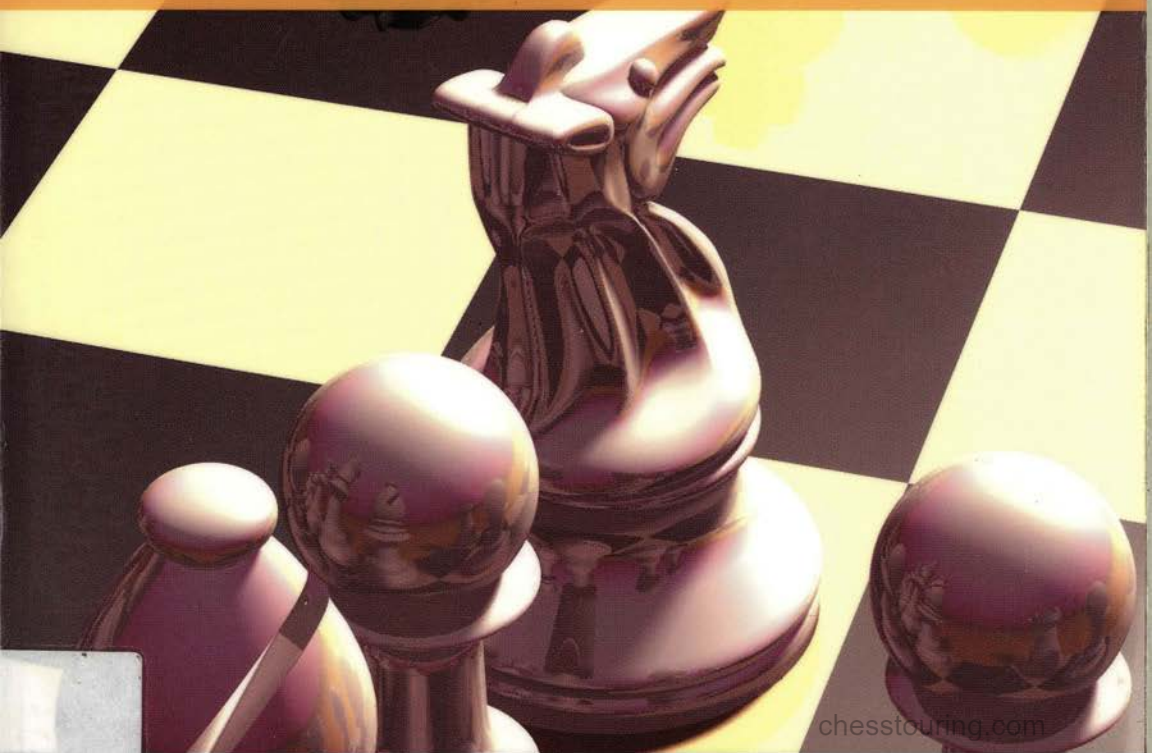


Richard Palliser

beating unusual chess openings

dealing with the English,
Réti, King's Indian Attack
and other annoying systems



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Richard Palliser is a young English International Master and 2006 Joint British Rapidplay Champion. He is quickly carving out a reputation as a skilled and prolific chess writer; previous works for Everyman Chess include *Starting Out: Sicilian Najdorf* and *Tango!*, both of which provoked much positive interest from critics and the chess public alike.

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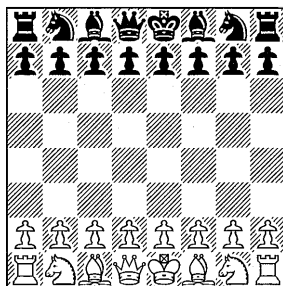
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Preface

Chess, like life, isn't a fair game. Not only can we blow a brilliancy with a one-move howler, but our opponents can be rather 'unsporting' in the opening. We might want White to allow us to wheel out our favourite Sicilian Dragon or main line King's Indian, but in reality he often won't. That doesn't, however, stop the majority of players from only preparing as Black the sharper and more theoretical parts of their repertoire. Quite simply, such an approach is illogical. Being prepared for the flank openings is more work than learning the latest twist in the Najdorf, but it is still work that needs to be done.

Most readers will have struggled at some point against one or both of 1 c4 and 1 ♘f3; two rather tricky moves to meet if one has never really studied them. I can't guarantee that my recommendations against them will suit everyone, but at the very least they should get the reader to think about these openings and to map out a repertoire against them. As we face the English somewhat less often than 1 e4 or 1 d4, the emphasis is on supplying Black with some fairly solid but still quite dynamic set-ups against it. For those who prefer something more lively, there's usually also a tricky secondary option designed to get the White player away from the sort of positions they tend to dwell successfully in.

This work is by no means solely devoted to the English and to that favourite transpositional device of the grandmaster, 1 ♘f3. We all know players who frequently wheel out something even more offbeat, and usually score pretty well with their choice of the Bird's (1 f4), 1 ♘c3 or whatever. Against us it will not be so easy for them to rack up another win since we will either respond solidly and avoid falling for their positional traps, or surprise them with something quite rare and complex. It would indeed be scandalous here not to consider openings like the Nimzowitsch-Larsen Attack (1 b3); such openings fully deserve to exist and

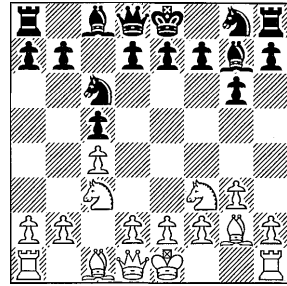
we must treat them with respect. Furthermore, they are no less 'interesting' than 1 e4 or 1 d4; just less explored and of a different character. After all, two of the best (in terms of both thorough coverage and independent analysis) openings books of the past decade have been devoted to these flank openings, namely Keilhack's *Knight on the Left: 1.Nc3*, and Jacobs and Tait's *Nimzo-Larsen Attack*.

I hope that this work will help readers to never again flounder helplessly when White doesn't begin 1 d4 or 1 e4, and that they will also gain an appreciation of the rich subtleties which lie beneath many of these flank openings. Finally, I am indebted to both John Emms and James Vigus for their kind help with this work, as well as to the ever-helpful staff of both the Cedars Library, Middlesbrough, and the Dewar Hogan Library, London.

Richard Palliser,
Harrogate,
December 2006

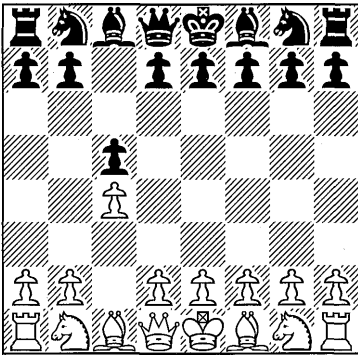
Chapter One

White Fianchettoes and Plays ♘f3



Introducing the Symmetrical English

1 c4 c5



The English can be a tricky creature to face. It is an extremely flexible choice and I suspect that many of its victims don't realize just how flexible it is. White can follow up by opting for either a simple and positional set-up or a simple and aggressive set-up, and he might even prefer something more complex and theoretical. In response

we will examine 1...c5, the Symmetrical Variation. Before any readers' eyes glaze over, it must be pointed out that this response, which was a great favourite with both Tal and Fischer, is actually somewhat more interesting than its name might imply!

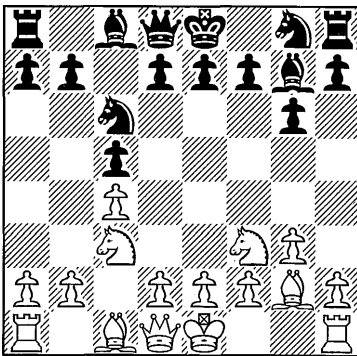
Move orders are especially important in the English, and the Symmetrical is no exception. Chapters One and Two deal with several white systems after a kingside fianchetto, and these retain a loyal following, especially at club level. They are traditionally reached via the move order 1 c4 c5 2 ♖c3 ♗c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♕g2 ♕g7, but readers should equally expect to see White prefer 1 c4 c5 2 g3 g6 3 ♕g2 ♕g7 4 ♖c3 ♗c6.

As we will examine further in Chapter Ten, 1...c5 is a very flexible response to 1 ♗f3 should Black be a Sicilian player. If White then follows up with 2 c4 we are back in this chapter after 2...♗c6 3 g3 c5 4 ♕g2 g6 5 ♖c3 ♕g7, but should he prefer either 3 ♖c3

or 3 d4 in that sequence, we find ourselves in Chapter Three or Chapter Four respectively.

The variations covered in Chapters Three and Four are characterized by an early $\text{d}f3$ from White. These lines are generally much more popular at international level than at club level, although all readers should still make sure that they know how to respond to both the 1 c4 c5 2 $\text{d}f3$ $\text{d}c6$ 3 $\text{d}c3$ of Chapter Three, and the 1 c4 c5 2 $\text{d}f3$ $\text{d}c6$ 3 d4 of Chapter Four.

In the so-called 'pure' Symmetrical lines (in which both sides fianchetto), we will concentrate on employing the so-called Botvinnik set-up: Black follows up his kingside fianchetto by clamping down in the centre, and especially on the d4-square, with ...e5. This set-up is fairly easy to play and can be employed against all of White's options in Chapters One and Two, although I've also given some tricky secondary options for those who prefer a more complex game. We will begin by examining 1 c4 c5 2 $\text{d}c3$ $\text{d}c6$ 3 g3 g6 4 $\text{g}g2$ $\text{g}g7$ 5 $\text{d}f3$ and then:



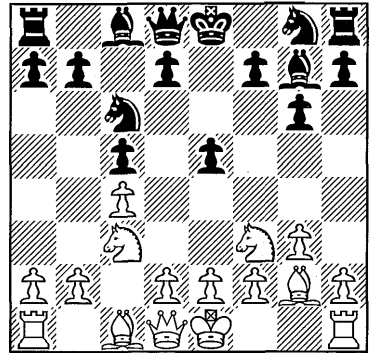
A: 5...e5

B: 5...d6!?

C: 5...a6!?

A)

1 c4 c5 2 $\text{d}c3$ $\text{d}c6$ 3 g3 g6 4 $\text{g}g2$ $\text{g}g7$
5 $\text{d}f3$ e5



Black sets up the Botvinnik formation and his initial plan is fairly simple, being to complete development. Having played ... $\text{d}ge7$, ...0-0, ...d6 and ... $\text{g}e6$ he will be able to seek counterplay, often with ...d5 leading to a Maróczy Bind position, although Black may also play on the queenside (with ...b5) or on the kingside (beginning with ...f5). Of course, White won't be idle while all this is going on and Black must take care not to cede unopposed control of d5, as well as not to allow White a strong queenside initiative based on the b4-break.

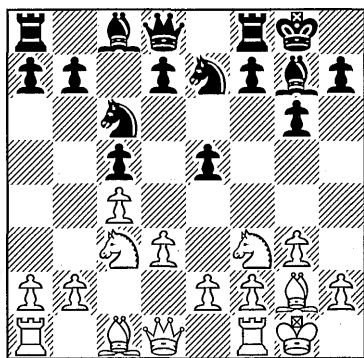
This variation with 5...e5 is often known as the Wedberg Variation, after the Swedish grandmaster who has employed it extensively. However, a whole host of other players connected to Scandinavia have played a key part

in its development, especially Pia Cramling, Nick De Firmian and Thomas Ernst. Their efforts have helped to show that Black can gain a perfectly acceptable and sound position after 5...e5, as well as that it is hard for White to kill the game off should he wish to.

We will begin by considering the key motifs of this variation, based around the main line after 5...e5 (Line A1), before returning to consider some tricky move order options of White's (Line A2).

A1)

1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♖g2 ♖g7
5 ♘f3 e5 6 0-0 ♗g7 7 d3 0-0



8 a3

Both sides have simply continued their development thus far, but now White wishes to expand on the queen-side. Black doesn't want to allow that, but he does want to force White to invest an extra tempo (with ♖b1) before halting the expansion with ...a5.

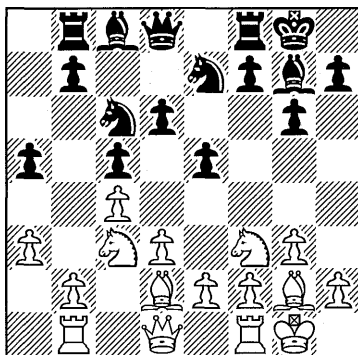
8...d6

The best move order. As 9 b4 isn't

yet a threat, there's no need for 8...a5; only after 9 ♖b1 should the a-pawn be advanced.

9 ♖b1 a5 10 ♘e1

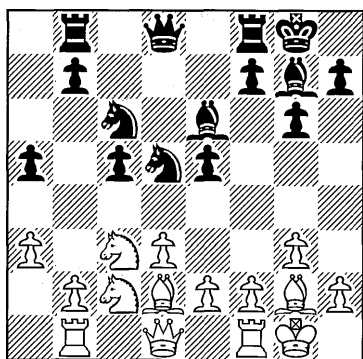
Re-routing the knight to c2, not just to support the b4-advance, but also with the aim of manoeuvring onward to e3 and d5. To appreciate why this is such a popular plan we should examine the alternative, 10 ♗d2. From d2, the bishop plays a part in facilitating the advance of White's b-pawn, but the problem with this move order is the clever semi-waiting move 10...♖b8!



Black's point is that White still cannot advance his b-pawn and so would like to play 11 ♘d5, but that can be met by an undermining 11...b5 or by 11...♘xd5 12 cxd5 ♗e7, with a good game for Black in both cases.

White has tried to continue after 10...♖b8 with 11 ♗e1, but practice has shown that the inclusion of the moves ♗d2 and ...♖b8 is fairly useful for Black who should play for ...d5: 11...♗e6 12 ♘c2 (once again 12 ♘d5 is well met by 12...b5 when 13 ♘xe7?! ♘xe7 14 cxb5 ♖xb5 15 b4 axb4 16 axb4 c4! saw

Black's superior central control and space give him slightly the more comfortable position in I.Csom-R.Hartoch, Skopje Olympiad 1972; White might prefer to maintain the tension with 13 b3, but 13...h6!? 14 ♖c2 f5 15 b4 axb4 16 axb4 bxc4 17 dxc4 e4 also failed to bring him any advantage in A.Gershon-P.Eljanov, Kharkov 2002) 12...d5 (consistent, although De Firmian's 12...♘d4!? 13 b4 axb4 14 axb4 b6 is an unexplored and reasonable alternative) 13 cxd5 (13 b3 is again a solid alternative, but also one which allows Black a choice of plans, including the equally solid response 13...b6!?, after which 14 e4 dxe4 15 dxe4 ♘d4 16 ♖d5 ♘ec6 17 ♗xd4 ♘d4 18 b4 was very equal and agreed drawn in B.Gulko-T.Shaked, US Championship, Denver 1998) 13...♘xd5.



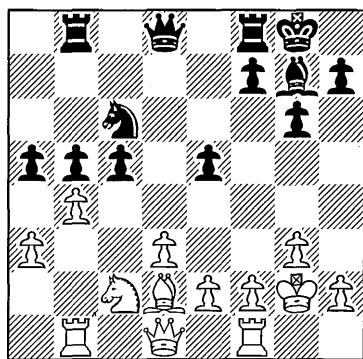
Taking stock, we can see that Black has achieved his desired Maróczy Bind formation and White must seek counterplay with an advance of his b-pawn, although if poorly timed this can play into Black's hands. Over the years White has tried a number of ap-

proaches here, but without ever really troubling the second player:

a) 14 ♘e4 b6 15 b4 axb4 16 axb4 ♘dxb4 17 ♘xb4 ♘xb4 18 ♙xb4 cxb4 19 ♚xb4 f5 20 ♘c3 e4! 21 ♘b5 ♚e7 22 ♚b1 ♚a8! saw the b4-advance only help Black's cause in P.Stempin-P.Cramling, European Team Championship, Haifa 1989.

b) 14 ♘e3 ♘xc3 15 ♙xe3 ♘d4 (Black often makes good use of the d4-square in this variation) 16 b4 axb4 17 axb4 gives Black a pleasant choice between 17...c4 and 17...cxb4 18 ♚xb4 ♚a5.

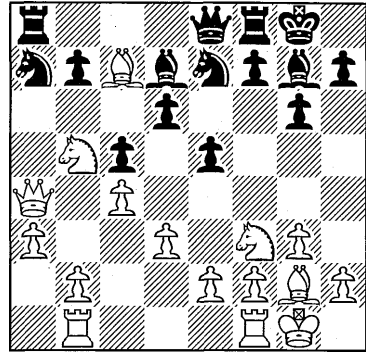
c) 14 ♘d5 ♙xd5 15 b4 (or 15 ♙xd5 ♚xd5 16 ♘e3?! ♚e6 17 ♚c1?! ♘d4! 18 ♚e1 ♘b3 19 ♚c2 a4! 20 ♚bd1 b5 21 ♙c1 f5 and Black's initiative swept everything before it in the game H.Teske-N. De Firmian, Hamburg 1993) 15...♙xg2 16 ♙xg2 b5! (rather than meekly agreeing to an exchange on b4, Black strives to seize the queenside initiative himself)



17 bxa5 ♘xa5 18 ♘e3 and now Black can consider the ambitious 18...f5!?, as well as 18...♚e8 19 ♚c1 ♙f8 20 ♙xa5! ♚xa5 21 ♘d5 ♚e6 22 e4 ♚a4! 23 f4 ♚d4

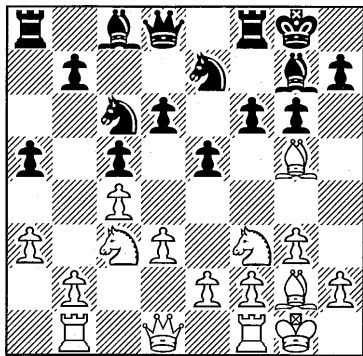
which was about equal in L.Evans-A.Karpov, San Antonio 1972.

Combining ♠d2 (without first going to g5) and ♗e1 doesn't appear too challenging for Black, which may help to explain why White has recently been exploring other avenues after 10 ♠d2 ♗b8: 11 ♖a4!? (Markowski and Mikhail Gurevich have both employed this a fair bit and theory is yet to decide on Black's most accurate response; White has also tried 11 ♖c1!?, but after 11...b6 12 ♗h6 f6! 13 ♗e1 ♗e6 14 ♗xg7 ♗xg7 15 ♗c2 d5 16 cxd5 ♗xd5 17 ♗e3 ♗de7! Black's bind ensures him of a reasonable future) 11...♠d7 (an alternative which may catch on is 11...♗e6!?, based on the point that 12 ♗g5 ♠d7 13 ♗ge4 ♗d4 14 ♖d1 ♠c6 should be fine for Black, and certainly 15 b4 axb4 16 axb4 cxb4 17 ♗xb4 f5 18 ♗g5 h6 19 ♗f3 ♗e6!? 20 ♖b1 g5! supplied counterplay in M.Gurevich-A.Maksimenko, Yugoslav Team Championship 1996; Markowski has thus preferred 12 ♗b5, against which I feel Black should follow Gershon's lead with 12...d5!? 13 ♗g5 ♠d7 14 ♖c2 d4) 12 ♗b5 (the alternative is 12 ♗fc1, but that allows Black to carry out his plan: 12...♗a7! 13 ♖d1 b5 14 cxb5 ♗xb5 15 ♗xb5 ♠xb5 16 b3 ♠c6 and Black didn't have any problems in M.Drasko-T.Ernst, Tallinn 1989) 12...♗a7!? (Kasimdzhanov's 12...♗f5 13 ♖d1 ♗cd4 is a solid and very sensible alternative) 13 ♠xa5 ♖e8 14 ♠c7!? (critical; Black regains his pawn with at least equality after 14 ♖c2 ♗xb5 15 cxb5 b6) 14...♗a8



15 ♖c2 (interestingly Markowski has tried 15 ♖xa7 ♗xa7 16 ♗xa7 ♖a8 17 ♗b5 ♠xb5 18 cxb5, although whether this was by accident or design I'm not sure; it will be worth seeing if he repeats this, especially as it doesn't appear that the queen sacrifice should offer White the advantage, such as after 18...d5!? 19 ♠xe5 ♠xc5 20 ♗xe5 ♖a5 21 ♗d7 ♗d8 22 ♗xc5 ♖xb5 23 b4 b6 24 ♗b3 ♖a4 and Black's queen remains active enough) 15...♠xb5! 16 ♠xd6! (White is committed since 16 cxb5? ♗xb5 17 ♠b6 ♗a6 18 a4 ♗xb6 19 axb5 ♖xb5 leaves him a clear pawn in arrears) 16...♠c6 17 ♠xc5 ♗ac8 18 ♠b4 ♖d7 19 ♠c3 ♖e6 20 ♗a1 ♗d6 wasn't too clear in E.Mednis-H.Schussler, Palma de Mallorca 1989. White has three pawns for the piece, but currently they aren't too dangerous and, with the ...e4-advance on the cards, Black is slightly for preference.

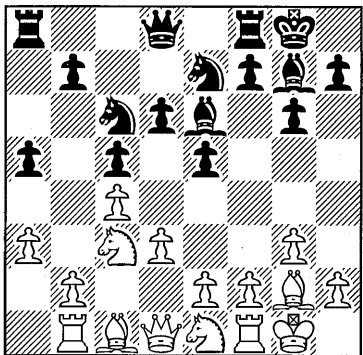
Before we return to the text move 10 ♗e1, we should note that White can also begin with the move order 10 ♠g5 f6!



11 ♙d2 (or 11 ♙e3 ♙e6 and again 12 ♜e1 is standard) 11... ♙e6 , but then he doesn't have anything better than 12 ♜e1 and we've transposed to Line A12 below.

Note Black's accurate tenth move in this sequence: ♙g5 should almost always be met with ... f6 , and most certainly not with ... h6 . The point being that White wants to exchange his bishop on e7, after which he has a good chance of bringing a knight to d5, while his queenside play is much faster than anything Black can muster on the kingside.

10... ♙e6



We've now come to another divide as White must decide whether or not to prevent 11... d5 :

A11: 11 ♜c2

A12: 11 ♙g5

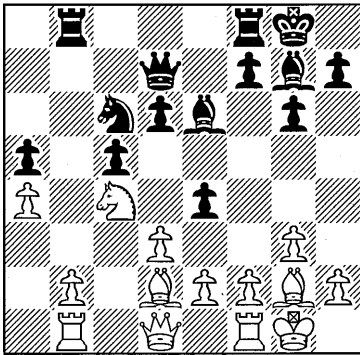
Instead 11 ♙d2 can just be met by 11... d5 , but White can also try to prevent that advance with 11 ♜d5 . Once again 11... ♞b8 ! is an effective response:

a) 12 ♙d2 is well met by 12... b5 as we saw via the move order 10 ♙d2 ♞b8 11 ♜e1 ♙e6 12 ♜d5 .

b) 12 ♙g5 f6 13 ♙d2 b5 14 ♜c2 ?! (this seemingly innocuous move has actually caused Black some problems in practice; instead 14 ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 15 b4 ? axb4 16 axb4 bxc4 17 bxc5 dxc5 18 ♙e3 ♜d5 ! 19 ♙xc5 ♜c3 shortly cost White a pawn in E.Fernandez Aguado-V.Moskalenko, Barcelona 2005, and 14 f4 f5 15 ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 16 fxe5 dxe5 17 cxb5 ?! ♞xb5 18 ♙c3 ♜d5 was another example of a misguided white exchanging strategy in C.Weiss-P.Eljanov, European Team Championship, Plovdiv 2003) 14... f5 ?! (surprisingly rare; 14... b4 15 axb4 axb4 16 ♞a1 f5 is the alternative) 15 b4 ?! (perhaps White must settle for the solid 15 b3) 15... axb4 16 axb4 bxc4 17 dxc4 e4 ! 18 b5 ♜e5 gave Black good play, with the g2-bishop rather blunted in A.Pekarek-K.Bischoff, Groningen 1980.

c) 12 ♜c2 b5 13 ♜ce3 (or 13 ♙d2 a4 ! 14 ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 15 ♜e3 f5 16 f4 ♞d7 with a good game for Black in L.Pant-sulaia-S.Karjakin, European Championship, Warsaw 2005, and no

better for White is 14 ♖ce3 due to Wedberg's 14...bxc4 15 ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 16 dxc4 ♖b3!) 13...♗d7 14 cxb5?! (perhaps White should prefer 14...f5!? or 14...b4 15 axb4 axb4 16 b3 ♖h3) 14...♗xb5 15 a4 ♖bb8 16 ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 17 ♖c4 (it may appear that White has secured a positional advantage on the queenside, but to assume that would also be to underestimate Black's central control) 17...♖c6 18 ♖d2 e4!



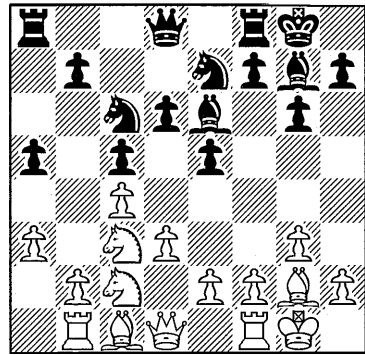
revealed that White's plan was rather misguided in L.Barczay-W.Uhlmann, Sarajevo 1969. After the further 19 ♖xa5 ♖xa5 20 ♖xa5, Black would have retained a sizeable advantage with 20...♖b3! 21 ♗d2 ♖a2 (Uhlmann).

A11)

1 c4 c5 2 ♖c3 ♖c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♖g2 ♖g7 5 ♖f3 e5 6 0-0 ♖ge7 7 d3 0-0 8 a3 d6 9 ♖b1 a5 10 ♖e1 ♖e6 11 ♖c2

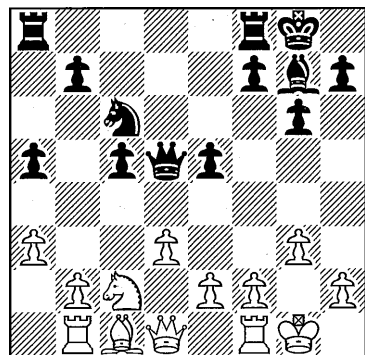
Allowing Black to create a Maróczy Bind, but White hopes to be able to gain counterplay with his knights. He may combine centralizing them with playing for the b4-break, which is an

important plan, just as it is in the closely-related line 10 ♖d2 ♖b8 11 ♖e1 ♖c6 12 ♖c2 d5.



11...d5 12 cxd5 ♖xd5 13 ♖e3

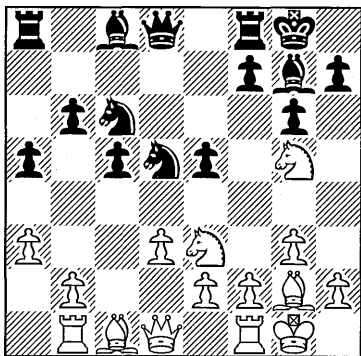
Challenging Black's control of d5. White doesn't have to do so immediately, but he most certainly should avoid panicking with 13 ♖xd5?! ♖xd5 14 ♖xd5 ♗xd5, when the exchanges have merely served to strengthen Black's bind and to highlight his spatial advantage.



Mistakes in chess often go together in pairs and here White has been known to continue further down a misguided path: 15 b4?! cxb4 16 axb4

a4! 17 b5 ♖d4 18 ♖xd4 exd4 19 ♙a3 ♜fc8 and Black has accumulated a number of useful positional advantages and should convert from here. Returning to the position after 14...♗xd5, White may do slightly better to settle for 15 ♖e3, although Black remains for choice: for example, 15...♗e6 16 a4?! (or 16 ♙d2 ♜fd8 17 f4?! exf4! 18 ♜xf4 ♙d4 19 ♜e4 ♗a2 and the white pieces were far from optimally placed in S.Bernstein-D.Byrne, New York 1961) 16...♜ad8! 17 f3 f5 (renewing the threat of ...e4 and the white queen doesn't really have a good square to flee to) 18 ♖c4 e4 19 ♙g5 ♜de8 20 ♖g2 ♖d4 and White was under severe pressure in A.Needleman-D.Flores, Las Condes 2005.

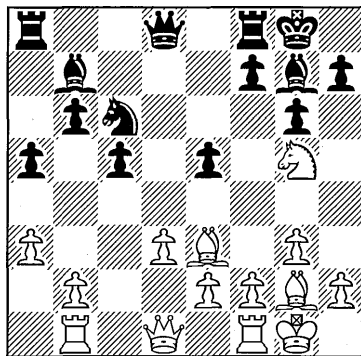
A much better alternative is 13 ♖e4 b6 14 ♖g5 ♙c8 15 ♖e3 which should be compared to the main line. Black's light-squared bishop is, if anything, slightly better placed on the more flexible c8-square than on d7, and again he has a choice:



a) 15...♖de7 keeps pieces on in the theoretically approved manner, al-

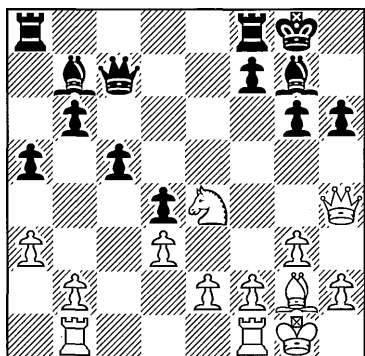
though 16 b4! (White must play actively: 16 ♙d2 h6 17 ♖e4 f5 18 ♗b3+ ♖h7 19 ♖c3 ♜b8 20 ♜fc1 f4 21 ♖f1? f3! was a good example of the dangers of playing too passively in L.Schnitzspan-K.Landa, Deizisau 2001) 16...axb4 17 axb4 cxb4 18 ♙d2 sees White making reasonable use of his activity. Nevertheless, Black should be fine here, unless he falls for 18...♗d6? 19 ♙xb4!, and 18...♜b8 19 ♙xb4 ♖xb4 20 ♜xb4 h6 21 ♖f3 ♙e6 22 ♗b1 ♖c6 23 ♜b5 ♖a7 24 ♜b4 ♖c6 saw White unable to increase the pressure against b6 (and Black actually chose to play on with 25 ♜b5 ♖a7 26 ♜b4 b5!?) in P.Benko-L.Schmid, Monaco 1969.

b) 15...♖xe3!? 16 ♙xe3 ♙b7



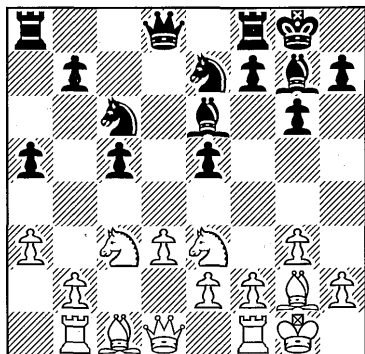
is a tempting alternative, especially when, as here, Black has been able to contest the h1-a8 diagonal. Traditionally the exchange of a pair of pieces was considered to favour White, but he has been unable to prove any advantage. Indeed Ribli even believes that White should try the radical 17 b4!? axb4 18 axb4 cxb4 19 ♙xc6 ♙xc6 20 ♜xb4 just to equalize, although clearly

quite a lot of play remains in this unbalanced position. Otherwise White can easily drift into trouble as she managed to with 17 ♖a4 ♜c7 18 ♖h4 h6 19 ♘e4 ♘d4! 20 ♙xd4 exd4



21 ♖f4?! ♜xf4 22 gxf4 ♜fe8 23 ♜fc1 ♜ad8 24 b4 cxb4 25 axb4 a4!, and Black's passed a-pawn was a useful asset in C.Foisor-P.Cramling, Jakarta 1993.

13...♘de7!



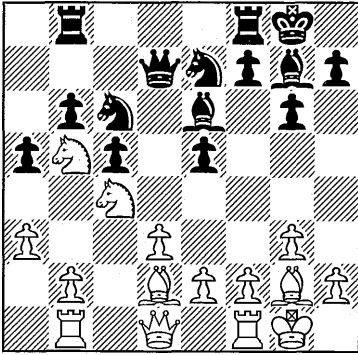
Overprotecting c6 so that Black can shore up c5 with ...b6. White now gains some temporary activity, but Black can be confident of shortly repelling or exchanging off any actively-placed white

knights. A good alternative, which some readers may prefer due to its forcing nature, is the pawn sacrifice 13...♘xe3!? 14 ♙xc3 ♘d4 15 ♙xb7!? (the only way to challenge Black; 15 b4 cxb4 16 axb4 ♜c7 is already quite comfortable for the second player, and after the 17 ♙xd4?! exd4 18 ♘e4 of S.Meenakshi-C.Philippe, La Fere 2005, Watson recommends 18...axb4! 19 ♜xb4 ♜a7 when he feels that the passed b-pawn should become a useful asset rather than a target) 15...♜b8 16 ♙g2 c4! when Black enjoys sufficient activity and pressure for the pawn. H.Olafsson-P.Cramling, Reykjavik 1995, continued 17 dxc4 ♙xc4 18 ♜e1 ♙b3 19 ♖d2 and now 19...♘c2!? was a worthy alternative to the game's 19...♖d6; just as in the Benko, Black's positional compensation endures in the ending.

14 ♘e4

Trying to play as actively as possible, but again there are alternatives:

a) 14 ♙d2 ♜b8 reaches a position which can also come about if Black meets 10 ♙d2 ♜b8 11 ♘e1 ♙e6 12 ♘c2 d5 13 cxd5 ♘xd5 14 ♘e3 with 14...♘de7 (we only considered 14...♘xe3 in the note to move 10). Play might then continue 15 ♘b5!? (or 15 ♘a4 b6 16 b4 axb4 17 axb4 ♘xb4 18 ♙xb4 cxb4 19 ♜xb4 ♙h6 with a roughly equal position when C.Partos-N.Ioseliani, Biel 1990, was agreed drawn) 15...♖d7 16 ♘c4 b6 when the white knights are well placed, but it is not especially easy for White to further improve his position and Black should be fine.



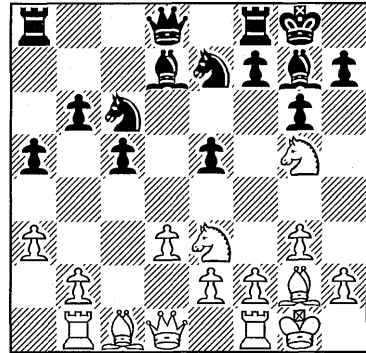
One example continued 17 b4 (or 17 fxc1 f8d8 18 g5 f6 19 e3 f5! 20 a4 xe3 21 fxe3 f5 and the position remained quite complex in O.Dumitran-A.Negulescu, Bucharest 1995) 17... f8d8 18 c1 axb4 19 axb4 d4 (19...e4!? also deserves attention because 20 $\text{xe4}??$ loses material to the fiendish 20... xc4! 21 xc4 e5) 20 xd4 cxd4 21 a3 dc8 22 fc1 b5 23 a5 and now in B.Larsen-R.Felgaer, Pinamar 2002, Black would have been at least holding his own against the Danish legend had he prefaced ... d5 with 23... e5 and an exchange of light-squared bishops.

b) 14 c4 b8 15 g5 f6 16 e3 b6 17 f4!? is a pawn break White may well play if he feels that he needs to be doing something. It is, however, at best double-edged and here 17... d5! 18 d2 f5! 19 h1?! xc3 20 xc3 xc4! 21 dxc4 e4 was an instructive exchange to blunt the g2-bishop and ensure Black of the advantage in A.Kolev-J.Gdanski, Budapest 1993.

c) Finally, 14 $\text{a4}?$ is another move which Black should be happy to see. After 14... d4! the white queen must

scuttle back whence she came since both 15 b3?? b5 16 xb5 d7 and 15 $\text{c4}??$ b5 16 xb5 xe2+! 17 h1 xd3 cost serious material.

14...b6 15 g5 d7



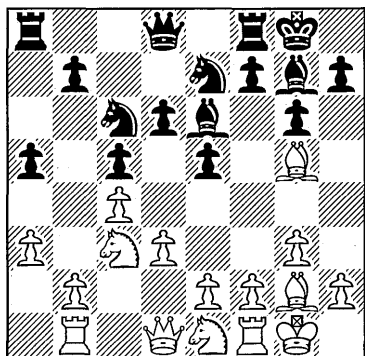
White has 'succeeded' in forcing Black's light-squared bishop to move again, but his knight will shortly have to leave g5 and Black should be able to patiently unravel. A couple of examples should help to highlight the main plans:

a) 16 d5 $\text{a7!}?$ (there's also nothing wrong with the simpler 16...h6 17 xe7+ xe7 18 e4 ac8) 17 xe7+ xe7 18 f3 d8 19 b3?! a4! 20 c2 (20 $\text{xb6}??$ b8 traps the queen) 20... e6 21 g5 f6 22 e3 c8 23 bc1 f5 and White was rather passive, while Black was well co-ordinated and all set to further advance in M.Schieferstein-V.Epishin, Bad Zwosten 1997.

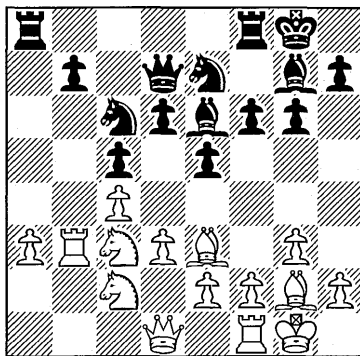
b) 16 c4 h6 17 e4 e6 18 d2 (probably White's best set-up) 18... b8 19 a4 d5 20 ed6 h7 21 h1 f5 (Black can play around the d6-knight) 22 f4 exf4 23 gxf4 db4 led to a tough and balanced struggle in H.Danielsen-P.H.Nielsen, Copenhagen 1996.

A12)

1 c4 c5 2 ♟c3 ♞c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♟g2 ♟g7
5 ♟f3 e5 6 0-0 ♞ge7 7 d3 0-0 8 a3 d6 9
♞b1 a5 10 ♞e1 ♟e6 11 ♟g5



for Black, as at the least was 14 ♟xh3!? ♞xh3 15 ♞e4 ♞d7 16 f4 f5! 17 ♞g5?! h6 18 ♞h3 b6 in L.Oll-P.Cramling, Dos Hermanas 1992) 14 b4 axb3 15 ♞xb3.



With this White usually hopes to prevent an early ...d5. It was thought that he could do so by retreating (after 11...f6) to either e3 or d2, but a recent discovery has cast doubt on that assertion in the case of the latter.

11...f6!

Preventing the desired exchange on e7, whereas 11...h6?! 12 ♟xe7 ♞xe7 13 ♞c2 with a pleasant edge is, of course, what White is after.

12 ♟d2

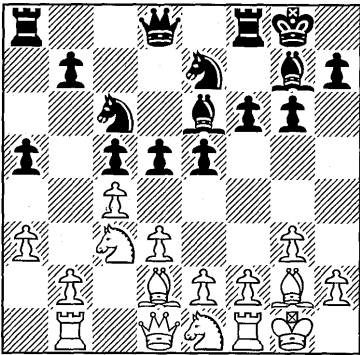
A major alternative is Andersson's 12 ♟e3 when the potential pressure against c5 prevents 12...d5. This line was recently endorsed for White in Tony Kosten's *The Dynamic English* (albeit via a 5 a3 move order – more on this in Line A1 of Chapter Two) and so Black players should familiarize themselves with what follows: 12...♞d7 13 ♞c2 a4! (a principled response, although 13...♟h3!? is a good alternative: 14 b4 ♟xg2 15 ♟xg2 axb4 16 axb4 b6 17 ♟d2 f5 is fine

This position has been assessed by both Kosten and Watson (in his *Symmetrical English: 1...c5*) as giving White an edge, based on the game U.Andersson-Y.Seirawan, Linares 1983. That's worth following for a while, if only to see how Black shouldn't be handling the position: 15...♞fb8 16 ♞b1 ♞a6 17 ♞b6 ♞c7 18 ♞b2 b6 19 ♟d2 ♞d8 20 a4 f5 21 ♞e3 ♞b4? 22 ♞xb4! cxb4 23 ♞xb4 and White had far too much positional compensation for the exchange.

For some time Black players were put off this line, even though Seirawan's position wasn't actually that bad until he severely underestimated the exchange sacrifice, and how poorly that left the scope of his pieces relative to White's. Recently Black has realized that White isn't doing so well at all after 15 ♞xb3. One idea is 15...♞a7!?, but probably the most accurate continuation is 15...♞ab8!, as leading English expert John Watson has recently en-

dorsed on ChessPublishing. P.Maletin-S.Safin, Nishnij Tagil 2005, continued 16 ♖b1 (16 ♖d2 ♘d4 17 ♖b6 d5 18 cxd5 ♘xd5 19 ♘xd5 ♙xd5 20 ♙xd5+ ♖xd5 21 ♖fb1 f5 also didn't particularly impress from White's point of view in M.Larochelle-T.Roussel Roozmon, Montreal 2004) 16...h6 (playing à la Roussel Roozman with 16...♘d4, as Watson has pointed out, is probably even better) 17 ♖b6 f5 18 ♘d5 and the Russian grandmaster playing White, realizing that he had no advantage, offered a draw. Play might have seen 18...♙xd5! 19 cxd5 ♘d4 20 ♙xd4 exd4 (Watson) with ideas of both ...♘c8 and ...f4.

12...d5!



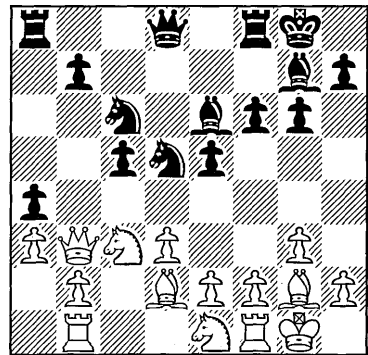
Black's ideal advance, although, as we've already mentioned, theory for a long time was wrongly dismissive of it.

13 cxd5 ♘xd5 14 ♖b3

Both Watson and Hansen have assessed this position as clearly favouring White, and it was left to another author of the Symmetrical English, David Cummings, to point out that things were actually far from clear. 14

♖b3 is definitely critical, but clued-up White players may try something else, realizing that the complications aren't actually favourable for them. Once again, though, 14 ♘xd5?! ♙xd5 15 ♙xd5+ ♖xd5 only serves to play into Black's hands, with 16 b4?! well met by 16...cxb4 17 axb4 a4. A superior alternative is 14 ♘c2, although Black can still gain a reasonable position with either Kosten's 14...f5 15 ♘e3 ♘de7, or the 14...a4!? 15 ♘e3 ♘b6 16 ♘e4 ♙b3 17 ♖e1 ♖e7 18 ♖c1 ♘d7 of A.Wohl-L.Ortega, Arco 2001.

14...a4!



A promising pawn sacrifice. Black should avoid 14...♘d4?! 15 ♙xd5! ♘xb3 16 ♙xe6+ ♙h8 17 ♙xb3 when the three pieces have scored well in practice against Black's extra queen, but he can also consider Cummings's idea of 14...♖b6!?. This remains untested, but that is much more a testament to the strength of 14...a4, than to any problem with 14...♖b6. Black will follow up a queen exchange on b6 with either ...a4 or ...c4, and so White might try 15 ♖c2, but then 15...♘d4 16 ♖d1 ♘c7! leaves

White in trouble on b3 (or a3 after 17 b3 ♖cb5) and is even stronger than Cummings's original idea of 15...♗de7 16 ♖a4 ♖b5.

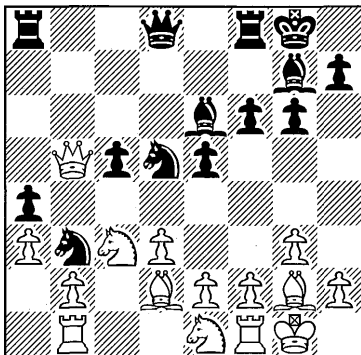
15 ♖xb7?!

Rather a case of entering the lion's den and I would imagine that many Whites would shy away from such a move. The alternatives are:

a) 15 ♖xa4!? ♗d4 16 ♖d1 ♗xe2+ 17 ♖xe2 ♖xa4 sees Black regain his pawn, but White develops counterplay with 18 f4!. Then, rather than the 18...b6 of C.McNab-L.Ravi, London 2001, Black should prefer 18...♙f5!, keeping pieces on and preparing to target d3. Play might continue 19 fxe5 fxe5 20 ♖c1 ♖d6 21 ♗f3 e4!? 22 dxe4 ♖xe4 when Black is very active and probably doing quite well after 23 ♖b5 ♗e3 24 ♙xe3 ♖xe3.

b) 15 ♖c4 ♗f4 16 ♖xc5 is another greedy pawn grab, essayed in K.Schlinkert-R.Wenzel, German League 1988. A simple and effective response is 16...♗xg2 17 ♗xg2 f5 with good compensation due to White's vulnerable kingside light squares.

15...♗a5 16 ♖b5 ♗b3



White's queen remains in some danger and Black's active pieces supply him with excellent compensation. A brief analysis quickly reveals the difficulties White faces here:

a) 17 ♖c6 ♗d4 18 ♖xc5? (he had to try 18 ♖xe6+ ♗xe6 19 ♙xd5 ♖d7 20 ♙xa8 ♖xa8, as pointed out by Kosten, when Black is only clearly better) 18...♖a5! forced resignation in D.Isonzo-M.Manik, Leipzig 2002.

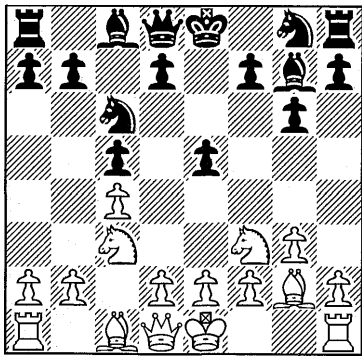
b) 17 ♙e3 ♗xe3 18 fxe3 ♖b8 19 ♖xa4 ♗d2 was a reasonable practical try, but didn't give White enough for the exchange since Black still had good central control in C.Matamoros Franco-J.Bellon Lopez, Havana 2001.

c) 17 ♗f3!? is untried, but even this doesn't appear to fully save White. Black can respond with Kosten's suggestion of 17...♖d6! (threatening to take on c3 and then trap the queen with ...♖fb8) 18 ♗e4 ♖c7, maintaining excellent compensation and threatening to cut off the queen's retreat with 19...♗e7. Play might continue 19 ♖c4 ♗f4 20 ♖c2 ♗xe2+ 21 ♙h1 ♖fc8 22 ♖fe1 ♗ed4 23 ♗xd4 and now both 23...cxd4 and 23...♗xd4 are promising.

Therefore 14 ♖b3 might well just be too risky, and so the bishop's retreat to d2 may fall out of favour.

A2)

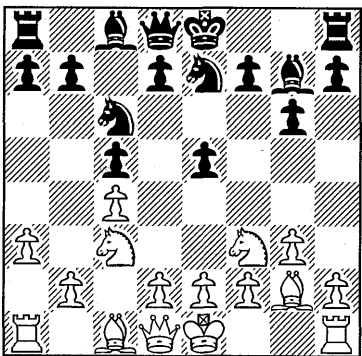
Having considered the main line of the Wedberg or Swedish Variation, we will now return to the position after **1 c4 c5 2 ♗c3 ♗c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 ♗f3 e5** and explore both White's early deviations and alternative move orders after:



- A21: 6 a3
 A22: 6 d3
 A23: 6 0-0

A21)

- 1 c4 c5 2 ♖c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♔g2 ♕g7
 5 ♗f3 e5 6 a3 ♗ge7



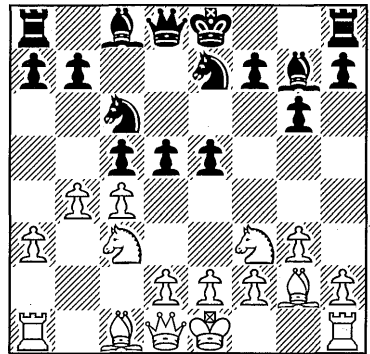
Calmly developing, rather than halt 7 b4 with the common 6...a5. Indeed, we will always try to avoid playing ...a5 until White has invested a tempo in ♖b1. Otherwise, White might be able to do something better with his extra move than ♖b1.

7 b4!?

Critical and otherwise play tends to

transpose into one of the main lines, such as with 7 ♖b1 a5 8 0-0 0-0 9 d3 d6 10 ♕g5 f6 11 ♔e3 ♔e6 12 ♗e1 and we're back in Line A12.

7...d5!



Classically countering White's wing play in the centre, and this is a recent idea of the Czech GM, Tomas Oral. Black can also consider 7...cxb4!? 8 axb4 ♗xb4 9 ♔a3 ♗bc6 which appears a little greedy, but as Hansen points out, may well also be playable. Certainly compared to the line 5 a3 e5?! 6 b4! cxb4 7 axb4 ♗xb4 8 ♔a3 ♗c6 when 9 ♗b5 is pretty strong, the inclusion of ♗f3 and ...♗ge7 helps Black. He must still take care not to allow White to dominate the centre and dark squares, such as with ♗g5-e4 and ♗d5 or ♗b5, but Black has reasonable chances to unravel. Practice has seen after 9...♗bc6:

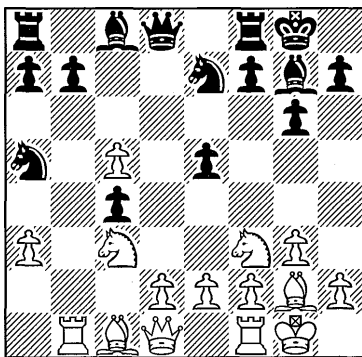
a) 10 ♗e4 0-0 11 ♗d6 e4!? 12 ♗xe4 d5 13 cxd5 ♖xd5 14 ♗c3 ♖h5 15 ♖b1 ♗d8! saw Black return the pawn to smoothly develop in J.Masculod-Taruffi, Graz 1978, and also possible was Hansen's 11...f5.

b) 10 ♖g5 0-0 11 ♖ge4 was C.Troyke-V.Chekhov, Dresden 1996, when Black should have advanced in the centre with 11...f5 12 ♖d6 e4! (Hansen), followed by either ...♗e5 or ...♗e5 and ...♗f6.

c) 10 ♖b5! 0-0 11 ♗d6 must be critical. At first it appears that Black might well have to give up an exchange for some but not quite enough compensation with 11...♖f5, but in A.Kirschner-A.Wallner, Austrian League 2006, he found something more creative: 11...a6!? 12 ♗c7 axb5! 13 ♗xd8 ♖xa1 14 ♖xa1 e4 15 ♖c1 exf3 16 ♗xf3 ♖xd8 17 cxb5 ♖d4 and, with Black having three minor pieces for the queen, the position was far from clear.

8 cxd5

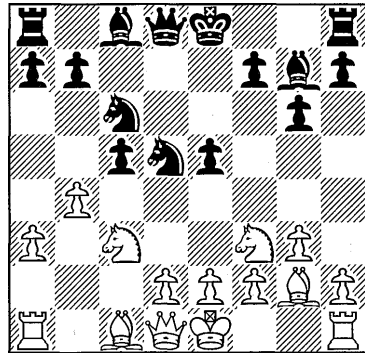
The alternative is 8 bxc5, but after 8...0-0 9 0-0 (9 cxd5 ♖xd5 10 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 11 ♗b2 gives Black good play after either 11...♖xc5 or even 11...e4!?) 9...dxc4 10 ♖b1 ♖a5!



11 d3 Black had no problems and was rewarded with an early and easy draw against a noted theoretician in I.Stohl-T.Oral, Czech League 2000. Play might

have continued 11...cxd3 12 exd3 ♗f5 13 ♖e4 ♖c7, intending ...♗fd8 and ...♖d5, or ...♖ac6-d4 with rough equality.

8...♖xd5



9 ♖xd5

Beliavsky has suggested that White might aim for a small edge with 9 e4!? ♖xc3 10 dxc3 ♖xd1+ 11 ♖xd1. That might well occur should Black respond too routinely, and so he should counter actively with 11...cxb4! 12 axb4 b5 13 ♖c2 0-0, followed by ...a5 with good counterplay on the queenside.

9...♖xd5 10 ♗b2 0-0

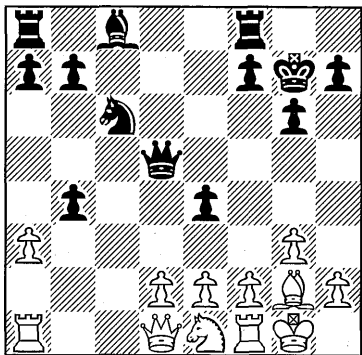
Keeping things simple, rather than allow White some play for his pawn after 10...cxb4 11 axb4 ♖xb4 12 ♖a4+ ♖c6 13 0-0 ♖d7 14 ♖a3.

11 0-0

Black appears to have an easy game in any case, as he also showed with 11 d3 cxb4 12 axb4 ♗d8! 13 0-0 ♖b5 in B.Belotti-J.Weber, Leon 2001. White was then the side with the onus to find some activity and counterplay, and with 14 ♖g5!? h6 15 ♖e4 ♖xb4 16 ♖a4 ♗d7 17 ♖xb5 ♗xb5 18 ♖c5 ♗c6 19

♖xb7 ♜db8 20 ♜c5 he managed to steer play into a slightly worse ending which he held.

11...e4! 12 ♙xg7 ♚xg7 13 ♜e1 cxb4



14 d3!?

Continuing to offer a pawn. White later preferred 14 axb4 ♜xb4 15 ♜a4 in M.Preiss-W.Cugini, Bratto 2002, but again Black drew without too much trouble after 15...♚b5! 16 ♙xe4 ♙d7 17 ♚a1+ ♙g8 18 ♜xa7 ♜xa7 19 ♚xa7 ♚xe2.

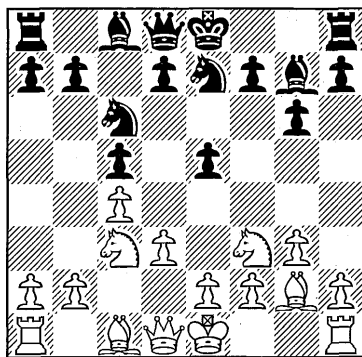
14...♙f5 15 ♜c2

We've been following A.Beliavsky-T.Oral, European Team Championship, Leon 2001, which was another success for Oral's idea. Had he wanted a double-edged struggle Oral might have captured on a3, but instead the game continued 15...♚e6 16 ♜xb4 ♜fd8 17 ♜xc6 bxc6 when White should have forced simplification and full equality with 18 ♚c1.

A22)

1 c4 c5 2 ♜c3 ♜c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 ♜f3 e5 6 d3 ♜ge7

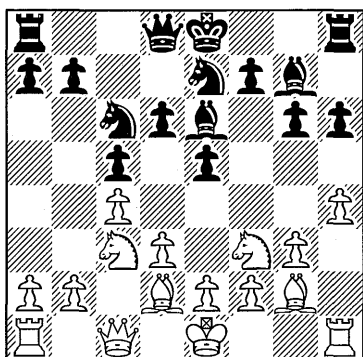
Obviously White can now transpose to the main line of A1 with 7 0-0.



Meanwhile, should he be aiming to reach Line A12, he might prefer the move order 7 a3 (or 7 ♙g5 f6 8 ♙d2 0-0 9 0-0 d6 and play will usually lead to the same thing after 10 a3 a5 11 ♜b1 ♙e6 12 ♜e1) 7...0-0 8 ♜b1 a5 9 ♙g5 f6 10 ♙d2 d6 (but not 10...d5?, allowing 11 cxd5 ♜xd5 12 ♜xe5!) 11 0-0 ♙e6 12 ♜e1, transposing to that section. White also has two independent tries:

a) 7 h4!? is rather uncompromising, but shouldn't overly concern Black so long as he doesn't panic: 7...h6 (here, rather than 7...h5, so as not to weaken the g5-square; those happy to take up the challenge might prefer 7...0-0!? 8 h5 d5! which is rare but far from clear, and certainly 9 cxd5 ♜xd5 10 ♙g5 ♜xc3 11 bxc3 ♚a5 12 hxg6 hxg6 13 ♜d2 ♚xc3 14 ♜c1 ♚a5 15 ♙d5 ♜d4 remained rather unclear in V.Petukhov-V.Filippov, Vladivostok 1995) 8 ♙d2 (instead 8 h5 is obviously met by 8...g5, while 8 ♜d5 is best met by 8...d6, prefacing an exchange on d5 followed by ...♜c7; White has also tried 8 e4 d6 9 ♙e3, but 9...♙g4 10 ♚d2 ♚d7 11 ♜g1 ♜d4! 12 ♜d5? ♜xd5 13 cxd5 ♚a4! revealed his plan to

be too ambitious in A.Lehtinen-T.Ernst, Stockholm 2000) 8...d6! (wisely not hurrying to castle since 8...0-0 9 ♖c1! ♗h7 10 h5 g5 11 ♕e4 prepares some nasty sacrifices on g5) 9 ♖c1 (White has also switched to queenside play with 9 a3, but Black can hold his own there with either 9...♗e6 10 ♖b1 a5, or 9...a6!? 10 ♖b1 ♖b8 11 b4 cxb4 12 axb4 b5 as he did in B.Gurgenidze-E.Stoliar, USSR Championship, Moscow 1957) 9...♗e6



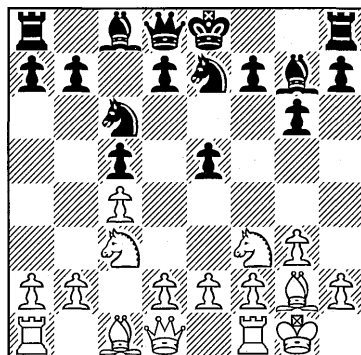
10 0-0 (Skatchkov had earlier failed to gain any advantage after 10 ♖b1 d5! 11 cxd5 ♗xd5 12 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 13 0-0 ♖d6 in P.Skatchkov-A.Vaulin, Novgorod 1997) 10...♖d7 11 ♖e1 ♗h3 12 ♗h1 ♖b8 13 ♖b1 a6 14 a4 ♗e6 was about equal in P.Skatchkov-B.Annaberdiev, Alushta 2005, although the black position was perhaps slightly the easier to handle with both the ...d5 and ...f5 advances on the agenda.

b) 7 ♗d2 can be met in the same way we'll shortly see Black handle 6 0-0 ♗ge7 7 ♗e1, namely with 7...0-0 (a reasonable alternative is the simple 7...d6 8 ♗f1 ♗f5, and 9 ♗e3 ♗xe3 10 ♗xe3 ♗e6 11 a3 a5 12 ♖b1 ♖b8! was

fine for Black in E.Dizdarevic-I.Herrera, Yerevan Olympiad 1996) 8 ♗f1 a6!? 9 ♗e3 ♖b8, when 10 0-0 b5 transposes to variation 'b1' in the notes to White's 7th move in Line A23.

A23)

1 c4 c5 2 ♗c3 ♗c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7
5 ♗f3 e5 6 0-0 ♗ge7



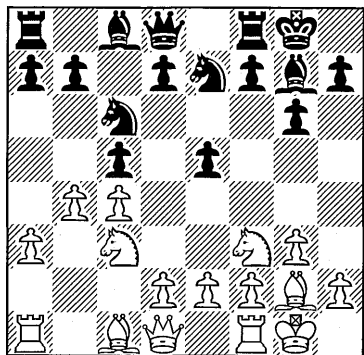
7 d3

Routinely developing as per Line A1, but White has two interesting alternatives:

a) 7 a3 can be met by either 7...0-0 or 7...d6, but I would prefer to avoid the latter in view of Watson's promising piece sacrifice 8 b4! e4 9 ♗g5 h6 10 ♗gxg4! cxb4 (or 10...f5 11 bxc5 fxe4 12 cxd6 ♖xd6 13 ♗xe4 with three healthy centre pawns for the piece) 11 axb4 f5 12 b5 when Black is under some pressure. This, incidentally, is also why we meet 6 a3 with 6...♗ge7, and not with 6...d6 as then 7 0-0 ♗ge7 8 b4 would transpose to this tricky gambit.

Therefore Black should prefer to meet 7 a3 with 7...0-0 when play usually follows one of the main lines after

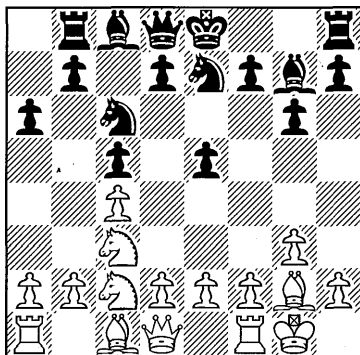
8 ♖b1 a5 9 d3 d6. Very few White players indeed have instead still had the coverage to advance with 8 b4!?, but again this is far from clear.



Both Watson and Hansen indicate 8...e4! (playing à la Oral with 8...d5!? also deserves serious attention; after 9 b5 ♖a5 10 cxd5 ♗xd5 11 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 Black is set to make good use of the weakening of the b3-square) 9 ♗g5 (9 ♗e1?! d5 sees Black taking over the central initiative and following 10 ♖b1 cxb4 11 axb4, as well as the 11...♗f5 of S.Arhipov-L.Winants, Nettetal 1992, I quite like the aggressive 11...dxc4!? 12 ♗xe4 f5 13 ♗c5 ♗d5, followed by ...f4; in this line White has also tried 11 cxd5 when Black might well develop actively and rely on an advanced passed pawn with 11...bxc3!? 12 dxc6 ♗xc6 13 ♗xe4 ♖e8 14 ♗g2 ♗f5 15 d3 ♖e7) 9...f5 10 ♖b1 (instead 10 ♗b2 is well met by 10...d5, but 10 bxc5 d6?! 11 cxd6 ♖xd6 12 ♖b1 h6 13 ♗b5! ♖b8 14 ♗h3 didn't give Black enough compensation in A.Tritschler-J.Horton, correspondence 2001, and so he should prefer the more mundane 10...♖a5) 10...h6! (10...d5?! 11

cxd5 ♗xd5 12 ♖b3 is awkward) 11 ♗h3 cxb4 12 axb4 g5 as leading to 'complications'. That's a fair enough assessment, but one can also see why several White players (Marin, for instance, marked 8 b4 as being dubious in some annotations of his) haven't been keen to play this position. Black can complete his development with ...d6, ...♗e6 and ...♗e5, before looking to either target the white queenside or to attack on the kingside, and alternatively he may even be able to get in a quick ...♗d4 and ...d5.

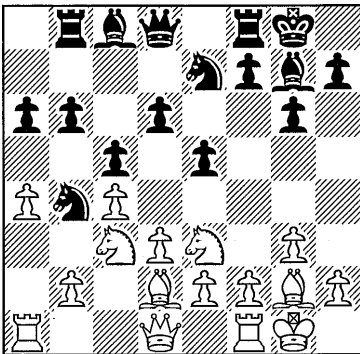
b) 7 ♗e1 spares no time improving the king's knight to control d5. Against this I like the plan of immediate queenside counterplay, beginning with 7...a6!? (7...0-0 8 ♗c2 d6 9 ♗e3 ♗e6 10 d3 ♖d7 is a very respectable alternative; the plan is simply to exchange the light-squared bishops as well as any knights which land on d5) 8 ♗c2 ♖b8 (I also wonder about 8...0-0, intending to meet both 9 ♗e3 and 9 d3 with 9...b5!?, sacrificing a pawn for central control, although White might well decline it to reach the safer pastures of variation 'b1').



After 8...♖b8, White must decide whether or not to allow ...b5:

b1) 9 ♖e3 (or 9 d3 b5 10 ♖e3) 9...b5 10 d3 0-0 gives Black a reasonable game: for example, 11 ♖ed5 d6 12 e3 (12 ♖b1 can be met by 12...b4, provoking exchanges, or more creatively with 12...♖xd5 13 ♖xd5 bxc4!? 14 dxc4 ♖f5 which gave Black good play after 15 e4 ♖e6 16 ♖a4?! ♖b4! 17 ♖d2 ♖d7 18 ♖a3 ♖xd5 19 cxd5 ♖b5 20 ♖fe1 f5 in P.Dalberg-N.Miezis, Dianalund 2005) 12...♖e6 13 ♖b1 f5 14 ♖d2?! bxc4 15 dxc4 e4! 16 h3 ♖e5 and White was already in some trouble in T.Ghitescu-D.Pira, St Lorrain 2000.

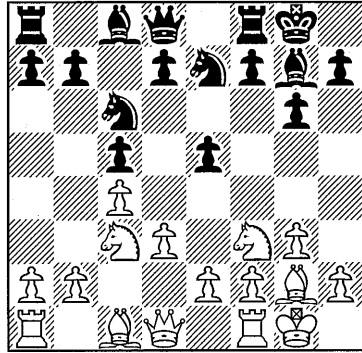
b2) 9 a4 0-0 10 ♖e3 (or 10 d3 d6 11 ♖b1 ♖e6 12 ♖e3 ♖d4 13 ♖d2 b5 14 axb5 axb5 15 ♖xb5 ♖xb5 16 cxb5 ♖xb5 17 b4 ♖c7 with equality in L.Van Wely-J.Polgar, Wijk aan Zee 1990) 10...d6 11 d3 ♖b4!? (exploiting the hole on b4 to fight for control of d5) 12 ♖d2 b6



13 ♖ed5 (or 13 ♖cd5 ♖bxd5 14 cxd5 ♖b7! 15 b4?!, as in K.Landa-R.Palliser, Isle of Man 2006, when I should have simply got on with my counterplay with 15...f5; this appears quite promis-

ing since 16 ♖b3 f4 17 ♖c4 runs into the thematic exchange sacrifice 17...f3! 18 ♖xf3 ♖xf3 19 exf3 ♖xd5) 13...♖bxd5 14 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 15 ♖xd5 ♖h3 16 ♖e1 a5 and Black enjoyed full equality when L.Brunner-J.Lautier, German League 1999, was agreed drawn.

7...0-0



8 a3

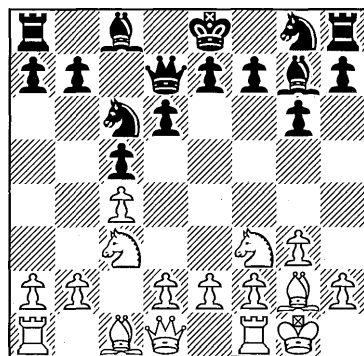
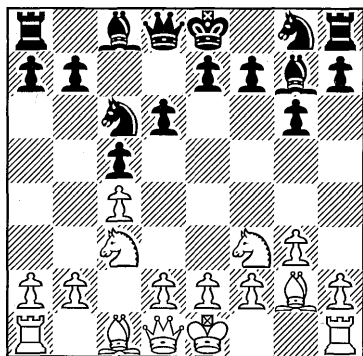
This was our main move order in Line A1, but if White is happy to reach Line A2, he might well prefer 8 ♖g5 f6 9 ♖d2 d6 and only then 10 a3 ♖e6 11 ♖b1 a5 12 ♖e1. The immediate re-routing of the king's knight with 8 ♖e1 is again also possible, but after 8...a6 9 ♖c2 ♖b8 10 a4 (or 10 ♖e3 b5) 10...d6, play has transposed to note 'b' to White's 7th move above.

8...d6 9 ♖b1 a5 10 ♖e1 ♖e6

We've now returned to an important junction at which White usually chooses between 11 ♖e1 (Line A1) and 11 ♖g5 (Line A2).

B)

1 c4 c5 2 ♖c3 ♖c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♖g2 ♖g7 5 ♖f3 d6!?



A flexible and a good option, especially if you want to make your opponent think for himself from an early stage.

6 0-0

White's main move, but he might prefer instead 6 d3. Then Black can take play back into Line A with 6...e5, although there's nothing wrong with 6...♖d7 even here. That was how Hernandez-Larsen began and after 7 e4 b6 8 0-0 play had transposed to our main line.

Frustrated in his attempt to force through an early d4 (as he manages with 5...♘f6 6 0-0 0-0 7 d4), and with Black cleverly refusing to budge his e-pawn, a number of White players have played for an early b4-advance. Such a plan appears a little misguided, especially if it permits a timely exchange on c3, but it is quite popular. White has even begun with 6 a3 after which 6...♖d7 7 ♖b1 b6 8 0-0 ♘b7 9 d3 ♘xc3! 10 bxc3 f5 was the actual course of Snape-Cox (see note 'c' to White's 7th move below).

6...♖d7!

A wonderfully creative idea of Larsen's, preparing to complete queenside development with ...b6 and ...♘b7 while maintaining a grip on the d4-square. Black may also flick in a timely ...♘xc3 (especially after e3, angling for a d4-advance), doubling White's c-pawns in Nimzo-style. Indeed it's far from unknown for White to emerge from the opening stage with the inferior position, and this is definitely a good line for Black to employ should he be aiming to outplay a weaker opponent. It's also worth noting that 6...♖d7 continues to surprise quite a few White players. Perhaps not surprisingly since this creative and high-scoring (60% for Black on ChessBase's *Big Database 2006*) line isn't covered by, for instance, Cummings's work on the Symmetrical.

Black has also tried to clamp down on the d4-square with 6...♘h6, but it is now known that he shouldn't be in a hurry to commit this knight. Rather than allow it to reach f5, White should play 7 d4! cxd4 8 ♘xh6 ♘xh6 9 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 10 ♖xd4 0-0 11 ♖fd1 ♘g7 12 ♖e3

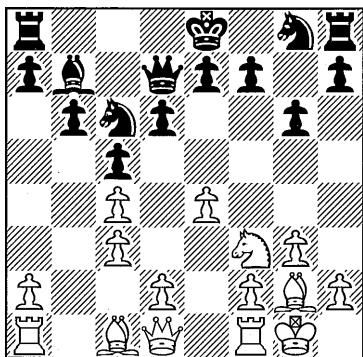
with an edge due to the awkward threat of 13 c5.

7 d3

Thwarted in his intention to break with d4, White contents himself with a Botvinnik set-up. This appears quite sensible, though a number of different ideas have also been seen:

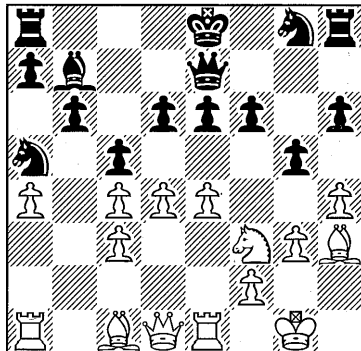
a) 7 b3 ♠h6 8 ♙b2 0-0 9 c3 meets one flexible set-up with another. Hansen's suggestion of 9...♠f5!?, continuing to prevent d4, was tried in L.Tinture-H.Pedersen, correspondence 2001, which continued 10 d3 ♜b8 11 ♚d2 b6 (11...a6!? 12 ♠d5 ♙xb2 13 ♚xb2 b5 would be a more ambitious handling of the black position) 12 ♜ad1 ♙b7 13 ♜fe1 ♠e5 14 ♠xe5 dxe5! and Black's clamp down the d-file ensured him of comfortable equality.

b) 7 e3!? doesn't have a great reputation as it provokes the exchange on c3. Certainly after 7...♙xc3! 8 bxc3 b6, White will have to lose a tempo with his e-pawn (playing instead d4 would leave c4 extremely vulnerable) and 9 e4 ♙b7



10 d3 h6!? (ruling out ♠g5 ideas and

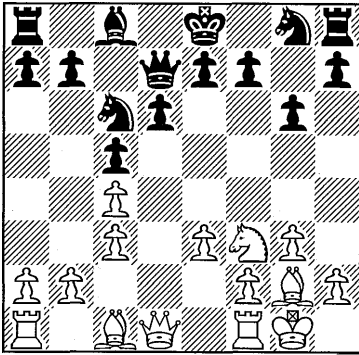
possibly preparing kingside expansion, but there is nothing wrong with the more commonly played 10...e6 and ...0-0) 11 ♜e1 (11 ♠d2!? is perhaps a more critical test of Ehlvest's idea; Black doesn't, of course, have to advance his g-pawn, but he did in S.Garcia Martinez-F.Ruiz Jimenez, Mancha Real 2002, only for the game to be halted prematurely after 11...g5 12 f4 gxf4 13 ♜xf4, although this appears fully viable for Black who might even continue 13...♠e5!?, followed by ...h5-h4) 11...g5 12 a4 e6 13 h4 f6 14 ♙h3 ♠a5 (a standard way to prevent d4, although here White doesn't have to be deterred) 15 d4 ♚e7 was the course of M.Benoit-J.Ehlvest, French League 1991.



Black's play may appear rather provocative, but it isn't at all easy to find a good plan for White here. Furthermore, Ehlvest's play has actually been very much in tune with the needs of the position: he has avoided committing his king and has retained a certain flexibility. White should now have employed a useful pass with 16 ♠d2

(Hansen), setting Black the task of deciding what to do about the kingside situation. Instead Benoit fell into the psychological trap of trying to punish Black, but found himself quickly crushed: 16 e5?! dxe5 17 ♖xe5?! fxe5 18 ♜xe5 0-0-0 19 hxg5? (losing the plot; White should have fought on with 19 ♜xe6 ♖d7 20 ♖e2!, forcing Black to find 20...♗b8! 21 ♖e5+ ♗a8 22 ♖xh8 ♜xc4 23 ♜xb6 ♖xh3 24 ♜xb7! ♗xb7 and even this isn't especially clear) 19...hxg5 20 ♗xg5?? ♜xh3! and 0-1.

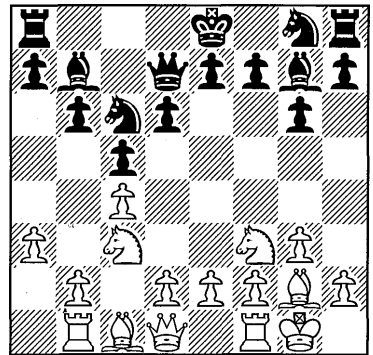
Going back to the capture on c3, White does much better with the extremely rare 8 dxc3!?



The semi-open d-file is of much more use to him than a pawn stuck on d3 and this recapture, while still unclear, is certainly the more challenging one. The (very) limited practice so far has tended to continue 8...f5!? (attempting to rule out an e4-e5 advance; 8...b6?! 9 c4 ♗b7 10 e5! was already rather awkward for Black in T.Piceu-J.Pinski, Rimavska Sobota 1996) 9 e4! fxe4 10 ♗g5 ♗f6 11 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 12 ♗xe4 and here Black must be careful:

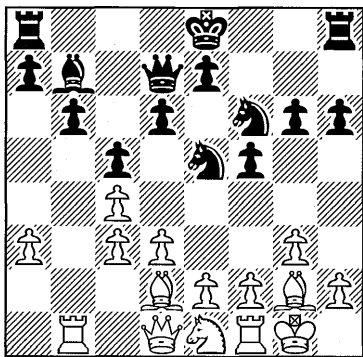
12...b6?! 13 ♖e1 ♗b7 14 ♗d5! e5 15 ♗g5 h6 16 ♗h4! was not the way to continue, as in S.Lorson-J.Srokowski, German League 1997. Much better is the calm 12...♖c7, followed by 13...♗h3 and 14...0-0-0, although in S.Giardelli-D.Adla, Buenos Aires 1992, Black found an alternative way to unravel: 13 ♗h6 ♗d7!? 14 ♖e2 0-0-0 15 ♜fe1 ♞de8! 16 ♗d5?! e6 17 ♗g2 ♜e7!, followed by ...♜f5 and ...♗c6.

c) 7 ♜b1 b6 8 a3 shouldn't strike fear into the reader's heart, since Black's solid queenside set-up is ideal for ensuring that White doesn't really get anywhere with his standard English queenside advance. Rowson has now suggested that Black might like to exchange on c3 immediately and, with White having spent time on a3 and ♜b1, such a plan has quite a lot of logic to it. There is also nothing wrong with how Black has continued so far in practice: 8...♗b7



9 d3?! (9 ♖a4 ♗h6 10 b4 ♜f5 11 ♗b2 0-0 12 ♜d5 was much better from White in C.Foisor-D.Adla, Cerrado 1997; here I wonder about 12...♗xb2 13

♠b2 f6, intending ...e6, although Adla's 12...e6!? was also reasonable, intending to equalize with 13 ♠f6+ ♠xf6 14 ♠xf6 ♠e5 15 ♣xd7 ♠xd7 – Hansen) 9...♠xc3! 10 bxc3 f5 leaves White struggling for a pawn break. I.Snape-J.Cox, Coulsdon 2006, continued 11 ♠g5 (Cox has also faced 11 ♠d2 after which 11...♠f6 12 e4 ♠e5! 13 ♣e2 fxe4 14 ♠xe4 ♠xe4 15 ♠xe4 ♠xe4 16 ♣xe4 ♣c6 left Black slightly for choice in A.Baruch-J.Cox, Coventry 2005) 11...h6 12 ♠d2 ♠f6 13 ♠e1 ♠e5! (a key motif; White will struggle to evict this knight without creating further weaknesses)



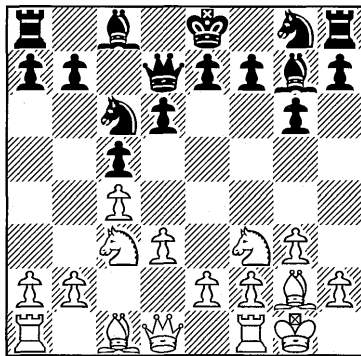
14 f3 g5 15 f4?! gxf4 16 ♠xb7 ♣xb7 17 ♣a4+ ♣d7 18 ♣xd7+ ♠fxd7 19 ♠xf4 e6 and Black was quite comfortably placed.

Returning to move nine, 9 e3?! is another misguided approach. The man himself showed how Black should continue with 9...♠xc3 10 bxc3 f5! 11 d3 ♠f6, and after 12 ♠e1 there was nothing wrong with 12...♠a5, but Larsen's 12...♠d8!? was instantly rewarded: 13 a4 ♠c6 14 a5? bxa5! 15 ♠e2 0-0 16 ♠a2

♣c7 17 ♠ba1 ♠b7 and Black went on to convert his extra pawn in V.Lago-B.Larsen, Palma de Mallorca 1989.

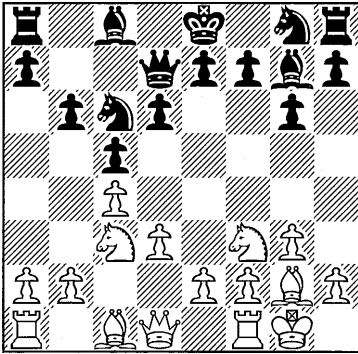
d) 7 a3 could just be met by an immediate exchange on c3, although White would then be a tempo ahead of our last variation. Black has thus usually preferred 7...b6 after which 8 b4 (8 e3 ♠xc3 9 bxc3?! ♠b7 10 e4 0-0-0 11 d3 h6 12 ♠e1 e5! 13 ♠d2 ♠ge7 14 ♠b3 ♣c7! 15 a4 a5 16 d4 g5 17 d5 ♠a7 18 ♠d2 ♠a6 gave Black a position Nimzowitsch himself would have been envious of in A.Wojtkiewicz-U.Andersson, Haninge 1990) 8...♠b7 9 ♠b2!? cxb4 10 axb4 ♠xb4 11 ♣b3 ♠c6 12 ♠d5 is an enterprising pawn sacrifice. Nevertheless, I'm far from certain that this is entirely sound since Black remains rather solid and a timely ...♠a5 will aid the defence. Perhaps White should now meet 12...e5 with 13 d4!?, whereas 13 ♠a3 ♠ge7 14 ♠xe7 ♣xe7 15 ♠fa1 0-0 16 ♠e1 ♠a5 didn't give him sufficient Benko-style compensation in D.Collas-J.Pinski, Budapest 1996.

Returning to 7 d3:



7...b6

Larsen's preference, although Black can also consider 7...♙xc3 8 bxc3 and then follow up with either 8...f5 or 8...b6.



8 e4

Trying to blunt the b7-bishop, but setting up a Botvinnik formation slightly impedes the g2-bishop and weakens the d4-square. White also opted for this set-up in M.Glienke-E.Kengis, Berlin 1999, only to see his opponent show a deep understanding of the position: 8 ♖b1 ♙b7 9 e4 e6 10 a3 ♗ge7 11 ♙d2 0-0 12 ♚c1?! ♗d4! 13 ♗xd4 cxd4 14 ♗e2 e5 15 f3 f5 16 ♙h3 b5! and Black was pressing across the board.

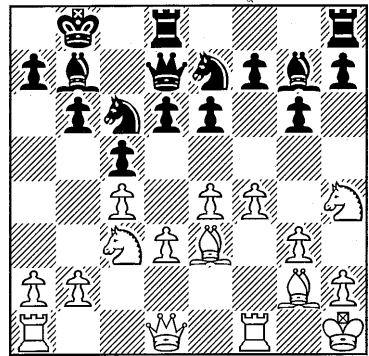
Larsen has also faced 8 ♙d2 ♙b7 9 ♖b1 which is a by now familiar white set-up, albeit with White having avoided any awkward exchange on c3. Black can now continue with either 9...e6 10 a3 ♗ge7 11 b4 0-0 or home in on the d4-square. The latter plan was seen in D.King-B.Larsen, Hastings 1990/1, and after 9...♗h6 10 a3 0-0 11 b4 ♗f5 12 e3 e6 13 ♚e2 ♖ad8 14 ♖fd1 ♙a8 15 ♗b5 ♖fe8 16 ♙c3 Black was holding

his own in the manoeuvring struggle and would have continued to do so had he employed Hansen's suggestion of 16...e5!.

8...♙b7

Beginning a fairly ambitious plan. Black might also prefer the solid and flexible set-up supplied by 8...e6 9 a3 ♗ge7 10 ♚c2 0-0, which is a good alternative. After 11 ♖b1 ♙b7 12 b4 h6 it's not easy for White to make any inroads, but 13 b5 ♗d4 14 ♗xd4 cxd4 15 ♗e2 ♖ac8 16 ♚a4?! a5! 17 ♙b2 e5 18 ♚d1 f5 was definitely not the way to try in S.Bews-A.Wojtkiewicz, Eupen 1993.

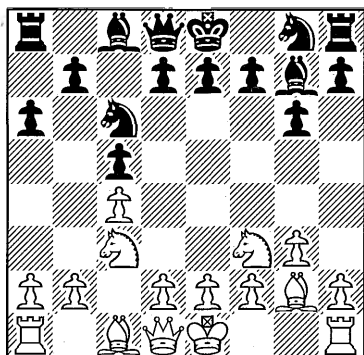
9 ♗h4 0-0-0! 10 f4 ♙b8 11 ♙h1 e6 12 ♙e3 ♗ge7



We've been following R.Hernandez-B.Larsen, Las Palmas 1976, and once again Black had made good use of a flexible set-up involving ...e6 and ...♗ge7. Larsen had realized that even an advance of White's b-pawn wouldn't especially inconvenience him, but neither did 13 ♙g1 f5 14 ♖c1 ♖hf8 15 a3 when 15...h6!? was possible, as well as the game's 15...fxe4 16 dxe4 e5 17 b4 ♗d4.

C)

1 c4 c5 2 ♖c3 ♗c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♕g2 ♕g7
5 ♖f3 a6!?



As Watson puts it, 'the idea is to beat White to the punch by enforcing ...b5 before b4 is possible.' Black attempts to stir up early counterplay and this system, like Line B, may well work quite well against a solid White player. It should work especially well if they have been studying Cummings's work on the Symmetrical since that fails to consider both 5...d6 and 5...a6 ! However, I must confess to having my doubts whether 5...a6 is completely sound: White is well placed for a quick d4-break and is a tempo up on Black's position after 5 a3 (see Line A of Chapter Two). That said, as we will frequently see in the next chapter, an extra tempo when colours are reversed is rarely too important in the Symmetrical.

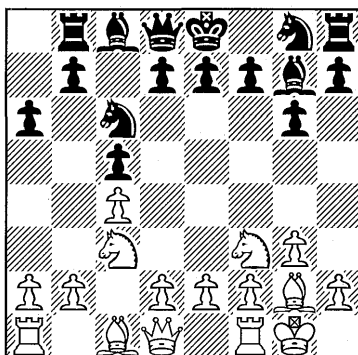
6 0-0

Watson describes 6 a3 ♖b8 7 ♖b1 b5 8 cxb5 axb5 9 b4 cxb4 10 axb4 as being 'the main line', but this system shouldn't trouble Black. He should re-

ply with 10...c5 as we will explore in Line A2 of Chapter Two (where this position arises from a 5 a3 move order). Black is also fine after both 6 b3 b5 7 ♕b2 ♖b8 and 6 d3 ♖b8 7 a4 d6. In the latter line he can either follow up with ...e5, reaching a version of Line A with White committed to a4, or prefer to play more creatively, such as with ...♗h6-f5 or ...♕d7 and ...♖c8.

A more critical alternative is the rare 6 e3! b5 (echoing a sacrifice White often employs in the 5 a3 variation; 7 cxb5 axb5 8 ♗xb5 ♕a6 certainly offers Black excellent play for his pawn) 7 d4 (J.Vigus-C.Beaumont, British League 1998) when Black should consider simply 7...bxc4 or the more creative 7...cxd4!? 8 ♗xd4 ♕b7 9 cxb5 axb5 10 ♗dxb5 ♗f6, intending ...0-0, ...♖b6 and ...♗e5 with some pressure for the pawn.

