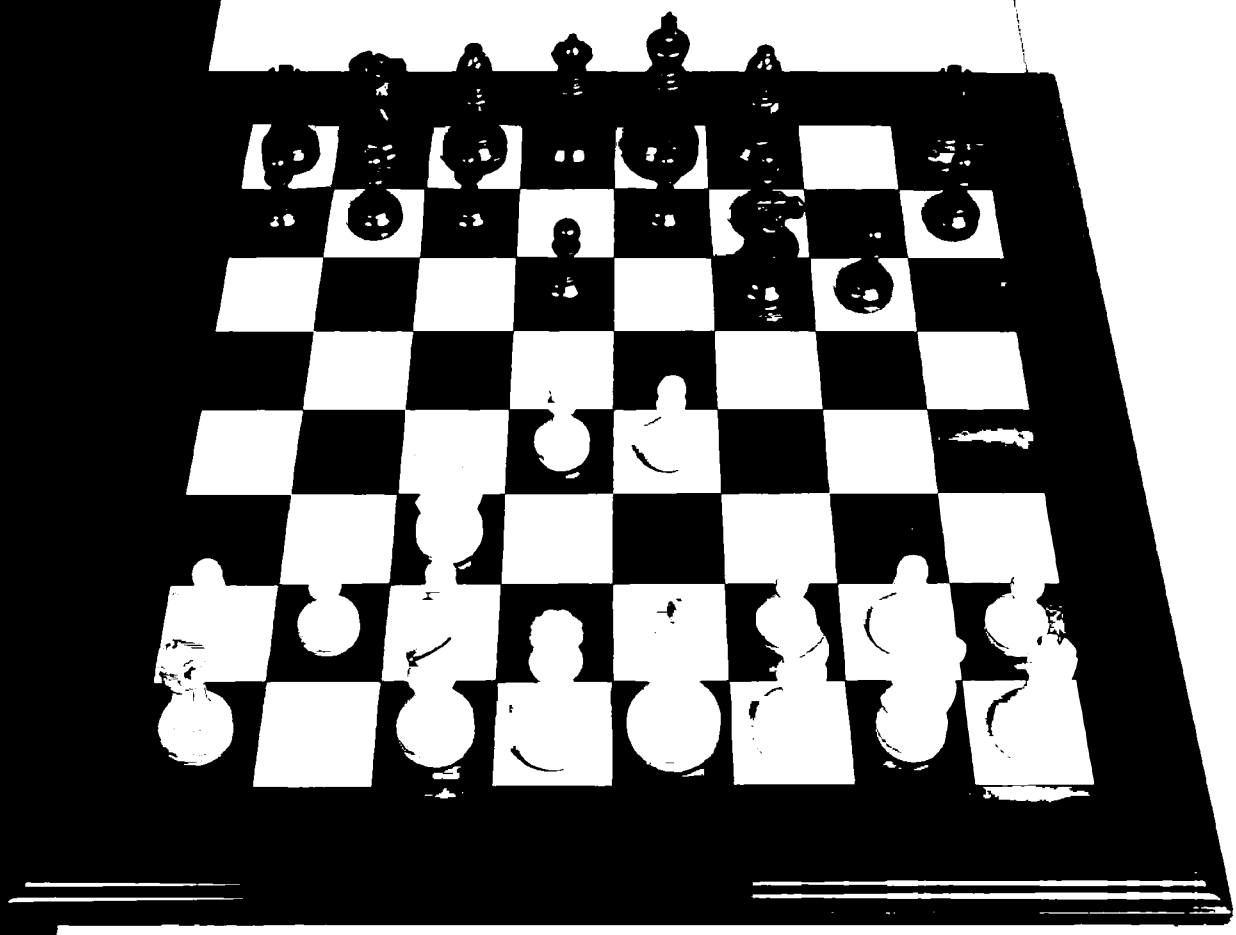
Grandmaster Repertoire

Mihail Marin

The Pirc Defence



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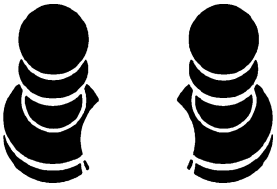
Grandmaster Repertoire

The Pirc Defence

By

Mihail Marin

To Mariya
And to my Kumas, of course



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THE PIRC DEFENCE

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Key to symbols used

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

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

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Preface

My love story with the Pirc Defence started a long time ago, while still a teenager. For reasons soon to be revealed, though, it remained at a platonic level for many years.

