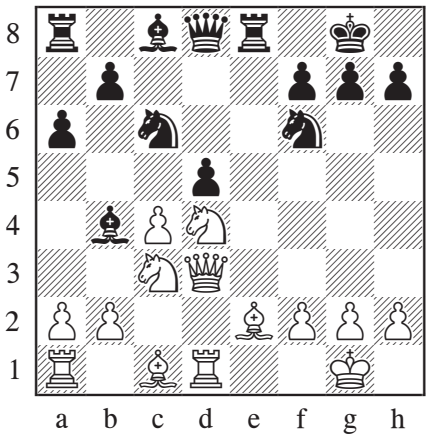
11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 cxd5 14.♗e3± was a simple route to a pleasant position for White in Ivanchuk – Andreikin, Astana 2012.

11...♖e8

11...♘xd4 12.♕xd4 ♕e7 13.♗f3 dxc4 14.♗g5± gives White a pleasant edge. Things can easily go downhill for Black, for instance:



14...♗e6? 15.♘e4 ♖fd8 16.♕e5± Black was unable to survive the pin in Quesada Perez – Pichot, Buenos Aires 2015.



12.♘xd5!?

12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♗g5 was also promising for White in Sedina – Bjarnason, Basel 2006.

12...♘xd5

12...♘xd4 13.♕xd4 ♖xe2 14.♗g5 ♕f8 15.♗xf6 ♗c5 16.♕d3 ♖xf2 17.♗d4±

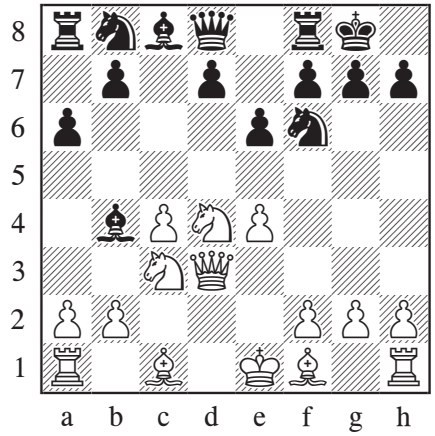
13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.cxd5 cxd5

14...♕xd5N may be a slight improvement, although 15.♕xd5 cxd5 16.♗e3 leaves Black defending a one-sided endgame.

15.♗e3±/±

The d-pawn was a serious weakness in B. Gonzalez – T. Carlsen, corr. 2015.

C33) 7...0–0



This was proposed by Vallejo in a lecture on Chess24. It looks rather optimistic to me and a bit of investigation revealed that Delchev and Semkov had already shown how to obtain a slight but enduring advantage.

8.e5! ♘e8

8...♘g4? 9.♕g3! is even worse.

9.♗f4

9.a3 has also scored well, but one good option is enough.

9...d6

9...♘c6 10.a3 ♗e7 11.♗e2 f6 12.♘xc6 bxc6 was also less than inspiring for Black in Boros – Mamedov, Teplice 2013; 13.0–0N would have been the simplest way to maintain White's advantage.

Vallejo ends his analysis here but Black has not equalized.

10.♘c2 ♗xc3† 11.♕xc3±

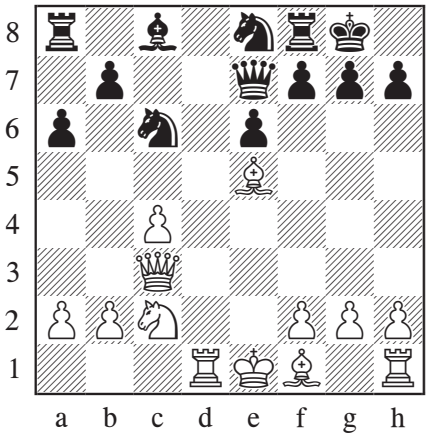
The Bulgarian authors stop here, concluding that White is better. I would agree, and it is worth adding a few more moves of the game which reached this position.

11...dxe5 12.♗xe5N

12.♖d1 ♕e7 13.♗xe5 ♘c6 was the move order of the game below. It makes no real difference, but somehow it feels more natural to recapture on e5 before moving the rook.

12...♘c6 13.♖d1 ♕e7

Here I found a way to improve White's play.

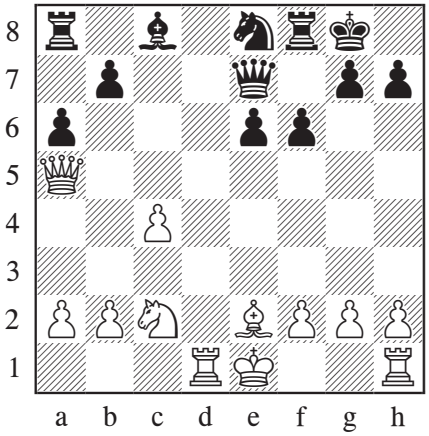


14.♗e2!N

On this occasion, retaining the bishop pair seems less important than developing quickly.

14.♗g3 f5 15.♗e5 f4 gave Black enough counterplay in Solodovnichenko – Miezis, Borup 2012.

14...♘xe5 15.♕xe5 f6 16.♕a5



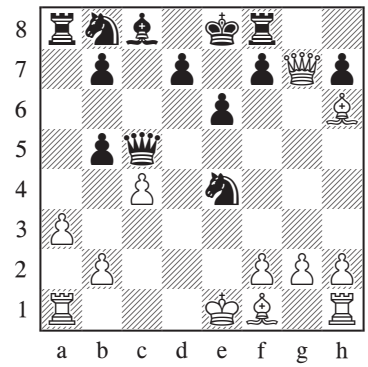
Each side has a pawn majority but White has the better chances as his pieces are more active and better coordinated. Black could easily get into trouble, for example:

16...e5?!

Trying to activate the central majority is a natural plan, but here it is strongly met by:

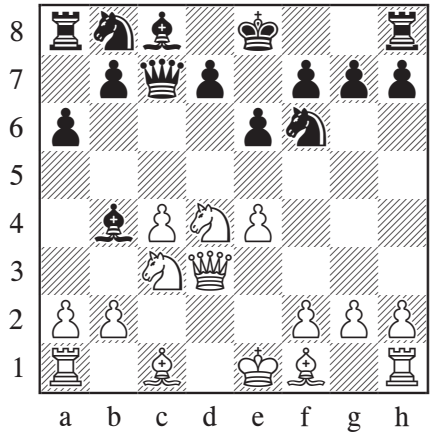
17.♘e3!

Suddenly Black comes under serious pressure.



13.f3! ♘f2 (13...bxc4 is the best move according to the engine, but the rather obvious 14.fxe4!N± leads to the winning of the exchange for White) 14.b4 ♕e7 15.♔xf2 White successfully converted his advantage in the stem game Ninov – Pikula, Lazarevac 1999.

C34) 7...♕c7



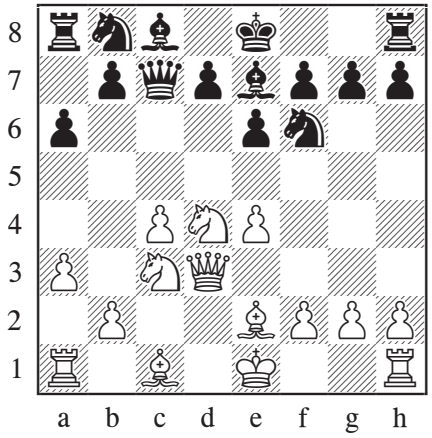
This has been Black's most popular choice so far. It's a sensible move and a typical one for the Kan, but slightly slow.

8.a3 ♗e7

The power of White's set-up was well illustrated in the following game: 8...♗xc3† 9.♕xc3 ♘xe4 (Black should prefer 9...0–0, although 10.f3 leaves White with an obvious edge due to his space advantage and bishop pair) 10.♘b5! axb5 11.♕xg7 ♖f8 12.♗h6 ♕c5

9.♗e2

9.♕g3!? ♕xg3 10.hxg3 ♘c6 11.♘c2± was a simple route to a safe edge in Landa – Werle, Vlissingen 2015. White has more space and can press in the queenless middlegame without much risk. If you like this sort of thing (as I do!), then this is all you need to know about this line. I thought about giving this as my main line, but decided it was worth checking what happens if we keep the queens on the board.

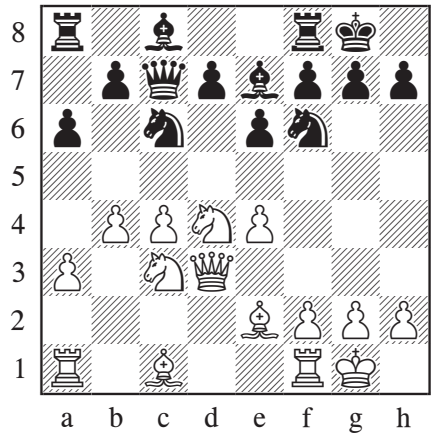


9...♘c6 10.0–0 0–0

10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 ♗d6 seems a bit artificial. White responded calmly with 12.♔h1 ♗e5 13.♕e3 0–0 14.♘a4±, earning a nice advantage in Leko – Bologan, Beijing 2012.

11.b4

I also considered 11.♔h1 ♖d8 12.f4, but this gives Black a chance to break out in the centre: 12...d5 13.cxd5 exd5 14.e5 ♘xd4!N (improving over 14...♘e4? 15.♘xc6 ♕xc6 16.f5 f6 17.e6± as in Giri – Landa, Eilat 2012) 15.♕xd4 ♗c5 Black has reasonable counterplay. For what it's worth, I let the engines run and found that White can eventually reach a better endgame, but the whole line is a lot of effort for not much reward.



11...♖d8!?N

This seems a better try than 11...♘e5, after which 12.♕g3 d6 13.♗h6 ♘g6 14.♗d2 ♖d8 15.♖ac1± gave White a nice advantage in Davletbayeva – Hakimifard, Tabriz 2014. Just as in some other lines in this chapter, the knight is not well placed on g6.

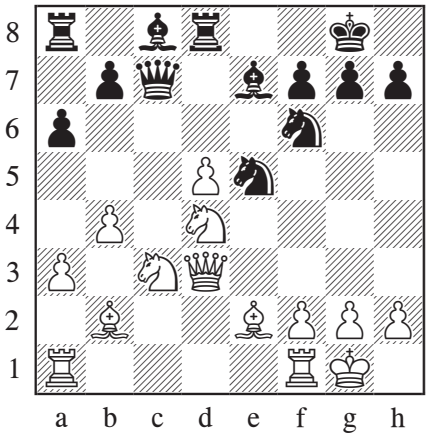
The text move is more critical: Black intends to break free with ...d5, and White needs to play accurately to prove something.

12.♗b2! d5

Anything else would be an admission that White has won the opening battle.

13.exd5 exd5 14.cxd5 ♘e5!

14...♘xd5? 15.♘db5!± is no good for Black.



15.♕c2! ♗d7 16.♖ac1 ♖ac8 17.♕b3±

Black does not have quite enough play for the pawn. He can try all kinds of ideas, and it would be neither useful nor practical to analyse all of them. In general, White should simply develop his pieces and let Black worry about how to win back the pawn without suffering unpleasant side effects.

C35) 7...d6

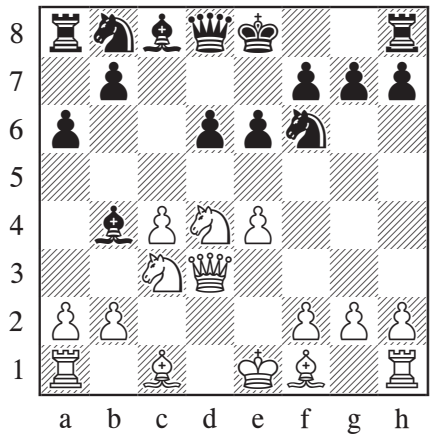
GAME 9

Eric Hansen – Ilya Smirin

Tromso Olympiad 2014

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♗b4 7.♕d3!? d6

This is an important move, which has been used by a few top players. The present game shows an excellent response for White.



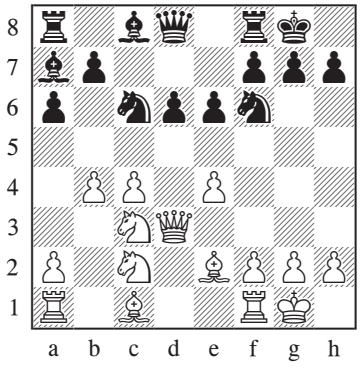
8.♘c2!

Forcing Black to choose between giving up the dark-squared bishop or being pushed backwards.

8...♗a5

This is perhaps the most flexible option, as it preserves the pin on the knight – although the real choice is not so much between a5 and c5, as between being pushed back to b6 and exchanging on c3.

Black gains little by playing 8...♗c5, as I do not think retreating to a7 is a great alternative, but we should consider it briefly. 9.b4 ♗a7 10.♗e2 ♘c6 11.0–0 0–0 Here I found an improvement over Smirnov – Papin, Vladivostok 2015:



12.♖d1!N e5 What else? 13.♗e3 ♗xe3 14.♕xe3 White keeps control over the d4-square. 14...♕c7 The only move. I have analysed this position more than I should have, only to establish that White is better, but without being able to refute Black's position outright. The most sensible approach is to continue improving with 15.a4 or 15.♖ac1, with an immensely pleasant position.

Black has also swapped off his bishop in a few games:

8...♗xc3† 9.♕xc3

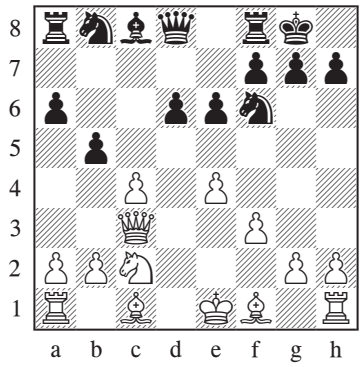
Slightly reminiscent of the 4.♕c2 Nimzo-Indian, don't you think?

9...0–0 10.f3 b5!?

Black has to do something quickly, otherwise White will catch up with development and enjoy a clear advantage thanks to his mighty dark-squared bishop.

Black failed to equalize after 10...d5 11.e5 ♘fd7 12.cxd5 exd5 13.♗e3 ♖e8 14.f4 ♘c6 (14...f6 15.0–0–0±) 15.♗e2 ♘f8 16.0–0± in Baufays – Gromotka, corr. 2015.

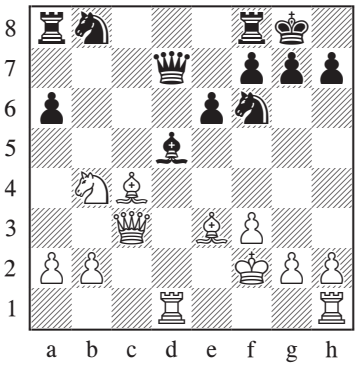
The text move was played in Gonzalez de la Torre – Paunovic, Elgoibar 2008. I suggest the following improvement:



11.♗e3!?N

One of many sensible moves. The only thing I would absolutely not recommend is taking on b5, which brings White further behind in development.

11...bxc4 12.♗xc4 d5 13.♖d1 ♗b7 14.exd5 ♗xd5 15.♘b4 ♕d7 16.♔f2±

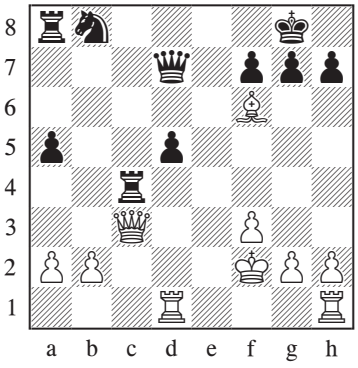


White has a nice edge. This is not something I would try to memorize, but I will show a few more moves as the position contains some interesting resources.

16...a5

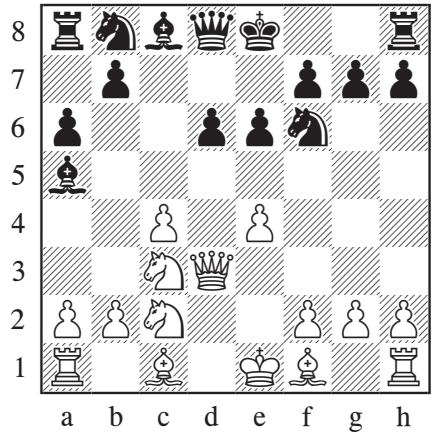
This is a logical try, but White remains better after:

17.♘xd5 exd5 18.♗d4! ♖c8 19.♗xf6 ♖xc4



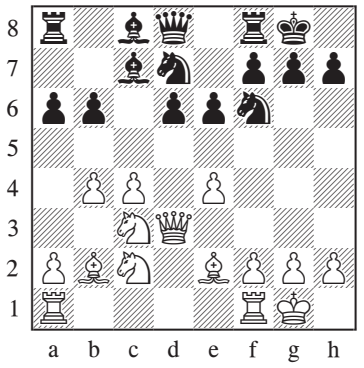
20.♕xc4 dxc4 21.♖xd7 ♘xd7 22.♗d4±

The ending is quite unpleasant for Black.



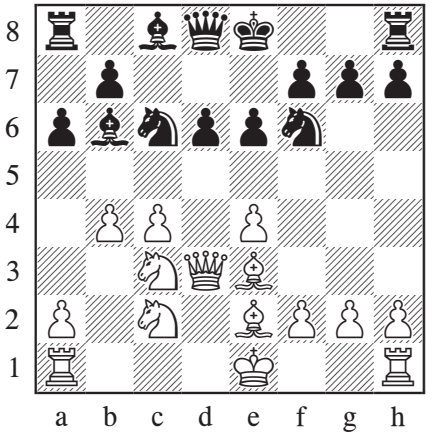
9.b4 ♗b6

9...♗c7 is a bit passive, and White should be better without too much difficulty. 10.♗b2 0–0 11.♗e2 ♘bd7 12.0–0 b6 occurred in Negi – Andreikin, Biel 2010. Here I like the recommendation of Michael Roiz:



13.f4!?N ♗b7 14.♗f3± "Black is suffering from a lack from space," as the Israeli GM points out.

10.♗e2 ♘c6 11.♗e3



11...♘e5?

Black may appear to be gaining time, but in fact the reverse is true. White's queen will be no worse placed on d2 than d3, now that now the bishop has made it to e3, whereas Black's knight will soon be driven away by f2-f4.

Back should have preferred something like 11...0–0N 12.0–0 e5 13.♖fd1 ♗e6 14.♖ac1±,

although I like White's prospects here as well. Compare the Kalashnikov positions in Chapter 5.

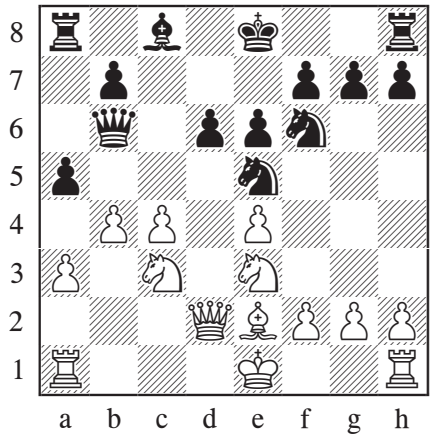
12.♕d2 ♗xe3 13.♘xe3

Black has obviously not come close to equalizing out of the opening: he has a weak pawn on d6, less space and will find it hard to complete development.

13...♕b6

13...0–0 14.♖d1 ♘e8 15.f4 ♘g6 16.0–0± is also excellent for White.

14.a3 a5



15.b5!

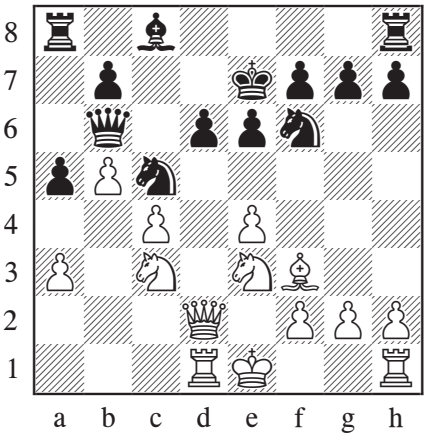
Hansen correctly judges that Black will not have time to exploit the c5-outpost.

15...♘ed7

15...0–0 16.0–0 ♕c7 17.♖fd1 ♘e8 was a better try, although the black pieces are poorly placed.

16.♖d1 ♘c5 17.♗f3 ♔e7?

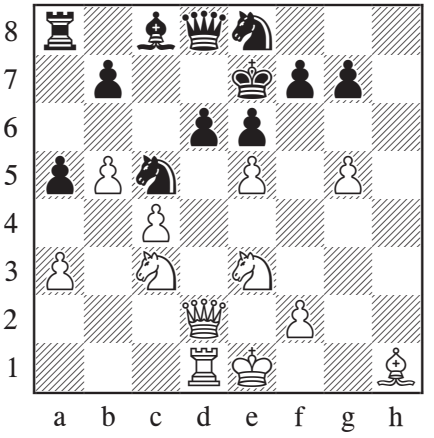
Black's last chance to stay in the game involved a positional pawn sacrifice. After 17...e5! 18.♕xd6 ♕xd6 19.♖xd6 ♗e6 20.0–0 ♖d8 21.♖xd8† ♔xd8 White is a pawn up, but the knight is well placed on c5, offering Black some drawing chances.



18.g4! h6 19.h4 ♕d8

No better is: 19...♔f8 20.g5 (20.♕xd6†± is fine, but White can do better than exchange queens) 20...hxg5 21.hxg5 ♖xh1† 22.♗xh1 ♘e8 23.f4 ♕c7 For some reason Roiz evaluated this position as only somewhat better for White, when the game is actually almost over. 24.♕h2 ♔g8 25.♗f3 and Black will not be able to withstand an invasion along the h-file.

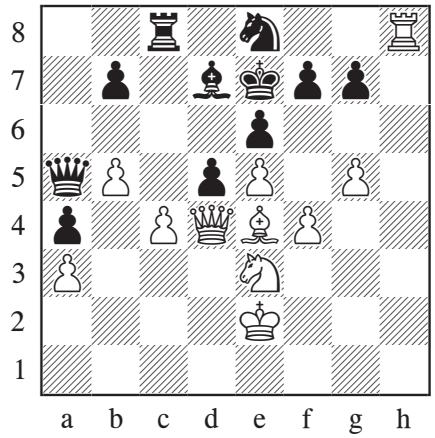
20.g5 hxg5 21.hxg5 ♖xh1† 22.♗xh1 ♘e8 23.e5



White's position is overwhelming. Hansen continues to play well, creating further threats without offering Black any counter-chances.

23...a4 24.♔e2 ♔f8 25.f4 ♗d7 26.♘e4 ♘xe4

27.♗xe4 d5 28.♖h1 ♕a5 29.♕d4 ♖c8 30.♖h8† ♔e7



31.♗xd5!

A small flourish to end Black's resistance.

31...b6 32.f5 exf5 33.g6
1–0

C36) 7...♘c6

This is perhaps the most critical line, so it's a good thing that we have the World Champion to show us the way.

GAME 10

Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand

Sochi (6) 2014

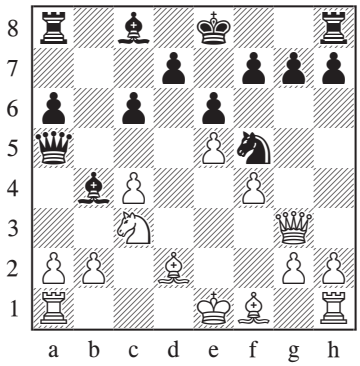
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 ♗b4 7.♕d3!? ♘c6

Black goes for active development but White can get a good position by exchanging knights.

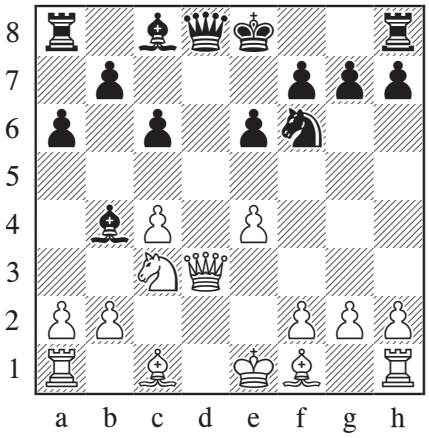
8.♘xc6 dxc6

Again this is the critical move.

Black should be worse if he takes with the other pawn: 8...bxc6 9.e5 ♘g4 10.♕g3 ♕a5 11.f4 ♘h6 12.♗d2 ♘f5 So far, White had done everything right in Eggink – Sliwicka, Lazy 2015. Here I suggest:

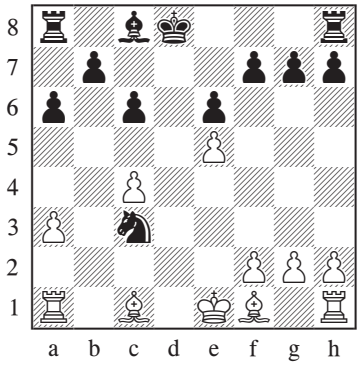


13.♕d3!N Putting the queen on a safe square while restricting the enemy knight. A possible continuation is 13...0–0 14.g4 ♘h4 15.♕g3 ♘g6 16.a3 d5 17.♖d1 ♗xc3 18.♗xc3 ♕c7 19.h4± and Black will suffer a direct onslaught.

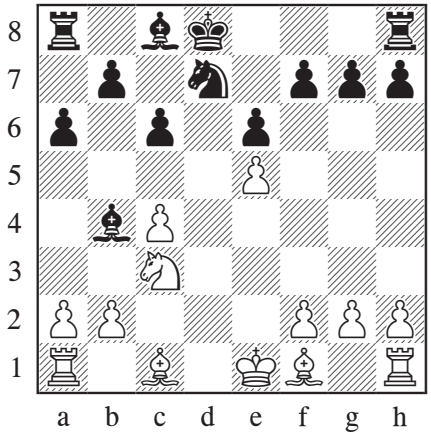


9.♕xd8† ♔xd8 10.e5 ♘d7

The pseudo-active 10...♘e4?! only succeeds in putting Black's knight in danger. 11.a3 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♘xc3



13.a4! ♘e4 14.♗e3 f6 15.♗d3 ♘g5 16.0–0± White obviously has fantastic play for a pawn.



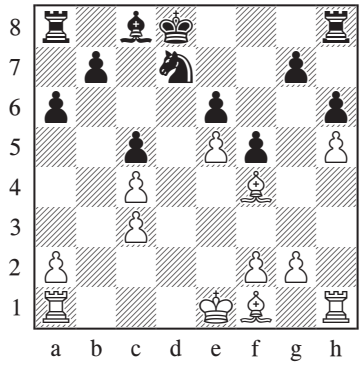
11.♗f4

11.f4? is the only move covered in *The Most Flexible Sicilian*.

11...♗xc3†?!

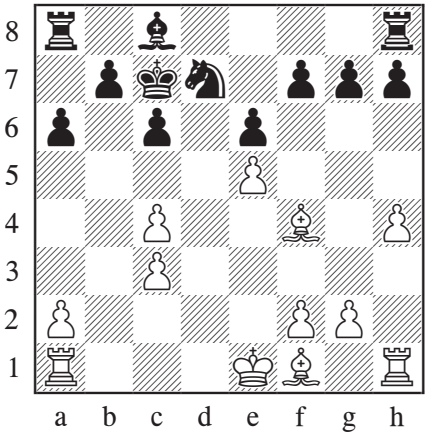
I think this was a poor decision. The doubled pawns are not too weak and, after giving up the dark squares, Black is completely without counterplay.

11...f5! has been played several times. A good example continued: 12.h4 ♗xc3†?! Once again, trading the bishop for the knight is misguided from Black's point of view. (12...♔c7N is more logical, although White remains slightly better after 13.♖h3.) 13.bxc3 c5 14.h5 h6



15.♖h3 ♔e7 16.♖g3 ♔f7 17.0–0–0 b6 18.♖d6 ♖a7 19.♖gd3 White had an overwhelming position in Milliet – Navrotescu, Saint Jacut de la Mer 2015.

12.bxc3 ♔c7 13.h4!±



Advancing this pawn causes Black some discomfort. One way or another, he will be left with a fixed kingside structure and long-term weaknesses. Another advantage of White's last move is that his rook may join the action via the third rank.

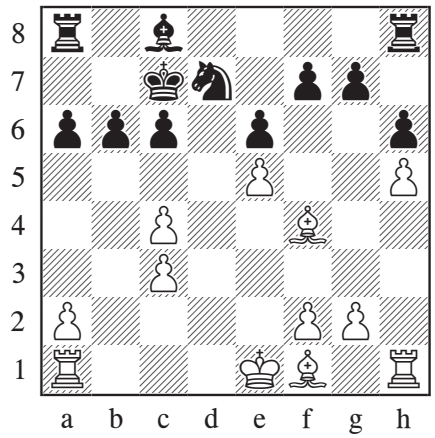
13...b6

13...h5 prevents any further squeezing from the h-pawn but, as Kasimdzhanov points out, White plays 14.♖h3! and immediately forces Black to make further concessions on the kingside. He will most likely have to play ...g6

at some point, leading to chronic weaknesses on the dark squares and a long-term weakness on f7.

14.h5 h6

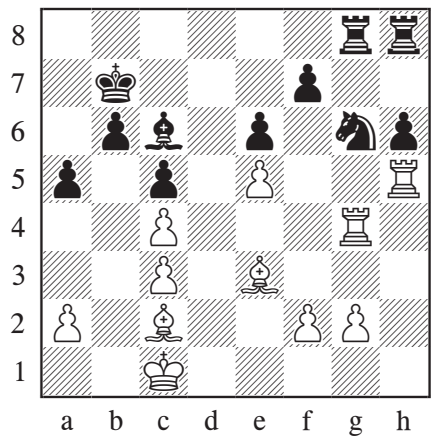
It is not obvious that the pawn should have been stopped here, as Black's pawn structure is now permanently fixed on the dark squares.



15.0–0–0 ♗b7 16.♖d3 c5 17.♖g3 ♖ag8 18.♗d3 ♘f8 19.♗e3 g6

Carlsen has organized his pieces excellently, making it so that each of Black's options involves a concession of some sort. Anand is not in a mood to wait and see, but this decision creates weaknesses in his position which are not easily repaired.

20.hxg6 ♘xg6 21.♖h5 ♗c6 22.♗c2 ♔b7 23.♖g4 a5 24.♗d1 ♖d8 25.♗c2 ♖dg8



26.♔d2??

26.♖g3 would have maintained White's clear advantage.

26...a4??

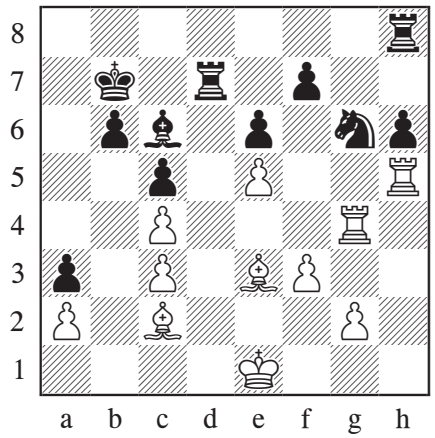
The moment he made his move, Anand saw what he had missed. Maybe it was the clear signs of relief in his opponent's face that alerted him.

The simple tactic 26...♘xe5! 27.♖xg8 ♘xc4† 28.♔d3 ♘b2† 29.♔e2 ♖xg8 would have won a pawn and possibly regained the World Championship.

27.♔e2±

White has a safe advantage and converted it without further drama.

27...a3 28.f3 ♖d8 29.♔e1 ♖d7



30.♗c1 ♖a8 31.♔e2 ♗a4 32.♗e4† ♗c6 33.♗xg6 fxg6 34.♖xg6 ♗a4 35.♖xe6 ♖d1 36.♗xa3 ♖a1 37.♔e3 ♗c2 38.♖e7† ♔a6 39.♖xh6 ♖xa2 40.♗xc5

1–0

Conclusion

The Kan is a flexible system, which is probably why the list of variations at the start of the chapter is so long. Still, our task is slightly eased by the fact that the rare options such as 5...b6, 5...g6 and other assorted moves, all enable us to obtain an easy game without much fuss.

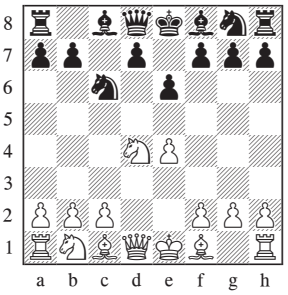
This leaves 5...♘f6 as the most important option by far. After the obvious 6.♘c3, we analysed three main branches.

6...d6?! reduces Black's active possibilities and gives White a great deal of freedom. 7.♗e2 ♗e7 8.0–0 0–0 9.f4!? gives excellent attacking possibilities, as the analysis shows.

6...♕c7 is a typical move for the Kan, which keeps all kinds of options open. We reply with 7.a3, when 7...♘xe4?! 8.♘xe4 ♕e5 is a dangerous pawn grab; 9.♕c2! gives White a powerful initiative, although some accurate moves are needed to prove it. We then looked at the safer alternatives, 7...b6 and 7...♘c6, each of which leads to its own unique possibilities. It is worth highlighting Kasparov's plan involving ♖ac1-c2, with the second rook shadowing Black's queen, followed by ♘a4-b2, as a regrouping method which is worth knowing about in several variations involving this type of structure.

Finally, we considered the active 6...♗b4, when 7.♕d3!? is our reply. Here it's hard to give general guidelines, as the character of the game depends entirely on the choices made over the next few moves. For instance: 7...d5 leads to liquidation of the centre with White retaining a slight initiative; 7...d6 leads to more of a closed game with White enjoying a space advantage; and 7...♘c6 usually leads to an early queen exchange. So we have to be ready for anything; but we have decent chances of an opening advantage in all cases.

Chapter 3

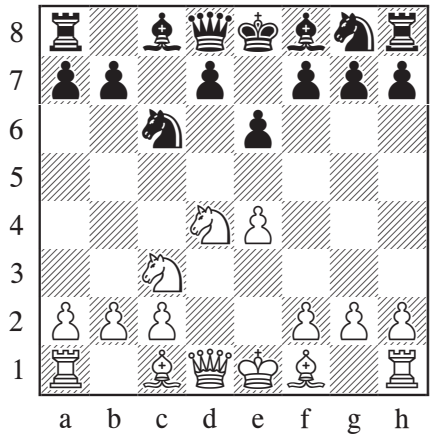


Taimanov

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3

A) 5...a6 92
B) 5...♕c7 6.♗e3 94
B1) 6...♘f6 94
B2) 6...a6 7.♕f3 95
B21) 7...♗b4 97
B22) 7...b5 100
B23) 7...d6 8.0–0–0 105
B231) 8...♘f6 105
B232) 8...♗d7 109
B24) 7...♘e5 8.♕g3 h5!? 9.♘f5!? 113
B241) 9...exf5? 115
B242) 9...f6! 116
B25) 7...♗d6 8.0–0–0 ♗e5 9.♘xc6! bxc6 10.♗d4 122
B251) 10...♘f6 123
B252) 10...♗xd4 125
B26) 7...♘f6 8.0–0–0 127
B261) 8...b5?! 128
B262) 8...♗b4 130
B263) 8...♗e7 132
B264) 8...h5!? 136
B265) 8...♘e5 9.♕g3 b5 138
B2651) 10.a3!? 138
B2652) 10.f4 ♘eg4 11.♗d2!? 142
B26521) 11...♕a7 143
B26522) 11...b4 145

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3



The Taimanov combines theoretical soundness with solidity, flexibility and counterattacking chances; all this explains why it is one of the most popular Sicilians, from club level all the way up to the world elite. In this chapter we will meet it head on, using a set-up with ♗e3 and ♕f3 which has emerged in recent years as the biggest threat to Black's system.

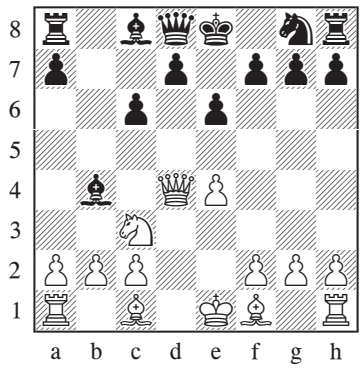
Black's two main options are **A) 5...a6** and **B) 5...♕c7**. Other moves exist of course, but they can be dealt with fairly quickly:

5...♘f6 was covered in Chapter 1 and 5...d6 can be found in Chapter 10.

5...♕b6 is seen occasionally, but 6.♘db5 ♗c5 7.♕d2! gives Black big problems on the dark squares.

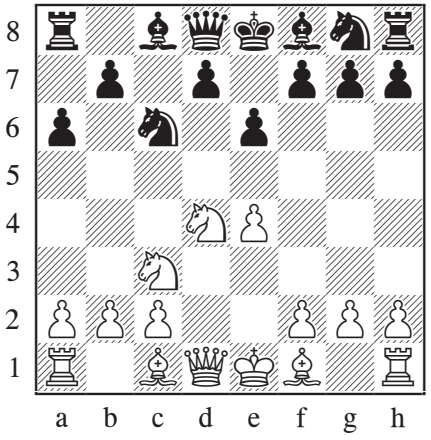
5...♗c5 can be met by 6.♘b3 (6.♘db5 is a decent move which should lead to an edge, but 6...♘f6 leads to a variation of the Four Knights which lies outside of our repertoire) 6...♗b4 7.♗d3!? (the solid 7.♗d2 is also fine) and White has a promising lead in development, which is more significant than the possible doubling of his queenside pawns.

5...♗b4 is conveniently met by: 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.♕d4



7...♗f8 (7...♗xc3†?! leaves Black too weak on the dark squares after 8.♕xc3 or even 8.bxc3!?) 8.♗f4 (or 8.♗d3) and White has a significant lead in development.

A) 5...a6



6.♗e3!

6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.♗d3 is the main line and a good try for an advantage. However, for our purposes the text move is more convenient.

6...♘f6

6...♕c7 has been the most popular choice but 7.♕f3 leads straight to our main line: see variation B2 on page 95.

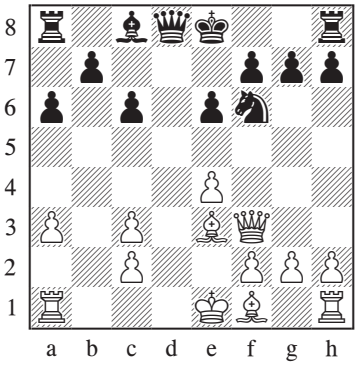
6...♘ge7 has been played in a bunch of games but 7.♘b3!? is promising for White. A similar idea can be found in Chapter 10 on page 335.

7.♕f3 ♗b4

White is simply playing his intended ♕f3 set-up and challenging Black to come up with something better than 7...♕c7, which transposes to variation B26. The text move is his main try but I like White's chances against it.

8.♘xc6! bxc6

8...dxc6 9.a3 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3 leaves Black vulnerable on the dark squares, while White's doubled pawns are not really weak. A high-level game continued:

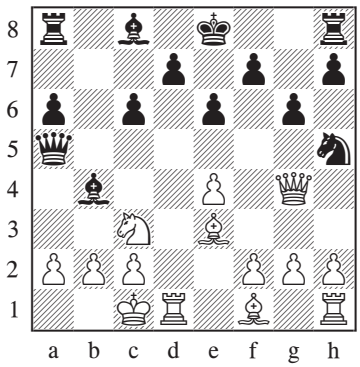


10...♕a5 11.♗d2 0–0 12.♗d3 e5 13.a4 ♗e6 14.c4 ♕c7 15.a5 c5 16.0–0 ♘d7 17.♖fb1 White enjoyed a pleasant edge in Grischuk – Grachev, Sochi 2017.

9.♕g3 0–0

This was Rublevsky's latest try.

Previously he played 9...♘h5 10.♕g4 (10.♕e5 is another good option which practically forces Black to go back with 10...♘f6) 10...g6 11.0–0–0 ♕a5 in Oparin – Rublevsky, Moscow 2017. White has several good options but I like the look of:

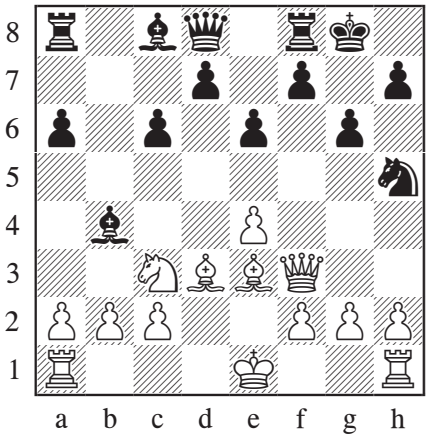


12.♗e2!?N Developing another piece while eyeing the knight on h5. Black is not really threatening to take on c3 as his dark squares will become too weak. (12.♕g5!?N is another possible approach, angling for a favourable endgame.)

10.♗d3 ♘h5

10...d5 11.e5 ♘e8 occurred in Kobo – Srijit, Escaldes 2017, when 12.0–0↑ would have given White a lead in development and active prospects across the board.

11.♕f3 g6



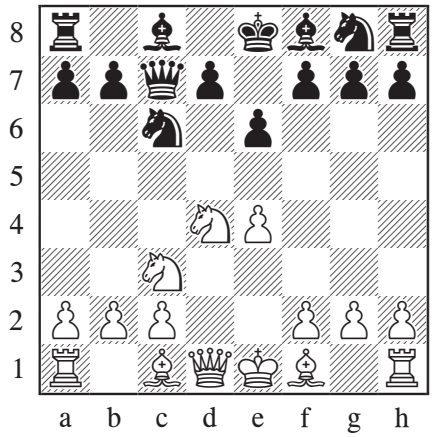
12.♗h6N

Improving over 12.0–0 d5, when Black was close to equal in I. Popov – Rublevsky, Sochi 2017.

12...♘g7 13.h4!

White has excellent chances on the kingside.

B) 5...♕c7



This is the most popular and characteristic continuation of the Taimanov scheme. Black improves his queen and gives himself the option of meeting ♘xc6 with ...dxc6, without allowing an unfavourable queen exchange.

6.♗e3

We will consider **B1) 6...♘f6** followed by the main line of **B2) 6...a6**.

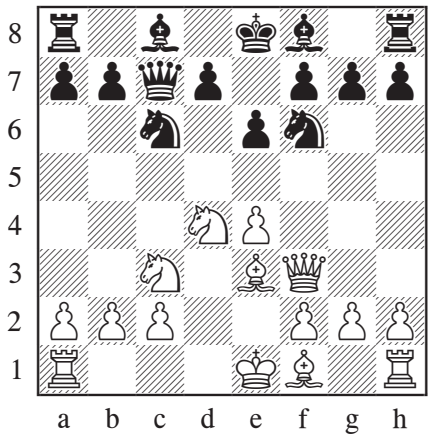
B1) 6...♘f6

This has been played in a few thousand games, but we can sidestep all of the main theory with:

7.♕f3

Once again, we are angling for a transposition to our main line, which would arise after 7...a6.

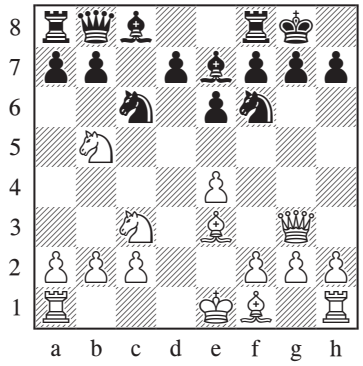
7.f4!? is a promising move, which is covered thoroughly by Negi in *1.e4 vs The Sicilian III*, and is also recommended by Kotronias and Semkov. The text is far simpler for us though, as Black must either transpose to our main line with 7...a6 or allow us an easy game with one of the alternatives mentioned below.



7...♗b4

7...♘xd4?! 8.♗xd4 e5 9.♕g3! d6 10.♗e3 a6 occurred in Carstens Dobuchak – Cunha, Fraiburgo 2016, when 11.♗g5N would have given White easy play, as he will soon conquer the d5-square.

7...♗e7 8.♘db5 ♕b8 9.♕g3! 0–0 is also excellent for White after:



10.♗f4!?N (10.♕xb8 ♖xb8 11.♘xa7 was somewhat better for White in Dragnev – Meszaros, Zalakaros 2015, but I would prefer the initiative over material) 10...e5 11.♗h6 Black will have to make a concession of some kind, as both the kingside and the d5-square are weak.

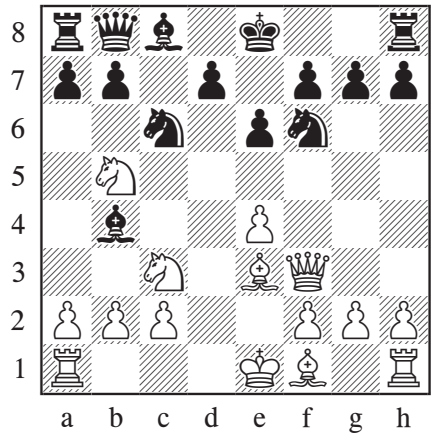
8.♘db5

The availability of this move, both here and

in the note above, reminds us of why Black plays an early ...a6 in the great majority of games!

8...♕b8

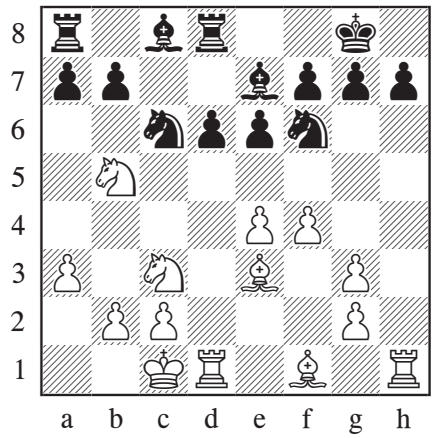
In Marosi – Acosta, Montevideo 2017, White could have obtained a pleasant advantage with:



9.♕g3!N

As we will see, this move is a useful resource in the main ♗e3/♕f3 lines. See, for instance, variation B22 on page 100. Here White gets an even more pleasant version of the thematic endgame.

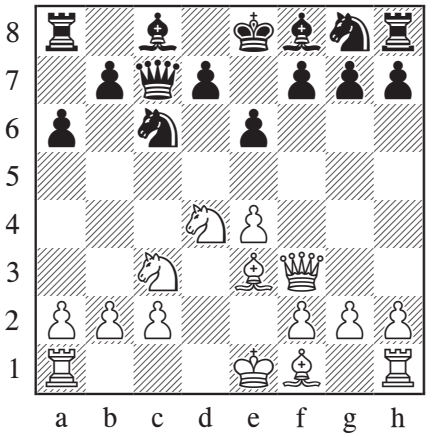
9...♕xg3 10.hxg3 0–0 11.a3 ♗e7 12.f4 d6 13.0–0–0 ♖d8



14.♗e2 a6 15.♘d4±

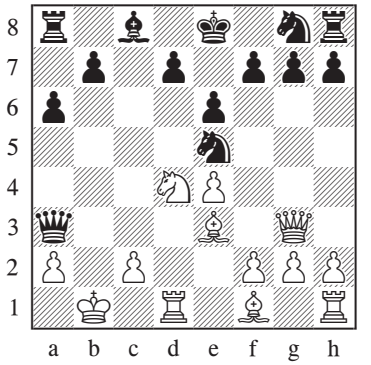
Kotronias and Semkov provide some further analysis but I am happy to stop here and say White is comfortably better.

B2) 6...a6 7.♕f3



This is the big main line of the chapter, and one of the most topical variations in the whole book. There are six main options, arranged in roughly ascending order of importance: **B21) 7...♗b4**, **B22) 7...b5**, **B23) 7...d6**, **B24) 7...♘e5**, **B25) 7...♗d6** and **B26) 7...♘f6**. Other moves are not too difficult to meet:

7...♗a3?! is not a good move, but it carries some shock value so it is worth seeing how to deal with it: 8.0–0–0! (8.bxa3? ♘e5 is Black's idea of course) 8...♘e5 9.♕g3 ♕xc3 10.bxa3 ♕xa3† 11.♔b1



11...♘g6 12.♘b3 ♘f6 13.f3± In Bogdanov – Q. Fontaine, Agneaux 2015, White's lead in development and threats on the dark squares were worth far more than Black's extra pawn.

7...♘ge7

This enables White to get an easy edge with:

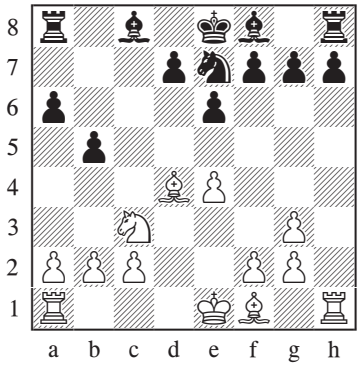
8.♕g3

If you prefer to keep the queens on, then Kotronias and Semkov's 8.♘b3!?N is a decent option.

K&S also mention in passing that 8.♘xc6!? ♘xc6 9.♕g3 offers White a slightly improved version of the queenless position, assuming the play proceeds in parallel for a certain number of moves afterwards. He has a point, but I would prefer not to give Black the freedom to recapture on c6 with the b- or d-pawns, even though White is slightly better there too.

8...♕xg3 9.hxg3 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 b5

10...♘c6? 11.♗b6 puts Black in a bind.



11.f3!

11.0–0–0 ♗b7 12.f3 transposes to a line discussed on page 103, which I prefer to avoid.

11...♗b7

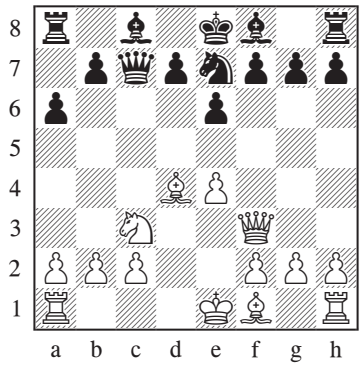
We have transposed to variation B22. You can find the continuation on page 103, along with an explanation of why it is beneficial for White to postpone castling.

A similar option is:

7...♘xd4 8.♗xd4 ♘e7

8...b5 9.♕g3 ♕xg3 10.hxg3 transposes to variation B22.

The text move should be met in typical fashion with:



9.♕g3!

9.♕e3 has been played several times but the position after 9...b5 is nothing special for White.

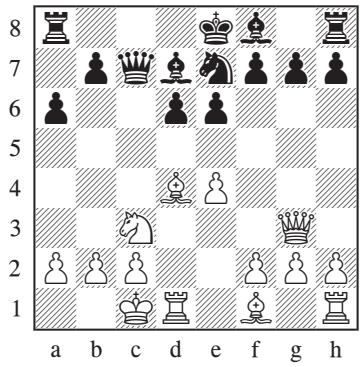
9...d6?!

9...♕xg3 10.hxg3 transposes to the 7...♘ge7 line above.

The text move is an independent try, but it's hard to believe that Black can benefit from keeping the queens on.

10.0–0–0 ♗d7

This occurred in Bauer – Miezis, Flims 2016. White has several good options but I like:

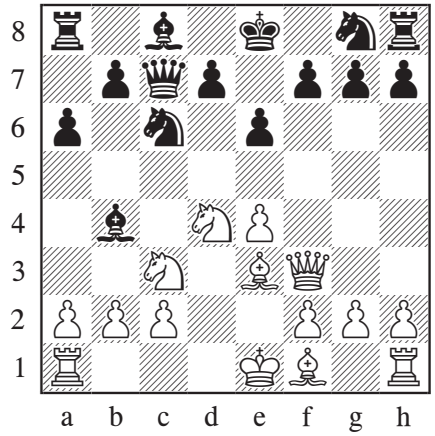


11.♗e3N ♘c6 12.♗e2 b5 13.♔b1⩲/±

White has improved his pieces and can think about doubling rooks and/or advancing his f- or h-pawns in the near future. The queen on g3 impedes the development of Black's kingside pieces, which is why Black generally prefers to exchange it.

B21) 7...♗b4

This is an active move but it comes with certain risks, as exchanging on c3 will render Black vulnerable on the dark squares.



8.♘xc6

This seems like the simplest way of avoiding the threatened ...♘e5.

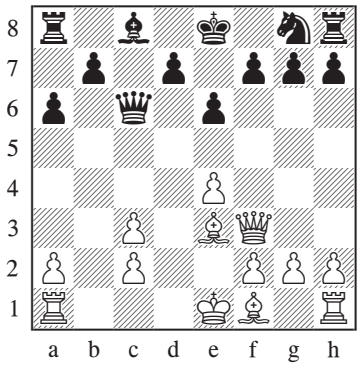
8.0–0–0!? is a promising alternative which the reader may also wish to investigate.

8...bxc6

Black has tried all three of the other playable moves:

8...♕xc6 9.♗d4 f6 (9...♘f6 10.0–0–0 is covered later on page 130 – see 9...♕xc6 10.♗d4 in the notes to variation B262) 10.a3 ♗e7 This was Markantonaki – Stefanidi, Hydra 2015, when 11.♕g3N± would have given White an obvious advantage.

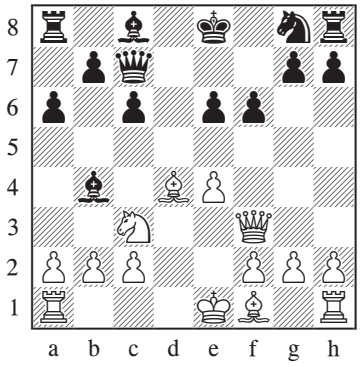
8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♕xc6 was played in Li Yankai – Zhang Shengyun, Harbin 2016. White continued 10.♗d4 and was successful, but more accurate would have been:



10.c4!N ♘e7 11.♗e2± White's strong bishops and open queenside files are more important than the doubled pawns. 11...b5!? looks like Black's most challenging idea, but 12.0–0! bxc4 13.♖fb1⩲ is a promising pawn sacrifice.

8...dxc6 9.♗d4 f6

9...e5 10.♕g3! f6 11.0–0–0N gives White a great game.



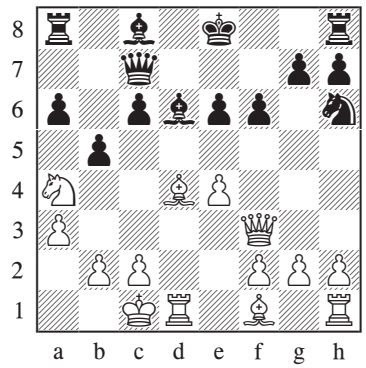
10.a3 ♗d6 11.0–0–0 ♘h6?!

11...e5N was the lesser evil although 12.♗e3 still favours White due to his lead in development.

12.♘a4 b5?

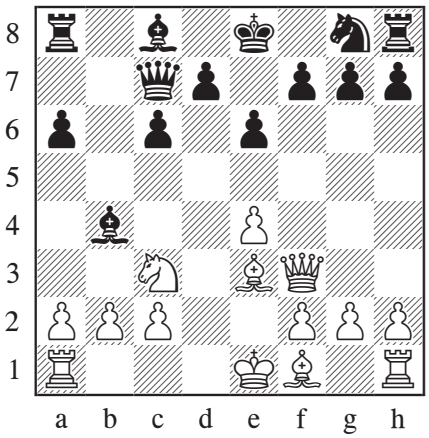
A mistake, but Black was in trouble anyway, as 12...c5 loses a pawn to 13.♗xc5! ♗xc5 14.♕h5†.

In Suarez Uriel – Cori Tello, Utebo 2017, White overlooked the strongest continuation:



13.♗b6!N ♕b8 14.e5!

With a decisive advantage.



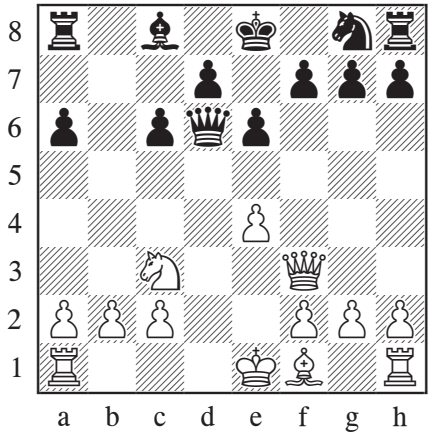
9.♗f4

White has a pleasant choice, with 9.♗d4 being the other good move. Kotronias and Semkov analyse both options and gives the latter an exclamation mark. I think the choice is mainly a matter of taste, and the text move just seems like a simpler route to an advantage, with no complicated variations to remember.

9...♗d6

9...♗xc3†? has not been played, for good reason, as the doubled pawns are far less weak than Black's dark squares. 10.bxc3 ♕a5 11.♕g3!±

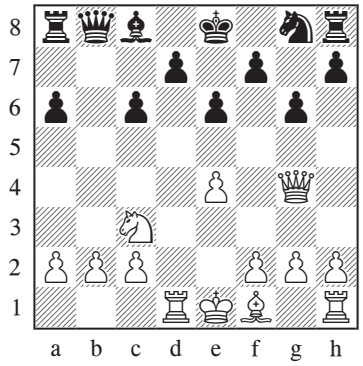
10.♗xd6 ♕xd6



11.♕g3

This virtually forces a queen exchange, leaving White with an easy positional edge.

11.♖d1!?N ♕b8 12.♕g4!? is a promising alternative for those who prefer a middlegame initiative. (12.♕g3 ♕xg3 13.hxg3 d5± is the same as the main line except White has been given the ♖d1 move for free. An extra developing move is always nice; on the other hand, White no longer has the option of long castling. The general evaluation is about the same though.) 12...g6 Now the most enterprising continuation is:



13.♗e2!? Sacrificing a pawn in order to accelerate the lead in development. 13...♕xb2 14.♕f3 ♕b8 15.0–0 ♕e5 16.♕e3 ♖b8

(16...♘e7 17.f4 ♕a5 18.e5⩱) 17.f4 ♕a5 18.♔h1⩲ With promising play for the pawn.

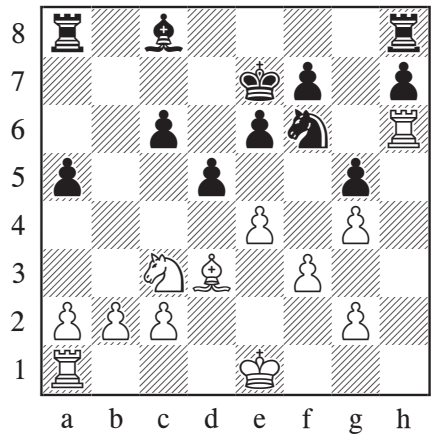
11...♕xg3 12.hxg3 d5 13.g4!±

Utilizing the spare g-pawn and open h-file to good effect. You certainly don't have to remember any more than this, but it is worth showing a few more moves of a well-played game.

13...♘f6 14.f3 g5

This prevents the further advance of the g-pawn but permanently weakens Black's kingside structure.

15.♖h6 ♔e7 16.♗d3 a5



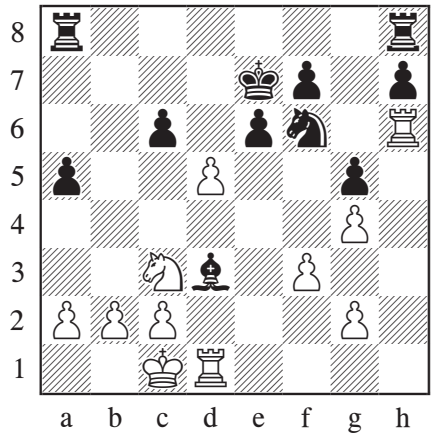
17.0–0–0 ♗a6 18.exd5!?

White decides on a small transformation, taking into account a specific tactical idea.

18.b3 and 18.♘a4 are sensible alternatives.

18...♗xd3

18...cxd5 is the move Black would like to play, but 19.♘xd5†! ♘xd5 (19...exd5? is even worse after 20.♖e1†) 20.♗xa6 is a nice trick to win a pawn.



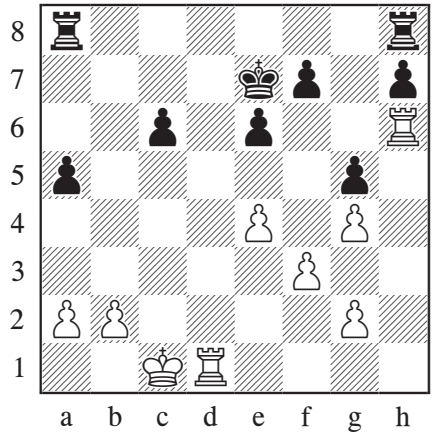
19.d6†!

Of course White inserts this move in order to prevent Black from improving his structure with ...cxd5.

19...♔xd6 20.cxd3!?

The more obvious 20.♖xd3† ♔e7 21.♘a4 would also have retained a nice edge.

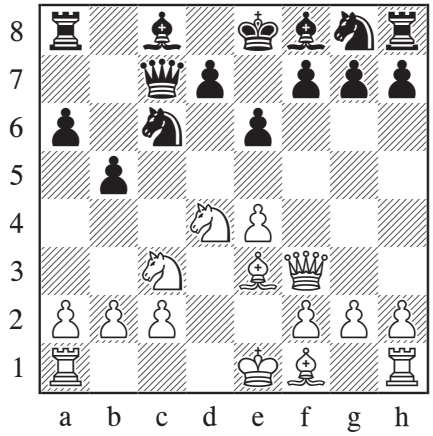
20...♔e7 21.♘e4 ♘xe4 22.dxe4



22...♖ab8 23.♖d4 ♖b5 24.♖c4±

White enjoyed a risk-free endgame advantage in Hammer – Werle, Fagernes 2015.

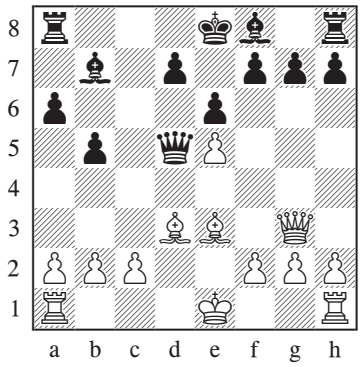
B22) 7...b5



8.♕g3

This thematic move is an especially convenient choice, as the resulting positions might also be reached after some of Black's other options.

A reasonable alternative is: 8.♘xc6!? ♕xc6 (8...dxc6 9.♕g3±) 9.♗d3 ♗b7 10.♕g3 ♘f6 11.e5 ♘d5 12.♘xd5 ♕xd5



13.0–0± Karjakin – Ezat, Doha 2015.

8...♕xg3

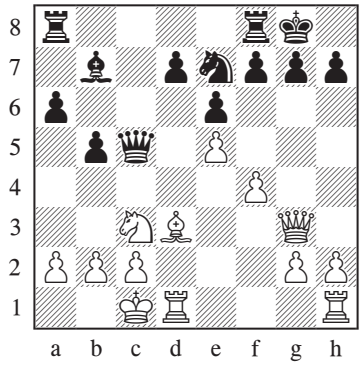
Black may as well make the exchange, otherwise the queen on g3 may become quite annoying for him. I checked two other moves:

8...♗d6 9.f4 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♘e7

10...♗xf4? loses to 11.♕xg7+– of course.

11.e5 ♗c5 12.♗xc5 ♕xc5 13.♗d3 ♗b7 14.0–0–0 0–0

Here I found a way to improve White's play.



15.♘e4!N

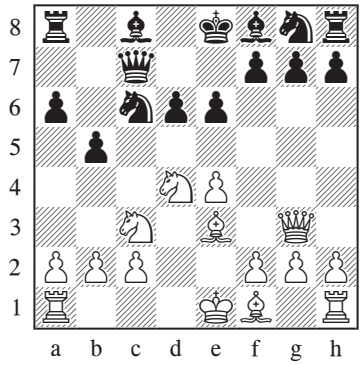
15.♗xh7†? ♔xh7 16.♖xd7 backfired after 16...♗c6 17.♕h4† ♔g8 18.♖xe7 b4–+ in Lilov – Bilan, Kazan 2016.

15...♗xe4 16.♗xe4 ♖a7 17.♕d3±

With lasting pressure along the d-file.

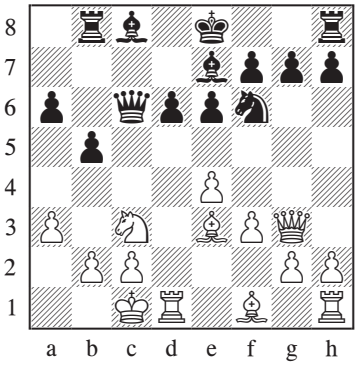
8...d6!?N

This has yet to be played but it immediately transposes to an existing game, Warmerdam – Leenhouts, Vlissingen 2015. A good continuation is:



9.♘xc6!?N ♕xc6 10.a3 ♘f6 11.f3 ♗e7 12.0–0–0 ♖b8

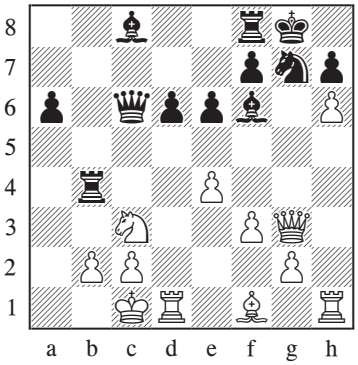
12...0–0 13.h4 gives White the faster attack, for instance: 13...♔h8 14.♕e1 ♖b8 15.h5 a5 16.h6 g6 17.♗g5±



13.h4 b4 14.axb4 ♖xb4 15.h5±

White has the better prospects and Black still cannot castle, as the following line demonstrates.

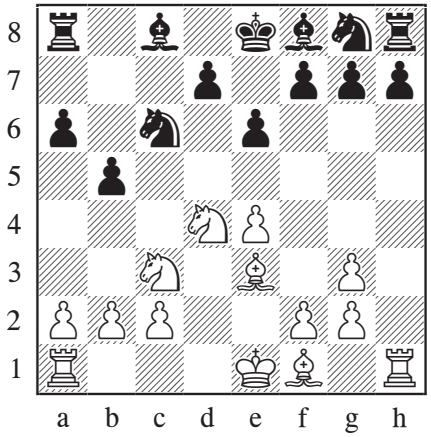
15...0–0? 16.♗h6 ♘e8 17.♗xg7 ♘xg7 18.h6 ♗f6



19.f4! ♕b6 20.♗d3

White is winning.

9.hxg3



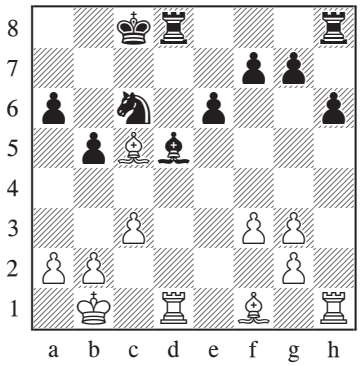
9...♘xd4

These knights will usually be exchanged at some point.

I also considered:

9...♗b7 10.f3

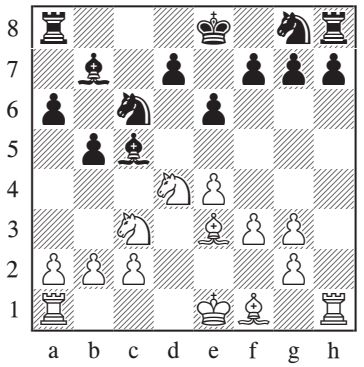
10.♘b3!? is an interesting attempt to exploit Black's hesitation in exchanging knights. A good example continued: 10...♘f6 11.f3 d5 12.exd5 ♘b4 13.0–0–0 ♘fxd5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5 15.♔b1 h6 16.c3 ♘c6 17.♘c5 ♗xc5 18.♗xc5 0–0–0



19.♗e2 ♔b7 20.b3 White's bishop pair gave him the edge in Bok – Spoelman, Amsterdam (rapid) 2015.

10...♗c5

10...♘xd4 11.♗xd4 transposes to the main line below.



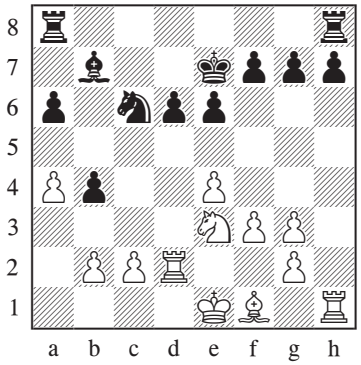
11.♖d1

11.♘f5 is playable but 11...♗f8!? leaves

White nothing better than repeating with 12.♘d4.

11...♘xd4 12.♗xd4 ♗xd4 13.♖xd4 ♘e7 14.a4 ♘c6 15.♖d2 b4 16.♘d1 ♔e7 17.♘e3 d6

In Demchenko – Kezin, Moscow 2015, White could have retained the upper hand with:

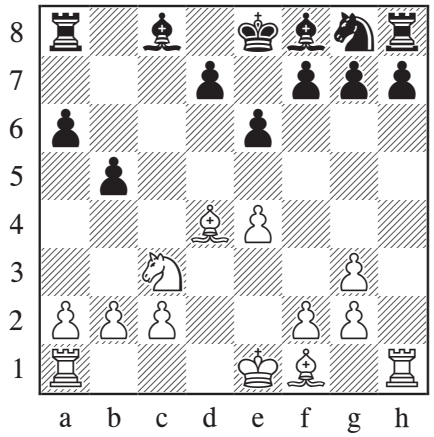


18.♘c4N

It is useful to play this before Black can consolidate his kingside with ...h6. Now he will have to put the 'wrong' rook on d8.

18...♖ad8 19.♔f2±

10.♗xd4



10...♗b7

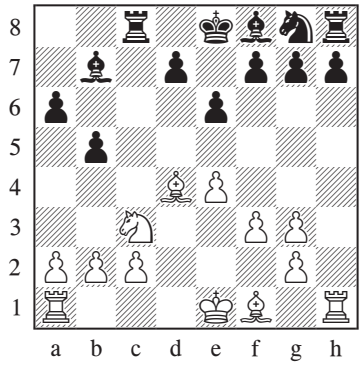
10...♘e7 reaches a position which was briefly discussed on page 96, in a note under 7...♘ge7. As I mentioned there, White should delay castling in favour of 11.f3!, when 11...♗b7 converts to our main line below.

11.f3 ♘e7

Black might also try:

11...♖c8N

This transposes to a couple of games, both of which continued with 12.0–0–0. Even though White has good chances after that move, I like the following suggestion of Kotronias and Semkov even more:

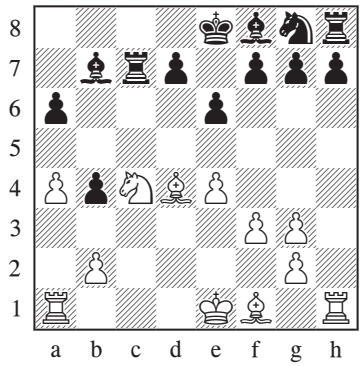


12.a4!N b4 13.♘d1

White offers a pawn sacrifice to obtain a considerable initiative. If Black does not accept it then he will stand clearly worse, as should become clear by comparing the main lines below. Therefore we will focus on what happens if he grabs the c2-pawn.

13...♖xc2 14.♘e3 ♖c7 15.♘c4

15.♖d1!? also gives White plenty of activity but the text move is natural and good.



15...d5 16.♘a5 ♗c8

16...♗a8? 17.♗xa6 is much worse for Black.

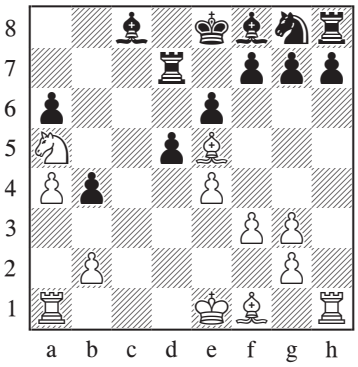
17.♗e5!?

This seems like the best way to maximize White's piece activity.

Kotronias and Semkov offer 17.exd5 exd5 18.♔d2± which would indeed be great if it was forced. However, Black can defend more resiliently by offering a counter-sacrifice: 17...♘f6! 18.dxe6 ♗d6! 19.exf7† ♔xf7 20.♗c4† ♗e6 21.♗xe6† ♔xe6 22.♖h3± White keeps an extra pawn and some winning chances, but Black's pieces are quite active and he has reasonable drawing chances.

17...♖d7

17...♖c5?! 18.♘b3 ♖c6 19.exd5 exd5 20.♘d4 ♖c5 21.♗d3± is great for White, so Black has no real choice but to place his rook on an ugly-looking square.



18.♖c1 ♘e7 19.♗b8!?

19.♗e2 is another good option which offers White a great deal of activity for the pawn.

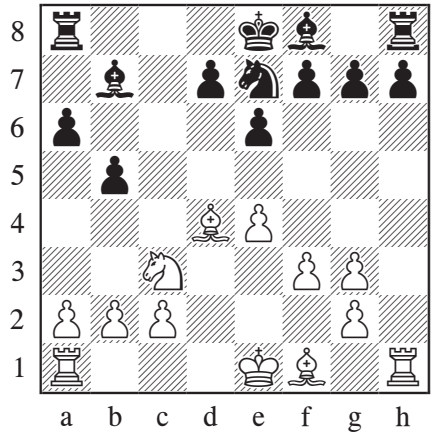
19...dxe4 20.♘c4 exf3 21.gxf3 ♗b7 22.♘d6† ♖xd6 23.♗xd6 ♘d5

23...♗xf3? 24.♖h4±

24.♗xf8 ♔xf8 25.♔f2±

Materially Black is okay, with two pawns for the exchange, but White still has the upper hand thanks to his piece activity, which should enable him to pick up a pawn or force some other concessions.

After the text move we reach a critical position where the best move has yet to be tested in practice.



12.g4!N

I take my hat off to Vassilios Kotronias, not only for suggesting this novelty (to which he and co-author Semkov modestly attach a '!?') in *Attacking the Flexible Sicilian*, but also for accurately conveying the essence of the position. Having analysed it in some detail, I entirely agree with their assessment, except for preferring a slightly different continuation a bit further down the line.

As Kotronias and Semkov explain, White's most effective plan is to play a2-a4 to weaken Black's queenside, and meet ...b4 with one of a few possible knight regroupings. However, the immediate 12.a4 b4 13.♘a2 allows 13...f5! when Black gets annoying counterplay. An obvious purpose of the text move is to discourage the ...f5-break.

Almost all of the games from this position have continued 12.0–0–0, with good results for White. However, Kotronias once again hits the nail on the head when he points out 12...d5!N as an improvement which solves most of Black's problems. I investigated this and played around with several lines; without

going into details, my general assessment is that White can generate a bit of pressure but Black's defensive task should not be too difficult.

Having concluded that the above two lines do not quite work in the way we would hope for, the merits of the text move start to become clear. As mentioned already, we now have the option of playing a2-a4 without allowing the annoying ...f5 idea. A second benefit of the text move is that it gives White the option of g4-g5 to cramp Black on the kingside and create further weaknesses there.

12...f6

This seems the most logical choice, as Black deals with two issues at once: he prevents the g4-pawn from advancing any further, and shields the g7-pawn, enabling his dark-squared bishop to develop (once the knight has moved out of the way).

12...d5 does not solve Black's problems here. 13.exd5 and now Kotronias and Semkov mention 13...♘xd5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5 15.a4 b4 16.♗d3 h6 17.g5 with some advantage for White, while I would add that 13...b4 14.♘e4 ♘xd5 15.g5 also leaves Black under pressure.

I also checked: 12...h6 13.a4 (13.g5!? could also be considered) 13...b4 14.♘a2 ♘c6 (14...a5 15.♗b5 ♘c6 16.♗e3 is unpleasant for Black) 15.♗e3 ♘e5 16.0–0–0 Although Kotronias and Semkov continue analysing more deeply, the position is not so forcing and I am quite happy to leave it here and say White has the better chances, with active possibilities on both flanks.

13.a4 b4 14.♘a2!?

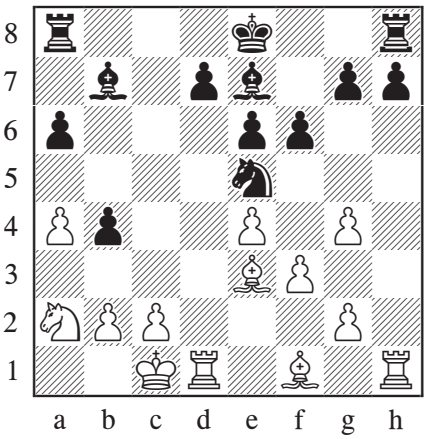
Kotronias and Semkov mention this move in a note but I would like to present it as my main line, as I slightly prefer it over the alternatives. I briefly checked 14.♘d1 intending ♘e3, but found 14...d5! to be a good answer.

14.♘e2 is Kotronias and Semkov's main line, which they analyse up to move 33(!). This is certainly a valid interpretation of the position but Black has many options along the way, and I regard the text move as a more straightforward way to keep some advantage.

14...♘c6 15.♗e3

15.♗b6 ♗d6 16.0–0–0 ♔e7 may also offer White some edge, but I prefer the text move.

15...♘e5 16.0–0–0 ♗e7



17.b3!?

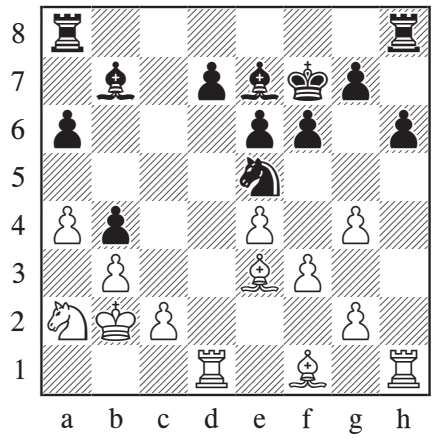
This is where my analysis deviates from that of Kotronias and Semkov and Semkov, who prefer a different plan with 17.♗d4. My idea is simply to tidy up the queenside by putting the king on b2 before deciding what to do next. There are many possible continuations and I will just mention a couple of noteworthy ideas.

17...♔f7

17...h6 18.♔b2 is similar.

18.♔b2 h6

18...♗c6 can be met by 19.a5± with ideas of ♗b6 and ♖d4.



19.♘xb4!?

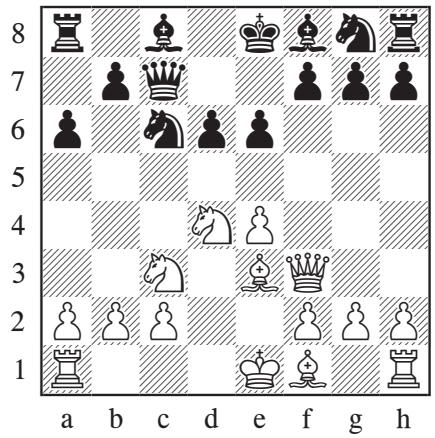
This is not only a strong move, but also the kind of tactical resource that could easily escape one's attention, so it is worth making a mental note of it.

A more straightforward plan would be 19.♗e2±, perhaps followed by ♖d2 and ♖hd1. Later White may transform the queenside with c2-c3, or reroute his knight to d3.

19...♗xb4 20.f4±

With complications favouring White.

B23) 7...d6



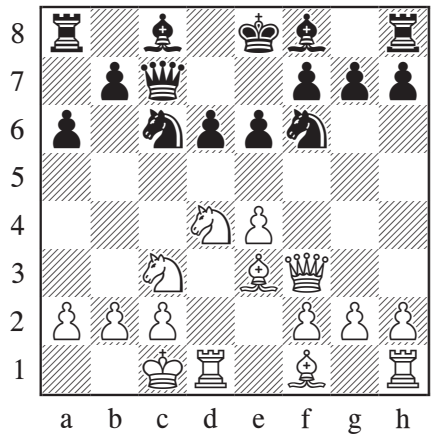
At first glance, this move may appear to be against the spirit of the Taimanov, as Black obstructs his dark-squared bishop and loses the option of recapturing on c6 with the d-pawn. However, it does have a couple of redeeming features. First, it takes the sting out of the ♕g3 plan. And secondly, Black anticipates the arrival of our king on the queenside, and prepares to launch an attack with ...♗d7 and ...b5, while leaving his kingside pieces at home for the time being.

8.0–0–0

Despite Black's plan outlined above, I am happy to accept the challenge. 8.♘xc6!? bxc6 9.0–0–0 is an interesting alternative, when Black can choose between 9...♘f6 and 9...♖b8. I spent some time looking at this, but eventually decided I would prefer to keep the exchange on c6 in reserve until a more favourable moment.

There are two main moves to consider: **B231) 8...♘f6** and **B232) 8...♗d7**.

B231) 8...♘f6



9.♕g3

This is a thematic choice for our ♕f3 set-up. The queen sidesteps a possible ...♘e5 attack and eyes the g7-pawn, making it harder for Black to develop the f8-bishop.

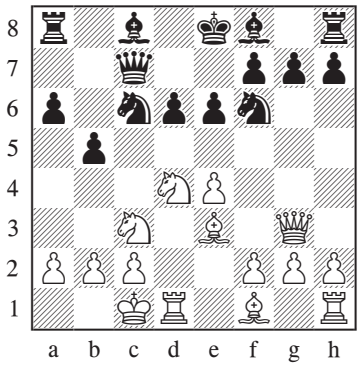
9...♘xd4

9...♗d7 is Black's most popular choice, after which 10.♘xc6 ♗xc6 leads to variation B232 below.

9...♘h5?! can hardly be a good idea. 10.♕h4 g6 11.g4 ♗e7 occurred in Jens – Lindam, Germany 2016, when 12.♗g5± would have been most unpleasant for Black.

9...b5

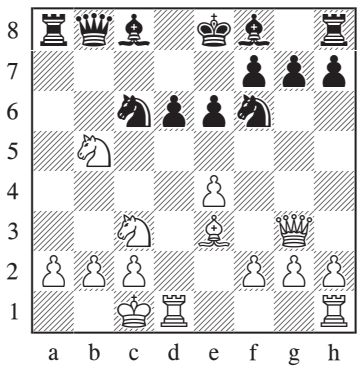
This runs into a nice idea:



10.♗xb5!

After 10.♘xc6 ♕xc6 11.e5 dxe5 12.♕xe5 ♗d7 White had no more than a tiny advantage in Jedryczka – Tomic, Patras 1999.

10...axb5 11.♘dxb5 ♕b8

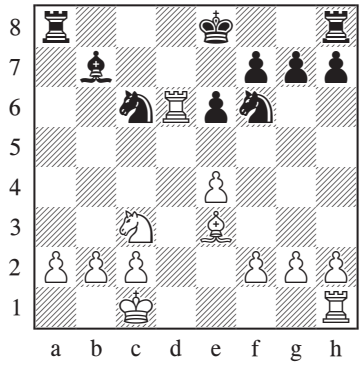


12.♘xd6†

White simplifies to a favourable endgame with three healthy passed pawns versus a knight.

White tried to be too clever with 12.♗c5?? in Ondok – Somogyi, Hungary 2016, when 12...♖xa2!!N–+ would have been an impressive tactical refutation. (12...♘xe4!N is a lesser, but still excellent continuation for Black.)

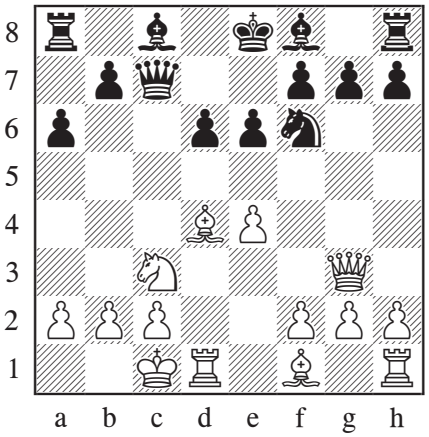
12...♗xd6 13.♕xd6 ♕xd6 14.♖xd6 ♗b7



15.f3 0–0 16.b3±

Black was unable to hold the endgame in Ilyasov – Garcia Rosales, corr. 2016.

10.♗xd4



10...e5 11.♗e3 ♗e6

I briefly considered 11...h6?! to stop the bishop from coming to g5, but 12.f4! opens the position to exploit Black's slow development.

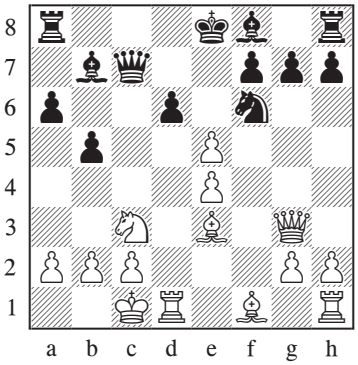
Black has also tried:

11...b5 12.f4 ♗b7

12...♗e6 occurred in Moe – Bjerre, Fredericia 2015, when 13.♘d5N looks promising, for instance: 13...♗xd5 14.exd5 ♖c8 15.c3±

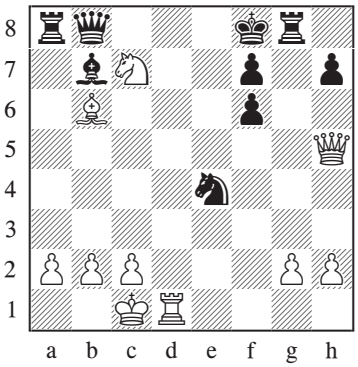
13.fxe5

13.♗d3 also offers White some advantage but it is tempting to open the position.



13...♘xe4

13...dxe5N 14.♗xb5†! axb5 15.♘xb5 gives White a dangerous initiative for the sacrificed piece. My main line continues: 15...♕b8 16.♗b6 ♗e7 17.♘c7† ♔f8 18.♕xe5 ♘xe4 19.♖hf1 ♗f6 20.♖xf6 gxf6 21.♕h5 ♖g8 (After 21...♖xa2 22.♔b1± Kotronias and Semkov give a long line where Black just about survives but still remains worse; I don't see this as an argument against White's play.)



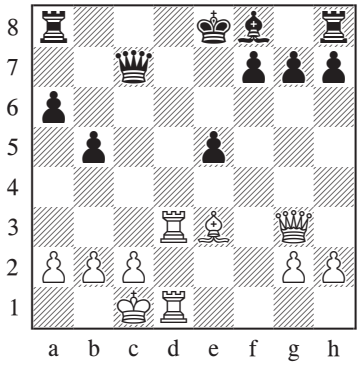
22.♕h6† ♔e7 23.♕e3± The game remains complicated but White is clearly on top.

14.♘xe4 ♗xe4 15.♗d3 ♗xd3?

Black should have settled for 15...d5, although 16.♖hf1± leaves him with nothing to compensate for White's considerable lead in development.

16.♖xd3 dxe5 17.♖hd1+–

Black is unable to get his king to safety and White easily broke through.



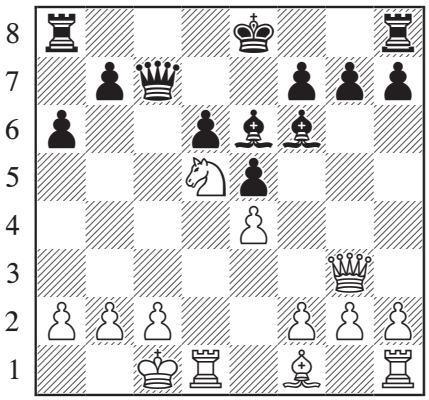
17...f6 18.♕g4 ♕f7 19.♕e4 ♖c8 20.♕f5 ♖b8 21.♖c3 ♕b7 22.♕e6† ♗e7 23.♖cd3

1–0 Motylev – Meskovs, Tallinn 2016.

12.♗g5

12.f4!? also leads to interesting play, but the simplest approach is to conquer the d5-square.

12...♗e7 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♘d5



14...♗xd5

This is the most common and natural reaction for a human player.

14...♕c6

This has been tried in a couple of correspondence games.

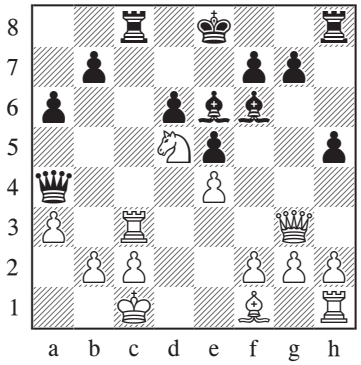
15.a3

15.♔b1N also looks sensible.

15...h5

15...b5 16.♔b1 ♖c8 occurred in Sisak – Vasconcellos, corr. 2017, when 17.c3N would have kept a nice edge for White.

16.♖d3 ♖c8 17.♖c3 ♕a4



18.♖xc8†!?N

The game continued 18.♘xf6† gxf6 19.♖xc8† ♗xc8 20.♕g7 ♖f8 21.♕xf6 ♕xe4 and White was pressing, although Black managed to hold in Nekhaev – Pessoa, corr. 2016. The text move leads to a simpler position with a long-term advantage for White.

18...♗xc8 19.♗d3! ♔f8!

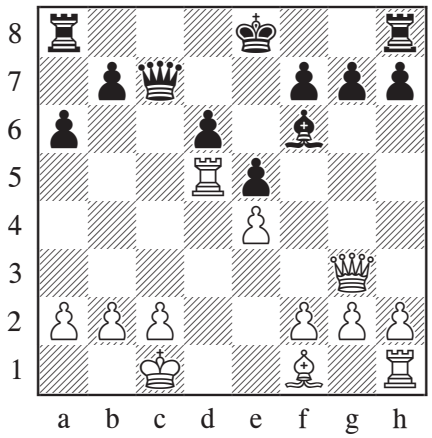
Black has to play this to protect himself against a queen invasion on g7.

20.♘b6 ♕c6 21.♘xc8 ♕xc8 22.♔b1±

Black is under pressure, much as in the main line below. It will not take long for White's bishop to find its way to the a2-g8 diagonal.

15.♖xd5

Black's position is more unpleasant than it may appear at first glance. His bishop is impeded by the d6- and e5-pawns, whereas White has a clear plan of manoeuvring his bishop to b3 and perhaps later d5. Once his pieces are fully coordinated, he can think about gaining space and attacking on either flank.



15...0–0 16.♗e2 b5

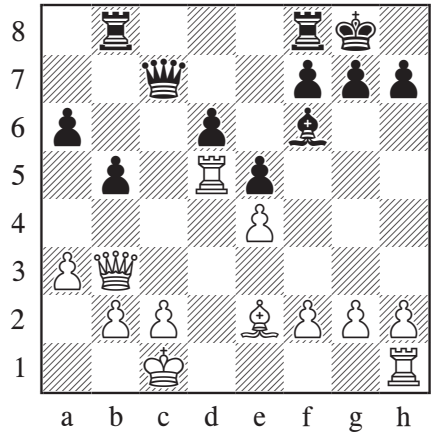
In *Attacking the Flexible Sicilian*, Kotronias and Semkov suggest that Black should avoid this pawn advance in such positions, on the basis that the a6-pawn is permanently weakened and the a2-a4 pawn lever can be used to pry open the queenside in the future. Although these are valid points, it would be rather depressing to sit and defend a worse position with no hope of counterplay. At least after the text move, White has to consider the possibility of the enemy pawns advancing to b4 and a3, with potential threats against our king.

17.a3!?N

17.♔b1± has been played a few times and is also promising for White. However, I like the idea of taking countermeasures against Black's queenside advance. For the moment we are preventing ...b4; and if Black manages to play it after suitable preparation, we can simply block the queenside with a3-a4.

17...♖ab8 18.♕b3

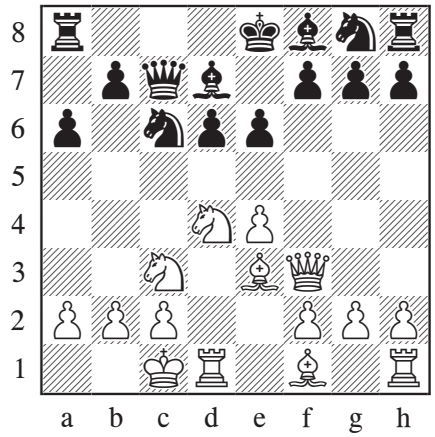
18.♔b1 b4 19.a4 is also good, but I would prefer to restrain the b5-pawn altogether for the time being.



18...♕b6 19.♖f1 ♖fc8 20.♔b1 ♖c5 21.g3±

White can continue improving his position with moves like h2-h4, c2-c3, and eventually transferring his bishop to b3, while it is not clear what Black should be doing.

B232) 8...♗d7



This is the more common continuation. Although this and the previous line may transpose to one another, the text move somehow feels more thematic, as Black makes use of the ...d6 move to continue with his queenside development, while staying flexible on the kingside.

9.♘xc6!?

This is a rather fresh idea, having only been tested in two games at the time of writing – although it is quite likely to transpose to some other games within a few moves.

Naturally, I also spent some time looking at the most common 9.♕g3. Black usually replies with 9...♘f6, when 10.f4!? leads to rich play, while 10.f3 is a more restrained approach advocated by Kotronias and Semkov. At some point I came to realize that 10.♘xc6!? ♗xc6 11.f3 contained some promise – but if I was going to aim for this position, I may as well exchange on c6 immediately, rather than give Black extra options such as ...♘e5.

9...♗xc6

9...bxc6?! has not been played, for good reason. On page 105, in the note to White's 8th move, I noted that 8.♘xc6!? bxc6 9.0–0–0 was a valid option, when 9...♘f6 and 9...♖b8 would be sensible moves. In the current position, it's as if White has chosen that line and Black responded with 9...♗d7?!, which is clearly not the best use of a tempo. White has several good moves but I find 10.g4!?± the most appealing, effectively preventing ...♘f6.

The present position was reached in Fier – Ramirez, Medellin (rapid) 2017, and one other game so far. I suggest a thematic move for this variation:

10.♕g3N

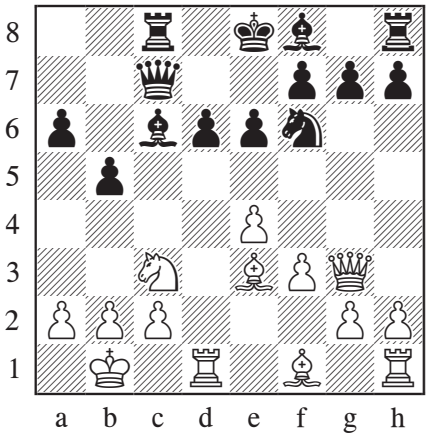
A new idea in this position, although it is likely to transpose to some existing games after a few natural developing moves.

10...♘f6

I can't see a reason for Black to delay this move any longer.

11.f3 b5 12.♔b1 ♖c8

Now we transpose to a couple of games.



13.♗d3!

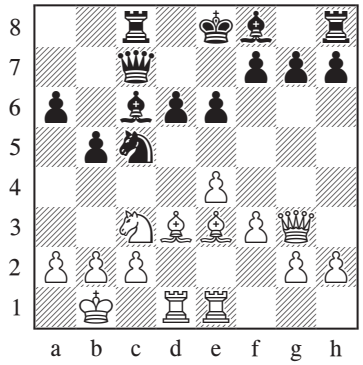
This move was played in both of the aforementioned encounters, and it also transposes to a few other games. White has to do something to defend the c2-pawn against the threat of ...b4 followed by a nasty discovered attack after the knight moves away from c3. The bishop may appear passive on d3, but it is useful in making way for the king's rook to go to the centre if required, and it also supports the e4-pawn, thus facilitating f3-f4, as shown in one of the lines below.

13...g6!?

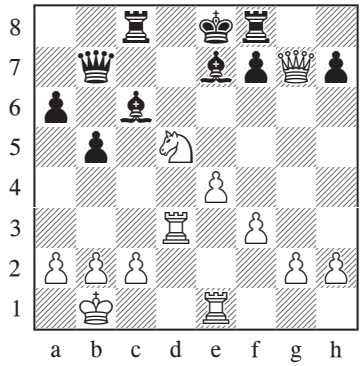
Out of several candidate moves, this is the engine's top choice and is noted by Kotronias and Semkov as Black's best option. (Those authors actually recommend something else for White, while noting this variation as an interesting alternative, which they reach via a slightly different move order.)

The first thing worth noting is that Black cannot solve his problems with the direct 13...d5? in view of 14.♗f4 ♕b6 15.exd5 ♘xd5 16.♘xd5 ♗xd5 17.♖he1± when Black is in big trouble with his king stuck in the centre.

13...♘d7?! 14.♖he1 ♘c5? was the choice of a strong GM, which was met forcefully with:



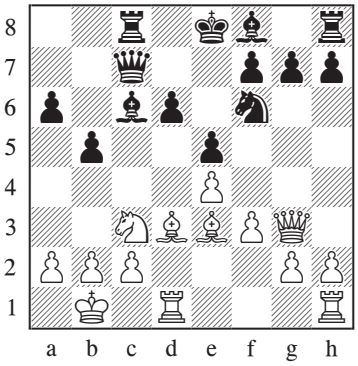
15.♘d5! ♕b7 16.♗d4! ♘xd3 17.♖xd3 e5 18.♗xe5! dxe5 19.♕xe5† ♗e7 20.♕xg7 ♖f8 In Lopez Martinez – Ivanisevic, Sitges 2016, the simplest way to secure the victory would have been:



21.♕e5!N ♗xd5 22.exd5+– Followed by d5-d6.

13...e5

This was tried successfully by another 2600 GM, but White's play can easily be improved.



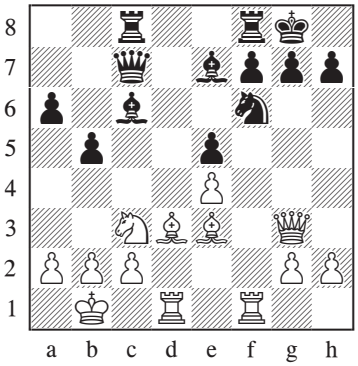
14.f4!N

14.a3?! was unnecessarily slow in Sarkar – Yilmaz, Reykjavik 2017.

14...♗e7

14...♘h5 is met by 15.♕g4! ♘xf4 (15...exf4? 15.♗d4+–) 16.♗xf4 exf4 17.♘d5 ♗xd5 18.exd5 g6 19.♖de1† ♗e7 20.h4→ with tough times ahead for the black king.

15.fxe5 dxe5 16.♖hf1 0–0



17.♗h6 ♘e8 18.♘d5 ♕d6 19.♗c1↑

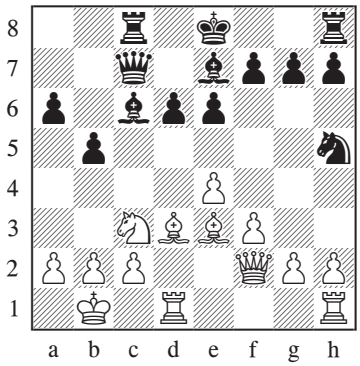
White has an obvious edge thanks to the great activity of his pieces.

Another recent try is:

13...♘h5!? 14.♕f2

14.♕h4N also deserves consideration. 14...♘f6 (Black should offer to repeat the position, as 14...g6 15.g4 ♗e7 16.♕f2 leaves him weakened on the dark squares) 15.♘e2 ♗e7 16.♕g3 0–0 17.♗h6 ♘e8 18.h4 The position is complex but I prefer White's chances, as he is closer to creating threats on the kingside than Black is on the queenside.

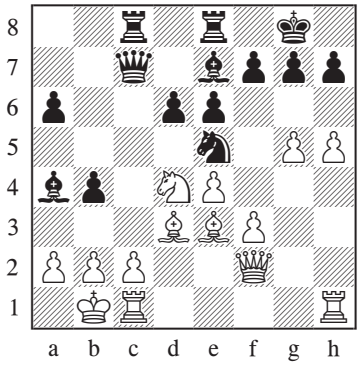
14...♗e7



15.g4

15.h4!?N is also worth considering, as Black may retreat the knight to f6 voluntarily.

15...♘f6 16.h4 ♘d7 17.g5 ♘e5 18.h5 b4 19.♘e2 ♗a4 20.♖c1 0–0 21.♘d4 ♖fe8



We have been following Abdumalik – Cramling, Riyadh (blitz) 2017. Obviously the last several moves were not forced, but it is fair to say that both sides have advanced their positions without committing any glaring errors. At this point, out of several possible continuations, the one I like most is:

22.♗e2!?N±

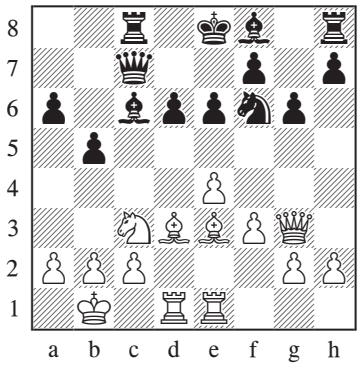
White's kingside attack is far more threatening than Black's queenside play.

The text move has only been played in one game so far, Dobrowolski – Jaracz, Poland 2016, when White continued with 14.♕h4. I suggest the following improvement:

14.a3!?N

For the moment, it is not obvious what our plan of attack should be, so I think it is worth taking a moment to stabilize the knight on c3.

14.♖he1N



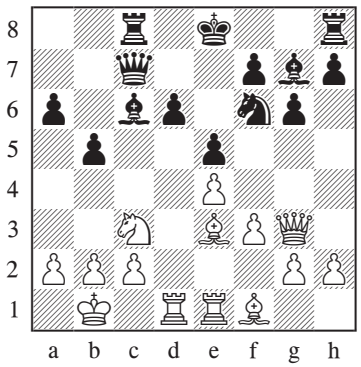
In their brief discussion of this line, Kotronias and Semkov indicate this rook move as White's best option, with the following idea in mind:

14...♗g7 15.♗f1

Targeting the d6-pawn. Naturally I gave this some attention too, but found that Black gets a decent game after:

15...e5!

15...b4? is much worse in view of: 16.♗xa6! bxc3 17.♗xc8 ♕xc8 (17...e5!? 18.♗a6 0–0 19.♖d3±) 18.♕xd6 ♘d7 (18...cxb2 19.♖d4! +–) 19.♗g5 ♗f8 20.♕d4 e5 21.♕xc3+–



16.♕f2

This is the computer's top choice.

After 16.a3 0–0 17.♗g5?! a5 White does not have time to conquer the d5-outpost, as the c2-pawn will hang, and meanwhile Black threatens to open the queenside with ...b4.

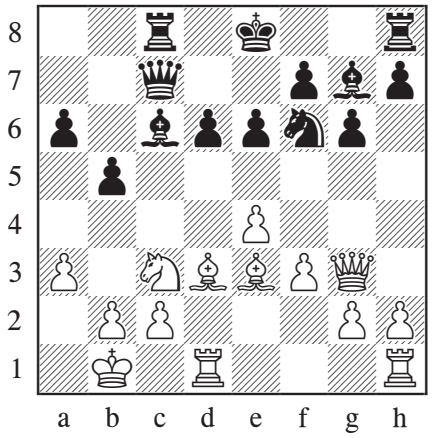
16...b4 17.♘d5 ♘xd5!

After 17...♗xd5 18.exd5± the two bishops should count for something.

18.exd5 ♗d7 19.♗xa6 ♖a8 20.♗b6 ♕b8

Black has full compensation for the pawn, and in a practical game his position would be much easier to handle.

14...♗g7



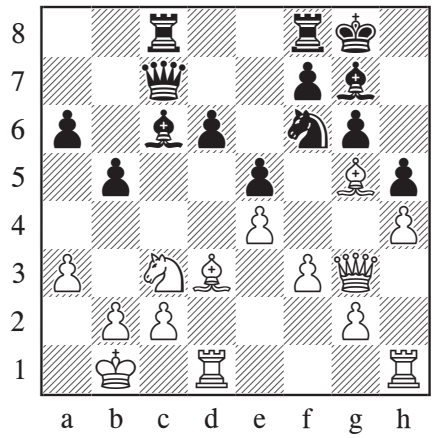
15.h4!

Having secured the knight on c3, I wondered if we could aim for an improved version of the previous note with 15.♗e2, targeting the d6-pawn. However, the machine instantly points out that 15...♗xe4! is a good reply. White has nothing better than 16.♕xd6 ♘d5! when only Black can hope to be better.

15...h5

15...0–0 is playable but risky. After 16.h5 ♘xh5 White can choose between 17.♕h4 and a further material sacrifice with 17.♖xh5!? gxh5 18.♖h1, with full compensation in either case.

16.♗f4 e5 17.♗g5 0–0



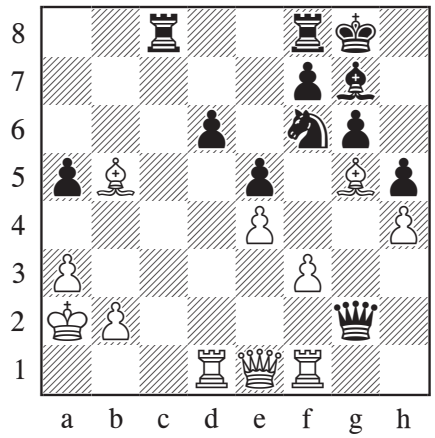
18.♕e1! a5!?

In the event of 18...♖b8 19.♗xf6 ♗xf6 20.g4→ White is the first to open lines towards the enemy king.

19.♘xb5!

This leads to a favourable transformation of the position.

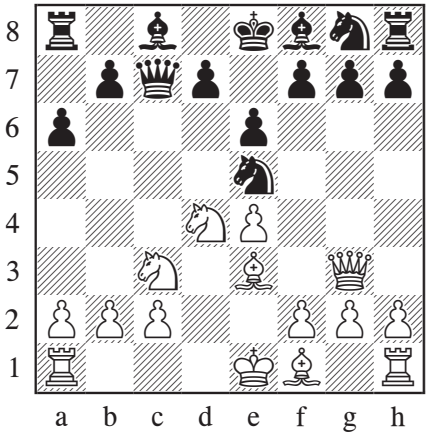
19...♗xb5 20.♗xb5 ♕xc2† 21.♔a2 ♕xg2 22.♖f1



22...♖c2 23.♖d2 ♖xd2 24.♕xd2 ♕xd2 25.♗xd2±

With the bishop pair and the chance to create a strong passed pawn in the near future, White has fine prospects in the endgame.

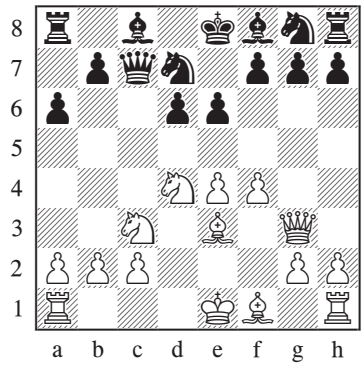
B24) 7...♘e5 8.♕g3



8...h5!?

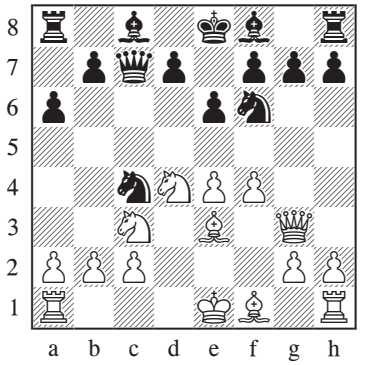
This quirky-looking move has been Black's most popular choice from this position; indeed, Kotronias and Semkov do not mention any alternatives. Black hopes to either dislodge the white queen from its excellent square, or provoke some concession such as h2-h4.

8...d6?! is hardly a serious option. 9.f4 ♘d7 (9...♘c4 10.♗xc4 ♕xc4 11.0–0–0 b5 12.a3 b4 13.axb4 ♕xb4 14.f5±) This occurred in Madrigal – Song, Cappelle-la-Grande 2016, when White could have exploited his considerable lead in development with:



10.f5!N ♘e5 11.fxe6 fxe6 12.♗e2 ♘f6 13.0–0–0 ♗d7 14.♕h3 0–0–0 15.♘xe6 ♕a5 16.♖d5! ♘xd5 17.exd5±

8...♘f6 gives White a choice. The simplest option for our repertoire is 9.0–0–0, which leads straight to variation B265 on page 138. Alternatively, if you wish to try and exploit Black's move order then 9.f4!? is possible. 9...♘c4?! was seen in Wei Yi – Lei Tingjie, Zhongshan 2014, when White's strongest continuation would have been:



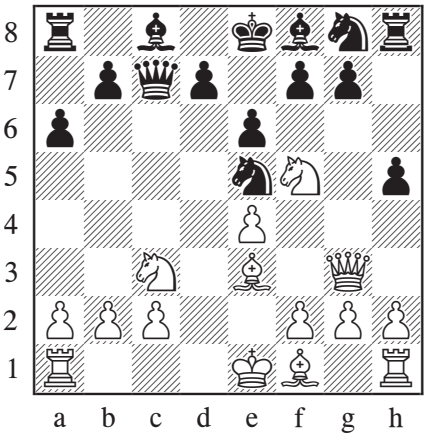
10.♗xc4N ♕xc4 11.e5 ♘d5 12.♘xd5 ♕xd5 13.0–0± With a serious lead in development and attacking prospects on the dark squares.

8...b5 is a sensible move which has been played by Caruana, but it usually just transposes to another of our main lines. 9.0–0–0 b4?! (9...♘f6 is normal; this will be analysed under variation B265) 10.♘f3! (10.♘a4 is fine but the text move comes close to refuting Black's play) 10...bxc3 11.♘xe5 cxb2† 12.♔b1 d5 13.exd5 ♘f6 14.d6! ♗xd6 15.♕xg7 ♖g8 16.♕xf7† ♕xf7 17.♘xf7 ♗b4 18.♘d6†± Vlasak – Hough, corr. 2015.

9.♘f5!?

First played by Mamedyarov in 2015, this sacrifice has not really caught on. I am not sure why this is so, as the idea is sound and it offers White a promising initiative in many lines. Perhaps the 'problem' is that there are a few long lines which engines assess as equal after perfect play, but I don't see this as a big drawback. There are no forced drawing lines and White will often be able to choose between two or more options offering good practical compensation, so Black will not simply be able to memorize his way to half a point.

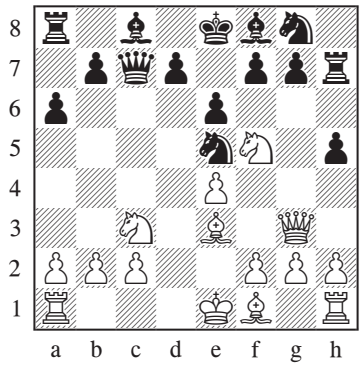
Should you wish to investigate a different path, I would say 9.0–0–0 and 9.h4 are the most interesting directions, but I will say no more about them here.



We will analyse **B241) 9...exf5?** and **B242) 9...f6!**.

9...g5!?N is not completely crazy, but 10.♗xg5 f6 11.♗h4 exf5 12.f4 ♘f7 13.0–0–0± offers White more than enough play for the sacrificed piece.

9...♖h7?! led to an eventual victory for Black in Firouzja – Banikas, Doha (blitz) 2016, but White can easily improve with:



10.♗d4! d6 11.f4 ♘g6 (11...♘g4 12.h3±) 12.♘e3±

B241) 9...exf5?

Black has wisely declined to eat the knight in all the games so far, but it is worth seeing how to refute it.

10.♘d5 ♕b8

10...♕d6 11.♗b6→ also puts Black in trouble.

11.♗b6 h4

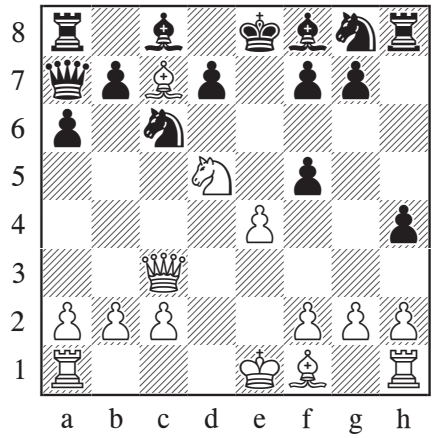
11...♗d6? 12.♕xg7+– is hopeless for Black.

12.♕c3 ♘c6 13.♗c7!

Kotronias and Semkov give 13.0–0–0 as leading to an eventual endgame with a plus for White, but the text move is even stronger.

13...♕a7

After 13...♗b4 14.♘xb4 ♕xc7 15.♘d5 ♕e5 16.♕xe5† ♘xe5 17.♘c7† White will emerge with an extra exchange.

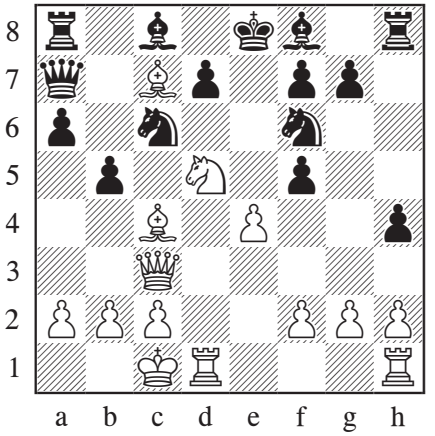


14.0–0–0 ♘f6

14...♘ge7 15.♖e1 fxe4 16.♖xe4 ♖h5 17.♗b6 ♖xd5 18.♗xa7 ♖xa7 19.♗c4 should be winning for White, as Black will hardly be able to get developed and coordinated without making serious concessions.

15.♗c4! b5

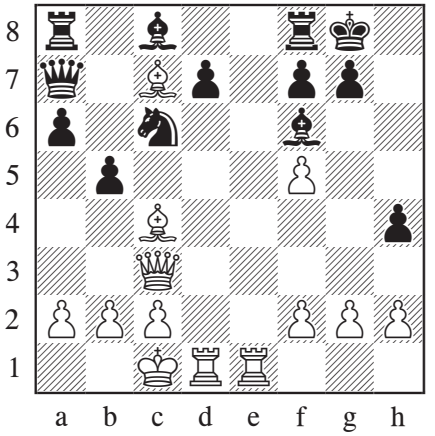
15...♗e7 16.♘xe7 ♘xe7 17.♗d6 ♕xf2 18.exf5+– and the attack is decisive.



16.♖he1!! ♗e7

Black also loses after: 16...bxc4 17.exf5† ♗e7 18.♖xe7†! ♘xe7 19.♘xf6† gxf6 20.♕xf6 ♖g8 21.♗d6+–

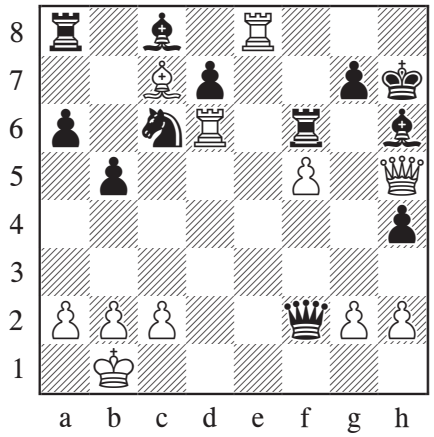
17.exf5 0–0 18.♘xf6† ♗xf6



19.♗xf7†!!

This is the justification for White's earlier play. The attack is overwhelming, as the following line demonstrates.

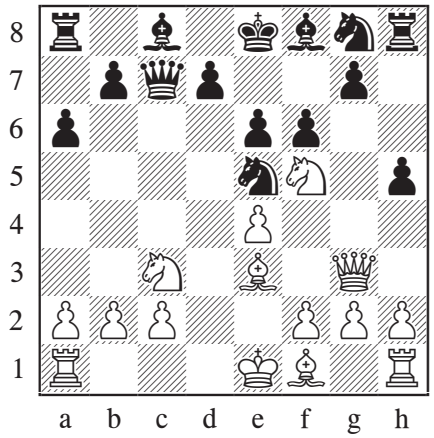
19...♖xf7 20.♖e8† ♔h7 21.♕f3 ♗g5† 22.♔b1 ♗h6 23.♕h5 ♖f6 24.♖d6! ♕xf2



25.♕g6†! ♖xg6 26.fxg6#

A simple but nonetheless beautiful finish.

B242) 9...f6!



This is the critical reply to our last move. Now Black really is threatening to capture the knight.

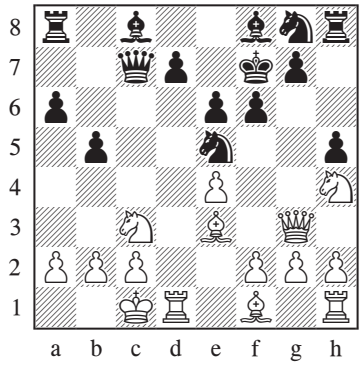
10.0–0–0

10.♘xg7†?! ♔f7 traps the knight. This isn't the end of the story, as 11.♘xh5 ♖xh5 12.f4 leaves White with two pawns and some attacking chances for the piece; nevertheless, I rate his compensation as significantly less dangerous than in the main line, and White went on to lose both of the games in which this approach was tried.

10...exf5

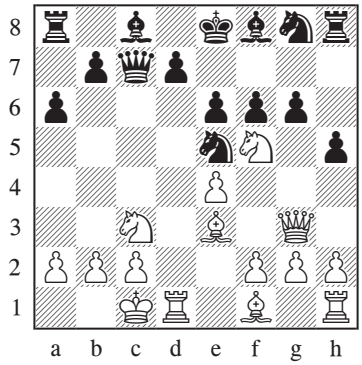
Capturing the knight is critical, and was Giri's choice in the stem game in 2015. At the time of writing, two other games have reached the same position. In both of them, Black was afraid to take the knight and tried to play more solidly, but the approach completely backfired.

10...♔f7? is a poor move: 11.♘h4 (11.f4!?N is also great for White) 11...b5 In Budima – Abbas, Antalya 2017, White could have got a huge advantage with:



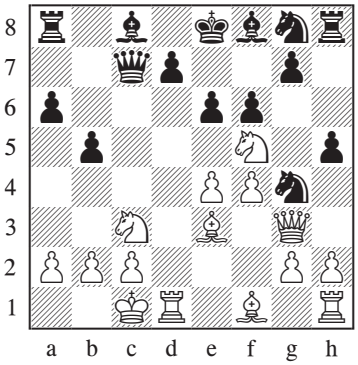
12.f4!N ♘g4 13.♘g6! And since taking the knight would cost Black his queen, the second player is in deep trouble.

10...g6?! was not much better in Ciganovic – Skok, Pula 2016. White should have reacted with:



11.f4!N ♘g4 12.h3 ♘xe3 (12...gxf5 13.hxg4 fxg4 14.♗e2 ♖h6 15.♕f2+–) 13.♕xg6† ♔d8 14.♘g7!±

If Black wants to avoid capturing the knight, the only decent way to do it is with the following untested idea:
10...b5!?N 11.f4 ♘g4



12.♗d4!?

Black's position is playable but risky, as White can choose between several tricky lines, including a few direct attacking options. The text move is arguably the trickiest for Black to deal with over the board.

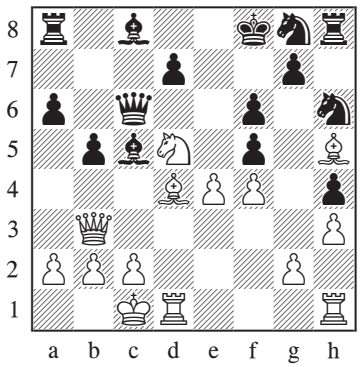
12.h3 ♘xe3 13.♕g6†!? (13.♘xe3 is also possible, leading to an unclear game with equal material) 13...♔d8 14.♘xg7! is a wild alternative; initially the computer gets excited about White's prospects, but eventually the line fizzles out to equality.

12...exf5

Black is unable to stay safe by choosing a quiet move in the hope of keeping the position closed, as White's last move created a nasty threat of h2-h3.

It is worth mentioning that 12...b4 13.♘d5! exd5 14.h3 g6 15.hxg4 gxf5 16.g5! is dangerous for Black, as Kotronias and Semkov point out.

13.h3 h4 14.♘d5! ♕c6 15.♕b3 ♘4h6 16.♗e2 ♗c5 17.♗h5† ♔f8



18.e5!? fxe5

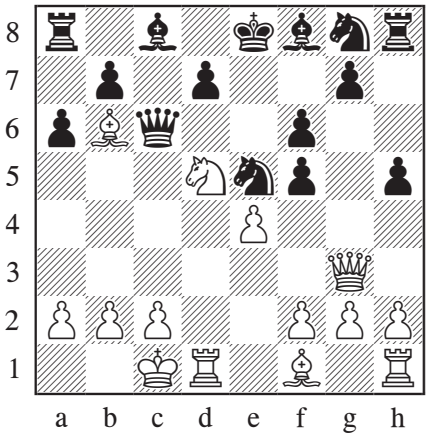
18...♗xd4 19.♖xd4 ♕c5 20.♖hd1 also gives Black plenty to think about.

19.fxe5 ♗xd4 20.♖xd4 ♘f7 21.♗xf7 ♔xf7 22.g4!⩲

White has full compensation at the end of this line by Kotronias and Semkov.

11.♘d5 ♕c6 12.♗b6

The last few moves were clearly best on both sides, but now it is time for Black to improve his play:



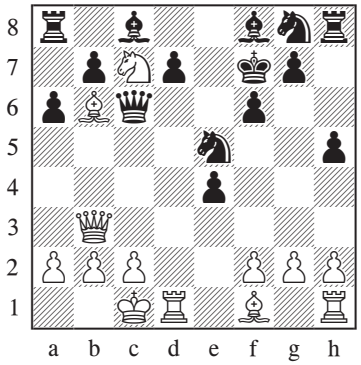
12...f4!N

Kotronias and Semkov also point out this clever idea, which offers a pawn in order to slow down White's attack.

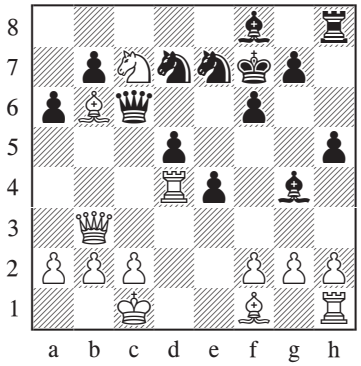
12...♔f7? is the kind of move that the defending player might come up with over the

board, but 13.exf5 ♗d6 14.f4 ♘g4 15.♕b3 ♔f8 16.♗c4→ leaves White with a virulent initiative for the material, while Black's pieces have no harmony whatsoever.

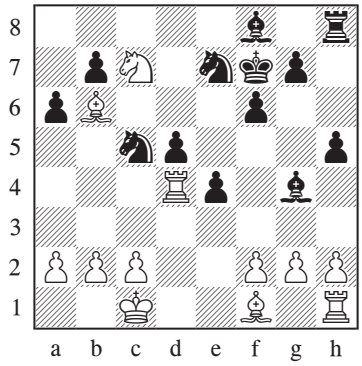
The one game from this position continued:
12...fxe4 13.♘c7† ♔f7 14.♕b3†
14.♘xa8 d5 15.♕b3 transposes.



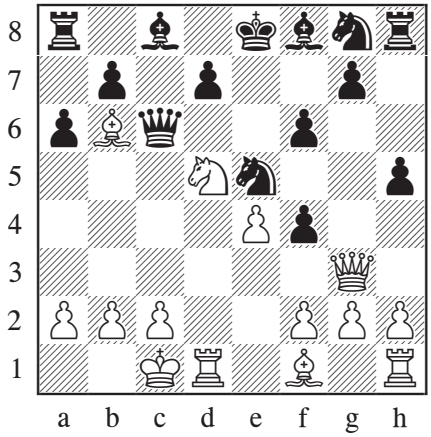
14...d5 15.♘xa8 ♘e7 16.♘c7 ♗g4!
16...♗e6? 17.♘xe6 ♕xe6 18.f3!± is unpleasant for Black.
17.♖d4 ♘d7
Now White's play can be improved with:



18.♗a5!N
The game continued 18.♘xd5? ♘xd5?! (18...♗e6!N 19.♗c4 ♘xd5 20.♗xd5 ♘xb6 21.♗xe6† ♕xe6 22.♕xe6† ♔xe6 23.♖xe4† ♔f7∓ would have left White fighting for half a point) 19.♖xd5 ♗e6 20.♖xd7† ♕xd7 21.♗c4 with simplifications and a subsequent draw in Mamedyarov – Giri, Tbilisi 2015.
18...♘c5
18...b5 19.♕c3 ♘c5 20.f3 is good for White, as Kotronias and Semkov point out.
18...g6 19.♘xd5! ♘c5 20.♕c3 ♘xd5 21.♖xd5± favours White as the rook is untouchable.
19.♕b6 ♕xb6
Kotronias and Semkov mention 19...♘e6 20.♕xc6 ♘xc6 21.♖xd5 ♘xa5 22.♘xe6 ♗xe6 23.♖xa5 and White is the exchange up.
20.♗xb6



20...♘e6
20...♘d7 21.♗a5±
21.♘xe6 ♗xe6±
Black has some compensation for the exchange, but not enough for equality.



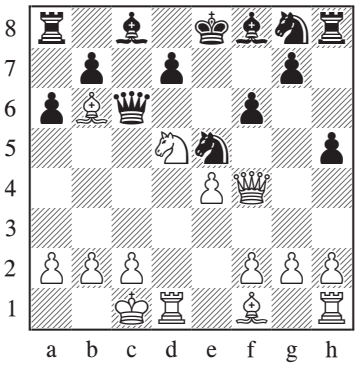
13.♕b3!?

Once again, we have one of those situations where White has no clear route to an advantage, but he can choose between a few decent approaches, while Black has to be ready for all kinds of tricks.

The alternative is:

13.♕xf4

This way, White collects a pawn and will prepare f2-f4, with a slower attack. The best defence is:



13...♔f7!

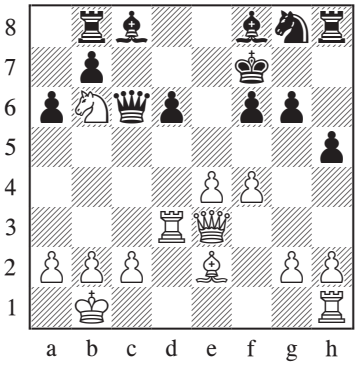
13...♗d6 14.♕g3 ♔f8 15.f4± looks promising for White.

14.♕e3 d6 15.f4 ♘d7 16.♗e2!?

This is the most interesting of a few playable moves.

16...g6 17.♔b1 ♘xb6 18.♘xb6 ♖b8 19.♖d3

Black's best defence is:



19...♕e8!!

Not an easy move to find.

Kotronias and Semkov point out that 19...♕c5? 20.♕xc5 dxc5 21.♖d8 ♘e7 22.♗c4† ♔g7 23.♗e6 ♗xe6 24.♖xb8 leaves Black in big trouble in the endgame.

I also checked 19...♕c7, when 20.f5! is dangerous.

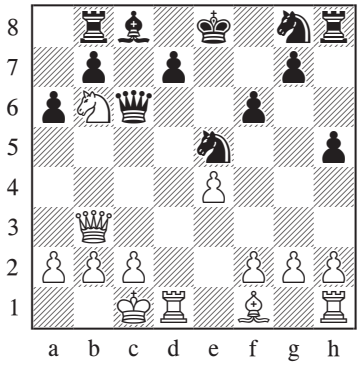
20.♖c3 ♕d8 21.♖d1 ♘e7 22.f5∞

Kotronias and Semkov provide some further lines but I think this is enough to show the type of position you can expect. The position is roughly balanced and challenging for both sides.

13...♗d6 14.♘xf4 ♕xe4!

It would be easy to suppose that, already being a piece up but behind in development, Black should avoid spending time grabbing additional material. However, the text move is his best defence.

14...♗c5?! 15.♘d5 ♗xb6 16.♘xb6 ♖b8 is unsatisfactory for Black due to:

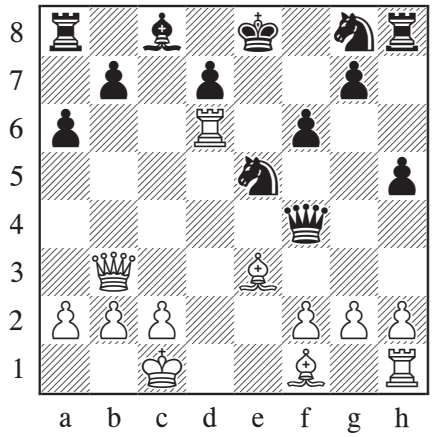


17.f4 ♘f7 18.♗c4 ♘gh6 19.e5 fxe5 20.fxe5 White has a dangerous initiative in this line from Kotronias and Semkov.

14...♘e7 15.♘d5 ♗b8 is not stupid, but 16.f4 ♘5g6 17.g3⩲ leaves White with a clamp and Black struggling to complete development and get coordinated.

15.♖xd6 ♕xf4† 16.♗e3

Black has an extra piece but his position is pretty scary, due to his poor development and inability to find a safe haven for his king.

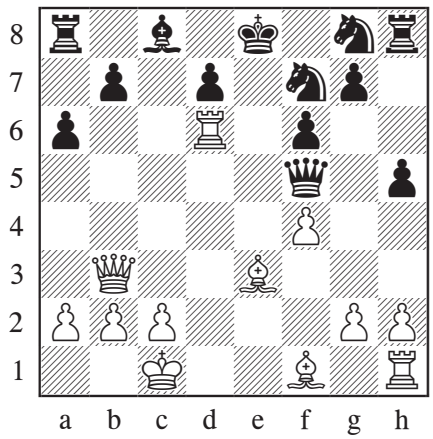


16...♕f5

16...♕g4 and 16...♕e4 can both be met by 17.f3, when Black has nothing better than transposing to the main line with 17...♕f5 18.f4.

17.f4 ♘f7

Here I would like to present an idea which has, to my knowledge, not been analysed anywhere else.



18.♗d3!?

Kotronias and Semkov analyse 18.♖d5 ♕e4 19.♖d4 and show some nice lines, eventually concluding that White has dangerous compensation but Black is objectively okay.

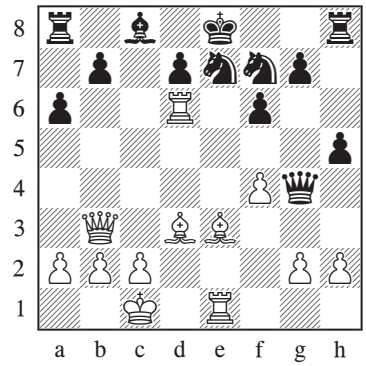
K&S's analysis seemed like an interesting path to explore, but then I realized that 18.♖d5 could be met by 18...♕g4!, when I was unable to find anything better than 19.h3 ♕g3 20.♖d3 ♕e1† 21.♖d1 ♕g3 and a repetition. Of course I spent some time investigating alternatives such as 19.♗c4 and 22.♗c4, but in both cases White struggles to find adequate compensation against correct defence.

For this reason, I decided to go back a step and investigate the text move, which transforms the material balance.

18...♘xd6

Black is virtually forced to give up his queen for some pieces.

Retaining the queen leads to a hopeless position:
18...♕g4? 19.♖e1 ♘e7



20.g3!

Amazingly, White can afford to spend a tempo guarding the f4-pawn, as his bishop will be fantastically powerful on c5.

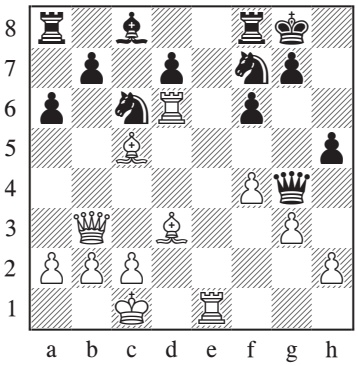
20...0–0

After 20...♘xd6 21.♗c5+– Black is a rook

and a piece up, yet he will have to pay an even higher price to avoid being mated.

21.♗c5 ♘c6

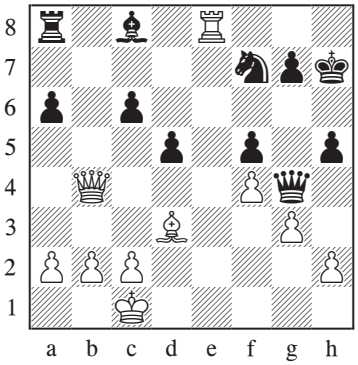
21...♘g6 22.♗e2 ♕f5 23.♖d5 ♕e4 24.♗b4! is also winning; my main line continues 24...a5 25.♗c4 ♕xd5 26.♗xd5 axb4 27.♗xf7† ♖xf7 28.♖e8† ♘f8 29.f5!+– with the deadly threat of ♖e7.



22.♖xc6!?

22.♗b6! is the computer's favourite, and the most efficient winning continuation if followed up correctly. The text move is also good enough though, and is simpler for a human to understand.

22...bxc6 23.♗xf8 ♔xf8 24.♗c4 d5 25.♕b4† ♔g8 26.♖e8† ♔h7 27.♗d3† f5

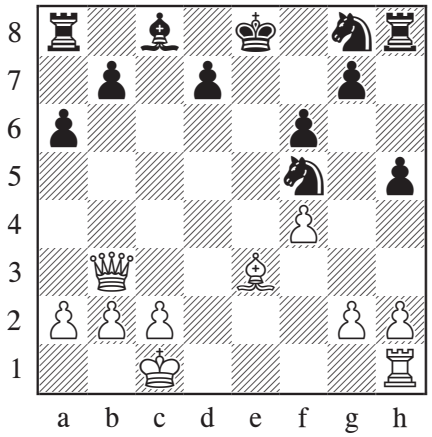


28.♕f8 ♕g6 29.a4!?+–

White can win back the piece any time, and the resulting endgame will be winning thanks to the active queen and Black's many weak pawns.

19.♗xf5 ♘xf5

Black has more than enough material for the queen, but he still has problems coordinating his pieces and getting his king to safety. The computer finds nothing better for Black than giving away a couple of pawns to relieve the pressure, as shown in the illustrative lines below.



20.♖e1 ♘ge7

20...d6!? is possible, as the discovered check is nothing special, but White can instead play 21.g3! with a probable transposition to the main line.

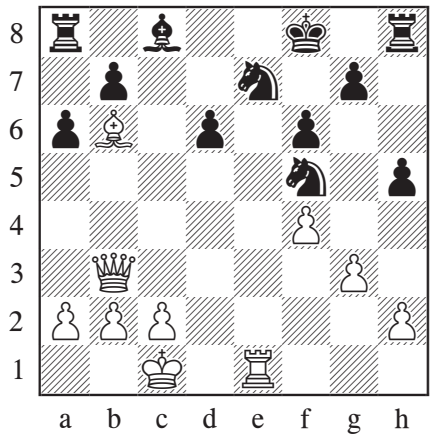
21.♗b6 d6 22.g3!

White wants to drive the knight away from f5, so he prepares h2-h3 without allowing his pawns to be immobilized by ...h4.

22...♔f8

Since the h-file is likely to be opened soon, it makes a lot of sense for Black to keep his rook on h8.

22...♗d7 23.♗c7 ♖c8 24.♕xb7 0–0 is another way for Black to mobilize his forces at the expense of a couple of pawns. Play continues: 25.♗xd6 ♘xd6 26.♕xd7 ♘ef5 27.♕a4± White's queenside pawns make him the slight favourite.



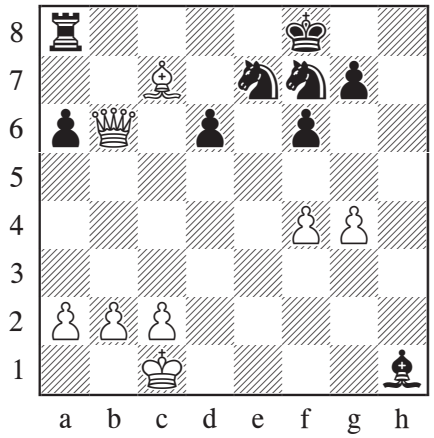
23.h3!

Continuing the plan.

23...♗d7 24.g4 hxg4 25.hxg4 ♘h6 26.♗c7!

White cannot break through with a direct attack, but instead he can use his active pieces to target Black's weak pawns.

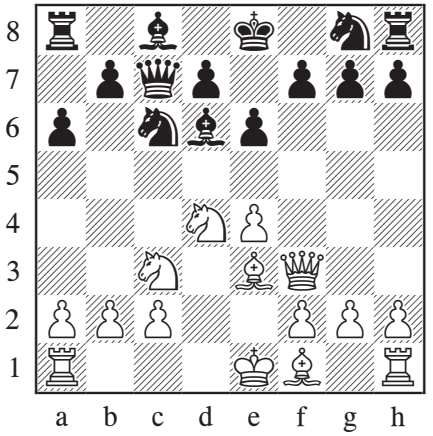
26...♘f7 27.♕xb7 ♗c6 28.♕b6 ♖h1 29.♖xh1 ♗xh1



30.♗xd6 ♘xd6 31.♕xd6±

Again we reach an endgame with an unusual material balance, where White's active queen and three-to-one pawn majority offer him some winning chances.

B25) 7...♗d6



This is one of Black's most popular options, intending to bring the bishop to e5.

8.0–0–0

It seems most natural to start with this move.

Nevertheless, you may also wish to consider:

8.♘xc6!? bxc6 9.0–0–0

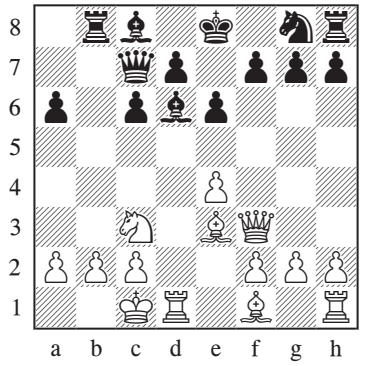
Black may or may not transpose to our main line.

9...♖b8?!

9...♗e5 is safer – see the main line below.

If Black wishes to play originally, then 9...♘f6!?N is the move to look at.

The text move was successful for Black in Tari – Eljanov, Reykjavik 2015, but things may have been different if White had found the following idea:



10.♖xd6!!N ♕xd6 11.♕g4

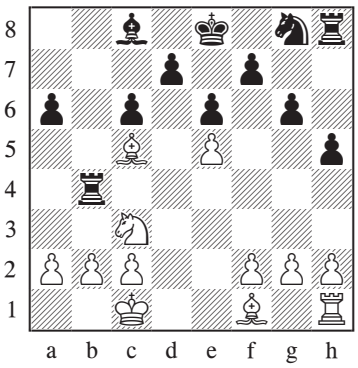
White has powerful compensation on the dark squares, for instance:

11...g6 12.e5! h5!

12...♕b4 13.♕xb4 ♖xb4 14.♗c5± gives White a better version of the same type of position.

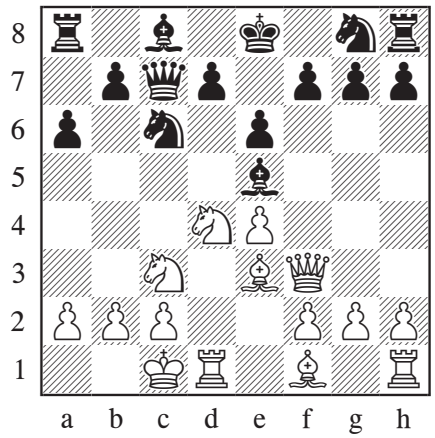
13.♕f4 ♕b4 14.♕xb4 ♖xb4 15.♗c5

Retreating the rook would allow ♘e4 with a serious initiative for White, so Black should give back the exchange and accept a slightly worse position.



15...a5 16.♗xb4 axb4 17.♘e4±

8...♗e5



9.♘xc6!

This feels simple and effective. White gets a slightly more pleasant position without having to remember all manner of sharp variations.

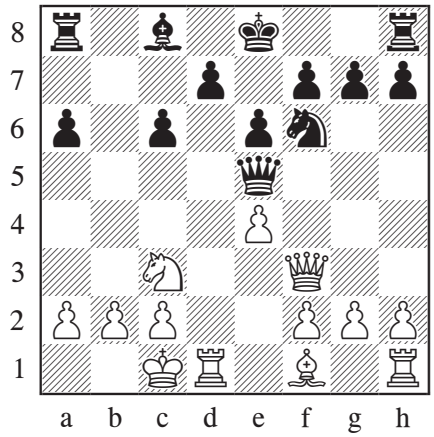
9...bxc6

9...♕xc6 has been tried a couple of times but seems an odd choice. 10.♗d4 ♗xd4 11.♖xd4 ♘e7 12.♕g3 0–0 This position occurred in Mihok – Y. Vovk, Hungary 2017, when 13.♕d6N± would have given White a pleasant advantage.

10.♗d4

The dark-squared bishops will soon vacate the board, and Black must decide whether to leave his bishop to be taken on e5 with **B251) 10...♘f6** or to make the exchange himself with **B252) 10...♗xd4**. Each option has its own pros and cons, as explained below.

B251) 10...♘f6 11.♗xe5 ♕xe5



12.♕e3!

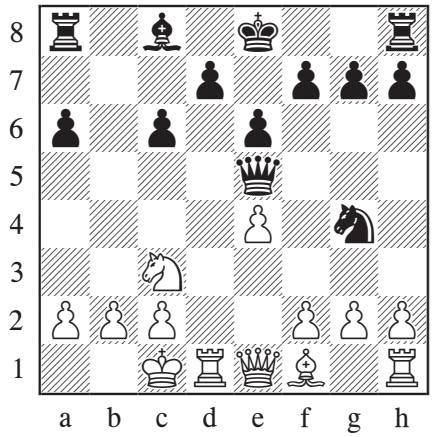
White can obtain a tiny endgame edge with 12.♕g3 ♕xg3 13.hxg3, as played by Shirov in a couple of games. However, compared with variation B252 below, having the rook on d1 instead of d4 reduces White's active options. The text move is more challenging, as White aims to use the queen on e5 as a target for f2-f4.

12...♘g4 13.♕e1!

Kotronias and Semkov suggest 13.♕e2!?, intending to meet 13...♘xh2 with 14.♕e3!N

when White develops a nice initiative. However, 13...♘f6!?N is more solid. The game continues, but I could not find anything special for White.

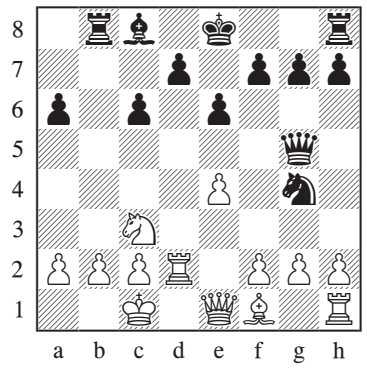
The text move is less forcing as the knight on g4 is not attacked, but sooner or later both the knight and the black queen will be driven away.



13...♕c5

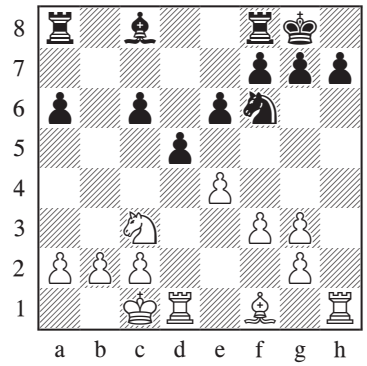
This time the pawn is well and truly poisoned: 13...♘xh2? 14.♗e2 and Black is in big trouble.

13...♕g5† 14.♖d2 ♖b8 was played in Vishnu – Bogner, Gibraltar 2015. Here I suggest:



15.f3!N ♘e3 16.♗d3± Black's knight is in danger of being cut off from its army.

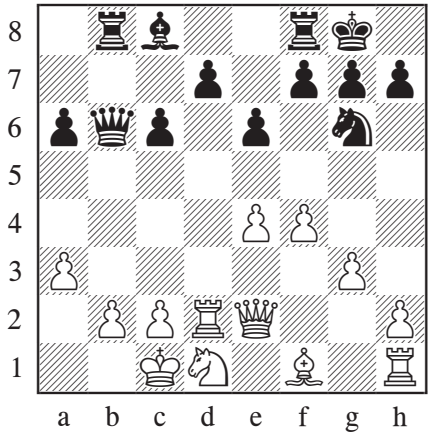
13...0–0 can be met by 14.f3 ♘f6 15.♕g3! ♕xg3 16.hxg3 d5 as in T.D.V. Nguyen – Kononenko, Pardubice 2016. White has a better version of the endgame from the note to move 12, as Black's king would have been better placed on e7. A good continuation is:



17.♗d3!?N h6 18.♘a4± With a typical plus for such positions.

14.♖d2 ♖b8 15.♕e2 ♘e5 16.f4 ♘g6 17.g3 ♕b4 18.♘d1 0–0 19.a3 ♕b6

We have been following Timman – Van Kampen, Wijk aan Zee 2015. White's most promising continuation would have been:



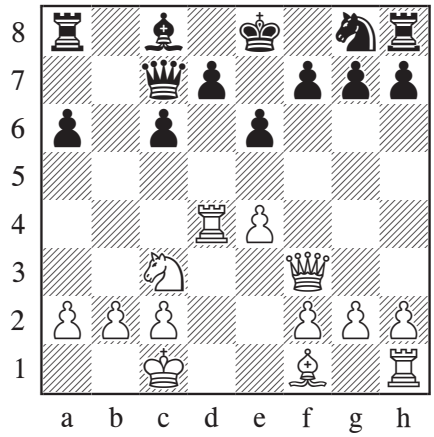
20.h4!N

Exploiting the misplaced knight to gain time for an attack. A sample continuation is:

20...d5 21.h5 ♘e7 22.h6 g6 23.g4±

White has good attacking chances, and the h6-pawn also has the potential for greatness in a future endgame.

B252) 10...♗xd4 11.♖xd4



Compared with the previous variation, Black's queen is less exposed, so we cannot use it to gain momentum for our attack. On the other hand, the plan of exchanging queens on g3 becomes more promising, as the rook on d4 can help to probe Black's queenside.

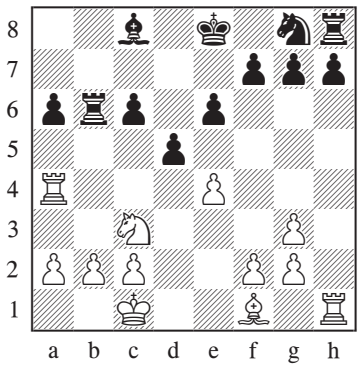
11...♘f6

This has been by far the most popular choice, and Black hardly has anything better.

11...e5 12.♖d2 ♘f6 13.g4!± gave White easy play in Lorenzo de la Riva – Esposito, Barcelona 2017.

11...♘e7 12.♕g3 ♕xg3 13.hxg3 d5 14.♘a4± was pleasant for White in Liu Guanchu – Xiang Zeyu, Zhongshan 2014. The position here resembles the main line but the position of Black's knight on e7 makes it harder for him to challenge the c5-outpost.

11...♖b8 12.♕g3! ♕xg3 13.hxg3 d5 14.♖a4 ♖b6 occurred in Trent – Wirig, Germany 2015.

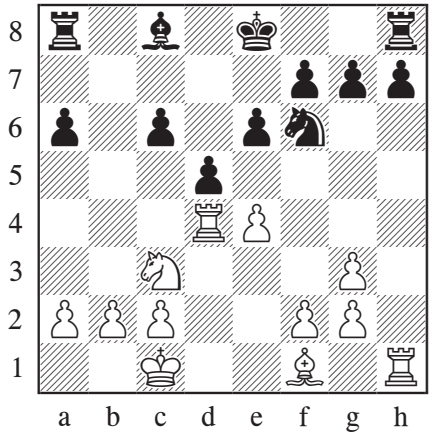


White has a typical favourable endgame and I especially like his prospects after 15.g4!?N±, making full use of the spare g-pawn and open h-file.

12.♕g3

If you are desperate for an attacking game then you can certainly investigate the alternatives 12.♕e3 and 12.g4!?. However, when we have the chance to get a favourable endgame, with genuine winning prospects and minimal risk, it is hard to resist it.

12...♕xg3 13.hxg3 d5



14.f3

White has a few other possibilities. At first I was attracted by 14.♖a4 ♔e7, as in Shubin – Zarubitski, Prague 2016, followed by 15.exd5!?N cxd5 16.♖a5± when White

can exert some pressure. However, Black can improve with 14...a5!?, preventing our rook from utilizing the a5-outpost. 15.b4 ♔e7! 16.♖xa5 ♖xa5 17.bxa5 ♗d7 The rook comes to a8 and Black should be okay.

14.exd5!? is also interesting; it turns out that trading the central e4-pawn for the one on c6 is not as anti-positional as it may appear. 14...cxd5 (14...exd5 15.f3 0–0 16.g4 h6 17.♘a4 ♗e6 18.♘c5± was good for White in Firouzja – Gholami, Tehran 2016) 15.f3 e5 This occurred in Abdumalik – Ju Wenjun, Chengdu 2015. Here I like 16.♖a4!?N 0–0 17.♖a5 ♗b7 18.g4 h6 19.♘a4 ♘d7 20.♗e2± and White keeps the better chances.

14...♔e7

This seems like the most natural move, and it was played in the only game in my database from this position.

14...0–0N is a possible alternative, when Black is ready to meet g3-g4 with ...h6. It looks interesting to try 15.♖a4!? a5 16.♖a3, with similar ideas as in the main line below. Here Black has not weakened his kingside, but on the other hand his king is not so well placed away from the centre.

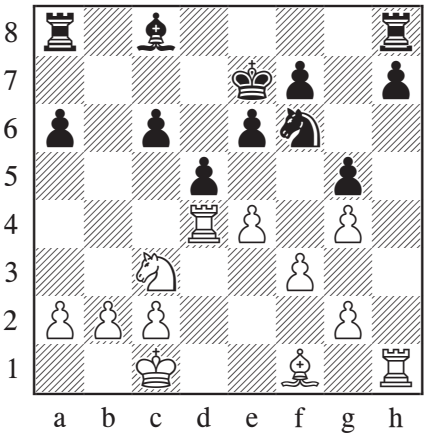
15.g4!

White utilizes the spare g-pawn to provoke the following weakening move.

15...g5

15...c5 16.♖a4 d4 17.♘b1± gives White ideas on both sides of the board, with g4-g5, c2-c3 and perhaps ♖a5 on the agenda.

All this happened in Dragnev – Bai, Graz 2016. White's play can be improved by means of:

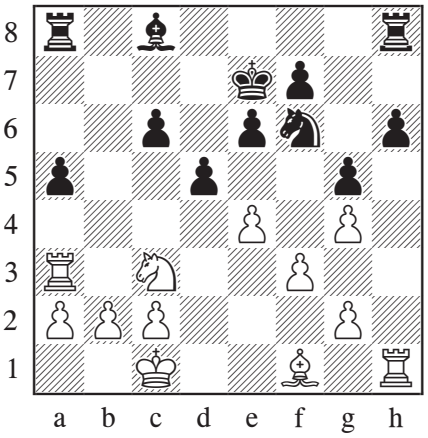


16.♖a4N a5 17.♖a3!

White has good chances to develop some pressure due to Black's coordination problems. Kotronias and Semkov also recommended this continuation but I have my own ideas about how to follow it up.

17...h6

It is worth taking a moment to consider 17...dxe4 18.♘xe4 ♘xe4 19.fxe4±, leading to a weird pawn structure with numerous weaknesses on both sides. White keeps the better chances as his three kingside pawns do a decent job of holding up Black's kingside majority, and ♖ah3 is a useful possibility.



18.♗d3 ♗b7

18...c5?! weakens Black's position: 19.exd5 (19.♖e1!? is also promising) 19...exd5 20.♘a4 c4 21.♘b6 ♖b8 22.♘xc8† ♖bxc8 23.♗f5↑

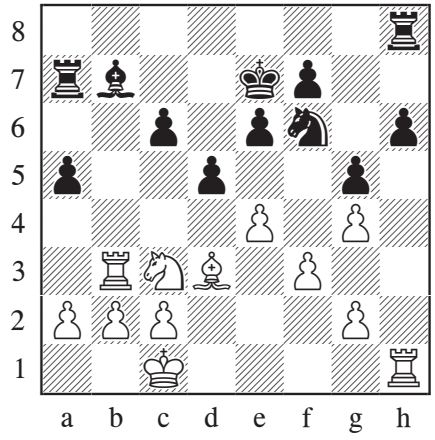
18...♘d7 is a sensible move, when I considered a couple of ideas:

a) Kotronias and Semkov give 19.exd5 cxd5 20.b4 ♗a6 21.b5 ♗b7 22.♘a4 with an edge to White. However, I think 20...♗b7! is more annoying; White can pick up the a5-pawn but I doubt that he can claim an advantage with such a rancid structure. Another option is 21.b5, but then Black is a tempo up on K&S's line.

b) For that reason, I prefer 19.♘a4!?, when White keeps a slight edge in a quiet position. He might put his king on d2 next, and can think about c2-c4 when the time is right.

19.♖b3! ♖a7

Kotronias and Semkov give 19...♗c8 20.♘a4 ♘d7 21.exd5 cxd5 22.♘b6 ♘xb6 23.♖xb6±. However, it seems more natural and critical for Black to avoid moving immediately back to c8 with his bishop. The text move challenges White to come up with something.



20.exd5!?

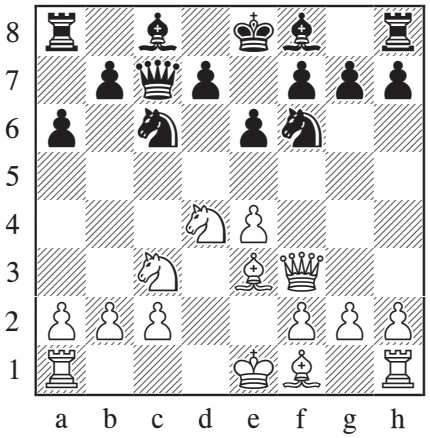
Changing the pawn structure in order to occupy the b5-square with tempo.

The flexible 20.♔d2!? also offers White a slight edge.

20...cxd5 21.♘b5 ♖aa8 22.♘d4 ♗c8 23.a4±

The position remains quite complex, but White's excellent piece activity and coordination should count for more than Black's central pawn majority.

B26) 7...♘f6



This natural developer has been Black's most popular choice of all.

8.0–0–0

We have reached a major branching point, where I identified five main options for Black: **B261) 8...b5?!**, **B262) 8...♗b4**, **B263) 8...♗e7**, **B264) 8...h5!?** and **B265) 8...♘e5**.

8...d6 has already been covered under variation B231.

8...♘xd4 has been played several times but the position after 9.♗xd4 has little independent significance. 9...e5 This has been the universal choice so far. (9...b5N can be met by 10.♕g3± with a typical plus for White) 10.♗e3 d6 11.♕g3 We have transposed to the earlier variation B231, with the present position occurring on page 106.

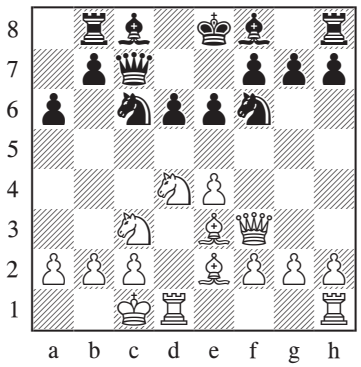
8...♖b8!?

This quirky move has been tried by a few strong players.

9.♗e2 d6

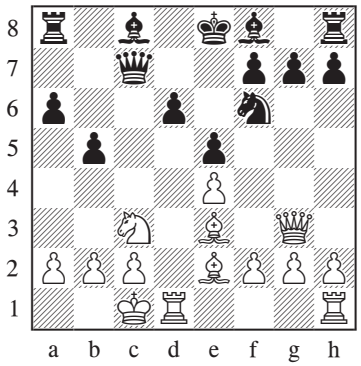
9...b5 10.♘xc6 dxc6 defeats the purpose of having the rook on b8, and 11.g4↑ gives White easy play.