6...♖b8

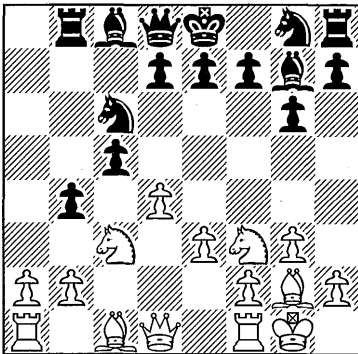


7 e3

Once again Black is happy to see 7 a4 and will reply with either 7...d6 8 d3 ♗h6 or 8...e5 9 ♗e1 ♗ge7 10 ♗c2 0-0. Black should probably also meet 7 d3

with 7...d6, since 7...b5 is risky in view of Watson's 8 cxb5 axb5 9 a4!. The text move is much more combative, as is Maksimovic's 7 a3 b5 8 cxb5 axb5 9 b4!? cxb4 10 axb4 ♖xb4 11 d4 when Black should settle for something solid like 11...♗a6 12 ♖e5 (B.Maksimovic-S.Marjanovic, Nis 1993) 12...b4 13 ♖a4 ♖f6.

7...b5 8 cxb5 axb5 9 d4 b4



10 ♖e4

White's most popular choice, but he has alternatives in this critical position:

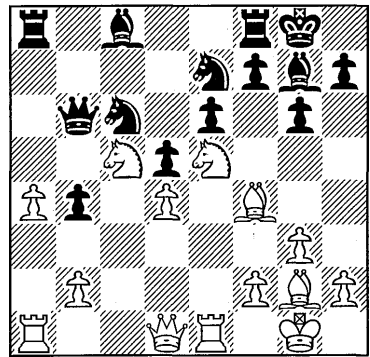
a) 10 ♖e2!? cxd4 11 ♖exd4 ♖xd4 12 ♖xd4 ♗b7 13 ♗xb7 ♖xb7 14 ♖f3 d5 was fine for Black in R.Klomp-F.Silva, Breda 1998, but Watson has assessed the superior 11 exd4 ♖f6 12 d5 ♖a5 13 ♖f4 as favouring White. That is certainly an interesting idea, though the black position remains quite playable after 13...0-0. He will play around the d5-pawn, angling for counterplay with ...♗a6 and ...♖c4, either before or after

fixing b2 with ...b3.

b) 10 ♖a4 should be met by either 10...c4!? or 10...cxd4 11 exd4 d6, but not 11...e6?! (A.Kveinys-Y.Rantanen, Jyväskylä 2001) in view of the awkward 12 d5! exd5 13 ♗f4.

10...cxd4 11 exd4 d5! 12 ♖c5 e6

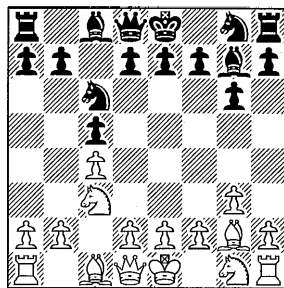
Black has blunted the g2-bishop's influence, albeit at the cost of allowing the white knight into c5. He can, however, both play around that knight and aim to undermine it with ...♖b6, which should supply good chances to equalize. A.Herzog-F.Hoelzl, Austrian League 1981, continued 13 ♗f4 ♖a8 14 a4 (14 ♖e5 ♖ge7 15 ♖d2 0-0 16 ♖fc1 ♖b6 17 h4 h5 18 a3 was a better try to retain an edge in H.Pfleger-J.Kupper, Vienna 1972) 14...♖ge7 15 ♖e1 0-0 16 ♖c5 ♖b6!



17 ♖ed7?! ♗xd7 18 ♖xd7 ♖xd4 19 ♖xf8 ♗xf8 20 ♗c1 ♖a5 with good activity and pressure for the exchange.

Chapter Two

White Fianchettoes without ♘f3



1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7

Having already examined the main move, 5 ♘f3, we will now turn our attention to White's attempts to play more dynamically. His leading independent tries are:

A: 5 a3

B: 5 e3

C: 5 e4

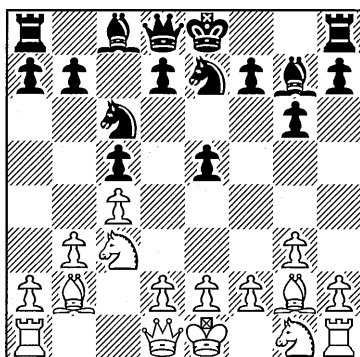
These three systems can lead to some strategically rich positions, and that has helped each of them to gain a dedicated following. Once again the Botvinnik set-up is a good way for Black to respond, although he must be alert to certain move order nuances, especially in Line A.

White may also begin with 5 d3, but after 5...d6 he lacks an independent option: 6 e3 is Line B, 6 e4 is Line C, and 6 ♘f3 transposes back to Chapter One. That leaves:

a) 5 ♗b1 is simply another route

into Line A after 5...d6 6 a3.

b) 5 b3 is a solid set-up, but also one which rather invites our favourite Botvinnik set-up. After 5...e5 6 ♗b2 (6 e3 ♘ge7 7 ♘ge2 0-0 8 0-0 d6 9 ♗b2 is an alternative route to Line B1) 6...♘ge7



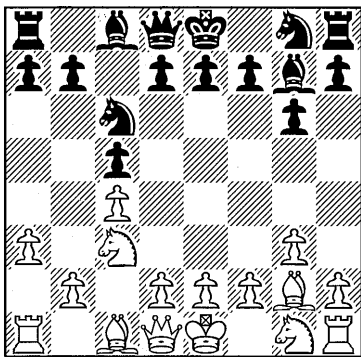
play usually transposes to the note to White's 8th move in Line B1, such as with 7 e3 0-0 (here Bellon Lopez's 7...d5!? also deserves serious consideration) 8 ♘ge2 d6 9 0-0. White might also play more creatively on move 7, but 7 h4 h6 keeps his kingside ambitions in

check, and 7 ♖h3!? d6 8 0-0 0-0 9 f4 f5 10 d3 h6 11 ♖d2 ♜b8 12 e3 a6 13 ♜ad1 ♙e6 saw Black holding his own in V.Smyslov-V.Bagirov, USSR Championship, Baku 1961.

c) 5 ♖h3 is an idea seen in quite a few Symmetrical positions. Black should be fine as long as he keeps the knight away from d5, and 5...e6 6 0-0 (or 6 ♖f4 ♖ge7 7 h4!? h6! 8 ♜b1 0-0 9 b3 d6 10 ♙b2 a6 11 d3 ♜b8 12 ♖d2 b5 and Black was fine so long as he didn't race to close the queenside, B.Larsen-M.Campos Lopez, San Antonio 1972) 6...♖ge7 7 ♖f4 d6 8 a3 ♖d7 9 ♜b1 b6 10 b4 ♙b7 11 ♖a4 0-0 12 ♙b2 ♜ad8 13 d3 ♙a8 was a model black set-up to counter possible pressure in R.Cagungan-A.Wojtkiewicz, Manila 1991.

A)

1 c4 c5 2 ♖c3 ♖c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 a3



According to ChessBase's *Big Database 2006*, this has been played less than 5 e3, but I would imagine that many club players may well face it at least as often, if not possibly even more

than 5 ♖f3. The simple reason being that 5 a3 was Tony Kosten's recommendation in his *The Dynamic English*; a superb little repertoire work for White, and one which appears to have sold pretty well judging from the number of Kostenites one still sees (the book was published in 1999) in most English weekend events.

It's hard not to see the attraction of 5 a3: White wastes no time in beginning queenside operations, recognizing that Black is still some way from beginning active counterplay. Furthermore, White retains a certain flexibility with regards to the development of his king's knight; depending on Black's set-up it may emerge on f3, e2 or even h3.

This one-time favourite of both Miles and Seirawan must be treated with some respect, but with a little early care Black can gain a perfectly respectable position. We will now consider:

A1: 5...d6

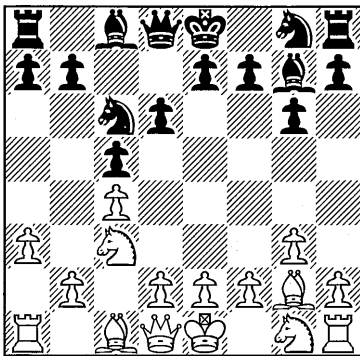
A2: 5...a6

The latter may at first sight appear quite dull, but sooner or later White will no longer be able to maintain the symmetry and Black hopes that this will actually lead to a concession. The former is somewhat less provocative and is actually a very sensible response to White's early queenside aggression. Black simply wants to erect a Botvinnik set-up and this is the best way of doing so.

Note that an immediate 5...a5 is less accurate; White can then play to exploit the tempo he hasn't lost on ♖b1. Even worse, though, is 5...e5?! which fails to heed White's plan. Following 6 b4! cxb4 (6...d6 is preferable, but clearly White is already well advanced on the queenside) 7 axb4 ♖xb4 8 ♖a3 punishment for Black's sloppy play should be swift with a white knight en route to d6.

A1)

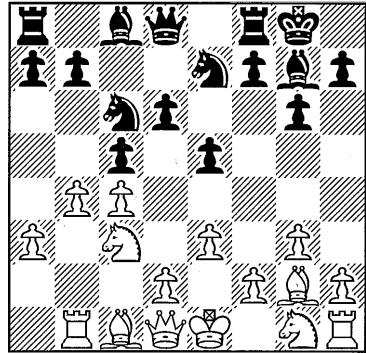
1 c4 c5 2 ♖c3 ♖c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♖g2 ♖g7
5 a3 d6



6 ♖b1

Consistent, although White can also transpose straight away into Chapter One with 6 ♖f3 e5 7 0-0. An independent and still rather unexplored option is Watson's suggestion of 6 e3!?. The idea is to meet 6...e5 with 7 b4 cxb4 8 axb4 ♖xb4 9 ♖a4+! (stronger than Watson's original idea of 9 ♖a3!? ♖d3+ 10 ♖e2 ♖c5 11 d4 exd4 12 exd4, when 12...♖g4+! is a slightly awkward check for White to meet) 9...♖c6 10 ♖xc6+ bxc6 11 ♖xc6+ ♖d7 12 ♖xd6 ♖e7 13

♖a3 when Black doesn't appear to have quite enough compensation. In practice Black has thus preferred 7...♖ge7 8 ♖b1 0-0 when it appears that White has made some queenside progress, but things are not so clear.

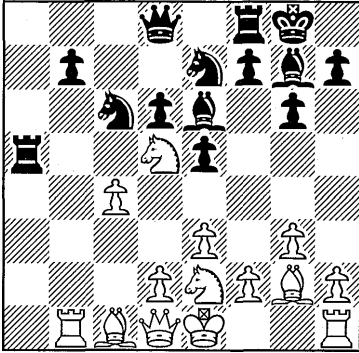


Black must act before White completes his development and so I quite like Liss's idea of 9 ♖ge2 (or 9 d3 f5! 10 b5?! c4! 11 ♖ge2 exd3 12 ♖xd3 ♖e5 and White was a little overextended in U.Boensch-W.Uhlmann, Berlin 1988) 9...cxb4!? (9...♖b8 10 0-0 ♖e6 is a solid alternative) 10 axb4 a5!. This logically strikes out against the white camp before it is fully co-ordinated, but does weaken b7. Black must thus continue creatively; something which he more than managed in D.Zifroni-E.Liss, Herzliya 1998: 11 bxa5 (or 11 b5 ♖b4 12 d3 d5 13 cxd5 ♖exd5 14 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 15 ♖a3 ♖e8 16 0-0 ♖g4! with plenty of counterplay for Black) 11...♖e6 12 ♖d5 ♖xa5

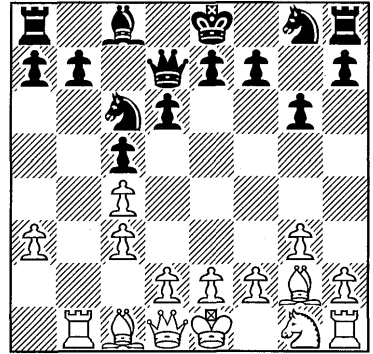
(see following diagram)

13 ♖ec3 ♖c5! (if b7 is a weakness, then so too are c4 and the c3-knight) 14 ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 15 d3 f5! 16 ♖b5 e4 17 ♖a3

exd3! 18 0-0 ♔xc4 19 ♔xc5 dxc5 20 ♖c1 ♔xb5 21 ♗b3+ ♕h8 22 ♗xb5 d2 23 ♜cd1 ♗d6 and the strong d2-pawn supplied good compensation for the exchange.



explored alternative, which should appeal to those who liked the idea of 5 ♘f3 d6 in Chapter One, is 6...♔xc3!?. With the rook on b1, White is pretty much committed to 7 bxc3, after which 7...♗d7



The course of Zifroni-Liss was far from forced, but this game is a reminder that it's not just White who has ample opportunities for creativity in the lines in this chapter. Black should also be aware that he doesn't have to answer 6 e3 with 6...e5. Instead 6...a5 is a reasonable idea, angling after 7 ♘ge2 e5 for a transposition to Line B. Finally, an idea which we will consider against 5 e3 appears quite promising here with White having played an early a3, namely 6...♔xc3!?. This has scarcely been tested, but should compare favourably with 5 e3 ♔xc3. Certainly the high-level game Y.Seirawan-U.Andersson, Tilburg 1990, was a success for Black: 7 bxc3 ♗c7!? 8 d3 f5 9 ♘h3 e5 10 0-0?! ♘f6 11 f3 h6 12 e4 g5! 13 exf5 ♔xf5 14 ♘f2 0-0-0 and White was forced to defend on the kingside.

6...a5

Sensibly preventing 7 b4, but an un-

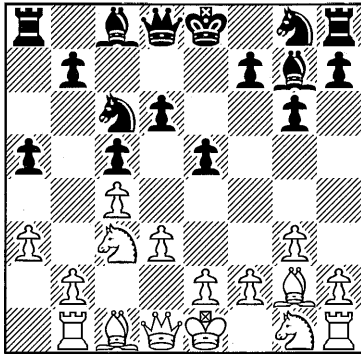
8 d3 (8 ♗a4!? appears more critical, when Black may well have to change tack and develop his bishop on the c8-h3 diagonal after ...♗c7, either immediately or following first 8...f5 and 9...♘f6; the main problem being that 8...e6 9 d4! ♘ge7 10 ♔g5 leaves Black vulnerable on the dark squares) 8...b6 (consistent with Line B of Chapter One, although Black may prefer to follow the course of T.Manouck-B.Trevisani, Forli 1993: 8...f5!? 9 h4 ♘f6 10 ♘h3 b6 11 ♘f4 ♔b7 12 e4 0-0-0 13 f3 ♕b8 14 ♔h3 e6 and Black enjoyed an effective and flexible central structure) 9 h4!? h6! (preparing to meet 10 h5 with 10...g5, keeping kingside lines closed just as Black does in the Hippo) 10 ♘h3 ♔b7 11 ♗a4 e6! 12 ♔d2 ♘ge7 13 ♘f4 0-0-0 14 ♜h2? ♕b8 15 ♗c2 ♘e5! 16 a4? g5! and Black was already able to exploit her model set-up to win material in

A.Gomez Rebollo-P.Cramling, Huelva 2002.

7 d3

It's notable that Kosten's aforementioned work already recommends that White should immediately transpose to Chapter One with 7 ♠f3, after which 7...e5 8 0-0 ♠ge7 9 d3 0-0 10 ♗g5 f6 11 ♗e3 ♗e6 12 ♗e1 ♖d7 is Line A12 of that chapter. White doesn't have to develop his king's knight to f3 and recently Mikhail Gurevich has developed a certain penchant for 7 e3. This is very likely to reach to Line B and indeed after 7...e5 8 ♠ge2 ♠ge7 9 0-0 0-0 White has nothing better than 10 d3 which transposes to the main line of that section.

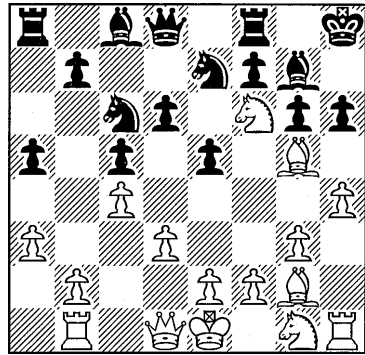
7...e5



Having ruled out an early b4, Black completes his Botvinnik central set-up. White almost always responds with 8 ♠f3, taking play back to lines considered in Chapter One. Occasionally he tries to exploit Black's move order with 8 ♠d5!? ♠ge7 9 ♗g5, but this isn't really a challenge. White's main problem after 9...0-0 is that his king's knight is a long way from d5 and so ex-

changes on e7 don't make much sense. White has thus tried some ambitious ideas with a quick h4, but they are really asking too much of his position:

a) 10 ♠f6?! ♗h8 11 h4 h6!



has deceived some strong players as White, with both 12 ♖c1 ♠f5 13 g4 ♠fd4 14 ♠h7 hxg5 15 hxg5 ♗g8 16 e3 ♠b3 17 ♖d1 a4! (O.Cvitan-A.Kovacevic, Bosnian Team Championship 2004) and 12 e4 ♠d4 13 ♗e2 ♠cc6 14 ♠xd4 ♠xd4 15 ♠h7 hxg5 16 hxg5 ♗g8 17 ♠xf8 ♗xf8 18 ♖d2 a4 (P.Nikolic-P.Cramling, Wattignies 1976) leaving the black minor pieces much stronger than White's extra rook.

b) 10 h4 is probably a better version of the same idea, although 10...h6 11 ♗xe7 ♠xe7 12 e3 ♠xd5! 13 ♗xd5 ♖b8 still left Black slightly for preference, especially after 14 a4?! ♗e6 15 ♖f3 ♖b6! in U.Boensch-Cu.Hansen, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988.

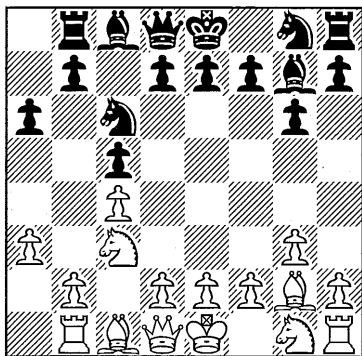
c) Finally, 10 ♠f3 f6! 11 ♠xe7+ ♠xe7 12 ♗d2 a4 (Ribli), usefully clamping down on White's b-pawn, reveals that it's too late for White to try and return to normal lines.

A2)

1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7
5 a3 a6 6 ♖b1

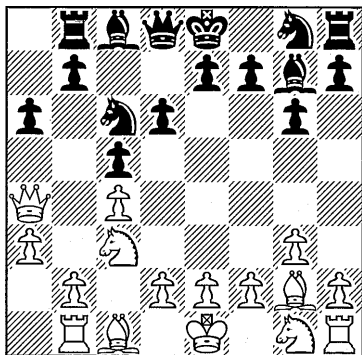
Consistently supporting the b4-push, although our main line position can also be reached via 6 ♘f3 ♖b8 7 ♖b1 b5 8 cxb5 axb5 9 b4 cxb4 10 axb4.

6...♖b8

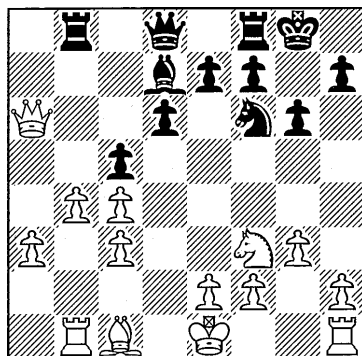


7 b4

White players appear to have gone off trying to prevent ...b5 with 7 ♖a4, due to the promising gambit 7...d6!. At the very least Black will gain easy development and good light-squared prospects and neither does declining the sacrifice promise White an easy life:

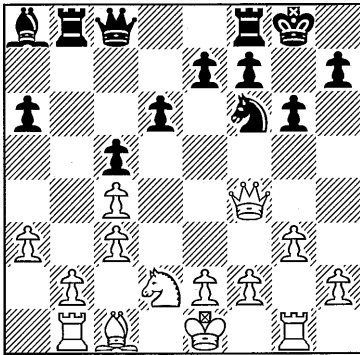


a) 8 b4 ♙f5! (pretty much forcing White to accept after all as both 9 ♖a1 ♙d7! and 9 e4 ♙d7 10 b5 ♘e5 are quite awkward for him) 9 ♙xc6+ bxc6 10 ♖xc6+ ♙d7 11 ♖xa6 (brave, while after 11 ♖g2 Timman intended 11...♖c8, supporting ...♙c6 and targeting c4) 11...♙xc3 12 dxc3 ♘f6 13 ♘f3 (perhaps 13 ♙h6!? is a better try, as pointed out by Watson, although it's worth noting that after 13...♘g4 14 ♙g7 ♙g8 15 h3 ♘xf2 16 ♘xf2 ♖xg7 Timman still felt that Black's far more compact structure and superior minor piece outweighed the extra pawn) 13...0-0



14 ♙h6 (or 14 b5 ♙f5 and White must give up the exchange with 15 ♘d2 to save his queen) 14...♖a8 15 ♖b7 ♖b8 16 ♖a6 ♖e8 17 0-0 ♖a8 18 ♖b7 ♖b8 19 ♖a7 ♖a8 20 ♖b7 ♙f5! 21 ♖a1? (he had to give up the exchange with 21 bxc5) 21...♙e4 22 ♖b5 ♖c8 saw White shortly overwhelmed on the kingside in Y.Seirawan-J.Timman, Montpellier 1985 – a fine example of the enduring compensation Black gains after the pawn sacrifice for the exchange of White's light-squared bishop on c6.

b) 8 ♖xc6+ bxc6 9 ♗xc6+ ♔d7 (9...♗f8!?, retaining the option of ...♗b7, has been more popular in practice and is also quite good, but I prefer the simpler text move, intending to gain compensation along the lines of Seirawan-Timman) 10 ♗g2 (the only move tried in practice thus far; White must avoid 10 ♗xa6? ♖xc3 11 dxc3 ♗c7! snaring his queen) 10...♖xc3 (further weakening White on the light squares, although I also quite like 10...♗b3!?, making it as hard as possible for White to advance his d-pawn) 11 dxc3 ♗f6 12 ♗f3 ♗c8! (preventing White from castling) 13 ♔d2 ♖h3 14 ♗f3 0-0 15 ♗f4 ♖g2 16 ♗g1 ♖a8

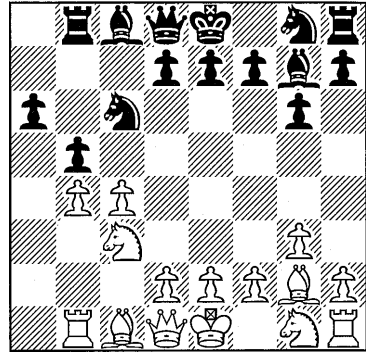


supplied promising compensation in A.Allahverdiev-D.Magerramzade, Baku 1997, and Black went on to increase the pressure with ...a5-a4 and ...♔d7-b6.

Instead of 10 ♗g2, Watson has suggested that 10 ♗f3! might be better, but after 10...♗b3! it's not at all easy for White to complete his development; Black has good play after the likes of 11 e3 ♗f6 12 ♗ge2 0-0 13 d3 ♖g4 14 ♗g2 ♖xe2!? 15 ♗xe2 ♗g4! 16 ♖d2 ♗d7 and

11 ♗e4 ♗b8 12 ♗f3 ♗f6 13 ♗c2 0-0 14 0-0 ♗g4, with awkward queenside pressure in both cases.

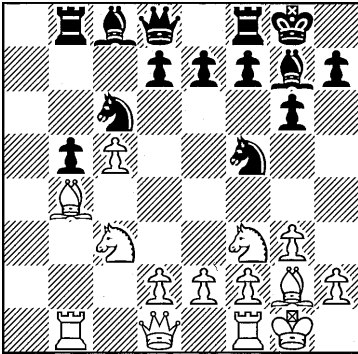
7...cxb4 8 axb4 b5



9 cxb5

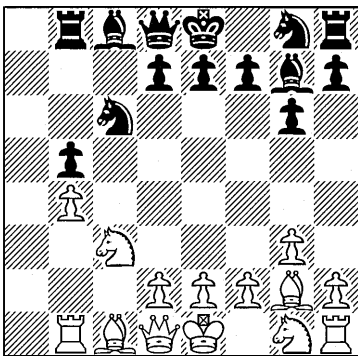
Once again White is best advised not to break the symmetry. Indeed, Tony Kosten has succinctly pointed out that 'attempts to do so tend to rebound on the perpetrator'. He certainly demonstrated that that was the case after 9 c5 in M.Krasenkow-A.Kosten, Asti 1996: 9...a5! (immediately undermining White's queenside) 10 ♖a3 (instead 10 ♗a2!? ♗c7! 11 ♖a3 ♗a7 12 ♗c1 ♖b7 13 e4? ♗e5 14 ♗c3 ♗a8 15 f3 f5! wasn't a success for White in M.Karttunen-S.Tiitta, Helsinki 2002; he has also tried the simple 10 bxa5 ♗xa5 11 ♖b2, but after the 11...♖b7 12 ♗xb5 ♖xb2 13 ♗xb2 ♗b4 14 c6 of F.Silva-A.Pereira, Portuguese Ch. 1994, Black has a promising choice between winning an exchange with 14...♗xb5 15 cxb7 ♗d3+ 16 cxd3 ♗xb2 and the computer's cute suggestion of 14...♖c8!?) 10...axb4 11 ♖xb4 ♗h6! (developing the knight to f6 wouldn't have achieved much, and so

Kosten aims it at the key d4-square) 12 ♖f3 (12 e3 ♖f5 13 d4 0-0 14 ♖ge2! might well improve, although Black was still fine after 14...♙b7 15 0-0 d6! 16 cxd6 ♖xb4 17 ♙xb7 ♖xb7 18 ♖xb4 ♖xd6 in A.Wirig-S.Pujos, French League 2003, since he could keep on protecting b5 as needs be and then break with ...e5) 12...0-0 13 0-0 ♖f5



and now Krasenkow felt that he had to accept a small disadvantage, due in no small part to his rather unhappy bishop on b4, with 14 e3 d6 15 cxd6 ♖xb4 16 ♖xb4 ♖xd6.

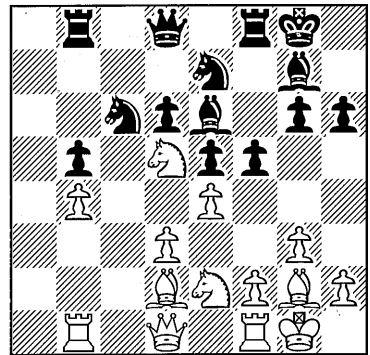
9...axb5



10 ♖f3

Kosten's recommendation and a move which injects some life into the position. The alternatives are, I'm afraid, rather dull and if playing for the win against them, one must be prepared to roll up the shirt sleeves and simply keeping on playing for a long time:

a) 10 e4 e5 (ambitious players may prefer to explore the provocative 10...d6 11 ♖ge2 h5!?, intending 12 d4 h4 13 ♙e3 ♙e6!? 14 d5 ♙g4 – Velimirovic) 11 ♖ge2 ♖ge7 is pretty level and, for example, 12 d3 d6 13 ♙e3 ♖d4 14 0-0 0-0 was agreed drawn in M.Suba-T.Georgadze, Medina del Campo 1980. Nevertheless, both sides can try to play for a win and with 12 0-0 0-0 13 d3 d6 14 ♙g5 h6 15 ♙d2 (15 ♙e3 is probably a superior retreat) 15...♙e6 16 ♖d5 f5

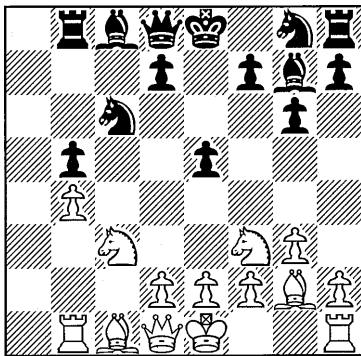


17 ♙c3?! ♙f7! (preparing an exchange on d5, to be followed by ...♖e7) 18 ♖xe7+ ♖xe7 19 ♖c1?! d5 20 exf5 ♖xf5 21 d4 e4 Black had most certainly achieved a favourable imbalance in M.Stuhlik-M.Neubauer, Oberpullendorf 2002.

b) 10 e3 e5 (both 10...e6 and 10...♠f6 also lead to rather symmetrical and level positions) 11 ♠ge2 ♠ge7 12 0-0 0-0 13 d4 exd4 14 exd4 d5 15 ♠f4 ♠b7 16 ♣d2 ♠f5 17 ♠b2 ♣d7 reclaimed the symmetry and was fine for Black in R.Dive-A.Ker, Dunedin 1998.

c) 10 ♠h3 e5!? (a good moment to break the symmetry, although Black can also play solidly with 10...♠h6) 11 f4! (correctly countering actively, whereas 11 d3 ♠ge7 12 0-0 d5 13 ♠d2 0-0 14 f4 d4! 15 ♠e4 ♠d5 saw White punished for drifting in K.Zuse-F.Gheorghiu, Berlin 1986) 11...♠ge7 12 fxc5 ♠xe5 13 ♠f4 0-0 14 0-0 ♣b6+! 15 e3 ♠b7 gave Black good play, with the c4-outpost at least balancing out the weakness of d5 in V.Georgiev-J.Lacasa Diaz, Sitges 2003.

10...e5!?



Breaking the symmetry and provoking White's next which quickly sharpens the struggle. This brings us to an important point and one which was also obvious after White's 10th move alternatives, namely that having to move first can even be something of a

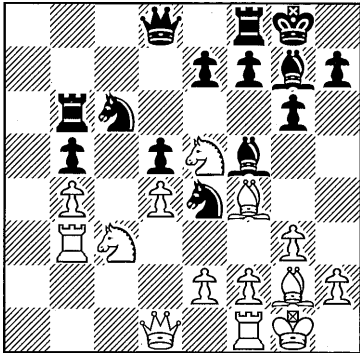
problem for White in symmetrical positions. As Suba has pointed out, 'Black's information is always greater by one move'. That might not sound like much, but it can be an important point. After each move in this variation Black can copy or, should he deem White's move a small inaccuracy, decide to deviate.

This position strikes me as being as good a moment as any for Black to adopt a slightly different set-up to White, but he can also continue to copy with 10...d5. It's worth having a quick look at how play might continue as it bears much relevance to the whole concept of symmetry and when to break it in this variation. Those who have read Jonathan Rowson's thought-provoking *Chess for Zebras* may already recognize this position, and I can do no better than also quickly show readers how the game J.Hodgson-K.Arkell, Newcastle (rapid) 2001, continued: 11 d4 ♠f6 12 ♠f4 (Kosten prefers the move order 12 0-0, angling for 12...0-0 13 ♠e5, although even he has to admit that White's advantage is non-existent after the superior 12...♠f5! 13 ♠b3 ♠e4 14 ♠f4 ♠b6 15 ♠e5 0-0, taking play back into Hodgson-Arkell) 12...♠b6 13 0-0 ♠f5 14 ♠b3 0-0 15 ♠e5 ♠e4.

(see following diagram)

White's dilemma here is how to make any meaningful progress; a problem highlighted by two variations mentioned by Rowson: 16 ♠xc6 ♠xc6 17 ♠xb5 ♣b6 and 16 ♠xe4 dxe4 17 ♠xc6 ♠xc6 when the end of the symmetry is slightly in Black's favour in

both cases. Hodgson tried to make some useful semi-waiting moves with 16 h3 h5 17 ♖h2, but after 17...♞e8 Black remained comfortably placed. I'm not a fan of statistics, but from the 8 games I've found after 15...♘e4, Black has scored +2 =6 -0 which isn't at all bad.



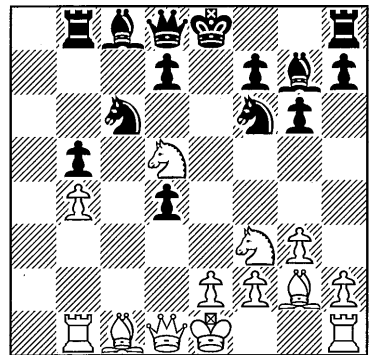
Those interested in seeing the remainder of Hodgson-Arkell and in discovering more about the issue 'that having the right to move is not always desirable' should consult Rowson's aforementioned work.

11 d4!?

This positional pawn sacrifice was enthusiastically recommended by Kosten back in 1999, but Black has subsequently found some major improvements. White might prefer something quieter, but then Black gets to develop comfortably after either 11...♘ge7 or even 11...d5; for example, 11 d3 ♘ge7 12 0-0 d5 13 ♘d2 0-0 14 ♖b3 h6 15 ♜fc1 ♙e6 16 ♖d1 ♖d7 17 ♙e1 f5! already saw Black taking over the initiative against White's rather passive set-up in M.Taimanov-T.Ernst, Stockholm 2003.

White has also tried 11 e4?!, but a combination of e4 and ♘f3 rarely works well (the king's knight belongs on e2 – or e7 – in Botvinnik set-ups) and 11...♘ge7 12 0-0 0-0 13 ♞e1?! (13 d3 is a better try, albeit still not too challenging for Black who should consider a quick ...f5) 13...d6 14 h3 h6! (wisely ruling out ♘g5 ideas and thereby facilitating both ...♙e6 and ...f5) 15 d3 ♙e6 16 ♘h4 d5 left Black better in S.Reshevsky-T.Petrosian, Los Angeles 1963.

11...exd4 12 ♘d5 ♘f6



13 ♙g5

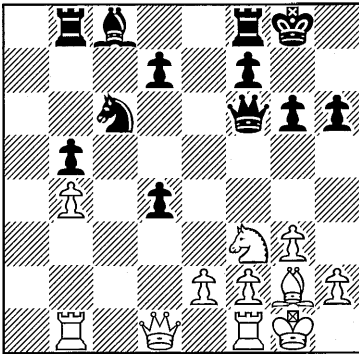
In view of White's difficulties in the main line, attention might perhaps turn to 13 ♘xf6+!? which made a successful debut in Z.Bratonov-O.Gladyszev, La Fere 2002: 13...♖xf6 14 ♙g5 ♖e6 (14...♖f5!? 15 ♙f4 ♖a8 16 ♙d6 ♖a3 also merits attention) 15 ♙f4 ♖a8 16 ♘g5 ♖c4?! 17 ♙d6! and Black never managed to castle satisfactorily. A more logical and better try is 16...♖e7, after which 17 ♘e4 ♙e5 enables Black to castle in view of 18 ♙h6?! d5 19 ♘c5 ♘xb4! 20 ♘d3 ♘a2.

13...h6!

Breaking the pin immediately, and this appears to ensure Black of a fully acceptable game.

14 ♖xf6+

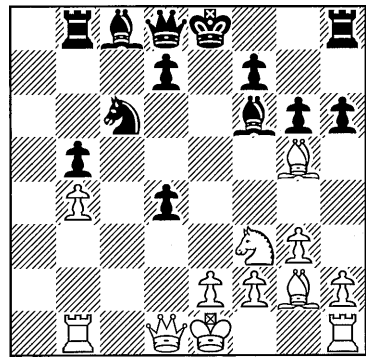
White might also play to regain his pawn with 14 ♖xf6 ♗xf6 15 0-0 (15 ♖c1!? ♗f8 16 0-0 ♖g7 – Watson – also looks fine for Black) 15...0-0 16 ♖xf6+ ♗xf6



17 ♗d2, but this shouldn't promise him any advantage since Black will gain counterplay down the e-file. Nevertheless, leading English practitioner, Normunds Miezis, gave this a try in N.Miezis-F.Gheorghiu, Winterthur 2002: 17...♖g7 (17...♗e8!? is also possible, hoping to force White to waste time on ♗fe1; he didn't in A.Holst-T.Rosenlund, Danish League 2000, but after 18 ♗xh6 ♗xe2 19 ♖g5 ♗b7 20 ♗h7+ ♖f8 21 ♗h4 ♖g7 22 ♗h7+ ♖f8 23 ♖e4!?, 23...♗g7 24 ♗h4 ♖e5 would have been at least equal for Black) 18 ♗fd1 (White might prefer to continue positionally, playing around the d4-pawn, but the pressure against b4 and e2 should not be underestimated; 18

♗fc1 ♗e8 19 ♗c5 ♗b7! 20 ♗d1 d3! 21 exd3? ♖xb4 saw Black's superior tactical ability force an ending a clear pawn up in A.Ornstein-T.Ernst, Swedish Ch. 1988, although 21 e3 ♖xb4 22 ♗xb4 ♗xf3 23 ♗xf3 ♗xf3 24 ♗xd3 would probably have led to a draw) 18...♗e8 19 ♗b2?! (trying to maintain some tension, but perhaps White must simply accept a even ending with 19 ♖f1 ♗b7 20 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 21 ♗xd4 ♗xg2+ 22 ♖xg2 ♗xd4 23 ♗xd4 ♗xe2 24 ♗xd7 – Watson) 19...d3! (the pawn was destined to drop in any case, and this forces White to take on an IQP) 20 exd3 ♖d4 (this is fine for Black, but 20...d5! would have been a good way to keep pieces on, when the threat of 21...♗g4 is awkward for White and 21 d4 ♗g4 22 ♗b3 ♗e4 23 ♗d3 ♗be8 leaves Black the more comfortably placed) 21 ♖xd4 ♗xd4 22 ♗c2 ♗b7 23 ♗c3 ♗xc3 24 ♗xc3 ♗xg2 25 ♖xg2 ♗e6 and the experienced Romanian should never have lost this level ending.

14...♗xf6



15 ♗f4

White can also transpose to our last

note with 15 ♖xf6 ♜xf6 16 ♚d2 0-0! 17 0-0 ♔g7. Note that Black doesn't fear 17 ♜xh6 because of 17...d3 18 0-0 dxe2, although the Danish IM Karsten Rasmussen was happy to twice play the position after 19 ♜fe1 in the same event. After 19...♙e8 20 ♔g5, Black could simply play 20...♜g7, although it's also tempting to follow the path of K.Rasmussen-C.Beaumont, Aarhus 1990: 20...♘d4?! 21 ♙d5 (White can also force a repetition with 21 ♜h7+ ♔f8 22 ♜h4 ♔g7 23 ♜h7+) 21...♙b7 22 ♖xf7+ ♜xf7 23 ♘xf7 ♘f3+ 24 ♔g2 and here 24...♘xe1+ 25 ♔h3 ♙g2+ 26 ♔g4 ♘f3 would have reached a fascinating, if obscure position. I'm not quite sure why Beaumont rejected this since 27 ♘g5 (instead 27 ♜xg6+ ♔f8 28 ♜f6 ♙e6 defends and 29 ♜h8+ ♔xf7 30 ♜xb8 ♘xh2+ 31 ♔h5 ♙f3+ is dangerous only for White) 27...♘e5+ 28 ♔h4 ♙e7 keeps everything covered, after which 29 f4! ♘f3+ 30 ♔g4 e1♚ 31 ♙xe1 ♘xe1 32 ♜xg6+ ♙g7 33 ♚d6 ♙f8 leaves Black's king no less unhappy than White's. Indeed the game will probably end in a perpetual check, such as with 34 h4 ♘f3 35 h5 ♘h2+ 36 ♔h4 ♘f3+ 37 ♔g4 ♘h2+.

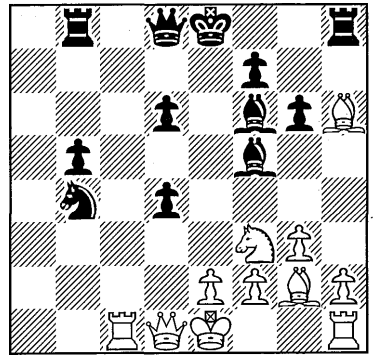
15...d6

Obviously Black doesn't want to allow the bishop into d6, but now White gets to carry out his trick. Whether he should is, however, a different matter.

16 ♖xh6?! ♙f5

White's point is that 16...♙xh6? 17 ♜c1 forks rook and knight, but Black can do much better than allow that.

17 ♙c1 ♘xb4!



Removing the knight from the attack, while capturing a useful pawn in the process. It's hard to believe that this was a novelty when unveiled in L.Thiede-J.Cox, European Club Cup, Rethymnon 2003, but presumably it had previously been believed that this capture was too risky. The black king may have to remain in the centre, but it is safe enough there and the passed b-pawn should not be underestimated. Previously Kosten had only examined 17...♙e4, after which 18 ♙d2 ♘e5 19 0-0 ♘c4?! 20 ♙g5! ♖xf3 21 ♖xf6 ♜xf6 22 exf3! turned out rather well for White in G.Zaichik-K.Thorsteins, Moscow 1988.

18 ♘xd4

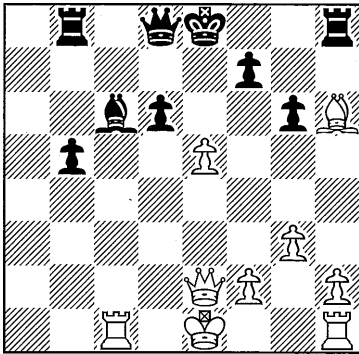
As a team-mate of John Cox's, I had the pleasure of observing Thiede-Cox at first hand and already White was deep in thought, trying to work out this complicated position. He eventually decided to head down a forcing line, albeit one which is fine for Black, but so too is 18 0-0 ♘a2 19 ♙a1 ♘c3.

18...♘d3+ 19 exd3 ♖xd4

Flicking in 19...♜e7+!? also looks

garner some easy points against any Kosten disciples would probably be fine in practice just memorizing up to move 21, before playing the resulting unclear positions with a probable large advantage on the clock.

22...♙xc6 23 dxe5

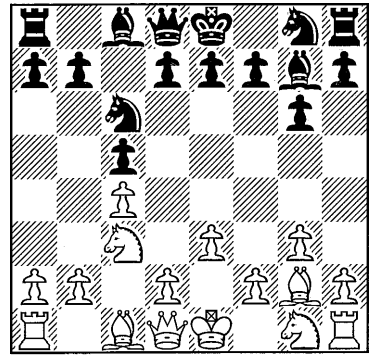


At this point Cox, knowing that a draw was good enough for his team, settled for the simple 23...dxe5 24 0-0 ♖xh6 25 ♗xe5+ ♜f8 26 ♖fd1 ♗e8 27 ♗d6+ ♜g8 28 ♖xc6 ♖h5, after which Black was never going to lose. Indeed, the game was shortly drawn, enabling Barbican to score a most professional undefeated 3½-2½ victory against their German opponents.

Returning to move 23, Black actually could have maintained some advantage with 23...♖xh6 24 ♖xc6 ♗a5+! 25 ♜f1 ♗a1+ 26 ♜g2 ♗xe5 (Steenbekers and Watson), which would have left White fighting for a draw in the ensuing double rook ending.

B)

1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 e3



Preparing a rather harmonious set-up. Black must now watch out for an early d4-advance, although it is important not to underestimate White's flexible set-up should his d-pawn only reach d3. In certain circles 5 e3 is often viewed as a tactical draw offer, and indeed many games have been drawn after 5...e6 6 ♘ge2 ♘ge7 7 0-0 (instead 7 ♘f4 maintains a fair amount of tension and produces an unbalanced positional struggle) 7...0-0 8 d4 cxd4 9 ♘xd4 d5 10 cxd5 ♘xd5 11 ♘xd5 ♘xd4 12 exd4 exd5. We will not, however, be exploring this line in any detail, not least because it only leads to a draw at best for Black and because White isn't committed to all those exchanges. Instead we will consider:

B1: 5...e5

B2: 5...♙xc3!?

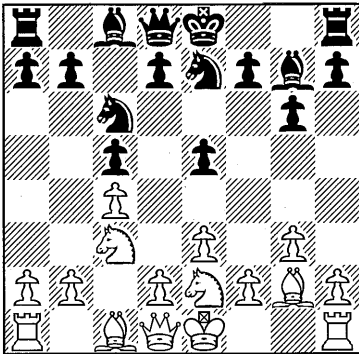
B1)

1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 e3 e5

Ruling out any notion of a d4-push and implementing our favourite Bot-

vinnik set-up. By placing his pawn on e5, Black also prevents White from unravelling with ♖f4, not that White really minds that. Instead he is often happy to maintain flexibility with his knight on e2 and, of course, such a set-up is often used by Black in reverse to combat the Closed Sicilian.

6 ♖ge2 ♗ge7



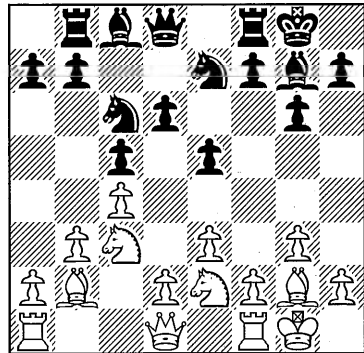
7 0-0

White almost always castles king-side in this line, although he may try to delay doing so. Black is then advised to seek a transposition, such as with 7 b3 d6 8 ♖b2 0-0 when White doesn't have anything better than 9 0-0, transposing to the note to his 8th move below. Note that with this particular move order, Black might be tempted to punish White, but such attempts generally backfire: for example, 8...♗e6 9 0-0 d5?! 10 cxd5 ♖xd5 allows White to generate some pressure and to change the nature of the struggle with Keene's suggestion of 11 ♖e4! b6 12 ♖f4!?. White might also delay castling to try for an early b4-advance, but after 7 d3 0-0 8 a3 d6 9 ♖b1 a5 (only now that White is

finally threatening b4) 10 0-0 play has transposed to our main line.

7...0-0 8 a3

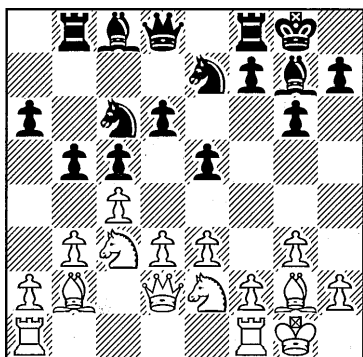
White can also keep his options open with 8 d3, but he can only postpone by a move the option of what to do with his b-pawn. We will ensure that it never reaches b4, but White can angle for that or place the pawn immediately on b3. After 8 b3 d6 9 ♖b2, 9...♖b8, as in the main line, is a good move, although Black can also adopt a set-up with 9...♗e6 and ...♗d7, since the Keene-endorsed 10 ♖e4 h6 11 d4?! fails to convince after 11...exd4 12 exd4 ♖f5!. After the prophylactic 9...♖b8 we will consider:



a) 10 ♖d5 rather breaks the old rule of thumb about waiting first for ...♗e6 (likewise when White has a pawn on e4, Black will find ...♖d4 to be much better timed once White has played ♗e3), and allows Black to demonstrate his idea: 10...b5!? (prefacing this with 10...a6 is also possible) 11 cxb5 (11 d3 is more restrained and should be compared with 10 d3, but Black can try to exploit White's move order with 11...a6

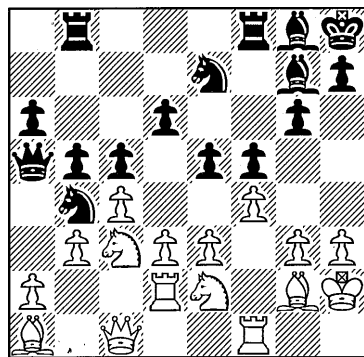
12 ♖d2 ♜xd5!; then 13 ♙xd5 ♜e7 14 ♙g2 ♙b7 is pretty level, and the more unbalanced 13 cxd5 ♜e7 14 d4!? exd4 15 exd4 c4! 16 bxc4 bxc4 also appears to be fine for Black) 11...♞xb5 12 ♜xc7+ ♜xe7 13 d4 (the only real way to make sense of the white set-up, but now the b5-rook becomes quite active) 13...exd4 14 exd4 ♙b7 15 ♜c3 ♙xg2 16 ♙xg2 ♞a5 17 dxc5 ♞xc5 and Black's activity at least fully compensated for his inferior structure in D.Jahr-L.Weglarz, Warsaw 1987.

b) 10 d3 a6 11 ♖d2 b5 produces quite a tough positional struggle.



Black has seized some useful queenside space, but White remains well coordinated and ready to pounce on any over-ambitious play. One high-level game continued 12 ♞ad1 (probably best as White prepares for kingside expansion; after 12 ♞fd1, 12...♖a5 has a solid reputation, but I also like the provocative 12...♙g4!? 13 h3 ♙e6 14 ♞ac1 ♖d7 15 ♙h2 f5 of H.Teske-J.Bellon Lopez, Havana 1998, and then meeting 16 ♜d5 with Ribli's suggestion of 16...♙f7!, preparing an exchange on d5) 12...♖a5

(provoking h3 with 12...♙g4 13 h3 ♙e6 makes slightly less sense when White still has a rook on f1 to support f4; however, this might still be possible if Black is happy to meet 14 ♜d5 with the unbalancing 14...♙xd5!? 15 cxd5 ♜b4 16 ♜c3 a5 17 a3 ♜a6 18 ♜e2 ♖b6 19 ♙h2 ♙h6, as he did in H.Westerman-W.Waagmeester, correspondence 1988) 13 h3 ♙e6 14 ♙a1 f5 (unable to make any progress on the queenside for the time being, Black seizes some more space as both sides begin to jockey for position) 15 f4 ♙h8 16 ♖c1!? (keeping the queens on and avoiding 16 ♜d5 ♖xd2 17 ♞xd2 when the thematic 17...♙g8 is fine for Black who threatens to exchange knights on d5) 16...♜b4 (regrouping with the 16...♙g8!? 17 ♞d2 h6 18 ♞fd1 ♖b6 19 ♙h2 ♞be8 of J.Voth-S.Boyd, correspondence 1991, might well be an even better set-up for Black) 17 ♞d2 ♙g8 18 ♙h2

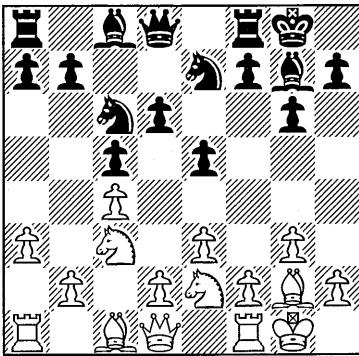


and in A.Lein-L.Polugaevsky, Tbilisi 1967, Black should have opted for Petrosian's suggestion of 18...♞fd8 with a fully acceptable position, albeit one in which it is hard for either side to make

progress. Instead Polugaevsky failed to appreciate some of the subtleties and 18...♖bd8?! 19 ♖fd1 h6 20 a3 ♖bc6 21 ♖d5! ♖xd5 22 cxd5 left him worse in view of 22...♗e7 23 fxe5 dxe5 24 e4.

Black's set-up is supposed to prevent White playing d4, but I wonder about an immediate 8 d4!?. The point is that 8...exd4 9 exd4 ♖xd4 10 ♖xd4 ♗xd4 11 ♖b5 offers White some compensation. Black might wish to explore that or he could opt for the simpler 9...cxd4!? 10 ♖b5 d5! (10...d6 11 ♖bxd4 ♗e5?! 12 ♖b3 gave White an edge in A.Frank-K.Moerger, Seefeld 2004 – surprisingly the only example of 8 d4 I could find) 11 cxd5 ♖xd5 12 ♖bxd4 ♗e8 with active piece play and a strong knight on d5 in the event of 13 ♖xc6 bxc6.

8...d6

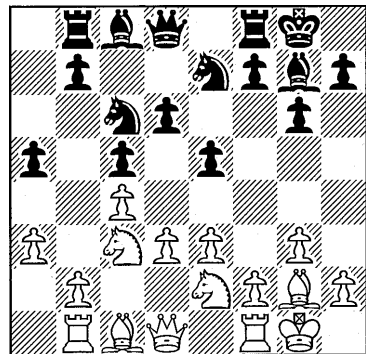


Fans of lines with an early ...a6 might wonder here about 8...a6?!, but unfortunately I cannot recommend it in view of 9 b4! cxb4?! 10 axb4 ♖xb4 11 ♗a3 ♖bc6 12 ♗d6 ♗e8 13 ♖b5! ♖f5 14 ♗c7 ♖e7 15 ♖ec3 and White had far too much thematic compensation in Y.Nikolaevsky-Y.Popov, Varna 1968.

9 ♖b1

Consistent, especially considering that an immediate 9 b4 is not the most convincing of gambits. After 9...cxb4 10 axb4 ♖xb4 11 ♗a3 White doesn't really gain enough compensation following Carsten Hansen's 11...♗ec6 12 d4 a5!. White can also opt for 9 d3, but this shouldn't be too challenging and Black has a pleasant choice between 9...♖b8 and 9...♗e6. The latter prepares to meet 10 ♖b1 with 10...d5, but neither is 10 ♖d5 especially troubling and 10...♖b8! 11 ♖ec3 (the more recent 11 ♗a2!? b5 12 b3 a5 13 ♗b2 ♖d7 14 ♗e1 ♗g4 was also fine for Black in D.Poldauf-G.Fish, German League 2005) 11...a6 12 ♖b1 (wisely avoiding 12 b4?! e4! when Black will follow up with an exchange on d3 and ...♗e5) 12...b5 13 cxb5 axb5 14 b4 ♖xd5 (Black frees his position through exchanges, although it's also perfectly possible to maintain more tension with 14...♖d7) 15 ♖xd5 ♗e7 was pretty comfortable for Black in M.Bertok-A.Adorjan, Birmingham 1973.

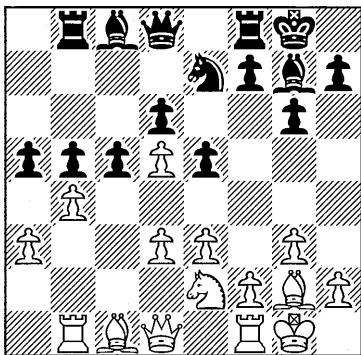
9...a5 10 d3 ♖b8



11 ♗d2

Electing not to fianchetto, but there are alternatives:

a) 11 ♖d5 should probably not be met by the apparently consistent 11...b5 since 12 cxb5 ♜xb5 13 ♛a4 ♜b8 14 ♙d2 is a little awkward, especially if Black doesn't want to see the whole queen-side liquidate and a draw ensue. Instead he might prefer 11...♗xd5 12 cxd5 ♕e7 when 13 b4 can be met by Karlsson's suggestion of 13...b5!,



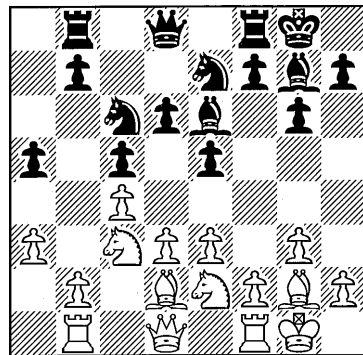
reaching an unclear and complex position after 14 bxc5 dxc5 15 e4 ♙a6.

b) 11 ♛b3!? ♙e6 12 ♗d5 has been employed by Gretařsson, but I'm neither quite sure what it achieves nor why his opponent rejected the consistent 12...b5!. Black regains the pawn after 13 cxb5 ♗xd5 14 ♙xd5 a4 15 ♛a2 (15 ♛xa4? ♙xd5 16 bxc6 ♙f3 gives Black far too much play on the light squares; already ...♛c8-h3 is threatened) 15...♙xd5 16 ♛xd5 ♗a7, and then 17 b4 ♗xb5 18 bxc5 should be met by 18...dxc5!, fixing d3 as a weakness as well as a3, whereas 18...♗d4!? was probably a little too clever in J.Borges Mateos-J.Mellado Trivino, Elche 1999, and 19 ♗xd4 ♜xb1

20 ♗c6 ♛d7 21 ♗b4 gave White reasonable play for the exchange.

c) 11 b3 should be compared with 8 b3, although it should be noted that b3 set-ups aren't especially popular at the moment amongst 5 e3 exponents. Here play might continue 11...♙e6 12 ♗d5 b5 13 ♙b2 ♛d7 with the usual tough positional battle ahead.

11...♙e6



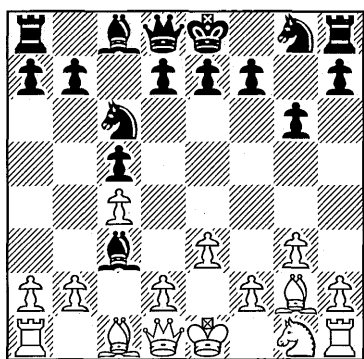
Preparing to break with 12...d5 and thereby encouraging White to occupy the d5-square with his knight. Black retains the ...b5 and ...f5 advances in this position but must, once again, be prepared for a lengthy manoeuvring battle. Some typical examples:

a) 12 ♗d5 (either underestimating or provoking Black's plan) 12...b5 13 cxb5 (critical; instead 13 ♗ec3 b4 14 axb4 axb4 15 ♗xe7+ ♗xe7 is fine for Black, and he might also consider Alterman's 14...cxb4!? 15 ♗a4 ♙d7) 13...♜xb5 14 ♗ec3 (reinforcing d5, although White can also play for exchanges and a draw with 14 ♛a4 ♛b8 15 ♗ec3 ♜xb2 16 ♜xb2 ♛xb2 17 ♜b1 ♛xd2 18 ♜d1 ♛b2 19 ♜b1, but rather than acquiesce to the repeti-

17 b4 axb4 18 axb4 ♖bd8 19 ♘c7 ♕f7 20 b5 ♘b8 21 ♘c3 ♘d7 22 ♘3d5 ♘f6 led to multiple exchanges on d5 and shortly a comfortable draw for the much lower-rated Black player in M.Gurevich-S.Roy Chowdhury, Vlissingen 2006.

B2)

1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 e3 ♙xc3!?

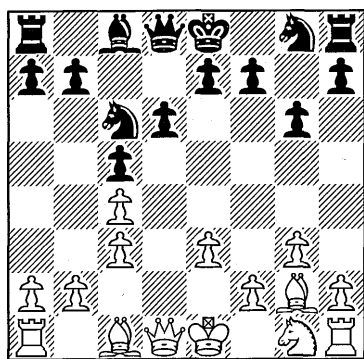


Readers will note that this has many similarities with the provocative Line B of Chapter One. It should therefore come as no surprise to learn that Larsen has also given this immediate exchange his patronage. Black's aim is fairly obvious: he hopes that White will have to lose a tempo with a later e3-e4 and, of course, the exchange has to be made immediately if at all before 6 ♘ge2 is played.

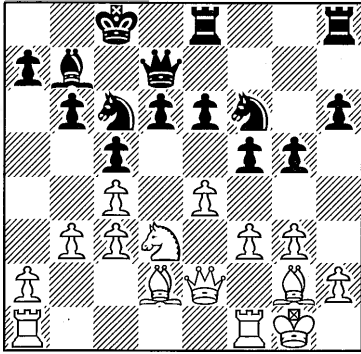
6 bxc3

White's main move, but 6 dxc3!? is not without merit and may well become more popular after a fine performance on the White side by Kveinys. Black usually continues à la Line B of Chapter One with 6...d6, intending 7...♕d7 and then a queenside fianchetto.

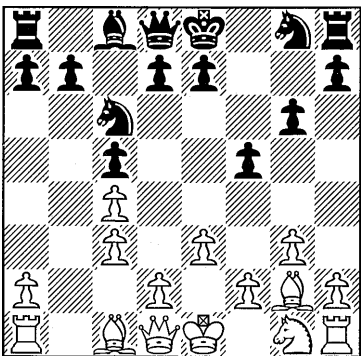
However, in light of variation 'b' below, I believe that he should give serious consideration to Rowson's untested suggestion of 6...b6!?, prioritizing the fianchetto. White might still continue 7 ♘f3 ♙b7 8 e4 d6 9 ♕e2, but then Black can save a useful tempo with 9...♕c7. To fully appreciate the aims of both sides in this variation, we will consider two lines after 6...d6:



a) 7 ♘e2 ♕d7 8 0-0 b6 9 ♘f4 ♙b7 10 e4 0-0-0 (in light of our next note, Black might wish to delay this with 10...e6!?, waiting to see White's plan before committing his king) 11 b3?! (the incisive 11 a4! is much more to the point, when 11...g5!? 12 ♘d5 e6 is probably best, since 11...♘a5?! fails to prevent White's intended attack: 12 b4 ♘xc4 13 ♕e2 ♘e5 14 a5 e6 15 axb6 axb6 16 ♙e3 being rather unpleasant for Black in I.Barraza Caracel-S.Gonzalez de la Torre, Mondariz Balneario 2002) 11...e6 12 ♘d3 f5! 13 ♙g5 ♕e8 14 f3 h6 15 ♙d2 ♘f6 16 ♕e2 g5 and Black had achieved a model set-up and was slightly for choice in O.Salmensuu-P.H.Nielsen, Gistrup 1997.



b) 7 e4 ♖d7 8 ♖f3! (a strong follow-up as White prepares to meet 8...b6? with 9 e5!, and a major improvement over the 8 ♖c2 b6 9 ♖f4 ♖b7 10 ♖e2 e6 11 ♖d3 h6 12 ♖d2 ♖ge7 13 0-0-0 0-0-0 14 ♖he1 ♖c7 of P.Benko-J.Tarjan, Lone Pine 1979, when Black took over the initiative with ...♖a6 and ...b5) 8...♖f6 9 ♖e2 ♖c7 10 h3 h6 11 ♖d2! b6 12 ♖f1 ♖b7 13 ♖e3 e6 14 ♖g4! and White's fine knight manoeuvre left Black under some pressure in A.Kveinys-S.Hansen, German League 2001.
6...f5!?

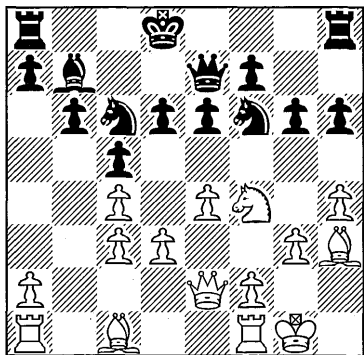


Continuing in very provocative style and it should come as no surprise to

learn that Miles, as well as Larsen, has employed this set-up.

Readers of a slightly nervous disposition should really be employing Line B1, but if anyone here wishes not to encourage the opposition h-pawn forwards, both 6...b6 and 6...d6 are possible. After the former, 7 ♖e2 (7 h4!? has been played even here, and although 7...♖f6 8 e4 ♖b7 9 ♖e2 d6 10 d3 ♖d7 11 ♖g5 ♖g4! 12 d4 ♖a5 13 h5 f6! 14 ♖c1 g5 was positionally quite complex, it most certainly wasn't bad for Black in A.Groszpeter-P.Schlosser, Lippstadt 1991) 7...♖b7 8 d3 d6 9 0-0 ♖d7 10 e4 was the logical continuation of J.Speelman-K.Commons, Lone Pine 1978. White has created a Botvinnik formation to try and neutralize the b7-bishop, but Black can still gain a reasonable position with plenty of kingside potential after 10...0-0-0 11 ♖f4 ♖b8 12 ♖h3 ♖e8! (Watson). Instead Commons's 10...f5?! 11 ♖f4 0-0-0?! should have been met by 12 exf5! gxf5 13 ♖d5, invading on e6, as pointed out by Watson.

Finally, a quick word on the latter option. 6...d6!? has been played extremely rarely, but prefacing the fianchetto like this is not without merit. I certainly couldn't let the thematic game S.Reuben-R.Dineley, British League 1999, pass by without drawing it to the reader's attention: 7 ♖e2 ♖d7 8 ♖f4 b6 9 d3 ♖b7 10 e4 ♖f6 (10...e6!? would have slightly weakened the dark squares, but would have prevented any ♖d5 ideas) 11 ♖e2 h6 12 h4 e6! 13 ♖h3 ♖e7 14 0-0 ♖d8!



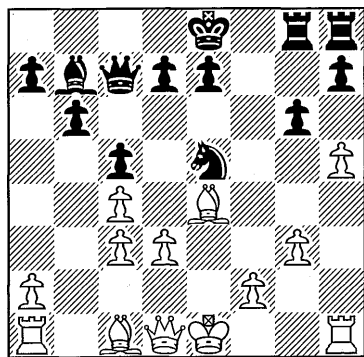
15 ♖g2 ♖c7 16 ♙e3 ♞ag8 17 f4 ♘d7! and Black's fine strategic play – walking the king to safety and then preparing to advance on the kingside – would not have disgraced a primer on the Nimzo.

Against 6...d6, White should possibly prefer to play aggressively in the centre with 7 e4!? ♞d7 8 ♘f3, just like after 6 dxc3. Black should still reply 8...b6, not fearing 9 e5?! in view of the fine exchange sacrifice 9...dxe5 10 ♘xe5 ♘xe5! 11 ♙xa8 ♘d3+ 12 ♖f1 ♘f6, leaving the white position full of weaknesses and problem pieces.

7 h4!?

White allows himself to be provoked, and by playing an immediate h4, his king's knight can stay on course for the aggressive g5-square. To see the benefits of this, we should examine A.Kosten-A.Miles, British Championship, Hove 1997: 7 ♘e2 b6 8 h4!? ♘f6 9 h5 ♖f7 (Miles doesn't want to cede the h-file with 9...♞g8?! when White would follow up with 10 hxg6 hxg6 11 ♘f4, but the risky 9...♘h5!? was possible since 10 ♞xh5 gxh5 11 ♘f4 0-0 12 ♙d5+

♘h8 13 ♞xh5 ♞e8! – Kosten – beats off the first wave of the attack; White should perhaps thus prefer 11 ♘d4!?, aiming to force a perpetual with 11...cxd4 12 ♞xh5+ ♖f8 13 ♞xf5+ 10 d3 ♙b7 11 ♘g1!?. (White doesn't want to open and then have to cede the h-file, and so redirects his knight) 11...♞c7 12 ♘f3 ♞ag8 13 e4! fxe4 14 ♘g5+ ♖e8 15 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 16 ♙xe4 ♘e5!



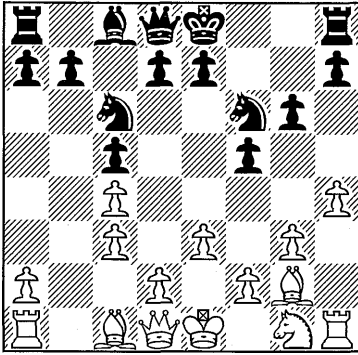
and despite a fair amount of creativity from both sides, the position remained roughly even.

White doesn't have to charge with his h-pawn, and to see how Black should develop against a slower set-up, we will observe another master of imbalance in action: 7 f4?! ♘f6 8 ♘f3 b6 9 0-0 ♙b7 10 d3 ♘a5! (preventing White from advancing with e4; a direct consequence of his misguided seventh move) 11 ♞e2 ♞c7 12 ♙b2 0-0 13 ♞ae1 ♞ae8 14 ♙c1 e6 15 h3 d6 and Black had a most harmonious set-up in E.Mednis-B.Larsen, New York 1990.

Finally, White may immediately seize space with 7 d4, but after 7...♘f6 8 ♘f3 d6, it's not clear that he wants to

advance further. Otherwise, though, Black will play ...e5 and he has a good version of the Dutch in either case due to the weakness of c4.

7...♗f6



8 h5

Consistent, especially since Black cannot capture: 8...♗xh5? 9 ♖xh5! gxh5 10 ♗xh5+ and White will pick up at least the f- and c-pawns, while retaining good long-term attacking chances for the exchange. However, should White dally but then play h5, Black may well be able to capture, and 8 d3 d6 9 h5?! ♗xh5! 10 ♖xh5 gxh5 11 ♗xh5+ ♗d7 12 ♗xf5+ ♗c7 13 ♗h5 ♗g8 didn't give White enough compensation in M.Fraschini-D.Adla, Buenos Aires 1993.

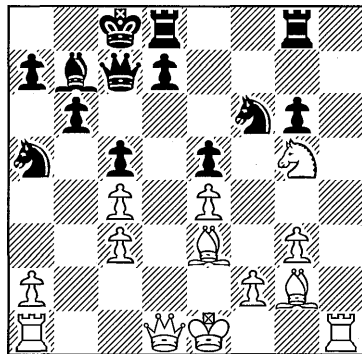
8...♖g8

Ceding the h-file to keep g6 well protected, and Black usually meets the related 1 d4 g6 2 c4 ♗g7 3 ♗c3 c5 4 d5 ♗xc3+ 5 bxc3 f5 6 h4 ♗f6 7 h5 in similar style with 7...♖g8!. In both cases he plans to castle long, gaining the safer long-term king position, and will later re-oppose the h-file with ...♖h8. Kosten points out that Black can also play à la

Miles here with 8...♗f7!?, although this appears especially provocative in view of his own suggestion on ChessPublishing: 9 ♗f3 ♗xh5 10 e4! fxe4 11 ♗g5+ ♗g7 12 ♗xe4 d6 13 d4! with some initiative.

9 hxg6 hxg6 10 d3

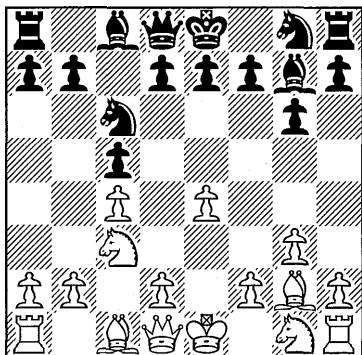
We've been following D.Fridman-L.Psakhis, online blitz 2004, which continued 10...d6?! 11 ♗f3! ♗d7 12 ♗g5 when it became clear that Black was experiencing some inconvenience with the e6-square: following 12...b6 13 e4 ♗b7, Kosten's 14 ♗e2 would have given White the edge. Black must always be alert to potential problems on e6 after the exchange on c3, but here he could have done much better with the immediate 10...b6! 11 ♗f3 ♗b7 (Kosten), which I'm sure Psakhis would have found with more time. White might still continue aggressively with 12 ♗g5 ♗c7 13 e4, but Black should be fine. He can castle immediately or play for a promising exchange sacrifice with 13...fxe4!? 14 dxe4 0-0-0 15 ♗f4 (trying to make some use of the g5-knight's advanced position) 15...e5 16 ♗e3 ♗a5!.



With c4 rather weak, White might well have to grab the exchange, but 17 $\text{d}f7$ $\text{d}xc4$ 18 $\text{d}xd8$ $\text{d}xe3$ 19 fxe3 $\text{d}xd8$ leaves his structure a wreck, while Black plans to capture on e4 or to make use of the c5-square after ...c4.

C)

**1 c4 c5 2 $\text{d}c3$ $\text{d}c6$ 3 g3 g6 4 $\text{g}g2$ $\text{g}g7$
5 e4 e5**



White employs our favourite Botvinnik set-up and, at club level at least, this is often a favoured line among those who like to play for a kingside attack with f4-f5, etc.

Unlike White in Chapter One, Black is not yet committed to ... $\text{d}f6$, although 5... $\text{d}f6$, intending ...0-0 and ... $\text{d}e8$ -c7 (both supporting ...b5 and heading for d4 via e6), is a very respectable option for those who don't mind playing both sides of the positions we considered in the last chapter. Instead, we will concentrate on:

C1: 5...e5

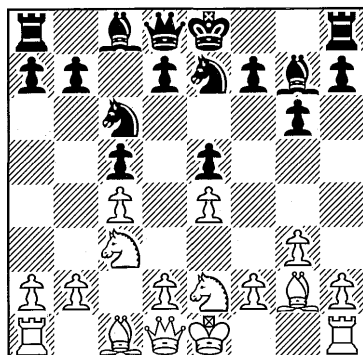
C2: 5...a6!?

C1)

**1 c4 c5 2 $\text{d}c3$ $\text{d}c6$ 3 g3 g6 4 $\text{g}g2$ $\text{g}g7$
5 e4 e5**

Black refuses to be deterred from his favourite set-up and now a rather blocked centre ensues. White again has the advantage of the move, although, just as in Line A2, whether that is an advantage is not so clear: Black will always have the option of copying or choosing to break the symmetry. Here, as Carsten Hansen has pointed out, 'White has difficulties creating much more than a fairly equal position'.

6 $\text{d}ge2$ $\text{d}ge7$



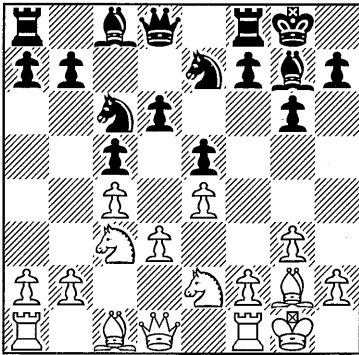
Black should continue to copy, if only because that leaves him well placed to meet 7 a3, a move order which Seirawan has used. That can now be effectively met by playing as in Line A2 with 7...a6 8 $\text{b}b1$ $\text{b}b8$ 9 b4 cxb4 10 axb4 b5. Also possible is 7...d6 8 $\text{b}b1$ a5 which should transpose to the note to Black's 9th move after 9 0-0 0-0 10 d3 $\text{b}b8$.

7 d3 d6 8 0-0

Several of the key themes of Chapter One are also relevant here; for ex-

ample, neither side should hurry with ♕e3 or ...♕e6, which would enable an effective ♜d5 or ...♜d4 in response. To illustrate this, I can do no better than follow Watson's excellent example of M.Fuller-R.Jamieson, Melbourne 1975: 8 ♕e3 ♜d4! 9 0-0 (9 ♕xd4 cxd4 10 ♜d5 0-0 11 ♖d2 ♕d7 12 0-0 ♜xd5 13 exd5 f5 14 f4 ♖f6 didn't impress for White in I.Radziejewicz-I.Krush, Calicut 1998, since White's knight wasn't especially active, while Black's dark-squared bishop was set to come to h6) 9...0-0 10 ♖d2 a6 11 ♕h6 ♖b8 12 ♕xg7 ♗xg7 13 ♜xd4 cxd4 and Black had full equality, and even more than that after 14 ♜e2?! b5!.

8...0-0



We have now reached the key tabiya for 5 e4 e5, albeit quite a stodgy one. There have been a large number of rather solid draws from this position, and undoubtedly this is one line which does justify the 'boring' tag often wrongly applied to the Symmetrical English. Nevertheless, Black doesn't have to reconcile himself with a draw here. He can break the symmetry when he wishes, while the options available

on both flanks should give him chances to outplay a weaker opponent.

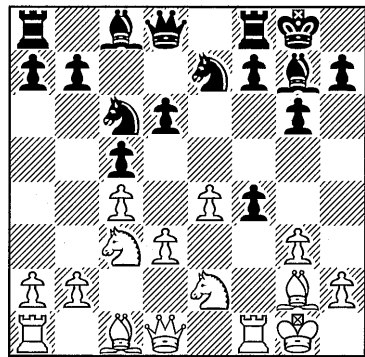
9 a3

Playing for b4, although a couple of hundred games have been played with the alternatives on my database. Summarizing the key points:

a) 9 ♕e3 is again well met by 9...♜d4.

b) 9 ♕g5 can be met by 9...f6 as in Chapter One, although Black can also 'break a rule' here with 9...h6!? because 10 ♕xe7 ♜xe7 leaves Black's bishops no worse than White's knights. White can't establish a knight on d5 and he also can't break through on the queen-side: 11 a3 a6! 12 ♖b1 ♖b8 13 b4 cxb4 14 axb4 b5 15 cxb5 axb5 was fine for Black and agreed drawn here in I.Starostits-A.Maksimenco, Scanno 2005.

c) 9 f4 is the sort of approach one should expect from an opponent determined to attack at any price. Rather than permit f4-f5, Black should halt White's charge in its tracks with 9...exf4!



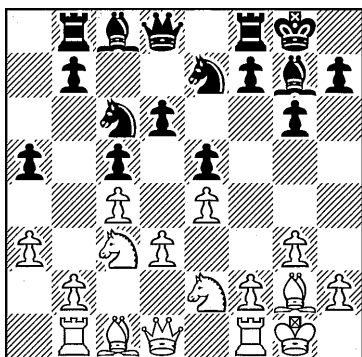
10 gx4 f5. White might prefer 10 ♕xf4, but that also doesn't promise him any

advantage and, for example, 10...♔g4!? (playing to establish a knight on d4) 11 ♖d2 ♗d7 12 ♘d5 ♘xd5 13 cxd5 ♙e5 14 ♚a1 b5 was fine for Black in R.Junker-M.Trauth, German League 1989.

d) 9 ♘d5 is probably White's most solid (and most dull) move. Black can try to unbalance with an exchange on d5 and then ...♙e7, although to play like that requires a fair amount of care and patience. Simpler is 9...♘d5 when Black is very solid and the game heading for a draw after 10 cxd5 ♘d4 11 ♘xd4 cxd4 12 f4 f6, while 10 exd5 ♘d4 11 ♘xd4 exd4 12 ♔d2 ♚e8 13 ♚e1 ♚xe1+ 14 ♗xe1 ♔f5 15 ♔e4 saw the players already shake hands in V.Antonov-M.Bjelajac, Pernik 1978.

9...a6

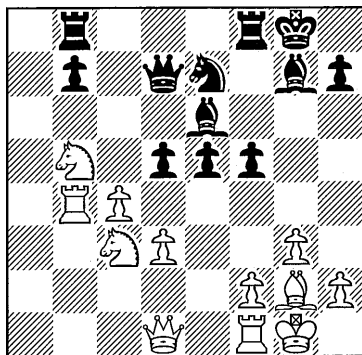
Maintaining the symmetry is a good response, although Black can also play as in Line B1 with 9...a5 10 ♖b1 ♖b8.



Black is ready to meet 11 ♘d5 with 11...b5 and so White might prefer:

a) 11 ♘b5!? ♔e6 12 ♘ec3 f5! gained counterplay before White could inflict any damage with his knights in

A.Adorjan-J.Arnason, Reykjavik 1982; Black equalizing comfortably following 13 exf5 gxf5 14 ♔g5 ♗d7 15 ♔xe7 ♘xe7 16 b4 axb4 17 axb4 cxb4 18 ♚xb4 d5.



b) 11 ♔g5 ♔e6 12 ♗d2 ♗d7 13 a4 ♘b4 14 b3 ♘ec6 15 ♚bd1 b6 16 ♘b5 f5 saw Black untangle his knights à la Adorjan and was fine for him in R.Singh-D.Harika, Hyderabad 2005.

c) 11 ♔d2 ♔e6 12 ♗a4!? (12 f4 ♗d7 13 ♘d5 ♔g4! also saw Black successfully prevent the f5-advance in M.Taimanov-Zhu Chen, Munich 2000) 12...b6 13 f4 exf4! 14 gxf4 ♔d7 15 ♗d1 ♔g4 16 ♗e1 ♗d7 17 ♗g3 f5 thwarted White in his attempts to advance his f-pawn and was rather comfortable for Black in E.Lobron-M.Wahls, Hanover 1991.

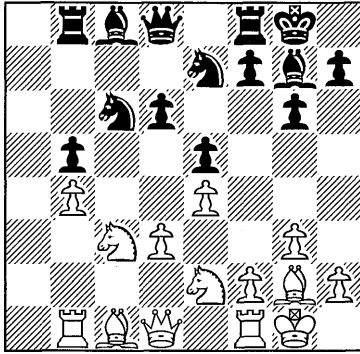
d) 11 ♔c3 has been Seirawan's choice and should probably be met, not by Anastasian's slightly passive 11...♔d7, but by 11...♔e6 and if 12 ♗d2, then either 12...♗d7 or 12...♘d4 13 b4 axb4 14 axb4 b6.

10 ♖b1 ♖b8

With Black threatening to seize the queenside initiative, White really has

no alternative but to see through his plan and advance there.

11 b4 cxb4 12 axb4 b5 13 cxb5 axb5



14 ♗g5

Trying to entice ...f6 which would slightly obstruct the g7-bishop, but Black doesn't have to oblige.

White has also tried an immediate 14 ♗e3, after which Black has a choice between 14...♘d4 and 14...♗e6. Following the latter, 15 ♘d5 (or 15 d4 exd4 16 ♘xd4 ♗c4 17 ♖e1 ♗e5 18 ♘d5 ♘xd5 19 exd5 ♗d7 20 ♗d2 ♖a8 21 ♖a1, as in B.Koch-H.Helm, correspondence 1973; Koch's notes suggest that White is doing well here, but he appears to have somewhat overvalued the c6-square and I would be happy to play Black after simply 21...♗b7) 15...♗d7 16 d4 exd4 17 ♘xd4 ♗e5 18 ♘xe7+ ♗xe7 19 ♘xe6 fxe6 20 ♗d4 ♖bc8 21 f4 ♘c4 saw White gain the bishop pair but no advantage, in view of Black's centralized knight in A.Pihlajasalo-P.H.Nielsen, Munkebo 1998.

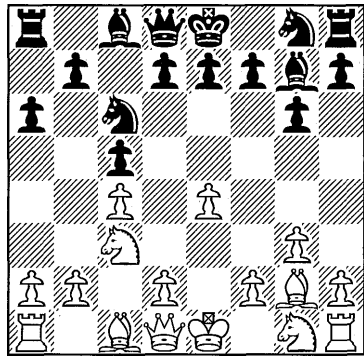
14...♗e6

Correctly not worrying about an exchange on e7, since that would leave

Black with the bishop pair and White unable to install a knight on d5. This position is pretty level, as was shown by the 15 ♘d5 h6 (Black can also play more ambitiously with Komljenovic's 15...f6 16 ♗e3 f5) 16 ♗e3 ♘xd5 17 exd5 ♘d4 and ½-½ of N.Gaprindashvili-P.Cramling, Belgrade 1996.

C2)

1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 e4 a6!?

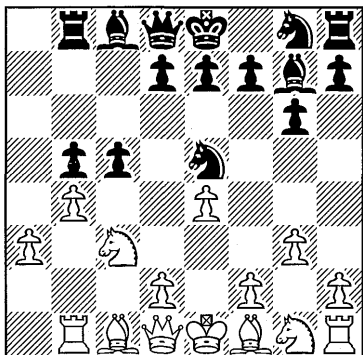


Selecting a dynamic secondary option against 5 e4 was no easy task. Black's two main moves (5...♗f6 and 5...e6) are both very playable but force Black to play a reversed version of either Chapter One or Line B of this chapter. Some readers may be happy to do so, but others will almost certainly not like the concept of 'having to play against themselves'.

Playing 5...a6!? doesn't fully avoid that problem, but striving to seize the initiative with an early ...b5 should pose some early problems for many White fans of a Botvinnik set-up.

6 ♗ge2

Both this and 6 d3 (after which 6...b5 7 ♖ge2 transposes to the note to White's seventh move in our main line) enable Black to carry out his planned ...b5. Bearing in mind Line A2, it might appear that Black is going to gain an inferior version: White has an extra tempo, but playing e4 so early is not necessarily a useful gain. After 6 a3 ♖b8 (it's also possible to start with 6...b5!?, when White should probably settle for 7 d3, since 7 cxb5 axb5 8 ♖xb5 ♙a6 9 ♖c3 ♗e5 compelled 10 ♙f1 and gave Black good compensation in E.Butti-M.Labollita, Buenos Aires 2002) 7 ♖b1?! (7 d3 is once again more prudent) 7...b5 8 cxb5 axb5 9 b4, Black reveals with 9...♗e5! that the 'extra tempo' has weakened rather than helped White. Ribli has pointed out that 10 d3 is well met by 10...c4! 11 dxc4 bxc4, and so in T.Bakre-R.Hasangatin, Abu Dhabi 2003, White found himself having to retreat with 10 ♙f1.

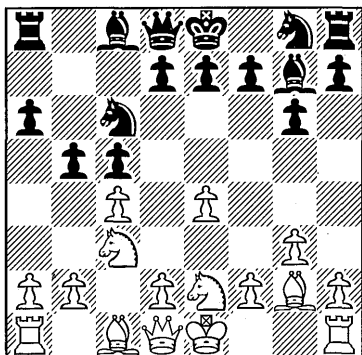


Such an approach does slightly smack of desperation, and after 10...c4! 11 f4?! (11 d4 cxd3 12 ♙xd3 ♗f6 13 ♗f3 ♗xd3+ 14 ♖xd3 ♖b6 15 0-0 d6 – Ribli –

also leaves Black better, but White should have tried this) 11...♗d3+ 12 ♙xd3 cxd3 13 ♖f3?! ♙xc3! 14 dxc3 ♗f6, it became clear that White's play had only served to fatally weaken his already vulnerable light squares.

Watson has suggested that 6 a4 is probably best, and it certainly avoids Black's fun with an early ...b5. One tempting response is simply 6...d6 7 ♗ge2 e5, playing as in Line C1, but with White unable to break with b4. Those not so keen to fully block the centre can instead continue 6...e6 7 ♗ge2 ♗ge7 8 0-0 0-0 9 d3 d6, followed by ...b6 and ...♙b7. Of course, this is a set-up White uses in Line B1, but here the extra tempo shouldn't be too important as a manoeuvring game is again in prospect. Having to play both sides of this position won't suit everyone (and 6...d6 is a good alternative), but Black's solid and flexible set-up is fairly well regarded by theory.

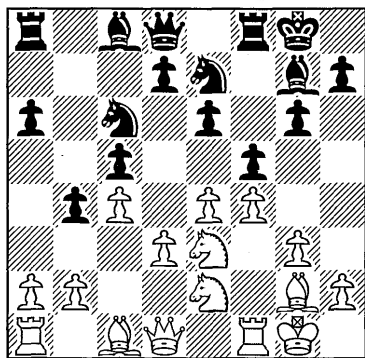
6...b5!



This could have been prefaced by 6...♖b8, but Black should be happy to see White accept the gambit.

