Grandmaster Repertoire

Boris Avrukh

The Classical Slav



Tired of bad positions? Try the main lines!

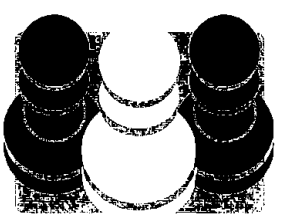
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Grandmaster Repertoire 17

The Classical Slav

By

Boris Avrukh



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Grandmaster Repertoire 17 – The Classical Slav

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Preface

I was delighted when John Shaw and Jacob Aagaard offered me the chance to write a book advocating the Classical Slav. Usually my name is associated with the Grünfeld, but the Slav has always been part of my repertoire and I noticed to my surprise that I have not suffered a single defeat in serious games when employing this opening!

I have always felt that that the Slav is a solid choice, where Black fights for the centre from the very first moves, compared with the Grünfeld, where Black gives up the centre in order to challenge it later on. I am convinced it is a clever idea to have two distinct openings in your repertoire, especially if they are conceptually different (like the Slav and the Grünfeld). From my own experience I know that 1.d4 players can often be divided into two camps: members of the first group don't like to face such a forcing opening as the Grünfeld, while those in the second group struggle to show anything against solid set-ups like the Slav! Therefore it makes a lot of sense to have both types of weapon at one's disposal.

The Slav is a highly popular choice at all levels, and almost all the elite players have it in their repertoires. I tried to make my choice of lines attractive for active and ambitious players (yes, the Slav can be aggressive) with many original ideas and deep analysis. As the title says, the heart of this book is the Classical Slav, which means that Black's queen's bishop is often headed for f5. However, when choosing the right move involved transposing to another opening, I have done so. So you will find a few cases where I transpose to the Meran or even the Queen's Gambit Accepted, but only when White's most theoretically critical lines have been avoided.

Of course this is a repertoire book, but in a few cases I have offered two options for Black. For example, after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 I was delighted to prove the soundness of the relatively new idea 4...♗f5!?, which often leads to exciting sacrificial play. On the other hand, for those who like Chebanenko-type positions (and dislike gambits!) I have also covered 4...a6. Indeed, set-ups involving ...a6 are featured in a few other lines as well.

Also after 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 I have given two lines, though both start with 6...♘bd7. My main choice is the famous Morozevich Variation with a later ...g5, which I eventually realized is both aggressive and solid – a fine combination! The other line I recommend is much less well known, and I will leave the details as a surprise for later.

The book contains plenty of remarkable ideas, some of which arise at a surprisingly early stage. As usual, I tried to advance the state of theory rather than just repeat the current state of practice. I hope that every reader will enjoy my work and have great success with the Slav.

Boris Avrukh
Beer-Sheva, January 2014

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Key to symbols used

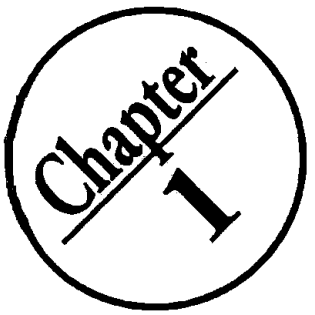
⩲	White is slightly better	→	with an attack
⩱	Black is slightly better	↑	with an initiative
±	White is better	?	a weak move
∓	Black is better	??	a blunder
+–	White has a decisive advantage	!	a good move
–+	Black has a decisive advantage	!!	an excellent move
=	equality	!?	a move worth considering
⯹	with compensation	?!	a move of doubtful value
⇄	with counterplay	#	mate
∞	unclear	N	novelty

Bibliography

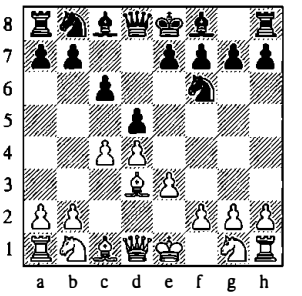
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Secrets of Opening Surprises (SOS)

Electronic/Internet Resources
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ChessPublishing.com
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Rare Lines



3.e3 and 4.♗d3

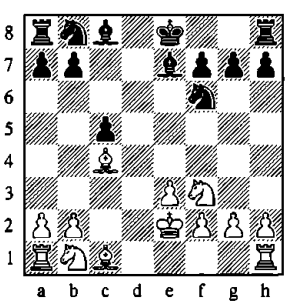
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1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♗d3

4...e5!

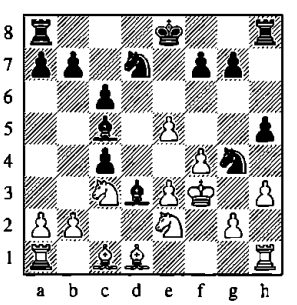
A) 5.♘e2 **8**
B) 5.dxe5 **8**
C) 5.♘c3 **10**

A) after 10.♔e2



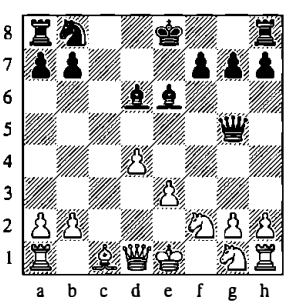
10...♘c6N

B) after 13.♘ge2



13...g5!N

C) after 12...♕g5!



Good compensation

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.e3 ♘f6

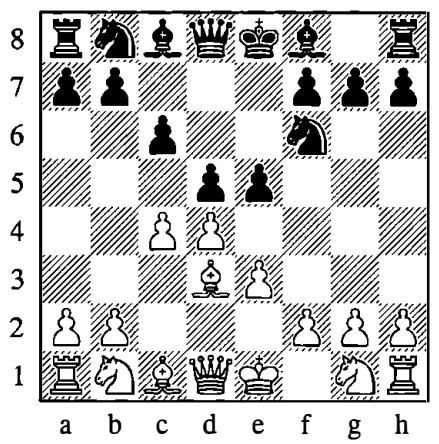
With this 3.e3 move order Black gains the additional option of 3...♗f5, which has a large amount of theory, as for example after 4.cxd5 cxd5 5.♕b3 or 4.♘c3 e6, but taking into account Black's possibility on the next move, 3...♘f6 makes a lot of sense.

4.♗d3

This is White's only independent option, as 4.♘c3 and 4.♘f3 both lead to popular systems covered later in the book. White is trying to play in 'Slow Slav' style while cutting out ...♗f5 lines, but there is a downside to his move order.

4...e5!

I find it hard to refrain from such a remarkable move! Where else in the Slav do you get a chance to play ...e7-e5 so quickly?



Now there are three main lines to consider: **A) 5.♘e2** is harmless but **B) 5.dxe5** and especially **C) 5.♘c3** are more interesting.

One minor line to quickly dismiss is: 5.cxd5 e4! 6.♗e2?! (Somewhat stronger was 6.♗c2 cxd5 7.♘c3 ♗d6 when Black has a better version of variation C, our main line, as the black knight has a comfortable square on c6 after the swap on d5.) 6...cxd5 7.♕b3 ♘c6 8.♘c3 a6 9.a3 ♗d6 10.♗d2 ♗e6∓ In Potapov – Komliakov, Salekhard 2007, Black was clearly better due to his space advantage.

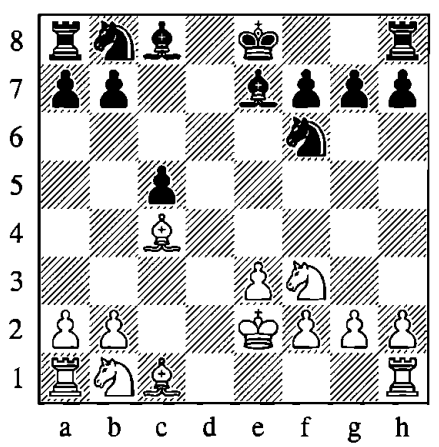
A) 5.♘e2 exd4!

If Black wants, he can simply transpose to our main line, variation C, with 5...e4 6.♗c2 ♗d6 and so on. However, taking on d4 punishes White's inaccurate move order.

6.♘xd4

After 6.exd4 dxc4 7.♗xc4 ♗d6 Black has a pleasant version of an anti-IQP position due to White's passively placed knight on e2. Let's see one illustrative example: 8.0–0 0–0 9.♘bc3 ♘bd7 10.♗b3 ♘b6 11.♕d3 And now in Khmelnitsky – Krivoshey, Presov 1997, Black could have secured a fine position with 11...♖e8!N followed by ...♗e6.

6...c5! 7.♘f3 dxc4 8.♗xc4 ♕xd1† 9.♔xd1 ♗e7 10.♔e2

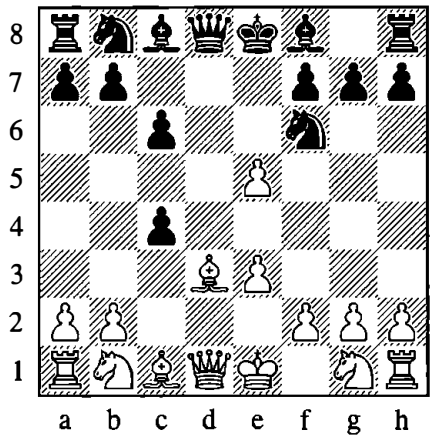


So far this is Nikolic – Shirov, Monte Carlo 1996, and now I like the simple:

10...♘c6N 11.♘c3 0–0 12.♗d2 ♗f5

With a comfortable endgame.

B) 5.dxe5 dxc4



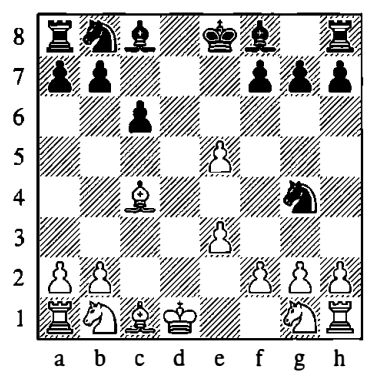
6.♗e2!

Otherwise White is worse:

6.exf6? cxd3 7.fxg7 ♗xg7 8.♘f3 0–0 9.0–0 was played in Cvitan – Kirov, Baku 1983, and after the natural 9...♘a6N 10.♘c3 ♗g4∓ Black is clearly better, due to his powerful bishops and strong d3-pawn.

6.♗xc4 ♕xd1† 7.♔xd1 ♘g4

Obviously this is the idea that makes Black's 4th move possible.



8.♔e1

Another logical line is: 8.♔e2 ♘xe5 There is only one example here: 9.♗b3? Obviously missing Black's following idea. (But even after White's best move, 9.♘d2, Black would enjoy a better game after: 9...♗f5 10.♘gf3 ♘bd7∓) 9...b6! White is in big trouble. 10.♘h3 ♗a6† 11.♔d1 ♘bd7 12.♗d2 0–0–0 Black had a close to decisive advantage in Porat – Pomar Salamanca, Munich 1958.

8...♘xe5 9.♗e2 ♗e7

9...♗f5 followed by ...♘d3, capturing one of White's bishops, also deserves serious attention.

10.♘d2 0–0 11.♘gf3 ♘bd7 12.♘c4

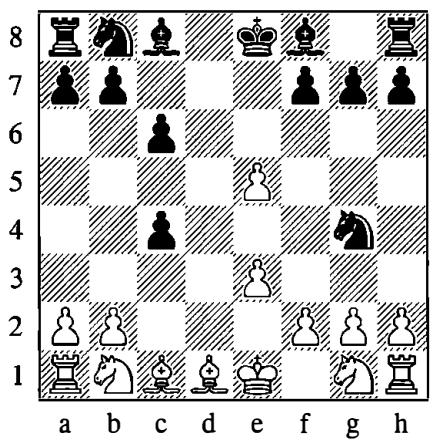
In Grooten – 'Socrates Exp', The Hague 1994, the computer should have gone for:

12...♘xc4N 13.♗xc4 ♘b6 14.♗b3 ♗f6 15.♔e2 ♗f5∓

Black has annoying pressure on the queenside.

6...♕xd1† 7.♗xd1 ♘g4

In my opinion this is the best square for the knight.

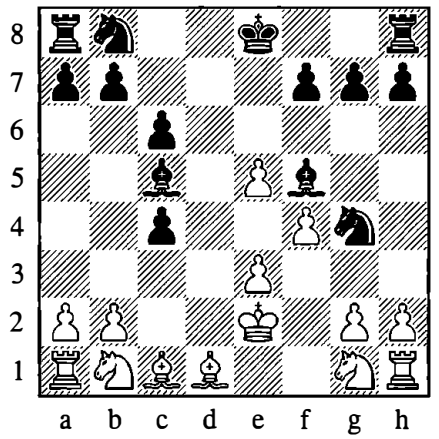


8.f4

One game continued 8.♘f3 ♘d7 9.e6 fxe6 when maybe White has some compensation for the pawn, but after the inaccurate 10.♘d4?! as was played in Terekhin – Dmitriev, Konopega 2007, Black could have replied 10...♘df6!N when I don't see anything interesting for White.

8...♗c5 9.♔e2 ♗f5

There have been numerous games here; White has tried two continuations.



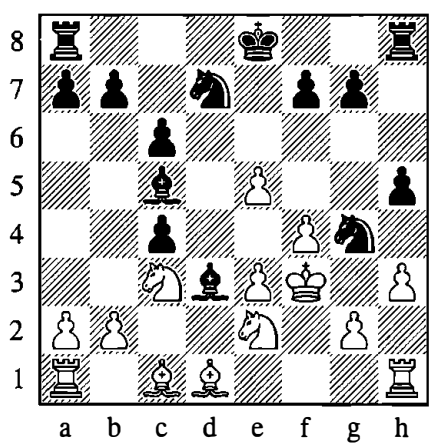
10.h3

The other move is 10.♘c3 when Black's strongest reply is: 10...♗d3† 11.♔f3 h5! 12.♘ge2 f6! It's a good idea to challenge White's centre. 13.exf6 ♘xf6 14.h3 ♘bd7∓ Black was better in Aleksandrov – Novitzkij, Minsk 2007.

10...♗d3† 11.♔f3 h5 12.♘c3

Another good example is 12.♗e2?! ♘a6 13.g3 ♘b4∓ and Black was clearly better in Benedetto – Cativelli, Buenos Aires 2000.

12...♘d7 13.♘ge2

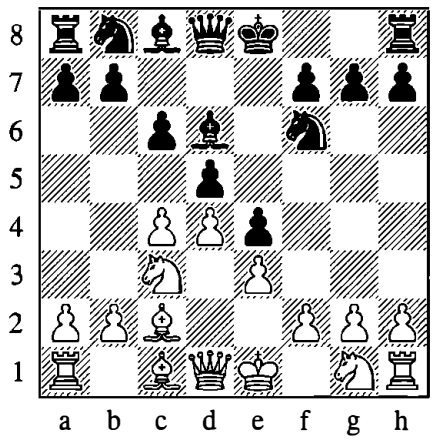


This occurred in Garcia Roman – Arngrimsson, Budapest 2013. Now Black should have played:

13...g5!N 14.♖e1 ♘h6

Black has the initiative.

C) 5.♘c3 e4 6.♗c2 ♗d6



7.f3

The point of White's previous play: he undermines Black's centre in order to gain attacking chances on the kingside.

I cannot believe White can afford to do without the f3-break. For example:

7.♘ge2 0–0 8.♗d2

Another line is: 8.h3 ♘a6! It's a really good idea to strengthen the d5-pawn with a knight on c7. 9.cxd5 cxd5 10.a3 ♘c7 11.♘f4 b6 12.0–0 ♗a6 13.♖e1 In Portisch – Beliavsky, Hungary 2003, Black did fine in the game, but even so I prefer the small improvement 13...♗c4! preventing White playing ♗b3. 14.b3 ♗a6 15.♗b2 ♖c8∓ And it's just more pleasant for Black, thanks to his space advantage.

8...♘a6 9.a3

In Abdulla – Hasan, Dhaka 2006, Black should have simply continued his idea with:

9...♘c7N

Without worrying about 10.c5 ♗e7 11.b4, as after 11...b6 12.0–0 ♗a6 Black has a fine position.

7...♗e6!?

A very clever move, which has been played only once in a correspondence game. Instead Black's main continuations, according to theory, are 7...0–0 and 7...exf3.

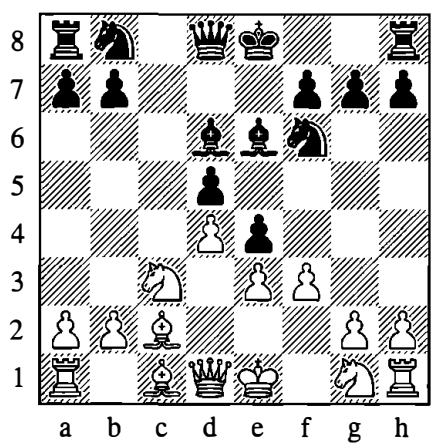
8.cxd5

Other options include the following two moves.

One of the ideas of Black's 7th move can be seen in the following variation: 8.fxe4 ♘xe4 9.♗xe4 dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♕h4†! 11.♘f2 ♗xc4 The c4-pawn is hanging! 12.♘f3 ♕e7∓ Black is simply better due to his pair of bishops.

After 8.♘ge2 Black can easily take the pawn: 8...exf3 9.gxf3 dxc4 10.e4 ♘h5! Black is doing well, for example: 11.♗e3 0–0 12.♕d2 ♘a6 (White might hope for some compensation after 12...♕h4† 13.♗f2 ♕h3 14.0–0–0 ♕xf3 15.♗e3⩲) 13.0–0–0 ♘b4 14.♗b1 f5! Black gives back the pawn, but in return he gets a comfortable game after: 15.a3 ♘d3† 16.♗xd3 cxd3 17.♕xd3 fxe4 18.fxe4 ♕h4∓

8...cxd5

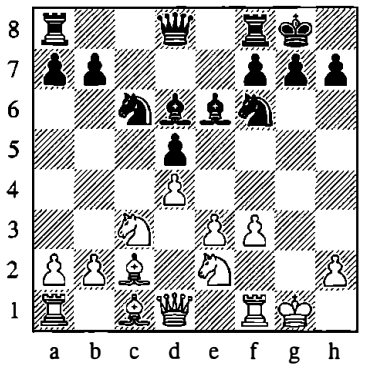


9.fxe4

I also examined:

9.♘ge2 exf3 10.gxf3 ♘c6 11.0–0 0–0

A very interesting position has arisen.



There are two lines to consider:

a) 12.♔h1 ♖e8 13.♖g1 g6 Black has a promising position.

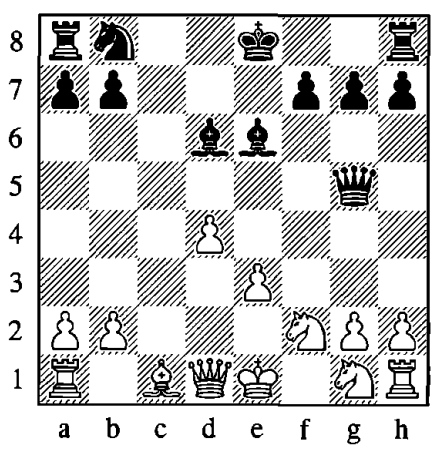
b) One of the key points in this position is that White can almost never play e3-e4, as it weakens his position significantly. For example: 12.e4 dxe4 13.fxe4 ♘g4! 14.e5 (14.h3 loses to 14...♕h4 15.♖f3 ♘h2!) 14...♕h4 15.♗f4 ♗c7 White's central pawns are under serious pressure. 16.♕e1 ♕xe1 17.♖axe1 ♗b6 And one of the pawns is falling.

9...♘xe4

Now White has to accept the challenge if he wants to fight for an advantage.

10.♗xe4 dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♕h4† 12.♘f2 ♕g5!

A very important finesse, which forces White to weaken his position on the kingside.



13.g3

Instead 13.♘f3 ♕xg2 14.♖g1? doesn't work in view of 14...♗b4† and Black wins.

13.♕f3 ♗b4† 14.♔f1 ♘c6 promises Black excellent compensation for the pawn.

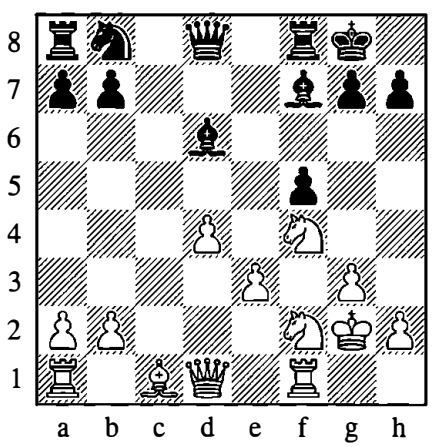
13...♗b4† 14.♔f1 0–0 15.♘e2

After 15.♘f3 ♕b5† 16.♔g2 f5! 17.♗d2 ♗d6 18.♗c3 ♗d5 Black unquestionably has great positional compensation.

15...f5 16.♔g2

16.a3 ♗a5 does not change much.

16...♕d8 17.♘f4 ♗f7 18.♖f1 ♗d6



Black had excellent positional compensation in Firsching – Rada, corr. 2011.

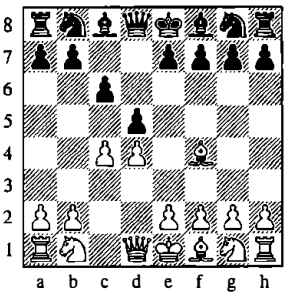
Conclusion

The move order 3.e3 ♘f6 will transpose to other main lines if White now develops either knight, but instead 4.♗d3 offers Black the independent opportunity to play 4...e5!. The critical response is variation C with 5.♘c3 e4 6.♗c2 ♗d6 7.f3. Black generally has to sacrifice a pawn but can be assured of excellent compensation.

In this chapter Black can seize the initiative far sooner than is usually the case in the Slav.



Rare Lines



3.♗f4

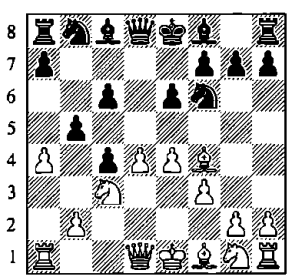
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♗f4 dxc4 4.e3 b5 5.a4 ♘f6 6.♘c3

6...b4

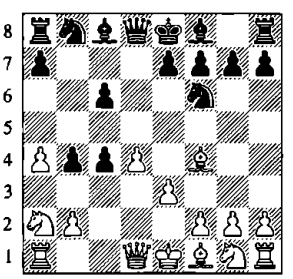
A) 7.♘a2 **15**
B) 7.♘b1 **15**

Note to 4.e3



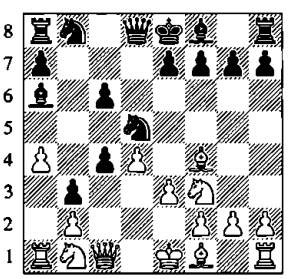
7...b4N

A) after 7.♘a2



7...♕d5!?N

B) note to 8.♕c1



10...♘b4!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♗f4

This rare move was a pet line of English grandmaster Tony Miles. White's usual plan now is to follow up with e2-e3 when any capture with ...dxc4 could be comfortably met by ♗xc4, without the need for the weakening a2-a4. So Black should cut across this plan by capturing at once.

3...dxc4

This is definitely the most principled reaction from Black. After 3...♘f6 4.e3 we would reach a very different position with independent theory.

4.e3

This is White's main continuation, but I also analysed the apparently more ambitious double advance:

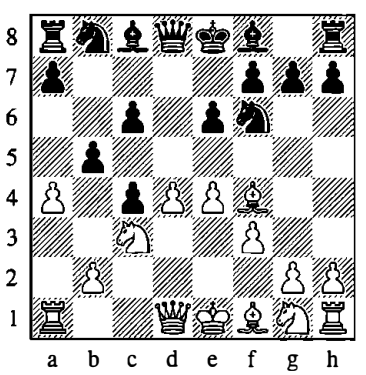
4.e4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 b5

The problem is that White's bishop is obviously misplaced on f4. No strong player has ever played this way with White. Just one example line is enough:

6.f3

Statistically, this is White's main choice.

6...e6 7.a4



Here Black has always reacted with 7...♗b4, but instead I recommend a novelty:

7...b4N

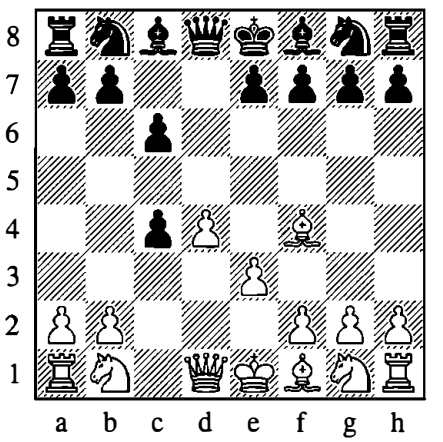
This is simple and strong. For instance:

8.♘a2 ♗a6 9.♖c1 b3! 10.♘c3 ♗b4

Black is clearly better, as White is unable to coordinate his pieces.

11.♘h3 0–0 12.♗e2 c5! 13.dxc5 ♕a5

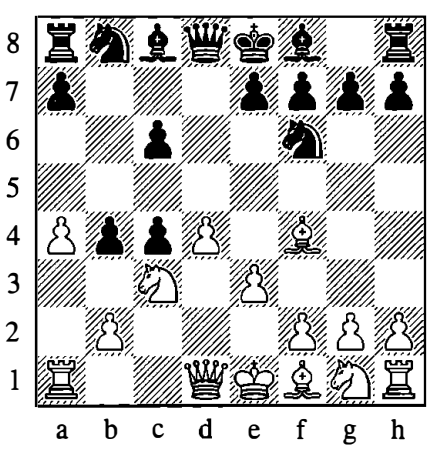
With a clear edge for Black.



4...b5 5.a4 ♘f6 6.♘c3

This is the only decent way to attack Black's queenside pawn structure, since the thematic 6.axb5 cxb5 7.b3? runs into: 7...e5! 8.♗xe5 ♗b4† 9.♔e2 (9.♘d2? obviously loses to 9...c3) 9...♗e6 The evaluation of this position is quite obvious, with the white king being placed horribly on e2, Mancini – N. Pert, France 2004.

6...b4



Now there is a split: **A) 7.♘a2** or **B) 7.♘b1**.

A) 7.♘a2

Here I developed the following strategy:

7...♕d5!?N

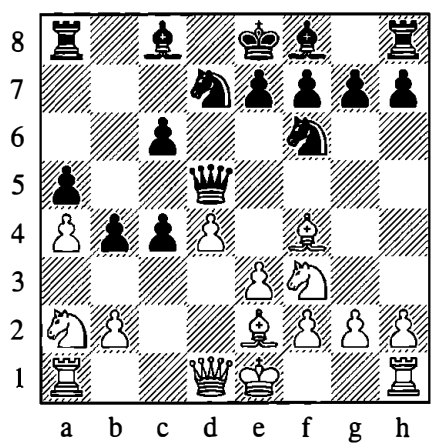
Taking into account that the b4-pawn is untouchable, I want to get the pawn on a5 before playing ...♗a6.

I will mention a few moves of the old line, just to show what I am trying to avoid: 7...♗a6 8.♘f3 e6 9.♘e5 ♕d5 Now this idea is too late (the safer option is 9...♘d5 10.♗xc4 ♘xf4 11.exf4 ♗xc4 12.♘xc4 ♗e7 13.0–0 and a draw was agreed in Jacobs – Schoenrock, Mecklenburg 2003). 10.♗e2! ♕xg2 The consistent choice but far too risky. 11.♗f3 ♕h3 12.♖g1 White has more than adequate compensation.

8.♘f3

I also checked: 8.f3 ♘bd7 9.♕c1 (instead 9.e4 is still impossible in view of the simple 9...♘xe4!) 9...♘b6 (9...e5 10.♗xc4 ♕a5 is also fine for Black) 10.e4 ♕xd4 11.♘xb4 ♘xe4! 12.fxe4 e5 13.♗d2 ♕xe4† 14.♘e2 ♘d5 15.♘xd5 cxd5 Black has great compensation.

8...a5 9.♗e2 ♘bd7



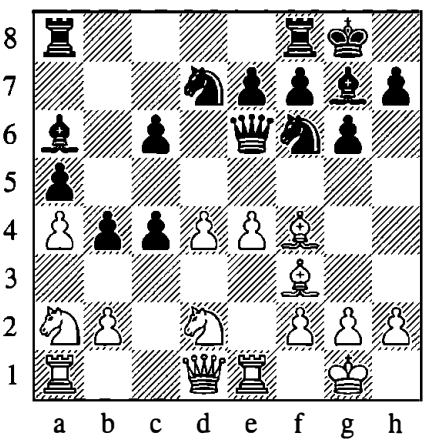
10.0–0

Now 10.♘e5 can be simply met by 10...♘xe5 11.♗xe5 ♗a6 12.♗f3 ♕d7 when Black has a safe position with a solid extra pawn.

10...♗a6

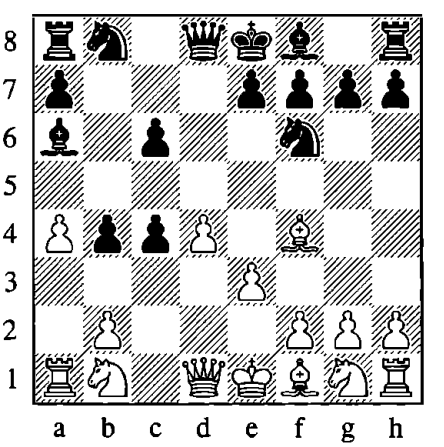
Less clear is 10...♘e4 11.♘e5 ♘xe5 12.♗xe5 f6 13.f3.

11.♘d2 g6 12.♗f3 ♕e6 13.♖e1 ♗g7 14.e4 0–0



Usually, with such a strong pawn centre, White would have compensation for the missing pawn, but his misplaced knight on a2 makes a difference. So Black's chances are preferable.

B) 7.♘b1 ♗a6



8.♕c1

At first sight 8.♕c2? looks pretty similar, but actually c2 is a very unfortunate square for the queen, as was proven in the following encounter: 8...b3! 9.♕c1 ♘d5 10.♘f3 This is Rusev – Banikas, Istanbul 2002, and now the most accurate move order would have been 10...♘b4!N 11.♘a3 e5! 12.♗xe5 ♘a2 with a decisive advantage.

8...c3!

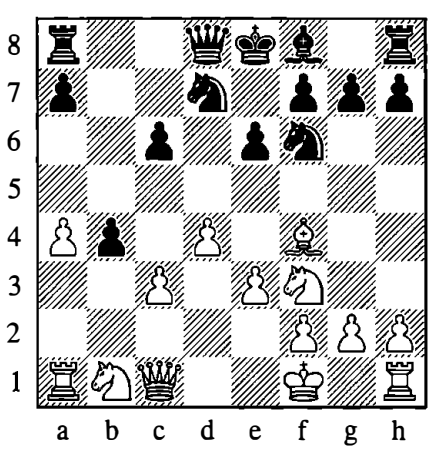
A thematic resource in this kind of position.

9.bxc3

9.♗xa6 cxb2 10.♕xb2 ♘xa6 could hardly promise White sufficient compensation.

9...♗xf1 10.♔xf1 e6 11.♘f3 ♘bd7

Also worthy of consideration is 11...c5!?.



12.♔e2

Instead 12.cxb4 ♗xb4 13.♘bd2 would not change much. In Dobrotka – Cvicela, Slovakia 2001, after the simple 13...c5N Black could certainly solve his problems, while White is still struggling with his misplaced king.

12...♕a5

This is not the only possible move, but it was played in both games where the previous position was reached.

13.c4 ♕a6

Black was also doing fine after 13...c5 14.♘bd2 ♖c8 15.♕b1 ♕a6 16.♕d3 ♗e7 in Rusev – Gagarin, Zadar 2005.

14.♕c2 c5 15.♖c1 ♖c8 16.♔e1 ♗e7

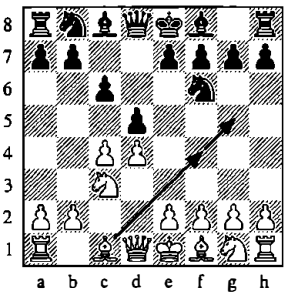
Black was better in Miles – Akopian, Las Vegas 1994.

Conclusion

3.♗f4 is rare but worth mentioning because it could be tricky if Black is unprepared, and it was a pet line of a superb player. Still, the lines I recommend above allow Black to fight for an advantage, even at this early stage.



Rare Lines



4.♗f4 and 4.♗g5

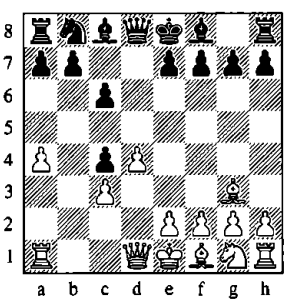
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3

3...♘f6

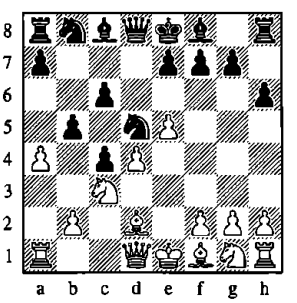
A) 4.♗f4 **18**
B) 4.♗g5 dxc4 **19**
B1) 5.e3 **19**
B2) 5.e4 **20**
B3) 5.a4 ♕a5 **20**
B31) 6.♗d2 **21**
B32) 6.♘f3 **21**

A) after 7.bxc3



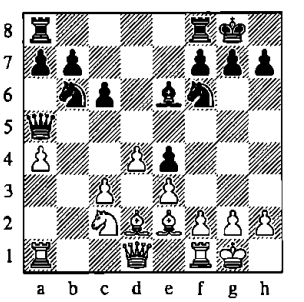
7...♕a5!?N

B2) after 8.♗d2



8...b4!?N

B32) after 14.bxc3



14...♕g5N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6

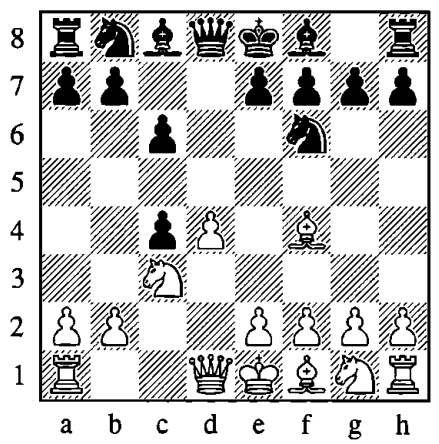
Of course the main lines now are 4.e3 or 4.♘f3, while 4.cxd5 is an Exchange Variation. We will consider these moves in future chapters, but first I will analyse two rare bishop moves: **A) 4.♗f4** and **B) 4.♗g5**.

A) 4.♗f4

I can hardly believe this move can pose Black any problems, but since it has occurred many times in practice, we are obliged to have concrete knowledge.

4...dxc4

Definitely the most challenging response, just as it was against 3.♗f4.



5.a4

Both 5.e3 b5 6.a4 and 5.e4 b5 transpose to positions examined via the 3.♗f4 move order in the previous chapter.

5...♘d5!?

Not the only idea in the position, but it looks pretty convincing and has been Black's most popular continuation.

6.♗g3

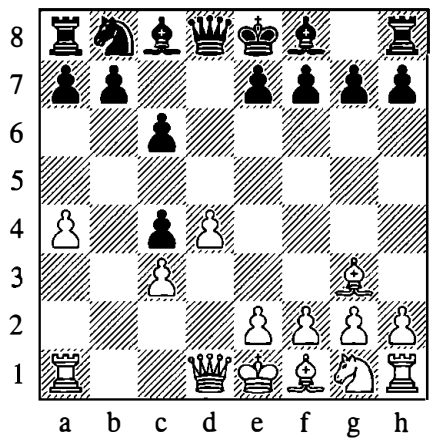
Three times White has opted for 6.♗d2 and Black always reacted with the solid but somewhat soft 6...♗f5, while instead the immediate 6...e5!N 7.dxe5 ♘b4 looks very strong. After 8.♘f3 ♘8a6 Black is clearly better.

6...♘xc3

This is the simplest solution.

7.bxc3

Now the following idea appealed to me.



7...♕a5!?N

Every game has instead continued 7...b5, but I am not a big fan of this type of position, where Black holds on to the pawn and in return White gets a lot of play in the centre (it reminds me of the Catalan where perhaps I would rather be White).

8.♕d2 ♘d7 9.e4 ♘b6

White certainly has some compensation, but I believe he cannot hope to gain any advantage. A sample line is:

10.♘f3 g6 11.♗e2

Provoking ...f6 is not such a great idea: 11.♘e5 ♗e6 12.♗e2 f6 13.♘f3 Now Black has 13...♗h6! 14.♕c2 f5 with the initiative.

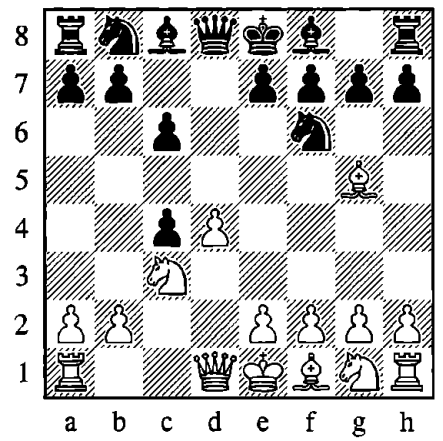
11...♗g4 12.0–0 ♗g7

Black seems very comfortable to me, while White must work hard to prove he has compensation.

B) 4.♗g5

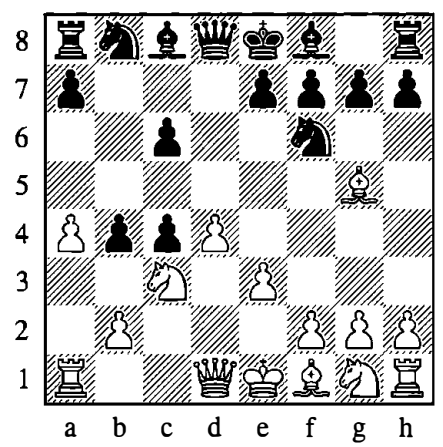
Again this move has been played many times, but nowadays it is not a popular line at higher levels.

4...dxc4



There are now three variations: **B1) 5.e3**, **B2) 5.e4** and **B3) 5.a4**.

B1) 5.e3 b5 6.a4 b4



7.♘b1

Amazingly, I discovered that in most of the games White had played:

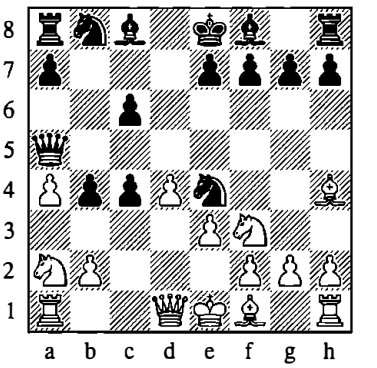
7.♘a2

But this seems a very bad idea.

7...♘e4! 8.♗h4

Only one game went 8.♗f4 ♕a5 and Black was already clearly better in Gerntke – Wendling, Willingen 2006.

8...♕a5 9.♘f3



This is Penson – Van Houtte, Gent 1989, and now Black should simply continue:

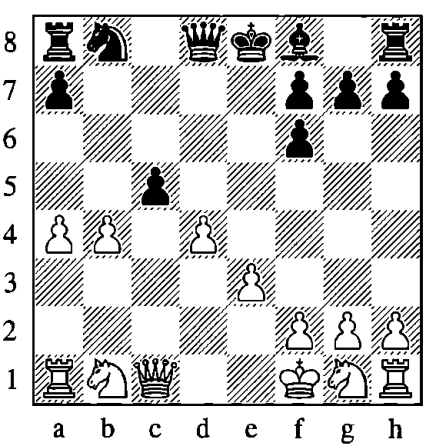
9...b3†!N 10.♘c3 e5 11.♗xc4 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♕xc3† 13.♘d2 b2 14.♖b1 ♗b4

With a clear edge.

7...♗a6 8.♗xf6

Another example is El Arousy – Rahman, Doha 1992, which continued: 8.♘d2 c3! 9.bxc3 bxc3 10.♘b3 Now Black should have played 10...♗xf1N 11.♔xf1 ♕d5 12.♗xf6 ♕c4†! 13.♘e2 c2 with a clear edge.

8...exf6 9.♕c1 c3 10.bxc3 ♗xf1 11.♔xf1 c5! 12.cxb4

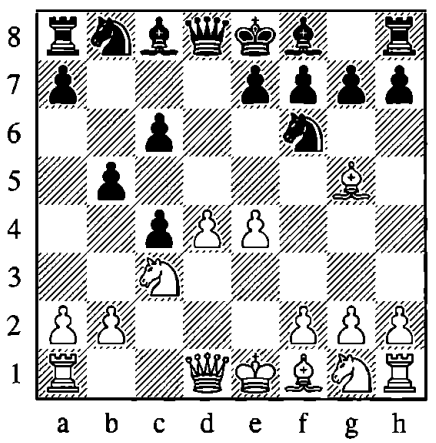


In the game Sinzhuk – Vysochin, Krakow 1999, Black wrongly captured on d4, while instead correct was:

12...cxb4N 13.♘d2 ♘d7

This would have given Black good play on the queenside.

B2) 5.e4 b5



White has tried various moves in this position, but in every case Black easily gets the better game. I have decided to examine the following seemingly ambitious move:

6.e5

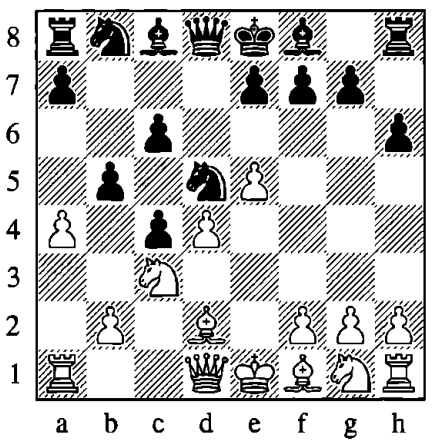
This is also White's most popular choice.

6...♘d5 7.a4

If 7.♘f3 then Black has a good square for the bishop with 7...♗f5. In the game Bisi – Marguerettaz, Ivrea 2008, White did not notice Black's threat of 8...♘b4 and quickly found himself in a lost position. I checked 8.♘h4 but here also after 8...♗e6 9.♗e2 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♗d5 Black will comfortably complete his development and retain a healthy extra pawn.

7...h6 8.♗d2

The alternative is 8.♗h4 and now I like the following solution: 8...b4 As in the game Dennhardt – Ripken, Neumuenster 1999. Now White's best continuation was 9.♘e4N but even so after 9...g5! 10.♗g3 c3 11.bxc3 ♗f5 Black clearly has the better endgame. For example: 12.f3 bxc3 13.♗c4 ♘e3 14.♕b3 ♘xc4 15.♕xc4 ♕d5 16.♕xd5 cxd5 17.♘xc3 e6 And despite material equality, White's position is very unpleasant.



Now the following idea appealed to me:

8...b4!?N 9.♘e4

White could have regained the pawn by 9.♘xd5 cxd5 10.♗xb4 but after 10...♘c6 11.♗c3 ♖b8 12.♘f3 ♗f5∓ Black has a pleasant positional advantage.

9...c3 10.bxc3 ♗f5

It is obvious that White's position is unpromising. Now best is:

11.c4 ♗xe4 12.cxd5 ♗xd5 13.♗xb4 ♘d7

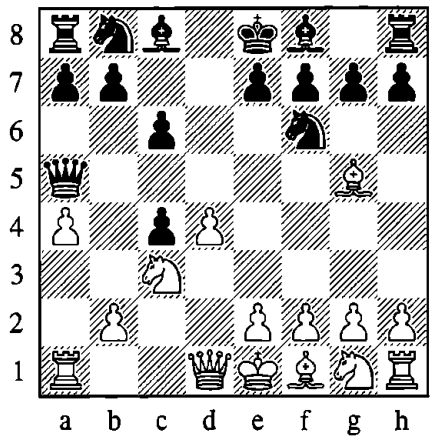
Followed by 14...e6 when Black will retain a positional edge.

B3) 5.a4

This is White's most popular choice.

5...♕a5

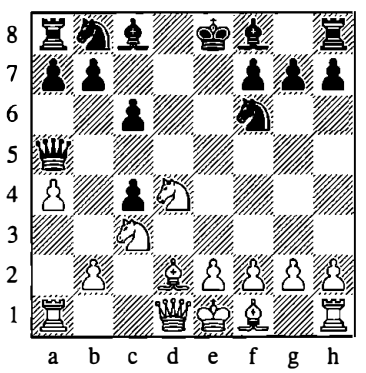
This looks very convincing for Black.



Now White has two main continuations: **B31) 6.♗d2** and **B32) 6.♘f3**.

B31) 6.♗d2 e5 7.dxe5

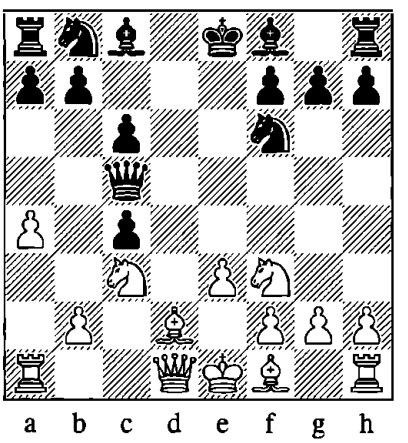
Alternatively White may play:
7.♘f3 exd4 8.♘xd4



Now Black has tried various moves, but why not choose the logical:
8...♘bd7!?N 9.e3 ♘e5
White seems to me to be in serious trouble. For instance:
10.♘e4
10.♗e2 brings no relief: 10...♘d3†! 11.♗xd3 cxd3 12.0–0 ♗e7∓
10...♕d5 11.♘xf6† gxf6 12.♗c3 ♖g8 13.f3 ♗e6!
Black will follow up by castling long; he definitely has the better game, thanks to his extra pawn.

7...♕xe5 8.♘f3 ♕c5
This is simply great for Black.

9.e3
A few games continued 9.e4?! ♘g4 10.♕e2 but after the natural 10...♘a6!N it is hard to offer White any good advice. The main point is obvious: 11.h3 ♘b4 12.hxg4 ♘d3†! It's better to take the h1-rook! 13.♔d1 ♘xf2† 14.♔c2 ♘xh1 With a winning position.



This was Soshnikov – Kalinski, Kharkov 2002. Once again I like:

9...♘a6N 10.♗e2
I also checked 10.b3 cxb3 11.♗xa6 bxa6 12.♕xb3 ♗e7 13.♖c1 0–0 14.0–0 ♗e6 and despite his damaged pawn structure, Black's extra pawn should be the most important factor.

10...♘b4 11.0–0 ♗g4 12.♘d4 ♗xe2 13.♘cxe2 a5
Black has the better position.

B32) 6.♘f3

Black has tried several moves here, particularly 6...♘e4, but after 7.♗d2 it looks very unclear to me. That's why I prefer:

6...♘bd7

With the idea of carrying out ...e7-e5; this looks very logical to me.

7.♗d2

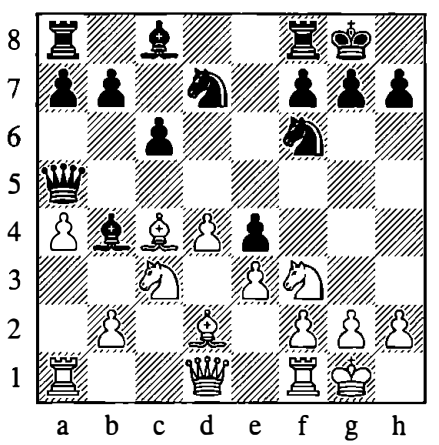
A game Gil Gonzales – Pomes Marcet, Spain 1994, continued 7.♕c2 and now I see no reason to refrain from 7...e5N. The following is just a sample line: 8.♗xf6 gxf6 9.e3 ♘b6 10.♗e2 ♗e7 11.0–0 ♗e6 Black's position looks comfortable.

7...e5 8.e3 ♗b4 9.♗xc4 0–0 10.0–0

Instead 10.♕b3?! makes little sense. Black gets a better game after 10...exd4 11.♘xd4 ♘e5 12.0–0 as in Goldenstein – Gikas, Troisdorf 2001. Now most accurate is 12...♖d8!N 13.♖ad1 c5 14.♘f3 ♘xc4 15.♕xc4 ♗e6 which would have secured Black's advantage.

10...e4

I prefer this ambitious move to 10...exd4 11.♘xd4 ♘e5 12.♗e2 ♖d8 13.♕c2 with equal play.



11.♘e1

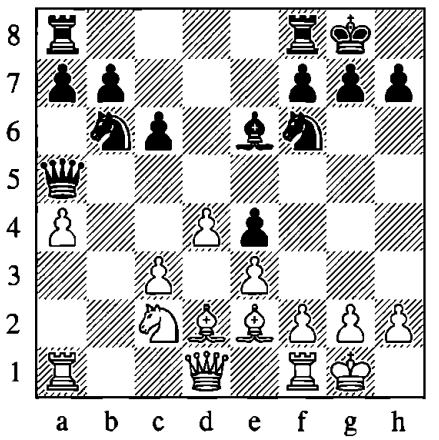
In my opinion 11.♘a2!N improves White's play, but even so after: 11...♗xd2 12.♘xd2 ♘b6 13.♘c3 ♖e8 (13...♘xc4 14.♘xc4 ♕g5 is also pretty level) 14.♕c2 ♕g5 Black is by no means worse; the play is rather balanced.

11...♘b6 12.♗e2 ♗e6

Instead 12...♘bd5!?N looks strong. For example, 13.♖c1 b6 with a very comfortable position for Black.

13.♘c2 ♗xc3 14.bxc3

14.♗xc3 ♕g5 is slightly better for Black.



14...♕g5N

In the game after 14...♗c4 15.♘a3 ♗xe2 16.♕xe2 ♘xa4 17.♖fb1⩲ White had interesting compensation in Gerstner – Klimes, Prague 1990.

15.♔h1 ♗c4! 16.♘a3 ♕d5

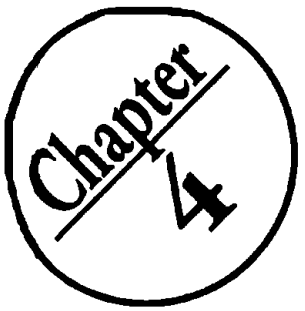
Black is at least not worse.

Conclusion

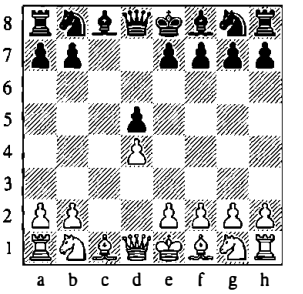
In this chapter we studied two rare bishop moves.

4.♗f4, like its cousin 3.♗f4, is essentially harmless if Black immediately takes on c4. White will, at best, have equal chances.

4.♗g5 is probably the more dangerous of the two bishop moves, but still not a real threat to Black. In the critical line B32, if White plays the novelty I suggest at move 11 then the chances should be about equal.



Exchange Variation



Minor Lines

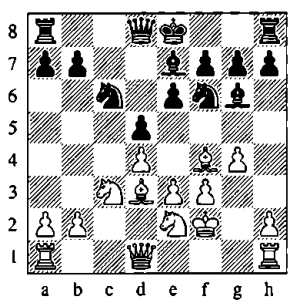
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5

3...cxd5

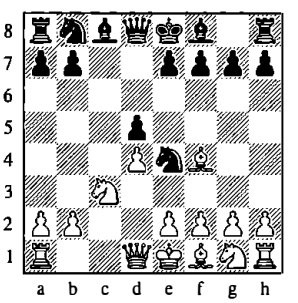
A) 4.♗f4 ♘c6 5.e3 ♘f6 6.♗d3 ♗g4 **24**
A1) 7.♘e2 **24**
A2) 7.♕b3 **25**
A3) 7.f3 **26**
B) 4.♘c3 ♘f6 **27**
B1) 5.♗g5 ♘e4 **27**
B11) 6.♗f4 **27**
B12) 6.♘xe4 **28**
B2) 5.♘f3 ♘c6 **29**
B21) 6.♘e5 **29**
B22) 6.♗f4 **30**

A3) after 11.g4



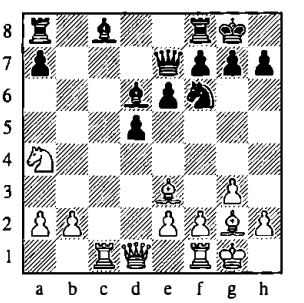
11...♘d7N

B11) after 6.♗f4



6...e5!?N

B21) after 14.♖c1

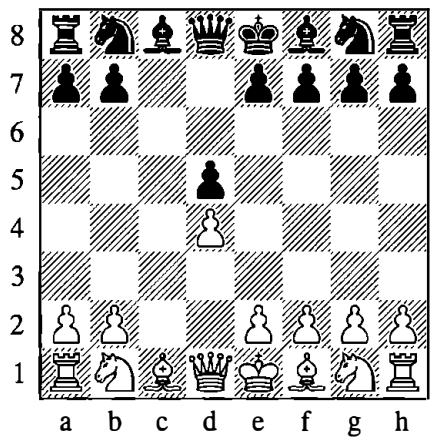


14...♖b8N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5

For many years the Exchange variation of the Slav was considered to be quite annoying to face, but essentially harmless. However, in the last two or three years the situation has changed dramatically and now it is very popular and a fashionable choice at GM level. This is quite understandable as in most of the lines White can try to create pressure on the queenside, while facing no major risks.

3...cxd5



I shall consider two options now: **A) 4.♗f4** and **B) 4.♘c3**. It is worth emphasizing that transpositions are common in the Exchange Variation.

A) 4.♗f4

This move order rarely has any independent significance. If White develops either knight to "bishop three" in the next couple of moves, then we will transpose to a normal line. However there is one rare move order that cuts across my intention to develop the bishop on f5:

4...♘c6 5.e3 ♘f6 6.♗d3

After 6.♘c3 ♗f5 we reach a normal main line position.

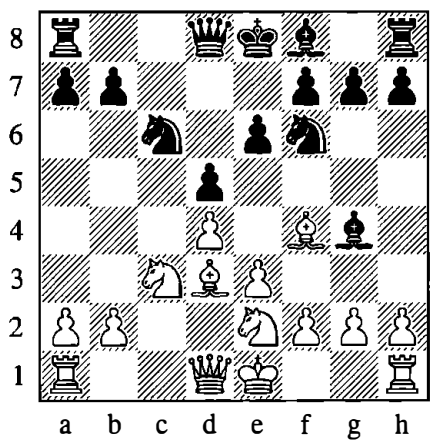
6...♗g4

6...a6 is Black's most popular response to White's tricky move order, but after 7.♘c3 it's just another tabiya, and one which I prefer to avoid.

Now there are three lines to consider: **A1) 7.♘e2**, **A2) 7.♕b3** and **A3) 7.f3**.

7.♘f3 would be a novelty, but a particularly illogical one, as it places Black under no pressure at all.

A1) 7.♘e2 e6 8.♘bc3



8...♗d6!

I feel this move is more challenging than 8...♗e7.

Now the key line is:

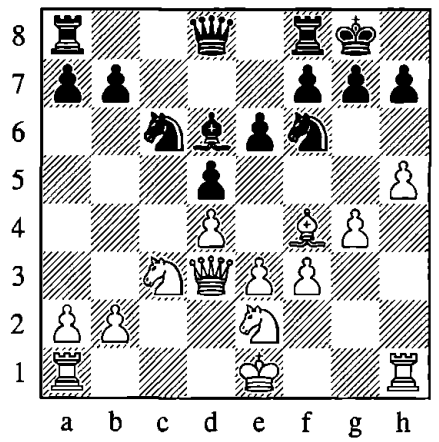
9.f3 ♗h5 10.g4

10.♕b3 is comfortably met by 10...♖b8.

10...♗g6 11.h4 0–0!

Strangely enough, White fails to create anything concrete on the kingside.

12.h5 ♗xd3 13.♕xd3



13...♗xf4

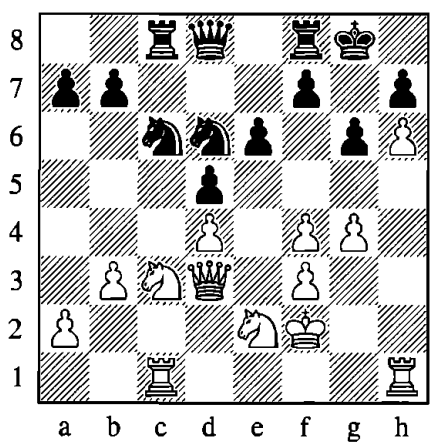
A logical exchange, though even after 13...♖c8, which allows 14.g5 ♘e8 15.g6, Black is alright after 15...fxg6 16.hxg6 h6!.

14.exf4

In the event of 14.♘xf4 the simplest solution for Black is 14...♘e8 15.0–0–0 ♘d6 16.♔b1 ♖c8 with double-edged play.

14...♖c8 15.h6 g6 16.♔f2 ♘e8! 17.♖ac1 ♘d6 18.b3

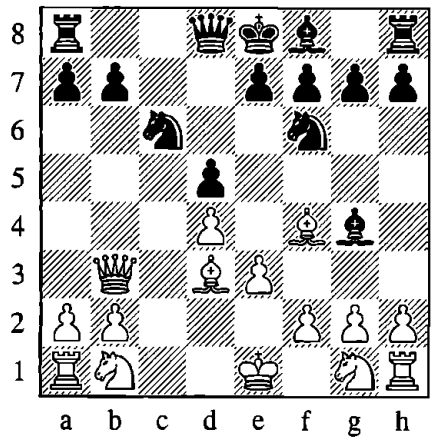
This position was reached in Kosanovic – Kallio, Budapest 2000, and now the natural continuation is:



18...♕a5N

Followed by ...♖c7 and ...♖fc8 when Black has nothing to complain about.

A2) 7.♕b3



This is not a big problem for Black, as he has a simple defence at his disposal:

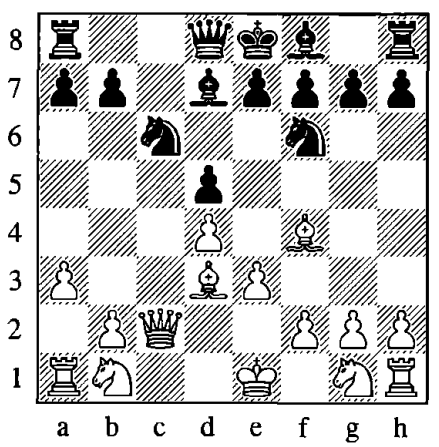
7...♘a5! 8.♕a4†

Black has no problems whatsoever after 8.♕c2 ♖c8 9.♘c3 e6 10.♘ge2 ♗h5 11.0–0 ♗e7.

8...♗d7 9.♕c2 ♘c6

Now White has to spend a move stopping the threat of ...♘b4.

10.a3



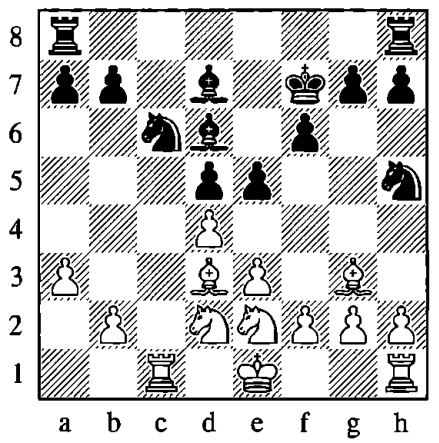
10...♕a5†

Black could also have played 10...♘h5N with the following point: 11.♗g3 ♘xg3 12.hxg3 e5 and Black has a good game.

11.♕d2 ♕xd2† 12.♘xd2 ♘h5

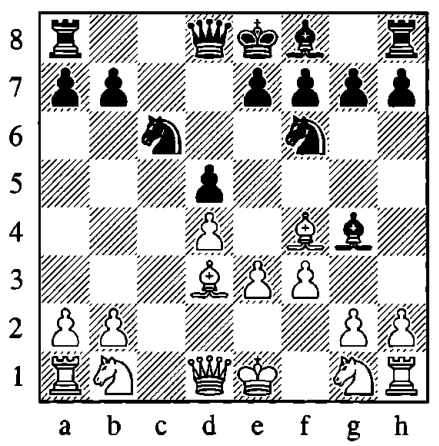
With this important resource, Black captures the dark-squared bishop.

13.♗e5 f6 14.♗g3 e5 15.♘e2 ♗d6 16.♖c1 ♔f7



Black was not worse by any means in Kjartansson – Solodovnichenko, Koge 2013.

A3) 7.f3

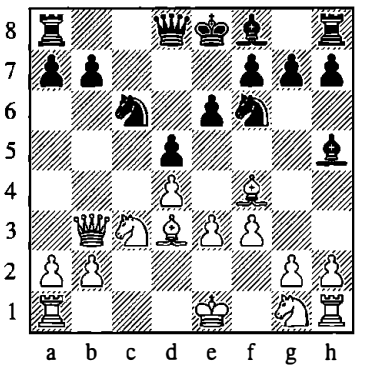


7...♗h5!

It's important to retreat to this square, as instead 7...♗d7 is unappealing after 8.♘c3. For example, 8...♘h5 9.♗g5! or 8...e6 9.g4 are both promising for White.

8.♘c3 e6 9.♘ge2

It is very important to meet 9.♕b3 accurately:

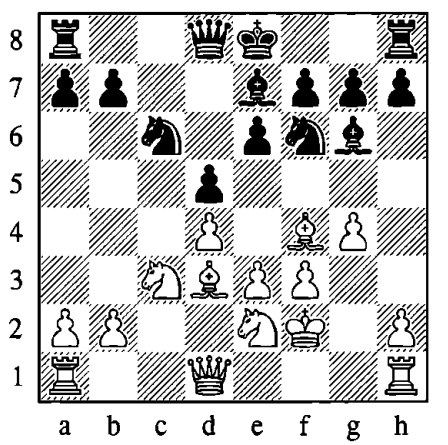


9...♕d7!N (Instead both games to reach this position continued 9...♕b6 which seems dubious, as after 10.♕xb6 axb6 11.♘ge2± In Avila Jimenez – Alcaraz Ortega, Albacete 2008, White had a pleasant advantage because of Black's seriously weakened queenside structure.) 10.♘ge2 ♗g6 11.♗b5 ♖c8 Black is simply fine.

9...♗e7 10.♔f2

White wants to keep the option of a kingside pawn advance, but this can hardly work.

10...♗g6 11.g4



Now in N. Pert – Dearing, Witley 1999, Black could have chosen the natural:

11...♘d7N

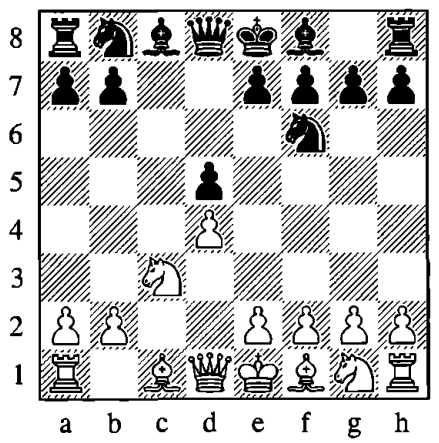
By taking control of the h4-square, Black obtains a comfortable game. For example:

12.♗g3 ♗xd3 13.♕xd3 h5

Avoiding all White's attacking ideas on the kingside.

B) 4.♘c3 ♘f6

Since childhood I have known that 4...♘c6 gives White an important extra option in 5.e4!?.



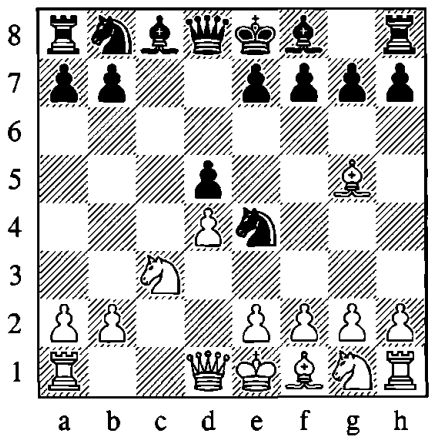
Now the three most common moves are **B1) 5.♗g5**, **B2) 5.♘f3** and 5.♗f4. We shall study the first two moves in this chapter, and then consider 5.♗f4 in the following two chapters. I will repeat that transpositions are common in the Exchange Variation, and for example 5.♘f3 and 5.♗f4 frequently lead to the same position.

B1) 5.♗g5

Surprisingly, this is played rather often, but it is not at all dangerous. At least not for Black! From a choice of several decent options, I prefer the following challenging move:

5...♘e4

This is a simple solution.

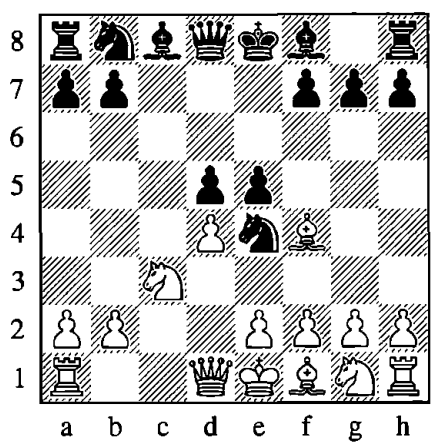


White's main moves are: **B11) 6.♗f4** and **B12) 6.♘xe4**.

B11) 6.♗f4

Now Black has various good options, but it's hard to resist when you have the chance to play:

6...e5!?N



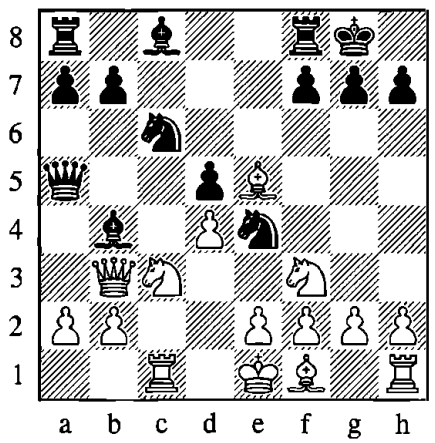
7.♗xe5

If 7.dxe5 then Black easily develops an initiative with 7...♗b4 and now 8.♕c2 ♗f5 9.a3 ♕a5 or 8.♖c1 d4 9.a3 ♗a5∓.

7...♕a5 8.♕b3

Worse for White is 8.♖c1 ♘c6 9.e3 as Black now has 9...♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♗a3 12.♖c2 ♗d7! followed by ...♗a4 with an initiative.

8...♗b4 9.♖c1 ♘c6 10.♘f3 0–0



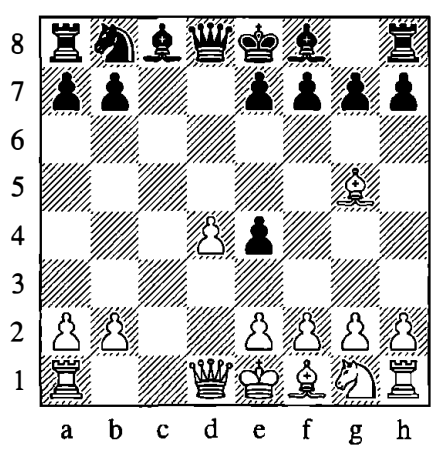
11.e3

White is unable to keep the bishop alive: 11.♗f4 ♗g4 12.e3 ♖fc8 13.♗d3 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♗xc3†! And Black is clearly better.

11...♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♗e6 13.♘d3 ♗xc3† 14.bxc3 ♖fc8 15.♘b4 ♕d8!▫

Followed by doubling rooks on the c-file; Black has excellent compensation for the pawn.

B12) 6.♘xe4 dxe4



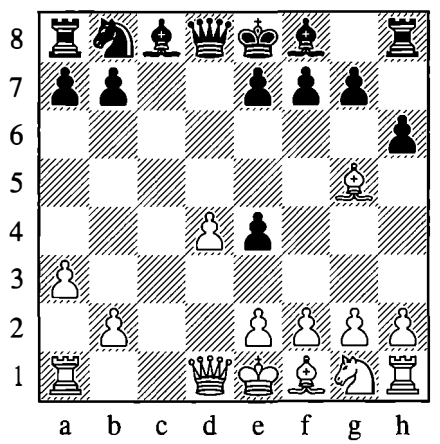
This line is White's most popular reply to 5...♘e4.

7.a3

A commonly-played alternative is 7.♕d2, but it is an unwise choice. The simplest way for Black is 7...♕d5 8.a3 ♘c6 9.♖d1 and now in Minhazuddin – Abdulla, Dhaka 2007, the natural 9...♘a5! would have enabled Black to launch a strong initiative.

About twenty games have reached the position after 7.a3, but nobody has tried the following logical move:

7...h6N



8.♗h4

The other option for the bishop is: 8.♗f4 ♘c6 9.d5 (the main tactical point is 9.e3? e5 10.dxe5 ♕a5† 11.♕d2 ♗b4–+) 9...e5 10.♗e3 ♘e7 (maybe 10...♘a5!? is even more challenging) 11.♕a4† ♕d7 12.♕xe4 ♕xd5 13.♕xd5 ♘xd5 White must fight for equality.

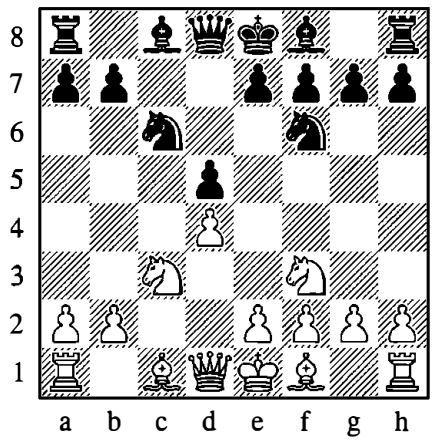
8...♕b6 9.♕c2

If 9.♕d2 then Black can play the obvious 9...e5 10.dxe5 ♘c6 11.e3 ♗e6 followed by ...g5, ...♖d8, ...♗g7 and so on, with a powerful initiative.

9...♘c6 10.e3 e5 11.♖d1 ♕a5† 12.♖d2 ♗e6

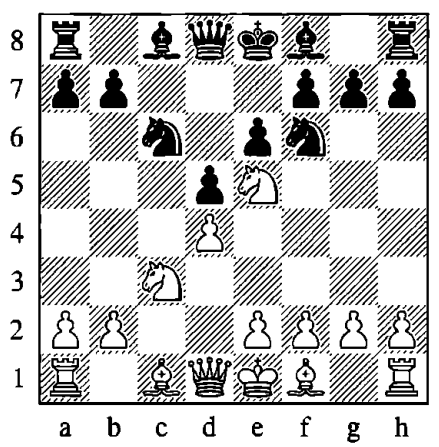
Black has a pleasant position.

B2) 5.♘f3 ♘c6



Now I will cover **B21) 6.♘e5** and **B22) 6.♗f4**. The latter move usually leads to the main lines, which I shall examine in the next two chapters, but in this chapter I shall only look at an early deviation from the main line.

B21) 6.♘e5 e6



White can hardly pose Black any problems.

7.♘xc6

The other popular move is:

7.♕a4 ♗d7 8.♘xd7 ♘xd7

There is nothing wrong with 8...♕xd7, as has been tried in a few games.

9.e3 ♗d6 10.♗e2 0–0 11.0–0 ♖c8

White's bishop pair is not relevant here; meanwhile Black's play on the queenside is very simple.

12.f4

This position was reached in Hahn – Unzicker, Berlin 1953, and now after the natural:

12...a6 13.♗d2 ♘b6 14.♕d1 ♘e7∓

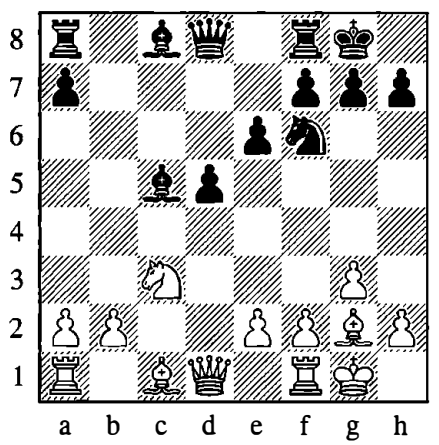
Black would have had the better game.

7...bxc6 8.g3

This is White's most popular idea after 6.♘e5, but of course it can hardly impress. The most logical response is as follows:

8...c5 9.♗g2 ♗e7 10.0–0 0–0 11.dxc5 ♗xc5

This position has occurred quite often.

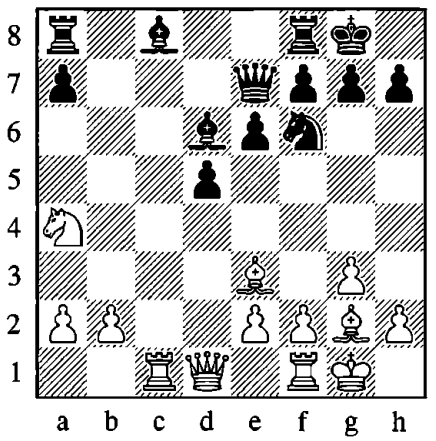


12.♘a4

White's main hopes are connected with this move.

It is important to note that the following move, which seems natural and has been played three times, is in fact a serious error: 12.e4? ♗a6 13.♖e1 ♕b6 Suddenly White is in trouble. A good example is: 14.♗e3 d4 15.♘a4 dxe3 16.♘xb6 exf2† 17.♔h1 fxe1=♕† 18.♕xe1 axb6 Black was winning in Van de Mortel – Loifenfeld, Germany 2001.

12...♗d6 13.♗e3 ♕e7 14.♖c1



Now in all three games to reach this position, Black opted for 14...♗d7, which I think is inaccurate. I prefer:

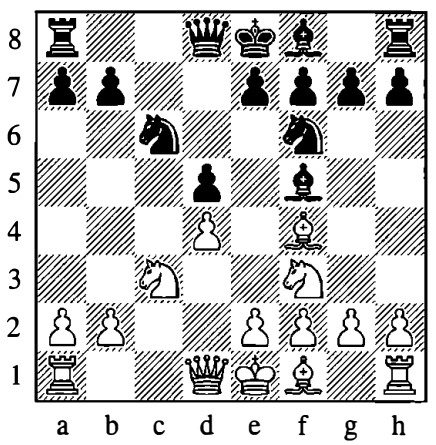
14...♖b8N

The following line is not forced but it does show typical play:

15.b3 ♖d8 16.♗c5 ♗a6 17.♗xd6 ♕xd6 18.♘c5 ♗b5

Black is very comfortable.

B22) 6.♗f4 ♗f5



This natural move is my preferred choice against the Exchange Variation. It is obviously an active developing move, but a common opinion about it is that dull equality is often the outcome. In fact, as we shall see, many interesting lines may result from 6...♗f5. Sure, some lines are dull, especially in the next chapter, but the Exchange Variation is strong enough to be worthy of respect. Certainly, we want to play for a win with Black, but let's start by equalizing.

A common alternative is 6...a6.

7.♖c1

This is the sideline I will cover now. The main moves are examined in the next two chapters.

7.e3 e6 transposes to variation C of Chapter 5.

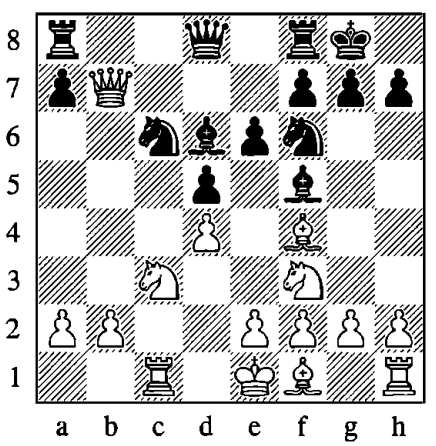
7.♕b3 ♘a5 8.♕a4† ♗d7 9.♕c2 e6 10.e3 transposes to 5.♗f4 ♘c6 6.e3 ♗f5 7.♕b3 ♘a5 8.♕a4† ♗d7 9.♕c2 e6 10.♘f3 – see page 52, variation B2 of Chapter 6.

7...e6 8.♕b3

For 8.e3 see line C2 of Chapter 5 on page 38.

Now I believe in the following sacrificial idea for Black:

8...♗d6!? 9.♕xb7 0–0



Both games to reach this position continued:

10.♕xc6

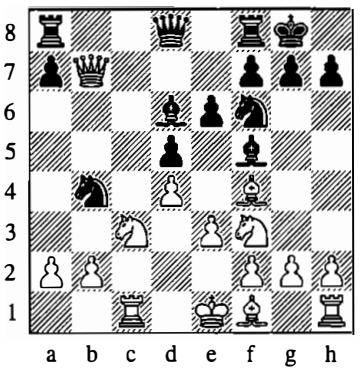
And indeed this looks like White's only

decent continuation.

10.e3

This runs into:

10...♘b4!



White is in trouble, for example:

11.♕xa8

Or 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.♘e5 ♖ab8 13.♕xa7 ♘c2† 14.♔d1 ♖xb2 15.♗d3 ♘a3 16.♗xf5 exf5∓ and Black is much better.

11...♕xa8 12.♗xd6 ♕b7 13.♗xf8 ♔xf8

White has to play:

14.b3

But now Black develops his initiative with:

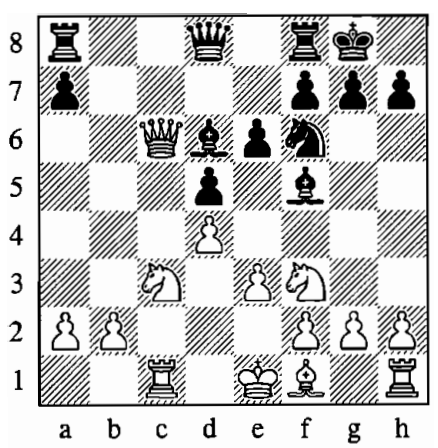
14...♕c7! 15.♘e5

After 15.♗e2 ♘c2† 16.♔d2 ♕a5 Black has an overwhelming initiative.

15...♕a5 16.♔d1 ♘xa2 17.♘xa2 ♕xa2 18.♖c8† ♔e7∓

Black is clearly better.

10...♗xf4 11.e3 ♗d6



12.a3

The alternative is unappealing:

12.♗b5

Now in the game Barcenilla – Dao Thien Hai, Tagaytay City 2013, Black's play was not very convincing, but instead very strong was:

12...a6!N

The main point is:

13.♗xa6

If 13.♗e2 ♕b8 14.♘d1 ♗b4† 15.♔f1 ♖a7 Black has fine compensation due to White's misplaced king.

13...♖b8

Black has ample compensation; one illustrative line runs:

14.b3 ♖b6 15.♕a4 ♕e7

Threatening 16...♖a8.

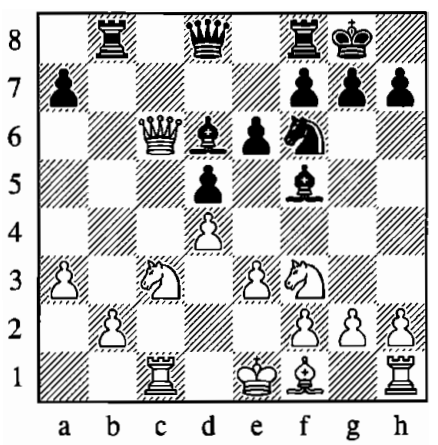
16.♗b5 ♖fb8 17.0–0 ♕d8!

Again ...♖a8 is a threat.

18.b4 ♘e4 19.♗e2 ♘xc3 20.♖xc3 ♖xb4 21.♕d1 ♖b1 22.♖c1 ♕a5

Black will regain the pawn and retain slightly better chances, thanks to his bishop pair.

12...♖b8



13.b4?

A serious mistake.

White should instead have played 13.♘d1

when after 13...♘e4 14.♕a4 ♗g4 15.♗e2 f5♖ Black has a lot of play for the sacrificed pawn.

13...a5!

White is in trouble.

14.♘e2

This was played in Voiska – Ortega, Campobasso 2006. Now Black could have decided the game on the spot with the natural:

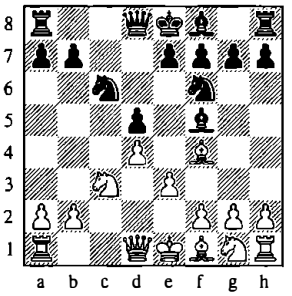
14...axb4–+

Conclusion

This chapter is a gentle introduction to the Exchange Variation. The lines examined here are generally unthreatening, but they are played surprisingly often. If he replies accurately, Black will have promising play in positions that are not at all dull.



Exchange Variation



Old Main Lines

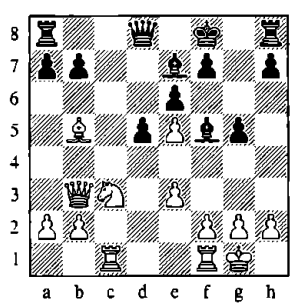
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♗f4 ♘c6 6.e3

6...♗f5

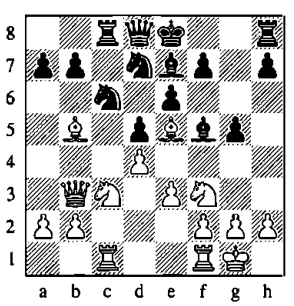
A) 7.♗d3 34
B) 7.♗b5 35
C) 7.♘f3 e6 36
C1) 8.♘e5 ♘xe5 9.♗xe5 ♘d7 37
C11) 10.♕b3 37
C12) 10.♗g3 37
C2) 8.♖c1 38
C3) 8.♕b3 ♗b4 39
C31) 9.♘e5 39
C32) 9.♗b5 0–0 39
C321) 10.0–0 40
C322) 10.♗xc6 41
C4) 8.♗b5 ♘d7 43
C41) 9.0–0 43
C42) 9.♕b3 44

C11) after 14.♖ac1



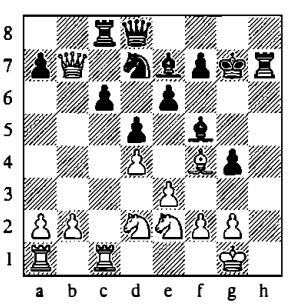
14...a6N

C41) after 12.♗e5



12...0–0!?N

C42) after 19.♗f4



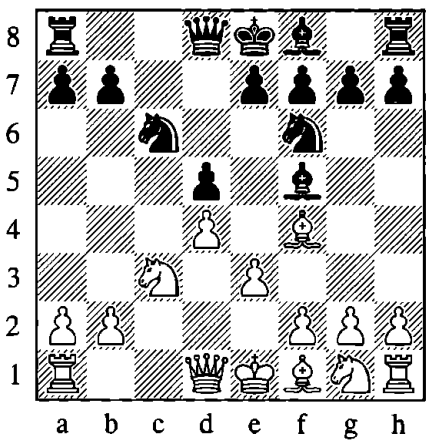
19...♗d3!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♗f4

This is a popular move order, but, as ever in the Exchange Variation, many transpositions are possible.

5...♘c6 6.e3 ♗f5

I was eager to make 6...♗g4 work, but I was not happy with 7.f3! ♗d7 8.♗d3 e6 9.g4 which is promising for White in my opinion.



Now there are four main moves. In this chapter I will examine **A) 7.♗d3**, **B) 7.♗b5** and **C) 7.♘f3**. Instead 7.♕b3 has recently surged in popularity at GM level, and I will cover it in the next chapter.

A) 7.♗d3

The exchange of light-squared bishops cannot pose Black any problems, but has to be covered, as it has been played many times.

7...♗xd3 8.♕xd3 e6 9.♘f3

The other likely possibility is:

9.♘ge2 ♗e7!?

This is the best chance of starting a fight.

The natural 9...♗d6 equalizes comfortably. One good example is: 10.0–0 0–0 11.♖ac1 ♖c8 12.h3 h6 13.♖fd1 And a draw was agreed in Nikolic – Solodovnichenko, Leiden 2009.

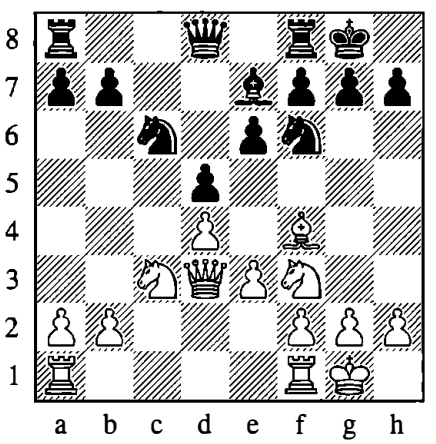
10.0–0 0–0 11.h3 ♖c8 12.♖ac1 ♕d7 13.♖fd1 b6 14.♗h2 ♖fd8 15.♕b1 ♕b7=

In Eperjesi – Le Quang, Budapest 2005, the position was more or less equal, but there is plenty of life in it.

9...♗e7!

Some have claimed that Black has a slight advantage, since his dark-squared bishop is better placed than his opponent's. Of course that claim is too optimistic, but this position definitely has some life left in it, despite being level, especially in comparison with 9...♗d6 10.♗xd6 ♕xd6 11.0–0 0–0 which is dead equal and one of the favourite lines for pre-arranged draws. You can find hundreds of them in the database!

10.0–0 0–0



11.♖fc1

Another commonly played move is:

11.h3 ♖c8

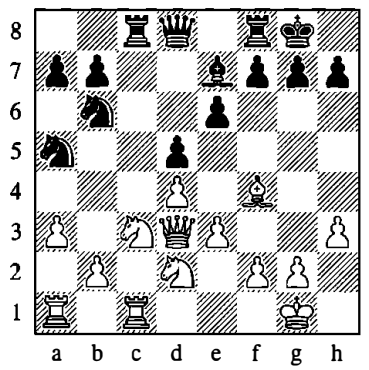
There is no real theory needed here. Of the numerous examples I could give, I just want to mention one line in order to show that the arising position contains fighting resources.

12.♖fc1 ♘d7 13.♘d2

Certainly White can try to simplify the position as in the following encounter: 13.♕b5 ♘b6 (13...♕b6 is not bad either)

14.♘a4 ♘xa4 15.♕xa4 a6 (15...f6 was more combative) 16.♘e5 ♘xe5 17.♗xe5 ♕e8 18.♕xe8 And a draw was agreed in Fridman – Shirov, Jurmala 2012.

13...♘b6 14.a3 ♘a5



15.b3

Very unfortunate is 15.♕b5? as after 15...♘bc4 16.♘xc4 ♖xc4–+ the white queen is in trouble, Mirzoev – Dominguez, Saint Vincent 2002.

15...a6 16.♕b1 ♕d7 17.♕b2 f6 18.♖c2 ♖c6 19.♖ac1 ♖fc8∞

With an equal but still complex position, Andonov – Tukmakov, Sochi 1987.

11...♖c8 12.a3 ♘d7

12...♘h5 is also an option.

After the text move a stem game continued:

13.♘d2 ♘b6 14.b4

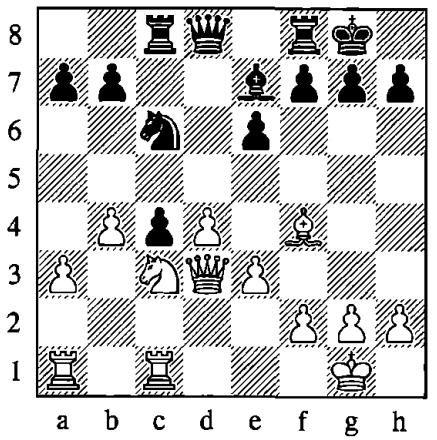
Black also has no problems after 14.♖c2 ♕d7 15.♖ac1 ♘a5.

14...♘c4!?

Black takes the chance to change the character of the game.

The solid 14...♗d6 would retain the balance. For example: 15.♗xd6 ♕xd6 16.♖c2 ♘e7 17.♖ac1 ♕d7=

15.♘xc4 dxc4



16.♕xc4

Other moves are of course possible:

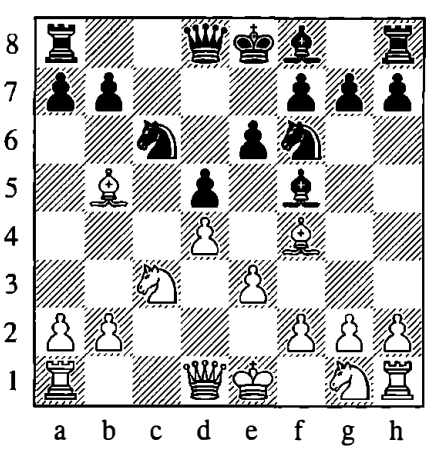
16.♕c2 g5!? 17.♗g3 f5 with a very unclear game.

Or 16.♕e2 a6 17.♖d1 b5 18.d5 exd5 19.♘xd5 ♗f6 20.♖a2 ♗e5! and Black is not worse.

16...♘xb4 17.♕e2 ♘d5 18.♘xd5 ♕xd5 19.a4 ♖c6

In Ikonnikov – Dominguez, Havana 2004, Black had managed to reach an unbalanced position and eventually prevailed, but the position is still equal.

B) 7.♗b5 e6



8.♕a4

This has been fashionable for some time.

8.♘f3 transposes to the 7.♘f3 e6 8.♗b5 move order, as in Variation C4.

White cannot benefit by starting with 8.♖c1 when the simplest reply is 8...♘d7 9.♘f3 ♖c8 10.0–0 ♗e7 and again we get a position from the 7.♘f3 e6 8.♗b5 line.

8...♕b6 9.♘f3 ♗e7

It transpires that allowing White's next move is not a big deal.

10.♘e5

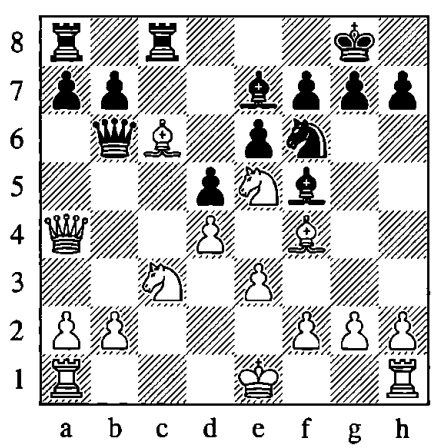
Certainly harmless is 10.0–0 0–0. For instance after 11.♖fc1 as in Voltchek – Kaps, Rimavska Sobota 1996, Black could have posed problems with the thematic 11...♘h5!N 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.♘e5 ♘xf4 14.exf4 ♕xb2 15.♘xc6 ♗d6∓ and Black's bishop pair might eventually prove dangerous.

10...0–0!

A surprising tactical idea.

11.♗xc6 ♖fc8

The point of Black's idea and effectively a refutation of White's play.



12.0–0

Even worse is 12.♗b5 a6 13.0–0 axb5 14.♕xb5 ♕xb5 15.♘xb5 ♖c2 16.♖fb1 as in Vera – Hector, Istanbul 2000. Now the accurate 16...h6!N would keep Black in full control, for instance 17.a3 g5 18.♗g3 h5 19.f3 ♘e8 with a clear advantage.

12...bxc6 13.♖fc1

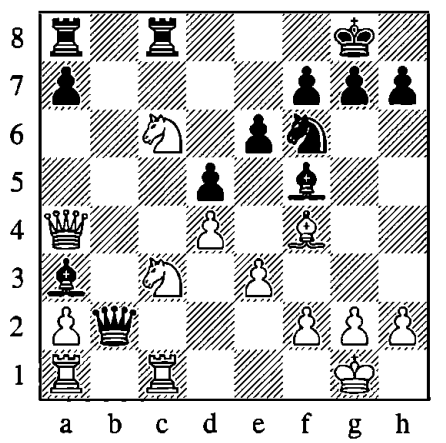
This position was reached in the top-level game Morozevich – Grischuk, Moscow 2007. Now Black could have captured the b2-pawn, as was proven later:

13...♕xb2!

Now the main line continues:

14.♘xc6 ♗a3!

Not an easy move to spot during the game.



15.♕a6

15.h3 is met by 15...♗c2!.

15...♗d3! 16.♕xd3 ♖xc6 17.♖ab1 ♕xc1† 18.♖xc1 ♗xc1

White must fight for the draw.

C) 7.♘f3 e6

In this important tabiya there are four main moves to consider: **C1) 8.♘e5**, **C2) 8.♖c1**, **C3) 8.♕b3** and **C4) 8.♗b5**.

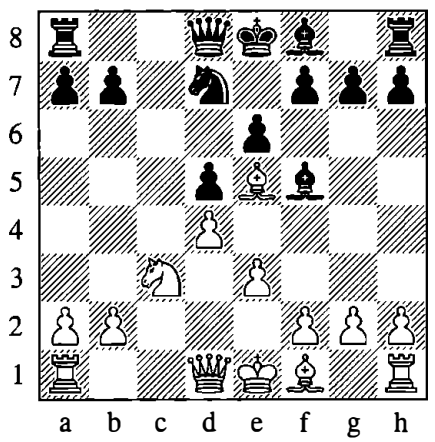
C1) 8.♘e5 ♘xe5

White's rather harmless 8th move allows Black a choice of easy solutions. Another decent line for Black is 8...♗d6 9.♗b5 ♗xe5 10.♗xe5 ♖c8.

9.♗xe5

Black also has no problems after 9.dxe5 ♘d7. For example, 10.e4 dxe4 11.♗b5 ♗b4 12.♖c1 a6 13.♗xd7† ♕xd7 14.♕xd7† ♔xd7 15.♔e2 ♗xc3 16.♖xc3 ♖hc8 with a drawish endgame in Mozny – Sodoma, Czech Republic 2008.

9...♘d7



Now I examined two moves: **C11) 10.♕b3** and **C12) 10.♗g3**.

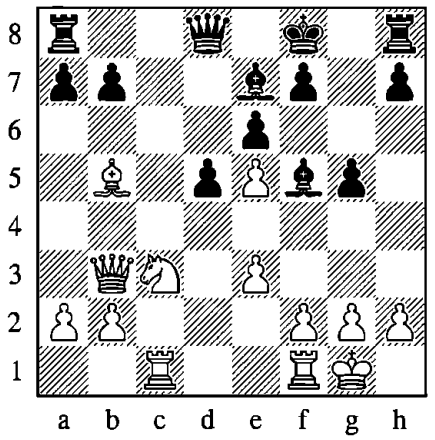
C11) 10.♕b3

This is a risky idea.

10...♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♗e7 12.♗b5† ♔f8

Black can easily end up better. Now the logical continuation is:

13.0–0 g5! 14.♖ac1



Five games reached this position and all of them continued 14...♔g7, but I believe there is a more accurate move:

14...a6!N

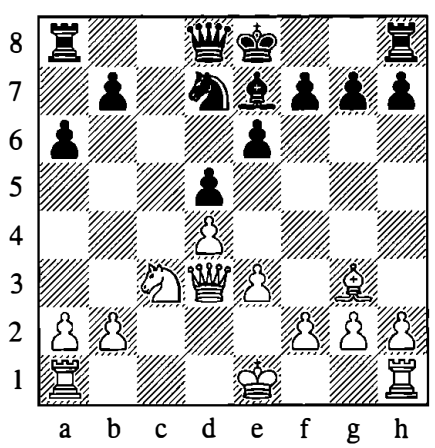
Indeed Black's chances are preferable. For example:

15.♗e2 ♕b8 16.f4 ♔g7 17.g4 ♗g6 18.♔g2

18.f5?! runs into: 18...♕xe5 19.fxg6 ♕xe3† 20.♔g2 hxg6∓

18...b5∓

C12) 10.♗g3 a6 11.♗d3 ♗xd3 12.♕xd3 ♗e7

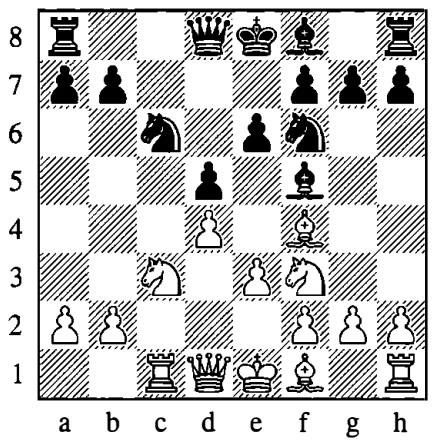


This is a safer line for White, but Black is comfortable.

13.0–0 0–0 14.♖fc1 ♖c8 15.♖c2 ♘b6 16.♖ac1 ♕d7=

In Szymczak – Mokry, Karvina 1982, Black had no problems.

C2) 8.♖c1



This allows Black to challenge the f4-bishop right away:

8...♗d6 9.♗xd6 ♕xd6 10.♗d3

Obviously this leads to a drawish position.

10.♗b5

This looks like the most ambitious option for White.

10...0–0 11.♗xc6

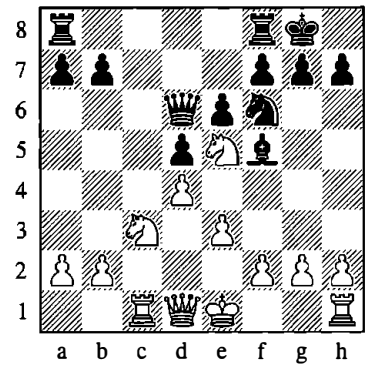
Kersting – Biller, Germany 1995.

11.0–0 ♘e7!N (11...♖fc8 12.♗xc6 ♖xc6 13.♘e5 ♖cc8 was Kleiser – Hafner, Lienz 2007, when White could have secured an edge with 14.g4 ♗g6 15.♕b3 ♕e7 16.f3±) 12.♘e5 a6 13.♗e2 ♖ac8=

11...♕xc6!?N

11...bxc6 is the dull safe option.

12.♘e5 ♕d6



13.g4

13.0–0 h6 saves the bishop from any harassment.

13...♗g6 14.h4

14.♕b3 can be soundly met by 14...♖fc8.

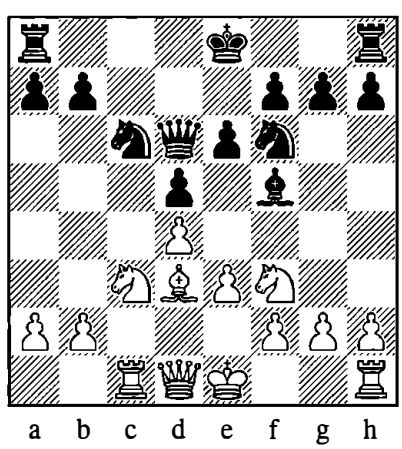
The text move is a bold attempt to chase the bishop, but Black has a good reply:

14...♘e4!

Now White can keep an unclear but roughly balanced position in various ways, including castling or taking on g6, but continuing to target the bishop would backfire:

15.♘xe4?! ♗xe4 16.f3?! f6!

White's position collapses.



10...♗xd3

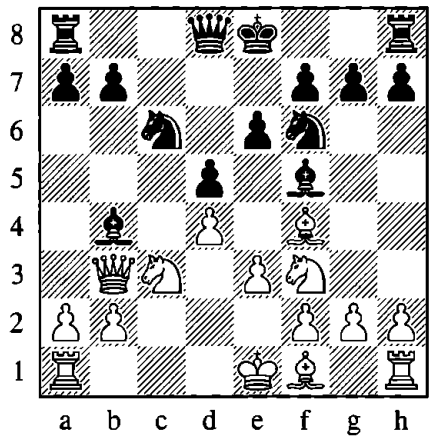
Black can try 10...♗g4!? when the position remains equal, but there is more chance of a fight. A good example here is: 11.0–0 0–0 12.a3 ♖ac8 13.b4 a6 14.♗e2 ♗xf3!? 15.♗xf3

b5 Black is trying hard to complicate the game, but White certainly remains solid. 16.♗e2 ♘d7 17.a4 And after White managed to exchange queenside pawns, there was nothing to play for in A. Mastrovasilis – Balogh, Rijeka 2010.

11.♕xd3 0–0=

With a drawish position, as we already saw above.

C3) 8.♕b3 ♗b4



Now there is a split: **C31) 9.♘e5** and **C32) 9.♗b5**.

C31) 9.♘e5 ♗xc3†

The simplest way to equalize, however Black can also try 9...♕e7 10.♗b5 ♖c8 with a more complicated game.

10.bxc3

The other recapture is also possible:

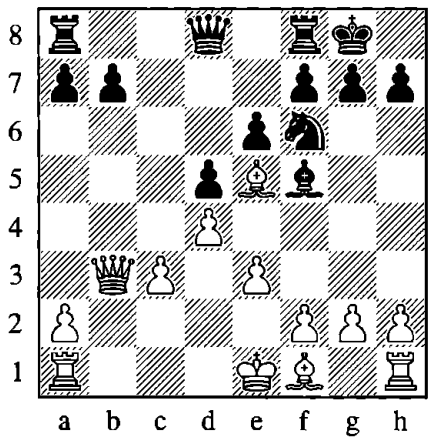
10.♕xc3 ♘xe5

10...0–0?! 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♕a3! transposes to Salgado Lopez – Najer, Rijeka 2010, which is good for White, who dominates the dark squares.

11.♗xe5 0–0 12.♕b4 ♖c8 13.♗e2 ♖c2 14.♗d1 ♖c4 15.♕a3 ♕b6 16.0–0 ♖fc8

Black is by no means worse, Martinovic – Erdos, Sibenik 2011.

10...♘xe5 11.♗xe5 0–0!



12.♗e2

After 12.♕xb7 ♖c8 Black easily regains the c3-pawn.

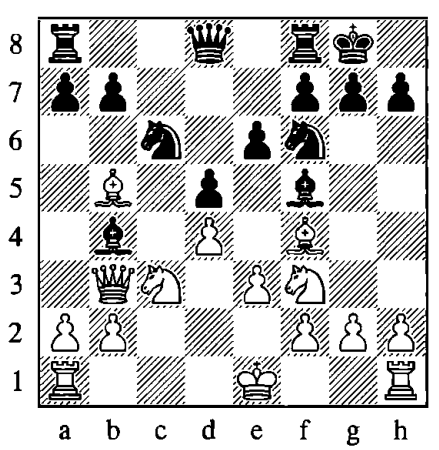
12...♖c8 13.0–0 ♘e4 14.♕xb7

Another example is Polak – Ragger, Austria 2013, which continued: 14.♖fc1 ♕h4!? 15.♗g3 ♕e7 16.c4 ♘d2 17.♕a4 ♘xc4 18.♗xc4 dxc4 19.♖xc4 ♗d3= Black had easily solved his opening problems and even went on to win.

14...f6 15.♗g3 ♖f7 16.♕a6 ♘xc3 17.♖fc1 ♘xe2† 18.♕xe2 ♖b7=

With dead equality in Akobian – Bu Xiangzhi, Istanbul 2012.

C32) 9.♗b5 0–0



There are two lines now: **C321) 10.0–0** and **C322) 10.♗xc6**.

C321) 10.0–0 ♗xc3

11.♕xc3

The other choice is:

11.♗xc6

Frankly, this is the way to draw.

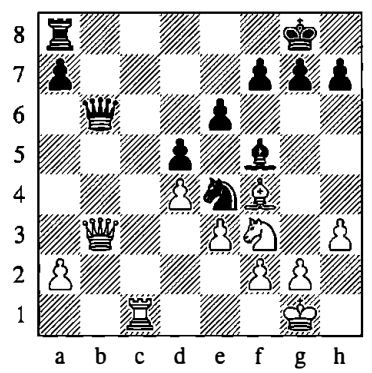
11...♗xb2 12.♗xb7 ♗xa1 13.♖xa1

13.♗xa8 ♕xa8 14.♖xa1 ♖c8 is just dead equal. Now Black has several decent moves, but somehow the one I like the most is:

13...♘e4

The key game continued:

14.♖c1 ♕b6 15.♗xa8 ♖xa8 16.h3



This is Najer – Bu Xiangzhi, Ergun 2006, and now I like the solid move:

16...f6N

Before taking any action I want to control the e5-square. A good illustrative line is:

17.g4 ♗g6 18.♖c7 ♕xb3 19.axb3 a5

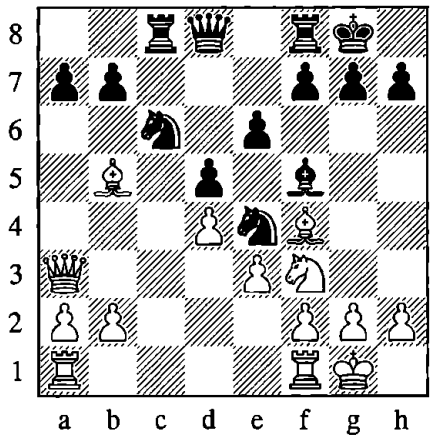
And it's drawish.

11...♖c8 12.♕a3

Or 12.♖fc1 ♘e4 13.♕a3 g5 14.♗g3 f6 15.♗xc6 bxc6 will eventually transpose to 12.♕a3.

12...♘e4

If 12...♕b6 then 13.♕c5! as in Richter – Van Kampen, Pardubice 2008, when White can hope for a slight pull.



13.♖fc1

This looks principled.

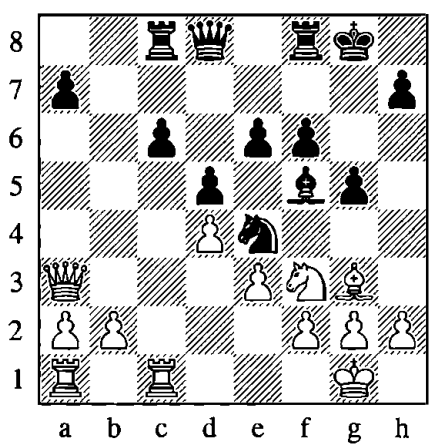
Instead capturing the a7-pawn is unexpectedly risky: 13.♗xc6 ♖xc6 14.♕xa7 Now in the game Cifuentes Parada – Okkes, Netherlands 1995, Black could have seized the initiative with 14...g5!N 15.♗g3 ♕e7 followed by ...♖fc8 and ...♖c2.

13...g5!

This idea is a key resource in a seemingly passive position; unexpectedly Black manages to seize the initiative.

14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.♗g3 f6!

A clever move. Black should not rush with 15...h5 as then 16.h4 g4 17.♘e1 is not so clear.



16.♘e1

The alternative is to grab on a7:

16.♕xa7 h5 17.h4 g4 18.♘h2

The other line is: 18.♘e1 ♘xg3 19.fxg3 ♕d6! The key move. 20.♔h2 ♖a8 21.♕c5 ♕xc5 22.♖xc5 ♖fb8 23.♖xc6 This is Taboas Rodriguez – Ramirez Garcia, Tres Cantos 2010, when after 23...♖xb2 White had a chance to advance his a-pawn; instead 23...♖a4!N was a great move, securing Black's advantage.

18...♘xg3 19.fxg3 ♕d6 20.♘f1?

This time after the sequence:

20...♖a8 21.♕c5 ♕xc5 22.♖xc5 ♖fb8!∓

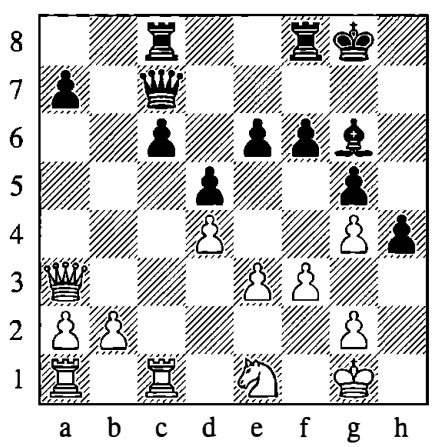
It was clearly in Black's favour in Rusev – Ni Hua, Villarrobledo 2009.

16...h5 17.f3 ♘xg3 18.hxg3 ♕c7 19.♔f2

19.f4 was preferable, but even so after 19...♗e4 Black has a serious initiative on the kingside.

19...h4 20.g4 ♗g6 21.♔g1

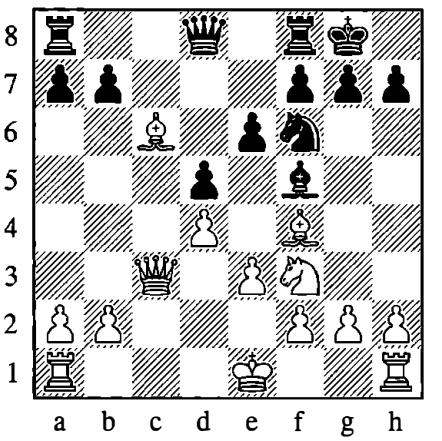
So far this is Bakre – Thakur, San Sebastian 2012.



21...h3!N

This obvious move would have kept Black on track. His initiative is quite strong, as he is going to open the h-file, followed by ...♔g7 and ...♖h8.

C322) 10.♗xc6 ♗xc3† 11.♕xc3



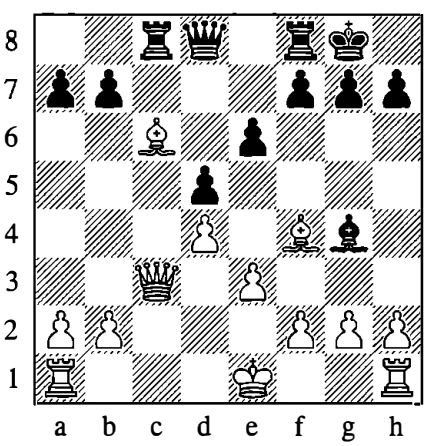
11...♖c8

Only not 11...bxc6 12.♕a3! and White preserves some edge.

12.♘e5 ♘g4!

This is an important finesse, as after 12...bxc6 13.♕a3 Black is far from equality.

13.♘xg4 ♗xg4



14.♕b4

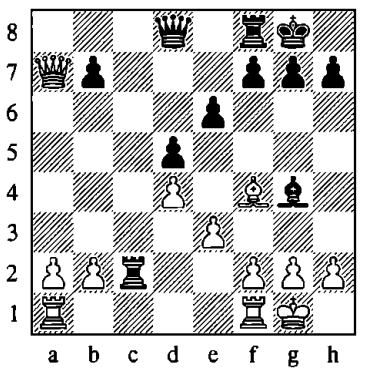
Taking the other pawn is weaker and leaves White without any real chance of fighting for an advantage:

14.♕c5 ♖xc6 15.♕xa7 ♖c2

Worthy of consideration is the engine's recommendation 15...♕e7!?N 16.0–0 ♖fc8, with full compensation.

16.0–0

A serious mistake would be 16.♕xb7? ♕a5† 17.b4 ♖e2† 18.♔f1 ♕a3 with a decisive attack.



16...♗e2!

An important move.

Instead premature is 16...♖xb2? running into 17.♖ab1 when Black loses the b7-pawn without any compensation.

17.♖fc1 ♖xb2 18.♖ab1 ♖xb1

18...♕c8!? was not bad either.

19.♖xb1 b5 20.a4

The last trick.

20...♕a8!

Of course not 20...bxa4? 21.♖b8! and White wins.

21.♕xa8 ♖xa8 22.axb5 ♗xb5

With a dead draw in Xiu – Bu Xiangzhi, Danzhou 2013.

14...♖xc6 15.♕xb7 ♕c8

Another decent option for Black is 15...♕a5† 16.b4 ♕a4 17.0–0 ♗e2! 18.♖fe1 ♗b5 and White had failed to prove the significance of his extra pawn in Colovic – Vucic, Triesen 2012.

16.♕xc8

Obviously not 16.♕b3? ♕a6! 17.f3 ♗f5∓ and White is in trouble.

16...♖fxc8 17.0–0 a5!

I believe Black should have no real problem holding this endgame.

18.f3 ♗f5 19.♖fe1

There are a couple of other options worth considering:

19.♖f2?! leads to an immediate draw after 19...♖c1† 20.♖xc1 ♖xc1† 21.♖f1 ♖c2 22.♖f2 ♖c1† 23.♖f1 as in Umansky – Simantsev, Belgorod 2009.

19.g4 ♗d3 20.♖f2

And now the simplest way to draw is:

20...♖c1† 21.♖xc1 ♖xc1† 22.♔g2 a4! 23.e4

Obviously 23.b3 axb3 24.axb3 ♖b1 25.♖a2 h6 is drawish.

23...♖c2! 24.♖xc2 ♗xc2 25.e5

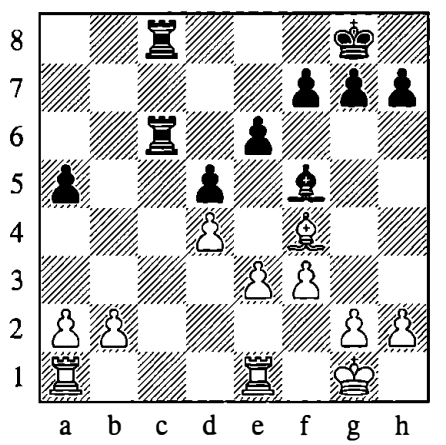
This occurred in Laxman – Adhiban, Aurangabad 2011, and now I suggest:

25...♗b1!N 26.b3

After 26.a3 ♗c2 White's extra pawn on the queenside is not relevant.

26...a3 27.♗c1 ♗xa2 28.b4 ♗c4 29.♗xa3 ♗b5

White has no chance of converting his extra pawn.



This position occurred in the well-known game Kramnik – Anand, Bonn (1) 2008. Vishy played 19...♗g6 and managed to hold easily, but I believe the most convincing way is:

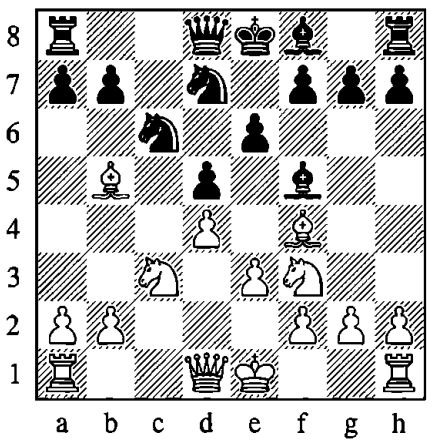
19...♖c2!N 20.b3

In the event of 20.e4 dxe4 21.fxe4 ♗g6 22.b3 f6 White has no ideas to improve his position.

20...♗d3 21.♗d6 ♖8c3! 22.♗a3 f6

With an easy draw.

C4) 8.♗b5 ♘d7



Now there is a split: **C41) 9.0–0** and **C42) 9.♕b3**.

C41) 9.0–0 ♗e7 10.♖c1

Again 10.♘e5 is harmless. For example: 10...♘cxe5 11.♗xe5 0–0 12.♗g3 a6 13.♗d3 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 ♖c8= with simple equality in Andersson – Wang Hao, Amsterdam 2006.

10.♕b3 leads to line C42 on the next page.

10...♖c8

As we will see later, there is a lot of sense in not rushing to castle short.

11.♕b3

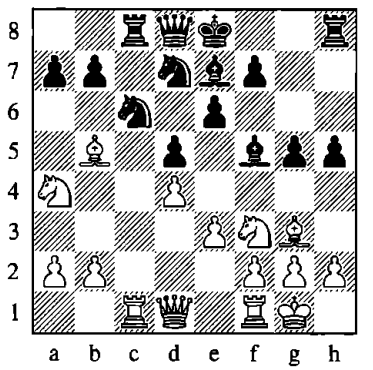
The following option can lead to similar play:

11.♘a4

This has been played quite a lot.

11...g5 12.♗g3 h5

This attacking plan also looks very interesting here.



13.♘c5

This looks like White's best option. Instead after 13.h3 White faced a serious attack in the following example: 13...g4 14.♘e5 (14.hxg4 hxg4 15.♘e5 ♘dxe5 16.dxe5 ♔f8 is not much better) 14...♘dxe5 15.♗xe5 f6 16.hxg4 hxg4 17.♗g3 ♔f7 18.♘c5 ♕f8! Kropff – Cubas, Asuncion 2006.

13...♘xc5

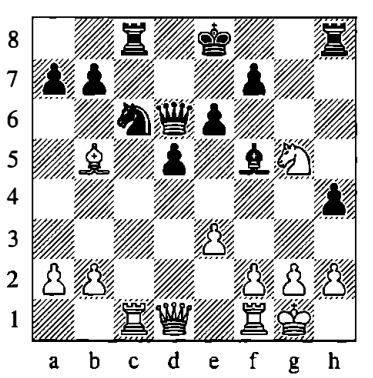
13...h4 runs into the unexpected 14.♗d6!.

14.dxc5 h4 15.♗d6

Black is obviously fine after 15.♗e5 f6 16.♗c3 e5.

15...♗xd6 16.cxd6 ♕xd6 17.♘xg5

17.♕a4 h3! 18.g3 0–0∓

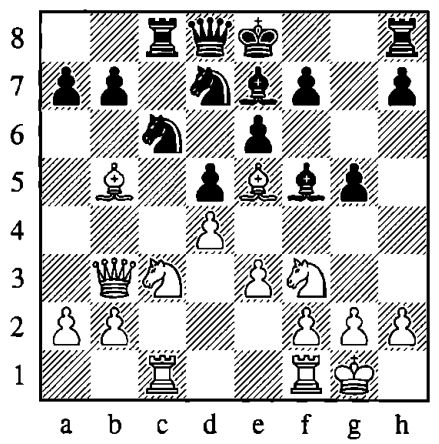


This position was reached in I. Sokolov – Danin, Koge 2013, and now I recommend the simple:

17...♕b4!N 18.♗xc6† ♖xc6!?
Black has a good game.

11...g5!?
This is the key idea. Instead in the event of 11...0–0 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.♕b7 White definitely has play.

12.♗e5
Instead dangerous for White is 12.♗g3 h5.



Two games have reached the position after the text move. Black won them both, but I was still not satisfied and I think the following move is a good improvement:

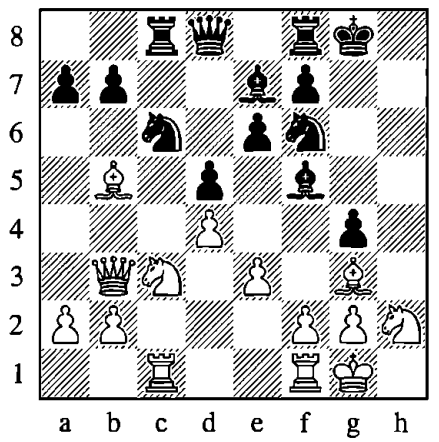
12...0–0!?N
I checked the following line:

13.♗g3 h5
I like this aggressive move, but also fine is the more positional 13...g4 14.♘d2 followed by 14...h5 or 14...♕b6∞ with a complex game.

14.h3 g4!? 15.hxg4 hxg4 16.♘h2
Or if 16.♘d2 then 16...♔g7 followed by ...♖h8.

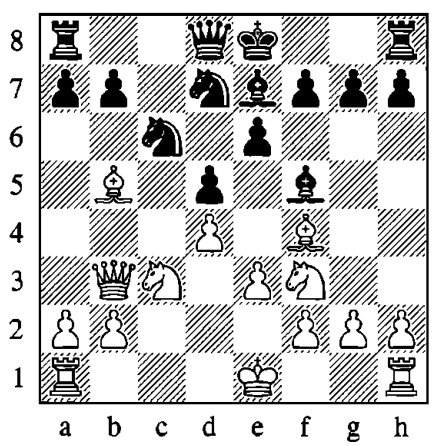
16...♘f6
Also interesting is 16...♔g7 17.♕d1 ♖h8 18.♘xg4 ♗h4! with complications.

After the text move the arising position is very complicated. A good illustrative line is:



17.♕d1 ♗d6!? 18.♗h4 ♗xh2† 19.♔xh2 ♔g7 20.♖h1 ♖h8 21.♔g1 ♘e7 22.♘e2 ♕b6
And Black is fine.

C42) 9.♕b3 ♗e7



10.0–0
For 10.♖c1 ♖c8 11.0–0 see the move order 9.0–0 ♗e7 10.♖c1 ♖c8 11.♕b3 in line C41.

10...g5!?
This aggressive idea is the main reason I chose this variation for Black.

10...0–0 leads to a normal positional game,

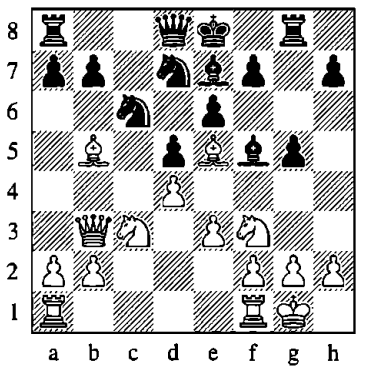
which is typical for the Exchange Variation. White is trying to get a slight pull with the help of 11.♖fc1.

11.♗g3

The alternative is:

11.♗e5 ♖g8!?

Black also achieves good results after 11...0–0.



Here I considered two moves for White:

a) 12.♖fc1 g4 13.♘e1 ♘dxe5 14.dxe5 ♔f8 15.♗d3

Pretty forced.

15...♗g6

Also worth considering is 15...♖g5!?. 16.♗xg6 hxg6 17.♘d3 ♕b8 18.♘b5 ♔g7 19.♕c3 ♖h8

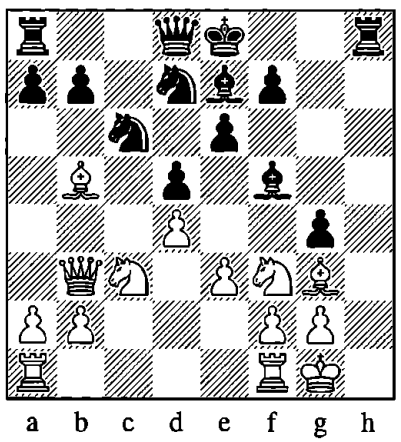
Now the only move to maintain equality was 20.♘d6, while instead after 20.♘d4 ♕g8 Black seized a dangerous initiative in Kveinys – Fridman, Essen 2001.

b) 12.♖fd1 Two games have reached here, but in my opinion Black has never opted for the best move: 12...♔f8!N The following line shows how good Black's position is: 13.♗g3 h5 14.e4 dxe4 15.d5 ♘c5 16.♕c4 ♘a5 17.♕d4 exf3 18.d6 ♗f6 19.♕xc5 ♕b6 20.♕xb6 axb6 21.d7 fxg2∓ Black is slightly better.

11...h5 12.h3 g4

Black has other moves, but the text is definitely the most challenging.

13.hxg4 hxg4



14.♘d2

This is the correct choice. The following lines show that other options are weaker:

14.♘e5 ♘dxe5 15.♗xe5 (Black is also better after 15.dxe5 ♔f8) 15...f6 16.♗g3 ♔f7 Black created a typical attack after 17.f3 ♕g8 in Van der Stricht – Hautot, Antwerp 2011.

After 14.♘e1 I like: 14...♘b6N (instead after 14...♔f8 15.♗d3! ♗xd3 16.♘xd3 White was doing fine in Brown – Sarkar, Los Angeles 2013) 15.♗d3 ♗xd3 16.♘xd3 ♗d6 Black's chances seem preferable; he will castle long and White must always be ready to face an attack along the h-file.

14...♔f8

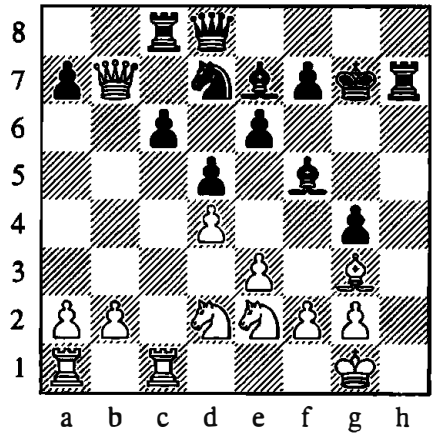
A good prophylactic move, as there is no immediate idea that might hurt White. For example after 14...♗h4 White has 15.♘e2 with the better game, as in V. Milov – Sadler, Isle of Man 1994.

15.♖fc1 ♔g7! 16.♘e2 ♖c8 17.♗xc6 bxc6 18.♕b7

Everything looks logical from both sides till now.

18...♖h7!

An excellent move; Black has in mind the move ...♕h8.



19.♗f4

The pawn on c6 is obviously untouchable. After 19.♖xc6?? ♖xc6 20.♕xc6 ♕h8 the rook on a1 is lost.

The pawn on a7 can be taken with 19.♕xa7 but then: 19...c5 (after 19...♕h8 20.f3 there is no mate) 20.♘f1 ♗d3! 21.♖e1 ♖a8 22.♕c7 ♕xc7 23.♗xc7 ♖c8 24.♗f4 f6⩲ Black has excellent compensation for the pawn, as mentioned by Jakovenko in *ChessBase Magazine* 148.

This position was reached in Rakhmanov – Jakovenko, Plovdiv 2012. A serious improvement would have been:

19...♗d3!N

As correctly pointed out by Jakovenko.

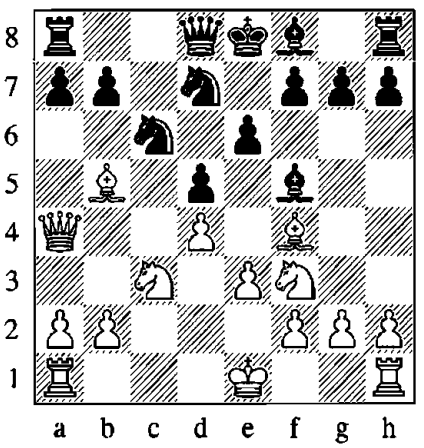
20.♘g3 c5 21.e4 ♘b6! 22.♕xa7 c4

Despite being a pawn down, Black dominates.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♗f4 ♘c6 6.e3 ♗f5 7.♘f3 e6 8.♗b5 ♘d7

When my book was published, a few people discovered that in this position I missed a popular option:

C43) 9.♕a4

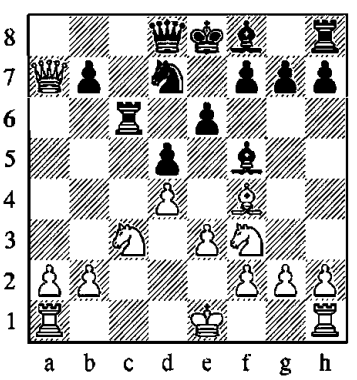


This move doesn't change the evaluation of the line as perfectly playable for Black; however, a bit of concrete knowledge is required.

9...♖c8! 10.0–0

Capturing the a7-pawn is dangerous for White:

10.♗xc6 ♖xc6 11.♕xa7



11...♗d3!

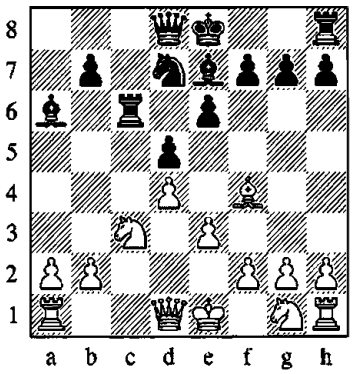
Another good possibility is 11...♕c8 12.♕a5 ♖a6 13.♕c7 ♕xc7 14.♗xc7 ♗b4 Grigorov – V. Milov, Roslavl 1989, and Black will regain the pawn, keeping the better chances.

12.♕a4

Another line is: 12.♕xb7 ♖b6 13.♕a7N (This is obviously stronger than 13.♕c7? ♖xb2 14.♕xd8† ♔xd8 15.a3 ♖c2∓ Petrovic – Zivkovic, Belgrade 2007.) 13...♖xb2 14.♖d1 ♗c4 15.♖d2 Black is at least equal after 15...♖b4!.

12...♗e7 13.♕d1 ♗a6 14.♘g1

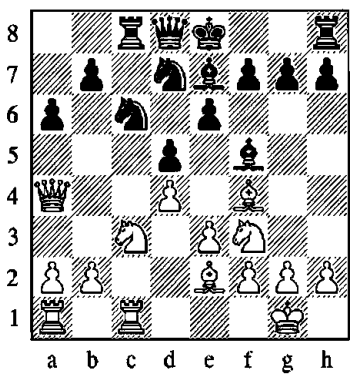
This has occurred in several computer games, but in none of them did Black play the simple:



14...♗b4N 15.♘ge2 ♗xe2 16.♔xe2 ♕a5∓
Black has the better game.

10...a6 11.♗xc6

11.♗e2 ♗e7 12.♖fc1 was played in Valov – Kurilov, St Petersburg 2007, and now Black can use the misplaced position of the white queen and play the thematic aggressive idea:



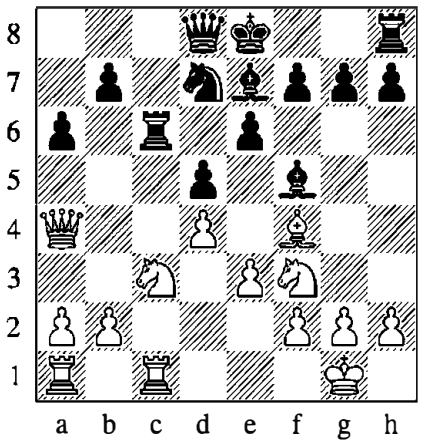
12...g5!N 13.♗g3 h5 This looks dangerous for White.

11...♖xc6 12.♖fc1

White must do something quickly in order to justify giving up his light-squared bishop.

12.♖ac1 allows Black to play: 12...♗d3! 13.♖fe1 (After 13.♖fd1 Regulus – GriffySr, email 2004, Black can play 13...♖c4N 14.♕b3 ♖b4 15.♕a3 ♗c4 and he has no problems.) 13...♗e7 14.♕b3 This was Stolba – Kaplan, Czech Republic 2006, now the solid 14...♕c8N would easily solve any problems.

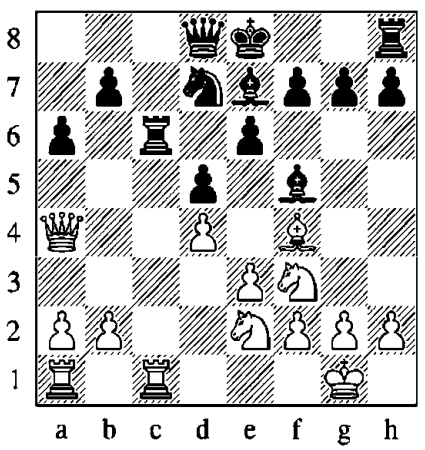
12...♗e7



Now there are two moves to consider: **C431) 13.♘e2** and **C432) 13.♘d1**.

C431) 13.♘e2

White is trying to use his slight lead in development to create some play along the c-file, but Black has a convincing way to hold equality.



13...♕b6 14.♖xc6 bxc6 15.♖c1

Also known is 15.♕b3 but it is rather harmless. For example: 15...f6 16.♖c1 ♕xb3 17.axb3 ♗d3 18.♘c3 Now 18...0–0 was comfortable for Black in Kaminik – Hector, Hamburg 1993, but also plausible was 18...♔f7!? keeping the king a step closer.

15...♗d3! 16.♕d1 ♗xe2

After 16...♗g6, I believe White should settle for a repetition with 17.♕a4 ♗d3 18.♕d1 etc.

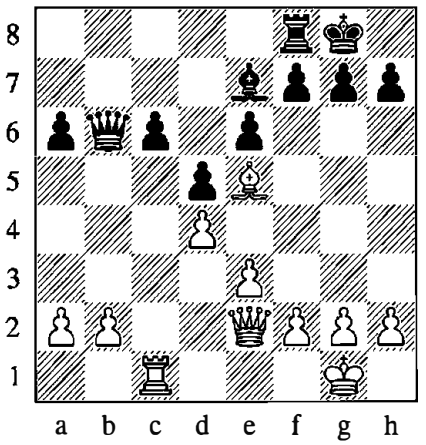
17.♕xe2

Opinions have varied about this position. Sveshnikov claimed an edge for White, while Dvoretsky was sceptical of this view (in the sources mentioned below). I prefer the latter view and think Black will soon be equal.

17...0–0 18.♘e5

Otherwise Black will get in a quick ...c5.

18...♘xe5 19.♗xe5



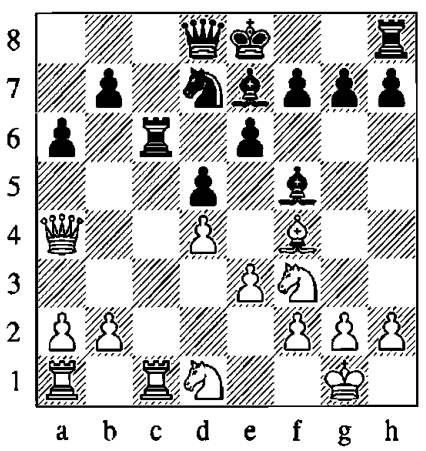
19...♖c8

This is the most accurate move, as played in the model game for this line. This line was also given as equal by Vigorito in *Play the Semi-Slav*.

20.h4 ♕b5 21.♕g4 ♗f8 22.b3 ♕d3

22...c5N looks good as well, though Black equalized easily enough with the text move in Rashkovsky – Dolmatov, Vilnius 1980.

C432) 13.♘d1



This is also an important line.

13...b5 14.♕b3 ♕c8

Vigorito preferred 14...♖c4 which leads to sharp play after, for example, 15.♘d2 ♕a5. His book *Play the Semi-Slav* offers a full page of analysis from this position. Sveshnikov also disapproves of 14...♕c8 giving this move an "?" in the 2002 No. 4 issue of the magazine *64*. So we are going against serious analysts.

15.e4

This move is the reason Vigorito preferred to avoid 14...♕c8. Certainly White has some play for the pawn, but Black has good defensive resources, so I believe White is struggling to show full compensation. Let's see some ideas:

15...♗xe4

In *The Chess Instructor* Mark Dvoretsky preferred:

15...dxe4 16.d5

Or 16.♖xc6 ♕xc6 17.♖c1 and now d5 or a8 are options, of which I prefer 17...♕a8 when I do not believe White has enough compensation.

16...♖c4 17.♘d4 0–0

In Dvoretsky's words, this move is "the most reliable".

18.♘c6 ♗f6 19.♖xc4 bxc4 20.♕xc4 ♘b6∓

This is Franco – Ihonen, Finland 1990. Dvoretsky stopped here and indeed Black seems better. The game continued:

21.♕c5 ♘xd5 22.♗d6 ♖e8 23.♖c1 ♕b7

Black's extra pawn is the main factor. Overall, it is possible 15...dxe4 is the most reliable option, but I also cover 15...♗xe4 as I want to offer some fresh ideas.

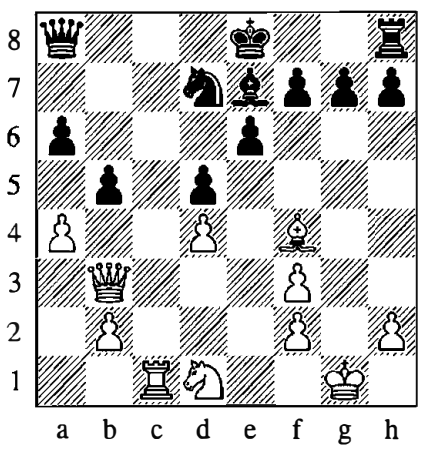
16.♖xc6 ♕xc6 17.♖c1 ♕a8

White's main ideas are clear: control of the c-file and a possible invasion on c7.

18.a4

The standard try.

18...♗xf3 19.gxf3



Dvoretsky assessed this as unclear. This position has been tested a few times with castling or playing 19...b4 Black's usual tries. Instead I suggest:

19...g5!?N 20.♗g3

20.♗d2 ♕b8 looks comfortable for Black; with no quick invasions on c7, White's compensation feels insufficient.

20...f5

Targeting the g3-bishop.

21.f4

Or 21.♗c7 saves the piece but kills the plan of landing a rook on c7. For example: 21...♕b7 22.♗a5 ♗d6∓

21...♖g8

One of several interesting moves.

22.♔h1 g4

Burying rather than winning the g3-bishop. Also possible was: 22...b4!?

Now one fun line runs:

23.axb5 ♕b7 24.♖c6 ♔f7 25.♖xa6 ♖b8 26.♕e3 ♘c5!

The complications work out in Black's favour.

Conclusion

In this chapter we considered three options after 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♗f4 ♘c6 6.e3 ♗f5.

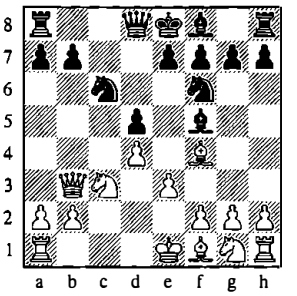
A) 7.♗d3 is harmless, and usually only seen when White is desperate for a draw – or has already agreed a draw before the game started.

B) 7.♗b5 is a more serious try but the sacrificial line I suggest is an ideal solution.

C) 7.♘f3 is the main line and can lead to many branches. If Black keeps a clear head and avoids becoming confused by transpositions, then there should be no theoretical problems.



Exchange Variation



7.♕b3

Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♗f4 ♘c6 6.e3 ♗f5 7.♕b3 ♘a5 8.♕a4†

8...♗d7

A) 9.♗b5 e6 **48**

A1) 10.♘f3 **48**

A2) 10.♖c1 **49**

B) 9.♕c2 e6 **50**

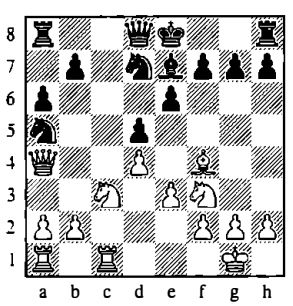
B1) 10.♗d3 **50**

B2) 10.♘f3 ♗e7 **52**

B21) 11.h3 **52**

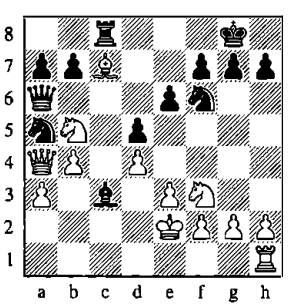
B22) 11.♗d3 **52**

A1) after 13.♖fc1



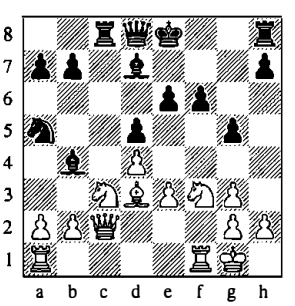
13...♘c4!?N

A2) after 20.b4



20...♗b2!N

B1) after 16.fxg3

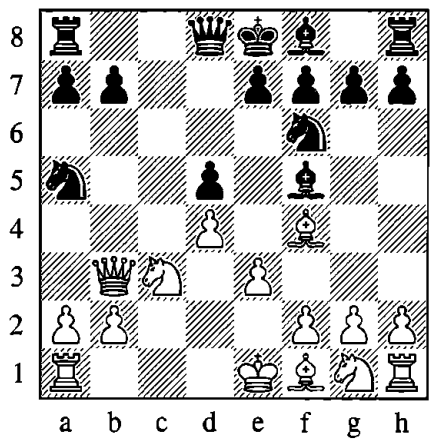


16...g4!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♗f4 ♘c6 6.e3 ♗f5 7.♕b3

Nowadays this line is very fashionable at all levels.

7...♘a5



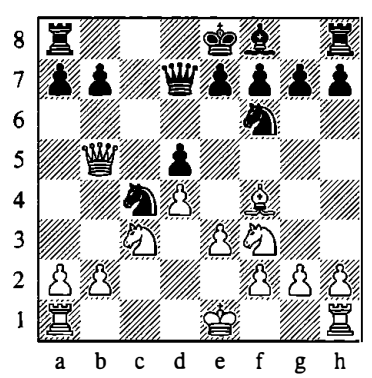
8.♕a4†

Hardly dangerous for Black is:

8.♗b5† ♗d7 9.♗xd7†

The main line is 9.♕a4, transposing to line A below.

9...♕xd7 10.♕b5 ♘c4! 11.♘f3



11...♖c8N

It's obvious that Black is fine after 11...e6, as for example occurred in Seirawan – Khalifman, Moscow 1990, but I feel that the text move is the most challenging.

12.♘e5

Another line is 12.♖c1 e6 when Black is very comfortable. For instance, 13.0–0 ♕xb5 14.♘xb5 a6 15.♘c3 ♘h5!∓ with the better game.

12...♕xb5 13.♘xb5 a6 14.♘xc4 dxc4 15.♘c3 b5 16.f3 e6 17.e4 ♗e7⇄

The position is double-edged.

8...♗d7

Now there are two main options: **A) 9.♗b5** is a popular alternative but the modern favourite is **B) 9.♕c2**.

A) 9.♗b5 e6

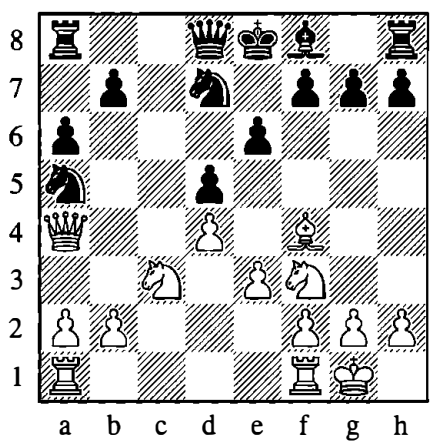
I like the text move, but another decent option is 9...♘c6.

Now I believe White has two reasonable moves: **A1) 10.♘f3** and **A2) 10.♖c1**.

A1) 10.♘f3 a6

10...♘c4 should also be okay.

11.♗xd7† ♘xd7 12.0–0



12...♗e7

In my opinion, we should not rush with 12...b5 since after this White gains a clear plan of playing 13.♕d1 followed by a2-a4.

13.♖fc1

Obviously White can try the other rook:

13.♖ac1 ♘c6

13...♘c4 14.e4 is a better version for White compared with 13.♖fc1.

14.♕b3 ♕b6 15.♕c2 0–0

15...♖c8 is also a good solid move.

16.♘a4 ♕b5

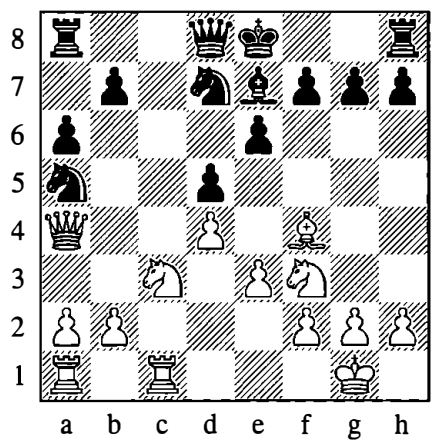
Now it was better to settle for a repetition with 17.♘c3, however in Cosma – Nezar, Metz 2002, White tried an interesting-looking move:

17.♗c7?!

This could have allowed Black to seize the initiative with:

17...♘b4N 18.♕b3 ♘d3 19.♖c3 ♖fc8∓

A recent game continued: 13.♘d2 ♖c8 14.♖ac1 b5 15.♕d1 0–0 16.a4 This was Fridman – Balogh, Bundesliga 2013, where Black opted for 16...b4 and achieved a comfortable draw, but I believe with 16...♕b6N 17.axb5 axb5 18.♕e2 b4 19.♘a4 ♕b7 20.b3 ♖c6! Black could have built up some pressure, although White's position should be holdable.



13...♘c4!?N

In every game Black has played 13...♘c6 and hardly experienced any problems, but I want to show that a more aggressive approach also deserves attention.

14.e4

This is probably White's best.

14...0–0 15.exd5

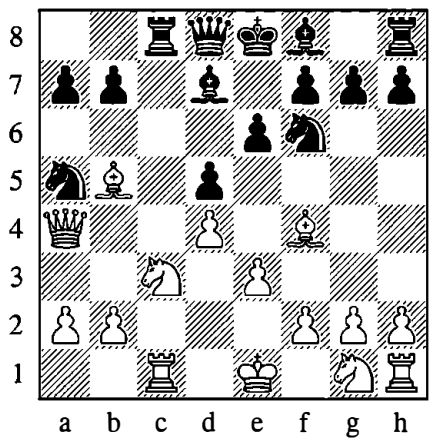
Or 15.♕c2 ♘f6 16.exd5 ♘xd5 17.♘xd5 exd5 with the same position.

15...♘db6 16.♕c2 ♘xd5 17.♘xd5 exd5 18.b3 ♘d6=

Black has no problems.

A2) 10.♖c1 ♖c8

To be honest, I also do not see anything wrong with 10...♘c4 or 10...a6.



11.♘f3?!

Amazingly this natural move appears to be inaccurate. White should instead develop his knight to e2.

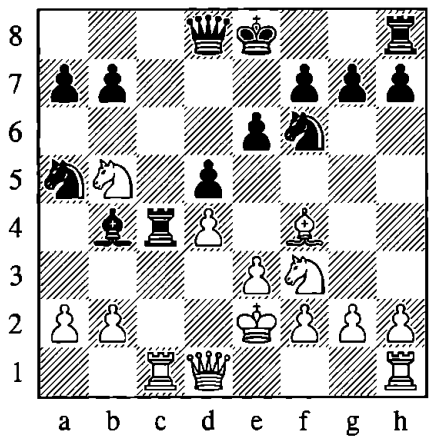
11...♖c4!

The neat point of Black's previous move.

12.♕d1

Even after the superior 12.♗xd7† ♘xd7 13.♕d1 Black would retain the better chances with 13...♗b4 followed by capturing on c3.

12...♗xb5 13.♘xb5 ♗b4† 14.♔e2



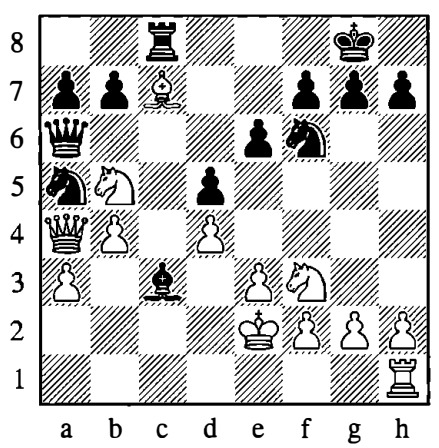
14...♖xc1

This is more challenging than 14...0–0 15.♕a4 when the game Wen Yang – Ni Hua, Danzhou 2013, ended with a funny repetition: 15...♗c3 16.♕a3 ♗b4=

15.♕xc1 0–0 16.♕c2 ♕b6 17.♕a4 ♖c8! 18.♗c7 ♕a6 19.a3 ♗c3!

A great move.

20.b4

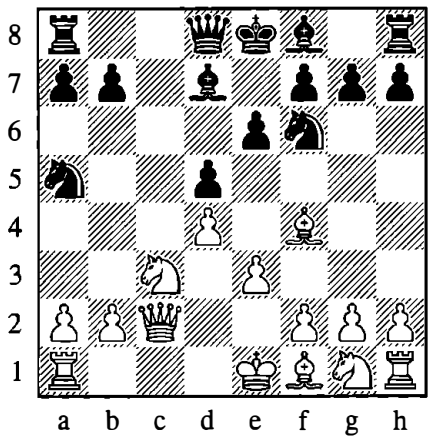


Black had played a brilliant game in Romanov – Eljanov, Legnica 2013, and would have crowned his efforts if he had continued:

20...♗b2!N 21.♕xa5 ♕c6 22.♘d2 ♘e4!

With a winning advantage.

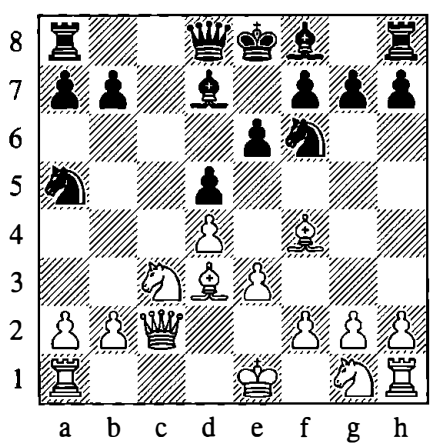
B) 9.♕c2 e6



White has two moves here: **B1) 10.♗d3** and **B2) 10.♘f3**.

The obviously foolish idea 10.♘b5 ♗b4† 11.♔d1? has occurred in two games, where Black missed the chance to decide the game in simple style: 11...♖c8N 12.♗c7 (12.♘c7† ♔f8–+) 12...♕e7 13.a3 0–0 With a decisive advantage.

B1) 10.♗d3



10...♗b4

At first I thought Black could play 10...♗e7, when after 11.♘f3 we transpose to line B22. But White can avoid this transposition by starting with 11.h3 followed by ♘f3.

11.♘f3

In the event of 11.a3 Black is fine after: 11...♗xc3† 12.♕xc3 ♖c8 13.♕b4 ♘e4!

11...♘h5!?

I like this challenging idea of trying to capture White's dark-squared bishop. Two games have reached this position, in both of which White played:

12.♗g5

Another line could be 12.♗e5 f6 13.♗g3 ♖c8 when I feel that Black is doing fine.

12...f6 13.♗h4

Another game continued:

13.g4 fxg5 14.gxh5 ♕f6 15.♘e5 ♘c6 16.♘xc6

After 16.♘xd7 ♔xd7 17.a3 ♗a5!? the position remains about equal.

16.♘g4 ♕f3 17.♖g1 e5! 18.♘xe5 ♘xe5 19.dxe5 0–0 allows Black to seize the initiative.

16...♗xc6 17.♗xh7 0–0–0 18.♗g6 ♔b8

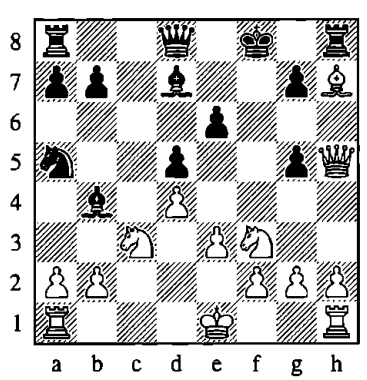
Black's compensation was fully sufficient in Vitiugov – Aronian, Paris/St Petersburg 2013, and I even believe White needs to be more careful.

I also checked the following principled line:

13.♗xh7N fxg5

It could be interesting to check 13...♘c4 and 13...♔f8.

14.♕g6† ♔f8 15.♕xh5



15...♗e8

An interesting alternative is 15...♘c4 16.♘xg5 ♕f6 17.0–0 g6 18.♕h6† ♕g7 19.♕h3 ♘d2 when it is hard to understand what is happening.

16.♕g4 ♖xh7 17.♘xg5 ♖h6 18.♘xe6† ♖xe6 19.♕xe6 ♗f7 20.♕h3 ♘c4

With double-edged play.

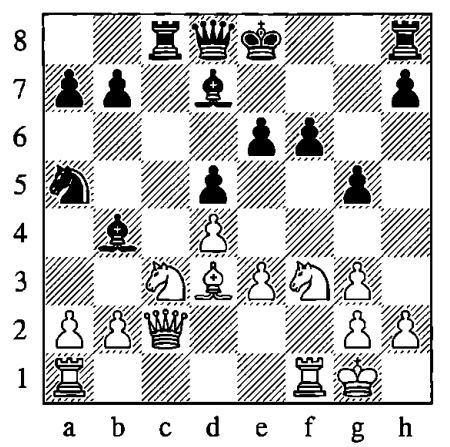
13...g5 14.♗g3

I also examined 14.g4. Black should play 14...♗xc3† and now White has two possible recaptures: 15.♕xc3 ♖c8 16.♕a3 e5 with a mess, and 15.bxc3 gxh4 16.gxh5 ♕c7 which is also very unclear.

14...♖c8 15.0–0

The text move is probably inaccurate. Better was something like 15.♘d2 but White is certainly not fighting for any advantage.

15...♘xg3 16.fxg3



This position occurred in Ki. Georgiev – Khairullin, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013. Black now missed a fine opportunity:

16...g4!N

Followed by ...f5 blocking the centre. White's idea of sacrificing on f5 will never work, for example:

17.♘h4 f5 18.♗xf5?! exf5 19.♖xf5 ♗xf5 20.♕xf5 ♕d7! 21.♕e5† ♕e7 22.♕xh8† ♔d7 23.♕e5 ♕xe5 24.dxe5 ♗xc3 25.bxc3 ♖xc3∓

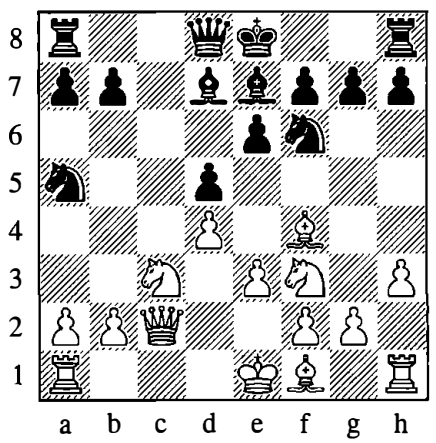
Black is better.

B2) 10.♘f3 ♗e7

A tricky move. Black has opted for 10...♖c8 in the majority of games, when 11.♗d3 has recently been a fashionable tabiya.

Now there are two main moves: **B21) 11.h3** is a serious alternative to **B22) 11.♗d3**.

B21) 11.h3



11...♘e4!?N

This is my original idea, while instead 11...♖c8 12.♗d3 leads to fully playable positions, with one of the recent top-level games in this line being Svidler – Le Quang, Tromso 2013.

12.♗d3

I also examined:

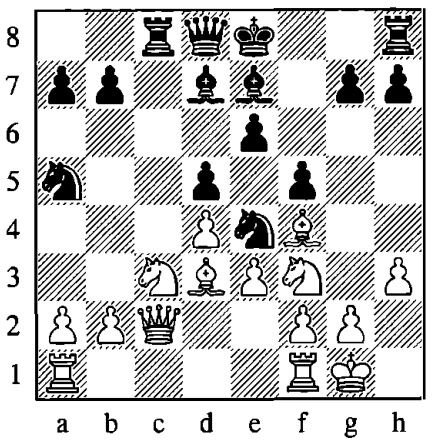
12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♘d2

I also analysed the immediate capture: 13.♕xe4 ♗b4† 14.♔d1 (after 14.♘d2 ♖c8 15.♗d3 ♕b6! Black has rich compensation) Black has, at the very least, a draw with: 14...♗a4† 15.b3 ♘xb3! 16.axb3 ♗xb3† 17.♔e2 ♗c4† 18.♔d1 ♗b3†=

13...♖c8 14.♕xe4 ♕b6

With good compensation.

12...f5 13.0–0 ♖c8



We have arrived at a very complicated position. The following line seems logical to me:

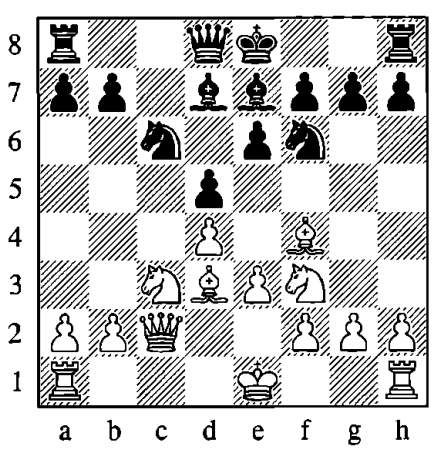
14.♖fc1

14.♘e5 0–0 15.♖ac1 ♘c6 is balanced.

14...0–0 15.♕d1 ♘xc3 16.♖xc3 ♖xc3 17.bxc3 b5 18.♘e5 ♗e8

Black has a perfectly playable position.

B22) 11.♗d3 ♘c6



A very concrete idea employed by Pavel Eljanov. Black is threatening to play 12...♘b4.

12.a3

Another logical defence against ...♘b4 is:

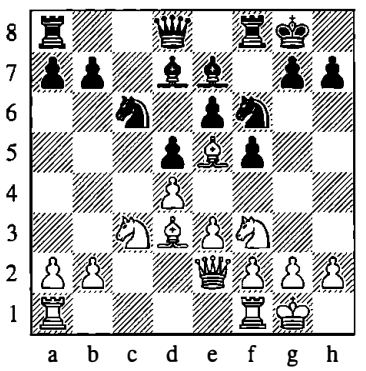
12.♕e2

Now Black uses the same idea as in the main line.

12...♘h5 13.♗e5 f6 14.♗g3 f5

White did not manage to pose Black any problems in the following encounter:

15.♗e5 ♘f6 16.0–0 0–0



17.♖ac1

Preferable would have been 17.♗f4 followed by ♘e5, retaining equality.

17...♘e4 18.h3 ♗e8!

After solving the problem of the "bad bishop" Black has nothing to complain about. In fact, he had the more comfortable game in Svane – Brunello, Legnica 2013.

12...♘h5

Black attacks the other bishop.

13.♗e5

Rather harmless is 13.♗g3. Black can, for example, play: 13...♖c8 14.0–0 ♘xg3 15.hxg3 f5 Black's position seems to me more promising, due to his bishop pair (15...h6 is also fine).

13...f6 14.♗g3 f5 15.♗e5

This move is probably White's best, as we already know that the position after 15.0–0 ♘xg3 16.hxg3 ♖c8 is good for Black.

Another game continued: 15.♘e5 0–0 16.♘xc6 ♗xc6 17.♗e5 ♘f6 (17...♗d6 is also fine for Black) 18.h3 ♘e4 19.0–0 ♖c8 20.♖fc1 ♕d7 With a balanced position in Bekker Jensen – Bluebaum, Bremen 2013.

15...0–0 16.h3

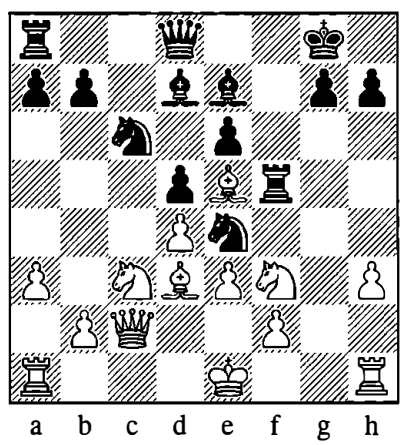
A natural line would be 16.0–0 ♖c8 17.♖ac1 ♘f6 with balanced play.

16...♘f6 17.g4

An aggressive but risky approach. It is quite understandable as after 17.0–0 ♘e4 18.♗h2 ♖c8 Black has an active game and should not have any problems.

17...♘e4 18.gxf5 ♖xf5!

A great idea that was prepared by Pavel at home.



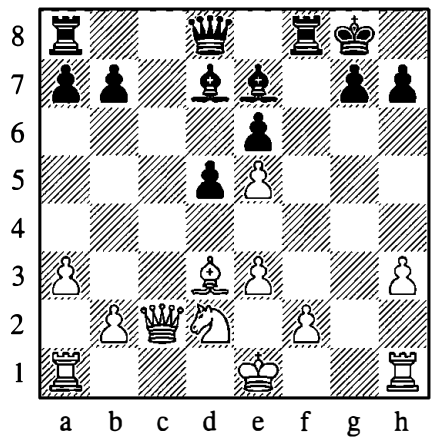
19.♘xe4

White immediately cracks under the pressure. Much stronger would have been 19.♗xe4 when after the logical 19...dxe4 20.♕xe4 ♕b6 21.♖b1 ♗e8∞ Black would enjoy fine compensation.

19...♖xf3 20.♘d2 ♘xe5!

An important finesse.

21.dxe5 ♖f8



22.♗xh7†?

The final mistake. Instead after the best defence 22.0–0 ♖c8 23.♕d1 ♖f7 Black would retain the better chances, but there is still a lot of fight in the position.

22...♔h8 23.♔e2 ♖c8

More accurate would have been 23...♗h4N 24.f4 d4 with a crushing initiative.

24.♕b1

More stubborn was 24.♕d3 ♕b6 25.a4, though after 25...♗e8 26.♗g6 ♗xg6 27.♕xg6 ♕a6† 28.♔e1 ♗b4 White should not be able to hold on for long.

24...d4

Black developed a winning initiative in Brunello – Eljanov, Legnica 2013. This game was played the day before the Svane – Brunello encounter mentioned in the note to move 12. The Italian GM spotted the force of Black's play and sensibly switched sides!

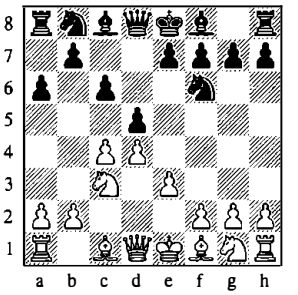
Conclusion

Nowadays 7.♕b3 is a trendy line at GM level, as White can generate queenside pressure if Black is inaccurate. However, the lines I recommend should keep Black out of trouble and reach interesting positions. In particular the critical line B2 leads to fascinating play in both its branches.

Overall the Exchange Variation has found greater popularity lately, but Black should have little to fear. The Exchange Variation used to have a reputation for dullness, but most of the lines we have seen in the last three chapters have life in them. True, there have been a couple of lines that are truly drawish, but that is always a problem when playing Black against an opponent who is both well prepared and unambitious. Fortunately such players are rare.



3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6



Introduction

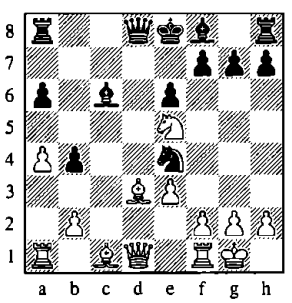
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3

4...a6

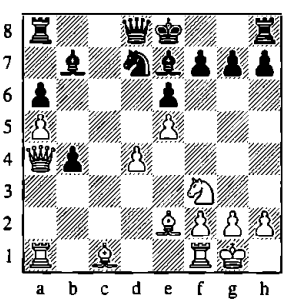
A) 5.b3 ♗f5 6.♗d3 e6!? 7.♗b2 ♘bd7 **56**
A1) 8.♗xf5N **57**
A2) 8.♘f3 **57**
B) 5.a4 **58**
C) 5.♗d3 dxc4 6.♗xc4 b5 **59**
C1) 7.♗d3 **60**
C2) 7.♗e2 e6 8.♘f3 ♗b7 9.0–0 ♘bd7 10.e4 c5 **61**
C21) 11.d5 **63**
C22) 11.e5 **64**
C3) 7.♗b3 e6 8.♘f3 c5 9.0–0 ♗b7 **65**
C31) 10.♕e2 **65**
C32) 10.e4 **67**

C1) after 15.♘e5



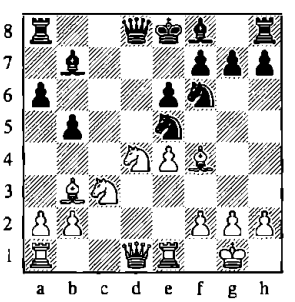
15...♘c5!N

C22) after 16.♕a4



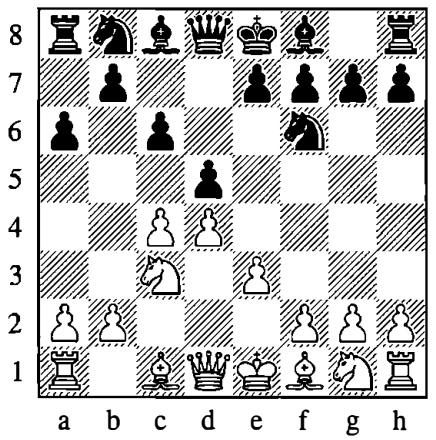
16...♕c8!?N

C32) after 13.♗f4



13...♗d6!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6



Although 4...♗f5, as we shall see, appears fully playable, it will not be to everyone's taste to give up a pawn, so it makes sense for us to examine a solid alternative. Black prepares to develop his light-squared bishop, intending to meet a subsequent ♕b3 with either ...b5 or ...♖a7. In this introductory chapter we will look at **A) 5.b3**, **B) 5.a4** and **C) 5.♗d3**.

5.♕c2 is covered in the next chapter, beginning on page 69.

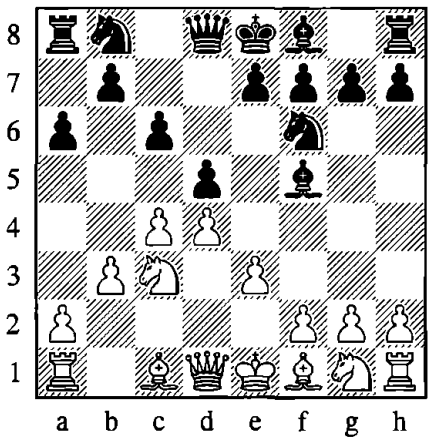
5.♘f3 is the main line, and will be examined in Chapters 9-11.

Another possibility is 5.♗d2 ♗f5 6.♕b3 ♖a7 (but not 6...b5? 7.cxd5 cxd5 8.a4!) when the logical continuation 7.♘f3 e6 transposes to the line 5.♘f3 ♗f5 6.♕b3 ♖a7 7.♗d2 e6 as found in variation B of Chapter 11 on page 116.

A) 5.b3

This has been played by some surprisingly strong players, but to me it looks too soft to overprotect the c4-pawn when ...b5 has not been played.

5...♗f5



6.♗d3

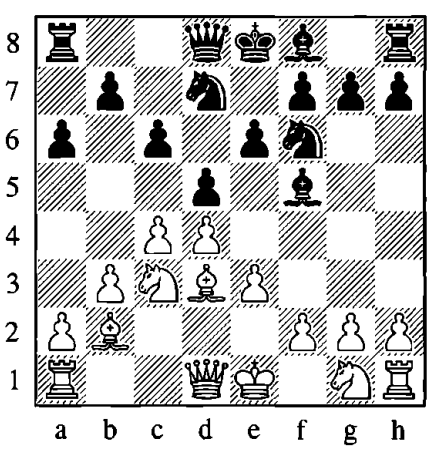
6.♘f3 is covered on page 89 via the move order 5.♘f3 ♗f5 6.b3 – see the note to White's 6th move in Chapter 9.

6...e6!?

I find this move the most appealing. Black should not fear the doubling of his pawns that might arise after an exchange on f5, as he will obtain solid control over the central squares and may easily seize the initiative on the kingside.

Obviously there is nothing wrong with 6...♗xd3 7.♕xd3 e6 8.♘f3 ♘bd7 9.0–0 ♗b4 as played in several games.

7.♗b2 ♘bd7



So far nobody has exchanged on f5; nevertheless, we should check **A1) 8.♗xf5N** before moving on to the usual **A2) 8.♘f3**.

A1) 8.♗xf5N exf5 9.♕f3

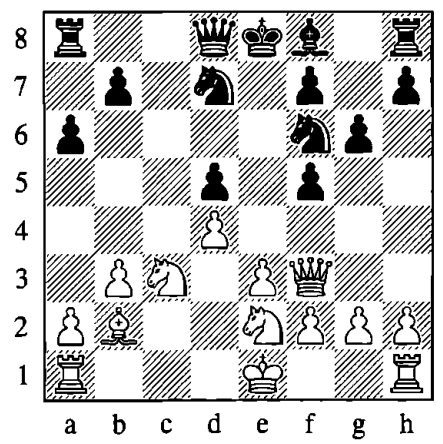
Trying to attack Black's pawns is the only critical try, but the second player has nothing to fear.

9...g6 10.cxd5

10.♘ge2 can be met by 10...♖c8 11.0–0 (11.cxd5 cxd5 transposes to the main line below) 11...dxc4!? 12.bxc4 b5 with interesting play for Black.

10...cxd5 11.♘ge2

The central pawn is untouchable: 11.♘xd5?? ♕a5† 12.♘c3 ♗a3! 13.♕e2 ♖c8 and White cannot avoid material losses.



11...♖c8! 12.0–0

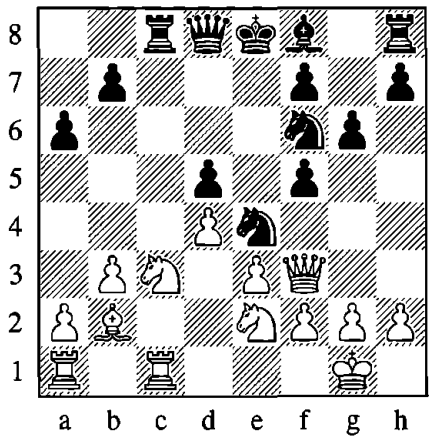
Again the pawn should be left alone: 12.♘xd5 ♖c2! 13.♖b1 ♘e4 and White is in trouble.

12...♘e4 13.♖fc1

Now 13.♘xd5 runs into 13...♘d2 winning an exchange.