9...♗b4 10.♘xc6 bxc6 occurred in Sethuraman – Fier, Fufeng 2017, when 11.♗g5!N would have given White better chances in a complex position.



10.♕g3 ♘xd4 11.♗xd4 e5 12.♗a7! ♖a8 13.♗e3 b5

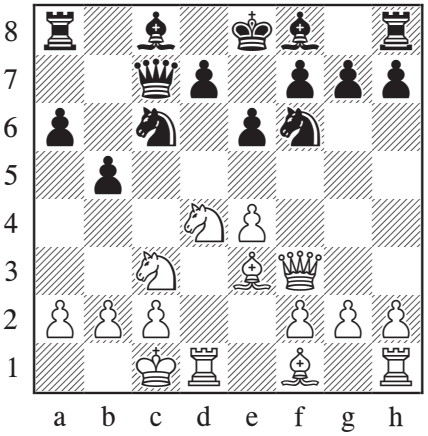
This occurred in Nepomniachtchi – Adhiban, Doha (rapid) 2016. White's simplest path to an advantage is:



14.a3N±

Intending ♗g5, followed by conquering the d5-square.

B261) 8...b5?!



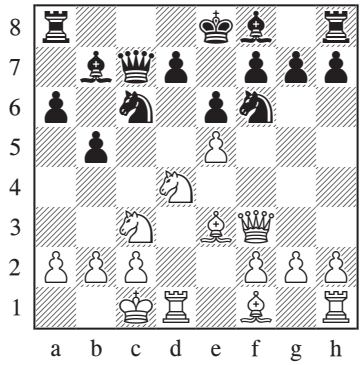
This move is poorly timed.

9.e5! b4

Retreating to g8 would hardly be a satisfactory way for Black to play the opening.

Black's only other attempt to make sense of his play is:

9...♗b7



10.♘xe6

This leads to a clear advantage and has been played in all three games so far.

The computer likes 10.♘dxb5!?N axb5 11.exf6 even more, so take your pick.

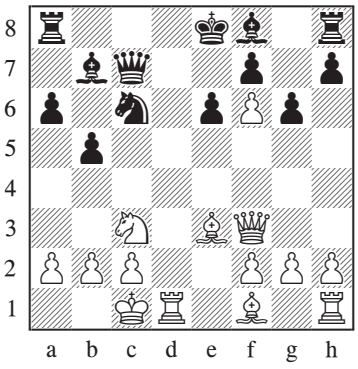
10...dxe6

10...fxe6 11.exf6 0–0–0 occurred in Ostrovskiy – Kolosowski, Lvov 2014, when

12.a4!N would have been strong.

11.exf6 g6

11...♖c8 was played in Vucinic – Skoulakis, Kavala 2014, when 12.♗xb5!N would have given White a huge advantage.

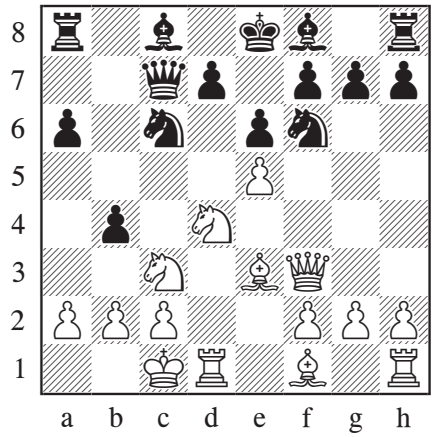


12.♕g3 ♕a5 13.♔b1 h5

Black's eventual victory in Adair – Klein, Internet (rapid) 2018, was nothing to do with the outcome of the opening. Among other strong moves, White can simply continue:

14.♗e2N+–

With an extra pawn and a safer king, White should be winning with best play.

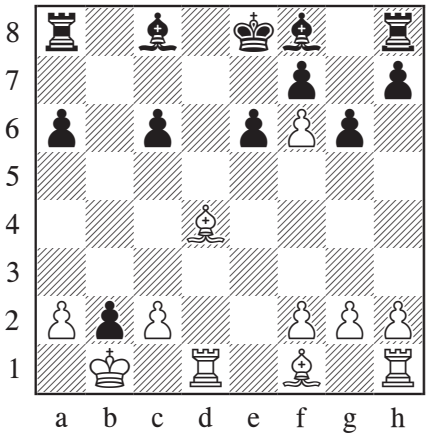


10.exf6!

10.♘cb5!? is also good but the text move is most accurate. The next few moves are virtually forced.

10...bxc3 11.♘xc6 cxb2† 12.♔b1 ♕xc6 13.♕xc6 dxc6 14.♗d4 g6

White's most accurate and energetic continuation is:



15.♗b6!N

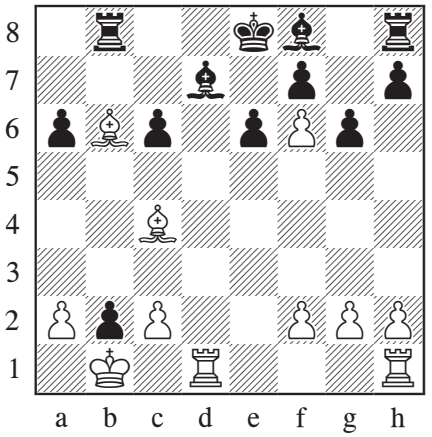
The most incisive, although 15.h4 was also clearly better for White in Yegiazarian – Hayrapetyan, Yerevan 2015.

15...♗d7

15...♗b7 16.h4! prepares ♖h3 or h4-h5, with a decisive advantage for White.

16.♗c4! ♖b8

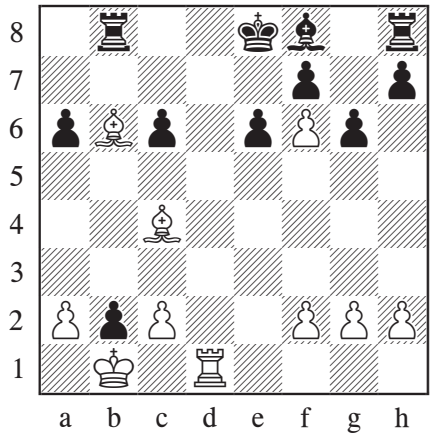
Otherwise White simply plays ♖d3 and wins.



17.♖xd7!

Despite the reduced material, White can break through to the black king with a direct attack.

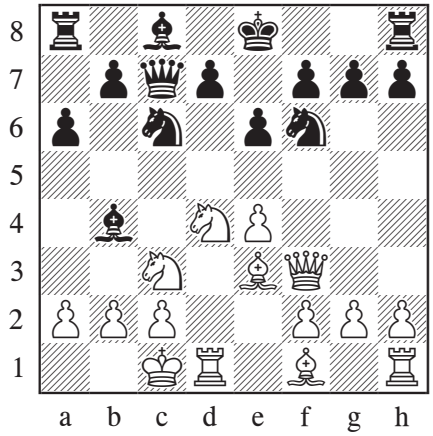
17...♔xd7 18.♖d1† ♔e8



19.♗c7! ♖c8 20.♗a5+–

Followed by ♗xa6, when Black will either be mated or suffer decisive material losses.

B262) 8...♗b4



This has been played in lots of games but it has proven to be a risky choice.

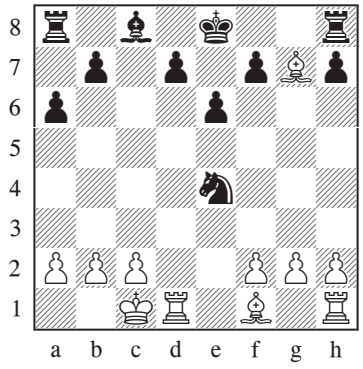
9.♘xc6!

Forcing Black to make a difficult decision.

9...bxc6

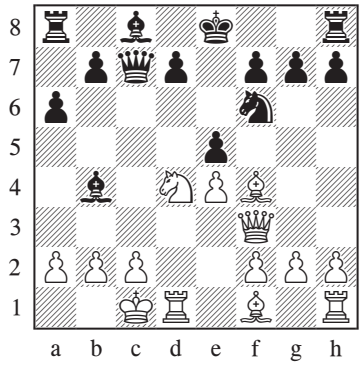
This has been Black's most popular choice. It is not mentioned by Kotronias and Semkov, although I noticed that they do reach the same position via a different move order elsewhere. In any event, Kotronias reacted well when he encountered this move late in 2017, as shown in the note to Black's 10th move. Before we get to that, let's check Black's three other options:

9...♕xc6 10.♗d4 ♗xc3?! (10...b5 is better, although 11.♗d3± is pleasant for White) 11.♗xc3 ♕xe4 12.♕xe4 ♘xe4 13.♗xg7 is excellent for White, as his dark-squared bishop has great potential. A good example continued:



13...♖g8 14.♗d4 d6 15.♗d3 f5 16.g4!± Potkin – Gutierrez Clares, Barcelona 2015.

9...♗xc3 is strongly met by: 10.♘d4! ♗b4 11.♗f4! e5



12.♗h6! ♗f8 13.♘f5! ♘xe4? (13...gxh6 14.♘d6† ♗xd6 15.♕xf6 ♖g8 16.♖xd6+–; 13...♖g8 14.♗g5±) 14.♗xg7 ♗xg7 15.♘xg7† ♔f8 This occurred in Hakobyan – Gokbulut, Yerevan 2017, when 16.♘f5!N+– would have been the most convincing of several winning moves.

9...dxc6 10.♗d4

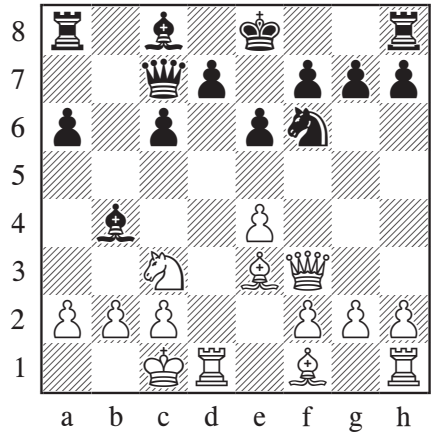
10.♘a4!?N ♘d7 11.♕g3 ♕xg3 12.hxg3 b5 13.♘b6 ♘xb6 14.♗xb6 is enough for a small, safe advantage, but White can play for more.

10...♗e7

10...e5? 11.♕g3 ♘g4 12.f3 ♕a5 13.♗g1 ♗xc3 14.bxc3 ♕a3† 15.♔d2 was winning for White in Antipov – Ameir, Abu Dhabi 2016.

11.e5 ♘d5 12.♘e4 c5 13.♘d6† ♗xd6 14.exd6 ♕xd6 15.♗xg7 ♖g8 16.♗f6±

White was much better in Colmenares – Joly, Monthey 2015, due to his powerful dark-squared bishop and safer king.



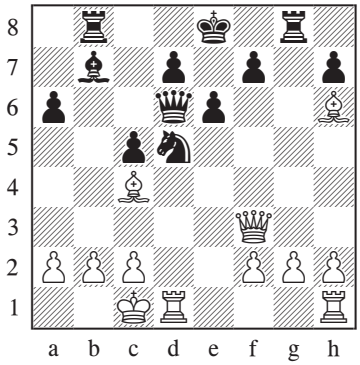
10.♗d4

White has a promising version of a thematic pawn structure, as the b4-bishop does nothing apart from blocking Black's play down the b-file.

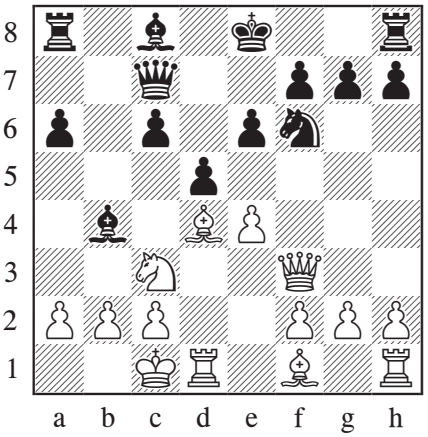
10...d5

10...♗d6 is hardly satisfactory for Black. 11.♘a4 ♗e5 12.♗xe5 ♕xe5 13.♘b6 ♖b8 14.♘c4 ♕g5† was seen in Bakhmatsky – Volotovsky, Lvov 2017, when 15.♖d2N± would have been most accurate. Black has serious problems on the dark squares.

Kotronias's opponent continued: 10...♗e7 11.e5 ♘d5 12.♘e4 c5 13.♘d6† ♗xd6 14.exd6 ♕xd6 15.♗xg7 ♖g8 16.♗h6 ♖b8 17.♗c4 ♗b7



18.♗xd5!? This isn't the computer's top choice, but a good human move for a practical game. 18...♗xd5 19.♕c3± White had a lasting advantage due to his safer king in Kotronias – Munguntuul, London 2017.



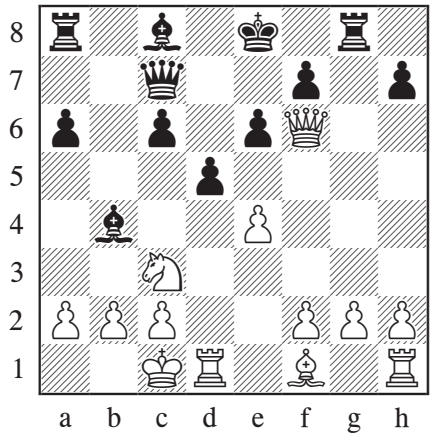
11.♗xf6

11.♗d3!?N looks somewhat better for White but let's stick with the more ambitious approach.

Kotronias and Semkov propose 11.exd5 cxd5 12.♗d3 and provide some analysis against 12...♗e7, but 12...♗b7! is an improvement which was played in Grinberg – Antipov, Gibraltar 2018, after which I found nothing special for White.

11...gxf6 12.♕xf6 ♖g8

White has won a pawn but Black has the makings of compensation, thanks to his unopposed dark-squared bishop, strong pawn centre and open b-file. The second player even went on to win in Staroske – Philippart, corr. 2009, and Kotronias and Semkov also caution against playing this way with White. However, the engine points out an excellent way to disrupt Black's play.



13.♕h4!N

Eyeing both the b4-bishop and the h7-pawn.

13...♖b8

13...♗xc3 14.bxc3 favours White.

14.exd5! ♗xc3

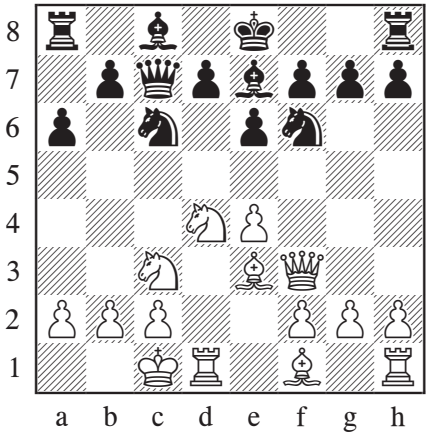
Black would love to play 14...cxd5 but 15.♗b5†!± reveals the tactical point of White's play.

14...exd5 keeps the dark-squared bishop but compromises Black's pawn structure and king safety. 15.g3!± is a strong move, preparing ♗h3 followed by ♖he1(†), while also opening up the possibility of ♕xh7 without allowing a troublesome check on f4.

15.bxc3 cxd5 16.♕d4

White keeps an extra pawn and his chances are clearly better. True, his king's shelter has been compromised, but Black has no serious threats and his own king is not entirely safe either.

B263) 8...♗e7



This has been Black's most frequent choice overall, but it is not so popular among top players.

9.♔b1!

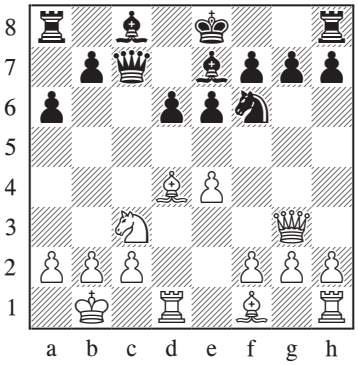
Kotronias and Semkov recommend this move, and I also believe it to be White's most promising idea. A high-quality waiting move is exactly what is needed, since each of Black's plausible replies comes with a drawback of some kind.

I also spent some time on the more popular 9.♗e2, but was not satisfied after 9...0–0 10.♕g3 d6! 11.h4!? ♔h8!, when White was unable to prove anything in Cheparinov – Zeng, China 2017.

9...0–0

This is the typical follow-up to Black's last move. Certainly 9...b5? would be inadvisable in view of 10.e5. Incidentally, Black's position is worse here than after 8...b5 9.e5, since here he cannot even muddy the waters with ...b4 or ...♗b7, as the presence of the bishop on e7 means that exf6 will attack another piece.

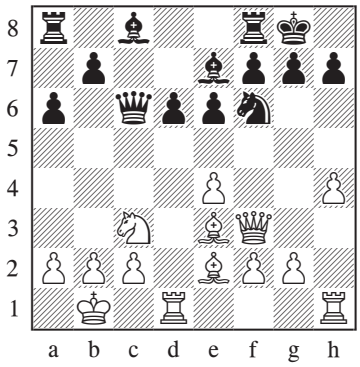
9...♘xd4 10.♗xd4 d6 11.♕g3 gives White easy play, for instance:



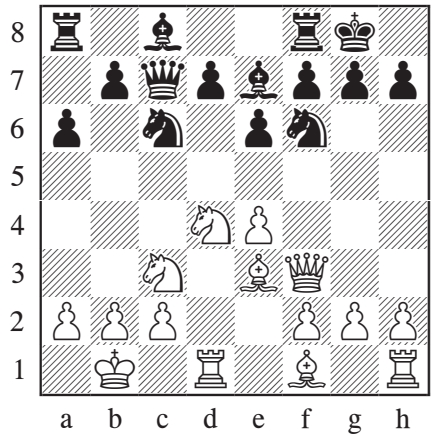
11...♗d7!?N This seems like the best try but it is not enough to solve Black's problems. (11...♘h5 occurred in Vetoshko – Zpevak, Slovakia 2017, when 12.♕e3N ♘f6 13.e5 would have been excellent for White) 12.e5 (12.♕xg7? ♖g8 13.♕h6 e5! enables Black to force a draw if he wants it: 14.♗e3 ♖g6 15.♕h4 ♖g4 16.♕h6 ♖g6=) 12...dxe5 13.♗xe5↑ White has excellent attacking chances.

9...♘e5 also causes Black more harm than good: 10.♕g3 ♘h5 (10...d6 11.f4 is great for White after 11...♘g6 12.♗e2 or 11...♘c4? 12.♗xc4 ♕xc4 13.e5 ♘h5 14.♕f3 g6 15.g4 ♘g7 16.♘e4+–) 11.♕h3 ♘f6 (11...g6 is hardly an improvement after 12.f4→) 12.f4 ♘eg4 13.e5 ♘xe3 14.♕xe3 ♘g4 15.♕g3 f5 16.h3+– Gascon del Nogal – Harper, Port of Spain 2016.

Finally, 9...d6 has been played a few times but White gets easy play after: 10.♘xc6! This exchange is perfectly timed, since Black can no longer recapture with the d-pawn. 10...♕xc6 (10...bxc6 11.g4 gives White easy attacking play, while the b2-pawn is easy enough to defend) 11.♗e2 0–0 12.h4



12...e5 The best try, otherwise Black would have to reckon on plans such as h5-h6, intending to meet ...g6 with ♗g5. However, now White can take over the d5-square while still keeping some attacking chances. 13.♗g5 ♖e8 14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.♘d5 ♗d8 16.g4 ♗e6 17.g5 White was clearly better in Sueess – Leemans, corr. 2014.



10.g4!

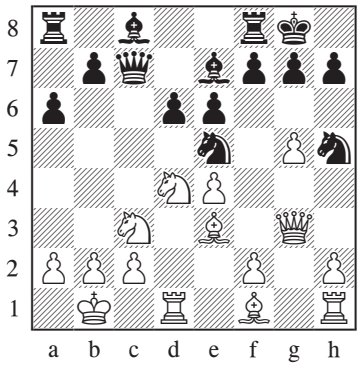
Once again, we have a way to expose the downside of the move chosen by Black. On the previous turn, this move would have amounted to no more than an unclear pawn

sacrifice in view of the reply ...♘e5. However, with the king already on g8, it would be too risky for Black to grab the g4-pawn.

10...d6

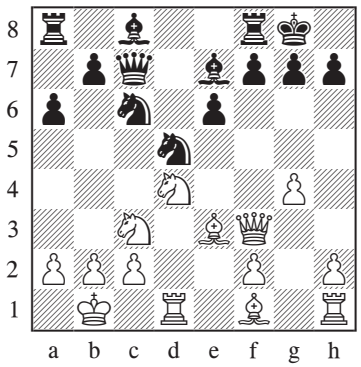
I checked four other possibilities:

10...♘e5?! 11.♕g3 d6 (11...♘fxg4? 12.♖g1 g6 13.♗c1 gives White massive attacking chances) 12.g5 ♘h5 In Sekar – Mishra, Puchong 2017, the most accurate continuation would have been:



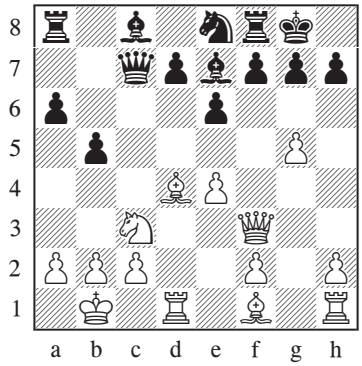
13.♕h4N g6 14.♗e2 ♘g7 15.f4 ♘c6 16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.♕g3 Followed by h4-h5, with a huge attack.

10...d5 avoids a mating attack but saddles Black with a permanently weak central pawn: 11.exd5 ♘xd5N (11...♘e5 12.♕g3 ♗d6 occurred in A. Smirnov – Ly, Melbourne 2014, when 13.♗f4N exd5 14.h3± is great for White, as Kotronias and Semkov point out)

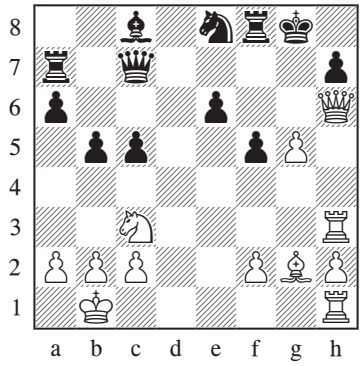


12.♘xd5 exd5 13.♗g2±/± The IQP is a long-term target, and White still has some attacking ideas such as ♘f5 or advancing his g- and h-pawns.

10...♘xd4 11.♗xd4 b5 12.g5 ♘e8 occurred in Kreuzholz – Uksini, Germany 2016, when White could have obtained a huge attack as follows:



13.♕h5!N g6 14.♕h6 ♗c5 15.♖d3 f5 (15...♗xd4? 16.♖h3 and the game is over) 16.♖h3 d6 Black avoids being mated but his position falls apart after: 17.♗xc5 dxc5 18.exf5 gxf5 19.♗g2 ♖a7

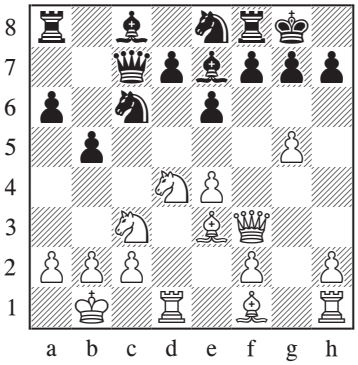


20.♘d5! ♕g7 21.♘b6 ♘d6 22.♘xc8 ♕xh6 23.♖xh6 ♖xc8 24.♖xe6+–

A final possibility is:

10...b5 11.g5 ♘e8

Rather like the line above, this permits White to build a devastating attack.



12.♘xc6 ♕xc6 13.♗d3 f5

13...b4 occurred in Juhasz – Cech, Banska Stiavnica 2017, when White overlooked the crushing reply: 14.♘d5! exd5 15.exd5 ♕b7 16.♕e4 g6 17.♕xe7+–

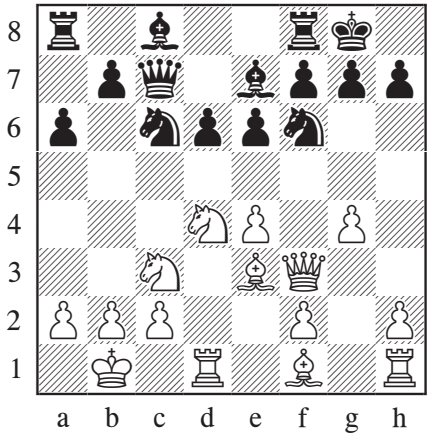
13...♗b7 14.♕h3 g6 15.♖hg1→ is also extremely dangerous for Black.

14.♕h3 g6?

14...d5N is the only chance, although after 15.exd5 exd5 16.♘e2± it will be tough for Black to survive.

15.exf5 exf5 16.♗e2 ♗b7 17.♘d5 ♗d8 18.♗f3 ♕c8 19.♗d4+–

Praneeth – Tarini, Noida 2016.



11.♘xc6!

Once again, this exchange is well timed in response to ...d6. One advantage is that Black no longer has the option of recapturing with the d-pawn; another is that, after ...bxc6, the ...d5 advance will involve the loss of a tempo.

11...bxc6 12.g5 ♘d7

12...♘e8 13.h4 is hardly an improvement for Black.

13.♕g3 ♖b8

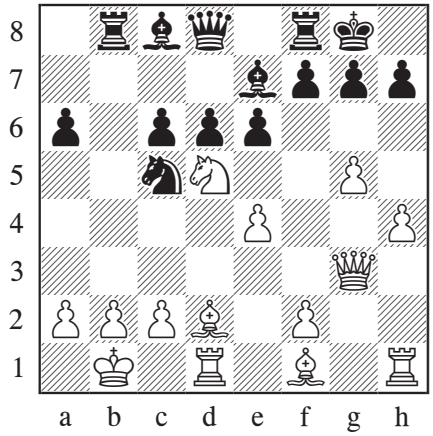
13...a5 14.h4 ♗a6 15.♗xa6 ♖xa6 16.h5 ♕b7 17.g6 ♗f6 18.♗g5!+– is a nice line mentioned by Kotronias and Semkov.

14.h4 ♕a5 15.♗d2 ♘c5?

15...♕b6N is necessary, though after 16.b3 ♘c5 17.h5± White is clearly ahead in the attacking race.

16.♘d5 ♕d8

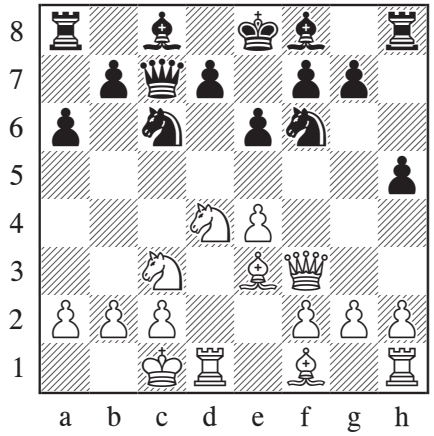
In Klek – Schleining, Dresden 2014, White missed the clearest winning line:



17.♗a5!N ♕xa5 18.♘xe7† ♔h8 19.♘xc6 ♖xb2† 20.♔xb2 ♕b6† 21.♔c1 ♘xe4 22.♕d3 ♕xc6 23.♗g2+–

With a decisive material advantage.

B264) 8...h5!?



This relatively rare move has been tried by several strong players, and I would not be surprised if it becomes more popular. Black's idea is to restrain our kingside play while angling for an improved version of variation B24, not least because the dangerous piece sacrifice from that line is not available to us here.

9.♘xc6

Ruling out any ...♘e5 ideas seems logical to me.

9.♗e2 ♘e5 10.♕h3 b5 11.f4 ♘c4 would justify Black's concept, as after 12.♗xc4 ♕xc4 White has lost a tempo by moving his light-squared bishop twice.

9...dxc6

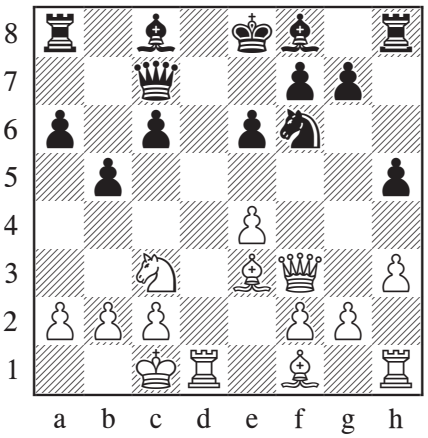
9...bxc6 is less challenging, for instance: 10.♗c4 (10.♗e2 also looks promising) 10...d6 11.♗g5 ♗e7 This was Nyysti – Meskovs, Stockholm 2016, when 12.♖he1N± would have left White superbly centralized. Any threats along the b-file can easily be neutralized, and it will be hard for Black to connect his rooks because castling carries obvious risks.

10.h3!

I checked a few other ideas but found this to be the most promising. The idea is shown in the note below.

10...b5

Black would like to take some space in the centre with 10...e5?! but this currently allows 11.♘a4!, when Black cannot cover the b6-square with 11...♘d7?? on account of 12.♗c4, which simply wins. Therefore he must either allow an annoying invasion on b6, or permanently weaken the d5-square with 11...c5. Of course, none of that would matter if Black could win an exchange with 11...♗g4, which explains why our previous move was important.



11.e5!

If Black had time to follow up with ...e5, he would have no problems.

11...♘d5 12.♗f4

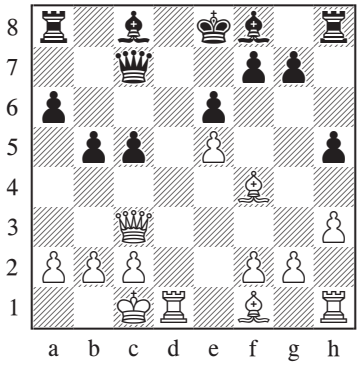
White does not mind trading his bishop for the black knight, as the c3-knight could then head for d6.

12...♕a5!

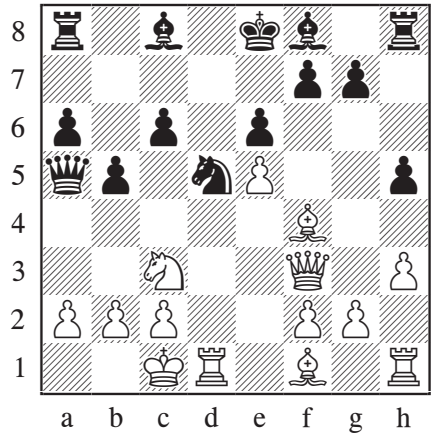
Black has to take care not to allow White to conquer the d6-square.

12...♗b7? 13.♘e4 would be great for White.

Another important point, mentioned by Kotronias and Semkov, occurs after: 12...♘xc3? 13.♕xc3 c5



14.♗e2 ♗b7 15.♖d6! Black is in big trouble, as the rook on d6 dominates the game and it is obvious that White will get more than enough compensation in the event that Black captures it.

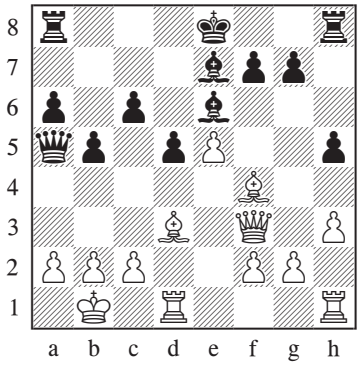


13.♗d3

White cannot put his knight on e4 with the a2-pawn hanging, so he may as well develop another piece. So far, this position has occurred in two games, both of which took place towards the end of 2017.

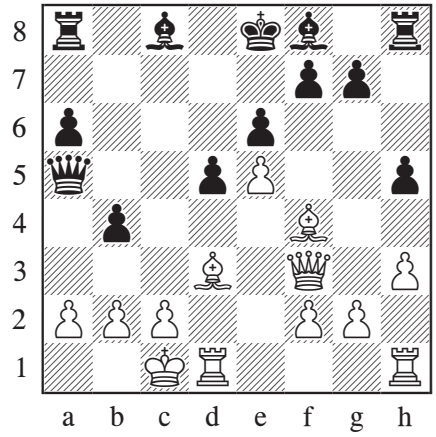
13...b4

13...♗e7 was the more recent try. 14.♘xd5 (14.g4!?N could also be considered) 14...exd5 15.♔b1 ♗e6 In Santos Latasa – Shankland, Sitges 2017, White's best continuation would have been:



16.g4!N g6 (16...hxg4 17.hxg4 0–0–0 18.♗f5 gives White a nice initiative) 17.♗d2 ♕b6 18.♕g3 Black's position remains playable but he is under some pressure, as f2-f4-f5 is a significant idea.

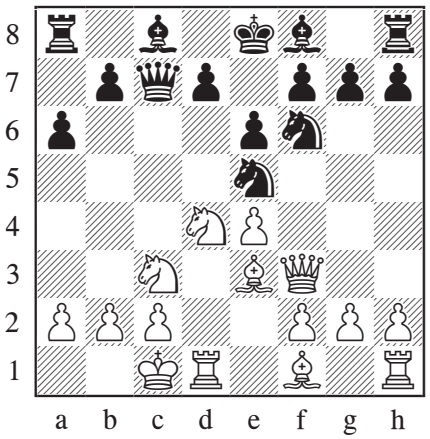
14.♘xd5 cxd5



15.♔b1 ♗d7 16.g4↑

This was Ragger – Rasmussen, Heraklio 2017. Once again, Black's position is playable but he faces the more difficult decisions, such as whether or not to simplify the kingside at the expense of the h-file. Meanwhile White's king is safe and his position is generally easier to handle.

B265) 8...♘e5



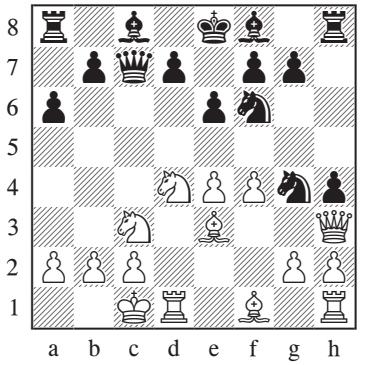
This is a thematic choice, fully in the spirit of the Taimanov. It has been a frequent choice among strong grandmasters, and may lead to some of the most complicated positions in the chapter.

9.♕g3 b5

This is the only decent move – although straight away, it opens up possibilities of different piece sacrifices on b5.

9...d6? 10.f4 ♘eg4 11.♗g1± was rotten for Black in Holtman – Obsivac, Vysna Boca 2017.

9...h5? has been played in a number of games. For some reason, only one player responded in the best way: 10.f4! h4?! (10...♘eg4N is the lesser evil, although 11.e5 ♘xe3 12.♕xe3 ♘g4 13.♕f3± still leaves Black in trouble) 11.♕h3 ♘eg4 Szyszylo – Klekowski, Katowice 2017.

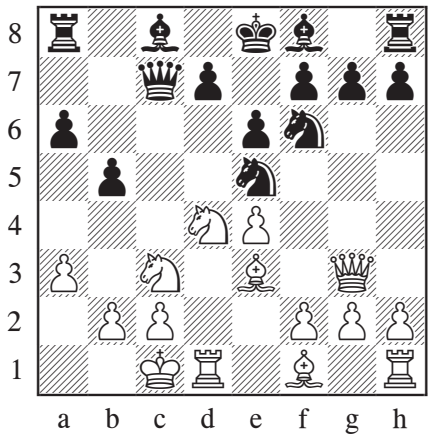


12.e5!N ♘xe3 13.♕xe3 ♘g4 14.♕f3 ♘h6 15.g4 White's advantage is close to winning.

Given the complexity and theoretical importance of this variation, I decided to cover two options for White: **B2651) 10.a3!?** and **B2652) 10.f4**.

10.♘dxb5!? is playable and 10.♗xb5!? leads to fascinating complications, but both moves have been extensively analysed and ultimately neutralized thanks to computers. It may still be possible to win some games by playing in this way, but I prefer to focus on other ideas.

B2651) 10.a3!?

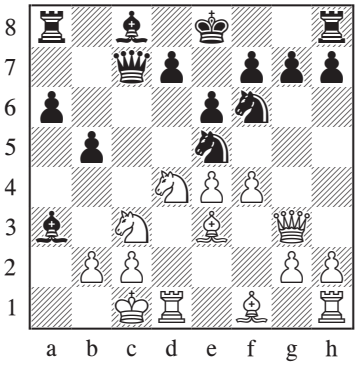


This quiet-looking move is surprisingly tricky. At the time of writing it has only been played in four games, none of which featured the most accurate continuation. Thus, the great majority of the following analysis is original.

10...♗b7

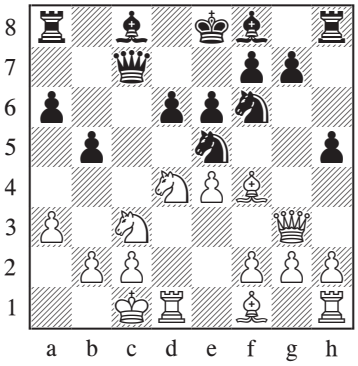
This is surely Black's best reply.

10...♗e7? is weak: 11.f4 ♗xa3 (I also checked 11...♘eg4N 12.♗g1 e5 13.♘f5 exf4 14.♘d5 ♘xd5 15.♕xg4 ♘f6 16.♕xg7 ♖g8 17.♕h6+– when Black's position is a wreck)

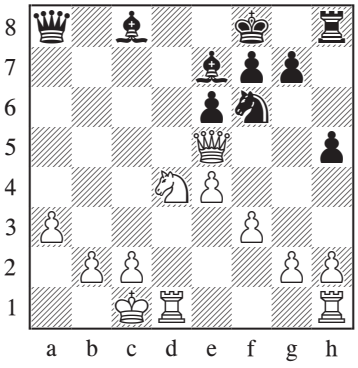


This was Peng – Rahul, Saint Louis 2017, when 12.♗d2!N+– would have refuted Black's play, as he is left with too many pieces hanging.

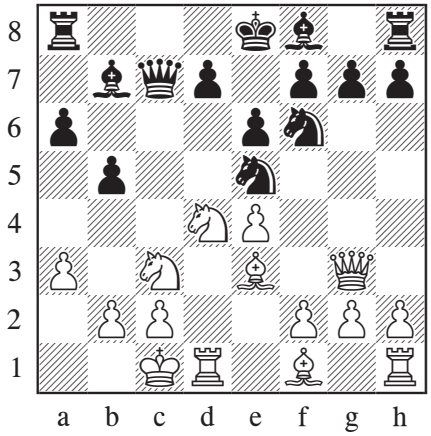
10...h5?! was the choice of a strong GM in Borisek – Ribli, Slovenia 2016, but White missed a chance to cause serious problems with: 11.♗f4!N d6



12.♗xb5†! axb5 13.♗xe5! dxe5 14.♘cxb5 ♕b7 (14...♕b8? 15.♘c6+–) 15.♕xe5 ♗e7 16.♘c7† ♔f8 17.♘xa8 ♕xa8 18.f3±

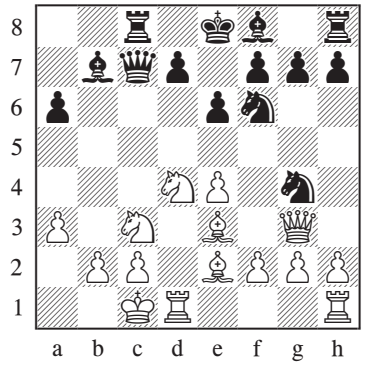


With a rook and three passed pawns versus two bishops, White is the clear favourite. Incidentally, this line illustrates one of the hidden points behind White's 10th move: the possibility of sacrificing on b5 under improved conditions.



11.f3!N

11.♗xb5 has led to a couple of victories for White, but 11...♖c8!N is a significant improvement. (11...♗xa3 12.♗f4 ♗d6 13.♘xe6 fxe6 14.♖xd6 ♕xd6 15.♗xe5± was great for White in Admiraal – Leenhouts, Belgium 2017) 12.♗e2 ♘eg4! Black has plenty of counterplay, as demonstrated in the following illustrative line:



13.♗f4 e5 14.♗xg4 exf4 15.♕h3 ♗xa3! 16.♘d5 ♗xb2† 17.♔xb2 ♗xd5 18.exd5 0–0

Black has ample compensation for the piece due to White's exposed king.

The text move is my improvement. I cannot promise it leads to an advantage against best play, but it certainly offers an interesting game while putting a few landmines in Black's path.

11...♖c8

This seems best. I considered two other moves:

11...♗e7 12.♘dxb5!

A nice example of the delayed piece sac on b5.

12.♕xg7? ♖g8 13.♕h6 ♖g6 14.♕h3 ♗xa3∓ is the point behind Black's last move.

12...axb5 13.♘xb5 ♕b8 14.♗b6

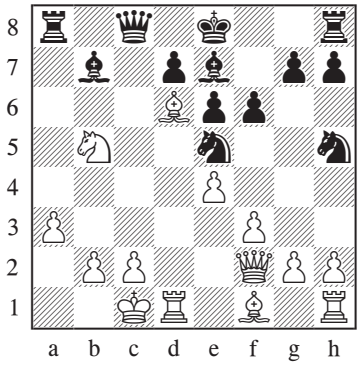
The main threat is ♗c7, winning the knight on e5. A secondary idea is to check on c7 and pick up the rook on a8. Black's best defence is:

14...♘h5 15.♕f2 f6

15...♗c6 16.♘c7† ♔f8 17.♘xa8 ♕xa8 18.♗c7± is excellent for White.

16.♗c7! ♕c8 17.♗d6

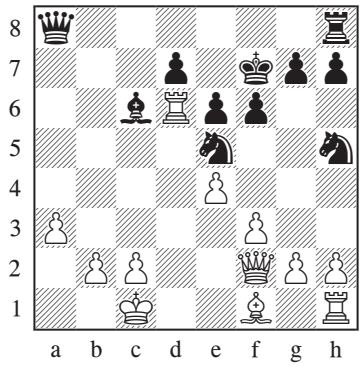
Black still has no good way to avoid the check on c7, so it is worth rerouting the bishop to d6.



17...♗c6

17...♔f7?! runs into 18.f4 ♘c4 19.♗xe7 ♔xe7 20.♗xc4 ♕xc4 21.♘d6 ♕c7 22.♘xb7± intending 22...♕xb7 23.♕c5†.

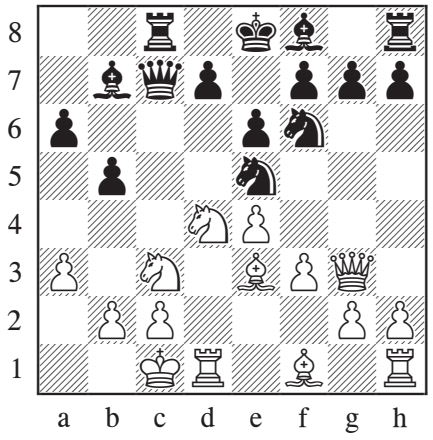
18.♘c7† ♔f7 19.♘xa8 ♗xd6 20.♖xd6 ♕xa8



21.f4! ♘xf4! 22.♕xf4 ♗xe4 23.♗a6!?±

White keeps the better chances in this weird computer line, the point of the last move being to prevent ...♖c8.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that 11...♘h5 is playable. In that case, any of 12.♕e1, 12.♕f2 and 12.♕g5 would be reasonable. I will not go into further detail, as it seems more principled for Black to delay misplacing his knight until he has run out of other useful ideas, as happens in the main line below.



12.♔b1!

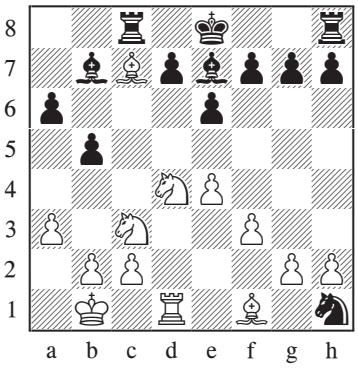
It is important to nullify the threat of ...♗xa3, which can be refuted in more than one way after the king move. It may seem as if White is playing rather slowly; indeed, moves like a2-a3, f2-f3 and ♔b1 are not exactly setting

the board alight. Nevertheless, Black still has to figure out a way to complete development and connect his rooks.

12...♘h5

I doubt that Black has anything better.

12...♗e7? is an attempt at a tactical solution which comes unstuck after: 13.♗f4! (13.♕xg7? ♖g8 14.♕h6 ♖g6 15.♕h3 ♗xa3 would justify Black's idea) 13...♘h5 (13...d6 14.♕xg7 ♖g8 15.♕h6 ♖g6 16.♕h3± leaves White with a safe extra pawn; having provoked ...d6, he no longer has to worry about ...♗xa3) 14.♗xe5 ♘xg3 15.♗xc7 ♘xh1

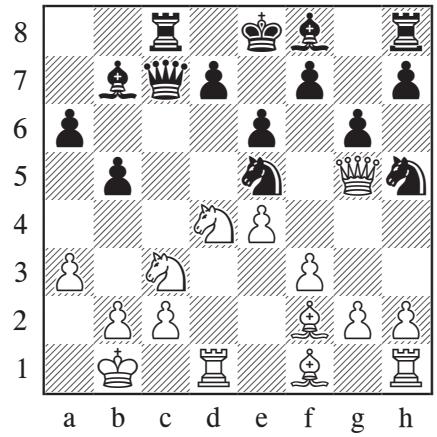


16.♗b6 ♖b8 17.♘b3! ♗xe4 18.♗a7! ♖a8 19.♗d4± White will soon pick up the knight on h1, and his two knights will be stronger than Black's rook and pawn in the resulting endgame.

12...d6 is not stupid, although it reduces the influence of Black's dark-squared bishop and still leaves him needing to find a way to develop his kingside. I prefer White's chances after, say, 13.♗e2 or 13.h4.

13.♕g5 g6 14.♗f2

14.g4 leaves Black with nothing better than forcing a draw: 14...♗e7 15.♕h6 ♗f8 16.♕g5=



14...b4 15.axb4 ♗xb4 16.♗e1

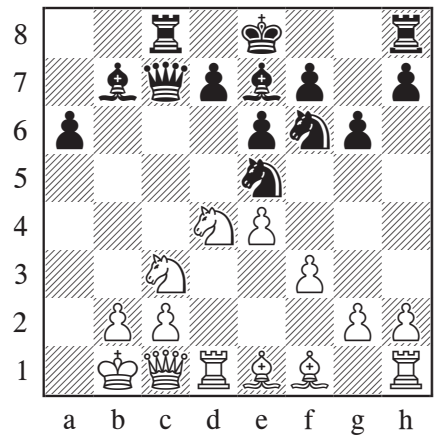
16.♕e3 0–0 (16...♗xc3 17.♕xc3 ♕xc3 18.bxc3 ♖xc3 19.♘xe6! dxe6 20.♗d4±) 17.♗e1 also leads to interesting play.

16...♗e7 17.♕c1!?

17.♕h6 can be met by 17...♗f6 18.g4 ♗g7 followed by ...♘f6 and Black seems okay, although you could certainly try digging deeper here as well.

17...♘f6

17...0–0 18.g4 ♘f6 19.h4 h5 20.gxh5 ♘xh5 21.♖g1→ looks promising for White.



18.g4 h6 19.♗g3

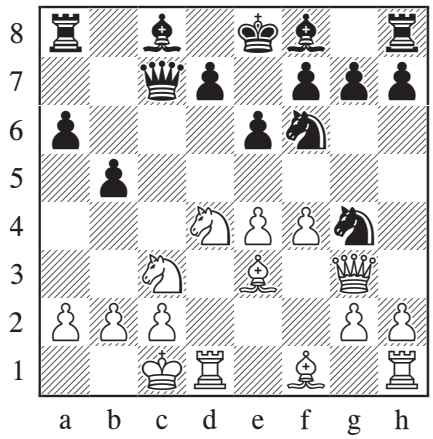
19.h4 d5! is messy.

19...d6∞

Now 19...d5? would be refuted by 20.♕f4.

I decided to end the analysis here, having reached a rich middlegame with chances for both sides. We are a long way removed from any existing games or theory, and I have mentioned a few alternatives along the way. The whole line with 10.a3!? is very much in the experimental stages, so I will leave it for interested readers to build upon my analysis and give some of these ideas a try. Besides, we still have another line to analyse...

B2652) 10.f4 ♘eg4



This is one of the hottest lines in the Sicilian right now. Surprisingly, we have a dangerous option which has been mostly neglected so far.

11.♗d2!?

This was introduced by Romain Edouard in 2016, and has only been repeated once at the time of writing. Despite its modest appearance, the move carries plenty of venom.

11.e5 has been tried in several games but after 11...♘xe3 12.♕xe3 b4! Black has no problems and has scored excellently.

11.♗g1

This is the more serious alternative, and has been by far the most popular choice. I will provide a brief summary of the theory from here, to serve as a starting point for interested readers to carry out their own investigations.

11...b4 12.♘a4

12.♘b1 e5! 13.fxe5 ♘xe5 was shown to be quite reliable for Black in Fressinet – Giri, Germany 2015.

12...h5

12...♘h6 is another significant option.

13.e5

13.♗d3 also deserves attention.

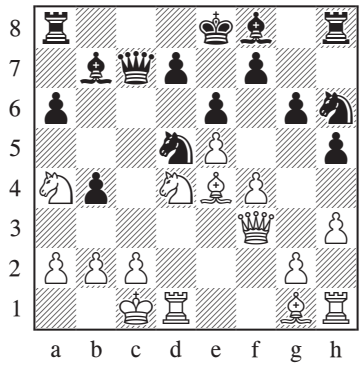
13...♘d5 14.h3

Other moves have been tried but I will focus on what I consider the most promising option for White at each turn.

14...♘h6 15.♗d3 g6

15...♗b7 16.♗e4 leaves Black nothing better than transposing with 16...g6.

16.♗e4 ♗b7 17.♕f3



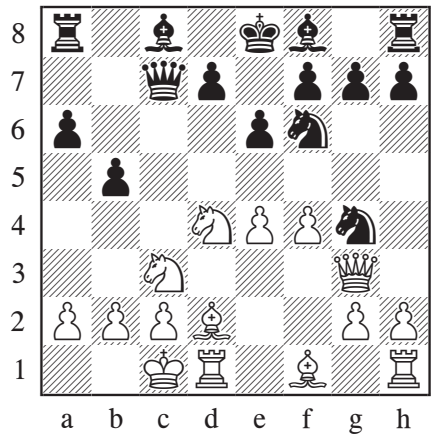
17...♖c8N

The following game shows the cost of a single mistake in such a position: 17...♘f5? 18.♘xf5 gxf5 19.♗xd5 ♗xd5 20.♖xd5 exd5 21.♘b6+– and Black's position was collapsing in Fier – Leenhouts, Amsterdam 2017.

18.♔b1

So far, there have been no practical tests from this position, but Kotronias and Semkov extend the analysis for a further twenty(!)

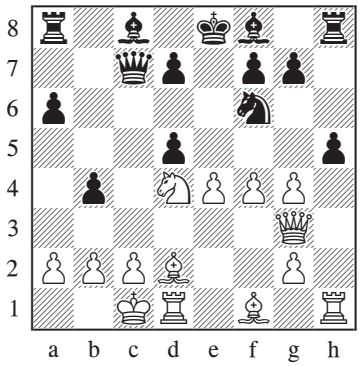
moves, with many variations along the way. Ultimately the choice on move 11 is a matter of taste, and I felt it would be more interesting and useful for the readers if I focused on the less explored option, to which we now return.



What is the reasoning behind moving the bishop to d2 instead of g1? At the most basic level, both moves have the same purpose: to leave the knight on g4 clutching at thin air, and vulnerable to e4-e5 and/or h2-h3. On g1, the bishop would maintain its influence on the diagonal towards a7, but it would leave the rook on h1 thoroughly restricted in the short term. By putting the bishop on d2, we aim for superior coordination and rapid piece play. One potential drawback is that our knight on d4 is currently undefended, and Black may try to exploit this by shifting his queen to a7, either before or after chasing the other knight with ...b4. When the d4-knight comes under attack, we will not bother moving or defending it, but will instead counter with either h2-h3 or e4-e5, leading to dynamic play with a shifting pawn structure and opening of new lines.

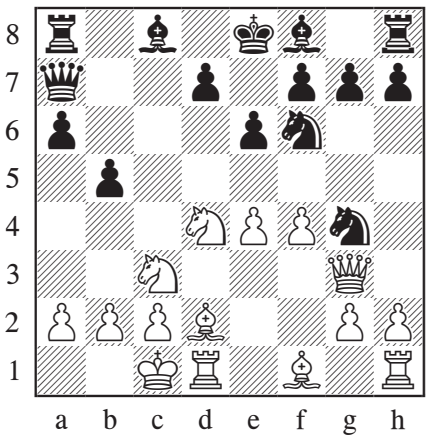
Black has two main options: **B26521) 11...♕a7** and **B26522) 11...b4**. Kotronias and Semkov award the former an exclamation mark (yes, they analyse this line as well, but not in anything like as much detail as 11.♗g1) but I actually found the latter move to be the acid test, if Black follows it up correctly.

11...h5N has not yet been tried, but it's a thematic move which is worth considering. 12.h3 (12.♗d3 is also playable but I see no reason to refrain from the more forcing continuation) 12...b4 13.♘d5! is a nice detail pointed out by Kotronias and Semkov. (13.hxg4 bxc3 14.♕xc3 ♕xc3 15.♗xc3 ♗b7 looks fine for Black) 13...exd5 14.hxg4



14...♘xe4 (14...dxe4 15.♗e2↑ also favours White) 15.♕e1 ♗b7 16.♗d3 0–0–0 17.♖xh5!± White benefits from a clearly superior pawn structure, although the position remains quite complicated.

B26521) 11...♕a7

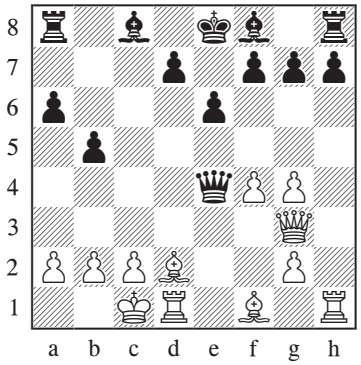


12.h3!N

12.e5 ♕xd4 13.exf6 ♘xf6 14.♗e3 ♕b4 15.f5 ♗b7 was messy in Balcerak – G. Johansson, Stockholm 2017. The text move is a natural improvement which forces Black to make a tricky decision.

12...b4!

12...♕xd4 is playable but risky, as 13.hxg4 ♘xe4 14.♘xe4 ♕xe4 leaves Black far behind in development, although his extra pawn gives him something to play for. I suggest:



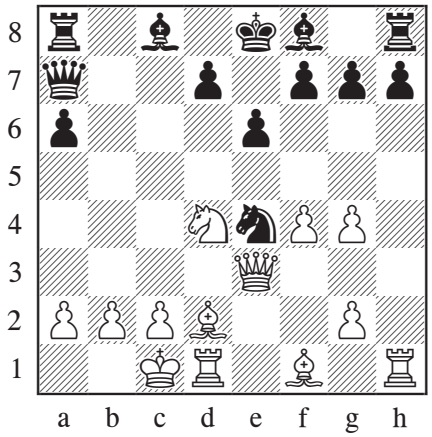
15.a3!? (15.♔b1 is also good) 15...♗b7 16.♗c3 Kotronias and Semkov briefly note this line and assess it as slightly better for White. Play might continue: 16...♖c8 17.♔b1 (17.g5!? ♖xc3 18.♕xc3 ♕xf4† 19.♔b1 ♕xg5 20.♕c7 ♗c6 21.♕c8† ♔e7 also looks dangerous for Black, although I don't see a clear win) 17...h6 (17...♗e7 would be met by 18.g5) 18.♖h3↑ White has more than enough play for the pawn.

13.hxg4

I briefly considered 13.♘d5!?, but after 13...♘xe4 14.♕xg4 exd5 15.♗e3 the position is merely unclear.

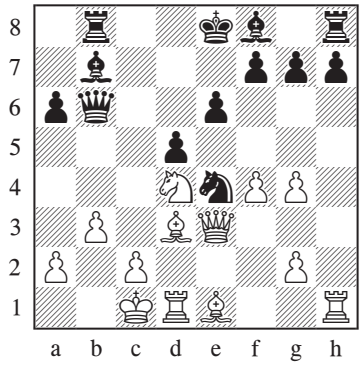
13...bxc3 14.♕xc3 ♘xe4 15.♕e3

A most unusual pawn structure has arisen, where both sides may try to benefit from the open files available to them. White has a lead in development, although I hesitate to draw too many conclusions from that, as the evaluation will depend on concrete analysis. However, it is worth pointing out one recurring positional theme, namely Black's difficulty in completing development and castling, which will always be risky on account of the open h-file.



15...♗b7

Against 15...d5, Kotronias and Semkov point out the following nice bishop shuffle: 16.♗a5! (16.♗e1 ♗c5 is decent for Black) 16...♕c5 (16...♗c5? 17.♗e2±) 17.♗e1 K&S end their analysis here, but it is worth including a few more natural moves. 17...♖b8 18.♗d3 ♕b6 19.b3 ♗b7

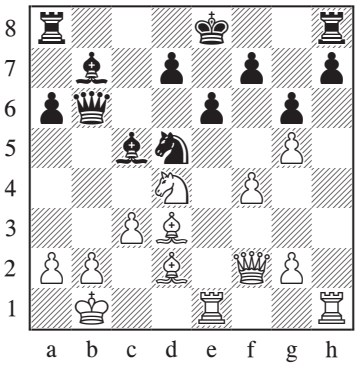


20.♗xe4 dxe4 21.♗c3± White's king is safe and he has fine prospects on the kingside, while it is hard to imagine Black's king ever finding a safe haven.

16.♗d3 ♘xd2

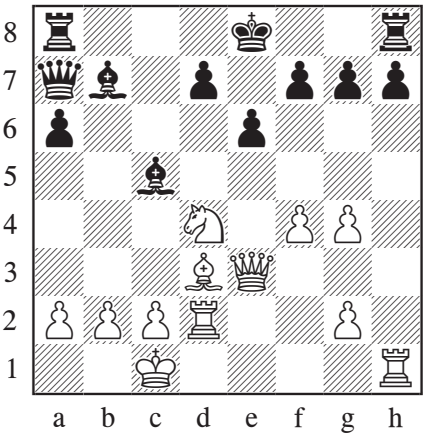
This move is not mentioned by Kotronias and Semkov, but trading the knight for an enemy bishop feels like the more natural choice which one might expect to encounter over the board.

16...♘f6!? leads to a complex position which also favours White. 17.g5 ♘d5 18.♕f2 ♕b6 19.c3 g6 (19...♗c5 gives White the extra option of 20.g6!?, aside from 20.♔b1 with a likely transposition) 20.♖de1 ♗c5 21.♔b1



21...♘b4 (21...♗xd4?! 22.cxd4± leaves Black weak on the dark squares; 21...♖b8 22.f5 a5 23.fxe6 dxe6 24.b3± is also good for White, as K&S point out) 22.cxb4 ♗xd4 23.♕e2± I found no fault with this line and assessment by K&S.

17.♖xd2 ♗c5



18.♗e4

18.c3 should also offer White an edge, but I like the simplicity of the text move.

18...♗xe4

18...♖c8 19.c3± does not change much.

19.♕xe4 d5

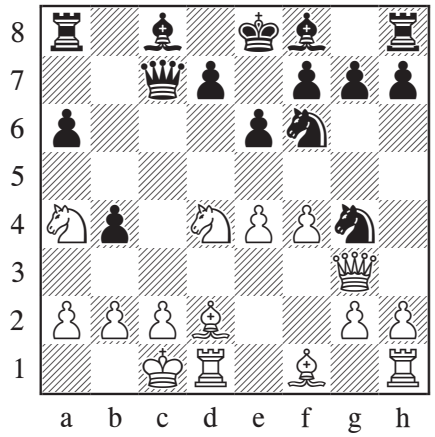
19...♖b8 20.c3±

20.♕e5 0–0 21.g5±

White has good attacking chances along the h-file.

B26522) 11...b4 12.♘a4

As I mentioned earlier, I believe this line to be theoretically the most critical choice, provided Black follows up correctly. The best move is:



12...h5!N

Kotronias and Semkov do not consider this move. Edouard mentions it briefly in his annotations, but does not include the best follow-up for Black.

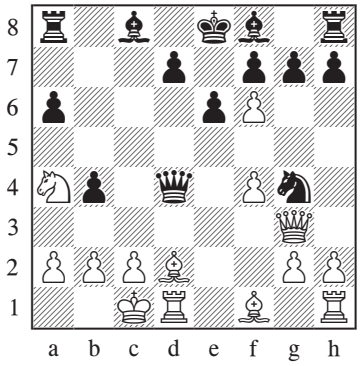
The game continued:

12...♕a7 13.e5! ♕xd4

13...♘d5N is well met by 14.♗xb4! ♘xb4 15.♕xg4 ♘xa2† 16.♔b1 ♘b4, and now White is better after 17.♗c4 as pointed

out by Edouard, while the more aggressive 17.f5!? also looks promising.

14.exf6



14...♘f2

Edouard mentions that 14...♘xf6 is well met by 15.♗e3 ♕e4 16.♘b6 ♖b8 17.f5 d6 18.♗d3 when White has a huge lead in development.

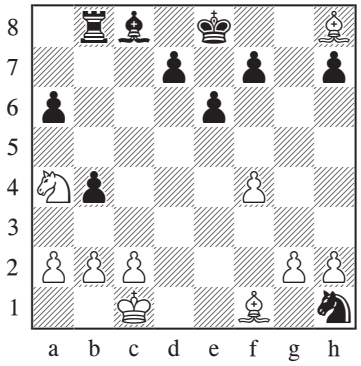
15.♕f3! ♖b8 16.♗c3!

This leads by force to an endgame with good winning chances for White.

16...♕xd1† 17.♕xd1 ♘xd1 18.fxg7 ♗xg7 19.♗xg7 ♘f2

19...♖g8? 20.♗d4 leaves the knight trapped.

20.♗xh8 ♘xh1

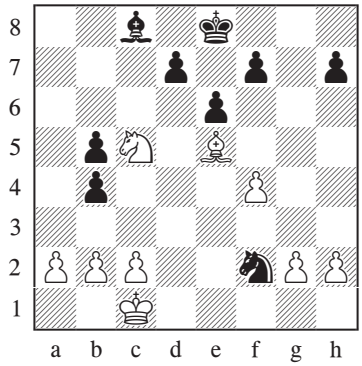


21.♗e5! ♖b5

21...♖b7N is slightly more complicated but White keeps a clear advantage: 22.♘c5!? (Edouard's suggestion of 22.b3 also puts Black under unpleasant pressure) 22...♖b6 23.♘e4 ♔e7 24.♗f6† ♔f8 25.♗d4 ♖c6 26.g3 f5 27.♘g5 e5 Black keeps his knight alive with inventive play, but it still may not be enough to save the game. 28.fxe5 ♖h6 29.♗g1 ♗b7 30.♗c4 ♖h5 31.♘f7± White remains clearly better at the end of this line by Kotronias and Semkov.

22.♗xb5 axb5 23.♘c5 ♘f2

In his annotations, Edouard points out a nice finesse here:



24.♔d2!N

The game continued 24.♗d4 d6! 25.♗xf2 dxc5 26.♗xc5 b3! 27.axb3 ♔d7 and Black was able to salvage half a point in Edouard – Neiksans, Drancy 2016. The advantage of the text move is seen after:

24...♔e7 25.♗d4 d6 26.♗xf2 dxc5 27.♗xc5†

Edouard points out that this reaches a similar ending to the game, but with a better pawn structure for White on the queenside. I haven't analysed it to check if it's definitively winning, but I suspect it is – and I'm certain that I would not want to go near such a position with Black.

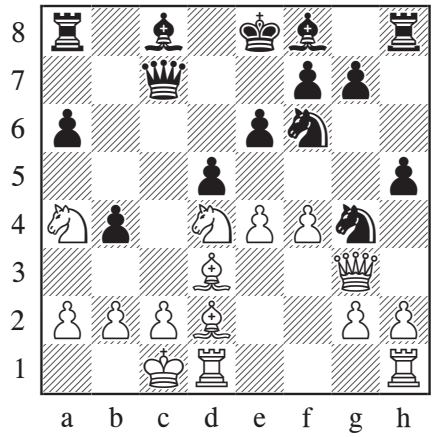
13.♗d3

We have reached another critical position.

13...d5!

This is not mentioned by Edouard in his annotations, although I am sure he must have analysed it privately.

13...♕a7 gives White a pleasant choice between the simple 14.c3, as given by Edouard, and the equally promising 14.h3!? ♕xd4 15.hxg4, leading to complications which favour White.

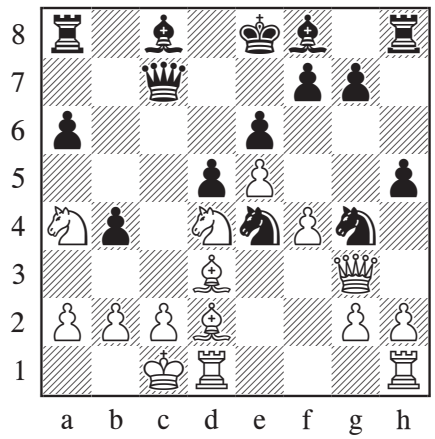


14.e5

I spent a bit of time looking at 14.exd5 ♘xd5 15.♔b1, on the basis that 15...♗d7?! 16.c4! works nicely. However, Black can improve with 15...♗d6, when he is at least equal.

14...♘e4

I will not spend time looking at weaker alternatives, as this active knight move is clearly the right choice.

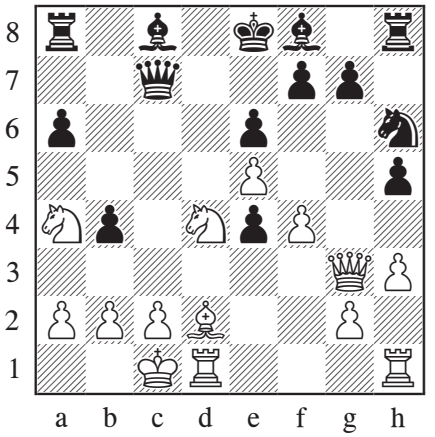


15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.h3

White should continue to force the play. A slower continuation such as 16.b3 ♗d7 17.♘b2 ♗c5 18.h3 ♘h6 19.♗e3 0–0 would offer Black at least equal chances.

16...♘h6

16...♗d7? 17.hxg4 ♗xa4 18.b3± is poor for Black, who has helpfully traded off White's bad knight while allowing the h-file to be opened.

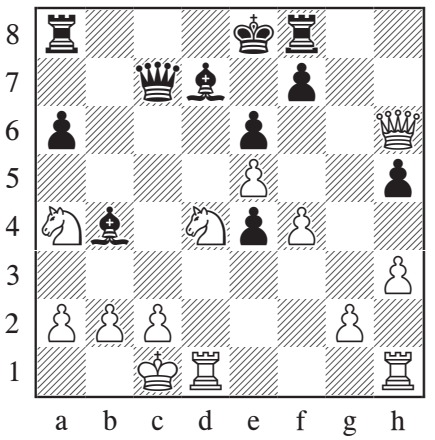


17.♗xb4!

17.b3 leads to an interesting position but one where Black is not worse at all. The text move is more dangerous and almost wins outright, but Black has just enough resources as we will see.

17...♗xb4 18.♕xg7 ♖f8 19.♕xh6 ♗d7!

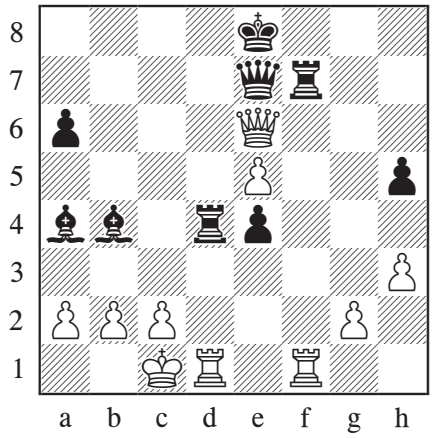
This attack on the a4-knight is the only thing keeping Black in the game.



20.f5!

20.a3 is just about okay, but hardly a try for an advantage. The text move is a good attempt to break through to the black king, but the second player can survive with a series of only moves. The critical line goes as follows:

20...♗xa4 21.fxe6 ♖d8 22.♖hf1 ♖xd4! 23.exf7† ♖xf7 24.♕e6† ♕e7



25.♕c8† ♖d8 26.♖xd8† ♕xd8 27.♕xd8†!?

White can force an immediate draw with 27.♕e6† ♕e7 28.♕c8† if he wishes it. The text move does not lead to an advantage but it offers a way to keep the game going for players who wish to fight to the death.

27...♔xd8 28.♖xf7 e3=

The computer maintains its '0.00' evaluation in all variations, although any result would be possible in a game between human players. Personally I see slightly more danger for White, due to the possibility of making a mistake and allowing Black to exploit his advanced passed pawn. So, if your opponent is fantastically well prepared and finds all the right moves in this line, it may be prudent to force a draw at noted above on move 27.

Conclusion

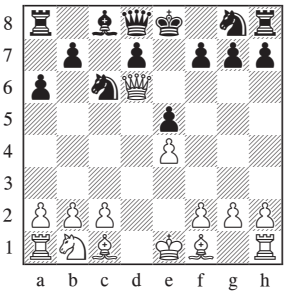
This chapter has explored in some detail the extremely trendy system which arises after 5.♘c3 ♕c7 6.♗e3 a6 7.♕f3. (The fact that we can head for this position against both 5...a6 and 5...♕c7 6.♗e3 ♘f6, as discussed in the early part of the chapter, certainly makes for a nice bonus to reduce our workload.)

At move 7, we considered several options, with 7...♗b4, 7...b5 and 7...d6 all having their own individual features and drawbacks. 7...♘e5 8.♕g3 h5!? is an especially interesting idea, when 9.♘f5!? is our move. Playing this way puts certain demands on us, in terms of both preparation and effort at the board, but I believe the investment is justified by the excellent attacking chances White obtains.

We then looked at the popular 7...♗d6 8.0–0–0 ♗e5, when 9.♘xc6! bxc6 10.♗d4 is promising. Depending on how Black proceeds, we will either develop a middlegame initiative or enjoy a slight endgame plus.

Finally we looked at the big main line after 7...♘f6 8.0–0–0, when Black has tried several moves. I would like to highlight 8...h5!? as a challenging option which I expect to gain in popularity, as well as 8...♘e5 9.♕g3 b5, when I analysed two interesting ideas for White. Even though a forcing route to an advantage remains elusive, I have shown plenty of fresh and dangerous ideas to pose problems for your opponents.

Chapter 4



Lowenthal

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 a6 6.♘d6† ♗xd6 7.♕xd6

A) 7...♕e7 **150**
B) 7...♕f6 8.♕c7!? **151**
B1) 8...♕g6?! **152**
B2) 8...♘ge7 *Game 11* **153**

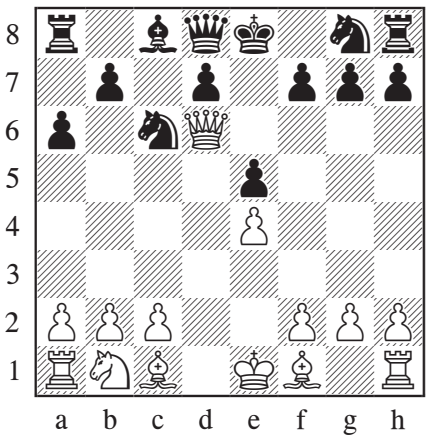
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 a6

This signals the Lowenthal Variation, which was the most popular continuation here, until Sveshnikov started playing 5...d6.

5...♘f6 is not bad. I recommend transposing to the Sveshnikov with 6.♘1c3, avoiding the trick variation your opponent will no doubt have prepared if he plays this move order.

5...h6 6.♘1c3 a6 is an inferior type of Lowenthal, which is saying something. (6...♘f6 transposes to a Sveshnikov sideline covered on page 172.) 7.♘d6† ♗xd6 8.♕xd6 ♕f6 9.♕d3 Black has no ...d5 tricks, so it's just strategic misery. For example: 9...♘ge7 10.♗e3 b5 11.0–0–0± Martins – U. Neumann, email 2009.

6.♘d6† ♗xd6 7.♕xd6



White has the bishop pair while Black has holes on d5 and d6, so consolidating our gains is the plan for the next few moves. We will consider **A) 7...♕e7** and **B) 7...♕f6**.

7...f5 8.♘c3 ♕f6 is a rare try to give Black a Lowenthal with added f-file play, but after the simple 9.♕d1± the weakness incurred is clear, with ♗c4 a likely follow-up.

7...♘ge7 8.♘c3 0–0 has been played in lots of games. But as White is already strategically winning, I will save the ink and move on to something at least slightly challenging.

A) 7...♕e7

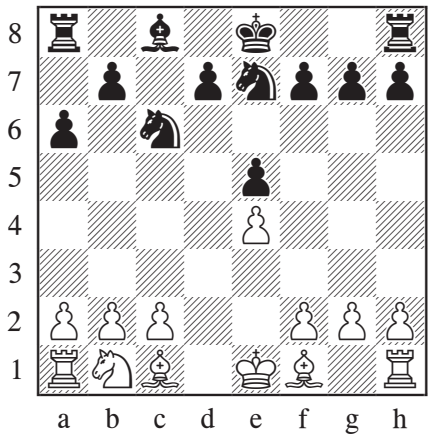
This move could not quite be called trendy, but it has found a few followers recently.

8.♕xe7†

Retreats to d2 and d1 are possible, but the queen exchange secures a pleasant edge, so we have no reason to duck it.

Note that our recommendation against 7...♕f6 does not work here: 8.♕c7? d5 and Black has equalized already, at the very least.

8...♘gxe7



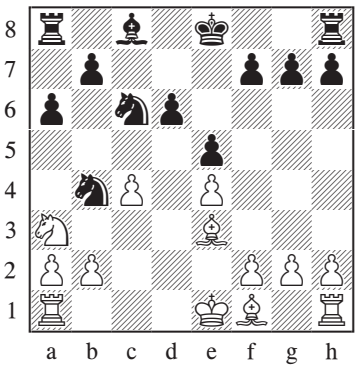
9.c4!±

This is the difference with the knight being on e7 instead of f6. The e4-pawn is not attacked, so White has time to play this move. White has a slight but enduring edge, and a game played for two results is a big success in my book.

9...♘d4

Or 9...♘b4 10.♘a3 is just a tiny temporary inconvenience. The lasting factors are White's

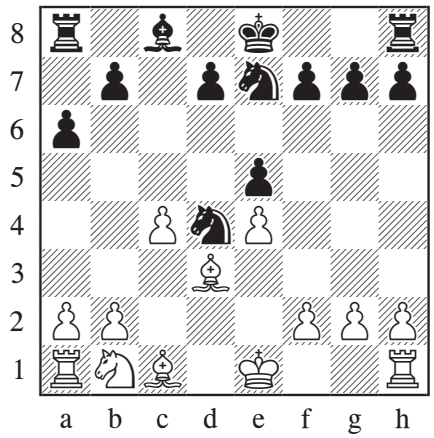
bishop pair and d-file pressure. For example: 10...♘ec6 11.♗e3 d6



12.0–0–0!? ♘xa2† 13.♔b1 ♘ab4 14.♖xd6± Simple chess would be ♗e2 and ♖hd1, but ideas such as c4-c5 and ♘c4 are also in the air.

10.♗d3

The following is just one possible example of how the play may proceed:



10...♘ec6 11.♗e3 ♘b4 12.♔d2 ♖b8 13.b3 d6 14.♘c3 ♘e6 15.♗e2±

White had better chances in Pineda – L. Buchaillot, corr. 2010.

B) 7...♕f6

This is the main idea in the Lowenthal. Black has traded the bishop pair and taken on a slight structural disadvantage in order to gain some time. It is not surprising that this is not entirely bad; trading positional advantages for dynamic ones is, after all, part and parcel of chess strategy. In this position there are many moves and all of them have been suggested in the various 1.e4 books over the years: ♕d1, ♕d2, ♕a3, ♕xf6.

8.♕c7!?

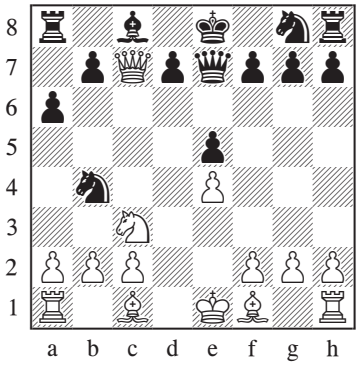
I decided on this move, as I found a number of fun ideas that might surprise your opponent and specifically because it works extremely well against every line; Black has one line that is by far his best chance, and even that is a depressing slightly worse ending.

Black has two main options: **B1) 8...♕g6?!** and **B2) 8...♘ge7**.

If you look in the database, then the following line looks respectable:

8...♕e7? 9.♘c3 ♘b4

But we managed to refute the variation with a surprising novelty.



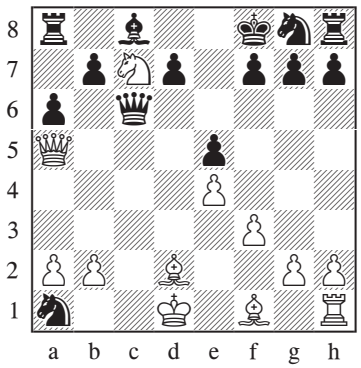
10.♗d2!!N ♘xc2†

Black has gone too far to go back.

10...d5 11.♘b5! axb5 12.♗xb5† ♗d7 13.♗xd7† ♕xd7 14.♕xe5† ♕e7 15.♕xe7† ♘xe7 16.♗xb4±

10...d6 11.♘b5! axb5 12.♗xb5† ♗d7 13.♕xb7 ♘xc2† 14.♔d1 ♘xa1 15.♕xa8† ♕d8 16.♗xd7† ♔xd7 17.♕a4† ♔e7 18.♔e2±

11.♔d1 ♘xa1 12.♘d5 ♕e6 13.♕a5! ♕c6 14.♘c7† ♔f8 15.f3±

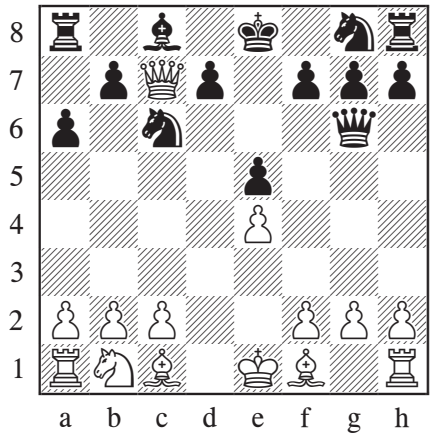


15...b6

15...♕c2† 16.♔e1 ♖b8 17.♗b4† ♘e7 18.♕xe5+–

15...♖b8 16.♘xa6 eyes a cheeky mate on d8. 16.♕xe5 ♘f6 17.♘xa8 d6 18.♕c3 ♕xa8 19.♗d3±

B1) 8...♕g6?!



This is one of the traditional Lowenthal ideas, but it does not work.

9.♘c3 d5!?

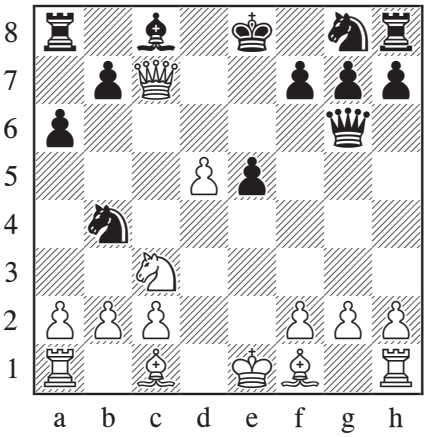
This is the type of stuff club players want when they risk trying the Lowenthal.

9...♘f6 10.♗e3 0–0 11.♕d6! b5 12.f3± White is strategically winning.

9...♘ge7 is a similar development to variation B2 below, but the move order here allows White to cover c2 easily by castling long, so no awkward ♗d3 moves are required. That means the right move is: 10.♗e3±

10.exd5 ♘b4

As I said, this is what everyone wants to play, but it just does not work:



11.♗e3!!

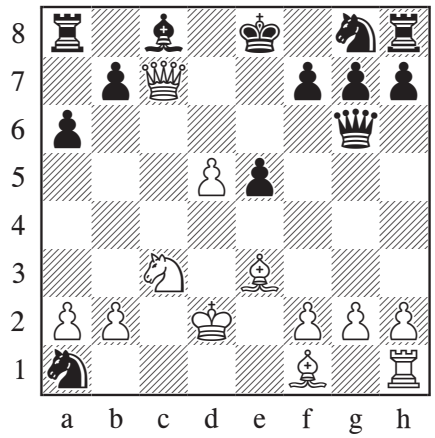
Played in only two games, but totally decisive.

11...♘xc2† 12.♔d2 ♘xa1

Taking the rook at least challenges White to show he has all the answers.

Instead 12...♘xe3 13.♕xe5† ♘e7 14.fxe3 simply leaves White a healthy pawn up. For example: 14...f6 15.♕g3 ♕f7 16.♕c7±

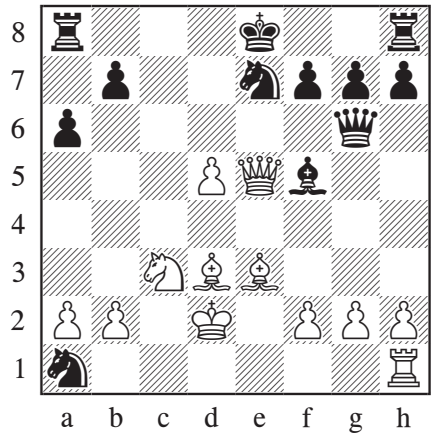
12...♗f5 fails comprehensively to the following precise sequence: 13.♕xe5† ♘e7 14.♗c5 0–0 15.♖c1 ♘c6 16.♕f4+– White's extra pawn is the least of it; threats include ♗xf8, g2-g4, and both black knights are in danger.



13.♗d3 ♗f5 14.♕xe5†

In the other game White completely lost the thread with 14.♕xb7?? ♖d8 15.♗xa6? ♘f6 16.♗b5† ♘d7 17.♖xa1 0–0–+ before somehow going on to win in Bures – Mrazek, Kouty nad Desnou 2010.

14...♘e7



15.d6+–

White's perfect handling of the opening gave her a winning position in Suchomelova – Nytra, Czech Republic 2013.

B2) 8...♘ge7

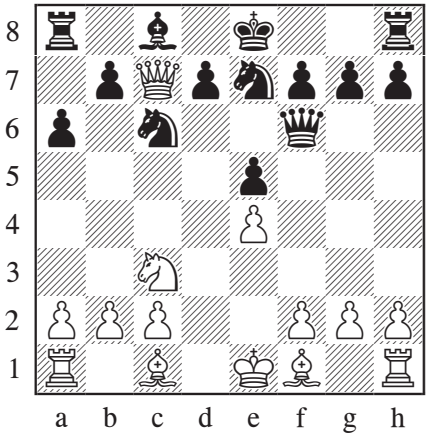
This is the more serious move.

GAME 11

Guido Bresadola – Ivan Attard

email 2010

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 a6 6.♘d6† ♗xd6 7.♕xd6 ♕f6 8.♕c7 ♘ge7 9.♘c3



9...♘b4

Black, as ever, should strike at c2 before White can cover it by castling long.

9...0–0? 10.♗e3

Please, please do not lose as follows: 10.♗d3? b5= 11.0–0?? ♖b8 and the queen is trapped.

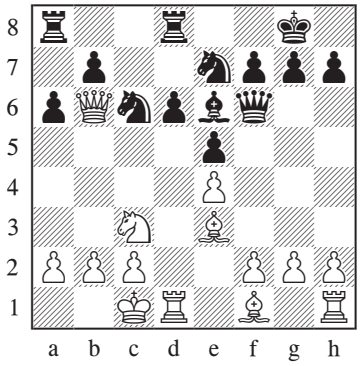
10...d6

10...b5 11.0–0–0 ♖b8 12.♗c5± shows the difference compared to 10.♗d3?; far from being trapped, the queen finds the ideal disruptive square on d6.

11.0–0–0 ♖d8 12.♕b6 ♗e6

12...♗d7 13.h4± is easy for White.

So far this is Kalod – Zpevak, Czech Republic 1996.



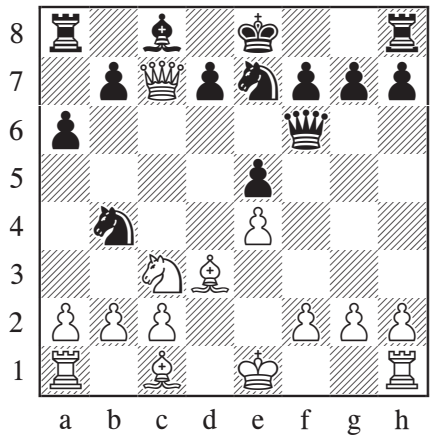
13.♘d5!N

13.h4 also looks good, but allowing 13...d5 needlessly complicates a simple and strong position.

13...♕h4 14.f3±

I do not see any serious prospects for Black to get a decent game.

10.♗d3



10...d5!

Finally a version where Black can play this break effectively.

10...0–0?! 11.0–0 d5 is an inaccurate move order due to: 12.f4! ♘xd3 13.cxd3 d4 14.♘a4 ♗g4 15.♘b6 ♖ae8 E. Berg – G. Jones, Oslo 2008. Emanuel gives 16.b3!N± as even stronger than what he did in the game, where he managed to win convincingly all the same.

11.0–0 d4 12.♘a4 ♕c6!

This is what Black must play, and it shows exactly what we are dealing with. The Lowenthal is these days little more than a low-rent Petroff, where the hope is not to hold a roughly even position, but rather a slightly worse position. Our job is to discourage these Lowenthalers by grinding them down at every opportunity.

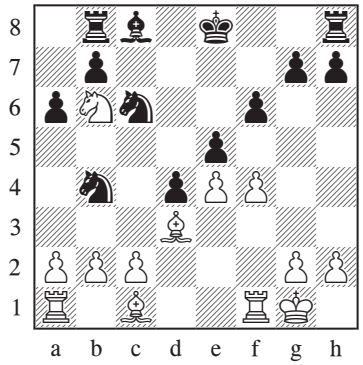
13.♕xc6† ♘exc6 14.♘b6 ♖b8 15.♗d2

Simple chess.

I also like:

15.f4!? f6

15...♗e6 was Heissler – Rabiega, Germany 1995, when I suggest: 16.f5!?N ♗d7 17.b3 f6 18.♗a3± There are many ways for White to get a pleasant position, but as far as I can tell, none that refutes Black's play.



16.♖f2!?N

I shall extend this line far further than you need to know, to illustrate an interesting idea.

16...♗e6

16...♘xd3 17.cxd3 0–0 18.b3±

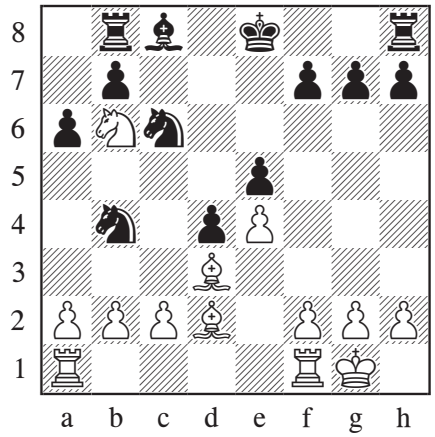
17.b3!? exf4

17...0–0 18.f5±

17...♔d8 18.♗c4±

18.♗xf4 ♘e5 19.♗xe5 fxe5 20.♗c4 ♗xc4 21.bxc4! ♔e7 22.a3 ♘c6 23.♖b1±

White has shattered his own structure in return for piece activity.



15...♘xd3!?

Taking on d3 before being nudged by a2-a3 feels odd, but it's not a bad move.

15...♗e6 16.a3 ♘xd3 17.cxd3, with some advantage to White because of the strongly placed knight on b6, is given by Berg. 17...f6 18.♖ac1 ♖d8 This was Ligterink – Sosonko, Nijmegen 1980, at which point Palliser remarks that "Black is again very solid". I would add that 19.♘a4N followed by f2-f4 and/or ♘c5 is evaluated by all modern engines as better for White. Claiming a theoretical advantage is not a problem in this line. The real issue is proving it over the board!

16.cxd3 ♗e6

Or 16...0–0 17.a4!± followed by b2-b4, as given by Parma.

16...a5 was suggested by Palliser as a way to avoid Parma's plan. 17.♖fc1 ♗e6 18.♖c5 White nevertheless seems better here after 18...a4 19.♖b5!±; but not 19.♘xa4 b5 20.b4 bxa4 21.♖xc6 ♔d7 22.♖ac1 ♖hc8 23.♖xc8 ♖xc8 24.♖xc8 ♔xc8 25.a3 which seems like a draw due to the opposite-coloured bishops.

17.f4!?

You can certainly start playing a game from here, with many different moves.

17.♖fc1N is another idea, for instance: 17...0–0 18.a4 f5 (18...f6 19.♖c5±) 19.f3 fxe4 20.fxe4 ♖f7 21.b4 ♖bf8 22.b5 ♘e7 23.♗b4±

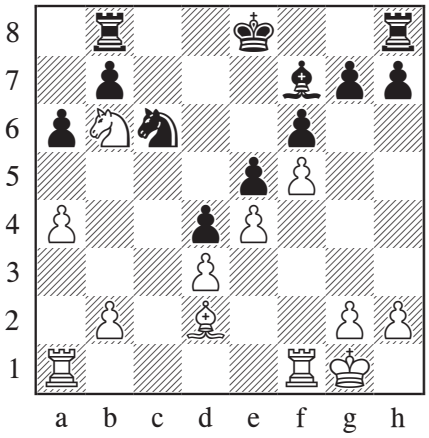
17...f6?

This is too compliant.

17...f5! is a better fighting move. For example, after 18.♘a4!? fxe4 White should probably keep it simple with 19.dxe4 with slightly better chances and a long game ahead. Instead the fancy 19.♘c5 works fine after 19...♗c8 20.♘xe4 0–0 21.♖ae1± but 19...e3 20.♘xe6 exd2 21.♖ad1 ♔e7 22.♘xg7 ♖hf8= looks about level.

18.f5 ♗f7 19.a4±

Let's see a demonstration of a squeeze.



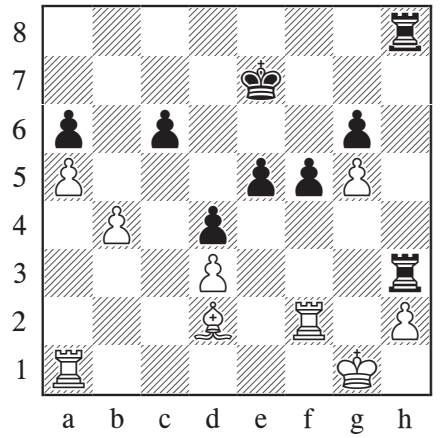
19...♗b3 20.a5 ♔e7 21.g4 g5 22.fxg6 hxg6 23.♘d5† ♗xd5 24.exd5 ♖h4!?

A clever try to defend by building a fortress, but it fails. Nevertheless, moving the knight was no better:

24...♘a7 25.♗b4† ♔f7 26.♗d6 ♖be8 27.♖ae1 ♔g7 28.g5 ♖h5 29.h4! ♘b5 30.♗e7!+–

Another knight sac idea is: 24...♖h3 25.dxc6 bxc6 26.♖ae1! ♖xd3 (26...g5 might delay the end, but should not change the result) 27.♗h6! ♖g8 28.g5+–

25.g5 f5 26.dxc6 bxc6 27.b4 ♖bh8 28.♖f2 ♖h3



29.b5!

The fortress falls!

Instead 29.♖e1 ♔d6 looks quite safe for Black.

29...cxb5 30.♖e1 ♔d6 31.♗b4† ♔e6 32.♖fe2 ♖e3 33.♖xe3 dxe3 34.♖xe3 ♖c8 35.♖h3 ♖c1† 36.♔f2 ♖b1 37.♗e1 ♖b2† 38.♔f3 ♖b1 39.♗f2 ♖d1 40.♖h6 ♔f7 41.♔e2 ♖a1 42.♗e1 ♖a2† 43.♔f1 f4 44.h4 ♖h2 45.♖h7† ♔e6 46.♖a7 ♔f5 47.♖xa6 ♔g4 48.♔g1 ♖e2 49.♗c3 e4 50.dxe4 ♖c2 51.♗e5 ♔g3 52.♗xf4†

1–0

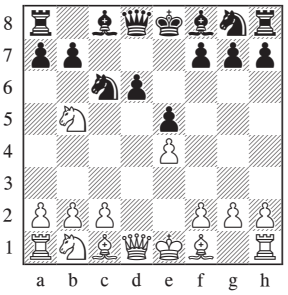
Conclusion

The Lowenthal is one of the less respectable members of the ...e7-e5 Sicilian family. For all that, Black is likely to suffer an unpleasant endgame rather than a quick mate. After 4...e5 5.♘b5 a6 6.♘d6† ♗xd6 7.♕xd6 there are two queen moves to consider.

7...♕e7 allows White to exchange queens followed by an immediate c2-c4. White has the bishop pair and a solid grip on his space advantage; that's a sure edge.

After the traditional 7...♕f6 I have chosen 8.♕c7!? as our move. It has the benefit that typical Lowenthal play, particularly starting with 8...♕g6?!, leads Black to disastrous positions. Black's only correct reply is 8...♘ge7 followed by a sequence that allows White a slight but definite endgame edge. Thus our repertoire choice reduces the Lowenthal into a grim struggle by Black to save a draw.

Chapter 5



Kalashnikov

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d6 6.c4

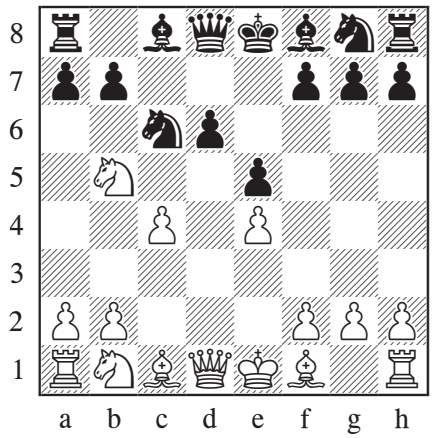
A) 6...g6!? 158
B) 6...♗e7 7.♘5c3!? 160
B1) 7...♗e6 161
B2) 7...f5 162
B3) 7...♘f6 8.♗d3 163
B31) 8...♘d7!? 163
B32) 8...0–0 9.0–0 164
B321) 9...♗e6 164
B322) 9...♘d7 *Game 12* **166**

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d6

The Kalashnikov is a structural cousin of the Sveshnikov but, by not using 4...♘f6 to force our knight to c3, White is offered the chance to seize space with c2-c4. And we will accept the offer.

6.c4

Note that 6.♘1c3, offering Black a chance to reach the Sveshnikov with 6...♘f6, allows various interesting alternatives for Black, including 6...a6 7.♘a3 ♗e7!?. And even if Black goes for 7...b5 8.♘d5, there is no need to transpose with 8...♘f6 as 8...♘ge7 and even 8...♘ce7 are both possible.



The c2-c4 move clarifies certain positional factors. White has a central grip, a great square on d5, and a backward pawn on d6 to target. Black has a fair share of the centre with his well-supported e5-pawn, and can spy a potential outpost on d4.

We should consider four moves: 6...a6 and 6...♗e6 both require just a brief mention, though there is nothing wrong with the latter – it should just transpose to one of the more significant lines. **A) 6...g6!?** is rare but interesting, while **B) 6...♗e7** is overwhelmingly the main line.

The inflexible 6...a6 does not make much sense, especially when you see that we plan to play ♘5c3 anyway. After 7.♘5c3 White has an improved version of our normal plan, as ...a7-a6 is not always essential against our repertoire.

6...♗e6!?

In my Kalashnikov-playing days, I thought this was an inflexible move, cutting out the option of quick ...f7-f5 ideas because Black would lose a tempo recapturing after exf5. However, now that I am aware of the 6...g6!? line, I realize that 6...♗e6 could be used as a way to delay a choice about the f8-bishop's future until Black has one more move's information.

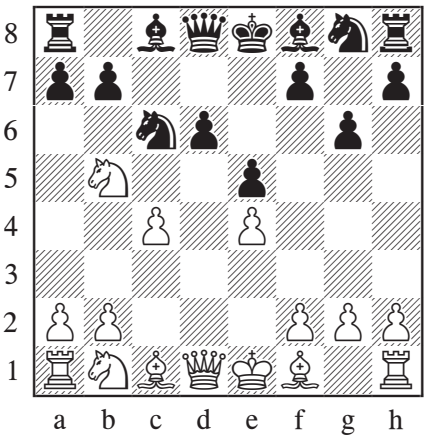
7.♗d3!?

The most flexible move that stays within our planned repertoire.

Instead 7.♘5c3 could be met by 7...g6!? when, unlike the 6...g6 variation, Black has not needed to spend a tempo on ...a7-a6.

Now both 7...♗e7 and 7...g6 are almost certain to transpose to the 6...♗e7 or 6...g6 variations.

A) 6...g6!?



A rare but intriguing line that has been tried by GMs such as Jobava, Dubov and Belous.

Later – probably *much* later – Black can try ...f7-f5, recapturing with a pawn if required. The f8-bishop looks likely to abandon the defence of the d6-pawn by going to g7, or perhaps even h6 to exchange itself. The latter idea suggests we should leave our bishop on c1 for now, to avoid a potential loss of tempo. The former idea suggests we should leave our knight on b5, and not voluntarily retreat to c3 as we do in the main line; the usefulness of the knight on b5 is shown in the note to 8 below.

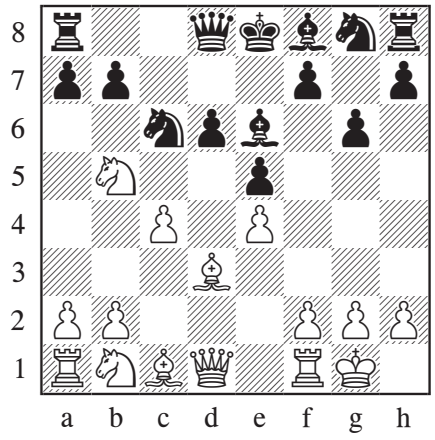
7.♗d3±

Due to transpositional possibilities via the 6...♗e6 move order, this move is most efficient for our repertoire.

Against this particular move order, White could also select a response that keeps the d-file open towards the d6-pawn. For example: 7.♘1c3 a6 8.♘a3 ♗g7 9.♘c2 ♘ge7 10.♗e2 0–0 11.0–0 ♗e6 12.♗e3 f5 13.f3!± Lagno – Dubov, Moscow (blitz) 2015.

7...♗e6 8.0–0

Before Black can move his f8-bishop, he needs to waste a move playing ...a7-a6, as otherwise a move by the d3-bishop puts too much firepower against d6.

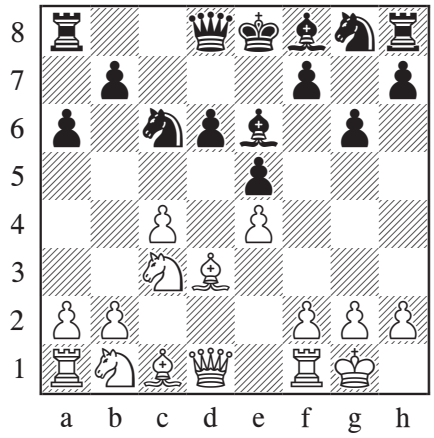


8...a6

8...♖c8 9.b3!? leaves Black facing the same problems over d6. One game concluded: 9...a6 10.♘5c3 ♗g7 11.♘d5 ♘ge7 12.♘bc3 0–0 13.♗e3 ♘d4 14.♘xe7† ♕xe7 15.♖e1 ♕h4 16.♘d5 ♗xd5± ½–½ G. Vazquez – Belous, Dallas 2016. Black was much higher rated, so we can guess he did not like his position. After 17.exd5!? one idea is g2-g3 followed by ♗xd4, forcing an ugly pawn recapture.

The need to nudge the b5-knight is shown after 8...♗g7?! 9.♗e2! when returning the bishop to f8 does not appeal, so instead Black could try: 9...♘d4 10.♘xd4 exd4 11.♘a3± Black's structure is not impressive at all.

9.♘5c3



9...♗g7

This is a standard developing move, but we should also consider the bishop-swap plan:
9...♗h6

I recommend meeting it with:
10.♘a3!?N

10.♘d2!? is an interesting way to avoid the swap, but after 10...♘f6 11.b3 0–0 12.♗b2∞ White had no advantage in Motylev – Belous, St Petersburg (rapid) 2015.

With ...g7-g6 played, an exchange of dark-squared bishops leaves some kingside weaknesses, while from c2 our knight will

cover the potential hole on d4. One sample line is:

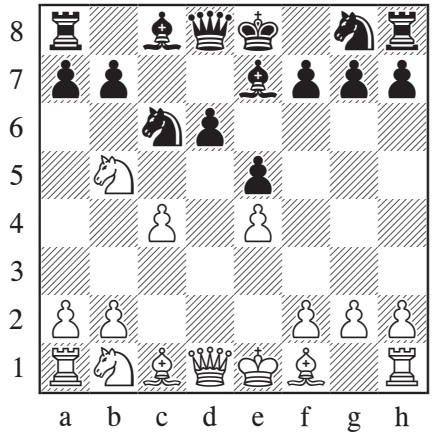
10...♗xc1 11.♖xc1 ♘f6 12.♕d2 0–0 13.♘c2 ♔g7 14.b3±

White can consider f2-f4 ideas.

10.♘d5 ♘ge7 11.♗e3 0–0

In Alekseev – Belous, Khanty-Mansiysk (rapid) 2015, White put his knight on d2, but the more usual 12.♘bc3!? looks a simpler way to an edge.

B) 6...♗e7



Almost universally played; in reply, I recommend a rare option, which I believe is just as promising as the well-known theoretical main lines with 7.♘1c3. I make that claim with some confidence, as we did reams of analysis on 7.♘1c3 for use in this book before realizing that 7.♘5c3!? was just as strong, but much less well known and requiring a fraction of the memorization.

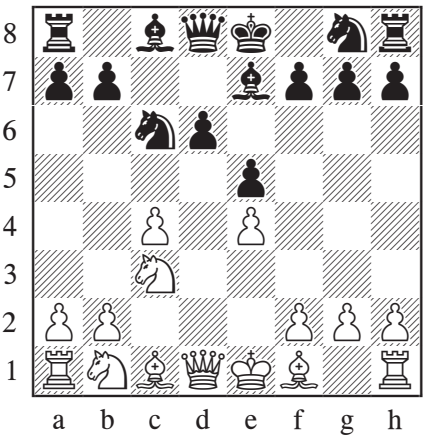
7.♘5c3!?

The sixth most popular move, with only around 70 games played, compared to over 3000 for the most common 7.♘1c3. Or, to give another indicator, Rotella's excellent 464-page Kalashnikov repertoire, *The Killer Sicilian*, only spends one brief paragraph on 7.♘5c3. I should also note that Rotella is not impressed by the move: "I doubt such a ponderous manoeuvre is critical to the Kalashnikov's survival".

I believe the Kalashnikov is a sound opening (I played it for several years) and no line will threaten its survival; the best we can do is to secure extra space and put Black under lasting pressure. Secondly, our planned manoeuvre, ♘d5 and ♘1c3, is no more ponderous than the main line 7.♘1c3 a6 8.♘a3 when our offside knight will inevitably have to move again, probably to c2. Kalashnikov aficionados will know that the rather passive c2-square has some merit as it covers d4, a hole that often attracts a black knight. True, but in our line our c3-knight has the option of e2, which covers d4 and f4. And an f2-f4 break will be a key part of our resources.

In addition to ♘d5 and ♘1c3, White's standard plan is ♗d3 and 0–0. And where is the c1-bishop going? Maybe nowhere. One of Black's common ideas is ...♗e7-g5, exchanging his bad bishop, so leaving our bishop on c1 might avoid wasting a move.

The expert on 7.♘5c3 is GM Evgeny Alekseev, who has played it repeatedly with excellent results.



We need a further split: **B1) 7...♗e6**, **B2) 7...f5** and the main line **B3) 7...♘f6**.

7...a6 is as illogical here as it is on move 6, and transpositions between the two are likely. In what my database claims is the first game with 7.♘5c3, Fernandez Garcia – Sunye Neto, Buenos Aires 1990, White supposedly met that move with 8.♘a3. I suspect a database input error, and that the real game featured the traditional move order of 7.♘1c3 a6 8.♘a3, when the same position is reached but the moves make more sense.

For our purposes, 7...a6 should be met by 8.♘d5 when White has an improved version of the positions we will see in the normal lines.

B1) 7...♗e6

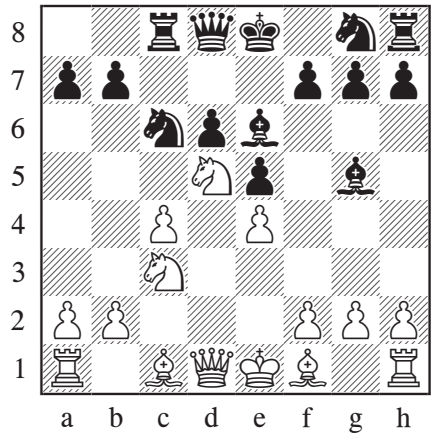
This will only be independent from the main line if Black avoids an early ...♘f6.

8.♘d5 ♖c8

Developing, but also making ...♗g5 ideas possible without falling for a ♘c7 fork.

9.♘bc3 ♗g5

Keeping it independent. After 9...♘f6 10.♗d3 a transposition to the main line is almost certain.



10.♗xg5!

A promising added option.

More typical would be 10.♗d3 ♗xc1 11.♖xc1 ♘f6 with a normal position for our line. It might seem that Black has gained by managing to play ...♗g5 without needing to play ...♘f6-d7 first, but in fact ...♘d7-c5 is a useful plan, and Black probably still wants to play it in this position.

10...♕xg5 11.♘b5 ♖d8

The best choice.

11...♕d8

This allows a forcing line:

12.♕a4!

Threatening ♘xa7.

12...a6 13.♘a7 b5 14.♕xa6

The most ambitious choice.

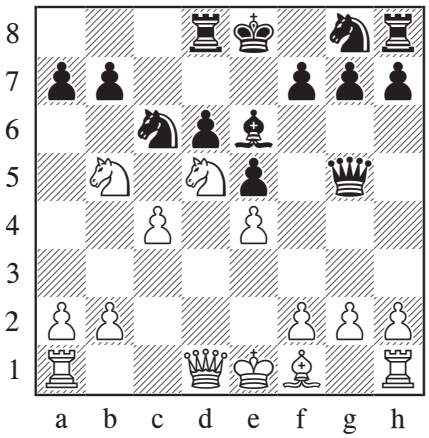
But simpler to play is 14.♘xc6 bxa4 15.♘xd8 ♔xd8 16.b4± with an endgame edge.

14...♘xa7 15.♕xa7 bxc4 16.♕a4† ♔f8

Even worse is: 16...♗d7 17.♕b4±

17.♗xc4 ♘f6 18.♘e3 ♘xe4 19.0–0±

Black needs to spend time fixing his king position to develop the h8-rook; meanwhile White will put a rook on d1 then start exploiting the two connected passed pawns.



12.h4!?N

Keeping the option of checking with either knight on c7.

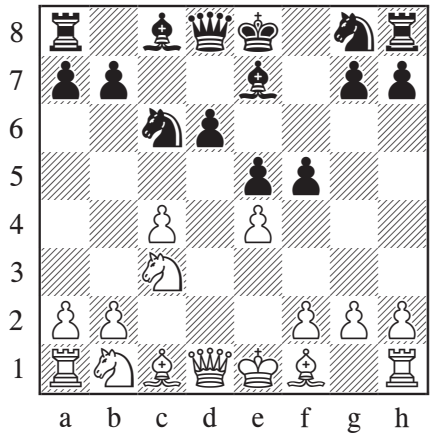
Instead 12.♘bc7† was unclear in Hagarova – Papadopoulou, Zanka 1995.

12...♕h6 13.g3±

White has an edge, with a plausible sample line being:

13...♘ge7 14.♘dc7† ♔f8 15.♘xe6† ♕xe6 16.♕d3 a6 17.♗h3 ♕f6 18.♘c3±

B2) 7...f5



A standard idea in the Kalashnikov, but White's knights are well placed to meet it.

8.exf5 ♗xf5 9.♗d3 ♗e6

Another standard sequence; Black needs to retain his light-squared bishop to cover the weaknesses created by the ...f7-f5 break.

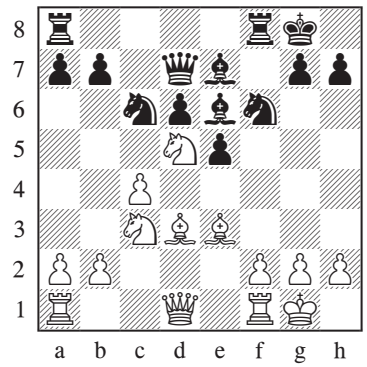
10.♘d5

Our standard plan; the following moves are also typical.

10...♘f6 11.♘bc3 ♘d4

This is frequently a double-edged move; the knight looks good on d4, but it can often be undermined by f2-f4 or challenged by ♗e3, when an exchange on d4 creates a weak pawn.

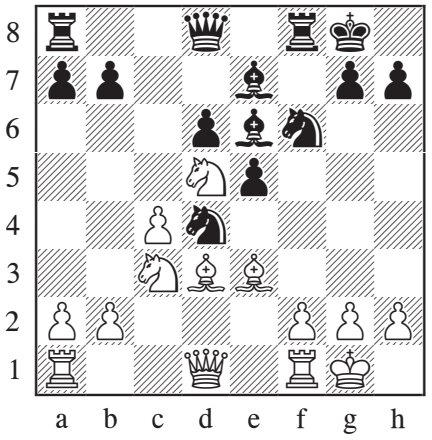
We can follow a recent game to see what might happen if Black avoids ...♘d4: 11...0–0 12.0–0 ♕d7 13.♗e3



13...♖ae8 (A positional idea worth noting is that 13...♘g4 contains no threat. 14.♗e4! ♘xe3 15.fxe3± The new e3-pawn is not weak and does a great job controlling d4; a white rook should soon appear on d1.) 14.♖c1 ♗d8 15.f3± In Lelumees – Kabisch, Stuttgart 2017, White had simply kept control of the position; expanding on the queenside was a logical next step.

12.♗e3 0–0 13.0–0±

White has a pleasant edge, which grew rapidly in the only game to reach this position. Black needed to play:



13...♘xd5

Instead the game continued 13...g6? which was a positional and tactical duff. 14.♘xe7† ♕xe7 15.♗xd4 exd4 16.♘b5± In Alekseev –

Klukin, St Petersburg (rapid) 2017, the d4-pawn was dropping.

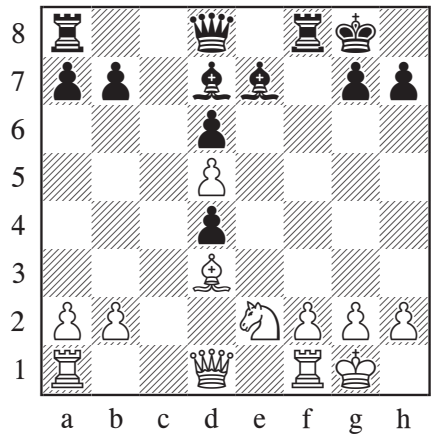
White has two promising recaptures:

14.cxd5

The greedy approach.

14.♘xd5 sees White playing to keep the positional grip. 14...♗xd5 15.cxd5 ♘f5 16.♗xf5 ♖xf5 17.♖c1± It's not much, but White is still asking questions.

14...♗d7 15.♗xd4 exd4 16.♘e2



16...♕a5!

Correctly playing for activity.

Instead 16...♗f6?! allows 17.♘f4± quickly followed by ♘e6, when Black will soon face a nasty opposite-coloured bishop middlegame.

17.♗e4 ♗f6 18.♕d3!

Unlike the variation above, 18.♘f4 ♗e5 19.♘e6 allows an equalizing trick: 19...♗xe6 20.dxe6 ♗xh2† 21.♔xh2 ♕e5† 22.♔g1 ♕xe4=

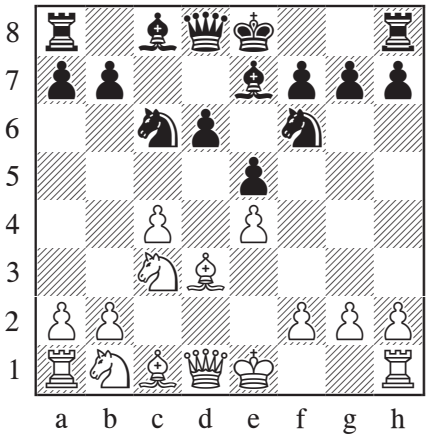
18...g6 19.♘xd4±

Black's f6-bishop gives him some compensation, but not enough for a full pawn.

B3) 7...♘f6

Simple development and preparing castling. This is the main line of our 7.♘5c3 variation, but we are talking about a few dozen games instead of many thousands as in a typical main line. That means there is plenty of unexplored territory, even at the early stages.

8.♗d3



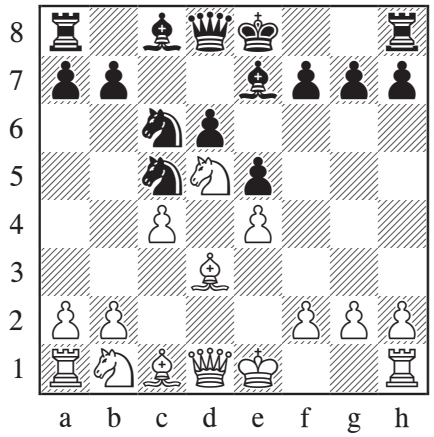
We need a further split: **B31) 8...♘d7!?** and **B32) 8...0–0**.

A minor option is: 8...♗e6 9.♘d5 0–0 10.♘xe7†!? An added option (White could stay on normal paths with 10.♘bc3 or 10.0–0). 10...♕xe7 11.♘c3 ♖ac8 12.b3 ♘d7 13.♗e3± In Alekseev – Potapov, Sochi (rapid) 2017, Black was solid, but White has an edge.

B31) 8...♘d7!?

This was a suggestion of Rotella, and has been tried by Shirov, so it is certainly worth a look. The plan of ...♘d7-c5 is normal, but often with the bishop already on e6. With the bishop still on c8, Black has the option of ...f7-f5 ideas, recapturing on f5 in one move.

9.♘d5 ♘c5



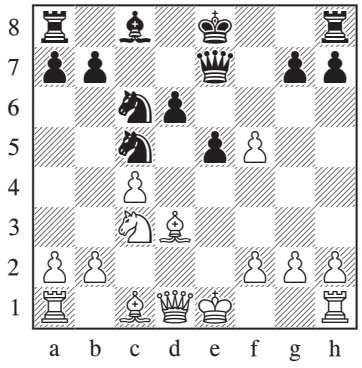
10.0–0!N

It's worth comparing the following high-level example to the note on 8...♗e6 on the previous page, to understand why it is best not to exchange on e7 in this case:

10.♘xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘c3 f5!

This break is now an effective equalizer. It's a point we see frequently: the ...f5 break does not lose time if the bishop is still on c8.

12.exf5



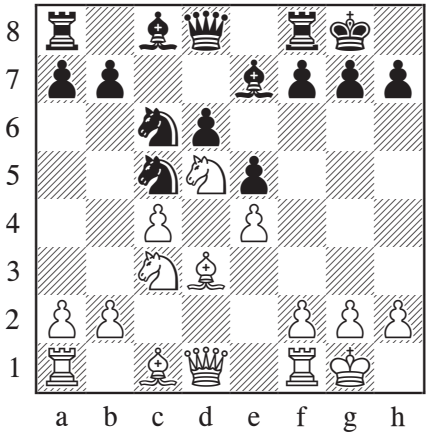
12...♘xd3†!N

12...0–0 13.♗b1! ♗xf5 14.♗xf5 ♖xf5 15.0–0 ♘d4 was the continuation of Alekseev – Shirov, St Petersburg (rapid) 2013, when 16.♗e3N± would have earned an edge.

13.♕xd3 ♘d4=

With ...♗xf5 to follow. Since White has no advantage here, we can see why simple development at move 10 is correct.

10...0–0 11.♘bc3



11...f5!?

11...♗g5 is covered on page 166 – see 11...♘c5 in the notes to Game 12.

It is logical to consider the text move, by analogy with the Alekseev – Shirov game, but things are quite different when there is still a big knight on d5.

12.exf5 ♘xd3

12...♗xf5?! 13.♗xf5 ♖xf5 14.♗e3± is even worse for Black.

13.♕xd3 ♗xf5 14.♘e4±

White has a positional edge; the coming moves are likely to be ♗e3, f2-f3 and ♖ad1.

B32) 8...0–0

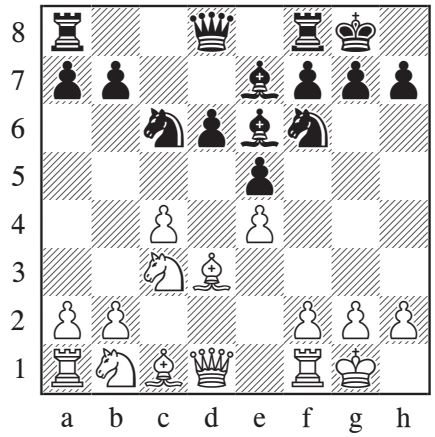
The most flexible option.

9.0–0

We need one last split: **B321) 9...♗e6** and **B322) 9...♘d7**.

B321) 9...♗e6

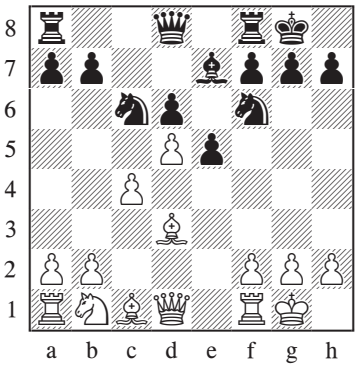
A natural development, but we now know that it makes a quick ...f7-f5 less appealing for Black.



10.♘d5 ♘d7

The standard idea.

Exchanging on d5 loses too much time:
10...♗xd5 11.exd5



11...♘b8

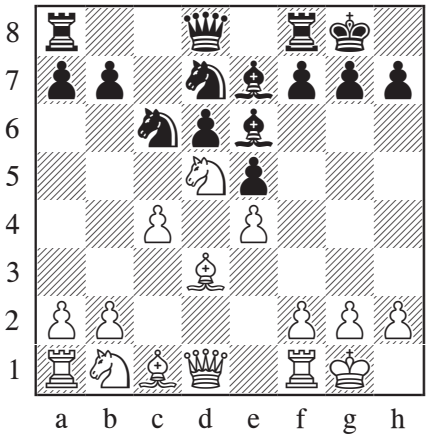
Or 11...♘d4 12.♗e3± when White does not need to rush to take on d4, though that is certainly a promising option, along with ♘c3 and b2-b4.

12.♘c3 ♘bd7 13.♗e3±

We will see somewhat similar positions in the ...e5-Najdorf chapter, but White is well ahead here. In the real Najdorf the pawn is on a6 (of course!) but Black has moved his knight directly from b8 to d7, and not wasted two moves going to c6 and back. The extra time gives White a decent advantage. For example:

13...♘e8 14.♕d2 f5 15.f3±

White will advance strongly on the queenside; Black's hoped-for kingside counterplay suffers from his lack of a single active piece.



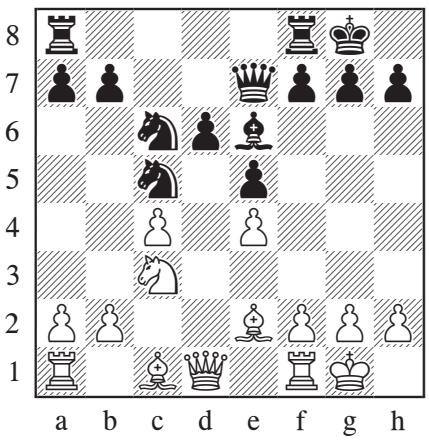
11.♘xe7†!

A good moment to take on e7, as with the bishop on e6, we do not need to worry about a quick ...f5-break equalizing.

Instead 11.♘bc3 ♗g5 12.♖e1 was Dolmatov – Moiseenko, Tripoli 2004, when Rotella suggested 12...♗xc1 13.♖xc1 and then 13...♘d4. That's close to level, but after 14.♘e3!? White can press, as in the 12...♘f6 13.♘e3!? line on page 167.

Instead, this feels an ideal moment for 13...♗xd5 taking most of the tension out of the position. For example: 14.♘xd5 ♘d4=

11...♕xe7 12.♘c3 ♘c5 13.♗e2±



With ...f7-f5 losing time when the bishop recaptures, White can afford to consolidate his bishop-pair edge. One game continued:

13...♖ad8 14.♗e3 ♕h4 15.f3 f5 16.♕d2 f4 17.♗f2 ♕h5 18.♘d5±

In Lovakovic – Rawlings, email 2015, Black's kingside play was never a threat, while White could build up on the queenside; White eventually broke through to win.

B322) 9...♘d7

GAME 12

Evgeny Alekseev – Denis Yevseev

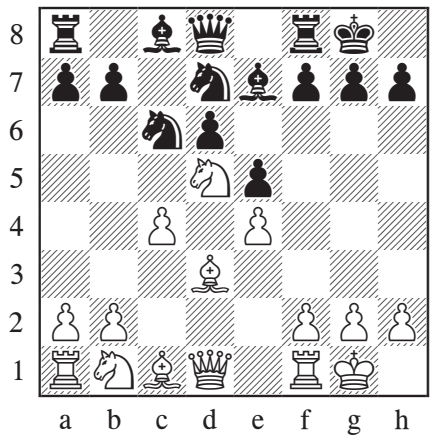
St Petersburg 2012

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d6 6.c4 ♗e7 7.♘5c3 ♘f6 8.♗d3 0–0 9.0–0 ♘d7

Starting the usual regrouping and preparing ...♗g5.

10.♘d5

Business as usual.



10...♗g5

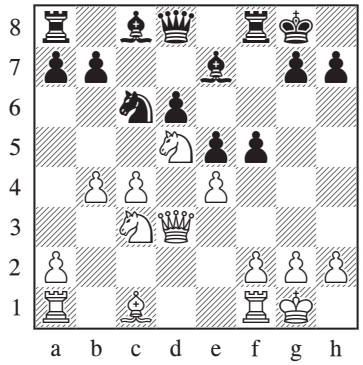
If Black wishes to play a ...♗g5 plan, it makes sense to play it now, while remaining flexible about the d7-knight's destination.

But also playable is:

10...♘c5 11.b4!? ♘xd3

We will see 11...♘e6 12.♘bc3 ♗g5 in the note to the next move in the main game.

12.♕xd3 f5 13.♘bc3±



An irritating position for Black: he needs to move the c8-bishop to complete development, but then White takes on f5, when Black has wasted a move.

13...♗e6

The logical 13...f4?! has a tactical flaw: 14.b5! ♘a5 (the square the knight wants is 14...♘d4? but 15.♗xf4 is the problem) 15.♘xe7† ♕xe7 16.♗a3±

14.exf5 ♗xf5 15.♘e4

White has a positional grip, in similar style to various other positions we see in this chapter. Once again, note how much happier Black would be if the d5-knight and e7-bishop had been exchanged.

11.♘bc3 ♗xc1

Again we should consider the knight move:

11...♘c5 12.b4!?

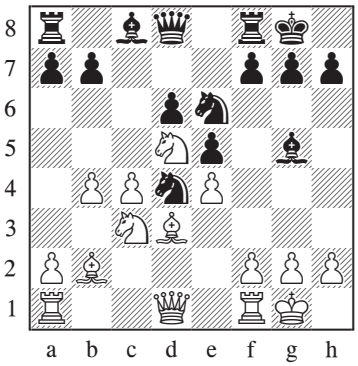
And once again this space-gainer is logical. Instead 12.♗c2 ♗xc1 13.♖xc1 is a clumsy version of the game; we would rather have the bishop well out of the way on b1.

12...♘e6

12...♘xd3 13.♕xd3 leads to a simpler position with a typical slight edge for White. Black could consider 12...♗xc1!?N 13.♖xc1 ♘e6 when 14.♗b1 is similar to the game,

except with b2-b4 added, which is generally a useful move though not always immediately essential.

13.♗b2 ♘cd4



This position occurred in Alekseev – Tekeyev, Sochi (blitz) 2016, and now I like:

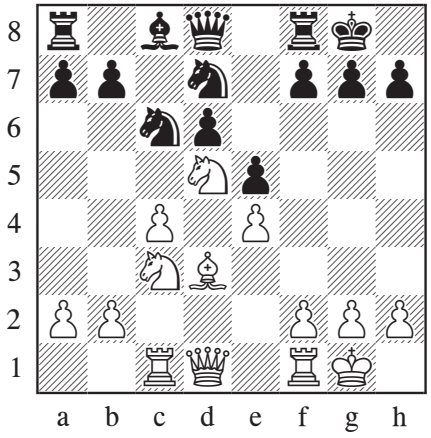
14.g3!?N

Preparing f2-f4, though it makes sense to tuck our king safely away on h1 first. For example:

14...♗h6 15.♔h1 a5 16.a3 ♔h8 17.♕h5 axb4 18.axb4 ♖xa1 19.♗xa1 ♗d7 20.f4→

Black is under immense pressure.

12.♖xc1±



The exchange of dark-squared bishops has eased Black's cramped position, but it also means the d6-pawn can be weak. If Black could reach this position except with his bishop sitting on e6, he would be about level. See page 165, note to White's 11th move in variation B321.

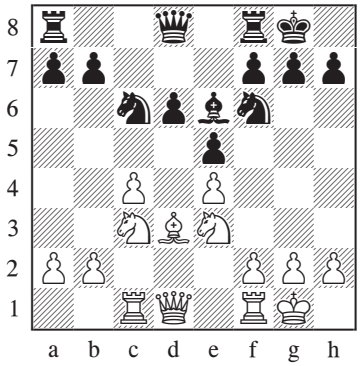
12...♘c5

The more active of the two likely posts for the knight.

12...♘f6 13.♘e3!?

Keeping more tension in the position, and also making the point that the f6-knight blocks a potential ...f5-break. All Black's pieces look sensible, but he has no pawn breaks and no clear plan; in contrast, White can slowly build up against d6.

13...♗e6



14.f3!?N

An odd-looking move, but I want to prepare ♕d2 and ♖fd1 without allowing a freeing ...♘g4.

Instead 14.♗b1 was played in Alekseev – Andriasian, Kallithea 2008, but the bishop move does not seem necessary here.

As mentioned, if 14.♕d2 then 14...♘g4 eases Black's position.

A typical continuation would be:

14...♖c8 15.♕d2 ♕b6 16.♖fd1 ♘d4 17.♘e2 ♘xe2† 18.♗xe2±

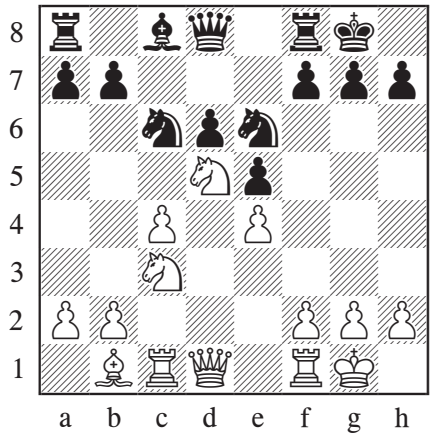
13.♗b1!

We will see that this bishop has more potential than may be immediately apparent.

Also, the c5-knight is not stable, with b2-b4 on the cards.

13...♘e6

Don't be fooled by the seeming balance of power between the knights. White occupies d5 with total control, while moving either black knight to d4 could be met by f2-f4.



14.♕d3!

A multipurpose move; it prepares ♖cd1 eyeing the weak d6-pawn, while adding more fuel to the planned f2-f4 break.

14...♕g5

Trying to clamp down on f4, but the break cannot be stopped.

Black could try a line such as: 14...♘ed4 15.f4! f6 when one of many options is: 16.f5!?± White can slowly build up with ♕e3, ♗d3, and perhaps g2-g4 and h2-h4, though expanding on the queenside with b2-b4 is also tempting.

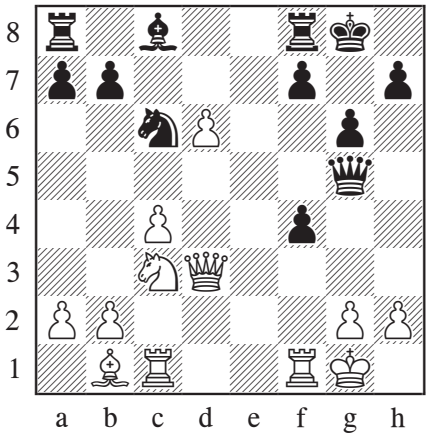
14...f6 15.f4 is similar.

15.f4!

Making use of the queen-and-bishop battery.

15...♘xf4 16.♘xf4 exf4 17.e5 g6 18.exd6

An amazing transformation; the d6-pawn is a fine asset.

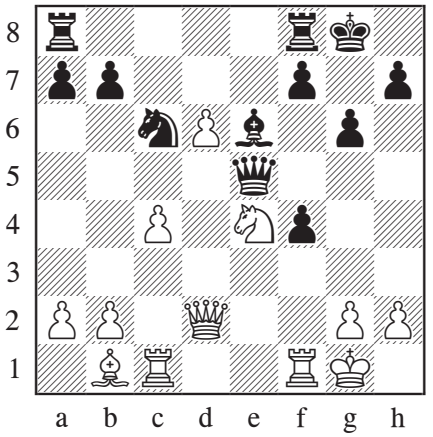


18...♗e6?!

Too slow. Black needed to put pressure on the d6-pawn at once.

18...♖d8 would have minimized Black's disadvantage. For example: 19.♖cd1 (unlike the game, after 19.♘e4 ♕e5 20.♕d2?! Black has time for 20...f5∞) 19...♗g4 20.♖d2 ♕c5† 21.♖ff2± The d6-pawn is still strong, but at least it is not supported by a pawn from c5.

19.♘e4 ♕e5 20.♕d2±



Another masterful multipurpose queen move: defending b2, hitting f4, and freeing the b1-bishop.

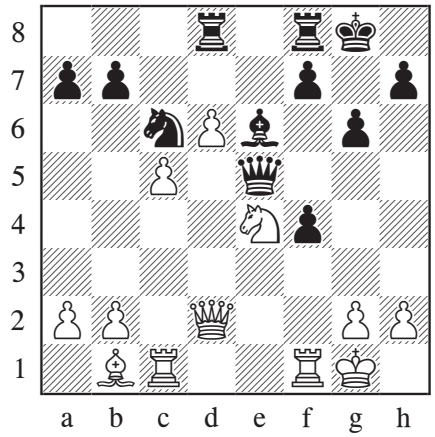
20...♖ad8?!

There is no longer any time for this move.

20...f5 was essential, even though 21.♘g5 is highly unpleasant.

21.c5+–

White's protected passed pawn on the sixth is a monster while Black's kingside is weak.

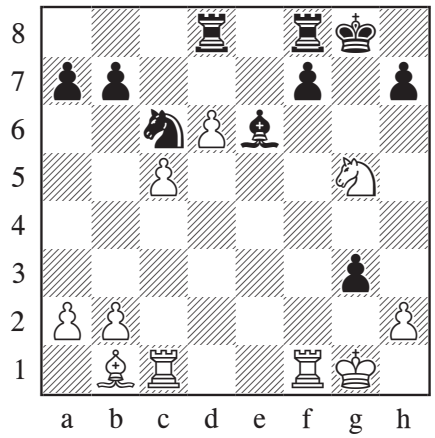


21...g5 22.g3!

Slow play with b2-b4 would also have worked, but the text move is the fastest winner. The position is giving me flashbacks to the 3...g5 lines of King's Gambit.

22...fxg3 23.♕xg5† ♕xg5 24.♘xg5

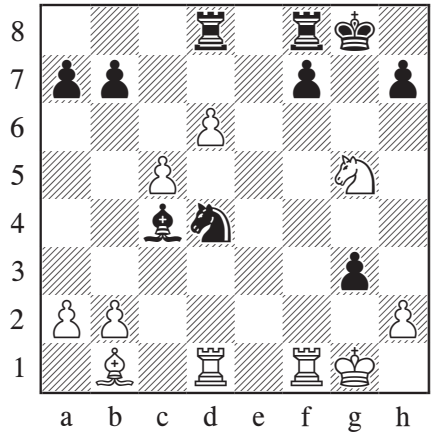
It soon becomes apparent that Black's queen was the only piece holding his position together.



24...♘d4

After 24...gxh2† 25.♔xh2 White has a killing attack, even without queens.

25.♖cd1 ♗c4



26.hxg3

This wins, but then so does every other plausible move.

26...♗xf1 27.♖xd4

Black resigned as 27...♗b5 28.♘xh7 wins back the exchange, leaving White two pawns up. A great game by Alekseev, demonstrating the power of his favourite anti-Kalashnikov weapon.

1–0

Conclusion

We meet the Kalashnikov, 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d6, with the space-seizing 6.c4.

Then 6...a6 is needlessly inflexible, while 6...♗e6 is likely to transpose to one of the two main lines, as long as White replies with the sensible 7.♗d3.

A) 6...g6!? is odd but not absurd. We should simply develop with ♗d3 and 0–0, leaving our knight on b5 until it is nudged back to c3 by ...a7-a6.

In contrast, I recommend meeting the main line of B) 6...♗e7 with the voluntary retreat 7.♘5c3!?, when Black has three main paths.

B1) 7...♗e6 8.♘d5 has many transpositional possibilities, but if Black tries the independent 8...♖c8 9.♘bc3 ♗g5 then White has the excellent option of 10.♗xg5! ♕xg5 11.♘b5.

B2) 7...f5 is a common Kalashnikov idea, but our knights are perfectly placed to meet it. After 8.exf5 ♗xf5 9.♗d3 ♗e6 10.♘d5 ♘f6 11.♘bc3 White has a controlled edge.

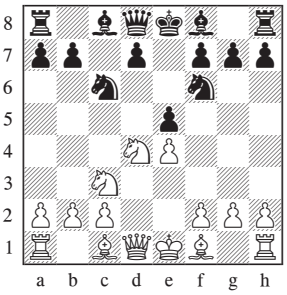
After B3) 7...♘f6 8.♗d3 if B31) 8...♘d7!? 9.♘d5 ♘c5 then White should avoid 10.♘xe7, as 10...♕xe7 11.♘c3 f5! is an effective equalizer. Instead 10.0–0 0–0 11.♘bc3 will transpose to later lines.

After B32) 8...0–0 9.0–0 we saw a final split.

After B321) 9...♗e6 10.♘d5 ♘d7, in contrast to the previous line, this is a fine moment to take on e7, as with the bishop on e6, we do not need to worry about a quick ...f5-break equalizing. After 11.♘xe7†! ♕xe7 12.♘c3 ♘c5 13.♗e2 White has an edge.

After B322) 9...♘d7 9.0–0 we saw various tries for Black, with one of the most solid and logical being 9...♘d7 10.♘d5 ♗g5 11.♘bc3 ♗xc1 12.♖xc1 ♘c5. But even here, after 13.♗b1! White has good prospects of building up pressure, as Alekseev brilliantly demonstrated.

Chapter 6

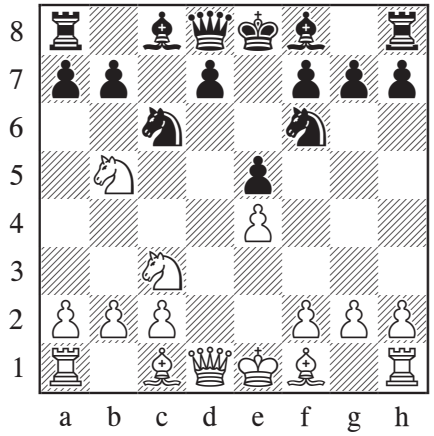


Sveshnikov

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5

6...h6 *Game 13* **172**
6...a6?! *Game 14* **176**
6...d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 **180**
Minor 8th Moves: **8...♗e6** (8...d5?; 8...♖b8; 8...♗e7) *Game 15* **180**
8...b5 9.♘d5 **186**
9...♕a5† *Game 16* **186**
9...♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 **193**
11...♘e7 12.♘xf6† gxf6 13.♗d3 d5! 14.♕e2 **193**
14...d4 (14...♕b6) *Game 17* **193**
14...dxe4 (14...♗e6) **199**
11...♗b7 *Game 18* **202**
11...♗g5 12.♘c2 **205**
12...♘e7 **205**
12...♖b8 **208**
11...0–0 12.♘c2 ♗g5 (12...♖b8) **13.a4 bxa4 14.♖xa4** **214**
14...♗b7?! (14...♖b8?!; 14...♘e7!?) *Game 19* **214**
14...a5 15.♗c4 ♖b8 16.b3 ♔h8 17.♘ce3 **219**
17...♗xe3 (17...♗e6; 17...f5?) **219**
17...♘e7 *Game 20* **222**
17...g6 *Game 21* **224**

In this chapter we shall concentrate on the position after: **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5**



And in particular the move 6...d6, which leads to the main lines of the Sveshnikov. The Sveshnikov is as tough a test as a 1.e4 player will face – it is right up there with the Najdorf in terms of theoretical respectability. Many grandmasters duck the challenge with 3.♗b5, the Rossolimo, which to be fair is one of the better anti-Sicilians. However, we shall stick to our Open guns with 3.d4.

Before we face the true challenge, we will deal with a couple of easier moves, 6...h6 and 6...a6. Then it's time for the many branches of the real Sveshnikov.

The main line continues with 6...d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 when we take a brief look at the Lasker variation 8...♗e6 (Game 15) before continuing on to the normal 8...b5 9.♘d5 when again there is a sideline, 9...♕a5† (Game 16), before we reach the main tabiya after 9...♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3. I will explain later why this is the line I recommend.

Then we need an extended study of the sharp 11...♘e7, followed by 11...♗b7 (Game 18), and 11...♗g5 (page 205). With those moves out of the way, we will finally be ready for the main line, which starts 11...0–0 12.♘c2 ♗g5 13.a4 bxa4 14.♖xa4.

6...h6

GAME 13

Daniel Alsina Leal – Joaquin Antoli Royo

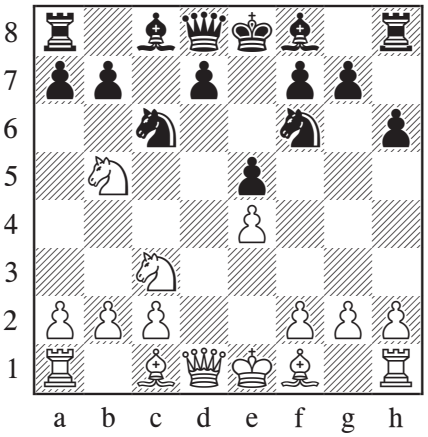
Villava 2009

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 h6

I was amused by the following comment by Cyrus Lakdawala in *Larsen Move by Move*: "I tearfully pleaded with Everyman to allow me to write a book on the rarely-played pseudo-Pelikan 6...h6, which I call The Ulfie, since GM Ulf Andersson has zillions of online games with it and has convinced me it is absolutely playable for Black."

Zenon Franco in *Spassky Move by Move* was calmer: "An unusual move."

I should admit I played 6...h6 a few times about ten years ago. I like endgames and was willing to suffer a slight disadvantage just to provoke an exchange of queens.



7.♘d6†

Sometimes the simple way is also the best.

7.♘d5?! ♘xd5 8.exd5 a6! has been played in lots of games and is not dangerous for Black.

7.♗e3

I dislike this ambitious approach because of the dangers it includes for White.

7...d6

7...♕a5? has a good score in the database, which serves as an example of how misleading statistics may be. After 8.f3 Black's position is simply horrible.

8.♘d5 ♘xd5 9.exd5 ♘e7!

Contrary to the Sveshnikov, this move is attractive here, as the knight will attack the bishop on e3 quickly.

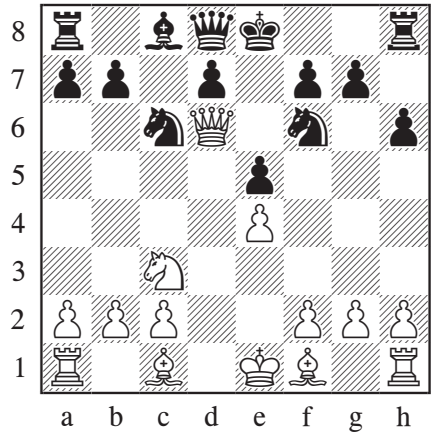
10.c3

This move, threatening the a7-pawn and ♕a4, is well-known from the Sveshnikov.

10...♘f5 11.♗xa7 ♗d7 12.a4 b6

This has been played in a few games and might offer White a chance to play for an advantage, but in practical terms I find Black's counter-attacking chances attractive.

7...♗xd6 8.♕xd6



8...♕e7

Again the simple move is best.

The apparently more aggressive 8...♕b6?! leads only to pain if White refuses to be cowed: 9.♗d2! ♕d4 (9...♕xb2? 10.♖b1+–) 10.♕xd4 ♘xd4 (10...exd4 11.♘b5 looks grim) 11.0–0–0 0–0 12.f3 b6 13.♗e3 ♘e6 14.♘d5± Jasnikowski – Zoltek, Zielona Gora 1982.

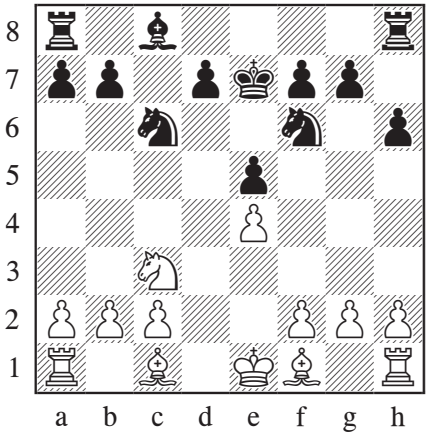
8...♕a5?! 9.♗d2± is similar to a weak line featured on page 176; see the Tarrasch – Mieses game in the notes there.

9.♕xe7†

This is absolutely the right move.

9.♘b5 is less threatening than it looks after: 9...♖b8! For example: 10.♗e3 ♘xe4 11.♕xe7† ♔xe7 12.f3 a6 13.fxe4 axb5 14.♗xb5 d6 15.0–0–0 Peters – Lakdawala, Costa Mesa 2003. If this was all White had, I would consider playing 6...h6 again.

9...♔xe7



10.♗e3

10.b3!? is interesting. One idea is ♗a3(†) of course, but covering the c4-square against ...♘c4 incursions is also handy, as we shall see in the note to Black's 12th move below.

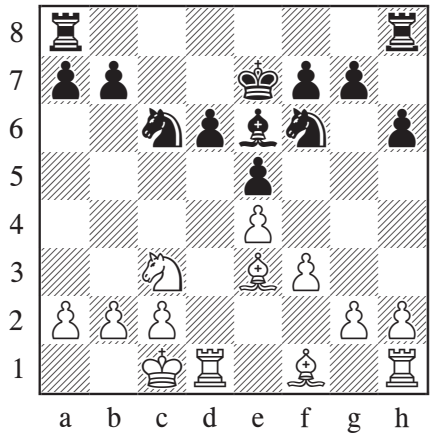
10...d6

Black's pieces develop easily: ...♗e6 and usually rooks to c8 and d8, but White has the pair of bishops and an advantage in space.

10...♖d8?! as in Suetin – Klavins, Minsk 1957, is an inaccurate move order due to: 11.♘d5†!N ♘xd5 12.exd5 ♘b8 (12...♘d4 13.♗xd4 exd4 14.0–0–0) 13.f4! d6 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.c4±

11.f3 ♗e6 12.0–0–0

Black has tried a number of moves from here.



12...a6

12...♖ac8 13.♔b1 a6 is just a transposition.

12...♖hc8!?

This move deserves particular attention. I recommend meeting it with:

13.b3!

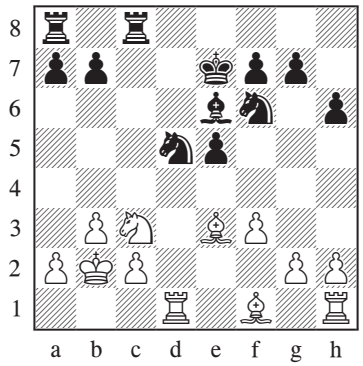
The natural 13.♔b1 runs into 13...♘a5!∞ which has been played just once, in Eremin – Helmer, email 2012. Black stops b2-b3 and discourages ♘d5 (Black can now take with the knight without losing a piece!) while furthering his own plan of ...♘c4. White may yet find an edge with some plan involving g2-g4 and h2-h4, but it is less clear and controlled than I want.

In such queenless Sicilian middlegames, b2-b3 is often a useful move for White. It gives a great square on b2 for the king, while keeping Black's knight out of c4. If Black plays slowly then White can neaten up his position with ♔b2 and consider a later ♘d5. So the attempt to "do something" is:

13...♘b4 14.♔b2 d5 15.exd5 ♘bxd5

15...♘fxd5 should lead to the same thing.

In I. Petrov – Horse, corr. 2011, the simplest continuation would have been:



16.♘xd5†N ♘xd5 17.♗d2±

The bishop pair is the dominant feature, as Black's pseudo-initiative is over.

12...♖hd8 13.b3 followed by ♔b2 is similarly fine, as again ...d6-d5 is no threat.

13.♔b1

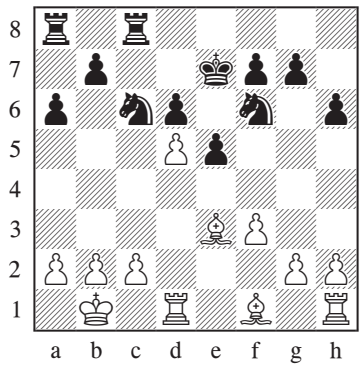
The cleanest way to play for White is to go ♘d5† next and get the advantage of two bishops versus two knights.

13...♖ac8

Ptting the other rook on c8 no longer has as much point as one move ago:

13...♖hc8 14.♘d5† ♗xd5 15.exd5

The knight has a few squares available but none of them is ideal.



15...♘a5

15...♘b4 16.c4 a5 17.g4± with h4 to follow.

15...♘b8 16.g4 ♘bd7 17.h4±

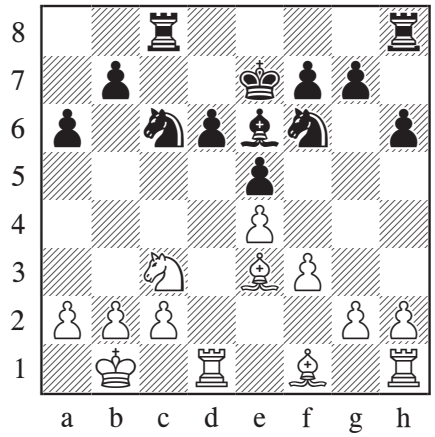
16.b3 b5

Rodriguez Lopez – Gomes, Famalicao 2015.

Now a promising option is:

17.a3!?N

Preventing ...b4 and intending ♔b2, followed by h2-h4, g2-g4 and so on.

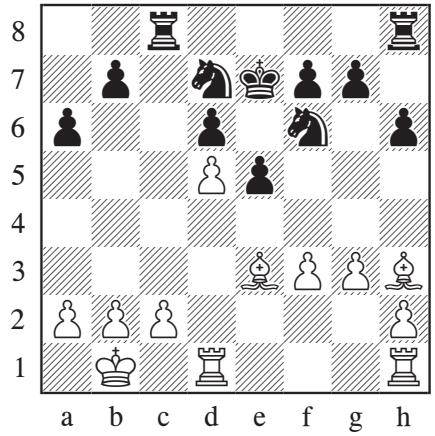


14.♘d5† ♗xd5 15.exd5 ♘b8 16.g3!?

16.g4!?N ♘bd7 17.h4± was another suitable plan.

16...♘bd7 17.♗h3

On almost every move there will be options for both sides; for instance, 17.c4!? looks promising. With two bishops versus two knights, White will be pressing in every case.



17...♘e8?!

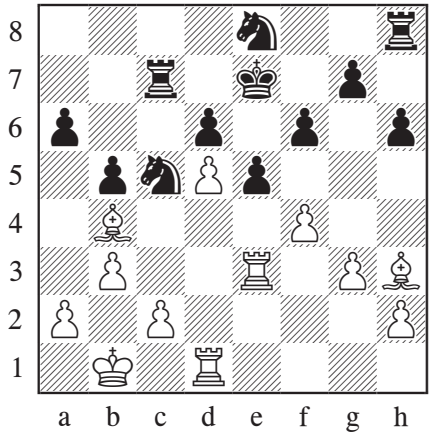
This retreat makes the central break even more potent.

17...b5 was more resilient, but after any of various moves, including 18.♖he1±, White has a sure edge.

18.f4!±

We do not need detailed notes on the rest; White just keeps tacking back and forth, improving his pieces, until Black cracks under the pressure.

18...♖c7 19.♖he1 f6 20.b3 b5 21.♗d2 ♘c5 22.♗a5 ♖b7 23.♗b4 ♖c7 24.♖e3



24...g5?

This accelerates the end, but it could not have been fun to sit passively with the knight on e8 having no legal moves.

25.♖de1 h5 26.♖c3 ♘d7 27.♖c6 ♖a7 28.fxg5 fxg5 29.♗e6 ♖h7 30.♗d2 ♖g7 31.h4 gxh4 32.gxh4

Black could have played on for a few more moves, but the outcome was clear.

1–0

6...a6

GAME 14

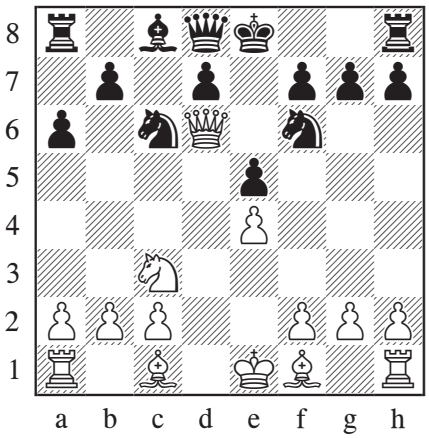
Dmitry Jakovenko – Jaime Cuartas

Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 a6?!

This is an inferior form of Lowenthal, as Black has the same structural problems but less activity.

7.♘d6† ♗xd6 8.♕xd6



8...♕e7

The best of an unappealing selection:

The slow 8...h6?! is effectively refuted by: 9.♗e3! ♕e7 10.♗c5 ♕xd6 11.♗xd6 b5 12.0–0–0± Illingworth – Smirnov, Sydney 2010.

8...♕a5?! 9.♗d2! With the terrible threat of ♘b5. 9...♕b4 10.♕xb4 ♘xb4 11.0–0–0 b5 12.♗g5 ♘g4 13.♗h4 f6 14.♗e2 ♘h6 15.a4± Tarrasch – Mieses, Nuremberg 1888.

8...♕b6 9.♗d2! ♕d4 10.♕xd4 exd4

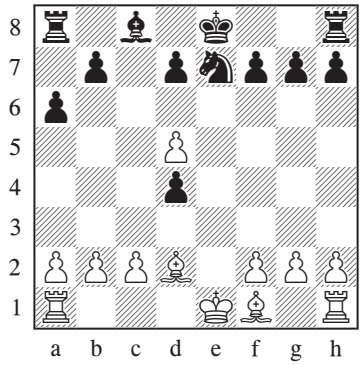
10...♘xd4 11.0–0–0 0–0 12.f3± was great for White in Schubert – R. Meijer, email 2011.

11.♘d5

In the 6...h6?! variation White can play ♘b5 and here this is obviously not possible, but White is much better even so. For example:

11...♘xd5 12.exd5 ♘e7

In Pawlak – K. Nielsen, Copenhagen 2010, White should have continued:



13.0–0–0!N

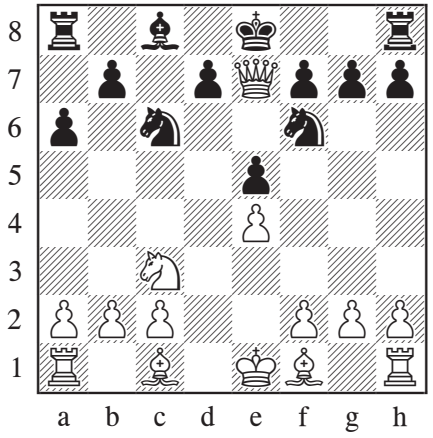
White is close to winning on account of:

13...♘xd5 14.♗c4

Followed by ♖he1(†) with a deadly attack.

9.♕xe7†

In the real Lowenthal, Black could at least accelerate his development by recapturing on e7 with the g8-knight, but no such option is available here.



9...♘xe7

So backwards it is.

9...♔xe7? steps directly into trouble: 10.♗g5± We could stop here, but I will give a few more moves just to show how quickly Black's position can be squeezed to death: 10...♘b4 11.0–0–0 h6 12.♗xf6† ♔xf6 13.a3 ♘c6 14.♘d5† ♔g6 15.♘b6 ♖b8 16.♗c4 ♖d8 17.♖d6† f6 18.♖hd1+– Iodice – Benetti, corr. 1988.

10.♗g5 b5

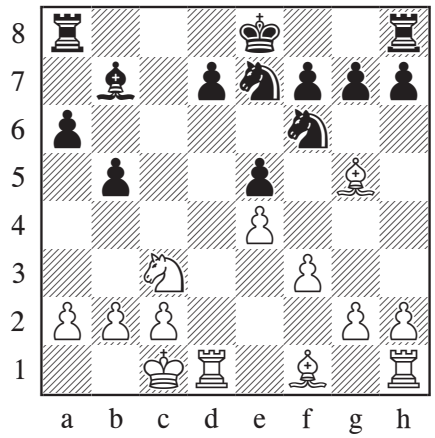
The best chance, but instead the wacky 10...♘fg8 has been played 15 times, which is baffling. I realize doubled pawns can be a worry, but ...♘f6-g8 is not a move you should volunteer. One simple reply is 11.0–0–0 f6 12.♗e3 b5 13.♗c5± as in Hegedus – Cvirik, Slovakia 2006.

11.f3 ♗b7

Instead 11...b4 12.♘a4± as in Meissner – Riefer, Troisdorf 2011, does not trouble White.

12.0–0–0

White looks and is better, but we should show a modicum of care; Black has ideas of ...♖c8, ...b4 and ...d5, so if we get smug and complacent, we could easily lose control.



12...h6

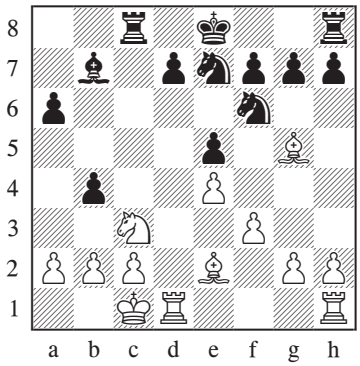
Nudging our bishop is well-timed here.