7 cxb5

Critical, but risky. We've already seen this capture backfire after 6 a3 and we should remember that Black isn't advised to meet 5 a3 with 5...e5?! due to 6 b4!. White is a tempo up (♗ge2) on that variation, but I would still expect the majority of White players who stumble into this position to prefer the solid 7 d3. Play might then continue 7...b4!? 8 ♖d5 (8 ♖a4!? d6 9 e5 ♖c7 10 exd6 exd6 11 ♗f4 ♗ge7 12 d4 is a much more enterprising try, although after 12...cxd4 13 c5 ♗e5! 14 cxd6 ♗xd6 15 ♖c1 ♗xf4 16 gxf4?! in M.Cordara-L.Ortega, Celle Ligure 1995, Black had a promising choice between 16...♗g4 and sacrificing an exchange with the game's 16...♖d6!?) 8...e6 9 ♗e3 ♗ge7!? (9...d6 10 0-0 ♗ge7 11 f4 f5 12 g4! exploited the pin down the long diagonal in Pe.Wolff-C.Gustavsson, Bruchkoebel 1993, although Black remained sufficiently solid after 12...♖a7 13 ♗g3 0-0 14 gxf5 exf5 15 exf5 gxf5) 10 0-0 0-0 11 f4 f5! which aims to hold White up on the kingside and to keep his knights restricted.



Critical must be 12 e5, but after 12...d6 13 d4 ♖b8 the white centre is undermined and Black gains a reasonable game with 14 d5 ♗a5 15 exd6 (or 15 dxe6?! ♗xe6 16 exd6 ♗c8, regaining the pawn with pressure against White's queenside) 15...♖xd6 16 a3!? ♗b7! 17 axb4 cxb4, intending ...♗c5 and if 18 dxe6, 18...♖b6.

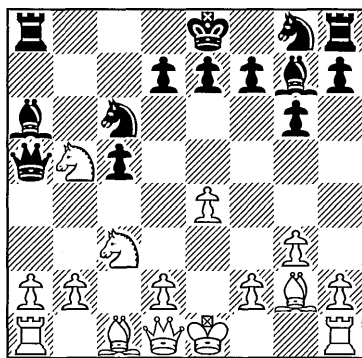
7...axb5 8 ♗xb5?!

White has a lousy score after this and so should probably prefer 8 f4, although 8...b4 9 ♗d5 ♗a6 10 d3 e6 11 ♗e3 ♗ge7 gave Black a good version of the Closed Sicilian in A.Cocchi-S.Sartori, Arvier 2002.

8...♗a6 9 ♗ec3

No matter what he tries, White will land up in a tangle. The alternative is 9 ♗bc3?! ♗b4! 10 0-0 ♗d3 when White really has to give up an exchange for some, but not quite enough compensation with 11 ♗f4 (11 ♖b3? ♗c2 12 ♖b1 ♗d4 wins the exchange under more favourable circumstances for Black) 11...♗xf1 12 ♖xf1 e6 13 ♖c4 ♖a5 14 ♖b1 ♗e7 (M.Fadel-J.Plachetka, Uzes 1989).

9...♖a5



10 ♕f1?!

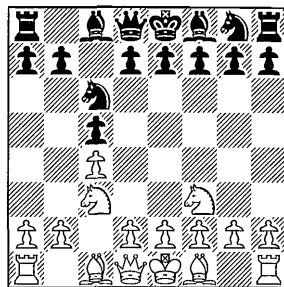
The only move tried in practice, but White should probably prefer 10 a4 ♕xc3 11 bxc3!? (11 ♖xc3 ♗b4 again sees Black home in on d3) 11... ♕xb5 12 axb5, as suggested by Watson who feels that this is unclear. It's certainly White's best try, but after 12... ♗xa1 13 bxc6 dxc6 14 e5 ♗a6 15 ♗f3 ♕f8! 16 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 17 ♕xc6 ♖d8 Black certainly shouldn't be worse despite White's bishop pair.

10... ♗f6 11 a4 0-0

White has managed to maintain his knight on b5, but lags somewhat in development. T.Leosson-B.Kristensen, Gausdal 1994, continued 12 ♕e2 ♗b4!? 13 f3 e6 14 0-0 d5! 15 exd5 exd5 16 ♖c7?! ♕xe2 17 ♗xe2 ♗d4 and Black, by this stage, had more than enough compensation in view of White's serious difficulties in terms of unravelling his queenside.

Chapter Three

The Three Knights Variation



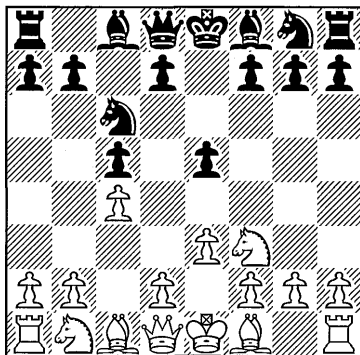
1 c4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3

This is the main subject of this chapter, but after 2 Nf3 Nc6 White also has:

a) 3 d4 is a very important alternative and will be the subject of Chapter Four.

b) 3 g3 essentially acquiesces in a transposition to Line A of Chapter One. The simplest way for Black to reach a Botvinnik set-up is with 3...e5 4. Nc2 g6 5. Nc3 g7. He can also begin with 3...g6, but then White has 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nc7 6 Nc2; not that this is really anything to worry about as long as Black avoids 6...Nf6 7 Nc3 0-0 8 Nc2 d6 9 0-0, transposing to a line in which White has good chances of maintaining a pleasant edge. Instead Black should prefer something disruptive, such as Keene's 6...Nc5! 7 Nc2 Nc6 or Ni Hua's 6...Nc5!.

c) 3 e3 is rare (occurring in only 3% of over 9,400 games which I found after 1 c4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6), but it can be a tricky move order. After 3...e5,



White almost always responds with 4 Nc3 which transposes to Line A below. For the reader only interested in Line B, however, 3 e3 is a slightly tricky creature to meet. Black should probably try 3...Nf6 4 d4 cxd4 5 exd4 d5, transposing to a Semi-Tarrasch or to a Panov-Botvinnik depending on whether Black meets 6 Nc3 with 6...e6 or 6...Nc4.

While on the subject of e3 lines, some astute readers may be wondering about 2 e3 – a move which goes unmentioned in many specialist works

on the Symmetrical. Firstly, it should be pointed out that one is unlikely to encounter 2 e3 (it occurs in under 0.5% of all games with 1 c4 c5), and secondly, Black has a choice of how to respond. After 2...d6 3 d4, 3...g6 is considered quite comfortable for Black, and there is also John Cox's recommendation from his excellent *Dealing with d4 Deviations*, namely 3...e6 4 d6 a6!?. Black can also remain true to our repertoire with 2...e5!?. Then 3 c3 (3 d4!? is extremely rare, but critical; after 3...cxd4 4 exd4 Black can respond with either 4...exd4 5 Wxd4 c6 or Maletin's 4...b4+ 5 d2 Wc7!?) 3...c6 4 d6 f6 is Line A below, while 4 g3 g6 5 g2 g7 transposes to Line B1 of Chapter Two.

Returning to 3 c3, and we will examine:

A: 3...e5

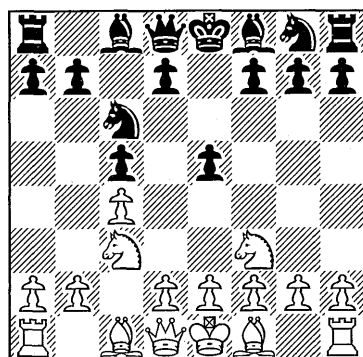
B: 3...d4!?

Black's main move is actually 3...f6, but that fits in slightly less well with both our repertoire and ethos. Furthermore, Kramnik's 4 g3 d5 5 g2!? (5 cxd5 is, of course, also possible) is not particularly easy to meet.

A)

1 c4 c5 2 f3 c6 3 c3 e5

Clamping down on the d4-square and intending, if allowed, to continue in true Botvinnik fashion with ...g6 and ...g7. Indeed, play often continues 4 g3 g6 5 g2 g7 and we've transposed to Line A of Chapter One.



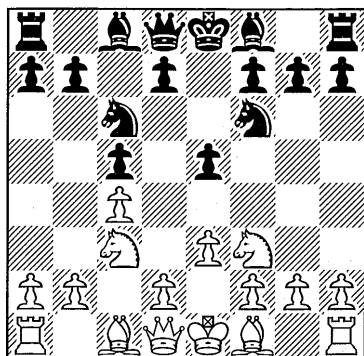
4 e3

This is White's main independent option should he not desire to play against a Botvinnik set-up. Interestingly, from just over a thousand games with 3...e5 on ChessBase's *Big Database 2006*, White's most popular move by far is 4 g3, with 4 e3 only being played in about 30% of all games.

Another common route back to Chapter One is 4 d3 g6 5 g3, although here White can also play more creatively, not that his attempts at doing so should unduly worry Black: 5 a3 (or 5 d5!? g7 6 h4 h6! 7 h5 g5 8 g4? d6 9 h3 e6 10 e4 Wd7 11 g1 f6 12 xf6+ xf6 13 d2 d8! 14 a3 a6 and Black took over the initiative with ...b5 in J.Haapasalo-T.Hillarp Persson, Stockholm 2006) 5...d6 (simplest and best; Black should probably avoid 5...a5?! due to 6,e3! f5 7 d4 e4 8 d5 b8 9 d2 d6 10 g4! and White had won the opening duel in the battle of the prodigies, M.Carlsen-S.Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2005) 6 b1 (or 6 g3 g7 7 g2 ge7 and play will transpose to Line A1 of Chapter One after 8 0-0 0-0, because 8

b4? isn't an option here due to 8...e4!) 6...a5 and in C.Barrero Garcia-I.Cheparinov, Seville 2003, White could find nothing better than transposing to Line A12 of Chapter One with 7 g3 ♗g7 8 ♗g2 ♜ge7 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♗g5 f6 11 ♗d2 ♗c6 12 ♜e1.

4...♜f6



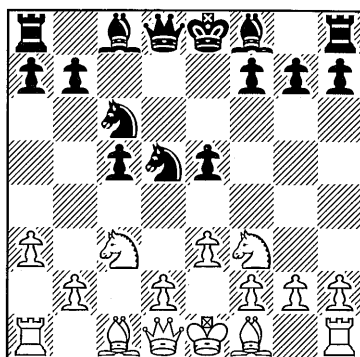
Preparing to advance Black's e-pawn. The reader might also be tempted by 4...f5?!, but that is probably too ambitious due to 5 d4.

5 d4

Consistently advancing in the centre. Instead, 5 b3 g6 6 ♗b2 ♗g7 7 ♜d5 d6 8 ♜xf6+ ♗xf6 9 d3 0-0 10 ♗c2 ♗g7 11 ♜c2 d5! 12 cxd5 ♜xd5 13 0-0 b6 14 a3 ♗b7 15 ♗c3 ♜ac8 16 ♜b2 a5 was rather comfortable for Black in C.Horvath-Z.Almasi, Hungarian Championship, Lillafured 1999; but White has some more challenging alternatives:

a) 5 a3 is a move which might well appeal to those with some experience of the Taimanov Sicilian as Black. After 5...d5 6 cxd5 ♜xd5 a reversed Sicilian position is indeed reached, but this

should not put off those who don't employ 1 e4 as White.

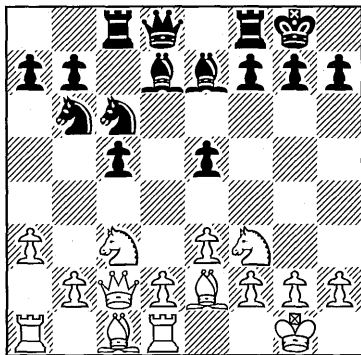


The reason being that the resulting position is actually quite positional, with Black aiming to hinder White's attempts to gain counterplay against the Maróczy Bind. Furthermore, as fans of Yermolinsky's excellent *The Road to Chess Improvement* will be especially aware, the extra tempo doesn't always help White in such reversed positions. White has now tried to probe on the queenside with:

a1) 7 ♜c2 ♜xc3 (not forced in this particular position, but a good way to prevent the black centre from coming under early pressure) 8 dxc3 (or 8 bxc3 ♗d6 9 ♗c4 0-0 10 0-0 ♗g4 11 ♗d5 ♗h5 12 c4 ♗g6 13 d3 ♜h8 and Black had maintained his central control in G.Arzumanian-V.Aveskulov, Kharkiv 2006) 8...♗e6! (taking control of the c4-square) 9 ♗b5 ♗d6 10 e4 ♜b6 11 ♜e2 0-0 12 ♜d2 ♗e7! 13 ♗c4?! ♜a5! 14 ♗xe6 ♜xe6 15 0-0 c4 favoured Black in P.Wells-S.Ganguly, Gibraltar 2004.

a2) 7 ♜a4?! only appears to expose the queen to attack, although 7...♜b6!?

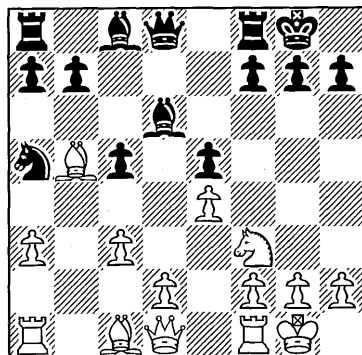
(7...♖xc3 8 bxc3 ♔d6 is again another good set-up, and 9 e4?! 0-0 10 d3 ♔d7 11 ♖c2 ♜c8 12 ♕e2 c4! usefully split the white queenside in O.Jakobsen-T.Wedberg, Esbjerg 1983, since 13 d4?! would have made matters even worse for White after 13...exd4 14 cxd4 ♕g4) 8 ♖c2 ♔d7 9 ♕e2 ♜c8 10 0-0 ♕e7 11 ♜d1 0-0



12 d4! gave White good chances to fully equalize in I.Glek-A.Gershon, Dresden 2004. Following 12...cxd4 13 exd4 ♖xd4 14 ♖xd4 exd4 15 ♜xd4 ♕f6 16 ♜d1 ♖c7, further exchanges and an early draw soon occurred, but Black could have played for more with 16...♕xc3!? 17 bxc3 ♖f6.

a3) 7 ♕b5 ♖xc3 (pretty much forced so that Black can defend e5, and the resulting structure shouldn't hold too many fears for him) 8 bxc3 (White has also played in the style of Ulf Andersson with 8 dxc3!? ♖xd1+ 9 ♖xd1 ♔d7 10 e4, but he was denied an edge by the accurate 10...f6 11 ♕e3 ♖a5! 12 ♕xd7+ ♖xd7 13 ♖c2 c4 14 ♜ad1+ ♖c6 in R.Ruck-Z.Almasi, Hungarian Championship, Kazincbarcika 2005)

8...♔d6 9 e4 (preventing any advance of the black e-pawn; 9 0-0 was a more provocative choice in Z.Bogut-D.Stojanovic, Neum 2002, and then Black can consider taking up the challenge with 9...e4!? 10 ♖a4 ♕f5! 11 ♕xc6+ bxc6 12 ♖xc6+ ♖f8 13 ♖e1 ♜b8, intending to swing the rook over to the kingside) 9...0-0 10 0-0 ♖a5! (an important idea and one which reveals a drawback to White's extra tempo, since in the reversed position the a-pawn hasn't moved)

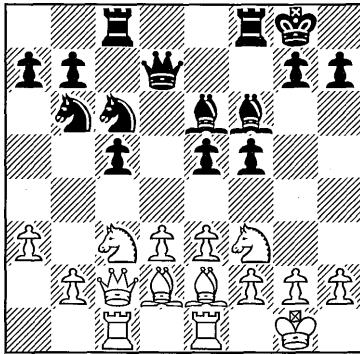


11 d3 (11 d4!? might be a better try, although 11...exd4 12 cxd4 ♕g4! 13 e5 ♕c7 still supplied counterplay against White's extended centre in I.Dorfman-L.Yudasin, Nikolaev 1983) 11...a6 12 ♕a4 b5! 13 ♕c2 f6 14 h3 ♕e6 gave Black a good Ruy Lopez-type set-up in P.Jaracz-Ni Hua, online blitz 2006.

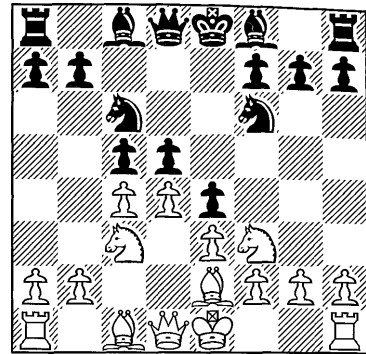
b) ♕e2 is another move which may appeal to Sicilian players. Again Black should take up the challenge with 5...d5, leading to:

b1) 6 cxd5 ♖xd5 7 0-0 (the alternative 7 ♕b5 ♖xc3 8 bxc3 ♔d6 should be compared with line 'a3', while 7 d4

♙e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♖c2 ♙e6 10 a3 ♜c8 11 ♜b1 f5! 12 ♙d2 ♙f6 13 ♜bc1 ♖d7 14 ♜fe1 ♜b6



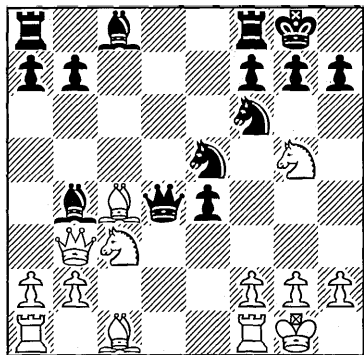
as he did after 10 ♙g5 dxc4! 11 ♜xc6 bxc6 12 ♖xd8 ♜xd8 13 ♙xc4 ♙xc3 14 bxc3 ♙e6 15 ♙xe6 fxe6 16 ♜fe1 ♜f7 in R.Ruck-V.Gashimov, European Team Championship, Gothenburg 2005)



saw Black develop most sensibly against White's rather slow set-up in M.Litinskaya-P.Cramling, Malmö 1986) 7...♙e7 8 ♙b5!? (White has to lose a tempo if he wants to try and achieve anything; the alternative is 8 d4, but that simply gave Black comfortable play against the IQP after 8...cxd4 9 exd4 ♜xc3 10 bxc3 exd4 11 cxd4 ♙e6 12 ♜b1 ♖d7 13 ♖a4 0-0 14 ♜d1 ♙d5! in G.Blum-A.Luft, Regensburg 1998) 8...♜xc3 9 dxc3 (9 bxc3!? deserves attention now that ...♙e7 has been played, although 9...♖c7 10 d4 exd4 11 cxd4 0-0, followed by ...♙g4, should still secure Black enough counterplay) 9...♖xd1 10 ♜xd1 f6 11 e4 ♙e6 12 ♙e3 a6! 13 ♙xc6+ bxc6 14 ♜d2 c4! 15 b3! cxb3 16 axb3 ♜f7 was finely balanced in S.Iskusnyh-V.Filippov, Moscow 2002.

b2) 6 d4!? e4!? (taking up the challenge; a solid alternative is 6...cxd4 7 exd4 exd4 8 ♜xd4 ♙b4 9 0-0 0-0 which should enable Black to fully equalize,

7 ♜g5!? (a recent idea from leading English authority, Tony Kosten; previously the sharp 7 ♜e5 ♙d6! had worked well for Black in practice: 8 ♖a4 0-0 9 ♜xc6 bxc6 10 dxc5 ♙e5 11 ♖xc6 ♙e6 12 cxd5 ♜xd5 13 ♜xd5 ♙xd5 14 ♖a4 ♖c7 gave Black excellent compensation for his pawns in S.Kalinitshew-F.Holzke, German League 2005, while the 8 cxd5 ♜xe5 9 dxe5 ♙xe5 10 ♜xe4 of J.Kraai-N.De Firmian, US Championship, Seattle 2003, should have been met by Ribli's energetic suggestion of 10...♜xe4!? 11 ♖a4+ ♙d7 12 ♖xe4 ♖c7 when White can't castle and Black has the initiative after both 13 ♙d3 f5 14 ♖c4 b5 15 ♖c2 0-0 and 13 ♙d2 ♙xb2 14 ♖xe7+ ♜xe7 15 ♜b1 ♙e5 16 ♜xb7 ♜hb8) 7...cxd4 8 exd4 ♙b4! (correctly pressurizing White's centre and thereby forcing him to sacrifice a pawn) 9 cxd5! ♖xd5 10 0-0 ♖xd4 11 ♖b3 0-0 12 ♙c4 ♜e5!

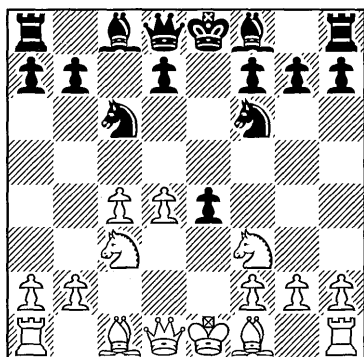


13 ♖xb4 ♜xc4 14 ♜xc4 ♞xc4 15 b3 ♞e5
16 ♞gx e4 ♞xe4 17 ♞xe4 ♙d7 saw
Black return the pawn for full equality
and A.Kosten-R.Palliser, British League
2006, was soon agreed drawn.

5...cxd4

Black can also begin with 5...e4 and
then transpose following an exchange
on d4. He is correct to eliminate most
of the central tension since 5...exd4 6
exd4 d5?! has been known to favour
White, due to 7 ♙g5 ♙e7 8 dxc5! d4 9
♙xf6 ♙xf6 10 ♞d5, ever since
L.Portisch-I.Radulov, Indonesia 1983.

6 exd4 e4



As 7 d5 is now rather insipid and

gives Black a few promising continuations, including the simple 7...exf3 8 dxc6 dxc6 9 ♜xd8+ ♙xd8 10 gxf3 ♙d6 of A.Gaitan Ramirez-V.Borovikov, Dos Hermanas 2004, White usually chooses between:

A1: 7 ♞d2

A2: 7 ♞g5

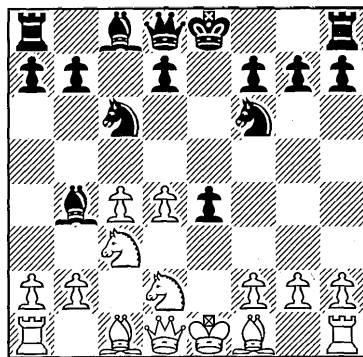
A3: 7 ♞e5

A1)

**1 c4 c5 2 ♞f3 ♞c6 3 ♞c3 e5 4 e3 ♞f6
5 d4 cxd4 6 exd4 e4 7 ♞d2**

In the related position 1 c4 e5 2 ♞c3 ♞f6 3 ♞f3 ♞c6 4 d4 e4, this is the most common square for the knight to move to. It's actually far less popular here, however, than going to e5 and g5, but in both cases the knight on d2 rather clogs up the white position.

7...♙b4



Beginning a policy of active development. Black will rarely exchange on c3 unless provoked, but shouldn't mind making that exchange so long as he can then gain good squares for his remaining minor pieces; something

which often requires a ...d5 advance.

8 a3

Rather compliant, but the alternatives don't promise White any advantage either:

a) 8 $\text{c}3$?! was too creative even by Speelman's usual standards in J.Speelman-V.Ivanchuk, Linares 1992. Black responded actively and quickly gained the upper hand with 8...d5 9 a3 $\text{xc}3+$ 10 bxc3 (or 10 $\text{xc}3$ $\text{g}4!$ with awkward pressure against White's centre) 10... $\text{e}6$ 11 cxd5 $\text{xd}5$ 12 $\text{e}2$ 0-0 13 0-0 $\text{a}5!$ 14 $\text{d}2$ $\text{ac}8$.

b) 8 d5 also appears too ambitious: 8... $\text{e}5$ 9 $\text{e}2?$! (perhaps White should try 9 $\text{dxe}4?$ $\text{xe}4$ 10 $\text{d}4$ when 10... $\text{a}5!$? 11 $\text{xe}5+$? $\text{d}8$ 12 $\text{xc}7$ $\text{e}8$ is rather awkward for him, but he can gain rook, bishop and pawn for his queen with 11 $\text{d}2$ $\text{xc}3$ 12 $\text{xe}5+$ $\text{d}8$ 13 bxc3 $\text{e}8$ 14 $\text{xe}8+$ $\text{xe}8$ 15 cxb4) 9...0-0 10 $\text{c}2$ $\text{d}3+$! 11 $\text{xd}3$ $\text{xd}3$ 12 $\text{xd}3$ $\text{xc}3$ 13 bxc3 (13 $\text{xc}3$ $\text{e}8+$ 14 $\text{f}1$ b5! also gives Black good activity and compensation) 13... $\text{e}8+$ 14 $\text{f}1$ d6 15 $\text{b}3$ $\text{d}7$ 16 $\text{f}4$ $\text{e}5$ 17 $\text{xe}5$ $\text{xe}5$ 18 f3 $\text{f}5$ 19 $\text{d}4$ $\text{e}7$ 20 h3 $\text{e}2$ and Black was doing rather well in I.Nei-I.Bondarevsky, USSR Championship, Leningrad 1963.

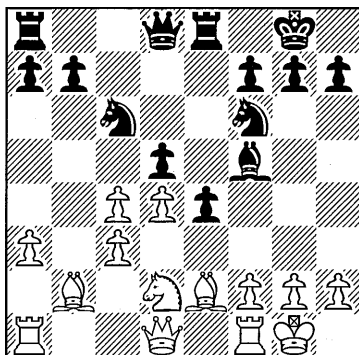
c) 8 $\text{e}2$ 0-0 9 0-0 $\text{e}8$ 10 $\text{b}3$ might be best and should be compared with our main line. Here Black can consider 10...d5 as well as 10...h6!? 11 c5 $\text{xc}3!$ (11...d5?! 12 $\text{b}5!$ is awkward) 12 bxc3 d6 13 $\text{b}1$ $\text{f}5$ which was fairly unclear in N.Tolstikh-I.Slavina, St Petersburg 2002. White does get to undouble his c-pawns in this line, but must still be

careful that he isn't left with serious pawn weaknesses, and after 14 $\text{b}2$ dxc5 15 $\text{xc}5$ b6 16 $\text{b}3$ $\text{d}5$ 17 $\text{d}2$ $\text{xf}6!$ 18 $\text{g}4$ $\text{ad}8$ 19 $\text{xf}5$ $\text{xf}5$ 20 c4 $\text{f}4$ Tolstikh's centre came under pressure.

8... $\text{xc}3$ 9 bxc3 0-0 10 $\text{e}2$ d5!

Fighting for control of the centre and especially the central light squares. Black would ideally like to establish a minor piece on c4, just as we saw Ivanchuk aiming to do against Speelman.

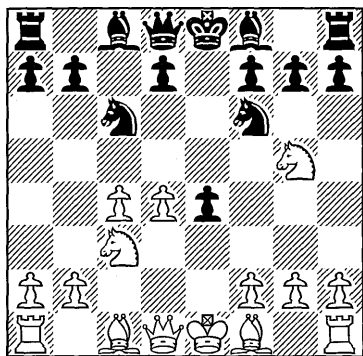
11 0-0 $\text{e}8$ 12 $\text{b}2$ $\text{f}5$



Black's position appears the easier to handle here and he may already be doing quite well. After 13 $\text{e}1$, both 13... $\text{c}8$ 14 $\text{f}1?$ dxc4! 15 $\text{e}3$ $\text{e}6$ 16 $\text{xc}4$ $\text{xc}4$ 17 $\text{xc}4$ $\text{xd}4!$ 18 cxd4 $\text{xc}4$ (K.Berg-L.Schneider, Copenhagen 1982), and 13... $\text{e}3!$? 14 fxe3 $\text{xe}3$ 15 $\text{c}1$ $\text{d}7$ 16 $\text{f}1$ $\text{e}7$ 17 cxd5 $\text{xd}5$ 18 c4 $\text{f}4$ 19 d5?! $\text{ae}8!$ 20 $\text{g}3?$ $\text{d}3!$ (D.Khismatullin-D.Bocharov, Tomsk 2004) saw White's position collapse.

A2)

**1 c4 c5 2 $\text{f}3$ $\text{c}6$ 3 $\text{c}3$ e5 4 e3 $\text{f}6$
5 d4 cxd4 6 exd4 e4 7 $\text{g}5$**

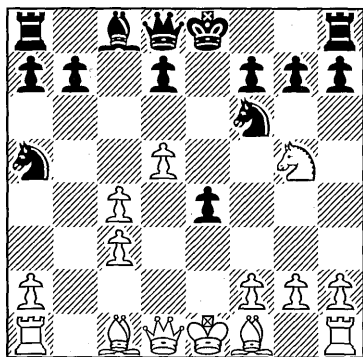


White's most aggressive choice, which is almost always followed up with 8 d5, aiming to pressurize Black's e4-pawn

7...♙b4 8 d5 ♙xc3+!

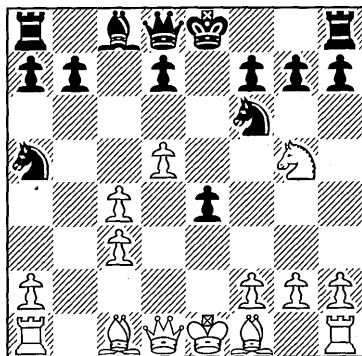
A creative approach and one which I prefer to the much more popular and theoretical 8...♗e5.

9 bxc3 ♗a5!



Already targeting White's weaknesses down the c-file in true Nimzo style. Curiously, this position can also arise, but with colours reversed, via the move order 1 c4 c5 2 ♗f3 ♗f6 3 ♗c3 e6 4 e4 ♗c6 5 ♙e2 d5 6 cxd5 exd5 7 e5 ♗g4 8 ♙b5!? d4 9 ♙xc6+ bxc6 10

♗a4 (a variation with which Zvjaginsev has scored well as White). Including below all the games played with that move order was not always especially easy for your author, despite some superb pioneering work from David Cummings, but was well worth doing, not least because it emphasized that Black is in good shape in this variation.



10 ♙a3

Preventing Black from castling, but White has also tried:

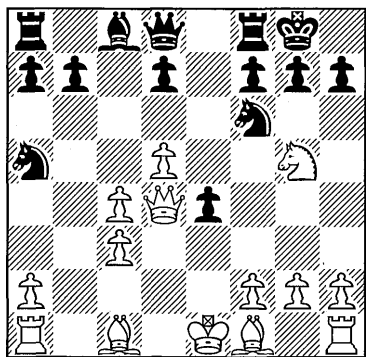
a) 10 f3 0-0! 11 ♙e2 d6 12 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 13 fxe4 ♗h4+ 14 g3 ♗xe4 15 0-0 ♙f5 16 ♗f4 ♗e5 17 ♙d2 ♗ac8 was rather comfortable for Black in C.Sender-G.Branding, correspondence 2001, although White held on to draw.

b) 10 ♙e2 0-0 11 0-0 d6 12 ♗d4?! ♗e8 13 f3 exf3 14 ♙xf3 ♗b6! 15 ♗xb6? axb6 16 ♗d1 ♙f5 was already horrendous for White in D.Madsen-T.Ernst, Rodeby 2000.

c) 10 c5?! 0-0 11 ♙f4 is another misguided plan, although evidently it's easy for White to quickly lose his way in this variation! Black isn't troubled by

a bishop on d6 and 11...b6! 12 ♖d4 ♘b7 broke up the white centre in (with colours reversed) A.Adorjan-T.Menyhart, Hungarian League 1997.

d) 10 ♖d4 is White's main alternative, relying on his centrally-placed queen to hold his position together. After 10...0-0 we have a further divide:

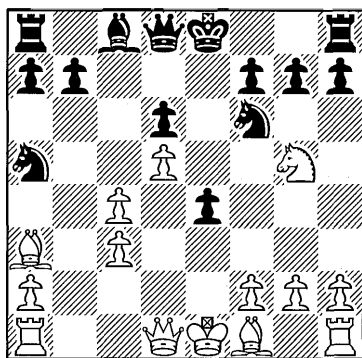


d1) 11 ♘e2 ♞e8 12 ♘h3 (instead 12 0-0 h6 13 ♘h3 d6 14 ♞e1 b6 gave Black a pleasant edge in A.Holst-B.Larsen, Danish Ch, Tåstrup 1998 – another game played with colours reversed – and 12 h4? d6 13 ♞g1 h6 14 g4 hxg5 15 ♘xg5 ♖e7 was far too desperate from White in V.Stamenkov-D.Solak, European Team Championship, Gothenburg 2005) 12...d6 13 ♘g5 ♞e5! 14 ♘f4 ♘xh3 15 gxh3 ♞f5 wasn't totally clear, but gave Black a number of promising options in E.Gausel-M.Rytshagov, Asker 1997.

d2) 11 f3! might well be White's best line, since 11...exf3 12 gxf3 h6 can be met by the dangerous 13 h4! ♞e8+ 14 ♖f2 according to Avrukh. Therefore in R.Vaganian-B.Avrukh, European Championship, Ohrid 2001, he preferred

11...♞e8 12 ♖f2 b6! 13 ♘xe4 (or 13 h4!? ♘a6 14 h5 h6 15 ♘xe4 ♘xc4+ 16 fxe4 ♖e7 17 ♘d3 ♞ac8 18 ♞h3 f6! 19 ♞g3 ♖h8 20 ♘f4 ♘xc4 and Black regained his pawn with equality in V.Akopian-V.Yemelin, Moscow 2002) 13...♘xe4+ 14 fxe4 ♖h4+ 15 g3 ♖xe4 16 ♖xe4 ♞xe4, regaining his pawn with an unbalanced but roughly level position.

10...d6



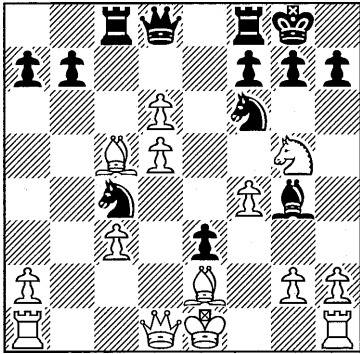
11 ♖a4+

Trying to target d6, but Black is happy to sacrifice that pawn to get castled. Neither does 11 ♖d4?! 0-0 12 c5?! dxc5 13 ♘xc5 ♞e8 help White, especially after 14 ♞d1 ♘g4 (Cummings), and so some players may plough ahead in the centre with 11 c5 0-0 12 cxd6. Unsurprisingly such a strategy is rather risky and White can easily find himself shortly in serious trouble after 12...e3! (more dangerous than prefacing ...e3 with Zhang Zhong's also quite playable 12...♞e8):

a) 13 fxe3? ♘g4 14 ♘f3 ♘xe3 (Cummings) is clearly a horrible position for White.

b) 13 f4? ♘g4 14 ♘e2 ♘c4 15 ♘c5

♞c8 is also pretty grim and saw Zvjaginsev (playing with colours reversed) en route to a rapid victory in V.Zvjaginsev-V.Filippov, Russian Championship, Elista 1997.

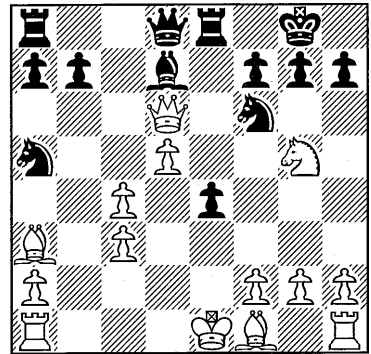


c) 13 ♙e2 h6 14 d7! has been suggested by Cummings and may well be best. He then gives 14...♙xd7 15 ♙xf8 ♚xf8 16 ♘f3 ♘g4 17 ♚d4 exf2+ 18 ♙f1 which is probably White's best try, albeit still far from clear after the fully playable 18...♞e8!?!; for instance, 19 ♚b4 ♞xc2! 20 ♚xf8+ ♙xf8 21 ♙xe2 ♙b5+ 22 c4 ♙xc4+ 23 ♙d2 ♙e7 should leave Black with two pawns for the exchange in the ending.

11...♙d7 12 ♚b4

This has been suggested for White by both Watson (on ChessPublishing) and Hansen, but they both appear to have been unaware that this position had already occurred, albeit again with colours reversed. Furthermore, when it did occur in V.Zvjaginsev-M.Ulibin, Russian Championship, Elista 1996, Zvjaginsev's *Informant* notes suggest that he wasn't too impressed by this queen manoeuvre. That game contin-

ued 12...0-0! (and not, of course, 12...h6? 13 ♚xd6 hxg5 14 ♚e5+) 13 ♚xd6 ♞e8



14 0-0-0?! h6 15 ♘h3 e3! 16 fxe3 ♘e4 17 ♚b4 (or 17 ♚f4 when 17...♞xc3! 18 ♞d2 ♞e4 is much stronger than winning a piece with 17...g4) 17...♙xh3 18 gxh3 ♘f2 19 ♞g1 ♘xd1 20 ♙xd1 ♚f6 and in view of White's appalling structure, Black, with his extra exchange, was already well on the way to victory. White's 14th was rather a case of castling into it. He (well, actually Black) later preferred 14 ♙e2 h6 15 ♘h3 e3 16 f3 in K.Kiik-A.Holmsten, Finnish League 2003, when 16...♚c8 17 ♚c5 wasn't so bad for White. Thus Black should prefer 16...♞c8 when 17 c5 allows him to capture on h3 and then d5, but even worse is 17 ♚f4? in view of the cute and devastating 17...b5! 18 cxb5 ♙xb5! 19 ♙xb5 ♚xd5.

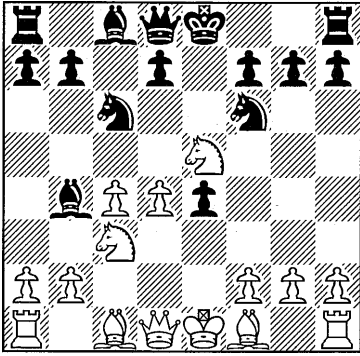
A3)

- 1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 e5 4 e3 ♘f6
- 5 d4 cxd4 6 exd4 e4 7 ♘e5

The most popular continuation, and now a fairly forcing variation (our

main line) will often follow.

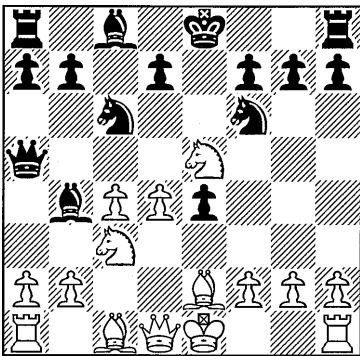
7...♙b4



8 ♙e2

White usually tries to castle as quickly as possible, but he might also employ Epishin's idea of 8 ♙e2 ♖a5 9 ♖b3 0-0 10 ♙e2, refusing to hurry with an exchange on c6. Black, for his part, should also handle this variation a little differently to how he does the main line, and 10...♞e8 11 ♘xc6 bxc6! 12 0-0 ♙a6 13 ♘a4 d5 14 ♞ac1 ♞ab8 15 ♖d1 ♙d6 16 b3 ♖c7 supplied effective counterplay in E.Kengis-J.Hall, German League 2000.

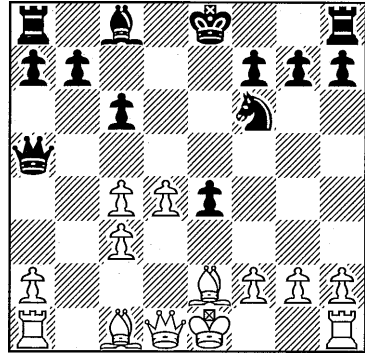
8...♖a5!



Once again we see Black developing as actively as possible after 3...e5; this time by attacking both white knights.

9 ♘xc6 dxc6

Should any reader, possibly fearing preparation, wish to avoid the main line, a less explored alternative is available in 9...♙xc3! 10 bxc3 dxc6.

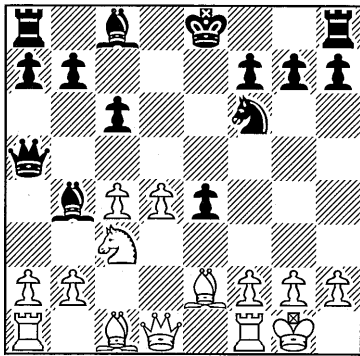


Just like in the main line, Black is quite solid here and will look to expand on the kingside. The onus is really on White to show that the half-open b-file and his extra dark-squared bishop compensate for his inferior structure. Factors which in P.Bjarnehag-J.Hall, Stockholm 1999, he failed to prove were especially dangerous: 11 ♖b3 0-0 12 0-0 ♞e8 13 ♙f4 (13 h3!? ♖f5 14 ♖b4 ♖g6 15 ♙h1 might well be more critical, as in L.Spassov-A.Luft, Sitges 1995, when Black should have responded with 15...♘d7, preparing both ...f5 and ...c5) 13...b6 14 ♞ae1 ♖f5! 15 ♙e5 ♙d7 16 ♖c2 ♖g6 and now 17 ♖c1? ♞xe5! 18 dxe5 ♙h3 allowed Black to regain the exchange with some advantage, but even the superior 17 ♙g3 (Hansen) wouldn't have left White better.

10 ♔d2

Covering c3 and preparing to net the bishop pair, but White has alternatives:

a) 10 0-0!?



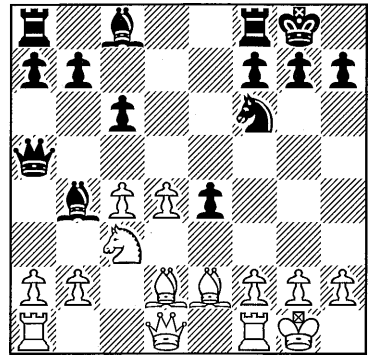
often just transposes after 10...0-0! (10...♙xc3!? is a touch greedy, but not impossible; then 11 bxc3 ♖xc3 12 ♜b1 0-0 13 ♜b3 ♖a5 14 ♜g3 ♙f5 15 h4!? gave White some initiative for the pawn in R.Bertholee-J.Polgar, Amsterdam 1990, although perhaps Black didn't have to rush to return it with 15...e3!?) 11 ♔d2.

White can consider other 11th moves here, but both 11 ♖b3 ♜d8 12 ♙e3 ♙e6 13 ♖c2 ♖f5! 14 h3 ♖g6 (V.Malakhatko-V.Borovikov, Swidnica 2000) and 11 ♙f4 ♜d8 12 ♖d2 (S.Del Rio Angelis-I.Herrera, Albacete 2002) 12...♙g4 13 ♙xg4 ♜xg4 14 a3 (and not 14 f3? ♜xd4!) 14...♙xc3 15 ♖xc3 ♖f5 are fine for Black.

b) 10 ♖c2 0-0 11 h3 (or 11 0-0 ♖f5 12 ♙e3 ♙d6 13 ♜fd1 ♙e6 14 h3 ♜ad8 15 ♙f1 ♖g6 16 ♙h1 ♙b8! 17 ♜d2 ♜fe8 18 ♙e2 ♙c8 19 ♖d1 ♖f5 and it was hard for White to make any progress, while

Black could toy with kingside threats and the ...b5-break in O.Zubov-V.Borovikov, Alushta 2001) 11...♜e8 12 a3 ♙d6 13 c5?! ♙b8! 14 b4 ♖d8 15 ♙e3 ♙e6 16 g4?! ♙c7 17 a4 enabled White's over-optimistic play in M.Suba-A.Moiseenko, Spanish Team Championship 2004, to be punished by either 17...♙d5!? or the game's 17...b6.

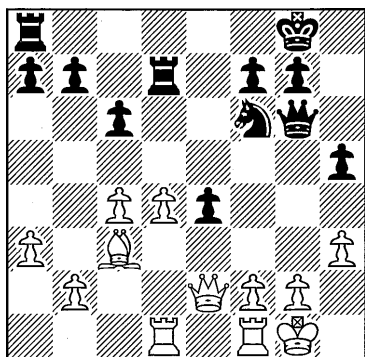
10...0-0 11 0-0



11...♜e8

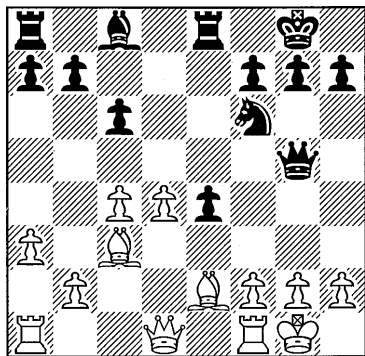
Natural; the king's rook will support the e-pawn, while the queen's rook places some pressure on the white d-pawn. Curiously, though, the second time that he reached this position Sergei Movsesian preferred 11...♜d8!?. The idea may well be that White is likely to advance with d5 at some point, after which the black rooks would prefer to be on c8 and d8, rather than on d8 and e8. This certainly deserves further attention and I wouldn't be surprised if it receives some. J.Stocek-S.Movsesian, 2nd matchgame, Plzen 2001 continued 12 a3 ♙xc3 13 ♙xc3 ♖g5 14 ♖c1 ♖g6 15 ♖e3 (15 ♖f4 should also be compared to the related position with the

black rook on e8; after 15...h5! 16 ♖ae1 ♗g4 17 ♗xg4 ♜xg4! 18 ♜xg4 hxg4 19 d5 cxd5 20 ♗xf6 gx6 21 cxd5 f5 Black had fully justified his rook placement as an equal ending occurred in H.Teske-Y.Gonzalez, Barbera del Valles 2006) 15...h5 16 ♖ad1 ♗g4! (just as in the main line, Black deprives White of the bishop pair) 17 h3 ♗xe2 18 ♜xe2 ♖d7



and now White could find nothing better than 19 d5 which led to full simplification and an easy draw for Black after 19...cxd5 20 ♗xf6 ♜xf6 21 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 22 cxd5 ♗e5.

12 a3 ♗xc3 13 ♗xc3 ♜g5



14 ♜c1

White needs to prevent the threat of 14...♗h3 and so offers an exchange of queens. He can also do so with 14 ♜d2, but that allowed a thematic advance with 14...e3! 15 fxe3 ♗e4 16 ♜c1 ♗xc3 17 ♜xc3 in A.Kosten-J.Karr, French League 2000, when 17...♖xe3 18 ♜d2 ♗h3 (Kosten) would have maintained equality.

An alternative plan for White is to use his dark-squared bishop to cover his kingside: 14 ♗d2 ♜g6 15 ♗f4 h5! (I like this useful space-gainer as preparation for ...♗g4 and an exchange of bishops; Black can also play more simply with 15...♗h3 16 ♗g3 ♗g4 17 ♗xg4 ♗xg4, although after the 18 ♖e1 ♖ad8 19 ♜b3 b6 20 ♖ad1 f5 of A.Kharlov-D.Jakovenko, Russian Team Championship 2005, Watson's 21 h3 ♗f6 22 ♗c7! ♖d7 23 ♗e5 might preserve a tiny plus) 16 ♗h1 (Black's last also prepared to push the h-pawn all the way; White might ignore that, but 16 ♜b3 h4 17 ♗h1 h3! 18 ♜g3 hxg2+ 19 ♜xg2 ♜xg2+ 20 ♗xg2 ♗g4 21 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 22 h3 ♗f6 23 ♖ad1 ♗h5 24 ♗h2 ♖ad8 gave Black at least sufficient kingside counterplay in the ending in A.Alienkin-V.Borovikov, Ostend 2005) 16...♗g4 17 h3 ♜f5 18 ♗h2 ♗xe2 19 ♜xe2 ♖ad8 20 ♖ad1 ♗d7! (another effective way to improve the knight) 21 ♜e3 ♗f8 22 ♖d2 ♖d7 23 ♖fd1 ♖ed8 was fairly comfortable for Black in G.Schwartzman-N.De Firmian, Las Vegas 1996.

14...♜g6

Of course Black has no intention of exchanging queens. He wants to deprive

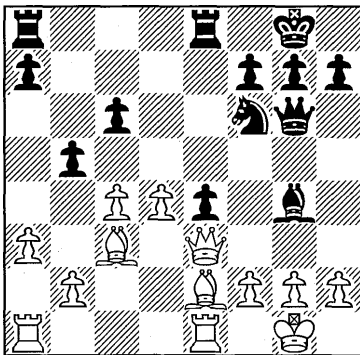
White of the chance of putting the bishop pair to good use by exchanging the light-squared bishops. After that the attacking team of queen and knight should enable Black to gain sufficient kingside counterplay.

15 ♖f4

White can also blockade the e-pawn with 15 ♖e3, although his queen is then prone to being attacked. After 15...♙g4 practice has seen:

a) 16 ♖ad1 ♙xe2 17 ♖xe2 ♘h5! 18 ♖e3 f5 19 f4 saw White halt Black on the kingside in C.Cobb-O.Cvitan, European Club Cup, Saint Vincent 2005. Following 19...♘f6 20 d5!? (before Black doubles on the d-file) 20...cxd5 21 cxd5, as well as the game's 21...♖f7 22 d6 ♘d5, Black had another double-edged option available in 21...♖ad8!? 22 ♖xa7 ♘xd5 23 ♖xb7 ♘xf4 24 ♖b3+ ♘e6 (Watson) when I quite like his kingside and central chances, although, of course, this is actually rather unclear due to White's passed queenside duo.

b) 16 ♖fe1 b5!?



reveals another way to gain counterplay, borrowed from the Slav.

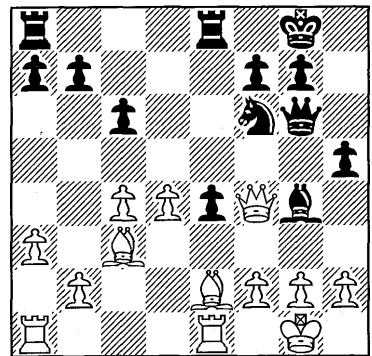
L.Pachman-Z.Ksieski, German League 1995, continued 17 b3 ♖ab8 18 ♙b4 bxc4 19 bxc4 and now Black should have simply played 19...♙xe2 20 ♖xe2 ♖f5.

c) 16 ♖ae1 could just be met by 16...♙xe2 17 ♖xe2 ♖ad8, but in K.Thomsen-R.Rizzo, correspondence 2001, Black preferred the ...b5 plan: 16...b5!? 17 b3 ♙xe2 18 ♖xe2 and now 18...♖ab8 was logical, keeping any ...♘g4 and ...f5 ideas in reserve.

15...h5! 16 ♖fe1

The later 16 ♖ad1 ♙g4 17 ♖fe1 ♖ad8 18 ♖g3 ♖f5 19 h3 ♙xe2 20 ♖xe2 b5 21 b3 ♖d7 also failed to bring White any advantage in Z.Franco Ocampos-I.Cheparinov, Mondariz Balneario 2003.

16...♙g4

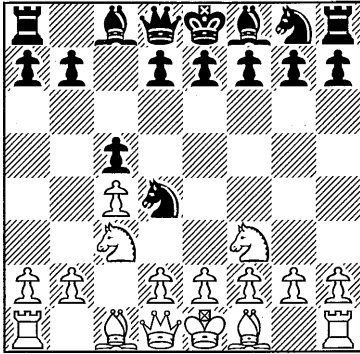


Black has carried out his plan and emerged with a fully satisfactory position. Marin now believes that White has to force exchanges with 17 d5 to maintain equality. Instead, M.Marin-S.Movsesian, European Club Cup, Neum 2000, continued 17 ♙f1 h4 18 h3 ♙xh3 19 ♖xh4 ♙g4 20 ♖e3 ♘h5 21

♖a1 f5 22 d5 c5! when Black's kingside play, with ...♗f7 and ...♞h8 threatened, was not to be underestimated.

B)

1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♘c6 3 ♘d3 ♘d4!?



Ljubojevic's move, which may well still shock opponents some 19 years after he first unveiled it. Clearly Black is happy to see an exchange on d4 when he gains good central play, but surely 4 e3 ♘xf3+ 5 ♖xf3 simply helps White's development? That may be so on a purely numerical level, but practice has shown that it is surprisingly hard for White to develop any kind of initiative without his king's knight. Its absence poses problems in terms of forcing through the d4-advance, and Black, given the chance, is quick to clamp down on the d4-square with a kingside fianchetto.

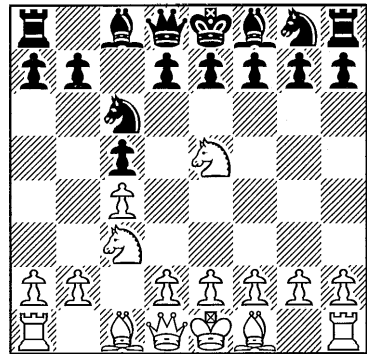
4 e3

Very much White's main move, but he has alternatives:

a) 4 ♘g1 rather ducks the challenge, but was White's choice in no less an encounter than G.Kasparov-J.Speelman,

Linares 1991. I don't fully trust either 4...e6 or 4...g6 here, and so Black should just repeat with 4...♘c6. White may then take play into either Chapter One or Chapter Two after 5 g3, but if he persists with 5 ♘f3 and Black isn't happy with a draw, the best way to play for a win is to switch to Line A with 5...e5.

b) 4 ♘e5 is similar and here Black should follow Kramnik's example with 4...♘c6

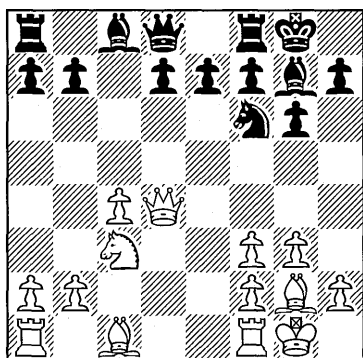


which has also led to some early draws after 5 ♘f3 ♘c6, etc. Black shouldn't fear 5 ♘xc6 dxc6 which does double his pawns, but those doubled pawns control a number of key squares. He is then quite comfortable, as was shown by 6 g3 e5 7 ♙g2 ♘f6 8 b3 ♙f5 9 ♙b2 ♙d6 10 d3 ♖d7 11 ♖d2 ♙h3 12 ♙xh3 ♖xh3 13 0-0-0 0-0-0 14 f3 h5 and the position remained quite balanced in L.Ftacnik-M.Krasenkov, Lubniewice 1994.

c) 4 g3 gives Black a choice:

c1) 4...♘xf3+ 5 exf3 g6 6 d4 cxd4 7 ♖xd4 ♘f6 8 ♙g2 (8 ♘d5!? ♙g7 9 ♙g5 0-0 10 ♙xf6 exf6 should also be quite

playable for Black with his powerful bishop, after ...f5, balancing out White's centralized knight; 8 b3 also aims for pressure down the long diagonal, but 8...♙g7 9 ♘b2 0-0 10 ♙g2 d6 11 0-0 ♙e6! 12 f4?! ♘d5! 13 ♚d2 ♘xc3 14 ♙xc3 ♙xc3 15 ♚xc3 ♚b8 saw Black comfortably equalize in G.Antonov-S.Bondarchuk, Nikolaev 2001) 8...♙g7 9 0-0 0-0

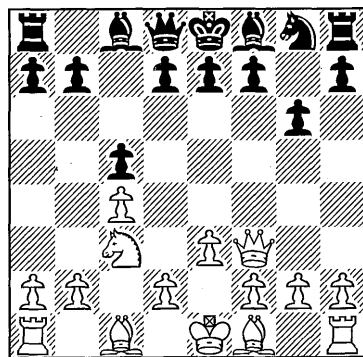


should be compared with the old main line (1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 ♘f3 ♘f6 6 0-0 0-0 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♚xd4), but this appears to be an improved version for Black. White may have an extra tempo, but he will find it much harder to advance his kingside pawns. Black, on the other hand, can still play for queenside counterplay as he did with 10 f4 (10 ♙g5 d6 11 ♚ac1 ♙e6 12 ♚d3 a6 13 f4 ♚b8 14 b4 b5 15 cxb5 axb5 16 ♚fe1 ♙c4 was also quite comfortable for Black in V.Akopian-Qin Kanying, Calcutta 2000) 10...d6 11 ♙d2 a6 12 ♚ac1 ♚b8 in P.Van der Sterren-J.Timman, Dutch Championship, Rotterdam 1998. White could have maintained equality according to Timman with 13 ♚d3, but in the game

he was instructively outplayed: 13 a4?! ♙e6 14 ♚d3 ♘d7! 15 b4 a5! 16 ♘b5 axb4 17 ♙xb4 ♘c5 18 ♚a3 ♘a6 and Black already had a slight edge.

c2) 4...g6!? is more combative – a factor highlighted by the course of E.Pigusov-M.Krasenkow, Shanghai 2000: 5 ♙g2 ♙g7 6 e3 (or 6 0-0 ♘h6! 7 ♘e1!? ♘hf5 8 e4 ♘d6 9 d3 0-0 10 f4 ♚b8 11 a4 b6 12 ♘f3 ♙b7 13 ♘xd4 ♙xd4+ 14 ♘h1 f5 with good counterplay in R.Vaganian-J.Kraai, German League 1999) 6...♘xf3+ 7 ♙xf3 d6 8 a3 (far from forced; 8 d4 cxd4 9 exd4 ♙h3!? 10 ♙xb7 ♚b8 11 ♙c6+ ♘f8 is an interesting pawn sacrifice according to Krasenkow, who had himself earlier preferred as White 8 h4!? h5 9 b3, only for Black to avoid the critical 9...♙xc3!? 10 dxc3 ♘f6 in M.Krasenkow-J.Lautier, Elista Olympiad 1998) 8...h5 9 h3 ♙xc3!? (Black can also consider the simpler 9...♘f6) 10 bxc3 ♘f6 11 d3 e5 12 e4 ♘h7! 13 h4 with a very tough position to assess, in which Black should possibly prefer 13...♘f8 to Krasenkow's 13...♙e6.

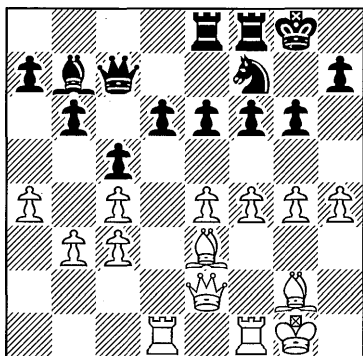
4...♘xf3+ 5 ♚xf3 g6



6 b3

Contesting the long diagonal, but again there are alternatives:

a) 6 g3 ♖g7 7 ♖g2 d6 8 0-0 should be compared with note 'd' to White's 8th move. Black can begin with 8...♘h6 or first flick in 8...♞b8, after which 9 ♞e2 (9 ♞d1 a6 10 d4 is an alternative plan, but Black was extremely solid after 10...cxd4 11 exd4 ♘f6 12 h3 0-0 13 a4 ♖d7 14 ♞e2 ♞e8 15 ♖e3 e6! 16 ♞fc1 ♖c6 in P.San Segundo Carrillo-J.Emms, Escaldes Zonal 1998) 9...♘h6 10 b3 ♖xc3!? (Hracek makes good use of his more flexible structure after this, but Black can also play more routinely with 10...♘f5 11 ♖b2 0-0, before aiming for ...b5) 11 dxc3 f6! 12 e4 ♘f7 13 f4 0-0 14 ♖e3 b6 15 a4 ♞c7 16 ♞ad1 ♖b7 17 g4 e6 18 h4 ♞be8

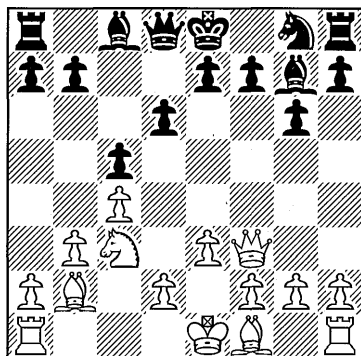


19 ♖f3 f5! slightly surprisingly left no less a player than Karpov in danger of being overextended in A.Karpov-Z.Hracek, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 1996.

b) 6 d4!? ♖g7 7 dxc5! (possibly White's best try, although despite being used by Benjamin, it hasn't caught on at grandmaster level; the alterna-

tives allow Black easier counterplay: 7 ♞d1 d6 8 ♖e2 cxd4 9 exd4 ♘h6 10 0-0 ♘f5 11 d5 0-0 12 ♖f4 e5! was fine for Black in A.Panchenko-Y.Balashov, USSR Championship, Moscow 1991, as was 7 d5 d6 8 ♖d3 ♘f6 9 h3 0-0 10 0-0 e5 11 e4 ♘e8! in J.Plieger-R.Mainka, Liechtenstein 1993) 7...♖xc3+!? (the alternative is 7...♞a5, but that allows White a pleasant edge with Hansen's 8 e4 ♞xc5 9 ♘d5!) 8 bxc3 ♞a5 9 e4 ♞xc5 10 ♖d3 d6 11 ♖e3 ♞a5 12 0-0 ♘f6 (Black might also consider the greedy 12...♞xc3!?; at any rate I can't see a clear refutation) 13 ♖d4! 0-0 14 ♖xf6 exf6 15 ♞xf6 ♞e5! 16 ♞xe5 dxe5 left White slightly better in J.Benjamin-P.Wolff, New York 1992, although Black held the ending without any real difficulty.

6...♖g7 7 ♖b2 d6

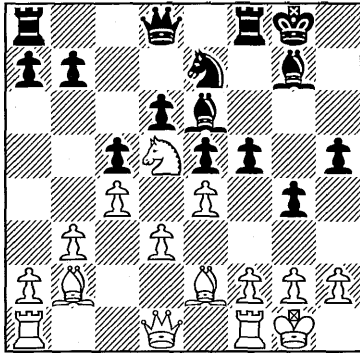


8 g4!?

A recent innovation, partly prompted by White's lack of success with the alternatives:

a) 8 ♞d1 e5! 9 ♖e2?! ♘e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♖f3 f5 saw Black make good use of our favourite Botvinnik set-up in

A.Galliamova-V.Kramnik, Kazan 1997, and after 12 ♖d5 ♙e6 13 d3 g5! 14 e4 g4 15 ♙e2 h5



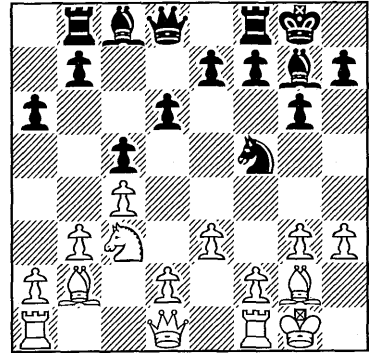
the 14th World Champion already enjoyed a strong offensive.

b) 8 ♙d3 ♜b8 9 h3 a6!? (a rare move order, but it appears not to make a difference since Black will follow up in any case with ...♗h6) 10 a4?! ♗h6 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♜fb1 e5! 13 ♖d5 f5 14 ♙f1 g5! again left White low on counterplay and Black with good attacking chances in C.Pritchett-G.Jones, European Championship, Cork 2005.

c) 8 ♙e2 ♗h6 9 h3 ♜b8 10 0-0 ♙d7! 11 ♜e4 ♙c6 12 ♜c2 0-0 13 f4 a6 14 ♙f3 ♙xf3 15 ♜xf3 b5 saw Black delay ...♗f5 to accelerate his queenside counterplay in H.Pfleger-L.Christiansen, German League 1989.

d) 8 g3 was once the main line, but is now considered to be rather too comfortable for Black. After 8...♗h6 and ...♗f5 Black has a clamp on the d4-square and will play for ...b5. Some examples:

d1) 9 h3 0-0 10 ♙g2 ♗f5 11 0-0 ♜b8 12 ♜d1 a6



13 a4 (preventing ...b5, but now White's position loses some of its flexibility and he may well be better off trying to play for an earlier a3 and b4 himself) 13...♙d7! 14 ♜c2 ♙c6 15 ♗e4 ♙xb2 16 ♜xb2 ♜c7 17 d4?! cxd4 18 exd4 d5! 19 ♗d2 ♜fd8 20 c5 b6 gave Black good counterplay against b3 and d4 in T.Purnama-Zhang Pengxiang, Singapore 2004.

d2) 9 ♙g2 ♜b8 10 ♜d1 0-0 11 0-0 a6 12 d3 b5 13 ♜d2 ♙b7 14 ♙xb7 ♜xb7 15 ♗d5 ♙xb2 16 ♜xb2 ♗g4 17 ♜e2 ♗e5 was fine for Black in L.Ftacnik-A.Miles, Manila Interzonal 1990.

d3) 9 h4!? was a recent attempt to inject some dynamism into the position, but Black initially responded well with 9...♜b8 10 ♙h3 ♙xh3 11 ♜xh3 ♜d7 12 ♜h1 ♗g4 13 h5 ♗e5 in J.Bonin-G.Shahade, New York (rapid) 2002.

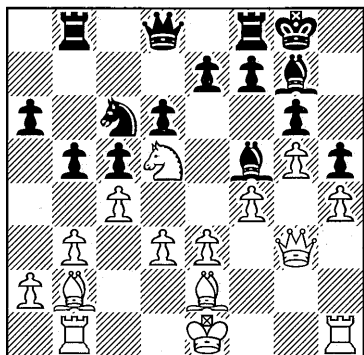
8...♜b8

Defending b7, not just to support a ...b5 advance, but also so that the c8-bishop can be developed.

9 ♙g2

Krasenkov's choice, but White has tried a number of other moves:

a) 9 ♖g3 ♜f6 10 f3 a6 11 h4 h5!
 (halting White on the kingside) 12 g5
 ♞d7 13 ♜b1 0-0 14 ♙e2 ♞e5 15 f4 ♞c6
 16 ♞d5 ♙f5 17 d3 b5



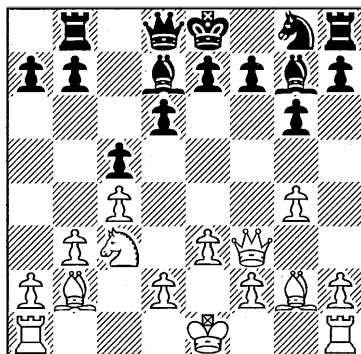
saw Black develop counterplay in G.Morrison-J.Emms, British Championship, Douglas 2005. The position remained far from clear, but there is always something of an onus on White in this line to maintain control. Should he lose it, he can easily be left horrendously overextended.

b) 9 0-0-0 is probably a move which White should delay. His king may well be perfectly safe in the centre, and here 9...h5!? 10 gxh5 ♜xh5 split his kingside pawns and halted any kingside progress for the time being in B.Lepelletier-P.Cramling, French League 1998.

c) 9 ♙e2 ♙d7 is similar to our main line, except that White must lose time with his light-squared bishop. After 10 ♖g3 ♙c6 11 ♙f3 ♖d7 12 0-0-0 a6 13 d4 cxd4 14 exd4 ♙xf3 15 ♖xf3 ♜f6 16 g5 ♞h5 Black wasn't worse when this rather unclear position was prematurely agreed drawn in P.Claesen-L.Vadasz, Paks 1997.

d) 9 h4 ♙d7 (9...h5!? 10 gxh5 ♜xh5 à la Cramling also deserves serious consideration) 10 ♖g3 ♜f6 11 f3 h6! (a slightly different, but also quite effective way to halt White on the kingside) 12 ♙d3 a6 13 ♜b1!? b5 14 ♞d5 e5! was fine for Black in V.Loginov-P.Skatchkov, St Petersburg 2002.

9...♙d7!



Practice has confirmed that this is Black's best response. Instead he was squashed after 9...a6?! 10 g5! b5 11 ♖e2 h6 12 h4 hxg5 13 hxg5 ♜xh1+ 14 ♙xh1 e6 15 f4 in Z.Izoria-M.Palac, European Championship, Warsaw 2005.

However, it is a little surprising that nobody has yet tested Krasenkov's suggestion of 9...♞f6!? 10 g5 ♞d7. His analysis continues 11 ♖e2 ♞e5 12 f4 ♙g4 13 ♖f1 ♞c6 which doesn't seem too bad at all for the second player. Certainly White has been halted on the kingside for the time being and must attend to the idea of 14...♞b4.

10 ♖e2

Wisely getting off the long diagonal. Instead 10 g5?! h6! is awkward for White since 11 h4 ♙c6 12 ♖g3 hxg5

(Krasenkow) forces him to recapture on g5 with his queen.

10...a6

Krasenkow and subsequent annotators suggested that this was too slow, but they clearly didn't spot Alekseev's improvement. That would appear to have fully rehabilitated 10...a6, but Black may also wish to explore two untried suggestions, namely Krasenkow's 10...♘f6!? 11 g5 ♘h5 and Ribli's 10...♙c8!? 11 g5 ♙c6. There is no point in denying that Black's score against 8 g4 hasn't been particularly impressive so far, but we are still in the early days of this sub-variation. As 8 g4 loses its surprise effect and as variations like the two we just mentioned are explored, I would expect Black's score to rise somewhat against it. Indeed, the signs are already there that the creative and fashionable 8 g4 objectively doesn't promise any advantage. If it clearly did, White surely wouldn't have explored so many options at move 9.

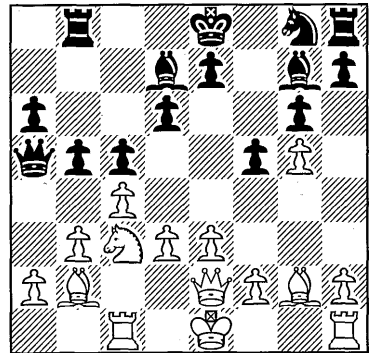
11 g5 b5 12 d3 ♗a5

Continuing Black's counterplay, while avoiding 12...e6? 13 ♘xb5!.

13 ♙c1 f5!

An important kingside space-gainer to remember. Previously 13...h6 14 h4 ♙h7!? (or 14...hxg5 15 hxg5 ♙xh1+ 16 ♙xh1 e5 17 ♙d2 ♘e7 18 ♘e4! and White was better in A.Petrosian-

A.Skripchenko, Dortmund 2000) 15 ♙a1! hxg5 16 hxg5 ♙xh1+ 17 ♙xh1 had given White an edge in M.Krasenkow-B.Macieja, Polish Championship, Plock 2000, although things wouldn't have been especially bad for Black had he found 17...e6, followed by 18...♙f8.



14 ♙f1

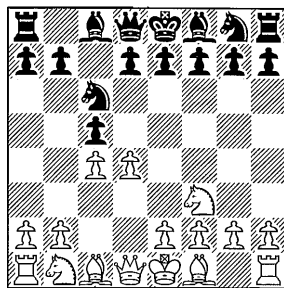
14 gxh6?! ♘xf6 would clearly be a most illogical step considering White's earlier moves. However, in any case, once Black has got in ...f5 he has sufficient space and central control of his own to maintain a rough balance.

14...♙f7 15 h4 h5!

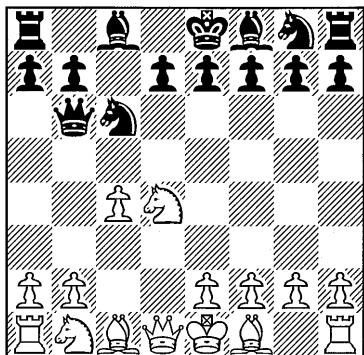
Closing the kingside, thereby ensuring that Black is fine as both sides begin to manoeuvre. E.Pigusov-E.Alekseev, Russian Team Championship 2001, continued 16 ♙c2 e6 17 ♘d1 e5 18 ♘c3 ♘e7 and Black was most certainly not worse.

Chapter Four

White Plays an Early d4



1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♗c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♜b6!?



A fairly rare move order, but also a good way to exploit Black's move order; i.e. the delay in developing his king's knight. Much more normal is 4...♗f6 5 ♘c3 e6 which is one of the main lines of the Symmetrical. Why then am I recommending an aggressive early deployment of the queen?

a) This variation is becoming popular at grandmaster level and has scored quite well there for Black. Its chief

supporter has been Zhang Zhong, but the likes of Pia Cramling, Pavel Eljanov and Bogdan Lalic have also been attracted to 4...♜b6.

b) White is forced to make an immediate decision about his d4-knight. Practice suggests that, when surprised by 4...♜b6, he may well reply with the fairly insipid 5 e3 which permits Black quite easy play.

c) Black avoids some slightly tricky lines with an early g3. A related move order to ours, and one which will often transpose, is 4...♗f6 5 ♘c3 ♜b6, but that also allows White to play 5 g3, as recommended by Khalifman in his *Opening for White According to Kramnik*. As we will see, White can't effectively transpose to that variation after 4...♜b6 with 5 ♘c2 e6 6 g3 due to 6...♗c5.

d) After 4...♜b6 5 ♗b3 e6 6 ♗c3 ♗f6 7 g3 one of the richest lines of the Symmetrical comes about, and it would be almost criminal to avoid it as Black. This variation usually arises via

4...♠f6 5 ♖c3 e6 6 g3 ♜b6 7 ♖b3, but with our move order Black has avoided a number of tricky options, especially 7 ♖db5 and the complex, but drawish 6 ♖db5.

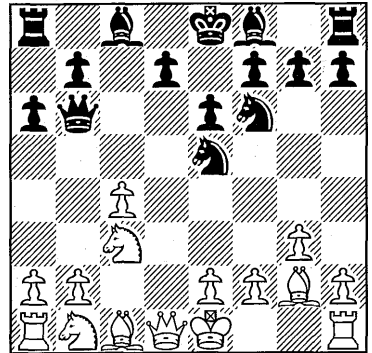
e) Finally, it should be noted that White's ♖f3 and d4 system is much less common below grandmaster level. Club players will probably meet the g3 systems considered in Chapters One and Two much more often than the more theoretical systems examined in both Chapter Three and here. Therefore I wanted to present a fairly dynamic choice for Black against 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4, but also one which wasn't overly theoretical. Furthermore, it also makes a lot of sense from the club player's perspective to break here with the pattern of the first three chapters, and to concentrate on only the one repertoire choice for Black against 3 d4.

5 ♖b3

White's main move. Instead, 5 ♖xc6?! allows Black a pleasant choice between 5...bxc6, followed by a kingside fianchetto with pressure down the b-file and control of d5, and 5...dxc6, after which ...e5 will quickly follow.

Another misguided approach is 5 ♖b5. This leap forward is often seen in the Symmetrical English, but only when Black has already weakened himself with ...e6. Here he hasn't and 5...a6 (5...♠f6 6 ♖1c3 d6 7 ♙e3 ♜a5, followed by ...a6 and a kingside fianchetto, also seems quite reasonable) 6 ♖5c3 e6 7 g3 ♖f6 8 ♙g2 ♖e5!? is similar to Black's attempts to actively counter the fianchetto

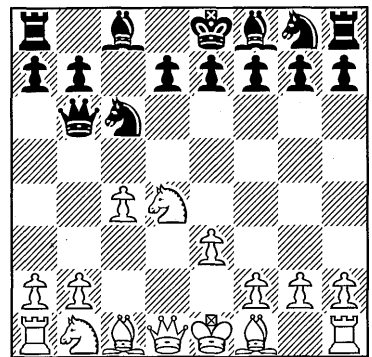
after both 5 ♖b3 and 5 ♖c2.



Following 9 ♜b3 ♜b4 10 ♖d2 ♙b8 11 0-0 ♙e7 12 ♜c2 0-0 13 a3 ♜c5 14 ♙d1 ♜c7 15 b3 b5 Black had unravelled with good queenside counterplay in A.Miles-S.Gligoric, Bugojno 1984.

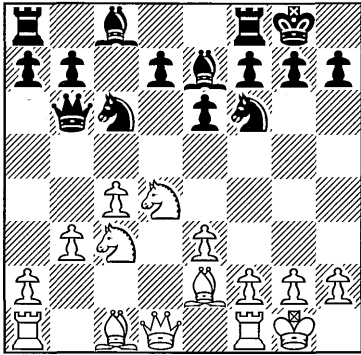
White has two more common and important alternatives to 5 ♖b3:

a) 5 e3 appears rather innocuous, but White can fianchetto on the queenside and play for a tiny edge. Black must be careful that his queen doesn't become rather redundant on b6 and should choose between two set-ups:



a1) 5...♠f6 6 ♖c3 e6 7 ♙e2 (sometimes White prefers to prevent ...♙b4

with 7 a3, not that it's clear Black wants to develop like that, and 7...d5 8 cxd5 exd5 gives Black a pretty reasonable IQP position: neither white bishop is especially well placed, while Black can develop easily and 9 ♕e2 ♕e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 b4 ♖xd4! 12 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 13 exd4 ♕e6 14 ♖b5 ♗fc8 15 ♕f4 ♖e8 saw him comfortably equalize in V.Popov-V.Korchnoi, St Petersburg (rapid) 2001) 7...♕e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 b3



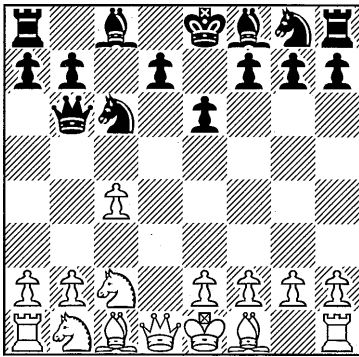
9...d5!? (this central counterstrike is the simplest way to equalize, but Black can also consider developing with 9...a6 10 ♕b2 d6: for example, 11 ♗c1 ♕d7 12 ♗d2 ♗ac8 13 ♗fd1 ♗fd8 14 ♖xc6 ♕xc6 15 ♗d4 ♗c5! didn't lead anywhere for White in O.Krivosov-P.Eljanov, Dos Hermanas 2004, but neither did the more aggressive 11 ♗d2 ♕d7 12 ♗ad1 ♗fd8 13 g4!? ♗a7 14 g5 ♖e8 15 ♖f3 ♗ab8 16 e4 ♕f8! 17 ♗f4 ♖e7 18 ♖h4 b5! and Black had good Hedgehog-type counterplay in M.Cuellar Gacharna-A.Karpov, Leningrad Interzonal 1973) 10 ♖xc6 (Black's main point is that 10 cxd5 ♖xd4 11 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 12 exd4 ♕b4! 13 ♕b2 ♕xc3 14 ♕xc3 ♖xd5 leads

to a very comfortable IQP position; White has also tried 10 ♖a4 ♗c7 11 ♖xc6, when I think that 11...bxc6 is still the best recapture, not that the IQP position after 11...♗xc6!? 12 cxd5 ♖xd5 13 ♕f3 ♗d8 14 ♕b2 ♗e8 15 ♗e2 ♕d7 16 ♕xd5 exd5 17 ♖c3 ♕c6 18 ♗d2 would have been so bad for Black in L.Ftacnik-A.Kosten, Austrian League 2004, had he continued 18...♕d6 19 ♖e2 ♗e4) 10...bxc6 11 ♕b2 ♕a6 12 ♗c2 (trying to maintain the tension and play in the centre; otherwise 12 cxd5 cxd5 13 ♖a4 ♗b7 14 ♕xa6 ♗xa6 15 ♗d4 ♗fc8 16 ♗fc1 ♕d6 saw Black hold her own on the queenside in L.Keitlinghaus-J.Polgar, Dortmund 1990) 12...♗ac8 13 e4 ♗fd8 14 ♗ad1 dxc4 15 bxc4 e5! saw Black control the d4- and d5-squares, and was fine for him in L.Ftacnik-A.Greenfeld, Beersheba 1990.

a2) 5...g6 can become a more adventurous alternative after 6 ♖c3 ♕g7!? (if Black is happy with Maróczy positions, there is nothing, of course, wrong with 6...♖f6 7 ♕e2 ♕g7 8 0-0 0-0 and, for example, 9 ♖b3 d6 10 e4 ♗d8 11 ♕e3 ♕e6 12 f3 ♖d7! 13 ♗d2 a5 14 ♗ac1 a4 15 ♖d4 ♖xd4 16 ♕xd4 ♕xd4+ 17 ♗xd4 ♗b6! gave Black a very comfortable version of the Accelerated Dragon in A.Adorjan-A.Wojtkiewicz, Debrecen 1990; 9 ♖c2!? has been suggested as an improvement, but Black can still gain sufficient counterplay with Van der Wiel's idea of 9...d6 10 e4 ♕e6 11 ♗b1 ♖d7, intending 12 ♖d5 ♕xd5 13 ♕e3 ♖d4!) 7 ♖d5 ♗d8 8 ♖b5! (critical and White's only try for the

advantage; instead 8 ♖e2 e6 9 ♘c3 ♗ge7 10 ♚b1 0-0 11 0-0 d5 gave Black a good game in M.Dobrotka-P.Petran, Slovakian League 2001) 8...♗f8! (Black must put his faith in his sound structure; 8...♙c5?! 9 f4 would be much worse) 9 ♙e2 a6 10 ♘d4 d6 11 0-0 ♙d7 12 b3 ♘h6! 13 ♙b2 ♘f5 14 ♚d2 ♘cxd4 15 exd4 h5 left White a touch better, but Black had just the kind of unbalanced position he was after against his much lower-rated opponent in A.Uogele-S.Sulskis, Lithuanian Championship, Vilnius 2000.

b) 5 ♘c2 should be met with the cunning 5...e6!,

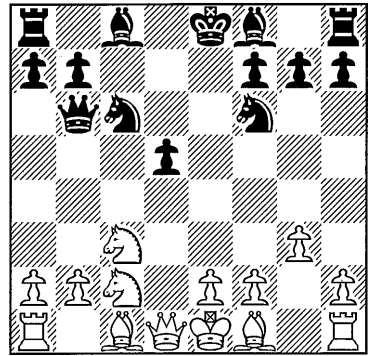


the point being to answer 6 g3 with 6...♙c5 (Romero Holmes's 6...♗e5!? 7 ♘e3 ♚c7 can also be considered) 7 e3 d5!. White surprisingly allowed this in L.Schandorff-N.De Firmian, Danish League 1999, which continued 8 cxd5 exd5 9 ♙g2 (9 ♚xd5? ♘f6 grants Black superb compensation and development; after 10 ♚d1?! 0-0 11 ♙g2 ♙g4 White finds himself sorely pressed for a good move) 9...♘f6 10 h3 0-0 11 0-0 when Black could liquidate his IQP with

11...d4. He probably should, though, already play for more, such as with 11...♙f5!? 12 ♘c3 ♙e4!, leaving White's light squares a little tender.

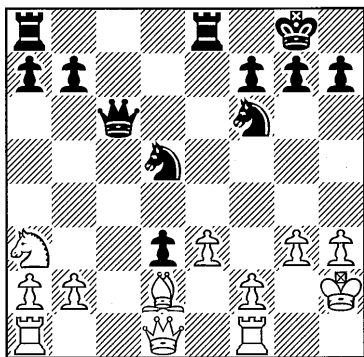
White does better, after 5 ♘c2 e6, with 6 ♘c3 ♘f6, when 7 e4?! has scarcely been seen, presumably because 7...♙c5 forces White into a slightly awkward defence of f2. He therefore usually chooses between:

b1) 7 g3?! again appears rather misguided due to 7...d5! (another strong sacrifice and probably superior here to 7...♙c5, since that allows White to respond aggressively with 8 ♘e3!? ♙xe3 9 ♙xe3 ♚xb2 10 ♚c1 ♚b4 11 ♙g2; Black can also consider 7...♗e5!?, when 8 ♗e3 is met by 8...♘fg4, but White should probably prefer that to 8 e4?! ♙c5 9 ♚e2 d6 which looks like it might well be an improved version for Black of Line C below) 8 cxd5 exd5



9 ♙g2 (even this doesn't fully solve White's difficulties, although neither does Gufeld's suggestion of 9 b3, due to 9...d4! 10 ♘a4 ♚a5+ 11 ♙d2 ♚d5; White might also bite the bullet, but 9 ♘xd5?! ♘xd5 10 ♚xd5 ♙e6 11 ♚e4

would only have made matters worse for him in A.Beliavsky-D.Gurevich, USSR 1975, had Black found the calm 11...♞d8!, threatening a large check on a5 followed by ...♙d5 and simply meeting 12 a3 with 12...♙e7 when White is forced into the disgusting 13 f3) 9...d4 10 ♖b1!? (10 ♖c4 avoids losing further time, but 10...♗xe4 11 ♙xe4 ♙h3 is also awkward for White) 10...♙c5 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♗e1! ♞e8 13 h3 ♙f5 14 ♗d3 ♖b4! 15 ♗xc5 ♜xc5 and Black had broken the blockade of d3, leaving him with an excellent and very active version of the Tarrasch in J.Aijala-J.Penrose, correspondence 1975. That fine game continued 16 ♗a3 ♙e4 17 ♙d2 ♙xg2 18 ♖xg2 ♜c6+ 19 ♖h2 d3! 20 e3 ♗bd5



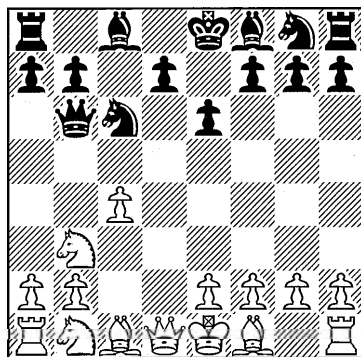
and White didn't last much longer on the kingside.

b2) 7 e3 has, like 5 e3, seen a surprising amount of action. Again Black should be able to obtain a pretty reasonable position so long as he isn't too ambitious: 7...♙e7 8 ♙e2 0-0 9 0-0 ♞d8!? (preparing to fully equalize with ...d5; if Black prefers to maintain some tension he should follow Khalifman's

example with 9...a6 10 e4 d6 11 ♙e3 ♜a5 12 ♜d2 ♙d7 13 ♞fd1 ♞fc8 14 f3 ♞ab8 which is also completely fine) 10 e4 d5! 11 cxd5 exd5 12 exd5 ♙e6 13 ♗e3 ♖b4 14 ♙c4 ♜c5 leaves White unable to further reinforce d5, and 15 ♜b3 ♗bx5 16 ♗exd5 ♗xd5 17 ♗xd5 ♙xd5 18 ♙xd5 ♜xd5 saw Black regain the pawn with full equality in T.Vakhidov-M.Venkatesh, Pune 2004.