13...♘df6

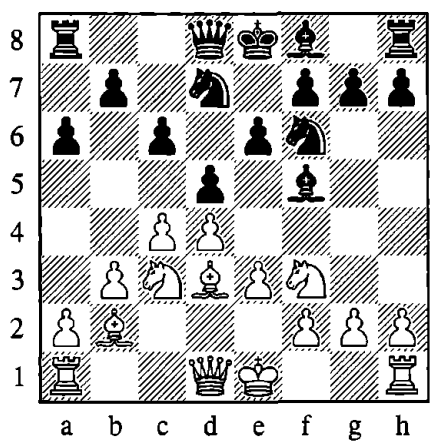
Black has consolidated his position in the centre and stands well. A possible line is:



14.♘f4 ♘xc3 15.♖xc3 ♖xc3 16.♗xc3 ♗d6

Black is fine.

A2) 8.♘f3



8...♗d6

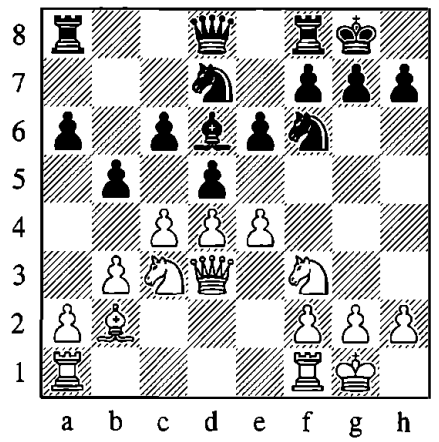
Again Black refuses to release the tension between the bishops. I only found a single game from this position, which we will follow for a few moves.

9.♕c2 ♗xd3

Compared with the earlier 6...♗xd3 exchange, Black has won a tempo.

10.♕xd3 0–0 11.0–0 b5 12.e4

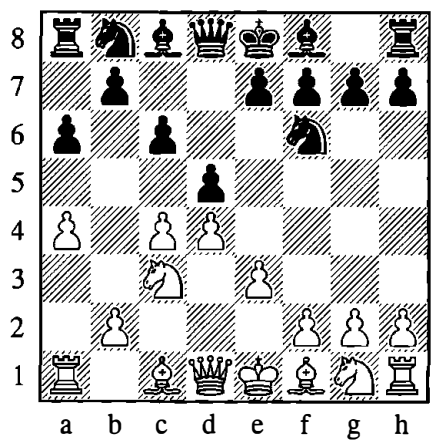
This position occurred in Sasikiran – V. Georgiev, Linares 1999. Here the strongest continuation is:



12...dxc4!N 13.bxc4 e5!

With a good game for Black.

B) 5.a4



5...♗f5

5...e6 is a reliable alternative, but I prefer to develop the light-squared bishop outside the pawn chain unless there is a good reason not to.

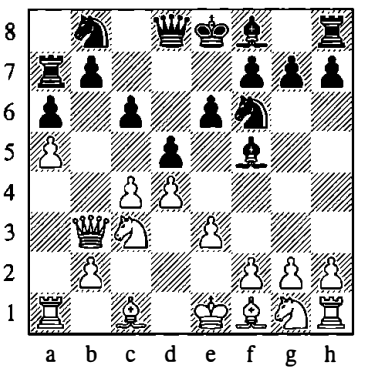
6.♕b3

This is White's only serious try for an advantage.

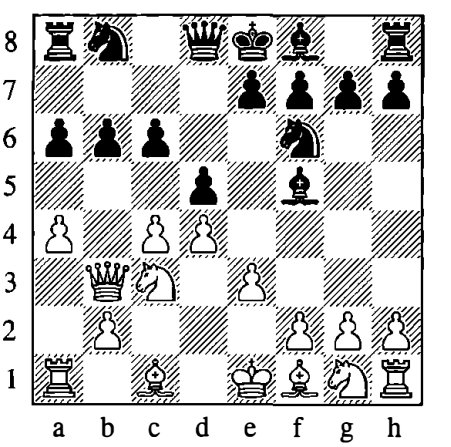
6...b6!

An important moment.

The typical 6...♖a7?! is not such a clever idea in view of: 7.a5! e6 (Black has also tried 7...dxc4 8.♗xc4 e6 Speelman – Smeets, London 2008, and now 9.♘ge2!N c5 10.0–0 ♘c6 11.♖d1! is clearly favourable for White.)



8.♕b6! ♕xb6 9.axb6 ♖a8 10.c5 Black has a strategically difficult position, due to White's simple but powerful plan of transferring his knight to a5, where it will not only tie Black to the defence of the b7-pawn, but also set up various sacrificial motifs on the queenside. Search your database for the instructive game Seirawan – Zhu Chen, Jinan 2002.

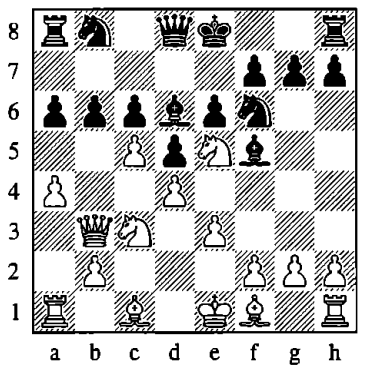


7.♘f3 e6 8.♘h4

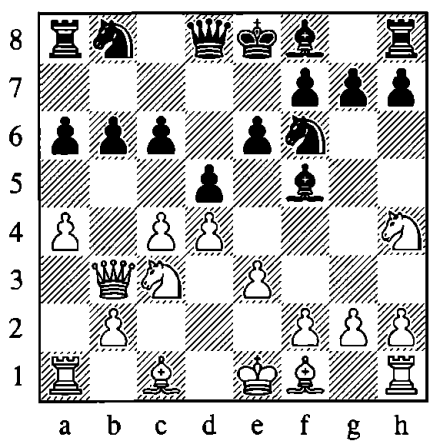
Apart from this main continuation, I briefly checked two other moves.

8.♗e2 occurred in Kraai – Seres, Budapest 2003. Here Black is not obliged to play the prophylactic 8...h6, but can instead continue with normal development with 8...♘bd7N since 9.♘h4 is comfortably met by 9...♗g4.

8.♘e5 was played in Voitovich – Piliposyan, Kharkov 2008, and here the natural 8...♗d6N offers Black a reliable game. (Less accurate is 8...♘fd7 9.g4! with some play for White.) It is possible that Black rejected this move in the game because of 9.c5, but the following response works well:



9...♗xe5 10.dxe5 ♘fd7 11.cxb6 ♕xb6 12.♕xb6 ♘xb6 The position is complex, but it seems to me that Black is in good shape.



8...♗e4!

A thematic idea, and the most awkward for White to meet.

9.♗d2N

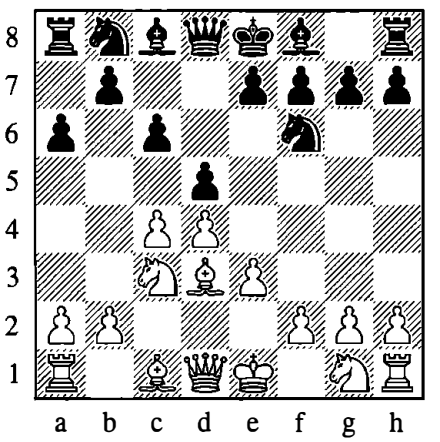
In the only game White wrongly exchanged on e4: 9.♘xe4?! Now in Novakovic – Milenkovic, Serbia 2007, Black should have preferred 9...dxe4!N when the knight is misplaced on h4 and Black's chances are preferable after 10.g3 c5 11.d5 exd5 12.cxd5 g6∓.

9.f3 is strongly met by 9...dxc4! 10.♗xc4 ♗d5∓ and again White is stuck with a misplaced knight on the edge of the board.

9...h6 10.♘f3 ♗h7

Black has a comfortable game.

C) 5.♗d3



This is a bit more challenging, as our typical scheme involving bringing the bishop on f5 has been prevented.

5...dxc4

I find this continuation to be the most convincing. Black transposes to a version of the Queen's Gambit Accepted where the white knight has gone to c3 rather early. There are also some similarities with the Meran Variation

of the Semi-Slav, especially in variation C2 below.

5...b5 6.b3 ♗g4 has been Black's most popular continuation, but after 7.f3 ♗h5 8.♘ge2 White has scored highly.

6.♗xc4

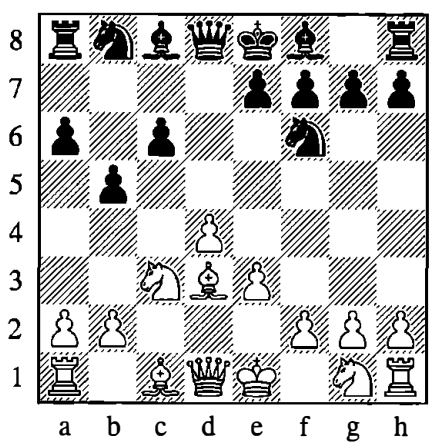
Compared with the QGA, White has lost a tempo by moving his bishop twice, but this is balanced out by the fact that Black will soon have to move his c-pawn for the second time.

6...b5

6...e6 gives White the extra option of 7.a4 c5 8.♘f3 ♘c6 reaching one of the main lines of the QGA. It is considered satisfactory for Black, but there is a huge amount of theory.

I find it more logical to gain space with ...b5 while we have the chance. Now White has three bishop retreats, each with its own good and bad points. We will analyse **C1) 7.♗d3**, **C2) 7.♗e2** and **C3) 7.♗b3**.

C1) 7.♗d3



Here I like the following move order.

7...♘bd7!?

7...e6 8.♘f3 c5 9.a4 b4 10.♘e4 leads to quite a big theoretical tabiya. The text move may also transpose to known lines within a few moves, but Black has slightly more attractive options after accelerating his queenside play.

8.♘f3 c5 9.a4

White can also ignore the queenside and focus on development with:

9.0–0 ♗b7 10.♕e2

10.e4?! is premature in view of 10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 e6 12.♖e1 ♗d6 and Black has the better position.

10...e6

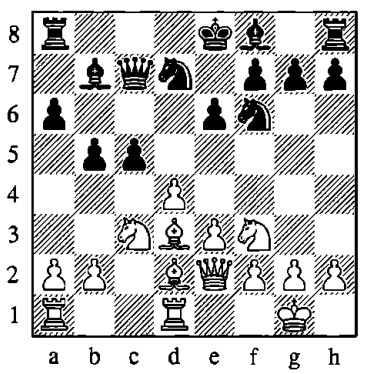
With this move we transpose to a position that has occurred in several hundred games, but Black's task is much simpler having avoided the early a2-a4.

11.♖d1 ♕c7

11...♕b6!? is worthy of consideration.

12.♗d2

Now Black should regroup in the following way.



12...♖c8 13.♖ac1 ♕b8

Black was comfortable in Sudar – Radeljic, Makarska 1994.

9...b4 10.♘e4

Here I would like to recommend a natural improvement for Black.

10...♗b7N

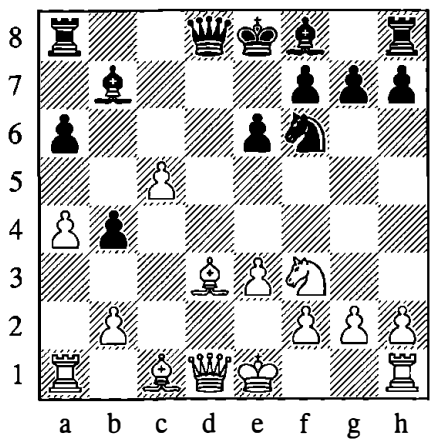
Instead of the weird 10...♕a5 as played in Neverov – Berezjuk, Pardubice 1995.

11.♘xc5

11.♘xf6† ♘xf6 12.0–0 cxd4 13.exd4 e6 is also fine for Black.

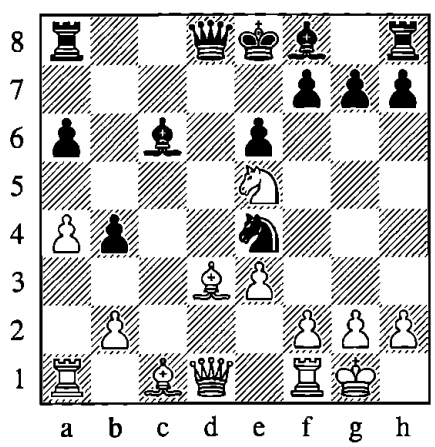
11...♘xc5 12.dxc5 e6

After this move we transpose to a few existing games. It is worth pointing out the following line.



13.0–0 ♘e4! 14.c6 ♗xc6 15.♘e5

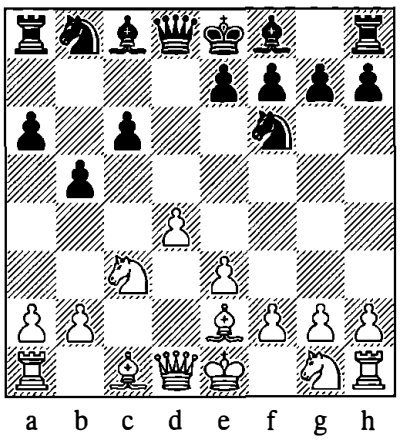
Now in the game Grdinic – Zaja, Pula 1993, Black missed an important finesse.



15...♘c5!N 16.♘xc6 ♕xd3

With simple equality.

C2) 7.♗e2



7...e6

7...♗b7 will almost certainly lead to the same positions.

8.♘f3

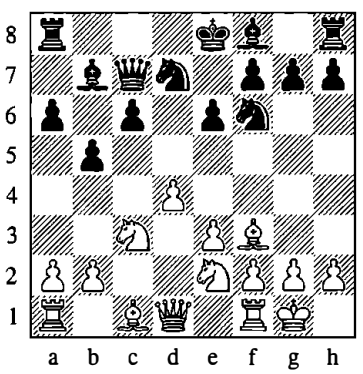
Another possible set-up is:

8.♗f3 ♗b7 9.♘ge2 ♘bd7 10.0–0

This is hardly dangerous for Black, despite White's great statistical score in the few existing games.

10...♕c7

It goes without saying that Black's main goal is to carry out ...c6-c5, after which he will be totally fine.



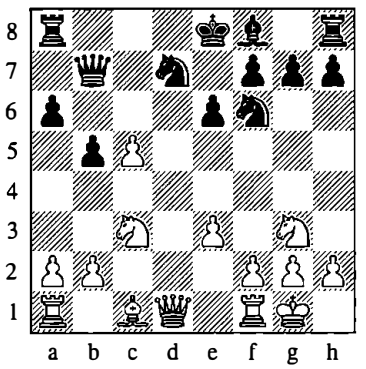
11.♘g3

In the event of 11.e4N I like 11...♖d8!? (11...c5 12.♗f4 e5 13.♗g3 ♗d6 is also fine) 12.♗f4 e5 13.♗g3 ♗d6 with nice play for Black.

11...c5

Black is already slightly more comfortable.

12.♗xb7 ♕xb7 13.dxc5



13...♘xc5!N

After 13...♗xc5 14.b3 0–0 15.♗b2 ♖fd8 16.♕e2 a draw was agreed in Prusikin – Slobodjan, Heringsdorf 2000. The text move is more ambitious and allows Black to fight for the advantage.

8...♗b7 9.0–0

Slightly premature is:

9.e4 c5 10.e5 ♘d5

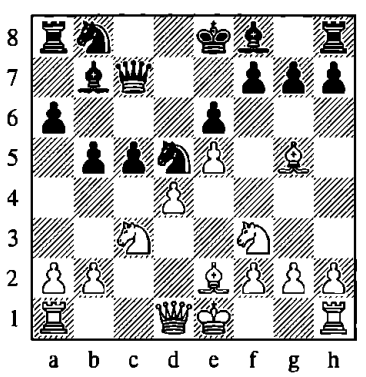
10...cxd4 and 10...♘fd7 look fine as well.

11.♗g5

11.0–0 gives Black a choice between transposing to the later variation C22 with 11...♘d7 and going for independent play with 11...cxd4!?.

11...♕c7

11...♕d7 also looks fine for Black.

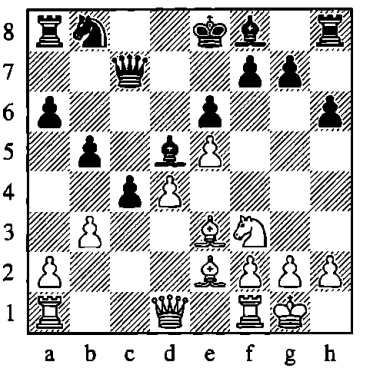


12.0–0 h6 13.♘xd5

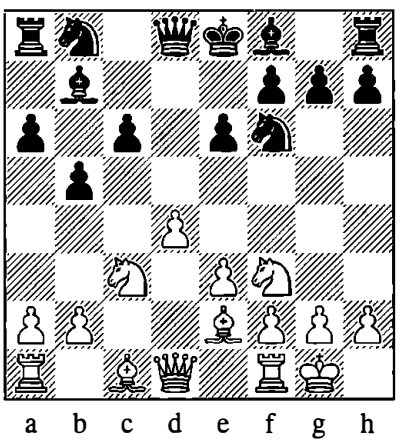
Preferable would be 13.♗h4N ♘f4 14.♖c1 with unclear play.

13...♗xd5 14.♗e3 c4 15.b3

Now in Miton – Bareev, Havana 2006, Black could have secured the better game by means of:



15...c3!N 16.a3 ♘d7∓



9...♘bd7

I prefer this continuation to 9...c5, where White has the annoying 10.dxc5 ♕xd1 11.♖xd1 ♗xc5 12.♘d2 intending to put pressure on Black's queenside with ♘b3 and a2-a4. A recent example continued 12...♘bd7 13.♘b3 ♗b4 14.♗d2 0–0 15.a4 bxa4 16.♘xa4 a5 and Black managed to hold in Topalov – Wang Hao, Sandnes 2013. Nevertheless, it seems to me that White obtains a

slight pull without having to incur much risk.

The present position usually arises from the Meran Variation of the Semi-Slav, when White opts for a relatively harmless retreat of the bishop to e2. There have been more than 400 games but, since our move order is pretty rare, I decided on a concise review of the theory.

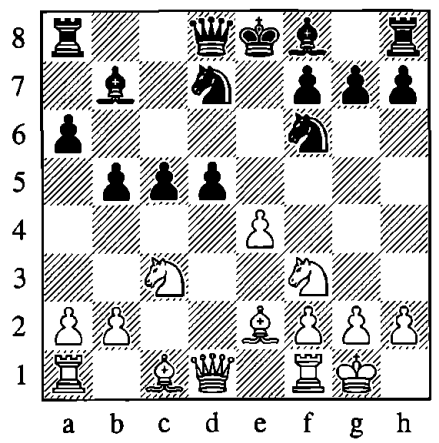
10.e4

Almost every legal move has been tried, but the central advance is the only remotely challenging one.

10...c5

In this position White chooses between **C21) 11.d5** and **C22) 11.e5**.

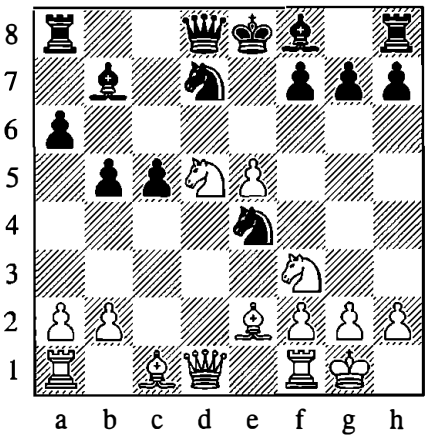
C21) 11.d5 exd5



12.e5

After 12.exd5?! ♗d6 Black's pieces are perfectly coordinated and White is simply worse. A good illustrative game continued 13.♗g5 ♕b8 (I see no drawback to the more natural 13...♕c7N) 14.a4 b4 15.♘b1 0–0 16.♘bd2 ♗xd5∓ and Black was just a pawn up in Nguyen Huynh Minh – Dao Thien Hai, Ho Chi Minh City 2010.

12...♘e4 13.♘xd5



13...♘xe5!

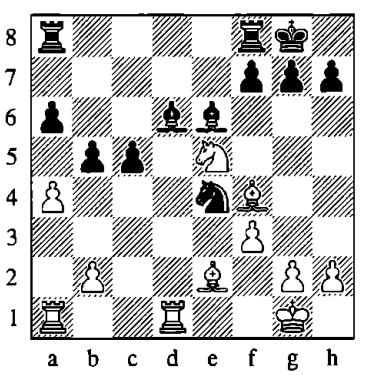
This has been considered strong ever since a Kramnik – Kasparov blitz game in 1998. More recent games have not changed the evaluation, as we will see.

14.♘xe5 ♕xd5 15.♕xd5 ♗xd5 16.♖d1 ♗e6!

16...♖d8 was Kasparov's choice but, instead of Kramnik's 17.♗f3, White could have obtained some initiative with 17.a4! as seen in one later game.

17.♗f3

After 17.a4 a clean route to equality was demonstrated in the following game: 17...♗d6 18.♗f4 0–0 19.f3

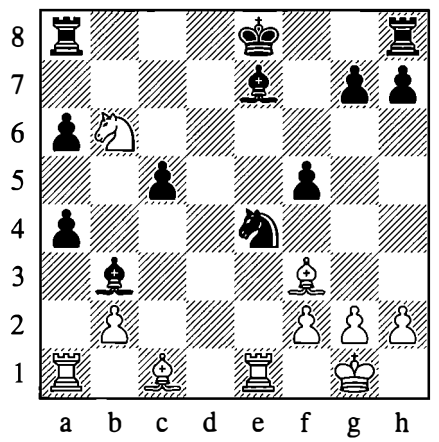


19...f6! 20.♘d3 ♗c4 21.axb5 ♗xb5 22.♗xd6 ♘xd6 23.♘xc5 ♗xe2 24.♖xd6 ♖fd8= "Skalde" – "Auryn", Internet (freestyle) 2007.

17...f5 18.a4

This does not carry too much impact when the black rook is still on a8. Still, it is hard to suggest anything better for White. 18.g4!? is one idea but 18...g6 keeps things solid.

18...bxa4 19.♖e1 ♗b3 20.♘c4 ♗e7 21.♘b6



21...♔f7!?

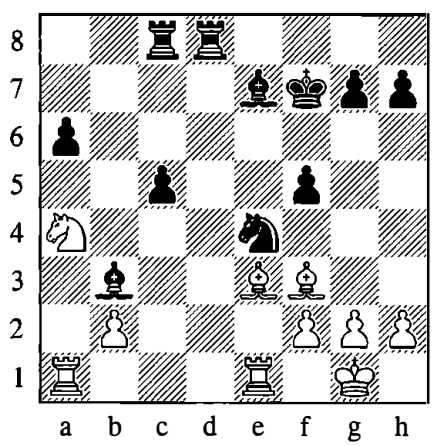
Offering an exchange sacrifice, which White declines.

21...♖d8N 22.♘xa4 0–0 is also perfectly fine.

22.♘xa4!?

22.♘xa8 ♖xa8 followed by ...♗f6 gives Black good play for the small material investment.

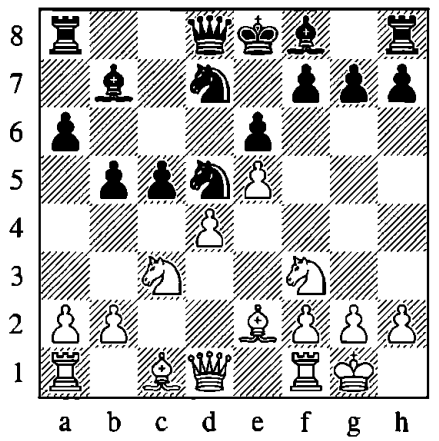
22...♖hd8 23.♗e3 ♖ac8



24.♗xe4 fxe4 25.♘c3 ♖c6 26.♘xe4

White managed to hold this endgame, though it was clear that Black was never in danger and at this stage he still held slightly better chances in Fressinet – Aronian, Paris/St Petersburg 2013.

C22) 11.e5 ♘d5



12.a4

This is the critical continuation. Other moves are less challenging and will not be discussed here.

12...♘xc3!?

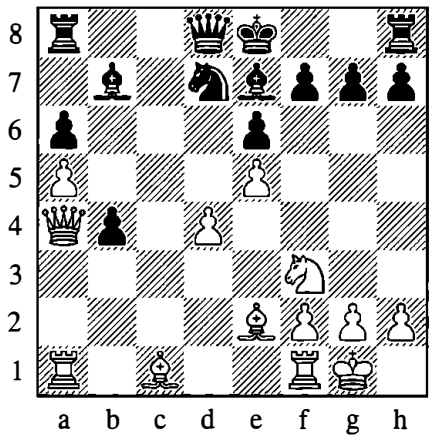
I find this an interesting and fully playable alternative to the main theoretical path involving 12...b4 13.♘e4 ♕c7.

13.bxc3 b4 14.cxb4

Another direction is 14.dxc5 bxc3 15.♕b3 ♗d5! and Black easily solved his opening problems after 16.♕xc3 ♗xc5 17.♗e3 ♗xe3 18.♕xe3 ♕a5 in Harikrishna – Goloshchapov, Sangli 2000.

14...cxb4 15.a5 ♗e7 16.♕a4

Two games arrived at this position. Here I would like to suggest a new path for Black.



16...♕c8!?N

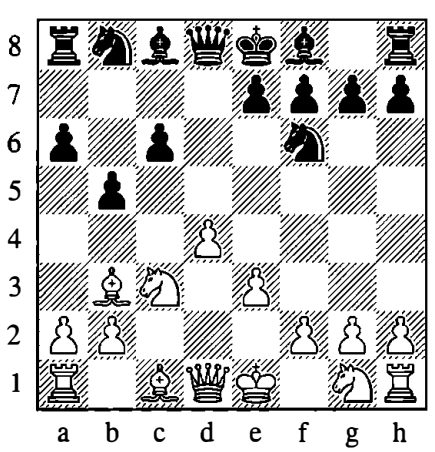
The two existing games continued 16...0–0 17.♗d2 ♖b8 18.♖fd1 when the black position is too passive for my taste.

The point of the text move is to drive the white queen away and strengthen Black's power on the a8-h1 diagonal as follows:

17.♗d2 ♗c6 18.♕c2 ♕b7 19.♖fb1 0–0 20.♖b2 ♖fc8 21.♕d1 ♖ab8

Black is fully mobilized and is by no means worse.

C3) 7.♗b3



Like the earlier variation C1, this is likely to transpose to the Queen's Gambit Accepted.

Once again, the early development of the knight to c3 means we will avoid some of White's most threatening systems.

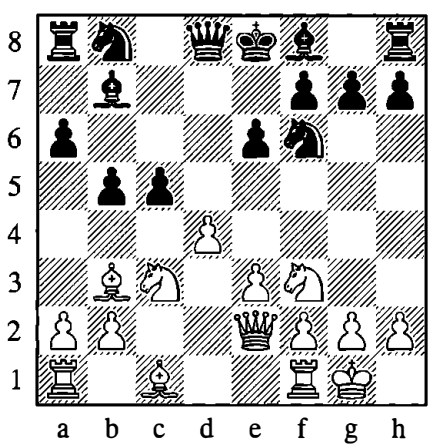
7...e6 8.♘f3

8.♕f3?! is too artificial, and after 8...♗b7 9.♘ge2 ♘bd7 10.0–0 ♗d6 11.♕h3 c5∓ the arrangement of White's pieces did not make much sense in Tibensky – Rohacek, Slovakia 2008.

8...c5 9.0–0 ♗b7

Not for the first time in the chapter, we have reached a position that has occurred in many hundreds of games through a different opening system. Here too, I will keep the coverage concise by focusing on the most important possibilities. The two main directions are **C31) 10.♕e2** and **C32) 10.e4**.

C31) 10.♕e2



10...♘bd7 11.♖d1

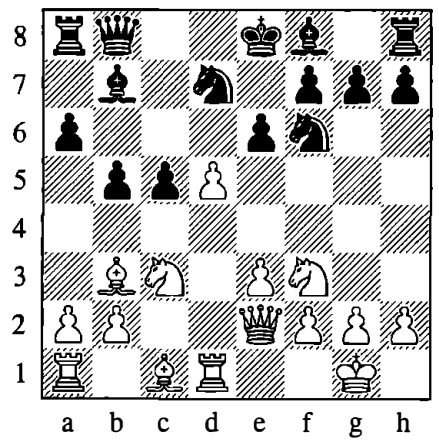
11.e4 does not pose any problems, and after 11...cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♗c5 Black has chances to seize the initiative. A recent game continued: 13.♘f3 ♕b8! 14.♗g5 This was Kuzubov – Zubov, Kiev 2012, and now the simple 14...0–0N 15.♗c2 ♖d8 would have given Black the more comfortable position.

11...♕b8!

Of a few good options, this is the one I like the most.

12.d5

This is the most principled continuation, but Black has a good answer.



12...c4!?

A fighting continuation in the style of the Meran.

It is well known that 12...exd5 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♗xd5 ♗xd5 15.♖xd5 ♗e7 16.e4 ♕b7 is a safe option, reaching a position where White has no advantage.

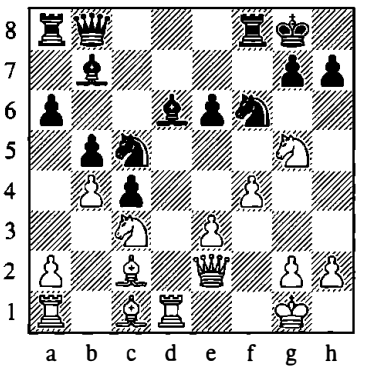
13.dxe6 fxe6 14.♗c2 ♗d6

Black has at least enough dynamic activity to make up for the minor weakness of the isolated e-pawn. I will just mention a few of the possible continuations from here.

15.a4

The most common continuation has been 15.e4 0–0 16.h3 ♕c7 with excellent chances for Black.

An important alternative is:
15.♘g5 0–0 16.f4 ♘c5 17.b4



17...♘d3!

An important improvement over 17...cxb3 18.axb3 h6 as played in a couple of games. At this point 19.♘f3N gives White quite a promising position.

18.♗xd3 cxd3 19.♖xd3N

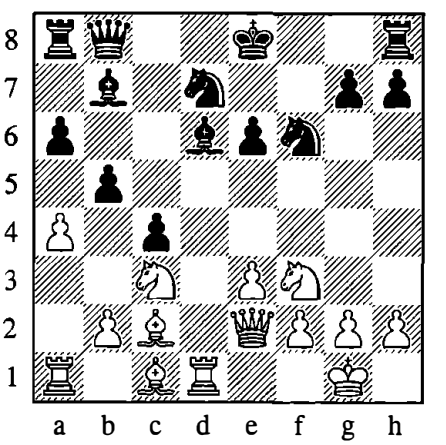
19.♕b2 occurred in Houdek – Goc, email 2005, and now 19...e5!N would have opened the game to Black's advantage.

19...♗xb4

Black is fine, since the e6-pawn is untouchable:

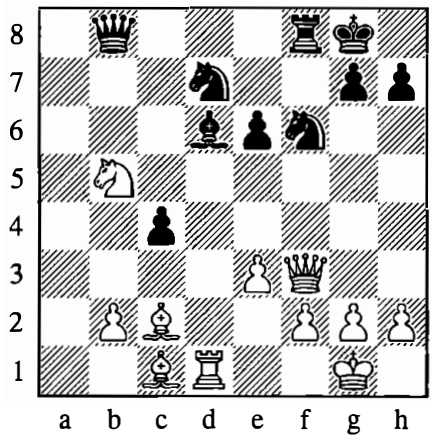
20.♘xe6? ♕c8! 21.♘xf8 ♗xc3

Black wins material.



15...0–0 16.axb5 axb5 17.♖xa8 ♗xa8 18.♘xb5 ♗xf3 19.♕xf3??

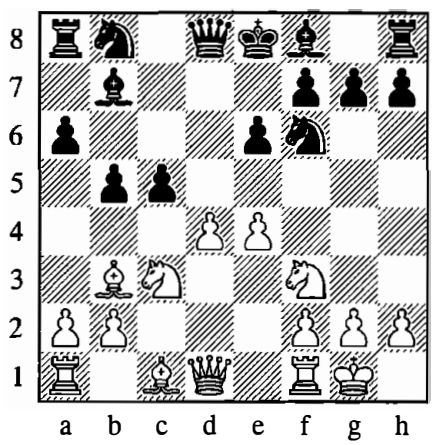
Correct is 19.gxf3N ♗xh2† 20.♔g2 ♕xb5 21.♔xh2 when I do not see anything better than a perpetual check for Black.



19...♗xh2† 20.♔h1 ♘e5–+

White's position was already hopeless in Istratescu – Aronian, Antalya 2004.

C32) 10.e4



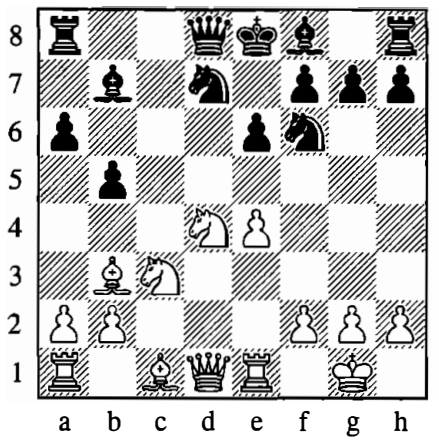
This has been tested in fewer games than the previous line, but it has achieved a better score for White.

10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘bd7

11...♘c6 12.♗e3 ♗e7 is close to equal, but after 13.♘xc6 ♗xc6 14.♕xd8† ♖xd8 15.f3 White has the more pleasant side of the simplified position.

12.♖e1

12.♕e2?! is inaccurate in view of 12...♗c5 13.♖d1 ♕b6 14.♗e3 0–0 15.f3 ♘e5 16.♖d2 ♖fd8 17.♖ad1 ♖d7 when Black's position is more comfortable.



12...♘e5!

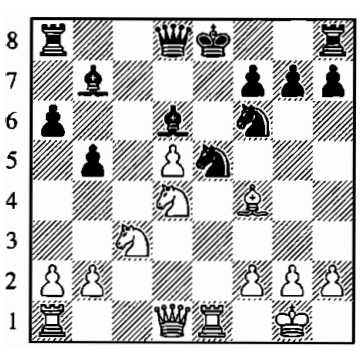
12...♘c5 has been more popular, but after 13.e5! ♘xb3 14.axb3 ♘d7 15.♕g4 White has a promising initiative.

13.♗f4

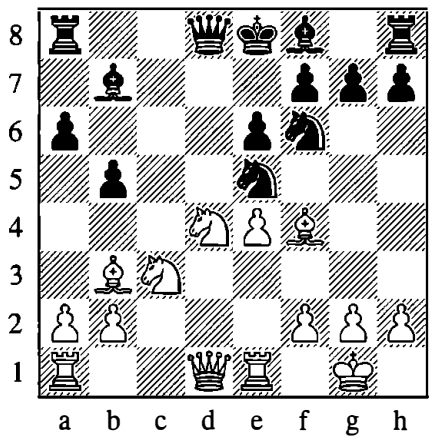
It is worth checking two sacrificial attempts:

13.♘d5 should be met calmly by 13...♗c5! 14.♗f4 ♘fd7 15.♖c1 ♖c8 and White was already worse in Narciso Dublan – Stefanova, Barcelona 2008.

After 13.♗d5!? Black can react with: 13...exd5 (13...♕d7!? is an interesting alternative) 14.exd5 ♗d6 15.♗f4



15...0–0 16.♗xe5 ♗xe5 17.♖xe5 ♖e8= Black easily regained the pawn in Tkachiev – So, Wijk aan Zee 2011.



13...♗d6!N

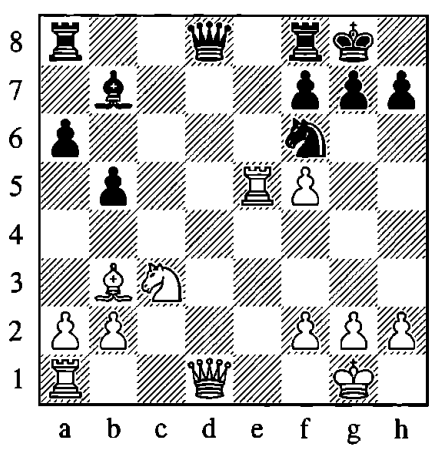
Improving over 13...♘g6 14.♗e3 when Black had to reckon with the plan of f4-f5 in Gonzalez Garcia – F. Cruz, Sant Marti 2011.

14.♘f5!?

This looks like the only critical test. 14.♗d5 transposes to 13.♗d5!? as considered in the note to move 13, while most other moves can be met by castling and normal development.

14...exf5 15.exf5 0–0 16.♗xe5 ♗xe5 17.♖xe5

After 17.♕xd8 ♗xh2† 18.♔xh2 ♖axd8 Black is by no means worse.



17...♕c7! 18.♖e3 ♖ae8

Black's development advantage easily compensates for White's extra pawn on f5, for example:

19.♕d4 ♖xe3 20.♕xe3 ♖e8 21.♕g3

21.♕d4 ♖d8 22.♕h4 ♕e5= wins back the pawn.

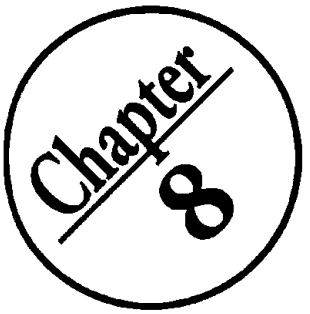
21...♕c5 22.♕f4 ♕c6!

Black has at least enough activity to maintain the balance.

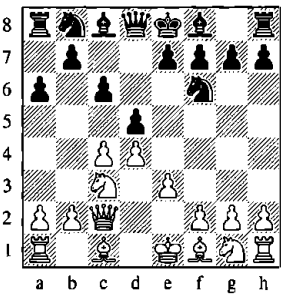
Conclusion

We began the chapter by checking two rare pawn moves on the queenside. 5.b3 ♗f5 6.♗d3 e6!? is an attractive line for Black, regardless of whether or not White opts to exchange on f5. The next option was 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♕b3, which should not be too dangerous for Black as long as he responds correctly with 6...b6!.

The majority of the chapter was devoted to 5.♗d3 dxc4 6.♗xc4 b5, when White has three plausible retreat squares for the bishop. Curiously, all three of them are likely to transpose to other major opening systems, namely the Queen's Gambit Accepted or the Meran Variation of the Semi-Slav. In all cases Black has avoided the most challenging theoretical lines, which is why we should not mind being pulled away from a pure Slav game.



3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6



5.♕c2

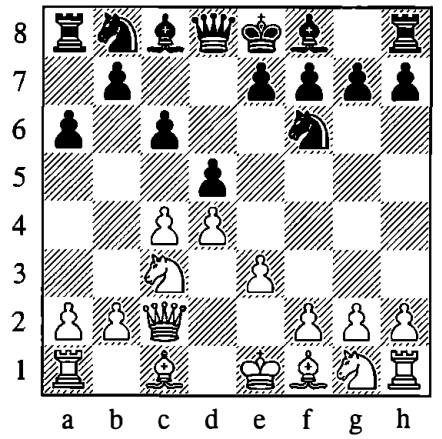
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♕c2 g6 6.♘f3 ♗g7 7.♗d3

7...0–0

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B) 8.♗d2 73
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C422) 12.♗d2 85
C423) 12.b4 86

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♕c2



This is definitely White's most important alternative to 5.♘f3. 5.♕c2 was recommended by Kornev in *A Practical White Repertoire with 1.d4 and 2.c4* so this line may become more popular.

5...g6

It goes without saying that Black has a variety of options available. One idea is 5...b5 6.b3 ♗g4, which leads to solid but sometimes passive positions; another is 5...e6 6.♘f3 c5, which has been tested at high levels, including in the 2012 Gelfand – Anand match for the World Championship.

I chose the text move for a couple of reasons. I like the idea of covering as wide a range of middlegame positions as possible, and the kingside fianchetto is not seen in many other parts of our repertoire. I also consider this line the most combative option for Black.

6.♘f3

Usually White puts the bishop on d3 first, but the two moves usually just transpose. I chose to make the knight move the main line in order to check a couple of set-ups where the bishop does not go to d3 – see the note to White's next move.

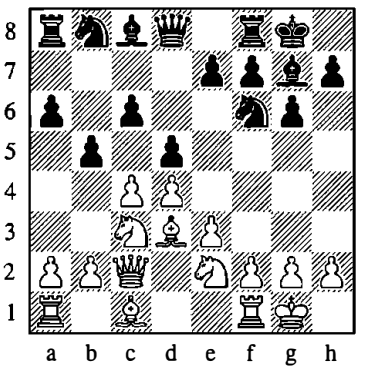
By the way, the development of White's knight to e2 is hardly a good idea:

6.♗d3 ♗g7 7.♘ge2

Of course 7.♘f3 just leads to our main line.

7...0–0 8.0–0 b5

With the white knight on e2 Black can play this move, since 9.c5 runs into 9...e5 with great play for Black. There is only one game from this position, which we will follow for a few moves.



9.cxd5 cxd5 10.♘f4 ♘c6!?

Obviously there was nothing wrong with the calm 10...e6N followed by ...♗b7 and ...♘bd7.

11.♘cxd5

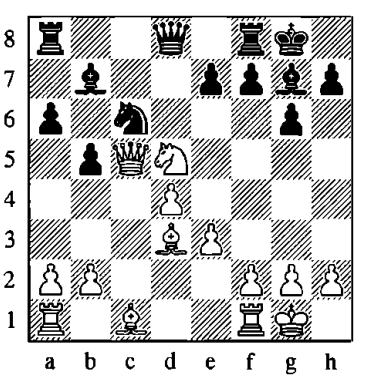
Black is ready for this tactical operation.

11...♘xd5 12.♘xd5

In the event of 12.♕xc6 ♘xf4 13.exf4 ♖b8∓ Black regains the d4-pawn and White has to fight for equality.

12...♗b7 13.♕c5

This occurred in Shengelia – Gonzalez, Istanbul (ol) 2012. Now the most accurate continuation is:

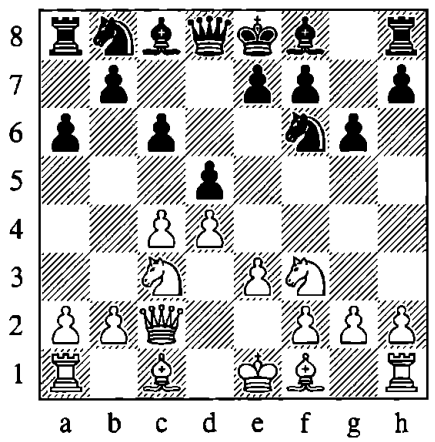


13...♖e8!N

Creating the threat of ...♘xd4. Black is better, for example:

14.♘b4 ♘xb4 15.♕xb4 e5∓

Black will win back the pawn while keeping the more active position.



6...♗g7 7.♗d3

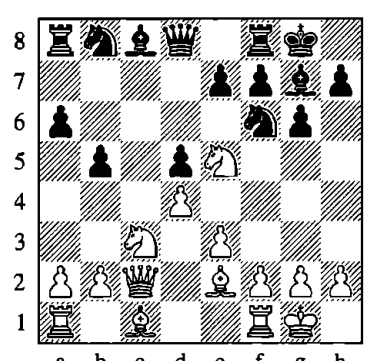
I checked a couple of set-ups where White avoids or postpones this move.

7.♗e2 0–0 8.0–0 b5 9.cxd5

9.b3 ♗f5 10.♗d3 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 ♘bd7 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♗d2 ♕b6 14.♖ac1 ♕b7 was equal in Kornev – Bryzgalin, St Petersburg 2001.

9...cxd5 10.♘e5

White intends to transfer his knight to d3 and follow up with a2-a4 and/or b2-b4, with pressure on the queenside.



10...♕d6!N

A good idea, preparing to put the queen's knight on d7.

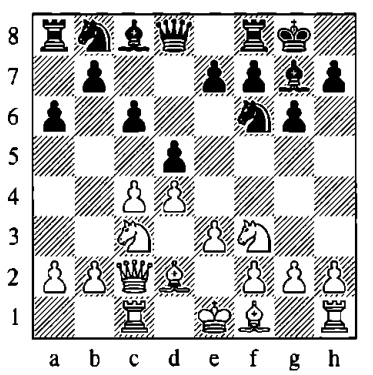
The immediate 11...♘bd7?! allows 11.♘c6!. White's idea worked perfectly in the following game: 10...♗b7 11.♘d3 ♘c6 12.b4!± Markus – Postny, Sibenik 2010.

11.♗d2 ♘bd7 12.♘d3 e5!

The game is complex but not unfavourable to Black.

7.♗d2 0–0 8.♖c1

This set-up has been employed quite often. I was surprised when the database search showed that I even used it myself a long time ago!



8...b5

This is the simplest way to solve Black's opening problems.

My game continued 8...♗g4 9.♕b3 ♗xf3 10.♕xb7? (today I understand that the superior 10.gxf3N gives White chances to fight for the advantage) 10...♘bd7 11.gxf3 e5! and Black obtained powerful play for the pawn in Avrukh – Fressinet, Leon 2001.

9.cxd5 cxd5 10.a4

This looks like the most challenging idea, but Black should be fine.

10...b4 11.♘e2N

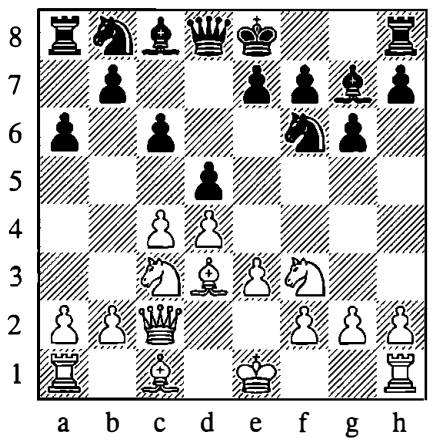
After the inferior 11.♘a2? a5 12.♘e5 ♘e4∓ Black was clearly better in Suvrajit – Deshmukh, Aurangabad 2011.

11...a5 12.♘f4 e6 13.♗d3

Black is also fine after 13.♕c7 ♘e4.

13...♗a6 14.0–0 ♘bd7

White can hardly aspire to an advantage with such a passive dark-squared bishop.



7...0–0

We have reached the first major branching point of the chapter. There are two sidelines, **A) 8.h3** and **B) 8.♗d2**, which have been tried by strong players, but the main line is of course **C) 8.0–0**.

A) 8.h3 b5

Black can play this way after White has played a slow move on the other flank.

9.b3

White has also tried blocking the position with:

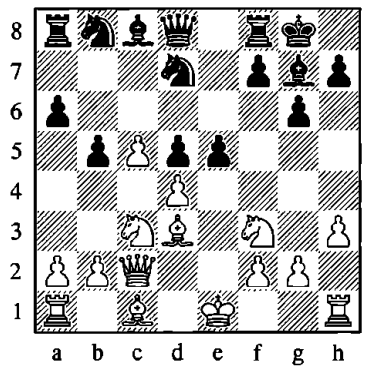
9.c5

Ivanisevic – Ipek, Antalya 2002. Now Black should of course aim for ...e5 at the earliest convenience, so the right move is:

9...♘fd7!N 10.e4

Other moves allow ...e5 with comfortable play for Black.

10...e5 11.exd5 cxd5



12.♗g5

Another option is 12.0–0 ♗b7! (not 12...e4? 13.♘xe4! dxe4 14.♗xe4 ♖a7 15.♗f4 when White has a dangerous initiative) 13.♗g5 ♕c8! 14.dxe5 ♘xc5 and Black is better.

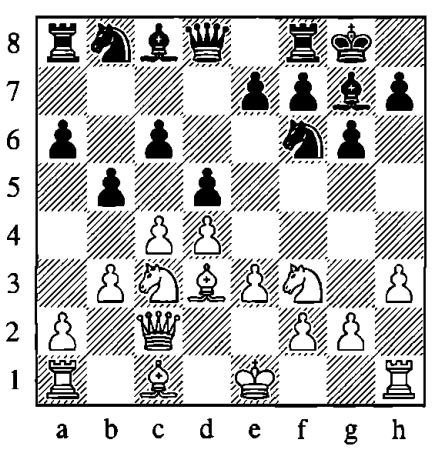
12...f6 13.♗d2 exd4

Here too, 13...e4?! 14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.♗xe4 ♖a7 16.0–0⩲ promises White great compensation.

14.♘e2 ♘c6 15.0–0 ♘ce5!

Black is by no means worse.

Returning to the main line, I would like to propose the following new idea.



9...dxc4N

Black played passively with 9...♘bd7 10.0–0 ♗b7 in Litinskaya – Fatalibekova, Halle 2004. Now after 11.c5!N I can hardly bear to look at Black's light-squared bishop.

10.bxc4 c5!?

10...bxc4 11.♗xc4 c5 12.0–0 cxd4 13.♘xd4 ♗d7 should equalize slowly, but White encounters no risk. The text move is much more interesting, as Black offers a pawn to fight for the initiative.

11.cxb5 axb5

11...♗b7!? also looks interesting.

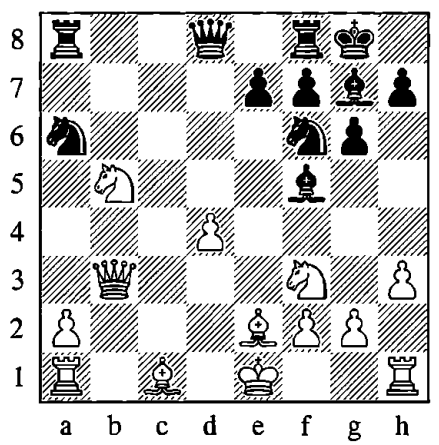
12.♘xb5

Another direction is 12.♗xb5 ♗b7 13.♗e2 (or 13.dxc5 ♘d5 14.♗d2 ♘a6 with good play for Black) 13...cxd4 14.exd4 ♘c6 with full compensation.

12...♘a6

Black has a lot of activity for the pawn. The following is an illustrative line I analysed:

13.♗e2 ♗f5 14.♕b3 cxd4 15.exd4



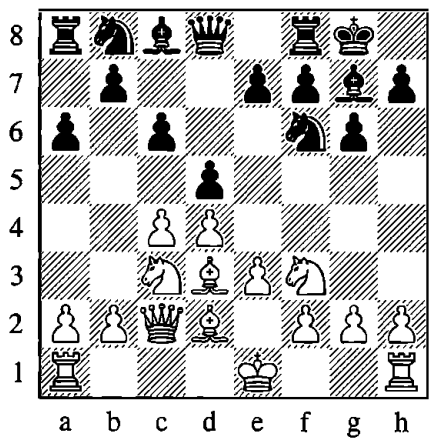
15...♘c7!

I don't like 15...♘c5 16.dxc5 ♘e4 17.0–0 ♗xa1 18.c6 when White's c-pawn is dangerous.

16.0–0 ♗e6 17.♕b2 ♘xb5 18.♗xb5 ♕d5=

Black regains his pawn thanks to the dual threats of ...♖xa2 and ...♗xh3.

B) 8.♗d2



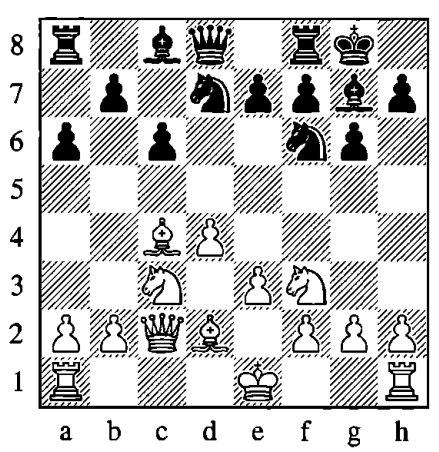
Against this flexible developing move we should choose a different plan.

8...dxc4!

The more popular 8...♗g4 did not appeal to me due to 9.♘e5 ♗e6 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♘a4 when White has a good position and has scored well.

9.♗xc4 ♘bd7!

I like this flexible move. Black is ready to play ...c5 and can choose whether or not to include ...b5 first.



10.0–0

Only this move has occurred in practice, but I checked a couple of alternatives all the same.

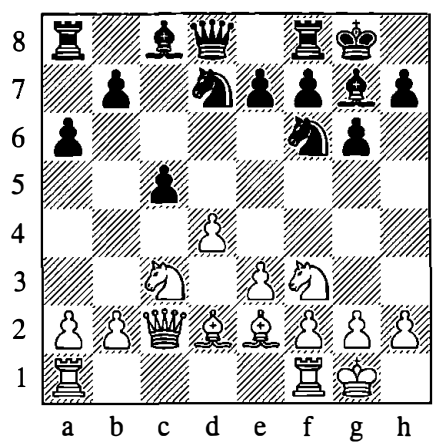
10.b4N is met by 10...e5! 11.dxe5 (after 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♗f5 13.♕b3 ♘e4 Black has the initiative) 11...♘d5! and Black regains the e5-pawn with a comfortable position.

10.e4N b5 11.♗e2 c5 12.d5 ♗b7 13.0–0 gives Black a choice between 13...c4 intending ...♖c8 and ...♘c5, or 13...e6!? 14.dxe6 fxe6, with a complex game in both cases.

10...c5 11.♗e2

Another direction is 11.♖fd1 b5 12.♗e2 cxd4 13.♘xd4 ♗b7 14.♕b3?! (14.b4N would have maintained the balance) and now in Milov – Fierz, Winterthur 2001, Black could have played 14...e5!N 15.♘f3 ♕e7 with a space advantage.

The present position has been reached in three games, but so far nobody has tested the most logical continuation for Black.



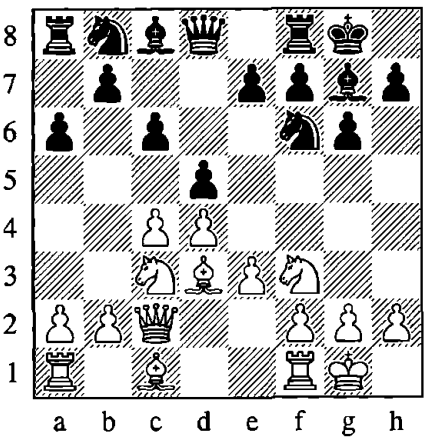
11...b5N

I will mention in passing that 11...cxd4N 12.♘xd4 ♘c5 13.b4 e5! 14.bxc5 exd4 15.exd4 ♕xd4 16.♗e3 ♕h4 leads to approximate equality.

12.a4 b4 13.♘e4 ♘xe4 14.♕xe4 ♖b8

Black has no problems whatsoever.

C) 8.0–0



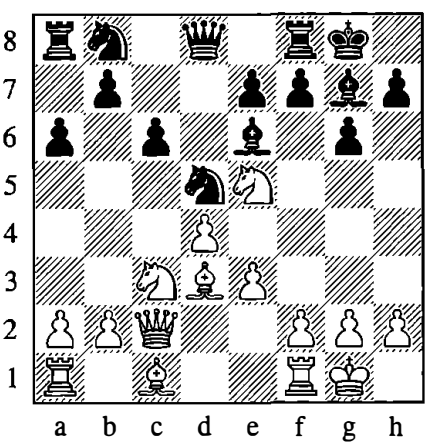
8...♗g4

This is Black's key idea which underlines the slight misplacement of the white queen.

9.♘e5 ♗e6

Now White has four main options: **C1) 10.cxd5**, **C2) 10.♗d2**, **C3) 10.b3** and **C4) 10.c5**.

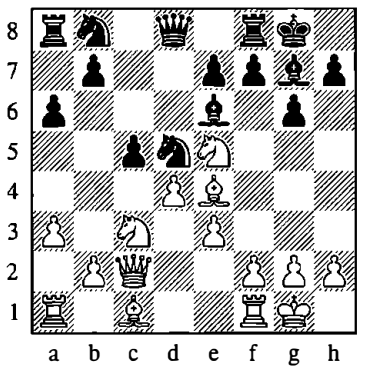
C1) 10.cxd5 ♘xd5



11.♘xd5

White has tried 11.a3 in several games. The

simplest response for Black is 11...c5! when a noteworthy game continued: 12.♗e4?! (White's best is 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5 13.♕xc5 ♗xe5 14.e4 but after 14...♗c4! 15.♕xc4 ♕xd4 Black obviously has no problems at all.) Van Wely – Kamsky, Wijk aan Zee 2009. Surprisingly, both players missed a simple tactical blow:



12...♘xe3!N 13.♗xe3 cxd4 Black will emerge with an extra pawn at the minimum.

11...cxd5 12.♗d2 ♘d7

This is the most natural move, and it is good enough for equality.

Alexander Morozevich managed to unbalance the position by playing 12...♕b6!? 13.♖fc1 ♗xe5 14.dxe5 ♘c6 15.♗c3 ♖fd8 in Tkachiev – Morozevich, France 2001. Black went on to win the game although White is certainly not worse at this point.

13.♘f3

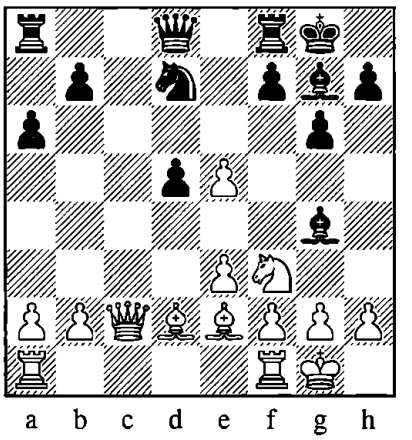
Obviously harmless is 13.♘xd7 ♕xd7 with equality.

13...♗g4 14.♗e2 e5

This active approach gives Black a good game.

15.dxe5

We have been following the game Kiselev – Amonatov, Kaluga 2003. Here Black should have played:



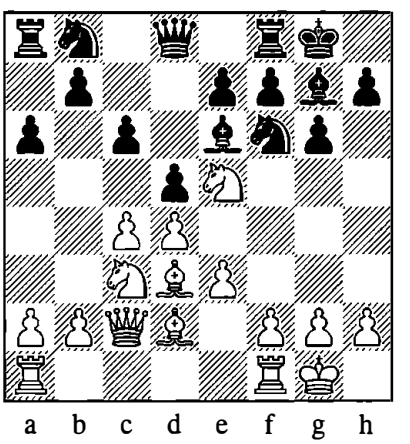
15...♗xf3!N 16.♗xf3 ♘xe5

With the following point:

17.♗e2 d4 18.exd4 ♘c6!

Already it is White who needs to be careful.

C2) 10.♗d2



10...♘bd7

I was not satisfied with 10...dxc4 11.♗xc4 ♗xc4 12.♘xc4 ♘bd7 13.b4 ♕c7 14.f4 as played in Krejci – Akkozov, Olomouc 2013, where Black was solid but a bit passive.

Now White can choose either **C21) 11.cxd5** or **C22) 11.♘xd7**.

C21) 11.cxd5 cxd5

Slightly inferior is 11...♘xd5 12.♘xd7 ♗xd7 13.♘e2! intending 13...e5 14.dxe5 ♗xe5 15.e4 ♘f6 16.h3 when White is better.

12.f4

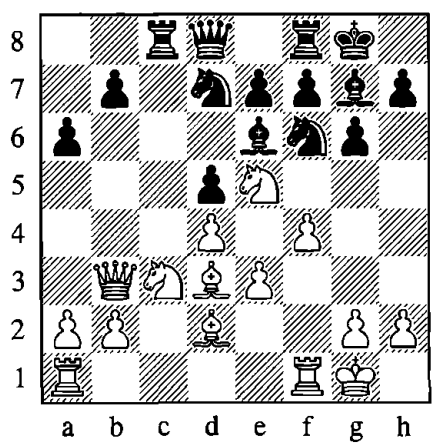
Definitely the most ambitious continuation.

12.♘xd7 was played in Saucey – Guadalpi, Le Mans 2003, and here Black should of course prefer 12...♗xd7!N followed by ...♗c6 when his position is fine.

12.♘f3 is worth considering, but here it runs into the annoying 12...♗g4!.

12...♖c8 13.♕b3

These moves were played in Flear – Prie, Creon 1998. After analysing the position in detail, I concluded that Black should go for the most principled continuation:



13...♘e4N

13...♘b6N looks quite solid, but after 14.f5 gxf5 15.♗xf5 ♕d6 16.♗xe6 ♕xe6 17.♖ac1 White may be slightly better.

14.♗xe4

Otherwise White is worse.

14...dxe4 15.♕xb7 ♖b8

Now White must decide which pawn to capture.

16.♕xa6

16.♕xe4 ♘xe5 17.fxe5 ♖xb2 18.♖f2 ♕b8 gives Black interesting compensation for the pawn. His next move will almost certainly be ...♖c8 and he will be looking for the opportunity to activate his dark-squared bishop soon after. This may be achieved with ...♗h6, or by breaking with ...f6 at a suitable moment.

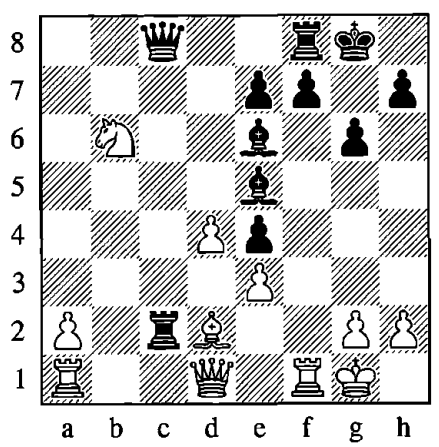
16...♘xe5 17.fxe5 ♖xb2 18.♕e2?!

Not the best move, but I would like to point out a remarkable line.

Objectively the best continuation is 18.♖f2 ♗h6 19.♕e2 ♕a8 20.a4 ♖c8 when Black has full compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

18...♗xe5! 19.♘a4 ♖c2 20.♕d1 ♕c8! 21.♘b6

A similar position is reached after 21.dxe5 ♖d8 22.♖f2 ♕c6 23.♘b6 ♖d3!. Despite being a piece up, White is in trouble as he is virtually paralysed.



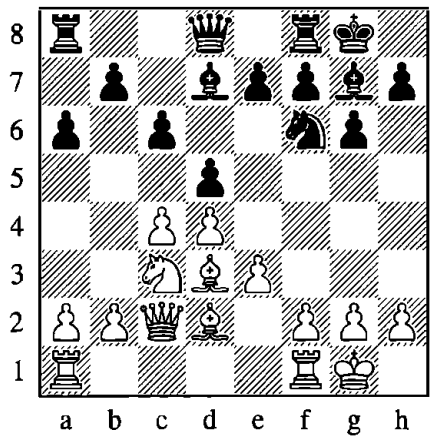
21...♕c7

21...♕c6 allows 22.d5! although even here after 22...♕xb6 23.♕xc2 ♗xd5 Black's compensation may well be sufficient.

22.dxe5 ♖d8 23.♖f2 ♖d3

Black has fantastic compensation for the sacrificed piece.

C22) 11.♘xd7 ♗xd7



This is the right recapture.

12.c5

White can also keep a fluid central position, as in the following game:

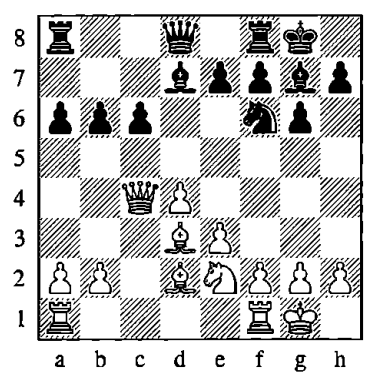
12.♘e2 dxc4 13.♕xc4

13.♗xc4 runs into 13...♗f5.

13...b6!N

With this strong new idea Black prepares ...c5, which is surprisingly difficult for White to counter.

I was unhappy with 13...♗f5 14.♗xf5 gxf5 15.f3± as played in Markus – Solak, Rogaska Slatina 2009.



14.♕c2

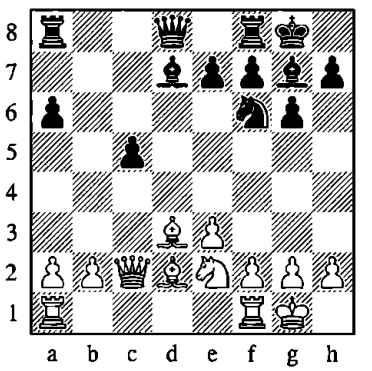
White cannot stop Black's idea with 14.b4?! in view of 14...c5 15.bxc5 ♗b5 16.♕c2 ♗xd3 17.♕xd3 bxc5 and White already needs to battle for equality.

14...c5!

It works here too!

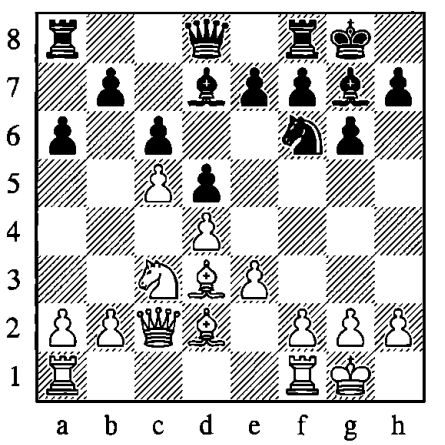
15.dxc5 bxc5

15...♖c8 is less accurate due to: 16.♗b4! (16.♗xa6?! is too risky due to ...♖xc5 17.♗c3 b5! and White's light-squared bishop is in trouble.) 16...bxc5 17.♗xc5 ♘d5 18.a3 (Black is fine after 18.♗e4 ♕a5 19.♖ac1 ♘b4!.) 18...♘c3 19.♘xc3 ♖xc5 20.♗xa6 Black definitely has compensation, but it may not be quite enough for two pawns.



16.♗c3 ♗b5 17.♖fd1 ♕c7 18.♖ac1 ♖fd8

Despite his slightly vulnerable pawn structure, Black should be fine thanks to his active pieces and the passive knight on e2.



12...♘g4!

The key idea, striving for ...e5.

The only line Kornev mentions in his repertoire book is 12...♖b8 13.♘a4 as in Ivanchuk – Wang Yue, Dagomys 2010, but I recommend that Black plays directly in the centre rather than on the queenside.

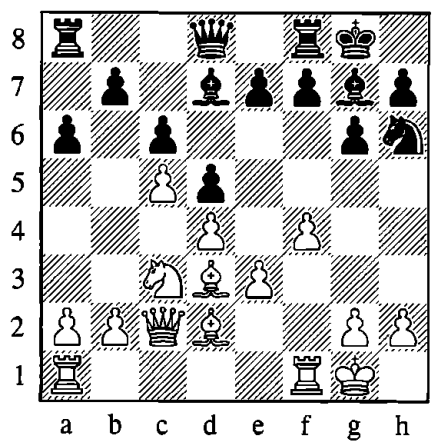
13.f4

The most logical, stopping the central break.

A recent game continued: 13.f3 ♘h6 14.♘e2 e5 15.♗c3 Blagojevic – Solak, Kragujevac 2013, and now after 15...♖e8N 16.♘g3 f5 Black has the more pleasant game.

13...♘h6

A few high-level games have arrived at this position. Black has two main plans: exchanging the light-squared bishops with ...♗f5, and preparing a central break with ...f6 and ...e5.



14.b4

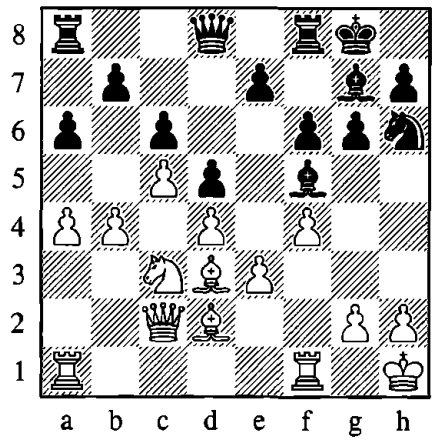
14.♕b3 ♖b8 15.h3 ♔h8 16.♘a4 f6 17.♘b6 ♗f5 18.g4 ♗xd3 19.♕xd3 ♘f7 20.♔g2 e5 saw Black executing both of the aforementioned ideas. The position remained complex and double-edged in Le Quang – Khalifman, Moscow 2012.

14...♗f5 15.a4 f6

Black looks to be in good shape, with ...e5 coming soon.

16.♔h1

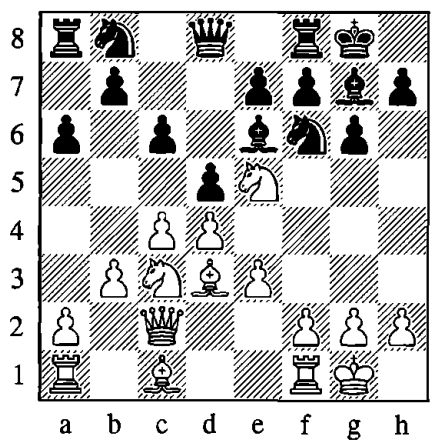
After 16.♘d1 ♗xd3 17.♕xd3 e5 18.♘f2 ♕d7 Black is by no means worse, Wang Yue – Kamsky, Nice 2009.



16...♕d7 17.b5 axb5 18.axb5 e5

With a double-edged position, Pap – Buhmann, Pardubice 2012.

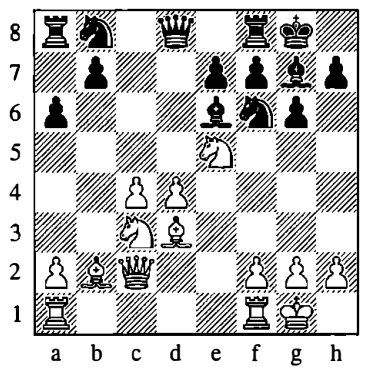
C3) 10.b3



Quite a popular move, but it allows Black to attack the centre in Grünfeld style.

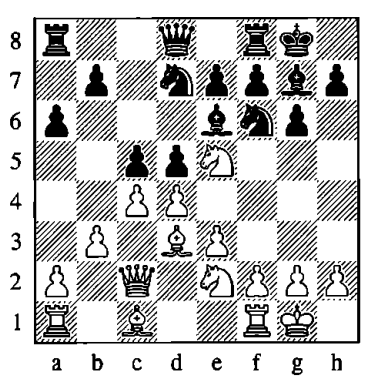
10...c5 11.cxd5

11.♗b2 has only been played in one game, and after 11...cxd4 12.exd4 dxc4 White decided to sacrifice a pawn: 13.bxc4!? (After 13.♗xc4 ♗f5 14.♕e2 b5 15.♗d3 ♗xd3 16.♕xd3 ♕d6 Black is comfortable.)



13...♕xd4 14.♘d5?! (After the correct 14.♘e4N ♕b6 15.♘g5 ♘bd7 16.♖ab1 White has sufficient compensation.) 14...♕c5 Black was better in Markos – Papa, Peniscola 2002.

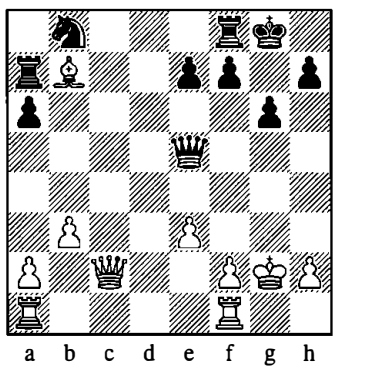
11.♘e2 has been played in fifteen games. Amazingly, the move I consider the most natural and strongest has not yet been tried: 11...♘bd7!N



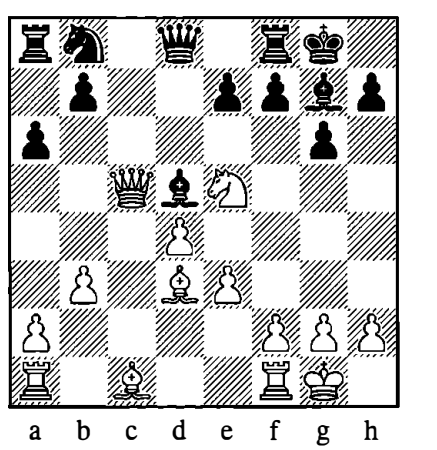
12.♗b2 (12.♘xd7 ♗xd7 13.dxc5 ♕c7 14.♗b2 ♕xc5= gives Black an easy life.) 12...cxd4 13.♗xd4 dxc4 14.bxc4 ♕c7= Black has no problems.

11...♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5 13.♕xc5

In the event of 13.♗b2 Black has the following interesting idea: 13...cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♗xg2!? (The simple 14...♘d7 equalizes comfortably.) 15.♔xg2 ♗xe5 16.♗xe5 ♕d5† 17.♗e4 ♕xe5 18.♗xb7 ♖a7



19.♕e4 (19.♗f3 would be more accurate) 19...♕g5† 20.♔h1 ♘d7 21.♖ac1 This position was reached in Wells – Hodgson, Germany 2000, and now after 21...e6N Black's position is slightly more comfortable, due to the slight vulnerability of White's king.



13...♗xe5 14.dxe5 ♗xg2!

Obviously this move is key. There are two possible responses: **C31) 15.♔xg2** and **C32) 15.♖d1**.

C31) 15.♔xg2 ♕xd3 16.♕xe7 ♘c6

Black is absolutely fine, as shown by the following examples.

17.♕xb7

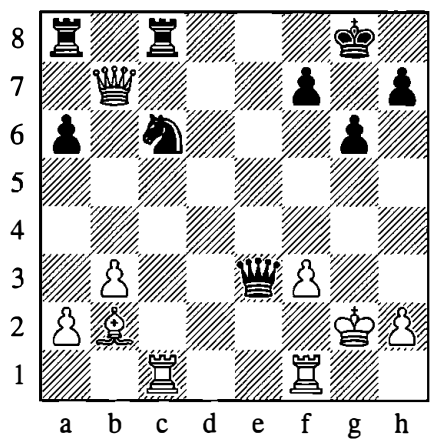
The alternative is: 17.♕f6 ♖fe8 18.♗b2 ♘xe5! 19.♗xe5 (19.♖ad1 ♕e4† 20.♔g1! is equal as well.) 19...♕d5† 20.♕f3 ♖xe5 21.♕xd5 ♖xd5 22.♖fd1 ♖ad8 23.♖xd5 ♖xd5 24.♖c1 ♖d2 25.♖c7= Ivanisevic – I. Sokolov, Istanbul 2000.

17...♖fc8!?

17...♕e4†N 18.f3 ♕xe5 19.♗a3 ♖ad8 is a straightforward drawing line proposed by the computer. The finish might be 20.♕xc6 ♖d2† 21.♖f2 ♖xf2† 22.♔xf2 ♕xh2† 23.♔f1 ♕h1† 24.♔f2 ♕h2†= with a perpetual.

18.e6 ♕e4† 19.f3 ♕xe6 20.♗b2 ♕xe3 21.♖ac1

Here Black should steer the game towards a draw with:



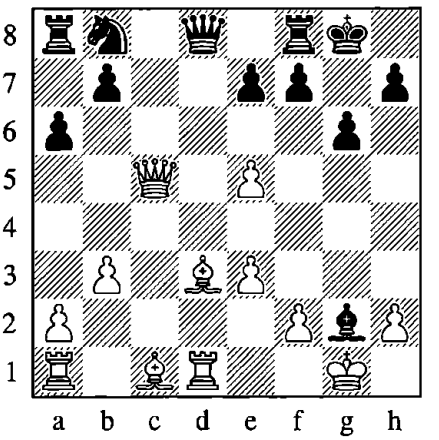
21...♖d8!N

In Atalik – Malakhov, Burgas 2012, Black played for a win with 21...♘e7?. He eventually succeeded, but the result was nothing to do with the objective strength of the knight retreat.

22.♕xc6 ♖d2† 23.♔h1 ♖xh2†! 24.♔xh2 ♕f4†

White's huge material advantage does not enable his king to escape the perpetual check.

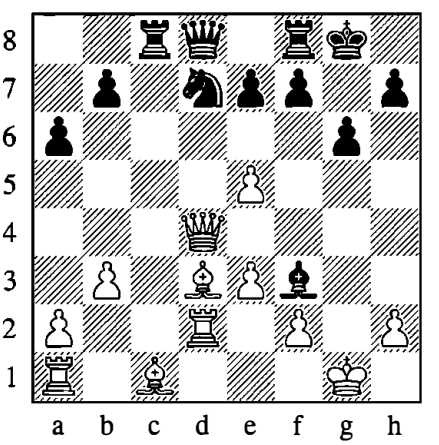
C32) 15.♖d1



Recently Mamedyarov has scored heavily from White's side of this position, but I was able to find a good solution.

15...♘d7 16.♕d4 ♗f3 17.♖d2 ♖c8!N

A clear improvement over 17...♗c6 18.e6! fxe6 19.♗c4 ♖f6 20.♗b2 with huge compensation for White, Mamedyarov – Movsesian, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013.



18.e6

18.♗b2 ♘c5 is not a good idea for White.

Also after 18.♗c4 ♕c7 19.e6 ♘f6 20.exf7† ♔g7 it is the first player who should be careful.

18...♘f6 19.exf7† ♔g7!

It is important for Black to maintain coordination and keep his king safe. The f7-pawn can be captured later.

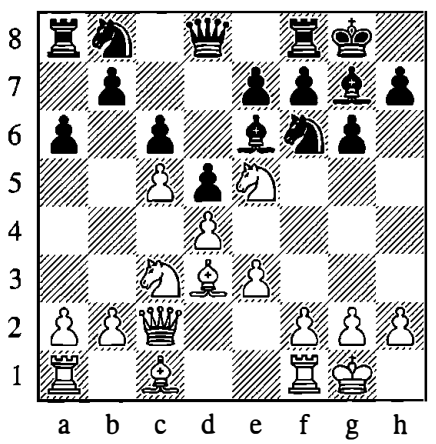
20.♕f4 ♗e4! 21.♗xe4

21.♗c2 ♕a5 22.♗xe4 ♖xc1† leads to the same thing.

21...♖xc1† 22.♖xc1 ♕xd2 23.♖c2 ♕d1† 24.♔g2 ♖xf7

The complications have subsided and the position is equal.

C4) 10.c5



This is the main continuation.

10...♘bd7

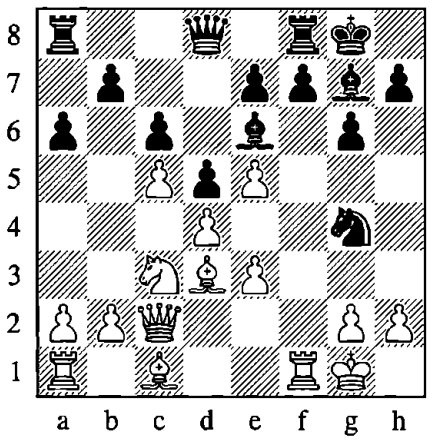
Now White much choose between **C41) 11.f4** and **C42) 11.♘xd7**.

C41) 11.f4

This has been the less popular option, but it has achieved a huge score for White. The following continuation is essential if Black is to avoid being subjected to positional pressure.

11...♘xe5! 12.fxe5 ♘g4!

Aiming for ...f6 to challenge the enemy pawn centre.



13.♘e2

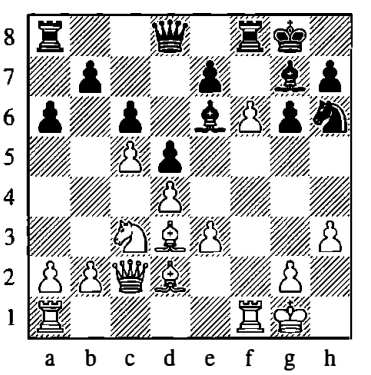
Targeting the bishop on e6.

The other natural continuation is:
13.♗d2 f6 14.h3

The inaccurate 14.exf6? was played in Sergienko – Lintchevski, Sochi 2007, and here Black missed the opportunity for 14...♕c7!N which would have enabled him to take over the initiative, for instance 15.g3 exf6 16.♖ae1 f5 with a positional advantage.

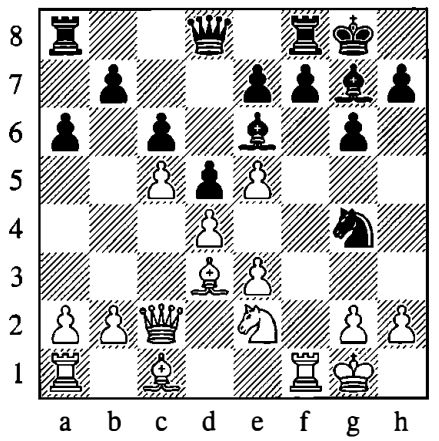
14...♘h6 15.exf6

Now in Kempinski – Handke, Germany 2004, the right recapture would have been:



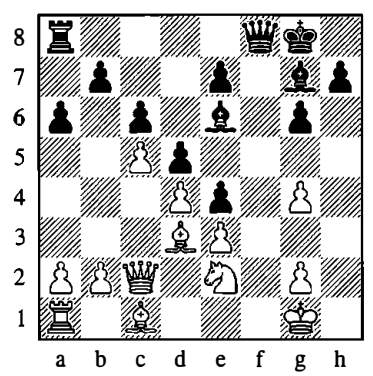
15...♖xf6!N

A good illustrative line is:
16.♖xf6 exf6 17.♗e1 ♕c7 18.♗f2 f5
Black has nothing to complain about.



13...f6 14.♘f4

The dubious 14.h3?! was played in Kuehn – Kurmann, Switzerland 2006. Here Black missed a simple tactical idea: 14...fxe5!N 15.♖xf8† ♕xf8 16.hxg4 e4 White has some problems, for instance:



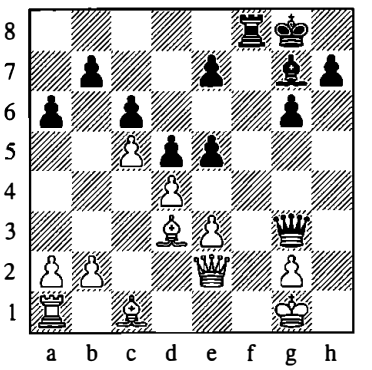
17.♗xe4 dxe4 18.♕xe4 ♕f7 19.♗d2 ♖f8 20.♕f4 ♕xf4 (20...♕e8!? also comes into consideration.) 21.♘xf4 ♗xg4 Black's bishop pair gives him the better chances.

14...♕d7

It is worth considering 14...♗c8!? intending 15.e6 f5! with a highly complex position.

15.h3 ♘h6

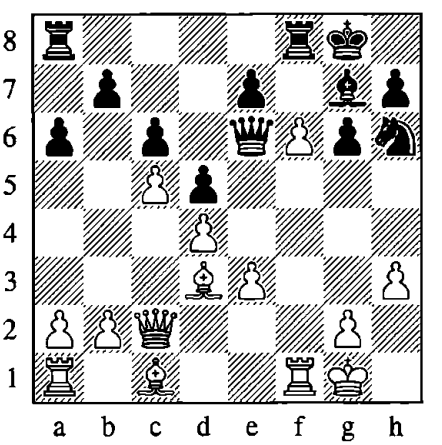
Black can even sacrifice a piece with: 15...fxe5!? 16.♘xe6 ♕xe6 17.hxg4 ♕xg4 White will have to give up another pawn to contain his opponent's initiative. The main line continues: 18.♕e2 ♖xf1† 19.♕xf1 ♖f8 20.♕e2 ♕g3



21.♗d2 exd4 22.♕e1 ♕xe1† 23.♖xe1 dxe3 24.♗xe3 e5 The arising endgame is roughly balanced and any result is possible.

16.♘xe6 ♕xe6 17.exf6

Here I found a slight improvement over the game Backlund – Dunis, Marseille 2005.



17...♖xf6N

The game continuation of 17...exf6 is probably fine, but I prefer the text move.

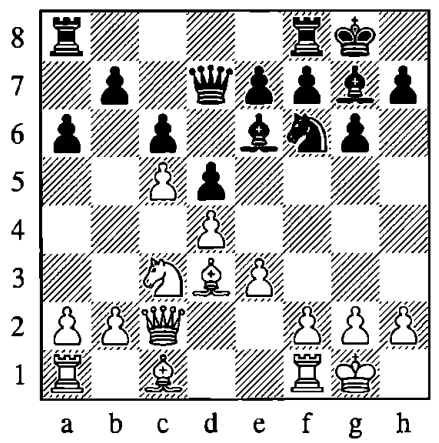
18.♗d2 ♘f5

Black equalizes at once, as White will have to exchange his bishop for the troublesome knight.

C42) 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7

After checking the different options, I concluded that recapturing with the queen was best.

11...♗xd7 has scored well for Black, but I did not like the following line: 12.h3! ♘e8 (I also checked the new idea 12...♘h5N, but unfortunately White has 13.g4 e5 14.dxe5 ♗xe5 15.gxh5 ♕g5† 16.♔h1 ♕xh5 17.f4 ♗xh3 18.♕h2 ♗xf1 19.♕xh5 gxh5 20.♗xf1 with the better endgame.) 13.f4 f6 Anand – McShane, London 2012. White has a few attractive ideas here, one of them being 14.♘a4N e5 15.e4! with promising play.



Here there are three main moves to consider: **C41) 12.♘a4, C42) 12.♗d2** and **C43) 12.b4**.

C41) 12.♘a4 ♖ae8 13.♘b6

13.f4 would be premature in view of 13...♗f5! forcing a favourable exchange of the light-squared bishops.

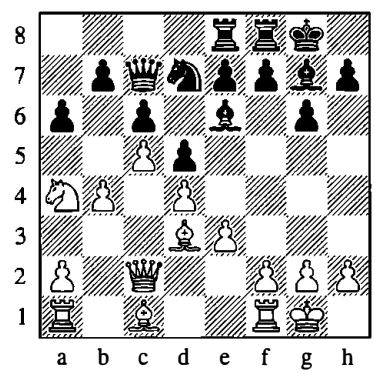
13...♕c7 14.f4

Clamping down in the centre is a typical plan.

14.♗d2 occurred in Akhmadeev – Tsybulnik, Saratov 2006. Here Black should have played the typical manoeuvre 14...♘g4N 15.f4 ♘h6 followed by ...♗f5 and later ...f6 and ...e5, with decent chances in a complex position.

14.b4 ♘d7 15.♘a4

Another notable game continued: 15.♘xd7 ♗xd7 16.f4 f6 17.e4 dxe4 18.♗xe4 f5 19.♕c4† ♔h8 20.♗f3 ♖d8 21.♗e3 ♗e8! Black easily solved his problems, and now it was White who had to play more accurately in Hracek – Kasparov, Prague (simul) 2001.

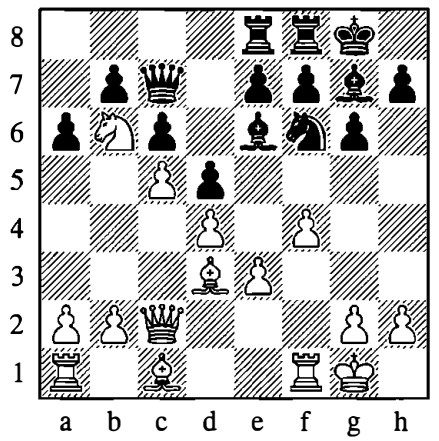


15...f6!N

A necessary improvement over 15...f5?! 16.f4! ♗f7 17.♗d2 e6 18.♘c3 Milov – Dautov, Switzerland 2006. This is exactly the structure we should be looking to avoid, as the centre is blocked and White has a free hand to advance on the queenside.

16.f4 ♗f7

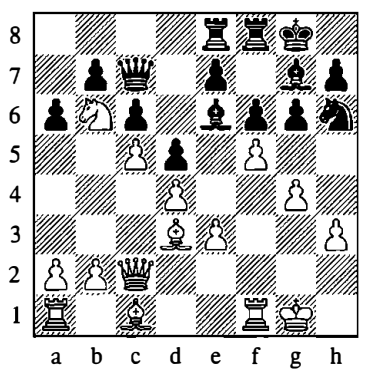
Black will follow up with ...e5. The position looks pretty typical for the whole variation, but it is hard to believe that the present version with the knight on a4 can be good for White.



14...♘d7!N

Since the ...♗f5 plan is not viable, Black should clear the path for his f-pawn to support a future ...e5.

14...♘g4 has been played, but I was not satisfied with the following line: 15.h3 ♘h6 16.g4 f6 17.b4!N (White preferred 17.f5 in D. Berczes – Arvind, Richardson 2013, and now the accurate:



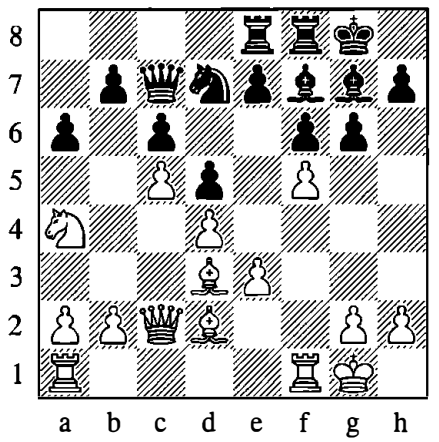
17...♗f7!N followed by ...e6 would have led to a complex battle.) 17...♗f7 18.a4 e5 19.♕f2 I do not see a convincing way for Black to develop his kingside play; meanwhile White is ready to press forwards on the queenside.

15.♘a4

Exchanging knights can hardly challenge the black position, so the text move is the only ambitious choice.

15...f6 16.♗d2 ♗f7 17.f5

17.g4 e5 18.f5 ♗h6!? is unclear but by no means bad for Black.



17...e6!

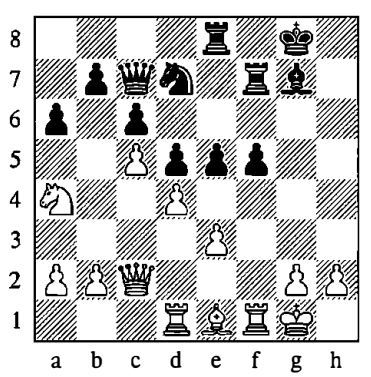
A promising pawn sacrifice.

18.fxg6 hxg6 19.♗xg6 f5 20.♗xf7† ♖xf7

In return for the pawn, Black has achieved a strong position in the centre. Initially the computer does not rate Black's chances, but this gradually changes as his pieces come to life.

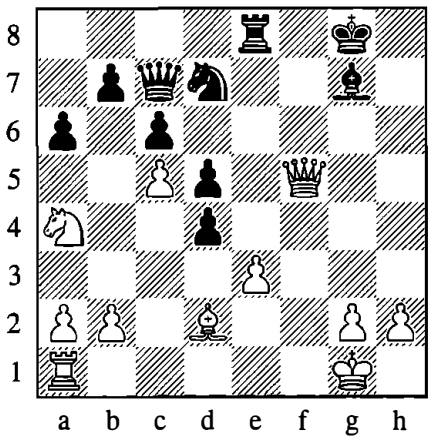
21.♖f3

I also considered: 21.♗e1 e5 22.♖d1



22...f4! 23.exf4 exd4 24.♕g6 ♖e4 25.♗d2 ♕d8 with good compensation.

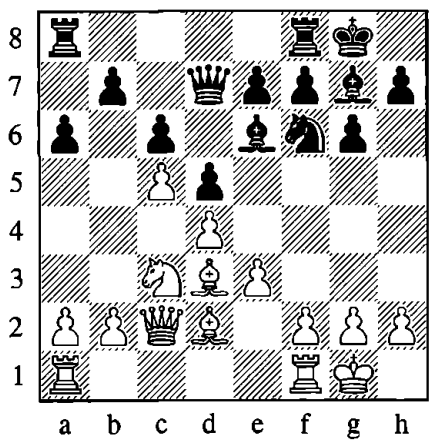
21...e5 22.♖xf5 ♖xf5 23.♕xf5 exd4



24.♖f1 ♘f8 25.exd4 ♗xd4† 26.♔h1 ♕h7!

Black has ongoing compensation, whether or not the queens stay on the board.

C42) 12.♗d2



12...♗f5!

Black should be happy to exchange the light-squared bishops; the slight weakening of his pawn structure is of little consequence.

13.♗xf5

White has also tried leaving the kingside structure unaltered: 13.b4 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 ♕c7 (It is worth considering the thematic 14...♘g4!?N 15.h3 [or 15.f4 f6] 15...♘h6 16.♘a4 ♖ae8 when Black looks fine.) 15.f4 ♘d7 16.a4 This position will be examined under the move order 12.b4 ♗f5 13.a4 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 ♕c7 15.f4 ♘d7 16.♗d2 – see the note to White's 13th move in variation C43 below.

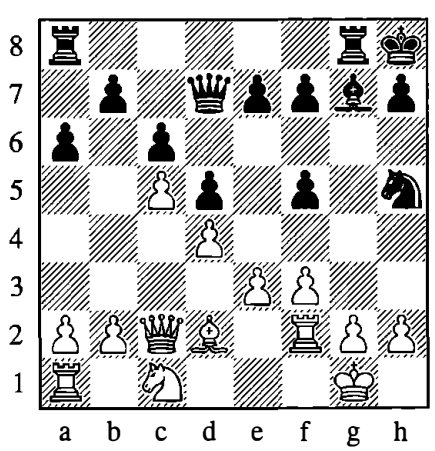
13...gxf5 14.f3

With this move White guards the e4-square but slightly weakens himself on the g-file.

14.♘e2 should be met by 14...♘h5, preventing the white knight from coming to f4. 15.♘g3 (15.f3 ♔h8 transposes to the main line below.) 15...♘xg3 16.hxg3 ♗f6 17.f4 ♔g7 18.♔f2 h5 19.♖h1 ♖h8 20.♖h3 ♖h6 The chances remained equal in Schreiner – Wallner, Bad Gleichenberg 2013.

14...♔h8 15.♘e2 ♘h5 16.♖f2 ♖g8 17.♘c1

We have been following the game Bischoff – Dautov, Germany 2007. I believe Black should have developed his kingside play in the following way.



17...♗f6N

In the game Black chose 17...e6, but I would prefer to keep this square free for the queen for the time being.

17...f4N does not achieve the desired effect after 18.♘d3.

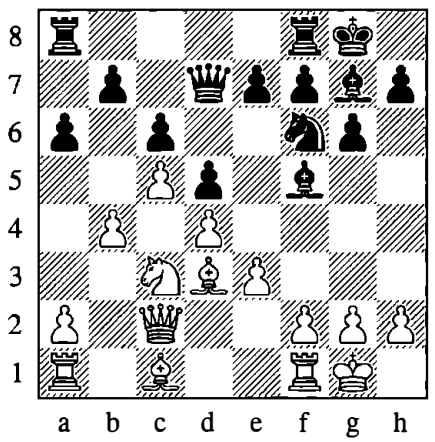
18.♘d3 ♖g7 19.g3

19.♘e5 ♗xe5 20.dxe5 ♖ag8 is hardly a problem for Black.

19...♖ag8 20.♖g2 ♕e6

The position remains interesting and double-edged.

C43) 12.b4 ♗f5



Obviously the position resembles the previous line, but White may try to accelerate his queenside play and/or develop the bishop to a square other than d2.

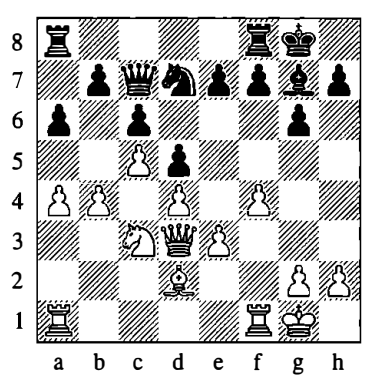
13.♗xf5

White may also ignore the bishop in order to avoid opening the g-file:

13.a4 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 ♕c7 15.f4

White should not allow Black to play ...e5 effortlessly.

15...♘d7 16.♗d2



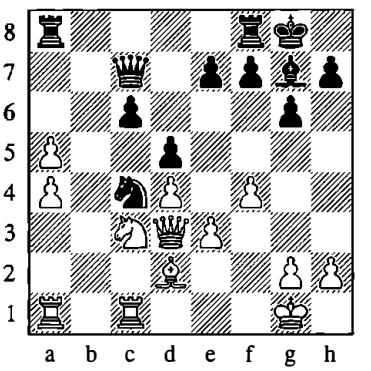
16...b6!

Surprisingly, Black can fight back on the queenside.

17.♖fc1

17.a5 b5 was played in Shariyazdanov – Sakaev, Kazan 2005. White's position is not so bad, although the blocking of the queenside obviously counts as an achievement for Black.

17...a5 18.cxb6 ♘xb6 19.bxa5 ♘c4



20.♘e4!

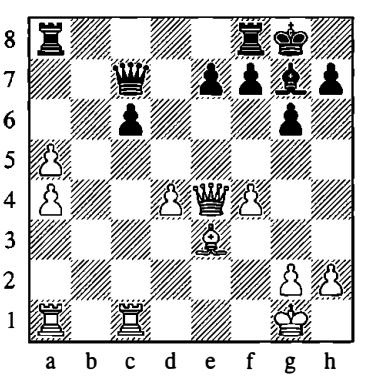
Without this move White would be worse.

20...♘xe3!?

20...♘xa5 should be roughly equal too.

21.♗xe3 dxe4 22.♕xe4

We have been following the game Milov – Postny, Warsaw 2005. Here the most accurate move is:

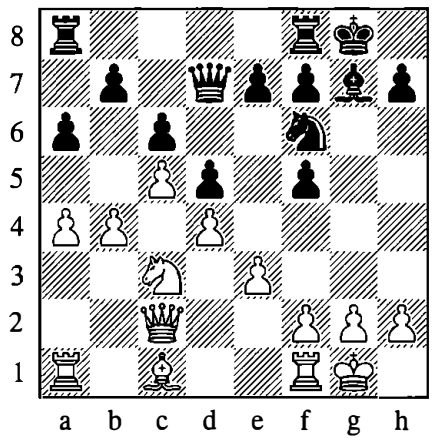


22...♖fc8!N

Black easily solves his problems.

13...gxf5 14.a4

Here I developed a new concept for Black.



14...h5!N

14...♔h8 is the only move to have been tried so far, but this did not appeal to me due to the following line: 15.f3 ♖g8 16.♗d2 ♗h6 17.♕d3 (17.♘e2!N is a bit more accurate.) 17...♖g7 Now in Wojtaszek – Postny, Barbera del Valles 2009, White should have played 18.♘e2!N ♖ag8 19.g3 when I don't see anything real for Black on the kingside (as a last resort White can even run away with his king), while White's queenside attack is set to run smoothly.

15.♗d2 h4

Black intends to push the pawn one square further, so White must decide how to react.

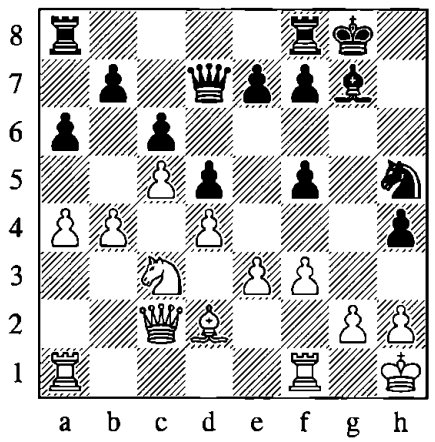
16.f3

16.h3 can be met by 16...♘e4 when the fixing of White's kingside structure makes f2-f3 unappealing.

16.b5 is possible, but after 16...axb5 17.axb5 h3 18.g3 ♘e4 Black should not be worse.

16...♘h5 17.♔h1

In the event of 17.♘e2 ♕e6 Black intends ...♔h8, ...♗h6 and ...♖g8 with good attacking chances. The h4-pawn is an important addition to Black's play on the kingside.



17...f4!?

Black can also play 17...♕e6 with similar ideas to the previous note, but the text move is also interesting.

18.♖ae1 ♖fe8 19.exf4 ♗xd4 20.♕d3 ♗f6 21.♘e4 ♕f5=

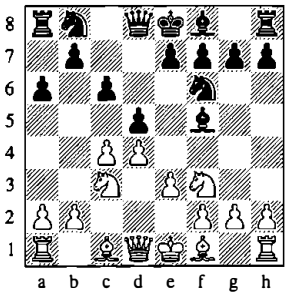
The position remains dynamically balanced.

Conclusion

Black's fianchetto set-up makes for quite an appealing option when the white queen is already committed to the c2-square. After the typical moves 8.0–0 ♗g4 9.♘e5 ♗e6 Black intends to complete his development with ...♘bd7 while challenging the knight on e5. The two most critical variations are C3 and C4. The first features an open centre and an early tactical skirmish, while the second sees White block the centre in an attempt to squeeze the opponent. I believe Black should be okay everywhere, but he should be ready to play any type of position and, in certain cases, be armed with the theoretical improvements mentioned in these pages.

Chapter 9

3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6



6.cxd5, 6.♘h4 and 6.♘e5

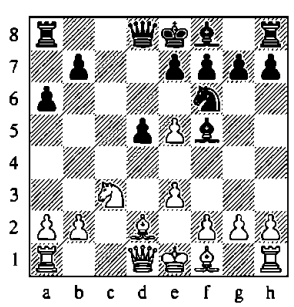
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♘f3

5...♗f5

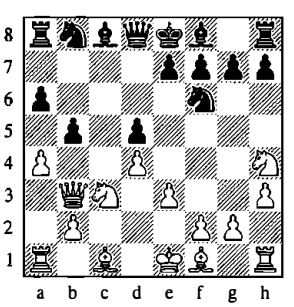
A) 6.cxd5 cxd5 **90**
A1) 7.♕b3 **90**
A2) 7.♘e5 **91**
B) 6.♘h4 ♗g4 **93**
B1) 7.♕c2 **93**
B2) 7.♕b3 **94**
C) 6.♘e5 ♘bd7! 7.♕b3 ♕c7! **95**
C1) 8.♘xd7 **96**
C2) 8.cxd5 ♘xe5 9.dxe5 ♘xd5 **97**
C21) 10.♗c4 **97**
C22) 10.♘xd5 **98**

A2) after 9.dxe5



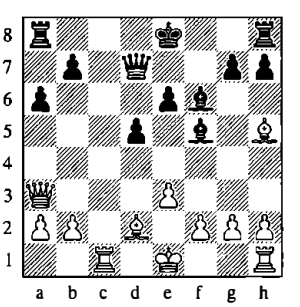
9...♘d7!N

B2) after 10.a4



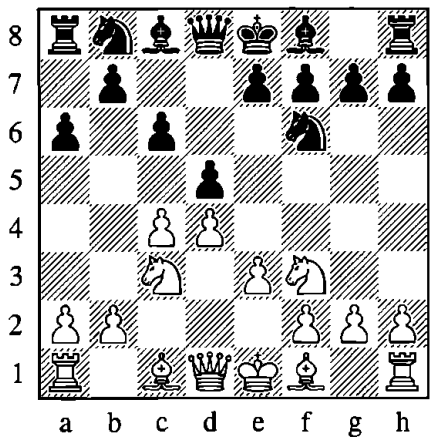
10...b4!N

C22) after 19.♗h5†!?



19...♗g6!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♘f3



This is the main move for White.

5...♗f5

5...b5 is the thematic continuation for the Chebanenko Slav, whereas the text move introduces a hybrid system in which Black keeps the advance of the b-pawn in reserve. The same position may also be reached via the move order 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5 5.♘c3 a6, so the present position may be considered a cornerstone of our repertoire against White's systems with an early e2-e3.

Black's system was tested a few times by Morozevich and Vallejo Pons in the early 2000s, but only became fashionable around the time that Carlsen included it in his repertoire in 2007. Nowadays it has been established as a major system and is often seen in games between strong grandmasters.

White has tried a variety of moves, and it is not easy to classify them thematically. I decided to start by analysing **A) 6.cxd5**, **B) 6.♘h4** and **C) 6.♘e5** in the present chapter.

The three bishop moves 6.♗d2, 6.♗e2 and 6.♗d3 will be considered in the next chapter. The main line of 6.♕b3 will be covered in Chapter 11.

6.b3

This is hardly the most challenging move order. Black can either transpose to a later variation or go for an independent possibility.

6...e6 7.♗e2 ♗b4!?

7...♘bd7 8.0–0 h6 is covered later under the move order 6.♗e2 h6! 7.0–0 e6 8.b3 ♘bd7 as covered in variation B2 of Chapter 10 on page 106.

8.♗d2

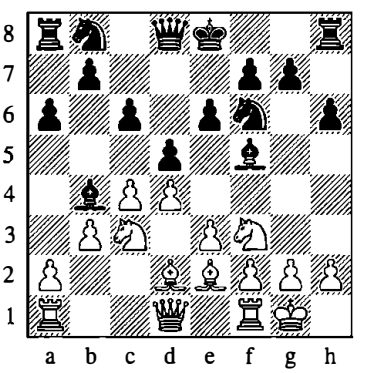
8.♗b2? loses a pawn after 8...♕a5 9.♖c1 ♕xa2.

8...h6

Thematic prophylaxis against ♘h4.

9.0–0

This position was reached in Pinter – R. Smith, Elista (ol) 1998, and a few other games. Here I would recommend:



9...♗e7!?N

So far 9...♗d6 is the only move to have been tested, but I prefer not to encourage 10.c5!?N ♗c7 11.b4 followed by an advance of White's queenside pawns.

Black can also consider 9...0–0!?N based on the fact that 10.♘xd5!? can be met by 10...♘xd5 11.cxd5 ♗xd2 12.♕xd2 exd5 with equality.

10.♘e5

White can try other moves, but Black has a healthy and solid position regardless.

10...♘bd7 11.f4 ♘e4 12.♘xe4 ♗xe4

Black is fine.

A) 6.cxd5 cxd5

White has tried several options from this position, but the only ones worth considering in detail are **A1) 7.♕b3** and **A2) 7.♘e5**.

A1) 7.♕b3 ♘c6!

Black can transpose to variation C of Chapter 11 with 7...♖a7 but, thanks to the early exchange on d5, he has the more dynamic possibility of sacrificing the b-pawn.

8.♕xb7

This is obviously the critical continuation.

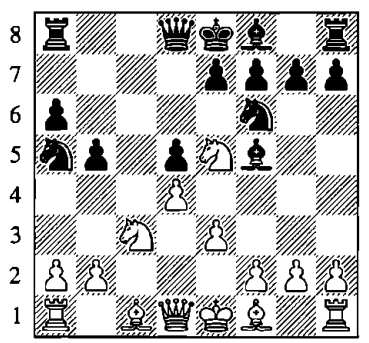
White can also try:

8.♘e5 ♘a5

It could be interesting to check the computer's suggestion of 8...♖b8!?.

9.♕a4† b5 10.♕d1

The piece sacrifice does not work: 10.♘xb5? axb5 11.♗xb5† ♗d7 12.♘xd7 ♘xd7 13.♗d2 (The key point is that after 13.b4 Black has 13...♘c6!.) Now in Ardiansyah – Stefanova, Surabaya 2002, Black could have played 13...e6!N with an obvious advantage.

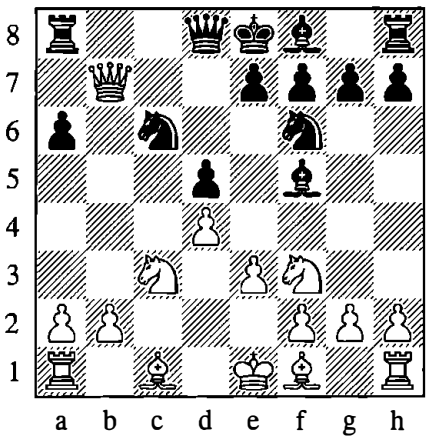


10...♖c8!N

10...g6 is the only move to have been played so far, but I favour the rook move for reasons that will soon become clear.

11.g4 ♗e6 12.♗g2 ♘c4! 13.♘xc4 dxc4⇄

Black has a perfectly playable position.



8...♘a5 9.♕b4 ♗d7!

The key move, forcing White to worry about his queen.

10.♘a4

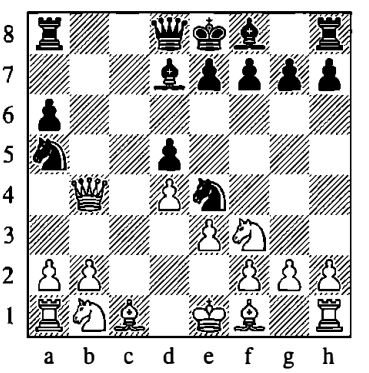
White has also tried:

10.♘b1

Now in Nitish – Rakesh, Nagpur 2012, Black missed the strongest continuation.

10...♘e4!N

Renewing the threat of ...e5. Here I examined a remarkable line.

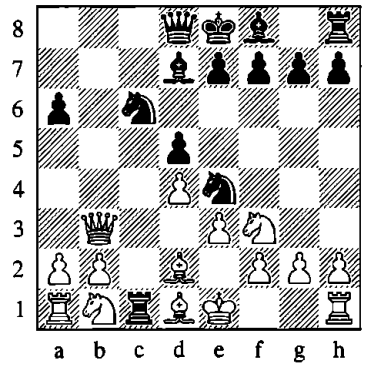


11.♗d2 ♖c8! 12.♗e2 ♖c1†! 13.♗d1

If 13.♗xc1 e6∓ the white queen is trapped!

13...♘c6 14.♕b3

After 14.♕b7 ♖xd1† 15.♔xd1 ♘xf2† 16.♔e2 ♘xh1 17.♘c3 e6 18.♖xh1 ♗d6 19.♕xa6 0–0∞ Black has plenty of play for the pawn.



14...♘xd2!?

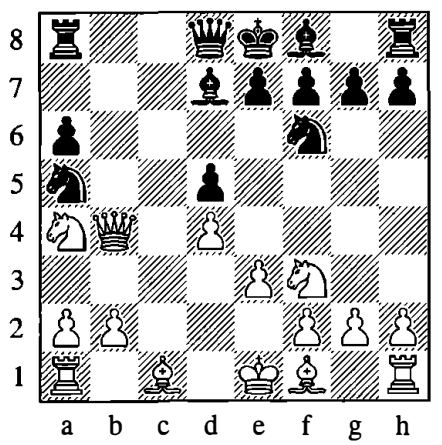
14...♘a5= forces a repetition if Black wants it.

15.♘fxd2

After 15.♔xd2 ♘a5 16.♕d3 ♖c7 Black has more than enough for the pawn.

15...♘a5 16.♕a3 e5 17.b4 ♖xd1† 18.♔xd1 ♘c6

Black has a powerful initiative for the sacrificed material.



10...e5N

Surprisingly, in the game Lechtynsky – Oresky, Czech Republic 2011, Black rejected this obvious move in favour of the less active 10...e6?!.

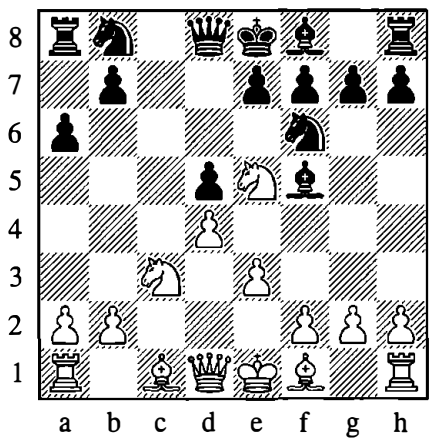
11.♘c5 ♘c6 12.♕a4

Also after 12.♕d2 ♘e4 13.♕d1 ♗xc5 14.dxc5 ♕a5†∓ Black is doing well.

12...♗xc5 13.dxc5 ♖b8!⩱

Black has fine compensation.

A2) 7.♘e5



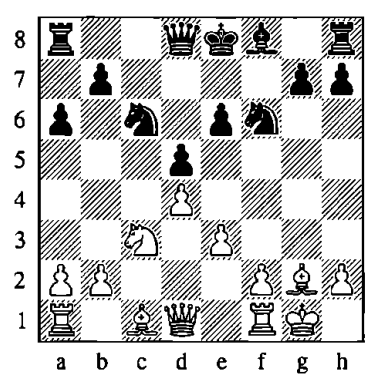
7...♘c6!

Once again, Black utilizes the c6-square which was made available by the early exchange on d5. Other moves do not promise Black equality.

8.♗d2

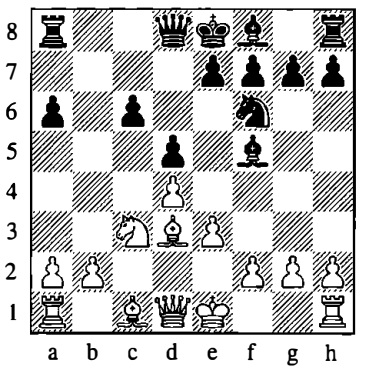
White has scored a couple of convincing wins with this move, so it will be our main line. 8.♕b3 transposes to the note to White's 8th move in variation A1 above.

8.g4 is not as threatening as it may appear. 8...♘xe5 9.gxf5 ♘c6! 10.♗g2 e6 11.fxe6 fxe6 12.0–0 Now in Javakhishvili – Kononenko, Chisinau 2005, Black should have played:



12...♗d6N 13.f4 0–0 with a good position.

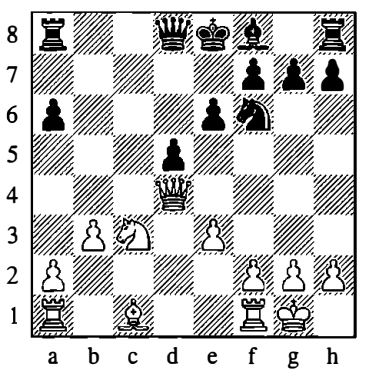
8.♘xc6 bxc6 9.♗d3



9...♗xd3

I would be tempted to try 9...e6!?N when 10.♗xf5 exf5 reaches a double-edged situation. Black has some weaknesses on the queenside, but in return he has good chances to develop play on the kingside.

10.♕xd3 e6 11.0–0 c5 12.b3 cxd4 13.♕xd4



13...♗d6!N

Black played 13...♗e7 and equalized slowly in Wu Shaobin – P.H. Nielsen, Calvia (ol) 2004, but the text move is more natural and active.

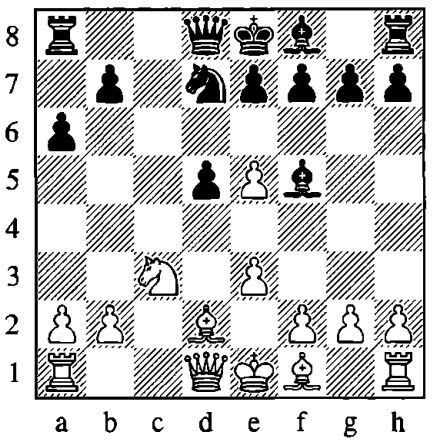
14.♗b2 0–0 15.♖ac1 ♕b8

Black has a healthy and reliable position.

8...♘xe5 9.dxe5 ♘d7!N

A necessary improvement.

The only game saw: 9...♘e4 10.♘xe4 ♗xe4 (After 10...dxe4 11.♕b3 ♕d7 12.♖c1 White keeps long-term pressure.) 11.e6! By sacrificing his central pawn White obstructs Black's kingside development for several moves. 11...fxe6 12.♗c3 ♖c8 13.♗d3 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 White was considerably better in Khruschiov – Looshnikov, Chelyabinsk 2008.



10.♘xd5 e6 11.♘f4 ♘xe5 12.♗c3 ♗d6

Black is doing fine. The following line seems to be White's only chance to cause problems, but it is nothing serious.

13.e4!?

13.♕d4 ♕e7 14.e4 ♗g6 15.♗e2 f6 is equal.

13...♗g4

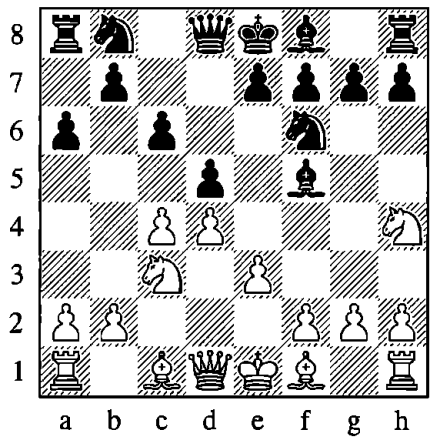
13...♗xe4 14.♕d4 ♗c6 15.♖d1 ♗c7 16.♕xe5 ♕xd1† 17.♔xd1 ♗xe5 18.♗xe5 gives White an edge in the endgame.

13...♗g6!? could be considered, but the text move works just fine.

14.♕d4 f6 15.f3 ♘c6 16.♕e3 e5 17.♘d5 ♗e6 18.♗c4 0–0

The position is balanced. It is worth adding that the ...♗b8-a7 manoeuvre is a useful resource for Black, especially if White opts for short castling.

B) 6.♘h4



This is a thematic move in all kinds of positions where Black develops his bishop to f5.

6...♗g4

I am sure that 6...♗c8 is a good equalizing move, but I prefer to recommend the option that does not allow White to repeat the position with 7.♘f3.

Here White's main options are **B1) 7.♕c2** and **B2) 7.♕b3**.

Less dangerous is:

7.f3 ♗c8

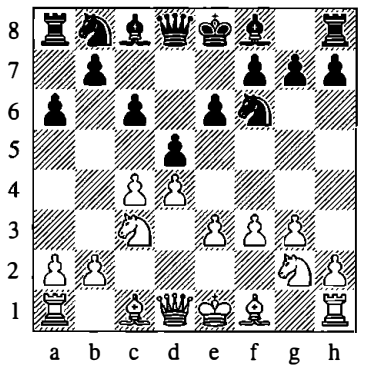
Now the bishop retreat is more attractive, as the knight looks silly on h4.

8.g3

I also checked the natural 8.e4N, when the thematic 8...dxe4 9.fxe4 e5! 10.dxe5 ♕xd1† 11.♔xd1 ♘g4 12.♔c2 ♘xe5 reaches a comfortable position for Black.

8...e6 9.♘g2

Cylwik – Przybyl, Bialystok 2010. Just about any normal move would be fine for Black, but I prefer to challenge the centre as follows:



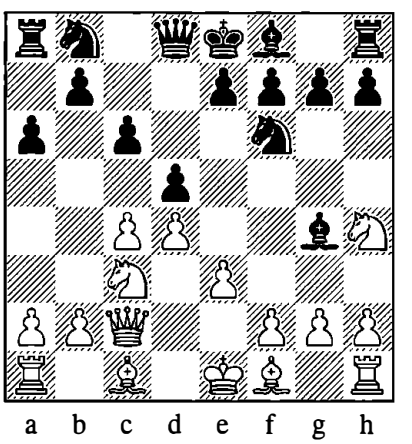
9...dxc4N

The immediate 9...c5N is equally good.

10.♗xc4 c5

Black is at least equal in view of the misplaced knight on g2.

B1) 7.♕c2



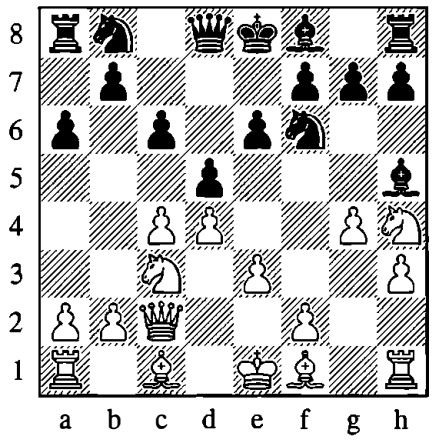
7...e6

I do not like the closed type of position that arose after 7...b5 8.h3 ♗e6 9.c5!± in Azmaiparashvili – Postny, Kallithea 2008.

8.h3 ♗h5 9.g4

Chasing the bishop is consistent.

I also considered 9.c5N ♘bd7 (9...b6!? 10.cxb6 ♘fd7! 11.♘f3 ♘xb6 also deserves attention) 10.g4 ♘g8!? with interesting play for Black.



9...♘fd7!

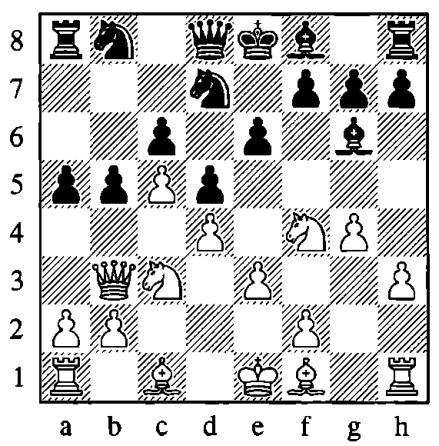
A typical device for such positions.

10.♘g2 ♗g6 11.♕b3 b5 12.c5 a5!

It is important to play this before White can apply pressure on the queenside with a2-a4.

13.♘f4

This position arose in Shankland – Gareev, Las Vegas 2012, when Black opted for the positionally dubious 13...b4. Instead I propose:



13...♘a6N

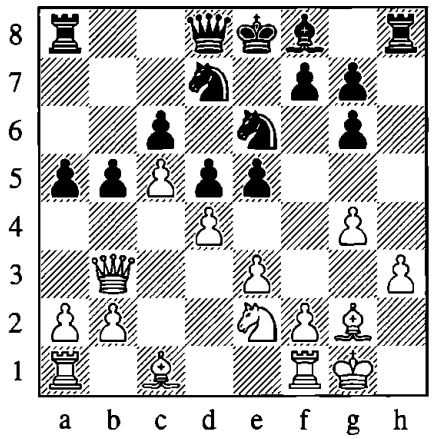
This natural move leads to a normal game for Black, although it is worth checking some tactical points as shown below.

14.♗g2 e5! 15.♘xg6 hxg6 16.0–0

16.a4 b4 17.♘xd5 is a thematic idea that should be considered, but after 17...♗xc5! Black is doing well.

16...♘c7 17.♘e2 ♘e6

It is also worth considering 17...e4 18.f3 exf3 19.♖xf3 ♘f6 with double-edged play.



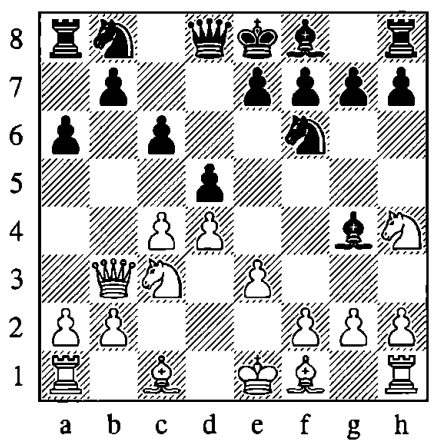
18.e4!?

18.f4 e4 looks pretty drawish, but only Black can have any ideas on the kingside.

18...dxe4 19.♗xe4 ♖c8

The position is unclear but roughly equal.

B2) 7.♕b3



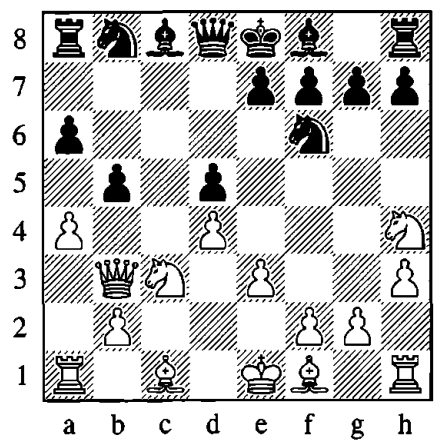
This looks like the most challenging, but in fact it does not pose many problems.

7...b5 8.cxd5

8.c5?! is not a realistic option for White any more, as after 8...e5! 9.h3 ♗e6 the bishop retreats to an ideal square and Black stands better.

8...cxd5 9.h3 ♗c8 10.a4

This position was reached in Mchedlishvili – Gustafsson, Kallithea 2003. Here Black missed a great opportunity for a thematic pawn sacrifice.



10...b4!N 11.♕xb4

Declining the offer does not make much sense for White, as after 11.♘e2 ♘c6 his pieces are badly misplaced.

11...e5 12.♕b3 e4!

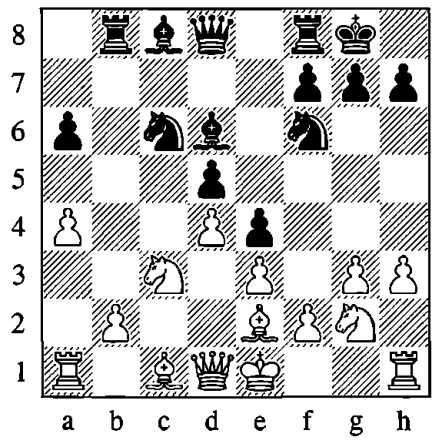
Underlining the problem of the misplaced knight. A few brief lines are enough to demonstrate that Black is more than okay.

13.g3

After 13.g4 ♘c6 14.♘g2 ♖b8 15.♕d1 ♘b4 16.♗e2 ♗d6 Black has fantastic compensation.

13...♘c6 14.♘g2 ♗d6 15.♗e2 ♖b8 16.♕d1 0–0

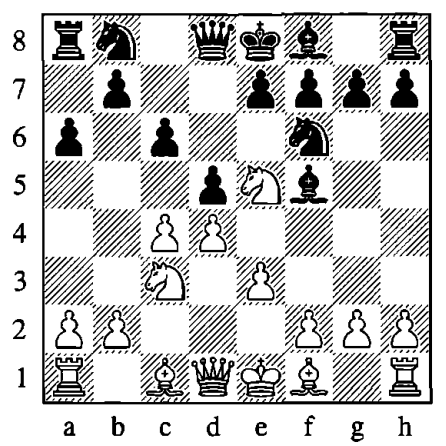
White's extra pawn is not doing much, and his kingside weaknesses make his life difficult. The continuation might be:



17.♘f4 ♖e8 18.h4 ♗xf4 19.gxf4 ♘b4

Black has the advantage.

C) 6.♘e5



6...♘bd7!

Black has to challenge the knight immediately, otherwise it will help White to create a lot of threats. See the following brief lines:

6...e6 7.g4! ♗g6 8.h4 and White has the initiative.

6...h6 7.♕b3 ♖a7 8.cxd5 cxd5 9.♗d2 e6 10.♖c1 ♘bd7 11.♗b5! and White went on to win in Ponomariov – Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2007.

7.♕b3

This is the main choice, but it is also important to mention:

7.g4?!

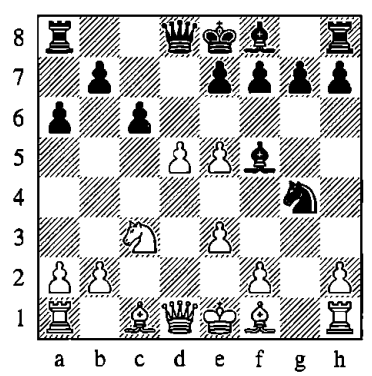
This tempting but incorrect move has been played by the normally super-solid Peter Leko. There cannot have been many games in Peter's career in which he committed a mistake as early as move seven with the white pieces.

7...♘xe5 8.dxe5

Perhaps the lesser evil is 8.gxf5 ♘xc4 9.e4 when White has some compensation for a pawn, although Black is still better after 9...g6 10.e5 ♘h5.

8...♘xg4 9.cxd5

Now in Leko – Carlsen, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2007, Black could have obtained some advantage with:



9...cxd5!N

I found nothing better than the following line for White.

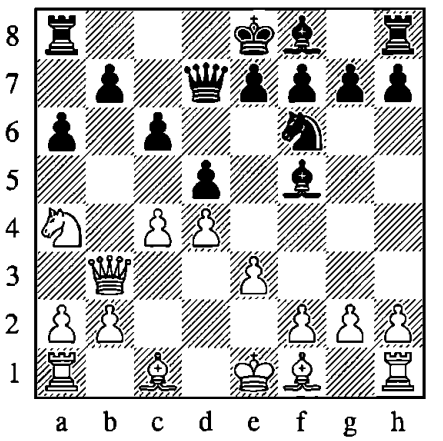
10.♕a4† ♗d7 11.♕d4 f6 12.exf6 ♘xf6 13.♘xd5 ♕a5† 14.♘c3 ♖d8!

Black is clearly better.

7...♕c7!

No other move is good enough. Now White has tried both **C1) 8.♘xd7** and **C2) 8.cxd5**.

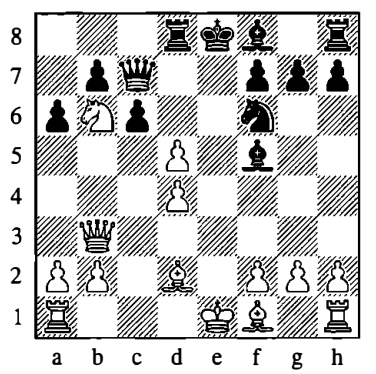
C1) 8.♘xd7 ♕xd7 9.♘a4



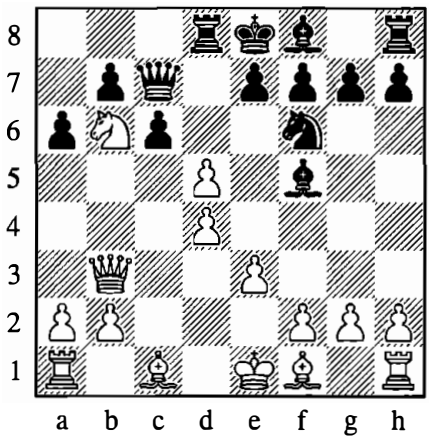
Aiming for a quick queenside offensive, but Black can neutralize it.

9...♕c7 10.♘b6 ♖d8 11.cxd5

11.♗d2 is risky. In Fridman – Kononenko, Port Erin 2005, Black missed a chance to strike in the centre with: 11...e5!N 12.cxd5 (In the event of 12.dxe5? ♘e4 13.♗a5 d4! White's position collapses.) 12...exd4 13.exd4



13...♗d6! 14.♗e2 0–0 15.♘c4 (15.dxc6?! ♖fe8 16.♗e3 ♗e4! leads to a big advantage for Black.) 15...♘xd5 16.♘xd6 ♕xd6∓ White should be okay after castling, but Black still has the more pleasant position playing against the isolated pawn.



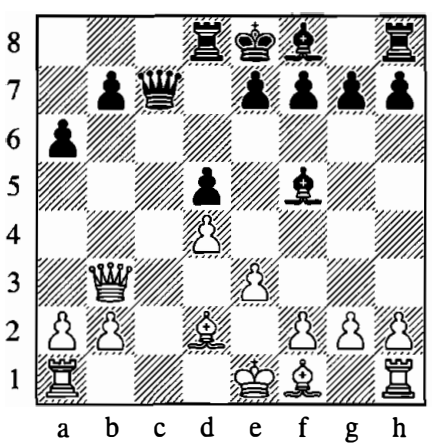
11...♘xd5!N

This is more accurate than: 11...cxd5 12.♕a4† ♗d7 13.♘xd7 ♕xd7 (13...♖xd7N avoids the queen exchange, but after 14.♗d2 e6 15.♖c1 ♕b8 16.♗d3 ♗d6 17.g3 White retains a slight edge.) 14.♕xd7† ♔xd7 15.♗d3 e6 16.♗d2 ♗d6 17.f3 Vera – Arencibia, Santa Clara 2006. Although the endgame is tenable for Black, White's bishop pair enables him to press for a long time with little risk.

12.♘xd5

White had better not refrain from the knight exchange, as after 12.♘c4?! e5! 13.♘xe5 ♗b4† 14.♗d2 ♗xd2† 15.♔xd2 c5! Black seizes the initiative.

12...cxd5 13.♗d2



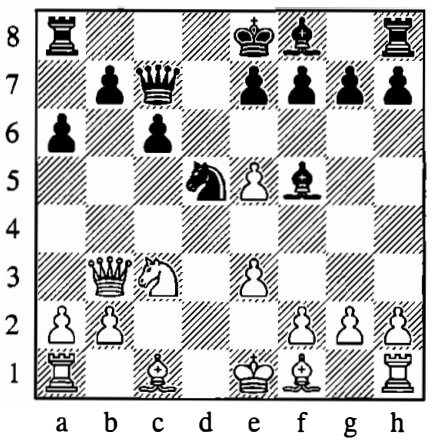
13...♖d6!

This accurate move enables Black to neutralize White's ideas on the c-file. The game might continue:

14.♖c1 ♖c6 15.♕a4 ♗d7

With simple equality.

C2) 8.cxd5 ♘xe5 9.dxe5 ♘xd5



Now **C21) 10.♗c4** is an interesting move which is worth considering, but most games have continued with **C22) 10.♘xd5**.

C21) 10.♗c4 e6

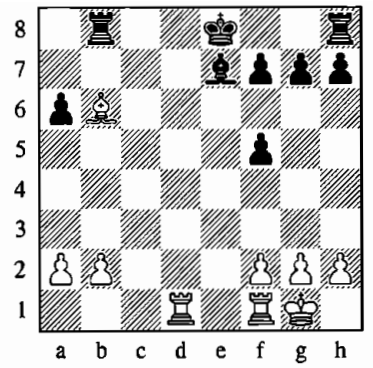
I also considered 10...0–0–0 but unfortunately it runs into trouble after 11.♗xd5 cxd5 12.e4! dxe4 (12...♕xe5 13.0–0 is dangerous) 13.♗e3 ♖d3 14.0–0 e6 15.♖ac1 ♔b8 16.♕a4 when White is better.

11.e4!

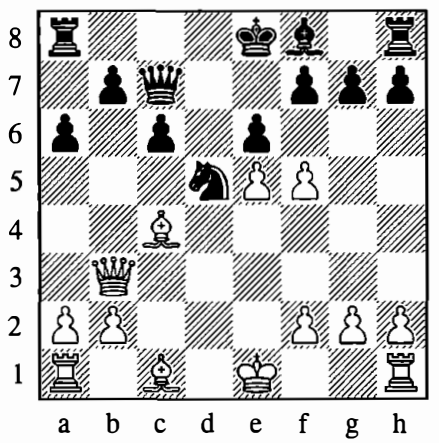
This is the main point behind White's play.

11...♘xc3 12.exf5 ♘d5

12...♕xe5† leads by force to the following endgame: 13.♗e3 ♘d5 14.♗xd5 ♕xd5 15.♕xb7 c5 16.♕b6 exf5 17.0–0 ♗e7 18.♖ad1 ♕e6 19.♗xc5 ♕xb6 20.♗xb6 ♖b8



I am pretty sure that Black should be able to hold, but it will not be much fun playing for a draw with no hope of winning.



13.fxe6

It is important to mention:

13.♗xd5N ♕a5†!

13...♕xe5† 14.♗e3 ♕xd5 transposes to the previous note with 12...♕xe5†.

14.♗d2

In the event of 14.♔e2 ♕xd5 15.♕xd5 cxd5 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.♗e3 ♔d7 Black equalizes comfortably.

14...♕xd5 15.♕xb7

15.♕xd5!? exd5 is roughly equal, although the mutual pawn majorities mean that any result is possible. However, please note that 15...cxd5? is a mistake, as after 16.♖c1 ♔d7 17.fxe6† fxe6 18.♗a5 ♖c8 19.♖xc8 ♔xc8 20.♔e2 followed by ♖c1(†) Black is unable to neutralize White's play along the c-file.

15...♕e4† 16.♔f1

Worse is 16.♗e3? ♗b4† 17.♔f1 0–0 when Black has the initiative.

16...♖d8 17.♗a5 ♕d3† 18.♔e1 ♕e4†=

Neither side can avoid the repetition.

13...♕xe5† 14.♗e3

14.♔f1?! is risky, and after 14...0–0–0 15.exf7 ♗c5 Black's initiative is dangerous.

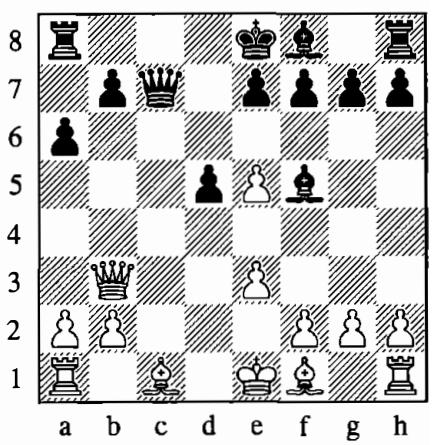
14...0–0–0

It is worth considering 14...fxe6N. A logical continuation is 15.♗xd5 cxd5 16.♕xb7 ♖b8 17.♕c6† ♔f7 18.0–0 ♗e7 19.b3 ♕d6 with a balanced position.

15.♗xd5 ♕xd5 16.♕xd5 ♖xd5 17.exf7 ♗e7=

All these moves were played in Spiess – Czaeczine, Berlin 2003. Black is poised to play ...♖f8 and pick up the f7-pawn, resulting in an equal endgame, although plenty of play remains.

C22) 10.♘xd5 cxd5



11.♗d2 e6

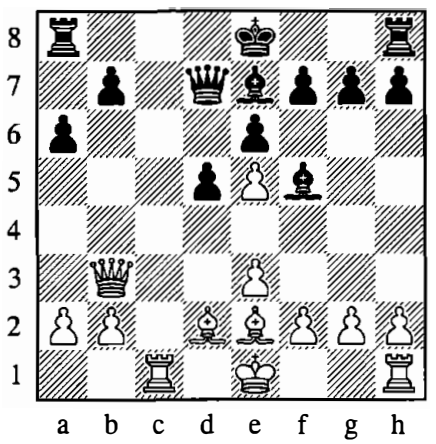
11...♕xe5?! is too risky in view of 12.♖c1! when Black faces problems completing his development.

12.♖c1 ♕d7 13.♗e2

13.♗d3 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 ♗e7 is equal.

13.♕b6 ♖c8 does not give White anything.

13...♗e7



14.♕b6

In the event of 14.♗b4 0–0 15.0–0 ♗xb4 16.♕xb4 ♖ac8 17.♕d6 ♕a4 the position is again just equal.

14...♗d8 15.♕b4 ♗e7

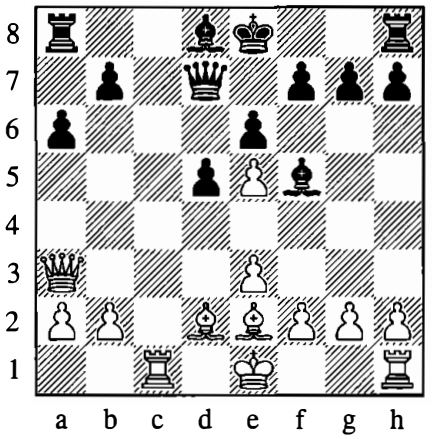
Unfortunately, it is not a good idea for Black to avoid the repetition with 15...f6 16.exf6 ♗xf6, as in Nilssen – Amonatov, Turin (ol) 2006, as after 17.0–0N White is better.

16.♕a5 ♗d8

16...♖c8? is a mistake, as after 17.♖xc8† ♕xc8 18.0–0 Black does not have a convenient way to deal with White's threats, as demonstrated by the following encounter. 18...♗d8 19.♕a3 f6 20.♖c1 ♕d7 21.exf6 gxf6 Now in Gelfand – Svidler, Monte Carlo (blind-rapid) 2006, White could have obtained a large advantage with the remarkable manoeuvre: 22.♗d1! ♔f7 23.♗a4 b5 24.♗d1! ♕b7 25.♕d6±

17.♕a3

17.♕b4= repeats the position.



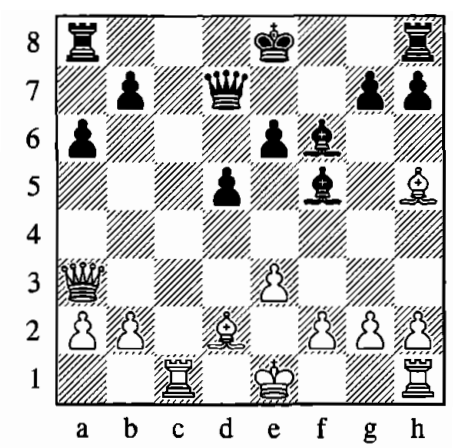
17...f6!

This time Black should avoid returning with the bishop, as 17...♗e7 runs into the annoying 18.♗b4!. Fortunately, when we compare the present position with the earlier note with 15...f6, we can observe that the white queen stands on the slightly inferior a3-square.

18.exf6 ♗xf6 19.♗h5†!?

After 19.0–0 ♔f7 Black is okay.

This position occurred in the recent game Rasmussen – S.B. Hansen, Helsingor 2013. At this point, instead of weakening his dark squares with 19...g6, Black should prefer:



19...♗g6!N 20.♗xg6† hxg6 21.0–0 ♔f7

Black has a solid position; the doubled g-pawns are not a serious problem and the open h-file might prove useful in the future.

Conclusion

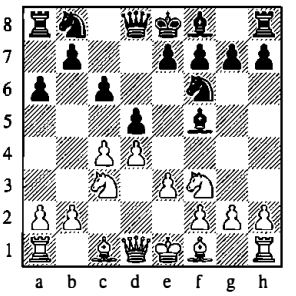
From the tabiya that occurs after 5...♗f5, the immediate 6.cxd5 cxd5 is not too dangerous as it allows the black knight to develop comfortably on c6 on the next move, even if White attacks the b7-pawn. This leaves the two knight moves as the more challenging attempts.

After 6.♘h4 ♗g4, 7.♕c2 is the more promising choice for White, leading to a complex position with mutual chances. Instead 7.♕b3 appears more active, but it could easily backfire after the strong pawn sacrifice that I recommend.

The main line of the chapter is 6.♘e5 ♘bd7! 7.♕b3 ♕c7!. My analysis indicates that Black should equalize, but there are some nuances that should be studied closely, especially after the critical variation C2 with 8.cxd5.



3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6



6.♗d2, 6.♗e2 and 6.♗d3

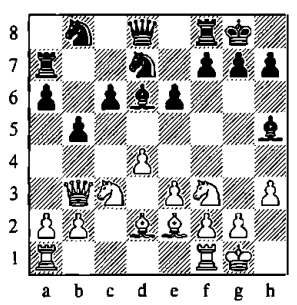
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♘f3

5...♗f5

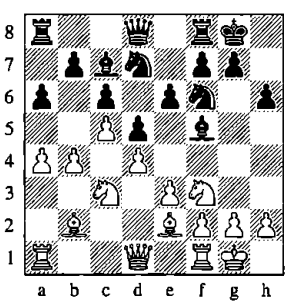
A) 6.♗d2 e6 7.♘h4 ♗g4 **102**
A1) 8.♕c2 **102**
A2) 8.♕b3 **103**
B) 6.♗e2 h6! **104**
B1) 7.♕b3 **105**
B2) 7.0–0 **106**
B3) 7.cxd5 **107**
C) 6.♗d3 ♗g6!? 7.0–0 e6 **108**
C1) 8.♘e5 **109**
C2) 8.b3 **110**
C3) 8.♗xg6 **112**

A1) after 15.♕b3



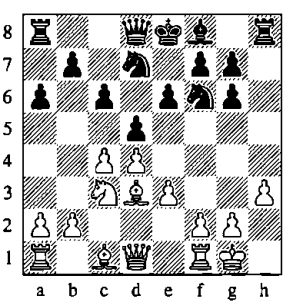
15...♗g6!N

B2) after 12.a4



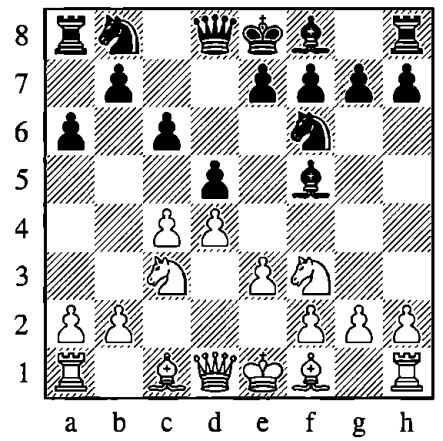
12...b6!N

C1) after 10.h3



10...♗e7N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♘f3 ♗f5



Beginning with the same tabiya as in the previous chapter, here we will move on to consider three bishop moves: **A) 6.♗d2**, **B) 6.♗e2** and **C) 6.♗d3**. The first two moves may appear tame, but White's idea is to make a waiting move in order to meet ...e6 with ♘h4.

A) 6.♗d2 e6 7.♘h4

White's plan is not without venom and has been chosen by some extremely strong players.

7...♗g4

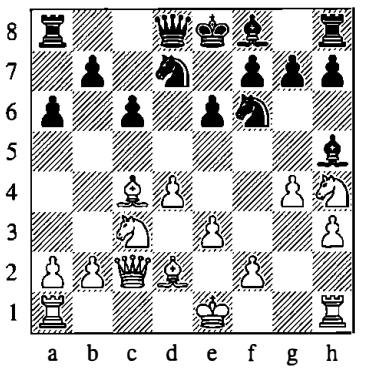
Other bishop moves are obviously not in the spirit of our chosen system. From this position it is worth checking **A1) 8.♕c2**, but the most popular move by far has been **A2) 8.♕b3**.

8.f3?! does not make much sense as the knight on h4 is misplaced. 8...♗h5 9.g3 Now in Ladron de Guevara – Larranaga Aldalur, Donostia 2008, the accurate 9...dxc4!N 10.♗xc4 c5 would have given Black the more pleasant game.

A1) 8.♕c2 ♗h5

This was played in the only game appearing in the database.

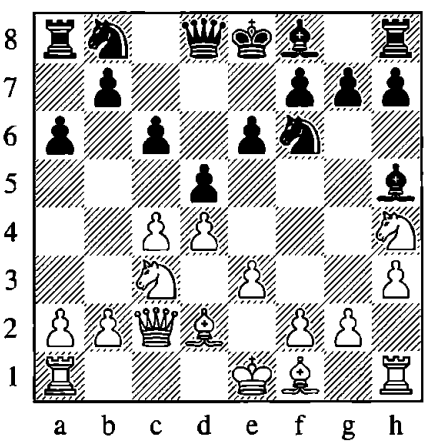
Alternatively I can propose: 8...dxc4N 9.♗xc4 (9.h3 ♗h5 10.g4 ♘d5! will lead to the same position) 9...♘bd7 10.h3 ♗h5 11.g4



11...♘d5! 12.gxh5 ♕xh4 13.0–0–0 ♕xh5 The position is double-edged; White's bishop pair and development advantage give him some compensation for the pawn, but Black is solid and has no weaknesses.

9.h3

I also considered 9.c5N ♘bd7 10.h3 ♘e4 (10...e5?! 11.g4±) 11.♘xe4 ♕xh4 12.♘g3 ♗g6 and Black is comfortable.



9...♘fd7!?

Black has other playable moves, but it is logical to drive the knight away before g2-g4 comes.

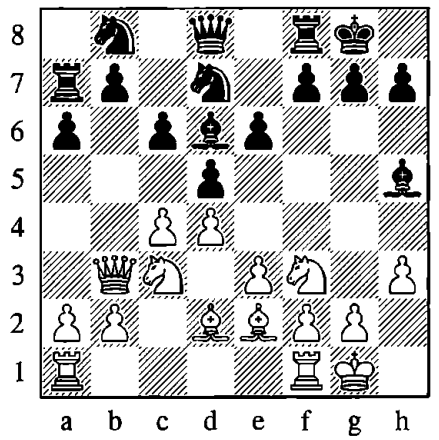
10.♘f3 ♗d6

This is slightly provocative. 10...♗e7N is a solid alternative.

11.♕b3

The critical continuation looks to be 11.c5N ♗c7 12.e4 0–0. The position is double-edged, and could become extremely complicated, for instance after 13.♗d3 ♗xf3 14.gxf3 e5!? (14...♕f6 is another idea).

11...♖a7 12.♗e2 0–0 13.0–0

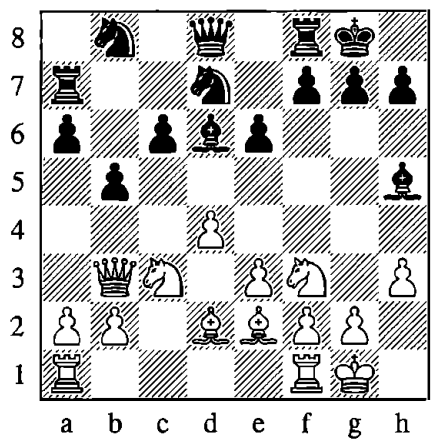


13...dxc4!

With this typical release of the central tension Black obtains a good game.

14.♕xc4 b5 15.♕b3

In this position I found a useful improvement.



15...♗g6!N

By taking control over the e4-square, Black prevents a possible ♘e4.

After the more obvious 15...c5 16.a4! cxd4 17.exd4 a draw was agreed in Grigoriants – Riazantsev, Moscow 2006, but White has some pressure and could have played on.

16.a4

Against most other moves Black can play 16...c5 with a good game.

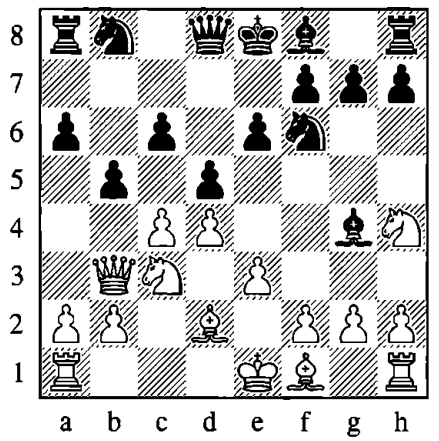
16...b4 17.♘a2 c5!?

An interesting pawn sacrifice. 17...a5 is a solid alternative.

18.dxc5 ♘xc5 19.♕xb4 ♘c6 20.♕c4 ♗e4!

Black has excellent compensation.

A2) 8.♕b3 b5



Black makes good use of the earlier ...a6 move.

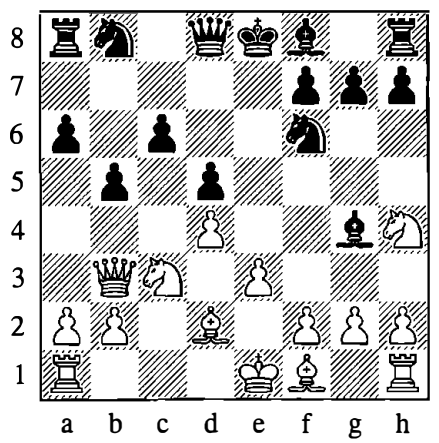
9.cxd5

An inferior option is 9.cxb5?! axb5!N when Black has a healthy pawn structure and a good game, for instance: 10.h3 ♗h5 11.g4 ♘fd7!? (Black also has no problems after 11...♗g6 12.♘xg6 hxg6) 12.gxh5 ♕xh4 Black's chances are higher.

9...exd5!

Usually this pawn structure would be unacceptable for Black; the c6-pawn is a long-term target, and if he manages to carry out the ...c5 advance the d5-pawn will become isolated and weak. The present position is an exception, as White's queen on b3 and knight on h4 are poorly placed, and Black will obtain a lot of activity in the ensuing IQP position.

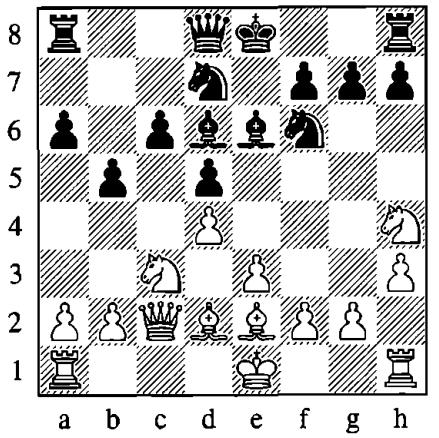
9...cxd5 is less convincing due to: 10.h3 ♗h5 11.g4 ♗g6 (11...♘fd7?! runs into 12.♘xd5! exd5 13.♕xd5 ♖a7 14.♕xh5 g6 15.♘xg6 fxg6 16.♕d5 with a strong initiative for White, Bercys – Ramirez Alvarez, Richardson 2010.) 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.g5 ♘fd7 14.♖c1 White stood better in Polak – Jirka, Prague 2007.



10.♘f3

10.♕c2 occurred in Shabalov – Ramirez, Richardson 2011. A logical continuation is 10...♘bd7N (the game continuation of 10...♗b4 does not make any sense to me) 11.h3 ♗e6 12.♘f3 c5 13.dxc5 ♗xc5 when Black's activity fully compensates for the isolated pawn.

10...♘bd7 11.♗e2 ♗d6 12.h3 ♗f5! 13.♘h4 ♗e6 14.♕c2



14...g6

A human move, but it is also possible to ignore the knight with 14...0–0!?N 15.♘f5 ♗c7 when Black has the better game.

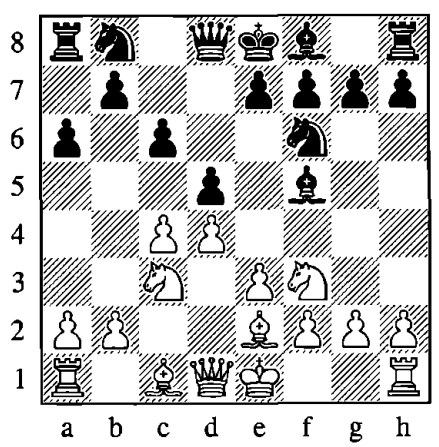
15.♗d3?!

A strange decision, but even after the better 15.0–0 c5 Black has a great game.

15...c5 16.dxc5 ♘xc5∓

Black obtained a superb game in Kosic – Gustafsson, Istanbul (ol) 2012.

B) 6.♗e2



6...h6!

I am not a big fan of the positions where Black allows his light-squared bishop to be

exchanged for an enemy knight, as occurs after 6...e6 7.♘h4 (7.♘e5!? intending g2-g4 is also quite challenging).

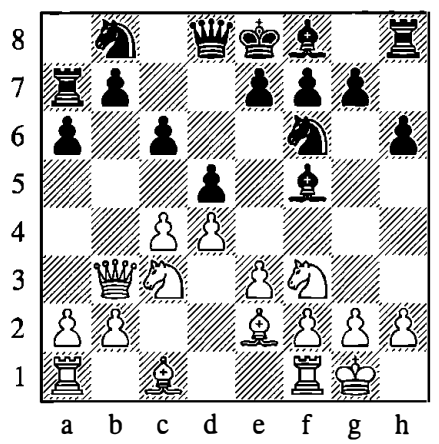
The present variation is one of only a few in which Black has time for the prophylactic move with the h-pawn. White has three main replies: **B1) 7.♕b3**, **B2) 7.0–0** and **B3) 7.cxd5**.

B1) 7.♕b3 ♖a7 8.0–0

This line is similar to the 6.♕b3 ♖a7 variation analysed in Chapter 11, and transpositions may easily occur. Here are a few such examples:

8.a4 e6 9.a5 ♘bd7 10.0–0 ♗d6 – see 6.♕b3 ♖a7 7.a4 e6 8.a5 ♘bd7 9.♗e2 ♗d6 10.0–0 h6 as covered on page 128.

8.cxd5 cxd5 9.♗d2 (9.♘e5 e6 – see 6.♕b3 ♖a7 7.cxd5 cxd5 8.♘e5 e6 9.♗e2 h6! on page 124) 9...e6 10.0–0 (10.♘e5 is covered in Chapter 11 – see 6.♕b3 ♖a7 7.cxd5 cxd5 8.♘e5 e6 9.♗e2 h6! 10.♗d2 on page 124.) 10...♘c6 This position is covered in variation B3 of the present chapter – see page 107.



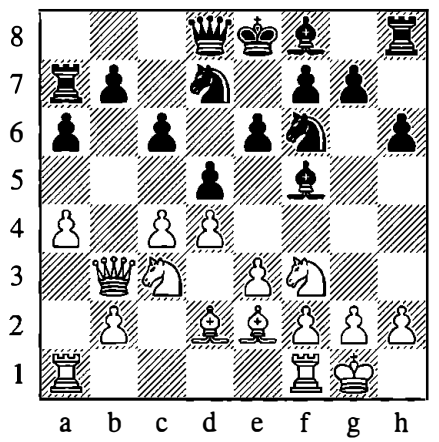
8...e6 9.♗d2 ♘bd7

This is the most natural developing move, but it is also worth considering 9...dxc4!?N 10.♗xc4 b5 11.♗e2 ♘bd7.

10.a4

10.♖fc1 ♗d6 (10...♗e7!? also makes sense) 11.a4 occurred in Ragger – V. Popov, Warsaw (rapid) 2012, and here 11...a5!N would have given Black a great position, just as in the main line below.

The present position was reached in Bukavshin – V. Popov, Warsaw (blitz) 2012. The following recommendation is not only a novelty, but an unusual concept which I have rarely seen in any of the existing games in this branch of Slav theory.



10...a5!N

We will see in Chapter 11 that Black can tolerate the pawn on a5 in such positions, but why allow it at all when we do not have to? Black has a comfortable position and it is not easy to suggest a constructive plan for White.

11.c5?!

If there were a way to punish Black's last move, it would be by blocking the queenside. However, it turns out that the second player is well equipped to meet this plan, so objectively White should play less ambitiously and settle for (at best) equality.

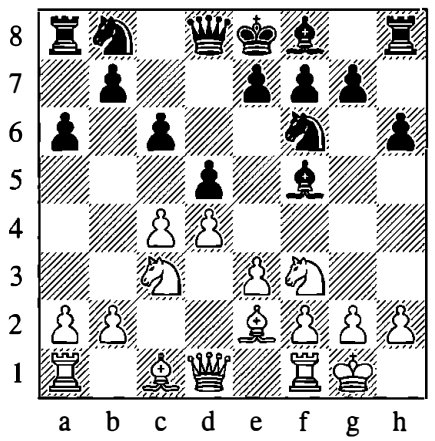
11...♗e7

11...b6?! is premature in view of 12.♗b5! with complications.

12.♖fc1 0–0 13.♕d1 b6 14.cxb6 ♕xb6

Black enjoys a clear positional edge.

B2) 7.0–0



This time White goes for simple development. His set-up looks innocent, but I would like to mention a few ways in which the game could become unbalanced.

7...e6 8.b3 ♘bd7 9.♗b2 ♗d6

9...♗e7 is a decent but less active alternative.

10.c5

The main alternative is:

10.♗d3 0–0!?

Exchanging on d3 is fine of course, but it could be useful to create some imbalance in the pawn structure.

11.♗xf5

11.♖e1 can be met by 11...♘e4 12.♕c2 ♘df6 when Black prevented e3-e4 and obtained a good position in Hillmann – Kalkhof, Germany 2012.

11...exf5 12.♕d3 g6 13.cxd5

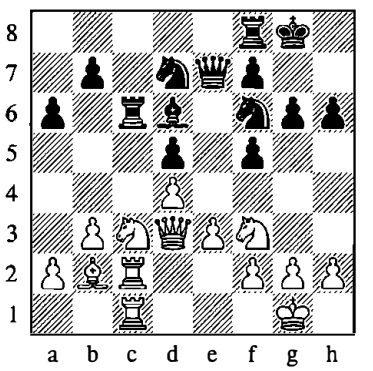
Opening the c-file seems like the only logical plan for White.

13...cxd5 14.♖ac1

Now in Oussedik – Fiala, Plzen 2011, Black should have continued:

14...♕e7N 15.♖c2 ♖ac8 16.♖fc1 ♖c6

Obviously Black's main idea is to install a knight on e4, so by preparing to contest the c-file he encourages the c3-knight to move away.



17.♘e2 ♖xc2 18.♕xc2 ♔g7

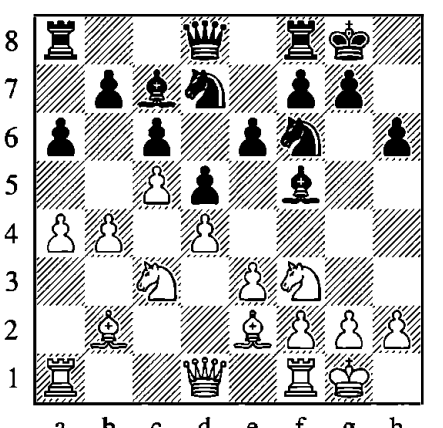
18...♘e4?! 19.♘f4 ♘df6 20.♘e5± is worse.

19.♘f4 ♖e8

The position remains balanced.

10...♗c7 11.b4 0–0 12.a4

This position has occurred in numerous games. Optically Black's position seems fine, but White's straightforward plan of advancing on the queenside should not be underestimated. The correct continuation has been pointed out by Dautov in CBM 96.



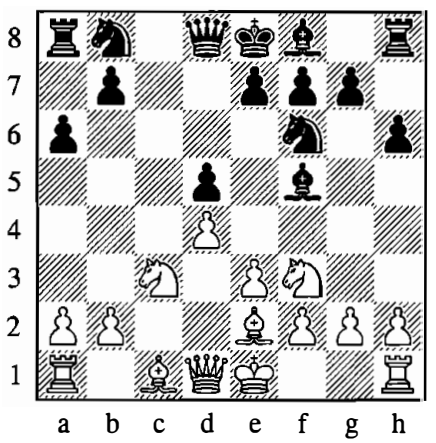
12...b6!N

Improving on the following encounter, in which Black fell into trouble: 12...♕e7 13.b5 ♗a5 14.♘d2 ♗xc3 15.♗xc3 ♘e4 16.♗a5 ♘xd2 17.♕xd2 axb5 18.axb5 e5 19.♗c3 Black was under unpleasant pressure in Malakhov – Dautov, Istanbul 2003.

13.cxb6 ♗xb6 14.♕b3 ♗c7

Black is not worse, as the pawn on b4 is just as weak as the one on c6.

B3) 7.cxd5 cxd5



White goes for an exchange structure, perhaps hoping to prove that the ...a6 and ...h6 moves have wasted too much time.

8.♕b3

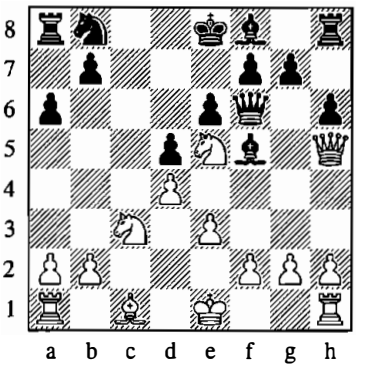
The following encounter featured a novel approach from White:

8.♘e5 e6 9.♗h5!?

This is certainly creative, but objectively it is not dangerous.

9...♘xh5 10.♕xh5 ♕f6

I would be tempted to try 10...g6!?N 11.♕e2 f6 12.♘d3 (or 12.♘f3 g5) 12...♘c6, hoping to benefit from the bishop pair in the long run.

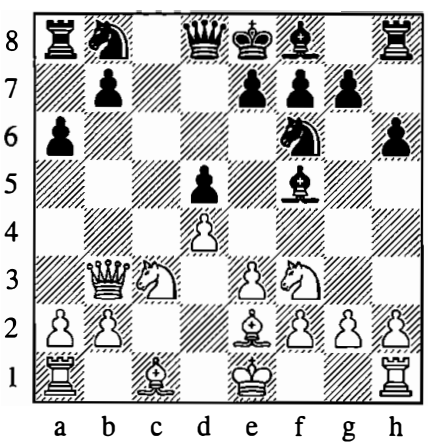


11.♘a4 ♘c6

Also after 11...♗b4†N 12.♗d2 ♗xd2† 13.♔xd2 ♕e7 14.♖hc1 0–0 15.♘c5 a5! Black is fine.

12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♗d2 ♗d3 14.♖c1 ♗b5 15.♘c5 ♗xc5 16.♖xc5 a5=

Bocharov – Yilmaz, Moscow 2012.



8...♖a7

I checked the familiar idea of 8...b5N 9.a4 b4!? 10.♕xb4 ♘c6 but unfortunately Black does not have sufficient compensation after 11.♕b3!, for example: 11...♖b8 12.♕d1 ♘b4 13.0–0 e6 14.a5±

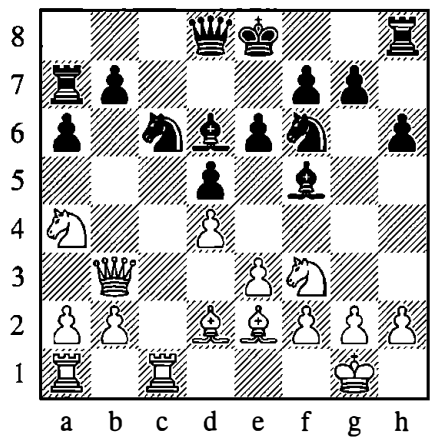
9.♗d2

9.♘e5 e6 transposes to variation C24 in the next chapter – see 6.♕b3 ♖a7 7.cxd5 cxd5 8.♘e5 e6 9.♗e2 h6! on page 124.

9...e6 10.0–0

10.♘e5 transposes to the same variation as the previous note, with 10.♗d2 as White's next move – see page 124.

10...♘c6 11.♖fc1 ♗d6 12.♘a4



12...0–0N

I slightly prefer this to 12...♘e4 13.♗e1 0–0N (In the game Black played the horrible 13...♕e7? and immediately got into trouble after 14.♘e5!± in Haba – Kireev, Chrudim 2004.) 14.♘d2 ♘f6!? although Black's position is perfectly playable here as well.

13.♗e1

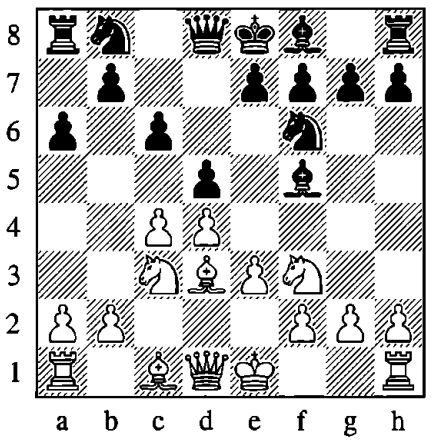
13.♘c5 ♕e7 is absolutely fine for Black.

13...♘d7 14.a3 ♕e7=

Neither side can claim the upper hand in this exchange structure. Nevertheless, there is enough complexity in the position to enable both sides to play for a win.

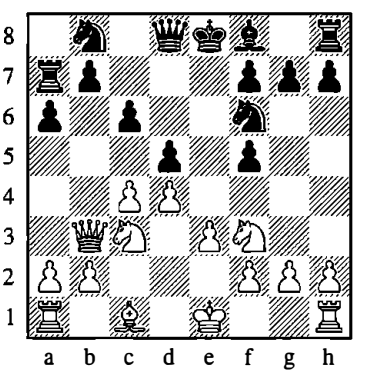
C) 6.♗d3

White aims for an improved version of the 5.♗d3 system as examined in Chapter 12. This move actually caused me a few headaches and, since I was unable to find full equality in the main line, I turned to a rare alternative which I believe to be a better solution.



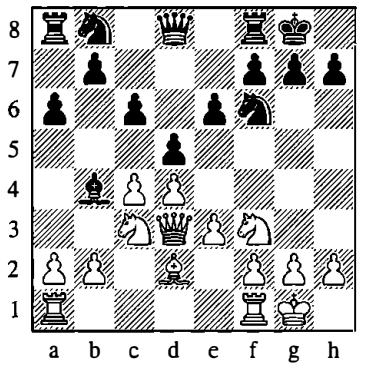
6...♗g6!?

Initially I was excited about 6...e6?! 7.♗xf5 exf5, as played by Carlsen against Topalov, but a closer examination revealed that Black was risking too much. 8.♕b3 ♖a7

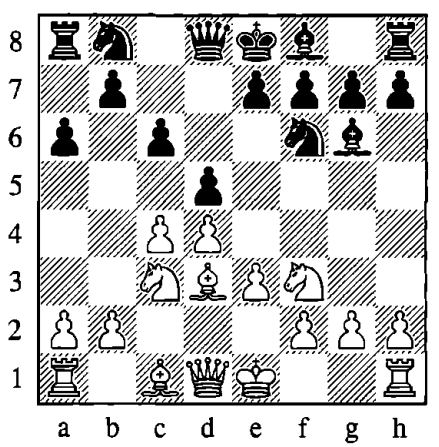


9.cxd5!N (9.♗d2 was played in the aforementioned game, and after 9...dxc4 10.♕xc4 ♗d6 11.0–0 0–0 12.♕d3 g6 13.e4 fxe4 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♕xe4 ♘d7 the situation was unclear in Topalov – Carlsen, Astana [rapid] 2012.) 9...cxd5 10.♗d2 White has every chance of developing an initiative on the queenside with moves such as ♖c1 and ♘e5.