Also sensible is:

12...♖c8 13.♗e2 b4

I considered 13...♘h5N but found 14.♖d6! f6 15.♗e3± to be a convincing reply.

13...h6 14.♗xf6! Here White is ready for this exchange. If instead we retreated then ...♘h5-f4 would make more sense. 14...gxf6 15.♖d6 ♘g6 (15...♖c6 16.♖hd1 ♗c8 17.a4 b4 18.♖xc6 dxc6 19.♘b1 ♘g6 20.g3 ♔e7 21.♘d2 ♗e6 22.♘f1±) 16.♖b6± ♖c7? 17.♗xb5!+– Samraoui – Kagiyama, email 2000.

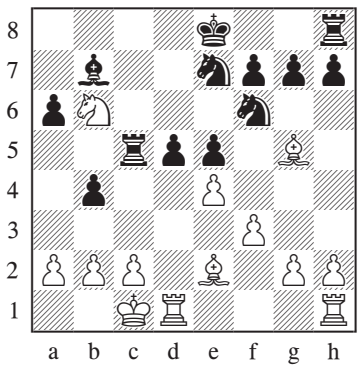


14.♘a4 d5 15.♘b6

Improving the knight's location is the best approach, as well as the easiest to play.

15.♗xf6 gxf6 16.exd5 ♗xd5 17.♗xa6 ♖c7 18.♗b5† ♔f8 19.♔b1 ♔g7 20.♘b6 ♗e6∓ was not so clear in Knebel – Kainz, email 2002, even though computer-like play might reveal an edge for White.

15...♖c5



16.exd5!N

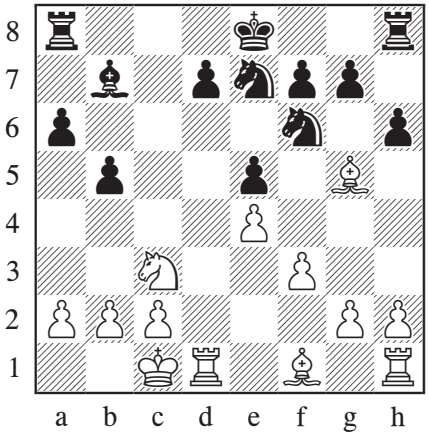
Instead 16.♗xf6?! was far less convincing in V. Dimitrov – Simonovic, Mataruska Banja 1996. There is no need to give up the bishop just yet.

16...♘exd5

16...♘fxd5 17.♘c4± leaves Black with even greater problems. For example: 17...0–0 18.♗xe7 ♘xe7 19.♖d7 ♗d5 20.♘b6 ♖e8 21.♖d1 ♗c6 22.♖c7+–

17.♘c4 0–0 18.♖he1±

It's all under control now.



13.♗h4

As the lines above showed, a common response is 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♖d6 but in this case 14...f5 is not so bad for Black. The frequently desirable 15.♖b6? would turn into an accidental exchange sac after 15...♗c6!.

13...g5

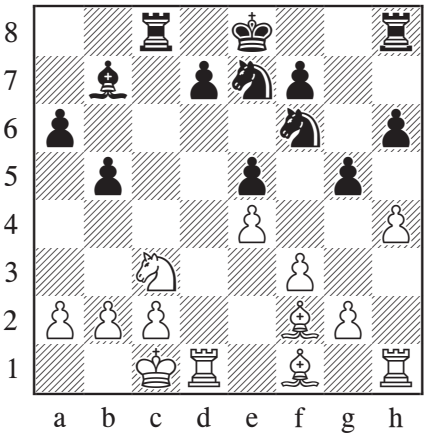
The consistent choice.

13...0–0–0 14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.♖d6± Bukvic – Jakic, Cetinje 2010.

13...♖c8 14.♖d6 ♖c6 15.♖d2 ♘g6 16.♗f2 0–0 17.g3± Grabowski – Belter, email 2011.

14.♗f2 ♖c8 15.h4±

Despite Black's efforts, White remains clearly better; he has the bishop pair and the more secure pawn structure.



15...♖g8

No better is: 15...g4 16.h5±

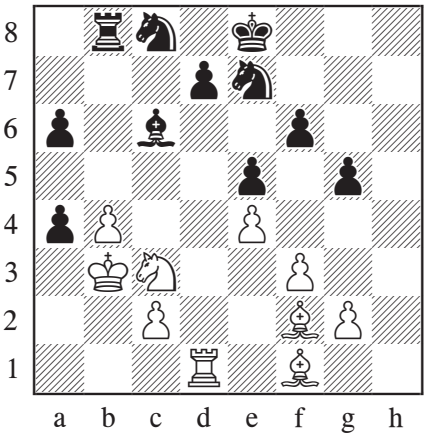
16.hxg5 hxg5 17.♖h6

I will not give detailed notes on the rest of the game, but it is instructive to watch how a world-class player exploits his bishop pair and mobile queenside pawns.

17...♖g6 18.♖h8† ♖g8 19.♖h6 ♖g6 20.♖h8† ♖g8 21.♖xg8† ♘fxg8 22.♗g3 f6 23.♗e1 ♗c6 24.b4!?

Fixing the b5-pawn and getting White's pawns in motion.

24...♖a8 25.♔b2 ♘c8 26.♗f2 ♘ge7 27.♔b3 ♖b8 28.a4 bxa4†



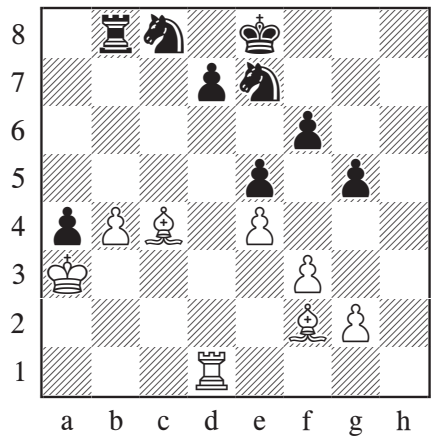
29.♔a3!

Keeping control.

29.♘xa4?! a5 30.c3 axb4 31.cxb4 d5 is getting messy.

29...♗b5 30.♘xb5 axb5 31.c4 bxc4 32.♗xc4

Just for a moment White is a pawn down, but the a4-pawn will not last, while the passed b5-pawn is a long-term asset.



32...♘c6

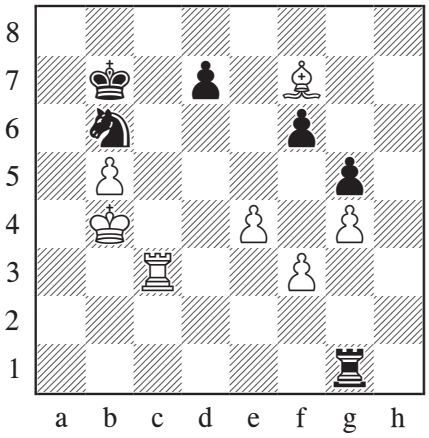
After 32...♘b6 White could simply move the c4-bishop to various faraway safe squares, but a direct option is: 33.♗xb6 ♖xb6 34.b5± Then ♔xa4 will follow when the pawn is threatening, while the black knight is dominated.

33.b5 ♘d4 34.♗xd4 exd4 35.♔xa4 ♘b6† 36.♔b4 ♖a8 37.♗b3 ♔d8 38.♖xd4+–

Black gave up a pawn, hoping that the b5-pawn would be difficult to advance; indeed it is, but it ties down Black's king and knight. To win, White needs to open a second front.

38...♔c7 39.♖d1 ♖h8 40.♖c1† ♔b7 41.g4 ♖h3 42.♖c3 ♖g3 43.♗f7 ♖g1

This allows the white rook to hop up to f5, but keeping an eye on f3 allowed a different disaster: 43...♖h3 44.♖a3! ♖h1 45.♔c5+– And the white king infiltrates, since ...♔c7 fails to the rook check on a7.

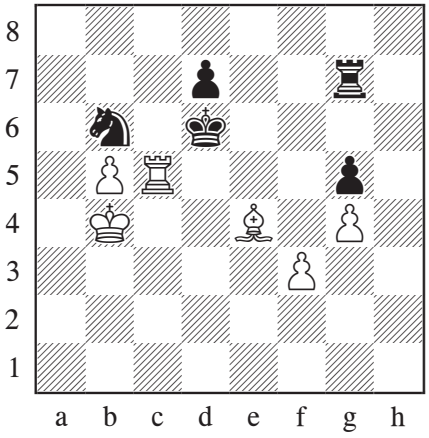


44.♖c5 ♖b1† 45.♗b3 ♖h1 46.♖f5 ♖h6 47.e5 fxe5 48.♖xe5 ♖g6 49.♗c2 ♖g7

With a second weakness created (the g5-pawn) now all Black's pieces are working full-time in defence. A delicate tap from Jakovenko, and it all falls apart.

50.♗e4† ♔c7 51.♖c5† ♔d6

Or 51...♔b8 52.♔a5 and the blockade on b6 falls: 52...♘c8 53.b6+–

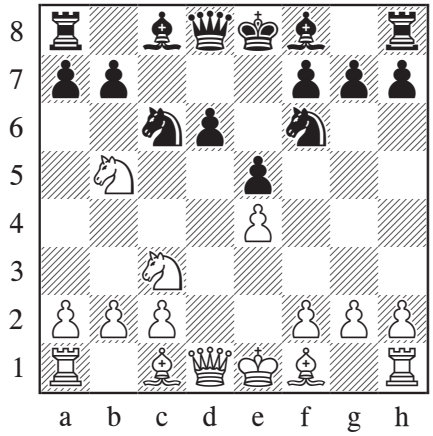


52.♖c1 ♔e5 53.♔a5 d5 54.♔xb6 dxe4 55.♖e1 ♔f4 56.♖xe4† ♔xf3 57.♖b4 ♖g8 58.♔a7

1–0

Now let's consider the main line at move 6:

6...d6



7.♗g5 a6

Almost universally played, for good reason. 7...♗e7? 8.♗xf6 gxf6 9.♘d5± is certainly not acceptable for Black.

Similarly, 7...♗e6? is a known position from the Taimanov, but with Black to move. With White to move it is simply great for us: 8.♘d5 ♖c8 9.c3!? a6 10.♗xf6 gxf6 11.♘a3±

8.♘a3

We have almost reached the real Sveshnikov, but first we must consider some sidelines.

Minor 8th Moves

GAME 15

Vasily Yemelin – Andrei Kharlov

St Petersburg 1998

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 ♗e6

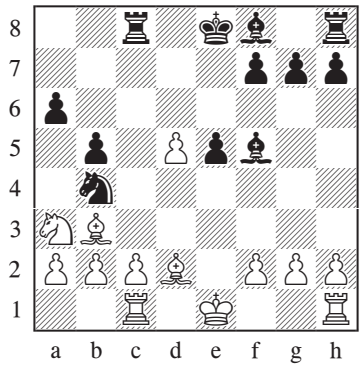
This move has been played in thousands of games but is currently out of fashion. It used to be called the Pelikan or Lasker variation, as both played it. Later on it was refined by 9...♖c8, as we shall see below.

8...b5 is the usual move, which will be featured in Games 16-21. Apart from that, Black may try:

8...♖b8 9.♘c4 b5 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.♘e3± is a typical Pelikan; rather like a modern Sveshnikov, except Black is less active.

8...♗e7 9.♘c4 ♗g4 10.♗e2 ♗xe2 11.♕xe2± has been played in some games. I doubt there is any need to know any theory here.

8...d5? fails to impress; in return for a pawn Black gets a few one-move threats, but they soon run out. 9.♘xd5 ♕a5† 10.♕d2 ♕xd2† 11.♗xd2 ♘xd5 12.exd5 ♘b4 13.♗c4 ♗f5 14.♗b3 ♖c8 15.♖c1 b5



In R. Jones – Ajvazi, Plovdiv 2010, White castled and later won, but I also like: 16.♔e2!?N ♖d8 17.♗xb4 (17.♖hd1!? ♘xd5 18.c4 gives White a rolling initiative, but an extra pawn is also handy) 17...♗xb4 18.c4 White has a clear advantage. For example: 18...bxc4 19.♖xc4 ♗xa3 20.bxa3 ♖xd5 21.♖c7! ♖d7 22.♖c8† ♖d8 23.♖xd8† ♔xd8 24.♗xf7 We are playing for two results, both of them probably equally likely.

9.♘c4!

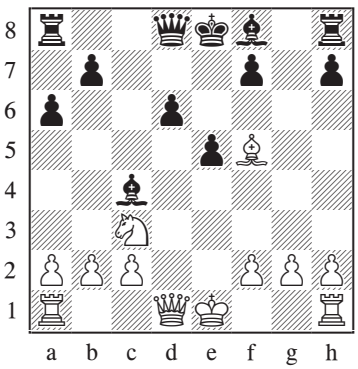
Exploiting that Black has not yet played ...b5.

9.♘d5?! is far less convincing. Black can consider various moves, including 9...♕a5† or even 9...♗xd5 10.exd5 ♕a5† 11.c3 ♕xd5.

9...♖c8

This is traditionally called the Larsen Variation, as he was one of the first grandmasters to play it. But it had already been tried a few times, most notably by the strong Danish master (and later IM) Bjorn Brinck-Claussen, which is no doubt where Larsen got the idea. When Larsen tried this variation against Robatsch in the 1963 Halle Zonal, the Austrian thought for almost one hour before making his next move.

9...♘d4?! is the old Pelikan move. 10.♗xf6 gxf6 (10...♕xf6 11.♘b6 ♖b8 12.♘cd5 ♕d8 13.c3 ♘c6 14.♕a4 has been played in a few games and is most unpleasant for Black. He will have to enter an inferior opposite-coloured bishops position by taking on d5, as 14...♗e7? 15.♗xa6 was a straight refutation in Muller – Zunker, Oberursel 1972.) 11.♗d3!? White is a tempo up on one of the games from the devastating Fischer – Taimanov Candidates match. 11...f5 12.exf5 ♘xf5 13.♗xf5 ♗xc4



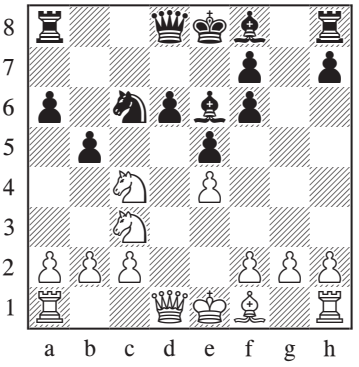
14.♕g4!N (More energetic than the also pleasant 14.♗d3 ♗e6 15.♗e4±, as played in Olafsson – Solin, Prague 1954, and the later Korneev – Favarel, Pau 2009.) 14...♕c7 15.0–0–0± Black has nothing good to write home about. His position is full of weakness, he is uncoordinated and underdeveloped, and his king is stuck in the middle.

9...b5?!

This idea does not work, although the assessment relies on a few important details.

10.♗xf6! gxf6

10...♕xf6 11.♘e3 (This is not a moment to get greedy: 11.♘xd6†? ♗xd6 12.♕xd6 ♘d4 13.♗d3 ♖d8 14.♕xa6 0–0 15.♘d5 ♕g5 16.♘e3 f5 gave Black enough compensation for the pawns in Trembecki – Leroy, email 2009.) 11...♕d8 12.♘cd5 g6 13.a4! b4 14.♗c4 ♗h6 15.♕d3± Bednarski – Kavalek, Krakow 1964.



11.♘e3 ♗h6

11...♘d4 12.♘cd5 f5 13.exf5 ♘xf5 14.♘xf5 ♗xf5 15.♕f3! ♗xc2 16.♘c7† ♕xc7 17.♕xa8† ♔e7 18.♕xa6± was another opening failure for Black in Casella – Simpson, Long Island 1995.

12.♘cd5

Compared to the Sveshnikov variation, the knight is on e3 rather than a3 – a significant difference.

12...♗xe3

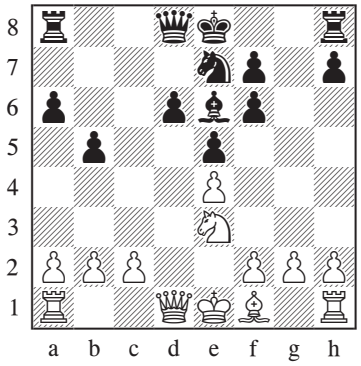
This seems like a confession of guilt, but the evidence was overwhelming.

13.♘xe3

White is obviously better; Black is lacking the two bishops to create counterplay.

13...♘e7

Honfi – Jo. Piket, Wijk aan Zee 1970

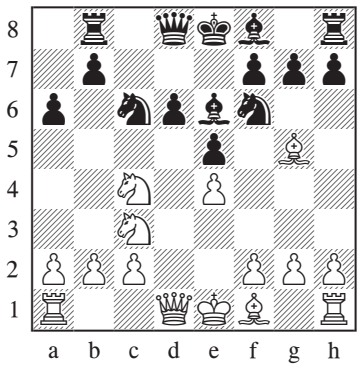


14.♗d3!N±

This is more accurate than 14.a4, as was played in the game, although White's advantage is not in doubt either way.

9...♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.♕xd6 ♗e7 12.♕xd8† ♖xd8 13.a3± is virtually equal according to Komodo 10. One draw in 11 games is what that has given Black. Where I come from, we call it "a pawn up".

9...♖b8!?



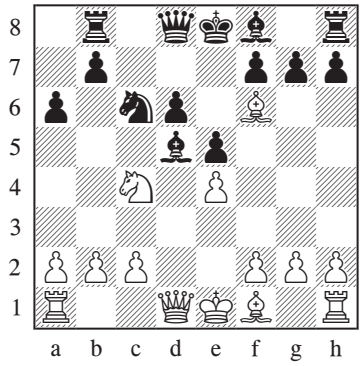
A very rare move, but worthy of attention because recently it was played by various strong players, including Gelfand, Radjabov and Iturrizaga. The Gelfand game was just blitz, but the other two were classical games. Where the elite go, many will follow. It may seem odd to put the rook on b8 when the half-open c-file is beckoning, but on c8 the rook can be vulnerable to a ♘b6 tempo-gainer. And even more simply, on b8 the rook defends the b7-pawn, which is vital in one tactical line.

10.♘d5

I will plump for this natural move, but we need to be wide awake with our move order in what follows: Alternatively, Negi's suggestion is also promising and remains almost unexplored. 10.a4!? I will not repeat all Negi's analysis, but a couple of key lines were 10...h6 11.♗xf6 ♕xf6 12.♘d5 ♕g6 13.♕d3± and 10...♘b4 11.♘d5 ♘bxd5 12.exd5 ♗f5 13.♗d3 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 ♗e7 15.♗e3±.

10...♗xd5 11.♗xf6

Instead 11.exd5 ♘e7 12.♗xf6 gxf6 13.a4 f5 14.a5 ♗g7 15.g4!?↑ worked well in Kryvoruchko – Iturrizaga Bonelli, Monzon 2016, but it's wild stuff, not the controlled edge I would prefer.



11...♕xf6

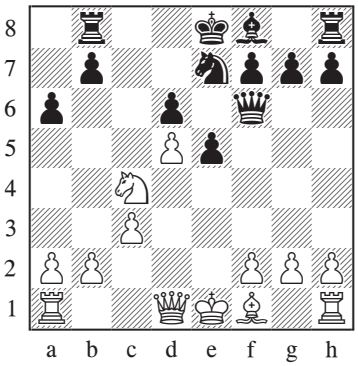
After 11...gxf6 we avoid the chaos by taking with our queen: 12.♕xd5N ♘b4 13.♕d2 d5 14.exd5 ♕xd5 15.♕xd5 ♘xd5 16.0–0–0± We will see a similar position below, except with the rook on c8; it must be preferable for Black to have the rook on c8, but both versions are excellent for White.

12.exd5!?

But in this case 12.♕xd5 is much less controlled than it looks: 12...♘b4 This is one point where the b7-pawn being defended is

vital. 13.♕d2 d5!∞ This position has led to three draws, most recently Harikrishna – Radjabov, Monzon 2016.

12...♘e7 13.c3±



Black's pieces are somewhat tangled, leaving his queenside vulnerable. For example:

13...b5

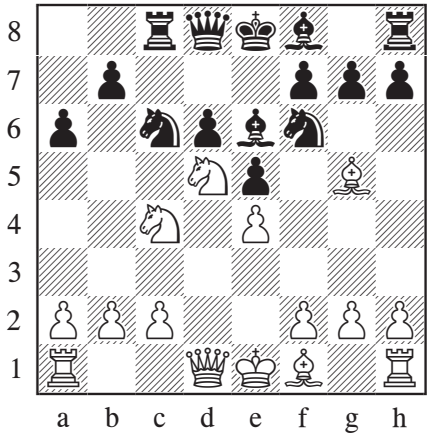
The computer's suggestion is 13...♘c8N but that's a grim way to defend some squares. I suggest 14.a4± planning a4-a5 and ♕a4†.

14.♘e3 ♘f5 15.♘c2 ♘h4 16.♘b4 ♗e7 17.♘xa6 ♖b7 18.♕g4±

Black did not have enough play for the missing pawn in S. Zielinski – M. Szabo, email 2010.

10.♘d5

The pressure is building so Black must react.

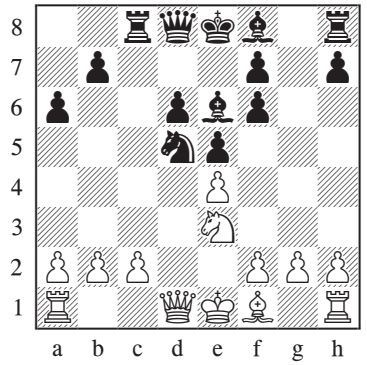


10...♗xd5

The critical test.

10...b5 11.♗xf6 gxf6 12.♘ce3 and we have our standard advantage.

10...♘b4 11.♗xf6 gxf6 12.♘ce3 ♘xd5



13.exd5! (Instead 13.♘xd5? f5∓ is a positional disaster) 13...♗d7 14.♗d3 ♗h6 This is a key moment to understand this variation. Usually people shy away from positions with opposite-coloured bishops when trying to prove an advantage, but in this line the light-squared bishop is superior to Black's dark-squared bishop, so the exchange is often to be encouraged. 15.♘f5! ♗xf5 16.♗xf5 ♖c5 17.0–0 ♔e7 18.♕h5 ♕f8 19.♖ad1 ♖g8 20.c3 ♖c4 21.g3± Brnas – Kristovic, Dubrovnik 2008.

11.♗xf6 gxf6

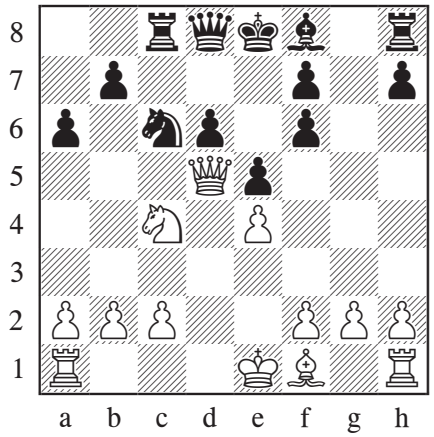
Black has to create complications.

After 11...♕xf6 12.♕xd5 then 12...♗e7 13.c3 leads to a straightforward advantage. For example: 13...0–0 14.♘b6 ♖c7 15.♕d3 ♕g6 16.g3± Leko – R. Jamieson, Sydney 1992.

Instead 12...♘b4? fails to 13.♕xb7, in contrast to the 9...♖b8 line mentioned above.

12.♕xd5

The right capture; Robatsch took with the pawn.

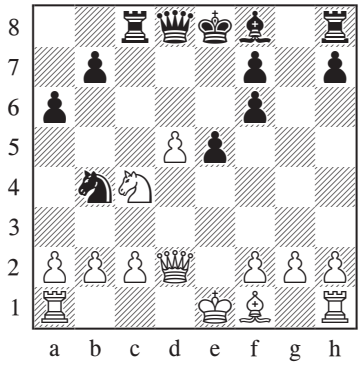


12...♘d4

12...b5?! 13.♘e3 ♘e7 14.♕d3 ♗h6 15.♗e2 ♗xe3 16.fxe3 d5 occurred in Korneev – Hernandez Montalvo, Padron 2002. In the game White castled queenside, but my eye is drawn to exploiting the open f-file, so I suggest 17.0–0!?N. Either way, White has a huge advantage.

The other knight hop is also possible, but no better:

12...♘b4 13.♕d2 d5 14.exd5



14...♘xc2†

14...♕xd5 15.♕xd5 ♘xd5 16.0–0–0± is the kind of position you want from the opening. For example, the top choice: 16...♖d8 17.♗d3 b5 18.♘a5 led to 1–0 in Gritsaenko – Dorer, email 2006, and every game since then.

15.♕xc2 ♗b4†

15...b5 16.0–0–0!? bxc4 17.♗xc4± was excellent for White in Calistri – San Marco, Issy les Moulineaux 2007.

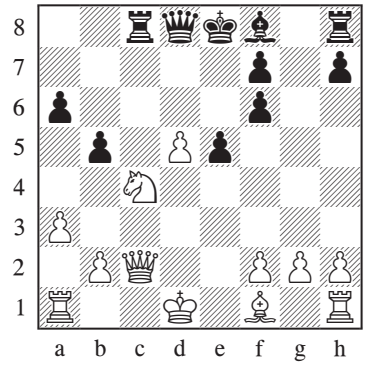
16.♔d1

Negi wrote in *1.e4 vs the Sicilian II* that he would rather avoid such lines. It does look wild, but we have it under control with a few precise moves; then we almost win by force.

16...b5 17.a3 ♗f8

17...♕xd5†? 18.♔c1 ♗e7 19.♘d6†+– Lemke – Rauch, East Germany 1981.

This is Woller – Stutz, Mecklenburg 2000.



18.♖c1!N

A small refinement.

18...bxc4 19.♕a4† ♕d7 20.♖xc4 ♖xc4 21.♕xc4±

White is a pawn up and will soon solve the problems with the king.

13.♗d3 ♕e7

Trying to snare our queen with ...♖c5.

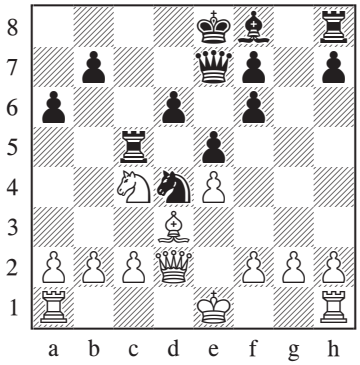
13...b5 leads to an unusual pawn structure: 14.♘e3 ♗h6 15.c3 ♗xe3 16.fxe3 ♘e6 17.0–0± The first game to reach here was Belikov – Seres, Gyor 1991, and nothing much has changed since. White's doubled pawns are doing fine work.

14.♕a5 ♖xc4

This is the critical attempt. Although it does not quite work, it is crucial to know the details, and thus it is our main line...

We must also consider:
14...♖c5 15.♕d2

What follows below may look complicated, but it follows standard themes, with c2-c3 kicking the knight the usual starter.



15...d5

I checked four other moves:

a) 15...b5 16.♘e3 ♗h6 17.c3 ♘e6 18.0–0 ♖g8 19.a4!N (Unsurprisingly, White can improve on the rather mysterious 19.♖e1?! as played in Koguchi – Oliver, Singapore 2007) 19...♕b7 20.axb5 axb5 21.♖a5± White is ready to invade on the queenside.

b) 15...h5 16.♘b6 ♕d8 17.♘d5 h4 18.c3 ♗h6 19.♕d1 ♘e6 20.♕b3± Bernal Varela – M. Szabo, email 2009.

c) 15...f5 16.c3 ♘e6 17.exf5 ♘f4 Morales – Munoz, Cali 2009. 18.♘e3!?N ♗h6 19.0–0–0±

d) 15...♕c7 16.c3 ♘e6 17.♘e3 ♗h6 18.0–0–0 ♗xe3 (18...d5 19.exd5 ♖xd5 20.♔b1 ♗xe3 21.♕xe3± Khorunzhy – Palmateer, email 2013) 19.fxe3 ♖g8 20.♖hf1 ♖g6 21.♖f5 ♘g7 22.♖f3 ♔e7 23.♔b1 ♘e6 24.♖df1± De Bari – Gildred, email 2009.

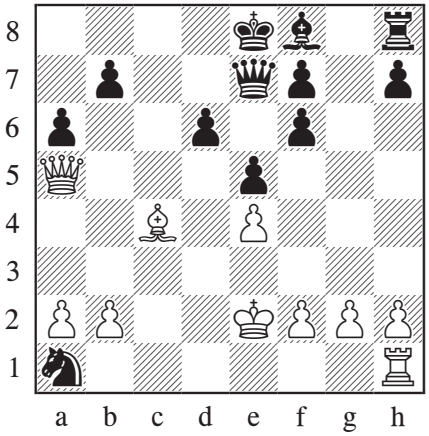
16.♘e3 ♗h6 17.c3 ♘e6 18.b4 d4 19.cxd4 exd4 20.bxc5 ♕xc5 21.♕c1 dxe3

Klapp – Meller, email 2009.

22.♕xc5!?N ♘xc5 23.♗c2±

Black has drawing chances, but without an engine and an encyclopaedia to help him, he is in even more trouble than it looks on the surface.

15.♗xc4 ♘xc2† 16.♔e2 ♘xa1



17.♖c1!!+–

This is the refutation of the main line of the Larsen variation.

17...♗h6

17...f5 once led to a win for Black:

a) After 18.♗xf7†? ♔xf7 19.♖c7 ♘c2 in Kosztolanczi – Gaal, Hungary 2012, the knight had escaped, and only Black could try for an advantage.

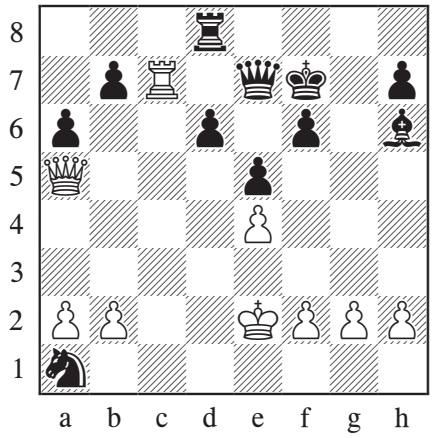
b) White misunderstood how the ♗xf7† tactic works; we need the f8-bishop to have moved first. So 18.exf5!N, taking the pawn and passing the move to Black, is a clean winner. Now if 18...♗h6 then 19.♗xf7†! ♔xf7 20.♖c7 works as planned. Of course it's not the only way: moves such as 18.♗d5 or even 18.♗xa6 are also quite decent.

18.♗xf7† ♔xf7

Black has no choice, since 18...♔f8 allows 19.♖c7 ♕d8 20.♗h5 and mate is only a few moves away.

19.♖c7 ♖d8

Compared to the game mentioned in the note to move 17, the obvious difference is that 19...♘c2 fails to 20.♖xe7† ♔xe7 21.♕c7†.

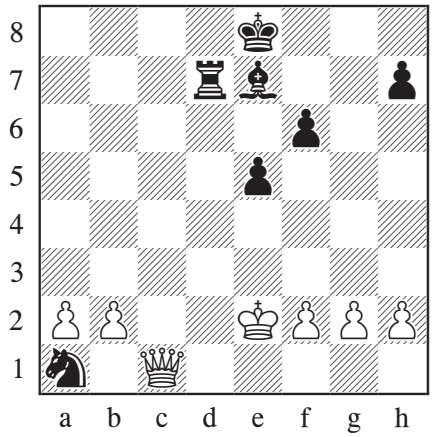


20.♕d5† ♔f8 21.♖xe7 ♔xe7 22.♕xb7† ♖d7 23.♕c8 d5

Curiously, there was a recent example of this long lost line: 23...♖d8 24.♕c3 d5 25.♕c5† In Kunal – Sriram, Noida 2016, Black's position was just as hopeless as in our main game.

24.♕g8 ♗f8 25.exd5 ♔e8 26.♕e6† ♗e7 27.♕xa6 ♖xd5 28.♕c6† ♖d7 29.♕c1

Having munched through the loose pawns, White will now dine on the stranded knight.



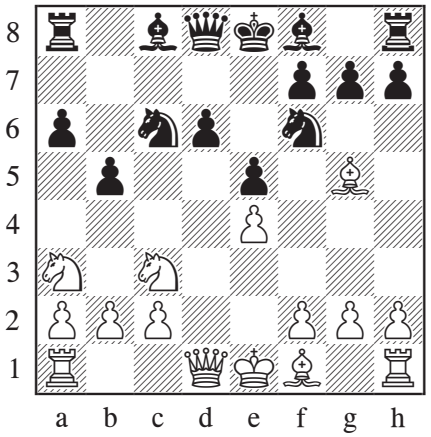
29...♘b3 30.axb3 ♔f8 31.b4 ♖d4 32.♕c8† ♔f7 33.b5 ♖b4 34.b3 h5 35.g3 ♗d6 36.♕d7† ♗e7 37.♕c6 ♗d8 38.♕d5† ♔e8 39.♕d6 ♖d4 40.♕e6†

The b-pawn is going through.

1–0

8...b5

With this move, we finally reach the main tabiya of the Sveshnikov.



9.♘d5

This positional approach offers a logical way to seek an advantage, without taking too many risks. If you are into Xtreme Sports and wild complications, Negi has some fascinating stuff for you with 9.♗xf6 in *1.e4 vs the Sicilian II*.

9...♗e7 is the main line – see page 193. Before then, we must analyse the alternative:

9...♕a5†

GAME 16

Hagen Tiemann – Brian Jones

Correspondence 2005

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♕a5† 10.♗d2 ♕d8

Black invites a repetition of moves.

11.c4!

This leads to plenty of complications and forcing play. Since 9...♕a5† is a relatively rare

line, I would prefer to have a low-maintenance answer to it, but they don't work as well.

11.♗d3

We tried to make this calmer move work, but found that Black has a convincing equalizer:

11...♖b8!

Preparing for c2-c4 by protecting the b-pawn. I looked at a few lines, which you might find interesting for reference.

12.c4

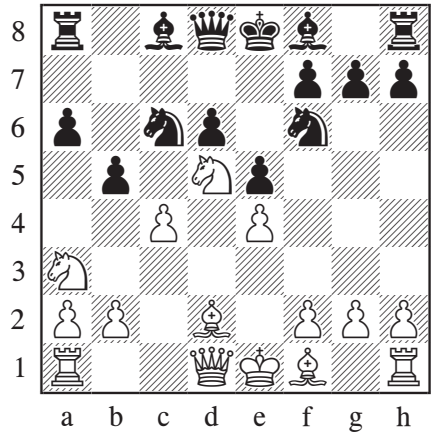
12.0–0 occurred in Grage – Konstantinov, email 2006. After 12...♗e7!N 13.c4 ♘xd5 14.exd5 ♘d4 15.cxb5 axb5 16.♗e3 b4 17.♘c2 ♘xc2 18.♕xc2 h6= Black has the sounder pawn structure, so his long-term chances are good.

12...♘xd5 13.cxd5!?N

13.exd5 is a principled try, but after 13...♘d4 14.0–0 ♗e7= Black was okay in Chauhan – Kilani, email 2013.

13...♘d4 14.♘c2 ♘xc2† 15.♕xc2 ♗d7 16.♗e3 ♗e7 17.♕d2 h6! 18.0–0 ♗g5

White's advantage is modest, if it even exists at all.

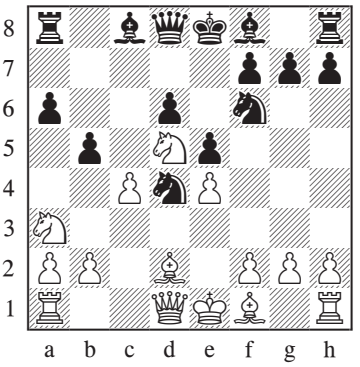


11...♘xe4

This is the critical line and it is really interesting. In even better news, White should be able to claim an advantage with accurate play.

11...bxc4?! just helps White. 12.♘xc4 is strong, as is the simple 12.♘xf6† ♕xf6 13.♗xc4±.

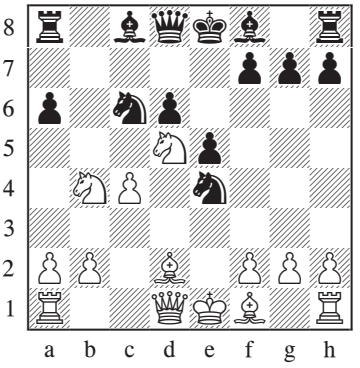
11...♘d4 as in Kotronias – Beshukov, Agios Nikolaos 1995, is rather rare.



A convincing reply is: 12.cxb5N ♘xd5 13.exd5 ♗e7 14.♗d3±

11...♘xd5 12.exd5 ♘d4 13.cxb5 ♗e7 14.♗d3 0–0 15.0–0± has been played in a few games. I do not see a lot of compensation for the pawn, but on the other hand, it is not all straightforward. I used to play positions like this with Black (from the Kalashnikov) and honestly, I never really felt they were OK for Black.

11...b4 12.♘c2 ♘xe4 13.♘cxb4



13...♗b7

13...♘xb4 14.♗xb4 ♘f6 15.♘xf6† gxf6

16.♗e2 f5 17.0–0± Muharemagic – Cardelli, Internet 2003. Without knights I don't think Black will create a strong enough attack to fully outweigh the many weaknesses he has accepted in his position.

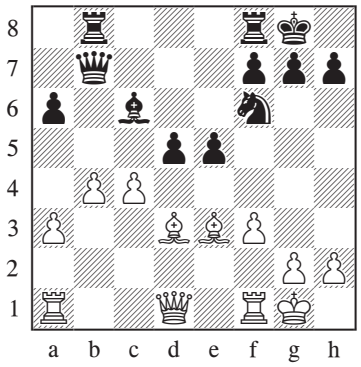
14.♘xc6 ♗xc6 15.♗e3 ♖b8 16.b4±

White has a mobile queenside majority and a grip on d5; you could stop your study of this line here and feel well enough prepared, but I will offer some further analysis should you wish to look deeper. The lines also contain interesting positional and tactical ideas:

16...♗e7 17.♗d3 ♘f6 18.♘xe7 ♕xe7 19.a3 ♕b7

19...♗xg2N is not a problem if White is precise: 20.♖g1 ♗e4 21.♗xe4! Making sure the rook is not trapped on g7. (21.♖xg7 ♗g6 22.♕a4† ♕d7! 23.♕xd7† ♘xd7 24.0–0–0 ♘f6=) 21...♘xe4 22.♖xg7±

20.f3 0–0 21.0–0 d5



In Freeman – Turati, email 2009, White played 22.♖e1 and agreed a draw. But there was an advantage available:

22.c5!N

Black's strong-looking centre can be effectively undermined.

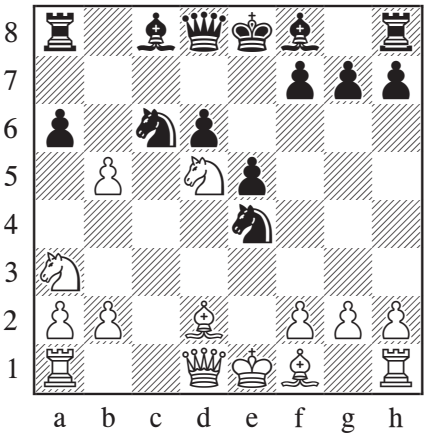
22...♗b5

22...d4 23.♗g5 ♘d5 24.♕e2± The double attack on a6 and e5 collects a pawn; Black's passed d-pawn offers some compensation, but not enough.

22...♖fe8 23.f4 Of course this is how we break up the black centre. 23...e4 (23...d4? 24.fxe5 dxe3 25.exf6 e2 26.♗xe2 ♗xg2 27.♗f3 ♗xf3 28.♕xf3+–) 24.♗e2± 23.f4 e4 24.♗xb5 axb5 25.♗d4±

Black faces the prospect of doubled f-pawns and a weakened king position, especially as 25...♘d7? is routed by: 26.♕g4 g6 27.f5+–

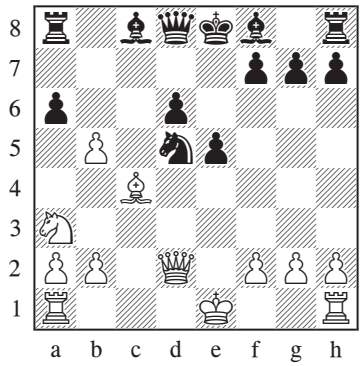
12.cxb5



12...♗e6

This counterattack is the usual choice, as simply moving the c6-knight gives White extra options:

12...♘e7 13.♗c4 (13.bxa6 ♘xd5 14.♕a4† ♗d7 15.♕xe4± has also been played in a few games) 13...♘xd2 (13...♗e6 transposes to the bolded main line) 14.♕xd2 ♘xd5 So far this is D. Toth – Z. Kiss, Miskolc 1997.

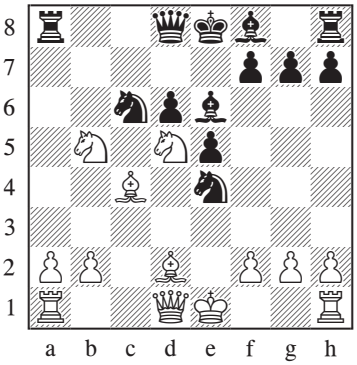


15.♗xd5!N Not a difficult improvement. 15...♖b8 16.bxa6 ♗xa6 17.♗c6† ♔e7 18.b4! d5 19.b5 ♗b7 20.0–0±

13.♗c4 ♘e7

Challenging White's grip on d5 is the logical try. The alternatives are certainly no better:

13...axb5 14.♘xb5



14...♖c8

The tactical try 14...♕h4 15.♗e3 ♘xf2 is just an unsound trick: 16.♘bc7†! ♔d8 17.♘xe6† fxe6 18.♗b6† ♔e8 19.♘c7† ♔e7 20.♗xf2 ♕xc4 21.♘xa8 ♘b4 22.♕e2 ♘d3† 23.♔f1 e4 24.♘b6+– Gallenweiler – Voyage, Freestyle 2008.

15.0–0 ♘xd2

15...♗e7 16.♗e3 0–0 17.♘xe7† ♕xe7 18.♗xe6 ♕xe6 19.f3 ♖b8N (19...♘f6? 20.♕xd6± Vaculik – Buchar, Czech Republic 1998) 20.a4 ♘c5 21.f4 exf4 22.♗xf4 ♖bd8 23.♖a3±

16.♕xd2 ♘d4

16...♗e7? 17.♘xe7± would force Black to recapture with the king, then suffer.

17.♘xd4!

Instead 17.♕b4 ♗xd5!N 18.♗xd5 ♕b6 allows Black to escape with reasonable chances.

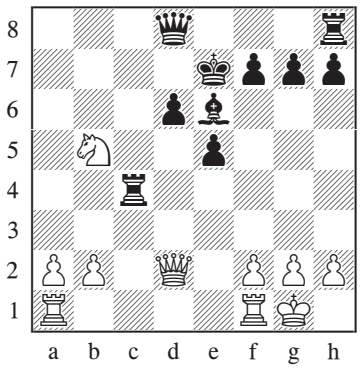
17...♖xc4 18.♘b5!

18.♘xe6 fxe6 19.♘e3± Malzinskas – Petraitis, corr. 1999.

18...♗e7

18...♖c5 19.♘bc3 ♗e7 20.a4±

19.♘xe7 ♔xe7



20.♕g5†!N

Improving over 20.♖fd1± as played in Sethuraman – Tiwari, Chennai 2011.

20...♔d7 21.♕e3 ♕a5 22.b3 ♖c6 23.a4±

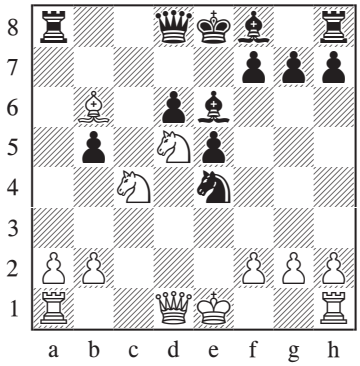
13...♘a5?

This may look messy, but White has it all covered.

14.♗e3

14.b6 also looks good.

14...♘xc4 15.♘xc4 axb5 16.♗b6



16...♕b8

16...♕g5 17.♘ce3 ♖c8 occurred in Marjanovic – Nathanail, Korinthos 1999. I propose: 18.♖c1!N ♖xc1 (18...♘c5 19.0–0 ♗e7 20.♘c7† ♔f8 21.♘xe6† fxe6 22.b4+–) 19.♕xc1 f5 20.♘c7† ♔e7 21.♘xe6 ♔xe6 22.♕c8† ♔f7 23.0–0±

16...♘xf2?! 17.♔xf2 ♕h4† does not work: 18.g3! ♕xc4 19.♘c7† ♔e7 20.♘xa8 ♕e4 21.♘c7 ♕b7 22.♘xe6 ♕xb6† 23.♘d4! White went on to win easily in Fass – Iriarte Gomez, email 2006.

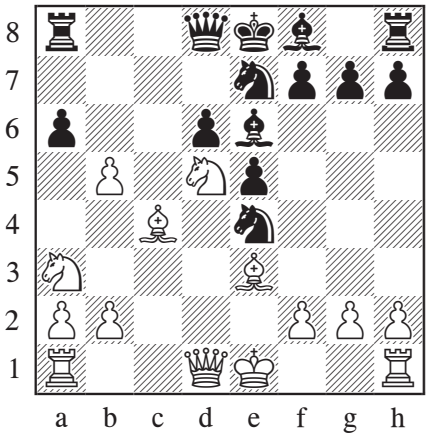
The text move was played in Calzetta Ruiz – Hernando Rodrigo, Montanchez 1998, and now I suggest:

17.♘c7†!N ♔e7

17...♔d7? 18.♘xe5†

18.♘e3 ♘f6 19.♘xa8 ♕xa8 20.a4±

14.♗e3



14...♖c8

The best chance.

14...♖b8? 15.0–0 axb5 16.♘xb5 ♘xd5 17.♗xd5 ♗xd5 18.♕xd5 ♘f6 19.♕c4! ♗e7 (19...♖c8 20.♕a4 ♕d7 21.♖ac1+–) 20.♘c7† ♔f8 21.♖fd1± White was much better in Petrushin – Timoscenko, Tbilisi 1974, one important point being that 21...♖xb2? 22.a4+– is overwhelming.

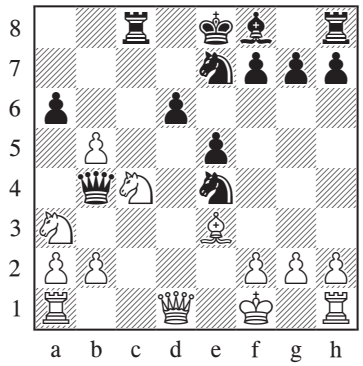
14...♕a5†? 15.♔f1! ♖c8

The other rook move does not help either: 15...♖b8 16.♖c1 ♘f5 17.♕d3 ♘xe3† (17...♘c5 18.♗xc5 dxc5 19.b6 ♗d6 20.♘c7† ♔e7 21.♘d5† ♔e8 22.♘e3 ♘xe3† 23.fxe3 ♗e7 24.♗xe6 fxe6 25.♘c4+– C. Koch – Nenciulescu, email 2009) 18.♕xe3 ♘d2† 19.♔e2 ♘xc4 20.♘xc4 ♕xa2 (Black suffered another defeat after: 20...♕d8 21.♘xe5! dxe5 22.♘c7† ♔d7 23.♖hd1† ♗d6 24.♖xd6† 1–0 Y. Xu – Hong, Hefei [rapid] 2010) 21.♕a7! ♖c8 Henrichs – Hausrath, Germany 2008, and now White wins with: 22.♕xa6!N ♕xa6 23.bxa6 ♖xc4 24.♖xc4 ♗xd5 25.♖c8† ♔d7 26.♖hc1+–

16.♘b6 ♗xc4†

16...♖c7N 17.♕b3 ♘d2† 18.♗xd2 ♕xb6 19.♗e3 ♗xc4† 20.♘xc4 ♕xb5 21.♕xb5† axb5 22.♘xd6† ♔d7 23.♘xf7+–

17.♘bxc4 ♕b4



18.bxa6!N

18.♘b6 is also decent, as in S. Andersson – Novoa, Internet 2003.

18...♘f5 19.a7 ♘xe3† 20.fxe3 ♕b7 21.♕a4† ♔e7 22.♕a5 ♔f6 23.♘b6 ♗e7 24.♔g1+–

15.♗b6 ♕d7 16.bxa6 ♖xc4

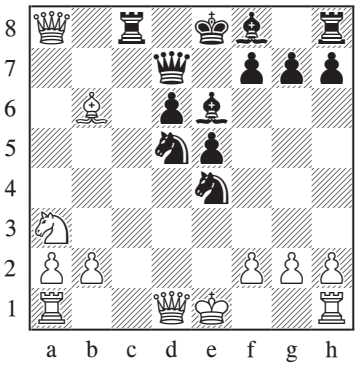
Black's best hope is to create complications.

The straightforward 16...♗xd5 17.♗xd5 ♘xd5 18.♕xd5 is simply winning. For example, 18...♘f6 19.♕a5 ♗e7 20.0–0 0–0 21.♖ac1+– Mista – Z. Markovic, Kraljevo 2011.

17.a7 ♗xd5

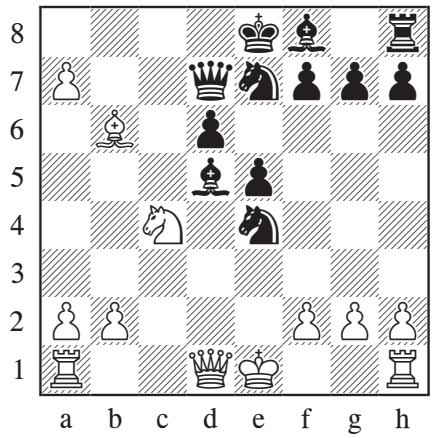
There have been 18 games with the bishop capture, and none with the knight capture. A surprising tally, as the knight recapture is not ridiculous, despite the apparent lunacy of allowing a pawn to promote.

17...♘xd5!?N was analysed by a young Garry Kasparov together with Timoschenko, one of the two founders of the Sveshnikov Variation; or the Chelyabinsk Variation, as the Russians call it. 18.a8=♕† ♖c8 White has at least a couple of options of roughly equal value.



19.♕aa4 (19.♕a5!? ♘xb6 20.♕xb6 d5 21.0–0 ♗xa3 22.bxa3 0–0 also favours White; compared with the other line, White does not get a pawn, but his king gets to castle...) 19...♘xb6 20.♕xe4 d5 21.♕xe5 ♗b4† 22.♔f1 0–0 23.♔g1± Black has two extra bishops and a lot of play – but White has an extra queen! I like White, but would not deny that it is a messy position.

18.♘xc4



18...♗a8

Going all the way back to a8 at least offers Black one tactical resource.

Instead after 18...♗c6 19.f3 then 19...d5?? 20.♘xe5 is obviously hopeless, so Black has to move the e7-knight somewhere. For example: 19...♘c8 20.fxe4 ♗xe4 21.♕e2 ♗a8 22.♗e3± Abreu Delgado – Gomez Jurado, Mislata 2008.

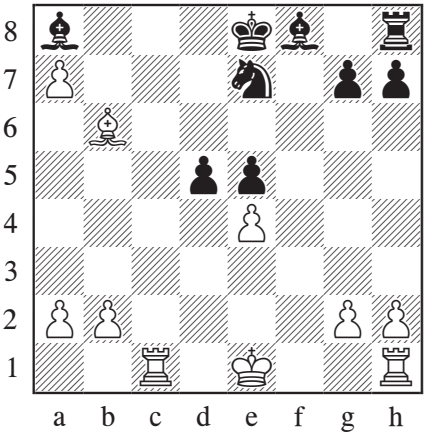
19.f3 d5

This is the resource mentioned above; it does not solve Black's problems but is by far the best attempt.

20.♘xe5

20.fxe4 also looks fine.

20...♕e6 21.♕d4 f6 22.fxe4 ♕xe5 23.♕xe5 fxe5 24.♖c1±

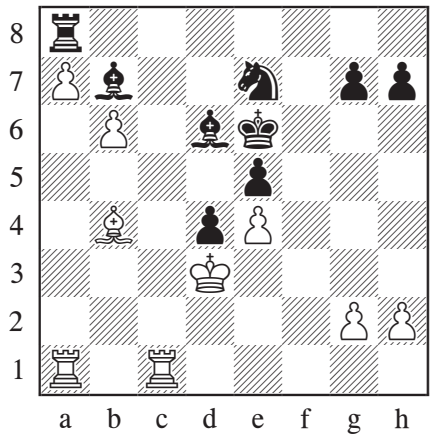


All the confusion has subsided and we can take stock: White has a rook and two pawns against two minor pieces. Materially not so much in it, but the a7-pawn is obviously huge. I will conservatively say "clear advantage" though Black is teetering on the edge of lost. I will pass briefly through the rest of the game, even though it's fun.

24...d4 25.♔e2 ♘c6 26.a3 ♔d7 27.b4 ♗d6

28.♔d3 ♘e7 29.♖hf1 ♔e6 30.b5 ♗xa3 31.♖a1 ♗d6 32.♖fc1 ♖c8 33.♗a5 ♗b7 34.b6 ♖a8 35.♗b4!!

A beautiful blockade-breaker, but not yet a clean winner.

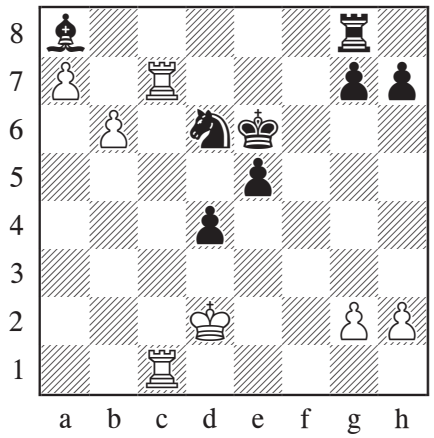


35...♘c8!

Refusing to buckle.

After 35...♗xb4 36.♖c7 ♗c6 37.b7 ♗xb7 38.♖xb7 White is almost home. For example: 38...♗c5 39.♖a6† ♗d6 40.g4 g5 41.♔e2 h6 42.♔d3 ♘c8 43.♖h7+–

36.♗c5 ♗xc5 37.♖xc5 ♘d6 38.♖e1 ♖g8 39.♖c7 ♗a8 40.♖ec1 ♗xe4† 41.♔d2 ♗a8

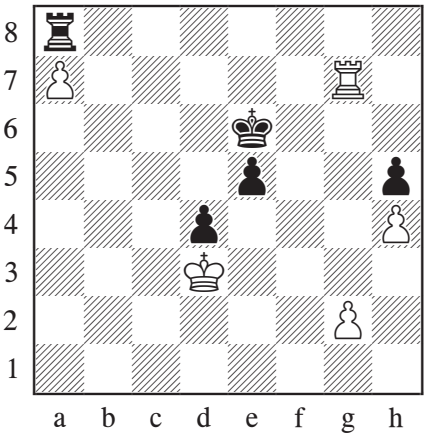


42.♖1c6 ♔d5

The only try.

After 42...♗xc6? 43.♖xc6 ♔d5 44.♖xd6† ♔xd6 45.b7 the pawns land.

43.b7 ♗xb7 44.♖xd6† ♔xd6 45.♖xb7 ♖a8 46.♖xg7 h5 47.h4 ♔e6 48.♔d3

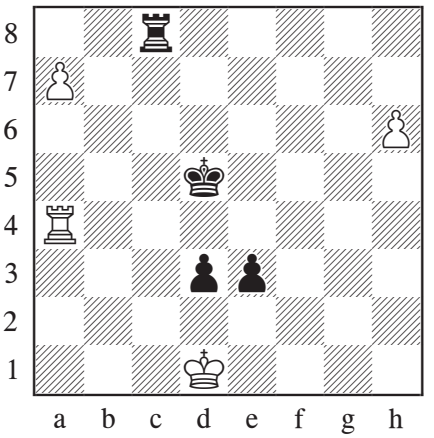


48...♔d5?

Black cracks (or maybe he made a typo?) after a titanic defensive effort.

48...♔f5 might well have held the draw.

49.g4 e4† 50.♔d2 hxg4 51.h5 ♖c8 52.h6 e3† 53.♔e2 ♖c2† 54.♔d1 ♖c8 55.♖xg4 d3 56.♖a4



Black's pawns are beautiful but it's White that will promote. Unfortunately for Black, 56...e2† 57.♔d2 ♖c2† 58.♔xd3 e1=♘† is not quite mate. Or 56...♖a8 57.h7 ♔e6 58.h8=♕ ♖xh8 59.a8=♕ and the mate on h1 is covered. **1–0**

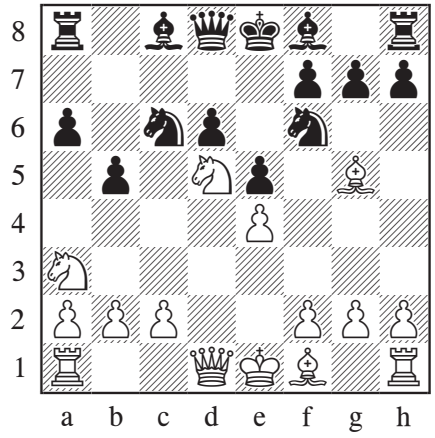
Introduction to 9...♗e7 – 11...♘e7

GAME 17

Detlev Kuhne – Maxim Konstantinov

Correspondence 2013

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5



9...♗e7

Against 9...♗e6? you can choose two different paths.

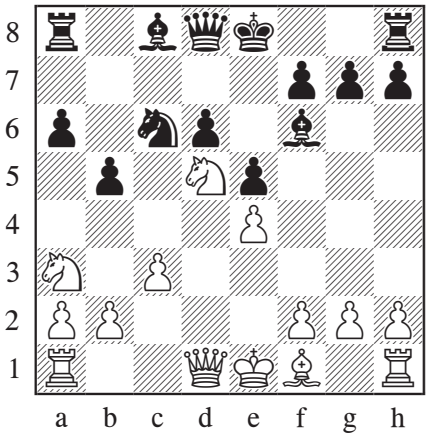
10.c4 b4 11.♗xf6!? gxf6 12.♘c2 ♖b8 13.b3± Tyner – Galant, Broken Arrow 2012.

10.♗xf6 gxf6 11.g3!? is also good. The comparison here is with the lines with 9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.♘d5 f5 11.g3, where White will take on f5 and Black will play ...♗c8xf5. Here he will lose a tempo, and so White will gain a pleasant advantage. 11...♗g7 12.♗g2 ♘e7 13.♘xe7 ♕xe7 14.c3± followed by ♘c2-e3.

10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3

The usual move; controlling the centre better while allowing the offside knight to find a better square on c2.

The trendy 11.c4 would offer a much more compact repertoire, but our analysis suggested it was less promising.



11...♘e7

A sharp line that is a favourite of Krasenkow; Carlsen gave it a go in 2015.

We shall see various other moves on the following pages, including 11...♗b7, 11...♗g5 and 11...0–0.

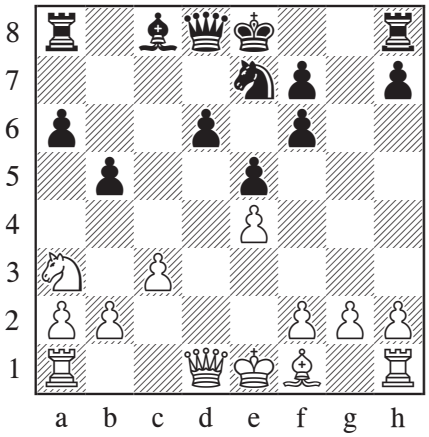
11...♖b8 12.♘c2 will transpose after 12...♗g5 (or 12...0–0). An independent option is 12...a5 but that offers White an easy opportunity: 13.♘xf6†!? ♕xf6 14.♕d5 ♘a7 Awkward but otherwise a pawn drops. 15.a4± In Vrbljanac – Kosanovic, Belgrade 2010, White had a pleasant edge; of course 15...bxa4? 16.♕xa5 would be hopeless.

12.♘xf6†

Again we need to be principled.

12.♘c2 is quite often played, but White has precisely nothing after 12...♘xd5 13.♕xd5 ♖b8= as in Giri – Carlsen, Saint Louis 2015, and many other games.

12...gxf6

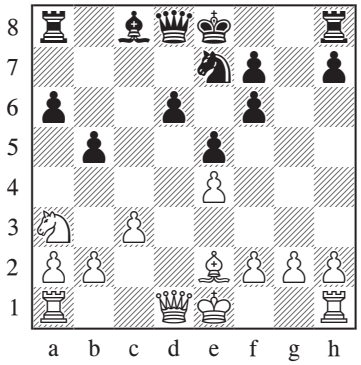


13.♗d3

An interesting alternative is:

13.♗e2!?

I want to give my reasons for not making it my main recommendation, as many might want to play it anyway, for practical reasons. It would make my life easier to recommend this shortish 13.♗e2 line, and move on. The problem is our analysis suggests Black can just hold a draw, while the much more complicated main line appears promising for White. So we shall do the hard work and study 13.♗d3; if you feel less fanatical, then 13.♗e2 is your move.



13...d5

This is the critical line.

13...♗b7 14.♗f3 ♕b6 15.♘c2 0–0–0 16.♘e3 d5N (16...f5?! was Skaroupka – Nepomucky, Chrudim 2001; after 17.exf5 d5 18.0–0± Black is in trouble) 17.♕c2 ♔b8 18.exd5 ♘xd5 19.♗xd5 ♗xd5 20.♘xd5 ♖xd5 21.0–0± Black has a number of weaknesses and will suffer slowly.

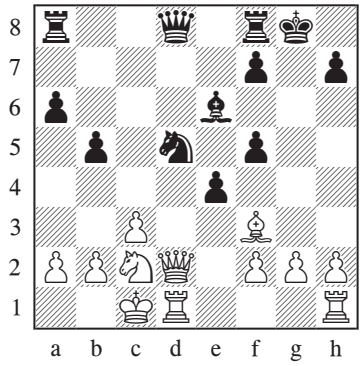
13...f5 14.exf5 ♗xf5 15.0–0 0–0 16.♘c2 d5 17.a4!± White is simply better in such a position. Black does not have an attack or the two bishops to justify his weaknesses. One example continued: 17...bxa4 18.♖xa4 a5 19.♘e3 ♗e6 20.♕d2 ♕b6 21.♖fa1 ♖ab8 22.♘d1 d4 23.♖xa5± S.B. Hansen – Krasenkow, Koszalin 1998.

After the text move White has a clever sequence:

14.exd5 ♘xd5 15.♗f3 ♗e6 16.♘c2

In general I like White here, but Black is just barely OK if he plays like a machine.

16...0–0 17.♕d2 f5 18.0–0–0 e4



It looks as if Black has equalized, but White has:

19.g4!! exf3 20.gxf5 ♗xf5 21.♕xd5 ♕xd5 22.♖xd5 ♗xc2 23.♔xc2 ♖fe8 24.♖g1† ♔f8 25.♖g3 ♖e2† 26.♖d2 ♖d8 27.♖xe2 fxe2 28.♖e3 ♖d1 29.♖xe2 ♖h1 30.f3 ♖f1 31.♔b3 ♖xf3 32.a4 ♖f5 33.axb5 ♖xb5† 34.♔c4±

This rook ending is unpleasant for Black and in a practical game, had he found/remembered all of this, he would still have

to play accurately to avoid defeat. This is possible when you have an engine at hand, so in this correspondence game he did escape, even though I have to say that a lot of the endings that hold are a pawn down and look very ugly until you go really deep (with computer assistance of course).

34...f5 35.♔d4 ♔f7 36.b4 ♔f6 37.♖a2 ♖b6 38.♔c5 ♖e6 39.♖f2 ♖e8 40.c4 ♖c8† 41.♔d4 ♖d8† 42.♔c5 ♖c8† 43.♔d4 ♖d8† 44.♔c3 ♖f8 45.♖a2 f4 46.♖xa6† ♔e5 47.♖a5† ♔e4 48.♖a1 f3 49.♖e1† ♔f4 50.b5 f2 51.♖f1 ♔e5 52.♔d3 ♖f4 53.c5 ♖f7 54.c6 ♔d6

Draw agreed in Hatzl – S. Larsen, email 2012.

13...d5!

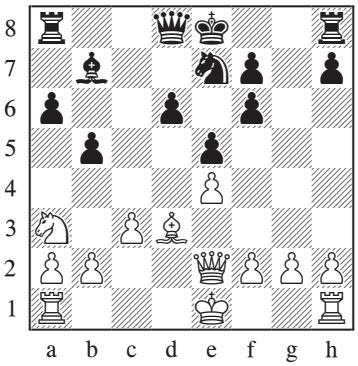
The most resilient.

13...♖g8 14.g3 d5 is a rare line that requires just a touch of care: 15.♘c2!N (15.♕e2 d4 16.cxd4 ♘c6!N equalizes) 15...♗b7 16.♕e2±

13...♗b7

This clearly points the bishop at White's kingside, so perhaps it is not such a shock that in most of the following lines White castles queenside.

14.♕e2



14...d5

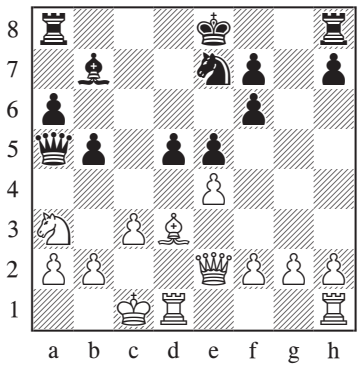
14...♖g8 15.g3 ♕b6 16.0–0–0 0–0–0 17.♘c2 ♔b8 18.♖he1± was great for White in Korneev – Felgaer, Dos Hermanas 2005.

Black is also under serious pressure after: 14...♕c7 15.♘c2 d5 (15...f5 16.f3 fxe4 17.fxe4 d5 18.0–0–0 d4 19.cxd4 exd4 20.♔b1 ♘c6 21.♖c1 ♕e7 22.♖he1 0–0–0 23.a4! bxa4 24.♗xa6 ♔b8 25.♘a3± Selen – S. Larsen, email 2012) 16.0–0–0 0–0–0 17.a4! dxe4 (17...bxa4 18.♗xa6±; 17...f5 18.axb5 fxe4 19.bxa6 ♗a8 20.♗b5±) 18.♗xe4 bxa4 19.♕g4† ♔b8 20.♗xb7 ♕xb7 21.♕xa4± Kraft – Krebs, email 2012.

15.0–0–0 ♕a5

15...d4 16.cxd4 exd4 17.♘c2± Kloster – Siebarth, email 2012.

15...♕b6 16.f4! 0–0–0 17.fxe5 fxe5 18.exd5 ♖xd5 19.c4± Shapiro – Oliveira, corr. 2002.



It is time for a powerful, if not fully original, novelty:

16.f4!N

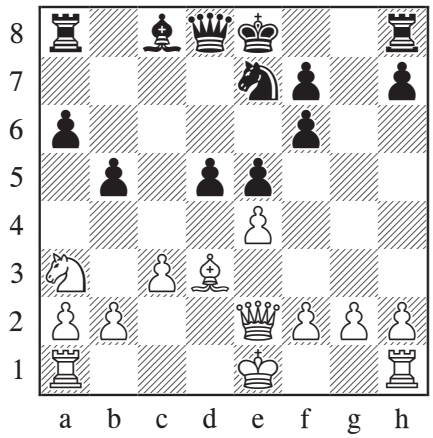
16.exd5 ♘xd5 17.♕f3 as in Rowson – Vallejo Pons, Selfoss 2003, also looks promising for White, and he did win, making it the greatest single victory for a Scottish player, until Vallejo, then rated a bit higher, lost to my colleague Jacob Aagaard four years later, also as Black in the Sicilian... But here Black can play: 17...♖c8! 18.♗e4 ♖xc3† 19.bxc3 ♕xa3† 20.♔d2 ♕b2† 21.♔e1 ♘xc3 22.♗xb7 ♘xd1 23.♕xd1 ♔e7 and White has no advantage at all. For example: 24.♕b3 ♕a1† 25.♕d1 ♕b2=

16...exf4 17.exd5±

With the point: 17...♗xd5 18.♗xb5† axb5 19.♖xd5+–

14.♕e2

We have reached a significant branching point, with four main options. We will deal with two in this game, and the other two in the analysis section that follows.



14...d4

The most common choice.

14...♗b7 transposes to the 13...♗b7 line in the note to move 13.

14...♗e6 and 14...dxe4 are covered next on page 199.

14...♕b6

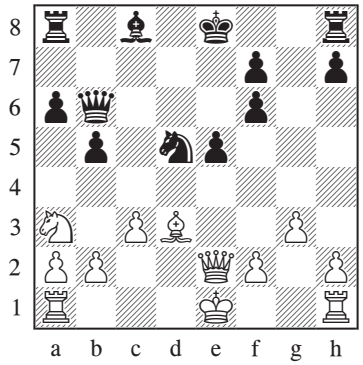
A less active square than d4 (where the black queen goes in the game) but certainly more secure.

15.exd5 ♘xd5

15...♗b7 16.♗e4 ♗xd5 17.0–0–0 0–0–0 18.c4!? is promising for White, for instance: 18...♕c6 19.♗xd5 (19.♖xd5 ♘xd5 20.♕f3 b4 21.♔b1 bxa3 22.♗xd5 ♕c5 23.♕xf6 ♕d6 24.♕xf7 ♕g6† 25.♕xg6 hxg6 26.b4±) 19...♘xd5 20.♕c2± Noble – Vidalina, email 2008.

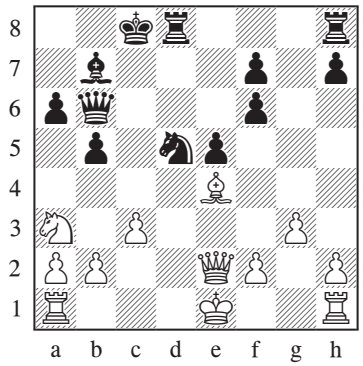
16.g3

In this line, and many other Sveshnikov lines, Black's bishop faces a close decision: e6 or b7?



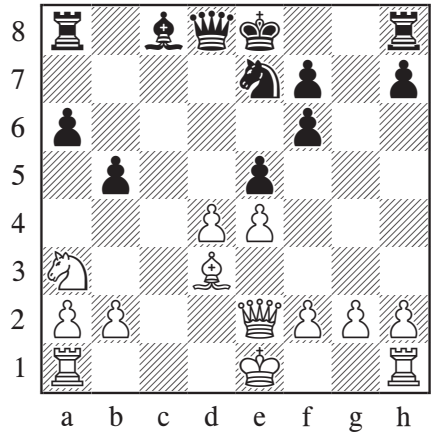
a) 16...♗e6 17.♘c2± I think White is in general slightly better in such positions. His structure is superior and I do not fear Black's counterplay. The following game could be one to follow: 17...h5 18.♗e4 0–0–0 19.a4! h4 20.axb5 axb5 21.0–0–0 f5 22.♗d3 f6 23.♗xb5± V. Ivanov – Troia, email 2013.

b) 16...♗b7 A bishop always looks pretty on the long diagonal, but now the ...f6-f5 advance is harder to carry out. 17.♗e4 0–0–0



18.0–0–0 (18.0–0!?N is riskier but may be objectively stronger, for instance: 18...♖hg8 19.♗xd5 ♖xd5 20.c4±) 18...♔b8 19.♔b1!?N (19.♘c2?! ♘e3!= Jensen – Brugger, email 2009) 19...b4 20.♘c4 ♕c6 21.♖xd5 ♖xd5 22.♗xd5 ♕xd5 23.♖d1! ♕e4† 24.♕xe4 ♗xe4† 25.♔c1 bxc3 26.b3± White will have a good ending. At some point he will win the c3-pawn, leading to a position with level material where Black has further pawn weaknesses.

15.cxd4



15...♕xd4

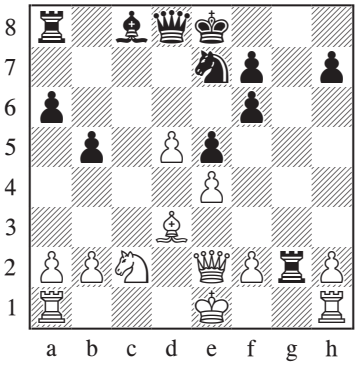
The black queen looks strong, but will not be allowed to rest on d4 for long.

The following game shows the problems with Black's position excellently:

15...♖g8 16.♘c2! ♖xg2

16...exd4 17.0–0±

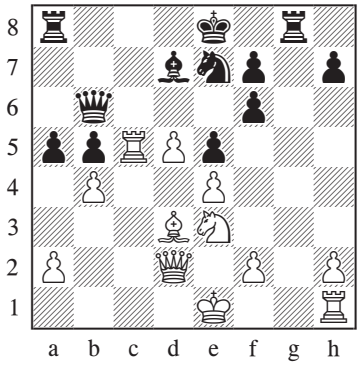
17.d5±



If your plan is just to memorize a few good moves, then here is enough, but for a boost in chess understanding, play through the rest also.

17...♕a5† 18.b4 ♕c7 19.♕d2 ♗d7 20.♘e3 ♖g8 21.♖c1 ♕b6 22.♖c5 a5

Here White found a striking idea:



23.a4!! axb4

Perhaps Black should have settled for 23...bxa4 24.♖xa5 ♖xa5 25.bxa5 ♕c5 26.♔e2 ♘g6 27.♖b1 ♘f4† 28.♔f3±.

24.♖xb5!

The typical exchange sacrifice.

24...♗xb5 25.♗xb5† ♔d8 26.d6 ♘g6 27.♕d5 ♖a7 28.♖g1 b3

Or 28...♖f8 29.♘c4 ♕d4 30.♕xd4 exd4 31.♘b6± and Black is threatened by ♔e2 and ♖c1-c8#.

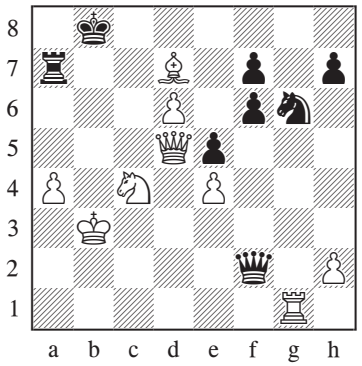
29.♔d2 ♔c8

The desperate attempt 29...♖xa4 also fails to save Black: 30.♗xa4 ♕b4† 31.♔e2 ♕xa4 32.♕b7 ♕a2† 33.♔d3 ♘f4† 34.♔c3 ♕a5† 35.♔xb3 ♖xg1 36.♕e7† ♔c8 37.d7†+–

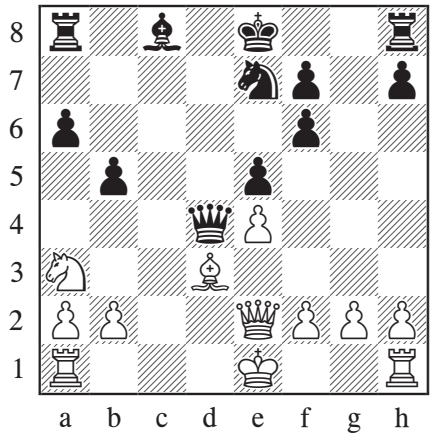
30.♔c3 ♔b8

30...♖d8 31.♘c4 ♕d4† 32.♕xd4 exd4† 33.♔xd4 is unlikely to change the outcome.

31.♔xb3 ♖d8 32.♘c4 ♕xf2 33.♗c6! ♖dd7 34.♗xd7



Black resigned in Schnabel – Nogga, email 2014, on account of: 34...♖xd7 35.♘a5! ♕b6† (35...♕xg1 36.♕b5† ♔a8 37.♕c6†! ♔b8 38.♕xd7+–) 36.♔c4 ♕a6† 37.♔c3 ♖xd6 38.♖b1† ♔c8 39.♕c5† ♔d7 40.♘c4 ♖c6 41.♕d5† ♔e7 42.♖b8+– That was a fine computer-aided resignation.



16.0–0!

After 16.0–0–0 ♕b6 17.♔b1 ♗e6 18.♘c2 ♘c6 Black most probably has enough to hold a dynamic balance.

16...♖g8

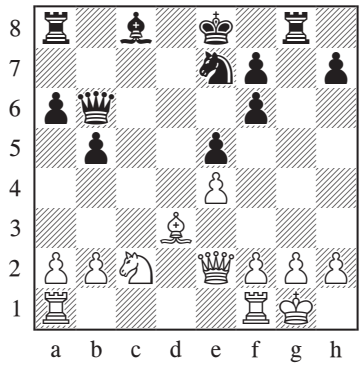
Trying to create counterplay, but White has it in hand.

The tranquil 16...0–0 places no pressure on White. For example: 17.♖fd1 ♕b6 18.♘c2 ♗e6 19.♘e3± Barua – Ramnath, Chennai 2012.

17.♘c2 ♕xb2

Grabbing the pawn and stepping into the cage is principled but dangerous.

17...♕b6 is not an ideal solution either. I found a nice way to improve on a centaur game:



18.♘e3!N Useful prophylaxis against ...♗g4, which would annoy White. 18...♗e6 19.♕f3 ♘g6 20.♖fd1±

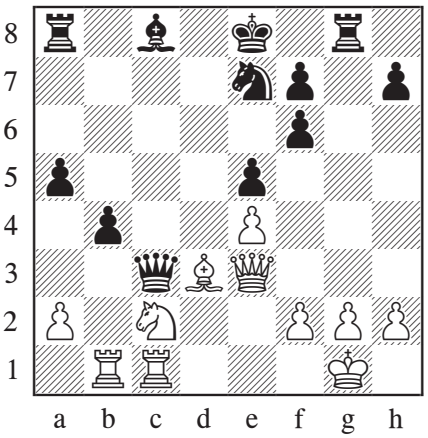
18.♕d2 b4

Now the queen escapes to c3 but that is far from the end of the story.

18...♗h3 runs into a wonderful combination. 19.♖fb1! ♗xg2 and now the fabulous point is: 20.f3!! ♗h3† 21.♔h1 ♗g2† 22.♕xg2 ♖xg2 23.♖xb2 ♖d2 24.♖b3 ♖d8 25.♘b4± The rest is a matter of technique.

19.♖ab1 ♕c3 20.♕e3 a5 21.♖fc1

Still kicking that queen around.

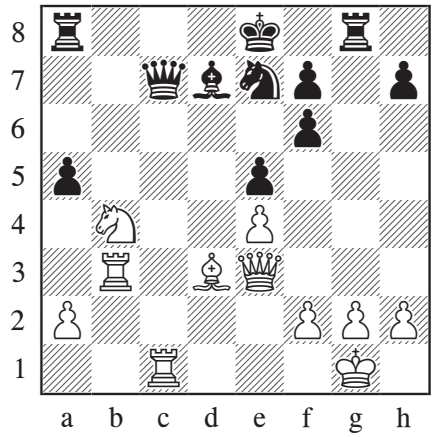


21...♗d7

Also deeply unpleasant is: 21...♗e6 22.♘xb4 ♕d4 23.♕xd4 exd4 24.♘a6±

22.♖b3 ♕c7 23.♘xb4±

With material equality restored, it is obvious that White is much better due to Black's weak structure.



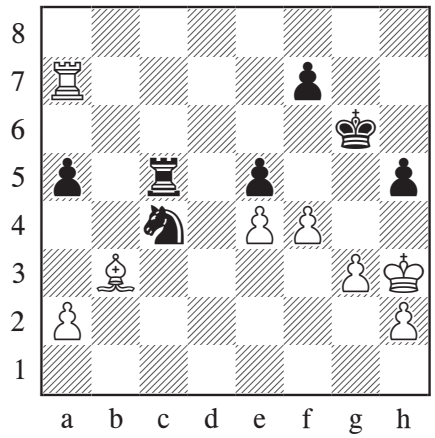
23...♕a7 24.♕xa7 ♖xa7 25.♘d5 ♔f8

Otherwise a check on b8 is fatal.

26.♘xf6 ♖g6 27.♘xd7† ♖xd7 28.g3

White is a pawn up for nothing and finished smoothly.

28...♖c6 29.♖cc3 ♖d4 30.♔g2 ♖b4 31.♖xb4 ♖xc3 32.♖b8† ♔g7 33.♗b5 ♖c8 34.♖b7 ♖c5 35.♗a4 ♘c8 36.f3 ♘d6 37.♖a7 ♘c4 38.♗b3 h5 39.♔h3 ♔g6 40.f4



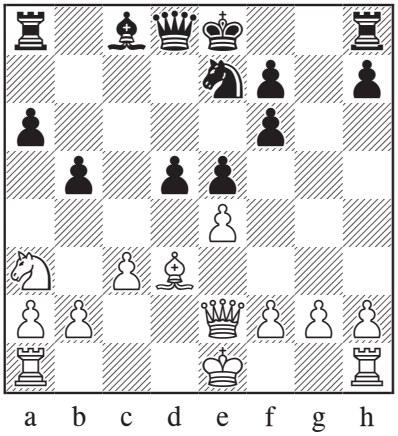
Over-the-board Black may not have resigned here, but he will soon run out of moves. For example, 40...exf4 41.gxf4 f6 42.♔h4 ♖c6 43.f5† ♔h6 44.h3 ♖c5 45.♖f7 ♖c6 46.♗xc4 and pawns start dropping.

1–0

11...♘e7 – 14...dxe4 and 14...♗e6

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 ♘e7 12.♘xf6† gxf6 13.♗d3 d5 14.♕e2

And here we are again.



14...dxe4

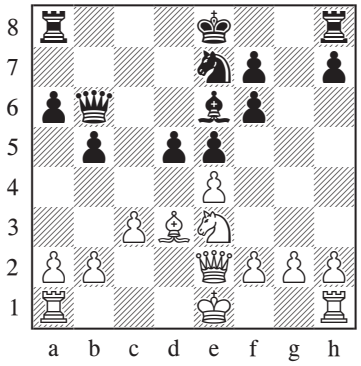
Provoking the bishop to e4 where it will gain a tempo on the rook then lose it back to ...f6-f5.

14...♗e6

This move is rare but it was tried by Krasenkow a few years ago, so is certainly worth a look.

15.♘c2 ♕b6 16.♘e3

Now the rook belongs on d8, but whether or not the black king should jump over it to c8 is a debate.



16...♖d8

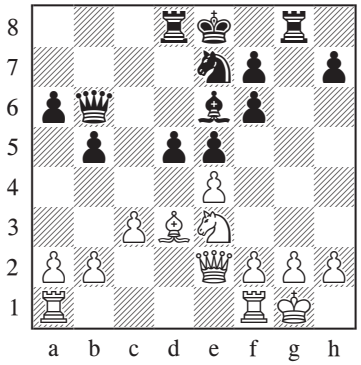
My guess is that the king is safer on e8 than c8.

16...0–0–0 17.a4 This must be the right move. 17...dxe4 18.♗xe4 f5 19.axb5! ♕xb5 (19...fxe4 20.♖xa6 and White will follow up with 0–0 and ♖fa1, which will be too much for the defence to bear) 20.♗f3!? Planning to sac the bishop (a tiny but safe edge was achievable via 20.♕xb5 axb5 21.♗d3±). 20...e4 21.♖xa6 ♕c5 22.♗xe4 fxe4 23.0–0↑ Over the board I would expect a White win, but Black eventually held a draw in Dogan – Troia, email 2011.

17.0–0±

I prefer White for the usual structural reasons, which also mean we have the safer king.

17...♖g8



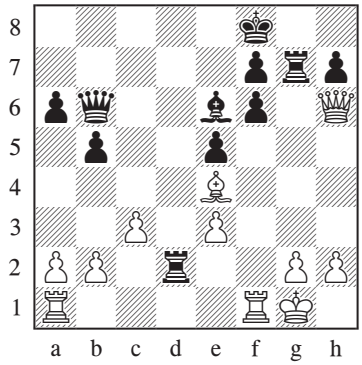
18.♕h5!?N

Crude and annoying.

Blomqvist – Krasenkow, Cappelle-la-Grande 2016, instead continued: 18.♖fd1 dxe4 19.♗xe4 f5 20.♖xd8† ♕xd8 21.♖d1 ♕c8 and Black was over the worst, and drew soon enough.

After the text move one possible line is:

18...♖g7 19.♕h6 ♔f8 20.exd5 ♘xd5 21.♗e4!? ♘xe3 22.fxe3 ♖d2



23.♖xf6±

White has won a safe pawn, as 23...♖xb2?? 24.♖af1 is a clean winner due to the many pins and the following trick: 24...♔g8 25.♗xh7†! ♖xh7 26.♖g6† fxg6 27.♖f8#

15.♗xe4

The next couple of moves are natural and obvious.

15...♖b8 16.0–0 f5 17.♖ad1

It makes sense to nudge the queen before deciding where the bishop belongs.

17...♕c7

But now it's decision time for the bishop.

18.♗b1

Another idea is:

18.♗d5

I like White's chances even though it's not totally clear.

18...0–0 19.c4!?N b4

19...♘xd5 20.cxd5 ♖b6 21.♖c1 ♕d6

22.♖fd1 and White has something to play for.

20.♘c2 b3 21.axb3 ♖xb3 22.♘e3 f4 23.♘g4 ♗xg4 24.♕xg4† ♔h8 25.♕h5 f6 26.c5!±

White has an advantage. The c-pawn is strong and the black king is weak. The b2-pawn and the a6-pawn are both irrelevant.

26...♘xd5

26...♖xb2? does not work. 27.♗e6! ♕c6 28.♖d6 ♕e8 (28...♕xc5? 29.♖d7 and White wins because of ♗e6-f5 coming.) 29.♕h3± Black has an extra pawn, the one on a6, which is entirely useless; meanwhile White's c-pawn is looming, and Black's king is insecure.

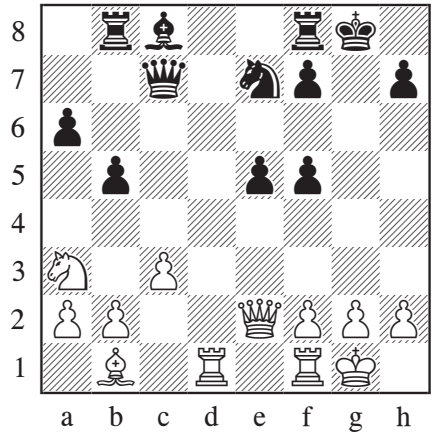
27.♖xd5 ♕f7

27...♖xb2 28.♖fd1 ♖b7 29.g3±

28.♕d1! ♖xb2 29.c6 ♕c7 30.♕c1 ♖b6 31.♕c5 ♖g8 32.♖c1±

Black is in a lot of bother.

18...0–0



19.♘c2!?N

The rooks might double on the d-file or get to the two central files. We don't know yet, but we do know that we have to bring the knight back to the game!

19.♖fe1 ♘g6 20.♘c2 ♗e6 21.♘b4 ♖b6! and Black held without problems in the high-level correspondence games Sochor – Bubir, email 2013, and Poehr – Hedlund, email 2014.

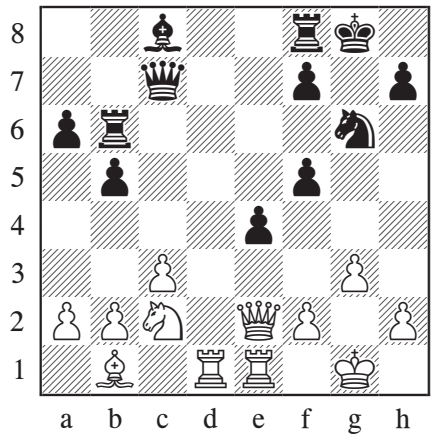
19...♖b6

Also after 19...♔h8 20.♘e3 f4 21.♘d5 ♘xd5 22.♖xd5 f6 23.♖fd1 Black has not succeeded in fully equalizing.

20.♖fe1 e4

Or 20...♘g6 21.g3 is similar.

21.g3 ♘g6



22.♘e3!

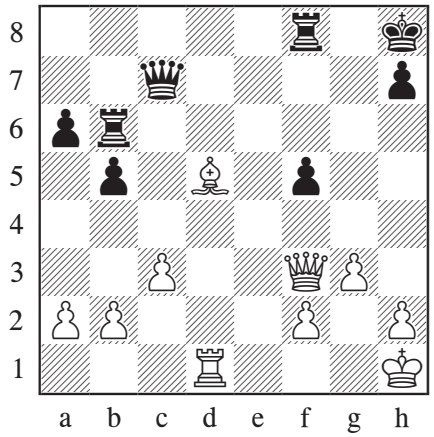
Instead 22.♘b4 ♗b7 23.♘d5 ♗xd5 24.♖xd5 ♘e5 should lead to a draw by force. 25.♖ed1 ♘f3† 26.♔g2 ♖h6 27.h3 ♖g6 28.♕e3 h5 29.h4 ♘xh4† 30.♔f1 ♘f3 31.♖xf5 ♕c4† 32.♗d3 ♖d8 33.♗xc4 ♖xd1† 34.♔g2 ♖g1† 35.♔h3 ♖h1† is one example of how this could happen.

22...♗e6 23.♕h5 ♘e5 24.♔h1!

The correct move order.

24.♘xf5?! ♗xf5 25.♕xf5 ♘f3† 26.♔h1 does not work as well, as 26...♖h6! puts White under pressure.

24...♘f3 25.♘xf5 ♗xf5 26.♖xe4 ♗xe4 27.♗xe4 f5 28.♗d5† ♔h8 29.♕xf3⩲



With a powerful bishop and two healthy extra pawns versus a rook, White has promising play.

11...♗b7 with ...♘b8-d7

GAME 18

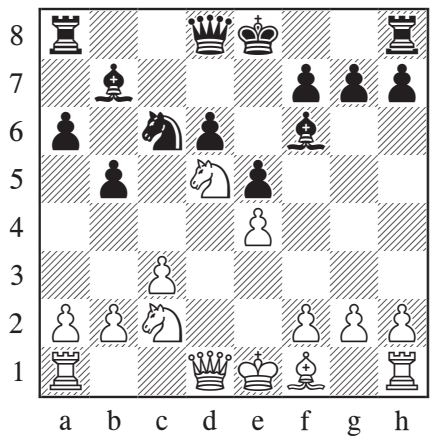
Oleg Korneev – Julen Arizmendi Martinez

Albacete 2001

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 ♗b7

Black's idea is to control the central light squares with the help of the manoeuvre ...♘b8-d7, but this is too slow.

12.♘c2



12...0–0

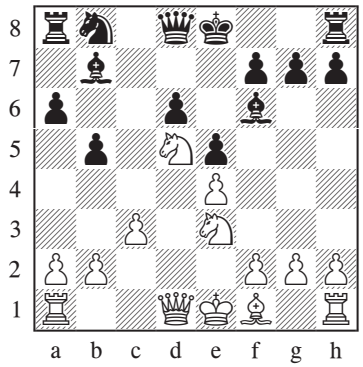
12...♗g5 13.a4 bxa4 14.♖xa4 0–0 transposes to page 216.

12...♘e7 is a worse version of the previous game: 13.♘cb4!? (13.♘ce3 ♗g5!∞ is less precise) Keeping control of d5 with an edge, for example: 13...♘xd5 14.♘xd5 0–0 15.♗e2± Gildardo Garcia – Nijboer, Wijk aan Zee 1996.

12...♘b8

This was an old favourite of John Nunn, but it can now be said to have been laid to rest, at least if Black intends to avoid transposing.

13.♘ce3!



13...♘d7?

Black should settle for 13...0–0 14.a4 bxa4 15.♖xa4 ♘d7, which transposes to the bolded main line on the next page.

13...♗g5? is hit by an idea we will see again. 14.♘f5 g6 15.h4! File this little sequence in your memory for future use. 15...♗f4 16.g3 gxf5 17.gxf4 ♘d7 18.♗h3± Firman – Volodin, Alushta 2001.

14.a4 bxa4 15.♘xf6†!

Knight takes bishop on f6 is unusual in these Sveshnikov lines; but in this particular case, either piece recapture leads to trouble.

15...♘xf6

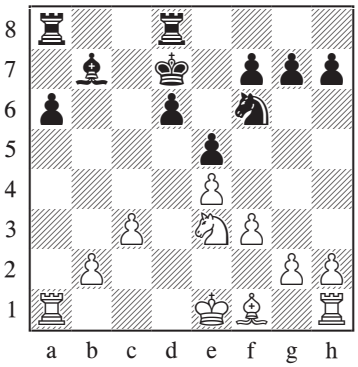
No better is: 15...♕xf6 16.♖xa4 ♕d8 17.♘f5 (17.0–0–0!N is even stronger) 17...0–0 18.♘xd6± Black did not have enough for the pawn in Iordachescu – Timoshenko, Tusnad 2004.

16.♕xa4† ♕d7

Or 16...♔f8 17.f3! and Black will drop material (probably the d6-pawn) before he can complete development. For example: 17...g6 18.0–0–0 ♔g7 19.♕b4± We could stop here, but I will show a few more moves as White keeps control perfectly in the following game: 19...♕c7 20.♖xd6 ♖hb8 21.♕a3 ♖d8 22.♖xd8 ♖xd8 23.♗c4 ♘h5 24.♗d5 ♗c8 25.g3 ♘f6 26.♖d1+– Keuter – De Carlos Arregui, email 2009.

17.♕xd7† ♔xd7 18.f3 ♖hd8

18...d5? loses more or less by force: 19.exd5 ♘xd5 20.0–0–0 ♔e6 21.♗c4 ♖hd8 22.♖d2 ♖d7 23.♖hd1 ♖ad8 24.b4 and Black is lost. The first threat is ♘xd5 and ♗xa6. 24...♖d6 25.♔c2 g6 (25...f5 26.♗xd5† ♗xd5 27.c4 and wins) 26.♘xd5 ♗xd5 27.♖xd5 ♖xd5 28.♖a1 ♖8d6 29.♖a5 and White wins easily.



Finally we should vary from Chandra – Bernard, Paracin 2014:

19.♖a5!N ♔e7 20.♗c4±

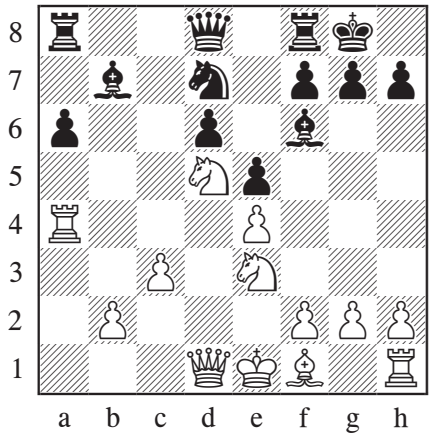
White is in complete control.

13.a4

The standard plan to improve our rook while creating a target on a6.

13...bxa4 14.♖xa4 ♘b8 15.♘ce3 ♘d7

White's advantage may appear strategic and restrained, but it can quickly transform into a vicious attack. For example: 15...♗g5 In this and similar positions, Black would love to have a chance to play ...♗xe3. 16.♘f5! g6 17.h4!±

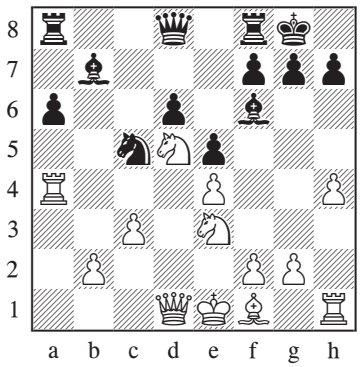


16.h4!

This was suggested by Garry Kasparov and should give White the better chances.

16...a5

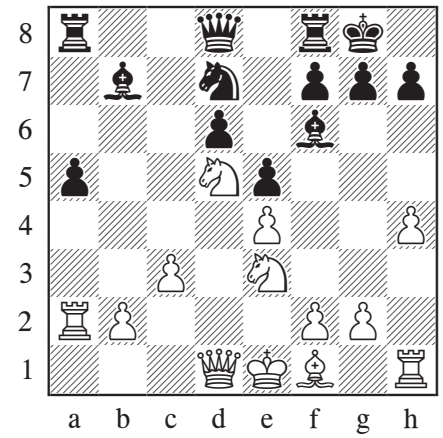
The only other played move is: 16...♘c5



17.♖a2!N (17.♖c4 a5 18.b4 axb4 19.cxb4 ♘e6 was nothing special for White in Zagrebelny – Gagarin, Moscow 1995) 17...♘xe4 The critical test. 18.♕f3 ♘c5 19.b4 ♗xd5 20.♘xd5 ♘e6 21.♖xa6± Black has a short-lived initiative, but in the long run the b-pawn will offer White the better chances.

17.♖a2±

White has a solid grip on d5 and clearly the healthier pawn structure. Black could mention his bishop pair, but the f6-bishop is obviously inferior to White's knights.

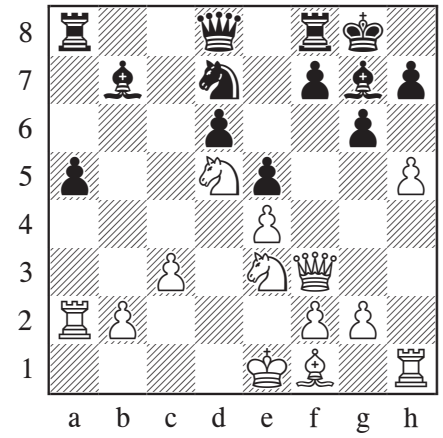


17...g6

Perhaps dreaming of ...f7-f5 one day.

Another way is to challenge d5 directly. 17...♘b6 18.♗c4! Controlling d5 is far more significant than any bishops-are-better-than-knights maxim. 18...♖c8 19.♘xb6 ♕xb6 20.♕d3± Khorunzhy – Orlovtsev, email 2012.

18.♕f3 ♗g7 19.h5



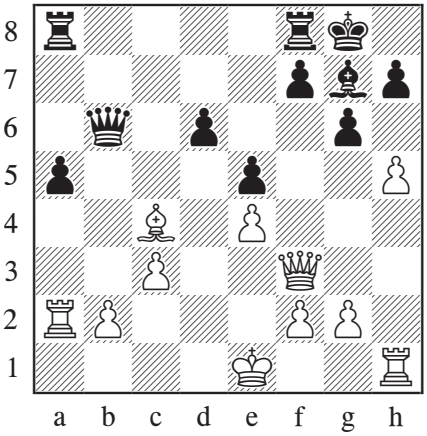
19...♗xd5?!

Black purifies his position so that only his worst minor piece is left; this should have been White's job.

More resilient was 19...h6 but 20.♗c4± is still highly unpleasant for Black.

20.♘xd5 ♘b6 21.♘xb6 ♕xb6 22.♗c4±

This is not at all drawish, whatever you think of opposite-coloured bishops.



22...♖ac8?

Now it's a positional apocalypse.

22...♖a7 at least gives White a chance to err. The hasty 23.h6?! allows 23...♖c8! 24.♗d5 ♗f8 and the black bishop is not quite as bad as in the game. But instead 23.hxg6 hxg6 24.♕g4± simply wins a pawn.

23.♗d5+– ♖c5 24.h6 ♗h8

This looks like the sort of unrealistic position a trainer might compose to show a bad bishop versus a wonder bishop.

25.0–0 ♕c7 26.♖fa1

It's almost zugzwang. The bishop is frozen. Moving the f8-rook overloads the black queen, allowing ♖xa5. And moving the queen or c5-rook will either allow ♖xa5 or set up a b2-b4 and ♖a7 killer.

26...♕e7 27.♖xa5 ♖xa5 28.♖xa5 ♕g5

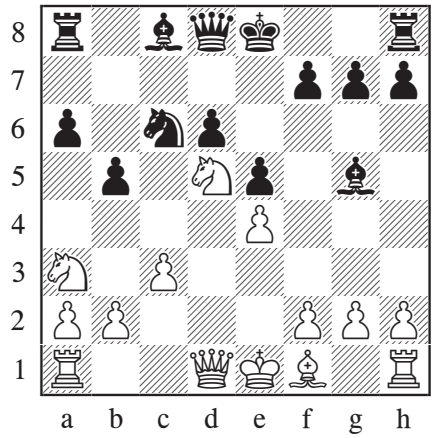
I strongly suspect Black saw the following move, and decided to end it all.

29.♕xf7†

1–0

11...♗g5 12.♘c2 ♘e7

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 ♗g5



This move offers Black various options. We shall start with the plan to challenge the dominant knight with ...♘e7, but without allowing his structure to be shaken by a pawn-doubling exchange on f6, of the sort we saw in the 11...♘e7 section. Then we shall move on to ...♖b8 ideas.

12.♘c2 ♘e7

This line was played by Magnus Carlsen when he was younger, perhaps inspired by Sveshnikov specialists such as Radjabov, Jakovenko and Halkias. Today the biggest expert in this line is probably Sergei Zhigalko of Belarus. In my opinion it is the most solid and durable line I have analysed for this book. This does not mean that White cannot create problems for his opponent though...

13.h4!

This is the most accurate move order, although it took some effort (not to mention an important novelty) to reach this conclusion.

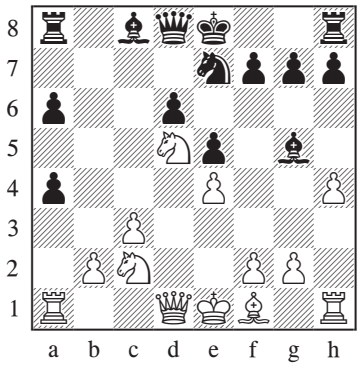
It is worth seeing the problem with the alternative sequence:

13.a4?! bxa4 14.h4

As GM Dorian Rogozenko has pointed out, this is only a sensible move when the bishop cannot return to e7.

Feeble is: 14.♖xa4? ♘xd5 15.♕xd5 ♗e6∓

In order to understand why the move h2-h4 is desirable for White, the following is a model game from Black's point of view: 14.♘cb4 0–0 15.♖xa4 a5 16.♘xe7† ♕xe7 17.♗c4 ♗d7 18.♘d5 ♕e8 19.♖a2 ♗d8! The bishop finds a better job to do than just guarding the empty h6-c1 diagonal! 20.0–0 ♖c8 21.♗b3 ♖b8 22.♕c2 ♔h8 23.♖fa1 f5 24.♗a4 ♗xa4 25.♖xa4 fxe4 26.♖4a2 ♕f7 27.c4 ♖b3∓ Smeets – Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2006.



14...♘xd5!N

14...♗h6 would lead to our target position.

The text move is the big idea which changes the evaluation of this move order.

15.hxg5

15.♕xd5 ♗e6 16.♕c6† ♗d7 17.♕xd6 ♗e7 18.♕xe5 0–0 would give Black excellent compensation. In the related variation mentioned in the notes to our main line below, White can castle queenside in safety. But in the present case, the addition of a2-a4 and ...bxa4 leaves the white king without any safe haven.

15...♘b6 16.♘e3 ♖b8

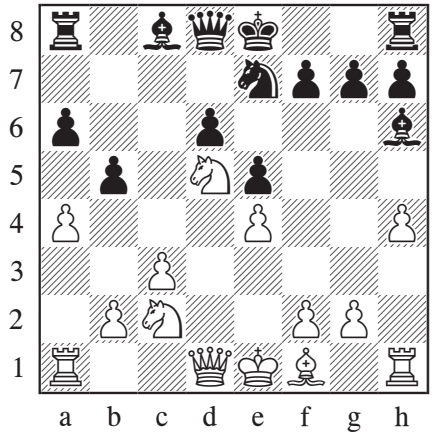
I doubt that White has any advantage in this wildly unclear position.

13...♗h6

13...♘xd5? is a poor relation of the strong novelty mentioned on the previous page. 14.♕xd5 ♗e6 15.♕c6† ♗d7 16.♕xd6± Black has no compensation here, as 16...♗e7 17.♕xe5 0–0 18.0–0–0! is excellent for White.

13...♗xh4? loses a piece as Black's planned trick backfires: 14.♖xh4 ♘xd5 15.♕xd5 ♗e6 16.♕b7! (16.♕c6† ♗d7 is less convincing) 16...♖b8 17.♕c6† ♗d7 18.♕xd6+–

14.a4



14...bxa4

Our chosen move order gives Black an extra option of 14...♘xd5!? but I like White after: 15.♕xd5 ♖b8 16.♕c6†!±

The text move reaches our target position, which has also occurred via the less accurate move order with 13.a4.

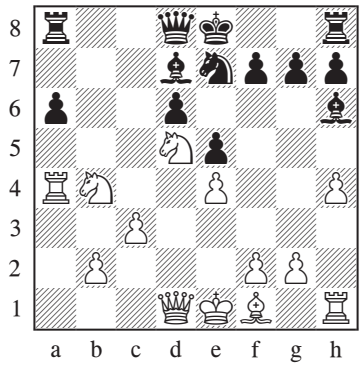
15.♘cb4 0–0

Castling is the right choice, but we should note why the following alternative is misguided:

15...♗d7?!

This does not stop us taking the a4-pawn, so it is a waste of time.

16.♖xa4!

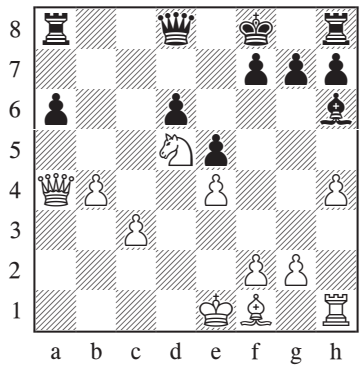


16...♘xd5

16...♗xa4 17.♕xa4† ♔f8 18.♘xe7 ♕xe7 19.♕c6 ♖a7 20.♗xa6± gives us our typical exchange sacrifice scenario. White is better, but the game continues. For example: 20...g6 21.♘d5 ♕d7 22.♕xd7 ♖xd7 23.♔e2 ♔g7 24.♖a1 f5 25.♗d3 ♖b8 26.b4 Caliskan – Shivdasani, email 2012. A clear demonstration of the ineffectiveness of the h6-bishop. White won without it feeling as if it was a challenge at all.

16...a5 17.♘xe7 axb4 18.♖xa8 ♕xa8 19.♘d5 0–0 20.cxb4 is good for White. Black has to sacrifice an exchange to stay in the game: 20...♖c8! 21.♘e7† ♔f8 22.♘xc8 ♕xe4† 23.♗e2 ♕xb4† 24.♔f1 ♗xc8 25.g3± Black has some compensation for the exchange, but the simplified nature of the position means that White will untangle himself and try to convert the extra exchange. Having a passed pawn matters a lot in that respect.

17.♘xd5 ♗xa4 18.♕xa4† ♔f8 19.b4±



White has the advantage, which has been confirmed in a number of games. Despite the sacrifice, he has still to lose a single game while winning several.

The first game in this variation is worth blitzing through to cement some themes in your head:

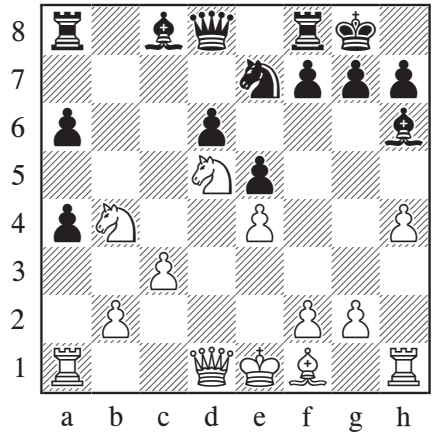
19...a5 20.b5 ♖b8 21.g3 g6 22.♗h3 ♔g7 23.0–0 ♖f8 24.♖a1 ♔h8

As Rogozenko mentioned, this is too slow and Black should have played the direct 24...f5 25.exf5 gxf5 though White is still better, as Rogozenko also pointed out. 26.♕xa5± is simple and good.

The trick Black was avoiding with 24...♔h8 was 26.♗xf5?! but Black has a counter-trick: 26...♕e8! with a likely draw as both f5 and b5 are under attack, and ...♕f7 is another possible source of counterplay.

25.♕xa5 ♕e8 26.c4 f5 27.♕c7 ♕f7 28.exf5 ♕xc7 29.♘xc7 gxf5 30.♖a6 ♖f7 31.♘d5 ♗f8 32.♖c6 f4 33.♗e6 ♖g7 34.g4 ♖e8 35.♗f5 ♗e7 36.h5 ♗g5 37.b6 e4 38.♖c8 ♖xc8 39.♗xc8 e3 40.fxe3 fxe3 41.b7

1–0 Karjakin – Radjabov, Warsaw 2005, was smooth and convincing all the way.



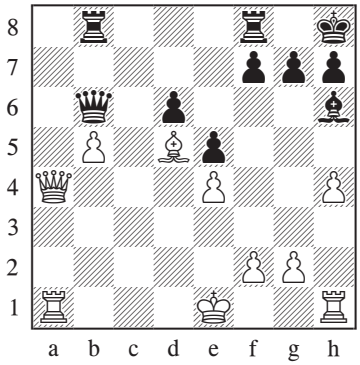
16.♖xa4

This is the most interesting try, as far as I am concerned. The position is quite depressing for Black, who is trying to hold on to a draw, with no activity, or purpose, or will to live...

The more analysed variation is:

16.♕xa4 a5 17.♗b5 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♗e6 19.♗c6 ♖b8 20.b4 axb4 21.cxb4 ♔h8 22.b5 ♗xd5 23.♗xd5 ♕b6

But it is not really going anywhere.



A recent rapid game saw a fine idea, but I doubt it is enough to carry the day:

24.♖h3!

24.♗c6 ♗e3! is an important point; Black has equalized.

24.0–0 ♕xb5 25.♕xb5 ♖xb5 has led to dozens of dull draws, most recently Kulaots – Zhigalko, Tallinn 2016.

24...♕xb5 25.♕xb5 ♖xb5 26.g4 f6 27.♖a7 ♖c8 28.♗e6 ♖c1† 29.♔e2 ♖b2† 30.♔f3 ♖b8 31.♔g2 ♖c2?

It is easy to blunder in rapid chess.

31...♖cb1 32.♖d7 ♖1b7 33.♖xd6 ♖b6 and Black holds a draw.

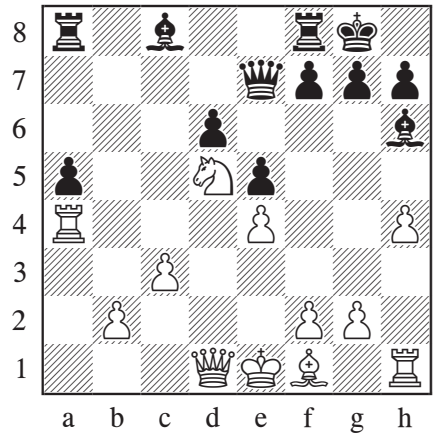
32.♖b3! ♖f8 33.♔f3 ♖d2 34.♖bb7 ♖c2 35.♖f7 ♖e8 36.♗d5 ♖c3† 37.♔g2 ♖cc8 38.g5 fxg5 39.hxg5 ♗xg5 40.♖xg7 ♖e7 41.♖gxe7

1–0 Dominguez Perez – Zhigalko, Berlin (rapid) 2015.

16...a5

16...♘xd5 17.♘xd5 a5 transposes.

17.♘xe7† ♕xe7 18.♘d5



18...♕d8!

Also fairly solid is: 18...♕b7 19.b3 ♔h8 20.♗c4 ♗d7 21.♖a2 f5 22.exf5 ♗xf5 23.0–0 ♗e6?! In Zhang – Ushenina, Sochi 2015, Black was provoking an unfavourable exchange (wiser was 23...♗d7±). 24.♘e3!±N would have been a big improvement. Once the light-squared bishops come off, the advantage is obvious. And 24...♗xe3? 25.♗xe6 ♕e7 26.♗d5 wins the exchange.

I believe the text move to be Black's most resilient option. Having made the decision to avoid the drawish paths of the 16.♕xa4 variation, this is a key position where White needs to come up with a good plan.

19.g3!

This is the natural way to make sense of having played h2-h4.

19.♗c4 ♔h8! with the intention of ...f7-f5 equalizes easily; Black had no problems in Herrera – Secer, email 2007.

19...♖b8

There are other lines, but still problems for Black to solve everywhere. For example:

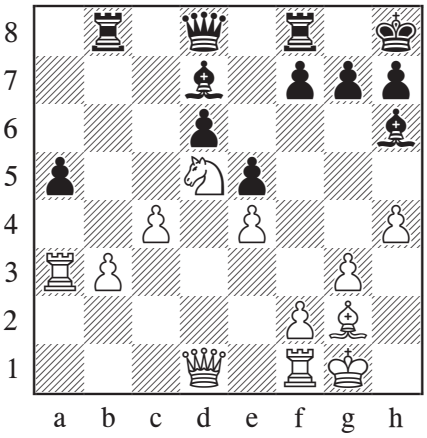
19...♔h8 20.♗g2 f5 (20...♗a6 21.c4±) 21.exf5 ♗xf5 22.0–0±

19...♗d7 20.♖a2 ♔h8 21.♗g2 ♗b5 22.b3 a4 23.c4 ♗c6 24.b4±

20.b3 ♗d7 21.♖a3

21.♖a2!?N might be more flexible. It is not obvious to me that the b3-pawn needs defending.

21...♔h8 22.♗g2 ♗b5 23.c4 ♗d7 24.0–0±



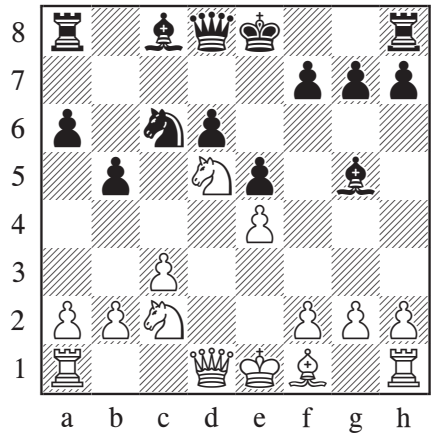
In Fusco – Real de Azua, Vicente Lopez 2007, White had a slight but definite edge; the h6-bishop is far from ideally placed, hitting nothing but fresh air.

11...♗g5 12.♘c2 ♖b8

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 ♗g5

Note that 11...0–0 12.♘c2 ♖b8 was the classical way to get into this line, leaving the bishop on f6 for now, where White often tried to prove something with moves such as 13.h4!?. But as we "just play the position" with 13.♗e2 rather than trying to prove any deficiency with this move order (or the one given as the main line), it becomes largely irrelevant, as we shall see on page 214.

12.♘c2



12...♖b8

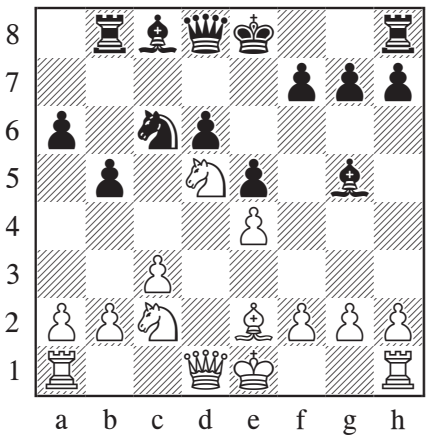
This is one of the two classical main lines. Black is basically preventing White's a2-a4 break, but on the other hand, the rook is often not doing much else on b8.

12...0–0 reaches the big main line, coverage of which begins on page 214, when 13.a4! is our reply. I should mention that if 13.♗e2 then Black would be better off playing something like 13...♘e7!? to clarify the position in the centre straight away.

13.♗e2

White has a simple plan of development in mind: 0–0 and then put all his pieces on the light squares starting with ♕d3 and a rook to d1 (sometimes the a-rook, sometimes the f-one).

The critical main line has been played out. 13.a4 bxa4 14.♘cb4 ♘xb4 White has two tries in this position, but neither will promise us a game. 15.cxb4 and 15.♘xb4 were studied by us in great depth, but with no success in finding an edge or promising unexplored territory.

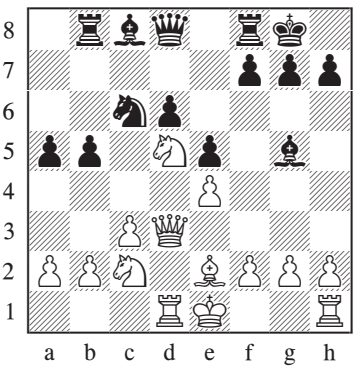


13...0–0 14.0–0

An interesting alternative is:

14.♕d3!? a5 15.♖d1

A move order suggested by the great theoretician Lanka.



15...♗e6

15...♘e7 16.♘ce3 ♗xe3 17.♘xe3 ♗e6 18.♕xd6 shows the idea behind Lanka's move order. 18...♕xd6 19.♖xd6 ♗xa2 20.0–0 b4 21.♖a6 ♖a8 22.♖a1 (22.♖xa8! appears to be a bit more accurate. 22...♖xa8 23.♖a1 b3 24.♖d1± and we have the same structure as in the game.) 22...b3 23.♖d1 a4 24.♖xa8 ♖xa8 25.♘c4 h6 26.♘a3 ♔f8 27.♗c4+– The a2-bishop was dead in Lanka – Nokso Koivisto, Cappelle-la-Grande 1992. 15...b4 16.0–0 ♗e6 17.c4 transposes to the Huschenbeth – Caruana game below.

16.0–0 b4 17.c4 a4

With the threat to oust the c2-knight from the protection of d4.

18.b3

This position is occasionally reached with White to move in the 11.c4 variation. If every 11.c4 line was as appealing, it would be my favoured line, but sadly Black has better ways to play against it.

18...♕a5?!

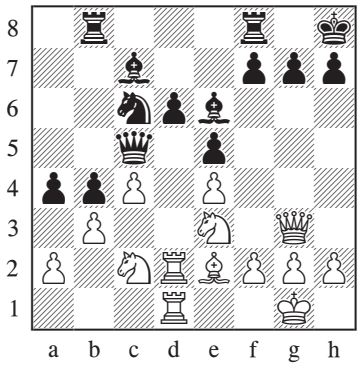
An instructive mistake by Black. The queen should keep contact with her kingside.

19.♕g3! ♗d8

19...♗h6 20.♗g4!±

20.♖d2!? ♕c5 21.♖fd1 ♔h8 22.♘de3 ♗c7

So far we are following Huschenbeth – Caruana, Chur 2010, and now the German GM recommends the improvement:



23.♘f5!

23.♗g4 also gives White a good edge.

23.h4 ♘e7 24.h5 f5 was OK for White in the Huschenbeth – Caruana game, perhaps even worth an edge, but Black's extra rating points told in the end.

23...g6 24.♕h4! gxf5

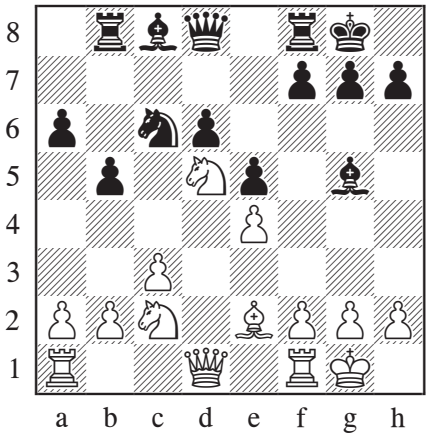
24...♗d8 25.♕h6 ♖g8 26.♘xd6±

25.exf5 ♗d8 26.♕e4 ♗c7

26...♗c8 27.♖d5 ♕a7 28.f6 ♘e7 29.♖xd6 ♗b6 30.fxe7 ♕xe7 31.♘xb4 ♗xf2† 32.♔xf2 ♖xb4 33.♕d3±

27.fxe6 fxe6 28.♗f3±

Huschenbeth thinks that due to the fact that White has the better bishop, he should be able to prove an advantage.

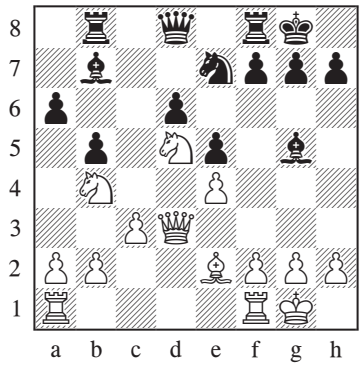


14...♗e6

I checked three other options.

14...♘e7 15.♘cb4 ♗b7 16.♕d3

Also good for White is 16.♘xe7† ♕xe7 17.♘d5 ♕d7 18.♕d3 a5 19.♖fd1 ♗c6 20.b4± Almasi – Van Wely, Monte Carlo 2003, but White can wait a bit for ...a5 before he exchanges on e7.



16...♘xd5 17.♘xd5 g6 18.♖ad1 f5 19.♗f3!?

19.exf5 was also strong, as if the rook takes White has ♗g4 and if 19...gxf5 then 20.f4!.

19...♔h8 20.a3 f4?! 21.♖d2 ♖g8 22.♖c1 ♗h6 23.c4 g5? 24.♗g4! ♗c8 25.h3!+–

Korneev – Capo Vidal, Salou 2006.

14...g6 15.♕d3 f5 16.♗f3± is similar to the Korneev game above.

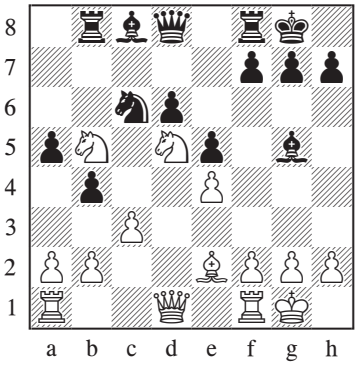
14...a5

This was supposed to be fine for Black for many years, but recent practice proves that White keeps some advantage.

15.♘a3! b4

If 15...♘a7 White can continue his plan with 16.♕d3.

16.♘b5

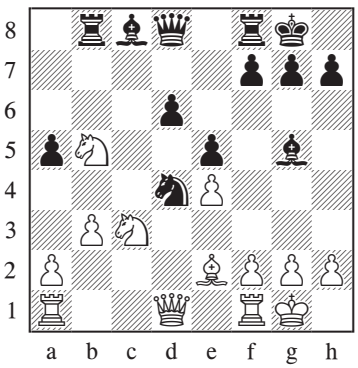


16...bxc3

The usual choice.

16...♘e7 has been seen only once, but is worth a closer look as it was a high-level and interesting game: 17.cxb4 axb4 18.♕a4 f5 19.♕xb4 ♘xd5 20.exd5 ♗a6 21.a4! e4 22.f4! exf3 23.♖xf3 ♕e7 24.♗f1 ♗e3† 25.♔h1 ♗xb5 26.♗xb5 f4 27.♖e1 g5 28.h3 (I suggest improving with 28.♕c4!N and if 28...g4 29.♖xf4 ♖xf4 30.♕xf4±) 28...♖fc8 29.♖fxe3!? fxe3 30.♕d4⩲ Laznicka – Sutovsky, Poikovsky 2015.

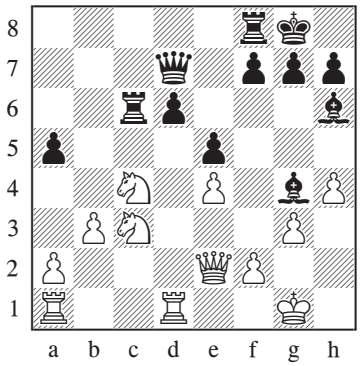
17.♘dxc3 ♘d4 18.b3



18...♘xe2†

18...♘xb5 19.♘xb5 ♖b6 20.♗c4± Schuster – Saboia Amorim, Brazil 1992.

19.♕xe2 ♗e6 20.♖fd1 ♖b6 21.g3 ♕d7 22.h4 ♗h6 23.♘a3 ♖c6 24.♘c4 ♗g4



25.♕d3!N

No need to weaken the dark squares yet!

25.f3 ♗e6 26.♘d5 was slightly better for White in Caire – Dorer, email 2010, but nothing much.

25...♖fc8!

After 25...♗xd1?! 26.♖xd1± White will get the d6 pawn and the a5 and e5-pawns will remain weak.

26.♖e1

26.a4 allows Black to take the exchange and bail out by giving it back on c4: 26...♗xd1 27.♖xd1 ♕e6 28.♘b5 ♖xc4!=

26...♗e6 27.♘d5±

White has a slightly improved version of the Caire – Dorer game quoted above, as he has avoided weakening himself with f2-f3.

Returning to the main line, White can proceed in accordance with the plan described on page 209 in the notes to move 13.

15.♕d3! a5

The usual response.

15...♗xd5?! 16.♕xd5 ♕b6 17.♖fd1± was a positional concession from Black in Korneev – Pogorelov, Dos Hermanas 2003.

15...♕d7 16.♕g3! is reminiscent of the Huschenbeth – Caruana game mentioned on page 210. 16...f6 17.♖fd1 a5 18.♘a3 ♘a7 19.h3 ♔h8 20.♗g4 was Karpov – Dolmatov, Amsterdam 1980. White has a big advantage and went on to covert it in fine clear-cut fashion, offering a textbook example of how to play with a good knight versus a bad dark-squared bishop.

16.♘a3!?

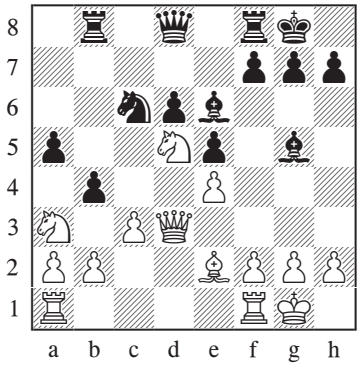
A rare move, but undeservedly so, as it forces Black to make an uncomfortable choice.

16.♖fd1 is the usual move and has been extensively analysed and explored: White has decent chances of an edge.

16...♘a7

Rather awkward-looking, but the correct choice.

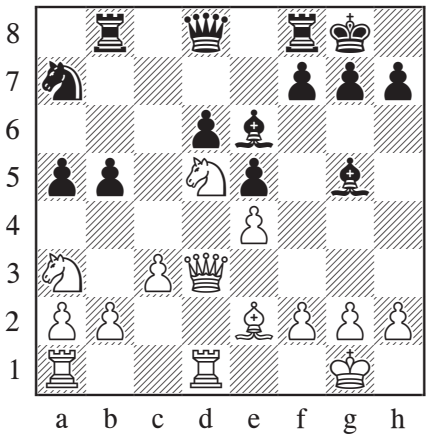
16...b4?! has been played in a few games.



Now 17.♘b5!N is unpleasant for Black. Why everyone has gone to c4 I do not know.

17.♖fd1!

The queenside rook will be needed on one of the three queenside files, while the kingside rook will hopefully not be needed on f1.



17...g6

One of many options.

17...b4 18.♘c4 ♘b5 19.♕c2! favours White, and the following lines show the usefulness of having the other rook on the queenside: 19...g6 (19...bxc3 20.bxc3 a4 21.♖ab1!±) 20.a4 bxa3 21.♘xa3 ♘xa3 22.♖xa3±

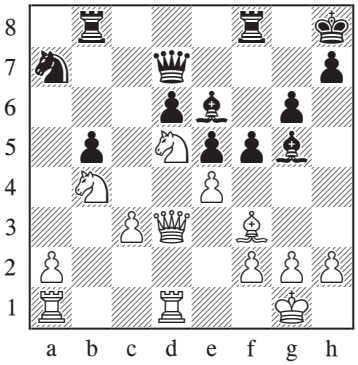
17...♕d7 18.♕g3 h6 (The engine suggests the appropriately cold-blooded 18...♕d8!? offering an odd repetition if we go back to d3. One idea is 19.♗g4!? perhaps with b2-b4 to follow.) 19.h4 ♗d8 20.♖d2 ♔h8 21.♖ad1± Nunn – Vukic, Reggio Emilia 1983.

17...f5N is untested. One idea is 18.♗f3 provoking 18...f4 when after 19.b4 White has play on the queenside, while Black's kingside ambitions are stymied. We will see a similar idea in the note to move 18 below.

18.♘e3

Putting pressure on d6, but not the only promising path.

18.b4!? is also a common plan. For example: 18...f5 19.♗f3 ♔h8 20.♘c2 axb4 21.♘cxb4 ♕d7



Now we can profitably vary from Smirnov – Kuzubov, Rivne 2005: 22.exf5!?N gxf5 (22...♗xf5 23.♗e4 ♗g4 24.f3 ♗e6 25.♘a6 ♖bd8 26.♘ac7±) 23.♘e3 e4 24.♕xd6 ♕xd6 25.♖xd6 ♗g8 26.♗d1±

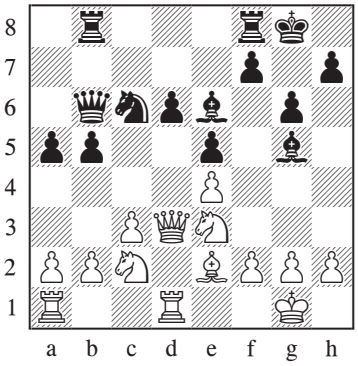
18...♕b6

Also possible is 18...b4 19.♘ac4 ♘b5 when 20.♗g4!? is an idea which should become a familiar ploy.

19.♘ac2 ♗c4

One of just two moves to have been tested in this position.

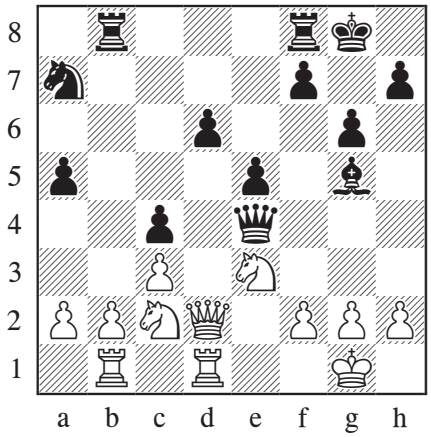
19...♘c6 was seen in Piscitelli – Portilho, Brazil 1980. My improvement is:



20.♗g4!N The exchange of the bishops is a natural part of making slow but steady progress; Black has not fully equalized. For example: 20...♖fd8 21.♕e2 ♕b7 22.g3 and White has clear ways to improve his position and create weaknesses in the black position; Black not so much.

20.♕d2! ♕c6 21.♗xc4 bxc4 22.♖ab1 ♕xe4

Now a vital improvement is:



23.f3!N

This tricky new move is necessary to retain an advantage.

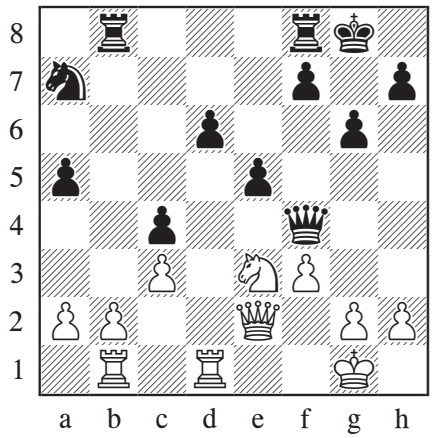
Instead after 23.♕xd6 ♘b5! 24.♕d5 ♕xd5 25.♘xd5 (25.♖xd5?? is the active move White would like to be possible, but 25...♘xc3 wins of course) 25...♖fc8 White had nothing in Tseshkovsky – Giorgadze, Tbilisi 1978.

23...♗xe3†

This is the most complicated option, but not the best.

23...♕c6 allows White to play easy moves, but after 24.♕xd6 ♕xd6 25.♖xd6± White has just an edge. Note that after 25...♘b5, which was so effective in the Tseshkovsky game above, White has a strong reply in the retreat: 26.♖dd1 The c4-pawn is threatened and 26...♖fc8 27.a4 leaves Black with the grim choice of 27...♘a7 28.♖d5 or 27...♘c7 28.♘xc4.

24.♘xe3 ♕f4 25.♕e2



White will soon win back the pawn while keeping some advantage. The following forcing line also works to our advantage:

25...e4 26.♘d5 exf3 27.♕f2 ♕g5 28.h4 ♕xg2† 29.♕xg2 fxg2 30.♘f6† ♔g7 31.♘d7±

Only one side is playing for a win in this endgame.

Introduction to the Main Line 11...0–0 12.♘c2 ♗g5

GAME 19

Vassilios Kotronias – Georgy Timoshenko

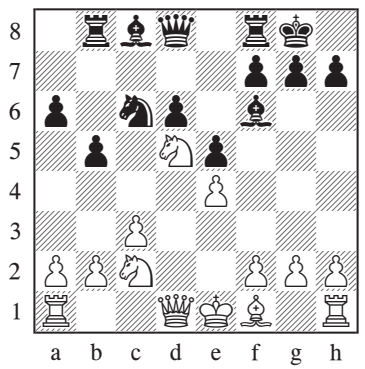
Thessaloniki 2007

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 0–0 12.♘c2 ♗g5

The text move is a vital line, but we also need to consider another option:

12...♖b8

This is the move order mentioned on page 208.



13.♗e2!?

And also as mentioned, we play normally, rather than try to claim Black has used an inferior move order.

The move to stop any ...♗g5 ideas is 13.h4, but 13...♗e7 has been played and analysed intensively, with nothing convincing found for White.

13...a5

An independent try.

By far the most common move is 13...♗g5 transposing back to page 209.

13...♘e7?! mixes up two ideas to poor effect; if Black wants to play a ...♘e7 plan, allowing doubled f-pawns in return for quick central play, then the slow ...♖b8 cannot be the most useful move to combine it with. 14.♘xf6† gxf6 15.♘e3!? (or 15.♗f3!?± also makes sense) 15...f5 16.exf5 ♘xf5 17.♘xf5 ♗xf5 18.0–0± Black's weaker structure will be a lasting nuisance.

14.0–0 b4

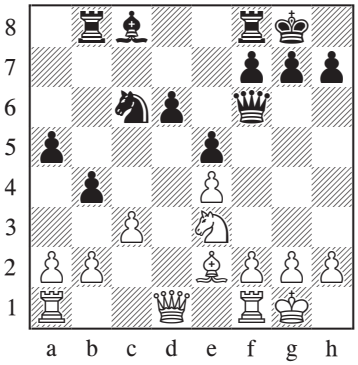
Once again, 14...♗g5 transposes to more normal territory.

15.♘xf6†!?N

Making room for the second knight on d5.

The only line to have been tested, twice, is 15.cxb4 axb4 which is also reasonable, but I would rather not weaken our d4-square.

15...♕xf6 16.♘e3±



White has a slight but pleasant edge, with a grip on d5. I will offer a few brief sample lines:

16...♘e7

16...bxc3 17.bxc3 ♕d8 18.♕a4±

16...♗d7 17.♗c4 ♖fc8 18.♕d3±

17.♗c4 ♗e6 18.♕d3!±

The most controlled way to keep our edge secure.

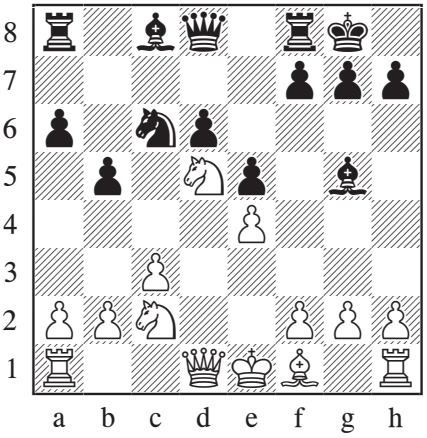
18.♕xd6 is possible, and after 18...♖fd8 19.♕a6 ♖a8 White can avoid a repetition with 20.♖fd1. But following 20...♘g6 21.♕b5 ♖db8 22.♕a4 our queen is kicked off-side, and Black has counterplay after: 22...♗xc4 23.♘xc4 ♘f4⇄

Black has many options, one of which is:

18...♘g6!?

But again White has a controlled response:

19.g3!



This is the classical main line and is recommended many places, including in Kotronias's *The Sicilian Sveshnikov* from 2014 (see next game). It was played by Kramnik, Leko, Kasparov, Topalov and so on. In this game we will mainly deal with the sidelines, which are generally not attractive for Black, but you need to know what to do with White.

13.a4 bxa4

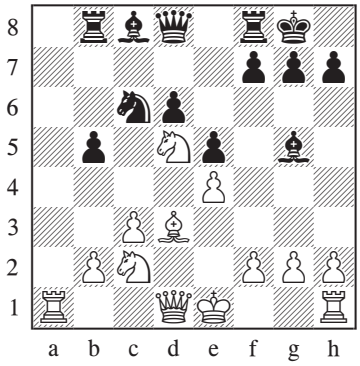
The standard move, and for good reason.

13...♖b8?!

Doubly ill-advised, as it surrenders the a-file and leaves the b5-pawn as a fixed target.

14.axb5 axb5 15.♗d3!

We have seen enough to know that 13...♖b8 is a bad idea, but I will show a few more possible moves to illustrate some typical plans and tactics.



15...♗e6 16.♘db4

More usual is 16.♘cb4. For example: 16...♘xb4 17.♘xb4 ♕d7 18.0–0 g6 19.♕e2± Ganguly – Wajih, New Delhi 2007.

16...♘e7

16...♘a5 is not so scary, but maybe just annoying enough to make 16.♘cb4 preferable.

16...♘xb4 would transpose to the Ganguly game after 17.♘xb4.

17.0–0 ♖b6

White still has enough control of d5, albeit indirectly: 17...d5? 18.exd5 ♗xd5 The knight cannot take due to the fork on c6. 19.♕e2 With a double attack; White wins a pawn.

18.♕e2

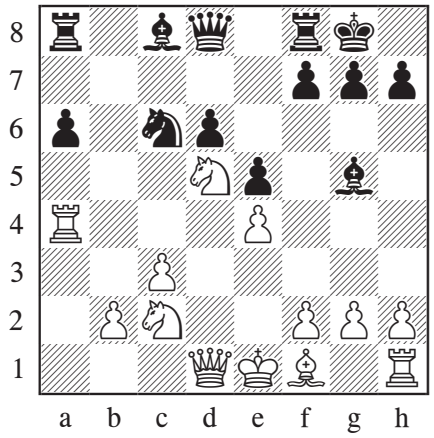
The b5-pawn feels the pressure, so Black decides to try to counter-attack, but White is positionally dominant.

18...f5 19.exf5 ♗xf5 20.♗xf5 ♖xf5 21.♖fd1±

Fedorchuk – Abergel, Palma de Mallorca 2015.

14.♖xa4

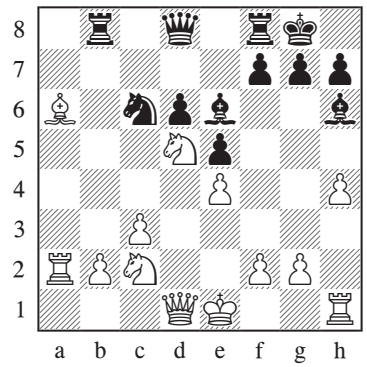
At this point the logical move is 14...a5, which we will cover below. But let's look at some alternatives first.



14...♗b7?!

As a method of challenging d5, this move is ineffective. As we shall see below, there is a pleasingly odd idea of zigzagging the bishop to b5, but this looks better than it is.

The counter-attacking 14...♖b8?! has been considered refuted for decades. 15.h4! ♗h6 16.♗xa6! ♗d7 (16...♖xb2 was a slightly more recent attempt, but it also does not work: 17.♗xc8 ♕xc8 18.♖c4 ♕b7 19.0–0 ♘d8 20.♖c7 ♕b3 21.♘cb4 ♘e6 22.♖c6 ♕xd1 23.♖xd1 ♘c5 24.f3± Pugh – Saksis, corr. 2001) 17.♖a2 ♗e6

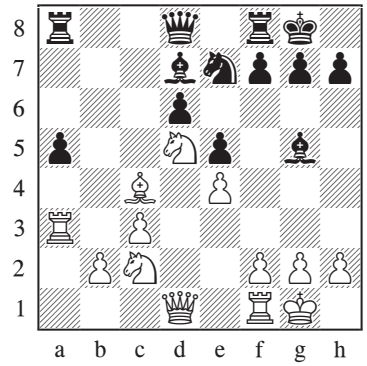


So far Volzhin – Chevallier, Metz 1994, and now 18.♗c4!±N is a good simple improvement.

14...♘e7!? 15.♗c4 a5

A perfectly reasonable way to play.

16.0–0 ♗d7 17.♖a3



17...♘xd5

I wondered what would happen after 17...a4, when the a4-pawn can seem annoying, but soon realized that it is a positional mistake, as the b4-square is highly useful for White and the a-pawn quickly becomes vulnerable. 18.♘cb4 ♖b8 (18...♔h8 19.♘xe7 ♗xe7 20.♕e2 ♕b8 21.♗d5 ♖a7 22.♗c6±) 19.g3 This seems the most flexible, but there are many good moves here. The following line should only be seen as an illustration. 19...♘xd5 20.♗xd5 Heading down a specific path with one idea in mind. (20.♕xd5±) 20...♕c8 21.♖xa4!? ♗xa4 22.♕xa4∞ White has a good game.

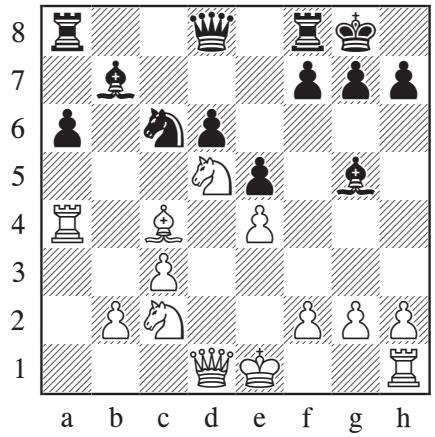
18.♗xd5 ♖b8 19.b4

19.b3!? is another possible move; White is just enjoying a pleasant moment here. As I see it, White can improve his position on both flanks with ease, while Black's task is more difficult.

19...axb4 20.♘xb4±

Shirov – Topalov, Morelia/Linares 2008. Black is *almost* OK, but he will have to defend for the entire game. Topalov had to find many accurate moves in order to hold – and failed to do so...

15.♗c4



15...♘a5

Starting the bishop-hopping plan mentioned above.

15...♘e7 The more standard plan, but in an ineffective version as White easily keeps control of d5. 16.0–0 a5 17.♕d3 ♗c6 18.♖a2 ♖b8 19.♖fa1± White has the traditional grip. For example: 19...♘xd5 20.♗xd5 ♗b5 21.♕d1 a4 22.g3 ♗d7 23.♘a3 ♕c7 24.♘c4 ♔h8 25.h4 ♗e7 We have arrived at Dorer – Scharf, email 2011, where White gained a big advantage with 26.♖xa4!±.

16.♗a2 ♗c6 17.♖a3 ♗b5

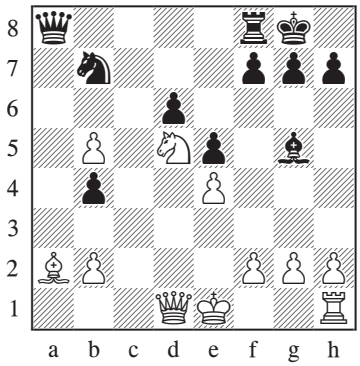
Just for a moment, this looks interesting: White is prevented from castling. But Black's queenside set-up is easily challenged.

17...♘b7 18.♘cb4 ♗b5

This is an even ropier version of the same idea:

19.c4 a5 20.cxb5 axb4 21.♖xa8 ♕xa8

Now we should vary from Schlachetka – Hamann, Germany 2002.



22.♗c4!N ♘c5 23.0–0!±

With the point being:

23...♘xe4 24.♕g4

And the tactics all work in White's favour:

24...♘d2

24...f5 25.♘b6† ♔h8 26.♕xg5 ♘xg5 27.♘xa8 ♖xa8 28.♖d1+–

25.♕xg5 ♘xc4 26.♘e7† ♔h8 27.♘f5 ♖g8 28.b3! f6

28...♘b6 29.♘xd6 ♕d5 30.♕e7+–

29.♕c1 ♘b6 30.♘xd6 h6 31.♕c5+–

18.h4 ♗h6

Or 18...♗f4 19.♘ce3 should transpose.

19.♘ce3 ♗xe3 20.♘xe3

The immediate threat is b2-b4 followed by ♗d5 and likely c3-c4.

20...♖c8

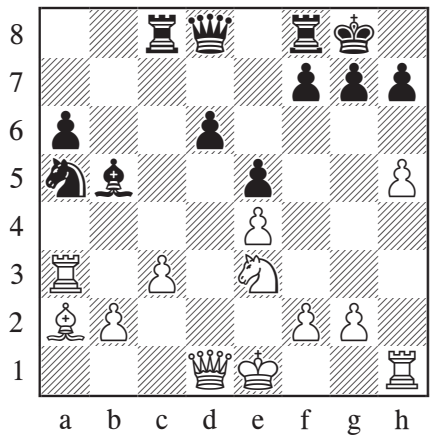
Allowing the a5-knight to advance to c4, if needed, takes some of the sting out of White's b2-b4 idea. But White can play on both sides of the board...

20...♘b7 is a grim retreat-and-hang-on plan.

For example: 21.♗d5 ♖a7 22.b4± De Holanda – Rivas Romero, email 1999, was well on its way to being a positional crush.

21.h5!±

Black is totally squeezed.



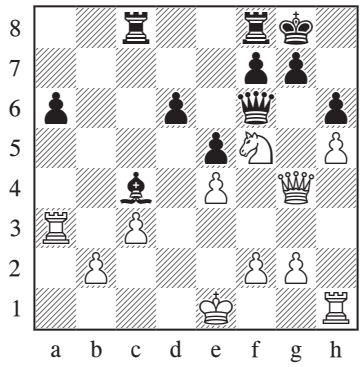
21...h6

Now the f5-square belongs to White's knight, but allowing the white pawn to reach h6 would create fresh problems.

21...♘c4 22.♗xc4 ♗xc4 23.h6 g6 The idea of ♕g7 mate is a hidden menace in many lines, which limits Black's options greatly. 24.♘xc4 ♖xc4 25.♕d3 ♕b6 26.0–0± We have seen enough to prove White's advantage, but the following sequence is instructive: 26...♕c6 (26...♕xb2 27.♕xd6!+– illustrates the value of the h6-pawn.) 27.♖d1 ♖d8 28.♖a5 ♕xe4 29.♖xa6 ♕h4 30.♖xd6 ♖xd6 31.♕xd6 White had a winning position in Ould Ahmed – Durandal, corr. 2009. The key point is that 31...♕xh6 loses to 32.♕b8†! ♕f8 33.♖d8.

22.♕g4 ♗d7

There is no longer time to play: 22...♘c4 White wins material by force after: 23.♗xc4 ♗xc4 24.♘f5 ♕f6



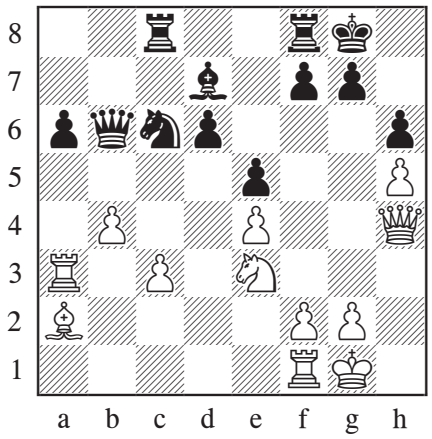
25.♕h4! Removing Black's best defender. 25...♕xh4 26.♖xh4± Threatening ♘e7† and ♘xd6, plus ♖g4; at least one pawn will drop.

23.♕h4

Also strong is 23.♘f5 ♗xf5 24.exf5± as Black's queen is once again overstretched, trying to hold both sides of his position together; f5-f6 is one threat.

23...♕b6 24.b4 ♘c6 25.0–0±

A dream position for our anti-Sveshnikov repertoire: a6 and d6 are weak, d5 is dominated, and a potential kingside attack is thrown in as a bonus.



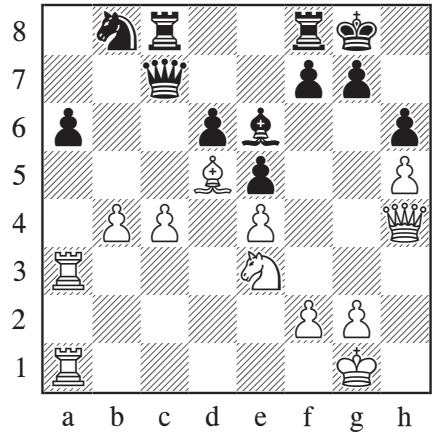
25...♗e6

The attempt to break free is 25...a5 but White has a lovely refutation: 26.♘d5 ♕b7 27.b5! ♕xb5 28.♘f6† gxf6 29.♕xf6 (29.c4+–

would also get the job done, though not as quickly.) Now the two main threats are c3-c4, freeing the rook, and ♕g6†; Black cannot stop them both. For example: 29...♕d3 30.♕g6† ♔h8 31.♕xh6† ♔g8 32.♕g6† ♔h8 33.♕f6† ♔h7 34.♗xf7+–

26.♗d5 ♘b8 27.♖fa1 ♕c7 28.c4

Black is completely dominated. The rest of the game is a simple mopping-up process.



28...♔h8 29.♘f5 ♗xf5 30.exf5 ♘d7 31.♖xa6 ♘f6 32.♖a7 ♕b6 33.♖b7 ♕d4 34.♕xd4 exd4 35.♗xf7 ♖a8 36.♖xa8 ♖xa8 37.f3

A beautifully controlled crush, and a perfect illustration of White's aims with the 9.♘d5 system.

1–0

Main Line – Rare 17th Moves

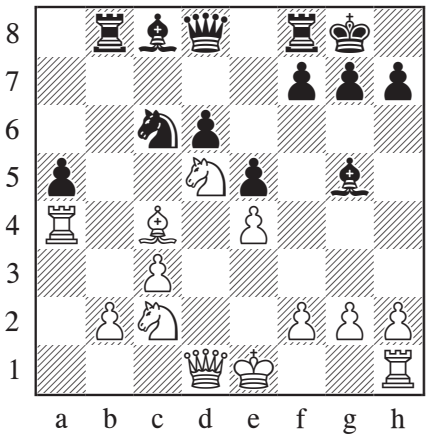
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 0–0 12.♘c2 ♗g5 13.a4 bxa4 14.♖xa4 a5

This move is certainly more challenging than the alternatives mentioned on page 216.

15.♗c4

Other options have been tried here, but the text move has been the main choice since the birth of the Sveshnikov Variation in the 1970s.

15...♖b8



16.b3

The most logical move.

16.♖a2 is the other main line here. This is more dangerous in the attacking lines where Black weakens his king's cover with ...g6 and White sacrifices a pawn with h4 (such as the modern classic Esserman – Fedorowicz in 2011, where White opened the second rank for the rook with b2-b4! at the right moment), but in the more positional lines where Black takes on e3 (as in the lines presented here) the rook is not so active at a2 and the move b2-b3 is much more useful. As White has good play in the attacking lines anyway (see Game 21) it is best to choose 16.b3, as most of the elite players do these days.

16...♔h8 17.♘ce3

This move "may be regarded as the ultimate main line of the Sveshnikov according to current theory" wrote Kotronias. With an opening as sound as the Sveshnikov, we need to use the best available weapons.

Black has tried a number of options. In the next game we will see 17...♘e7, before moving on to the absolute main line 17...g6. Before all that though, we will start with a few sidelines.

17...♗xe3

With the rook on a2, this is playable and most probably fine for Black, but with the rook active on a4, Black cannot equalize.

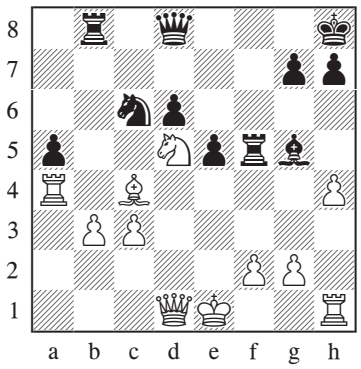
17...♗e6 18.h4!? also leaves Black short of equality. For example: 18...♗xe3 19.♘xe3 ♗xc4 20.♘xc4 f5 21.♘xd6±

17...f5?

This has been played quite often, but only by lower-rated players. In this case the ...f5-break merely opens lines for White's attack.

18.♘xf5 ♗xf5 19.exf5 ♖xf5 20.h4!

White has scored 6/6 from here, and indeed his position is already overwhelming.



20...♗xh4

Or 20...♗e7 21.♗d3 ♖f7 White can crash through with either 22.♖c4 or 22.♕h5 ♕g8 23.♖c4.

21.g3

And h7 is going. We can follow a Lanka game (often a good idea) to its quick end:

21...♗xg3 22.fxg3 e4 23.♕g4 ♖g5 24.♖xh7† ♔xh7 25.♕h4† ♔g6 26.♘f4†

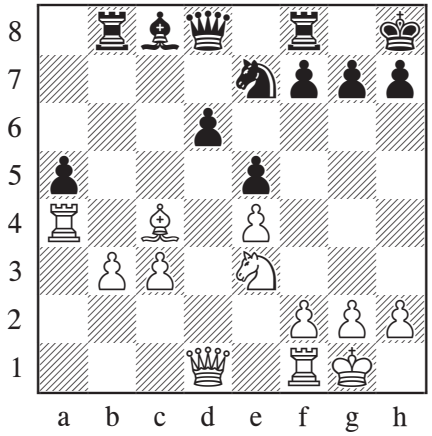
1–0 Lanka – Korsus, Kiel 2003.

18.♘xe3 ♘e7

Or 18...f5 is likely to transpose. Following 19.exf5 ♗xf5 20.0–0 Black has no better option than 20...♘e7. Instead 20...♗g6 21.♕d2 followed by ♖d1 puts quick pressure on d6.

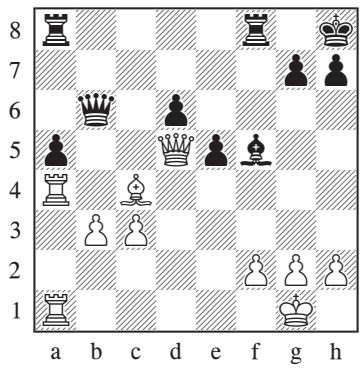
19.0–0±

To quote Rogozenko on this position: "White can play for a win without any risk of losing."



19...f5 20.exf5 ♗xf5

Instead 20...♘xf5?! is the main line with the rook at a2 and the pawn on b2 (see for example the game Carlsen – Van Wely, Schagen 2006) but here it is not good. 21.♘xf5 ♗xf5 22.♕d5 ♖a8 23.♖fa1 ♕b6



24.♖1a2! (Just for the record, 24.♖xa5 is also possible as 24...♗e4 can be met by 25.♕f7. Clever stuff, but White's advantage is greater after the text move.) 24...♗b1 25.♖d2 ♕d8 26.♖a1 ♗g6 27.♕xd6± Vuckovic – Bogosavljevic, Mataruska Banja 2008.

21.♖a2!

Rerouting to d2 is the most effective plan.