Having seen how to respond to White's slightly inferior alternatives, we return to his main move, 5 ♖b3:

5...e6



6 ♗c3

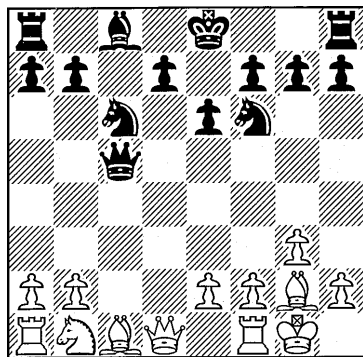
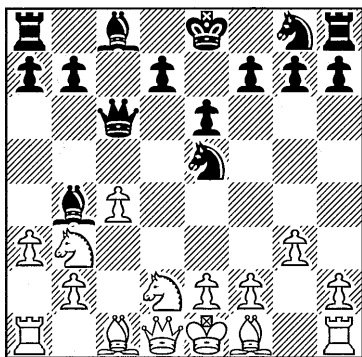
Khalifman prefers the immediate 6 a3 when 6...♗f6 7 ♗c3 transposes to Line B below.

Again 6 g3 has also been seen, when Black must decide how best to time the disruptive ...♗e5:

a) 6...♗e5 7 ♗1d2 (far from forced, although 7 ♙g2?! ♙b4+ doesn't appear to give White enough compensation, and, for example, 8 ♙d2 ♗xc4 9 0-0 ♗xd2 10 ♗1xd2 d5 11 e4 ♗f6 12 exd5 exd5 13 a3 ♙e7 14 ♞e1 ♙e6 simply left Black a clear pawn in B.Kohlweyer-

J.Lautier, Dutch League 2000; 7 e4 has actually been the most common response, but is well met by Wedberg's consistent 7...a5!, after which 8 ♖e3 ♗c6 9 ♘3d2 ♜f6 10 f3 ♙c5 11 ♖e2 0-0 12 ♘c3 gave Black a pleasant choice between the game's 12...d5!? and the more restrained 12...d6 in A.Veingold-H.Schussler, Tallinn 1983) 7...♙b4 (targeting c4, although 7...a5!? is a good alternative which left Black pretty active after 8 e3 ♜f6 9 ♙e2 d5! 10 0-0 a4 11 ♜d4 ♙c5 in G.Serper-T.Wedberg, Vienna 1991) 8 a3 ♗c6!

12 ♙g5!? ♜c8! 13 ♙xf6 gxf6 14 0-0 ♙c6 being about equal in B.Gelfand-V.Topalov, Monaco (rapid) 2003; and Black was also fine after 8 ♘1d2 d6! 9 0-0 ♙d7 10 ♗c2 ♜c8 11 ♗c3 ♗a6 12 c5 b6 13 f4 ♘c6 14 cxd6 ♙xd6 15 ♘c4 ♙e7 16 ♗d3 0-0 in V.Korchnoi-D.Zagorskis, Hamburg 1997) 8...♙xc5 9 ♘xc5 ♗xc5 10 0-0 ♘c6! (improving over 10...0-0 11 b3 ♘c6 12 ♙a3 ♘b4 13 ♘c3 d5 14 ♜c1 ♗e7 15 e4! which gave White full compensation in the game P.H.Nielsen-J.Lautier, Spanish Team Championship 2004)

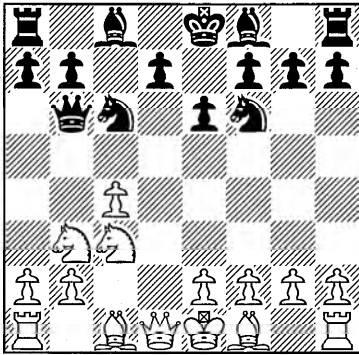


9 axb4? (speculative, but one can see why 9 ♜g1 ♙xd2+ 10 ♘xd2 didn't appeal to the Dutchman) 9...♗xh1 10 ♘d4 ♜f6! (10...♗xh2?! 11 ♘e4! would have been somewhat less clear) 11 ♘4f3 d6 12 b3 0-0 13 ♙b2 ♘xf3+ and 14...e5 left White unable to keep the black queen cornered in J.Werle-J.Timman, Crowthorne 2006.

b) 6...♜f6 7 ♙g2 ♜e5 8 c5!? (an enterprising idea of Peter Heine Nielsen's; prior to this Gelfand had twice failed to get anywhere after 8 ♗c2 ♗a6! 9 c5 d5 10 cxd6 ♙xd6, with 11 ♘c3 ♙d7

11 ♘c3 (Ribli has suggested that White might try 11 b3!?, when Black might consider 11...♗d4!? as well as Lautier's suggestion of 11...d5 12 ♙a3 ♘b4, but note that 11...♗e5?! should be avoided due to 12 ♗d2! ♗xa1? 13 ♘c3 d5 14 ♙a3 ♗xf1+ 15 ♘xf1 a6 16 e4 with some initiative for White) 11...d5 12 ♙g5 h6! 13 ♙xf6 gxf6 14 ♜c1 ♗e7 15 ♗d2 ♘f8 gave Black reasonable chances to untangle, and left White with no more than sufficient compensation at best in the game P.H.Nielsen-I.Cheparinov, Wijk aan Zee 2005.

6...♘f6



We will now chiefly focus on:

A: 7 e4

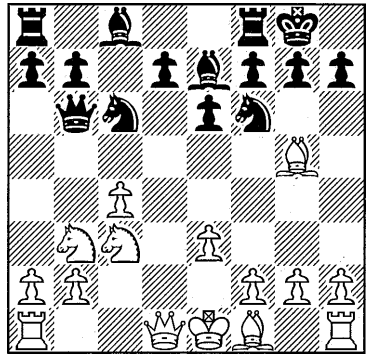
B: 7 a3

C: 7 g3

White may also opt to develop his dark-squared bishop:

a) 7 ♗g5 has been used on occasion by both Korchnoi and Lautier. After 7...♗c7 (more popular has been 7...♗b4 8 ♗xf6 gxf6, but I'm not so keen on the black position after 9 ♖c1!; another alternative is Thorstein's 7...d5!?, intending to meet 8 ♗xf6 with 8...dxc4 9 ♗d4 ♖d8, followed by regaining the piece, while 8 e3 dxc4 9 ♗xc4 ♗e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♗e2 ♗d7 12 ♖ac1 ♗e5! saw Black equalize in J.Benjamin-K.Thorsteins, Reykjavik 1990) 8 e3 (or 8 e4 0-0 9 ♖d2 h6 10 ♗e3 ♖d8 11 ♗c5?! ♗xc5 12 ♗xc5 ♗e7 13 ♗d3 d5 14 e5 ♗e4 and Black had the initiative in K.Robatsch-J.Horvath, Austrian League 1994) 8...a6 9 ♗e2 ♗e5 10 ♗f4!? d6?! 11 c5! Black was already in some trouble in J.Lautier-Zhang Zhong, Turin Olym-

piad 2006. However, Black's 8th and 9th moves can both be improved upon. One idea being simply 8...0-0,



meeting a quiet move like 9 ♗e2 with 9...d5! 10 cxd5 ♗d8, and also not fearing 9 c5!? due to 9...♖d8! followed by 10...b6 or 10...d5.

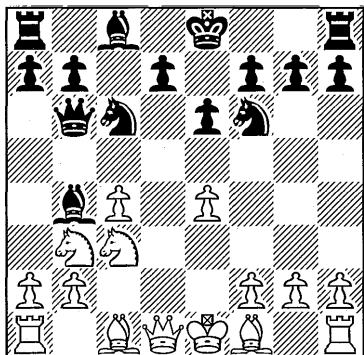
b) 7 ♗e3 ♖c7 8 ♖c1 (8 ♗b5 ♖b8 9 c5!? is probably more critical, but remains completely unexplored; one possible response is 9...b6 10 ♗d6+ ♗xd6 11 ♖xd6 ♗d5!?, intending 12 ♗d2 ♗db4) 8...a6 9 ♖d2 ♗b4 10 ♗f4?! e5! 11 ♗g3 ♗e4 12 ♖c2 ♗xc3 13 bxc3 ♗a3 14 ♖b1 d6 already left Black for preference due to the sickly white c-pawns in K.Robatsch-T.Tolnai, Bad Wörishofen 1993.

A)

1 c4 c5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♖b6 5 ♗b3 e6 6 ♗c3 ♗f6 7 e4 ♗b4

Immediately pressurizing e4 and gaining counterplay. Interestingly, Hansen's comprehensive work on the Symmetrical describes this line as being 'only interesting for Black'. I'm not sure that this unusual form of the Sicil-

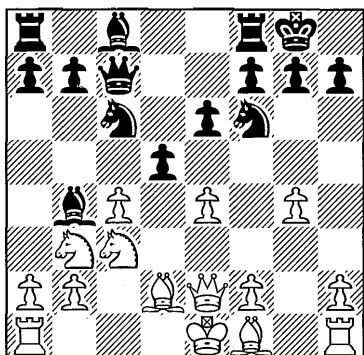
ian (it could also occur via 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♜b6 5 ♗b3 ♗c6 6 c4 ♗f6 7 ♗c3 ♗b4, although with that move order Black usually prefers 5...♗f6) is so bad for White: Black must be careful not to cede an early initiative, although he should be able to emerge with a good game.



8 ♗d3

The most natural way of defending e4, but there are alternatives:

a) 8 ♜e2?! is how White covers e4 in Line C, but here it is rather misguided: 8...d6 9 ♗e3 ♜c7 10 ♗d2 0-0 11 g4? d5!



12 ♗g2 dxc4 13 g5 ♗xe4 14 ♗xe4 cxb3 was superb for Black in K.Thorsteins-

So.Polgar, Budapest 1989.

b) 8 ♜c2 0-0 9 ♗g5 ♗d4! 10 ♗xd4 ♜xd4 11 ♗d3 ♗g4 12 ♗d1 ♜e5 13 ♗h4 f5 borrowed a dark square plan from the Queen's Indian to develop counterplay in P.Benkovic-M.Pap, Subotica 2001.

c) 8 ♗e3 is White's main alternative and should be compared to our main line. It can even transpose after 8...♗xc3+ 9 bxc3 ♜c7 10 ♗d3 (or 10 f3 d6, preventing 11 c5, after which 11 ♗d4 a6 12 ♗b1 ♗e5 13 ♜a4+ ♗d7!? 14 ♜b4 0-0 15 ♜xb7 was W.Arencibia-P.Toth, Rio de Janeiro 2003, when Black could have safely regained his pawn with 15...♜a5! 16 ♜b2 ♗fb8 17 ♗b3 ♜c7) 10...d6 11 0-0 0-0, although Black can also consider Schmittziel's 10...♗e5!? 11 ♗d4 b6, and after 12 0-0, 12...d6 is probably best, again contesting the important central dark squares.

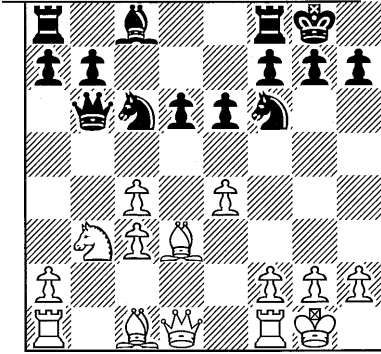
8...0-0

Black can also consider delaying this for 8...d6, but he probably shouldn't repeat Van der Wiel's creative 8...♗e5 9 0-0 ♜d6!? since 10 ♗f4! 0-0 (10...♗xc3 11 bxc3 ♜xd3 12 ♗xe5 ♜xe4 13 ♗e1 ♜xc4 14 ♗xf6 gxf6 15 ♜f3 supplies dangerous compensation, as pointed out by Van der Wiel) 11 ♗e1 b6 12 ♗f1 gave White an edge in V.Korchnoi-J.Van der Wiel, Amsterdam 1988, and 11 ♗xe5 ♜xe5 12 f4 might well have been even stronger.

9 0-0 ♗xc3! 10 bxc3 d6

Black has inflicted some central damage and will complete his development, after ...♜c7, with either ...b6 and ...♗a6, or ...e5 and ...♗e6. This type

of position is known from the Sicilian and there White usually has no more, at best, than sufficient activity to compensate for his inferior structure.

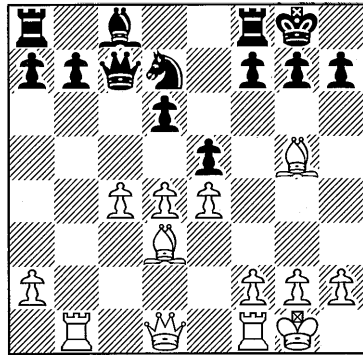


The main difference here (compared to, say, a line of the Gã-Pã: 1 e4 c5 2 d3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 dxd4 d6 5 d2c3 ♖b6!? 6 d2b3 d2b4 7 d2d3 d2xc3+ 8 bxc3 d6) is that White's doubled c-pawns have advanced beyond c2 and c3. That means that Black, as well as taking care on the kingside and over the e5-square, must watch out for a c5-advance, but he should also find it easier to target the front c-pawn.

11 d2e3

This position remains very rare, despite a little bit of grandmaster testing at the end of the eighties. White initially preferred 11 d2f4, but after 11...e5 12 d2e3 ♖c7, Black was quite comfortable, since he could always meet f4, if necessary, with an exchange there, when J.Smejkal-G.Sax, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988, was prematurely agreed drawn. Azmaiparashvili later preferred 11 d2b1, a move which was endorsed by *Informator*. However,

Black can do much better than follow the course of Z.Azmaiparashvili-Y.Dokhoian, Lvov 1990: 11...♖c7 12 d2d4 g6? 13 d2a3 ♗d8 14 d2xc6! bxc6 15 f4 d2b7 16 c5! and White was much better. Clearly Black's overly prophylactic 12th move only served to further weaken his dark squares. He should instead ensure himself of a fully satisfactory position with either 12...d2e5, and if 13 d2b5, then 13...♖c6, or the more radical 12...d2xd4!? 13 cxd4 e5 14 d2g5 d2d7,



striking back in the centre in Nimzo style.

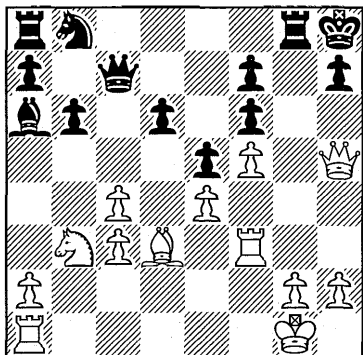
11...♖c7 12 f4 b6

Prudently delaying ...e5, since 12...e5!? 13 f5!? b6 14 g4, while rather committal on White's part, does threaten to steamroller Black on the kingside.

13 ♖f3

We've been following S.Conquest-J.Horvath, Prague 1989, in which Black could have placed his faith in his flexible Scheveningen centre to continue developing counterplay with 13...d2a6. White isn't yet threatening to advance either his e- or f-pawns, but Horvath

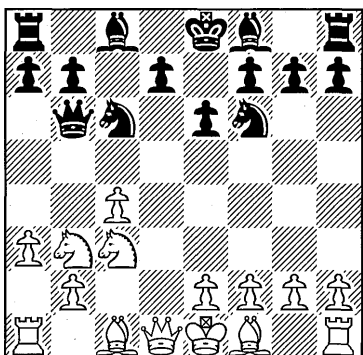
instead decided that it was time to respond in the centre and 13...e5!? 14 f5 ♖a6 15 ♙g5 ♜h8! 16 ♙xf6 gxf6 17 ♖h5 ♘b8! 18 ♚f3 ♜g8,



while far from fully clear, gave Black good chances to defend on the queen-side before prosecuting his long-term advantage on the other flank.

B)

1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♖b6 5 ♘b3 e6 6 ♘c3 ♘f6 7 a3

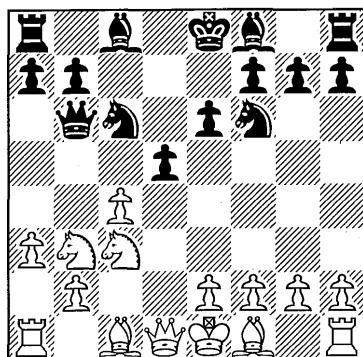


Preparing e4, having prevented Black from gaining easy counterplay, as in Line A, with ...♙b4. This approach has been recommended in two

fairly recent repertoire books (Davies's *The Dynamic Réti* and Khalifman's *Opening for White According to Kramnik*), and so readers would do well to acquaint themselves with the lines considered below.

7...♙e7

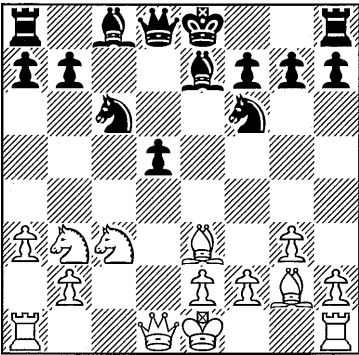
Preparing to head for a type of Hedgehog, although contrary to both Khalifman and Davies, I'm not so sure that the IQP positions arising after 7...d5 are so bad for Black:



a) 8 cxd5 could still be met by 8...exd5, but Black usually prefers 8...♘d5. After 9 ♙d2 (or 9 ♘xd5 exd5 10 ♙f4 ♙e7 11 e3 0-0 12 ♙d3 ♙e6 and Black was fairly comfortable due to his pressure down the b-file in M.Eickmann-U.Vetter, correspondence 2000, while both 10...a5!? and 10...d4 also merited close consideration) 9...♘xc3 10 ♙xc3 e5 11 e3 ♙e6 12 ♘d2 ♙e7 (12...♗d8!? could also do with a test; the idea being to meet 13 ♖c2 with 13...♙d5, hoping to induce White into weakening the d4-square with 14 e4) 13 ♙c4 ♙xc4 14 ♘xc4 ♖c5 the position is pretty level. B.Gulko-A.Szieberth, Bern

1995, continued 15 ♖b3 (also possible is 15 ♖g4, when Black should probably castle, rather than repeat Tolnai's experimental 15...♘d4!?) 15...0-0 16 0-0 b5 17 ♘a5 ♘xa5?! 18 ♙xa5 and the threat of 19 ♙b4 helped White gain an edge, but Black can improve with either 16...♙fd8 or later 17...e4!?, gaining space and freeing some useful squares up for the queen.

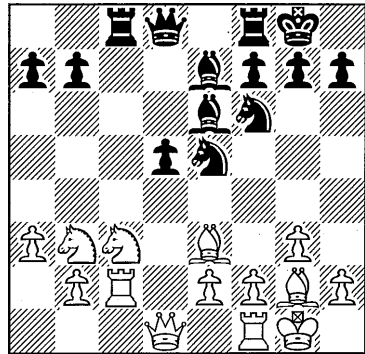
b) 8 ♙e3!? has been theory's recommendation. The idea is that 8...♖d8 9 cxd5 exd5 (this time Black should definitely keep the knights on; he needs to gain some active counterplay and 9...♘xd5 10 ♘xd5 exd5 11 g3 ♙e7 12 ♙g2 ♙f6 is well met by Razuvaev's effective 13 0-0!) 10 g3 ♙e7 11 ♙g2



is very similar to a Tarrasch Queen's Gambit.

It clearly is, but I'm not sure that this is a particularly good version for White; he might well miss the option (which he normally enjoys with his knight on d4) of both ♘xc6 and ♖a4. Furthermore, Zoltan Almasi has been happy to play this line as Black; his game with Izoria (Bled Olympiad, 2002)

continuing 11...♙e6 12 0-0 (12 ♘c5?! 0-0 13 ♘xb7 is a rather misguided approach, but one which a White player unfamiliar with the Tarrasch might try; 13...♖b8 14 ♘c5 ♖xb2 15 ♘3a4 ♖e5 16 ♘d3 ♖f5 17 h3 h5 gave Black good counterplay in M.Stangl-E.Schmittdiel, Altensteig 1991, but quite possibly 17...d4 was both more thematic and stronger) 12...0-0 13 ♖c1 (White can also go after the bishop pair with 13 ♘d4, but 13...♖d7 14 ♘xe6 fxe6 strengthens d5 and 15 ♖a4 a6! 16 ♙ad1 b5 17 ♖c2 ♙ac8 18 ♙f4 ♙d6 19 ♙g5 ♙e5 saw Black continue energetically, leading to an unbalanced and complex position in A.Wojtkiewicz-L.Sokolin, New York 1994) 13...♙c8 14 ♖c2 ♘e5! (correctly aiming for activity to offset the IQP; this goes unmentioned by Khalifman who only gives 14...♘a5?! 15 ♘xa5 ♖xa5 16 ♖d2 b6 17 ♙d4 which left White in control and better in P.Schlosser-E.Schmittdiel, Altensteig 1991)

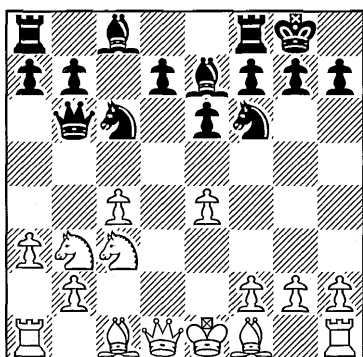


15 ♘d4 (accepting that, with Black threatening 15...♘c4 and 16...♙f5, White needs his knight back on d4) 15...♘c4 16 ♙g5 ♖h8 (16...h6? was best

avoided due to the tactical trick 17 ♖xf6 ♗xf6 18 ♜xe6 fxe6 19 ♜xd5! – Izoria) 17 e3 h6 18 ♖xf6 ♗xf6 19 a4 ♖a5 and Black had reasonable counterplay. Some readers might well like this Taraschesque approach, and it is an especially good choice if one wants to reach a complex position against a weaker opponent.

8 e4 0-0

Move order is particularly important in this line. Black usually plays both ...d6 and ...a6 in the Hedgehog and so has been known to start with 8...d6, but we want to delay those pawn advances.



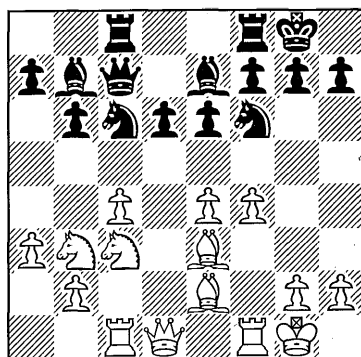
9 ♗e2

White has also been known to start with 9 ♗e3, but then 9...♖c7 should transpose to our main line after 10 ♖c1 b6! (10...a6 11 ♗e2 b6 12 0-0 ♗b7 13 f3 ♖ab8 14 ♜h1 ♗fe8 15 ♖d2 d6?! 16 ♜d5! was clearly better for White in M.Stangl-P.Spiriev, Budapest 1989; a good example, pointed out by Khalifman, of the problems of playing a normal type of Hedgehog against White's 7 a3 move order) 11 ♗e2 (11

♜d5? fails to 11...exd5 12 cxd5 ♜xe4) 11...♗a6 12 0-0.

9...♖c7 10 0-0

White can also play more aggressively with 10 f4, as he did in N.Tolstikh-B.Lalic, Pardubice 2001: 10...d6 11 ♗e3 b6 12 ♖c1 ♗b7 (now that White can no longer bolster his e-pawn with f3, Black's light-squared bishop can go to b7) 13 0-0 ♖ac8.



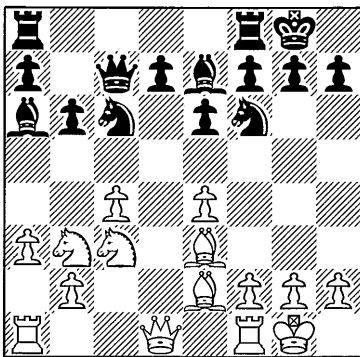
We should stop and examine this position, especially because some readers may not be too keen on a Hedgehog approach. However, I believe that this is Black's best way of meeting 7 a3 and that he has a slightly improved version of a normal Hedgehog; once again White would prefer his knight to still be on d4.

After 13...♖ac8 it is not so easy for White to make progress, especially since the standard trick 14 ♜d5 exd5 15 cxd5 again doesn't convince, because e4 is too weak after 15...♖b8. He might thus prepare ♜d5 with 14 ♗f3, but after 14...♖b8 Black retains his choice of plans: to prepare ...d5, to prepare ...b5, and to target the c4-pawn (he will often

combine all three options, only committing fully to one after having seen White's reaction). Tolstikh actually preferred to improve his b3-knight, but 14 ♖d2 ♜d8!? 15 b4 d5! 16 cxd5 exd5 17 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 18 cxd5 ♜xd5 saw Lalic fully equalize.

10...b6 11 ♖e3 ♗a6!

Both Davies and Khalifman neglect this approach, assuming that Black will instead play a more normal Hedgehog involving ...a6 (a move which there is absolutely no need to hurry with here). That is especially surprising considering that 11...♗a6 is an idea of the highly respected theoretician, Bogdan Lalic. It was recently adopted by Zhang Zhong after he had earlier played 11...♗b7 12 ♜c1 ♜ac8 which is probably not too bad for Black, although 13 c5! is a little awkward.



12 ♜c1 ♜ac8 13 f3

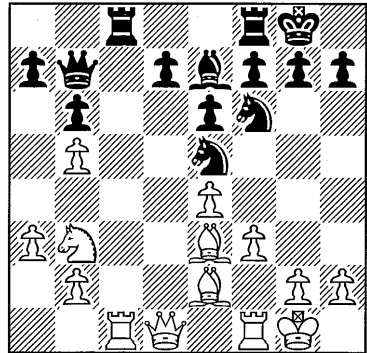
White can again prefer a set-up with 13 f4. Black should probably respond with 13...d6, when two possible plans are ...♜fd8 and ...♜b7, playing for ...d5, and ...♗d7-c5. Instead T.Sammalvuo-B.Lalic, Cappelle la

Grande 2002, saw the provocative 13...♜fd8!? 14 e5 ♗e8 15 ♗d5 ♜b8 16 ♗xe7+ ♗xe7, when White should have preferred Stohl's 17 ♗d3 to the 17 c5 ♗d5 of the game.

13...♗e5

Continuing Black's plan and pretty forcing what follows, assuming that White wants to save his c-pawn.

14 ♗b5 ♗xb5 15 cxb5 ♜b7



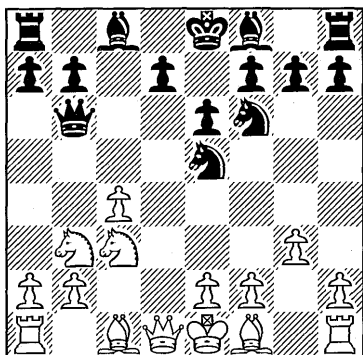
This position was reached in Xu Jun-Zhang Zhong, Jinan 2005, and Black didn't have any problems. White, though, was struggling to do anything with his bishop pair, and after 16 ♜d4 ♗g6 17 ♗h1 ♜xc1! 18 ♜xc1 ♜c8 19 ♜xc8+ ♜xc8 20 ♜c4 ♜b8 21 ♗d4 h5! 22 ♗g1 h4 Black was slightly for choice due to his kingside and dark-square prospects.

C)

1 c4 c5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♜b6 5 ♗b3 e6 6 ♗c3 ♗f6 7 g3

As we've already seen, this complex and important variation more usually arises via the move order 4...♗f6 5 ♗c3 e6 6 g3 ♜b6 7 ♗b3.

7...♘e5!



8 e4

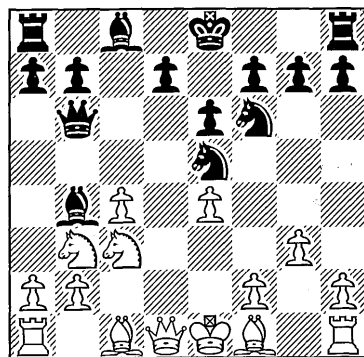
White's main way of defending c4, but occasionally he tries to do without this committal advance:

a) 8 ♖g2?! ♗xc4 9 e4 (or 9 0-0 d5 10 e4 dxe4 11 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 12 ♖xe4 ♖e7 13 ♖c2 ♖b4! 14 ♖d1 e5 and in I.Zugic-A.Abreu, Havana 2004, White could find nothing better than grabbing back his pawn in return for losing the initiative after 15 ♗xh7 ♖g4) 9...♗b4 10 ♖e2 offers White a little compensation, but not really enough. It will take Black a while to develop his light-squared bishop, but despite that he was still better after 10...♖c7 11 0-0 ♗xc3! 12 bxc3 d6 13 ♗d2 ♗xd2 14 ♖xd2 0-0 15 ♖a3 ♖d8 in V.Ikonnikov-Y.Gonzalez, Havana 2004.

b) 8 ♖d4!? twice brought Agrest some success in the early nineties. An obvious but untried response is 8...♖xd4 9 ♗xd4 ♖b4. Alternatively, Black can take up the challenge with 8...♖c6!? 9 ♖xe5! ♖xh1 10 ♗b5 d6! 11 ♗xd6+ ♖xd6 12 ♖xd6 ♖d7 13 ♖e3 ♖c6 14 ♖xc6 ♖xc6, when 15 ♗a5 left White

with some compensation for the exchange in E.Agrest-J.Gdanski, Bielsko Biala 1990.

8...♗b4



Continuing to develop as actively as possible – a policy Black must follow because otherwise he will be handicapped by his blocked-in light-squared bishop – and forcing White to spend further time defending his advanced centre.

9 ♖e2

Covering as many light squares as possible. White might prefer to break the pin with 9 ♖d2, but then Black can transpose to Line C2 below with 9...d6 10 ♖e2 0-0 or blow open the centre with the dangerous 9...d5!?

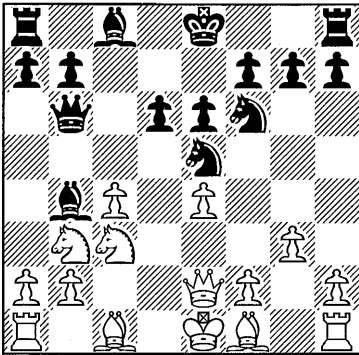
It should also be noted that no less a theoretical expert than Igor Stohl has dabbled in the extremely rare 9 ♖c2!?. Unfortunately his opponent didn't respond with the critical 9...♗xc3+ 10 bxc3 and here Black has a choice: 10...♗f3+ 11 ♖e2 ♗e5 12 c5 ♖a6+ 13 ♖e1 ♖c6 followed by ...d6 is obvious, but Black might still prefer 10...d5!?, striking out on the light squares and

aiming to attack the centralized white king.

9...d6!

Danner's move, which has superseded the older alternatives. Black will delay castling, preferring to damage the white structure and to hold up the e5-advance. Instead, after 9...0-0 10 f4 ♖c6, White can play 11 e5 immediately or first include 11 ♙e3 ♜c7 12 ♙g2 b6, and then 13 e5 again gives him the better prospects.

After 9...d6! we will consider:



C1: 10 f4

C2: 10 ♙d2!?

The former is the traditional main line, but in recent years White has struggled to prove any advantage with it. Those grandmasters still employing this variation as White are therefore just as likely these days to prefer the fashionable latter option.

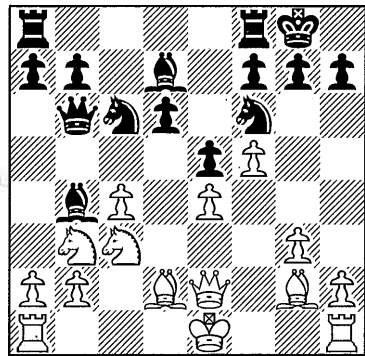
C1)

1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♗c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♜b6 5 ♗b3 e6 6 ♖c3 ♗f6 7 g3 ♗e5 8 e4 ♙b4 9 ♜e2 d6 10 f4 ♖c6

The best retreat; from c6 the knight may even go to a5 or to d4, while it also contests the key e5-square.

11 ♙e3

White doesn't have to allow his pawns to be doubled, but permitting that is the lesser evil. Instead 11 ♙g2?! (11 ♙d2?! 0-0 12 ♙g2 e5 comes to the same thing) 11...e5! 12 ♙d2 (12 ♙e3?! ♗d4! 13 ♜d3 ♖c2+ 14 ♖d2 ♗xe3 15 ♜xe3 ♜c6 is even worse for White) 12...0-0 13 f5 (another relatively best move: 13 ♗d5? is well met by 13...♙xd2+ 14 ♜xd2 ♗xd5 15 cxd5 ♗b4!, intending 16 a3 ♗xd5 and if 17 ♜xd5?, then 17...♙e6; while 13 ♗b5? exf4! 14 gxf4 ♜e8 15 ♙xb4 ♗xb4 16 0-0-0 would have left White facing an early bath in L.Portisch-G.Sax, Brussels 1988, had Black found 16...d5! 17 ♜d2 dxc4 18 ♜xb4 cxb3 19 ♜xb3 ♙e6 – Sax) 13...♙d7



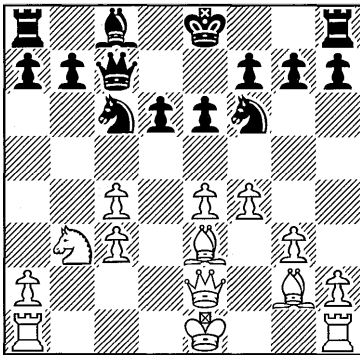
14 ♗d3 (this variation is littered with White catastrophes – he really must stick to 11 ♙e3 – and another occurred after the attempt to hack White's way out of trouble: 14 g4?! ♗d4 15 ♗xd4?! exd4 16 ♗d5? ♗xd5 17 cxd5 d3! 18

♖xd3 ♙b5 and White could have already resigned in C.Ionescu-S.Conquest, Bucharest 1999) 14...♘d4 15 ♖d1 ♙c6 16 ♖f1 ♘xb3 17 axb3 saw White go on to scramble a draw in A.Karpov-B.Gulko, Linares 1989, but there was no doubt that Black had much the more comfortable position at this stage; as well as Gulko's 17...♘d7, 17...♙c5 was quite promising.

11...♙xc3+ 12 bxc3 ♖c7

I'm not a big fan of statistics, but Black's fine score of 63% from 68 games with this position (on ChessBase's *Big Database 2006*) is testament to the problems that White has faced from this position.

13 ♙g2

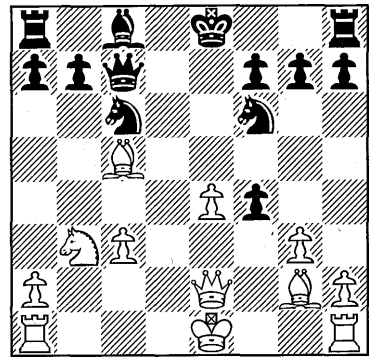


13...0-0

Black's main move, but if he wants to avoid either a forced draw (note 'a2' to White's 14th move) or the theoretical main line, he can also consider:

a) 13...e5!? counters immediately in the centre. White can liquidate his doubled pawns, but after 14 c5 (14 0-0 is the alternative, after which A.Suetin-S.Kindermann, Bern 1995, continued

14...b6 15 a4 ♙a6 16 ♖fd1 0-0 17 f5, when I quite like the regrouping 17...♘b8!?, as well as Hansen's idea of 17...♘d7 18 ♙f1 ♖fc8 and if 19 ♖g4, then 19...♘f6) 14...dxc5 15 ♙xc5 (15 ♘xc5?! b6! 16 ♘a6 ♙xa6 17 ♖xa6 0-0 18 ♖e2 ♖fe8 19 f5 ♘a5 20 ♖c1 ♘c4 21 ♙g5 ♖c5 22 ♙xf6 gxf6 left Black with the superior minor piece in A.Thaler-O.Kroll, correspondence 1994) 15...exf4!, Black should be able to gain sufficient counterchances in this sharp position.



Hansen gives 16 ♖d2 (16 0-0-0!? ♙g4 17 ♙f3 ffg3 18 e5 ♙xf3 19 ♖xf3 ♘d7 20 ♙d6 ♖b6 is critical; note here that 21 ♖xg3 0-0-0 22 ♖xg7? allows 22...♘xe5 since Black has a check on e3) 16...fxg3 17 ♙d6 ♖d8 18 hxg3, and now as well as his 18...h5!?, Black can consider 18...♘g4 19 0-0-0 ♘ge5 20 ♖f4 ♘g6.

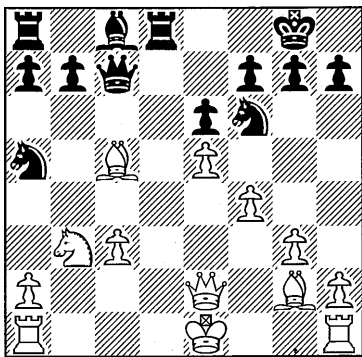
b) 13...♘a5!? also provokes an advance of the c-pawn: 14 c5 (alternatively, 14 ♘xa5 ♖xa5 15 0-0 e5 16 ♖d3 ♘g4 17 ♙f2 ♘xf2 18 ♖xf2 ♖c5!? 19 ♖d1 ♙e6 20 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 21 ♖xd6 ♖c8 gave Black full compensation due to White's vulnerable structure in T.Headlong-R.Palliser, Oxford 2004) 14...♘xb3 15

axb3 dxc5 16 e5 ♘d7 and White clearly has compensation, but just how much is not easy to assess. This is another line, like 13...e5, in need of further testing. The only example so far (R.Hanel-A.Fauland, Austrian League 1989) continued 17 0-0 a6 18 b4!? ♚b8! 19 bxc5 ♘xc5 20 ♖c4 b6 21 ♙ab1 0-0 and White could do no more than regain his pawn with equality.

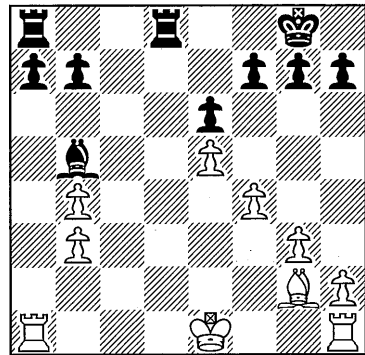
14 0-0!?

A critical choice. White, just as he sometimes does in both the related Hedgehog and Scheveningen, stakes everything on a kingside attack to offset his queenside weaknesses. He can also play more positionally:

a) 14 c5 has received the attention of some strong grandmasters, but Black is believed to have found the antidote in 14...dxc5 15 ♙xc5 ♚d8 16 e5 (Black also gains good play after 16 0-0 e5!; for example, 17 f5 b6 18 ♙e3 ♙b7 19 ♚ac1 ♚ac8 20 ♙fe1 ♘e7 21 ♘d2?! ♖d7! 22 ♙g5 ♖d3 forced a favourable ending in V.Prokopisic-M.Oleksienko, Evpatoria 2002) 16...♘a5!. White has then tried, albeit without much success:



a1) 17 ♙b4 ♘xb3 18 axb3 ♘d5 continues the key theme of playing actively and not allowing White to consolidate. In V.Kramnik-V.Salov, Wijk aan Zee 1998, Black held without any trouble: 19 ♖c4 (White should avoid 19 ♙xd5?! exd5! 20 ♖e3 ♙f5 21 ♙c5 b6 22 ♙d4 ♖d7 23 0-0 ♚ac8 24 ♙f2 ♙e4 25 ♖e2 ♚c6 when his vulnerable kingside light squares were the most important feature of the position in V.Filippov-A.Khalifman, Linares 1997) 19...♖d7! 20 ♖d4 ♘xb4 21 ♖xd7 ♙xd7 22 cxb4 ♙b5



23 ♙xb7 ♙ab8 24 ♙a6 and ½-½.

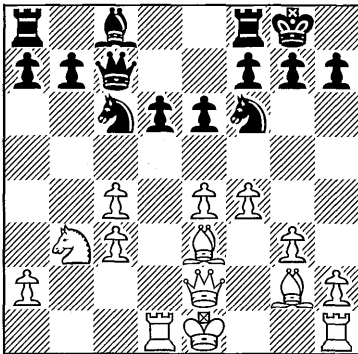
a2) 17 exf6 is White's best option if he is only after a draw: 17...♘xb3 18 axb3 ♖xc5 19 ♖e5 ♖b6 20 ♖g5 ♖c3+ 21 ♙f1 ♖d3+ 22 ♙g1?! enabled Black to play on with 22...♖g6 in W.Uhlmann-J.Van der Wiel, Baden-Baden 1992. However, 22 ♙f2 would have left him with nothing better than a perpetual, while another can arise earlier after 20 fxg7 f6 21 ♖xf6 ♖e3+ 22 ♙f1 ♖d3+ (R.Schutt-A.Capoccia, correspondence 1999).

a3) 17 ♖b5?! ♘xb3 18 axb3 ♙d7 19 ♖b4 (or 19 ♖c4 b5! 20 ♖d4 ♙c6 21 ♙d6

♙xg2 22 ♙xc7 ♜xd4 23 cxd4 ♙xh1 24 exf6 gxf6 and Black impressively went on to convert this slightly better ending in J.Smejkal-R.Lau, Porz 1992) 19...♙c6 20 ♙d6 gets White's dark-squared bishop to its ideal square, but here Black can easily play around it with the light-squared bishops coming off. Z.Azmaiparashvili-J.Arnason, Reykjavik 1990, continued 20...♞d7 21 0-0 ♙xg2 22 ♙xg2 ♞c6+ 23 ♜f3 ♙e4 24 ♞d1 b5! 25 c4 a6 and White faced a long defence.

a4) 17 ♙d4 is another move which can quickly lead to a perpetual. However, as well as 17...♙xb3 18 axb3 ♜xd4 19 cxd4 ♞c3+ 20 ♙f2 ♞xd4+ 21 ♙f3 ♞d5+, Black can also play for more with 21...♙d5!? 22 ♞hd1 ♞b6 23 ♞d3 ♙d7 24 ♞d4 ♞xb3+ 25 ♙f2 ♙c6, which was a pretty reasonable exchange sacrifice in G.Jankovskis-I.Farago, Giessen 1992.

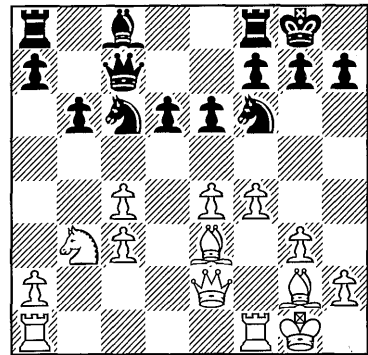
b) 14 ♞d1!? has only received three outings so far, but has attracted the attention of both Peter Wells and Lubomir Ftacnik, and so I suspect that it may well gain some future interest.



Black responded solidly and sensibly in L.Ftacnik-P.Jaracz, Koszalin 1999:

14...b6 (Black can also consider 14...e5!? when 15 f5 b6 16 g4 ♙d7 17 g5 is critical) 15 e5 dxe5 16 fxe5 ♙d7 (16...♙e8!? 17 ♙d4 ♙b7 was a more ambitious try in P.Wells-A.Greenfeld, Isle of Man 2006, when 18 ♙b5 ♞c8 19 ♙c1 ♙xe5! 20 ♙a3 ♙xg2 21 ♞xg2 ♙f6 gave Black good compensation for the exchange in the game, but clearly this was all far from forced) 17 ♙d4 ♙xd4 18 cxd4 ♙b7 19 ♙xb7 ♞xb7 20 0-0 ♞ac8 21 ♞c1 f6! (correctly breaking up White's centre to gain counterplay) 22 exf6 ♙xf6 23 ♙f4 ♞c6, and now 24 ♜f3?! ♙h5! only helped Black in the game, but even after Hansen's 24 ♞fe1, Black shouldn't have too much to fear following 24...♞fe8 when e6 is no weaker than c4 and d4.

14...b6



15 g4

Pressing ahead on the kingside.

Alternatively, 15 e5?! dxe5 16 fxe5 ♙d7 doesn't appear to give White enough play for his sickly c4- and e5-pawns. The game W.Heinig-L.Psakhis, Berlin 1991, for example, continued 17 ♙d4 ♙b7 18 ♙f4 (or 18 ♙b5!? ♞xe5 19

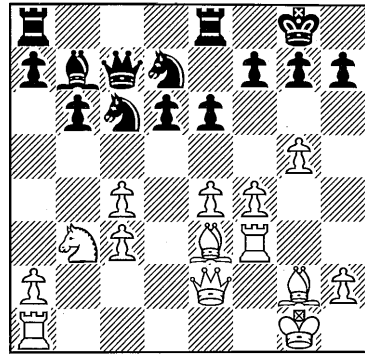
♖ad1 ♜c5 20 ♜d6 ♜a5 21 ♜xb7 ♜axb7 and Black's knights hold everything together) 18...♜a5 19 ♙xb7 ♜xb7 20 ♖ad1 ♜a5 21 ♚g4 ♜h8 22 ♚h5 ♜xc4 and White was just a clear pawn in arrears.

A more important alternative is 15 ♜d4 – Magnus Carlsen's choice when he recently tried to rehabilitate this variation. Unfortunately for him, Black responded rather well in M.Carlsen-A.Volokitin, Biel 2006: 15...♜xd4! (ironing out the white structure, but gaining immediate pressure against c4; this is the simplest approach, but Black can also consider the older 15...♙b7 16 ♜b5 ♚c7) 16 cxd4 (16 ♙xd4?! e5! is even worse for White) 16...♙a6 and now, as explained in Watson's excellent ChessPublishing annotations to the game, the Norwegian should have bailed out with 17 e5! (in the game 17 ♖ac1?! ♖ac8 18 e5 ♜d5 19 ♙xd5! exd5 20 f5 dxc4! 21 f6 g6 didn't give White enough for his pawn) 17...♜d5 18 cxd6 ♚xd6!? 19 ♙f2 ♖ac8 20 ♖fc1 ♚c6 21 ♙f1 ♜f6 when White should be able to hold his hanging pawns, although Black can certainly press, such as by trebling on the c-file and arranging ...b5.

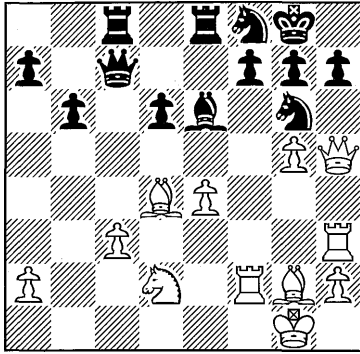
15...♙b7!

Kramnik's idea, later refined by Arnason and Leko. Black places his bishop here, rather than on a6, realizing that the c4-weakness won't run away. In the short term, counterplay against the white centre and the ability to contest the long diagonal are Black's priorities.

16 g5 ♜d7 17 ♖f3 ♚fe8!



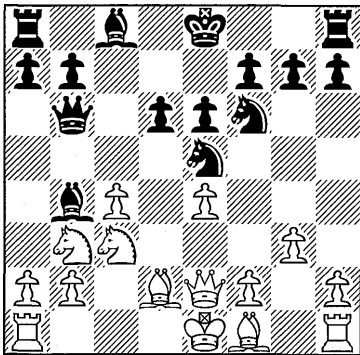
A key rook manoeuvre in this structure. The rook will now be well placed should the e-file open after a pawn exchange on f5, while Black can defend h7 with the key defensive resource ...♜f8. White can still gain some attacking chances, but I feel that objectively Black should be doing well. Practice has seen: 18 ♖h3 ♖ac8 (or 18...♜f8!? 19 ♖f1 ♙a6 20 ♜d2?! ♜a5! 21 ♚h5 ♜xc4 22 ♜xc4 ♙xc4 23 ♖f2 d5 24 f5 exf5! 25 exf5 ♚e5 26 ♙d4 ♚e1+ and Black, having won a pawn and opened the e-file, was considerably better in R.Akesson-L.Schandorff, Reykjavik 1997) 19 ♚h5 ♜f8 20 ♖f1 ♜e7! (strengthening the defence and unveiling an attack on c4) 21 ♜d2 ♙a6 22 f5 (White later failed to really improve with 22 ♙d4, and 22...♙xc4 23 ♖f2 e5! left Black slightly for preference in M.Illescas Cordoba-P.Leko, Leon 1996) 22...♙xc4 23 ♖f2 was J.Hjartarson-J.Arnason, Reykjavik 1995, and now Hjartarson points out that the consistent 23...exf5! would have left Black clearly better after both 24 ♙d4 f4! 25 ♖xf4 ♜eg6 26 ♖f2 ♙e6



and 24 exf5 ♖xf5! 25 ♜xf5 g6 26 ♗h6
gxf5 27 ♕d4 ♜e5.

C2)

1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4
♗b6 5 ♘b3 e6 6 ♘c3 ♘f6 7 g3 ♗e5 8 e4
♕b4 9 ♗e2 d6 10 ♕d2!?

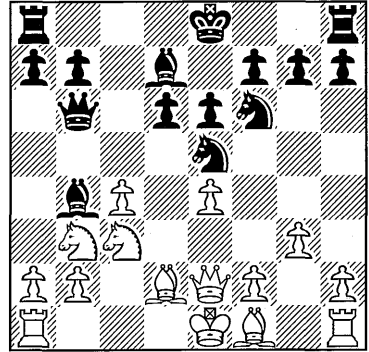


10...a5!?

Commencing immediate counter-
play and dissuading White from cas-
tling long. A more popular choice has
been 10...0-0, when White has several
options, including 11 0-0-0, but that can
lead to a rather theoretical game. Play
can also become quite sharp after
10...a5!?, but there is less established

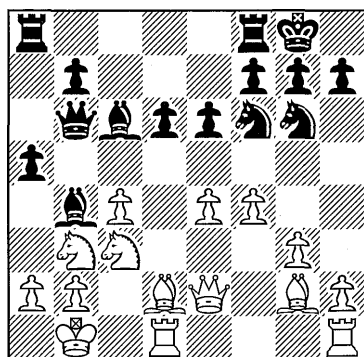
theory after it and Black does appear to
gain a fair share of the chances in a
complex struggle.

Another move which theory has
been a little too quick to pass over is
10...♕d7!?



This may well appeal to those who
like to analyse fairly complex but un-
explored positions. It has been con-
demned on the basis of an old encoun-
ter between Korchnoi and Anand, but
that was not so clear: 11 f4 ♗g6 12 ♕g2
♕c6 (should readers not be fully im-
pressed with Anand's play, they can
also consider 12...0-0 13 0-0-0 ♜fc8!?
this doesn't block the c-file and Black
was already slightly for choice after 14
♗b1 a5 15 ♕e3 ♗a6 16 ♗b5 d5! in
S.Iskusnyh-G.Sargissian, Novgorod
1999) 13 0-0-0 (Tsesarsky has suggested
13 ♜d1!?, but after 13...0-0 White
doesn't appear to have anything better
than 14 ♕e3 when 14...♕xc3+ 15 bxc3
♗c7 begins immediate counterplay
against c4 and e4; 13 ♜c1 has also been
seen, but Black was doing rather well
after 13...0-0 14 a3?! ♕xa3! 15 ♗b5 a6 16
♗xa3?! ♗xb3 17 ♕c3 d5 in H.Elwert-

G.Sanakoev, correspondence 1999) 13...0-0 14 ♖b1 (tucking the king away; White has also tried 14 ♜hf1, but then Black has 14...a5!?, as well as the rather effective 14...♞ac8 15 g4?! d5! of E.Agrest-T.Wedberg, Harplinge 1998) 14...a5! (Black mustn't dally with his counterplay since White can always opt for a swift advance of his h-pawn)



15 ♗e3 (preparing to exploit the downside to Black's last, namely the weakening of the b5-square; 15 ♜c1 a4 16 ♗e3 ♞a6 17 ♘d2 a3 18 b3 ♘d7 19 ♖a1 ♗e7 20 ♜he1 ♞a5 21 ♘db1 ♗c5 was somewhat less impressive from White, and gave Black good pressure in A.Anelli-S.Negri, Buenos Aires 2003) 15...♞c7 16 ♗b5! ♗xb5 17 cxb5 a4 18 ♘d4 and now 18...a3 19 b6! ♞e7 20 ♗c2 was a little awkward for Black in V.Korchnoi-V.Anand, Paris (rapid) 1991, but Black might be able to improve with 18...♗c5!?. The idea is to follow up with ...a3, ...♞b6, ...♞ac8 and a central counter-break. White might well be able to cut across that plan, but 19 f5 doesn't appear to promise him an advantage: Black can respond with either

19...♗xd4!? 20 ♗xd4 ♗e5, retaining good central control, or 19...exf5 20 ♘xf5 ♗xe3 21 ♞xe3 ♞ac8 and if 22 ♞c1, then 22...♞d7 beginning counterplay against b5.

11 f4

Displacing the e5-knight, but White also has:

a) 11 ♗g2!? a4 12 ♗b5 quickly became rather sharp in A.Delchev-K.Hulak, Croatian Team Championship 2001: 12...♗xd2+ 13 ♘xd2 ♗d7 14 f4 ♗eg4! (preparing to meet 15 h3 with 15...♗xb5) 15 e5! dxe5 16 fxe5 ♗xb5 17 exf6 ♗e3! (a key resource) 18 cxb5 ♗c2+ 19 ♗d1 and now Black could have repeated and forced a draw, but Hulak preferred to play on with 19...♗xa1!? 20 fxg7 ♞g8 21 ♞e4! ♞xb5 22 ♞xb7 ♞xb7 23 ♗xb7 ♞b8 24 ♗c4! which was pretty unclear, but probably roughly balanced.

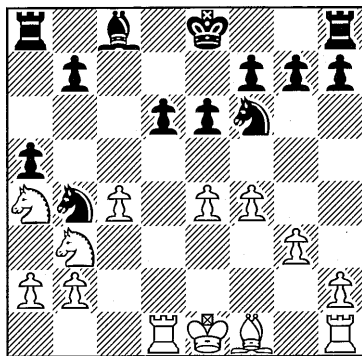
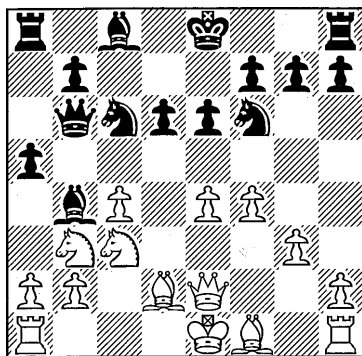
b) 11 ♗b5 0-0 (11...♗xd2+!? 12 ♘xd2 0-0 is also possible, intending to meet 13 f4 with 13...♗eg4) 12 ♗g2?! (12 ♗xb4!? is probably a better try, although Black gains counterplay after 12...axb4 13 f4 ♗ed7 with ...e5 and ...♗c5) 12...♗xd2+ 13 ♘xd2 d5! saw Black already taking over the central initiative in R.Bonnmann-D.Hilge, German League 2000.

11...♗c6

Retreating as Black does in Line C1, but 11...♗g6!? may also be possible and has been used by Topalov's second. After 12 ♗g2 a4 13 ♗e3 ♞c7 14 ♘d4 ♗xc3+ 15 bxc3 ♗d7 16 0-0 0-0, the black knight would probably have preferred to have been on c6, rather than g6, in J.Ivanov-I.Cheparinov, Zaragoza 2004,

but Black still had some counterplay against c4.

12...♙xd2+ 13 ♖xd2 ♜b4!? 14 ♜xb4
♘xb4 15 ♖d1!



12 ♖a4!

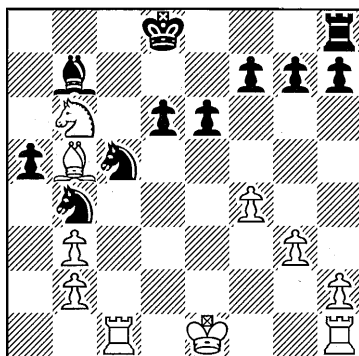
Preventing Black's a-pawn from further destabilizing the white queenside. White might also consider:

a) 12 ♙e3 ♜c7 13 ♙g2 was seen in A.Fuhrmann-S.Berkley, correspondence 2001, when Black should have flicked in 13...a4 before exchanging on c3, thereby regaining use of the a5-square.

b) 12 0-0-0?! is rather risky since Black hasn't castled himself and doesn't need to hurry to do so. Tsesarsky has analysed this position in some detail and it's notable that no White players have as yet been keen to challenge his analysis: 12...a4 13 ♙e3 ♜d8 14 ♖d2 (or 14 ♖d4 a3! 15 ♖db5 axb2+ 16 ♜xb2 and now, rather than the Israeli analyst's 16...♜a5, when White might be able to bale with 17 a3!?, simply 16...0-0 17 a3 ♙xc3 18 ♖xc3 ♜e7, transposing to 14 ♖d2, is rather promising) 14...a3 15 ♖db1 axb2+ 16 ♜xb2 ♜e7!? 17 a3 ♙xc3 18 ♖xc3 0-0 19 ♙e2 ♙d7 and White will come under strong pressure on the queenside.

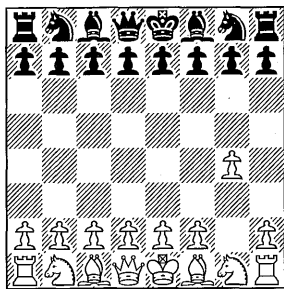
This position was reached in A.Huzman-I.Tsesarsky, Ramat Aviv 1999, and at first sight looks a little ropery for Black due to his queenside weaknesses. Nevertheless, both black knights supply some counterplay and here the radical 15...b5! (Tsesarsky's 15...♜e7!? might also be possible; he then gives 16 a3 ♖c6 17 ♖b6 ♜a7 18 ♙g2 a4! 19 ♖d4 ♖xd4 20 ♖xd4 e5 which is clearly fine for Black, but Cummings's 17 ♙d3 is more critical) 16 ♖b6 (16 cxb5 ♙b7 illustrates Black's main idea, namely counterplay against e4, although the unusual queenside arrangement means that the position is still quite unclear after 17 ♙g2 ♙xe4 18 ♙xe4 ♖xe4: for example, 19 ♜e2 ♖xa2 20 ♜a1 ♖b4 21 ♖c3 ♖c5 22 ♖xc5 dxc5 23 ♖e4 ♜e7 when White's b-pawns remain doubled, but his pressure against a5 continues to maintain a rough balance) 16...bxc4 appears fully playable. White can win an exchange, but 17 ♖xa8 (alternatively, 17 e5?! cxb3! leaves Black a little better after 18 exf6

♖b8 19 ♗xc8 ♜xc8 20 fxg7 ♜g8 21 axb3
♕e7 22 ♙d3 ♜xg7, but 17 ♙xc4 ♜b8 18
♗xc8 ♜xc8 19 ♗xa5 ♗xe4 is far from
clear; Black's active knights and central
pawns being pitted against White's
queenside passers) 17...cxb3 18 axb3
♙b7 19 ♜c1 ♗xe4 20 ♙b5+ (and not 20
♗b6? ♗c5!, regaining the exchange)
20...♙d8 21 ♗b6 ♗c5 offers Black good
compensation with his three well-
placed minor pieces and useful central
majority.



Chapter Five

Two Advances of the g-pawn



White's Alternatives to 1 c4 and 1 ♘f3

We now turn our attention to a number of unorthodox systems which are quite rare but have their adherents. One will probably only face a first move other than 1 e4, 1 d4, 1 c4 and 1 ♘f3 in no more than 5% of one's games, but that is no reason not to have some idea how to meet them. The following chapters (devoted to 1 f4, 1 b3, 1 ♘c3 and 1 b4) are arranged in descending order of their popularity on ChessBase's *Big Database 2006*. One shouldn't read too much into that order, however, as in the correspondence world, both 1 ♘c3 and 1 b4 are much more popular, while in my own games 1 ♘c3 has been the most common of these unorthodox first moves I've faced.

Most readers will probably know of a local club or tournament player who employs one of these systems, and just because they are rare does not mean that we should think of them as being inaccurate. That is a big psychological

trap which Black must avoid falling into. As we will see, all these systems fully deserve to exist in their own right and can lead to quite complex play. The secret for Black is to choose in response either a solid line which doesn't require too much knowledge, or a tricky variation, aiming to surprise the White player and to take him a little out of his shell.

The main unorthodox system not listed above is 1 g4, the Grob. We will shortly explore that in this chapter, but first there are a few other tricky pawn moves to consider. Note, however, that the like of 1 a4, 1 ♘a3, 1 h3 and 1 f3 will not be considered here. Black should meet them by simply developing his pieces, possibly in relation to any reversed opening which might occur (i.e. 1 a3 e5 is suitable for 1 e4 players; while 1 d4 exponents should prefer 1 a3 d5). These are not first moves which one should lose any sleep over; anyone who does should really be reading a

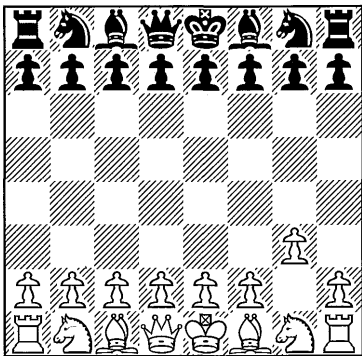
more basic book on opening play like Emms's *Discovering Chess Openings!*

Back to those three more respectable and slightly tricky (on transpositional grounds) pawn moves:

a) 1 e3 can be met by 1...e5 when 2 c4 is an unusual form of the English, and 2 d4 exd4 3 exd4 d5 an Exchange French. Black might prefer the flexible 1...d6 or even 1...c5, when 2 c4 was discussed briefly at the beginning of Chapter Three. White can also meet 1 c3 c5 with 2 d4, but then both 2...d6 and 2...d5 lead to quite comfortable forms of the Colle for Black.

b) 1 d3 will often transpose after 1...d5 (1...c5 is also possible, hoping for a Symmetrical English or a Sicilian, although White might prefer 2 f4 and a Bird's) 2 g3 d6 3 g2 to variation 'c'.

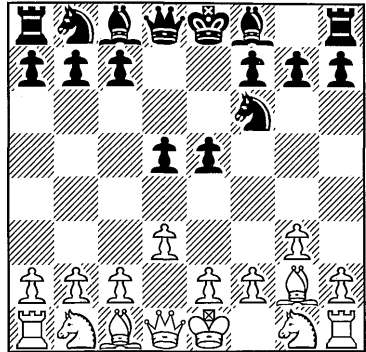
c) 1 g3



is by far the most important option for Black to have decided on a response to. Indeed, 1 g3 occurs more often at GM level than any of the lines we will consider in the next four chapters. Fortunately for our purposes, it is usually used as a transpositional device. After

1...d5 2 g2 (or 2 f4, transposing to a Bird's and Chapter Six) 2...d6, play will often transpose to Chapter 11: 3 c4 d4 usually leads after 4 d3 c6 5 0-0 e5 to Line C3 of that chapter, while 3 d3 is a King's Indian Attack and Line B. Tricky White players can also keep Black guessing a bit longer with 3 d3:

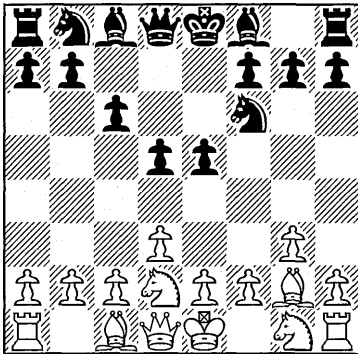
c1) 3...e5 is one good reply.



After 4 d3 c6 5 0-0 e7 a reversed Classical Pirc is reached and White doesn't have a good way to use his extra tempo. As well as 6 d2, 6 c4 is often seen, when 6...d4 takes us into Line C3 of Chapter Eleven, while 6 g5!? e6 7 d3 is well met by Keilhack's 7...g8!, preventing White from beginning a kingside attack.

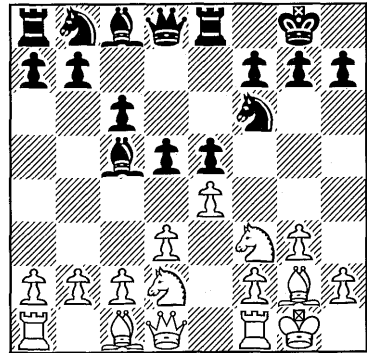
c2) 3...c6 is also well worth considering, especially if one knows that the opponent is trying to delay d3. Unfortunately 4 d3 takes us into a KIA in which Black can't employ exactly our preferred system (Line B of Chapter Eleven), although he can play in a very similar, if slightly more solid fashion to it with 4...e5. One main point behind 3...c6 becomes clear after 4 d2 (4 f4 is

White's last chance for a Bird's and transposes to note 'd' to White's 2nd move in Line A of Chapter Six) 4...e5! (4...♙f5 is also possible, but Dunnington's 5 e4 ♗g6 6 f4!? is a little awkward) and then:



c21) 5 ♗g3?! is just the sort of move an unsuspecting opponent might play. Black should strike with 5...e4! and then 6 dxe4 dxe4 7 ♗g5 e3! 8 fxe3 ♗g4 9 ♗de4 ♖xd1+ 10 ♔xd1 h6! 11 h3 hxg5 12 hxg4 ♜xh1+ 13 ♙xh1 ♙e7 (Azmaiparashvili) leaves White with a horrible structure, while 6 ♗d4 ♖b6 7 c3 c5! 8 ♗c2 exd3 9 exd3 ♖e6+ 10 ♖e2 ♗c6 11 ♖xe6+ ♙xe6 was extremely comfortable for Black in M.Klauser-E.Shvidler, Zürich 1989.

c22) 5 e4 ♙c5! (not mentioned in *Winning Unorthodox Openings*, but this is much better than the exchange on e4) 6 ♗g3 (and not 6 ♗e2? ♙xf2+! 7 ♔xf2 ♗g4+ 8 ♔g1 ♗e3 9 ♖e1 ♗xc2 10 ♖d1 ♗xa1 with some advantage) 6...0-0! 7 0-0 (7 ♗xe5 ♜e8 regains the pawn with a good game after 8 ♗ef3 dxe4 9 dxe4 ♗xe4 10 0-0 ♙f5) 7...♜e8 gives Black a pretty reasonable reversed Pirc.



L.Stein-E.Jimenez, Havana 1968, for example, continued 8 c3 (or 8 h3 ♗bd7 9 ♔h2?! a5 10 exd5 cxd5 11 d4 exd4 12 ♗b3 ♙b6 13 ♗bxd4 ♗e4! 14 c3 ♗df6 and Black enjoyed an active IQP position in I.Bilek-E.Geller, Havana 1971) 8...♗bd7?! (the more recent 8...♙b6 9 ♖c2 ♗bd7 10 ♜e1 ♗c5 11 exd5?! ♙f5! 12 ♜xe5 ♙xd3 also turned out well for Black in A.Timofeev-D.Jakovenko, Russia 2000) 9 b4 ♙f8 10 ♙b2 ♖c7 11 a3 a5! 12 exd5?! cxd5 13 ♜c1 e4! and Black had seized the initiative.

The Grob: 1 g4

Objectively this favourite of Basman's probably deserves to be labelled as dubious, but we should not become overconfident on the rare occasions that we get to face the Grob, especially as those who employ it normally revel in extremely obscure positions. Black is thus advised to develop as quickly as possible against it and, in general, we will refrain from an early advance of the h-pawn. That is positionally desirable and has tempted a great many players, but it is also the move that White often

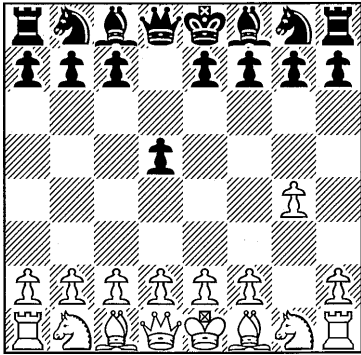
wants to see and Black can find that his rook becomes a little misplaced on h5. We will concentrate on:

A: 1...d5

B: 1...c5

A)

1 g4 d5

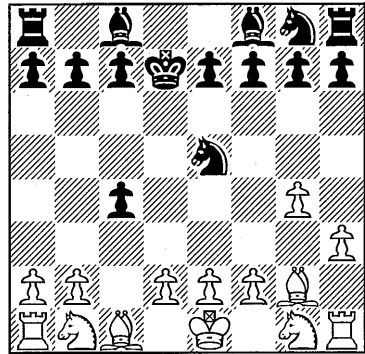


2 h3

Basman's choice, but plenty of other Grob exponents prefer the move order 2 ♖g2, hoping for 2...♙xg4 3 c4 c6 4 ♗b3 with queenside pressure and especially for the trap 4...♖c7 5 cxd5 cxd5 6 ♘c3 e6?? 7 ♗a4+ when the g4-bishop drops. After 2 ♖g2 Black should prefer:

a) 2...♘c6!? is a rare, but also quite effective move order. The idea is simply to transpose to our main line after 3 h3 e5. White might also try 3 c4 (opening up the g2-bishop's range is a common Grob strategy; alternatively, 3 e3 c5 4 d3 ♙e6 5 ♘c3 ♗d7 6 h3 0-0-0! 7 ♘ge2 h5 8 g5 f6 9 f4?! ♘ge7 10 a3 d4! 11 ♘e4 ♘d5 saw Black's aggressive, but straightforward play leave him clearly better in M.Gantner-F.Ott, Zürich 2005)

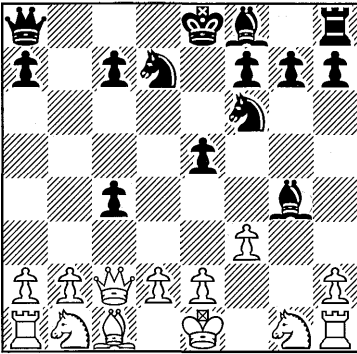
3...dxc4 4 ♗a4 (not forced, but both 4 h3 ♙e6 5 ♘a3 ♗d7 6 ♗a4 a6! 7 ♙xc6 ♗xc6 8 ♗xc6+ bxc6 9 ♘f3 ♙d5!, as in P.Slesinski-R.Jedynak, Lublin 1999, and 4 ♙xc6+ bxc6 5 ♗a4 ♗d5!? 6 ♘f3 ♗b5 7 ♘c3 ♗xa4 8 ♘xa4 ♙xg4 9 ♘e5 ♙e6 10 ♘c5, which occurred in M.Neskovic-T.Butschek, Ruhrgebiet 2005, and then 10...♙d5! 11 e4 e6 12 exd5 ♙xc5 13 dxe6 fxe6 14 ♘xc4 ♘e7 15 d3 ♗d8 16 ♙e2 ♘f5 leave White with insufficient compensation) 4...♗d7 (Black can also consider 4...♙xg4!? since 5 ♙xc6+ bxc6 6 ♗xc6+ ♙d7 7 ♗xc4 ♘f6 already leaves him slightly for choice due to his bishop pair) 5 h3 ♘c5!? 6 ♗xd7+ ♙xd7!



and Black's king might have been in the centre, but he was very comfortable with the queens off and White unable to easily regain his pawn in E.Roberts-M.Cehajic, correspondence 2003.

b) 2...♙xg4 3 c4 dxc4!? 4 ♙xb7 ♘d7 is quite a promising exchange sacrifice. Should White accept, Black gains excellent play on the light squares and it is clear that he has stolen most of White's fun. Play might continue 5 ♙xa8 (White can decline, but after 5 ♗a4 e5 6 ♘f3

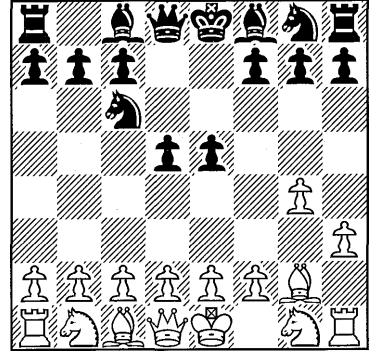
♙d6 7 ♘c3 ♗gf6 8 h3 ♙h5 9 ♗g5 ♖b8
 10 ♖xa7 in P.Broli-D.Fourrage, corres-
 pondence 1998, Black enjoyed the supe-
 rior development and 10...0-0 11 ♗ge4
 ♙g6 would have left White with a
 rather unconvincing position; I suppose
 White might also try 5 h3!? ♙f5 6 ♙xa8
 ♖xa8 7 ♖h2, but this appears rather
 artificial and Black can begin to target
 the unhappy rook with 7...e6! 8 ♗f3
 ♙d6 9 ♗g2 ♗e5) 5...♖xa8 6 f3 (grim, but
 forced since 6 ♗f3? ♗e5 7 ♖a4+ ♙d7 8
 ♖a3 ♗d3+ 9 exd3 e6! 10 ♖a5 ♖xf3 11
 ♗g1 cxd3 12 ♗c3 ♙d6 leaves the white
 king in grave danger) 6...c5 7 ♖c2 (or 7
 ♗c3 ♙e7 8 ♖a4 ♙h4+ 9 ♗d1 ♙e6 10 b3?!
 ♗e7! 11 e4?! 0-0 12 ♙a3 ♗b6 13 ♖b5
 ♗d8 and Black was doing well, with
 both White's king and queen far from
 ideally placed in B.Landin-R.Holving,
 Norrköping 1998) 7...♗gf6



8 ♗c3 (8 ♖xc4!? must be more critical,
 but 8...♙c5 9 d3 ♙e6 10 ♖a4 0-0 still
 leaves Black with good compensation:
 he will target b2, while White struggles
 to develop his king's knight) 8...♙e7 9
 h4?! 0-0 10 ♗e4 (slightly too late, White
 realizes that 10 ♗h3? is rebuffed by

10...♙xf3!) 10...♗xe4 11 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 12
 fxe4 ♗c5 13 b3 cxb3 14 d3 a5 and, de-
 spite the exchange of queens, Black had
 more than enough for the exchange in
 I.Horvath-R.Messa, Caorle 1981.

2...e5 3 ♙g2 ♗c6!?



Developing swiftly and provoking
 White into a double-edged advance of
 his c-pawn. Far more often Black pre-
 fers 3...c6 which blunts the long diago-
 nal and is also a good move, but White
 probably has some experience of the
 resulting 4 d4 e4 5 c4. Indeed, it makes
 sense to steer clear of the arising re-
 versed French-type positions which
 White has probably undertaken some
 analysis of.

4 c4

Consistent, but the fact that White
 has tried a number of different strate-
 gies here suggests that it is not so easy
 for him to respond to Black's classical
 set-up. Practice has also seen:

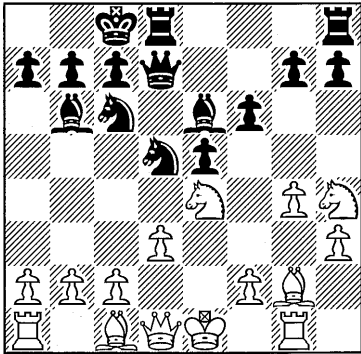
a) 4 ♗c3 can be met by either
 4...♙e6, or 4...d4!? when 5 ♙xc6+ bxc6 6
 ♗e4 ♗f6 7 ♗xf6+ ♖xf6 8 d3 ♙b4+ 9
 ♙d2 ♙xd2+ 10 ♖xd2 c5! left White
 struggling due to his light square

weaknesses and lack of a safe home for his king in L.Cherner-A.Pfeiffer Ferreira, correspondence 1996.

b) 4 c3 prepares d4 and was once used by Basman, but 4...♙c5! prevents that aim and Black intends to swiftly complete his kingside development with ...♘e7 and ...0-0. In T.Day-B.Martinec, correspondence 1997, White still tried to force through d4 with 5 ♘f3?! e4! 6 ♘d4, but 6...♗f6! would have rather ruined his plan.

c) 4 d3 is White's main alternative and after 4...♙e6, preventing 5 c4, White again faces a dilemma over how best to develop:

c1) 5 ♘d2 ♙c5! 6 ♘gf3 f6 7 e4 ♘ge7 8 ♘h4 ♗d7?! 9 exd5 ♘xd5 10 ♘e4 ♙b6 11 ♚g1 0-0-0



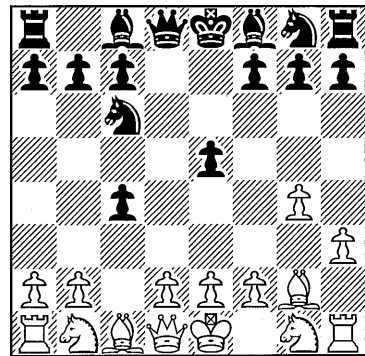
left Black set to strike back with some effect on the kingside in A.Benend-S.Panzalovic, Lampertheim 2000.

c2) 5 ♘f3 ♙c5 6 ♙g5?! f6 7 ♙h4 ♘ge7 8 0-0? h5! 9 g5 ♘f5 10 gxf6 ♘hx4 11 ♘hx4 ♗xf6 12 ♘f3 e4 (M.McCarthy-T.Lundqvist, correspondence 2003) highlights why White can rarely castle short in the Grob.

c3) 5 c3 ♘ge7 6 ♘f3 f6 7 ♗a4 ♗d7 8 c4 dxc4 9 dxc4 ♘c8! 10 ♙e3 ♙b4+ 11 ♘fd2 0-0 12 0-0 ♘b6 13 ♗c2 f5! was a model performance (sensible development, followed by taking over the initiative) from Black in M.Basman-V.Ravikumar, British Championship, Torquay 1982.

4...dxc4!

Once again we see Black happy to take up the challenge by pocketing a pawn in return for opening up the long diagonal. Should such an approach not appeal, Black has two pretty reasonable alternatives in 4...d4 (reaching a reversed Schmid Benoni in which White has weakened his kingside; then 5 d3 ♙d6 6 a3 a5 7 b3 ♘ge7 8 ♘d2 ♘g6 was already pretty comfortable for Black in G.Kadas-L.Sapi, Agard 1976) and Miles's 4...♘ge7!? 5 ♗a4 dxc4, when White can regain his pawn, but at the cost of allowing Black free and easy development.



5 ♙xc6+

In *The Killer Grob*, Basman suggests 5 ♗a4!? ♙d7 6 ♗xc4 ♘d4 7 b3 (and not 7 e3?? ♙b5 8 ♗c3 ♙b4! when White

loses his queen), but this remains untried, quite possibly because 7...♙e6 followed by 8...♙d5 leaves Black at least equal.

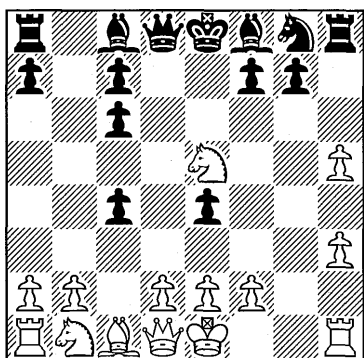
5...bxc6 6 ♖f3

White has also tried the more obvious 6 ♖a4, when I quite like 6...♙d6!? 7 ♖xc6+ ♙d7 8 ♖xc4 ♗e7, gambiting a pawn for a healthy lead in development. Black doesn't have to play so adventurously, though, and instead 6...♗d5 7 ♗f3 ♖b5 8 ♖c2 ♙d6 (S.Sullivan-B.Keagle, Concord 1994) is a reasonable way of hanging on to the extra pawn.

6...h5!

Only now that White has traded his light-squared bishop does Black strike on the kingside. This undermining advance is rather powerful and is definitely preferable to the immediate 6...e4 7 ♗e5 ♗d5 8 ♖a4.

7 gxf5 e4 8 ♗e5



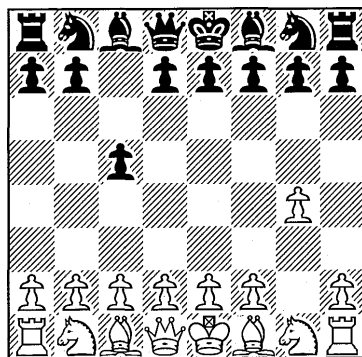
This fragmented position was reached in M.Basman-A.Summerscale, London 1990. In the game things were not so clear after 8...♗d5 9 ♖a4 e3 10 f3!, but Black can retain the advantage

with Dunnington's suggestion of 8...♗xh5, and 8...♖g5!? 9 ♖a4 ♗e7 might well be even stronger.

B)

1 g4 c5

A rare choice as Black usually prefers to move one of his centre pawns. Nevertheless, employing the same setup as we did against the English makes a lot of sense. Not only is Black familiar with it, but he also avoids giving White an immediate central target to undermine.



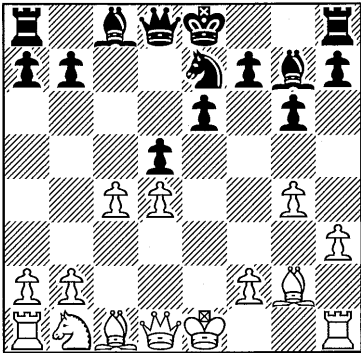
2 ♙g2 ♗c6 3 c4

White usually opts for a type of English like this, but he can also take play into an extremely rare line of the Sicilian, namely the Vinohrady variation, with 3 e4, followed by 4 ♗c3. Black has a number of reasonable responses, including 3...g6 4 ♗c3 ♙g7 5 d3 e6 (or 5...e5) followed by ...♗ge7, and 3...d6 4 ♗c3 e5!? 5 d3 ♙e6 6 h3 ♗ge7 7 ♗ge2 ♗g6 8 ♗d5 ♗h4 when he wasn't any worse in this obscure position in N.Vlassov-H.Nakamura, online blitz 2004.

3...g6 4 ♖c3

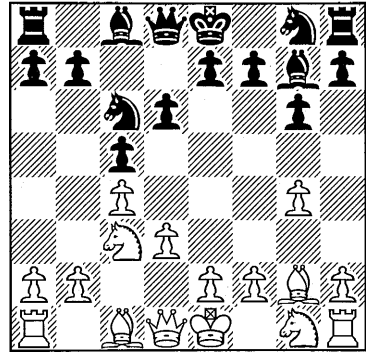
Alternatively, 4 g5 clamps down on Black's kingside and provokes ...h6. Playing that is not especially bad, but Black should prefer to counter in the centre: 4...♙g7 5 ♗f3 d6 6 ♖c3 e6 7 h4 ♗ge7 8 d3 d5! 9 cxd5 exd5 10 ♙f4 a6 and Black's central control left him with a pretty reasonable position in D.Wedding-Wop, correspondence 1994.

White might also play for d4, but 4 e3 ♙g7 5 h3 e6 6 ♗e2 ♗ge7 (6...d5!? 7 cxd5 exd5 8 d4 cxd4 9 exd4 ♗ge7 10 ♗bc3 h5 is also possible, as in O.Vovk-V.Berezin, Kiev 2002) 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 9 exd4 d5



is fine for Black; once again White's advanced kingside will probably be more of a hindrance than a help to him.

After 4 ♖c3 Black continues to develop simply and sensibly.

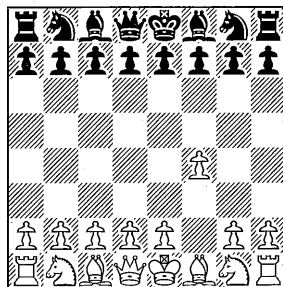
4...♙g7 5 d3 d6

Now all of 6 e4, 6 e3 and 6 h3 (followed by 7 ♗f3) can be met with our favourite anti-English set-up, namely 6...e5, followed by 7...♗ge7 and 8...0-0.

The only difference between this position and those considered in Chapters One and Two is White's extended kingside. That ought to help Black since he will be able to consider playing aggressively with ...f5, aiming to further weaken the white king position. Perhaps that explains why, when a Ukrainian IM reached the position as White after 5...d6, he tried the creative 6 h3 e5 (6...e6 7 ♗f3 ♗ge7 is a good alternative) 7 ♙d5!? ♗ge7 8 ♗f3. However, even this wasn't enough to bring White close to any advantage, and 8...♗b4 9 ♙g5 f6 10 ♙d2 ♗bxd5 11 cxd5 a6 12 a4 b6 13 e4 ♙d7 14 ♙e3 h5! 15 g5 f5 saw Black taking over the initiative in S.Belezky-A.Vaya Gomez, La Roda 2005.

Chapter Six

Bird's Opening



1 f4

The Bird's can be a tricky opening to face, especially should a 1 e4 player find themselves a tempo down in a reversed Dutch position. Opinions vary, though, as to whether the extra tempo over a Dutch really helps White: Malaniuk has even stated that it might be quite harmful, but in his enterprising recent work on 1 f4, Tim Taylor extols the virtues of the reversed Dutch. I believe that the reversed Dutch positions are quite playable for Black, and should suit many 1 d4 players, but we will focus on two less theoretical options:

A: 1...d5

B: 1...d6!?

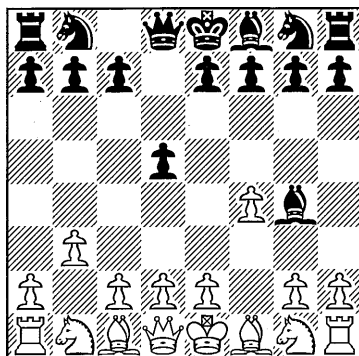
A)

1 f4 d5 2 ♖f3

White's main move, but depending on what type of set-up he is after, this can be delayed:

a) 2 b3 appears quite natural, but is

actually a little risky due to 2...♗g4!, disrupting White's development in a manner which we will also see in Line A of Chapter Eleven.