The main line is 6...♗xd3 7.♕xd3 e6 but I was not completely satisfied after: 8.0–0 ♗b4 9.♗d2 0–0



10.♖fd1! Black has an inferior version of variation C from Chapter 12. 10...♘bd7? loses a pawn to 10.♘xd5, so he must either exchange, defend or spend time moving the bishop. White's advantage is not large, but it definitely exists.



7.0–0

7.♗xg6 hxg6 8.♕d3 e6 9.0–0 has been played; the resulting position is covered under variation C3 below.

The following alternative is not dangerous for Black:

7.♘e5 ♗xd3!

Black should not allow the bishop to be captured by the enemy knight.

8.♕xd3 e6

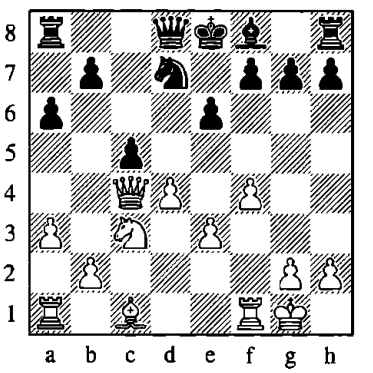
It looks as though Black has lost time, but in fact the extra move ♘e5 makes his life easier, as ...♘bd7 will soon come with added effect. In the following encounter White tried too hard to prove something.

9.a3 ♘bd7 10.f4?! dxc4! 11.♕xc4

Also after 11.♘xc4 c5 Black has a nice game.

11...c5 12.♘xd7 ♘xd7 13.0–0

Goganov – V. Popov, St Petersburg 2012. Now a simple and strong continuation is:



13...cxd4N 14.exd4 ♖c8 15.♕d3 g6!

It is clear that White will have to fight for equality.

7...e6

From this position I focused on three main tries: **C1) 8.♘e5**, **C2) 8.b3** and **C3) 8.♗xg6**.

8.♖e1 has been played in one game, Sawolainen – Stanczyk, Neubrandenburg 1998. White's last move prepares e3-e4, so Black should react with 8...♗b4N when a plausible continuation is: 9.♗xg6 hxg6 10.♕b3 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 b5 12.cxd5 exd5 13.a4 0–0 with a double-edged game. Black's pawns could become fragmented after an exchange on b5, but he has excellent control over the light squares.

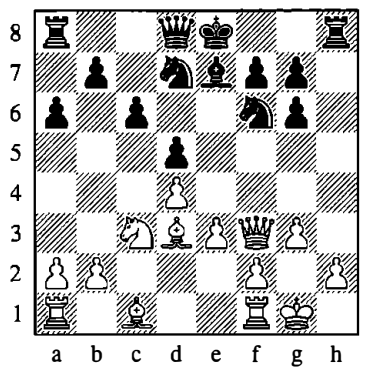
C1) 8.♘e5 ♘bd7!?

It is absolutely fine to play 8...♗xd3 9.♕xd3 ♘bd7, just as after 7.♘e5 above. However, I would like to show an alternative approach provoking the exchange on g6, which is

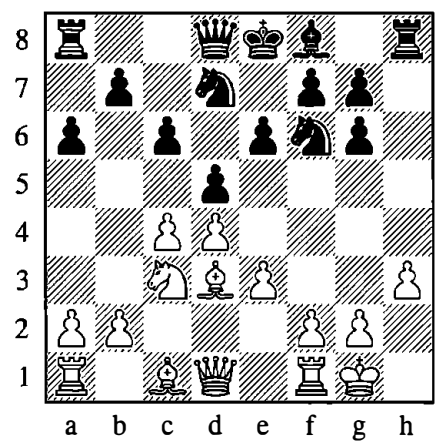
justified by the fact that White has already castled.

9.♘xg6 bxg6 10.h3

Another game saw: 10.g3 ♗e7 11.cxd5?! This exchange is premature, as the resulting Carlsbad structure does not promise White anything. 11...exd5 12.♕f3



12...♘f8!? (There is nothing wrong with 13...0–0, but it is tempting to keep the rook on the h-file.) 13.e4 This is practically forced, as otherwise ...♘e6-g5 would be unpleasant. 13...dxe4 14.♗xe4 ♕d7! Black was doing well in Jakovljevic – Predojevic, Sarajevo 2013.



10...♗e7N

This makes more sense than 10...dxc4 11.♗xc4 c5 as seen in Parligras – Volkov, Bad Wiessee 2012. At this point White should have played 12.♗e2!N intending to transfer the bishop to f3, with annoying pressure against Black's queenside.

11.♗d2

After 11.c5 e5 12.b4 ♕c7 Black may benefit from the half-open h-file with ideas such as ...g5-g4 or, after closing the centre with ...e4, ...♘h7-g5.

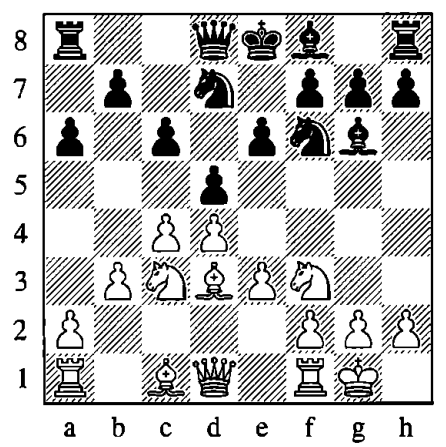
11...dxc4 12.♗xc4 c5

On move 10 I rejected this plan but it makes more sense here, as White's bishop manoeuvre can be countered in a way that was not available previously.

13.♗e2 cxd4 14.exd4 ♕b6!

Attacking b2 and d4. Black is ready to castle and centralize his rooks, and has decent chances in this complicated position.

C2) 8.b3 ♘bd7

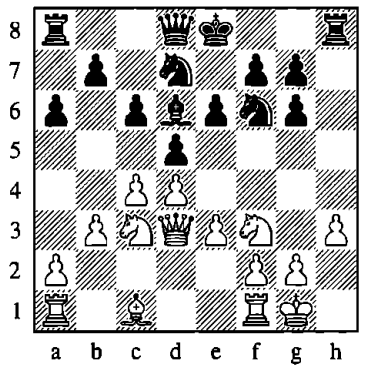


9.♗b2

This is the obvious move, but White has tested a few others as well.

9.h3 ♗d6 (Black can also consider 9...♗b4 10.♗b2 0–0, which is similar to the main line below.) 10.♗xg6 hxg6 11.♕d3 This was played in the recent game Giri – Kamsky, Beijing

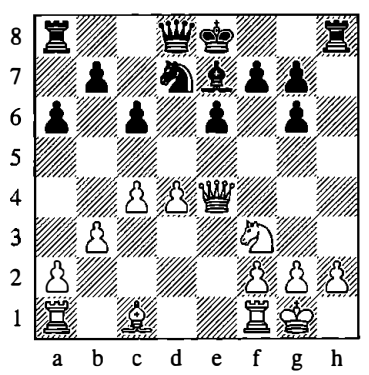
2013. Here Black should have favoured the simple continuation:



11...0–0N Now 12.e4 can be met by 12...dxc4 13.♕xc4 (13.bxc4 e5=) 13...e5 with equal chances and a typical Slav structure.

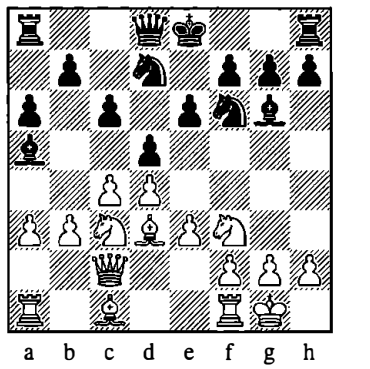
9.♕c2 leaves Black with an interesting choice of where to develop his bishop. The following two options are equally playable, but lead to quite different position types:

a) 9...♗e7 10.♗xg6 hxg6 11.e4 dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♕xe4 Even here, Black can try to benefit from the half-open h-file as follows:

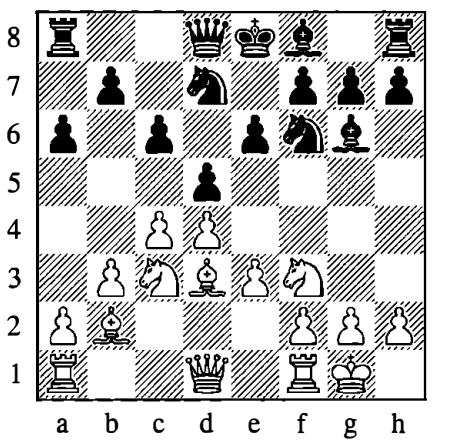


13...♕a5 14.♖e1 ♕h5!?N (14...0–0 15.♗d2 ♕f5 16.♕e3 ♖fe8 was solid enough in Weetik – Bryzgalin, Maykop 2008.) A good illustrative line is 15.h3 g5 16.♕g4 ♕xg4 17.hxg4 ♘f6 18.♗xg5 ♘xg4 19.♗xe7 ♔xe7 20.d5 cxd5 21.cxd5 ♖h6 with equality.

b) 9...♗b4!?N 10.a3 ♗a5 reaches a complicated position. My main idea is:



11.b4 ♗c7 12.e4 dxc4! 13.♗xc4 0–0 14.♕e2 a5! In this complex position Black has enough counterplay to stop White from enjoying the benefits of his strong pawn centre.

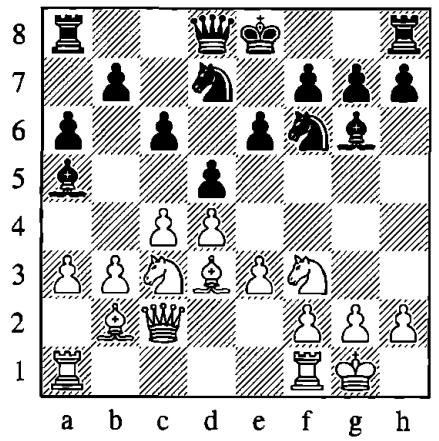


9...♗b4

Black aims to hold up the e3-e4 advance. 9...♗e7 10.♕c2 0–0 11.♗xg6 hxg6 12.e4 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4 dxe4 14.♕xe4 ♕a5 led to a normal type of position in Sasikiran – Morozevich, Moscow 2001. Perhaps White can claim a tiny advantage but Black's position is fully playable.

10.a3 ♗a5 11.♕c2

This position occurred in Kirschbaum – Sobolevsky, Soemmerda 2002. Here I found an interesting new direction.



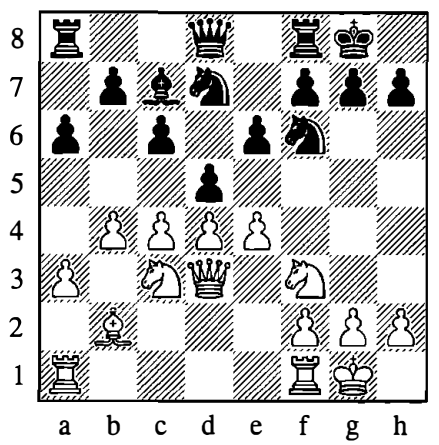
11...♗xd3N

11...0–0N can also be considered.

12.♕xd3 0–0

My idea is revealed after the following natural continuation:

13.b4 ♗c7 14.e4



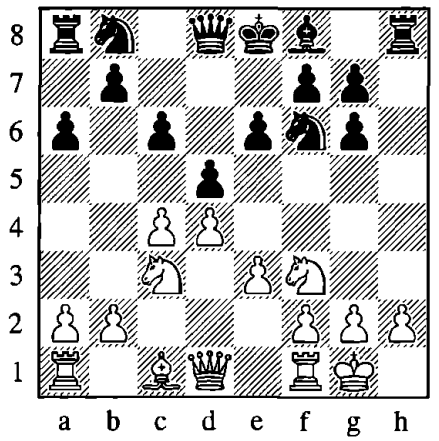
14...dxc4 15.♕xc4 b5!? 16.♕e2

It is dangerous to grab a pawn with 16.♕xc6 on account of 16...♕b8! intending ...♖c8 and White's queen is in trouble.

16...♘b6

The position is double-edged; Black's light-square control makes up for White's strong pawn centre.

C3) 8.♗xg6 hxg6



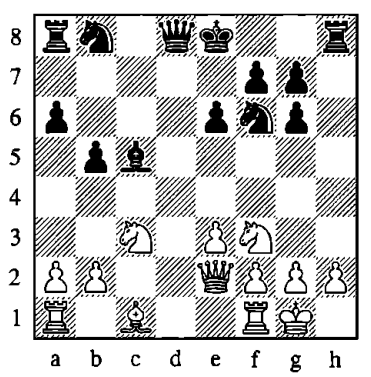
9.♕d3

Guarding the c4-pawn and intending to push through with e3-e4.

9...♗b4N

The fact that this move is a novelty is mainly due to the fact that this exact position has only been reached in a couple of games. The concept of putting the bishop on this square to inhibit e3-e4 is absolutely standard.

I do not recommend following the path of the two existing games: 9...dxc4?! 10.♕xc4 b5 11.♕e2 c5 12.dxc5 ♗xc5

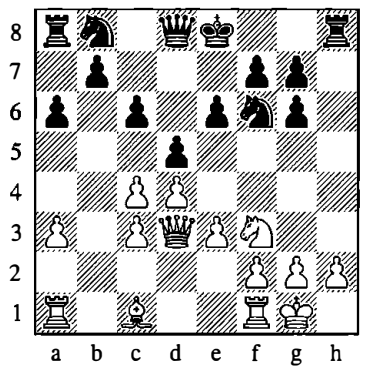


13.e4! (The soft 13.b3 allowed Black to complete development with near-equal chances in Pelletier – Topalov, Warsaw 2013.)

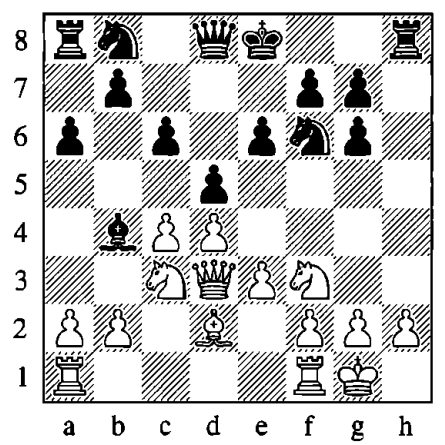
13...b4 14.♘a4 ♗e7 (14...♗a7 15.a3! is also excellent for White.) 15.b3 Black was under pressure in Gavrilov – Iljushin, Moscow 2011.

10.♗d2

After 10.a3 ♗xc3 Black can make good use of the h-file, whichever way White recaptures: 11.bxc3 (11.♕xc3 ♘e4 12.♕c2 ♘d7 13.h3 ♕c7 looks promising for Black, who will continue with ...g5 and long castling.



11...♕c7! 12.h3 ♘e4 13.♘d2 ♘xd2 (13...f5 also looks interesting.) 14.♗xd2 ♘d7 With ...♘b6 coming soon, Black is absolutely fine.

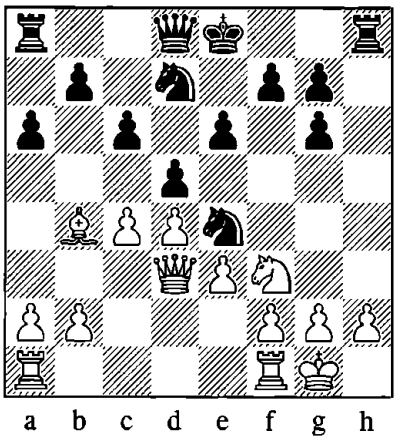


10...♗xc3 11.♗xc3 ♘e4 12.♗b4

This looks tempting, but it transpires that Black can do without short castling.

12.♖ac1 is met by 12...♘d7 and it is still not obvious what White's plan should be.

12...♘d7



13.h3

After 13.♖ac1 g5! White is already experiencing problems connected with the h-file.

13...f5

Black is by no means worse in this double-edged position.

Conclusion

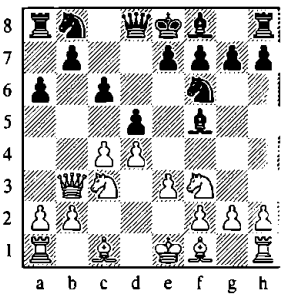
This chapter featured three bishop moves, each leading to a slightly different type of struggle. 6.♗d2 can be met safely by 6...e6 7.♘h4 ♗g4, when neither 8.♕c2 nor 8.♕b3 is too threatening, although both should be handled with care.

After 6.♗e2 Black must react with the accurate 6...h6! to safeguard his light-squared bishop before solidifying his centre with ...e6. White has several paths to an interesting game, but Black is doing okay in all of them.

The final part of the chapter covered 6.♗d3, when I recommend departing from mainstream theory with 6...♗g6!?. The whole line is relatively untested, but it seems to offer satisfactory play to Black. Especially interesting are the lines involving an exchange on g6, after which Black may leave his king in the centre and attempt to exploit the half-open h-file.



3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6



6.♕b3

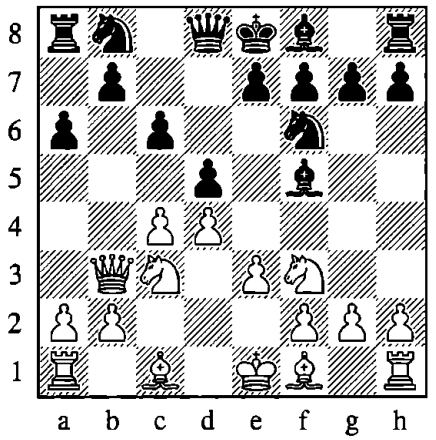
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♘f3 ♗f5 6.♕b3

6...♖a7

A) 7.♘h4 115
B) 7.♗d2 116
C) 7.cxd5 cxd5 118
C1) 8.♗d2 118
C2) 8.♘e5 e6 120
C21) 9.f3 120
C22) 9.♗d2 121
C23) 9.♕a4† 122
C24) 9.♗e2 124
D) 7.a4 e6 125
D1) 8.♗d2 126
D2) 8.♘h4 126
D3) 8.a5 ♘bd7 127
D31) 9.♗e2 ♗d6 10.0–0 h6 11.♗d2 0–0 128
D311) 12.♘a4 128
D312) 12.♖fd1 129
D32) 9.♘h4 129

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♘f3 ♗f5 6.♕b3



This is the most critical continuation, and it is the one I recommended for White in the original *Grandmaster Repertoire 1*.

6...♖a7

I consider this more reliable than 6...b5 7.c5 when White has a space advantage and Black must watch out for a queenside attack.

Here there are four main moves to consider: **A) 7.♘h4**, **B) 7.♗d2**, **C) 7.cxd5** and **D) 7.a4**.

7.♗e2 h6 transposes to variation B1 of the previous chapter. Black can also consider 7...e6 since, with the queen already on b3, 8.♘h4 can be met conveniently by 8...♗g4.

A) 7.♘h4

This has not been played in many games, but it has been used by several strong players and has scored highly.

7...♗c8!?

This has only been played in a single game so far, but it has some appealing points, as Black avoids exchanging his bishop and leaves the enemy knight misplaced on the edge of the board. It is hard to draw firm conclusions and I could easily have dedicated fifty pages to this almost fresh position, but to keep things sensible I have focused on a few of the lines I consider most plausible and interesting.

8.♕c2N

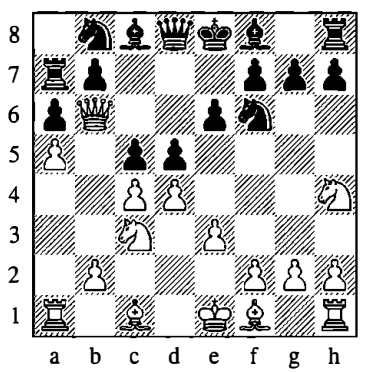
8.♘f3 gives Black a choice. Apart from repeating the position with 8...♗f5, there is also the idea of 8...e6!? leading to an unusual version of a Semi-Slav with the moves ♕b3 and ...♖a7 included.

8.♗d3 was played in Bericat – Garcia Martinez, email 2004, the only example I found on the database in which 7...♗c8!? occurred. The most logical reply to White's last move is 8...dxc4N 9.♗xc4 e6 10.0–0 b5 11.♗e2 c5 with equal chances, as Black has a pretty good version of a Queen's Gambit Accepted.

8.a4N e6 9.a5

This appears tempting, but Black has a remarkable reply available.

9...c5 10.♕b6



9...cxd4!! 11.♕xa7

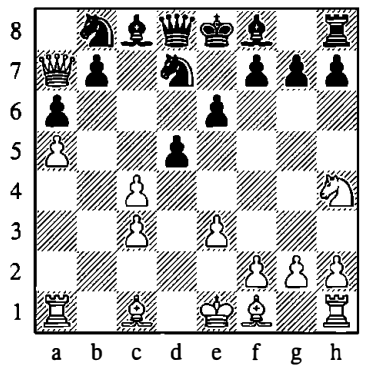
11.exd4 is objectively best, but after 11...♘c6 12.♕xd8† ♔xd8 13.♗g5 ♗b4 White will have to work for equality.

11...dxc3 12.bxc3

12.♕xb8? ♗b4! 13.♔e2 dxc4 is winning for Black.

12...♘fd7!

This elegant retreat puts White in trouble.

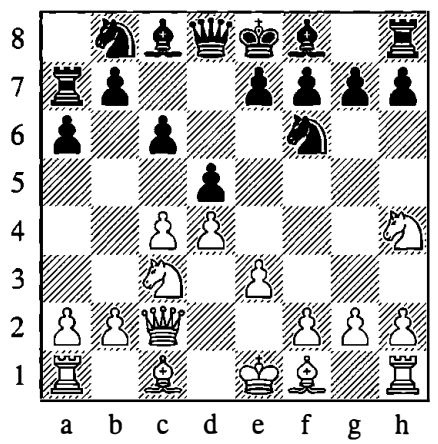


13.♕d4

After 13.♘f3 ♗c5 14.♕a8 ♕c7 it is hard to imagine that White will survive with his queen in such a position.

13...♘c6 14.♕g4 h5! 15.♕g3 ♘c5!–+

Black has too many threats.



8...e6

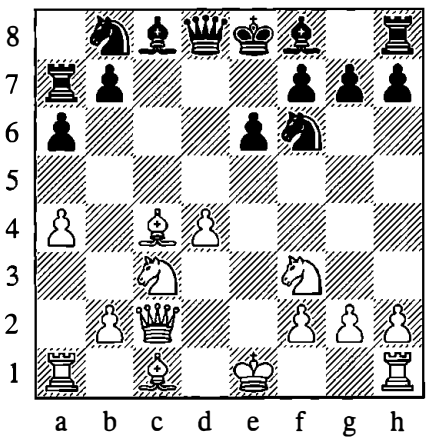
Playing in Chebanenko style with 8...b5!? also deserves consideration. This option has the merit of making room for the rook on a7 to swing to the centre later.

9.♘f3 dxc4 10.a4

After 10.♗xc4 c5 11.0–0 b5 12.♗d3 ♘c6!? the rook can be put to use on the seventh rank and may go to c7 or d7 according to circumstances.

10...c5 11.♗xc4 cxd4 12.exd4

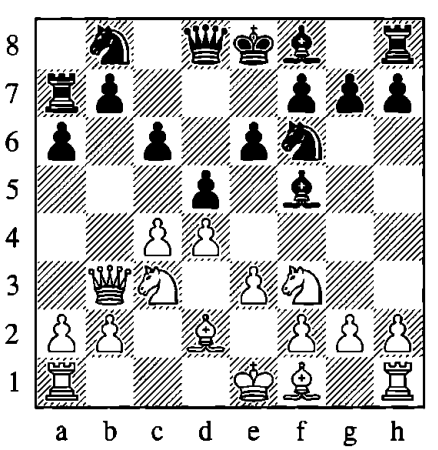
12.♘xd4 is not dangerous in view of 12...b6 13.0–0 ♖d7! followed by ...♗b7 when Black has a solid and flexible set-up.



12...♗e7 13.0–0 ♘c6 14.♖d1 0–0

We have reached a complicated IQP position resembling one of the main lines of the Queen's Gambit Accepted, but with the white queen and black rook unusually placed on c2 and a7 respectively. It would be possible to analyse much more deeply of course but, since this is just one of many possible lines after 7...♗c8!?, I am content to stop here and say that both sides have their chances.

B) 7.♗d2 e6

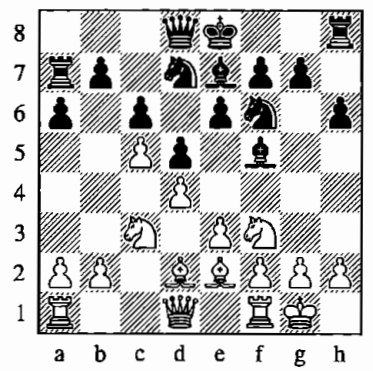


8.♘h4

This has been White's most popular try. Black must always watch out for the plan of chasing the bishop, but this time he is well placed to meet it.

8.a4 is covered under the move order 7.a4 e6 8.♗d2 – see variation D1.

8.c5 is hardly dangerous for Black. 8...h6 I like this prophylactic move. 9.♗e2 ♘bd7 10.0–0 ♗e7 11.♕d1



This position occurred in Baburin – Lopez Astaneh, Kilkenny 2011, and now after 11...0–0N 12.b4 ♕c7 13.a4 b6! Black has a promising position.

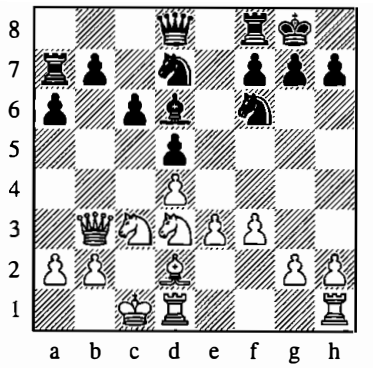
8.cxd5 exd5

8...cxd5N has not been played, but it immediately transposes to variation C1 below. However, it is arguably more logical to recapture with the e-pawn when the opportunity presents itself.

9.♘e5 ♗d6 10.♗d3 ♗xd3 11.♘xd3 ♘bd7 12.f3 0–0 13.0–0–0?!

After the normal-looking 13.0–0 b5 14.♘e2 ♘b6 15.♕c2 ♘c4 16.b3 ♘xd2 17.♕xd2 ♖e8 the chances are equal, as the mutual weaknesses compensate for one another.

The text move is playable but perhaps a bit too ambitious. In Hess – Ramirez, Wheeling 2012, Black could have obtained excellent chances with:

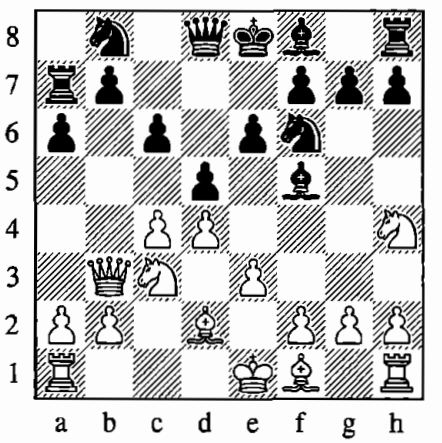


13...b5!N 14.e4

In the event of 14.g4 ♘b6 Black has rich counterplay.

14...dxe4 15.fxe4 c5! 16.dxc5 ♘xc5 17.♘xc5 ♗xc5

Black is certainly not worse.



8...♗e4!

This is the best response, and a thematic one for this set-up; compare the later variations D2 and D32.

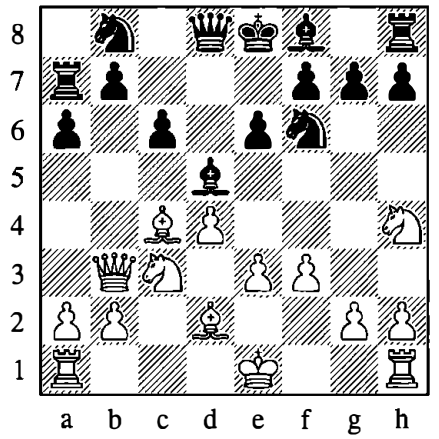
9.f3

9.cxd5 should be met by 9...cxd5, transposing to variation C1 below, where the position is reached via the move order 7.cxd5 cxd5 8.♗d2 e6 9.♘h4 ♗e4.

9...dxc4! 10.♗xc4 ♗d5

The bishop finds a safe spot and the white

knight is left stranded. In the only practical example from this position, White blundered immediately.



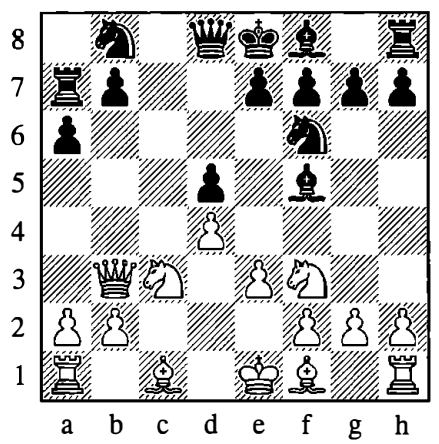
11.♘xd5?

Better is 11.♗xd5N cxd5 with comfortable equality for Black.

11...cxd5 12.♗d3 g5–+

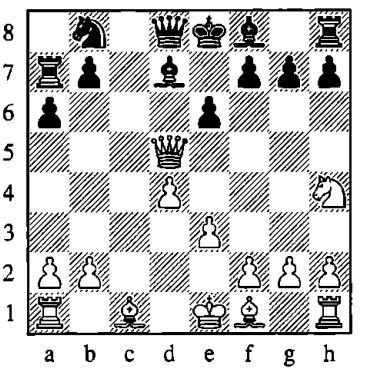
Shkurikhin – Kirillov, Tomsk 2008.

C) 7.cxd5 cxd5



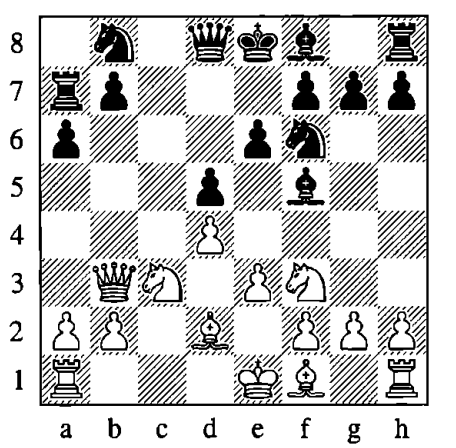
White has two main ways of handling this version of the Exchange structure. The first is flexible development with **C1) 8.♗d2**; the second is **C2) 8.♘e5** hinting at a possible advance of one or more kingside pawns.

8.♘h4 has only been played once, in the game Hernandez Carmenates – Arias, Morelia 2008. I found this to be one of only a few positions in the entire system where Black can play 8...♗d7!N. (In the game Black preferred 8...♗g6?!, but this obviously justifies White's last move.) The main point is that after 9.♘xd5 ♘xd5 10.♕xd5 e6 Black has a potent initiative, as demonstrated by the following line:



11.♕h5 g6 12.♕e5 f6 13.♕e4 ♗b4† 14.♗d2 ♗xd2† 15.♔xd2 ♕a5† 16.♔d1 ♗a4† 17.♔e2 From here Black can force a repetition, but he can also try 17...♔f7!? 18.♖c1 ♘d7⩱ with interesting compensation, due to the poor coordination of the white pieces.

C1) 8.♗d2 e6



9.♘h4

Another direction is:

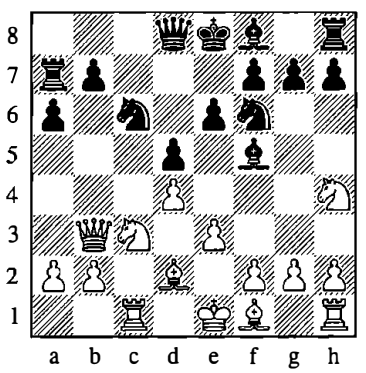
9.♖c1 ♘c6N

It is strange that no one has tried this move, as it is natural to develop the knight while keeping different options open for the dark-squared bishop.

9...♗d6 has been played, but 10.♘h4! gives White chances for an edge. An important point is seen after 10...♗g4 11.h3 ♗h5 12.g4 when 12...♘fd7? does not work on account of 13.♘f5! exf5 14.gxh5.

10.♘h4

10.♘a4 ♗e7 11.♗e2 (11.♗xa6? ♖xa6 12.♕xb7 does not work due to 12...♖xa4 13.♕xc6† ♕d7–+) 11...♘d7 12.0–0 0–0 leads to a complex game with mutual chances.



10...♗g4 11.h3 ♗h5 12.g4 ♘d7! 13.♘g2

13.♘f5?! achieves nothing with the bishop still on f8, and after 13...♗g6! 14.♘g3 ♗d6 Black stands better.

13...♗g6 14.♘f4

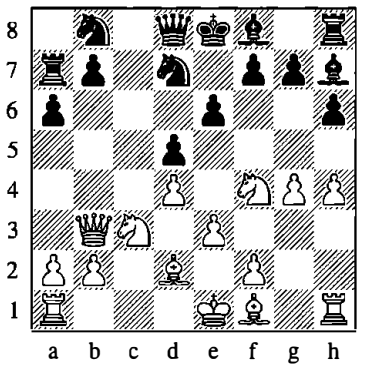
14.h4 h6 15.♘f4 ♗h7 is not dangerous for Black.

14...♗d6 15.♘xg6 hxg6

The position is pretty unclear.

9...♗e4

I prefer this over: 9...♗g4 10.h3 ♗h5 11.g4 ♘fd7 12.♘g2 ♗g6 13.h4 h6 14.♘f4 ♗h7 Hambleton – D'Amore, Forni di Sopra 2013. Here White could have posed problems by means of:

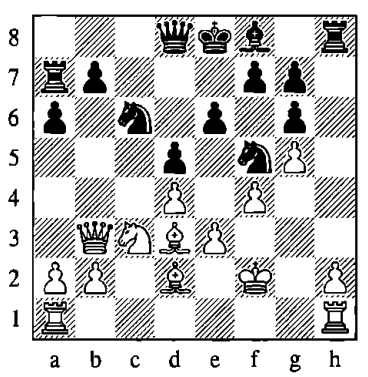


15.g5!N The pawn sacrifice cannot be accepted, as 15...hxg5 16.hxg5 ♕xg5 17.e4! gives White a decisive initiative.

10.f3 ♗g6 11.♘xg6 hxg6 12.♗d3

This move was used successfully by Jan Gustafsson.

Marching the g-pawn with 12.g4 ♘c6 13.g5 is bold, but it fails to impress. 13...♘g8 (13...♘d7 is a reliable alternative.) 14.f4 ♘ge7 15.♗d3 ♘f5 16.♔f2 This position occurred in L'Ami – Smeets, Leeuwarden, 2005, and here I propose:

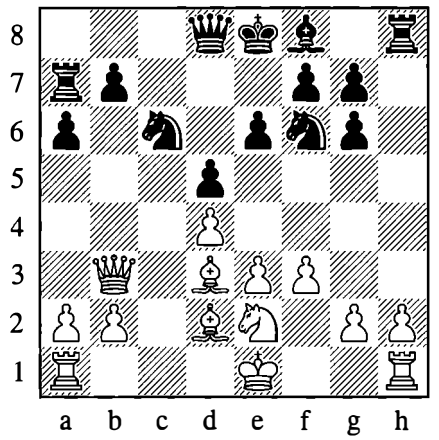


16...♖h4!N Preventing any h2-h4 ideas. 17.♖ac1 ♗d6 Intending ...f6 with good prospects on the kingside.

12...♘c6 13.♘e2

This position is from the game Gustafsson – Handke, Baden-Baden 2011. Here I see no

reason to refrain from the most active and natural move.



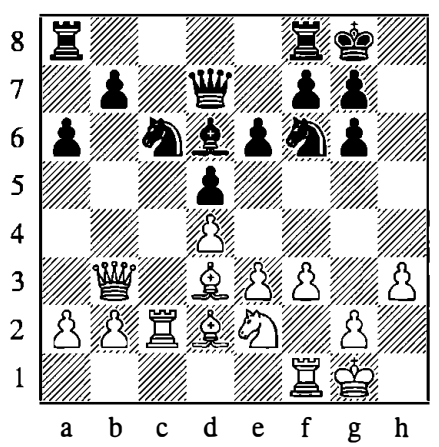
13...♗d6N

In the game Black went for 13...♗e7, which is a bit too passive for my taste.

14.h3 0–0 15.0–0 ♕d7 16.♖ac1 ♖aa8

Black prepares to bring his rook back into play and the position is more or less balanced. I would like to mention one interesting way in which Black may change the character of the position.

17.♖c2



17...e5!? 18.dxe5 ♘xe5

Black has an active IQP position.

C2) 8.♘e5

This is the most popular move in the position, as well as the most aggressive.

8...e6

From this position White has tried four different moves, all of them quite interesting: **C21) 9.f3**, **C22) 9.♗d2**, **C23) 9.♕a4†** and **C24) 9.♗e2**.

C21) 9.f3 h6!

Good prophylaxis.

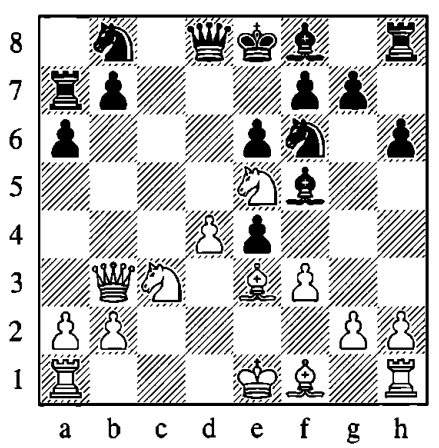
10.e4?!

This continuation is ambitious, but objectively dubious.

The natural 10.♗d3N leads to a balanced position after 10...♗xd3 11.♘xd3 ♘c6.

10...dxe4 11.♗e3

Here Black can fight for an advantage with:



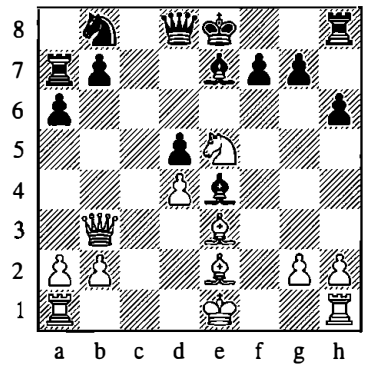
11...♘bd7!N

The game continued:

11...♘d5

Not a bad move, and an understandable decision from a practical point of view.

12.♘xd5 exd5 13.♗e2 ♗e7 14.fxe4 ♗xe4



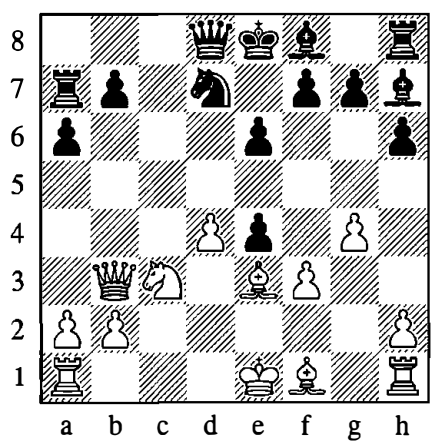
15.♕a4†?!

Better was 15.0–0 0–0 16.♗h5! f5 with roughly equal chances.

15...♘c6 16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.♕xc6† ♕d7 18.♖c1 0–0

A draw was agreed here in Pashikian – Mchedlishvili, Tbilisi 2009. However, Black could have played on with 18...♕xc6! 19.♖xc6 ♔d7 20.♖b6 ♔c7 21.♖b3 ♖b7 when White still needs to work to hold the position.

12.g4 ♗h7 13.♘xd7 ♘xd7



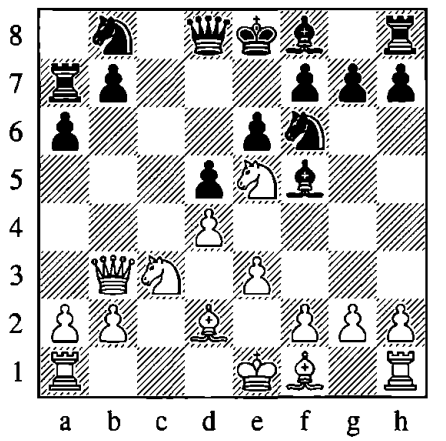
14.♘xe4

White fails to achieve anything with 14.d5 in view of 14...♗c5!.

14...♖a8

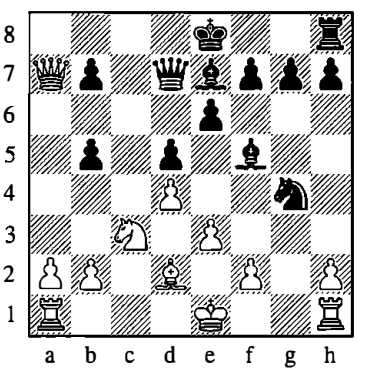
Black is positionally better.

C22) 9.♗d2



9...♘bd7

Another decent option is 9...♗e7!? which also sets a small trap: 10.♕a4† ♘bd7 11.g4?! ♘xg4 12.♘xd7 ♕xd7 13.♗b5 axb5 14.♕xa7 Ubilava – Almagro Llanas, Collado Villalba 2003.

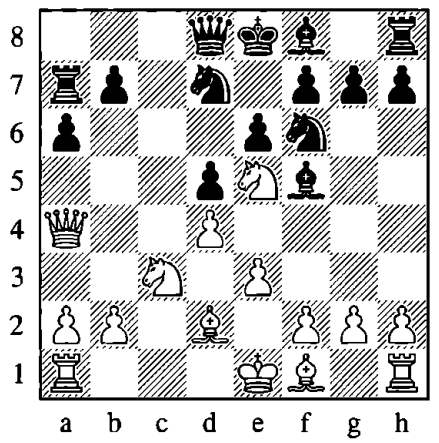


14...0–0!N Avoiding a check along the back rank. 15.h3 White must drive the knight away before ...♗h4 comes. 15...♘f6∓ White's position is a wreck and his king lacks a safe haven.

10.♕a4

10.♘xd7 ♘xd7 is also pretty harmless, for instance: 11.a4 ♗d6 12.♗e2 0–0 13.0–0 ♘b8 14.♘a2 ♘c6 15.♗d3 ♗xd3 16.♕xd3 ♖a8 Black was comfortable in Miedema – L'Ami Maastricht 2007.

The text move also fails to achieve anything after Black's simple reply.



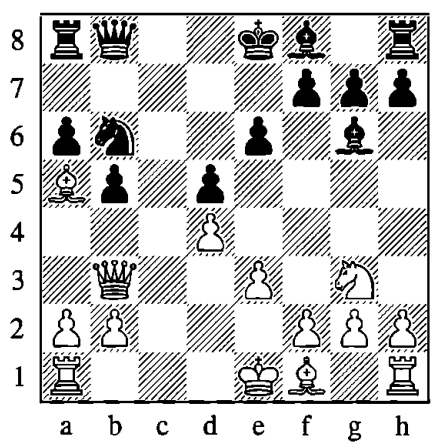
10...♖a8! 11.♘xd7 ♘xd7

The following game is a good model for Black.

12.♕b3 b5

12...♖b8!? could also be considered, holding the pawn back for the moment.

13.♘e2 ♘b6 14.♘g3 ♗g6 15.♗a5 ♕b8



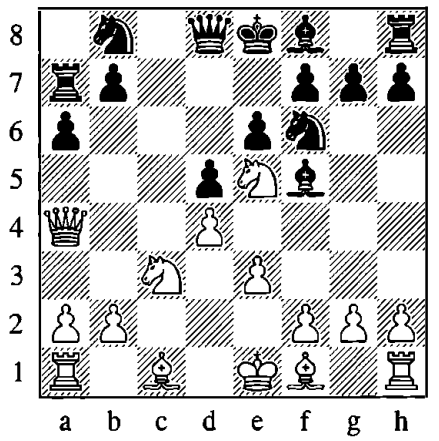
16.♗xb6

Sensing that he is in danger of becoming worse, White hastens to simplify the position.

16...♕xb6 17.♗d3 ♗xd3 18.♕xd3 ♗b4† 19.♔e2 0–0

Kozul – Erdos, Bizovac 2005. Black has the more comfortable game although White should be able to hold.

C23) 9.♕a4†



This has been White's most popular choice, but it is not too dangerous for Black.

9...♘bd7

But not 9...♘fd7? 10.g4 ♗g6 11.h4 when White has a strong initiative, Guramishvili – Barbosa, Jakarta 2011.

10.e4?!

This might have some shock value, but objectively it is not dangerous for Black. Here are a couple of other ideas:

10.f3 h6!?N (Black can also consider 10...♖a8 11.g4 b5 12.♕d1 as played in Perdomo – Labollita, Buenos Aires 2006, at which point it is necessary to find 12...♘xe5N 13.dxe5 ♘xg4! 14.fxg4 ♕h4† 15.♔d2 ♗xg4 16.♕e1 ♕g5 with interesting compensation for the piece.) Now 11.♘xd7 ♘xd7 12.e4 looks like the most challenging idea, but after 12...dxe4 13.fxe4 ♗g6 14.♗e3 ♖a8 15.♗d3 ♗d6 White's centre is starting to look vulnerable.

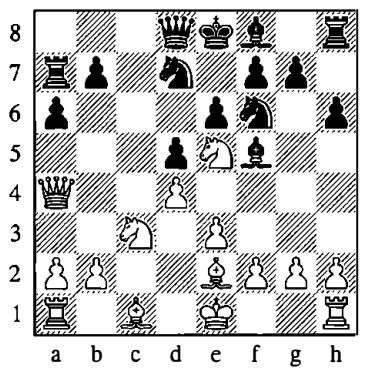
10.♗e2

Here I would like to recommend the following improvement.

10...h6!N

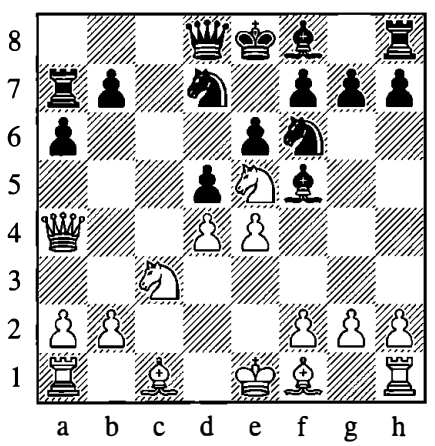
I was not fully satisfied with 10...♖a8 11.g4 ♗g6 12.h4 b5 13.♕d1 b4 14.h5 ♗e4 15.♘xe4 ♘xe4 as occurred in Paragua – Vidit, Subic Bay Free Port 2009, as White could have retained a small edge with: 16.♕a4!N ♗d6 17.♘xd7 ♕xd7 18.♗d1±

The main point of the text move is that it completely neutralizes White's plan of pushing his kingside pawns, as shown by the following line.



11.g4?! ♗h7 12.h4 ♖a8 13.g5? hxg5 14.hxg5 ♗c2!

White loses material.



10...♘xe4 11.g4 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗g6 13.♗b5

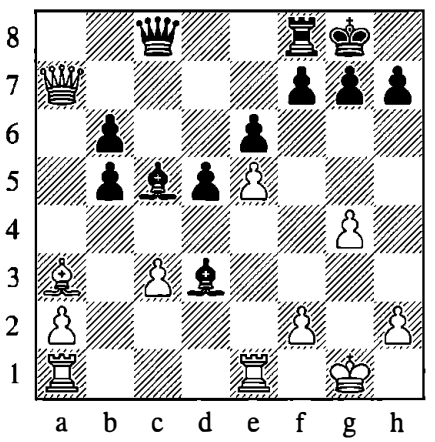
This is the point behind White's earlier play. He wins the exchange but has made plenty of sacrifices along the way, having given up a pawn and incurred some structural weaknesses.

13...axb5 14.♕xa7 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♕c8

Black has tremendous positional compensation, and in the following game he skilfully improved his position.

16.0–0 ♗c5 17.♕a5 ♗d3 18.♖e1 0–0 19.♗a3 b6 20.♕a7

This position occurred in Ki. Georgiev – Damljanovic, Benasque 2009. At this point I suggest:



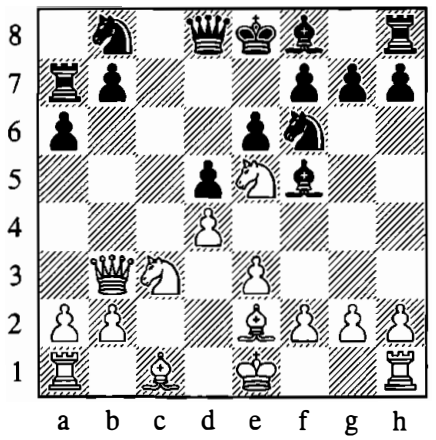
20...♗g6!N

The game saw 20...♕c6 21.♗xc5 bxc5 22.a4 with some counterplay for White. Instead I would prefer to recapture with the queen on c5, prioritizing piece activity over pawn structure. Retreating the bishop is useful, as it means ♖e3 will not come with tempo.

21.♖ad1 ♕c6 22.♗xc5 ♕xc5 23.♖e3 b4! 24.cxb4 ♕xb4

Black's strong bishop and potentially powerful passed pawn, together with the exposed position of the white king, make his chances clearly preferable.

C24) 9.♗e2



9...h6!

Again this prophylactic move is best. Here it was pretty obvious that White was threatening g2-g4 followed by h2-h4 when Black's bishop would be in trouble.

I was surprised to find an old game of mine on the database, which I had completely forgotten about. My opponent played the weird 9...h5 and after 10.0–0 ♘bd7 11.♘xd7 ♘xd7 12.e4! dxe4 13.♗e3 I was able to seize the initiative in Avrukh – Abolianin, Antwerp 1997.

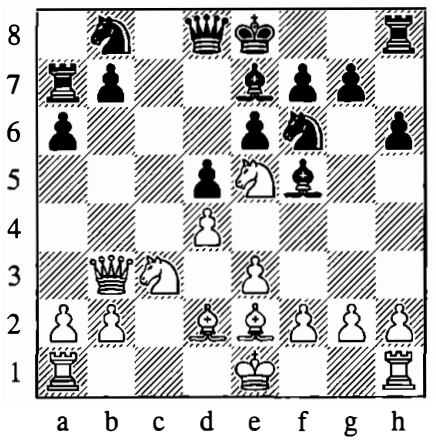
10.♗d2

10.0–0 ♘bd7 11.f4 was tried in Mamedov – Mchedlishvili, Tbilisi 2012, and now the natural 11...♗e7N 12.♗d2 0–0 13.♖ac1 ♖a8 gives Black decent chances in a complex middlegame.

10...♗e7!

The apparently more active 10...♗d6? runs into 11.♕a4†! ♘c6 (Black's problem is that the natural 11...♘bd7 allows 12.♘b5) 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♕xc6† ♕d7 14.♕xd7† ♔xd7 15.♘a4 and White was a healthy pawn up in Carlsen – Bologan, Astana 2012.

A serious alternative is 10...♘bd7, but after 11.0–0N (11.♖c1 ♗e7 12.♘xd7 ♘xd7 13.0–0 transposes to the Aronian – Carlsen game in the next note) 11...♗e7 12.♘xd7 ♘xd7 13.♘a4 White has some pressure.



11.0–0

By castling now, White gives himself the option of moving the king's rook to the c-file.

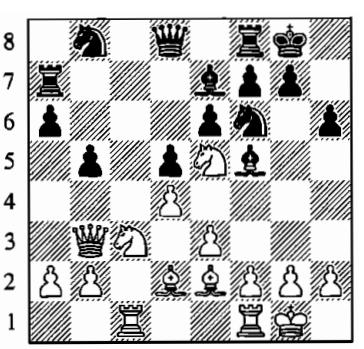
11.♖c1 0–0

11...♘fd7N could be an interesting alternative.

12.0–0 b5!?N

After 12...♘fd7 13.♘xd7 ♘xd7 14.a4 ♘b8! Black was doing fine in Aronian – Carlsen, London 2011.

However, the text move seems more challenging. I always have a pleasant feeling about playing the move ...b5 in such positions, as it makes it seem as though the position of my rook on a7 is justified. The continuation might be:

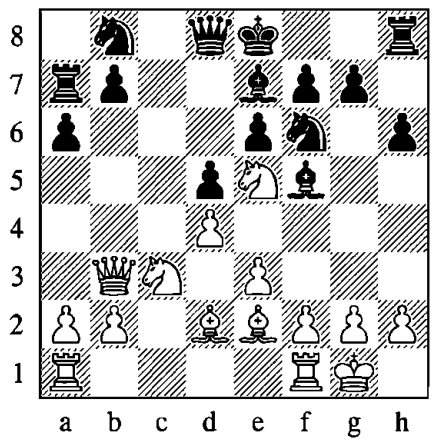


13.♘b1

After 13.a4 b4 14.♘a2 a5 Black is absolutely fine, having gained so much space.

13...♘fd7 14.♘d3 ♗d6!

Black is doing well, with ...♘b6-c4 coming soon.



11...0–0 12.♖fc1 ♘fd7!

It is important to choose this knight, since after 12...♘bd7 13.♘xd7 ♘xd7 14.♘a4 White was slightly better in Khairullin – Yilmaz, Moscow 2012.

13.♘xd7 ♕xd7!

The point behind retreating the king's knight to d7 was to recapture this way, allowing the other knight to go to the more active c6-square.

14.♘a4 ♘c6 15.♘c5

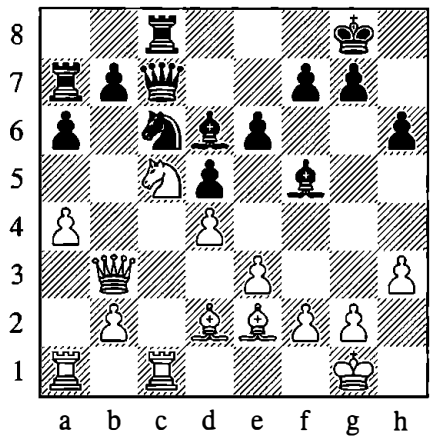
It is important to mention that after 15.♕b6 ♗d6! 16.♘c5 ♕e7 17.♘xa6 ♖fa8 18.♘c5 e5! Black has sufficient counterplay.

15...♕c7

White has a bit of pressure on the queenside, but Black can neutralize it with a few accurate moves.

16.h3 ♖c8 17.a4 ♗d6

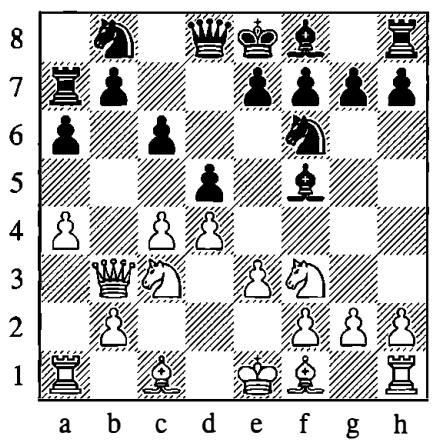
17...a5N is also possible.



18.a5 ♕e7 19.♗d3 ♗xd3 20.♘xd3 ♖aa8=

Black had no problems in Le Quang – Vallejo Pons, Tromso 2013.

D) 7.a4



I consider this move the main line, having recommended it in *Grandmaster Repertoire 1*.

7...e6

Black has no time for 7...h6 due to the strong positional idea: 8.a5 e6 9.♕b6! ♕xb6 10.axb6 ♖a8 11.c5 ♘bd7 12.b4 ♖b8 13.♘d2! as played in Ton That Nhu – Zhou Haonan, Kemer 2007. The knight is heading for a5 and Black will be in permanent defensive mode on the queenside, in view of the various sacrificial ideas.

Here I considered three main paths: **D1) 8.♗d2**, **D2) 8.♘h4** and **D3) 8.a5**.

D1) 8.♗d2

This position is sometimes reached via the move order 7.♗d2 e6 7.a4, as mentioned in the notes to the earlier variation B.

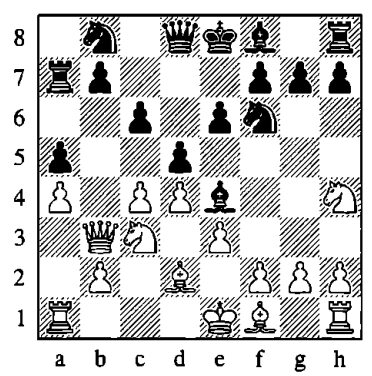
8...a5!

I like this ambitious move which prevents a4-a5 and secures a potential outpost of b4.

The calm 8...h6 is playable as well The one practical example continued 9.♗e2 ♗e7 10.0–0 0–0 11.♘e5 ♘bd7 12.f4 ♘xe5 13.fxe5 ♘e4 14.♘xe4 ♗xe4 with balanced chances, Markus – Panarin, Internet 2004.

9.♗e2

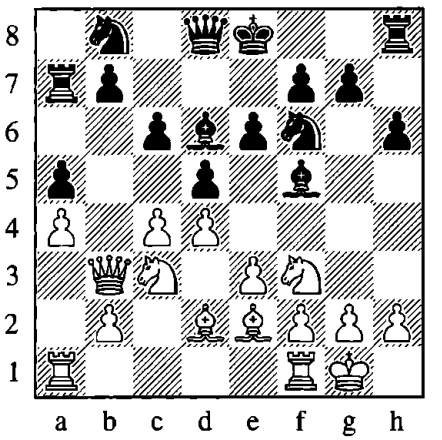
9.♘h4 should be met by: 9...♗e4!N (Worse is 9...♗g4?!, since after 10.h3 ♗h5 11.cxd5 exd5 as played in Schwartz – Bosschem, Livigno 2011, White could have seized the initiative by means of 12.g4N ♗g6 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.g5 ♘h5 15.e4!.)



10.cxd5 (10.f3 dxc4! 11.♗xc4 ♗d5 is pleasant for Black.) 10...♗xd5 11.♘xd5 exd5 Black has a comfortable version of the Carlsbad pawn structure.

9...h6 10.0–0 ♗d6

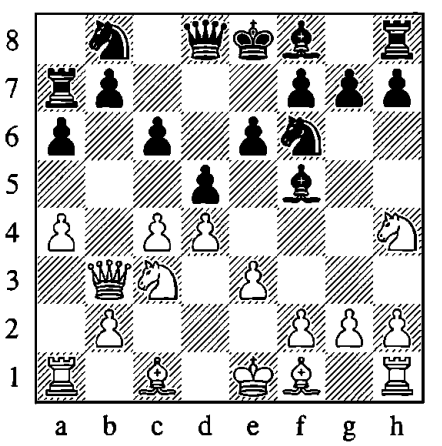
10...♘bd7N is more flexible and discourages White's next move in the game, not that it is especially threatening.



11.♘e5 0–0 12.♖ac1 ♘bd7 13.f4 ♘e4 14.♘xe4 ♗xe4

Black equalized without any problems in Yusupov – Anand, Bastia 2002.

D2) 8.♘h4



8...♗e4

The e4-square is usually the first choice for the bishop when it is chased in this variation. The main point is that f2-f3 can be met by ...dxc4 followed by ...♗d5 when the bishop escapes and the knight on h4 is made to look silly.

9.cxd5

9.a5 ♘bd7 transposes to 8.a5 ♘bd7 9.♘h4 ♗e4 – see variation D32 below.

9...cxd5

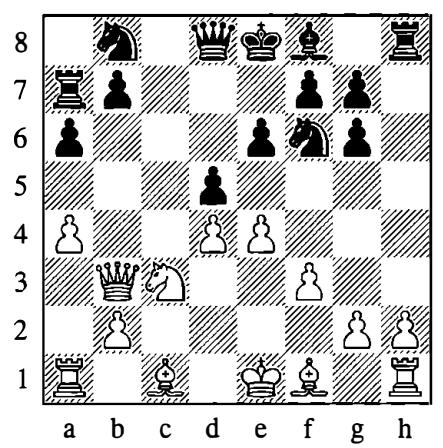
9...♗xd5 is also possible, but recapturing with the pawn is strong enough.

10.f3 ♗g6 11.♘xg6 hxg6

White has succeeded in exchanging his knight for the enemy bishop, but the f2-f3 move has weakened his kingside and the exchange of c-pawns has freed the c6-square for Black's knight.

12.e4

Another encounter saw: 12.♗d3 ♗d6 (12...♘c6N 13.♗d2 ♗b4 is also quite logical.) 13.f4?! Too ambitious. (Correct would have been 13.♗d2N ♘c6 14.♘e2 maintaining a balanced position.) 13...♘c6 14.♗d2 g5! Excellent play. 15.♘e2 gxf4 16.exf4 ♘g4 17.g3 ♕e7 Black was better in Krudde – L'Ami, Netherlands 2007.



12...♘c6!N

This is an obvious improvement over 12...dxe4 13.♗e3! ♘d5 14.♘xd5 exd5 15.fxe4 and White seized the initiative in Bercys – Fernandez, Lindsborg 2004.

13.♗e3 ♗b4

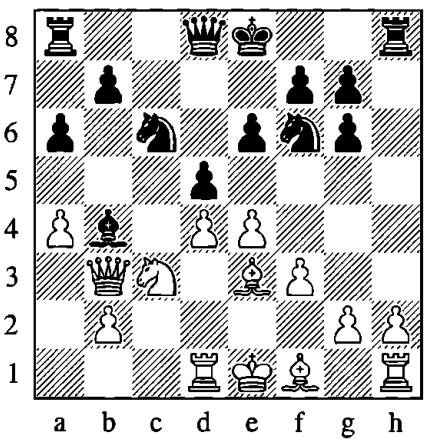
Black has a solid and playable position. Here is a possible continuation I examined.

14.♖d1

14.e5 ♘g8 leads to a similar type of position.

14...♖a8

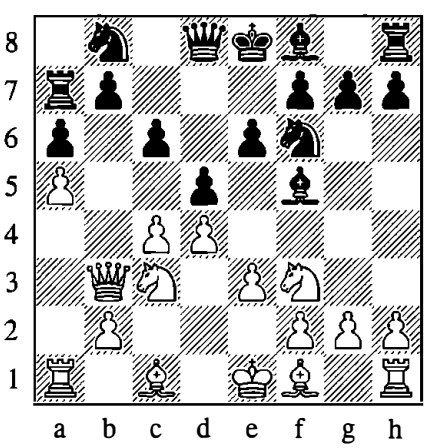
14...dxe4!? leads to a messy position after 15.d5 exd5 16.♗xa7 ♕e7 17.♗b6 exf3†.



15.♗e2 ♕c7 16.e5 ♘g8 17.0–0 ♘ge7

Black is by no means worse in this complicated position.

D3) 8.a5



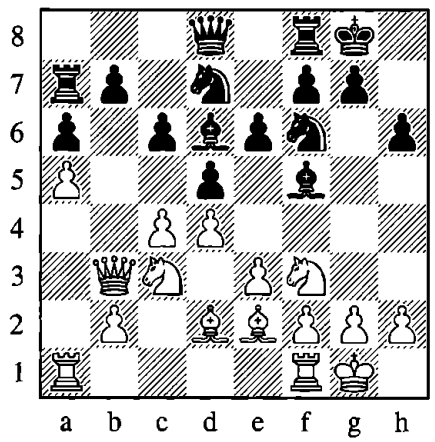
8...♘bd7

Black develops another piece and prevents the ♕b6 idea. From here it is worth checking **D31) 9.♗e2**, although I believe the most dangerous idea is **D32) 9.♘h4**.

D31) 9.♗e2 ♗d6 10.0–0 h6

Black can try to do without this move, but it is useful enough to be worth playing at some point.

11.♗d2 0–0



Here we have two main paths: **D311) 12.♘a4** and **D312) 12.♖fd1**.

D311) 12.♘a4 ♕e7

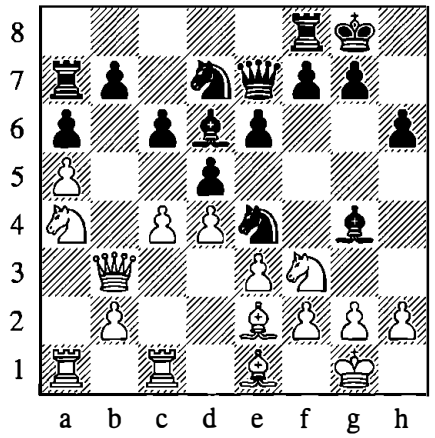
It is essential to prevent ♗b4.

13.♖fc1

The computer suggests 13.c5 ♗c7 14.♘b6 but this is hardly a good idea, since after 14...e5 15.♗b4 e4 Black has good chances to develop an initiative on the kingside.

13...♘e4 14.♗e1 ♗g4

This is the most ambitious way for Black to generate play on the kingside.



15.♕d1 f5

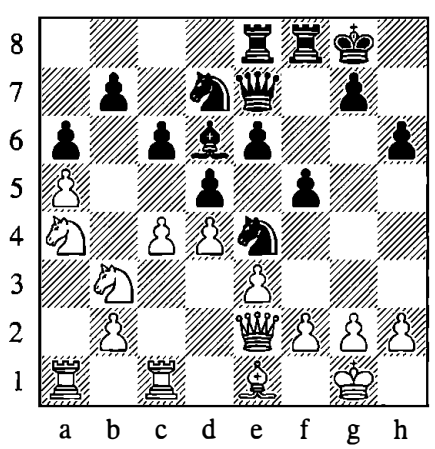
Already I find Black's position more appealing.

16.♘d2

16.b4 was played in Ragger – V. Popov, Warsaw (rapid) 2012, and now Black should have played the active 16...f4!N. After the logical sequence 17.exf4 ♗xf4 18.♖cb1 ♗f5 19.♖b3 ♖aa8 the position is highly complex, but easier to play for Black.

16...♗xe2 17.♕xe2 ♖aa8 18.♘b3

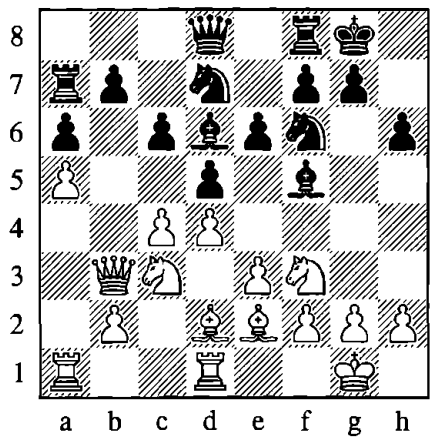
This position appeared in the game Bukavshin – V. Popov, Warsaw (blitz) 2012. At this point the best continuation is:



18...♖ae8!N 19.f3 ♘ef6 20.f4 g5

Black has the better game.

D312) 12.♖fd1



12...♕e7

I used this move to obtain a good position in one of my own recent games. However, it is also worth considering the flexible 12...♖e8!?N keeping the option of ...♗c7.

13.♗e1 ♖e8

I see no point in releasing the central tension with 13...dxc4?! as played in Oms Pallisse – Alonso Rosell, Barcelona 2012, as after 14.♗xc4N White is slightly better.

The immediate 13...♘e4?! also did not appeal to me in view of 14.♘xe4 ♗xe4 (or 14...dxe4 15.♘d2 e5 16.♘f1±) 15.♘d2 ♗h7 16.f4! and White is better, due to his space advantage.

14.♖ac1 ♘e4 15.♘a2

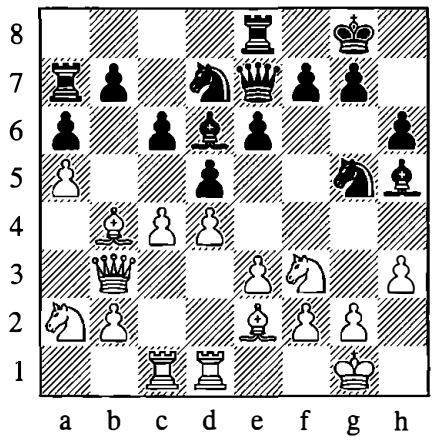
Now after 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4 16.♘d2 ♗h7 17.f4 Black has the important resource 17...♗b4 attacking the a5-pawn. 18.♘f3 (18.♕a4 ♖aa8 is also fine) 18...♗xe1 19.♖xe1 ♘f6 Black has no problems.

15...♗g4

15...♖aa8 16.♗b4 ♗g4 also offers Black a decent game.

16.h3 ♗h5 17.♗b4 ♘g5

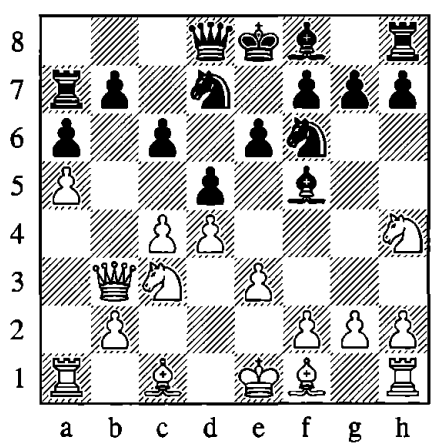
17...♖aa8 was fine here too, but I wanted to develop some play on the kingside.



18.♗xd6 ♕xd6 19.♕b4 ♕c7!

Mikhalevski – Avrukh, Acre 2013. Obviously a queen exchange is not in Black's plans. The position remains complicated but Black definitely has nothing to complain about.

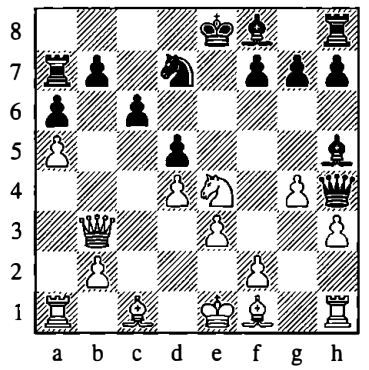
D32) 9.♘h4



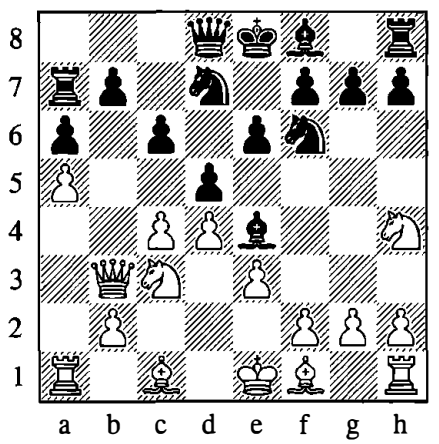
This is White's most ambitious continuation, and the one I recommended in *Grandmaster Repertoire 1*.

9...♗e4

This is better than 9...♗g4. In the aforementioned book I provided a good novelty after: 10.h3 ♗h5 11.g4 ♘e4 12.♘xe4 ♕xh4 (White is also better after 12...dxe4 13.♘g2! ♗g6 14.♘f4 ♗d6 15.♗d2.) 13.cxd5 exd5 Van Wely – Strating, Netherlands 2006.



14.gxh5!N The above line has not been repeated so my novelty has still not been tested in practice. However, after rechecking my analysis from six years ago, I was unable to find any holes in my work.



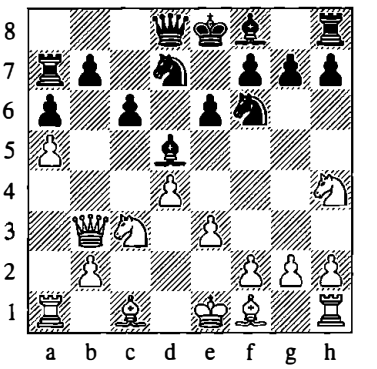
10.f3

I will keep my previous recommendation as the main line, although it does not lead to any advantage. Other moves also fail to bring White anything.

Releasing the tension with 10.c5 can hardly hurt Black. 10...♗e7 11.f3 ♗g6 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.♗d2 This was Flumbort – Erdos, Budapest 2003, and now 13...♕c7N 14.g3 e5 leads to balanced play.

10.cxd5 ♗xd5!

This is one of the advantages of putting the bishop on e4 on the previous move.



11.♘xd5 cxd5

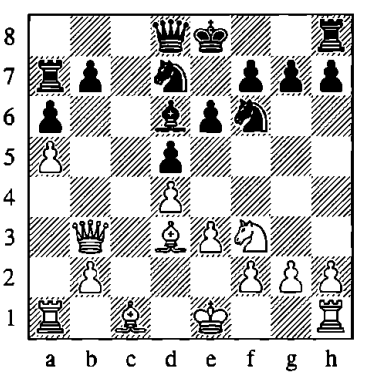
Black can seriously consider 11...exd5!?N with an unusual version of the Carlsbad pawn structure. Since the queenside is blocked, White's only active plan would be to carry out e3-e4, but this will take time to prepare and may lead to further weaknesses.

12.♘f3 ♗d6

12...♘b8!?N 13.♗d3 ♘c6 14.♗d2 ♗d6 leads to the same position.

13.♗d3

Shabalov – Zhang Pengxiang, Shanghai 2002. This would have been a good time for Black to regroup with:

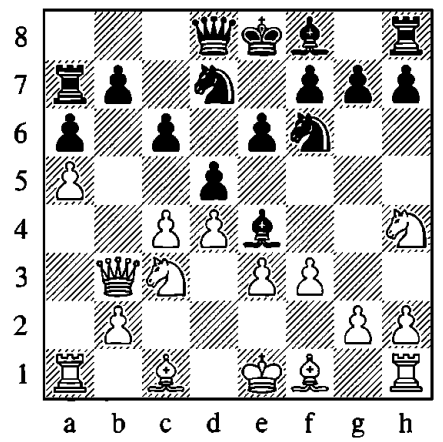


13...♘b8!N 14.♗d2 ♘c6 15.♗c3

This move is useful as it enables White to meet ...♘e4 with ♗xe4 (before ...f5 comes) followed by ♘d2.

15...0–0 16.0–0 ♕e7=

Black has a solid position and is ready to bring his rook back into play with ...♖aa8.



10...dxc4!N

This is my improvement over 10...♗g6 11.♘xg6 hxg6 12.g3 ♗d6 13.♔f2 ♕c7 14.♔g2 ♖a8 15.♗d2 when White got a promising position in Krejci – Murdzia, Czech Republic 2013.

11.♗xc4

11.♕xc4 ♗d5 does not make much sense for White.

11...♗d5

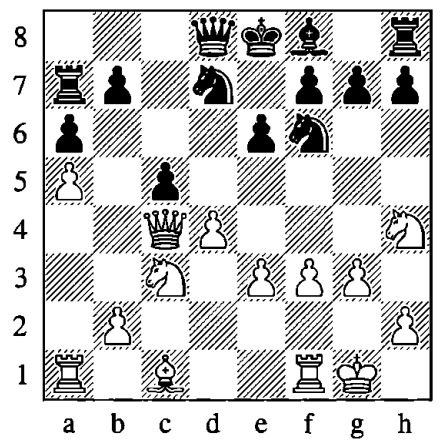
Being on Black's side, I am very happy to see White's knight on the edge of the board, failing to exchange Black's light-squared bishop. I examined the following variations here:

12.g3

In *Grandmaster Repertoire 1* I reached this position in one of the notes to a main line, stopping here with a "±" symbol. Having re-examined it more closely, I now believe Black should be fine after correct play.

I also considered: 12.♗xd5 cxd5 13.0–0 b5! (13...g5 14.e4! gxh4 15.exd5 gives White a dangerous initiative.) 14.axb6 ♘xb6 15.g3 ♗e7 16.♘g2 0–0 Black has slightly the more promising position, as he can fight for some initiative on the queenside.

12...♗xc4 13.♕xc4 c5! 14.0–0



14...b5! 15.axb6 ♘xb6 16.♕d3 cxd4 17.exd4 ♗e7

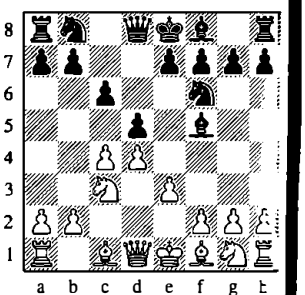
17...♗c5!? could also be considered. Either way, Black has no problems.

Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the main theoretical branch of the hybrid system with ...a6 and ...♗f5, where White targets the b7-pawn with ♕b3. The set-up with the black rook on a7 looks slightly odd, but the position is solid enough to withstand this small inconvenience. White has tried several different set-ups, the main theoretical paths being 7.cxd5 cxd5 8.♘e5 and 7.a4 e6 8.a5. Each brings its own challenges, but I found the black position to be perfectly reliable.

Chapter 12

3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5



Introduction and 5.♗d3

Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5 5.♗d3 ♗xd3 6.♕xd3 e6 7.♘f3 ♘bd7 8.0–0

8...♗b4

A) 9.b3 **133**

B) 9.a3 ♗xc3 **134**

B1) 10.♕xc3 **134**

B2) 10.bxc3 **135**

C) 9.♗d2 a5! 10.a3 ♗e7 **136**

C1) 11.e4?! **137**

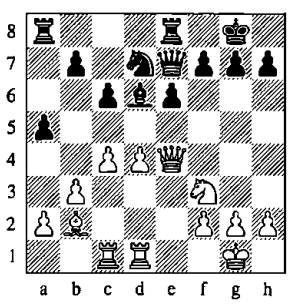
C2) 11.b3 **138**

C3) 11.♖ad1 **139**

C4) 11.♖fe1 **139**

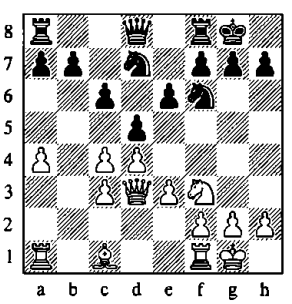
C5) 11.♖fd1 **140**

A) after 16.♕xe4



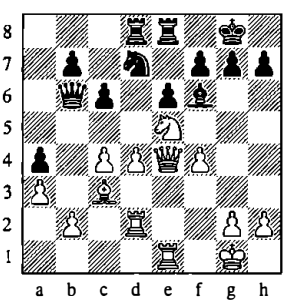
16...a4!N

B2) after 11.a4



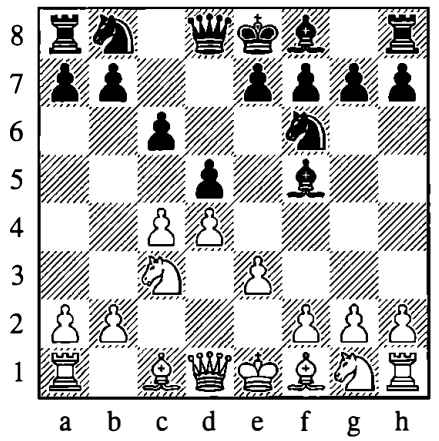
11...♖e8N

C5) after 19.f4



19...♕a6!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5



With this natural developing move, I intend a pawn sacrifice, as we shall see in Chapter 14. 4...a6, as we saw in the previous five chapters, is an equally valid option.

5.♗d3

This move is considered to be pretty harmless, but it is worth familiarizing yourself with the subtleties of the ensuing play. This move will be covered in detail in the rest of this chapter.

5.♕b3 is the subject of the next chapter beginning on page 142.

5.cxd5 is a major alternative which can be found in Chapter 14.

5.♘f3 a6 has been covered in Chapters 9-11 under the move order 4...a6 5.♘f3 ♗f5.

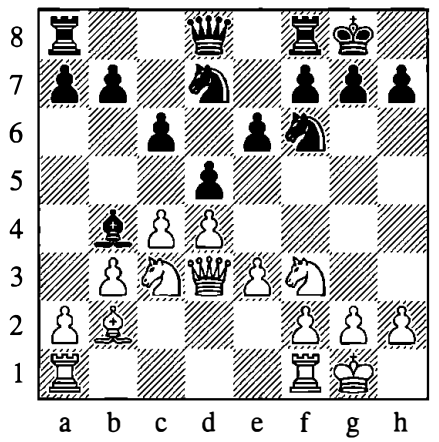
5...♗xd3 6.♕xd3 e6 7.♘f3 ♘bd7

7...a6?! transposes to a line I prefer to avoid, as discussed on page 108 in the note with 6...♗xd3. When the present move order occurs, there is absolutely no reason for Black to move his a-pawn.

8.0–0 ♗b4

8...♗e7 and 8...♗d6 are also playable, but I find the text move to be the most active approach. White has three main replies: **A) 9.b3**, **B) 9.a3** and **C) 9.♗d2**.

A) 9.b3 0–0 10.♗b2



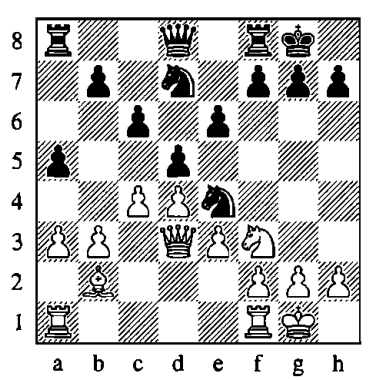
10...a5

This is Black's most popular continuation, with the obvious idea to play ...a4 at a suitable moment.

11.♖fd1

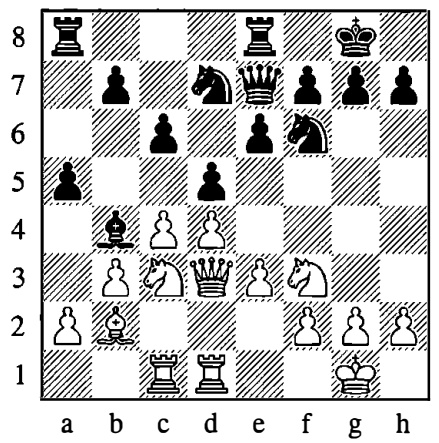
This leads to a calm positional game.

11.a3 has been played three times, but for some reason Black always refrained from the natural 11...♗xc3N 12.♗xc3 ♘e4 when his position is comfortable. It is worth adding the following point: 13.♗b2?! (13.♘d2 is better, when 13...f5 is just equal.)



13...a4! 14.b4 ♘d6 15.c5 ♘c4 Only Black can be better here.

11...♖e8 12.♖ac1 ♕e7



13.♕c2

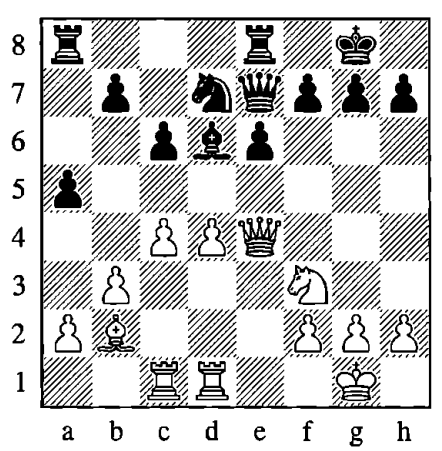
More tension would arise after 13.♘a4 ♗d6 14.♘e5, but Black is still doing fine after 14...♗c7, forcing White to reckon with the idea of ...♘xe5.

13...♗d6 14.e4

White does not have many constructive ideas apart from this logical advance.

14...dxe4 15.♘xe4 ♘xe4 16.♕xe4

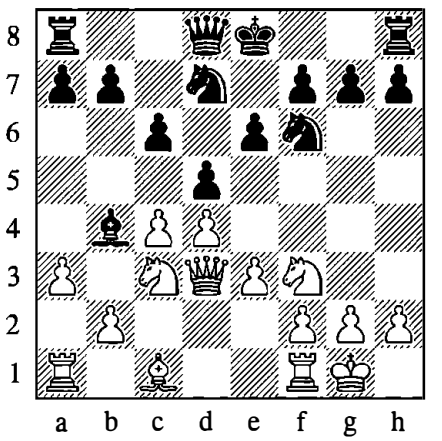
We have been following the game Gausel – Shirov, Moscow 1994. Here I believe it was exactly the right moment to play:



16...a4!N

Black has some activity on the queenside to go along with his rock-solid position in the centre.

B) 9.a3

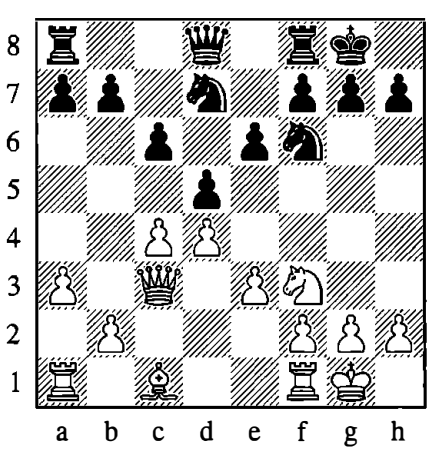


9...♗xc3

Black can also seriously consider 9...♗e7!?, claiming that White's last move has loosened his queenside slightly. A logical continuation is 10.e4 dxe4 11.♘xe4 0–0 12.♖e1 ♘xe4 13.♕xe4 ♕a5 with balanced play, Lobron – Ki. Georgiev, Antwerp 1997.

After the text move White can try either **B1) 10.♕xc3** or **B2) 10.bxc3**.

B1) 10.♕xc3 0–0



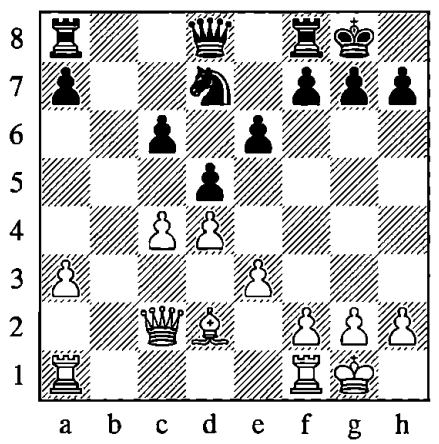
11.b3

Black has an amazing score here without losing a single game, but if he plays passively and allows White to get in a3-a4 followed by ♗a3, he could become slightly worse. For this reason I would like to propose an active approach:

11...♘e4 12.♕c2 b5! 13.♘d2

After 13.c5 a5! White's queenside play is blocked forever. Then after 14.♘e1 we have 14...a4 15.b4 e5! with counterplay, rather than allowing White to gain space with f2-f3, ♘d3 and ♗b2.

13...♘xd2 14.♗xd2 bxc4 15.bxc4



15...♘b6!

The point of Black's simplifying operation.

16.♗a5

16.cxd5 cxd5 17.♗b4 ♖c8 18.♕d3 ♖e8 is comfortable for Black.

Now in Anderton – Ferguson, England 1999, Black's simplest continuation would have been:

16...♕d7N=

With full equality.

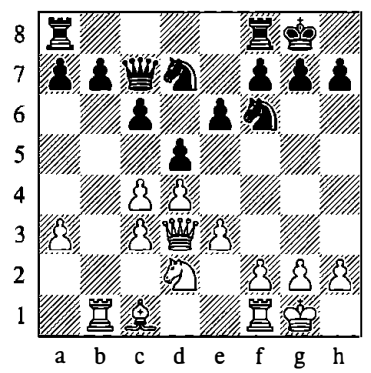
B2) 10.bxc3 0–0 11.a4

This has been White's main choice, but two other moves are quite natural as well.

11.cxd5 cxd5 12.c4 gives Black an easy game: 12...dxc4 13.♕xc4 ♘b6 14.♕d3 ♕d5 15.♗d2 ♘c4 16.♖fc1 ♖fc8 Black was slightly better thanks to the outpost on c4 in Galinsky – Kernazhitsky, Kiev 2005.

11.♖b1 ♕c7 12.♘d2

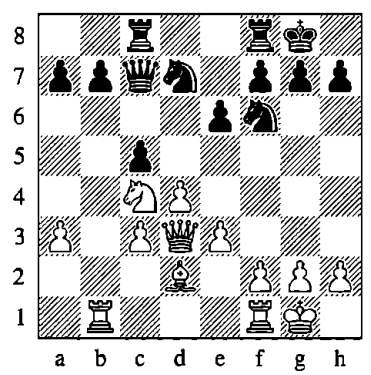
Three games have reached this position. My preferred continuation is:



12...dxc4!?N

Both 12...c5 and 12...e5 are absolutely fine, but I have in mind another type of structure that suits my taste.

13.♘xc4 c5 14.♗d2 ♖ac8



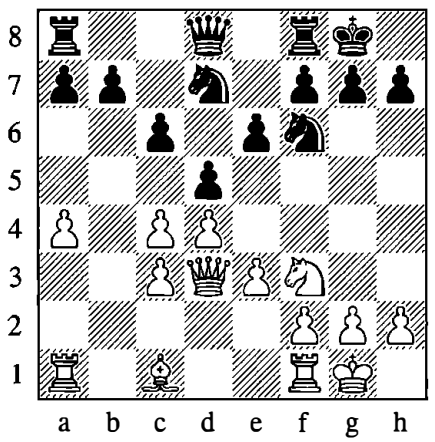
15.♖fc1

The inaccurate 15.♖bc1?! allows 15...b5! when Black is already better.

15...♘g4 16.g3 f5

With a double-edged game.

The text move has been played in several games. Here I favour another new move:



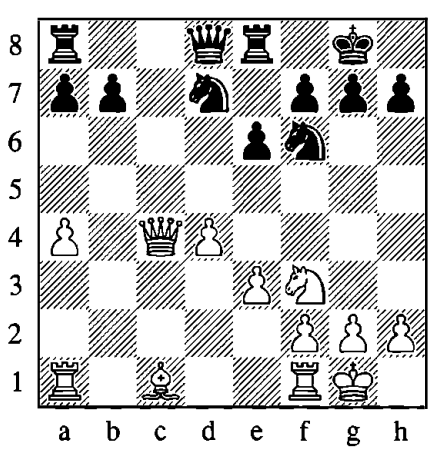
11...♖e8N

It is logical to remove the rook in anticipation of the coming ♗a3. A logical continuation is:

12.cxd5

12.♗a3 ♘b6! shows one of the points behind Black's last move.

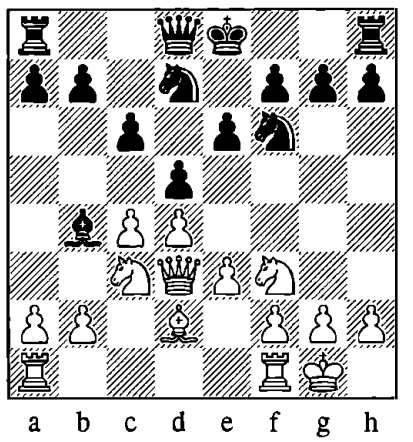
12...cxd5 13.c4 dxc4 14.♕xc4



14...♘b6 15.♕d3 ♕d5=

Black has no problems.

C) 9.♗d2



9...a5!

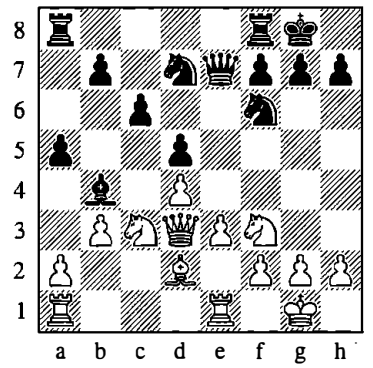
Please note that the natural 9...0–0?? runs into 10.♘xd5! and White wins a pawn. The text move is the best way to handle this trick, defending the bishop and making a generally useful move which gains space on the queenside.

10.a3

This has been the most popular choice by far. I checked briefly two other ideas.

10.♘e2 0–0 11.♘g3 occurred in Enigl – Fahrner, Austria 2001, but it is hard to take this strange-looking knight manoeuvre seriously. The simplest reaction is 11...♗d6!N, preventing e3-e4 and leaving White short of constructive ideas.

After 10.b3 I like the idea of 10...♕e7!N, preventing a2-a3 and leaving White almost with a plan. In the event of 11.♖fe1 (11.♘a4 is comfortably met by 11...♗d6) 11...0–0 the plan of opening the centre leads nowhere for White: 12.cxd5 exd5



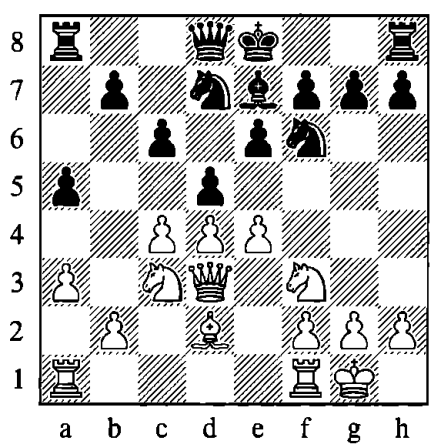
13.e4 dxe4 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♖xe4 ♕d6 16.♗f4 ♕d5∓ Black has a positional advantage.

10...♗e7

I prefer this over 10...♗xc3 11.♗xc3 which leads to a sound but slightly passive position for Black. A good illustrative game here continued 11...♘e4 12.♘d2 f5 13.f3 ♘xd2 14.♗xd2 0–0 15.a4 with a slight edge to White, Yusupov – Nikolic, Istanbul 2000.

We now reach a major branching point where White can try **C1) 11.e4?!**, **C2) 11.b3**, **C3) 11.♖ad1**, **C4) 11.♖fe1** or **C5) 11.♖fd1**.

C1) 11.e4?!



This is exactly what Black is hoping for, as he has a well-concealed tactical resource.

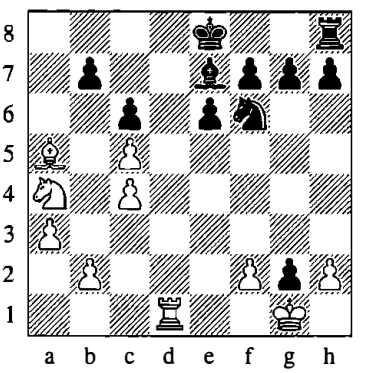
11...♘c5!

This elegant blow leads by force to an endgame favouring Black.

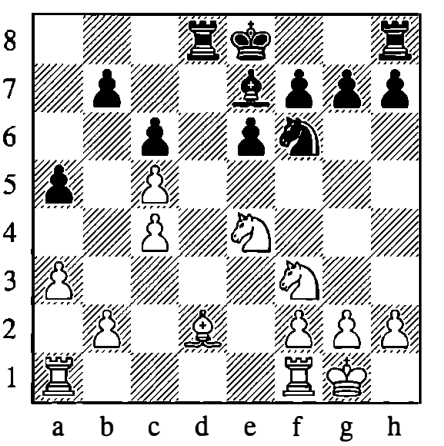
12.dxc5 dxe4 13.♕xd8† ♖xd8 14.♘xe4

The last few moves have been more or less forced up to here.

White has also tried 14.♘a4 exf3 15.♗xa5. Now in Lapiccirella – Zanellato, Bratto 2002, Black could have retained the advantage with: 15...fxg2N 16.♖fd1 (16.♔xg2 does not change the evaluation after 16...♖d4 17.b3 ♖g4†! followed by 18...♖g5.) 16...♖xd1† 17.♖xd1



17...h5! 18.♔xg2 h4! Black's rook enters the game via h5 and he keeps the better chances, as White's minor pieces are temporarily misplaced on the queenside.

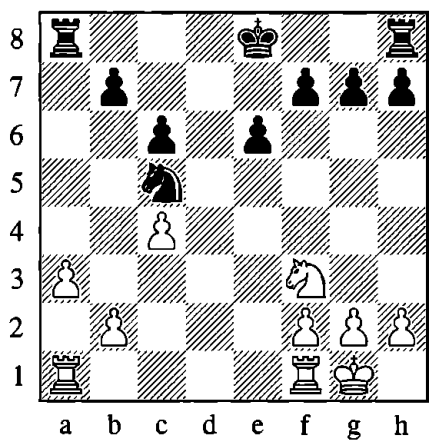


14...♘xe4 15.♗xa5 ♖a8 16.♗b4 ♗xc5

This has been played in every game so far, but 16...♘xc5!?N also deserves attention. After 17.♗xc5 ♗xc5 18.♖fd1 ♔e7 19.♔f1 Black is slightly better, although White should be able to survive.

17.♗xc5 ♘xc5

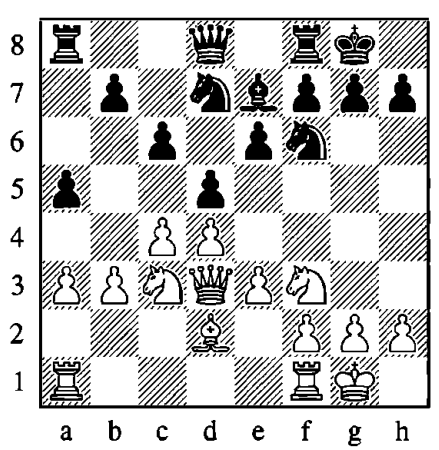
White is still a long way from equalizing the game. A good illustrative game continued:



18.♖fd1 ♔e7 19.♔f1 f6 20.♖ac1 e5 21.♖c2 ♖hd8∓

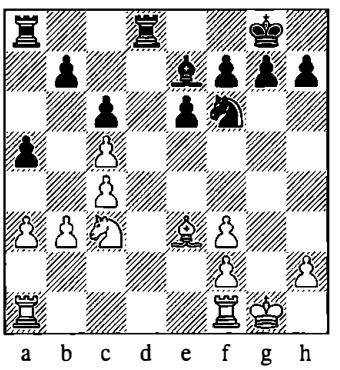
White was still suffering in Cacho Reigadas – Shirov, Cala Galdana 2001.

C2) 11.b3 0–0



12.♖fd1

12.e4? once again runs into 12...♘c5! when White gets an even worse version of the previous line: 13.dxc5 dxe4 14.♕xd8 ♖fxd8 15.♗e3 exf3 16.gxf3



16...♖d3! 17.♘a4 ♖ad8 18.b4 This was Kovalenko – Kazhgaleyev, St Petersburg 2009, and now 18...♘d7N 19.f4 ♗f6 20.♖a2 ♖b3∓ leads to a serious advantage for Black.

12...♕b6

This is a logical follow-up to the earlier ...a5 move.

13.c5

13.♕c2 occurred in Hernandez – Archangelsky, Hoogeveen 2001. Here Black should have continued with the natural 13...♕a6! when the pressure on the c4-pawn is quite annoying for White, and 14.c5 b6 15.cxb6 ♘xb6 reaches a nice position for Black.

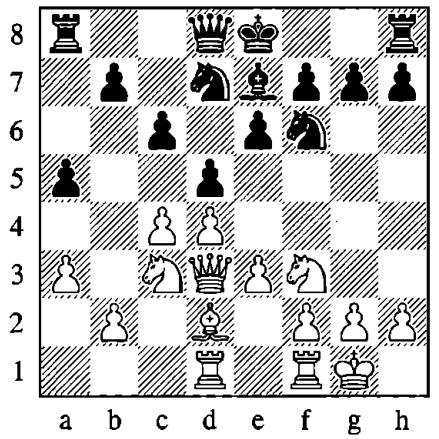
13...♕a6 14.♕xa6 ♖xa6 15.b4 ♘e4

Another option is 15...♖fa8!?N 16.b5 cxb5 17.♘xb5 ♖c6!= followed by ...b6.

16.♗e1 axb4 17.axb4 ♘xc3 18.♗xc3 ♖fa8 19.♖xa6 ♖xa6 20.♖b1 b5

The endgame was balanced in Romanishin – Sargissian, Aix-les-Bains 2011.

C3) 11.♖ad1



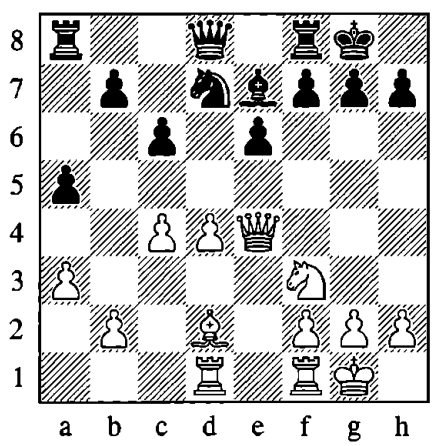
This is pretty similar to 11.♖fd1, as covered in variation C5 below.

11...0–0 12.e4 dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4

I like the idea of clarifying the central situation by exchanging a pair of knights.

14.♕xe4

Here I was surprised to discover than none of the three existing games proceeded with the strongest move:



14...a4!N

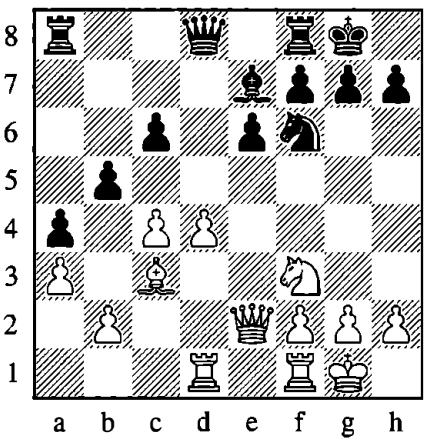
It is useful to fix White's queenside pawns after a2-a3 has been played. I checked a few possible directions from here.

15.♗c3

15.♗f4 ♕a5 16.♖fe1 ♖fd8 17.♕c2 ♖ac8 18.h3 b5 19.c5 ♘f8 reaches a complex but roughly equal position.

15...♘f6 16.♕e2 b5!

A nice positional pawn sacrifice.



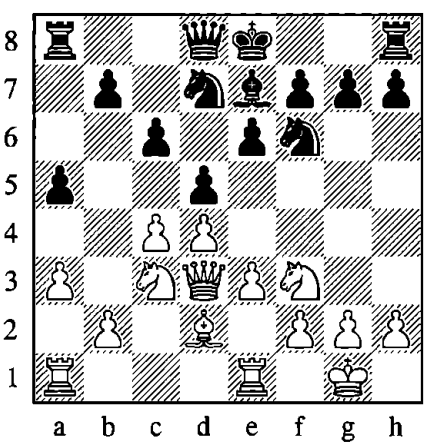
17.♘e5

After 17.cxb5 cxb5 18.♕xb5 ♘d5⩱ Black has obvious compensation due to his solid blockade of the isolated pawn and long-term pressure on the queenside.

17...♕c7 18.♗d2 bxc4 19.♕xc4 ♖fc8=

The position remains balanced.

C4) 11.♖fe1



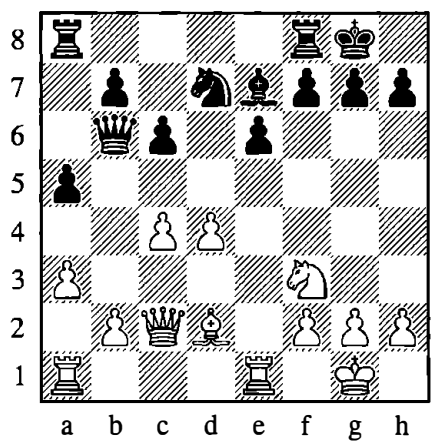
Another rook move which does not alter the play too much.

11...0–0 12.e4 dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♕xe4 ♕b6

This has been played a few times and works out fine, although the untested 14...a4!?N could be considered here too.

15.♕c2

After 15.♗c3 Black can start to harass the c4-pawn with: 15...♕a6! 16.♕e2 (16.b3?! a4! shows the advantage for Black in provoking the a2-a3 move. 16...♘b6 17.♘e5 ♗f6 Black has promising counterplay.



15...a4N

15...♖fe8 allowed White to play 16.a4 in the game Romanishin – Gunina, Podebrady 2012.

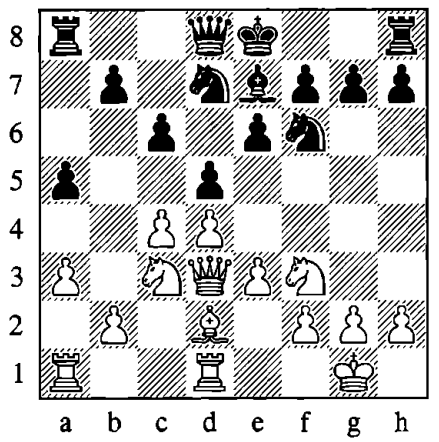
16.d5

Maybe in the aforementioned game Black was worried about this central break, but it turns out not to be dangerous.

16...cxd5 17.cxd5 ♗c5! 18.♗c3 exd5 19.♖ad1 ♕d6!=

White has enough activity to win his pawn back, but he will get no more than equal chances.

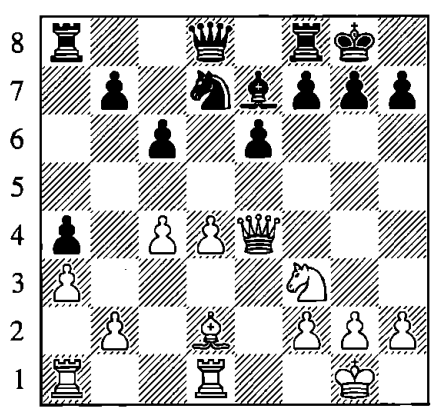
C5) 11.♖fd1



This has been the highest-scoring of White's main options, although it is probably no better or worse than the similar rook moves.

11...0–0 12.e4 dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♕xe4 a4

Once again we see Black fixing White's queenside structure. We have already examined this type of position in the previous few lines, so I will just mention an illustrative game in which the play took a slightly different direction.



15.♗c3 ♖e8

The familiar idea of 15...♘f6 16.♕e2 b5!?

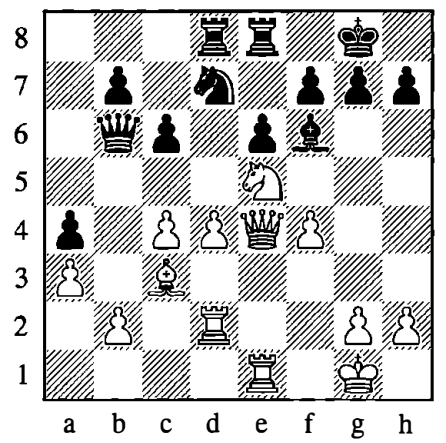
could be considered here too, although in the present line White's queen's rook might find a good home on c1, whereas in the earlier variation C3 it had already committed itself to d1.

16.♖d2 ♕b6 17.♖e1 ♗f6

17...♕a6 is playable too, although after 18.♘e5 Black has nothing better than exchanging knights and playing for a draw in a fractionally worse position.

18.♘e5 ♖ad8 19.f4

This position was reached in Romanishin – Svetushkin, Kavala 2006. Here the most accurate continuation is:



19...♕a6!N 20.♕e2

After 20.c5 g6 Black has an easy plan of ...♗g7 followed by ...♘f6-d5.

20...♗e7!

Black wants to continue with ...♘b6 attacking the c4-pawn. The game is more or less balanced.

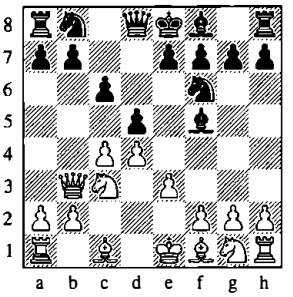
The immediate 20...♘b6 allows White to launch an attack with 21.♘g4 ♗e7 22.♘h6†!? gxh6 23.♕g4† ♔f8 24.d5 with unclear complications.

Conclusion

The early exchange of bishops on d3 takes some tension out of the position, but that does not mean the ensuing struggle will be easy for either player. If Black plays lazily then the e3-e4 advance may offer White a useful space advantage in the centre, so developing the bishop to b4 makes good sense. Later the bishop may exchange itself for the knight on c3 or retreat to e7, depending on how White plays. The ensuing positions are equal but far from dead, and both sides will have to play accurately in the battle that lies ahead.

Chapter 13

3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5



5.♕b3

Variation Index

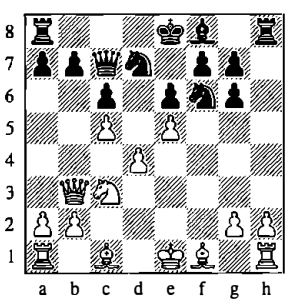
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5 5.♕b3

5...♕b6

A) 6.c5 143
B) 6.cxd5 143
C) 6.♕xb6 axb6 7.cxd5 ♘xd5! 8.♘xd5 cxd5 144
- **C1) 9.♗b5†** 145
- **C2) 9.♗d2** 145

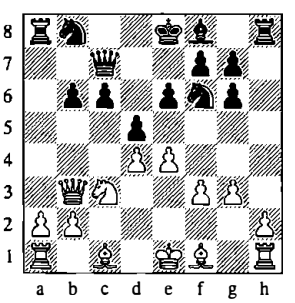
D) 6.♘f3 e6 146
- **D1) 7.♕xb6?!** 147
- **D2) 7.♗e2** 148
- **D3) 7.♘h4 ♗e4 8.c5 ♕c7 9.f3 ♗g6** 149
  - **D31) 10.e4** 150
  - **D32) 10.♘xg6** 151
- **D4) 7.c5 ♕c7** 151
  - **D41) 8.♕a4** 152
  - **D42) 8.♘h4** 152

D31) after 13.e5



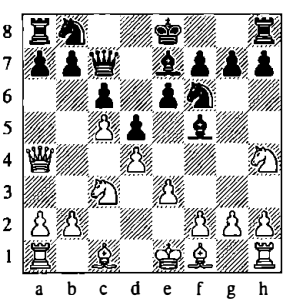
13...♘xe5!N

D32) after 13.e4



13...b5!N

D41) after 9.♘h4



9...♗e4N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5 5.♕b3

This queen sortie is a natural response to Black's last move but, without the preliminary exchange on d5, it can hardly hurt us.

5...♕b6

Here White has four main options: **A) 6.c5**, **B) 6.cxd5**, **C) 6.♕xb6** and **D) 6.♘f3**.

A) 6.c5

This would be fully justified if Black was forced to swap queens, but in the present position it is just premature.

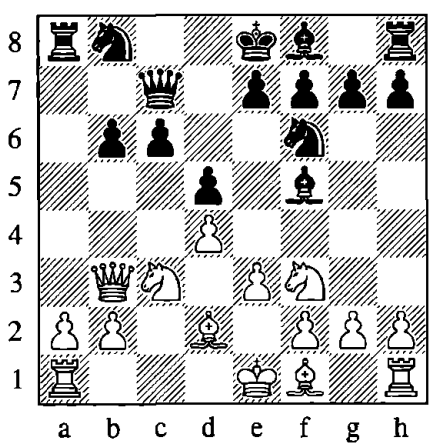
6...♕c7!

Now Black is ready to undermine White's pawn wedge from two sides: with ...b6 on the queenside and ...e5 in the centre.

7.♘f3

Another game continued: 7.f4?! b6 8.cxb6 axb6 9.♗d2 e6 10.♘f3 Voloshin – Meduna, Pardubice 1994, and now the simple 10...♗e7N 11.♗e2 0–0 12.0–0 c5 enables Black to maintain clearly better chances.

7...b6 8.cxb6 axb6 9.♗d2



9...e6

I would prefer the prophylactic 9...h6!N followed by completing development as in the example shown below. In that case Black keeps a slight edge without allowing the possibility mentioned in the next note.

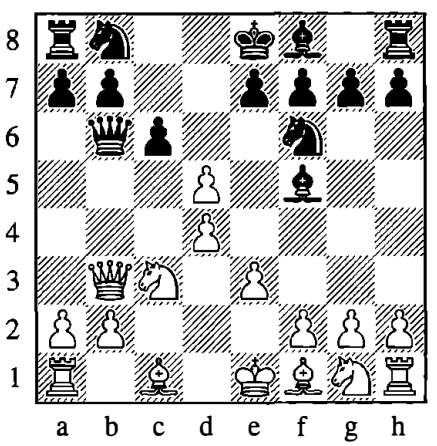
10.♗e2

White should have preferred 10.♘h4!N ♗e4 11.f3 ♗g6 with approximately equal chances.

10...♗e7 11.0–0 0–0 12.♖fc1 ♘bd7 13.a4 c5⩲

Black's central majority gave him the edge in Voiska – Madl, Ostrava 1999.

B) 6.cxd5



6...♕xb3

Black takes the opportunity to damage his opponent's pawns.

7.axb3 ♘xd5!

By exchanging knights, Black avoids any ♘b5 raids.

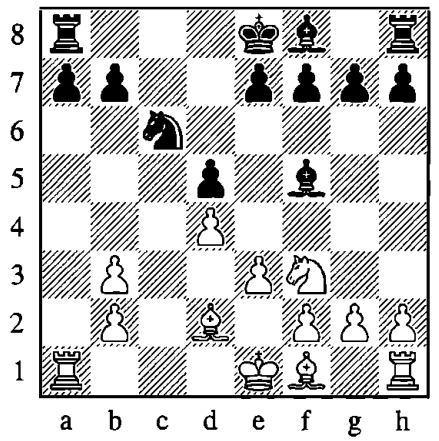
8.♘xd5 cxd5 9.♘f3 ♘c6

The arising endgame is absolutely harmless for Black. I will show just a few illustrative examples.

10.♗d2

Another possible direction is: 10.♗b5 ♗d7 11.♗d2 e6 12.0–0 ♗d6 13.♖fc1 ♔e7 14.♗f1

♖hc8 15.♘e1 a5 16.♘d3 b6 17.f3 f6 Black was even slightly better in Szeberenyi – Sulyok, Hungary 1997.



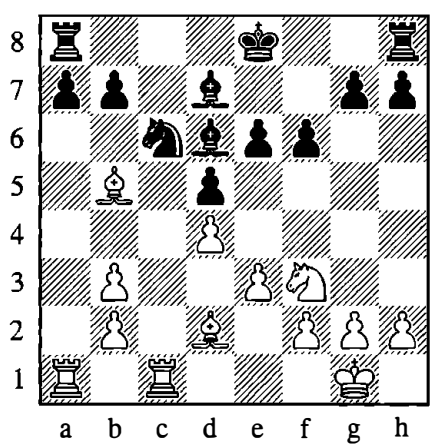
10...f6

It is important to cover the e5-square, avoiding a possible jump of the white knight.

11.♗b5

White tried 11.b4 e6 12.♗b5 in Hernandez Carmenates – Burmakin, Montcada 2012. Here the best way forward is 12...♔d7N 13.♔e2 ♗d6 14.♖hc1 ♖hc8 and Black is by no means worse.

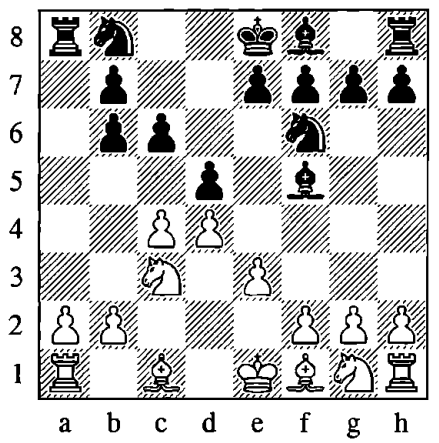
11...♗d7 12.0–0 e6 13.♖fc1 ♗d6



14.♘e1 ♔e7 15.♗e2 ♖hc8 16.♘d3 ♘d8

Black was comfortably equal in Dumitrache – Dovzik, Odorheiu Secuiesc 1993.

C) 6.♕xb6 axb6



7.cxd5

This is better than 7.♘f3?! e6 when Black already has the more promising game. This position is examined in the later variation D1 via the move order 6.♘f3 e6 7.♕xb6 axb6.

7...♘xd5!

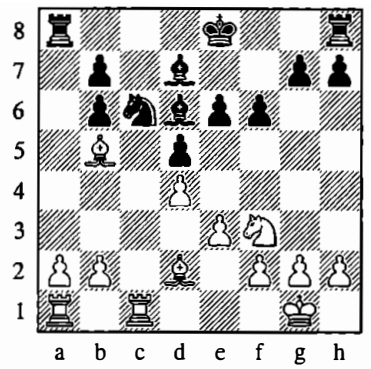
It is essential to take this way, as the exchange of a pair of knights leaves White with very few ideas on the queenside.

The inaccurate 7...cxd5? 8.♘f3 gives White some initiative.

8.♘xd5 cxd5

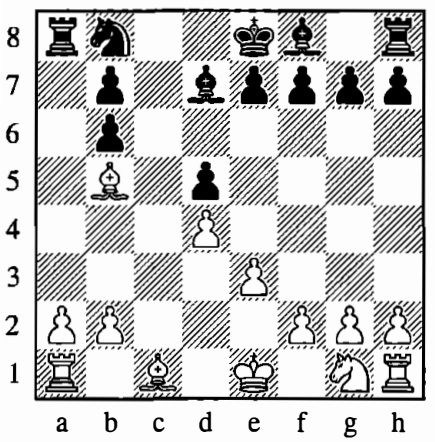
Here I checked two main continuations: **C1) 9.♗b5†** and **C2) 9.♗d2**.

9.♘f3 ♘c6 10.♗b5 f6 11.♗d2 ♗d7 (11...e6 is also fine, and transposes to variation C2 below. However, it is simpler to retreat the bishop to d7 when the opportunity is given.) 12.0–0 e6 13.♖fc1 ♗d6



Black has simple equality, for instance: 14.a3 ♔e7 15.♗c3 ♘a5 16.♗xd7 ♔xd7= G. Gustafsson – Soderborg, Linkoping 2001.

C1) 9.♗b5† ♗d7



10.♗d3

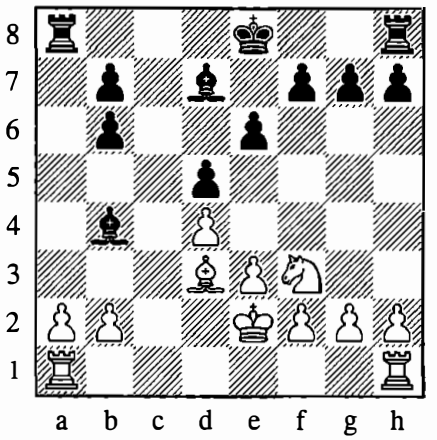
Exchanging the light-squared bishops is strategically favourable for Black, as demonstrated in the following game: 10.♗xd7† ♔xd7 11.♘f3 ♘c6 12.♗d2 e6 13.♔e2 ♗d6 14.♖hc1 ♖a4 15.a3 ♖ha8 16.♖c2 f6 17.♖d1 b5∓ Bernstein – Treybal, Carlsbad 1923.

10...♘c6 11.♗d2 e6 12.♘f3 ♘b4!

Not the only good move, but the most incisive.

13.♗xb4 ♗xb4† 14.♔e2

Here I found a simple improvement for Black.



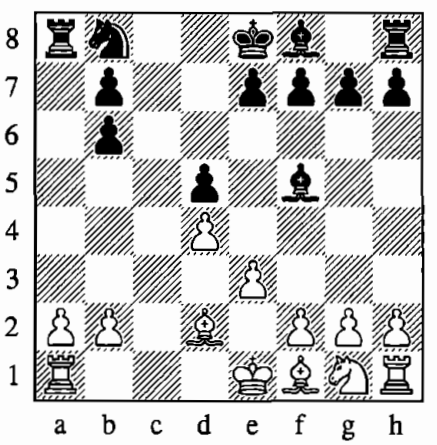
14...f6!N

Preventing ♘e5 and hoping to exploit the bishop pair in the long run. It is important to mention that opening the centre achieves nothing for White:

15.e4 dxe4 16.♗xe4 0–0–0!∓

The opening of the position favours Black's bishop pair.

C2) 9.♗d2



9...♘c6 10.♗b5

10.♘f3 f6 11.♗b5 transposes to the earlier note with 9.♘f3.

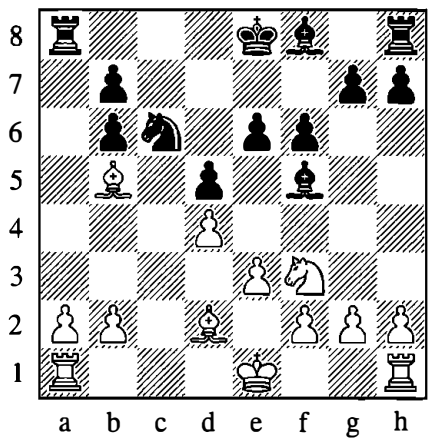
10...e6

Another reasonable option is 10...♗d7 11.♘e2 e6 12.♘c3 which occurred in two encounters. Now after 12...♘a5N 13.♔e2 ♘c4 14.♗xc4 dxc4= Black has no problems.

11.♘f3 f6

It is important to cover the e5-square sooner or later.

There is no doubt that 11...♗d6 is also fine.



12.♔e2

Another direction is:

12.♘h4 ♗e4!?N

12...♗g4 13.h3 ♗h5 14.g4 ♗f7 15.f4 ♗d6 16.♖g1 h6 17.♘f3 ♔e7 was equal in Hebden – N. Pert, Bunratty 2013.

The text move seems more interesting as an attempt to unbalance the game.

13.a3

Black's idea is shown after 13.f3 ♗c2 14.g3 ♗a4 15.♗e2 ♗b3! 16.a3 ♘a5 with good play on the queenside.

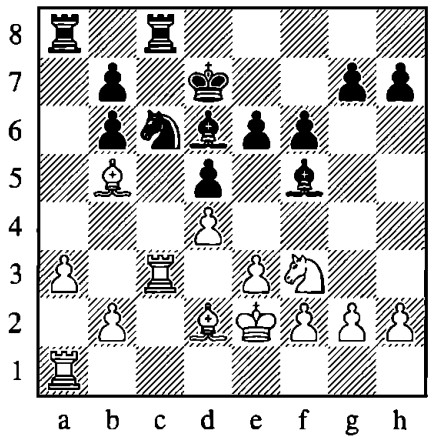
13...h6 14.♖c1 ♖c8 15.f3 ♗h7 16.g3 ♗d6=

The position remains balanced.

12...♗d6 13.♖hc1 ♔d7

13...♖c8!?N 14.♖c3 e5 is also an option.

14.a3 ♖hc8 15.♖c3



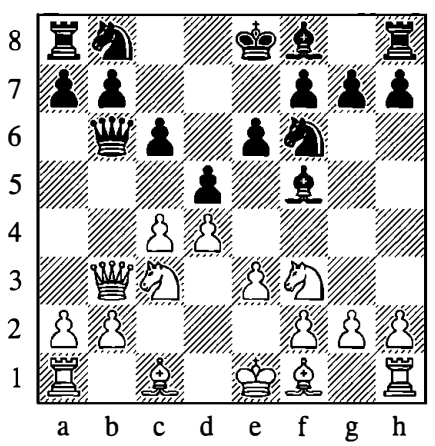
15...♔d8!

This may look a bit passive, but in the following game Black quickly achieved full equality.

16.♖ac1 ♘a7 17.♖xc8† ♖xc8 18.♖xc8† ♔xc8=

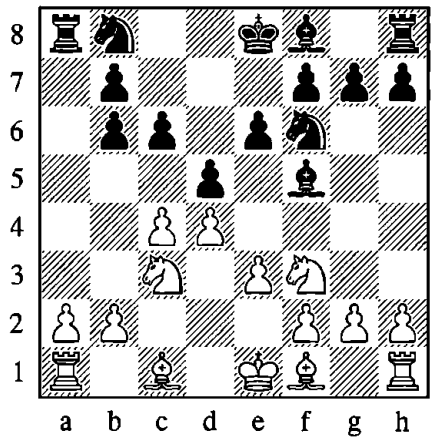
Li Ruofan – Kolbus, Port Erin 2004.

D) 6.♘f3 e6



Despite there being a serious number of games, this line is pretty harmless and Black's play is quite simple. There are four main continuations: **D1) 7.♕xb6?!**, **D2) 7.♗e2**, **D3) 7.♘h4** and **D4) 7.c5**.

D1) 7.♕xb6?! axb6



This exchange obviously favours Black, since his rook becomes active along the a-file and his front b-pawn can be used to gain space on the queenside.

8.♘h4

The queen exchange has usually been connected with this follow-up. White hopes to eliminate the light-squared bishop, but an unpleasant surprise awaits him.

8...♗c2! 9.cxd5

This has been White's most popular reply, but it does not do him much good.

9.♔d2 ♗b3! 10.cxd5 gives Black a pleasant choice:

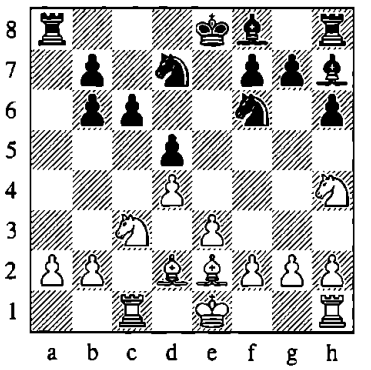
a) 10...exd5 is a simple option which transposes to the note to White's 10th move in the main line below.

b) Black has the additional option of 10...♘xd5!?. This also gives him slightly better chances, and in the one practical example I found, White got into further trouble after 11.♗d3?! ♘b4∓ in Espin – Segovia Sanchez, Euskadi 2000.

9.♗d2

This simple move may be White's best chance to equalize. Black should respond with:

9...h6 10.♖c1 ♗h7 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♗e2 ♘bd7



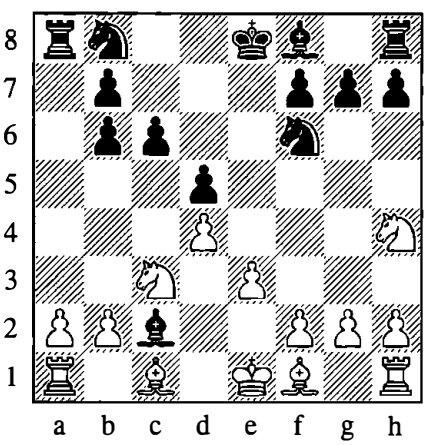
13.a4?!

13.a3 is more accurate, although Black retains the better game after 13...b5 followed by ...♘b6. The text move occurred in Popchev – Engqvist, Podgorica 1991. Now with the simple:

13...♘e4!N 14.♗d1 ♘df6

Black could have secured an obvious superiority.

9...exd5



10.♗d2

Black also does well after:

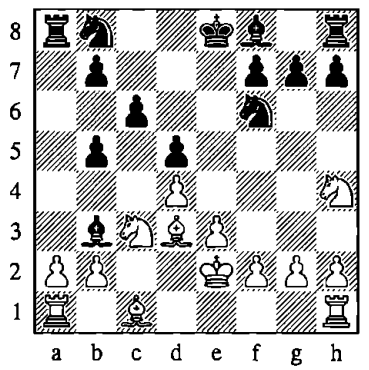
10.♔d2 ♗b3!

The bishop escapes and helps Black to create play on the queenside.

11.♗d3 b5 12.♔e2

Another game continued 12.♗b1 ♘bd7 13.♔e1 b4 14.♘e2 ♗c4 15.f3 g6 and Black was clearly better, Akselrod – V. Popov, Ekaterinburg 2002.

After the text move I found an improvement over the game Ioseliani – Cramling, Tilburg 1994.

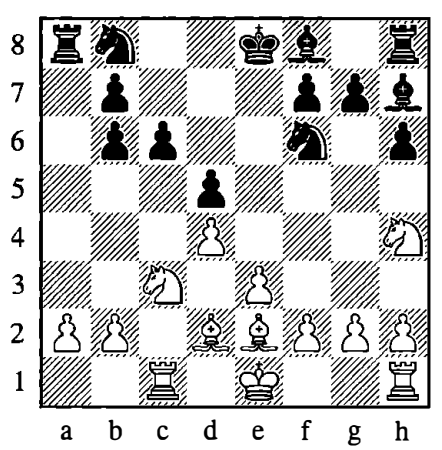


12...b4N 13.♘b1 ♗c4 14.♘d2 ♗xd3† 15.♔xd3 ♘a6

Black has ongoing pressure on the queenside.

10...h6 11.♖c1 ♗h7 12.♗e2

I found four games that reached this position. Black keeps a positional advantage with any normal move, but following option is the one I like the most.



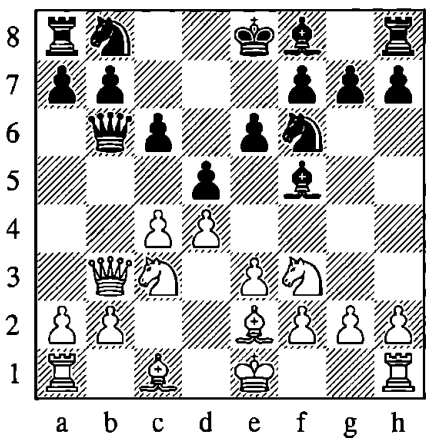
12...♘e4!?N

A possible continuation is:

13.a3 ♘d6! 14.♘f3 ♘d7

Black is ready to start his play on the queenside with ...b5 and ...♘b6, with clearly preferable chances.

D2) 7.♗e2



This is an improvement on the last line from White's perspective, but such a set-up can hardly threaten Black.

7...h6

7...♘bd7 is also fine, as ♘h4 is not a real threat. In any case, Black has a comfortable position and I will just mention one noteworthy plan for White.

8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♗d2 ♗e7 10.♖fc1 0–0 11.♘a4!?

At least this move forces Black to make a decision.

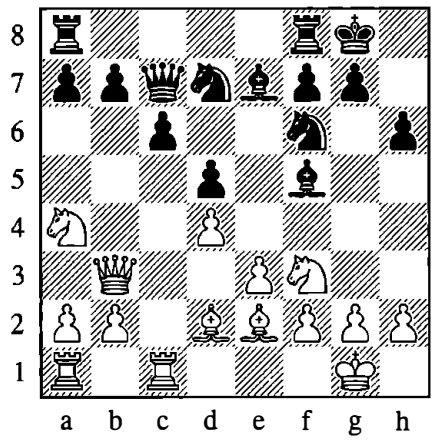
11...♕c7

11...♕xb3 is also fine, and after 12.axb3 ♗d6 13.h3 ♖fe8 14.♘c3 a6= Black had nothing to worry about in Asanov – Dokhoian, Minsk 1986.

12.cxd5

12.♗b4? is a serious mistake in view of 12...dxc4 13.♗xc4 ♗xb4 14.♕xb4 b5! 15.♗xb5 ♕b7! 16.♖xc6 a6–+ and Black won material in Kloepfer – Jaracz, Hamburg 1995.

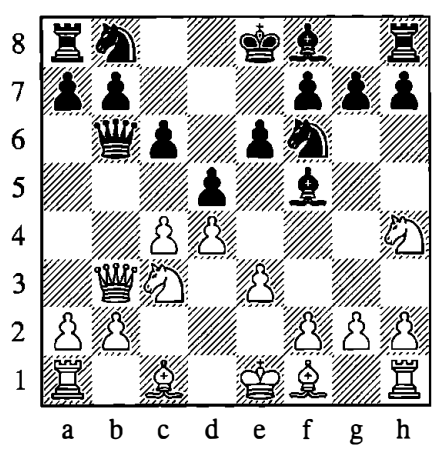
12...exd5



13.♗b4 ♖fe8 14.♗xe7 ♖xe7=

Black has a comfortable version of the Carlsbad pawn structure, with a pair of bishops exchanged and his other bishop developed actively. Meanwhile, White's queen is blocking his traditional minority attack.

D3) 7.♘h4



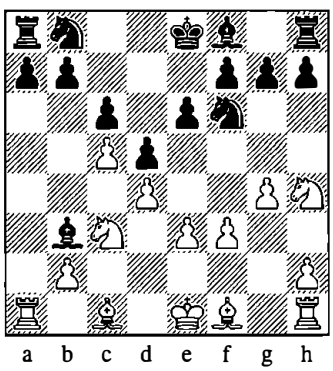
7...♗e4!

Black should avoid the tempting 7...♕xb3 8.axb3 ♗c2 9.c5! ♗xb3 10.♗d3 ♘bd7 11.♘f3⩲ when White has good compensation for the pawn.

8.c5

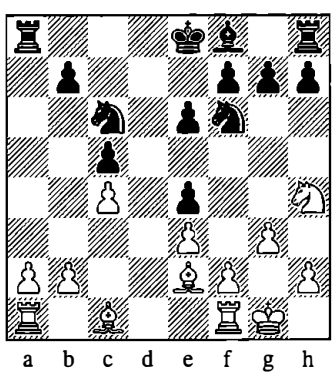
Other options are much worse.

8.f3? ♕xb3 9.axb3 ♗c2! gives Black a much better version of the previous note, as the knight on h4 is threatened with being trapped. His best attempt is: 10.g4 ♗xb3 11.c5

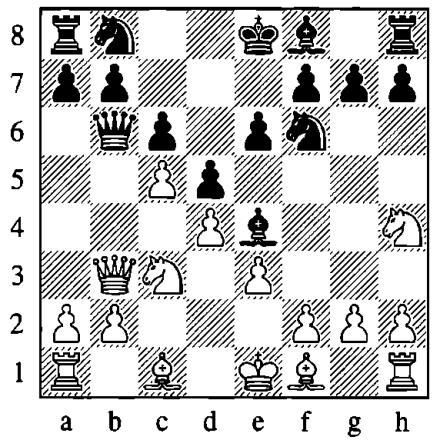


Now in Franic – Galic, Sibenik 2011, the natural 11...♗e7N 12.♘g2 ♘bd7 13.♖a3 ♗c4 would have retained an obvious advantage for Black.

8.♘xe4?! is also inadvisable as after 8...dxe4! White's knight is misplaced on the edge of the board. A good example continued: 9.♕xb6 axb6 10.g3 c5! 11.dxc5 bxc5 12.♗e2 ♘c6 13.0–0



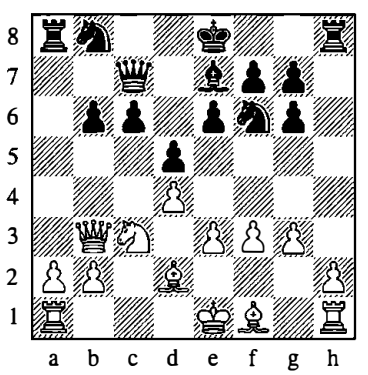
This was Kretchetov – Amanov, Las Vegas 2010, and here Black could have played 13...g5!N 14.♘g2 ♗g7 with some advantage.



8...♕c7 9.f3 ♗g6

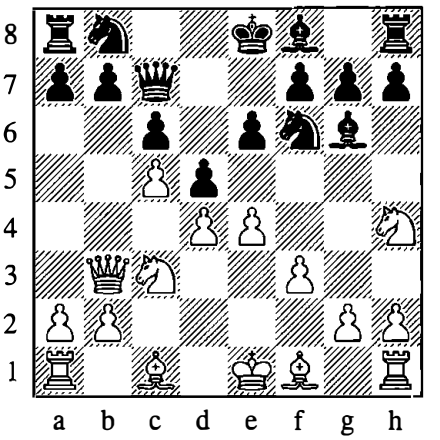
Here I examined two main options for White: **D31) 10.e4** and **D32) 10.♘xg6**.

A minor alternative is: 10.g3 b6 (Black can easily play 10...♘bd7, but I do not see any reason to postpone the thematic undermining.) 11.cxb6 axb6 12.♗d2 ♗e7 13.♘xg6 hxg6



Black already has a comfortable position and after the dubious 14.f4? c5 15.♗e2 ♘c6 he easily obtained a pleasant advantage in Piket – Miles, Linares 1995.

D31) 10.e4

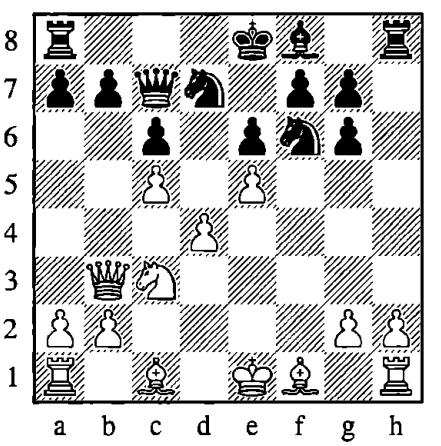


10...dxe4

The immediate 10...b6!? also comes into serious consideration, for example: 11.exd5 exd5 12.♘xg6?! hxg6 13.♗e3 bxc5 14.dxc5 ♘bd7 Black was already much better in Boss – Roeder, Nuremberg 1999.

11.♘xg6 hxg6 12.fxe4 ♘bd7 13.e5

Up to now all the moves have been highly logical, but here Black needs to improve.



13...♘xe5!N

Black went wrong with 13...♘xc5? in Plichta – Stoma, Warsaw 2009, after which the unexpected 14.♕c2!N would have given White the advantage. (Instead White played

14.dxc5? transposing to the main line below.)

14.dxe5

After 14.♗f4 ♘f3† 15.gxf3 ♕xf4 16.♕xb7 ♖b8 17.♕xc6† ♔d8 neither king is completely safe, but White's is in greater danger.

14...♕xe5† 15.♗e2N

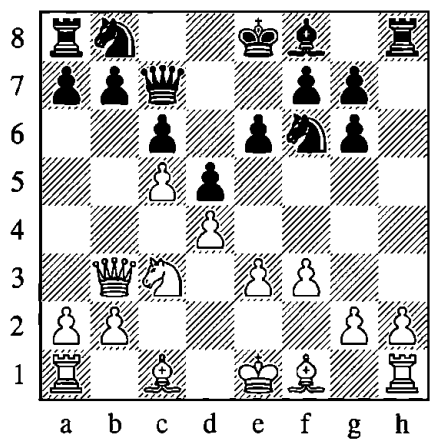
The best chance.

15.♘e2?! 0–0–0 gave Black a larger advantage in Plichta – Stoma, Warsaw 2009.

15...0–0–0

Black has great compensation for the piece.

D32) 10.♘xg6 hxg6



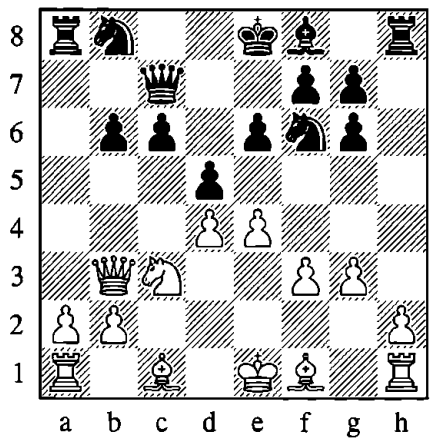
11.g3

11.e4 has also been played. Now 11...dxe4 leads immediately to variation D31 above, and was actually the move order seen in the Plichta – Stoma game that was quoted.

It is also worth mentioning that 11...b6!?N gives Black a great game as usual, for instance 12.cxb6 axb6 13.♗e3 (13.g3 transposes to the main line below) 13...b5 14.e5 ♘fd7 and Black can easily seize the initiative on the queenside.

11...b6 12.cxb6 axb6 13.e4

This happened in Abbasov – Koziak, Sautron 2007. At this point Black's strongest continuation is:



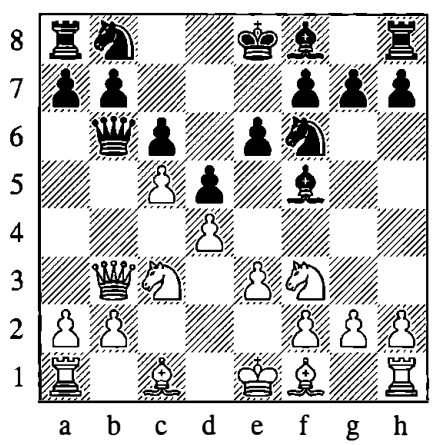
13...b5!N

Seizing space on the queenside.

14.♗d3 ♘bd7 15.0–0 dxe4! 16.♘xe4 ♘d5∓

Black has the more pleasant game.

D4) 7.c5

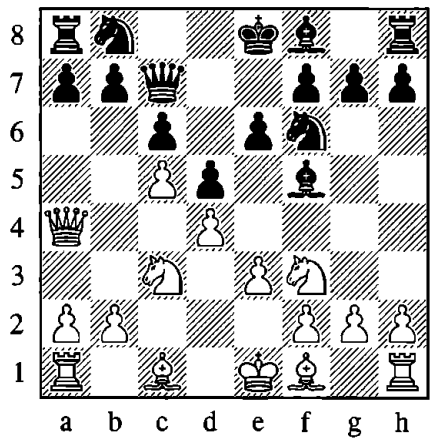


7...♕c7

As usual, Black avoids opening the a-file for White's rook and prepares the thematic undermining of the queenside. White's two main replies are **D41) 8.♕a4** and **D42) 8.♘h4**.

After 8.♗e2 I like the thematic 8...b6, clarifying the situation on the queenside. After 9.cxb6 axb6 10.♗d2 we reach a position considered in variation A at the start of the chapter.

D41) 8.♕a4



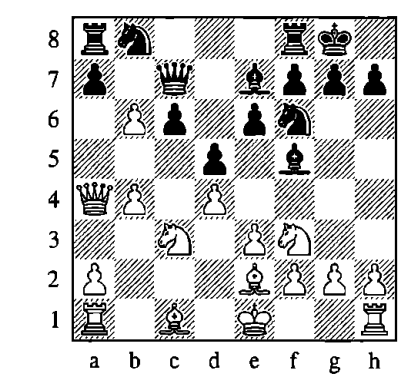
White prepares to meet ...b6 with b2-b4, but Black can easily postpone that plan and play for central expansion with ...e5 instead.

8...♗e7

8...♘bd7 is perfectly fine and may transpose to the main line. Black could also consider 8...h6!? to safeguard his light-squared bishop.

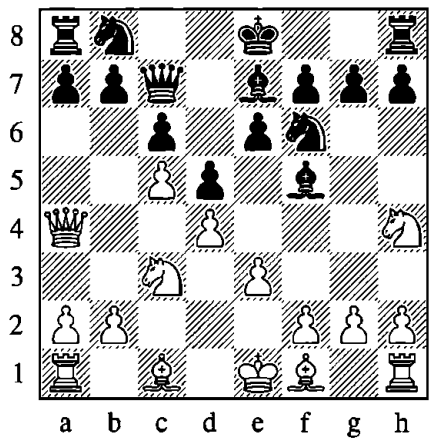
9.♘h4

9.b4 is worse, as after 9...0–0 10.♗e2 Black comes with a nice tactical trick: 10...b5 11.cxb6 (11.♕b3 a5 12.bxa5 ♕xa5 13.0–0 ♘bd7 was better for Black in Nakonechny – Zubov, Nikolaev 2001.)



11...♕b7! 12.0–0 axb6 13.♕b3 h6! 14.a4 ♘bd7 Black has a great game, as he will easily carry out the ...c5 break in the near future.

This position has occurred in three games. Black can play any sensible move here, but my preference is:



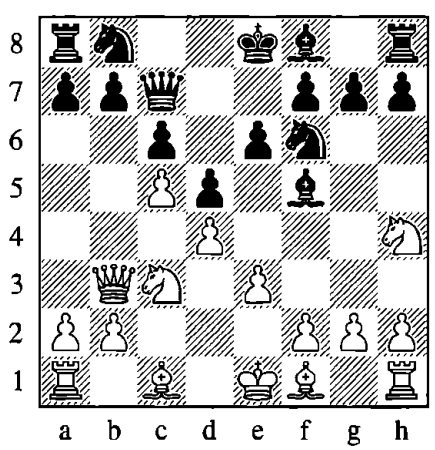
9...♗e4N

Provoking a slight weakening of White's kingside.

10.f3 ♗g6 11.♘xg6 hxg6 12.g3 ♘bd7 13.b4 e5⇄

Black has a lot of counterplay.

D42) 8.♘h4



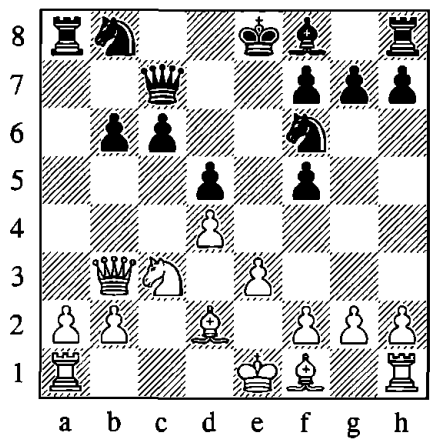
This is White's usual idea.

8...b6!?

8...♗g6 is the main theoretical option and the choice of most strong players but, as the reader can see from the previous lines, I am a big fan of the undermining move.

9.♘xf5 exf5 10.cxb6 axb6 11.♗d2

Another game went 11.♗d3 g6 12.♗d2 ♘bd7 13.♖c1 ♕b7 14.f3 reaching the same position as in the main line below.

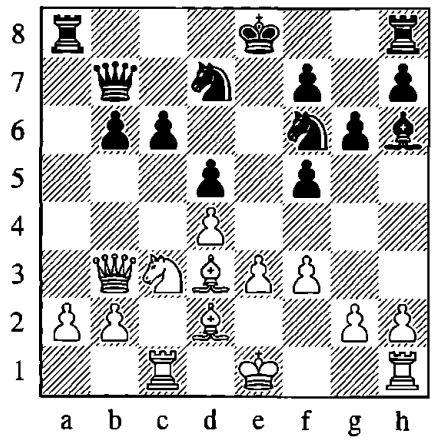


11...♘bd7 12.♖c1 ♕b7

12...♕d6!? is also worthy of consideration, especially as it stops the potential repetition mentioned in the note to move 15 below.

13.f3 g6 14.♗d3 ♗h6!?

Obviously there is nothing wrong with 14...♗g7 15.0–0 0–0 either.



15.0–0

White's best move may well be 15.♕b4 inviting a repetition after 15...♗f8 16.♕b3.

15...0–0 16.♕c2 ♖fe8∓

Black was more than okay in Korsunsky – Somlai, New York 1993.

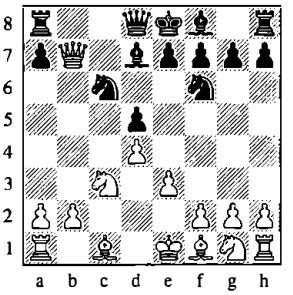
Conclusion

The queen excursion to b3 is not dangerous when played before exchanging pawns on d5. The opposition of queens on b3 and b6 could lead to a situation where either side has doubled b-pawns. In the event of an early cxd5 exchange, as in variations B and C, it is important for Black to take back with the knight on d5, as the subsequent knight exchange will dampen White's queenside prospects.

The most interesting positions of the chapter occur after White advances with c4-c5. Generally Black should react by retreating his queen to c7, followed by undermining the enemy queenside wedge with ...b6 at the earliest convenience. After a pawn exchange on b6, Black's open a-file and central majority are useful positional pluses, and his quick development might also lead to tactical opportunities such as those seen in variation D31.



3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5



5.cxd5 – Glasgow Kiss

Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♕b3 ♘c6! 7.♕xb7

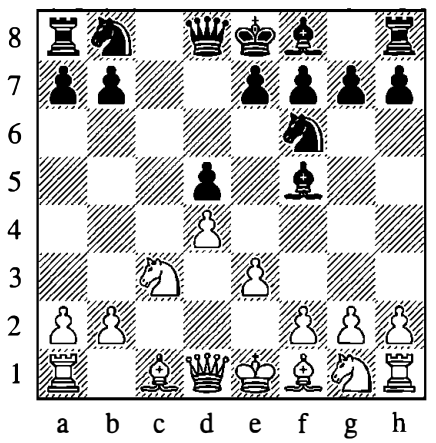
7...♗d7

A) 8.♗b5 156
B) 8.a3 157
C) 8.♕b3 ♖b8 9.♕d1 e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 158
C1) 11.♘f3 159
C2) 11.♘ge2 ♗c5! 160
C21) 12.♘f4N 160
C22) 12.♘d4 162
C3) 11.♗e2 ♗d6 12.♘f3 0–0 13.0–0 ♕e7 164
C31) 14.♘xe5 165
C32) 14.g3 165
C33) 14.♘d4 ♖fc8 167
C331) 15.♖e1 167
C332) 15.h3 ♖b6 16.a4 ♗b4! 17.a5 ♖bb8 18.♗d2 ♘c4! 19.♗xc4 ♖xc4 20.♘ce2 ♗d6N 21.b3 ♖cc8 22.♖c1 ♘e4 23.♘f4 ♕g5 169
C3321) 24.f3 171
C3322) 24.♖xc8† 173

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5 5.cxd5

It goes without saying that this capture, in conjunction with ♕b3 on the next move, is the most challenging continuation for White.

5...cxd5



6.♕b3

For a time this was considered a semi-refutation of Black's bishop jump on move 4.

6.♘f3 gives Black a choice. 6...a6 leads to variation A of Chapter 9, which we saw was harmless. Black can also consider 6...e6 via the present move order, which should equalize pretty easily as well.

6.♗d3 has been played in some games, but after 6...♗xd3 7.♕xd3 e6 Black has a comfortable version of an Exchange Variation and easy equality.

A final harmless alternative is:

6.♗b5† ♘c6

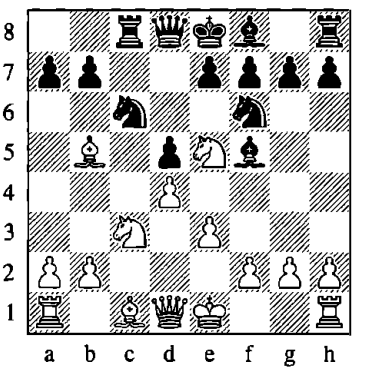
Black has a pleasant choice, as 6...♘bd7 is also fine. One game continued: 7.♘f3 e6 8.♘e5 a6 9.♘xd7 ♘xd7 10.♗d3 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 ♗e7 12.0–0 0–0 13.e4?! dxe4 14.♕xe4 b5∓ Black was positionally better in Karagiannis – Pavlidis, Peristeri 2010.

7.♘f3 ♖c8

White's obvious attempt to fight for the initiative is:

8.♘e5

This position has occurred in three games. Here Black can easily solve his opening problems with:

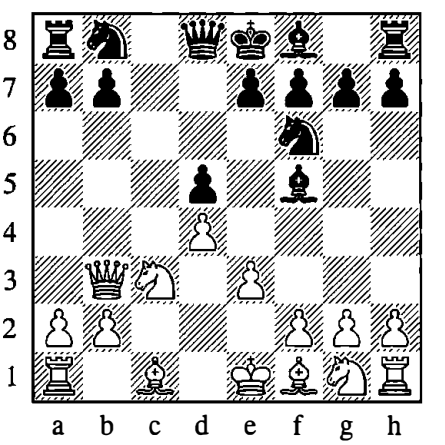


8...♘d7!N 9.♘xc6

9.♘xd5 ♘dxe5 10.dxe5 ♗e4=

9...bxc6 10.♗d3 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 e6=

Followed by a quick ...c5.



6...♘c6!

A revolutionary concept, first analysed seriously in Glasgow. Although the database shows a few early examples of this move from 1998, it was not until 2012 that any grandmasters took notice of it. It could still catch many players by surprise. For example,

6...♘c6 is not mentioned in either of the recent repertoire books by GM Kornev or IM Watson.

Black sacrifices the b7-pawn for active play; he is not going to regain the pawn anytime soon, but he can expect long-term compensation based on the activity of his pieces.

The reader might be surprised to learn that 6...♗c8 has been played in more than 200 games. I was always sceptical about this passive retreat, even though it has been used by strong players.

7.♕xb7

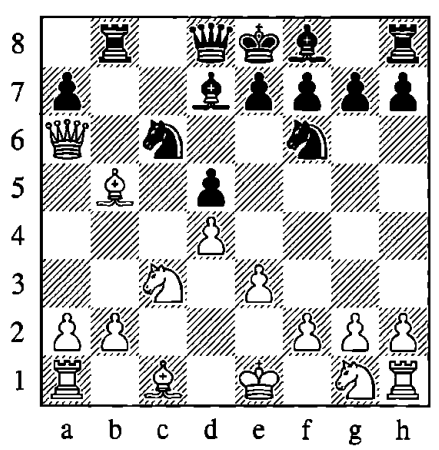
If White does not capture this pawn, one has to wonder why the queen went to b3 at all.

Nevertheless, 7.♘f3 reaches a position that has occurred several times via different move orders. Black's simplest reply is 7...♖b8 8.♘e5 e6 when he has no problems.

7...♗d7

This is the basic tabiya of the whole line. White has tried three moves: **A) 8.♗b5**, **B) 8.a3** and **C) 8.♕b3**.

A) 8.♗b5 ♖b8 9.♕a6



9...♘b4!?N

An obvious novelty.

The known move is not bad either, although I found a quick improvement there too:

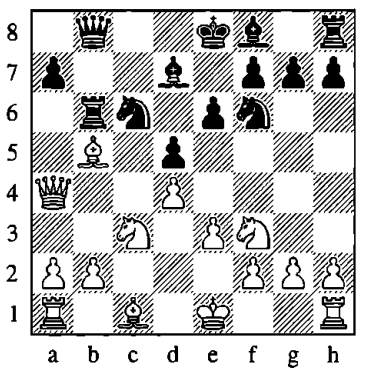
9...♖b6 10.♕a4 ♕b8!N

10...e6 was played in Ezat – Levin, Dos Hermanas 2003, but after 11.♗e2!N (in the game Black obtained good play after 11.♘f3 ♗d6 12.0–0 0–0 13.a3 ♕c7⩱) 11...♗d6 12.♘f3 Black has to prove his compensation.

11.♘f3

Now 11.♗e2 runs into 11...♘b4 12.♕d1 ♗f5 with an initiative for Black, or even 11...♖xb2!?.

11...e6



12.0–0

12.♗e2 ♖xb2! regains the pawn with at least equality for Black.

12...♗d6 13.h3

13.♗e2 is met by 13...♘e5! when Black picks up the h2-pawn.

13...0–0 14.♗e2 ♘e5 15.♕d1 ♘xf3† 16.♗xf3 ♖c8⩱

Black has sufficient compensation due to White's difficulties developing his queenside.

10.♗xd7†

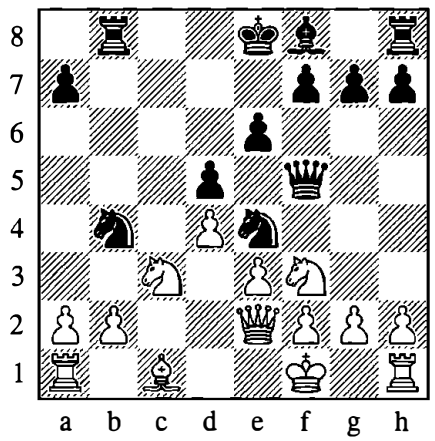
10.♕a4? loses to 10...♖xb5! 11.♘xb5 e5 12.dxe5 ♘e4 and White is helpless against the numerous threats.

10...♕xd7 11.♕e2 ♕f5 12.♔f1 e6

It could be interesting to check 12...♘d3!? as well.

13.♘f3 ♘e4

Black has sufficient compensation due to White's misplaced king. I examined the following line:



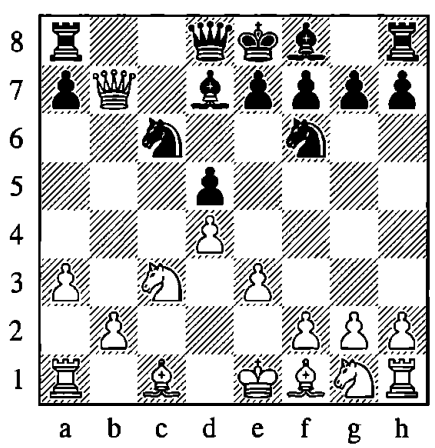
14.♘xe4

In the event of 14.♘h4 ♕f6 15.♘f3 ♕f5= it is difficult for either side to avoid the repetition.

14...dxe4 15.♘e5 ♗d6 16.a3 ♘d3 17.g4 ♕f6 18.♘xd3 exd3 19.♕xd3 ♕f3 20.♖g1 ♗xh2 21.♖g2 ♗d6⩱

Black has an ongoing initiative for the pawn, with better coordination and a safer king.

B) 8.a3



By taking control over the b4-square, White secures the position of the queen when it moves to a6.

8...♖b8 9.♕a6 e5!N

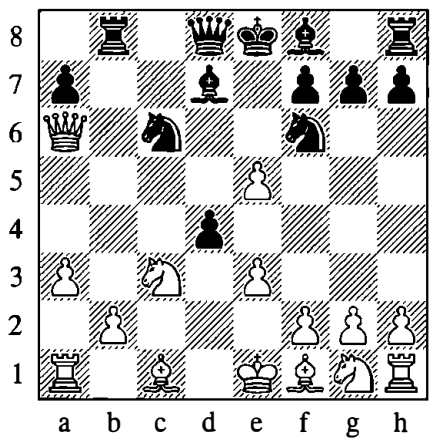
9...♖b6 10.♕d3 e5 was played in Savina – Kashlinskaya, Kazan 2013, but the immediate central break is more aggressive and effective.

10.dxe5

10.♘f3 ♖b6! forces the queen to an inferior square, and after 11.♕e2 ♗d6 White has to solve the problem of developing his kingside.

10...d4!

10...♘xe5 gives Black good play as well, but the text move is more forcing.



11.exf6

11.exd4 ♘xd4 12.♗d3 ♘g4 13.♘f3 ♘xf3† (13...♗c5!?) 14.gxf3 ♘xe5 promises Black rich compensation.

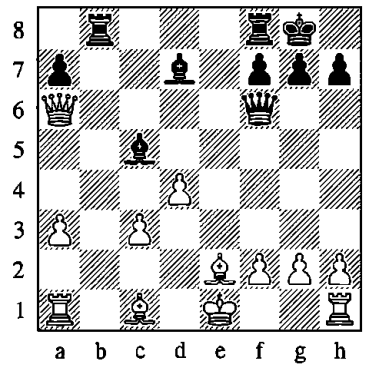
11...dxc3 12.bxc3 ♕xf6 13.♘e2

I also considered 13.♗d2 ♖b6 (also possible is 13...♗d6 14.♘f3 0–0 followed by ...♘e5 at a suitable moment.) 14.♕c4 ♕g6⩱ with an ongoing initiative for Black.

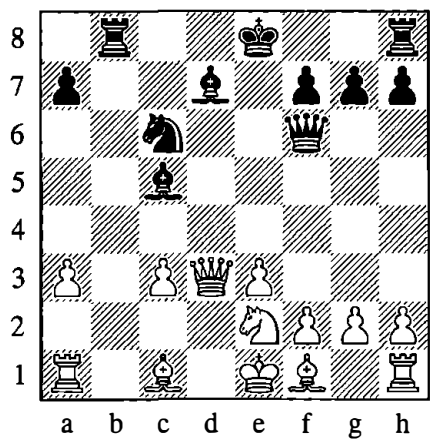
13...♗c5 14.♕d3

14.♘d4 0–0 also gives Black sufficient play,

for example: 15.♗e2 (Risky is 15.♗d2 ♖b2! 16.♗e2 ♗xd4 17.cxd4 ♕g5 with a dangerous initiative.) 15...♘xd4 16.exd4



16...♗xd4! 17.♕xf6 ♗xf6 18.0–0 ♗xc3 19.♖a2 The endgame should be a draw, although Black is marginally more active.



14...♘e5

This is likely to lead to a draw by repetition.

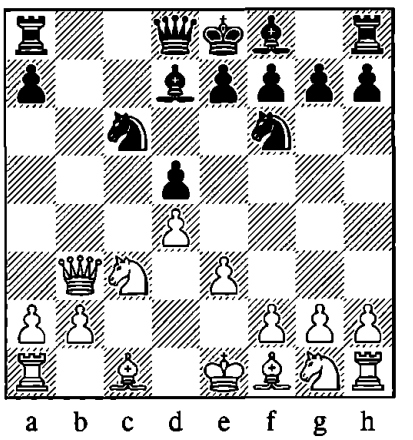
14...♗f5 15.♕c4 ♘e5 is similar.

15.♕c2 ♗f5 16.♕a4†

16.e4? ♗xf2†–+

16...♗d7 17.♕c2 ♗f5=

C) 8.♕b3



This is the most popular and undoubtedly the most logical continuation. White retreats the queen from the danger zone and prepares to catch up on development.

8...♖b8 9.♕d1 e5 10.dxe5

White can also start with:

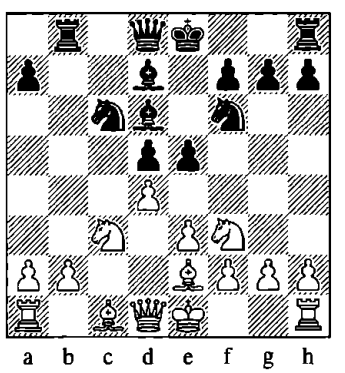
10.♘f3 ♗d6

10...e4?! is premature due to 11.♘e5! as played in Winants – Shaw, Istanbul (ol) 2012. Black can hardly hope for sufficient compensation after his light-squared bishop is eliminated.

11.♗e2

11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♗e2 transposes to our main line – see variation C3 below.

I found a couple of games in which White continued to postpone the central exchange.



11...0–0

11...e4N is more reasonable here than on the previous move. After 12.♘d2 Black can choose between 12...0–0 and 12...♘e7!? transferring the knight to the kingside, with good play for a pawn in either case.

12.0–0

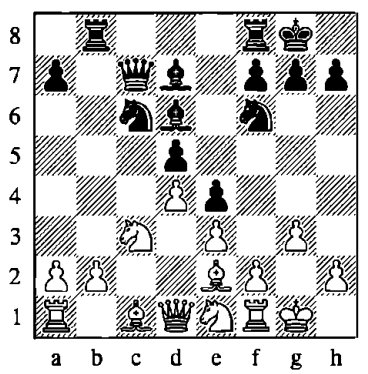
White insists on avoiding the exchange on e5, but I consider it rather dangerous as Black gains a lot of space.

12...e4

Instead 12...♕e7 was played in Korobov – Akopian, Antalya 2013, but this puts less immediate pressure on White.

13.♘e1 ♕c7 14.g3

Here a draw was agreed in Schandorff – S.B. Hansen, Helsingor 2013. I must add that Black's position looks promising after:



14...♘a5!

14...♗h3 15.♘g2 ♕d7 comes into consideration, but I like the plan of playing on the queenside even more.

10...♘xe5

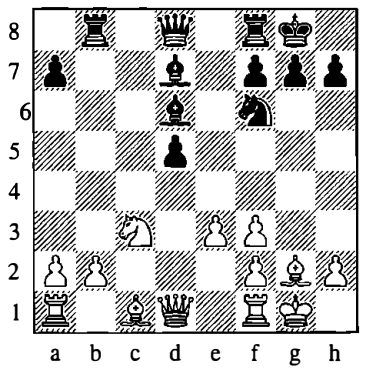
Here White must make an important choice between **C1) 11.♘f3**, **C2) 11.♘ge2** and **C3) 11.♗e2**.

C1) 11.♘f3 ♘xf3†!?N

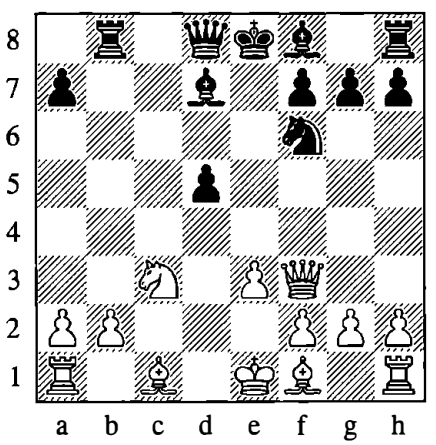
I only found one practical example of White's last move, which continued 11...♗d6 12.♗e2 with an immediate transposition to variation C3. The text move is an independent option that Black can consider playing if it suits his taste.

12.♕xf3

12.gxf3 seems like a safe idea at first glance, but Black has an attractive idea at his disposal: 12...♗d6 13.♗g2 0–0 14.0–0



14...♖b6! Intending to transfer the rook along the sixth rank to kingside, for instance 15.♘e2 ♗e5 16.♘d4 ♘e8! and suddenly Black's initiative becomes rather serious.



12...♗d6 13.h3

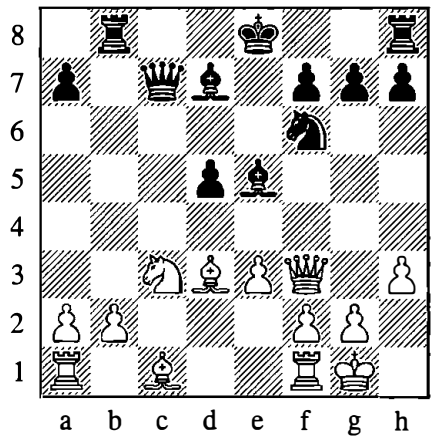
The threat of ...♗g4 forced White to lose additional time.

13...♗e5 14.♗d3 ♕c7

14...♕a5 is more or less the same.

15.0–0

Also after 15.♖b1 ♗xc3† 16.bxc3 ♖xb1 17.♗xb1 0–0 18.0–0 ♗b5 19.♖d1 ♗a4!= the draw looks like the logical result.



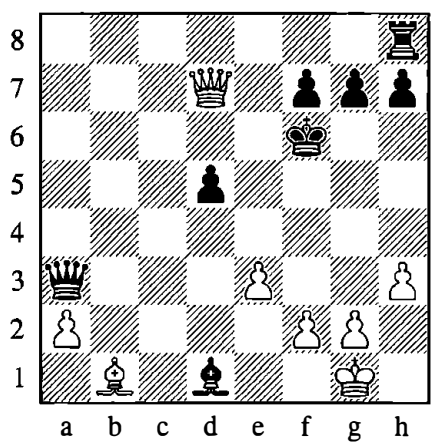
15...♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♕xc3 17.♖b1 ♖xb1 18.♗xb1 ♗b5

18...0–0 19.♕e2 ♖b8 is also fine for Black, and can be used by players who do not wish to allow an immediate draw.

19.♖d1 ♗a4

Black is ready to repeat the position. If White wishes to avoid it, the following speculative line is his only option.

20.♕f4!? ♗xd1 21.♕b8† ♔e7 22.♕xa7† ♘d7 23.♗a3† ♔f6 24.♕xd7 ♕xa3



25.♕f5† ♔e7 26.♕e5† ♔d7 27.♕xd5† ♕d6 28.♕xf7† ♔d8 29.♕xg7 ♖e8

White is poised to take a fifth pawn for the rook, but his pawns are a long way back and it seems to me that Black has more chances to play for a win.

C2) 11.♘ge2

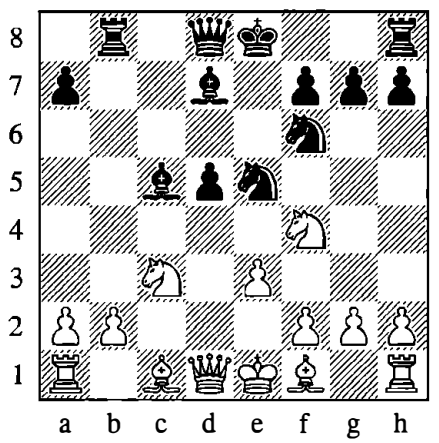
This has only been played in a single game so far, but it is a significant option which should be taken seriously.

11...♗c5!

11...♗d6 runs into 12.♘f4 ♗c6 13.♗e2 0–0 14.0–0 when Black's compensation is questionable.

After the correct bishop move, it is worth considering both **C21) 12.♘f4N** and **C22) 12.♘d4**.

C21) 12.♘f4N



This move has some merit, but it invites Black to carry out the ...d4 push after suitable preparation.

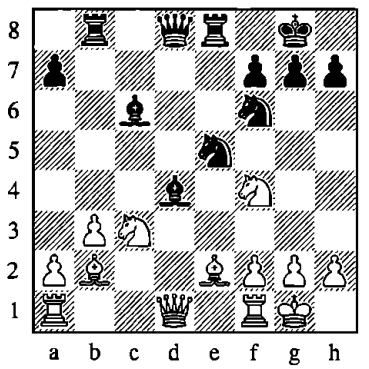
12...0–0 13.♗e2 ♗c6 14.0–0 ♖e8!

14...d4 15.exd4 ♗xd4 is slightly premature in view of 16.♘fd5!.

15.♘d3

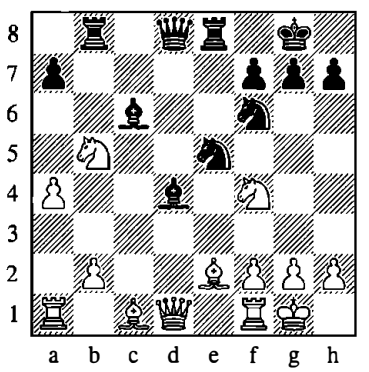
I checked two other options for White.