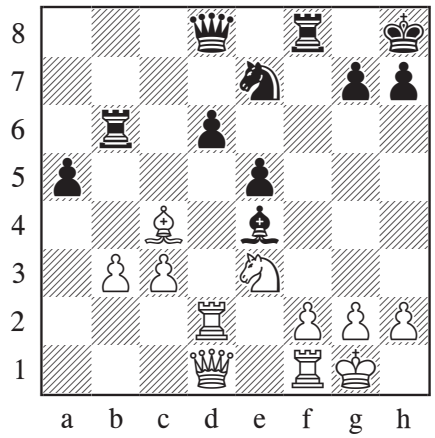
After 21.♘xf5 ♖xf5 22.♗d3 ♖f6 23.♗c2 ♕b6 24.b4 axb4 25.♖xb4 ♕c7 26.♕d3 White's edge was not so big in Karjakin – Khalifman, Amsterdam 2007.

21...♗e4

Here and on the following moves, both sides (but especially White!) have various plausible options.

For example, 21...♖f6 22.♖e1± is the usual pleasant niggle.

22.♖d2 ♖b6



23.♖e1

One of several promising moves.

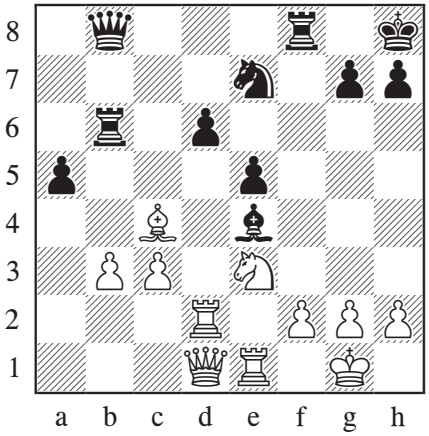
23.♕a1!? is a useful move in this and similar positions.

23.♗e6!? ♖f6 24.♗d5 is more purposeful than it may at first appear. After 24...♗xd5 25.♘xd5 Black must exchange again, so 25...♘xd5 26.♖xd5 and the presence of the rook on f6 weakens the back rank. 26...h6 (The back-rank issue shows up after 26...♕b8 27.c4 ♖xb3 28.c5± and a strong pawn will appear on d6.) Now in Kasimdzhanov – Tregubov, Bastia (rapid) 2006, White, no doubt due to time shortage, wasted his chance with: 27.♖xe5?! ♖xb3 28.♖xa5 ♖xc3= Instead 27.c4± would have kept a handy edge.

In contrast, the apparently more direct 23.♗d5 ♘xd5 24.♘xd5 allows Black to avoid the second exchange with 24...♖b7 when Black is close to level.

In what follows I will give several examples to give a better picture of how to play this variation.

23...♕b8



24.f3

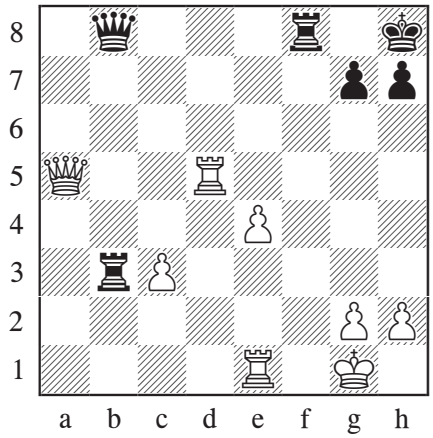
24.♕a1 is again a good alternative. For example: 24...♕c7 25.♖ed1 (25.♕a3!?) 25...d5 A cold-blooded way to simplify into an inferior but holdable ending. (Instead 25...h6 26.h3 ♗b7 27.♕a3 ♖d8 28.♗e6 ♕xc3 29.♖xd6± led to a convincing win in Leko – Radjabov, Morelia/Linares 2008.) 26.♘xd5 ♘xd5 27.♗xd5 ♗xd5 28.♖xd5 ♖xb3 29.♖xa5 (29.♕xa5 ♕xa5 30.♖xa5 ♖xc3 31.♖xe5 gives White the better side of a draw, as in Pawlowski – Schwenck, email 2008.) 29...♖xc3 30.♖a8 ♖g8 31.♖xg8† ♔xg8 32.♕a2† ♔f8 33.h4± Black's position is unpleasant, but should be defendable.

24...♗a8 25.♕a1 d5?!

Another 'simplify and grimly hang on' approach, but the resulting position is nasty.

More reliable was 25...e4 26.fxe4 ♗xe4 when White keeps an edge with 27.♕a3!±. However, please note that the hasty 27.♕xa5? allows drawish liquidation after 27...d5.

26.♘xd5 ♗xd5 27.♗xd5 ♘xd5 28.♖xd5 ♖xb3 29.♕xa5 e4 30.fxe4±



In Gappel – Balosetti, corr. 2009, Black somehow managed to hold this endgame, but it is clearly a borderline case: engines will find defensive resources, but try to defend it yourself and you will find how difficult it is.

17...♘e7

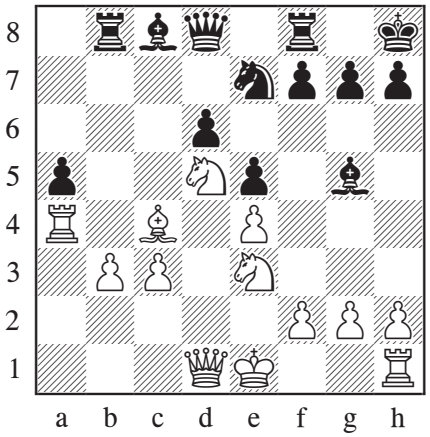
GAME 20

Juergen Stephan – Sakae Ohtake

Correspondence 2008

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 0–0 12.♘c2 ♗g5 13.a4 bxa4 14.♖xa4 a5 15.♗c4 ♖b8 16.b3 ♔h8 17.♘ce3 ♘e7

This was recommended by Kotronias in *The Sicilian Sveshnikov*. It's the second-most-common move in the position, a long way behind 17...g6.



18.♘xe7 ♕xe7 19.♘d5 ♕d8 20.0–0 f5

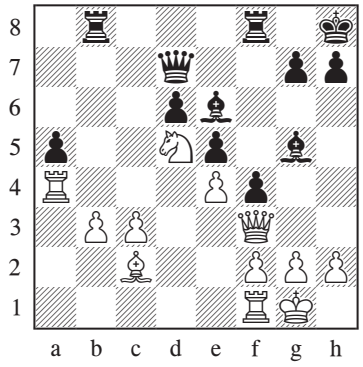
Black needs to create counterplay, and in this position that means ...f7-f5.

20...♗d7 21.♖a2 f5 22.♕e2! is just a transposition.

21.♕e2!

The most promising as far as I am concerned, but very rarely played and not mentioned in Kotronias's book.

21.♗d3 ♗e6 22.♗c2 f4! 23.♕f3 ♕d7 and Black had a strong attack in Kuzmin – Khan, email 2013. Black won this game in great style after a pawn advance on the kingside. But what matters is of course what happens if White takes the a-pawn.



24.♖xa5N ♗g4 25.♕d3 f3 26.g3 ♗h3 27.♖fa1 ♗g2 28.♖a7 ♕h3 29.b4 ♗h1 30.♕f1 ♗g2 with a draw by repetition. Black does not have anything more, but this is scary enough!

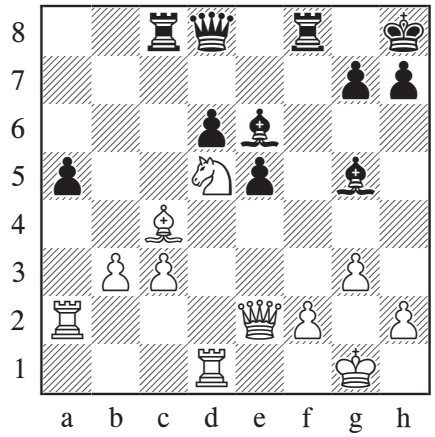
21.exf5 ♗xf5 22.♕e2 is the main line given by Kotronias. I suspect White can put a bit of pressure on Black here as well, but overall it is not much.

21...♗d7 22.♖a2 fxe4 23.♕xe4

Natural but not compulsory.

23.♖fa1!? is one of the ideas behind the ♕e2 move; White does not need to take back on e4 at once, as the pawn is going nowhere. For example: 23...a4 (23...♕e8 24.♖xa5 ♕g6 25.b4 ♗d8 26.♖a8 and White went on to win in Ivanov – Dobrica, email 2009) 24.bxa4 e3 25.♘xe3 ♕a5 26.♘d5 ♗c6 27.♖d1 ♕c5 28.♕d3 ♗e8 29.♗b5 ♗h5 30.♖f1 And we have another long correspondence win in Schumacher – Langheld, email 2013.

23...♗f5 24.♕e2 ♗e6 25.♖d1 ♖c8 26.g3



26...♖c5?!

Donating a tempo or two to White's cause.

26...♖b8

This is Black's best.

27.♖d3!

With the idea to reduce Black's counterplay by exchanging one pair of rooks on f3.

Another move that has been tried here is 27.♕e1 but after 27...♗g4 28.♖da1 ♕c8 29.♖xa5 ♗f3! Black has the same type of counterplay as can occur in the 21.exf5 line mentioned above. This type of position could easily cost White a loss in a practical game. My proposed 27.♖d3 is also prophylaxis against this type of idea.

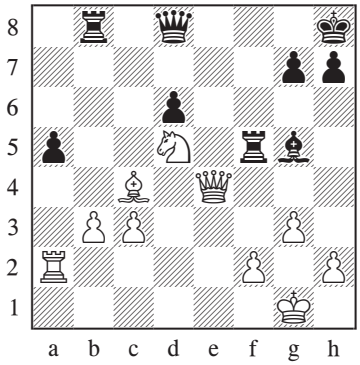
27...♗f5

After 27...♕d7 28.♖xa5 Black doesn't seem to have enough for the material he just gave up.

28.♖f3 e4

Black's only chance to obtain counterplay.

29.♖xf5! ♖xf5 30.♕xe4±



White has excellent compensation for the exchange and he is effectively the only one playing for the full point, as Black's attacking potential has been significantly reduced. One sample line is:

30...♖e5 31.♕d4 ♗f6 32.♕d3 g6 33.b4 axb4 34.cxb4

White plans a gradual expansion, probably with ♔g2, f2-f4 and b4-b5.

27.b4! axb4 28.cxb4 ♖c8 29.b5±

White scores pretty well from here in correspondence chess. With the main game, and another in the notes, we will see two crazy games between strong correspondence GMs.

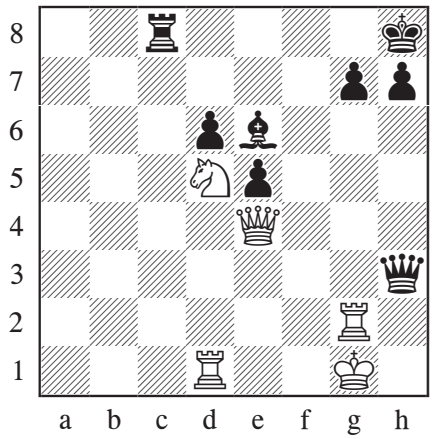
29...♖c5 30.h4 ♗xh4

If Black retreats then the b-pawn is strong, so exposing the white king is a worthy try.

31.b6 ♕g5 32.♕e4 ♗xg3 33.fxg3 ♕xg3† 34.♖g2 ♕h3 35.b7 ♖xc4 36.b8=♕ ♖xb8 37.♕xc4

After a flurry of tactics, it's time to count the pieces: Black has four pawns for a rook. It's not enough as the pawns are no threat. The white king has zero pawn cover, but is secure on g1; Black cannot even create a check. So the rest of the game is a mopping-up procedure.

37...♖c8 38.♕e4



38...♕h5

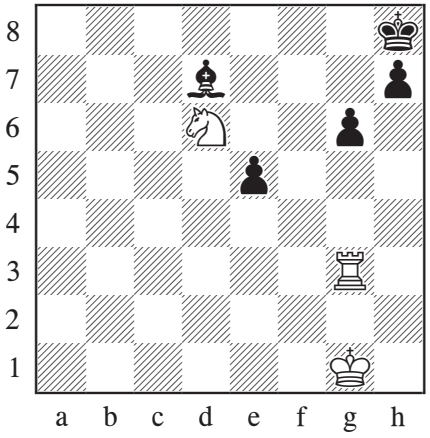
The other correspondence game finally deviated with 38...♕b3 but it was the same story: 39.♘e3 ♖c4 40.♕d3 ♕b6 41.♖f2 ♖f4 42.♖a1 ♕c6 43.♕c2 ♕xc2 44.♖xc2 h5 45.♖d2 ♖d4 46.♖xd4 exd4 47.♘c2 In Stalmach – V. Grigoryev, email 2008, Black could have called it a day here, but he went to a bitter end 20 moves later.

39.♖a1 ♗h3 40.♖g3 ♗e6 41.♘c3 ♖g8 42.♕b4 ♖d8 43.♕b7 ♕f7 44.♖a7 ♕xb7 45.♖xb7

I would have given up here.

45...g6 46.♖e7 ♗f5 47.♘b5 ♖d7 48.♖xd7 ♗xd7 49.♘xd6

Or failing that, here.



49...♔g7 50.♖a3 ♔f6 51.♖a7 ♔e6 52.♘f7 ♗c8 53.♔f2 ♔d5 54.♖e7 ♔d4 55.♖xe5 ♗f5 56.♖e7 h5 57.♔g3 ♗b1 58.♔h4
1–0

17...g6

GAME 21

Anish Giri – Alexei Shirov

Hoogeveen 2014

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 0–0 12.♘c2 ♗g5 13.a4 bxa4 14.♖xa4 a5 15.♗c4 ♖b8 16.b3 ♔h8 17.♘ce3 g6

The big main line; obviously Black has ...f7-f5 in mind.

18.h4!

This bold move was first played by Gyula Sax in 1996. We will use the half-open h-file, and prove that 17...g6 weakened the h7-pawn.

Instead after 18.0–0 f5 there would be a

double-edged battle, where 17...g6 has made a positive contribution.

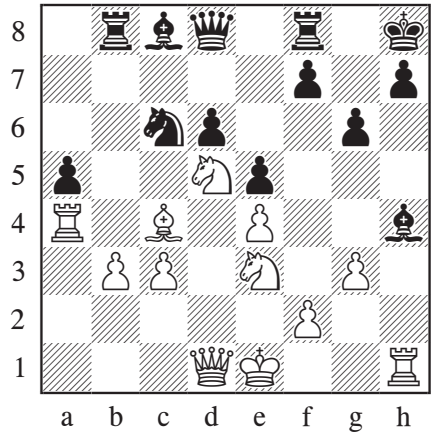
18...♗xh4

The critical test, and almost universally played.

18...♗xe3 19.♘xe3 ♘e7 20.h5± leads effortlessly to pleasant play for White.

19.g3

The h-file is key to our plan, with f2-f4 the other big idea, so this tempo-gainer is automatic.



19...♗g5

The most combative reply.

19...♗e7? is a feeble move which allows White a similar attacking scheme to the game, except with his king far more secure. The right reply is 20.♖a2! followed almost certainly by f2-f4.

Black hardly does any better with:

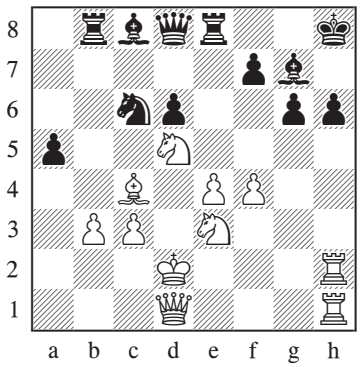
19...♗f6?! 20.♖a2! ♗g7 21.f4 exf4 22.gxf4 ♖e8

The correspondence players have shown White the right path:

23.♖ah2!

23.♕f3 was less convincing in Ponomariov – Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2005.

23...h6 24.♔d2!+–



With the king clear of the e-file, White has overwhelming threats, including ♘f5 or f4-f5. Here are some sample lines:

24...♖xe4

24...♔g8 25.♘f5! gxf5 26.♖g2 ♔h8 27.♕h5 ♖e6 28.exf5 ♖f6 29.♕g5 and White wins with the sheer brute force of the heavy pieces.

25.♖xh6†! ♔g8

25...♗xh6 26.♖xh6† ♔g7 27.♕h1 and White wins. The last move shows another point of the wonderful 24.♔d2! in clearing the back rank.

26.♕g1! ♖xe3 27.♖h8†! ♗xh8 28.♕xg6† ♗g7 29.♕h7† ♔f8 30.♖g1+–

Black may be a rook and bishop up, but far more than that will soon drop.

20.f4!

I mentioned Sax played 18.h4 in 1996, but it was not until 2005 that 20.f4 was played (by Topalov) after which the line really took off. Today I consider this promising for White, even though the last word has not been spoken yet.

20...exf4 21.gxf4 ♗h4†

Almost universally played, and for good reason.

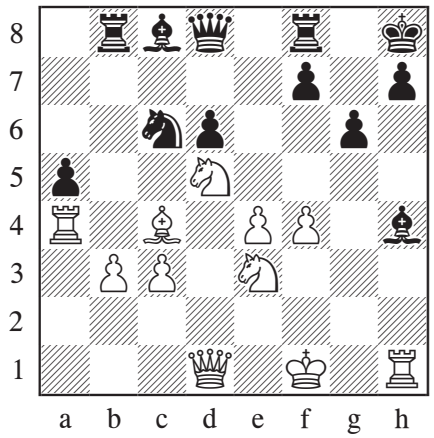
21...♗f6? 22.♖a2! The attacking themes are, unsurprisingly, similar to the 19...♗f6 line mentioned above. For example: 22...♖g8 (22...♔g7 23.♘f5†! ♗xf5 (23...gxf5 24.♖g2†

♔h8 25.♖xh7† ♔xh7 26.♕h5#) 24.exf5 a4 25.♖ah2+– was played in a freestyle game.) 23.♖ah2! ♖g7 24.♖h6!+– Gulevich – Nadeev, email 2010. Followed by ♕e2-h2 and f4-f5; White has a winning attack.

22.♔f1!

This game was not the first time this move was played, but it was the first high-profile game. White has a very strong attack.

Practice has shown that 22.♔d2 ♘e7! defends for Black, so White's idea is to leave the second rank clear for the time being.



22...f5

This is forced; Black needs counterplay fast.

22...♘e7?! 23.♖a2!+– and White's attack is unstoppable.

22...g5 23.♕h5 f6 24.♘g2± looks great for White.

Finally, 22...♖g8 23.♖a2 ♖g7 24.♖ah2 g5 25.♘g2± is also ugly for Black.

23.♖a2!

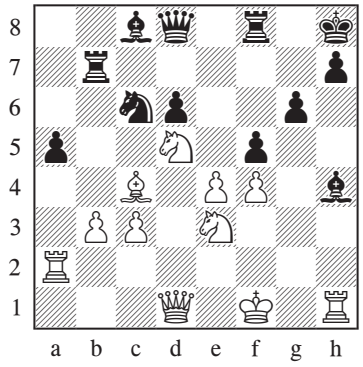
With our king exposed, total precision is required.

23.exf5?! ♗xf5 24.♘xf5 ♖xf5 gives Black enough play for at least equality.

23...fxe4

The move that is almost always played.

23...♖b7



This has been played in two games, but it does not work:

24.♗a6!N ♖bf7 25.♗xc8 fxe4 26.♔g1!

As usual, our shaky king means we must be precise before reaping the rewards.

26.♗e6? is just one example to show how a seemingly obvious move can throw away all our advantage: 26...♖xf4† 27.♘xf4 ♖xf4† 28.♔g1 (28.♔g2 ♕g5†) 28...♕g5† 29.♘g4 (29.♘g2 ♕c5† 30.♔h2 ♕g5 and White has nothing better than repeating with 31.♔g1) 29...♘e5 30.♕xd6 ♖xg4† 31.♗xg4 ♕xg4† 32.♖g2 ♕f4 and White has to take the perpetual.

26...♗g3 27.♗e6 ♖xf4 28.♘xf4 ♗xf4 29.♘g4±

It's messy enough to stop me claiming a clear win, but Black is out of checks, so White's rook outweighs Black's three pawns.

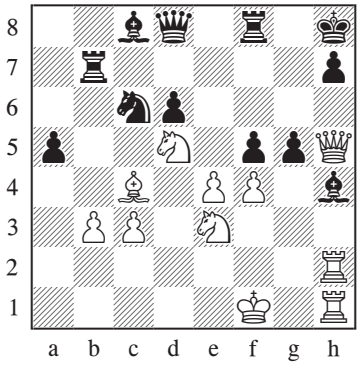
23...g5

This has many transpositional possibilities, but Black should avoid the independent lines. Let's see:

24.♖ah2 ♖b7

24...fxe4 transposes to the game.

25.♕h5



25...♗e6?!

Wiser is 25...fxe4 26.♔e2 ♗e6 and we have transposed to our main game.

26.fxg5 fxe4† 27.♘f6 ♖xf6†

This has to be tried.

28.gxf6 ♕xf6† 29.♔e2

It feels messy but in fact White has it under control.

29...♗xc4†

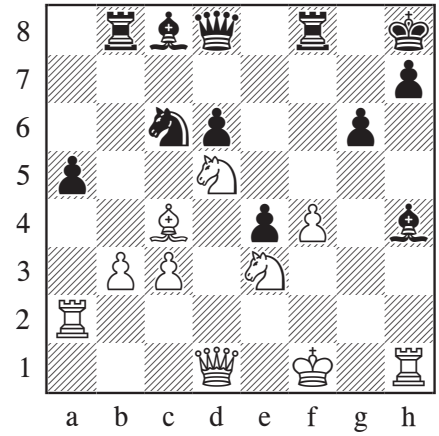
29...♕f3† 30.♕xf3 exf3† 31.♔xf3 ♘e5† 32.♔e4 ♘xc4 33.bxc4±

30.♘xc4!

30.bxc4 ♘d4†! looks about level.

30...♖e7 31.♖c1!±

One last careful move. Instead 31.♖xh4? ♕xc3∓ might spoil all our efforts.



24.♖ah2 g5

The only move.

25.♕h5!

It takes both engines and humans quite a while to appreciate the power of the queen jump to h5, but it works beautifully.

In his ChessBase analysis, Rogozenko only mentions 25.♘g2 ♖b7 26.♘xh4 gxh4 27.♖xh4 ♖g7 and correctly states that Black is fine.

25...♖b7

Lending support to h7 looks logical, but the tactics work in White's favour.

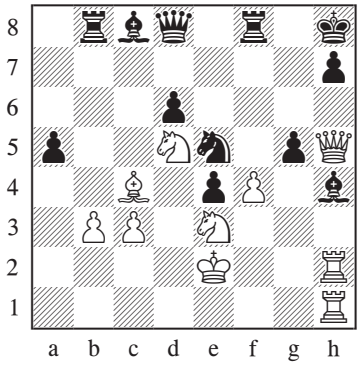
25...♗e6 26.♔e2 gives Black nothing better than 26...♖b7!, transposing to our main game.

25...♘e5!

The only move that survives in correspondence chess. According to Giri, this leads to a bad endgame, but even so, this is Black's best bet. Otherwise he is practically lost. The analysis that follows is necessarily detailed; to take on the Sveshnikov we need a sharp-edged weapon.

26.♔e2!

Absolutely the only move.



26...♘xc4

One of two main options.

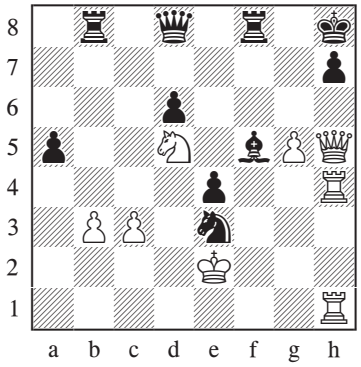
26...♗g4† 27.♘xg4 ♘xc4 28.bxc4 ♕c8 The best try. (Instead, for example, 28...♕d7? 29.♘gf6+– is disastrous.) 29.♘ge3 Black has no effective continuation. For example:

29...♕d7 30.♕h6 ♖f7 31.♘c2!? (31.♘d1!?N ♖bf8 32.♔d2± is also promising) 31...♖xf4 32.♔d2 ♖f7 33.♖e2 a4 34.♖xe4 a3 35.♖e2 ♖e8 36.♖hh2 ♖b8 37.♘xa3 ♗g3 38.♖hg2 ♕f5 39.♘c2 White went on to win in Manso Gil – Korze, corr. 2012.

27.fxg5! ♖xb3

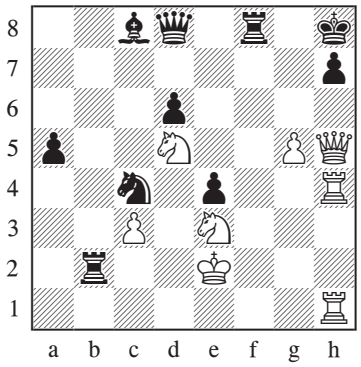
The only move to avoid instant disaster.

27...♘xe3? 28.♖xh4 ♗f5 was Gantsooj – Bigabylov, Chalkidiki 2016.



29.♘xe3!N A winning novelty. 29...♕c8 Allowing one of the main threats. (But the alternative allows the other: 29...♖b7 30.♘xf5 ♖xf5 31.♕xh7†+– and White will soon have an extra rook.) 30.g6! ♖b7 31.♕xh7† Not the only way, but forcing and fun. 31...♖xh7 32.♖xh7† ♔g8 33.♘d5 ♕d8 (Or 33...♕a6† 34.c4 ♖d8 saves the queen but loses the king: 35.♘f6† ♔f8 36.♖f7#) 34.♘e7† ♕xe7 35.♖xe7 ♗xg6 36.♖e6+–

28.♖xh4 ♖b2†



Now White has a choice between two promising options:

29.♘c2!?N

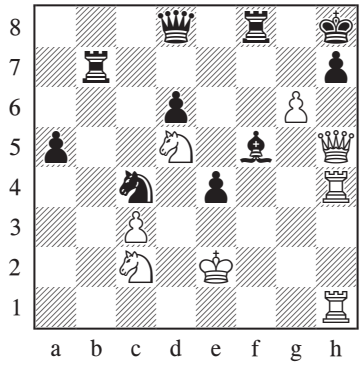
29.♔e1 ♖b1† 30.♘d1 ♗f5 31.g6 ♖b7 32.♖f4 (White is also better after 32.♕e2!?N ♗xg6 33.♕xc4 ♕g5 34.♕d4† ♔g8 35.♖4h2±) 32...♗e6 (32...♗xg6?! 33.♖xf8† ♕xf8 34.♕xg6 ♖g7 35.♕xe4± led to the conversion of the extra piece after an additional 30 moves in Korneev – Huerga Leache, Linares 2015. Korneev really knows his theory and is worth following for excellent repertoire recommendations.) 33.♖xf8† ♕xf8 34.♕xh7† ♖xh7 35.♖xh7† ♔g8 36.♘e7† ♕xe7 37.♖xe7 ♗f5 38.g7 (38.♖c7!?±) 38...a4 39.♔f2 a3 40.♘e3 ♘xe3 41.♔xe3 a2 ½–½, Zemlyanov – Gilbert, email 2013. Now 42.♖a7 ♗e6 43.♔xe4 ♗f7 44.♔d4 ♔xg7 45.c4 ♔f6 46.♖xa2 may look like progress, but the endgame is a tablebase draw – and not a very difficult one.

29...♗f5

29...♖xc2†? 30.♔d1 wins easily, as the rook can no longer defend along the 7th rank.

29...♖b7 30.g6 ♘e5 31.♘ce3± also puts Black under serious pressure.

30.g6 ♖b7

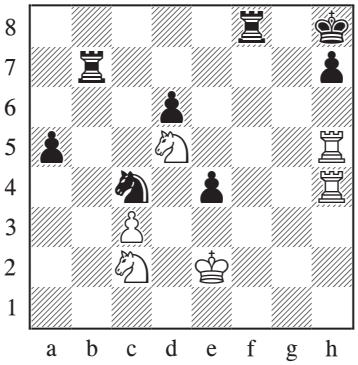


31.♖g1!

I noticed that someone had analysed 31.♖b1 on the Playchess engine-sharing function. It seems to me that, although 31...♗xg6 32.♖xb7 looks very fancy, there is a potential problem after: 32...♗xh5† 33.♖xh5 ♖f7

34.♖xf7 ♕g8 35.♖fxh7† ♕xh7 36.♖xh7† ♔xh7 37.♘f6† (37.♘ce3!?) 37...♔g6 38.♘xe4± My concern here is that Black may be able to give up his knight for the c-pawn under circumstances that are within the drawing parameters.

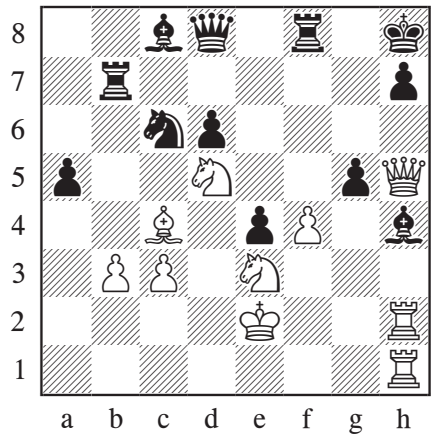
31...♗xg6 32.♖xg6 ♕e8 33.♖h6 ♕xh5† 34.♖6xh5±



With good winning chances for White. It is true that Black has some drawing chances as well. But for the outcome of the opening, this is almost as good as it gets.

26.♔e2±

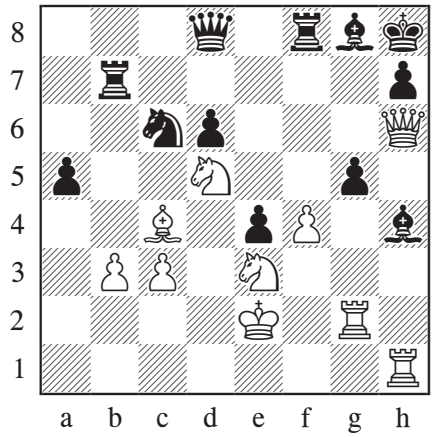
As ever, our king requires care, but it really is a clear advantage to White if you look deeply enough.



26...♗e6 27.♕h6 ♗g8

No better is 27...♗xd5 28.♘xd5 ♖ff7 29.♕e6± Black remains two pawns up, but his pieces are dominated, while facing many threats. One quiet idea for White is ♔d1, stepping away to safety from the potentially-opening e-file, while retaining all the threats.

28.♖g2



28...♖bf7?

Allowing a big tactical punch.

Giri wrote that he had studied some correspondence games in his preparation. One of them went like this: 28...♗xd5 29.♘xd5 ♘e7 30.♖xg5 ♘xd5 31.♖xd5 ♗f6 32.♖dh5 ♕e7 33.♗d5± Agrafenin – Trebizan, email 2012. Black held this game, but I would not build my Black repertoire on this. Even Houdini would not suggest it!

29.♖xh4! gxh4 30.♘f5

Good enough, but perhaps 30.f5 planning f5-f6, was simpler.

30...h3 31.♘h4!

Forcing play limits Black's options, and secures the win.

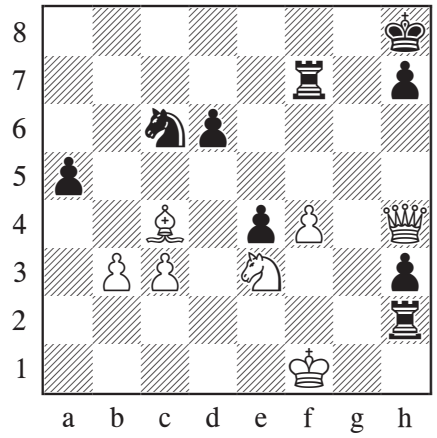
But even the less direct 31.♖g3 also won. For example: 31...♕d7 32.♘f6!+–

31...♕xh4

Black had no choice due to the threat of ♘g6#.

32.♖xg8† ♖xg8 33.♕xh4 ♖g2† 34.♔f1 ♖h2 35.♘e3+–

Finally all is clear. Black manages a few checks, but the outcome is certain.



35...♖g7 36.♕f6 ♖h1† 37.♔f2 ♖h2† 38.♔e1 ♖h1† 39.♔d2 ♖h2† 40.♔c1 ♘e7 41.♘f5 ♖hg2 42.♘xg7 ♖xg7 43.♕f8† ♘g8 44.♗xg8 ♖xg8 45.♕f6† ♖g7 46.♕h4
1–0

Conclusion

After 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 we had a brief look at 6...h6 and 6...a6. The former allows White a pleasant endgame, while the latter is a poor version of the Lowenthal.

After 6...d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 we saw why 8...♗e6, the Lasker variation, is far less respectable than the main line, though note the tricky 9...♖b8!?, which is a modern attempt to revive it.

Normal is 8...b5 9.♘d5 when the sideline 9...♕a5† effectively offers a draw. Naturally we decline, but to gain promising play we need to learn a few forcing lines. That's an annoying workload against a mere sideline, but it's the only way to make the most of our chances.

The main tabiya of the positional Sveshnikov is reached after 9...♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3.

11...♘e7 is a Krasenkow favourite; Black allows doubled f-pawns but plans to break in the centre. After 12.♘xf6† gxf6 I mentioned two lines: 13.♗e2!? is easy to learn, but Black might just hold; 13.♗d3 requires a lot of work, but looks good for White.

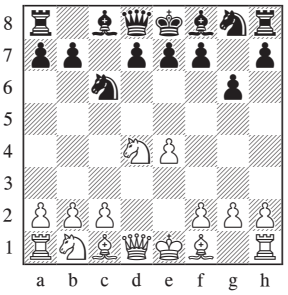
We then saw 11...♗b7 when Black can try a couple of versions of a ...♘c6-b8-d7 plan; both are too slow, with a quick a2-a4 the key idea.

11...♗g5 followed by ...♘e7 is as solid a defence as White will ever face. We cannot refute it, but we can force Black into an unpleasant defensive task where a draw is the height of his ambition. White should note that 13.h4! is the right move order, avoiding a nasty novelty in the 13.a4 move order.

11...♗g5 followed by ...♖b8 forces us to switch off auto-pilot, as a2-a4 has been discouraged. However, we have a simple yet powerful plan with ♗e2, 0–0 and ♕d3.

Then finally we saw the main line of the Sveshnikov, which starts 11...0–0 12.♘c2 ♗g5 13.a4 bxa4 14.♖xa4, and continues in great detail and depth. This is a line where White needs precise knowledge, as there are several sharp variations where White's king is exposed. It's all under control if you know what you are doing, so this is a topic that demands serious homework. The Sveshnikov is a tough defence: we need a heavyweight weapon against it.

Chapter 7



Accelerated Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 g6 5.c4

A) 5...♘f6 6.♘c3 d6 7.f3! ♘xd4 (7...♗g7) **8.♕xd4 ♗g7 9.♗e3 0–0 10.♕d2** **233**
A1) 10...♗e6 (10...♕a5) **235**
A2) 10...a5 **236**
B) 5...♗g7 6.♗e3 ♘f6 (6...♘h6) **7.♘c3** (7...d6) **238**
B1) 7...♘g4 8.♕xg4 ♘xd4 (8...♗xd4?) **9.♕d1** (9...♘c6) **239**
B11) 9...e5 **240**
B12) 9...♘e6 **244**
B2) 7...0–0 8.♗e2 **247**
B21) 8...b6 **248**
B22) 8...d6 9.f3! (9...♘h5; 9...♕b6?!) **250**
B221) 9...♘xd4 10.♗xd4 **252**
B2211) 10...a6 11.♕d2 ♗e6 12.♘d5! **252**
12...♘d7 (12...b5N; 12...♘xd5) **252**
12...♗xd5 *Game 22* **254**
B2212) 10...♗e6 **257**
B222) 9...♗d7 10.♕d2 **260**
B2221) 10...♕a5 **261**
B2222) 10...a6 **262**
B2223) 10...♘xd4 **263**

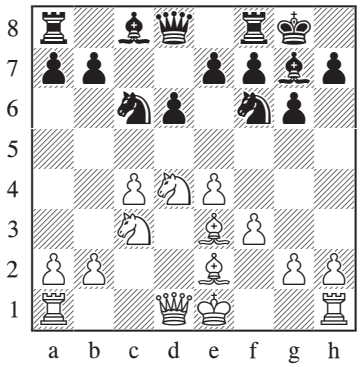
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 g6

This is the Accelerated Dragon. Compared with a normal Dragon, it has the advantage of allowing Black to play ...d7-d5 (without wasting a tempo on ...d6) in certain lines. The disadvantage is that it allows White to establish a clear space advantage with the following move.

5.c4

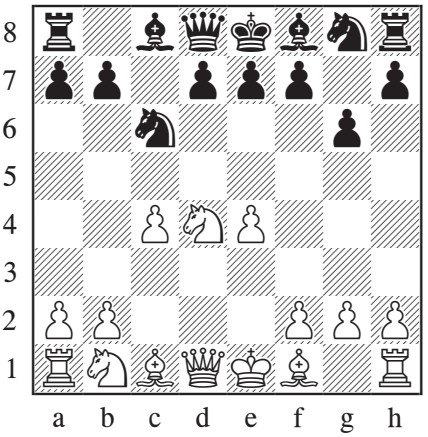
5.♘c3 is the main alternative and Negi's recommendation in *1.e4 vs. the Sicilian II*, but it is not compatible with the set-up I am recommending against the Dragon.

The text move introduces the Maroczy System, which is the main reason why Black's set-up is not more popular. (In other words, if 5.c4 wasn't a good move and everybody played 5.♘c3, then every Dragon player would favour the 'Accelerated' move order.) In most of the lines, White tends to get a small but lasting advantage. I was also attracted to a much more recent concept involving long castling in certain lines, which can be surprisingly effective in the right circumstances. If Black goes for simple development, we will aim for the following target position:



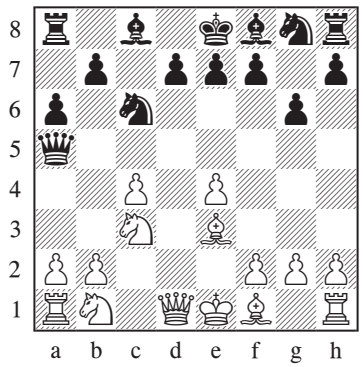
By playing an early f2-f3 instead of 0–0, White keeps the option of castling on either side. We will continue the discussion of this position in variation B22; for now though, just keep it in mind as a memory marker, as it can arise via several different move orders.

Let's return to our main tabiya of the chapter.



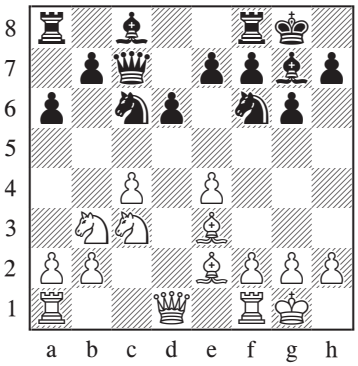
Black has two main options: **A) 5...♘f6** and **B) 5...♗g7**. Each has its own pros, cons and unique possibilities. In both cases, we will aim for the target position noted above. First though, we will take a quick look at a few sidelines:

5...♕b6 6.♘b5 a6 7.♗e3 ♕a5† 8.♘5c3 is an unusual sequence; Black wastes a few tempos with his queen and White wastes a few with his knight, but the end result tends to be fairly close to a normal Maroczy position. For example:



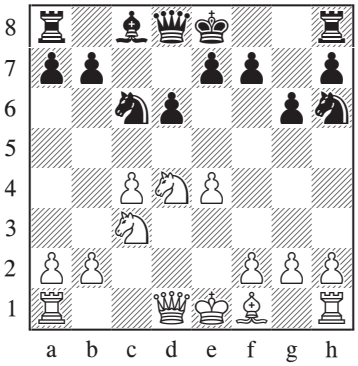
8...♘f6 (8...♗h6!? 9.♗xh6 ♘xh6 10.♕d2 ♘g4 occurred in Lenz – Bakre, Oberwart 2005,

when 11.♘d5!?N ♕xd2† 12.♘xd2 ♖b8 13.c5± would have been pleasant for White) 9.♘d2 ♗g7 10.♗e2 d6 11.0–0 0–0 12.♘b3 ♕c7 In Holfelder – Krolla, Wiesbaden 1992, White could have obtained a pleasant advantage with:



13.♘d5!?N ♕b8 (13...♕d8?! 14.♗b6 ♕d7 15.f3±) 14.♕c2±

5...♗h6!? looks odd, but even Tiviakov has tried it out. There are certain variations of the Maroczy in which Black tends to benefit from an exchange of the dark-squared bishops, but here White can use it to his own advantage, especially with the help of a timely c4-c5 break. For instance: 6.♘c3 d6 (6...♗xc1 7.♖xc1 d6 8.c5!?N dxc5 9.♘xc6 ♕xd1† 10.♖xd1 bxc6 11.♘a4±) 7.♗xh6 ♘xh6 In Boxberg – Stuemer, Goch 2013, White could have obtained excellent chances with:



8.c5!?N dxc5 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♕xd8† ♔xd8 11.f3 f5 12.0–0–0† ♔c7 13.♗c4±

A) 5...♘f6 6.♘c3 d6

The rationale for this move order (instead of an early ...♗g7) is that Black wants to swap knights on d4 and force White to recapture with the queen rather than a bishop. White cannot really prevent this plan with 7.♗e3, as 7...♘g4 would be awkward; that's why Black played ...d6 on the last move.

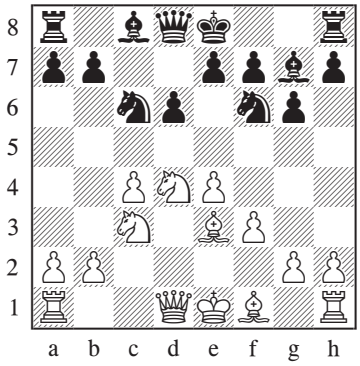
7.f3!

Recently this move order has become more popular, as Black has achieved good results after 7.♗e2 ♘xd4 8.♕xd4 ♗g7 9.♗e3 0–0 10.♕d2 a5! followed by ...a4. Unlike in variation A2 below, here White cannot block the pawn with ♘a4 because the e4-pawn will be left hanging.

7...♘xd4

Black continues with his plan.

7...♗g7 is a major alternative. 8.♗e3 is obvious and good, but it is important for White to follow up correctly. I would like to emphasize two important details:



a) 8...♘xd4 should still be met by 9.♕xd4, transposing to our main line below. With the bishop already on e3, it may seem tempting to recapture with the bishop, but it's less accurate for reasons explained in the note below.

b) 8...0–0 should be met by 9.♗e2!, reaching the target position identified on page 232, which will be covered later under the 5...♗g7 move order; see variation B22 on page 250.

It is important to understand that 9.♕d2?! would lead to a worse version of the main line below after 9...♘xd4! 10.♗xd4 ♗e6, followed by ...♕a5, ...♖fc8 and so on. The difference here is that White's dark-squared bishop sits on the unfavourable d4-square rather than e3, which is enough to reduce his advantage to zero. Whenever the knight moves from f6, White will either have to exchange bishops or waste time retreating to e3, either of which helps Black.

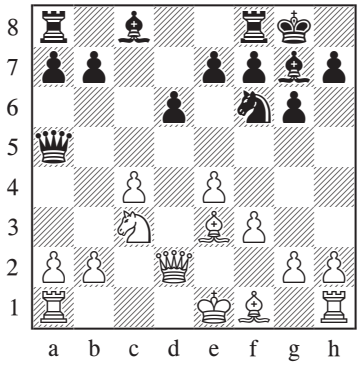
8.♕xd4 ♗g7

Black carries out his plan. For the moment, Black is not threatening a discovered attack, as the g7-bishop is undefended. Obviously Black intends to castle on the next move, so White should be ready to retreat his queen once that happens.

9.♗e3 0–0 10.♕d2

Black's two most important options are **A1) 10...♗e6** and **A2) 10...a5**.

10...♕a5



This is also quite popular, but it usually transposes to variation A1.

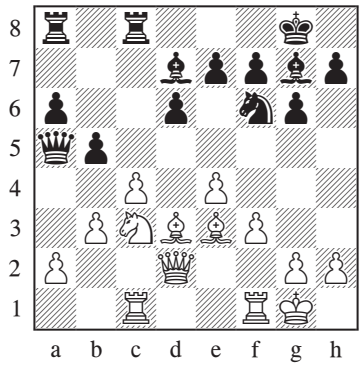
11.♖c1 a6

11...♗e6 has been by far the most popular choice, leading straight to variation A1.

12.b3 ♗d7

12...♗e6 13.♗d3! transposes again.

13.♗d3 ♖fc8 14.0–0 b5



15.♖c2!±

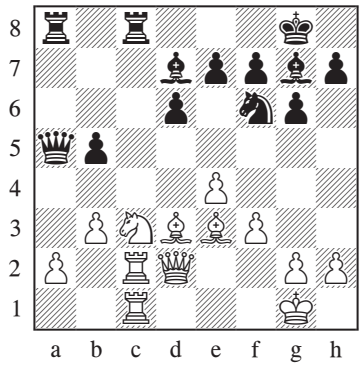
Now we see the drawback of Black's choice of the d7-square for his bishop. True, it helped to support the ...b5 break, but White can safely ignore it, as exchanging on c4 would only help to activate White's light-squared bishop.

15...♗e6

This was Black's choice in the original game from this position. Now the threat of ...bxc4 forces White to react, but the loss of time with the bishop is an important detail.

15...b4 was tried in some later games, but 16.♘d5 and 16.♘e2 both favour White; the choice is a matter of taste.

16.cxb5 axb5 17.♖fc1 ♗d7

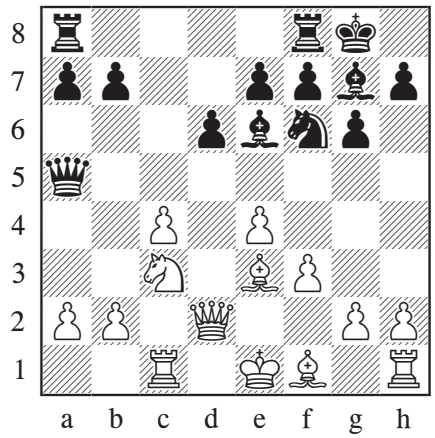


Black has spent several tempos moving his bishop back and forth, but he probably thought it was worth it due to the improvement in his structure. However, he was in for an unpleasant surprise.

18.♘xb5!! ♖xc2 19.♖xc2 ♗xb5 20.♖c8† ♖xc8 21.♕xa5 ♗xd3 22.b4±

Normally a rook and two minor pieces would be more than a match for a queen, but White's passed pawns on the queenside tip the balance in his favour, and he soon won in Portisch – Gheorghiu, Siegen (ol) 1970.

A1) 10...♗e6 11.♖c1 ♕a5



Black sets in motion a thematic plan of ...♖fc8, ...a6 and ...b5, but White is well placed to meet it here.

12.♗d3!

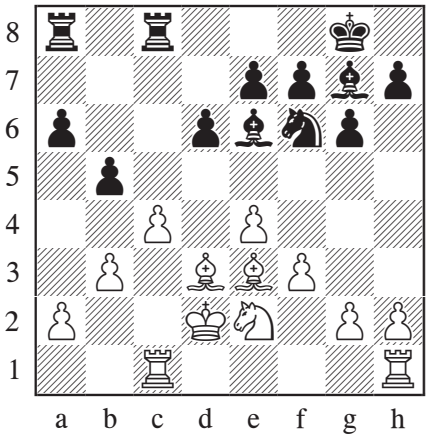
12.♘d5 is a decent alternative, when 12...♕xa2! 13.♘xe7† ♔h8 is the key line. The theory runs quite deep, and the general picture is that Black is under some pressure but can probably hold with good defence. I prefer the text move, as it avoids any long theoretical lines while still posing quite a lot of problems for Black. Peter Lalic does not consider this possibility in *Play the Accelerated Dragon*.

12...♖fc8 13.b3 a6 14.♘e2!

Now we see the advantage of developing the bishop on d3 instead of e2. The knight is heading for either f4 or d4, depending on circumstances.

14...♕xd2† 15.♔xd2 b5

15...♘d7 16.♘f4 ♘c5 17.♗e2 (17.g4!?N also looks promising) 17...a5 18.h4± gave White an enduring edge in Kasparov – Kasimdzhanov, Batumi 2001.



16.♘d4 bxc4?

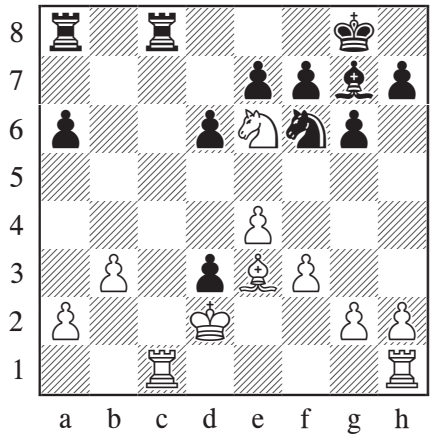
Black has committed this mistake in two games so far.

16...♗d7N was better, although White retains the better chances after: 17.cxb5 (17.♖hd1!? is also decent) 17...axb5 18.♖xc8† ♗xc8 19.♖c1! ♖xa2† 20.♖c2 ♖xc2† 21.♔xc2± White will restore material equality by picking up the b-pawn (bearing in mind that 21...b4 can be met by 22.♘c6). In the resulting endgame, he will have some winning chances due to his passed b-pawn and more active king.

17.♘xe6 cxd3

17...fxe6 18.♖xc4 gave White a clear advantage due to his bishop pair and potential for a passed pawn on the queenside in Vasiesiu – Ursan, Cap Aurora 2017.

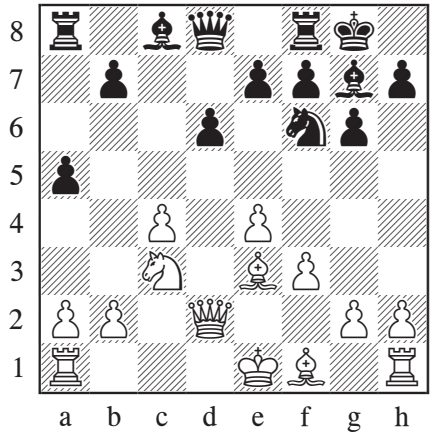
In Mareco – Garnier, Esperanza 2003, White missed a good opportunity:



18.♘c7!N ♖ab8 19.♘xa6 ♖a8 20.♖xc8† ♖xc8 21.♖c1 ♖a8 22.♘b4+–

Winning a pawn and, most likely, the game.

A2) 10...a5



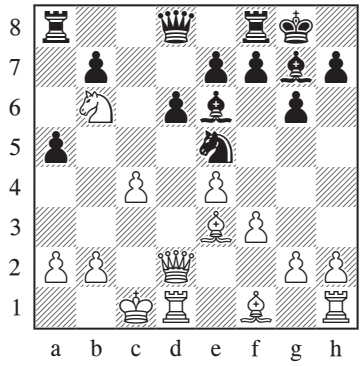
This has been a popular choice, intending ...a4 and ...♕a5 with counterplay. My colleague Andrew Greet recommended this approach in his 2008 book *Starting Out: The Accelerated Dragon*, and showed that Black has good prospects against White's two most popular continuations, namely 11.♗e2 and 11.b3. However, he did not take the following idea into account.

11.♘a4!

This is a pretty modern invention, having first been played in 2006. It has become more popular in the past five years or so, and White's results have been excellent. The knight blocks the a-pawn and takes aim at the weakened b6-square.

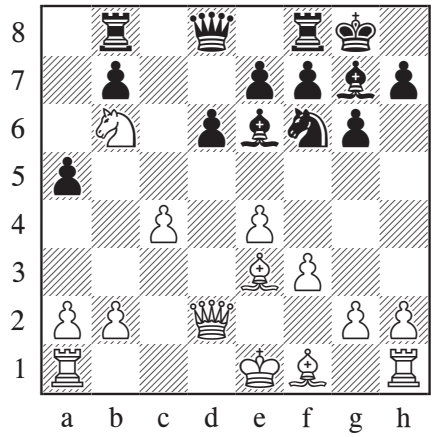
11...♗e6

11...♘d7 has been played in lots of games but the surprising 12.0–0–0! is an excellent reply. Funnily enough, this happened in the very first game in which White's 11th move was played; but despite White's convincing win in that game, the plan of long castling in this position has never been repeated. 12...♘e5 (12...b6N is a possible attempt to improve but 13.h4 h5 14.♔b1 offers White good attacking prospects; I can't see where Black's counterplay is coming from.) 13.♘b6 ♗e6



14.♔b1!? (14.♘xa8 ♕xa8± leaves Black with insufficient compensation for the exchange, but White prefers to keep his strong knight and play for an attack) 14...a4 15.a3 ♕c7 16.♖c1 ♘c6 17.h4 ♘a5 18.♖c2 ♘b3 19.♕f2 ♖a5 20.♘d5 ♗xd5 21.exd5± White was ready to press on with his kingside attack in Van den Doel – Hendriks, Netherlands 2006.

12.♘b6 ♖b8

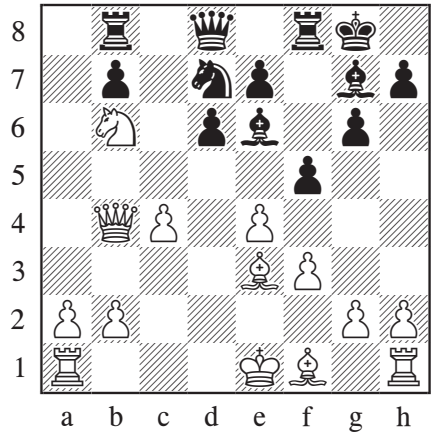


13.♕xa5

13.♗e2!?N ♘d7 14.♘d5 ♘c5 15.0–0± is a safe route to a positional edge, but taking the pawn is more ambitious.

13...♘d7 14.♕b4 f5

Here I found a useful improvement over two existing games.

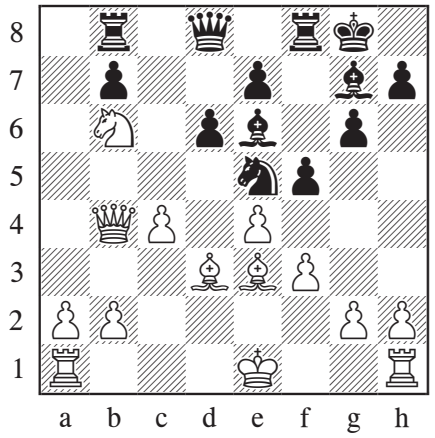


15.♗d3!N

After 15.♘xd7 ♕xd7 16.♗d3 fxe4 17.fxe4 White went on to win in Cheparinov – Vachier-Lagrave, Porto Carras 2011, but Black had reasonable compensation for the pawn at this stage.

15.exf5 ♖xf5 also gave Black counterplay in Gong – Dewi, Tashkent 2016. I wondered if White could improve with 16.♗e2N, but found that 16...♖e5 17.♘xd7 ♗xd7 18.♕d2 ♕a5 19.a3 ♕xd2† 20.♔xd2 ♖a5⩲ offers Black enough activity for the pawn.

15...♘e5



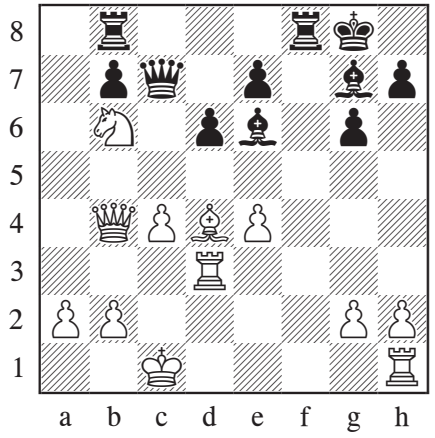
16.0–0–0!

Once again, queenside castling proves a useful option.

16.♗c2 f4 17.♗f2 ♘c6 18.♕d2 ♗xb2 19.♖b1 ♗e5 20.0–0 g5 offers Black decent prospects on the kingside.

16...♘xd3† 17.♖xd3 fxe4 18.fxe4 ♕c7 19.♗d4!?

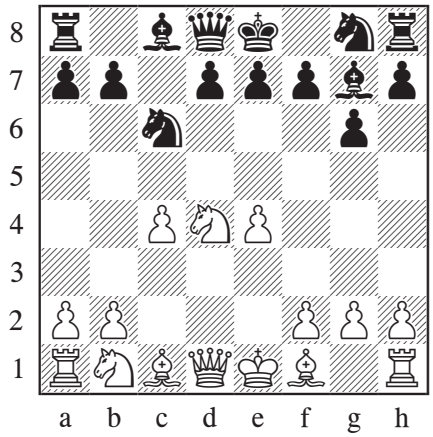
19.♔b1± is also good.



19...♗xd4 20.♖xd4 ♖f2 21.♖d2 ♖bf8 22.♖e1±

Black's counterplay is not enough, as it is hard for him to get his queen involved in the action. White has good chances to convert his extra pawn.

B) 5...♗g7



This has been a more frequent choice than the previous line, although the two moves can transpose. Once again, we will head for the target position identified on page 232.

6.♗e3 ♘f6

Black almost always develops the knight to this square, either immediately or after 6...d6.

A quirky alternative is:

6...♘h6

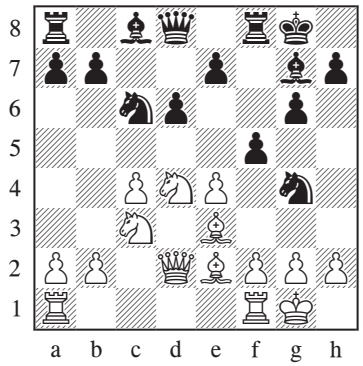
The idea of this move is to go for counterplay with ...f5, but Black takes quite a risk in opening up his kingside.

7.♘c3 0–0

7...♘g4 is an unusual way of getting to variation B1 below.

8.♗e2 f5

Black can also delay this advance until the next move with: 8...d6 9.0–0 f5 10.♕d2 ♘g4 (10...♘xd4 11.♗xd4 e5 does not trap the bishop on account of 12.♗e3 f4 13.♕d5† ♘f7 14.♗d2±, as seen in Fabiani – Aleshnia, email 2000; 10...♘f7 11.exf5 gxf5 12.f4± also favoured White in Ponomariov – Kassimski, Dagomys 2004)



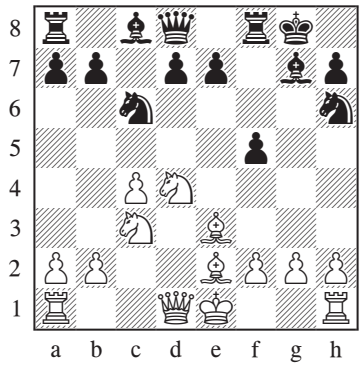
11.♗xg4 fxg4 12.♘d5± White's minor pieces are well centralized and he was ready to improve the rooks next in Broyles – Nett, email 2007.

9.exf5

9.♕d2? f4 10.♗xf4 ♗xd4 11.♗xh6 ♗xf2† 12.♔d1 ♖f7∞

9...gxf5

This position was reached in Yermolinsky – Chepukaitis, Leningrad 1980, and several subsequent games. I found a new and surprising way for White to seize the advantage:



10.♕d2!N f4

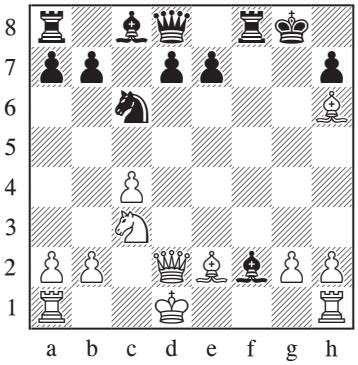
10...♘g4 11.♘xf5! ♘xe3 12.♘xe3± is a safe extra pawn.

11.♗xf4 ♗xd4 12.♗xh6 ♗xf2†

12...♖xf2 leaves Black's pieces too unstable after: 13.♘b5! ♖f6 14.♘xd4 ♘xd4 15.♕g5† ♖g6 16.♕d5† e6 17.♕xd4 ♖xh6 Black avoided losing material but 18.0–0+– still leaves him in a hopeless position.

13.♔d1

White may have lost the right to castle, but Black's king is much more exposed.



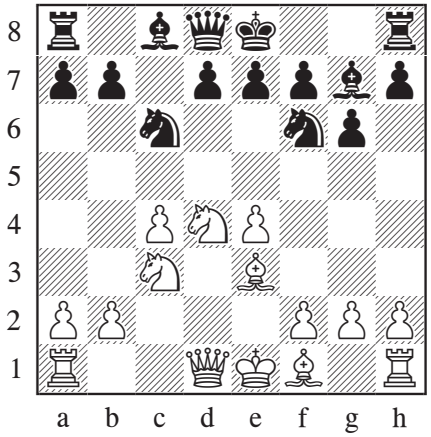
13...♗d4

Both 13...♖f7 14.♗h5+– and 13...♖f6 14.♘e4+– are hopeless for Black.

14.♕g5† ♔h8 15.♗xf8 ♕xf8 16.♖f1+–

Black is the exchange down and will probably have to exchange queens, leading to a lost endgame.

7.♘c3

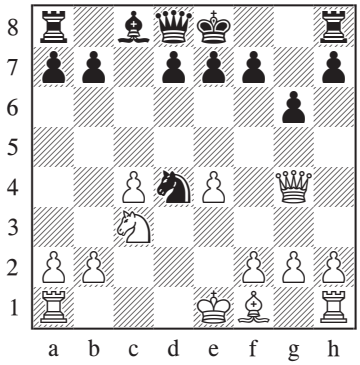


We have reached an important junction, where **B1) 7...♘g4** is a significant alternative to **B2) 7...0–0**. Both of these moves are covered from Black's perspective by IM Panjwani in his recent book *The Hyper Accelerated Dragon*.

7...d6 gives White a choice. 8.f3 is one good option, transposing to the note to Black's 7th move in variation A. There is also nothing wrong with 8.♗e2, when it is hard to believe that Black has anything better than 8...0–0, which transposes to the later variation B22.

B1) 7...♘g4 8.♕xg4 ♘xd4

8...♗xd4? 9.♗xd4 ♘xd4 is well known to be dodgy for Black after:

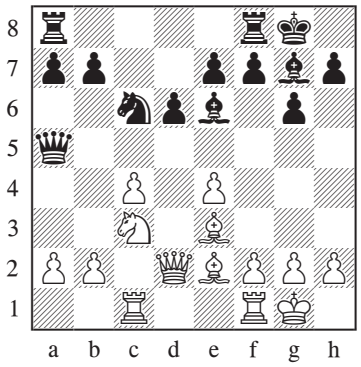


10.0–0–0! e5 11.♕g3 d6 12.f4! This is an attempt at a direct refutation. (12.♘e2 ♘xe2† 13.♗xe2± was a simple route to an edge in Levin – Pajeken, Hamburg 2001) 12...f6 13.f5 ♔f7 (13...gxf5? 14.♕g7 ♖f8 15.♘d5 gives White a huge attack) 14.♘e2 White has excellent attacking chances and has achieved a heavy plus score from here.

9.♕d1

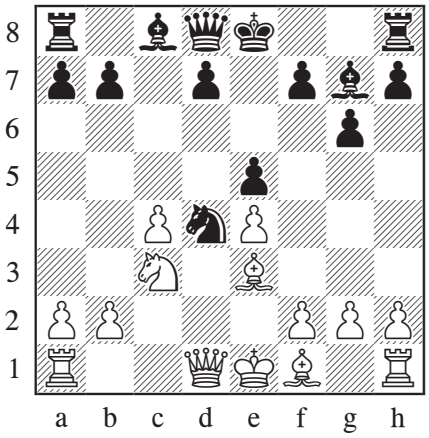
Here Black has two main tries: **B11) 9...e5** and **B12) 9...♘e6**.

9...♘c6 is playable but rather passive. 10.♗e2 0–0 11.0–0 d6 12.♕d2 ♗e6 13.♖ac1 ♕a5



14.b3 (14.♖fd1 is also good, for instance: 14...♖ac8 15.b3 f5 16.exf5 ♕xf5 17.♗f3 b6 18.♘b5 ♘e5 19.♗b7±) 14...a6 15.f4 f5 16.♗f3 ♔h8 17.exf5 gxf5 18.♖fe1 ♗f7 19.♔h1 e5 20.♗xc6 bxc6 21.♕xd6± Roiz – Cmilyte, Helsingor 2008.

B11) 9...e5



This move is recommended by Panjwani.

10.♗d3

I favour a simple plan of development with 0–0, ♕d2 and bringing at least one rook into the centre. According to circumstances, White can either challenge the enemy knight with ♘b5 or ♘e2, or plonk his own knight on d5.

10...0–0 11.0–0 d6

This is the most natural choice, opening a path for the c8-bishop. I also investigated a couple of other tries:

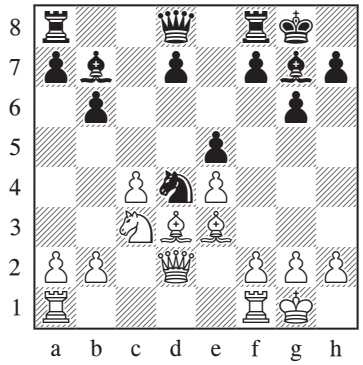
11...a6 12.♖c1 d6 13.♕d2 ♗e6 is covered on page 242 – see the note on 13...a6.

Black has also tried a double fianchetto development;

11...b6 12.♕d2

12.♖c1 ♗b7 13.♕d2 is also possible.

12...♗b7



13.♖ad1!?

The familiar plan of 13.♖ac1 followed by ♖fd1 and ♘e2 is also possible.

Greet's suggestion of 13.f3 a6 14.♘e2 b5 15.cxb5 axb5 16.♘xd4 exd4 17.♗h6 is also reasonable.

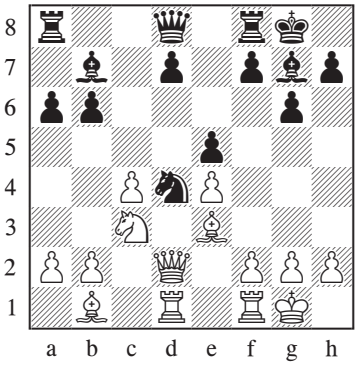
The justification for moving the queen's rook to d1 is that there is no real pressure against the c4-pawn now that Black's bishop has gone to b7 rather than e6, which means the rook is not really needed on c1. White's plan from here will be to drop his bishop back to b1, after which he will be able to think about ♗xd4 and ♘e2, winning the d4-pawn.

13...a6

13...♘e6 14.♗b1 ♗c6 15.b4 ♖c8 16.a3 ♖c7 17.♗a2↑ was good for White in Smyslov – Bagirov, Leningrad 1960.

I also considered 13...f5!?N 14.exf5 ♕h4!? but 15.f3! gxf5 16.♘e2 is a good answer. The bishop drops back to f2 and Black's attack runs out of steam.

14.♗b1



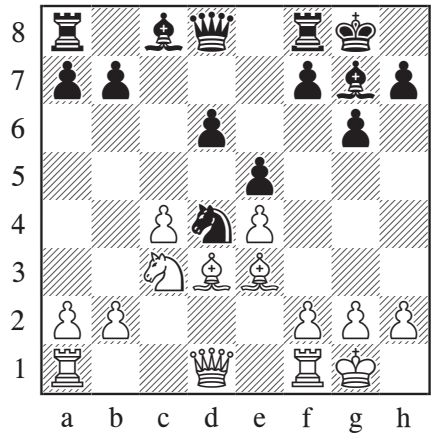
14...♖c8

14...d6? allows White to carry out his plan: 15.♗xd4 exd4 16.♘e2 ♕c7 17.b3 ♖ae8 18.f3 f5 19.exf5±

14...♖e8 is a reasonable try, but 15.f4! d6 16.♕f2 ♖f8 17.f5→ shows another advantage to leaving a rook on f1.

15.b3 b5 16.♗d3!

White keeps the better chances, as Psakhis points out.



12.♖c1

White can also consider:

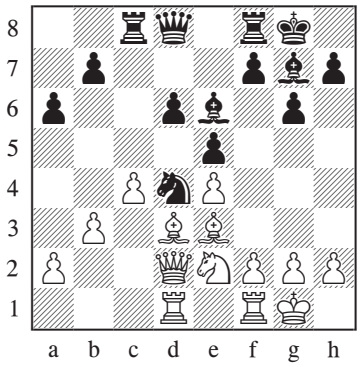
12.♕d2 ♗e6 13.♖ad1!?

The plan involving ♖ad1 and ♗b1 is not quite as strong here as it is after ...b6, because Black can still prepare ...b7-b5. Nevertheless, White still does well in the following line:

13...a6

Otherwise White may soon be tempted to try ♗xd4 followed by ♘b5; besides, Black needs this move to prepare ...b5.

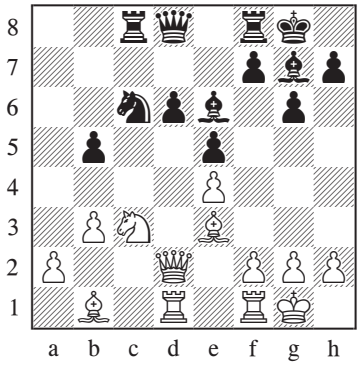
14.b3 ♖c8 15.♘e2



15...♘c6

15...b5 is awarded a '!' Panjwani but I'm not convinced. 16.cxb5 (Panjwani mainly focuses on 16.♗xd4 bxc4 17.♗xc4 ♗xc4 18.♗e3 ♗e6 19.♕xd6 ♕xd6 20.♖xd6 ♖c2 when Black has enough compensation to hold) 16...♘xb5 This position was reached in Toropov – Vakhlamov, Moscow 2007. Panjwani covers this in a brief note, saying Black has counterplay. However, after 17.♕b4N± Black is under pressure on the queenside. His knight is oddly placed and the pawns on a6 and d6 are weak.

16.♗b1 b5 17.cxb5 axb5 18.♘c3



18...♕a5 19.♘d5 b4 20.♗g5 f6 21.♗e3 f5

All this happened in Polugaevsky – Piket, Aruba 1994. Some older theoretical sources favoured Black's dynamic counterplay but modern engines show that this is not the case after:

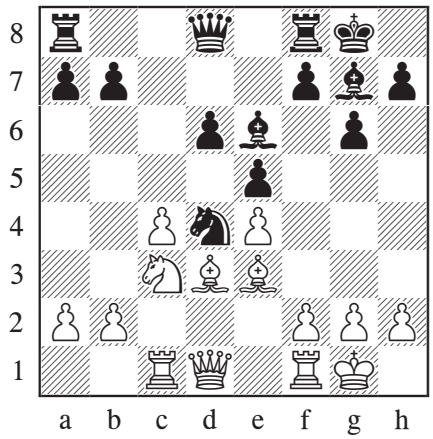
22.♗b6!N

Followed by ♘c7, and White wins material for insufficient compensation.

12...♗e6

For the moment, Black should improve his pieces without doing anything too committal.

12...f5 creates weaknesses, and 13.exf5 gxf5 14.f4!? leaves Black positionally worse.



13.♕d2 ♖c8

I also considered:

13...a6

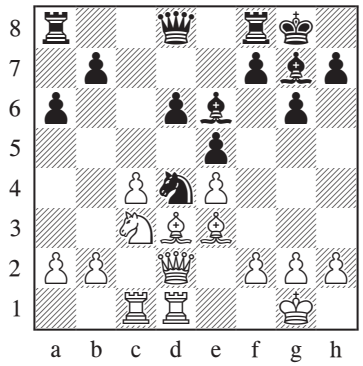
This does not change much, and White has more than one promising continuation.

14.♖fd1

Or 14.b3 with a split:

a) 14...♖b8 15.♖fd1 ♕h4 16.♘e2 was better for White in S. Foisor – Congiu, Herceg Novi 2005.

b) 14...♕a5 15.♘d5 (15.♕b2!? is a good alternative which resembles our bolded main line) 15...♕xd2 16.♗xd2 ♗xd5 17.cxd5 ♖fc8 18.♗b4 ♗f8 19.f3 f5 20.♔f2± Saravanan – Turner, Scarborough 1999. This type of endgame offers White a risk-free edge thanks to his bishop pair and space advantage. Black's knight occupies a nice outpost, but it can't really do anything and White can swap it off if and when he feels like it.



Having developed all his pieces on good squares, White is ready to follow up with ♘e2.

14...♕d7

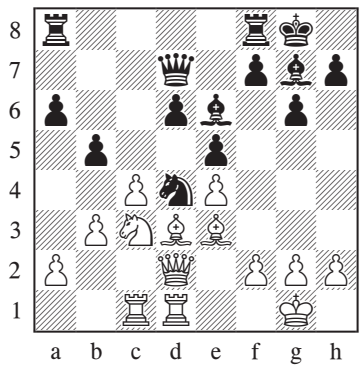
14...♗g4!? can be met by 15.♘e2!± (but not 15.f3? ♗xf3!∓) intending h2-h3, when any subsequent exchanges on e2 will benefit White.

15.b3!?±

15.♘e2 b5 16.♘xd4 exd4 17.♗h6 ♗xh6 18.♕xh6± is a good alternative.

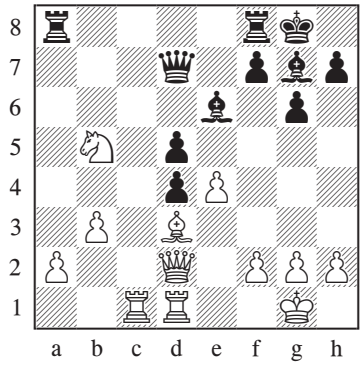
The text move was played in Ivanchuk – Bogdanovich, Odessa 2006. White keeps a slight advantage, in view of the following line:

15...b5?



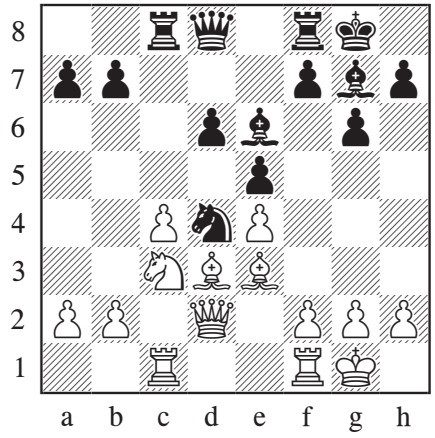
The is the move Black would like to play, but it doesn't work.

16.cxb5 axb5 17.♗xd4 exd4 18.♘xb5 d5



19.♘c7!

Black has no compensation for the material deficit.



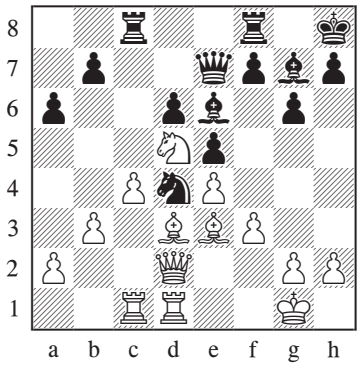
14.b3 a6 15.♖fd1

As far as I can see, this move is not covered in Panjwani's book, although I may have overlooked it amid the jungle of variations and different move orders.

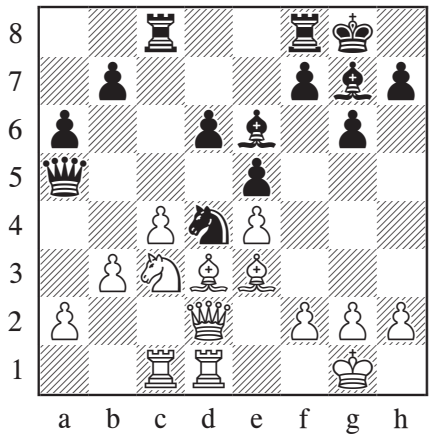
With that being said, the exact move order doesn't matter too much. In most of the lines we are looking at, White goes for pretty much the same set-up, with queen on d2 and rooks on d1 and c1, followed by either ♘d5 or ♘e2 at a suitable moment, offering good chances of an edge regardless of what Black does.

15...♕a5

Black has also tried: 15...♕e7 16.f3 ♔h8 17.♘d5 (17.♘e2!?N ♘c6 18.♗b1 is a possible improvement which also favours White)



17...♗xd5 18.cxd5 h5 This occurred in Dizdar – Smirin, Dresden 1998, when 19.♕b4N± would have maintained an edge for White.



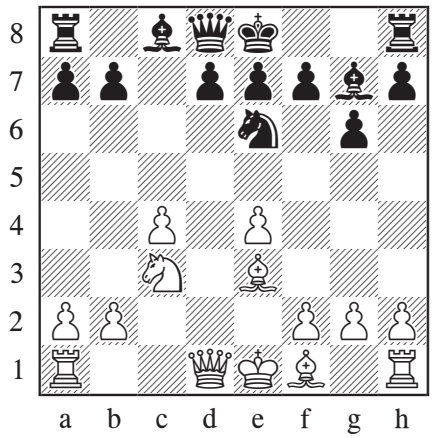
16.♕b2!?±

White kept the better chances in Felgaer – Stokke, Pula 2010. His last move is the most ambitious option, which prepares either ♘d5 or ♘e2 without allowing a queen exchange.

A decent alternative is 16.♘d5 ♕xd2 17.♗xd2 ♖fe8, as seen in Psakhis – Berkovich, Israel 2002, when 18.♗b4!?N± would be my choice. The position resembles the Saravanan – Turner game, and may appeal to technically minded players.

B12) 9...♘e6

This has been the most popular choice, and is a good deal more enterprising than retreating to c6.



10.♖c1!

It is important to realize that 10.♗e2? is a mistake due to 10...♗xc3†! 11.bxc3 d6, when Black has excellent chances to exploit White's ruined pawn structure.

10.♕d2 is less accurate than the text move because 10...♕a5 virtually forces 11.♖c1 anyway. Therefore White should make the rook move first in order to keep some other options open for his queen.

10...♕a5

This is Black's most interesting way of handling the position. The main point of the queen move is to support a dark-squared strategy with ...g5, making full use of the knight on e6. Other moves are easier to deal with:

10...a5? is a thematic move but it is poorly timed here, as 11.c5! gives White a powerful grip on the queenside.

10...0–0 gives White a pleasant choice between 11.b4 and 11.♗d3, with similar ideas (and a possible transposition) to the next two lines below.

10...d6

White can meet this move ambitiously with:

11.b4!?

The point of this move is to deprive Black's knight of the c5-square.

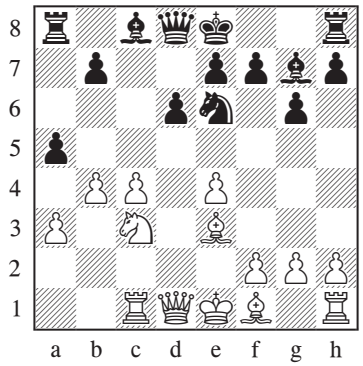
11.♗e2 has been the most common continuation, and should lead to a slight edge after something like 11...0–0 12.0–0 a5 13.b3 ♗d7 14.♕d2 ♗c6 15.f3 ♘c5 16.♖c2 ♕b6 17.♖b1 ♖fc8 18.♗f1 ♕d8 19.a3 b6 20.♕f2 ♖cb8 21.♘b5±. This is a thematic type of position which favours White; my only reservation about it is that I will be recommending an entirely different plan in variation B22.

11.♗d3!? is another interesting attempt to improve on the above set-up with the bishop on e2. After 11...0–0 12.0–0 White intends ♗b1 followed by f2-f4, with good prospects on the kingside.

11...a5

After 11...0–0 12.♗e2 it is hard to suggest an active plan for Black, apart from ...a5.

12.a3



12...axb4 13.axb4 ♖a3

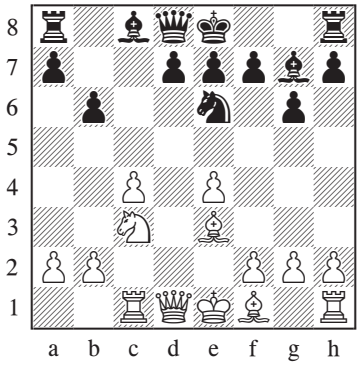
13...♗d7 is met by 14.♗e2 followed by 0–0.

14.♘d5±

Black's pieces are short of space. True, he controls the a-file, but it is hard to see any way for him to exploit it.

10...b6

This is similar to the above line, and can be met in exactly the same way:



11.b4

Once again, 11.♗e2 is playable but less ambitious than the text move.

11.♗d3!? ♗b7 12.0–0 0–0 13.♗b1 can also be considered.

11...♗b7 12.♗d3 0–0 13.0–0 ♖c8 14.♕d2±

White is in control and it is not obvious how Black will generate counterplay.

11.♗e2

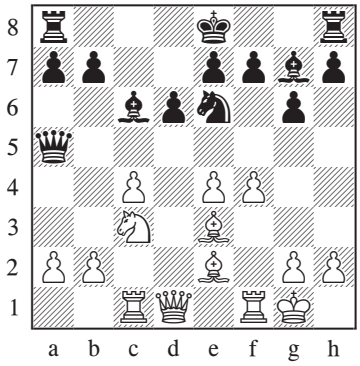
11.♗d3!? is a good alternative which Greet offers as an antidote to Black's set-up. Play may continue 11...g5 (after 11...b6 12.0–0 ♗b7 the e4-pawn is defended, so 13.f4! is excellent for White) 12.0–0 b6 13.♗d2! with the better chances for White. However, I have chosen to focus on the text move, which also seems excellent.

11...b6

Before playing the committal ...g5, it makes sense for Black to develop his bishop and attack the e4-pawn, provoking a slight weakening with f2-f3.

11...♗xc3†? 12.♖xc3 ♕xa2 13.♕c2 gives White an overwhelming initiative for a pawn.

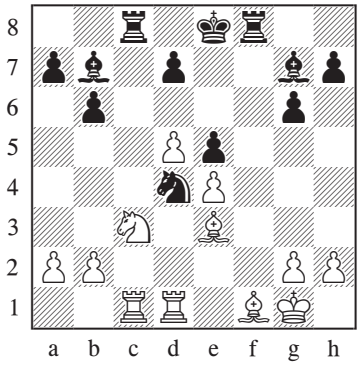
11...d6 12.0–0 ♗d7 allows White to play more aggressively with 13.f4, for instance: 13...♗c6 (13...♘c5 is well met by 14.♗d4!)



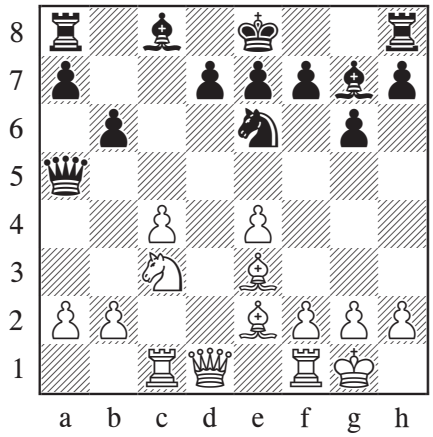
14.f5 ♘c5 15.f6! ♗xf6 (15...exf6 16.b4 ♕xb4 17.♕xd6 ♘a6 18.♕xb4 ♘xb4 19.♘d5± Mesko – Penades Ordaz, corr. 2009) 16.♖xf6 exf6 17.b4 ♕xb4 18.♕xd6± ♘a6 19.♕xf6 ♖g8 20.♘d5 1–0 Richter – Trautmann, corr. 1983.

12.0–0

12.♕d5 is also quite promising. A good example continued: 12...♕xd5 (12...♖b8 is safer, although 13.♕xa5 bxa5 14.b3 should be slightly better for White) 13.cxd5 ♘d4 14.♗d3 f5 15.f3 ♗b7 16.0–0 ♖c8 17.♖fd1 fxe4 18.fxe4 ♖f8 19.♗f1 e5



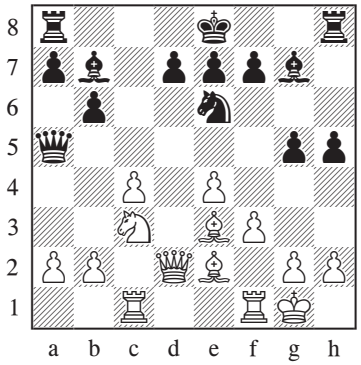
20.a4! ♔e7 21.♘b5 White won in instructive fashion in Muck – Weber, corr. 2010.



12...♗b7 13.f3 g5 14.♖f2!

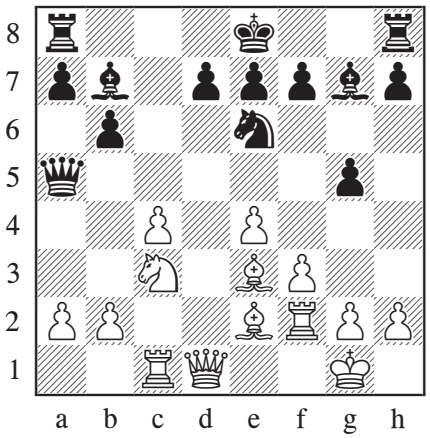
This move prepares a highly effective regrouping plan, which was first played by Nigel Short.

To appreciate the effectiveness of White's plan (beginning with the accurate 10.♖c1! instead of 10.♕d2), it is worth comparing the following position from the game in which Bent Larsen first introduced the ...g5 plan:



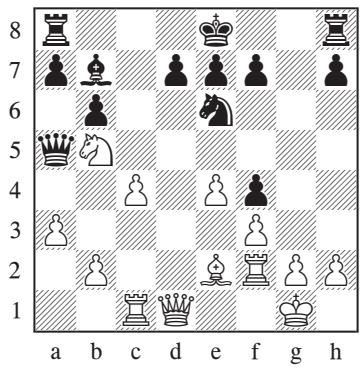
15.♖fd1 d6 16.♘d5 ♕xd2 17.♖xd2 ♗e5 18.b4 ♖c8 19.a4 h4 20.♗f1 f6 21.♖a2 ♗d4 Black was doing fine and went on to make a comfortable draw in Karpov – Larsen, Brussels 1987. Once the queens were exchanged, he had no real problems.

Now let's return to our main line. The big difference here is that, rather than ♕d2 followed by ♖fd1, White intends (after ♗f1) to put his rook on d2 with the queen on d1. Crucially, he will be able to follow up with ♘d5 without allowing a queen exchange. This makes things much trickier for Black, as we will soon see.



14...h5

14...♗e5 15.a3 ♗f4 is positionally desirable but 16.♗xf4 gxf4 17.♘b5! gives Black problems with his queen:



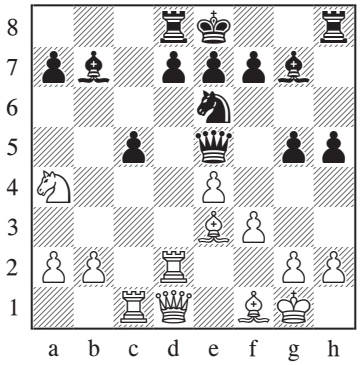
17...♗c6 18.♖c3 ♖c8 19.b4 ♕a6 20.♘d4 ♗a4 21.♕d2 ♕b7 22.♘xe6 dxe6 23.♕xf4± Zakhartsov – Mankeyev, Olomouc 2007.

15.♗f1 ♕e5

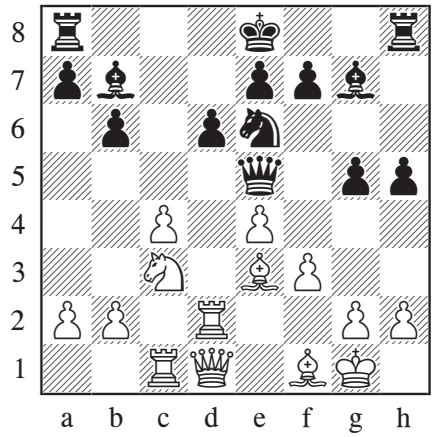
Black must not delay this move. After 15...h4? 16.♖d2 d6 17.♘d5 Black's queen was misplaced and short of squares in Enjuto Velasco – Dobierzin, Krynica 1999.

16.♖d2 d6

Greet criticizes this move and instead proposes 16...♖d8, in order to give Black the option of ...♕b8 followed by ...♗e5. However, he overlooked a surprising resource: 17.c5!N (17.♘d5 ♕b8 has occurred in a couple of games) 17...bxc5 (17...♘xc5?? 18.♗d4 wins immediately) 18.♘a4!



18...0–0 (18...d6? 19.♘xc5! is even worse for Black) 19.♘xc5 ♘xc5 20.♖xc5 d5 21.♕b3± White wins a pawn.



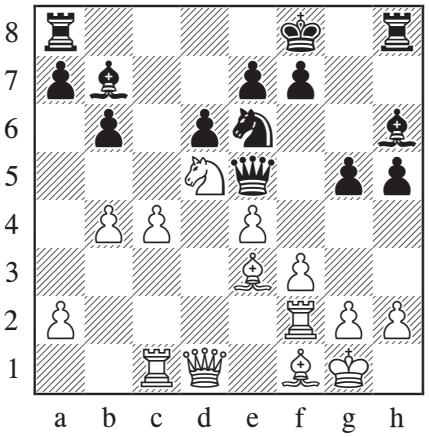
17.♘d5 ♔f8 18.b4 ♗h6

This position was reached in Short – Larsen, Hastings 1987, and a bunch of later games. White has several good options but I like:

19.♖f2N

As recommended by a few commentators. Short's 19.♕b3 was also good for White.

19.c5!? is also interesting, but one good option is enough.



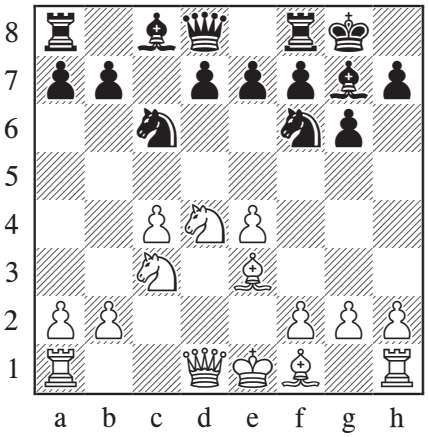
19...♗g7

19...g4 20.f4! ♕xe4 21.♗d3 is a nice variation given by Greet.

20.♕a4±

White is much better, as Bologan points out.

B2) 7...0–0

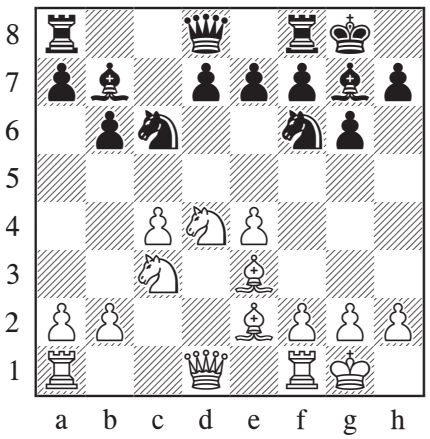


This natural move has been Black's most common choice.

8.♗e2

This prevents ...♘g4 while developing another piece. We will consider the double fianchetto with **B21) 8...b6**, followed by the main line of **B22) 8...d6**.

B21) 8...b6 9.0–0 ♗b7



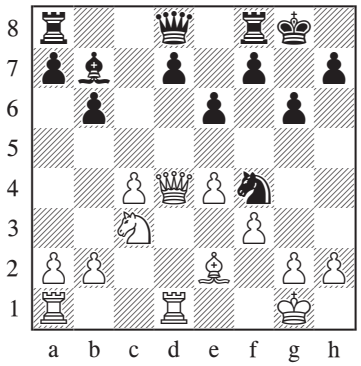
10.f3

It is useful to overprotect the e4-pawn.

10...e6

This has been Black's most popular try. Preparing ...d5 is a natural idea but it does not equalize.

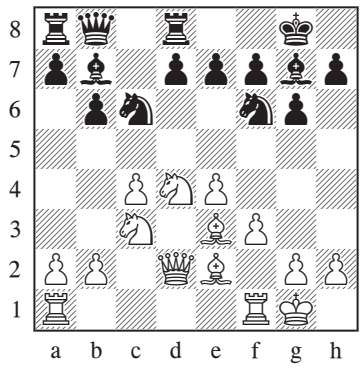
10...♘h5 looks tricky but White can safely ignore it with 11.♕d2 ♘f4 12.♖fd1, for instance: 12...♘xd4 13.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 14.♕xd4 e6



15.♕e5 ♘xe2† 16.♘xe2 ♖c8 17.b3 f5 18.♘c3 ♗c6 19.♖d4 ♖f7 20.♖e1 White was much better in Stojanovic – Miralles, Switzerland 2012.

10...♕b8!? 11.♕d2 ♖d8

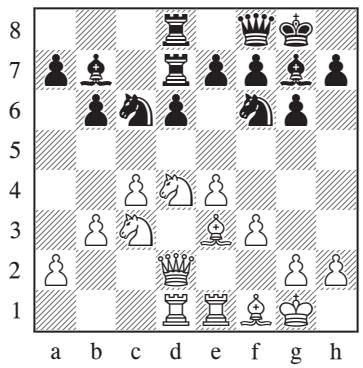
This looks odd until you understand Black's masterplan, which involves ...d6, ...♖d7, ...♕f8, ...♖ad8, ...e6 and, finally, ...d5!. It's rather long-winded though, and White has a few good ways to play against it.



12.♖ad1

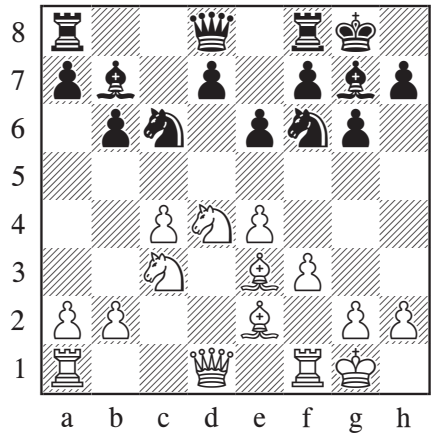
Greet likes 12.♖fd1, with the idea of using the rook on a1 as follows: 12...d6 13.♘b3! Intending to advance the a-pawn. 13...e6 14.a4 ♘a5!? 15.♘xa5 bxa5 16.♘b5 d5 This has been recommended for Black, but Greet correctly points out that 17.♕xa5, threatening both ♘c7 and ♗xa7, is much better for White.

12...d6 13.♖fe1 ♖d7 14.♗f1 ♕f8 15.b3 ♖ad8



Black is two moves away from completing his plan, but White is just in time to stop it. 16.♘c2! e6 17.♗g5!

The c2-knight is ready to come to e3, keeping an edge for White in M. Socko – Lind, Warsaw (rapid) 2007.



11.♕d2

11.♘db5 has been the most popular move but 11...d5! is a good answer.

11.♖c1 is a sensible alternative which is recommended by Greet. It works well against the ...d5 break, but recently Black has achieved decent results with the more patient 11...♕e7!?.

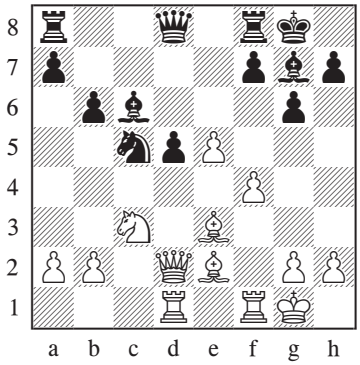
Finally, White can consider exchanging knights by taking on c6, either here or on the previous move. This approach should lead to a slight edge as well, but I prefer not to give Black the freedom to choose whether or not to change the pawn structure by recapturing with the d-pawn.

11...d5

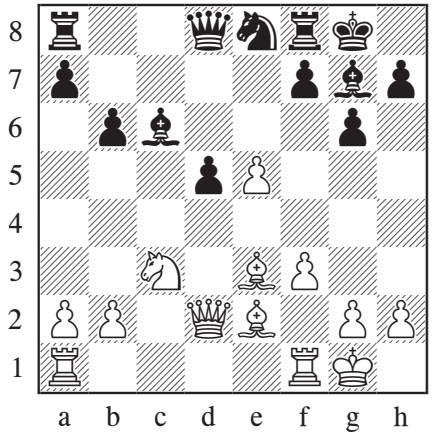
Black had better not delay this move. If he plays slowly with a move like 11...♕e7, then 12.♘db5 ♘e8 13.♖ad1 gives White a clear advantage.

12.cxd5 exd5 13.♘xc6 ♗xc6 14.e5 ♘e8

14...♘d7?! 15.f4 ♘c5 16.♖ad1 makes life difficult for Black:



16...♘e4 (16...f6 17.♘xd5 fxe5 occurred in Kuporosov – Yakovich, Soviet Union 1984, when 18.fxe5!N would have been strongest, as 18...♗xe5? 19.♗c4 is winning for White) 17.♘xe4 dxe4 18.♕xd8 ♖fxd8 19.♖xd8† ♖xd8 20.♖c1± Black was facing a miserable endgame in Jansa – Velimirovic, Bor 1985.



15.f4

15.♗d4 is a good alternative, after which 15...♘c7 16.♖ad1 f6 17.exf6 ♗xf6 18.♖fe1 ♕d6 19.♗xf6 ♕xf6 20.♗b5! was better for White in Marin – Gashimov, Spain 2007.

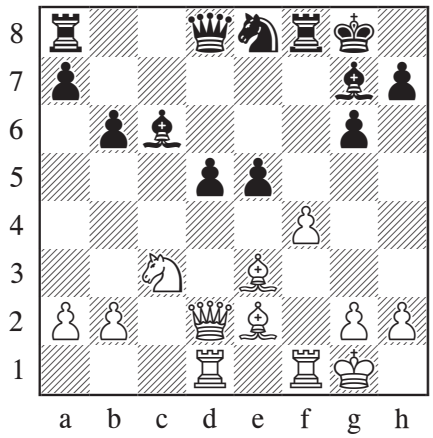
15...f6

After 15...♘c7 White keeps the better chances with: 16.♗f3 (16.♖ac1!?N also looks promising) 16...f6 17.exf6 ♗xf6 18.♖ad1±

16.♖ad1!

After 16.exf6 ♘xf6 I failed to find any advantage.

16...fxe5



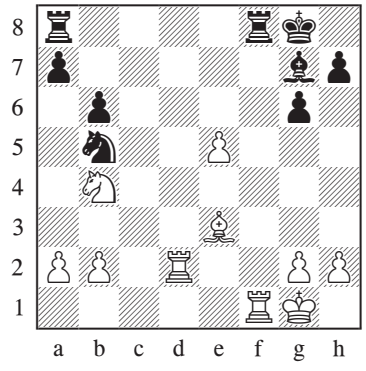
17.♘xd5!

White clearly has the edge in piece activity.

17...♘f6

17...exf4? 18.♘xf4 ♕xd2 19.♖xd2 ♘f6 20.♗c4† ♔h8 21.♘e6 ♘e4 22.♖c2 ♖xf1† 23.♗xf1+–

17...♘c7 did not solve Black's problems in the following game: 18.♘b4 ♕xd2 19.♖xd2 ♗b5 20.♗xb5 ♘xb5 21.fxe5

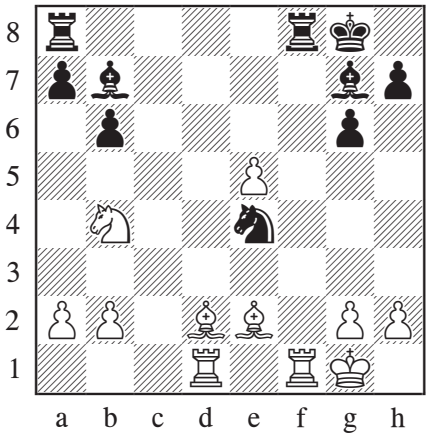


21...♖xf1† 22.♔xf1 ♖f8† 23.♔e2 ♖e8 24.♘c6 ♗xe5 25.♘xe5 ♖xe5 26.♖d7± Bogner – Kountz, Germany 2010.

18.♘b4! ♕xd2

18...♗b7? 19.fxe5 ♘e4 20.♗c4† ♔h8 21.♕xd8 ♖axd8 22.♖xf8† ♖xf8 23.e6 is winning for White.

19.♗xd2 ♗b7 20.fxe5 ♘e4



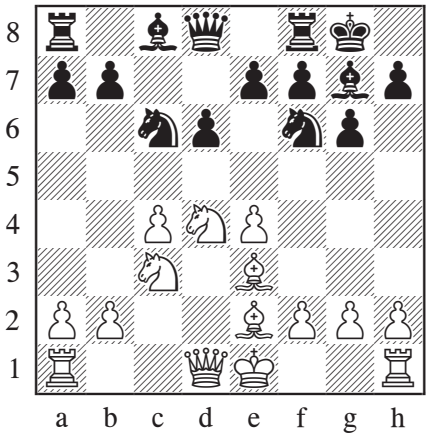
21.♗f4

I also checked 21.♗c4†N ♔h8 22.♘d3, but after 22...♖xf1† 23.♔xf1 ♖d8 Black has reasonable play for the pawn.

21...g5 22.♗e3 ♗xe5 23.♖d7±

White kept some initiative in Ragger – Greenfeld, New Delhi 2011.

B22) 8...d6



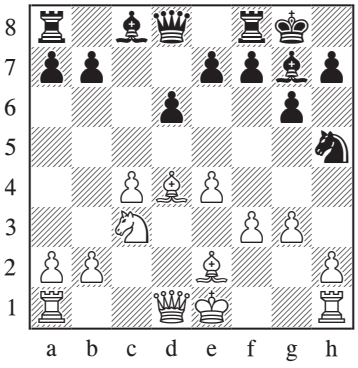
This is the main line. It has a reputation for being safe and solid, but I have some ideas to challenge that assessment.

9.f3!?

Panjwani covers the main line of 9.0–0 over several chapters but does not consider the text move at all. I think it's an excellent choice for White though. Overprotecting the e4-pawn is almost always useful, and the text move also allows for the possibility of queenside castling in some lines. For a long time this possibility went overlooked, as it was always assumed that it would be too risky to put the king on the queenside having already played c2-c4. However, as we will see, it can be extremely effective in the right situation.

Black's two most important replies are **B221) 9...♘xd4** and **B222) 9...♗d7**.

9...♘h5 has been tried a few times but after 10.g3 it's not clear what the knight is doing. 10...♘xd4 (10...♗h3?! 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.g4±; 10...♗d7 11.♕d2±) 11.♗xd4

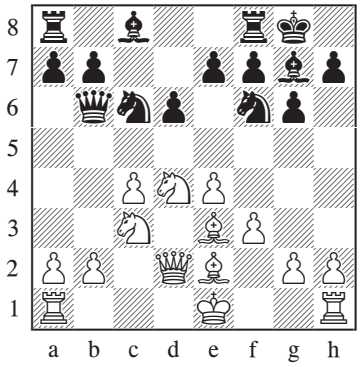


11...♗e6 12.f4 ♘f6 13.0–0 ♖c8 14.b3 ♕a5 (14...♗h3 15.♖f3 is good for White) 15.f5 ♗d7 16.a3 White had a nice initiative in So – Mamedov, Shamkir 2015.

9...♕b6?!

This can sometimes be a problem in similar positions, but here it is misguided as none of Black's tactical ideas work.

10.♕d2!



10...♘xd4

10...♘xe4?? is refuted by 11.♘xc6 and White wins material.

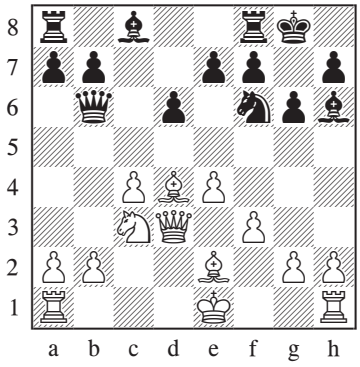
11.♗xd4 ♗h6!?

This seems to me like the only real attempt to make sense of Black's play.

After 11...♘xe4? 12.♗xb6 ♘xd2 13.♗e3 Black's knight is trapped.

12.♕d3!

12.♗xb6 ♗xd2† 13.♔xd2 axb6 14.a4± is a tad better for White, but not the most ambitious way to play the position.

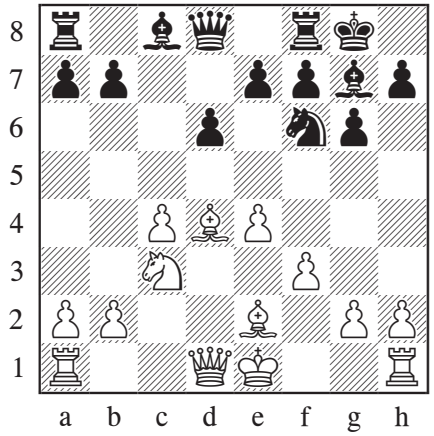


12...♕a5 13.0–0

White has better development and good prospects in the middlegame. For example: 13...♗e6 14.f4 ♖ac8 15.b3±

Black is clearly suffering from misplaced pieces.

B221) 9...♘xd4 10.♗xd4



From here I examined two continuations. **B2211) 10...a6** is an immediate attempt to prepare ...b5, whereas **B2212) 10...♗e6** sees Black concentrate on piece development.

10...♗d7 11.♕d2 transposes to the later variation B2223.

B2211) 10...a6 11.♕d2

White makes a useful move and avoids committing his king for the moment. It is not so easy for Black to carry out ...b5, so he usually develops his bishop while waiting to see what White does.

11...♗e6 12.♘d5!

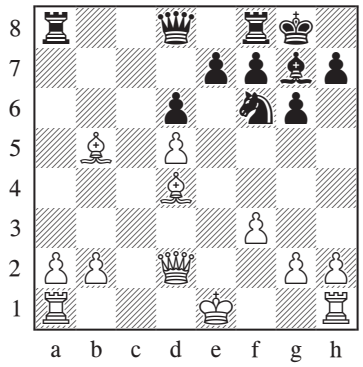
This is both simple and powerful.

12...♘d7

This was played in a correspondence game against our good friend Nikos Ntirlis.

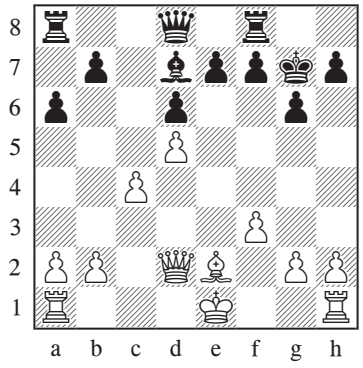
12...♗xd5 can be found in Game 22 below.

12...b5N has yet to be tried, but this is no excuse not to check it out. After all, if it worked, White's play up to this point would have been meaningless. The simplest reply is: 13.cxb5 axb5 14.♗xb5 ♗xd5 15.exd5

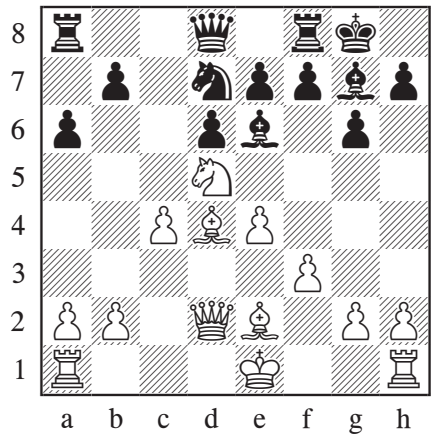


15...♗h6!? Black has to do something quickly, otherwise he will find himself both a pawn down and positionally lost after ♗c6. 16.♕xh6 ♕a5† 17.♔f2 ♕xb5 18.♖hd1± White is obviously better.

12...♘xd5 has only been tested in Kozlowski – Krystofiak, Poland 2012, but is certainly not stupid. I suggest: 13.♗xg7N ♔xg7 14.exd5 Some sort of imbalance is needed to play for a win. White is only a bit better, but Black has a passive position without much counterplay, so White is still the one having all the fun. 14...♗d7



15.h4! h6 (15...f6 16.h5 g5 17.♕d4±; 15...h5 16.g4 ♖h8 17.0–0–0±) 16.h5 g5 17.♕d4† ♔g8 18.0–0± White can consider attacking with f3-f4 in the future.



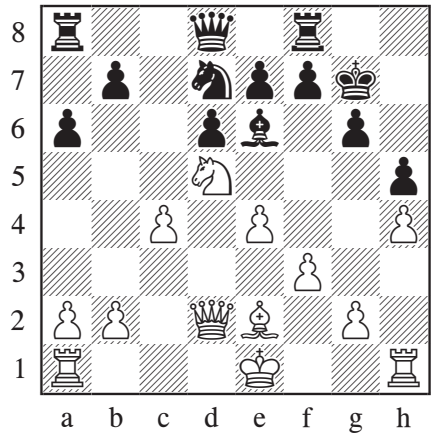
13.♗xg7!

Keeping the good bishop with 13.♗e3 would be the traditional strategy. In this position though, because White has not castled, he can justify the bishop exchange by launching an attack on the kingside.

13...♔xg7 14.h4! h5

This is the principled approach but, as the game demonstrates, White has fantastic attacking potential.

14...f6 might be a better move but 15.0–0–0± leaves White with a pleasant advantage. Even if Black makes it to the endgame, he will still have a cramped position with numerous weaknesses.



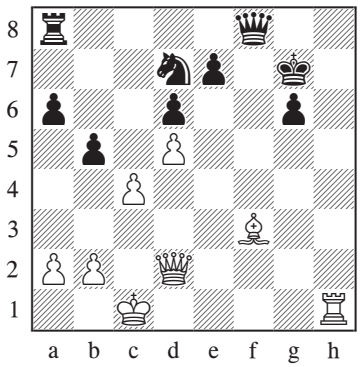
15.0–0–0 b5

Black seeks active counterplay but White can simply ignore it.

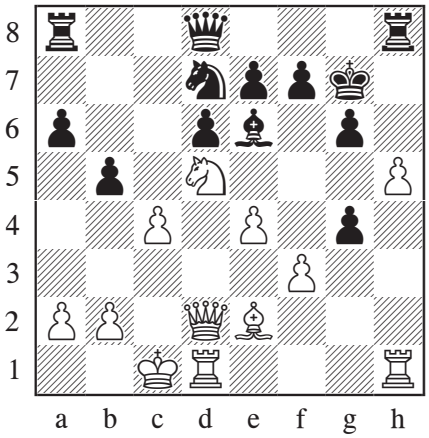
16.g4! hxg4 17.h5 ♖h8

It is hard to imagine that there is any way for Black to keep his position together.

Another possible line is: 17...gxf3 18.♗xf3 ♗xd5 (or 18...♖h8 19.hxg6 fxg6 20.♖xh8 ♕xh8 21.♘c7 and White wins) 19.exd5 ♖h8 20.hxg6 fxg6 21.♖xh8 ♕xh8 22.♖h1 ♕f8



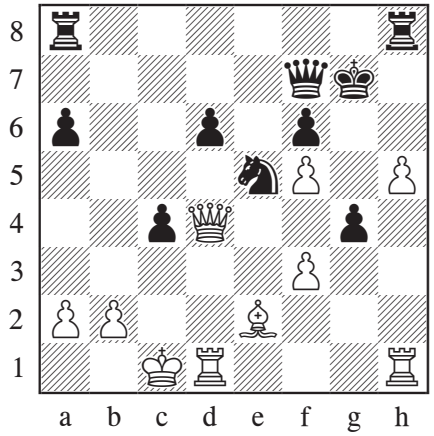
23.♗g4! ♘f6 24.♕h6† ♔f7 25.♗e6† ♔e8 26.♕xf8† ♔xf8 27.♖h8† and White wins.



18.♕d4† f6 19.♘f4 ♕g8 20.♘xg6 ♘e5 21.♘xe7+–

Black has avoided being mated but he has lost a few pawns, making the rest of this game an exercise in good technique.

21...♕f7 22.♘f5† ♗xf5 23.exf5 bxc4



24.f4! ♘d3† 25.♔b1 ♖hg8 26.♗xg4 ♕a7 27.♕xa7† ♖xa7 28.♗e2 ♔h6 29.♗xd3 cxd3 30.♖xd3

White soon won the endgame in Ntirlis – Ruiz-Jarabo, corr. 2014.

Now let's rewind to move 12 and see a game where 12...♗xd5 was played.

GAME 22

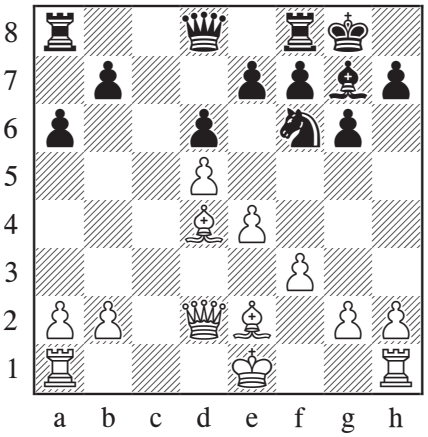
Dmitry Svetushkin – Georgios Tzambazis

Aghios Kirykos 2004

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 g6 5.c4 ♘f6 6.♘c3 d6 7.f3 ♗g7 8.♗e3 0–0 9.♗e2 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 a6 11.♕d2 ♗e6 12.♘d5 ♗xd5 13.cxd5

I chose this as an illustrative game not just because White played the exact line I am recommending, but mainly because the trade of a black bishop for a white knight on d5 is something that can happen in many Maroczy lines, so it is worth exploring the ensuing structure in some detail.

White has the better prospects, for a number of reasons:



a) He has a significant space advantage. The fact that two sets of minor pieces have been exchanged certainly eases Black's discomfort; but even so, he will still have problems finding good squares for all his pieces.

b) The bishop pair is an important long-term advantage. Thinking far ahead to the endgame, note that the light-squared bishop is the one with no opponent. For the moment it may seem that this is a bad bishop, but actually it has great potential, especially if it can be successfully rerouted to the h3-c8 diagonal.

c) White has a few possible pawn levers, whereas it is hard to imagine Black benefiting from playing ...e6 or ...f5, as these will tend to open the game for White's bishops. Thus White has more freedom to change the pawn structure to suit his own purposes.

13...♖c8

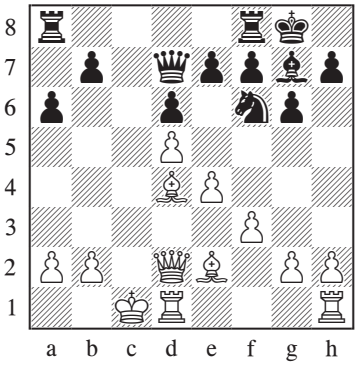
I also considered:

13...♕d7!?

This has been played in an engine game. I would be tempted to castle long.

14.0–0–0!?

The game continued 14.0–0 ♕a4 15.♗e3 ♖fc8 16.b3 ♕a3 17.♖fc1 ♘d7 18.♖ab1 and White had the better chances here too. Transferring the light-squared bishop to h3 is almost always a good plan in such positions.

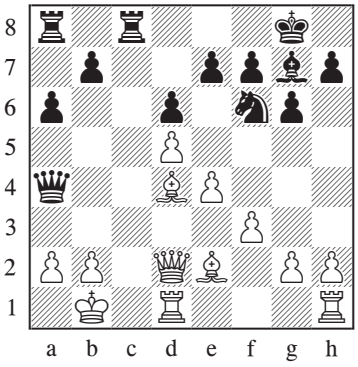


14...♕a4

14...♖fc8† 15.♔b1 ♘h5 is the top engine choice. (15...e6 16.♗xf6 ♗xf6 17.dxe6 ♕xe6 18.♕xd6± and White can play for a win without the slightest risk) 16.♗xg7 ♘xg7 (16...♔xg7 17.g4 ♘f6 18.h4 h6 19.g5 ♘h5 20.♗f1!± followed by ♗h3-g4 gives White an overwhelming position) 17.h4± White is obviously better.

15.♔b1 ♖fc8

Now White can use his space advantage to create dangerous threats on the kingside.



16.h4!

I find White's attacking potential quite impressive.

16...h5

16...♘d7? 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.h5 gives White an overwhelming attack.

16...♘h5 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.♗d3± allows White to develop his attack without offering Black any counterplay.

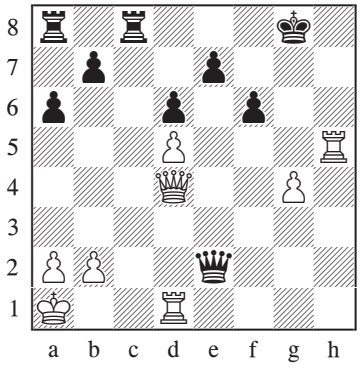
17.g4! hxg4 18.h5! gxh5?!

18...gxf3 19.♗xf3 ♖c4 is a slightly better try, although 20.hxg6 fxg6 21.♗xf6 exf6 22.♕h2± leaves Black in a pretty desperate state.

19.fxg4! ♘xe4 20.♕e3

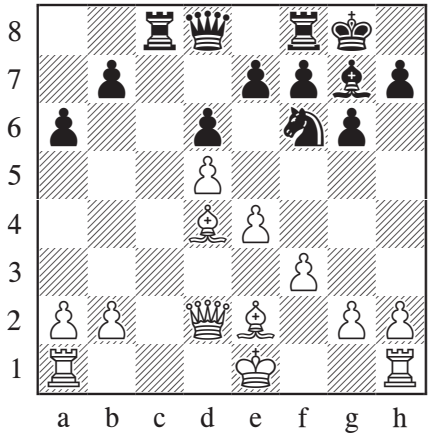
I cannot find a decent move for Black. For example:

20...♘f2!? 21.♕xf2 ♕c2† 22.♔a1 ♗xd4 23.♕xd4 ♕xe2 24.♖xh5 f6



25.♕g1!+–

The threats of g4-g5 and ♕h1 are too much for Black to handle.

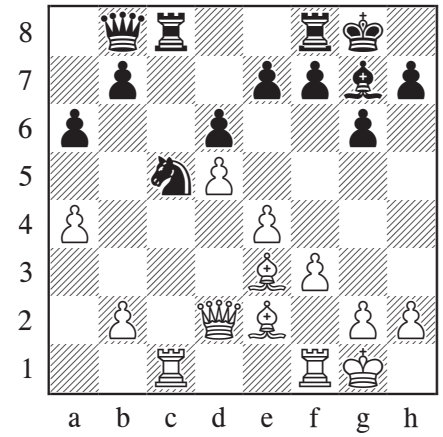


14.0–0 ♘d7 15.♗e3 ♕c7

15...♘c5 16.♖ac1 a5?! weakens the light squares, and after 17.b3 b6 18.♗b5 f5 19.exf5 ♖xf5 20.♖fd1 ♕f8 21.♖b1 ♗e5 22.a3 (intending b3-b4) White had a huge advantage

in Hasangatin – Jedlicka, Tatranske Zruby 2000.

16.♖ac1 ♕b8 17.a4 ♘c5



18.a5

I would have preferred 18.♕b4!N ♖c7 19.b3 ♖fc8 20.a5± to reduce Black's activity. White has the advantage and will be able to make Black's life difficult for a long time.

18...♘b3 19.♖xc8 ♖xc8 20.♕b4 ♘c5 21.♖c1 ♘d7 22.♕d2 ♖c7 23.g4 ♕c8 24.♔g2 ♖xc1 25.♕xc1 ♕xc1 26.♗xc1

The ending is better for White, but this version is slightly better for Black than I would have wanted to allow. The c1-bishop is not well placed and the a5-pawn needs to be monitored. However, in the game Black makes it easy for White to improve his position and achieve optimal coordination.

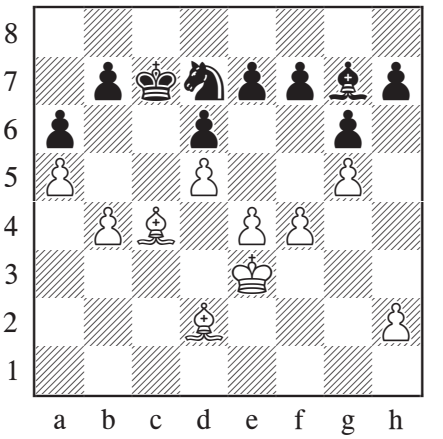
26...♘c5?! 27.♗c4! ♔f8 28.♔f2 ♔e8 29.g5

White's position is improving with every move.

29...♔d8 30.♔e3 ♔c7 31.b4 ♘d7 32.♗d2 ♗e5?!

It's hard to be sure, but I have a feeling this may be the moment where Black's position slips from clearly worse to outright lost. He had to try 32...f6!? to obtain some breathing space.

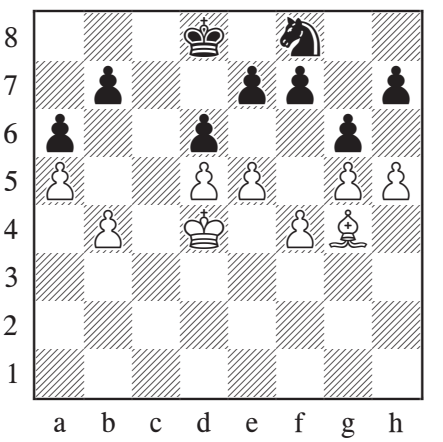
33.f4 ♗g7



34.♗e2!

The bishop transfers to its best diagonal. Svetushkin's handling of the technical challenges is impressive.

34...♗h8 35.♔d3 ♗g7 36.♗e3 ♗h8 37.♔c4 ♗g7 38.h4 ♗h8 39.h5 ♗g7 40.♗g4 ♗h8 41.♗d4 ♗xd4 42.♔xd4 ♘f8 43.e5 ♔d8



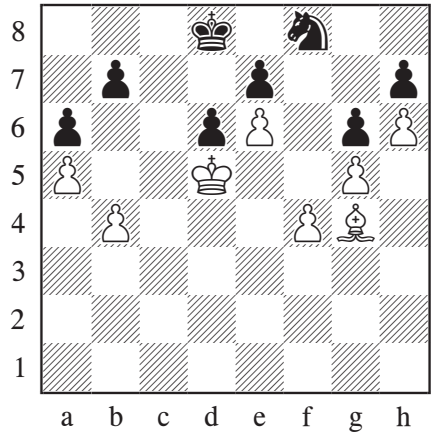
44.h6!

This pawn is destined for greatness.

44...♔c7 45.♔c4 ♔d8 46.e6!

Now Black's knight is completely paralysed. Even if Black could eliminate all of the queenside pawns, he would end up in zugzwang and lose.

46...fxe6 47.dxe6 ♔c7 48.♔d5 ♔d8



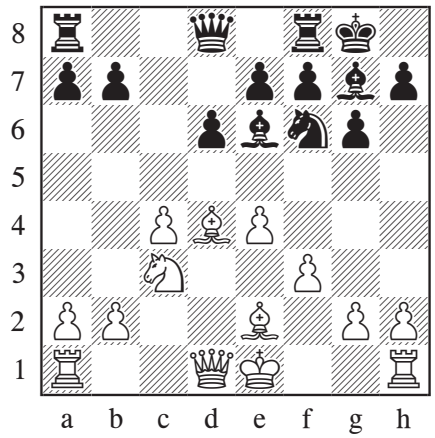
49.f5!

White could have won by slower means, but this breakthrough wins easily.

49...gxf5 50.♗xf5 ♔c7 51.♗d3 ♔d8 52.♗xh7 ♘xh7 53.g6 ♘f6† 54.♔d4 1–0

B2212) 10...♗e6

This seems like a more accurate choice than 10...a6, based on the principle that pieces should come before pawns.



11.0–0!

Here the plan of ♕d2 and ♘d5 (or 0–0–0) doesn't work, as Black can make good use of the tempo he saved by omitting ...a6. However, White can instead revert to a favourable version of the traditional set-up with short castling, as Black's bishop is not so well placed on e6 here.

11...♕a5 12.♔h1 ♖fc8 13.b3±

It is hard to say exactly how much better White's position is, and it hardly matters anyway. What's more important is that Black is unable to get his counterplay working if White plays accurately.

13...♘d7

This is a thematic idea but it does not work well. That said, I'm not sure exactly how Black should improve.

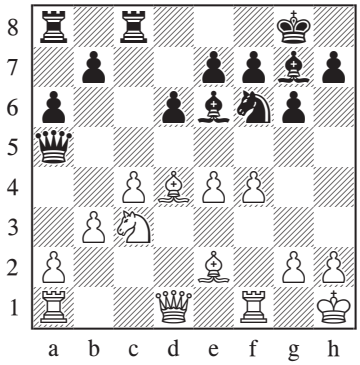
13...b5? clearly doesn't work; I only mention it because the same move is something to watch out for in similar positions when White's queen is on d2. Here we simply play 14.♘xb5 and enjoy being a pawn up.

13...a6

Preparing ...b5 is an obvious idea but White has a good way to meet it.

14.f4!

With the following idea in mind:



14...b5

This is clearly the move Black would like to play, but White is perfectly placed to deal with it.

15.f5 ♗d7 16.♗xf6! ♗xf6 17.♘d5±

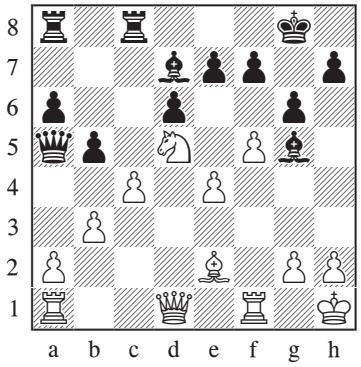
Black's position is falling apart.

17...♗g5

17...bxc4 18.fxg6 hxg6 19.♖xf6+–

17...♗xa1 18.♘xe7†+–

17...♕d8 18.fxg6 hxg6 19.♘xf6† exf6 20.♕xd6±

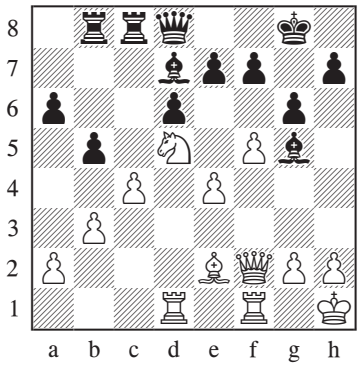


18.♕d4! ♕d8

18...♗c6 19.e5! (19.♘b6 ♗f6) 19...♗xd5 20.♕xd5 ♖f8 21.♗d3 gives White a powerful attack.

18...bxc4 19.fxg6 hxg6 20.♘b6± and White wins the exchange.

19.♖ad1 ♖ab8 20.♕f2

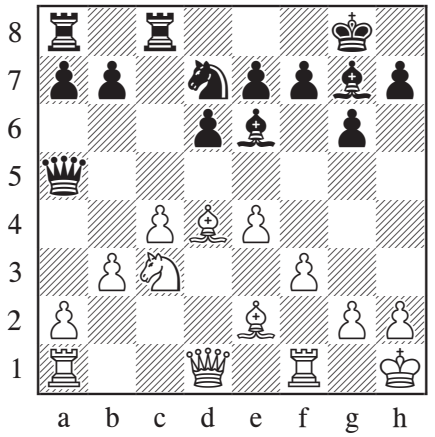


20...f6

20...♕f8 21.♕g3 ♗h6 22.f6! is winning for White.

21.♕g3 ♔g7 22.h4 ♗h6 23.fxg6 hxg6 24.♗g4±

Black remains under pressure and suffers from serious weaknesses in his position.

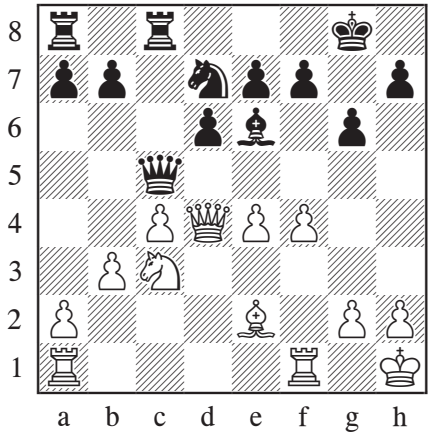


14.f4!

Making life uncomfortable for the bishop on e6.

14...♗xd4 15.♕xd4 ♕c5

15...f6 16.f5 ♗f7 17.fxg6 hxg6 18.♗g4 ♖d8 19.♗xd7 ♖xd7 20.♘d5± is also tough for Black.



16.♕d2!N

16.♕d3?! f6 17.♕g3 ♖f8± was somewhat better for White in Kasparov – Hracek, Prague (simul) 2001, but the text move is even better.

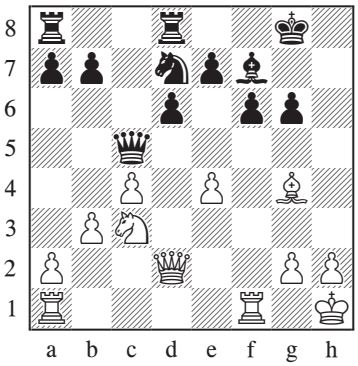
16...♘f6

The alternative is:

16...f6 17.f5! ♗f7

17...gxf5 18.exf5 ♗f7 19.♗f3± is highly unpleasant for Black.

18.fxg6 hxg6 19.♗g4 ♖d8

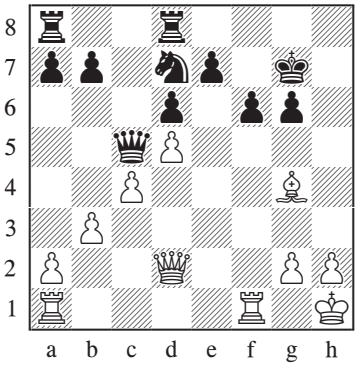


20.♘d5

20.♕h6 ♕g5 21.♕xg5 fxg5 22.♗xd7 ♖xd7 23.♖f2 gives White a favourable endgame but there is more to be gained by keeping the queens on.

20...♗xd5 21.exd5 ♔g7

21...♘e5 allows 22.♕h6! and White wins.

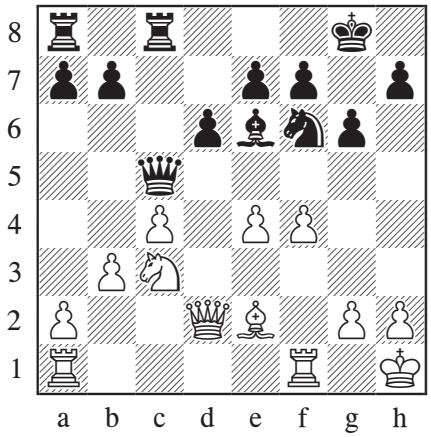


22.♗xd7

Preventing Black from establishing a strong knight on e5.

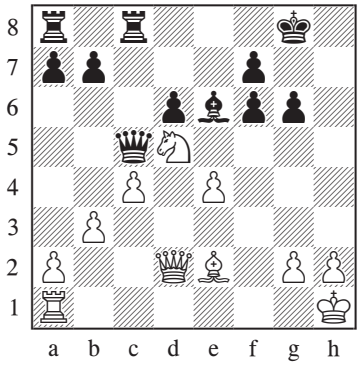
22...♖xd7

White keeps an overwhelming advantage after 23.♖ae1, or the even stronger 23.♖f3!.

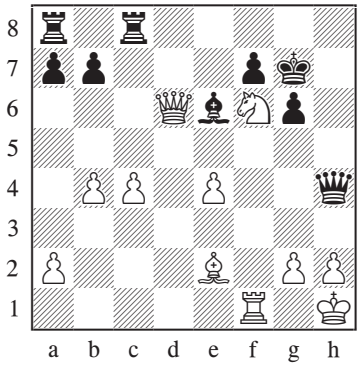


17.f5! ♗d7 18.fxg6 fxg6

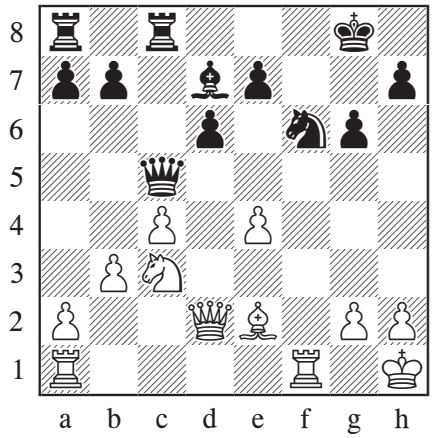
18...hxg6 allows us to get flashy with: 19.♖xf6!? (19.♘d5 ♘xd5 20.exd5 also leads to a great advantage) 19...exf6 20.♘d5 ♗e6



21.b4! An important detail. The queen is short of squares, giving White a few extra tempos. 21...♕f2 22.♖f1 ♕h4 23.♘xf6† ♔g7 24.♕xd6 Black is in trouble, for instance:



24...♗xc4 25.g3 ♕h8 26.♗xc4 ♖xc4 27.♕e5
White has an overwhelming advantage.



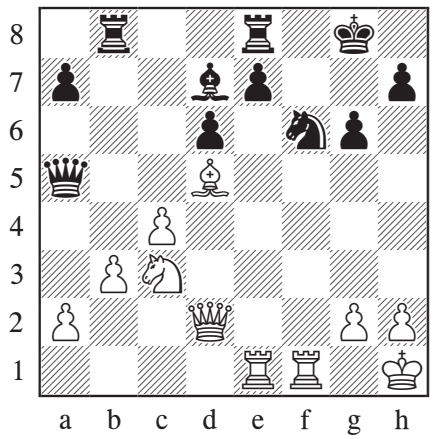
19.e5!!

A great move, leading to serious problems for Black.

19...♕xe5 20.♗f3

An elegant double attack, hitting the pawns on b7 and (indirectly) e7. Black has nothing better than:

20...♖e8 21.♖ae1 ♕a5 22.♗xb7 ♖ab8 23.♗d5†



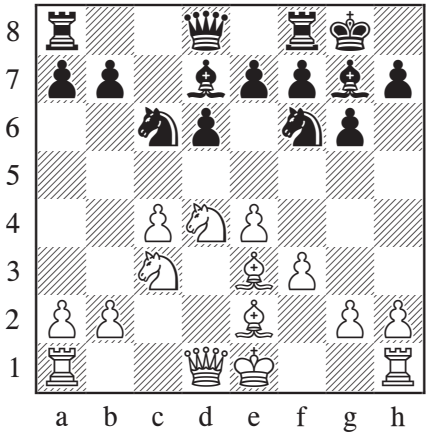
23...♘xd5

23...♔g7 24.♕b2± followed by ♗e6 is also terrible for Black.

24.♕xd5† ♕xd5 25.♘xd5±

White wins a pawn for starters.

B222) 9...♗d7



This is Black's most flexible continuation.

10.♕d2

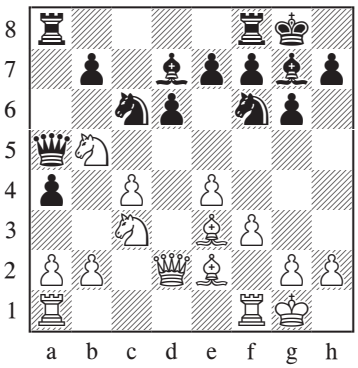
We reply with a flexible move of our own. Please note that 10.0–0 would be less accurate, as White gives up the often alluring possibility of long castling. Moreover, 10...♕b6!? is an interesting reply, leading to tactical complications.

We will analyse three main continuations. Against both **B2221) 10...♕a5** and **B2222) 10...a6**, we will castle on the kingside, having lured Black into a suboptimal set-up. We will finish by analysing the most popular and thematic continuation, namely **B2223) 10...♘xd4**, which allows us to castle queenside to good effect.

10...♖c8 should be met by 11.0–0! (11.g4 ♘e5 12.b3 a6 offers Black plenty of counterplay) 11...♘e5 (11...a6 leads straight to variation B2222) 12.b3 and it is not clear what Black is doing next.

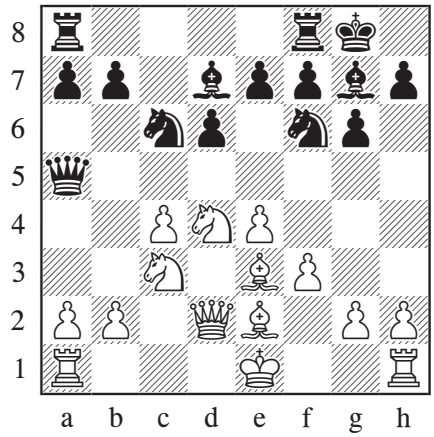
10...a5 allows White to exploit the b5-outpost with: 11.♘db5! (11.0–0 allows 11...♘xd4

12.♗xd4 ♗c6, when Black transposes to a solid main line) 11...a4 12.0–0 ♕a5



13.♖ac1 (White has several good options, 13.f4!? and 13.♖ad1 being a couple of them) 13...♖fc8 14.f4 ♗e6 This was Adhiban – Guseinov, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010, when 15.h3!?N would have kept a pleasant advantage for White, as Black suffers from a lack of space.

B2221) 10...♕a5



11.0–0

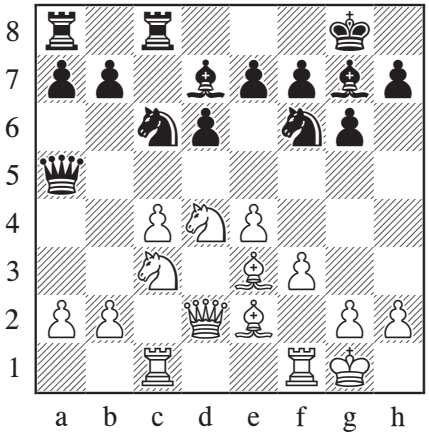
If we castled on the queenside then Black's last move would make a lot of sense, whereas now he simply has an inferior version of a standard Maroczy Bind set-up.

11...♖fc8

This is consistent with Black's previous move. 11...♘xd4 12.♗xd4 is a thematic exchange, but Black usually combines it with ...a5, ...♗c6 and ...♘d7-c5, so here the queen on a5 just gets in the way.

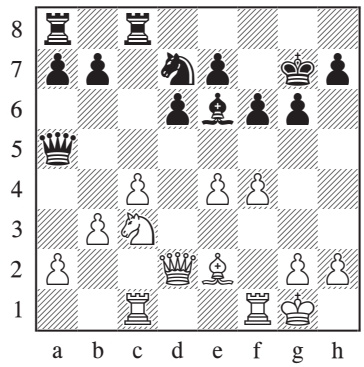
12.♖ac1!

I also checked 12.♖fd1 and found that 12...a6 13.♘b3! gives White a nice advantage. However, 12...♘xd4 13.♗xd4 ♗e6 14.b3 ♘d7 is more annoying; normally we would look to threaten f4-f5 against Black's set-up, but the plan is less effective now that the rook has moved away from f1.



12...a6

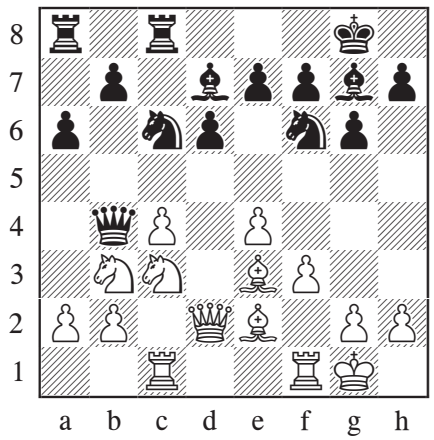
Here we are better placed to meet 12...♘xd4 13.♗xd4 ♗e6, although some precision is needed. Play continues 14.b3 ♘d7 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.f4 f6 and now a key idea is:



17.♕d1! Preparing ♗g4 to expose Black's weaknesses on the light squares. 17...♘c5 This occurred in Nguyen Huynh Minh – Nguyen, Dalat City 2004, when for some reason White rejected the obvious move: 18.♗g4N Black is clearly under pressure.

13.♘b3 ♕b4!?

13...♕d8 has been more common but White keeps a nice edge with 14.♘a4 or 14.♘d5.

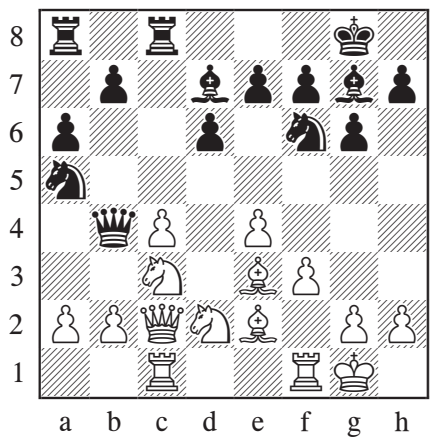


14.♕c2!N

14.c5 ♗e6 was not so clear in Fodor – Glatt, Hungary 2006. The text move threatens to trap Black's queen; his next couple of moves are forced.

14...♘a5 15.♘d2!

Threatening a2-a3.



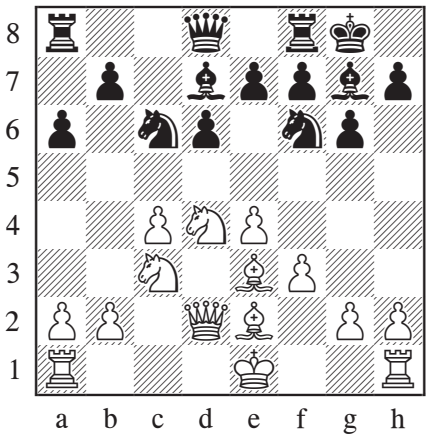
15...♘c6 16.a3

16.♕b1 also favours White.

16...♕a5 17.♖fd1±

Black suffers from a cramped position with no obvious counterplay in sight, and ideas of ♘b3 and c4-c5 are in the air.

B2222) 10...a6

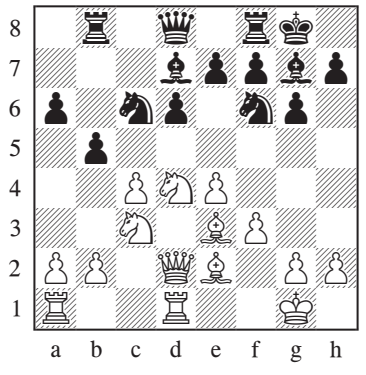


11.0–0

11.g4!? has been played a few times but 11...b5!N offers Black decent counterplay. So once again, we should be happy to play a traditional Maroczy set-up, having lured Black into a suboptimal set-up with ...a6.

11...♖c8

11...♖b8 12.♖fd1 b5 is a thematic plan but White has no problem getting an advantage against it:



13.cxb5 ♘xd4 14.♗xd4 axb5 and now either 15.a3 or 15.b4 leaves White with a pleasant position and good prospects on the queenside. The b5-pawn may become weak, or White may simply swap it off to create a strong passed pawn.

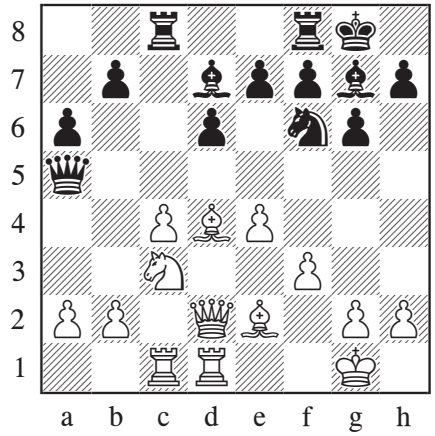
12.♖ac1 ♘xd4

In the event of 12...♘e5 13.b3 Black is running out of ideas.

12...♖e8 has been tried in some games, but 13.♖fd1 develops another piece and asks Black what he is doing. (13.♘xc6!? also gives White the upper hand, but I would not be in a hurry to exchange pieces with such a space advantage.)

13.♗xd4 ♕a5 14.♖fd1

14.a3 is also promising but it seems logical to develop the last piece, while also creating a threat.



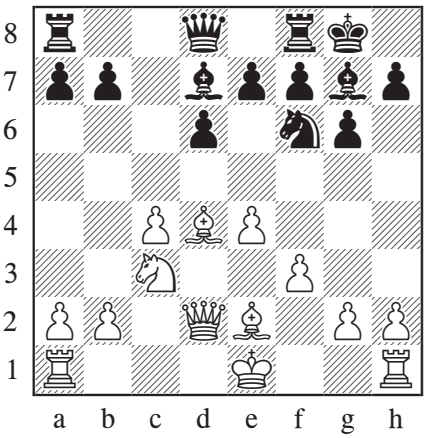
14...♖fe8

14...b5? 15.♘d5! is a typical trick.

15.a3±

White keeps a pleasant advantage and has achieved a huge practical score of well over 80% from here.

B2223) 10...♘xd4 11.♗xd4



11...♗c6

This has been the most popular continuation. Black's typical plan involves ...a5 and ...♘d7-c5, but White can take advantage of the fact that he has not yet castled.

Another move order is:

11...a5 12.h4!

Just as in the main line, White can play the Maroczy Bind in the spirit of the Yugoslav Attack!

12...a4

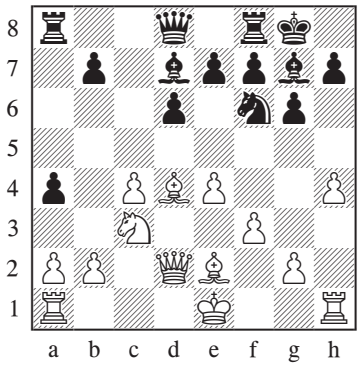
I considered three other options:

a) 12...♗c6 13.0–0–0! (13.h5 is playable although 13...e5! keeps Black in the game, with ...♘xh5 to follow) 13...♕c7?! 14.h5→ and Black was in trouble on the kingside in Arutyunova – Finkelshtein, Evpatoria 2005.

b) 12...♘h5 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.g4 ♘g3 15.♖h2 ♘xe2 16.♘xe2 h6 occurred in Pasztor – Celustkova, Liptovsky Mikulas 2015. White has no immediate breakthrough, but 17.♕d4†N ♔g8 18.♘c3± keeps a clear advantage.

c) 12...h5N has not yet been tried, but 13.0–0–0 a4 14.g4! transposes to an existing game which continued: 14...e5?! (14...hxg4? 15.h5 gives White a devastating attack; 14...a3 15.b3 ♗c6 is a better try, but

16.♖dg1!? still gives White excellent chances) 15.♗e3 hxg4 This was Asabri – S. Ali, Taza 2005, when 16.♗g5!N→ would have posed insurmountable problems to Black.

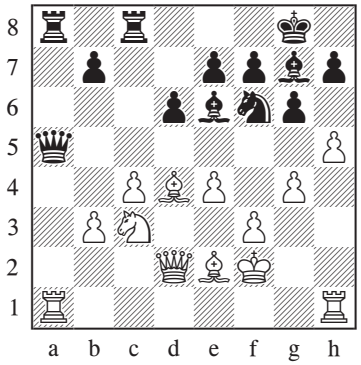


13.h5 ♕a5

This position was reached in Knezevic – Silva Lillo, Argenteuil 1997. I like the following way of building up White's position:

14.g4!N ♖fc8 15.♔f2 ♗e6 16.b3 axb3 17.axb3

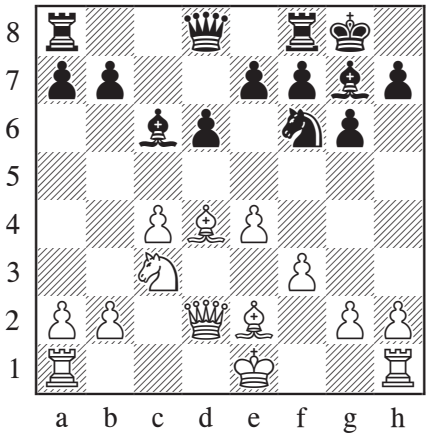
Black should retreat his queen and accept that he stands clearly worse. The alternative leads to disaster:



17...♕xa1? 18.♖xa1 ♖xa1 19.♘d5+–

With decisive material gains.

Let's return to the main line, where Black's thematic continuation plays right into our hands.

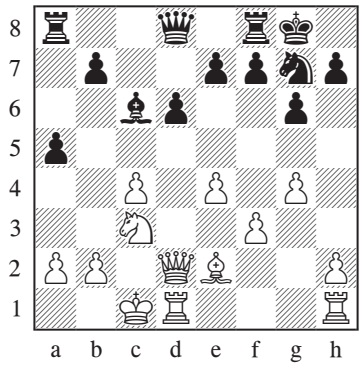


12.0–0–0!

If White was going to castle on the kingside, then 12.b4!? would be the most accurate move order, preventing the thematic ...♘d7 on account of b4-b5, trapping the bishop. Black must therefore try something like 12...b6, when 13.0–0± gives White a pleasant advantage. This would be a fully satisfactory outcome from the opening, but I like the plan of attacking on the kingside even more.

12...a6

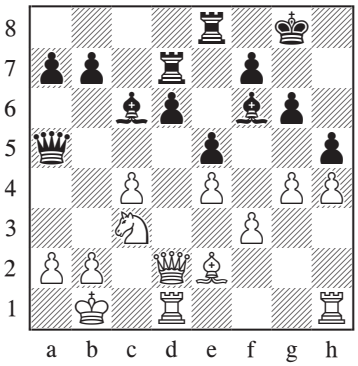
12...♘h5 is not a stupid move but it is well met by: 13.♗xg7 ♘xg7 14.g4 a5



15.h4± White had an obvious edge in O'Donnell – Monteverde, email 2003.

Black soon got into trouble in the following game: 12...♕a5 13.♔b1 ♖fe8 14.g4 e5 15.♗e3

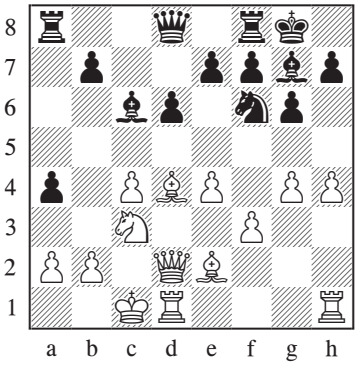
♖ad8 16.h4 h5 17.♗g5 ♖d7 18.♗xf6 ♗xf6 In Bicskei – Majstorac, Senta 2010, White made several mistakes and somehow ended up losing. At this point, the simplest win would have been:



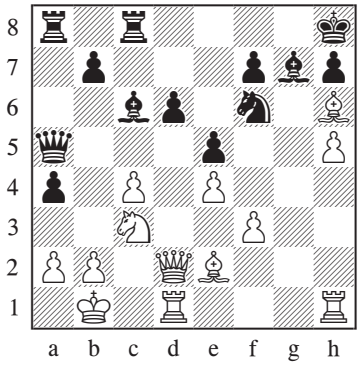
19.gxh5N Black's position will soon fall apart.

12...♖e8?! is hardly satisfactory: 13.g4 ♘d7 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.h4 ♖h8 This occurred in Saucey – Uhl, Calvi 2005, when 16.h5N ♕a5 17.g5± would have been excellent for White.

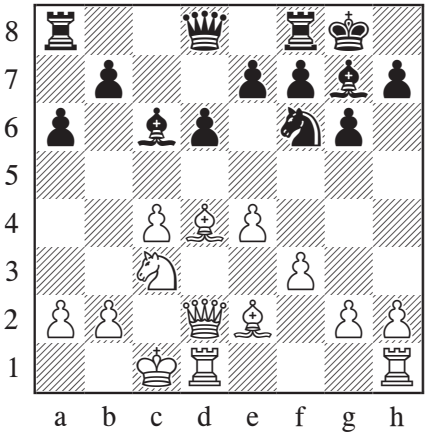
Another game continued:
12...a5 13.g4 a4 14.h4



14...♕a5?!
14...a3 can be met by: 15.b4!? h5 (15...♖c8 16.♔b1±) 16.g5 ♘e8 17.f4±
14...h5 15.gxh5 ♘xh5 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.f4 ♖h8 18.♖hg1± also favours White.
15.h5± ♖fc8 16.♔b1 gxh5?
Black was already in trouble, but opening the g-file like this is suicidal at best.
17.gxh5 e5 18.♗e3 ♔h8 19.♗h6
19.♕xd6+– is also good enough.



19...♖g8 20.♗xg7† ♖xg7 21.♕xd6 ♘e8 22.♕f8† ♖g8 23.♕xf7 ♖a6 24.♖hg1
1–0 Wagner – Fritzer, Vienna 2008.



13.♔b1

13.g4 h5 14.h4 was not so convincing after 14...hxg4 15.fxg4 e5! in Vani – Mateus, Mureck 2009. White could easily improve on move 14 of this game, but I also like the text move, just taking a moment to improve the king's position.

13...♕d7

13...b5 occurred in Putzbach – Nolting, Bad Woerishofen 1988. The trouble for Black is

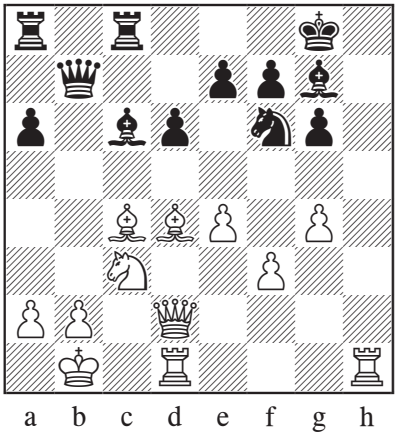
that the bishop on c6 just gets in the way of his attack, so White can simply get on with his own plans: 14.g4!N bxc4 (14...♖b8 15.h4±) 15.♗xc4 ♕c8 16.♖c1±

14.g4 b5

Once again, there is no need to react to Black's queenside play.

15.h4 bxc4 16.h5 ♕b7 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.♗xc4 ♖fc8

In Bilic – Cebalo, Bizovac 2004, White missed a clear way to break through:



19.g5!N ♘xe4

Other moves lose more quickly.

20.fxe4 ♗xe4† 21.♘xe4 ♕xe4† 22.♔a1 ♖xc4

Black's combination has netted him a couple of pawns, but the open h-file proves his undoing.

23.♗xg7 ♔xg7 24.♕h2+–

Conclusion

The Maroczy Bind has long been established as a quality choice. In this chapter, we saw how modern nuances can be used to imbue this vintage system with added punch.

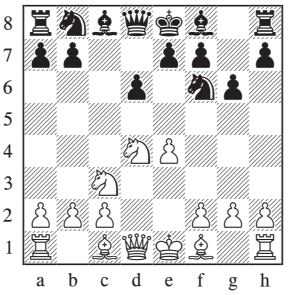
After 5.c4, our first main line continued 5...♘f6 6.♘c3 d6, when 7.f3! is the most accurate way to steer the game towards the target position identified on page 232. After the further 7...♘xd4 8.♕xd4 ♗g7 9.♗e3 0–0 10.♕d2 there are a couple of important details. First, 10...♗e6 11.♖c1 ♕a5 12.♗d3! has significant advantages over the more common bishop development to e2. Secondly, 10...a5 should be met by 11.♘a4!, leading to excellent prospects for White.

Black's other main option is 5...♗g7 6.♗e3 ♘f6 7.♘c3, leading to a further split.

7...♘g4 is an interesting way of exchanging knights. Play continues 8.♕xg4 ♘xd4 9.♕d1 and now both 9...e5 and 9...♘e6 are valid options, although I like White's chances in both cases.

Finally, 7...0–0 8.♗e2 d6 is a well-known main line with a reputation for solidity, but 9.f3! is an excellent move which reaches the target position identified early in the chapter. The big idea is to retain the option of castling on the queenside and launching a vicious kingside attack – an approach which has been overlooked in many books, making it an even more dangerous practical weapon. If Black anticipates this plan and prepares to launch his own queenside attack, White can happily revert to kingside castling, having lured Black into a suboptimal set-up for that type of position.