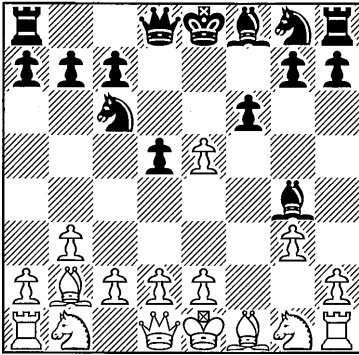


Just as there 3 ♘f3 ♗xf3 4 exf3 c6 5 ♗b2 ♘f6, followed by ...g6, leaves White without a central pawn break and Black has quite a solid and comfortable position. White might thus prefer to delay ♘f3, but doing so also doesn't especially help him:

a1) 3 h3?! ♗h5 4 g4 is a reversed 2 ♗g5 Dutch in which the additional b3

is something of a hindrance for White: 4...e5! 5 ♖g2 ♗g6 6 f5 ♗xf5 7 gxf5 ♜h4+ 8 ♘f1 ♜f4+ 9 ♖e1 ♜g3+ 10 ♘f1 ♜f4+ 11 ♖e1 ♗e7! favoured Black in S.Christensen-C.Ward, Copenhagen 2001, and 5 ♗f3!? c4 6 e3 ♗g6 7 ♗e5 is at best unclear for White; Black can even consider the check as well as the 7...♗d6!? 8 ♗xg6 hxg6 9 ♜e2 g5! of S.Bücker-A.Yusupov, German League 1993.

a2) 3 ♗b2 ♗c6 4 g3 (4 h3 ♗h5 5 g4 e5! is once again an active and fairly promising counter-thrust) 4...e5!? (Black doesn't have to gambit; Kotronias's 4...h5 5 ♗g2 ♜d7 is also quite viable) 5 fxe5 f6

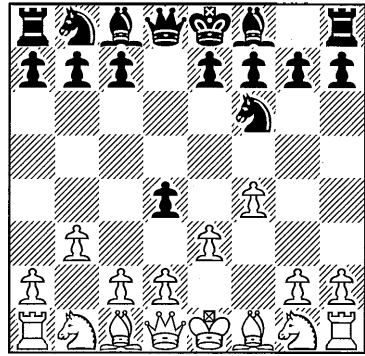


6 ♗h3!? (after 6 exf6 ♗xf6 7 ♗g2, Black intended 7...♗c5 with plenty of play for the pawn) 6...♗xh3 7 exf6 ♗xf6 8 ♗xh3 ♗c5 9 e3?! d4! 10 e4?! 0-0 11 d3 ♗b4+ 12 ♗d2 ♗d5! left White in huge trouble against Black's active approach in V.Kupreichik-A.Yusupov, Yerevan 1982.

b) 2 e3 ♗f6 (an immediate 2...d4!? is rare but also quite playable; White should probably then keep the centre closed with 3 c4) 3 ♗f3 ♗g4 is very similar to the main line. Indeed after 4

♗e2 ♗d7 we transpose to the note to White's 4th move in it, but 4 h3 ♗xf3 5 ♜xf3 is a little more problematic since the e-pawn can no longer be gambited. Instead Black should probably prefer the solid 5...e6 to 5...♗bd7.

Note that after 2 e3 ♗f6, White is once again best advised not to fianchetto: 3 b3?! d4!



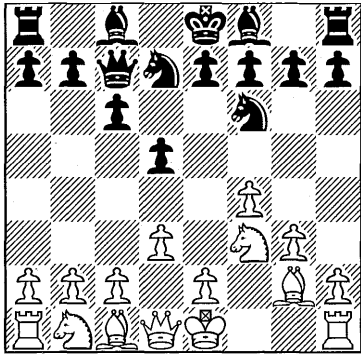
4 ♗d3 (relatively best since 4 ♗f3 dxe3 5 ♗c4 exd2+ 6 ♗bx d2 e6 is not an especially convincing gambit and 4 ♗b2 dxe3 5 dxe3 ♜xd1 ♗c6 already leaves Black slightly for choice) 4...dxe3 5 dxe3 e5! (once again this active approach nets Black a strong initiative) 6 fxe5 ♗g4 7 ♗b5+ c6 8 ♜xd8+ ♘xd8 9 ♗e2 ♗xe5 gave Black the edge due to the isolani on e3 in A.Nimzowitsch-L.Steiner, Kecskemet 1927.

c) 2 d3 ♗f6 3 g3 c6 4 ♗g2 transposes to variation 'd'.

d) 2 g3 ♗f6 (Black also has a tempting option available in 2...h5!? which is positionally quite justified here; M.Kaloskambis-V.Kotronias, Athens 1988, for example, continued 3 ♗f3 h4! 4 ♗xh4 e5 5 ♗g2 ♗h6 6 d4? ♗f5 7 ♜d3

e4 8 ♖b3 ♘c6 9 ♙e3 ♗xg3 10 ♚g1 ♜xh2 after which Black won a miniature, and he can also consider 4...♜xh4!? as played by Sveshnikov) 3 ♙g2 c6 is a reversed Leningrad, but with Black not committed to a kingside fianchetto, and leads to a further divide:

d1) 4 d3!? attempts to prevent Black from developing with 4...♙g4 since the bishop can be hassled by White's kingside pawns. However, White has delayed ♘f3 and is committed to d3 – factors which Black might exploit to play for ...e5 with 4...♗bd7 (4...♖b6 is another option and, with White committed to a reversed Leningrad, some players will also be happy with 4...g6) 5 ♗f3 ♖c7 and then:

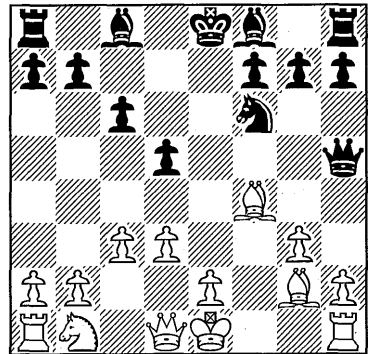


d11) 6 0-0 e5 7 c3!? (or 7 ♗c3 ♙d6 8 fxe5 ♗xe5 9 ♗xe5 ♙xe5 10 e4 dxe4 11 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 12 ♙xe4 and then 12...♙e6 was fine for Black in A.Bochkarev-S.Solcanean, Bucharest 2001, but he could have preferred 12...♙h3!?, followed by going long) 7...exf4 8 gxf4 ♙c5+ 9 ♖h1 was seen in D.Suttles-A.Bachtiar, Skopje Olympiad 1972, when 9...♗g4?! 10 ♗d4! turned out well

for White, and so Black should prefer the simpler 9...0-0, followed by 10...♙e8.

d12) 6 ♗c3 e5 7 e4!? is an aggressive central response from White, but Black gained good counterplay with 7...dxe4! 8 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 9 dxe4 ♙c5 10 ♖e2 0-0 11 f5 a5 12 g4 b6 in D.Hahn-B.Finegold, Flint 1993.

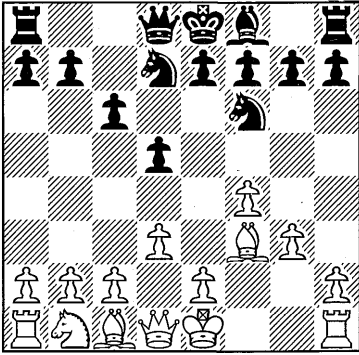
d13) 6 c3 e5 7 fxe5 ♗xe5 8 ♗xe5 ♖xe5 9 ♙f4 ♖h5 also fails to trouble Black since his queen is quite well placed on h5, supporting ...♙h3.



White shouldn't, however, prevent that with 10 h3?! since 10...♖g6! 11 g4 h5 12 g5 h4! left him in some trouble in M.Ardaman-G.Kaidanov, Dallas 1996.

d2) 4 ♗f3 ♙g4 (4...♖c7!? is rather rare here, but still seems quite viable: 5 0-0 ♗bd7 6 d3 e5 transposes to variation 'd11' and 5 b3 ♙g4 6 ♙b2 ♗bd7 7 ♗e5 ♙f5 8.0-0 e6 should also be fine for Black) 5 d3 (White has tried a number of alternatives without proving any advantage: for example, 5 0-0 ♗bd7 6 d4 ♙xf3 7 ♙xf3 e6 is a comfortable Stonewall for Black, and 5 ♗e5!? ♙f5 6 d3 ♗bd7 7 0-0 e6 8 ♗xd7 ♖xd7 9 ♖e1 0-0!

10 ♖d2 h5 led to a complex struggle in A.Rodriguez-D.Lemos, Buenos Aires 2006) 5...♙xf3!? 6 ♙xf3 ♖bd7 has certain similarities with line 'd1'.

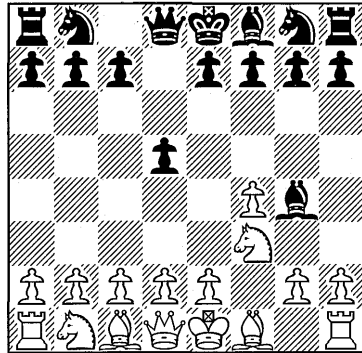


Play might continue 7 0-0 (or 7 e4 dxe4 8 dxe4 e5 9 ♖e2 ♙b4+ 10 ♙d2 ♙xd2+ 11 ♖xd2 and a draw was agreed in this balanced position in J.Vigus-R.Skytte, Witley 2001) 7...e5 8 e4 (once again White usually feels the need to counter in the centre) 8...dxe4 9 dxe4 ♙c5+ 10 ♖h1 0-0 (the solid choice; Black might prefer 10...♖e7 11 ♖c3 0-0-0!? and after the 12 ♖e2 of J.Van Mil-A.Van de Oudeweetering, Enschede 1995, one idea was the double-edged 12...h5!? 13 ♖a4 ♙d6 14 ♙e3 ♙b8) 11 ♖e1 ♖e8 12 f5!? ♖c7 13 ♖c3 ♖ad8 when Black was quite solid and well co-ordinated in C.Bauer-T.Luther, Bissen 1995. In the long run, White might be left with a bad light-squared bishop, but Black should not underestimate White's attacking chances. Luther defended neatly with 14 g4 ♖f8 15 ♙g5 ♖e7 16 ♙h4 h6! 17 ♖e2 ♙d4 18 ♖d1 ♖8h7 19 c3 ♙b6 20 ♙g3 ♖g5 and shortly invaded down the d-file.

After examining those important move orders, we return to 2 ♖f3:

2...♙g4

Taking play into a reversed 2 ♙g5 Dutch, but those familiar with the main lines of that opening may well prefer 2...g6. After 2...♙g4, Black threatens to exchange on f3 and indeed White must play quite creatively to prevent Black from enjoying a fairly comfortable position.



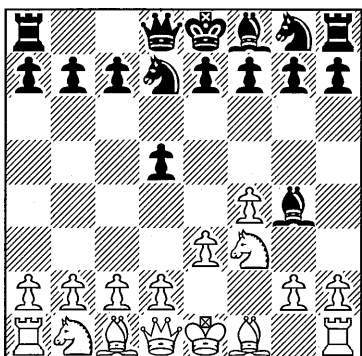
3 e3

White's main move, preventing the doubling of his pawns. Instead, both fianchettoes are met by the exchange on f3, and 3 d4 can be too, although there Black might also consider 3...♖d7 4 ♖bd2 e6 5 e3 ♖h6! 6 ♙d3 ♖f5 7 ♖e2 c6 8 0-0 ♖f6 which effectively neutralized White's Stonewall set-up in V.Pirc-G.Barcza, Belgrade 1954.

A more enterprising White alternative is 3 ♖e5!?, reaching an unusual type of reversed Trompowsky: 3...♙h5 (probably best; Black prepares to counter g4-ideas with ...f6 and should also meet 4 c4 with that nudge) 4 d4 (or 4 g3, when Black can develop solidly

with 4...♖d7 5 ♖g2 e6 as Pavlovic has done, or prefer 4...f6!?, after which 5 ♖f3 ♖xf3 6 exf3 ♗d7 7 d4 ♖h6 8 ♖d3 ♖c6 9 c3 e5! 10 fxe5 fxe5 11 ♖xh6 gxh6 12 0-0 0-0-0 gave Black plenty of attacking options on the kingside in J.Petro-R.Nagy, Hungarian League 1994) 4...e6 (the active 4...f6 5 ♖d3 ♖c6 6 c3 e5!? also deserves consideration) 5 ♗d3! ♖d7 6 ♗h3 ♖xe5! 7 ♗xh5 ♖c4 8 e3 ♖f6 9 ♗f3 ♖d6 10 ♖d2 ♖fe4 11 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 12 ♖d3 f5 was solid for Black and roughly even in R.Gabdrakhmanov-K.Sakaev, Podolsk 1992.

3...♖d7

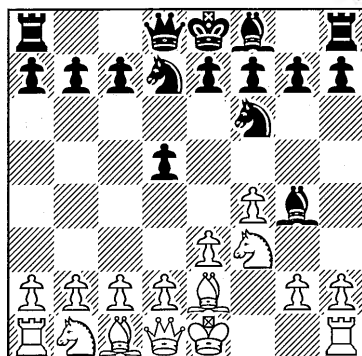


The most flexible follow-up and Black can be happy with his score of 66% from 94 games with this move on ChessBase's *Big Database 2006*. However, he should by no means relax here. Taylor's recent work on the Bird's dealt with this line in some detail and proposed a couple of enterprising ways for White to avoid drifting into a passive position.

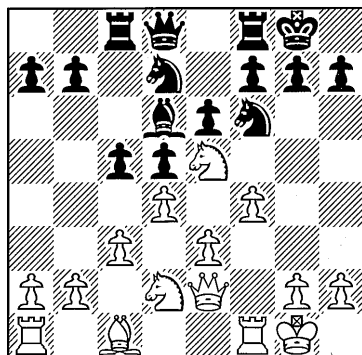
4 h3!?

Probably best, but 4 ♖e2 has been more popular and after 4...♖gf6

(4...♖xf3!? 5 ♖xf3 c6 is less common, but also deserves attention), White has tried a number of approaches:



a) 5 ♖e5 ♖xe2 6 ♗xe2 e6 7 0-0 (or 7 b3 ♖xe5! 8 fxc5 ♖d7 9 ♖b2 ♗h4+ with a slightly better ending for Black – Taylor) 7...♖d6 8 d4 0-0 9 ♖d2 c5 10 c3 ♖c8



and due to the absence of the light-squared bishops, this wasn't a good version of the Stonewall for White in B.Larsen-T.Petrosian, Portoroz Interzonal 1958.

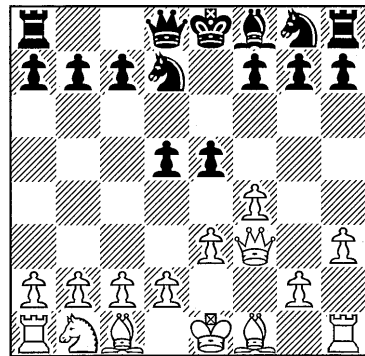
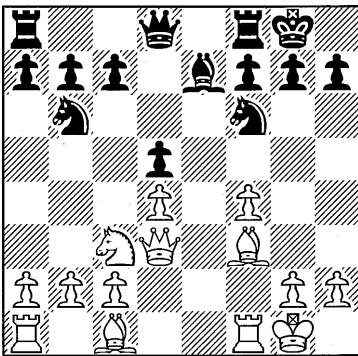
b) 5 b3 ♖xf3 6 ♖xf3 e5 7 fxe5 ♖xe5 8 ♖b2 ♖d6 9 ♖c3 c6 10 ♗c2 ♗c7 is rather easy for Black. Should White go short,

Black can castle queenside and attack with ...h5 and ...d4. Thus in K.Chernyshov-P.Svidler, Voronezh (rapid) 2003, White preferred 11 0-0-0 when Black can still go long with a comfortable game or follow Svidler's more doubled-edged 11...0-0!? 12 ♖b1 b5 13 g4 a5.

c) 5 0-0 ♟xf3 6 ♟xf3 e5 7 d4!? (an idea of Larsen's, endorsed by Taylor; instead 7 fxе5 ♞xe5 gives Black easy development and attacking chances: for example, 8 b3 c6 9 ♟b2 ♟d6 10 d3 ♞c7 11 ♞d2 0-0-0! 12 ♞e2 h5 favoured Black in T.Keskiarja-M.Manninen, Finnish League 1997, and even 8 d3 c6 9 ♞d2 ♞c7 10 e4!? leaves Black for preference after Taylor's 10...♞xf3+ 11 ♞xf3 ♟d6 12 h3 0-0 13 exd5 cxd5! 14 c3 a5) 7...exd4! (best; Black has more often preferred 7...e4, but 8 ♟e2 ♟d6 9 b3 ♞e7 10 c4 c6 11 ♞c3 gave good queenside play and an edge in B.Larsen-H.Smailbegovic, Sarajevo 1960) 8 exd4 ♟c7 9 ♞c3 (White needs to open lines for his bishops, but 9 c4 also doesn't especially trouble Black after 9...c6 10 cxd5 ♞xd5 11 ♞c3 ♞7f6 12 ♞b3 ♞d7 - Taylor) 9...♞b6 10 ♞d3 0-0

11 f5 (it is not at all easy for White to develop any kind of initiative against Black's solid set-up, but Taylor has suggested 11 b3!? ♞e8 12 ♟d2 c6 13 ♞ae1 ♞c7 14 ♞d1, intending ♞f2, c3 and ♟d1-c2 with attacking chances; Black should respond with 14...♟d6 and then either a quick ...c5 or a trade of all the rooks, followed by ...♞b6-d7-f8 if necessary) 11...c6 12 ♟g5 h6 13 ♟h4 ♞h7! began counterplay in D.Feofanov-V.Yemelin, St Petersburg 2004.

Once again White can also head for a Stonewall approach with 4 d4, but this shouldn't be too challenging so long as Black responds sensibly: 4...e6 5 ♟e2 ♞gf6 (simplest, although 5...♟xf3 6 ♟xf3 f5!? 7 0-0 ♞gf6 8 c4 c6 9 ♟d2 ♟e7 10 ♞e2 0-0 11 ♞c3 h6 12 g4 wouldn't have been so bad for Black in S.Williams-R.Palliser, Witley 1999, had I countered on the kingside with 12...fxg4!? 13 ♟xg4 ♞xg4 14 ♞xg4 ♞f5) 6 0-0 ♟d6 is fine for Black since, as we saw in Larsen-Petrosian, White doesn't achieve anything with 7 ♞e5 and an exchange of light-squared bishops. **4...♟xf3 5 ♞xf3 e5!**



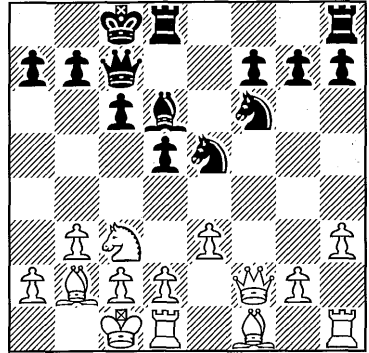
A vigorous and active gambit. White players who reach this position, especially readers of Taylor's fine work, are likely to be ready to meet 5...♗g6 with 6 g4! (6 ♖c3 has been more popular, but is less critical; Black might even respond as in our main line with 6...e5!? 7 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 8 ♖xd5 ♖h4+ 9 ♗d1 c6 10 ♖c4 ♗d6 – Taylor), after which 6...e6 7 d3 ♗b4+ 8 c3 ♗d6 9 e4 dxe4 10 dxe4 e5 11 g5 ♗g8 12 f5 h6 13 h4 ♗e7? 14 ♖h5! saw White rewarded for his creativity with some advantage in H.Danielsen-T.Luther, Schwerin 1999. I'm not certain that things would have been at all clear had Black preferred 13...♖e7, but it makes practical sense to avoid a line our future opponents have both probably studied and are looking forward to.

Should Black, though, want something a little less ambitious than our main suggestion, he might consider 5...e6; the idea being to delay developing the king's knight, thereby taking the sting out of an early g4-advance. This solid choice most certainly deserves further testing, especially as 6 d3 (or 6 ♖c3 f5!? 7 ♗e2 ♗g6 8 d3 ♗b4 9 ♗d2 c6 10 0-0-0 a5! 11 g4 b5 and Black had good counterplay in J.Maurer-T.Hallinan, correspondence 1991) 6...c6 7 ♗e2 g6 8 e4 ♗g7 9 c3 ♖b6! was fine for Black in the recent encounter T.Rendle-M.Godena, Calvia 2006; the game fizzling out to a draw after 10 ♖f2 dxe4 11 dxe4 e5 12 ♗a3 ♖xf2+ 13 ♗xf2 ♗g6 14 ♗f3 ♗c5 15 fxe5 ♗fxe4+ 16 ♗xe4 ♗xe4+ 17 ♗f3 ♗c5 18 ♗c4 0-0 19 ♗e3 ♗e6 20 ♗ad1 f6.

6 ♖xd5!

Critical, and this was the bold choice of a young Kramnik when confronted with 5...e5. White might prefer in practice to decline the gambit, but 6 ♗e2 ♗g6 7 b3?! exf4 8 exf4 ♗c5 9 ♗a3 ♗xa3 10 ♗xa3 ♗e4! 11 0-0-0 0-0 12 ♗d3 ♗dc5 was not especially convincing for him in V.Matrosov-E.Gasanov, St Petersburg 2005, and 8...♗e4!? might have been even stronger.

A better way of developing quietly is 6 ♗c3 c6 7 b3, although this allows Black easy development with 7...♗d6 8 ♗b2 ♖c7 9 0-0-0 0-0-0. Following 10 fxe5 ♗xe5 11 ♖f2 ♗f6



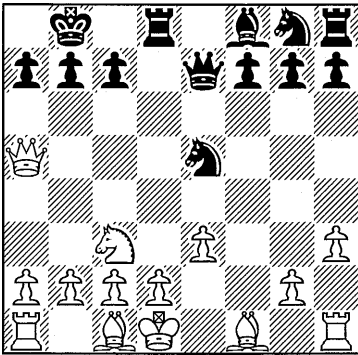
12 e4! (White needs to change the nature of the struggle; otherwise he can easily drift into a slightly worse position, such as after 12 g4 h6 13 ♗g2 ♗g6 14 ♖hf1 ♗e5 15 ♗b1 ♗b8 16 ♗h1 ♖he8 – Taylor) 12...♗xe4 13 ♗xe4 dxe4 14 ♖xa7 ♖he8 15 ♗e2 f5 an unbalanced but roughly equal position was reached in T.Taylor-J.Banawa, Los Angeles (rapid) 2005.

6...♖h4+ 7 ♗d1 0-0-0 8 fxe5 ♖e7

Playing to regain one of the pawns,

after which the open central files, Black's slightly better development and the misplaced white king will supply compensation for the other one. This appears to be the most accurate continuation because after 8...♘c5 9 ♖f3 ♘h6 10 g3 ♗e7 (O.Ukkelberg-S.Brynell, Oslo 2001), White can continue 11 d4!, with the idea of 11...♗xe5 12 ♙d2, and Black doesn't have enough for the pawns.

9 ♖a5 ♙b8 10 ♘c3 ♗xe5



11 ♗a4

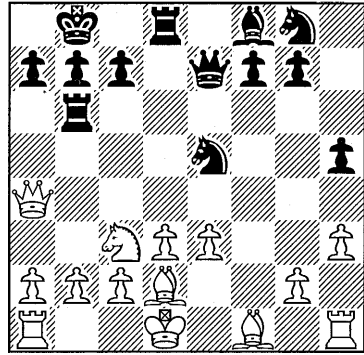
It is not especially easy for White to complete his development here. 11 d3?, for instance, runs into 11...♘c4, regaining the pawn with some advantage.

11...h5!?

Preparing to swing the king's rook into the game. I quite like this creative approach, although in a later correspondence game Black preferred 11...♘h6 12 d3 ♘f5 and after 13 ♖f4 g6 (13...♗e6!? 14 g4 ♘h4, followed by activating the dark-squared bishop and advancing one or more kingside pawns was also possible) 14 g4 ♙h6 15 ♖f2 ♘h4 16 e4 ♙xc1 17 ♙xc1 f5! 18 exf5 gxf5

19 gxf5 ♗hf8 White was still some distance from fully unravelling and Black retained compensation in A.Hanegby-R.Pijl, correspondence 2001.

12 d3 ♗h6 13 ♙d2 ♗b6

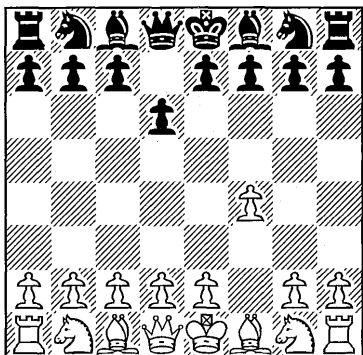


This complex position was reached in V.Kramnik-M.Oratovsky, USSR 1990, and Black has good compensation here. Furthermore, his position is both the easier and more enjoyable to play; as Taylor puts it, 'one small error from White allows a raging attack'. Correct was now 14 ♙c1, whereas in the game Kramnik came under heavy pressure after 14 b3?! g6 15 ♖f4 ♙g7 16 ♙e2 h4 17 ♙e1 ♙c6 18 d4 ♙cd6 19 ♙c1 g5 20 ♖h2 f5 21 ♙b2 c5 22 ♘b5 a6! 23 ♘xd6 ♖xd6 and Black had more than enough for the exchange.

B)

1 f4 d6!?

1 ♘f3 f5 2 d3 is currently all the rage as an anti-Dutch device and this tricky move has similar aims. Black simply wants to force through a quick ...e5, but without necessarily losing a pawn in the process.

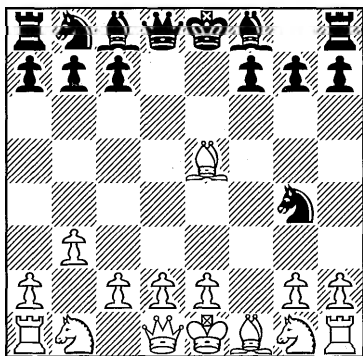


2 ♖f3

By far White's most popular move. With the exception of variation 'e', the alternatives aren't really all that challenging:

a) 2 d4 is a rather ineffective Stone-wall and gives Black a number of enticing options: 2...♖f6 followed by ...g6, 2...c5, and 2...♗g4!? are all good replies, and even 2...d5 isn't a bad move.

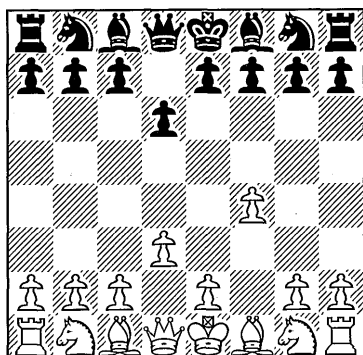
b) 2 b3 can be met by the consistent 2...e5, but Black might prefer 2...♖f6!? hoping for the venomous 3 ♗b2?! e5! 4 fx e5?! dx e5 5 ♗xe5 ♖g4.



The main point is that 6 ♗b2 ♗d6 leaves White in huge trouble down the

e1-h4 diagonal, and 7 ♖f3 ♗xh2! 8 ♗xh2 ♖xh2 nets an exchange. Neither does 6 ♗g3 especially help White; Black is doing well after an immediate 6...♗d6, but even better is 6...♖f6 7 c3 (and not 7 ♖c3? ♖e3! 8 dx e3 ♗b4) 7...♗d6.

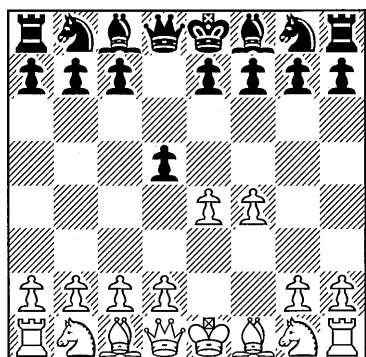
c) 2 d3 borrows an idea from 1 ♖f3 f5 2 d3 d6 and isn't so bad.



After 2...e5 3 e4 an unusual and roughly level sort of King's Gambit Declined is reached. In J.Dietz-M.Lindinger, German League 2003, White preferred 3 ♖c3, but after 3...♖c6 4 g3?! Black should have advanced with 4...d5!.

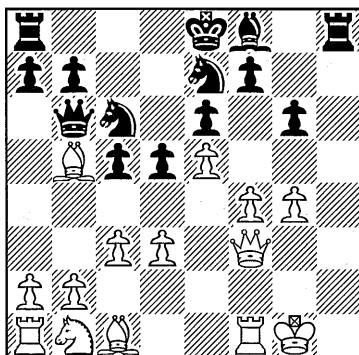
d) 2 ♖c3 is another unusual, but playable idea. If Black isn't a Pirc (2...♖f6) or Sicilian (2...c5) player, he might try 2...d5!?, hoping to transpose to variation 'e2' after 3 e4. Instead 3 ♖f3 leaves White a tempo up on a rare line of 1 ♖c3, but this probably shouldn't be too fatal: for example, 3...d4 4 ♖e4 ♖f6! leads to an extremely unusual position, but Black shouldn't be worse after 5 ♖xf6+ exf6 or 5 d3 ♖c6 6 e3 dx e3 7 ♗xe3 ♖d5.

e) 2 e4 can be met by 2...c5 or 2...e5 if Black is so versed in the Grand Prix Attack or the King's Gambit Declined, but there is also a much more creative option available, namely 2...d5!?. We are playing the Scandinavian a tempo down, but White's extra tempo is far from useful, being the rather weakening and committal f4. Surprised by 2...d5, White has tried:



e1) 3 e5 c5 should give Black a comfortable French or Caro position in which he can develop his light-squared bishop outside the pawn chain: for example, 4 ♖f3 (4 c4!? might be White's best try and was seen in K.Zuse-A.Miltner, Walldorf 2006; Black should either respond with 4...d4 or keep the tension with 4...♗c6!?) 4...♙g4 (or 4...♗c6 5 ♗c3 ♙g4 6 ♚b5 e6 7 ♙xc6+ bxc6 8 d3 ♗h6 9 0-0 ♗f5 and despite Black's doubled c-pawns, the Bird's leading practitioner didn't have any advantage in H.Danielsen-R.Skytte, Copenhagen 1999) 5 h3 ♙xf3 6 ♗xf3 e6 7 ♙b5+ ♗c6 8 0-0 g6 (setting up a Gurgengidze-type structure to keep White under control on the kingside) 9 c3

♗ge7 10 g4?! h5! 11 d3 hxg4 12 hxg4 ♖b6

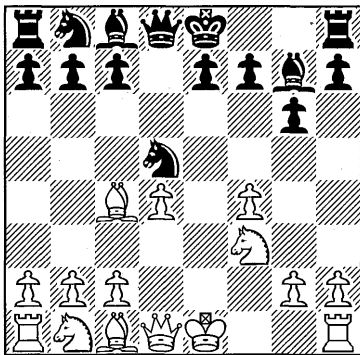


gave Black an ideal set-up in Y.Rantanen-A.Natri, Finnish League 2005.

e2) 3 ♗c3 is similar to the so-called Toilet variation (1 e4 c5 2 f4 d5 3 ♗c3), but Black might well claim that the absent ...c5 is as much a weakness as a strength. Here 3...dxe4 4 ♗xe4 ♗d7 (Braun's 4...♗f6!? 5 ♗xf6+ exf6 is also possible) 5 ♗f3 ♗gf6 leaves him solidly placed and 6 ♗f2 e6 7 g3 ♙d6 8 ♙g2 0-0 9 ♗d3 c5! transposed to a favourable type of Toilet in H.Petraki-S.Djuric, Athens 1998, before White made matters worse for himself: 10 b3? e5! 11 fxe5 ♗xe5 12 ♗dxe5 ♙xe5 13 c3? ♙xc3! 14 dxc3 ♗e8+ and Black was already pretty much winning.

e3) 3 exd5 ♗f6 (3...♖xd5!? is less popular, but also quite reasonable) 4 ♗f3 (alternatively 4 c4 c6! 5 ♗c3 cxd5 6 cxd5 ♗xd5 7 ♗f3 ♗c6 8 ♙c4 e6 and White didn't have a particularly good Panov in J.Montell Lorenzo-M.Oratovsky, Salou 2000, while he was outplayed after 4 ♙c4 ♗xd5 5 ♗c3 ♗b6 6 ♙b3 g6 7 ♗f3 ♙g7 8 d4 0-0 9 ♗e5

♘c6! 10 ♙e3 ♘a5 11 ♖f3 ♘xb3 12 axb3 c6 13 ♘e2?! f6 14 ♘d3 e5! in A.Martin Gonzalez-I.Teran Alvarez, Spanish Team Championship 2001) 4...♘d5 5 d4 g6 6 ♙c4 ♙g7 gives White a clamp on e5 in return for the weaknesses around the f4-pawn.



Black has a solid game and after 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♙b3 ♙g4 9 c3 e6 10 h3 ♙xf3 11 ♖xf3 c5!? 12 dxc5 ♖c7 13 ♙xd5 ♖xc5+ 14 ♙e3 ♖xd5 15 ♖xd5 exd5 he had a quite reasonable IQP position which was shortly drawn in N.Short-J.Timman, Malmö 2002.

2...♙g4

A logical follow-up to Black's last, but this isn't the only option. From's Gambit (1...e5) has been somewhat suffering theoretically of late, but fans of the From can try for an improved version here with the rather unexplored gambit 2...e5!? 3 fxe5 dx5 4 ♘xe5 ♙d6.

3 e4

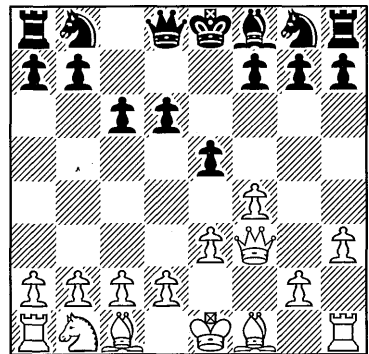
White's only real try for the advantage. The alternatives give Black an easy game:

a) 3 g3 merely allows Black to carry out his intentions: 3...♙xf3 4 exf3 g6

(or 4...♘f6 5 f5 d5 6 d4 c5 7 c3 ♖b6 8 dxc5 ♖xc5 9 ♖d4 ♖xd4 10 cxd4 ♘c6 11 ♙e3 g6! 12 fxg6 hxg6 and Black was slightly better in J.Petro-V.Okhotnik, Sarospatak 1995) 5 d4 ♙g7 6 c3 c6 7 ♙d3 e6! (setting up a solid yet flexible centre in Hippo style, and thereby reminding White of his fractured structure and blunted bishops) 8 0-0 ♘c7 9 ♖e1 ♘d7 10 ♘d2 d5, followed by ...c5 was rather comfortable for Black in R.Van Kemenade-R.Palliser, Huddersfield 2005.

b) 3 h3? is the sign of a man still so asleep at 9am as to have forgotten that he opened with 1 f4: 3...♙xf3 4 exf3 e5 5 fxe5 ♖h4+ 6 ♙e2 ♘c6! already left Black somewhat better in W.Williams-R.Palliser, Bradford 2005.

c) 3 e3 is the best of White's quiet approaches, and after 3...e5 (Black's usual choice, but I wonder if he wouldn't be better off with the more flexible 3...♘d7!?!; following up with ...c6, an exchange on f3, a kingside fianchetto and only then perhaps ...e5) 4 h3 ♙xf3 5 ♖xf3 c6 an unbalanced but fairly level position is reached.

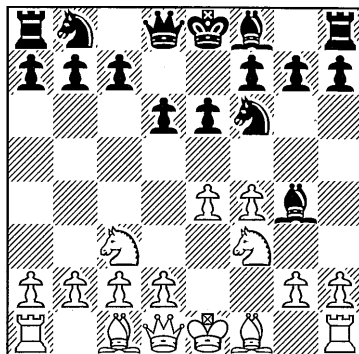


In M.Klauser-Z.Novoselski, Zürich 1988, 6 b3 (or 6 f5 ♗e7 7 b3 ♘f6 8 ♗c3 d5 9 e4?! ♜xe4 10 ♜xe4 dxe4 11 ♚xe4 ♗h4+ 12 ♜d1 0-0 and Black was better in F.Polenz-T.Schwarz, Werther 2002) 6...♗e7?! 7 ♗b2 ♗f6 8 fxe5 dxe5 9 ♗c3 ♜d7 10 0-0-0 left White with open lines and attacking chances for his bishops. Black should instead respond to 6 b3 with either an exchange on f4 or support e5 with 6...♜d7, meeting 7 ♗b2 ♜gf6 8 fxe5 with 8...♜xe5.

3...♜f6

1...d6 is a pretty rare, but promising line against the Bird. It remains rather unexplored and here I wonder about playing once again in Scandinavian style with the untried 3...d5!? 4 exd5 ♚xd5 (4...♜f6 5 ♗b5+! is a little awkward) 5 ♗c3 and then each of 5...♚a5, 5...♚d6 and 5...♚e6+!? deserve attention.

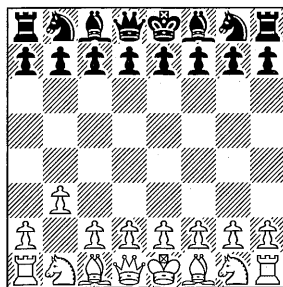
4 ♗c3 e6



Black's play is very similar to the Wade Defence (1 d4 d6 2 ♜f3 ♗g4), except that here White is a little overextended with his pawn on f4. That should ensure Black of an untheoretical but fully playable position, and 5 d4?! d5! 6 e5 ♜e4 7 ♗d3 ♗b4 8 ♗d2 ♜xd2 9 ♚xd2 ♗xf3 10 gxf3 ♚h4+ gave him an excellent version of the French in S.Le Floch-V.Okhotnik, Guichen 1993.

Chapter Seven

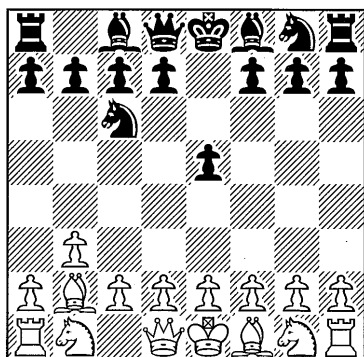
The Nimzo-Larsen Attack



1 b3

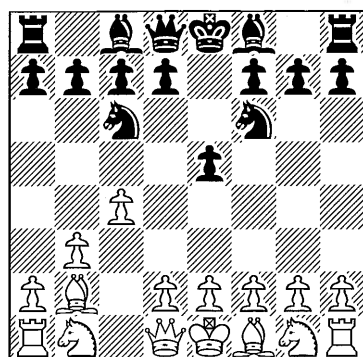
The Nimzo-Larsen Attack. White prepares to undermine any centre Black cares to erect and hopes that his dark-squared bishop will play an integral role. Black, for his part, can aim to show that his centre actually blunts the fianchettoed b2-bishop. Indeed, I believe that he should take up the challenge with 1...e5, after which we will explore one main line and one offbeat, but fashionable and promising alternative.

1...e5 2 ♖b2 ♜c6



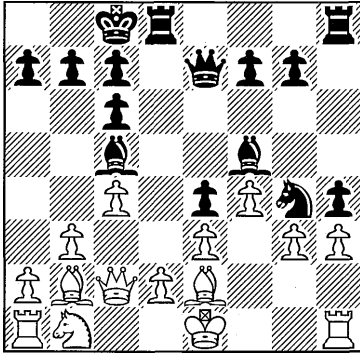
3 e3

White's most popular move. He can also employ a type of reversed Sicilian, not that this is especially popular nowadays, with 3 c4 ♘f6 and then:



a) 4 ♘f3 is an idea better played without c4 in. Black should respond aggressively with 4...c4 5 ♘d4 ♙c5! 6 ♘xc6 (Black also develops rapidly after 6 e3 ♙xd4! 7 exd4 d5 – Jacobs and Tait) 6...dxc6 when it is not so easy for White to complete his development, as was shown by the legendary miniature

B.Larsen-B.Spasky, Belgrade 1970: 7 e3 ♙f5 8 ♖c2 ♗e7 9 ♙e2 0-0-0 10 f4? (trying to control e5 and block the h2-b8 diagonal is too ambitious, although Black was already slightly for preference in any case) 10...♘g4! 11 g3 (and not 11 0-0? ♗xd2!) 11...h5! 12 h3 h4!



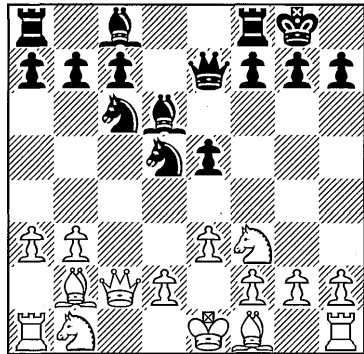
13 hxg4 (Black also wins after 13 ♙xg4 ♙xg4 14 hxg4 hxg3 15 ♖g1 ♖h1! – Spassky) 13...hxg3 14 ♖g1 ♖h1! 15 ♗xh1 g2 16 ♖f1 ♗h4+ 17 ♙d1 gxf1♗+ 0-1.

b) 4 g3 d5 5 cxd5 ♗xd5! is Keene's effective counter to White's double fianchetto. Black once again secures a good game by continuing in active vein: 6 ♘f3 e4 7 ♘c3 ♗a5 8 ♘h4 ♙e6 9 ♙g2 0-0-0! 10 0-0 (10 ♘xe4? ♘xe4 11 ♙xe4 fails to 11...♗xd2! – Jacobs & Tait) 10...♙e7 11 f4 ♖he8 12 ♙h1 ♙b8 13 a3 ♘g4! and the white position was already badly creaking in V.Nestorovic-Z.Kozul, Bled 1995.

c) 4 ♘c3 d5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 6 g3 ♘xc3! 7 dxc3 ♗f6 8 ♙g2 ♙c5 was an effective exchange to gain easy development in M.Wotulo-E.Solozhenkin, Noumea 1995. Indeed, White normally avoids an early ♘c3 in this variation having

lost the option of recapturing on c3 with the b-pawn.

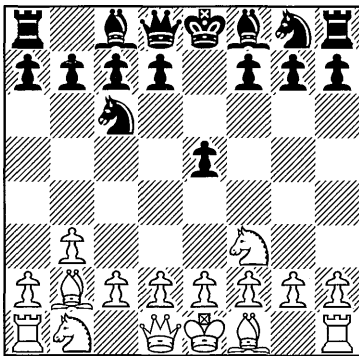
d) 4 e3 d5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 is an Open Sicilian which even non-1 e4 players should not shy away from as Black. Not only is this Black's best response to White's c4-plan, but it is also quite a comfortable version of the Sicilian for him: lines with an early ...b6 are not considered too challenging. Black should complete his development along the lines of 6 a3 (a typical Sicilian move; alternatively, 6 ♙b5 is well met by the pawn sacrifice 6...♘db4! 7 ♘f3 – and not 7 ♙xe5? ♗d5 – 7...♘d3+ 8 ♙xd3 ♗xd3 9 ♙xe5 ♘b4; while 6 ♘f3 can either be met in similar fashion to 6 a3 with 6...♙d6 or with the more ambitious 6...e4!?) 6...♙d6 7 ♗c2 0-0 8 ♘f3 ♗e7.



Practice has shown that Black is very solid here and shouldn't have too much to fear. After 9 d3 (9 ♘c3!? ♘xc3 10 ♗xc3 f5 11 ♙b5 is more combative, but led to no more than an unclear position following 11...e4! 12 ♙xc6 bxc6 13 ♘e5 c5 14 b4 cxb4 15 axb4 ♙b7 in B.Larsen-B.Spasky, Leiden 1970; Black should also be aware that Petrosian's 9 ♙d3 is

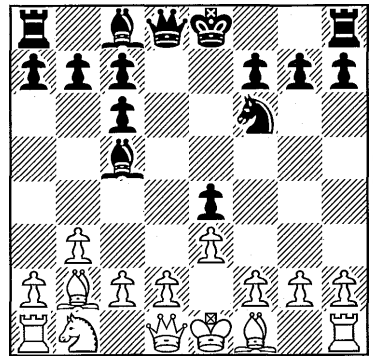
well countered by 9...f5! and if 10 ♖c4, then 10...♗c6) 9...♗g4!? (9...f5 is more common, but there is nothing wrong with first developing the light-squared bishop as actively as possible) 10 ♖bd2 ♗h8 (prudently avoiding any tricks down the a2-g8 diagonal after ...f5) 11 ♗e2 f5 12 0-0 (White can easily drift into a bad position in this line; thus in their fine guide to 1 b3, Jacobs and Tait are probably correct to point out that White should prefer the radical 12 h3!? ♗h5 13 g4 fxg4 14 hxg4 ♗xg4 15 ♖h4 ♣f7 16 ♖e4 ♗xe2 17 ♣xe2 of T.Grabuzova-T.Shumiakina, Moscow 1999, although after 17...♖f6 I'm not sure that White has quite enough compensation) 12...♗ae8 Black has achieved a harmonious and aggressive set-up, which quickly turned into a venomous attack following 13 ♖c4?! e4! 14 dxe4 (14 ♖xd6 exf3 15 ♖xe8 fxe2 16 ♗xg7+ ♗g8 17 ♗fe1 ♗xe8 18 ♗b2 ♣g5 is also good for Black) 14...fxe4 15 ♖d4 ♖xd4 16 ♗xd4 ♗f3! in P.Szczepanek-B.Grabarczyk, Swidnica 1997.

Also worth a mention is 3 ♖f3!?



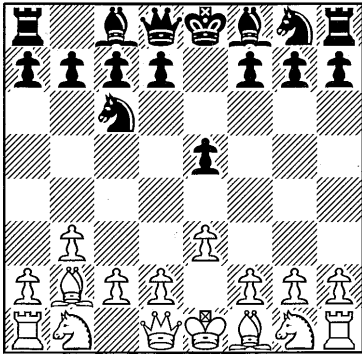
Just as after 3 c4, Black shouldn't

mind falling in with White's plans here and he can secure a good game with 3...e4 4 ♖d4 ♖f6 5 e3 (5 c4 is another route to the first-mentioned Larsen-Spassky encounter) 5...♗c5!? (5...♖xd4 6 ♗xd4 d5 is a solid and sensible alternative, intending to quickly develop with 7 c4 dxc4 8 ♗xc4 ♗d6 9 ♖c3 0-0 10 ♣c2 ♗f5) 6 ♖xc6 dxc6. White is better off here than Larsen was since he hasn't advanced his c-pawn, but Black again enjoys both free development and a spatial advantage.



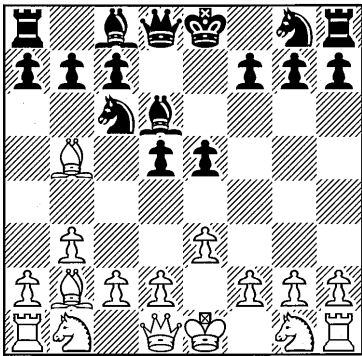
Play might continue 7 ♖c3 ♗f5 (Larsen's suggestion, not that matters would have been at all clear after 7...0-0 8 ♣e2!? ♣e7 9 a3 ♗g4 10 f3 in B.Larsen-T.Ledic, Vinkovci 1970, had Black maintained the pin with Keene's 10...♗h5) 8 ♗e2 (8 ♖a4 ♗e7 9 c4 ♣d7 10 ♣c2 0-0 11 ♗e2 ♗ad8 12 ♖c3 ♗fe8 was also pretty comfortable for Black in Andersson-Mattsson, correspondence 1973) 8...♣e7 9 d4 exd3!? 10 cxd3 0-0-0 11 0-0 h5! and despite having traded his e4-bridgehead, Black had promising attacking chances in B.Lovric-Z.Martic, Medulin 1997.

Returning to 3 c3, and will we examine:



A: 3...d5
B: 3...♘f6

A)
1 b3 e5 2 ♘b2 ♗c6 3 e3 d5 4 ♘b5 ♗d6

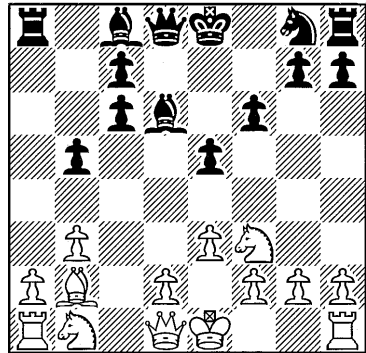


The main line of the Nimzo-Larsen Attack, and this deserves to remain as the main line from Black's perspective because he is in fairly good shape here.

5 f4

White's main try, exploiting the early development of both his bishops, but he can also try:

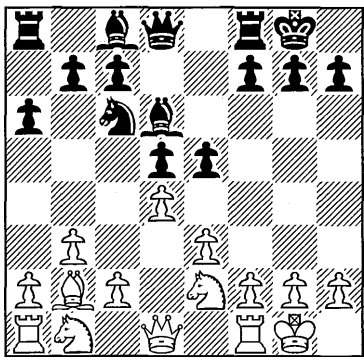
a) 5 ♘f3 f6!? (critical, although 5...♗g4 6 h3 ♗xf3 7 ♖xf3 ♗ge7 8 c4 0-0! is a decent alternative) 6 c4 (or 6 d4 e4 7 ♗fd2 f5 with a pretty reasonable reversed French-type position; for example, 8 c4 a6! 9 ♗xc6+ bxc6 10 g3? ♗f6 11 h4 0-0 12 ♗a3 c5! already gave Black some advantage in K.Gornall-J.Littlewood, Southport 1998) 6...a6! 7 cxd5! (White needs to play creatively; 7 ♗xc6+ bxc6 8 ♖c2 ♗e6 9 0-0 ♗h6 10 d3 0-0 11 ♗c3 ♖e8 saw Black building up on the kingside in W.Rakhorst-P.Boll, correspondence 1983) 7...axb5 8 dxc6 bxc6



9 ♗c3 (a somewhat better try than 9 ♖c2 ♗e7 10 d4?! c4! when White was struggling in L.Liljedahl-J.Cooper, Nice Olympiad 1974: 11 ♖xe4? ♗f5 12 ♖h4 h5! 13 d5 c5, as pointed out by Jacobs and Tait, sees White's offside queen cost him a piece, while 11 ♗fd2 f5 12 ♗c3 0-0 13 a3 ♖e8 14 b4 ♗e6 15 ♗b3 ♖h5 left Black clearly better in the game) 9...♗e7 (Black should also consider the untried 9...♗g4!? 10 d4 ♗c7) 10 d4 exd4 11 ♗xd4 0-0 12 ♖f3 (Black gains good compensation for the pawn after 12 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 13 ♖d5+ ♗f7 14

♖xc6 ♜b8 15 ♖f3 ♘b7 16 ♖h3 b4 17 ♗e2 ♘a6 18 ♗d4 ♜a8) 12...♘d7 13 0-0 was the course of E.Bricard-D.Anic, Montpellier 1988, and has been assessed as slightly favouring White by NCO. However, after Jacobs and Tait's sensible suggestion of 13...b4 14 ♗e4 c5, Black certainly shouldn't be any worse; he has useful pressure down the a-file and will activate his light-squared bishop via c6.

b) 5 ♗e2 ♗ge7! (a more flexible square than f6 for the king's knight, especially since White may well take play into a reversed French position) 6 0-0 (6 c4 a6! 7 cxd5 axb5 8 dxc6 ♗xc6 should be compared with 5 ♗f3; Black was slightly better after 9 ♗bc3 b4! 10 ♗e4 ♘e7 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♖c2 f5 13 ♗d4g3 ♘e6 in I.Csom-G.Botterill, Hastings 1974/75) 6...0-0 7 d4 a6 (not 7...e4?! 8 c4 a6 9 ♘xc6 bxc6? 10 c5) 8 ♘xc6 ♗xc6

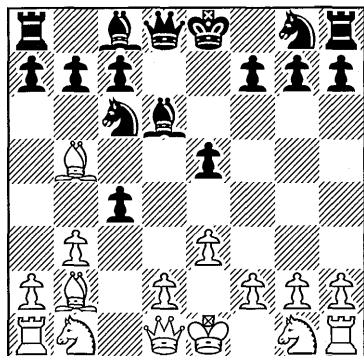


once again sees the d4-advance not especially help White. Here there is no hurry for Black to close the centre and his bishop pair already leaves him slightly for choice.

c) 5 d4 exd4!? (simplest, but those

with some experience of Winawer positions may prefer 5...e4) 6 ♖xd4 ♗f6 7 ♘xc6+ bxc6 8 ♗f3 0-0 9 0-0 ♜e8 10 ♗bd2 c5 11 ♖d3 ♗e4!? 12 ♗xe4 ♜xe4 13 c4 ♘b7 14 cxd5 ♘d5 15 ♜ad1 c6 saw Black's original and impressive play leave him with good kingside chances in P.Clarke-P.Littlewood, British Championship, Portsmouth 1976.

d) 5 c4 is the most important alternative and was endorsed by Dunnington (in *Winning Unorthodox Openings*), but Black shouldn't have too many problems after 5...dxc4! and then:



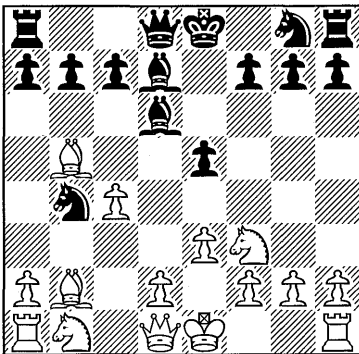
d1) 6 ♗f3?! exb3 7 ♖xb3 (and not 7 ♗xe5? ♘xe5 8 ♘xe5 ♖g5 9 ♘xc6+ bxc6 9 ♖c3 enables White to regain the pawn, but at too high a price in terms of development: 9...♜b8 10 ♖xc6+ ♘d7 11 ♖c2 ♗f6 12 d3 e4! saw Black opening the position to his advantage in W.Dorow-M.Aigmueller, correspondence 1980.

d2) 6 f4!? has been rather rare, but deserves more attention. Black should probably respond as in the main line

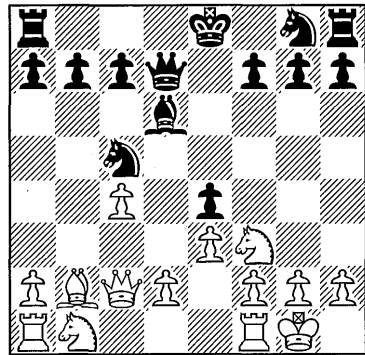
with 6...♖h4+ 7 g3 ♖e7 and after 8 ♘f3 (M.Jadoul-J.Krijgelmans, Antwerp 1999), shore up e5 with 8...f6. Jacobs and Tait then give 9 fxe5 fxe5 10 ♙xc6+ bxc6 11 ♘e5 ♘f6 12 ♘xc4 0-0 with an unbalanced position, but also a fully acceptable one for Black; his strong light-squared bishop, allied to the weakened white kingside, supplies good compensation for the pawn.

d3) 6 ♙xc4 ♖g5! (much more aggressive than 6...♘f6, the only move mentioned by Dunnington) 7 ♘f3! ♖g6! (7...♖xg2 8 ♙xf7+! is annoying) 8 ♙b5?! (this costs too much time, although Black is fine in any case, such as after 8 d3 ♘f6 9 ♘bd2 0-0 10 0-0 ♞e8) 8...♙d7 9 0-0 ♘ge7 10 ♘c3 was F.Sanfrutos Lopez-J.Malmstroem, correspondence 2003, when Black should have advanced with 10...e4! before castling long.

d4) 6 bxc4 ♙d7 7 ♘f3 ♘b4! (Black can also shore up e5 with the prudent 7...f6, but he should avoid the common 7...♖e7 which allows a standard motif for this variation: 8 c5! ♙xc5 9 ♙xc6 ♙xc6 10 ♘xe5 and White is better due to his central majority)



8 ♙xd7+ (Jacobs and Tait prefer 8 ♖b3, but they appear to have overlooked the promising exchange sacrifice 8...♙xb5 9 cxb5 e4! 10 ♙xg7 exf3 11 ♙xh8 fxg2 12 ♞g1 ♖g5 when Black is somewhat better; White might prefer 10 ♘e5, but Black remains rather comfortable after 10...♖e7 11 0-0 ♘f6) 8...♖xd7 9 0-0 ♘d3 appears a little misguided at first sight since White can remove the knight from d3 with 10 ♖b3, but after 10...♘c5 11 ♖c2 e4!



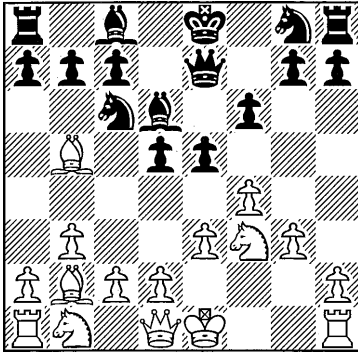
12 ♙xg7? (J.Van Arkel-J.Posch, correspondence 1987) 12...exf3! 13 h3 (13 gxf3? ♖h3 14 f4 ♘f6! is immediately decisive) 13...fxg2 14 ♙xg2 ♘h6 15 ♙xh8 0-0-0 (Jacobs and Tait) Black has a rather powerful attack.

5...♖h4+!

Forcing a small concession before defending e5.

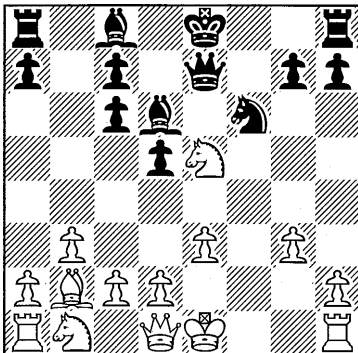
6 g3 ♖e7 7 ♘f3 f6!

Continuing to shore up e5. Black should prefer this to the popular alternative 7...♙g4 when 8 fxe5! ♙xe5 9 ♙xe5 ♙xf3 10 ♖xf3 ♖xe5 11 ♘c3 ♘f6 12 ♙xc6+ bxc6 13 0-0 gives White a small but pleasant edge.



8 ♖e2

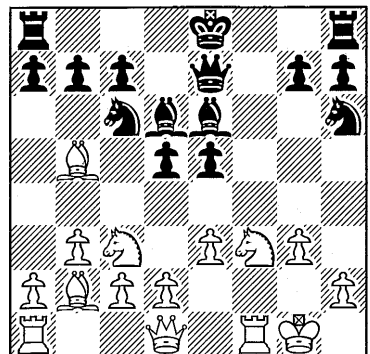
Black's last is actually a pawn sacrifice, but not one which White should accept since 8 ♕xc6+?! bxc6 9 fxe5 fxe5 (or 8 fxe5 fxe5 9 ♕xc6+ bxc6, but not with that move order 9 ♖e2? ♕xe5 10 ♖h5+ ♗d8! or 10 ♕xc6+ ♗d8 – Keene – when Black regains his piece with some advantage) 10 ♖xc5 ♖f6 gives Black promising compensation: the effects of the check on h4 can clearly be seen and Black's light-squared bishop is an especially strong piece.



Practice has then seen: 11 ♖xc6 (this must be critical; otherwise 11 ♖d3 0-0 12 0-0 ♕h3 13 ♕xf6 ♖xf6 14 ♖xf6 ♗xf6 15

♖c3 ♖f8 16 ♗e2 ♗g6! 17 ♖f2 ♕f5 gave Black strong pressure in A.Pridorozhni-A.Gipslis, Decin 1997, and flicking in 11...♕g4!? was possibly even stronger, while 11 ♖f3 0-0 12 0-0? ♕h3 13 ♖e1 ♖g4! 14 ♗e2 ♖xf3! 15 ♗xf3 ♖f8 16 ♗e2 ♖f2 was already decisive in A.Asimnios-G.Timoshenko, Kavala 2004) 11...♗e4 12 0-0 ♕h3 13 ♖f2 ♖g4 14 ♖f3 (or 14 ♖c3 ♗h1+! 15 ♗xh1 ♖xf2+ 16 ♖g1 ♖xd1 17 ♖xd1 0-0 18 ♖f2 ♕d7 and White didn't have quite enough for the exchange in R.Didoni-G.Iacchetti, Saint Vincent 2006) 14...♖xh2! 15 ♗xh2 ♕g4 16 ♖d4 c5 17 ♖c3 ♗g6 (M.Brkic-Z.Susak, Omis 2006) and, although this isn't fully clear, Black will regain his piece while retaining some initiative.

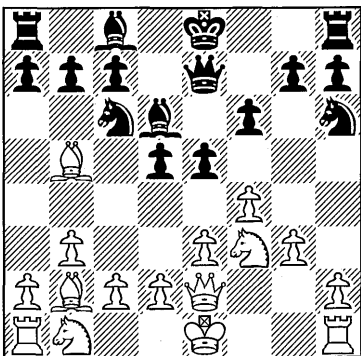
Another option is 8 ♖c3 when 8...♕e6 9 0-0 (the most popular, but not forced: 9 fxe5 fxe5 10 e4 d4 11 ♖d5 ♗d7 doesn't especially trouble Black; neither does 9 f5 ♕f7!? 10 e4 dxe4 11 ♖xe4 ♖h6 12 0-0 0-0; and 9 ♗e2 a6! 10 ♕xc6+ bxc6 11 0-0-0?! ♖h6 12 e4 d4 13 ♖a4 c5 14 fxe5 fxe5 15 ♖hf1 c4! gave Black a strong attack in M.Chandler-C.Crouch, British League 1998) 9...♖h6 10 fxe5 fxe5



11 e4! (Black's bishop pair gave him the advantage after 11 ♖h4?! 0-0-0 12 ♙xc6 bxc6 13 ♖e2 ♙h3 14 ♖a6+ ♔d7! 15 ♖g2 ♜hf8 in R.McMichael-M.Chandler, London 1994) 11...dxe4 (11...d4!? 12 ♖d5 ♖d7 – Jacobs and Tait – is also reasonable; Black can play around the d5-knight and White must even take care that that piece doesn't become trapped) 12 ♙xc6+ bxc6 13 ♖xe4 was prematurely agreed drawn in J.Mellado Trivino-A.Strikovic, Lorca 2005. The position is rather unbalanced, but Black's strong light-squared bishop once again fully compensates for his fragmented structure.

8...♖h6

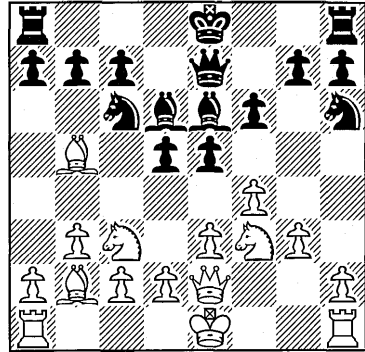
Best, and once again Black should avoid 8...♙g4. That was seen in the stem game with 8 ♖e2 (a move which has subsequently often been assessed as slightly favouring White) and after 9 h3 ♙h5 10 g4! ♙f7 11 ♙xc6+ bxc6 12 ♖a6 White's weakened light squares had been replaced by a useful kingside spatial advantage in R.Keene-A.Martin Gonzalez, Alicante 1977.



9 ♖c3

9 c4? has also been seen, but is misguided: 9...0-0 10 cxd5 ♖b4 leaves White in a pickle since 11 d3 exf4!? (11...a6 is also good) 12 gxf4 ♖g4 13 e4 ♖e3! sees both of Black's knights invading.

9...♙e6



10 e4

After 10 0-0-0, Black opted to maintain her structure with 10...♖d7 in I.Padurariu-J.Zawadzka, Budva 2003, but probably even stronger was 10...a6! 11 ♙xc6+ bxc6, transposing to Chandler-Crouch above.

10...dxe4!?

An alternative approach to 10...d4 11 ♖d5 (A.Germesz-L.Dalmas, correspondence 1982) 11...♖d7 when, once again, Black can play around the d5-knight and will begin to drive the white pieces backwards with ...a6.

11 ♖xe4

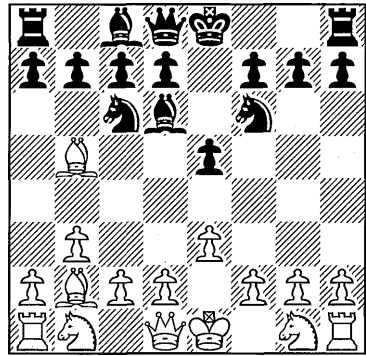
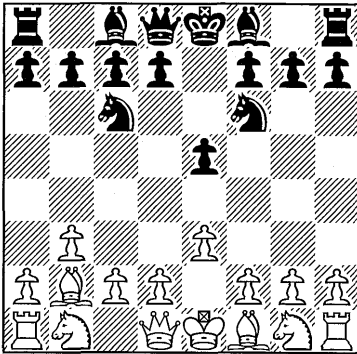
This rather unbalanced position was reached in T.Wall-C.Crouch, Sutton 1999, when Black continued too provocatively with 11...exf4. He should prefer 11...0-0 12 ♙xc6 bxc6 13 fx5 fx5 which is very similar to the positions we considered after 8 ♖c3. Once again

White's weakened kingside and light squares compensate Black for his split queenside and weak e-pawn.

Big Database 2006 with this daring bishop sortie, and White has often been stumped for a good reply.

B)

1 b3 e5 2 ♖b2 ♘c6 3 e3 ♘f6



4 ♖b5

White's main move, but he can still opt for a reversed Sicilian position with 4 c4 d5 (which we considered above via the move order 3 c4 ♘f6 4 e3 d5). Also occasionally seen is 4 ♘f3 when 4...e4 5 ♘d4 ♖c5 was again considered above (via 3 ♘f3 e4 4 ♘d4 ♘f6 5 e3 ♖c5). In light of what follows, Black might also wish to consider meeting 4 ♘f3 with 4...♖d6!?, as he did in K.Bischoff-I.Khenkin, German League 2001: 5 d3 0-0 6 ♘bd2 ♖e8 7 a3 and now there was nothing wrong with 7...♖f8, preparing ...d5, as well as the game's highly-creative 7...b5!? 8 c4 b4 9 a4 ♖b7 10 ♖c2 ♖c5.

4...♖d6!?

A remarkable move, and also quite a fashionable one among grandmaster ranks. Black has scored an impressive 60% from 157 games on ChessBase's

He isn't helped by the fact that 5 ♖xc6 simply helps Black develop his queenside after 5...dxc6, but there is more to 4...♖d6 than just following up with ...a6. Indeed, the bishop will rarely remain on d6 for long, and after castling, Black may regroup with ...♖e8 and ...♖f8. Alternatively, the bishop can continue to eye the white kingside along the h2-b8 diagonal: either from e5 after ...e4, or by regrouping to c7 after ...♗e7 and ...c6.

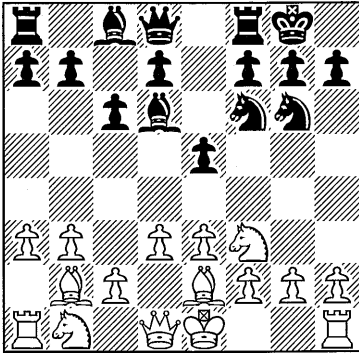
This idea seems very modern, but I should reveal that it was actually first seen in the game B.Suhle-A.Anderssen, Breslau 1859!

5 ♘a3!?

At first sight this might appear just to be a ridiculous response to a silly-looking bishop move, but it is actually White's main try. He wants to displace the bishop with 6 ♘c4 and has frequently struggled after the alternatives:

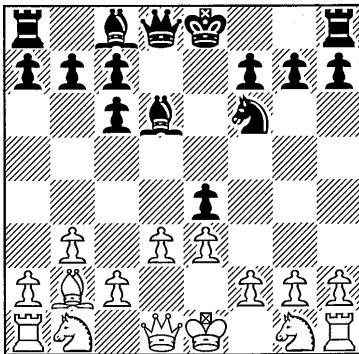
a) 5 a3 aims to regroup with ♖e2 and c4, but this is rather slow. One

promising response is 5...0-0 6 ♔e2 ♘e7! (preparing to counter 7 c4 with 7...c6, although Bosch's suggestion of 6...♞e8!? 7 c4 ♔f8, followed by ...d5, also deserves consideration) 7 ♘f3 ♘g6 8 d3 c6



9 h4?! (this only plays into Black's hands, though otherwise White finds himself with a pretty tame set-up) 9...♞e8 10 h5 ♘f8 11 h6 g6 12 c4 ♔c7 13 e4 d5 14 ♘bd2 d4 15 g3 ♘e6 and Black was slightly better, due to his safer king position and extra space in R.Skytte-R.Palliser, Witley 2001.

b) 5 ♔xc6 dxc6 6 d3 e4!? opens up the d6-bishop.

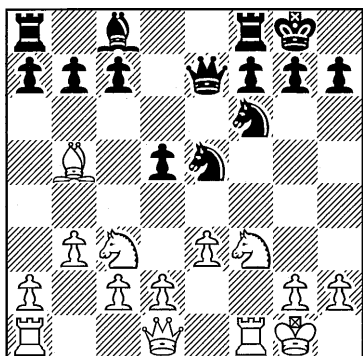


The point is that 7 dxe4 (7 ♘d2 might be a better try, although Black was still pretty comfortable after 7...exd3 8 cxd3 0-0 9 ♘gf3 ♖e7 10 0-0 ♔g4 11 ♖c2 ♞ad8 12 ♞fe1 ♞fe8 since White couldn't easily advance in the centre in J.Gonzalez Rodriguez-M.Narciso Dublan, Barcelona 2003) 7...♘xe4 8 ♔xg7? ♔b4+!? 9 c3 ♖xd1+ 10 ♔xd1 ♞g8 11 ♔e1 ♔d6 sees Black regain his pawn with plenty of interest, but neither did 8 ♘c3 ♖h4 9 ♖f3?! ♘xc3 10 ♔xc3 0-0 11 h3 ♔e6 really help White in J.Gonzalez Sanz-M.Narciso Dublan, Lillet 1999.

c) 5 d4 is a classical response, but doesn't fit especially well with White's early bishop development. After 5...e4!? (5...exd4 6 exd4 0-0 7 ♘e2 ♞e8 also gives Black good play) 6 ♘c3 ♘e7 7 ♖d2?! c6 8 ♔f1 ♔b4! 9 a3 ♔a5 10 ♘ge2 d5 (Black's pieces are much better placed than White's in this reversed French position) 11 h3?! ♘f5 12 g3 ♖e7 13 0-0-0 b5! Black held the upper hand in P.Clark-D.Goodman, British Championship, Portsmouth 1976.

d) 5 ♘f3 was described by Dunnington as 'the one serious attempt at advantage', but it hasn't found many followers of late. Black should be happy to follow the course of V.Mikhalevski-B.Avruckh, Ramat Aviv 1998: 5...e4! 6 ♘h4!? (trying to sharpen the struggle; otherwise White can easily drift into a slightly worse position, as he did after 6 ♘d4 ♘xd4 7 ♔xd4 0-0 8 0-0 ♖e7 9 f3 c6 10 ♔e2 exf3 11 ♔xf3 ♔e5 12 ♔xe5 ♖xe5 13 ♘c3 d5 in T.Gillani-D.Sadvakasov, Calvia Olympiad 2004,

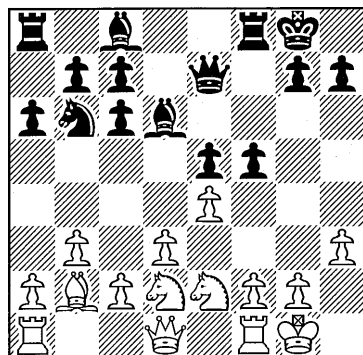
and Black was also rather comfortable following 6 ♙xc6 dxc6 7 ♜e5 0-0 8 0-0 ♞e8 9 f4 exf3 10 ♝xf3 ♙g4 11 ♞e1 ♜e4 in W.Schwaninger-I.Glek, European Club Cup, Rethymnon 2003) 6... ♙e5 7 ♙xe5 ♜xe5 8 0-0 0-0 9 f4 exf3 10 ♝xf3 ♞e7 11 ♜c3 d5



12 ♞e1 and Black is clearly fine after Kosten's 12...c6 (simpler and probably better than Avrukh's rather ambitious 12...c5!?).

e) 5 ♜e2 has been the most popular alternative to 5 ♜a3 . White intends to continue with 6 ♜g3 , followed by ♜h5 or, especially if Black has played ... ♜e7 , f4. However, the b5-bishop can no longer retreat and so Black should take the bishop pair: 5...a6! 6 ♙xc6 dxc6 7 d3 (wisely opting for a solid set-up as the alternatives allow Black some fun: 7 ♜g3 h5! 8 ♜c3 h4 9 ♜ge4 ♜xe4 10 ♜xe4 ♙f5 11 ♜xd6+ ♞xd6 12 d3 0-0-0 was quite pleasant for Black since 13 e4? failed to 13... ♙xe4! in S.Solbrand-R.Bator, Stockholm 1993; and 7 ♜bc3 e4! ? 8 ♜g3 ♞e7 9 ♞e2 0-0 10 0-0-0?! ♙a3! 11 ♙xa3 ♞xa3+ 12 ♞b1 ♞e8 13 f3 exf3 14 gxf3 a5 gave Black a strong at-

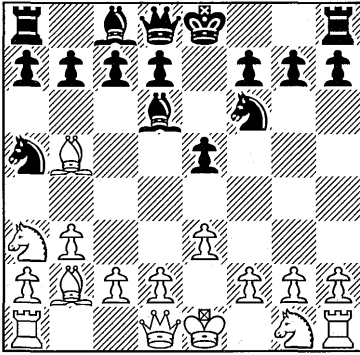
tack in K.Bischoff-E.Sutovsky, Essen 2001) 7...0-0 8 ♜d2 ♞e7 (8...b5!? 9 0-0 ♞e8 10 e4 ♜h5! 11 ♞e1 ♞f6 is also possible as in the game K.Gawehns-O.Eismont, German League 2001) 9 h3 ♜d5! (correctly stirring up counterplay before White slowly expands on the kingside with e4 and f4) 10 c4 ♜b6 11 0-0 f5!?



12 exf5 ♙xf5 13 ♜g3 ♙g6 14 ♞e1 ♜d5 15 ♜f3 ♞f6 16 ♙xe5 ♙xe5 17 ♞xe5 ♜f4 18 ♞h2 ♞ae8 saw Black's kingside pressure fully compensate for the sacrificed pawn in W.Arencibia-S.Estremera Panos, Malaga 2000.

5...♜a5!?

Continuing in 21st Century style to hinder the opponent's plans. Black can also play more solidly with 5...a6 6 ♙xc6 dxc6 7 ♜c4 ♞e7 with a reasonable sort of Exchange Lopez (or even DERLD!) for Black. V.Turikov-V.Iordachescu, Dresden 2003, for example, continued 8 ♜e2 h5! ? 9 h3 ♙d7 10 d4 e4 11 ♜xd6+ cxd6 12 c4 h4 and was roughly balanced, although Black could be content with his extra kingside space.



6 ♗e2

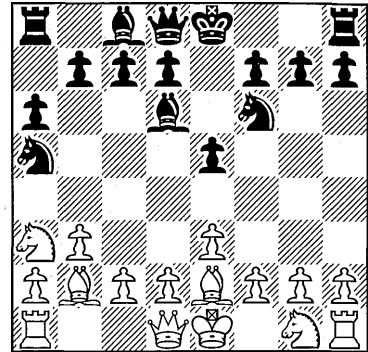
Retreating the bishop out of harm's way. Instead, 6 ♖c4 ♗xc4 7 ♗xc4 0-0 has been considered pretty comfortable for Black, as was shown by the 8 ♗e2 (or 8 ♗f3 e4! 9 ♗g5?! ♗e7 10 h4 d5 11 ♗e2 a5 12 c4 c6 13 ♖c2 h6 14 ♗h3 ♗g4 and once again kingside aggression had rather backfired on White in M.Nei-M.Rytshagov, Helsinki 1995) 8...c6 9 ♗g3 ♗c7 10 0-0 d5 11 ♗e2 ♗c8 12 c4 a5 13 a3 ♗e6 of T.Gelashvili-J.Hector, Istanbul Olympiad 2000.

White also has 6 ♗f3 which has received some attention from Hodgson; not that he had any advantage after 6...a6 7 ♗e2 ♖e7 8 ♗b1 0-0 9 c4 b6 (both here and on move 7, Black can also play more ambitiously with ...e4!?) 10 ♗c3 ♗b7 11 0-0 ♖fe8 12 d3 ♗a3 13 ♖c1 ♗xb2 when J.Hodgson-J.Speelman, British League 1998, came to an early and peaceful halt.

6...a6

Almost universally played, and this ensures that 7...♖e7 can't be met by 8 ♗b5, but Black can also consider Karjakin's 6...c6!?. Certainly 7 c4 0-0 8 ♗c2

b6! (8...♗c7? 9 b4! reminds us that it's not just White's knight which can find itself embarrassed on the rim) 9 ♗f3 e4 10 ♗fd4 ♗e8 11 f4!? c5 12 ♗f5 ♗f8 13 g4 d5 left Black's central play at least the equal of White's creative, if slightly desperate, kingside advance in T.Grabuzova-S.Karjakin, online blitz game 2004.



7 c4

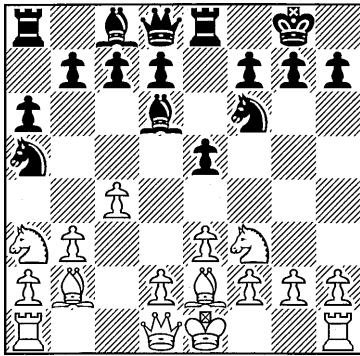
Preparing ♗c2 and avoiding 7 ♗c4 ♗xc4 8 bxc4?! ♖e7 9 a4?! 0-0 10 ♗h3 ♗c5 11 f4? ♗xe3! 12 ♗xe5 ♗a7 13 ♗f2 d6 14 ♗b2? ♗e8 15 d4 ♗g4 (and 0-1) which was a complete disaster for White in K.Sakaev-E.Sveshnikov, Gausdal 1992, but also not atypical of the sort of misdirected play which 4...♗d6!/? can induce.

7...0-0 8 ♗f3

Another move order is 8 ♗c2 ♗e8 when 9 ♗f3 transposes to our next note, and Black was also fine after 9 d3 ♗c6 10 ♗f3 ♗f8 11 e4 b5 12 0-0 bxc4 13 bxc4 ♗c5 14 ♗d2 d6 in B.Kovacevic-C.Marzolo, European Championship, Warsaw 2005. A more creative approach is also possible, but after 9 g4?! ♗f8 10

g5 ♖e4 11 h4 ♘c6 12 ♗f3 d5 White's kingside demonstration didn't fully convince in T.Todorov-C.Marcelin, Bois Colombes 2004, before Black blundered with 13 g6!? hxg6 14 cxd5 ♖xd5 15 ♙c4 ♗d7 16 h5 b5!? 17 ♙f1 ♗f5 18 ♗e2 gxh5! 19 ♗h4 ♗g4? (19...♗f6! would have retained Black's large advantage, such as after 20 ♙g2 ♙g4 21 ♗f1 ♗c5 22 f3 ♙f5) 20 ♗xg4 hxg4? 21 ♙g2 f5 22 d3.

8...♗e8!

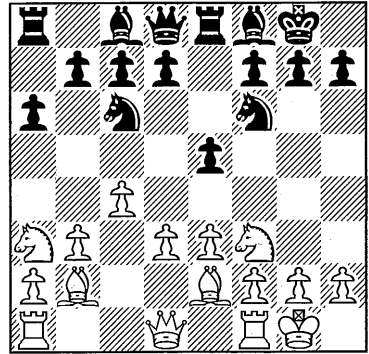


9 0-0

Black's last not only prepared to regroup with ...♙f8 and ...d5, but also supported meeting 9 ♖c2 with 9...e4. White must then take care not to underesti-

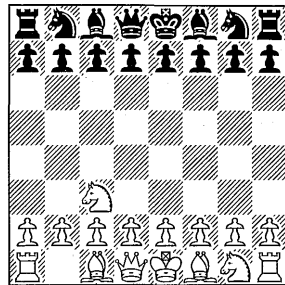
estimate Black's activity, as he did with 10 ♗h4!? (Black is also fine after 10 ♗fd4 c5 11 ♗f5 ♙e5 – Bosch – but White should probably prefer this) 10...♖c6 11 f4?! ♙c5 12 ♗f5 d5 13 cxd5 ♗b4! and Black was somewhat better in M.Zurek-Z.Hracek, Czech League 2001.

9...♙f8 10 d3 ♗c6



Black intends 11...d5 and has a good game. In B.Chatalbashev-S.Atalik, Saint Vincent 2003, White prevented that plan with 11 e4, but Black was still slightly for choice after 11...♙c5! (moving a second minor piece for a third time, but this is both correct and positionally justified) 12 ♖c2 d6 13 ♗e3 b5 14 ♗d5 bxc4 15 bxc4 ♗b8.

Chapter Eight



Der Linksspringer:

1 ♖c3

1 ♖c3

A much more popular choice in the correspondence world than OTB, although I'm not quite sure why. Perhaps the majority of players remain ignorant that 1 ♖c3 is both an independent system, and not just a transpositional tool, as well often allowing White early free piece play. This opening has been referred to as the *Dunst*, the *Van Geet* and *Der Linksspringer* ('The Knight on the Left'), and Black certainly should not neglect it in his preparation unless he wants to join the ranks of miniature victims (particularly in the lines featuring an early ...e5: either on move one or after 1 ♖c3 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 ♖xe4). We will focus on:

A: 1...d5

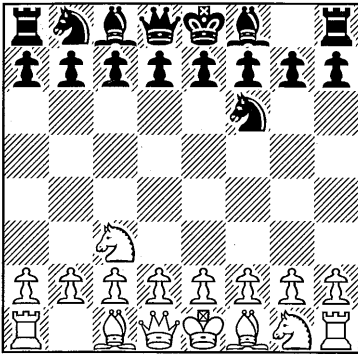
B: 1...c5

The latter is a common choice with **Sicilian** players, but not everyone has the Sicilian in their repertoire. Instead,

French players should meet 1 ♖c3 with 1...e6, when Keilhack suggests that White has nothing better than 2 e4 (or 2 d4 d5 3 e4). It may also be useful for French players, when reaching their favourite opening via a 1 ♖c3 move order, to know that Keilhack's impressive work also covers following up 1 ♖c3 d5 2 e4 e6 with each of 3 ♖f3, 3 g3 and 3 f4. Likewise the **Caro-Kann** player should begin 1 ♖c3 c6, and once again White hasn't really anything better than 2 e4 (or 2 d4 d5 3 e4). Just like against the French, Keilhack doesn't abandon the 1 ♖c3 player after 1...c6 2 e4 d5, but considers in some detail the offbeat systems 3 f4, 3 ♖f3, 3 g3 and 3 d3.

Another major defence to 1 e4 is 1...e5, but unfortunately 1 ♖c3 e5 2 ♖f3!? ♖c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♗g5 is quite a tricky system. Fortunately for **Ruy Lopez** and **Petroff** defenders help is at hand in 1 ♖c3 ♖f6, when 2 e4 e5 will lead to a Vienna or Four Knights (this

move order is also recommended for **Alekhine** exponents who can meet 2 e4 with 2...d5).



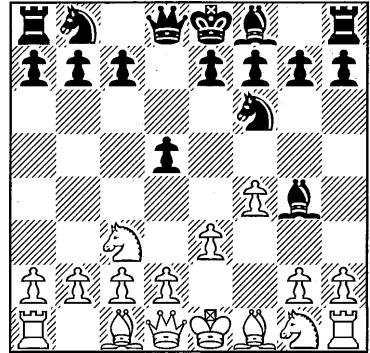
Indeed, Keilhack mentions that the leading 1 d3 authority, the Danish correspondence GM Ove Ekebjærg, usually meets 1 d3 f6 with 2 e4. His comprehensive book does cover a few offbeat alternatives to 2 e4, but none really convince or should greatly trouble Black over the board:

a) 2 d4 d5 3 g5 is theoretically the most important alternative, transposing to the Veresov (Black should respond with 3...bd7 or 3...c5!?, as advocated by Cox).

b) 2 f3 d5 3 d3 (3 d4 is a harmless queen's pawn position; Black develops comfortably after 3...f5) 3...c6 4 g3 e5 is a reversed Pirc with White committed to an early d3. This shouldn't trouble Black with one good response to 5 g2 e7 6 g5 e6 7 0-0 being Keilhack's 7...g8! as we saw (via 1 g3) at the beginning of Chapter Five.

c) 2 f4 is the so-called Aasum System. Mixing d3 and f4 is certainly quite unusual, and White intends to

follow up with an early g4! One possible response is 2...d5 3 e3 (3 d3?! c6! 4 f3 g4 5 e3 d4 – exploiting the early development of white's queen's knight – 6 e4 e5 7 e2 b4+ saw Black win the opening duel in M.Hermann-M.Ehrke, German League 1994) 3...g4

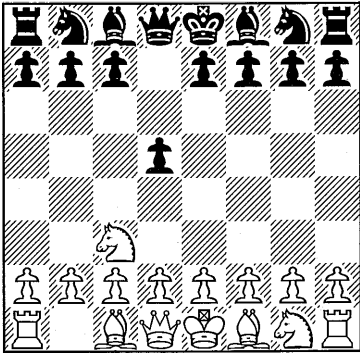


4 f3 (or 4 e2 xe2 5 xc2 c6 6 f3 bd7 7 d3 b6 8 d2 g6 9 0-0 g7 and Black had a fairly comfortable reversed Dutch in M.Kreuzahler-R.Denkinger, Mengen 1994) 4...bd7 5 h3 xf3 6 xf3 and we're back in a line of the Bird's (see note 'a' to Black's 5th move in Line A).

d) 2 g4?! xg4 3 e4 d6 4 e2!? (4 d4 e5! is an even worse choice) 4...f6 5 d4 gives White a little compensation for the pawn, but this shouldn't be sufficient so long as Black develops sensibly. He did just that with 5...g6 6 g5 c6! 7 d2 b5 (already beginning counterplay, and surely the absence of his g-pawn doesn't really help White's attack) 8 xf6?! exf6 9 0-0-0 g7 10 d5 b4 11 b1 c5 and Black was somewhat better in V.Demian-K.Dolgitser, correspondence 2001.

A)

1 ♖c3 d5



2 e4

Retaining an independent spirit, rather than take play into a Veresov with 2 d4 ♖f6 3 ♗g5. White has also tried both 2 e3 (when Black should probably avoid 2...e5 3 ♖h5!?, preferring 2...♖f6 or 2...g6) and 2 f4 (after which 2...♖f6 was seen above, via the move order 1...♖f6 2 f4 d5, and here Black can also consider 2...d4 3 ♖e4 e5!?).