It is important to note that White cannot develop his queenside comfortably, as 15.b3 is met powerfully by: 15...d4 16.exd4 ♗xd4 17.♗b2

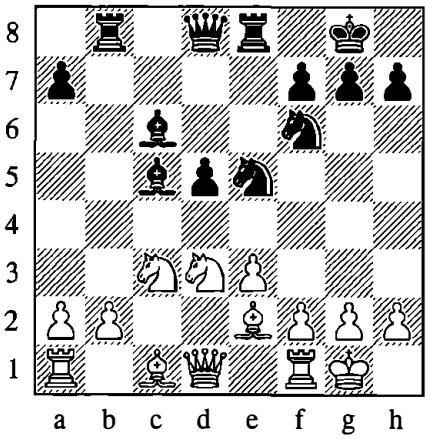


17...g5! 18.♘d3 ♘d5! with a strong initiative.

15.a4 d4 16.exd4 ♗xd4 17.♘b5



17...♗xb5! 18.♗xb5 (18.axb5 may be better, although 18...♖b7! intending ...♖d7 promises Black full compensation.) 18...♗xf2†! 19.♔xf2 (After 19.♔h1 ♕xd1 20.♖xd1 ♖ed8 21.♗d2 ♗d4 Black is by no means worse.) 19...♕b6† 20.♔g3 ♘e4† 21.♔h3 g5! Black's attack is dangerous.



15...♘xd3 16.♕xd3

16.♗xd3? is much worse due to 16...d4 17.exd4 ♕xd4 18.♗e2 ♕h4 with a big advantage for Black.

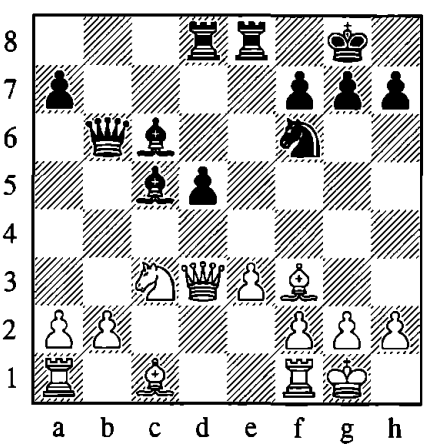
16...♕b6!

The simplifying 16...d4 does not lead to full equality after: 17.exd4 ♕xd4 18.♕g3 ♘e4 19.♘xe4 ♗xe4 20.♗e3 ♕xb2 21.♗xc5 ♕xe2 22.♗xa7 ♖a8 23.♗d4 ♗g6 24.a3±

17.♗f3

17.b3 d4 is good for Black.

17...♖bd8



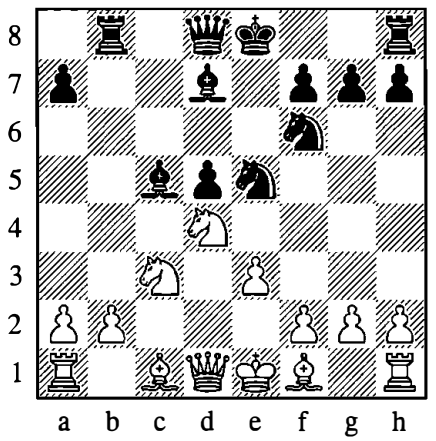
18.♘e2

Otherwise ...d4 will be strong.

18...♗b5 19.♕c2 ♘e4

Black has tremendous compensation for the pawn.

C22) 12.♘d4



This way White blockades the d-pawn and stabilizes his centre to some degree.

12...0–0 13.♗e2

In the only game to have reached this position, Black went for a remarkable attacking plan.

13...♖b6!?

I will mention two other ideas:

13...♕e7N 14.0–0 ♖fc8 is the initial suggestion of the engine, Black's queenside pressure is less strong here than in the main line C33 that we will encounter later. White is better after the prophylactic 15.a3 (as opposed to 15.b3 ♗b4⩱; 15.h3!? also deserves attention though).

A more serious alternative is:

13...♘e4!?N 14.♘xd5!?

14.0–0 should be met by 14...♖b6 transposing to the main line as covered below. (14...♘xc3 15.bxc3 is less appealing for Black.)

14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.0–0 ♕h4⩱ gives Black every chance of developing an initiative on the kingside.

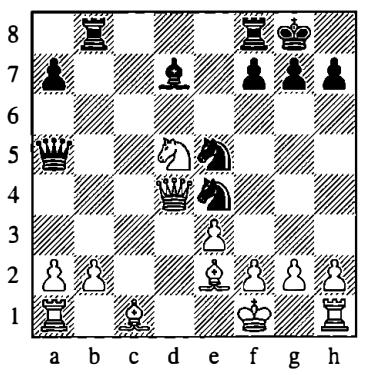
14...♕a5† 15.♔f1

In the event of 15.♘c3 ♘xc3 16.bxc3 ♗xd4 White must fight for equality.

15...♗xd4 16.♕xd4

16.exd4 ♘g6⩲ promises Black long-term compensation.

White appears to be safe, but Black has a remarkable resource.



16...♘f3!!

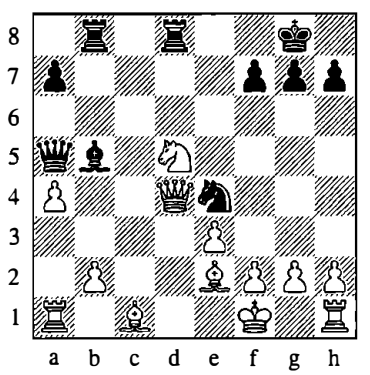
Now the most White can achieve is a draw after accurate defence.

17.♗xf3

17.gxf3?? ♗h3† 18.♔g1 ♕e1† leads to mate.

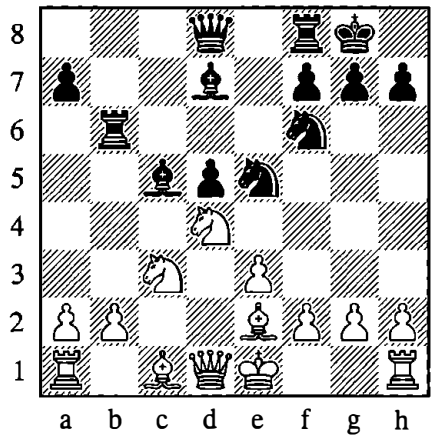
17...♗b5† 18.♗e2 ♖fd8 19.a4

Otherwise White is worse, for instance: 19.♕xe4 ♖xd5 20.g4 ♖d1† 21.♔g2 ♖xh1∓



19...♗xe2† 20.♔xe2 ♖xd5 21.♕xe4 ♕a6† 22.♔e1 ♖bd8 23.♕c2 ♕a5† 24.♔e2 ♕a6† 25.♔e1 ♕a5†=

Neither side can avoid the perpetual.



14.0–0

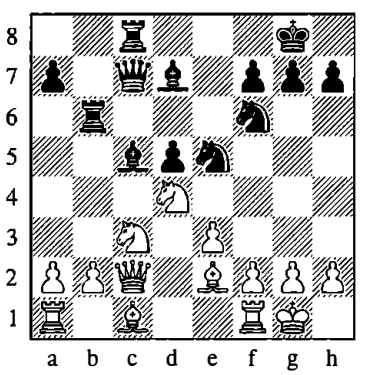
In view of Black's next move in the main line, it is logical to check the alternative:

14.♕c2N

By the way, Black can avoid this extra option by starting with 13...♘e4 as analysed above.

14...♕c7 15.0–0 ♖c8

A strange situation has arisen. Black has no concrete threats and White has good chances to develop his dark-squared bishop, but Black's active pieces still allow him to keep full compensation.



16.♖d1

16.a4 ♖b4!∞

16.♗d2 ♕b8 17.♘b3 ♘eg4 18.g3 ♗f8∞

16...♘eg4 17.g3 ♕b7 18.f3 ♘e5 19.b3 h5

The game remains double-edged and roughly equal.

14...♘e4!

Black sacrifices a second pawn in order to transfer his rook to the kingside, where it will help to create serious threats.

15.♘xd5

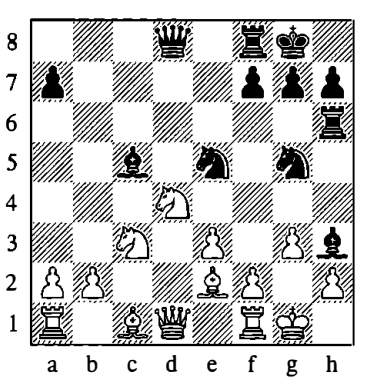
White has no time for 15.♘b3? as after 15...♕h4! 16.♘xe4 ♖h6! the attack is decisive.

15.f4 stops the attack on the kingside, but after 15...♘xc3 16.bxc3 ♘c4 Black has serious positional compensation for the pawn.

15...♖h6 16.f3

16.♘f4 does not solve White's problems due to 16...♕h4 17.h3 ♘g5! followed by a sacrifice on h3.

The only reasonable alternative is 16.g3 when I examined the following natural line: 16...♗h3 17.♘c3 ♘g5! White would be happy to give up the exchange, as he would keep some advantage thanks to his solid position and two extra pawns. Therefore Black should avoid taking on f1 and focus on his kingside initiative.



18.f4 ♕a8 19.♖f2 ♘g4 20.♕e1 ♘xf2 21.♕xf2 ♘e4 22.♘xe4 ♕xe4 23.♗f3 ♕d3 24.♗e2 ♕e4= After a series of logical moves, a draw is the most logical outcome.

16...♕h4 17.fxe4 ♕xh2† 18.♔f2 ♕h4†

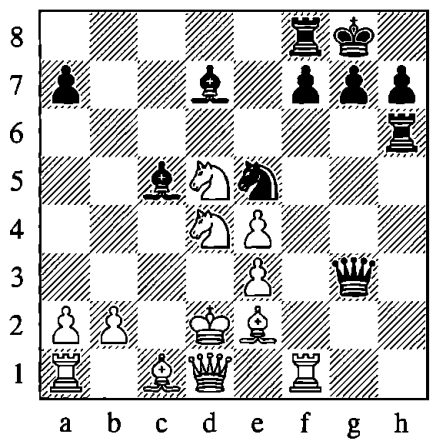
18...♖h3 is also sufficient.

19.g3?

White should have settled for 19.♔g1 with a likely draw.

19...♕h2† 20.♔e1 ♕xg3† 21.♔d2

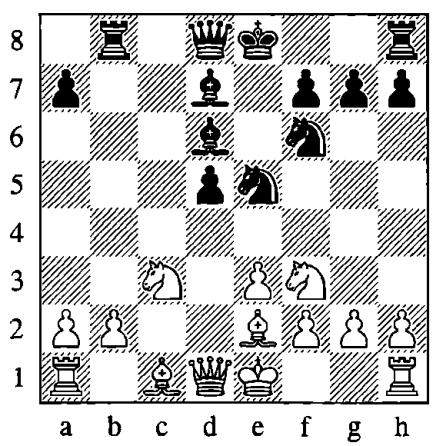
This position occurred in Staniforth – Bird, Sunningdale 2013. Here Black could have crowned his imaginative play with:



21...♗xd4!N 22.exd4 ♖h2 23.dxe5 ♗b5 24.♕b3 ♕g5†!

With a decisive attack.

C3) 11.♗e2 ♗d6 12.♘f3



Right now this set-up is White's first choice by far, although it has often been reached via the move order 10.♘f3 ♗d6 11.dxe5 (11.♗e2 was considered earlier in the note to White's 10th move on page 158.) 11...♘xe5 12.♗e2.

12...0–0

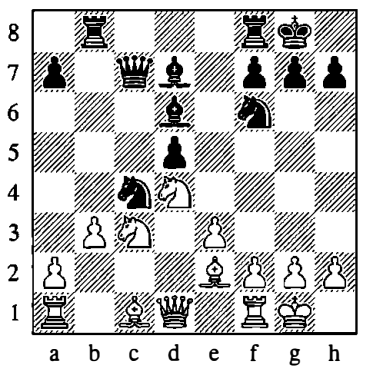
Black has tried another set-up, but it is less than impressive:

12...♕c7?! 13.♘d4 0–0 14.0–0!

14.h3?! ♘e4! 15.♘xe4 dxe4 gave Black good compensation in Wojtaszek – Wang Yue, Poikovsky 2012, as the pawn on e4 offered the basis for a future kingside attack.

14...♘c4 15.b3!

White sacrifices back his extra pawn, but in return completes his development and reaches a favourable version of an IQP position.



15...♗xh2†

Also after 15...♘xe3 16.♗xe3 ♕xc3 17.♖c1± White has a pleasant edge.

16.♔h1 ♘d6 17.♗b2

17.♗a3 ♕a5! is less clear.

17...♗e5 18.♖c1

White kept a pleasant edge in Ax. Smith – Hector, Orebro 2013, as any queen retreat could be met by ♘f3 forcing Black to exchange his dark-squared bishop.

13.0–0 ♕e7

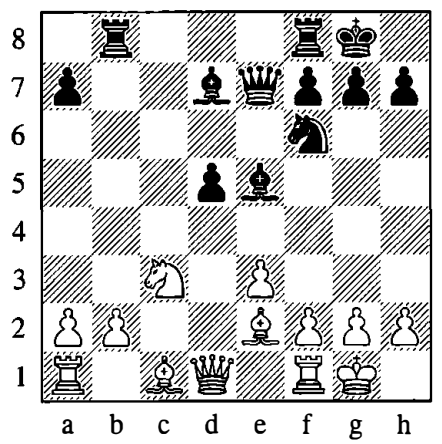
13...♖b6? does not work here: 14.♘d4 ♗b8 15.♘a4 ♗xa4 16.♕xa4± Ortiz Suarez – Arjun, Barbera del Valles 2013.

After the text move White has tried three continuations: **C31) 14.♘xe5**, **C32) 14.g3** and **C33) 14.♘d4**.

C31) 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5!N

Black must sacrifice a second pawn.

14...♕xe5?! is worse is view of: 15.f4! ♕e6 16.♗f3 ♗c5 (Also after 16...♗c6 17.♘e2 Black failed to prove sufficient compensation in Gordievsky – Deviatkin, Moscow 2013.) 17.♘xd5 ♘xd5 (Black's only chance is to play 17...♖fd8N but after 18.♕c2! it is hard to believe he has enough compensation for being two pawns down.) 18.♗xd5 ♗xe3† 19.♔h1± White was clearly better in Stefanova – Girya, Dilijan 2013.



15.♘xd5

White may as well take the second pawn, as it is not clear how he should develop his queenside.

15...♘xd5 16.♕xd5 ♖fc8!

Black's activity provides full compensation, as shown in the following lines.

17.♕a5

17.♕d2 ♖d8! 18.♕c2 allows Black a minimum of a repetition with: 18...♖dc8 19.♕d2 ♖d8=

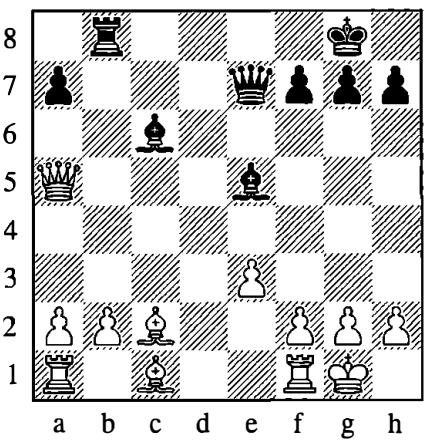
17...♖c2

Black has several ideas, but this is the option I like the most.

18.♗d1

18.♗d3 ♕d6! is dangerous for White.

18...♗c6! 19.♗xc2

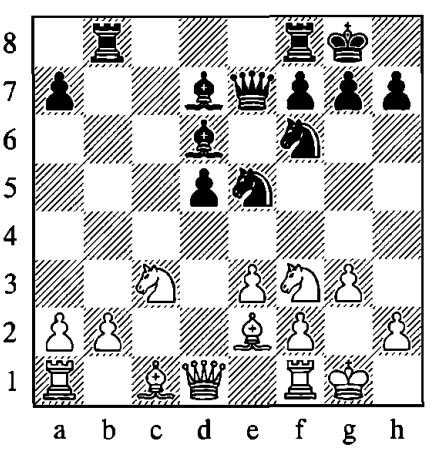


19...♗xh2†

The thematic double-bishop sacrifice is good enough to force a draw, but Black cannot aspire to anything more.

20.♔xh2 ♕h4† 21.♔g1 ♗xg2 22.♔xg2 ♕g4†=

C32) 14.g3



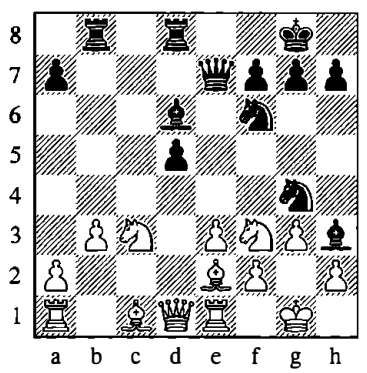
Bolstering the kingside makes a lot sense. Once again, I was forced to find a new direction for Black.

14...♖fd8!N

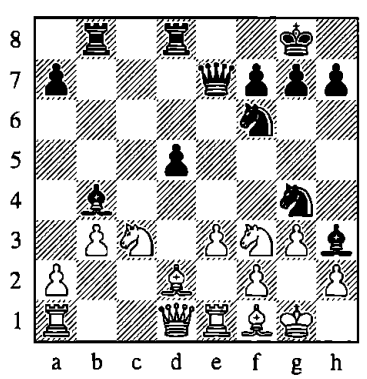
14...♖fc8 was played in the one available game, but this allows White to take the second pawn: 15.♘xd5!N (Instead 15.♘xe5?! ♗xe5⩲ gave Black excellent compensation in Lauber – Hector, Germany 2013.) 15...♘xd5 16.♕xd5 ♗c6 17.♕d1 Black has some compensation, but I do not believe it is enough for two pawns.

15.♘d4

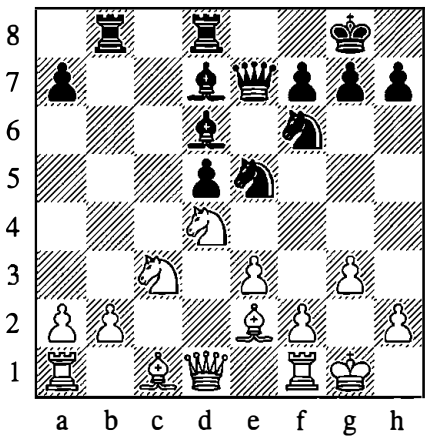
At first sight it looks as though White can play 15.b3 without any problems, but Black gets plenty of play by means of: 15...♗h3 16.♖e1 ♘eg4 (16...♗c5 17.♘d4 ♘e4 is an interesting alternative.)



17.♗f1 (17.♘g5 ♗e5 18.♘xh3 ♗xc3 19.♗d2 ♗xa1 20.♕xa1 ♕d7 is also at least okay for Black.) 17...♗b4 18.♗d2



18...♘xf2! 19.♔xf2 ♗g4 20.♔g1 ♘e4 21.♘xd5 ♖xd5 22.♗xb4 ♕b7 23.♕e2 ♘g5 24.♗g2 ♕xb4 Black retains full compensation for the pawn.



15...♖dc8!

We have reached the position from the main C33 line, with White having been given the extra move g2-g3. Although this has some value for defending the kingside, it also weakens the light squares and opens up some fresh attacking possibilities for Black.

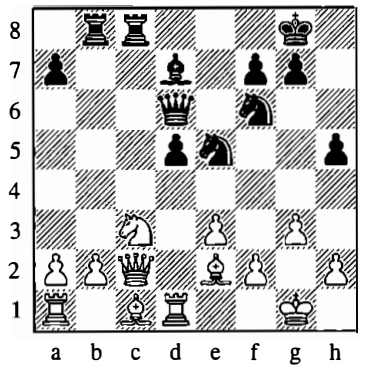
16.♕c2 h5!

Exposing the negative side of White's extra move.

17.♗d2

17.h4 is playable, but it practically guarantees Black ongoing compensation as the kingside pawns will remain exposed for a long time. 17...♗b4 18.♗d2 ♗g4 19.f3 ♗d7⩲ is the continuation I like the most.

17.♘f5 ♕e6! Giving up the dark-squared bishop is not a big deal here, as Black's attack will be conducted on the light squares. 18.♘xd6 ♕xd6 19.♖d1



19...♕e6!? (19...♗g4 is also playable but the text move is more interesting.) 20.f3 ♗b5 21.♗xb5 ♖xb5 22.♕e2 ♖b4 Black has good compensation, as White is largely tied up.

17...h4 18.♖ac1

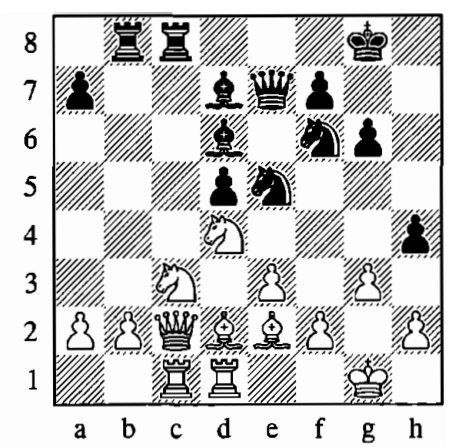
18.♖ad1 can be met by 18...hxg3 19.hxg3 ♘eg4!∓ intending to transfer the queen to h5.

18...g6!

White does not have any concrete ideas, so Black can prepare his play along the h-file.

19.♖fd1

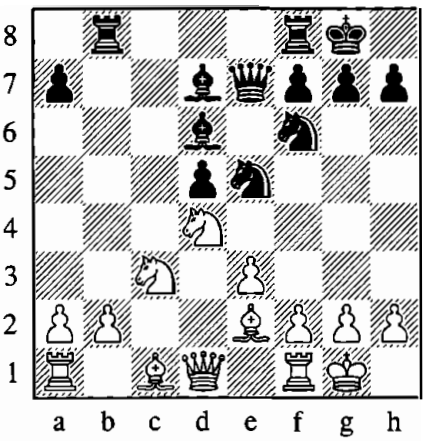
The prophylactic 19.♔g2 ♔g7 20.♖h1 is too passive, and after 20...♘e4 Black's initiative is becoming serious.



19...♔g7 20.♗e1 hxg3 21.hxg3 ♘fg4!

White is in considerable danger.

C33) 14.♘d4



This is the most critical theoretical branch of the chapter.

14...♖fc8

Black brings his last piece into play. I found three games from this position, the two most important continuations being **C331) 15.♖e1** and **C332) 15.h3**.

15.♘cb5 has been played, but it did not turn out well for White. 15...♗c5 16.♗d2? White should have brought his knight back to c3, when his position would have remained acceptable, although the loss of time would hardly have made a good impression. 16...♘c4! Now Black takes over the initiative. 17.a4 ♘xb2 18.♕e1 ♘e4∓ C. Horvath – Brunello, Arvier 2012.

C331) 15.♖e1

There is no special idea behind this move, but it is common to put the rook on this square when playing against an IQP.

15...♘eg4!

The most direct idea, striking at the weak kingside.

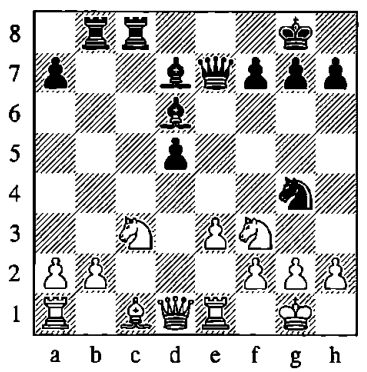
16.g3?

Of the plausible candidate moves, White chooses one of the worst.

16.h3?? is worse still, and Black wins on the spot with: 16...♗h2†! 17.♔f1 ♘xf2! 18.♔xf2 ♖xc3–+

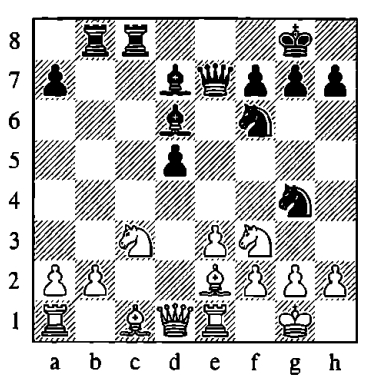
16.♘xd5 is worth checking, but after 16...♗xh2† 17.♔f1 ♕e5 18.♘xf6† ♘xf6⩱ Black retains serious compensation for the missing pawn.

16.♗xg4 ♘xg4 17.♘f3 appears good for White, but it turns out that Black can sacrifice a second pawn:

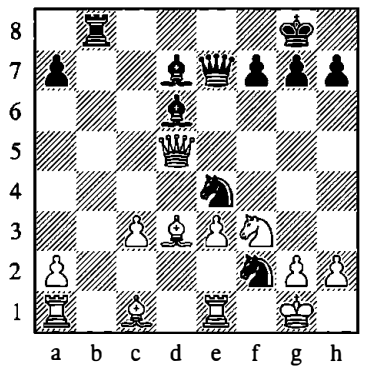


17...♘f6! 18.♘xd5 (18.h3 ♗f5⩱ fine for Black.) 18...♘xd5 19.♕xd5 ♗g4 Black has a lot of activity for the sacrificed material.

16.♘f3 looks natural, but Black can once again demonstrate his tactical resources:

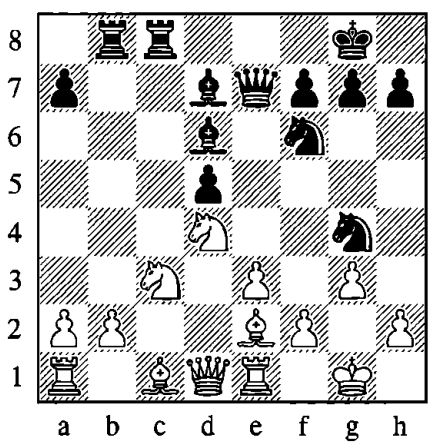


16...♖xc3! 17.bxc3 ♘e4 18.♕xd5 The only move. (Instead after 18.♖f1 ♘xc3 19.♕d2 ♘xe2† 20.♕xe2 ♗e5! Black is winning.) 18...♘gxf2 19.♗d3! Otherwise White is clearly worse.



From here Black has a draw in the pocket with 19...♗e6 20.♕d4 ♗c5 21.♕e5 ♗d6= if he wants it, but he might also consider pressing for more with 19...♗g4 20.♗xe4 ♘xe4 21.♕d3 ♖d8.

Returning to the main line, in the game Loh – Charles, Cammeray 2013, Black missed a golden tactical opportunity.

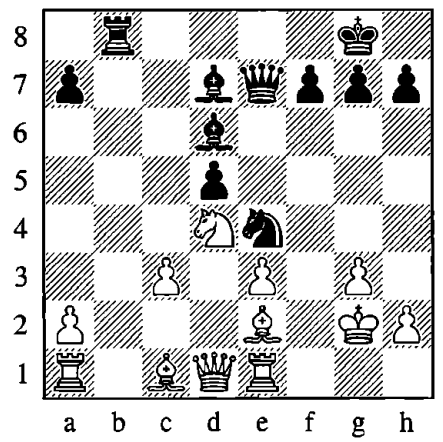


16...♘xf2!N 17.♔xf2 ♖xc3! 18.bxc3

Objectively White should not take the rook, but in that case he will be left with a horrible position with equal material. It seems likely

that both players calculated this far during the game, but failed to spot the finesse on move 19.

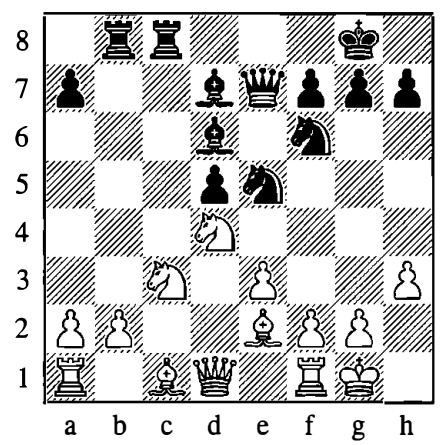
18...♘e4† 19.♔g2



19...♗xg3! 20.♘f3 ♕e6!

Black has a devastating attack.

C332) 15.h3



This is the most challenging move of all. We have already seen how important the g4-square can be for Black's attack, so it makes sense for White to guard it. Of course, it remains to be seen if the h3-pawn will itself become a target.

15...♖b6

We have already encountered this thematic idea. Apart from swinging the rook along the sixth rank, Black also has the idea of preparing ...♗b8 and ...♕d6 at a suitable moment.

16.a4 ♗b4!

Black needs to adjust his plan in response to White's last move.

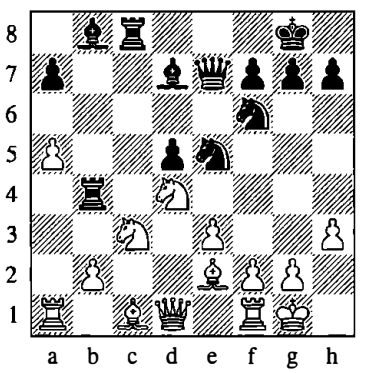
There is no time for:

16...♗b8 17.a5!

17.♗b5 runs into 17...♗xh3! 18.gxh3 ♘e4 19.♕h5 ♖g6† 20.♔h1 ♕c7 with a strong initiative.

17...♖b4

17...♖b7? obviously allows 18.♗a6.



18.f4!

Black's scheme would be fine if it were not for this annoying move.

18.♘a2 ♖a4 19.b3 allows a remarkable exchange sacrifice: 19...♖xd4! 20.exd4 (20.♕xd4 ♘c6 21.♕b2 ♗e5 22.♕b1 ♗xa1 23.♕xa1 ♘xa5 is fine for Black.) 20...♘g6⩲ Black has a surprising amount of play on the kingside.

18...♘c4 19.♗xc4 ♖bxc4 20.♕d3

Black's compensation is not quite sufficient.

17.a5 ♖bb8 18.♗d2

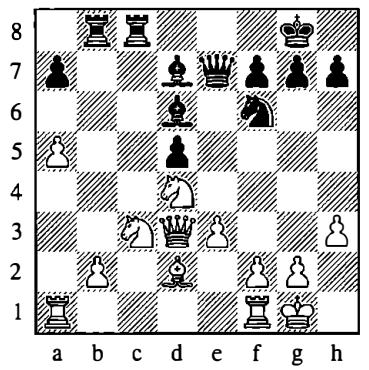
After some prophylactic work White has managed to develop his dark-squared bishop, but in doing so he has seriously weakened his pawn structure.

18...♘c4! 19.♗xc4 ♖xc4

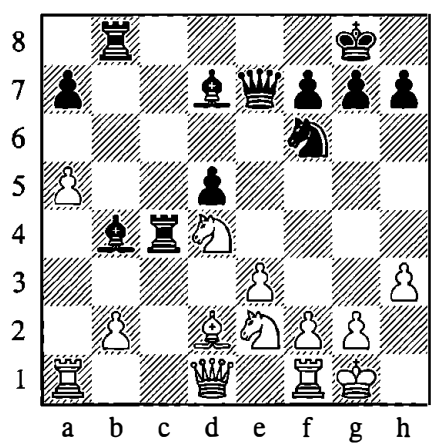
Black must recapture this way, as after 19...dxc4 20.♕c2 ♗d6 21.♖fe1! his compensation is hardly enough.

20.♘ce2

I checked another natural option: 20.♕c2 ♗d6 21.♕d3 (21.♘xd5? does not work in view of 21...♕e5 and Black wins.) 21...♖cc8



We have reached a position that characterizes what Black is aiming for in this variation. His positional trumps include the bishop pair and pressure on White's queenside pawns. He has two main active ideas: to play ...♕e5 with a view to provoking the weakening f2-f4, and to play ...♘e4 at a suitable moment.



20...♗d6N

This is my new idea. In my opinion it is essential to keep the bishop pair in order to have chances to seize the initiative on the kingside.

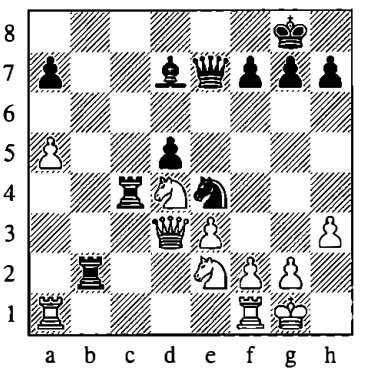
The one existing game continued:

20...♗xd2 21.♕xd2 ♘e4

Although Black achieved an easy draw, I was not fully satisfied with this line.

22.♕d3 ♖xb2

Now in Melkumyan – Ragger, Germany 2012, White missed a strong idea:



23.♖fb1!N

The game continued 23.♘f4 when 23...♖c3!N would have solved Black's problems: 24.♕d1 (Or 24.♘xd5 ♕h4 25.♘xc3 ♘xf2 26.♘f3 ♘xh3†! 27.♔h2 ♕h5 and according to my engine it's a draw in all lines.) 24...♕d6 25.♖b1 ♖d2 26.♕h5 ♘f6 27.♕h4 h6 Black's active pieces enable him to hold the IQP position without difficulty.

23...♖xb1†

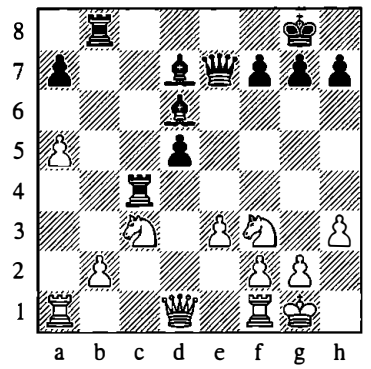
Worse is 23...♖cb4 24.♖xb2 ♖xb2 25.♕a6! ♗e8 26.♖c1 with advantage to White.

24.♖xb1 g6 25.♘f3 ♕d6 26.♘d2 ♘xd2 27.♕xd2±

The position may well be tenable, but it is likely to be a long torture for Black.

21.b3

I also considered: 21.♗c3 ♘e4 22.♘f3 ♘xc3 23.♘xc3 (23.bxc3 ♖c5! followed by ...♗b5 promises Black sufficient compensation.) Now Black has a lovely tactical solution:



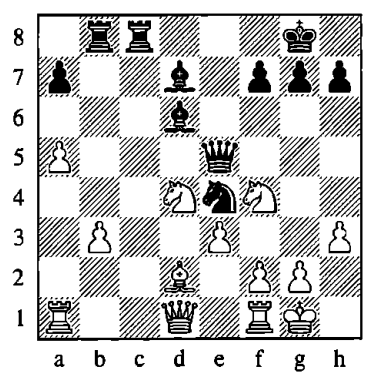
23...♗xh3! 24.gxh3 ♕d7! 25.♕xd5 ♖g4† Now White had better accept a draw with 26.hxg4 ♕xg4†, as 26.♔h1?! ♖h4! can be dangerous only for him.

21...♖cc8 22.♖c1

22.♘f4 can be met by 22...♘e4 with two options for White:

a) Safest and best is 23.♖c1 ♕g5 transposing to the main line below.

b) 23.♘xd5?! is too dangerous: 23...♕e5 24.♘f4



24...g5! 25.♘f3 ♕f6 26.♘h5 ♕h6 27.g4 f5 Black has a powerful initiative.

22...♘e4

I was not satisfied with 22...♖xc1 23.♗xc1! ♕d8. Among other possibilities, White can play 24.♗b2!? ♕xa5 25.♕d3± with a positional plus.

23.♘f4

23.f3?! allows 23...♘xd2 24.♕xd2 ♗b4∓ when Black regains the pawn with the better game.

23.♖xc8† ♖xc8 24.♘f4 ♕g5 just transposes to the main line below.

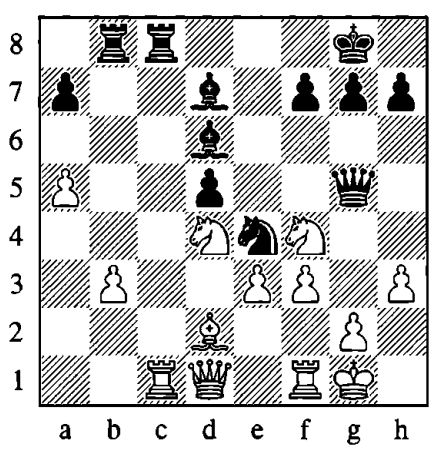
23...♕g5

Unfortunately the direct 23...g5 24.♘h5 ♕e5 is met by 25.f4! gxf4 26.♘xf4 and White is better.

Although we are well into the middlegame and have departed known theory three moves ago, I believe the present line to be among the most critical for the future of Black's early pawn sacrifice. Therefore I have analysed more deeply than some other lines, and will make a final division of the material. We will analyse two options in detail: **C3321) 24.f3** and **C3322) 24.♖xc8†**.

24.♘f3 should be met by 24...♕h6, the main point being 25.♘xd5 ♗xh3! 26.gxh3 ♕xh3 with a dangerous initiative for Black.

C3321) 24.f3



White chases away the annoying knight, but weakens his kingside.

24...♘g3

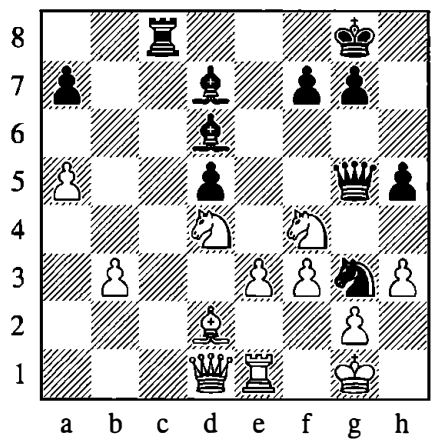
I briefly considered 24...♘xd2 25.♖xc8† ♖xc8 26.♕xd2 ♕e5 but found Black's compensation to be less clear.

25.♖xc8†

25.♖e1 h5 (25...♖e8!? also comes into consideration) 26.♖xc8† ♖xc8 is just another route to the same position.

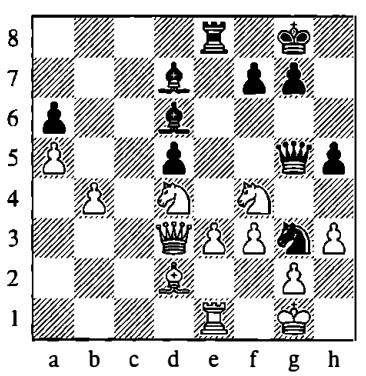
25...♖xc8 26.♖e1 h5

The arising position is complex and demands a deep investigation. My feeling is that Black has enough activity for the pawn, and I have included some supporting variations.



27.b4

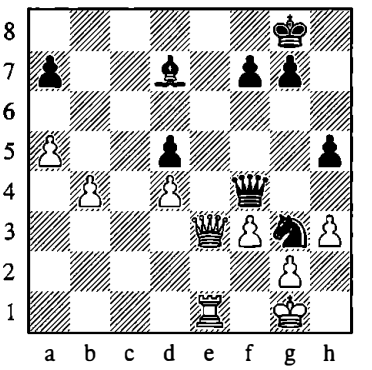
A reasonable alternative is: 27.♕b1 ♖e8 28.b4 a6 29.♕d3 (After 29.b5 axb5 30.a6 ♗xf4 31.exf4 ♕f6 Black keeps everything under control.)



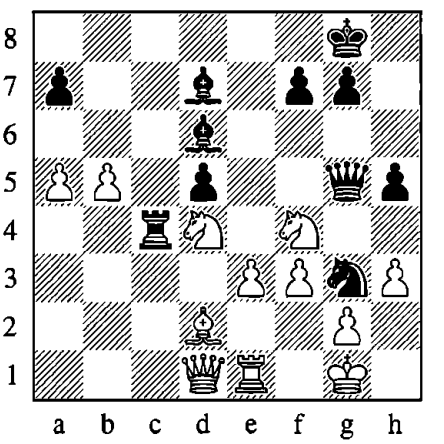
29...♗xf4 30.exf4 ♖xe1† 31.♗xe1 ♕xf4 32.♗xg3 ♕xg3 33.♔f1 ♕f4 The position remains balanced, as Black will always have enough counterplay against the enemy king.

27...♖c4! 28.b5

28.♕b3 allows: 28...♖xd4 29.exd4 ♗xf4 30.♗xf4 ♕xf4 31.♕e3



31...♕h4! A draw is the logical outcome here too, for example: 32.♕f2 ♕f4 33.♕e3 ♕h4=



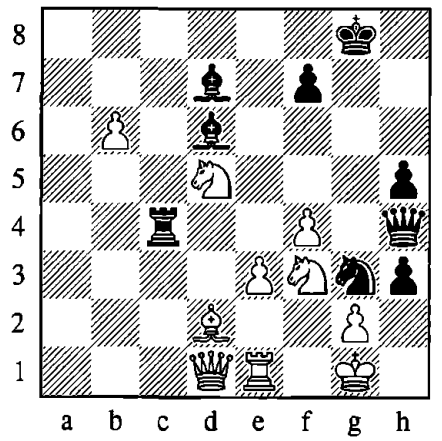
28...♕h4!

Black intending ...g5-g4 with serious kingside threats.

29.b6 axb6 30.axb6 g5 31.♘xd5

A remarkable line is 31.♘fe2 ♗xh3 32.gxh3 ♕xh3 33.♘xg3 ♕xg3† 34.♔f1 g4!= and somehow every line ends in perpetual check.

31...g4 32.f4 gxh3 33.♘f3



33...h2†! 34.♘xh2 ♗c6 35.♕f3

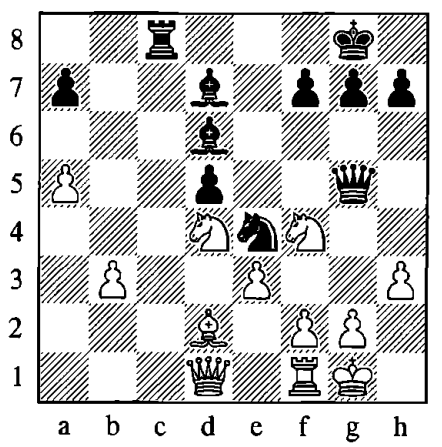
Otherwise White is worse.

35...♖c5 36.e4 ♖c2 37.♖d1 ♗c5†

This leads to a draw. Black has other playable moves, but nothing leading to an advantage.

38.♗e3 ♘e2† 39.♔h1 ♘g3†=

C3322) 24.♖xc8† ♖xc8



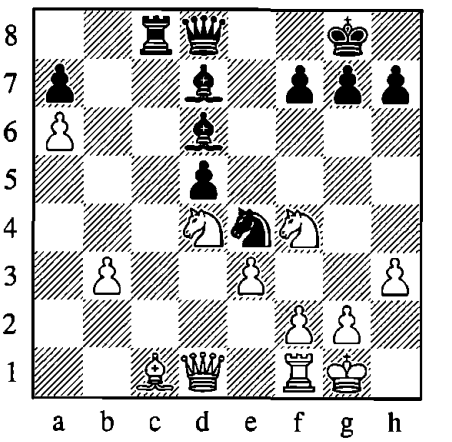
White exchanges off a potential attacking unit.

25.♗c1

White intends to put the bishop on b2. His last move also threatens ♘f3 with a double attack on g5 and d5.

25...♕d8! 26.a6

In the event of 26.♗b2 ♗xf4 27.exf4 ♕xa5 28.♖e1 h6! I don't see any problems for Black.



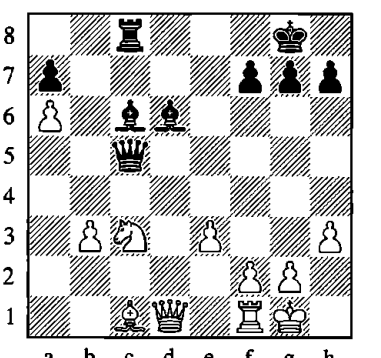
26...♕b6!

Surprisingly, Black is not obliged to defend his central pawn.

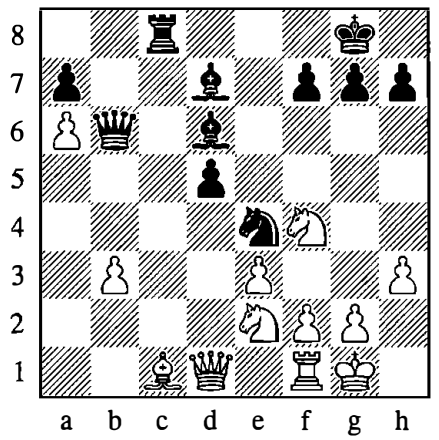
27.♘de2

27.♗b2 is harmless, and after 27...♗xf4 28.exf4 ♕xa6 29.♘c2 ♗e6 the position is equal.

27.♘xd5 allows Black to activate his light-squared bishop to good effect: 27...♕c5 28.♘e2 ♗c6 29.♘ec3 ♘xc3 30.♘xc3



30...♖d8! 31.♕c2 ♗f3! 32.gxf3 ♕g5† 33.♔h1 ♕h5=



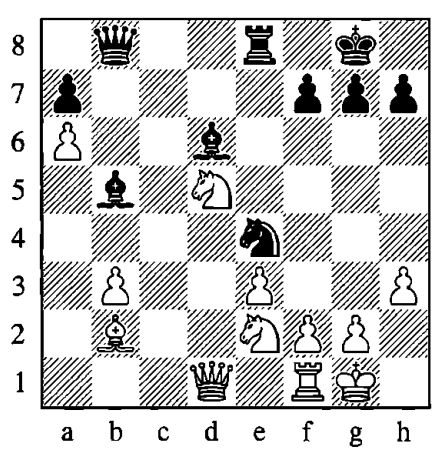
27...♗b5 28.♗b2 ♖e8!

The a6-pawn can be taken at any time; for the moment it is more important for Black to improve his rook and overprotect the knight.

29.♘xd5

It is hard to suggest anything else, especially taking into account that the natural 29.♖e1 runs into 29...♘xf2!.

29...♕b8



30.f4

Amazingly after 30.♕c2 ♗h2†! 31.♔h1 ♗d6 White has nothing better than 32.♔g1= repeating.

30...♗xe2 31.♕xe2 ♕xb3 32.♖d1 f5!∓

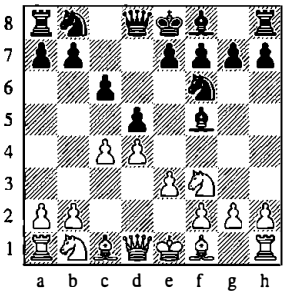
Black has good positional compensation for the pawn, and a draw is the most likely outcome.

Conclusion

After 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♕b3 the modern gambit continuation 6...♘c6! makes a refreshing change and provides a relatively untested theoretical background – an increasingly rare thing nowadays. After 7.♕xb7 ♗d7 the critical continuation is 8.♕b3 ♖b8 9.♕d1 e5, which normally leads to an IQP structure where Black has a lead in development and numerous open lines to compensate for the missing pawn. Depending on how White continues, Black may find active play on either flank, sometimes linking from one to the other, for instance with a rook switch from b6 to the kingside. The theory of the line is still in its infancy but, after a deep investigation which uncovered many new ideas for both sides, my conclusion is that Black's chances are perfectly adequate.

Chapter 15

4th Move Alternatives



3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5

Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3

4...♗f5

A) 5.♕b3 **176**

B) 5.♗e2 **177**

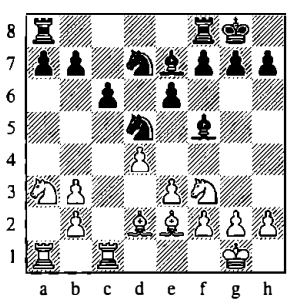
C) 5.♗d3 ♗xd3 6.♕xd3 e6 7.0–0 ♘bd7 8.♘bd2 ♗e7 **177**

C1) 9.e4 **178**

C2) 9.♖d1 **179**

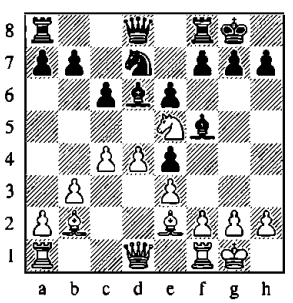
C3) 9.b3 **180**

A) after 12.♖fc1



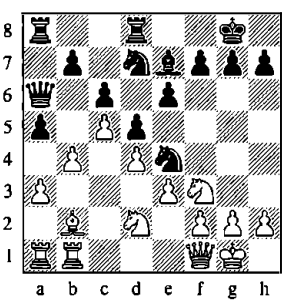
12...♖fd8N

B) after 11.♘e5



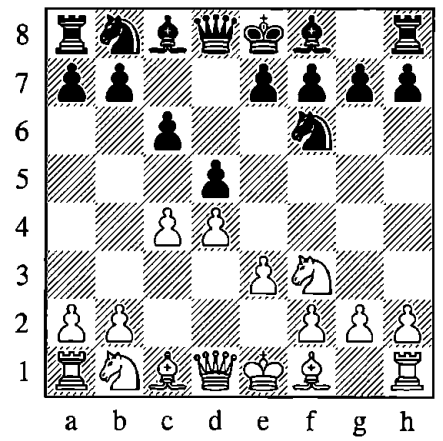
11...♕g5!?N

C3) after 15.b4



15...b6N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3



This positional continuation is well known to me, having served as my recommendation in *Grandmaster Repertoire 1*.

4...♗f5

This is the classical reply. In the present chapter we will discuss the sidelines **A) 5.♕b3**, **B) 5.♗e2** and **C) 5.♗d3**.

5.♘bd2 will be covered under the move order 4.♘bd2 ♗f5 5.e3 – see variation B of Chapter 18 on page 213.

5.cxd5 is a significant option which can be found in the next chapter, beginning on page 183.

The main line is 5.♘c3, when 5...a6 leads to the system examined in Chapters 9-11.

A) 5.♕b3 ♕b6

This is my first choice, although 5...♕c7 is a valid alternative.

6.cxd5

6.♘c3 e6 transposes to variation D of Chapter 13 on page 146.

6...♕xb3!

It is important to insert this exchange before recapturing on d5.

7.axb3 ♘xd5

Black should take with the knight in order to make use of the outpost on b4.

8.♗d2

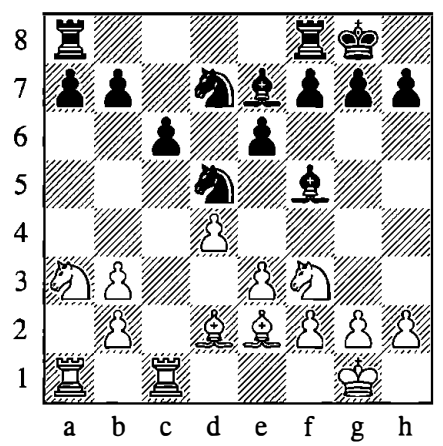
8.♘c3 ♘b4! exploits the queenside structure and disrupts White's development. 9.♔d2 ♘d7 (It is also worth considering 9...h6!?N to safeguard the light-squared bishop.) 10.♘h4 ♗g6 11.♘xg6 hxg6 12.♗c4 a6 Black had a positional advantage thanks to his better pawn structure in Salov – Bareev, Biel 1993.

8...e6 9.♘a3

Transferring the knight to c4 is White's best idea.

9...♗e7 10.♗e2 ♘d7 11.0–0 0–0 12.♖fc1

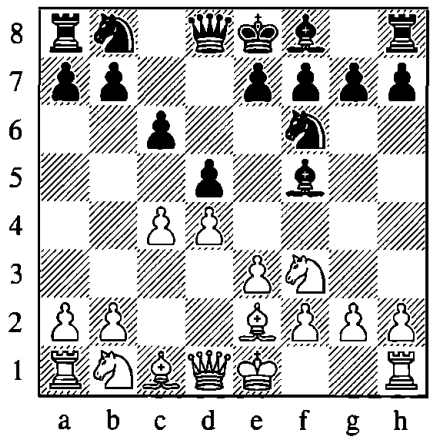
These natural moves occurred in Vladimirov – De Boer, Tilburg 1994. Here the most logical continuation is:



12...♖fd8N 13.♘c4 c5 14.♘a5 ♖ab8

Black maintains the balance without any difficulties.

B) 5.♗e2



Obviously this set-up is pretty innocent, so I decided just to give a few illustrative lines where the play might become double-edged.

5...e6 6.0–0 ♘bd7 7.b3 ♗d6 8.♗b2 0–0 9.♘bd2

Black should not worry about 9.♘h4 as after 9...♘e4 10.♘xf5 exf5 he has good prospects on the kingside.

9.♘c3 ♘e4 is similar to the main line, and is likely to transpose after White exchanges on e4.

9...♘e4

This is the most popular move according to my database.

9...h6 is another sensible idea.

10.♘xe4

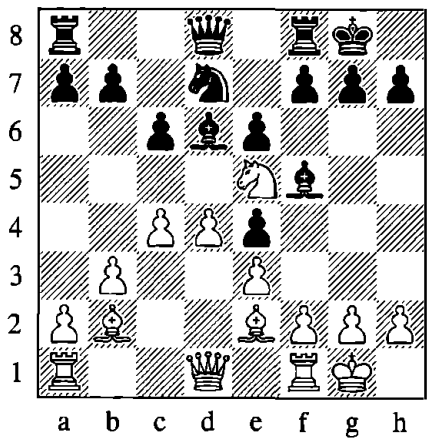
In the event of the simplifying 10.♘e5 Black can try 10...♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♗e7 with a slight unbalancing of the pawn structure.

10...dxe4!?

This is more interesting than 10...♗xe4 11.♘d2 ♗g6 12.♗f3 ♕e7 13.g3 ♘f6 with equal play, as seen in Deepan Chakkravarthy – Sundararajan, Visakhapatnam 2004.

11.♘e5

This position occurred in Salo – Grau, Stockholm 1937. Here I found a remarkable idea.



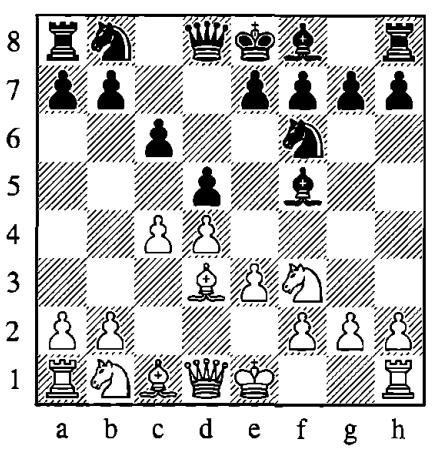
11...♕g5!?N

11...♗c7N is just equal.

12.♘xd7 ♖fd8

Black regains the piece and has some chances to seize the initiative on the kingside.

C) 5.♗d3



5...♗xd3 6.♕xd3 e6 7.0–0 ♘bd7 8.♘bd2

White's last move gives the present line a unique flavour.

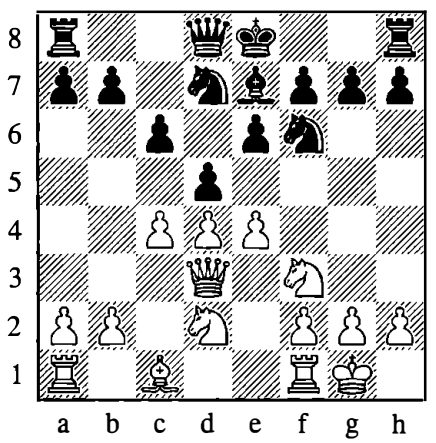
8.♘c3 is considered under the move order 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5 5.♗d3 ♗xd3 6.♕xd3 e6 7.♘f3 ♘bd7 8.0–0 – see Chapter 12. In that line Black follows up with 8...♗b4, but the same move is not quite as appealing with the knight on d2.

8...♗e7

Black settles for a less active development of the bishop, but on the other hand White's knight is less active on d2 than c3, and the c1-bishop is obstructed.

From here I analysed three options for White: **C1) 9.e4**, **C2) 9.♖d1** and **C3) 9.b3**.

C1) 9.e4



9...dxc4!

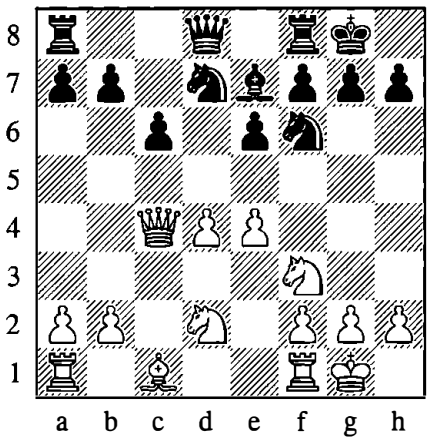
I prefer to avoid 9...dxe4 10.♘xe4, which leaves Black solid but slightly passive. This option also justifies White's decision to develop his knight on d2 instead of c3. Instead we will aim for positions where White is more likely to wish his knight had gone to c3.

9...0–0 is playable, but it gives White too much freedom for my liking.

10.♕xc4

White has no choice, as 10.♘xc4? runs into 10...♘c5! winning a pawn.

10...0–0



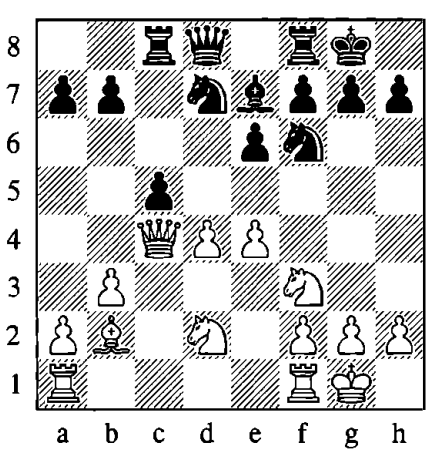
11.b3

11.♖e1 is too slow and after 11...c5 Black already has the more pleasant game. The one practical encounter continued 12.e5 ♘d5 13.♘e4 cxd4 14.♕xd4 ♘b4! and Black was better in Galakhov – Vysochin, Alushta 1999.

11...♖c8

The immediate 11...c5!N is even more accurate, but I will show a few more moves from a game which illustrates a few nice ideas.

12.♗b2 c5



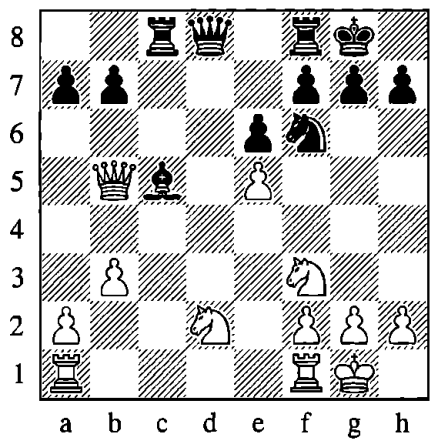
13.♕b5

The more natural 13.♕e2 leads to balanced play.

13...cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♗c5

14...♕c7 15.♗b2 b6 would have been more ambitious.

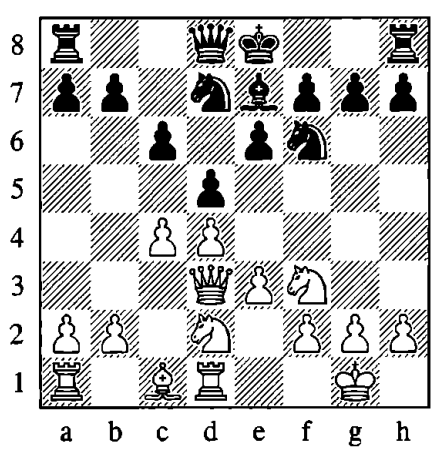
15.♗xf6 ♘xf6 16.e5



16...♕d7! 17.♕xd7 ♘xd7

Black easily solved his opening problems and White had to tread carefully in Papaioannou – Shirov, Leon 2001.

C2) 9.♖d1



9...0–0 10.e4 a5!?

As the reader will have already noticed, I prefer to avoid the structure arising after 10...dxe4 11.♘xe4, as Black has fewer chances to complicate the game there.

10...dxc4?! is less attractive here due to 11.♘xc4 when there is no ...♘c5 trick as the white queen is defended.

11.a4

This looks slightly strange, but White easily got an advantage in the one game in which it was played. I considered a few alternatives:

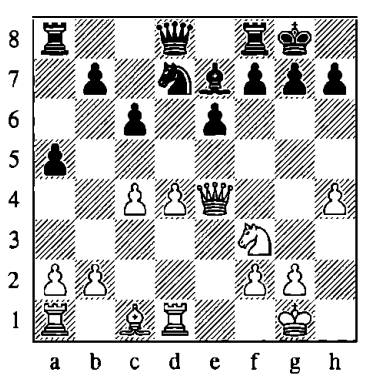
11.e5 can be met by 11...dxc4 when Black gets the d5-square for his knight.

11.cxd5 exd5 (11...cxd5 12.e5 is too passive for Black.) 12.e5 ♘e8 leads to a complicated game. The play might continue: 13.♘f1 ♘c7 14.♘g3 (14.♘e3 f6) 14...g6 15.♗h6 ♖e8 with a complex battle ahead.

11.h4!? dxe4

11...a4 is possible, as after 12.cxd5 Black can expose a drawback of White's previous move with 12...cxd5 intending 13.e5 ♘g4! with a good game.

12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♕xe4



13...a4

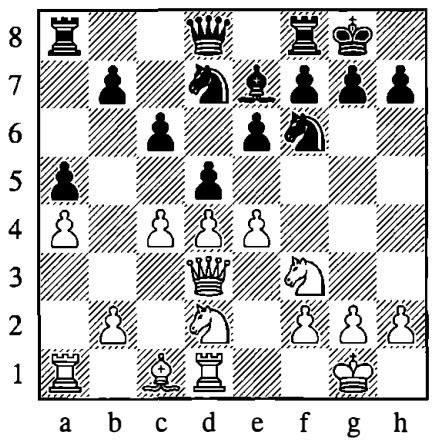
Now it is getting double-edged.

14.♗g5

This occurred in Kurajica – Malakhov, Solin 2006. Now the simplest continuation is:

14...h6N 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7

Black has no reason to complain.



11...dxe4N

11...♕c7 12.e5 ♘e8?! 13.b3 f5 14.exf6 ♖xf6 15.♘f1 gave White the advantage in Korchnoi – Miles, Johannesburg 1979.

12.♘xe4 c5!

This leads to a more interesting game with the pawns already on a4 and a5.

13.♘xf6†

13.♘c3 cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♕b6 is pretty unclear, but White's pawn majority has been immobilized and I like the outpost on c5.

13...♗xf6 14.d5

This seems principled, but Black has enough resources

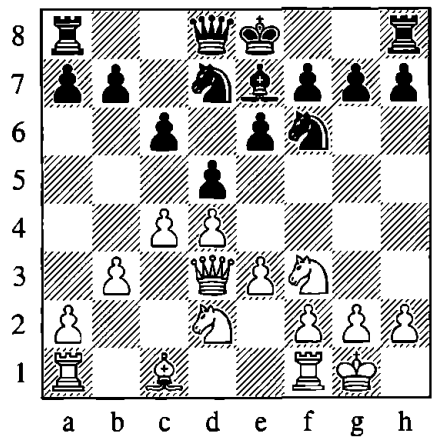
14...exd5 15.cxd5

15.♕xd5? ♘b6! is unpleasant for White.

15...♘e5 16.♘xe5 ♗xe5

The position remains balanced. If White plays for light-square domination by putting his queen on b5, the manoeuvre ...♕h4-b4 might prove to be a useful counter.

C3) 9.b3



9...0–0 10.♗b2 a5!

Black follows the usual method to obtain counterplay on the queenside.

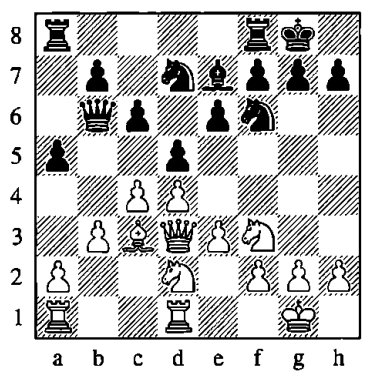
11.a3

Another logical continuation is:

11.♗c3 ♕b6

11...a4?! 12.b4 gave White the better game in Gruenenwald – Patuzzo, Switzerland 2008.

12.♖fd1



12...♖fd8

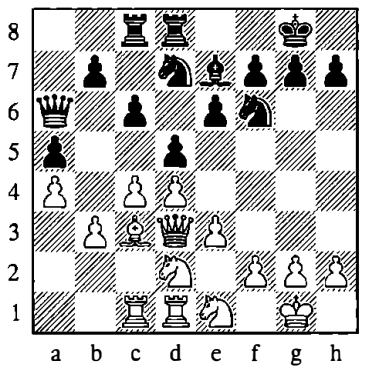
12...a4!?N can be considered, for instance: 13.c5 (13.b4 ♕a6= is Black's main idea.) 13...♕a6 14.♕xa6 ♖xa6 15.b4 ♘e8! Followed by ...♘c7-b5 with a perfectly playable position.

13.♖ac1 ♕a6 14.a4

After 14.e4 Black has 14...dxe4 15.♘xe4 a4 with counterplay.

14...♖ac8 15.♘e1

15.e4 dxe4 16.♘xe4 c5! is fine for Black.



15...♕b6

I slightly prefer 15...b6 followed by ...c5 at a suitable moment, as played in Kachur – Filipenko, Decin 1996.

16.♕c2 ♕c7 17.♘d3 b6=

The position remained balanced but complicated in Karpov – Gelfand, Sanghi Nagar 1995.

11...♕b6 12.♖fb1

The Serbian grandmaster Zlatko Ilincic is a big fan of this variation for White. He seems certain that the last move is White's best, as he has not played anything else since 2001.

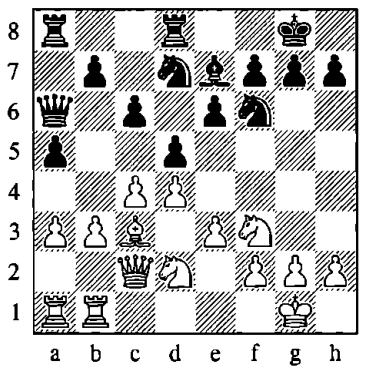
12...♖fd8

This is the most flexible move.

12...♕a6 13.♕c2 b5 14.c5! gives White a useful space advantage and Ilincic has scored two victories from this position.

13.c5

The first time he reached this position, the Serbian grandmaster chose: 13.♗c3 ♕a6 14.♕c2 Ilincic – Sedlak, Novi Sad 2003.



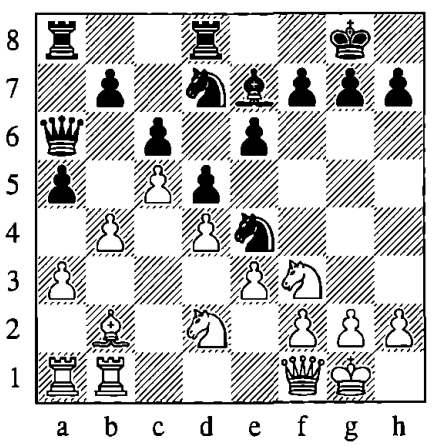
However, he must later have realized that Black could play 14...c5!N with a good game.

13...♕a6 14.♕f1

White's best move may be 14.♕c2N, although after 14...b6 15.b4 ♖db8 Black has nothing to complain about.

14...♘e4 15.b4

This position was reached in Ilincic – Mihok, Kecskemet 2011, and again by the same players two years later.



15...b6N

Mihok favoured 15...f5 and drew both games. His approach is perfectly viable, but I prefer the text move slightly.

16.♕xa6 ♖xa6

Black has a comfortable game. The main point is shown after the following natural continuation:

17.♘xe4 dxe4 18.♘d2 bxc5 19.bxc5 ♘xc5!

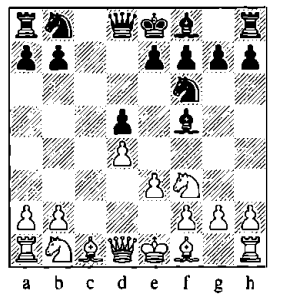
Black wins a pawn, although White should be able to draw.

Conclusion

5.♕b3 and 5.♗e2 are not bad moves, but they both fail to put Black under any notable pressure. Of the lines examined in this chapter, only 5.♗d3 presents any real challenges, as the subsequent development of the queen's knight to d2 forces Black to play slightly differently from the recipe given in Chapter 12 when the knight was on c3. Later when e3-e4 comes, Black can get a solid position by capturing, but I was keen to look for ways for Black to keep more tension in the position, and most of the lines contain enough complexity to enable either side to play for a win.

Chapter 16

4th Move Alternatives



4.e3 ♗f5 – 5.cxd5

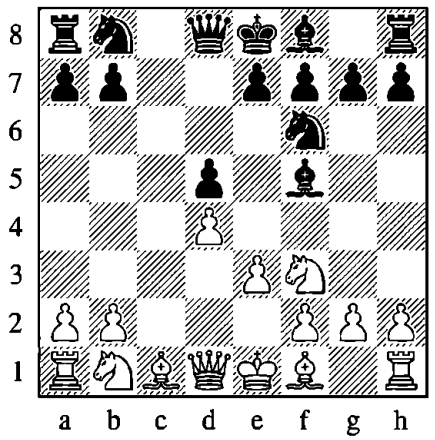
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♕b3

6...♕c7

A) 7.♘c3 e6 184
A1) 8.♗b5† 184
A2) 8.♘h4 186
A3) 8.♘e5 ♘c6 9.♗d2 ♗e7 187
A31) 10.♘b5 188
A32) 10.♖c1 188
B) 7.♗d2 e6 189
B1) 8.♘c3 189
B2) 8.♘a3 190
B3) 8.♗b5† ♘c6 191
B31) 9.0–0 192
B32) 9.♗b4 ♗d6 192
B321) 10.♕a3 192
B322) 10.0–0 0–0 11.♗xc6 bxc6! 193
B3221) 12.♗xd6 193
B3221) 12.♘bd2 195

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5 5.cxd5 cxd5



The pawn exchange has been White's second-most-popular choice after 5.♘c3.

6.♕b3

This is the most significant option by far. Here are a few minor alternatives:

6.♘e5 e6 (6...a6 is also fine, after which 7.♘c3 takes us to variation A2 of Chapter 9) 7.♘c3 ♘fd7!? is comfortable for Black.

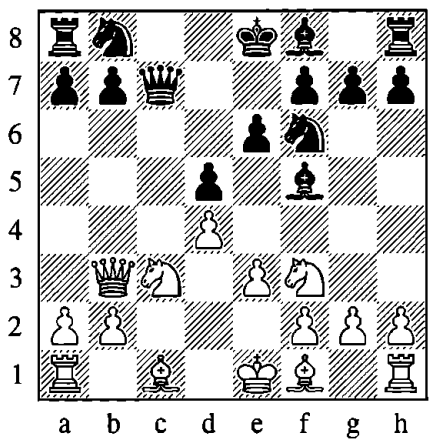
6.♗b5† ♘c6 (6...♘bd7 is also fully reliable) 7.♘e5 ♖c8 8.♘c3 has been covered under the move order 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗f5 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♗b5† ♘c6 7.♘f3 ♖c8 8.♘e5 – see the note to White's 6th move in Chapter 14, where I have shown that the improvement 8...♘d7!N easily solves Black's problems.

The most popular alternative to the main line is 6.♘c3 when Black has a choice. The simplest in terms of our repertoire is 6...a6, leading to the line 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♘f3 ♗f5 6.cxd5 cxd5 as covered in variation A of Chapter 9 on page 90. Via the present move order, Black may also consider 6...e6 which offers him a solid game.

6...♕c7

This is the best way to defend the b-pawn. From here White sometimes tries **A) 7.♘c3** but the more flexible and challenging option is **B) 7.♗d2**.

A) 7.♘c3 e6



White now has a wide choice, the main options being **A1) 8.♗b5†**, **A2) 8.♘h4** and **A3) 8.♘e5**.

8.♗d2 transposes to 7.♗d2 e6 8.♘c3 – see the later variation B1.

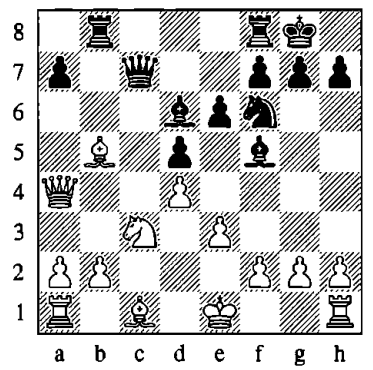
A1) 8.♗b5† ♘c6 9.♘e5

Despite the active appearance, this set-up does not achieve much.

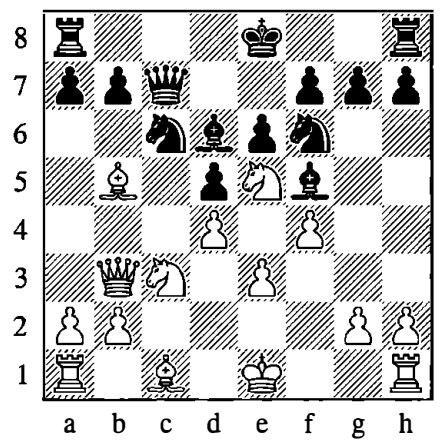
9.♗d2 is an inaccurate move order for White due to: 9...a6! (9...♗e7 10.♖c1 transposes to the later variation B1 where Black is doing fine, but by hitting the bishop immediately he can develop his bishop to the more active d6-square.) 10.♗xc6† bxc6! Black already has the better game, for example: 11.0–0 ♗d6 12.h3 0–0 13.♖fc1? ♖fb8 14.♕a4 ♖xb2∓ Fourcand – Al Sayed, Calvi 2008.

9...♗d6 10.f4

After 10.♕a4?! 0–0 the failure of White's strategy is shown in the following lines: 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♗xc6 (12.♗e2 e5 13.h3 ♖ab8∓) 12...♖ab8 13.♗b5 Now in Csicsay – Tomcsanyi, Hungary 1994, Black could have decided the game by means of:



13...♘e4!N 14.♘xe4 ♗xe4 15.0–0 ♗xh2† 16.♔h1 f5! with a decisive attack.



10...0–0 11.♗d2

Also unpleasant for White is:

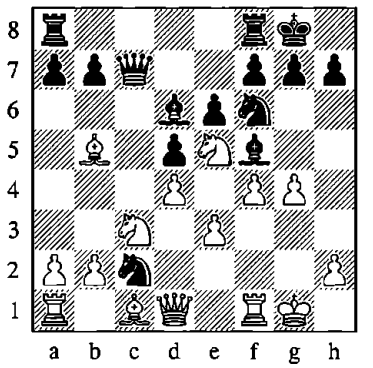
11.0–0 ♘b4!

The one practical encounter continued:

12.♕d1 ♘c2 13.g4?

13.♖b1 was the best chance, although after 13...♘a3! 14.♖a1 ♘xb5 15.♘xb5 ♕b6 16.♘xd6 ♕xd6 Black has an obvious positional advantage.

Now in Goormachtigh – Vermeiren, Geraadsbergen 2012, Black should have played:



13...♘xg4!N 14.♘xg4 ♘xa1 15.♗d3 ♗xd3 16.♕xd3 ♕c4 17.♕d1 b5

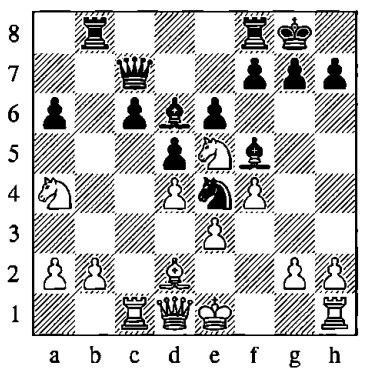
With a decisive advantage.

11...a6

Black has other good options, but the text move seems like the most principled.

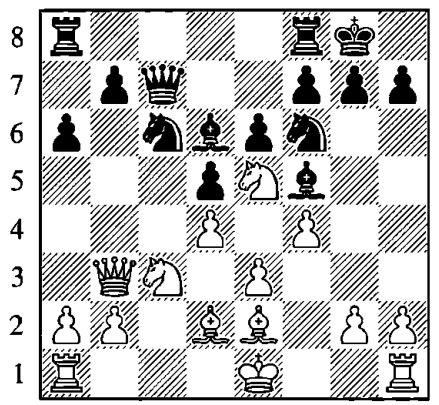
12.♗e2

Another game continued: 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.♘a4 Otherwise Black will carry out ...c5 with much the better position. 13...♖ab8 14.♕d1 ♘e4 Strategically White is in big trouble. 15.♖c1 Pytel – M. Gurevich, Eupen 1997.



15...♗xe5!N 16.fxe5 (16.dxe5 c5 17.0–0 c4 18.b3 ♖fc8 is also clearly better for Black.)

16...f6 Black is clearly better, since White cannot play 17.exf6 ♖xf6 18.0–0 in view of 18...♖h6–+ with a crushing attack.



12...♘a5

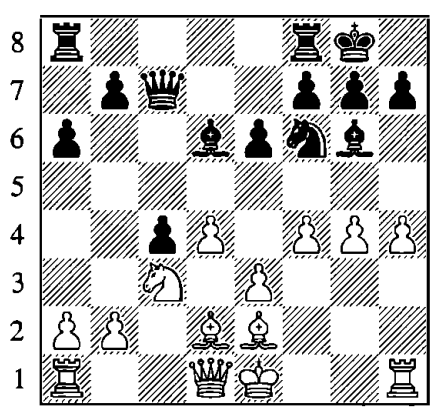
12...b5N also comes into consideration.

13.♕d1 ♘c4

Simple and strong.

14.♘xc4 dxc4 15.g4 ♗g6 16.h4

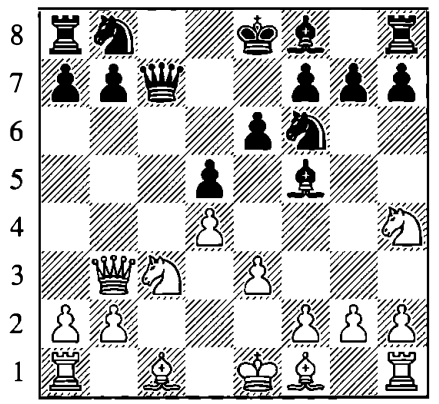
Now in Hartmann – Martin, France 2006, Black could have played:



16...♗b4!N 17.h5 ♗xc3 18.♗xc3 ♗e4 19.0–0 ♘d5∓

With an obvious positional superiority.

A2) 8.♘h4

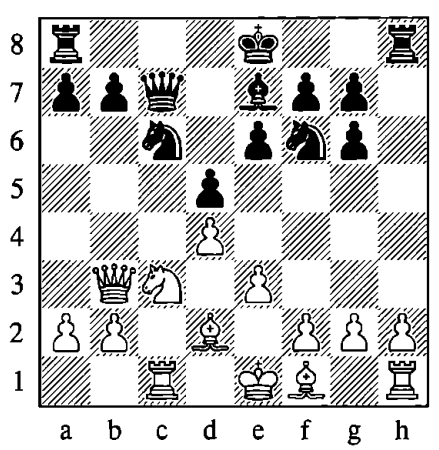


8...♗g6!

It is always important to choose the right option for this bishop according to the demands of the position. There is a playable alternative in 8...♗e4 9.f3 ♗g6, but the extra move f2-f3 does not really weaken White's position and it brings some positive value for him. Therefore, on this occasion I prefer to retreat the bishop directly to g6.

9.♘xg6 hxg6 10.♗d2 ♘c6 11.♖c1 ♗e7

This position has been reached in several games. I would like to mention an unusual but quite promising plan involving kingside expansion from Black.



12.h3

12.♗d3 occurred in Savon – Bagirov, Yerevan 1982, and now after 12...g5!?N 13.g3 ♖c8 14.f3 ♔f8 15.0–0 g6 we reach a complex position where Black intends ...♔g7, perhaps followed by doubling the rooks along the h-file, and/or playing ...g4 at some point.

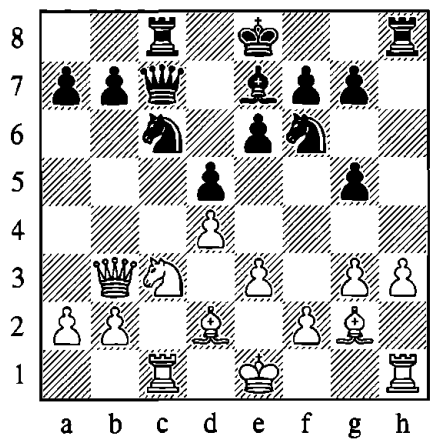
12...g5!?N

Black has preferred the soft 12...0–0 in a couple of games, but I want to make better use of the half-open h-file.

13.g3

This is the most natural reply, as the prospect of ...g4 was quite annoying for White.

13...♖c8 14.♗g2



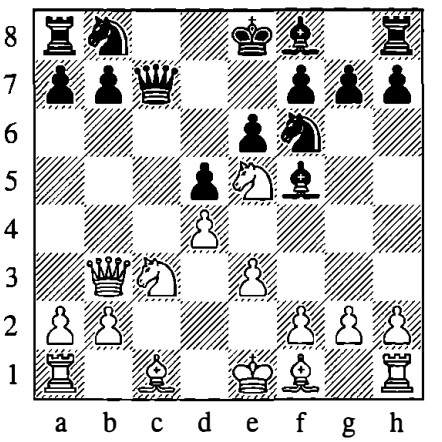
14...0–0

This makes sense now that White has committed his light-squared bishop to the flank.

15.♕d1 ♖fd8 16.0–0 ♘e8

The knight is heading for d6 and Black has a good game.

A3) 8.♘e5



This might look active, but it is not dangerous.

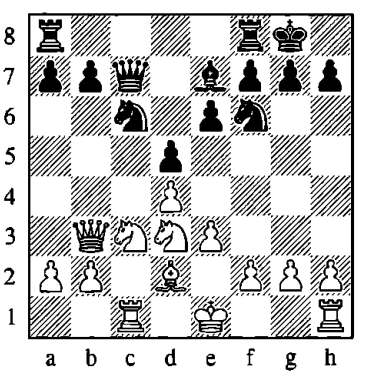
8...♘c6 9.♗d2

9.♗b5 takes us back to variation A1.

9...♗e7

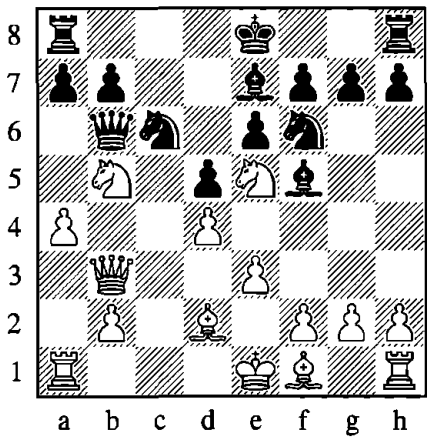
Now it is worth considering **A31) 10.♘b5** and **A32) 10.♖c1**.

Objectively White's best approach may be to aim for equality with 10.♗d3 ♗xd3 11.♘xd3 0–0 12.♖c1 as seen in Burmakin – Solozhenkin, Elista 1994. Here I like the natural continuation:



12...♖ac8N 13.0–0 ♕b8= Black has a comfortable position.

A31) 10.♘b5 ♕b6 11.a4



This has been played in a couple of games. Here I found a natural and strong novelty.

11...♘e4!N

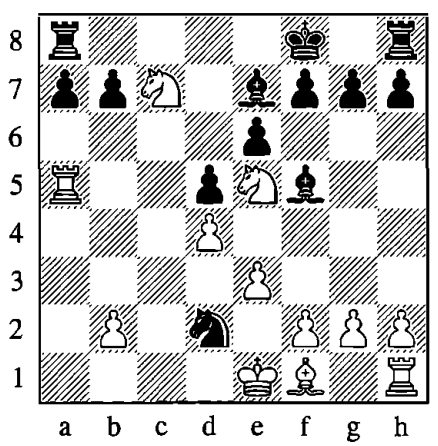
This move creates serious problems for White.

12.a5!? ♘xd2 13.♕a4

The best try, but Black remains on top.

13...♕xa5 14.♕xa5 ♘xa5 15.♘c7† ♔f8 16.♖xa5

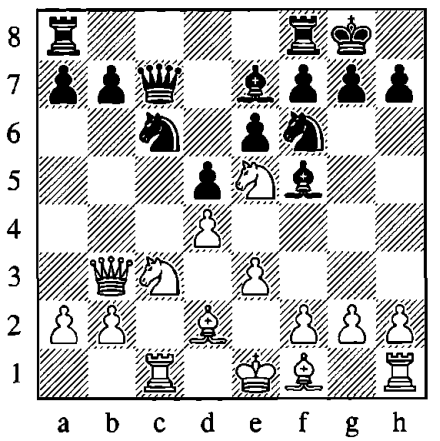
16.♘xa8? loses to 16...♘db3.



16...♘e4 17.♖b5 ♖c8 18.♖xb7 ♗d6 19.g4 ♖xc7 20.♖xc7 ♗xc7 21.gxf5 ♗xe5 22.dxe5 exf5∓

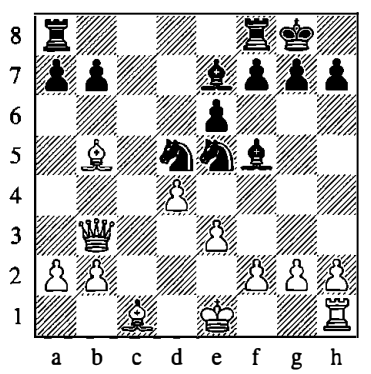
White has survived the complications, but he still faces a tough endgame.

A32) 10.♖c1 0–0



11.♗e2

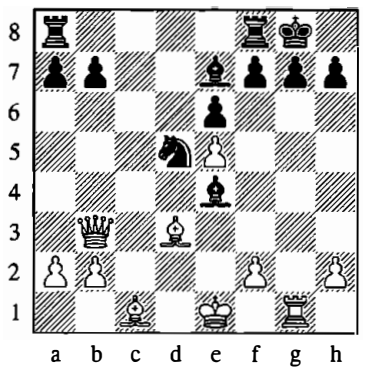
The alternative is: 11.♗b5 ♘xe5!? Black can head for complications. (Normal moves such as 11...♖fc8 and 11...♘d7 offer fully adequate play.) 12.♘xd5 ♕xc1† 13.♗xc1 ♘xd5



14.e4!

After 14.dxe5? ♖ac8 White finds himself in trouble due to the threat of ...♗c2, and after 15.♔d1 ♖fd8 16.♗d2 ♗b4 his position was already hopeless in Baikov – Janovsky, Moscow 1995.

14...♗xe4 15.dxe5 ♗xg2 16.♖g1 ♗e4 17.♗d3



17...♖ac8 18.♗d2 ♗xd3 19.♕xd3 ♖fd8

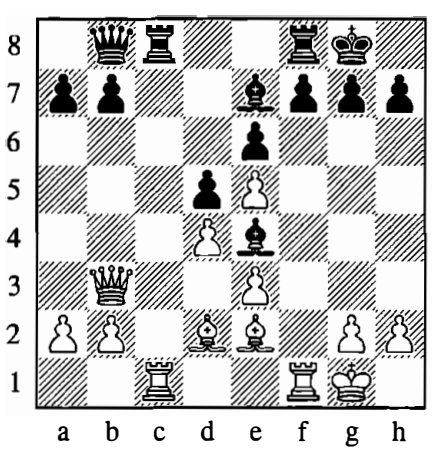
Black had more than enough compensation for the queen in Nikolic – Khalifman, Ter Apel 1994.

11...♖ac8 12.0–0 ♕b8 13.f4

After 13.♘xc6 ♖xc6 14.♘a4 ♖fc8 15.♖xc6 ♖xc6 the players agreed a draw in Grünfeld – Bisguier, Vienna 1952, but the final position was more pleasant for Black.

The text move is ambitious but Black is well placed to meet it.

13...♘xe5 14.fxe5 ♘e4 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4



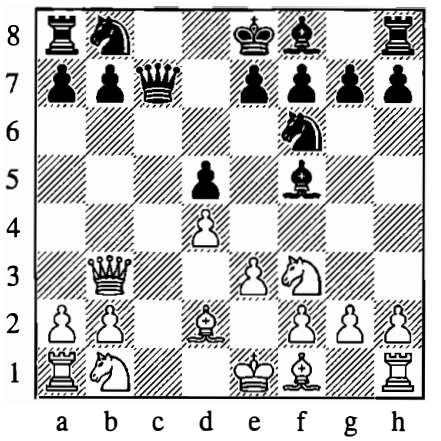
16.♗b4 ♗xb4 17.♕xb4

We have been following the game Baum – Menge, Germany 1992. Here Black could have maintained some initiative with:

17...♖c7!N

White must be careful, as Black threatens to take control over the c-file.

B) 7.♗d2

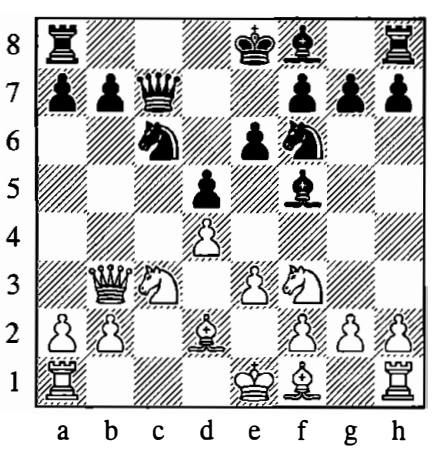


This is the more flexible way of developing White's forces. Now the c-file remains open and White may be able to exchange his bad bishop via the b4-square.

7...e6

From this position White has tried three moves: **B1) 8.♘c3**, **B2) 8.♘a3** and **8.♗b5†**.

B1) 8.♘c3 ♘c6



9.♖c1

9.♗b5 transposes to the 9.♗d2 line in the notes to the earlier variation A1.

9.♘h4 ♗g6 10.♘xg6 hxg6 leads back to variation A2.

9...♗e7 10.♗b5

10.♘h4 ♗g6 11.♘xg6 hxg6 leads once again to variation A2.

10.♘e5 is variation A32.

10...0–0 11.0–0 a6!

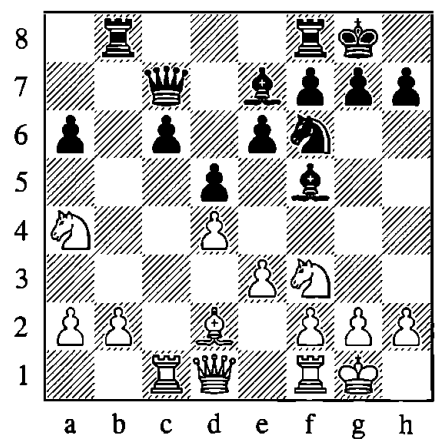
The simplest and most direct solution.

12.♗xc6 bxc6

With such a strong bishop on f5, Black has nothing to fear from this pawn structure. There is only one practical example from this position, which we will follow for a few more moves.

13.♘a4 ♖ab8 14.♕d1

Shariyazdanov – Kupreichik, Maikop 1998. Now the most accurate continuation is:



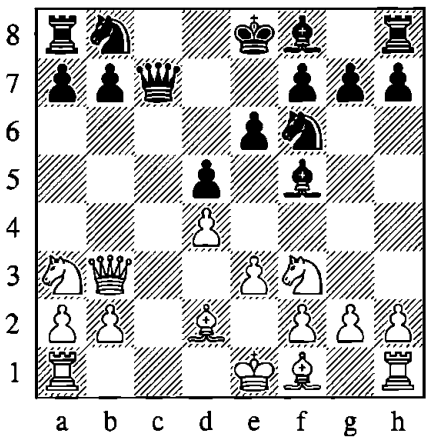
14...♘d7N 15.♗c3 ♖fc8 16.b3 ♕b7

Black is ready to carry out ...c5.

17.♘c5 ♘xc5 18.dxc5 ♗e4

Black has the more comfortable position, with two bishops and a central pawn majority.

B2) 8.♘a3

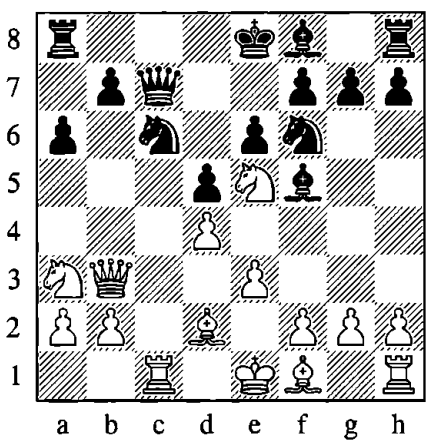


8...♘c6 9.♖c1

White's set-up has been played several times, but it is not too threatening.

9...a6 10.♘e5

10.♕a4 ♗e7 11.♗b5 has been tried, but after 11...0–0 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.♘e5 c5 14.0–0 ♖fc8 Black was just better with his bishop pair in Yusupov – Kramnik, Linares 1993.



10...♗e7!N

Surprisingly, the weak 10...♘e4? is the only move to have been tried. 11.♕a4 ♘xd2 Now

in Palme – Halosar, Berlin 1938, White missed 12.♘xc6!N bxc6 13.♖xc6 ♕d7 14.♗b5! with a clear advantage.

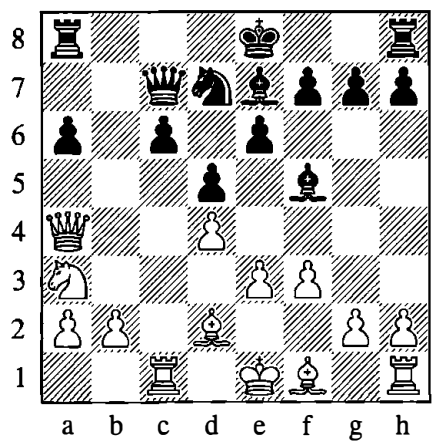
The text move is an obvious improvement, after which I examined the following interesting variations.

11.f3

After 11.♗d3 ♗xd3 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♕xd3 0–0 14.0–0 ♖ab8 15.♖c2 ♘e4= the misplaced knight on a3 fully compensates for Black's structural weakness on the queenside.

11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♕a4 0–0! is a strong idea, based on Black's development advantage and the misplaced knight. 13.♗a5 (After 13.♕xc6? ♕xc6 14.♖xc6 ♖fb8! White is already lost.) 13...♕b7 14.b3 ♖fc8 Black will play ...c5 next, with an excellent game.

11...♘d7 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♕a4



13...0–0!

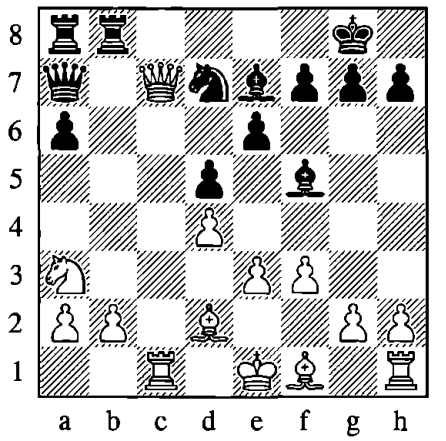
Once again the pawn sacrifice is a key idea.

14.♕xc6 ♕a7!

Black has promising compensation, for example:

15.♕c7 ♖fb8

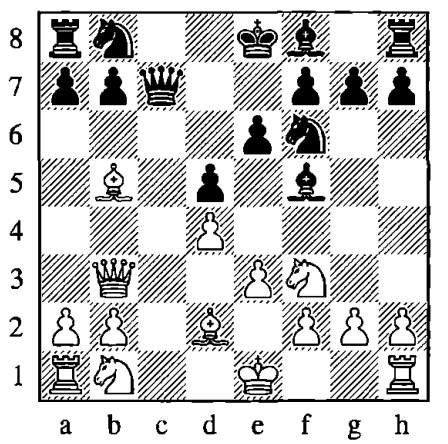
The queen exchange is no problem.



16.♕xa7 ♖xa7 17.♗c3 ♘b6

White must worry about the unpleasant prospect of ...♘a4.

B3) 8.♗b5†



Finally we come to the main move.

8...♘c6

I would also like to mention, in passing, a less popular alternative that was chosen by Carlsen: 8...♘bd7 9.0–0 a6 10.♖c1 ♕b6 11.♗e2 ♕xb3 12.axb3 ♗d6 13.♘c3 ♔e7 14.♘h4 ♗g6 Black had a fully adequate position in Tkachiev – Carlsen, Astana (rapid) 2012.

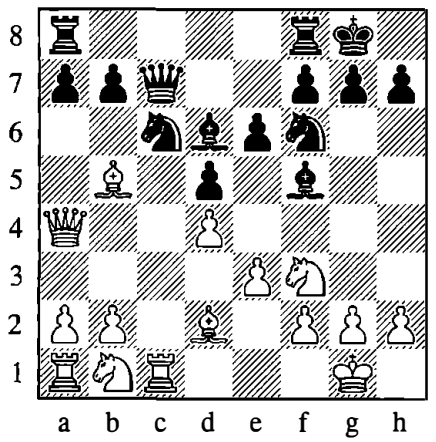
After the text move White can choose between **B31) 9.0–0** and **B32) 9.♗b4**.

B31) 9.0–0 ♗d6 10.♖c1

10.♗b4 leads to variation B322 below.

10...0–0 11.♕a4

Here I discovered an interesting new idea.



11...♕b8!?N

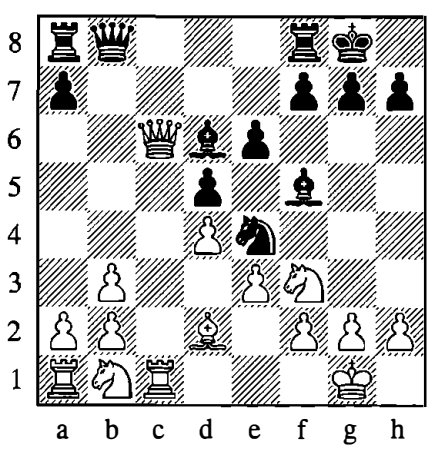
Alternatively, 11...♖fc8 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.♗b4 ♗xb4 14.♕xb4 ♘d7 has been played in a few games and is definitely enough for equality.

12.♗xc6

This is not forced, but it is obviously the critical continuation that needs to be checked.

12...bxc6 13.♕xc6 ♘e4

13...♘g4!? is also worth considering.

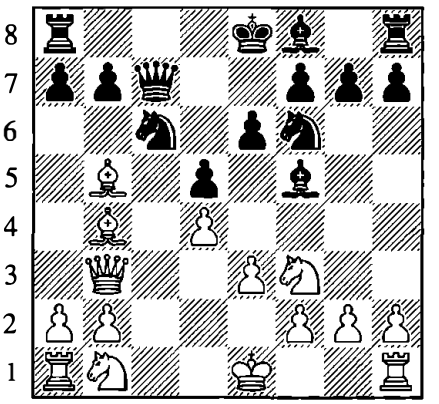


Black has nice compensation, as shown in the illustrative line:

14.b3?! ♘xd2! 15.♘bxd2 ♗a3 16.♖e1 ♖c8 17.♕a4 ♗b2 18.♖ad1 ♗c2

Black wins material.

B32) 9.♗b4



9...♗d6

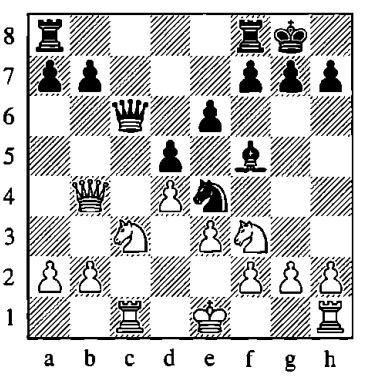
9...♗xb4† 10.♕xb4 ♘d7 is regarded as solid. but I prefer the text move. From this position I analysed **B321) 10.♕a3** and **B322) 10.0–0**.

B321) 10.♕a3

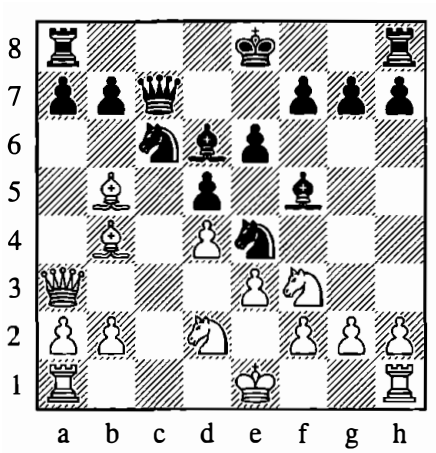
This has been the most popular choice, but Black has a convincing answer.

10...♘e4! 11.♘bd2

11.♘c3 0–0 12.♗xc6 ♕xc6 also sees White fall short of equality, for instance: 13.♖c1 ♗xb4 14.♕xb4



In Danner – Gagarin, Oberwart 2001, Black missed a strong continuation: 14...♕a6!N 15.♕b5 ♘xc3 16.♕xa6 bxa6 17.♖xc3 ♖ab8 18.b3 ♖fc8∓ Black's control over the c-file matters more than the doubled pawns.

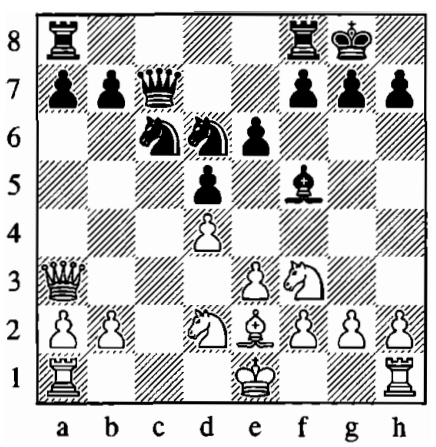


11...0–0 12.♗xd6

Even worse is: 12.♗xc6 ♕xc6 13.0–0 ♗xb4 14.♕xb4 a5! 15.♕a3 ♘xd2 16.♘xd2 ♖fc8∓ Black's control over the c-file gave him a nice edge in Cifuentes Parada – Hector, Haninge 1992.

12...♘xd6 13.♗e2

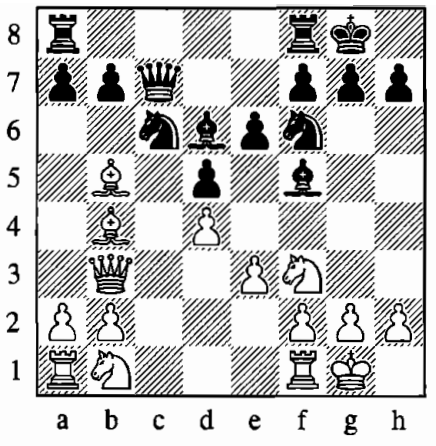
This position occurred in Chatalbashev – Khenkin, Padova 1998, and here the obvious and strong continuation is:



13...♖fc8!N 14.0–0 ♕d8∓

Black has the more pleasant game; his short-term plan will be ...a5 followed by ...♘b4.

B322) 10.0–0 0–0



11.♗xc6

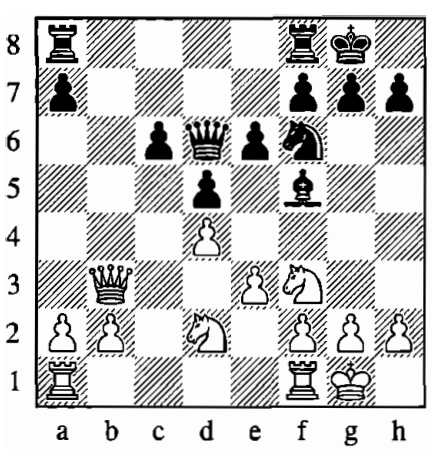
11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.♗xc6 bxc6 transposes to line B3221 below.

11...bxc6!

After 11...♕xc6 12.♘e5 ♕b6 13.♗xd6 ♕xd6 Black is solid, but it will be tough for him to generate winning chances.

The text move is theoretically sound, and gives more chances to unbalance the game. White can start with either **B3221) 12.♗xd6** or **B3222) 12.♘bd2**.

B3221) 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.♘bd2

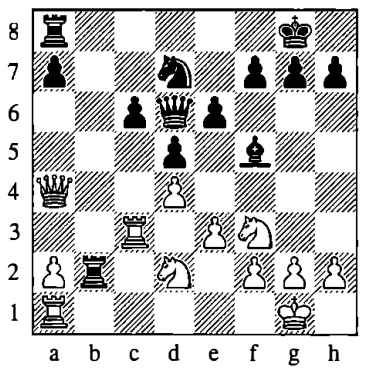


13...♘d7!

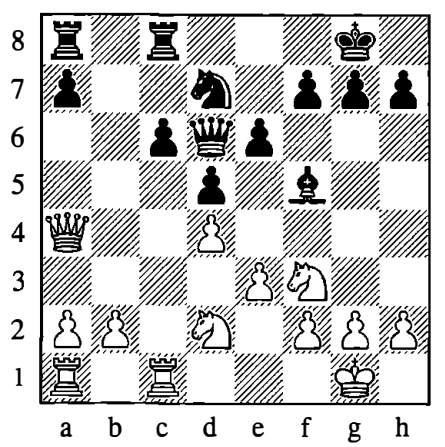
A typical move, covering the important c5- and e5-squares.

14.♖fc1 ♖fc8 15.♕a4

15.♖c3 ♖cb8 16.♕a4 ♖xb2 works out well for Black:



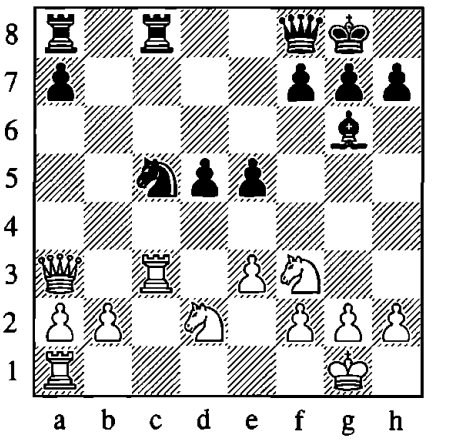
17.♕xc6 (17.♖xc6 ♘b6! 18.♖xd6 ♘xa4 19.♖c6 ♘b6 leads to the same position with one more move having been played) 17...♕xc6 18.♖xc6 ♘b6 White faced a difficult endgame in Gomez Fontal – Dominguez Perez, Las Tunas 2001.



15...c5!

Black must time this move carefully; here it works fine.

16.dxc5 ♘xc5 17.♕a3 ♕f8! 18.♘d4 ♗g6 19.♖c3 e5 20.♘4f3



20...♘d3!?

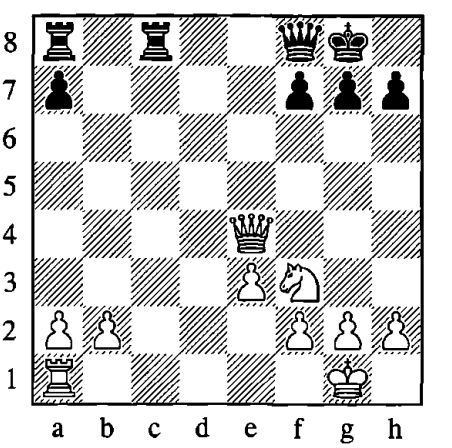
There is nothing wrong with 20...e4N 21.♘d4 ♘d3 with a balanced position.

21.♖xd3N

Clearly the critical test. 21.♖xc8 was played in V. Georgiev – Peralta, Athens 2006. Here Black could have tried an interesting pawn sacrifice: 21...♖xc8!?N 22.♕xa7 ♕d8! Black will rapidly regain the pawn on the queenside and enjoy a pleasant edge thanks to the powerful knight.

21...♗xd3 22.♕xd3 e4 23.♘xe4 dxe4 24.♕xe4

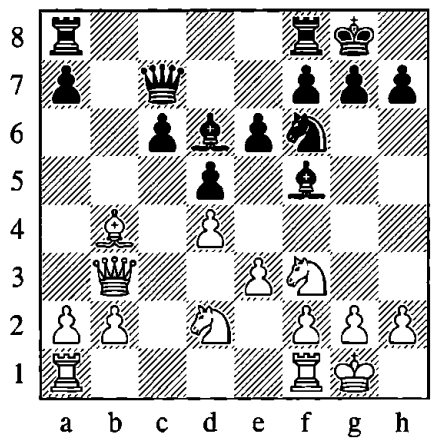
If White was given time to stabilize his position and plant the knight on d4 he would stand better, but in the meantime Black can start creating threats.



24...♖ab8 25.b3 ♕a3! 26.h4 ♖c1† 27.♖xc1 ♕xc1† 28.♔h2 ♖c8

Black's chances are not worse.

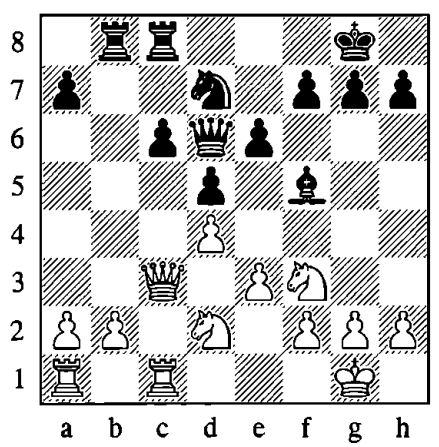
B3221) 12.♘bd2



12...♖ab8 13.♗xd6 ♕xd6 14.♕c3 ♘d7

Again this typical move. Black is not only supporting a future ...c5, but also taking control over the e5-square.

15.♖fc1 ♖fc8



16.♘b3

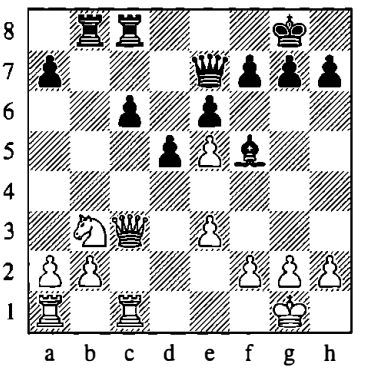
White endeavours to stop ...c5.

A less commonly played option is:
16.♘e5 ♘xe5 17.dxe5 ♕e7

The immediate 17...♕b4 is imprecise. After 18.♕xb4 ♖xb4 19.b3 White's b-pawn is secure and if 19...c5 then 20.♖c3 and the c5-pawn is under a little pressure.

18.♘b3

18.b3 c5 19.e4 ♗g6 was very comfortable for Black in Horton – Pellen, email 2010.



18...♕b4

Now that the b2-pawn is fixed as a target, this is a safe equalizer.

If Black wishes to keep more tension in the position, then 18...h5!? 19.♘c5 ♕g5∞ is an option.

19.♕xb4

19.♕c5 ♕xc5 20.♖xc5 h5= was Vujadinovic – C. Koch, email 2006; Black's ideas include ...♗d3-c4.

19...♖xb4

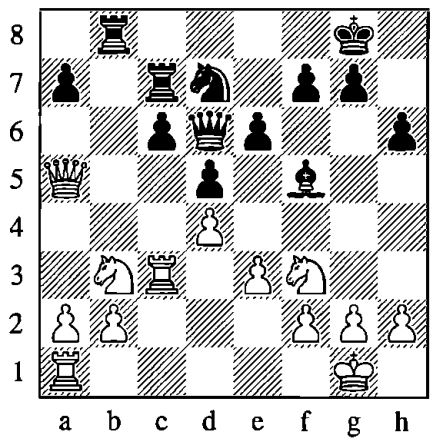
The weaknesses on b2 and c6 cancel each other out; a draw is highly likely. A couple of sample lines are enough: 20.♘d4 ♖xb2 21.♘xc6 ♔f8 22.♘xa7 ♖xc1† 23.♖xc1 ♖xa2= or 20.♖c5 ♗d3 21.♖ac1 g5 22.♖xc6 ♖xc6 23.♖xc6 ♗c4=.

16...h6 17.♕a5 ♖c7

The position is roughly balanced, as Black's strong light-squared bishop fully compensates for the weakening of his queenside structure. The English GM Mark Hebden has had this position twice with White, but failed to achieve anything in either game.

18.♖c3

In the later game White got into trouble after 18.h3 ♖b5! 19.♕d2?! ♗e4 20.♘e1 c5∓ in Hebden – Mellem, Oslo 2011.



18...♖b5 19.♕a6 ♖b6 20.♕e2 ♕b4!

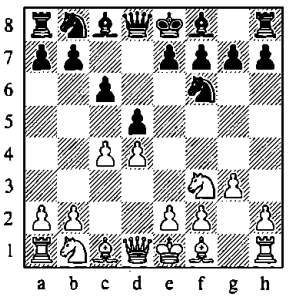
Black obtained a comfortable position in Hebden – Balogh, Cappelle la Grande 2010.

Conclusion

The 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♕b3 ♕c7 variation is popular among players wishing to play for a slight edge in a simplified position. The characteristic pawn structure occurs after an exchange on the c6-square, which often forces Black to take back with the b-pawn. Fortunately, Black's strong bishop on f5 and activity along the b-file should make up for this slight structural concession and I found that Black could claim at least equal prospects in all the major lines.



4th Move Alternatives



4.g3

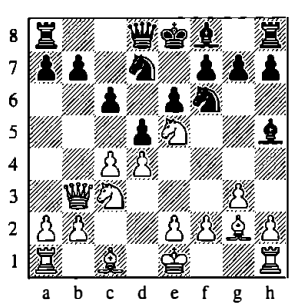
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♗g4 5.♗g2

5...e6

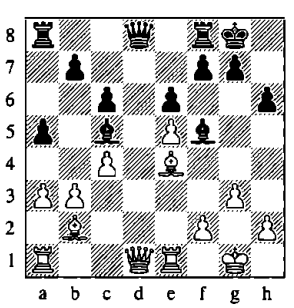
A) 6.♘e5	**198**
B) 6.0–0 ♘bd7	**199**
B1) 7.♘c3?!	**199**
B2) 7.♘bd2	**200**
B3) 7.b3	**201**
C) 6.♕b3 ♕b6 7.♘c3 ♘bd7 8.0–0 ♗e7	**204**
C1) 9.h3	**205**
C2) 9.c5	**206**
C3) 9.♗f4	**207**
C4) 9.♖e1	**208**

A) after 8.♕b3



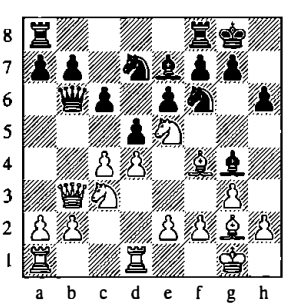
8...♘xe5!?N

B3) note to 14.cxd5



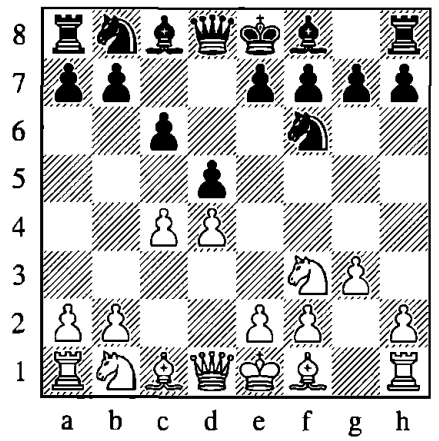
17...♕b6!N

C3) after 11.♘e5



11...♗h5!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3

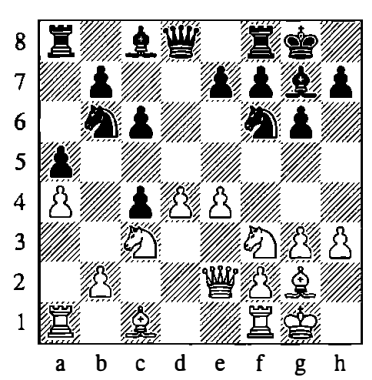


With this tricky system White plays in the style of the Catalan. The idea is interesting and I have even used it as a surprise weapon in a few of my own games.

4...♗g4

In my opinion this is the simplest solution for Black.

One of my games shows how the play may develop in the event that Black takes the c4-pawn: 4...dxc4 5.♗g2 ♘bd7 6.0–0 g6 7.♘c3 ♗g7 8.e4 0–0 9.♕e2 ♘b6 10.a4 a5 11.h3



11...e5!? 12.dxe5 ♘fd7 13.♗g5 ♕e8 14.♕e3 ♖a6 15.♖fd1 The position was interesting and double-edged in Avrukh – Motylev, Eilat 2012.

5.♗g2 e6

From here the main options are **A) 6.♘e5**. **B) 6.0–0** and **C) 6.♕b3**.

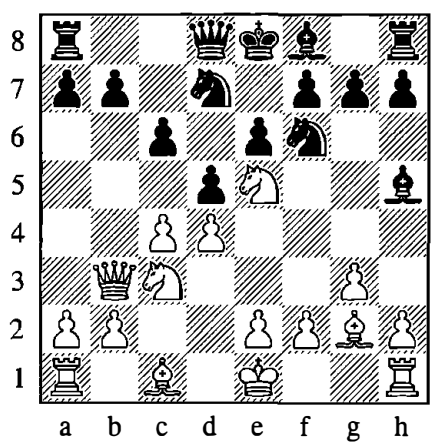
6.♘c3 ♘bd7 is likely to transpose elsewhere. for instance 7.0–0?! leads to variation B1 and 7.♕b3 ♕b6 to variation C.

A) 6.♘e5 ♗h5

6...♗f5 also fine. After the text move, White's main try is:

7.♘c3 ♘bd7 8.♕b3

Here I found an ambitious new idea for Black.



8...♘xe5!?N

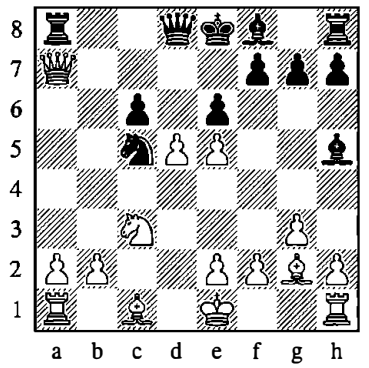
8...♕b6 is a solid alternative which has been played in all the games so far from this position.

9.dxe5 ♘d7 10.♕xb7 ♖c8!

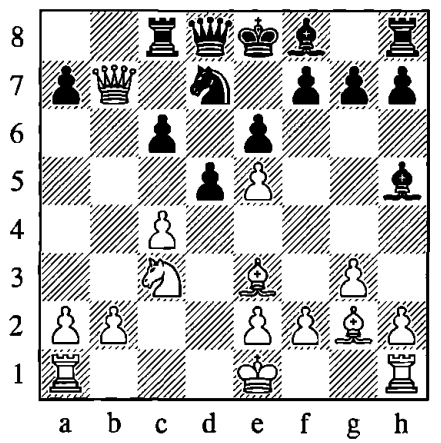
Black has promising compensation for the pawn, as shown by the following lines.

11.♗e3

11.♕xa7?! is too risky. 11...♘c5 12.cxd5 ♖a8 White's queen is trapped. He has an ingenious way to preserve approximate material equality, but it does not fully solve his problems:



13.♗g5! ♕c8 14.♕b6 ♖a6 15.♕d8† ♕xd8 16.♗xd8 ♔xd8 17.dxc6 ♘a4! Black's extra piece is worth more than White's pawns in this endgame.



11...♘c5 12.♗xc5

12.♕xa7? ♖a8∓

12...♗xc5⩱

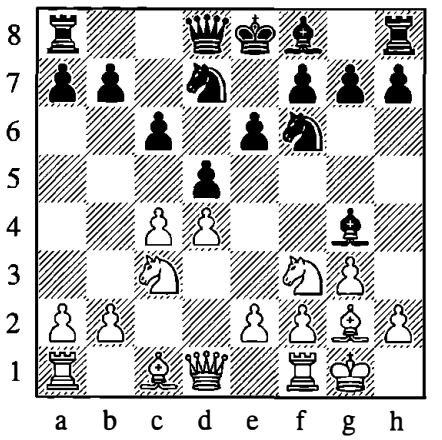
Black's bishop pair and activity offer full compensation for the pawn.

B) 6.0–0 ♘bd7

From this position White's main options are **B1) 7.♘c3?!**, **B2) 7.♘bd2** and **B3) 7.b3**.

7.♕b3 ♕b6 8.♘c3 ♗e7 reaches a position covered on page 205 under variation C.

B1) 7.♘c3?!



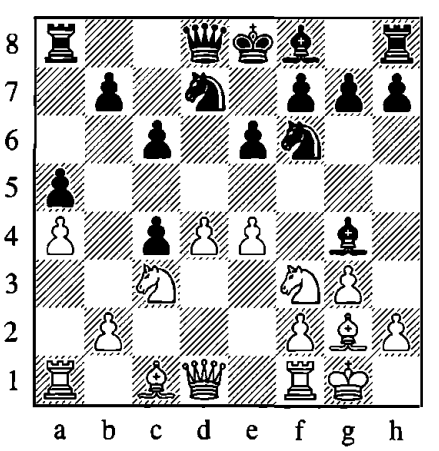
This entails a risky pawn sacrifice for White.

7...dxc4!

After this simple capture I do not see how White can justify being a pawn down. True, the position bears some resemblance to the Catalan, but here Black's light-squared bishop is on the active g4-square instead of being stuck on c8. The most popular continuation has been:

8.a4 a5! 9.e4

Here I like the following concrete approach.



9...♕b6!

Black prepares to strike in the centre with ...e5, which might be preceded by ...♖d8.

10.h3

White tried 10.d5 in Matnadze – Gonzalez Garcia, Barcelona 2011, but the last move is obviously premature in view of 10...♘e5N 11.♗f4 ♘d3 with a clear plus for Black.

10...♗xf3 11.♗xf3

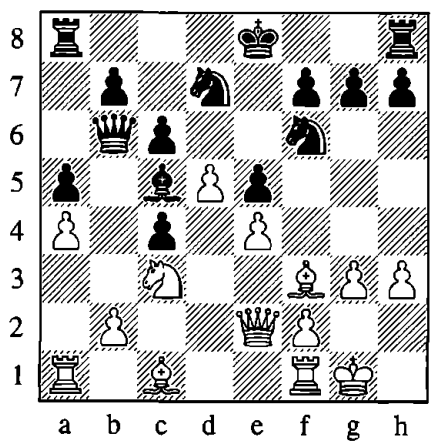
11.♕xf3?! ♕xd4 12.♗e3 ♕d6 does not promise White any compensation.

11...e5 12.d5 ♗c5

This secures some advantage, but 12...♘c5N may be even stronger.

13.♕e2

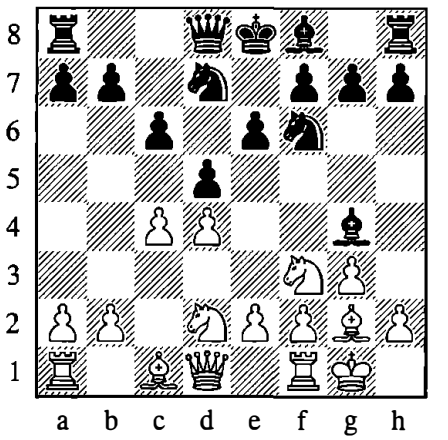
This position occurred in Matnadze – Ortiz Suarez, San Cristobal 2012. At this point, instead of defending the pawn with the queen, I favour a positional approach.



13...cxd5N 14.♘xd5 ♘xd5 15.exd5 0–0 16.♕xc4 ♗d4

Black has a positional advantage and the more active pieces.

B2) 7.♘bd2



7...♗e7 8.♖e1

Preparing to gain space by advancing the e-pawn.

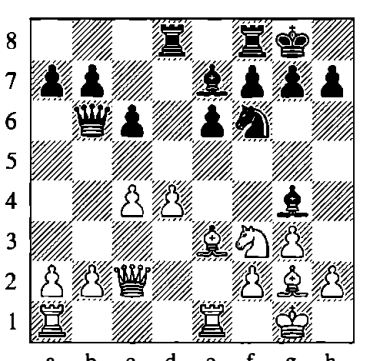
8.b3 0–0 9.♗b2 transposes to the next variation B3 below.

8...0–0 9.e4 dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♖xe4 ♘f6

After a few natural moves, we have arrived at a fairly balanced middlegame.

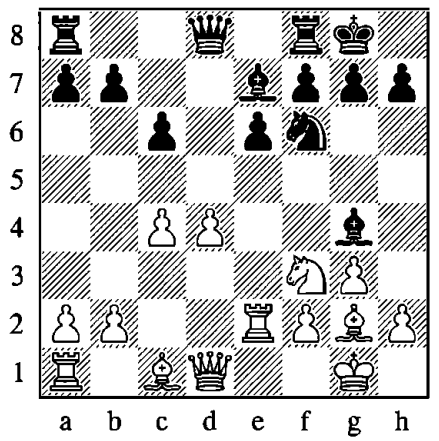
12.♖e2

12.♖e1 is similar, although in this instance Black might wish to threaten the b2-pawn with: 12...♕b6!? 13.♗e3 ♖ad8 (After 13...♕xb2 14.♖b1 ♕xa2 15.♖xb7 ♗d6 16.♕a1 White has sufficient compensation.) 14.♕c2



This happened in Shyam – Swapnil, Chennai 2013, and now I like the solid 14...♗f5N 15.♕e2 h6 16.♘e5 ♕a6 with an equal but complex game.

After the text move I am proposing a new continuation:



12...h6!?N

Ensuring the safety of the light-squared bishop.

12...♕a5 has been played in a couple of games. A logical continuation is 13.h3 ♗xf3 14.♗xf3 ♖fd8 15.♕b3 ♖d7 16.♗d2 ♕b6 17.♗c3 ♕xb3 18.axb3 a6 when Black was solid and White's bishop pair did not count for a great deal in Tosic – Drasko, Belgrade 1998.

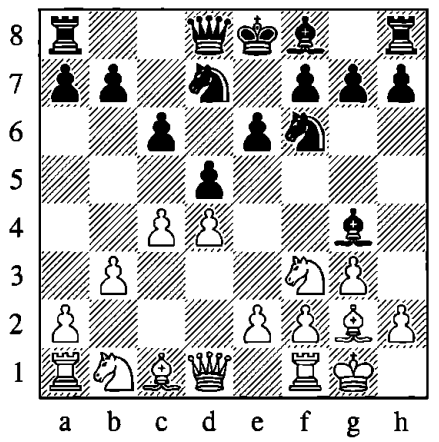
13.♗f4

Another possible continuation is 13.♗e3 a5!? 14.h3 ♗f5 15.a4 ♕d6 when Black is doing fine.

13...♕b6 14.h3 ♗f5

Black has adequate play.

B3) 7.b3



This has been the most popular continuation.

7...♗e7

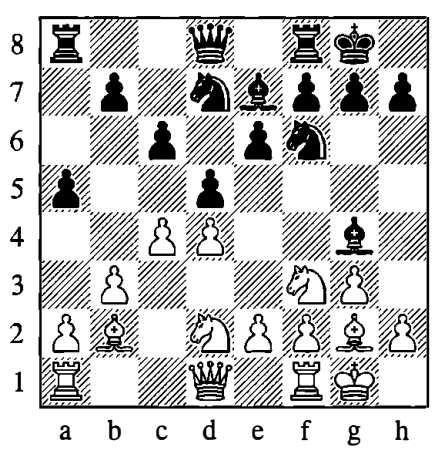
This square seems preferable to d6, as in that case a future ♘e5 might come with greater impact.

8.♗b2 0–0 9.♘bd2

This position has occurred in a huge number of games, via several move orders. I will focus on the most important lines.

9...a5!

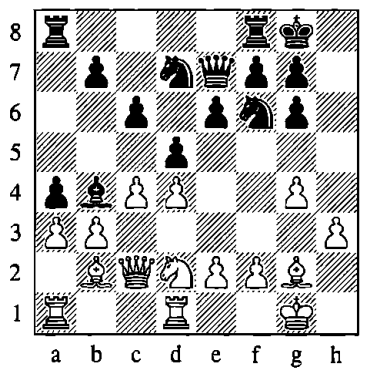
This idea is thematic in positions with a pawn on b3, and I consider it the best plan for Black.



10.a3

This is the obvious reply.

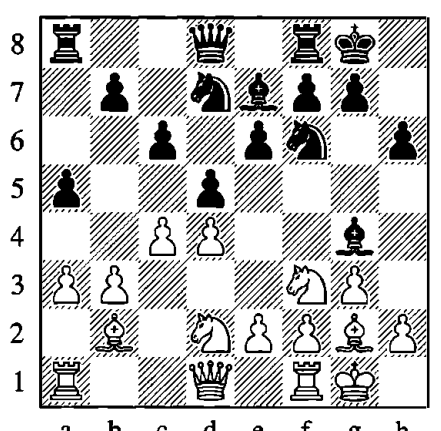
White has also tried ignoring the a-pawn and chasing the light-squared bishop with: 10.h3 ♗h5 11.g4 ♗g6 12.♘h4 a4 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.♕c2 ♗b4! 15.♖fd1 ♕e7 Black has a comfortable position. From here the inaccurate 16.a3?! was played in Donchenko – Zheliandinov, Soviet Union 1977, and here Black could have achieved a better game as follows:



16...♗xd2N 17.♖xd2 ♘b6! The knight comes to c4 with great effect.

10...h6

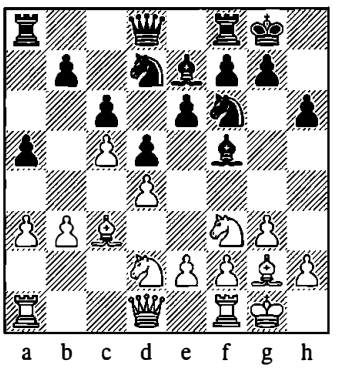
Black has a few decent alternatives, but I like the idea of giving the bishop an escape route to h7.



11.♖e1

Preparing a central advance is logical. Here are a couple of other instructive continuations:

11.♗c3 ♗f5! Making full use of the previous move. 12.c5

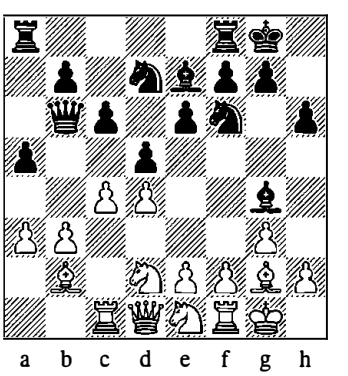


This occurred in Ruck – Portisch, Hungary 2005, and now after the logical 12...b6N 13.b4 ♕b8∓ I prefer Black. The opening of the queenside works nicely with the bishop on f5, as the white rooks will be denied the use of the b1-square.

11.♖c1 ♕b6

11...♗f5 is a good alternative, but I would like to show an illustrative example with a different set-up.

12.♘e1



12...c5!?

Black finds an interesting way to change the character of the game. Obviously this

was not forced, and any other sensible move would have maintained equal chances.

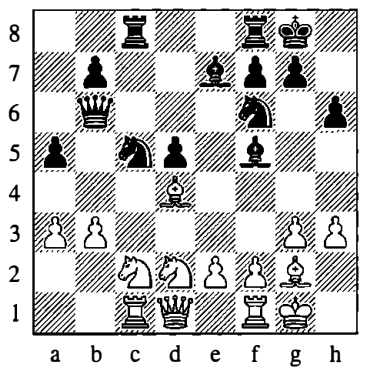
13.h3 ♗f5 14.cxd5 exd5 15.dxc5 ♘xc5

The position remains balanced, as Black's active pieces compensate for the isolated pawn.

16.♗d4 ♖ac8 17.♘c2?!

White chooses an unfortunate square for the knight.

17.♘d3 would have kept the game equal.

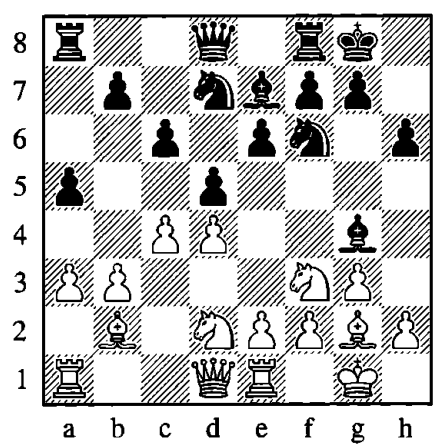


17...♕e6! 18.♔h2

This position was reached in S. Ivanov – Dautov, Leningrad 1989, and now Black missed a strong idea:

18...♘cd7!N

Black is ready to exchange on c2, followed by capturing a pawn on a3 or e2.



11...♗f5

With the h7-square now available, the bishop retreats in order to prevent e2-e4.

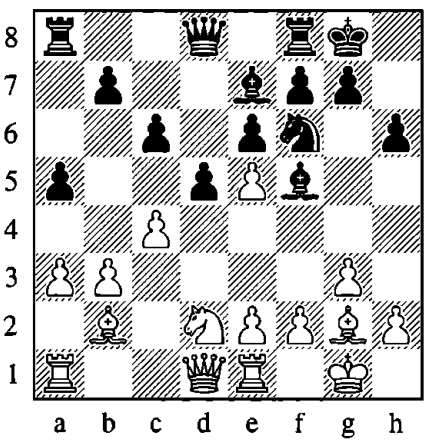
12.♘e5

This is White's most active try.

The calm 12.e3 can be met by 12...♘e4 13.♕e2 ♕b6 14.♖ac1 ♖fd8 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4= with a good game for Black, Kuzubov – Filippov, Tashkent 2011.

12...♘xe5 13.dxe5

Now Black has a choice.



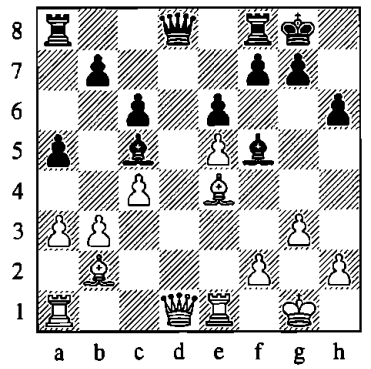
13...♘d7!?

This is the way to keep more complexity in the position.

13...♘e4 is a safe route to equality, the only drawback being that the position may become dull rather quickly. 14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.e3 ♕b6 16.♕c2 ♖fd8 17.♗d4 c5 was fully equal in Vijayalakshmi – Zubarev, Borup 2012.

14.cxd5

14.e4?! is premature due to 14...dxe4 15.♘xe4 ♘c5 16.♘xc5 ♗xc5 when Black's bishops are more active. 17.♗e4 Now in Sziraki – Gonda, Hungary 2010, Black should have continued:



17...♕b6!N 18.♕c2 ♗xe4 19.♖xe4 ♖fd8∓
Black will double along the d-file next.

14...exd5!?N

This new move is an interesting way to unbalance the structure.

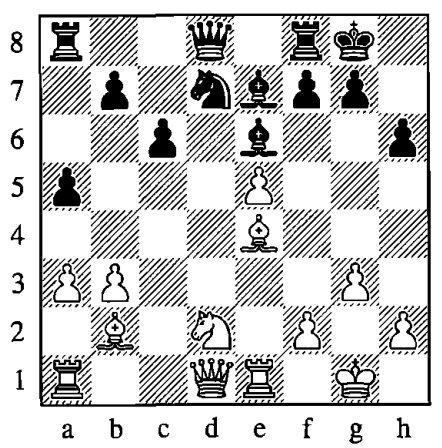
14...cxd5 is also fine, and was played in Malaniuk – Dreev, Tilburg 1993. Here the only really challenging idea for White is 15.e4N, but after 15...dxe4 16.♗xe4 ♘c5 17.♗xf5 exf5 18.♘c4 ♕xd1 19.♖axd1 ♘xb3 20.♖d7 ♖fe8 he has no more than equality.

15.e4 dxe4 16.♗xe4

16.♘xe4 ♘c5 can only be better for Black.

16...♗e6

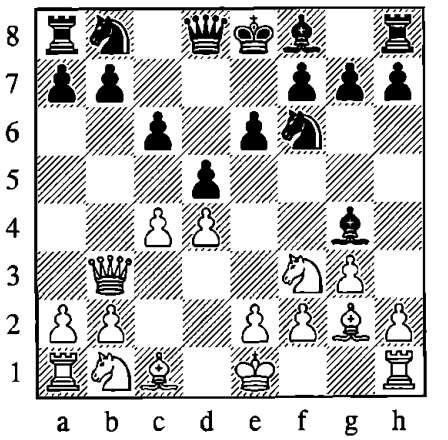
The arising position is quite complicated and roughly balanced. An illustrative line is:



17.♕e2 ♘c5 18.♗c2 ♕b6 19.♗d4 ♖fd8 20.♕e3 ♕b5!

With equal chances.

C) 6.♕b3



I decided to make this move our main line, although the ensuing positions may also be reached via the 6.0–0 move order.

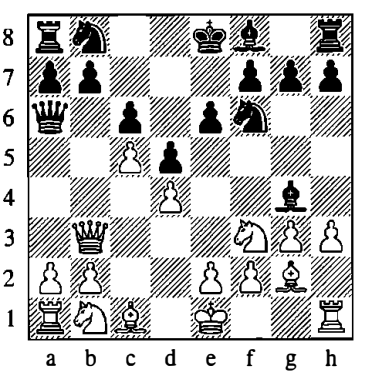
6...♕b6 7.♘c3

Trying to establish a queenside clamp is not dangerous:

7.c5 ♕a6!?

I prefer this fighting continuation over 7...♕xb3 8.axb3 ♘bd7 9.♘c3 a6 10.b4 ♖c8 when the position was equal in Grunberg – Martinovic, Nis 2008.

8.h3

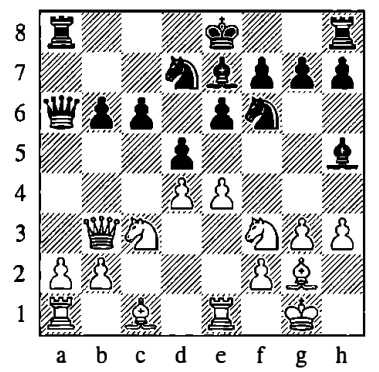


8...♗h5

8...♗xf3 9.♗xf3 b6 is also fine for Black.

Here I found one example in which Black equalized easily after:

9.♘c3 ♘bd7 10.0–0 ♗e7 11.♖e1 b6 12.cxb6 axb6 13.e4

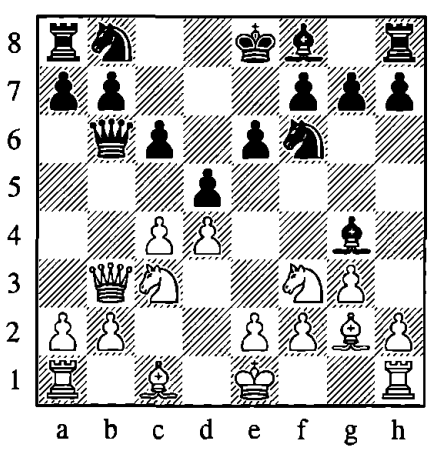


13...♘xe4

13...0–0!?N deserves attention, as 14.e5?! ♘e8 is no problem for Black, who intends ...♘c7 and ...c5 with easy play.

14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.♖xe4 ♘f6 16.♖e1 ♗xf3 17.♗xf3 ♘d5=

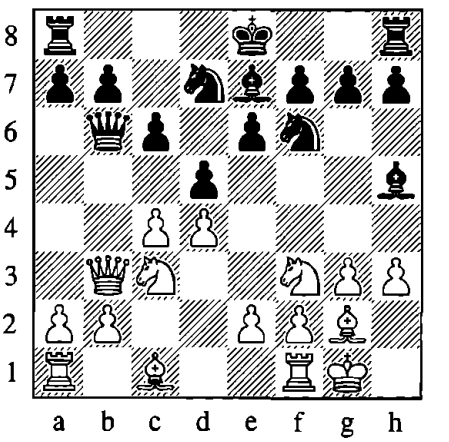
Burmakin – Matamoros Franco, Benidorm 2008.



7...♘bd7 8.0–0 ♗e7

We have reached the main branching point for the set-up involving the white queen on b3. White has four main options from here: **C1) 9.h3**, **C2) 9.c5**, **C3) 9.♗f4** and **C4) 9.♖e1**.

C1) 9.h3 ♗h5



From here White may continue by analogy with any of the other three main lines, but I will focus on his attempts to chase the light-squared bishop.

10.♘h4

10.g4 ♗g6 11.♘e5?! is hardly a good idea for White, and after 11...♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♘d7 13.cxd5 ♕xb3 14.axb3 exd5 15.e4 dxe4 16.♘xe4 ♘xe5 Black was better in Andreikin – Morozevich, Astana 2012.

10...♕a6!?

With this interesting move, Black forces White to take a decision regarding the c4-pawn.

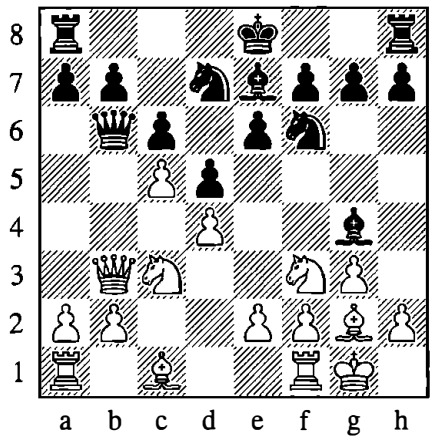
11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♗f3 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♗xf3 14.♘xf3

This position was reached in "Cato the Younger" – "Kitsune", Internet 2007. Here the natural continuation is:

14...0–0 15.e4 c5⇄

Reaching a double-edged middlegame where Black has fair chances.

C2) 9.c5



9...♕a6!

Black gets a fine position after posting his queen on this active square.

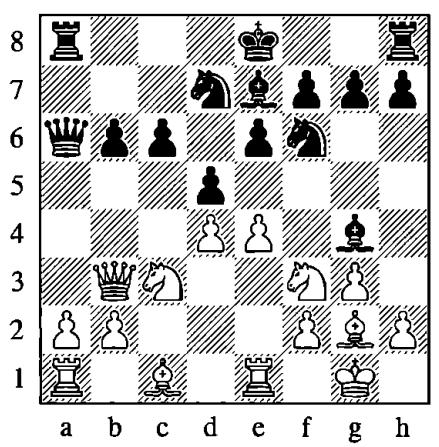
10.♖e1 b6

Undermining White's pawn wedge is Black's main idea.

11.cxb6 axb6

It is worth considering 11...0–0!?N 12.bxa7 (12.e4 ♖ab8 looks nice for Black.) 12...♕xa7 with interesting compensation.

12.e4



12...0–0!?

Maintaining the tension is the most ambitious way to handle the position.

As always, 12...♘xe4 is perfectly reliable, and 13.♘xe4 dxe4 14.♖xe4 ♗f5 15.♖e1 0–0 16.♗f4 ♖ac8= was fine for Black in Bernadskiy – Velicka, Brezova 2010.

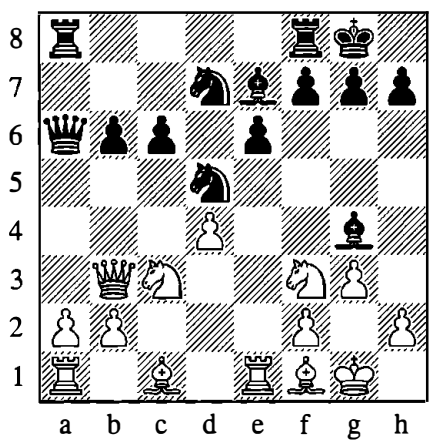
13.exd5

Another game continued: 13.♗f4 ♖fc8 Black continues to play flexibly. 14.♘e5 ♘xe5 15.♗xe5 This was Ekeberg – Dvirnyy, Rhodes 2013, and now 15...dxe4N 16.♘xe4 ♘d5 would have given Black a comfortable game.

13...♘xd5!

This is an important improvement over 13...cxd5?!, which has occurred in four games, all of which saw White fail to play the unpleasant 14.♘h4!N following by h2-h3 and g3-g4 to hunt down the bishop.

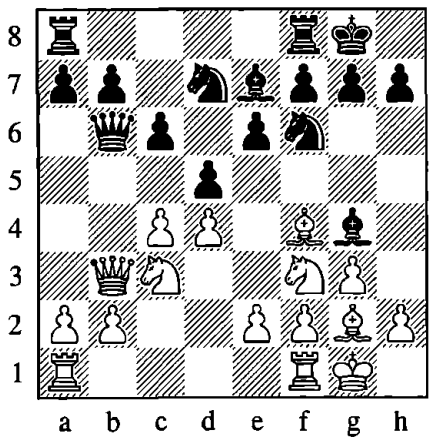
14.♗f1



14...♕b7N

After 14...♕a7 15.♘xd5 cxd5= Black did not experience any problems in Kozlov – Kharitonov, St Petersburg 1995. The text move looks like a slight improvement, as the queen keeps in touch with some light squares and gives the rook a clear view of the a-file.

C3) 9.♗f4 0–0



10.♖fd1

White has tried several alternatives. I will show you the two most important of them.

10.♘d2

This move occurred in Cvitan – Jakovljevic, Pula 2003. Here Black could have captured the central pawn.

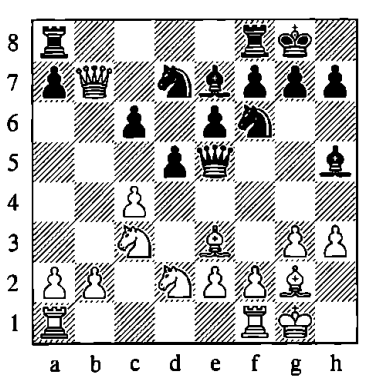
10...♕xd4N

Best play from here continues:

11.h3 ♗h5

11...♗f5 gives White a choice between forcing an immediate draw with 12.♗e3 ♕e5 13.♗f4= and keeping the game going with 12.♕xb7 ♕b6 13.♕xb6 axb6 14.e4 dxe4 15.♘dxe4 ♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♗xe4 17.♗xe4 ♖fc8 when the position is equal.

12.♗e3 ♕e5 13.♕xb7



13...♕b8! 14.♕xc6

14.♕xb8 ♖fxb8 15.♘b3 a5 is double-edged, but not worse for Black.

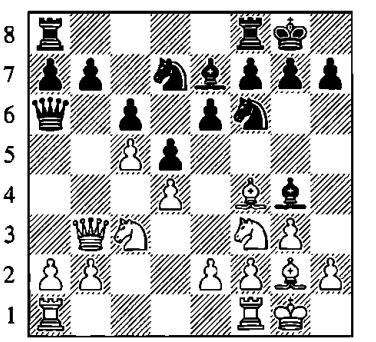
14...♕xb2 15.♖fc1 ♖fc8

If Black does not want to allow a threefold repetition he could investigate 15...♖ac8!? intending 16.♕a6 ♗g6, although the position is objectively equal there too.

16.♕a6 ♘c5 17.♕a5 ♘b7=

10.c5 ♕a6

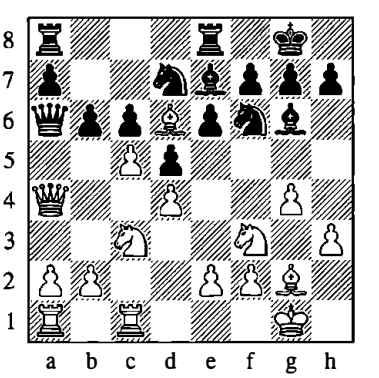
As usual in such structures, Black intends to play ...b6 next. The following continuation looks like the most interesting one for White.



11.h3 ♗h5 12.♖fc1 b6 13.g4 ♗g6 14.♗d6!?

Making use of the earlier bishop development.

14...♖fe8 15.♕a4



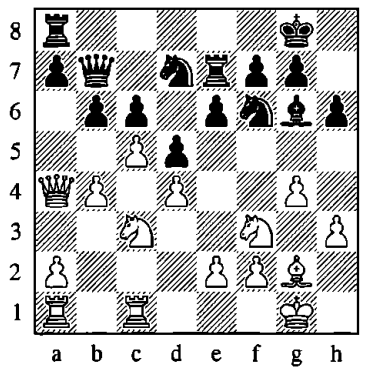
15...♕b7!N

This is much stronger than 15...♕xa4 16.♘xa4 ♘e4 as occurred in Burmakin –

Rublevsky, Tomsk 2001, at which point White could have secured an edge by means of 17.♗xe7N ♖xe7 18.cxb6 axb6 19.b3±.

16.♗xe7 ♖xe7 17.b4 h6!

Safeguarding the bishop. The position is complicated, but Black looks to be in great shape.

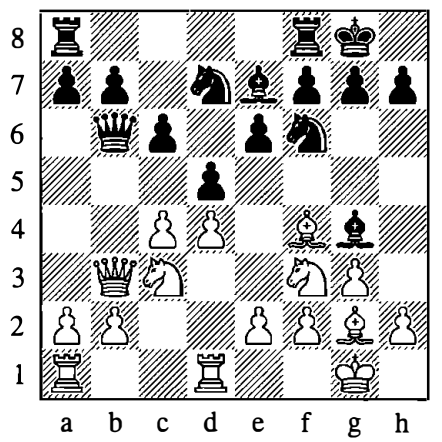


18.♘d2

18.b5 ♖c8 favours Black.

18...b5 19.♕b3 e5

Black seizes space in the centre and may turn his attention to White's weakened kingside in the future.



10...h6!?

Yet again we see this useful move, creating an escape route for the bishop while keeping the other pieces flexible.

11.♘e5

I also checked 11.c5 ♕a6 12.♗f1 b6 13.h3 ♗xf3 14.exf3 ♕c8 15.cxb6 axb6 when Black's superior pawn structure gives him the better chances in the long term.

11...♗h5!N

This is the right move.

Black should not rush with 11...♘xe5 as after 12.dxe5 ♘d7 13.h3 ♗h5 14.g4 g5 15.♗g3 ♗g6 16.cxd5 ♕xb3 17.axb3 exd5 18.e4 White managed to seize the initiative in Szalai – K. Szabo, Budapest 2004.

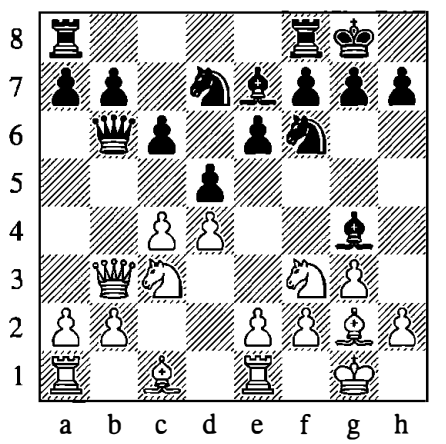
12.h3

Chasing the bishop is the natural plan, but Black has a good answer.

12...♕xb3 13.axb3 g5! 14.♗e3 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♘d7

Black has a fine position.

C4) 9.♖e1 0–0

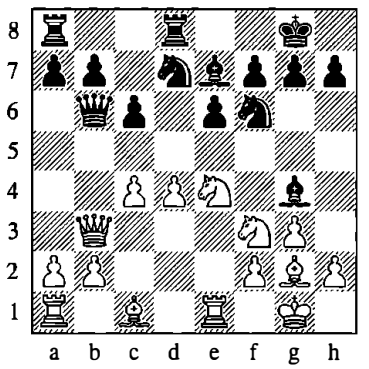


10.c5

If White is looking to get somewhere with the c4-c5 advance, this is the best time to try it.

10.e4 gives Black easy equality after: 10...dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♖fd8 (11...♘xe4 12.♖xe4 ♘f6 is also

good enough.) In the one game in the database, White immediately committed a mistake:



12.♘xf6†? ♗xf6 13.♘e5 ♗xe5 14.dxe5 ♘xe5∓ Mikac – Sax, Pula 1994. Black won a clear pawn as the knight was untouchable.

10...♕xb3

10...♕a6!?N is possible, even though White's set-up is designed to discourage it. The critical line seems to be: 11.e4 ♘xe4 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♖xe4 ♗f5 14.♗f1 ♕a5 15.♖e1 ♕c7 16.♗f4 ♕c8 Despite gaining some tempos against the queen, it is not clear what White has really achieved, and the position remains complicated.

11.axb3 a6

This move not only locks the queenside to prevent b4-b5 ideas, but also frees the rook from the defence of the a-pawn. We will follow a recent game between two high-ranking GMs.

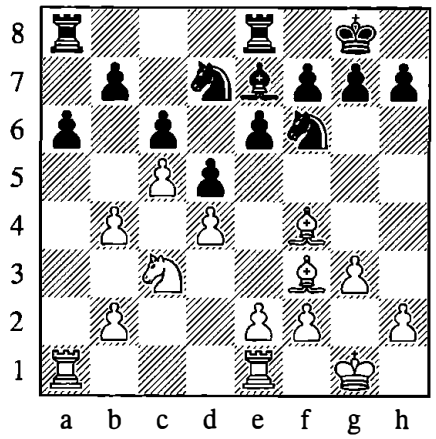
12.b4

12.♘d2?! would be premature in view of 12...e5 13.e3 ♖ae8 14.b4 ♗d8! when Black has no problems.

12...♖fe8 13.♗f4 ♗xf3!?

A good positional decision. Black is fighting to carry out the ...e5 push.

14.♗xf3



14...♖ac8!

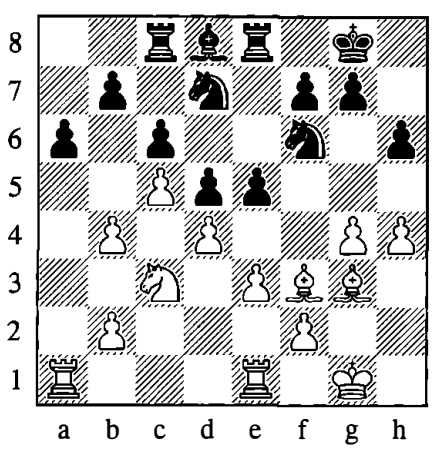
Manoeuvring the bishop to c7 is an important part of Black's strategy.

15.g4 h6 16.h4

This looks like the most challenging idea, but Black retains a reliable position.

16...♗d8 17.e3 e5 18.♗g3

These moves were played in Tkachiev – Movsesian, Legnica 2013. Here Black has a couple of possible improvements.



18...♗c7!?N

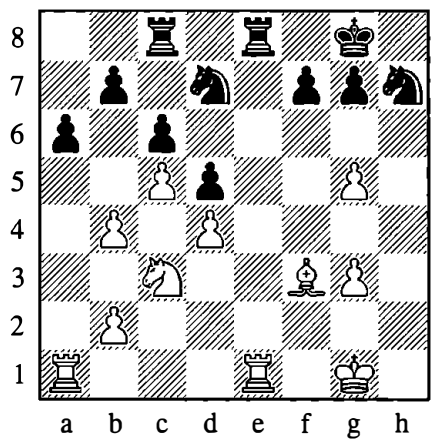
This may lead to some remarkable complications.

In the game Black preferred 18...g5 and went on to draw. His last move is playable but slightly weakening, and it is not essential to block the g-pawn yet.

18...e4N 19.♗d1 ♗c7 20.♔g2 ♘f8 was another way to maintain a balanced position.

19.g5 hxg5 20.hxg5 exd4 21.exd4 ♗xg3 22.fxg3 ♘h7

After a series of natural moves, we reach a critical moment.

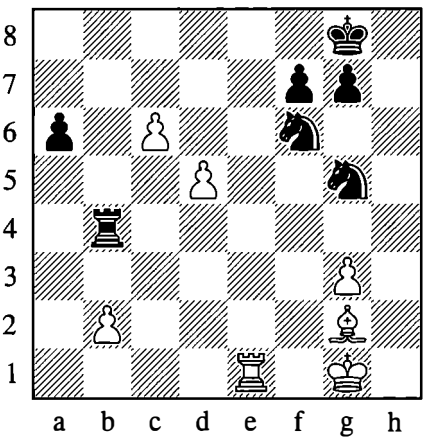


23.♘xd5!

23.♗g4 ♘hf8 and 23.g6 ♘g5 are both comfortable for Black.

23...♖xe1† 24.♖xe1 cxd5 25.♗xd5 ♘xg5 26.♗xb7 ♖b8 27.♗g2 ♘f6 28.c6 ♖xb4 29.d5

The pawns are dangerous, but Black's pieces are close enough to deal with them.



29...♘ge4 30.c7 ♖c4 31.♗xe4 ♖xc7=

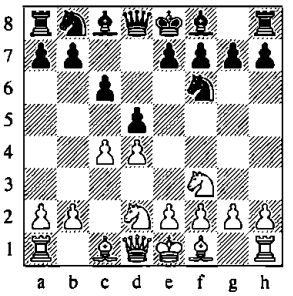
The complications have finally subsided, and the ensuing endgame should be drawn.

Conclusion

In principle, White's Catalan-style system should not be too dangerous against Black's set-up with the bishop on g4. White can arrange his pieces in a number of different ways, the main distinction being whether or not he puts his queen on b3. Black's play is logical and easy to understand in most of the lines. In many cases, a timely ...h6 is an important detail which secures the future of the light-squared bishop.



4th Move Alternatives



4.♘bd2

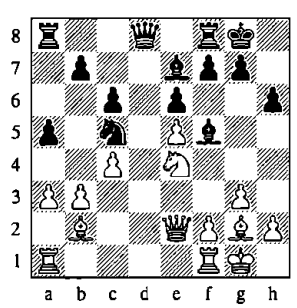
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘bd2

4...♗f5

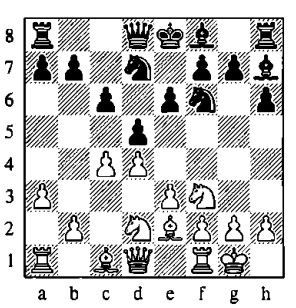
A) 5.g3	**212**
B) 5.e3 e6	**213**
B1) 6.♘h4	**213**
B2) 6.♗e2	**215**
C) 5.♘h4 ♗e6! 6.e3 g6	**217**
C1) 7.♗d3	**217**
C2) 7.♗e2	**218**

A) note to 13.cxd5



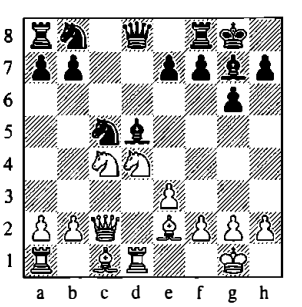
15...♕d3N

B1) after 10.a3



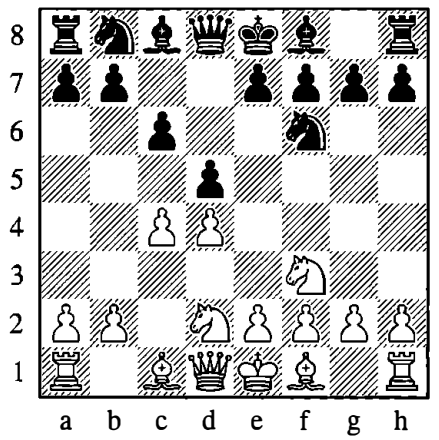
10...a5N

C2) after 14.♖d1



14...♘bd7!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘bd2



This is not the most popular continuation but it is employed by strong players from time to time. White's last move contains more venom than its modest appearance may suggest, so Black should be ready for it.

4...♗f5

From here White has three main ways of proceeding with his development: **A) 5.g3**, **B) 5.e3** and **C) 5.♘h4**.

A) 5.g3

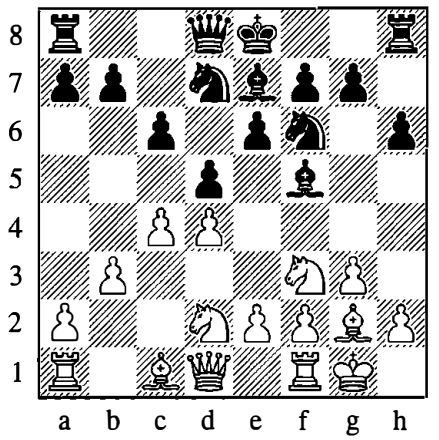
This type of Catalan set-up is considered rather harmless with Black's light-squared bishop developed on f5.

5...h6

It is worth making an escape route for the bishop before playing ...e6.

6.♗g2 e6 7.0–0 ♘bd7 8.b3 ♗e7

I prefer to put the bishop on e7 rather than d6 here. The reason is that a future ♘e5 jump can be met by ...♘xe5, as the reply dxe5 will not deliver a fork.



9.♗b2 0–0

There have been a lot of games from this position, but Black has no problems and I will just mention a few important points. One of the main ideas is to play ...a5 in the near future, when the likely reply a2-a3 will leave the b3-pawn slightly vulnerable.

10.♘e5

After 10.♖c1 a5 11.a3 ♕b6! the target on b3 comes into play. 12.♘e5 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 occurred in Wickenfeld – Hoefelsauer, Internet 2011, and now after 13...♘e4!N 14.♘xe4 dxe4 White's position is starting to become uncomfortable precisely because of the queenside weakness.

10...a5!

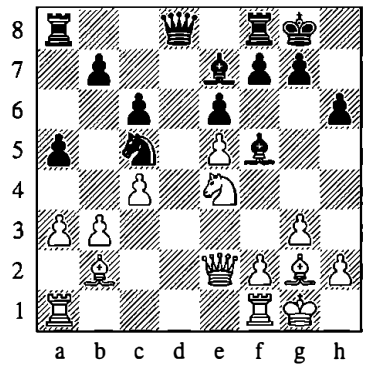
The same recipe works well here too.

11.a3 ♘xe5!?

Alternatives such as 11...♕b6 and 11...♗h7 are fully satisfactory for Black, but the text move is more challenging.

12.dxe5 ♘d7 13.cxd5

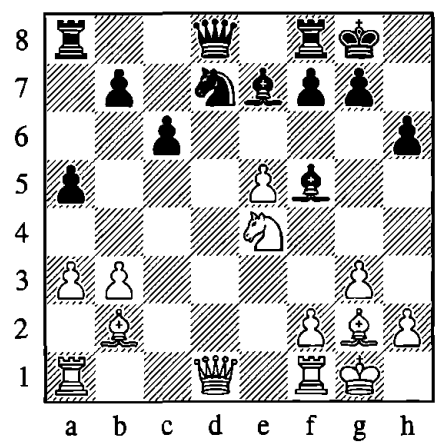
The other natural line is: 13.e4 dxe4 14.♘xe4 ♘c5! 15.♕e2



15...♕d3N (Black can also consider 15...♗xe4 16.♗xe4 as in Aggelis – Kourousis, Peristeri 2010, and now 16...♘xb3N 17.♖ad1 ♕b6 leaves Black a pawn up although White definitely has some compensation.) 16.♕xd3 ♘xd3 17.♗c3 ♖fd8 18.♖fd1 g5!? Black is by no means worse in the endgame.

13...exd5 14.e4 dxe4 15.♘xe4

I also checked 15.♗xe4N ♗h3! 16.♗g2 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♘c5 when Black is doing fine; once again, the weakness of the b3-pawn is an issue for White.



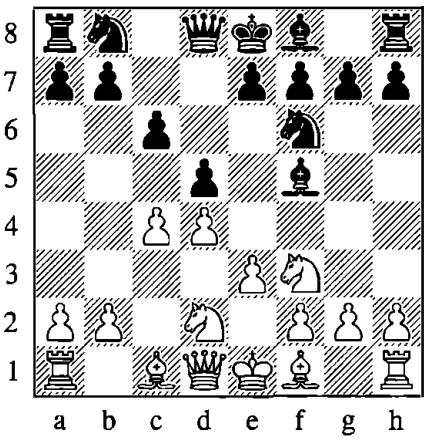
15...♘c5! 16.♘xc5

16.♕c2 ♕d3 does not bring White relief either.

16...♗xc5

Black was better in Talla – Berezjuk, Ostrava 1998.

B) 5.e3

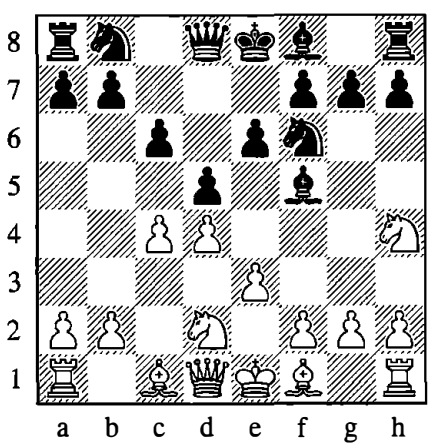


5...e6

5...h6 makes some sense here too but, with the white knight on d2, Black should not be too concerned about the prospect of the bishop being chased. We will consider **B1) 6.♘h4** and **B2) 6.♗e2**.

A harmless alternative is: 6.♕b3 ♕b6 7.c5 (After 7.♗e2 h6 8.0–0 ♘bd7 it is hard to see how White can justify the position of his knight on d2.) 7...♕c7 8.♗d3 b6! Thematic and strong. 9.cxb6 axb6 10.♕c2 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 This was Peric – Strugatsky, Chicago 2003, and now after the logical 11...c5!N Black is obviously better.

B1) 6.♘h4



The position resembles the popular theoretical variation 4.e3 ♗f5 5.♘c3 e6 6.♘h4, but the placement of the white knight on d2 instead of c3 clearly favours Black.

6...♗e4

This is my first choice, although 6...♗g6 also gives Black an improved version of the aforementioned line.

7.♗e2

Black has nothing to fear from:

7.f3 ♗g6

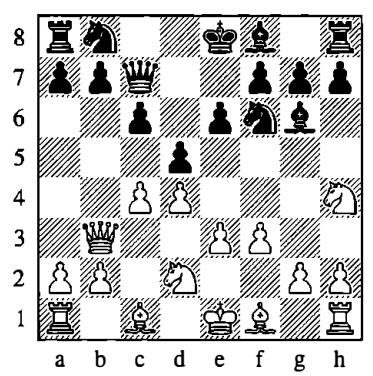
We can easily see the difference caused by the unfavourable position of White's knight. We could stop analysing here, but I will briefly mention a couple of illustrative examples.

8.♕b3

8.♘xg6 hxg6 9.♗d3 has occurred a few times in practice. Black does fine after developing the bishop to d6, but an even stronger continuation is 9...c5!N when Black is already fighting for the advantage.

8...♕c7

Black is fine, as the set-up with the knight on d2 does not make much sense.



9.♘xg6?!

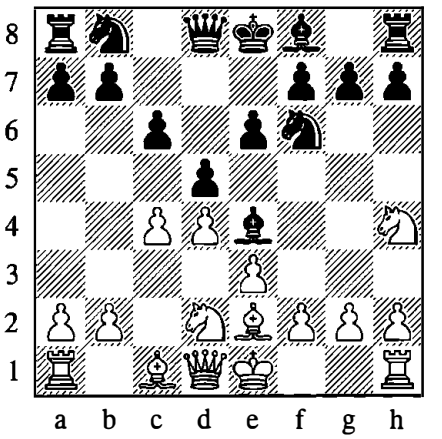
White should delay this capture.

9...hxg6 10.f4

Now in Van der Auweraert – Wilschut, Leiden 2013, Black should have played:

10...c5!N

Taking over the initiative.



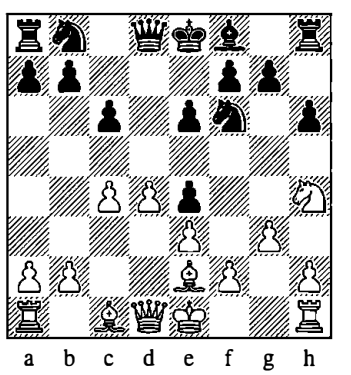
7...h6

This simple move works well.

In the following high-level game Black played much too aggressively: 7...♘bd7 8.0–0 ♗d6 9.g3 ♕e7 10.a3 g5?! 11.♘hf3 h5?! 12.♘xg5 h4 13.g4 White was better in Giri – Fressinet, Beijing 2012.