Chapter 8



Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3

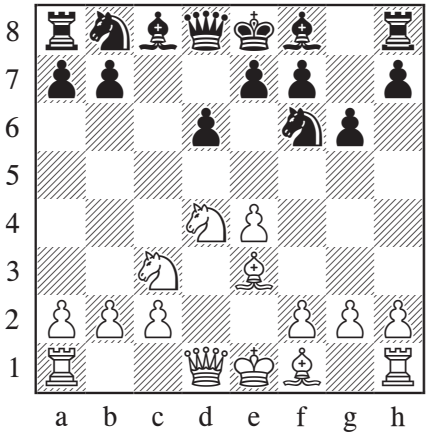
A) 7...a6 8.♕d2 (8...♘c6; 8...b5) **269**
A1) 8...h5 **269**
A2) 8...♘bd7 *Game 23* **271**
B) 7...♘c6 *Game 24* **275**
C) 7...0–0 8.♕d2 ♘c6 9.0–0–0 (9...♕a5; 9...♗e6) **278**
C1) 9...♗d7 **278**
C2) 9...♘xd4 **281**
C3) 9...d5 10.♕e1!? (10...dxe4??; 10...♗e6?!) **286**
C31) 10...e6?! 11.h4! (11...♗d7?!; 11...h5?!; 11...♖e8?!) **287**
C311) 11...♕e7?! **288**
C312) 11...♕c7 *Game 25* **290**
C32) 10...e5 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.exd5 **293**
C321) 12...cxd5 *Game 26* **294**
C322) 12...♘xd5 13.♗c4 ♗e6 14.♘e4 **298**
(14...♖e8?!; 14...h6) **299**
C3221) 14...♕b8 **300**
C3222) 14...♕c7 **302**

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6

The Dragon is an exciting system which continues to defy all White's attempts at a direct refutation. In this chapter I will advocate a policy of controlled aggression. The general plan will be to aim for a kingside attack, while being ready to switch to a positional strategy when the position demands it.

6.♗e3

Preparing a Yugoslav Attack with 7.f3 and 8.♕d2.



6...♗g7

We don't have to worry about 6...♘g4?? yet, as 7.♗b5† wins material.

6...♘c6 7.f3 will almost certainly convert to one of the main lines, as Black can hardly delay ...♗g7 indefinitely.

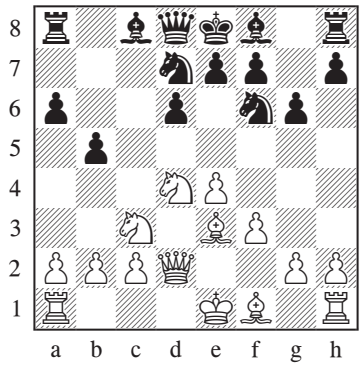
The only other option worth mentioning is:

6...a6!?

With this move, Black goes for an 'accelerated' version of the Dragadorf System, which will be discussed in Variation A below. However, it's likely to come to the same thing.

7.f3 ♘bd7 8.♕d2 b5?!

Black should prefer 8...♗g7, with a transposition to variation A2 on page 271.



9.a4!

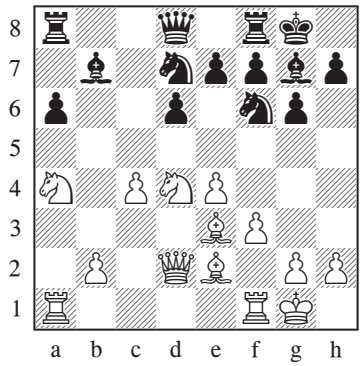
This is an important motif to remember in situations where Black plays ...b5 before White has committed to queenside castling.

9...bxa4

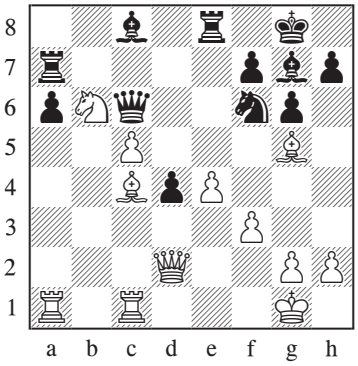
9...b4 10.♘d5 ♘xd5 11.♘c6 ♕c7 12.exd5 is clearly better for White.

10.♘xa4 ♗g7 11.♗e2 ♗b7 12.c4 0–0 13.0–0

White has a pleasant position with good chances to exert pressure against Black's weakened queenside. This is why, as a general rule, Black should wait for White to castle on the queenside before playing ...b5. You don't need to know any more than this, but I will include a bit more of the game to show how Kasparov increased his advantage.



13...♘c5 14.b4 e5 15.bxc5 exd4 16.♗g5 ♖e8 17.cxd6 ♕xd6 18.c5 ♕c6 19.♗c4 ♗c8 20.♘b6 ♖a7 21.♖fc1



21...♘d7 22.♗d5 ♕c7 23.♘c4 ♕xc5 24.♘a5 ♕f8 25.♘c6

White's pieces are dominating and Black was unable to resist for much longer in Kasparov – Ki. Georgiev, Sarajevo 2000.

7.f3

We have reached our first major branching point, where **A) 7...a6**, **B) 7...♘c6** and **C) 7...0–0** must be considered.

7...♗d7 reaches a position discussed on page 375 of the previous volume – see the note on 6...g6 in the coverage of the Kupreichik System.

A) 7...a6

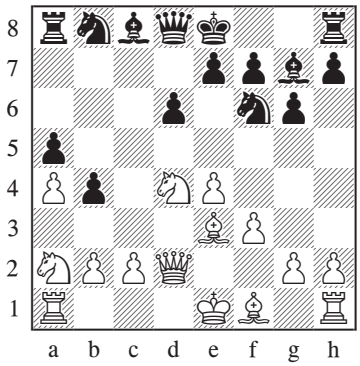
This move introduces the Dragadorf System, so called because it combines elements of the Dragon and Najdorf. Simon Williams recommended it in his 2009 book *The New Sicilian Dragon*. For a while Black's set-up became quite popular and presented White with a lot of challenges, but I believe my recommended scheme causes serious problems for the defence.

8.♕d2

We will consider two main options: **A1) 8...h5** is an attempt to restrain White's kingside ambitions, and the more natural **A2) 8...♘bd7** is the main line.

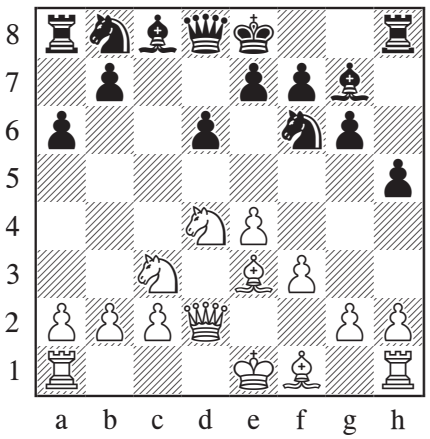
8...♘c6?! simply gives Black a bad version of a normal Dragon.

8...b5 is once again premature due to: 9.a4! b4 (9...bxa4 is likely to transpose to the Kasparov – Georgiev game noted above) 10.♘a2 a5



11.♗b5† ♘bd7 12.c3 bxc3 13.♘xc3± White had an easy edge in Galkin – Motylev, Novokuznetsk 2008.

A1) 8...h5



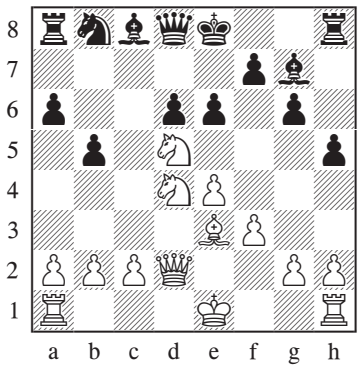
9.♗c4!

9.0–0–0 b5 10.♘d5 offers decent chances for an edge, but this is a rare case where I prefer to develop the bishop to c4. As you will see throughout the chapter, I usually recommend doing without this move, but here it makes a lot of sense. Black's last move may have

prevented ideas such as ♗h6 and g2-g4, but it leaves him vulnerable to a central attack with ♗g5, ♖he1, f3-f4 and e4-e5; the bishop on c4 nicely supports this plan. Moreover, if Black chases the bishop with ...b5, then ♗d5 often proves an effective reply, as we will see.

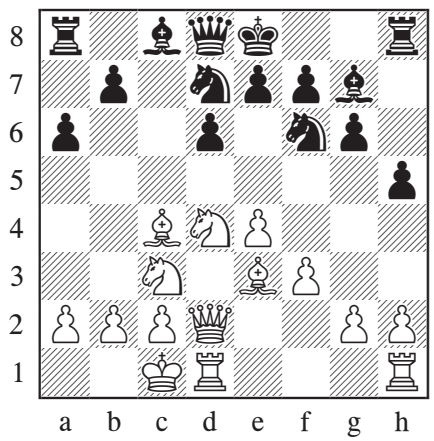
9...♘bd7

9...b5 is well met by: 10.♗d5! (10.♗b3 should favour White too but the text move is more forcing) 10...♘xd5 11.♘xd5 e6



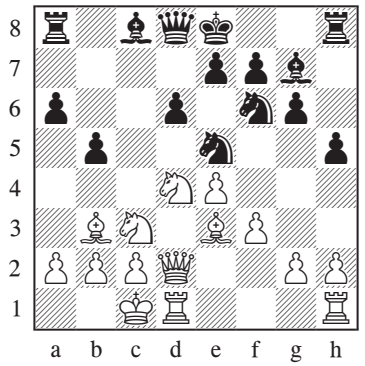
12.♘b6! ♖a7N (12...♕xb6 13.♘xe6 ♕xe3† 14.♕xe3 ♗xe6 occurred in Zlotov – Borhy, Hajduboszormeny 2016, when 15.0–0–0N would have been close to winning for White) 13.♘xc8 ♕xc8 14.♘xb5 axb5 15.♗xa7 ♗xb2 16.♗d4 ♗xa1 17.♗xa1 0–0 18.♕xd6± Black may win back the lost pawn but his dark-square weaknesses will remain.

10.0–0–0



10...b5

Sometimes Black prefers 10...♘e5 11.♗b3 b5, in order to discourage ♗d5, which would now lose a tempo. However, White has another strong idea which, surprisingly, has yet to be tested.



12.♗g5!N White has excellent prospects in the centre with f3-f4, ♖he1 and e4-e5 coming.

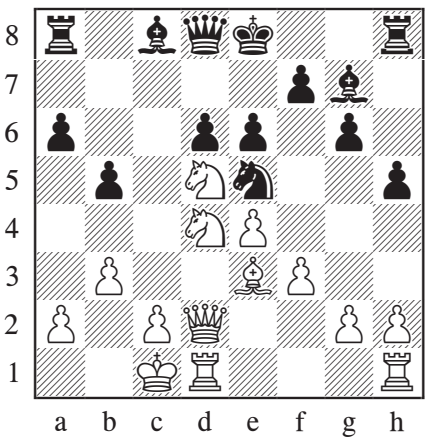
11.♗d5!

Again this is our preferred reply to ...b5.

11...♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♘e5

12...♗b7 13.♗g5 ♗xd5 14.exd5 ♘e5 15.b3 ♖c8 16.♖he1± left Black hard pressed to defend against f3-f4 in Guizar – Ensor, corr. 2011.

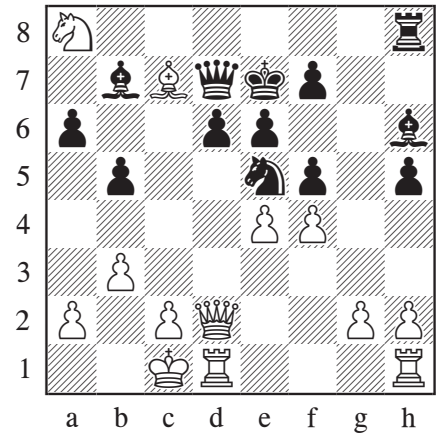
13.b3 e6



14.♘f5!

This spectacular move leads to a big advantage by force.

14...gxf5 15.♗b6 ♕d7 16.♘c7† ♔e7 17.♘xa8 ♗b7 18.♗c7 ♗h6 19.f4



19...♘d3†!?

This tricky move is as good a try as any, but White deals with it efficiently.

20.cxd3 ♖c8 21.♔b1 ♗xa8 22.♗a5 fxe4 23.♖he1 f5 24.♕e2 ♕e8 25.♕e3 ♔f8 26.♖c1+–

Black failed to demonstrate compensation for the exchange and White converted his advantage in Riccio – Gerola, corr. 2009.

A2) 8...♘bd7

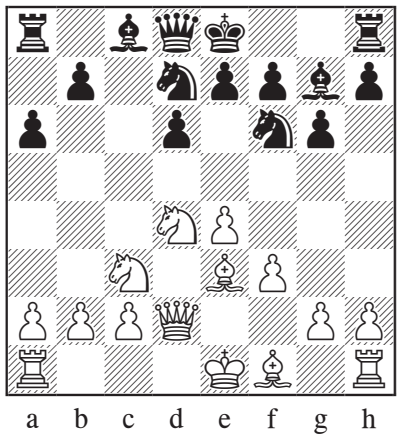
This natural move is the main line, but the following game shows an excellent way for White to meet it.

GAME 23

Peter Catt – Richard Sutton

Correspondence 2010

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 a6 8.♕d2 ♘bd7



9.g4!

9.0–0–0 has been the most popular choice but the text is more accurate. White not only starts his attack a move earlier, but also keeps the option of short castling, which may prove useful in some lines, as we will soon see. Before moving on, I will mention a few other ideas which I rejected for one reason or another.

9.a3!? comes with the sneaky idea of meeting 9...b5 with 10.a4!. However, a more flexible move such as 9...0–0N makes it harder for White to justify his last move.

9.a4!? offers White chances for a slight plus but it's hardly the kind of move that will keep Dragadorf players awake at night.

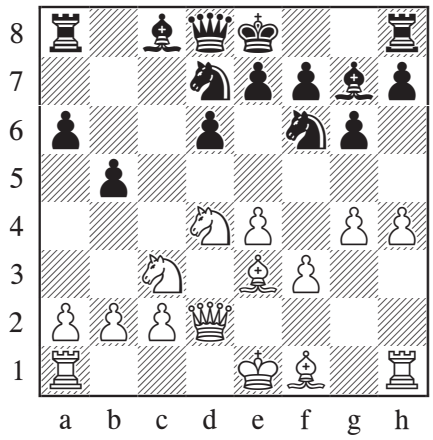
9.♗e2 b6 10.♘d5 ♘xd5 11.exd5 ♗b7 12.c4 0–0 13.0–0 ♖e8 14.♖ac1± gave White a small

edge in Efimenko – Nakamura, Gibraltar 2007. Once again though, I prefer a more ambitious treatment of the position.

9...b5 10.h4!

Khalifman recommends 10.g5 ♘h5 11.a4, but I am not so keen on the idea of advancing pawns on both sides of the board. Even if White develops strong pressure on the queenside, Black will always have chances for counterplay against White's overextended kingside structure.

10.♘c6!? ♕c7 11.♘xe7 leads to interesting complications but Black seems to be okay after: 11...♗b7! (11...♔xe7?! 12.g5 ♗b7 13.gxf6† ♗xf6 14.0–0–0 favoured White in Kotronias – Gelashvili, Thessaloniki 2007. We analysed this more deeply and found some beautiful ideas for White, but sadly they are irrelevant as both sides can improve earlier.) 12.g5! b4 13.♘cd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5 15.♕xd5 0–0 16.♖d1 ♗xb2 17.♗e2 ♗e5 18.♔f2 It looks like White may have chances to press; however, after 18...♘b6 19.♕a5 ♖ab8 20.h4 d5 21.♗xb6 ♖xb6 22.♖xd5 ♗c3 Black was able to hold in Strehlau – Goebert, corr. 2010.



10...h5

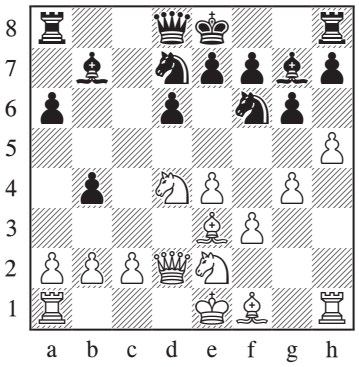
This is the most common move and the recommendation of Williams, although he does briefly consider the following alternative:

10...♗b7 11.h5 b4

11...♖g8 is more solid; but if Black has to resort to this, it says something about the difficulty of his position. 12.0–0–0 (the computer's suggestion of 12.h6!? ♗h8 13.g5 also looks promising) 12...♖c8 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.g5 ♘h5 15.♗h3 Black's position was unpleasant in Hernandez Guerrero – Gulko, Lubbock 2007.

12.♘ce2

12.♘a4 is clearly better for White but I like the text move even more.



12...e5

Another game continued 12...d5 13.h6 ♗f8 14.g5 e5 and now in Bitoon – Shanava, Vung Tau 2008, 15.gxf6N exd4 16.♗xd4 dxe4 17.0–0–0→ would have given Black huge problems.

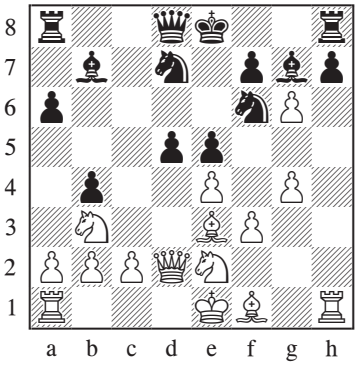
13.♘b3 d5?

This is the move Black would like to play and is given by Williams, but Black is taking too many liberties.

13...a5 is a slight improvement, although 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.♖xh8† ♗xh8 16.g5± was still unpleasant for Black in Fuller – Hein, corr. 2010.

14.hxg6

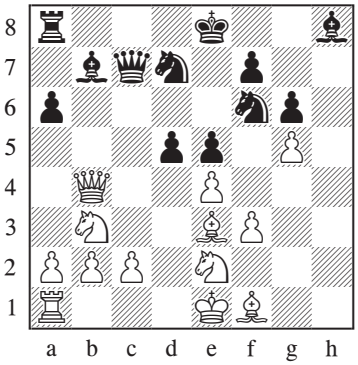
Williams briefly reaches this position in a note and calls it unclear, but Black is in serious trouble.



14...hxg6

14...fxg6 15.♕xb4+–

15.♖xh8† ♗xh8 16.♕xb4 ♕c7 17.g5



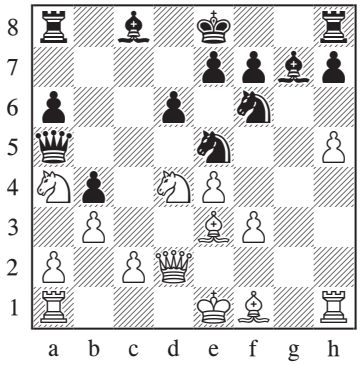
17...d4

17...♘h5 18.♘a5 also leaves Black in big trouble, as 18...♖b8 runs into 19.♗a7.

18.gxf6 ♗xf6 19.♗f2+–

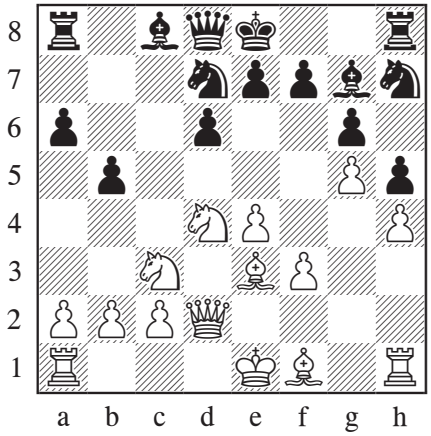
Palac – Romero Holmes, Arvier 2008.

If Black is determined to avoid ...h5, then 10...b4 looks like a slight improvement on the above line, as a subsequent ♕xb4 will not attack a bishop on b7. Nevertheless, White still has excellent prospects after: 11.♘a4! (11.♘ce2 ♘e5! offers Black reasonable counterplay) 11...♕a5 (11...♗b7 occurred in Kryvoruchko – Shanava, Olomouc 2006, when 12.h5N± would have been excellent for White) 12.b3 ♘e5 13.h5 gxh5 14.gxh5 (14.g5!?N could also be considered)



14...♘xf3†!? 15.♘xf3 ♘xe4 16.♕d3 ♗xa1 17.♕xe4 ♖b8 18.♗d3↑ Black eventually held a draw, but at this stage White's active minor pieces were clearly stronger than the rook in Efanov – Sergeev, corr. 2010.

11.g5 ♘h7



12.f4!

12.0–0–0 has been the more common choice and the two moves often transpose, but Williams points out that the text has an important advantage of keeping the option of short castling. The attacking plan of f4-f5 is a powerful one, which is helped by the fact that the knight on h7 is severely misplaced.

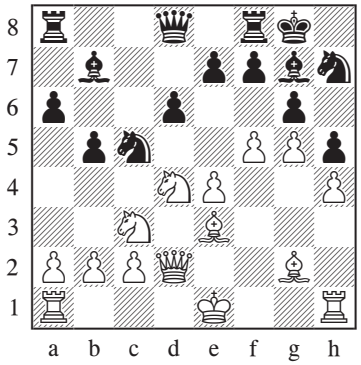
12...e5

Williams suggested this move as a novelty in his 2009 book. It's an interesting idea but the

continuation of the present game more or less refutes it. Black also has a hard time after other moves:

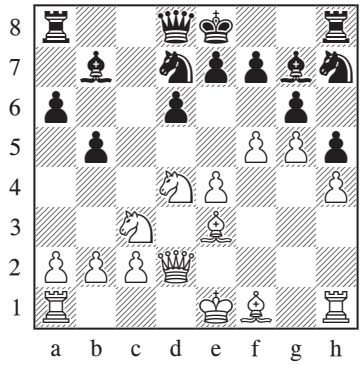
12...0–0? was tried in Hoeksema – J. Hanley, Groningen 2006, when 13.♘c6!N would have been crushing. Black has to take the practically suicidal measure of exchanging his Dragon bishop for the knight on c3, as 13...♕e8 14.♘d5+– leads to an immediate loss of material for him.

12...♘c5 allows White to press ahead with his attack: 13.f5! ♗b7 14.♗g2 0–0 (14...b4 15.♘d5 0–0 16.0–0–0 was great for White in Franklin – Caglar, London 2016, and 16.0–0!?N would also have been excellent)



15.0–0!? (15.0–0–0 is the computer's favourite and is certainly a good move, but there is something to be said for keeping our king away from Black's region of activity) 15...b4 16.♘d5 e6? (Black should prefer 16...a5 although 17.a3 leaves him with big problems) 17.f6 exd5 18.fxg7 ♖e8 19.exd5+– Black was positionally busted in Guseinov – Shanava, Baku 2006.

White also gets a powerful attack after:
12...♗b7 13.f5!



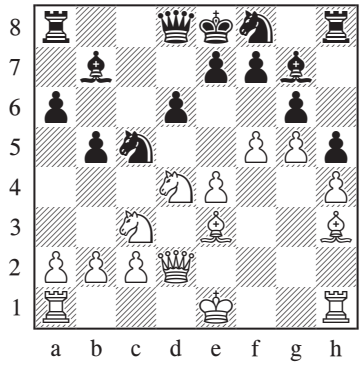
13...♘hf8

13...♕a5 14.fxg6 fxg6 15.♗h3 (15.♘d5!?N ♕xd2† 16.♔xd2± is simple and strong) 15...♘e5 16.♗e6 ♘f8 17.0–0± Danzanvilliers – Hryniw, corr. 2013.

13...♘e5 14.0–0–0 0–0 15.♘d5 ♗c8 occurred in Motylev – Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2006. White has several excellent continuations but 16.♗h3N looks best to me; White is already close to winning.

14.♗h3 ♘c5

Grayland – Bekkesletten, corr. 2013. Here I found a nice improvement for White:



15.0–0!N

In the game White retreated the bishop to g2 and kept some advantage, but there's actually no need to defend the e4-pawn.

15...b4

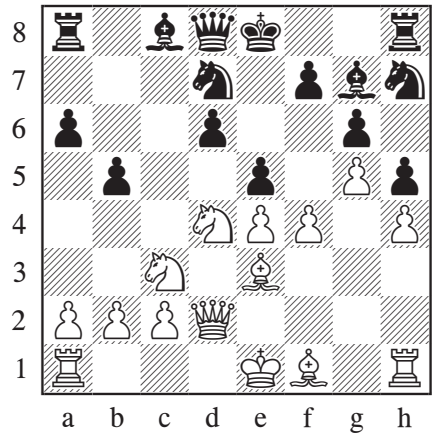
15...♘xe4? 16.fxg6! gives White a huge attack.

16.♘ce2 ♖b8

16...♘xe4 17.fxg6 ♘xg6 18.♕xb4+–

17.a3!?→

White has several good options but I like this idea of bringing another piece into the attack. Black is in serious trouble; he has no real hope of getting his king to safety and the loss of the e4-pawn is hardly relevant.



13.♘c6 ♕c7 14.♘e7!

A most unusual outpost for a knight! This is stronger than 14.♘b4 exf4, although even that is no picnic for Black.

14...exf4 15.♘cd5!

Williams gave 15.♘ed5 ♕a5 16.♗xf4 ♘e5 as a possible continuation needing practical tests. My assessment is that 17.♗e2 leaves White with a clear advantage, but the game continuation is even stronger.

15...♕d8

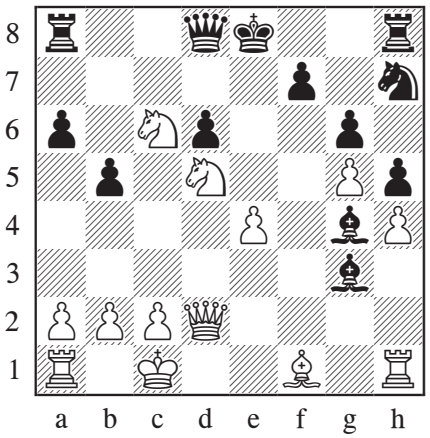
15...♕b8 16.♗xf4 is equally horrible for Black. The knights on d5 and e7 prevent him from castling, and White will soon be able to complete development and break through.

16.♗xf4 ♘e5 17.♗xe5 ♗xe5 18.♘c6 ♗g3†

18...♕d7 19.♘xe5 dxe5 20.♕b4 is crushing.

19.♔d1 ♗g4† 20.♔c1

White's king is oddly placed but it is in no real danger, unlike its counterpart.



20...♕c8 21.♕c3 ♗e5

Obviously Black cannot castle as it's mate on e7.

21...♖f8 22.♘b6 is hopeless for Black, as is 21...♖g8 22.♘de7 ♗e5 23.♘xc8 ♗xc3 24.♘b6.

22.♘xe5 ♕xc3 23.bxc3 dxe5 24.♘c7†

Faced with the prospects of a hopeless endgame the exchange down, Black resigned.

1–0

B) 7...♘c6

GAME 24

Norman Rogers – Teddy Coleman

Washington DC 2003

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 ♘c6 8.♕d2

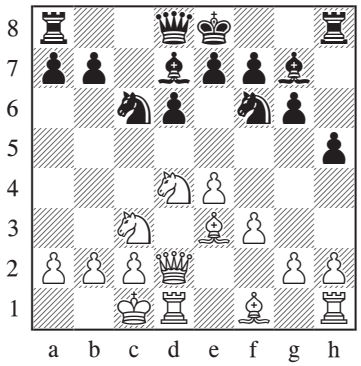
Now 8...0–0 leads to our main line, as covered in variation C, but in this section we will see a different approach.

8...♗d7

Black's idea is to postpone castling and develop his queenside play, avoiding giving White a target on the kingside. Tiviakov has

played this with good results, especially in open tournaments, although he never pretended it was objectively Black's best line.

Another version of the same idea is:
8...h5 9.0–0–0 ♗d7



10.h3!

White intends ♗e2 next, when g2-g4 will be a positional threat. If Black prevents it with ...h4, then we will switch to central play with f3-f4.

It is also possible to play 10.♔b1 followed by h2-h3, with the same ideas.

10...a6

10...♖c8 11.♔b1 a6 does not change much. 12.♗e2 h4 (12...♘e5? 13.f4 ♘c4 14.♗xc4 ♖xc4 15.e5 would be devastating for Black) 13.f4 ♘h5 14.♖he1 ♘g3 In Antoniou – Erdogan, Leon 2001, White should have played 15.♗f3!N with clearly better chances, for instance: 15...0–0 16.f5 ♘e5 17.♗h6 ♘c4 18.♕c1 ♘a3† 19.♔a1 ♖xc3 20.bxc3 ♕a5 21.♗xg7 ♔xg7 22.♖d3 ♘c4 23.♕g5±

11.♗e2 h4

In the event of 11...0–0 12.g4 b5 13.♘d5!± Black is forced to make an unpleasant concession on the kingside.

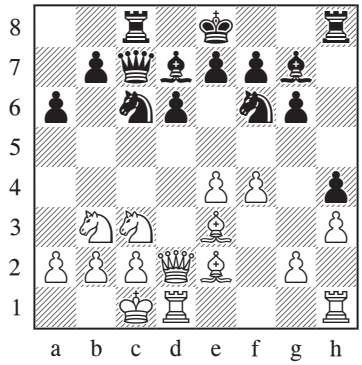
11...♖c8 12.g4± is also excellent for White.

12.f4! ♕c7

12...♘h5 13.♗f3 ♘xd4 14.♗xd4 e5 15.fxe5 dxe5 occurred in Kudrin – Brjuhin, Dubna 2009, and now after 16.♗b6!?N ♗h6 17.♗e3 ♗xe3 18.♕xe3 ♘f6 19.♘d5 White is close to winning.

12...♖c8N 13.♗f3 0–0 14.♖he1± is also excellent for White. 14...♘a5!? is a reasonable attempt to complicate matters, but 15.e5! ♘c4 16.exf6! ♘xd2 17.fxg7 ♔xg7 18.♖xd2 maintains White's big advantage.

13.♘b3 ♖c8

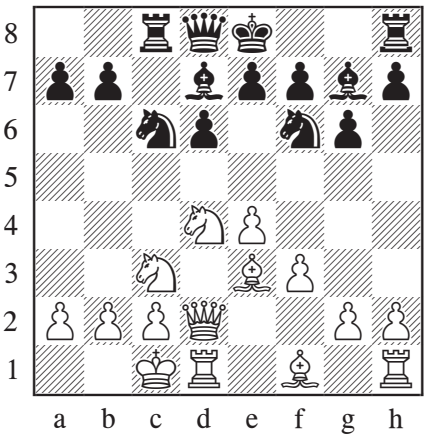


14.♔b1!N

White needs to improve on the disastrous 14.♘d5?? ♘xd5 15.exd5 ♘b4 16.c4, as seen in Czarnota – Bakalarz, Krakow 2004, when 16...♕xc4†!N 17.♗xc4 ♖xc4† 18.♔b1 ♗f5† would have been winning for Black.

14...0–0 15.♗f2±

9.0–0–0 ♖c8

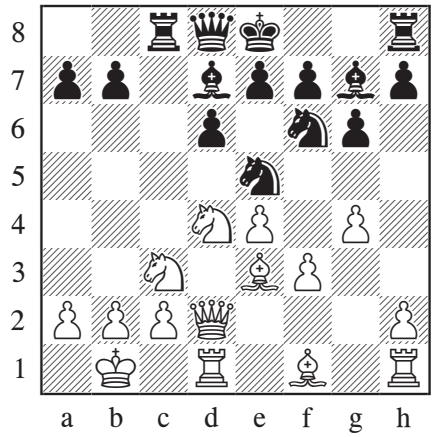


10.g4

White should start with this pawn, rather than allow Black to block the kingside with 10.h4?! h5.

10.♔b1 is perfectly valid, and is likely to transpose to our main line within a few moves.

10...♘e5 11.♔b1



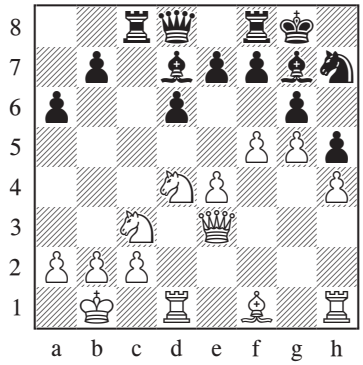
11...a6

11...0–0 has been the most common continuation; we will analyse this position under variation C1.

The text move sees Black continue to postpone castling. The trouble is that he needs to bring the h8-rook into the game at some point.

12.h4 b5

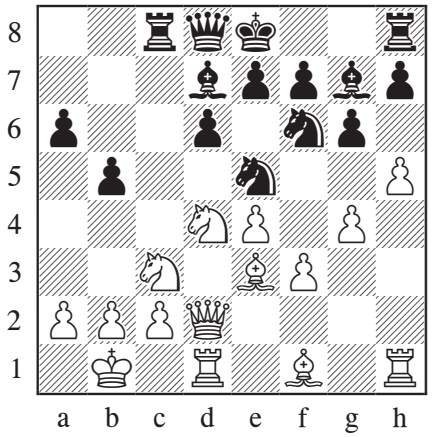
12...h5 13.g5 ♘h7 also leads to big trouble for Black after: 14.f4 ♘g4 15.f5! ♘xe3 16.♕xe3 0–0



This was Vaibhav – Wang, Kemer 2009, when 17.♗h3!N+– would have left Black unable to defend his light-square weaknesses.

13.h5

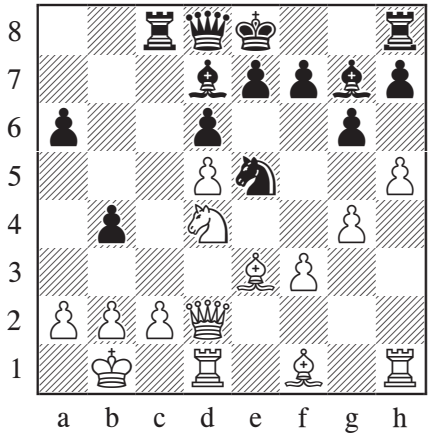
Now Black must take into account the possibility of h5-h6.



13...b4

13...♖g8 14.a3 ♘c4 15.♗xc4 bxc4 16.hxg6 hxg6 17.♘de2± was also highly unpleasant for Black in Petrovic – Baklanov, email 2008.

14.♘d5 ♘xd5 15.exd5±



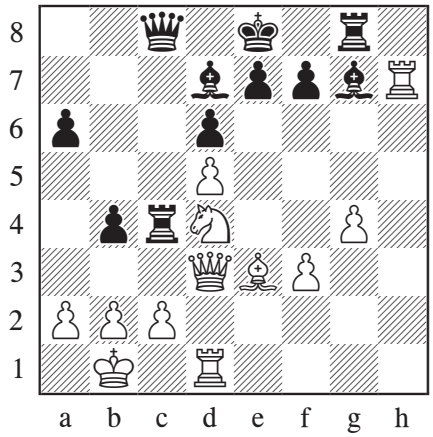
15...gxh5

This must have been a horrible move to

make, but it is obvious that Black's opening strategy has failed.

16.♖xh5 ♘c4 17.♗xc4 ♖xc4 18.♕d3 ♕c8 19.♖xh7 ♖g8

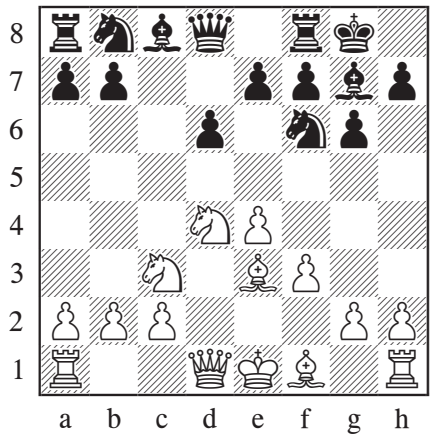
White can win in many different ways, but he finds the quickest and most stylish method.



20.♖xg7! ♖xg7 21.♖h1 ♖g8 22.♕h7 ♖f8 23.♕g7 ♖xd4 24.♗xd4 e5 25.♗e3 f6 26.♖h7 1–0

It is time to move on to the main lines where Black castles.

C) 7...0–0



8.♕d2 ♘c6 9.0–0–0

9.♗c4 is a serious option but I find the text move more appealing.

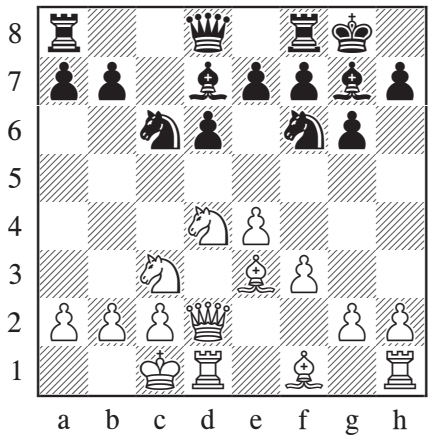
There are three main options to analyse. **C1) 9...♗d7** has been played in a lot of games but is rather dubious. **C2) 9...♘xd4** makes a bit more sense, as Black prepares to develop the bishop on e6, but White still has excellent prospects against it. And finally, **C3) 9...d5** is the most critical move, and quite rightly the main line.

Other moves have been tried, but I don't see anything that warrants detailed analysis. Here are a few brief examples:

Black gains nothing from 9...♕a5 10.♔b1, when he will have to watch out for ♘d5 tricks whenever the knight moves away from c6.

9...♗e6 gives White a few good options: 10.♘xe6 (10.♔b1 is also fine, when it is hard to believe that Black can do better than transpose to variation C2 by exchanging on d4) 10...fxe6 11.g3!? is a nice idea, intending ♗h3 with pressure on the light squares.

C1) 9...♗d7

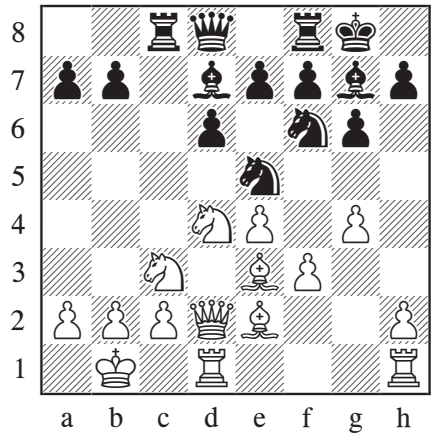


This move makes more sense when White's bishop has gone to c4, as in that case Black can

follow up by attacking that piece with ...♖c8. With the bishop still on f1, Black's plan is too slow.

10.g4 ♖c8 11.♔b1 ♘e5 12.♗e2!?

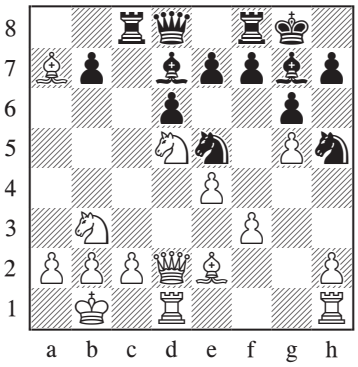
I find this a simple and effective way to play.



12...b5

Black does not really get enough compensation with this pawn sacrifice, but it is hard to suggest a satisfactory alternative. Here are a few examples:

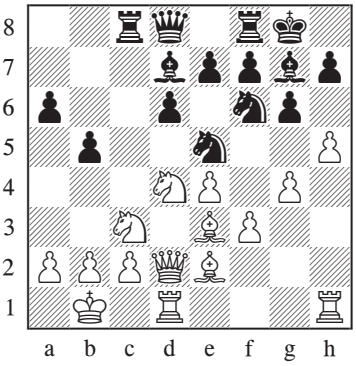
12...♕a5 13.♘b3 ♕c7 14.g5 ♘h5 15.♘d5 ♕d8 16.♗xa7 is a safe pawn grab, as Black is unable to mount much of an offensive on the queenside. For instance:



16...b5 17.♗b6 ♕e8 18.♗d4 ♘c4 19.♗xc4 bxc4 20.♘a5 ♗e6 21.♗xg7 ♘xg7 22.♕b4± Korneev – Getta, San Sebastian 2000.

12...a6 13.h4 b5 14.h5

White's attack is much faster, as the following lines demonstrate.



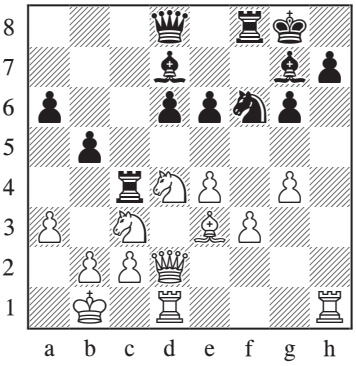
14...e6

14...♖e8 15.hxg6 hxg6? (15...fxg6 is a better try although 16.g5 is still close to winning for White) 16.♗h6 ♗h8 17.♗f8 ♖xf8 18.♖xh8† ♔xh8 19.♕h6† ♔g8 20.♖h1 ♘h5 21.gxh5 g5 This occurred in Falcon – Titichoca Daza, Montevideo 2016, when 22.f4!N would have been the quickest route to victory.

15.a3

Black's last move threatened to trap the knight with ...b4, so White takes a moment to prevent it before continuing with the attack.

15...♘c4 16.♗xc4 ♖xc4 17.hxg6 fxg6



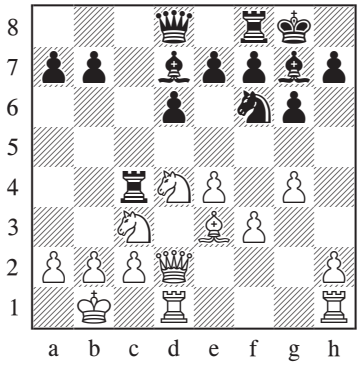
18.e5! ♘d5

18...dxe5 19.♘xe6 wins easily.

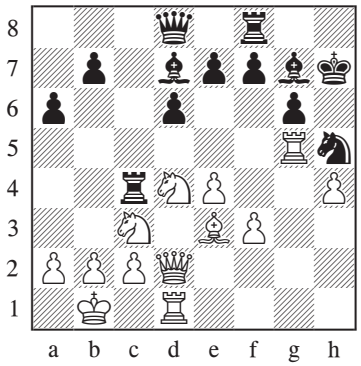
19.♘xd5 exd5 20.e6 ♗xd4 21.♗xd4 ♗xe6

In Zielinski – Sypien, Krynica 2001, White had several winning continuations, the simplest being:
22.b3N+–

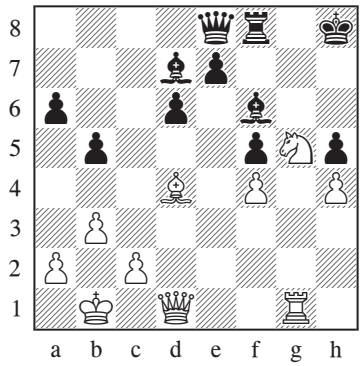
A final alternative is:
12...♘c4 13.♗xc4 ♖xc4



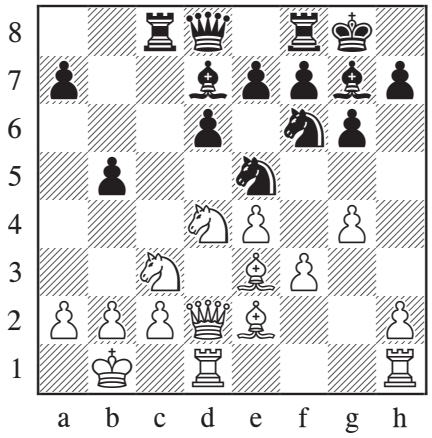
This leads to a well-known variation with an extra tempo for White, since his bishop took the route of ♗e2xc4 rather than ♗c4-b3xc4. It would have been possible to end the line here, but I couldn't resist including the following correspondence game, which White won in great style.
14.h4 h5 15.gxh5 ♘xh5 16.♖hg1 a6 17.♖g5 ♔h7



18.e5! b5
18...dxe5 19.♘b3! is winning.
19.♕d3 ♔g8 20.♘e4 ♗xe5 21.♖xh5! gxh5 22.♖g1† ♔h8 23.♘g5 f5 24.b3 ♕b8 25.f4
Not only attacking the bishop on e5, but also preparing to target the h5-pawn with the queen.
25...♖xd4 26.♗xd4 ♗f6 27.♕d1 ♕e8



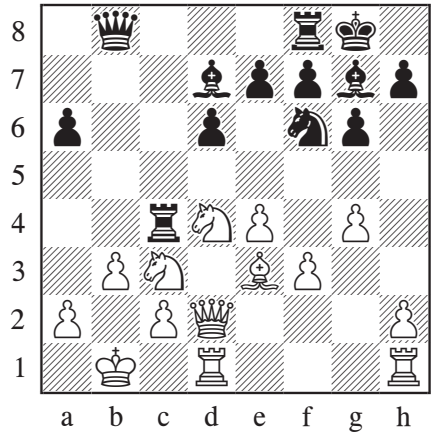
28.♖g3!
Black can hardly move a piece.
28...♗xd4
If Black marks time with a move like 28...a5, White plays 29.♖e3, intending ♗xf6† followed by ♕e2 or ♕e1, and the defence will soon crack.
29.♕xd4† ♖f6 30.♕a7+–
Black soon had to resign in Pessoa – Lopes, corr. 2012.



13.♘cxb5
White can grab the pawn quite safely.

13...a6 14.♘c3 ♘c4 15.♗xc4 ♖xc4 16.b3 ♕b8

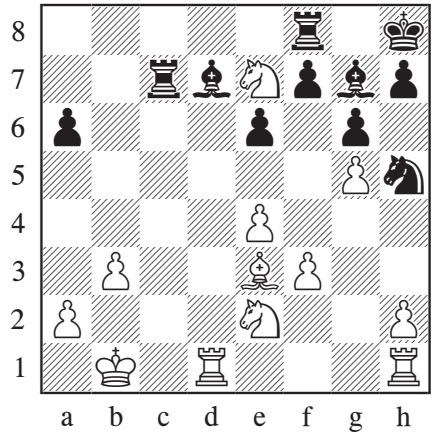
In Korneev – Carlsen, Reykjavik 2004, White's most convincing continuation would have been:



17.g5N ♘h5 18.♘d5 e6

18...♖e8 is well met by 19.♕a5!± intending ♕b6.

19.♘e7† ♔h8 20.♘e2 ♕c7 21.♕xd6 ♖xc2 22.♕xc7 ♖xc7



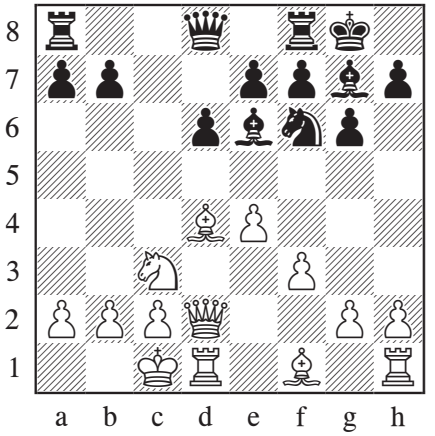
23.♖c1

The knight on e7 is not in any real danger, and it even prevents Black from challenging for the c-file.

23...♖xc1† 24.♖xc1 ♗b5 25.♘d4 ♗d3† 26.♔b2±

White has good chances to convert his extra pawn.

C2) 9...♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♗e6



This used to be regarded as the main line but these days Black has a lot of problems to solve.

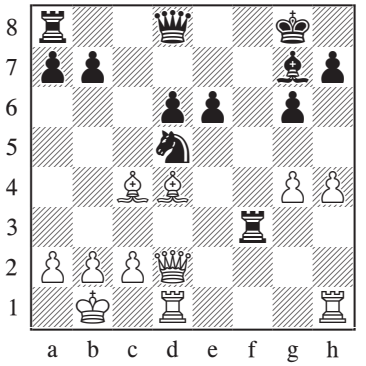
11.♔b1

A well-known finesse, forcing Black to waste a tempo with his queen.

11...♕c7

To develop his attack, Black must play ...♖fc8 followed by ...♕a5.

White's last move ensures that the immediate 11...♕a5? runs into 12.♘d5, when 12...♕d8 is the only way to avoid losing the e7-pawn. 13.h4! is the most logical continuation, when Black has no counterplay available. For example: 13...♗xd5 14.exd5 e5 15.dxe6 fxe6 16.g4 ♘d5 17.♗c4 ♖xf3



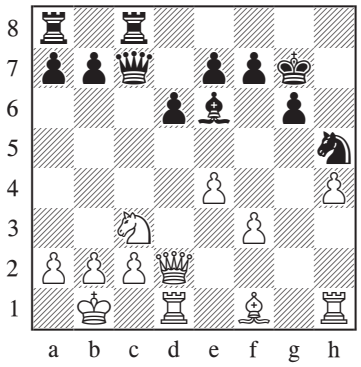
This occurred in Jenni – Baer, Winterthur 2004, when 18.♕e2!N would have won on the spot.

12.h4!

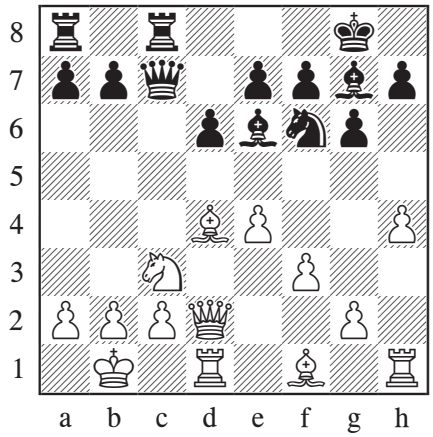
12.g4 has been played in about the same number of games but the text move is more efficient, as h4-h5 can be played without the support of the g-pawn.

12...♖fc8

12...h5 does not hold up the attack: 13.g4! ♖fc8 (13...hxg4? 14.h5 gxh5 15.♕g5 ♖fc8 16.♗d3 gave White a crushing attack in Blodstein – Serper, Soviet Union 1982, and a few subsequent games) 14.gxh5 ♘xh5 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7

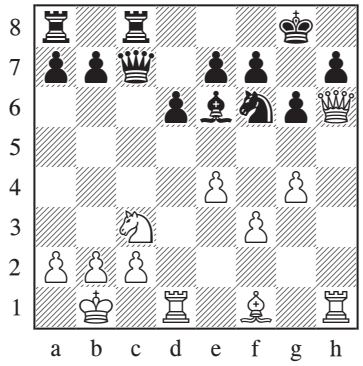


16.f4! ♕a5 17.f5 ♖xc3 Otherwise Black will succumb to the attack. 18.♕xc3† ♕xc3 19.bxc3 gxf5 20.exf5 ♗xf5 21.♖g1† ♔f6 22.♗d3± Foote – Needham, corr. 2005.

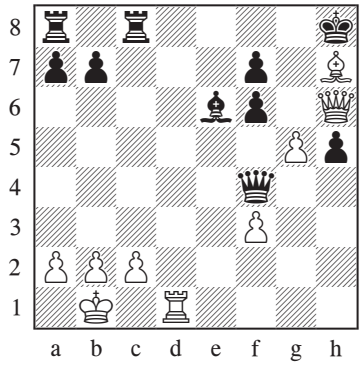


13.h5 ♕a5

13...♘xh5? is a losing move: 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.g4 ♘f6 16.♕h6† ♔g8



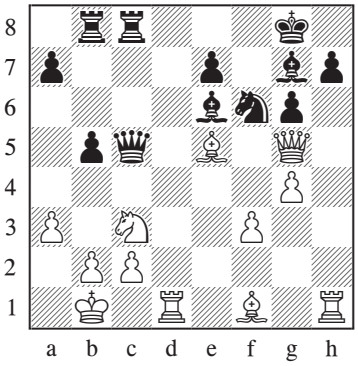
17.e5! The point of this finesse will become clear in a few moves. 17...dxe5 18.g5 ♘h5 19.♖xh5 gxh5 20.♗d3 This is why the e4-pawn had to be removed. 20...e4 21.♘xe4 ♕f4 22.♘f6† exf6 23.♗xh7† ♔h8



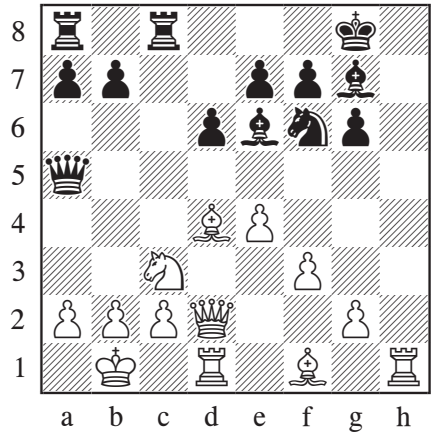
24.♗f5†! ♔g8 25.♕h7† ♔f8 26.♕h8† Black resigned in Evans – Zuckerman, New York 1966, on account of 26...♔e7 27.gxf6#.

14.hxg6 hxg6

14...fxg6 15.a3 also leaves Black well behind in the attacking race. A good example continued: 15...♖ab8 16.g4 b5 17.♕g5 ♕c7 18.e5 dxe5 19.♗xe5 ♕c5



20.♗xf6 exf6 21.♖d8†! White won the queen and the game in Volokitin – Kovalenko, Kharkov 2001.



15.a3

There is no reason to allow ...♖xc3 followed by ...♕xa2†.

15...♖ab8

Preparing ...b5-b4.

16.♗d3!

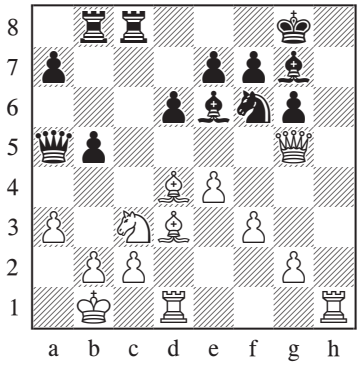
This has proven to be the best way of developing White's play. The immediate threat is ♖h4 followed by ♖dh1, with an unstoppable attack. The bishop may also participate in the attack after a subsequent e4-e5.

16...♗c4

Black has also taken a pounding after the alternative:

16...b5 17.♕g5!

Black has tried several moves but with little success. Here are a few examples:

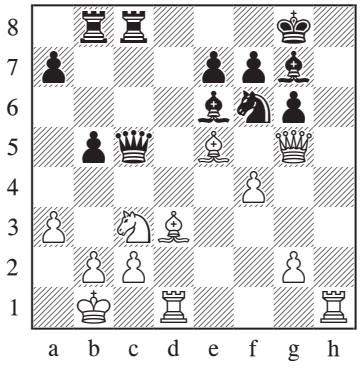


17...♖c5!?

This exchange sacrifice is objectively not good enough, but it seems to be Black's best practical chance to complicate matters. I checked three other options:

a) 17...♘h7? loses quickly: 18.♖xh7 ♔xh7 (after 18...♗xd4 19.e5! Black resigned in Lobanova – Zhikhareva, corr. 2009, in view of 19...♔xh7 20.♖h1† ♔g8 21.♗xg6+–) 19.♖h1† ♔g8 20.♗xg7 ♔xg7 21.♕h6† ♔f6 22.e5† ♔xe5 23.♕e3† ♔f6 This was Ruiz Castillo – Perez Lujan, Guatape 2016, when 24.♕d4†N ♔g5 25.♕h4# would have been the quickest mate.

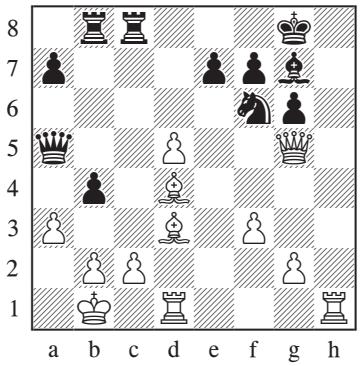
b) 17...♕c7 18.e5 dxe5 19.♗xe5 ♕c5 20.f4 is well known to be bad for Black:



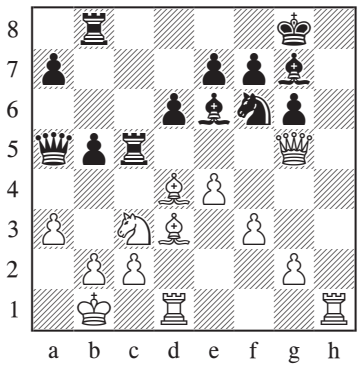
20...♘g4 (the original model game in this line ended quickly after 20...♖b7

21.♗xg6 fxg6 22.♕xg6 ♗f7 23.♖h8† 1–0 Van der Wiel – Sax, Plovdiv 1983) 21.♗xb8 ♕xg5 22.fxg5 ♖xb8 23.♘e4± White converted his extra exchange in Betker – Noeth, corr. 2009.

c) 17...d5 18.♘xd5 ♗xd5 19.exd5 b4



20.♗xg6! So far, White has scored a perfect 8/8 from here. The stem game continued: 20...bxa3 (Another possible line is: 20...fxg6 21.♕xg6 ♕a4 22.♗xf6 exf6 23.♖h7 ♕xc2† 24.♕xc2 ♖xc2 25.♖xg7† ♔xg7 26.♔xc2+–) 21.♖h7! ♖xb2† 22.♗xb2 ♕b4 23.♗xf7† ♔xf7 24.♕xg7† ♔e8 25.♕xe7† ♕xe7 26.♖xe7† ♔xe7 27.d6† 1–0 Seger – Ljungberg, corr. 1984.

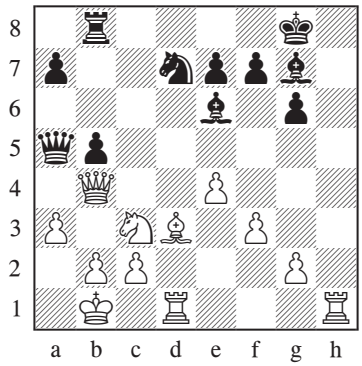


18.♗xc5 dxc5

18...b4!? has some shock value but White can refute the attack with a few accurate moves: 19.♗e3! ♗f5 (19...♕xg5 20.♗xg5 bxc3 21.b3+– left Black with nothing for the exchange in Hoffmann – Brajdic, Zagreb 2006) 20.♘b5 (20.♗c4 bxc3 21.♗b3+– is also fine) 20...bxa3 21.exf5 axb2 22.c3!+– Black had too few pieces remaining in Chow – Van de Mortel, Chicago 2005.

19.♕xc5 ♘d7 20.♕b4

White is objectively winning but he still needs to find a few good moves before Black can create threats on the queenside. The most effective plan is to play ♘d5, meeting ...♗xd5 with exd5 and then open lines with d5-d6 at the right moment, as the following lines demonstrate:

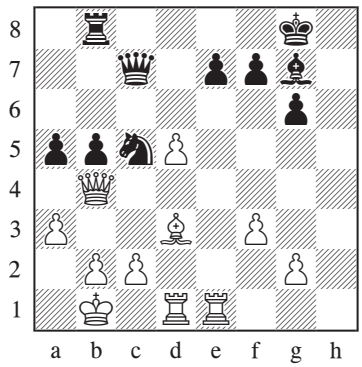


20...♕c7

20...♕b6 21.♘d5 ♗xd5 22.exd5 ♘c5 occurred in Atakisi – Citak, Antalya 2004. White has a few ways to win but the most effective (as well as the most stylish) is 23.d6!N exd6 24.♗xg6!! fxg6 25.♕g4+– when White is the first to break through with his attack.

21.♘d5 ♗xd5 22.exd5 ♘c5 23.♖he1 a5

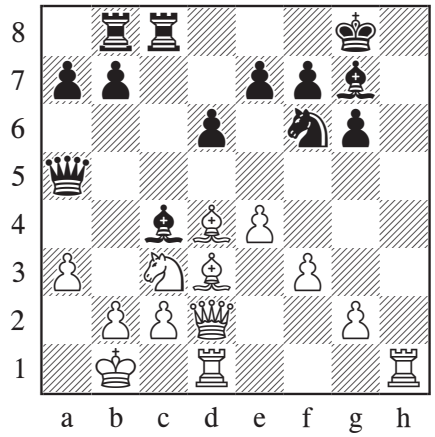
In Bartholomew – Van de Mortel, corr. 2009, White should have continued:



24.d6!N exd6 25.♕h4+–

Threatening ♖e7. White keeps an extra exchange and should win with careful play.

After the text move White has several tempting and promising ideas, but I think the following continuation stands out as the final refutation of Black's play.

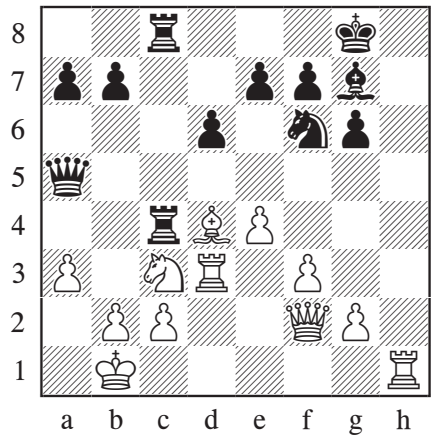


17.♗xc4 ♖xc4 18.♕f2!

18.♕c1 is the most popular move and has scored well, but the text is even stronger. The main threat is ♗xf6 followed by ♘d5, and a secondary idea is ♕h4 followed by ♘d5.

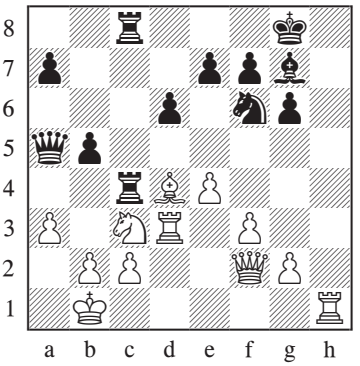
18...♖bc8 19.♖d3!

Preventing the (double) exchange sacrifice on c3. In some lines the rook can swing to the h-file after f3-f4.

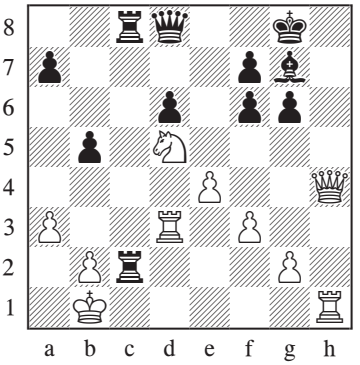


19...♔f8

19...b5 occurred in Vachtfeidl – Johansson, London 2012, when White missed the strongest continuation:



20.♗xf6!N exf6 (20...♗xf6 21.♘d5+–) 21.♕g3 ♖4c6 22.♘d5 ♕d8 23.♕h4! White can afford to abandon the c2-pawn as the kingside attack will decide. 23...♖xc2



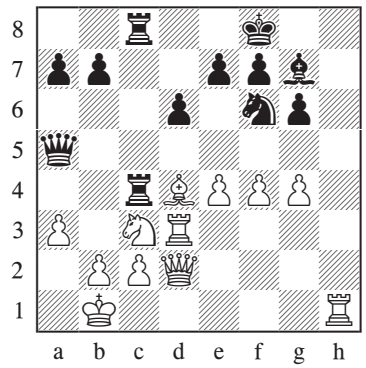
24.f4! ♔f8 (24...f5 is no good due to the simple 25.♕xd8† followed by ♔xc2) 25.♖dh3 ♔e8 26.♕h7 ♗f8 (26...♔f8 27.♕h8† leads to a quick mate) 27.♕g8 and Black can resign.

20.g4!

At the moment White has no immediate way to break through, so he makes a useful attacking move while waiting to see what Black does.

20...b5

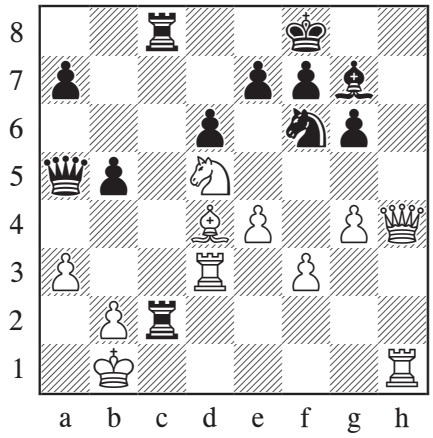
20...♖4c6 can be met by 21.♕d2 ♖c4 22.f4 with a decisive attack, for instance:



22...♔e8 23.e5 ♘d5 24.♖h7 1–0 Harney – Blittkowsky, corr. 2012.

21.♘d5! ♖xc2 22.♕h4±

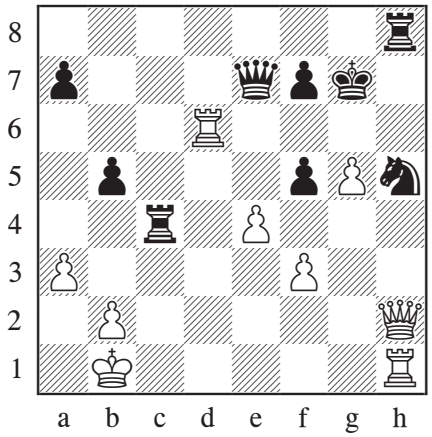
It was essential to wait for Black to play ...b5 before making this pawn sacrifice. If the pawn was on b7, then ...♕b5 would give Black a winning position.



22...♖2c4 23.g5 ♘h5 24.♗xg7† ♔xg7 25.♘xe7 ♖h8

Material is level but Black's defences will soon be ripped open.

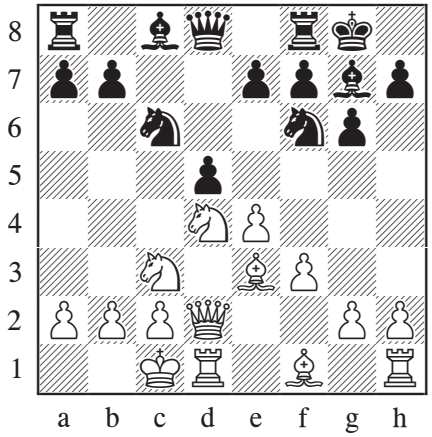
26.♕h2! ♕d8 27.♘f5†! gxf5 28.♖xd6 ♕e7



29.♖h6! ♖xh6 30.gxh6† ♔h7 31.♕xh5 fxe4 32.♖g1 exf3 33.♖g7† ♔h8 34.♕xf3 ♕e4† 35.♕xe4 ♖xe4 36.♖xf7

Black avoided the mating attack but ended up in a lost rook endgame, which White soon converted in Quattrocchi – Joppich, corr. 2010.

C3) 9...d5



Finally we come to the critical test of the 9.0–0–0 variation.

10.♕e1!?

White has tried several other moves. It is worth mentioning that 10.exd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♗d4 is usually thought of as the main line, when 12...e5 13.♗c5 reaches a

position I would be happy to recommend for White; indeed, we will see something similar in variation C322. The problem with all this is the modern 12...♗xd4! 13.♕xd4 ♕b6, which continues to hold up well for Black.

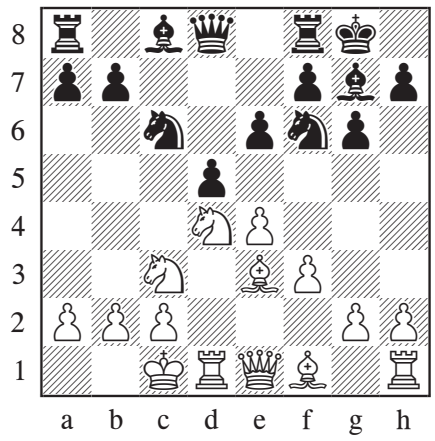
The 10.♕e1 variation was developed in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and is still popular today. Usually it leads to the same pawn structure as the 12...e5 13.♗c5 line noted above, but with some small differences in piece placement, as will be discussed later. However, there are some possible deviations along the way.

We will analyse **C31) 10...e6?!** and **C32) 10...e5**.

10...dxe4?? loses to 11.♘xc6 of course.

10...♗e6?! occurred in Navara – Hou Yifan, Prague (blitz) 2013, when 11.♔b1!N ♖c8 12.♘xe6 fxe6 13.♗f2± would have been the most convincing way of meeting Black's dubious experiment.

C31) 10...e6?!

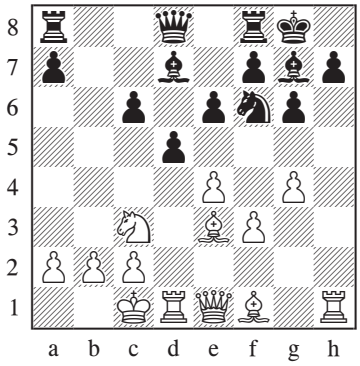


This was recommended by Peter Heine Nielsen in his ChessBase DVD series, but our analysis indicates that it is too slow.

11.h4!

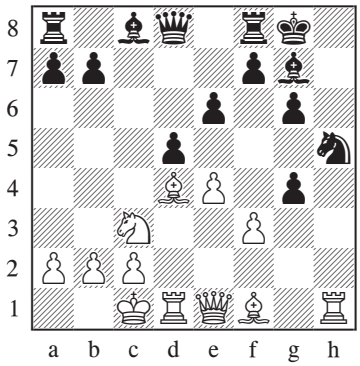
Launching a dangerous attack. I considered two main tries: **C311) 11...♕e7?!** and the somewhat more resilient **C312) 11...♕c7**. Most of Black's other options belong on the scrap heap, as the following lines illustrate:

11...♗d7?! 12.h5 ♘xh5 13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.g4 gives White a virulent attack: 14...♘f6N (14...d4 15.♗xd4 ♗xd4 16.♖xd4 ♕g5† 17.♔b1 ♘f6 18.e5 ♘d5 19.f4 ♘xc3† 20.♕xc3 ♕e7 21.♗c4 was terrible for Black in Luther – Wallinger, Germany 1990)

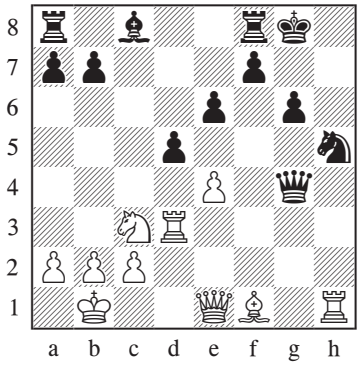


15.e5 ♘e8 16.♕g3 f6 17.♕h2 ♔f7 18.f4 ♖h8 19.♗d3 f5 20.♖dg1 Black's extra pawn is irrelevant and it is unlikely that he will survive the attack for much longer.

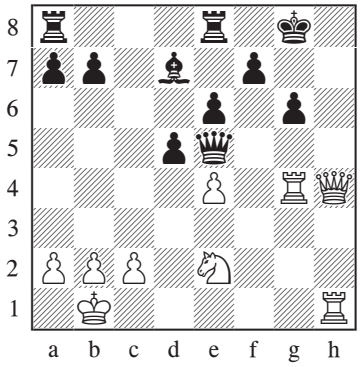
11...h5?! 12.g4 hxg4 13.h5 ♘xd4 14.♗xd4 ♘xh5 occurred in Bruun – Christensen, Helsingor 2009. A simple improvement is:



15.fxg4!N ♕g5† 16.♔b1 ♗xd4 17.♖xd4 ♕xg4 18.♖d3! White is completely winning. For example:

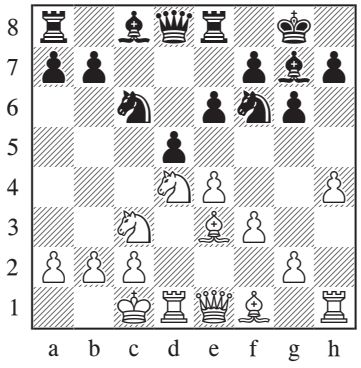


18...♕g5 19.♗e2 ♘f4 20.♖g3 ♕e5 21.♖g4 ♘xe2 22.♘xe2 ♗d7 23.♕h4 ♖fe8

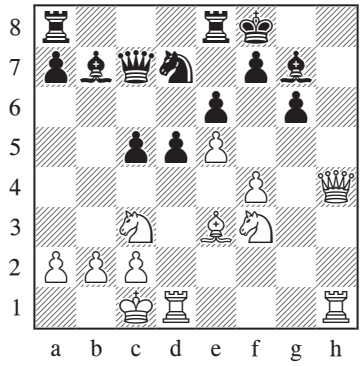


24.♖xg6†! fxg6 25.♕h7† ♔f8 26.♖f1† ♕f5 27.♘f4 and Black is mated.

11...♖e8?! has been played in quite a few games but, for some reason, no one found the strongest reply:

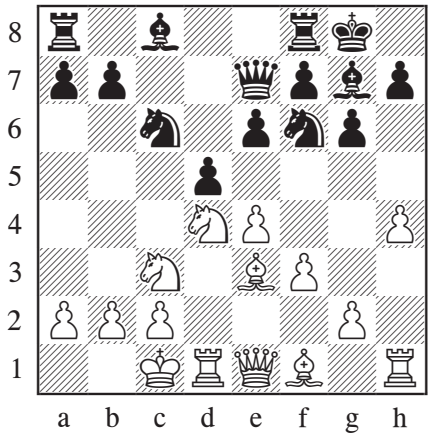


12.♗b5!N ♕c7 13.h5± Black is already in big trouble. Here is a nice illustrative line: 13...♘xh5 14.g4 ♘f6 15.♕h4 h5 16.gxh5 ♘xh5 17.♕g5 ♘f6 18.♗xc6 bxc6 19.e5 ♘d7 20.♕h4 ♗b7 21.f4 ♔f8 22.♘f3 c5



23.f5! The defence soon falls apart. 23...exf5 24.♘xd5 ♗xd5 25.♖xd5 ♘xe5 26.♘g5+– The threats are too many and too brutal to speak of.

C311) 11...♕e7?!



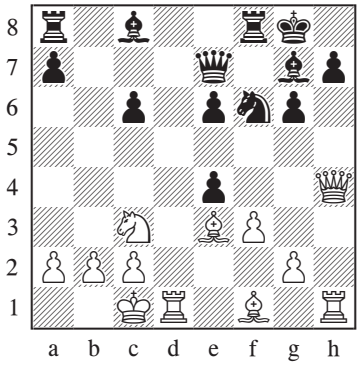
12.h5!

As usual in this line, Black faces urgent problems on the kingside.

12...♘xh5

Black also has problems after:
12...dxe4 13.hxg6 fxg6 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.♕h4

The queen often comes to this excellent attacking square in these lines, showing one of the advantages of the 10.♕e1 variation.



15...♖b8

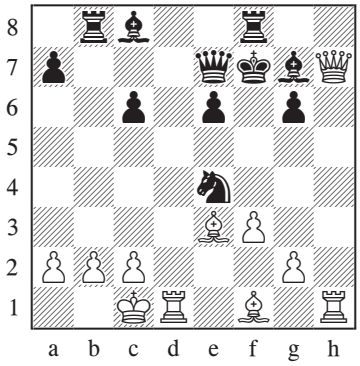
15...exf3? 16.♘e4! wins.

16.♘xe4 ♘xe4

16...♖xb2!?N may have been a better try but 17.♗c4! is a good answer. The continuation might be 17...♖xa2!? 18.♗d4! ♖a4 19.♗xf6 ♖xf6 20.♘xf6† ♗xf6 21.♗xe6† ♕xe6 22.♕xa4 ♕e3† 23.♖d2 ♗c3 24.♖hd1 and White is winning.

17.♕xh7† ♔f7

White has a few winning lines but the simplest is:

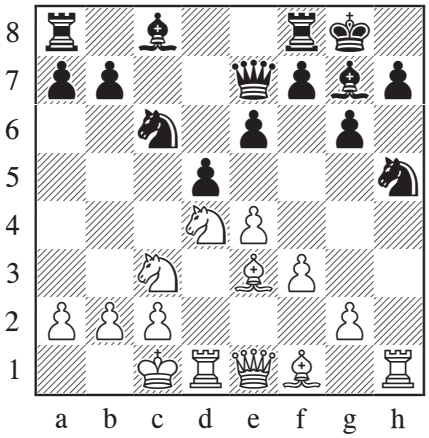


18.♗h6!N

18.fxe4!? ♖h8 19.♕xh8 ♗xh8 20.♖xh8 ♕f6 21.♗d4 e5 22.♗c4† ♗e6 23.♖xb8 was also good enough in Pietzsch – Gempe, Leipzig 2013.

18...♕f6 19.♗xg7 ♕xg7 20.fxe4+–

White has an extra pawn plus a big initiative.



13.g4!N

White exchanged on c6 in D. Richter – Alvarez, corr. 1995, but there is no reason to give Black chances along the b-file. The justification for the text move is revealed in the line that follows.

13...♘xd4

13...♘f6 14.♕h4+– gives White everything he wants.

14.♖xd4!! ♗xd4

After 14...♘f6 15.♕h4 the threat of e4-e5 is devastating. 15...♖e8 16.♗b5 ♗d7 17.e5+–

14...♕c5 15.♖xd5 ♗xc3 16.♖xc5 ♗xe1 17.gxh5 also leaves Black with insurmountable difficulties.

15.♗xd4

White has an overwhelming initiative for the exchange. You don't need to know any more than this, but I have included some lines to illustrate how the game might go.

15...♘f4 16.exd5

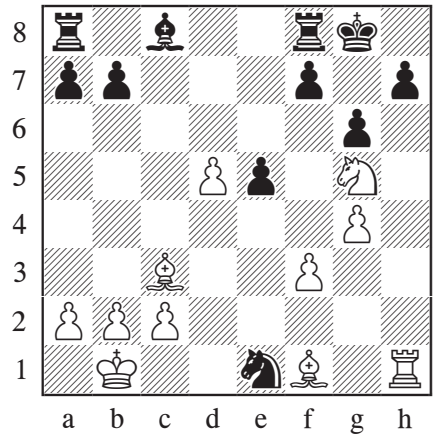
16.♕e3 is also good enough.

16...♕g5

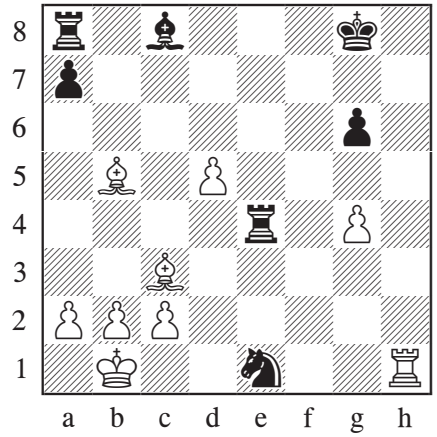
16...f6 17.g5 e5 18.♘e4! fxg5 19.♗c4 ♕d8 20.♗xe5 is winning.

17.♘e4! ♘d3† 18.♔b1 ♘xe1 19.♘xg5 e5 20.♗c3!?

20.♗xe5 f6 21.♗c4 is a simple route to a big advantage. The text move is more entertaining: White temporarily goes a rook down but is nonetheless winning.



20...f6 21.♘xh7 ♖f7 22.♘xf6† ♖xf6 23.♗xe5 ♖xf3 24.♗c4 b5 25.♗xb5 ♖e3 26.♗d4 ♖e4 27.♗c3



27...♖b8

27...♘f3 28.♗c6 ♖b8 29.d6 wins.

28.♗c6 ♖xg4 29.d6 ♖g5 30.♖xe1 ♗g4 31.b4+–

Let's move on to Black's most popular option on move 11.

C312) 11...♕c7

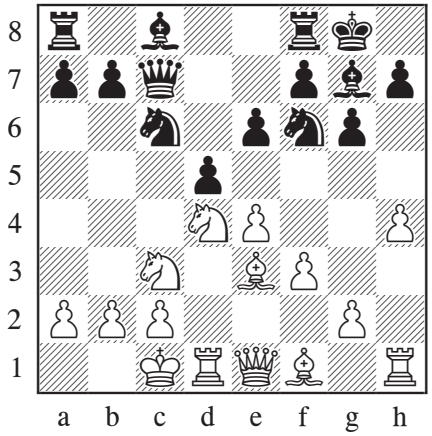
GAME 25

Veselin Topalov – Lu Shanglei

Baku 2015

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 0–0 8.♕d2 ♘c6 9.0–0–0 d5 10.♕e1 e6?! 11.h4! ♕c7

This is Black's best try but it runs into a strong idea.



12.♘db5!

Peter Heine Nielsen, Carsten Hansen and David Vigorito all overlook this move in their respective Dragon works.

White's most popular continuation has been 12.h5 ♘xh5 13.g4 but Black is fine after 13...♘g3! 14.♘db5 ♕b8 15.♖h3 a6! as in Georgiadis – Liu, Arlington 2015.

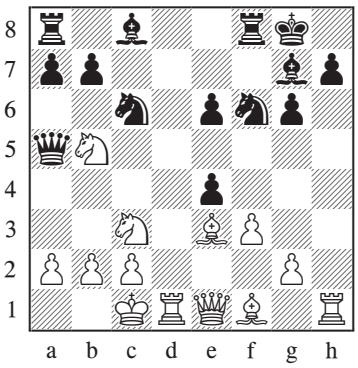
12.♔b1!? is a good move which would have

been worth investigating, but the text is simply stronger.

12...♕b8

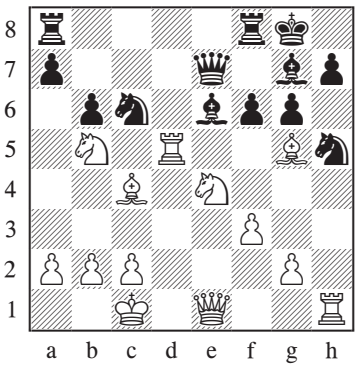
12...♕e5? 13.f4+– makes no sense for Black.

12...♕a5?! has been the most common choice but it's also a mistake. 13.h5 dxe4 14.hxg6 fxg6 This has occurred in two games and White has several good continuations, the most accurate being:

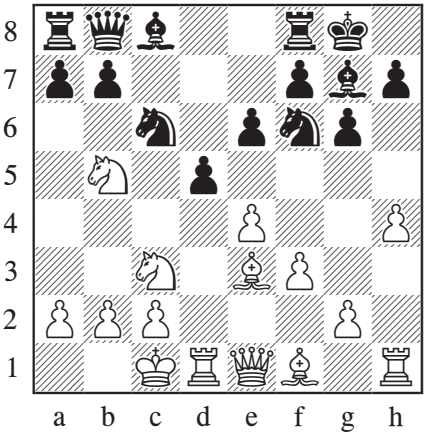


15.♗e2!N± White is clearly better, with a development advantage and several potential targets to attack.

Finally, 12...♕d8N seems like an admission that things have gone wrong for Black, but I checked a few lines anyway: 13.h5! ♘xh5 (13...a6 is met by 14.♘d4± and Black has essentially just wasted a tempo with ...a6) 14.exd5 exd5 15.♖xd5 ♕e7 16.♘e4 b6 17.♗g5 f6 18.♗c4 ♗e6

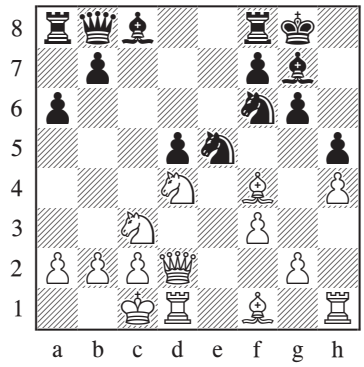


19.♗d2! Black has serious difficulties, for instance: 19...♖fd8 20.♖xd8† ♖xd8 21.♘xf6† ♗xf6 22.♕xe6† ♕xe6 23.♗xe6† ♔h8 24.c3+–



13.exd5 ♘xd5

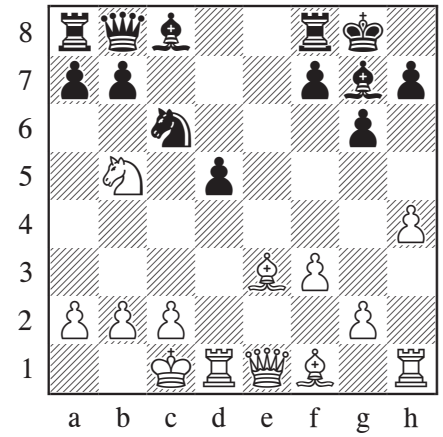
Against 13...exd5 as played in Gesicki – Nemec, email 2012, I would recommend 14.♕d2!?N, mirroring Topalov's idea in the main game. (14.g4!?N a6 15.♘d4 also looks strong. I think White is better after most sensible moves in this structure, although I'm not entirely convinced by the engines' suggested plan of h4-h5-h6, which could be useful for a future endgame but reduces our attacking chances in the middlegame.) 14...a6 15.♗f4 ♘e5 16.♘d4 h5



17.g3! White intends to finish development, either by swinging the rook to the centre via h2, or by playing ♗g2 and ♖he1. Black will

have a hard time coordinating his pieces and finding a good plan.

14.♘xd5 exd5

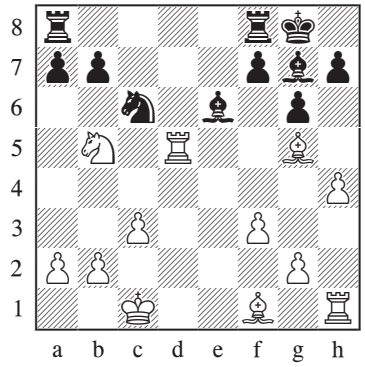


15.♕d2!

White reverses his 10th move to prepare ♗f4.

15...a6

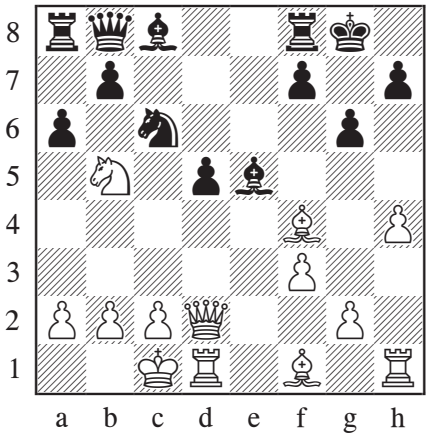
15...♕e5!N is Black's best chance although White keeps the upper hand. My analysis continues: 16.c3 ♕e7 17.♗g5 ♕c5 18.♕xd5 ♕xd5 19.♖xd5 ♗e6



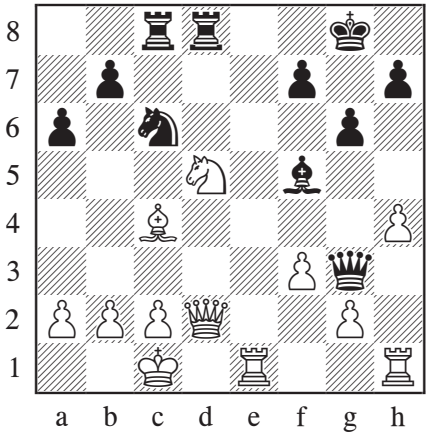
20.♖c5 ♗xa2 (20...♖ad8 21.♗c4±) 21.♘d6± Black is under a lot of pressure.

16.♗f4 ♗e5

16...♘e5 17.♘c3 ♗e6 18.♗h6± was incredibly dangerous for Black in Fabig – Kausch, email 2010. White is threatening to open up the h-file with a dangerous attack, as well as simply taking the d-pawn.



17.♗xe5 ♕xe5 18.♖e1 ♕g3 19.♘c3 ♗f5 20.♘xd5 ♖fd8 21.♗c4 ♖ac8



22.♔b1

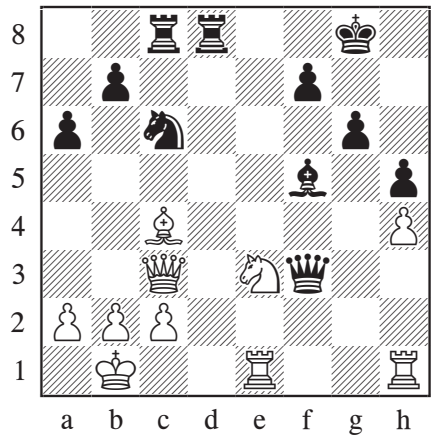
This is good enough to maintain a clear advantage.

22.h5!N intending h5-h6 is even stronger. For example, 22...♘e5 23.♔b1!! ♘xc4 24.♘e7† ♔g7 25.♕c3† f6 26.♘xc8 ♖xc8 27.♖e7† and mate is approaching.

22...h5?!

22...♕d6± is more resilient.

23.♕c3 ♕xg2 24.♘e3 ♕xf3

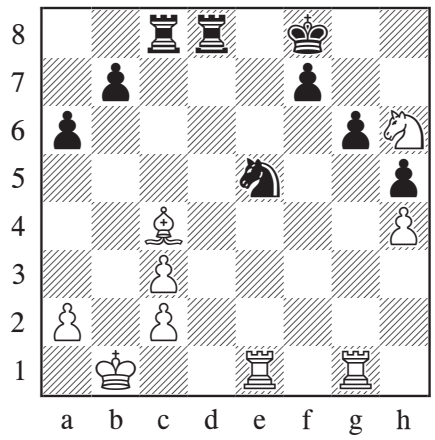


25.♖hf1?!

25.♖ef1! would have been crushing, as 25...♕g3 26.♕f6! leaves Black defenceless.

25...♕g3 26.♖g1 ♕e5 27.♘xf5 ♕xc3 28.bxc3 ♔f8 29.♘h6 ♘e5

Suddenly things are not so simple, although White is still winning.



30.♗xf7?

30.♗b3! is stronger: 30...♘c4 (30...♘f3 31.♘xf7+–) 31.♗xc4 ♖xc4 32.♖ef1 and the knight will get out eventually.

30...♘f3 31.♗xg6 ♘xe1 32.♖xe1?

32.♗xh5!±

32...♔g7 33.♗f5 ♖c6

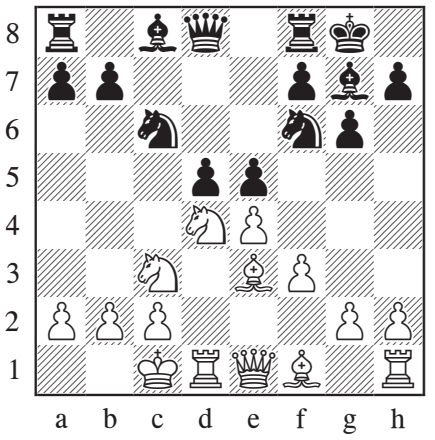
White's advantage has evaporated and, despite Topalov's heroic efforts, it never returned.

34.♖e7† ♔f8 35.♖f7† ♔e8 36.♖h7 ♖d1† 37.♔b2 ♖b6† 38.♔a3 ♖dd6 39.♖h8† ♔e7 40.♘g8† ♔f7 41.c4 ♖dc6 42.♗d3 ♔g7 43.♖xh5 ♔xg8 44.♖d5 ♖c7 45.h5 ♔g7 46.c5 ♖b1 47.c4 ♖h1 48.♔b4 ♖h2 49.a4 ♔h6 50.♔a5 ♖b2 51.♗e4 ♖b3 52.♖e5 ♖b2 53.c6 bxc6 54.♖e6† ♔xh5 55.♖xc6 ♖e7 56.♗d5 ♔g5 57.♖xa6 ♔f5 58.♗c6 ♔e5 59.♗b5 ♖b7 60.♖a8 ♔d6 61.♔a6 ♖c7 62.♖d8† ♔c5 63.a5 ♖h7 64.♖b8 ♖a2 65.♖b6 ♖g7 66.♖c6†

½–½

Even though Black got off the hook in this game, he was clearly in big trouble and the whole approach of 10...e6?! seems to me to be too slow. Now let's move on to his best and most popular option.

C32) 10...e5



11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.exd5

After a couple of virtually forced moves, Black must make a choice. **C321) 12...cxd5** looks like a tempting way to construct a nice pawn centre, but **C322) 12...♘xd5** is the main line and the best move.

C321) 12...cxd5

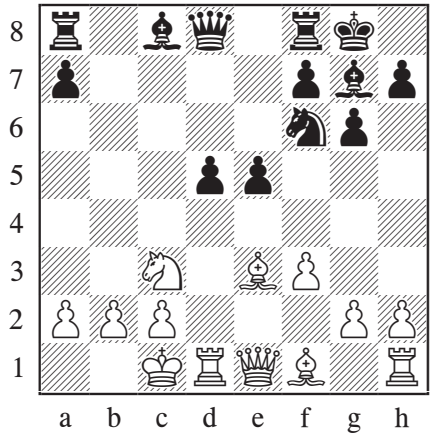
GAME 26

Juergen Hess – Anatoly Spirin

email 2009

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 0–0 8.♕d2 ♘c6 9.0–0–0 d5 10.♕e1 e5 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.exd5 cxd5

White should be happy to see this move. Black will not be able to maintain his nice pawn centre and will have to either weaken himself or offer a questionable pawn sacrifice.



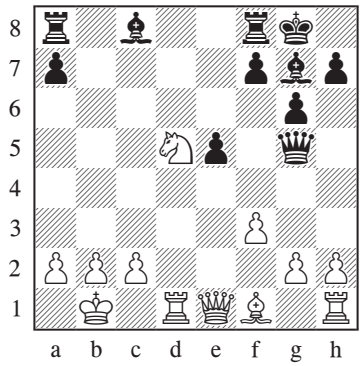
13.♗g5 ♗e6

This is virtually forced. Other moves make White's life much easier, for instance:

13...♕e8? 14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.♘xd5 ♗g7 16.♗c4± Walczak – Kopacz, Zakopane 2001.

13...d4?! 14.♕xe5! ♘e4!?N (14...♘g4? 15.♕xg7† ♔xg7 16.♗xd8+– made things easy for White in Perunovic – Myo, Istanbul [ol] 2012) 15.♕xg7† ♔xg7 16.♗xd8 dxc3 17.♗h4 cxb2† 18.♔xb2 ♖b8† 19.♔a3 ♘c3 20.♗g3! ♘xd1 21.♗xb8±

13...♕b6?! is a dodgy pawn sacrifice: 14.♗xf6 ♕xf6 15.♘xd5 Unlike some well-known lines where Black gets fair compensation for a pawn, here he is hampered by the ...e5 move, which blocks the g7-bishop and gives White a perfect outpost on d5. 15...♕g5† 16.♔b1



16...♖b8 (16...e4!?N is a suggestion of Carsten Hansen but 17.♕g3!± is a good answer; Black will soon have to enter a tough endgame) 17.h4 ♕d8 This was Savelli – Boudignon, France 1994, and now 18.♗c4!N would have left White with an extra pawn for hardly any compensation at all.

14.♗c4!

Utilizing the pin along the d-file – another advantage of the 10.♕e1 move.

14...♕c7

This is the soundest move, although it does not equalize.

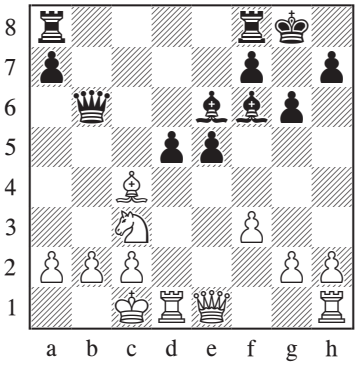
14...♕b6?!

This is another version of the dodgy pawn sac.

15.♗xf6

15.♘xd5? ♘xd5 16.♗xd5 e4∓

15...♗xf6



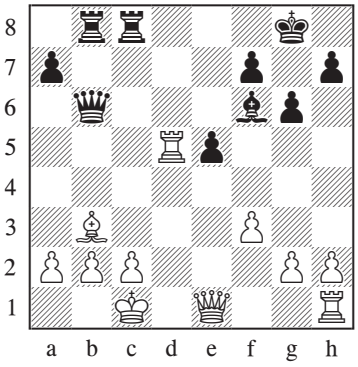
16.♗xd5!?

White has a pleasant choice, as 16.♘xd5 also leads to some advantage: 16...♗xd5 17.♖xd5 e4 18.♖b5 ♕c7 19.♕xe4 ♖ae8 20.♕d3 ♕f4† 21.♔b1 ♖e3 22.g3 (22.♕f1!? is also worth considering) 22...♖xd3 23.gxf4 ♖xf3 24.f5 g5± Tan – Vea, Gibraltar 2016.

16...♖ab8 17.♗b3 ♖fc8

17...a5 is mentioned by Vigorito as leading to reasonable compensation for Black, but I don't think it's enough for a pawn. For instance, 18.♘a4 ♕c6 19.♕c3 and White went on to convert his advantage in Kravtsov – Mujica, corr. 2010.

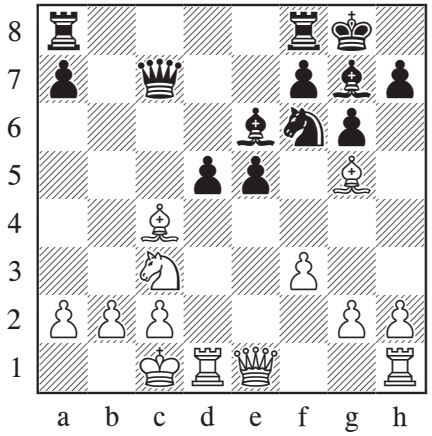
18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.♖xd5



White has an extra pawn plus the safer king, and has won all three games from this position. One example continued:

19...♕c6?! 20.♕e4 ♖c7 21.h4±

Davila – Madrid, Calvia (ol) 2004.

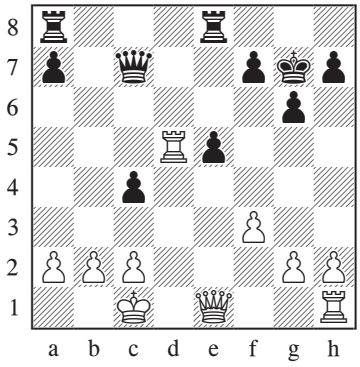


15.♗xf6

Black gets enough compensation after 15.♗xd5 ♘xd5 16.♘xd5 ♗xd5 17.♖xd5 a5! as in Krivic – Moreira, email 2009.

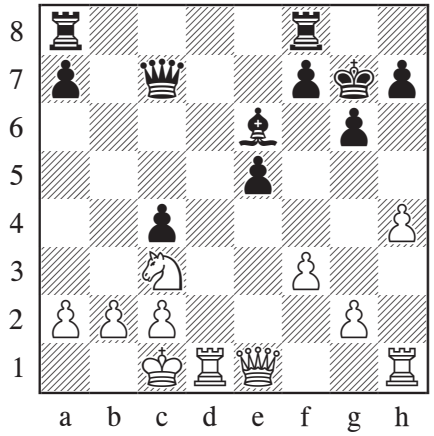
15...dxc4 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.h4!?

17.♘d5 is a safe route to a positional edge. 17...♗xd5 18.♖xd5 ♖fe8 (18...f6 19.♕c3 ♖ad8 occurred in Berthelot – Mohr, Paris 1993, when 20.♕a5!N ♖c8 21.♕xc7† ♖xc7 22.b4!± would have given White a pleasant endgame playing for two results) This position was reached in Mortensen – P.H. Nielsen, Tjele 1991, and several subsequent games. I found an interesting new idea:



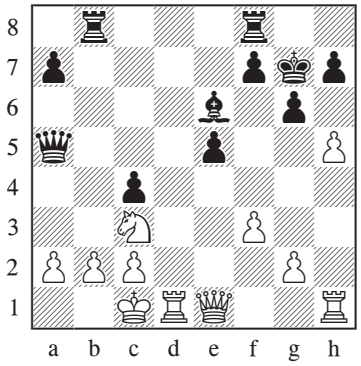
19.♕e3!?N So far everybody has put the queen on the natural c3-square but I think it may be better placed on e3, as prophylaxis against the possible plan of ...e4. 19...♖ab8 20.♖hd1±

Although the above line is good for White, I think he has every reason to play more ambitiously.



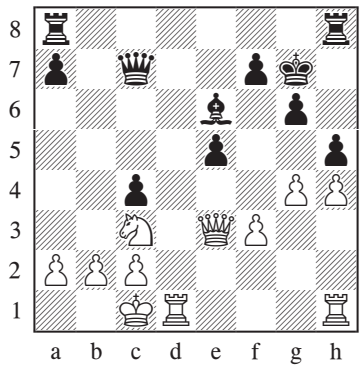
17...♖ab8

17...♕a5?! is inaccurate. 18.h5 ♖ab8 In Ponkratov – Dimukhametov, Nabereznye Chelny 2008, White should have continued:



19.♖d6!N Threatening ♕h4. (The immediate 19.♕h4 enables Black to stay in the game with 19...♕b4.) 19...♖fd8 20.♖xd8 ♖xd8 21.♕h4 White has a winning attack.

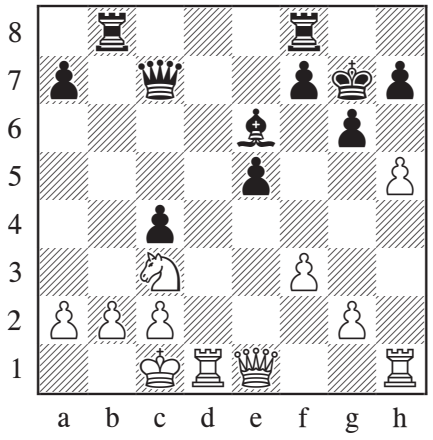
17...h5 has been tried a few times. Surprisingly, nobody went for the direct attacking option: 18.g4!?N (18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.♖xd5 ♖fe8 20.♕e3± gave White a typical slight edge in Narayanan – Dodeja, Pune 2016, much like the 17.♘d5 line noted above.) 18...♖h8 (18...hxg4? 19.h5± is too dangerous for Black) 19.♕e3!?



19...hxg4? (19...♖ab8 should be preferred although 20.g5± still favours White) 20.h5 f6 21.fxg4 ♗xg4 22.♖df1! f5 23.hxg6± The position remains complicated but the difference in king safety is the defining factor.

18.h5

Black is under pressure and it is not easy to determine the best defence.



18...♕b6?!

This tempting move has been made in all three games from this position, but it only compounds Black's difficulties.

18...f6N is the lesser evil although White keeps the upper hand after: 19.hxg6 hxg6 20.♘e4 g5

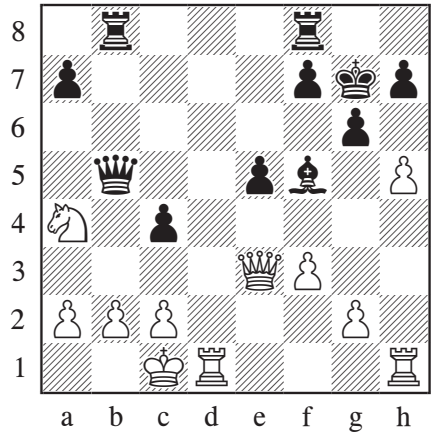
(20...♖h8?! 21.♖xh8 ♖xh8 22.♖d6±) 21.♖d6 ♗f5 22.♕d2±

19.♘a4! ♕b5 20.♕e3!

Black does not have time to capture the knight, as hxg6 would be devastating.

20...♗f5

Black prepares to recapture on g6 with the bishop, but White smartly changes the focus of his attack.



21.h6†! ♔g8 22.♕a3±

White has the superior minor piece and the h6-pawn is a source of worry for Black. This explains why he hurried to exchange queens, but the endgame is also no fun for him.

22...♕b4 23.♕xb4 ♖xb4 24.♘c3 ♖fb8 25.b3 ♗e6 26.a3 ♖4b6 27.b4

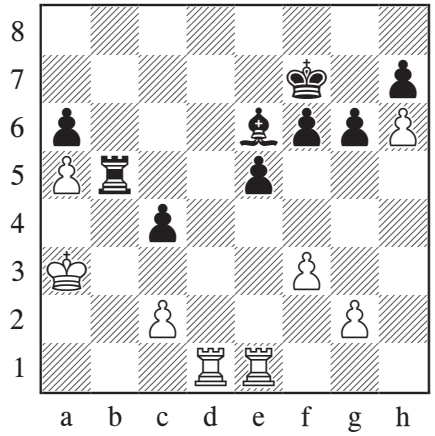
White controls the only open file, his knight is stronger than the enemy bishop and he has a far more effective pawn majority, all of which adds up to a decisive advantage.

27...♔f8 28.♖he1 ♖a6 29.♔b2 f6 30.b5 ♔f7 31.a4 ♖ab6 32.♔a3 a6 33.a5

White had other winning continuations which may have been more suitable for a practical game, but evidently he decided that winning the exchange would be the clearest way when using a computer for assistance.

33...♖xb5 34.♘xb5 ♖xb5

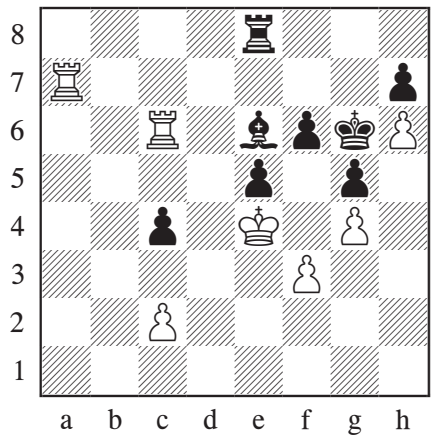
Black is almost in time to save himself, but White has worked everything out.



35.♖d6! ♖xa5† 36.♔b4 ♖a2 37.♖c6 g5 38.♖d1 ♖b2† 39.♔c3 ♖b7 40.♖xa6 ♖e7 41.♖dd6

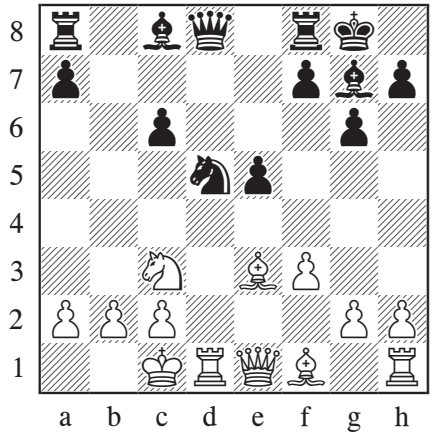
Black has nothing to do except shuffle his rook back and forth.

41...♖e8 42.g4 ♖e7 43.♔d2 ♖e8 44.♔e3 ♖e7 45.♔e4 ♖e8 46.♖db6 ♖e7 47.♖c6 ♖e8 48.♖a7† ♔g6



49.♖g7† ♔xh6 50.♖cc7
1–0

C322) 12...♘xd5

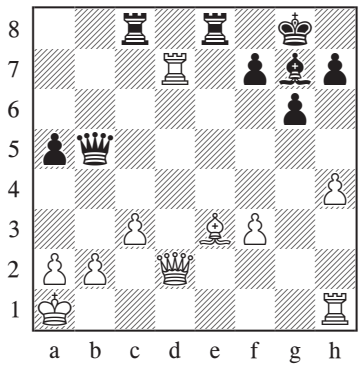


This is the more reliable choice for Black, avoiding an overextended pawn centre.

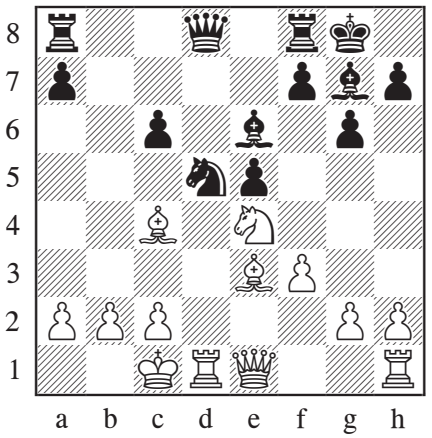
13.♗c4 ♗e6 14.♘e4

Centralizing the knight is the most popular idea and the one that makes the most sense to me.

14.♔b1!? is the currently trendy move and also seems quite playable. However, after 14...a5!? the play takes on a decidedly forcing character. We spent some time analysing 15.h4 ♕c7!N 16.♘xd5 cxd5 17.♗xd5 ♖ac8 18.c3 ♗xd5 19.♖xd5 ♕b7 20.♕d2 e4! 21.♖d7 ♕b5 22.♔a1 exf3 23.gxf3 ♖fe8 and found that Black should have enough compensation. Our main line continues:



15.♖d7 ♕b5 16.♕d2 ♖ac8 17.♔a1 ♗xd5 18.♖xd5 ♕b7 19.♕d3 ♕c6 20.♗f2 h5 21.♖d1 ♖e6 22.♖d5 ♖b8 23.♖xa5 ♖xb2 24.♔xb2 ♖e2† 25.♖d2 ♕xc3† 26.♕xc3 ♖xd2† 27.♔c1 ♗xc3 28.♖a8† ♔h7 29.♗e1 ♖xa2 30.♖xa2 ♗xe1= Black will easily hold this endgame.



We have reached a thematic structure for the 9.0–0–0 d5 variation, and it is worth pausing to consider the approximate plans for both sides. Unlike some other Dragon lines, the game is unlikely to be decided by brute-force attacking. White will normally continue with g2-g4 and h2-h4, threatening to create a huge attack with h4-h5, but Black will nip this idea in the bud with ...h6. Our plan from there will be to block the kingside, usually with g4-g5 (inviting ...h5), but sometimes with h4-h5 (inviting ...g5). Once that has occurred, we will look to build a positional advantage by occupying the c5-square and doubling rooks on the d-file. In an ideal world, we will shut down Black's counterplay and eventually obtain a winning endgame, thanks to dominant minor pieces and a far superior queenside structure.

Obviously Black will also have a say in things. Over the next few moves, he will generally move his queen off the d-file and replace it with the f8-rook. He will keep his king safe by meeting h2-h4 with ...h6, as mentioned above. He often exchanges the light-squared bishops by means of ...♘f4, followed by recapturing

on e6 with the knight, after which White will have to watch out for ...♘d4 ideas. And with it being a Dragon, Black will always be looking for opportunities to unleash the g7-bishop with a timely ...e4.

Black has tried several moves here but we will focus on the main lines of **C3221) 14...♕b8** and especially **C3222) 14...♕c7**. I also checked a couple of minor options:

14...♖e8?!

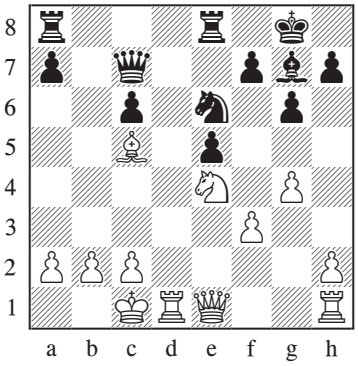
The rook usually belongs on d8, and there is no reason for Black to commit it to the 'wrong' square so soon.

15.g4 ♕c7 16.♗c5 ♘f4

16...h6 transposes to the Van den Doel – Habibi game in the next note.

16...♖ad8 has been played a few times but 17.♔b1N keeps a nice edge for White: 17...h6 (17...♘f4 18.♗d6±) 18.♖g1!?± Discouraging ...f5 while keeping the usual positional advantages.

17.♗xe6 ♘xe6

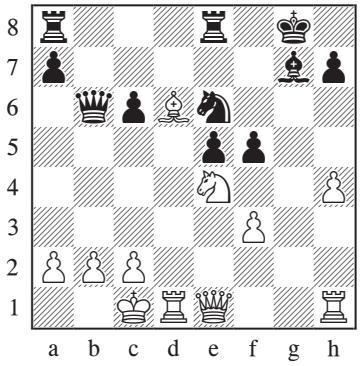


18.♗d6 ♕b6 19.h4± f5

This seems like Black's only chance to get some counterplay but the open g-file leads to great problems for him.

19...♘d4 was well met by 20.c3! ♘xf3 21.♕e2+– and the knight was trapped in Oral – Hamberger, Graz 1994.

20.gxf5 gxf5



21.♘g3!

21.♘c3 was less convincing in Babaev – Alford, Dos Hermanas 2004.

21...♘d4

21...e4 22.c3 exf3 23.♘xf5 ♕b5 24.♘e7† ♖xe7 25.♗xe7 ♘f4 26.♔b1 is winning for White.

22.♘h5 ♖ad8N

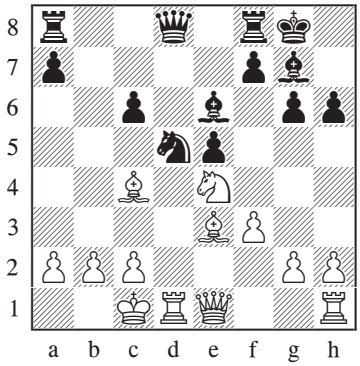
22...♖e6 23.♖g1 was hopeless for Black in Kerek – Medvegy, Paks 1997.

23.♘xg7 ♔xg7 24.♗xe5† ♔f7 25.f4

With an extra pawn and the safer king, White should be winning.

14...h6

This has been played a few times but it usually transposes to the main line.



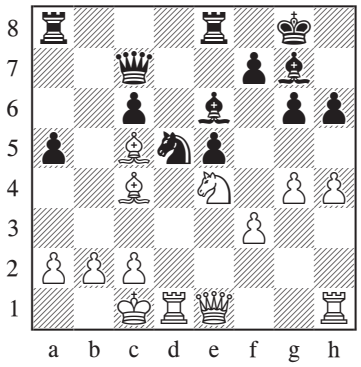
15.g4 ♕c7 16.♗c5 ♖fe8?!

16...♖fd8 17.♕h4 transposes to variation C3222.

I guess the idea of the text move is to place

the rook opposite White's queen, but it doesn't work as there are too many pieces blocking the e-file.

17.h4 a5



18.a4

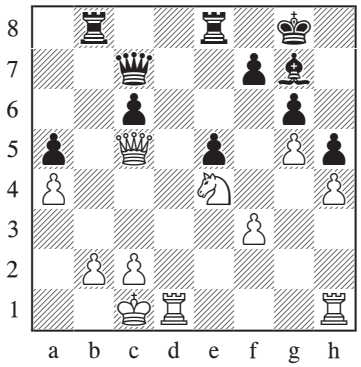
18.h5!?N threatens to blast open the kingside with g4-g5, so Black is virtually forced to play 18...g5, when 19.a4!± gives White an even better version of the game. The game continuation is still good though, and it is worth including a few more moves to show the dream position that White soon obtains.

18...♘f4 19.♗xe6 ♘xe6 20.♕e3! ♖ab8 21.g5 ♘xc5

Also after 21...h5 22.b3± White is dominating.

22.♕xc5 h5

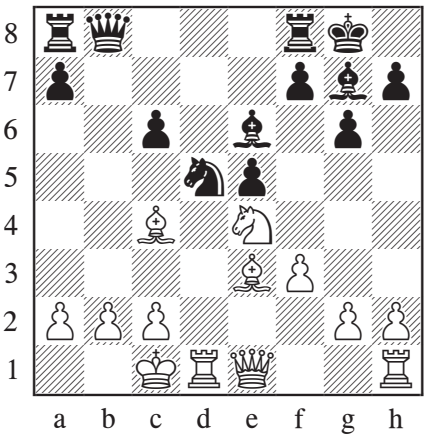
22...♖b4 23.b3± does not change much.



23.♖d6 ♖ec8 24.♖hd1 ♖b4 25.♖d7 ♕b6 26.♕e7 ♖f8 27.♖d8+–

Black was unable to do much about the threat of ♖xf8† followed by ♖d8 in Van den Doel – Habibi, Zwolle 1998.

C3221) 14...♕b8



This is less popular than the main line below, with good reason, as Black cannot create meaningful threats against the b2-pawn.

15.♗c5

15.♗d2!? was seen in Rowson – Ward, Plymouth 1992, and the engines approve of it. However, I will focus on the more human move which has been played by virtually everyone else.

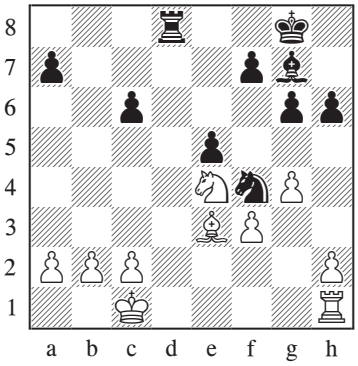
15...♖d8 16.♕h4

16.♕a5 is another good option; see Panarin – Antipov, Sochi 2012.

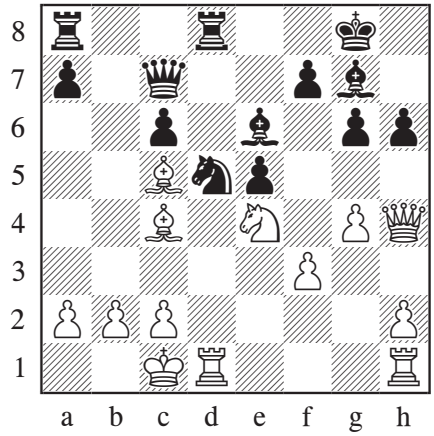
16...h6 17.g4 ♕c7

17...a5 occurred in Al Modiahki – West, Penang 1991, when 18.a4!N would have been strong; compare the main line below.

17...♘f4 18.♗xe6 ♘xe6 19.♗e3 ♘f4 20.♖xd8† ♕xd8 21.♕xd8† ♖xd8 reaches a typical endgame which should favour White. In Mannion – Helmer, Hastings 2013, White should have continued:



22.c3!N Threatening ♗xf4 followed by ♖d1. 22...♘e6 23.♔c2±



18.g5

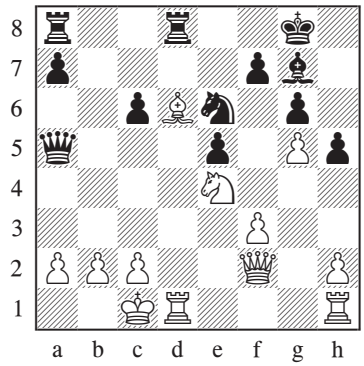
This is our thematic plan. Black is virtually forced to block the kingside with ...h5, leaving the knight on e4 with improved stability.

18.♔b1!?N is another good option. A logical sequence is 18...♖d7 19.♖d3 ♖ad8 20.a3 ♘f4 21.♖xd7 ♖xd7 22.♗xe6 ♘xe6 23.♗e3 ♘f4 24.♕f2± and White keeps some edge.

18...h5 19.♕f2 a5?!

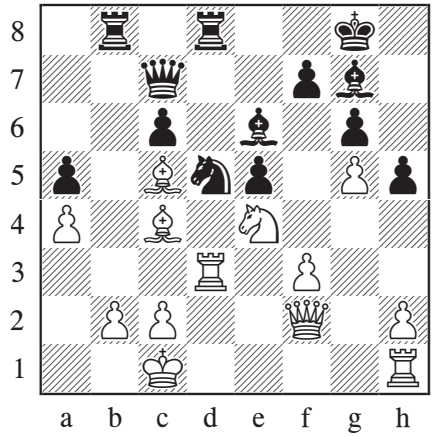
Sometimes this is a good move and other times it's bad; it all depends on the situation on the board. In this case, White can conveniently block the pawn with a2-a4, stifling Black's activity and fixing the a5-pawn as a target for a future endgame.

19...♘f4 is a better try although White keeps the upper hand with: 20.♗xe6 (but not 20.♗d6?? as played in Mueller – Golziow, corr. 1989, when 20...♖xd6!N 21.♘xd6 ♗d5!! 22.♗xd5 cxd5 23.♘b5 ♕a5 would have been winning for Black) 20...♘xe6 21.♗d6 ♕a5



22.a3!?N (22.♔b1± was also good in Karatorossian – S. Farago, Budapest 1997) White's last move prepares to meet 22...♖d7 with 23.♗b4! ♖xd1† 24.♖xd1 ♕b5 25.♗e7±, keeping the upper hand.

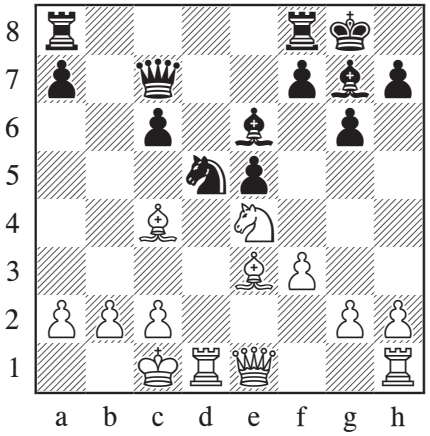
20.a4! ♖ab8 21.♖d3±



21...♔h8 22.♖hd1 ♘f4 23.♖xd8† ♖xd8 24.♖xd8† ♕xd8 25.♗f1 ♕d5 26.b3

White is dominating. In Dvoirys – Basin, Simferopol 1988, he soon obtained a winning position by targeting the weak a5-pawn.

C3222) 14...♕c7



This is the most popular move by far, and is recommended by Gawain Jones in *The Dragon Volume Two*.

15.♗c5 ♖fd8

Jones argues that Black has a slightly improved version of the old main line after 9...d5, which occurs after 10.exd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♗d4 e5 (12...♗xd4! 13.♕xd4 ♕b6 is the modern line which I prefer to avoid) 13.♗c5 ♗e6 14.♘e4 ♖e8. Jones points out that Black has benefited from being able to move his rook directly from f8 to d8, rather than the inferior e8-square. However, I think White should be happy with the trade-off, as he has avoided the 12...♗xd4! line mentioned above, while reaching a pawn structure which should favour him in the long run. A tough battle lies ahead, but I believe White should have the better chances if he knows what he is doing.

16.♕h4 h6

This is virtually forced, as Black needs to prevent ♘g5.

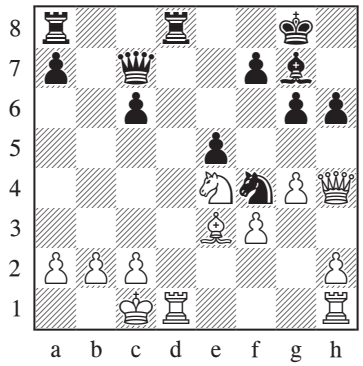
17.g4

Preparing g4-g5, leading to the usual kingside blockade after ...h5.

17...♖d7

Doubling on the d-file seems normal and is recommended by Jones.

A thematic alternative is:
17...♘f4 18.♗xe6 ♘xe6 19.♗e3 ♘f4



20.♖xd8†!

20.♕f2 ♖d5! was not so easy in Stull – Prizant, corr. 1994. When permitted, Black will often look to utilize the d5-square for his pieces, including the rooks as well as the light-squared bishop in any lines where White does not exchange it after ...♘f4.

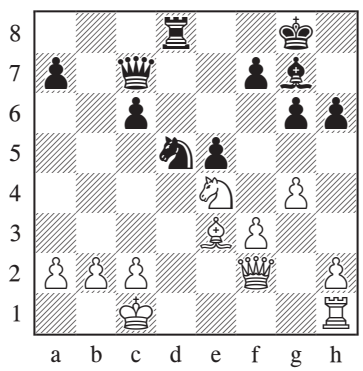
20...♖xd8 21.♕f2!

I believe that White preserves an edge after this accurate move. I will present a few illustrative lines.

21...♘d5

21...♘e6 22.h4±

21...♘h3 22.♕f1 ♕a5 23.♔b1 ♘f4 24.♕c4±



22.♗d2!?N

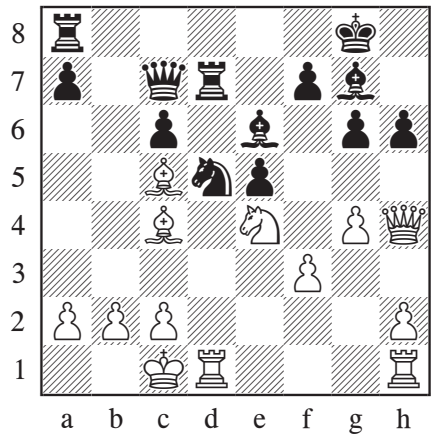
After 22.♗c5 a draw was agreed in Mroczek – Sodomski, corr. 2017. In this somewhat simplified position, I like having the bishop on d2 where it monitors some important squares on both flanks.

22...♕b6

22...♘f4 23.h4± also looks pleasant for White.

23.♖e1 ♘f4 24.♕xb6 axb6 25.♗xf4 exf4 26.c3±

The illustrative line ends in another favourable endgame for White.



18.g5

White carries out the typical plan of blocking the kingside to prevent ...f5.

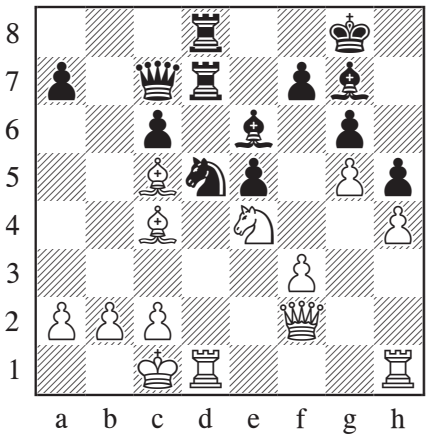
I also considered 18.♕f2!?N ♖ad8 19.h4, intending h4-h5, but found 19...f5! to be a good reply.

18...h5 19.♕f2

Having blocked the kingside, White brings his queen to a better square.

19...♖ad8 20.h4!

Jones covers this line in a note and only considers 20.♖he1. Having explored some lines after both moves, I believe the text move to be slightly more useful for White.



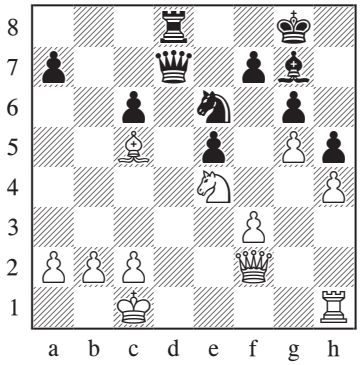
20...♘f4 21.♖xd7

21.♗xe6!? ♘xe6 22.♖xd7 ♖xd7 23.♗e3± was also promising for White in Sgherri – B. Thompson, email 2016.

21...♖xd7

I also examined:

21...♕xd7N 22.♗xe6 ♘xe6



23.b3!

Obviously White must avoid 23.♔b1?? ♕d1† and mate.

23.♗e3 looks like a normal move but 23...♘d4! is a good reply. 24.c3 ♘f5 and now 25.♗xa7? would be a mistake allowing 25...♖a8 26.♗c5 ♖xa2, with obvious problems for White.

23...♘d4 24.c3 ♘e6

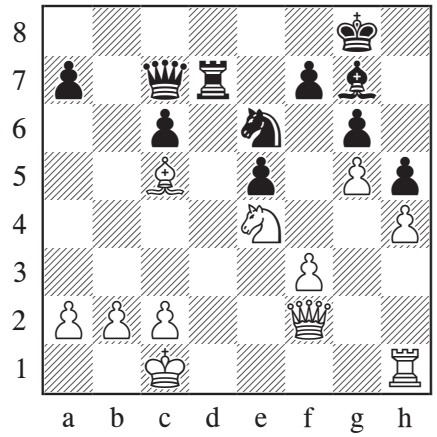
Now 24...♘f5 can safely be met by 25.♗xa7! ♖a8 26.♗c5+– when the a2-pawn is

defended; this is why White's 23rd move was so important.

25.♗xa7 ♘f4 26.♔b1 ♕d3† 27.♔b2 ♕d5 28.♕e3±

Black has no real compensation for the pawn.

22.♗xe6 ♘xe6



23.♗e3!N

After 23.♔b1 ♖d5 24.♗e3 a draw was agreed in Sorcinelli – Susla, corr. 2014. I believe the text move to be more accurate.

23...♘d4

23...♕b7 24.♕e2 a5 25.♕c4± is nice for White.

24.c3 ♕a5 25.♔b1 ♘f5 26.♕e2 ♖d5 27.♗f2±

White keeps an edge thanks to his bind on the kingside and his long-term chances to create a passed pawn on the queenside.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have recommended meeting the Dragon with the Yugoslav Attack. After 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 we considered the following options.

7...a6 is the Dragadorf, a modern, hybrid system. We react with 8.♕d2, keeping the option of meeting an early ...b5 with a2-a4. The flexible 8...♘bd7 is the main line, when 9.g4! b5 10.h4! seems excellent for White.

7...♘c6 introduces another sideline where Black delays castling. The whole concept is dubious, as Game 24 demonstrates.

We then moved on to the main lines with 7...0–0 8.♕d2 ♘c6, when 9.0–0–0 is our choice, leading to a further branching.

9...♗d7 is occasionally tried by strong players but it makes a lot less sense here than it does against 9.♗c4. The simple plan of 10.g4, followed by ♔b1 and ♗e2, gives White excellent chances.

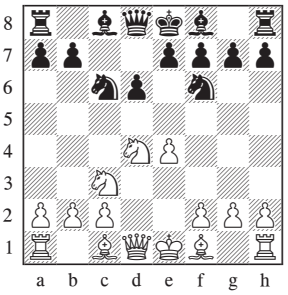
9...♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♗e6 used to be a main line but it is currently experiencing a theoretical crisis. If you do your homework, you will have excellent chances to score a convincing victory.

Finally, 9...d5 is the critical test, when 10.♕e1!? is our choice.

Then 10...e6?! 11.h4! gives White fine prospects, with 11...♕c7 12.♘db5! being an important detail, as we saw in Game 25.

10...e5 is the main line, when 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.exd5 cxd5 enables White to obtain positional pressure, as Game 26 demonstrated. 12...♘xd5 is more reliable, when we continue 13.♗c4 ♗e6 14.♘e4. The position is full of complexity but I like White's prospects in the lines I have analysed. With careful play, White can neutralize his opponent's activity, with good chances to exploit his queenside superiority later in the game.

Chapter 9



Classical

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.f3

A) 6...♘xd4 **306**
B) 6...a6 **307**
C) 6...♕b6?! **310**
D) 6...e5 7.♘b3 **312**
D1) 7...h6?! **313**
D2) 7...a5 **314**
D3) 7...♗e6 **315**
D4) 7...♗e7 8.♗e3 **317**
D41) 8...♗e6 9.♘d5 **318**
D411) 9...♗xd5 **318**
D412) 9...0–0 **320**
D42) 8...0–0 9.♕d2 **323**
D421) 9...♗e6 **323**
D422) 9...a5 10.♗b5 ♘a7 11.♗d3! **325**
D4221) 11...♘c6 **326**
D4222) 11...♗e6 **328**

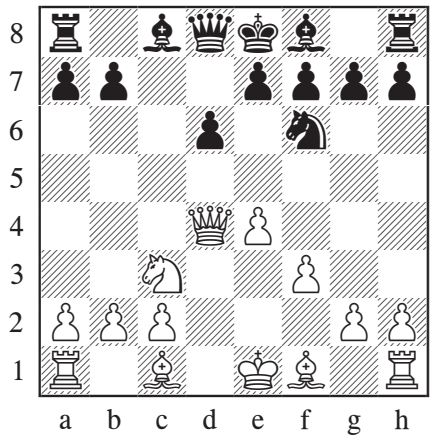
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.f3

Considering that the English Attack is our choice against both the Najdorf and Scheveningen, it was natural to use it against the Classical Sicilian as well.

I analysed four main options: **A) 6...♘xd4**, **B) 6...a6**, **C) 6...♕b6?!** and **D) 6...e5**.

6...g6 7.♗e3 leads to the Dragon of the previous chapter, and 6...e6 to the Scheveningen of Chapter 10.

A) 6...♘xd4 7.♕xd4



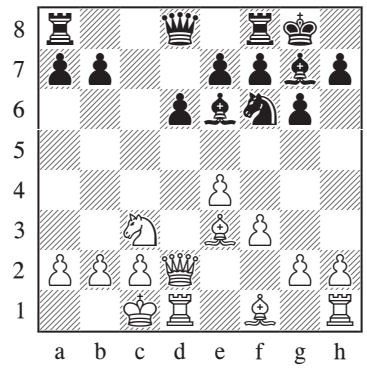
7...g6

This Dragon-esque set-up has been tried by some strong players but White has more than one way to get an edge against it.

8.♗g5!?

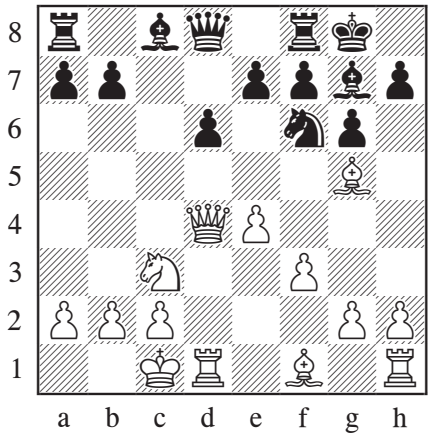
This active move prepares long castling followed by a quick e4-e5 break.

8.♗e3 is also possible, when 8...♗g7 9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0 ♗e6 reaches a position almost identical to variation C2 of the previous chapter, except that here White's bishop is on e3 instead of d4, which has some minor pros and cons but should not change the evaluation too much. Just as in the Dragon line, White should proceed with:



11.♔b1! Consolidating the queenside while discouraging ...♕a5 due to the ♘d5 trick. 11...♕c7 12.♘b5! ♕c8 This occurred in Krivec – Sudakova, Rijeka 2006, when 13.g4!?N ♗c4 14.♗d4± would have kept the better chances for White.

8...♗g7 9.0–0–0 0–0

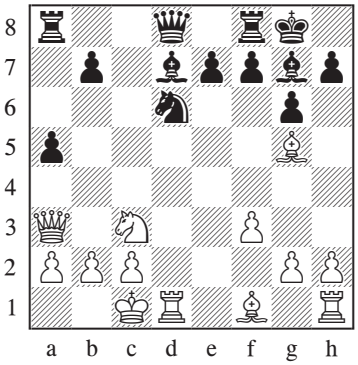


10.♕b4!

Threatening to push the e-pawn.

10...a5 11.♕a3 ♗e6

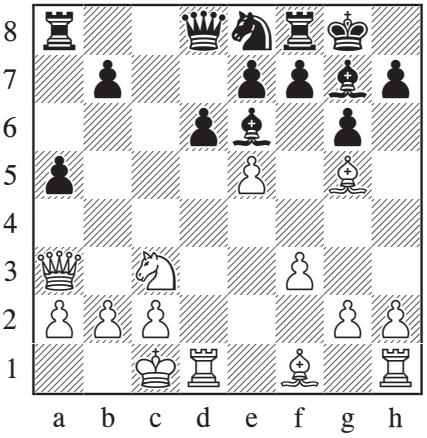
11...♗d7? led to a quick collapse for Black in one game: 12.e5! ♘e8 13.exd6 ♘xd6



14.♖xd6! This elementary tactic highlights the power of the bishop on g5. 14...h6 15.♗b5 hxg5 16.♖xd7 ♕b6 17.♕xe7 ♗xc3 18.♖xb7+– White kept his extra piece in Kulaots – Pataki, Paks 2003.

12.e5 ♘e8

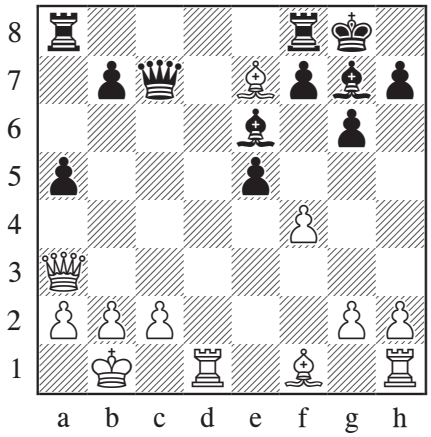
Here I found an improvement over Ehlvest – Kotsur, Istanbul (ol) 2000.



13.f4!N ♕c7

After 13...♖c8 14.♗d3 White is ready to mobilize his last piece with ♖he1. Play may continue 14...f6 15.exf6 ♘xf6 16.♖he1 ♗f7 17.f5± and Black is in trouble.

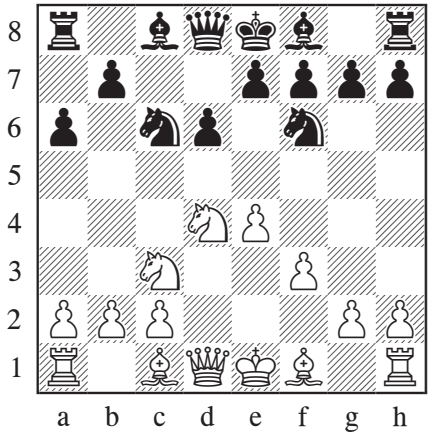
14.♔b1 dxe5 15.♘b5 ♕c6 16.♗xe7 ♘c7 17.♘xc7 ♕xc7



18.♗xf8 ♗xf8 19.♕a4 exf4 20.♗b5 ♗g7 21.♖hf1±

Black has less than full compensation for the exchange.

B) 6...a6



This position could also be reached via a Najdorf. The combination of ...♘c6 and ...a6 looks weird, but its purpose becomes clearer after Black's next move.

7.♗e3 d5!?

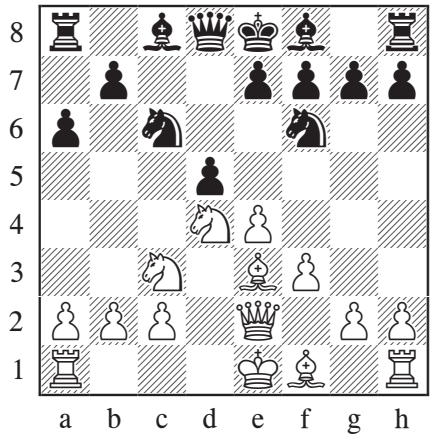
Without the pawn on a6, this move would have allowed ♗b5, leading to material gains for White.

7...♕b6?! leads straight to variation C below, while other normal moves such as 7...e6, 7...e5 and 7...g6 all transpose to other chapters.

7...♗d7 8.♕d2 gives White a good version of a standard English Attack.

8.♕e2!

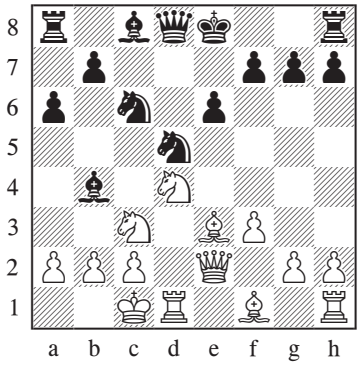
This move is rare but effective, for reasons that will become clear.



8...e5

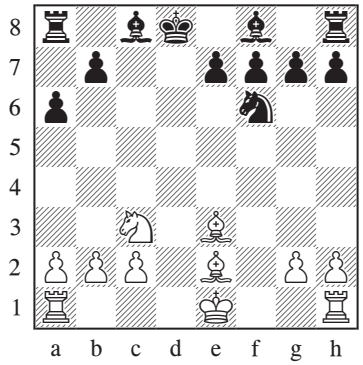
After 8...♘xd4? 9.♗xd4 dxe4 10.0–0–0± the open d-file spelled trouble for Black in Gulevich – Hoch, email 2006.

8...e6 9.0–0–0 ♗b4?! (9...♗e7N is better although 10.g4 clearly favours White) 10.exd5 ♘xd5 occurred in Teran Alvarez – Abreu Delgado, Santa Clara 2000, when White should have continued:



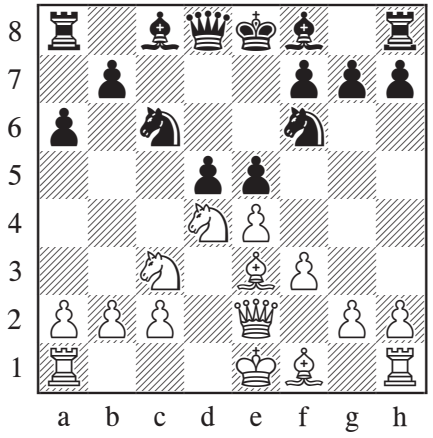
11.♘xd5!N ♕xd5 12.♘b3 ♕e5 13.f4± With an obvious initiative.

8...dxe4 also fails to equalize after: 9.♘xc6 exf3?! (9...bxc6N is preferable, although 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.fxe4 e5 12.♕c4! ♕c7 13.0–0–0 ♗e7 14.♕a4 0–0 15.♗c4± gives White a clear positional edge) 10.♘xd8 fxe2 11.♗xe2 ♔xd8



12.0–0–0† ♔e8 13.♗f3± Black's extra pawn was little consolation for White's enormous lead in development in Avotins – Siigur, corr. 2004.

After the text move I found a significant improvement over the few existing games.



9.exd5!?N

Making full use of the queen's positioning on the e-file.

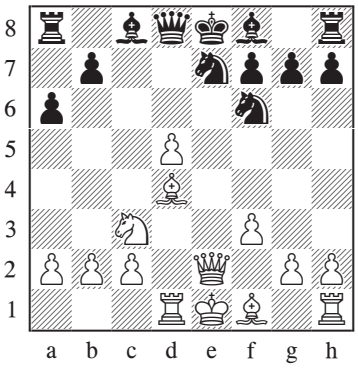
9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.exd5 ♘xd5 11.0–0–0 has scored heavily for White but I think Black is okay after: 11...♗e6 12.♕e1 ♕c7! (12...♗b4? 13.♕g3 ♗xc3 14.♕xg7 ♗xb2† 15.♔xb2 ♕b8† 16.♔a1 ♔d7 17.c4+– De la Villa Garcia – Sutovsky, Pamplona 1998) 13.♘e4 ♘xe3 14.♕xe3 ♗e7= Marotta Moraes – Miraglia, email 2002.

9...♘xd5

Accepting the sacrifice gives White too strong an attack:

9...exd4? 10.♗xd4† ♘e7 11.♖d1!

11.0–0–0 offers great compensation but the text move is even more accurate.



11...♕d6

11...♘fxd5?! 12.♘xd5 ♕xd5 13.♗b6!+– is the difference from the variation with castling. Black loses his queen, as there is no saving check on g5.

12.♕e3! ♔d8

Otherwise White plays ♗c5 and d6, winning.

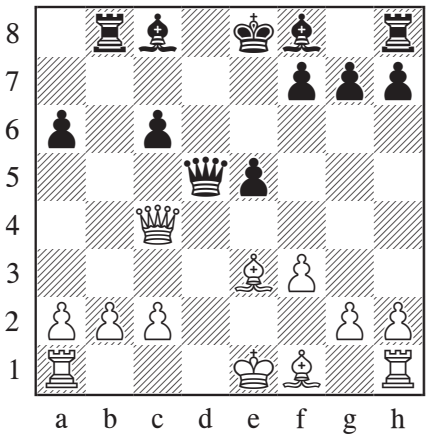
13.♗b6† ♔d7 14.♗c4±

Black's future is entirely bleak.

10.♘xd5 ♕xd5 11.♘xc6 bxc6

11...♕xc6 is conveniently met by 12.♕c4!, for instance: 12...♗e6 (12...♕xc4? 13.♗xc4 ♗d7 14.0–0–0 ♗c6 15.♗b6± leaves Black in serious difficulties) 13.♕xc6† bxc6 14.0–0–0± White will continue with ♗d3-e4, with a safe positional advantage.

12.♕c4! ♖b8

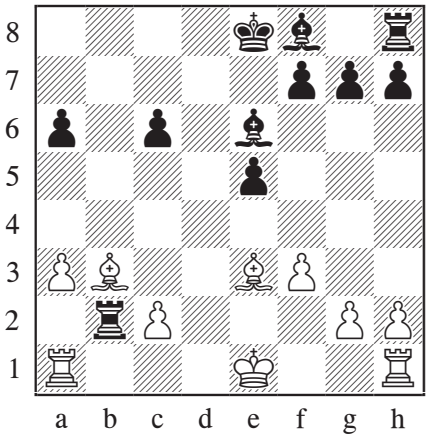


13.a3! ♕xc4

13...♖xb2?! is risky in view of 14.♕c3 ♖b8 15.♖d1 ♕e6 16.♗g5! f6 17.♗e3± when Black will have a hard time getting his king to safety.

13...♗e7 is safer although 14.♕c3± once again gives White a pleasant edge.

14.♗xc4 ♖xb2 15.♗b3 ♗e6



16.♗c1 ♖xb3 17.cxb3 ♗xb3 18.♖b1 ♗c4 19.♗e3±

For the moment Black has enough material with two pawns for the exchange, but he is under pressure due to White's active rook and the weakness of the a6- and c6-pawns.

C) 6...♕b6?!

This is a serious move which has been played in well over 200 games. However, I believe it to be a mistake, based on the strength of White's reply.

7.♗e3!

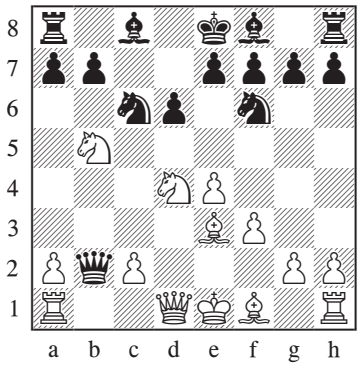
This comes close to refuting Black's concept, as it turns out that taking on b2 is too dangerous for him.

7.♘b3 has been by far the most popular choice, followed by ♕e2 and ♗e3 with mutual chances.

7...a6

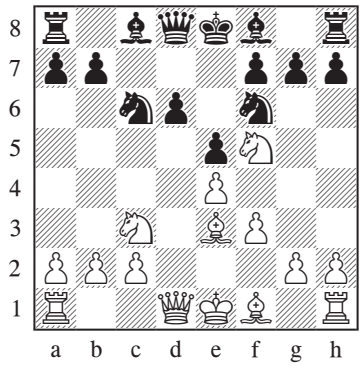
This is the critical choice according to the database statistics, with Black achieving a healthy plus score so far. However, this has nothing to do with the objective strength of Black's opening scheme.

7...♕xb2? is refuted by 8.♘cb5 when Black loses material by force, for instance:

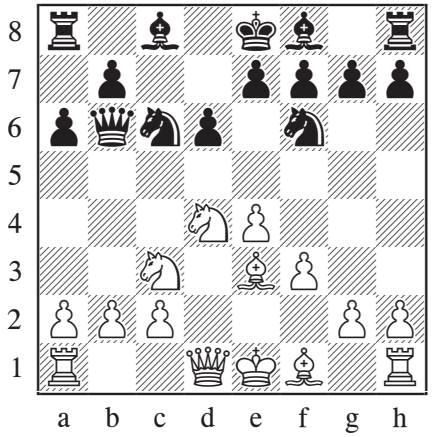


8...♕b4† (8...♔d8 9.a3+– Accinelli – Chiu Lelyen, La Paz 2017; 8...♘xd4 Summakoglu – Kilic, Aksu 2017, 9.♘c7†!N ♔d8 10.♗xd4+–) 9.♗d2 ♕c5 10.♘c7† ♔d8 11.♘b3+– Cucu – Breahna, Bucharest 2007.

7...e5 isn't so terrible but White gets an easy positional edge after: 8.♘f5 ♕d8 (8...♕xb2? is once again a losing move: 9.♘b5 ♗xf5 10.♖b1 ♕xa2 11.♘c7† ♔d8 12.♘xa8 ♗c8 13.♗b5 ♗d7 Ambarcumova – Ivanova, Vladimir 2007. 14.0–0N+–)



9.♗c4 ♗e6 (9...♗xf5?! 10.exf5 ♕c8 11.g4± Vicicko – Kulmany, Hungary 2010) Now in Costantini – V. Georgiev, Reggio Emilia 2001, 10.♗b3N± would have been simple and strong.



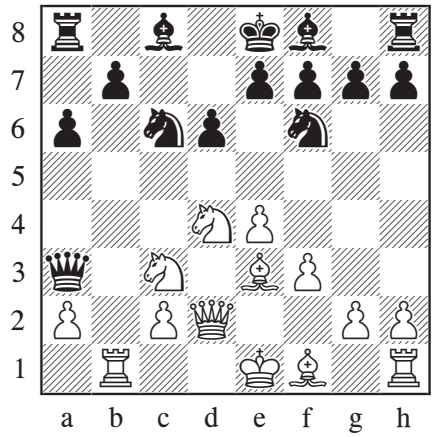
8.♕d2!

Initially I spent some time analysing 8.a3, when 8...e5 9.♘f5 ♕c7 leads to an interesting game where White has chances for an edge. But then I came back to the text move and realized it was simply a big improvement, as White gets a powerful initiative to compensate for the sacrificed pawn.

8...♕xb2

Otherwise what was the point of putting the queen on b6?

9.♖b1 ♕a3

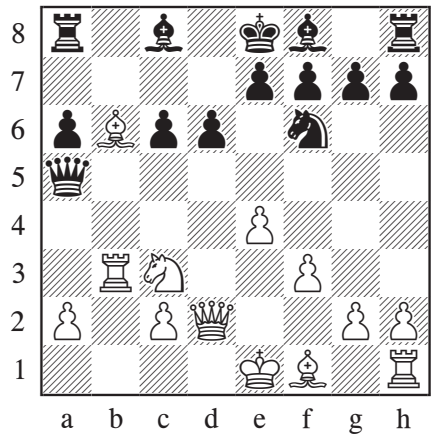


10.♘xc6!

10.♗b5?! axb5 11.♘dxb5 ♕a5 12.♗b6 may seem like an attractive idea, but after 12...♕xb6 13.♘xd6† exd6 14.♖xb6 White has no advantage.

10...bxc6 11.♖b3 ♕a5 12.♗b6

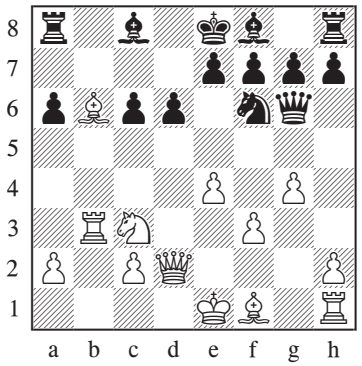
White has a useful lead in development and Black's queen will have to take up an awkward position.



12...♕e5!?N

This is perhaps the trickiest move to crack.

12...♕h5 13.g4! ♕g6 occurred in Abuin Boullon – Rodriguez Lopez, Ferrol 2002, and now White has a significant improvement:



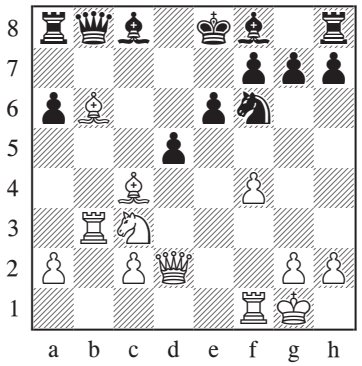
14.♗e3!N e5 (14...e6 15.e5! dxe5 16.♗d3 is White's big idea) 15.♖b6 ♗d7 16.h4 h6 17.♗xa6 ♗e7 18.♗b7 ♖b8 19.a4± The position is still messy but White has a considerable advantage.

13.♗c4 ♗e6

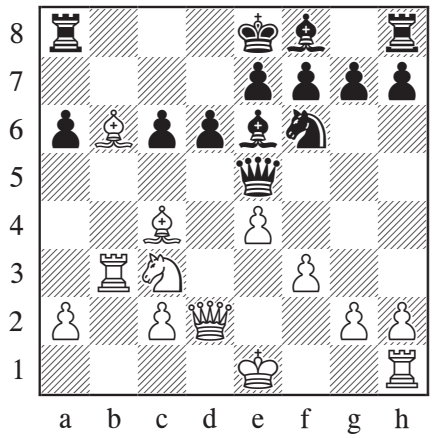
Alternatives are no better, for instance:

13...e6 14.f4 ♕h5 15.♗e2 ♕g6 16.e5 ♘d7 17.exd6 is clearly better for White.

Another nice line is: 13...d5 14.0–0 e6 15.f4 ♕b8 16.exd5 cxd5 (16...♕d6 17.♕e3±)



17.♘xd5! ♘xd5 18.♗xd5 exd5 19.♖e1† and White wins.

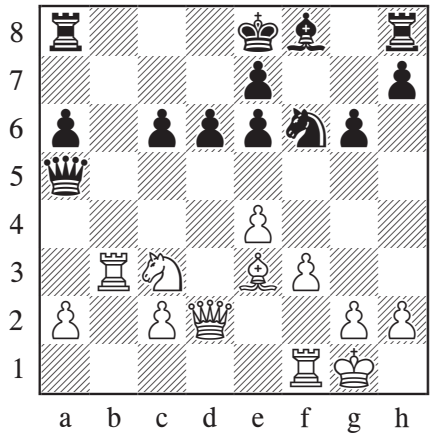


14.♗d4 ♕a5 15.♗xe6 fxe6 16.♗b6 ♕h5 17.♗e3 ♕a5

17...g6 18.♘e2!+– forces Black to make horrible concessions.

18.0–0 g6

Just when it seems as though Black is ready to complete development, White can strike with the following hammer blow.



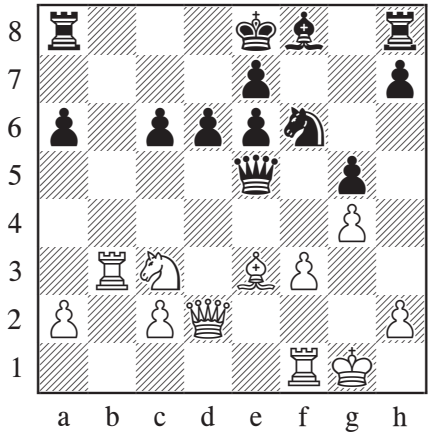
19.e5!! ♕xe5

19...♘d7 20.♖fb1± and Black cannot complete his development.

20.g4!

Black's queen is close to being trapped. His best attempt is:

20...g5



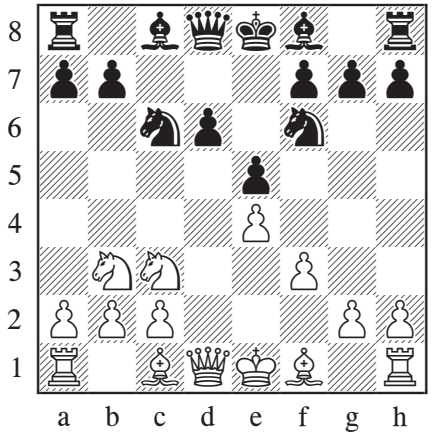
21.♗d4 ♕f4 22.♕d3 d5 23.♘e2 ♕c7 24.♕e3±

Black's position is on the verge of falling apart.

D) 6...e5

This is the main line and the most challenging response.

7.♘b3

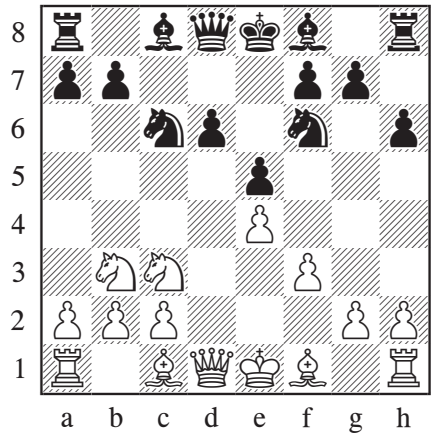


The position is similar to the famous 6.f3 (or 6.♗e3) 6...e5 Najdorf, which will be analysed in Chapter 11, but there are some key differences. Here there is not much sense

in Black aiming for queenside play with ...a6 and ...b5, as that will only give him an inferior version of a Najdorf, having committed his knight to c6 rather than the often preferable d7-square. On the other hand, having ...♘c6 on the board instead of ...a6 has some positive features for Black. For the moment, he is slightly better developed than in the Najdorf line. More concretely, ...a5-a4 is an important resource, expanding on the queenside while targeting the knight on b3. Compared with the Najdorf, Black has avoided losing a tempo with an early ...a6, so the ...a5-a4 plan carries a lot more bite here.

We will analyse **D1) 7...h6?!**, **D2) 7...a5**, **D3) 7...♗e6** and **D4) 7...♗e7**.

D1) 7...h6?!