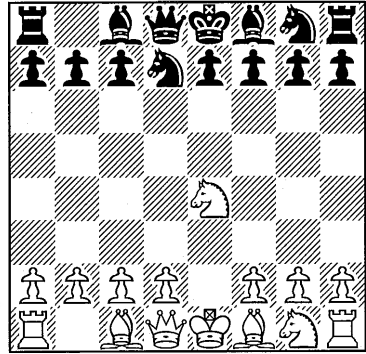
2...dxe4 3 ♖xe4

The less said about 3 d3?!, the better really. This gambit does grant White easy development, but I'm far from convinced that it's worth a central pawn. One good reply is 3...exd3 4 ♗xd3 ♖f6 5 ♗g5 e6 (5...♗g4!? is also pretty reasonable) 6 ♖e2 ♖b4! 7 ♖f3 h6 8 ♗h4 ♖bd7 9 0-0 c6 10 ♖e4 ♗e7 11 ♗xf6 gxf6! 12 ♖ad1 ♖c7 and Black enjoyed a pawn-up Burn French in J.Lutton-R.Palliser, Port Erin 2002. Likewise Black should be happy to see 3 ♗c4?! when 3...♖f6 4 f3 exf3 5 ♖xf3 c6 6 d4 ♗f5 reaches one of Black's better defences to the Blackmar-Diemer.

3...♖d7

Together with Black's last, this is a very solid and respectable way of countering 1 ♖c3. Black doesn't attempt to refute White's opening or to gain lots of space (as with 2...d4), but simply settles for sensible development. The position should be compared to both a Caro and a French Rubinstein: Black will hope to demonstrate that he has gained from the omission of an early ...c6 or ...e6, while White will generally omit d4, preferring a set-up with ♗c4 and d3.

We should also note that 3...♖d5!? is possible if Black is a **Scandinavian** player, since after 4 ♖c3 play transposes to that opening.

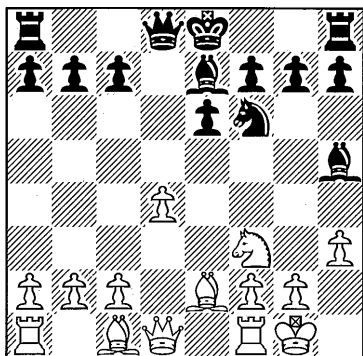


4 ♗c4

The choice of the true 1 ♖c3 player. Indeed, the alternatives have been especially rare in the correspondence world, largely because Black gains a comfortable Caro or Scandinavian-type position:

a) 4 d4 ♖g6 5 ♖xf6+ (5 ♖g5?! is possible against the Caro, but here Black is a tempo up; after 5...e6 6 ♗d3

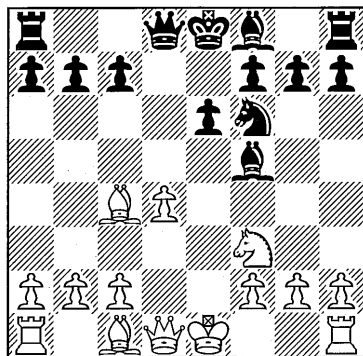
♙d6 7 ♘f3 h6 White should retreat since 8 ♗xe6? fxe6 9 ♙g6+ ♖e7 10 0-0 ♗f8 11 ♙d3 b6 12 c4 ♙b7 13 ♙d2 c5 14 ♙c3 cxd4 15 ♗xd4 ♖f7 failed to supply any real compensation for the piece in A.Thorsteinsson-J.Tisdall, Reykjavik 1988) 5...♗xf6 6 ♗f3 ♙g4! (continuing to swiftly develop; note, though, that 6...♙f5 7 c3 e6 8 ♗e5 ♙e7 9 ♖b3!, possibly followed by an advance of White's kingside pawns, isn't so comfortable for Black) 7 h3 ♙h5 8 ♙e2 (or 8 g4 ♙g6 9 ♙g2 e6 10 ♗e5 c6 11 0-0 ♗d7 12 ♗c4 as in T.L.Petrosian-G.Sargissian, Stepanakert 2004, when Black can continue to play for exchanges with 12...♗b6, as well as consider the game's more ambitious 12...h5!?) 8...e6 9 0-0 ♙e7 gave Black comfortable equality in B.Heberla-A.Beliavsky, Warsaw (rapid) 2004.



Not only has White effectively chosen a quiet line against Black's Caro/Scandinavian set-up, but the exchange of knights has freed any cramp in the black camp. After 10 ♗e5 ♙xe2 11 ♖xe2 0-0 12 c3, Beliaevsky's 12...c5 was a little premature, and first

12...♖d5 would have left Black with a very sound position.

b) 4 ♗f3 ♗g6 5 ♗xf6+ (or 5 ♗g3 when I would be tempted by a king-side fianchetto, but in Z.Mestrovic-E.Dizdarevic, Zenica 2003, Black preferred to reach a favourable Rubinstein: 5...c5 6 ♙c4 e6 7 0-0 ♙e7 8 d4 0-0 9 dxc5 ♖c7 10 ♖e2 ♙xc5 11 ♙d3 b6 12 ♗e4 ♙b7 with full equality due to the time that White had lost with his knight) 5...♗xf6 6 d4 transposes to variation 'a', but 6 ♙c4 is more tricky. Black must avoid 6...♙g4? due to the tactics against f7 and should prefer 6...♙f5 (playing along Rubinstein lines with 6...e6 7 d4 ♙e7 8 ♖e2 0-0 9 ♙g5 c5 10 0-0-0 ♖c7 is also possible, as Black did in R.Cvek-P.Velicka, Ostrava 2003) 7 d4 e6 with a comfortable Caro.



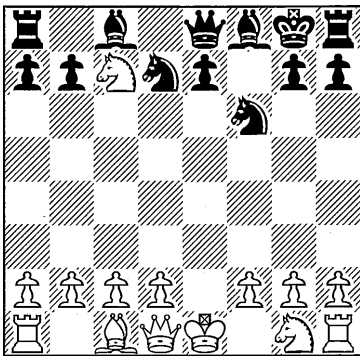
Note that here 8 c3 isn't so dangerous since Black can meet 8...♙c7 9 ♗e5 (or 9 ♖b3 ♙e4 and Black can also consider the more ambitious 9...0-0!?) 9...0-0 10 g4?! with 10...♙e4!.

4...e6

Blunting the bishop, and Black is now happy to reach a Rubinstein

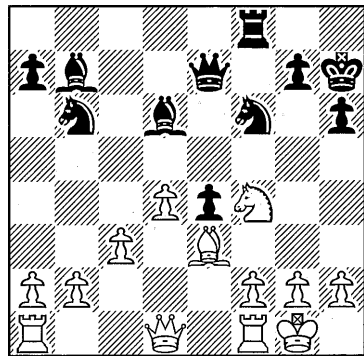
French in which White's light-squared bishop is slightly misplaced (it usually goes to d3). Those seeking something more ambitious should consider 4...♗g6!?. Once again the exchange on f6 doesn't cause any problems for Black and 5 ♖g5?! e6 6 ♜e2 ♗b6! comfortably prevents any ♗xf7 sacrifice. A better line for White is 5 d3 when 5...e6 transposes to our main line, but Black can also consider the untried 5...g6!? (after which Keilhack correctly points out that 6 ♗xf7?!+ ♗xf7 7 ♗g5+ ♖g8 8 ♗e6 ♜e8 9 ♗xc7 ♜d8 10 ♗xa8 is critical – compare this with what follows).

It must be said that 4...♗g6!? is actually rather provocative due to the forcing line 5 ♗xf7+ ♗xf7 6 ♗g5+ ♖g8 7 ♗e6 ♜e8 8 ♗xc7. Indeed, theory has often condemned this position for Black, but as shown by Keilhack matters are far from clear. Indeed, those who enjoy analysing unbalanced positions may well find it quite rewarding to study the rather obscure and fascinating branches which follow:



a) 8...♜d8!?! avoids an exchange of queens (as can occur after the seemingly

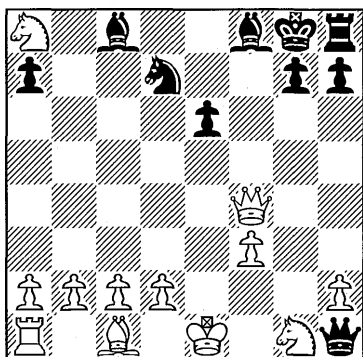
more direct 8...♜g6) and prepares to expand in the centre: 9 ♗xa8 e5 10 d4 ♗d6 11 ♗f3 e4 leaves Black an exchange and two pawns down, but the a8-knight is cornered and Black's initiative should not be underestimated. Even if this is shown not to be objectively fully sound, Black has good practical chances: 12 ♗g5 (or 12 ♗e5 ♗xe5 13 dxe5 ♜a5+ 14 ♗d2 ♜xe5 15 ♗c3 ♜e7 16 ♜d2 e3! 17 ♜xe3 ♜xe3+ 18 fxe3 ♗g4 19 0-0 ♗f7 and Black enjoyed a favourable ending due to his bishop pair in D.Van Geet-F.Henneberke, Beverwijk 1964) 12...h6 13 ♗e6 ♜e7 14 ♗f4 ♗h7 15 ♗e3 b6 16 c3 ♗b7 17 ♗xb6 ♗xb6 18 0-0 ♗f8 gave Black two active minor pieces for a rather passive rook and three pawns in A.Spice-T.Hinks Edwards, British League 1997.



Black went on to win, prompting Keilhack to ask: "Does White, as van Geet suggests, only experience 'practical difficulties' converting his material advantage? Or does Black have serious counter-play anyway?" Having studied those two game fragments, and undertaken some analysis with *Fritz*

(whose evaluation for White keeps falling), I believe that Black does gain serious counterplay, although we clearly need several more practical examples before a firm verdict can be reached.

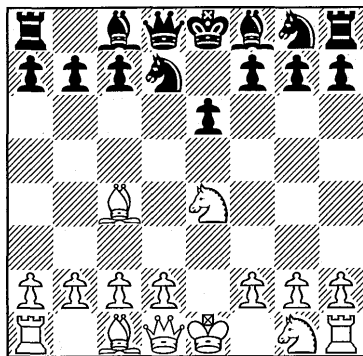
b) 8...♖g6 9 ♘xa8 reaches another fascinating and totally obscure position: 9...b5!? (Black can also consider both 9...b6!? and 9...♗xg2; after the latter, 10 ♗f3 ♗xf3 11 ♘xf3 ♘e8! 12 a4! b6 13 a5 ♙b7 14 ♚e2 ♙xa8 15 axb6 ♙xf3+ 16 ♚xf3 axb6 looks, as Keilhack aptly puts it, 'like a game of losing chess'; this is actually a rather unclear ending which was reached in both Herms-Iraeta, Bellvitge 1998, and A.Van den Berg-H.Hicker, Lignano Sabbiadoro 2005) 10 f3!? (an idea of Keilhack's; White must avoid 10 ♘c7? ♗xg2 11 ♗f3 ♙b7, but can also consider 10 ♗f3 ♘c5! 11 d4 ♙b7 12 ♗g3! – Keilhack – forcing another highly unclear ending) 10...♘d5 11 ♗e2 ♘f4 12 ♗xb5 ♗xg2 13 ♗c4+ e6 14 ♗xf4 ♗xh1



is analysis from Keilhack who stops here with the very reasonable assessment of unclear. To show just how enjoyable these positions can be to ana-

lyse, here's a typical computer-assisted continuation: 15 ♖f2 ♙b7 16 ♘c7 ♙c5+ 17 d4 ♙xd4+ 18 ♙e3! ♙c5! 19 ♗c4 ♗xh2+ 20 ♖f1 ♙xc7 21 ♗xe6+ ♖f8 22 ♙d1! ♗e5! 23 ♗xd7 ♙a6+ 24 ♘e2 ♗xe3 25 ♗f5+ ♖g8 26 ♗d5+ ♖f8 27 ♗f5+ and it's perpetual.

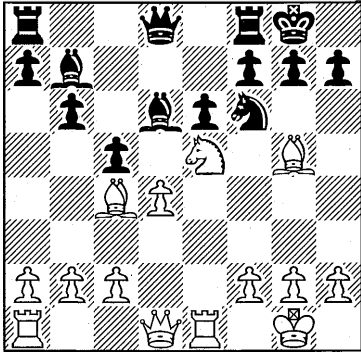
Whether Black should prefer 8...♗g6 9 ♘xa8 b5 to 8...♗d8 is an almost impossible question to answer. What is clear is that this variation needs some testing. Should you find yourself up against a 1 ♘c3 exponent, why not give these fascinating lines a go?



5 d3

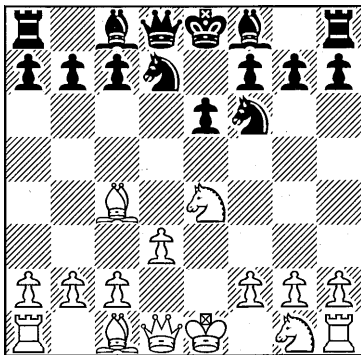
Fighting for the central light squares, rather than play d4 and allow Black to break with ...c5. White has also tried 5 f4, but after 5...♘gf6 6 ♘f2 ♘b6 7 ♙b3 c5! 8 d3 ♙d6 9 ♘f3 ♗c7 10 g3 ♙d7 his original play hadn't been too successful in R.Olthof-J.Schuurmans, Belgian League 1995. It is also possible to begin with 5 ♘f3 when 5...♘gf6 6 d3 transposes to our main line, while 6 ♘xf6+ ♘xf6 7 0-0 is likely to lead to a harmless variation of the French Rubinstein: 7...♙d6!? (7...♙e7 8 d4 0-0

is also quite playable when 9 ♗e5 c5 10 dxc5 ♖xd1 11 ♞xd1 ♙xc5 12 c3 ♗e4! 13 ♗d3 ♙e7 14 ♙e3 ♗d6 15 ♙b3 b6 16 a4 ♗f5 fully equalized in Z.Mestrovic-O.Jovanic, Zadar 2002) 8 d4 0-0 9 ♙g5 b6 10 ♗e5 ♙b7 11 ♞e1 c5!



12 dxc5 ♙xc5 13 ♖e2 ♖c7 14 ♙d3 (Black doesn't fear 14 ♙xf6 gxf6 when 15 ♗g4 ♖f4 leaves his bishops looking menacing, and so White should probably prefer to force perpetual with 15 ♖h5 fxe5 16 ♖g5+) 14...♗d5 15 ♖c4 f5 16 ♖e2 ♗f6 was unbalanced, but roughly equal in G.Van Perlo-J.Morgado, correspondence 1993.

5...♗f6



6 ♗f3

Ekebjærg has preferred 6 ♖c2, but Black demonstrated a good response in O.Ekebjærg-A.Kamenets, correspondence 1999: 6...♗xe4 7 dxe4 ♗e5! 8 ♗f3 (or 8 ♙b3 ♙b4+ 9 ♙d2 ♙xd2+ 10 ♖xd2 ♖xd2+ 11 ♗xd2 g5!? – Keilhack – with rough equality) 8...♗xc4 9 ♖xc4 ♖d6 10 0-0 ♖c5 11 ♖b3 ♙e7 12 ♞d1 0-0 13 ♙e3 ♖c6 and White's activity was at best the equal of Black's bishop pair.

6...♙e7

Developing, but Black has two pretty reasonable alternatives:

a) 6...♗b6!? 7 ♙b3 (or 7 ♙g5 ♗xc4 8 dxc4 ♖xd1+ 9 ♞xd1 ♙e7 with good long-term prospects for Black due to his extra central pawn and bishop pair) 7...♗xe4 8 dxe4 ♖xd1+ 9 ♗xd1 was pretty level in R.Starkie-D.Calvert, British League 2006, and here Black might have considered 9...a5!? 10 a4 ♗d7, improving his knight and preparing to fianchetto his queen's bishop.

b) 6...a6!? should be compared with our main line, and after 7 a4 b6 8 0-0 ♙b7 9 ♗g3 ♙d6 10 ♞e1 0-0 11 ♗g5 h6! 12 ♗5c4 ♗xe4 13 ♗xe4 ♖h4 14 ♗xd6 cxd6 Black didn't have any problems, with his solid yet flexible structure offsetting White's bishop pair in A.Spice-G.Wall, British League 1997.

7 0-0

White can also begin with 7 ♖e2, but this should transpose after 7...a6.

7...a6!?

Preparing to fianchetto before castling. Black can also consider 7...0-0 8 ♖e2 and only then 8...a6. He should, though, avoid the more common 8...c5.

That enables White to gain an edge by creating some kingside and central pressure, especially after 9 ♙d2 b6 10 ♞fe1 ♙b7?! 11 ♜eg5! , threatening a powerful sacrifice.

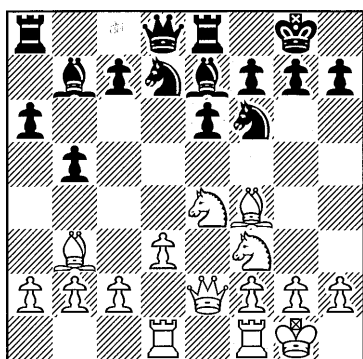
8 ♖e2

White might also restrain ...b5, but Black was fine after 8 a4 b6 9 ♖e2 0-0 10 ♜xf6+ ♙xf6 11 c3 ♙b7 12 ♙f4 c5! 13 ♞ad1 ♞c8 14 ♙b3 ♞c6 in V.Biliy-A.Kislinsky, Alushta 2006. Note especially here how Black delayed ...c5 until after an exchange of knights, thereby ensuring that White could no longer easily target e6 and f7.

8...b5 9 ♙b3 ♙b7 10 ♙f4

In J.Azevedo-V.Vigfusson, correspondence 1995, White preferred 10 c3 0-0 11 ♙f4 when Black should have first patiently neutralized any attacking hopes of his opponent with 11... ♞e8 , possibly followed by ...h6.

10...0-0 11 ♞ad1 ♞e8!

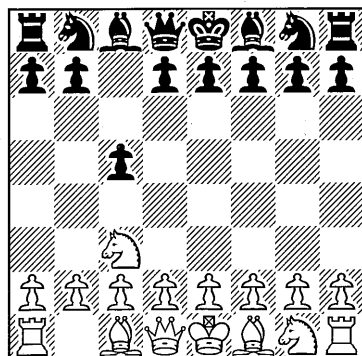


This position was reached in R.Schindwein-S.Skembris, Cappelle la Grande 1995. Having developed his pieces, Skembris's last was an important move to shore up e6. Unable to

attack e6, it's not so easy for White to find a plan and after 12 ♜fg5 h6 13 ♜f3 (13 ♜xf7? ♞xf7 14 ♙xe6+ ♞f8 doesn't really supply any compensation) 13... ♞c8 14 c3 c5! 15 ♙c2 ♞c6 16 ♞fe1 ♞ad8 Black had unravelled with an easy game.

B)

1 ♜c3 c5



2 ♜f3

A tricky move order. White may still transpose to an Open Sicilian after this, but he can also prefer an independent approach depending on how Black responds. White has also tried:

a) 2 e4 transposes straight into a Sicilian and should make Black's day.

b) 2 f4 will often lead to a Grand-Prix Attack after 2... ♜c6 3 e4 or 2...d5 3 e4 (which is the so-called Toilet sub-variation), but Black can also head for an unusual form of the Bird's with 2...d5.

c) 2 d4 cxd4 3 ♞xd4 ♜c6 4 ♞h4 ♜f6 was the beginning of no less an encounter than A.Morozevich-G.Kasparov, Frankfurt (rapid) 2000.

Black went on to win after 5 ♖f3 d5, but White could have preferred 5 ♗g5, transposing to a variation of the Trompowsky. The 13th World Champion should probably, however, have delayed ...♖c6 in favour of 3...e6 when White lacks a good move: 4 e4 (or 4 ♗f4 ♖c6 5 ♖d2 d5 6 ♖f3 f6 7 0-0-0 ♗b4 8 a3 ♗xc3 9 ♖xc3 e5 and White found himself pretty much forced into a slightly desperate piece sacrifice on e5 in R.Schlindwein-W.Gerstner, Waldshut 1991) 4...♖c6 5 ♖a4 a6 6 ♖f3 ♖c7 7 ♗g5 ♗b8! and Black enjoyed a rather favourable version of an Open Sicilian in T.Hamilton-H.Nakamura, Parsippany 2005.

Before exploring 2 ♖f3 in more detail, it may help different types of Sicilian player to know what move order after 1 ♖c3 c5 2 ♖f3 they should be aiming for:

a) **Dragon** players (and those happy to play the **Accelerated Dragon** when White hasn't a Maróczy option; i.e. players who are prepared to meet 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 ♖c3 with 3...g6) should be pretty happy with the variation 2...♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 g6 when White's independent options aren't particularly convincing.

b) **Najdorf** exponents might not be too comfortable after 2...d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 g3 (especially in view of Ligterink's 5...♖c6 6 ♗g2 ♗d7 7 ♗g5!). They might well thus prefer to reach the Najdorf via the move order 2...♖f6, hoping for 3 e4 d6 4 d4 and intending to meet 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 with 4...d5!?

c) 2...♖f6 is also a move order

which may appeal to **Classical** players, but they actually have a good chance of reaching their favourite Sicilian after 2...♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♗g5 e6.

d) **Sveshnikov** players must avoid 2...♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♗g5 c5? 6 ♖db5 d6 7 ♖d5! when Black already pretty much has to jettison an exchange with 7...♗e6. As 4...e5?! 5 ♖db5 d6? 6 ♖d5! is another position to avoid, the Sveshnikov exponent should probably try 2...♖f6, hoping for 3 e4 ♖c6 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♖xd4 e5.

e) Both **Scheveningen** and **Kan** players should be happy with the move order 2...e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 a6 5 g3 ♖f6.

f) With apologies to fans of slightly less popular Sicilian lines, that only leaves the **Taimanov** out of Black's main options. Unfortunately Taimanov players (or rather those who meet 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖d4 e6 5 ♖c3 with 5...♖c7; should Black prefer 5...a6, he can follow 1 ♖c3 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 a6) should probably not meet 1 ♖c3 with 1...c5. Quite simply 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 e6?! 5 ♗f4! favours White, such as after 5...d6 6 ♖db5 e5 7 ♗e3! ♖f6 8 ♗g5.

Having mapped out the territory a little, we can now return to 2 ♖f3 and further explore:

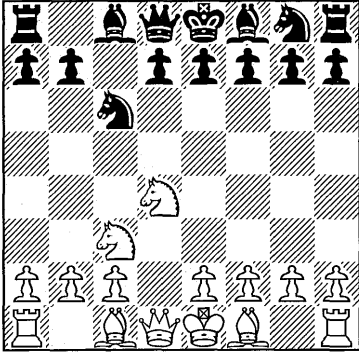
B1: 2...♖c6

B2: 2...♖f6

B3: 2...e6

B1)

1 ♖c3 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4



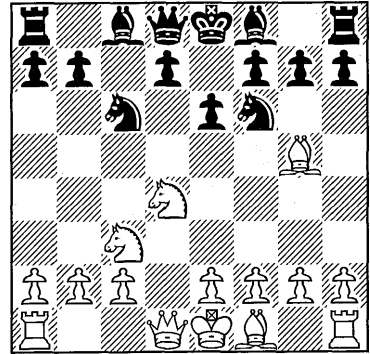
4...g6

The choice of the Dragon and Accelerated Dragon player. Those who prefer to reach a Classical Sicilian should prefer 4...♟f6 and then:

a) 5 g3 can be met by 5...g6, taking play into a Fianchetto Dragon (see note 'a' to White's 5th move below), or by 5...d5 6 ♟g2 (6 ♟g5?! is also well met by 6...e5! when 7 ♟db5 a6! 8 ♟xd5!? axb5 9 ♟xf6+ gxf6 10 ♟xd8+ ♟xd8 11 ♟xf6 ♟g8 12 ♟xe5 ♟c6 didn't give White enough for the piece in D.Van Geet-Y.Balashov, Beverwijk 1965, and 8 ♟xf6? gxf6 9 ♟a3 ♟b4 10 ♟ab1 d4 11 a3 ♟d5 was even worse for him in F.Feistenauer-E.Steflitsch, Austrian League 1997) 6...e5 7 ♟b3!? (7 ♟xc6 bxc6 8 0-0 also led to an unbalanced but roughly equal position after 8...♟d6 9 ♟a4 ♟e6 10 c4 ♟d7 in B.Pel-A.Kovalev, Groningen 1996) 7...d4 8 ♟b1 ♟e6 9 c3 ♟d5 (9...dxc3!? 10 ♟xd8+ ♟xd8 11 ♟xc3 ♟b4 is also fine for Black) 10 0-0 ♟xg2 11 ♟xg2 ♟d5+ was seen in A.Sydor-V.Tukmakov, European Team Championship, Bath 1973. Keilhack points out that this isn't as

good for Black as it may at first appear, but certainly the second player shouldn't be too unhappy with such a position out of the opening.

b) 5 ♟g5 e6 leads to a further divide:

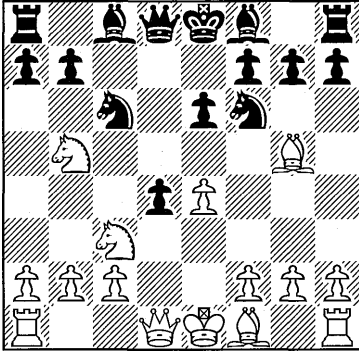


b1) 6 e3 ♟b4 7 ♟d2 (Dunnington preferred 7 ♟db5!?, but failed to consider the critical 7...d5 8 ♟xf6 gxf6 which is quite reasonable for Black) 7...h6! 8 ♟xf6 ♟xf6 9 a3 ♟a5 10 ♟e2 d5 11 0-0 ♟d7 left Black slightly for choice due to his easily-acquired bishop pair in A.Sydor-M.Tal, Lublin 1974.

b2) 6 ♟xf6 ♟xf6! (6...gxf6 can be countered by the awkward 7 e3; this is one reason why Black should prefer 5...e6 to 5...d6) 7 ♟db5 ♟e5 (7...♟b4!? 8 ♟d6+ ♟e7 is also promising) 8 ♟d2 a6 9 f4 ♟b8 10 ♟d4 d5 11 e3 ♟d6 12 ♟e2 0-0 was another promising opening for Black in J.Lubbers-T.Kohl, correspondence 2001.

b3) 6 ♟db5!? d5 7 e4 (critical, whereas 7 ♟xf6!? gxf6 prepared to drive back the b5-knight in J.Brooke-D.Gormally, Newport 1997, and 7 ♟f4? e5 8 ♟g5 costs White too much time;

Black can then pretty much force White into a speculative piece sacrifice with 8...a6 9 ♖xd5 axb5 10 ♖xf6+ gxf6 11 ♗xd8+ ♖xd8 12 ♗xf6 ♖g8 13 ♗xe5 ♖c6) 7...d4

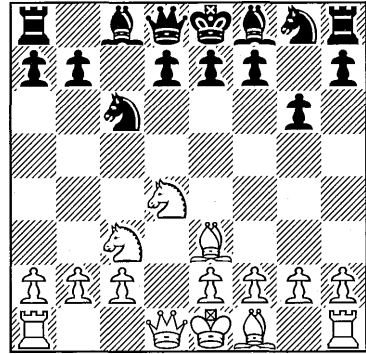


8 e5 ♖xe5 9 ♗f4?! (9 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 10 ♖xd4 is equal, but White should probably prefer this) 9...♖g6 (Black can even consider 9...dxc3!?) 10 ♗xe5 cxb2 11 ♖c7+ ♗xc7! 12 ♗xc7 ♗b4+ 13 c3 ♗xc3+ 14 ♖e2 ♖d5 15 ♖b1 ♖xc7 16 ♗c2 ♖d5 with promising compensation for the queen) 10 ♖c7+ ♖e7 11 ♗g3 dxc3 12 ♗xd8+ ♖xd8 13 0-0-0+ ♗d7 14 ♖xa8 ♖c8 15 ♖c7 a6! prevented White's knight from escaping and, although not fully clear, looked good for Black in P.Morssink-E.Ragozin, Haarlem 2000.

b4) 6 ♗d2 ♗e7 7 0-0-0 0-0 leaves White with nothing better than 8 e4, when we have finally reached a main line Rauzer after 8...d6. However, not all Classical players meet the Rauzer with ...♗e7. Those who don't can still play 5...e6 (hoping for 6 e4 d6) and after 6 ♗d2 can consider the rare, but far from illogical 6...d5!?. This has surpris-

ingly only received the one outing so far: 7 e4 dxe4 8 ♗b5 (and not 8 ♖db5?! ♗xd2+ 9 ♖xd2 ♖b8 10 ♗xf6 gxf6 11 ♖xe4 f5 12 ♖ed6+ ♖e7 13 ♖xc8+ ♗xc8 – Keilhack – when Black takes over the initiative) 8...♗d7 9 0-0-0 ♖xd4!?) 10 ♗xd4 ♗xb5 11 ♖xb5 ♗xd4 12 ♖xd4 ♖d5! 13 ♖hd1 ♗e7 14 ♖c7+ ♖xc7 15 ♗xe7 f5 was unclear but roughly balanced in T.Harding-I.Perevertkina, correspondence 1997.

5 ♗e3

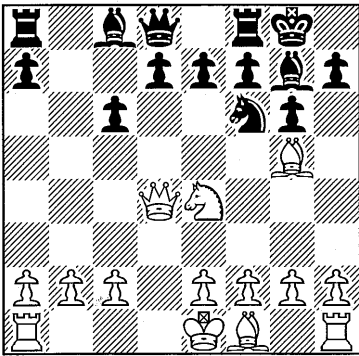


An attempt to exploit the absence of e4, this was recommended in *Winning Unorthodox Openings*. As well as 5 e4, White has tried:

a) 5 g3 is White's most sensible alternative and usually leads to the Fianchetto variation of the Dragon (which isn't considered especially critical these days) after 5...♗g7 6 ♖b3 (6 ♖xc6 bxc6 7 ♗g2 ♖f6 is also quite comfortable for Black) 6...♖f6 7 ♗g2 0-0 8 0-0 d6 9 e4 (or 9 ♖e1 ♗d7 10 e4). Black can also consider the move order 7...d6 8 0-0 ♗d7 when White is again best advised to advance his e-pawn. Failure to do so risks losing the initiative and 9 ♗f4?!

♖c8! 10 ♖e1 ♕h3 11 ♕h1 h5! 12 e4 (the right idea, but this comes too late) 12...h4 13 ♘d5?! ♘h5! 14 c3 ♘xf4 15 ♘xf4 ♕g4 left White under some pressure, especially since 16 f3 ♕d7 17 g4 h3! effectively left White playing a piece in arrears in A.Slinger-R.Palliser, York 2005.

b) 5 ♘xc6?! bxc6 6 ♗d4 should be compared to our main line. After 6...♘f6 7 ♕g5 (7 e4 is well met by 7...♗b6!) 7...♕g7 8 ♘e4 White succeeds in forcing a structural concession, but Black gains plenty of dynamic counter-chances: 8...0-0!



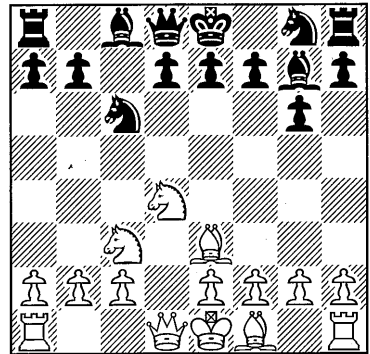
9 ♘xf6+ (or 9 ♕xf6 exf6 10 ♘d6 f5 11 ♗b4 ♗c7 12 c3 c5! 13 ♗f4 ♖b8 and the pin, allied to Black's queenside pressure, left White in some trouble in B.Dieu-S.Plantet, French League 2004) 9...exf6 10 ♕f4 f5 11 ♗b4 a5 12 ♗a3 ♗b6 13 c3 d5 14 ♕d6 ♖e8 15 e3 ♕a6! 16 ♕xa6 ♗xa6 17 0-0-0 ♖e4 gave Black good attacking chances in R.Stockmann-P.Pasedag, German League 1998.

c) 5 ♕g5!? is a better idea. One sensible response is 5...♗a5!? (5...♕g7 6 ♘db5 ♘f6 7 ♘d5 ♘xd5 8 ♘d6+ illus-

trates White's main idea; not that this is so bad for Black after 8...♕f8 9 ♗xd5 ♗a5+ 10 ♗xa5 ♘xa5) 6 ♘xc6 (or 6 h4! ♕g7 7 ♘b3 ♕xc3+! 8 bxc3 ♗xc3+ which is cold-blooded but good; after 9 ♕d2 ♗e5 10 e3?! d6 11 c4 ♘f6 12 ♖c1 ♘e4! White must have been sorely regretting his early play in V.Kochetkov-E.Egorov, Samara 2002) 6...bxc6 7 ♗d4 e5, although in M.Dupre Guegan-J.Le Roux, Fouesnant 1997, Black preferred the more ambitious 7...♗xg5!? 8 ♗xh8 ♘f6 9 e3 d6, trapping the white queen at the cost of the exchange.

d) 5 ♕f4?! is another rather ambitious and slightly misguided idea. As shown by Keilhack, Black can even fall in with White's plans since 5...♕g7 6 ♘db5 d6 7 ♘d5 ♖b8 is hardly crushing for White. Probably even better, however, is 5...♘f6 6 ♘db5 d6 when 7 ♕g5 a6 8 ♕xf6 exf6 9 ♘d4 ♕g7 10 e3 0-0 11 ♕e2 f5! 12 ♘xc6 bxc6 13 0-0 ♖b8 gave Black at the very least plenty of dark square pressure to offset his worse structure in A.Hermlin-R.Nevanlinna, Jyvaskyla 1995.

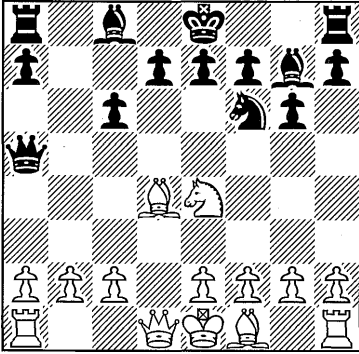
5...♕g7



6 ♗xc6 bxc6

The only move mentioned by Dunnington, but 6...dxc6!? 7 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 is also rather comfortable for Black.

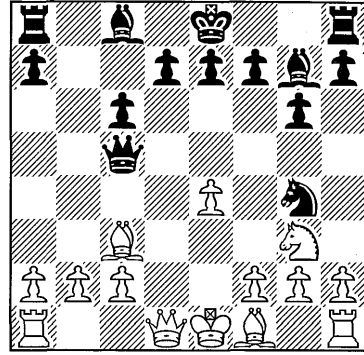
7 ♕d4 ♗f6 8 ♗e4 ♖a5+!



Another idea which goes unmentioned in *Winning Unorthodox Openings*, but not by the ever-thorough Keilhack. He also points out that again Black may also be happy to accept doubled pawns with 8...♖b8!?. Then 9 ♕xf6 (9 e3? ♗xe4! 10 ♕xg7 ♖a5+ 11 c3 ♗g8 was not a success for Van Geet with his favourite opening in D.Van Geet-K.Langeweg, Beverwijk 1967) 9...♕xf6 10 ♗xf6+ exf6 is critical, but far from clear; even without an extra dark-squared bishop, Black's queenside activity compensates for his fragmented structure.

9 c3

Trying to keep tension since 9 ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 10 ♗xd2 0-0 11 e4 d6 already left Black very slightly for choice due to his control of d5 in K.Metzer-V.Rozhkov, correspondence 1990. That was, however, preferable to the continuation of E.Hurwitz-P.Hopwood, York 2003: 9 ♕c3?! ♖f5! 10 ♗g3 ♖c5 11 e4?? ♗g4!



12 ♖d2 ♕xc3 13 bxc3 ♗xf2! and Black won material.

9...♖f5 10 ♗g3!?

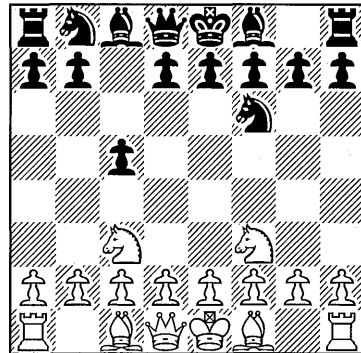
Once again 10 ♗xf6+ ♕xf6 11 ♕xf6 ♖xf6 is very comfortable for Black.

10...♖e6!?

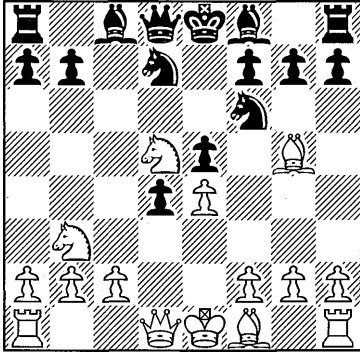
This was the course of J.Brooke-R.Palliser, Bradford 2005, in which Black clearly didn't have any problems after 11 ♖a4 0-0 12 e3 ♖d6! 13 ♖a5 ♖b8 14 ♕e2 d6 15 c4 c5 16 ♕c3 ♕b7 17 f3 h5!, and 10...♖f4 might have been even more accurate.

B2)

1 ♗c3 c5 2 ♗f3 ♗f6



Black's inability to play ...0-0 doesn't seem especially problematic) 7...d4 8 ♖d5 when he remarks that 'White has the initiative for the time being'.



However, this position should be fully viable for Black. One idea is the radical 8...h6!? 9 ♖xf6+ ♖xf6 10 ♙xf6 gxf6 and if 11 ♙b5+, then 11...♙d7. Black's kingside structure is split, but just as in the Sveshnikov, it is precisely this feature of the position which supplies a lot of his dynamic counterplay. Furthermore, White's knight is not so well placed on b3 and Black shouldn't be worse in this unbalanced position.

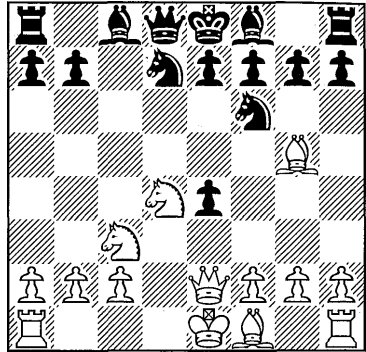
7 ♖e2

Playing to regain the pawn and to castle long. White has also tried:

a) 7 ♖b3 ♖c7!? 8 ♙xf6 (or 8 ♖d2 when 8...♖e5 9 0-0-0 doesn't especially convince for Black and so he should prefer 8...a6 9 0-0-0 e6) 8...♖xf6 9 ♙b5+ ♙d7 10 ♙xd7+ was H.Augustin-H.Bellmann, correspondence 1997, when Black wouldn't have had any problems after 10...♖xd7 11 ♖xd7+ ♖xd7 12 ♖xe4 g6 (Bellmann).

b) 7 ♙c4 a6 8 0-0 ♖a5 9 ♖d2 e6 was

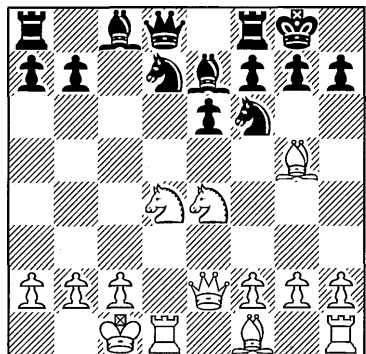
A.Kaunzinger-R.Prediger, German League 1997, when White should probably have recaptured on e4 with equality, rather than drift into trouble after 10 a3 b5! 11 ♙a2 ♙b7 12 ♖fe1?! ♖b6 13 ♖ad1 ♙c5 14 ♙e3 0-0.



7...e6!?

Treating the position like a French Rubinstein in which the white queen is possibly a little misplaced and Black has already got in the freeing ...c5. This appears to improve over 7...h6 8 ♙xf6 ♖xf6 9 0-0-0 ♙d7 10 ♖xe4 which slightly favoured White in B.Diev-Somgogno, correspondence 1997.

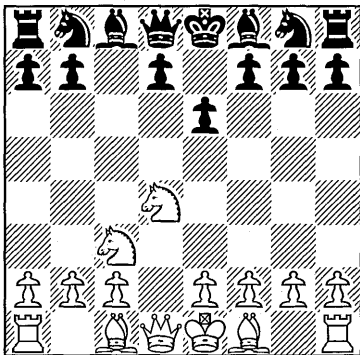
8 0-0-0 ♙e7 9 ♖xe4 0-0



This is an important, albeit untested, position for the assessment of 4...d5!?, and White doesn't appear to have any advantage: for example, 10 ♖xf6 ♗xf6 11 ♜xf6+ (or 11 ♖b1 a6, followed by ...♗c7) 11...♗xf6 12 ♜b5 ♜b6! 13 ♜d6?! (White should prefer 13 ♗e4 ♗d7 14 ♗d3 g6, although this is also fine for Black and 15 ♗xb7?? drops a piece due to the check on g5) 13...♗d8 14 ♜xc8 ♗axc8 15 ♗xd8+ ♗xd8 16 ♗e3 ♜d5 and Black's initiative outweighs White's theoretically-superior minor piece.

B3)

1 ♜c3 c5 2 ♜f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4



4...a6

We've already noted that 4...♜c6 is rather suspect and 4...♜f6 5 ♜db5 is also probably best avoided. The text is a good way to limit White's options (and also goes unmentioned by Dunnington), but should any Scheveningen players not wish to play ...a6 so early, they might wish to consider the solid 4...d6 5 g3 ♜f6.

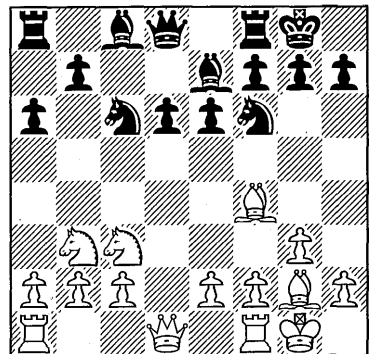
5 g3

Due to Black's flexible set-up, this is

White's only real alternative to accepting an Open Sicilian with 5 e4.

5...♜f6 6 ♗g2 d5

This central advance is both logical and strong, though Black might prefer to retain more flexibility with 6...♗e7 7 0-0 0-0. Then 8 e4 d6 is a fianchetto Scheveningen, but Kan players might prefer 8...♗c7. White doesn't have to play 8 e4, but the alternatives rather lack punch: for example, 8 ♗f4 (or 8 b3?! d5 9 ♗b2 b5 10 e3 ♗b7 11 ♜ce2 ♗b6 12 ♜f4 ♜bd7 and Black was slightly better in M.Narciso Dublan-M.Marin, Andorra 1993) 8...d6 9 ♜b3 ♜c6



10 a4 d5! (costing a tempo, but challenging White to find a good plan; note, too, how Black delayed this until he could meet 11 e4 with 11...d4 and 12...e5) 11 a5?! ♗b4! cost White material (12 ♗d2 ♜xa5 13 ♜xd5 ♜xb3 14 ♗xb4 ♜xd5 15 ♗xf8 ♜xa1 16 ♗a3 ♜xc2 nets a pawn) in M.Kuijff-A.Wojtkiewicz, Wijk aan Zee 1993.

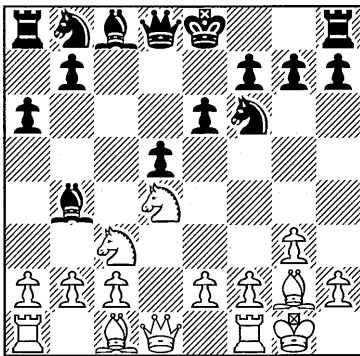
7 0-0

In view of Black's strong response, White should perhaps prefer 7 e4, although clearly this isn't the sort of at-

tacking, unusual position most 1 ♖c3 players are after. Following 7...♗xe4 8 ♗xe4 dxe4 9 ♕xe4 e5 10 ♗f5 ♖xd1+ 11 ♖xd1 ♗c6 12 ♖e1 f6 Black equalized comfortably in D.Van Geet-J.Donner, Utrecht 1961, and 11...♗d7!? might have been even more accurate.

7...♕b4!

Clamping down on e4, and this is much better than allowing White a small initiative with 7...♕e7 8 e4.

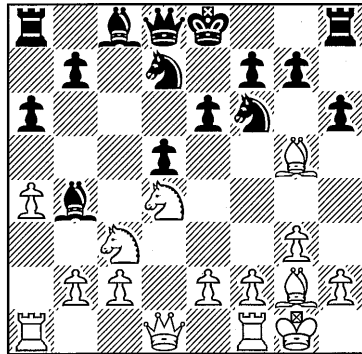


8 ♕g5

This doesn't especially impress, but like Keilhack, I'm at a loss to suggest a good move for White. Black was also pretty comfortable after 8 ♖d3 ♗bd7 9 a3 ♕e7 10 ♗f3 ♖c7 11 ♕g5 h6 12 ♕e3 0-0 in O.Bock-G.Schmid, Untergriesbach

2003, while in J.Havenaar-R.Gwaze, Oxford 2003, White decided that he had nothing better than 8 ♗b1! Unsurprisingly such an approach doesn't trouble Black and Gwaze was quickly better following 8...0-0 9 c3 ♕c5 10 ♗d2 ♗c6 11 ♗2b3 ♕a7 12 ♕g5 h6 13 ♕xf6 ♖xf6 14 ♖d2 ♖d8 15 ♖ad1 e5.

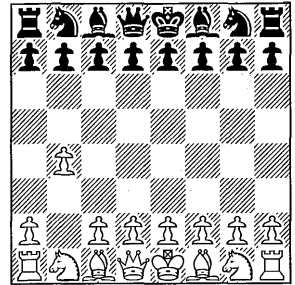
8...♗bd7 9 a4 h6



Once again Black tries to net the bishop pair, and this position was reached in A.Spice-I.Sokolov, European Club Cup, Eupen 1997. With 10 ♗a2 ♕e7 11 ♕d2 ♗c5 12 ♗c3 e5 13 ♗b3 ♗xb3 14 cxb3 ♕e6 White continued to thrash around, while Black developed classically and already enjoyed a pleasant advantage.

Chapter Nine

The Sokolsky



1 b4

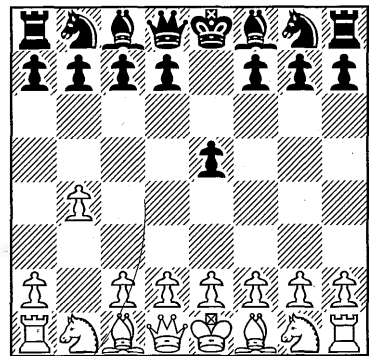
This is the Sokolsky Opening, but it has some other names: one being the Tartakower, even though Arthur Skipworth was playing 1 b4 some 51 years before Tartakower's famous 1919 win with it over Réti. Before that game, Tartakower was apparently inspired by a trip to Vienna Zoo; hence his christening 1 b4 the 'Orang-utan'! Enough of the nomenclature, and for our purposes it's more useful to know that Sokolskytes usually like to gain a space advantage on the queenside before challenging Black's centre. The opening can lead to some unbalanced reversed French positions, but Black has two more promising options:

A: 1...e5

B: 1...c6!?

A)

1 b4 e5



2 ♖b2

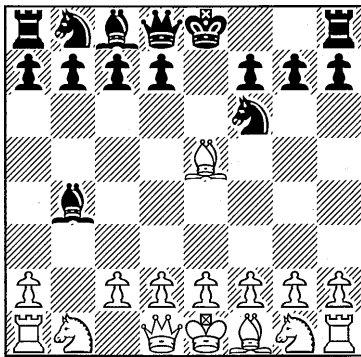
The main move, but if he is determined to maintain his queenside structure, White may prefer 2 a3. That doesn't place any immediate pressure on the black centre, though, and so ideal development with 2...d5 3 ♖b2 ♕d6 can and should be carried out. A.Dergatschova Daus-A.Yusupov, Essen (simul) 2000, was a good example of how Black can quite easily maintain his centre while developing: 4 e3 ♗f6 5 c4 c6! 6 d3 (or 6 ♗f3 ♕e7 7 ♗c3?! d4!

8 ♖e2 ♗g4 9 exd4 ♗xf3 10 gxf3 exd4 11 ♗xd4 a5 and Black had more than enough for the pawn in G.Welling-M.Sadler, Ostend 1991) 6...0-0 7 ♖d2 ♗e8 8 ♗e2 ♖bd7 9 ♗gf3 ♖f8 10 ♖c2 ♗g6 and Black was very comfortably placed with the Sokolskyte having failed to generate any real pressure against his centre.

2...♗xb4

This active capture is not as popular as one might expect. Presumably the old adage about 'central pawns being more important than flank pawns' has convinced many to pursue alternative paths, but this is just a good move. In return for the e-pawn Black gains easy and swift development, while White even has to be careful about tactics down the half-open e-file.

3 ♗xe5 ♖f6



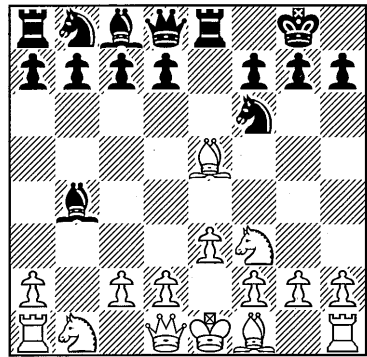
4 e3

The relatively common position reached after seven moves in our main line can come about in a number of ways. Another path is 4 c4 0-0 5 ♖f3 (or 5 e3 d5 6 ♖f3 ♗e8 7 cxd5 ♖xd5) 5...♗e8 6 e3 d5 7 cxd5 ♖xd5. With this move

order White might, however, delay e3 for 6 a3. Black can then continue as in the main line with 6...♗a5 7 e3 d5 8 cxd5 ♖xd5, although he should note that this position is slightly different: 9 ♗e2 ♗xe5?! is no longer so convincing due to 10 ♖xe5 ♖f6 11 ♖c4 ♖xa1 12 ♖xa5 (Kosten). Instead he should prefer 9...♖c6 (or first 9...c5), while a slightly different strategy is 6...♗f8!?. This retreat is sometimes voluntarily played after 6 e3 and here Black is effectively a tempo ahead. He will follow up with ...c5, ...g6 and ...♗g7 (to contest the long diagonal), before finally advancing his d-pawn.

4...0-0 5 ♖f3 ♗e8!

Black doesn't really need to know too much to play this line, so long as he remembers to develop quickly and actively.



However, if there is one useful concept to remember it is this: to develop the kingside and to break with ...d5, while delaying ...♖c6. This is much more tricky than an immediate 5...♖c6 and is a line rather neglected in Dunnington's coverage of 1 b4 in his *Win-*

ning *Unorthodox Openings* (the most recent source for Sokolskytes).

6 c4

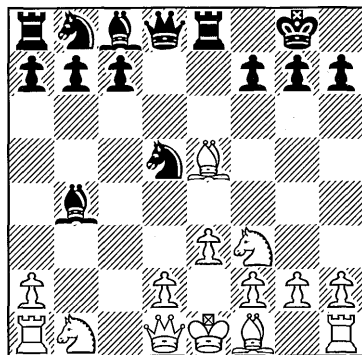
White is usually advised to contest the centre with an early c4 (either here or back on move 4), but this is a rather risky strategy. A quieter and possibly more prudent approach is 6 e2 d5 7 0-0, although this doesn't disrupt Black's development at all. Indeed, he has a pleasant choice here: 7...c5, followed by ... c6 with ideas of ...d4, is one good approach, and another is 7... bd7 !?. After the latter, R.Vidoniak-S.Tiviakov, Gausdal 2005, continued 8 b2 b6 9 d3 d7 10 c1 a4 ! 11 a3 a5 12 d4 ?! b6 13 f3 c5 14 e2 c7 15 bc3 g4 ! and Black was already the side firmly in the driving seat.

Returning to the position after 6 e2 d5, and possibly this is a better time for 7 c4, although a future star showed a good way to deal with it in V.Akopian-R.Ponomariov, Verdun 1995: 7...c5!? (7...dxc4 8 xc4 c6 9 b2 g4 is a reasonable alternative) 8 cxd5 xd5 9 0-0 c6 10 b2 f5 and Black had good pressure down the central files before gaining the advantage after 11 c1 e7 12 c3 ad8 13 a4 ?! f4 !

6...d5 7 cxd5

Once again, I suspect that if he knows what's good for him, White might well prefer the much less common 7 b2 . Black can then play 7... c6 8 cxd5 xd5 9 a3 a5 or follow Ponomariov's handling and transpose to the last note with 7...c5!? 8 cxd5 xd5 9 e2 c6 10 0-0 f5 .

7... xd5

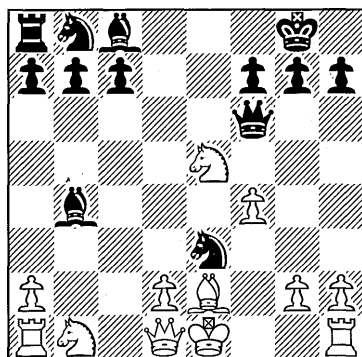


8 b2

Trying to escape the tactics down the e-file, and the alternatives are littered with white corpses. For example:

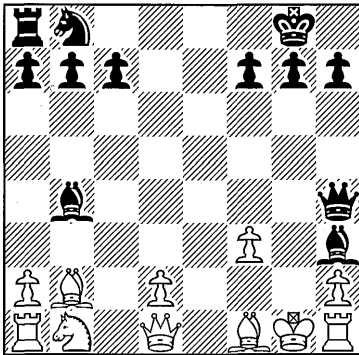
a) 8 c3 ? xe5 ! 9 xe5 xc3 10 b3 (and not 10 dxc3? xc3 +) 10... d5 11 e4 (or 11 c4 e6 12 xd5 xd5 13 xb4 xe5) 11... f6 12 xd5 c6 13 xf7 + xf7 14 xf7 xf7 sees Black's active minor pieces somewhat outweigh White's rook and pawn.

b) 8 e2 ? is even worse for White: 8... xe5 ! 9 xe5 f6 10 f4 (otherwise Black just develops and then attacks on the kingside after 10 0-0 xe5 11 d4 g5 12 f3 d6) 10... xe3



11 ♖a4 (alternatively 11 ♖b3 ♜xg2+ 12 ♕d1 ♜xf4 was already pretty much winning for Black in Lindqvist-P.Soerenfors, correspondence 1975) 11...b5!? (11...♙d7 12 ♜xd7 ♖xa1 13 ♕f2 ♜d5 is also rather strong) 12 ♖xb5 c6 13 ♖d3 ♜xg2+ 14 ♕d1 ♜xf4 15 ♖e3 ♜xe2 16 ♕xe2 ♙a6+ left Black the exchange down but with a winning attack in K.Jaskulski-W.Zehm, correspondence 1985.

c) 8 ♙c4 ♙g4 9 ♙b2 ♜xe3! (practically dangerous, but this probably only leads to a draw should White defend accurately; Black might thus also wish to consider simply developing with 9...♜c6 10 0-0 ♖d7) 10 fxex3 ♜xe3+ 11 ♕f2 ♜xf3+ 12 gxf3 ♖h4+ 13 ♕g1! (13 ♕e3?! definitely encourages Black to play for more with 13...♙h5!, after which 14 ♖g1? ♙c5+ 15 d4 ♜c6! 16 dxc5 ♜e8+ 17 ♕d3 ♙g6+ 18 ♕c3 ♖f6+ began a winning king hunt in Kuhn-Engel, correspondence 1985) 13...♙h3 14 ♙f1



14...♖g5+ 15 ♕f2 ♖h4+ 16 ♕e2 ♖e7+ is a perpetual, although in a number of correspondence games Black has played for more with 14...♜c6!?. This leaves

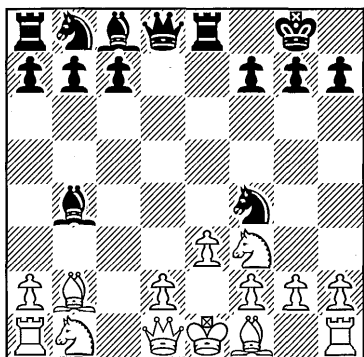
Black with good attacking chances, a healthy lead in development and three pawns for the rook. Perhaps a materialistic computer will find some deep way to refute the sacrifice, but I certainly haven't found anything too convincing. One game to reach this fascinating position was K.Ramm-F.Gawehns, correspondence 1978: 15 ♙xh3 ♖xh3 16 ♖f1 ♖f5! 17 ♖g2 (17 ♖e2!? ♜d8 18 ♖e4 is proposed by the machine, but Black has at least a draw after 18...♙c5+ 19 ♕g2 ♖g5+ 20 ♕h3 ♖h6+ 21 ♕g3 ♜d4!) 17...♙c5+ 18 ♕f1 ♜d4!? 19 ♖g4? (19 ♙xd4! ♙xd4 20 ♜c3 ♜e8 21 ♜e1 was correct when Black can force a draw with 21...♜xe1+ 22 ♕xe1 ♙xc3 23 dxc3 ♖b1+ 24 ♕f2 ♖b6+, or ambitiously try for more with 21...♖d3+!? 22 ♜e2 ♖xd2 23 f4 c5) 19...♖d3+ 20 ♕g2 ♜e8 21 ♙g1 f5 and Black had a winning attack with the majority of White's pieces still unable to come to their king's aid.

d) 8 a3!? ♜c6!? 9 ♙b2 (White is probably wise to avoid 9 ♙b5?! ♜xe5! 10 ♙xe8 ♖xe8 11 axb4 ♜d3+ 12 ♕f1 ♜5xb4 with a useful bind and good light square play for the exchange) 9...♙d6 10 ♙e2 ♙g4 is fairly playable for White, not that Black is worse here. White may be able to advance with d4, but the black pieces will restrain any further advance of his central pawns and Black may also look to attack on the kingside.

8...♜f4!

Disrupting White's development. Black can also develop with 8...♙f5 and another good option is 8...♜c6. After the latter, White should probably play the

position after 9 ♖b5 ♗g4 unless he has undertaken a fair amount of analysis of 9 ♗e2. Once again this is a rather risky choice in view of 9...♞xe3!? which occurred in R.Franke-A.Loeffler, correspondence 1984: 10 fxe3 ♜xe3 11 ♞b3 (11 ♞a4!? ♜xg2+ 12 ♜d1 isn't such an easy nut to crack and those tempted by 8...♝c6 should also make sure that they analyse 11 ♞c1) 11...♜xg2+ 12 ♜f2? (White had to try 12 ♜d1 ♗e6 13 ♞d3, even though Black retains dangerous attacking chances for the rook after 13...♞e7) 12...♗h3! 13 d4 ♞e7 14 ♜bd2 and Black went on to win a brilliancy after 14...♞e8, though he could have wrapped up proceedings somewhat faster with 14...♗xd2 15 ♜xd2 ♜xd4.



9 ♗e5

Blocking the e-file, but in few of Black's aggressive response, White should probably prefer something else:

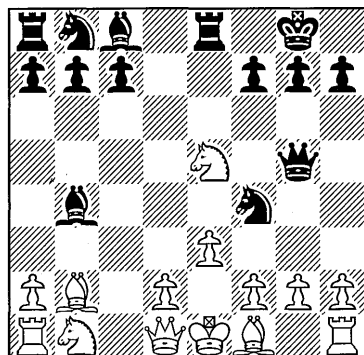
a) 9 ♞b3 has frequently been met by the tempting, if rather unclear 9...♗a6!?. Black can also consider 9...♝c6, when 10 ♗c4?! (White's best move according to practice, but a number of correspondence players appear to have missed

the following queen sacrifice) 10...♜xg2+ is untested, but appears promising. After 11 ♜f1 ♗h3 12 ♗xf7+ ♜h8 13 ♗xe8 ♞xe8 Black has a rather strong attack for the exchange; the main point being 14 ♜g5 ♜d4!! when 15 ♜f7+ (or 15 ♗xd4 ♞b5+ 16 d3 ♜xe3+ 17 ♜e2 ♞xg5 18 ♗xe3 ♞g4+ 19 f3 ♞g2+ 20 ♜d1 ♞xh1+ and White is routed) 15...♞xf7 16 ♞xf7 ♜f4+ 17 ♜e1 ♜d3+ 18 ♜d1 ♜xb2+ 19 ♜c1 ♜d3+ 20 ♜d1 ♗g4+ 21 f3 ♗xf3+ 22 ♞xf3 ♜xf3 23 ♜e2 ♜fe5 sees Black regain the queen with interest.

b) 9 a3!? hopes for 9...♗a5?? 10 ♞a4. Black should prefer 9...♗d6, after which 10 g3 (10 ♞c2 ♗g4 11 ♜c3 ♜c6 12 0-0-0!? ♜g6 is also rather unbalanced, although again the black position is probably the easier to play) 10...♜h3 11 ♗g2 ♜c6 12 d4 ♞e7 13 ♞d3 ♗g4 saw White face continued problems getting castled, though the position was objectively fairly unclear in E.Teichmann-Z.Zhao, Melbourne 2000.

9...♞g5!

Preparing a promising exchange sacrifice, while also setting a nasty trap.



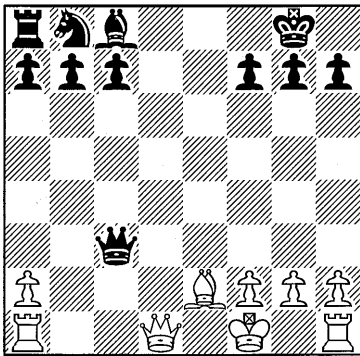
10 exf4

Taking up the challenge. Alternatively, 10 $\text{c}3$ doesn't really trouble Black after 10... $\text{f}5$ (or 10... $\text{a}5$), but that is superior to falling for 10 $\text{g}3?$ $\text{xe}5!$ 11 $\text{gxf}4$ (or 11 $\text{xe}5$ $\text{xe}5$ 12 $\text{c}3$ $\text{d}5$ and the white position is on the verge of collapse) 11... $\text{xe}3+$! 12 $\text{fxe}3?$ (12 $\text{e}2$ is hardly much of an improvement; White didn't last long after 12... $\text{g}2$ 13 $\text{f}1$ $\text{e}4$ in P.Leisebein-D.Rosner, correspondence 1989) 12... $\text{h}4+$ 13 $\text{e}2$ $\text{g}4+$ when the white queen goes west.

10... $\text{xf}4$ 11 $\text{e}2$

White has also tried 11 $\text{e}2?$!, but Black regains his piece with advantage after 11... $\text{c}6$ 12 $\text{g}3$ $\text{f}5$ 13 $\text{f}4$ $\text{f}6$ 14 $\text{g}2$ $\text{fxe}5$.

11... $\text{xe}5$ 12 $\text{xe}5$ $\text{xe}5$ 13 $\text{c}3$ $\text{xc}3$ 14 $\text{dxc}3$ $\text{xc}3+$ 15 $\text{f}1$

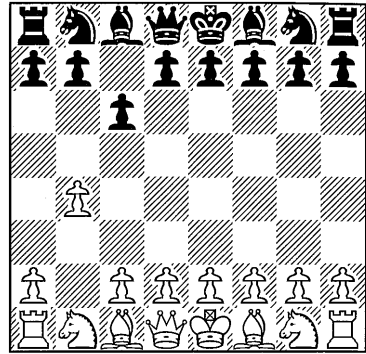


The last few moves have been pretty forced and it's time to take stock: Black has two pawns for the exchange and it will take White some time to untangle his kingside. That should promise Black some advantage and a number of correspondence games have

suggested that he has at least an edge here: for example, 15... $\text{c}6$ 16 $\text{c}1$ $\text{f}6$ 17 $\text{b}3$ $\text{d}4!$ 18 $\text{c}3$ $\text{f}5$ 19 $\text{d}1$ $\text{d}8!$ 20 $\text{xc}7?$! $\text{c}8$ gave Black a winning attack in G.Billing-J.Bogert, correspondence 1993.

B)

1 b4 c6!?



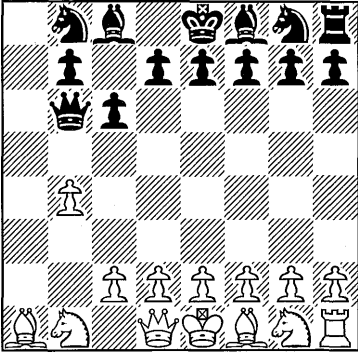
One advantage of the Sokolsky is that it dissuades Black from playing 1... $\text{c}5$. Pushing the c-pawn just one square is, however, a rather effective reply. The idea is simple: Black wants both to prevent White from gaining further space with $\text{b}5$ and to immediately attack the $\text{b}4$ -pawn.

2 $\text{b}2$

Logical, and White's most popular move, but those who have seen Black's idea before might well try something else:

a) 2 $\text{a}3$ $\text{a}5!$ is an idea Black has also tried after 2 $\text{b}2$. Here the wing counter has often induced 3 $\text{b}2?$! (White should prefer 3 $\text{b}5!$?, not that this should overly concern Black: after 3... $\text{e}5$ 4 $\text{b}2$ $\text{d}6$ he has reasonable cen-

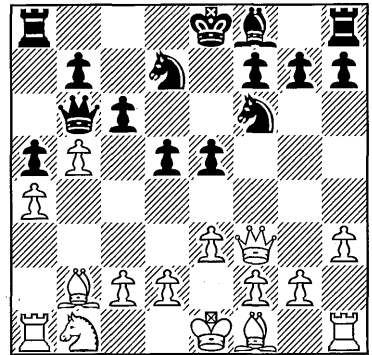
tral control and White might well regret the advance of his b-pawn should he be forced to exchange on c6 or if Black can bring a knight to c5) 3...axb4 4 axb4 ♖xa1 5 ♙xa1 ♖b6



when neither 6 ♙c3 nor 6 c3 is particularly appetizing for White (which is why after 1...c6 2 ♙b2 a5, he often tries the gambit 3 b5!?). After the latter, White's dark-squared bishop is somewhat restricted and Black can develop with an easy game; for example, C.Haessler-J.Donaldson, Seattle 1980, continued 6...d5 7 ♘f3 ♘f6 8 e3 ♙f5 9 d4 e6 10 ♘bd2 ♙d6 11 ♙e2 ♘bd7 12 ♘h4 0-0! and White was worse due to his queenside weaknesses.

b) 2 e3 is White's main way of delaying his ideal bishop development on b2. Black should still respond with 2...♖b6 3 a3 a5 4 b5!? (once again this advance can be safely ignored; White has also tried the positionally grim 4 bxa5 when Black has shown a willingness to activate his rook, but should probably just prefer 4...♖xa5, followed by development) 4...d5! (prudently avoiding the greedy 4...cxb5?! 5 ♘c3 b4

6 axb4 ♖xb4 7 ♙a3 ♖b6 8 ♖b1 ♖e6 9 ♘f3 d6?! 10 ♘d4! which left White with a serious initiative in H.Bennett-R.Gibbons, Auckland 1996) 5 ♘f3 (or 5 ♙b2 ♘f6 6 ♘f3 ♙g4! 7 a4 ♘bd7 8 h3 ♙h5!? 9 c4 e6 10 ♘c3 ♙b4 11 ♖c1 0-0 and Black had good squares for all his minor pieces in W.McGeary-M.Oshiro, Seattle 1990) 5...♘f6 6 a4 ♙g4 7 h3 ♙xf3! (Black could also retreat to h5, but taking over the centre is both simple and fairly effective) 8 ♖xf3 e5 9 ♙b2 ♘bd7



10 g4?! (despite being well advanced on the queenside, White can't easily create any pressure there, hence this slightly desperate attempt to gain some counterplay) 10...♙d6 11 ♙e2 0-0 12 g5 ♘e4 13 ♖f5 ♖d8! 14 h4 ♖e7 and White was well advanced on both flanks, but Black was well centralized, had fewer weaknesses and enjoyed the advantage in M.Ardaman-E.Anka, Chicago 2006.

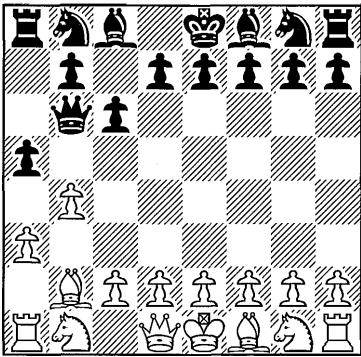
c) 2 c4 usually just transposes to our main line after 2...♖b6 (a pretty reasonable alternative is 2...♘f6 3 ♙b2 d5 4 e3 e6) 3 a3 a5 4 c5 ♖c7 5 ♙b2 axb4 6 axb4 ♖xa1 7 ♙xa1.

White has also tried 3 ♖b3!?, but once more that allows Black to break up the queenside with 3...a5!, since 4 a3 axb4 5 c5? no longer works due to the hanging c1-bishop after 5...♞xc5. Thus in A.Dergatschova Daus-A.Naiditsch, Ruhrgebiet 1997, White had to resort to 4 bxa5 ♞xa5 5 ♘c3, but after 5...♙f6 6 e3 e5 7 ♗b2 ♗a3 8 ♚f3 ♗xb2 9 ♞xb2 0-0 10 ♗e2 d6 11 e4, Black had a pretty comfortable position and should have continued with 11...♘a6 and 12...♘c5.

2...♞b6

Wasting no time in attacking b4, and now White's hand is pretty much forced since both 3 c3 and 3 ♗c3 are almost too ugly to contemplate.

3 a3 a5



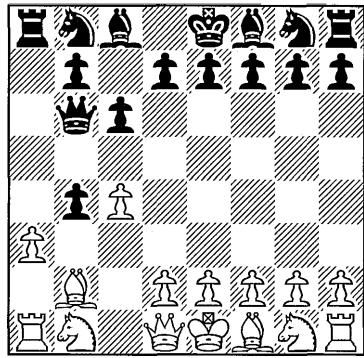
4 c4

A key tactical trick to reduce the pressure against b4. If White had to defend instead with 4 c3?! then I suspect that the Sokolsky would be much rarer than it already is. Black should respond by simply developing his pieces, leaving White to worry about his queenside problems: 4...♘f6 5 e3 d5 6 ♚f3 ♗g4 7 ♗e2 ♘bd7 being a good

way to begin in V.Popov-V.Dragiev, Sofia 1995.

A better alternative to 4 c4 is 4 ♘f3!? axb4 5 ♗d4 ♞c7 (and not 5...c5? 6 ♗xc5!) 6 axb4 ♞xa1 7 ♗xa1 when Black cannot advance his e-pawn. He must also avoid 7...d5?? 8 ♗e5!, but does have a good move in the logical if slightly cheeky 7...♞b6!.

4...axb4



5 c5! ♞c7

Retreating rather than lose a rook after 5...♞xc5?? 6 axb4.

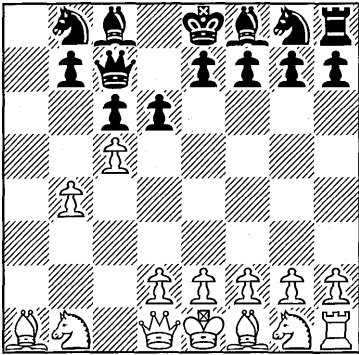
6 axb4 ♞xa1 7 ♗xa1

Slightly surprisingly, this position was assessed by Nunn as giving White an edge in NCO. Perhaps he was impressed by the trick White has just carried out, or by White's extra space, but Black should be fine here. Indeed, White's trick is only really a 'trick' in that it's the cleanest way to equalize!

7...d6

It is the d-pawn, not the b-pawn, which Black should use to undermine c5. Somewhat less convincing is 7...b6?! when 8 e3 d6 9 ♘a3! bxc5 10 bxc5 dxc5 11 ♘f3 ♘d7 12 ♘c4 gave White promis-

ing compensation for his pawn in M.Bosboom-S.Ernst, Dieren 1999. Black can also attempt to misplace one of White's pieces before undermining c5: after 7...♘a6!? 8 ♙c3 d6 9 d4 ♘f6, according to Watson the position is 'probably about equal, although Black is better-developed'.



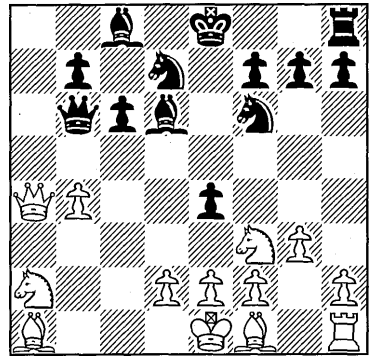
8 ♙a4?!

Probably too ambitious. Black also found himself with quite a comfortable position after 8 cxd6 exd6 9 ♘c3 ♘f6 10 b5 ♙e7 11 e3 0-0 12 ♙e2 ♘bd7 in D.Belc-D.Ivanisevic, Igalo 1994, but White's most popular choice in practice has been 8 d4. A solid continuation is then 8...♘f6 (more ambitious is 8...e5!? when White should probably prefer 9 e3 to 9 dxe5 dxc5 10 bxc5 ♙xc5 11 e3 ♙e6 12 ♘f3 ♘e7 and Black later put his queenside majority to good use in

Lunin-V.Zakharov, Moscow 1999) 9 ♘c3 b6 (only now when both captures expose White's b-pawn) 10 cxd6 ♙xd6 11 b5 ♙b4 when Black has quite easy development, and the position is not so dissimilar from certain types of the Queen's Gambit Declined. After 12 e3 (12 bxc6 ♘xc6 13 e3 ♘e4 14 ♙c2 ♙a5!, freeing up the b4-square, is similar) 12...♘d5!? 13 ♙c2 ♙a5 14 ♙b2 e6 Black has some useful activity and certainly isn't worse, with one bishop about to be developed on b4 and the other set to take up a good role on b7.

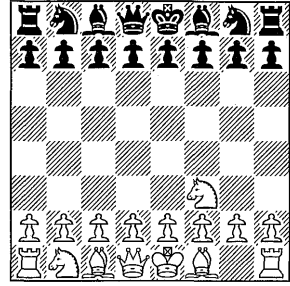
8...e5 9 ♘f3 ♘d7

Completing the undermining of c5, and now 10 cxd6 ♙xd6 11 g3 ♘gf6 12 ♘c3 ♙b6! 13 ♘a2 e4



left Black with a useful initiative in E.Teichmann-D.Watts, British Championship, Southampton 1986.

Chapter Ten



The 1 ♖f3 Problem – and a Possible Solution

The Problems Posed By The Transpositional 1 ♖f3

For the club player 1 ♖f3 usually heralds either a King's Indian Attack (KIA) or a Réti, but things are somewhat different at higher-rated levels. There fiendish White players often employ 1 ♖f3 with the aim of transposing to certain 1 d4 openings, while avoiding others. It's most certainly worth the while for all players to consider how 1 ♖f3 impinges on their repertoire. To see just how big a problem it can be, let's examine the impact of 1 ♖f3 on Black's main defences to 1 d4:

King's Indian players are well placed to meet 1 ♖f3. After 1...♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♕g7 4 e4 d6 5 d4 we're back into the main line of that opening, although Black should also be prepared for 4 g3 and an English approach.

On the other hand, **Grünfeld** exponents are often being targeted when White begins with 1 ♖f3. Following 1...♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 White has a

number of tricky, independent options, including 4 ♖a4+, 4 cxd5 ♗xd5 5 ♖a4+, and 4 cxd5 ♗xd5 5 e4 ♗xc3 6 dxc3. Black most certainly should be prepared for all of those, although some Grünfeld players even prefer something other than a kingside fianchetto and ...d5 after 1 ♖f3.

Fans of the **Nimzo** are the other major category targeted by flexible 1 ♖f3 players. Following 1...♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♕b4 we reach the Nimzo-English in which White has a number of alternatives to 4 d4, as we'll explore further in Chapter Twelve.

Modern Benoni and **Benko** players should both be aware that they are rather move ordered by 1 ♖f3. Some may be happy to allow a transposition to a Nimzo after 1...♗f6 2 c4 e6. If not Black might consider a Hedgehog with 1...♗f6 2 c4 c5 or even 1...c5 (see below).

It used to be considered quite acceptable for **Dutch** players to meet 1

♠f3 with 1...f5, but recently White has been scoring rather well with the subtle 2 d3.

Queen's Gambit Declined exponents are among those least affected by 1 ♠f3. Play will often transpose after 2 d4 (a move order recommended in the *Opening Repertoire for White According to Kramnik* series) or 2 c4 e6 3 d4. Réti players will, though, prefer 2 c4 e6 3 g3, but Black might deviate first with 2...d4 as we will consider in the next chapter.

Those who employ the **Queen's Gambit Accepted** will probably be happy to counter 1 ♠f3 d5 2 c4 with 2...dxc4. Play can transpose to their favourite opening after 3 e3 ♠f6 4 ♙xc4 e6 5 d4 c5, although Black must also be ready for both 3 e4 (as recommended in Davies's *The Dynamic Réti*) and 3 ♗a3.

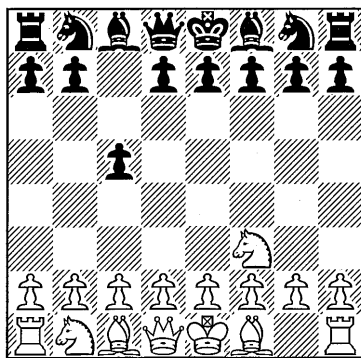
Likewise **Slav** players can counter 1 ♠f3 d5 2 c4 with 2...c6, although it has been fairly fashionable of late among certain grandmasters to then delay d4, preferring first 3 e3 and a queenside fianchetto.

And a Possible Solution

So far we have only considered how 1 ♠f3 affects Black in relation to his defence to 1 d4, but for certain players their defence to 1 e4 is also an important consideration. This becomes clearer if we consider 1 ♠f3 c5; a move which should suit the Sicilian player happy also to play our English lines from Chapters 1-4. Based on Chess-Base's *Big Database 2006*, after 1 ♠f3 c5:

2 c4 occurs approximately 50% of the time; 2 g3, 28%; and 2 e4 just 10%. Of course, popular though the Sicilian is, by no means everyone plays it, so possibly even non-Sicilian players may wish to gamble with 1 ♠f3 c5, especially if they know their opponent's repertoire.

In this chapter, after 1 ♠f3 c5, we will consider:



A: 2 b3

B: 2 g3

Note that there's also the quite rare move order 2 ♠c3, transposing to Line B of Chapter Eight.

A)

1 ♠f3 c5 2 b3 d6

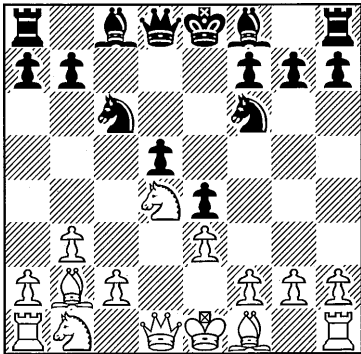
Preparing to neutralize White's fianchettoed bishop with a Botvinnik set-up.

3 ♙b2

Natural, but White can also try to cut across Black's plans with an early d4:

a) 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♠xd4 is a reasonable line when Black prefers 2...♠c6 to 2...d6,

but here there isn't a knight on c6 to be exchanged. Black can thus counter aggressively with 4...e5!? (another reasonable choice is the more solid 4...d5; White is hardly in a position to exploit the tempo gained) 5 ♖f3 e4 (striving forwards, although development with 5...♗f6 6 e3 ♖c6 is also fine for Black) 6 ♖d4 d5 7 e3 ♗f6 8 ♖b2 ♖c6 which has been played a few times.

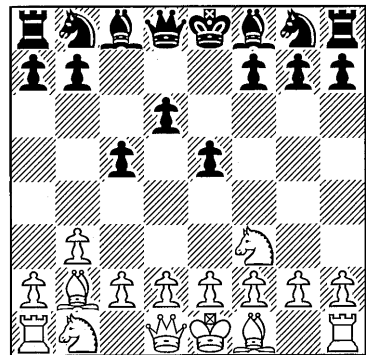


Black's centre is not so easy to undermine and he should be able to quickly complete his development with an active game: 9 ♖e2 (Black was also fine, and eyeing up h2, after 9 ♖d2 ♖d6 10 c4 ♖e5 11 ♖e2 dxc4 12 bxc4 0-0 in L.Sanchez Silva-A.Martin Gonzalez, Spanish Championship 1993; 9 ♖xc6!? bxc6 10 c4 might be critical, but wouldn't have given White any advantage had Black met 10...♖b4+ 11 ♖c3 0-0 12 a3 ♖d6 13 cxd5 cxd5 14 ♖b5 with the consistent 14...♖b8 in N.Andrianov-S.Sulskis, Philadelphia 2003) 9...♖b4+! 10 c3 ♖c5 11 0-0 0-0 12 c4 ♖xd4 13 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 14 exd4 (or 14 ♗xd4 dxc4 and there's a small drawback to each of White's recaptures)

14...♖e6 15 ♖c3 b6! 16 ♗d2 ♖c8 was slightly better for Black due to his pressure against c4 in Z.Franco Ocampos-J.Bellon Lopez, Oropesa del Mar 1996.

b) 3 e3 e5 transposes to our main line after 4 ♖b2, as does 4 d4 cxd4 5 exd4 e4 6 ♖fd2 d5 7 c4 ♖f6 8 cxd5 ♗xd5 9 ♖b2 ♖c6. White also has 4 ♖b5+!? when 4...♖c6 (the correct response, not fearing the doubled pawns; this is preferable to 4...♖d7 5 0-0 f5 6 d4 cxd4? 7 exd4 e4 8 ♖g5! ♖gf6 9 ♖e6 ♗b6 10 d5! and Black was quickly blown away in J.Speelman-C.Ward, London 1999) 5 0-0 (5 ♖xc6+ bxc6 6 d3 ♖e7 7 e4 is similar to a 3...e6 Rosolimo, but Black can exploit his extra tempi with 7...f5!, while 5 ♖b2 transposes to the note to White's 5th move in our main line) 5...♖g4!? 6 h3 ♖h5 7 ♖e2 ♖e7 8 ♖b2 ♖f6 9 d3 0-0 10 c4 ♖e8! led to a slightly unusual form of the English and was about equal in A.Miles-G.Sax, Teesside 1975.

3...e5



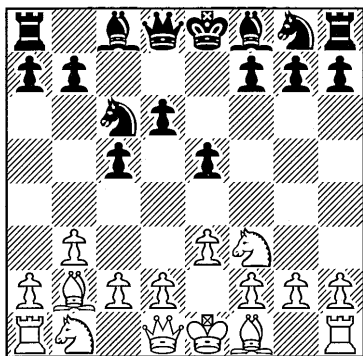
4 e3

Retaining a Nimzo-Larsen flavour. Instead 4 c4 takes play back into the

English. We saw at the beginning of Chapter Two that an early b3 isn't too critical a challenge to our favoured Botvinnik set-up, and that is also the case here: 4...♘c6 5 ♘c3 g6 6 g3 ♙g7 7 ♙g2 ♗ge7 8 0-0 0-0 develops comfortably along standard lines, but should Black want something a little different, he might consider Speelman's 4...g5!?

4...♘c6

Black wants to develop behind his central pawn wall and so refuses to reopen the long diagonal for the b2-bishop with 4...e4.

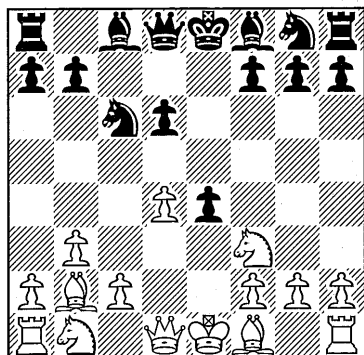


5 d4!?

Striking before Black can complete his development, but this is by no means a single-edged sword. Alternatively, 5 d3 g6 (Black can also prefer the more aggressive 5...f5 and 6...♘f6 before fianchettoing) 6 ♙e2 ♗ge7 7 c4 ♙g7 8 0-0 0-0 once again gives Black a comfortable Botvinnik set-up. Another system which Black shouldn't fear is 5 ♙b5 because of the active response 5...e4! 6 ♗g1 ♙g5, after which 7 ♙f1 ♗f6 8 d4 cxd4 9 ♙xc6+ bxc6 10 ♙xd4 d5 11 ♘d2 h5! gave Black a favourable

sort of reversed Winawer in J.Just-N.Miezis, Bad Wiessee 1999.

5...cxd4 6 exd4 e4!



Without this move Black's whole system would be rather questionable. Now, however, the centre remains fairly closed and Black has a reasonable game.

7 ♗fd2

White might wish to reopen the long diagonal, but 7 d5?? is tactically inadvisable: 7...exf3 8 dxc6 ♗e7+ won material in J.Redpath-C.MacDonald, Oban 2001.

7...d5 8 c4

Speelman's 8 ♙e2?! rather neglects g2 and allows 8...♙g5! after which 9 g3 ♙h3 10 c4 ♗f6 11 ♘c3 ♙b4! 12 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 13 cxd5 ♗a5 left White in some trouble due to his inability to castle in R.Nocci-W.Fischer, correspondence 2003.

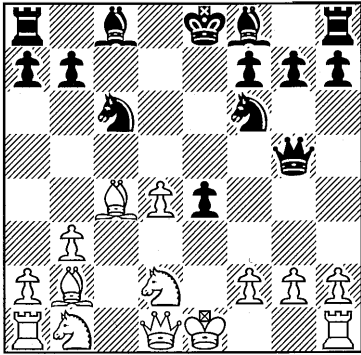
8...♗f6 9 cxd5

White doesn't have to exchange, but 9 a3!? also shouldn't trouble Black: 9...dxc4 10 ♘xc4 ♙e7 11 ♗e3 ♙d6 12 ♘d2 ♙b8!? 13 ♘dc4 ♗e7! 14 g3 0-0 was fine for him in A.Kosten-J.Karr, French League 2002.