8.0–0

8.♘xe4N does not appear to have been tested. The most challenging reply is: 8...dxe4!? (There is also 8...♘xe4 9.♘f3 ♗b4† when Black obviously has no problems.) 9.g3 Now Black gets a good position with:



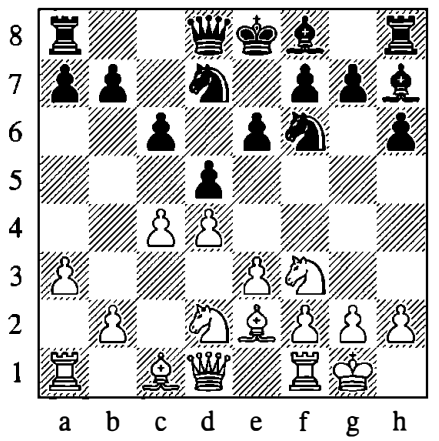
9...♗b4† 10.♗d2 ♕a5! 11.a3 ♗xd2† 12.♕xd2 ♕xd2† 13.♔xd2 ♘bd7 Black's chances look preferable to me; the plan is long castling followed by undermining the centre with ...e5 or ...c5.

8...♗h7

The loss of time incurred by Black's bishop is no big deal, as White has misplaced his knight on h4.

9.♘hf3 ♘bd7 10.a3

This position occurred in Ruck – Neubauer, Rijeka 2010. Black has several good arrangements, but my preference is:



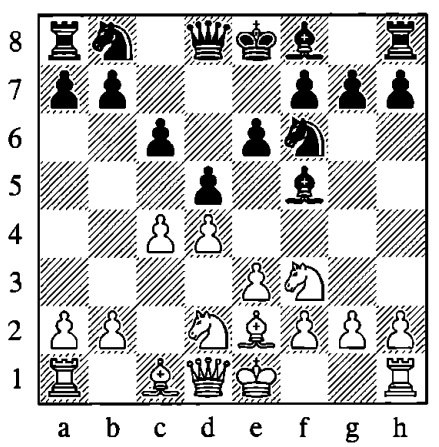
10...a5N 11.b3 ♗d6

11...♗e7 12.♗b2 0–0= also gives Black a solid and flexible position.

12.♗b2 ♕b8!

Preventing the enemy knight from jumping to e5. Black has a solid and harmonious position.

B2) 6.♗e2



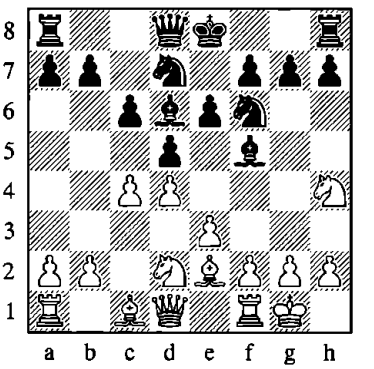
This set-up is as harmless as it looks.

6...♘bd7 7.0–0 h6

Black can also play without this prophylactic move:

7...♗d6 8.♘h4

8.b3 0–0 9.♗b2 is considered under the move order 5.♗e2 e6 6.0–0 ♘bd7 7.b3 ♗d6 8.♗b2 0–0 9.♘bd2 – see variation B of Chapter 15 on page 177.

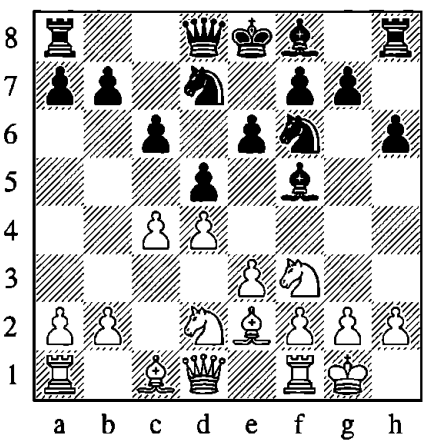


8...0–0!?N

The normal replies 8...♗g6 and 8...♗e4 are both quite acceptable.

9.♘xf5 exf5

Black has a comfortable position with active prospects on the kingside. Once again, White's misplaced knight on d2 is a significant factor.



8.b3 ♗d6

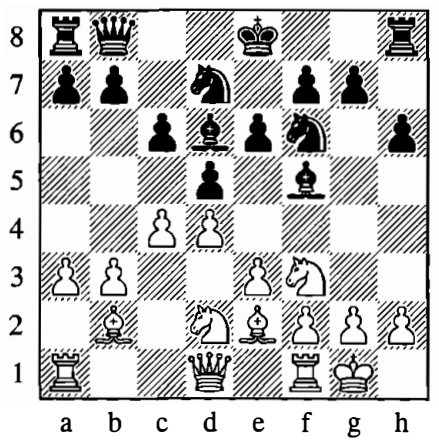
8...♗e7 9.♗b2 0–0 is another good option for Black.

9.♗b2 ♕b8

I prefer to keep control over the e5-square, although there is nothing wrong with 9...0–0 10.♘e5 ♕e7 when Black has a perfectly playable position.

10.a3

Preparing to advance the queenside pawns looks like the most logical plan for White.



10...g5!?

This active move impressed me.

Obviously Black has a more solid option available: 10...a5 11.c5 ♗c7 12.b4 Now in Inarkiev – Volkov, Elista 2001, 12...b6!N would have offered Black fine play. There is no need to worry about 13.b5 bxc5 14.dxc5 cxb5 15.c6 ♘c5 when the game is complex but not unfavourable to Black.

11.g3

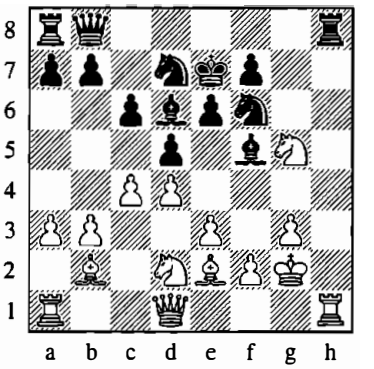
This seems like the most natural reaction to Black's threat of ...g4 followed by taking on h2.

11...h5!

Black sacrifices a pawn to launch an attack.

12.♘xg5 h4 13.f4

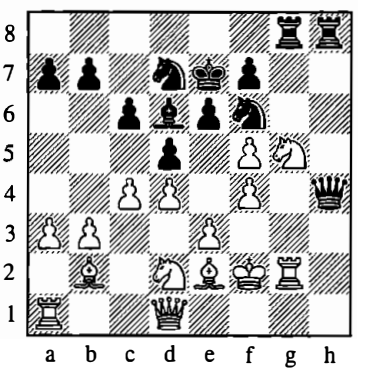
In the event of 13.♔g2 hxg3 14.hxg3 ♔e7 15.♖h1 Black has a nice resource:



15...♗xg3! 16.♖xh8 ♕xh8 17.fxg3 ♖g8 18.♘df3 ♗e4 With a strong initiative.

13...hxg3 14.hxg3 ♔e7 15.♔g2

I also considered: 15.g4 ♕f8 16.♖f2 ♕h6 17.♖g2 ♖ag8 18.gxf5 ♕h1† 19.♔f2 ♕h4†



White has to repeat with 20.♔g1=, as 20.♔f1? allows Black to decide the issue with a crushing blow: 20...♗xf4! 21.exf4 ♕xf4† 22.♔e1 ♘e4–+

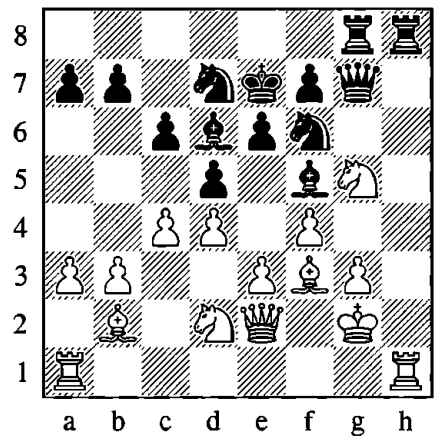
15...♕f8 16.♗f3?

White's best continuation was 16.♖h1 ♕g7 17.♖xh8 ♖xh8 18.♕g1 with chances to hold, although after 18...♕g6 I prefer Black.

16...♕g7 17.♕e2 ♖ag8 18.♖h1

We have been following the game

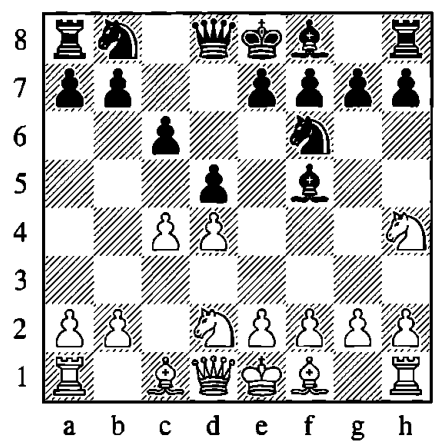
Roumegous – Milliet, Belfort 2003. Here the most convincing continuation is:



18...♘h7!N

With a crushing initiative, as White is unable to withstand the pressure on the g-file.

C) 5.♘h4



This is White's main idea, and his only real chance to pose problems in the opening.

5...♗e6!

This is the most logical retreat.

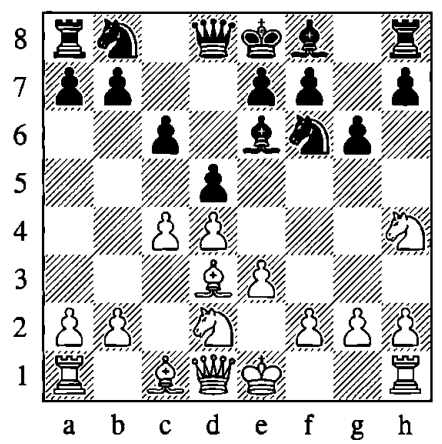
5...♗g6 looks more natural at first sight, but it is here that White can demonstrate one of the few major advantages of having the knight on d2 instead of c3. The point is seen after 6.♕b3 ♕b6? (6...♕c7 is essential) 7.♕h3! threatening both ♕c8† and ♘xg6.

6.e3 g6

Black has an improved version of a Schlechter Variation thanks to the position of White's knights. The one on h4 will soon have to return to f3, effectively making Black's ...♗e6 a free developing move. Also, with the queen's knight on d2 instead of c3, it should be easier for Black to free himself with ...c5.

From here White must decide how to develop his king's bishop; we will analyse both **C1) 7.♗d3** and **C2) 7.♗e2**.

C1) 7.♗d3



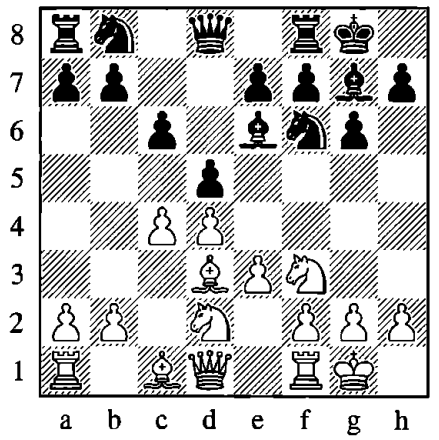
7...♗g7

The immediate 7...c5!?N 8.♘hf3 ♘c6 also comes into consideration.

8.0–0 0–0 9.♘hf3

White has also tried 9.b4 in an attempt to stop ...c5. Now in Miron – Kalezic, Cetinje 2009, it would have been logical for Black to play 9...a5N 10.bxa5, and here Black has a pleasant choice between 10...♕xa5 and 10...c5 11.♘hf3 ♘c6, with a great game in both cases.

In *SOS* Volume 13, GM Grivas mentioned 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 as leading to an edge for White in Nikolaev – Gavrilov, St Petersburg 2009. Instead 9...cxd5 looks at least equal for Black; space is level while both of White's knights are awkwardly placed.



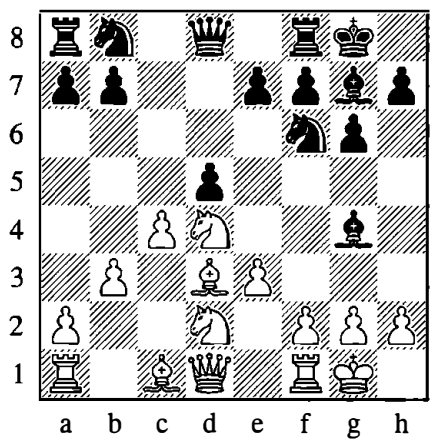
9...c5 10.b3

After 10.dxc5N ♘bd7 Black is fine.

10...cxd4

10...♘c6N 11.♗b2 ♘h5!? is an interesting alternative which leads to an unclear position.

11.♘xd4 ♗g4



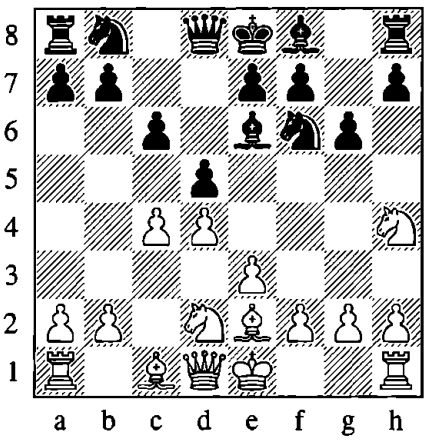
12.♗e2

Also after 12.f3 ♗d7 13.♗b2 ♘a6! Black is absolutely fine.

12...♗xe2 13.♕xe2 e5 14.♘4f3 ♘c6

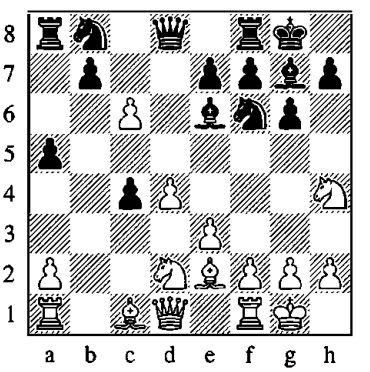
Black easily solved his opening problems in Laznicka – Shirov, Novy Bor 2012.

C2) 7.♗e2



7...♗g7 8.0–0 0–0 9.♘hf3

9.b4?! is rather pointless: 9...a5! 10.b5 (10.bxa5 ♕xa5 is comfortable for Black.) 10...dxc4! 11.bxc6



In Nijs – Van Kampen, La Fere 2008, Black should have chosen the simple 11...♘xc6N 12.♘xc4 ♖c8∓ with an obvious advantage.

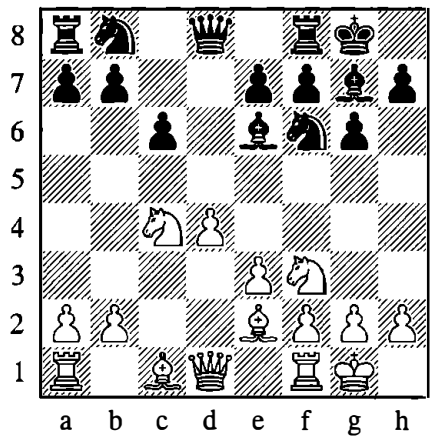
9...dxc4!

This is the most accurate continuation.

9...c5N allows 10.dxc5 ♘bd7 11.c6! bxc6 12.♘d4 with promising play for White.

10.♘xc4

10.♗xc4 ♗xc4 11.♘xc4 also allows 11...c5! 12.dxc5 ♘c6= when Black will easily regain the c5-pawn.



10...c5!

Once this freeing move has been played, everything works nicely for Black.

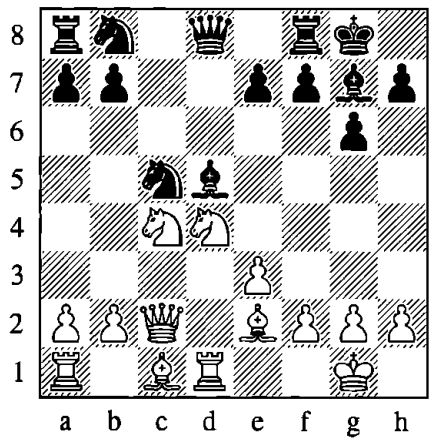
11.dxc5 ♘e4

The position can be compared to a Grünfeld, or perhaps a Catalan with reversed colours. Despite the simplified central structure there are some dangers for White, due to the superiority of the g7-bishop over its counterpart on c1.

12.♘d4 ♗d5 13.♕c2 ♘xc5

13...♘a6!?N also deserves consideration.

14.♖d1



14...♘bd7!N

This simple developing move improves over 14...♗e4 15.♕c3 ♕c8?! 16.♕a3± when White was better in Negulescu – Stanciu, Predeal 1988.

15.b4

White gains a tempo to develop his dark-squared bishop.

15...♘e4 16.f3 ♗xc4 17.♗xc4 ♘d6 18.♗f1 ♕b6

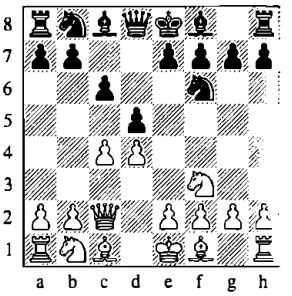
Black has the more promising position.

Conclusion

4.♘bd2 has some positive features; the c4-pawn is defended and the third rank is left clear, as highlighted by the devilish trap mentioned on page 217 in the introductory comments to variation C. However, in the event that Black plays correctly, the game is likely to resemble a more popular theoretical variation, with the difference that the white knight will be placed on the less active d2-square instead of the usual c3. This should enable Black to equalize without much trouble, and possibly even fight for the initiative.



4th Move Alternatives



4.♕c2 and 4.♕b3 – Sidelines

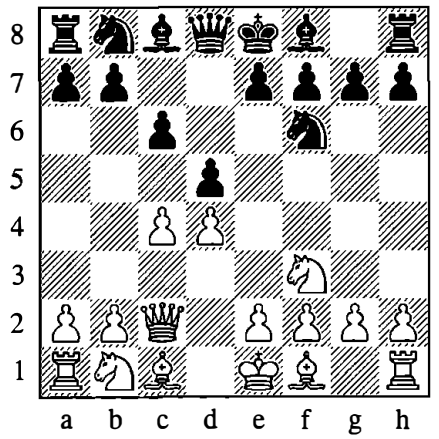
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♕c2

4...dxc4

A) 5.e4 b5 6.b3 cxb3 7.axb3 e6 8.♗d2 a5 9.♗d3 ♗b7 10.0–0 ♗e7 221
A1) 11.♗c3 222
A2) 11.♘c3 223
A3) 11.♖c1 223
B) 5.♕xc4 ♗g4 225
B1) 6.♕b3 225
B2) 6.♗g5 227
B3) 6.♗f4 228
B4) 6.♘e5 228
B5) 6.♘bd2 ♘bd7 7.g3 e6 8.♗g2 ♗e7 9.0–0 0–0 230
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B532) 12.♖e1 234
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B54) 10.♘e5 ♗h5 11.♘xd7 ♘xd7 12.♘b3 a5 237
B541) 13.e4?! 237
B542) 13.a4 238

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♕c2



White defends the c4-pawn and, for the moment at least, prevents the development of the bishop to f5. On the other hand, the early queen development loses some time.

4.♕b3 dxc4 5.♕xc4 leads to our main line.

4...dxc4

4...g6 is a reliable alternative, but it does not work as well against 4.♕b3.

Here White sometimes tries the gambit **A) 5.e4**, but the main move is of course **B) 5.♕xc4**.

A) 5.e4 b5 6.b3

This has been by far the most popular follow-up. White makes no attempt to win back the c4-pawn, instead aiming for active positional compensation based on his strong centre and open lines on the queenside.

We should also consider the rare alternative:

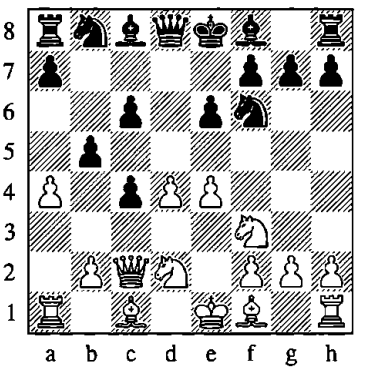
6.a4

Compared with the Geller Gambit, White may try to make use of the fact that his knight has not yet gone to c3.

6...e6 7.♘bd2

This was White's choice in the only all-grandmaster game to have taken place in this rare sideline.

7.axb5 cxb5 8.b3 ♗b7! is excellent for Black. 7.♗e2 should be met by the flexible 7...♗e7, intending ...0–0 or ...♘a6 according to circumstances.

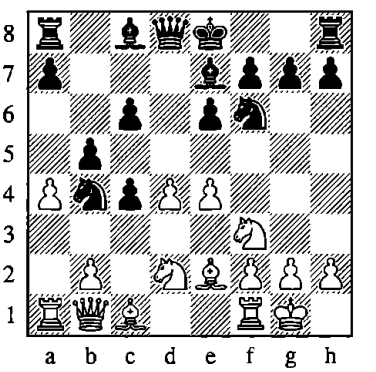


7...♘a6!

Black finds a good way to highlight the questionable position of White's queen.

8.♗e2 ♘b4 9.♕b1 ♗e7 10.0–0

This position was reached in Yegiazarian – Asrian, Yerevan 2008. Here I suggest:



10...a5!?N

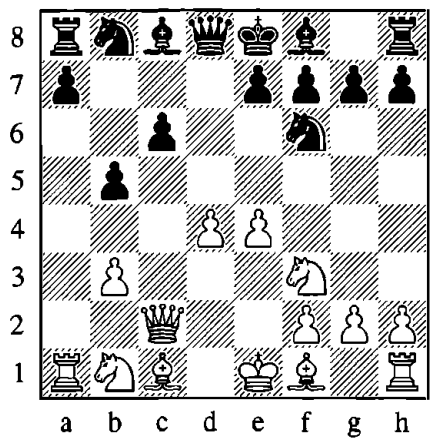
Gaining some useful space on the queenside. In the game Black got a reasonable position after castling, but I would prefer to avoid giving White a clear target for the time being.

11.e5 ♘fd5 12.♘e4 h6!

Black will follow up by improving his position on the queenside, and the onus is on White to prove his compensation.

6...cxb3 7.axb3

I was surprised to see quite a lot of grandmaster games from this position. White's pawn sacrifice is not too dangerous, but Black should possess some concrete knowledge.



7...e6 8.♗d2

This is White's usual plan.

In the event of 8.♗d3 ♗b7 9.0–0 ♗e7 White has to reckon with the ...♘a6-b4 manoeuvre, so he usually plays 10.♗d2, after which 10...a5 transposes to the main line below.

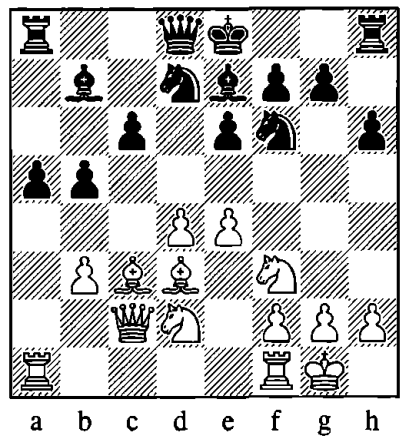
8...a5

It is important to prevent ♗a5 followed by b4, which would immobilize Black's queenside pawns and render his light-squared bishop passive.

9.♗d3 ♗b7 10.0–0 ♗e7

From this position White has tried several moves at one time or another, but the three most important options are **A1) 11.♗c3**, **A2) 11.♘c3** and **A3)11.♖c1**.

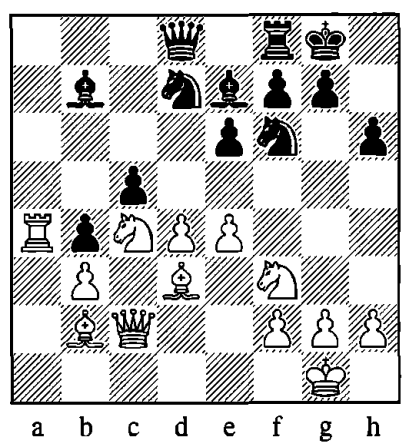
A1) 11.♗c3 ♘bd7 12.♘bd2 h6



Black has to play this prophylactic move before castling, otherwise e4-e5 will win the h-pawn.

13.♖a2 0–0 14.♖fa1 b4 15.♗b2 c5 16.♘c4 a4 17.♖xa4 ♖xa4 18.♖xa4

18.bxa4 cxd4 19.a5 gives White chances to hold, although Black is still better after 19...♘c5.



18...cxd4 19.♗xd4 ♗c5!

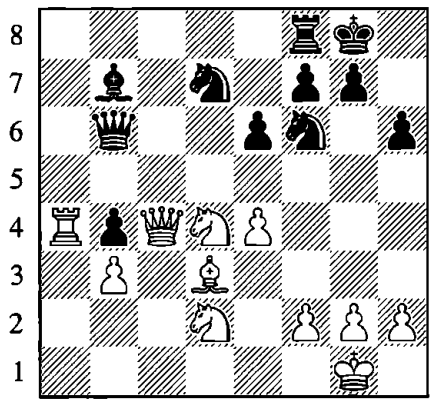
Despite regaining the pawn, White is in some trouble on account of his misplaced minor pieces.

20.♘cd2?!

An inaccuracy in a difficult position.

20...♗xd4 21.♘xd4 ♕b6 22.♕c4

We have been following the game Nakamura – Cu. Hansen, Malmo/Copenhagen 2005. So far Black has played perfectly, and here he could have won material with:



22...e5!N 23.♖xb4

Knight retreats lose immediately to 23...♘g4.

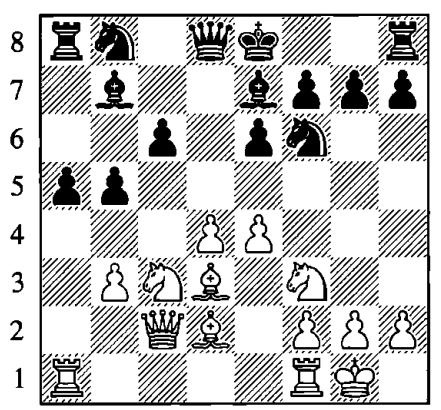
23...♕xd4 24.♕xd4 exd4 25.f3!?

25.♖xb7 ♘c5 restores Black's material advantage.

25...♘c5 26.♖xd4

White has some vague hopes to resist, based on the limited number of pawns remaining, but Black should win eventually.

A2) 11.♘c3



This time White makes no attempt to prevent the knight manoeuvre to b4, and instead mobilizes his own knight for attacking purposes.

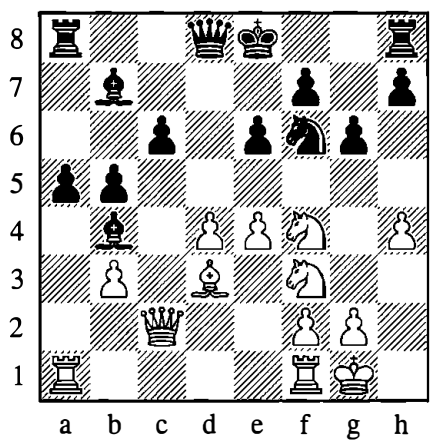
11...♘a6 12.♘e2 ♘b4 13.♗xb4 ♗xb4 14.♘f4 g6!?

This move works fine, although it is not the only good option.

14...h6N intending ...♖c8 is suggested by Vigus, and 14...♕b6!?N is also sensible. In both cases Black is at least equal.

15.h4

This position was reached in Van der Werf – M. Gurevich, Amsterdam 2002. At this point Black should have played:



15...0–0!N

Based on the following points.

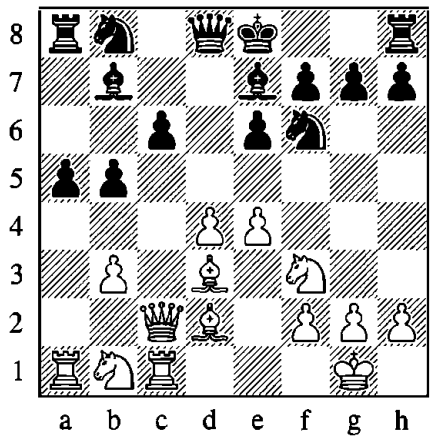
16.e5

16.h5 c5! gives Black a great position.

16...♘d5 17.♘xd5 cxd5 18.♗xb5 ♖c8 19.♕e2 ♖c3∓

White has regained his pawn, but Black has obtained a nice initiative on the queenside.

A3) 11.♖c1



I believe this is White's best option. Now I have a new idea:

11...b4!?N

With this move Black weakens the c4-square, but temporarily prevents the white knight from developing, so White has to waste time solving this issue.

I was not fully satisfied with other moves for Black. It is worth taking a closer look to understand the threat posed by White's play:

If 11...♘bd7 12.♘c3 then Black no longer has the idea of ...♘a6-b4 and with the knight on d7 he has to worry about e4-e5. 12...b4N (The only game went 12...e5? 13.dxe5 ♘g4 14.♗f4± and White was clearly better in Thejkumar – Abhishek, Bhopal 2013.) 13.♘a4 ♖c8 14.♗e3 With nice compensation for the pawn.

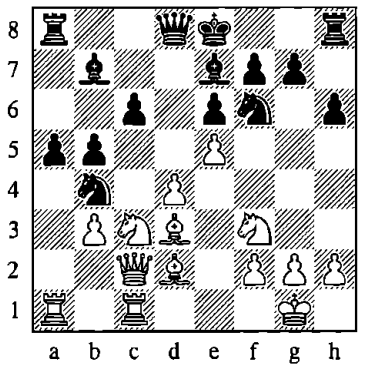
Black's most common move here is:

11...h6

And then the critical line goes:

12.♘c3 ♘a6 13.e5 ♘b4

Simply retreating is not a solution: 13...♘d7 14.♗e2 ♘b4 (if 14...b4 15.♘e4 then White has a lot of compensation) 15.♕e4 ♕b6 A draw was agreed in Duhayon – Hautot, Fontaine 2010, but after 16.♕g4 ♔f8 17.♘e4 ♘d5 18.♘d6 Black's position seems to me quite dangerous.



14.exf6!

The critical test.

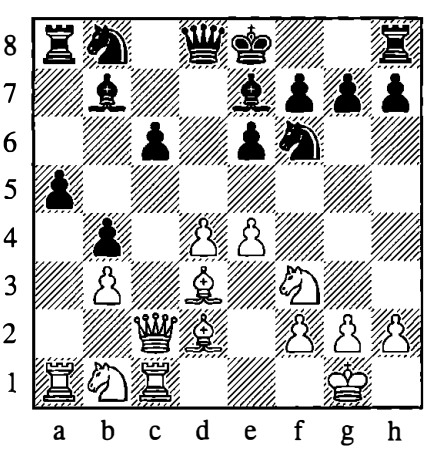
Black has no worries after: 14.♕b1 ♘fd5 15.♘e4 ♘xd3 16.♕xd3 0–0∓

14...♘xc2 15.fxe7 ♕xe7 16.♖xc2 0–0 17.♘e4! c5!

Black has to play this move, as otherwise the b7-bishop will be out of play.

18.dxc5 ♖fd8 19.♘d6 ♗xf3 20.gxf3

With a very unclear and unbalanced position in the recent encounter Eden – Shaw, Hinckley Island 2014.



12.♗f4

Eyeing the d6-square is critical.

Instead 12.♗g5 is not a serious test. For example: 12...h6 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.e5 ♗e7 15.♘bd2 ♘d7∓ and White lacks full compensation for the pawn; Black will get in ...c5 at some point.

Or 12.♗e3 ♘bd7 13.♘bd2 and, unlike the main line, there is no threat on d6, so Black has time for the simple 13...h6 with a comfortable position; castling and ...c6-c5 are obviously the likely moves next.

12...♘bd7 13.♘bd2 c5!

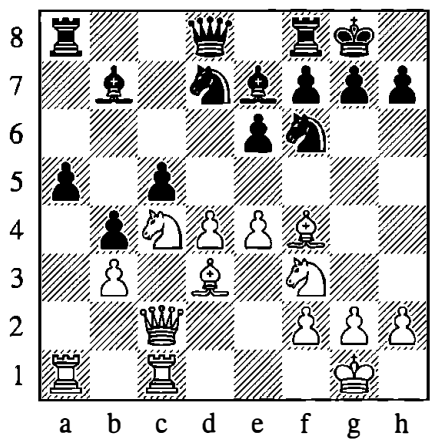
Black has to play fast.

14.♘c4

Hardly a good idea for White is 14.dxc5 ♘xc5 15.♗b5† ♔f8! 16.♘e5 ♖c8 and Black is better.

14...0–0!

White was threatening 15.♘d6†, so Black's best idea is to sacrifice back his extra pawn.



15.e5

Another line is: 15.♗d6 a4! (the natural 15...cxd4?! runs into the unpleasant 16.♘xa5! and White is better) 16.♖xa4 ♖xa4 17.bxa4 cxd4 with balanced play.

15...♘d5 16.♗xh7† ♔h8 17.♗e4 cxd4 18.♘xd4 ♘c5 19.♗d2

Worse is 19.♗g3?! ♘e3 20.fxe3 ♗xe4 and Black is better.

19...♘e3!

The simplest solution.

20.♗xe3 ♗xe4 21.♕d1 a4! 22.bxa4 ♘d3 23.♕g4 ♗h7 24.♖d1 ♕c7

Black has fully sufficient compensation for the pawn; the position is balanced.

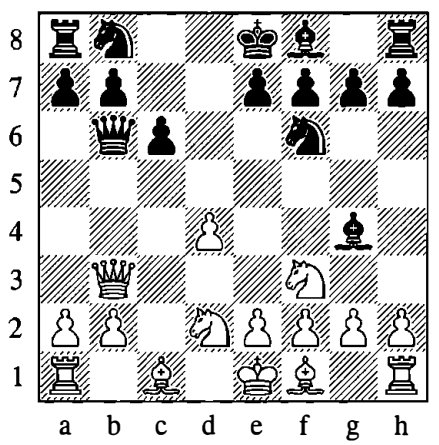
B) 5.♕xc4 ♗g4

5...♗f5 is the other main option, but I prefer to hit the knight.

From this position White's most challenging option is 6.♘c3, which will be afforded special coverage in the next chapter beginning on page 240.

In the present chapter we will consider the sidelines **B1) 6.♕b3**, **B2) 6.♗g5**, **B3) 6.♗f4**, **B4) 6.♘e5** and **B5) 6.♘bd2**.

B1) 6.♕b3 ♕b6 7.♘bd2



This scheme has only been tested in three games so far, but White was rated over 2500 in two of them.

7...♘bd7 8.♘c4

8.g3

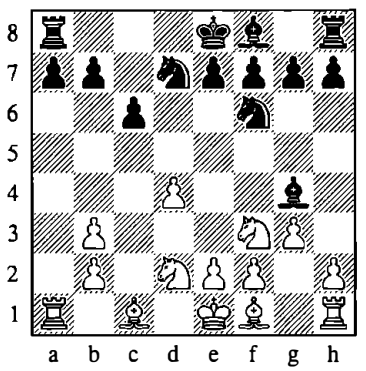
This move was played in Zhou Jianchao – Wang Yue, Yerevan 2006. Here it looks good for Black to play:

8...♕xb3!?N

There is also 8...e6N when the natural 9.♗g2 ♗e7 10.0–0 0–0 transposes to the later variation B53 on page 233.

9.axb3

9.♘xb3 ♗xf3 10.exf3 is hardly a good idea for White, as his pawn structure is badly damaged.



9...♘d5

Heading for the new outpost on the queenside.

10.♗g2 ♘b4 11.0–0 e6

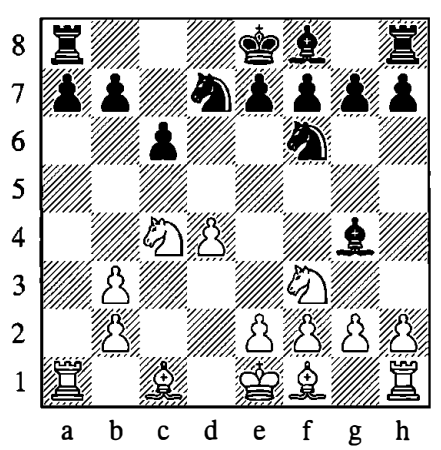
Black is fine.

8...♕xb3

One of the points of White's move order is that the thematic 8...♕a6? makes no sense here due to 9.e4 (or 9.e3).

9.axb3

This position occurred in Gabriel – Domont, Switzerland 1999, and one subsequent game. Here I found a strong new idea.

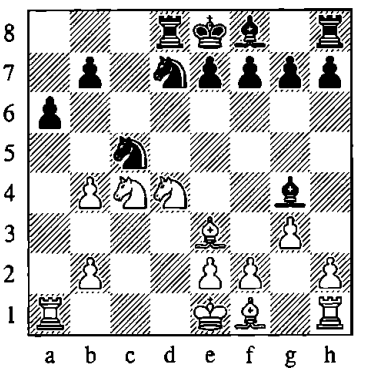


9...c5!N

This easily solves Black's problems, for instance:

10.♗e3

Another direction is: 10.dxc5 ♘xc5 11.♘d4 ♖d8 12.♗e3 a6 13.g3 (13.f3 ♗c8 14.♖c1 e6 is also fine for Black.) 13...♘fd7 14.b4

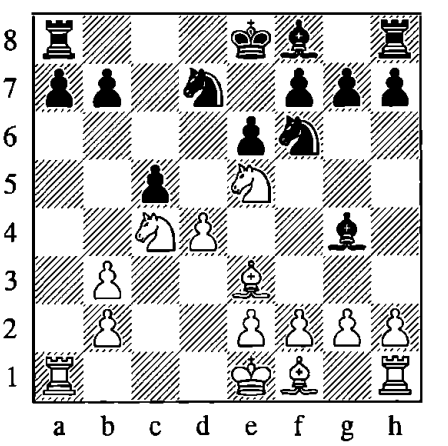


14...e5! 15.bxc5 exd4 16.♗xd4 ♘xc5 Black is by no means worse.

10...e6

10...♗xf3 11.exf3 e6 also comes into consideration.

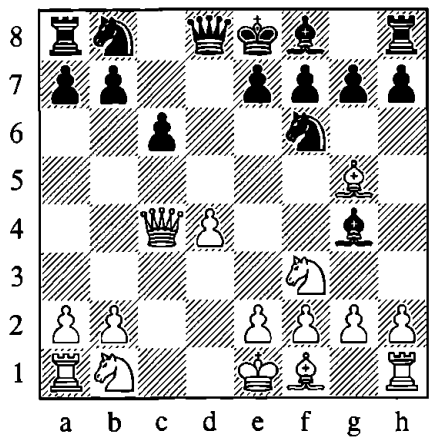
11.♘fe5



11...b5! 12.♘xd7 ♘xd7 13.♘a5 cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♖c8

With equal chances.

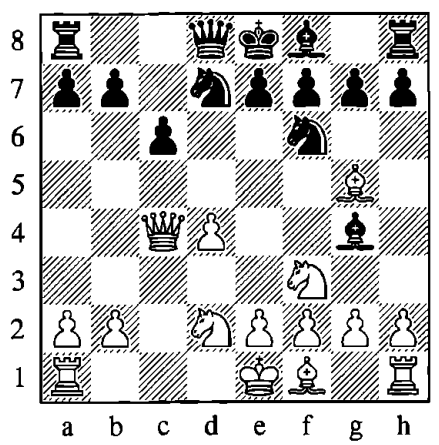
B2) 6.♗g5



This move is extremely rare, but it deserves to be considered.

6...♘bd7 7.♘bd2

7.♘c3 leads to variation A of the next chapter on page 241.



7...♕a5!N

This new idea is the best way to challenge White's set-up. The threat of 8...♗xf3 forces him to take action of some kind.

I found one game in which Black played 7...♕b6, but after 8.e3 it transpired that his last move did not really threaten anything, Schussler – Semcesen, Sweden 2007.

8.♕c3

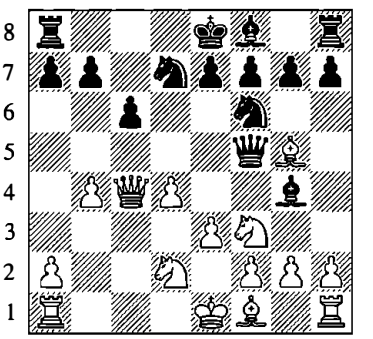
Another idea to consider is:

8.b4 ♕f5

This would be my top choice, although 8...♕a3 9.♕b3 ♕xb3 10.♘xb3 ♘e4 looks absolutely fine for Black as well.

9.e3

In the event of 9.♗xf6 ♘b6! 10.♕c3 exf6 11.e4 ♕e6 12.♗e2 f5! Black is better.

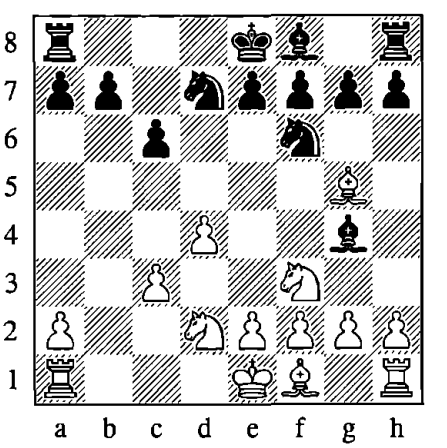


9...e5 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.b5 ♗e6 12.♕c2 exd4 13.♘xd4 ♗b4!

Black is fine, as the bishop pair and lead in development compensate for the pawn weakness that will arise after the likely exchange on c6.

8...♕xc3 9.bxc3

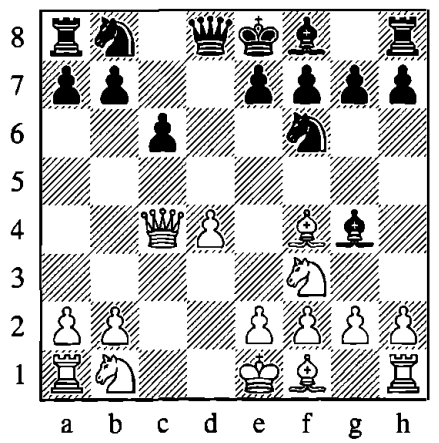
Black should not have any problems after the queen exchange. I developed the following line:



9...h6 10.♗h4 ♗f5 11.e3 e6 12.♗e2 ♗e7 13.a4 c5

Black is doing fine.

B3) 6.♗f4



Here we see another bishop development that can hardly pose Black problems.

6...♘bd7 7.♘bd2

7.♘c3 leads to variation B of the next chapter on page 242.

7...e6 8.e3 ♗e7 9.♗d3

I also considered 9.♗e2 0–0 10.h3 as played in Cramling – Villavicencio Martinez, Las Palmas 2005. Here the simple 10...♗f5N 11.0–0 c5 gives Black adequate play, although the game continuation of 10...♗xf3 11.♗xf3 ♕a5, pinning the knight and preparing ...e5, is also interesting.

9...0–0 10.0–0 c5 11.♖ac1 a6

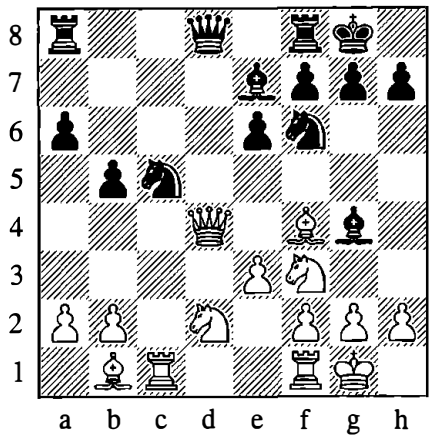
11...♖c8N is also sensible.

12.dxc5 ♘xc5 13.♗b1 b5

Again 13...♖c8N was possible.

14.♕d4

We have been following the game Bareev – Morozevich, Monaco (rapid) 2002. Here Black's most accurate continuation is:



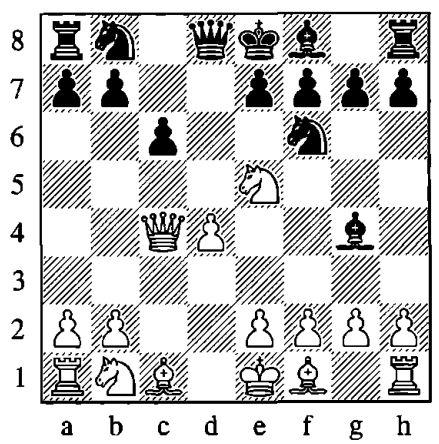
14...♖c8N

Instead of exchanging queens, which enables White to bring his knight to a good square and follow up with f2-f3 and e2-e4, gaining space and shutting Black's light-squared bishop out of play.

15.♘e5 ♗h5=

With simple equality.

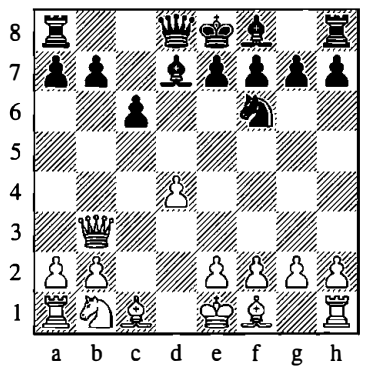
B4) 6.♘e5



White avoids the doubling of his kingside pawns and threatens mate.

6...♗e6 7.♕d3

7.♕a4 is hardly a good square for the queen: 7...♘bd7 8.♘xd7 ♗xd7! Forcing White to spend additional time. 9.♕b3 Now in Melnichuk – Kharchenko, Lugansk 2009, Black could have played:



9...c5!N 10.dxc5 e6 Black is poised to regain the c5-pawn with comfortable equality, and if White takes the materialistic approach with 11.♕xb7 ♗xc5 12.e3 ♖b8 13.♕f3 0–0∞ Black obtains a dangerous initiative.

7...♘bd7 8.♘xd7

White can also retreat the knight:

8.♘f3

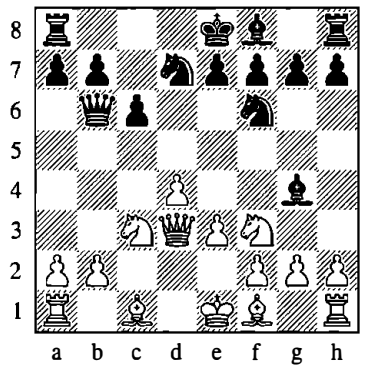
Here I like the following active idea for Black:

8...♗g4 9.♘c3 ♕b6! 10.e3

White has tried two other possibilities:

10.♘d2 e5 11.e3 was the rather artificial continuation seen in Barlov – L. Milov, El Sauzal 2004. Now after the natural 11...♖d8N 12.♘c4 ♕c7 White's opening strategy has obviously failed and Black enjoys the better game.

10.e4 looks logical, but after 10...♗xf3 11.gxf3 e5 White's queen is obviously misplaced on d3. The only game here saw 12.♗e3, and here I like the ambitious 12...♕xb2!N (12...exd4 13.♗xd4 ♗c5 was enough for comfortable equality in Andersson – Peralta, Barcelona 2009, but Black can aim for more.) 13.♖b1 ♕a3 I don't see how White can justify being a pawn down.



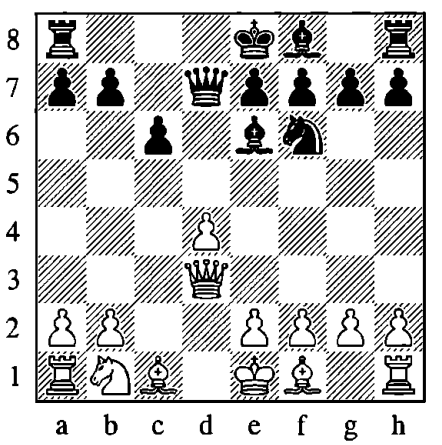
10...♗xf3!?

A logical follow-up, though 10...♖d8 11.♕c2 e6 is also perfectly playable for Black.

11.gxf3 e5 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.♕f5 ♘ed7

In this complicated position a draw was agreed in Poluljahov – Kharitonov, Kstovo 1997.

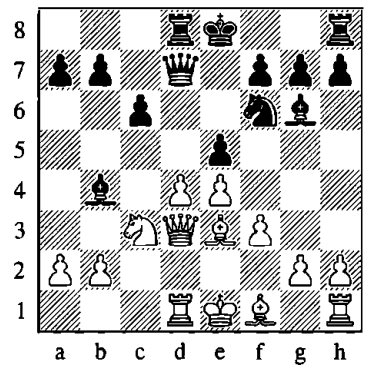
8...♕xd7



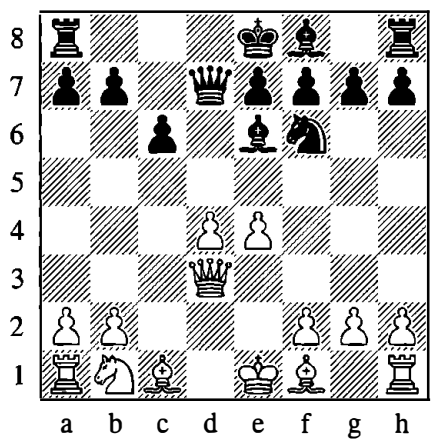
9.e4

Another direction is: 9.♘c3 ♖d8 10.e3 ♗f5! By provoking e3-e4 Black loosens the enemy centre. 11.e4 ♗g6 12.♗e3 e5 13.♖d1?! (13.dxe5N ♕c7 14.♕c4 is a better try, although after 14...♘g4! White will have to fight for equality.) 13...♗b4 14.f3 Here I

found a strong improvement over the game Appelman – Stripunsky, New York 2004:



14...♘d5!N 15.♗d2 ♕e7 White is in trouble.



9...♖d8 10.♗e3 ♘g4!

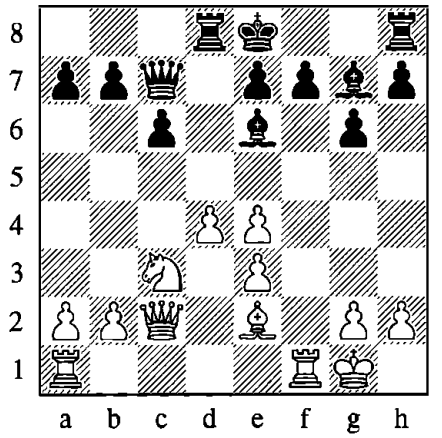
Black should not waste the opportunity to eliminate White's dark-squared bishop.

11.♘c3 ♘xe3 12.fxe3 ♕c7 13.♗e2 g6 14.0–0 ♗g7

14...♗h6!? also comes into consideration.

15.♕c2

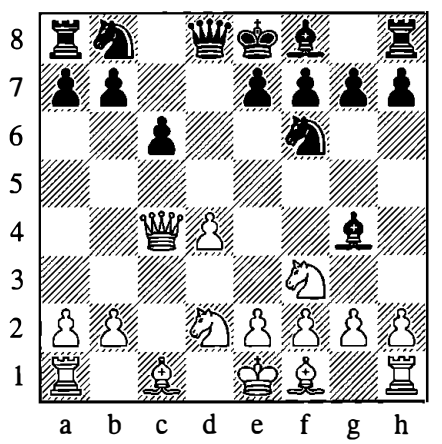
We have been following the game Schandorff – P.H. Nielsen, Horsens 2003. Here the most logical continuation is:



15...0–0N 16.♖ad1 ♕a5

Black's chances are preferable, as his bishop pair may tell in the long run.

B5) 6.♘bd2



This is the most important of the options covered in the present chapter. Actually it has been an even more popular choice than 6.♘c3, although I consider the latter to be the more theoretically challenging of the two knight moves.

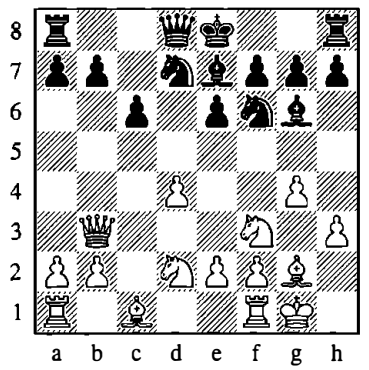
6...♘bd7 7.g3

Sometimes White goes for a space-gaining fianchetto, gaining time against Black's bishop in the process.

7.h3 ♗h5 8.g4 ♗g6 9.♗g2

This has been played in several games, but it is not dangerous for Black.

9...e6 10.0–0 ♗e7 11.♕b3

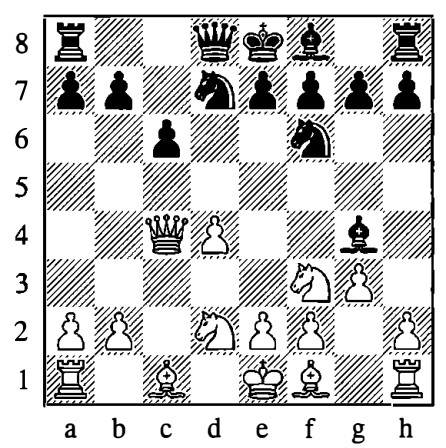


11...♕c7!

Black makes good use of the fact that the enemy pawn is on g4. Not only does it leave the white kingside slightly more exposed, it also deprives him of the ♗f4 move, which would be possible with the pawn on g3.

12.♘e5 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♘d5 14.♘c4 h5! 15.g5 ♘b6

Black easily solved his opening problems in V. Georgiev – Buhmann, Germany 2008.

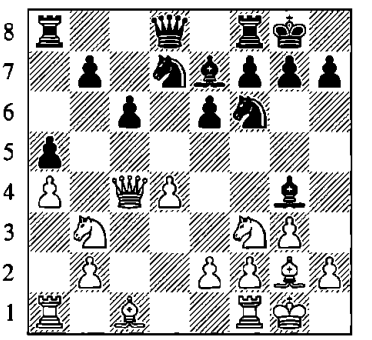


7...e6 8.♗g2 ♗e7 9.0–0 0–0

Many strong players opted here for 9...♗h5 to take the sting out of the ♘e5 plan, but I do not consider this idea to be dangerous for Black.

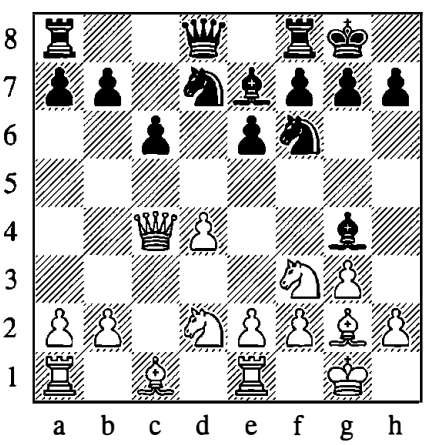
From here White has tried almost every legal move at some point, but the most important options are **B51) 10.♖e1**, **B52) 10.b3**, **B53) 10.♕b3** and **B54) 10.♘e5**.

10.♘b3 is premature due to: 10...a5! 11.a4 (I don't see much point in 11.♗g5 a4 12.♘bd2 as occurred in Megaranto – Barbosa, Ho Chi Minh City 2012, as after 12...h6N 13.♗xf6 ♘xf6 14.♘e5 ♗f5 Black is doing well. The absence of White's dark-squared bishop might tell in the long term.)



11...♗f5! Taking the important c2- and d3-squares under control, while also taking the sting out of any ♘e5 ideas. 12.e3 ♕b6 White's position was not making much sense in Rozum – Romanko, Pardubice 2011.

B51) 10.♖e1



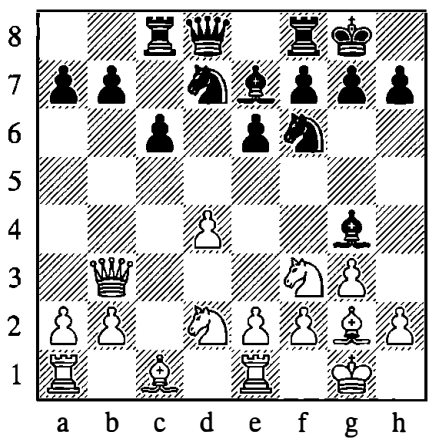
This is a pet move of the Ukrainian grandmaster Vadim Malakhatko. To me it looks too slow, taking into account that e2-e4 is unlikely to be a good idea for White, as in that case his pawn centre is liable to become vulnerable.

10...♖c8

Black's main plan is to play ...c5 at an appropriate moment.

11.♕b3

It is important to mention that after 11.♘e5?! as played in Gheorghiu – Reicher, Bucharest 1969, Black has the strong reply 11...b5!N 12.♕c2 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♘d5 when his favourable pawn structure gives him the better chances.



11...b5!?

Black can afford to play this active move, although there is nothing wrong with the solid 11...♕b6.

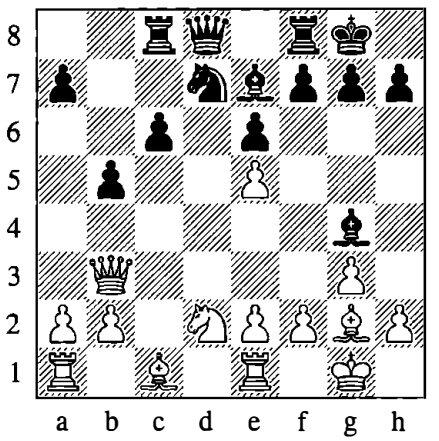
12.♘e5?!

Surprisingly, this dubious move has been played twice by Malakhatko.

Something along the lines of 12.a4N a6 13.axb5 axb5 14.h3 ♗h5 15.g4 ♗g6 16.♘h4 could be considered normal play from White, though after 16...♕b6 17.♘xg6 hxg6 18.♘f3 c5= Black has nothing to complain about.

12...♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♘d7

I know from my own experience that this structure can be problematic for White. He should only go for it if he has a concrete follow-up in mind, as Black's queenside majority is likely to become a telling factor in the long term.



14.h3 ♗f5!?

The natural 14...♗h5 is also fine, and after 15.g4 ♗g6 16.f4 a5 Black had a good game in Malakhatko – L. Milov, Belgium 2012.

15.e4?!

This fully justifies Black's provocative last move.

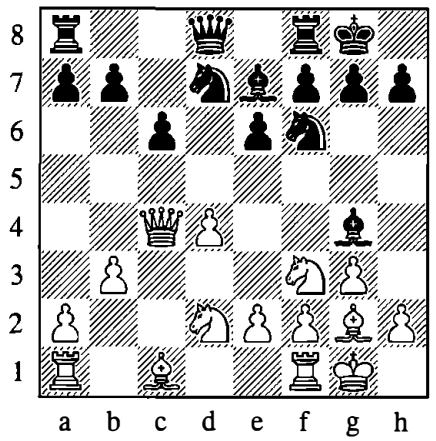
15.g4 ♗g6 transposes to the previous note.

Perhaps White should try 15.♘f3 although the most he can aspire to is equality.

15...♗g6 16.f4 ♘c5∓

Black was ready to invade on d3 in Malakhatko – Hautot, Antwerp 2011.

B52) 10.b3



The queenside fianchetto is a logical way for White to complete his development, but it is too soft and allows Black to carry out his plans with ease.

10...♖c8

White cannot stop the impending ...c5.

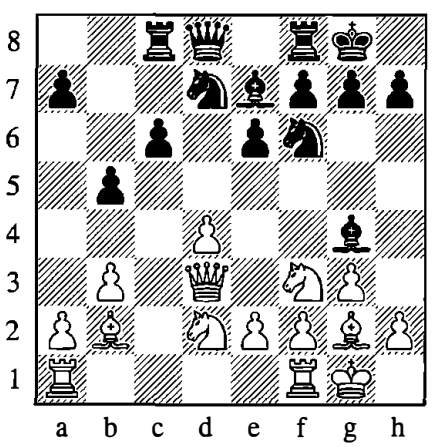
11.♗b2 b5!?

This seems more interesting than 11...c5= although the latter is objectively fine as well.

12.♕d3?

Amazingly all three games saw this move, which runs into a nice trick.

White should prefer 12.♕c2N c5 13.♖fc1 although Black is comfortable after 13...a6.



12...♗f5!

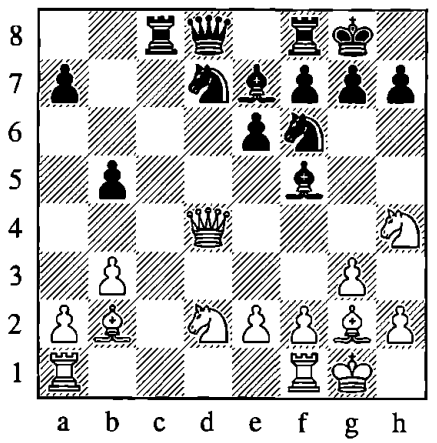
Funnily enough, Black also overlooked this move in two out of the three games.

13.♕c3

Obviously the main tactical point is that White cannot play 13.e4? in view of 13...♘c5.

13...c5 14.♘h4 cxd4 15.♕xd4

Now in the game Kosic – Hautot, Istanbul (ol) 2012, Black should have played:



15...♖c2!N 16.♘xf5 ♗c5 17.♕d3 ♖xb2

White is in trouble, for instance:

18.♘h4 ♘e5 19.♕xb5 ♕b6 20.♕xb6 ♗xb6∓

White will soon drop a pawn on a2 or f2.

B53) 10.♕b3

I chose this move in my most recent game on the white side of this line.

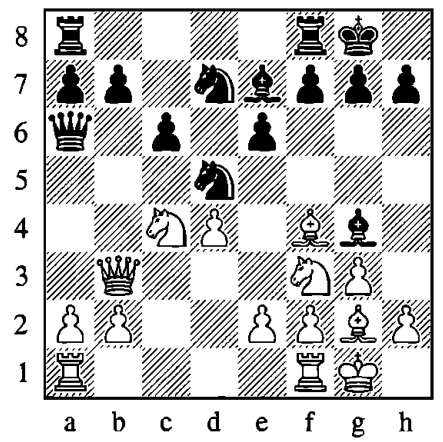
10...♕b6 11.♘c4 ♕a6

Black should avoid exchanging on b3 here, as the ensuing endgame is better for White. The problem is the annoying plan of placing the knight to a5, where it will exert long-lasting pressure on Black's queenside.

At this point White's three most important

options are **B531) 12.♗f4**, **B532) 12.♖e1** and **B533) 12.♗d2**.

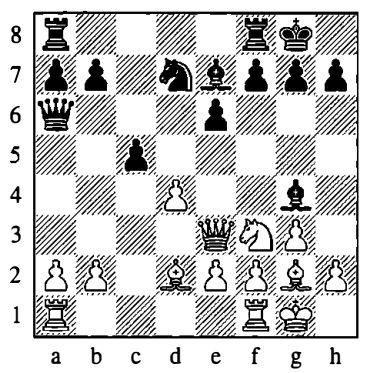
B531) 12.♗f4 ♘d5



13.♗d6N

This seems like the most natural move to consider.

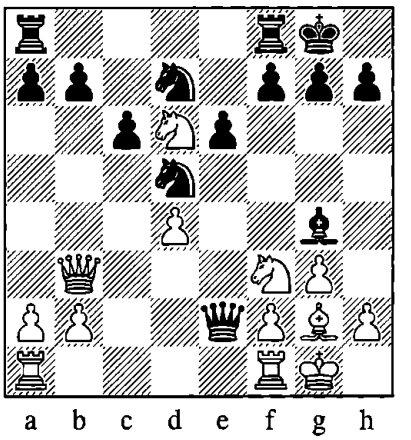
The only practical example on my database continued: 13.♗d2 c5! 14.♘e3 ♘xe3 15.♕xe3 Dreev – Kogan, Benidorm 2008.



Now after 15...♖ac8!N Black has a comfortable game, as 16.d5 ♗f6 17.dxe6 ♗xe6∓ is not helping White.

13...♗xd6 14.♘xd6 ♕xe2!?

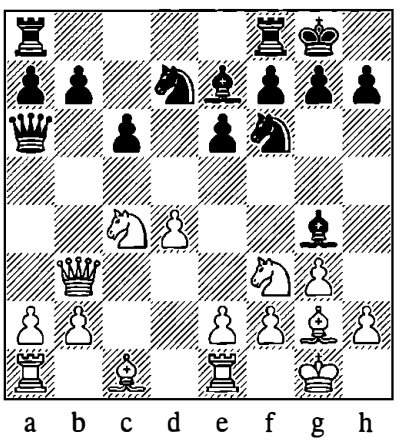
This is the critical line, although 14...c5 15.♘b5 ♕b6 is a perfectly solid alternative.



15.h3 ♗h5 16.♖fc1 ♕a6 17.♕xb7 ♕xb7 18.♘xb7 ♖fb8 19.♘a5 ♖xb2 20.♘xc6 ♔f8

With such a nice blockade of the d-pawn, Black cannot be worse.

B532) 12.♖e1



This rook move has been White's most popular choice, but it seems to me that Black's reply is a convincing one.

12...♖fd8 13.♗f4

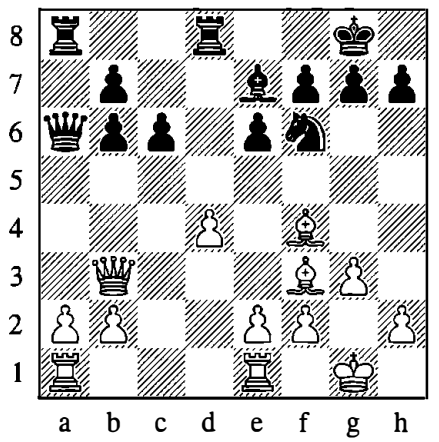
13.e4 occurred in Xu Jun – Arslanov, Moscow 2011, but Black is fully ready to meet this with 13...c5!N, for instance: 14.d5 b5! 15.♘ce5 c4 16.♕c2 ♗xf3 17.♘xf3 exd5 18.exd5 ♗c5 Black has a comfortable game.

13...♗xf3!?

13...♘d5 14.♗d6 showed White's idea in Levin – Lampert, Bad Woerishofen 2013, although objectively this is just equal as well.

14.♗xf3 ♘b6 15.♘xb6 axb6

Another route to simple equality is 15...♕xb6 16.♖ed1 ♕xb3 17.axb3 ♘d5= as in Agrest – Jaracz, Dresden 2007.



16.a3?!

16.♖ed1 is better, although after 16...♘d5 17.♗d2 b5 Black has a fully adequate game.

The text move was played in Harikrishna – Kasimdzhanov, Nancy 2011. Here I could not find a good reason not to capture the central pawn.

16...♖xd4N 17.♗e3 ♖a4! 18.♕xb6 ♕xb6 19.♗xb6 ♘d5 20.♗xd5 exd5

Black's stronger pawn chain and more active pieces enable him to play for a win with virtually no risk.

B533) 12.♗d2

This is the move I employed in my own game, after realizing that the other options did not promise White much.

12...♘b6

This is Black's best idea.

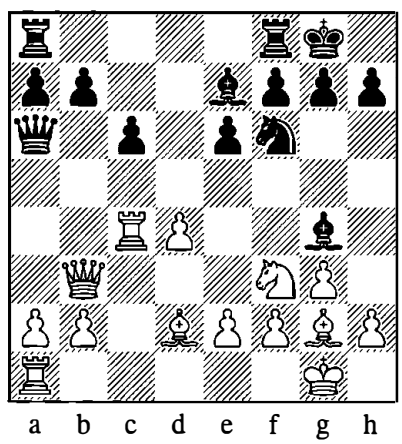
13.♖fc1

13.♘ce5 does not work on account of 13...♕xe2 14.♖fe1 ♕b5!.

13.♘a5?! ♖ad8 is also unpromising for White.

13...♘xc4 14.♖xc4

After 14.♕xc4 ♕xc4 15.♖xc4 the ensuing endgame is harmless. Here I like 15...♘d7= when Black's position is thoroughly sound.



14...♗f5!?

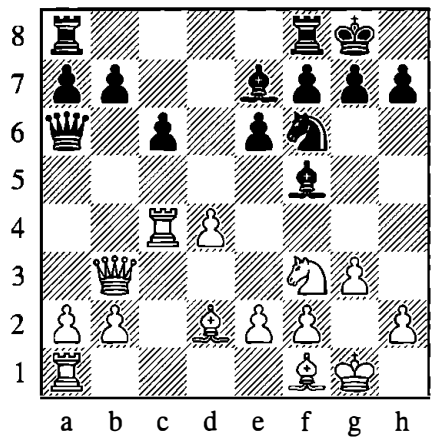
This came as a surprise, as in my preparation I mostly concentrated on 14...♘e4. Actually the text move is quite logical, since there is not much for the bishop to do on g4, whereas transferring it to e4 is a thematic idea to neutralize White's bishop.

15.♗f1

This is one of the hidden ideas in the position, which neither side should forget. White is trying to harass the queen on a6, but Black will have time to solve all his problems.

I also examined 15.♘e5 ♗e4 16.♗xe4 ♘xe4 17.♗e1 ♘d6 18.♖c2 ♕b6! 19.e3 ♕xb3 20.axb3 ♘b5 with a double-edged endgame where

White's b-pawns might become vulnerable in the long term.



15...♗e4N

15...♕b6 16.♗b4 ♘d5 17.♗xe7 ♕xb3 18.axb3 ♘xe7 19.♘e1 ♖fd8 reached a complex but balanced endgame in Avrukh – Smeets, Istanbul 2012.

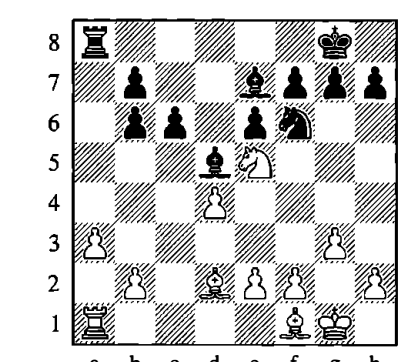
The text move is another convincing route to equality. The following line features logical play on both sides.

16.♖a4

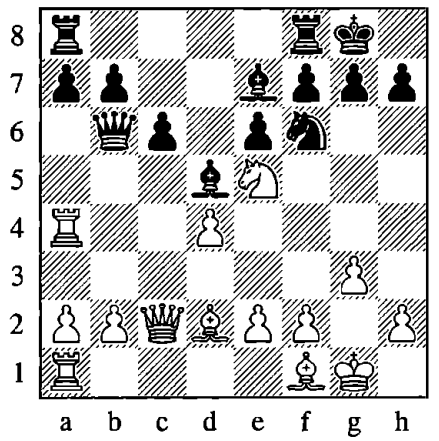
Black was threatening ...♗d5.

16...♕b6 17.♘e5 ♗d5 18.♕c2

In the event of 18.♕xb6 axb6 19.♖xa8 ♖xa8 20.a3 Black can make good use of the open a-file:



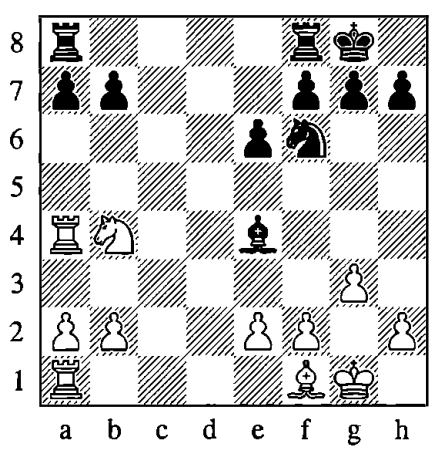
20...♖a4! 21.f3 ♖xd4 22.♗e3 ♖a4 23.♗xb6 ♗d6 24.♘d3 ♘d7 25.♗f2 f5 Black has the slightly better endgame.



18...c5!

Just the right timing.

19.♗a5 ♕d6 20.♕xc5 ♕xc5 21.dxc5 ♗xc5 22.♘d3 ♗e7 23.♗b4 ♗xb4 24.♘xb4 ♗e4!



25.f3

25.♗g2 ♗xg2 26.♔xg2 ♖fc8= reaches a plainer type of equality.

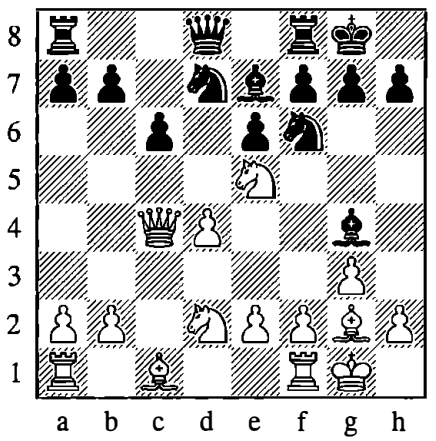
25...a5 26.fxe4

The key point here is:

26...b5! 27.♖a3 axb4 28.♖b3 ♖a4

Black is not worse in this double-edged endgame.

B54) 10.♘e5

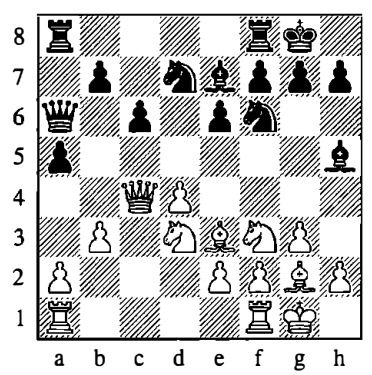


This has been White's most popular continuation.

10...♗h5 11.♘xd7

This is clearly White's first choice. He has also tried some other moves, but without much success.

11.♘df3 is one such move, after which I like the following example: 11...♕b6 12.b3 a5 A thematic idea, Black tries to develop some play on the queenside. 13.♗e3 ♕a6 14.♘d3?!



This was Lipka – Bulski, Czech Republic 2011, and now with the simple 14...♘d5N 15.♗d2 ♘b4! Black could have obtained an excellent game.

11...♘xd7

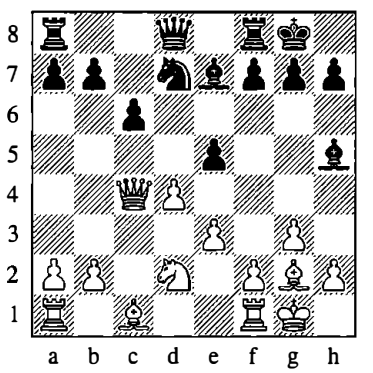
This is more flexible than 11...♕xd7 12.♘b3 ♖fd8 13.e4 when White stands slightly better.

12.♘b3

Once again I will mention a few minor alternatives which have been tried by strong players, without bringing White any success.

12.♘e4 ♕b6 13.b3 a5! We are already familiar with this typical idea. 14.e3 ♕a6 15.♗d2 e5 Already it was White who had to fight for equality in Khairullin – Ni Hua, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011.

12.e3 looks solid, but after 12...e5! Black already has the more comfortable position.



13.♘b3 exd4 (13...a5!?N looks attractive as well.) 14.♘xd4 ♗f6∓ With simple and strong play, Black obtained the better chances in Vitiugov – Inarkiev, St Petersburg 2012.

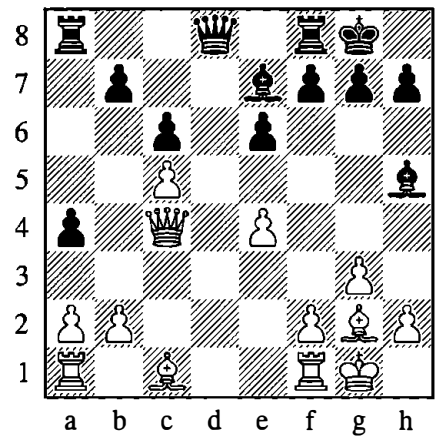
12...a5

Black has tried some other moves, but I like the plan of going after the knight. White can either ignore the advancing pawn with **B541) 13.e4?!** or block it with **B542) 13.a4**.

B541) 13.e4?!

As the punctuation suggests, this move is inaccurate and Black can get the better game with precise play.

13...a4 14.♘c5 ♘xc5 15.dxc5



15...♗f6!

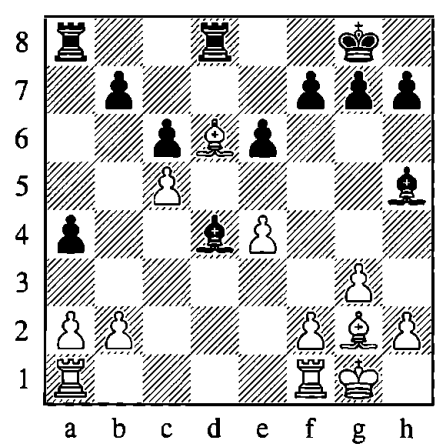
15...e5 16.♗e3 ♗g4 17.b4 axb3 18.axb3 ♕c7 19.b4 ♖fd8 gave Black comfortable equality in Fridman – Gustafsson, Dortmund 2012, but the second player has every right to aim for more.

16.♗f4

16.♖b1N is the best try, although Black still retains the better chances after 16...♕d4! 17.♕c2 ♖fd8 18.♗e3 ♕d3∓.

16...♕d4! 17.♕xd4 ♗xd4 18.♗d6 ♖fd8

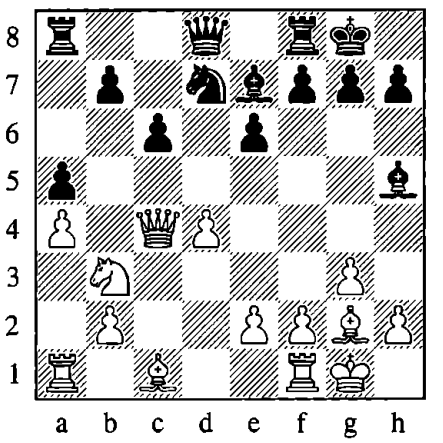
18...a3!?N is good for Black as well.



19.♖ab1 e5 20.♖fc1 f6

The endgame was quite unpleasant for White in Oganian – Dastan, Porto Carras 2013.

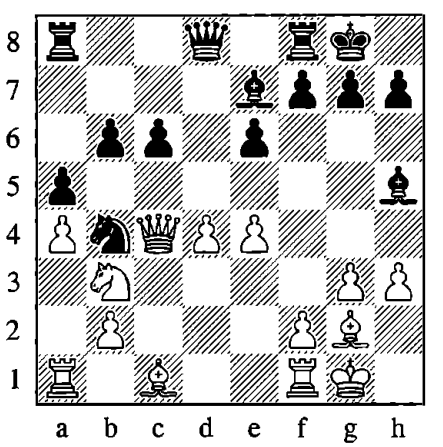
B542) 13.a4



This makes more sense. Black has tried a few moves here, but I like the following set-up as seen in a recent game.

13...♘b6 14.♕c2 ♘d5 15.e4 ♘b4 16.♕c4 b6 17.h3

This position occurred in Aghasaryan – Andriasian, Yerevan 2013. Here I believe Black's best idea to be:



17...♕d7!N

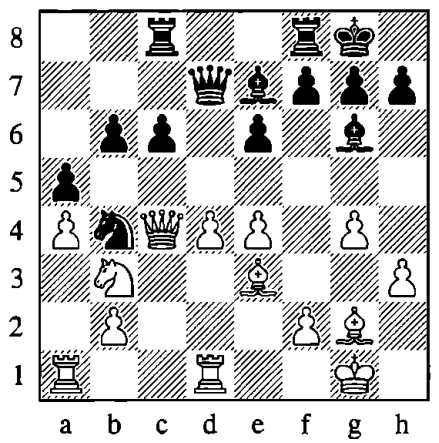
Intending to regroup with ...f6 and ...♗f7. Play might continue:

18.♗e3

After 18.g4 ♗g6 19.f4 f6! White's position is rather vulnerable, despite its aggressive appearance.

18...♖ac8 19.g4 ♗g6 20.♖fd1

Black has a solid position, and can even think about fighting for the initiative:



20...f5!? 21.gxf5 ♗f7

Black's chances are higher.

Conclusion

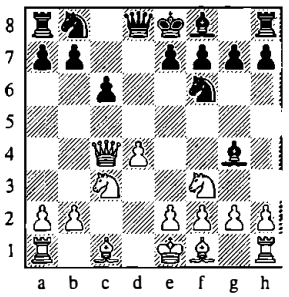
We have reached the end of the first of two chapters devoted to the 4.♕c2 (or 4.♕b3) 4...dxc4 section of Slav theory. The pawn sacrifice 5.e4 b5 6.b3 is interesting, but Black can develop smoothly and has good chances to obtain an advantage, especially if he returns the extra pawn at an opportune moment. However, note carefully line A3 with 11.♖c1, where a novelty is required to convincingly meet White's play.

The main line is, unsurprisingly, 5.♕xc4 ♗g4. From here many different moves have been tried, but the most important part of the present chapter was variation B5 with 6.♘bd2, intending a kingside fianchetto. Black's position is extremely solid and he should obtain adequate counterplay by advancing one or more of his queenside pawns, although the best way to arrange this will depend on the specific way in which White has arranged his forces.

Having reached the end of this particular branch of theory, the next chapter will discuss the more ambitious variation beginning with 6.♘c3.



4th Move Alternatives



5.♕xc4 – Main Line

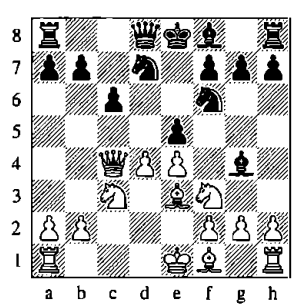
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♕c2 dxc4 5.♕xc4 ♗g4 6.♘c3

6...♘bd7

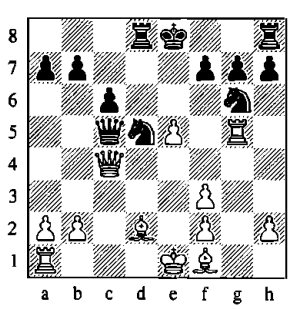
A) 7.♗g5 241
B) 7.♗f4 242
C) 7.e4 e5!? 242
C1) 8.♗e3 243
C2) 8.♘xe5 243
C3) 8.dxe5N ♗xf3 245
C31) 9.e6?! 245
C32) 9.exf6 246
C33) 9.gxf3 ♘xe5 10.♕e2 ♗c5 248
C331) 11.♖g1 248
C332) 11.♗e3 249
C333) 11.♗d2 ♘h5! 12.f4 ♕xd2†! 13.♔xd2 ♘xf4 14.♕d1 0–0–0† 15.♘d5 cxd5 249
C3331) 16.♕c1 251
C3332) 16.♔c2!?N 252

C1) after 8.♗e3



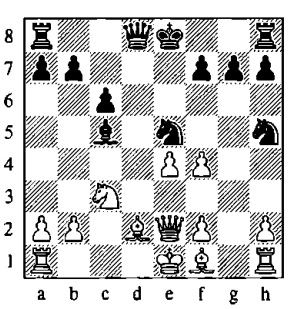
8...♕a5!N

C331) after 17.♕c4



17...♕e7!N

C333) after 12.f4



12...♕xd2†!

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♕c2 dxc4 5.♕xc4 ♗g4 6.♘c3

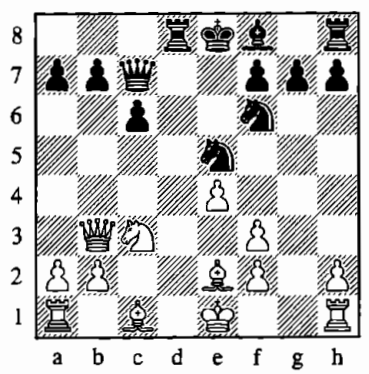
I regard this as the most challenging continuation.

6...♘bd7

After this standard move it is worth considering the bishop developments **A) 7.♗g5** and **B) 7.♗f4**, but the main move by far is **C) 7.e4**.

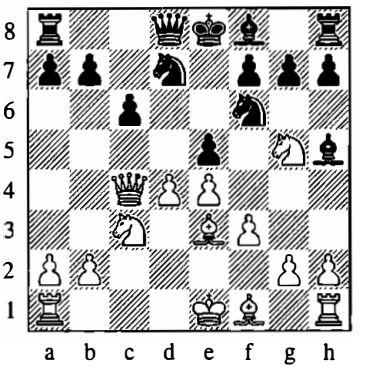
7.♕d3 does not make a great deal of sense here, although it transposes to the known line 6.♘e5 ♗e6 7.♕d3 ♘bd7 8.♘f3 ♗g4 9.♘c3, as discussed in the note to White's 8th move in variation B4 of the previous chapter.

After 7.♕b3 Black has more than one playable move, but the untested 7...♕c7!?N looks most interesting to me. A natural continuation is: 8.e4 ♗xf3 9.gxf3 e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♗e2 ♖d8



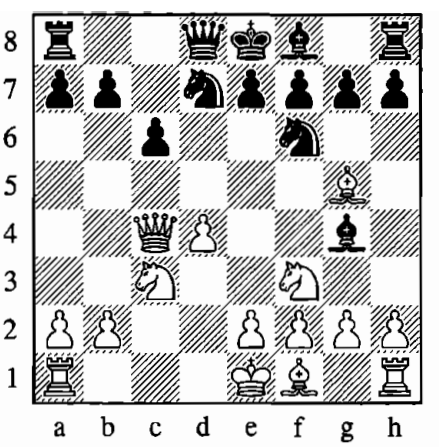
12.♗e3 ♗e7 13.f4 ♘d3† 14.♗xd3 ♖xd3 Black should not have any problems.

White can hardly benefit from playing 7.♘g5. The simplest response is: 7...e6 (7...♗h5 8.e4 e5 9.♗e2 ♗g6 is also fine for Black.) 8.f3 ♗h5 9.e4 e5 10.♗e3 Sasikiran – Kasimdzhanov, Wijk aan Zee 2009. At this point Black should play:



10...exd4N 11.♕xd4 (Also after 11.♗xd4 ♗d6 Black has a comfortable game.) 11...♗c5 12.♕d2 ♕a5 13.♗e2 ♖d8 Black has a healthy and active game.

A) 7.♗g5



7...♕a5!

This is the most convincing way to meet White's last move.

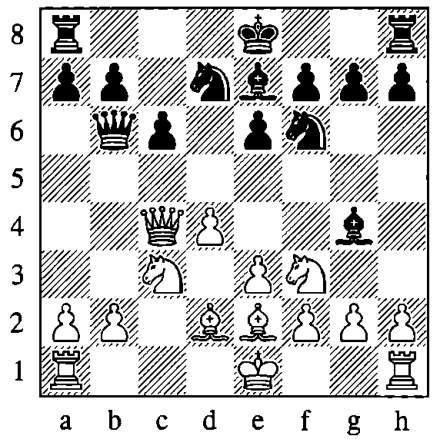
8.♗d2

After 8.♗h4?! ♘b6 9.♕b3 ♗e6 10.♕c2 ♗f5 11.♕c1 ♘e4∓ Black has gained time for development, and White misses having the bishop available to defend the queenside.

8.b4 runs into 8...♕f5! 9.♗d2 e5! and after 10.♘g5 exd4! 11.♕xf7† ♔d8 Black is clearly better.

8...e6 9.e3 ♗e7 10.♗e2 ♕b6

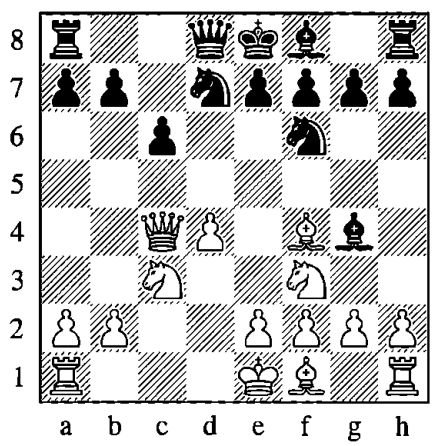
10...♕c7!? is a fully playable alternative in case Black wishes to avoid a queen exchange.



11.♕b3 ♕xb3 12.axb3 0–0

Black had no problems in Bu Xiangzhi – Vitiugov, Ningbo 2010.

B) 7.♗f4



This has been tested by both Mamedyarov and Gelfand, but it has not been repeated since 2012, when the latter lost with it against Giri.

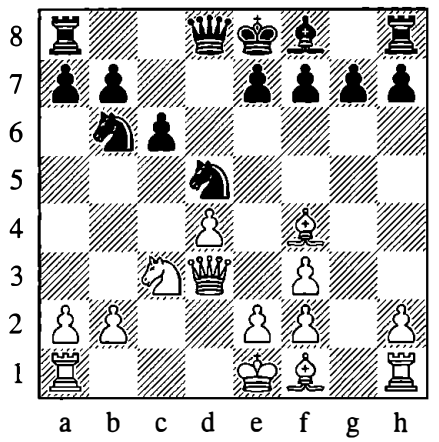
7...♘b6 8.♕d3

8.♕b3 ♗xf3 9.gxf3 ♕xd4 does not promise White any serious compensation.

8...♗xf3!?

Black embarks on an interesting strategy.

9.gxf3 ♘fd5



10.♘xd5N

This is obviously stronger than 10.♗e5?! f6 11.♗g3 ♘b4 12.♕b1 ♕xd4 13.♗h3 e5 14.0–0 ♗e7 when White failed to prove his compensation in Gelfand – Giri, Wijk aan Zee 2012.

10...♘xd5 11.♗d2 e6 12.e4 ♘b6 13.0–0–0 ♕c7

I do not believe White can hope for anything serious without either of his knights remaining on the board. Black has a rock-solid pawn structure and will soon complete development with ...0–0–0, ...g6 and ...♗g7, with pressure against the d4-pawn.

C) 7.e4

This is the main move, which has been played in well over a hundred games.

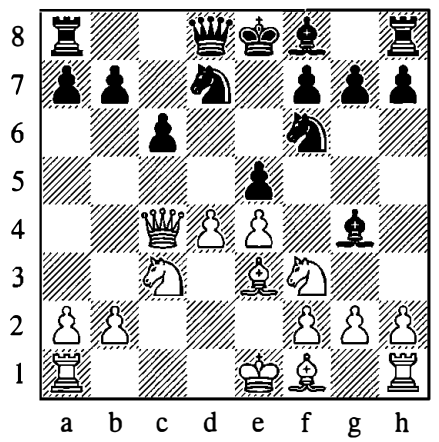
7...e5!?

I can hardly believe that this remarkable idea has only been tested in two games at the time of writing. This means it is not only a strong move in its own right, but is also likely

to carry some surprise value. Almost everyone has exchanged on f3 before advancing in the centre but, as we will soon see, there are times when Black may do well to hang on to the light-squared bishop.

So far, **C1) 8.♗e3** and **C2) 8.♘xe5** have been tested in practice. After analysing those moves, we will finish with the most complicated option, the still-untested **C2) 8.dxe5N**.

C1) 8.♗e3



In the related situation where Black has already exchanged on f3, this is White's most popular move. In this position though, Black can make good use of the light-squared bishop.

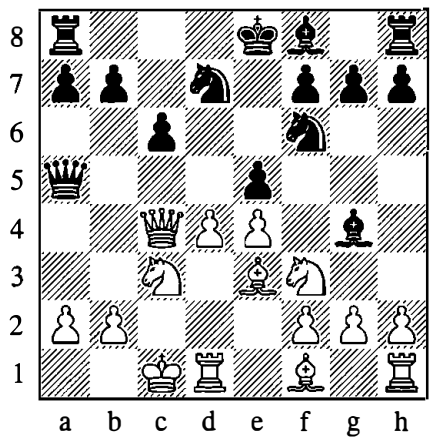
8...♕a5!N

8...♗d6 is quite playable, although after 9.0–0–0 Black should improve with 9...♕e7N, which offers him a good game. (Instead 9...0–0 was played in Griffiths – Van Kampen, Athens 2012, and now after 10.dxe5N ♘xe5 11.♕d4! ♗xf3 12.gxf3 ♗c7 13.f4 White is slightly better.)

The text move is more challenging. Now Black is threatening 9...♘xe4, and I am not sure if White even has equality.

9.0–0–0

The natural reply, but Black has a good answer.



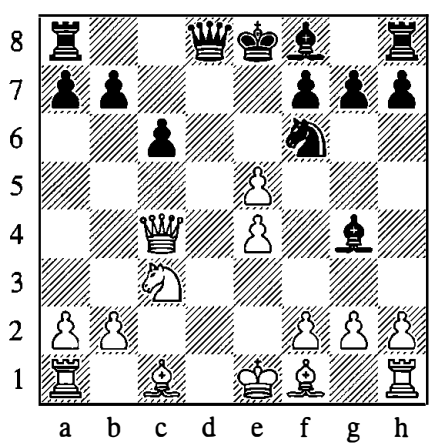
9...exd4 10.♗xd4 ♗e6!

Reminding us of why it is useful to delay the exchange on f3.

11.♕e2 ♗c5∓

Black has the safer king and the more comfortable game.

C2) 8.♘xe5 ♘xe5 9.dxe5



9...♗e6

A useful intermediate move, vacating the g4-square for the knight.

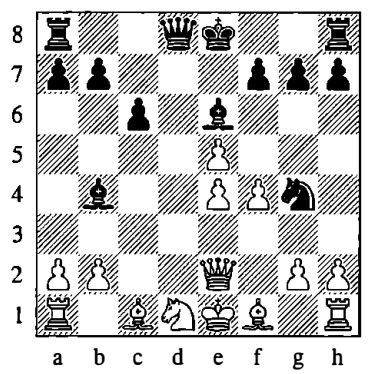
10.♕d3!?N

This is the computer's top choice.

The only practical encounter continued 10.♕a4 ♘g4 11.♗e2 ♘xe5 12.0–0 ♗c5 13.♕c2 ♕e7 and Black was comfortable in Grigoryan – Grover, Kocaeli 2011.

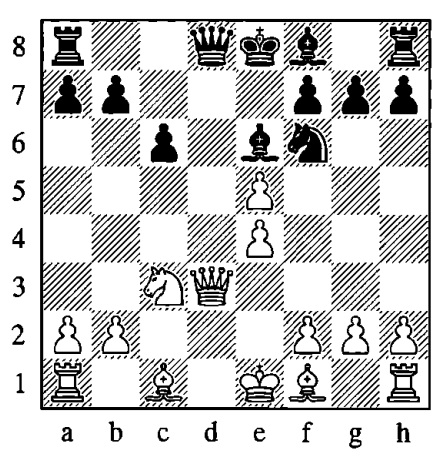
I also examined 10.♕e2N ♘g4 with two possibilities for White:

a) 11.f4? ♗c5 12.♘d1 ♗b4†!



13.♘c3 (13.♗d2 ♗c4–+) 13...♕d4 14.♕f3 0–0–0 Black is winning.

b) 11.♗f4 is better, although after 11...♕c7 12.♕c2 0–0–0 13.♗e2 ♘xe5 14.♗g3 g5! I like Black's position.



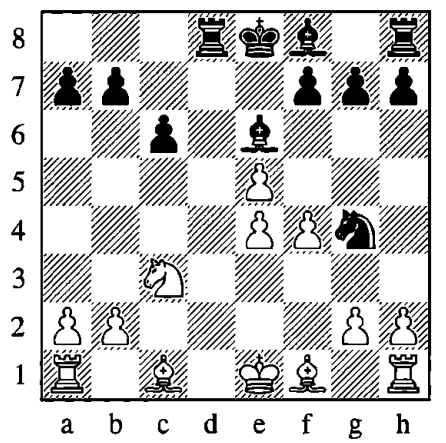
10...♘g4 11.♕xd8†

Once again, 11.f4? is too risky in view of 11...♕b6! 12.♕f3 ♗c5 with a strong initiative for Black.

11...♖xd8 12.f4?!

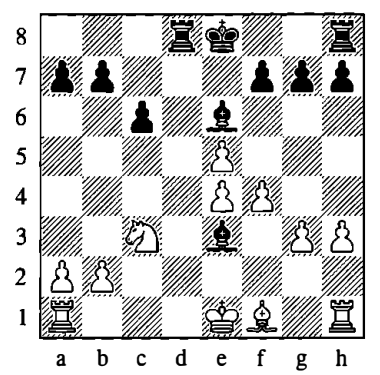
12.♗f4 is safer. Play may continue 12...♗c5 13.♗g3 ♗d4 14.♖d1 ♗xe5 15.♖xd8† ♔xd8 16.♗xe5 ♘xe5 17.f4 ♘g4 when Black has a reliable position and the endgame is likely to end in a draw.

The text move looks like a principled attempt, but in fact White risks becoming worse.



12...♗c5 13.♗e2

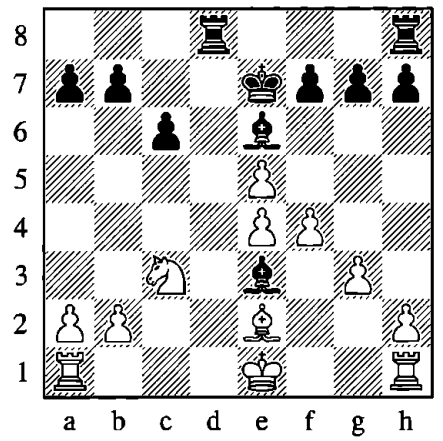
I also considered: 13.h3 ♘e3 14.♗xe3 ♗xe3 15.g3



15...g5! 16.f5 ♗c8 17.h4 gxh4 18.♖xh4 ♗d4 19.0–0–0 ♗xe5 White should be careful.

13...♘e3 14.♗xe3 ♗xe3 15.g3 ♔e7

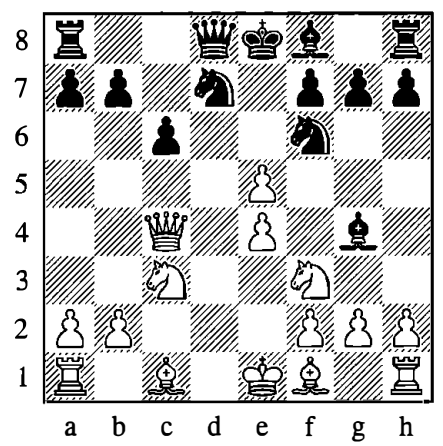
Also worth considering is 15...g5!? 16.f5 ♗c8 17.♗h5 0–0 with good compensation for Black, who intends ...♗d4.



16.♖d1 ♖xd1† 17.♘xd1 ♗d4 18.b3 ♖d8

Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn.

C3) 8.dxe5N



8...♗xf3

Now is a more appropriate time to make this exchange, as White has already committed himself to taking on e5. Of course White also has a chance to try an intermediate move, and we will consider **C31) 9.e6?!** and **C32) 9.exf6** before moving on to the main line **C33) 9.gxf3**.

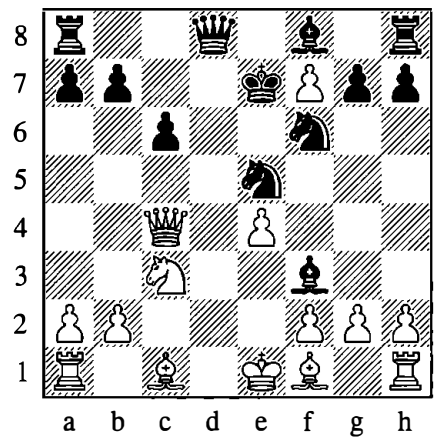
C31) 9.e6?!

With this move White is being too clever for his own good.

9...♘e5!

9...♗h5 10.exd7† ♘xd7 is obviously adequate for Black, but the main line is more ambitious.

10.exf7† ♔e7

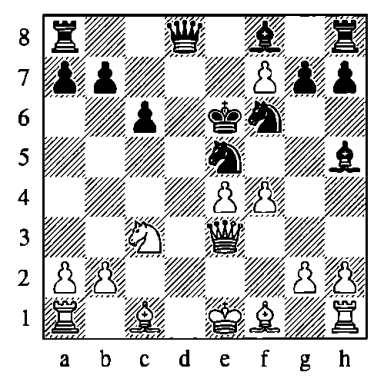


11.♕c5†

Another possible direction is: 11.♕b3 ♕b6 (The computer suggests 11...♕d7!? with crazy complications.) 12.♕xb6 axb6 13.gxf3 ♘xf3† 14.♔d1 ♔xf7 and Black retains a clear positional advantage.

11...♔e6 12.♗c4†

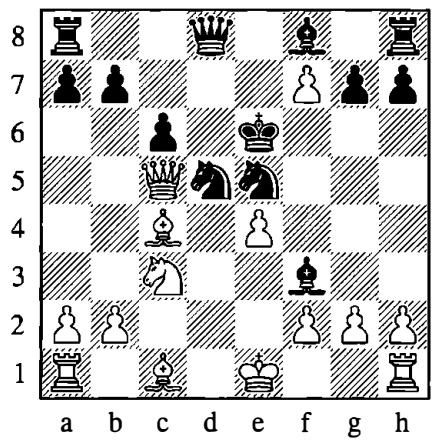
12.♕e3 ♗h5 13.f4 is great for Black, as long as he navigates the complications correctly:



13...♗b4! This is the easiest continuation for a human to understand. Black threatens a check on d1 while catching up on development. (The machine points out that 13...♘fg4! 14.♕h3 ♕b6! is objectively even stronger.) 14.♗d2 ♘eg4 15.♕e2 ♗xc3 16.♗xc3 ♔xf7 17.h3 ♖e8! Black has a clear advantage.

12...♘d5

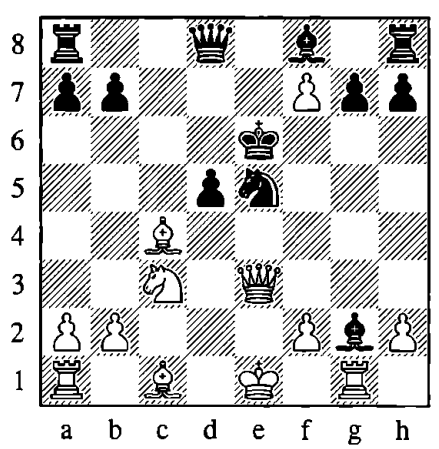
It was something special to see and analyze this amazing position.



13.exd5†

13.♕e3 ♗xg2 14.exd5† cxd5 reaches the same position.

13...cxd5 14.♕e3 ♗xg2 15.♖g1



15...♗c5! 16.♕e2

16.♕xc5? ♘f3† wins, as 17.♔d1 allows Black to capture on c4 with check.

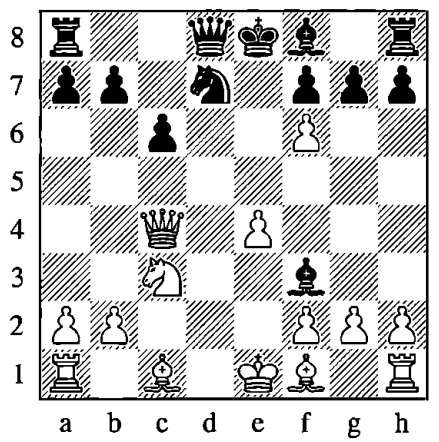
16...♗f3 17.♗xd5† ♕xd5!

A final finesse.

18.♘xd5 ♗xe2 19.♘c7† ♔xf7 20.♔xe2 ♖ac8∓

The complications have subsided and material is level. However, Black has an obvious positional advantage thanks to his better pawn structure and White's slightly exposed king.

C32) 9.exf6



9...♕xf6!

Black offers a sacrifice.

10.gxf3

Taking is the critical test, but it turns out that Black has at least a draw in his pocket.

10.♗e3 gives Black a choice between a complicated continuation and a solid one:

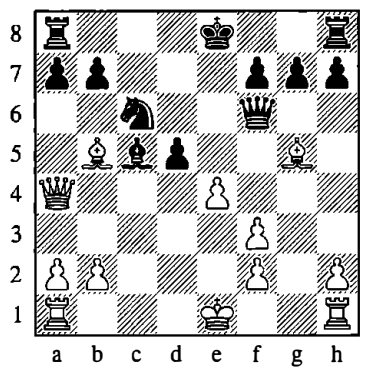
a) 10...♘e5!? 11.♕b3 ♖d8 is an amazing computer idea: 12.♕xb7 (After 12.gxf3 ♘xf3† 13.♔e2 ♖d2†! 14.♗xd2 ♘d4† 15.♔e1 ♘xb3 16.axb3 ♗c5 17.f4 ♕e6! Black has great compensation due to White's weak king.) 12...♗a3!! This unbelievable idea reaches a

wild position, which the engine evaluates as dead equal in several lines. It would seem a little excessive to provide full analysis of such a position in an untested sideline, so I will cut the analysis off here and allow interested readers to conduct their own investigations.

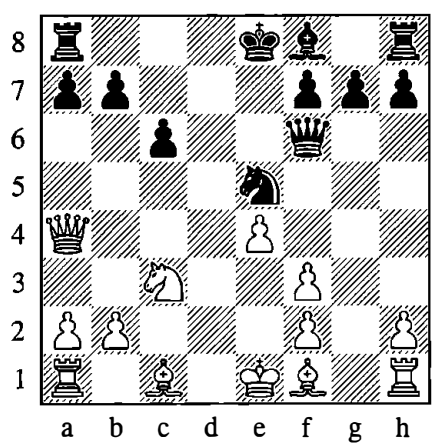
b) The safe continuation is 10...♗g4 11.♗e2 ♗e6 with a reliable position for Black. (11...♗xe2 12.♕xe2 ♗b4 is pretty balanced as well.)

10...♘e5 11.♕a4

The counter-sacrifice 11.♘d5?! is hardly a good idea for White: 11...cxd5 12.♕a4† ♘c6 13.♗b5 ♗c5 14.♗g5

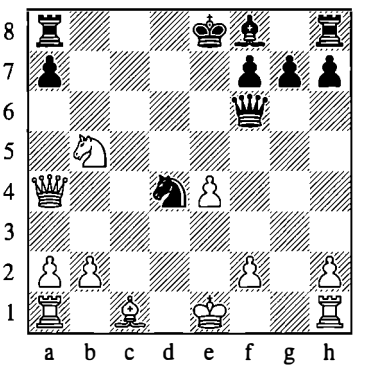


14...♕g6! (Black can force a draw with 14...♕xf3 15.♗xc6† ♔f8 16.0–0 ♕g4†= but he has every reason to play for more.) 15.♗e3 ♗xe3 16.fxe3 dxe4 White will have to fight for equality.



11...♘xf3† 12.♔d1

12.♔e2?! is too risky: 12...♘d4† 13.♔e1 b5! (13...♘f3† repeats the position if Black is happy with a draw.) 14.♗xb5 cxb5 15.♘xb5

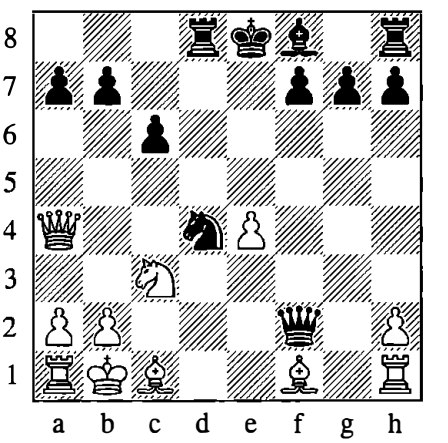


15...♗b4†! 16.♔f1 0–0 Black has a promising initiative, and 17.♕xb4? loses to 17...♕f3.

12...♖d8† 13.♔c2

The flashy 13.♘d5? ♗c5 14.♗d3 ♕h4 leaves White with a losing position.

13...♘d4† 14.♔b1 ♕f3 15.♖g1 ♕xf2 16.♖h1



16...♕f3

This is the soundest continuation, forcing an immediate draw.

If Black wishes to play for a win, he might consider 16...♗d6!?. The machine evaluates

the position slightly in White's favour, but in a practical game Black would have ongoing compensation for the piece and any result would be possible.

17.♖g1 ♕f2=

The rook must go back to h1.

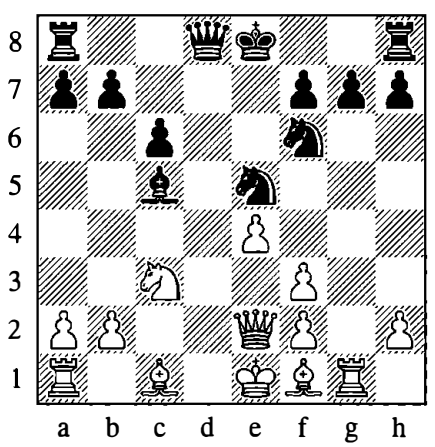
C33) 9.gxf3 ♘xe5

We have now transposed to a position that has been reached several times via the move order 7...♗xf3 (instead of my recommended 7...e5!?) 8.gxf3 e5 9.dxe5 (9.♗e3 is a major alternative) 9...♘xe5.

10.♕e2 ♗c5

After a couple of natural moves we reach a final branching point, where White has tried **C331) 11.♖g1**, **C332) 11.♗e3** and **C333) 11.♗d2**.

C331) 11.♖g1



This has only been played once, and Black found a convincing reply.

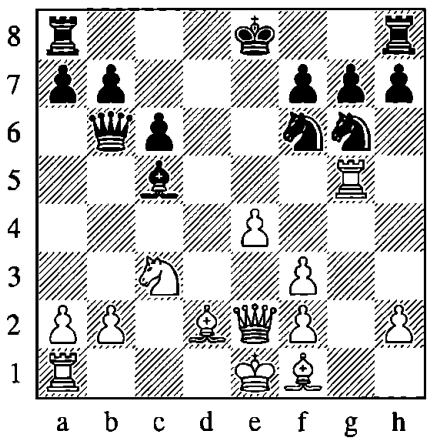
11...♕b6! 12.♖g5

12.f4?? loses to 12...♘d3†!.

12.♖xg7 is risky, as after 12...♖d8 Black has a strong initiative. (Note that 12...0–0–0?! is less accurate as 13.♗h3† frees an escape square for the white king with gain of tempo.)

12...♘g6 13.♗d2

13.e5 ♘d5 14.♘xd5 cxd5 15.♕b5† is better, although after 15...♔e7 16.♕xb6 axb6 White will be the one fighting for the draw.

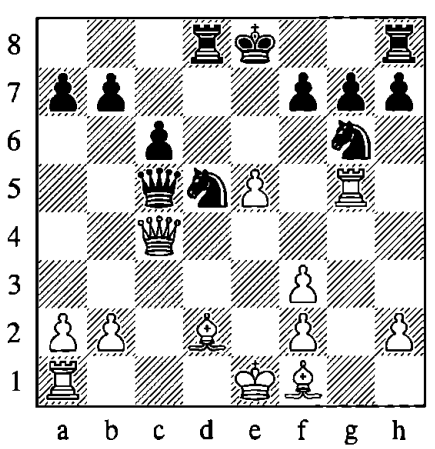


13...♖d8 14.e5 ♘d5 15.♘a4 ♕b4!

Impressive play from Black.

16.♘xc5 ♕xc5 17.♕c4

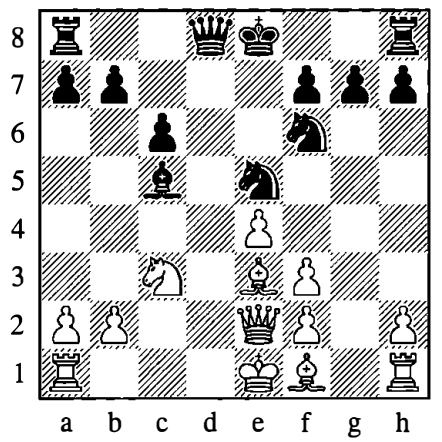
This position occurred in Krasenkow – Harikrishna, Nancy 2009, and now Black's strongest continuation is:



17...♕e7!N 18.0–0–0 0–0

Black has a clear advantage thanks to his better pawn structure and piece coordination.

C332) 11.♗e3

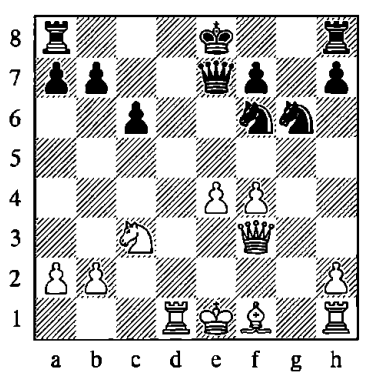


11...♗xe3 12.fxe3 g5!

This great positional idea was found during my work with Vladimir Kramnik in 2006. Fortunately for me, I was the first to employ it in a serious game.

13.f4

After 13.♖d1 my opponent offered a draw and I decided to accept it in Khenkin – Avrukh, Maalot-Tarshiha 2008, on account of my favourable tournament situation at the time. A logical continuation is: 13...♕e7 14.f4 gxf4 15.exf4 ♘g6 16.♕f3



Black has a few ideas at his disposal; my own preference is 16...♘d7 17.♗h3 0–0–0 with a nice position.

13...gxf4 14.exf4 ♘g6 15.♕f3 h5!?

An interesting idea, planning the ...♘g4 jump.

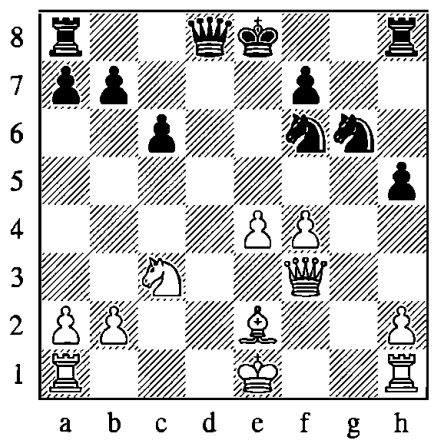
My old analysis shows another sound continuation: 15...♕d4 16.♖d1 ♕b4 17.♖d2 ♖d8! with balanced play.

16.♗e2?!

This inaccuracy allows Black to seize the initiative.

16.h3N allows Black to choose between 16...♕d4, 16...♕c7!? and 16...h4 intending ...♘h5.

16.e5N ♘g4 17.♖d1 ♕b6 also gives Black a full share of the chances.



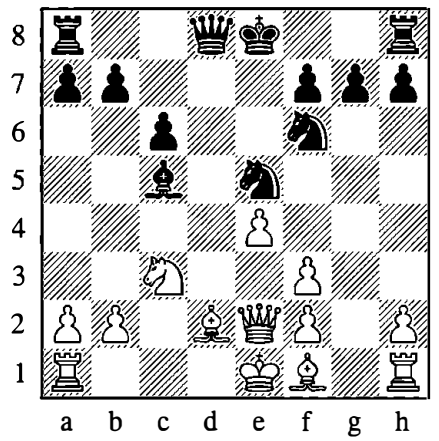
16...♘g4! 17.♕g3 ♕d4 18.♗xg4 hxg4 19.♖d1 ♕c5

Black was better in Kulaots – Buhmann, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010.

C333) 11.♗d2

This is the most important continuation. White intends to make the necessary preparations for

pushing his central pawns. If Black does not find a suitable response, he will be in trouble.



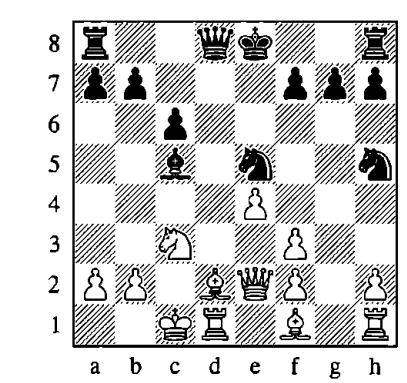
11...♘h5!

This is another remarkable idea that was discovered in the course of my work with Vladimir Kramnik in 2006, but it was not tested until 2011 when my Israeli national team-mate Evgeny Postny played it.

12.f4

12.0–0–0?!N

This move was mentioned in 2008 by Vigus, who also found our idea from the main line before it was tested. I believe it to be clearly inferior to the main line.



12...♕h4!

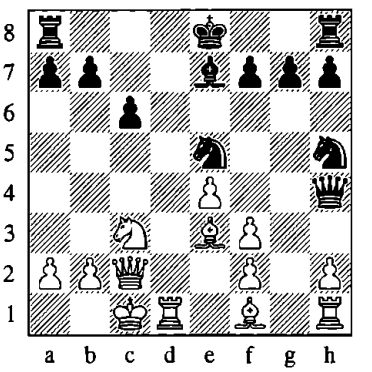
12...♕f6 should also be pretty good for Black, but the text move is more accurate. It goes without saying that establishing control over the f4-square is Black's main positional idea.

13.♗e3 ♗e7

13...♗b6 also deserves attention.

14.♕c2

In the event of 14.♖g1 Black can safely win a pawn with14...♕xh2.

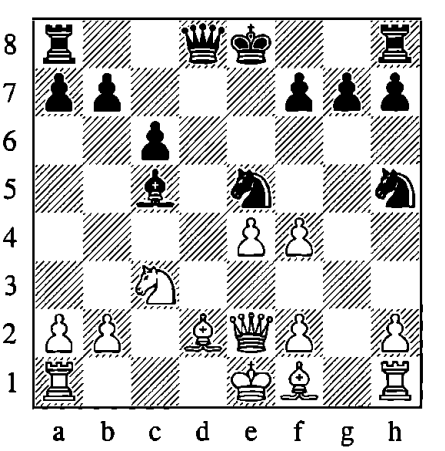


14...0–0!

Black should not accept the pawn sacrifice. 14...♘xf3?! 15.e5! gives White some initiative, based on the fact that 15...♘xe5 16.♕f5! is unpleasant.

15.♘e2 ♖ad8 16.♘d4 g6

Black has an obvious positional advantage, as White cannot advance his kingside pawns.



12...♕xd2†!

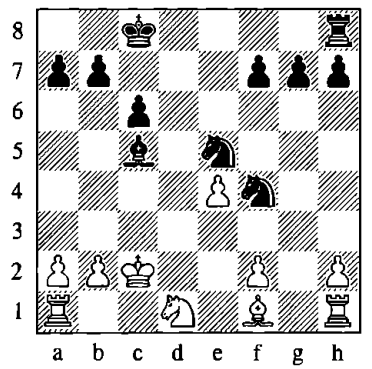
This is the big idea behind Black's previous move.

13.♔xd2 ♘xf4 14.♕d1 0–0–0†

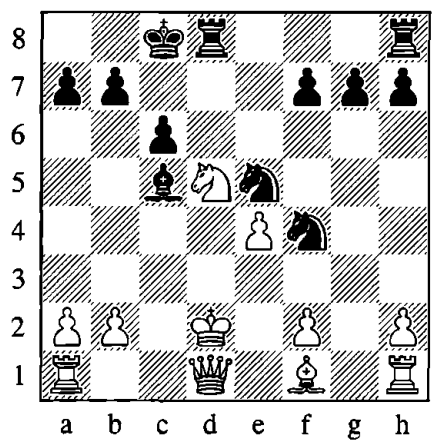
Black has promising compensation for the queen.

15.♘d5

15.♔c2? ♖xd1 16.♘xd1 is worse. In Verhoeven – Lemmers, Netherlands 2012, Black missed the strongest reply:



16...♘f3!N 17.♘c3 ♖e8 Black dominates the board.



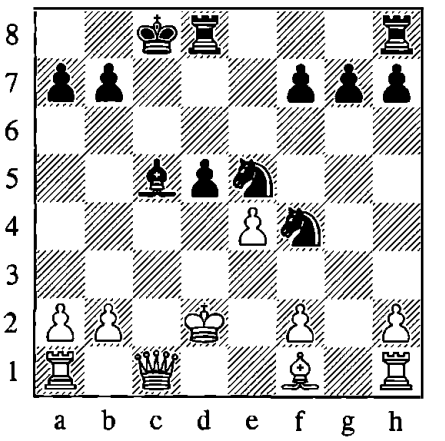
15...cxd5

This is the right recapture.

Evgeny chose the inaccurate 15...♘xd5?! in Caspi – Postny, Aix-les-Bains 2011. At this point the precise 16.♕b3!N ♘f4† 17.♔c2 ♗xf2 18.♖d1 would have brought White an advantage.

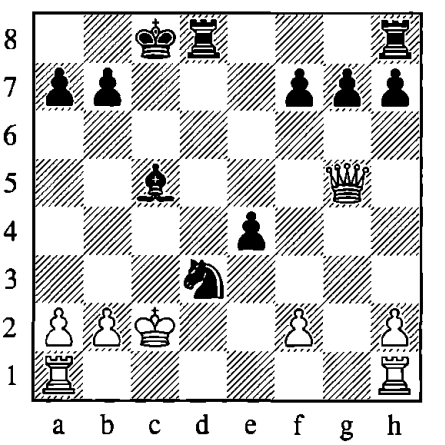
After the text move we will analyse both **C3331) 16.♕c1** and **C3332) 16.♔c2!?N.**

C3331) 16.♕c1



This move was chosen in the only game I found on the database.

16...dxe4† 17.♔c2 ♘ed3 18.♗xd3 ♘xd3 19.♕g5



19...♖d5!?

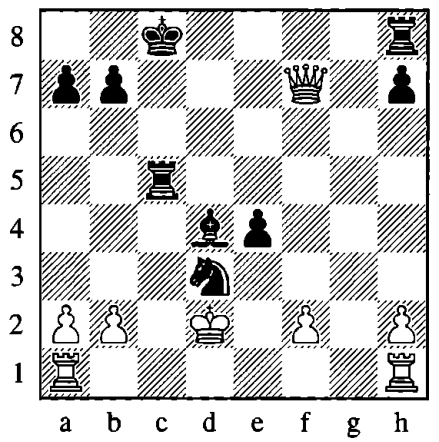
Black finds an interesting and rather active idea.

The calm 19...g6N is fully playable, and gives Black sufficient compensation for the queen.

20.♕xg7 ♗d4 21.♕xf7 ♖c5† 22.♔d2

I also checked 22.♔b1 ♗xb2 23.♕e6† ♔b8 24.♕xe4 ♘xf2 25.♕b4 ♖hc8 26.♕xb2 ♘xh1= when a draw is highly likely.

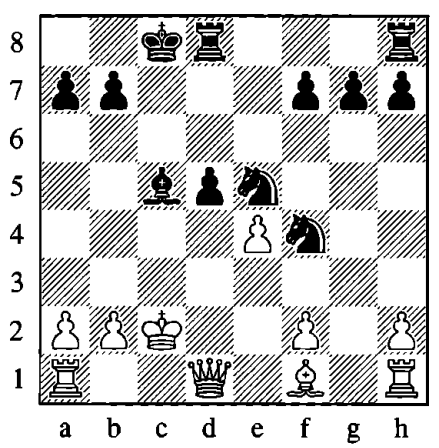
We have been following the game Hoang Thanh Trang – Barbosa, Jakarta 2013. Now the most accurate continuation is:



22...♖d8!N 23.♖hg1 ♗xb2 24.♔e3 ♖c3 25.♕f5† ♔b8=

The position remains quite tactical, but I believe my analysis engine when it tells me the situation is drawish with correct play.

C3332) 16.♔c2!?N



This untested move has some interesting points, but I found a nice reply.

16...♔b8!?

In the event of 16...dxe4 White gets the additional option of 17.♕e1!? (17.♕c1 transposes to variation C3331 above) although Black should still be okay after the accurate 17...♖d4!.

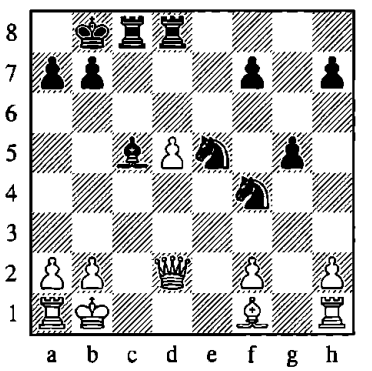
17.♕d2

This seems to be the critical line.

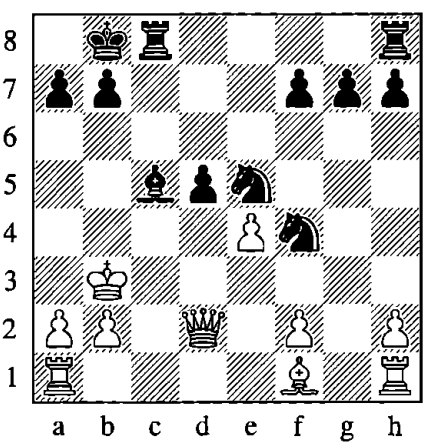
Neither 17.♕e1 ♘f3 nor 17.♕c1 g5 make much sense for White.

17...♖c8 18.♔b3!?

18.♔b1 g5! 19.exd5 ♖hd8 also brings Black nice compensation, for instance:



20.a3 (20.♕c3 ♖xd5 21.a3 ♗xf2⩲) 20...♖xd5 21.♕c2 ♗d4 22.♕xh7 ♘f3!⩱

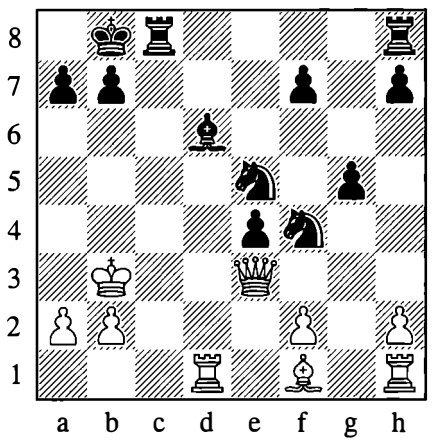


18...g5! 19.♕c3 ♗d6

I would like to point out that 19...d4!? 20.♕g3 f6 21.h4 h6⩱ is also very much in the spirit of this line. Though it is hard to be one hundred percent sure of the final evaluation here, Black has beautiful positional compensation for the queen.

20.♕e3 dxe4 21.♖d1

21.♕xe4? is a serious mistake due to 21...♘d7! when Black develops a decisive initiative.



21...♘ed3 22.♗xd3 ♘xd3 23.♖xd3 exd3 24.♕xd3 ♗e5=

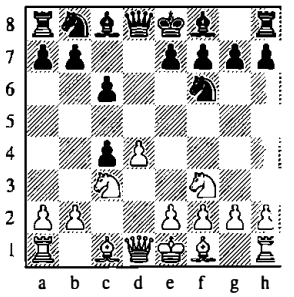
By now the material is about even, while Black has no weaknesses and should not be in the slightest danger.

Conclusion

Most of this chapter has been devoted to the 7.e4 e5!? variation, which has still only been tested in a couple of games, making it a great surprise weapon as well as an objectively strong one. We saw that Black was at least equal against the various alternatives on move 8 and 9. The most critical variation of the whole chapter occurs after 8.dxe5N ♗xf3 9.gxf3 ♘xe5 10.♕e2 ♗c5 11.♗d2 ♘h5! preparing an amazing queen sacrifice. After checking the few available games along with some significant untested options, I am convinced that Black's scheme is fully correct and reliable.



4...dxc4



5.g3 and 5.e3

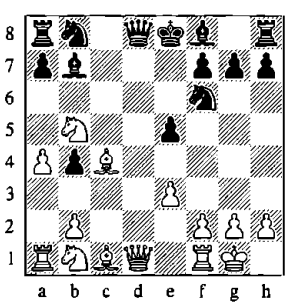
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3

4...dxc4

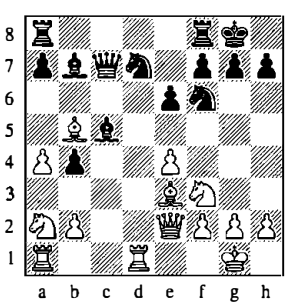
A) 5.g3 255
B) 5.e3 b5 6.a4 b4 256
B1) 7.♘b1 ♗a6 256
B11) 8.♘bd2 256
B12) 8.♕c2 257
B13) 8.♗e2 258
B2) 7.♘a2 e6 8.♗xc4 ♘bd7 9.0–0 ♗b7 10.♕e2 ♗e7 259
B21) 11.e4 260
B22) 11.♖d1 262

B13) after 12.♗xc4



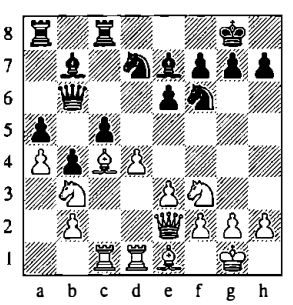
12...♕e7!N

B21) after 15.♗e3



15...a5!!N

B22) after 16.♖ac1



16...cxd4N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4

White generally plays 5.a4 here, and that will be the subject of Chapters 23-34. However, it is important to know how to meet some of White's less common 5th moves. In this chapter we look at **A) 5.g3** and **B) 5.e3**, before studying 5.e4 in the next chapter.

A) 5.g3

My personal preference is to meet this by also fianchettoing on the kingside.

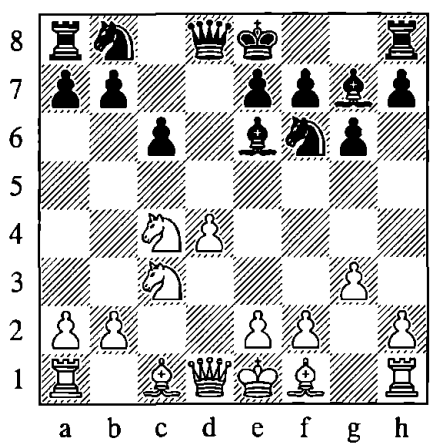
5...g6!? 6.♘e5

The only independent move.

6.♗g2 ♗g7 reaches a position from the Grünfeld Defence that I covered briefly in *Grandmaster Repertoire 8*. Black is doing well as it is not at all easy for White to regain the pawn, for example 7.♘e5 runs into 7...♘g4!.

6...♗g7 7.♘xc4 ♗e6!

Black benefits from his lead in development by starting active play.

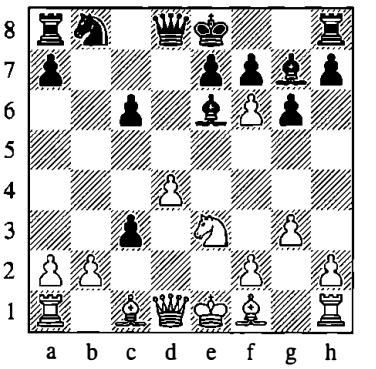


8.♘e3

This was played in Feoktistov – Belikov, Alushta 2005. It is not the best square for the knight, but it's understandable that White was not satisfied with the alternatives:

8.♘e5 ♘d5 9.♘f3 c5 is comfortable for Black.

8.e4 b5! 9.♘e3 b4 10.e5 bxc3 11.exf6 gives Black a pleasant choice.



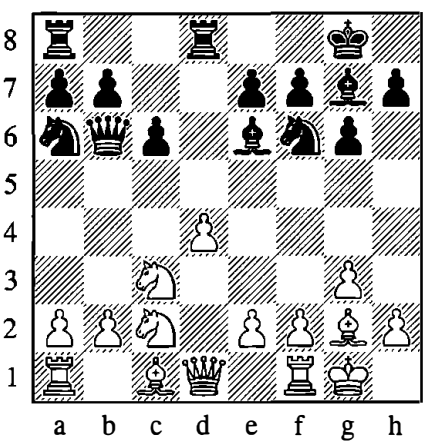
I like 11...c2!? 12.♘xc2 ♗xf6 13.♗g2 0–0 with pressure on the white centre, though 11...♗xf6 12.bxc3 ♗d5! also looks promising for Black.

From here I developed the following plan for Black.

8...0–0N 9.♗g2 ♕b6

9...a5 10.0–0 ♘a6 11.♘c2 ♘b4!? also deserves attention.

10.0–0 ♖d8 11.♘c2 ♘a6



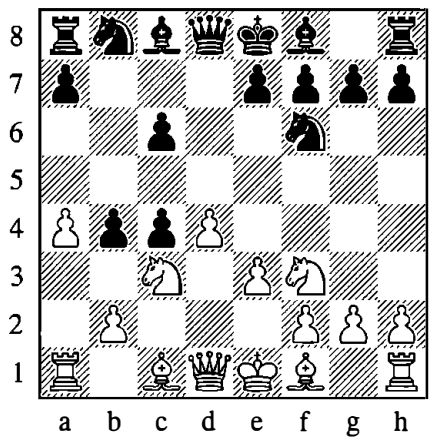
Black is ahead in development and has the

more active pieces. The following is a good illustrative line:

12.♘a4 ♕c7 13.e4 ♕d7 14.b3 b5! 15.♘c3 c5 16.d5 ♗h3 17.♕e2 ♗xg2 18.♔xg2 e6∓

Black is better prepared for the opening up of the position.

B) 5.e3 b5 6.a4 b4



We will examine **B1) 7.♘b1** and **B2) 7.♘a2**, after a quick look at the other possible knight move.

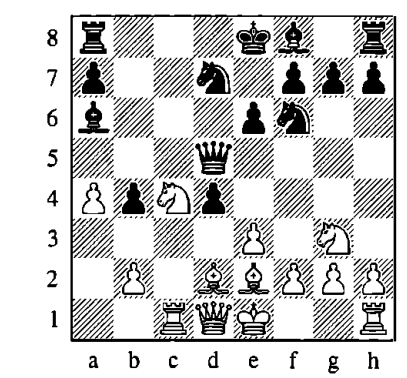
7.♘e2

This can hardly be recommended in view of the following convincing game.

7...♗a6 8.♘g3 c5! 9.♗d2 e6 10.♖c1 ♕d5! 11.♘e5

Black is also clearly better after 11.♗e2 ♘c6 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.0–0 ♘a5!.

11...cxd4 12.♘xc4 ♘bd7 13.♗e2



This position from Mamedyarov – Nakamura, Zug 2013, may look unclear, but my engine indicates that Black can coolly grab the white g-pawn.

13...♗xc4N 14.♗xc4

In the event of 14.♖xc4 d3 15.♕c1 ♖d8, Black is clearly better.

14...♕xg2

White has no compensation for the material deficit.

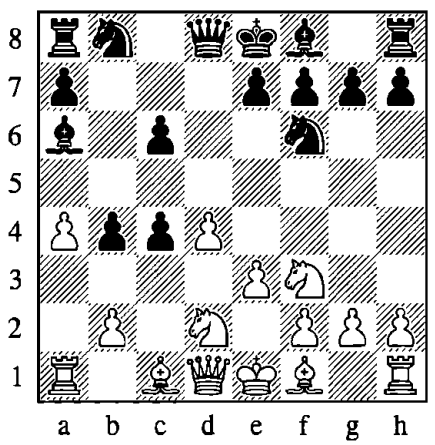
15.♗b5 ♖d8 16.♗c6 ♕h3 17.exd4 ♗e7

Black will castle next, remaining a healthy pawn up.

B1) 7.♘b1 ♗a6

White now has three main possibilities: **B11) 8.♘bd2**, **B12) 8.♕c2** and **B13) 8.♗e2**.

B11) 8.♘bd2



8...c3!

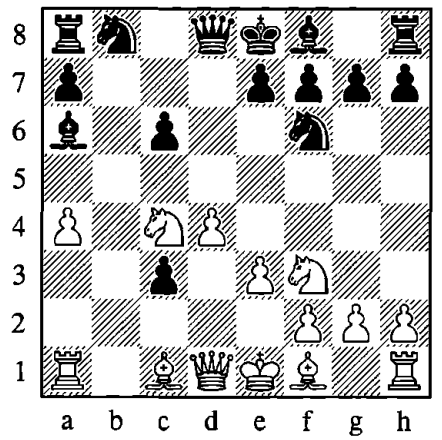
A thematic resource for Black in this type of position.

9.bxc3 bxc3 10.♘c4

This ambitious move has been White's preferred option.

With 10.♘b1 White regains the pawn, but Black will comfortably complete his development and then carry out ...c5. 10...♗xf1

11.♔xf1 e6 12.♘xc3 ♗b4 13.♕c2 (13.♗b2 is probably more accurate, but in any case White cannot hope for an advantage.) 13...0–0 14.♔e2 Zegarac – P. Varga, Bajmok 2001. After the natural 14...♘bd7N 15.♗b2 ♕a5, Black will soon play ...c5 with a comfortable game.



10...♕d5!N

A strong novelty. I find it surprising that out of eleven games, nobody has gone for this tempting move.

11.♕b3

Another logical move is 11.♘fe5, though here Black achieves good play with natural moves: 11...e6 12.f3 ♗b4 13.♕b3 c5 14.♗a3 ♗xa3 15.♕xa3 0–0 16.dxc5 ♗xc4 17.♘xc4 ♘bd7 18.♕xc3 ♖fc8∓ and White will experience problems along the c-file.

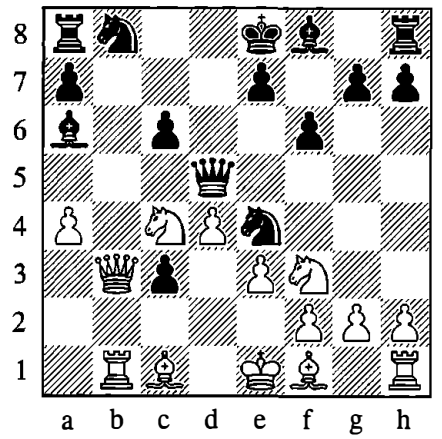
11...♘e4 12.♖b1

White's best chance.

12...f6!

Not only making a bolthole for the king, in anticipation of a possible sacrifice on b8, but also taking control over the e5-square.

The natural 12...e6 runs into 13.♘fe5, when the threat of 14.f3 is unpleasant.



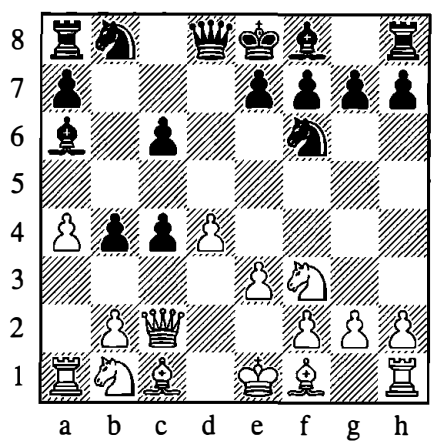
13.♗d3 e6 14.♕c2

14.0–0? falls for the tactical trick 14...♘c5! with a huge advantage.

14...♗xc4 15.♗xe4 ♕a5

Black is better; White will need to work hard to demonstrate compensation.

B12) 8.♕c2



This would be a good idea if White were able to continue with ♗xc4, but Black does not allow this.

8...b3! 9.♕d1 e6 10.♗e2

With 10.♘e5 c5 11.♗xc4 ♗xc4 12.♘xc4, White regained the c4-pawn in Sharevich – P.H. Nielsen, Internet 2004, but after

12...♕d5!N she would have lost an important kingside pawn: 13.♘bd2 ♕xg2∓

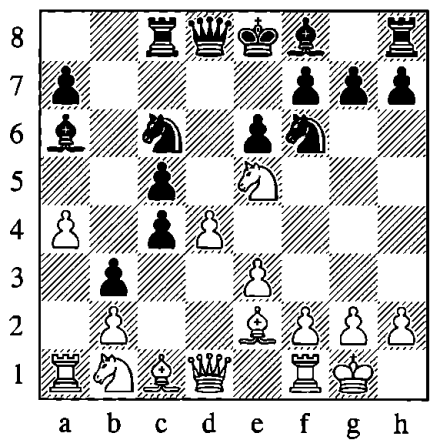
10.♘bd2 ♕d5 11.♗e2 ♘bd7 12.0–0 (12.♘xb3? fails to 12...cxb3 13.♗xa6 ♕a5† and White remains a piece down.) 12...♖b8!∓ Black had prevented 13.♘xb3 and retained an extra pawn in Adorjan – Torre, Toluca 1982.

10...c5 11.0–0 ♘c6 12.♘e5

I reckon White's best chance is 12.♘a3N cxd4 13.♘xc4, although as a minimum Black has 13...d3!? 14.♗xd3 ♘b4 15.♗e2 ♕xd1 16.♖xd1 ♖c8 17.♘fe5 ♘e4 with the better endgame.

12...♖c8!

Now White is in trouble.



13.♘a3

Maybe not the best move, but other options were hardly acceptable either:

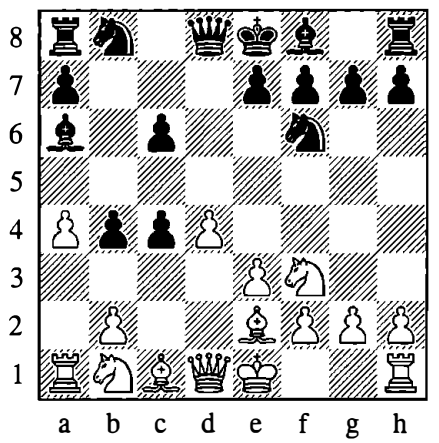
13.♗xc4 ♗xc4 14.♘xc4 cxd4 15.♕xb3 ♗e7 and White has regained the material, but finds himself clearly worse from a positional point of view.

13.♘xc4 cxd4 14.♘d6† ♗xd6 15.♗xa6 ♖c7 16.♕xb3 0–0 is the same story; White has got the pawn back, but Black has much the better game due to his well-coordinated pieces and superior pawn structure.

13...cxd4 14.♘axc4 ♕d5 15.♗f3 ♘e4∓

Black was clearly better in Timman – Kasparov, Prague 1998.

B13) 8.♗e2



The main idea – White intends to castle first and then to decide on further action.

8...c5! 9.0–0

I also examined two other continuations:

9.♘bd2 c3 10.bxc3 bxc3 11.♘b1 ♗xe2 12.♕xe2 cxd4 13.♘xd4 (13.exd4 ♘d5 is positionally better for Black) 13...e5 14.♘b5 ♘bd7 15.0–0 a6 16.♘5xc3 As often happens in this line, White has regained the pawn, but meanwhile Black has comfortably completed her development. 16...♕a5 17.♕f3 ♖c8 18.♘e4 ♗b4 Black had the more pleasant position in Ivakhinova – Girya, Belgrade 2013.

9.♘e5

White has tried this in a few games.

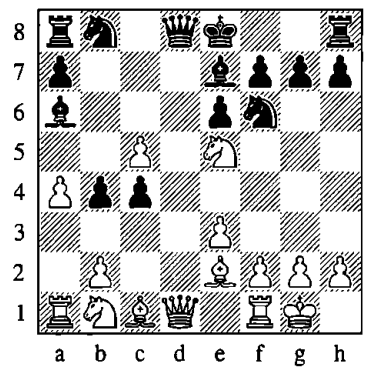
9...e6 10.0–0

10.♗f3 doesn't make much sense in view of 10...♘d5.

10...♗e7 11.dxc5?!

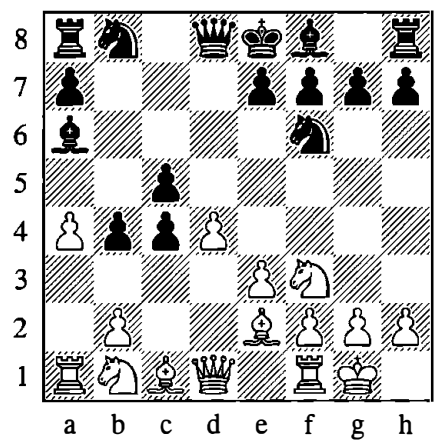
Even after the better 11.♘d2, Black can claim an edge: 11...c3 12.bxc3 bxc3 13.♘b1 cxd4 14.exd4 ♕c8!∓

In Olsen – Hillarp Persson, Gentofte 1999, Black missed a powerful idea involving an exchange sacrifice:



11...♕d5!N 12.♗f3 ♕xe5 13.♗xa8 0–0 14.♗f3 ♘bd7 15.c6 ♘c5∓

Black is clearly better.



9...cxd4 10.♘xd4

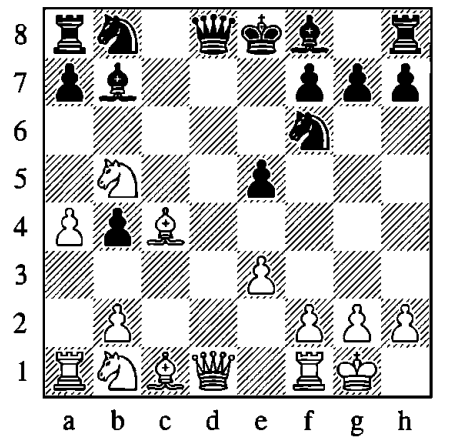
After 10.exd4 e6 White would likely regain the c4-pawn, but Black can count on ending up in a position with good play against the isolated d-pawn.

10...e5! 11.♘b5

11.♗f3? was not a good idea in Vernay – Eliet, Guingamp 2008. Black could have sacrificed the exchange: 11...exd4N 12.♗xa8 d3∓ with a large advantage.

11...♗b7! 12.♗xc4

This was played in Selin – V. Popov, Tula 1999, and here Black has a clever way to seize the advantage.



12...♕e7!N

The white knight is suddenly trapped on b5!

13.♕b3

Even worse is 13.♖e1 a6 14.♘d4 ♕c7!∓ and White is losing material.

13...a6 14.♘d6† ♕xd6 15.♗xf7† ♔e7 16.♖d1 ♕xd1†!

16...♕c6? may look tempting, but surprisingly 17.e4! offers White great compensation for the knight.

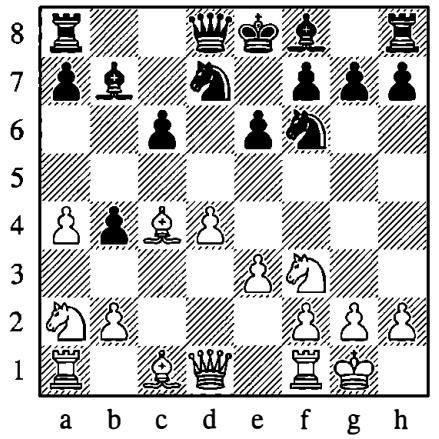
17.♕xd1 ♔xf7

Black has more than enough for the queen and stands better.

B2) 7.♘a2

This is White's first choice according to theory. The next few moves are pretty logical.

7...e6 8.♗xc4 ♘bd7 9.0–0 ♗b7

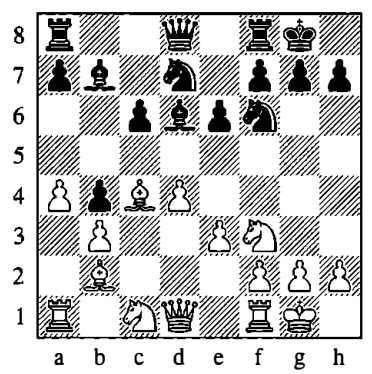


We have arrived at a thematic position where White can choose from various set-ups.

10.♕e2

The most popular continuation. I also examined a couple of alternatives:

10.b3 ♗d6 11.♗b2 0–0 12.♘c1 Papa – Drabke, Switzerland 2008. I don't see any reason to refrain from the standard break.



12...c5N Here I developed the following line: 13.♘d3 cxd4 14.♘xd4 (14.♗xd4 ♕b8! is fantastic for Black) 14...♘b6 15.♗b5 ♖c8 16.♖c1 ♖xc1 17.♕xc1 ♕b8 18.♘c6 ♗xc6 19.♕xc6 ♖c8 20.♕f3 ♘bd5 and Black has no problems.

10.♗d2 a5 11.♘c1

At some point White has to transfer the knight from a2.

11...♗e7

Now White can choose between two squares for his knight.

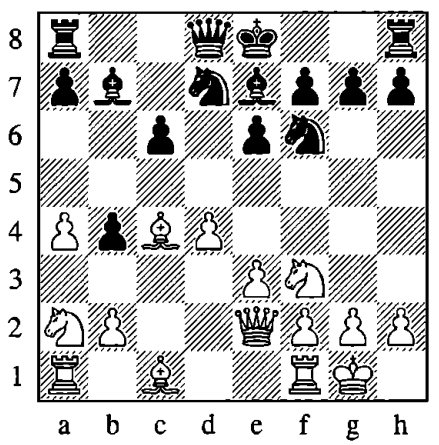
12.♘b3

12.♘d3 is worse. I like the following example: 12...0–0 13.♖c1 ♖c8 14.♕e2 ♘b6 White clearly has problems with his light-squared bishop. 15.b3? ♘xc4 16.♖xc4 (16.bxc4 c5 is also excellent for Black) 16...♗a6 17.♖c2 ♕d5 White had a lost position in Nguyen Tuan Minh – Pham Minh Duc, Vung Tau 2000.

12...0–0 13.♕e2 c5 14.♖fd1 ♕b6

Play has transposed to line B22 below.

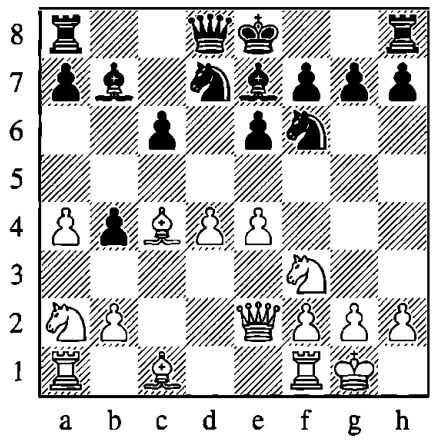
10...♗e7



White's main options are **B21) 11.e4** and **B22) 11.♖d1**.

11.b3 0–0 12.♗b2 c5 13.♘c1 ♕a5!? Black plays ambitiously, preventing the exchange of light-squared bishops. (There is nothing wrong with the natural 13...♘b6 14.♗a6 ♗xa6 15.♕xa6 ♘e4 16.♘d3 ♕c8 and Black has no problems.) 14.♘d3 cxd4 15.♘xd4 a6 Black has good chances in this complex position, D. Rombaldoni – Balogh, Cappelle la Grande 2010.

B21) 11.e4

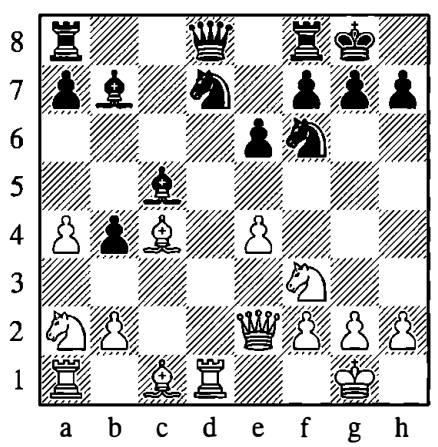


11...0–0 12.♖d1

White's position would be promising were it not for the poorly-placed knight on a2.

After 12.e5 ♘d5 White did not manage to achieve a natural arrangement of his pieces in the following encounter: 13.♗d2 a5 14.♘c1 ♘5b6! 15.♗d3 c5 and Black was better in Graf – Motwani, Bled (ol) 2002.

12...c5 13.dxc5 ♗xc5



14.♗b5

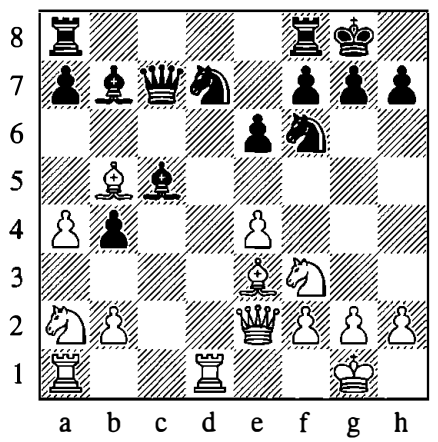
This looks like the most serious move. The alternatives are:

14.♗g5 ♕c7 15.♗b5 was played in Rios – Narvaez, Cali 2008. Now the natural 15...♘e5!N would be strong, and after 16.♗xf6 gxf6 Black is better, due to the misplaced knight on a2.

In both games with 14.♘e5, Black reacted with the natural 14...♕c7. Although this is not at all bad, I believe Black instead has a great opportunity to take over the initiative. 14...♘xe5!N 15.♖xd8 ♖axd8 with the possible continuation: 16.♗g5 ♖d4! 17.♗a6 ♗xa6 18.♕xa6 ♘eg4 19.♗xf6 ♘xf6 and the poorly-placed knight is starting to tell.

14...♕c7 15.♗e3

This has happened in three encounters, in all of which Black exchanged bishops on e3. I discovered a strong improvement for Black, after which White must play precisely in order to survive.



15...a5!!N 16.♖ac1

I think this is White's best idea, because after 16.♗xd7 ♘xd7 17.♖xd7 ♕xd7 18.♗xc5 ♖fc8 19.♕e3 ♕xa4 Black has the better chances.

16...♗xe4 17.♗xd7 ♘xd7 18.♗xc5 ♗xf3 19.gxf3!

After 19.♕xf3? ♘xc5 20.♕e3 ♖ad8! Black would be winning.

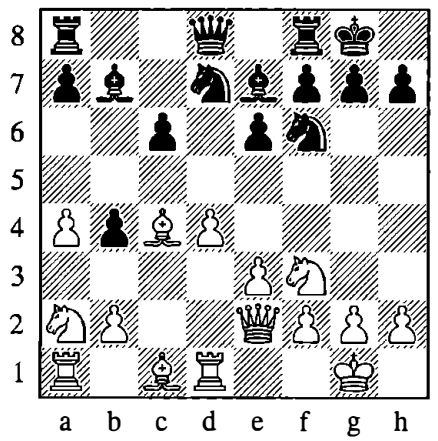
19.gxf3 ♘xc5 20.♕e3 ♖ac8 21.♖c4!

White can probably hold, thanks to the following variation.

21...♕b6 22.♖dc1 b3 23.♘b4! ♖cd8 24.♕xc5 ♕xc5 25.♖xc5 axb4 26.♖5c4

The rook ending is drawn.

B22) 11.♖d1 0–0



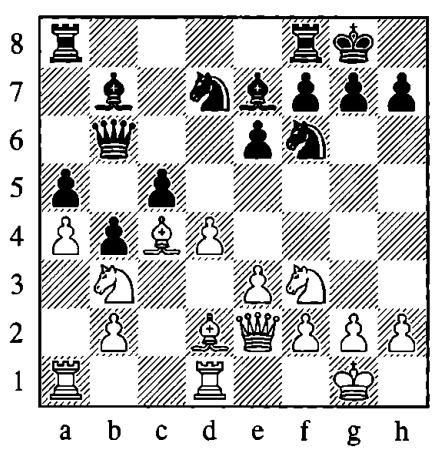
12.♗d2

12.e4 transposes to line B21 above.

12...a5 13.♘c1

White's best plan is to first solve the problem of his misplaced knight. Meanwhile Black manages to obtain play in the centre.

13...c5 14.♘b3 ♕b6



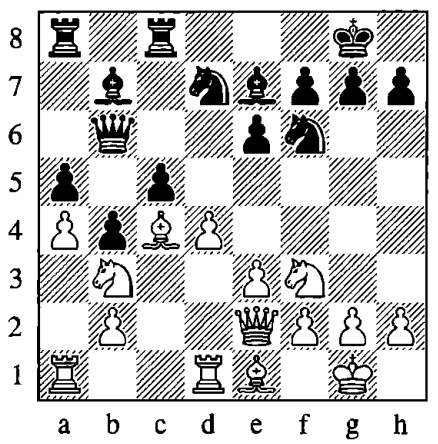
15.♗e1

This has been White's choice in the majority of games.

I would also like to mention 15.♗b5, which has been played three times. I recommend the ambitious 15...♗d5!N 16.dxc5 ♕a7! when Black enjoys slightly the better chances, for example: 17.♘bd4 ♘xc5 18.♘e5 ♕c7 19.f4 ♘fe4 20.♖ac1 ♕b7∓

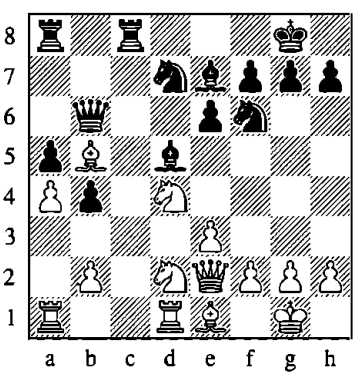
15...♖fc8!?

It was not easy to decide how to place the rooks, but eventually I opted for this set-up.



16.♖ac1

Once again 16.♗b5 is comfortably met by: 16...♗d5 17.♘fd2 (17.♘bd2 cxd4 18.♘xd4 is just a transposition) 17...cxd4 18.♘xd4



This position has arisen in three games, but for some reason nobody has gone for 18...e5N. After 19.♘f5 ♗f8 20.e4 ♗c6 21.♗xc6 ♕xc6 it is White who must think about equality.

16...cxd4N

In my opinion it is a suitable moment for this exchange.

In Shulman – Potkin, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011, Black opted for the calm 16...h6.

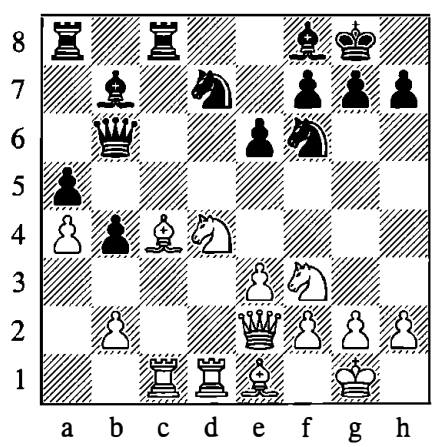
17.♘bxd4

In the event of 17.♘fxd4 e5 18.♘b5 ♘c5 19.♘xc5 ♖xc5 20.b3 ♖ac8, Black has the better game.

17...♗f8!

A prophylactic move, which is actually beginning to prepare the ...e5 advance.

It goes without saying that the immediate 17...e5? would have been premature, in view of 18.♘f5 ♗f8 19.♘g5! with a decisive attack.



I analysed the following line:

18.♘d2

Heading for the c4-square.

18...♘c5 19.♗b5 e5 20.♘c4 ♕c7 21.♘f3 ♗xf3!? 22.gxf3

This is better than: 22.♕xf3 ♘d3! 23.♖b1 (23.♖c2 e4 24.♕e2 b3 25.♖c3 ♗b4 26.♖cxd3 exd3 27.♕xd3 ♗xe1 28.♖xe1 ♖ab8 gives Black the advantage) 23...e4 24.♕e2 ♖d8∓

22...♘b3 23.♖c2 g6

The position is complex, and looks to me pretty balanced.

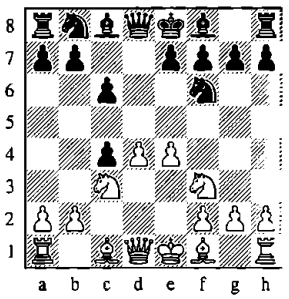
Conclusion

By meeting the rare 5.g3 with 5...g6!? Black aims for a Grünfeld position in which it is not easy for White to regain the c4-pawn. The immediate 6.♘e5 avoids this scenario, but while White is regaining the pawn Black gains a lead in development and active play.

The main theme of the chapter was 5.e3 b5 6.a4 b4, when the knight can retreat to b1 or a2. In either case the game often develops in similar fashion – while White is regaining the c4-pawn and bringing his knight back into the game, Black can comfortably complete his development and break with ...c5 to obtain good play in the centre.



4...dxc4



5.e4 – Geller Gambit

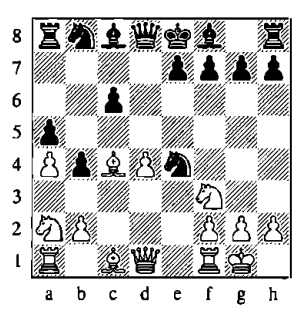
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.e4

5...b5

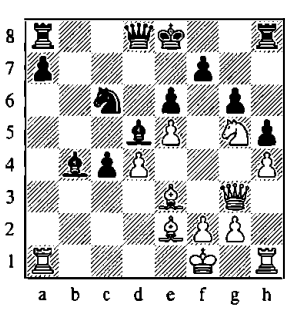
A) 6.♕c2 265
B) 6.a4 266
C) 6.e5 ♘d5 7.a4 e6 267
C1) 8.axb5 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 cxb5 10.♘g5 ♗b7 11.♕h5 g6 12.♕g4 ♗e7 267
C11) 13.h4 267
C12) 13.♗e2 268
C2) 8.♘g5 ♗e7 269
C21) 9.♘ge4 269
C22) 9.h4 h6 10.♘ge4 b4 11.♘b1 ♗a6 270
C221) 12.♕g4 270
C222) 12.♘bd2 271

B) after 9.0–0



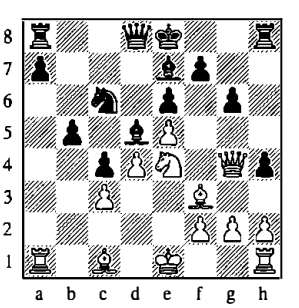
9...♘d6N

C11) note to 14.♕f4



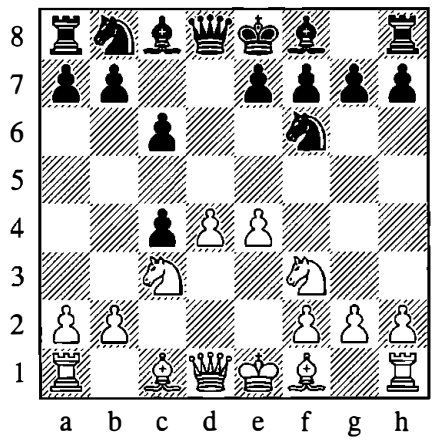
18...♘e7!N

C12) after 17.♕g4



17...b4N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.e4

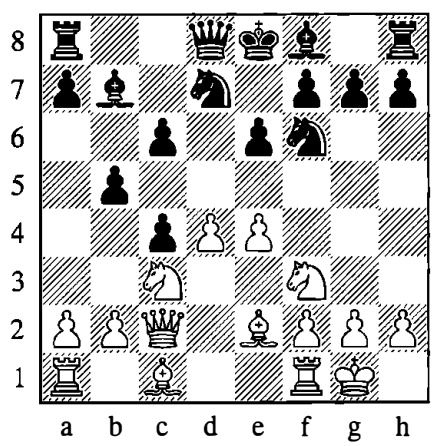


This aggressive approach is not very popular nowadays, but it certainly requires accurate knowledge from Black to ensure that White does not obtain a serious initiative.

5...b5

I would like to quickly deal with the minor alternatives **A) 6.♕c2** and **B) 6.a4**, before concentrating on the main line of **C) 6.e5**.

A) 6.♕c2 e6 7.♗e2 ♗b7 8.0–0 ♘bd7



The position that has arisen closely resembles the Moscow Variation which has been so popular in recent years, but there is one important difference: Black has not committed his pawn structure on the kingside with ...h6 and ...g5.

9.♗g5

Another line is 9.♗f4 ♗e7 10.♖ad1, when I like the following example: 10...0–0 11.♘e5 ♘xe5 12.♗xe5 ♕a5 13.♗f3 ♖fd8 14.♖fe1 ♖d7 and White did not manage to create anything to compensate for the pawn deficit in Timon Piote – Grischuk, Ubeda 2000.

9...h6 10.♗h4 g5!

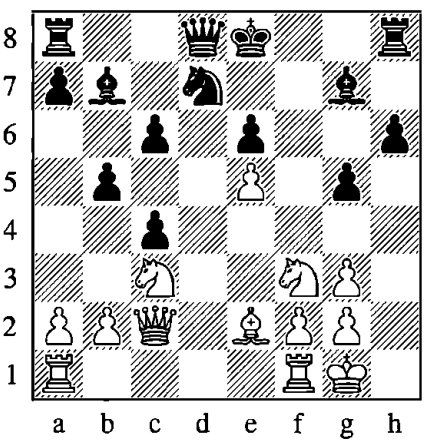
This is a good time for this advance as Black is able to exchange White's dark-squared bishop.

11.♗g3 ♘h5 12.d5

This is White's only attempt to benefit from his development advantage, but Black easily keeps everything under control.

The inclusion of 12.a4 a6 would not make much difference.

12...♘xg3 13.hxg3 ♗g7 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.e5



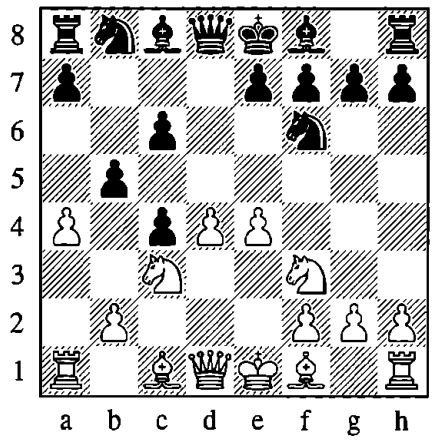
15...♕e7!

White has no compensation for being a pawn down. The following example provides a good illustration.

16.a4 a6 17.♘d4 0–0 18.♗g4 ♘xe5 19.♗xe6† ♔h8∓

Black was much better in Adler – Bergstrom, Sweden 1996.

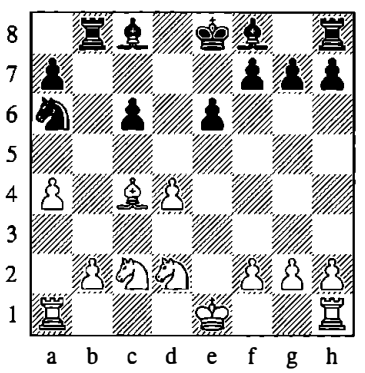
B) 6.a4



This is a more serious alternative to the main line.

6...b4 7.♘a2 ♘xe4 8.♗xc4

In the event of 8.♘xb4 Black has a simple but forcing line: 8...♕a5 9.♗d2 ♘xd2 10.♕xd2 e6 11.♘c2 ♕xd2† 12.♘xd2 ♘a6 13.♗xc4 ♖b8∓



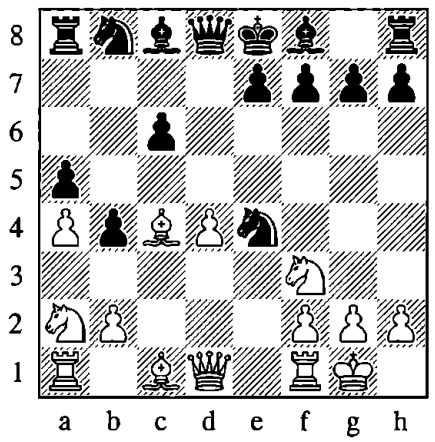
White has restored the material balance, but Black kept an obvious positional superiority in Savva – L.B. Hansen, Heraklio 2007.

8...a5

8...e6 is a decent alternative.

9.0–0

I also checked the logical 9.♘e5, when Black has 9...♘d6N 10.♗b3 ♗a6. Black need not be concerned about 11.♕f3 e6 12.♘xc6 ♕b6 13.♘xb8 ♖xb8, since despite regaining the pawn White stands much worse.



In Stark – Zychowski, Sautron 2009, Black now blundered with the horrible 9...♗g4?, allowing 10.♗xf7† followed by ♘e5†. Instead I developed the following line of play:

9...♘d6N 10.♗b3

After 10.♗d3 Black continues with 10...♗e6, first transferring the bishop to d5 and then completing his development.

10...e6 11.♗f4

I have to admit that White keeps a certain amount of compensation, but Black's position remains sound.

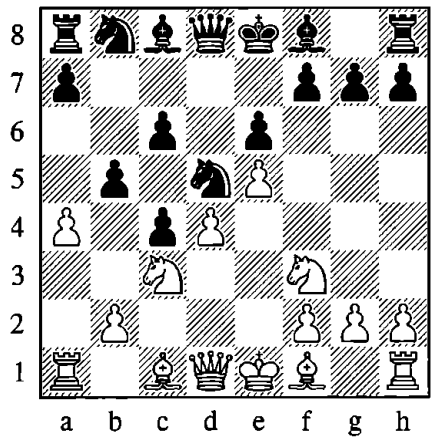
11...♘f5 12.♘c1 ♗d6

A possible continuation goes:

13.♘d3 ♗xf4 14.♘xf4 ♕d6 15.g3 ♘d7

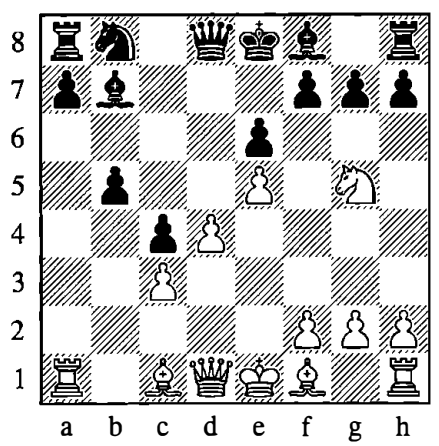
The onus is on White to prove that his compensation is sufficient.

C) 6.e5 ♘d5 7.a4 e6



I consider this position to be the tabiya for this variation. There have been a large number of games with both **C1) 8.axb5** and **C2) 8.♘g5**.