This a typical follow-up to ...e5 in certain Sicilian variations, but I include it here as an example of what Black should not do, and how we should punish him if he does it. As we will see, White does not generally develop his bishop to g5 in this variation, so the text move loses an important tempo. Moreover, it renders Black's kingside more vulnerable to an attack with g4-g5 in some lines.

8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♕d2 0–0

It is also worth considering:

9...a5?!

For the second time in a short period, Black makes a thematic yet ill-advised pawn move. White can reply in his preferred fashion with:

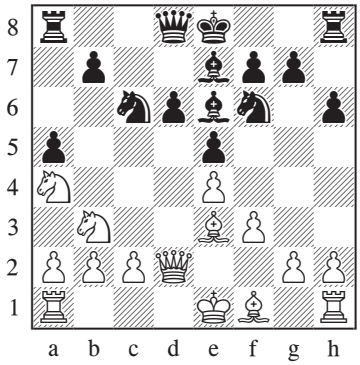
10.♘a4!

An important motif which is worth knowing about. White intends to complete development with ♗b5 and 0–0, followed by taking advantage of Black's seriously weakened queenside.

10...♗e6N

This is surely Black's best try.

10...♘d7?! occurred in Morozevich – Milos, Internet 2000, when 11.♗b5!N 0–0 12.0–0 ♕c7 13.♕c3 ♗g5 14.♗f2± would have left Black in a stranglehold on the queenside, with White having a free hand to increase the pressure with ♖fd1 and so on.



11.♗b5!

11.♘b6 allows 11...a4!! 12.♘xa8 ♕xa8 13.♘c1 a3 when White is still somewhat better with best play, but Black has been given too much counterplay out of the blue.

11...0–0 12.c4!

White has a pleasant advantage, with excellent control over the queenside.

10.0–0–0 a5

This move is more logical here than on the previous turn, as White's positional plan of playing on the queenside does not work as well

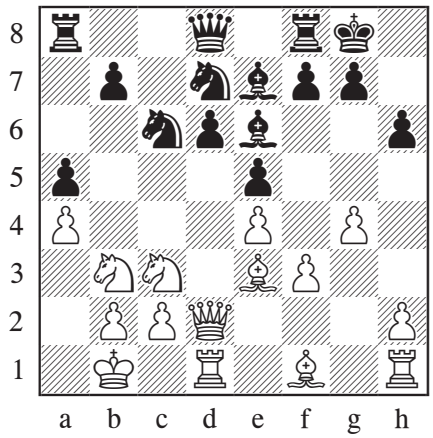
after committing his king to that side of the board. Fortunately, he has a different way to halt Black's play.

11.a4!

11.♗b5?! is less effective due to 11...♘a7 12.♗e2 ♗d7! 13.a4 b5! and Black gets plenty of counterplay.

11...♗e6 12.g4 ♘d7 13.♔b1

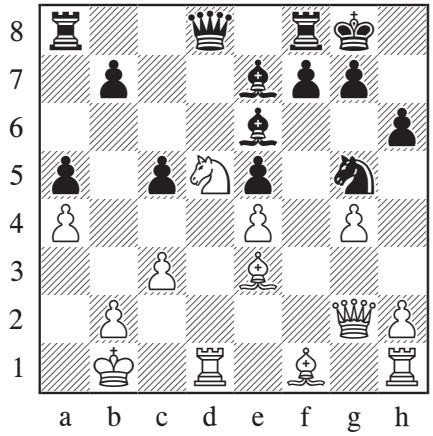
White's attack is faster, as was shown in a correspondence game.



13...♘c5 14.♘xc5 dxc5 15.♘d5 ♘d4 16.c3!

White can afford to give up a pawn, as his positional advantages are huge.

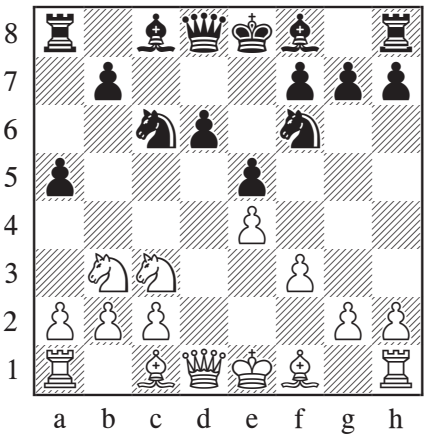
16...♘xf3 17.♕f2 ♘g5 18.♕g2



18...♘h7 19.h4 ♗xh4 20.♗xc5+–

White was dominating and soon picked up material in Gusakov – Rychkov, corr. 2012.

D2) 7...a5



Usually Black waits for a few moves before launching the a-pawn, but it is worth considering this early version of the idea.

8.♗e3!

8.♗b5 is the obvious reply but in that case White has to be careful not to transpose to some other line where it is preferable to meet ...a5 in a different way.

The text move avoids this problem while showing complete disdain for Black's supposed threat of pushing his rook's pawn down the board.

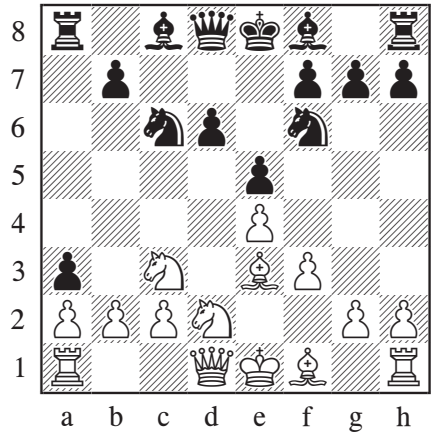
8...a4 9.♘d2

The knight is heading for c4, where it will be superbly placed.

9...a3

9...♗e6 10.♘c4 d5 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5 13.♘b6 (13.♗b6!?N ♕d7 14.♘e3±) 13...♖a5 14.c3!?± was also promising for White in Akatova – Abramov, St Petersburg 2006.

The text move seems most consistent, but White can continue his policy of ignoring Black's a-pawn.

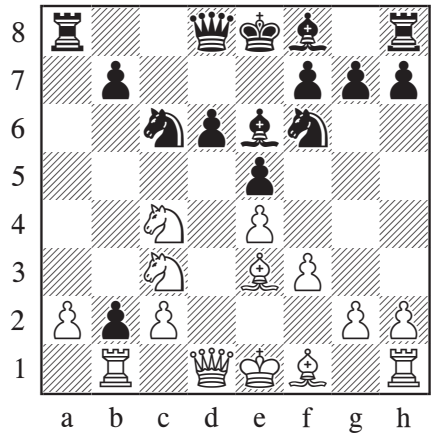


10.♘c4! axb2 11.♖b1 ♗e6

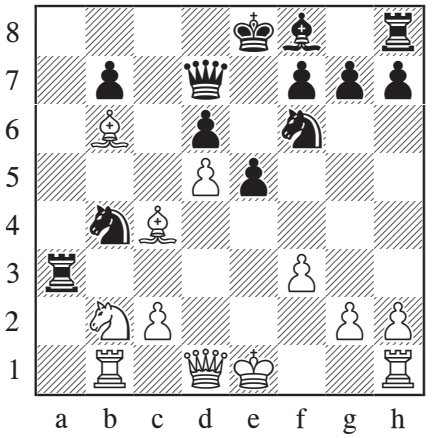
11...♗e7 12.♗b6 ♕d7 13.♖xb2 0–0 14.♗e2 ♗d8 15.♕xd6 ♕xd6 16.♘xd6 ♗e7 17.♘cb5± was also great for White in Obolenskikh – Shushpanov, Novosibirsk 2003.

11...d5!?N may be the best try, although 12.♘xd5 ♘xd5 13.exd5 ♗b4† 14.♔f2± still favours White.

We have been following Zimmermann – Humburg, Oberhof 2012. Instead of taking on b2 immediately, White should have preferred:



12.♘d5!N ♖xa2 13.♗b6 ♕d7 14.♘xb2 ♗xd5 15.exd5 ♘b4 16.♗c4 ♖a3



17.c3!

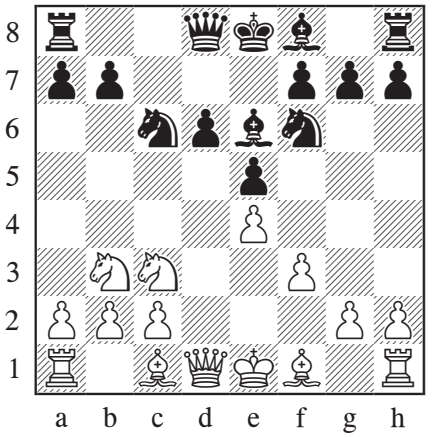
This computer move is the most accurate.

The more obvious 17.0–0 is also fine, for instance: 17...♗e7 18.♕d2 ♘a6 19.♗b3 ♕b5 20.♘c4 ♖xb3 21.cxb3 ♘xd5 22.♗f2±

17...♖xc3 18.♕d2 ♖xc4 19.♘xc4 ♘bxd5 20.♕a2±

Black has plenty of pawns but he is in serious trouble due to his poor development and weak king.

D3) 7...♗e6

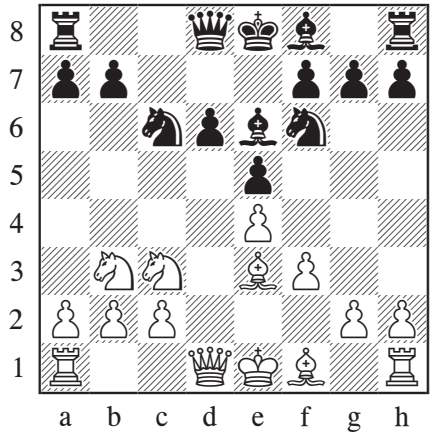


This is less popular than the other main bishop development (covered in variation D4 below) but it presents us with an interesting dilemma.

8.♗e3!

On this occasion, I don't feel the need to prevent ...d5.

8.♘d5 is the main line but after 8...♗xd5 (8...♗e7 9.♗e3 transposes to variation D41) 9.exd5 ♘e7 (instead of 9...♘b8, which is similar to 10...♘b8 in the notes to variation D411) we reach an interesting position where, unlike the later variation D411, Black's knight will go to g6 to assist with kingside counterplay, rather than regrouping on the queenside. It is quite possible that White can obtain an advantage here somehow, but his task is not simple and ultimately I found the text move to be the more practical choice.



8...d5

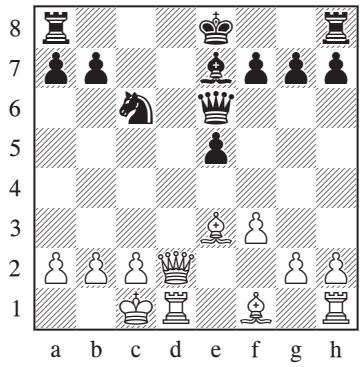
This is the most important option for us to consider.

8...♗e7 leads straight to variation D41.

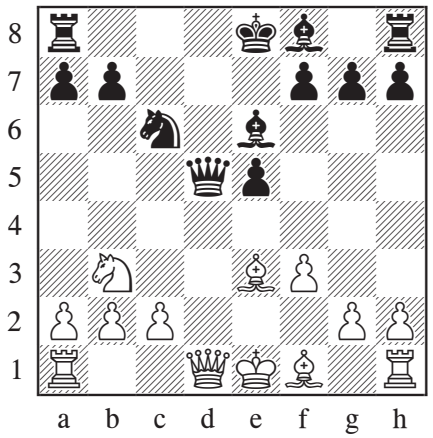
9.exd5 ♘xd5 10.♘xd5 ♕xd5!

Database statistics are rather misleading here: the text move scores significantly worse than the alternative, yet I find it the more challenging option.

10...♗xd5 11.♕d2 gives White a pleasant edge with natural moves. A good example continued: 11...♗e7 12.0–0–0 ♗e6 13.♘c5 ♕c8 14.♘xe6 ♕xe6



15.♕d5 ♕xd5 16.♖xd5 a6 17.c3 0–0 18.♖d7 b5 19.♗e2 ♖ad8 20.♖hd1± Kryvoruchko – Zeleny, Pardubice 2005.



11.♕xd5 ♗xd5 12.0–0–0 0–0–0

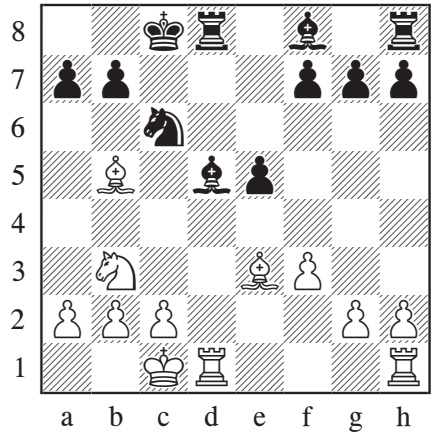
After the last few obvious moves, White now has to be quite accurate if he is to cause problems for his opponent.

13.♗b5!

Now the a7-pawn is indirectly threatened, and c2-c4 may prove strong in some lines, now that the bishop has been developed actively.

The immediate 13.c4 is premature. 13...♗e6 14.♖xd8† ♔xd8 15.♘c5 ♗c8 16.♗e2 White

has no real advantage and all the games on my database which reached this position ended in draws.



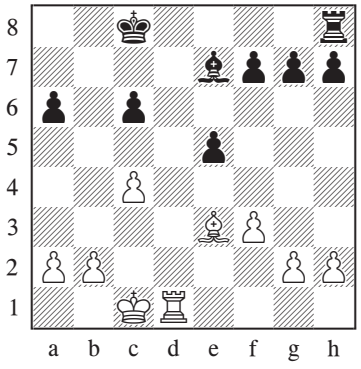
13...a6

13...♔c7 was seen in Paragua – Maksimenko, Milan 2001, when 14.♗xc6!?N bxc6 15.♖d3 would have been problematic for Black.

14.♗xc6 ♗xc6 15.♘a5 ♖xd1†!

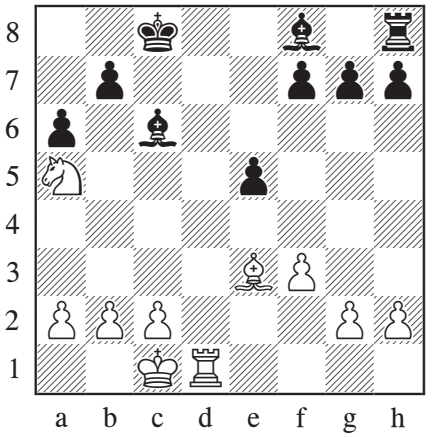
This is the best defence, although giving up the open file in this way would not be an easy decision to make over the board.

15...♗e7 was played in another game, which continued: 16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.c3 ♖d5 18.c4 ♖xd1† 19.♖xd1



19...♖d8 20.♖xd8† ♔xd8 21.♗d2 ♗c5 22.♔c2 White successfully converted his endgame advantage in Cilloniz Razzeto – Cowling, corr. 2013.

16.♖xd1



16...♗b5!

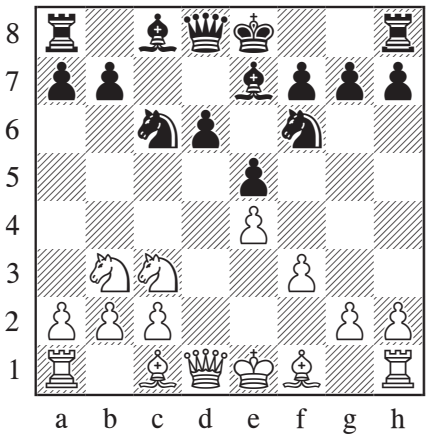
Preventing ♖d3 in order to provoke White's next move.

16...♗e8 17.♖d3 is a bit awkward for Black, with ♖c3† and ♗b6 coming.

17.c4 ♗e8 18.♗b6 ♗e7 19.c5±

Black went on to hold a draw in Sutton – Sitorus, corr. 2016. Nevertheless, my general assessment of this line is that White is generally the one exerting slight pressure with little to no risk.

D4) 7...♗e7



This is Black's most flexible and popular choice.

8.♗e3

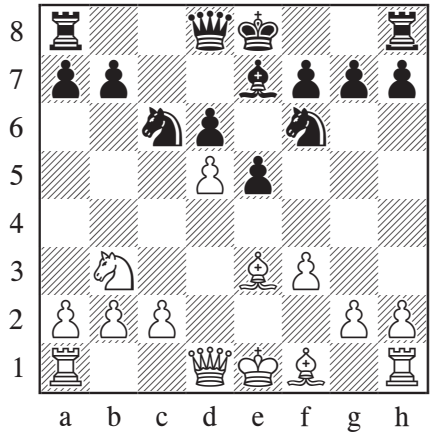
And now we have a split between **D41) 8...♗e6** and **D42) 8...0–0**.

D41) 8...♗e6 9.♘d5

This is our typical reaction when the enemy bishop arrives on e6. The point, of course, is that removing the knight will now cost Black his bishop pair.

We will consider **D411) 9...♗xd5** and **D412) 9...0–0**.

D411) 9...♗xd5 10.exd5



10...♘b4

This is the usual choice: Black attacks the d5-pawn, thus forcing c2-c4, and will later reroute the knight via a6-c5.

The alternative is:

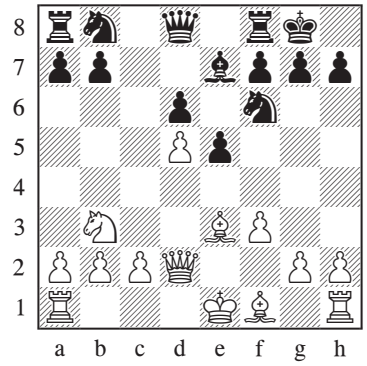
10...♘b8

This gives White additional freedom to decide on which part of the board he wants to play.

11.♕d2

White can also consider delaying the queen move with 11.♗e2, for instance: 11...0–0 12.0–0 ♘bd7 13.a4!±, when 13...♘h5 is strongly met by 14.g3 f5 15.f4!±.

11...0–0



12.g4!?

If White prefers to attack on the queenside, he can play 12.♗e2 ♘bd7 13.0–0 ♕c7 14.♘a5!?± as in Mamedov – Baches Garcia, Balaguer 2005. The last move targets b7 (or the c6-square if Black plays ...b6) and stops ...a5, while preparing a typical pawn roller with b2-b4 and c2-c4.

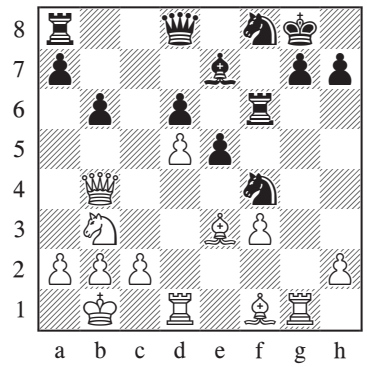
12...♘bd7 13.g5 ♘h5 14.0–0–0

White has a favourable version of a Najdorf-style position. The following game is a good example:

14...f5 15.gxf6 ♖xf6 16.♔b1 ♘f4 17.♖g1

The computer points out that 17.♘d4!N is even stronger but the game continuation is fine.

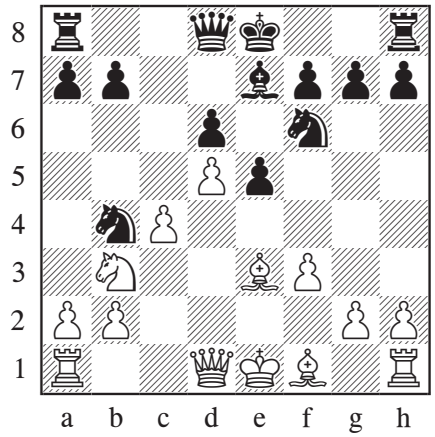
17...♘f8 18.♕b4 b6



19.♘d2 ♘8g6 20.♘e4 ♖f8 21.♗b5 ♘h4 22.♖df1 ♔h8 23.♕d2 ♖b8 24.c3 ♕c8 25.♕d1 ♕f5 26.♗a4 a6 27.♗c2

White was in control in Svidler – Karpov, Odessa (rapid) 2009.

11.c4

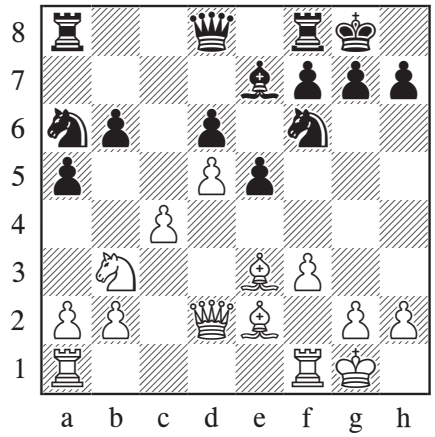


11...a5 12.♕d2 b6

Black sets up a dark-squared pawn wall, partly to slow down White's future queenside attack and partly to secure the c5-square for his knight(s).

12...0–0?! 13.a3 wins a pawn.

13.♗e2 0–0 14.0–0 ♘a6

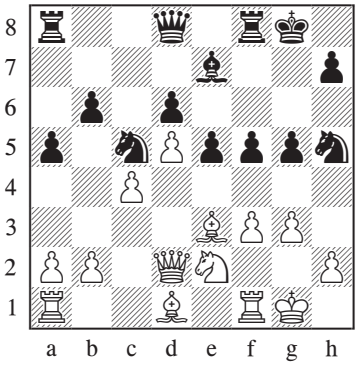


15.♘c1!

15.♖ae1 ♘d7 16.f4 ♘ac5 17.fxe5 ♘xb3 18.axb3 ♘xe5 was decent for Black in Ivanchuk – Dominguez Perez, Wijk aan Zee 2009.

15...♘d7

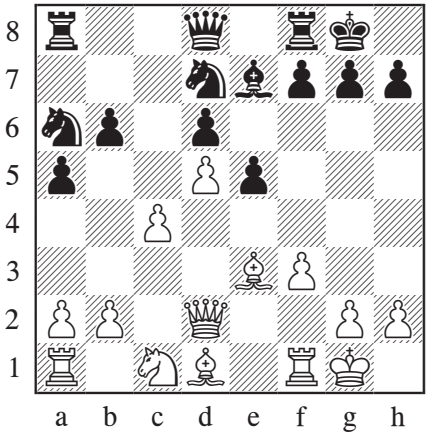
Another nice example continued: 15...♘c5 16.♗d1 ♘h5 17.g3!? f5 18.♘e2 g5



19.♘c3!? f4 20.♗f2 ♘f6 21.♗c2± White went on to win a fine game in Cubas – Tsuboi, Sao Paulo 2005.

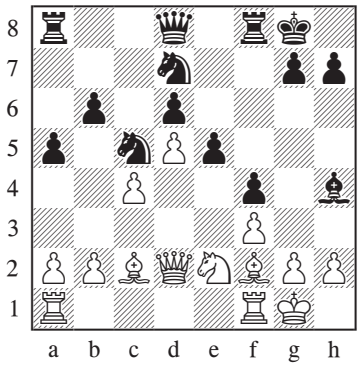
16.♗d1!

Just as in the example above, the bishop is heading for the superior c2-square, while making room for the knight to go to e2.



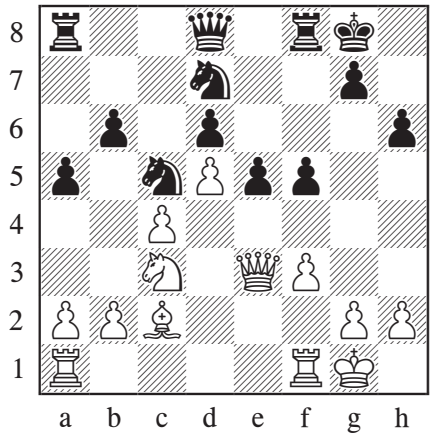
16...♘ac5 17.♘e2 h6

17...f5 18.♗c2 f4 19.♗f2 ♗h4 was played in Gallagher – McShane, Torquay 2002. Here, instead of weakening his kingside with 20.g3?!, White should have played:



20.♘c3N± Intending b2-b3, a2-a3 and b3-b4. Black has some ideas on the kingside, but White's chances are higher.

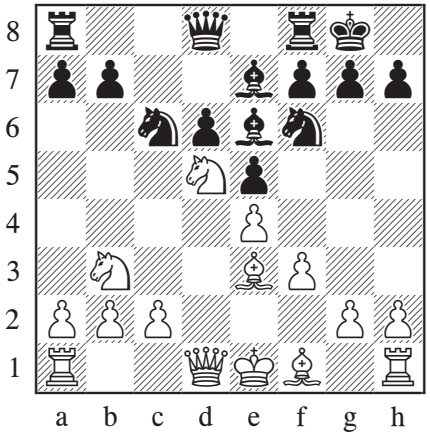
18.♗c2 ♗g5 19.♘c3 ♗xe3† 20.♕xe3 f5



21.b3 ♖f6 22.a3 ♘f8 23.b4 ♘cd7 24.♗a4 g5 25.♗c6±

White was making significant gains on the queenside in Perunovic – Lupulescu, Dresden (ol) 2008.

D412) 9...0–0



10.♗e2!?

10.♕d2 is also possible, and it actually transposes to the later variation D421, which arises after 8...0–0 9.♕d2 ♗e6 10.♘d5. However, when the present move order arises, I would be tempted to develop the bishop first in order to keep some extra flexibility, both in terms of the queen's placement and of using the d2-square to reroute the b3-knight in some lines.

10...a5

This pawn move is one of Black's main resources and we will see plenty more of it throughout the rest of the chapter. I checked two other possibilities:

10...♘d7 11.♘xe7† (11.♕d2N and 11.0–0N also deserve consideration) 11...♕xe7 12.0–0 f5 13.exf5 ♖xf5 14.♗d3 ♖f7 15.c3 gave White a nice edge with the two bishops in Mirasov – Matsenko, Chelyabinsk 2009.

10...♗xd5

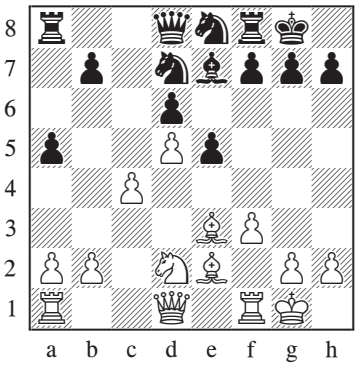
This has been the most popular choice but White gets a promising version of a thematic structure.

11.exd5 ♘b4

11...♘a5 12.0–0 ♕c7 13.♘xa5 ♕xa5

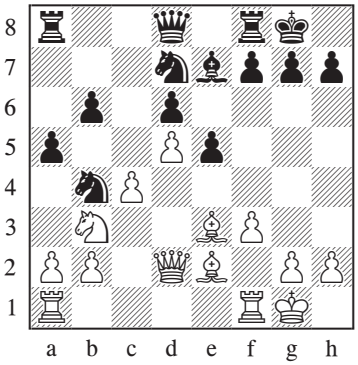
14.c4± was pleasant for White in Vuckovic – Rashidian, Wiesbaden 1993.

11...♘b8 12.0–0 ♘bd7 13.c4 a5 14.♘d2 ♘e8 occurred in Jirovsky – Bielczyk, Ceske Budejovice 1993. Here my suggestion would be:



15.♘e4!?N The knight is heading for c3. (15.♘b1N is also possible, but we may as well prevent ...♗g5 for another move.) 15...f5 16.♘c3± Having improved the knight, White is ready to expand on the queenside. If Black tries to exchange bishops with ...♗g5, then we should of course avoid it with ♗f2.

12.c4 a5 13.0–0 ♘d7 14.♕d2 b6



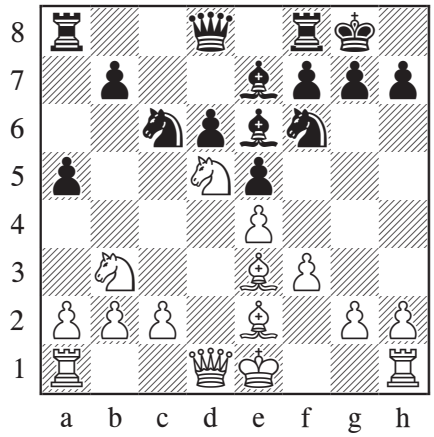
15.f4!

With the b4-knight out of play, this is a good moment to open the kingside and win the use of the d4-square for our knight.

15.♘c1 ♘a6 16.b3 h6 17.a3 ♗g5 18.♖b1 f5 19.♗xg5 ♕xg5 20.♕xg5 hxg5 21.♘a2 ♔f7 22.♘c3 ♘c7 23.♖fc1 ♔e7 was pleasant for Black in Chandler – Kramnik, Germany 1994.

15...♖c8 16.a3 ♘a6 17.fxe5 ♘xe5 18.♘d4 ♘c5 19.b4±

White had an ideal position in Motylev – Kosteniuk, Moscow 2002.



11.c4!?N

Despite being a novelty, this move immediate transposes to a bunch of existing games, some of which involved the somewhat unusual Open Sicilian move order with 5.f3!? (instead of 5.♘c3).

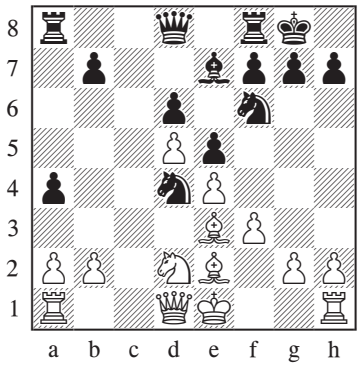
11.♗b6 has been played in all games so far, but I'm not convinced that White gains anything worthwhile with this move.

I also considered: 11.♘b6N ♖b8 12.0–0! (There is no need to prevent ...d5. Besides, 12.c4?! ♘d7 13.♘d5 ♗g5∓ is excellent for Black.) 12...d5 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5 15.c3 b5 16.♕d2 White can aim to take the d-file and perhaps utilize the c5-square, but it would be stretching the bounds of reality to claim any theoretical advantage.

11...♘d7

Black has also tried: 11...a4 12.♘d2 ♗xd5 (12...♘d4 gives White a choice between

simple development with 13.0–0 and playing to win a pawn with 13.♘xe7† ♕xe7 14.♗xd4 exd4 15.♘b1!?) 13.cxd5 ♘d4

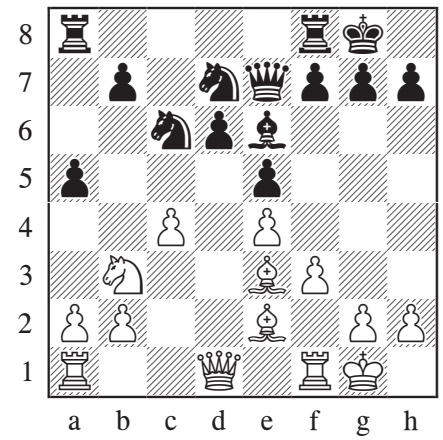


14.♘c4 b5 This occurred in K. Yang – Zhou Jianchao, Philadelphia 2017, when 15.♘a3!N± would have been good for White.

12.♘xe7†

12.0–0 is playable but I would rather prevent ...♗g5 and put my faith in the long-term power of the bishop pair.

12...♕xe7 13.0–0



13...♘c5

13...a4 14.♘d2 does not really help Black, for instance: 14...♘c5 (14...f5 15.exf5 ♗xf5 16.♘b1±) 15.♘b1 f5 (15...♘a5?! 16.♘a3± Fedorov – Parligras, Mamaia 2012) 16.exf5 ♗xf5 17.♘c3± Lupulescu – Cosma, Calimanesti 2014.

13...f5!?N is worth checking. My main line continues 14.exf5 ♗xf5 15.♗d3!? e4 16.fxe4 ♗xe4 17.♗f2 a4 18.♗xe4 ♕xe4 19.♘d2 and White keeps an edge, as his bishop has the potential to outwork the black knights. Initially the engine gives an evaluation of more or less dead equal, but it creeps up in White's favour when given more time.

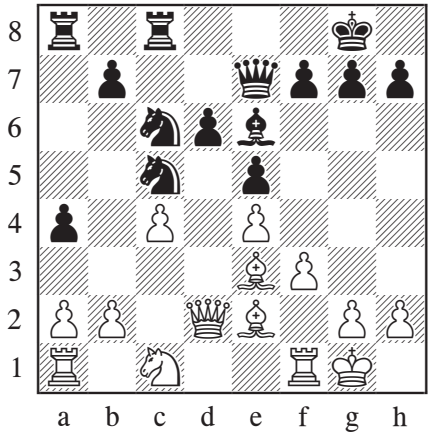
14.♕d2

14.♘d2!? is another good option, for instance: 14...f5 15.exf5 ♗xf5 16.♘b1 ♘d4 17.♘c3 ♘c2 18.♘d5 ♕d8 19.♖c1 ♘xe3 20.♘xe3± I. Petrov – Woznica, corr. 2012.

14...a4 15.♘c1 ♖fc8

15...f5 16.exf5 ♗xf5 17.♖d1± looks good for White.

This position was reached in Grabner – Havumaki, corr. 2014, and one subsequent correspondence game, both of which continued with 16.♖d1, after which 16...♘a5! left White with no advantage. I prefer a different idea:



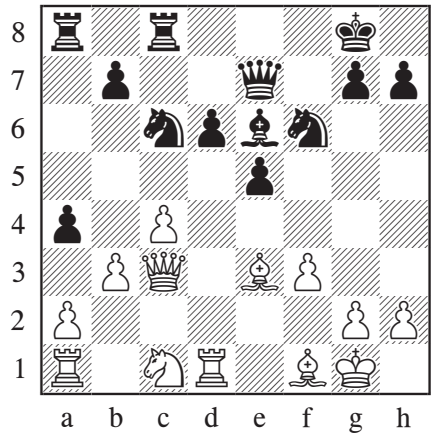
16.♕c3!N

Black has been gearing up for counterplay against the c4-pawn, so I want to play b2-b3 as soon as possible.

16...♘d7

This seems best to me. If Black tries the immediate 16...f5, White plays 17.exf5 ♗xf5 18.♖e1 and may consider exchanging on c5 at any moment. By retreating the knight first, Black removes this possibility and clears the c-file, inducing White to spend a tempo stabilizing the queenside with b2-b3.

17.b3 f5 18.exf5 ♗xf5 19.♖d1 ♘f6 20.♗f1 ♗e6



21.♘d3!

I also considered 21.♕d2 d5 22.cxd5 ♘xd5 23.♗c4 ♘xe3 24.♗xe6† ♕xe6 25.♕xe3 when White can try to grind out an advantage based on the isolated e-pawn, but the position is basically equal.

21...e4 22.fxe4 ♘xe4 23.♕b2±

Even if Black manages to swap off his isolated d-pawn, he will still have to contend with the power of White's two bishops on a relatively open board.

D42) 8...0–0

This is Black's most popular move order.

9.♕d2

Black has tried several moves but we will focus on the two most popular: developing with **D421) 9...♗e6**, and commencing counterplay with **D422) 9...a5**.

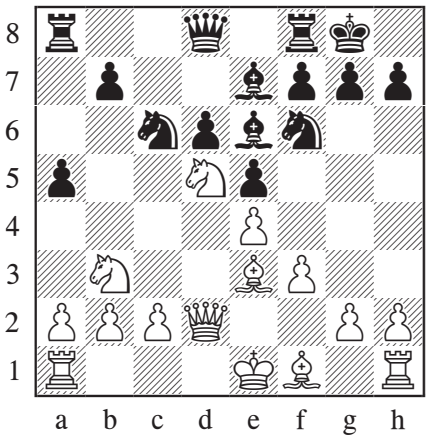
D421) 9...♗e6 10.♘d5

Once again, the bishop's arrival on e6 is the cue for us to plug the hole on d5.

10.0–0–0 takes the game in a different direction, where 10...a5 has yielded good results for Black.

10...a5

10...♗xd5 11.exd5 ♘b8 is the Svidler – Karpov game, as noted earlier on pages 318-9.



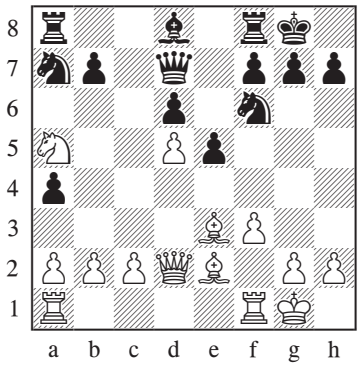
11.♗b5!

Strangely, the database only shows one game in which this move was played, although it immediately transposes to a few dozen other games.

11...a4!?

This has only been played once but it is the most critical choice, leading to an odd tactical sequence.

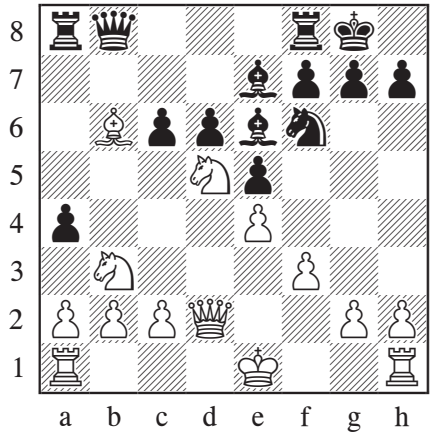
The more common 11...♗xd5 12.exd5 seems promising for White. For instance: 12...♘a7 13.♗e2 a4 14.♘a5! ♕d7!?N 15.0–0 ♗d8



16.b4 (16.♘c4!?) 16...♘c8 17.c4±

12.♗b6 ♕b8 13.♗xc6 bxc6

In Brendel – Tischbierek, Deizisau 2000, White should have continued:



14.♘xe7†N ♔h8

Okay, capturing a hanging piece with check may seem like an easy choice, and it would be easy to assume that Black must have blundered. But when we look more closely we see that the b6-bishop and b3-knight are both hanging (with the a2-pawn pinned), and the e7-knight is short of squares. White can still keep the better chances but some care is needed.

15.♗e3 axb3 16.cxb3 ♕c7

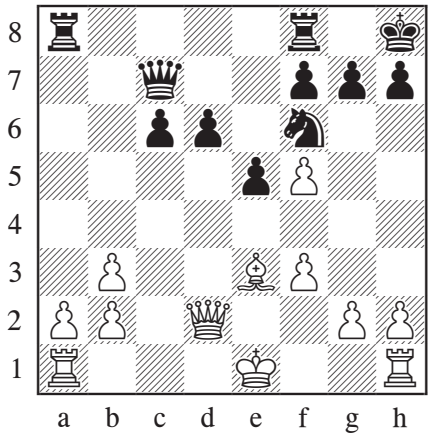
16...d5 17.0–0 ♕c7 18.♘f5 d4 19.♗f2 ♗xf5 20.exf5 ♘d5 21.♖fc1± sees White keep an extra pawn while c6 remains weak.

17.♘f5 ♗xf5

17...♖fd8? 18.♗g5 is unpleasant for Black.

18.exf5

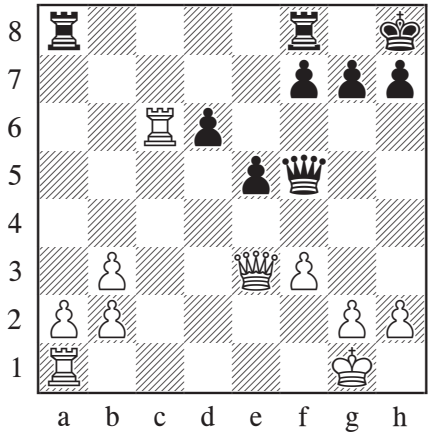
Black's strong centre gives him a certain amount of compensation for the missing pawns, but objectively he is still not fully equal. There are many possible moves and it's not the kind of position we can analyse exhaustively; however, it is worth including one forcing line where Black insists on regaining his pawn.



18...♕d7 19.0–0 ♘d5 20.♖fc1

20.g4?! ♖fb8 gives Black decent prospects.

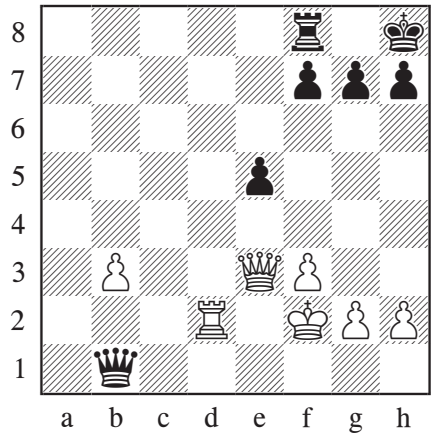
20...♕xf5 21.♖xc6 ♘xe3 22.♕xe3



22...♖xa2!

This trick enables Black to restore material equality, but the draw is still some way off.

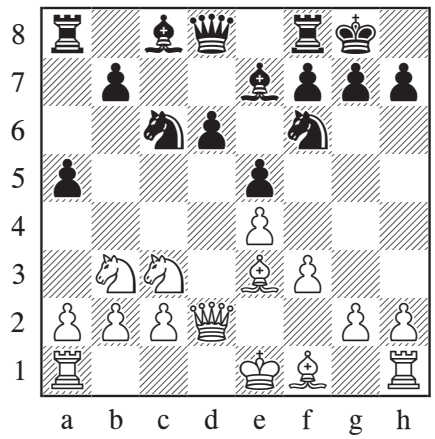
23.♖xa2 ♕b1† 24.♔f2 ♕xa2 25.♖xd6 ♕xb2† 26.♖d2 ♕b1



27.♕d3 ♕xd3 28.♖xd3±

Despite the reduced material, Black is under pressure due to his distant king and the passed b-pawn. Note that White will have time to play b3-b4 and ♖b3, even after 28...♖b8, due to the weak eighth rank.

D422) 9...a5



This is perhaps the most testing move order, and is recommended by Mihail Marin in his *The Classical Sicilian* DVD. White needs to be extremely precise to secure an edge against it.

10.♗b5 ♘a7

10...♗e6 11.♖d1! should transpose to variation D4222 after 11...♘a7 12.♗d3. (Instead, 11.0–0–0 allows Black good counterplay after 11...♘a7 or 11...♘b4.)

11.♗d3!

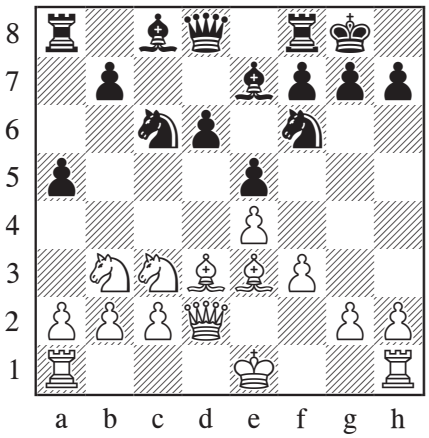
This has been White's most popular choice, although it seems paradoxical at first – why should we give up the fight for the d5-square by blocking the d-file? One advantage of the d3-square is that the bishop helps restrain the ...f5 break, which tends to be a good source of counterplay in these positions, as well as keeping the f2-square available for the queen, which would not be the case if the bishop retreated to e2. This move is not mentioned on Marin's DVD.

It is worth briefly showing Black's ideas after the other popular bishop retreat: 11.♗e2 ♗e6 12.♖d1 ♘c8 13.♕c1 ♕c7 14.♘b5 ♕c6 15.c4 ♘b6 16.♘d2 ♘h5 With ...♘f4 and/or ...f5 on the cards, Black had enough counterplay in Akatova – N. Kosintseva, Dagomys 2008. (Alternatively, 16...♖fc8 17.0–0 ♘xc4 18.♗xc4 ♗xc4 19.♕xc4 ♕xc4 20.♘xc4 ♖xc4 21.♘xd6 ♖c2 22.♘f5 ♔f8 23.♖f2 ♖ac8= was good enough for equality in Morozevich – Korotylev, Moscow 2004.)

Before moving on, it is worth mentioning a secondary idea: 11.♗xa7 ♖xa7 12.a4!?N may be marginally in White's favour, although giving up the dark-squared bishop will not be to everyone's taste, so I will leave it for interested readers to explore this for themselves.

Black has two main options at this juncture: **D4221) 11...♘c6** and **D4222) 11...♗e6**.

D4221) 11...♘c6



12.a3

White anticipates ...a4 and makes sure the black pawn will not get any further.

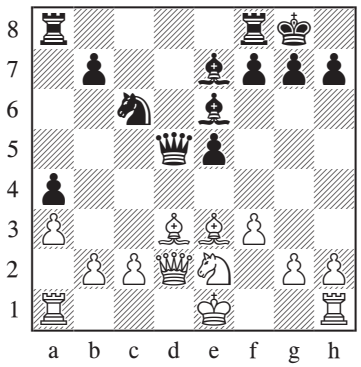
12.♗b5!? repeats the position. Even if you don't want a draw, you could consider repeating once, just to see if your opponent is willing to 'risk' allowing a threefold repetition.

12...♗e6

Another popular continuation is:

12...a4 13.♘c1 ♗e6 14.♘1e2 d5 15.exd5 ♘xd5 16.♘xd5 ♕xd5

Black may have freed himself in the centre but White can look to exploit the many holes on Black's queenside, caused by the advancing a-pawn. For example:

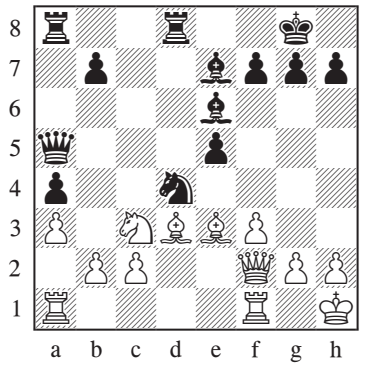


17.♘c3

17.♖d1!? is another possible direction.

17...♕a5 18.♕f2 ♘d4 19.0–0 ♖fd8 20.♔h1

20.f4!? is also worth considering, and led to success for White in S.M. Larsen – Varberg, corr. 2008.

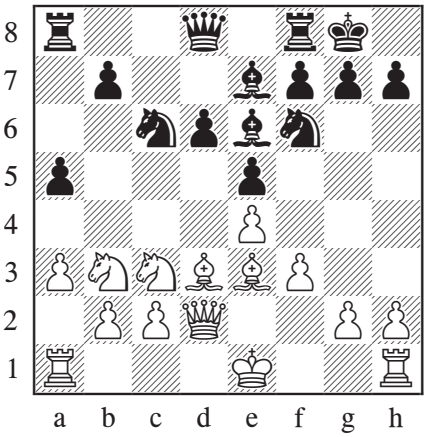


20...♕b6 21.♖ab1 f5

Movsesian – Avrukh, Ohrid 2001. Here my suggestion would be:

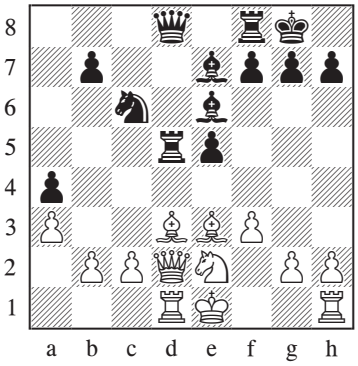
22.♖fe1N±

With some pressure against Black's overextended central position.



13.♖d1 h6

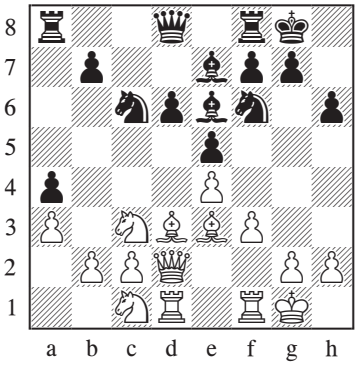
13...a4 14.♘c1 ♖a5!? is an interesting way to activate the rook. Still, White keeps the usual slight edge after: 15.♘1e2 d5 16.exd5 ♘xd5 17.♘xd5 ♖xd5



18.♘c3 ♖a5 (otherwise 18...♖d6N 19.♕f2± leaves the a4-pawn weak) 19.0–0 ♘d4 This was Oleksienko – Melia, Paleochora 2008, and now the machine points out the subtle 20.♔h1!N±, keeping the options of direct action with f3-f4, or continuing improvement of the pieces with ♕f2 or ♘e4.

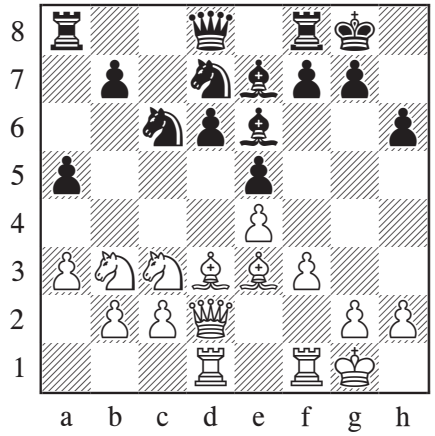
14.0–0 ♘d7

Once again Black can throw in 14...a4 15.♘c1, and here I checked a new idea:



15...♘a5!?N (Black needs to improve on 15...d5 16.exd5 ♘xd5 17.♘xd5 ♕xd5 18.♕f2 ♔h8 19.♘e2 ♕d7 20.f4± as in Kovacevic – Ermenkov, Zadar 2006) The text move is an interesting suggestion from the machine, but 16.♕f2 ♘c4 17.♗xc4 ♗xc4 18.♖fe1± keeps some edge for White.

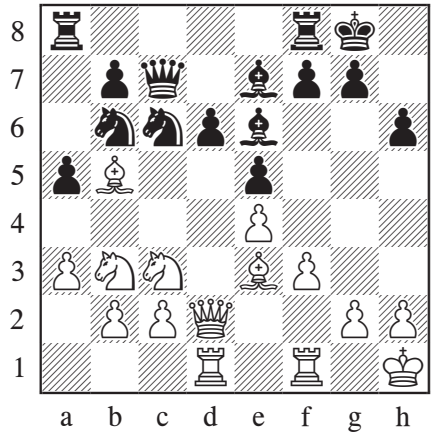
The text move was played in a slightly older game, in which Black decided to avoid the ...d5 plan altogether, presumably as he was wary of coming under pressure along the central files, as featured in some of the lines above. However, the closed strategy also left him struggling to equalize.



15.♗b5 ♕c7 16.♔h1 ♘b6

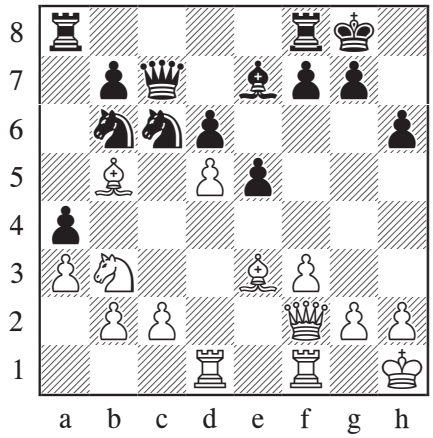
16...♘c5 17.♘d5 ♗xd5 18.♕xd5 ♖fd8 19.c3 ♘e6 20.g3± leaves White with two bishops and excellent control.

We have been following Ivanchuk – Khalifman, Elista 1998. This would have been a good moment for White to force a change in the position with:



17.♘d5!N ♗xd5 18.exd5 a4 19.♕f2!

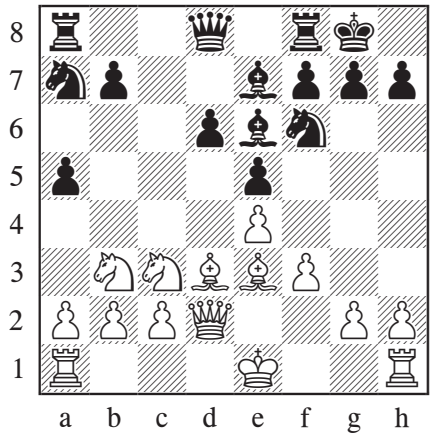
19.dxc6 bxc6 20.♗d3 axb3 21.cxb3± also favours White but the text move is stronger.



19...♘xd5 20.♖xd5 axb3 21.cxb3±

White has two strong bishops and a powerful blockade on the light squares, while his doubled pawns are not weak at all.

D4222) 11...♗e6



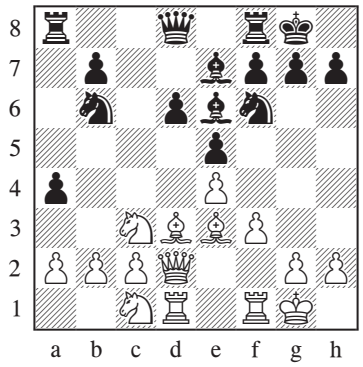
This is Black's most popular move. In contrast to the previous line, Black not only avoids offering a repetition of moves, but also prepares to turn the seemingly misplaced knight on a7 into a positive feature, by rerouting it via c8-b6.

12.♖d1 ♘c8 13.0–0 ♘b6

Black may also advance his a-pawn one or two more squares:

13...a4 14.♘c1 ♘b6

14...a3?! has scored well but seems too optimistic: 15.b3 ♕a5 (15...♘b6 16.♕f2 ♘fd7 occurred in Kojovic – Todorovic, Kragujevac 2016, when 17.♖d2N± followed by ♖fd1, ♘1e2 and so on, would have been excellent for White) 16.♘b5 d5 17.♕xa5 ♖xa5 This was McClement – Iovcov, Kocaeli 2011, when 18.exd5N ♘xd5 19.♗d2 ♘b4 20.c4± would have made it hard for Black to justify his queenside weaknesses – one active knight on b4 is not enough.



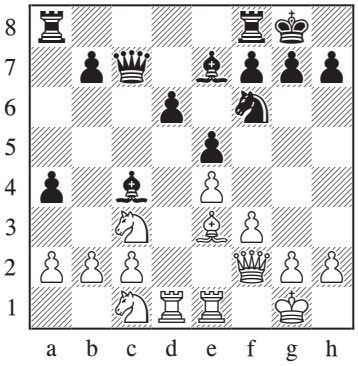
15.♕f2

15.♖fe1!? is also possible, by analogy with the note to White's next move in the main line below.

15...♘c4 16.♗xc4 ♗xc4 17.♖fe1 ♕c7

17...♕c8 18.a3 does not change much: White will carry out the exact same plan of ♘d3-b4.

Another game continued: 17...♗e6 18.a3 h6 (18...♕c7 19.♘d3 ♖ac8 20.♘b4± Simon – Kopylov, Hannover 2016) 19.♘d3 ♕c8 20.♘b4 ♗c4 This was Broekmeulen – Decoster, Maastricht 2015, where Black found nothing better than returning with his bishop to c4. Surprisingly, the loss of time doesn't harm him too much, as he doesn't have many active ideas in any case. I like the idea of 21.♖d2N± followed by continuing the squeeze.



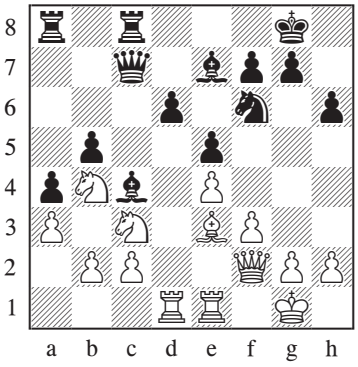
18.a3 b5 19.♘d3

19.♘1a2 is also sensible and may transpose.

19...h6

Black can also eliminate the knight. 19...♗xd3 20.♖xd3 ♕c4 21.♖ed1 ♖fc8 This was Stiri – Papadopoulou, Aspropyrgos 2003, when 22.g4!± would have been best. Black will have to worry about g4-g5 to conquer the d5-square, and White may even be able to build an attack later in the game.

20.♘b4 ♖fc8



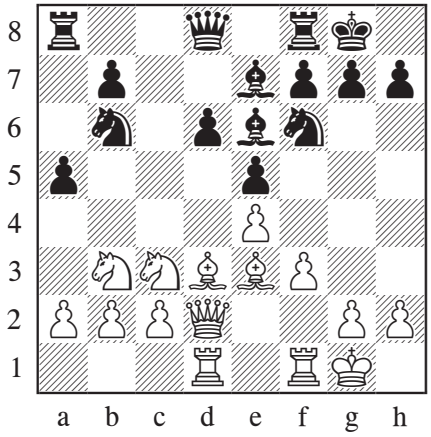
21.♖d2!N

21.♗b6 ♕b7 22.♘cd5? is an instructive mistake. White wants to exchange some minor pieces to reach a dominant position with control over the d5-square, but fails to take into account dynamic factors. 22...♗xd5 23.♘xd5 ♘xd5 24.♖xd5 Now in Borisov – Zinchenko, Kharkov 2004, both players overlooked 24...f5!N 25.♗e3 b4!∓ when White is in trouble: his supposed positional advantage means nothing when his queenside is falling apart.

The text move is much better: once again, White simply strengthens his position by doubling rooks before taking any direct action.

21...♕b7 22.♖ed1±

Black has no counterplay and has a tough defence in store.



14.♕f2

This natural move has been the most popular choice.

Another idea is:

14.♖fe1!?

This has not been played many times but it deserves consideration. White anticipates the upcoming exchange on c4 and removes his rook from the potential attack from Black's bishop.

14...♘c4

14...d5?! 15.exd5 ♘bxd5 occurred in Talukdar – Kopylov, Montevideo 2017, when 16.♘c5!N would have been unpleasant for Black.

14...a4 15.♕f2 ♘bd7 16.♘d2 ♕b8 was played in Santos Ruiz – Lopez Martinez, Linares 2016. Out of a few playable options, I like 17.♘db1!?N, clearing the d-file and preparing to put the knight on a3.

15.♗xc4 ♗xc4 16.a4

White had slightly the more pleasant position in Baklan – Miton, Bled (ol) 2002. (16.♘c1!? is also interesting.)

14...♘c4

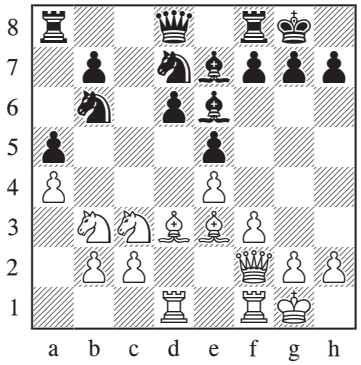
This is certainly the most natural move.

14...♘fd7

This has also been tried by some strong players. I suggest:

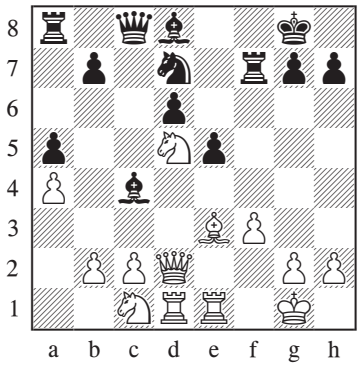
15.a4

15.♖d2 ♗h4!? 16.g3 ♗e7 17.♖fd1 a4 18.♘c1 was seen in Kryvoruchko – Savchenko, Plovdiv 2012, when 18...f5! 19.exf5 ♗xf5 20.a3 ♗xd3 21.♘xd3 ♘c4 22.♖e2 ♕a5∓ would have been promising for Black.



15...♘c4 16.♗xc4 ♗xc4 17.♖fe1 ♕c8 18.♘d5 ♗d8 19.♘c1 f5 20.exf5 ♖xf5 21.♕d2 ♖f7

In Schneider – Zinchenko, Pardubice 2008, White should have continued:



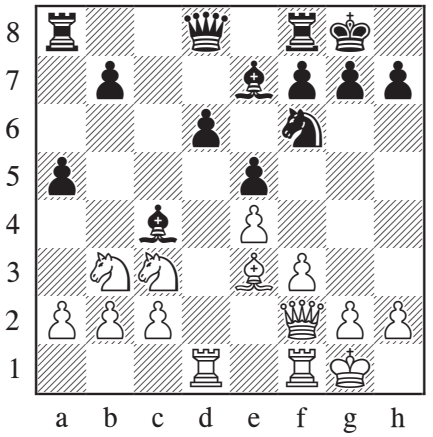
22.♘e2!N±

With the following point:

22...♗xd5 23.♕xd5 ♕xc2 24.♕b5

White will soon regain the pawn while keeping some initiative.

15.♗xc4 ♗xc4



16.♖fe1 ♕c8

I checked a bunch of other moves:

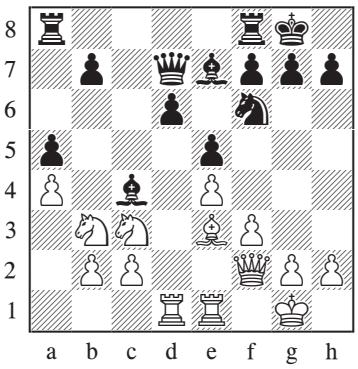
16...a4 gives White a choice. 17.♘c1 is the simple option, transposing to the 13...a4 line analysed in the notes above. However, the current move order gives White the additional option of 17.♘c5!?, which also looks quite promising.

16...b5 is no problem in view of 17.♘d2! ♕c8 18.♘xc4 ♕xc4 19.♕e2 ♖fc8 20.♕xc4 ♖xc4 21.♘xb5 (21.♖e2!?N) 21...♖xc2 22.♖d2 ♖xd2 23.♗xd2 and White had an easy endgame edge in Wei Yi – Gao Rui, China 2015.

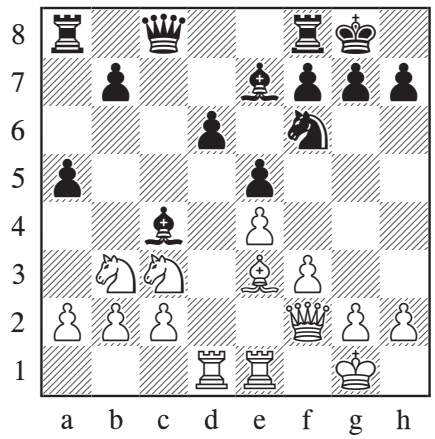
16...♕b8 17.a4 b5 is well met by: 18.♘d2! ♖c8 19.♘xc4 bxc4 20.♘b5± White kept a pleasant edge in Kovacevic – Vuckovic, Budva 2003.

16...♕d7 gives White more than one good option. 17.a4!? (White can also consider 17.♗b6N ♗d8 18.♗xd8 ♖fxd8 19.♘d2 ♗e6

20.a4 intending ♘db1-a3. Black cannot free himself with 20...d5? as 21.♘c4! is nasty.)



17...♖fc8!?N (after 17...b5 18.♘d2! ♖fc8 19.♘xc4 ♖xc4 20.axb5 White won a pawn in Mamedov – Nuri, Aix-les-Bains 2011) The text move was suggested as an improvement by an anonymous ChessBase annotator, but 18.♘d2!? ♗e6 19.♘db1± is promising for White, with the knight coming to a3 next.



17.a4

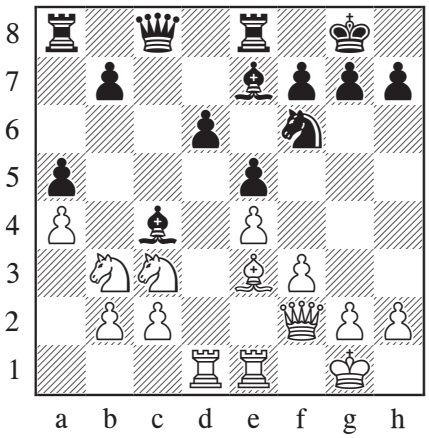
White clamps down on the queenside and prepares to manoeuvre the b3-knight to d2, b1 and a3.

The immediate 17.♘d2 ♗e6 18.♘db1 allows Black an interesting opportunity: 18...b5! 19.♘xb5 d5 20.exd5 ♘xd5⩱ Black had plenty of play for the pawn in Tauscher – Tomek, email 2012.

17...♖e8!?

17...♕c6 18.♗b6 ♗d8 19.♗xd8 ♖fxd8 20.♘d2 ♗e6 21.♘db1 ♖ac8 22.♖d2± was pleasant for White in Panarin – Y. Vovk, Cappelle-la-Grande 2008.

The text move seems to me like Black's most promising idea, as the rook will be well placed in the event of a future ...d5 followed by opening the centre. After some experimentation with the computer, I came up with a new concept:



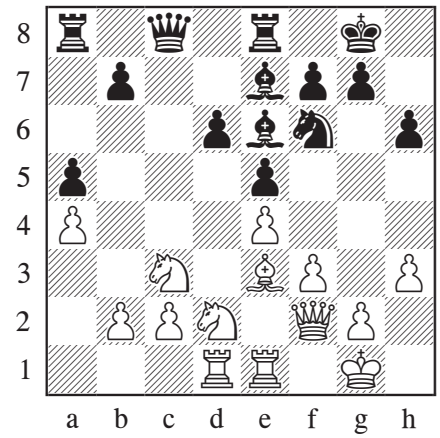
18.h3!?N

The idea is to play ♘d2, with a view to following up with f3-f4 after the bishop goes to e6.

The typical plan of 18.♘d2N ♗e6 19.♘db1 allows 19...♕c6 20.♘a3 d5! 21.exd5 ♘xd5 22.♘xd5 ♗xd5 23.♘b5 ♗e6 and Black is okay.

18.♗g5 ♕c6 (18...♘g4!?N is also playable; after 19.♕d2 ♗xb3 20.fxg4 ♗xg5 21.♕xg5 ♗xc2 22.♖c1 White has enough play for a pawn but no advantage according to my analysis) 19.♗xf6 ♗xf6 20.♘d2 This occurred in Oleksienko – Durarbayli, Minsk 2014, and now 20...♗e6N 21.♘f1 ♗d8! 22.♘e3 ♗b6 would have been fine for Black.

18...h6 19.♘d2 ♗e6



20.f4 exf4 21.♗xf4±

I like White's prospects: the loss of the bishop pair does not harm his chances too much, and he can improve his position with ♘f3-d4 and possibly putting a knight on b5.

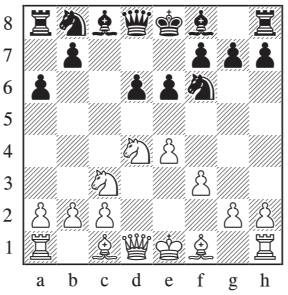
Conclusion

I suggest meeting the Classical Sicilian with 6.f3 intending ♗e3, since the English Attack is our weapon of choice against other Sicilians too.

We started by considering sidelines such as 6...♘xd4 7.♕xd4 g6 and 6...a6 7.♗e3 d5!?, both of which require accurate handling if White is to obtain an opening advantage. We then considered 6...♕b6?!, which is quite a popular attempt to drive the knight back to b3, but it proves to be a mistake after 7.♗e3! when eating the b2-pawn leads to trouble for Black, whether he does it immediately or on the next move.

The big main line occurs after 6...e5 7.♘b3, when there are many branches to consider. It is hard to give much general advice, as each move order has its own possibilities and nuances. However, there is one particularly important issue to keep in mind, which is how to respond to the ...a5 thrust, which may come at practically any moment in these lines. There is no set 'rule' for how to react – it all depends on the specifics of the position. For instance, in variation D1 we met ...a5 with a2-a4; in variation D2 we completely ignored it; in variation D412, when our knight was already on d5, we ignored ...a5 and responded with c2-c4; and in variation D422 we met 9...a5 with 10.♗b5. So please pay attention to the explanations of why each reaction makes sense in one position but not another, as simply trying to memorize the moves may only lead to confusion.

Chapter 10



Najdorf-Scheveningen

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4

4...♘c6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗e3 (6...♗e7) **335**
6...♘ge7 **335**
6...a6 **336**
4...♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗e3 ♗e7 7.f3
7...e5 **337**
7...♘c6 The Classical Scheveningen line **338**

Najdorf – 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3

Early deviations **6...♕b6!?** *Game 27* **344**
6...e6 7.♗e3
7...♗e7 The English Attack at club level *Game 28* **351**
7...d5!? (7...♕b6?!) *Game 29* **353**
7...h5 (7...b5 8.♕d2 h5?!; 7...♘bd7) *Game 30* **356**
7...♘c6 8.♕d2 **360**
8...h5!? (8...♗d7; 8...♕c7) **361**
8...♗e7 *Game 31* **364**
7...b5! 8.♕d2 **367**
8...♗b7 **368**
8...b4 9.♘a4 ♘bd7!? 10.0–0–0 **374**
10...♕c7 (10...d5?!; 10...♘e5?) *Game 32* **374**
10...♕a5 *Game 33* **376**
8...♘bd7! 9.g4! **379**
9...♘b6?! (9...♗b7?!) *Game 34* **379**
9...h6 **384**
10.a3!? *Game 35* **384**
10.♖g1!? **390**
10.0–0–0 **392**
10...♗b7?! *Game 36* **392**
10...b4! *Game 37* **399**

When we published *Experts vs the Sicilian* in 2004, GM Thomas Luther chose 6.♗g5 against the Najdorf, and GM Viktor Gavrikov chose 6.g4 against the Scheveningen. Already then, but to a greater extent now, the Scheveningen has become a marginal opening – played so rarely that it has become a subsection of the Najdorf in this book.

While the Najdorf is not as popular as a decade ago, it is still one of the best and most important openings in chess. After **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6** there are many options. Popular at the moment are 6.h3 and 6.♗g5, but also 6.♘b3, 6.a4, 6.a3, 6.h4 and every other weird touch-move-move seems to deserve a go at least once.

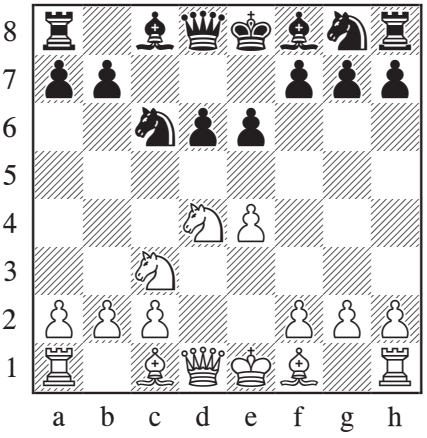
We debated a lot what to go for, with only 6.♗g5 excluded (as Parimarjan Negi did a full book on this quite recently – *Grandmaster Repertoire – 1.e4 vs The Sicilian I*). Eventually we settled on the English Attack – the set-up with ♗e3 and f2-f3. We shall choose 6.f3 against the Najdorf move order and 6.♗e3 against the Scheveningen move order (we shall discuss the reason for these move orders shortly). This line was popularized in the 1980s by Short, Nunn and other English players. If Black does not know how to play against it, he can get crushed quite rapidly, while even against strong computer preparation, it remains very dangerous. While not the most popular move at the moment, my opinion is that this is the best line available for White.

In this chapter we shall look first at the Scheveningen lines and then the Najdorf-Scheveningen lines. I had no illusion that I would be able to present the reader with an advantage everywhere, but was quite satisfied to find that Black's life is far less comfortable than is perhaps commonly thought. So many lines have been attempted, but as I shall demonstrate, only one gives Black a serious chance of equalizing. There too he will have to be well-prepared and accurate, while White has many ways to create an interesting game, so this should not be discouraging. With computers it is frequently possible to prove equality in the opening, but unless you take it with you to the game (which I hope you do not), this is of little use.

Before we get to the Najdorf version of the Scheveningen, I wish to cover an attempt by Black to reach a Scheveningen-type position using either a 2...e6 or 2...♘c6 move order. I realize that starting a Najdorf chapter with a move order other than 2...d6 is a jolt (especially as Black's a-pawn may remain on a7!) but in its plans and intentions, the following Scheveningen-style try belongs next to its Najdorf-Scheveningen cousins.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 d6

Of course Black could reach the same position in various move orders, particularly 2...♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e6 5.♘c3 d6.



Black is playing a version of a Scheveningen while delaying ...♘f6. This is more of an issue for fans of the Keres Attack, as g4-g5 would not come with the same force.

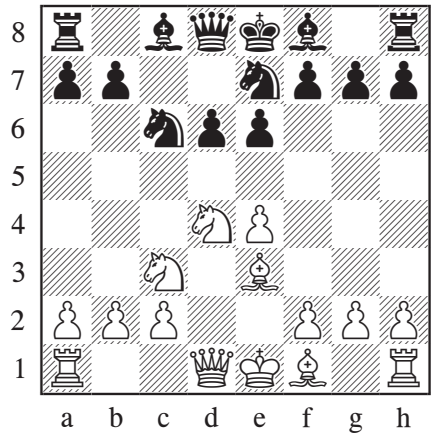
6.♗e3

With the Keres Attack no longer on the menu, the great majority of Black players have continued with 6...♘f6, transposing to normal positions which we will see later.

I checked a couple of independent lines: **6...♘ge7** and **6...a6**.

6...♗e7 was played by Tal on a couple of occasions, but it is not much more than a transpositional possibility. In the event of 7.♕d2 a6 8.0–0–0 ♕c7 9.g4N h6 10.h4 Black has a much less active position than in most main lines, and he can hardly leave the knight on g8 forever.

6...♘ge7



7.♘b3!

By avoiding the knight exchange, we highlight the fact that Black's knight is not well placed on e7.

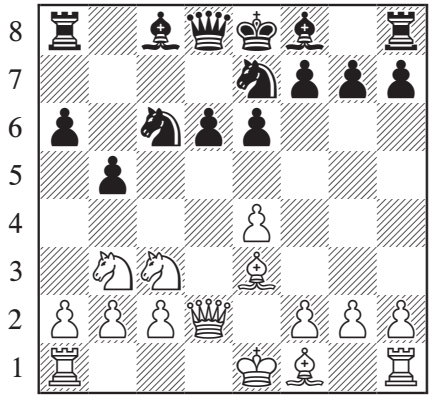
7.♕d2 ♘xd4 8.♕xd4 ♘c6 is Black's main idea – although even then, 9.♕d2 ♗e7 10.0–0–0 gives White good chances.

7...a6

I also considered 7...♘g6 8.f4 ♗e7 and now 9.♕f3, 9.g3N and 9.♕d2N are all excellent options.

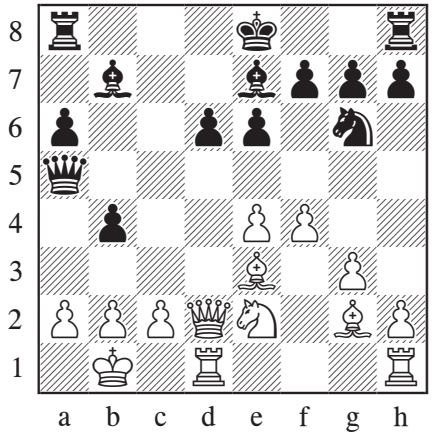
8.♕d2 b5

8...♘g6 9.f4 ♗e7 10.g3 is likely to transpose, as Black will surely play ...b5 at some point.



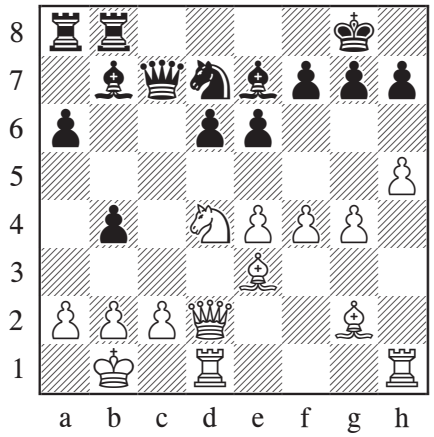
9.0–0–0 ♘g6 10.f4 ♗e7 11.g3 ♘a5 12.♘xa5 ♕xa5 13.♔b1 ♗b7 14.♗g2 b4 15.♘e2

These moves were not forced, but they represent sensible play on both sides. The prevailing theme is the misplaced knight on g6, which serves no purpose other than presenting a target which enables White to advance on the kingside with gain of tempo.



15...0–0 16.h4 ♖fb8 17.h5 ♘f8 18.♘d4 ♕c7 19.g4 ♘d7

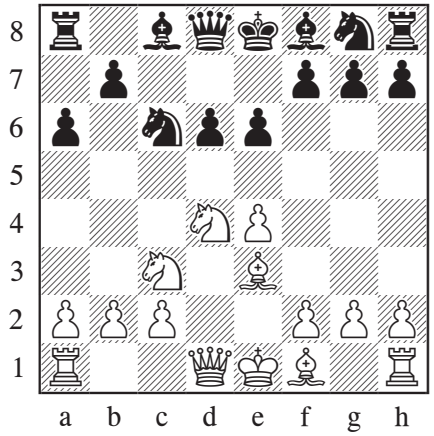
In Wang Jue – Xu Yinglun, Zhongshan 2014, White should have continued:



20.♗f3!N ♘c5 21.♕g2±

White stabilizes the centre and has a clear advantage in the attacking race.

6...a6

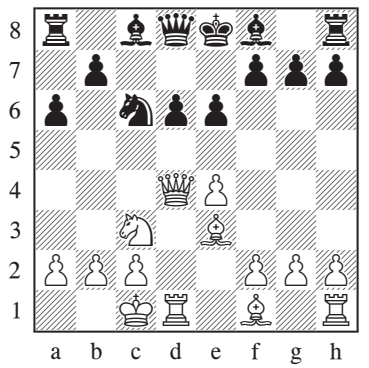


This time Black leaves his knight on g8 for a while and tries to accelerate his queenside play.

7.♕d2 ♗d7

7...♘ge7 8.♘b3! transposes to the previous variation.

I also considered:
7...♘xd4 8.♕xd4 ♘e7 9.0–0–0 ♘c6



10.♕b6! ♗d7

10...♕xb6 11.♗xb6 ♗d7 12.♗c7! wins a pawn.

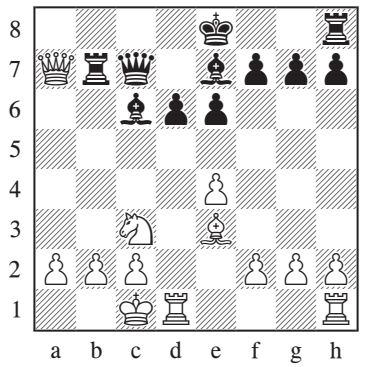
11.♕xb7

11.f4!? is also promising.

11...♖b8 12.♕xa6 ♗e7 13.♗b5 ♕c7 14.♗xc6

White is spoilt for choice, with 14.♗f4± and 14.♕a3 d5 15.♗c5± being tempting alternatives.

14...♗xc6 15.♕a7 ♖b7



In Bakunts – Babujian, Yerevan 2016, White should have continued:

16.♕a6N 0–0 17.♖d4!±

The game goes on, but Black hardly has enough compensation for two pawns.

8.0–0–0

For the moment, we continue our normal development. As a general rule, our plan will be to meet ...b5 by exchanging knights on c6, after which we may or may not reroute the other knight to d4.

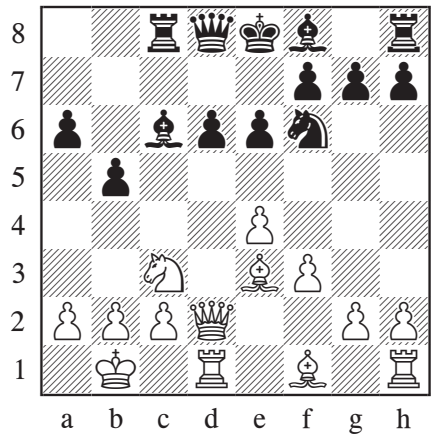
8...♖c8

8...b5 9.♘xc6 ♗xc6 10.f3 ♘f6 (10...b4 11.♘e2 d5 12.♘d4 ♗b7 13.e5±) 11.g4 occurred in Najer – Milov, Philadelphia 2007. White has a promising position, in accordance with the plan outlined above.

9.♔b1 b5

Once again, this is our cue to exchange knights.

10.♘xc6! ♗xc6 11.f3 ♘f6



12.g4

12.♘e2 ♗e7 13.♘d4 ♗b7 14.g4± also favoured White in Vallejo Pons – Bischoff, Mainz (rapid) 2003.

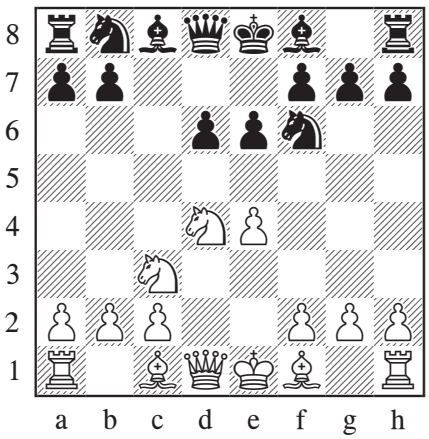
12...h6 13.h4 ♕c7 14.♗d3±

In Von Hoesslin – De Mol, Bad Woerishofen 2003, White was ready for g4-g5. I consider this a more flexible way of playing than the Vallejo game – although White is doing well in either case, so take your pick.

Avoiding the Najdorf

One of the practical advantages of the English Attack is that the Scheveningen almost disappears as an independent opening. After 6.♗e3 Black's best move is 6...a6 without a doubt. However, this does not mean we should not have a look at what happens if Black refrains from this transposition.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e6



This is the pure Scheveningen move order. In the old days, everyone recommended the Keres Attack with 6.g4!?, but as we are recommending the English Attack with 6.f3 against the Najdorf, it makes sense to play in the same way against the Scheveningen. Except, there is no reason to fear ...♘g4, so we can put the bishop on e3 first.

6.♗e3 ♗e7 7.f3

At this juncture, all variations including castling and so on, transpose to the Najdorf or Classical Scheveningen lines below.

7...e5

This is the only independent line.

7...0–0 8.♕d2 d5 9.e5 ♘fd7 10.f4 ♘c6 11.0–0–0 is a favourable version of the French Steinitz. The bishop is misplaced on e7; in the ...♗e7-lines there, Black does not take early on d4.

8.♗b5†! ♔f8

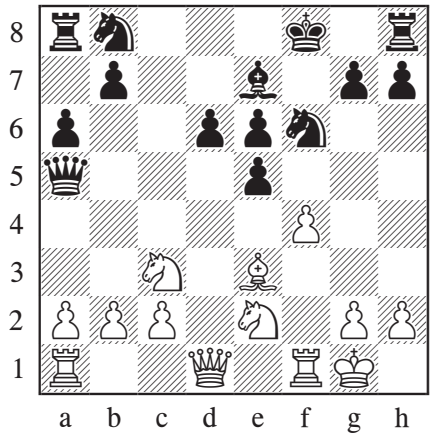
8...♗d7? 9.♘f5 is already winning for White.

9.♘de2 ♗e6 10.f4±

White already has a fine advantage. One example continued:

10...a6 11.♗a4 ♕a5 12.♗b3 ♘xe4?! 13.0–0 ♘f6 14.♗xe6 fxe6

Borgo – Rasik, Bad Woerishofen 1993. At this point the strongest was:



15.f5!N

For example:

15...exf5 16.♖xf5 ♘bd7 17.♘d5 ♖c8 18.♘ef4! ♔e8 19.a4!

White has a winning attack.

There is no reason to fear such artificial play.

The Classical Scheveningen line

Earlier I gave the impression that there was no serious way to avoid the Najdorf when playing the Scheveningen. This is partially true, as hardly anyone would ever play the Scheveningen in the spirit of the Classical Sicilian. However, as we go 6.f3 against the Classical, we should anticipate 6...e6 as a serious move in that position. Once again a quick ...a6 is to be expected, but it is not the only line. Black can also go for quick kingside development, leaving us with a hybrid line:

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e6 6.♗e3 ♗e7 7.f3 ♘c6 8.♕d2 0–0

The neutral approach.

8...a6 transposes to Game 31.

8...♗d7?! is a dubious move order which gives White more than one good option: 9.♘db5!? has scored highly, while simple play with 9.0–0–0 is also strong.

8...d5

Trying to solve all Black's problems at once, but it is foiled by an accurate and obvious reply:

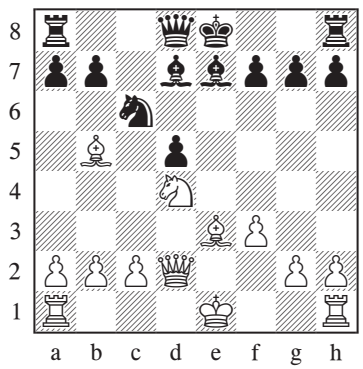
9.♗b5! ♗d7

The best chance, but now an IQP is inevitable.

10.exd5 ♘xd5

Of similar strength is 10...exd5 11.0–0–0 0–0 12.♔b1 a6 as in Hossain – Sahu, Mumbai 2011, when 13.♗a4N was logical, heading for b3 to pressure the IQP.

11.♘xd5 exd5



12.♘e2!?

Playing to attack the IQP rather than merely blockade it.

12.0–0–0 ♖c8 could be similar after 13.♘e2!? but the independent option 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♘b3 0–0 15.♗c5 ♖e8 16.♖he1 ♗e6 gave White no more than a tiny edge in Svidler – Shengelia, Warsaw 2013.

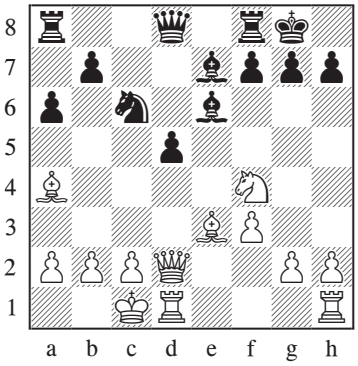
12...0–0

No better is 12...♗e6 13.0–0–0 ♕c7 14.♘f4 0–0–0 as in Simmelink – Shishkin, email 2007, when simply 15.♔b1± was good.

13.0–0–0 ♗e6

Or 13...a6 14.♗a4! planning ♗b3 and ♘f4 is similar.

14.♘f4 a6 15.♗a4



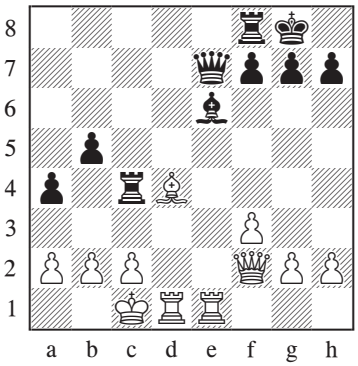
It's worth continuing the line as the play is forcing:

15...♘a5 16.♘xd5 ♘c4 17.♘xe7† ♕xe7 18.♕f2 b5

Trying to keep more tension.

After the simple 18...♘xe3 19.♕xe3 ♕c7 20.♔b1 b5 21.♗b3± White keeps an extra pawn.

19.♗b3 ♖ac8 20.♗d4 a5 21.♖he1 a4 22.♗xc4 ♖xc4



In Wang Yu – Dembo, Moscow 2004, the best way to fight for the initiative in this opposite-coloured bishop position was:

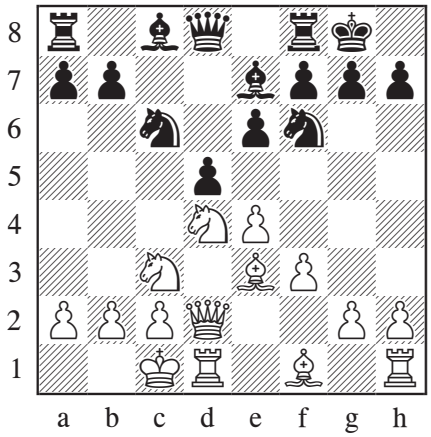
23.f4!±

9.0–0–0

9.g4 d5 10.g5 is possible, but I see no need to take special countermeasures against Black's next move.

9...d5

9...a6 transposes to Game 31 while most other moves are met by 10.g4 with a typical kingside attack.



10.♗e2!

Keeping the tension creates problems for Black.

10.exd5 is much more common but I find it less convincing after 10...♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♕xd5.

10...♘xd4

Keeping the queens on allows Black more hope of seeing a middlegame blunder.

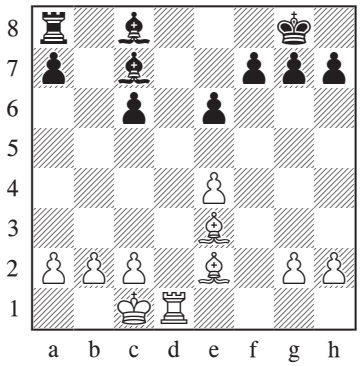
10...dxe4 11.♘xc6

This leads to a simplified position with a pleasant edge for White:

11...bxc6

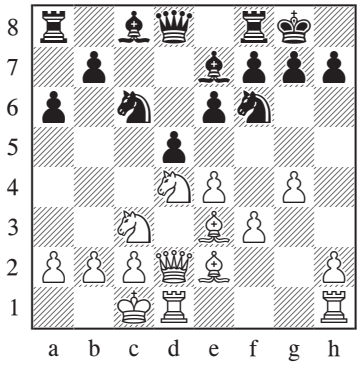
11...♕xd2† 12.♖xd2 bxc6 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.fxe4± leads to similar play. After 14...e5 15.♗c4 Black has somehow scored 2/2 in practice, but it's obvious that White stands better.

12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.♖xd8† ♗xd8 14.♖d1 ♗c7
14...♗e7 15.♘xe4 ♘xe4 16.fxe4 e5 17.♗c4± Navara – Movsesian, Rijeka (rapid) 2010.
15.♘xe4 ♘xe4 16.fxe4±

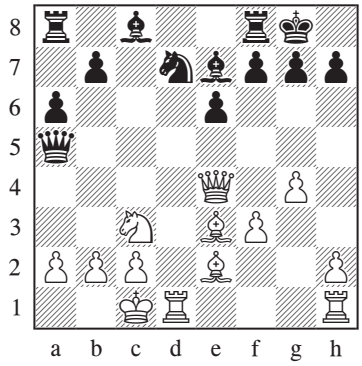


Bologan – Tosic, Rijeka 2010.

10...a6 11.g4!?
The most promising option.
Instead 11.♔b1 ♕c7 transposes to a Giri – Van Wely game I will mention on page 364, but which is not part of our repertoire, as I believe it does not offer White much.



11...♘xd4
The most testing response, keeping his queenside as one pawn island.
After 11...dxe4 12.♘xc6 ♕xd2† 13.♖xd2 bxc6 White can secure a pleasant endgame edge with: 14.fxe4!N (instead 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.fxe4 e5 was next to nothing for White in T. Kosintseva – Timofeev, Moscow 2010) 14...e5 15.♖g1± Intending g4-g5 without allowing ...♘g4. And note that 15...♗b4 16.♖d3 does not trouble White.
12.♕xd4 dxe4 13.♕e5!
In this case, without a weak pawn on c6, the endgame would give White little.
13...♘d7
The best defence.
13...♕e8?! 14.♗d4!± is unpleasant for Black, and 14...♗d7?! as in Pucher – Riff, Mulhouse 2011, was already losing: 15.g5!N ♘h5 16.f4 f6 17.gxf6 ♘xf6 18.♖hg1+– The kingside attack is overwhelming.
14.♕xe4 ♕a5



15.♗d4!?N
More aggressive than the previously-played tries. The best defence still leaves White better, and finding that defence without computer assistance would be tough.
15.♔b1 ♘f6 16.♕f4 e5 17.♕a4 ♕xa4 18.♘xa4 ♗e6 left Black almost level in Wang Hao – Timofeev, Ningbo (rapid) 2010.
15...♘f6
One of two moves of equal value.
15...e5 allows a forcing line: 16.♘d5! ♗g5† 17.f4 ♗xf4† 18.♘xf4 exd4 (not 18...exf4?? 19.♗d3+–) 19.♘d5 ♘c5 The right choice (surprisingly, to me at least, 19...♕xa2?! fails to trouble the white king after: 20.♗d3 f5 21.♕xd4±). 20.♕xd4± White has the more active pieces.

16.♕e3!

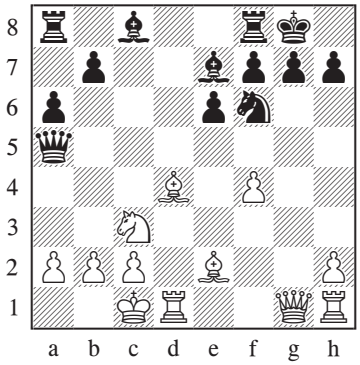
Threatening ♗b6 and preparing f3-f4, but apparently falling for a trick.

16...♘xg4 17.♕g1

That newly opened g-file is handy.

Certainly not 17.fxg4?? ♗g5.

17...♘f6 18.f4±

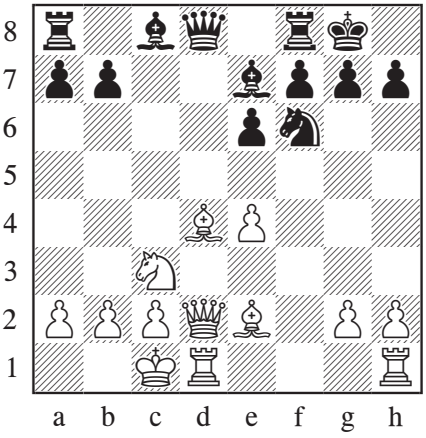


White's kingside play is worth much more than a pawn. The best the engine can suggest is:

18...♖d8 19.♔b1 g6 20.♕e3 ♖xd4 21.♖xd4

But Black does not have enough for the exchange.

11.♗xd4 dxe4 12.fxe4



12...♘d7

This has been played in almost every game so far.

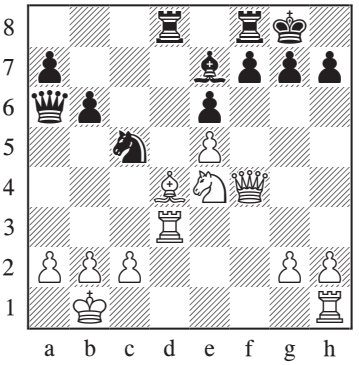
12...♕a5

This has been played in one game, which White won in great style:

13.♔b1 b6 14.e5 ♘d7 15.♕f4 ♗a6 16.♗xa6 ♕xa6 17.♘e4±

The e5-pawn gives White useful attacking prospects.

17...♖ad8 18.♖d3 ♘c5?!



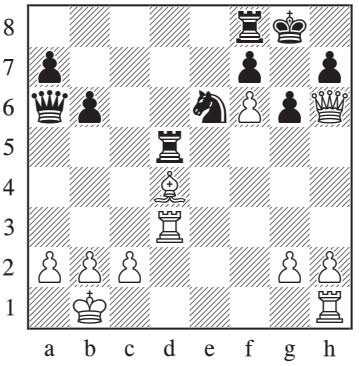
19.♘f6†! ♗xf6 20.exf6 e5! 21.♕xe5 g6?

The only way to stay alive was 21...♘e6 though after various moves, including 22.b3!?± White is obviously much better.

22.♕g5+–

Black's king is too weak.

22...♘e6 23.♕h6 ♖d5



24.g4!

Cutting out ...♖h5 ends the contest rapidly.

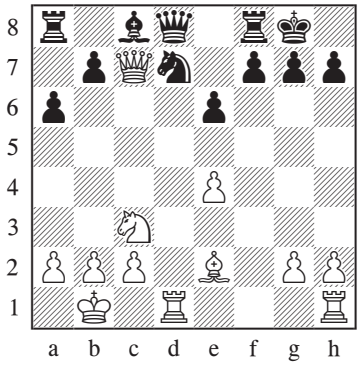
24...♕b7 25.♖e1 ♖fd8 26.♖h3 ♖h5 27.gxh5 ♖xd4 28.hxg6 fxg6 29.♖he3

1–0 Navara – Rasik, Ostrava 2010.

13.♔b1 e5

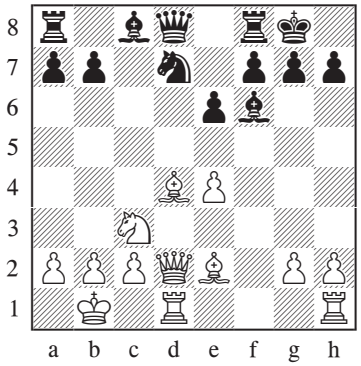
The most direct option, but there are others:

13...a6 14.♕f4 ♗f6 15.♗xf6 (also appealing is: 15.♕g3 ♗xd4 16.♖xd4 b5 17.♖hd1 ♖a7 18.a4!?±) 15...♕xf6 16.♕c7 ♕d8 Pavlovic – Ki. Georgiev, Vrnjacka Banja 2010.

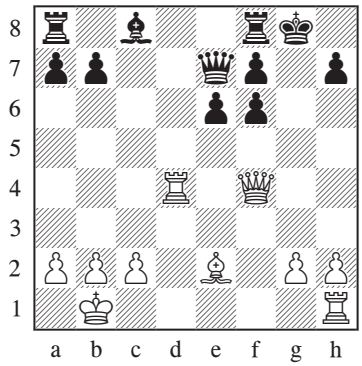


17.♕xd8N ♖xd8 18.♖d6 The d-file pressure is annoying. For example: 18...b5 19.♖hd1 ♖a7 20.a4±

13...♗f6?! as in Rydstrom – Laustsen, Helsingor 2014, allows a vicious novelty:



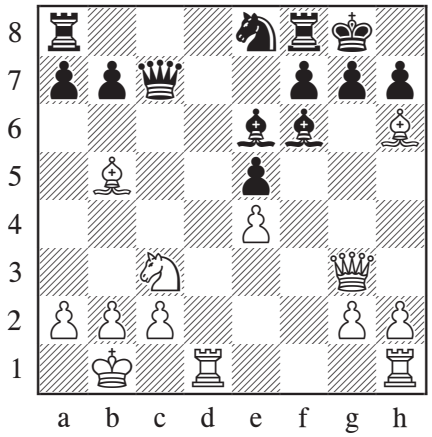
14.e5!!N ♘xe5 (14...♗e7 15.♘b5±) 15.♘e4 There is no way to escape all the threats. 15...♘c6 (even worse is: 15...♘d7 16.♗xf6 gxf6 17.♕h6+–) 16.♘xf6† gxf6 17.♕f4 ♘xd4 18.♖xd4 ♕e7



19.♕h4 Threatening ♗d3 so the following moves are forced: 19...♖e8 20.♗b5 e5 21.♖d3 ♖d8 22.♖g3† (22.♖xd8† ♕xd8 23.♗d3 ♔f8 24.♖f1+– also gives White a winning attack) 22...♔h8 23.♗d3+– Black must give up the exchange to avoid mate.

14.♗e3 ♘f6 15.♕e1 ♕c7 16.♕g3 ♗e6 17.♗h6 ♘e8 18.♗b5 ♗f6

18...♔h8 is stronger, but 19.♗xe8 gxh6 20.♗a4± is still appealing for White.



19.♖df1!N

This is the right rook, as the h1-rook is valuable where it is, as we shall soon see.

19.♖hf1?! gives away some of our advantage. For example: 19...♕e7 20.♘d5!?N (20.♗xe8 ♖fxe8 21.♘d5 ♗xd5 22.exd5 ♖ad8 was about level in De la Villa Garcia – Franco Alonso,

Tossa de Mar 2010) 20...♗xd5 21.♖xd5 ♖d8 22.♖xd8 ♕xd8 23.♗c4±

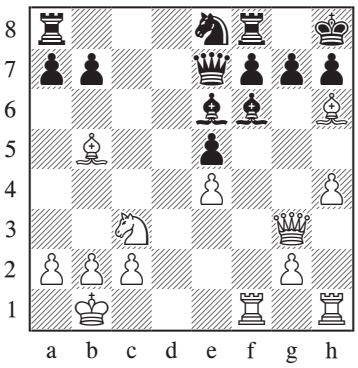
19...♕e7 20.h4!

Threatening to trap the queen with h4-h5 in the key line.

20...♖c8

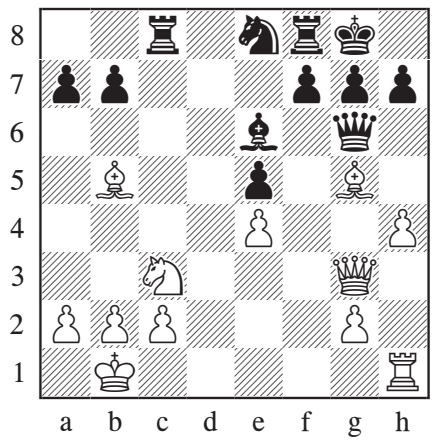
The best defence.

20...♔h8



21.♖xf6! gxf6 (we see the h1-rook in action after: 21...♕xf6? 22.♗g5 ♕g6 23.h5+–) 22.♗xf8 ♕xf8 23.♕f2! Effectively a double attack, based on the idea: 23...♕g7 24.♗xe8 ♖xe8 25.♕xa7+–

21.♖xf6 ♕xf6 22.♗g5 ♕g6



23.h5

Now we see the point of Black's 20th move.

23...♖xc3

Otherwise Black would have to resign.

24.♕xe5 f6 25.♕xe6†

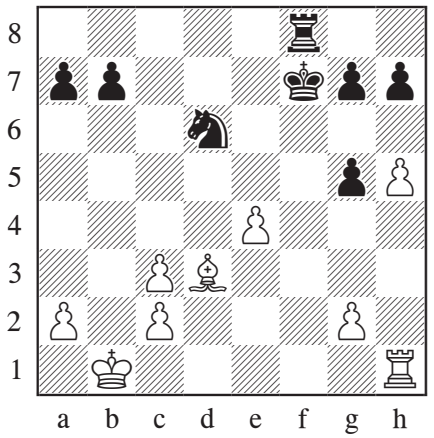
The simplest, as the following line is forced.

25.hxg6 fxe5 26.gxh7†± is also fine.

25...♕f7 26.♕xf7† ♔xf7 27.bxc3 ♘d6

Or 27...fxg5 28.♖f1† leads to a winning pawn ending.

28.♗d3 fxg5



29.e5 ♘c8 30.♖f1† ♔e8 31.♖xf8† ♔xf8 32.♗xh7

White's two extra pawns should win.

The Classical Scheveningen line is a sideline for a reason. Black's best option there is to play ...a6 at some point and return to the Najdorf-Scheveningen, but as we shall see, the knight is a bit misplaced on c6 then.

It's time to move on from the purely Scheveningen lines to the Najdorf-Scheveningen lines.

A small point about the move order

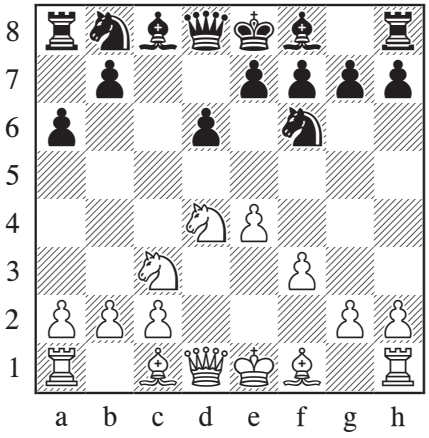
When the English Attack became popular in the 1980s and 1990s, White always played 6.♗e3 followed by 7.f3. Black had the possibility of playing 6...♘g4, but until Kasparov started playing it religiously and proved its validity, it was not a main concern for White. However, once it became so, 6.f3 was seen as a more sophisticated move order. There are pluses and minuses. The minuses are covered in the following game.

GAME 27

Peter Leko – Judit Polgar

Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2003

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3



6...♕b6!?

This is the only extra option offered to Black after 6.f3 instead of 6.♗e3. This of course does not account for the various limitations White has already forced on himself; 6...e5 cannot be met with 7.♘f3, 6...e6 not with 7.g4, and so on.

Luckily, if you do find a good way to play after 6.♗e3 ♘g4, you can transpose well between variations, while building up a repertoire with these extra options, should you wish so.

7.g4

An equally valid move order is:

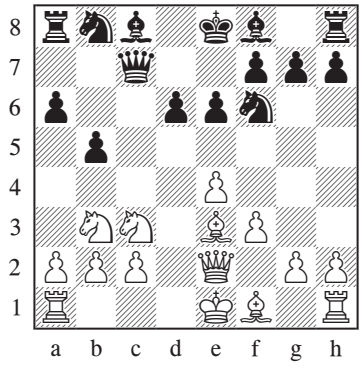
7.♘b3 e6 8.♕e2

After 8...♘c6 9.g4 we have transposed to our main line. There is one alternative set-up for Black.

8...♕c7

Black has a good score with this flexible approach, but I believe in White's chances.

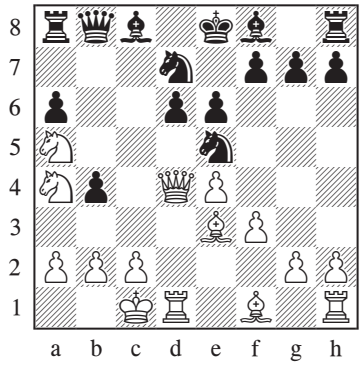
9.♗e3 b5



10.0–0–0 ♘bd7

Now we play similarly to the main line.

10...b4? is premature. 11.♘a4 ♘bd7 12.♕c4! ♕b8 13.♘a5 ♘e5 14.♕d4 ♘fd7 Manole – Hajbok, Brasov 2011.



15.♗d2!N Winning a pawn. The key point

is: 15...♘c5 16.♘xc5 dxc5 17.♕d8†!! ♔xd8 18.♗g5† ♔c7 19.♗d8#

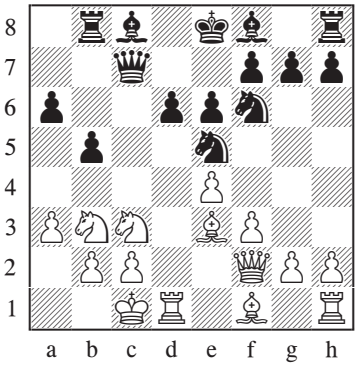
11.a3!

Having defended the b6-square, Black was threatening ...b4.

11...♘b6

The most flexible.

11...♘e5 12.♕f2 (12.g4!?N ♘c4 13.g5 ♘d7 14.♗d4± also feels pleasant for White) 12...♖b8 Delorme – Gerard, Sautron 2001.

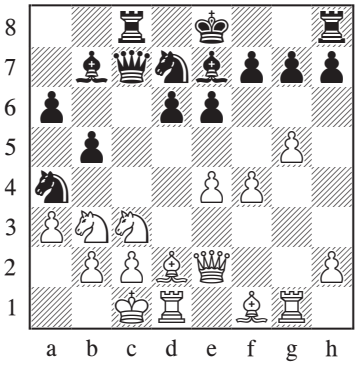


13.g4!N ♘fd7 14.♖g1±

12.g4 ♗e7 13.g5 ♘fd7 14.f4!?

14.h4 ♘c4 15.♗d4± also looks great.

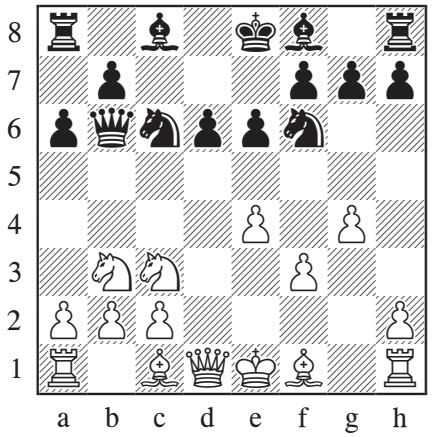
14...♗b7 15.♖g1 ♘a4 16.♗d2 ♖c8



17.♖g3!±

Wurschner – Szczepankiewicz, email 2012. If Black castles, White arrives quickly with f4-f5 and a serious attack.

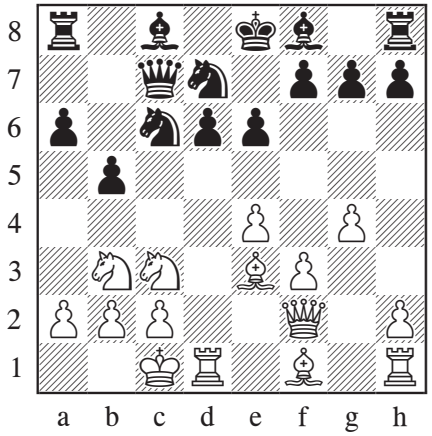
7...♘c6 8.♘b3 e6



9.♕e2

Placing the queen on e2 is not much worse than placing it on d2. The reason for this is that it often belongs on f2 or g2. This usually costs a tempo. The real question about this variation is if it is worth it for Black to spend time pushing the knight from d4 to b3. My guess is that it is not.

9...♕c7 10.♗e3 b5 11.0–0–0 ♘d7 12.♕f2!



12...b4

The only decent alternative for Black is probably:

12...♘ce5 13.a3!

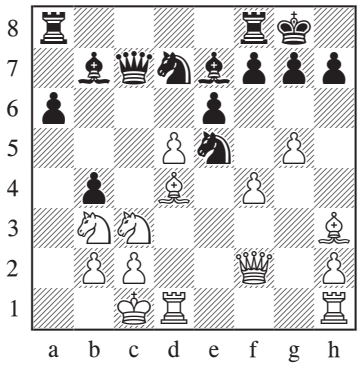
Black's counterplay on the queenside seems slower than White's kingside attack. We will analyse a) 13...♗b7?! and b) 13...♗e7.

a) 13...♗b7?!

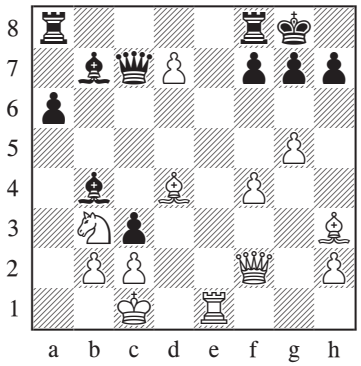
This looks very natural, but most Najdorf players know that the bishop needs to "do something" here for this move to be good, and at the moment the e4-pawn is rock solid, so this is not the case. Usually Black's most obvious counterplay is with ...♖b8 and ...b4.

14.g5 ♗e7

The way to make sense of 13...♗b7 is to try to blow up the centre, but after 14...d5 15.exd5 ♗xa3 16.♗d4 ♗e7 White has a lot of tempting options. I like: 17.♗h3! 0–0 18.f4± White has an advantage here; only one variation looks critical. 18...b4?! (18...♘g6 19.♖hf1±)

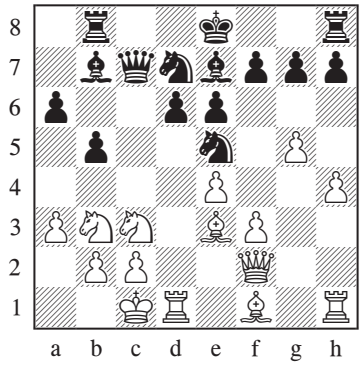


19.♖he1!! bxc3 20.dxe6 ♘f3 (20...fxe6 21.♗xe6† ♔h8 22.♗xd7 ♗d6 23.♗c5 cxb2† 24.♔b1 ♗xc5 25.♕xc5 ♕xc5 26.♘xc5 ♘xd7 27.♘xb7 ♘b6 28.♖d4±) 21.exd7± ♘xe1?! 22.♖xe1 ♗b4



23.♗f5! cxb2† 24.♗xb2 ♗xe1 25.♕d4 f6 26.♗e6† ♔h8 (26...♖f7 27.f5+–) 27.gxf6 ♖xf6 28.♕xf6! ♕xd7 (28...gxf6 29.♗xf6#) 29.♕h6 ♕e7 30.♗f5! White has a winning attack.

15.h4 ♖b8



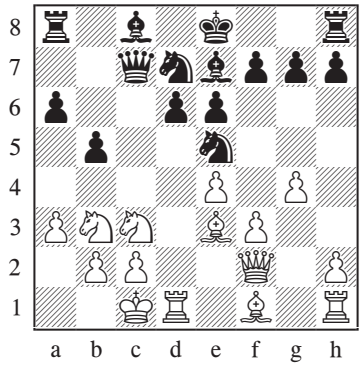
16.♖g1

16.♔b1!N followed by h4-h5 looks more accurate to me.

16...♘c4 17.♗xc4 bxc4 18.♘d2 0–0 19.h5 d5 20.exd5 exd5 21.♗d4±

Black survived in Juan – Fenollar Jorda, email 2010, but his prospects look grim to me.

b) 13...♗e7 can be met in several ways.

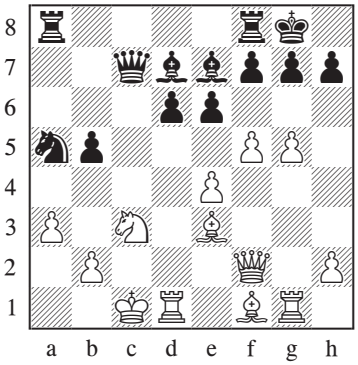


Normally I would say "one good option is enough", but learning about the different methods available here should help to enhance your understanding of these positions in general.So we will consider b1) 14.♖g1!?N, b2) 14.g5!?N and b3) 14.h4.

b1) 14.♖g1!?N

The idea here is to launch the f-pawn.

14...♘c5 15.f4 ♘xb3† 16.cxb3 ♘c6 17.b4± 0–0 18.g5 a5 19.bxa5 ♘xa5 20.f5 ♗d7



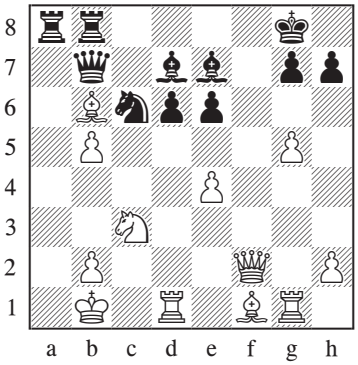
21.♔b1!

21.f6 allows the amazing 21...♖fb8!! 22.fxe7 b4 23.axb4 ♖xb4 with crazy complications: 24.♗d3 ♗e8 25.♖de1 ♕xe7 26.♖g3 ♕b7 27.g6 ♘b3† 28.♔d1 hxg6 29.♖h3 ♖a5∞

21...b4! 22.♗b6!

I checked 22.axb4 but only found equality after: 22...♖fb8 23.g6 fxg6 24.fxg6 hxg6 25.♖xg6 ♗f8 26.bxa5 ♕xa5 27.♗c4 ♕xc3 28.♖f1 ♕xc4 29.♖xg7†=

22...♕b7 23.axb4 ♘c6 24.b5 ♖fb8 25.fxe6 fxe6



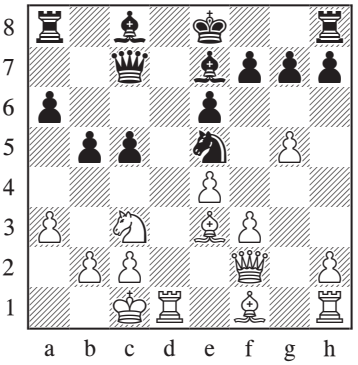
26.♗d4 ♘xd4 27.♕xd4±

White keeps the better chances although the position remains complicated.

b2) 14.g5!?N

I also like this move, which has an interesting strategic concept behind it.

14...♘c5 15.♘xc5 dxc5



16.♕g3!

The h2-pawn defends the queen, which is rather important.

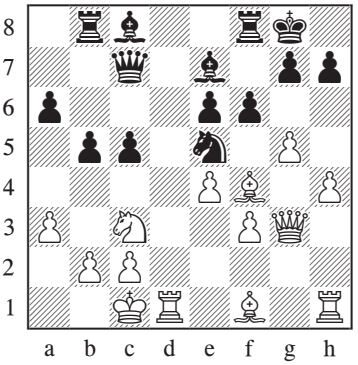
16...0–0

16...b4?! leads to a poor position after: 17.♗f4! bxc3 18.♗xe5 cxb2† 19.♔xb2 ♕b6† 20.♔a2 0–0 21.♗c4 ♖a7 22.h4±

17.♗f4 f6 18.h4± ♖b8

18...b4? 19.♘b1± White is preparing ♗c4.

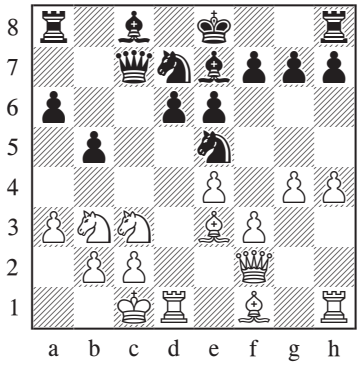
19...c4!? 20.♗xc4 ♕xc4 21.gxf6 ♗xf6 22.♗xe5 ♗xe5 23.♕xe5±



19.♖d5!! exd5 20.♘xd5 ♕d6 21.gxf6 ♗xf6 22.♘xf6† ♕xf6 23.♗xe5 ♕h6† 24.♔b1±

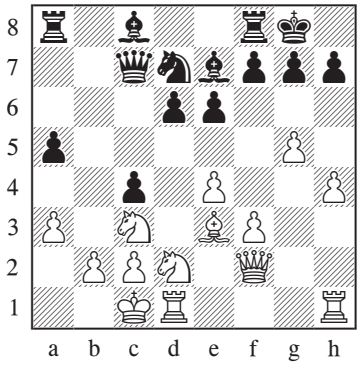
White has given up an exchange for a pawn, but the dark-squared bishop is more powerful than any minor piece I have seen recently.

b3) 14.h4



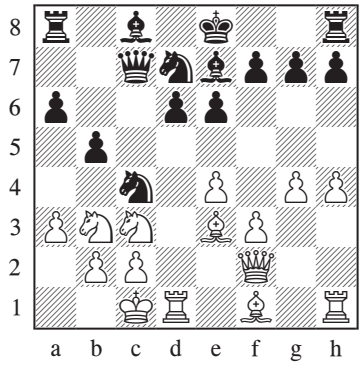
This leads to a further split between b31) 14...0–0, b32) 14...♘c4 and the untested b33) 14...♘c5!N. The last option is Black's only decent way to create counterplay, as far as I can see.

b31) 14...0–0 15.g5 is probably all bad news. 15...♘c4 (15...♖b8 16.♖g1± b4 17.axb4 ♖xb4 18.f4 ♘c4 19.♗xc4 ♖xc4 20.f5!±) 16.♗xc4 bxc4 17.♘d2 a5 (17...♖b8 18.♗a7 ♖a8 19.♗d4±)



18.♔b1!± The king goes to a1; White has a more dangerous attack on the kingside.

b32) 14...♘c4 occurred in Nijboer – Van der Stricht, Vlissingen 2002, when White should have played:



15.♗xc4!N White is simply better in this structure. For example: 15...bxc4 16.♘d2 ♖b8 17.♗a7 ♖b7 18.♗d4± But obviously the game has just begun.

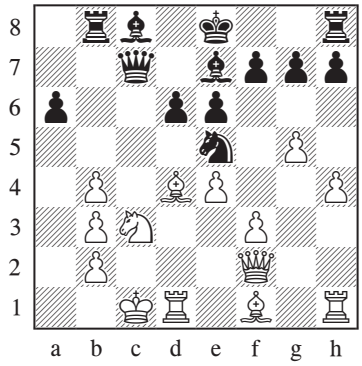
b33) 14...♘c5!N 15.g5!±

Analysis has convinced me that this is the strongest continuation. Play could continue in many directions, but White generally wants to play ♗d4 and f3-f4. I have analysed the most direct continuation in detail.

15...♘xb3† 16.cxb3 b4!?

16...♖b8 17.b4±

17.axb4 ♖b8 18.♗d4

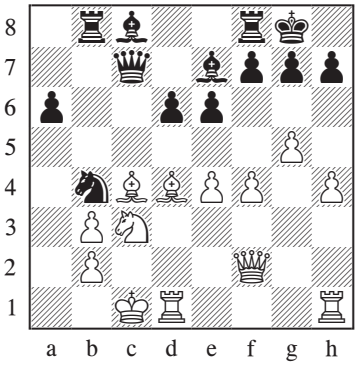


18...0–0

18...♖xb4 19.f4 ♘c6 20.♗c4! is very similar. (20.♗xg7 ♖g8 21.♗d4 ♖xb3 is probably also to White's advantage, but seems less clear to me) 20...♘a5 21.♗xg7 ♖g8 22.♗d4 ♘xc4 23.bxc4 ♕xc4 24.♔b1 ♗b7 25.♖he1 a5 26.e5 d5 27.f5±

19.f4 ♘c6 20.♗c4! ♘xb4

20...♘xd4? 21.♕xd4 ♖xb4 22.h5± gives White good attacking chances.



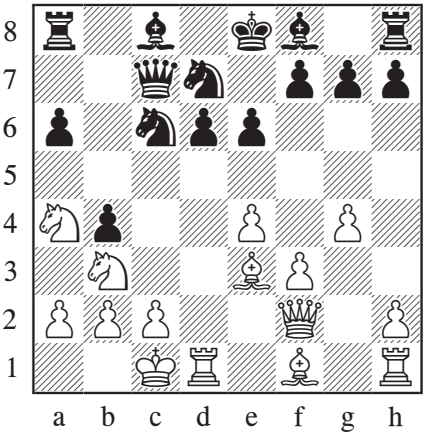
21.f5! exf5 22.g6! hxg6?!

22...d5 23.exd5 ♗d6± is the last try according to the computer, but hardly something that scares us. After 24.gxh7† ♔h8 25.♖hg1 f6 26.h5 ♗d7 27.♕h4+– White is ready for both ♖g2 and ♖dg1, and the more direct ♖xg7!?.

23.h5 d5 24.hxg6! dxc4 25.♖h7! ♗g5† 26.♔b1 fxg6 27.♖xg7† ♕xg7 28.♗xg7 ♔xg7 29.♕g3

White wins.

13.♘a4!



13...♖b8

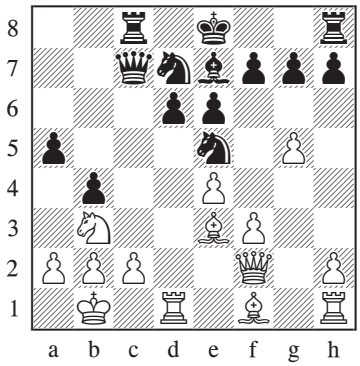
As ever, there is an alternative:

13...♗e7 14.g5 ♘ce5

This is very natural, but I like White's chances here as well.

14...♖b8 15.♖g1 is similar to our main illustrative game.

15.♘b6 ♖b8 16.♘xc8 ♖xc8 17.♔b1 a5



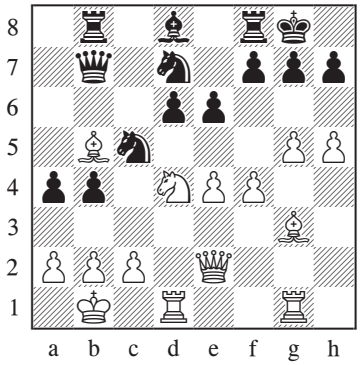
18.♘d4±

18.h4±

18...♘c5?

18...0–0 19.h4± with a complicated game was essential, even if more attractive for White.

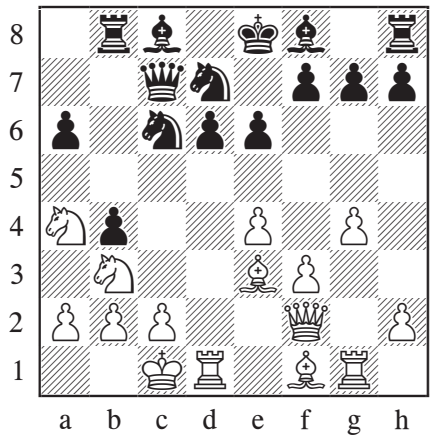
19.♗b5† ♘ed7 20.h4± ♕b7 21.♕e2 0–0 22.h5 a4 23.♖hg1 ♗d8 24.♗f2 ♖b8 25.♗g3 ♘e5 26.f4 ♘ed7



27.g6 b3 28.cxb3 axb3 29.a4 ♘f6 30.e5 dxe5 31.♘c6 ♖c8 32.gxh7† ♔xh7 33.♗h4 exf4 34.♕e5 ♖g8 35.h6 g6 36.♗xf6 ♗xf6 37.♕xf6 ♖xc6 38.♗xc6 ♕xc6 39.♕xf7† ♔h8 40.♕xf4 ♕xa4 41.♕e5†

1–0 Engwall – Edwards, email 2014.

14.♖g1!



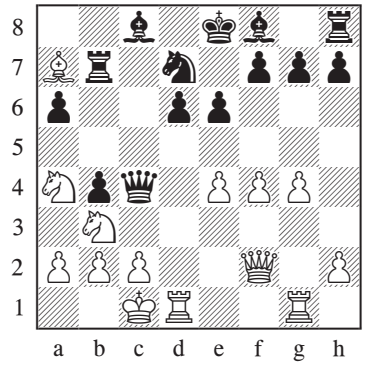
A flexible move that discourages either knight from coming to e5.

14...♗e7

We should also consider the following options:

14...h5 15.gxh5 ♖xh5 16.♔b1 ♘e7 17.♘d2 d5 18.h4 e5 19.♕h2 ♗b7 20.♘b3 ♕c6 21.♘ac5 ♘xc5 22.♗xc5 ♕f6 23.♕d2 ♗a8 24.f4± Fagerstrom – Slawinski, email 2009.

14...♘ce5 If Black was allowed two moves in a row, then ...♕c6 would be winning. 15.f4 But now we have time for this, and we are better: 15...♘c4 16.♗a7 ♖b7 17.♗xc4 ♕xc4

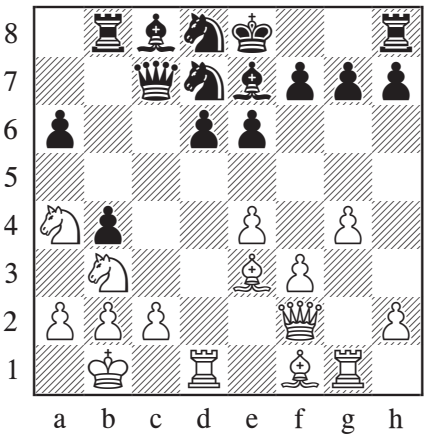


18.♘b6! ♘xb6 19.♗xb6 ♕c6 20.♗e3 ♖d7 (20...♕xe4 21.♖d4 ♕g6 22.f5 ♕f6 23.h4±) 21.♖d4±

15.♔b1 ♘d8?!

This looks like a bad move, even though it is of course played with an idea. But I think it is just too slow.

15...♘ce5 16.f4 ♘g6 is the suggestion of many engines. White looks good to me after 17.♘d4± with the point: 17...♘c5?! 18.♘xc5 dxc5 19.♘f5!±



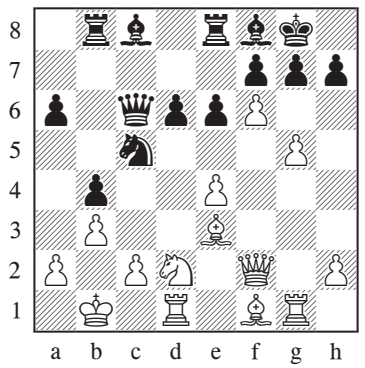
16.♘d2!± ♕c6 17.b3 0–0

This moves the king into the firing line, but it is also hard to continue the game with the king stuck in the centre.

18.g5 ♘b7 19.f4 ♘bc5 20.♘xc5 ♘xc5 21.f5!+– ♖e8 22.g6!?

This is very powerful and enough to win the game, but there was an even stronger and somewhat unusual continuation, which is worth remembering for another time.

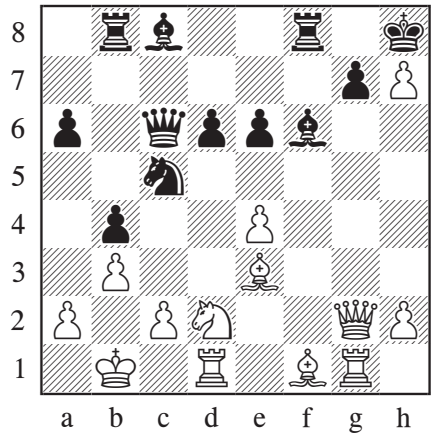
22.f6 ♗f8



23.g6!! hxg6 24.♖xg6 Black is mated in short order.

22...fxg6 23.fxg6 ♖f8 24.gxh7† ♔h8 25.♕g2 ♗f6

Despite missing a direct win, Leko still managed to win the game with a nice trick.



26.e5! ♕xg2 27.♗xg2 ♗xe5 28.♘c4 ♗f4 29.♖gf1 g5 30.♘xd6 ♗b7 31.♗d4† ♔xh7 32.♘xb7 ♘xb7 33.♗a7 ♔h6 34.♖d7 ♖fd8 35.♗xb8 ♖xd7 36.♗xf4 gxf4 37.♖xf4 a5 38.♗xb7 ♖xb7 39.♖f6† ♔g5 40.♖xe6 ♖b5 41.♔b2 ♖c5 42.♖e4 ♔f6 43.♖c4 ♖f5 44.a3 ♖b5 45.axb4 axb4 46.h4 ♔e6 47.h5 ♔f6 48.h6 ♔g6 49.♖c6† ♔h7 50.c3
1–0

6...♕b6 is a serious alternative to the standard Scheveningen/Najdorf lines, but with good preparation, White should leave the opening with sunny prospects. The real downside of playing 6.f3 against the Najdorf is the loss of 6...e5 7.♘f3 and 6...e6 7.g4, but as we recommend neither line in this book, that is not a serious drawback for us.

The English Attack at club level

The grandmasters reading this book will look mainly at the detailed overview of the critical variations, but for the club player, the English Attack is also very attractive. The following game is an illustration of why.

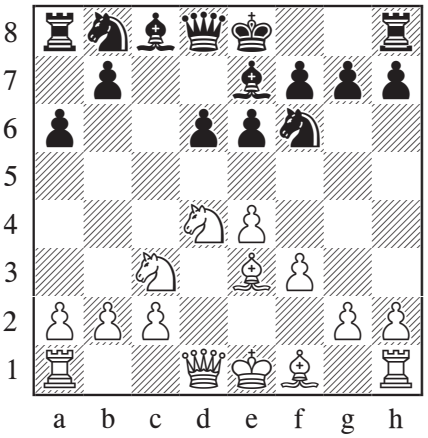
GAME 28

Valeri Pliskine – Alexandar Budnikov

St Petersburg 1999

I have included this small game because this is the way most club players under 2000, who are unfamiliar with the English Attack, have played against it – that is, the same way they were playing against 6.♗e2 and similar systems. This positional approach does not work against the English Attack; the mating conspirators arrive way too early... But this game was played before the English Attack became commonplace, so for this reason an unrated player managed to win a miniature against a grandmaster.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 ♗e7



Later on it was understood that this seemingly obvious move was highly inflexible. In some lines, where Black plays ...h6, the bishop is needed on f8 to defend the king from an invasion down the h-file. In other lines, moving the bishop is simply a loss of tempo.

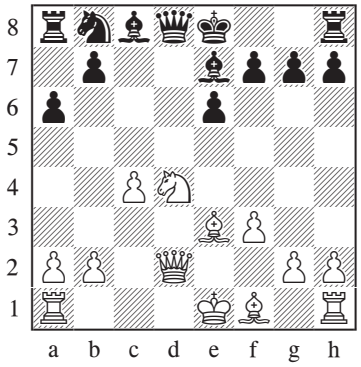
8.♕d2 0–0

Black can try to break in the centre with the d-pawn, but it is not likely to offer equality.

8...d5 9.e5

The principled move.

9.exd5 I find this simplest, but the advantage may not be the most obvious. 9...♘xd5 10.♘xd5 ♕xd5 Schmitzer – Dietze, Germany 1994. 11.c4N ♕d8



12.♗d3± White is better, but not a lot. But every time we have an edge from the opening these days, is a champagne moment, as Boris Gelfand famously said.

9...♘fd7 10.f4

We have achieved a strange version of the French Defence, Steinitz Variation. Black has taken on d4 and placed his bishop on e7.

10...♘c6 11.0–0–0

Other plans are possible here, but this is the most obvious.

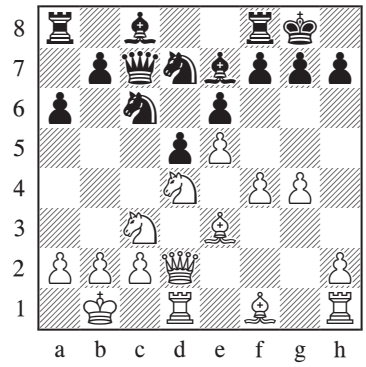
11...♕c7

11...♘xd4 12.♗xd4 b5 13.♔b1 ♗b7 14.♗d3 ♘c5 Naiditsch – Kovalyov, Montreal 2009. 15.g4!?N (also 15.♘e2 is good) 15...♘xd3 16.♕xd3 b4 17.♘e2 a5 18.♕e3±

12.♔b1 0–0

12...b5 13.♘xc6 ♕xc6 14.♘e2± Dgebuadze – Cvetkovic, Patras 1998.

13.g4

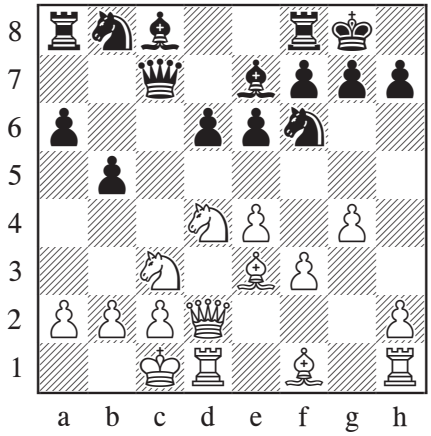


13...♘xd4N

After 13...♗c5?! in A. Zhigalko – Ziyaev, Calvia (ol) 2004, White should have played 14.♘ce2!N when Black's position would be quite difficult.

14.♗xd4 b5 15.♗d3±

9.0–0–0 ♕c7 10.g4± b5



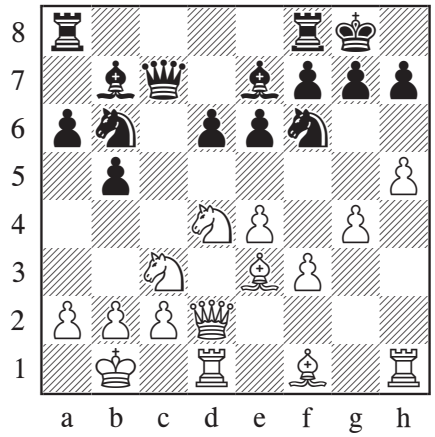
11.♔b1

11.g5! ♘fd7 12.h4 would be more efficient, but White still has a big advantage.

11...♗b7 12.h4

12.g5! ♘h5 13.♗h3 and ♗g4 is devastating.

12...♘bd7 13.h5 ♘b6

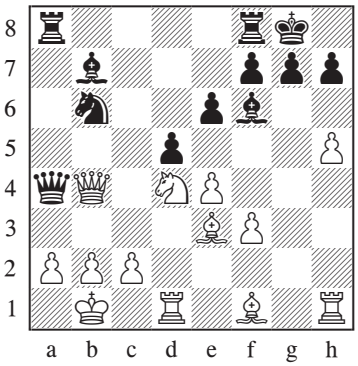


14.g5?!

14.♕h2! was a better move. Black no longer has a knight fork on c4.

14...♘e8?

After 14...b4! White would have had to find a lot of accurate moves to prove a win. 15.♘cb5! (15.♘ce2 ♘c4± would make it a fight again) 15...axb5 16.gxf6 ♗xf6 17.♘xb5 ♕c6 18.♕xb4 d5 19.♘d4 ♕a4



20.♕xb6! ♕xa2† 21.♔c1 ♖fb8 22.e5! ♗xe5 23.♔d2 White is winning, but it is still messy and things could go wrong.

15.g6 ♗f6 16.♖g1?

16.h6! was stronger. The key idea is that 16...hxg6 17.♕h2 is over.

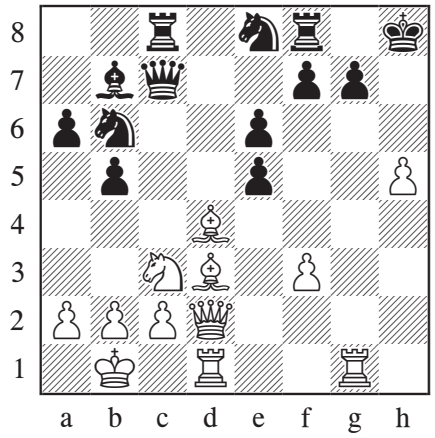
16...♖c8?!

16...b4 17.♘ce2 ♘c4 18.♕d3 d5±

17.♗d3± ♗xd4? 18.gxh7† ♔xh7

18...♔h8 19.♗xd4 e5 20.♗xb6 ♕xb6 21.h6 g6 22.f4 would also give White a winning attack.

19.e5† ♔h8 20.♗xd4 dxe5



21.♖xg7! ♘xg7 22.♕h6†
1–0

White did not take his first chances, yet still won quickly. The potency of the English Attack should be obvious to all.

In the next game we shall look at some rare deviations after 6...e6 7.♗e3.

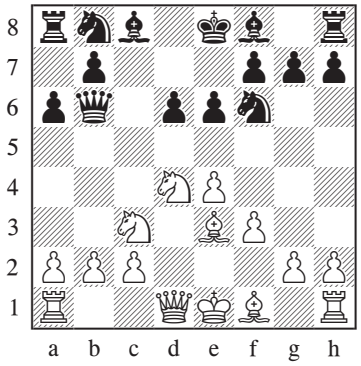
GAME 29

Vladisa Zivkovic – Svetislav Marinkov

Belgrade 2005

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 d5!?

Totally misguided is the greedy:
7...♕b6?!



8.a3!

White does not have an advantage after: 8.♕d2 ♕xb2! 9.♘b3 ♕a3 10.♗b5† axb5 (10...♘bd7 11.♘b1!) 11.♘xb5 ♕a4 12.♘c7† ♔e7 13.e5 ♘d5∞

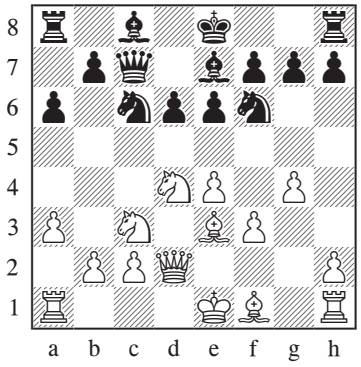
8...♘c6

8...♕xb2 9.♘a4+–

9.♕d2± ♕c7

White wins after 9...♕xb2 10.♖a2 ♕b6 11.♘xe6+–.

10.g4 ♗e7



We have reached a typical position from the English Attack, where White has won a meaningful tempo in a2-a3 and Black has chosen a less than perfect line.

11.g5 ♘d7 12.0–0–0 0–0 13.h4 b5 14.♘xc6 ♕xc6 15.h5 ♖b8 16.g6 a5

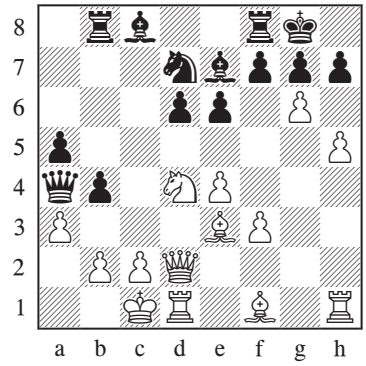
16...♕b7 17.♗d4!± b4? 18.h6!+–

17.♘e2

17.♗g5!N ♗xg5 18.♕xg5 b4 19.h6!! would have won quickly, but is somewhat speculative, of course.

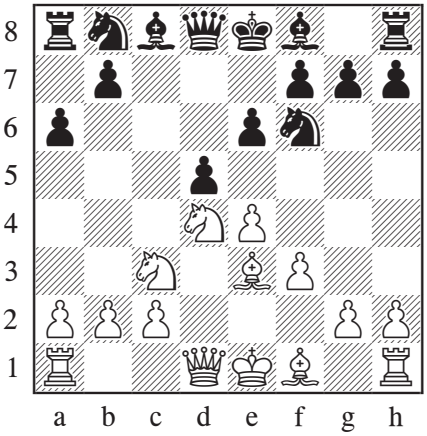
17...b4 18.♘d4 ♕a4

18...♕b7 19.a4!



19.h6! bxa3 20.gxh7† ♔h8 21.hxg7† ♔xg7

In what was probably a blitz game, Molner – Krush, Internet 2010, White missed 22.h8=♕† with immediate mate.



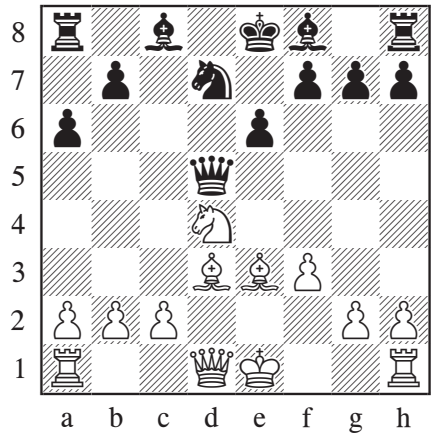
8.exd5

8.e5 ♘fd7 9.f4 transposes to a sideline of the French Steinitz, which lies outside of our Tarrasch repertoire. Black seems okay after: 9...♕b6! (9...♘c6 10.♕g4!? and 9...♗c5 10.♕h5!? both look hopeful for White) 10.a3 ♘c6 11.♗e2 (11.♕d2 ♕xb2 12.♖a2 ♕b6 13.♘xe6 d4!=) 11...♗c5 12.♘a4 ♕a5† 13.c3 ♗xd4 14.♗xd4 ♘xd4 15.♕xd4 0–0=

8...♘xd5

8...exd5? 9.♕d2± is positionally disastrous for Black.

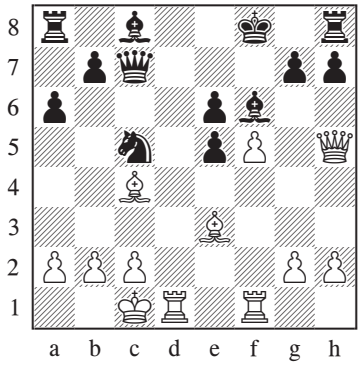
9.♘xd5 ♕xd5 10.♗d3 ♘d7



11.0–0

I have some preference for 11.♕e2!?N, which gives White a nice start to the game. I have analysed a few lines, but see no big problems. 11...♘c5 is most critical, but after 12.♗c4 ♕e5 13.f4 ♕c7 14.f5! White stands better, as the following brief lines demonstrate:

a) 14...e5?! is met strongly with 15.0–0–0! ♗e7 16.♘e6!!± with the point 16...fxe6 17.♕h5† ♔f8 18.♖hf1 ♗f6



19.♖d8†!! ♕xd8 20.♗xc5† ♔g8 21.fxe6 and it is all over.

b) 14...♗e7 15.0–0–0 0–0 16.fxe6 ♗xe6 17.♘xe6 ♘xe6 18.♔b1± Black will need to defend a lousy position for a long time.

11...♘c5 12.♗e2 e5

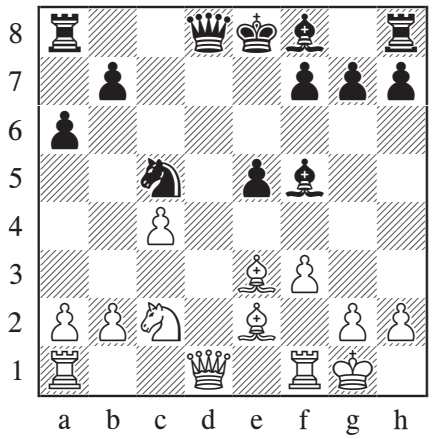
Or 12...♗e7 13.f4 0–0 14.♗f3 ♕d6 15.♕d2 is very marginally better for White too.

13.c4

13.♘b3 was the last chance to play for an advantage.

13...♕d8 14.♘c2 ♗f5?!

14...♕xd1 15.♖axd1 ♘a4 would have equalized.



15.♘b4± ♕d6?! 16.♘d5± a5?! 17.♔h1

17.f4! e4 18.♕d4 would have given White a winning position.

17...♗e7 18.a3 a4 19.f4 e4 20.♘xe7 ♕xe7 21.♕d5 ♖c8 22.♕xf5 0–0 23.♖ad1 ♖c6 24.♗xc5 ♖xc5 25.♖d5 g6 26.♕e5 ♕xe5 27.fxe5 ♖c6 28.♖fd1 h5 29.♔g1 ♖e6 30.♖1d4 f5 31.exf6 ♖fxf6 32.c5 e3 33.♖d6 ♔g7 34.♖xe6 ♖xe6 35.♖d7†
1–0

We have nothing to fear here; White is better out of the opening.

GAME 30

Fabiano Caruana – Hikaru Nakamura

Saint Louis 2016

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 h5

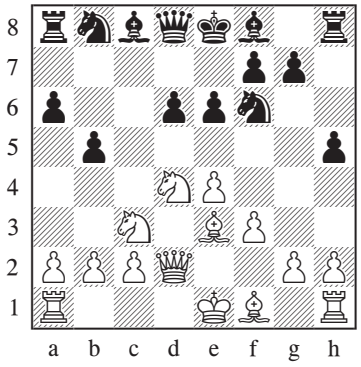
Nakamura has used this line on occasion. Played well, it is not directly bad, but it is still a sideline for a reason.

Worse is:

7...b5 8.♕d2

8.g4?! is premature when the d7-square is free for the queen or bishop. The most obvious example is 8...b4 9.♘a4 ♗d7! and Black has great counterplay.

8...h5?!



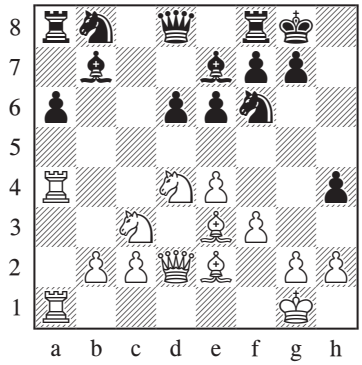
I do not think this works in this position. Black cannot afford to weaken his kingside after he has already weakened the queenside.

9.a4!

We should always consider the strength of this push.

9...b4

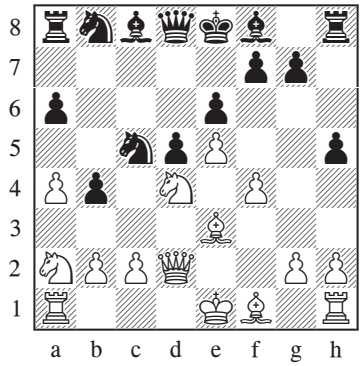
9...bxa4 10.♖xa4! ♗e7 11.♗e2 0–0 12.0–0 ♗b7 13.♖fa1 is a positional disaster. After 13...h4 in Fressinet – Nevednichy, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007, White should have continued:



14.b4!N d5 15.b5! This is overwhelmingly strong. Black is surprisingly lost at the end of the following line: 15...e5 16.♘f5 d4 17.♗f2! dxc3 (the way to stay almost alive is: 17...♘fd7 18.♘xe7† ♕xe7 19.♘d5 ♗xd5 20.exd5 ♘b6 21.♖a5 ♘xd5 22.♗d3±) 18.♕g5 g6 19.♗e3! White is totally winning; next comes ♗c4.

10.♘a2 d5 11.e5 ♘fd7 12.f4 ♘c5

This was played in De la Villa Garcia – Spraggett, Burguillos 2007.



The critical line is the same as always in these positions:

13.c3!N

This would destroy Black's position.

13...♘e4

13...bxc3 14.♘xc3 ♗e7 15.b4±

13...♘xa4 14.♘xb4 ♘c5 15.♗e2±

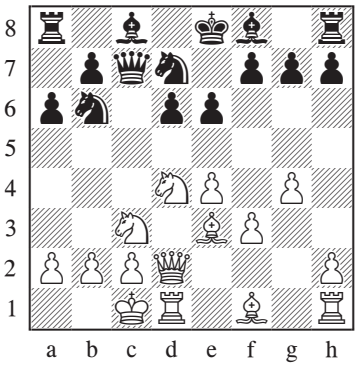
14.♕c2 bxc3 15.♘xc3 ♘xc3 16.♕xc3 ♗e7 17.♗d3 0–0 18.0–0

White's position is overwhelming.

7...♘bd7 8.g4

Now 8...h6 9.♕d2 b5 transposes to lines covered later in this chapter. But I should mention an independent line:

8...♘b6 9.♕d2 ♘fd7 10.0–0–0 ♕c7



11.♕f2

If you are looking for more, you could check out: 11.f4!?N ♘c4 12.♗xc4 ♕xc4 13.♖hf1! b5 14.b3 ♕c7 15.f5 ♘e5 16.g5± White is likely to play ♘c3-e2-f4.

11...♘c4 12.♗xc4 ♕xc4 13.♔b1 b5 14.h4 ♗b7 15.♘b3 ♕c7 16.g5

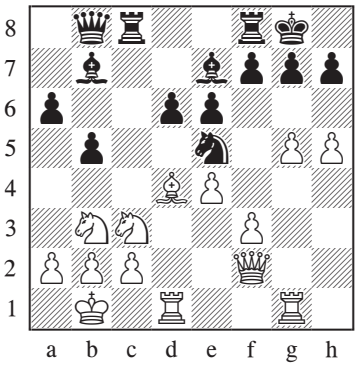
16.a3!

16...♖c8

Black should have pushed ...b5-b4 at some point; just as White should have prevented it with a2-a3.

17.h5 ♗e7 18.♖hg1 ♘e5?! 19.♗b6! ♕b8 20.♗d4 0–0

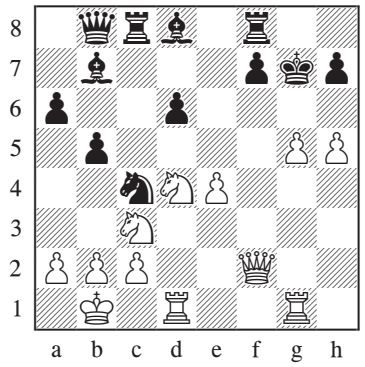
So far we have been following Leko – Zhang Zhong, Berlin (blitz) 2015.



21.f4!N ♘c4 22.f5!

White crashes through. For example:

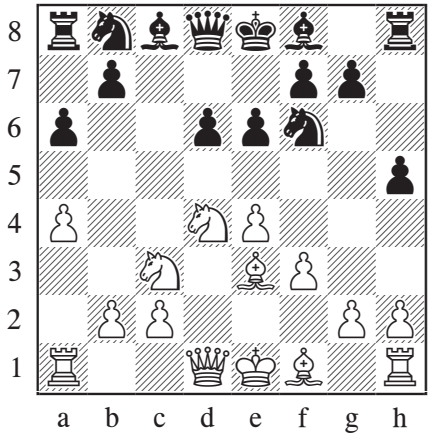
22...e5 23.f6! exd4 24.♘xd4 ♗d8 25.fxg7 ♔xg7



26.g6!

Black's position collapses.

8.a4!?

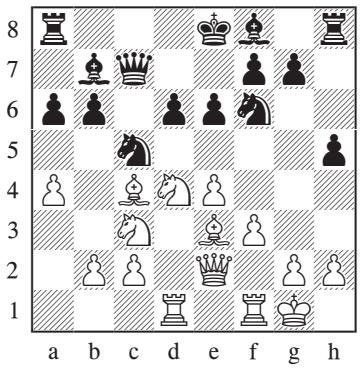


If Black can make pointless pawn moves on the flank, we can make reasonable ones. The main difference is that the ...h5 move exposes the black king, while White will castle to the opposite side of where he has weakened his position.

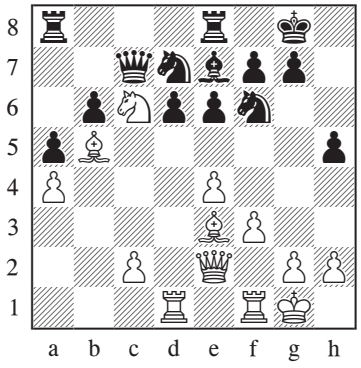
8...♘c6

I also think White is better after 8...b6 9.♗c4 ♗b7 10.♕e2 ♘bd7 11.0–0±. For example:

11...♕c7 12.♖ad1 ♘c5 Berescu – Baramidze, Kusadasi 2006.



At this point I have a very ambitious idea: 13.b4!N ♘cd7 14.b5 a5 15.♘c6! This pawn sacrifice sharpens the position. 15...♗xc6 16.bxc6 ♕xc6 17.♘b5 ♗e7 18.♘d4 ♕c7 19.♗b5 I prefer White. For example: 19...0–0 20.♘c6 ♖fe8



21.g4!± hxg4? 22.fxg4 ♘xe4 23.♕f3+–

9.♗c4

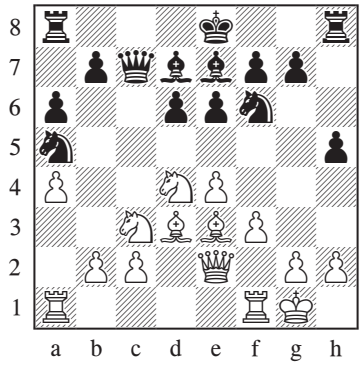
The positional approach.

9...♕c7

9...d5N 10.exd5 exd5 11.♗a2±

10.♕e2 ♗e7 11.0–0 ♘e5

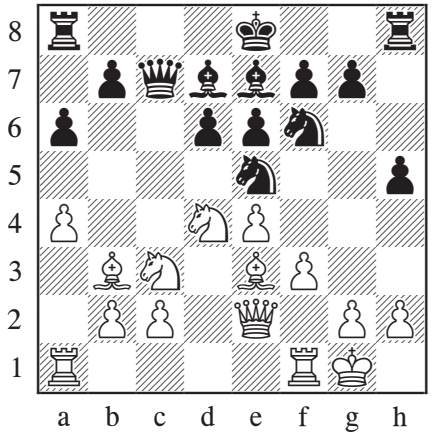
Maurice Ashley recommended 11...♘a5, but I think White is better after: 12.♗d3 ♗d7



13.♘b3! Opening the c-file would benefit White, and also fine is: 13...h4 14.♘xa5 ♕xa5 15.♕f2 ♕c7 16.♗b6 ♕c8 17.h3 ♘h5 18.a5±

11...0–0 followed by ...♖fe8 was Roiz's recommendation for Black, but I think that Caruana had in mind 12.♘xc6! ♕xc6 (12...bxc6 13.a5 d5 14.♗b6 ♕b8 15.♗d3±) 13.♗b3, when White is better.

12.♗b3 ♗d7



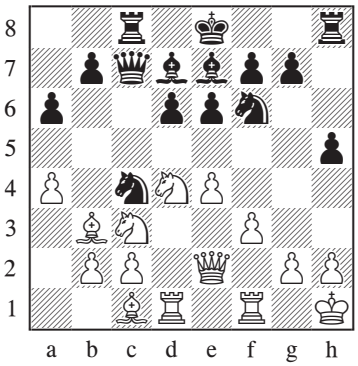
13.f4?!

This weakens the position prematurely.

GM Roiz recommended 13.♖fd1!?N on chesspublishing.com. This great analyst is always worth listening to. His variation goes: 13...♖c8 14.a5 0–0 15.♕e1 ♘c4 16.♗xc4

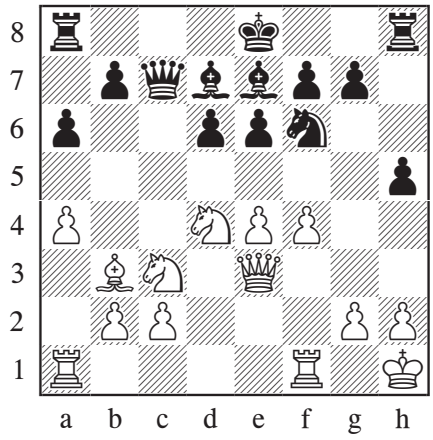
♕xc4 17.♘b3 ♕c7 18.♗g5± "Despite the pair of bishops, Black suffers from a lack of active play." – Roiz. I find this quite attractive.