9... ♖xd5 10 ♙c4

White has more often preferred 10 ♖c3?, but Black shouldn't be bluffed: 10... ♖xd4 11 ♘c4 ♙c5 12 ♖xd4 ♙xd4 13 ♘d6+ ♙e7 14 0-0 ♙g4 left White a clear pawn down and struggling in Z.Basagic-I.Jelen, Dobrna 2002.

10... ♖g5!



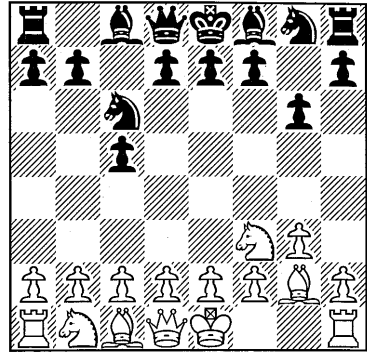
Once again this active move is rather effective. M.Lazic-R.Felgaer, Lido Estensi 2003, continued 11 ♙f1 ♙b4 (Jacobs and Tait's 11...b5!? 12 d5 bxc4 13 dxc6 cxb3 is also possible) 12 a3 ♙a5 13 d5 ♘e5 14 ♙b5+ ♙d7 15 ♙xd7+ ♘exd7 16 ♘c4 ♙c7 and was fairly unclear; White's strong d-pawn supplying some counterplay for his lost castling rights.

B)

1 ♖f3 c5 2 g3 ♘c6 3 ♙g2 e5

Seizing central space before fianchettoing the king's bishop.

Black can also begin with 3...g6, which usually transposes to our main line after 4 0-0 ♙g7 5 e4 e5, but White has two slightly tricky independent options:



a) 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♘xd4 ♙g7 reaches a position we discussed via the move order 1 ♘c3 c5 2 ♖f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 g6 5 g3 ♙g7 (see note 'a' to White's 5th move in Line B1 of Chapter Eight), and will often transpose to a type of Fianchetto Dragon.

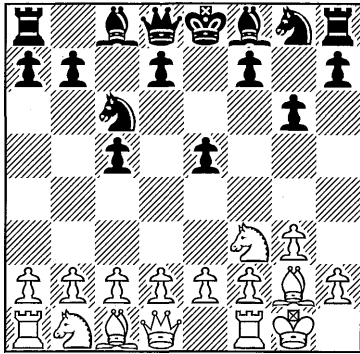
b) 4 c3!? ♙g7 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4 d5 7 ♘c3 leads to a rather solid variation of the Grünfeld after 7...♖f6, and the attempt to avoid that with 7...e6 isn't fully satisfactory due to 8 ♙f4! ♘ge7 9 ♖d2 (A.Miles-U.Andersson, Las Palmas 1980). Black might thus prefer to meet 4 c3 with 4...e5!?, when 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4 e4 7 ♘e5 d5 8 0-0 ♙g7 transposes to note 'b' to White's 5th move in our main line below. In this exact position, Romanishin's 8 ♖a4!? has been considered more accurate, but 8...♙g7 9 ♘xc6 ♖d7 10 ♘c3 bxc6 11 b3 f5! 12 ♙a3 ♖f6 13 e3 ♙f7 14 ♖a5 g5 15 ♘a4 f4 gave Black quite reasonable counterplay in R.Tischbierek-V.Chekhov, Dresden 1985.

4 0-0

Black's last ensured that 4 c3?! can be met by 4...e4, but White often pre-

fers 4 c4, when 4...g6 5 0-0 ♖g7 leads to Chapter One.

4...g6



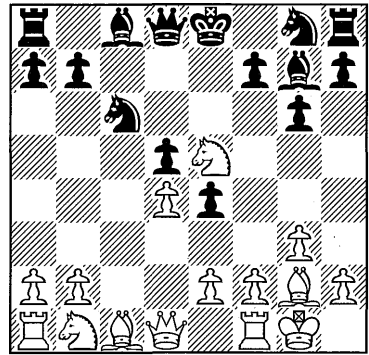
5 e4

A standard advance which tends to define the KIA, but White has alternatives:

a) 5 d3 ♖g7 usually leads either to an English (after 6 c4) or to our main line (after 6 e4), but there's also 6 c3 ♖ge7 7 a3 when 7...0-0 8 b4 d6 (Black should avoid 8...cxb4?! 9 axb4 ♖xb4 due to 10 cxb4! e4 11 dxe4!? ♖xa1 12 e5 and White had dangerous play for the exchange in J.Timman-Jo.Piket, Amsterdam 1970) 9 e4 transposes to the notes to White's 8th move in the main line. White might delay advancing his e-pawn, but that shouldn't be too challenging to meet; for example, 9 ♖b2 h6 10 ♖fd2!? ♖e6 11 ♖b3 cxb4 12 axb4 a6! 13 ♖1d2 ♖c8 kept White at bay on the queenside and was fine for Black in K.Bischoff-A.Skripchenko, Pulvermuehle 2004.

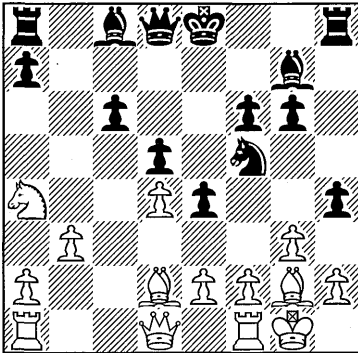
b) 5 c3 ♖g7 6 d4!? cxd4 7 cxd4 e4! (keeping the centre closed, rather than greedily win a pawn in return for a

vulnerable structure and dark square weaknesses) 8 ♖e5 d5



9 ♖xc6 (exchanging immediately, rather than allow Black the option of recapturing with a piece on c6 after 9 ♖c3 ♖ge7; White has also tried 9 f3!? ♖b6 10 ♖xc6 as in S.Conquest-C.Ward, Port of Spain 1999, when 10...exf3 11 ♖xf3 bxc6 is fine for Black, while the aggressive 9 ♖a4 ♖ge7 10 ♖g5 was very well countered by 10...♖b6! 11 ♖xe7 ♖xd4! 12 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 in M.Berkovich-A.Greenfeld, Israel 1995, and after 13 ♖c3 ♖xe7 14 ♖xd5+ ♖e6 15 ♖c7+ ♖xe5 16 ♖xa8, Greenfeld's improvement of 16...♖d7 would have trapped the white knight) 9...bxc6 10 ♖c3 ♖e7 (sensibly covering c6 and not blocking the f-pawn) 11 ♖a4 (or 11 ♖g5 h6 12 ♖xe7 ♖xc7 13 e3 0-0 14 ♖d2 h5 15 ♖fc1 f5 16 ♖a4 ♖f6 17 ♖c3 g5 18 ♖ac1 ♖d7 19 ♖b3 f4 and Black's kingside attack proved far stronger than White's queenside play in A.Yermolinsky-V.Chekhov, Telavi 1982) 11...h5!? (aiming to exploit the fact that White can't block the kingside with 12 h4? due to 12...♖f5, when both 13 e3 g5

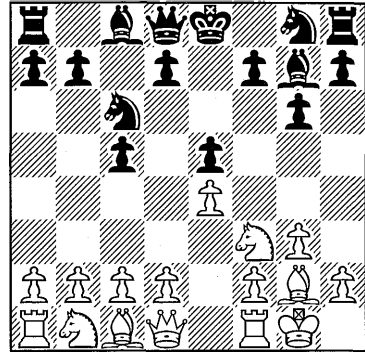
and 13 $\text{g}5$ $\text{f}6$ give Black excellent attacking prospects) 12 $\text{b}3$?! (White should probably prefer 12 $\text{h}3$, when Black has always continued 12... $\text{d}f5$ in practice, leading to a double-edged game, but he might also wish to consider the more ambitious 12... $\text{h}4$?! 13 $\text{g}4$ $\text{xg}4$ 14 $\text{hxg}4$ $\text{h}3$ 15 $\text{h}1$ $\text{d}6$, intending 16... $\text{h}4$ 17 $\text{e}3$ $\text{f}5$) 12... $\text{h}4$ 13 $\text{g}5$ $\text{f}6$ 14 $\text{d}2$ $\text{d}f5$



15 $\text{e}3$ $\text{h}6$ 16 $\text{e}2$ $\text{g}5$ 17 $\text{f}c1$ $\text{d}6$ 18 $\text{e}1$ $\text{hxg}3$ 19 $\text{hxg}3$ $\text{d}h4$! saw Black break through on the kingside in G.Terreaux-V.Hort, Geneva 1987.

c) 5 $\text{b}4$?! is extremely rare, but has some similarities with White's $\text{b}4$ -gambits in Chapters One and Two. A.Garcia Luque-D.Campora, Dos Hermanas 2005, continued 5... $\text{cxb}4$ (Black might also decline the pawn, preferring 5... $\text{e}4$?! 6 $\text{d}e1$ $\text{g}7$ 7 $\text{c}3$ $\text{cxb}4$ 8 $\text{x}e4$ $\text{d}5$ 9 $\text{g}2$ $\text{d}ge7$ with good development and an unclear position) 6 $\text{b}2$ $\text{g}7$ 7 $\text{a}3$ $\text{bxa}3$ 8 $\text{dxa}3$ $\text{d}ge7$ 9 $\text{d}c4$ and then the simplest continuation was 9... $\text{d}6$ 10 $\text{a}3$ $\text{d}f5$ (Marin), preparing to return the extra pawn with 11 $\text{g}4$ $\text{d}5$?! 12 $\text{d}cxe5$ $\text{d}h4$.

5... $\text{g}7$



6 $\text{d}3$

Once again White might also try 6 $\text{c}3$ $\text{d}ge7$ 7 $\text{d}4$, but this time Black is better developed and 7... $\text{cxd}4$ 8 $\text{cxd}4$ $\text{exd}4$ 9 $\text{f}4$ $\text{d}5$! 10 $\text{e}5$ $\text{g}4$ 11 $\text{e}1$ $\text{wb}6$ worked out rather well for him in F.Nijboer-T.Ernst, Groningen 1991.

6... $\text{d}ge7$ 7 $\text{c}3$

White usually inserts this, both to control the $\text{d}4$ -square and to assist with a possible $\text{b}4$ -advance, but practice has also seen:

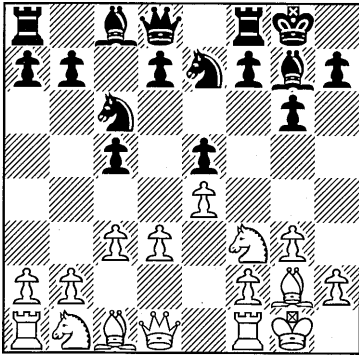
a) 7 $\text{d}c3$ transposes to a fairly harmless line of the Closed Sicilian for Black. White's king's knight is a little misplaced, obstructing the $\text{f}2$ -pawn, and so it is usually re-routed with 7... 0-0 8 $\text{d}d2$ $\text{d}6$ 9 $\text{d}c4$, but that allows Black to complete his development with 9... $\text{e}6$ 10 $\text{e}3$ $\text{d}d7$. After 11 $\text{d}ed5$ $\text{f}5$ Black wants to gain a strong kingside attack following ... $\text{f}4$, and 12 $\text{g}5$ $\text{h}6$ 13 $\text{x}e7$ $\text{d}xe7$ 14 $\text{exf}5$ (White often also prevents ... $\text{f}4$ like this in the KIA proper lines considered below) 14... $\text{d}xf5$ 15 $\text{d}d2$ $\text{f}f7$ 16 $\text{eae}1$ $\text{faf}8$ 17 $\text{f}4$ $\text{b}5$! left him with the bishop pair and good coun-

terplay in S.Harkamal Singh-S.Shipov, Dubai (rapid) 2001.

b) 7 ♖bd2 0-0 8 a4 usually transposes to note 'a' to White's 9th move after 8...d6 9 ♖c4 h6 10 c3.

c) 7 ♙e3 d6 8 ♗d2 is a typical plan in the Closed Sicilian, but here White can't follow up ♙h6 so easily with f4, and 8...0-0 9 ♙h6 f5! 10 ♙xg7 ♗xg7 11 ♖c3 h6 12 exf5 ♙xf5 13 ♖h4 ♙e6 14 f4 ♗b6 once again gave Black a good position in G.Tringov-P.Benko, Varna Olympiad 1962.

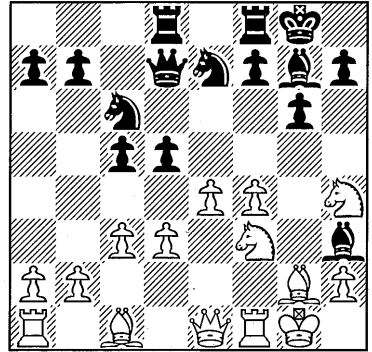
7...0-0



8 ♖bd2

Playing in reversed King's Indian style, except that we will now continue with our favourite Botvinnik set-up, rather than advance with ...d5. However, if White prefers to play for f4 with 8 ♖h4 then Black should reveal one of the main reasons behind not playing an early ...d6: 8...d5! 9 ♖d2 (or 9 f4 exf4 10 ♙xf4 h6 11 ♙c3 d4! 12 ♙f2 ♖e5 and Black was already slightly better in H.Lamb-N.Miezis, Fourmies 2001) 9...♙e6 10 f4 (this would work well if the centre was closed, but it is

actually quite fluid) 10...♗d7 11 ♖df3 exf4! (the simplest solution; Black avoids allowing a strong f5-advance and leaves the white pieces looking a little silly) 12 gxf4 ♗ad8 13 ♗e1 ♙h3

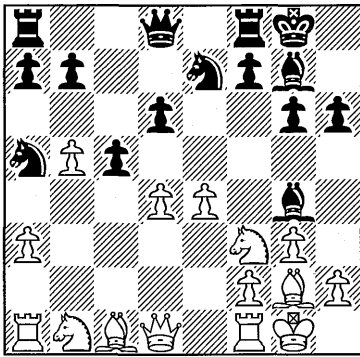


14 ♖g5 ♙xg2 15 ♖xg2 was V.Loginov-T.Ernst, Manila Olympiad 1992. Here Black might have driven White backwards with 15...h6, following up with a combination of ...d4 and ...f5, but Ernst found something even stronger: 15...b5! (intending 16...d4 when White can't block with 17 c4, and Black had seen that White's next wasn't at all dangerous) 16 f5 gxf5! 17 exf5 ♖xf5 18 ♗f2 ♖ce7 19 ♗xc5 d4! 20 c4 bxc4 21 ♗xc4 ♖d5 and Black was significantly better.

An even more common mistake from White is 8 ♙e3 d6 9 d4?!. This might appear tempting, but it underestimates Black's pressure down the long diagonal, and after 9...exd4! 10 cxd4, both 10...♙g4 and 10...d5!? favour Black.

A much better alternative is for White to immediately begin his queen-side counterplay with 8 a3!? and after 8...d6 9 b4 h6 10 ♖bd2 we're back in

the main line. Instead in that sequence Black often prefers to prevent b5 with 9...a6, but 9...h6 (9...cxb4!? 10 axb4 b5, followed by ...a5, is a decent alternative) 10 b5 (or 10 ♙e3 b6 11 ♖c1 ♔h7 12 ♘bd2 ♙e6 13 b5 ♘d4!? and Black exploited White's slightly cramped position to gain immediate counterplay in V.Olexa-L.Pachman, Bratislava 1959) 10...♘a5 shouldn't be a problem; the queenside is closed and once again 11 d4?! only plays into Black's hands: 11...exd4 12 cxd4 ♙g4



13 ♙b2 was G.Small-J.Donaldson, Los Angeles 2003, when there were several tempting options available, including 13...d5!? and 13...f5 14 exf5 ♘xf5. Going back, White should prefer something like 11 c4, although Black still gains quite reasonable counterplay after 11...f5.

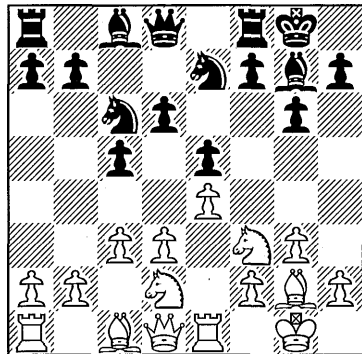
8...d6 9 a3!?

Trying to gain some activity. The alternatives can easily lead to a rather passive position for White:

a) 9 a4 h6 (Black can also counter effectively with 9...♖b8) 10 ♘c4 ♙e6 11 ♖e1?! (or 11 ♖e2 ♖d7 12 ♙d2 ♖ae8 13

♘c1 f5 14 exf5 gxf5 15 f4 which is a standard defensive reaction to the threat of ...f4; it can work well if Black isn't fully developed, but here he is and 15...exf4! 16 ♙xf4 ♘g6 17 ♖h5 ♘xf4 18 gxf4 ♙f7 19 ♖h3 d5 left Black better in K.Schulz-V.Chekhov, German League 1994) 11...f5 12 exf5 ♘xf5 13 ♘fd2 (easy to criticize, but White already rather lacked a good move) 13...d5 14 ♘e3 ♖d7 gave Black a powerful central advantage in H.Gruenberg-W.Uhlmann, East German Championship, Groeditz 1976.

b) 9 ♖e1 is a fairly well-known KIA position, but usually it is White's move here (Black having played ...e6 and then ...e5).



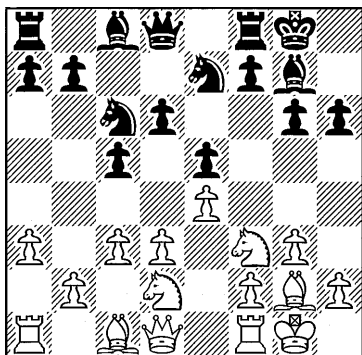
It is even possible to put the extra tempo to immediate use by aiming for a rapid ...f5: 9...h6 10 h3 f5!? 11 b4 cxb4 12 cxb4 ♙e6 13 a3 fxe4 14 dxe4 ♖d7 gave Black a comfortable position in P.Woodfinden-R.Palliser, Leeds 2005, and now I should have met 15 ♔h2 with 15...b5, followed by ...a5 and/or ...♘c8-b6.

c) 9 ♘b3?! f5 10 ♙e3 h6 11 exf5 ♘xf5 12 ♖d2 ♙c6 13 ♖ad1 a5! already

left White struggling in B.Marshall-R.Palliser, York 2000.

9...h6

Preparing ... $\text{g}6$. I'm far from certain that $9...a5$ is as bad as some sources have indicated, but after $10 a4$, followed by $\text{c}4$, White does have a grip on the queenside and the $c4$ -knight is pretty secure.

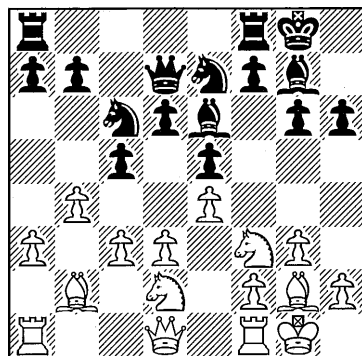


10 b4 $\text{g}6$ 11 $\text{g}2$

White preferred $11 \text{c}1$ $\text{d}7$ $12 \text{b}3$ in A.Ledger-C.Ward, British Championship, Norwich 1994, when Ward opted for the sensible $12...b6$ $13 \text{g}2$ $\text{a}8$, but Black might also consider

$12...c4!$? $13 \text{dxc}4 \text{gxc}4$ with a pretty reasonable type of Sicilian.

After $11 \text{g}2$, Black can either fight back on the queenside with $11...b5!$? or continue with $11... \text{d}7$.

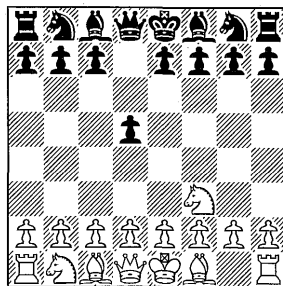


Both ensure him of a reasonable position and, after the latter, D.Anic-M.Palac, Montecatini Terme 1997, for example, continued $12 \text{e}1 \text{a}8$ $13 \text{b}3 b6!$ (once again keeping White at bay) $14 b5!$? $\text{g}b3$ $15 \text{c}b3 \text{a}5$ $16 \text{a}4 c4!$ $17 \text{d}2 \text{cxd}3$ $18 c4 a6$ $19 \text{a}1 \text{b}7$ and Black was more than holding his own in the queenside complications.

Chapter Eleven

Black Meets

1 ♘f3 with 1...d5



1 ♘f3 d5

Of course, meeting 1 ♘f3 with 1...c5 is not to everyone's taste. This classical response remains a very popular alternative, especially among those who play either the QGD, the Slav or the QGA. White can now take play into those openings with 2 d4, but here we will only consider his attempts to remain within the flank openings. That is something which White will often do at club level where 'systems-based' flank openings have a certain following. We will now consider:

A: 2 b3

B: 2 g3

C: 2 c4

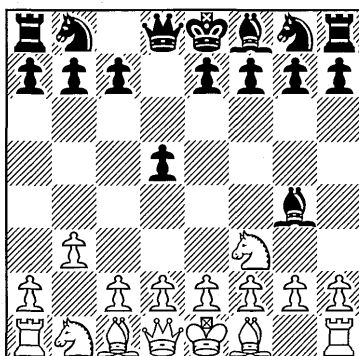
A)

1 ♘f3 d5 2 b3

Black's ...♗g4 approach also works well should White prefer a type of Sokolsky to 2 b3. After 2 b4 ♗g4! 3 ♗b2 ♗xf3 4 gxf3 (or 4 exf3 e6 5 b5 c5! 6 d4?!

c4! 7 a4 a6 8 bxa6 ♖xa6 and Black's intelligent early play had netted him a number of positional advantages in R.Bernardt-S.Kalinitschew, Schwabisch Gmuend 2001) 4...e6 5 e3 ♘f6 6 a3, Black might prefer 6...c5!? to the solid 6...g6 7 c4 ♗g7 8 d4 0-0 9 ♘d2 ♘c6!? 10 ♖c1 a5 of D.Juswanto-J.Ehlvest, Bali 1999.

2...♗g4



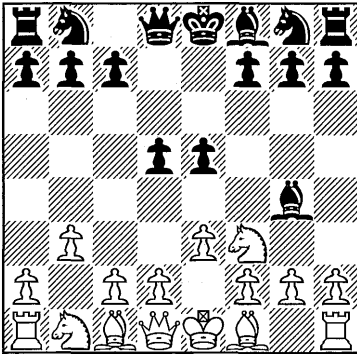
An accurate reply, popular amongst grandmasters, which prevents White from smoothly continuing his devel-

opment with ♖b2 and e3. Black intends to capture on f3, before setting up a solid formation, usually with ...e6 and ...g6.

3 ♖b2

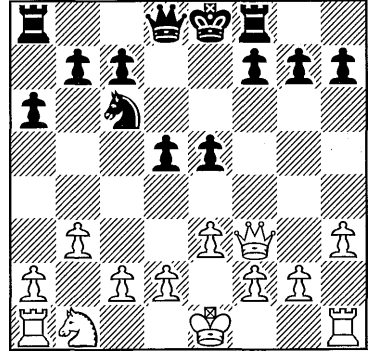
Continuing his plan, but White can also avoid having his pawns doubled:

a) 3 e3 appears natural, but allows Black to demonstrate one of the main points behind his last move: 3...e5!



4 h3 ♕xf3 5 ♖xf3 ♘c6 (Black more usually prefers 5...♗f6, but this plan is at least as good; he can also consider 5...g6!? when again it is not at all easy for White to attack the black centre, and 6 ♖b2 ♕g7 7 ♖e2 ♘c6 8 g3 ♗ge7 9 ♕g2 0-0 10 0-0 ♖d7 11 d3 ♗ad8 12 ♘d2 a5 was pretty comfortable for Black, with his strong centre offsetting White's bishops in A.Mastrovasilis-I.Miladinovic, Chania 1999) 6 ♖b5 (a standard Nimzo-Larsen idea, but Black's set-up is ready to meet this; White also failed, though, to generate any early initiative with 6 ♖b2 ♗ge7 7 ♖g3 ♖d6 8 ♘c3 0-0-0 9 0-0-0 g6 10 ♖g4+ in E.Limp-S.Slipak, Vicente Lopez 2001, when there was nothing

wrong with 10...f5!? 11 ♖a4 a6) 6...♗gc7 7 ♕a3 a6 8 ♕xc6+ ♗xc6 9 ♕xf8 ♗xf8 and Black has quite a pleasant position.



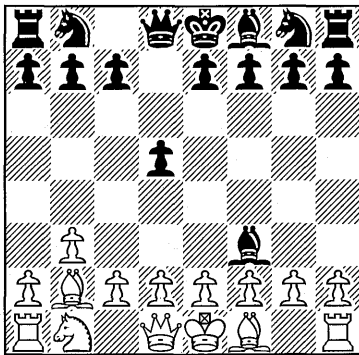
He will castle long and White must be careful not to be overrun by Black's strong centre. In M.Taimanov-K.Rasmussen, Copenhagen 1993, he quickly found himself on the defensive: 10 ♘c3 d4! 11 ♗a4?! ♖e7 12 0-0 f5 13 exd4 e4! 14 ♖d1 ♗xd4 15 c3 ♗e6 16 d4 0-0-0 and Black was better.

b) 3 ♗e5!? makes a fair amount of sense when we consider that Black is effectively playing a reversed Trompowsky. However, the extra move b2-b3 is at least as much a hindrance as a help for White. After 3...♕f5!, he can't follow up with 4 c4 d4 5 ♖b3. Black meanwhile is threatening ...f6 and should emerge from the opening with easy equality: 4 d4 (and not 4 f4? f6 5 ♗f3 e5! 6 fxe5 fxe5 7 ♗xe5?? ♖h4+ 8 g3 ♖d4 - Jacobs and Tait) 4...♗d7 5 e3 (5 ♗d3?! is a more creative try, but also quite a suspicious one; 5...e6 6 g3 c5! 7 ♖b2 cxd4 8 ♕g2 ♖b6 9 0-0 ♗gf6 didn't give White enough for his pawn in

D. Van Riemsdijk-G. Milos, Fortaleza 1989) 5...dxe5 6 dxe5 e6 7 d3?! ♖g5! left White already in a spot of trouble on the kingside in N. Rossolimo-S. Tartakower, 1st matchgame, Paris 1948.

3...dxf3

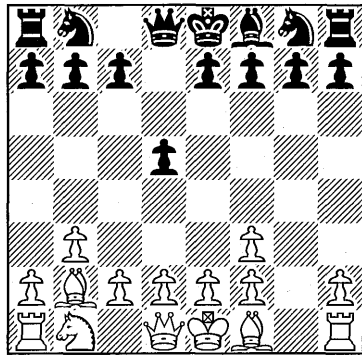
Black can also develop one of his knights, but this capture is the most precise. White can easily now struggle for a good plan no matter which recapture he prefers: taking with the g-pawn wrecks his kingside, but recapturing with the e-pawn deprives him of a useful central break.



4 gxf3!?

Trying to inject some life into the position. White's problem is that after 4 exf3 e6 5 f4 (or 5 d4 g6 6 d2 d3 7 f4 c5 8 b5+ d6 9 0-0 d7! 10 d3 0-0 and Black had a harmonious set-up and pressure against d4 in M. Taimanov-A. Volzhin, St Petersburg 1998) 5...d3 6 g3 g6 (once again preparing to contest the long diagonal, although Black can also opt for a more classical set-up; 6...c5 7 d3 d6 8 d2 e7 9 d2 0-0 10 0-0 c8 11 d3 d7!,

preparing ...d6, was about equal in J. Granda Zuniga-I. Morovic Fernandez, Havana 2003) 7 d4 (now White rather suffers from an inflexible structure, but he lacks a good alternative; he might prefer 7 d3, but Black can then comfortably develop with ...d7, ...0-0, ...c5 and ...d6) 7...d7 8 d3 0-0 9 d2 d7 10 d3 c5 11 c3 cxd4 12 cxd4 d6 13 0-0 b6 saw White struggling to do anything with his Stonewall set-up, while Black just got on with his queenside counterplay in J. Castellort Fernandez-N. Sulava, Benasque 1999.



4...e6

As Black intends to develop with ...e6, ...d7, ...d6 and ...g6, this is probably the most accurate move order since 4...d6 allows 5 dxf6!?

5 e3 d3 6 f4

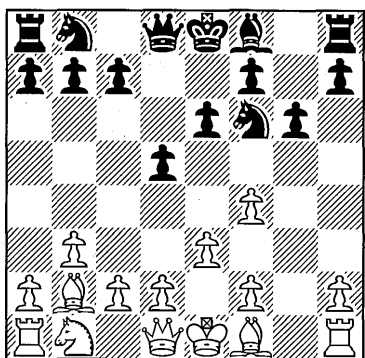
White doesn't have to include this, but Black is also rather solid after 6 c4 c6 7 d3 g6 when White could find nothing better than the rather ambitious 8 d2 d7 9 d3 in C. Rossi-N. Sulava, European Championship, Ohrid 2001. Such a plan appears rather misguided, however, since the whole

point of Black's set-up with ...e6 and ...g6 is to prevent f4-f5.

White can also start with 6 ♖g1, but delaying c4 may well just give Black a free hand on the queenside: 6...g6 7 d4 ♙g7 8 ♘d2 0-0 9 ♙d3 c5! saw him enjoy just that before preparing ...e5 with 10 dxc5 ♜c7 11 f4 ♜xc5 12 ♜f3 ♘c6 in A.Everet-A.David, European Championship, Saint Vincent 2000.

6...g6

Black can also first prefer 6...♘bd7, after which 7 c4 c6 8 ♖g1 g6 9 ♘c3 ♙g7 10 ♜c2 0-0 11 d4 ♜a5! 12 0-0-0 ♜fc8 13 ♖b1 c5 began counterplay against the white king in D.Johansen-L.Brunner, Moscow Olympiad 1994.

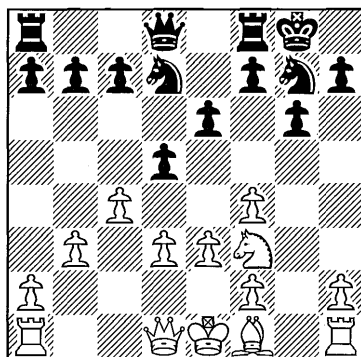


7 c4

When White delays playing either c4 (creating some pressure against d5 and usually inducing the prudent ...c6 in reply) or d4, he runs the risk that Black will seize the initiative with ...c5 and ...d4. One example of that being V.Podgorodecky-P.Tregubov, Krasnodar 1996: 7 d3 ♙g7 8 ♘d2 0-0 9 ♘f3?! c5 10 ♙e2 d4! 11 c4 (11 exd4 ♘d5!? 12 ♜d2 cxd4 13 ♙xd4 ♙xd4 14 ♘xd4 ♜f6

also favours Black) 11...♘c6 12 ♜d2 a6 13 0-0-0 b5 and White found himself under some pressure.

7...♙g7 8 d3 0-0 9 ♘d2 ♘h5! 10 ♙xg7 ♘xg7 11 ♘f3 ♘d7



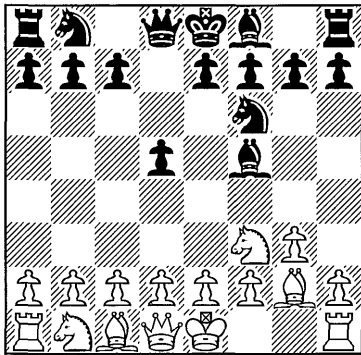
We've followed L.Alburt-M.Dlugy, New York 1992, in which Black could be happy with the outcome of the opening. Any kingside chances for White were looking pretty non-existent, while Alburt also had to find a role for his bishop. Black could have met 12 ♜c2 with Dlugy's suggestion of 12...♜f6, but in the game he pursued a more uncompromising strategy and was rewarded with the initiative after 12...c6 13 ♜c3 ♜e7 14 ♙e2 f6!? 15 d4 ♜ad8 16 ♜c1?! g5!.

B)

1 ♘f3 d5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♙g2 ♙f5

If Black is going to place his bishop on f5 then 3...c6 4 0-0 ♙f5 is a slightly more popular way of doing so. One reason is supposed to be to dissuade c4, but 3...c6 4 c4 is a gambit which both Kosten and Davies were happy to recommend in their respective 'dy-

namic' repertoire works. 3...e5 has been employed by the likes of Smyslov, Korchnoi, Yusupov, Gelfand and Naiditsch, and Black doesn't have to follow up with ...c6, transposing to the so-called Lasker variation. Instead, he may well be able to advance his pawn to c5 in one move, thereby saving a tempo over certain lines of the Lasker. We should also note that this is a rather solid set-up against the King's Indian Attack. Essentially Black is playing a French, but with his light-squared bishop outside the pawn chain; a factor which should benefit him, since from h7 the bishop both shores up the kingside defence and assists Black's counterplay, especially if White advances with the typical e4-e5.

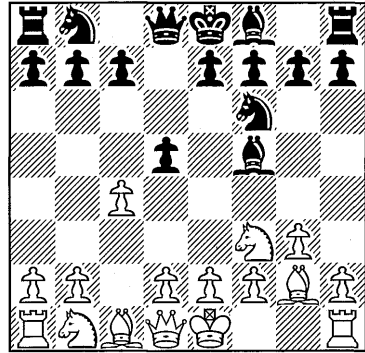


4 0-0

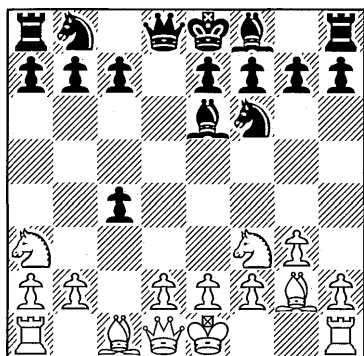
Continuing flexibly, whereas 4 d4 is a rather inflexible choice. This type of set-up is not as rare as one might imagine, but it is a kind of poor man's Catalan, due once again to the active positioning of Black's light-squared bishop. For his part, Black should not hurry with ...c5 (when he may run into

trouble on the queenside after c4) and a Dutch legend showed how to handle the position in F.Muco-J.Timman, Lucerne Olympiad 1982: 4...e6 5 0-0 d7 6 d2 e7 7 c4 0-0 8 b3 e4! (freeing his position through exchanges and avoiding any ideas of h4) 9 e2 c6 10 e4 xe4 11 e1?! xg2 12 xg2 f6! 13 c2 dxc4 14 xc4 c5 15 f3 c8 16 d3? cxd4 17 xd4 e5 and, like many before him, White had discovered that the best way of drawing with a stronger player is not necessarily to hurry to trade wood at every opportunity.

A better and more critical alternative is 4 c4 when Black must decide how provocatively he wants to play:



a) 4...dxc4!? 5 a3!? (taking up the challenge since 5 a4+ c6 6 xc4 d7 is rather comfortable for Black; for example, 7 d3 e5 8 0-0 d6 9 d4 0-0 10 b3 b6 was pretty equal in J.Kristiansen-T.Wedberg, Helsingborg 1990) 5...e6! (Korchnoi's idea, intending to hang on to the pawn, and preparing to continue with ...d7 and/or ...d5)

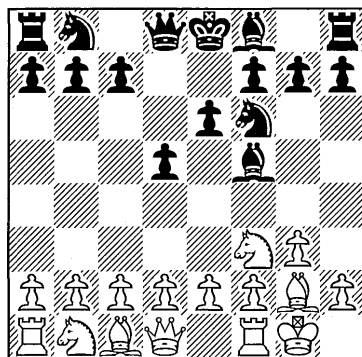


6 ♖g5 (6 ♜a4 is well met by 6...c6, and so White should probably regain the pawn with 6 ♜c2, giving Black a choice between developing comfortably with either 6...g6 7 ♘xc4 ♙g7 or 6...♙d5!? 7 ♘xc4 e6) 6...♙d5 7 e4?! (too ambitious; 7 ♜a4+ ♙c6 8 ♙xc6+ ♘xc6 9 ♜xc4 e6 was fairly pleasant for Black, but White should still have probably preferred this) 7...♙c6 8 ♘xc4 h6 9 ♘xf7!? (a creative attempt to solve White's difficulties, but it fails to fully convince) 9...♙xf7 10 ♘e5+ ♙g8 11 0-0 ♙e8!? 12 ♜b3+ e6 was G.Dizdar-V.Korchnoi, Sarajevo 1984, when *Informant* points out that White should have tried 13 ♜xb7!? ♘bd7 14 ♘c6 ♜c8 15 ♜xc8 ♜xc8 16 ♘xa7, although after 16...♜b8, White's knight is in some danger and Black's extra piece a little more relevant than White's three extra pawns.

b) 4...e6 is the solid approach, after which 5 0-0 transposes to note 'c' to White's 5th move in our main line. Alternatively, 5 ♜b3 ♘a6! neatly solves Black's problems since 6 ♜xb7 ♘xb4 7 ♘d4! ♜b8 (S.Palatnik-S.Dolmatov,

Hradec Kralove 1981) leaves White unable to prevent a perpetual on his queen. White can keep the game going in a number of ways after 5...♘a6, but none should bring him any advantage: for example, 6 cxd5 exd5 7 ♘d4!? ♙c8! 8 ♘c3 c6 9 0-0 ♙c5 10 ♘f3 0-0 11 d4 ♙e7 12 ♙f4 ♘c7 13 ♜ad1 ♘e6 saw Black unravel with a roughly level position in O.Romanishin-L.Polugaevsky, USSR 1980.

4...e6



5 d3

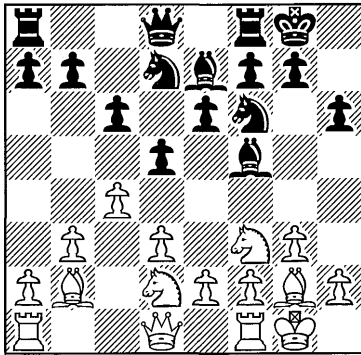
Supporting the e4-advance, but White doesn't have to play this:

a) 5 ♘h4 is a little premature due to 5...♙g4 6 h3 ♙h5 7 g4?! ♘fd7!.

b) 5 b3 is a move order White often uses against the Lasker variation. Here Black should play as in our main line, and after 5...♙e7 6 ♙b2 0-0 7 d3 h6 8 ♘bd2 ♙h7 play has transposed to note 'a' to White's 7th move below.

c) 5 c4 is an important alternative, taking play away from the KIA and into the realms of the Réti. Black should counter in a solid manner with 5...c6 6 d3 (or 6 cxd5 exd5 7 d3 ♙e7 and

then 8 d3 0-0 9 Bb3 Bb6 10 Bxb6 axb6 11 d4 g6 12 e4 d8! was fine for Black in R.Lubczynski-A.Naiditsch, Warsaw (rapid) 2005, as was 8 d4!? g6 9 d3 g5! 10 b3 g6 11 e4 dxe4 12 dxe4 0-0 13 f4 b7 14 h1 e8 in A.Obukhov-Y.Balashov, Kurgan 2001) 6...b7 7 b3 (not the only way to develop, but 7 d3 is well met by Nikolic's 7...g5: 8 Bb3 Bb6! 9 h4 g6 10 g6 h6 11 Bxb6 axb6 12 cxd5 exd5 13 d2 b5 didn't lead anywhere for White in V.Smyslov-P.Nikolic, Ljubljana 1985, and neither did 8 cxd5 exd5 9 a4? d6 10 Bb3 Bb8! 11 d2 0-0 12 b4 g4 13 f1 f3! 14 f3 xb4 15 Bxb4 e5 in E.Dizdarevic-P.Nikolic, Sarajevo 1998) 7...e7 8 b2 h6 9 b2 0-0, reaching a fairly important position for the Réti.



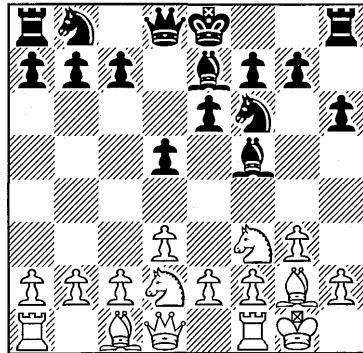
M.Botvinnik-V.Smyslov, World Championship (12th matchgame), Moscow 1958, continued 10 Bc2 g7 11 a3 a5! (it is important for Black to hold White up on the queenside and to seize some useful space there) 12 g3 b5 13 cxb5 cxb5 14 b4! Bc7! 15 Bb2 (and not 15 Bb3?! Bc8! when White must move

his rook from the a-file since 16 Bc1? axb4 17 axb4 is clearly impossible) 15...b6 16 g5 and now Smyslov opted for 16...Bd7. Probably 16...Bb7 is slightly more precise, and then 17 Bc1 (White doesn't have to vacate the a-file, but after Gleman's 17 b3!? axb4 18 axb4, Black can equalize with 18...Bxa1! 19 Bxa1 a4 20 Bb4 Bc8 - Marin) 17...a4 18 Bb4 Bc8 19 b3 axb4 20 axb4 Bb6! 21 Bxb6 b6 22 c5 d7 equalized fully in P.Harikrishna-L.Dominguez, Dos Hermanas 2005.

5...h6

Prudently giving the bishop a retreat square on e7. Black often prefers first 5...g7, but that allows White the interesting option of 6 h4!? g4 7 h3 g5 and then either 8 f4 or 8 g4 d7 9 f5!.

6...b2 g7



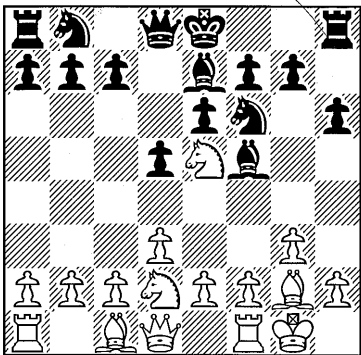
7 Bc1

Forcing through the e4-advance, and I imagine that this direct approach will be especially popular at club level. Stronger players may well prefer one of the more flexible alternatives:

a) 7 b3 0-0 8 b2 g7 9 c4!? (realiz-

ing that pushing through e4 isn't especially promising, White tries to deviate; alternatively, 9 ♖e1 c5 10 e4 ♖c6 11 ♖e2 transposes into note 'a' to White's 9th move in our main line, while 9 ♖e5 ♖bd7 10 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 11 e4 ♖f6! 12 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 13 e5 ♖d7 14 f4 a5 15 a4 c6 16 ♖e2 b5 was roughly balanced in T.Gelashvili-P.Harikrishna, Istanbul Olympiad 2000) 9...♖c6! (obstructing the c-pawn may appear a little strange, but Black wants to advance with ...d4 and ...e5) 10 ♖e5 (drawish exchanges now follow, but 10 a3 is simply met with 10...a5 and White continues to experience problems since he can't move his e-pawn due to the weakness of d3) 10...♖xe5 11 ♖xe5 ♖d7 12 ♖b2 ♖f6 13 ♖c2 ♖xb2 14 ♖xb2 ♖f6 15 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 was rather equal and agreed drawn in B.Gulko-A.Yusupov, Horgen 1995.

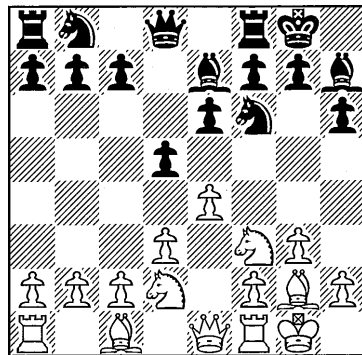
b) 7 ♖e5 is an intriguing way to try and gain a tempo on the main line.



After 7...0-0 8 e4 ♖h7 9 ♖e2 White has done just that, and so Black should prefer 7...♖bd7! 8 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 (Emms), when 9 e4 dxe4 10 ♖xe4 0-0 11 ♖e2 c6 is pretty even.

c) 7 c4 c6 8 b3 ♖bd7 9 ♖b2 transposes back to a position considered in note 'c' to White's 5th move.

7...0-0 8 e4 ♖h7

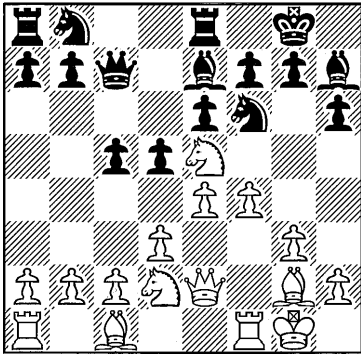


9 e5

A typical advance, but it might well be more testing not to open up the h7-bishop:

a) 9 ♖e2 c5 transposes to our main line after 10 e5, but White can also free his f-pawn to advance with 10 ♖e5!? (10 b3 ♖c6 11 ♖b2 ♖c7! 12 e5?! ♖d7 13 ♖fe1 b5 14 a3 ♖ab8 15 ♖f1 c4 16 d4 ♖a5! 17 b4 c3 left Black far too far ahead on the queenside in V.Pirc-S.Reshevsky, Maribor 1967) 10...♖e8!? (a useful prophylactic move, although there's nothing too wrong with the more standard 10...♖bd7 11 ♖xd7 ♖xd7) 11 f4 (White can also try to wait, but 11 ♖e1 ♖b6 12 ♖g4 dxe4!? 13 ♖xf6+ ♖xf6 14 dxe4 ♖c6 was fine for Black in L.Stratil-M.Matlak, Czech Team Championship 1992, as is 11 b3 ♖fd7! 12 ♖df3 ♖xe5 13 ♖xe5 ♖d7 14 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 - Rukavina; note that in that latter line 12 ♖xf7?! ♖xf7 13 exd5 might appear tempting for White, but after 13...♖f6 14 dxe6+ ♖xe6 15 ♖d5

♞f8 Black's minor pieces will be quick to exploit White's weakened light squares) 11...♞c7



12 ♞ef3 (White can't find a better plan than pushing his e-pawn, but this loss of time isn't fully convincing; perhaps he might prefer 12 b3, although 12...♞c6 13 ♞xc6 ♞xc6 14 ♟b2 c4! 15 dxc4 ♞xe4 still supplied Black with counterplay in R.Eidelson-R.Idrisova, St Petersburg 2004) 12...♞c6 13 c5 ♞d7 14 c4!? ♞b6 15 b3 ♞ad8 16 ♜f2 a5! attempted to hold Black up on the queenside, but was still more pleasant for the second player in W.Szenetra-D.Bunzmann, Schwaebisch Gmuend 2003.

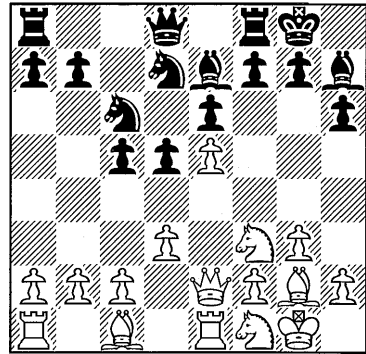
b) 9 ♟h1?! c5 10 ♞g1 is a rather slow way of freeing White's f-pawn (if White wishes to do so, he should instead take his knight to e5), and 10...♞c6 11 f4 ♜c8 12 e5 ♞d7 13 ♞df3?! c4! 14 dxc4 ♞b4! already cost White material on the queenside in A.Ledger-Z.Almasi, Festuge 1991.

9...♞fd7 10 ♞e2 c5 11 ♜e1

Preparing ♞f1, h4 and ♞h2-g4 in typical King's Indian Attack fashion. White might also reach for his f-pawn,

but after 11 ♞e1?! ♞c6 12 f4 it's not at all easy for him to make further progress on the kingside, and 12...b5 13 ♟h1 ♞b6 14 c3 ♞a6 15 ♞f2 ♞a5 16 d4 cxd4 17 cxd4 f6! left Black with a promising French position in H.Doeres-D.Bunzmann, German League 2002.

11...♞c6 12 ♞f1



12...♟h8!?

Preparing to break up White's kingside play with a timely ...f6 break. Another good and consistent approach is to continue on the queenside with 12...b5 13 h4 a5. Here Black's light-squared bishop should really be much better placed on h7 than it usually is in such positions on the queenside and, for example, 14 h5 a4 15 ♟f4 c4!? 16 d4 b4 17 b3 axb3 18 axb3 ♞b6 gave Black good queenside pressure in V.Moskvin-R.Hasangatin, online blitz 2004.

13 h4 ♜c8 14 h5 f6!

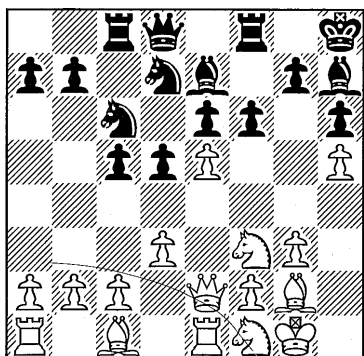
Both sides have continued in consistent vein, except that White's play has rather neglected the position of Black's light-squared bishop. With the bishop actively deployed on h7, Black has a good version of the French and 15 exf6

♠xf6 16 ♖xe6 ♜b4 17 ♜e2 c4! saw him regain at least his pawn with advantage in Y.Stepak-M.Chandler, London 1985.

C1: 3 b4!?

C2: 3 e3

C3: 3 g3



C)

1 ♜f3 d5 2 c4 d4

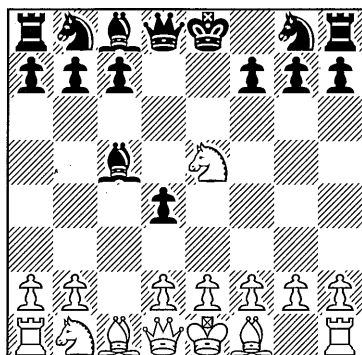
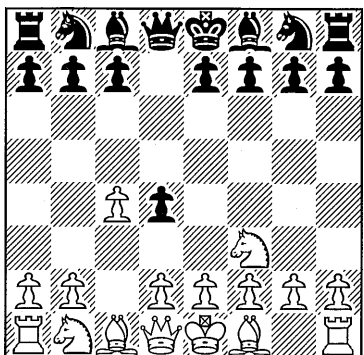
A quick reminder that QGA players may prefer 2...dxc4, and some QGD exponents 2...e6. Our preference reaches a reversed Benoni position, but it should be noted that we will meet 3 g3 with 3...♘c6 and a reversed Schmid Benoni, rather than risk reaching a sharper reversed Modern Benoni. White now faces a choice between developing quietly and trying to using his extra tempo with immediate effect:

White can also begin with 3 d3, but that usually just transposes to Line C3 after 3...♘c6 4 g3 e5 5 ♙g2.

There are also two independent and fairly rare options:

a) 3 a3 is a creation of Suba's. The idea is that 3...a5 4 e3 ♘c6 5 exd4 ♘xd4 6 ♘xd4 ♖xd4 gives White an improved version of Line C2. Perhaps that's so if Black meets 7 ♘c3 with 7...e5, but as in C2, we will prefer a modern approach with 7...c6. This surprisingly remains untested (Black has usually met 3 a3 with 3...g6 in practice), but appears fully playable for Black since White is in no position to show up ...a5 as a having been a weakening advance.

b) 3 c5!? is Mihai Grünberg's tricky invention. Black has tended to respond with 3...♘c6, but he does better by jettisoning a centre pawn: 3...e5!? (Grünberg himself actually gave this an exclamation in an *SoS* article of his) 4 ♘xe5 ♙xc5

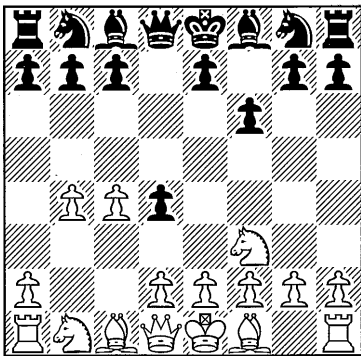


5 b4!? (5 ♖a4+?! appears inferior: 5...♗d7 6 e3 ♗gf6! was actually agreed drawn in M.Grünberg-A.Tugui, Targoviste 2001, but is assessed by Grünberg as already favouring Black; and also promising is 5...c6!?, after which 6 b4 ♗b6 7 ♗b2 ♗f6 8 e3 0-0 9 ♗c4?! ♗c7! 10 ♗xf7 ♖xf7 11 ♗xf7+ ♗xf7 12 ♗xd4 a5! was pretty good for Black in G.Schebler-M.Turov, Pardubice 2004) 5...♗b6 6 a4 (a suggestion of Grünberg's who also mentions 6 ♖a4+ c6 7 ♗f3 ♗g4 8 ♗a3 ♗f6 9 e3 ♗xf3 10 gxf3 ♖d5 11 ♗e2 ♗bd7 12 ♖b3 which he assesses as equal, although I slightly prefer Black: both 12...♖xb3 and 12...♖g5!? are tempting) 6...c6 7 ♗c4 ♗c7 8 d3 ♗e7! homed in on c3 and left White's early play looking a little unconvincing in A.Glicenstein-T.Abergel, Paris 2005.

C1)

1 ♘f3 d5 2 c4 d4 3 b4!? f6!

Preparing to advance in the centre, while hoping to demonstrate that White's last was a little too ambitious.

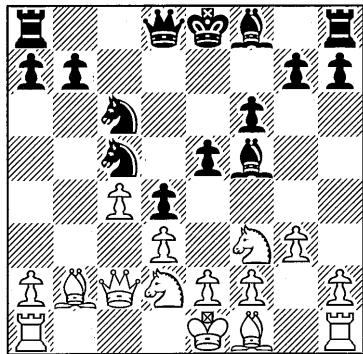


4 e3

White usually chooses to fight back in the centre before his queenside is undermined, but he has also tried:

a) 4 d3 c5 5 ♖b3 (or 5 a3 a5 6 bxa5 ♖xa5 7 g3 ♗d7! 8 ♗bd2 ♗a4 9 ♗b3 ♖a6 10 ♖b1 ♗d7 11 ♖d2 ♖a8 12 ♖a2?! ♗c6 and Black won a queenside pawn on his terms in A.Pahor-V.Misanovic, Rabac 2003) 5...a5! (gaining control of the c5-square, although if Black is a 1 d4 player, there is also nothing wrong with 5...c5 and a reversed Benko) 6 b5 ♗d7 7 g3 b6 8 ♗g2 ♗b7 9 0-0 ♗d6 10 ♗a3 was fairly comfortable for Black in H.Pronold-V.Lazarev, Bled 1994, although he should probably have avoided any tactics down the long diagonal (10...♗e7?! 11 ♗xd4!) with 10...a4 11 ♖b2 ♗xa3 12 ♖xa3 ♗c5, followed by ...♗e7 and ...0-0.

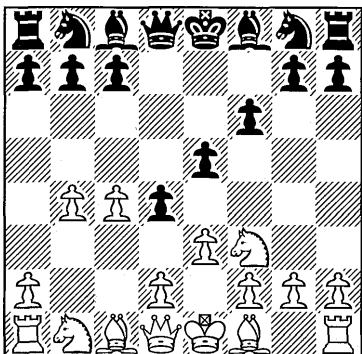
b) 4 ♗b2 e5 usually transposes to note 'b' to White's 5th move after 5 e3. Alternatively, 5 ♖b3 has been tried, when 5...a5 can this time be met by 6 a3, but Black should prefer 5...c5! 6 bxc5 (otherwise 6...e4 follows) 6...♗a6 7 d3 ♗xc5 8 ♖c2 ♗e7 9 g3 ♗c6 10 ♗bd2 ♗f5!?



with a pretty reasonable reversed Benko declined in S.Lang-H.Teske, Forchheim 2003.

c) 4 ♖a4+ hopes that 4...♙d7 5 ♖b3 e5 6 e3 leaves Black's bishop misplaced on d7, but Black should never be cowed out of contesting the queenside in this variation. Thus 4...c6!? is possible, intending 5 b5 e5, while 5 ♘a3 e5 6 ♘c2 a5 7 d3?! ♘a6! 8 ♙a3? axb4 9 ♘xb4? was a complete disaster for White on the queenside in P.Boersma-J.Delemarre, Dutch League 2000, costing him a piece after 9...♙g4.

4...e5

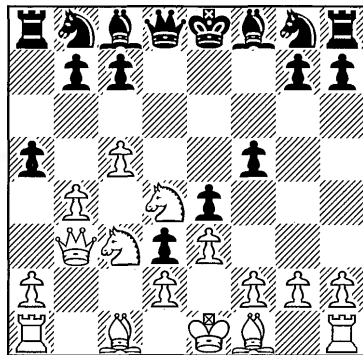


5 ♖b3

We've already seen this plan; White wants to use his queen to defend his advanced queenside pawns. Once again, though, he has also tried a number of different ideas:

a) 5 c5 is similar to Grünberg's 3 c5, but Black appears to have found a good answer: 5...d3! (ambitious, but promising, although should any reader find it too ambitious, Black can also gain a reasonable game with 5...a5; for example, 6 ♙b5+ c6 7 ♙c4 ♙g4 8 exd4!?

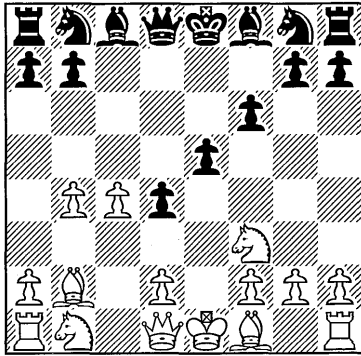
e4! 9 ♖e2 ♖e7 10 h3 exf3 11 ♖xe7+ ♘xe7 12 hxg4 fxg2 13 ♖g1 h5! was rather messy and very unclear in Y.Nikolaevsky-S.Savchenko, Kiev 1995) 6 ♖b3 (the modern preference; 6 ♙b2 was preferred in the stem game S.Bernstein-J.Moskowitz, New York 1941, in which White struggled to develop his kingside: 6...♙e6 7 ♖a4+ c6 8 ♘c3 ♖d7 9 ♖a3 ♘a6 10 ♖c1 ♗d8 11 ♙a1 ♘h6 12 e4 ♙e7 13 ♘d1 and now Black should have taken steps against the threat of 14 ♖c3 with 13...♙f7! 14 h3 – and not 14 ♖c3? ♖g4! – 14...♙g6) 6...e4 7 ♘d4 a5! (flicking in this queenside advance can only really help Black) 8 ♘c3 f5



9 ♘e6 ♖e7 10 ♖a4+ (White must avoid 10 ♘d5?? ♙xe6, while his inability to develop his kingside left him much worse after 10 ♘xf8 ♙xf8! 11 b5 ♙e6 12 ♖a4 ♘d7 13 ♙a3 ♘xc5 14 ♖d4 b6 15 ♘a4 ♙f7 16 ♘xc5 bxc5 17 ♙xc5 ♖g5 in C.Gabriel-V.Korchnoi, Zürich 1999) 10...♙f7 11 ♘xf8 ♖xf8 12 ♙a3!? (12 ♘d5?! ♙d7!, with the idea of 13 ♖a3 ♘a6 14 ♖xa5 ♘e7 15 ♘xc7 ♘c6 16 ♖b6 ♘xc7 17 ♖xc7 ♖c8 – Kosten – was

promising for Black in J.Randall-H.Williamson, correspondence 2002) 12...axb4!? 13 Wxa8 Da6 14 Exb4 Dxb4 15 Bb1 Dc2+ 16 Ed1 Df6 (Kosten) gives Black promising compensation for the exchange in view of White's ongoing kingside difficulties. Possibly even stronger, though, is Harvey Williamson's suggestion of 9...a4!? 10 Wc4 (10 Dxa4! Wd7 11 c6 Wxc6 is also good for Black) 10... We7 11 Dxf8 Exf8 when Black has much the better development and quite probably some advantage.

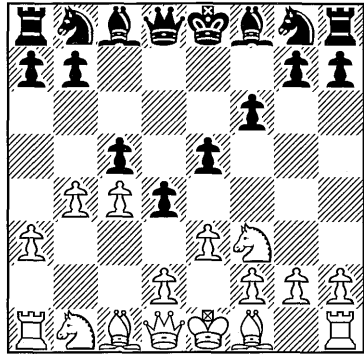
b) 5 Eb2 c5 (reaching a kind of reversed Blumenfeld; 5...dxe3 6 fxe3 Exb4 is messier and far from clear in view of 7 c5!?) 6 exd4 (or 6 bxc5 Dc6 7 exd4 exd4 8 d3 Exc5 9 Ee2 Dh6 and Black developed smoothly, while both white bishops were a little misplaced in Rajkovic-A.Tikovsky, Jablonec nad Nisou 1954) 6...cxd4



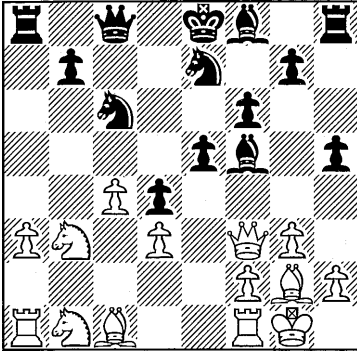
7 a3 and now Gallagher's suggestion from NCO of 7...a5!? appears very logical. The same idea was seen, albeit a move later, in L.Kremer-S.Tartakower, Polish Championship, Jurata 1937: 7... Dh6 8 Ed3 a5 9 0-0!? axb4 10 Ee1

Dc6 11 Ee4 and White had some play for his pawn, but probably not enough had Black preferred 11... Ee6! .

c) 5 a3 defends b4 for the time being, but isn't such a useful move after 5...c5!.



White's problem is that having gone e3, he can't fianchetto and play a type of Benko. Instead, he might aim for a sort of reversed Benoni, but 6 exd4 (or 6 bxc5 Dc6 7 d3 Exc5 8 e4 and White had managed to close the centre in O.Peyrat-N.Nikcevic, Bagneux 2001, but Black had good development and obtained counterplay with 8... Dge7 9 Dbd2 a5! 10 g3 a4 11 Eg2 Ee6 12 0-0 13 De1 Wd6 14 Dc2 Bfb8 15 Db4 b5) 6...cxd4 (in his notes for *Informant* 60, Bareev actually assesses this position as clearly favouring Black; that's a little over the top, but Black is doing well since he can undermine the white queenside) 7 d3 a5 8 bxa5 (or 8 b5 a4, fixing White's queenside and preparing to bring a knight to c5 after which Black will play for ...e4) 8... Dc6 9 g3 Wxa5+ 10 Dfd2 Ef5 11 Wf3 Dge7 12 Eg2 h5!? 13 0-0 Wc7! 14 Db3 Wc8



gave Black good attacking chances in E.Bareev-G.Hertneck, Munich 1994.

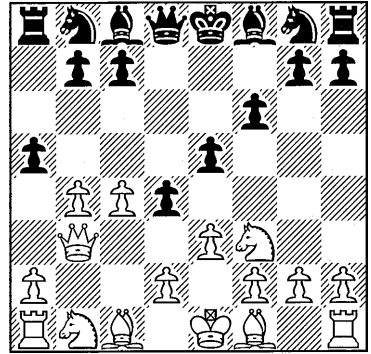
d) 5 $\text{♟}\text{e5?}$ is far too optimistic: 5...fxe5 6 $\text{♞}\text{h5+ ♚e7}$ 7 $\text{♞}\text{xe5+ ♜f7}$ 8 c5 ♙e6 9 ♙e2 ♟f6 10 a3 a5 11 ♙b2 axb4 12 exd4 ♟c6 13 ♞f4 ♟e7! left White without any real compensation in G.Abrahams-A.Thomas, Hastings 1951/2.

e) 5 exd4?! is another move best avoided: 5...e4! 6 ♞e2 (or 6 ♟h4 ♞xd4 7 ♟c3 e3! 8 ♟f3 exf2+ 9 ♚e2 ♙g4 – Krnic) 6... ♞e7 7 ♟g1 (7 ♟h4 allows 7...g5, although White will obtain some compensation for his piece) 7... ♟c6 8 ♞e3 ♟xb4 9 ♟a3 ♟h6 10 ♙b2 ♟f5 11 ♞b3 c5 left Black clearly better in R.Gerber-A.Raetsky, Lausanne 2003.

f) 5 ♞a4+! ? is extremely rare, but was seen in A.Mirzoev-G.Flear, Elgoibar 2004, in which Black took up the challenge: 5...c6 6 $\text{♙c2 d3!?$ 7 ♙d1 and now, rather than hurry with the game's 7...e4, I like 7... ♙e6! 8 c5 (8 ♙b3?! a5! is Black's main idea, blocking out all White's pieces after 9 b5 c5, and meeting 9 c5 with 9... ♙xb3 10 axb3 ♟a6) 8...a5 9 ♙a3 ♟d7 10 b5 ♞c8! when c5 is dropping off and Black appears to be doing well.

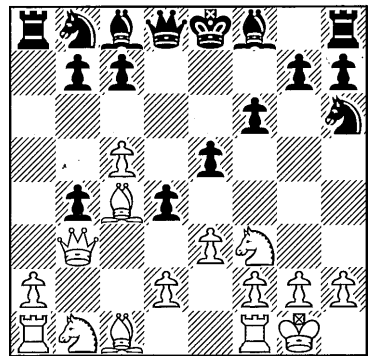
5...a5!?

The position rather flares up after this, but it seems preferable to 5...c5 6 bxc5 ♙xc5 when 7 ♙a3! ♙xa3 8 ♟xa3 is a little awkward for Black, such as after 8...dxe3 9 fxe3 ♟h6 10 c5!.



6 b5

White's most popular move, but it leads to an easy position for Black. Instead 6 exd4?! e4! 7 ♞e3 ♞e7 8 ♟g1 axb4 9 ♙b2 f5 10 ♟h3 ♟f6 11 ♙e2 g6 12 0-0 ♙g7 (K.Juergens-M.Umansky, Austrian League 2003) is probably not the best way to unbalance the position, but 6 c5! is more dangerous. After 6...axb4 7 ♙c4 ♟h6 8 0-0 Black has a choice:



a) 8...♙xc5 9 exd4 ♘xd4 10 ♘xd4 ♖xd4 11 ♙b2 has been the only continuation tried in practice when White undoubtedly has some play for his two pawns, but Black should be able to return one to get developed: 11...♗b6! (and not 11...♗d6?! 12 d4 e4? 13 ♘d2 ♙f5 14 ♘xe4! ♙xe4 15 ♖ae1 ♘c6 16 ♖xe4+ ♔d8 17 ♖e6 which was rather promising for White in V.Ilinisky-R.Lev, Gausdal 1991) 12 d4 ♘c6! 13 dxe5 ♘a5 14 ♗d3 ♙f5 15 ♗e2 0-0-0!? 16 ♖c1 ♘xc4 17 ♗xc4 ♖d7 18 a3 ♖hd8 turned out well for Black in W.Chouari-P.Pupke, correspondence 2004.

b) 8...dxe3!? aims to keep lines closed with 9 fxe3 e4!. Instead 9 d4!? exd4 10 fxe3 tries to keep them open, but gives Black a reasonable choice between the prudent 10...d3!? and 10...♙xc5!? 11 exd4 ♘xd4+ 12 ♘xd4 ♖xd4+ 13 ♙e3 ♖xa1 14 ♖e1 ♗e5! 15 ♙d2 ♘c6, when the white bishops appear well placed but there isn't an obvious way to get at the black king, and Black is probably doing quite well in this unbalanced position.

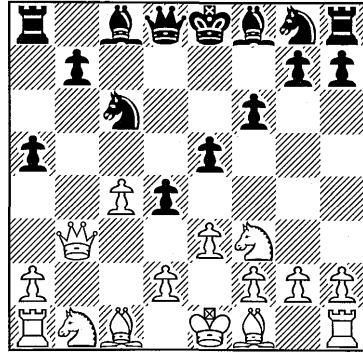
6...c5

If Black wants to keep the position open, then 6...dxe3!? 7 dxe3 (or 7 fxe3 e4 8 ♘d4 f5) 7...♙g4 (S.Hilton-H.Pechova, correspondence 2002), followed by ...♘bd7 is a reasonable way of doing so.

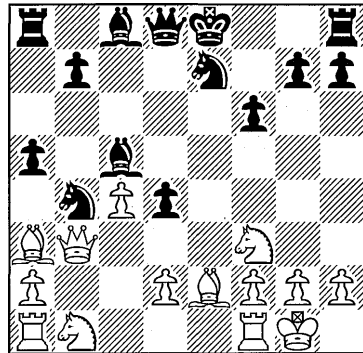
7 bxc6

Black was also fine in a reversed 4 a4 Benko-type position after 7 d3 b6! 8 g3 ♙b7 9 ♙g2 ♙d6 10 ♘h4 ♙xg2 11 ♘xg2 ♘e7 in G.Toscano-C.Vasile, correspondence 1995.

7...♘xc6



This position has rarely occurred (as we have seen White has tried a lot of different ideas after 3...f6), but appears quite playable for Black, whose centre offsets any pressure of White's down the b-file. Two examples: 8 exd4 exd4 9 ♙e2 ♙c5 10 0-0 ♘ge7 11 ♙a3 ♘b4!



followed by ...♙f5 gave Black good development and activity in A.Krechetov-R.Kholmov, Moscow 1996, while 8 ♘a3 a4 9 ♗b1 was seen in L.Dobrovolsky-R.Fabry, Stary Smokovec 1996, when Black can consider 9...dxe3!? 10 fxe3 ♘h6, as well as the game's 9...♘h6 10 exd4 ♘xd4 11 ♘xd4 ♖xd4 12 ♘b5 ♗b6 which was roughly equal.

C2)

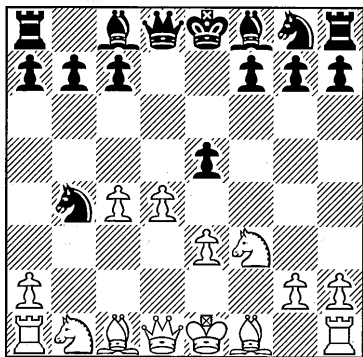
1 ♖f3 **d5** **2** c4 **d4** **3** e3 ♗c6

Black can also play a reversed Modern Benoni with 3...c5 (after which a set-up with ...♗d6 and ...♗ge7 is probably best), but the text is simpler and quite effective.

4 exd4

If White wishes to liquidate the centre, he can also begin with 4 ♖xd4. He may, though, prefer to retain some tension:

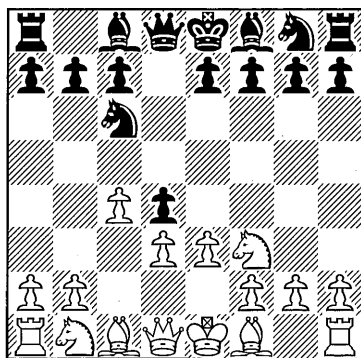
a) 4 b4?! has some similarities with Line C1 and is still occasionally seen, but is considered slightly suspect due to 4...dxe3 5 fxe3 ♗xb4 6 d4 (6 ♖a4+!? ♗c6 7 d4 is also possible, but 7...♗d7 8 ♖b3 e5! 9 d5 ♗b4 10 a3 ♗a6 11 ♗xe5 ♗c5 12 ♖c2 ♗a4 13 ♖f2 ♗f6 14 ♗c3 ♗d6 saw Black return the pawn to retain the advantage in Z.Kozul-A.Petrosian, Slovenian Team Championship 1994) 6...e5! which is a strong central counter.



J.Plachetka-P.Lukacs, Vrnjacka Banja 1985, continued 7 a3 (or 7 ♗xe5?! ♖h4+ 8 ♗d2 ♗f6 when White's king is rather misplaced and 9 ♗c3 ♗g4! 10

a3?! ♗xe5 11 g3 ♖d8 12 axb4 ♗xb4 left Black much better in S.Kustar-P.Lukacs, Zalakaros 1997) 7...♗c6 8 d5?! (8 ♗c3 is probably better when Black can exchange on d4 or return the pawn with 8...♗f6!? 9 d5 ♗b8 10 ♗xe5 ♗d6 11 ♗f3 0-0 12 ♗d3 ♗g4 13 0-0 ♗bd7 which saw him develop comfortably in L.Shamkovich-E.Vasiukov, USSR Championship, Baku 1972) 8...e4! 9 ♗fd2 ♗e5 10 ♗xe4 ♖h4+ 11 ♗f2 ♗h6! and Black was well on course to exploit White's many weaknesses.

b) 4 d3 is a rather uncritical approach which shouldn't trouble Black.



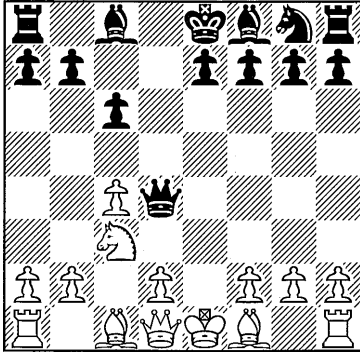
He developed sensibly with 4...e5 5 exd4 (or 5 a3 a5 6 g3 ♗f6 7 e4?! ♗e7 8 ♗g2 ♗d7! 9 b3 ♗c5 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♗e1 f5! and Black took the initiative in G.Kacheishvili-J.Rowson, Guarapuava 1995) 5...exd4! 6 ♗e2 h6 7 0-0 ♗f6 8 b3 ♗c5 9 ♗a3 0-0 10 ♗b2 ♗e8 11 ♗c2 ♖d6 12 ♗e1 a5 in M.Cebalo-B.Lalic, Zenica 1987, and was left with a comfortable position.

4...♗xd4 5 ♗xd4 ♖xd4 6 ♗c3

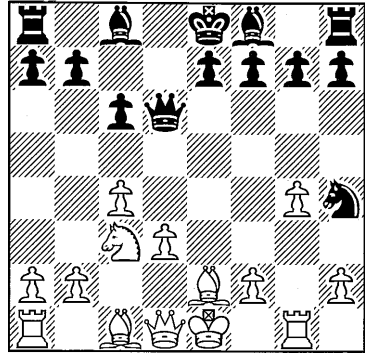
Occasionally White begins with 6 d3, but this should just transpose after 6...c6 7 ♗c3.

6...c6

The modern preference, and one popular with a number of grandmasters. There is also nothing wrong with the older 6...e5, but the text is simpler: Black prevents ♘b5 and can thus meet 7 d3 and 8 ♖e3 with Granda Zuniga's fine idea of 7...♘h6.



c) 8 ♖e2!? ♘f5 9 g4?! (as Marin points out, White should prefer the more conservative 9 0-0 ♗d8 10 ♖g4 g6 11 ♜e1 ♖g7 12 ♖g5 h6! 13 ♖f4 when 13...0-0 is about equal; White probably has enough activity to compensate for his problems down the d-file) 9...♘h4 10 ♜g1 ♗d6!



7 d3 ♘h6! 8 ♖e3

Continuing White's plan, but in view of his lack of success with this, White might try something else:

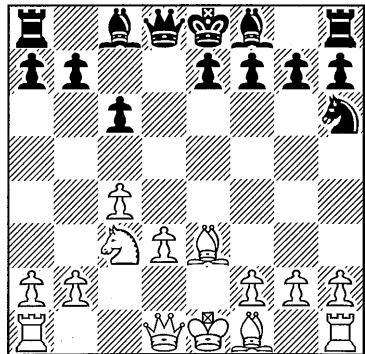
a) 8 h3 ♘f5 9 g4?! is rather too ambitious, though. Black was slightly better after 9...♗e5+! 10 ♗e2 ♗xe2+ 11 ♘xe2 (or 11 ♖xc2 ♘d4) 11...♘h4 12 ♖c3 h5! 13 gxh5 ♘f3+ 14 ♖d1 ♜xh5 15 ♖c2 g6 in T.Marttala-S.Brynell, Stockholm 2005.

b) 8 ♖xh6?! gxh6 shows a lack of understanding of the position: Black's control of d4 and bishop pair is far more important than the doubled h-pawns. S.Reina Bernal-O.Korneev, Malaga 2002, continued 9 ♖e2 ♜g8 10 ♖f3 ♖f5 11 ♗a4 ♜g6!? 12 0-0 0-0-0 13 ♘e4 e6 14 b4 ♖g4 15 ♖xg4 ♜xg4 16 ♜ad1 f5 and Black had managed to put the half-open g-file to good use.

revealed White's concept to be rather misguided in I.Rausis-F.Vallejo Pons, French League 2005: 11 f4?! e5 12 f5 h5! 13 h3 ♗d4 14 ♜g3 hxg4 15 hxg4 g6! and White was undone on the kingside.

8...♗d8

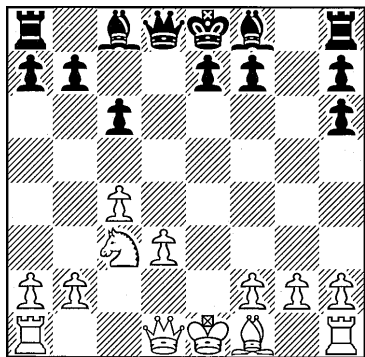
The safest retreat, but 8...♗d6!? is a good alternative.



9 ♖xh6

Now that White can advance with d4, this is possible, although I still feel that this is an exchange which Black should be happy to see. Alternatively, 9 ♖e2 ♜f5 10 0-0 g6 11 ♞d2 ♙g7 12 ♜ab1 0-0 was quite pleasant for Black due to his grip on d4 in A.Santl-A.Raetsky, Seefeld 1996, but 9 d4!? is probably critical. However, Black will gain the bishop pair and should not be too unhappy about his chances in the resulting unbalanced positions: 9...♜f5 10 ♞d2 g6 11 ♖e2 (11 0-0-0!? ♙g7 12 ♙c2 0-0 13 ♜b1 was agreed drawn in P.Kotsur-M.Ulibin, Teheran 2004, but Black might have continued in this unclear position with 13...♜xe3 14 ♞xe3 ♞a5!?) 11...♙g7 12 ♜d1 0-0 13 0-0 ♞a5! (beginning counterplay; note too how Black doesn't rush to exchange on e3 as he hopes that White may weaken his centre with a d5-advance) 14 g4?! ♜xe3 15 ♞xe3 f5! 16 ♞xe7 fxg4 17 d5 ♙f5 favoured Black due to his bishops and safer king in G.Olarasu-B.Kovacevic, Nova Gorica 2001.

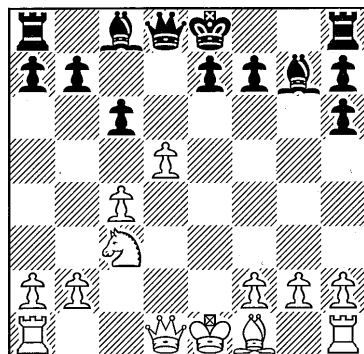
9...gxh6



10 d4

Not forced, but 10 ♖e2 ♙g7 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♙f3 ♙f5 13 ♖e4 (N.Rashkovsky-G.Giorgadze, Ubeda 1999) and now 13...♙c6!? (Watson) should also be a little better for Black.

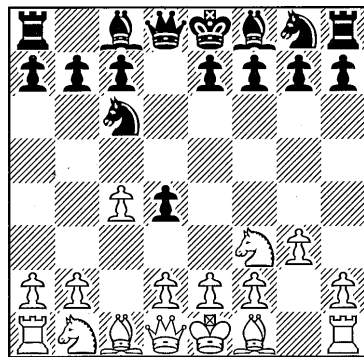
10...♙g7 11 d5



This is V.Zvjaginsev-J.Granda Zuniga, Pamplona 1995, and the best way of putting Black's bishop pair to good use is probably Atalik's idea of 11...♞b6!? 12 ♞d2 ♙f5, which he assesses as being slightly better for Black.

C3)

1 ♜f3 d5 2 c4 d4 3 g3 ♜c6



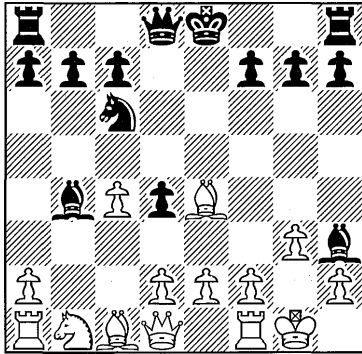
The Schmid Benoni is not considered the most critical of Black openings and often leads to a manoeuvring struggle. Thus it should come as no surprise to learn that White's extra tempo isn't too important in this reversed version.

4 $\text{g}2$ e5 5 0-0

White frequently begins with 5 d3, though that just transposes after 5... $\text{d}f6$ 6 0-0.

5... $\text{d}f6$ 6 d3

Black didn't prevent 6 b4!? because that simply helps him to quickly develop: 6...e4! (and not 6... $\text{d}xb4$?! 7 $\text{d}xe5$!) 7 $\text{d}g5$ $\text{d}xb4$ 8 $\text{d}xe4$ $\text{d}xe4$ 9 $\text{d}xc4$ $\text{d}h3$ and White lags a little in the developmental stakes.

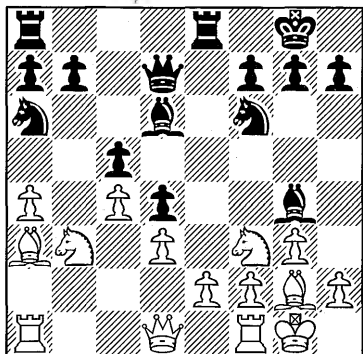


He should avoid allowing the awkward 10 $\text{g}2$?! $\text{d}xg2$ 11 $\text{c}xg2$ d3!, and instead 10 $\text{d}e1$ (10 $\text{d}a4$?! was surprisingly seen in C.Matamoros Franco-F.Vallejo Pons, Spanish Team Championship 2003, but 10... $\text{d}xf1$ 11 $\text{d}xc6$ + bxc6 12 $\text{d}xc6$ + $\text{c}f8$ 13 $\text{c}xf1$ d3! didn't really give White enough for the exchange, especially after 14 e3?! $\text{b}b8$ 15 $\text{d}a3$ when Kosten's 15...h5! would have

been very strong) 10... $\text{d}f6$ 11 $\text{d}a4$ 0-0-0 12 $\text{d}xc6$ was preferred in L.Psakhis-V.Zhuravliov, USSR 1979. After 12... $\text{d}xc6$ 13 $\text{d}xc6$ bxc6, I even slightly prefer Black due to his bishops and extra space, but the game itself followed a more exciting course: 12...bxc6!? 13 $\text{d}xb4$ $\text{d}he8$ 14 f4! d3! 15 e3 g5! 16 $\text{d}b2$ $\text{d}e6$ 17 $\text{d}c3$ gxf4 18 exf4 $\text{d}xe1$ + 19 $\text{d}xe1$ $\text{d}xe1$ + 20 $\text{c}f2$ $\text{d}f1$ + 21 $\text{c}e3$ h5 22 $\text{d}c5$ $\text{d}e1$ + 23 $\text{c}f2$ $\text{d}f1$ + 24 $\text{c}e3$ $\text{d}c1$ + and 1/2-1/2.

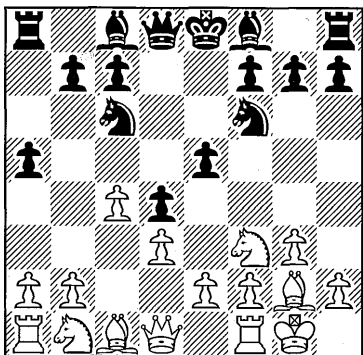
6...a5

Prudently preventing 7 b4, though Black can also consider 6... $\text{d}e7$!?. This appears to fall in with White's plans, but is actually quite playable and has been used by Kasimdzhanov: 7 b4 $\text{d}xb4$! 8 $\text{d}xe5$ 0-0 9 a3 (9 $\text{d}d2$ $\text{d}e8$ 10 a3 $\text{d}a6$ 11 $\text{b}b1$ $\text{b}b8$ 12 $\text{d}b3$ $\text{d}f8$ 13 $\text{d}f3$ c5 14 $\text{d}e1$ $\text{d}f5$ 15 $\text{d}f4$ $\text{d}d6$ was also fine for Black in A.Kulikov-E.Najer, Moscow 1998, but 9 $\text{d}b2$ is Davies's recommendation in *The Dynamic Réti*; he doesn't, however, mention the logical 9... $\text{d}d6$! 10 $\text{d}f3$ c5 which led to a roughly equal position after 11 $\text{d}bd2$ $\text{d}g4$ 12 h3 $\text{d}d7$ 13 a3 $\text{d}c6$ 14 $\text{d}e1$ $\text{d}fe8$ in F.Thiemann-M.Umansky, correspondence 2003) 9... $\text{d}a6$! (c5 is almost always a good square for a knight in this reversed Benoni structure) 10 $\text{d}d2$ $\text{d}d6$ 11 $\text{d}cf3$ $\text{d}e8$ 12 $\text{d}b3$ c5 13 a4?! (White improved with 13 e3 dxe3 14 fxe3 $\text{d}g4$ 15 d4 in C.Hess-C.Gnuechtel, Dresden 2005, when Black might have played 15... $\text{d}e6$!?, trying to encourage White to both blunt his g2-bishop and gain a static centre following 16 d5) 13... $\text{d}g4$ 14 $\text{d}a3$ $\text{d}d7$



was pretty comfortable for Black in R.Odendahl-R.Kasimdzhanov, Vlissingen 2004. Remember, however, that even in seemingly quiet, manoeuvring positions, tactics are never far from the surface. After 15 $\text{Re}1$, the then FIDE World Champion should probably have dissuaded $\text{e}3$ with 15... $\text{Rad}8$, rather than allow 15... $\text{Te}7$ 16 $\text{Qfxd}4$!?