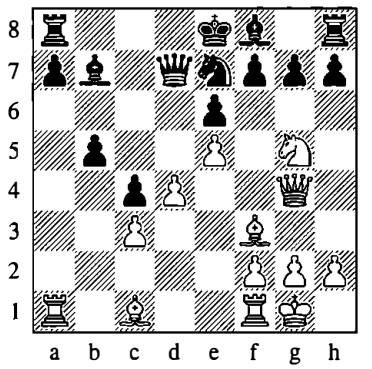
C1) 8.axb5 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 cxb5 10.♘g5 ♗b7



11.♕h5

This is by far White's first choice.

The most serious alternative is 11.♕g4 and now I like: 11...♕d7 12.♗e2 ♘c6! Aiming for the ...♘e7-d5 manoeuvre. 13.0–0 ♘e7 14.♗f3 This position arose in Kryakvin – Dragomarezkij, Internet 2006. Black should now play:

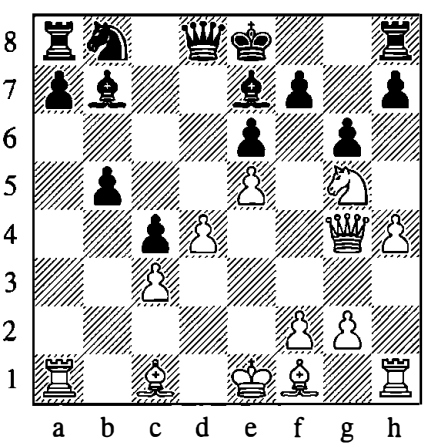


14...h5!N 15.♕f4 (In the event of 15.♕h3 ♘d5 16.♘e4 a5∓ Black keeps everything under control.) 15...♘d5 16.♗xd5 ♗xd5 17.♗a3 ♗xa3 18.♖xa3 a5 19.♖fa1 ♕c7 Black is better.

11...g6 12.♕g4 ♗e7

White has two main moves: **C11) 13.h4** and **C12) 13.♗e2**.

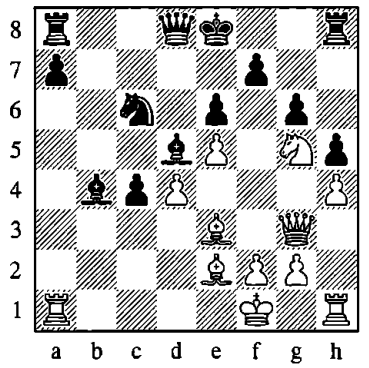
C11) 13.h4



Black has a simple way to meet this.

13...h5 14.♕f4

Another direction is 14.♕g3 ♗d5! 15.♗e2 and now best is 15...b4! 16.cxb4 ♘c6 17.♗e3 ♗xb4† 18.♔f1 Uwira – Overbeck, Idstein 2009. Black should now play:

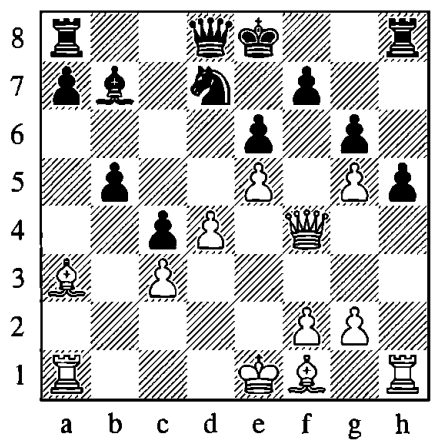


18...♘e7!N 19.♕f4 ♘f5∓ with a clear advantage.

14...♗xg5 15.hxg5 ♘d7 16.♗a3

This is probably White's best try.

16.♖h4 has been more popular, but after 16...♘b6 17.g4 ♘d5 18.♕g3 ♔d7!∓ Black was clearly better in Dino – Komarov, Belfort 1990.

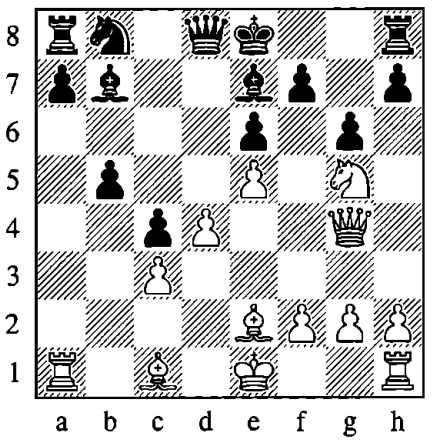


All five games from this position featured 16...♘b6, but this allows 17.♗c5. In my opinion it makes sense for Black to play the flexible:

16...a5N 17.♗d6 ♘b6

Black can think not only about ...♘d5, but may also consider playing ...♘c8-e7-f5. I do not see any real compensation for White for being a pawn down.

C12) 13.♗e2



13...♗d5

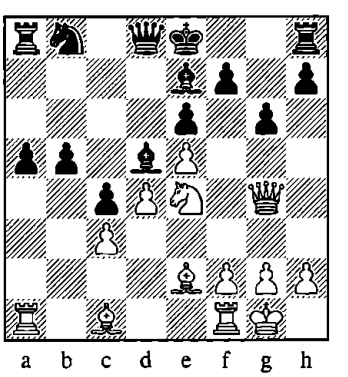
This seems to me the most flexible move, though I believe 13...♘d7 is a reasonable alternative.

14.♗f3

White has three other options:

14.h4 h5 15.♕g3 transposes to the note to White's 14th move in C11 above.

14.0–0 a5! Black keeps his options open for his knight, ready to develop it to c6 or d7. (14...♘c6 15.♘e4 is less convincing.) 15.♘e4 This position occurred in Sapis – Comp Mephisto, Jaroslawiec 1997. Black should now play:



15...h5!N 16.♕f4 ♘d7 and I don't see any ideas for White.

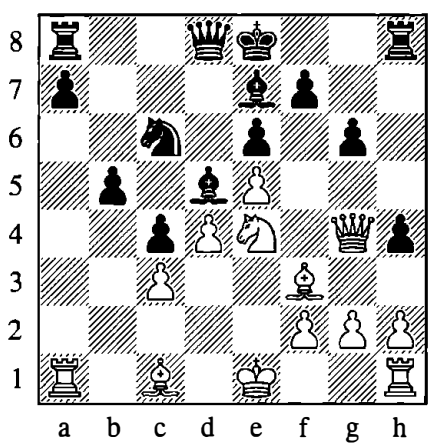
14.♘e4 h5! Not only chasing the queen away from a good square, but also preventing the ♗h6 move. 15.♕f4 a5 Now Black is ready to meet ♗a3 with ...b4. 16.♗f3 ♘d7 As in the previous line, White has no way to develop his initiative, so he tried the desperate 17.♘d6† ♗xd6 18.♗xd5 in Manninen – Hector, Ostersund 1992, which should have led to a big advantage for Black: 18...♗xe5!N 19.dxe5 exd5∓

14...h5 15.♕g3 ♘c6 16.♘e4

16.0–0 b4 17.♘e4 occurred in Wendt – Weigel, Fuerth 1999, and Black could have played 17...h4N 18.♕g4 ♔f8∓ transposing to our main line.

16...h4 17.♕g4

This was Sjodin – Khenkin, Stockholm 1996. Black can now achieve a very promising position:



17...b4N 18.0–0 ♔f8∓

C2) 8.♘g5

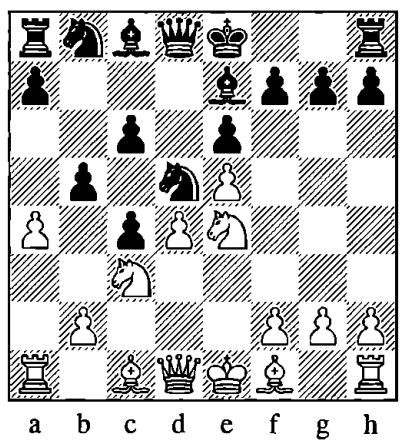
This is a popular attempt to seize the initiative.

8...♗e7

White generally chooses between **C21) 9.♘ge4** and **C22) 9.h4**.

First though, it's important to mention that 9.♕h5? fails to 9...g6 10.♕h6 ♘b4! 11.♕g7 ♖f8, and White's position collapsed in Podzielny – Strating, Gent 1993, as he has no reasonable defence against the threat of ...♘c2†.

C21) 9.♘ge4



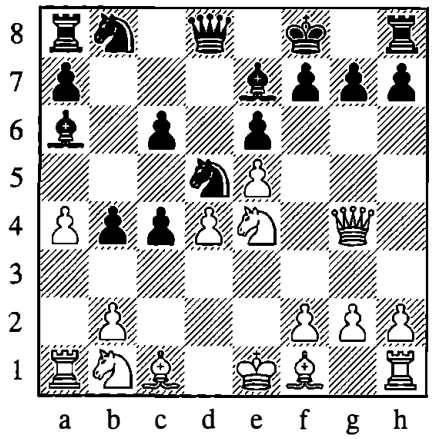
This looks logical, though White's other knight will now be forced to retreat.

9...b4! 10.♘b1 ♗a6

I cannot find any reason why Black should refrain from this natural move, even though it was not the choice in the following top-level encounter: 10...f5 11.exf6 ♘xf6 12.♘xf6† ♗xf6 13.♗xc4 ♕xd4 14.♕h5† g6 15.♕e2 ♕e5 with balanced play, Aronian – Kramnik, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2007.

11.♕g4 ♔f8

Black has the simple idea of carrying out ...c5 at a suitable moment, and it's not clear what White can do to oppose this. The following is a good example of how play may develop.



12.♗e2 ♘d7

A good alternative is 12...h5 13.♕f3 Prusikin – Cordts, Bad Wiessee 2002, and now 13...c5N would give Black a clear plus.

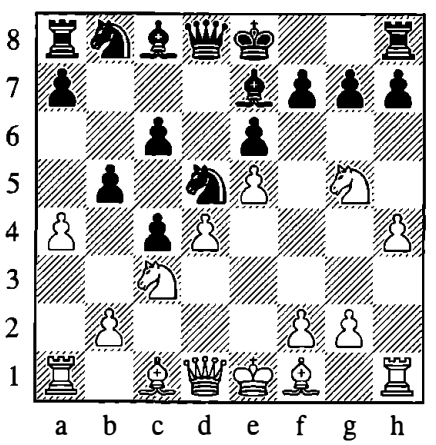
13.0–0 c5 14.dxc5 ♘xe5

Although this is promising, 14...h5!N is even stronger.

15.♕g3 ♘d3

Black was clearly better in Sosonko – Hübner, Brussels 1987.

C22) 9.h4



The most popular continuation.

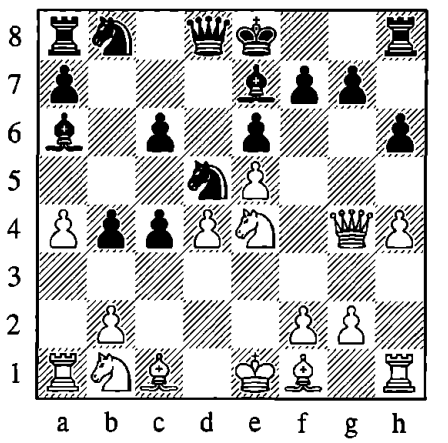
9...h6 10.♘ge4

Compared to line C21, it's a slightly different story – the insertion of the moves h4 and ...h6 is in White's favour as Black's kingside pawn structure is more vulnerable.

10...b4 11.♘b1 ♗a6

There are now two directions for White: **C221) 12.♕g4** and **C222) 12.♘bd2**.

C221) 12.♕g4

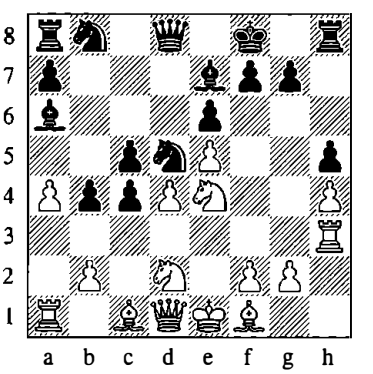


12...♔f8

This is my preference, though 12...g6 also looks reasonable.

13.♘bd2

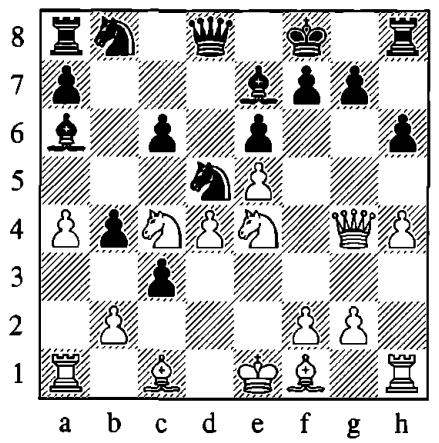
One games went 13.♖h3, which allowed Black to immediately strike in the centre: 13...h5 14.♕d1 c5! 15.♘bd2 (15.♘xc5 leaves Black with a clear edge after 15...♗xc5 16.dxc5 ♘c6) Markos – Erdos, Austria 2011. Now the most convincing for Black is:



15...cxd4N 16.♗xc4 ♗b7 17.♘f3 ♕c7 18.♗e2 ♘c6 with advantage to Black.

13...c3 14.♘c4

Two games have reached this position, and in both of them Black captured the white knight on c4. That seems to me some kind of concession, and instead I prefer:



14...c5!N

This works beautifully for Black. Here are the relevant lines:

15.♘xc5

15.dxc5 ♘d7 is also better for Black.

15...♗xc5 16.dxc5 ♘c6 17.♘d6 ♘xe5 18.♕g3 ♗xf1 19.♔xf1 ♘c6

Black stands better, since White does not have full compensation for the pawn deficit.

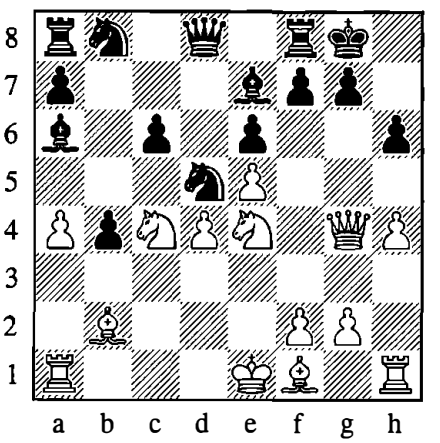
C222) 12.♘bd2 c3 13.♘c4 cxb2

I prefer this continuation to 13...♗xc4 14.♗xc4 cxb2 15.♗xb2, where White retains definite compensation.

14.♗xb2 0–0 15.♕g4

This has been White's only choice here.

In the event of 15.♖h3N Black should not be tempted by 15...♘f4, as after 16.♖g3 ♗xh4 17.♖g4 ♘g6 18.♘cd6 White keeps long-term compensation. Instead I recommend 15...♘d7, when 16.♕g4 transposes to our main line.



15...♘d7N

This is my new idea.

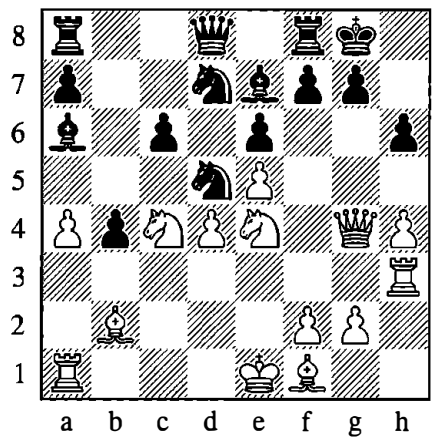
I find Black's other options much less convincing – both 15...♔h8 16.♖h3, which has occurred in three games, and 15...b3 as played in Zakharevich – Ulibin, Samara 2000, which can be met by 16.♘cd2!N.

16.♖h3

The most natural way to play for the initiative on the kingside. I also checked a couple of other moves:

16.♗d3?! ♘7b6 is obviously bad for White.

16.♗c1 ♔h8 (16...f5 is also worthy of consideration) 17.♕h5 f5! 18.♘g5 (Against 18.♘ed6 Black has the strong idea 18...♗xd6 19.♘xd6 ♗xf1 20.♔xf1 ♘7f6! with a clear advantage after 21.♘f7† ♖xf7 22.♕xf7 ♘g4.) 18...♕e8! 19.♕xe8 ♖fxe8 20.♘xe6 b3 21.♗d2 ♖ab8∓ White has regained the pawn, but Black's initiative may well prove decisive.



16...h5!

An important tactical trick, using the fact that the h-pawn is untouchable due to the ...♘f4 fork. This enables Black to easily neutralize White's initiative on the kingside, for instance:

17.♕f3 f5! 18.exf6 ♘7xf6 19.♘xf6† ♖xf6 20.♕e4 ♗xc4 21.♗xc4 ♕d6

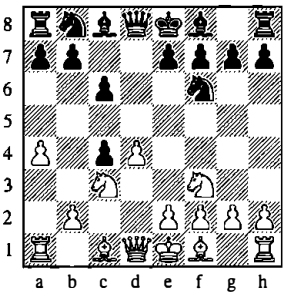
Black is clearly better.

Conclusion

With the aggressive 5.e4 b5 6.e5 ♘d5 7.a4, White is willing to sacrifice a pawn in order to seize the initiative on the kingside. Black must not underestimate this initiative, but must play accurately in order to contain it. However, by following the analysis in this chapter I believe that Black can face this challenge with confidence, and may look forward to emerging from the complications with excellent chances.



4...dxc4



5.a4

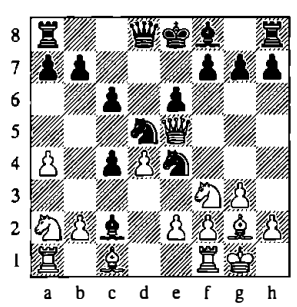
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4

5...♗f5

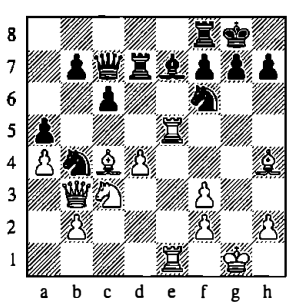
A) 6.g3	**274**
B) 6.♘h4 ♗c8	**275**
B1) 7.e4	**275**
B2) 7.e3 e5 8.♗xc4 exd4 9.exd4 ♗e7 10.0–0 0–0	**277**
B21) 11.h3	**277**
B22) 11.♘f3	**278**
B23) 11.♖e1 ♘a6	**279**
B231) 12.♗xa6	**279**
B232) 12.♗g5	**279**
B233) 12.♕b3	**281**

A) after 12.♕e5



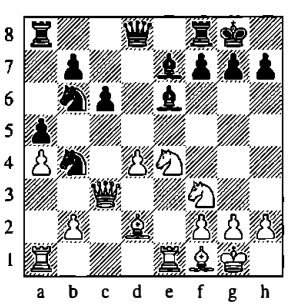
12...♘d6!N

B22) after 19.♗h4



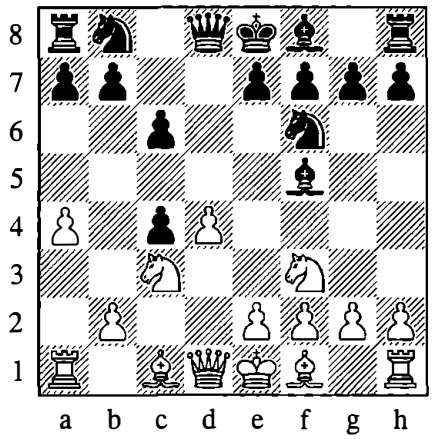
19...♘g4!N

B233) after 17.♕c3



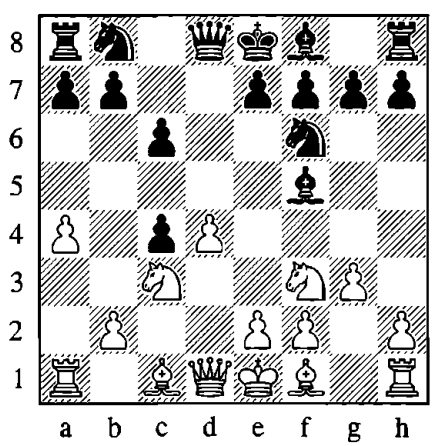
17...♘6d5N∓

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5



White's main moves are 6.e3, which is covered in Chapters 25-29, and 6.♘e5, which is the subject of Chapters 30-34. In this chapter I would like to take a brief look at **A) 6.g3** and then go on to **B) 6.♘h4**.

A) 6.g3



Trying to play in the style of the Catalan.

6...♘a6!

Simple and strong; the knight is heading for an excellent outpost on b4.

7.♗g2

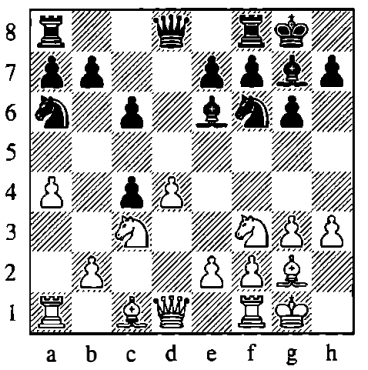
A logical alternative is to chase the bishop off the b1-h7 diagonal:

7.♘h4 ♗e6 8.♗g2 g6 9.0–0 ♗g7 10.♘f3

Another directions is 10.h3 ♕d7 11.♔h2 Stupak – Sriram, Beirut 2011, and here Black could have played the straightforward 11...♖d8! 12.♘f3 c5! 13.♗e3 ♘d5∓ with an obvious edge.

10...0–0 11.h3

This was Ivanisevic – Pikula, Mataruska Banja 2008. The following simple idea is strong:



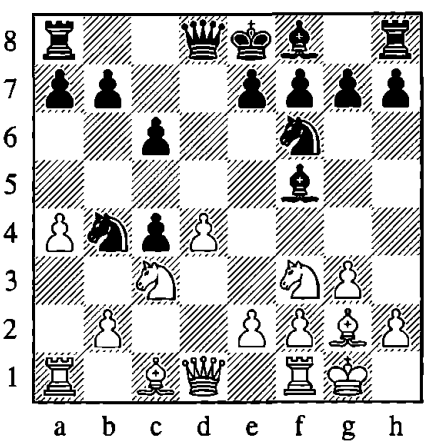
11...♕c8N 12.♘g5

12.♔h2 ♖d8 is also seriously better for Black.

12...♖d8 13.e4 ♘c5∓

Black has a clear advantage.

7...♘b4 8.0–0



8...♗c2!

An unpleasant surprise for White, seriously damaging his coordination.

9.♕d2

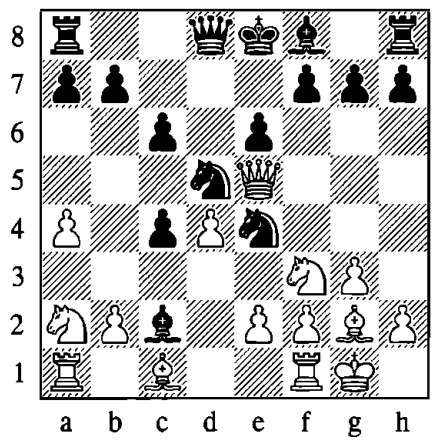
9.♕e1 ♗b3! 10.♖b1 e6 11.♗g5 ♗e7 is also excellent for Black.

9...e6 10.♘a2 ♘e4! 11.♕f4

11.♕e1 is not an improvement: 11...♘xa2 12.♖xa2 a5 13.♗f4 ♗b4 14.♕c1 ♗b3 15.♖a1 0–0∓ and Black is clearly better.

11...♘d5 12.♕e5

This position arose in Shabalov – Schwartzman, Chicago 1994. Black should now play:



12...♘d6!N 13.♘e1 ♗f5

The white queen is in trouble.

14.g4 ♗xg4 15.e4 ♘e7 16.♘c3 ♘g6 17.♕g3 ♗h5∓

B) 6.♘h4

Quite a fashionable choice.

6...♗c8

This is my main recommendation, but for those who would like another option, 6...e6 is covered in the next chapter.

I would just like to mention that 6...♗d7, which I once employed successfully, is problematic in view of the following line: 7.e4! e6 8.♗xc4 ♘xe4 9.♘xe4 ♕xh4 10.♕f3 ♗b4† 11.♔f1 h6 12.♗f4 0–0 13.♗e5 with powerful compensation for White.

The independent lines for White here are **B1) 7.e4** and **B2) 7.e3**.

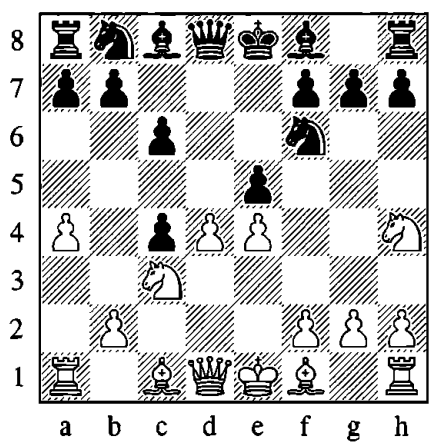
7.♘f3 is of course possible, and after 7...♗f5 8.♘h4, Black may either repeat with 8...♗c8 or transpose into the following chapter with 8...e6.

B1) 7.e4

Theory considers this dubious in view of the following thematic tactical response:

7...e5!

It seems that White is now unable to keep the balance.



8.♗xc4

The most challenging line. Other options are:

8.dxe5 ♕xd1† 9.♘xd1 (9.♔xd1? ♘g4∓ is bad for White) 9...♘xe4 10.♗xc4 ♗b4† 11.♔e2 ♘d7 12.f4 ♘b6 13.♗d3 ♘c5 14.♗c2 ♗e6

15.♘e3 Black's play was excellent in Tarlev – Kharchenko, Alushta 2007, and now the natural 15...0–0–0!N would secure his advantage.

8.♘f3 exd4 9.♕xd4

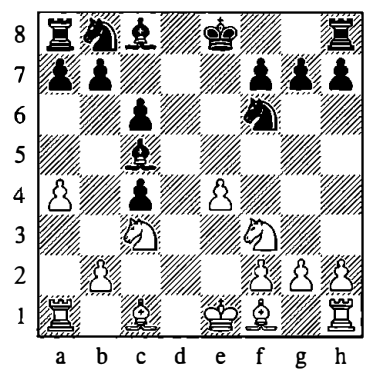
9.♘xd4 is hardly satisfactory: 9...♗c5 10.♗e3 ♕e7! 11.♗xc4 This position arose in Shumiakina – Mashinskaya, St Petersburg 2003, and now the obvious 11...♘g4!N leads to an advantage for Black.

9...♕xd4 10.♘xd4 ♗c5

Black has the better game already.

11.♘f3

This is relatively best, but Black can respond powerfully:



11...♗e6N 12.♘g5 ♘g4! 13.♘xe6 fxe6 14.♗xc4 ♘xf2 15.♖f1 ♖f8 16.♗g5 ♘d7 17.♗xe6 ♘e5 18.♔e2 ♘fd3∓

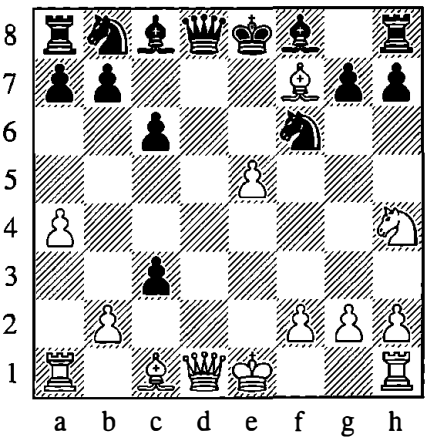
White has regained the pawn, but Black maintains an obvious positional advantage.

8...exd4 9.e5 dxc3!

It would certainly be risky to enter into these complications without precise knowledge, so it is no surprise that in most games Black has refrained from this capture.

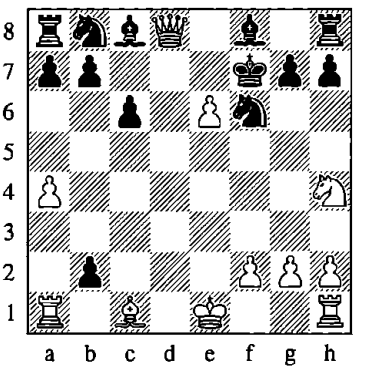
10.♗xf7†

Objectively, it may be better to play 10.♕xd8† ♔xd8 11.exf6 gxf6 12.bxc3 ♗e6∓, but White can hardly be happy being a pawn down and having to fight for a draw.



10...♔xf7 11.♕xd8 cxb2! 12.♕c7†

In the event of 12.e6† we have to capture with the king!



12...♔xe6!! (12...♗xe6? runs into 13.♕c7† ♘bd7 14.♗xb2 and Black is lost) 13.♕xc8† ♘bd7∓ with a clear advantage.

12...♔e6! 13.♕xc8†

A key point is 13.♗xb2 ♘a6!∓ and the white queen is trapped on c7.

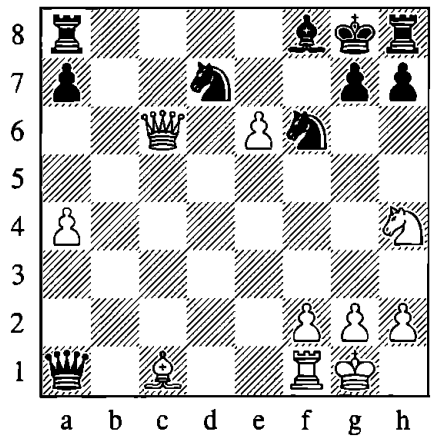
13...♘bd7 14.♕xb7

After 14.♕xd7† ♘xd7 15.♗xb2 ♗b4† 16.♔e2 ♘xe5 17.f4 ♘c4 18.♗xg7 ♖he8, Black is much better.

14...bxa1=♕ 15.♕xc6† ♔f7 16.e6† ♔g8 17.0–0

This was Larsen – Teschner, Wageningen

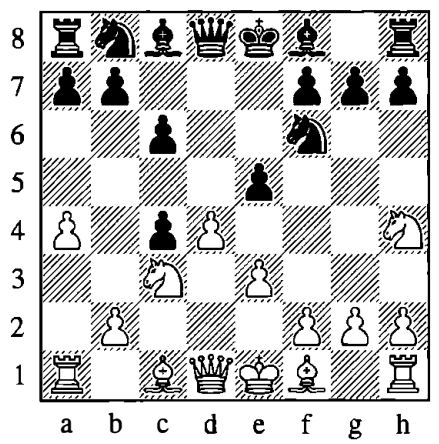
1957, and here Black missed an opportunity to decide the game:



17...♖d8!N 18.♕c7 ♕e5 19.♕xd8 ♕xe6

Black has a decisive material advantage.

B2) 7.e3 e5

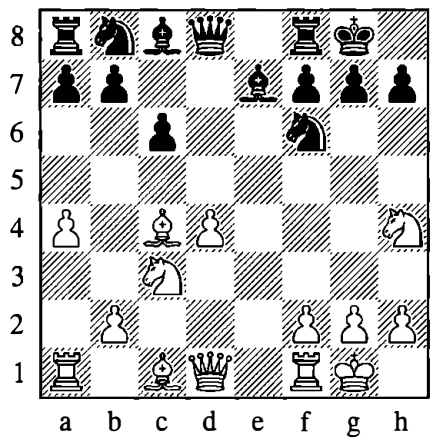


The key move in Black's strategy.

8.♗xc4

Seldom does 8.dxe5 work well for White, and here is no exception: 8...♕xd1† 9.♘xd1 ♗b4†! 10.♗d2 ♗xd2† 11.♔xd2 ♘e4† 12.♔e1 ♗e6 13.f4 ♘a6 14.♘f2 This occurred in the well-known world championship game, Alekhine – Euwe, Netherlands (15) 1935. Although Black did fine in that game, here I consider 14...♘ec5N to be most convincing, for example: 15.f5 ♗d5 16.e4 ♘xe4 17.♘xe4 ♗xe4 18.♗xc4 ♖d8∓ and Black maintains an advantage.

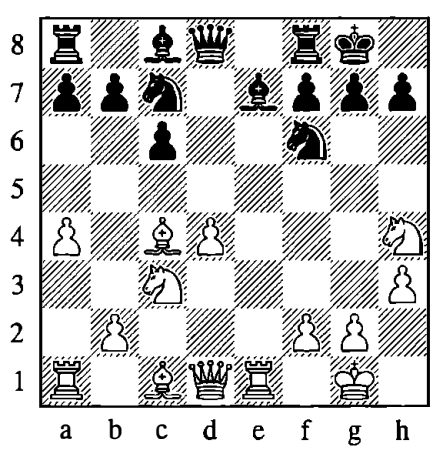
8...exd4 9.exd4 ♗e7 10.0–0 0–0



White sometimes plays **B21) 11.h3** or **B22) 11.♘f3**, though **B23) 11.♖e1** is by far the first choice.

B21) 11.h3 ♘a6 12.♖e1 ♘c7

12...♘d5!?N 13.♘f3 ♘ab4 is also worth considering.



13.♘f3

Or 13.♗g5 ♗e6 14.♗xe6 ♘xe6, and now 15.♗e3 ♖e8 was absolutely harmless in Turova – Bensdorp, Dresden 2004. The tempting 15.♘f5N looks critical, but Black has an adequate response in 15...♘d5! 16.♘xe7† ♘xe7 17.♕g4 ♘xg5 18.♕xg5 ♖e8 with balanced play.

13...♗e6 14.♗d3 ♖e8 15.♘g5 ♗d5!?

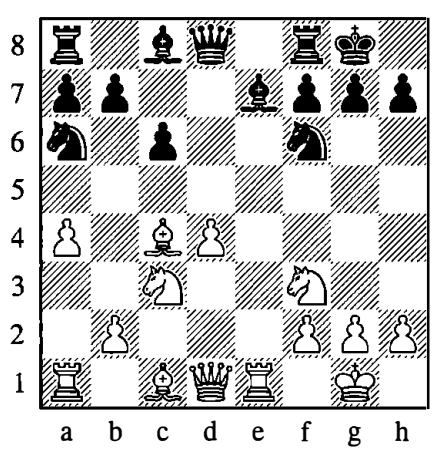
I like this, though Black has various other decent alternatives.

16.♘xd5 ♘cxd5 17.♘f3

White has failed to achieve anything from the opening, and a draw was agreed in Psakhis – Miles, Benasque 1995. I think the final position would be easier to play for Black in a practical game.

B22) 11.♘f3 ♘a6 12.♖e1

This position commonly arises from 11.♖e1 ♘a6 12.♘f3.



12...♘b4

12...♗g4 is premature: 13.h3 ♗xf3 (13...♗h5 allows the thematic 14.g4 ♗g6 15.♘e5 and White has the initiative.) 14.♕xf3 ♘b4 15.♗b3 ♖e8 16.♗g5 and with his bishop pair White is better, I. Ibragimov – Wojtkiewicz, Connecticut 2004.

13.♗g5

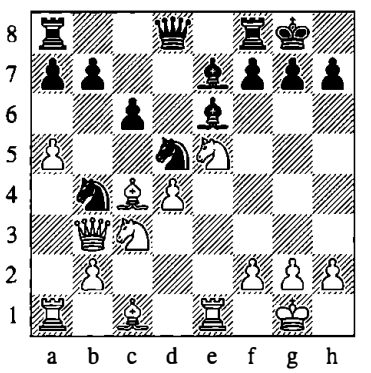
White has tried two other moves here:

13.♕e2 ♖e8 14.♗g5 ♗f5 15.♘e5 ♘fd5 This thematic simplifying idea equalizes easily. 16.♗xe7 ♖xe7 17.♕f3 ♗e6 and Black already had the more comfortable position in Braun – Naumann, Bad Woerishofen 2008.

13.♘e5 ♘fd5 14.a5

I also examined 14.♕b3, when Black may respond actively: 14...♗f5! 15.♘e4 f6 (15...a5 16.♗d2 ♕b6 17.♖ad1 ♖fe8 is solid and okay for Black) 16.♘f3 ♔h8 17.♗d2 a5 and Black has a comfortable game.

14...♗e6 15.♕b3



15...♗f5!?N

I like this new idea, because after 15...♕c8 16.♗d2 b5 17.axb6 axb6 18.♖ac1 White retained serious pressure in Babula – Miton, Czech Republic 2011.

16.♘e4 f6 17.♗d2 ♔h8 18.♘f3 b5

This seems to be the right way.

19.axb6 axb6 20.♖xa8 ♕xa8

The position is more or less equal.

21.♘h4 ♗d7 22.♘g3 b5 23.♗xb5!? cxb5 24.♘hf5

The tricky idea fails to make an impression on the black position.

24...♕a4! 25.♕xa4 bxa4 26.♘xe7 ♖b8=

The weakness of the b2-pawn makes the position drawish.

13...♗g4 14.♕b3?!

An interesting but risky decision.

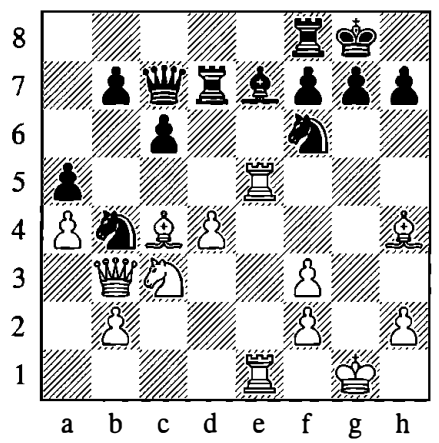
14.♕e2N is an important alternative. Black should not be afraid to play 14...♖e8, as after 15.♗xf7† ♔xf7 16.♘e5† ♔f8 17.♘xg4 ♘xg4 18.♗xe7† ♕xe7 19.♕f3† ♕f6 20.♕xg4, he easily regains the pawn by 20...♘c2! 21.♖xe8† ♖xe8 22.♖d1 ♘xd4 with equality.

14...♗xf3 15.gxf3

15.♗xf6 ♗xf6 16.♕xb4 ♗h5!∓ was certainly not White's intention.

15...a5 16.♖ad1 ♕c7 17.♖e5 ♖ad8 18.♖de1 ♖d7! 19.♗h4

This all occurred in Eljanov – Ivanchuk, Nalchik 2009, and here Black missed an elegant tactical trick:



19...♘g4!N

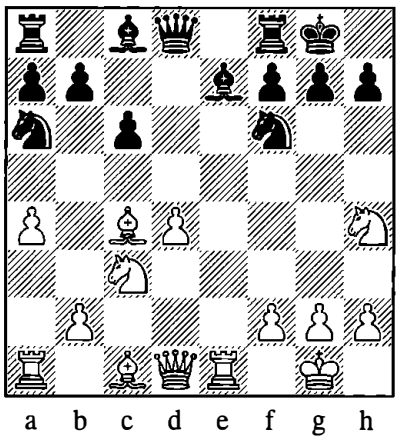
White now has nothing better than:

20.♗g3 ♘xe5 21.dxe5

Black can neutralize White's initiative by giving back the exchange.

21...♕d8 22.e6 fxe6 23.♗xe6† ♔h8 24.♗xd7 ♕xd7∓

B23) 11.♖e1 ♘a6



We shall now look at **B231) 12.♗xa6**, **B232) 12.♗g5** and **B233) 12.♕b3**. Other options are 12.h3, transposing to line B21, and 12.♘f3, transposing to line B22.

B231) 12.♗xa6 bxa6

Damaging the black pawn structure in this way can be a good idea when White's a-pawn has not moved, but here White's weaknesses along the b-file offer Black good play.

13.♘f3 ♗e6 14.♗g5

14.♕c2 was tried in Barsov – Ansell, London 1999, and here the natural 14...♘d5N is simple and good: 15.♘e4 ♘b4 16.♕c3 a5 17.♗d2 ♖e8∞ and Black could soon be better.

14...h6 15.♗h4 ♖e8 16.a5 ♗g4

If Black wants a more complex game, he can play: 16...♖b8N 17.♘e5 ♕c7∞

17.h3 ♗xf3 18.♕xf3 ♕xd4 19.♕xc6 ♕xh4 20.♖xe7 ♖xe7 21.♕xa8† ♔h7

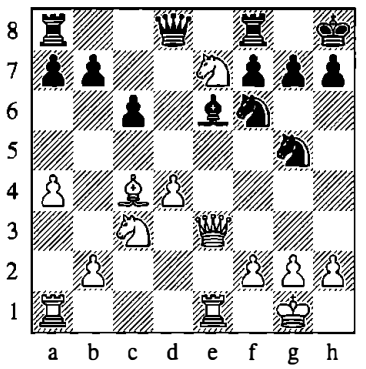
The position was equal in Epishin – I. Sokolov, Mainz (rapid) 2003.

B232) 12.♗g5 ♘c7 13.♕b3

White's other main option is:
13.♕f3 ♘e6

Black can afford to allow the white knight onto the f5-square.

14.♘f5 ♘xg5 15.♘xe7† ♔h8 16.♕e3 ♗e6!



17.b3?!

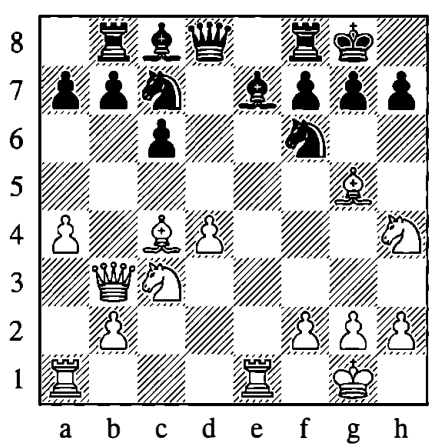
An unfortunate decision that remained unpunished in Arkell – Ansell, Oxford 1998. 17.♕xg5N ♗xc4 18.♖e3 would have been better, with complex but balanced play, for instance: 18...♗e6 19.♖g3 ♘e8 20.♕h4 h6 21.♖e1 ♘f6 22.♖xe6 fxe6 23.♘g6† ♔h7 24.♘xf8† ♕xf8=

17...♘h3†!N 18.gxh3 ♕xe7

Black is obviously preferable due to White's damaged pawn structure.

13...♖b8

I like this, although 13...♘fd5 looks a decent alternative.



14.♘f3

White has tried two other moves:

14.♖ad1 ♗g4!

One of the key points of 13...♖b8 was to allow the development of this bishop; Black should not restrict himself to just the ...♘fd5 simplifying idea.

15.f3 ♗d7 16.♕c2

White already has the opportunity to go wrong: 16.f4?! b5! 17.axb5 cxb5 18.♗f1 ♗e6 19.♕c2 Legky – Graf, Odessa 1991, and now 19...b4N 20.♘e4 b3! 21.♕c1 ♗g4∓ would secure Black an edge.

16...♘fd5 17.♗xe7 ♘xe7 18.♗a2 ♘ed5

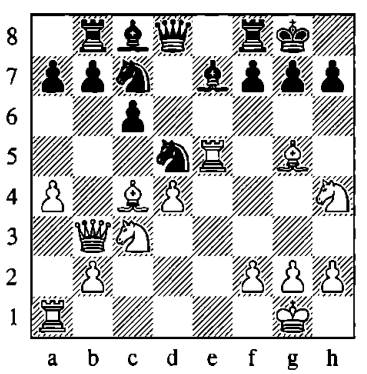
Black was comfortable in Shipov – Wojtkiewicz, Internet 2001, although 18...♗e6!?N could also be considered.

14.♖e5

Quite a tricky move. In my opinion Black should react with:

14...♘fd5N

After 14...♗e6 15.♗xe6 ♘xe6 16.♘f5 ♘xg5 17.♘xe7† ♔h8 18.d5± White had some initiative in Cornette – Geenen, Aix-les-Bains 2011.



15.♖xe7!?

A tempting exchange sacrifice, though Black can cope with it.

After 15.♗xe7 ♘xe7 16.♘f3 ♗e6 17.♖ae1 ♕d7, I cannot see White creating anything.

15...♘xe7 16.♖e1

16.♕a3 is weaker: 16...♖e8 17.♘e4 ♗e6 18.♕g3 (after 18.♘d6 ♗xc4 19.♘xe8 ♕xe8 20.♗xe7 ♕d7 Black is better) 18...♗xc4 19.♘f6† ♔h8 20.♘xe8 ♕xe8 21.♕xc7 ♘d5∓ and Black enjoys a slight pull.

16...♗e6 17.♘f5

The point.

17...♖e8 18.♘xe7† ♖xe7 19.♗xe7 ♕xe7 20.♗xe6 ♘xe6

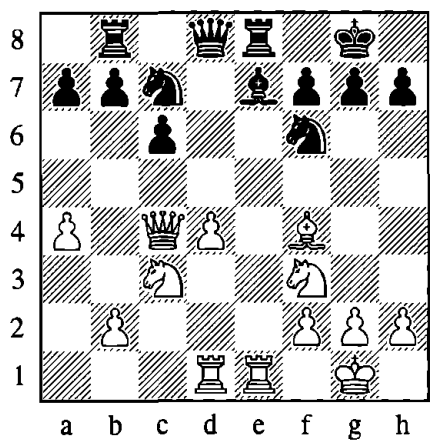
After all the simplifications, Black does not have any problems. To avoid being worse, White is obliged to play:

21.d5 cxd5 22.♘xd5 ♕d6 23.♖d1 ♕e5=

14...♗e6 15.♖ad1 ♗xc4

15...♘fd5!? could also be considered.

16.♕xc4 ♖e8 17.♗f4



17...♖c8

Black also equalized comfortably with 17...♗d6 18.♘e5 ♘fd5 19.♗g3 f6 20.♘d3 ♗xg3 21.hxg3 ♔h8= in Najer – Holzke, Plovdiv 2012.

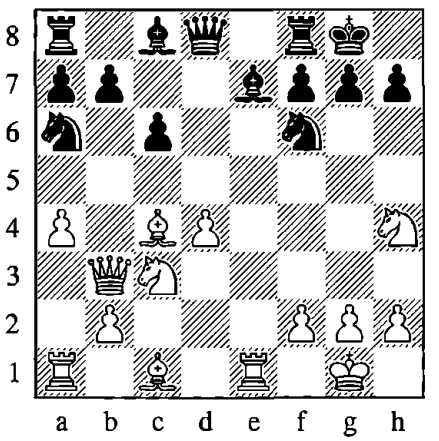
18.♗xc7 ♕xc7 19.♖e2

This was Pixton – D. Fernandez, Dallas 2002, and now I recommend the simple:

19...♗d6N

This secures a pleasant position for Black.

B233) 12.♕b3



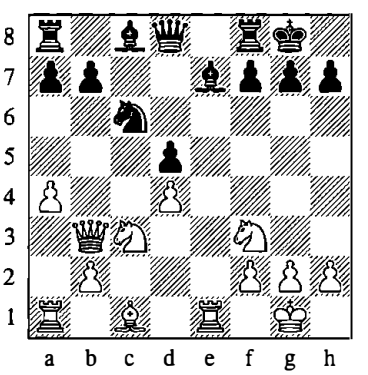
12...♘d5

12...♘c7 13.♘f3 is promising for White.

13.♘f3 ♘ab4 14.♗d2

Needless to say, White can hardly hope for any advantage with:

14.♗xd5?! cxd5 15.♘a2 ♘c6 16.♘c3



16...♗e6N

This gives Black chances to fight for the advantage.

In Rojo Huerta – Perez Rodriguez, Madrid 2003, Black went for the repetition with 16...♘b4.

17.♕xb7

I can only guess that Black was worried by this pawn grab, and missed that it can be met by:

17...♖b8!

Instead 17...♘b4 18.♗g5! is unclear.

18.♕a6

After 18.♕xc6 ♖b6 the white queen is trapped.

18...♕d7

Black has great positional compensation.

14...a5

Black has a sound position. The only game from here continued:

15.♘e4

15.♗xd5 cxd5 16.♘b5 ♗f5 (16...♗d7 17.♘e5 ♗c6 is a more solid approach) 17.♗xb4 ♗xb4 18.♖e5 g6 19.♖xd5 ♗e6 20.♖xd8 ♗xb3 and the bishop pair offers ample compensation for the pawn.

15...♘b6

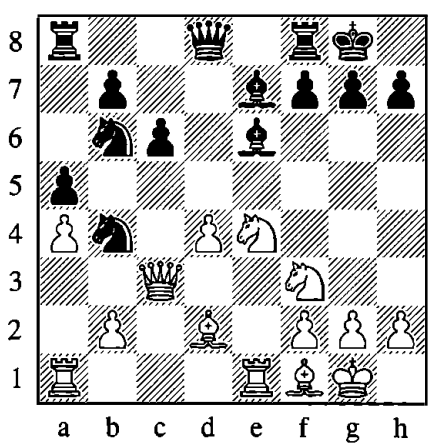
15...♗f5 also looks fine for Black.

16.♗f1

Too passive; 16.♘c5 would still keep equality.

16...♗e6 17.♕c3

This happened in Jankovic – Van Wely, Aix les Bains 2012, and now Black should play:



17...♘6d5N∓

Black would enjoy the better game.

Conclusion

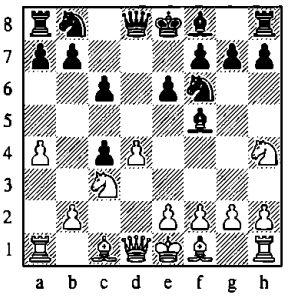
Meeting the fashionable 6.♘h4 with 6...♗c8 challenges White to find something other than repeating the position with 7.♘f3.

The overambitious 7.e4 is strongly met by 7...e5!. Provided Black is familiar with a few tactical variations, he has every chance of claiming an advantage.

After the more restrained 7.e3, the key move for Black is again 7...e5. This typically leads to positions in which White has an isolated queen's pawn, while Black has a solid set-up and can count on obtaining a fair share of the chances.



4...dxc4



6.♘h4 e6

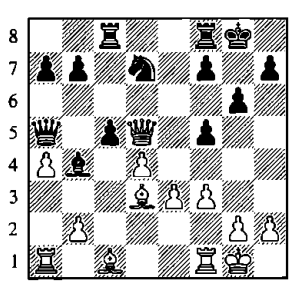
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘h4 e6 7.♘xf5 exf5 8.e3 ♗b4 9.♗xc4

9...0–0

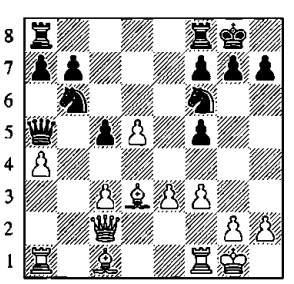
A) 10.0–0 ♘bd7 **284**
A1) 11.f3 **284**
A2) 11.♕b3 **285**
B) 10.♕c2 **286**

A1) note to 13.d5



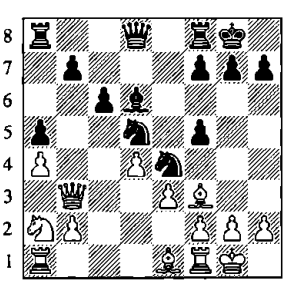
16...♘b6!N

A1) after 15.bxc3



15...c4!N

A2) after 16.♗e1



16...♖a6!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘h4 e6

Having looked at 6...♗c8 in the previous chapter, I can propose this move as an alternative which avoids giving the opponent the option of an early repetition.

7.♘xf5

Postponing the capture of the bishop doesn't make much sense and only allows additional options for Black: 7.e3 ♗d3 (Simplest, though 7...♗g4 8.f3 ♗h5 9.♗xc4 ♗b4 followed by ...c5 is also interesting.) 8.♗xd3 cxd3 9.♕xd3 This was Gavrikov – Tukmakov, Mazatlan 1988; after 9...c5N it's not clear what the white knight is doing on h4.

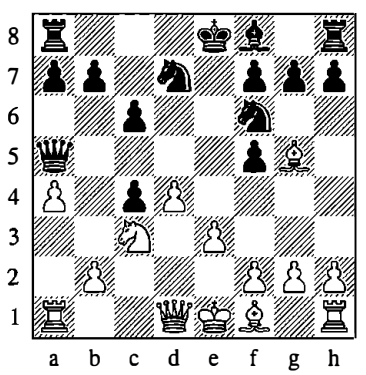
7...exf5 8.e3

Developing the dark-squared bishop outside the pawn chain is harmless:

8.♗g5 ♘bd7

8...♗b4 9.e3 ♕a5 10.♗xf6 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 ♕xc3† 12.♔e2 gxf6 13.g3 was played in Tregubov – Kasimdzhanov, New Delhi/Teheran 2000, but it doesn't really appeal to me.

9.e3 ♕a5



Black threatens 10...♘e4, so White must make the following exchange.

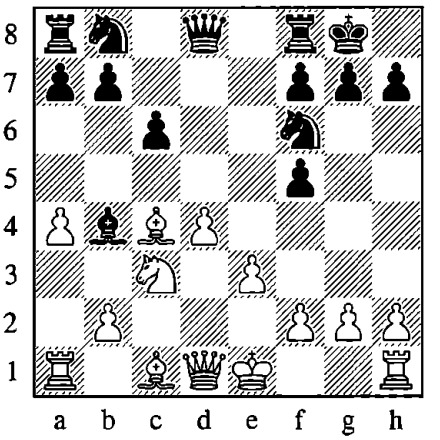
10.♗xf6 ♘xf6 11.♗xc4 ♗d6

Black has a comfortable position. A good example from here is:

12.♕b3 ♕c7 13.♖c1 0–0 14.h3 ♖ae8 15.0–0 f4 16.exf4 ♗xf4∓

It is White who is fighting for equality, Umansky – Kuporosov, Gorky 1989.

8...♗b4 9.♗xc4 0–0

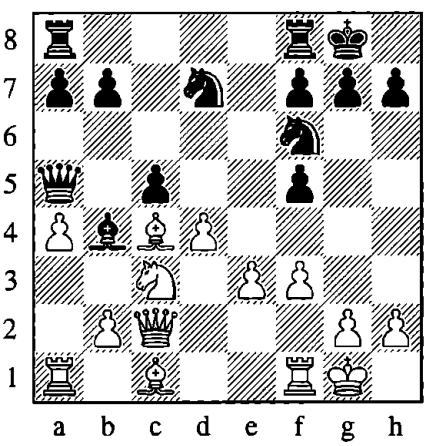


White now chooses between **A) 10.0–0** and **B) 10.♕c2**.

A) 10.0–0 ♘bd7

White's most popular option here is 11.♕c2, after which 11...g6 transposes to line B below. Besides this, White has two other directions: **A1) 11.f3** and **A2) 11.♕b3**.

A1) 11.f3 ♕a5 12.♕c2 c5



Black already has a fine game.

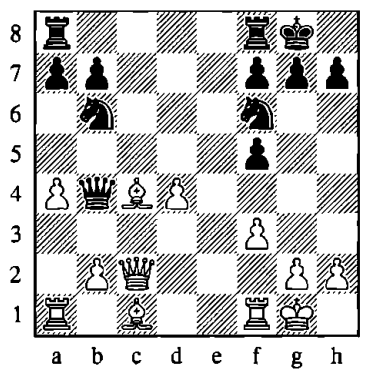
13.d5

I examined three other options for White:

13.♗b5 has been played in a few games, but with the simple 13...cxd4N 14.exd4 a6 15.♗d3 g6∓ Black would retain a slight positional superiority.

13.♘a2 cxd4 14.♘xb4 ♕xb4 15.exd4 ♘b6!

Black is just in time to capture the light-squared bishop.



16.b3

16.♗b3?! ♕xd4† 17.♕f2 ♕xf2† 18.♔xf2 ♖ac8 is better for Black, though White has decent chances to survive, Yusupov – Chandler, Linares 1988.

16...♘xc4 17.♕xc4

Black can now improve on Horak – Koch, email 2001.

17...♕b6N

The position is fairly balanced, though a touch more comfortable for Black.

13.♗d3 g6 14.♕b3

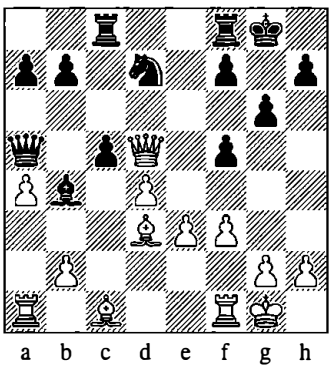
This is too slow and allows Black to obtain good play.

14...♖ac8 15.♘d5

15.♘b5 is White's best try, but even then Black can claim an edge: 15...cxd4 16.exd4 a6∓

15...♘xd5 16.♕xd5

This was Sadorra – Iotov, Dallas 2012, and Black should now play:



16...♘b6!N 17.♕xb7 c4! 18.♗e2 ♖fe8

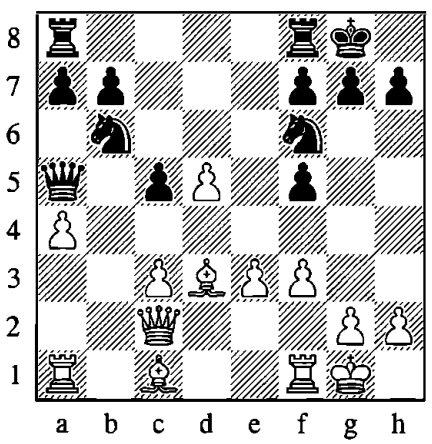
Black threatens ...♖e7, trapping the queen.

19.f4 ♗d2!

Black has an obvious advantage.

13...♘b6 14.♗d3 ♗xc3 15.bxc3

We have been following Kaidanov – Felgaer, Khanty-Mansiysk 2005. Black's best is now:

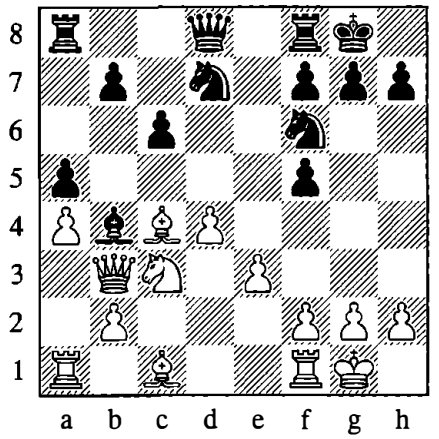


15...c4!N 16.♗xf5 g6 17.♗e4 ♘fxd5 18.♗d2 ♖ad8

Black has a comfortable position.

A2) 11.♕b3 a5

In this position I feel that Black's play is much easier.



12.♘a2

Another possible line is 12.♖d1 ♘b6 13.♗f1 h5!? 14.g3 h4 15.♗g2 Kanter – T. Petrosian, Legnica 2013, and now I recommend the simple 15...♕e7N 16.♗d2 ♖ad8∓ and Black maintains the better chances.

12...♗d6 13.♗d2

The b7-pawn appears to be poisoned:

13.♕xb7? ♖b8 14.♕xc6

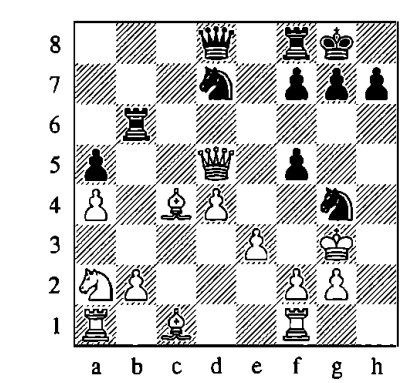
After 14.♕a6 Black has 14...♖b6 15.♕xa5 ♗xh2† 16.♔xh2 ♘g4† 17.♔g3 c5!–+ with a decisive attack.

14...♗xh2†! 15.♔xh2 ♘g4† 16.♔g3

Or 16.♔g1 ♕h4 17.♕c7 ♘de5! 18.♗xf7† ♔h8 and Black is winning, Astrom – Rylander, Haninge 1997.

16...♖b6! 17.♕d5

In Hernandez Carmenates – Cheparinov, Pontevedra 2004, Black missed a chance to decide the game.

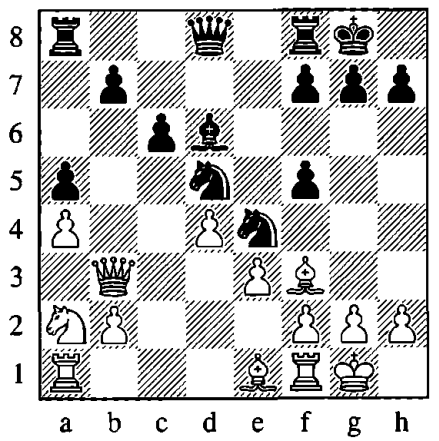


17...♕c7†!N 18.♔f3

18.f4 ♘df6 19.♕xf5 ♕xc4–+

18...♖d6 19.♕b5 ♖b8–+

13...♘b6 14.♗e2 ♘bd5 15.♗f3 ♘e4 16.♗e1



16...♖a6!N

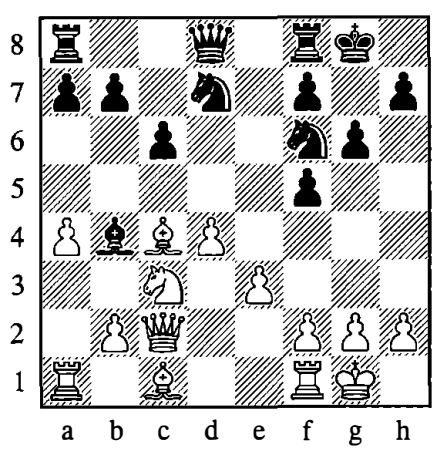
This seems even more challenging than 16...♕e7 17.♘c3 ♘b4, with a complex but roughly equal game, J. Cobb – N. Pert, Sunningdale 2007.

17.g3 ♖e8∓

I slightly prefer Black's position.

B) 10.♕c2 g6 11.0–0 ♘bd7

This position is also commonly reached by the move order 10.0–0 ♘bd7 11.♕c2 g6.



12.f3

12.♖d1 is considered to be relatively harmless: 12...♘b6 13.♗e2 (Or 13.♗a2 ♕d6 14.f3 Hoang Thanh Trang – Dembo, Budapest 2003, and now the accurate 14...♖fe8N 15.a5 ♘bd5 gives a complex game.) 13...a5 14.♗f3 ♖e8 15.♗d2 ♕d6 White may not be worse yet, but it is difficult for him to find any constructive ideas, Korchnoi – Zhu Chen, Roquebrune 1998.

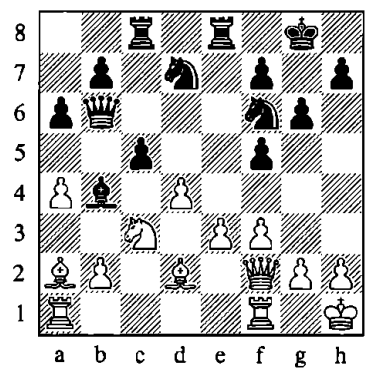
12...♖c8 13.♔h1

White's other plan is to transfer his queen to the kingside via f2-h4.

13.♗a2 c5 14.♕f2

14.♔h1 transposes to the main line.

14...♖e8 15.♔h1 ♕b6 16.♗d2 a6



17.♕h4

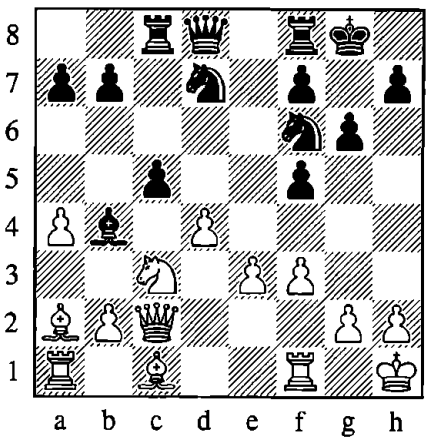
Another line is: 17.♖ad1 ♗a5 (also reasonable is 17...cxd4 18.exd4 ♕d6 with balanced play) 18.♗c1 cxd4 A draw was agreed here in Khenkin – De Vreugt, Hoogeveen 2004, but after 19.exd4 ♗xc3 20.bxc3 ♖xc3 White would have to work hard to prove his compensation.

17...♗a5! 18.♖ab1 ♕d6 19.♖fd1 c4

After blocking the light-squared bishop, Black has nothing to worry about, Lalith – Sundararajan, Nagpur 2008.

13...c5 14.♗a2

In this critical position Black has tried nine different moves!



14...♖e8!?

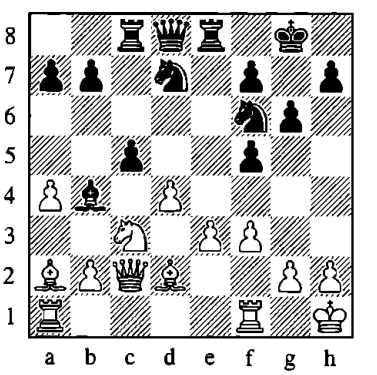
I believe this works best for Black. I intended to claim this move as a novelty, but subsequently discovered that it had been played in one email game.

15.♘b5

This seems more critical than the alternatives:

15.♕f2 transposes to the note to White's 13th move above.

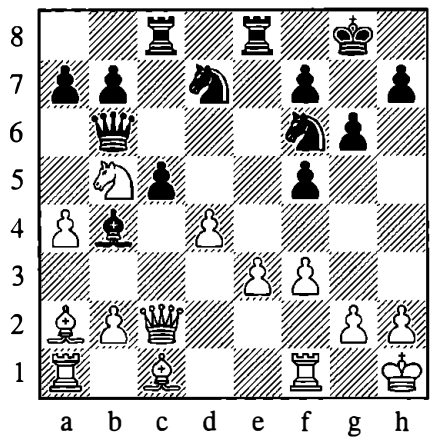
One of the key ideas is that 15.♗d2 runs into a beautiful riposte.



15...f4! White is in trouble, for instance: 16.♕d3 c4! 17.♗xc4 fxe3 18.♗xe3 ♗xc3 19.bxc3 ♖xc4 20.♕xc4 ♖xe3 and Black is clearly better.

15.♖d1 c4 Now that the white rook has left the f-file Black can release the pressure on d4, as White's idea of opening up the position with e3-e4 is no longer so relevant. 16.♗d2 ♘b6 Black has a comfortable position.

15...♕b6



16.♕b3

The queen seems better placed here than on the c4-square:

16.♕c4 ♔h8!?

Black can try this tricky move, although there is nothing wrong with 16...♖f8.

17.e4

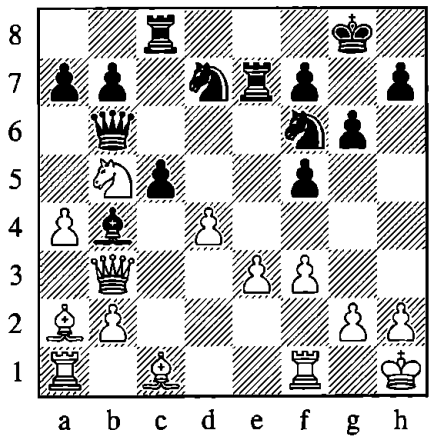
Surprisingly, the f7-pawn is untouchable: 17.♕xf7? c4! 18.♗xc4 ♖e7–+ and the white queen is trapped.

17...a6 18.dxc5 ♗xc5 19.♘c3 fxe4 20.♘xe4 ♘e5 21.♕b3 ♕xb3 22.♗xb3 ♘xe4 23.fxe4 ♘g4

White will have to be careful in order to hold the position.

16...♖e7

I was not satisfied with 16...♔h8 17.e4!, nor with 16...a6 17.♕xf7† ♔h8 18.dxc5 ♘xc5 19.♕c4!.



17.dxc5N

17.♕d3 a6 18.♘c3 ♖ce8∓ left White without anything constructive to do in A. Kozlov – Petruzzelli, email 2006.

17.♖d1 ♔g7 also leaves White lacking constructive ideas, and after 18.dxc5 ♗xc5 19.♕c3 a6 20.b4 axb5 21.axb5 ♕xb5 22.bxc5 ♕xc5∓ White would have to fight for the draw.

17...♗xc5 18.a5!? ♕xa5

Black could consider 18...♕a6!?, although 19.e4 should maintain the balance.

19.♕xf7† ♔h8 20.♕c4 a6 21.♘d4 ♘b6 22.♕d3 ♗b4!

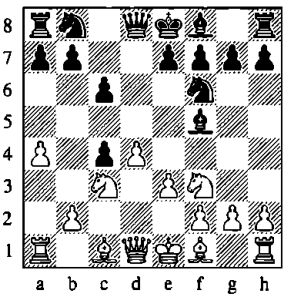
The position is more or less equal, though still very complicated.

Conclusion

It may seem slightly odd for Black to allow White to obtain the bishop pair and damage the black pawn structure at the same time. However, in return Black obtains easy development and pressure against the white centre. The critical position for this variation occurs after 14.♗a2 in line B. I believe that I have demonstrated that the rare 14...♖e8!? works well for Black; indeed White must then play accurately to avoid drifting into a passive position.



6.e3



Introduction

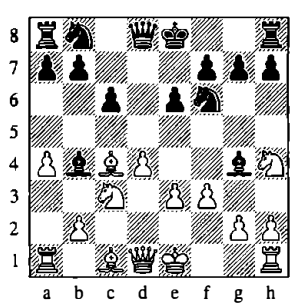
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3

6...e6

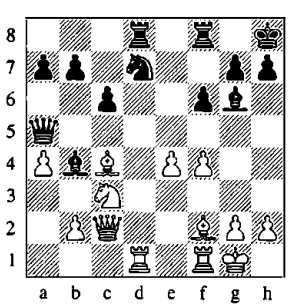
A) 7.♘e5 **290**
B) 7.a5 **291**
C) 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 **292**
C1) 8.♘h4 **292**
C2) 8.♘e5 **293**
C3) 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕b3 a5 10.♘a2 ♗e7 **295**
C31) 11.♕xb7 **297**
C32) 11.♘h4 **297**

C1) note to 9.♕b3



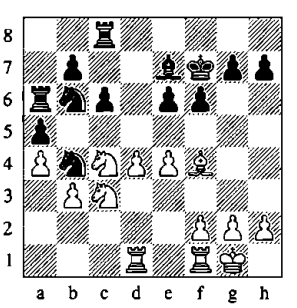
9...♗h5!N

C2) after 20.♖ad1



20...♘c5!N

C32) after 22.♘c4



22...♘6d5!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3

This is one of the traditional main lines of the Slav and will be the focus of this and the next four chapters. The other main line, 6.♘e5, will be covered in Chapters 30-34.

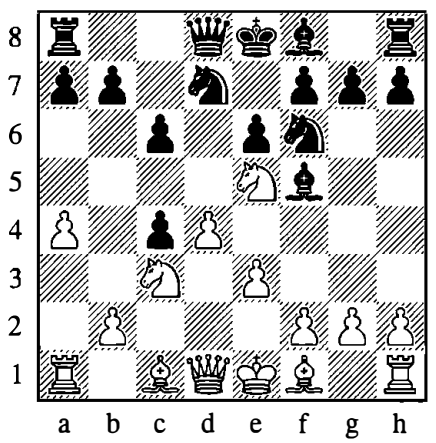
6...e6

In this introductory chapter we will consider less critical options for White: **A) 7.♘e5**, **B) 7.a5** and **C) 7.♗xc4**. Of course 7.♗xc4 can lead to the main line, but for now we will just consider the minor lines it can lead to.

A) 7.♘e5

A pretty harmless move order.

7...♘bd7



8.♘xc4

Another option is:

8.♘xd7 ♕xd7 9.♗xc4

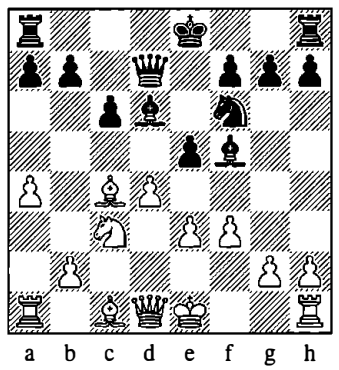
The main point here is that our dark-squared bishop is not yet on b4, and can be placed on a better square. For example:

9...♗d6

Also worthy of attention is 9...♖d8 when one good example continued: 10.0–0 ♗d6 11.♕e2 ♕c7 12.h3 ♘e4 13.♗d3 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♗xd3 15.♕xd3 e5 16.♗a3 0–0 With a balanced position in Ju Wenjun – Wang Yu, Shandong 2007.

After the text move a key example is:

10.f3 e5



11.d5

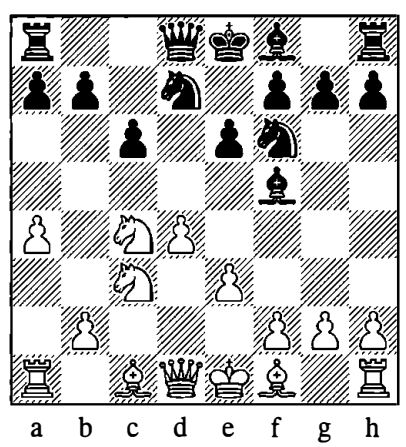
A critical line is 11.dxe5 ♗xe5 12.♕xd7† ♘xd7 13.e4 but Black should be fine after 13...♗e6 14.♗xe6 fxe6 15.♗e3 ♘b6.

11...e4!

Now it's dangerous for White.

12.g4 ♗g6 13.dxc6 bxc6 14.g5 ♘h5 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4 16.fxe4 ♘g3! 17.♖g1 ♘xe4

And Black was better in Javanbakht – Pourramezanali, Zahedan 2012.



8...♗b4 9.♗e2 0–0 10.0–0 ♕c7

Black has a very comfortable game. I want to mention one important detail – generally speaking our idea is to carry out ...e6-e5, so it looks quite principled to play:

11.f4

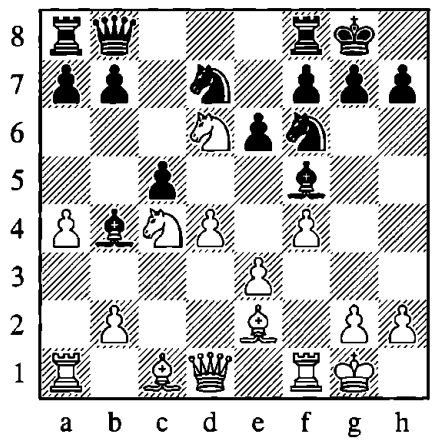
But here we have a typical resource:

11...c5!

This undermines White's pawn structure.

12.♘b5 ♕b8 13.♘bd6

More challenging would have been 13.g4 ♗e4 14.g5 ♘d5 15.♘bd6 although Black should be okay after 15...♗g6.

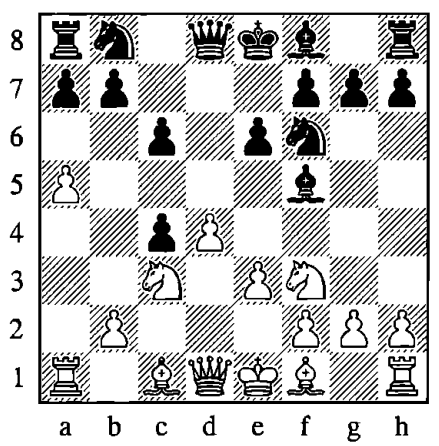


This position occurred in Salas Romo – Feigins, Buenos Aires 1939, and now Black should have played:

13...♘b6N 14.♘xf5 exf5 15.♘e5 ♕c7

The position remains balanced.

B) 7.a5

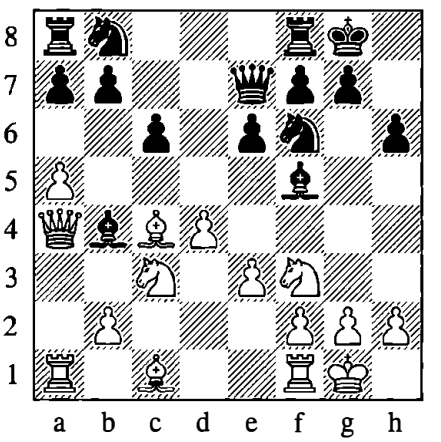


A significant number of games have been played with this move. I developed the following line for Black:

7...♗b4 8.♕a4 ♕e7 9.♗xc4 0–0 10.0–0 h6!

In my opinion, this is a very flexible move. Black not only secures his light-squared bishop, but also prepares the ...c5-advance, then the knight can be developed to a more central square on c6.

Most games have instead continued 10...♘bd7 when one of White's options is 11.♘h4 ♗g4 12.f3 ♗h5 13.g4 with a complex game.



11.♘e5

A couple of other options are worth mentioning:

11.♕b3?!

This is just a waste of time.

11...c5 12.♘e5

12.dxc5 was tested in Orsag – Kolesar, Trinec 1998, when the simple 12...♗xc5N∓ followed by ...♘c6 would secure Black a very comfortable game.

12.♖a4 obviously cannot be recommended for White, as the rook is misplaced on a4. 12...♘c6 13.dxc5 ♗xc5 14.♗b5 ♘b4! 15.♘d4 ♗g6∓ and Black was much better in Liardet – Riand, Geneva 1992.

12...cxd4 13.exd4 ♘c6 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.♗f4 ♗d6! 16.♗xd6 ♕xd6∓

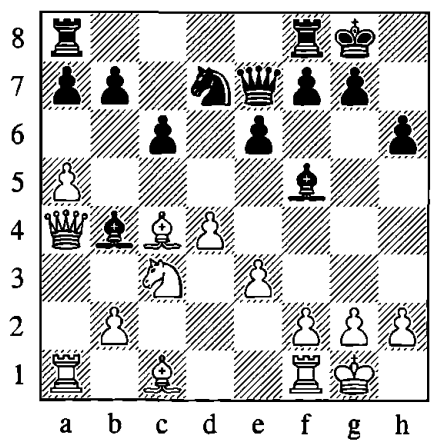
Black had a positional advantage in Speelman – Ehlvest, Reykjavik 1988.

11.♗d2 is quite passive and Black was very comfortable in the following example: 11...c5 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.♖ac1 a6 14.♖fd1 ♘c6 15.♗e2 ♖fd8∓ Thingstad – Bjerke, Gjovik 2009.

11...♘bd7

Now 11...c5 would be premature in view of 12.♘a2! and the c6-square is controlled by the white knight.

12.♘xd7 ♘xd7



13.♕b3

I also examined the natural 13.e4 ♗h7 14.♗e2 when Black can solve his problems with the thematic idea: 14...e5 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 (also interesting is 15...♗c5!?) 16.♗e3 ♖fd8=

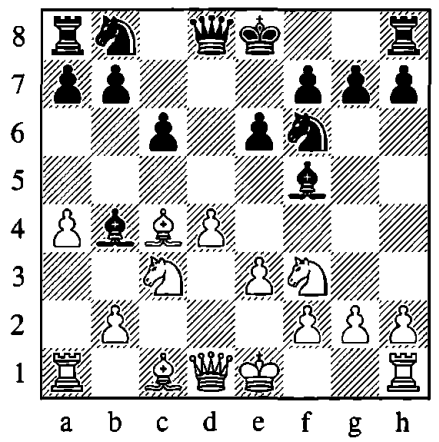
13...b5 14.axb6

In Kluss – Schroeder, Viernheim 1999, the right recapture was:

14...axb6!N 15.♖xa8 ♖xa8=

With an equal game.

C) 7.♗xc4 ♗b4



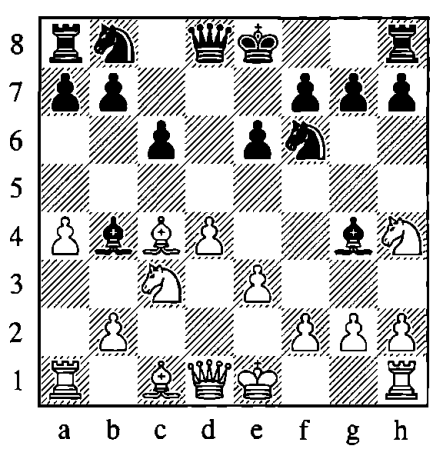
Now there are three lines to analyse: **C1) 8.♘h4** and **C2) 8.♘e5** are minor alternatives to **C3) 8.0–0**.

For 8.♕b3 a5 9.0–0 ♘bd7 see via 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕b3 on page 296.

C1) 8.♘h4

We have seen various versions of this standard plan, but this is considered to be not such a good version for White. In fact, this is probably the worst possible moment to play ♘h4.

8...♗g4!



9.♕b3

This has been played in most of the games.

The alternative is:

9.f3

Now Black should play a novelty:

9...♗h5!N

And not 9...♘d5 10.0–0 ♗h5 11.g3± as in Zimmermann – Astolfi, Cappelle la Grande 1994, when White was fighting for the advantage.

Black is likely to be threatening ...g5, so White has two options:

10.0–0

If 10.g3 then Black simply plays 10...c5 and obtains an excellent game after 11.0–0 cxd4 12.exd4 0–0.

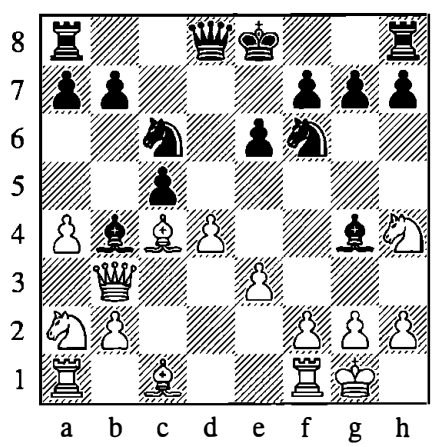
10...g5 11.g4 gxh4 12.gxh5 ♖g8† 13.♔h1 ♕a5∓

Black is better.

9...c5 10.0–0 ♘c6

This is one of the key differences compared to other versions of the ♘h4 idea: usually the black knight is placed on d7.

11.♘a2



11...0–0N

In my opinion, this novelty is logical.

The only game to reach the previous position instead continued 11...♘a5 12.♕d3 ♘d7 13.♗b5! and White was doing quite well in Epishin – Ehlvest, Tallinn 1986.

The following sequence is rather logical:

12.f3 ♗h5 13.♘xb4 cxb4 14.g4

14.♗d2 runs into 14...♘xd4!.

14...♖c8!

And now I checked two options:

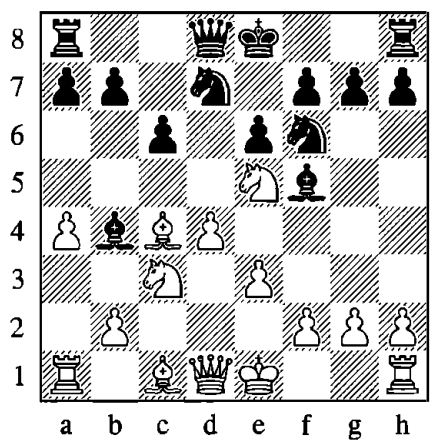
15.♗b5

Or 15.♕d1 ♘d5 16.♘g2 ♗g6 17.♗b3 ♘a5 18.e4 ♘b6 19.♗e3 h5! with a complex game.

15...♘a5 16.♕d1 ♘d5 17.♘g2 ♗g6 18.e4 ♘b6 19.♗e3 a6 20.♗e2 ♘bc4

Black's activity fully compensates for his inferior pawn structure.

C2) 8.♘e5 ♘bd7



9.♘xd7

The alternatives are less impressive:

9.♘d3

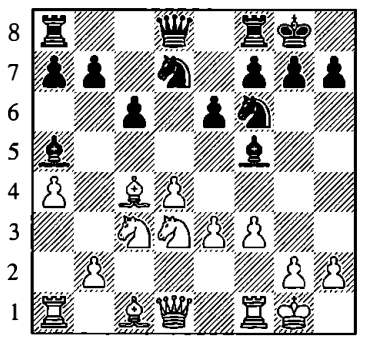
Now every move should be good for Black, but I especially like:

9...♗a5 10.0–0 0–0

Black is ready to play ...c6-c5 on the next move.

11.f3

11.♘e2 was Manakova – Kovalevskaya, Kstovo 1998, and Black could have played 11...c5N as after 12.♘xc5 ♘xc5 13.dxc5 ♕c8 she would regain the pawn with a very comfortable game.



This is O'Connell – Harding, Dublin 1991, and now I like:

11...♗xd3!N 12.♕xd3 c5

Black has a pleasant game, for instance:

13.♘e4 ♘xe4 14.fxe4 ♕b6

Black already has the advantage.

9.♕b3 a5 10.f3?

10.♘xd7 ♘xd7 11.0–0 0–0 would be more or less balanced.

This dubious idea was tried in Osborne – Cooksey, Sunningdale 2007. Black can play simply:

10...♘xe5N 11.dxe5 ♘d7 12.e4

This obvious try runs into:

12...♘xe5! 13.exf5

13.♗e2 ♗g6∓ is just a pawn up for Black.

13...♕h4† 14.g3 ♕xc4∓

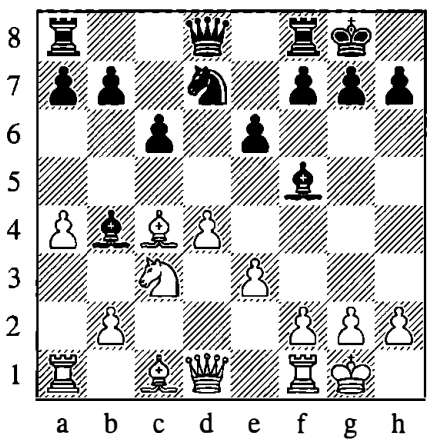
Black is a healthy pawn up.

After the text move I believe both recaptures are perfectly playable, but I prefer:

9...♘xd7

This seems more natural to me, since Black prepares both thematic ways of undermining White's centre: ...c6-c5 and ...e6-e5.

10.0–0 0–0



11.e4

I also checked two other moves:

11.♕b3

Here, to my great surprise, I discovered that nobody had tried the following natural-looking move:

11...a5N

All the games had continued 11...♕b6 but the position after 12.e4 ♗g6 13.♗e3 does not appeal to me.

12.e4

As usual, the b7-pawn is not a problem: 12.♘a2 ♗d6 13.♕xb7? ♘b6 14.b3 (14.♗e2 loses to 14...♗xh2†! 15.♔xh2 ♕d6† 16.♔g1 ♖fb8) 14...♘xc4 15.bxc4 ♗d3 16.♖d1 ♗xc4 17.♕xc6 ♖c8 18.♕f3 ♗b3! Black is clearly better.

After the text move Black can even play:

12...♗xc3!?

Simplifying to a balanced position.

13.exf5 ♗xd4 14.fxe6 fxe6 15.♗xe6† ♔h8 16.♕h3 ♘e5 17.♗e3 ♗xe3 18.♕xe3 ♕f6=

11.f3

This doesn't make much sense, as it simply allows Black an additional option:

11...e5 12.e4 ♗e6!?

12...♗g6 would transpose to the 11.e4 line.

13.♗xe6 fxe6

Black has a perfectly playable position as was proven in the following encounter:

14.♗e3 exd4 15.♗xd4

Black has a serious choice. In the game Abdulla – Murshed, Calicut 2007, he went for 15...♗c5 16.♘e2 e5 17.♗xc5 ♘xc5 with a balanced position, while instead I prefer:

15...♕e7N

Followed by ...♖ad8.

11...♗g6 12.f3 e5

Of course this is the key idea for Black.

13.♗e3

This is the most popular reaction, but we also have to be ready for two other options:

13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♗e2 ♕b6† 15.♔h1 as in Wojtaszek – Johannessen, Evora 2007. Black's only problem is how to include his light-squared bishop in the play, and this could be achieved by 15...f6!N followed by ...♗f7 as there is no danger from 16.f4 ♖ad8 17.♕c2 ♘d7 as White's centre is hanging.

13.d5 ♕a5 14.dxc6 bxc6 15.♔h1 ♘b6 16.♗b3 was Khalifman – Akopian, Dagomys 2008. Black should have continued 16...♖fd8N 17.♕e2 ♖ab8 18.♗d2 ♘d7 19.♖fd1 ♔h8= with a roughly equal game.

13...exd4 14.♗xd4 ♕a5 15.♕c2

15.♕e2 occurred in Gleizerov – Nedochetov, Dubai 2008, and now 15...♖ad8N was the right move, then after the logical sequence 16.♗a2 ♘c5 17.♖fd1 ♖d7∞ the play is double-edged.

15...♘e5 16.♗e2 ♖ad8 17.♗f2 f6

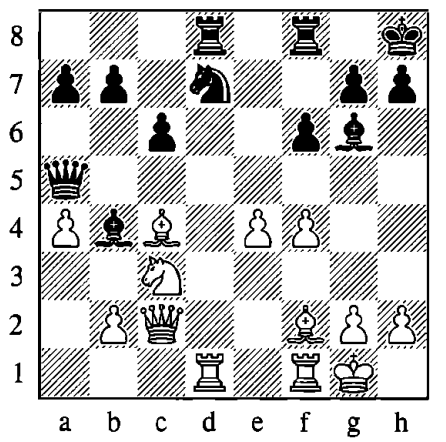
As we already know, this is thematic: the light-squared bishop enjoys the game from the f7-square.

18.f4 ♘d7 19.♗c4†

If 19.♘a2N ♗c5 20.b4 ♗xf2† 21.♖xf2 ♕c7 22.♘c3 ♖fe8= the play is rather equal, but this was a better choice of continuation for White.

19...♔h8 20.♖ad1

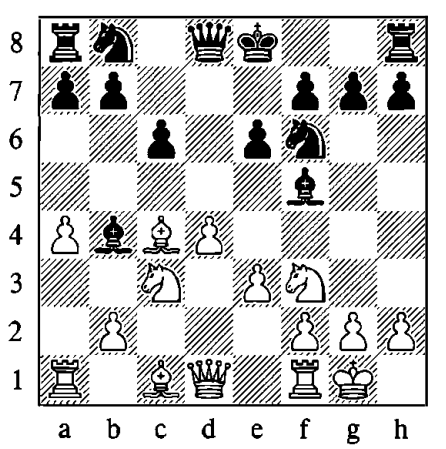
This is Krasenkow – Golod, Port Erin 2007, and after the correct:



20...♘c5!N 21.f5 ♗h5

Black would be better.

C3) 8.0–0

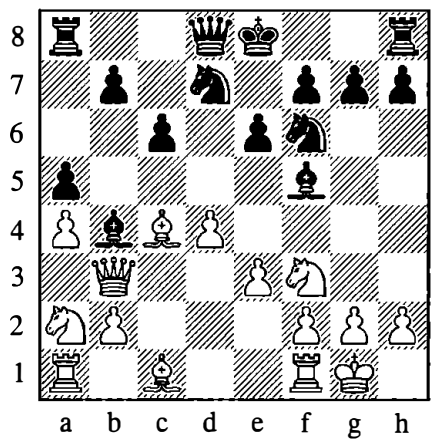


8...♘bd7 9.♕b3

9.♘h4 is covered in Chapter 26, and 9.♕e2 in Chapters 27-29.

9...a5 10.♘a2

10.♘h4 ♗g4 transposes to variation A of the next chapter on page 300.



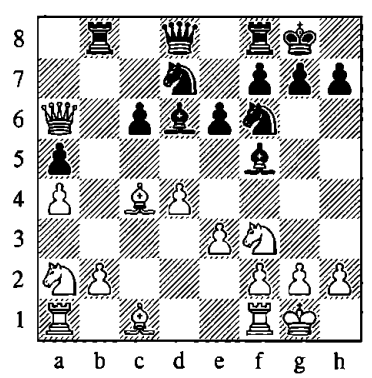
10...♗e7

If a draw is an unacceptable result, I can suggest the following line:

10...♗d6 11.♕xb7

It is hard to imagine White has anything better.

11...♖b8 12.♕a6 0–0



Black has interesting compensation. In practice White has tried only two moves:

13.♗d3??

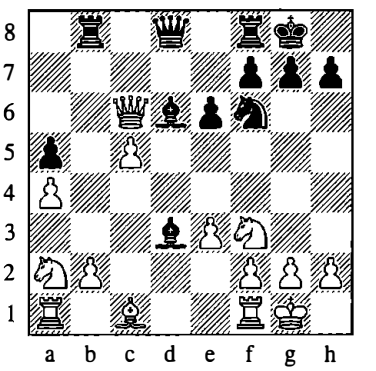
A better move is 13.♗e2 but here Black has nice positional compensation after 13...♕c7 14.♘c3 ♖b4 (threatening 15...♘b8) 15.♗d1 e5⩲ as in Thuerauf – Krauss, Nuremberg 2008.

The text move loses on the spot in view of:

13...♘c5! 14.dxc5 ♗xd3

Black is winning, since his light-squared bishop is untouchable, while after:

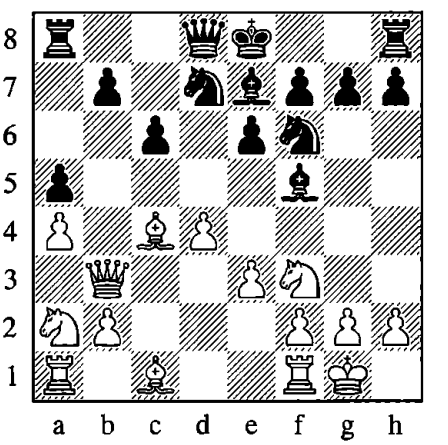
15.♕xc6



This occurred in Kovacs – Gyurkovics, Hungary 2000, when Black could have decided the game with:

15...♗c7!N 16.♖d1 ♕c8!

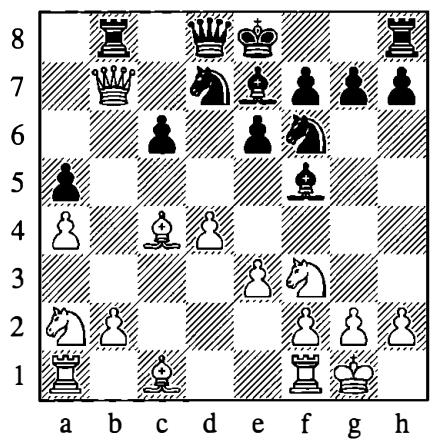
Threatening ...♗xh2†.



The two main options to consider are: taking a draw with **C31) 11.♕xb7** and playing on with **C32) 11.♘h4**.

White has tried other moves, but they are hardly challenging for Black. For example: 11.♗d2 ♘e4 12.♖fc1 This is obviously not a way to fight for an advantage. 12...♘xd2 13.♘xd2 This occurred in Miton – Warakomski, Poznan 2005, and now Black has a pleasant choice between the calm 13...♘b6N 14.♘c3 0–0 15.♗e2 e5= and 13...0–0N 14.♕xb7 ♖b8 15.♕xc6 ♘e5! when despite being two pawns down, Black's initiative looks dangerous. For example: 16.dxe5 ♕xd2 17.b3 ♗a3 18.♖d1 ♕c2∞

C31) 11.♕xb7 ♖b8



12.♕a6

12.♕xc6? loses to 12...♖b6–+.

12...♖a8

The white queen cannot escape from the corner.

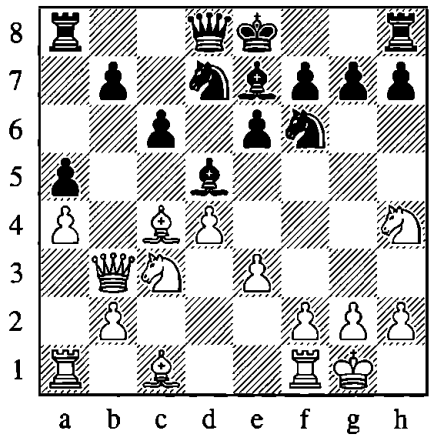
13.♕xc6

Or 13.♕b7 ♖b8 of course.

13...♖c8 14.♕b5 ♖b8 15.♕a6 ♖a8=

You can find many examples in the database of games which have finished in this way.

C32) 11.♘h4 ♗e4 12.♘c3 ♗d5



This just leaves the white knight misplaced on h4.

13.♗xd5

13.♘xd5 has been played four times. Black has never recaptured with 13...exd5N which I believe is the simplest solution. 14.♗d3 ♗b4 (14...0–0 is still possible, but then White can force a draw by capturing on b7.) 15.♘f3 ♘e4 16.♕c2 Now Black can play 16...f5 or 16...♕e7, in either case with a complicated game where Black is definitely fine.

13...♘xd5 14.♘f3

Another line is 14.♘xd5 cxd5 and Black easily equalized after 15.♘f3 ♕b6 16.♕xb6 ♘xb6 17.b3 f6 in Ivanchuk – Anand, Bilbao 2008.

14...♕b6 15.♕c4

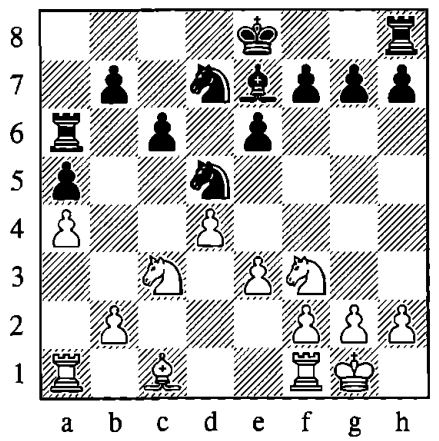
As usual the queen exchange is rather harmless in this type of position: 15.♕xb6 ♘7xb6 16.e4 ♘b4 The weakness of White's queenside pawn structure might tell in the long term. 17.♖d1 0–0 18.♗f4 ♖ac8 19.b3 f5∞ Black was absolutely fine in P. Nikolic – I. Sokolov, Enschede 2003.

15.♕d1 ♘7f6 16.♘e5 0–0 17.♕e2 ♕a6 As in the previous example, the queen exchange makes Black's life easier. 18.♕xa6 ♖xa6 19.♗d2 ♖d8= With an equal game in Beliavsky – Khalifman, Minsk 1987.

15...♕a6

This is a pretty thematic idea.

16.♕xa6 ♖xa6

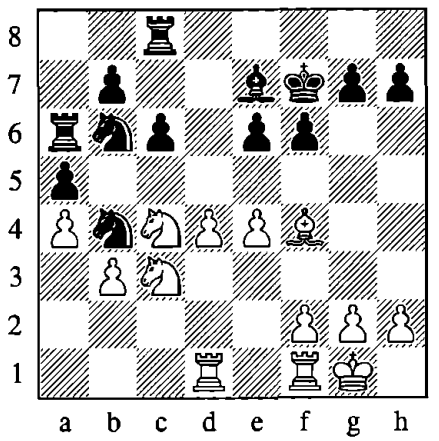


The arising endgame is balanced but far from being drawish, since the pawn structure promises double-edged play, as was illustrated in the following encounter:

17.e4 ♘b4 18.♗f4 f6

The black king will be comfortably placed on f7.

19.♖ad1 ♔f7 20.b3 ♖c8 21.♘d2 ♘b6 22.♘c4



This is Miton – Rublevsky, Sochi 2007. Probably White's last move was slightly inaccurate and Black could have exploited it by means of:

22...♘6d5!N 23.♗d2 ♘xc3 24.♗xc3 b5 25.♘e3 bxa4 26.bxa4 c5∓

White should be careful, as his a4-pawn might become a serious target.

Conclusion

The lines in this chapter are not a threat to Black.

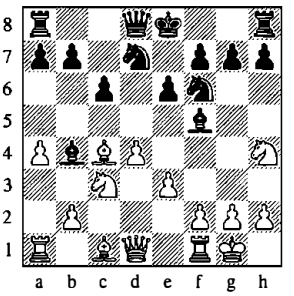
After A) 7.♘e5 or B) 7.a5 Black equalizes with little effort.

The position with real practical importance arises after 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕b3 a5 10.♘a2 when the main line 10...♗e7 allows White the choice of forcing a draw with C31) 11.♕xb7 or playing on in a balanced position with C32) 11.♘h4.

For Black players who wish to avoid the possibility of a forced draw, I added the sharp and interesting option of 10...♗d6.



6.e3



9.♘h4

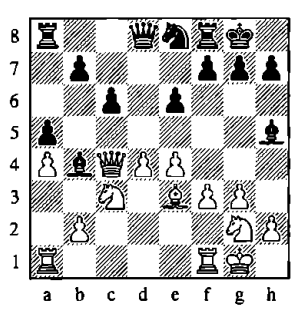
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♘h4

9...♗g4

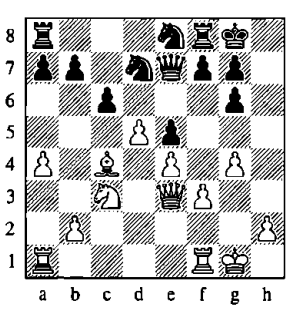
A) 10.♕b3 a5 11.f3 ♗h5 **300**
A1) 12.g3 **301**
A2) 12.g4 **303**
B) 10.f3 ♗h5 **305**
B1) 11.e4 **305**
B2) 11.g4 ♗g6 **306**
B21) 12.♘g2 **306**
B22) 12.e4 0–0 **308**
B221) 13.♘xg6 **309**
B222) 13.g5 ♘e8 14.♘xg6 hxg6 **310**
B2221) 15.♗e3 **310**
B2222) 15.f4 **311**

A1) after 16.♘g2



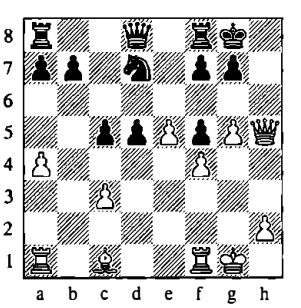
16...f6!N

B1) after 19.♕xe3



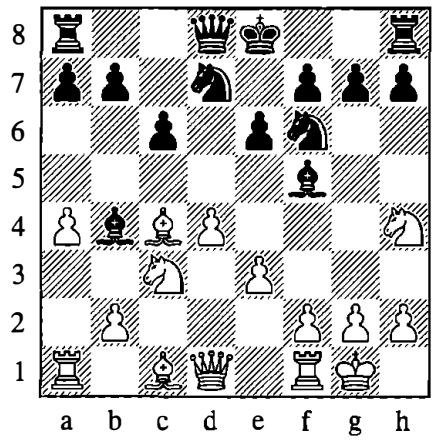
19...♕b4!N

B2222) after 21.♕h5



21...♖e8!?N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♘h4



This is considered the most respectable alternative to 9.♕e2, which is covered in Chapters 27-29.

9...♗g4

9...0–0 invites 10.♘xf5 exf5 with a transposition to the 6.♘h4 e6 line, but unfortunately White has extra options such as 10.f3 and 10.h3 which did not appeal to me as much.

After the text move **A) 10.♕b3** is sometimes seen, but the main move is of course **B) 10.f3**.

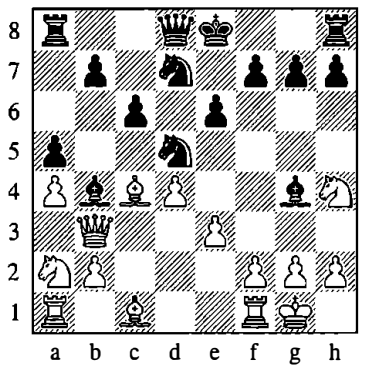
A) 10.♕b3 a5 11.f3

11.♘a2

Here I found an interesting novelty.

11...♘d5!?N

11...♗e7 is not bad, but there were a couple of things that put me off this move. Firstly, White can force a draw by 12.♕xb7 ♖b8 13.♕a6 ♖a8= if he wants it. Secondly, White can play 12.f3 ♗h5 13.g4 ♗g6 14.e4. Objectively Black's position may be okay here, but I am generally not keen on positions when White manages to establish pawns on f3 and e4 against a bishop on g6.



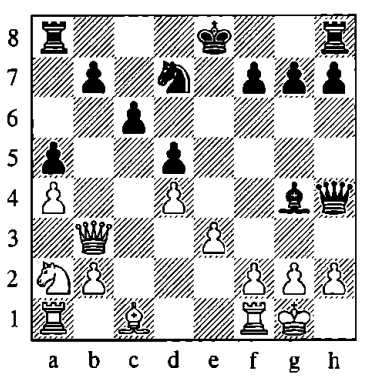
12.♗xd5

12.g3?! is hardly a good idea in view of 12...♗e7 13.♘g2 ♘5b6 14.♗d3 e5! and Black is better.

12.♘xb4 ♘xb4 13.g3 ♘b6= is comfortable for Black.

12...exd5 13.♘xb4 ♕xh4 14.♘a2

Also after 14.♘d3 ♗e2 15.♖e1 ♗xd3 16.♕xd3 0–0 17.♗d2 ♖fe8 Black should not have any problems.



14...b6 15.f3

15.♕a3 can be met by 15...c5!.

15...♗e6

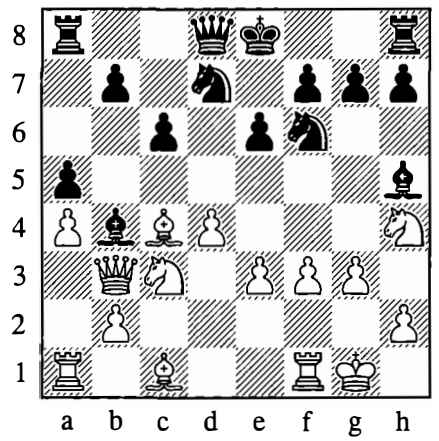
The position is balanced.

11...♗h5

11...♘d5? allows the simple 12.fxg4 ♕xh4 13.e4 with some advantage for White, Sjoberg – Rubene, Stockholm 2000.

Now I examined two main moves for White: **A1) 12.g3** and **A2) 12.g4**.

A1) 12.g3



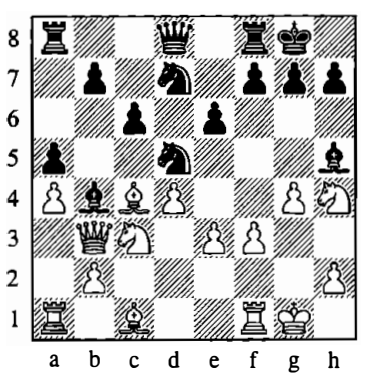
12...0–0

Those readers looking for a completely new direction could consider 12...g5!?N 13.♘g2 ♕b6!? with a highly complex game. A possible line is 14.♘e1 g4 15.♗d2 gxf3 16.♘xf3 ♖g8 followed by ...0–0–0 with double-edged play.

13.e4

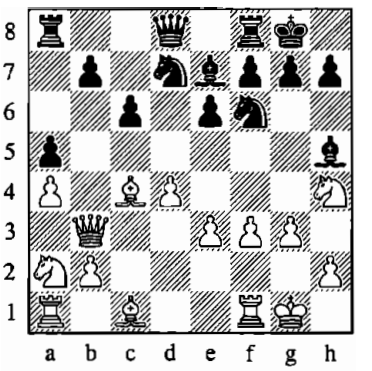
This is the most challenging continuation. Other options are less dangerous.

13.g4 was played in Dokhoian – Haba, Germany 1990, but this does not make a lot of sense in view of the strong reply: 13...♘d5!N



14.♘g2 ♗g6 15.e4 ♘5b6 16.♗e2 ♕e7 17.♗e3 f6 Black has a comfortable game.

Also pretty harmless is:
13.♘a2 ♗e7



14.g4

Other options are weaker and allow Black to take over, for example:

14.♗e2 occurred in Damljanovic – Ki. Georgiev, Struga 2005, and now 14...c5!N 15.♘c3 cxd4 16.exd4 ♕b6∓ gives Black the better game.

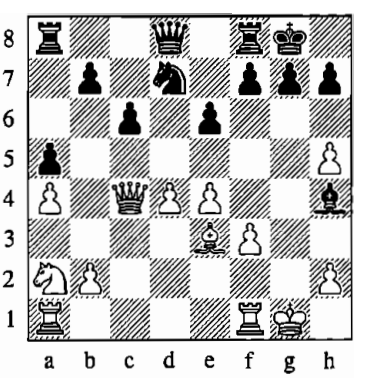
So far nobody has been brave enough to capture the b7-pawn, and indeed after 14.♕xb7 ♖b8 15.♕a6 c5! the position is dangerous for White.

14...♘d5 15.gxh5 ♗xh4 16.e4 ♘5b6 17.♗e3

17.♗e2 would have been preferable, although after 17...c5 18.♗e3 cxd4 19.♗xd4 e5 20.♗e3 ♗g5 Black is by no means worse.

17...♘xc4 18.♕xc4

Now in Shulman – Vigorito, Philadelphia 2003, Black should have played:



18...♗g5N 19.♕e2

19.f4?! ♗h6! followed by ...♕h4 gives Black an obvious advantage.

19...♗xe3† 20.♕xe3 f5!

Black's chances are higher.

13...♘b6 14.♗e3

The d4-pawn was hanging, so White had no time to save his light-squared bishop.

14...♘xc4 15.♕xc4

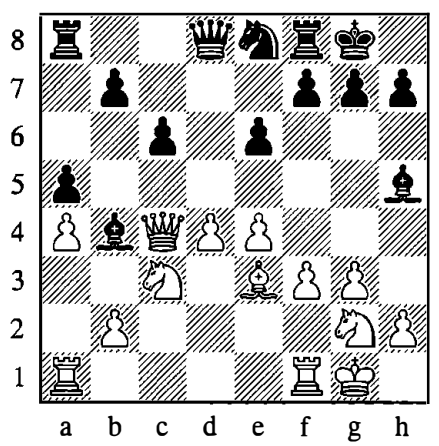
The bishop pair does not guarantee Black an easy game, and he must be quite accurate over the next couple of moves. The right way is:

15...♘e8!

I failed to find equality after 15...♘d7 16.♘g2. For instance, after 16...e5 17.♖ad1 ♕e7 as seen in Cebalo – Portisch, Reggio Emilia 1985, White could have played 18.d5!N with a clearly better game.

16.♘g2

Here I found a new idea.



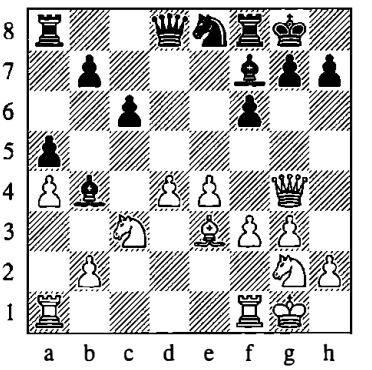
16...f6!N

It's hard to be satisfied with 16...♘d6?! 17.♕b3 when White was better in Yusupov – Speelman, Barcelona 1989.

17.♘a2

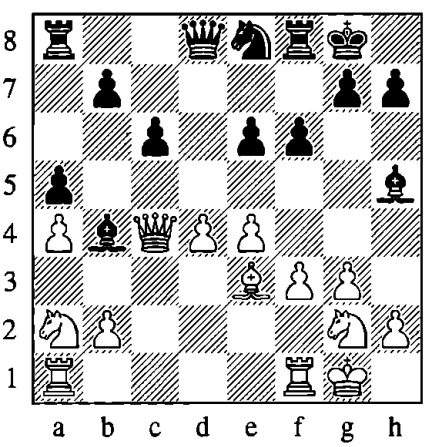
One way or another, White has to accept the challenge by capturing the pawn on e6, otherwise Black will simply play ...♗f7 with better chances thanks to his bishop pair.

The immediate 17.♕xe6† ♗f7 18.♕g4 gives Black a pleasant choice:



a) 18...♘d6 gives White nothing better than forcing a draw with: 19.♗h6 ♗g6 20.♘h4 gxh6 21.♘xg6 hxg6 22.♕xg6† ♔h8 23.♕xh6† ♔g8 24.♕g6†=

b) If Black does not want to allow a drawing line then 18...h5!? 19.♕h3 ♘d6 reaches a rather unclear position where Black has definite compensation for the pawn.



17...♗d6 18.♕xe6† ♗f7 19.♕g4 ♕b6!

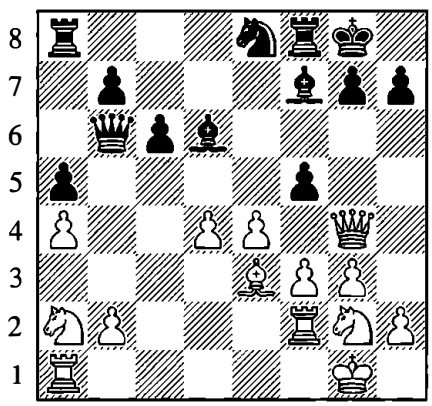
Black has plenty of activity for the pawn.

20.♖f2

20.e5 is well met by 20...♗xa2! 21.exd6 (21.♖xa2 ♕b3!∓) 21...♗d5 22.d7 ♘c7 and after regaining the d7-pawn Black will enjoy a positional advantage.

20...f5!?

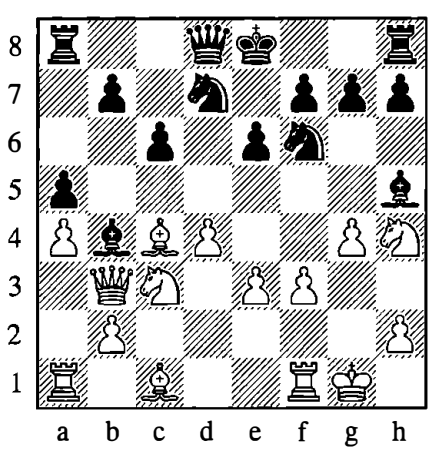
20...♕b3 is also good enough.



21.exf5 ♘f6 22.♕h4 ♗xa2 23.♖xa2 ♖ae8

Despite being two pawns down, Black is not worse. His coordination is excellent and he intends ...♘d5 followed by ...♖xf5.

A2) 12.g4



12...♘d5

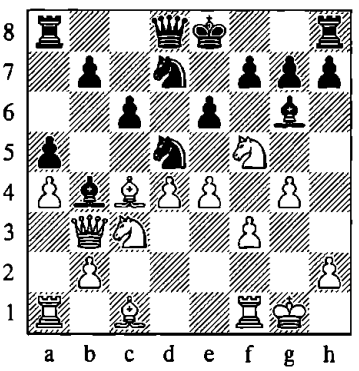
This is my first choice, although 12...♗g6 is also playable.

13.♘g2

13.♘f5!?N

So far nobody has tried this move, but it is quite interesting.

13...♗g6 14.e4



14...exf5

Taking the knight seems best, although 14...0–0 15.♘g3 also leads to a complicated game.

15.gxf5

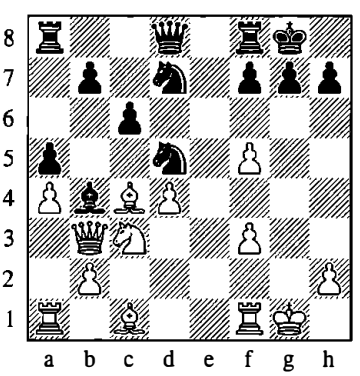
Now Black can choose between a safe continuation and a more complicated one.

15...♗xf5

The more complex line is 15...♗h5!? 16.exd5 0–0 17.dxc6 bxc6⩱ with nice compensation.

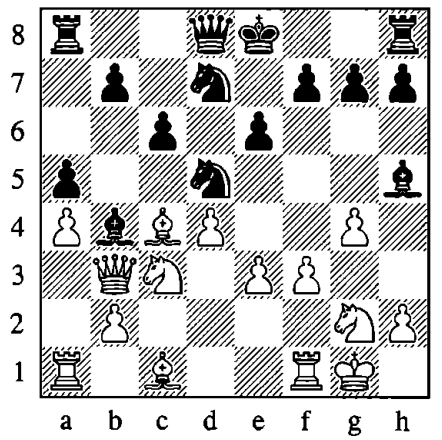
16.exf5 0–0

Now the following simplifying line looks natural.



17.♗xd5 cxd5 18.♘xd5 ♘f6 19.♘xb4 ♕xd4† 20.♗e3 ♕xb4 21.♕xb4 axb4 22.♗c5 ♖fe8 23.♗xb4 ♖e5

The endgame looks drawish.



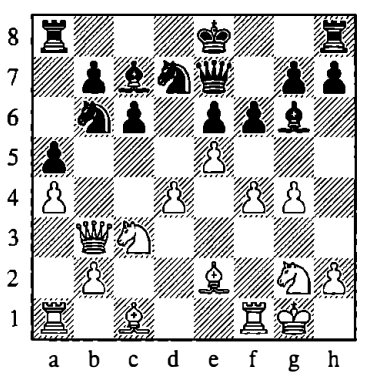
13...♗g6 14.e4 ♘5b6 15.♗e2 ♕e7!

Preparing ...f6 followed by ...♗f7.

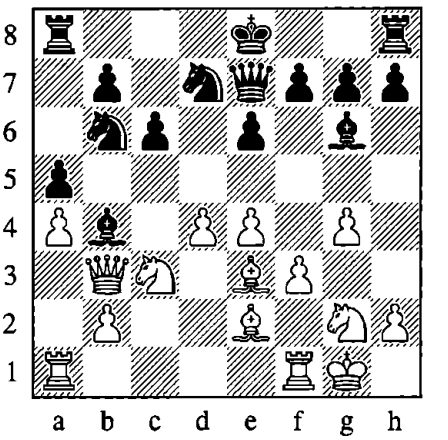
16.♗e3

The attempt to discourage ...f6 with 16.♘f4?! backfires after: 16...e5! 17.dxe5 ♗c5†! 18.♔h1 ♘xe5∓ Black will play ...f6 next anyway, and the white knight is absolutely misplaced on f4.

16.♘a2 ♗d6 17.e5 ♗c7 18.f4 looks very challenging, but White's space-gaining strategy also leaves him with some weaknesses. 18...f6 19.♘c3



19...0–0 (19...0–0–0!? is an interesting alternative.) 20.♗e3 ♖ae8 21.♖ac1 h6∞ This complex position occurred in the computer game Stockfish – Houdini, CCRL 2012. I have a small preference for Black's side, as the white pawn structure is slightly vulnerable.



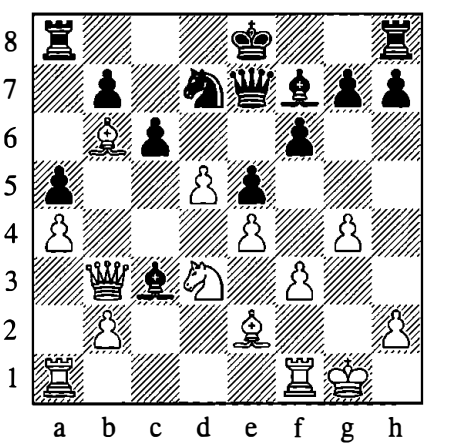
16...f6 17.♘f4?!

White should try something else here, although Black is at least equal in any case.

17...♗f7 18.♘d3 e5!

Once Black finds an active role for his light-squared bishop, he has every chance of taking over.

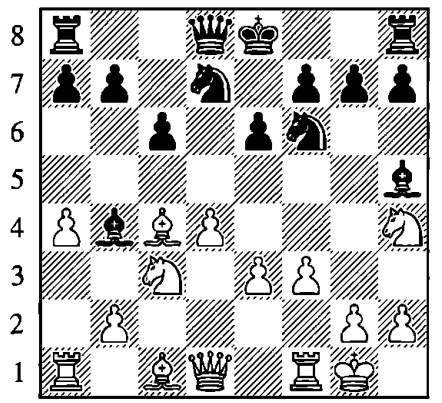
19.d5 ♗xc3 20.♗xb6



20...cxd5! 21.♗f2 ♗d4 22.♕xb7 0–0

Black was better in Ponomariov – Bacrot, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009.

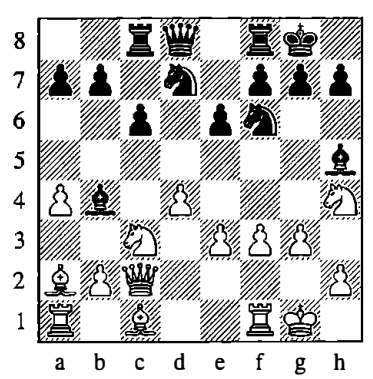
B) 10.f3 ♗h5



This is the main continuation, where White avoids committing his queen to the b3-square. Now there are two main moves: **B1) 11.e4** and **B2) 11.g4**.

Obviously 11.♕b3 a5 leads straight back to variation A.

I would also like to mention 11.g3 0–0 12.♕c2 (12.♕b3 is more common, when 12...a5 transposes to line A1 above) 12...♖c8! 13.♗a2 as occurred in Conquest – Flear, Blackpool 1988. Here Black could have fought for the initiative with:



13...c5!N (There is even the computer's suggestion of 13...g5!?N 14.♘g2 c5!.)

B1) 11.e4

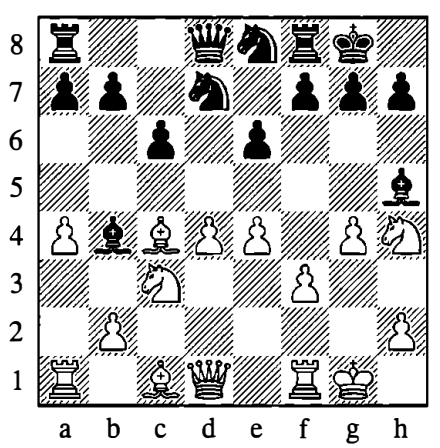
This has only rarely been played, but it is not bad.

11...0–0

Black was successful with 11...♘b6 in Portisch – Smyslov, Amsterdam 1981, but here White missed a strong idea in 12.♗b3!N (instead of 12.♗e2 as occurred in the game) when I was unable to find equality for Black. The key point is that 12...♗xc3 13.bxc3 ♘xe4 14.♕e1! gives White a dangerous initiative.

12.g4 ♘e8!?

12...♗g6 transposes to variation B22 below. The text move is an extra option that Black can consider against the move order starting with 11.e4. I am not convinced that it is a real improvement, but I will give a few lines to allow the reader to make up his own mind.



13.♘g2 ♗g6 14.♗e3

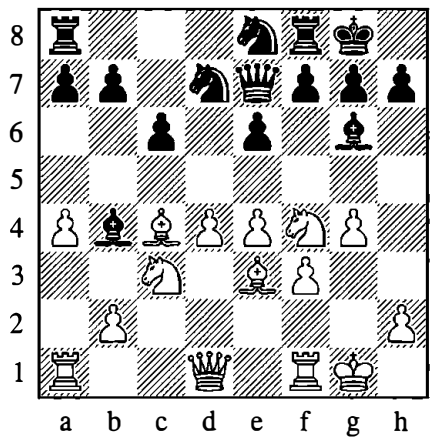
After 14.♘f4 e5 15.♘xg6 hxg6= Black had a pleasant game in Niessen – Schoonhoven, email 2003.

14...♕e7

It is too soon to commit the knight with 14...♘d6, and after 15.♗b3 White stands better.

15.♘f4

This rather encourages Black's next move. White should try something else, although the black position is solid enough.

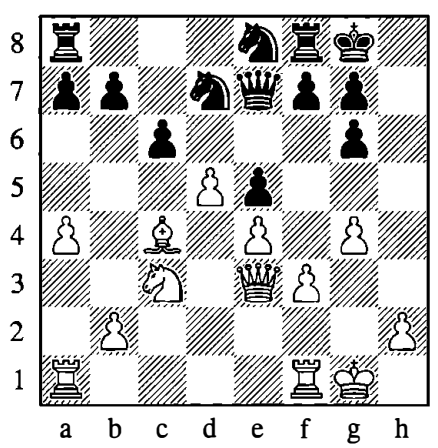


15...e5! 16.♘xg6

16.♘d3 is more challenging although 16...exd4 17.♗xd4 ♗a5! leads to an unclear game with decent chances for Black.

16...hxg6 17.d5 ♗c5! 18.♕e2 ♗xe3† 19.♕xe3

Here I found an improvement over the game Sobek – Zilka, Karvina 2001.



19...♕b4!N 20.♗a2 ♘d6

Black is at least equal.

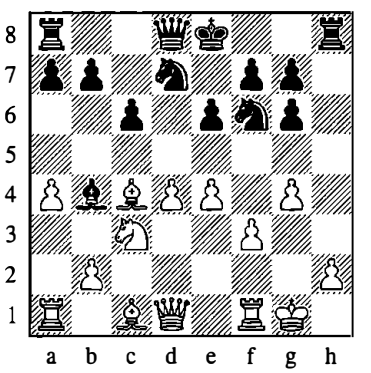
B2) 11.g4 ♗g6

This obvious retreat is not the only playable move, but I think it is best.

11...g5!? is a challenging alternative, but after the accurate continuation 12.♘g2 ♗g6 13.e4 h6 14.♕b3 ♕b6 15.♗e3 White was better in Van Wely – Smeets, Amsterdam 2009.

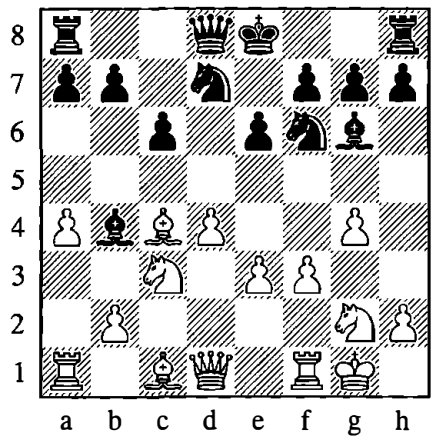
Now White faces a choice, the main options being **B21) 12.♘g2** and **B22) 12.e4**.

Another option is 12.♘xg6 hxg6. Despite great statistics for White, I believe this exchange to be premature as Black still has the option of long castling at his disposal. 13.e4 I found four games with this position, but the following natural continuation was not played in any of them:



13...♕c7!?N (Of course if Black wants to keep things simple there is 13...0–0 transposing to variation B221 below.) 14.♕e2 0–0–0 15.♗e3 ♔b8∞ Black's position looks promising to me.

B21) 12.♘g2



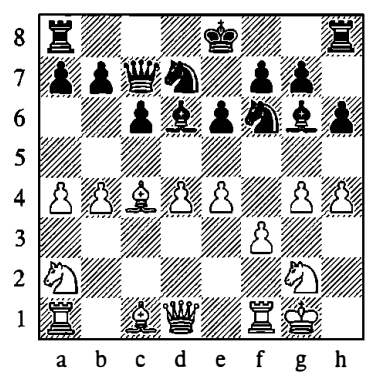
Rather than exchanging the bishop, White hopes to shut it out of play with e3-e4.

12...♕a5 13.♘a2 ♗d6 14.e4

Another example continued:

14.h4 h6 15.b4 ♕c7 16.e4

Here I found a strong continuation for Black.



16...a5!N

The game continued with the natural 16...e5 17.d5 ♘b6 18.♗b3 with a complex game, Haik – Flear, Paris 1988.

17.e5

Obviously this is the critical test.

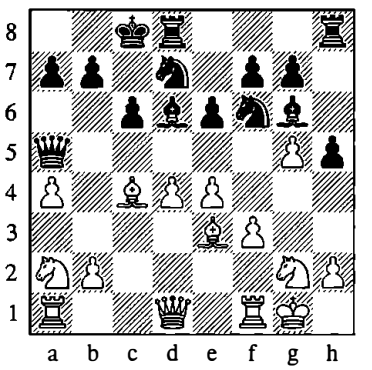
17.b5 c5 is excellent for Black.

17...♘xe5! 18.dxe5 ♗xe5 19.♗e3 ♖d8 20.♕e2 ♗xa1 21.♖xa1 0–0

We have reached an unbalanced position where I prefer Black's rook over White's bishop and knight, as Black has two extra pawns and a more solid structure.

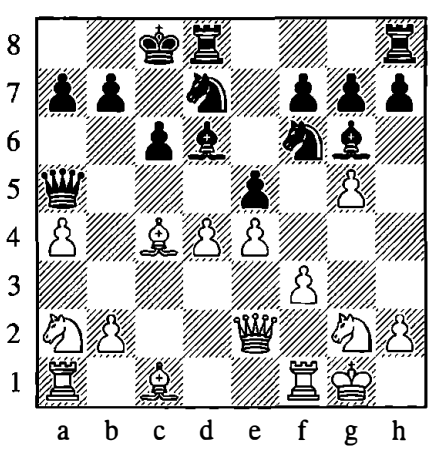
14...0–0–0 15.♕e2

This looks like a good move, especially taking into account that after 15.♗e3 Black has a remarkable resource: 15...h5 16.g5



16...♘g4!! 17.fxg4 hxg4 18.♗f4 (18:♕xg4 ♗xh2† 19.♔f2 ♘e5 loses on the spot) 18...♗xf4 19.♖xf4 ♘e5 20.b4 ♕c7 21.♗e2 ♖h3 22.♗xg4 ♖d3 23.♕e1 ♖8xd4 Black has a dangerous initiative for the sacrificed piece.

15...e5 16.g5



16...♘xe4!N

The position is full of tactical resources, so it was not a big surprise to discover this piece sacrifice.

16...♘h5 occurred in Birnboim – Greenfeld, Munich 1987, and here White could have seized the initiative with: 17.d5! ♘b6 18.b4 ♗xb4 19.♘xb4 ♕xb4 20.♗a2 cxd5 21.a5→

17.b4

17.fxe4 exd4 18.b4 ♕c7 just transposes.

17...♕c7 18.fxe4 exd4

Black has two pawns and plenty of positional pluses for the sacrificed piece.

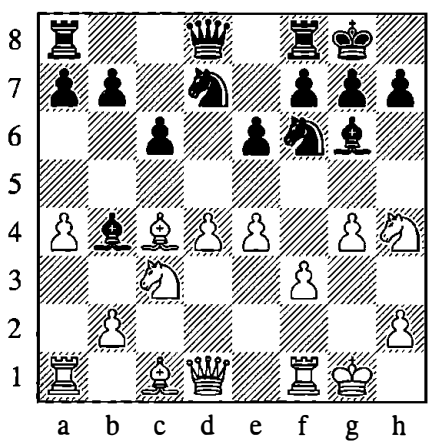
19.♘h4!

Other moves are worse; for instance, 19.♗f4 runs into the unpleasant 19...h6! 20.gxh6 ♗xf4 21.♘xf4 ♖xh6 22.b5 ♘e5 and White is in trouble.

19...♘e5 20.♗b3 d3 21.♕g2 ♗h5!?

Black has good chances, although the position is extremely complicated.

B22) 12.e4 0–0



From here we will discuss the two most important continuations, **B221) 13.♘xg6** and **B222) 13.g5**, after first checking a couple of minor alternatives.

13.♘e2 c5!? 14.g5 ♘h5 15.♕b3

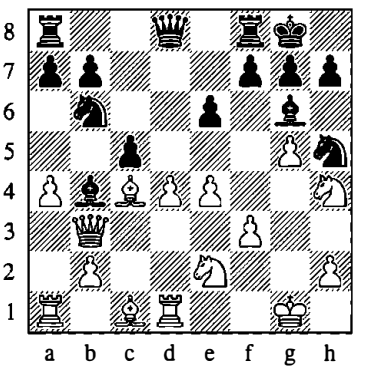
Perhaps White was pinning his hopes on 15.♗d3 cxd4 16.f4, but after the calm 16...h6 Black is better.

15...♘b6

15...♕e7!?N is also good.

16.♖d1

Now in Timofeev – Grigoryan, Cappelle la Grande 2013, it would have been good to play:

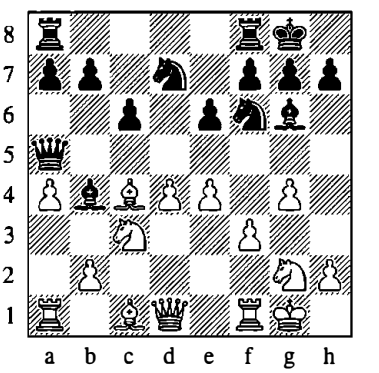


16...♕e7N 17.♗e3 cxd4 18.♘xd4 ♘xc4 19.♕xc4 ♖ac8 20.♕b3 ♗d6∓

Black has the better chances thanks to White's weak kingside.

13.♘g2 ♕a5

White has tried two moves from this position.



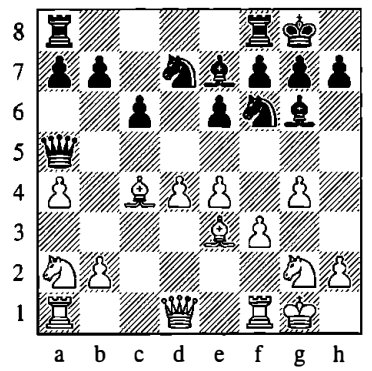
14.♘a2

14.♕b3 e5N (The horrible 14...h5?? occurred in Fuchs – Schmidt, Germany 2007, and now with 15.♘h4N ♗h7 16.g5+–

White could have decided the game in his favour.) A logical sequence here is 15.g5 ♘e8 16.dxe5 and now I like 16...♘c7! 17.♘e3 (17.♗e2 ♘e6 is great for Black) 17...♗c5 with a complicated game.

14...♗e7 15.♗e3

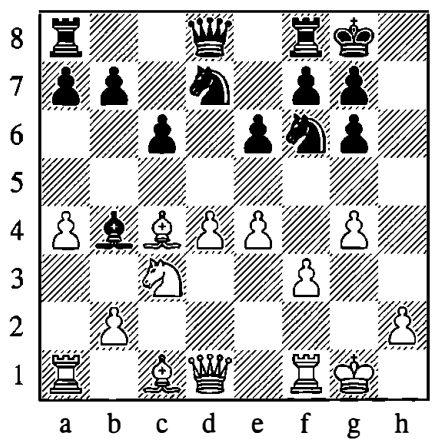
At this point a draw was agreed in Jasnikowski – Jelling, Bellinge 1991, although of course the position remains complicated. A logical continuation is:



15...♖fd8 16.♕e2 c5

Black looks to be more than okay.

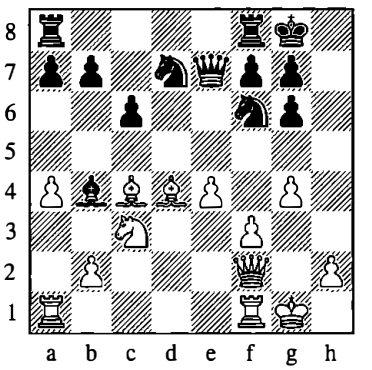
B221) 13.♘xg6 hxg6



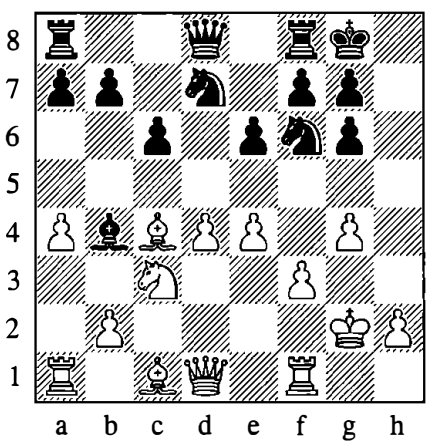
14.♔g2

This is perhaps the most challenging move, apart from 14.g5 when 14...♘e8 immediately transposes to variation B222 below.

14.♗e3 has been played in quite a few games, but is pretty harmless: 14...e5 15.♕e2 (15.dxe5 ♘xe5 16.♗e2 occurred in Sturua – Shanava, Batumi 2001, and now after 16...♕e7N Black has a healthy position with all of his pieces on good squares.) 15...exd4 16.♗xd4 ♕e7 17.♕f2



This position was reached in Laxman – Thakur, Chennai 2011. White's play has been unconvincing, and now after 17...♘e5N 18.♗e2 g5! Black could have obtained a nice clamp on the dark squares.



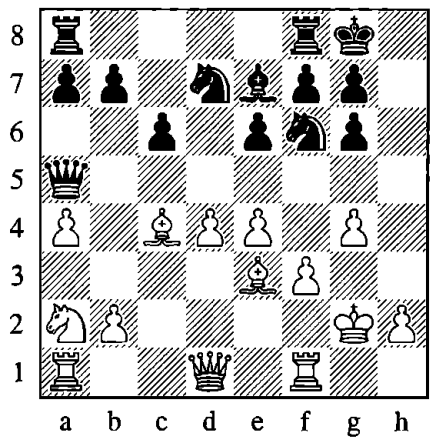
14...♕a5!?N

I decided on this new move as I was not completely happy with either of the immediate pawn breaks.

14...c5? is a mistake in view of 15.♘a2! ♗a5 16.dxc5 and White won a pawn in Dorfman – Hector, Cannes 1989.

14...e5 is slightly premature due to 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 16.♗e2±.

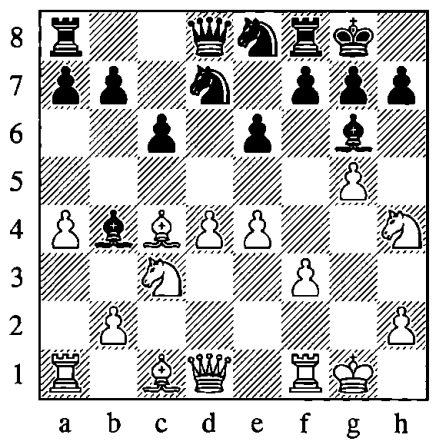
15.♘a2 ♗e7 16.♗e3



16...e5! 17.dxe5 ♕xe5!?

Black has a good position.

B222) 13.g5 ♘e8



14.♘xg6

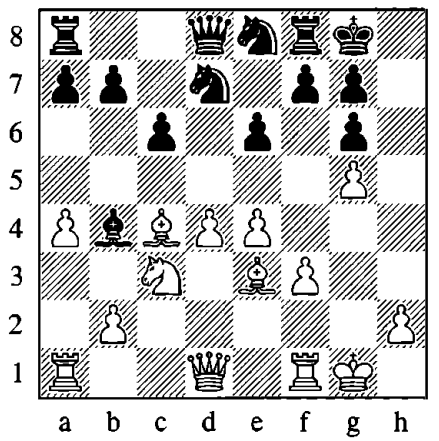
This capture is almost always played here, and it is difficult to see how White may benefit from delaying it any longer.

After a move like 14.♗e3 Black can consider 14...♕e7 by analogy with variation B2221 below, but there is also the option of 14...♗h5!?, attempting to punish White for not exchanging the bishop.

14...hxg6

Now **B2221) 15.♗e3** and **B2222) 15.f4** must both be considered.

B2221) 15.♗e3



This position has been tested in several games between strong players, but so far nobody has tried the following natural move.

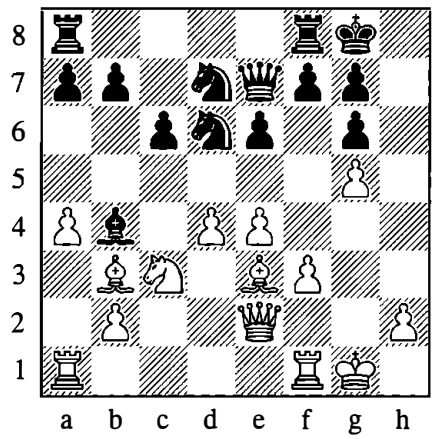
15...♕e7!?N

I like the flexibility of this move. Most games have continued with 15...♘d6, but I would like to avoid blocking the d-file for the moment.

16.♕e2

16.♘a2 can be met by 16...♘d6 17.♗e2 ♗a5 18.b4 ♗c7 with an unclear middlegame. White undeniably has more space, but Black's pieces are harmoniously placed and he is ready to strike with ...e5 at any moment.

16...♘d6 17.♗b3



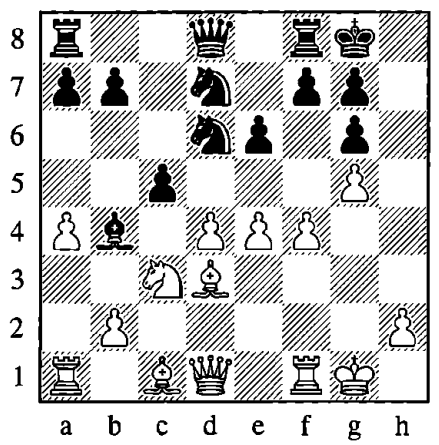
17...♖ac8!

With the white bishop on b3, I prefer to avoid opening the a2-g8 diagonal with ...e5, hence the last move which prepares ...c5.

18.h4 c5 19.d5 c4 20.♗a2 ♗xc3 21.dxe6 ♕xe6 22.bxc3 ♘c5

The position remains double-edged, but I believe Black is fine.

B2222) 15.f4 ♘d6 16.♗d3 c5



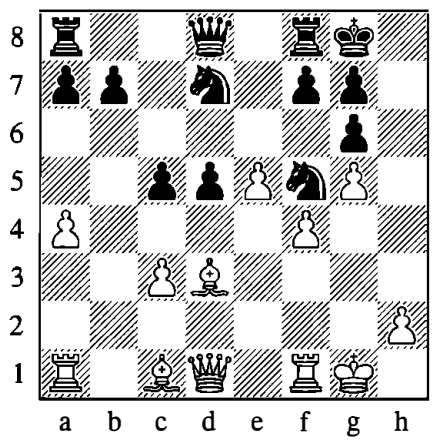
Black's practical results from this position have not been great, but I was able to improve his play in all the important lines.

17.d5

17.e5 was played in Pheby – Huybrecht, corr. 2000, and now after 17...c4!N 18.♗xg6 fxg6 19.exd6 ♘b6∞ Black is at least equal and White risks becoming overextended.

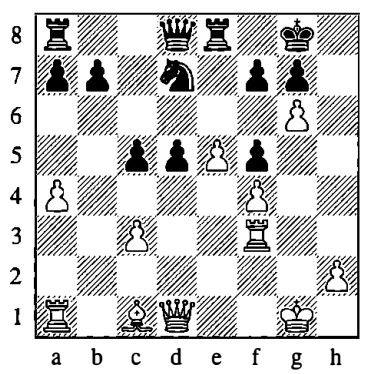
17...♗xc3 18.bxc3 exd5 19.e5 ♘f5

This is the best square for the knight, as after 19...♘e4 20.c4↑ White developed a serious initiative in Jasnikowski – Hector, Bellinge 1991.



20.♗xf5

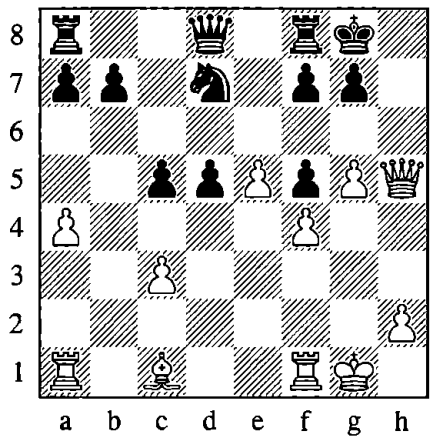
In the event of 20.♖f3 hoping to develop a mating attack on the h-file, Black should defend in the following way: 20...♖e8 21.♗xf5 (After 21.♖h3 ♘f8! 22.♗xf5 gxf5 23.♕h5 ♘g6∓ White has nothing.) 21...gxf5 22.g6



22...♘f8! 23.gxf7† ♔xf7 24.♖g3 d4 Black is at least equal.

20...gxf5 21.♕h5

I also checked 21.♕xd5 ♘b6 22.♕xb7 ♕d3≅ when Black has nice compensation, as his knight is potentially much stronger than White's remaining bishop.



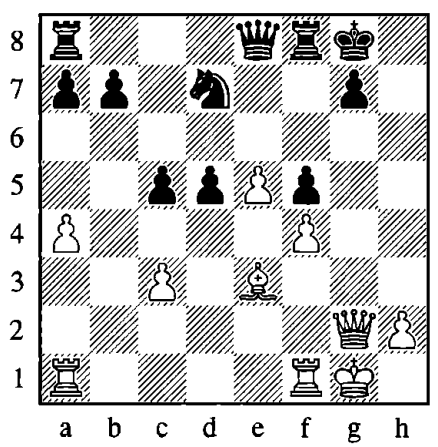
21...♖e8!?N

In the game Black got into trouble: 21...♕b6 22.♗e3 ♖fd8 23.♖ab1 ♕c6 24.♖f3 ♘f8? 25.♖h3 ♘g6 26.e6+– Jasnikowski – Westphal, Germany 2001.

22.g6 fxg6 23.♕xg6 ♖f8!

23...♕b6 24.♕xf5 ♖e6 25.♖a2 ♖g6† 26.♖g2 ♖xg2† 27.♔xg2 ♕c6 28.♕d3 is less clear to me.

24.♗e3 ♕e8 25.♕g2



25...♖f7!

Black is unable to save the d5-pawn, so he makes sure that its capture will not come with check, while preparing the ...♘f8-e6 manoeuvre.

26.♕xd5 ♘f6! 27.♕xc5 ♘e4

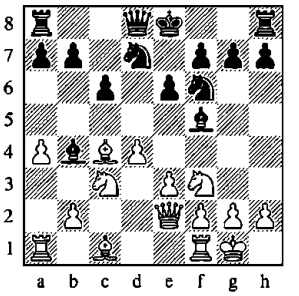
With such a great knight, Black has full compensation for the pawn.

Conclusion

9.♘h4 is quite an ambitious move; the main lines saw White advancing his pawns in the centre and on the kingside and, in most cases, exchanging his knight for the bishop on g6. Black must look for the right moment to strike back in the centre with either ...e5 or ...c5. The ensuing positions are often unclear and difficult to evaluate, but I believe Black has enough resources, and one should not forget that White's pawn advances may leave his king exposed later in the game.



6.e3



9.♕e2

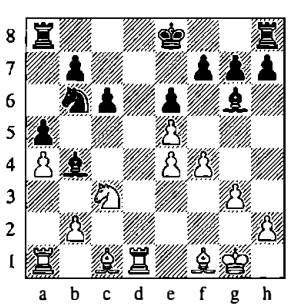
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕e2

9...♗g6

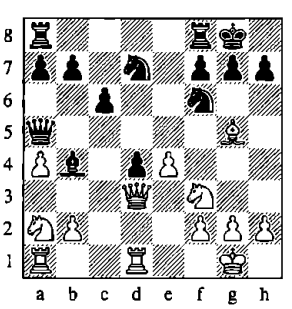
A) 10.♗d3 **314**
B) 10.♖d1 0–0 **315**
B1) 11.♗d2 **316**
B2) 11.♘e5 **317**

note to White's 10th move



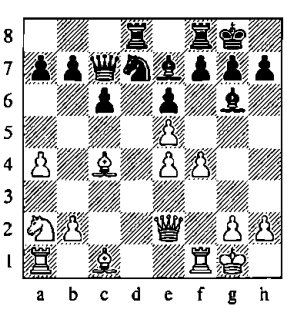
17...♘d7!N

A) after 15.♘a2



15...♗e7N

B2) note to 14.e4



16...♕b6†N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕e2

This is White's most popular move, threatening e3-e4 and vacating the d1-square for the rook.

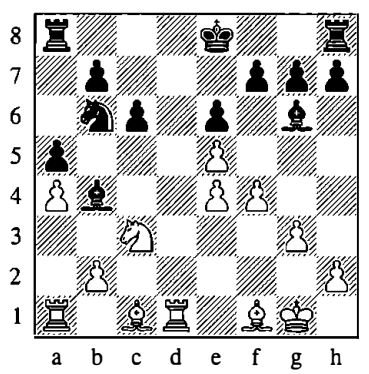
9...♗g6

This is Black's most popular continuation, although 9...0–0 is likely to transpose to the next chapter after 10.e4 ♗g6.

After the text move White has tried several moves. In the present chapter we will consider the relatively harmless **A) 10.♗d3** and **B) 10.♖d1**.

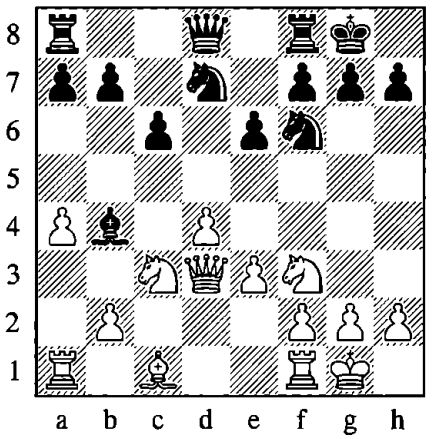
The main theoretical direction is unquestionably 10.e4, which is covered in the next two chapters.

10.♘e5?! is dubious, as after 10...♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♘d7 White does not have enough activity to compensate for his damaged pawn structure. A good example is: 12.f4 ♘b6 13.♖d1 ♕h4 14.g3 ♕h3 15.♕f1 ♕xf1† 16.♗xf1 a5 17.e4



17...♘d7!N (17...♗xc3?! 18.bxc3 ♗xe4 19.♖d4⩲ followed by c3-c4 gave White good compensation in Wassin – Perun, Kiev 2003.) 18.♗e3 ♘c5∓ White must fight for equality.

A) 10.♗d3 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 0–0



This can hardly be dangerous for Black.

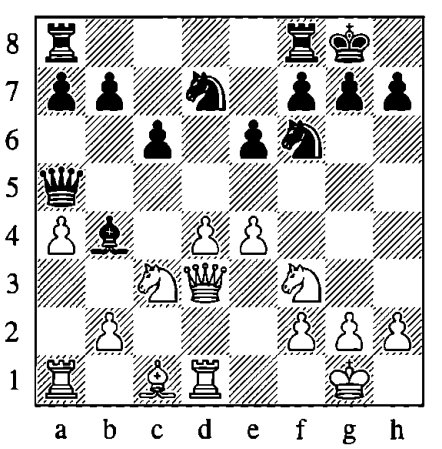
12.♖d1

12.e4? allows a typical tactical device: 12...♗xc3! 13.bxc3 ♘c5! 14.♕c2 ♘cxe4 15.♖e1 ♘d6 White does not have sufficient compensation for the missing pawn. 16.c4 ♘f5 17.♗b2 ♕c7 Black slowly but surely converted his extra pawn in Laren – Finegold, Lansing 1989.

12...♕a5

White has tried a few different moves here, but the following central advance is the most principled.

13.e4

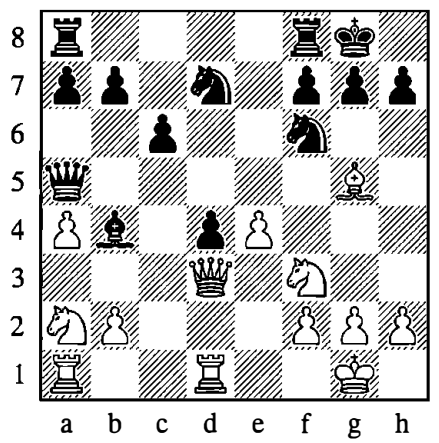


13...e5! 14.♗g5

14.♘a2 is the main alternative. Here I found two games in which Black captured on d4, but I would prefer to keep the tension with 14...♗e7N. A possible continuation is 15.b4 ♕c7 16.♗b2 exd4 17.♗xd4 ♖fd8 intending ...♘f8 with an unclear game.

14...exd4 15.♘a2

This position occurred in Yusupov – Bareev, Germany 2001. Here I suggest:



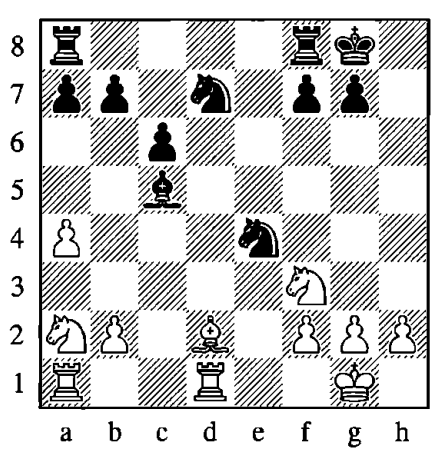
15...♗e7N 16.♕xd4 h6!

Based on the following tactical point.

17.♗xh6!?

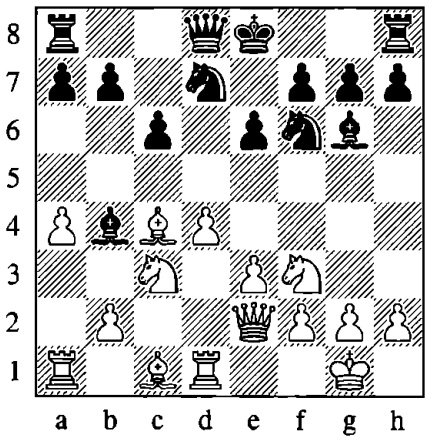
17.♗d2 ♕h5! is also pleasant for Black.

17...♗c5! 18.♕d2 ♕xd2 19.♗xd2 ♘xe4



Black's active pieces give him a slight edge.

B) 10.♖d1

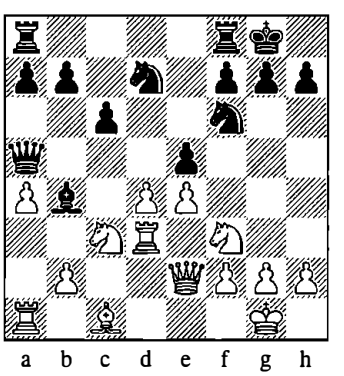


10...0–0

After this obvious reply it is worth considering two main options: **B1) 11.♗d2** and **B2) 11.♘e5**.

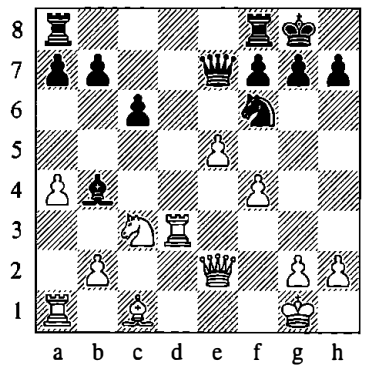
11.e4? reaches a position covered on page 320 – see 11.♖d1? in the notes to move 11 in the next chapter.

11.♗d3 ♗xd3 12.♖xd3 (12.♕xd3 was covered in variation A above, after 10.♗d3 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 0–0 12.♖d1) 12...♕a5 13.e4 e5 is not dangerous for Black. A plausible continuation is:



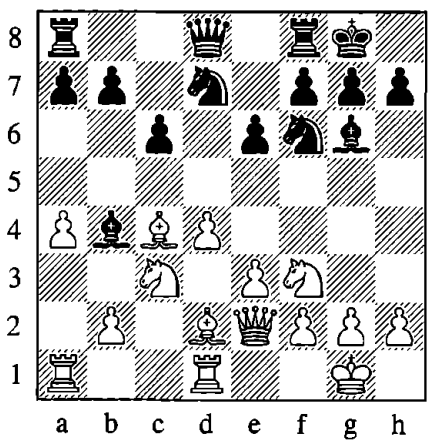
14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♕xe5 16.f4 ♕e7

(16...♕e6 17.e5) 17.e5 Now Black can exploit the odd position of the rook on d3 with:



17...♖ad8! 18.♖xd8 ♖xd8 19.♗d2 This was Raffaele – Hermans, email 2002, and now 19...♘d5N would have been at least equal for Black.

B1) 11.♗d2



11...♕e7

With this flexible move, Black maintains the options of both ...e5 and ...c5.

12.♗e1

12.a5 looks quite logical, and has been played several times. Here I like the preparatory 12...♖ac8N, waiting for a suitable moment to strike at the centre.

12...♖ad8

White has a solid position but Black has a lot of resources, as showcased by the following game.

13.♖ac1?!

White should have preferred 13.h3N with equality.

13...♗h5!

Suddenly the pin along the d1-h5 diagonal causes problems for White.

14.h3

14.♕c2 is the lesser evil, although Black will have a slight edge after exchanging on f3.

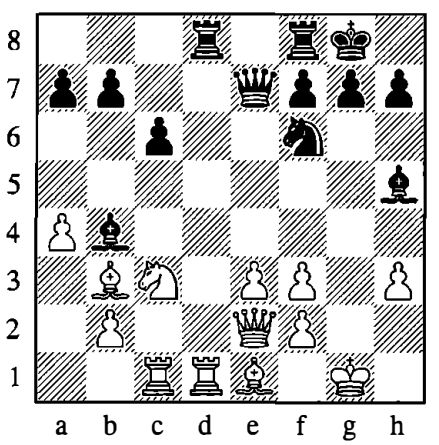
14...e5!

Black is already clearly better.

15.dxe5

After 15.g4 ♘xg4! 16.hxg4 ♗xg4 17.♘e4 ♗xe1 18.♖xe1 ♔h8! Black has a decisive initiative.

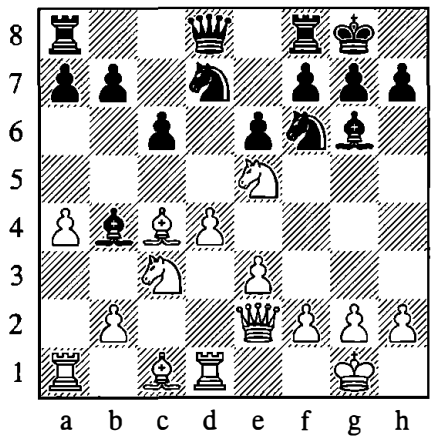
15...♘xe5 16.♗b3 ♘xf3† 17.gxf3



17...♘d7!

Black was already winning in Zilberman – Balogh, Cappelle la Grande 2009.

B2) 11.♘e5

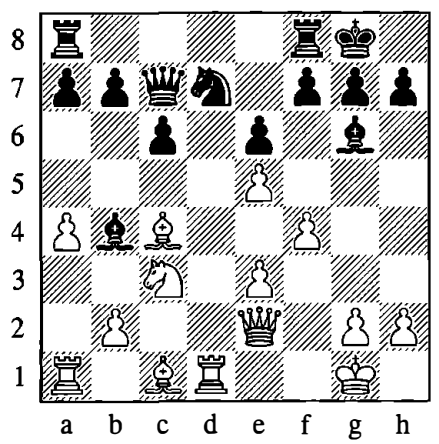


This is the most popular, and a consistent way to follow White's previous move.

11...♘xe5!

In such positions, it is always a big question whether or not to go for the exchange on e5. In this particular case it is highly recommended, and I believe Black can fight for an advantage.

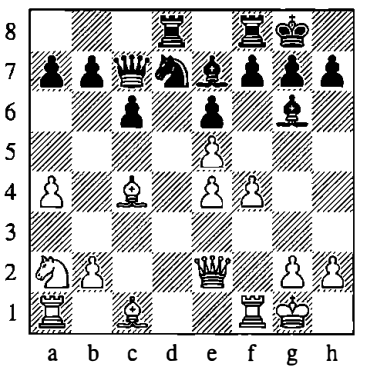
12.dxe5 ♘d7 13.f4 ♕c7



14.e4

14.♗d2 ♖fd8 15.♗e1 is rather slow, and after 15...♘c5∓ Black's superior pawn structure gave him the upper hand in Vincensini – Houard, Marseille 2009.

14.♘a2 has scored well for White, but I do not believe it alters the assessment of the position as being in Black's favour. 14...♗e7 15.e4 ♖ad8 16.♖f1 This was Ivkov – Vukovic, Zagreb 1949, and here Black could have obtained an excellent position with:



16...♕b6†N 17.♔h1 (17.♗e3 ♗c5) 17...♕d4 18.♘c3 ♗h5! 19.♕xh5 ♕xc4 Black has succeeded in swapping off his endangered bishop before f4-f5 became a serious problem. In the resulting position White still has some attacking chances, but Black's superior structure and counterplay along the d-file are more significant.

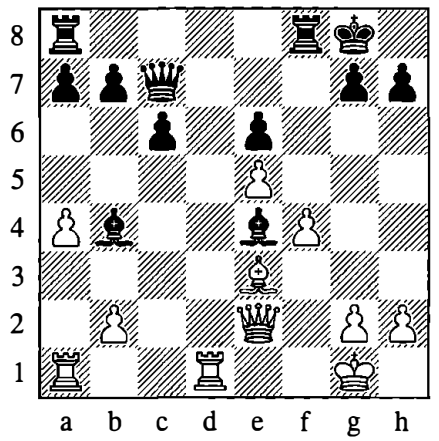
14...♘c5 15.♗e3

15.♘a2? is a clear mistake here due to 15...♘xe4 16.♘xb4 ♕b6† 17.♗e3 ♕xb4∓ and Black is just a healthy pawn up, Ju Wenjun – Cramling, Beijing (blitz) 2011.

15...♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♗xe4 17.♗xe6N

17.♖d4? occurred in Brasoy – Forsaa, Tromso 2003, and here Black missed the simple 17...♗g6!N 18.♗xe6 ♗c5∓ securing a material advantage.

17...fxe6



18.♕c4 ♗d5

18...♖xf4!? 19.♗xf4 ♕b6† 20.♔h1 ♗d5∞ gives Black nice compensation, but it is hardly necessary to play this way as the main line is more than sufficient.

19.♕xb4 b6∓

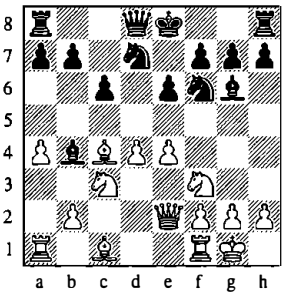
Black has an obvious positional advantage as his bishop is stronger than its white counterpart.

Conclusion

The sidelines examined here demand a certain amount of accuracy from Black, but ultimately none of them pose much of a theoretical threat. After this short introduction to the 9.♕e2 ♗g6 variation, the next two chapters will be devoted to the much more critical variation beginning with 10.e4.



6.e3



10.e4

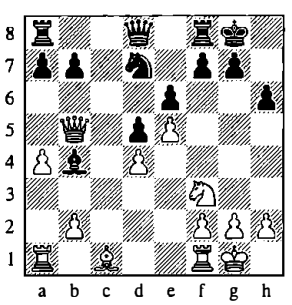
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕e2 ♗g6 10.e4

10...0–0

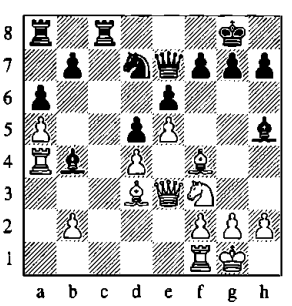
A) 11.e5 ♘d5 **321**
A1) 12.♘xd5 **321**
A2) 12.♗d2 **322**
A3) 12.♘e4 **323**
B) 11.♗d3 ♗h5 **324**
B1) 12.h3 **325**
B2) 12.♗f4 **326**
B3) 12.e5 ♘d5 **328**
B31) 13.♗d2 **328**
B32) 13.♘e4 **330**
B33) 13.♘xd5 cxd5 14.♕e3! ♖e8!? **331**
B331) 15.♘e1 **332**
B332) 15.♗d2 **333**

A1) after 15.♕b5



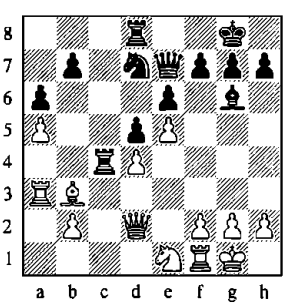
15...♕e7!N

B2) after 17.♖a4



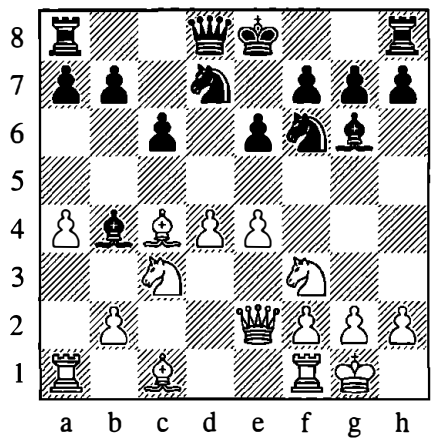
17...♗xf3!N

B332) after 23.♗b3



23...♕b4!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕e2 ♗g6 10.e4



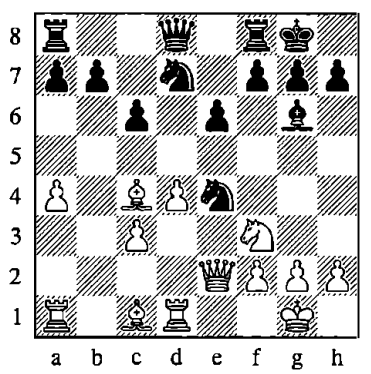
This is unquestionably the main theoretical direction. White advances in the centre and offers a pawn sacrifice.

10...0–0

It is possible to accept the offer with 10...♗xc3 11.bxc3 ♘xe4, but after 12.♗a3 White has genuine compensation.

The text move is regarded as the main line. Now White has two reasonable moves: **A) 11.e5** and **B) 11.♗d3**.

11.♖d1? does not work: 11...♗xc3 12.bxc3 ♘xe4



13.♕e3 (13.♗b2 ♕a5∓ is also clearly better for Black.) 13...♘b6 14.♗a2 ♘d5∓ Black was a healthy pawn up in Von Herman – Batchuluun, Internet 2009.

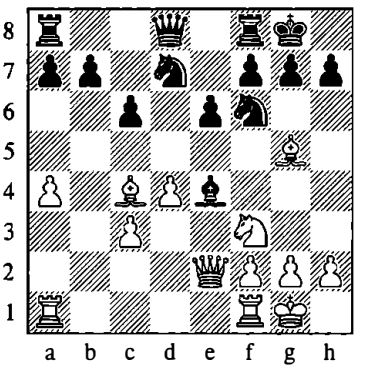
Another dubious line is:

11.♗g5?!

This simply allows Black to capture a pawn.

11...♗xc3! 12.bxc3 ♗xe4

Grabbing the pawn is much better here than on the previous move, as Black has already castled and the white bishop has moved away from the excellent a3-square.

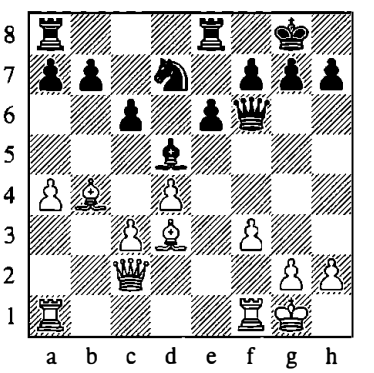


13.♘e5 ♕a5 14.♘xd7 ♘xd7 15.♗e7

15.♕xe4 ♕xg5∓ is obviously not White's idea.

15...♖fe8 16.♗b4 ♕f5 17.f3 ♗d5 18.♗d3 ♕f6 19.♕c2

At first sight it looks as though White has made serious progress by threatening both 20.♗xh7† and 20.c4, but Black has a convincing reply.



19...g6!N

This is stronger than 19...h6 20.c4 c5! 21.dxc5 ♗c6 with just a slightly better game for Black, Damljanovic – Gelfand, Mallorca 2004. The point behind the last move is revealed after:

20.c4?

White should try something else, although Black will be clearly better after replying with ...e5 or ...c5.

20...♕xd4† 21.♔h1 ♘e5!

Black is winning.

A) 11.e5 ♘d5

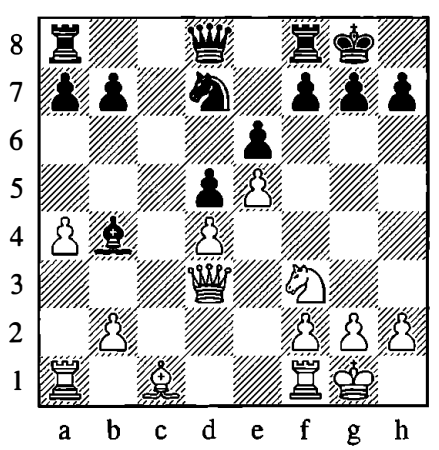
Now White has three natural options: **A1) 12.♘xd5**, **A2) 12.♗d2** and **A3) 12.♘e4**.

A1) 12.♘xd5 cxd5 13.♗d3 ♗xd3

13...♗h5 transposes to the later variation B33 but, when the present move order appears, the bishop exchange offers an easier path to equality.

13...♗e7 is another good move.

14.♕xd3

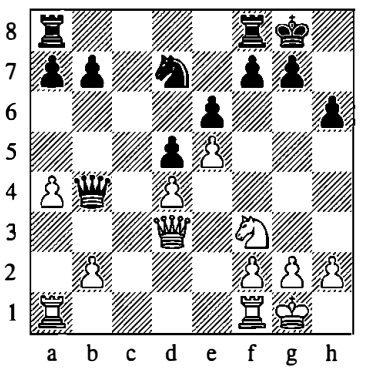


14...h6!

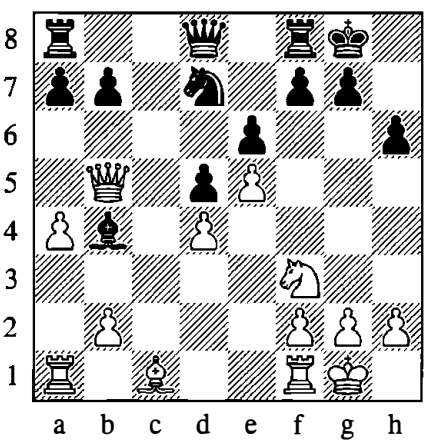
It is important to prevent ♘g5.