White is also better after 13.♔h1!?N ♖c8 14.♖ad1 ♘c4 15.♗c1±, which is my preference.



I think this is the best way for White to place his pieces. It is important to point out that Black cannot play 15...h4 16.f4 h3? on account of 17.g4!±, when White has a very strong attack.

13...♘eg4 14.♔h1 ♘xe3 15.♕xe3



15...♕c5

15...0–0–0!∓ was even better.

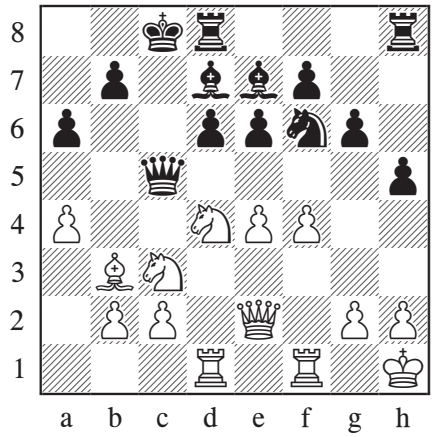
16.♖ad1 g6?!

I do not see the reason for this move. I am sure Nakamura had a reason to play like this, but it looks like a waste of time.

16...0–0–0 still looks fine.

17.♕e2 0–0–0

17...♘g4 18.♖d3±



18.f5?!

Stronger was: 18.e5! dxe5 19.fxe5 ♘g4 20.♖xf7 ♖de8 21.♘e4 (21.h3!?±) 21...♕xe5 22.♕c4† ♔b8 23.♘f3 ♕c7 24.♕xc7† ♔xc7 25.♘fg5±

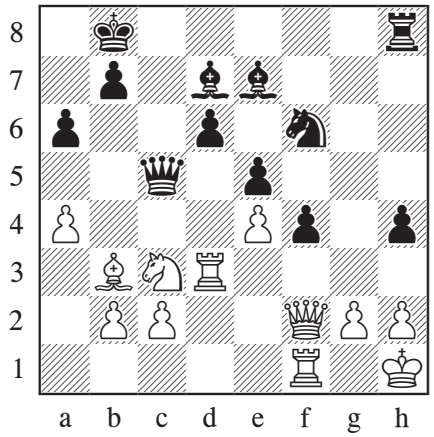
18...e5

Taking on f5 first made more sense as White gets extra options from the game's move order, but this is OK too.

19.♘f3 gxf5 20.♘g5!? f4! 21.♖d3 ♔b8

The more accurate 21...♗g4 22.♕d2 ♖d7! would have kept the balance without need for great play.

22.♘xf7 h4 23.♘xh8 ♖xh8 24.♕f2



Black must be careful not to end up without compensation for the exchange, but things really went downhill from here.

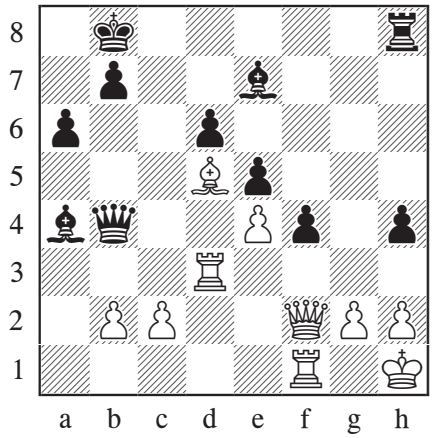
24...♕b4?

24...d5!! would have equalized. 25.♗xd5 ♕xf2 26.♖xf2 ♗c5 27.♖ff3! (27.♖f1? ♘h5! 28.b4 ♗a7 29.♘e2 ♘g3† 30.♘xg3 hxg3 31.h3 ♗g4!∓) 27...♗g4 28.h3 ♗xf3 29.gxf3! White has slightly better practical chances, but it should be a draw.

24...♕xf2 25.♖xf2 d5! simply transposes.

25.♘d5 ♘xd5 26.♗xd5 ♗xa4?

26...♗c8 would have lasted longer.



27.♖a3!

There is no defence against trapping the bishop.

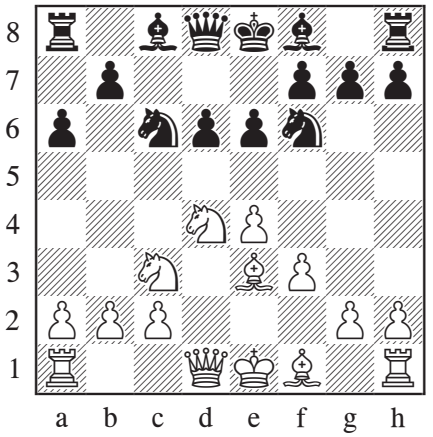
27...h3 28.c3 ♕b5 29.b3 ♗h4 30.bxa4 ♕d3 31.g3
1–0

The Nakamura line, should he wish to claim ownership of it, is not ridiculous. It's just not very good either. As White I would be optimistic that I was on the path to an opening advantage if I saw my opponent play this. If my opponent was Nakamura, he would then destroy me in the middlegame, but that's another story.

...♘c6 lines

In the 1990s, variations with ...♘c6 were fashionable, with Kasparov one of the main defenders. But by the 2000s the variation was running out of steam. New ideas would surface briefly, but even when they worked, they always seemed to rely as much on luck as on the qualities of the position. I see no great reason to change this point of view today.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 ♘c6



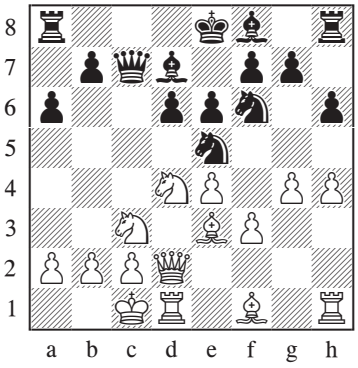
8.♕d2 h5!?

Lines with ...h5 have become trendy in the Sicilian, but I do not like this version of it.

8...♗d7 9.g4 would show how misplaced the black pieces are. I cover this briefly under the 8...♕c7 move order.

8...♕c7 9.0–0–0 is flexible and gives Black several options, none of which is terribly attractive. We will consider a) 9...♗d7?!, b) 9...♘e5 and c) 9...♗e7:

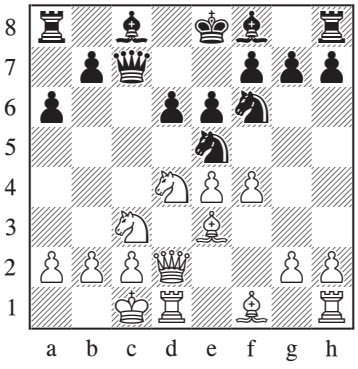
a) 9...♗d7?! is a simple disaster. 10.g4! h6 11.h4 ♘e5



12.♖g1! g6 13.g5 hxg5 14.hxg5 ♘h5 15.f4 ♘c4 16.♗xc4 ♕xc4 17.f5 White is essentially winning, Doluhanova – Deszczynski, Warsaw 2011.

b) 9...♘e5 10.f4

This is great for White, as we will see.

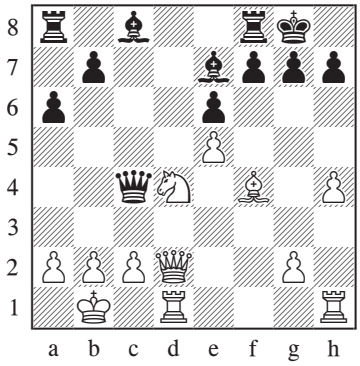


10...♘ed7!?

A weird but necessary move.

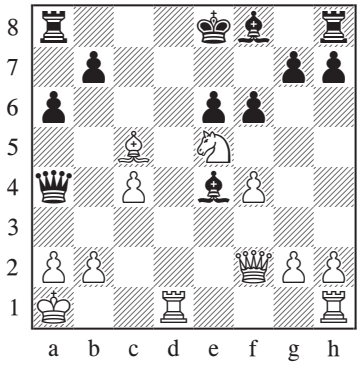
10...♘c4?! is punished brutally: 11.♗xc4 ♕xc4 12.e5 ♘d5 13.♘xd5 ♕xd5 14.♔b1 with a split:

b1) 14...dxe5 15.fxe5 ♗e7 16.♗f4 ♕c4 17.h4 0–0 Kulaots – Leito, Harjumaa [rapid] 2010.



At this point 18.♖h3!N with ideas such as ♖g3 or ♖c3 is essentially winning. Kulaots found a less obvious path, but still took the full point.

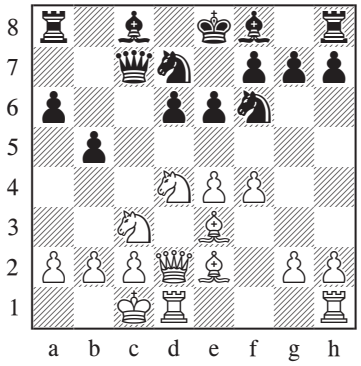
b2) 14...♗d7 15.♕f2 dxe5 16.♘f3 ♕b5 17.♘xe5 ♗c6 18.c4 ♗e4† 19.♔a1 ♕a4 20.♗c5 f6 was Kulaots – Leito, Puhajarve (rapid) 2017; Black survived from this second attempt at this bad variation.



But here 21.♗xf8!N ♖xf8 22.♕b6 would have won the game.)

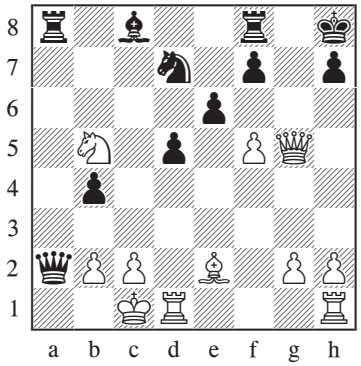
11.♗e2 b5

In Fedorchuk – Kozul, Ohrid 2001, White should have continued:



12.e5!N dxe5

Black has a critical line, which requires accuracy to be refuted. 12...b4 13.♘cb5! axb5 14.♘xb5 ♕a5 15.exf6 d5 The only move (15...♕xa2 16.♘xd6† ♗xd6 17.♕xd6 gxf6 18.♗c5 leads to mate). 16.fxg7 ♗xg7 17.♗d4± 0–0 18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.f5! White has a winning attack. For example: 19...♕xa2 20.♕g5† ♔h8



I continued the variation this far because White still has to play accurately in order to win: 21.fxe6! fxe6 22.♕e7! White is ready to play ♗d3. 22...♗a6 23.♗d3 ♘f6 24.♖hf1 ♖ae8 25.♕d6 White is ready for ♕e5, winning.

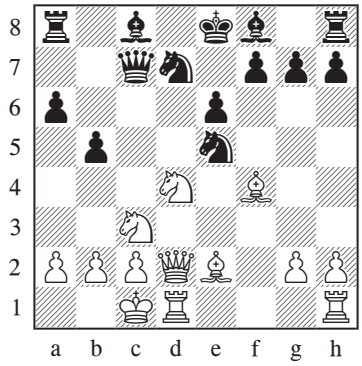
13.fxe5 ♘xe5

13...♕xe5 14.♗f3 and White wins.

14.♗f4±

Black is entirely unready for the tactics; White is ready for ♘f3, ♗f3 and ♕e3.

14...♘fd7



15.♘dxb5!

15.♖he1 is better according to the computer, but I find the complications inhuman.

15...axb5 16.♗xb5⩲

Black has an indefensible position. For example:

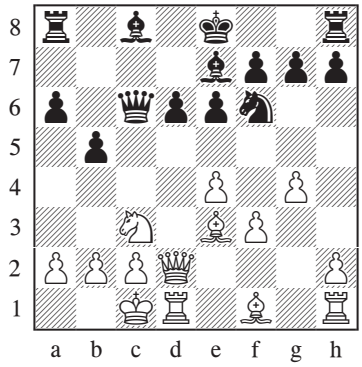
16...♖a7 17.♕e3 f6 18.♗xe5 fxe5 19.♖hf1 ♗e7 20.a4!±

Black is a piece up, but nothing in his position works.

c) 9...♗e7 10.g4 b5

This gives us a good moment to trade knights.

11.♘xc6 ♕xc6

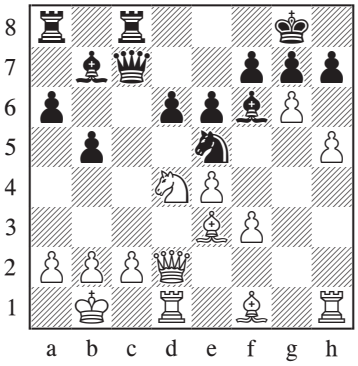


12.♘e2!

This typical manoeuvre gives White a plus.

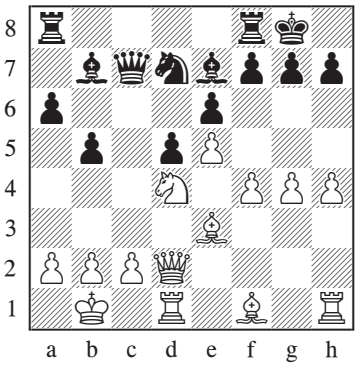
12...♗b7 13.♘d4 ♕c7 14.♔b1 0–0 15.h4 d5

Black has to do something, as White is ready for the assault. For example: 15...♘d7?! 16.g5± ♘e5 17.h5 ♖fc8 18.g6 ♗f6 was Novgorodskij – Kamov, Kazan 2008, when White can improve on his play with:



19.h6!N hxg6 (19...fxg6 20.♗h3 and White is doing swimmingly) 20.hxg7 ♗xg7 21.♗h6 ♗f6 22.♕h2 White's attack is overwhelming. For example: 22...♘d7 23.♗d3 ♘f8 24.♗f4 e5 25.♗g5 ♗g7 26.♘f5! gxf5 27.♖dg1 and mate will follow. Look at how far along Black is (or rather is not) with his attack.

16.e5 ♘d7 17.f4±

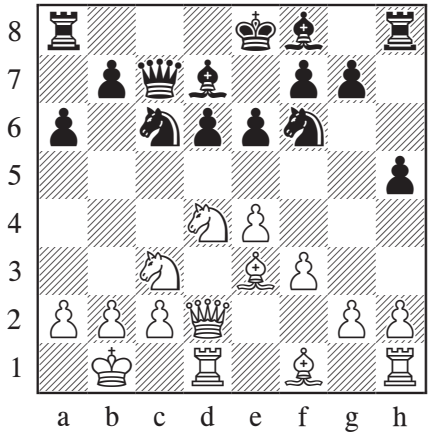


Korneev – Lloret Climent, Valencia 1998. These types of positions are unattractive for Black as far as I am concerned.

9.0–0–0 ♗d7

There is a somewhat similar position in the Classical Sicilian after 5...♘c6 6.♗g5 e6 7.♕d2 a6 8.0–0–0 ♗d7 9.f3 ♗e7 10.h4 h6 11.♗e3 h5. There the ...h5 plan makes good sense, as White had already committed his h-pawn. But in our case, White can do better than h2-h4.

10.♔b1 ♕c7

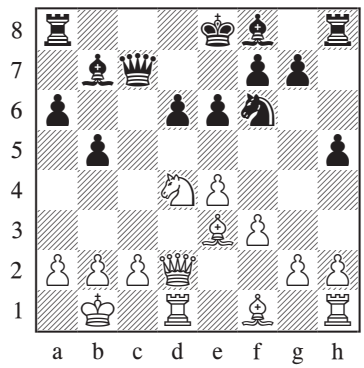


11.♘xc6! ♗xc6

11...bxc6?! 12.♗c4! gives White a pleasant advantage. Black's centre may look solid and strong, but it cannot do anything; meanwhile the white king will be very safe with the bishop placed on b3.

12.♘e2 d5

12...b5 13.♘d4 ♗b7 happened in Openshaw – Byrn, Gibraltar 2013.

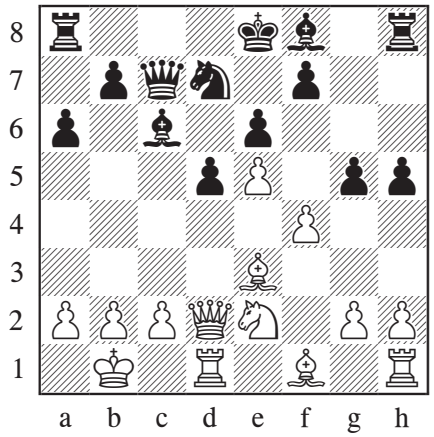


After 14.♗d3!N ♗e7 15.♖he1± White is somewhat better. For example 15...0–0 16.h3 or 15...♖c8 16.♗g5.

13.e5 ♘d7 14.f4 g5?

Trying to undermine the e5-pawn, but it backfires.

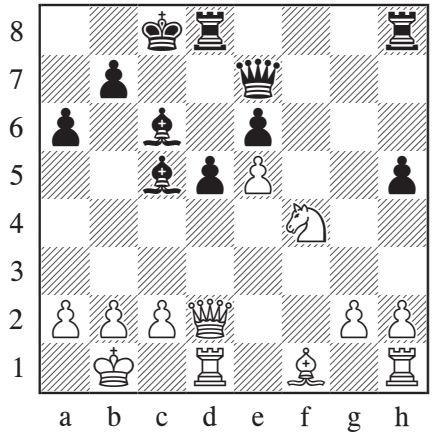
14...♘c5 15.♘d4 ♗e7 16.g3± would have been normal play.



15.f5! ♘c5

This was probably not the original plan, but the consistent 15...♘xe5?! 16.♗xg5 is hopeless for Black. For example: 16...♘c4 (or 16...♗e7 17.fxe6 fxe6 18.♘d4+–) 17.♕c3 e5 18.♘f4! ♖g8 19.h4+–

16.fxe6 fxe6 17.♗xc5 ♗xc5 18.♕xg5 ♕e7 19.♕d2 0–0–0 20.♘f4±



White was much better in Cheparinov – Al-Modiahki, Sochi 2008.

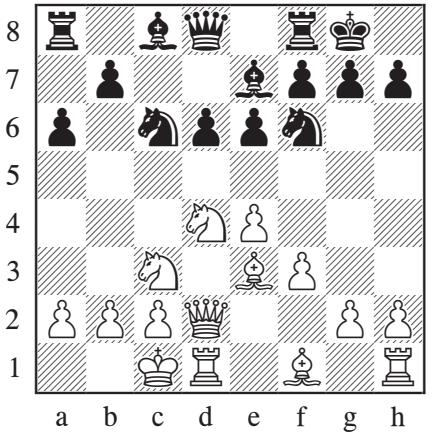
The next game covers the main line of the ...♘c6-variation.

GAME 31

Robert James Fischer – Boris Spassky

Belgrade (25) 1992

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 ♘c6 8.♕d2 ♗e7 9.0–0–0 0–0



10.g4!

The main line. This game actually used a different move order to reach this position, but I changed it to fit our repertoire.

I was tempted to recommend 10.♔b1 as a more flexible approach, with the idea 10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 ♘d7 12.h4 b5 13.♗g5! with serious pressure on the dark squares, but I failed to find anything special for White after 10...d5 11.♗e2 ♕c7! 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 exd5 as in Giri – Van Wely, Amstelveen 2017.

10...♘d7

10...♘xd4 11.♗xd4 b5 12.g5 ♘d7 13.h4 transposes to our main game.

11.h4 ♘xd4

After 11...♘de5 12.♘xc6! bxc6 13.♗e2 ♖b8 14.f4 ♘d7 15.h5 ♕a5 16.♕e1 ♕b4 17.b3± White's prospects on the kingside are far superior to those of Black on the queenside, Da Riva Alonso – Kratochvil, email 2011.

12.♗xd4 b5 13.g5 b4

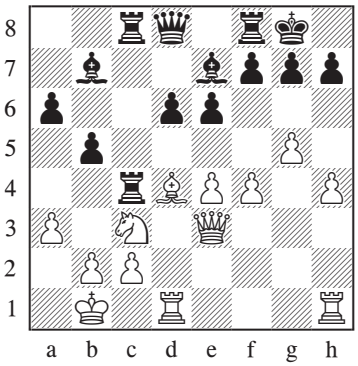
I also considered two lines in which Black develops more slowly on the queenside.

13...♗b7 14.a3!

14.♔b1 is playable but after 14...b4 Black avoids the ♘a4-b6 idea from the main game.

14...♖c8 15.♔b1 ♘e5 16.♕e3 ♘c4 17.♗xc4 ♖xc4 18.f4!

This is much more incisive than 18.♖hg1, the move which was mentioned by Emms in *Play the Najdorf: Scheveningen Style*. White will soon build a deadly initiative in the centre and on the kingside.



18...b4 19.axb4 ♖xb4 20.f5! exf5 21.♖he1! fxe4 22.♘xe4 ♗d5

In the event of 22...♗xe4 23.♕xe4 ♖e8 24.♖e2+– the pin decides.

23.♘f6†!?

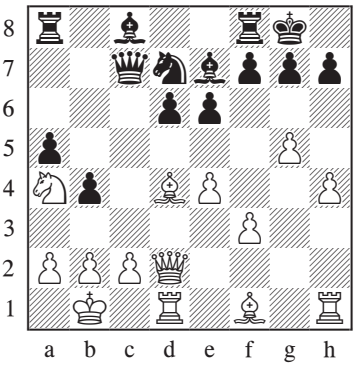
The computer confirms that this is the most direct route to victory. However, the simpler 23.♘g3 ♗e6 24.♘h5 ♗g4 25.♘xg7 ♗xd1 26.♖xd1 should also do the trick.

23...gxf6 24.♗c3 ♖b5 25.♖g1 fxg5 26.♕d4

White went on to win convincingly in Ustimenko – Susla, corr. 2014.

13...♕c7 14.♔b1 b4 15.♘a4 a5

Gelfand suggested a pawn sacrifice, but it does not quite work: 15...♗b7 16.♕xb4 ♗c6 17.♘c3 ♖fb8 18.♕c4 ♘e5 19.♕e2 ♗b5 20.♕f2 ♗xf1 21.♖hxf1 ♘c4 22.b3 ♖b4 23.♖d3 ♖c8 Aagaard – P.H. Nielsen, Malmo/Copenhagen 2004. This gave compensation for Black, according to Gelfand 15 years ago. But after 24.f4!N ♘a3† 25.♔b2 ♘c4† 26.♔a1 ♘a3 27.♗e3!+– with ♗c1-b2 coming, White has a winning position. The extra pawn is only a small part of it.

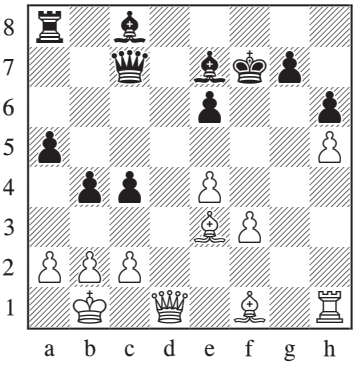


16.h5 ♘c5 17.g6!! h6

17...♘xa4? 18.h6! leads to a mating attack instantly.

18.♘xc5 dxc5 19.♗e3 ♖d8 20.♕c1 ♖xd1 21.♕xd1 c4 22.gxf7† ♔xf7

Nechepurenko – Seeman, Moscow 2006. This is awfully concrete, but also totally desperate for Black.



23.♕d4!N ♗a6

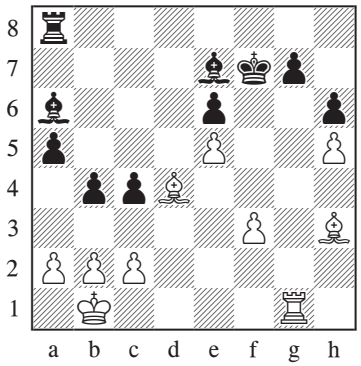
23...c3 24.e5 ♗b7 25.♗c4 ♖d8 26.♕f4† ♔e8 27.♗b5† ♗c6 28.♕c4 ♖c8 29.♕xe6 ♗xb5 30.♕g6† ♔f8 31.♗xh6 ♕xe5 32.♗xg7† ♕xg7 33.♕f5† ♕f7 34.♕xc8†±

24.♗h3 ♕d6

24...♖d8 25.♗xe6†! ♔xe6 26.♕xg7± and

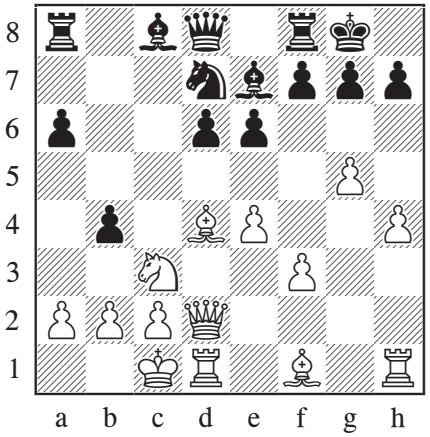
White has excellent winning chances with the three pawns for the bishop.

25.♖g1 ♕xd4 26.♗xd4 ♗f6 27.e5 ♗e7



28.♖g4! ♗c8 29.♖f4† ♔e8 30.♗f2 c3 31.♗f1 ♗a6 32.♗xa6 ♖xa6 33.bxc3 bxc3 34.♖c4±

White picks up a pawn and has a good chance of winning the endgame.



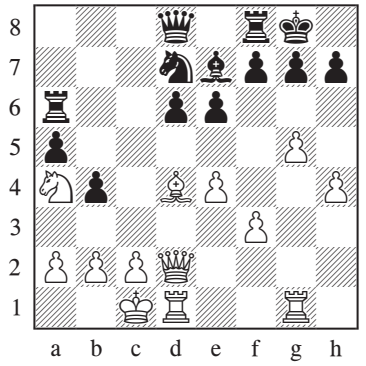
14.♘a4!

14.♘e2!? was successful in Anand – Andreikin, Moscow 2013. But the best way to play is like Fischer, of course.

14...♗b7?

We now know this to be a positional blunder. Let's look at the serious moves.

14...a5 15.♖g1 ♗a6 is a reasonable strategy, in similar style to the French Defence. After 16.♗xa6 ♖xa6 as in A. Horvath – Efimenko, Zalakaros 2015, White should play:



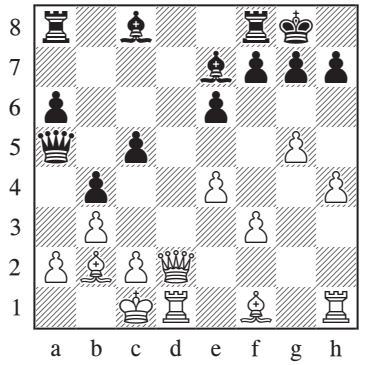
17.♕h2!?N ♖c6 (17...♕b8 18.♔b1) 18.♔b1 ♕c7 19.b3! White has the better prospects. The following fantasy variation is worth inspecting. 19...e5 20.♗e3 ♖c8 21.♖d2 ♘f8 22.h5 ♘e6 23.♘b2 ♖c3 24.♕e2 ♘c5 25.g6 fxg6 26.hxg6 h6 27.♗xc5!? ♕xc5 28.♖gd1± White has a positional advantage.

14...♕a5 15.b3 ♘c5

15...♗b7 16.a3 (16.♔b1 is also interesting. Emms mentions 16...d5 but 17.g6!N is a killer response.) 16...d5 Emms reaches this position in a note and gives Black's last move an exclam, but modern engines show a refutation: 17.g6! fxg6 (or 17...e5 Kurgansky – Polishchuk, email 2007, 18.♗e3N d4 19.gxh7† ♔h8 20.♗h6! ♗f6 21.axb4±) 18.♗h3 e5 19.♗e6† ♔h8 20.h5 g5 21.h6 g6 22.♗a1 d4 23.♗xd7 1–0 Potrata – Wagner, corr. 2012.

This is the critical line. But here too White is simply better if he knows what he is doing.

16.♘xc5! dxc5 17.♗b2±



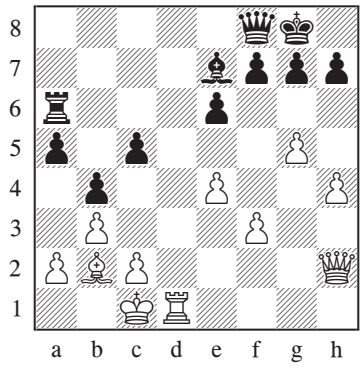
17...♖d8

17...♕xa2? is surprisingly just lost after 18.♕f4 ♕a5 19.♗c4+– when Black has no defence against the attack on the kingside.

18.♕h2 ♖xd1† 19.♔xd1 ♕d8†

If 19...♕xa2 20.♔c1 ♕a5 White has: 21.g6! h6 (or 21...fxg6 22.h5 ♕d8 23.hxg6 h6 24.♗xg7! with a winning attack) 22.gxf7† ♔xf7 23.♖g1 ♗f6 24.♕f4 Black is defenceless.

20.♔c1 a5 21.♗c4 ♗a6 22.♖d1 ♕f8 23.♗xa6 ♖xa6

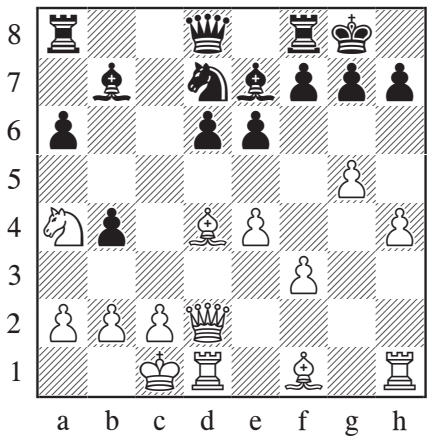


24.♕c7! ♖d6 25.♖g1 ♕d8

25...♗d8 26.♕b7 ♕e7 27.♕b5 ♕d7 28.♕c4! (28.♕xc5?? ♗b6) 28...♕c6 29.a4±

26.♕xc5±

Moll – Punzon Moraleda, email 2009.



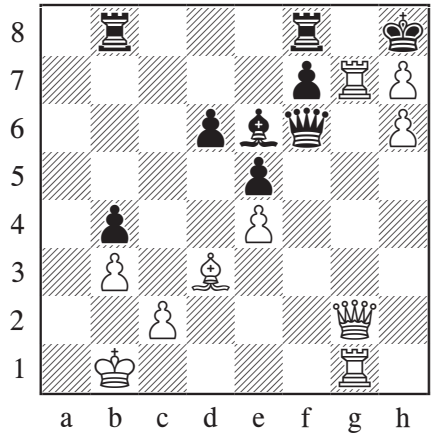
15.♘b6! ♖b8

Of course the simple tactical point is: 15...♘xb6 16.♕xb4±

16.♘xd7 ♕xd7 17.♔b1±

With the knights gone, Black has no way to break through on the queenside in time.

17...♕c7 18.♗d3 ♗c8 19.h5 e5 20.♗e3 ♗e6 21.♖dg1 a5 22.g6 ♗f6 23.gxh7† ♔h8 24.♗g5 ♕e7 25.♖g3 ♗xg5 26.♖xg5 ♕f6 27.♖hg1 ♕xf3 28.♖xg7 ♕f6 29.h6 a4 30.b3 axb3 31.axb3 ♖fd8 32.♕g2 ♖f8



33.♖g8† ♔xh7 34.♖g7† ♔h8 35.h7 1–0

The ...♘c6-line has gone out of fashion for good reason: White is better *and* has an attack. It is a long time since Black had any fun in this variation.

7...b5! – sidelines

It is not clear where the black knights and bishops belong at this early point in the game. In less dynamic lines, Black needs to develop, castle and stay away from early commitments with the pawns. But in the English Attack that logic is turned upside down. Black does not want to commit his king too soon. And if he wants to stay on e8, then the bishop belongs on f8. And if White castles queenside, which seems very likely, Black will want to attack with his pawns there. In that case the bishop is not naturally placed on b7, where it is blocking the b-file.

Obviously Black will have to develop and none of these piece moves are truly bad on their own, but White's attack is dangerous and should be respected. Active counterplay is desperately needed. So in comes 7...b5!.

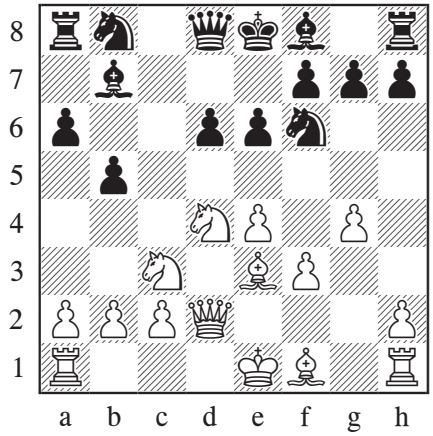
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 b5!

It is not surprising that, in an opening defined by a thirst for blood, the most aggressive and dynamic move is also the best.

8.♕d2 ♗b7

This move is what Jacob Aagaard calls "an aesthetic move" and that is not a compliment. It looks entirely natural to put the bishop here, but in time we shall understand that this is not a great square for the bishop. Black is better off playing 8...b4 or 8...♘bd7!, which we will consider in the remainder of the chapter.

9.g4



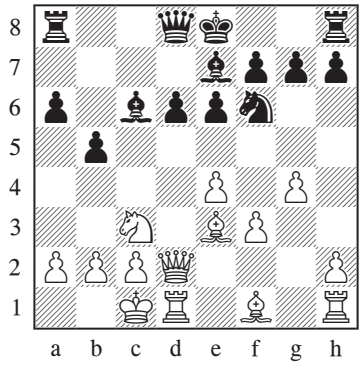
9...♘fd7

This may look a bit weird, but at least it makes sense of Black's play.

9...♘c6

This is similar to the 7...♘c6-lines. White is simply better after normal play:

10.♘xc6! ♗xc6 11.0–0–0 ♗e7



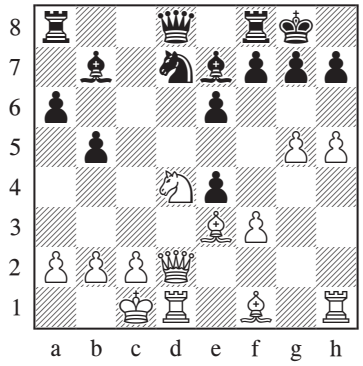
12.♘e2!±

I like this way of playing the position. Once again, it is very similar to the 7...♘c6 lines. 12.g5± is also decent.

12...0–0 13.g5 ♘d7 14.♘d4 ♗b7 15.h4 d5 16.h5! dxe4?!

Denisov – Avdeeva, Kaluga 2003.

16...♘e5 17.g6! ♗f6 (Black is also in trouble after 17...dxe4 18.h6!. For example: 18...♘xg6 19.hxg7 ♖e8 20.♕h2 ♗h4 21.f4 ♕f6 22.♗e2 ♕xg7 23.f5+–) 18.h6! ♘xg6 19.hxg7 ♗xg7 20.♕h2 ♖e8 21.♕xh7† ♔f8 This is Dimitrov – Le Quang, Chalkidiki 2003. White is totally winning, with the strongest choice being 22.f4!N ♕c7 23.f5 and Black's position collapses.

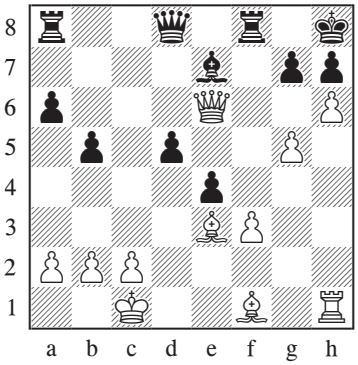


At this point White missed a nice combination.

17.♘xe6!!N fxe6 18.♕xd7 ♗d5 19.♖xd5!

This is certainly the move that escaped White.

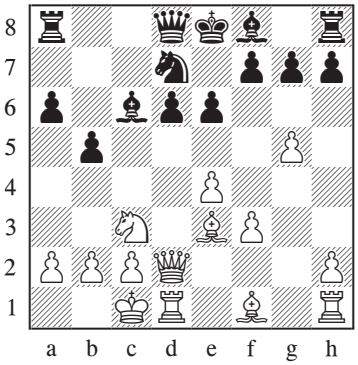
19...exd5 20.♕e6† ♔h8 21.h6!



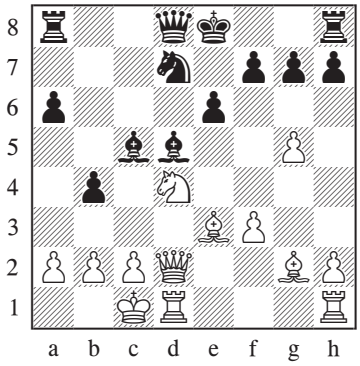
White's attack is winning. For example: 21...♗xg5 22.hxg7† ♔xg7 23.♖g1 h6 24.f4+–

10.0–0–0 ♘b6

10...♘c6 is not much different from the usual; White has a great attacking position. 11.♘xc6! ♗xc6 12.g5

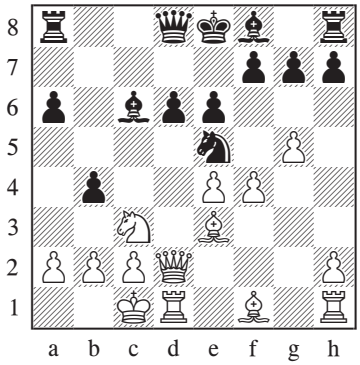


a) 12...b4 13.♘e2 d5 14.♘d4 ♗b7 15.exd5 ♗xd5 16.♗g2 ♗c5 (16...♕a5 17.♘b3 ♕xa2 18.f4 and Black's position collapses) And now we should vary from Sawadkuhi – Putzbach, Hamburg 2004:



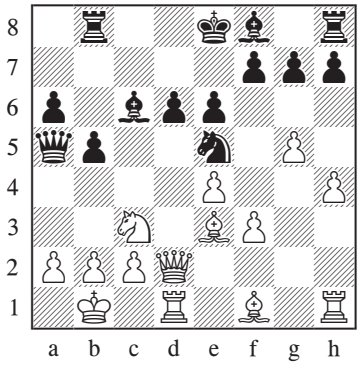
17.♘f5!N 0–0 18.♗xc5 ♘xc5 19.f4 (19.♘xg7?? ♕c7! would be bad news. 20.♘h5 ♗xa2 and the check on b3 is decisive.) 19...♕c7 (19...♗xg2? fails to 20.♘h6†!! winning on the spot) 20.♗xd5 exd5 21.♕d4 ♘e6 22.♕xb4 White has won a pawn. There are some obstacles to converting it, but these are luxury problems.

b) 12...♘e5 13.f4 b4 Melnikov – Lelekova, St Petersburg 2002. White could have crashed through with:



14.♘d5!N ♘d7 15.♕xb4! with the idea 15...exd5 16.exd5 ♗b5 17.c4+– and White is simply winning.

c) 12...♕a5 13.♔b1 ♖b8 14.h4 ♘e5 This was Wang Hao – Vescovi, Taiyuan 2006.

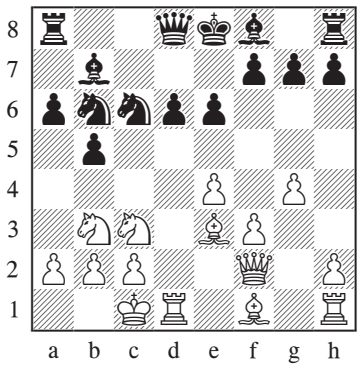


White could have punished Black with: 15.♕f2!N b4 (15...♗e7 16.♘e2 0–0 17.♘d4 ♗d7 18.h5± is a big attacking position) 16.♘e2 ♘c4 17.♘d4! ♘xe3 (17...♗b5 18.f4+– is even worse for Black) And now both 18.♕xe3± and 18.♘xc6!? ♘xd1 19.♕a7± give a big advantage. It depends if White wants an endgame or not.

11.♘b3 ♘8d7

White needs to play accurately to refute the following concept:

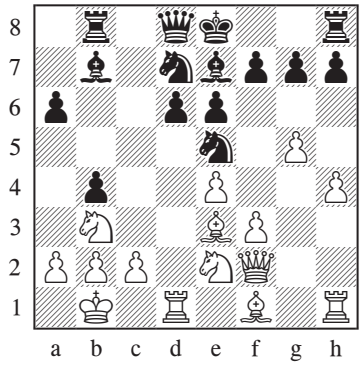
11...♘c6!? 12.♕f2!



12...♘a4!

Active counterplay is necessary.

12...♘d7? has for some reason been played a lot. It is obvious that Black has big problems, having lost a lot of time. 13.♔b1 ♗e7 (13...♘ce5 14.g5± ♖b8 15.h4 b4 16.♘e2 ♗e7 Bologan – Akopian, Stratton Mountain 1999.

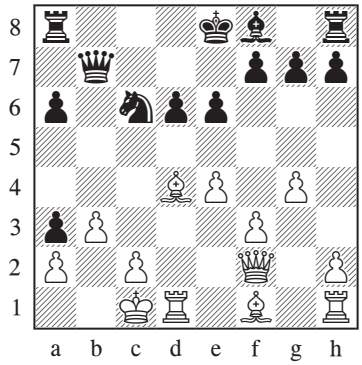


17.♘ed4!N would have secured White a big advantage.) 14.h4 0–0 15.g5 ♖c8 16.♖g1 ♘ce5 Grischuk – Grachev, Internet 2006. White is better in a lot of ways, but most convincing is: 17.f4!N ♘c4 (17...♖xc3 18.bxc3 ♘c4 19.f5!+–) 18.♗xc4 ♖xc4 19.f5! b4 20.♘d2! ♖xc3!? 21.bxc3 bxc3 22.♘b3±

13.♘xa4 bxa4 14.♘c5 a3! 15.b3! ♕c7!?N

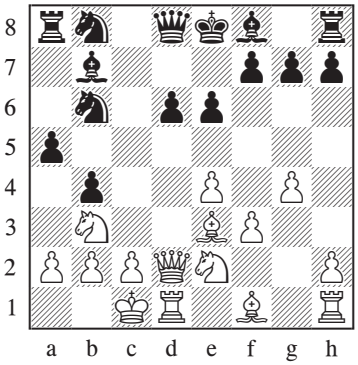
15...♗c8?! 16.♘a4!± G. Shahade – I. Novikov, New York 2002.

16.♘xb7 ♕xb7 17.♗d4!±



White is better, but the position is rather complex and not without pitfalls.

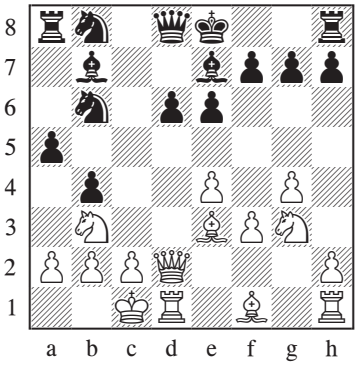
11...b4!? 12.♘e2 a5



This is very natural, but White is also better here.

13.♘c5!N

13.♘g3 ♗e7? happened in Rasik – Sikora, Ostrava 2014.



I mention this only because I would never want one of the readers of this book to overlook a move like 14.♕d4!N.

13...♘c4

The only challenge.

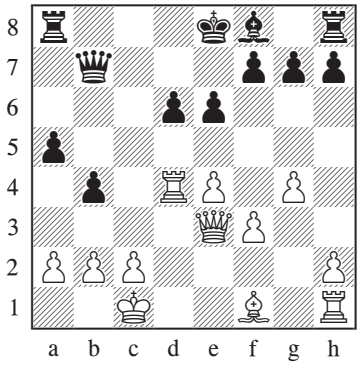
14.♘xb7 ♕c7 15.♕d4 ♘xe3 16.♕xe3 ♘c6!

This allows Black to fight.

16...♕xb7? 17.♘d4 ♘d7 18.♗b5 is flowing well for White. For example: 18...♖c8 19.♕d3 ♖c5 (19...♖c7 20.f4± followed by f4-f5) 20.♗a4! ♗e7 21.♔b1± Black lacks active prospects, so his position is deeply unpleasant.

17.♘d4 ♘xd4 18.♖xd4 ♕xb7

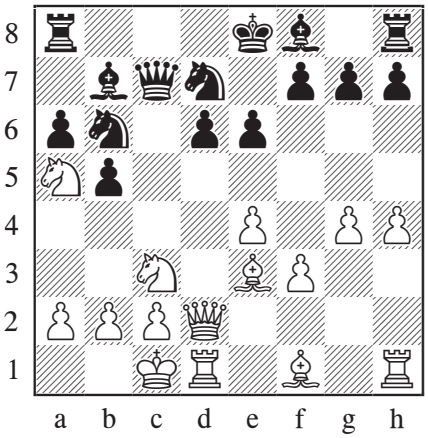
Black just needs to play ...♗e7 to be OK. So we need to find one move to be better:



19.♕g5!±

12.♘a5! ♕c7 13.h4

13.♗f4 has been very successful in practical play, but after the natural 13...♘e5! I have not found anything.



13...♘e5!?N

This is a significant improvement. Black plays more directly, keeping his position flexible.

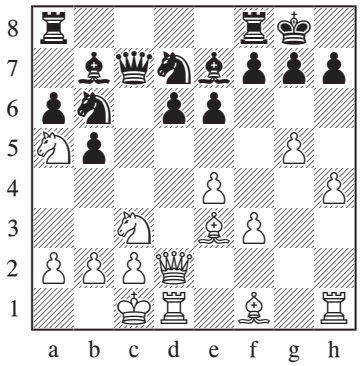
13...♗e7 14.g5 0–0

The most natural move, but there is no unnatural path to equality either.

14...♘e5? 15.♕d4!± with f3-f4 to come.

14...b4 15.♘e2 d5 (15...♘c4 16.♘xc4 ♕xc4 17.♔b1±) 16.♘xb7 ♕xb7 17.exd5 ♘xd5 18.♗d4 0–0 19.♗g2±

14...♖c8 15.♗xb5! axb5 16.♘xb5 ♕b8 17.♘xd6† ♗xd6 18.♕xd6 ♗a6 19.♖he1± Such endgames have been known to be better for White for at least 50 years.

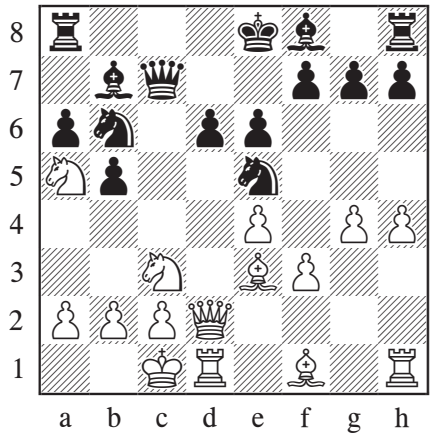


15.h5!N

An improvement over 15.g6?! as in Karakas – Morley, email 2013, when 15...♘e5! would have been decent for Black.

15...b4 16.♘e2 ♘e5 17.♘d4 ♘bc4 18.♘xc4 ♘xc4 19.♗xc4 ♕xc4 20.b3 ♕c7 21.g6

With a strong attack.



14.♕f2!?

14.g5?! is inaccurate. After 14...b4! Black has his full share of the chances.

The bolded move is my recommendation, but not the only promising continuation here:

14.♘xb7 ♘bc4 15.♕e2!?

15.♕f2 transposes. The idea of putting the queen on e2 is that after 15...♕xb7 16.♗d4, White is better and ready for f3-f4 in some lines. But on the other hand, from f2 the queen protects the bishop on d4. Both moves are good.

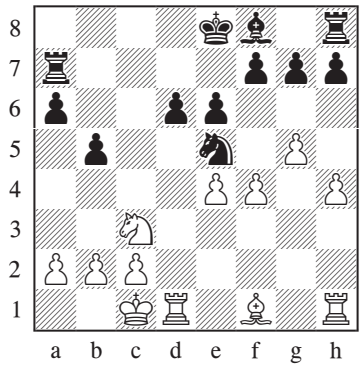
15...♘xe3

15...♕xb7 16.♗d4±

16.♕xe3 ♕xb7 17.g5 ♕a7

Necessary, as after 17...♗e7 18.f4± White is in full control.

18.♕xa7 ♖xa7 19.f4±



The endgame is better for White for sure, but not everyone dreams of a slightly better endgame when opening with 1.e4.

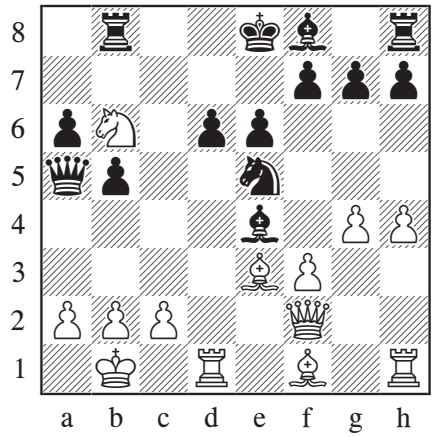
14...♘a4 15.♘xa4 ♕xa5 16.♘b6 ♖b8

16...♕xa2? 17.♘xa8 ♗xa8 18.♗d4± gives White full control of the position; and extra material.

17.♔b1 ♗xe4!

Black has to go for the sharpest continuation, even if it costs a lot of time.

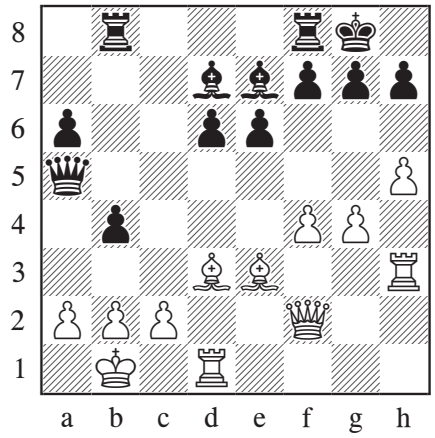
17...♗e7 18.♖g1± does not challenge White at all.



18.♗e2! ♗c6 19.h5 ♗e7 20.♖h3 0–0 21.f4 ♘d7

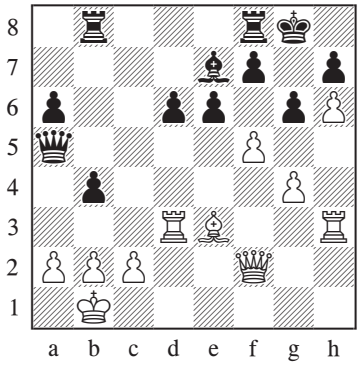
Or 21...♘c4 is comfortably met by: 22.♘xc4 bxc4 23.♗xc4±

22.♘xd7 ♗xd7 23.♗d3⩲ b4



24.g5!?

This is the most dangerous attacking move. But it is stronger to play: 24.f5! ♗b5 (24...exf5 25.gxf5 ♗f6 26.h6→ is hazardous for Black) 25.h6 ♗xd3 26.♖xd3 (26.hxg7?! ♗xc2† 27.♕xc2 ♖fc8 28.♕h2 ♕e5! allows Black to neutralize White's pressure) 26...g6



27.f6 ♗d8 28.♖xd6± White has a positional advantage. Black's future will be a fight for a draw that will last for a very long time.

24...♗b5?

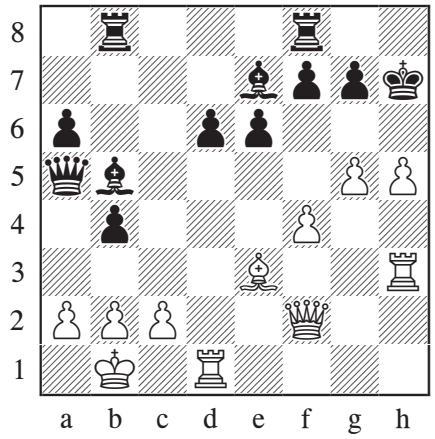
I show this move just for entertainment value.

Black might be able to hold the balance with 24...f5!∞. It seems the best White has is 25.♗a7 ♖b7 26.b3 d5 27.♗d4 ♗d6 28.h6 g6, but we have not found an advantage. 29.♗b2 ♕c5 30.♗d4 ♕a5 31.♗b2= This is why 24.g5 is not my main recommendation. If it were not for this line, it would be.

25.♗xh7†

Not a difficult move.

25...♔xh7



26.f5!

But this *is* difficult. White's attack is overwhelming. For example:

26...exf5?! 27.♕xf5† ♔g8 28.h6!

And mate is near.

8...♗b7 is not a great line. White is better in a number of ways, but if Black plays the novelty mentioned above, the game remains complicated. If you are unhappy with this, I suggest you take up the Exchange Slav or Ludo.

8...b4 and 9...♘bd7

In his prime, in the first decade of this century, World Champion Veselin Topalov worked very hard, especially on the Sicilian Defence, where he found many important novelties for both colours. One of these was for Black to push the b-pawn and then leave it hanging. We shall encounter this later on, with g2-g4 and ...h6 included, which is the main line of this chapter. These inclusions seem to be to Black's advantage, so it is not a surprise that White is fighting seriously for an advantage in this section.

GAME 32

Alexander Lastin – Alexander Petrushin

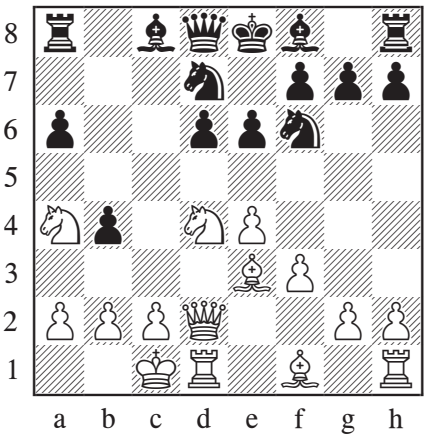
Sochi 2005

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 b5 8.♕d2 b4 9.♘a4 ♘bd7!?

As mentioned above, this variation was invented by Topalov.

10.0–0–0

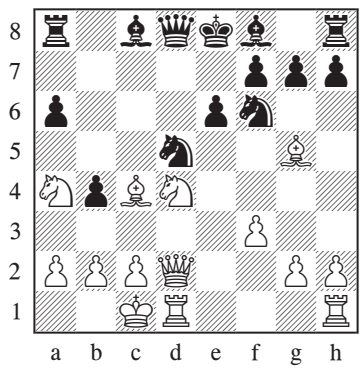
The most natural way to continue. Other lines exist, but after looking through all of them, we concluded this was best. We were rather surprised about this, as we originally looked at 9.♘d1!? earlier or 10.c4 here.



10...♕c7

Flexible play is frequently the right way for Black to play in the Sicilian.

10...d5?! 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♗c4! ♘7f6 13.♗g5±



This is all we need to know. White crashes through in the centre.

13...♕c7 14.♗xd5!

Time should not be wasted when exploiting a lead in development.

14...♘xd5 15.♖he1 ♗b7 16.♕e2!

Threatening to take on e6.

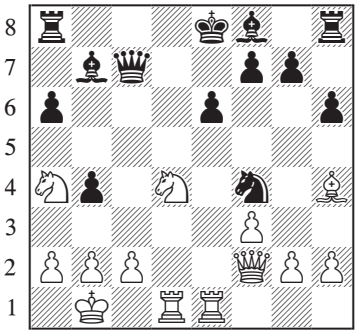
16...♕d6 17.♔b1!?

White is better after this move and in the

game he could have won a miniature. But it later turned out that White could react even more aggressively with: 17.f4! ♖c8 18.f5 ♗e7 19.♗xe7 ♕xe7 20.fxe6 0–0 21.g3± Potrata – Villar Ramos, email 2007.

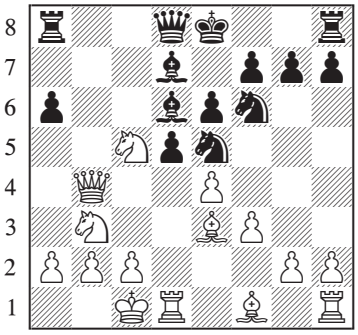
17...h6 18.♗h4 ♘f4 19.♕f2 ♕c7

In Leko – Topalov, San Luis 2005, White famously missed a winning combination:



20.♘b6!! ♕xb6 (20...♖b8 21.♘f5 ♗c6 22.♕d4+–) 21.♘xe6 ♕xf2 22.♘xg7#

10...♘e5? does not work. 11.♕xb4 ♗d7 12.♘b3 a5 (12...d5 13.♘ac5 ♗d6 was tried in A. Smirnov – Vikharev, Ishevsk 2005:

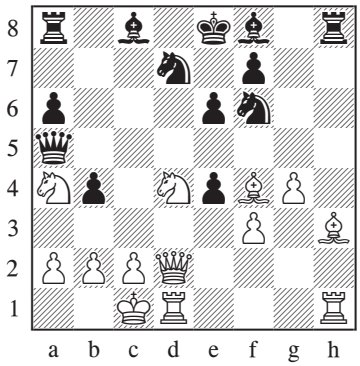


After 14.♕e1!?N White seems to be a pawn up for not very much.) 13.♕d4 ♖b8 14.♘c3 ♗e7 15.a4± White was simply a pawn up in Lafarga Santorroman – Mrkvicka, email 2006.

10...♕a5 will be covered in the next game.

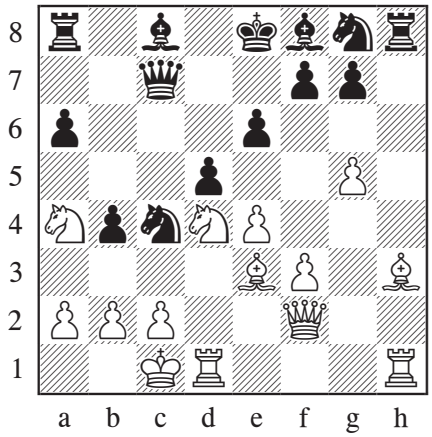
11.g4! h6 12.h4 d5 13.♗h3 ♘e5

13...g5 looks hopeless, but 14.hxg5 hxg5 15.♗xg5 dxe4 16.♗f4 ♕a5 still happened in Matsuura – Vescovi, Belo Horizonte 2010.



At this point White should have played 17.g5!N ♕xa4 18.gxf6 ♕xa2 19.♘b3, when he is completely winning. For example: 19...♕a4 20.♗xe6! ♖xh1 21.♗xf7† ♔xf7 22.♕d5† ♔xf6 23.♗g5† ♔g7 24.♖xh1 and mate follows.

14.g5 ♘c4 15.♕f2 hxg5 16.hxg5 ♘g8

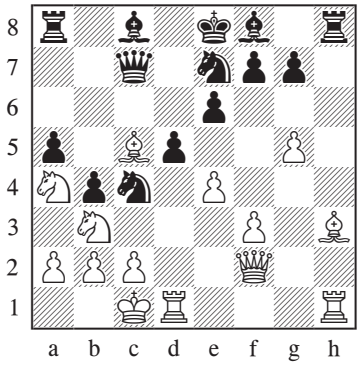


17.♘b3±

White has a big advantage.

17...e5?!

17...♘e7 18.♗c5± is also great for White. For example: 18...a5?!

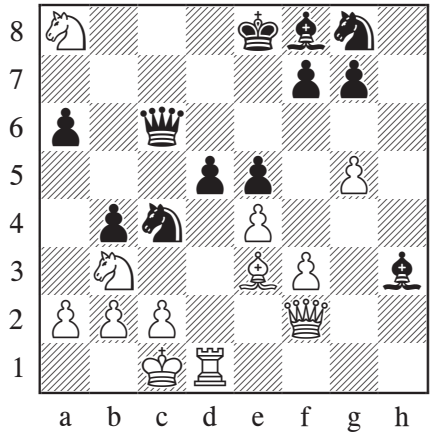


19.exd5! ♘xd5 20.♖xd5! exd5 21.♗d7† ♔xd7 22.♖xh8 ♕f4† 23.♔b1 ♗xc5 24.♘bxc5† ♔c6 25.♘b3 ♕e3 26.♘d4† ♔c7 27.♕xe3 ♘xe3 28.♖g8 g6 29.♖f8 White wins.

18.♘b6 ♖xh3

Or 18...♘xb6 19.♗xb6 ♕c4 20.♗d7† and White wins.

19.♘xa8 ♕c6 20.♖xh3 ♗xh3



21.♗c5 d4 22.♗xf8 ♔xf8 23.♘xd4! ♕xa8 24.♘f5 ♗xf5 25.♕c5†
1–0

We continue looking at this variation with the latest scream and some important original analysis in the annotations to move 14.

GAME 33

Hikaru Nakamura – Nils Grandelius

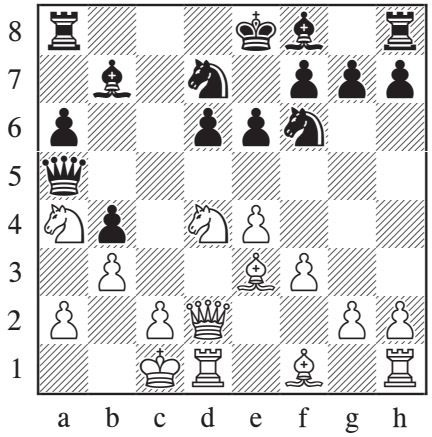
Gibraltar 2018

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 b5 8.♕d2 b4 9.♘a4 ♘bd7 10.0–0–0 ♕a5

This is the critical line. But right now, it does not look sufficient for equality for Black.

11.b3 ♗b7

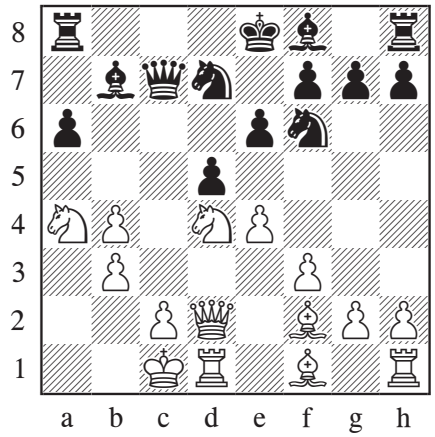
Move orders matter. 11...♘c5?? 12.♘c6 ♕c7 13.♗xc5 ♕xc6 14.♗xb4+– Warakomski – Gajek, Warsaw 2012.



12.a3!

For a while my choice was 12.♔b1!? ♘c5 13.a3 ♘xa4 14.axb4 ♕c7 15.bxa4 ♗e7 16.♖c1 0–0 17.c3, but after 17...♖fb8! I was unable to find an advantage. The model game continued: 18.a5 ♗c8 19.♗d3 e5 20.♘f5 ♗xf5 21.♗b6 ♕c6 22.exf5 d5! 23.♖he1 ♘d7 24.♗f2 d4 25.♗xd4 exd4 26.♖xe7 ♕a4 27.♗c2 dxc3 28.♗xa4 ♖xb4† 29.♔c2 cxd2 30.♔xd2 ♖xa4 31.♖xd7 ♖xa5 ½– ½ Kozenko – Seric, email 2016.

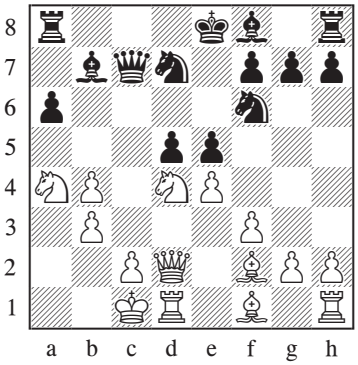
12...♕c7 13.axb4 d5 14.♗f2!



The modern treatment. This is really the critical moment for this line. And I do not think Black is in great shape.

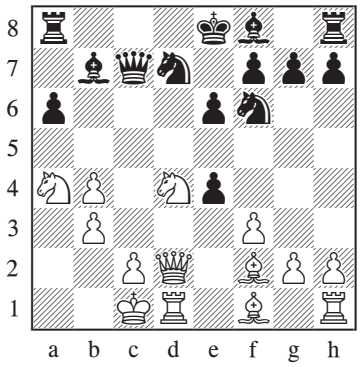
14...♗d6?

14...e5 as in Bok – Gordievsky, Wijk aan Zee 2018, allows White to crash through in the centre with great force:



15.exd5!N exd4 16.♕e1†!? (16.♖e1† ♔d8 17.♗xd4 ♘xd5 18.♗c4 ♗xb4 19.c3⩱ is also better for White if you go deeper, but it seems riskier) 16...♔d8 17.♗g3 ♗d6 18.♗xd6 ♕xd6 19.♖xd4± With three pawns for the piece, White is definitely for choice.

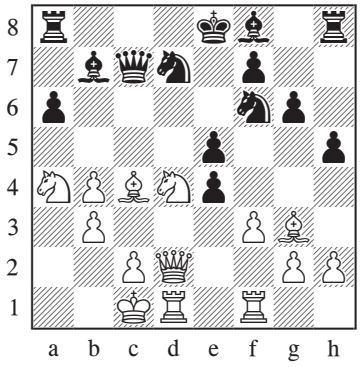
The most critical option is:
14...dxe4



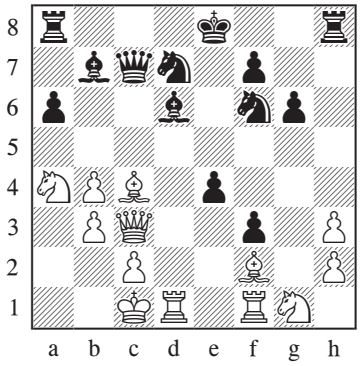
We spent a lot of time on this position and came up with a number of ideas for White.

15.♗c4!N

I also think Black is in danger after 15.♗g3, but he should be able to solve his problems with accurate play. 15...e5 (15...♕c8? 16.♗c4 ♗d5 17.♗xd5 ♘xd5 18.♘f5!± Yoo – Preotu, Calgary 2017) 16.♗c4 g6 17.♖hf1 17...h5 Donmez – CrimsonKnight, engine game 2015. (17...♗e7 18.♕h6! ♗d5 19.♗xd5 ♘xd5 20.♘f5! ♘xb4 21.♘g7† ♔d8 22.♖d2 ♔c8 23.fxe4± oops – Asterix_2006, engine game 2015)



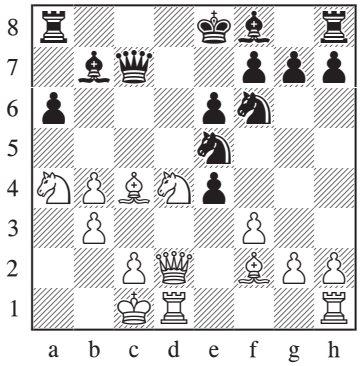
18.♕c3!?N The position is rather unclear, but in practical terms, I prefer White. My engine suggests 18...♗d6 19.♘e2 h4 20.♗f2 h3 as an active reply, but after 21.gxh3! exf3 22.♘g1 e4 White can blow Black's position wide open:



23.♖xd6!! ♕xd6 24.♘c5 ♘xc5 25.♗xc5 ♕f4† 26.♗e3 ♕f5 27.♗d4± White will win material. For example, 27...♔e7? 28.♘xf3! exf3 29.♗xf6† ♕xf6 30.♖e1†. But if you go back earlier in this line, improvements will be available for Black for sure.

Returning to the position after 15.♗c4!N, Black's best reply is:

15...♘e5!



16.♕c3!

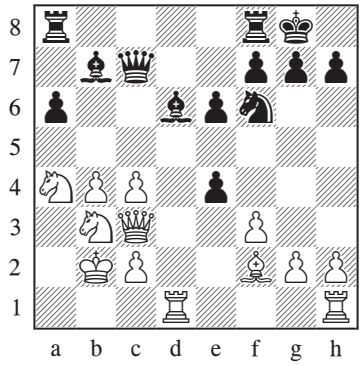
An important move.

16.♖he1 ♘xc4 17.bxc4 ♕xc4! gives Black a good fighting position. After 18.♘b6 ♕xb4! 19.♘xa8 ♗xa8 Black is not worse.

16...♘xc4 17.bxc4 ♗d6 18.♘b3

The engines are not impressed at first, but after looking deeper we found out that White is better.

18...0–0 19.♔b2



19...♖fc8

Other lines also lead to an advantage for White.

19...♘d7 20.♖xd6!? ♕xd6 21.♘bc5⩲ White has delicious compensation.

19...♗e5 20.♗d4 ♗xd4 21.♖xd4 ♗c6 22.♘ac5 a5 23.bxa5 ♖fb8 24.♔c1 exf3 25.gxf3±

19...exf3 20.gxf3 ♗xb4 21.♕xb4 ♗xf3 22.♗g3±

20.♖xd6!?

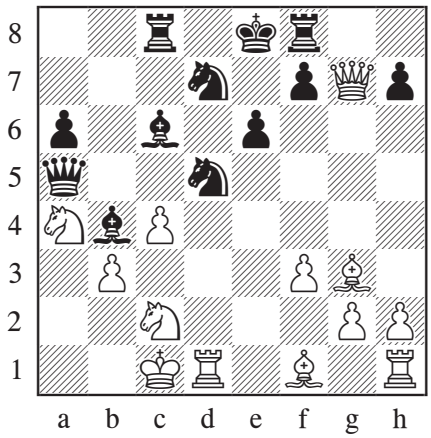
20.♘ac5 is also sensible.

20...♕xd6 21.♘b6 ♘d5 22.♘xc8 ♖xc8 23.♕d4 ♕c7 24.c5 exf3 25.gxf3 e5 26.♕c4 ♘b6 27.♕d3 ♘d5 28.♗e1±

15.exd5 ♘xd5

After 15...♗f4 16.♗e3 ♗xe3 17.♕xe3 ♘xd5 18.♕d2± White is a pawn up.

16.♗g3 ♖c8 17.c4 ♗xb4 18.♕g5 ♕a5 19.♕xg7 ♖f8 20.♘c2 ♗c6



21.♕a1 ♘c5

Black would also not hold after 21...♘7b6 22.♘xb6 ♕xa1† 23.♘xa1 ♘xb6 24.♘c2±, when the extra pawn counts.

22.♘xc5 ♕xa1† 23.♘xa1 ♗a3† 24.♔d2 ♗b4† 25.♔d3 ♘c3 26.♘xa6 ♖d8† 27.♔c2 ♖xd1 28.♘xb4 ♖xa1 29.♔xc3 ♔d7 30.♘c2 ♖b1 31.♘e1 ♖a8 32.♗d3 ♖c1† 33.♔d2 ♖aa1 34.♗e5 ♖d1† 35.♔e2 ♖ac1 36.♗b2 1–0

8...♘bd7!

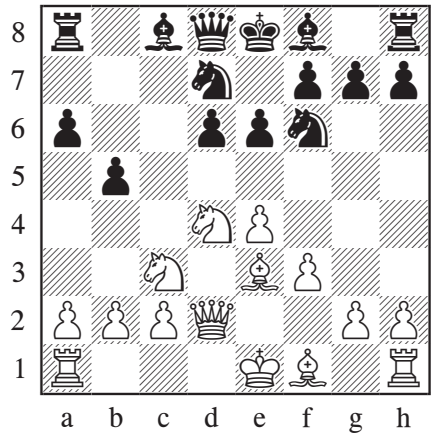
Experience has shown that the b8-knight is most frequently best when placed on d7. As Black has to do something, 8...♘bd7 is the most logical choice. This is where White will meet his greatest challenges. We will continue with 9.g4, when 9...h6 is the best move. Instead 9...♘b6 would be great if White castled queenside automatically, but 10.a4! puts Black under a lot of pressure.

GAME 34

Pavel Volosov – Justin Paul

email 2013

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 b5 8.♕d2 ♘bd7



9.g4!

It is important to know the right move orders to play this variation. At this point 9.0–0–0 gives Black a great game after 9...♘b6! when Black's play on the queenside is really easy. Would you like to know more? Then look up games such as Movsesian – Kasparov, Sarajevo 2000.

9...♘b6?!

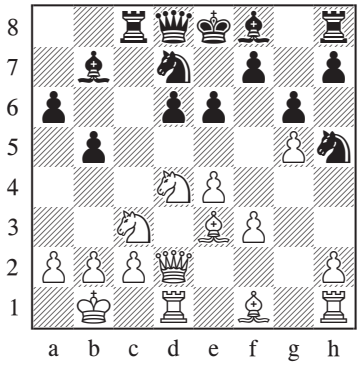
But as we shall see, here this move does not work.

9...♗b7?!

This is a misconception of how the position needs to be played. White is simply better.

10.g5 ♘h5 11.0–0–0 g6 12.♔b1 ♖c8

Vallejo Pons – Hracek, Ohrid 2009.



A not very surprising improvement was:

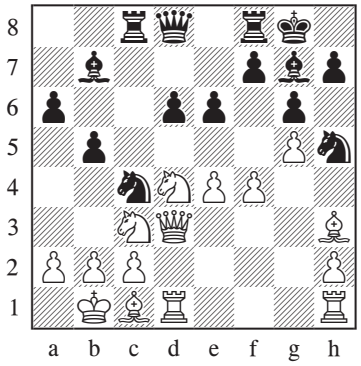
13.♗h3!N ♘e5 14.f4 ♘c4 15.♕d3 ♗g7

15...♘xe3? 16.♕xe3± ♗g7 17.f5! gxf5 (17...♗xd4±) 18.exf5! ♗xh1 19.fxe6+–

16.♗c1!±

And not: 16.f5?! gxf5 17.exf5 ♗xd4! 18.♗xd4 e5∞

16...0–0



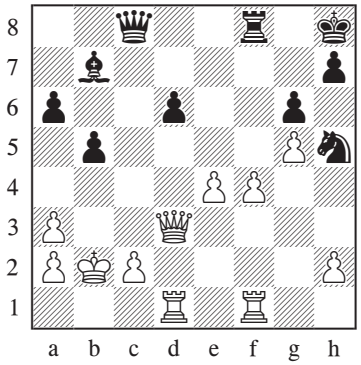
17.♘xe6!? fxe6 18.♗xe6† ♔h8 19.♗xc8 ♕xc8 20.♖hf1

If White is allowed to play ♘d5, he will dominate the position.

20...♘a3† 21.bxa3 ♗xc3

21...♕xc3 22.♕xc3 ♗xc3 23.♖xd6 ♗xe4 24.♗b2 ♗xb2 25.♔xb2 ♘xf4 26.♖xa6 gives an endgame only White can win; and there are good chances he will do just that. For example: 26...♘d3† 27.cxd3 ♖xf1 28.dxe4 ♖f2† 29.♔c3 ♖xh2 30.a4 bxa4 31.♖xa4 and things are becoming desperate for Black.

22.♗b2 ♗xb2 23.♔xb2±



The white king is exposed, but Black has no way to attack it. The bishop is on the wrong colour of squares, while the knight is stuck on the wrong side of the board. White's positional advantages are far more tangible.

10.a4! ♘c4

This is more or less forced.

10...b4? 11.♘a2 a5

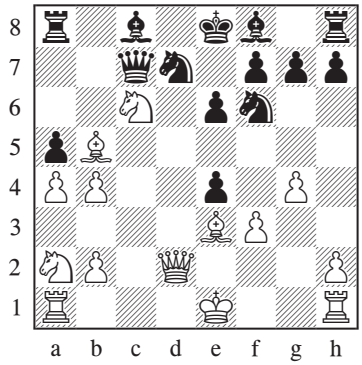
11...d5 12.g5 ♘fd7 13.a5± Forcen Esteban – Silva Lucena, Linares 2017

12.c3 d5 13.cxb4 dxe4 14.♗b5†! ♘bd7?

14...♗d7 15.♘c6! ♕c7 16.♗xb6 ♕xb6 17.bxa5 ♕b7 18.♖c1 exf3 19.0–0±

15.♘c6 ♕c7

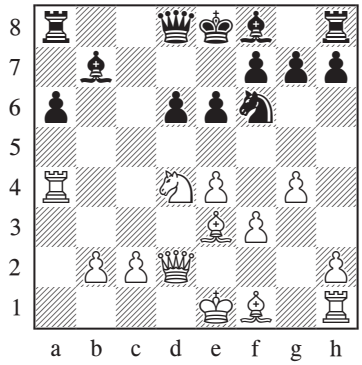
In Barbosa – Aliaga Fernandez, Praia da Pipa 2014, White could have played:



16.♗f4!N+–

A small improvement in an already winning position.

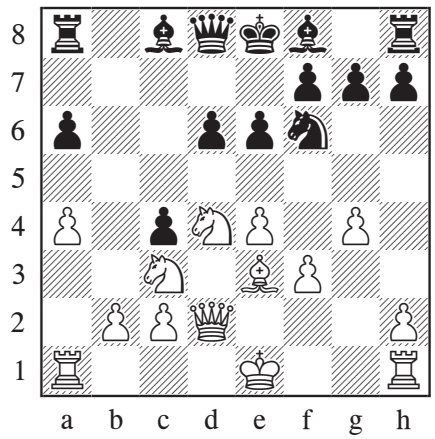
10...bxa4?! is also poor. 11.♘xa4 ♘xa4 12.♖xa4 ♗b7



13.♘b3!± This simple move shows who is in charge on the queenside. 13...h6 (13...♗e7?! 14.♘a5 is to White's advantage of course) 14.♘a5 ♗c8 15.♗e2 ♗d7 16.♖a2 ♗e7 Dunlop – Kleiser, email 2012. After the natural

17.0–0N 0–0 18.b4±, White is ready for c2-c3, ♖fa1 and ♘b3, winning a pawn. This is not his only plan, but certainly Black has something to worry about.

11.♗xc4 bxc4



12.g5!

The positional 12.a5 has been played many times but the attacking plan is stronger.

In *The Sicilian Scheveningen: Move by Move*, Lorin D'Costa offers recommendations against 12.0–0 followed by g4-g5 and f2-f4, as well as 12.g5 followed by h2-h4. However, our analysis indicates that the combination of 12.g5 and 13.f4, which the English IM does not consider, is strongest.

12...♘d7 13.f4

This position is strategically complex, but also a lot better for White if you go deep enough.

13...♕c7

13...♘c5 14.f5 ♗b7 transposes to 13...♗b7 below.

After 13...♕a5 14.0–0 ♗b7 I like the following idea: 15.♖ab1!? ♖c8 16.♕g2!± The queen generally belongs here. 16...♘c5 (16...g6 17.♕h3 ♗g7 18.f5±) 17.f5 e5 18.♘de2± Kuosa – Karg, email 2009.

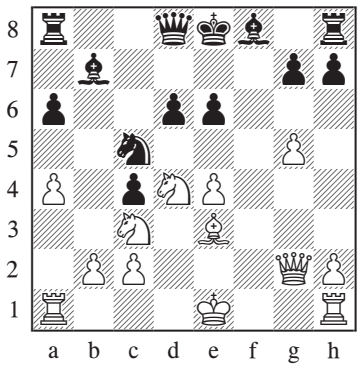
13...♗b7 14.f5

This is very sharp, but at the same time very promising for White.

14...♘c5

14...e5 15.♘de2 (15.♘f3!? ♕a5 16.0–0±) 15...h6 16.gxh6 gxh6 17.♘g3 ♘f6 18.a5! h5 19.♗g5 h4 20.♘f1 ♖g8 21.♗xf6 ♕xf6 22.♘e3 ♗h6 23.0–0–0±

15.fxe6 fxe6 16.♕g2



White has an overwhelming advantage; Black will rapidly regret putting the bishop on b7. I think the following lines are rather illustrative of this variation, so the extra effort to play through them is worth the time investment.

16...♕d7

16...g6 17.0–0–0 ♕e7 18.♖hf1 ♗g7 19.♕g4 ♖f8 20.♖xf8† ♔xf8 21.♘f3! Black is being slaughtered here. 21...♗xc3 (21...♔g8 22.♗xc5 dxc5 23.♘d2±) 22.♗xc5 ♗xb2† 23.♔xb2 dxc5 24.♘e5 White is just winning.

16...♘xe4 17.♘xe4 ♕a5† 18.♔e2! ♕d5 19.♘xe6! ♕xe6 20.♘f6† gxf6 21.♕xb7 ♖d8 22.♖ae1 ♖d7 23.♕c6 White has a winning attack.

17.♖f1 0–0–0 18.0–0–0 ♘xa4 19.♘xa4 ♕xa4 20.♔b1 ♖e8

20...♕d7 21.g6!±

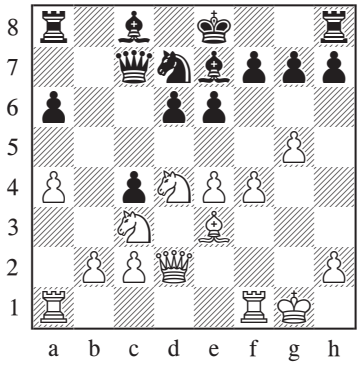
21.♖f7 ♖e7 22.♖xe7 ♗xe7 23.♘xe6 c3 24.♖d4

♕d7 25.♘xg7

1–0 Brzezinski – Hueser, email 2015.

14.0–0 ♗b7

The critical move is 14...♗e7!? as played in Zundel – Shapiro, email 2007. We spent a lot of energy finding out that the strongest way to play the position is to fight hard for the light squares. Those same light squares you might have thought we had given up together with our light-squared bishop.



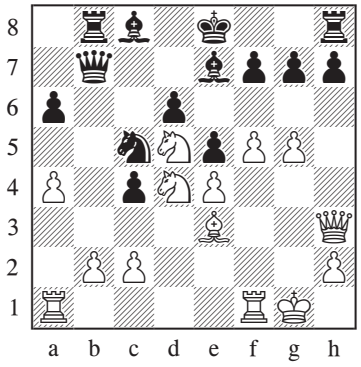
15.♕g2!?N ♖b8

15...♗b7 16.♖ad1± is also a plausible line, but because it is less forcing, I will just claim that White is better and leave it at that.

16.♕h3! ♘c5

Not 16...0–0? due to 17.f5 ♔h8 18.♕h5 with ♖f4-h4 coming, with a winning attack.

17.f5 e5 18.♘d5 ♕b7



19.♖ad1!!± exd4

19...♘xe4 20.♘e6!! fxe6 21.fxe6 ♖f8 22.♖xf8† ♗xf8 23.♖f1 ♗e7 24.♕xh7 ♗xe6 25.♘xe7+–

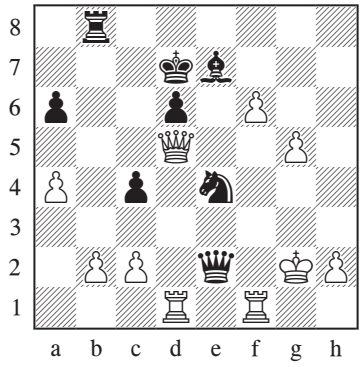
20.♗xd4 ♘xe4

This leads to a very long forced variation.

21.♗xg7 ♖g8 22.♕xh7 ♕a7† 23.♔g2 ♖xg7 24.♕xg7 ♗b7 25.♕g8† ♔d7

25...♗f8 26.g6! ♗xd5 27.♖xd5 ♕e7 28.♖d4 ♔d7 29.g7 ♗xg7 30.♕xg7 ♘f6 31.♔h1+–

26.♕xf7 ♗xd5 27.♕xd5 ♕e3 28.f6 ♕e2†



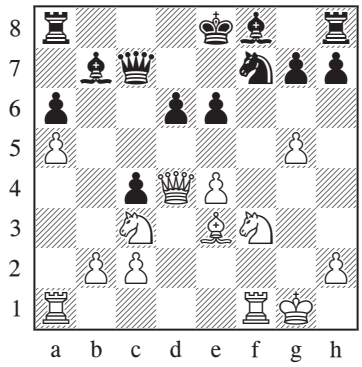
29.♔g1!

The text move sidesteps a lovely drawing trick: 29.♔h1 ♕xc2!! 30.fxe7 ♘g3†! 31.♔g1 ♘e2†=

29...♗d8 30.♕f5† ♔c6 31.♔h1±

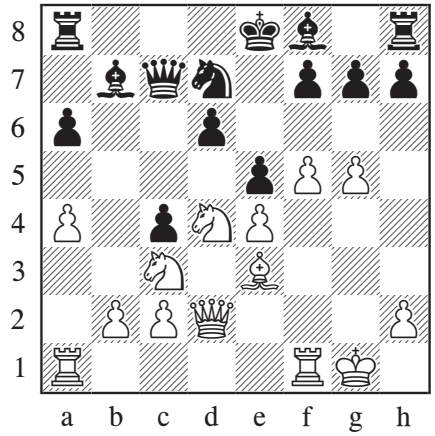
Followed by ♕f3 with good winning chances for White.

14...♕b7N 15.f5 ♘e5 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.♘f3! ♘f7 18.♕d4 ♕c7 19.a5 ♗b7



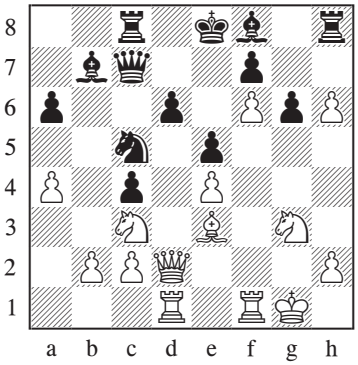
20.♖a4!? ♖c8 21.♖b4±

15.f5 e5

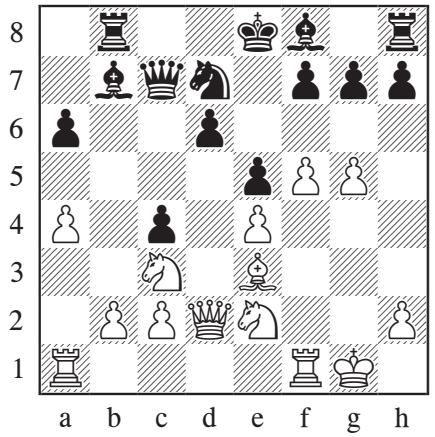


16.♘de2 ♖b8

16...h6 is met strongly with 17.f6!. Black has to play: 17...g6 (17...hxg5 fails to 18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.♕xd5 ♘b6 20.fxg7 ♗xg7 21.♕a5 ♖b8 22.♕xa6+–) 18.gxh6 ♘c5 19.♘g3 ♖b8 20.♖ad1 ♖c8 Sherwood – Benassi, email 2012.



At this point I must confess to being somewhat confused about selecting the strongest line. I have come around to 21.♔g2!N being the best move. This idea is attractive because Black wants to play ...♕d7-g4 in many lines and we need to be ready with h2-h3 immediately to knock the queen back. 21...♕d7 22.a5 ♘a4 23.♖b1!± is one line. This is all very difficult to evaluate correctly, but clearly Black has difficulties getting his pieces into the game.



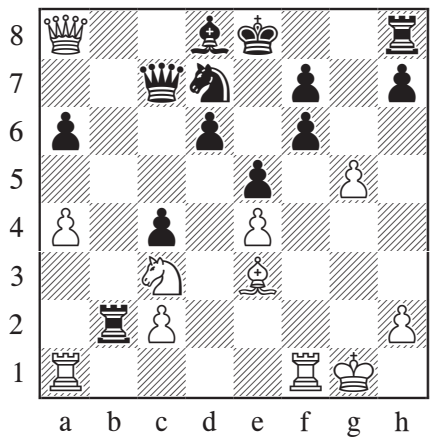
17.♘d5!?

17.♘g3!N transposes to 16...h6 above after 17...h6 18.f6! g6 19.gxh6 ♘c5.

17...♗xd5 18.♕xd5 ♗e7?!

Black's best chance is: 18...h6! 19.g6 ♘f6 20.gxf7† ♕xf7 21.♕c6† ♕d7 22.♕xa6 ♘xe4 23.♘c3 ♘xc3 24.bxc3± The a-pawn secures White an edge. It's hard to say how serious that edge is without some practical tests. But I will take the extra pawn without hesitation.

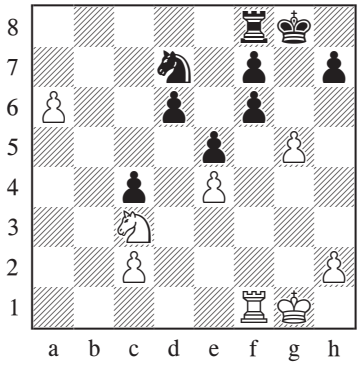
19.♘c3! ♖xb2 20.f6 gxf6 21.♕a8†! ♗d8



22.♖ab1! ♕a5

Black's position cannot be saved. For example, 22...♕b8 23.♕xa6 0–0 24.♗a7 ♕xa7†

25.♕xa7 ♗b6† 26.♕xb6 ♖xb6 27.♖xb6 ♘xb6 28.a5 ♘d7 29.a6 and the endgame more or less wins itself.



One finish could be 29...♖a8 30.♖a1 fxg5 31.a7 ♘b6 32.♖b1.

23.♘d5 ♖xb1 24.♖xb1 ♕xa4 25.gxf6+– 0–0 26.♗h6 ♕xc2 27.♖e1 ♕c3 28.♖e3 ♕xe3† 29.♘xe3 ♗b6 30.♕c6 ♗xe3† 31.♗xe3 1–0

9...h6

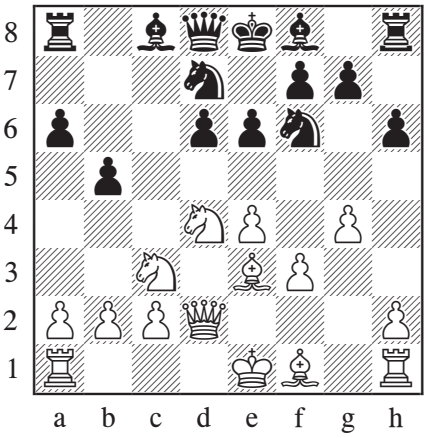
Finally, we have reached the apex of the Najdorf-Scheveningen. Against 9...h6 there is no provable path to an advantage, at least as far as our team has been able to work out. We have many ideas that we will share with you below, and there are pitfalls for Black all over. But no guaranteed advantage for White. The correspondence players might object to this, but our problem is simple: we just cannot find an advantage. The tournament player should not be distressed, as we have many ideas about how to play and it will be uncomfortable for Black everywhere. We have complex lines with chances for both sides, where it is easier to play White, and we have lines where White gets a slight pull, but reasonable defence will hold. I suggest you choose on the day which line suits your mood and the tournament situation.

GAME 35

Blazo Kalezic – Nenad Karisik

Bijelo Polje 2016

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 b5 8.♕d2 ♘bd7 9.g4! h6

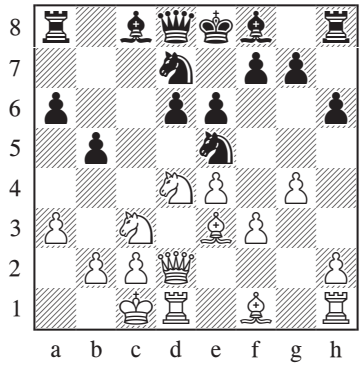


10.a3!?

This is a sharp approach to fighting for an advantage. We will cover both 10.♖g1 and 10.0–0–0 below.

10...♗b7

A very instructive example is the following: 10...♘e5?! 11.0–0–0 ♘fd7 Dominguez Perez – Ponomariov, Moscow 2009. The following set-up seems both very practical and very strong.

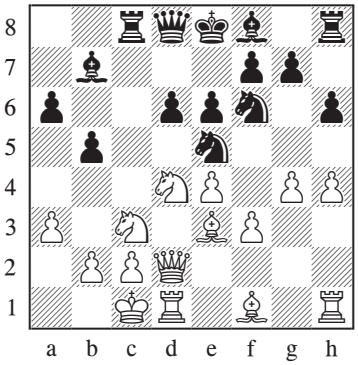


12.♕e1!N ♘b6 (12...♗b7 13.h4 ♘b6 14.♔b1 ♖c8 15.♗c1 ♗e7 16.♖h3!±) 13.h4 ♘bc4 14.♗g1 ♗b7 15.♗e2 ♖c8 16.f4 ♘d7 17.♖h3± Black's position is not just unpleasant, it is also very hard to play.

11.0–0–0 ♖c8

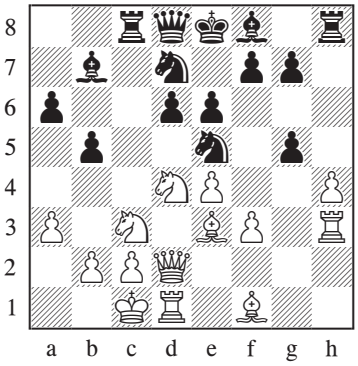
Weaker is:

11...♘e5?! 12.h4 ♖c8



13.♖g1

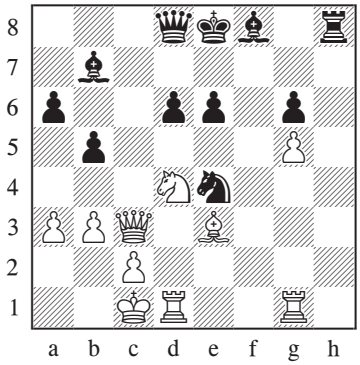
Also interesting was 13.♖h3!? ♘fd7 14.♕e1!N. I am in love with this set-up. (It's an improvement over 14.g5 hxg5 as in Hirneise – Al Sayed, Doha 2016, though even here White could have been better:



15.♗xg5!N ♕b6 16.h5 ♘c4 17.♗xc4 ♖xc4 18.♗e3 ♕c7 19.♘de2±) 14...♘c4 15.♗g1 ♘de5 16.♗e2±

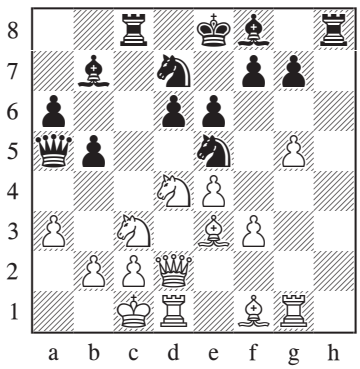
13...♕a5

13...♘fd7 is in trouble against direct play: 14.g5 hxg5 15.hxg5 g6 16.f4 ♘c4 17.♗xc4 ♖xc4 18.f5!± ♘c5 19.fxe6 fxe6 (19...♘xe6 does not work either: 20.♘xe6 fxe6 21.♗d4 ♖h5 22.♗e5 ♖c6 23.♗f6 ♕a5 24.♔b1 ♖h3 25.♖h1 ♖xh1 26.♖xh1 ♕c7 27.♖h8 ♕f7 28.e5 ♔d7 29.♕h2 ♔e8 30.♖h7 1–0 Bologan – Dobrov, Internet 2004.) 20.b3 ♖xc3 21.♕xc3 ♘xe4



22.♕d3 ♕c8 The best try. (22...♕e7 as in Guliyev – Guilleux, Dieppe 2012, loses to 23.♖g4!N d5 24.♘xb5! axb5 25.♖xe4+–; 22...♕d7 loses to 23.♖g4!N d5 24.♘xb5 ♕xb5 25.♕d4! ♖h7 26.♖xe4+–) 23.♘e2 e5 24.♘g3 ♖h4 Resourceful defence, but after 25.♖h1! ♕g4 26.♖xh4 ♕xh4 27.♘xe4 ♗xe4 28.♕c3± White remained in control in Walczak – Svidersky, email 2013.

14.g5 hxg5 15.hxg5 ♘fd7



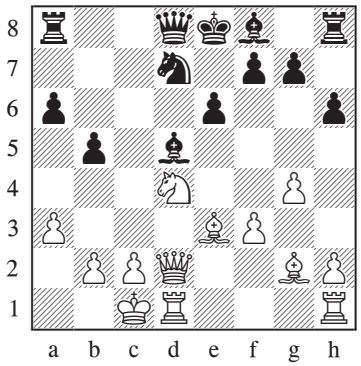
16.g6! ♘xg6

16...♖xc3 17.♕xc3 ♕xc3 18.gxf7†±

17.♘xe6 fxe6 18.♖xg6 ♔f7 19.♖g3+–

White had a winning attack in Norrelykke – Sielaff, email 2010.

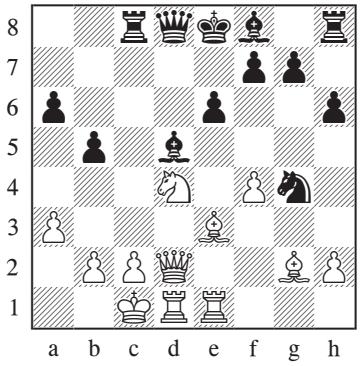
11...d5?! is premature, as 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 ♗xd5 14.♗g2± looks great for White.



Below are a few examples:

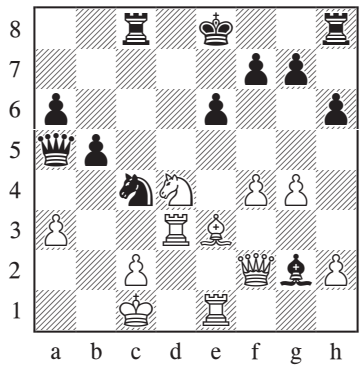
a) 14...♘e5 15.♕e2! ♘c4 16.♘f5! ♕c8 17.♗d4 f6 18.f4 ♗xg2 19.♕xg2+– Velmarin – Quirk, email 2012. 19...exf5 20.gxf5! is an important point.

b) 14...♘f6 15.f4 ♘xg4?! (15...♖c8 16.♖he1 ♗e7 17.f5±) 16.♖he1± This is bad for Black. For example: 16...♖c8



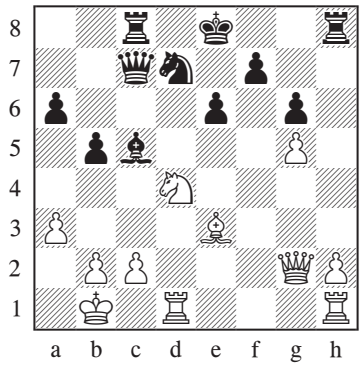
17.♘xe6!! fxe6 18.♗b6 ♕xb6 19.♕xd5 ♗e7 20.♕d7† ♔f7 21.♖xe6 ♖xc2† 22.♔b1 ♕d8 23.♖xe7† ♕xe7 24.♕f5† ♘f6 25.♗d5† ♔f8 26.♕xc2+–

c) 14...♖c8 15.♖he1! ♘e5 16.f4! ♘c4 17.♕f2 ♗xa3!? 18.bxa3 ♕a5 19.♖d3 ♗xg2



20.♘f5! 0–0 21.♘e7† ♔h7 22.♘xc8 ♖xc8 23.♗d2! ♘xd2 24.♕xd2 ♕xd2† 25.♔xd2±

d) 14...♕c7 15.f4 ♗xg2 16.♕xg2 ♖c8 17.♔b1± ♗c5 18.g5 hxg5 19.fxg5 g6 Cilloniz Razzeto – Salcedo Mederos, email 2011.

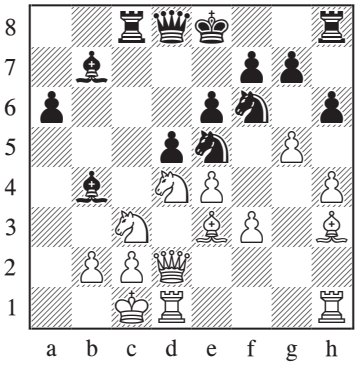


20.h4!N is a strong improvement. The key point is 20...e5 21.♕e4 ♗b6 22.h5!! ♘c5 23.♕d5 exd4 24.♗xd4 ♖xh5 25.♖xh5 gxh5 26.g6! and Black's position collapses.

12.♔b1

After 12.h4 d5 (12...♘b6 13.♖h3!?±) there are a few options for White to ponder:

a) 13.♗h3 allows Black to equalize with: 13...b4! 14.axb4 ♗xb4 15.g5 ♘e5!



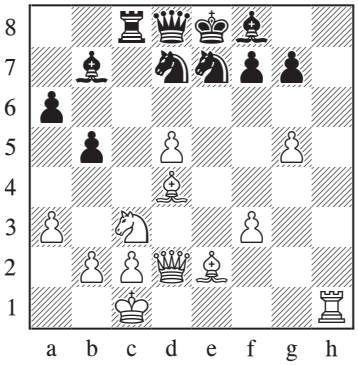
There is more than one move order, but this is the key point. 16.gxf6 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♘c4 18.fxg7 ♖g8 19.♕e1 ♕a5 A draw was agreed in Eldridge – Petrov, email 2011, due to: 20.♔b1 ♘a3† 21.♔b2 ♘c4†=

b) 13.♗e2!?

This is interesting, even if not critical.

13...b4

13...e5 14.g5 exd4 15.♗xd4 hxg5 16.hxg5 ♖xh1 17.♖xh1 ♘g8 18.exd5 ♘e7 Morrow – Figlio, email 2016.



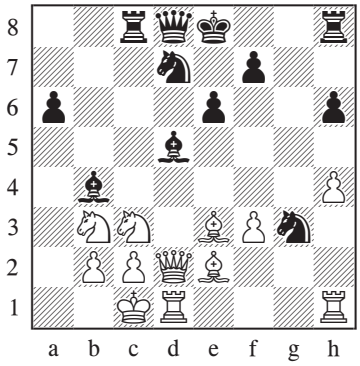
19.f4!?N ♘b6 20.♖e1∞

14.axb4 ♗xb4 15.g5 ♘h5

15...dxe4 16.gxf6 ♘xf6 17.♘b3 ♕e7 18.f4 ♘d5 19.♕d4 ♗xc3 20.bxc3 ♘xc3 21.♕xg7 ♖f8 22.♔d2 ♕b4 23.♕d4 ♕xd4† 24.♘xd4 ♘xd1 25.♖xd1± Gysi – Koskela, email 2007.

16.gxh6 gxh6 17.exd5 ♗xd5 18.♘b3 ♘g3

Kvassay – Beykirch, email 2012.



19.♗d4!N ♖g8 20.♖hg1 ♘xe2† 21.♕xe2 ♖xg1 22.♖xg1 ♗xb3 23.cxb3 ♕a5 24.♔b1

This looks more dangerous for Black than for White.

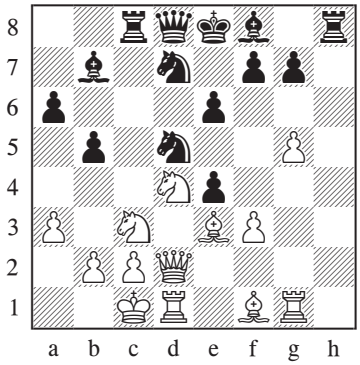
c) 13.♖g1!?

This appears to be the most dangerous.

13...dxe4

13...e5?! does not work here. 14.g5! exd4 15.♗xd4 hxg5 16.hxg5 ♘h5 17.♗h3± gave White a raging attack in Campian – Grabner, email 2014.

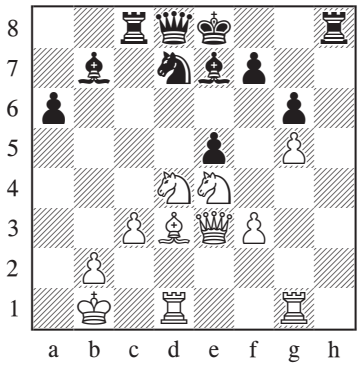
14.g5 hxg5 15.hxg5 ♘d5



16.♘xd5

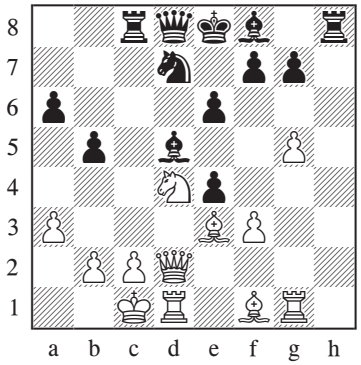
Black is holding on after 16.♘xe4 g6 17.♔b1. We analysed this in immense depth, but I shall just give a summary of the key line: 17...b4! 18.axb4 ♗xb4 19.c3 ♘xe3 20.♕xe3 ♗e7 21.♗d3 (21.♘xe6 fxe6 22.♘d6† ♗xd6 23.♖xd6 looks dangerous, but Black can save the game with 23...e5!

and all White has is a draw after something like: 24.♗d3 ♔e7 25.♖xg6 ♗d5 26.♖d1 ♗f7 27.♗f5 ♗xg6 28.♖xd7† ♕xd7 29.♕xe5† ♔d8 30.♕xh8† ♔c7 31.♕e5† ♔b6 32.♗xg6 ♕d1† 33.♔a2 ♕a4†=) 21...♕b6 (21...e5 Steinke – Claridge, email 2013.



22.♘c2!?N ♔f8 23.♕e2 would be a decent way to play for an advantage.) 22.♖h1 ♖xh1 23.♖xh1 ♗xe4 24.♖h8† ♘f8= White has no advantage here, as proven in a number of correspondence games.

16...♗xd5



17.g6!

17.fxe4 ♗xe4 18.♗g2 ♘c5= Malashenkov – Konstantinov, email 2012.

17...f5

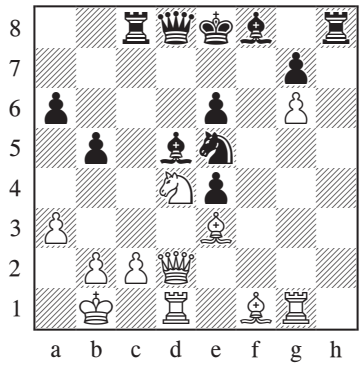
17...f6!? could be the right path for Black, but it is wildly unclear.

18.fxe4! fxe4?

18...♗xe4 19.♘xe6 ♗xc2 20.♘xd8 ♗e4† 21.♕c3 ♖xc3† 22.bxc3 ♗xa3† 23.♔d2±

19.♔b1 ♘e5

Morozevich – Nakamura, Thessaloniki 2013.



20.a4!!N

This would have made Black's structure collapse.

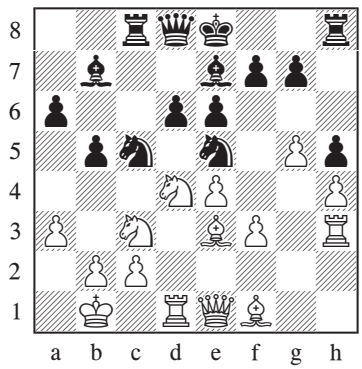
20...♕c7

20...bxa4 21.♗xa6+–

21.axb5 ♘f3 22.♘xf3 ♗b4 23.♕c1 exf3 24.♖xd5 exd5 25.b6+–

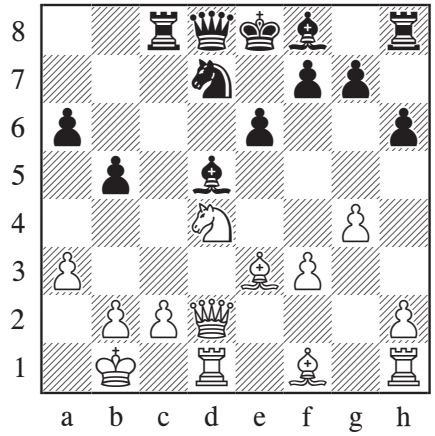
12...d5!

12...♘e5 13.♕e1 gives us our standard set-up. 13...♘fd7 (13...d5N 14.♗f4! ♗d6 [14...♘g6 15.♗g3±] 15.♘cxb5! axb5 16.♗xb5†± ♘fd7?! 17.exd5 ♗xd5 18.♘f5!+–) 14.h4 ♗e7 15.♖h3 ♘c5 16.g5 h5 Gueci – Noble, email 2012.



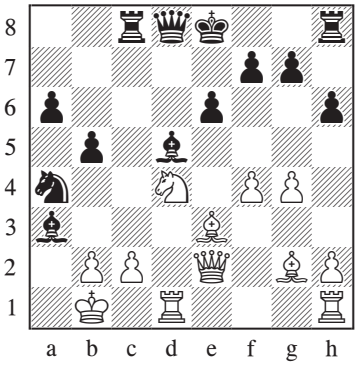
17.f4!N ♘g4 18.♗g1±

13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5



15.♗e2

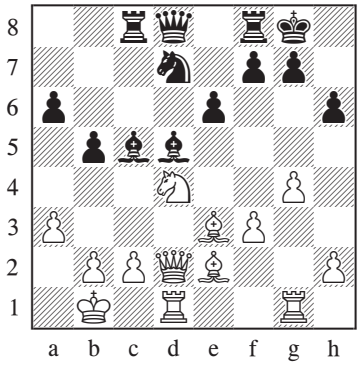
Very sharp and very important to know well in order to play it, is the following try: 15.♗g2!?N ♘b6 16.♕e2! ♗c5 (16...♘a4 17.f4 ♗xa3 looks strong, but White has:



18.♘xe6!! fxe6 19.♗xd5 ♕e7 20.♖d3!±) 17.f4 0–0 18.g5 hxg5 (18...h5 19.♖he1±) 19.fxg5∞

15...♗c5 16.h4

Also interesting was 16.♖hg1 0–0, which was the move order in Ponomariov – Wojtaszek, below.



17.g5!?N looks promising. 17...g6!? (17...h5 18.g6 f5 19.c3±) 18.gxh6 ♔h7 19.f4 ♘f6 20.♗d3 (20.f5 exf5 21.♘xf5 ♗e4!=) 20...♘e4 21.♕e1 ♕b6 22.c3±

16...g6?

A better choice would have been:

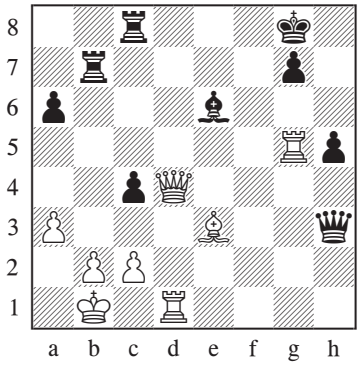
16...0–0!?∞

Let's follow one example from this wild position:

17.♖hg1 ♘e5 18.f4 ♘c4 19.♗xc4 bxc4 20.g5 h5 21.g6 ♕xh4

21...♕f6!?∞ looks preferable.

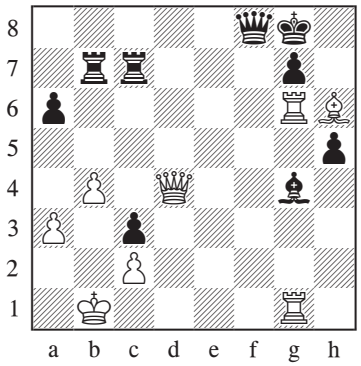
22.f5± ♕h3 23.gxf7† ♖xf7 24.fxe6 ♖b7 25.♖g5 ♗xd4 26.♕xd4 ♗xe6



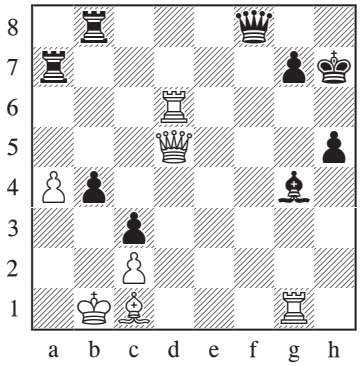
27.♖dg1?!

27.♕e5! followed by ♗d4 won rather quickly. Note also the threat to the h5-pawn.

27...♖cc7 28.♖5g3?
28.♗d2! was stronger.
28...♕f5 29.♗h6 ♕f8 30.♖g6 c3?
30...♗g4=
31.b4 ♗g4

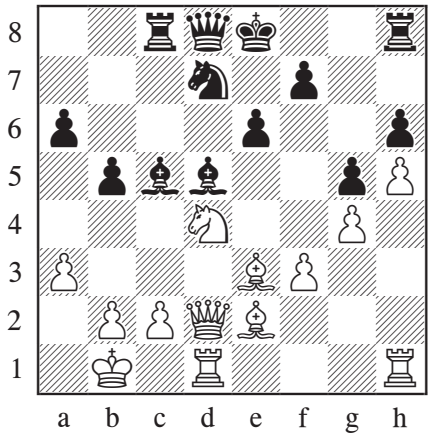


32.♗f4?∞
32.♕d5† ♔h8 33.♖6xg4 hxg4 34.♗c1 ♖f7 35.♖h1† ♔g8 36.♕e4 would have given White excellent winning chances.
32...♖f7 33.♗c1? a5!
The game has turned sour.
34.♖d6 ♖b8 35.♕d5 ♔h7 36.♔a1 axb4 37.a4 ♖a7 38.♔b1



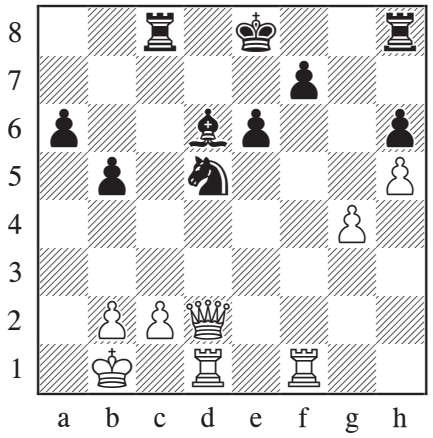
38...b3 39.cxb3 ♖xb3† 40.♔c2 ♖b8 41.♗e3 ♗f5† 42.♔xc3 ♖c7† 43.♗c5 ♖bc8
0–1 Ponomariov – Wojtaszek, Khanty-Mansiysk 2017.

17.h5 g5



18.♖hf1!?±
18.♖he1!N is even stronger.

18...♕e7?! 19.f4+– gxf4 20.♗xf4 ♗xa3 21.♘f5 ♕b4 22.♘d6† ♕xd6 23.♗xd6 ♗xd6 24.♗f3 ♘f6 25.♗xd5 ♘xd5



26.g5 hxg5 27.♕xg5
1–0

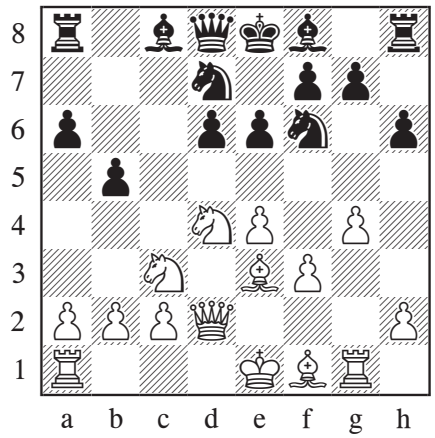
10.♖g1!?

This is not a main line, but sometimes it is good to have an extra option up your sleeve.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 b5 8.♕d2 ♘bd7 9.g4! h6

I want to throw in an additional idea, which is not mainstream, but can be used successfully as a surprise weapon.

10.♖g1!?

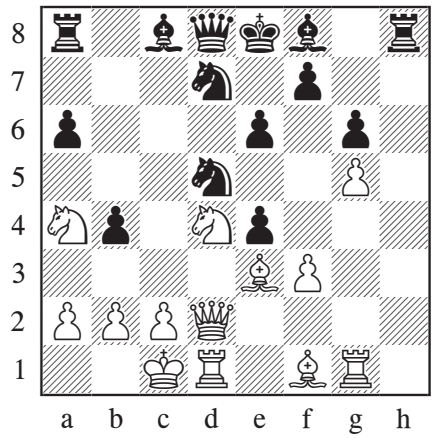


10...b4 11.♘a4 d5

11...♘e5 is a sensible option. After 12.h4 ♗d7 13.g5 hxg5 14.hxg5 ♘xe4 15.fxe4 ♗xa4 16.0–0–0 g6 17.♕xb4 ♗d7∞ both sides have their chances.

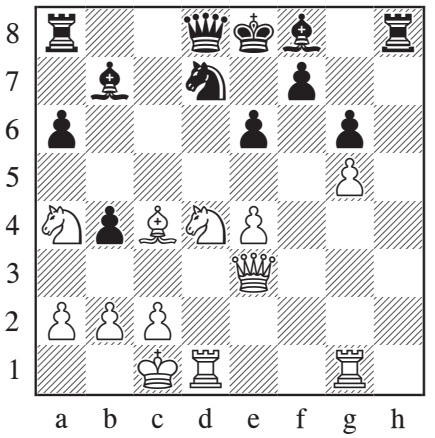
12.h4 dxe4 13.g5 hxg5 14.hxg5 ♘d5 15.0–0–0 g6

So far we have followed Pena Duarte – Fernandez, Bogota 2014.



The critical line is impossible for someone to play with Black without great preparation – AKA, having read this book...

16.♗c4!N ♗b7 17.fxe4 ♘xe3 18.♕xe3



At this point we will analyse two lines in detail.

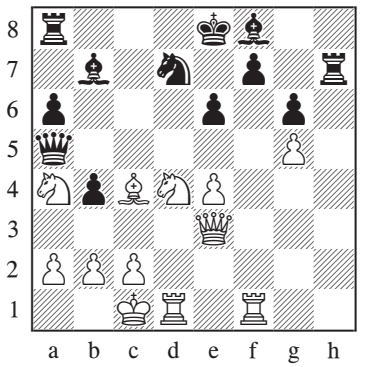
a) **18...♕a5!?**

This allows some beautiful ideas, but Black might survive in one line:

19.♖gf1!! ♗e7!

Everything else goes down in flames.

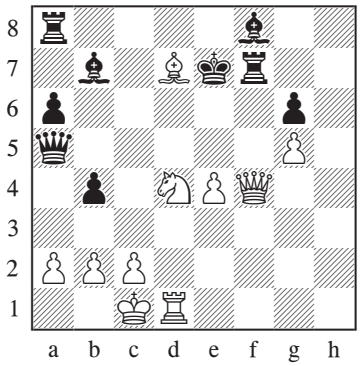
19...♖h7?



20.♗xe6! fxe6 21.♘xe6 ♖c8 22.♖xd7!! ♕xa4 23.♖xf8† ♔xd7 24.♕d4† ♔e7 25.♖xc8 ♗xc8 26.♕f6† ♔d7 27.♘c5† and wins.

19...♕xa4? 20.♖xf7! ♔xf7 21.♗b3! ♕a5

22.♗xe6† ♔e7 23.♕f4! ♖h7 24.♗xd7 ♖f7



25.♘c6† ♗xc6 26.♕d6† ♔d8 27.♕xc6 and the next check will hurt.

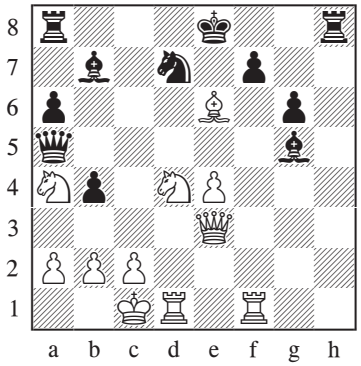
20.♗xe6

Demanding that Black finds some tough moves to equalize.

Or 20.♔b1!?∞ is one way to keep the tension.

20...♗xg5

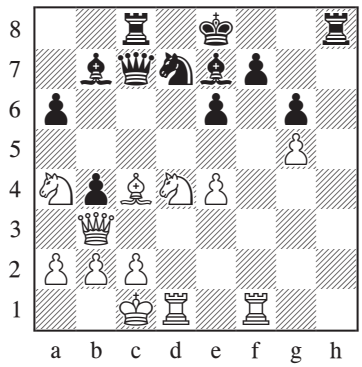
20...fxe6 21.♘xe6 ♕e5 22.♕b3 ♖c8 23.♘b6 ♖xc2†! (23...♘xb6?? 24.♘c7† ♖xc7 25.♕f7#) 24.♔b1 ♗xe4 25.♔a1 ♖c6 26.♘c5 ♖f8 27.♘cxd7 ♖xf1 28.♖xf1 ♕e6 29.♕d1 ♕d6 30.♕b3 ♕e6=



21.♗xd7† ♔e7! 22.♘f5† ♕xf5 23.exf5† ♗xe3† 24.♔b1 ♔f6=

The real drama is over.

b) **18...♕c7!?** 19.♕b3 ♗e7 20.♖gf1 ♖c8



21.♗xe6 fxe6 22.♘xe6 ♕e5 23.♘b6! ♖xc2†! 24.♔b1 ♗xe4 25.♔a1 ♖c6! 26.♘c5! ♖f8 27.♘cxd7 ♖xf1 28.♖xf1 ♕e6 29.♕d1 ♖d6 30.♕c1 ♖c6= Chess is a draw.

10.0–0–0

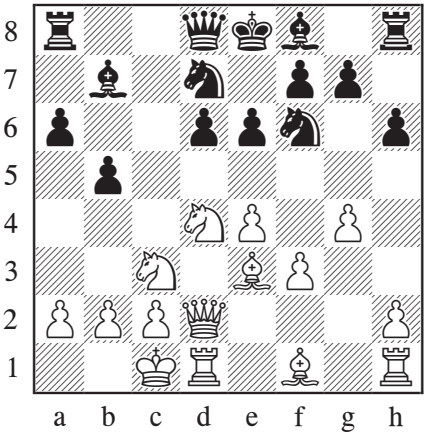
This is the main line. Its theory is well developed and Black holds his own with very accurate play. But it is not a pleasant existence.

GAME 36

Alexander Grischuk – Tongsen Wang

China 2017

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 b5 8.♕d2 ♘bd7 9.g4! h6 10.0–0–0 ♗b7?!



This was the main line for what seems like a generation. However, now it looks like it is not really working for Black. We shall look at the critical 10...b4! in the next game.

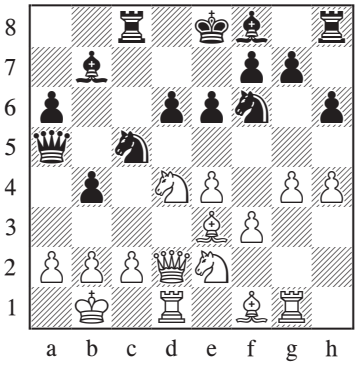
11.h4 b4

The main line. I do not think any of the alternatives are feasible.

11...♘e5 12.a3! transposes to a 10.a3 line that is good for White; see page 385.

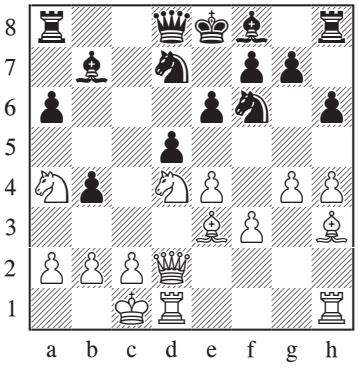
11...♘b6 12.a3! is similar.

11...♖c8 12.♖g1± b4 13.♘ce2 ♕a5?! 14.♔b1± ♘c5? occurred in Sanchez Naranjo – Martin Rueda, Madrid 1999.

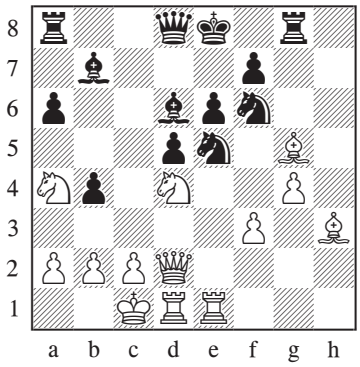


Now after 15.a3!N White wins.

11...d5 12.♗h3 b4 13.♘a4 This position was tested a lot before computers reached the depth needed to confirm that Black is just gone.



a) 13...g5 is refuted by direct action. The following game is more or less perfect play by White as far as I can tell. 14.hxg5 hxg5 15.e5! ♘xe5 16.♗xg5 ♖g8 17.♖he1 ♗d6

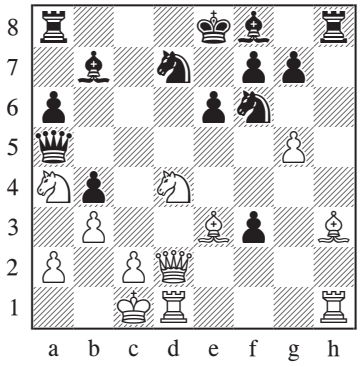


18.♘c5! ♗xc5 19.♖xe5 ♔d7 20.♖de1 ♖c8 21.♖xe6 ♘e4 22.♖6xe4 ♕xg5 23.f4 ♕h4 24.♖4e3 ♖ce8 25.g5† ♔d8 26.♘f5 ♕h7 27.♘h6 ♖xe3 28.♖xe3 ♖f8 29.♖d3 ♔c7 30.a3 1–0 Hertel – Tiemann, email 2001.

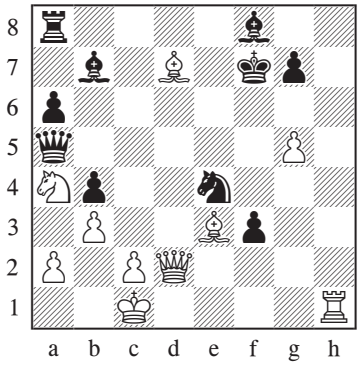
b) 13...♕a5

An intermediate move that slightly changes the refutation, but not the evaluation.

14.b3 dxe4 15.g5 hxg5 16.hxg5 exf3



17.♘xe6! fxe6 18.♗xe6 ♖xh1 19.♗xd7† ♔f7 20.♖xh1 ♘e4



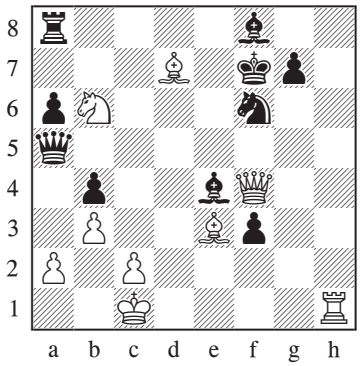
21.g6†! ♔xg6

21...♔e7 22.♕d3 ♕e5 23.♔b1 White is 'simply' winning. But yeah, it is rather complicated. 23...♕d5 24.♘b6! ♕xd3 25.cxd3 ♘f6 26.♗f5 ♖e8 27.♘c4 f2 28.♖f1 ♗c8 29.♖xf2 ♗xf5 30.♖xf5+– White won in Rocca – Millstone, email 2007.

22.♕h2

Black is busted.

22...♔f7 23.♕f4† ♘f6 24.♘b6 ♗e4



25.♔b2?

A human error.

25.♗d4!N ♕xa2 26.♗b2+– was correct.

25...g5 26.♕c7 ♖a7?

Black misses a chance to save himself with: 26...♗e7! 27.♕c4† ♗d5=

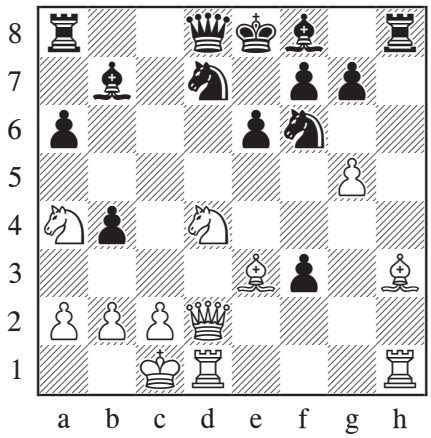
27.♕c4† ♔g6 28.♗d4 ♗g7 29.♕e6 ♖xd7 30.♘xd7 f2 31.♘f8†

1–0 Lutz – Sammalvuo, Calvia (ol) 2004.

c) 13...dxe4

This was refuted brilliantly just after Sammalvuo had released his big book on the English Attack.

14.g5 hxg5 15.hxg5 exf3

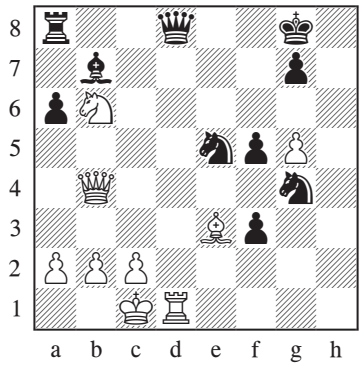


16.♘xe6! fxe6 17.♗f5!! exf5

17...♖xh1 18.♗g6† ♔e7 19.♕d6#

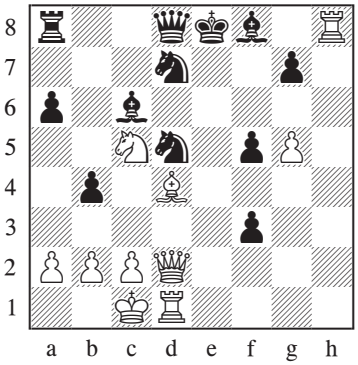
18.♖xh8 ♘d5

18...♘g4 19.♘b6! ♘de5 20.♖xf8† ♔xf8 21.♕xb4† ♔g8 occurred in Cento – Beth, email 2010.



The following improvement ends all the arguments: 22.♕b3†!N ♔h7 23.♖h1† ♔g6 24.♕e6† ♘f6 25.♕xe5 f2 26.gxf6 ♗xh1 27.♕g3† ♔xf6 28.♕h4† ♔f7 29.♕xh1 ♖b8 30.♘c4+–

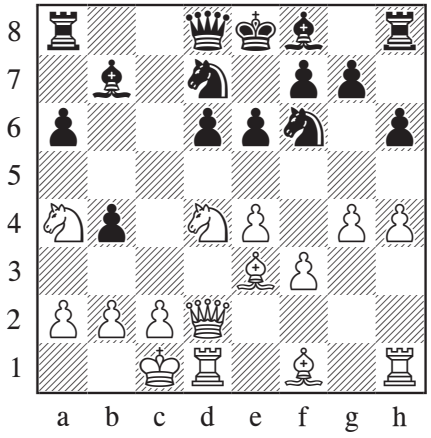
19.♘c5 ♗c6 20.♗d4



White is winning.
20...♕a5 21.♕e1† ♔d8 22.♕e6 ♔c7 23.♘xd7 ♗d6 24.♗b6† ♕xb6 25.♘xb6

1–0 Erenburg – Sammalvuo, Budapest 2004.

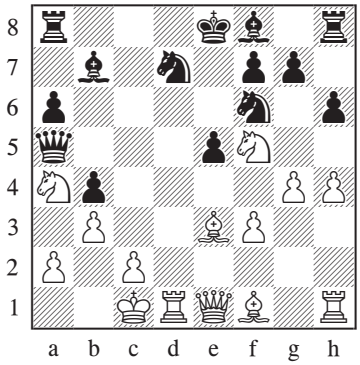
12.♘a4



12...♕a5

12...d5 13.♗h3 transposes to the previous note.

Black has a very concrete line in 12...e5 13.♘f5 d5 14.exd5 ♕a5 15.b3 ♕xd5, but after 16.♕e1! Black is busted. 16...♕a5 (16...♕xf3 17.♖g1 ♕c6 18.♗c4+– gave White an overwhelming attack in Lovakovic – Lozano Kafure, email 2014)

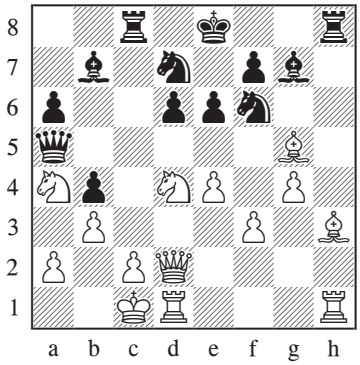


17.♗c4!N A marginal improvement. (17.♖h3, with a big advantage, was good enough to win in Hefka – Ninov, email 2010) 17...♗xf3 18.♖f1 ♗xd1 19.♕xd1 White is an exchange down, but look at his pieces; Black is lost. For example: 19...0–0–0 20.♘d6† ♔b8 21.g5 and it all collapses.

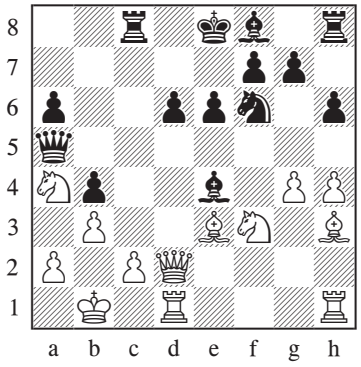
13.b3 ♘c5

Black has attempted other moves here, but they have not worked out.

13...♖c8 14.♗h3 ♘e5 (One other attempt was 14...g5, which is refuted by: 15.hxg5 hxg5 16.♗xg5 ♗g7

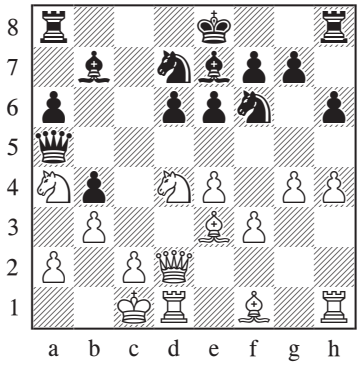


Caruana – Vachier-Lagrave, Cap d'Agde 2008. After 17.♗g2!N White is winning.) 15.♔b1! White has a big advantage. One game went: 15...♘xf3!? 16.♘xf3 ♗xe4



17.♘d4! ♗xh1 18.♖xh1± Balabaev – Joao, corr. 2002.

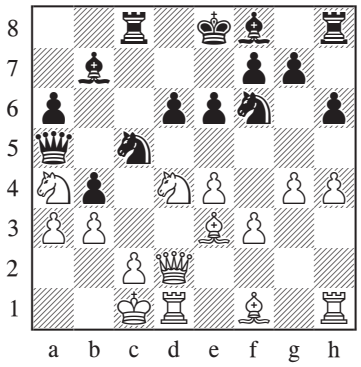
Van Wely has tried to resurrect various lines. The following is one of his attempts: 13...♗e7



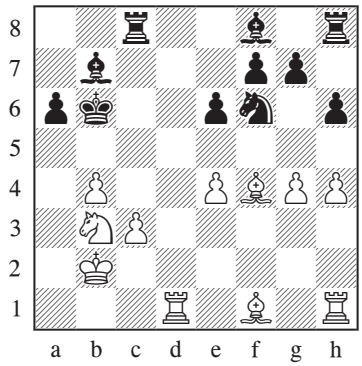
14.♖h3! ♘c5 15.a3! ♖c8 16.axb4 ♘xb3† 17.♘xb3 ♕xa4 18.♔b2 d5 19.♗c5± Caruana – Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2016.

14.a3! ♘xa4

14...♖c8 was a great invention at one point, but has finally been buried.



15.axb4 ♘xb3† 16.♘xb3 ♕xa4 17.♔b2 d5 18.c3 dxe4 19.♖a1 ♕d7 20.♕xd7† ♔xd7 (20...♘xd7 21.♘a5±) 21.♖d1† ♔c7 22.♗f4† ♔b6 23.fxe4±



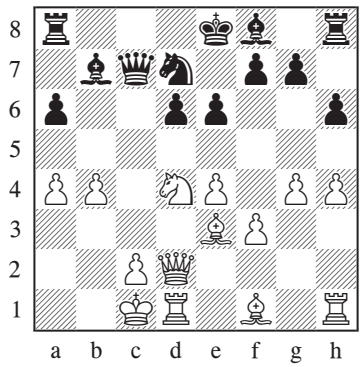
White has a huge advantage, although we should not underestimate that the position is still very complicated, at least to play over the board. In correspondence chess, this is entirely gone for Black: 23...♘xg4 24.♖g1 ♘f6 25.♘d2 ♗xe4 26.♗e3† ♔c7 27.♘xe4 ♘xe4 28.♗xa6 ♖b8 29.♗d4 ♗d6 30.♖xg7 1–0 Ferreira – Almiron, email 2005.

15.axb4 ♕c7 16.bxa4 d5

The correct central advance.

16...e5?! does not really work: 17.♘b3 d5 18.exd5 ♗xd5 19.♘c5+– ♗xf3 20.♘xa6 ♕c8 21.♗b5† ♗c6 22.♗b6 1–0 Perez Garcia – Leyva Proenza, Havana 2001.

16...♘d7



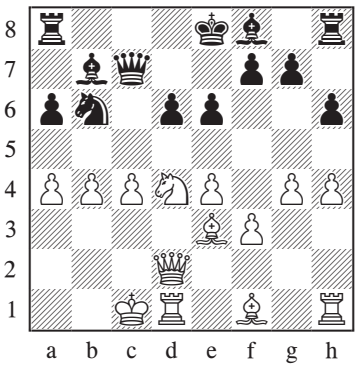
This seems to have gone out of fashion. I am sure many top players are looking forward to playing:

17.c4!N

White is strategically winning, it seems. Black has no real compensation for the pawn. Obviously, White will have serious practical challenges with such an open king, but without risk there is no reward.

17...♘b6

17...♗e7 18.♔b2 ♖b8 19.♖c1±



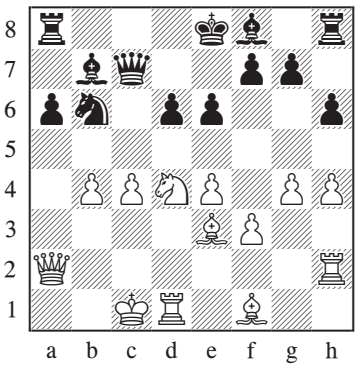
18.♖h2!!

This is the key idea. This rook is the last piece to enter the game.

18...♘xa4

18...♘xc4 is the critical line, but the pin on the c-file is mighty. 19.♕c3 d5 20.♖c2 ♖c8 21.exd5 ♗xd5 22.♗xc4 ♗xc4 23.♘xe6! fxe6 24.♖d4±

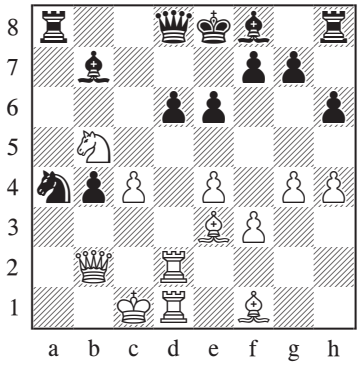
19.♕c2 ♘b6 20.♕a2!



A great positional decision; the a5-square is wonderful for White.

20...♗e7

20...a5 needs to be covered of course. 21.♘b5 ♕d8 22.♖hd2 Yes, the white king is exposed to some extent, but all his pieces are playing. And boy are they playing! 22...axb4 23.♕b2 ♘a4

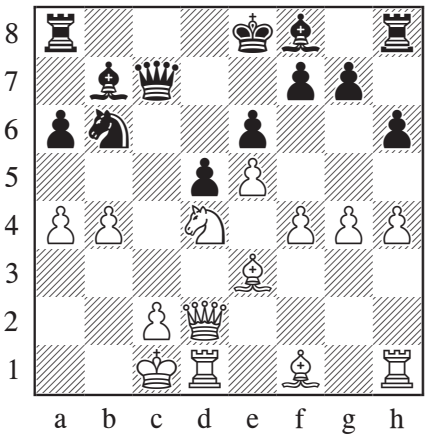


24.♖xd6!! ♘xb2 (24...♗xd6 25.♕xg7) 25.♖xd8† ♖xd8 26.♘c7† ♔e7 27.♗c5† ♔f6 28.♖xd8 ♗xc5 29.♖xh8 White has a winning endgame.

21.♕a5 0–0 22.♘b3 ♗d8 23.♖c2 ♕c6 24.♕a3 ♘d7 25.♘a5 ♗xa5 26.bxa5! ♘e5 27.♖xd6 ♕c7 28.c5 ♘xf3 29.c6 ♗c8 30.g5 hxg5 31.hxg5 ♕e7 32.♕c5+–

White is totally winning.

17.e5 ♘d7 18.f4 ♘b6



19.♖h3!

At first Topalov played 19.a5 against Kasparov. Then 19.f5 became the big main line. Finally, Kasparov with White found that 19.♖h3! was the right way to play the position... and that game was against Topalov. All the time everyone followed Kasparov, of course.

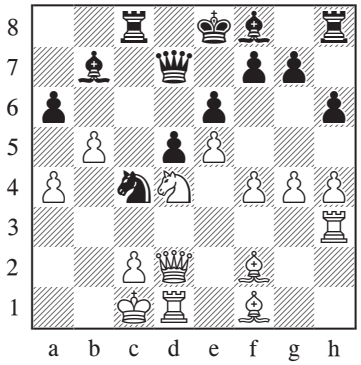
19...♖c8

19...♘xa4 20.♗f2 ♗e7 21.f5 ♖c8 22.♗e1± is almost overwhelming for White.

20.♗f2 ♘c4

20...♕d7 21.b5! ♘c4

This happened in Szafranski – Wuerzebesser, email 2002.



At this point I suggest a not very surprising novelty.

22.♗xc4!N ♖xc4

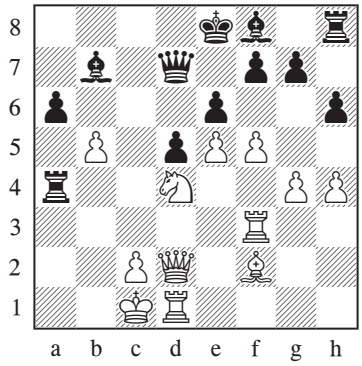
22...dxc4 23.♕a5! would be a disaster for Black.

23.f5!

The a-pawn is not the most important thing in the world.

23...♖xa4 24.♖f3!±

We could stop here, but I want to go a little deeper than just saying that White has a strong attack. Actually, a lot deeper – depth 48 at some points, if you are into computers.



24...♗b4

24...♖a3 25.♖xa3 ♗xa3† 26.♔b1 ♗c5 27.f6! ♗xd4 28.♗xd4 ♕xb5† 29.♔c1 g6 30.♕e3 a5 Preparing ...♕b4. 31.♖d3! Provoking ...a4, which would be met with 32.♖d2!. And after 31...♔d7 32.♖b3 ♕f1† 33.♔b2 ♗a8 34.♗c3!± White has a strong attack.

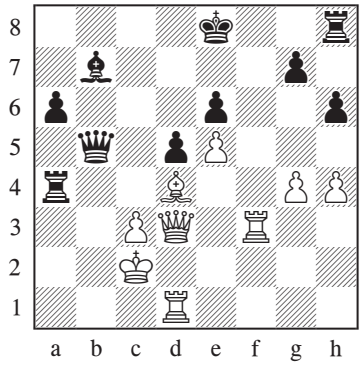
25.c3 ♗a3† 26.♔c2 ♗c5

26...0–0 27.♖a1 axb5 28.f6±

27.fxe6 fxe6 28.♕d3!

We now see why the a-pawn was less relevant than the lead in development.

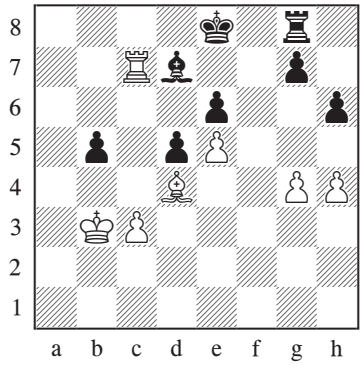
28...♗xd4 29.♗xd4 ♕xb5



30.♕xb5†! axb5 31.♖df1

Black is a pawn up, but plagued by endless problems.

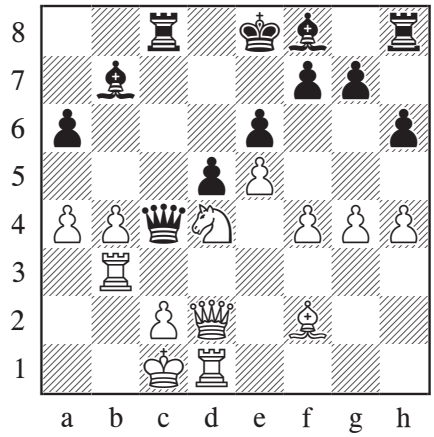
31...♗c6 32.♖f7 ♖g8 33.♖c7 ♗d7 34.♔b3 ♖c4 35.♖a7 ♖a4 36.♖b7 ♗c8 37.♖c7 ♖c4 38.♖ff7 ♖xc7 39.♖xc7 ♗d7



40.♗c5±

Can Black hold this? I would guess not.

21.♗xc4 ♕xc4 22.♖b3±



White has an extra pawn and Black has nothing to show for it.

22...♗e7 23.♔b2 ♔d7 24.f5 ♖c7 25.♗e1 a5 26.♕f2 axb4 27.fxe6† fxe6 28.♘xe6 ♕xg4 29.♘xc7 ♕xd1 30.♗xb4 ♕h5 31.e6† ♔xc7 32.♕f4† ♔c6 33.♗xe7
1–0

Finally, the time has come for us to look at the main line with 10...b4!.

GAME 37

Gert Jan Timmerman – Florin Serban

email 2009

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 b5 8.♕d2 ♘bd7 9.g4! h6 10.0–0–0 b4! 11.♘ce2

11.♘a4 ♘e5! 12.♕xb4 ♗d7 has been tried a number of times, but we could not find even a shadow of an advantage for White here.

11...♕c7

11...d5?

This leads to rapid destruction.

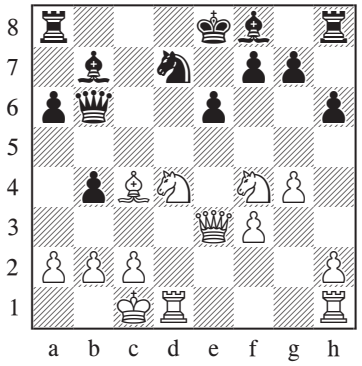
12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♘f4!±

White has a very dangerous attacking position. For example:

13...♗b7 14.♗c4 ♘xe3

14...♘7f6 15.♖he1±

15.♕xe3 ♕b6



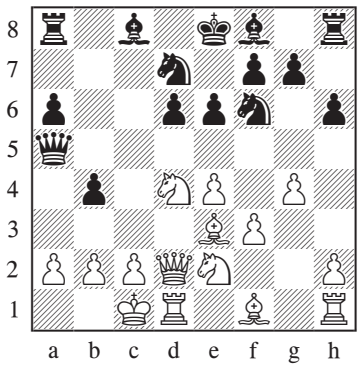
16.♗xe6! fxe6 17.♘fxe6

White has a winning attack.

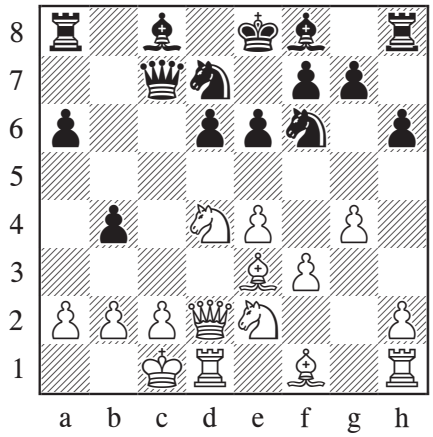
17...♔f7 18.♕b3 ♔f6 19.h4 ♘c5 20.g5† hxg5 21.hxg5† ♔g6 22.♘f4† ♔xg5 23.♖hg1† ♔xf4 24.♖g4† ♔e5 25.♖g5† ♔f6 26.♖f5† ♔e7 27.♘c6†

1–0 Kr. Szabo – Guliyev, Zalakaros 2008.

11...♕a5 has been played in 20 games.

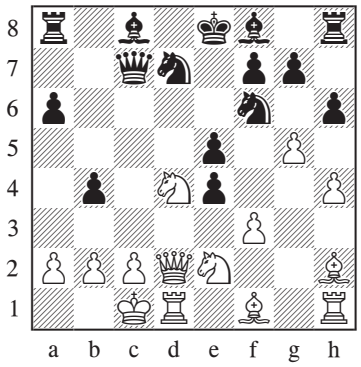


But no one has found 12.♘b3!N ♕c7 (12...♕xa2? 13.♕xb4 d5 14.♕e1! ♕a4 15.♘c3 ♕b4 16.♖d4 ♕b8 17.exd5+–) 13.♕xb4 d5 14.♕c3 ♕xc3 15.♘xc3 dxe4 16.♘xe4 ♘xe4 17.fxe4 ♗b7 18.♘d2 ♗e7 19.h3± Black does not have enough compensation for the pawn, even though he definitely has some.



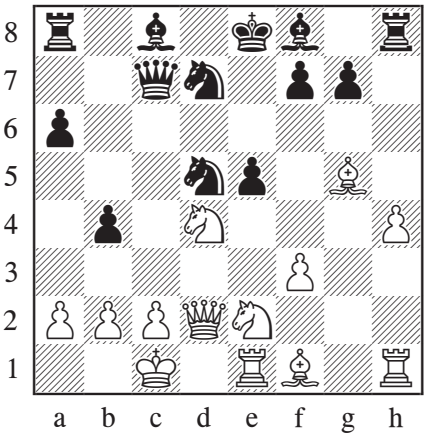
12.h4 d5 13.g5

Khalifman recommended 13.♗f4 e5 14.♗h2 dxe4 15.g5 but failed to consider:



15...hxg5! 16.hxg5 ♖xh2! We found this to be fully OK for Black. For example: 17.♖xh2 exd4 18.♖h8 ♘d5 19.♕xd4 ♗b7 20.fxe4 ♘5b6 21.♗h3 0–0–0 22.♔b1 ♔b8 23.♗xd7 ♘xd7 24.♖xf8 ♖xf8 25.♕xd7 ♗xe4=

13...hxg5 14.exd5 ♘xd5 15.♗xg5 e5 16.♖e1



16...♗b7

Not surprisingly, Black needs to develop his pieces and get his king to safety.

Another email game went:

16...f6 17.♘f4 ♘xf4 18.♗xf4± ♘c5

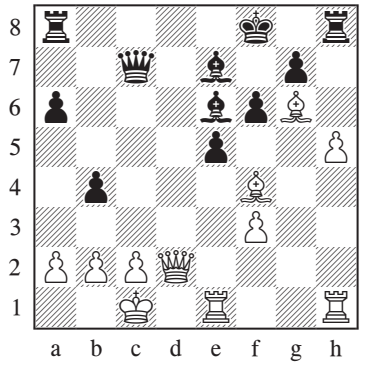
18...♕d6 19.♗d3!± ♕xd4? 20.♗g6† ♔d8 21.♕xd4 exd4 22.♖e8#

19.♗d3 ♗e7?

A rare mistake in these computery times.

19...♗d7 20.♗g6† ♔d8 21.♗g3±

20.♗g6† ♔f8 21.h5 ♘e6 22.♘xe6† ♗xe6



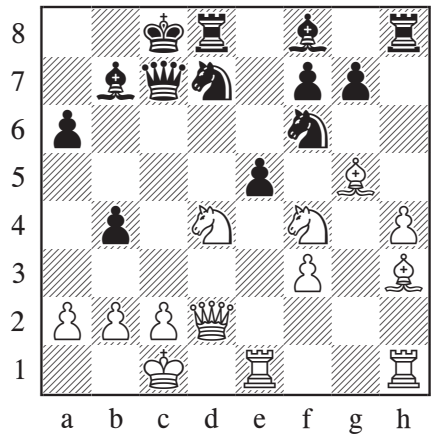
23.h6!+– exf4 24.hxg7† ♔xg7 25.♕g2 ♖xh1 26.♗e4† ♔f8 27.♖xh1 ♗d6 28.♗xa8 ♗f7 29.♖h7 ♕c4 30.b3 ♕e6 31.♗e4 f5 32.♕g7†
1–0 Langer – Bartsch, email 2015.

Another noteworthy example continued: 16...♘7b6 17.♘f4! ♘xf4 18.♗xf4 f6 19.♗d3± Robson – Zherebukh, Internet 2017.

17.♘f4 ♘5f6

Black needs to avoid: 17...♘xf4? 18.♕xf4 f6 19.♘e6 ♕d6 20.♕f5±

18.♗h3 0–0–0

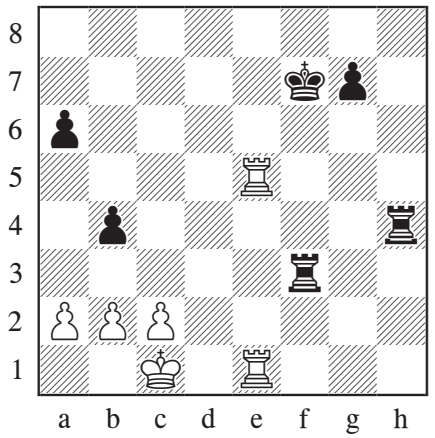


19.♘fe6 fxe6 20.♘xe6 ♕d6 21.♕e2 ♖e8!

21...♗d5 22.♘xd8 ♔xd8 23.♗xd7 ♔xd7 24.♖d1 ♔c7 25.♖d2±

22.♖d1 ♗d5 23.♘xf8 ♖exf8 24.♕d3 ♔c7 25.♗xd7 ♔xd7 26.♗xf6 ♖xf6 27.♕xd5 ♕xd5 28.♖xd5† ♔e6 29.♖a5 ♖xf3 30.♖e1 ♖xh4 31.♖axe5† ♔f7

This endgame should of course be drawn. But in practice it is not without dangers for Black. So White has a "better draw", as our ex-Soviet friends would say. I have included this email game in full, to give you a chance to see how tablebases are useful in defence, although not available to everyone at every event.



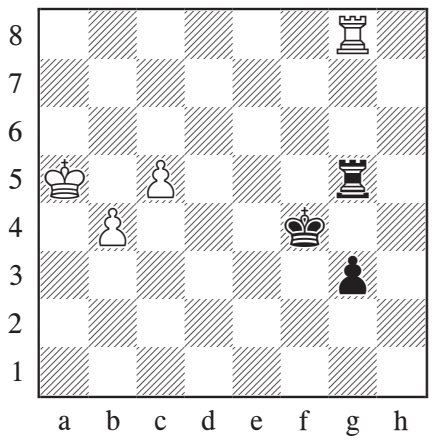
32.b3 ♖g4 33.♖e7† ♔g6 34.♖a7 ♖f6 35.♔b2 ♖g2 36.♖c7 a5 37.a3 bxa3† 38.♔xa3 ♖f7 39.♖c6† ♖f6 40.♖c7 ♖f7 41.♖c8 ♖ff2 42.♖e6† ♔h5?

42...♔f7 43.♖ec6 ♖f5 was the right defence.

43.♖e5† ♖g5

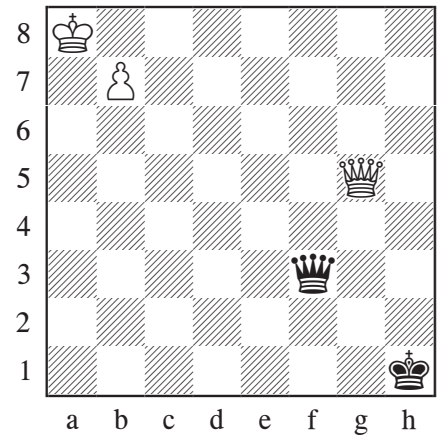
43...g5 44.♔b2 ♔h4 45.♖xa5 g4 was more human, but after 46.b4 Black will still have to defend an unpleasant endgame.