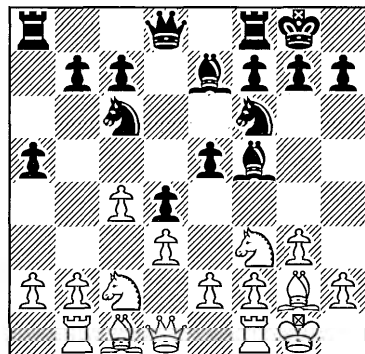
Returning to 6...a5:



7 e3

White can also delay this break, preferring first 7 $\text{Qa}3$. Black frequently meets this with 7... $\text{Qc}5$, but I prefer the more restrained 7... $\text{Qe}7$, keeping the c5-square free for a knight. The merits

of doing so quickly became apparent in M.Hofmann-D.King, Zug 1983: 8 $\text{Qc}2$ (8 $\text{Qb}5$? is outwardly more aggressive, but Black should be fine after 8...0-0 9 $\text{e}3$ $\text{Qg}4$ 10 $\text{exd}4$ $\text{exd}4$: White quickly got into trouble with the artificial 11 $\text{Qd}2$?! $\text{Qd}7$ 12 $\text{Qf}4$?! $\text{Tac}8$ 13 $\text{Qd}2$ $\text{Qh}5$ 14 $\text{Qe}4$ $\text{Qf}6$ 15 $\text{Qe}2$ $\text{Tfe}8$ in Z.Sarosy-D.MacLeod, correspondence 1991, and so Sarosy has suggested 12 $\text{b}3$ as an improvement, but that rather invites the logical 12...a4!) 8...0-0 9 $\text{Tb}1$ (or 9 $\text{e}3$ when Black should play as in our main line with 9... $\text{dxe}3$ and if 10 $\text{Qxe}3$, then 10... $\text{Qg}4$ is tempting) 9... $\text{Qf}5$! (restraining the e3-break)



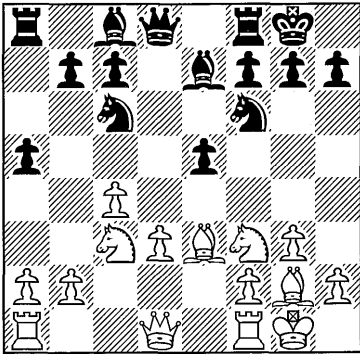
10 $\text{Qh}4$ $\text{Qg}4$ 11 $\text{a}3$?! $\text{Qd}7$! 12 $\text{Qf}3$ $\text{a}4$ 13 $\text{Qd}2$ $\text{Qc}5$ 14 $\text{Qc}4$ $\text{Qb}3$ 15 $\text{h}3$ $\text{Qe}6$ 16 $\text{Qd}2$ $\text{Qca}5$! (Black is happy to further free his position with an exchange of knights before netting the bishop pair) 17 $\text{Qxb}3$ $\text{Qxb}3$ 18 $\text{Qa}1$ $\text{Qxc}1$ 19 $\text{Qxc}1$ $\text{Qd}7$ and King held a pretty pleasant advantage before White collapsed with 20 $\text{Qxb}7$? $\text{Ta}7$! 21 $\text{Qg}2$ $\text{Qxh}3$ 22 $\text{b}4$ $\text{Ta}6$ 23 $\text{f}3$? $\text{Tg}6$ 24 $\text{Qe}1$ $\text{Qh}4$! and 0-1.

7...dxe3!

Both the simplest and the best con-

tinuation. Black has frequently preferred 7...♗e7, but then 8 exd4 exd4 9 ♘a3 leads to a pleasant white edge (for anyone not convinced, the superb game J.Speelman-H.Koneru, British Championship, Torquay 2002, should demonstrate the problems that Black can face after the exchange of pawns on d4).

8 ♗xe3 ♗e7 9 ♘c3 0-0



10 d4

Vallejo's choice, but as this leads to drawish simplification, White might prefer:

a) 10 h3 ♗f5 11 ♖b3! (trying to inject some life into the position; 11 d4 exd4 12 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 13 ♖xd4 c6 14 ♖f4 ♗e6 15 ♘a4 ♘d7 16 ♗fd1 ♖b8 was pretty equal, although White was later outplayed in Cao Sang-Z.Varga, Balatonlelle 2001) 11...♘d4! (a suggestion of Kosten's, aiming to improve over 11...♖c8 12 ♘d5 ♘xd5 13 cxd5 ♘b4 14 ♘xe5 ♗xh3 which was quite unclear in M.Makarov-M.Muse, Berlin 1996) 12 ♗xd4 (12 ♖xb7?! ♗b8 13 ♖a6 ♘xf3+ 14 ♗xf3 ♗xh3 15 ♗fd1 ♗g4! 16 ♗xg4 ♘xg4 begins to erode White's kingside

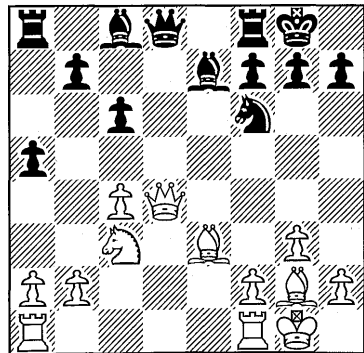
defences) 12...exd4 13 ♘d5 (13 ♘b5 is well met by 13...♗c5, followed by ...c6) 13...♘xd5 14 cxd5 ♗f6 and, while this is quite unclear, Black shouldn't be any worse, due to his bishop pair and pressure against d3. White can't easily win the d4-pawn (15 ♖c4 is rebuffed by 15...♖d7 16 g4 b5) and if 15 ♗ac1, then the active 15...♗b8 16 ♗c5 c6! 17 dxc6 bxc6 18 ♖c2 ♗c6 maintains the balance.

b) 10 ♗e1!? ♘g4 (Hort's 10...♗c8 11 h3 ♗e6 12 ♖b3 ♗b8 is a solid alternative) 11 ♘d5 ♘xe3 12 ♘xe7+?! (Davies suggests 12 fxe3, although I still feel that Black has his fair share of the chances in an unclear struggle after 12...f5, and if 13 ♖b3, then 13...a4 14 ♖c3 ♗f6) 12...♖xc7 13 fxe3 ♗g4 14 ♖b3 e4! 15 dxe4?! ♗xf3 16 ♗xf3 a4 gave Black a marked positional advantage in A.Wojtkiewicz-Y.Seirawan, Haninge 1990.

10...exd4 11 ♘xd4 ♘xd4

Should Black want to keep pieces on, then Finkel's 11...♘e5!? 12 b3 ♘fg4 is a reasonable try.

12 ♖xd4 c6!



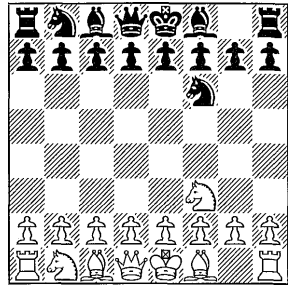
Taking control of some key squares like this appears to be the cleanest equalizer. F.Vallejo Pons-B.Gelfand, Monaco (rapid) 2005, continued 13 ♖a4 (or 13 ♗f4 when Black might consider 13...♗e6 and 14...♗b8, as well as 13...♗d6 14 ♗h4 ♕g4 15 ♗xd8 ♖xd8 16

♗b6 ♖e8 17 ♖ad1 ♗f8 18 ♕e4 ♕e5 which was pretty level at this stage in G.Margvelashvili-I.Krush, Schaumburg 2006) 13...♗xd4 14 ♗xd4 ♗e6. 15 b3 ♕d7 16 ♖fe1 ♖fd8 17 h3 ♗b4 and soon led to a draw since neither side could easily make any progress.

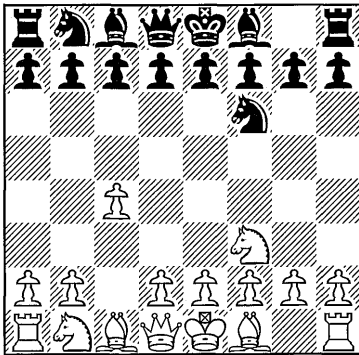
Chapter Twelve

Black Meets

1 ♘f3 with 1... ♘f6



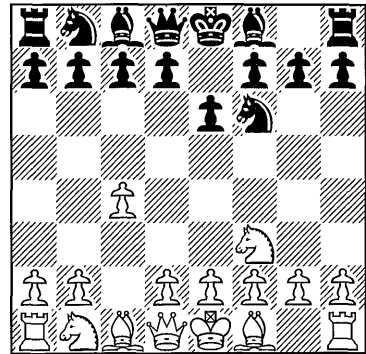
1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4



This is the main move which we will be focussing on in this chapter. As well as 2 d4, White can play a King's Indian Attack with 2 g3, when 2...d5 takes us back into the KIA line we considered in the last chapter. Occasionally White also tries 2 b3, when a number of strong players have been happy to counter-fianchetto with 2...g6. Black can also play 2...d5 3 ♖b2 and then either 3...♗g4, playing along the lines of Line A of Chapter Eleven, or 3...♗f5,

intending to employ the same solid set-up which we considered against the KIA in Line B of that chapter.

2...e6



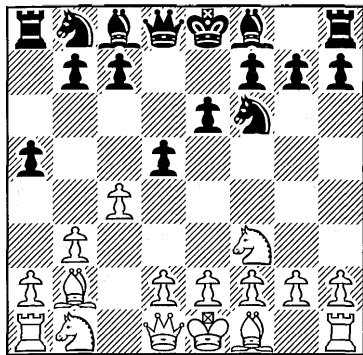
We will now consider:

A: 3 g3

B: 3 ♘c3

As well as with 3 g3, White can also play a type of Réti beginning with 3 b3. In response 3...a6 (our dynamic reply to 3 g3) loses much of its punch after 4

e3, but Black can still follow a fairly uncharted, but fully viable course with 3...d5 4 ♖b2 a5!?, as both Ehlvest and Volkov have done.

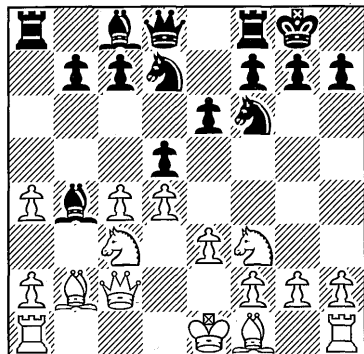


The idea is to meet 5 g3 with 5...a4, and in practice White has usually tried one of:

a) 5 ♘c3 c6 (playing a reversed Benoni with Ribli's idea of 5...d4!? 6 ♗b5 c5 7 g3 ♘c6 8 ♖g2 ♗e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 d3 e5 is also quite possible) 6 e3 (6 d4 a4 7 e3 ♖a5 8 ♙c1 ♗e4 gave Black good Cambridge Springs-type counterplay in J.Pomes Marcet-A.Vaisser, Groningen 1991) 6...♗bd7 7 d4 ♖b4!? 8 a3 ♖xc3+ 9 ♖xc3 ♗e4 10 ♖b2 0-0 11 ♗e2 b6 12 0-0 ♖a6 was pretty solid for Black and didn't leave the white bishops looking especially active in S.Sabaev-O.Romanov, Karvina 1998.

b) 5 e3 hopes that Black's last move was a bluff, but it wasn't and 5...a4! 6 bxa4 ♗bd7 7 ♘c3 (White played more creatively with 7 cxd5 exd5 8 ♗c3 ♖d6 9 ♙c1 c6 10 ♖d3!? in S.Grigroriants-S.Volkov, Elista 2000, but Black would have had plenty of counterplay and compensation after Grigroriants's logi-

cal suggestion, 10...♗c5! 11 ♖c2 ♖g4) 7...♖e7 (Ehlvest's suggestion of 7...♗c5!? 8 d4 ♗ce4 9 c5 c6, followed by ...b6, also deserves close attention) 8 ♖c2 0-0 9 d4 ♖b4! was reached in K.Spraggett-J.Ehlvest, Clermont Ferrand 1989, when Black appears to have reasonable counterplay.



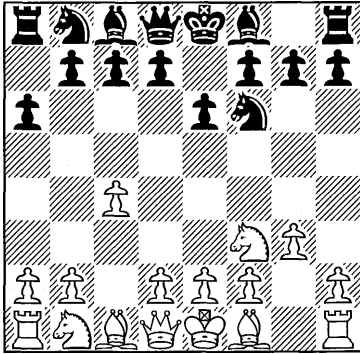
After 10 cxd5 (Ehlvest wonders if 10 ♖d3!? might have been more accurate, although after 10...dxc4 11 ♖xc4 ♗b6 12 ♖b3 ♖d7 13 0-0 Black should be fine so long as he doesn't race to regain the pawn; one idea being 13...♗fd5!? 14 e4 ♗xc3 15 ♖xc3 ♖xc3 16 ♖xc3 ♖xa4 17 ♙ac1 c6 18 ♖xa4 ♙xa4 19 ♖b3 ♙a6 when it's not at all easy for White to do anything with his classical centre) 10...exd5 11 ♖d3 ♙e8 12 0-0 c6 13 a3 ♖a5! a Carlsbad structure had arisen, but with White having traded his minority attack options for a pretty useless extra doubled a-pawn.

A)

1 ♗f3 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 a6!?

An intriguing idea from the ever-creative Ukrainian, Oleg Romanishin,

which he first unveiled in 1974. This dynamic alternative to 3...d5 and 3...c5 has stood the test of time, and has even been employed by the likes of Karpov, Kamsky and Svidler.

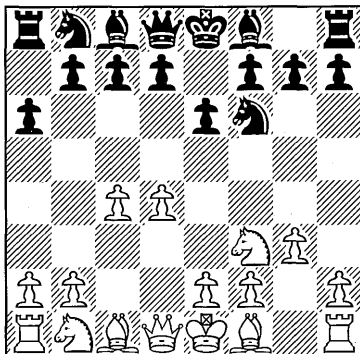


4 g2

Completing the fianchetto, but as usual White has alternatives:

a) 4 b3 c5 (slightly more accurate than 4...b5 5 d3 c3 when Black can't defend b5 with ...b6) 5 g2 b5 transposes to our main line.

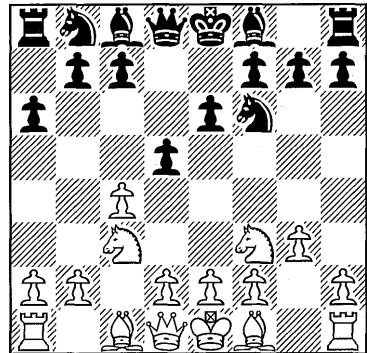
b) 4 d4 is quite rare, probably because White doesn't usually want to trade a centre pawn for a flank one.



After 4...b5 5 g2 (or 5 c2 b7 6

g2 e4 7 c3 bxc4 8 xc4 d5 9 a4+ d7 10 c3 c5 and Black was pretty comfortable in L.Voloshin-V.Baklan, Austrian League 2006) 5...bxc4 6 e5 d5 7 xc4 c5 8 0-0 c6 9 dxc5 xc5 10 e3 xe3 11 xe3 b8 12 d2 0-0 Black was at least equal in M.Donk-P.Wells, Antwerp 1996.

b) 4 c3 d5

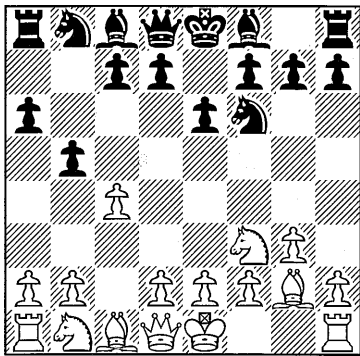


5 cxd5 (reducing Black's fun; instead 5 d4?! transposes to a line of the Catalan considered slightly suspect due to 5...dxc4 6 g2 b5 7 e5 a7! when White lacks compensation with ...c5 on the way, while 5 g2 gives Black a choice between 5...dxc4!? and playing as in Line C3 of the last chapter with 5...d4 6 b1 c6 7 0-0 e5) 5...exd5 6 d4 (it might be a little more testing for White to retain some flexibility with his d-pawn, although Black should also be fine after 6 g2; A.Graf-M.Krasenkow, USSR Championship, Moscow 1991, continued 6...d6 7 0-0 0-0 8 d3!? h6 9 e4 dxe4 10 dxe4 c6 11 e1 g4 12 f4 ge5! 13 xe5 xe5 14 h3 and now Krasenkow's notes observe that he could have equalized with 14...c6!,

enabling Black to meet 15 ♖h5 with 15...♞c7) 6...♙d6 7 ♙g2 0-0 isn't a particularly promising sort of Exchange Queen's Gambit for White. Black equalized comfortably in S.Gazakaev-A.Smirnov, Smolensk 2005: 8 0-0 ♜e8 9 ♙g5 c6 10 ♞c1 (10 ♞d3 ♜bd7 11 e4!? dxe4 12 ♜xe4 ♙e7 13 ♞fe1 h6 14 ♙xf6 ♜xf6 15 ♜xf6+ ♙xf6 16 ♞xe8+ ♞xe8 17 ♞e1 ♞d8 also didn't give White anything in B.Villamayor-R.Zelcic, Elista Olympiad 1998) 10...♜bd7 11 a3 h6 12 ♙f4 ♙f8! 13 h3 ♜b6 14 ♜e5 ♙e6 15 g4 ♜fd7 and there was no way past the solid black defences.

4...b5!

The consistent follow-up. White can now win a pawn, but doing so is rather risky.

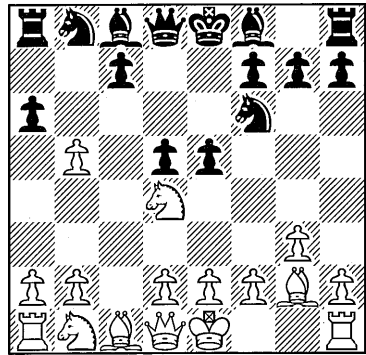


5 b3

This has become by far White's most popular choice in practice, simply maintaining his centre. To see why that's so, we should explore the alternatives:

a) 5 ♜d4 d5 (5...c6!? is also promising, especially if White falls for 6 cxb5 axb5 7 ♜xb5?! cxb5! 8 ♙xa8 d5 when

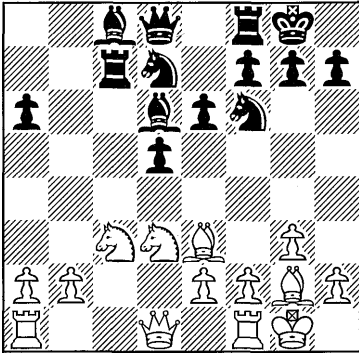
his bishop is trapped) 6 cxb5 e5! gives Black a strong centre in return for his pawn.



When one considers that he may well also gain pressure down the half-open a- and b-files, it becomes clear that this is quite a promising gambit, as was shown by L.Espig-R.Tischbierek, East German Championship, Eilenburg 1984: 7 ♜c6 (Tischbierek feels that White should prefer 7 ♜f3 e4 8 ♜d4 axb5 9 ♜xb5, although Black clearly has promising compensation after 9...c6 10 ♜d4 ♞b6 11 ♜b3 ♙d6 12 d3 ♙f5) 7...♜xc6 8 bxc6 ♙c5 9 e3 (White preferred 9 0-0 h5! 10 e3 d4 11 ♞c2 ♙a7 12 h3 ♙e6 13 ♜a3 in M.Manakova-V.Bogdanovski, Nis 1995, when Black should probably have continued forwards with 13...e4!?) and now 9...d4!, preventing White from easily developing his queenside, would have left Black somewhat better according to Tischbierek.

b) 5 ♜e5 ♞a7!? 6 d4 (or 6 cxb5 axb5 7 ♞b3 ♙b7 8 0-0 ♙xg2 9 ♙xg2 ♜a6! 10 ♞xb5 ♜b4 11 ♜a3 ♞a8+ 12 ♜f3! ♜c6! 13 ♜c2 ♞xa2 14 ♞xa2 ♞xa2 and Black

regained his pawn with rough equality in R.Vaganian-Y.Seirawan, Biel Interzonal 1985) 6...bxc4 7 dxc4 d5 8 e5 c5! 9 dxc5 e5 10 0-0 0-0 11 c3 e6 12 e3 c7 13 d3 b7



saw Black's extra central pawn help him to equalize comfortably in A.Huzman-P.Svidler, European Club Cup, Panormo 2001.

c) 5 0-0 bxc4 6 a4 (or 6 e5 d5 7 dxc4 when Black faces a pleasant choice between Gelashvili's 7...dxc4!? 8 a8 c6, and 7...a7 8 e5 c5 à la Svidler) 6...b7 7 c3 c5 8 e5 (8 axc4 d5! 9 a4+ a7 is also fine for Black) 8...xg2 9 xg2 e7 10 axc4 0-0 saw White regain his pawn, but without troubling Black, who went on to seize the initiative with 11 g4 b6 12 xf6+ xf6 13 g4 c6 14 e4?! e7 15 h5 f5! 16 c3 f4 17 d3 f5 in S.Sahu-N.Davies, Wrexham 1997.

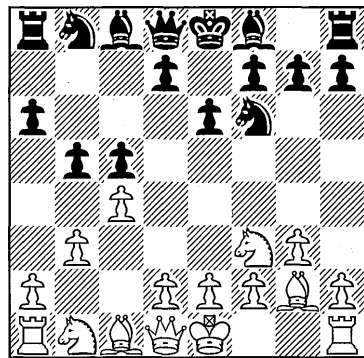
d) 5 d3 c5! heads for a Hedgehog-type set-up in which Black has already got in ...b5. That should ensure him of reasonable counterplay, as he gained with 6 0-0 b7 7 e4 (7 c3 should probably be met by 7...b6, just as in

the main line) 7...d6 8 cxb5?! axb5 9 c3 b6 10 e3 g4! 11 b3 c6 12 a4 xe3 13 fe3 c4! in S.Zhelesny-M.Krasenkow, Moscow 1992.

e) 5 cxb5 axb5 6 d4 a5 reveals another neat point behind 3...a6, although I would also be tempted to play 6...d5! as in variation 'a' above. The rook advance was preferred in, for example, M.Klausner-V.Korchnoi, Switzerland 1985, which continued 7 b3 a7! 8 d4 b7 9 0-0?! xg2 10 xg2 c6 11 e2 a8 and Black had promising queenside pressure.

5...c5

Once again Black should prefer this move order to 5...b7 when 6 c3 is a little awkward, as even Romanishin has discovered to his cost.



6 0-0

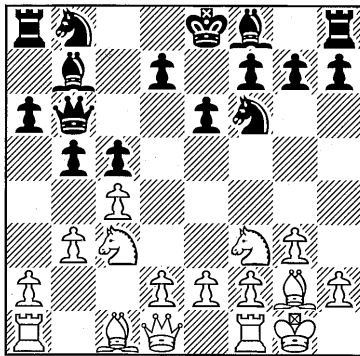
Our main line can also be reached via 6 c3 b6 7 0-0, but White can follow independent paths with that move order: 7 e3 (or 7 e4 c6!? 8 e5 g4 9 0-0 b7 10 e2 h5! 11 h3 h6 12 cxb5 axb5 13 a5 b5 c7 14 e2 f5 15 b5 b6 when Black had full compensation for his pawn in I.Stohl-

P.Wells, Austrian League 2001, and the simpler 7...♙b7 is also quite playable) 7...♙b7 8 ♖e2!? (8 0-0 would once again transpose to the main line) 8...♙c6 9 0-0 ♙c7 10 d4 0-0 11 ♙b2 b4! (Ribli's improvement over the 11...d6?! 12 d5! of A.Khalifman-V.Yemelin, St Petersburg 1998) 12 ♖a4 ♙xa4 13 bxa4 ♖c6 14 ♖d2 ♖ac8 gave Black good counterplay in V.Filippov-G.Giorgadze, Bugojno 1999.

6...♙b7 7 ♖c3

Critical, but quite often White prefers 7 ♙b2 ♙e7, when 8 ♖c3 ♖b6 transposes to note 'a' to White's 8th move, and the solid 8 d3 0-0 9 ♖bd2 also shouldn't especially trouble Black. Following 9...d6 10 e3 ♖bd7 11 ♖e2 bxc4!? 12 ♖xc4 a5! 13 ♖fd1 a4, he had equalized comfortably in C.Landenbergue-V.Anand, Biel 1988.

7...♖b6



8 e3

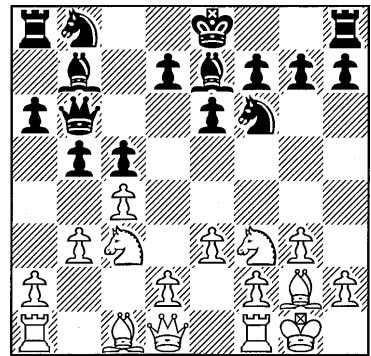
Supporting the d4-advance like this is White's main plan, but he can also consider:

a) 8 ♙b2 ♙e7 9 d4 is an interesting idea of Andersson's, unsurprisingly

aiming for a small edge. In response Black needs to be accurate, as he was with 9...cxd4 10 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 11 ♖xd4 ♙xg2 12 ♙xg2 ♖c6 13 ♖fd1 ♖xd4! 14 ♖xd4 ♖b8 which kept the white pieces at bay in M.Marin-R.Pogorelov, La Pobra de Lillet 1997.

b) 8 d3 ♙e7 9 e4 isn't an especially promising Botvinnik set-up since Black has already got in ...b5: after 9...d6 10 ♙e3 (10 h3 ♖c6 11 ♙e3 ♖d4 12 ♖b1 e5 13 ♖h4 b4 14 ♖e2 ♖d7! was also fine for Black in R.Vaganian-M.Krasenkow, Tallinn 1988) 10...0-0 11 b4!? bxc4 12 bxc5 dxc5 13 ♖b1 ♖a7 14 d4?! ♖d8 15 ♖c2 ♖c6! 16 dxc5 ♖g4 17 ♙g5 ♙xg5 18 ♖xg5 didn't see the opening of the game at all trouble Black in E.Miroshnichenko-L.Aronian, Antalya (rapid) 2004, and now 18...♖ge5 would have confirmed Black's advantage.

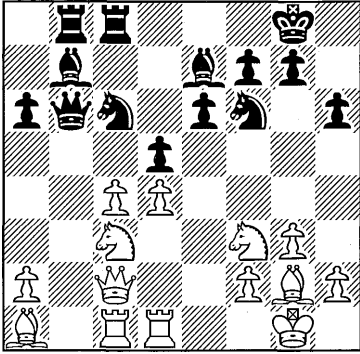
8...♙e7



9 ♖e2

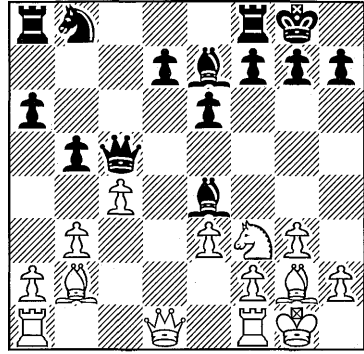
Delaying d4 for the time being. White might also try to cut across Black's ...♖e4 exchanging manoeuvre with 9 ♖c2, but his queen is far less happy on e2 than c2 once the central

files open. Following 9...0-0 10 ♖b2 ♗c6 11 ♖ac1 ♖fc8! 12 ♖fd1 h6 13 ♖a1 ♖ab8, White should probably have sat tight with 14 d3 in Z.Arsovic-S.Drazic, Podgorica 1996. Instead, 14 d4?! cxd4 15 exd4 bxc4!? 16 bxc4 d5



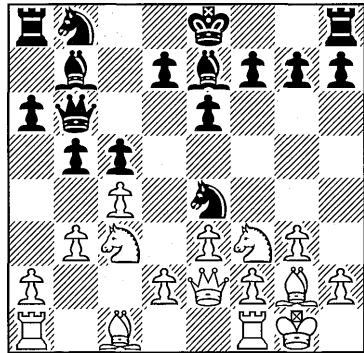
saw the black d-pawn finally advance and with some effect; Black quickly seizing the upper hand with 17 c5 ♖c7 18 ♖b1 ♗d7 19 ♖a4 ♖f6! 20 ♖a3 ♗a5 21 ♖c1 ♗c4.

White doesn't have to move his queen, but 9 d4 instead is met by 9...♗e4! (not the only move, but this appears to be the simplest equalizer). After 10 ♖b2 0-0 11 dxc5 (or 11 ♖c2 ♗xc3 12 ♖xc3 and now Black soon regretted the weakening 12...f5?! in A.Donchenko-N.Olenin, Moscow 1995; much better was 12...♗c6 and if 13 dxc5, then 13...♖xc5 with pressure against c4, while the black queen may also go to h5) 11...♖xc5! (the correct recapture; 11...♖xc5?! 12 ♖c2 ♗xc3 13 ♖xc3! left Black with less counterplay and White with a pleasant edge in Z.Ribli-S.Kindermann, Munich 1988) 12 ♗e4 ♖xe4



13 b4?! (rather ambitious, but perhaps White miscalculated; 13 ♖c1 is also possible when Black should avoid 13...♖h5?? 14 ♖d4, preferring 13...b4, intending ...a5, ...d6 and ...♗d7-c5) 13...♖xb4 14 ♖d4 ♖f6 15 ♖xe4 d5! 16 ♖c2 ♖xb2 17 ♖xb2 ♖xb2 18 ♖ab1 ♖f6 19 cxd5 exd5 20 ♖fd1 ♖d8 21 ♗e1 when Black kept an edge due to his queenside majority in D.Zagorskis-A.Panchenko, Minsk 1994.

9...♗e4!



Exchanging knights is once again a good plan. Black both frees his position and takes some of the pressure off b5.

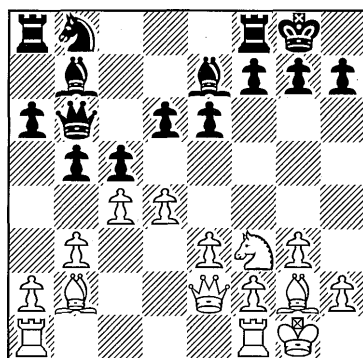
10 ♗xe4 ♖xe4 11 d3

Played not so much with e4 in mind (a Botvinnik set-up shouldn't trouble Black since his queenside counterplay has already begun), but more to avoid the tactical point 11 ♖b2 bxc4 when White can't recapture with his pawn due to the loose bishop on b2. Nevertheless, White can play this way and he was even recommended to do so in *The Dynamic English*: 12 ♜xc4 (Aseev's 12 ♖xg7!? ♜g8 13 ♖c3 ♖d3 14 ♜d1 ♖xf1 15 ♖xf1 cxb3 16 ♖c5 gives White some compensation for the exchange, though I have my doubts that it's enough after 16...d5 17 ♜h5 ♜f8) 12...♜b7! 13 ♖e1 (probably the most testing way of resolving the pressure down the long diagonal; 13 ♜e2 0-0 14 d3 ♖c6 15 e4 d6 16 ♖d2 ♖d7 17 f4 a5 18 f5 exf5 19 ♜xf5 ♖e5! didn't really lead anywhere for White in K.Bischoff-G.Giorgadze, Lippstadt 1998) 13...♖xg2 14 ♖xg2 0-0 15 ♜g4 f6 was seen in P.Schlosser-K.Aseev, Brno 1991. Bosch feels that 'Black stands well' here and I am inclined to agree with him. (Indeed, when the two players met the following year, Schlosser preferred the more restrained 11 d3.) The game continuation of 16 ♜ad1 ♖c6 17 d4?! cxd4 18 exd4 ♖b4! 19 ♖a3 a5 was not a success for White, and so Kosten has suggested that he might prefer 16 ♜fc1!?. The idea is to target the c5-pawn, but after 16...♖c6! Black is most certainly not worse since he can meet 17 ♖f4 with 17...♖e5 18 ♖xe5 fxe5 19 ♖d3 ♜d5, when both his strong centre and pressure down the f-file are useful assets.

11...♖b7 12 ♖b2 0-0 13 d4

White can first insert 13 ♜fd1 d6 before 14 d4 when 14...♖d7 is fine for Black, while in R.Buhmann-V.Baklan, Austrian League 2006, another method of unravelling was revealed: 14...♜e8!? 15 dxc5 dxc5 16 h4 ♜a7! 17 ♜d2 ♖c6 18 ♜ad1 ♜d7 19 ♖e5 ♜xd2 20 ♜xd2 ♖xg2 21 ♖xg2 f6 22 ♖f3 ♜c6 23 ♜d3 ♜c8 24 e4 ♜c7! 25 h5 ♜d7 and Black had fully equalized before going on to outplay his opponent.

13...d6



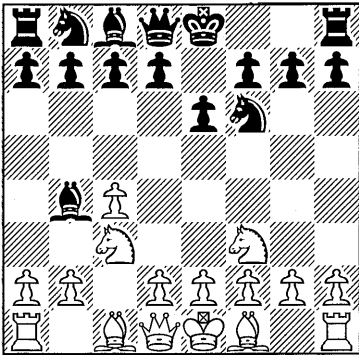
This position bears some similarities with a Queen's Indian, and both the exchange of knights and queenside space gained have helped Black. After 14 dxc5 he might recapture with the d-pawn (when 15 ♜fd1 ♜e8!? transposes to Buhmann-Baklan above), but there is also nothing wrong with 14...♜xc5: 15 ♖d4?! ♜h5! 16 cxb5 axb5 17 ♜fc1 ♖c6 18 ♖b2 ♜fb8. 19 e4 b4! fixed a2 and gave Black an edge in V.Akopian-M.Chiburdanidze, World Team Championship, Lucerne 1997, and 15 cxb5 ♜xb5 16 ♖d4 ♜xe2 17 ♖xe2 ♖xg2 18 ♖xg2 ♖c6 led to a rather equal ending in U.Andersson-L.Van Wely, French League 2002.

B)

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♖b4

The only system which we will cover here. Queen's Indian players can also consider 3...b6, but must then be prepared for both the Khalifman-endorsed 4 g3 ♖b7 5 ♘g2 ♖b4 6 0-0 0-0 7 d3 and the sharper 4 e4!? ♖b7 5 ♘d3.

After 3...♖b4, we have reached the so-called Nimzo English. White could, of course, transpose to the Nimzo proper with 4 d4, but those who employ this tricky move order normally prefer to continue down an independent path. This line is particularly popular at grandmaster level, but is pretty rare at club level. Nevertheless, the reader should still examine what follows since one never knows just who might be a follower of Kramnik, and the 14th World Champion has especially made good use of Line B4 in his career.



We will now consider:

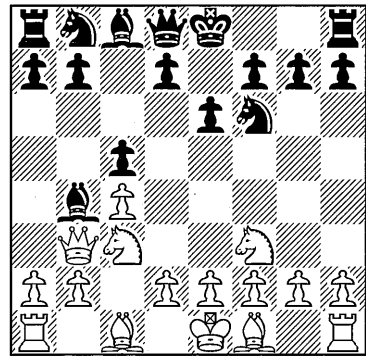
- B1:** 4 ♖b3
- B2:** 4 g4!?
- B3:** 4 g3
- B4:** 4 ♖c2

There's also Speelman's favourite 4 e3 0-0 5 ♘e2!?, but Black shouldn't worry too much about this attempt to avoid theory. One fully viable response is 5...d5, and another is 5...c5 after which 6 ♘a4 (or 6 0-0 ♘xc3 7 dxc3 b6 8 ♘d3 ♖b7 9 ♖e2 ♘e4! and Black equalized in V.Korchnoi-D.Bronstein, USSR Championship, Leningrad 1960) 6...d6 7 a3 ♘a5 8 0-0 ♘c7!? (preparing to fianchetto and break with ...d5) 9 b4 b6 10 ♘c3 ♘c6 11 d4!? cxb4 12 axb4 ♘xb4 13 ♖a4 a5 14 ♘a3 ♘d7 15 ♖b3 ♘c6! 16 ♖xb4 axb4 17 ♖xb4 ♖a5 18 ♘b5 ♖xb5 19 cxb5 ♖xa1 20 ♖xa1 d5 saw Black return his extra pawn to fully equalize in J.Speelman-D.Gormally, Hastings 2000/1.

B1)

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♖b4 4 ♖b3 c5

Kramnik's choice against a line which he has dabbled in himself as White. Those who meet the 4 ♖c2 Nimzo proper with the Zürich, though, can prefer 4...♘c6, since after 5 a3 ♘xc3 6 ♖xc3 a5 7 b3 d6, White has nothing better than transposing to the Zürich with 8 d4.

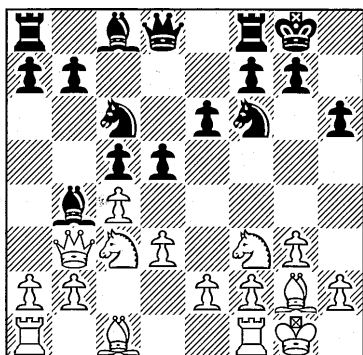


5 g3

White can also begin with 5 a3, when 5...♙a5 6 g3 (not forced, but the alternatives also don't promise White any advantage: for example, 6 ♖b5!? ♙xc3 7 bxc3 b6 8 g3 0-0 9 ♙g2 ♙a6 10 ♖a4 ♙b7 11 d3 d6 12 0-0 ♘bd7 13 e4 a6 14 ♖b3 ♙c6 15 a4 ♖c7 16 ♙f4 ♙ab8 17 ♖a2 ♙b7 was rather balanced when V.Dobrov-A.Riazantsev, Moscow 2004, was agreed drawn) 6...0-0 7 ♙g2 ♘c6 takes us back to our main line.

5...♘c6 6 a3

White doesn't have to play an early a3, but after 6 ♙g2 0-0 7 0-0 d5 8 d3 h6 (Black responds as in our main line, but just as there 8...♙xc3!? 9 ♖xc3 d4 is also worth considering)

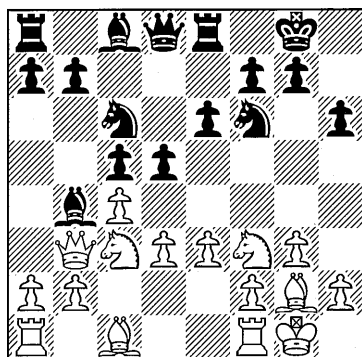


9 ♘a4 b6, White doesn't have anything better than 10 a3 ♙a5 which takes us into the note to White's 10th move in the main line. As well as 9 ♘a4, White has two independent options that can be tried:

a) 9 ♙f4 b6 10 a3 ♙a5 11 ♘a2!? (once again 11 ♘a4 is the main line; alternatively 11 ♘e5 ♙b7 should be fine for Black, while 11 ♘b5?! is well

met by 11...a6 since 12 ♘d6? e5 wins material) 11...♘h5!? (trying to force the bishop back to d2; Black can also play more simply with Izoria's 11...♙b7 12 ♖a4 ♖e7 13 ♘e5 ♙fc8) 12 ♘e5?! (12 ♙e3 was probably preferable, not that White has any advantage after 12...♘f6, but not 12...d4? due to 13 ♘xd4!) 12...♘xf4 13 ♘xc6 ♘xe2+ 14 ♙h1 ♖c7! 15 cxd5 exd5 16 ♖xd5 ♙b7 turned out well for Black in Y.Pelletier-M.Mchedlishvili, European Championship, Silivri 2003.

b) 9 e3 ♙e8

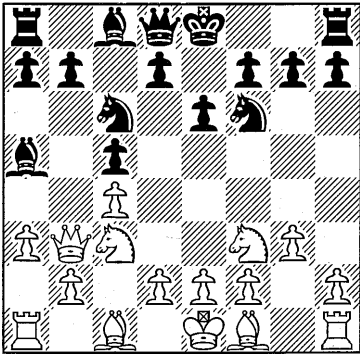


10 a3 dxc4!? (preparing to vigorously counter in the centre) 11 dxc4 ♙xc3 12 ♖xc3 e5 13 b4 e4 14 ♘d2 ♖e7! 15 b5 ♘e5 16 ♘xe4 was G.Kasparov-V.Anand, World Championship (4th matchgame), New York 1995, when 16...♙h3! would have given Black good compensation. Anand then mentions 17 ♙xh3 (or 17 ♘d2 ♙xg2 18 ♙xg2 ♙ad8 19 ♙b2 b6! with a dangerous initiative; even worse for White, though, is 17 ♙b2? ♙xg2 18 ♘xf6+ ♖xf6 19 ♙xg2 ♖f3+ when he will do well to survive due to his numerous weak light squares) 17...♘f3+

18 ♖h1 ♜xe4 19 ♜b2 ♞ad8, when Black threatens 20...♘fd2 and has excellent activity for his pawn.

6...♙a5

One of the key points behind 4...c5. Black wants to preserve his dark-squared bishop, thereby asking White just what his queen now achieves on b3.

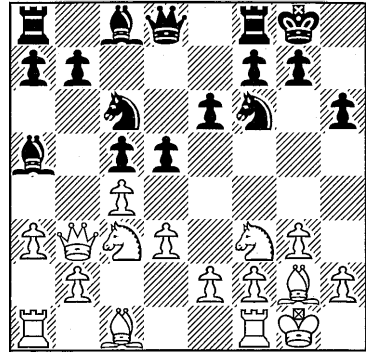


7 ♙g2 0-0 8 0-0 d5

Black has also opted for a set-up with 8...d6 and ...e5, but this classical advance is his best option.

9 d3 h6!

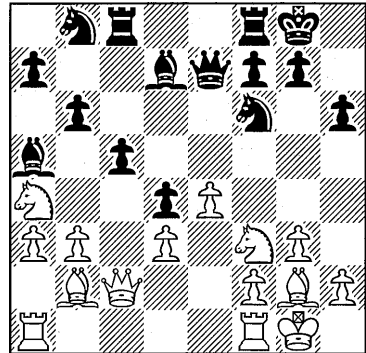
Wisely preventing White from generating pressure against d5 after ♙g5. Black should avoid 9...d4 10 ♘a4 b6?! 11 ♘e5! (J.Speelman-Y.Seirawan, 1st matchgame, Saint John 1988), but he can also consider 9...♙xc3!? 10 ♜xc3 d4 11 ♜c2 e5 when his strong centre and extra space roughly balance out White's bishops; for example, 12 ♙d2 a5! 13 b4 axb4 14 axb4 ♞xa1 15 ♞xa1 cxb4 16 ♞b1 ♜e7 17 ♜b2 b3! 18 ♜xb3 e4 was fine for Black in the game L.Pachman-L.Polugaevsky, Mar del Plata 1962.



10 ♙f4

White can also begin with 10 ♘a4 b6, when 11 ♙f4 ♞e8 is our main line, but there is also:

a) 11 ♜c2 ♙d7 12 cxd5 exd5 13 b3 ♞c8 14 e3 ♜e7 15 ♙b2 d4! 16 e4 ♘b8



blunted White's bishops and gave Black a good game in L.Ftacnik-A.Istratescu, Khanty Mansyisk 2005.

b) 11 e3!? ♜e7 12 ♜c2 was V.Gavrikov-R.Berzinsh, Tampere 1999, when Gavrikov feels 12...♙b7 is best, not that Black would have been doing too badly had he met 12...♙d7 13 b3 ♞ac8 14 ♙b2 ♞fd8 15 ♘c3 ♙e8 16 ♞fd1 by changing tack with 16...♙xc3!? 17 ♜xc3 d4.

10...♖e8

An important move, trying to force through ...e5 and thereby cut across White's plans.

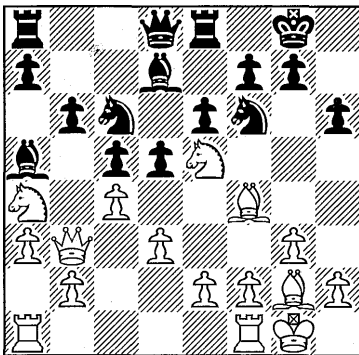
11 ♖a4

White hopes that, after 11...b6, Black's bishop might become stranded on a5, but the bishop isn't any worse placed than the a4-knight. White can also occupy the e5-square, but 11 ♖e5 ♗xe5 12 ♖xe5 (V.Filippov-P.Kiriakov, Krasnoyarsk 1998) 12...♗g4!? 13 ♖f4 d4! 14 ♖c4 e5 15 ♖c1 ♖b6 (Kosten) is fine for Black.

11...b6

Shoring up c5 in preparation for gaining counterplay against the a4-knight, but more adventurous souls might prefer to investigate Kramnik's suggestion of 11...e5!? 12 cxd5 ♗d4! 13 ♗xd4 cxd4 14 ♖c1 ♖g4.

12 ♖e5 ♖d7!

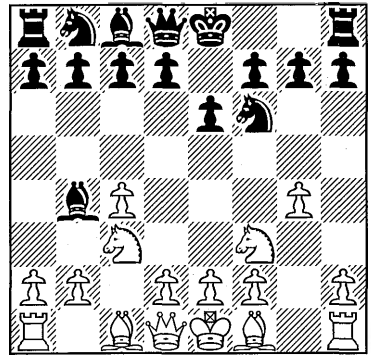


We've been following V.Topalov-V.Kramnik, Dortmund 2001, in which Black enjoyed a fair share of the chances. His last threatened 13...♗d4, and 13 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 14 ♖c3 ♖ad8 is comfortable for Black. Topalov thus

preferred 13 e3!?, but after 13...g5! 14 ♗xc6 ♖xc6 15 ♖e5 ♗g4 16 ♖c3 ♖xc3 17 ♗xc3 dxc4 18 dxc4 ♖xg2 19 ♗xg2 ♗e7 White was the side who needed to be accurate to maintain equality, and Kramnik went on to win.

B2)

1 ♖f3 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗c3 ♖b4 4 g4!?



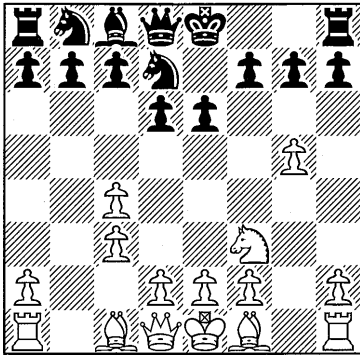
A very modern flank advance, which serves to remind us just how much remains to be discovered in the flank openings, as well as just how complex they can be. This radical idea was invented independently by Zvjaginsev and Krasenkow, and it's a line which Black needs to be prepared for, to avoid quickly falling into a poor position.

4...d6

A solid and prudent choice. Black can also play 4...0-0 5 g5 ♗e8 which is objectively far from clear. However, this is the type of position 4 g4 exponents are ready for. One example being M.Krasenkow-O.Romanishin, Lvov 2000: 6 ♗c2 d5 7 b3 ♖e7 8 ♖g1 c5 9 e3 ♗c6?! 10 ♖d3 f5 11 gxf6 ♗xf6 12 a3

♖e8 13 ♗b2 ♜h5 14 ♙e2 d4 (finally trying to achieve something with his more advanced centre) 15 ♘xd4! ♘xd4 16 exd4 ♜xh2 17 0-0-0 cxd4 18 ♗e4 and White enjoyed dangerous attacking chances for his pawn.

Black can also reach our preferred system via 4...♙xc3 5 dxc3 d6 (which has actually been Adams's preferred move order). White can also recapture with 5 bxc3, but again Black gains a reasonable sort of Nimzo set-up after 5...d6 6 g5 ♗fd7:



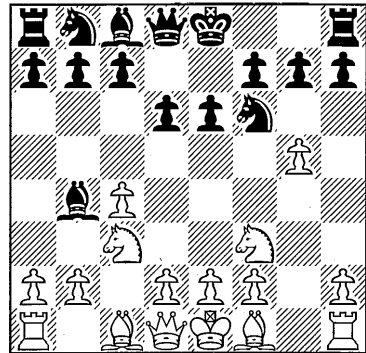
a) 7 d4 b6 8 e4 (or 8 a4 ♗c6 9 e4 ♗e7 10 ♙e3 f5! 11 gxf6 ♗xf6 12 a5 0-0 13 axb6 cxb6 14 ♖g1 e5 15 ♗d2 ♗h8 and Black enjoyed both the safer king position and the better centre in V.Dobrov-M.Carlsen, Gausdal 2005) 8...♙b7 9 ♙d3 ♗c6 10 ♙e3 ♗e7 11 ♗d2 e5 saw Black counter in true Nimzo style in M.Gurevich-A.Istratescu, Antlya (rapid) 2004. White's advanced g-pawn doesn't always help him in this line, especially when Black replies solidly. Here Gurevich lacked a safe home for his king, and following 12 ♖b1 0-0 13 ♗h5 f6 (13...f5!? was also quite effective)

14 g6 hxg6 15 ♗xg6 ♗f7 16 ♗g3?! f5! Black had seized the initiative.

b) 7 ♙g2!? e5 8 d3 ♗c6 9 h4 was consistent with 4 g4 in H.Nakamura-R.Pogorelov, Reykjavik 2004, when Black castled into some strong kingside pressure. He should have preferred either 9...f5 10 gxf6 ♗xf6, fighting back on the kingside, or the solid 9...♗f8!? 10 h5 ♗e6.

5 g5

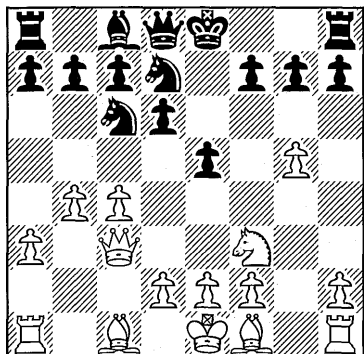
Consistent. Instead 5 ♗a4+?! ♗c6 leads nowhere for White since 6 ♗d4? is more than well parried by 6...♙d7 due to the hanging rook on h1.



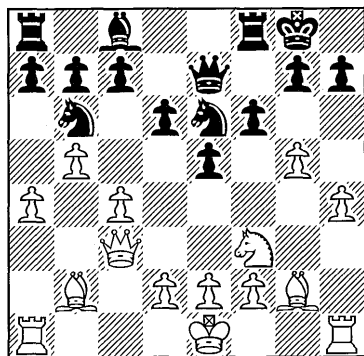
5...♙xc3

Keeping things simple, but Black can also consider 5...♗fd7, leading to another sub-variation which remains pretty unexplored, but doesn't seem at all bad for the second player. After 6 ♗c2 (covering c3, whereas 6 ♗c4?! was probably too creative an idea in R.Scherbakov-S.Ionov, Maikop 1998; Black enjoyed a comfortable QGD-type position after 6...d5 7 ♗g3 0-0 8 cxd5 exd5 9 a3 ♙d6 10 d4 ♖e8 11 ♙g2 c6 12 0-0 ♗f8, and could also have played

more ambitiously with 7...dxc4!?)
 6...♖c6 7 a3 ♗xc3 8 ♜xc3 e5 9 b4 we reach a position in which White would like to open the position with d4 to exploit his bishops and extra space, but Black is currently quite solid.



Black has tried a number of moves here, but demonstrated a good way to unravel in Z.Bratanov-M.Mchedlishvili, Izmir 2002: 9...0-0 (9...♜e7!? is also possible; 10 ♗b2 was then M.Krasenkow-V.Bogdanovski, Elista Olympiad 1998, when Black should consider Mikhalchishin's idea of 10...♖f8!?, intending 11...♗g4 and 12...♖e6) 10 ♗b2 (White has to play this since an immediate 10 d4?! allows Black too much counterplay with 10...a5! 11 b5 ♖xd4 12 ♖xd4 exd4 13 ♜xd4 ♖c5) 10...f6 11 h4 (once again 11 d4 is far from ideal; Black might keep the position closed with 11...e4 12 ♖d2 f5, but he can also grab with 11...fxg5!? 12 d5 ♖e7 since 13 ♖xg5?! runs into 13...♖xd5!) 11...♜e7 12 ♗g2 ♖b6 13 b5 ♖d8 14 a4 ♖e6 and a rather unusual, but also very modern situation was reached.

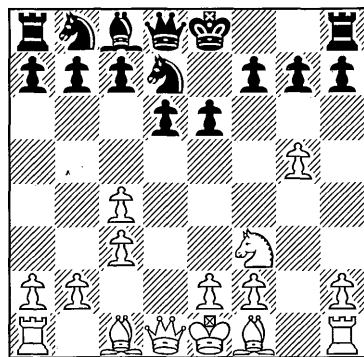


White has seized a lot of space on both flanks, but Black remains solid and controls some key central squares. The black position is at the least the easier to play, and Mchedlishvili went on to win a fine game by exploiting White's king position: 15 ♖g1 ♖f4! 16 ♗h1 ♗f5 17 d3 ♖d7 18 ♖d2? ♜ae8 19 ♖g3 ♗g6 20 ♖e1 fxg5 21 hxg5 ♖c5 22 ♖c2 ♖fxd3! 23 exd3 ♜xf2+ 24 ♖e1 ♜f8 25 ♗d5+ ♖h8 26 ♜c3 ♜f4 0-1.

6 dxc3

Krasenkow's preference, but White also has 6 bxc3 ♖fd7, transposing to the notes to Black's 4th move.

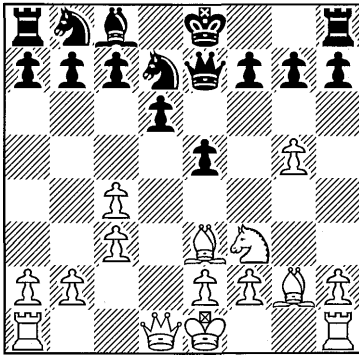
6...♖fd7



7 ♖g2

Alternatively 7 ♖e3 should be met by 7...♞e7 and only then 8...e5. Black preferred an immediate 7...e5?! in A.Iljin-I.Tarasov, Kaluga 2005, but that should have been punished by 8 c5! (8 ♞c2 ♞e7 9 0-0-0 ♗c6 10 h4 was the game when Black would have been fine had he continued with the consistent 10...♗b6, preparing ...♖e6 and ...0-0-0) 8...dxc5 9 ♞d5 ♞e7 10 0-0-0 ♗c6 11 ♖g2 (Iljin) with awkward pressure. Ideally in this system, Black would like to only castle long once White has already also done so. Thus in Z.Varga-C.Balogh, Zalaegerszeg 2004, he met 7 e4 c5 8 ♖e3 ♞e7 9 ♞c2 ♗c6 10 ♔g1 with 10...a5!?, before 11 0-0-0 ♗c5 12 h4 ♖e6 13 b3 0-0-0 14 ♗b2 b6 15 a3 h6! began counterplay and was roughly equal.

7...e5 8 ♖e3 ♞e7



9 ♞c2

Taking control of the f5-square because Black had earlier struck back on the kingside with 9 ♗d2 f5!?. However, he should probably prefer 9...♗c6 in any case, since 9...f5 10 gxf6 ♗xf6 11

♗e4 ♗xe4 12 ♖xe4 ♗d7 13 ♞d3 ♗f6 14 ♖g5! ♞f7 15 ♖xf6 gxf6?! 16 c5! was pretty good for White in M.Krasenkow-E.Lobron, Subic Bay 1998, and even the superior 15...♞xf6 wouldn't have equalized after 16 0-0-0! (Krasenkow).

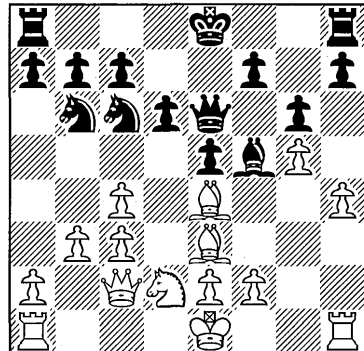
9...♗c6 10 h4 ♗b6

Black's play might at first appear a little slow, but he is refusing to create any weaknesses and wants to bring his king to safety on the queenside. Such a strategy is sometimes also seen in other openings characterized by an early white kingside advance, like the Keres Attack. Here, as there, Black must be careful, even with his king safe on the queenside, not to be squashed on the kingside, but he can aim to chip away at the advanced white pawns with either a well-timed ...h6 or ...f6 break.

11 b3 g6!?

Black does now lose some kingside flexibility, but Adams clearly judged it worthwhile in order to develop his bishop as actively as possible.

12 ♗d2 ♖f5 13 ♖e4 ♞e6!

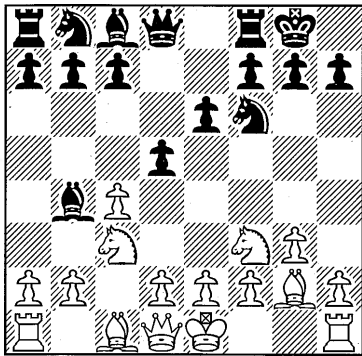


This unbalanced, but dynamically equal position was reached in

M.Cornette-M.Adams, French League 2003. Black hoped to gain some useful central control after 14 ♖xf5?! gxf5, and in the game he classically began central counterplay with 14 a4 ♜d7! (now 15 a5 is met by 15...a6) 15 h5 0-0-0 16 0-0-0 ♖b8 17 ♜h4 ♜e7 18 hxg6 hxg6 19 ♜dh1 ♜xh4 20 ♜xh4 c6!.

B3)

1 ♜f3 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 ♖b4 4 g3 0-0
5 ♖g2 d5



Rapidly countering in the centre against White's solid set-up. This has a good reputation and is partly possible because 6 d4 dxc4! transposes to a variation of the Nimzo (usually reached via 1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 ♖b4 4 g3 0-0 5 ♜f3 d5 6 ♖g2 dxc4) considered to give Black pretty reasonable counterplay.

6 a3

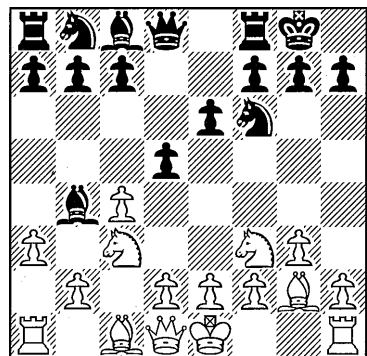
Putting the question to the bishop, but White also has:

a) 6 cxd5 exd5 usually leads to quite a comfortable Carlsbad structure for Black. One good example being 7 d4 c6 8 0-0 ♜e8 9 ♖c2 ♜bd7 10 ♖f4 ♜f8 (just

as in the Exchange Queen's Gambit, this manoeuvre is a key way for Black to unravel) 11 ♜ad1 ♜g6 12 ♖c1 ♖e7 13 ♜fe1 ♜e4! 14 ♖b3 ♖f5 which left Black well co-ordinated and controlling the e4-square in V.Epishin-O.Romanishin, Terrassa 1991.

b) 6 0-0 dxc4 7 ♖a4 is a slightly suspicious gambit, which is probably best met by Korchnoi's 7...a5 when 8 ♖b5 (8 a3!? ♖d7 9 ♖c2 might be a better try, although here Black can also consider 9...♖c7!? 10 ♜e5 ♜c6, as well as 9...♖xc3 10 dxc3 ♖c6 11 ♖g5 h6 12 ♜ad1 ♜bd7 which equalized in A.Mikhailchishin-J.Speelman, Baku 1983) 8...b6 9 ♖xc4 ♖a6 10 ♖h4 ♖xc3 11 dxc3 ♖xc2 12 ♜e1 ♖xf3 13 ♖xf3 ♜a7 14 ♖g5 c5 didn't give White enough for his pawn in A.Miles-V.Korchnoi, European Club Cup 1984.

c) 6 ♖b3 is White's second most popular move, but after 6...c5 7 0-0 (or 7 a3 ♖a5 8 0-0 ♜c6 9 d3 h6) 7...♜c6 8 d3 h6 we've transposed to Line B1 and indeed this was the move order used in Kasparov-Anand (see note 'b' there to White's 6th move).

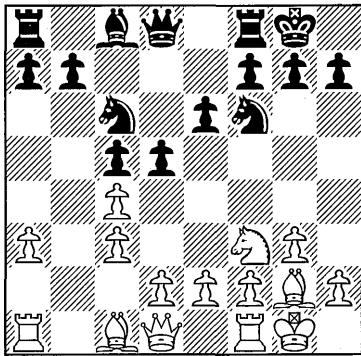


6...♗xc3!?

Ceding the two bishops in return for maintaining a pawn on d5. It should be noted that 6...♗e7 is a more popular choice, but after 7 d4 dxc4 Black must be familiar with the Catalan's many nuances if he is to try and demonstrate that the extra move a3 hinders rather than helps White.

7 dxc3

The alternative is 7 bxc3 when, with White unable to quickly bring his bishop to g5, Black can expand with 7...c5 (7...♗c6!?, gaining good piece activity after 8 cxd5 exd5 9 0-0 ♖e8 as in J.Speelman-S.Hutchings, British Championship, Brighton 1972, also deserves attention) 8 0-0 ♗c6.

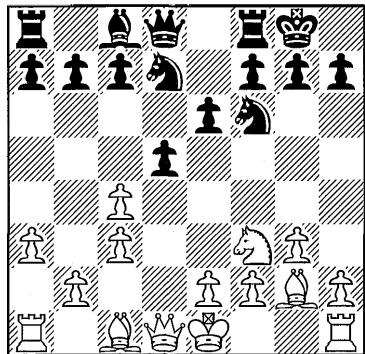


Following 9 ♖b1 (or 9 cxd5 exd5 10 d3 h6 11 ♗c2 ♖e8 12 h3 b6 13 ♖e1 ♗b7 and Black had a harmonious set-up, while White's bishops weren't especially dangerous in A.Mikhalchishin-B.Kohlweyer, Groningen 1990) 9...b6 10 cxd5 exd5 11 d3 h6! (sensibly preventing White from pressurizing d5 with ♗g5, and also preparing a retreat square should Black prefer ...♗f5 to

...♗b7) 12 ♖e1 ♖e8 13 h3 ♗f5!? 14 ♗a4 ♖c8 15 g4!? ♗h7 16 ♗f4, Black began counterplay with 16...c4 in J.Le Roux-A.Sokolov, French Championship, Val d'Isere 2004, but probably even better was Ribli's suggestion of 16...♗e4!? 17 ♖bc1 (17 dxe4 ♖xc4 regains the piece due to the loose f4-bishop) 17...♗f6 18 ♗d2 ♗xd2 19 ♗xd2 ♗d6.

7...♗bd7!

Taking control of the e5-square and thereby preventing White from following up 8 0-0?! dxc4 with 9 ♗e5.

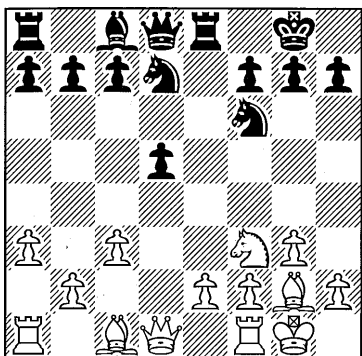


Having played a3, White rarely wants to sacrifice a pawn and so usually releases some of the central tension. Black should not, however, be tempted to play as he does against 7 bxc3 since 7...c5?! 8 0-0 ♗c6 9 ♗g5! dxc4 10 ♗a4 h6 11 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 12 ♗xc4 gave White a pleasant edge in V.Ivanchuk-V.Bologan, European Club Cup, Saint Vincent 2005.

8 cxd5 exd5 9 0-0 ♖e8

A useful semi-waiting move as Black waits on how White intends to develop his dark-squared bishop before deciding where to deploy his

queen's knight. He should not rush to move the knight from d7 since both 9...♖b6?! 10 a4! and 9...♗c5 10 ♗e3 merely play into White's hands.



10 ♗c2

Trying to remain flexible. Black also gains a perfectly satisfactory position after the alternatives:

a) 10 ♗f4 ♗c5 (M.Taimanov-Y.Yemelin, St Petersburg 1998) both further clamps down on the e4-square and allows Black to consider completing his development with ...♗f5 and ...♗e6.

b) 10 b3 ♗c5 11 ♗b2 a5! (trying to keep the b2-bishop restricted and preparing to meet 12 c4 with 12...a4) 12 ♗c2 ♗c7 13 ♗d4 ♗ce4 14 c4 c5 15 ♗f3 d4 was about equal in N.Nikcevic-A.Sokolov, Ulcinj 1997.

c) 10 a4!? ♗c5 11 a5 ♗e7 12 ♗d4 ♗ce4 13 ♗f4 c5!? 14 ♗b5 g5 15 ♗c1 a6 16 ♗a3 h6 drove White backwards and left Black actively placed in A.Poluljahov-D.Arutunian, Moscow 2005.

10...♗c5!?

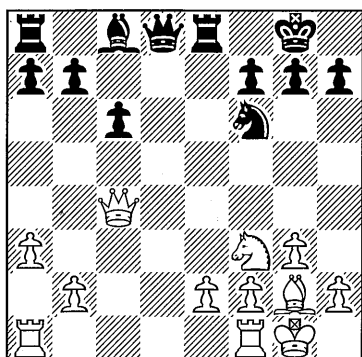
Black can also continue the waiting game with 10...♗e7.



11 ♗g5

Alternatively, 11 c4 dxc4 12 ♗xc4 ♗e7 13 b4 led to another early draw in Z.Ribli-J.Timman, Amsterdam 1986, since Black would have been fine after 13...♗ce4 14 ♗b2 ♗e6 15 ♗c2 ♗d5. White has also been keen to avoid 11 ♗e3 when Black can just continue with 11...♗ce4 followed by ...♗c7 and ...♗f5, but he also has a tempting exchange sacrifice available in 11...♗xe3!? 12 fxe3 ♗e7 due to his control of the e4- and g4-squares.

11...♗ce4 12 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 13 c4 dxc4 14 ♗xc4 c6



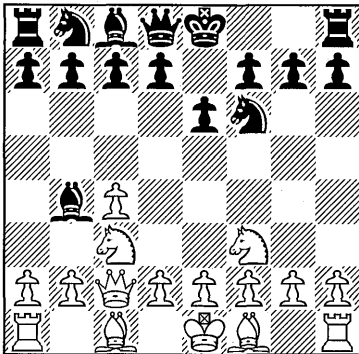
White clearly hasn't got anywhere

and this position was actually agreed drawn in A.Adorjan-O.Romanishin, Polanica Zdroj 1992.

B4)

1 ♘f3 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♖c2

White's most popular move and the one advocated in Khalifman's *Opening for White According to Kramnik* series.

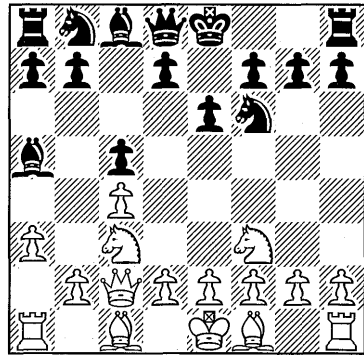


here, but as I showed in *Tango!* (1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 ♘c6 3 ♘f3 e6 4 ♘c3 ♗b4 5 ♖c2 also reaches the Zürich for those who were puzzled), Black should be able to gain reasonable counterplay.

5 a3

White usually flicks this in, though he can delay it for a move or two, preferring first 5 g3.

5...♗a5



4...c5

A solid and independent try. Instead 4...0-0 is Black's most popular choice, but not everyone meets a normal 4 ♖c2 (i.e. with d4 played instead of ♘f3) with 4...0-0. Those who there employ 4...d5 should be aware that here 4...d5 doesn't convince. After 5 a3 ♗xc3 6 ♖xc3 Black lacks counterplay for the bishop pair due to the absence of a pawn on d4 to attack.

Those who prefer to meet the 4 ♖c2 Nimzo with the under-rated Zürich variation should be aware that, here too, 4...♘c6 is quite viable. Khalifman continues 5 a3 ♗xc3 6 ♖xc3 a5 7 b3 d6 and then recognizes that White hasn't anything better than 8 d4, transposing to the Zürich. He actually claims an edge

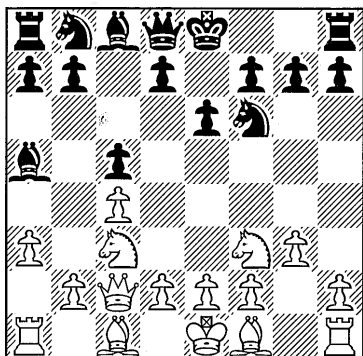
6 g3

The main line, but occasionally White has tried to avoid the fianchetto:

a) 6 e3 0-0 7 d4 shouldn't be too dangerous; at least so long as Black develops with 7...b6, followed by ...♗a6 or ...d5. As we saw in Line B1, it is far from easy for White to target the a5-bishop and here it will usually trade itself on c3 at the right moment, thereby increasing Black's control over the key e4-square. H.Ree-M.Tal, Wijk aan Zee 1976, continued 8 ♗e2 ♗a6! 9 0-0 ♗xc3 (a well-timed exchange before White played 10 ♗a4 and 11 ♖b1) 10 ♖xc3 cxd4 11 ♘xd4 (or 11 exd4 d5 12 b3 ♘bd7 - Khalifman - and Black has good counterplay against c4) 11...d5 12

cxd5 ♖xd5 13 ♕f3 ♘e4 14 ♖c2 ♕b7 and Black didn't have any problems.

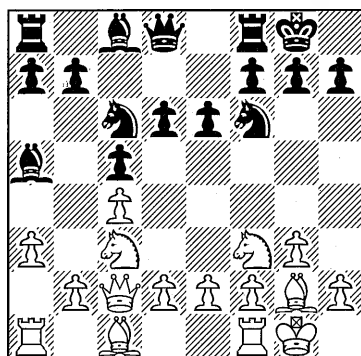
b) 6 d4!? cxd4 7 ♘xd4 appears slightly strange, but White hopes that the inclusion of a3 and ...♕a5 will help him. One key point is that 7...♘c6 can be met by 8 ♘b3. Instead, Black should probably prefer the active 7...d5, after which 8 cxd5 ♖xd5! (continuing to generate pressure, whereas 8...♘xd5 9 b4! ♕b6 10 ♘xd5 exd5 11 ♕b2 gave White a small edge in K.Sakaev-A.Yermolinsky, Krynica 1997) 9 ♕e3?! (a little ambitious, although 9 e3 ♕xc3+ 10 ♖xc3 0-0, followed by ...e5 also gives Black easy development) 9...♕xc3+ 10 ♖xc3 0-0 11 f3 e5 12 ♘b3 b6 13 ♗d1 ♖b5 14 ♕f2 ♕e6 15 ♘d2 e4! left White rather on the back foot in M.Zlotnikov-J.Benjamin, Philadelphia 1992.



6...♘c6 7 ♕g2 0-0 8 0-0 d6

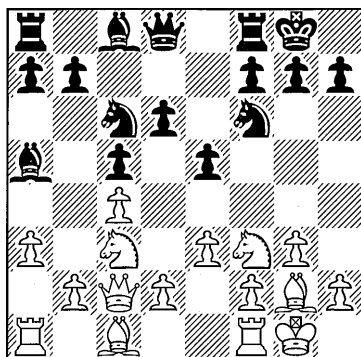
A more modest continuation than that employed by Black in Line B1, but White's queen is better placed on c2 than b3. This subtle difference means that White can prevent 8...d5?! 9 ♘a4! b6? (Black has to play 9...♖e7, or 9...♘d4 as Magnus Carlsen once tried

in a blitz match) due to the vicious tactic 10 cxd5 exd5 11 b4! when he wins a piece.



9 d3

The most flexible. Probably 9 e3 is slightly less accurate, although two of Michael Adams's opponents have been happy to use it. Black should then expand in the centre with 9...e5, which leads to:



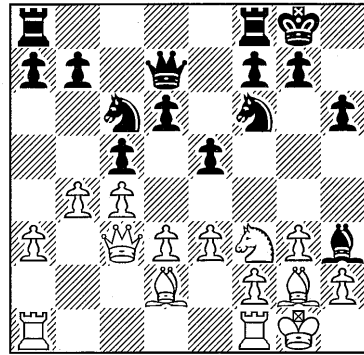
a) 10 ♘h4!? ♕xc3 11 ♖xc3 was A.Panchenko-K.Lerner, USSR Championship, Moscow 1991, when I quite like the idea of ignoring b4 with 11...♕e6!?, intending 12...♖d7 and meeting 12 b4 with 12...e4!.

b) 10 d4 is quite a critical continuation. Black should probably decline the pawn, preferring to keep the centre closed, and 10... ♙xc3!? (10... cxd4 11 exd4 exd4 12 ♘b5 ♙b6?! 13 ♙f4 worked out well for White in J.Granda Zuniga-A.Naiditsch, Wijk aan Zee 2004, although 12... d5 was a better try) 11 ♗xc3 e4 12 ♘d2 cxd4 13 exd4 d5 gave him good counterplay in L.Pantsulaia-J.Gustafsson, Turin Olympiad 2006.

c) 10 d3 a6!? (preparing counterplay with ...b5; Adams had earlier first played 10... ♙d7 and after the 11 ♙d2 a6 12 ♘h4 ♗b8 13 f4 b5 14 b3 of L.Van Wely-M.Adams, Wijk aan Zee 2002, has recommended 14... exf4!? 15 gxf4 ♖e8 as Black's most accurate continuation, keeping White in check on the kingside and in the centre) 11 b3 (a later game deviated with 11 ♘h4 and after 11... ♙d7 12 ♗b1 ♗b8 13 ♘a2! b5 14 b4 ♙b6! 15 ♙b2 ♗e7 16 ♗fc1 ♗fc8 17 ♗e2 ♙a7 a complex, but roughly balanced situation was reached in A.Shchekachev-V.Baklan, Austrian League 2005) 11... ♗b8 12 ♘d2 ♙d7 (only now does Black develop his bishop to d7 since he needs to defend c6) 13 ♘de4 ♘xc4 14 dxe4?! (Adams is quick to reveal the downside to this, although 14 ♘xe4 would have been well met by the aggressive 14... f5! since 15 ♘xd6? ♗e7 16 b4 ♙b6 17 ♘xb7 ♗xb7 18 b5 axb5 19 cxb5 ♘d8 – Ribli – leaves White struggling) 14... ♙xc3! 15 ♗xc3 b5 16 ♙d2 bxc4 17 bxc4 ♙e6 18 f4 f6 was slightly better for Black with White's bishops lacking scope in E.Agrest-M.Adams, French League 2003.

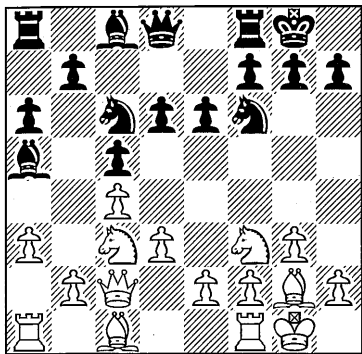
9...h6

Black wants to play ...e5, but first prevents ♙g5 at the cost of a tempo. Indeed, he has usually shied away from 9...e5 in practice, but we should see if this is really so bad: 10 ♙g5 ♙xc3 (Black doesn't want to allow the knight into d5) 11 ♗xc3 h6 12 ♙d2 and now Khalifman only considers 12... ♘d4. Instead, I'm far from certain that matters are so bad for Black following 12... ♙g4!? 13 e3 ♗d7 14 b4 ♙h3.



The second player is very solid here and after the exchange of light-squared bishops will be able to consider the ...d5 and ...e4 advances, as well as just sitting tight. Furthermore, it's not especially easy for White to exploit his extra queenside space: b5 provokes ... ♘e7 and ...d5, and 15 bxc5 ♙xg2 16 ♘xg2 dxc5 begins counterplay down the d-file. Note that White can easily become a little vulnerable on the light squares, especially following 17 ♘xe5?! ♘xe5 18 ♗xe5 ♗xd3 19 ♗c3 ♗ad8.

Another idea for Black to consider is playing as he did against 9 e3 with 9...a6!?.



Khalifman is strangely silent about this, but it doesn't seem too bad and 10 ♖d1 (or 10 ♖b1 ♖b8 11 ♗a2 ♗d4!? 12 ♗xd4 cxd4 13 b4 ♗b6 14 a4 ♗d7 15 a5 ♗a7 16 ♗a3 ♗c6! 17 ♖fc1 ♗xg2 18 ♗xg2 ♗g4 19 h3 ♗e5 and White had logically advanced on the queenside, but without gaining any advantage or demonstrating that his pieces were especially well placed in A.Shchekachev-V.Ikonnikov, Bethune 2005) 10...e5 (Black isn't afraid of the ♗g5-pin after this, although he could also have considered 10...♗d7!? 11 d4 cxd4 12 ♗xd4 ♗c7 and if 13 ♗g5, then 13...♗g4) 11 ♗g5 ♗xc3 12 ♗xc3 a5 (this delay in playing ...h6 is very interesting; Milos decides that he must play e3, but that comes at the price of the bishop pair) 13 e3 h6 14 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 15 ♗d2 ♗e7 16 ♖f1 ♗c6 17 f4 ♗d7 18 ♖f2 exf4 19 gxf4 f5! 20 ♗h1 d5 restrained White on the kingside before beginning counterplay, with an unclear position in G.Milos-J.Sunye Neto, Sao Paulo Zonal 1995.

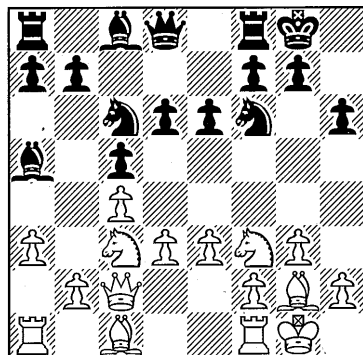
10 e3

Taking control of d4 and preparing to play as after 9 e3, but with an extra

tempo, has been White's main choice. The alternatives should be a little less testing:

a) 10 ♖b1 e5 11 e3 ♗e6 12 ♗a2 ♗d7 (avoiding 12...d5?! due to 13 b4 cxb4 14 axb4 ♗c7 15 b5 – Karpov – when White has made some useful progress on the queenside) 13 b4 ♗d8! 14 ♗c3 ♖c8 15 bxc5!? dxc5 16 e4 ♗g4! 17 ♗d5 ♗xf3 18 ♗xf3 ♗xd5 19 exd5 ♗d4 left Black rather solid and equal in G.Kamsky-A.Karpov, Reggio Emilia 1991.

b) 10 ♗d2 e5 11 ♖ab1 ♗g4 12 e3 ♗d7!? 13 ♗d5 ♗d8! 14 b4 cxb4 15 ♗xf6+ (or 15 axb4 ♗xd5 16 cxd5 ♗e7 17 ♗b3 ♗b6 and White is somewhat held up on the queenside) 15...♗xf6 16 ♗xb4 ♖fc8 17 ♗c3 d5 saw Black obtain reasonable counterplay in B.Schneider-L.Christiansen, Porz 1991.



10...e5 11 ♗d2!?

Endorsed by Khalifman. White's idea is to follow up an exchange on c3 by breaking with f4. To see why this has been considered his best try, we must again examine the alternatives:

a) 11 h3 ♗e6 12 ♗h2 ♖c8 13 b3 d5 14 ♗a4 b6 15 ♖d1 d4! 16 ♖b1 a6 17 exd4

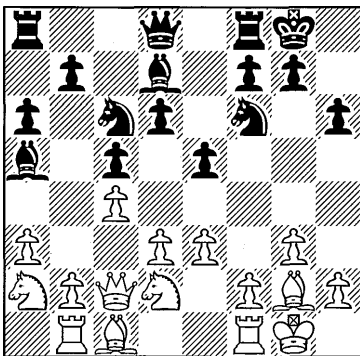
exd4 18 ♖f4 ♖e8 was fine for Black since White couldn't trap the a5-bishop in A.Karpov-M.Adams, Groningen 1995.

b) 11 ♖d5 ♖d7!? (preparing to play around the d5-knight; Khalifman's idea of 11... ♖xd5 12 cxd5 ♖e7 13 ♖d2 ♖f5 is also reasonable, making it hard for White to advance his e- and f-pawns) 12 ♖d2 ♖b8 13 ♖b1 b5 14 b4! cxb4 15 ♖xf6+ ♖xf6 16 cxb5 ♖e7! 17 a4 ♖fc8 18 ♖d1 a6 countered on the queenside and was rather unclear in L.Pantsulaia-A.Istratescu, Turin Olympiad 2006.

11...a6!?

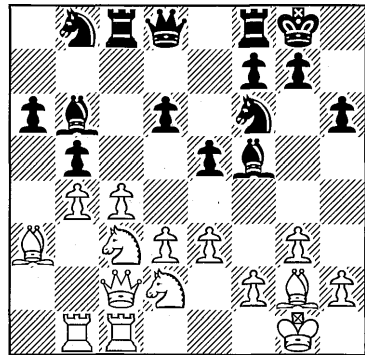
Once again Black prepares immediate queenside counterplay and thereby provokes a crisis on the queenside. This type of active approach goes unmentioned by Khalifman who mainly concentrates on 11... ♖xc3 12 ♖xc3 a5 13 b3 ♖e6 14 ♖b2 ♖d7 15 f4! (D.Komljenovic-J.Ehlvest, Dos Hermanas 1998) when White does indeed have some pressure and a small edge.

12 ♖b1 ♖d7 13 ♖a2



Countering with b4 must be critical, and this occurred in T.Nyback-E.Agrest, European Team Champion-

ship, Plovdiv 2003. Agrest has also been happy to play 4 ♖c2 as White, so we should take his idea as Black here pretty seriously. Despite having slightly less firepower on the queenside, Black can hold his own in that sector and shouldn't be worse here; an assessment borne out by the game: 13...b5 (the machine's slightly strange-looking 13... ♖c8!? is also possible; the idea is to cover b7, while preparing ...♖h3, and after 14 b4 cxb4 15 axb4 ♖b6 16 ♖c3 ♖h3 it is not so easy for White to make further progress on the queenside: for example, 17 b5 axb5 18 ♖xb5 ♖xg2 19 ♖xg2 ♖c5 20 ♖ce4 ♖xe4 21 ♖xe4 b6 and Black retains a solid stance) 14 b4 cxb4 15 axb4 ♖b6 16 ♖c3 ♖c8 17 ♖a3 ♖b8! 18 ♖fc1 ♖f5



and Nyback was struggling to make progress, partly due to his granite-biting dark-squared bishop. Following 19 cxb5, Black was fine after just recapturing, but Agrest could also have considered seizing the initiative with 19...d5!?, meeting 20 e4 with 20... ♖xf2+! 21 ♖xf2 ♖b6+ 22 ♖e2 ♖g4 23 ♖f1 ♖e3+ 24 ♖d1 dxe4 25 ♖xe4 ♖d4.

Index of Variations

The English: White Fianchettoes and Plays ♘f3

1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 ♘f3 e5 (5...d6 – 27; 5...a6 – 33) **6 0-0** (6 a3 – 22; 6 d3 – 24) **6...♗ge7 7 d3 0-0 8 a3 d6 9 ♖b1 a5 10 ♘e1 ♙e6 11 ♙g5** – 19 (11 ♘d5 – 14; 11 ♘c2 – 15)

The English: White Fianchettoes without ♘f3

1 c4 c5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 a3

5 e3 e5 – 48 (5...♙xc3 – 54)

5 e4 e5 – 58 (5...a6 – 61)

5...a6 (5...d6 – 37) **6 ♖b1 ♖b8 7 b4 cxb4 8 axb4 b5 9 cxb5 axb5 10 ♘f3 e5** – 43 (10...d5 – 43)

The English: The Three Knights Variation

1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 e5 (3...♘d4 – 79) **4 e3 ♘f6 5 d4 cxd4 6 exd4 e4 7 ♘e5** – 74 (7 ♘d2 – 70; 7 ♘g5 – 71)

The English: White Plays an Early d4

1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♖b6 5 ♘b3 (5 e3 – 86; 5 ♘c2 – 88) **5...e6 6 ♘c3 ♘f6 7 g3** (7 e4 – 91; 7 a3 – 94) **7...♘e5 8 e4 ♙b4 9 ♖e2 d6 10 f4** – 99 (10 ♙d2 – 104)

Two Advances of the g-pawn

1 g4 (1 g3 – 109) **1...d5** (1...c5 – 114) **2 h3** (2 ♙g2 – 111) **2...e5** – 112

Bird's Opening

1 f4 d5 (1...d6 – 123) **2 ♘f3** (2 b3 – 116; 2 g3 – 117) **2...♙g4 3 e3 ♘d7 4 h3** (4 ♙e2 –

120) 4...♗xf3 5 ♖xf3 e5 – 121 (5...♗gf6 – 122; 5...e6 – 122)

The Nimzo-Larsen Attack

1 b3 e5 2 ♗b2 ♗c6 3 e3 (3 c4 – 128) 3...d5 (3...♗f6 4 ♗b5 ♗d6 – 136) 4 ♗b5 ♗d6 5 f4 (5 c4 – 132) 5...♖h4+ 6 g3 ♖e7 7 ♗f3 f6 – 133

Der Linksspringer: 1 ♗c3

1 ♗c3 c5 (1...♗f6 – 141; 1...d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 ♗xe4 ♗d7 – 143) 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 (2...♗f6 – 153; 2...e6 – 156) 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 g6 – 150 (4...♗f6 – 150)

The Sokolsky

1 b4 e5 (1...c6 – 163) 2 ♗b2 ♗xb4 3 ♗xe5 ♗f6 – 159

Black Meets 1 ♗f3 with 1...c5

1 ♗f3 c5 2 g3 (2 b3 – 168) 2...♗c6 3 ♗g2 e5 – 171

Black Meets 1 ♗f3 with 1...d5

1 ♗f3 d5 2 c4 (2 b3 – 177; 2 g3 ♗f6 3 ♗g2 ♗f5 – 180) 2...d4 3 g3 (3 b4 – 187; 3 e3 – 192) 3...♗c6 4 ♗g2 e5 – 195

Black Meets 1 ♗f3 with 1...♗f6

1 ♗f3 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗c3 (3 b3 – 199; 3 g3 – 200) 3...♗b4 4 ♖c2 (4 ♖b3 – 207; 4 g4 – 210; 4 g3 – 214) 4...c5 5 a3 ♗a5 6 g3 ♗c6 7 ♗g2 0-0 8 0-0 d6 9 d3 – 218 (9 e3 – 218)