15.♕b5

15.♗d2 ♕a5 is harmless for Black, for instance: 16.♗xb4 (16.b3?! ♗xd2 17.♘xd2 occurred in Duquesnoy – Bailet, Aix-les-Bains 2007, and here Black could have posed problems with 17...♖ac8N 18.♖ac1 ♘b8!∓ followed by ...♘c6, as the pawns on b3 and d4 are both weak.) 16...♕xb4



17.♕b5 ♕xb5 18.axb5 Now in Weissel – Wallner, Vienna 2005, the accurate 18...a6!N would have immediately solved all of Black's problems.



15...♕e7!N

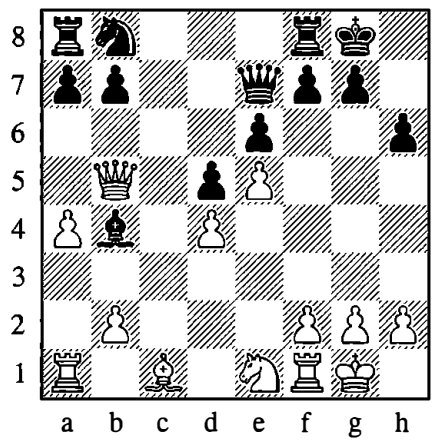
15...a5 gave Black a playable position in Graf – Duchateau, Deizisau 2005, but the text move seems more accurate to me. Black develops the queen while defending both the bishop and the b7-pawn.

16.♘e1

16.♕xb7? would be a serious mistake in view of 16...♘xe5! 17.♕xe7 ♘xf3† 18.gxf3 ♗xe7∓ when White's pawn structure is terrible.

16...♘b8!

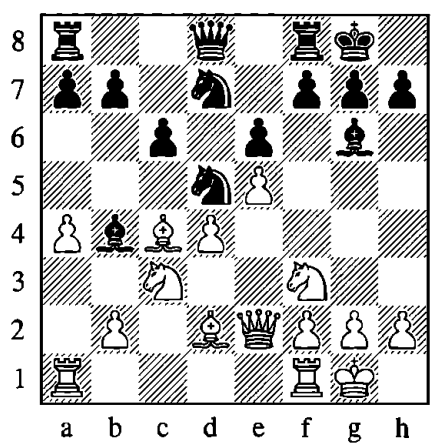
A thematic manoeuvre in this type of pawn structure.



17.♘d3 a5 18.♗e3 ♘c6

Black is comfortably equal.

A2) 12.♗d2



This has occurred in quite a lot of games. Black has tried many moves, with 12...♕a5 being the most popular, but I was attracted by the following rare move.

12...♘e7!?

This seems to me like the most combative move, but so far it has only occurred in two games. The knight is heading for f5 where it will threaten the d4-pawn, perhaps in conjunction with a bishop on h5.

13.♖fd1 a5!

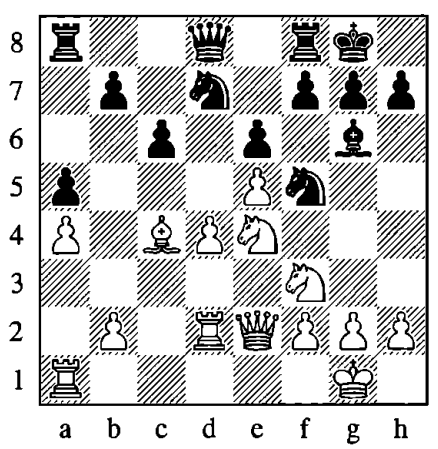
Originally I found this move as a novelty, but then it was played in a game in September 2013.

14.♘e4N

It seemed to me that this was the critical move on which to focus my analysis.

14.♗g5 was played in the aforementioned game, Del Rio de Angelis – Ortega Ruiz, Azuqueca de Henares 2013. The natural reply is 14...h6N, with the possible continuation 15.♗h4 ♘b6 16.♗d3 ♗xd3 17.♕xd3 (or 17.♖xd3 ♘bd5) 17...♕d7 with a comfortable position for Black.

14...♗xd2 15.♖xd2 ♘f5



16.g4!?

Now the position becomes more complicated. Quieter moves can be met by the simple ...♘b6-d5.

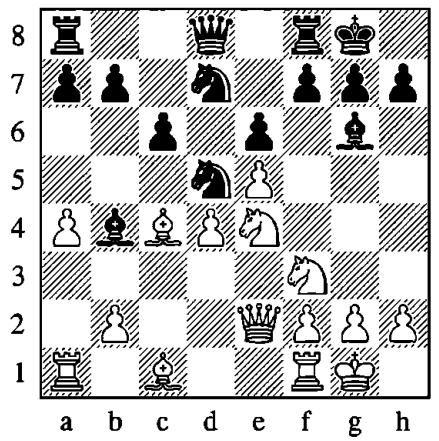
16...♘h4 17.♘d6 ♘b6

Black has a decent position. It is worth pointing out that the b7-pawn is untouchable:

18.♘xb7? ♘xf3† 19.♕xf3 ♕g5!

White loses material.

A3) 12.♘e4



Here Black has numerous reliable options, but I like the following calm move.

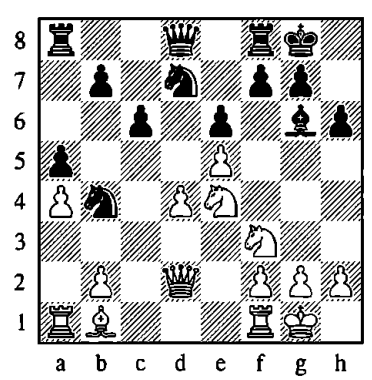
12...h6!?

Preventing the enemy pieces from using the g5-square.

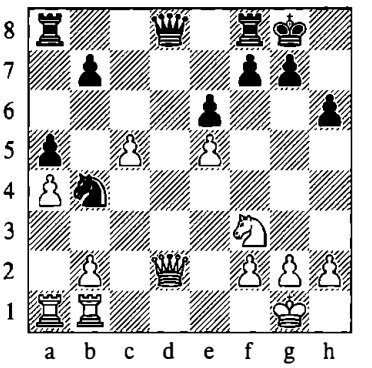
13.♖d1

Here are a couple of other instructive lines I checked.

After 13.♗d3 I like 13...a5 when the one example on the database continued: 14.♗d2 ♗xd2 15.♕xd2 ♘b4 16.♗b1



16...c5! 17.♘xc5 (17.♖d1N was the right way to maintain the balance.) 17...♘xc5 18.dxc5 ♗xb1 19.♖fxb1 Now in Siegel – S. Savchenko, Bad Wiessee 2002, Black could have obtained a pleasant edge with:



19...♖c8N 20.♖c1 ♕c7! Followed by ...♖fd8 and, if necessary, ...♖d5.

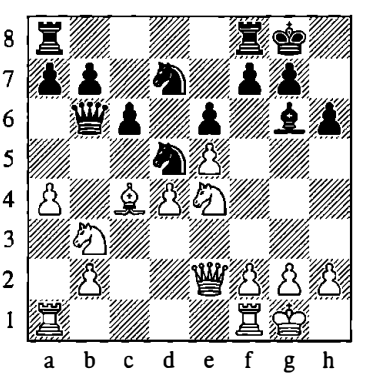
13.♗d2 ♗xd2

I don't see any problem for Black in exchanging the dark-squared bishops.

14.♘fxd2

14.♘exd2N can be met by 14...♘b4 15.♘e4 a5 16.♘d6 ♖b8 followed by ...♘b6-c8 with a comfortable game.

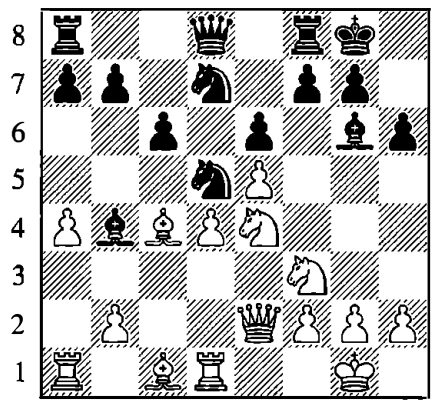
14...♕b6 15.♘b3



15...♕b4

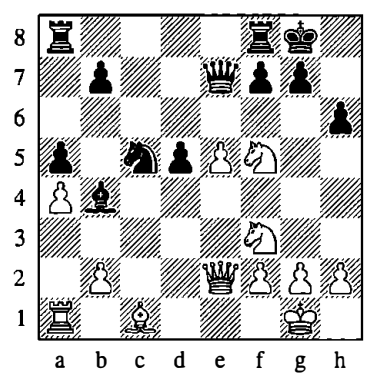
If Black is not satisfied with the prospect of the potential repetition that might occur in the line below, I can recommend

15...♗xe4!?N 16.♕xe4 ♕b4 17.♖fc1 a5= with a balanced but still complicated game.
16.♘d6 ♘7b6 17.♖fc1 ♘c8 18.♘e4 ♘cb6= N. Pert – Purdon, England 1996.



13...a5 14.♗d2

14.♗d3 looks natural although Black has no problems. A nice example continued: 14...♕e7 15.♘g3 ♗xd3 16.♖xd3 c5 17.dxc5?! ♘xc5 18.♖xd5 exd5 19.♘f5 Uhlmann – Bruemmer, Magdeburg 1964. White's seemingly attractive exchange sacrifice is actually not too dangerous, especially after the accurate continuation:



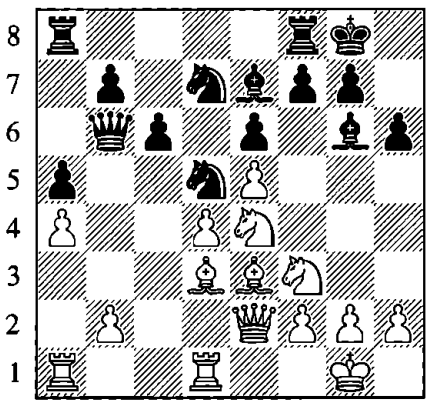
19...♕e8!N 20.♘3d4 ♖a6∓ Black has a clear advantage.

14...♗e7 15.♗d3 ♕b6

White is starting to run out of constructive ideas.

16.♗e3

Now in Schoof – Zeitz, Germany 1988, Black's most ambitious continuation would have been:



16...♘xe3!?N

The game continuation of 16...♖fd8 is equal.

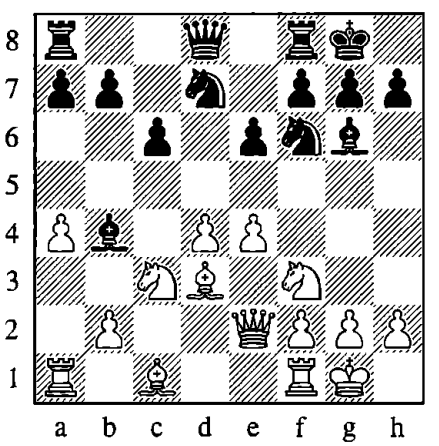
17.♕xe3

17.fxe3 can be met by 17...c5.

17...♖fd8

I prefer Black's position with the two bishops.

B) 11.♗d3



11...♗h5

Without this move, the e4-e5 push might lead to problems for Black on the kingside. In

the event of an exchange on d3, White would follow up with ♘g5 threatening mate on h7. If Black allows the bishop to be exchanged on g6 and recaptures with the h-pawn, White can play ♘g5 and develop threats along the h-file. It is therefore worth spending another tempo with the bishop to prevent these ideas, while also pinning the f3-knight.

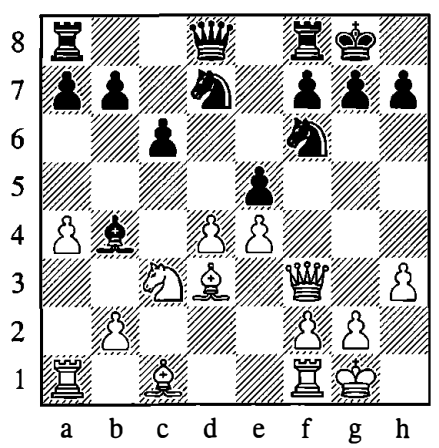
From this position it is important to mention **B1) 12.h3** and **B2) 12.♗f4**, although **B3) 12.e5** is by far White's first choice.

Other moves allow Black to execute his main freeing idea of ...e5, for instance: 12.♖d1 e5 13.♗e3 ♕e7 14.h3 ♖fe8 and Black was at least equal in Dovzik – Pataki, Hungary 2010.

B1) 12.h3 ♗xf3

This is much simpler than 12...e5 13.g4 exd4 14.♘a2 ♘xg4 15.hxg4 ♗xg4 with complications.

13.♕xf3 e5



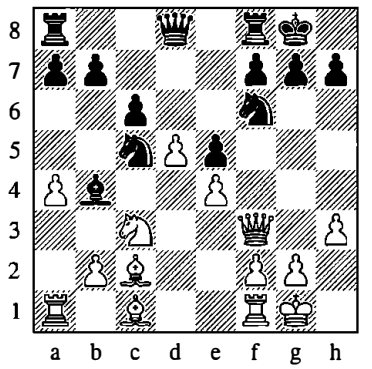
14.♗e3

Another game continued:

14.d5 ♘c5 15.♗c2?

15.♗c4N is an obvious improvement, when 15...♗xc3 16.bxc3 cxd5 17.exd5 ♕c7∞ leads to double-edged play.

The text move occurred in Goehler – Starck, Jueterbog 1985, and now for some reason Black refrained from the simple:



15...♗xc3N 16.♕xc3

Or 16.bxc3 cxd5 17.♗a3 dxe4 18.♕e3 b6 with some advantage.

16...♘cxe4 17.♗xe4 ♘xe4 18.♕xe5 ♖e8 19.♕d4 ♕xd5 20.♕xd5 cxd5

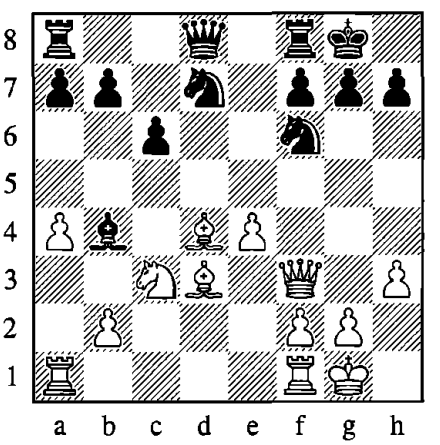
Black has an extra pawn and White's only consolation is that he still has some drawing chances.

14...exd4

This is simple enough, but Black can also keep the tension with 14...♖e8.

15.♗xd4

Shulman – Wojtkiewicz, Dallas 2000. Now Black's most comfortable route to equality is:

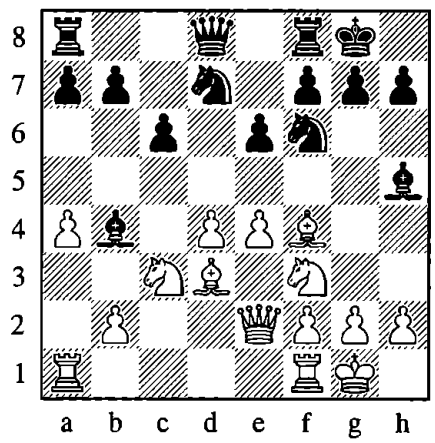


15...♗c5N

Ensuring that White will not have a pair of bishops. The continuation might be:

16.♗xc5 ♘xc5 17.♖ad1 ♘fd7 18.♗c2 ♕b6 19.b3 ♖fd8=

B2) 12.♗f4



White develops his last minor piece and holds up ...e5.

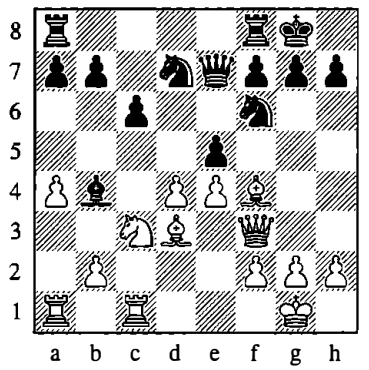
12...♕e7!?

12...♖e8 has been much more popular. Then after 13.e5 ♘d5 14.♘xd5 cxd5 we reach a position with a lot of games in the database, but I found the version with the queen on e7 more interesting.

Black can also deviate from the above line with 14...exd5!? although I am not sure about the position arising after 15.♗f5 ♘f8 16.g4 ♗g6 17.♗g3 ♘e6 18.♖ad1 as seen in Izeta Txabarri – Iruzubieta Villaluenga, Elgoibar 1993.

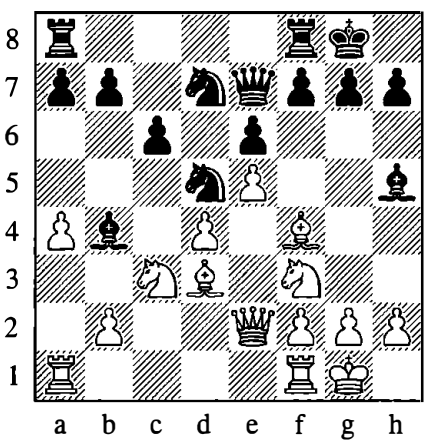
13.e5

This is virtually forced, otherwise Black will play ...e5 himself with an easy game, as shown in the following example: 13.♖fc1?! ♗xf3! 14.♕xf3 e5



15.♗e3 exd4 16.♗xd4 ♘e5 17.♕g3 Now in Siedentopf – Schlemermeyer, Dresden 2002, the simple 17...♗d6!N would have clarified Black's advantage.

13...♘d5



14.♘xd5

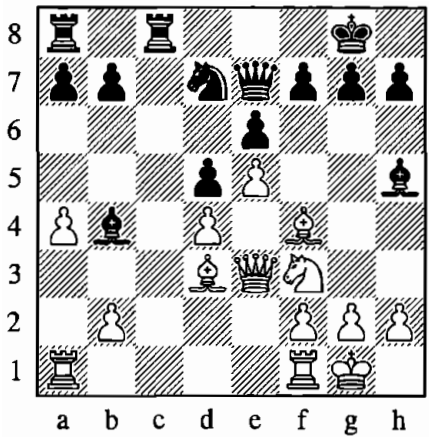
14.♗d2 is playable, although it seems strange to move the bishop for a second time in a few moves. Now in Comas Fabrego – Bermejo Arruego, Castellar 1995, I think Black should have played 14...a5N with a good game.

14...cxd5 15.♕e3

15.♖fc1 ♖fc8 16.♕e3 transposes to the note with 16.♖fc1 on the next page.

15...♖fc8

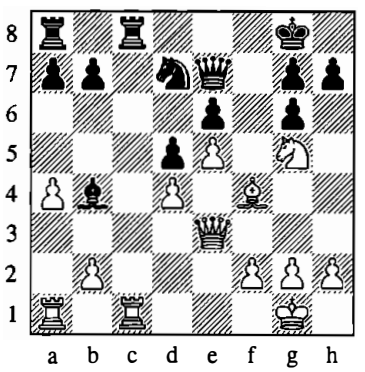
This highlights one of the advantages of the earlier queen move to e7.



16.a5!

This looks like the most interesting try. Apart from the positional threat of a5-a6, White prepares to activate his rook using the a4-square. I checked a couple of other continuations as well:

16.♘g5 ♗g6 17.♗xg6 fxg6 18.♖fc1



18...h6N

The most ambitious continuation. Also not bad is 18...♖c6 19.♕b3 a5 with equality, Kozma – Teschner, Monte Carlo 1967.

19.♘h3

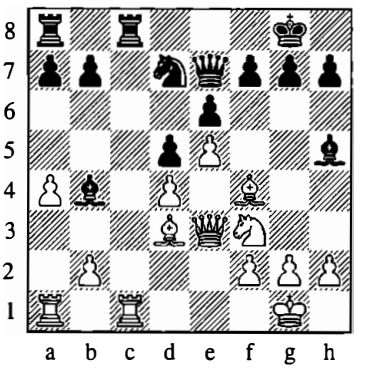
After 19.♘f3 g5 20.♗g3 ♖c6! 21.h4 gxh4 22.♗xh4 ♕f8∓ Black's queenside play develops easily, while White has nothing on the kingside.

19...g5 20.♗g3 ♘b6 21.b3 ♗a5!?

Black has good prospects on the queenside.

16.♖fc1

I found five games in which this position arose. Black has tried 16...♗g6 and 16...a6, but I think the most interesting continuation is:



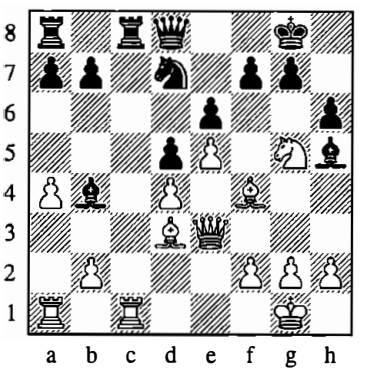
16...♕d8!?N

Intending to deploy the queen on the queenside to attack White's weaknesses.

17.♘g5

After 17.♘d2 ♖xc1† 18.♖xc1 ♖c8 19.♘f1 ♖xc1 20.♕xc1 ♘f8 White's attacking chances have ended, but his queenside pawn weaknesses might tell in the long term.

17...h6



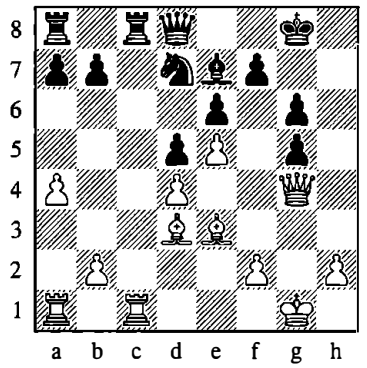
18.♕h3

After 18.♗h7† ♔f8 19.♘h3 ♖xc1† 20.♖xc1 ♖c8 Black keeps everything under control.

18...hxg5 19.♗e3

This type of sacrificial motif must be taken seriously, but Black can return the material to reach a safe position.

19...g6 20.g4 ♗xg4 21.♕xg4 ♗e7



22.h4 ♔g7 23.hxg5 ♖xc1† 24.♖xc1 ♖c8

With the kingside blocked, Black is in no danger and White still needs to keep an eye on his queenside weaknesses.

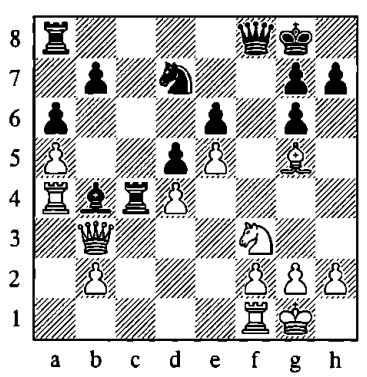
16...a6 17.♖a4

This is one of the main ideas behind White's previous move.

17.♘e1N is pretty harmless, and after 17...♕e8!? 18.♗b1 ♗g6 19.♗xg6 hxg6 20.♘d3 ♗f8 Black has a comfortable position.

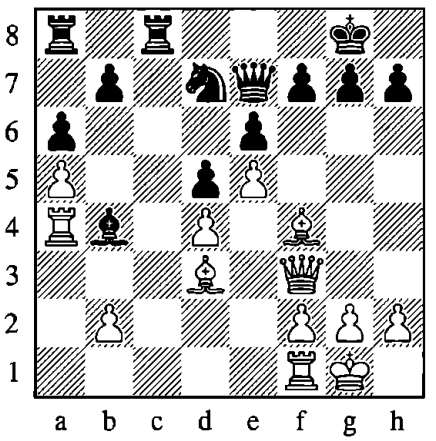
17...♗xf3!N

This is an obvious improvement over: 17...♗g6 18.♗xg6 fxg6? Now White obtains a big advantage by force. (18...hxg6 is better although I still prefer White after 19.♕b3 ♖c4 20.♖c1 ♖ac8 21.♖xc4 ♖xc4 22.h4±) 19.♕b3 ♖c4 20.♗g5 ♕f8



21.♗d2! ♗xd2 22.♖xc4 dxc4 23.♕xb7!± Geller – Furman, Gorky 1954.

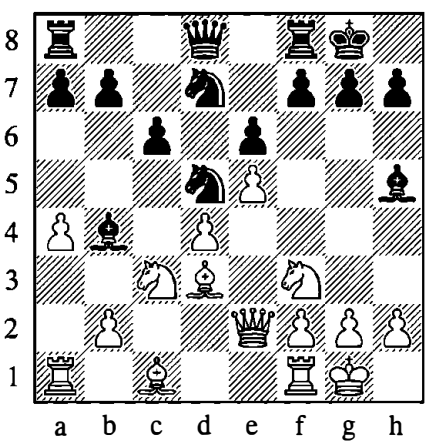
18.♕xf3



18...♘b8! 19.♖fa1 ♘c6 20.♗e3 ♖c7

Black is doing fine.

B3) 12.e5 ♘d5

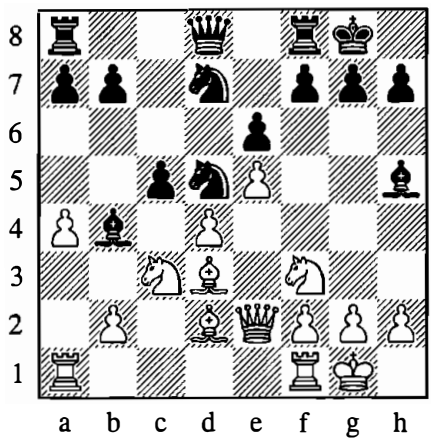


This is the most important theoretical branch. Now **B31) 13.♗d2** is harmless and **B32) 13.♘e4** is a slightly more serious try, but the main line by far is **B33) 13.♘xd5**.

B31) 13.♗d2

This allows Black to strike at the centre without delay.

13...c5!



14.♖fd1

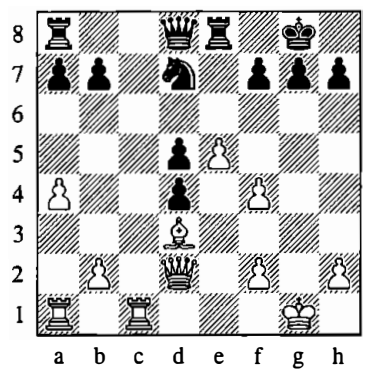
Of course it is also necessary to check:

14.♘xd5 ♗xd2 15.♕xd2

I discovered the following funny line: 15.♕e4N ♗g6 16.♕e2 Here Black has a choice between 16...♗h5 repeating the position, or 16...♗a5 if he wants to keep the game going.

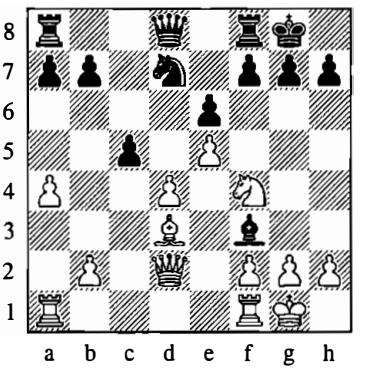
15...♗xf3 16.♘f4

Or 16.gxf3 exd5 17.f4 cxd4 18.♖fc1 ♖e8



19.♗f5?! (Better was 19.♗f1N ♘f8 20.♖a3 f6 maintaining equality.) 19...♘f8! 20.♖a3 ♘e6 21.♖g3 ♕h4 22.♗xe6 fxe6∓ White was facing an unpleasant defence in Sasikiran – Rublevsky, Foros 2007.

At this point I managed to discover an interesting new resource.



16...cxd4!N

In both of the existing games Black opted for the more obvious 16...♗c6.

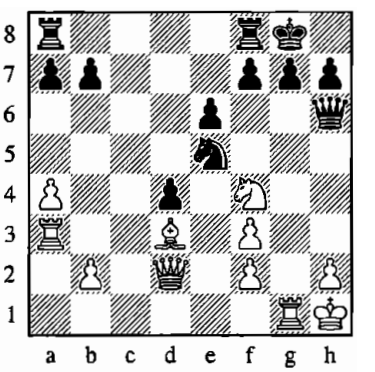
17.gxf3

After 17.♖fe1 ♗c6 18.♗c2 Black has a slightly better game, for example: 18...a5 19.♕xd4 ♕b6 20.♕d3 g6∓ White's minor pieces are misplaced.

17...♕g5† 18.♔h1 ♘xe5 19.♖g1 ♕h6!

Surprisingly, White has no good way to escape the pin. First he must defend the f3-pawn.

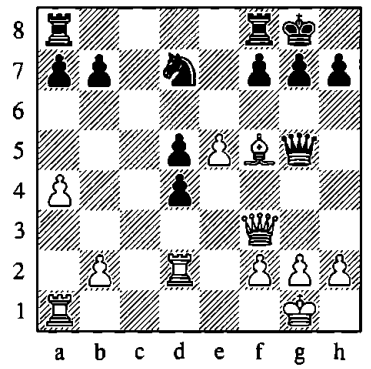
20.♖a3



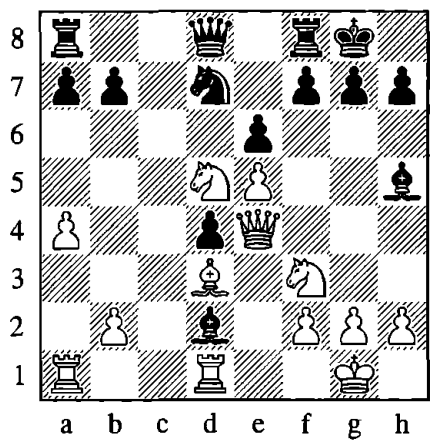
20...♘g6! 21.♗xg6 fxg6 22.♖g4 e5∓

14...cxd4 15.♘xd5 ♗xd2 16.♕e4

Another game continued: 16.♖xd2 exd5 17.♗f5 Gligoric – Smyslov, Belgrade 1956. Here it is strange that Black refrained from the natural 17...♗xf3!?N 18.♕xf3 ♕g5 when White must play accurately to equalize. He can do so with:



19.♖xd4 ♘xe5 20.♕h3 g6 21.f4! ♘f3† 22.♕xf3 ♕xf5 23.♕xd5=



16...g6!

16...♗g6? 17.♕xd4± is much worse.

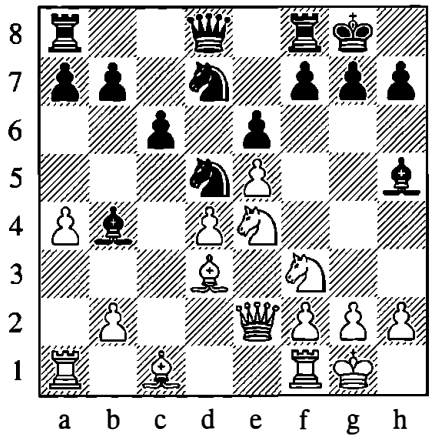
17.g4 exd5 18.♕xd4 ♗xg4 19.♕xg4 ♗h6 20.♗b5 ♘c5 21.♗c4

The pin along the d-file allows White to regain the missing pawn, although the most he can hope for is equality.

21...♕c8 22.♕xc8 ♖axc8 23.♖xd5 ♖fd8

Geller – Smyslov, Moscow 1955. Black has slightly the more pleasant side of a probable draw.

B32) 13.♘e4



13...♗e7

The main point of this retreat is to prepare ...c5 without allowing ideas such as ♗g5 for White.

14.♘g3

14.a5

This is the main alternative. Here I like:

14...c5!

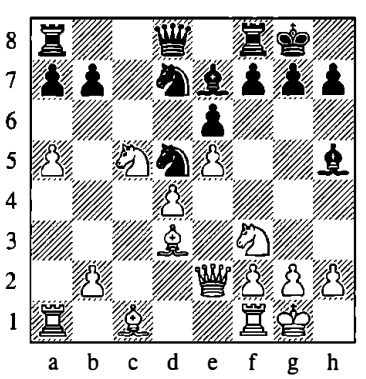
This was recommended by Sadler but has never been played, apart from in a correspondence game more than thirty years ago.

15.♘xc5N

Other moves are much worse:

15.dxc5? ♘xe5 gave Black a clear advantage in O'Connor – Stoll, corr. 1982.

15.♘g3?! runs into 15...♗xf3 16.♕xf3 cxd4 17.♕e4 g6 18.♗h6 ♘c5 19.♕f3 ♕c7! 20.♗xf8 ♔xf8 when Black has more than sufficient compensation for the exchange.

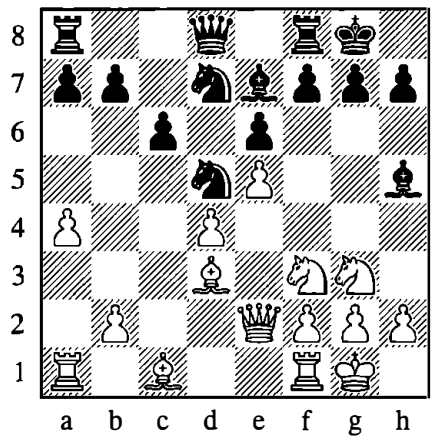


15...♗xc5!?

This looks more interesting than 15...♘xc5 16.dxc5 ♖c8 with roughly equal chances.

16.dxc5 ♖c8

The position is double-edged, but Black is fine for sure.



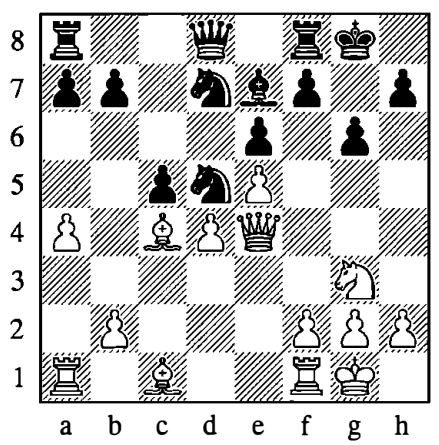
14...♗xf3!?

I consider this the simplest solution, although 14...♗g6 has been played more frequently.

15.♕xf3 c5 16.♕e4 g6 17.♗c4

17.♗h6N looks like a slight improvement for White, and after 17...♖e8 18.♗b5 a6 19.♗xd7 ♕xd7 20.dxc5 ♗xc5 21.♕d3 the position is more or less balanced.

The present position occurred in Litinskaya – Kaczorowska, Lubniewice 1995. Here Black should have continued:



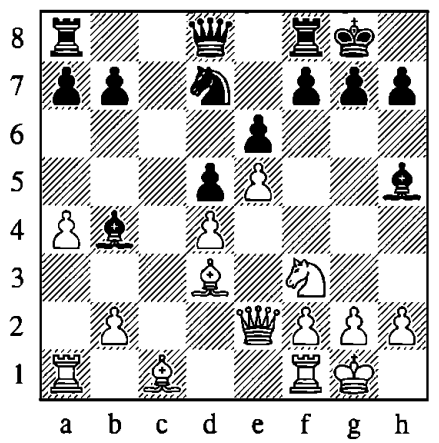
17...cxd4N 18.♗h6

18.♗xd5? ♘c5 19.♕xd4 ♘b3! is excellent for Black.

18...♖e8 19.♖ad1 ♕c7 20.♗xd5 exd5 21.♕xd4 ♕xe5 22.♕xe5 ♘xe5 23.♖xd5 ♘g4 24.♗f4 ♘f6

Black is a little better, but White should hold.

B33) 13.♘xd5 cxd5



Exchanging knights is clearly White's first choice.

14.♕e3!

This is the only way to fight for an opening advantage.

14.h3?! has been used by a few decent players, but it is too slow. Black can play 14...♘b8 with a comfortable game, but I discovered an even stronger option in 14...f5!N when I don't see a path to equality for White; his kingside play is unlikely to go anywhere, while Black intends ...♘b8-c6.

14...♖e8!?

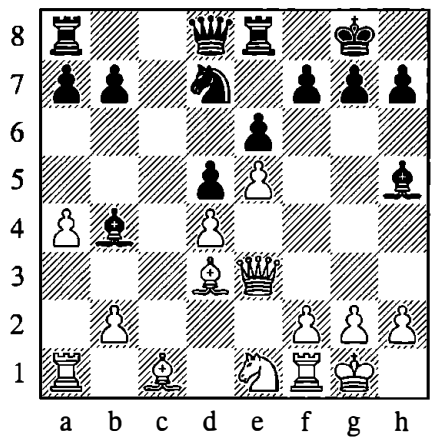
14...♗e7 has been the most popular choice, and 14...♗g6 is another reliable option. However, after a serious investigation

I concluded that the text move is at least as theoretically sound, while also offering more chances for Black to play for a win in the main lines.

In the remainder of the present chapter, we will analyse **B331) 15.♘e1** and **B332) 15.♗d2**.

15.♘g5 is the most theoretically challenging move, and will receive dedicated coverage in the next chapter.

B331) 15.♘e1



15...♗g6

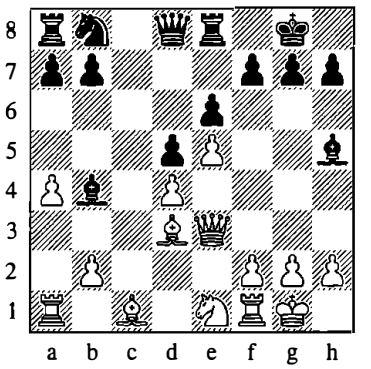
This is the main theoretical continuation.

15...♖c8 is a natural move which was chosen by Kramnik against Topalov, in the first of their rapid tie-break games in the Elista match of 2006. However, I am not sure about the position after 16.♗xh7†!? ♔xh7 17.♕h3 g6 18.g4 ♖h8 19.gxh5 ♔g8 20.h6 as played in Karthikeyan – Diepeveen, Dieren 2009. Black certainly has some positional trumps, but White has genuine attacking chances.

I would also like to mention an untested option which I believe to be a playable alternative to the main line:

15...♘b8!?N

The knight manoeuvre is thematic, but it has still not been tried in this position.



16.♗xh7†!?

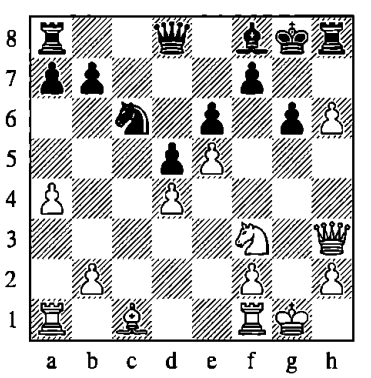
This familiar sacrifice is White's only serious chance to cause problems. Neither of the following options poses much of a threat:

16.♗b5 ♘c6 17.♘d3 ♕a5=

16.♘c2 ♘c6 17.f4 ♕b6! (17...f5 is a bit passive, but is still good enough for equality.) 18.f5 exf5 19.♖xf5 (19.♗xf5? ♖xe5!) 19...♗g6 20.♖f2 ♗e7 21.♗xg6 fxg6 22.b3 ♖f8 23.♖xf8† ♖xf8 24.♗d2 h6 Black is by no means worse; his structure has been damaged slightly, but the pawns on b3, d4 and e5 are all vulnerable.

16...♔xh7 17.♕h3 g6 18.g4 ♖h8 19.gxh5 ♔g8 20.h6 ♘c6 21.♘f3 ♗f8

Black intends to bring his knight to f5 to round up the h6-pawn. If White does not play accurately he could fall into a strategically dangerous position, but he can maintains the balance as follows:

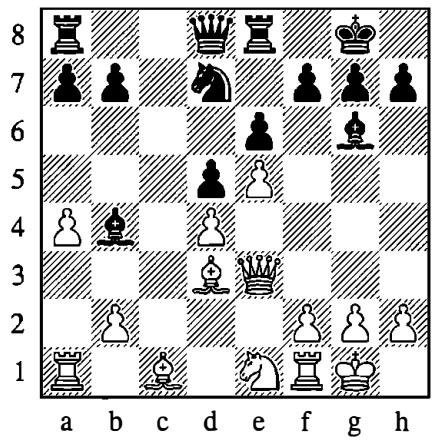


22.♗g5 ♕d7 23.♖ac1

Or 23.♕h4 ♘e7 24.♕f4 ♘f5 25.♘h4 ♗xh6 26.♗xh6 ♘xh6 27.♖fc1 ♔h7 28.♕f6 with equality.

23...♗xh6 24.♗xh6 ♘e7 25.♖c3 ♘f5 26.♖fc1 ♖xh6 27.♕g4 ♖h5

The position remains balanced.

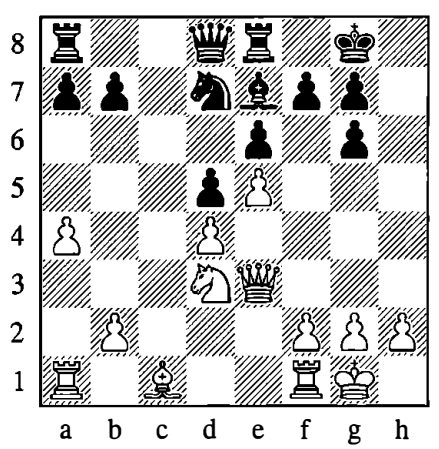


16.♗xg6 hxg6

When the white knight has vacated the f3-square, there is no problem recapturing with the h-pawn.

17.♘d3 ♗e7!

17...♕b6 18.♘xb4 ♕xb4 19.b3 ♖ac8 20.♗a3 ♕c3 21.♖ac1 ♕xe3 22.fxe3 f6 23.♗d6 left Black under some pressure in Anand – Kramnik, Bonn (7) 2008.



18.♗d2 ♖c8

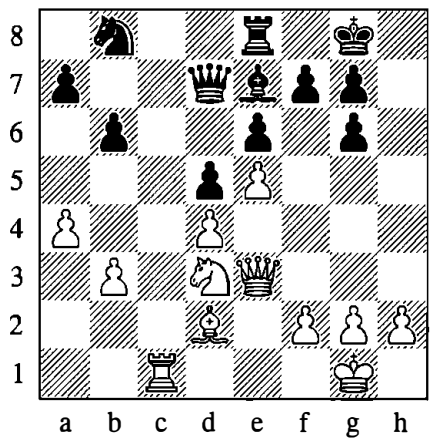
I only found one practical example from this position, where Black comfortably solved his problems.

19.♖fc1 ♘b8

19...♕b6!? 20.b4 ♖c4! is a reliable alternative.

20.♖xc8 ♕xc8 21.♖c1 ♕d7 22.b3 b6

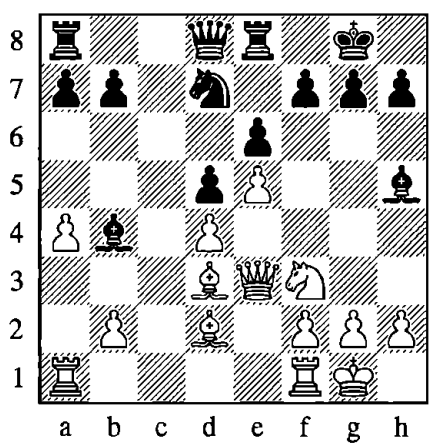
There is nothing wrong with 22...♖c8 either.



23.♗b4 ♗xb4 24.♘xb4 a5 25.♘a2 ♖c8=

Banusz – Erdos, Budapest 2004.

B332) 15.♗d2



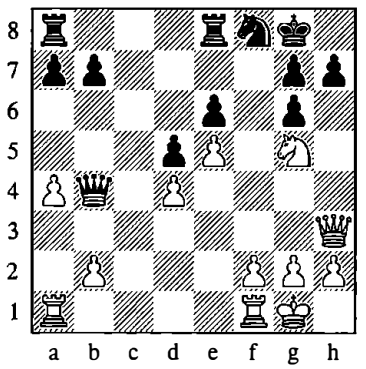
15...♕a5

15...♗e7?! is too timid and after 16.♖fc1 White's space advantage gave him a pleasant edge in Kramnik – Aronian, Shanghai 2010.

16.♗xb4 ♕xb4 17.♕d2

This is the consistent follow-up; White is hoping to simplify to a favourable endgame.

17.♘g5 ♘f8 18.♕h3 ♗g6 19.♗xg6 occurred in Hatzoudis – Kokolias, Iraklio 2011, and now 19...fxg6!N was correct.



White has no more ideas on the kingside, and must now start thinking about his weaknesses on the queenside.

17.♘e1!?

This retreat makes some sense, as White intends to find a more active home for the knight on c2 or d3.

17...♗g6N

I believe this is objectively best.

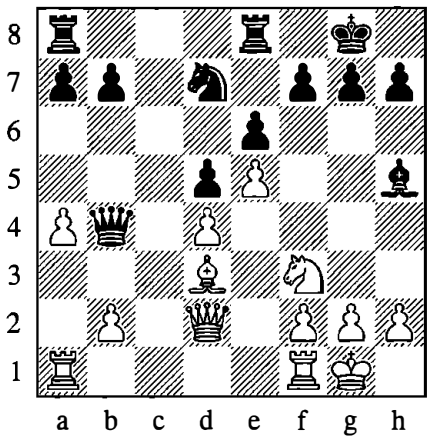
Black can also play 17...♖ec8 18.♘c2 as in Dieckmann – Teeriaho, email 2005, and now 18...♕a5N 19.f4 ♗g6 with a complicated game.

18.♗xg6

Or 18.♘c2 ♕e7 19.♗xg6 hxg6 20.♖fc1 ♖ac8 with equality.

18...hxg6 19.♘d3 ♕b6 20.b4 ♖ec8 21.♘c5 ♘xc5 22.bxc5 ♕d8

Black has no problems as ...b6 will come next.



17...♕e7

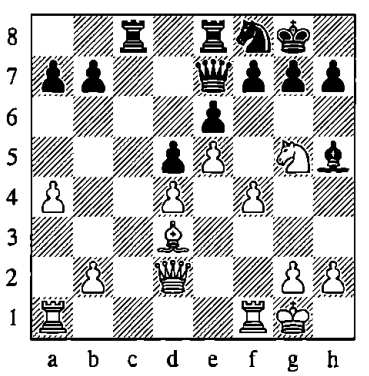
17...♕xd2 18.♘xd2 leads to a slight but long-term advantage for White, enabling him to press without risk. I wondered if Black could improve with 18...♘b8!?N (18...♖ec8 19.♖fc1 was better for White in Lukacs – Kiss, Hungary 2009), but found that after 19.♖fc1 ♘c6 20.♗b5 ♖eb8 21.♘b3 a6 22.♗f1!± White has some pressure.

18.♘e1

18.♘g5 ♘f8N

I was not happy with 18...♗g6 19.f4 ♗xd3 20.♕xd3 ♘f8, despite Black's eventual positive result in Arencibia Rodriguez – Delgado Ramos, Havana 2009. After 21.♘f3!N it is not clear to me how Black should oppose White's kingside offensive. The continuation might be 21...♖ac8 22.g4 ♖c7 23.f5 ♖ec8 24.♖f2 and, even though I don't see any decisive threats for White, the position still looks unpleasant to defend.

19.f4 ♖ac8



20.f5

In the event of 20.♘f3 I like 20...♖c7 21.f5 exf5 22.♗xf5 ♘e6 23.g4 ♗g6 when Black is solid enough. White's only real idea on the kingside is to advance his h-pawn, but h2-h4 can always be met by ...h5.

20...exf5 21.♗xf5 ♖c4

Black starts his counterplay, and White already has to reckon with the threat of ...♕b4.

22.g4 h6 23.♘f3 ♗g6 24.b3 ♖b4

The position is complicated, but Black's queenside counterplay looks fully adequate to me.

18...♗g6 19.a5

After 19.♗xg6 fxg6!? 20.♘d3 ♘b8 21.♖ac1 ♘c6 22.♕e3 ♖ac8 the position is equal.

19...♖ac8 20.♗b5?!

White starts to lose the thread of the position.

20.♗xg6N hxg6 (20...fxg6 is also possible) 21.♘d3 was better although Black is still fine after 21...♖c4.

20...a6 21.♗a4 ♖ed8

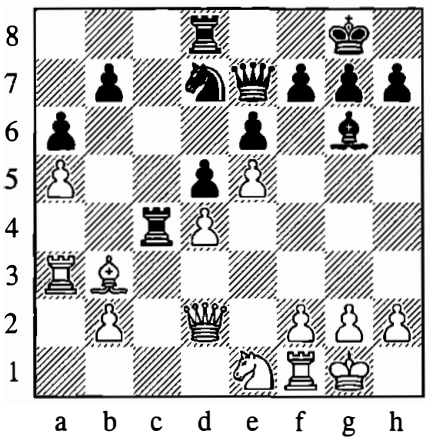
Already White has to be careful.

22.♖a3

22.♗c2 would have kept White's disadvantage to a minimum.

22...♖c4 23.♗b3

Now in Cmilyte – Goryachkina, Belgrade 2013, Black could have posed serious problems with:



23...♕b4!N 24.♕e3 ♖c7 25.♘d3 ♗xd3 26.♕xd3 ♘b8!

Black controls the only open file and White will have to play carefully to avoid losing one of the weak queenside pawns.

Conclusion

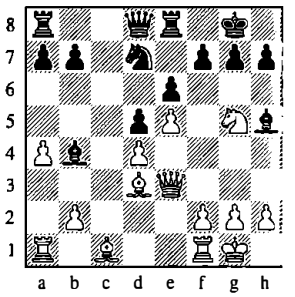
10.e4 is White's most principled approach against our set-up. After the usual 10...0–0, White usually advances the same pawn to e5, either immediately or after a preliminary 11.♗d3 ♗h5.

After the moves e4-e5 and ...♘d5, White must decide whether or not to exchange on d5. If he avoids doing so, Black's solid structure and powerful knight on d5 should offer him good chances. The main thematic structure for this variation occurs after the moves ♘xd5 and ...cxd5. The ensuing position will resemble a French Defence to some degree, but Black should benefit from the active placement of his light-squared bishop on h5. Another important point is that White's a2-a4 leaves him with some holes on the queenside.

We have seen that Black has satisfactory chances in all of the main variations of this chapter. It is now time to move on to the most challenging option of 15.♘g5.



6.e3



15.♘g5

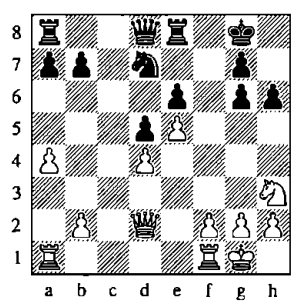
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕e2 ♗g6 10.e4 0–0 11.♗d3 ♗h5 12.e5 ♘d5 13.♘xd5 cxd5 14.♕e3 ♖e8 15.♘g5

15...♗g6

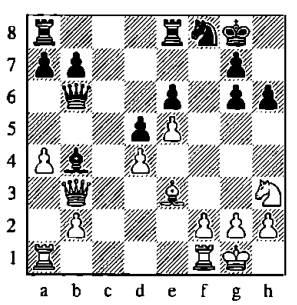
A) 16.♗xg6 fxg6 337
A1) 17.♗d2 337
A2) 17.a5 338
A3) 17.♕h3 340
B) 16.f4 341
B1) 16...♗xd3 17.♕xd3 f5 342
B11) 18.♕b5 342
B12) 18.g4 343
B13) 18.♔h1 345
B14) 18.♗e3 346
B2) 16...♖c8!? 348

A1) after 19.♘h3



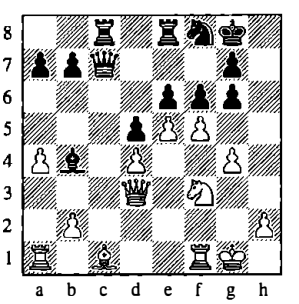
19...♘b8!N

A3) after 20.♘h3



20...♗e7!N

B2) after 21.f5?



21...exf5!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕e2 ♗g6 10.e4 0–0 11.♗d3 ♗h5 12.e5 ♘d5 13.♘xd5 cxd5 14.♕e3 ♖e8 15.♘g5

This has been White's most popular move, and I consider it the most dangerous attacking try.

15...♗g6

Now **A) 16.♗xg6** is an important option, but the main line is **B) 16.f4**.

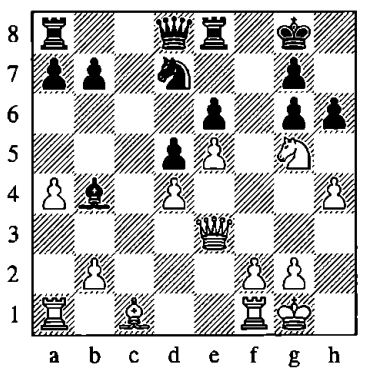
16.h4!?

This has only been played in a single game, but it is not without venom. I believe Black should react with:

16...h6!N

The game continued 16...♗xd3 17.♕xd3 ♘f8 18.h5 h6 19.♘f3 ♕a5 20.♘h2! ♘h7 21.♘g4 and Black's position was dangerous in Zhao Xue – Wang Yu, Jiangsu Wuxi 2011.

17.♗xg6 fxg6



18.♘f3

The knight cannot retreat to h3 as the h4-pawn would be left hanging.

18...♕e7 19.a5 ♘b8!

Black has nothing to complain about.

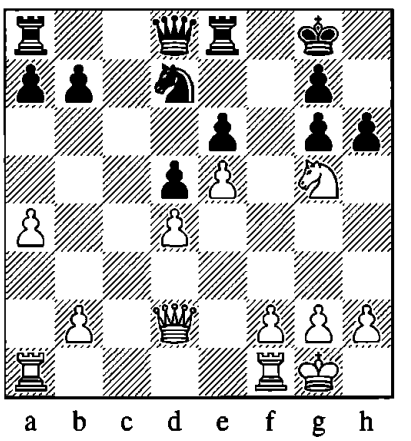
A) 16.♗xg6 fxg6

I don't like 16...hxg6 at all, as in that case Black will always have to reckon with White's attacking ideas along the h-file.

At this point White has a wide choice. I decided to focus on the three continuations that I regard as the most dangerous: **A1) 17.♗d2**, **A2) 17.a5** and **A3) 17.♕h3**.

17.f4 was played in Erdos – Goldenberg, Beijing (rapid) 2008, but it seriously reduces White's attacking possibilities on the kingside. 17...♖c8N looks best, and after 18.♕d3 ♕c7 19.♗e3 ♕c4 20.♕xc4 ♖xc4 21.♖fc1 h6 22.♘f3 ♖ec8= Black has no problems whatsoever.

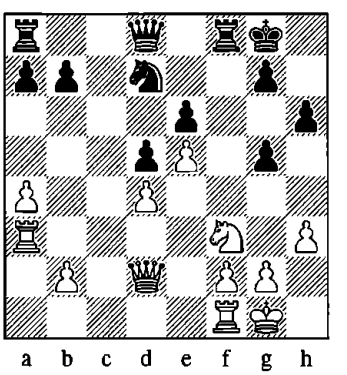
A1) 17.♗d2 ♗xd2 18.♕xd2 h6



White obviously has two knight retreats.

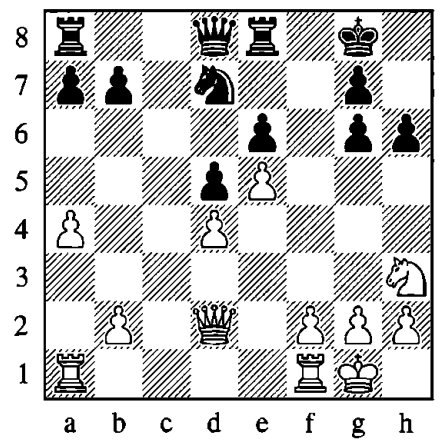
19.♘h3

19.♘f3 g5! 20.h3 ♖f8 21.♖a3 was seen in Pavlidou – Fakhiridou, Chalkida 2009. Here I like:



21...♘b8!N White lacks constructive ideas, while Black is ready to post his knight on c6 and combine activity along the f-file with threats against White's weak queenside pawns.

I found two games from the present position, but in both of them Black's play was far from convincing. I believe this is the right moment for Black to carry out the thematic knight manoeuvre:



19...♘b8!N

I examined a couple of lines from here.

20.♖a3

20.♘f4 g5 21.♘e2 ♘c6 22.f4 ♖f8! 23.b4!? (23.fxg5 ♕xg5 is just equal) 23...g4 Black intends ...♘e7-f5 with a fully reliable game.

20...♘c6 21.♖g3

White is starting to develop threats on the kingside, so Black should react vigorously.

21...♕a5!

Black can also try 21...♕h4 22.♘f4 g5 23.♘e2 ♖f8, although after 24.h3 White's position seems more promising.

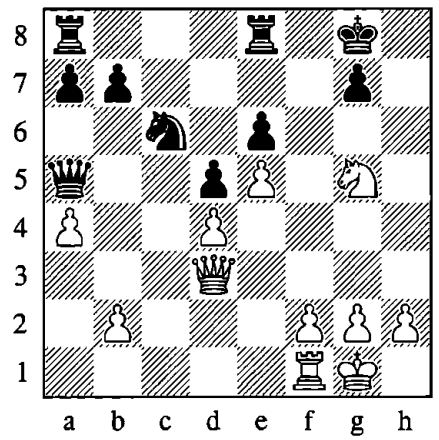
22.♕d3 g5 23.♖xg5!

This seems best, although it is only good enough for a draw.

After 23.f4 ♕xa4 24.♖d1 g4! 25.♖xg4 (or 25.♘f2 h5 26.h3 ♖f8) 25...♘e7! Black has the better game.

23...hxg5 24.♘xg5

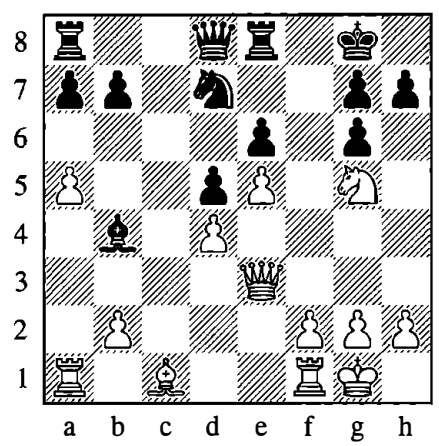
Despite his extra rook, Black cannot win. The finish might be:



24...♕c7 25.♕h7† ♔f8 26.f4 ♘xd4 27.f5 exf5 28.♖xf5† ♘xf5 29.♕xf5† ♔g8 30.♕h7†=

With perpetual check.

A2) 17.a5

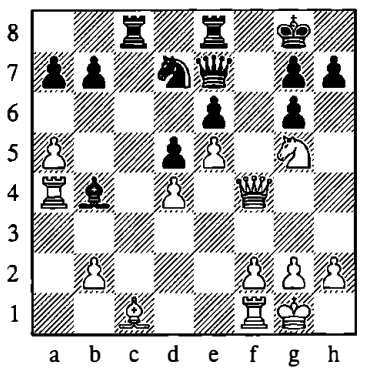


Several strong players have chosen this option with White.

17...♖c8 18.♕h3

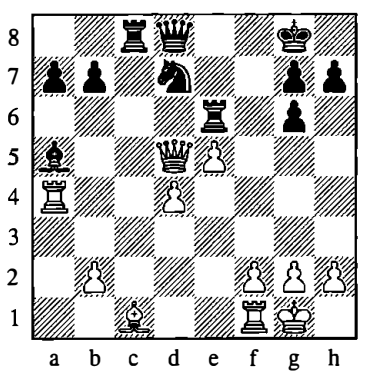
18.a6 does not impress me at all. 18...b5!?N This ambitious approach is fully justified. (The solid 18...♕b6 19.♕f3 ♖e7 was also decent in Nyzhnyk – Mirzoev, Denizli 2013.) 19.♕f3 ♖e7 20.♘h3 ♕b6 Black is absolutely fine.

18.♕f4 ♕e7 19.♖a4

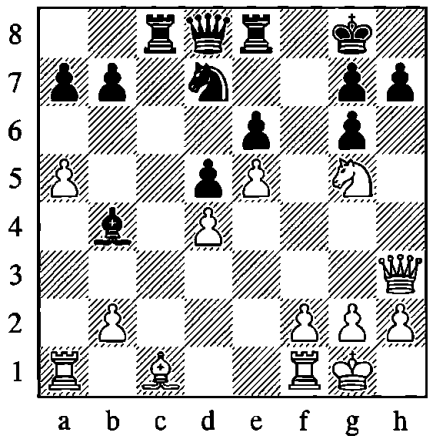


19...♘f8 This solid move is enough for equality. (Those who enjoy complications may wish to check 19...h6!?N 20.♘xe6 b5!, although the final verdict seems to be equality here too.) 20.♗e3 h6 21.♕f7† ♕xf7 22.♘xf7 ♔xf7 23.♖xb4 ♖e7 24.♗d2 ♖c2 25.♗c3 ♖c7= Giri – P.H. Nielsen, Wolvega 2010.

18.♖a4 leads to a forcing tactical sequence: 18...♗xa5 19.♕f3 ♖e7 20.♘xe6 ♖xe6 21.♕xd5



21...♘c5! This equalizes easily. 22.♕xd8† ♗xd8 23.dxc5 ♖xe5 (23...a6N is likely to transpose.) 24.♗e3 a6 The arising endgame is level, a good example being 25.♖b4 ♗e7 26.♗d4 ♗xc5 27.♗xc5 ♖exc5 28.♖xb7 ♖b5 and a draw was soon agreed in Bacrot – Andriasian, Fujairah City 2012.



18...♘f8 19.♕b3

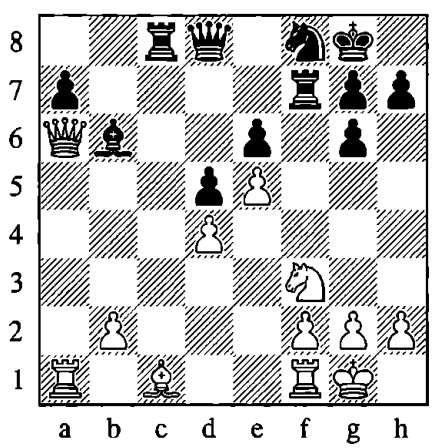
This is White's most recent attempt to fight for an advantage.

19...♗xa5

I also checked 19...♖c4 but found that after 20.♖a4 ♕e7 21.♗e3 White is slightly better, as he has the tricky idea of ♘g5-e4.

20.♕xb7 ♖e7 21.♕a6 ♗b6 22.♘f3 ♖f7

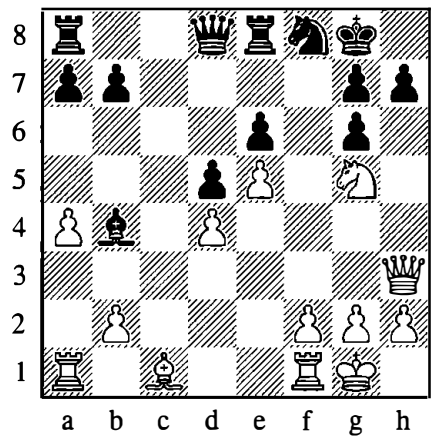
Black can also consider 22...h6!?N 23.h4 (23.♗d2 allows 23...g5) 23...♖c2 24.♕d3 ♖ec7!? with a complex game.



23.♗g5 ♕e8 24.♖fc1 ♖fc7 25.♖xc7 ♖xc7 26.♗d2 ♕f7 27.♕d3 ♕f5=

Black equalized comfortably in Vachier-Lagrave – Balogh, Legnica 2013.

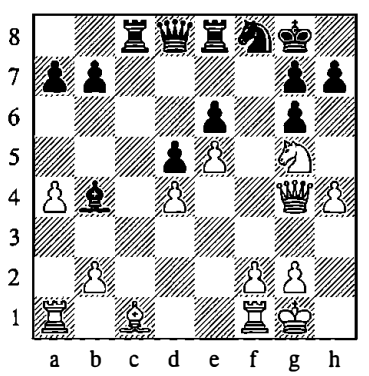
A3) 17.♕h3 ♘f8



18.♕b3

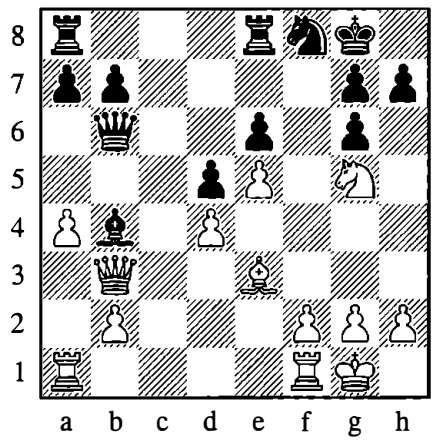
Again we see the idea of switching the queen between flanks.

Playing for a kingside attack with 18.♕g4 ♖c8 19.h4 is too slow. In Ikonnikov – Andriasian, Leiden 2013, Black should have developed his play by means of:



19...♖c2!N There is certainly nothing to fear from 20.h5?! as after 20...gxh5 21.♕xh5 ♕d7 White has nothing on the kingside while Black is about to cement his domination over the c-file with ...♖ec8.

18...♕b6 19.♗e3

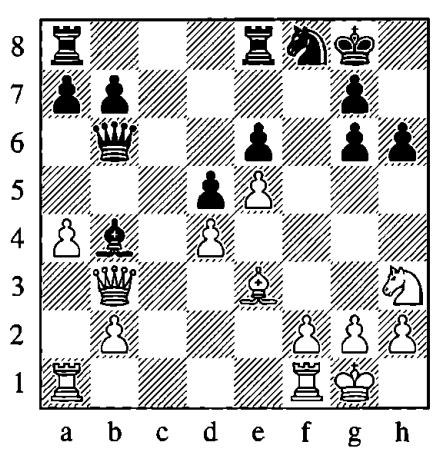


19...h6!

This is stronger than 19...♗e7, which has been played in a couple of games: 20.♕xb6 axb6 21.♖fc1! (After 21.♘h3 ♖ec8 22.♘f4 g5! 23.♘h3? h6 24.f4?! gxf4 25.♘xf4 ♗g5! Black was better in Topalov – Wang Yue, Nice 2009.) 21...♖ec8 22.♖xc8 ♖xc8 23.♖c1 ♖xc1† 24.♗xc1± Black had to suffer for a long time to draw in Girya – Goryachkina, Taganrog 2011.

20.♘h3

20.♘f3N looks harmless. One possible continuation is 20...g5 21.♕d3 ♕a6!? 22.♕xa6 bxa6∞ with a double-edged endgame.



20...♗e7!N

I believe this is more accurate than 20...g5, as played in Kashlinskaya – Wang Yu, Ningbo 2010. After 21.f4!N White's kingside initiative could become dangerous. Note that the tricky 21...♗d2!? is met by 22.♕d3 ♗xe3† 23.♕xe3 and Black still has some problems to solve.

21.♕d3

After 21.♕xb6 axb6 22.♘f4 ♖ec8 23.♘d3 ♔f7= Black is fine.

21...♖ac8!?

21...♕a6 is solid, but Black can also keep more tension in the position. I analysed the following line:

22.♘f4 g5!

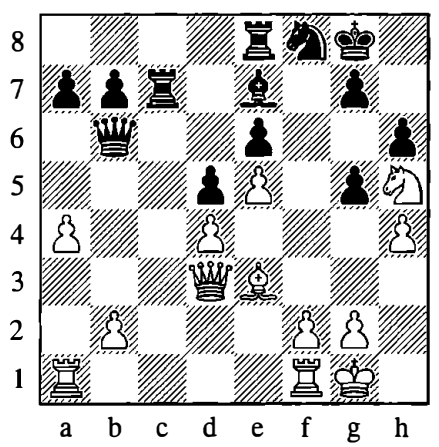
22...♔f7 23.♖fc1±

23.♘h5 ♖c7

23...♕xb2? 24.♖fb1 is no good for Black.

24.h4

24.f4? runs into 24...♕xb2 25.fxg5 ♖c3∓.



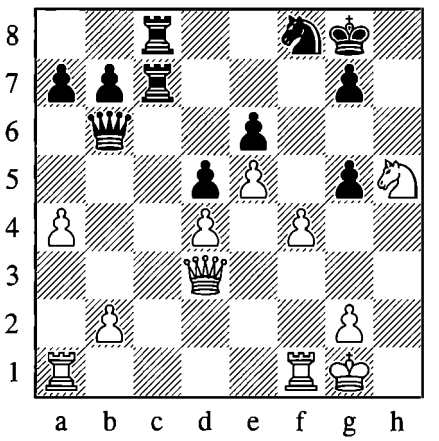
24...♖ec8!

24...gxh4 may be playable, but Black will have to face some dangers on the kingside after 25.♕e2 followed by ♕g4.

25.hxg5 ♗xg5 26.♗xg5 hxg5

Black has enough resources to meet the attack. The following line is quite remarkable.

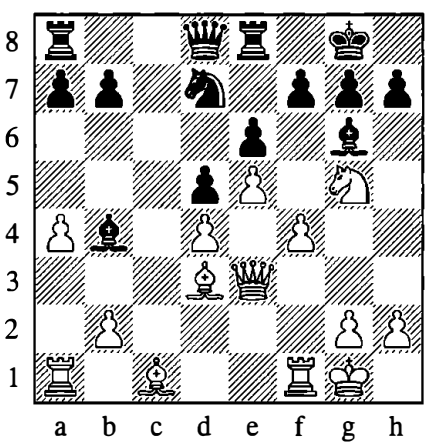
27.f4



27...♖f7! 28.fxg5 ♕xb2 29.g6 ♖xf1† 30.♖xf1 ♖c1 31.♔h2 ♖xf1 32.♕xf1 ♘xg6 33.♕d3

White is just in time to make a draw.

B) 16.f4

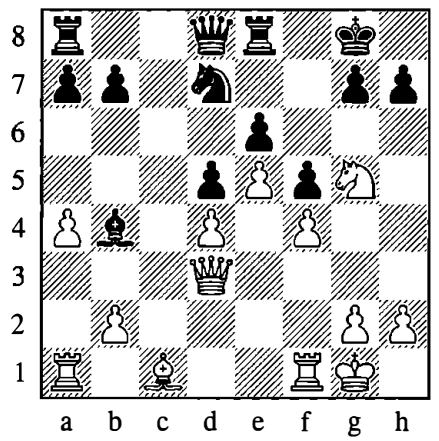


This is the most ambitious move. White plays for a kingside attack, avoiding the ...fxg6 pawn structure which fortifies Black's defences.

At this point Black must make an important decision. **B1) 16...♗xd3** is recognized as the

main line, and is the only move to have been tested at the elite GM level. However, I also found **B2) 16...♖c8!?** to be perfectly playable.

B1) 16...♗xd3 17.♕xd3 f5



This is the consistent follow-up to the bishop exchange, and nothing else is ever played. White's kingside play has been blocked for the time being, and both sides will have to regroup their pieces to adapt to the new situation on the board.

White has four main tries: **B11) 18.♕b5**, **B12) 18.g4**, **B13) 18.♔h1** and **B14) 18.♗e3**.

18.exf6 is harmless. After 18...♘xf6 19.♗e3 ♕d7 20.♘f3 ♗d6 Black has clearly solved his opening problems, and a draw was agreed in Miton – Riazantsev, France 2007.

18.♗d2 simplifies the position, and after 18...♗xd2 19.♕xd2 ♘b8 20.♖fc1 ♘c6 21.a5 ♖c8 22.b4 a6 the situation was equal in Vaganian – Gustafsson, Germany 2007.

B11) 18.♕b5

This has been White's second-most-popular choice, but I would guess this is because most players have overlooked the strong reply:

18...a5!

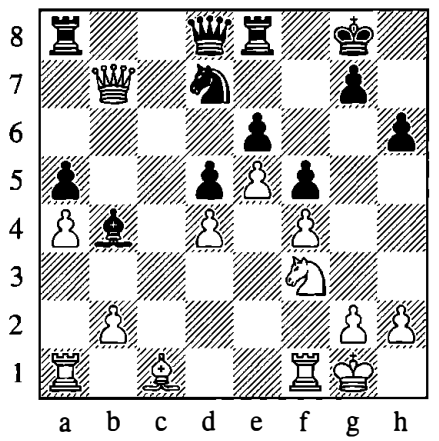
The main point is that the b7-pawn is indirectly defended.

19.♕xb7?

White should settle for 19.♗e3 although Black obviously has no problems. One good plan is 19...♖a6 20.♖ac1 ♖b6 21.♕d3 ♗e7 22.b3 ♘b8 23.♘f3 ♘c6 with an equal game.

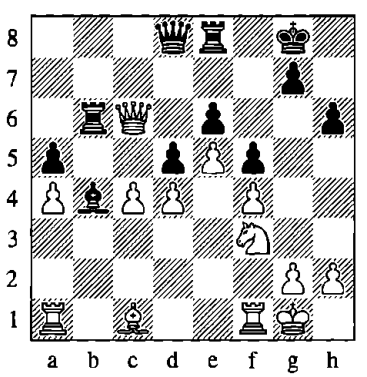
19...h6 20.♘f3

This position occurred in Pashikian – T. Petrosian, Yerevan 2009. Here Black missed a golden opportunity to seize the advantage:



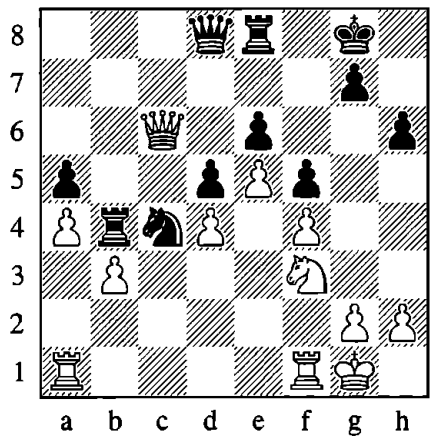
20...♘b6! 21.♗d2

21.b3 ♖b8 22.♕c6 is no better due to 22...♘c4! 23.bxc4 ♖b6 and the queen is trapped.



White can keep approximate material equality with 24.♕xe8† ♕xe8 25.c5 ♖b7, but Black is obviously better and the only question is whether White can hold a draw.

21...♖b8 22.♕c6 ♘c4 23.♗xb4 ♖xb4 24.b3



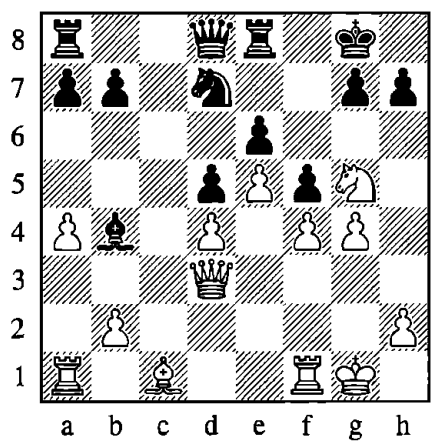
24...♖b6!

A nice finesse, driving the queen to a slightly worse square.

25.♕c5 ♖xb3 26.♖fb1 ♕b8 27.♖xb3 ♕xb3

Black has a clear positional advantage.

B12) 18.g4



This direct attacking move leads to interesting complications.

18...h6

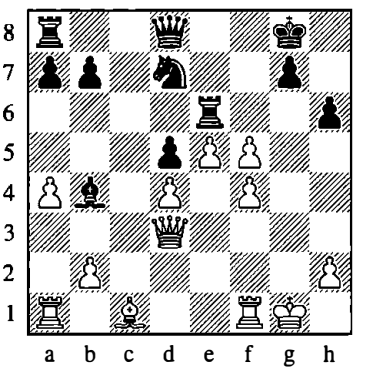
Now White has tried two ways of sacrificing his knight.

19.gxf5

A slightly worse version is:

19.♘xe6?! ♖xe6 20.gxf5

Here I found a clear improvement over the one existing game.



20...♖c6!N

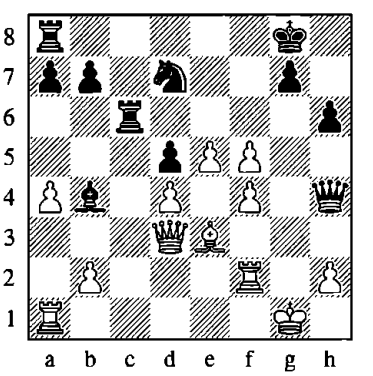
20...♖e7 21.♔h1 gave White a dangerous attack in Chatterjee – Batchuluun, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010.

The text move also leads to a complicated position, but one where Black is able to arrange faster counterplay, which swings the balance in his favour, for example:

21.♗e3

21.♔h1 ♖ac8 22.♖g1 is too slow due to 22...♕h4! when the threat of ...♖c2 is decisive.

21...♕h4 22.♖f2



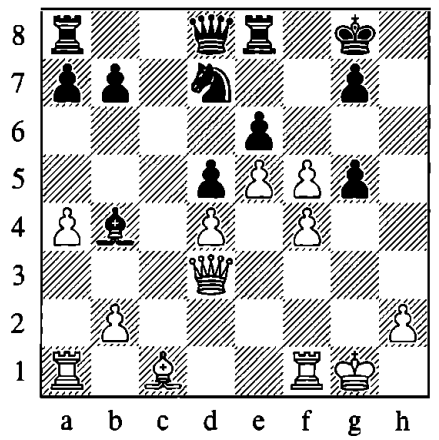
22...♕h3! 23.♖g2 ♖f8

The most human decision, forcing White to play:

24.f6 ♘xf6 25.exf6 ♖cxf6

Black has an obvious positional advantage.

19...hxg5

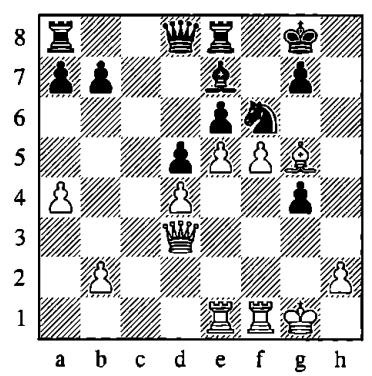


20.f6

20.fxe6?! ♖xe6 21.f5 allows the counter-blow 21...♘xe5! when Black is clearly better.

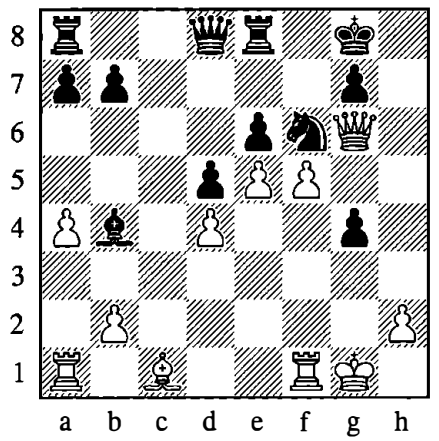
20...g4! 21.♕g6?

The only way for White to maintain equality is 21.f5! ♘xf6 when a logical line is: 22.♗g5 ♗e7 23.♖ae1



23...exf5! 24.exf6 ♗xf6 25.♖xe8† ♕xe8 26.♗xf6 gxf6 27.♕xf5 ♕e3† 28.♔g2 ♕xd4= The game should end in a draw, for instance after 29.♖f4 ♕d2† 30.♔g3 ♕e3† 31.♔xg4 ♕e2† 32.♔g3 ♕e3† with perpetual check.

21...♘xf6 22.f5



22...♕b6!

Black did well to find this over the board, as such moves can be easy to miss.

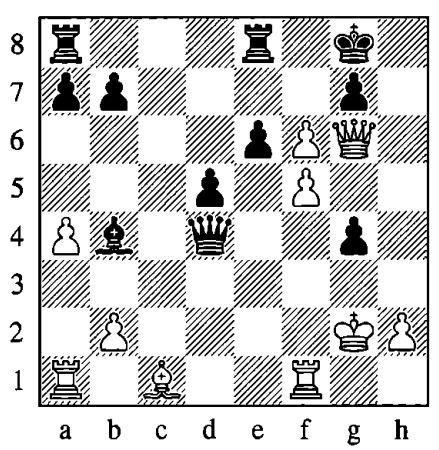
23.exf6

After 23.♗e3 exf5 24.♖xf5 ♘h7 25.♕f7† ♔h8 26.♕xd5 ♖f8 White does not have much compensation for the piece.

23...♕xd4† 24.♔g2?

24.♗e3 was the best try. After 24...♕xf6 25.♕xg4 ♗d6 White is clearly worse, but he still has chances to hold.

Now in the game Cordova – Kovalyov, Buenos Aires 2007, Black missed a simple win.

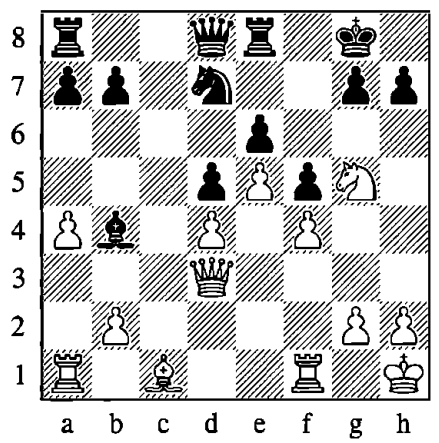


24...♕e4†!N 25.♔g3 ♗e1†

Black is able to win the exchange and then use the checking power of the queen to come back and defend the kingside.

26.♖xe1 ♕xe1† 27.♔g2 ♕e4† 28.♔g1 ♕d4† 29.♔g2 ♕xf6–+

B13) 18.♔h1



This time White prepares to put his rook on the g-file before following up with g2-g4.

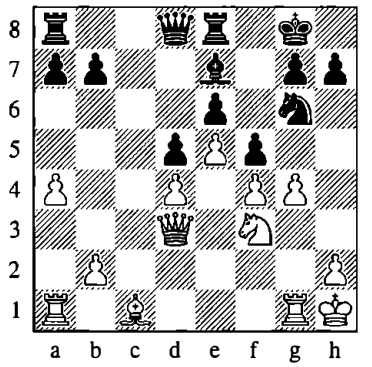
18...♘f8

This solid move has been played twice, but Black can also consider 18...♖c8!?N 19.♖g1 ♕c7. Now ...♕c4 is an idea, and if White starts attacking with 20.g4 there is 20...♕c2! 21.♕b5 h6! 22.♕xb4 hxg5 with the better game for Black.

19.♖g1 ♗e7 20.g4!?N

This aggressive move should definitely be considered.

20.♘f3 should be met by 20...♘g6. Black's last move is the usual way to counter the attacking plan of g2-g4. 21.g4?! This is tempting, but premature. Now in the game Pruess – Jaracz, Bad Wiessee 2007, Black should have continued:



21...fxg4!N 22.♖xg4 ♖f8 23.♗e3 ♖f5∓ Black controls everything on the kingside.

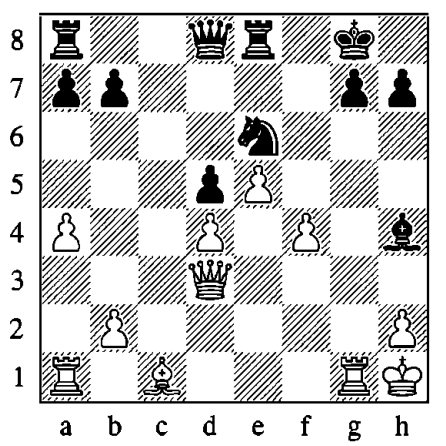
20...♗xg5 21.gxf5!

This is the only challenging idea.

After 21.fxg5?! fxg4 22.♖xg4 ♘g6 followed by ...♖f8 Black is positionally better and is in no danger on the kingside.

21...♗h4 22.fxe6 ♘xe6

Although the position is complicated, Black seems to be fine, as shown by the following lines.



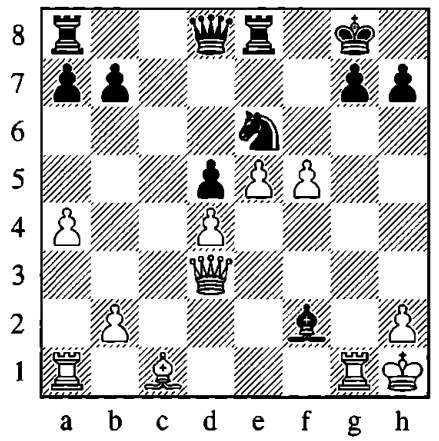
23.f5

I also considered 23.♗e3 ♔h8 24.♖g4 g5!? 25.f5 ♘c7 26.♖ag1 ♖g8∓ and Black consolidates.

23...♗f2!?

This is the safe option.

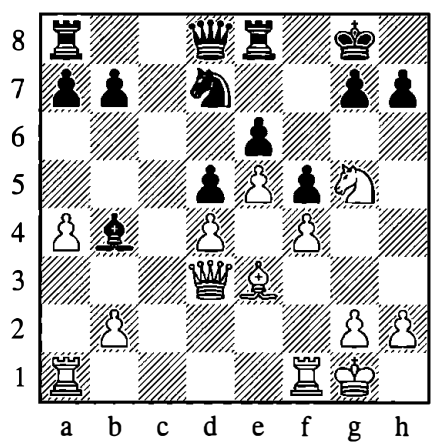
23...♘g5 is playable, but after 24.f6 ♘e6 25.♕f5 ♔h8 26.♖a3 White has enough compensation.



24.♖g2 ♗xd4 25.fxe6 ♗xe5 26.♗g5 ♕d6 27.e7 ♗f6!?

With equality.

B14) 18.♗e3

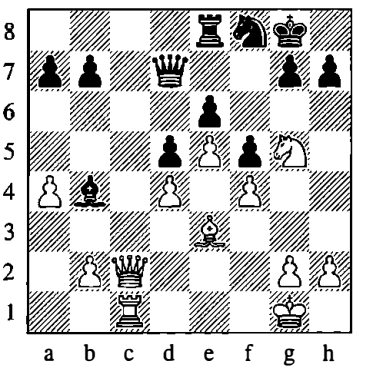


This is the main line. White plays flexibly, focusing on development before proceeding with any attacking ideas.

18...♘f8 19.♔h1

The aggressive 19.g4!? has not yet been played. Apart from the principled 19...h6, Black also has a calm option in 19...♕d7 20.♔h1 ♗e7 with reliable play.

Playing on the queenside is hardly dangerous. One game continued: 19.♖fc1 ♕d7 20.♖c2 ♖ac8 21.♖ac1 ♖xc2 22.♕xc2 S. Lund – Blomqvist, Stockholm 2007.



Of several possible equalizing continuations, 22...h6N 23.♘f3 ♘g6 is perhaps the most convincing, when Black's plans include ...♗a5 to cover the c7-square, followed by ...♘e7 and ...♖c8.

19...♗e7

19...♖c8?! 20.g4 ♕d7 21.♖g1 was played in the famous game Topalov – Kramnik, Elista (2) 2006, in which White built up a formidable attack before going wrong and losing in the endgame. Objectively Black may be okay, but such positions are difficult to defend in practice.

20.♘f3

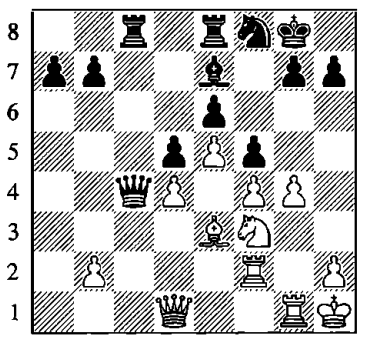
20.♘xe6? ♘xe6 21.♕xf5 is met by 21...♕d7! when White does not have enough for the sacrificed piece.

20...♖c8 21.♗d2

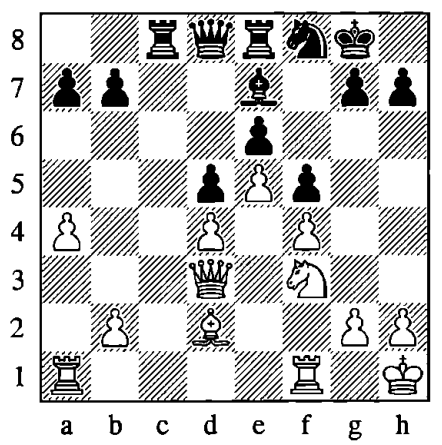
Here are a couple of other examples in which strong players got nowhere with White.

21.h3 ♕c7 22.♖fc1 ♕d7 23.♖g1 ♕c7 24.♖gc1 ♕d7 25.♕b3 A draw was agreed here in Jakovenko – Rublevsky, Moscow 2006, and indeed after 25...♖xc1† 26.♖xc1 ♖c8 Black has no problems.

21.♖f2 ♕d7 22.♖g1?! This pawn sacrifice is too risky. 22...♕xa4 23.g4 ♕c4! 24.♕d1 Now in Neverov – Sundararajan, Abu Dhabi 2007, Black should have played:



24...fxg4N 25.♖xg4 ♖c7 26.h4 ♗d8 White does not have enough attacking chances to make up for the pawn deficit.

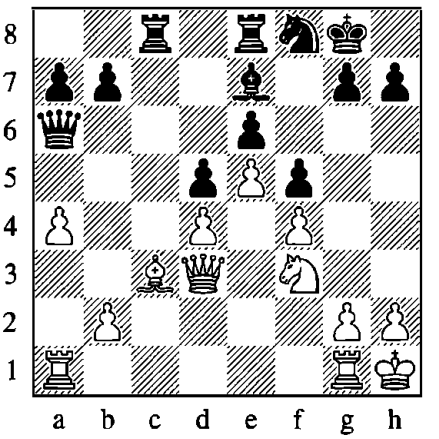


21...♕d7 22.♖g1 ♕c6

22...♖c7!?N also deserves attention, having the following defensive scheme in mind: 23.g4 fxg4 24.♖xg4 ♗d8! followed by ...♕f7 and Black is doing well.

23.♗c3 ♕a6

We will follow an instructive practical example in which White became too ambitious and Black managed to take over the initiative.

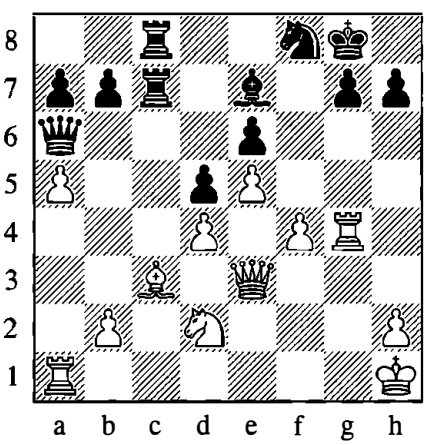


24.♕e3

24.♕xa6 bxa6 should be more or less balanced.

24...♖c4 25.a5 ♖ec8 26.♘d2 ♖4c7 27.g4 fxg4 28.♖xg4

Li Shilong – Wang Yue, Beijing 2008. Now Black could have employed a strong set-up that we have already seen in the note to White's 20th move in variation B13.



28...♘g6!N 29.♖ag1 ♖f8

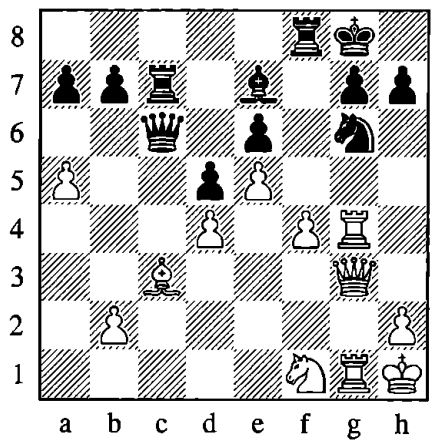
Now it is hard for White to make anything happen on the kingside. The continuation might be:

30.♕g3 ♕c6!

Intending ...♕e8-f7-f5.

31.♘f1

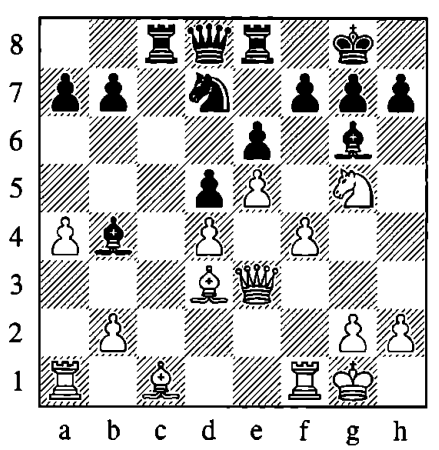
The knight is heading for e3, but Black can alter his plans.



31...♕b5! 32.♖xg6 hxg6 33.♕xg6 ♗h4 34.♕xe6† ♖ff7

White is in some trouble. For the moment he has two pawns for the exchange, but the f-pawn is weak and his king is exposed.

B2) 16...♖c8!?



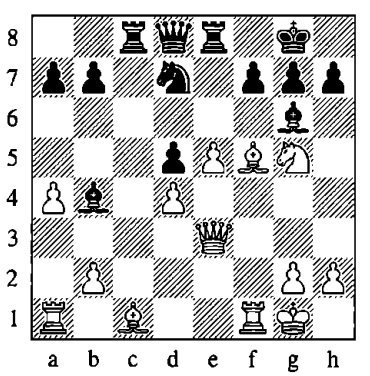
So far this move has not been tried by anyone at the elite GM level, but it seems to me that it promises Black a good position, and is arguably an even more effective equalizer than 16...♗xd3. I was actually slightly concerned that I may have missed an important detail, based on the fact that Vladimir Kramnik did not choose the text move against Topalov in the Elista match, as I know from my personal experience of working with Vladimir that he almost never fails to find the most accurate moves in his preparation for such an important match. Still, after re-checking my analysis I found no problems for Black.

17.g4

This is the most principled reaction and it has been White's most common choice.

17.♕h3?! is not a serious option, as Black can play 17...♗xd3 18.♕xd3 f5 as in Fabre – Hajnal, Geneva 2010, arriving at a position from the 16...♗xd3 line with the extra move ...♖c8 included.

It is important to mention that 17.f5?!N does not work due to: 17...exf5 18.♗xf5

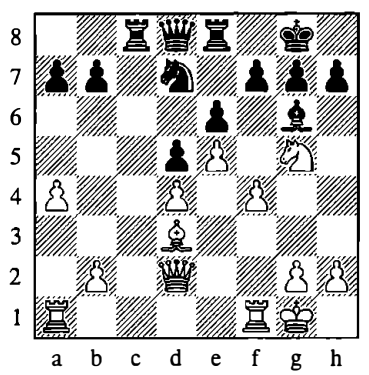


18...♖xe5! (18...♗xf5 19.♖xf5 f6! is also strong) 19.dxe5 ♗c5 20.e6 fxe6 21.♗xe6† ♔h8 22.♕xc5 ♘xc5 23.♗xc8 ♕xc8 Black stands better.

In the event of 17.♗xg6N it is quite safe to choose: 17...hxg6 There is no need to take with the f-pawn here, although that option is perfectly solid as well. 18.♕h3 ♘f8 White has no real attack on the kingside, while Black is ready to start his play on the other flank.

17.♔h1 was played in Bakos – Pataki, Eger 2005. Black has several playable ideas, but 17...♖c6!?N looks quite appealing, with ideas of doubling on the c-file as well as utilizing the rook on the sixth rank in the event of a future f4-f5. (17...♗xd3N 18.♕xd3 f5 is another idea; the same position has briefly been discussed under the move order 16...♗xd3 17.♕xd3 f5 18.♔h1 ♖c8!?N – see the note to Black's 18th move in variation B13.)

Finally, 17.♗d2 is harmless at best: 17...♗xd2 18.♕xd2



18...♗xd3!N (18...♕b6 was about equal in Magerramov – Meduna, Trnava 1981, but the text move is more accurate.) 19.♕xd3 ♘f8 Black has the easier game; the plan is ...h6 and ...♖e7-c7.

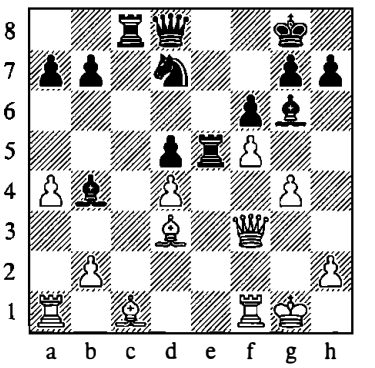
17...f6!

This counter-strike promises Black a good position.

18.♗xg6

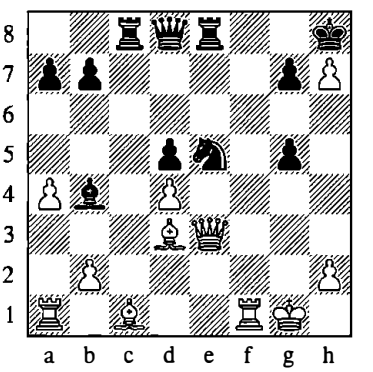
Other moves are no better:

18.♘xe6? ♖xe6 19.f5 ♖xe5! 20.♕f3?! (20.♕g3 was the lesser evil although 20...♗e8 21.dxe5 ♘xe5 still leaves Black with the better position.)



20...♗f7! 21.dxe5 fxe5∓ Damjanovic – Jeremic, Kragujevac 2010.

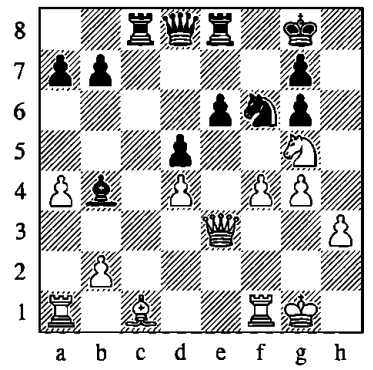
Another direct approach for White is: 18.f5 exf5 19.gxf5 fxg5 20.fxg6 ♘xe5 21.gxh7† ♔h8



22.♗f5? This allows a nice refutation. (22.♗b5!N ♘c6 23.♕xg5 was the way to maintain the balance.) 22...g4! Suddenly Black is winning. 23.♕g3 ♘f3† 24.♖xf3 gxf3–+ Pelletier – Nanu, Rijeka 2010.

18...hxg6 19.♘f3

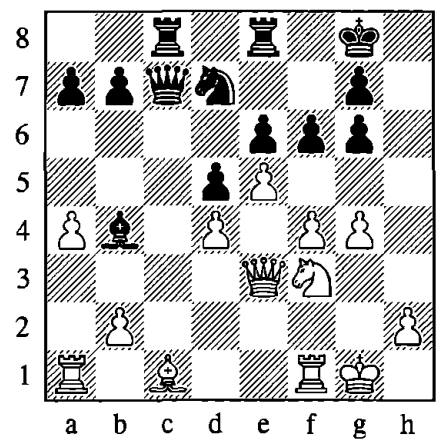
I also examined: 19.exf6N ♘xf6 (19...gxf6 20.♘xe6 ♕e7 21.f5 ♘f8 is sufficient for equality, but the text move is more active.) 20.h3 The position is rather complex, but the following line looks logical:



20...♘h7 21.♘f3 ♘f6 22.♕d3 (22.♘g5= repeats the position) 22...♘e4 23.♗e3 ♖f8 With a balanced position.

19...♕c7

Black has other playable moves, but the text looks good enough.

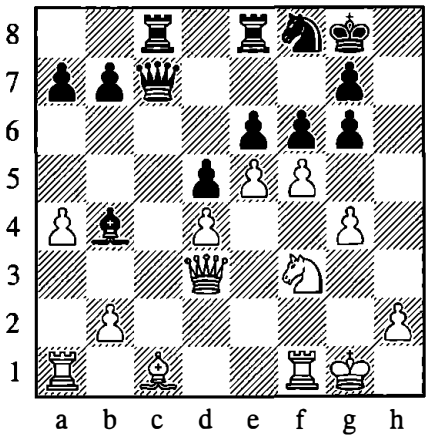


20.♕d3

After 20.♖f2 Black has the interesting possibility of 20...g5! 21.♕d3 ♕c4 22.♕g6 ♘f8 23.♕h5 ♖e7! with good chances in a highly unclear position.

20...♘f8 21.f5?

White should have played more patiently, when the chances would have remained about equal. The last move was a tempting but unfortunate one; in Pelletier – Deviatkin, Moscow 2003, Black could have played:



21...exf5!N 22.gxf5 ♕c4!

With a clear advantage.

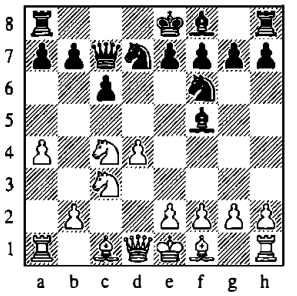
Conclusion

15.♘g5 is a logical move which threatens h7 and unblocks the f-pawn. After the standard 15...♗g6, there are two directions. 16.♗xg6 fxg6 should not be too dangerous; Black has made a minor structural concession but, in return, White's attacking chances are diminished.

16.f4 is more ambitious, but Black has a choice of good replies. The standard 16...♗xd3 17.♕xd3 f5 is extremely solid, and the relatively untested 16...♖c8!? offers a different type of position where Black also appears to be in good shape.



6.♘e5



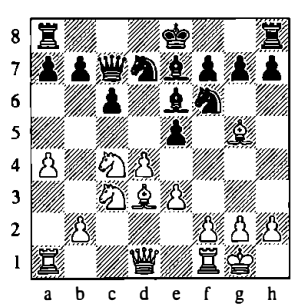
6..♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7

Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7

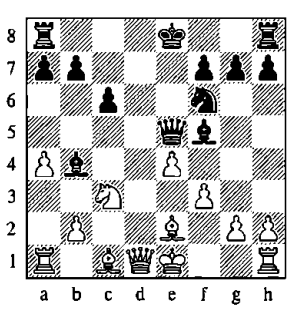
A) 8.♗g5 e5 9.e3 ♗e7 **352**
A1) 10.♗h4 **353**
A2) 10.♗d3 **353**
B) 8.f3 e5 **354**
B1) 9.dxe5?! **354**
B2) 9.e4 **355**
C) 8.♕d2 **356**

A2) after 11.0–0



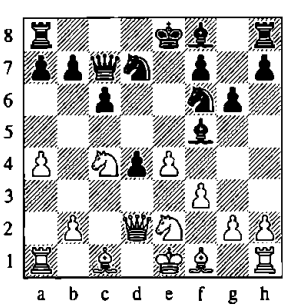
11...exd4!N

B1) note to 10.e4



12...♗xe4!N

C) after 11.♘e2



11...a5!?N

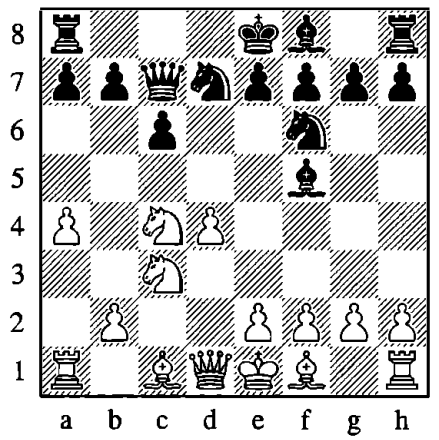
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5

Not just attacking the c4-pawn, but also preparing to occupy the centre with f2-f3 and e2-e4.

6...♘bd7

I prefer this to Black's other main option of 6...e6.

7.♘xc4 ♕c7



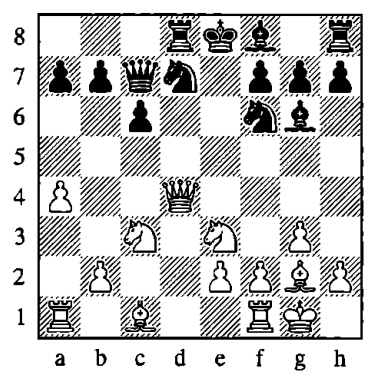
Now 8.g3 is the main line and will be examined in Chapters 31-34. In this chapter we consider the minor lines **A) 8.♗g5**, **B) 8.f3** and **C) 8.♕d2**.

A fourth alternative is the pretty harmless:

8.♘e3 ♗g6 9.g3 ♖d8

Going for the ...e5 advance is definitely more ambitious than 9...e6.

10.♗g2 e5 11.0–0 exd4 12.♕xd4



12...♘c5!?N

This my preference, though there is nothing wrong with: 12...♗c5 13.♕h4 ♘e5 14.♘c4 ♖d4 15.♗f4 ♖xc4 16.♗xe5 ♖xh4 17.♗xc7 ♖b4 A draw was now agreed in Halkias – Krivoshey, Tanta 2002, although the position seems slightly more comfortable for Black.

13.♕c4 a5

White has still to solve the problem of how to develop his queenside.

A) 8.♗g5

This looks quite aggressive, but it doesn't stop Black from playing his planned central break.

8...e5 9.e3

The other direction is:

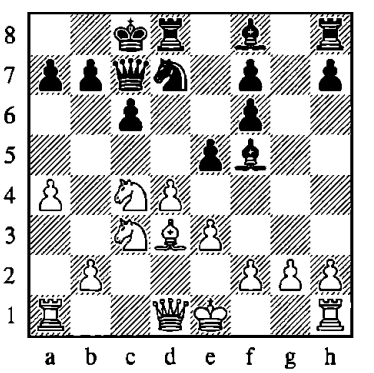
9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.e3 0–0–0!

This is strongest, although Black is also fine after other moves.

11.♗d3

This was White's choice in Boensch – Balogh, Austria 2009.

11.♗e2 ♖g8 12.0–0 was played in Csiszar – Schachinger, Austria 2012, and now 12...♘c5!N is much better for Black.



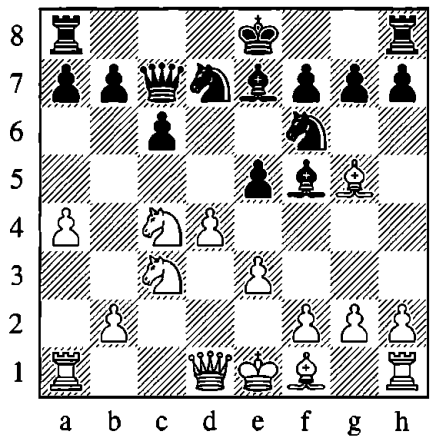
11...♗g6N

Black has various routes to an advantage, but this looks most convincing.

12.♕c2

12.0–0 ♔b8 13.♖e1 ♘c5∓
12...♔b8 13.0–0–0 exd4 14.exd4 ♘b6∓

9...♗e7



First of all, I should mention that 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♗f4 ♘fd7 is not dangerous for Black. However, White may chooses between the rather tricky **A1) 10.♗h4** and the simpler **A2) 10.♗d3**.

A1) 10.♗h4 exd4N

This is an improvement on 10...♗e6 11.♗g3 ♗xc4 12.♗xc4 0–0 13.0–0± and White had a slight pull in Barsov – Bu Xiangzhi, Doha 2006.

11.♗g3

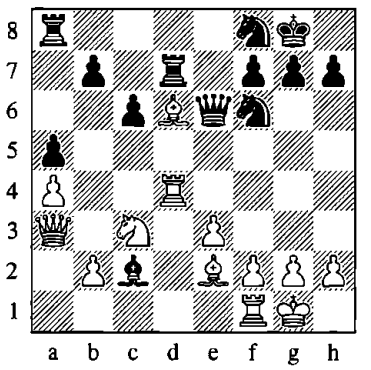
The alternative is:

11.♕xd4 0–0 12.♗g3 ♕c8 13.♘d6 ♗xd6 14.♗xd6 ♖d8 15.♗e2 ♘f8! 16.♕b4

After 16.♕c5 b6 17.♕a3 ♕e6 White cannot keep the bishop pair: 18.♗xf8 (18.♗g3 ♗d3∓) 18...♖xf8=

16...a5 17.♕a3 ♕e6 18.♖d1 ♖d7 19.0–0 ♗c2! 20.♖d4

20.♖d2 ♖ad8 21.♖xc2 ♕xd6 is level.



20...♕b3!

The most accurate.

20...♖ad8 runs into the unpleasant 21.♗c4. 21.♕a1 ♘e8 22.♗c4 ♕b6 23.♗xf8 ♖xd4 24.exd4 ♔xf8

The position is equal.

11...♕c8 12.exd4

12.♕xd4 0–0 transposes to the previous note.

12...0–0 13.♗d3 ♘b6 14.0–0 ♗xd3 15.♕xd3 ♘xc4 16.♕xc4 ♕d7 17.♖ad1 ♖ad8

Black has comfortable equality.

A2) 10.♗d3 ♗e6

10...♗xd3 11.♕xd3 ♖d8 looks playable as well.

11.0–0

11.a5 was tried in Aronian – Gelfand, Beersheba 2005, and the reply was the natural 11...0–0. Instead, I suggest that Black should first play 11...♖d8!?N with the following beautiful point: 12.0–0 What else White can play? 12...h6 13.♗h4 exd4 14.♗g3 ♕c8 15.exd4 ♘c5! Black has good play against the isolated pawn and can start thinking about the advantage.

11...exd4!N

A simple improvement over three grandmaster games. If Black has the chance to

release the pressure and simplify the position then why not take the opportunity?

11...0–0 12.♗h4 exd4 13.♗g3 ♕d8 14.exd4 was played in Anastasian – Gagunashvili, Beersheba 2005, and in *ChessBase Magazine* 110, Hübner now gives: 14...♘b6N 15.♘e5 a5=

12.♗f4

12.exd4 is just bad: 12...♘g4!∓

12...♕d8 13.exd4 ♘b6

Black has a very comfortable position.

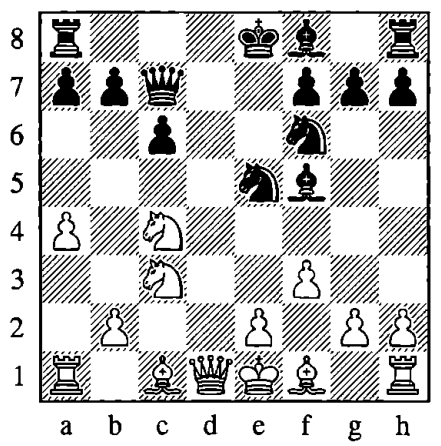
B) 8.f3

It is of course a thematic idea to prepare e2-e4 in this way, but here it's harmless since Black can get in ...e5.

8...e5

White has two options: **B1) 9.dxe5?!** and **B2) 9.e4**.

B1) 9.dxe5?! ♘xe5



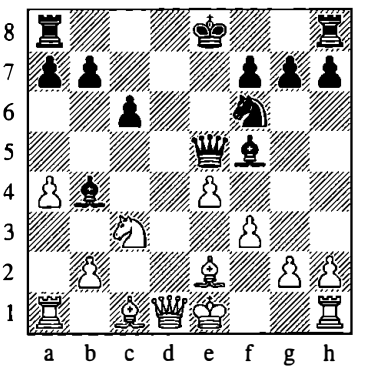
White is already worse.

10.e4

Exchanging knights does not help White:

10.♘xe5 ♕xe5 11.e4 ♗b4 12.♗e2

12.♗d2? was played in Giobbi – Piergentili, Porto Sant'Elpidio 2011, and now Black could win with 12...0–0–0!N, for example: 13.♕b3 ♖xd2! 14.♕xb4 (14.♔xd2 ♘xe4† 15.fxe4 ♕xe4–+) 14...♖d4 15.♕b3 ♘xe4–+ with a decisive attack.



12...♗xe4!N

Retreating with 12...♗e6 also gives Black the better game, Kishnev – Smyslov, Gelsenkirchen 1991, but it's hard to resist playing such a tactical blow in the centre.

13.♕b3

13.fxe4 is worse: 13...♘xe4 14.0–0 ♗xc3 15.♔h1 ♗d4 16.♗f4 ♕d5∓ and Black is two pawns up.

13...♗xc3† 14.♕xc3 ♕xc3† 15.bxc3 ♗g6

Black is a pawn up.

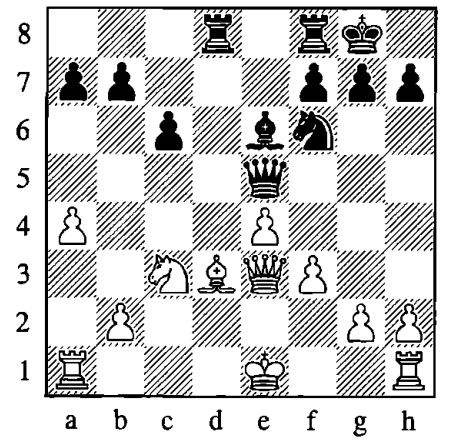
10...♖d8! 11.♕c2 ♗e6 12.♘xe5 ♕xe5 13.♗e3 ♗c5

Black has very active pieces, and even White's solid pawn structure doesn't enable him to keep equality.

14.♕f2

After 14.f4 ♕h5 15.♗e2 Dupont – Eggenberger, Zürich 2008, Black missed the strong 15...♗g4!N with advantage, for instance: 16.♗xc5 ♕xc5 17.♖d1 0–0 18.e5 ♖xd1† 19.♕xd1 ♗xe2 20.♕xe2 ♘d5 21.♘xd5 cxd5 and Black is better.

14...♗xe3 15.♕xe3 0–0 16.♗d3



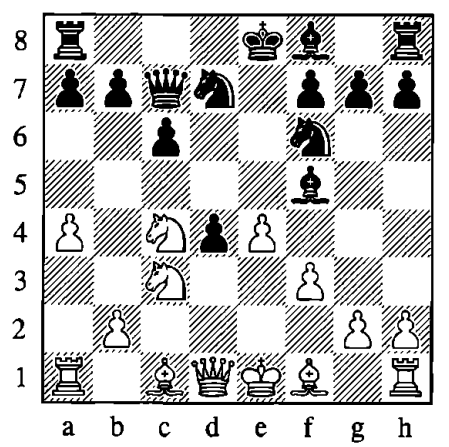
16...♘d5! 17.♘xd5 cxd5 18.0–0 dxe4 19.♕xe4

This occurred in Weisshaupt – Cordts, Germany 2000, and now correct is:

19...♕c5†N 20.♔h1 g6

White is doomed to an unpleasant defence.

B2) 9.e4 exd4



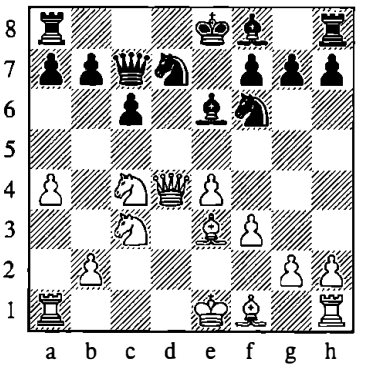
10.♘e2

10.exf5? dxc3∓ leaves White without a good continuation.

10.♕xd4

This is White's main alternative.

10...♗e6! 11.♗e3



11...♗b4!N

I prefer this ambitious move to accepting comfortable equality with: 11...♗c5 12.♕d2 ♗xe3 13.♕xe3 0–0 14.♗e2 a5= Dahlstrom – Engqvist, Sweden 2006.

12.♗e2 0–0 13.♕d2

After 13.0–0 ♖fd8 the white queen is facing a discovered attack.

13...♘e5 14.♘xe5 ♕xe5 15.0–0 ♖fd8 16.♕c1

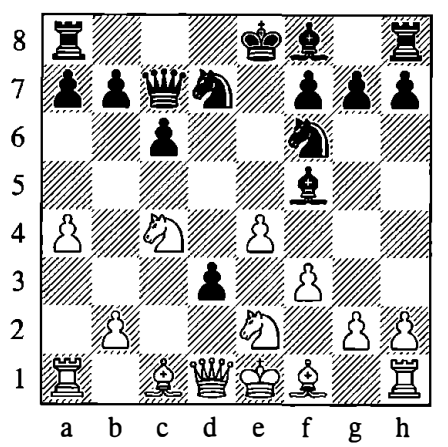
16.♕c2 allows 16...♘d5!? with the initiative.

16...♕a5∓

Black has the more pleasant position; he will continue with ...♘d7-c5.

10...d3!?

Black has other good moves here, but I like this tricky option.



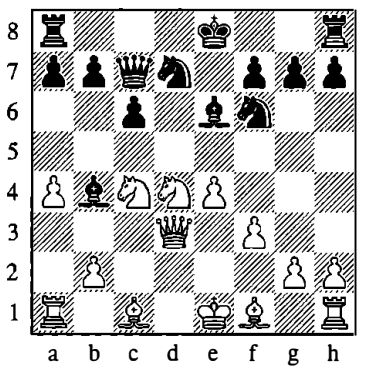
11.♘d4

This is White's best try.

11.♘c3 ♗e6 12.♗xd3 was played in Beil – Trichkov, Czech Republic 1993, and now the natural 12...0–0–0N 13.♕e2 ♘h5 gives Black much the better game: 14.0–0 ♘f4 15.♗xf4 ♕xf4∓

11.♕xd3

This was Frosch – Macsik, Zalakaros 2000, and now Black should play the natural:
11...♗e6N 12.♘d4 ♗b4†



White is facing difficulties.

13.♔f2

Or 13.♗d2 ♗xc4 14.♕xc4 ♗xd2† 15.♔xd2 0–0 and Black has a serious initiative.

13...♘c5 14.♕c2 ♖d8 15.♘xe6

15.♗e3 runs into some elegant tactics: 15...♘cxe4†! 16.fxe4 ♘g4† 17.♔e2 ♘xe3 18.♔xe3 ♗c5 and White is lost.

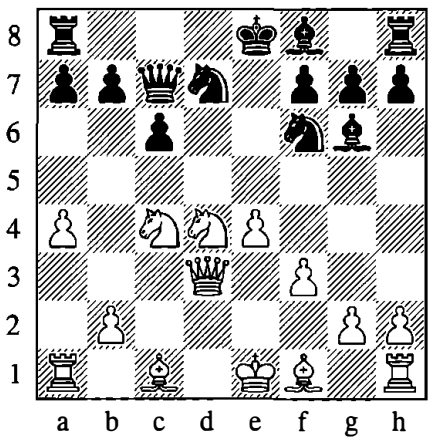
15...♘xe6 16.g3 h5!

Black has a long-term initiative.

11...♗g6

I prefer this to 11...♗e6 12.♘xe6 fxe6 13.♕xd3, when the bishop pair would give White an edge.

12.♕xd3



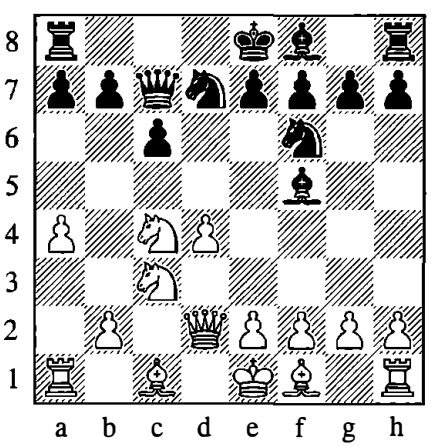
12...♖d8N

This keeps more tension in the position than 12...♗b4† 13.♗d2 ♘e5 14.♘xe5 ♗xd2† 15.♕xd2 ♕xe5 Oppermann – C. Johansson, email 2006, when 16.♘b3N ♖d8 17.♕c3 is roughly equal.

13.♕c3 ♘b6

Black has the more comfortable game.

C) 8.♕d2



With this move, White stops 8...e5 due to 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♕f4!. Having prevented Black's counter in the centre, White now has the clear plan of playing f2-f3 and e2-e4.

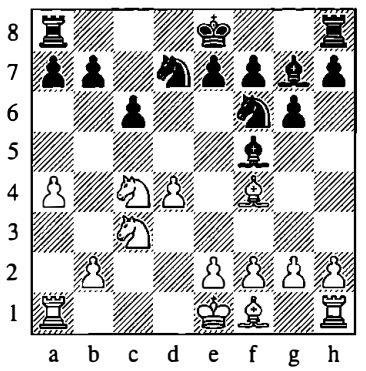
8...g6

I like this response the most; Black not only prepares to fianchetto his dark-squared bishop, but by protecting the f5-bishop he is once again ready to play ...e5.

I believe that 8...♘b6 is also a reasonable option.

9.f3

Exchanging queens is quite harmless:
9.♕f4 ♕xf4 10.♗xf4 ♗g7



11.0–0–0?!

Another game saw 11.f3?! and White also faced problems: 11...♘d5! 12.♘xd5 cxd5 13.♘e5 ♘xe5 14.♗xe5 f6! and Black was better in Iclicki – I. Porat, Givataim 2007.

In my opinion White's best option is 11.e3N, but obviously he is not fighting for an advantage: 11...♘h5! 12.♗g5 h6 13.♗h4 g5 14.♗e2 ♗g6 gives Black comfortable equality.

11...♘d5!

White is under pressure.

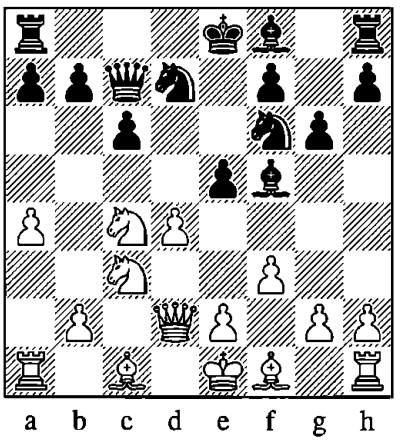
12.♗g3

This position arose in Pileckis – Marchlewicz, Warsaw 2009. Black can enjoy a pleasant edge with the natural:

12...0–0N 13.e3 ♖ac8 14.♗d3 ♗e6∓

White's pieces are lacking in coordination.

9...e5



10.e4

White has also tried:

10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♕f4

11.e4 ♗e6 12.♕g5 was played in Duzhakov – S. Savchenko, Peterhof 2008, and now with the natural 12...♘fd7N 13.♘xe5 f6! 14.♕g3 fxe5∓ Black could have achieved the better game.

11...♘fd7

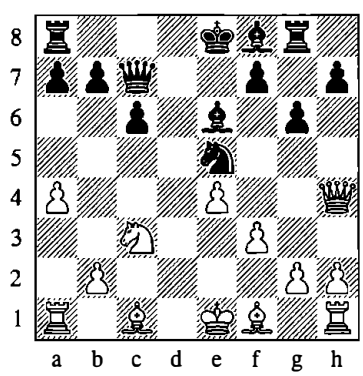
White cannot take advantage of the pin along the h2-b8 diagonal and his position quickly deteriorated in the following encounter:

12.e4 ♗e6 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5

White now tries to play against the black king, but it just makes his position worse.

14.♕f6 ♖g8 15.♕h4?!

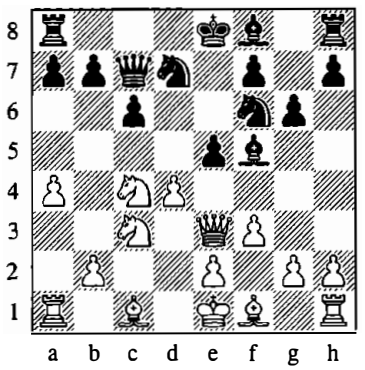
This was Podolchenko – Bai, Mumbai 2012, and Black can now go on the offensive:



15...♗c5!N

The white king is in danger, for instance: 16.♗e2 g5! 17.♗xg5 ♕b6 18.♖b1 ♘c4
White is in serious trouble.

Although it looks unnatural, we should also be aware of 10.♕e3N.

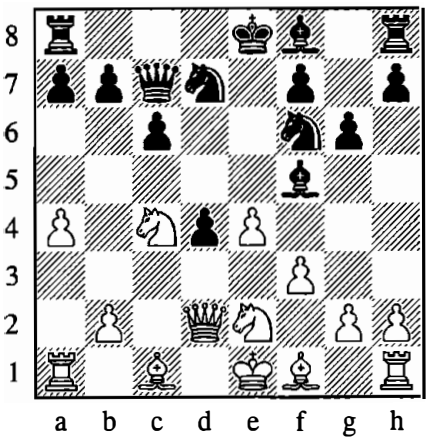


The simplest response is 10...♗b4 11.dxe5 ♘d5 12.♘d6† ♕xd6 13.exd6† ♘xe3 14.♗xe3 ♗xd6∓ and the endgame is more comfortable for Black.

10...exd4 11.♘e2

This continuation provides me with a memorable moment from the 2006 Chess Olympiad in Turin. In Israel's last-round match against Russia, this move was employed by my teammate Victor Mikhalevski, and it helped him to beat Bareev on fourth board. Meanwhile I managed to beat Alexander Morozevich, and Israel achieved a remarkable 3–1 victory.

The alternative is: 11.♕xd4 ♗e6!N (This is even more convincing than 11...♗c5 12.♕d2 ♗e6 13.♕f4 ♕xf4 14.♗xf4 with a balanced game, Pileckis – Dambrauskas, Vilnius 2012.) Play may continue 12.♗e3 ♗c5 13.♕d2 ♗xe3 14.♕xe3 0–0 and Black has no problems.

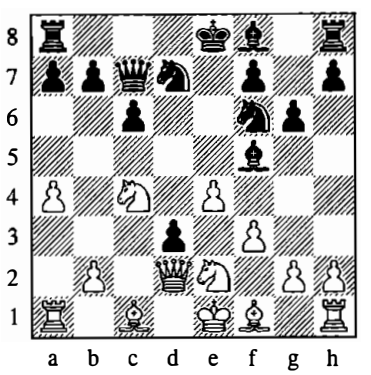


Objectively speaking, this continuation should not pose Black real problems, and he even has a choice of two interesting ideas:

11...a5!?N

This is a remarkable idea; by introducing the threat of ...♗b4, Black prevents 12.♘xd4.

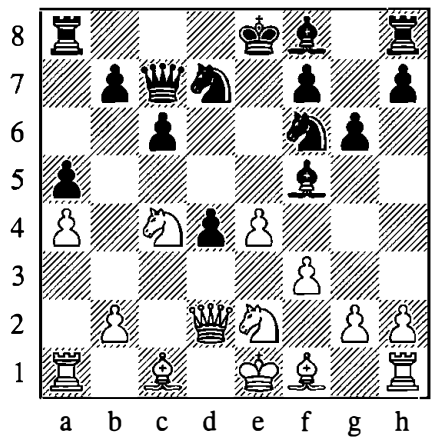
Black may also disrupt White's coordination with: 11...d3!?N



12.♕xd3 (Black has no problems after 12.♘f4 a5 13.♘xd3 ♗e6 14.♕c3 ♗xc4 15.♕xc4 ♘e5 16.♕c2 ♘fd7 17.♗e3 ♘xd3† 18.♗xd3 ♗b4† 19.♔f2 0–0–0=) 12...♗e6 13.♗d2 ♘c5 14.♕c3 ♗xc4 15.♕xc4 0–0–0 16.♘c3 ♔b8 and Black has a reliable position.

The aforementioned game Mikhalevski – Bareev, Turin (ol) 2006, continued 11...♗e6

12.♘xd4 ♗xc4 13.♗xc4. I find this position rather unclear, perhaps even with chances for an advantage for White.



12.♕xd4

The alternative is:

12.♕f4 ♗b4† 13.♔f2 ♕xf4 14.♗xf4

14.♘xf4 ♗e6∓ is risky for White.

14...d3! 15.♘c1

15.exf5 is worse: 15...dxe2 16.♗xe2 ♘d5!∓

15...♗e6 16.♗xd3 ♘c5

If Black wants to fight on, he can play 16...0–0.

17.♗e5 ♔e7 18.♗d6† ♔d7

It seems that White has to settle for the draw.

19.♗e5 ♔e7=

12...♗b4† 13.♗d2 ♗xd2† 14.♕xd2

Only Black can be better after 14.♘xd2 ♗e6 15.♕c3 ♕e5.

14...♗e6 15.♘d4 ♗xc4 16.♗xc4 0–0 17.0–0 ♖fd8=

The position is roughly equal.

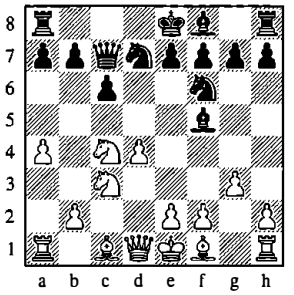
Conclusion

After 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7, we looked at various 8th move alternatives for White. Both A) 8.♗g5 and B) 8.f3 are adequately countered by 8...e5, when Black can count on achieving at least equality.

C) 8.♕d2 is slightly trickier as it prevents the immediate 8...e5, but Black can prepare the central break with 8...g6, and after 9.f3 e5 Black again obtains good counterplay.



6.♘e5



8.g3

Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4

10...♘fd7

A) 11.a5 f6 **362**

A1) 12.a6!? **362**

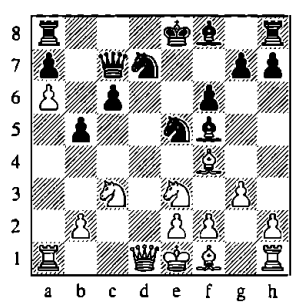
A2) 12.♕c1 **363**

B) 11.♕d4 **364**

C) 11.♕c1 **365**

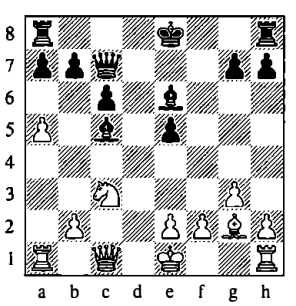
D) 11.♘xe5 **366**

A1) after 13.♘e3



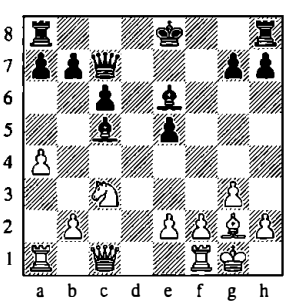
13...♗g6N

A2) after 16.♗g2



16...a6!?N

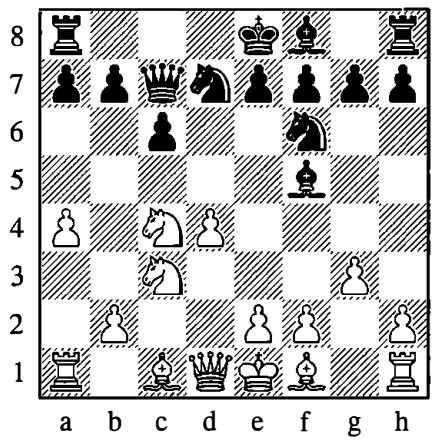
C) after 16.0–0



16...0–0–0!?N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3

We looked at the alternatives in the previous chapter, but this is by far White's first choice.



8...e5 9.dxe5

White occasionally tries:

9.♗g2 ♖d8!

9...♗e6 is a good move as well.

10.0–0 ♗e6

A straightforward idea that gives Black easy play.

11.dxe5

White cannot play 11.♘e3? in view of 11...exd4 12.♕xd4 ♘c5 13.♕f4 ♗d6 14.♕g5?! h6! 15.♕xg7 ♔e7 and the white queen was trapped in Krasiewicz – Kludacz, Grodzisk Mazowiecki 2007.

Black gets a comfortable game after 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♗f4 ♗d6 13.dxe5 ♗xe5 14.♗xe5 ♕xe5 15.♕c2 0–0 16.♖fd1 a5 Sambuev – Kulikov, Moscow 1998.

11...♘xe5 12.♘d2

This position arose in Hanel – Herndl, Austria 1989, where Black went for a strange attacking idea with 12...h5. I prefer the normal:

12...♗b4N 13.♕c2 0–0

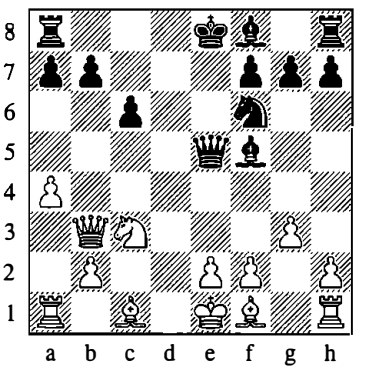
Black has nothing to complain about, with all his pieces well-placed.

9...♘xe5 10.♗f4

Exchanging knights is obviously harmless:

10.♘xe5 ♕xe5 11.♗f4

11.♕b3 is more challenging, but Black has a convincing response available:



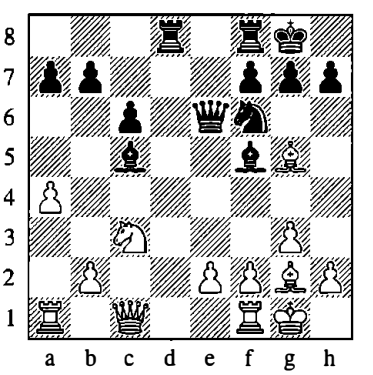
11...0–0–0N In six games, nobody has played this obvious move. 12.♗g2 ♗c5 13.0–0 ♕e6! 14.♕xe6† ♗xe6 Black has a very comfortable game.

11...♕e6 12.♗g2 ♖d8 13.♕c1 ♗c5

13...♗b4!?N is worth considering.

14.0–0 0–0 15.♗g5

This was played in Vargas – Torres Rodriguez, Caldas 2011. Black can obtain the better game by means of:

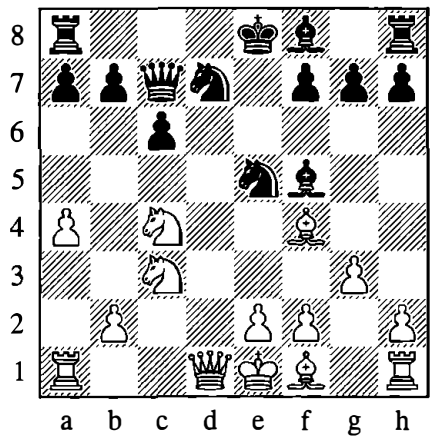


15...♖fe8N

15...h6 allows White to equalize: 16.♗xf6 ♕xf6 17.♘e4 ♗xe4 18.♗xe4 ♗b4=

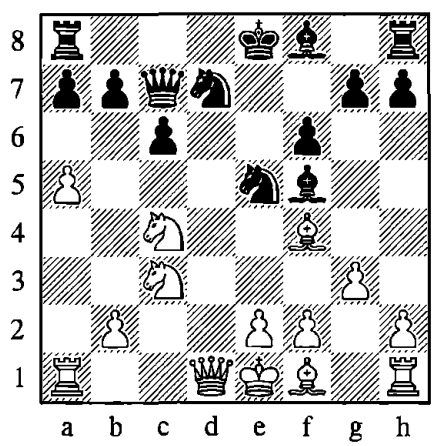
16.e4 ♗g6∓

10...♘fd7



White's first choice by far is 11.♗g2, which will be covered in Chapters 32-34. However, some very strong players have employed various other options here: **A) 11.a5**, **B) 11.♕d4**, **C) 11.♕c1** and **D) 11.♘xe5**.

A) 11.a5 f6

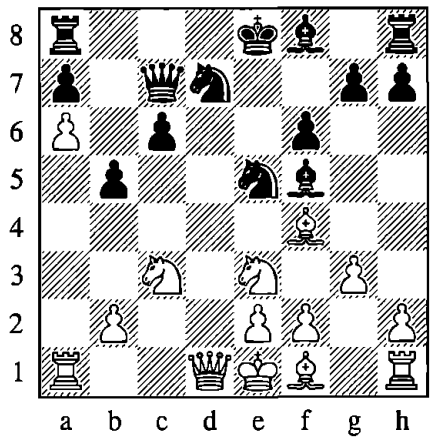


Now I shall look at the new idea **A1) 12.a6!?** as well as **A2) 12.♕c1**. Also possible is 12.♗g2, which transposes to variation B of the next chapter on page 371.

A1) 12.a6!?

I recently faced this interesting idea in a rapid tournament in Israel.

12...b5 13.♘e3

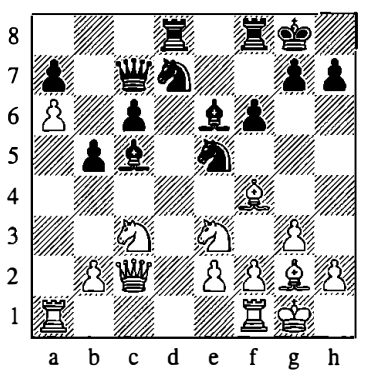


13...♗g6N

After serious investigation, I believe this is the right square for the bishop.

In the game I opted for the visually more natural:

13...♗e6 14.♗g2 ♖d8 15.0–0 ♗c5 16.♕c2 0–0



In Postny – Avrukh, Israel (rapid) 2013, White now played 17.♖ac1, which looks logical but allowed me to consolidate my position with 17...♕b6. Instead, a serious improvement is:

17.♘e4!N ♗b4

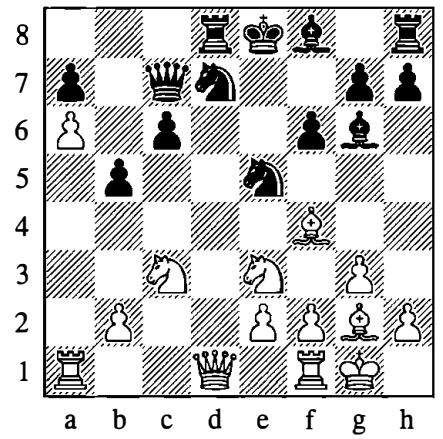
17...♗e7 runs into the unpleasant 18.♗h3! ♗xh3 19.♘d5 with advantage.

18.♖fd1 ♕b6 19.♘f5!

White definitely has the initiative.

14.♗g2 ♖d8 15.0–0

This is the most testing move. It took me a lot of time to find the following reliable line for Black.



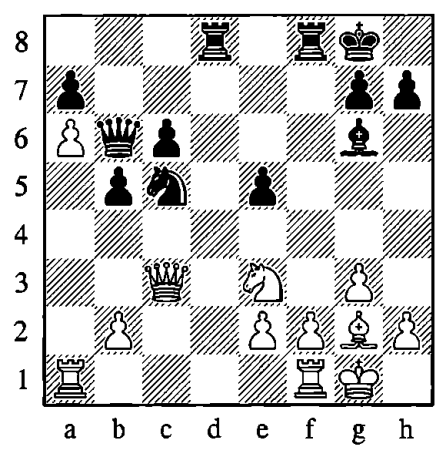
15...♕b6

Surprisingly enough, neither 15...♘c5 16.♕e1 nor 15...♗e7 16.♖c1 promises Black an easy life.

16.♕c1 ♗c5 17.♘e4 0–0

Unfortunately we are unable to retain our bishop: 17...♗e7? 18.♖d1 0–0 19.♘d6 and White develops a dangerous initiative.

18.♘xc5 ♘xc5 19.♗xe5 fxe5 20.♕c3



20...♘e6!

The key move.

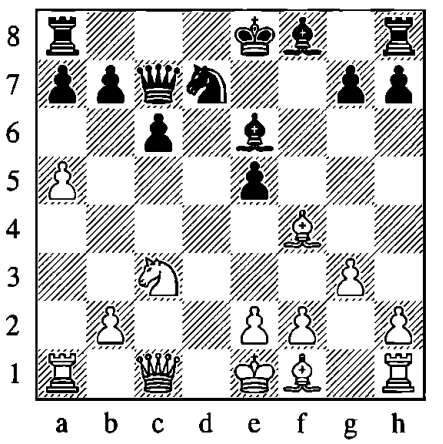
21.♕xe5 ♘d4

In fact it is only a temporary sacrifice, as Black quickly regains the pawn. For example:

22.♖ad1 ♘xe2† 23.♔h1 ♘d4

With an equal game.

A2) 12.♕c1 ♗e6 13.♘xe5 fxe5



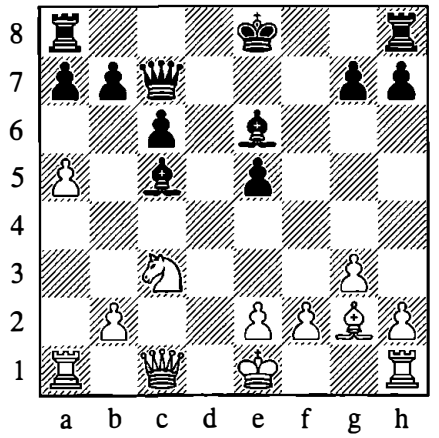
A thematic pawn structure for this variation, which we shall see quite a few times in this chapter. The slightly weakened e5-pawn, together with the outpost for white pieces on the e4-square, is compensated by White's weakened queenside, especially the b3- and b4-squares. Were the white pawn still on a2, we could speak about a positional edge for White, but the pawn having advanced changes the situation.

14.♗e3 ♘c5 15.♗xc5

White has to give up his dark-squared bishop since the threat of ...♘b3 is too strong.

15...♗xc5 16.♗g2

Obviously 16.a6? doesn't work, because White would come under a strong attack after 16...0–0 17.e3 ♕f7.



Now I like the ambitious idea of castling queenside. To prepare this, we first need to stop White's a5-a6 idea.

16...a6!?N

16...0–0 17.0–0 ♖ad8 18.a6 b5 was played in Mamedyarov – Fressinet, Porto Carras 2011, and here White could have obtained the better game by means of: 19.♘e4N ♗e7 20.♘c5 ♗c4 21.♘b7±

17.0–0 0–0–0 18.♘e4 ♗b4 19.♘c5 ♗f5

Black is also fine after: 19...♗xc5 20.♕xc5 ♖d4 21.♖ad1 ♖hd8 22.♖xd4 exd4 23.♖c1 (23.♖d1 ♕d6 24.♕b6 ♕c7=) 23...g6 24.♕a7 ♕b8 25.♕b6 ♕c7 26.♕b4 ♕d6 27.♖c5 ♗f5=

20.♖a4 ♖d4 21.♘b3

21.e3 ♗xc5 22.exd4 ♗xd4 promises Black fine compensation for the exchange.

21...♗d2 22.♕a1 ♖xa4 23.♕xa4 ♖d8 24.♗e4

White should probably settle for this, as otherwise he might get into trouble, for example: 24.♖d1 ♗g5 25.♖xd8† ♕xd8 26.♕b4 ♕d1† 27.♗f1 ♗h3 28.♕f8† ♗d8 29.♘d2 g5∓

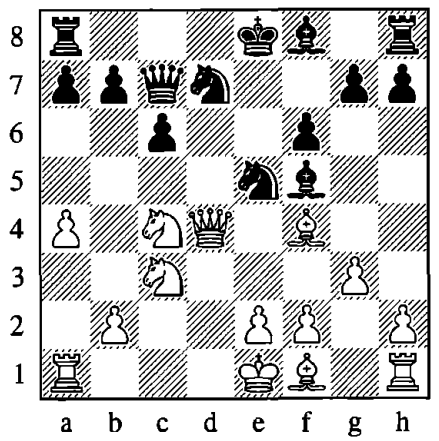
24...♗h3 25.♗g2

White should not be tempted by: 25.♖d1?! ♗e3!∓

25...♗f5=

The repetition of moves seems a logical conclusion.

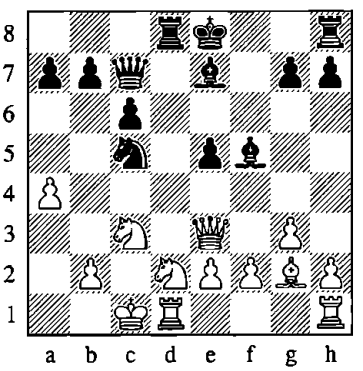
B) 11.♕d4 f6



12.♖d1

White has tried other moves:

12.0–0–0? is very bad, allowing Black to seize a decisive initiative: 12...♘c5 13.♘d2 ♖d8 14.♗xe5 fxe5 15.♕e3 ♗e7 16.♗g2



16...♘d3†! 17.exd3 ♖xd3 and White's position was resignable in Arbanas – Erdos, Bizovac 2005, in view of 18.♕e2 ♖xc3†! 19.bxc3 ♗a3#.

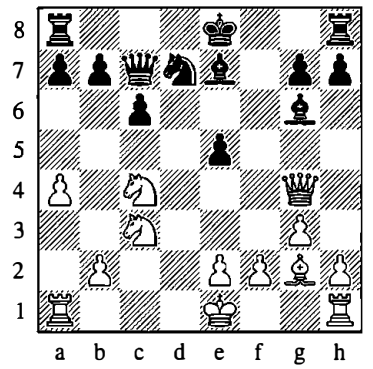
12.♗g2 ♗c5

Black has the better chances already.

13.♗xe5 fxe5 14.♕h4

14.♕d2 0–0 15.0–0 occurred in Van Laatum – Marcus, Belgium 2000, and now Black should have continued 15...♘f6N 16.♘e3 ♗g6 17.♕c1 ♕e7 with the better game.

14...♗e7 15.♕h5† ♗g6 16.♕g4



16...♗f7!N

This is best, maintaining Black's advantage. 16...0–0 was played in Rakhmanov – Dmitrenko, Cherepovets 2005, but that allows 17.♕e6†N ♖f7 18.♗h3 with an unclear game.

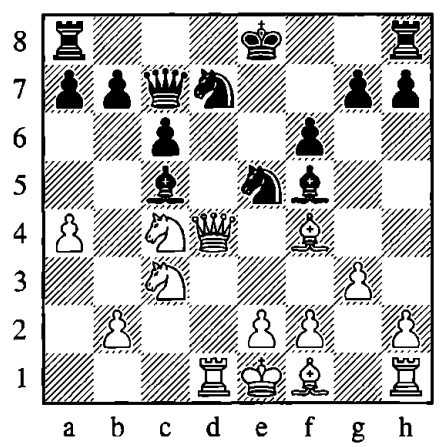
17.♕e4

Black was threatening 17...♘f6.

17...0–0 18.0–0 ♖ac8!

Followed by 19...♘c5 with a clear advantage.

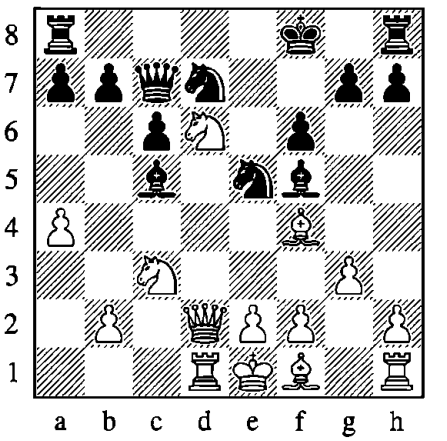
12...♗c5



13.♘d6†

After 13.♗xe5 fxe5 14.♘d6† Black gets a clear edge with simple moves: 14...♗xd6 15.♕xd6 ♕xd6 16.♖xd6 ♔e7 17.♖d2 a5 18.e4 ♗e6 19.♗e2 ♘c5 20.0–0 ♖hd8∓ and Black had a serious advantage in Ben Nasser – Anurag, Fujairah City 2012.

13...♔f8! 14.♕d2



14...♗xd6!N

A big improvement over 14...♘d3† 15.exd3 ♗xd6, which was equal in Lindstedt – Varga, Borsodtavho 1991.

15.♕xd6† ♕xd6 16.♖xd6 ♖e8!

This demonstrates the point of Black's 13th move; White has no good way to stop ...♘d3†.

17.♗g2 ♘d3† 18.♔f1 ♘xf4 19.gxf4 ♔e7 20.♖d4 ♘c5∓

Black has the better game.

C) 11.♕c1

Quite a respectable move, which has been played by many strong players.

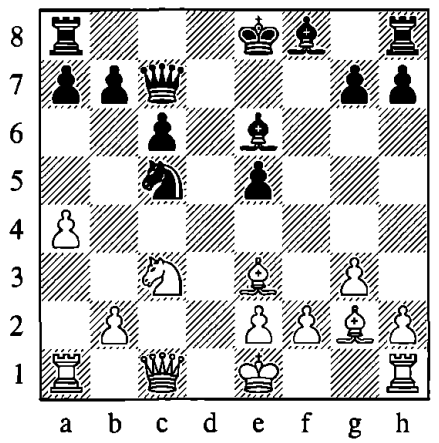
11...f6

I consider this the most convincing response, though 11...♗e6 is a decent alternative.

12.♗g2 ♗e6 13.♘xe5 fxe5

Again we have this pawn structure.

14.♗e3 ♘c5



15.♗xc5

The weakness of the b3-square makes it difficult for White to manage without exchanging this knight:

15.♕c2 ♗b3! 16.♕b1

White doesn't achieve much with: 16.♕f5 ♗e6 17.♕g5 h6 18.♕h5† ♗f7 19.♕f5 ♗e6=

16...♗e6 17.♗xc5

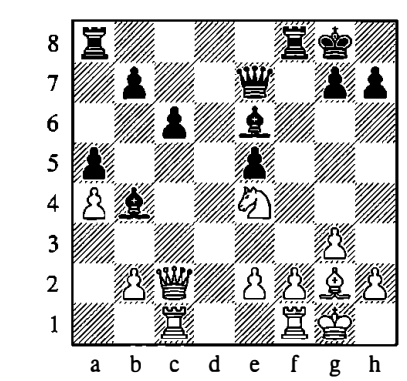
Otherwise ...♘b3 will be unpleasant.

17...♗xc5 18.0–0 a5

A natural reaction, though Black could also refrain from this move and continue 18...♕e7 19.a5 a6.

19.♕c2 ♕e7 20.♖ac1 0–0 21.♘e4 ♗b4

The position is more or less balanced.



22.♘c5 ♗f7 23.♗e4 ♔h8 24.♘d3

We have been following Gagunashvili – Arutinian, Tbilisi 2002, and now I recommend:

24...♖ad8N 25.e3

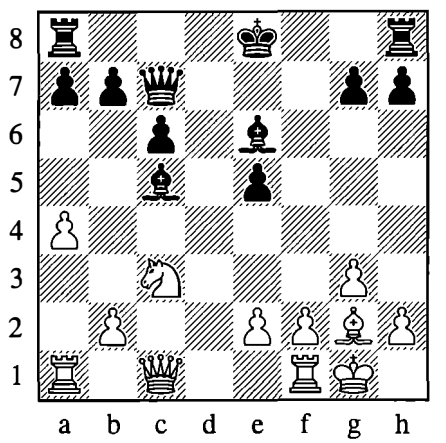
25.♘xb4?! ♕xb4 26.♗xh7 ♖d2 is dangerous for White.

25...♗g8

The position remains equal.

15...♗xc5 16.0–0

Here I propose a new move:



16...0–0–0!?N

I believe White has a slight pull after 16...0–0 17.♘e4 ♗e7 18.a5, as has been played in several games.

17.♘e4

17.a5 a6 transposes to variation A2 – see page 364 for the continuation from this position.

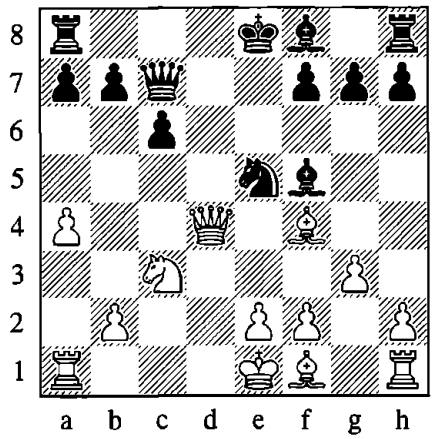
17...♗b4 18.♘g5

18.a5 a6 is another transposition to variation A2.

18...♗g4 19.e3 ♕e7 20.♕c4 ♗f5

Black has no problems.

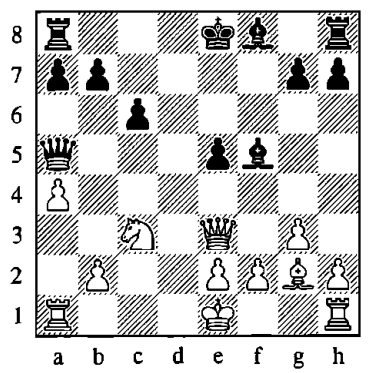
D) 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♕d4



This has been played plenty of times, but it is quite harmless.

12...f6 13.a5

After 13.♗g2 I like 13...♕a5!, which both unpins the knight and prevents a4-a5. Genov – Ponomariov, Bilbao 2004, continued 14.♗xe5 fxe5 15.♕e3 and here Black should just complete his development naturally:

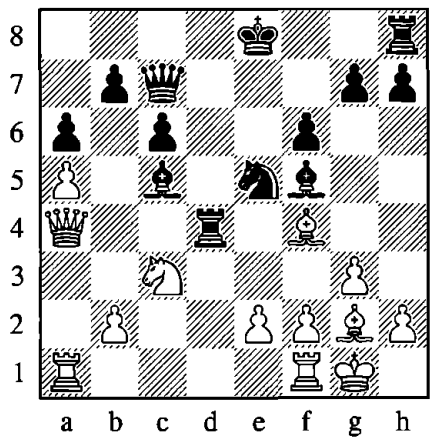


15...♗e7N 16.0–0 0–0 17.♗e4 ♗e6∓ and Black enjoys the better game.

13...a6 14.♗g2 ♖d8 15.♕a4 ♗c5

Black can also play: 15...♕f7 16.0–0 ♗e7 17.♖ad1 0–0 18.♖xd8 A draw was agreed here in B. Jones – M. Sanchez, email 2006. After 18...♖xd8 19.♖d1 ♖xd1† 20.♘xd1 ♗e6, the position would be more or less balanced.

16.0–0 ♖d4



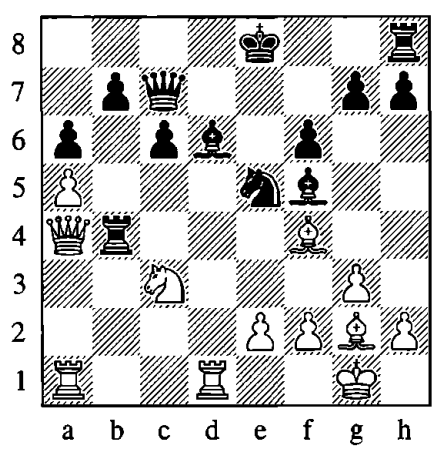
Here 17.♕a2 ♕e7 18.♖ac1 was played in Iskusnyh – Morozevich, St Petersburg 1998, and now Black can obtain the better game with: 18...♗e6N 19.b3 ♖b4 20.♖b1 0–0∓

Instead, White has an improvement, although even that does not offer him any hope of an advantage.

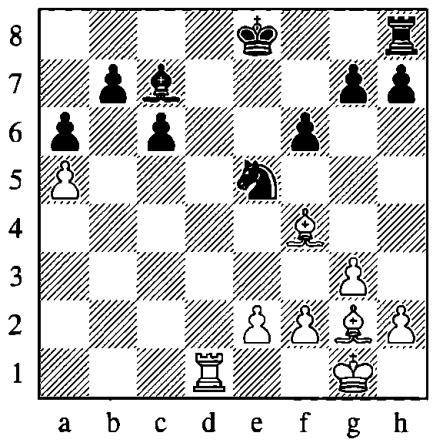
17.b4!N ♗d6

Obviously Black cannot play 17...♖xb4? in view of 18.♘d5 and White wins the exchange.

18.♖fd1 ♖xb4



19.♘d5 ♖xa4 20.♘xc7† ♗xc7 21.♖xa4 ♗c2 22.♖ad4 ♗xd1 23.♖xd1



Thanks to his bishop pair, White should be able to hold this position.

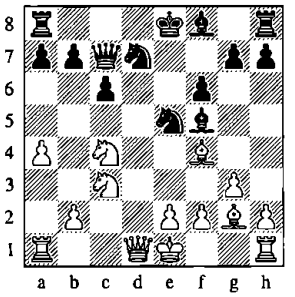
Conclusion

Although several of the sidelines presented in this chapter have been tried by strong players, I do not think that Black should be overly worried about them. However, one line which did cause me some concern was the tricky A1) 11.a5 f6 12.a6!?. It took me a lot of effort to find a convincing way to counter this new idea, but I believe that my recommendation will hold up well.

One theme of the chapter was when an exchange of pieces on the e5-square gave Black an isolated e-pawn, but with compensation in the form of the bishop pair. In such positions, I pointed out that Black can generally keep the balance by arranging to castle queenside.



6.♘e5



11...f6

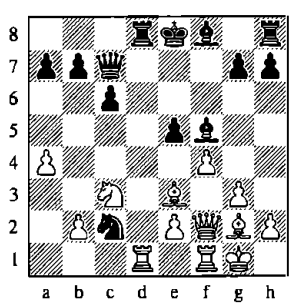
Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♘fd7 11.♗g2

11...f6

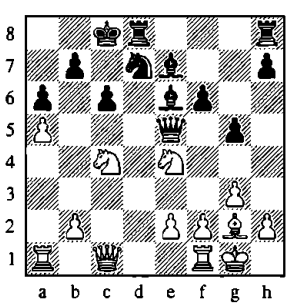
A) 12.♘xe5 370
B) 12.a5 371
C) 12.0–0 g5 372
C1) 13.♘xe5 gxf4! 14.♘xd7 ♕xd7 373
C11) 15.♕c1 374
C12) 15.a5N 375
C2) 13.♗xe5 ♘xe5 376
C21) 14.♘xe5 377
C22) 14.♘e3 ♗e6 378
C221) 15.a5 378
C222) 15.♕c2 378
C223) 15.♕d4 ♕b6 16.♕e4 379
C2231) 16...♕b4 379
C2232) 16...a5N 380

A) after 18.♕f2



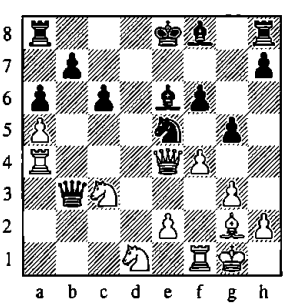
18...♘xe3N

C) note to move 13



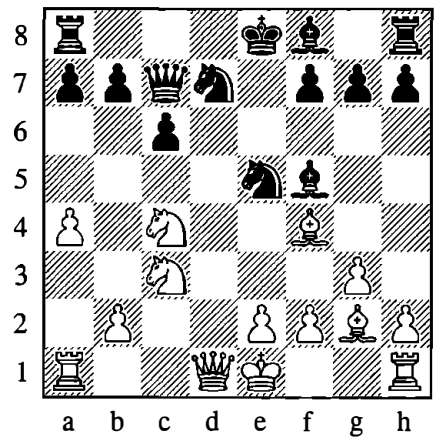
18...♕c7!N

C2231) after 20.f4



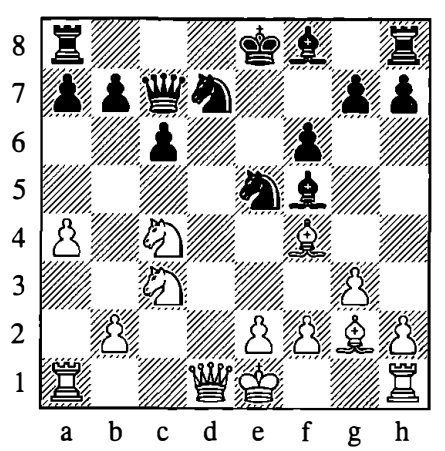
20...gxf4!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♘fd7 11.♗g2



We have now reached the main line. I have decided to cover two options for Black from this position. The Morozevich line with 11...g5 will be covered in the following two chapters, but in this chapter I will examine a topical line in which Black plays that pawn thrust a move later.

11...f6



We shall take a quick look at the minor lines **A) 12.♘xe5** and **B) 12.a5** before turning to the standard **C) 12.0–0**. A fourth option, 12.♕c1 transposes to line C of the previous chapter on pages 365-6.

A) 12.♘xe5 fxe5 13.♗e3

It's important for White to control the c5-square. 13.♗g5 ♘c5 is promising for Black, as was demonstrated in the following example: 14.0–0 a5! 15.♔h1?! ♗e7 16.♗xe7 ♕xe7 17.♖a3 0–0∓ and Black was clearly better in Tunik – Morozevich, Krasnodar 1997.

13...♘c5!

This is stronger than 13...♗c5 14.♕c1! 0–0 15.0–0± and White was slightly better in Radjabov – Gagunashvili, Mainz 2005.

14.0–0

Black also gets a comfortable game after: 14.♗xc5 ♗xc5 15.0–0 ♖d8 16.♕b3 ♕f7

White now blundered with:

17.♗d5??

17.♕xf7† ♔xf7∓ is just slightly better for Black.

17...♖xd5!

White was hoping for 17...cxd5 18.♕b5† followed by 19.♕xc5.

18.♘xd5 ♕xd5–+

Touzane – Wagner, France 2003.

14...♖d8 15.♕e1 ♘b3

There is also nothing wrong with the natural 15...♗e7, which has been played in a few games.

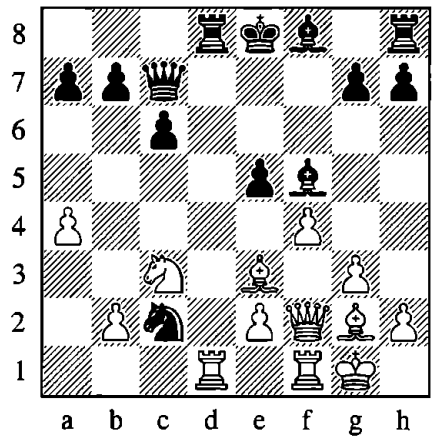
16.♖d1 ♘d4 17.f4

This looks overambitious.

After the safer 17.♘e4 a5! 18.f4 ♗b4 19.♕f2 0–0 20.♗xd4 exd4 21.♖xd4 ♖xd4 22.♕xd4 ♖d8 23.♕c4† ♕f7 24.♕xf7† ♔xf7, Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn.

17...♘c2 18.♕f2

Black should now play:



18...♘xe3N

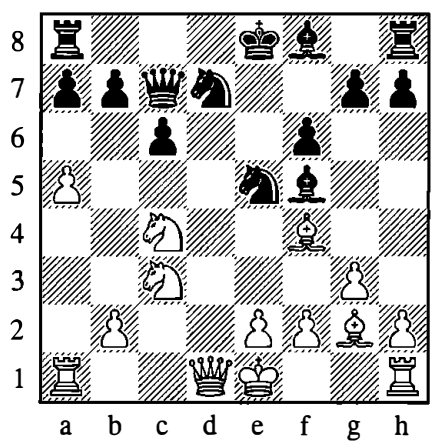
Although Black was fine after 18...♖xd1 19.♖xd1 ♘xe3 20.♕xe3 ♕b6= Hochgraefe – Haba, Germany 2002, the text is even stronger.

19.♕xe3 ♕b6 20.♕xb6 axb6

White will have to defend an inferior endgame.

21.♖xd8† ♔xd8 22.fxe5 ♗c5† 23.♔h1 ♗e6 24.♘e4 ♔e7∓

B) 12.a5



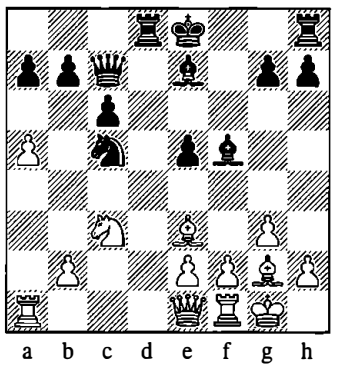
12...♘c5 13.0–0

In Budai – Macsik, Budapest 2005, White played the clearly inferior 13.♗xe5 fxe5 14.0–0 ♖d8 15.♕e1. After 15...♗e7N Black would enjoy a pleasant edge.

13...♖d8 14.♕c1!

This surprising idea is more dangerous than: 14.♕e1 ♗e7 15.♘xe5 fxe5 16.♗e3

Here I examined the obvious:



16...♘b3!?N

16...0–0 17.♗xc5 ♗xc5 was fairly balanced in Beliavsky – Hübner, Frankfurt 1998.

17.♗xa7

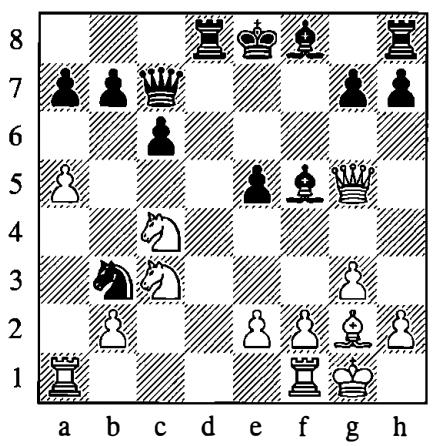
17.♖a4 is worse: 17...♘d4 18.♕c1 0–0 19.♗xd4 exd4 20.♘d5 ♕d7 21.♘xe7† ♕xe7∓

17...♘xa1 18.♗b6 ♕d7 19.♕xa1 ♖a8 20.♕c1 ♕e6 21.♘e4 0–0=

White has decent compensation for the small material deficit, but Black is not in danger.

14...♘b3 15.♗xe5 fxe5 16.♕g5

This is the idea behind White's 14th move. Here I propose the following new idea:



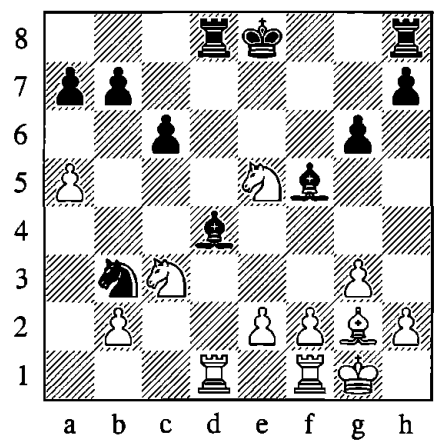
16...g6N

I was not satisfied with: 16...♗e6 17.♘xe5 ♘xa1 18.♖xa1 ♗d6N Although this is an improvement, it does not quite equalize. (18...a6 19.♕e3 ♕d6 was played in Zimmermann – Kharchenko, St Petersburg 2012, and here White can secure his advantage with the effective 20.♗f3!N, with the two strong threats of 21.♗h5† and 21.♖d1.) 19.♕h5† ♗f7 20.♘xf7 ♕xf7 21.♕xf7† ♔xf7 22.a6± and Black is doomed to passive defence.

17.♖ad1 ♗e7 18.♕e3 ♗c5 19.♕xe5†

Black has no problems after: 19.♖xd8† ♔xd8 20.♕xe5 ♕xe5 21.♘xe5 ♔c7=

19...♕xe5 20.♘xe5 ♗d4



Black's powerful dark-squared bishop provides good compensation for the pawn.

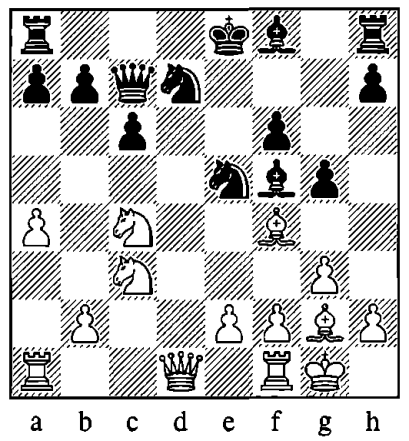
21.e4 ♗c8 22.♘f3 ♗g7 23.a6 b6=

C) 12.0–0 g5

This is the latest word in the theory of this variation.

12...♘c5 is considered to be the main direction here, but in my opinion White can claim a slight edge with correct play.

12...0–0–0?! would be a great move (indeed, Hector used this line to beautifully outplay me in 2009), were it not for 13.♖c1! ♘c5 14.♕e1. This effectively refutes Black's idea, due to a crushing ♘b5 blow landing in most lines.



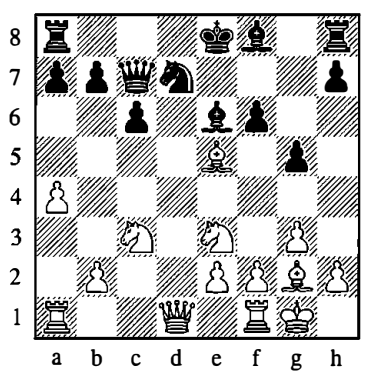
It's hard to say which is the main line here – I believe that both of White's captures are interesting: **C1) 13.♘xe5** and **C2) 13.♗xe5**.

A third try is:

13.♘e3

This is an inaccurate move order that allows Black an extra option.

13...♗e6 14.♗xe5



14...♕xe5!

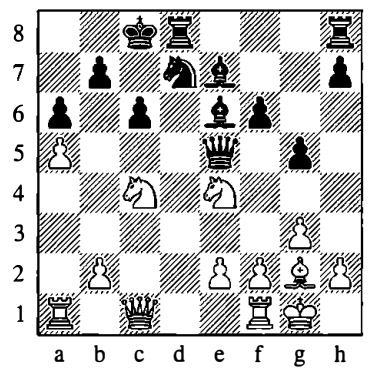
This is much simpler than 14...♘xe5, which transposes to line C22.