44.♖xg5† ♔xg5 45.♔a4 ♖f5 46.c4 ♔f4 47.c5 g5 48.♔xa5 g4 49.b4 g3 50.♖g8 ♖g5



51.♖xg5 ♔xg5 52.c6 g2 53.c7 g1=♕ 54.c8=♕ ♕a1† 55.♔b6 ♔h4 56.♕c4† ♔g3 57.♕g8† ♔h2 58.♕h7† ♔g1 59.♕g6† ♔h1

60.♕h5† ♔g1 61.♕g4† ♔h1 62.♕h3† ♔g1 63.♕g3† ♔h1 64.♕f3† ♔g1 65.♕e3† ♔h1 66.♕e4† ♔g1 67.♕e3† ♔h1 68.♕h6† ♔g1 69.♕g5† ♔h1 70.♕h4† ♔g1 71.b5 ♔g2 72.♕e4† ♔g1 73.♕g4† ♔h1 74.♕h5† ♔g1 75.♕g5† ♔h1 76.♕h5† ♔g1 77.♕g5† ♔h1 78.♔b7 ♔h2 79.b6 ♔h1 80.♕h6† ♔g1 81.♕g6† ♔h1 82.♕h5† ♔g1 83.♔b8 ♔g2 84.♕g5† ♔h1 85.♕d5† ♔h2 86.♕d6† ♔h1 87.♕c6† ♔h2 88.♕c7† ♔h1 89.♕b7† ♔g1 90.♕d5 ♔h2 91.♕h5† ♔g1 92.b7 ♕c3 93.♕g6† ♔h1 94.♕a6 ♔h2 95.♕a2† ♔h1 96.♔a8 ♕c6 97.♕a5 ♕f3 98.♕e1† ♔g2 99.♕d2† ♔h1 100.♕c1† ♔g2 101.♕g5† ♔h1



102.♕g3!? ♕xb7†!? 103.♔xb7 ½–½

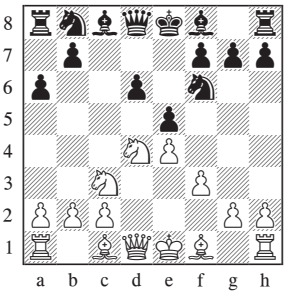
Conclusion

Let's be honest – this chapter is hard work. So many long, sharp lines; so many moves, moves, moves. The reality is that seriously challenging the Najdorf-Scheveningen requires a heavy-duty weapon. Console yourself with the thought that if you put in the effort to study the material in this chapter, you are highly likely to rewarded over the board for your industry.

Rather than repeat all the details about the lines in this chapter where White is happily better, I will focus on the one big problem line. And that is 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.♗e3 b5! 8.♕d2 ♘bd7! 9.g4! h6. I can assure you that we worked like maniacs to force an advantage for White here, but could not find it. Maybe it does not exist. What we offer instead are three lines full of new ideas – 10.a3!?, 10.♖g1!? and 10.0–0–0. All three are dangerous for Black, and before your vital game, you can study the one you like best, while Black must be ready for everything. We may not have a theoretical advantage, but we do have a practical one.

In the English Attack against the Najdorf-Scheveningen, Black's respectable choices are narrow and his existence not one of fighting for glory, as much as it is fighting for survival.

Chapter 11



Najdorf with 6...e5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5

7.♘b3 ♗e6 (7...b5, 7...♗e7, 7...♘bd7, 7...♘c6) **8.♗e3** **404**

8...♘bd7 (8...d5, 8...♘c6!?) **9.g4!** **405**
9...h6 *Game 38* **404**
9...♘b6 *Game 39* **411**
9...b5 *Game 40* **412**

8...♗e7 9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0
10...a5?! *Game 41* **414**
10...b5 11.g4 b4 *Game 42* **417**
10...♘bd7 11.g4 b5 (11...♕c7, 11...♘b6) **12.g5** **420**
12...b4 *Game 43* **420**
12...♘h5 13.♔b1 **426**
13...♘b6 *Game 44* **426**
13...♖c8 *Game 45* **431**

8...h5!? *Game 46* **436**
8...♗e7 9.♕d2 h5 *Game 47* **442**

The variations with 6...e5 can truly be said to be the pure Najdorf lines in the English Attack. Again, I worked through the variations with the assistance of Nikos Ntirlis and only at the end, when everything had been decided, we checked what Khalifman had done, to make sure we did not omit any important lines. Again, we did in a chapter what he did in a whole book, which necessarily means some reductionism. There are a lot of plausible, but ultimately poor, variations that I covered very briefly, which filled many pages or even a chapter in Khalifman's book. I prefer to have it all in one chapter, even if it is a rather large chapter.

In this chapter I rely a lot on correspondence games. B90 was at some point the New World for engine games and now it seems to be where correspondence players like to dig deep. Looking at these games has given me the distinct impression that the engines underestimate White's long-term chances in these positions. From a human perspective, things look even brighter for White.

The structure of this chapter starts with various alternatives to the most natural set-up for Black: 6...e5, 7...♗e6 and 8...♗e7, followed by ...b5 and ...♘bd7. They are not all bad, but I still hope to demonstrate why they are unattractive for Black and give a decent direction of travel for White.

Then we deal with the main lines after **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0 ♘bd7 11.g4 b5 12.g5**, where both 12...b4 (Game 43) and 12...♘h5 (Games 44 and 45) are covered. The former was almost the main line after 1.e4 for a few years, but at the moment it looks rather unattractive for Black.

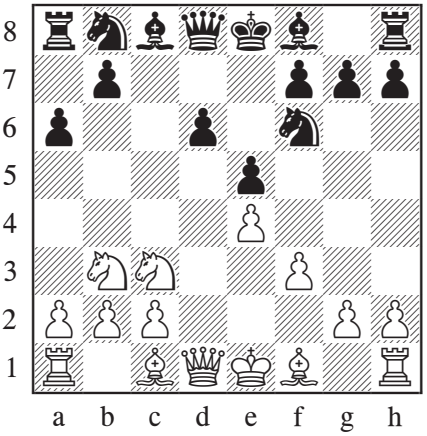
What has become the modern main line are positions where Black plays ...h7-h5 at some point. We will cover both 8...h5 (Game 46) and 8.♗e7 9.♕d2 h5 (Game 47).

GAME 38

Jiri Stocek – Valeriy Neverov

Prerov 2001

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3



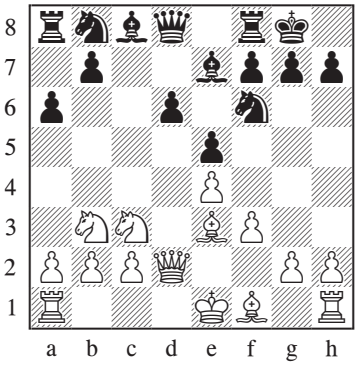
7...♗e6

The bishop belongs here. Black of course has other ways to play these positions, but in general, without controlling the d5-square, things don't really work out for him.

Let's look at a few examples:

7...b5 is premature on account of 8.a4!± b4?! 9.♘d5 ♘xd5 10.♕xd5 ♖a7 11.♗e3 ♗e6 12.♕a5! ♕xa5 13.♘xa5± Magem Badals – Ayas Fernandez, Andorra 1997.

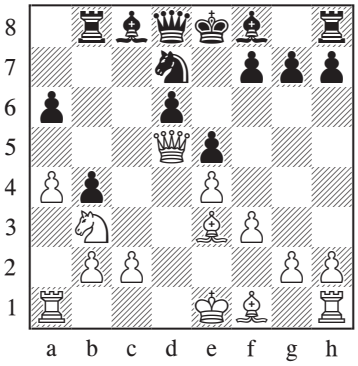
7...♗e7 8.f3 0–0 9.♕d2



a) 9...♘c6 10.0–0–0 b5 all look natural moves, but after 11.♔b1! ♗b7 12.g4± White has a great advantage: g5 and ♘d5 will come and Black will be dominated.

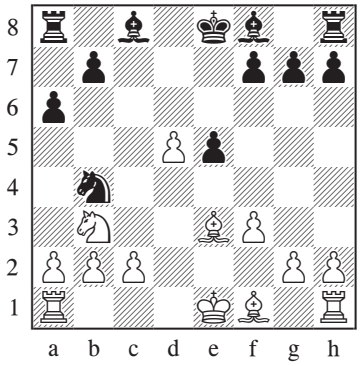
b) 9...♕c7 For some reason, no one has found the best continuation here: 10.♘a4!N ♘bd7 11.c4, White enjoys a pleasant structural advantage. And after 10...♗e6 11.♘b6 ♘c6 12.♘xa8 ♖xa8 13.♗d3± Black has insufficient compensation for the exchange.

7...♘bd7 8.f3 b5 was an experiment that went all wrong: 9.a4!± b4 10.♘d5 ♘xd5 11.♕xd5 ♖b8



12.♗c4 ♕f6 13.♘a5 ♗e7 14.♗a7+– Tiviakov – Gelfand, Elista 1998.

7...♘c6 8.f3 d5 also did not work out for Black. 9.♘xd5 ♘xd5 10.♕xd5 ♕xd5 11.exd5 ♘b4



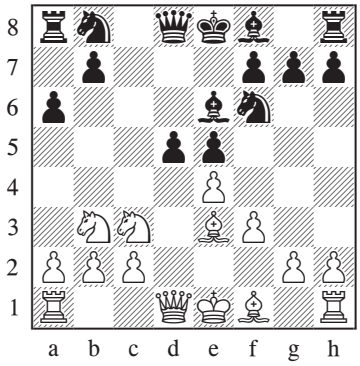
12.0–0–0 Black's opening play proved a failure in Krueger – Sidenko, email 2004. For example: 12...♘xa2† 13.♔b1 ♘b4 14.g4!±

8.♗e3 ♘bd7

Honestly, I do not like this move much. A quick g4-g5 is unpleasant for Black and he will have to react to it.

The main moves are definitely 8...♗e7 and 8...h5, but Black has tried a few other things as well.

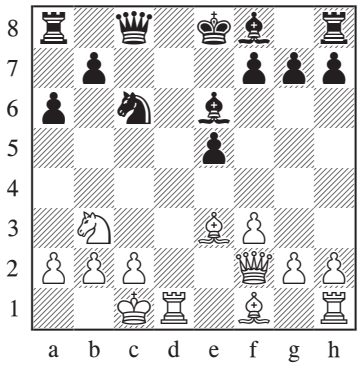
8...d5



This is an attempt to solve all of Black's problems immediately. It is the nature of chess that such strategies to neutralize the game only work when White has done something slow or unnatural. But as he has not, Black will always find himself a move too slow.

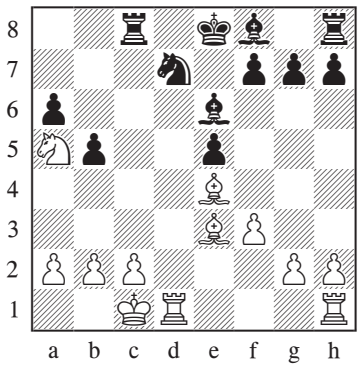
9.exd5 ♘xd5 10.♘xd5 ♕xd5

10...♗xd5 11.♕d2 ♘c6 12.0–0–0 shows how Black is suffering for being second off the starting block. After 12...♗e6 13.♕f2 ♕c8 as in Gerhardt – Mueller, Germany 2013, White should continue:



14.♘c5!N Black should settle for 14...♗e7, when he simply a bit worse. There are many ways for Black to get such compromised positions from the opening, where he is hoping for a draw in a technically worse position. Fighting for equality is always dangerous for Black; it may backfire. Instead he can try 14...♗xa2, but White gains an advantage with: 15.♘d7! ♘d4 16.♗xd4 ♕xd7 17.♗xe5 ♕a4 18.♕b6! ♖c8 19.♗c7 ♗e6 20.♖d4 ♕c6 21.♕xc6† bxc6 22.♗a5± Black is in serious trouble.

11.♕xd5 ♗xd5 12.0–0–0 ♗e6 13.♘a5! b5 14.♗d3 ♘d7 15.♗e4 ♖c8



Vieira – Morato, email 2005. White has several strategies at this point. Most obvious to check is:

16.♗b7!?N

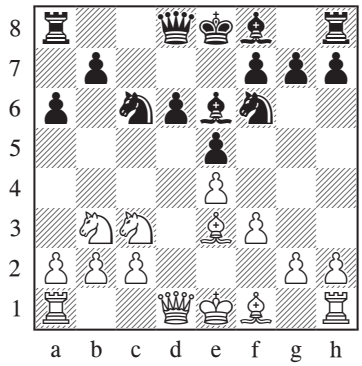
Taking the pawn is the first instinct. If it works, it works. And it works!

16.♖he1 ♗e7 17.a3± is also extremely pleasant for White.

16...♖c7 17.♗xa6 ♗b4 18.♗d2 ♗xd2† 19.♖xd2 ♖a7 20.♖d6 ♔e7 21.♖hd1 ♘b8 22.♘c6† ♘xc6 23.♖xc6 ♖b8 24.♖dd6 b4 25.♖b6 ♖xb6 26.♖xb6 ♔d7 27.♖b7†

White should win this endgame; a pawn is a pawn.

8...♘c6!?



This is a serious option. The key idea is to prepare ...d5, which White has to do something about.

9.♕e2!?

I like this move, keeping the d-line clear for the time being, preparing queenside castling. The key idea is that the knight is not well-placed on c6.

9.♘d5 ♗xd5 10.exd5 ♘e7 11.c4 g6 12.♗d3 ♗g7 13.0–0 0–0 was the recommendation of Khalifman, but I cannot see why White should be better here.

9...♗e7 10.0–0–0 0–0

10...♘d7 was Fedorov – Loginov, Minsk 2008. After 11.♔b1!N White looks much better to me.

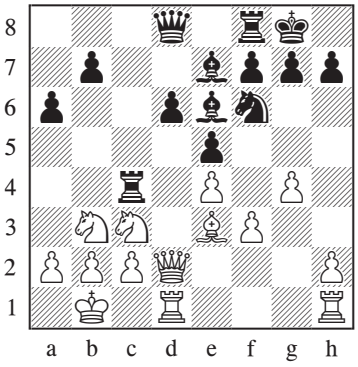
11.g4

The black pieces do not look well coordinated.

11...♖c8 12.♔b1 ♘a5

White should not allow the sacrifice on c3. He is better after:

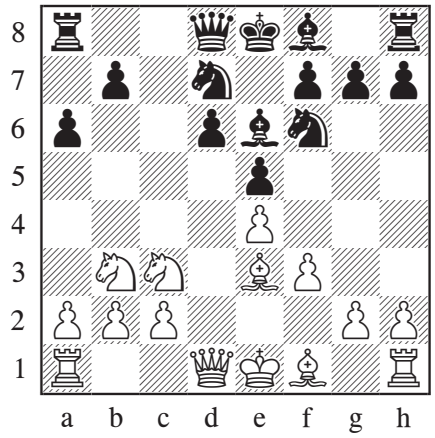
13.♕d2! ♘c4 14.♗xc4 ♖xc4



As in Kritz – Guliyev, Echternach 2004. Now it makes sense to simply play natural moves with:

15.h4!?N b5 16.g5 ♘h5 17.♘d5 ♗xd5 18.♕xd5 ♕c7 19.c3 ♖b8 20.♖hf1±

Black's position might not be objectively horrible, but it looks unappealing to me.



9.g4!

It is important to get the move order right. After 9.♕d2 b5 10.g4 Black is in time with: 10...b4! 11.♘d5 ♗xd5 12.exd5 ♘b6, which has proved to be good for Black in quite a number of games.

9...h6

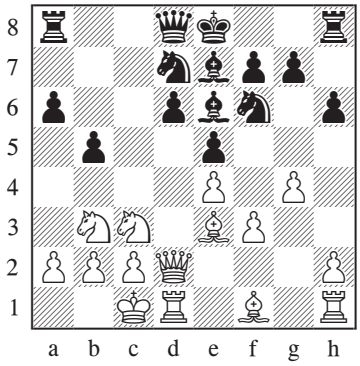
This is a considerable concession; castling will never ever be fun after this.

We will see 9...♘b6 in the next game, and 9...b5 in the game after that.

10.♕d2 b5

Black has also tried:

10...♗e7 11.0–0–0 b5



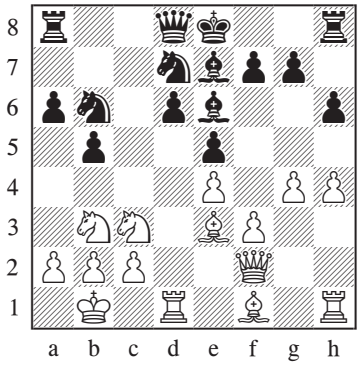
12.h4 ♘b6

But this set-up is not great for Black either.

13.♕f2 ♘fd7

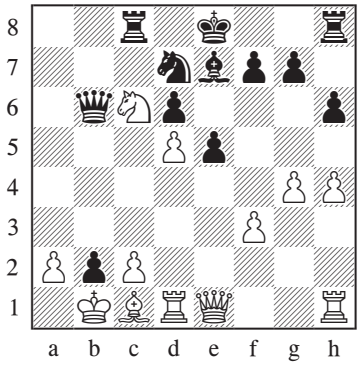
13...♘a4 would make sense if White took the knight, but after 14.♘d5± Black has not managed to generate real counterplay.

14.♔b1



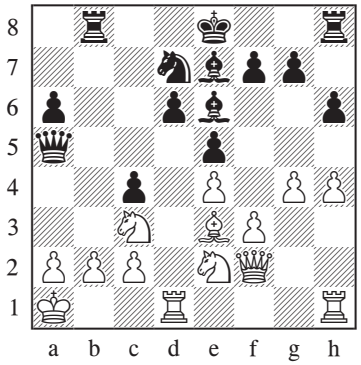
14...♘c4

14...♖c8 15.♘d5 ♗xd5 16.exd5 ♘c4 17.♗c1± is everything Black wants to avoid. White has control over the light squares and Black still cannot castle without getting assaulted. 17...♕b6 18.♕e1 a5 19.♗xc4 bxc4 20.♘xa5 c3 21.♘c6 cxb2 was Kasparov – Huzman, Tel Aviv 1998.



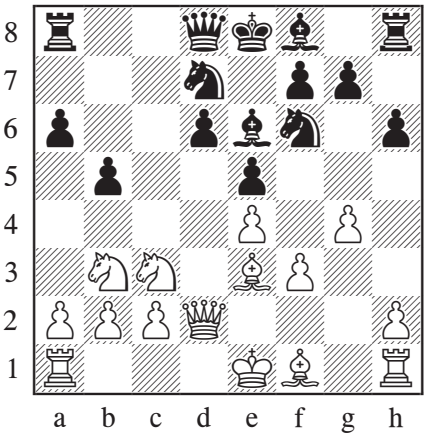
White should continue with: 22.♗xb2N ♗f6 Now the strongest is: 23.f4! (White can also play 23.♖d3!? ♘c5 24.♖d4 0–0 25.♖b4, when play is really sharp. But White is better. 25...♖xc6! 26.♕d2!! ♕a6 27.dxc6 ♕xc6 28.♖d1 ♕xf3 29.♕xd6 ♗e7 30.♕d5 e4 31.♖c1 ♕xg4 32.♖c4±; 23.♖h3± was Khalifman's recommendation.) 23...e4 24.♕xe4† ♔f8 25.c3! ♗xc3 26.♖h2 ♖e8 27.♕d3 ♗f6 28.♕f5 ♕b7 29.♔a1 ♕c8 30.h5± White is technically winning, although some practical obstacles remain.

15.♗xc4 bxc4 16.♘c1 ♖b8 17.♘1e2 ♕a5 18.♔a1



A standard set-up for White in these positions. With the control of the d5-square and Black having no real attack, things look promising for us.

18...♖b7 19.♘d5 ♕b5 20.♖b1 ♕c6 21.♘ec3± Papenin – Ryan, email 2011.



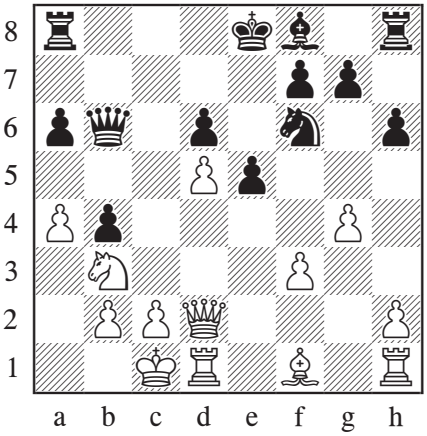
11.a4!

This is an important finesse.

After 11.0–0–0 ♘b6 Black is well coordinated, although White can fight for an advantage there as well.

11...b4 12.♘d5 ♗xd5 13.exd5 ♘b6 14.♗xb6 ♕xb6 15.0–0–0

15.a5!? ♕b7 16.0–0–0 ♗e7 17.h4 was better for White a lifetime ago in Hjartarson – Haces, Thessaloniki (ol) 1984.

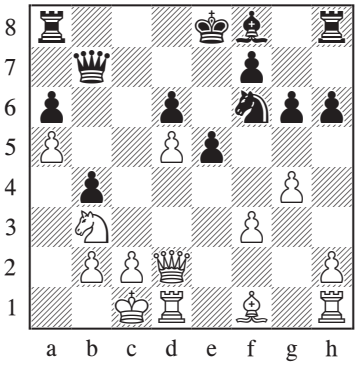


15...♗e7?!

This is inflexible.

Black would be better off playing:
15...g6 16.a5 ♕b7

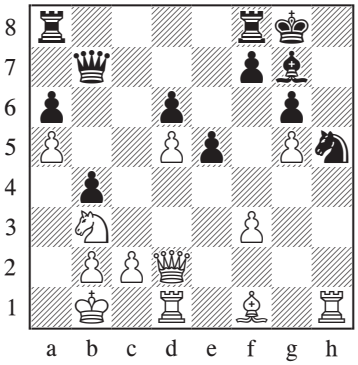
As in Grout – Gutovskyi, email 2012. But I like White a lot here too. White can play many different ways. I suggest:



17.♔b1!?N ♗g7 18.h4±

You could imagine play continuing:
18...0–0 19.g5 hxg5 20.hxg5 ♘h5

20...♘d7?! 21.♖h4! ♖ab8 22.♗d3 ♖fc8 23.♖dh1 gives a winning attack. A small point is 23...♔f8 24.♖h7! followed by ♕h2 and ♖xg7 wins.

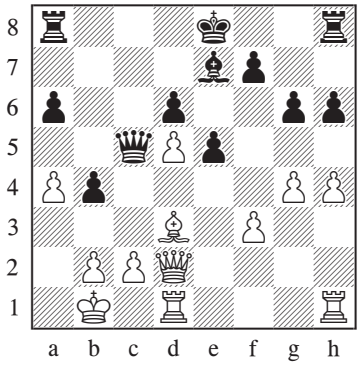


21.♗d3! ♕xd5 22.♗e4! ♕xd2 23.♖xd2±

As so often in this variation, the opposite-coloured bishops give Black no comfort.

16.h4 ♘d7 17.♔b1± g5!?

17...♘c5! was suggested by Ftacnik as OK for Black. But after his 18.♘xc5 ♕xc5 19.♗d3 g6, White has a very nice continuation:



20.f4! ♗f6 21.f5! Black is strategically busted.

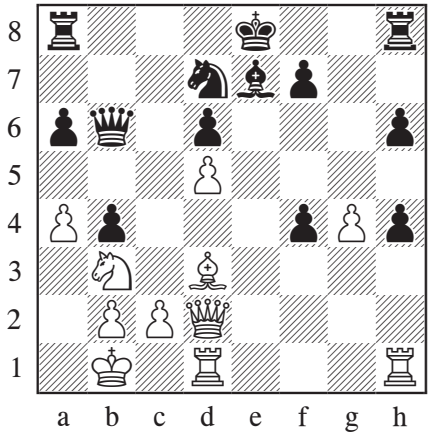
18.♗d3 gxh4

Black is under a lot of pressure.

18...♘c5? loses to 19.♘xc5 ♕xc5 20.hxg5!, on account of 20...♗xg5 21.♕xg5!.

18...♖g8 may be objectively best, but 19.a5 ♕b7 20.♖he1± gives an immense advantage.

19.f4 exf4



20.♖de1! f3

20...♘e5 21.♕xf4 gives White a winning advantage as well.

21.♖xh4

There was always a chance to throw in 21.a5! at some point.

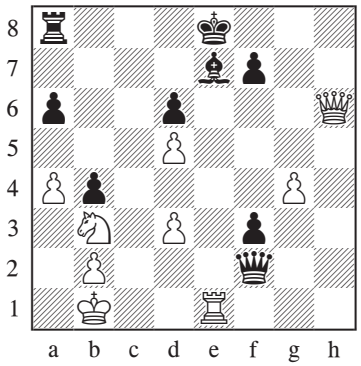
21...♘e5 22.♖xh6 ♖xh6 23.♕xh6 ♘xd3

23...♖c8?! is immediately refuted by 24.♖xe5! ♕g1† 25.♔a2 dxe5 26.♕h8† ♗f8 27.♕xe5† ♔d8 28.d6 and White has too many threats. For example: 28...f2 29.♗f5!+–

Objectively best was 23...0–0–0, when after 24.a5 ♕a7 25.♕f4 White dominates.

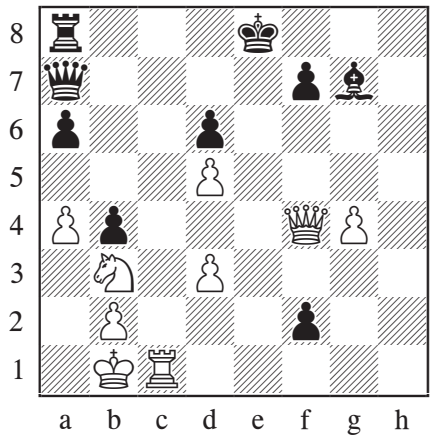
24.cxd3 f2

After 24...♕f2 White wins as follows:



25.♖e4! ♕f1† 26.♔a2 ♕xd3 27.♕h8† ♔d7 28.♕xa8 ♕xe4 29.♕c6† ♔d8 30.♘a5! with a mating attack.

25.♖c1 ♕b7 26.♕h8† ♗f8 27.♕d4 ♕a7 28.♕f4 ♗g7



29.♖c2?

29.♖f1 would eliminate the passed pawn and give White an easily winning position.

29...♕b7! 30.♖e2†?!

A pointless check. After 30.♖c6! ♕a7 31.g5± White keeps the pressure going.

30...♗e5 31.♕f3

Surprisingly White has no advantage after 31.d4 ♕xd5 32.♔a2 ♕c6! 33.dxe5 ♕xa4† 34.♔b1 ♕xb3 35.exd6† ♔f8! 36.♕h6† ♔g8 and White should give perpetual check.

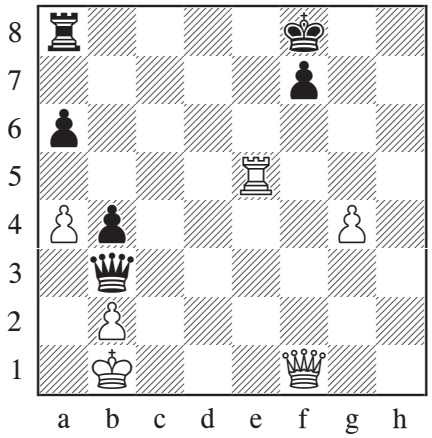
31...f1=♕†?

31...♕xd5 32.♕xd5 f1=♕† would have given Black decent chances in a highly unclear position.

32.♕xf1 ♕xd5 33.d4 ♕xb3 34.dxe5 dxe5?

34...♕d3† 35.♔a2 0–0–0± would have kept the fight going.

35.♖xe5† ♔f8



36.♕h1! ♔g7

36...♕d3† 37.♔a1 ♔g7 also does not save the game. After 38.♖g5† ♔f6 39.♕h6† ♔e7 40.♖e5† ♔d7 41.♕h1! ♔d6 42.♖e1 White has too many threats for Black to handle.

37.♖g5† ♔f6 38.♕h6† ♔e7 39.♖e5† ♔d7

40.♕d2† ♔c6 41.♕d4
1–0

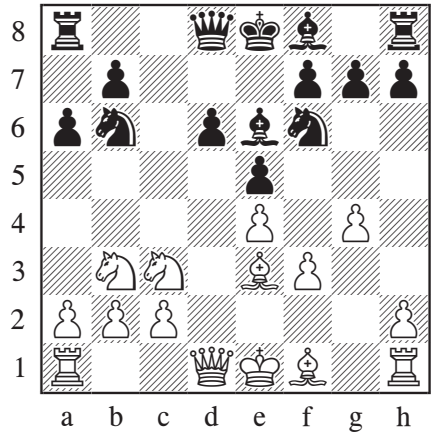
The positions with an early ...h6 do not really work for Black. If White is well-prepared, he has good reasons to be optimistic.

GAME 39

Ding Liren – Ruslan Ponomariov

Khanty-Mansiysk 2017

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♘bd7 9.g4 ♘b6



This is another way to create counterplay. But it looks artificial to me – too slow. It is not surprising that White is better everywhere.

10.g5 ♘h5

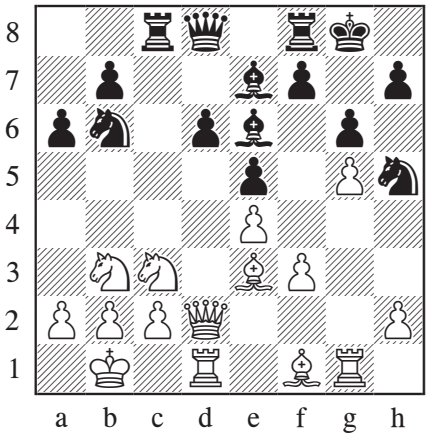
Going to d7 is not the idea. The knight would have no future there, unlike in the ...e6-lines, where it can jump to e5.

11.♕d2 ♗e7 12.0–0–0 0–0

White has an improved version of the main lines with ...♘h5.

13.♔b1 ♖c8 14.♖g1 g6

14...♕c7 has also been played. Out of many reasonable options, 15.h4!? seems simplest, when I doubt that Black has better than transposing to the next note with 15...g6. Instead the attempt to break free with 15...d5?! did not quite work after: 16.♗xb6 ♕xb6 17.exd5 ♕xg1 18.dxe6 fxe6 19.♕d7 ♗b4 20.♗h3 ♕h2 21.♗xe6† ♔h8 22.♕a4 ♖xc3 23.bxc3 ♗xc3 24.♕c4 ♘f4 25.♕xc3 ♘xe6 26.♖d6± Van Oosterom – Joao, corr. 2005.



15.♕f2!?

I am honestly not clear on whether I should recommend this or a slightly different move order, so I will leave it to you, the reader, to choose your favourite. Sometimes moves can be equally strong.

15.h4 ♕c7 16.♕f2

16.♕h2 is also a serious move according to correspondence players, although I do not understand why you would put the queen on h2.

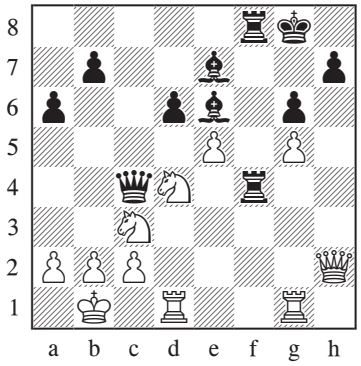
16...♘c4 17.♗xc4 ♕xc4 18.f4±

White is better, as I see it.

18...exf4 19.♗xf4 ♘xf4 20.♕xf4 f6

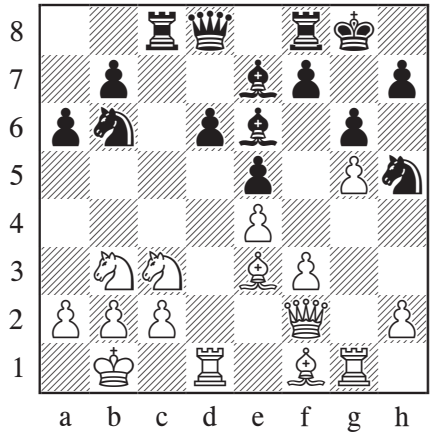
If 20...♖fe8 then 21.h5! is essential, to meet ...♗f8 with h5-h6.

21.♕h2 fxg5 22.hxg5 ♖f7 23.♘d4 ♖cf8 24.e5 ♖f4



Dominguez Perez – Quesada Perez, Santa Clara 2005. Strongest here may be: 25.♖h1!?N h5 26.exd6 ♗xd6 27.♘de2±

Black will struggle to prove compensation for the exchange.



15...♘c4 16.♗xc4 ♖xc4

After 16...♗xc4 I like the rare idea: 17.♕g2!? (17.♘d5?! ♗xd5 18.♖xd5 f5 19.gxf6 ♘xf6 left d5 and e4 hanging in Rahde – Rakovic, corr. 2008) 17...b5 18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.♖xd5 f5 20.gxf6 ♖xf6 Mamedov – Nitin, Sort 2008. 21.♘c1!N± The knight will be activated via e2-g3 (or -c3, while watching out for exchange sacs) or after a2-a3 and ♘a2-b4-d5.

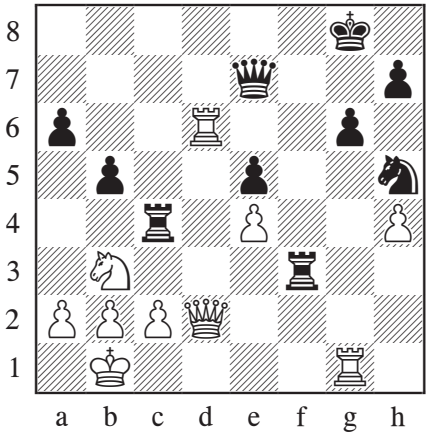
17.♘d5! ♗xd5 18.♖xd5 b5

After 18...f5 19.gxf6 ♘xf6 White can utilize the hanging rook on c4 with: 20.♕d2! ♕c7 21.♖d3 ♘h5 22.♗h6 ♖c8 23.♖c1± Reppmann – Mielke, email 2009. This is not a particularly special game; White has an edge, just as in many other examples.

19.h4 f6

19...f5 20.♘d2 ♖c8 21.♕e2± is also better for White. A fantasy variation continues: 21...♕e8 22.♕d3 fxe4 23.♘xe4 ♕c6 24.♖d1 ♖xf3 25.♘xd6 ♖cf8 26.♕b3 ♔h8 27.a4 bxa4 28.♕c4 ♕xc4 29.♘xc4±

20.♕d2 fxg5 21.♗xg5 ♖xf3 22.♗xe7 ♕xe7 23.♖xd6±



The black position has too many weaknesses and Ponomariov is unable to keep it together.

23...♖f7 24.♖xa6 ♖xe4 25.♕d5 ♖xh4 26.♕xb5 ♘f4 27.a4 e4 28.♖a8† ♔g7 29.♖e8 ♕a7 30.♕e5† ♔h6 31.♕g5† ♔g7 32.♖xe4 ♖h5 33.♕g3 ♖h3 34.♕e1 ♘d5 35.♘d4 ♕b6 36.a5 ♕b7 37.♘e6† ♔g8 38.♘d8 ♕b5 39.♖e8† ♔g7 40.♕e5†
1–0

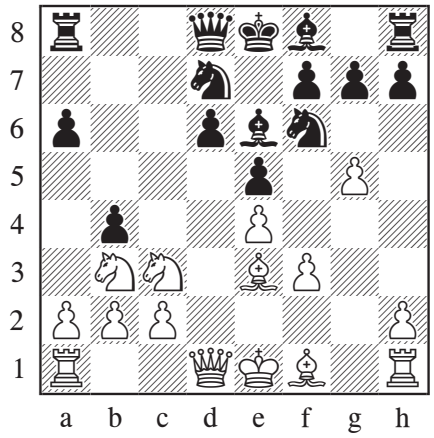
9...♘b6 is somewhat artificial, but the knight is not traveling on the wrong path; it's just that Black's options are limited. As I see it, White should get an advantage from the opening, but I would not characterize the variation as directly refuted.

GAME 40

Adrian Schilcher – Maigonis Avotins

email 2013

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♘bd7 9.g4 b5 10.g5 b4



This is another way for Black to react to the fact that g4-g5 is coming quickly. The ensuring structure is like many others in this chapter: sad for Black, but not necessarily unplayable. The jury may still be deliberating over the final verdict, but in the meantime White will scoop up a lot of nice wins.

11.♘d5

11.♘e2 ♘g8! seems to be playable for Black. The key idea is 12.f4 h6! with a sharp game.

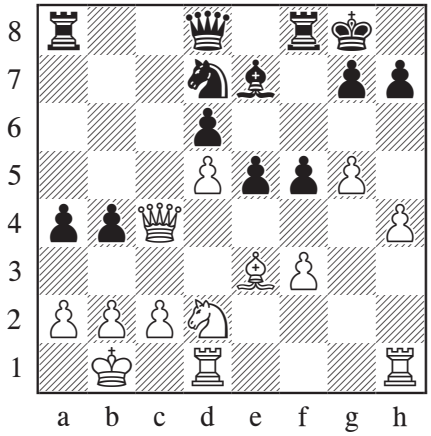
11...♘xd5 12.exd5 ♗f5 13.♗d3 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 ♗e7 15.h4 0–0

15...a5 16.♘d2 0–0 17.0–0–0 a4 18.♔b1 f5 19.♕c4 transposes to our main line.

16.0–0–0

This feels like the most accurate move, but White can also try 16.f4!?N to mix things up.

16...a5 17.♘d2 a4 18.♔b1 f5 19.♕c4

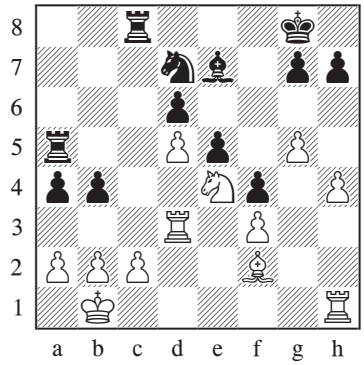


Black is close to equality here, but in practice things are far from simple. One thing that attracted me to the English Attack was the way Black is continuously equal according to Stockfish, but losing game after game, even in correspondence chess.

19...♖b8

19...a3 20.b3 ♖b8 21.♖hf1 ♖b7 22.f4 ♕a5 23.♕d3 e4 24.♘c4± favoured White in Firsching – Raap, email 2013.

Another game continued: 19...♕a5!? 20.♕c6 f4 21.♗f2 ♖fd8 22.♘c4 ♕a6 23.♖d3 ♖dc8 24.♕xa6 ♖xa6 25.♘d2 ♖a5 26.♘e4±



This is Kurgansky – Schmidt, email 2008. The engine can tell me this is equal as many

times as it wants, but I would much rather be White and have that fantastic knight dominating everything.

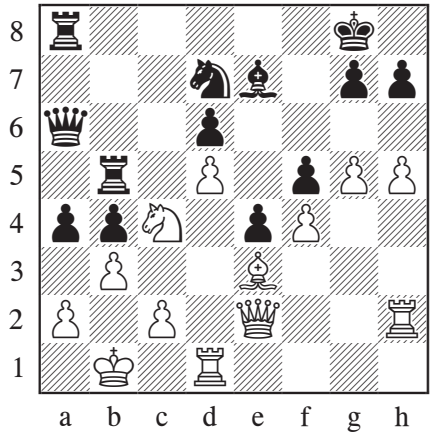
20.f4 ♖b7 21.♕e2 ♕a5?!

21...♕a8 22.b3 ♖e8!? was better, when White has a pleasant position, but Black can claim to be in the game as well.

22.♘c4 ♕a6 23.b3 e4?!

23...♖e8± was a better defensive try.

24.♖h2± ♖b5 25.h5 ♖a8



26.♕f1!

A clever reorganization of the pieces.

26...♕b7 27.♖hd2 ♕a6 28.♕h3 ♖f8 29.♗g1 ♕c8 30.♖e1 ♘c5 31.♗d4 axb3 32.cxb3 ♘a6 33.♖c1 ♘c7 34.♘b6 ♕b7 35.g6 h6 36.♘d7 ♖xd5 37.♘xf8 ♗xf8 38.♕f1 ♘b5 39.a4 ♘c3† 40.♔b2 ♕c6 41.♕h3
1–0

9...b5 10.g4 b4 looks sharp at first glance but quickly results in a typical structure, where White has an enduring positional advantage. The apparent "attack" against the white king is not real, because the black pieces are much too passive – in the long term, White is the favourite.

In essence, this is another of those positions that can arise from the opening where Black has compromised his position somewhat for clarity. It is still a complex battle, but one which White should engage in with glee.

GAME 41

Maksim Pundak – Heinrich Hoexter

email 2016

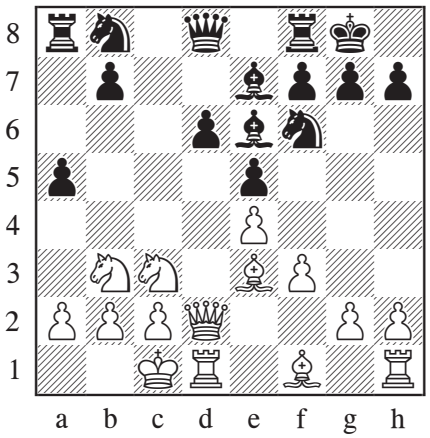
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♗e7

This is the first we have seen of this standard move. It leads to the big main lines – but before we get to them, we shall start with some unusual 10th move deviations.

9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0 a5?!

This line was recommended in many books and became rather popular at some point. However, it has since been almost refuted in correspondence chess, and I doubt that there will be a serious change in this evaluation.

10...♘c6? does not work here. After 11.♘d5± it is clear that Black has move-ordered himself.



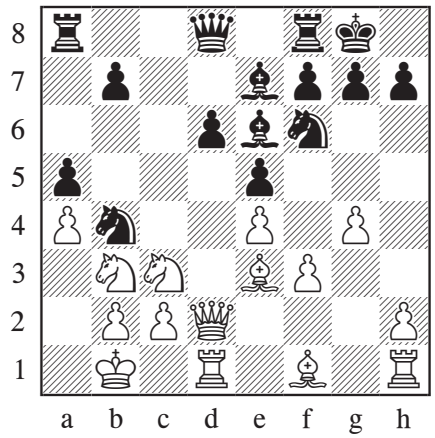
11.a4! ♘c6

11...♘a6 12.g4 ♘b4 makes little difference.

12.g4! ♘b4

12...♖c8 13.♔b1 ♘b4 transposes to the game.

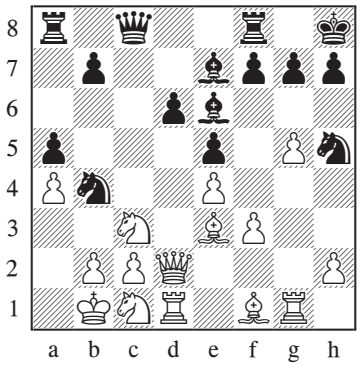
13.♔b1!



13...♖c8

Black has also tried:

13...♕c8 does not make a lot of sense. Normal play works wonders for White: 14.g5 ♘h5 15.♖g1 ♔h8 16.♘c1!



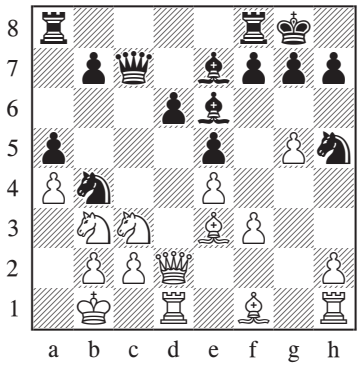
If White had all the time in the world, he would play ♗b5 and then ♘d3xb4 with a clear advantage. Black tried breaking in the centre, but it did not work. 16...d5?! 17.♘xd5 ♗xd5 18.exd5 ♖d8 19.c4 ♗c5 20.♗xc5 ♕xc5 21.♖g4 ♘f4 22.♖e1 ♖e8 23.♘a2± Bes – Koopmans, email 2014.

Things are similar after the other queen move: 13...♕c7 14.g5

Sticking with the programme.

14...♘h5

14...♘d7?! allows 15.f4! exf4 16.♗xf4 ♘e5 17.♘d4±, which was simply horrible for Black in Dominguez Perez – Wojtaszek, Havana 2008.



15.♖g1

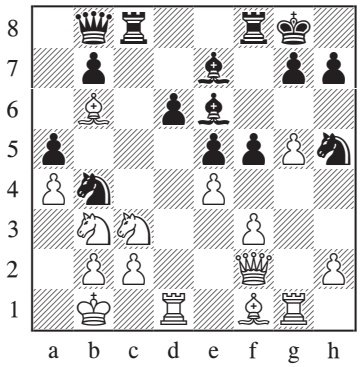
15.♗b5 f6 16.h4 ♖ac8 17.♕f2± was also strong in Kolesnikova – Lukasevicius, email 2017.

15...♖ac8 16.♕f2 f5

Black has to seek active counterplay.

16...♗d8 17.♘c1 f5 18.♕d2!± Schlenther – Konstantinov, email 2013.

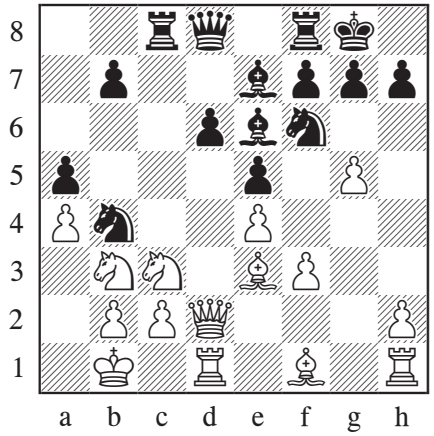
17.♗b6 ♕b8



18.♕e2! ♘f4 19.♕b5 fxe4 20.fxe4 d5!? 21.exd5 ♗f5 22.♖d2 ♕d6 23.♗xa5 ♘xc2 24.♖xc2 ♕g6 25.♘a1!±

Mackintosh – C. Sadler, email 2016.

14.g5



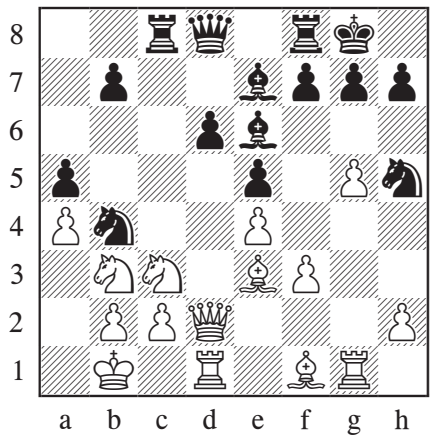
14...♘h5

This prevents White from playing f3-f4. Other moves have not fared better:

14...♘e8 15.f4 exf4 16.♗xf4 ♗g4 17.♖e1± Zambor – Hefka, corr. 2010.

14...♘d7 15.f4 exf4 16.♗xf4± Saric – Shirov, Reykjavik 2015.

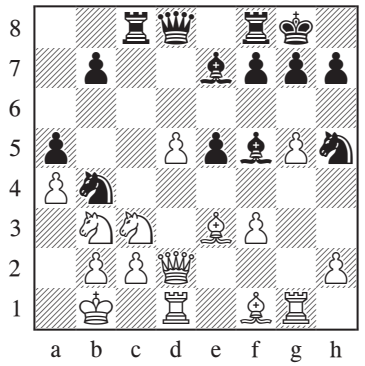
15.♖g1!



15...f5

Black seeks counterplay, but it does not work out. Neither do any other lines:

15...d5? 16.exd5 ♗f5 is not too difficult to refute. As so often, White has an ugly move that can be fully justified by the extra pawn he has just won:



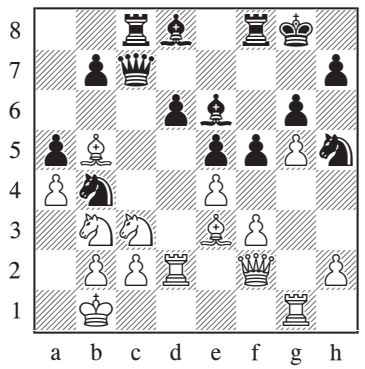
17.♘a1! ♗c5 18.♗b5 ♕d6 19.♖ge1 ♘f4 20.♘e4 White was completely winning in Duchardt – LeSavouroux, email 2015.

The sharpest variation comes after the calm:
15...g6

White plays in the most direct way with:
16.♗b5 ♕c7 17.♕f2 ♗d8

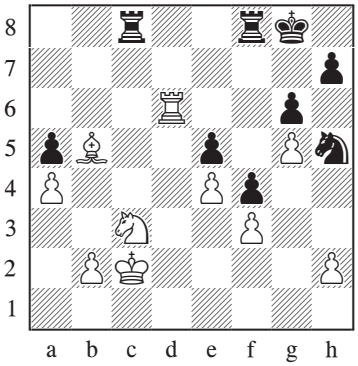
17...♘f4 18.♗xf4 exf4 19.h4± Massy – Akrill, email 2017.

18.♖d2 f5



19.♖gd1!! f4 20.♗a7 b6 21.♖xd6 ♗xb3 22.♗xb6 ♗xc2† 23.♕xc2 ♘xc2 24.♗xc7 ♗xc7 25.♔xc2 ♗xd6 26.♖xd6±

White is technically winning. The exchange does not matter a lot; what matters is that Black cannot get his pieces playing.



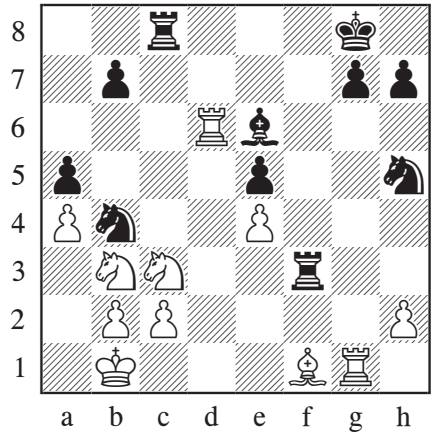
26...♖fd8

26...♘g7 27.b3 ♔h8 28.♗c4 ♖fd8 29.♘b5! is an important point. For example: 29...♘e8 30.♖a6 was winning for White in Merrheim – Witzschel, email 2013.

27.♖e6 ♖c5 28.♖a6 ♘g7 29.b3 ♔f8 30.♖f6† ♔e7 31.♗c4

White went on to win in Bennett – Vaitonis, email 2014.

16.gxf6 ♖xf6 17.♗g5 ♖xf3 18.♗xe7 ♕xe7 19.♕xd6 ♕xd6 20.♖xd6±



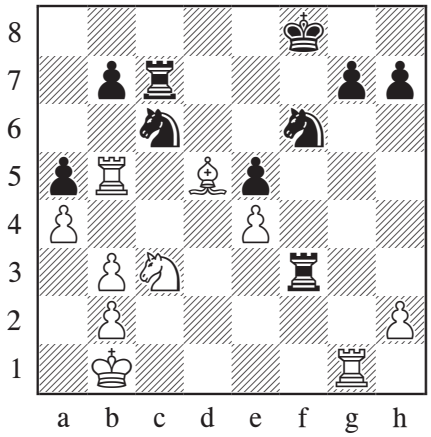
20...♗xb3

20...♘f4 21.♘xa5 ♖f2 is active, but no improvement. After 22.♘xb7 ♖xc2 23.a5 White was winning in Inarkiev – Andriasian, Gjakova 2016.

21.cxb3 ♘f6 22.♖b6

After 22.♗c4† ♔f8 23.♖b6 ♖b8 24.♖b5! ♘c6 25.♖d1 ♖h3 26.♖d6 ♖d8 27.♖xd8† ♘xd8 28.♖xa5 ♖xh2 29.♖xe5± White won on move 74 in Schuller – Demian, email 2014.

22...♖c7 23.♖b5 ♘c6 24.♗c4† ♔f8 25.♗d5±



White has a technically winning position.

25...♘b4 26.♖xa5 ♘bxd5 27.exd5 ♖d7 28.♖b5 ♖f2 29.h3 ♖f3 30.a5 ♖xh3 31.d6 e4 32.♘a4 e3 33.♘c5 ♖xd6 34.♖e1 ♘d7 35.♘xb7 ♖dh6 36.♖e2 ♖h1† 37.♔a2 ♖1h5 38.♖xh5 ♖xh5 39.b4 ♖b5 40.♘d6 ♖xb4 41.♖xe3 ♖b8 42.b4 g5 43.♔b3 ♖a8 44.♔c4 g4 45.b5
1–0

10...a5 seems busted. I do not expect this line to come back to life. If you encounter it, think of zombie movies...

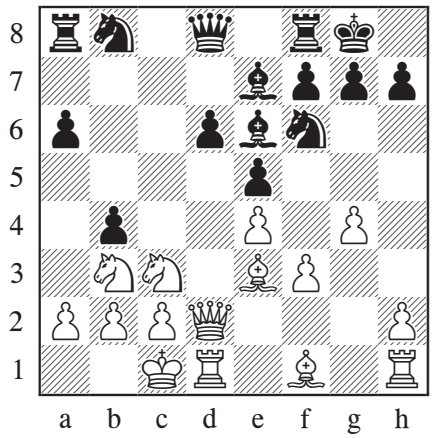
GAME 42

Horst Vennemann – Peter Grott

email 2004

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0 b5 11.g4 b4

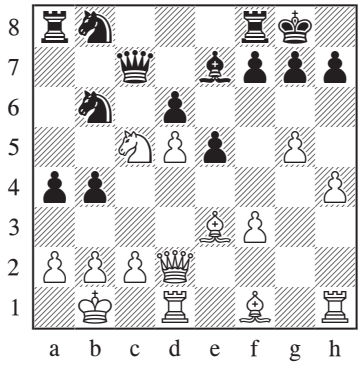
11...♘bd7 is the big main line – we will return to that position in the coming games. But when we get to it, I will use the move order 10...♘bd7 11.g4 b5, as I also need to cover some 11th move alternatives to 11...b5.



12.♘d5 ♗xd5 13.exd5 a5 14.♔b1 a4

This is the most meaningful way of playing the position as far as I am concerned. But as it is not really working, slow play needs to be checked as well.

14...♕c7 15.g5 ♘fd7 16.h4 ♘b6 17.♘c5! a4



This has been played in a few games, with the strongest player defending the black side being Tazelaar.

At this point I recommend a new idea: 18.♘e4!?N ♖c8 19.♖c1!

Prophylaxis against ...b4-b3.

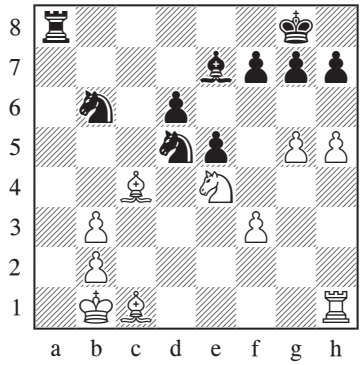
19...♘8d7

19...♘c4 20.♗xc4 ♕xc4 21.h5± would give White an attack without any real counterplay for Black. Next up comes g5-g6.

20.h5 b3 21.cxb3 ♕xc1† 22.♕xc1 ♖xc1† 23.♗xc1 axb3 24.axb3

24.a3!? could also be considered.

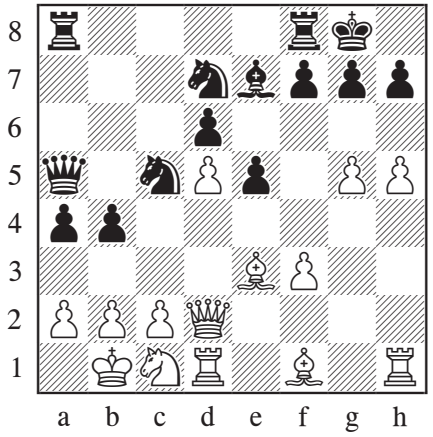
24...♘xd5 25.♗c4 ♘7b6



26.♖d1±

Black's king has little chance of entering the game. He will have to defend for a long time.

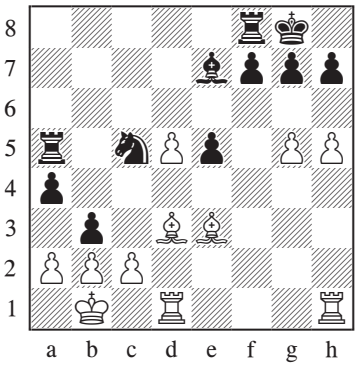
15.♘c1 ♕a5 16.g5 ♘fd7 17.h4 ♘a6 18.h5 ♘ac5



19.g6!?

I believe White could have played better here with: 19.♘d3!N ♘xd3 (19...♖fb8 20.g6 ♗f6 21.♗h3 a3 22.b3 ♘xd3 23.gxf7† ♔xf7

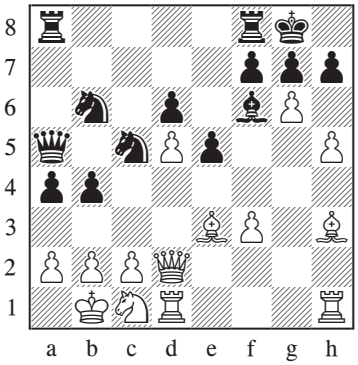
24.♗e6† ♔e7 25.♕xd3+–) 20.♗xd3 ♘c5 21.f4! White has a great position. A nice point is that after 21...b3, White can play: 22.♕xa5 ♖xa5 23.fxe5 dxe5



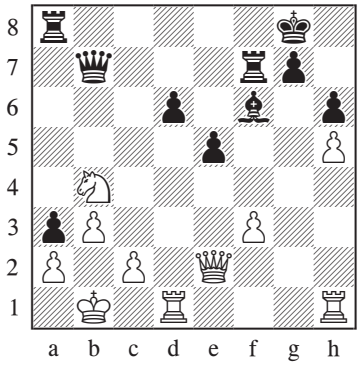
24.d6! ♗xd6 25.♗c4 with g5-g6 as just one of the many ways forward.

19...a3?!

More resilient was 19...♗f6 20.♗h3 ♘b6, as in Tiviakov – Gormally, Kilkenny 1998.



I have seen this game quoted as being the right way for White to play. But here the right way forward was different from what Tiviakov did: 21.♕e2!N is the way to go. The critical line seems to be 21...h6 22.gxf7† ♖xf7 23.♗xc5 ♕xc5 24.♗e6 a3 25.♘d3 ♕a5 26.b3 ♘xd5 27.♗xd5 ♕xd5 28.♘xb4 ♕b7

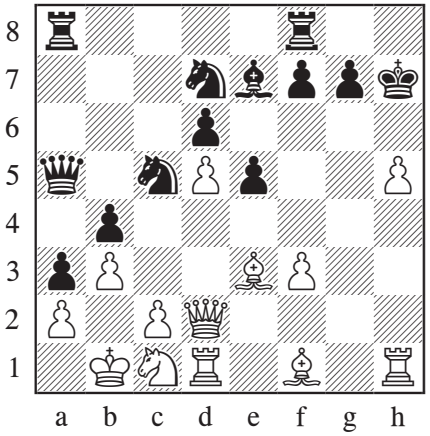


29.♘d5± and White can press forever, although Black has his chances.

20.gxh7† ♔xh7

20...♔h8N 21.b3 is also great for White.

21.b3±



White has a large advantage and won convincingly. Actually, there was hardly any fight.

21...♖fb8 22.♗h3 ♗f6 23.♗f5† ♔g8 24.♖dg1 ♔f8 25.♗g5 ♔e7 26.♗xf6† gxf6 27.h6 ♖h8 28.♖g7 ♖af8 29.h7 ♘a6 30.♖hg1 ♘c7 31.♖g8 ♕a8 32.♖xf8
1–0

11...b4 seems mistimed. Played on an earlier move, Black has more flexibility with the

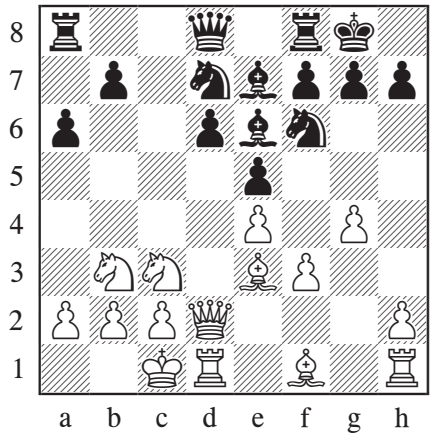
structure; played later, he is fully developed and ready for the main lines. But played at this point, White gets a structural advantage and results have reflected that.

GAME 43

Panayotis Frendzas – Pascal Roques

email 2015

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0 ♘bd7 11.g4



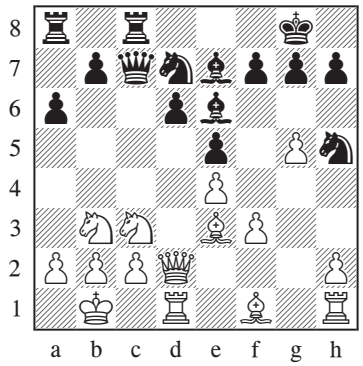
11...b5

To me this is the only sensible move. White is progressing quickly on the kingside, so Black urgently needs to create counterplay on the queenside. This position also commonly arises via the move order 10...b5 11.g4 ♘bd7.

I will offer a few examples where Black played in more relaxed style – and got kicked because of it.

11...♕c7 12.♔b1 ♖fc8 13.g5 ♘h5

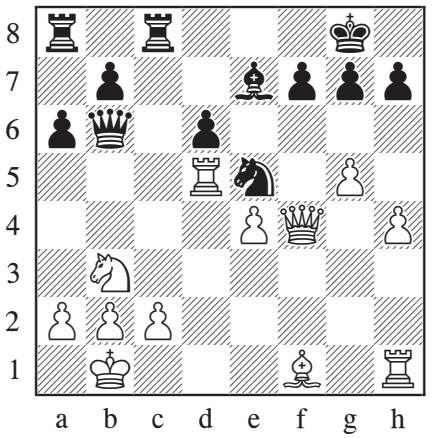
It looks as if the kingside is blocked, but White has more than one way to break through:



14.f4! exf4 15.♗xf4 ♘xf4 16.♕xf4 ♘e5

16...b5 17.♘d4 b4 18.♘d5±

17.h4 ♕b6 18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.♖xd5!

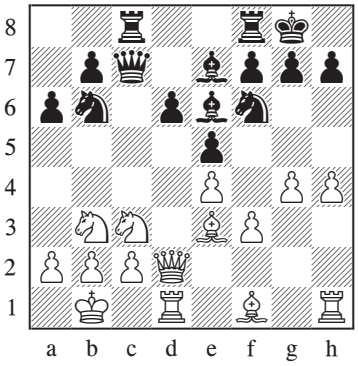


White had a big plus in Grischuk – Sjugirov, Moscow 2009. I should mention that taking with the pawn is also good for White, but it makes less sense to do so. Another point about this type of position is that if Black is preparing ...♗f8-g7, White should be ready with h4-h5-h6, with a crushing advantage, as famously seen in Karjakin – Kramnik, Dortmund 2004.

11...♘b6

This is also awkward; White has several ways to play for an advantage. The following game is a good example:

12.♔b1! ♖c8 13.h4 ♕c7



14.h5!

When White is given so much extra time, he should exploit it.

14...h6

14...♘fd7 15.g5 f5 is an idea seen at times. But here it weakens the light squares too much: 16.exf5! ♗xf5 17.♖h2 ♖fe8 18.♘a5 ♗f8 19.♗d3 ♗xd3 20.♕xd3± Voss – Romanov, corr. 2004.

15.g5 hxg5 16.♗xg5 d5

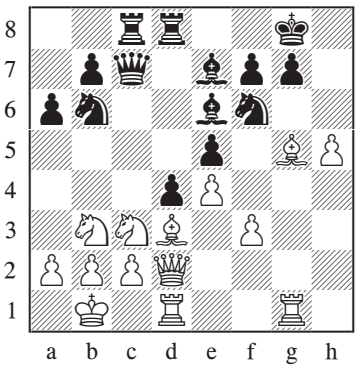
At first the engine believes White has overplayed his hand by allowing this advance, but the game shows otherwise.

17.♖g1 ♖fd8

17...d4 fails to: 18.♗xf6! ♗xf6 19.♕h6 ♕e7 20.♘d5 ♘xd5 21.exd5 ♗f5 22.♗d3 ♗xd3 23.♖xd3+– Black has no way to stop ♖d2-g2xg7. When it happens, the king can run, but the h-pawn will be passed and the black king exposed.

18.♗d3 d4?!

18...♔f8± was more tenacious.



19.♘d5! ♗xd5 20.exd5 ♘bxd5 21.♗h6 ♘e8 22.♗xg7 ♘xg7 23.h6

23.♖xg7†! is even quicker.

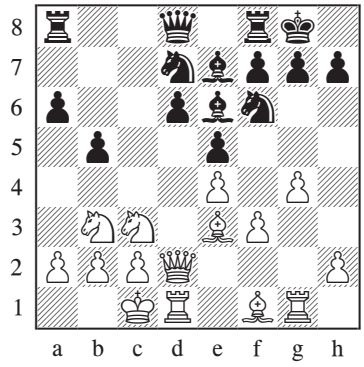
23...♗f6 24.hxg7 ♗xg7 25.♕h6 f6 26.♘c5 ♖d6 27.♕h7† ♔f8 28.♗c4 ♖e8 29.♘e4 ♖e7 30.♗xd5

1–0 Grischuk – Ftacnik, Calvia (ol) 2004.

12.g5

According to Anand, a more human way to play the position is:

12.♖g1!?



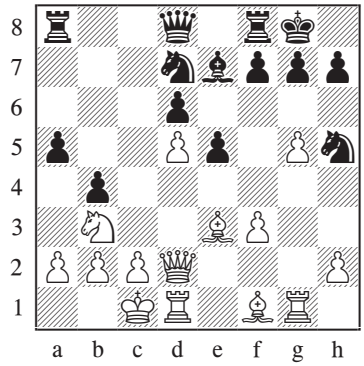
This is likely to transpose to our main lines if Black doesn't play:

12...b4 13.♘d5 ♗xd5 14.exd5 a5

Black has to do something; the b-pawn is hanging after all.

14...♘b6 15.♘a5 ♕c7 Taking on d5 first does not change anything. 16.♘c6 ♘fxd5 17.♘xe7† ♕xe7 18.♗xb6 ♘xb6 19.♕xd6 ♕g5† 20.♕d2± Ter Sahakyan – Zhou, Martuni 2008.

15.g5 ♘h5



16.♗b5!

This is definitely the downside to advancing the pawns on the queenside too early.

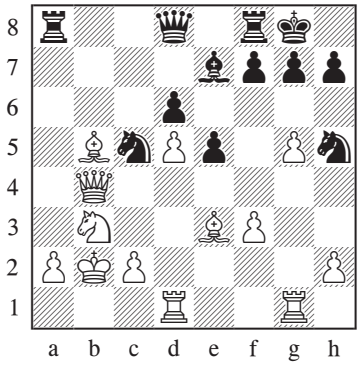
16...a4 17.♘a1

Now there is no way to defend the pawns.

17...a3

17...♘f4 18.♕xb4± Ovall – Thomas, email 2011.

18.♕xb4 axb2† 19.♔xb2 ♘c5 20.♘b3±

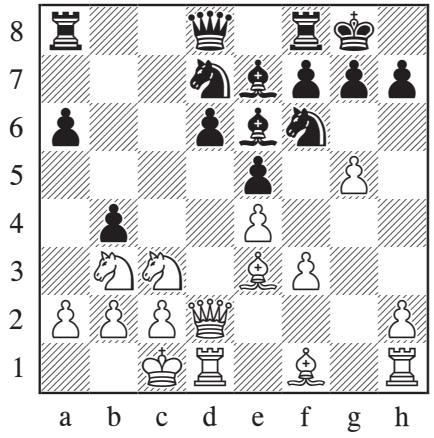


Black will have to play extraordinarily well to justify the pawn deficit, Vrana – Bas Fortuny, corr. 2016.

I recommend 12.g5, but there is nothing wrong with 12.♖g1.

12...b4

This became an important main line in recent years.

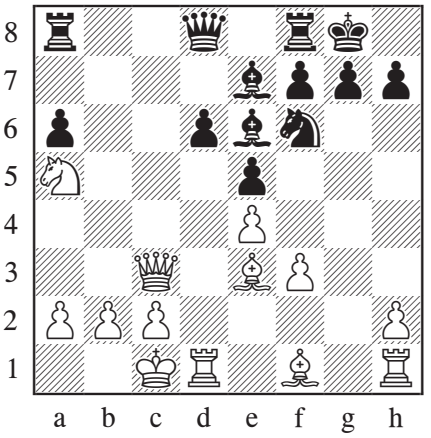


13.gxf6!?

This move is what has dampened Black's attraction to playing this line. As with so many modern opening systems, we end up in a position where correspondence players hold with Black most of the time (but not always) and where over-the-board players will have to suffer endlessly. Immensely strong players such as MVL, Grischuk and others have got into big trouble as Black in this line; I have a feeling your opponents will fare not much differently.

13.♘e2 ♘e8 14.f4 a5 15.f5 a4 is another deeply-analysed main line that was popular for years. In fact, it is too deeply analysed, with too much to remember and no advantage to speak of.

13...bxc3 14.♕xc3 ♘xf6 15.♘a5



15...♕e8

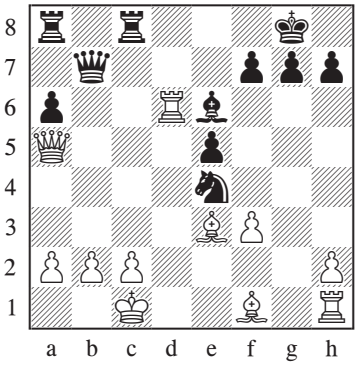
There are a few move orders that all lead the same place, but one real alternative.

15...♕d7 16.♘c6 ♖fc8

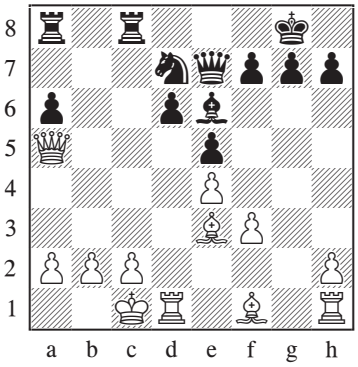
Bringing the other rook to c8.

17.♘xe7† ♕xe7 18.♕a5 ♘d7

18...♕b7 19.♖xd6 ♘xe4 was played in Wei Yi – Lu Shanglei, China 2014.



20.♖xe6!N fxe6 21.♕xe5 ♘f6 22.♕xe6† Khalifman recommends 22.♖g1 here, which is also good, but taking the pawn with check is more natural; White is simply better with two pawns for the exchange and two strong bishops. 22...♔h8 23.♕f5!±



19.b3

Warning: This is not my recommendation! The fact that Black can make a draw with perfect play or stunning preparation is a downside.

19.♔b1! has been played twice and would be my default choice. The games are far from memorable.

19...♘c5

Kribben – Soderberg, email 2010. Here I would consider:

20.♕b6!?N

The engine now recommends a big combination with:

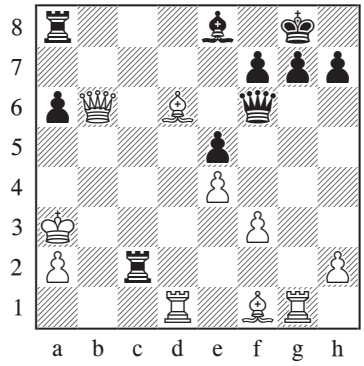
20...♗xb3!

Black makes a draw, but only after a scare. After something like 20...♖d8 21.♗xc5 dxc5 22.♖xd8† ♖xd8 23.♗xa6± Black will have to do a lot of work to fully justify the pawn deficit. Even if the computer at depth 24 thinks Black is equal, it is less certain at greater depths. And as a puny human, I see only two possible results.

21.♗xc5 ♗a4 22.♗xd6 ♕g5† 23.♔b2 ♖xc2† 24.♔a3!

24.♔a1 ♖c1† is an immediate draw.

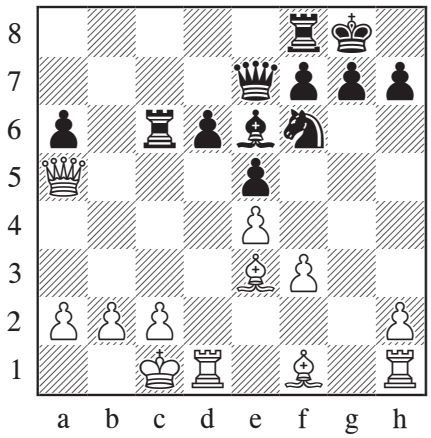
24...♗e8 25.♖g1 ♕f6



26.♗c4! ♖xc4 27.♖xg7†! ♕xg7 28.♖g1 ♕g6! 29.♖xg6† hxg6 30.♗xe5 ♖c6

Black will make a draw with counterplay against the white king, although the position still looks rather uncomfortable.

16.♘c6 ♖c8 17.♘xe7† ♕xe7 18.♕a5 ♖c6



19.♔b1!

I strongly prefer this prophylactic move. Black's counterplay is mainly down the c-file and White's chances are mainly on the queenside, as I see it.

White has also tried:

19.♖g1

But it is clear from practical experience that Black equalizes with accurate play.

19...♖fc8 20.♔b1

20.c3 ♘d7 21.♗g5 f6 22.♗h6 g6 23.♗e3 was the recommendation by Alexander Khalifman. But practical play has not been kind to this suggestion. In a dozen games, only Black has been able to squeeze out a few wins.

20...d5! 21.♗g5

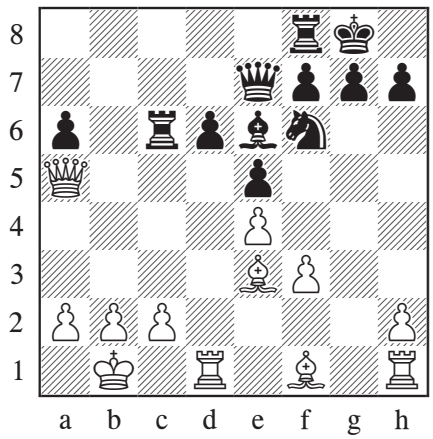
21.b3 d4 22.♗c1 ♘d7 23.f4 ♖xc2! 24.f5 ♗xb3 25.axb3 ♘c5 has led to draws in five games. A possible line could be: 26.♗c4 ♖xc4 27.bxc4 ♕b7† 28.♗b2 ♕xe4† 29.♔a2 ♕c2 30.♕b4 a5 31.♕b5 a4 32.♖c1 ♕xh2⩱ In practical play this is far from over, but White has no advantage according to Stockfish.

21...dxe4

21...d4? 22.f4!± Topalov – Grischuk, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 2011.

22.fxe4 ♔h8 23.♗d3 h6

Black has had no problems whatsoever in a dozen games.



19...♘h5

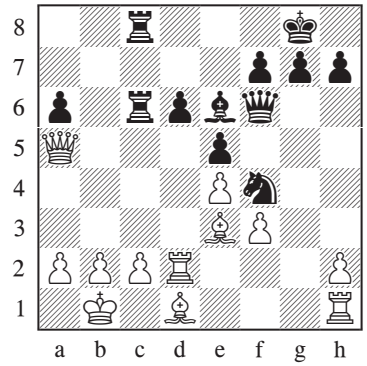
Other games have continued:

19...d5? 20.exd5 ♘xd5 21.♖xd5 ♗xd5 22.♕xd5 ♖d6 23.♕e4 ♖d1† 24.♗c1 ♕g5 25.f4 ♕xf4 26.♕xf4 exf4 27.♗g2± White won easily in Robson – Troff, Saint Louis 2015.

19...♖b8 20.♖g1 ♕b7 21.b3 ♘e8 22.♖g2± Serafim – Da Maia, email 2007.

19...♖fc8 20.♖d2 ♘h5 21.♖g1

21.♗e2 I like this move even more than Giri's choice, although he was very close to winning his high-level encounter. 21...♘f4 22.♗d1 ♕f6 (22...♕b7 23.h4 h6 24.h5 ♔h8 25.b3± has been played in two correspondence games. The score for White is one each – one win, one draw.)



23.c3 This modest set-up is very attractive. 23...♘h3 24.♔a1 h6 25.♕a3 ♗c4 26.b3 ♗e6 27.c4± Zugrav – Nataf, email 2016.

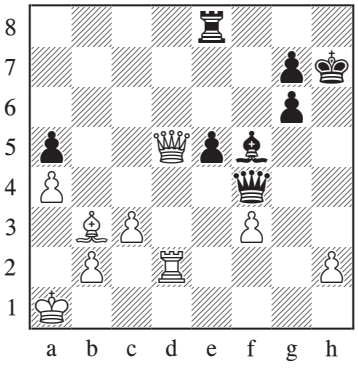
21...♕h4

21...♕f6 22.♗e2 ♘f4 23.♗d1± happened in a few email games that White won. It may not look much, but Black has no active play whatsoever.

22.♗e2 ♘f4 23.♗d1±

White has an edge, which grows rapidly after the following move:

23...f5?! 24.exf5 ♗xf5 25.♔a1 d5 26.c3 ♖g6 27.♖xg6 hxg6 28.♗xf4 ♕xf4 29.♕xd5† ♔h7 30.♗b3 a5 31.a4 ♖e8



Up to this point Anish Giri has played perfectly, but here he fails to find the right path.

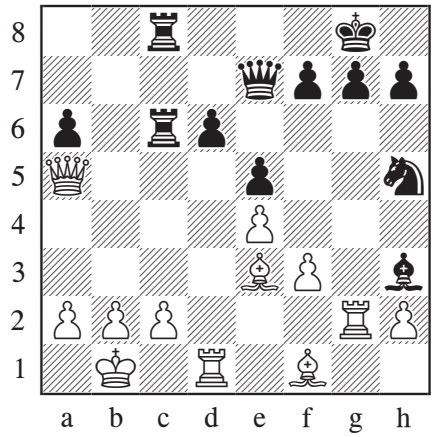
32.♔a2??

32.♕b5!+– would have consolidated.

32...♗e6 33.♕c6 ♗xb3† 34.♔xb3 ♖b8† 35.♔c2 ♖xb2†!=

The draw was inevitable in Giri – Vachier-Lagrave, Saint Louis 2016.

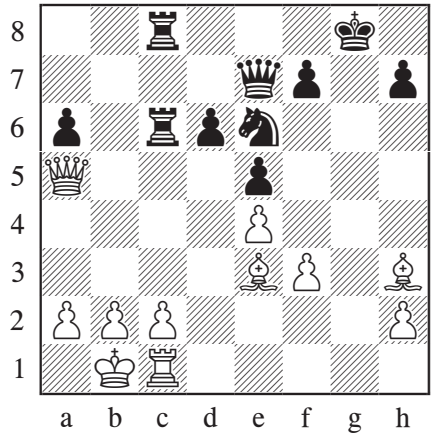
20.♖g1 ♖fc8 21.♖g2 ♗h3



This position has occurred in two email games. White is probably better after a noncommittal move, but he is doing brilliantly after:

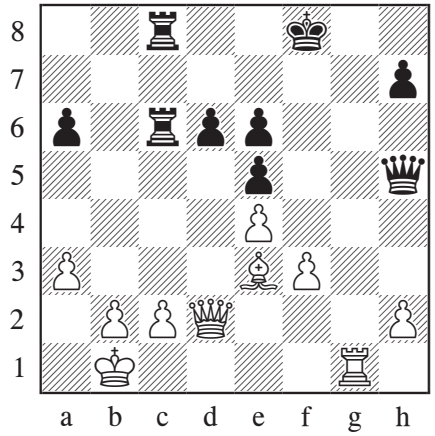
22.♖xg7†!! ♘xg7 23.♗xh3 ♘e6 24.♖c1!

This is most accurate, although White also eventually won after 24.♖g1† ♔h8 25.♖g2 in Baranowski – Borisovs, email 2011.



24...♕h4 25.♖g1† ♔f8 26.♗xe6 fxe6 27.♕d2 ♕h5 28.a3±

At a low depth, the engines believe in Black; once they go deep, they run away screaming.



28...♕xf3

Or 28...♔e7 29.♖g7† ♔e8 30.♕g2 with a deadly attack.

29.♕d3 ♕h5 30.c4 ♔e8 31.c5 dxc5 32.♖g8† ♔e7 33.♖g7† ♔f8 34.♖g3 ♔e8 35.♕f1 c4 36.♔a2 ♖6c7 37.♗d2 ♕xh2 38.♖g2 ♕h5 39.♗b4 ♕h6 40.♖g8† ♔d7 41.♗a5 ♔e7 42.♖g2 ♖c5 43.♗b4 a5 44.♗xc5† ♖xc5 45.♕g1 ♔d6 46.♖g8 ♕f6 47.♖a8 ♕e7 48.♕g8 ♖c7 49.♖a6† ♔d7 50.♕h8 c3 51.♕xe5 c2 52.♕d4† ♔c8 53.♖a8† ♔b7 54.♕a7† ♔c6 55.♕a6† ♔c5 56.♕xa5† ♔d4

57.♕d2† ♔xe4 58.♖a4† ♔f5 59.♕f2† ♔g5 60.♕h4† ♔g6 61.♖g4† ♔f7 62.♕xh7† ♔e8 63.♖g8† ♔d7 64.♕d3† ♔c6 65.♕xc2† ♕c5 66.♕a4† ♕b5 67.♕a8† ♖b7 68.♕c8† ♔b6 69.♕xe6† ♔a7 70.♕e3†
1–0

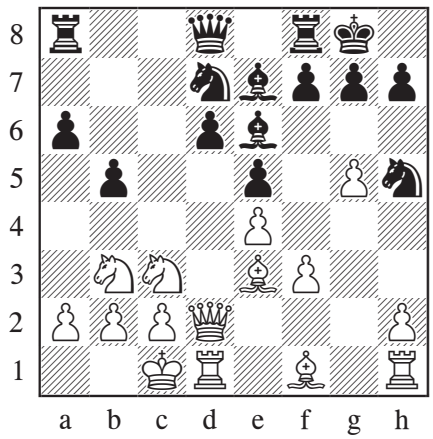
12...b4 was once one of the main lines of opening theory. 13.gxf6 is not a refutation, but the ensuing structure is impractical for Black – equality may be promised by the engines, but results show that it is elusive in practice.

GAME 44

Vyacheslav Lyukmanov – Marco Cusicanqui

email 2016

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0 ♘bd7 11.g4 b5 12.g5 ♘h5



This is the trendiest line in correspondence chess right now. Mainly because it is a mess and the computers have problems evaluating the positions correctly. We know this because the computer will give a position a 0.00 evaluation at a ridiculous depth like 57 or something (I have done my homework) and still White wins one correspondence game after the other.

I suppose the Black players go for this line because the computer does not find any advantage for White. It is only later on they realize that positions with no counterplay and passive pieces are difficult to defend, even with engine assistance.

13.♔b1

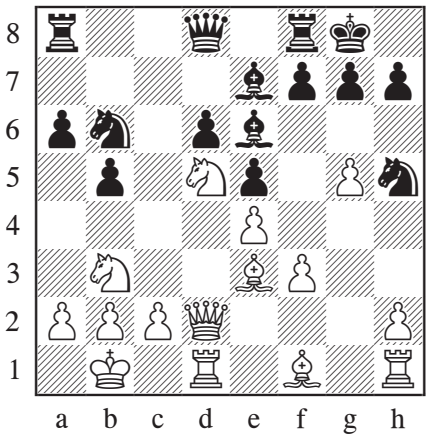
This is the more relaxed line. The key idea is that this king move always improves White's position, while Black is sort of waiting for White to put the knight on d5.

13.♘d5!? forces Black to give up his bishop. But after 13...♗xd5 14.exd5 f6! the game is not clear at all. Recently there was a big fight between Caruana and Mamedyarov in the 2018 Candidates in this line, where Black was OK from the opening. Caruana could have won this game many times though, so the line should not be entirely abandoned on this account.

13...♘b6

On the surface it looks desirable to take on d5 with a knight, but I would personally prefer to face the game move rather than 13...♖c8, which we will cover in the next game.

14.♘d5



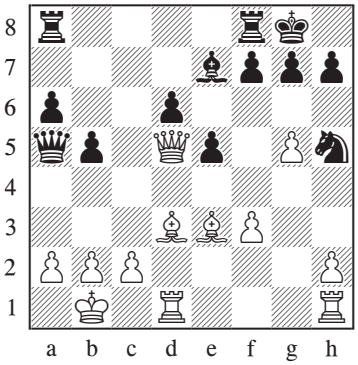
14...♘xd5

Taking with the bishop does not make a lot of sense at this point.

14...♗xd5?! 15.exd5 ♕c7

Black also got into trouble after: 15...♘c4 16.♗xc4 bxc4 17.♘a5 c3 18.♕xc3 ♗xg5 19.♘c6 ♕f6 20.♗xg5 ♕xg5 21.♕a3 ♕f6 22.c4! ♔h8 23.c5± Karakas – Chomicki, email 2013.

16.♘a5 ♘xd5 17.♕xd5 ♕xa5 18.♗d3±



White has sacrificed a pawn but taken control of the light squares: a typical scenario for this variation, and we will see many more examples of it in the pages ahead. The following game is included merely as illustration.

18...♖ac8 19.c4 ♕d8 20.cxb5 axb5 21.h4 b4 22.♖he1 g6 23.♗a6 ♖b8 24.f4! ♘xf4 25.♗xf4 exf4 26.♗c4 ♖c8 27.♗b3 ♔g7 28.♕d4† f6 29.h5 ♖c5 30.h6† ♔h8 31.♗d5 ♖c8 32.♖e6 ♕c7 33.♗b3 d5 34.gxf6 ♗c5 35.♕xd5 ♖fd8 36.♕f3 ♖xd1† 37.♕xd1 ♖f8 38.♕d5 f3 39.♕xf3 ♕h2 40.f7 ♕xh6 41.♕d5

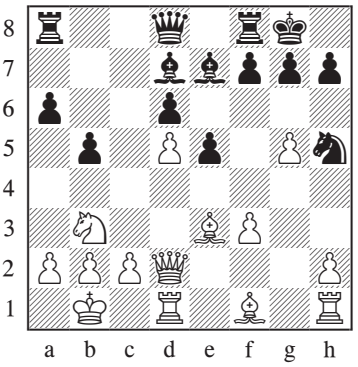
1–0 Compagnone – Stewart, email 2016.

15.exd5 ♗f5

The main alternative is:

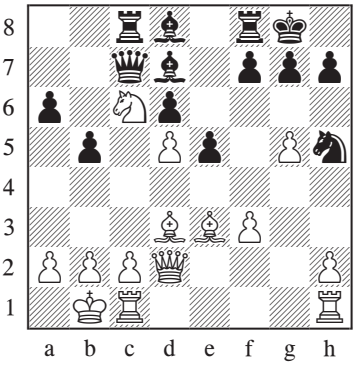
15...♗d7

Guarding the c6-square looks natural, but White will be happy to plant his knight there anyway and sac a pawn. What we are really playing for is domination over the light squares. It is important to understand that opposite-coloured bishops are not necessarily a relief for Black; White's unopposed light-coloured bishop can totally dominate the position under the right circumstances.

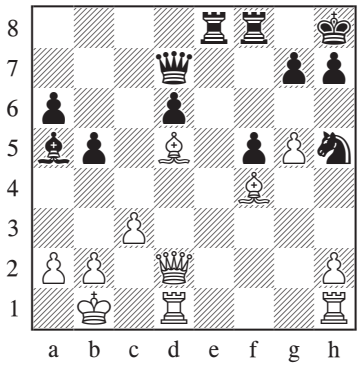


16.♘a5! ♕c7

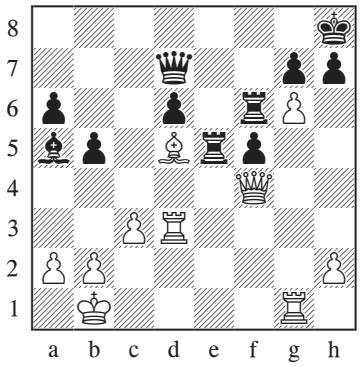
Thematic play arises after: 16...♖c8 17.♗d3 ♕c7 18.♖c1 ♗d8 19.♘c6!



This is the big idea which we will see again and again. 19...♗xc6 20.dxc6 ♕xc6 21.♗e4⩲ ♕d7 22.♖cd1 f5 23.♗d5† ♔h8 24.f4! exf4 25.♗xf4 I am sure that Black can hold this position with perfect play – but this is hard to achieve, even in correspondence chess. 25...♗a5 (25...♘xf4 26.♕xf4 ♗b6 27.♖he1 ♖ce8 may have been better, but after 28.a3± Black has not solved all his problems.) 26.c3 ♖ce8 In correspondence chess you can sometimes get really deep ideas, as occurred on the following move:

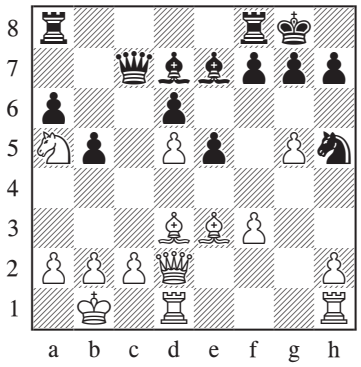


27.g6!! ♘xf4 There are no easy choices. (27...hxg6 28.♖hg1±; 27...h6 28.♗f7!±) 28.♕xf4 ♖e5 29.♖d3 ♖f6 30.♖g1±



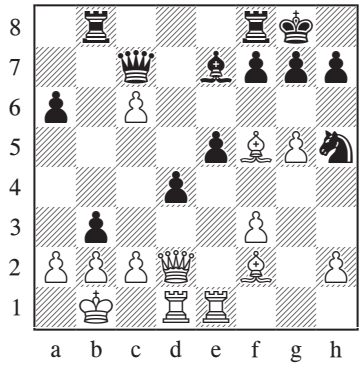
White has an enduring initiative and went on to win in Broniek – Vohl, email 2016.

17.♗d3



Let's inspect a few examples from this position after a) 17...♖ab8, b) 17...f5 and c) 17...g6:

a) 17...♖ab8 18.♖he1 b4 19.♘c6 ♗xc6 20.dxc6 d5 (20...♕xc6 21.♗e4 ♕c8 22.h4± is our standard dream scenario) 21.♗f5 d4 22.♗f2 b3!?

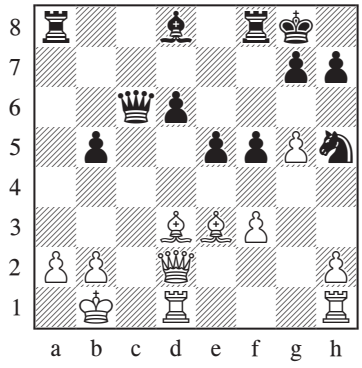


Winning the exchange will prove much less of a success that Black was likely hoping. 23.cxb3! ♗b4 24.♕c2 ♗xe1 25.♗xe1 g6 26.♗e4 ♘f4 27.h4 ♘e6 28.♕c4± Kitson – Ewan, email 2017. White is in full control and soon the pawns will start rolling.

b) 17...f5 18.c4 ♗d8

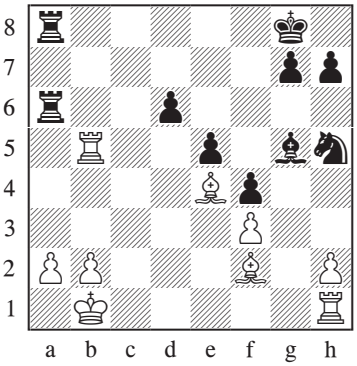
18...f4 19.♗f2 ♗d8 happened in Wapniewski – Savoca, email 2017. I think logical play is best: 20.♘c6!N bxc4 21.♖c1! ♗f5 (21...♗xg5 22.♖xc4 followed by ♘xe5 gives an advantage as well) 22.♗xf5 ♖xf5 23.♖xc4 ♕d7 24.h4±

19.♘c6 ♗xc6 20.dxc6 ♕xc6 21.cxb5 axb5



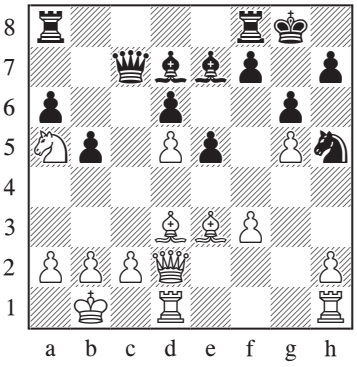
White continues pursuing his thematic plan of taking control over the light squares.

22.♗c2! ♖a6 23.♕d5†!± ♕xd5 24.♖xd5 f4 25.♗f2 ♗xg5 26.♖xb5 ♖fa8 27.♗e4



I think correspondence games tended to be shorter in the days when you had to pay for stamps, although the absence of computers made it possible to swindle your opponent from a bad position. Many correspondence games these days seem to last longer because it's so easy to send off an extra move on a server. However, in this position, Black did not waste his opponent's time: 1–0 Lee – S. Jones, email 2017.

c) 17...g6



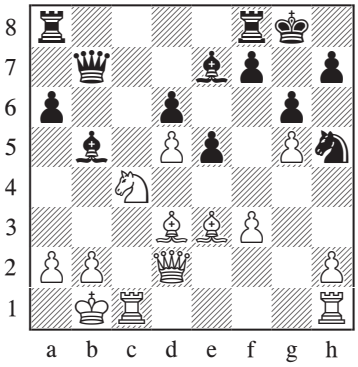
18.c4

18.h4 is also a decent move. One game was a flying success for our team: 18...♖ab8 19.a3 ♖be8 Stupid computer moves. 20.♗e4 ♘g3 21.♖hg1 (21.h5!? was also very tempting) 21...♘xe4 22.fxe4 ♗d8 23.b4 ♕c8 24.♖df1± Black had no counterplay whatsoever in Anokhin – Offenborn, email 2016.

18...bxc4

After 18...♖ab8 19.cxb5 ♗xb5 it is not difficult to find 20.♗e4!, which takes control of the c6-square. 20...f5 21.gxf6 ♘xf6 22.♘c6 ♗xc6 23.dxc6 ♔h8 24.♖c1± with a lasting positional advantage, Compagnone – Bolignano, email 2017.

19.♖c1 ♗b5 20.♘xc4 ♕b7

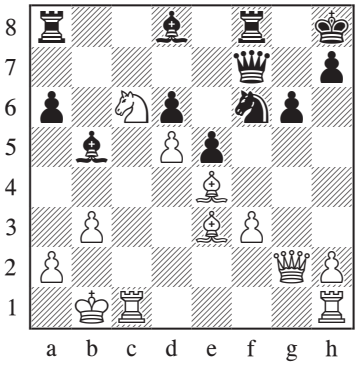


21.♗e4 f5 22.gxf6 ♘xf6 23.♕g2 ♔h8 24.♘a5 White also had success with 24.a4 ♗d7 25.♘a5 ♕b8 26.♘c6± in Zawadka – Wojcik, email 2017.

24...♕d7 25.b3 ♗d8

White was also doing well after 25...♖f7 26.h4 ♗f8 27.♖c3 ♖c8 28.♖xc8 ♕xc8 29.♖c1 ♖c7 30.♘c6± in Doderer – Jarecki, email 2016.

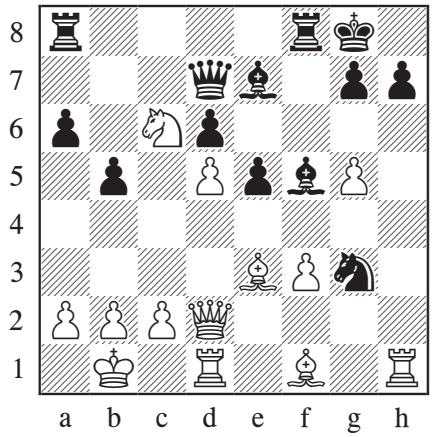
26.♘c6 ♕f7



27.♘xd8 ♖fxd8 28.♗g5 a5 29.h4 a4 30.b4 a3 31.h5±

Bergmanolson – Bolignano, email 2017.

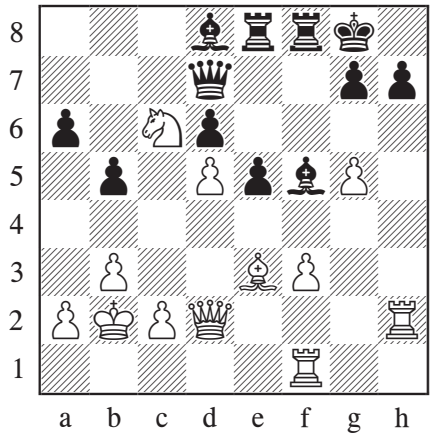
16.♘a5 f6 17.♘c6 ♕d7 18.h4 fxg5 19.hxg5 ♘g3



20.♖h2!

This is a more useful square than g1. To fight for equality, Black has to take on f1 anyway.

20...♘xf1 21.♖xf1 ♖ae8 22.b3 ♗d8 23.♔b2±



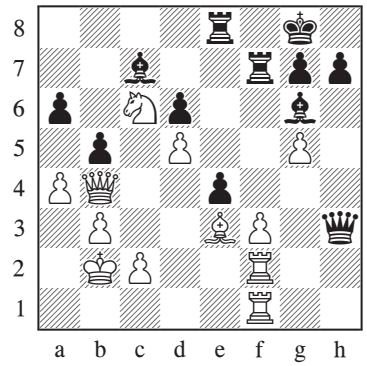
White is better, no matter what the over-confident engines believe. White has three active plays: f3-f4, ♕a5 and ♖a1 followed by a2-a4. All of them can put Black under pressure. His position is difficult to hold together in practice, even in correspondence chess.

23...♗g6 24.♖hf2 ♕h3

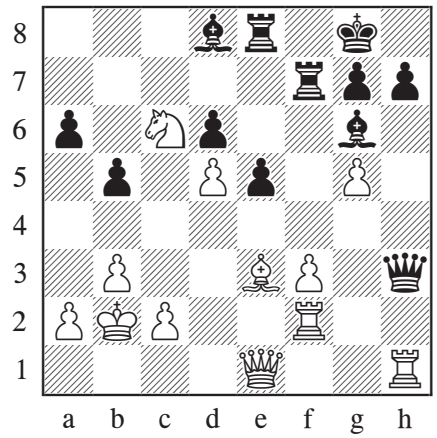
Heading for opposite-coloured bishops is not necessarily an escape route for Black. White is better after: 24...a5 25.♘xa5 ♗xa5 26.♕xa5 ♖a8 27.♕b4± In Rallabandi – Sherwood, email 2017, White won on move 54.

25.♕e1 ♖f7 26.♖h1

White was also able to press in another game, after: 26.♕b4 ♗c7 27.a4 e4

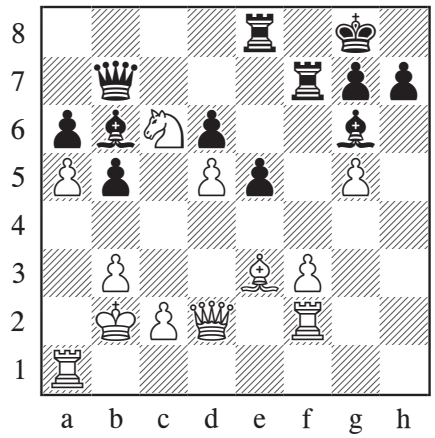


28.a5!± In Dunlop – Nekhaev, email 2017, Black managed to draw the game, but this is not guaranteed to be replicated.



I will not annotate the rest of the game deeply, as the opening is over, but I want to include it anyway, to show White's potential.

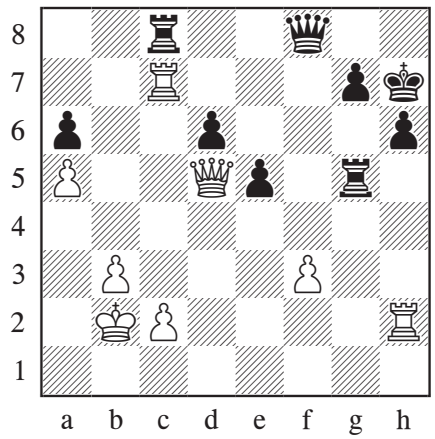
26...♕g3 27.♖g1 ♕h3 28.♖gf1 ♗c7 29.♖h1 ♕d7 30.♕d2 ♗d8 31.♖a1 ♕b7 32.a4 ♗b6 33.a5!



33...♗xe3

33...♗d8 34.f4 exf4 35.♖xf4 ♖xf4 36.♗xf4 ♕d7 37.♖e1 would also see White on the path to victory.

34.♕xe3 ♕d7 35.♕b6 ♖a8 36.♖e1 ♖f4 37.♖e3 ♕f7 38.♖h2 ♕f8 39.♖c3 b4 40.♖e3 ♖f5 41.♕xb4 ♖xg5 42.♕b7 h6 43.♖c3 ♔h7 44.♘e7 ♗f7 45.♖c7 ♖e8 46.♘c8 ♗xd5 47.♕xd5 ♖xc8



48.♖xh6†! ♔xh6 49.♕e6† ♔h7 50.♖xc8 ♕xf3 51.♖d8 ♖g6 52.♕c8 ♖f6 53.♕xa6 e4 54.♕c4 ♖g6 55.♕g8† ♔h6 56.♕h8† ♔g5 57.♖f8 1–0

12...♘h5 is the current main line in correspondence chess; with good reason, but 13...♘b6 is impractical, it seems. The weakness of the c6-square is the dominating positional feature. Whether Black is objectively OK or not is less relevant than White's pleasant play in practice.

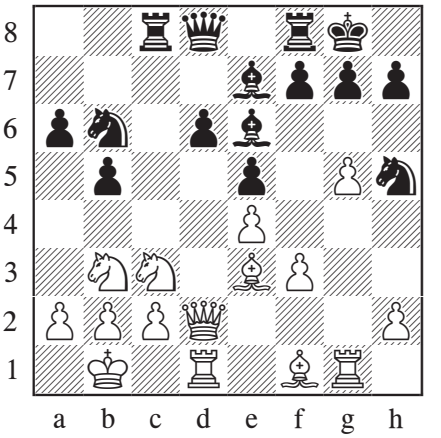
Now let's move on to the more challenging 13...♖e8.

GAME 45

Peter Svidler – Sanan Sjugirov

Loo 2014

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0 ♘bd7 11.g4 b5 12.g5 ♘h5 13.♔b1 ♖c8 14.♖g1! ♘b6



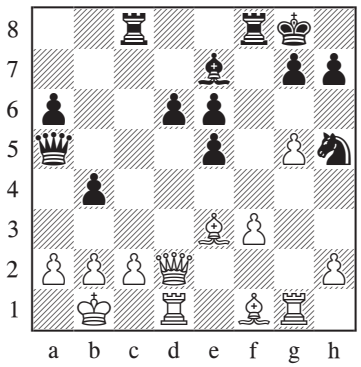
15.♘a5

I also spent some time analysing 15.♕f2!? ♘c4 16.♗xc4 bxc4 17.♘c5, which could be a future direction. But as it is quite different in character from the main line, I decided to let it be.

15...g6

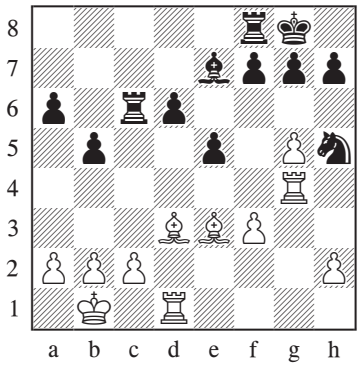
The most solid option.

15...b4? is premature on account of: 16.♘d5! ♘xd5 17.exd5 ♕xa5 18.dxe6 fxe6 (18...g6?! 19.exf7† ♔xf7 was Majhi – Zepeda, Hoogeveen 2015, when 20.a3!N ♖b8 21.♖g4! would have given White a totally winning position.)



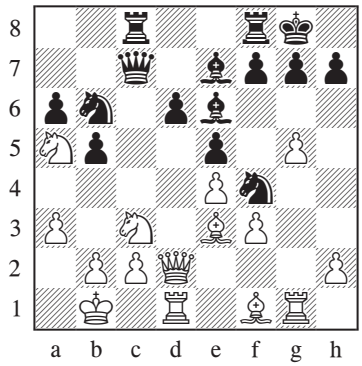
19.♗h3± Black is in trouble, for instance: 19...♔f7? 20.g6†! hxg6 21.♕g2 White wins.

15...♕c7 introduces us to the following fantastic pawn sacrifice: 16.♘d5! ♘xd5 17.exd5 ♗xd5 18.♕xd5 ♕xa5 19.♖g4!? (19.♗d3!?) 19...♕c7 20.♗d3 ♕c6 (20...g6 21.a4!?) 21.♕xc6 ♖xc6

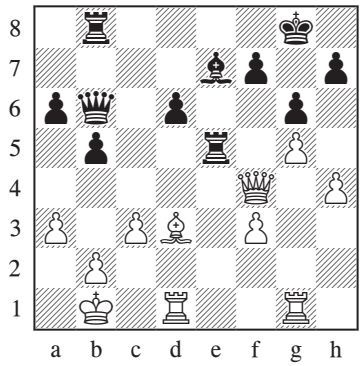


22.a4± Kramnik – Vallejo Pons, Monte Carlo 2004. Black is a pawn up, but his pieces are bad, especially his bishop, and White has a serious intitiative on the queenside. This is thematic for this variation.

After 15...♘f4?! 16.a3! the crazy engine at first wants to return to h5 with the knight! One game went: 16...♕c7



17.♗xf4! exf4 18.♘d5 ♘xd5 19.exd5 ♗xd5 20.♕xd5 ♕xa5 21.♗d3 g6 22.h4 ♖c5 23.♕e4 ♖e5 24.♕xf4 ♖b8 25.c3 ♕b6 Dominguez Perez – Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2010.



If White had played 26.♕h2!N followed by f3-f4, h4-h5 and f4-f5, he could have won the game quickly, as the black king is much too exposed. A possible line goes 26...a5 27.f4 ♖c5 28.h5 b4 29.cxb4 axb4 30.hxg6 fxg6 31.♖h1 h5 32.a4 d5 33.f5! and Black's position collapses.

16.a3

I do not like 16.♘d5?! ♘xd5 17.exd5 ♗xd5 18.♕xd5 ♕xa5 19.c4, on account of 19...♘f4! as in Wojnar – Holroyd, email 2015, where nothing really works for White.

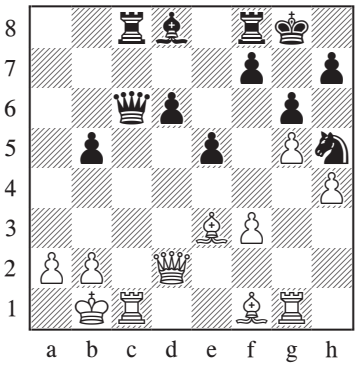
16.h4!?

This makes a lot of sense now that the rook is on g1 and Black does not have the ...♘g3 resource; so it should be considered as an alternative. Here are a few examples:

16...♕c7!

16...b4 is premature: 17.♘d5 ♘xd5 18.exd5 ♕xa5 19.dxe6 fxe6 20.♗h3 ♘g7 21.h5! ♕c7 22.hxg6 hxg6 23.f4! gives White the initiative, as in Morozov – Glushenkov, email 2015, a game he won.

17.♘d5 ♘xd5 18.exd5 ♗d7 19.c4 ♗d8 20.♘c6 ♗xc6 21.dxc6 ♕xc6 22.cxb5 axb5 23.♖c1



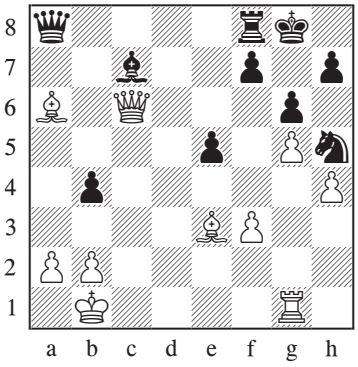
23...♕b7?!

A mistake, but 23...♕xc1† 24.♕xc1 ♖xc1† 25.♗xc1± gives an endgame only White can win.

24.♖xc8 ♕xc8 25.♕xd6 ♗c7 26.♕c6±

White has an overwhelming position and Black soon buckles under the pressure.

26...b4 27.♗a6 ♕a8?

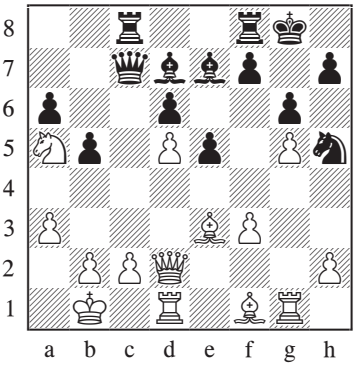


28.♖c1!

1–0 In Sevian – Vazquez, Medellin 2017, Black hated his position so much he resigned. If he had continued, he had no choice but to play 28...♕xc6 29.♖xc6 ♗a5, when 30.♗c4 ♘f4 31.♗c5 ♖a8 32.♖f6 ♘e6 33.♗xe6 fxe6 34.♖xe6 is two pawns up for White.

16...♕c7 17.♘d5 ♘xd5 18.exd5 ♗xd5

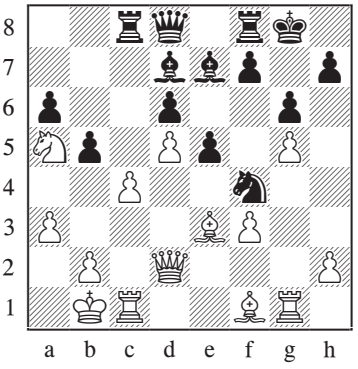
A respectable alternative is 18...♗d7.



From a practical perspective, I would be more than happy to take White's position, as I find his play far more natural and enjoyable. There are different ways to interpret the position, so I will show some examples and analysis of two options: a) 19.c4!? and b) 19.♗d3.

a) 19.c4!? ♗d8

19...♘f4 20.♖c1 ♕d8

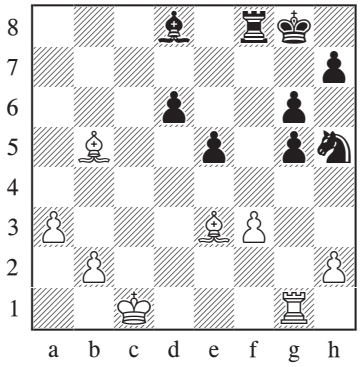


21.♘b7 led to an immediate draw in Straka – Dothan, email 2016.

It is important not to fall for: 21.h4? ♗f5† 22.♔a1 ♘xd5!! 23.♘b7 ♕c7 24.♕xd5 ♗e6 25.♕e4 bxc4!∓

But I personally think 21.♗xf4!?N exf4 22.h4 ♕b6 23.♗d3 looks quite pleasant for White. I would play like this in a tournament game for sure.

20.♘c6 ♗xc6 21.dxc6 ♕xc6 22.cxb5 axb5 23.♖c1 ♕xc1† 24.♕xc1 ♖xc1† 25.♔xc1 f6 26.♗xb5 fxg5

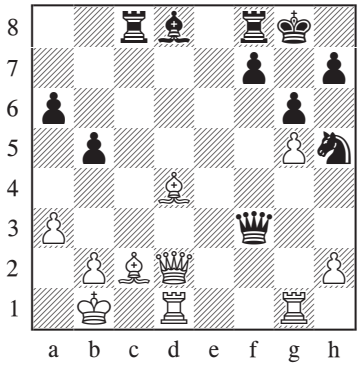


27.♗c6±

Tischenko – Audie, email 2012.

b) 19.♗d3 ♘g7

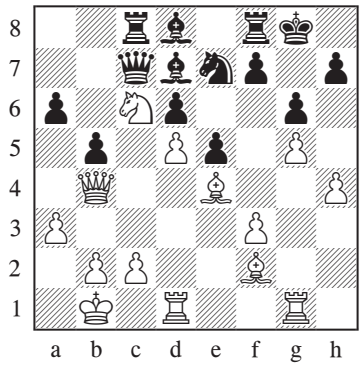
19...♗d8 20.♘c6 ♗xc6 21.dxc6 d5 22.c3 ♕xc6 23.♗c2 d4 24.cxd4 exd4 25.♗xd4 ♕xf3 occurred in Dominguez Perez – Vachier-Lagrave, Beijing (rapid) 2014.



26.♗c3!N± would have been a strong improvement; the bishops are powerful.

20.♗e4 ♗d8 21.♘c6 ♕b7 22.♕b4 ♕c7 23.h4 ♘f5 24.♗f2 ♘e7

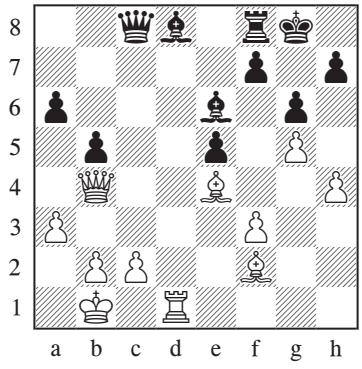
Ponomariov – Amonatov, Almaty 2016. At this point the former FIDE World Champion chose not to play:



25.♘xe5!N ♘xd5 26.♖xd5 dxe5

Presumably Ponomariov misevaluated this position, as in fact White is much better. A possible continuation is:

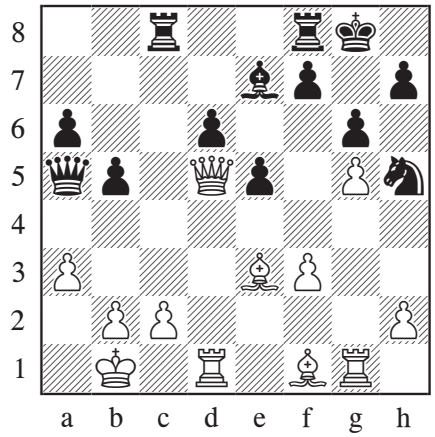
27.♖gd1 ♗e6 28.♖c5 ♕b8 29.♖xc8 ♕xc8



30.a4! bxa4 31.♗c5! ♖e8 32.♕xa4 ♗e7 33.♗xe7 ♖xe7 34.b3

With a technically winning position, even though good technique would be required to convert it.

19.♕xd5 ♕xa5

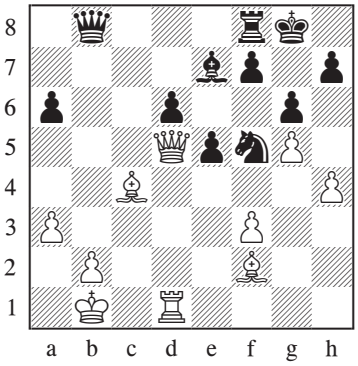


20.♖g4!?

20.♗d3 ♕c7 21.♗e4⩱ led to a win for White in Keskowski – Siebarth, email 2015. I am not sure if White was objectively better at this stage, but Black's position is evidently not easy to handle, even with the help of a computer, which is good news for us.

20...♘g7 21.h4 ♕c7 22.c4 ♘e6

No better is: 22...♘f5 23.♗g1 bxc4 24.♖xc4 ♕b8 25.♗f2 ♖xc4 26.♗xc4±



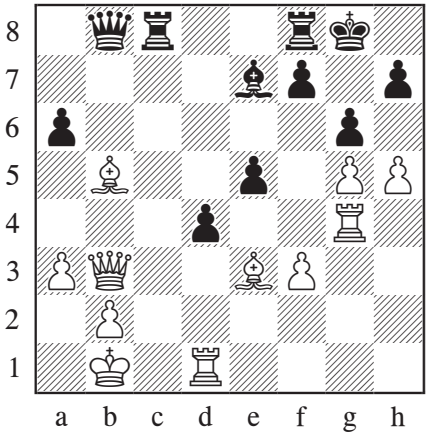
White's position is much easier to play, as well as objectively better. Three correspondence games have been played here – White won them all.

23.♗d3± ♕b8 24.cxb5 ♘c7 25.♕b3 d5 26.h5 ♘xb5 27.♗xb5

Naturally White avoids 27.hxg6? ♘c3†!.

27...d4?!

27...gxh5 28.♖h4 d4 would have kept the game sharp.



28.♗xd4?!

28.hxg6! hxg6 29.♗xd4 exd4 30.♗c4± was the right path.

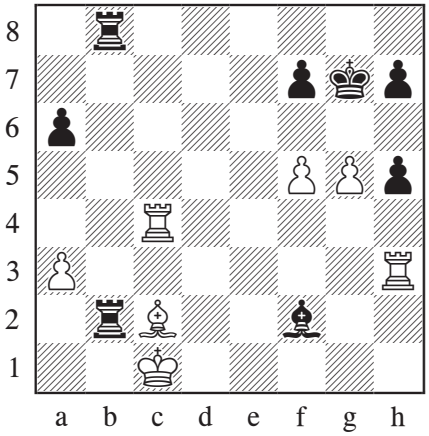
28...exd4 29.♗a4 ♕xb3 30.♗xb3 gxh5 31.♖gxd4 ♔g7

31...♖fd8! would have given Black excellent drawing chances.

32.f4 ♖cd8 33.♖e4! ♗c5 34.♖h1?!

34.f5!± was more precise.

34...♖d2 35.♖c4 ♖b8 36.♖h3 ♗d4 37.♔c1 ♖xb2 38.♗c2 ♗f2 39.f5



39...♖a2?

39...♖2b5! 40.♖xh5 ♔g8 would have kept the balance.

40.f6† ♔g8 41.♖b3 ♖e8 42.♔b1 ♖xc2 43.♖xc2 ♗h4 44.♖c5 h6 45.gxh6 ♗xf6 46.♖xh5 ♗d4 47.♖b7
1–0

The above is one of the absolute main lines in the English Attack at the moment. I like White's prospects, but certainly the Sicilian Najdorf is alive and ready for more battles.

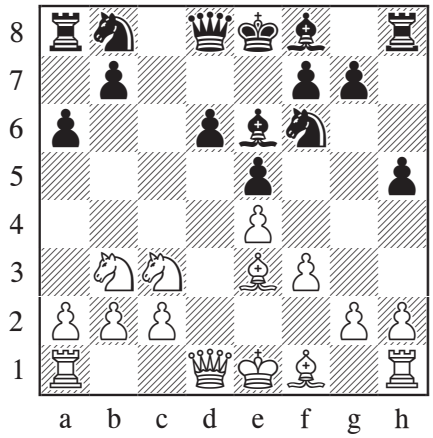
...h5 Lines

GAME 46

Alexander Areshchenko – Saleh Salem

Abu Dhabi 2015

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♘c3 cxd4 5.♘xd4 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 h5!?



An unknown move in the early 1990s, but now as trendy and mainstream as it gets. Naturally the main idea is to stop g2-g4, but there is a secondary idea of a later ...g7-g6 and ...♗f8-h6, exchanging Black's potentially more passive bishop.

9.♘d5

I like this direct move, making it likely White will gain the bishop pair.

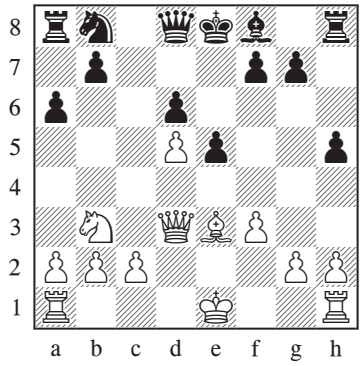
If instead we use the move order 9.♕d2 ♘bd7 10.♘d5 then 10...♘xd5 11.exd5 ♗f5 becomes more of an option, for reasons we shall see in a moment.

9...♗xd5

The standard choice.

Black needs to take on d5 one way or another, as a move such as 9...♘bd7?! allows 10.c4 cementing the monster knight in place.

The problem with 9...♘xd5 10.exd5 ♗f5 is that both White's queen and f1-bishop have not moved, meaning the following plan does not lose a tempo, unlike the related 9.♕d2 variation. 11.♗d3 ♗xd3 12.♕xd3



The position is more pleasant for White after, for example: 12...♘d7 13.0–0–0±

10.exd5 ♘bd7 11.♕d2 g6

The most common move order as it's highly flexible.

After 11...♕c7 I suggest 12.♖c1 with a likely transposition to our main line. (Instead 12.c4 a5! would head towards a type of position I recommend we avoid. I will explain more about the move orders in the note to White's 13th move.)

12.♗e2

This is the best practical choice to fight for the advantage without mind-bending levels of theory.

Instead 12.0–0–0 ♘b6 13.♔b1 is an interesting pawn sacrifice, but both knight captures on d5 are playable, and have been played and analysed intensively.

12...♕c7

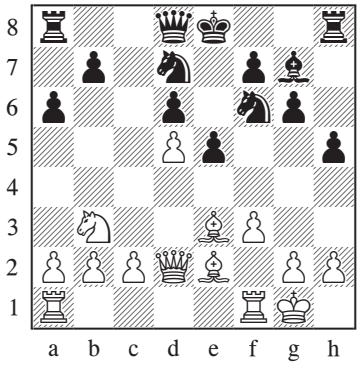
This is the recommended line in *The Sharpest Sicilian 2012*.

12...♗g7

Remaining flexible with the queen makes a lot of sense. This is a highly popular line, and leads to tense middlegames fights.

13.0–0

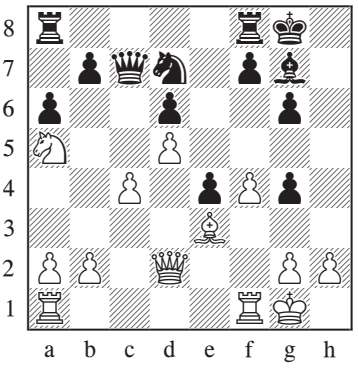
When we see Black's next move, it will be obvious why 13.♘a5 is a move I would like to work, but there is a problem line: 13...♕c7 14.c4 e4!∞ If we allow Black to take on f3 then he will have plenty of play along the e-file, after he castles and puts a rook on e8. Exchange sacs on e3 crop up alarmingly, with vicious dark-square play. We want nothing to do with that, but instead 15.f4?! ♘g4 is even worse, and highly unpleasant for White.



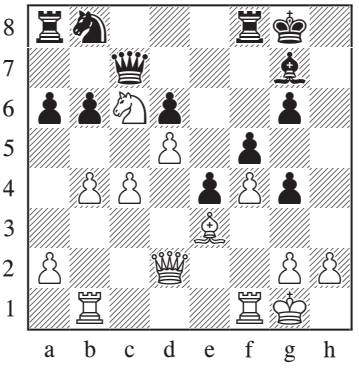
13...b6

Stopping our ♘a5 expedition.

13...0–0 14.♘a5 is a position I would be happy to reach as White. For example: 14...♕c7 15.c4 The a5-knights supports our queenside advance, and of course hitting it with ...b7-b6 allows ♘c6. 15...e4 16.f4 ♘g4 17.♗xg4 hxg4



It's a very different story with no rook on h8 and a king on g8 as a potential target. 18.♖ab1!? One of several promising options. White has ideas of b2-b4 and f4-f5; the former is our standard advance, but in this case, it also stops the black knight hopping from c5 to d3, while the latter targets the black king. 18...f5 (Black should try 18...♘c5! when 19.f5 gxf5 20.♖xf5 ♘d3∞ looks dangerous for Black, with his exposed king, but perfect defence might allow him to hold the balance.) 19.b4 b6 Otherwise c4-c5 was coming. 20.♘c6 ♘b8



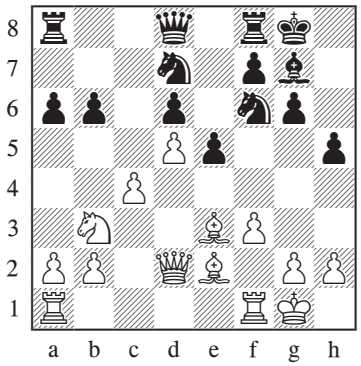
21.c5! Perfect thematic play. 21...bxc5 22.bxc5 ♘xc6 23.dxc6 dxc5 24.♕d5† ♕f7

25.♕xc5± The c-pawn was mighty in M. Yusupov – Bronnikov, email 2011.

14.c4

There is always room for a less usual approach, so 14.a4!? is interesting.

14...0–0



15.♖ac1

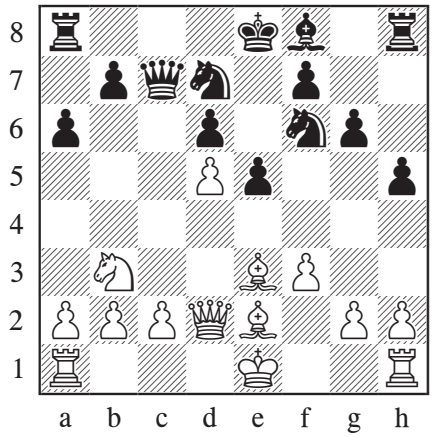
The normal way, but there's plenty of scope for experimentation.

For example, 15.♖ae1 ♖c8 16.♗g5 was Inarkiev – Korobov, Eilat 2012.

15.h3!? is another idea that crops up many places, demanding that Black be ready for g2-g4 plans.

15...a5∞

In Topalov – Vachier-Lagrave, Paris (rapid) 2017, White tried 16.♕d1 with the idea ♘d2-b1-c3-b5, but it's a mystery to me why he didn't use the more usual route: 16.♘a1!N then on to c2-a3-b5.



13.♖c1!

This precise move cuts out Black's queenside ideas and steers him back towards play on the kingside.

Instead 13.c4 allows the line suggested in *The Sharpest Sicilian 2012*: 13...a5!? 14.♖d1 (14.♖c1 a4 is similar; 14.a4 is uninspiring when our bishop is passive on e2 instead of sitting proud on b5: compare 13...a5?! in the notes below.) 14...a4 15.♘a1 ♕a5 The exchange of queens combined with Black's gain of space takes a lot of the sting out of White's position.

13.0–0? is a move-order blunder. 13...♘b6! Since 14.c4 would be en prise, the only way to save the d5-pawn is the positionally disastrous: 14.♗xb6 ♕xb6† 15.♔h1 h4!?∓ Black has the vicious idea of ...♘h5-g3†, but even simple play with ...♗h6 is excellent.

13...♗g7

The point of our previous move becomes clear after 13...a5?! 14.a4 when ♗b5 will quickly follow, with a powerful and secure outpost.

13...♘b6?! 14.c4 now makes no sense for Black, as the knight is misplaced on b6 when c4 is defended.

13...♘g8

Black wants to play ...♗h6 and doesn't mind spending an age to do so.

14.c4!

The most precise move order.

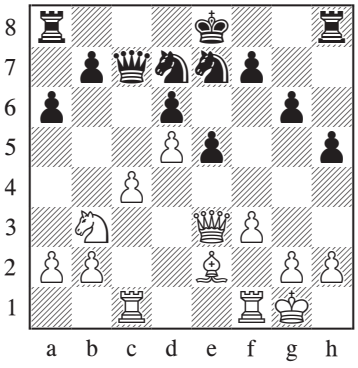
Instead 14.0–0 ♘e7!∞ was messy in Topalov – Dominguez Perez, Tromso (ol) 2014, as Black plans ...♘f5, and White cannot play ♗d3 as it would hang the d5-pawn.

14...♗h6

On with his plan.

With the d5-pawn secure, 14...♘e7 15.♗d3! is good for White.

15.0–0 ♗xe3† 16.♕xe3 ♘e7



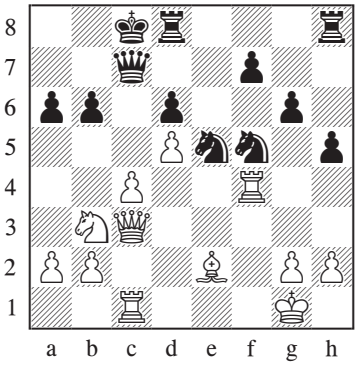
17.f4!↑

The downside to Black's slow play is that his king has no safe haven. We can follow an email game to illustrate White's play:

17...♘f5 18.♕c3 0–0–0

A temporary solution, but even worse was: 18...0–0?! 19.fxe5 ♘xe5 20.♖xf5! gxf5 21.♘d4±

19.fxe5 ♘xe5 20.♖f4 b6



21.♘d4 ♘xd4 22.♖xd4

Since it is clear the black king is insecure, 22.♕xd4? ♕c5 would be dopey from White.

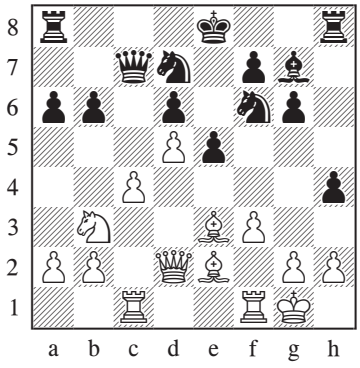
22...a5 23.a3 ♔d7 24.b4↑

In Roques – Petersons, email 2015, Black had a pretty knight and an ugly king.

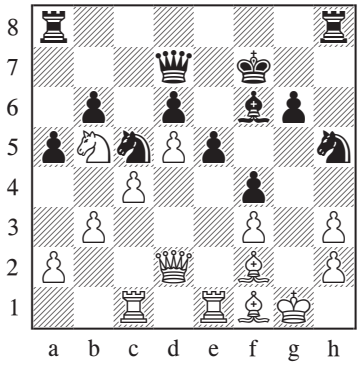
14.0–0 0–0

Almost universally played, but a recent game saw a creative deviation:

14...h4 Hoping to make use of the rook on h8. White met this with our standard plan: 15.c4 b6



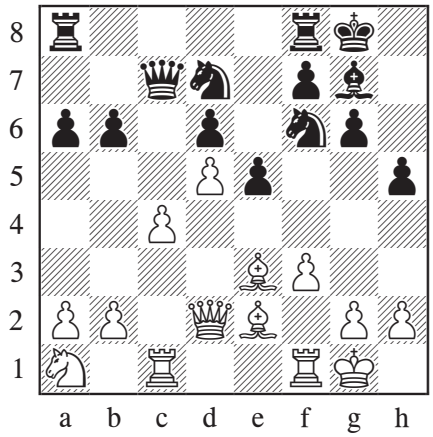
16.♘a1 A plan we shall become used to. 16...a5 17.♘c2 ♘h5 18.♖fe1 ♘c5 19.b3 f5 20.♗f1 ♔f7 21.♘a3 f4 22.♗f2 h3 Black is trying hard to make sense of the rook on h8, but it never really gets into the game. 23.♘b5 ♕d7 24.gxh3 ♗f6



25.♕c2!± In Forcen Esteban – Volokitin, Minsk 2017, a2-a3 and b2-b4 was coming.

15.c4 b6 16.♘a1∞

A common re-routing plan; the knight is heading for c6 via c2 and b4. It also makes way for the b-pawn, as a general queenside advance is White's usual plan. White has scored well from this position, and I am tempted to claim an edge, but 'unclear' feels most accurate.

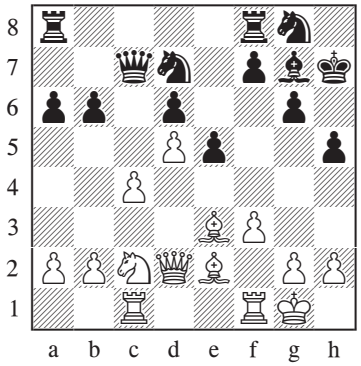


16...h4

One of many ways the game could go, and in reply White usually has several options, so comprehensive coverage is impossible. Both sides can start playing from here. So what follows are examples of typical ideas.

16...♖fe8 is a sensible developer when 17.♘c2 is our usual plan. The result will be decided in a tense middlegame.

16...♔h7?! 17.♘c2 ♘g8 is an overly sophisticated way to prepare ...♗h6.



18.g4! An appropriately crude response. 18...hxg4 19.fxg4 ♘e7 Understandably abandoning the original plan (instead 19...♗h6?! 20.♖f3 leaves the black king needing its bishop defender). 20.♖f3↑ Black's plan has clearly failed.

17.♘c2 ♘h5

As on most moves, Black has several reasonable options.

17...♖fe8 18.♘b4 has been tested several times, and is similar to the game. 17...a5?! stops the knight reaching c6, but after 18.♘a3 the b5-square is even more valuable.

18.♖fd1

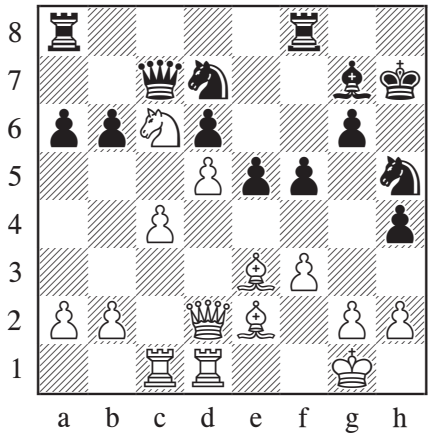
Moving the f1-rook is wisest, though going to the e1-square also looks sensible.

The point is that 18.♘b4 ♘f4! is irritating when the d3-bishop has no sensible retreat.

18...f5

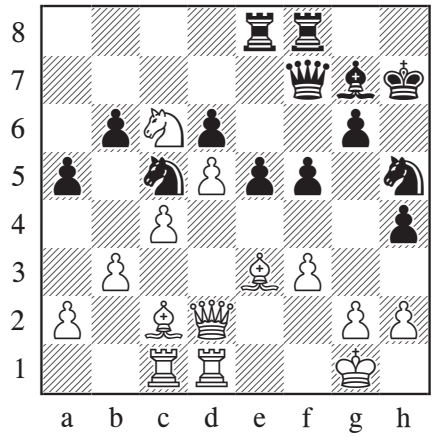
Naturally 18...♘f4 would be met by 19.♗f1 when Black has gained nothing.

19.♘b4 ♔h7 20.♘c6



Reaching the destination; now it's time to start thinking about advancing the b- and c-pawns, though of course White also needs to keep an eye on Black's kingside tries.

20...a5 21.♗d3 ♖ae8 22.♗c2 ♘c5 23.b3 ♕f7



24.♖b1?

White has played in fine logical fashion, but this slip allows Black to show his idea.

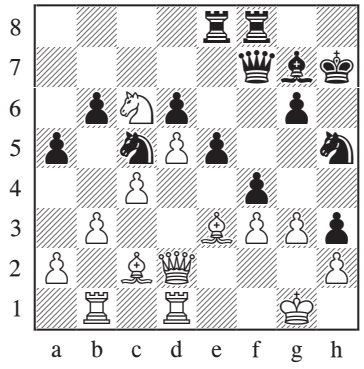
Correct was 24.♖f1!± when we will soon see why defending f3 is essential. If Black tries the same idea as in the game: 24...h3 White keeps control with 25.g3 f4 26.♗xc5. Now 26...fxg3? 27.♗xb6 loses for Black, as f3 is covered, so Black must try 26...bxc5 allowing 27.g4! ending Black's attacking dreams.

24...h3!∞

Now it's just an unpredictable mess.

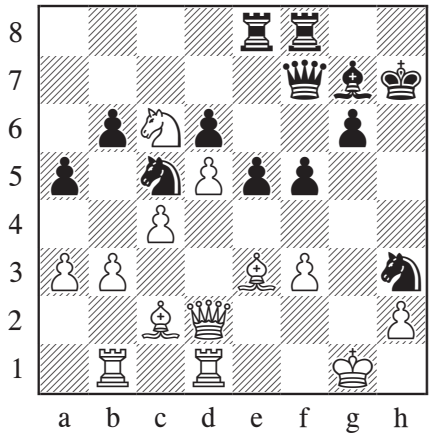
25.gxh3

It's too late to try to close the kingside with 25.g3 f4 due to the following point:



26.♗xc5? Instead of recapturing on c5, Black has the killing 26...fxg3! 27.♗xb6 ♕xf3 and the attack crashes through; ...♗h6 is just one of the resources.

25...♘f4 26.a3 ♘xh3†



27.♔h1

No better is 27.♔g2 e4! 28.♔xh3 f4 which leads to wild drawing lines, as the white king is too exposed to hide from all the checks indefinitely.

27...♕f6 28.b4 axb4 29.axb4 ♘d7 30.♕g2 ♘f4?

Letting White off the hook.

30...♕h4!∓ supports the nasty knight, and offers dangerous play.

31.♗xf4 exf4 32.♘d4 ♖e3 33.♘e6

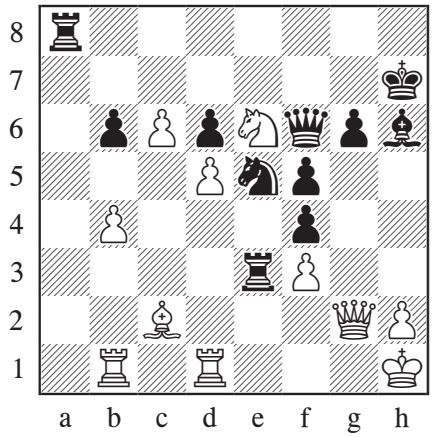
More precise was 33.♖g1! ♕xd4 34.♕xg6† ♔g8 35.♗xf5 ♖xf5 36.♕xf5±.

33...♖a8 34.c5 ♗h6?

Black needed to take on c5 one way or the other, with roughly even chances.

35.c6 ♘e5

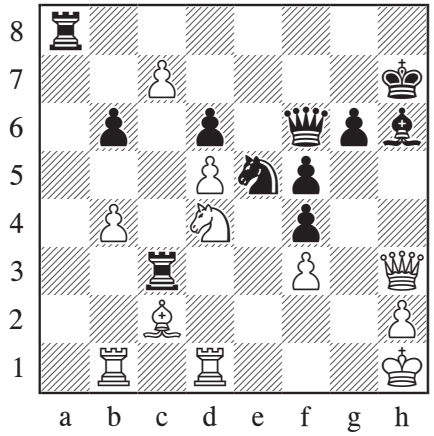
Attacking f3 and c6, but I suspect Black overlooked the following double defence.



36.♘d4!±

Obvious after the event, but a backwards move by an apparently perfectly-placed piece is missable. Now White is back in control.

36...♕f7 37.♕h3 ♕f6 38.c7 ♖c3



39.♘xf5!

Ripping open the black king's defence, but it's the power of the c-pawn that makes it work.

39...♖xc2

After 39...gxf5 40.♗xf5† ♔h8 41.♖bc1 the c-pawn decides.

40.♘xh6 ♔g7 41.♖bc1 ♖xc1 42.♖xc1 ♘d3 43.♘g4 ♕g5 44.c8=♕ ♖xc8 45.♖xc8 1–0

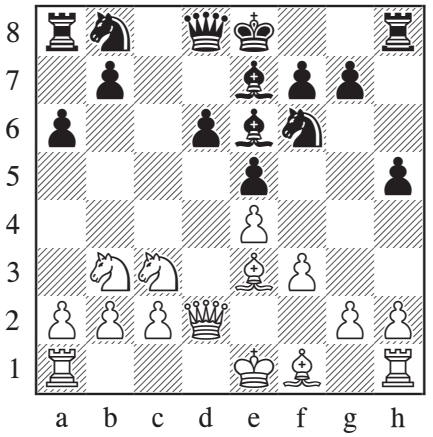
White had a tactical wobble in the middle, but he started and finished in fine thematic style. Areshchenko is a Najdorf expert who plays 8...h5 with Black, so he is likely to know the most testing reply to it.

GAME 47

David Roubaud – Daniel Perry

email 2015

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♘c3 cxd4 5.♘xd4 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♕d2 h5



A related idea to 8...h5, but a seemingly less logical version, as the option of ...♗h6 is gone. However, we will see one idea to improve the dark-squared bishop's prospects.

10.♘d5

Once again, I like this direct reply to ...h7-h5 plans.

10...♗xd5

The same choice Black made in the 8...h5 line.

10...♘xd5

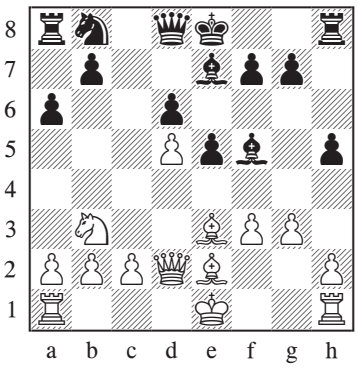
This is a more serious option than its cousin in the 8...h5 variation.

11.exd5 ♗f5 12.♗e2!?

In this case the exchange of light-squared bishops is not a simple solution, as after 12.♗d3 ♗xd3 13.♕xd3 White has lost a tempo with his queen.

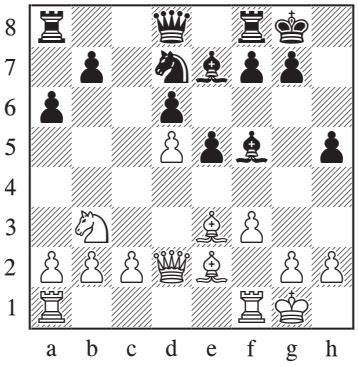
12...♘d7

This is the usual move, but also surprisingly popular is: 12...♗h4† 13.g3 ♗e7



I find it hard to believe that provoking g2-g3 is worth two tempos. It does weaken White's kingside, so a logical response is: 14.0–0–0!? The game could develop in many ways, but one instructive game continued: 14...♘d7 15.h3 ♖c8 16.♗d3 Black has been free with his tempos, so we can be too. 16...♗xd3 17.♕xd3 ♕c7 18.♘d2 g6 19.g4± In Ter Sahakyan – Gabuzyan, Yerevan 2016, White had a pleasant positional edge.

13.0–0 0–0



14.♘a5!

After this thematic move, White's queenside play gives him the better chances in this well-tested position. For example:

14...♕c7 15.c4 ♗g6 16.b4±

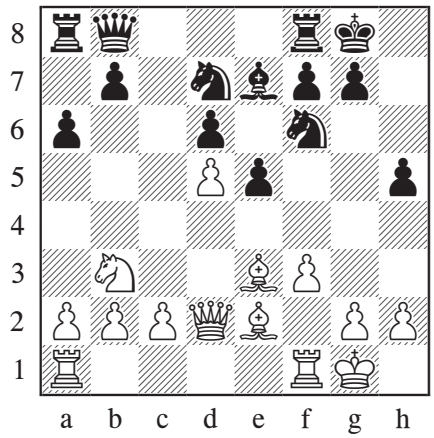
In Jakovenko – Kantans, Germany 2016, White's c4-c5 break was imminent.

11.exd5 ♘bd7 12.♗e2

We play in similar style to the 8...h5 line.

12...0–0 13.0–0 ♕b8!?

This has been played by Nepomniachtchi a couple of times. Black seeks to exchange his poor bishop via d8 and b6. I like the way White fought against this plan.



14.a4!? ♗d8 15.♔h1

Freeing our bishop from the g1-a7 diagonal.

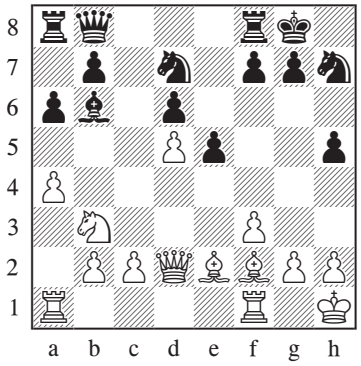
15...♗b6 16.♗g5 ♘h7

Not forced, but against quiet play White would continue a4-a5 and c2-c4, with the queenside pawn advance typical of this structure.

17.♗h4 ♗d8 18.♗f2 ♕c7

Giving up on the original plan.

After the consistent 18...♗b6?!, the fact that White has provoked the knight from f6 to h7 makes a key difference:



19.♗xb6! ♘xb6 20.f4!± Hitting h5. It almost goes without saying that 20...♘f6?? would lose to 21.fxe5 dxe5 22.♖xf6 gxf6 23.♕h6.

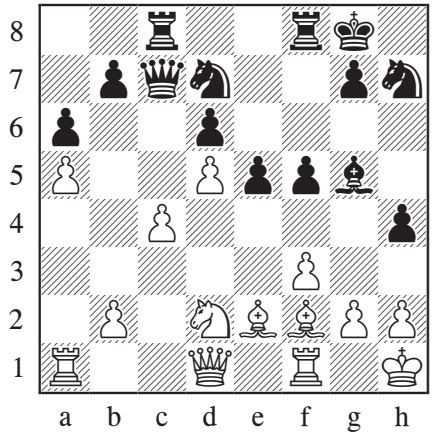
19.a5 ♗g5

Yes, the bishop has found an active square, but Black's kingside pieces are not working as a team.

20.♕d1 ♖ac8

White no longer needs to be creative, as it's time to play the usual queenside advance plan:

21.c4 h4 22.♘d2 f5



23.b4±

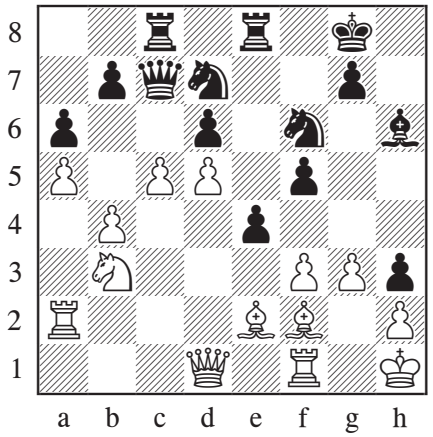
After all the dancing around, White's play is flowing smoothly. We don't need extensive notes on the rest of the game, as we are well into the middlegame.

23...♘hf6 24.♘b3

An excellent square for the knight, supporting c4-c5, but also discouraging Black's most natural central advance, ...e5-e4, as the knight could then leap into d4, then on to e6 or f5.

24...h3 25.g3 ♖fe8 26.♖a2 ♗h6 27.c5 e4

Allowing the following knight lift, but the alternative was to sit and watch while White advanced his queenside.



28.♘d4!

This leads to a wild tactical sequence, but White has assessed the resulting position perfectly.

28...dxc5 29.♘xf5 ♕e5 30.♘xh6† gxh6 31.fxe4 ♕xe4† 32.♗f3 ♕c4 33.♖c2 ♕xb4 34.♕c1±

For the moment, Black is a pawn up, but his king is too exposed.

34...♕b5 35.♗d4!

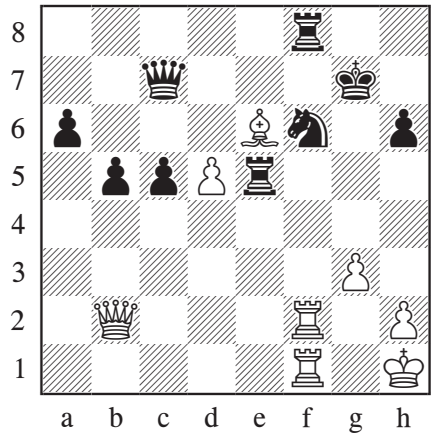
Using the c-file pin to remove a vital defender.

35...♘e5 36.♗xe5 ♖xe5 37.♖cf2 ♖f8 38.♗g4 ♔g7 39.♗xh3

With the annoying pawn gone, White's king is safe, while the black king has no shelter.

39...♕xa5 40.♕b2 ♕c7 41.♗e6 b5

In a reversal of the normal plans, Black has queenside passed pawns while White has a kingside attack; the latter is much faster.

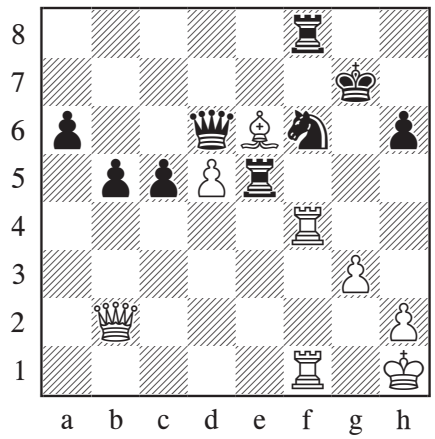


42.♖f4!

This move is icily precise, as instead the immediate 42.♖f5? would allow 42...♖xf5 43.♖xf5 c4= when Black threatens ...c4-c3.

42...♕d6

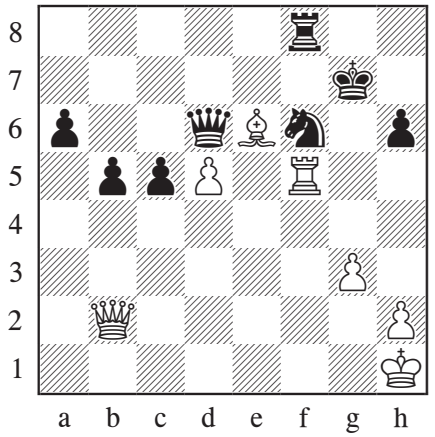
After 42...c4 43.♕f2 ♕e7 44.♕d4 ♕c7 45.♖g4† ♖g5 46.♖xg5† hxg5 47.♖f5 the attack breaks through before the pawns can touch down.



43.♖f5!+–

Removing another key defender.

43...♖xf5 44.♖xf5



44...♔g6

Unlike the line above, 44...c4 is no threat to advance further, so White has time for 45.♖f4+–.

45.♖f4 b4 46.♔g2 ♕c7 47.h4

Black is defenceless, with h4-h5† just one of the threats.

For example, 47...h5 48.♕b1† ♔g7 49.♖f5 ♔h8 50.♕c1 ♕g7 and everything wins, but it feels appropriate to return to the traditional queenside advance plan with 51.d6!.

1–0

Conclusion

After 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 this chapter was all about the 6...e5 Najdorf. We play 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 when there are three options: 8...♘bd7 lines, 8...♗e7 lines and ...h5 lines.

Following 8...♘bd7 9.g4! we saw three moves. 9...h6 creates a weakness that makes castling kingside scary, while 9...♘b6 is rather slow and clumsy. 9...b5 followed by 10...b4 should be playable for Black, who gets close to equality, but practical results have been great for White.

After 8...♗e7 9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0 there are various ways to play.

We started with 10...a5?! which used to be totally respectable, but no longer. The key moves are 11.a4! then usually 12.g4 and 13.♔b1, with email games showing the way for White.

10...b5 11.g4 b4 leads to sharp play, but I like White's chances, especially with the suggested novelty at move 19.

10...♘bd7 11.g4 b5 is a vital position, and we noted that Black's 10th and 11th moves can be played in either order. After 12.g5 we started by looking at the counterattack 12...b4 when 13.gxf6!? is the move that is troubling Black. If Black instead moves the knight with 12...♘h5 then after 13.♔b1 we saw both 13...♘b6 and 13...♖c8. Neither line has been refuted, but White's practical chances look excellent.

Finally, we saw two varieties of ...h7-h5 lines.

After 8...h5!? we can use a clever move order to sidestep the recommendation in *The Sharpest Sicilian 2012*. Also vital are lines where Black leaves his queen on d8 with 12...♗g7 – the line I recommend in response leads to a tense middlegame fight.

8...♗e7 9.♕d2 h5 could of course have been covered next to its 8...♗e7 cousins, but its ideas are easier to understand after seeing the 8...h5 line. Of particular interest is Black's idea of ...♕b8, clearing a path for the e7-bishop to exchange via d8 and b6. But we also saw how to fight against that idea.

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B23) 7...d6 8.0–0–0 **105**
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17...g6 *Game 21* **224**

Chapter 7 – Accelerated Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 g6 5.c4

A) 5...♘f6 6.♘c3 d6 7.f3! ♘xd4 (7...♗g7) **8.♕xd4 ♗g7 9.♗e3 0–0 10.♕d2** **233**
A1) 10...♗e6 (10...♕a5) **235**
A2) 10...a5 **236**
B) 5...♗g7 6.♗e3 ♘f6 (6...♘h6) **7.♘c3** (7...d6) **238**
B1) 7...♘g4 8.♕xg4 ♘xd4 (8...♗xd4?) **9.♕d1** (9...♘c6) **239**
B11) 9...e5 **240**
B12) 9...♘e6 **244**
B2) 7...0–0 8.♗e2 **247**
B21) 8...b6 **248**
B22) 8...d6 9.f3! (9...♘h5; 9...♕b6?!) **250**
B221) 9...♘xd4 10.♗xd4 **252**
B2211) 10...a6 11.♕d2 ♗e6 12.♘d5! **252**
12...♘d7 (12...b5N; 12...♘xd5) **252**
12...♗xd5 *Game 22* **254**
B2212) 10...♗e6 **257**
B222) 9...♗d7 10.♕d2 **260**
B2221) 10...♕a5 **261**
B2222) 10...a6 **262**
B2223) 10...♘xd4 **263**

Chapter 8 – Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3

A) 7...a6 8.♕d2 (8...♘c6; 8...b5) **269**
A1) 8...h5 **269**
A2) 8...♘bd7 *Game 23* **271**
B) 7...♘c6 *Game 24* **275**
C) 7...0–0 8.♕d2 ♘c6 9.0–0–0 (9...♕a5; 9...♗e6) **278**
C1) 9...♗d7 **278**
C2) 9...♘xd4 **281**
C3) 9...d5 10.♕e1!? (10...dxe4??; 10...♗e6?!) **286**
C31) 10...e6?! 11.h4! (11...♗d7?!; 11...h5?!; 11...♖e8?!) **287**
C311) 11...♕e7?! **288**
C312) 11...♕c7 *Game 25* **290**
C32) 10...e5 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.exd5 **293**
C321) 12...cxd5 *Game 26* **294**
C322) 12...♘xd5 13.♗c4 ♗e6 14.♘e4 **298**
(14...♖e8?!; 14...h6) **299**
C3221) 14...♕b8 **300**
C3222) 14...♕c7 **302**

Chapter 9 – Classical

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.f3

A) 6...♘xd4 **306**
B) 6...a6 **307**
C) 6...♕b6?! **310**
D) 6...e5 7.♘b3 **312**
D1) 7...h6?! **313**
D2) 7...a5 **314**
D3) 7...♗e6 **315**
D4) 7...♗e7 8.♗e3 **317**
D41) 8...♗e6 9.♘d5 **318**
D411) 9...♗xd5 **318**
D412) 9...0–0 **320**
D42) 8...0–0 9.♕d2 **323**
D421) 9...♗e6 **323**
D422) 9...a5 10.♗b5 ♘a7 11.♗d3! **325**
D4221) 11...♘c6 **326**
D4222) 11...♗e6 **328**

Chapter 10 – Najdorf-Scheveningen

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4
4...♘c6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗e3 (6...♗e7) **335**
6...♘ge7 **335**
6...a6 **336**
4...♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗e3 ♗e7 7.f3
7...e5 **337**
7...♘c6 The Classical Scheveningen line **338**

Najdorf – 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3
Early deviations **6...♕b6!?** *Game 27* **344**
6...e6 7.♗e3
7...♗e7 The English Attack at club level *Game 28* **351**
7...d5!? (7...♕b6?!) *Game 29* **353**
7...h5 (7...b5 8.♕d2 h5?!; 7...♘bd7) *Game 30* **356**
7...♘c6 8.♕d2 **360**
8...h5!? (8...♗d7; 8...♕c7) **361**
8...♗e7 *Game 31* **364**
7...b5! 8.♕d2 **367**
8...♗b7 **368**
8...b4 9.♘a4 ♘bd7!? 10.0–0–0 **374**
10...♕c7 (10...d5?!; 10...♘e5?) *Game 32* **374**
10...♕a5 *Game 33* **376**
8...♘bd7! 9.g4! **379**
9...♘b6?! (9...♗b7?!) *Game 34* **379**
9...h6 **384**
10.a3!? *Game 35* **384**
10.♖g1!? **390**
10.0–0–0 **392**
10...♗b7?! *Game 36* **392**
10...b4! *Game 37* **399**

Chapter 11 – Najdorf with 6...e5

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5

7.♘b3 ♗e6 (7...b5, 7...♗e7, 7...♘bd7, 7...♘c6) **8.♗e3** **404**
8...♘bd7 (8...d5, 8...♘c6!?) **9.g4!** **405**
9...h6 *Game 38* **404**
9...♘b6 *Game 39* **411**
9...b5 *Game 40* **412**
8...♗e7 9.♕d2 0–0 10.0–0–0
10...a5?! *Game 41* **414**
10...b5 11.g4 b4 *Game 42* **417**
10...♘bd7 11.g4 b5 (11...♕c7, 11...♘b6) **12.g5** **420**
12...b4 *Game 43* **420**
12...♘h5 13.♔b1 **426**
13...♘b6 *Game 44* **426**
13...♖c8 *Game 45* **431**
8...h5!? *Game 46* **436**
8...♗e7 9.♕d2 h5 *Game 47* **442**

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