15.a5 a6! 16.♘e4?!

16.♕c2 would allow White to maintain the balance: 16...♗c5 17.♖a4 f5 18.♘c4 ♕f6 19.♖d1 0–0 20.e3 ♖ad8=

16...0–0–0 17.♕c1 ♗e7 18.♘c4

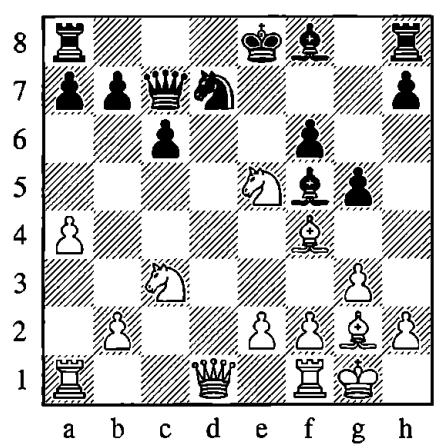
This was Ekeberg – Manne, Bergen 2001, and Black should now play:



18...♕c7!N 19.♖d1 ♔b8

Black keeps the better chances, since White does not have a clear plan and the bishop pair will tell in the long term.

C1) 13.♘xe5



13...gxf4!

This is the only good way.

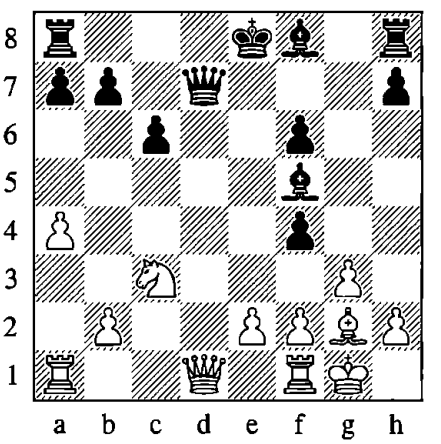
After 13...♘xe5 14.♗e3! h5 15.♘e4 ♗e7 16.♕b3±, White was clearly better in Sheldon – Crouch, Newport 1999.

14.♘xd7 ♕xd7

Once again, this is Black's only decent option.

14...0–0–0? was played in Miknevicius – Pak, Prague 2012, but is clearly inferior in view of the simple 15.♕d4!N ♗xd7 16.♕xa7± and Black has nothing to compensate for the loss of the pawn.

14...♗xd7?! runs into: 15.e3! fxg3 (after 15...0–0–0 16.exf4, Black's compensation for the pawn is hardly sufficient) 16.♕h5† ♔e7 This was Ashwin – Dahale, Jalgaon 2010, and now 17.hxg3N would secure White a clear positional advantage.



White's most dangerous options are **C11) 15.♕c1** and **C12) 15.a5**.

It seems to me less critical if White exchanges queens and then grabs the f4-pawn:

15.♕xd7† ♔xd7

15...♗xd7 16.gxf4 ♖g8 17.♘e4 ♗e7 18.♘g3 0–0–0 should also give Black enough compensation for the pawn.

16.♖fd1†

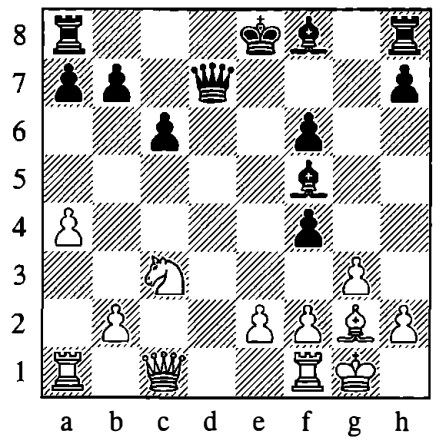
16.gxf4 ♗b4⩱

16...♗d6 17.♖d4 ♖ad8 18.gxf4 ♖hg8 19.♔f1 ♔c7 20.♖ad1 a5

Black's bishop pair gave him sufficient

compensation in Baramidze – Hector, Nuremberg 2013.

C11) 15.♕c1



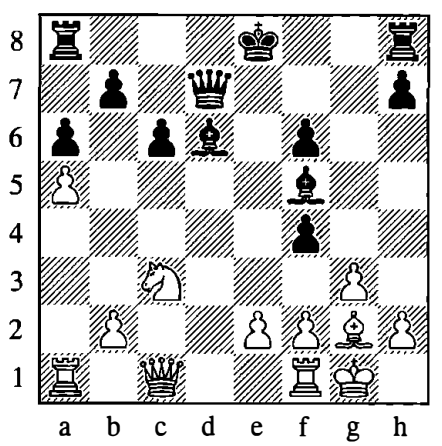
15...♗d6N

This is my improvement over 15...fxg3 16.hxg3 ♗b4 17.♖d1 ♕e7 18.♕f4± and Black was in trouble in Ki. Georgiev – Skatchkov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013.

16.a5

It is extremely risky for White to take the f4-pawn: 16.gxf4 0–0–0 17.♔h1 ♖hg8 and Black has ample compensation.

16...a6



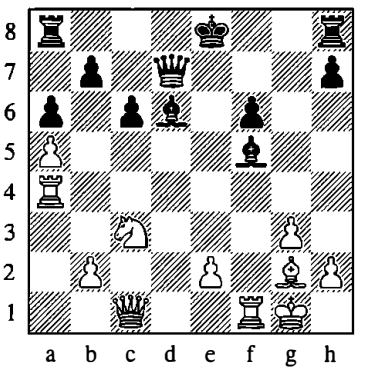
17.♖d1

I also examined two other options for White:

17.♖a4 fxg3 18.fxg3

Recapturing this way leads to interesting tactics.

After 18.hxg3 0–0–0 19.♘d5 ♔b8 20.♘xf6 ♕c7 21.♖d1 h5 22.♘e4 ♗e7, Black has thematic compensation thanks to the bishop pair.



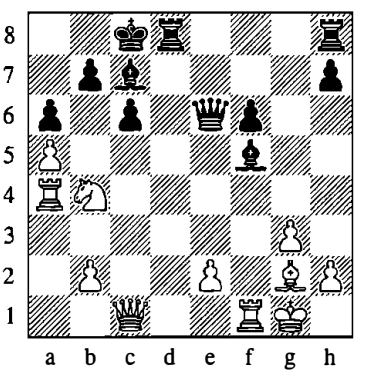
18...0–0–0

White has various attacking ideas, but it seems that Black can keep things under control.

19.♘d5

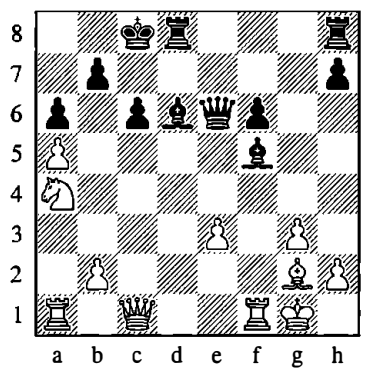
19.♕e3 ♔b8 20.♗xc6 gives White no more than a draw: 20...bxc6 21.♕b6† ♔a8 22.♕xa6† ♔b8 23.♖xf5 ♕xf5 24.♕b6† ♔c8 25.♕xc6† ♔b8=

19...♕e6 20.♘b4 ♗c7



21.♘xc6!
A remarkable idea.
21...bxc6 22.♖c4 ♖d6!
The only move to maintain the balance.
23.♗xc6 ♔d8! 24.♗b7 ♖d7 25.♖xc7! ♖xc7 26.♖d1† ♖d7 27.♕c8† ♔e7 28.♖xd7† ♕xd7 29.♕xh8 ♕d4† 30.♔g2 ♗e4†
With perpetual check.

17.e3
This is connected with a tactical idea.
17...fxg3 18.fxg3
18.hxg3 0–0–0 is comfortable for Black.
18...0–0–0 19.♘a4!
Taking advantage of the black queen being tied to the defence of the f5-bishop.
19...♕e6



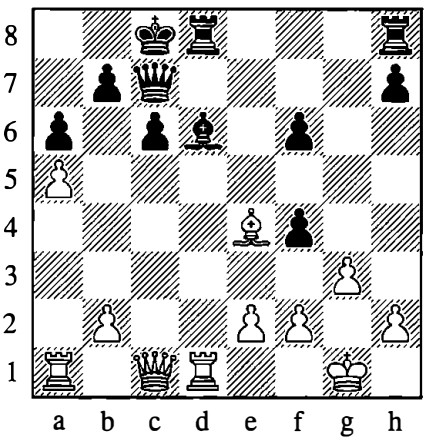
20.♗d5 ♕e5 21.♗xc6 ♔b8!?
Black can also play 21...bxc6 22.♕xc6† ♔b8= and White has no more than a perpetual.
22.♕c3 ♕xc3 23.♘xc3 ♗d3 24.♖fd1 ♗c5
Black is not worse.

17...♕c7

Necessary prophylaxis, since 17...0–0–0? runs into 18.♘b5! axb5 19.a6 with a decisive attack.

18.♘e4 ♗xe4 19.♗xe4 0–0–0

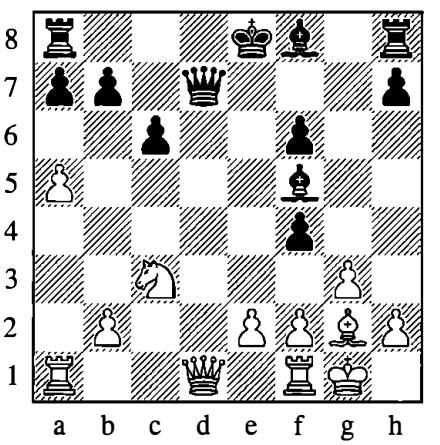
The opposite-coloured bishops mean that Black has little to be worried about, for instance:



20.♖a4 ♗e5
20...♔b8 is also playable.

21.♖xd8† ♖xd8 22.e3 fxe3 23.♕xe3 ♕d6=

C12) 15.a5



This is the move that caused me most concerns. Black must play accurately to ensure that he obtains full compensation.

15...fxg3N

15...♕xd1 16.♖axd1 a6 was played in Colpe – Hector, Helsingor 2013, and now 17.gxf4 ♗e7 18.e4 ♗e6 gave Black good compensation for the pawn. Instead, 17.♘e4N would make it difficult for Black to achieve full equality.

15...a6 16.♕a4!

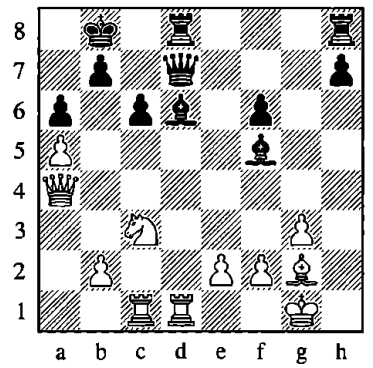
An excellent square for the white queen.

16...fxg3

16...♗d6 17.♘e4 ♗xe4 18.♕xe4† ♕e7 19.♕f5 is uncomfortable for Black.

17.hxg3 0–0–0 18.♖fd1 ♗d6 19.♖ac1 ♔b8

White's pieces are well coordinated.



20.♘e4

Another interesting options is 20.♘a2!? followed by ♘b4.

20...♗xe4 21.♗xe4

Despite the opposite-coloured bishops, Black's position is unpleasant, as it is difficult for him to deal with White's idea of sacrificing on c6.

16.fxg3!

This is the critical continuation.

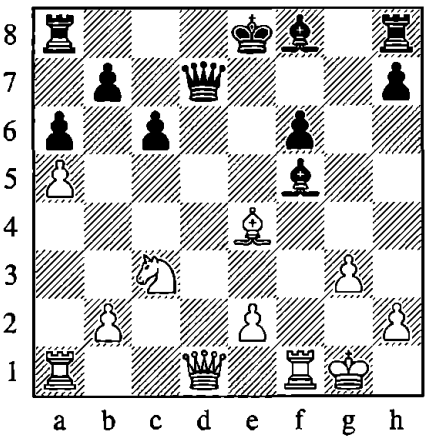
16.hxg3 ♕xd1 17.♖fxd1 a6 is not dangerous for Black, for example: 18.♘e4 ♔f7 19.♖a4 ♔g6!? 20.♘d6 ♗xd6 21.♖xd6 ♖ad8 22.♖ad4 ♖xd6 23.♖xd6 ♖e8 with equality.

16...a6

16...0–0–0 17.a6 ♕xd1 18.♘xd1 ♗c2 might be an option for Black, but he would be playing for at best a draw.

17.♗e4!

Black's position is quite comfortable after 17.♕xd7† ♗xd7 18.♖xf6 ♗c5† 19.♔h1 0–0–0, with typical compensation for the pawn.



17...♗h3

This looks like Black's best option.

18.♕xd7†

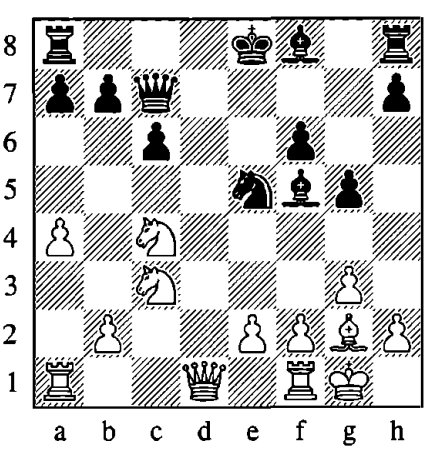
Another line here is 18.♖xf6 0–0–0 19.♕xd7† ♖xd7 20.♗f5 ♗xf5 21.♖xf5 ♗g7, and Black has full compensation.

18...♗xd7 19.♖xf6 0–0–0

Less accurate is 19...♗g7 20.♖f4 0–0–0 21.♖d1, with a slight advantage for White.

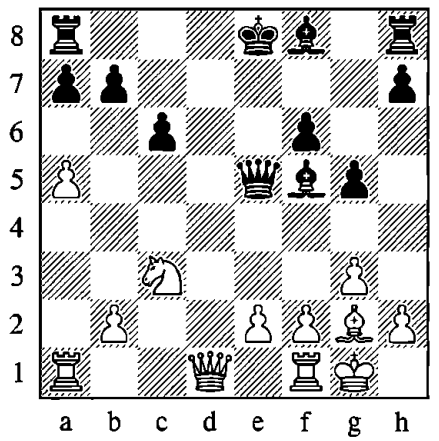
With the text, Black keeps the options open for his dark-squared bishop and retains typical compensation.

C2) 13.♗xe5 ♘xe5



A few games have featured **C21) 14.♘xe5**, but **C22) 14.♘e3** is more popular.

C21) 14.♘xe5 ♕xe5 15.a5



15...a6

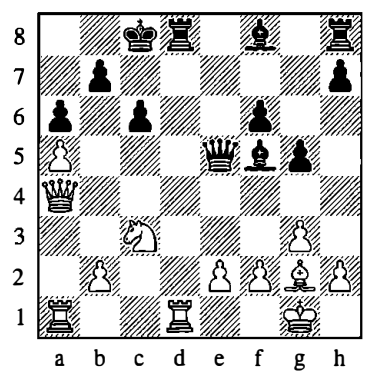
Black has to react with this to stop White's a5-a6 idea.

16.♕b3

White has also tried:

16.♕a4 0–0–0 17.♖fd1

Now I see no reason to refrain from the tempting:



17...♗c5N

After 17...♖xd1† 18.♖xd1 ♔c7 19.♕b3 ♗c5 20.♘d5†! ♔b8 21.♘b4 ♗xb4 22.♕xb4± White obtained a slight pull in Fabian – Alonso, Buenos Aires 2010.

18.♗xc6

This is the only dangerous-looking idea.

18...bxc6 19.♕xc6† ♔b8 20.♕xa6

But it doesn't turn out to be too dangerous, for example Black can play:

20...♗a7

White does not have anything better than repeating the position.

21.♘b5 ♗c5 22.♘c3=

16...♖b8

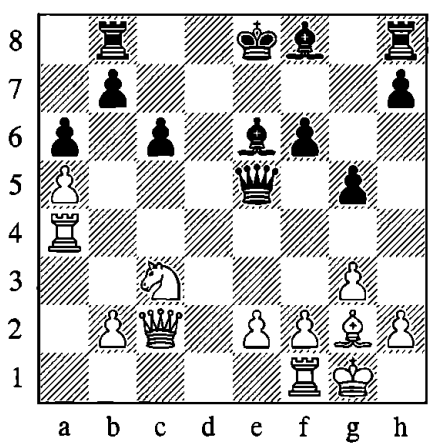
16...0–0–0!?N is worth considering. The following line looks quite logical: 17.♘a4 (17.♖fc1 ♗e6∓) 17...♗e6 18.♕b6 ♕c7 19.♕e3 ♕e5 20.♕a7 ♕b8=

17.♖a4

I also examined 17.♖ad1N ♗e7 18.f4, and concluded that Black maintains equality with: 18...♕e3† 19.♔h1 ♕e6 20.♕b6 0–0 21.e4 ♗g4=

17...♗e6 18.♕c2

This position arose in Sachdev – Bindu, Panaji 2012. Black should now play:



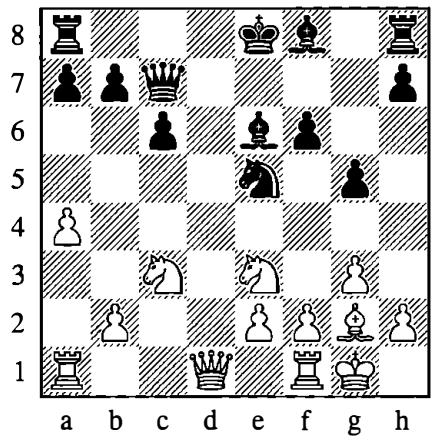
18...f5N 19.♖d1

19.e3 ♗g7∓

19...♗e7 20.e3 0–0 21.♗f1 ♖bd8

The position is balanced.

C22) 14.♘e3 ♗e6



Here I examined three moves: **C221) 15.a5**, **C222) 15.♕c2** and **C223) 15.♕d4**.

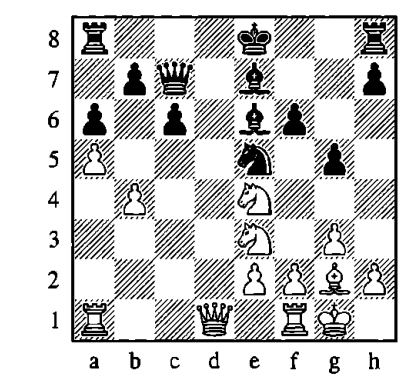
C221) 15.a5 a6 16.♘e4

16.♕a4 0–0–0 17.♖fc1 ♕f7 18.♕e4 ♗c5 19.♘a4 ♖d4 20.♕c2 ♗b4 21.♘c5 ♖hd8 gave Black an edge in Tikkanen – Hector, Orebro 2013.

16...♗e7 17.f4N

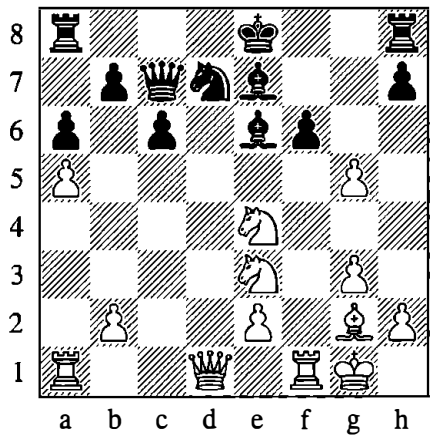
I believe this is the critical continuation.

White strategy failed in the following game: 17.b4?!



17...f5! With this move, Black takes over the initiative. 18.♘c5 ♗xc5 19.bxc5 f4 (19...♖d8!? is also good) 20.♘c2 ♖d8 21.♕c1 0–0∓ and Black was better in Rodshtein – Inarkiev, Plovdiv 2012.

17...♘d7! 18.fxg5



18...0–0–0

The point of Black's play.

19.♕c2 fxg5 20.♘f5 ♘e5

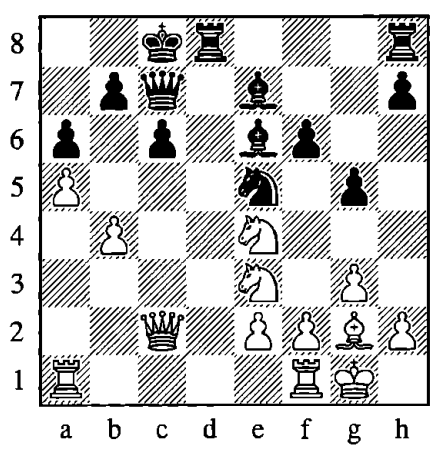
The position looks pretty equal.

C222) 15.♕c2 0–0–0 16.a5 a6

It is always essential to stop White playing a5-a6.

17.♘e4 ♗e7 18.b4

Postl – Kreisl, Austria 2013, reached this position. Black should now play the active:



18...f5N 19.♘c5 ♗xc5 20.♕xc5

Black's play is easier after the other recapture: 20.bxc5 ♖hf8! (an immediate 20...f4 would allow 21.♘f5) 21.♕c3 f4 22.♘c2 ♕g7 23.♖fd1 fxg3 24.♕xg3 h5 and Black has the initiative.

20...f4 21.♘c2 ♗c4! 22.♘d4

In the event of 22.♖fe1, Black easily develops his initiative on the kingside with 22...h5 23.♖ac1 h4.

22...♕d6 23.♖fd1

23.♕xd6 ♖xd6 24.♘f3 ♘xf3† 25.♗xf3 ♖d2∓

23...♕xc5 24.bxc5 ♔c7 25.♗e4 h6

Black has the better game.

C223) 15.♕d4

An important idea, aiming to get the queen to e4.

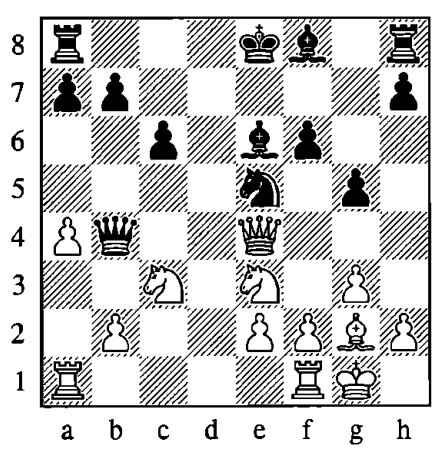
15...♕b6

Also possible is 15...♗e7, transposing to the note on 14.0–0 in line B of the next chapter (see page 390).

16.♕e4

Now **C2231) 16...♕b4** is fine for Black, though I prefer **C2232) 16...a5N**.

C2231) 16...♕b4



17.a5

17.f4 is not dangerous for Black: 17...gxf4 18.gxf4 ♕xe4 19.♘xe4 ♘d7 20.a5 a6 with a balanced position.

17...a6 18.♖a4?

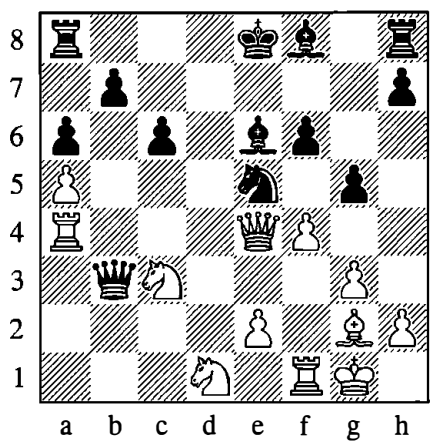
This may look tempting, but objectively better is 18.f4 gxf4 19.gxf4 ♕xe4 20.♘xe4 ♘d7, transposing to the previous note.

18...♕xb2

Black is perfectly okay after 18...♕xe4 19.♘xe4 ♗e7, but the text is more ambitious and strong.

19.♘ed1 ♕b3 20.f4

White's hopes were obviously based on this move, but Black can keep everything under control:



20...gxf4!N

A simple improvement over 20...♘d7 Ding Liren – Fressinet, Moscow 2013, when 21.♗h3N seems to maintain the balance, for instance 21...♘c5 22.♗xe6 ♕xe6 23.♕xe6† ♘xe6 24.fxg5 fxg5 25.♖e4= and White has enough compensation for the pawn.

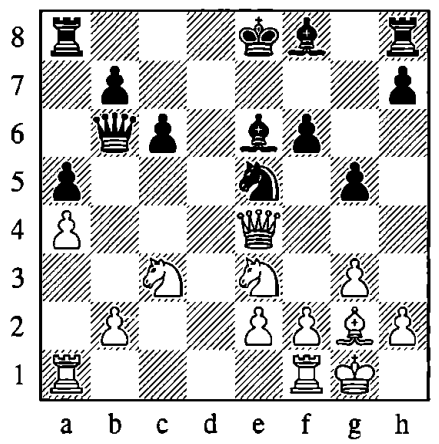
21.gxf4

21.♕xf4 is no improvement: 21...0–0–0 22.♔h1 ♗e7 and Black is clearly better.

21...♘d7 22.♗h3 ♘c5 23.♗xe6 ♕xe6 24.♕xe6† ♘xe6 25.♖e4 ♔f7

White cannot hope to obtain sufficient compensation.

C2232) 16...a5N

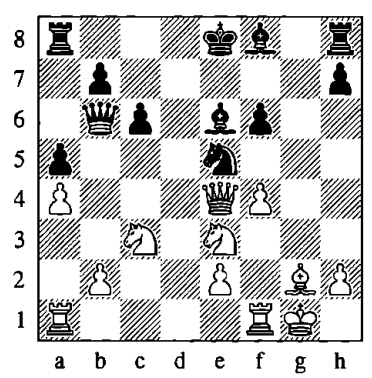


17.♖ad1

The most challenging move, preventing long castling, although I also checked a couple of alternatives:

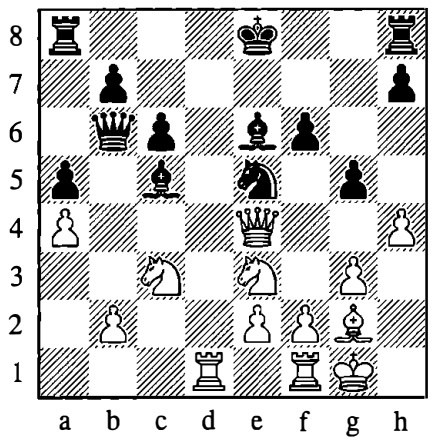
17.h4 can be met with the aggressive continuation: 17...0–0–0! 18.hxg5 ♖d4 19.♕c2 fxg5 20.♘b5 ♖d7 and Black has good chances to take over the initiative in the long term, thanks to the bishop pair.

17.f4 gxf4 18.gxf4



18...0–0–0! (but not 18...♗c5? 19.♔h1 ♗xe3 20.fxe5 f5 21.♖xf5! with advantage to White) 19.fxe5 f5 20.♖xf5 (White is in serious trouble after 20.♕f4 ♗c5 21.♔f2 ♖d4! 22.♕h6 ♖e8∓) 20...♗xf5 21.♕xf5† ♔b8 22.♘cd1 ♗c5 23.♕e4 ♖d2 and Black is better.

17...♗c5 18.h4



18...♕xb2

18...h6 is also good enough, as White does not have anything better than: 19.♘f5 ♗b3 20.♘d6† (20.♖d2 ♖d8 21.♖xd8† ♔xd8 followed by ...♔c7 looks safe for Black) 20...♔e7 21.♘f5† ♔f7 22.♘d6† ♔e7=

19.♖c1 0–0–0 20.hxg5 ♖d4 21.♕c2 ♕xc2 22.♖xc2 ♗b3!

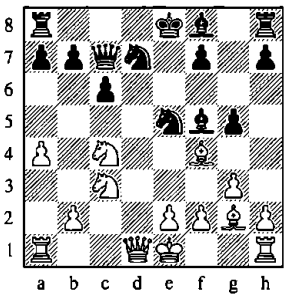
Black is doing fine.

Conclusion

The minor lines 12.♘xe5 and 12.a5 should not pose Black any great problems, but the meat of this chapter arises after 12.0–0 g5. We saw that in various lines Black must be willing to sacrifice a pawn, but with accurate play he can count on obtaining thematic compensation. Several of the variations in this chapter have so far only appeared in a handful of games, but I hope that my investigations will enrich the developing theory of this line.

Chapter 33

6.♘e5



Morozevich – 12.♘xe5 and 12.♗xe5

Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♘fd7 11.♗g2

11...g5

A) 12.♘xe5 gxf4 13.♘xd7 0–0–0 14.♖d4 ♕xd7 **382**

A1) 15.♕xh8 **384**

A2) 15.♖xf4 ♗d6 **384**

A21) 16.♕h6 **385**

A22) 16.♖d4 **386**

A23) 16.♕c1 ♔b8 **387**

A231) 17.a5 **387**

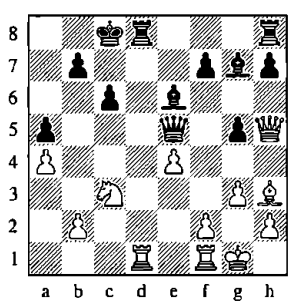
A232) 17.0–0 **388**

B) 12.♗xe5 ♘xe5 13.♖d4 f6 **389**

B1) 14.♘e3 **391**

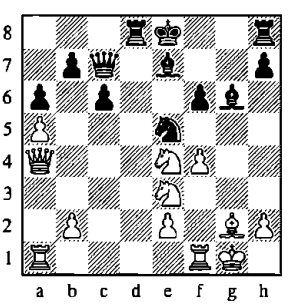
B2) 14.0–0–0 **392**

B) note to 13.♖d4



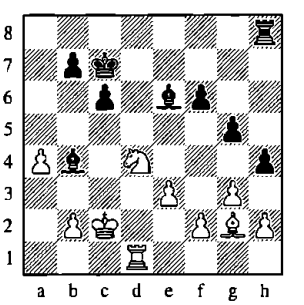
18...g4!N

B1) after 20.gxf4



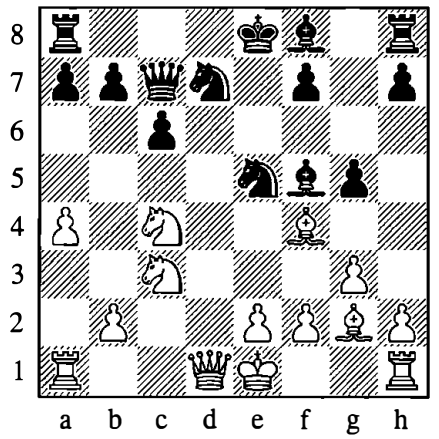
20...f5!N

B2) after 27.♘d4



27...♗f7N

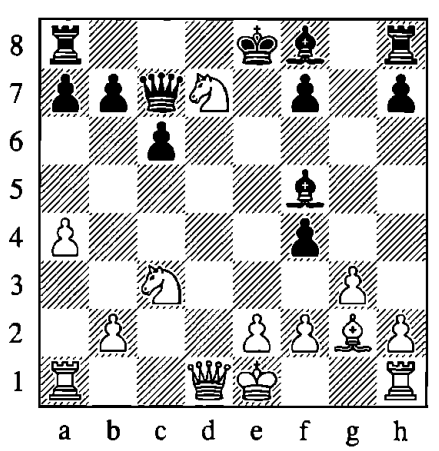
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♘fd7 11.♗g2 g5



This continuation came into fashion after the well-known game, Kasparov – Morozevich, Wijk aan Zee 2000. It was not actually a novelty, since the move had already been employed in a handful of earlier games, but it was this game which drew attention to this remarkable idea. Since that encounter, the line starting with 11...g5 has been known as the Morozevich Variation.

White's most popular response is 12.♘e3, which is covered in the next chapter. In this chapter we examine both ways of capturing the central knight: **A) 12.♘xe5** and **B) 12.♗xe5**.

A) 12.♘xe5 gxf4 13.♘xd7

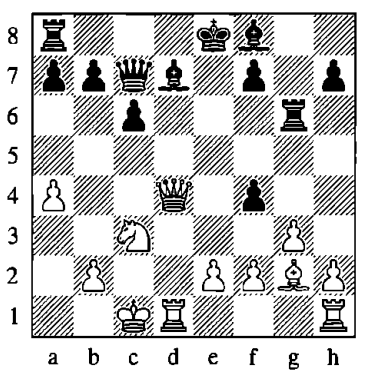


13...0–0–0

Deferring the recapture of the knight is definitely Black's first choice.

Theory has dismissed 13...♕xd7 as clearly inferior in view of 14.♕xd7† ♗xd7 15.gxf4. However, I believe Black's chances should not be underestimated: 15...♖g8 16.♖g1 (16.♗f3 0–0–0 also offers Black decent compensation) 16...♖g6 17.0–0–0 ♖h6 18.♖h1 ♖d8 Black has thematic compensation, thanks to his bishop pair and White's vulnerable queenside pawn structure, Benatar – Piccoli, email 2002.

13...♗xd7 is not entirely clear either, though it seems to me that 14.♕d4 ♖g8 15.0–0–0 is quite promising for White. After 15...♖g6, White can improve on the key encounter P.H. Nielsen – Hector, Middelfart 2003, with:



16.♗f3!?N and after 16...♗g7 17.♕e4† ♗e6 18.gxf4 it will be hard for Black to prove that his compensation is sufficient.

14.♕d4

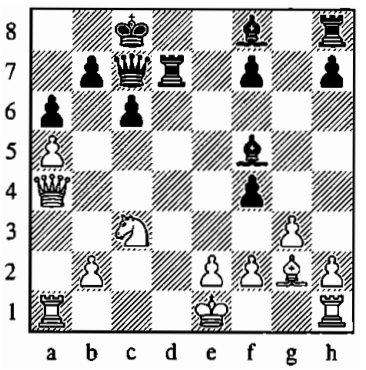
White has no other decent options, though I should mention:

14.a5?

This allows Black to take over the initiative.

14...♖xd7 15.♕a4 a6

It goes without saying that Black needs to stop the a5-a6 break.



16.0–0

After 16.♕xf4 ♕xf4 17.gxf4 ♗b4, White is under serious pressure.

16...♗c5

Black has other good moves as well.

17.♖ac1

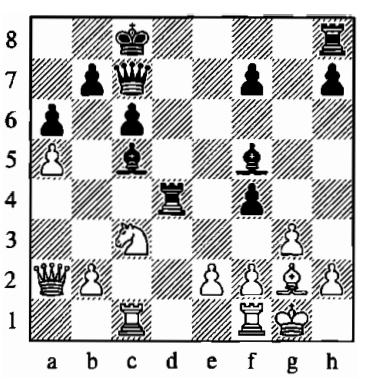
17.♕xf4 ♕xf4 18.gxf4 ♖g8 19.♔h1 might offer White more chances to survive, although after 19...♖d4 20.e3 ♖b4 it is no picnic for White.

17...♖d4!

After the obvious 17...fxg3 18.hxg3 ♕xg3, Black's initiative surprisingly slows down: 19.♘e4 ♗xe4 20.♕xe4 ♕g5 21.b4! ♗a7 22.b5! and the play has become rather double-edged.

18.♕a2

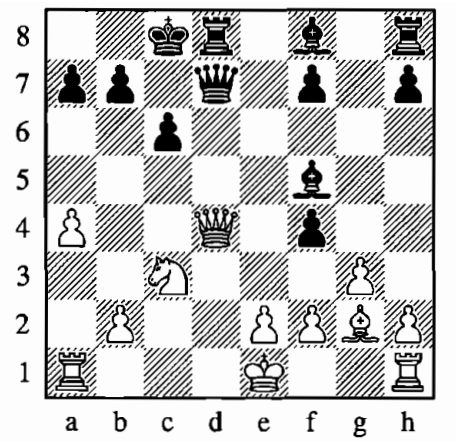
We have been following Ivanisevic – Grischuk, Plovdiv 2003. Although Black went on to win in convincing style, here he could have decided the battle on the spot:



18...fxg3N 19.hxg3 ♖g4 20.e3 ♖xg3! 21.fxg3 ♕xg3

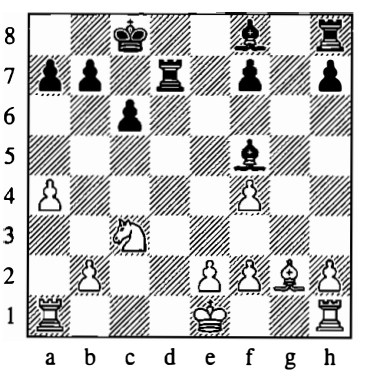
With a crushing attack.

14...♕xd7



White now chooses between **A1) 15.♕xh8** and **A2) 15.♕xf4**.

15.♕xd7†?! ♖xd7 16.gxf4 is definitely not a good way for White to win a pawn.

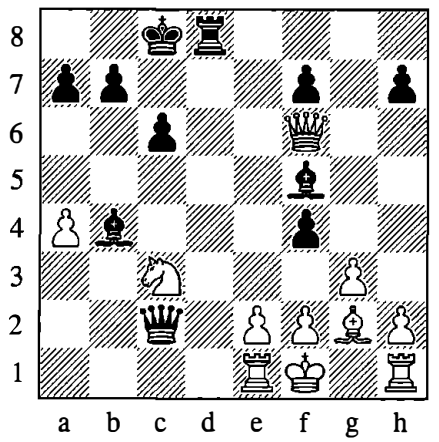


16...♗b4 (16...♖d4!? 17.e3 ♖b4 18.0–0–0 ♗g7∓ also looks attractive for Black) 17.♖d1 ♖hd8 18.♖xd7 ♖xd7 19.h4 ♖d4 20.♗h3 This was played in Dragomirescu – Swathi, Malinska 2005, and now the correct 20...♗d7!N 21.♗xd7† ♔xd7∓ would leave White facing a hard fight to draw.

A1) 15.♕xh8

The next few moves for both sides are forced.

15...♕d2† 16.♔f1 ♕xb2 17.♖e1 ♗b4 18.♕f6 ♕c2



19.♘e4

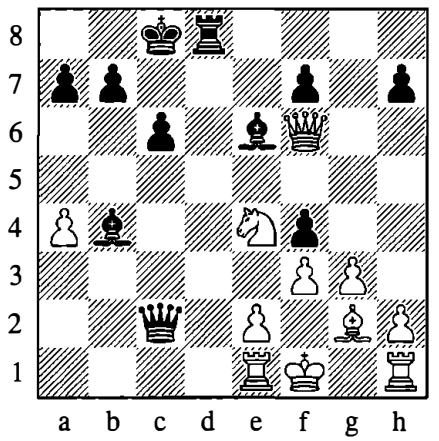
The dubious 19.g4?! ♗g6! 20.g5 occurred in Rajesh – Soumya, Dieren 2009, and now Black should play the natural: 20...♕xc3N 21.♕xc3 ♗xc3 22.♖c1 ♗b2 23.♖e1 ♖d4∓ The a4-pawn is dropping, after which Black's a-pawn should decide the issue.

19...♗e6

It might be interesting to try 19...♖d5!?N, though after 20.h4 ♗xe4 21.♕xf4 ♗xg2† 22.♔xg2 ♗xe1 23.♖xe1 ♕d2 24.♕g4† f5 25.♕g8† ♖d8 26.♕e6†, the game should end peacefully.

20.f3

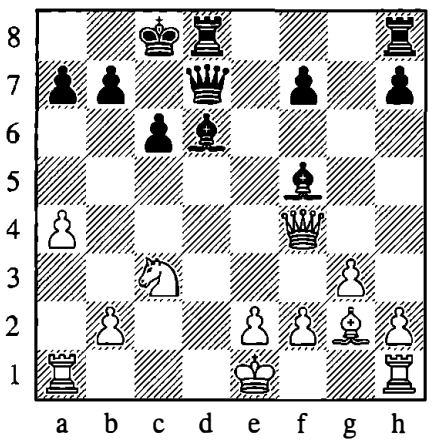
I noticed that White could try 20.♕a1N, and after 20...♗xe1 21.♔xe1 an unusual position would arise. It is hard for either side to make progress, though it looks to me less fun to be on the white side. As often happens in such crazy positions, the computer evaluation is 0.00.



20...♗xe1 21.♔xe1 ♕c1† 22.♔f2 ♕e3† 23.♔e1 ♕c1†=

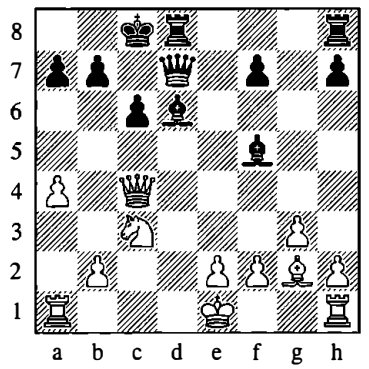
After a few more checks, the draw was agreed in Neubauer – Kreisl, Austria 2011.

A2) 15.♕xf4 ♗d6



We have finally arrived at the thematic position for the 12.♘xe5 variation. Black is a pawn down, but the bishop pair together with White's vulnerable pawn structure on the queenside (White would be more than happy to move his a-pawn back to its initial position) promise Black sufficient compensation. White has a wide choice of squares for his queen, the main options being **A21) 16.♕h6**, **A22) 16.♕d4** and **A23) 16.♕c1**.

A fourth option is:
16.♕c4



16...♔b8N

In Janssen – De Vreugt, Kavala 2002, Black played the less accurate 16...♗e6. This allows 17.♗d5!N, and after 17...♗h3 18.0–0–0 ♔b8 19.♗xf7 Black's compensation is questionable.

The following sequence of moves looks logical.

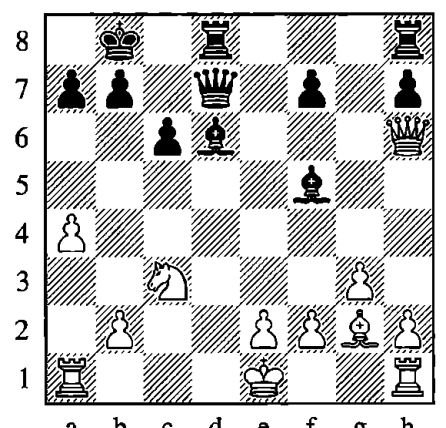
17.0–0 ♕e6

17...♗e6 is less convincing after 18.♕h4 ♕e7 19.♕h5.

18.♕xe6

Play has transposed into line A21 below. 18.♕h4 would also be a transposition, to the note to White's 18th move in line A21.

A21) 16.♕h6 ♔b8

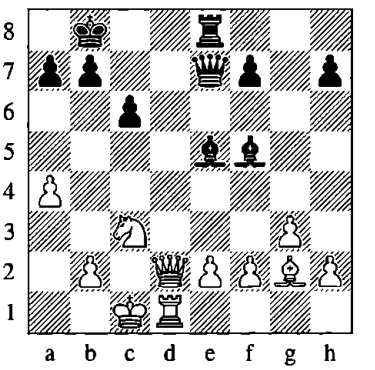


17.0–0

White has tried a couple of other options:

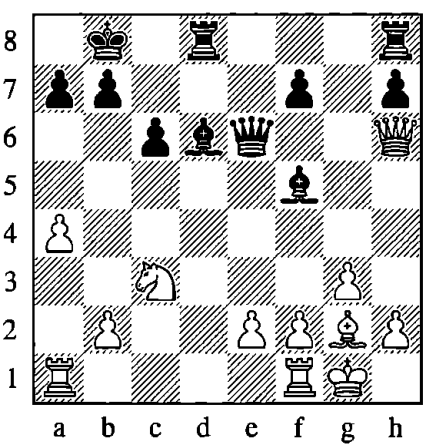
17.a5 a6 18.0–0 ♕e6 19.♕xe6 ♗xe6 transposes to the main line.

17.0–0–0?! is slightly risky, although White managed to keep the balance in the following encounter: 17...♕e7! 18.♖d2 ♗e5 19.♖hd1 ♖xd2 20.♕xd2 ♖e8



Black's compensation is beyond doubt. 21...♕b4 is an unpleasant threat, which obliges White to play energetically: 21.e4 ♗e6 22.f4 ♗c7 23.♕d4 ♗b3 24.♖d3 ♗b6 25.♕d6† ♕xd6 26.♖xd6 ♗g1∞ with a balanced position in Ruck – Kreisl, Austria 2010.

17...♕e6

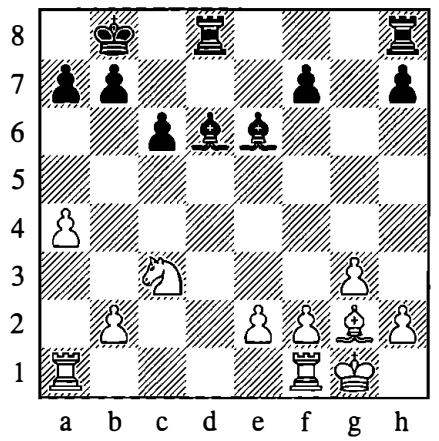


18.♕xe6

After 18.♕h4, Black opted for 18...h5 in Fernandes – Reefat, Mallorca 2004, but now 19.♘e4N would be a bit annoying. Instead, Black should play either 18...♕e5!?N or 18...♗e7N 19.♕f4† ♗d6 and if White avoids the repetition with 20.♕f3, then 20...♖he8 offers Black rich compensation.

18...♗xe6

This endgame promises Black full compensation, and he has achieved a positive score in practice.



19.a5

This looks useful for White, as otherwise Black will play ...a5 himself.

19...a6 20.♘e4 ♗b4

Black can also play: 20...♗e7 21.♖fc1?! (21.♖fd1N would maintain the balance) 21...♖d5! 22.e3 ♖hd8 Black slowly but surely seizes the initiative. 23.♗f1 ♗f5 (23...♖e5N is also good) 24.♘c3 ♖d2 25.♘a4? ♗b4∓ and Black was clearly better in Ribli – Acs, Austria 2010.

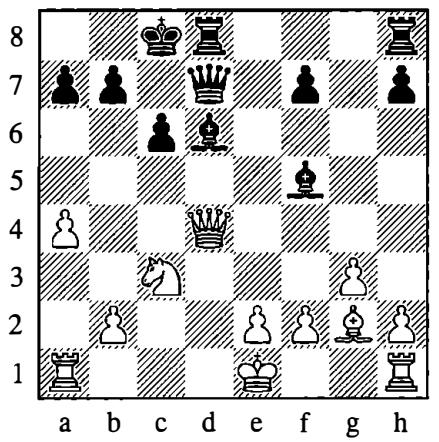
21.♖a4

White's best choice is 21.♘g5N with a balanced position.

21...♗e7 22.♖c1 ♖d5! 23.h4 ♖hd8 24.♘g5 ♗xg5 25.hxg5 ♖xg5

White was in trouble in Jobava – Khalifman, Bled 2002. This game seems to confirm that despite the endgame being objectively balanced, it is much easier for Black to handle in practice.

A22) 16.♕d4



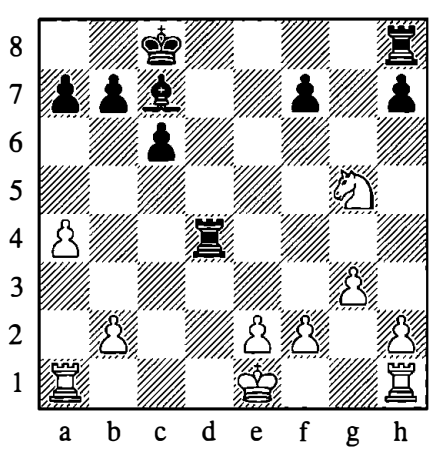
16...♗c7!

As we have already seen, Black does not mind exchanging queens.

17.♕xd7† ♖xd7 18.♗e4

White tried 18.♖d1 ♖hd8 19.♖xd7 ♖xd7 20.e3 in Vyskocil – Bartos, Ostrava 2005. Black should continue 20...♗e5N 21.♔e2 ♗d3† 22.♔f3 f5 23.♖g1 ♔c7 and Black is pressing.

18...♗xe4 19.♘xe4 ♖d4 20.♘g5

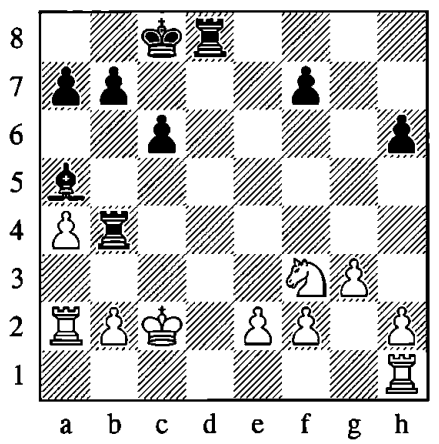


20...h6

The immediate 20...♖b4!?N would be trickier, for example 21.♖a2 ♖e8 and neither of the pawns is touchable: 22.♘xh7? ♗d8 23.f4 f6∓ and the knight is trapped, or 22.♘xf7 ♖c4! 23.0–0 ♖xe2 and Black has an obvious initiative.

21.♘f3 ♖b4 22.♖a2 ♖e8 23.♔d2 ♗a5 24.♔d3 ♖d8† 25.♔c2

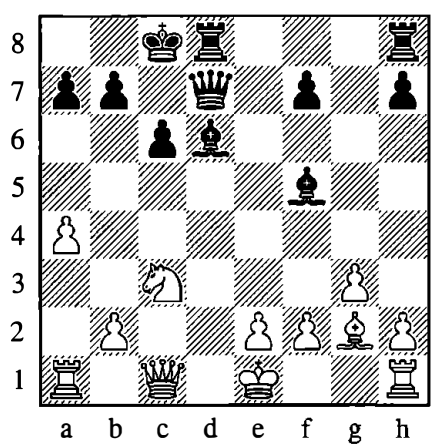
We have been following Y. Vovk – Burg, Dieren 2009.



25...♖d5!N

Black maintains full compensation for the pawn.

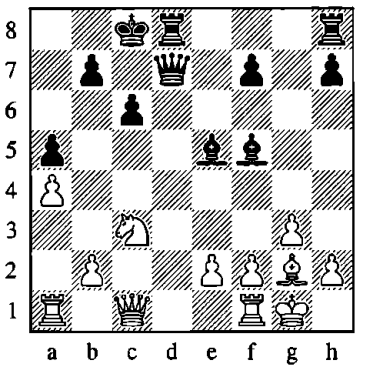
A23) 16.♕c1



In my opinion, this is the most interesting option.

16...♔b8

Necessary prophylaxis, as we can see from the following game: 16...a5 17.0–0 ♗e5?



18.♘b5! ♕e7 19.♘a7† ♔b8 20.♘xc6† bxc6 21.♕xc6 and Black was already lost in Kramnik – Morozevich, Monaco 2002.

White now chooses between **A231) 17.a5** and **A232) 17.0–0**.

A231) 17.a5 a6 18.♖a4

18.0–0 ♕e7 19.♖a4 ♗c7 transposes to the main line.

18...♗c7

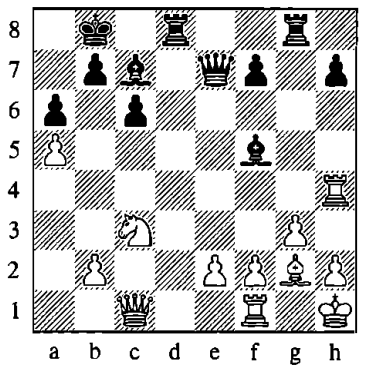
Black could consider inserting 18...h5N 19.h4 and then playing 19...♗c7.

19.0–0 ♕e7

I believe this position should be more or less balanced, though in practice it has gone better for Black.

20.♘e4

An earlier game continued:
20.♖h4 ♖hg8 21.♔h1?!
Something like 21.♖d1 was preferable.



21...♖g4!

Black takes over the initiative.

22.♖xg4 ♗xg4 23.♕h6 ♕b4

23...♗f5 was a reliable alternative.

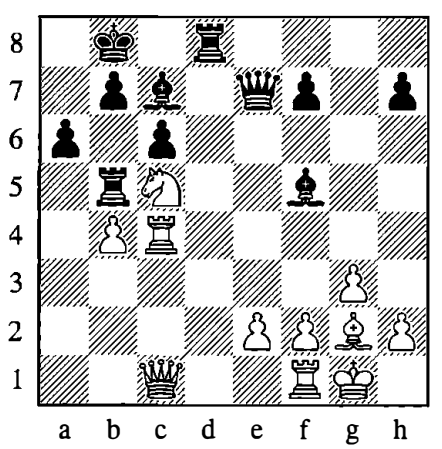
24.♕xh7 ♕xb2

As is usually the case when Black captures the white queenside pawns while losing his own on the kingside, the position is clearly favourable for Black, Kempinski – Morozevich, Bled (ol) 2002.

20...♖d5! 21.♖c4

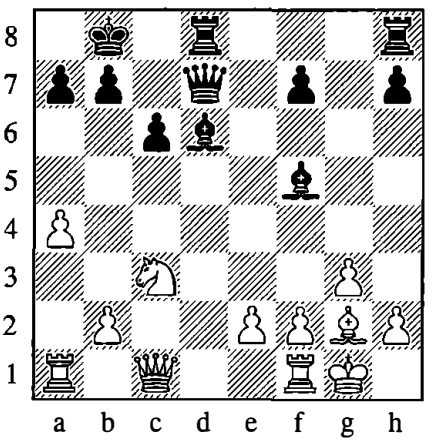
This idea of installing the knight on c5 by sacrificing the a5-pawn fails to impress. Instead, 21.♘c3N would keep the balance.

21...♖xa5 22.♘c5 ♖b5 23.b4 ♖d8∓



Black was better in Kandyba – Prizant, Tula 2004. I guess that White might have been basing his hopes on sacrificing with 24.♗xc6, but then realized that it would not give enough: 24...bxc6 25.♘xa6† ♔b7 26.♖xc6 ♗b6 27.♕c4 ♖dd5! and Black remains better.

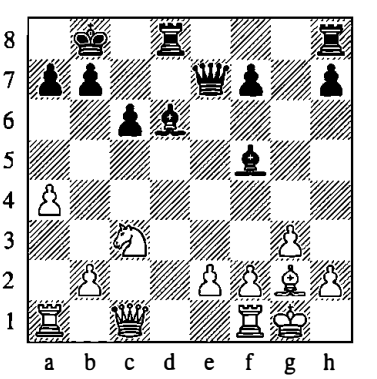
A232) 17.0–0



This is an important point in this line. I was not satisfied with the moves Black has previously played here, so I would like to propose a novelty:

17...♕e6N

This looks very similar to 17...♕e7, as employed in the top-level game Kramnik – Anand, Moscow 2002, but there is a most important difference.



18.b4!N allows White to seize the initiative on the queenside, based on the line: 18...♗xb4?

19.♕f4† ♕d6 20.♕xf5 ♗xc3 21.♖ab1± My novelty avoids such possibilities by keeping the f5-bishop defended.

17...a5 would be good but for the reply 18.♘e4. There is one example here: 18...♗b4 19.♕f4† ♔a8 20.♖ac1 and White had clearly improved the position of his pieces in Gomez Esteban – Cifuentes Parada, Elgoibar 2003.

17...h5 was played in Kramnik – Giri, Antalya 2013, and is also interesting, but I prefer the text move.

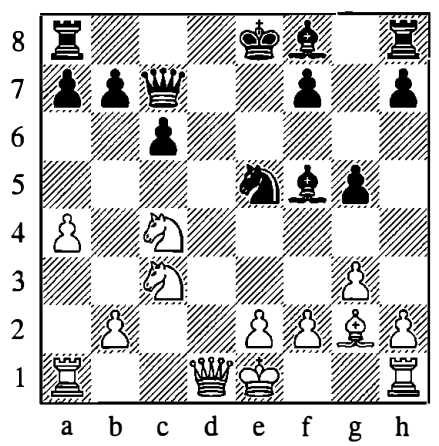
18.a5 a6 19.♖d1

Another direction is 19.♖a4 ♕e5 20.e3 ♖he8 with a complex game.

19...♗c7 20.♖xd8† ♖xd8 21.e3 ♗e5

Black has full compensation for the pawn.

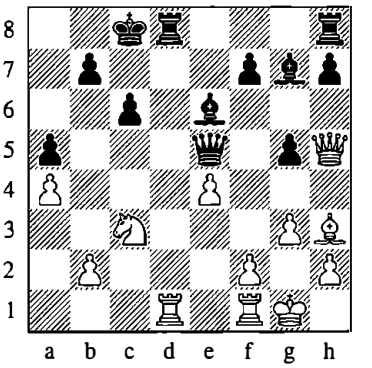
B) 12.♗xe5 ♘xe5



13.♕d4

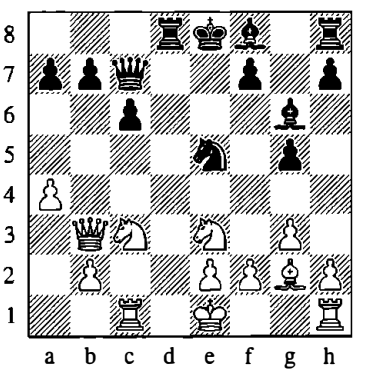
White's hopes for an advantage are connected only with this move. Otherwise the loss of the dark-squared bishop is just senseless, as the following two examples illustrate:

13.♘xe5?! ♕xe5 14.0–0 a5 15.e4 ♗e6 16.♕h5 0–0–0! 17.♖ad1 ♗g7 18.♗h3 occurred in Gostisa – Skoberne, Otocec 2009, and now strongest for Black is:



18...g4!N 19.♗xg4 ♕xh5 20.♗xh5 ♗b3 and Black's rook will penetrate to d2, with a serious initiative.

13.♘e3 ♗g6 14.♖c1 ♖d8 15.♕b3 was played in Le Roux – T. Petrosian, Warsaw 2012, and now simplest is:



15...f5!N 16.f4 gxf4 17.gxf4 ♘g4 18.♘xg4 fxg4 19.♕e6† ♗e7 20.0–0 ♕d7∓ and with equal material and the bishop pair, Black's position is preferable.

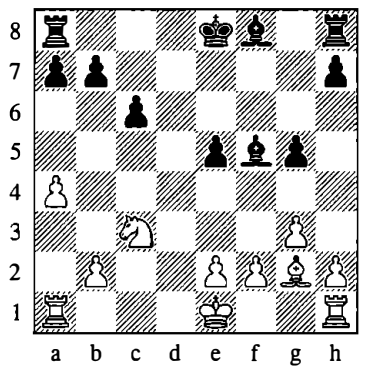
13...f6

The starting position of the 12.♗xe5 variation. White commonly chooses between **B1) 14.♘e3** and **B2) 14.0–0–0**, though there are several other interesting options:

14.♘xe5 ♕xe5

But not 14...fxe5? 15.♕e3± and White is better.

15.♕xe5† fxe5



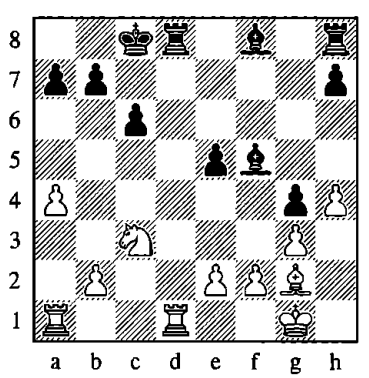
It is important to understand that this kind of position is absolutely harmless for Black. I believe that it even promises Black the better game due to the weakness of the white queenside pawn structure, which more than compensates for White's strong outpost on e4.

16.h4

Another good illustrative example is 16.0–0 0–0–0 17.♗e4 ♗e6 18.♖fd1 h6 and Black's play is much easier, as shown in the following game: 19.♖xd8† ♔xd8 20.♖d1† ♔c7 21.♗c2 ♗e7∓ Wang Lei – Zhukova, Shenyang 2000.

16...g4 17.0–0 0–0–0 18.♖fd1

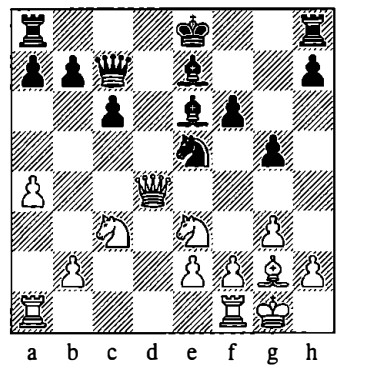
This was Martinez Romero – Torres, Florencia 2013. Black should now play the natural:



18...a5!N 19.♗e4 ♖xd1† 20.♖xd1 ♗e6∓

Once again I prefer Black.

14.0–0 ♗e7 15.♘e3 ♗e6



16.a5

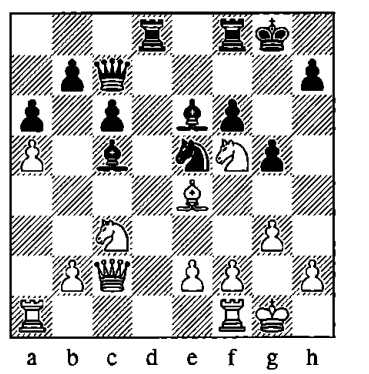
White has also tried 16.♗e4, but without great success: 16...♕d8! As we already know, the queen swap is usually favourable for Black. 17.♕d1 ♕xd1 18.♖fxd1 This was played in Gunina – Guramishvili, Gaziantep 2012, and with 18...♗b3N 19.♖d2 ♔f7∓ Black would already have the better game.

16...a6 17.♕e4 0–0 18.♘f5

White occupies the weakened f5-square, but it's not a big deal.

18...♗c5 19.♕c2?! ♖ad8 20.♗e4

This was Kunin – Ortmann, Marburg 2006. Black can now obtain the better game:



20...♔h8!N

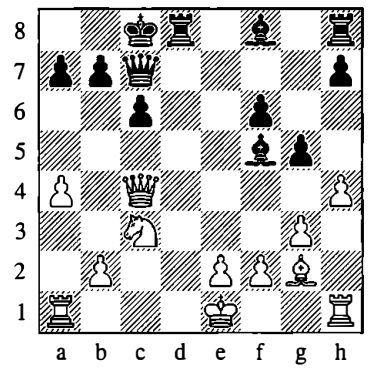
Black has several ideas, such as ...♘c4, ...♗b4

or ...♕f7, and it's hard for White to deal with all of them.

14.h4

This can hardly pose Black problems.

14...♘xc4 15.♕xc4 0–0–0



16.♗e4!N

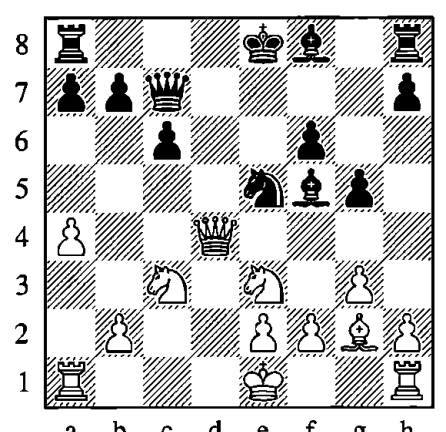
This improvement enables White to keep the balance.

It is inaccurate to swap pawns before carrying out this idea: 16.hxg5?! fxg5 17.♗e4 ♗xe4 18.♕xe4 ♔b8! 19.♖d1 ♗d6 and Black's position was more comfortable in Kotanjian – Petrosyan, Jermuk 2013.

16...♕e5 17.♗xf5† ♕xf5 18.hxg5 fxg5 19.♕e4 ♕f6 20.♖d1 ♖xd1† 21.♔xd1 h6 22.♔c2

The position is balanced.

B1) 14.♘e3



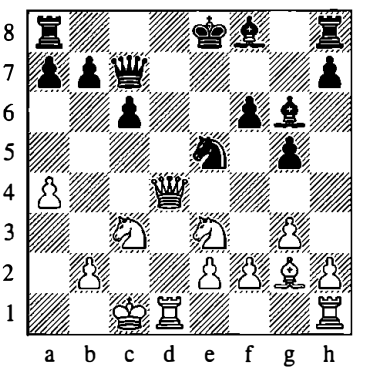
14...♗g6

This is the more common retreat, though 14...♗e6 should be playable as well.

15.a5

White has also tried:

15.0–0–0



15...♕b6!

This leads to simple equality.

16.♘e4

Otherwise White is worse.

16...♕xd4

16...♗e7 allows White some extra options connected with avoiding the queen swap.

17.♖xd4 ♗e7 18.♖hd1 f5 19.♘d6† ♗xd6 20.♖xd6 0–0 21.f4 ♘g4! 22.♘xg4 fxg4 23.e3 ♖ae8

The endgame was equal in Bu Xiangzhi – Ni Hua, Xinghua Jiangsu 2009.

15...a6

In my opinion, this leads to a more complex battle than 15...♕d6 16.♕xd6 ♗xd6 17.a6 0–0–0 18.axb7† ♔xb7 19.0–0 ♗c5 20.♘a4, when Black has to fight for the draw.

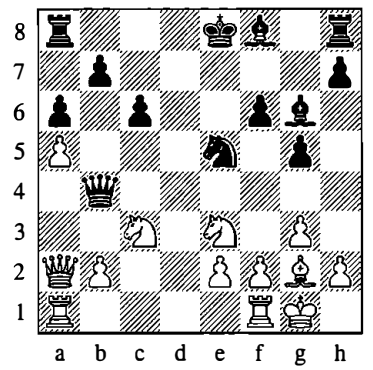
16.0–0

White tried 16.♘e4 ♖d8 17.♕c3 in Buhmann – Ribli, Austria 2010, but after the natural 17...♗g7N Black would face no problems, the main point being 18.♕b4 ♗f8! 19.♕b3 ♗e7 20.♕e6 ♖d4 and White has

nothing more than forcing a draw: 21.♘xf6† ♔d8 22.0–0 ♗f7 23.♕f5 ♗g6=

16...♖d8

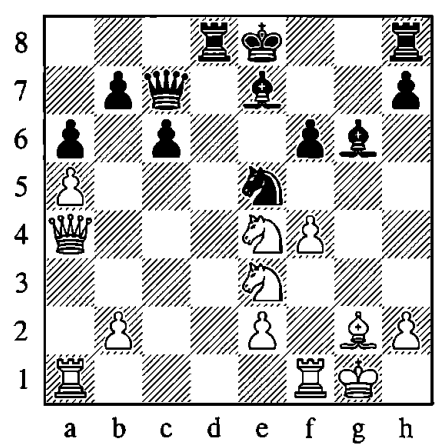
Also fine is: 16...♕d6 17.♕a4 ♕b4 18.♕a2



Black now played 18...♗f7 in both games where this occurred. Instead, I think it is worth considering 18...0–0–0N 19.♕e6† ♔b8 20.♕xf6 ♗d6 21.♕xg5 ♕xb2 with interesting compensation for the pawn.

17.♕a4 ♗c5 18.♘e4 ♗e7 19.f4 gxf4 20.gxf4

This complex position arose in Ernst – Giri, Leeuwarden 2009. In order to obtain a reliable position, Black should strike in the centre:

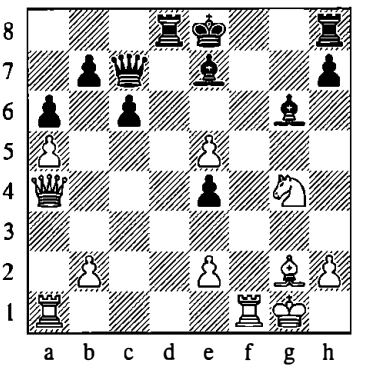


20...f5!N 21.fxe5

Black is also fine after: 21.♘g5 ♗xg5 22.fxg5 0–0 23.♕f4 ♕e7 24.♖ad1 ♖de8=

21...fxe4 22.♕b3

After the natural 22.♘g4, Black has a surprising way to bring his king to safety and take over the initiative:



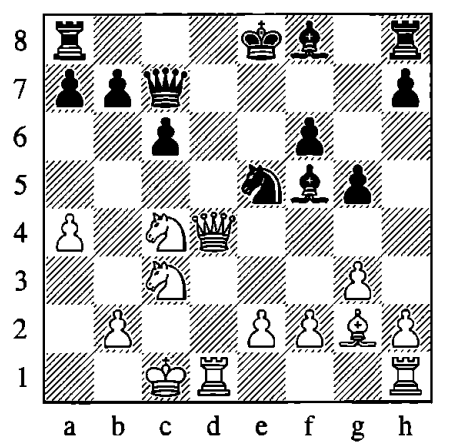
22...♔d7! 23.♗xe4 ♖hg8 24.♔h1 ♔c8 25.♗xg6 ♖xg6 26.♕e4 ♔b8∓

22...♕xe5 23.♕xb7

Black now has several options which keep the balance, for example:

23...♕b5 24.♕c7 ♕c5 25.♔h1 ♗d6 26.♕b6 ♖b8=

B2) 14.0–0–0



This is by far White's most popular continuation.

14...♖d8

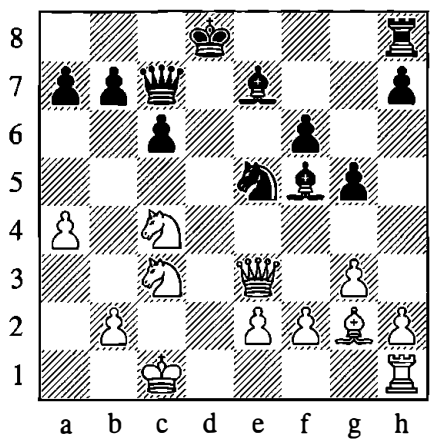
In my opinion, this is a clear route to equality.

14...♗e7 leads to extremely sharp play after 15.♘e3, when I believe White has good chances to fight for the advantage; at any rate, I cannot see any ideas for Black that I would be happy to recommend here.

15.♕e3 ♗e7 16.♖xd8†

After 16.♘xe5 ♕xe5, it would not be the right time for White to take a pawn: 17.♕xa7?? ♕xc3†! 18.bxc3 ♗a3# Instead, 17.♖xd8† ♔xd8 transposes to the main line.

16...♔xd8



17.♘xe5

The only decent alternative is:

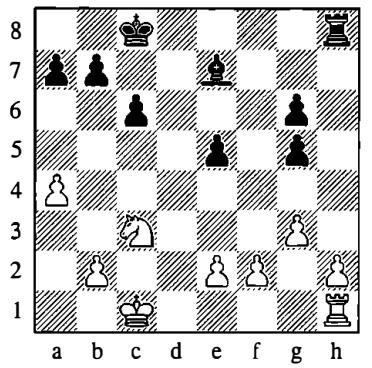
17.♖d1† ♔c8 18.♗e4

18.♘xe5 ♕xe5 19.♕xa7 ♗a3 is another transposition to our main line.

18...♗g6 19.♗xg6 hxg6 20.♘xe5 ♕xe5 21.♕xe5

21.♕xa7 was played in Arabidze – Girya, Belgrade 2013, and now 21...f5!N would give Black full compensation. For example, 22.♔b1 ♗c5 23.♕a5 ♗d4 24.♕xe5 ♗xe5 25.♖h1 and here Black may even play: 25...♗xc3 26.bxc3 g4=

21...fxe5 22.♖h1



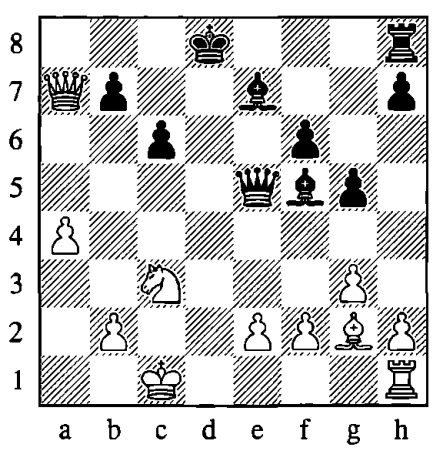
Although Black eventually won a convincing game in Vachier-Lagrave – Aronian, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010, for some reason he refrained from playing ...g4 for several moves, and in turn White refrained from f2-f3 followed by ♘e4. I am sure Black should fix the h2-pawn right away.

22...g4N 23.♘e4 ♔c7=

The game should end in a draw.

17...♕xe5 18.♕xa7

18.♖d1† ♔c8 19.♕xa7 ♗a3 comes to the same thing.



18...♗a3!

A remarkable move, which keeps Black right in the game.

19.♖d1†

The foolhardy 19.♔d2? can be met by the cool-headed 19...♔c8! and the white king will come under attack, for example: 20.♕a8† ♔c7 21.♕xh8 ♕d4† 22.♔e1 ♗xb2 23.♘b5† (24.♕g7† ♔b6–+) 23...cxb5 24.♕g7† ♗d7 and White is lost.

19...♔c8

But not: 19...♔c7?? 20.♘b5† cxb5 21.♕xb7#

20.♕d4

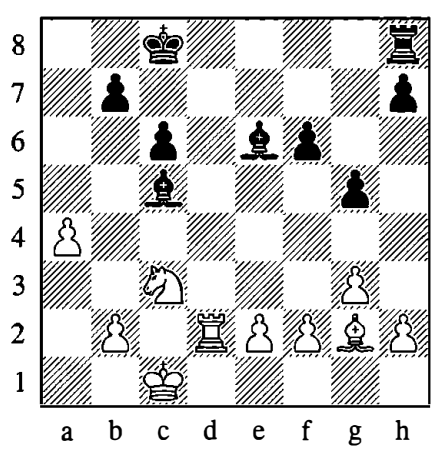
20.♖d4 ♕c5 21.♕xc5 ♗xc5 reaches the same position.

20...♕xd4 21.♖xd4 ♗c5 22.♖d2!

Obviously this is the only way to defend the f2-pawn.

22.♖d1 is a serious mistake: 22...♗xf2 23.♗e4 ♗e3† 24.♔c2 ♗h3∓ and the bishop pair gave Black the better endgame in Gelashvili – Bu Xiangzhi, Internet 2006.

22...♗e6



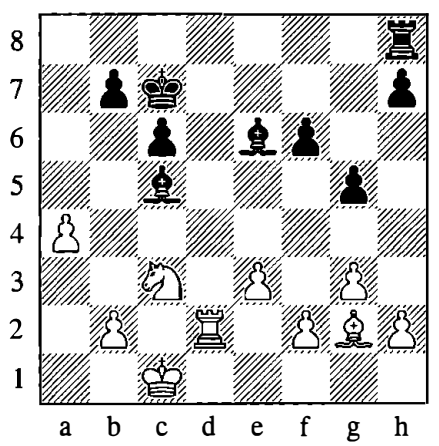
Finally we have arrived in an endgame in which White's extra pawn seems quite healthy, but Black's bishop pair, together with the weakness of the b3- and b4-squares as well as a4-pawn, makes Black task relatively straightforward. None of the grandmasters who reached this position with Black have managed to lose.

23.e3

23.♘e4 is met by 23...♗e7, and the white knight is not doing anything on e4.

23...♔c7

23...h5 is pretty similar, with one recent high-level game continuing: 24.♔c2 h4 Opening the h-file is one of Black's key ideas, helping him to activate his rook and attack the white pawns. 25.♗f3 hxg3 26.hxg3 ♔c7 27.♘e4 ♗e7 28.g4 f5 29.gxf5 ♗xf5 and Black started to play for a win in Postny – Najer, Eilat 2012.



24.♔c2

Another move here is:

24.♗e4 h5 25.♗c2

White successfully employed 25.♘e2 in Zilka – Videki, Austria 2013, but 25...♖a8N looks a convincing reply. White's best option is then to return with his knight to c3, because 26.♘d4 ♗xd4 27.♖xd4 c5 allows Black to regain the pawn, and 26.♗c2 runs into 26...♗b4 27.♖d1 ♗g4!.

25...h4 26.♘e4 ♗e7 27.f4 hxg3 28.hxg3 ♖h3 29.♖f2

This happened in Ftacnik – Bu Xiangzhi,

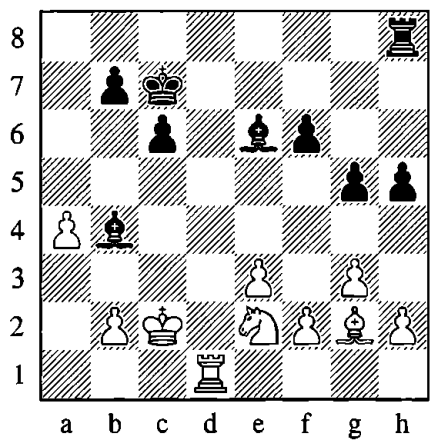
Turin (ol) 2006, and Black could now try: 29...♗b4N∓

White is under some pressure.

24...h5 25.♘e2

Here my opponent offered a draw in Babula – Avrukh, Turin (ol) 2006, and I found no reason not to accept. Meanwhile, another game continued from here:

25...♗b4 26.♖d1



26...h4

Another idea deserves attention: 26...♗g4!?N 27.f3 ♗d7 28.♔b3 ♗c5 29.♘d4 ♖e8 30.e4 ♗d6⩱ and Black will continue with ...h4 or ...g4, depending on circumstances.

27.♘d4

In Zhao Xue – Shen, Wuxi 2006, Black now opted for 27...♗d7, but I feel that the light-squared bishop should stay on the a2-g8 diagonal.

27...♗f7N 28.♗e4 hxg3 29.hxg3 ♖h2 30.♖f1 ♗c4 31.♗d3 ♗d5

The position is equal.

Conclusion

We started our examination of the Morozevich Variation by looking at both of White's captures on e5.

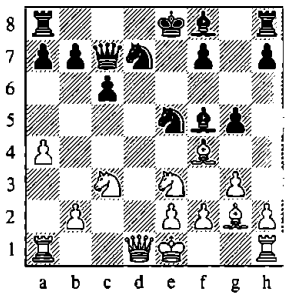
After 12.♘xe5 gxf4 13.♘xd7 0–0–0 14.♕d4 ♕xd7 15.♕xf4 ♗d6, we arrive at a thematic position for this variation, in which Black's bishop pair promises compensation for the pawn. We saw that Black welcomes the exchange of queens in various lines, and so 16.♕c1 is the critical option, but even there Black can count on obtaining full compensation.

The other capture, 12.♗xe5 leads to a flurry of tactics in the main line, but here too we reach a position in which Black has the bishop pair as compensation for White's extra pawn.

Since both these lines seem to offer Black comfortable play, White's search for an advantage is increasingly focused on 12.♘e3, which we cover in the next chapter.



6.♘e5



Morozevich – 12.♘e3

Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♘fd7 11.♗g2 g5 12.♘e3 gxf4 13.♘xf5 0–0–0 14.♕c2 ♘c5 15.0–0 fxg3 16.hxg3

16...a5

A) 17.♘e4 ♘xe4 **399**

A1) 18.♕xe4 **399**

A2) 18.♗xe4 **400**

B) 17.♖ad1 h5 18.♖xd8† ♕xd8 19.♖d1 ♕f6 **402**

B1) 20.e4 **402**

B2) 20.♘e4 **405**

B3) 20.♗h3 **407**

B4) 20.e3 ♔b8 21.♘e2 ♘e6 **408**

B41) 22.♘h4 **408**

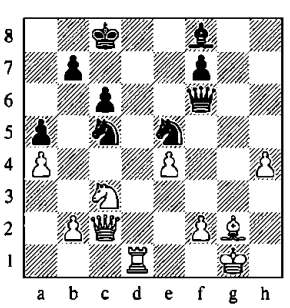
B42) 22.♘ed4 **409**

B5) 20.♕d2 ♔b8 **411**

B51) 21.♕f4 **412**

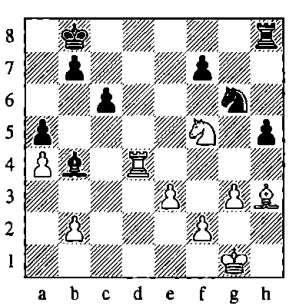
B52) 21.♗h3 **413**

B1) after 22.gxh4



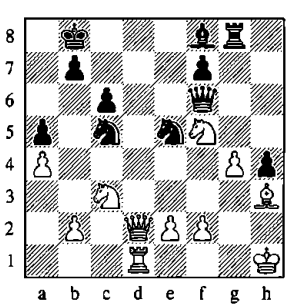
22...♘e6!N

B3) after 26.♖xd4



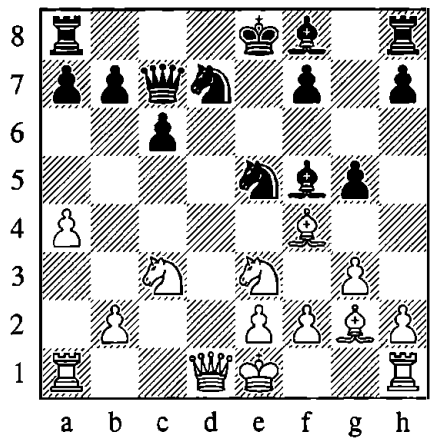
26...♘e5!N

B52) after 23.♔h1



23...♘c4!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♘fd7 11.♗g2 g5 12.♘e3

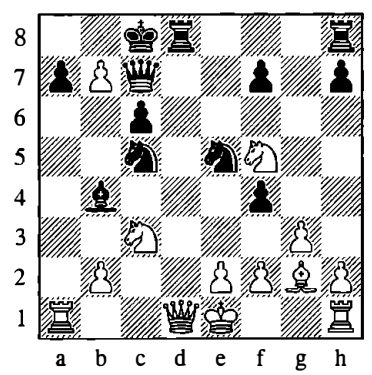


This is the most popular move and is regarded as the critical test.

12...gxf4 13.♘xf5 0–0–0 14.♕c2

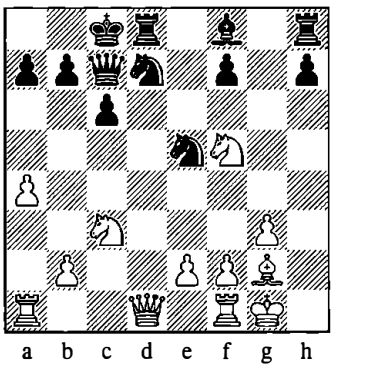
This has been White's clear first choice.

14.a5 has been tried in only one game, which continued: 14...♗b4 15.a6?! ♘c5 16.axb7†



This was Lee – Pruess, Agoura Hills 2009, and now the obvious 16...♔b8N 17.♕c2 ♘c4∓ leaves White in trouble due to the powerful threat of ...♖d2.

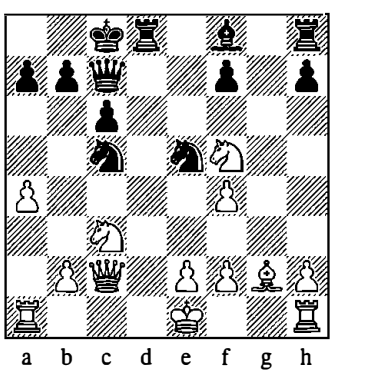
14.0–0 fxg3 15.hxg3 has been seen in quite a few games. Here I propose a rare move with a view to transposing to one of our main lines.



15...♘c5! (15...h5 has given Black a good statistical score, but after 16.♖c1 ♔b8 17.♘d5! ♕a5 18.b4 ♗xb4 19.♘xb4 ♕xb4 20.♖b1± Black's position from the game Balog – Pataki, Hungary 2006, does not appeal to me, as White has good prospects on the open b-file.) 16.♕c2 a5 We have reached the first major branching point of the chapter, as found on the next page via the move order 14.♕c2 ♘c5 15.0–0 fxg3 16.hxg3 a5.

A final sideline is the dubious pawn grab:
14.gxf4?! ♘c5 15.♕c2

After 15.♘d5?! cxd5 16.fxe5 ♕xe5 White is unable to maintain his knight on f5, since 17.♕c2 runs into 17...d4 followed by ...d3.

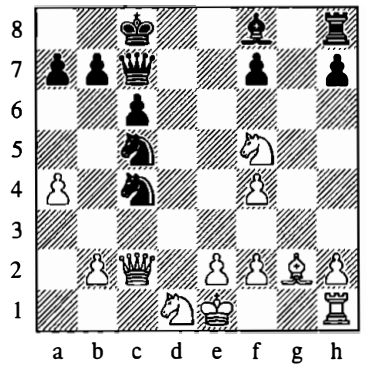


15...♘c4! 16.♖d1

White has to defend against ...♖d2 somehow.

16...♖xd1† 17.♘xd1

Here I found a simple improvement.

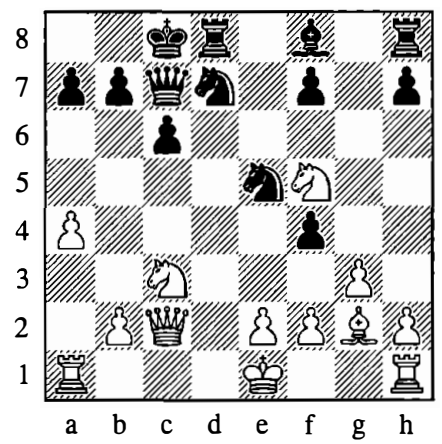


17...♕xf4!N

In both of the existing games Black opted for 17...♕a5 18.♘c3 ♘xb2 19.0–0, resulting in extremely double-edged play.

18.e3 ♕g4 19.0–0 ♘d6!

Black stabilizes the situation, and has a positional advantage and equal material.



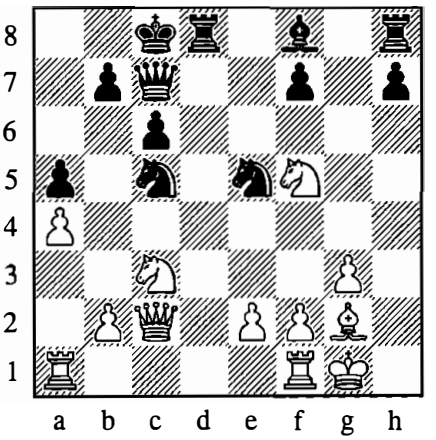
14...♘c5 15.0–0

White has no reasonable alternatives. One game continued 15.b4? and now in Bratanov – Manole, Sunny Beach 2012, Black missed the strong 15...f3!N 16.exf3 ♘ed3† 17.♔f1 ♘xb4 with a clear advantage.

15...fxg3

15...♘e6 used to be popular, but nowadays it is considered inferior to the main line.

16.hxg3 a5



It is essential to stop b2-b4. The present position can be considered the main tabiya of the 12.♘e3 variation. White's two most important options are **A) 17.♘e4** and **B) 17.♖ad1**.

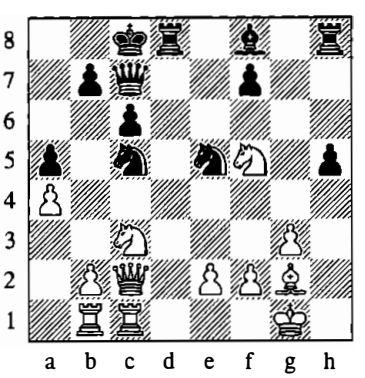
17.♖fd1 h5 does not have much independent value. For instance, 18.♖xd8† ♕xd8 19.♘e4 (19.♖d1 leads straight to variation B) 19...♘xe4 20.♕xe4 ♕f6 21.♖d1 transposes to line B2.

17.♖ab1 ♘e6 18.♕e4 h5 19.♖fc1 transposes to 17.♖fc1 below.

17.♖fc1 h5 18.♖ab1

18.b4 axb4 19.♘b5!? cxb5 20.axb5 ♔b8 is mentioned as unclear by Sakaev; White has some compensation for the piece, but the sacrifice still looks a bit optimistic to me.

After the text move Black obtains comfortable play with the following set-up.



18...♘e6 19.♕e4 ♗c5

This position has only been reached in one game, in which White played too ambitiously.

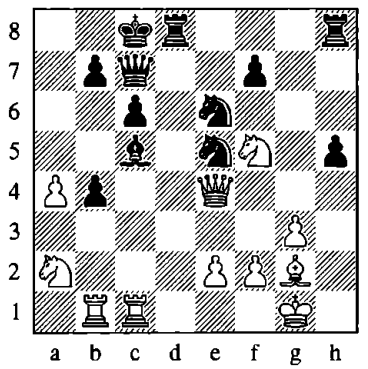
20.b4?!

20.e3N is safer, but after something like 20...♔b8 21.♘e2 ♗b4 Black is fine.

20...axb4 21.♘a2?

A clear mistake.

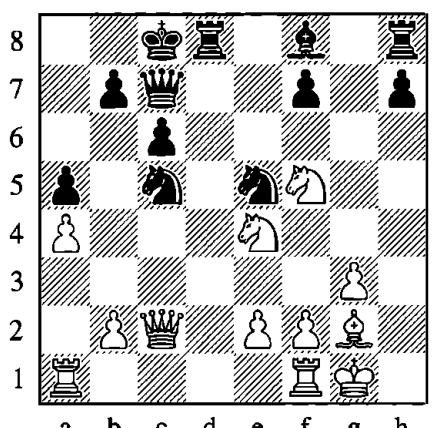
21.♖xb4 is correct. In that case Black should not take the exchange and has a pleasant choice between 21...♘g4 22.e3 ♖d2 and 21...h4!?, in both cases with a promising game.



21...h4! 22.♘xh4 ♗xf2†! 23.♔xf2 ♖d4

Black was winning already in H. Gretarsson – Guramishvili, Reykjavik 2013.

A) 17.♘e4

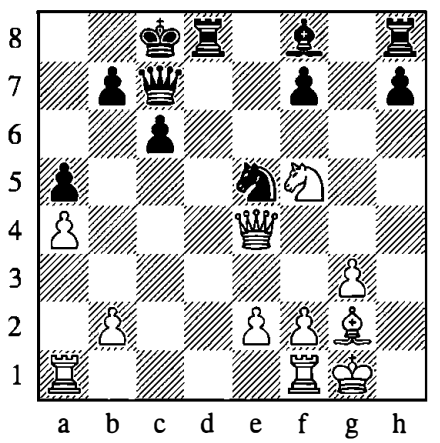


17...♘xe4

Keeping the pair of knights brought Black success in one game, which continued: 17...♘e6 18.♖ad1 ♗b4 19.♖xd8† ♖xd8 Ruck – Van Wely, Panormo 2002. Unfortunately, I found that White can improve with 20.e3N ♔b8 21.♖d1 ♖xd1† 22.♕xd1± when Black's kingside pawns are quite vulnerable.

At this point both **A1) 18.♕xe4** and **A2) 18.♗xe4** deserve attention.

A1) 18.♕xe4



18...h5!

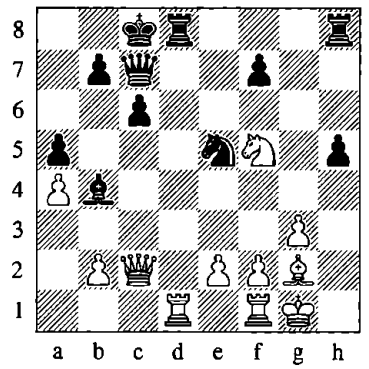
It is quite a clever decision not to commit the dark-squared bishop, as it is not yet clear if this piece should go to c5 or b4.

19.♖ad1 ♗c5

This is a good choice as the reply ♖c1 would now cost White a tempo.

20.♗h3

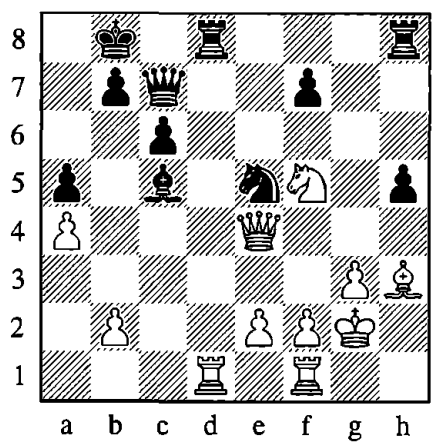
20.♕c2 was played in Kelecevic – Tukmakov, Winterthur 2003. Having provoked the queen into retreating to a less active square, Black should have played 20...♗b4N when I examined the following line:



21.e3 ♔b8 22.♖d4 ♖xd4 23.exd4 ♘g6 24.d5 h4 25.dxc6 hxg3 26.♘xg3 ♘e5= Black will regain the pawn with a drawish position.

20...♔b8 21.♔g2

This happened in Gunina – Guramishvili, Gaziantep 2012. Here Black missed a nice chance to play:

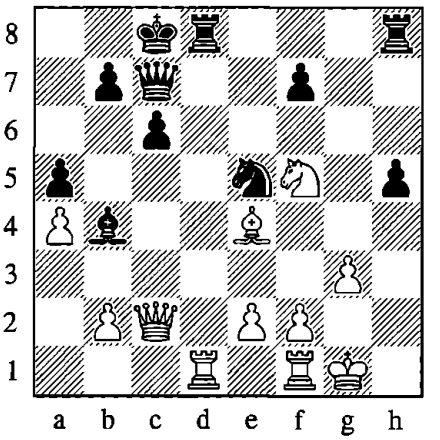


21...♖de8!N 22.♕c2 ♗b4=

With a balanced game.

A2) 18.♗xe4 ♗b4 19.♖ad1 h5

Having completed development, Black starts thinking about kingside activity. Now White will have to reckon with the possibility of ...h4 at every turn.



20.♔g2 ♘g6!

Now the threat is real.

21.♘e3

I checked two other knight moves.

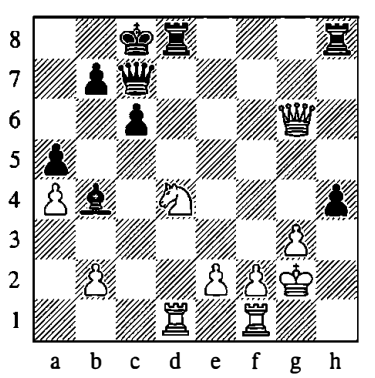
21.♘g7?! ♖dg8 22.♗xg6 fxg6 23.♘e6 was played in Kotanjian – Andriasian, Yerevan 2007, and here 23...♕f7N 24.♘d4 ♔b8∓ gives Black the better game.

I also examined:

21.♘d4N h4!?

21...♘e5 is playable but invites a repetition.

22.♗xg6 fxg6 23.♕xg6



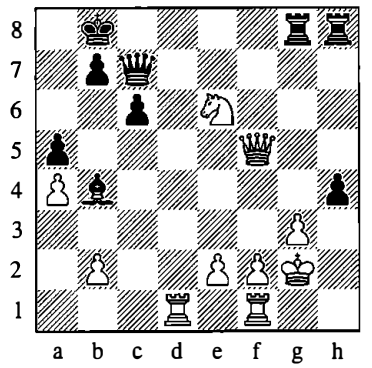
23...♖dg8!

23...hxg3? 24.♘e6!+–

24.♕f5† ♔b8 25.♘e6!?

25.g4 leads to forced draw after: 25...♖f8

26.♕d3 ♖f4 27.f3 ♖f6 28.♘f5 ♖xf5! 29.♕xf5 ♕g3† 30.♔h1 ♕h3† 31.♔g1 ♕g3†=

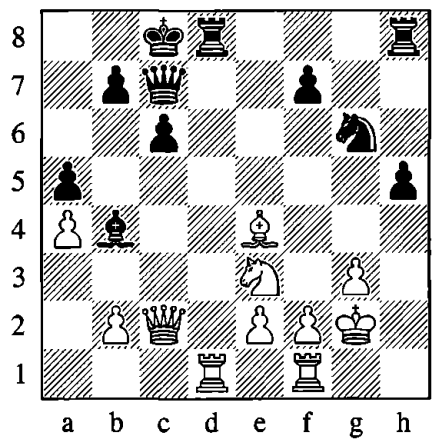


25...♕e7 26.g4

26.♖h1 ♔a8⩱

26...h3† 27.♔h1 ♗d6⩱

Black has sufficient compensation due to the vulnerable position of the white knight.



21...h4!N

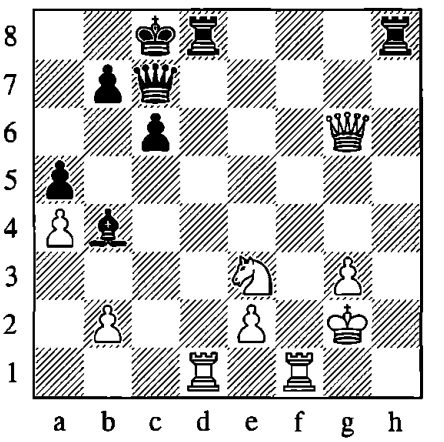
Black is obliged to improve on 21...♘e5 22.♖h1! when White has seriously improved his position. 22...♔b8 was seen in the game Kotanjian – Fressinet, Plovdiv 2008, and here White could have won the h-pawn with 23.♗h7!N.

22.♗xg6 fxg6 23.♕xg6 hxg3

The fracturing of White's kingside ensures Black of full compensation for the pawn.

24.fxg3

24.♕e6† ♔b8 25.♖xd8† ♕xd8 26.fxg3 ♕e8 (26...♔a7!?⩱ is more ambitious) 27.♕xe8† ♖xe8 leads to a drawish endgame.



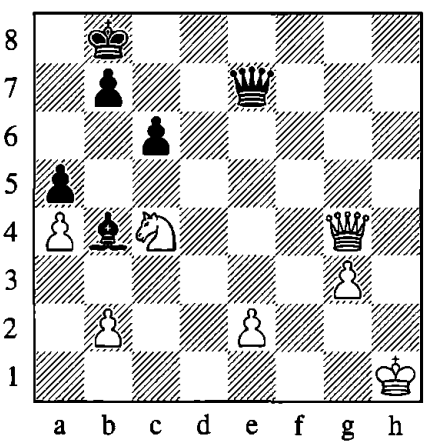
24...♕e7

24...♖de8 also comes into consideration.

25.♖xd8† ♖xd8 26.♕g4† ♔b8 27.♘c4

White has managed to consolidate to some degree, but the vulnerability of his king gives Black ongoing counterplay.

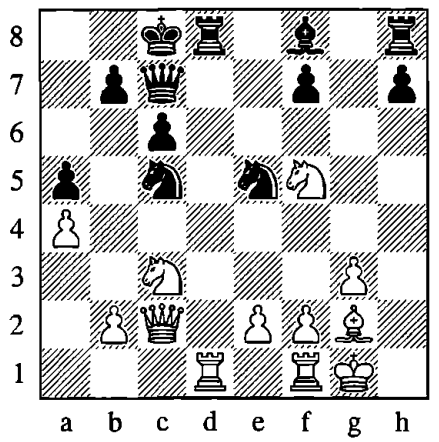
27...♖h8 28.♖h1 ♖xh1 29.♔xh1



29...b5! 30.axb5 cxb5 31.♘a3 ♕e5⩲

Black has no problems in this endgame.

B) 17.♖ad1



This can be considered the main line although, as pointed out earlier, 17.♖fd1 usually transposes in a few moves.

17...h5 18.♖xd8†

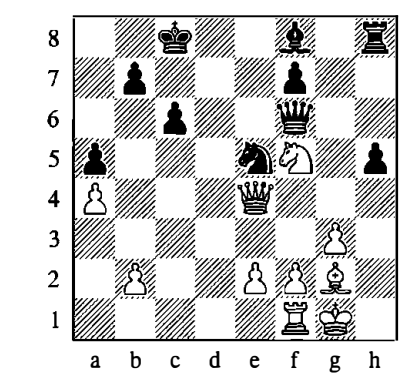
18.♗h3 ♔b8 19.♖xd8† ♕xd8 20.♖d1 ♕f6 transposes to variation B3 below.

18...♕xd8 19.♖d1

The only other move to have been tried is:

19.♘e4 ♘xe4 20.♕xe4 ♕f6

This is less challenging and Black should equalize without too much effort, as shown in the following examples.



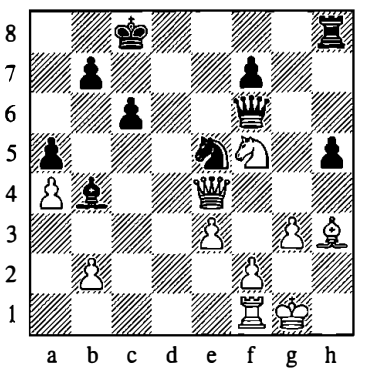
21.e3

21.♗h3 ♔b8 22.♖d1 ♗c5 is covered under the move order 19.♖d1 ♕f6 20.♗h3 ♔b8 21.♘e4 ♘xe4 22.♕xe4 ♗c5 – see variation B3 below.

21.♖c1 ♗b4 22.♘d4 ♖d8 23.e3 occurred in Lapcevic – Jovanovic, Belgrade 2005, and here the natural 23...♔b8N leads to a reliable position for Black.

21...♗b4 22.♗h3

In this position I noticed that Black is not obliged to move the king.



22...♖d8!N

It is useful to seize the d-file.

22...♔c7 23.♖d1 ♖d8 24.♖xd8 ♔xd8 occurred in Xu Jun – Al Sayed, Cebu City 2007. The resulting position is playable for Black, but his pieces are a bit passive and his kingside pawns are slightly vulnerable.

23.♘g7†

Otherwise Black will just move the king and benefit from his control over the d-file.

23...♔b8 24.♘xh5 ♕e7! 25.b3 ♖d3 26.♖b1 ♖d2∞

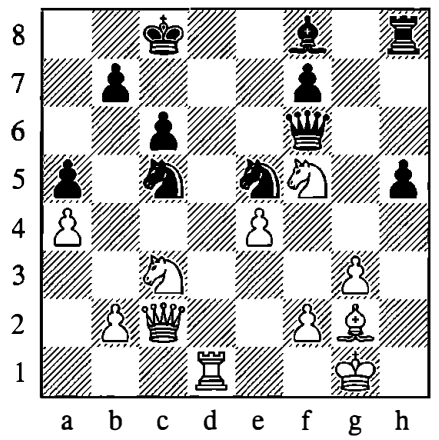
Black has full compensation.

Let's return to the main line with 19.♖d1.

19...♕f6

We have reached a critical position where White must make an important choice. We will analyse **B1) 20.e4**, **B2) 20.♘e4**, **B3) 20.♗h3**, **B4) 20.e3** and **B5) 20.♕d2**.

B1) 20.e4



White intends to mobilize his kingside pawns with f2-f4 and e4-e5. The plan appears ambitious, but Black has more than one good way to counter it.

20...h4

This is the most direct option, but the following alternatives are also interesting and perfectly playable:

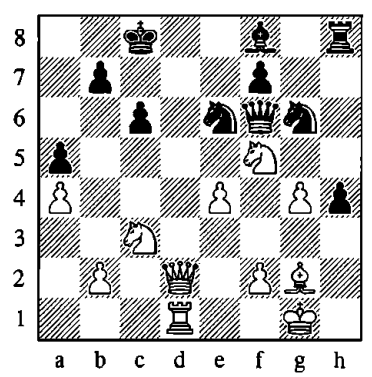
20...♘g6!?N

This is a new idea I found.

21.♕d2

21.f4 h4 22.e5 ♕e6 23.♕d2 ♗e7∞ is highly unclear.

21...h4 22.g4 ♘e6



23.e5!

Otherwise White is in trouble.

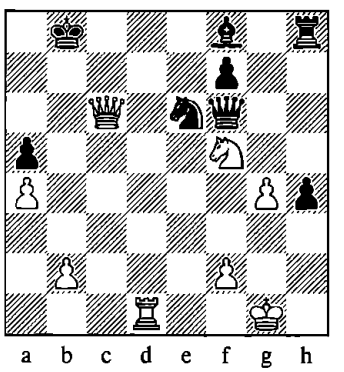
23...♘xe5

23...♕xe5?? 24.♘b5! wins for White.

24.♘d5!?

24.♘e4 also leads to perpetual after: 24...♕g6 25.♕xa5 ♕xg4 26.♕a8† ♔c7 27.♕a5† ♔c8=

24...cxd5 25.♕xd5 ♘c6 26.♕d7† ♔b8 27.♗xc6 bxc6 28.♕xc6



28...♕e5

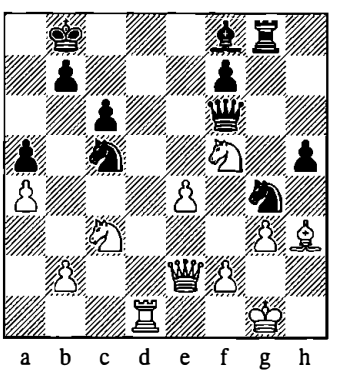
White's attack is good enough for a draw, but nothing more.

29.♕b6† ♔a8 30.♕a6† ♔b8=

20...♘g4

This move has been employed successfully in practice.

21.♗h3 ♔b8 22.♕e2 ♖g8



23.♗xg4 hxg4!N

After 23...♖xg4 Black went on to score a crushing victory in Najer – Ni Hua, Plovdiv 2010, but it might have been a different

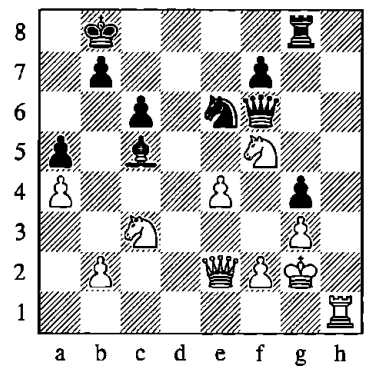
story if White had found 24.♕f3!N. White intends to improve his position with ♔g2 followed by ♘e3 and/or ♖h1, and I don't see a good answer for Black.

24.♔g2

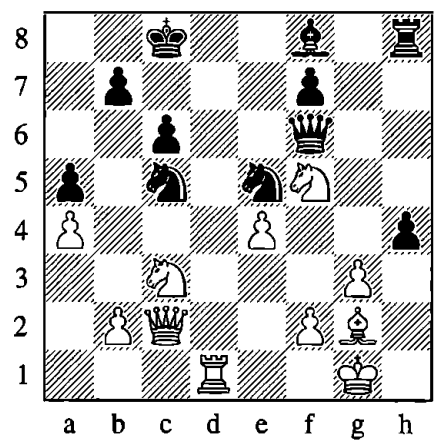
24.♘e3 is a principled alternative, but after 24...♗d6 25.♘xg4 ♕e6 Black has great compensation for the pawn, for instance 26.e5 ♗c7 27.♖d4 ♕g6 or 26.♘e3 ♗e5.

24...♘e6 25.♖h1 ♗c5

The position is complex and double-edged. It should be noted that capturing the g4-pawn is dangerous:



26.♘h6 ♖g5 27.♘xg4 ♖xg4! 28.♕xg4 ♕xf2† 29.♔h3 ♕xb2∓



21.♘xh4

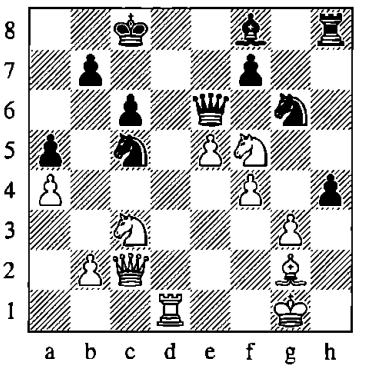
White can also ignore the pawn and proceed with his central play:

21.f4 ♘g6

21...♘c4!?N could be an interesting alternative to check.

22.e5 ♕e6

Now White can and should force a draw as follows.

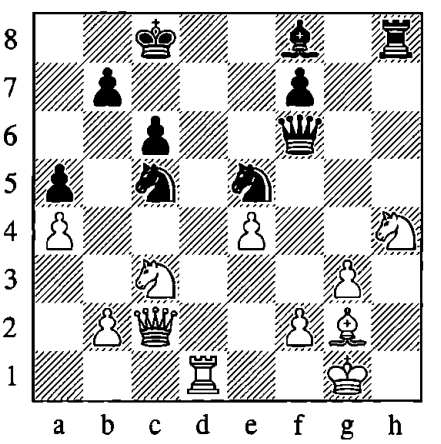


23.♘e2

Instead after 23.♘d6†? ♗xd6 24.♖xd6 ♕c4 25.♗f1?! ♕b4 Black was already winning in the game Ivanchuk – Gelfand, Sochi 2005.

23...hxg3 24.♘d6† ♗xd6 25.♖xd6 ♕g4 26.♕xc5 ♕xe2 27.♖xc6† bxc6 28.♕xc6† ♔d8 29.♕b6† ♔e8=

In view of the perpetual check, the players shortly agreed a draw in Johannessen – L'Ami, Germany 2006.



21...♖xh4!

This positional exchange sacrifice is Black's idea, but it is important to follow it up correctly.

22.gxh4 ♘e6!N

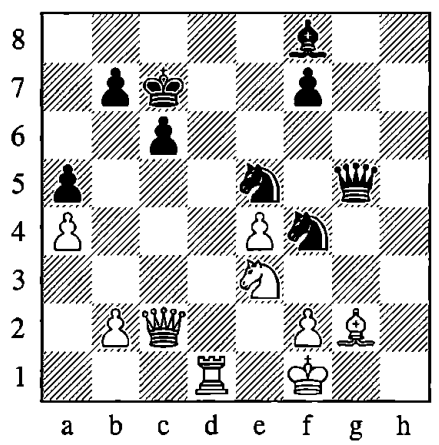
The only game on my database continued 22...♕xh4 23.♘e2 ♘e6 24.♕c3 and although Black eventually drew in Arounopoulos – Jonckheere, email 2007, I am rather suspicious about his compensation in the present position.

23.♘d5!

This is the critical line.

23.♘e2?! ♗c5 is extremely dangerous for White.

23...♕xh4 24.♘b6† ♔c7 25.♘c4 ♕g5 26.♔f1 ♘f4 27.♘e3

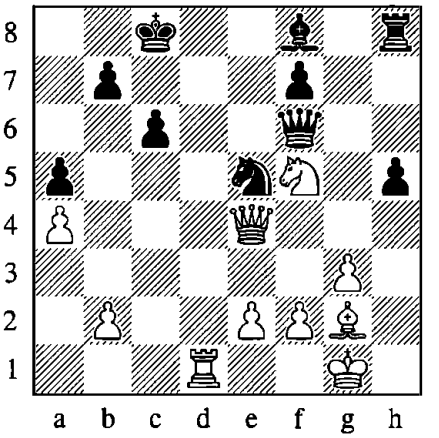


27...♘xg2!?

This is the cleanest way to force a draw. Other moves are playable, but I was unable to find any route to an advantage for Black.

28.♘xg2 ♕h5 29.♕d2 ♕h1† 30.♔e2 ♕h5†=

B2) 20.♘e4 ♘xe4 21.♕xe4



Kaufman's repertoire book stops at this position, noting that White has a better pawn structure and active pieces, but the battle has hardly started.

21...♗c5

21...♗b4 22.♗h3 ♔b8 23.♕d4 has occurred in a few games and favours White slightly. The bishop is more active on c5.

22.e3

I checked two other possibilities.

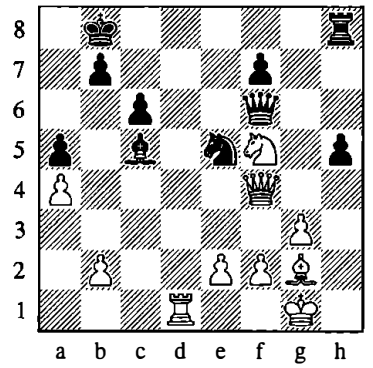
22.♗h3 ♔b8 is covered under the move order 20.♗h3 ♔b8 21.♘e4 ♘xe4 22.♕xe4 ♗c5 – see variation B3 below. However, against the present move order I believe 22...♔c7!N to be more accurate, just as in the main line. After the likely response 23.e3 we reach the same position as in the main line below.

22.♕f4 ♔b8

22...♔c7!?N looks playable here too. True, after 23.♖c1 Black is forced to play the ugly-looking 23...♗d6, but I do not see how White can exploit this temporary disharmony.

23.♗h3

The natural 23.e3N can be met by: 23...h4! 24.g4 (After 24.gxh4 ♖g8 25.♘h6 ♕xf4 26.exf4 ♖g6 Black is out of risk.) 24...h3 25.♗f1 (25.♗e4?! ♔a7 is better for Black.) 25...♕e6∞ With double-edged play.



23...h4!?N

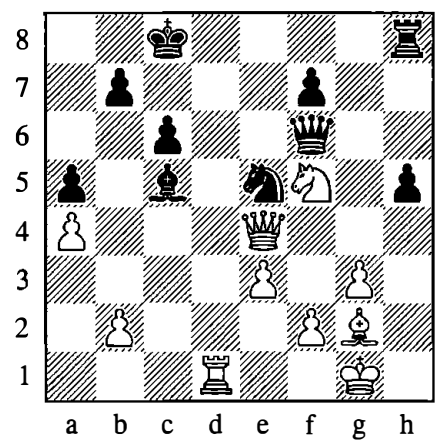
23...♔a7 was played in Zhu Chen – Sebag, Hangzhou 2011. I do not see any specific problems with the king move, but I believe that Black should take the opportunity to advance the h-pawn if it works.

24.g4

The main point is 24.gxh4 ♔a7 25.e3 ♖g8† 26.♔f1 ♕e6⩱ with full compensation.

24...♖g8 25.e3 ♔a7∞

The position remains unclear but roughly equal.



22...♔c7!N

Just as in the above note with 22.♗h3, I favour this square for the king instead of the usual home on b8. The king is quite well protected on c7 but, in the event of a queen exchange, it is ideally placed to rush to the b4-square.

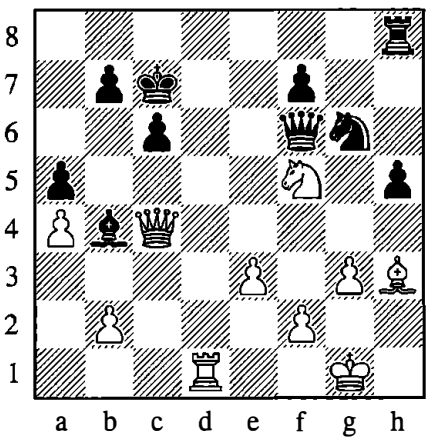
Having said that, 22...♔b8 is perfectly playable and after 23.♗h3 we transpose to the move order 20.♗h3 ♔b8 21.♘e4 ♘xe4 22.♕xe4 ♗c5 23.e3 – see variation B3 below.

23.♗h3 ♘g6

Black has a choice of decent continuations. One such alternative is 23...♖g8 24.♔f1 ♔b6! 25.♕c2 ♖d8= when Black has no problems, and the potential activity of his king gives White something to think about.

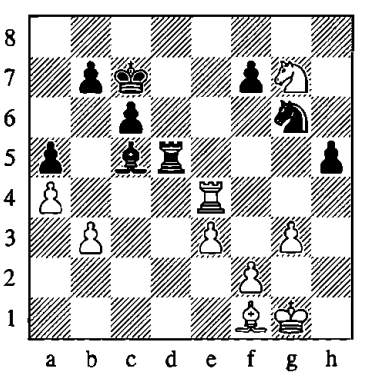
The immediate 23...♔b6!? can also be considered.

24.♕c4 ♗b4



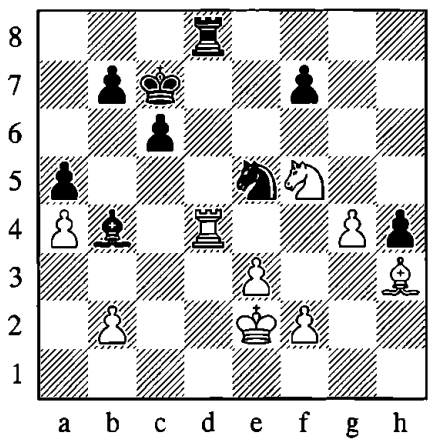
25.♔f1

The endgame after 25.♕d4 ♕xd4 26.♖xd4 is pretty harmless, as Black quickly obtains counterplay: 26...♗c5 27.♖e4 ♖d8 28.♗f1 ♖d2 29.b3 ♖d5 30.♘g7



30...h4 31.gxh4 ♘xh4!=

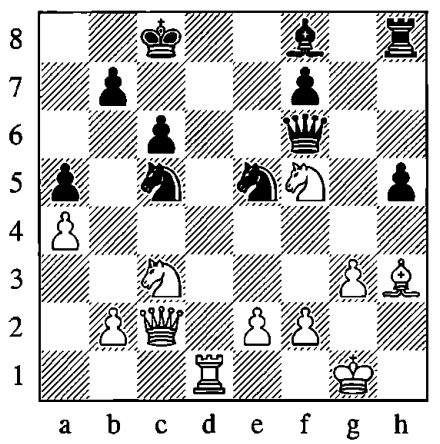
25...h4 26.g4 ♖f8 27.♕d4 ♕xd4 28.♖xd4 ♘e5 29.♔e2 ♖d8



30.b3 ♖xd4 31.♘xd4 ♘d7 32.g5 ♘c5=

The endgame is balanced.

B3) 20.♗h3



Compared with the previous variation, this has the advantage of making the possible king move to c7 less appealing.

20...♔b8

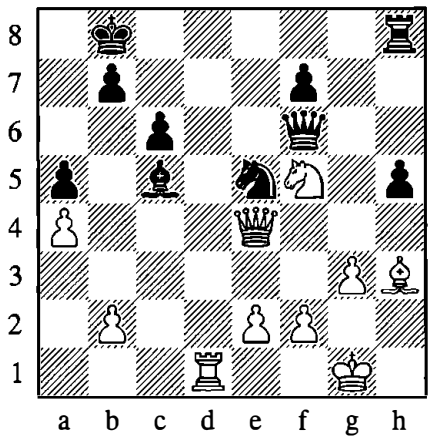
This time 20...♔c7?! runs into the annoying 21.♕d2!.

21.♘e4

21.♕d2 transposes to variation B52 on page 413.

21...♘xe4 22.♕xe4 ♗c5

22...♗b4 23.♕e3 looks slightly better for White.



23.e3

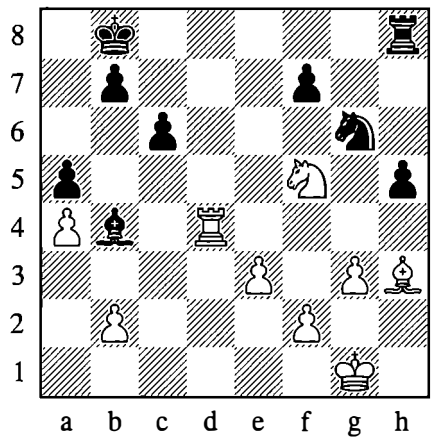
23.♕h4 is not dangerous: 23...♕xh4 24.♘xh4 ♔c7! 25.♔f1 ♖d8 26.♖xd8 ♔xd8 Zhou Jianchao – Maletin, Moscow 2011. Black should not have any problems in the endgame as his queenside counterplay is fast enough.

23...♘g6

23...♔c7!? occurred in Gupta – Gopal, Olongapo City 2010. We have already seen that there are some advantages to having the king on c7. It seems weird to move the king for a second time, but I don't see a concrete problem, so this could be considered as a safe alternative to the more complicated main line.

24.♕c4 ♗b4 25.♕d4 ♕xd4 26.♖xd4

We have been following the game Rodshtein – Vitiugov, Plovdiv 2010. Black eventually held a draw, but he had to suffer for a while in a worse endgame. Instead I suggest going for counterplay with:



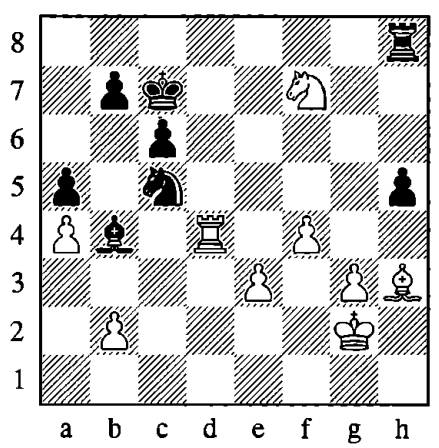
26...♘e5!N

Not only threatening a fork on f3, but also heading for the queenside.

27.♔g2 ♔c7 28.f4

28.♘g7 ♗e7 29.♖f4 h4 30.g4 ♖f8 is also balanced.

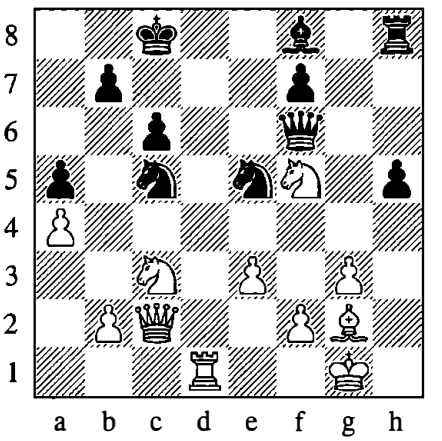
28...♘d7 29.♘h6 ♘c5 30.♘xf7



30...♖e8 31.♘e5 ♖d8!?

Black is about to regain a pawn on the queenside. The resulting endgame is sharp, but ultimately equal.

B4) 20.e3

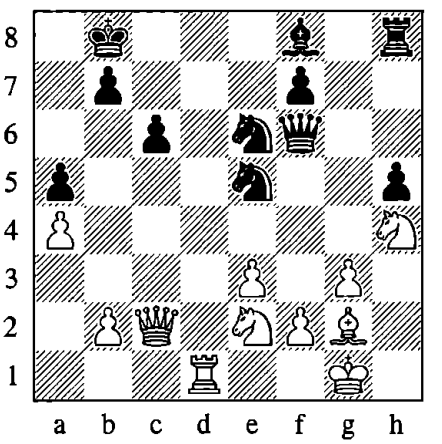


The main idea behind this move is to activate White's second knight via the e2-square.

20...♔b8 21.♘e2 ♘e6

Clearing the path for the bishop. From this position White has tried both **B41) 22.♘h4** and **B42) 22.♘ed4**.

B41) 22.♘h4



This move looks weird, but it was introduced by Mamedyarov and later repeated by Jakovenko. White blocks the h-pawn and introduces the option of exchanging queens with a timely ♕f5.

22...♗b4

Also fully playable is:

22...♗e7!?N 23.♘c3

23.♘d4 ♖d8 24.♘xe6 fxe6 25.♖xd8† ♗xd8 is equal.

I also checked: 23.♘f5 ♗b4 24.♘f4 ♘xf4 25.exf4 ♘g6 26.♖d7 ♘f8 27.♖d1 ♘g6=

23...♖d8 24.♖xd8† ♗xd8 25.♘e4 ♕g7 26.♘f5 ♕g4

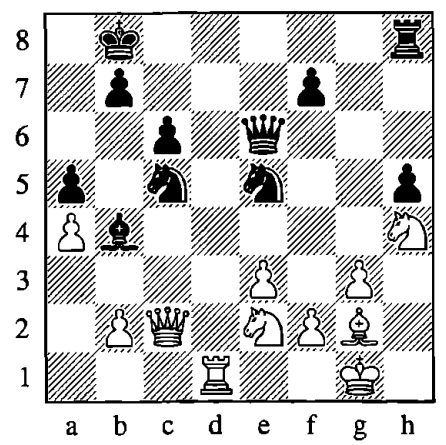
Black has no problems.

23.♘d4 ♘c5!

When this line occurred for the first time in practice, Black played the inaccurate 23...♘xd4 24.♖xd4 ♖d8 25.♖xd8† ♕xd8 26.♗f3! ♘xf3† 27.♘xf3± and White was slightly better in Mamedyarov – Wang Hao, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009.

24.♘e2 ♕e6!?

24...♘g6N 25.♘xg6 ♕xg6 26.♕c4 h4 27.gxh4 ♕f6= was a simple route to equality, but it looks like Black was already aiming for more.

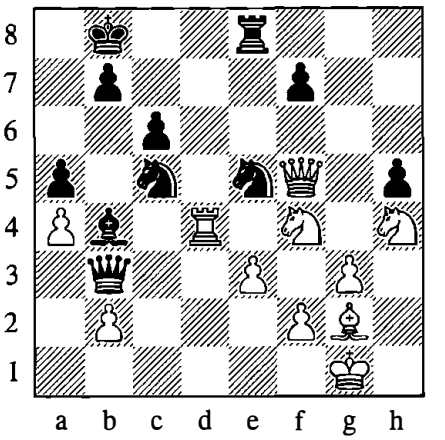


25.♖d4 ♕b3 26.♕f5?!

26.♗e4N would have maintained the balance.

26...♖e8 27.♘f4?

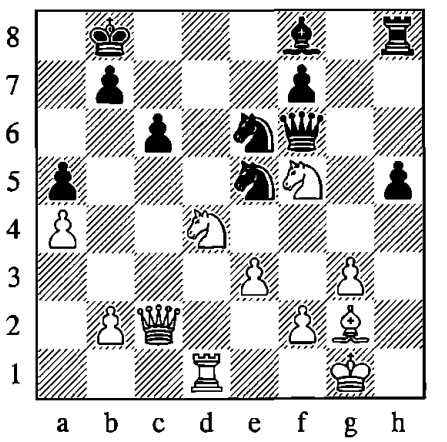
The second mistake in a row.



27...♕xa4 28.♘xh5 ♕a1† 29.♗f1 ♕xb2∓

White was in trouble in Jakovenko – Najer, Taganrog 2011.

B42) 22.♘ed4



22...♗b4 23.♘xe6

23.♕e4 ♖d8 is fine for Black.

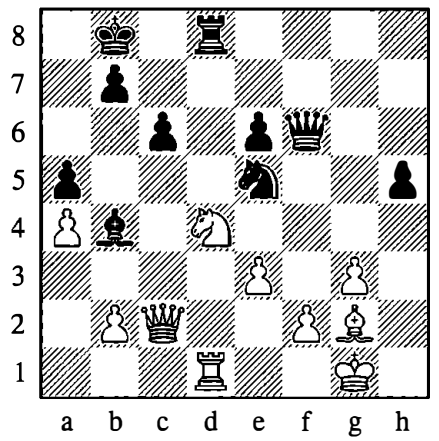
23...fxe6!

The pawn is more useful on e6 than on f7, as it forces White's strong knight to find another home.

24.♘d4 ♖d8

The seemingly tempting 24...h4? does not work: 25.f4! hxg3 (25...♘g6? 26.♘xc6†+–;

25...h3 26.fxe5 ♕xe5 27.♗e4 ♕xg3† 28.♔h1± 26.fxe5 ♕h6 27.♕e2 Black does not have enough for the sacrificed piece.



25.♖f1 ♖c8

A good alternative is:

25...♖d6!?N

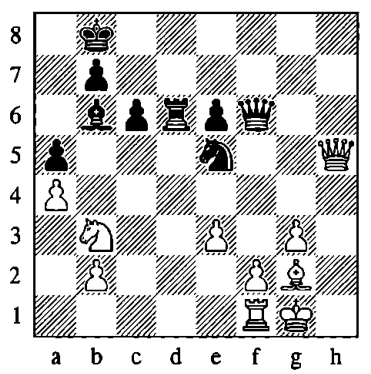
I analysed the following sample lines.

26.♕h7 ♗c5 27.♘b3

27.♘b5? is bad in view of 27...♖d7 28.♕g8† ♖d8 29.♕h7 ♗b6 30.♘c3 ♖h8 followed by ...h4 with an attack.

27.♘e2 ♕f5 also looks favourable for Black.

27...♗b6 28.♕xh5

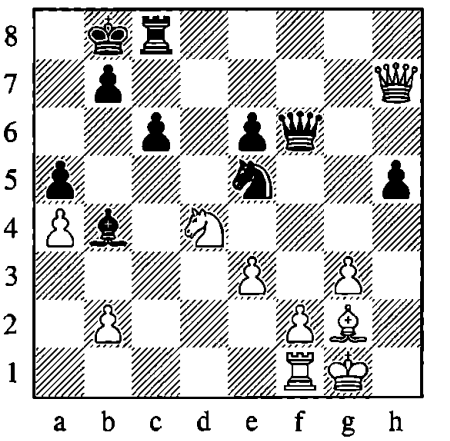


28...♖d3! 29.♘c1 ♖d2 30.b3 ♔a7

Black has excellent compensation for the pawn.

26.♕h7

26.♕b3 allows 26...h4 27.♕xe6 ♕xe6 28.♘xe6 hxg3 29.fxg3 ♘c4 when White will have to be careful.



26...♘c4!

Black starts his counterplay just in time.

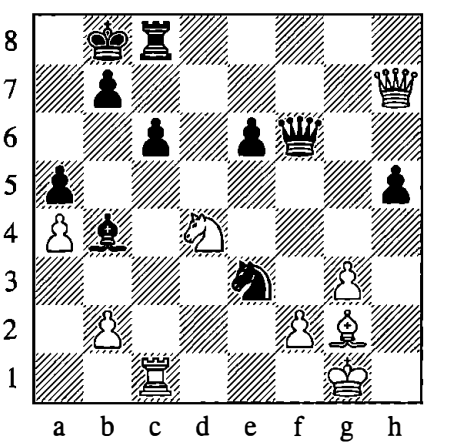
27.♖c1

27.♕xh5?! ♘xb2 is risky for White, as the a4-pawn will soon fall.

27...♘xe3!?

Black decides to force the play.

27...♘b6 leads to a reliable position as well, for example: 28.b3 (or 28.♕xh5 ♘xa4 29.♖c2 e5 30.♘f3 ♗d6=) 28...e5 29.♘f3 ♖h8 30.♕e4 ♖e8=



28.♘xc6†

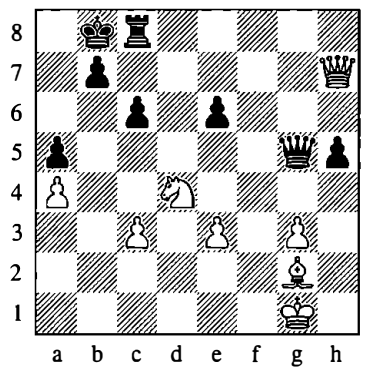
Another direction is:

28.fxe3 ♗d2 29.♖c3!?

This is challenging but risky for White.

29.♘xc6† leads to simplifications: 29...bxc6 30.♖xc6 ♖xc6 31.♗xc6 ♗xe3† 32.♔h2 ♕xb2† 33.♔h3 ♗g1! 34.♕xh5 ♔c7 and it should be a draw.

29...♗xc3 30.bxc3 ♕g5



31.♔f2 ♖g8

This leads to a forced draw.

Black has a few other reliable moves such as 31...♖f8 and 31...e5.

32.♗xc6 ♕xg3† 33.♔e2 ♖g7 34.♕h8† ♖g8 35.♕h7 ♖g7=

Forcing a repetition of moves.

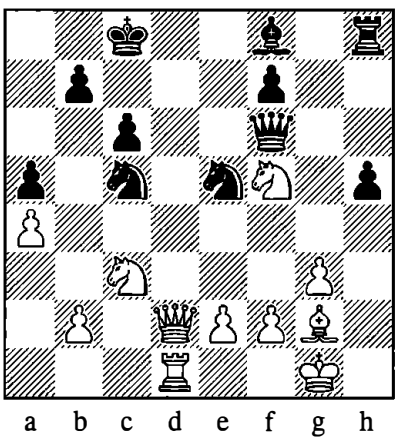
28...bxc6 29.♖xc6 ♖xc6

29...♕d4 was also good enough: 30.fxe3 ♕xe3† 31.♔h2 ♖xc6 32.♗xc6 ♕e2† 33.♗g2 ♔c8!=

30.♗xc6 ♕e7! 31.♕xe7 ♗xe7 32.fxe3 ♔c7 33.♗f3

In this absolutely equal position a draw was agreed in Avrukh – Fressinet, Bundesliga 2008.

B5) 20.♕d2



This is considered to be White's most dangerous continuation.

20...♔b8

This is not only Black's most popular move; it is also probably the only good option available.

20...♖g8? would be a decent move if it were not for 21.♘b5! cxb5 22.♕xa5 with a crushing attack.

20...♗e7?! 21.♗h3 ♔b8 will be examined via the 20...♔b8 21.♗h3 ♗e7?! move order in the notes to variation B52 below.

20...♘e6N

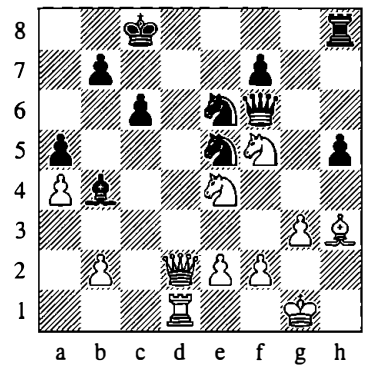
This seems like Black's best attempt to deviate from the main line, but I was unable to find equality after accurate play from White.

21.♗h3

21.♘d6†?! ♗xd6 22.♘e4 does not work due to 22...♗b4! 23.♘xf6 ♗xd2 24.♖xd2 ♖d8! intending 25.♖xd8† ♔xd8 26.♘xh5 ♘c4! when Black is likely to win the pawn race in the endgame.

21...♗b4 22.♘e4!

White forces an advantageous endgame.

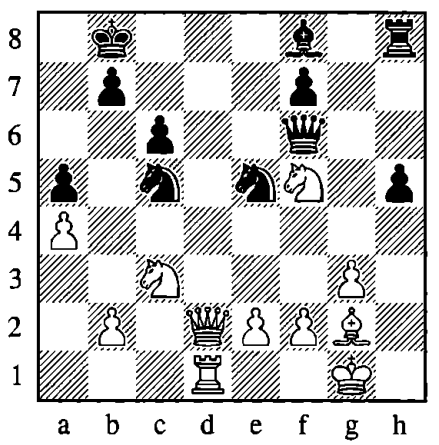


22...♕xf5 23.♗xf5 ♗xd2 24.♖xd2 ♔c7 25.♗xe6

Less convincing is: 25.♘f6 ♘c5 26.f4 ♘g4 27.♘xg4 hxg4 28.♖d4 ♖d8 29.♖c4 b6 30.♔f2 ♖d2=

25...fxe6 26.♔g2±

Black faces an unpleasant defensive task.



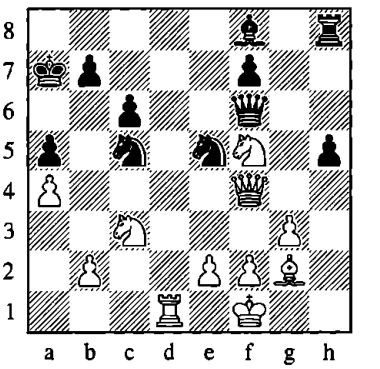
In this position White has tried two options: **B51) 21.♕f4** and **B52) 21.♗h3**.

B51) 21.♕f4 ♘e6!?N

This new move leads down a forcing path to eventual equality.

The following alternative also seems adequate: 21...♔a7 22.♔f1!?

22.♘e4 ♘xe4 23.♗xe4 (Black has no problems after 23.♕xe4 ♗c5 24.e3 ♖g8 25.♕c2 ♗b4 with equality.) 23...♗c5 24.♕c1 Now with 24...♔b6! Black made excellent use of his king and obtained a good position in Timman – Van Kampen, Groningen 2009.



22...h4! 23.gxh4

Much worse is: 23.♘xh4? ♕xf4 24.gxf4 ♖xh4 25.fxe5 ♗g7∓

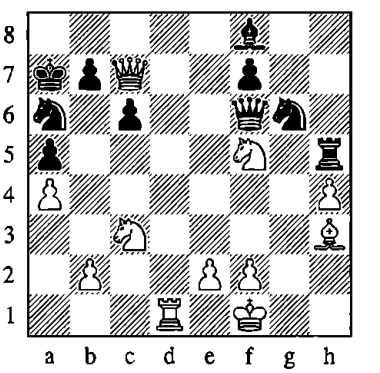
23...♖h5 24.♗h3

24.e4 ♘c4⩱ leaves Black with excellent compensation.

24...♘g6 25.♕c7

25.♕g4 ♕h8=

25...♘a6



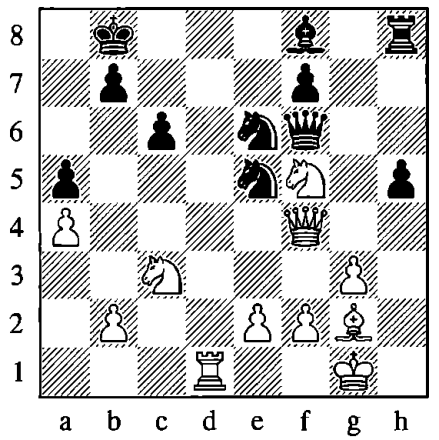
26.♕c8

26.♕d7 ♘c5 27.♕d8 ♕xd8 28.♖xd8 ♗e7 29.♘xe7 ♘xe7=

26...♗e7 27.♘xe7 ♘xe7 28.♕d8 ♕xh4 29.♗g2 ♘f5

After a series of accurate moves the position remained balanced in Napalkov – Dolgov, corr. 2008.

Returning to the new move proposed in my main line, the following sequence looks pretty logical.

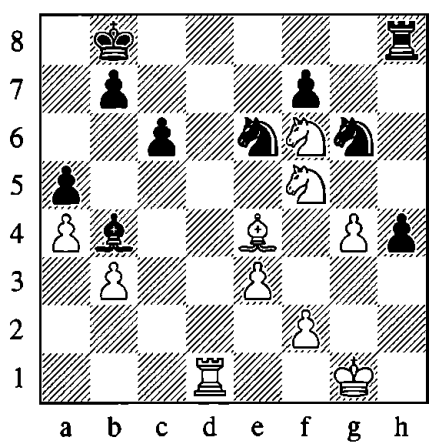


22.♘e4 ♘xf4 23.♘xf6 ♘e6 24.♗e4

24.♘d7† ♘xd7 25.♖xd7 ♗b4 26.♖xf7 ♘c5 gives Black plenty of counterplay, as he will soon pick up at least one of White's queenside pawns.

24...♗b4 25.b3 ♘g6 26.e3! h4 27.g4

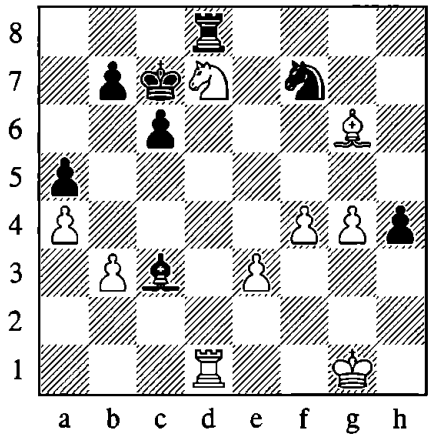
27.gxh4 ♘xh4 is simply equal.



27...♗c3!

The only move to maintain the balance.

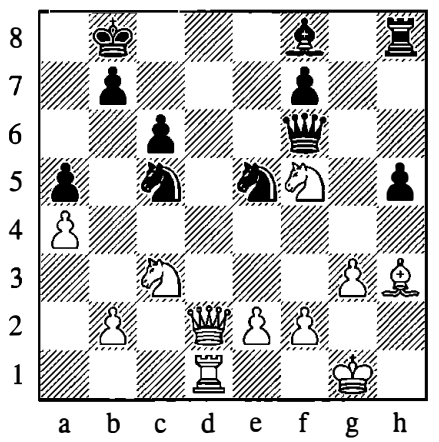
28.♘d7† ♔c7 29.♘d6 ♘g5 30.f4 ♖d8 31.♘xf7 ♘xf7 32.♗xg6



32...♘e5! 33.fxe5 ♖xd7=

The opposite-coloured bishop endgame is dead equal, with or without rooks.

B52) 21.♗h3



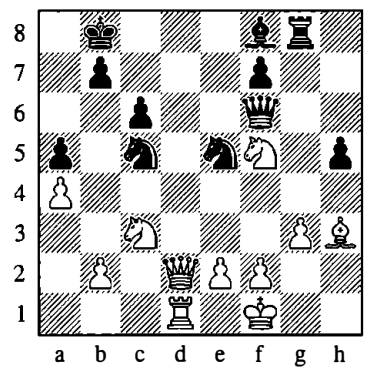
21...h4!

It is hard to refrain from this move; not only does it work well, it also stands out as the only convincing route to equality. I investigated some other ideas but found problems with all of them, as noted in the brief summary below.

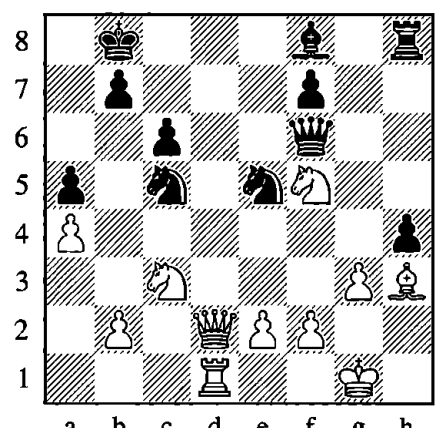
21...♗e7?! 22.♕e3 ♘g6 occurred in Gelfand – Akopian, Yerevan 2008, but here White has the powerful improvement 23.♖d4!N. Black is in trouble here, as it is not easy to find a good answer to the plan of ♖c4 followed by ♘e4.

21...♘g6 has been played a few times. I think Black is doing well after 22.♕e3, which occurred in all the existing games, but I dislike Black's position after the calm 22.e3!?N. I did a lot of work on this position, with the main line being 22...h4 23.g4 ♘e5 24.♕e2±, but I could not find a clear path to equality.

The only other plausible idea is 21...♖g8!?. The only game here continued: 22.♔f1



22...♘g4! 23.♕f4† ♔a7 24.♗xg4 hxg4 25.♘d4?! (25.♔g2N or 25.♕c7N would retain the balance) 25...♕xf4 At this point a draw was agreed in Fridman – Spoelman, Hilversum 2009, but it is obvious that after 26.gxf4 ♗g7 White will have to fight for a draw. Despite this positive outcome, I am pretty sure that White can improve on move 22, so I would like to focus on the advance of the h-pawn.



22.g4

This continuation was chosen in both of the games that reached this position. Nevertheless, it is obligatory to consider both of the possible captures on h4.

22.♘xh4N ♘c4

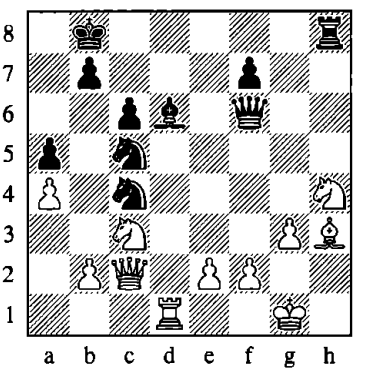
This is the only good reply. The game might continue:

23.♕c2

23.♕d8†? is obviously bad, since after 23...♕xd8 24.♖xd8† ♔a7∓ White's queenside starts to fall apart.

23...♗d6

Black has created serious threats on the kingside.



24.♗g2!

This is the only move that enables White to maintain the balance.

24...♗xg3! 25.fxg3 ♘e3 26.♕d2 ♘xd1 27.♘xd1 ♖d8!

Less convincing is 27...♘xa4 28.♕xa5 ♘xb2 29.♘xb2 ♕xb2 30.♗f3± when I prefer White.

28.♕c2 ♕d4† 29.♘f2 ♕b4

The position remains complex but roughly equal.

22.gxh4N ♗h6

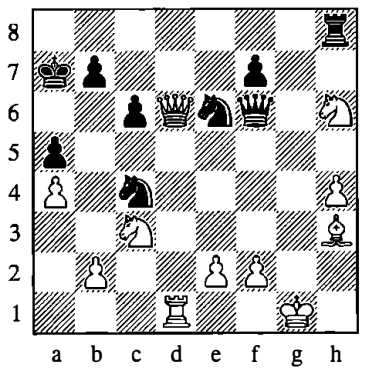
Here too, Black gets long-term compensation for the pawn, as shown in the following illustrative lines:

23.♕d4 ♘e6 24.♕d6† ♔a7 25.♘xh6

25.♘e4?! is well met by 25...♕g6† 26.♔h1 ♖d8 27.♖g1 ♘g4!! and Black takes over the initiative: 28.♕g3 ♕xf5 29.♕xg4 ♕d5∓

25...♘c4

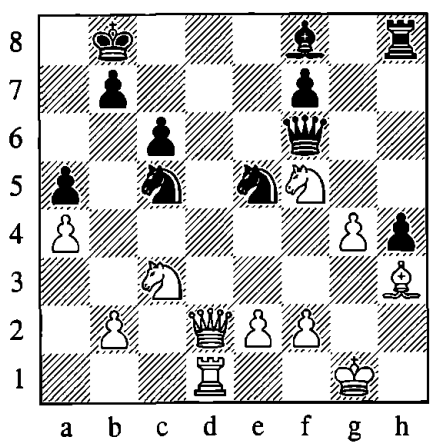
Also good enough is: 25...♖xh6 26.♗xe6 ♕xh4 27.♕d4† ♕xd4 28.♖xd4 ♖g6† 29.♔f1 ♖xe6=



26.♕d3 ♕xh4 27.♘xf7 ♖g8† 28.♔h1 ♘f4 29.♕d4† c5 30.♘b5†

30.♕xc5†? ♔a8 loses for White.

30...♔a6 31.♘c7† ♔a7=



22...♖g8

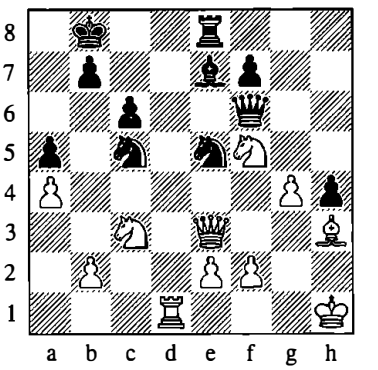
Another game saw:

22...♗e7

This would not be my first choice, but it still looks pretty reliable.

23.♕e3 ♖e8 24.♔h1

24.♔h2!?N is an interesting attempt to improve White's play, as Black is prevented from following the same path as in the game: 24...♘g6?! 25.f4 ♕e6 26.♕xe6 fxe6 27.♘xe7 With the king on h1, Black could meet this move with the intermediate ...♘xf4 when the bishop would be left hanging on h3. 27...♖xe7 28.e3± The endgame is clearly favourable for White.



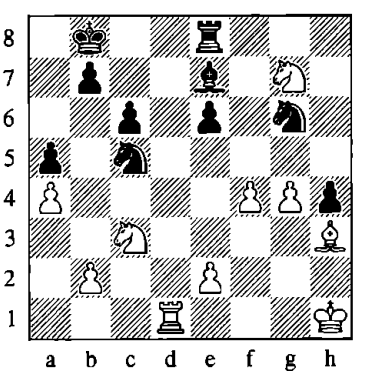
24...♘g6 25.f4 ♕e6!

With the king on h1 this idea works well.

26.♕xe6 fxe6 27.♘g7

As I mentioned above, 27.♘xe7 can be met here by 27...♘xf4! 28.♘xc6† bxc6 29.♗g2 with equality.

Now in V. Mikhalevski – Ni Hua, Edmonton 2009, Black's most accurate continuation would have been:



27...♖f8!N 28.e3 ♗f6 29.♘h5 ♗h8

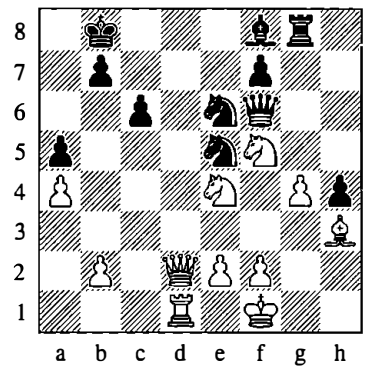
29...♗xc3!? 30.bxc3 ♘xa4 31.♖a1 ♘xc3 32.♖xa5 ♖d8⇄ is highly unclear.

30.g5 ♔c7

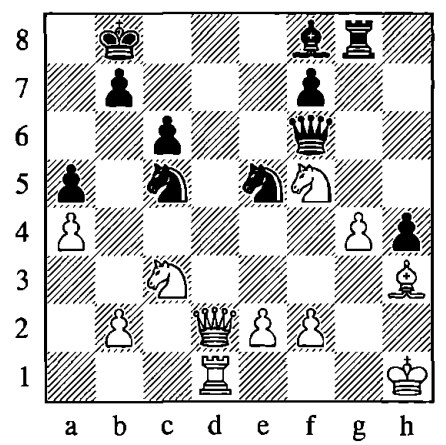
Black has a comfortable position.

23.♔h1

23.♔f1 is quite interesting, but Black has a nice response. 23...♘e6 24.♘e4



24...♘xg4! The threat of mate in two shows that the placement of the white king on f1 is not without drawbacks. 25.♗xg4 ♕e5! 26.f3 ♖xg4 27.♘f6 ♕xf6 28.fxg4 ♕e5∞ Black has full compensation.



23...♘c4!N

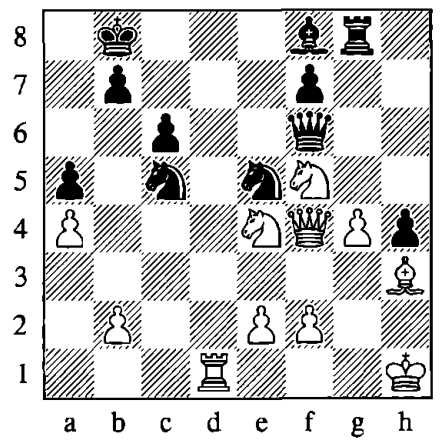
A necessary improvement over the horrible 23...♘e6? 24.♘e4 ♕g6 25.♕xa5 ♘xg4 26.f3! when White was easily winning in Wang Hao – Ni Hua, Xinghua Jiangsu 2009.

24.♕f4† ♘e5

The knight has been forced to retreat, but White's queen is not well placed on f4 and now ...♘e6 is on the agenda. I examined a couple of ways in which White may avoid repeating the position.

25.♘e4

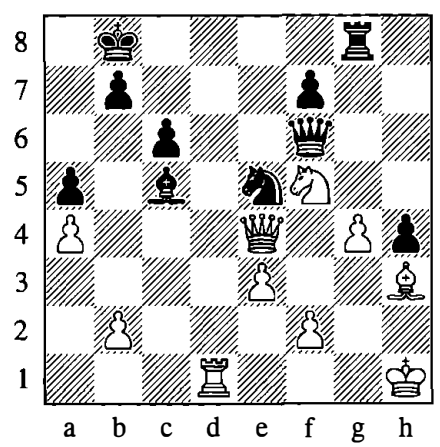
25.♕d4 ♘ed7 seems fine for Black, for instance: 26.♕d2 (26.e3 ♕xd4 27.exd4 ♘e6 28.d5 cxd5 29.♘xd5 ♗c5 30.♘h6 ♖g7 31.♘f5 ♖g8=) 26...♕e6 27.♕f4† ♕e5 28.♕xe5† ♘xe5 29.♖d8† ♔c7 30.♖e8 ♘ed7 and Black holds easily.



25...♘xe4 26.♕xe4 ♗c5 27.e3

After 27.g5 ♕e6 28.e3 ♔a7 the chances are about equal.

Now Black has a remarkable idea to connect his pieces.



27...♕h8! 28.b3 f6 29.♘d4 ♖d8
Black is doing fine.

Conclusion

12.♘e3 takes us to the main theoretical paths of the Morozevich Variation after the standard moves 12...gxf4 13.♘xf5 0–0–0 14.♕c2 ♘c5 15.0–0 fxg3 16.hxg3 a5. The ensuing positions feature irregular pawn structures and are both positionally and tactically complex; it is no wonder that this variation became fashionable at the elite level.

17.♘e4 seems relatively harmless, so the main line is 17.♖ad1 (or 17.♖fd1) 17...h5 18.♖xd8† ♕xd8 19.♖d1 ♕f6 when we analysed five different paths for White. Both sides must pay attention to the specific nuances of each line, as one mistake could prove fatal. A few of the important themes for Black include moving the king to c7 instead of b8 where appropriate, and the correct timing of the ...h4 push. We also saw several lines where Black simplified to an endgame while giving up a pawn on the kingside, knowing it would be possible to win back at least one of White's weak queenside pawns. Future games will surely advance the theory even further but, for the time being, the novelties and original analysis contained in this chapter make it most advanced source of theory available on this variation.

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C4) 9.♖e1 *208*

Chapter 18
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘bd2 ♗f5

A) 5.g3 *212*
B) 5.e3 e6 *213*

B1) 6.♘h4 *213*
B2) 6.♗e2 *215*
C) 5.♘h4 ♗e6! 6.e3 g6 *217*
C1) 7.♗d3 *217*
C2) 7.♗e2 *218*

Chapter 19
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♕c2 dxc4

A) 5.e4 b5 6.b3 cxb3 7.axb3 e6 8.♗d2 a5 9.♗d3 ♗b7 10.0–0 ♗e7 *221*
A1) 11.♗c3 *222*
A2) 11.♘c3 *223*
A3) 11.♖c1 *223*
B) 5.♕xc4 ♗g4 *225*
B1) 6.♕b3 *225*
B2) 6.♗g5 *227*
B3) 6.♗f4 *228*
B4) 6.♘e5 *228*
B5) 6.♘bd2 ♘bd7 7.g3 e6 8.♗g2 ♗e7 9.0–0 0–0 *230*
B51) 10.♖e1 *231*
B52) 10.b3 *232*
B53) 10.♕b3 ♕b6 11.♘c4 ♕a6 *233*
B531) 12.♗f4 *234*
B532) 12.♖e1 *234*
B533) 12.♗d2 *235*
B54) 10.♘e5 ♗h5 11.♘xd7 ♘xd7 12.♘b3 a5 *237*
B541) 13.e4?! *237*
B542) 13.a4 *238*

Chapter 20
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♕c2 dxc4 5.♕xc4 ♗g4 6.♘c3 ♘bd7

A) 7.♗g5 *241*
B) 7.♗f4 *242*
C) 7.e4 e5!? *242*
C1) 8.♗e3 *243*
C2) 8.♘xe5 *243*
C3) 8.dxe5N ♗xf3 *245*
C31) 9.e6?! *245*
C32) 9.exf6 *246*
C33) 9.gxf3 ♘xe5 10.♕e2 ♗c5 *248*
C331) 11.♖g1 *248*
C332) 11.♗e3 *249*
C333) 11.♗d2 ♘h5! 12.f4 ♕xd2†! 13.♔xd2 ♘xf4 14.♕d1 0–0–0† 15.♘d5 cxd5 *249*

C3331) 16.♕c1 *251*
C3332) 16.♔c2!?N *252*

Chapter 21
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4

A) 5.g3 *255*
B) 5.e3 b5 6.a4 b4 *256*
B1) 7.♘b1 ♗a6 *256*
B11) 8.♘bd2 *256*
B12) 8.♕c2 *257*
B13) 8.♗e2 *258*
B2) 7.♘a2 e6 8.♗xc4 ♘bd7 9.0–0 ♗b7 10.♕e2 ♗e7 *259*
B21) 11.e4 *260*
B22) 11.♖d1 *262*

Chapter 22
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.e4 b5

A) 6.♕c2 *265*
B) 6.a4 *266*
C) 6.e5 ♘d5 7.a4 e6 *267*
C1) 8.axb5 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 cxb5 10.♘g5 ♗b7 11.♕h5 g6 12.♕g4 ♗e7 *267*
C11) 13.h4 *267*
C12) 13.♗e2 *268*
C2) 8.♘g5 ♗e7 *269*
C21) 9.♘ge4 *269*
C22) 9.h4 h6 10.♘ge4 b4 11.♘b1 ♗a6 *270*
C221) 12.♕g4 *270*
C222) 12.♘bd2 *271*

Chapter 23
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5

A) 6.g3 *274*
B) 6.♘h4 ♗c8 *275*
B1) 7.e4 *275*
B2) 7.e3 e5 8.♗xc4 exd4 9.exd4 ♗e7 10.0–0 0–0 *277*
B21) 11.h3 *277*
B22) 11.♘f3 *278*
B23) 11.♖e1 ♘a6 *279*
B231) 12.♗xa6 *279*
B232) 12.♗g5 *279*
B233) 12.♕b3 *281*

Chapter 24
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘h4 e6 7.♘xf5 exf5 8.e3 ♗b4 9.♗xc4 0–0

A) 10.0–0 ♘bd7 *284*
A1) 11.f3 *284*
A2) 11.♕b3 *285*
B) 10.♕c2 *286*

Chapter 25
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6

A) 7.♘e5 *290*
B) 7.a5 *291*
C) 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 *292*
C1) 8.♘h4 *292*
C2) 8.♘e5 *293*
C3) 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕b3 a5 10.♘a2 ♗e7 *295*
C31) 11.♕xb7 *297*
C32) 11.♘h4 *297*

Chapter 26
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♘h4 ♗g4

A) 10.♕b3 a5 11.f3 ♗h5 *300*
A1) 12.g3 *301*
A2) 12.g4 *303*
B) 10.f3 ♗h5 *305*
B1) 11.e4 *305*
B2) 11.g4 ♗g6 *306*
B21) 12.♘g2 *306*
B22) 12.e4 0–0 *308*
B221) 13.♘xg6 *309*
B222) 13.g5 ♘e8 14.♘xg6 hxg6 *310*
B2221) 15.♗e3 *310*
B2222) 15.f4 *311*

Chapter 27
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕e2 ♗g6

A) 10.♗d3 *314*
B) 10.♖d1 0–0 *315*

B1) 11.♗d2 *316*
B2) 11.♘e5 *317*

Chapter 28
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕e2 ♗g6 10.e4 0–0

A) 11.e5 ♘d5 *321*
A1) 12.♘xd5 *321*
A2) 12.♗d2 *322*
A3) 12.♘e4 *323*
B) 11.♗d3 ♗h5 *324*
B1) 12.h3 *325*
B2) 12.♗f4 *326*
B3) 12.e5 ♘d5 *328*
B31) 13.♗d2 *328*
B32) 13.♘e4 *330*
B33) 13.♘xd5 cxd5 14.♕e3! ♖e8!? *331*
B331) 15.♘e1 *332*
B332) 15.♗d2 *333*

Chapter 29
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕e2 ♗g6 10.e4 0–0 11.♗d3 ♗h5 12.e5 ♘d5 13.♘xd5 cxd5 14.♕e3 ♖e8 15.♘g5 ♗g6

A) 16.♗xg6 fxg6 *337*
A1) 17.♗d2 *337*
A2) 17.a5 *338*
A3) 17.♕h3 *340*
B) 16.f4 *341*
B1) 16...♗xd3 17.♕xd3 f5 *342*
B11) 18.♕b5 *342*
B12) 18.g4 *343*
B13) 18.♔h1 *345*
B14) 18.♗e3 *346*
B2) 16...♖c8!? *348*

Chapter 30
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7

A) 8.♗g5 e5 9.e3 ♗e7 *352*
A1) 10.♗h4 *353*
A2) 10.♗d3 *353*
B) 8.f3 e5 *354*

B1) 9.dxe5?! *354*
B2) 9.e4 *355*
C) 8.♕d2 *356*

Chapter 31
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♘fd7

A) 11.a5 f6 *362*
A1) 12.a6!? *362*
A2) 12.♕c1 *363*
B) 11.♕d4 *364*
C) 11.♕c1 *365*
D) 11.♘xe5 *366*

Chapter 32
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♘fd7 11.♗g2 f6

A) 12.♘xe5 *370*
B) 12.a5 *371*
C) 12.0–0 g5 *372*
C1) 13.♘xe5 gxf4! 14.♘xd7 ♕xd7 *373*
C11) 15.♕c1 *374*
C12) 15.a5N *375*
C2) 13.♗xe5 ♘xe5 *376*
C21) 14.♘xe5 *377*
C22) 14.♘e3 ♗e6 *378*
C221) 15.a5 *378*
C222) 15.♕c2 *378*
C223) 15.♕d4 ♕b6 16.♕e4 *379*
C2231) 16...♕b4 *379*
C2232) 16...a5N *380*

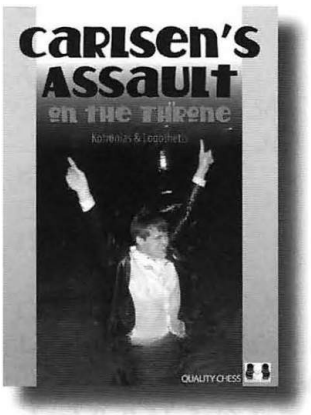
Chapter 33
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♘fd7 11.♗g2 g5

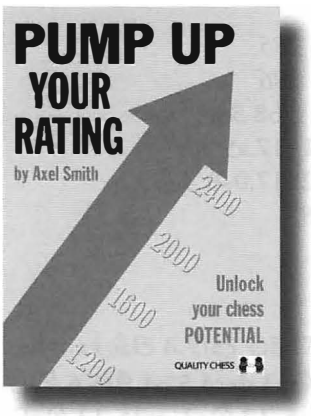
A) 12.♘xe5 gxf4 13.♘xd7 0–0–0 14.♕d4 ♕xd7 *382*
A1) 15.♕xh8 *384*
A2) 15.♕xf4 ♗d6 *384*
A21) 16.♕h6 *385*
A22) 16.♕d4 *386*
A23) 16.♕c1 ♔b8 *387*
A231) 17.a5 *387*
A232) 17.0–0 *388*
B) 12.♗xe5 ♘xe5 13.♕d4 f6 *389*
B1) 14.♘e3 *391*
B2) 14.0–0–0 *392*

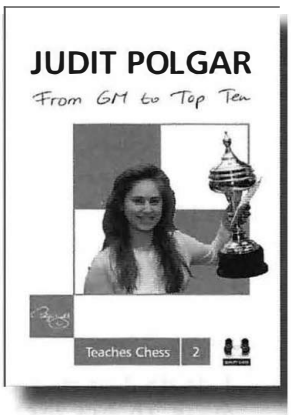
Chapter 34
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗f5 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♕c7 8.g3 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗f4 ♘fd7 11.♗g2 g5 12.♘e3 gxf4 13.♘xf5 0–0–0 14.♕c2 ♘c5 15.0–0 fxg3 16.hxg3 a5

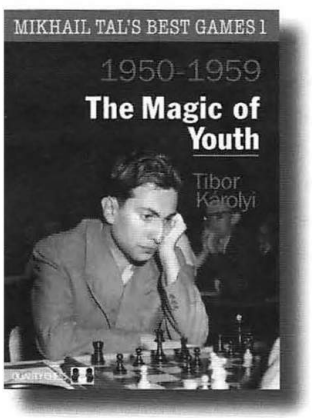
A) 17.♘e4 ♘xe4 *399*
A1) 18.♕xe4 *399*
A2) 18.♗xe4 *400*
B) 17.♖ad1 h5 18.♖xd8† ♕xd8 19.♖d1 ♕f6 *402*
B1) 20.e4 *402*
B2) 20.♘e4 *405*
B3) 20.♗h3 *407*
B4) 20.e3 ♔b8 21.♘e2 ♘e6 *408*
B41) 22.♘h4 *408*
B42) 22.♘ed4 *409*
B5) 20.♕d2 ♔b8 *411*
B51) 21.♕f4 *412*
B52) 21.♗h3 *413*

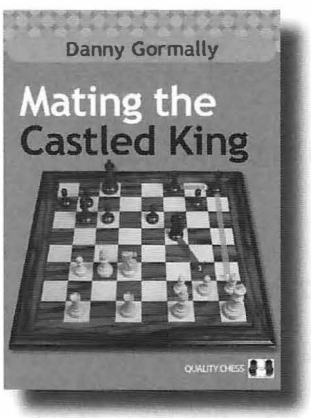
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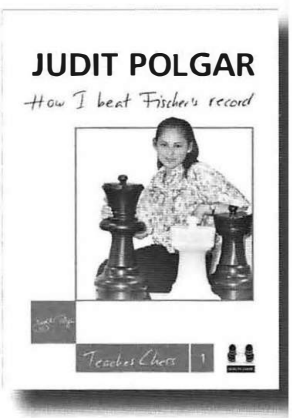


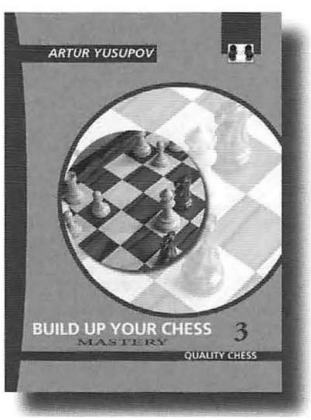


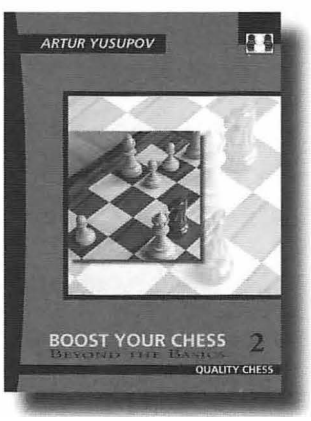


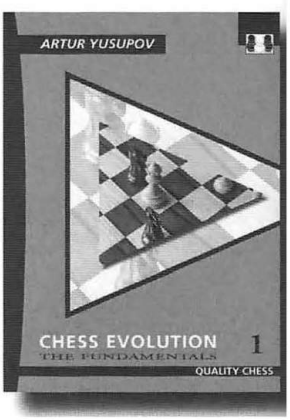




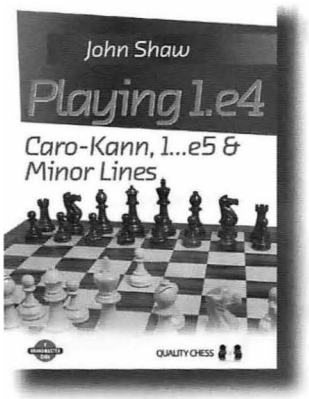


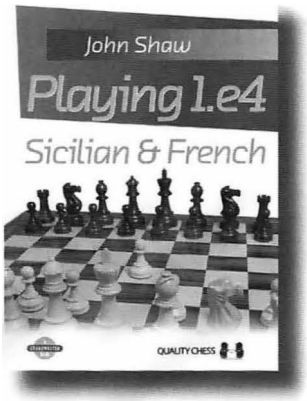


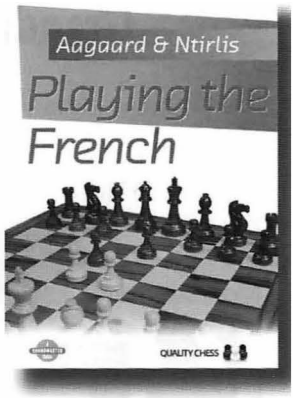




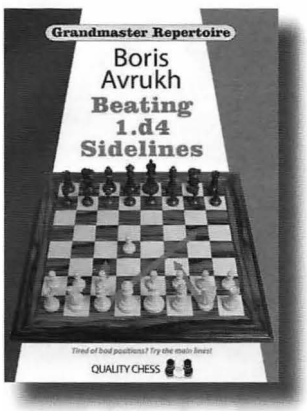
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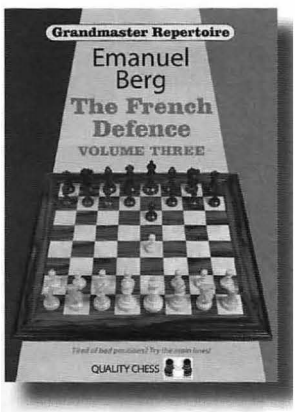


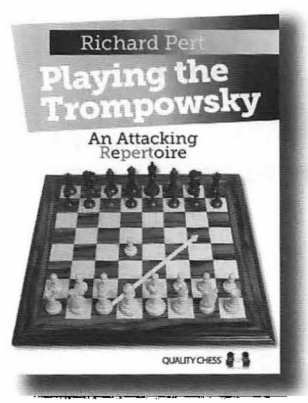


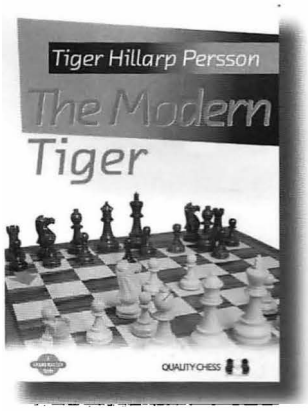


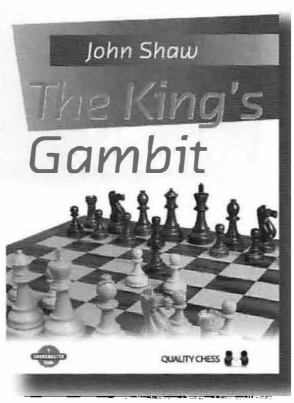












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