In 1983 my father gave me Guerman Samoilovich Fridshtein's *Zaschita Pirtsa-Ufimtseva*, which captivated me immediately, possibly due to its pleasant green cover. I studied it carefully and even filled a 48-page maths notebook with my analysis. When everything was done I showed my father (a second category player) what I considered my most spectacular finding in one of the main lines. He was delighted, as everything started with a knight sacrifice on b2, but as we went along the main line of the analysis I suddenly realized that I had not counted the pieces in the final position very well: Black was still a piece down!

I was so disappointed and ashamed (I did not say a single word to my father about it) that I immediately gave up the plan of playing the Pirc. But for many years my father was convinced I was playing "Guerman" (this is how we had baptized the opening, according to the author's name), when in fact I had switched to the Sicilian Paulsen.

The second important moment in this story occurred in the autumn of 1996. For two years I had been playing the Sicilian Dragon almost exclusively, but then Kasparov spoiled it all by using this opening (and one of my novelties in the game he won) during the match with Anand. It immediately became clear that the Dragon was going to become fashionable, ceasing to be *my* opening and forcing me to keep pace with the latest theoretical developments, which has never been my favourite hobby.

I had little more than a month to prepare for the Romanian Championship and definitely needed a new opening against 1.e4, as this was the main move of most of my opponents. In the meantime I had been fooling around with the Caro-Kann a bit, but that was obviously not *my* opening. I asked my friend and trainer IM Vali Stoica for advice and a few hours later he came up with the following idea: "Bob, you are skilled in pawn play. Why not try the Pirc?"

I became so addicted to this idea (after all, the Dragon constellation was still there, pawns from the d-file to the h-file) that at the championship I started all my games with 1...d6, even in the two games when my opponents played 1.d4 and 1.♘f3. And then nearly a whole decade followed in which I played the Pirc almost exclusively. I temporarily gave up the Pirc after a painful loss to Fressinet in 2004 (see page 221), but three years later I reclaimed the moral right to play it at least occasionally after using it to defeat the same opponent in the last round of a blitz super-tournament. Nowadays my repertoire is quite ample, but if I feel too lazy or tired to prepare I just choose the Pirc: the opening I can play just by reflex.

Based on my accumulated experience over the years, I will now give a general description of this opening.

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The Pirc is mainly a positional weapon, but the strategic tension that gradually accumulates often leads to critical moments when tactical or dynamic decisions are necessary. In other words, it is an opening that suits players with a balanced (or complete) style.

Over the years I have developed the useful habit of constantly analysing my own games, looking for improvements – mainly in the cases when I was in danger, but not only then. The Pirc is flexible enough to allow me to vary a little from one game to the next, thus avoiding my opponents' specific preparation.

After a few years I had accumulated some slight doubts regarding certain lines I had played. It was with great joy that I received Nunn and McNab's *The Ultimate Pirc* as a present from my friend Ari Ziegler, and I immediately started looking for their recommendations in the positions that were bugging me. Much to my surprise, in all six cases I found my own games in the main lines – precisely the games in which I had felt unsure at certain moments!

This was very flattering, of course. It meant that my knowledge, understanding and games were good enough to build a book upon, but at the same time I understood that I had to do the new analytical work myself in order to keep the opening in good shape; hard and rewarding work at the same time.

The repertoire examined in this book is the fruit of many years of refining my analysis, but I advise the reader to follow my own method of continuous improvement. I believe that the verbal comments to all the critical lines will serve as a guideline.

Dieter Nisipeanu, a natural enemy of the Pirc, once confessed to me his personal view. This opening gives White a false impression of safety, increasing the risk of becoming careless or over-optimistic in the middlegame. Indeed, Black is cramped in the first phase of the game, but his strategic and dynamic resources are greater than one might think at a brief glance. But the reverse of the medal is that Black should believe in his position and his chances of turning the tables at White's first inaccuracy.

A few years ago I published a pair of ChessBase DVDs containing a Pirc repertoire for Black. For this book I had two main reasons for analysing different lines against White's main systems. First of all, I thought that this was the correct approach anyway. Secondly, and more importantly, I also wanted to deepen and widen my own knowledge of my favourite opening.

The general structure of the book contains the positional lines with 4.♘f3 (Chapters 1 to 4), the aggressive lines with 4.f4 and 4.♗e3 (Chapters 5 to 10), and assorted less topical systems (Chapters 11 to 17). Before launching into these chapters I have placed a strategic introduction, explaining in some detail the most typical structures of the Pirc.

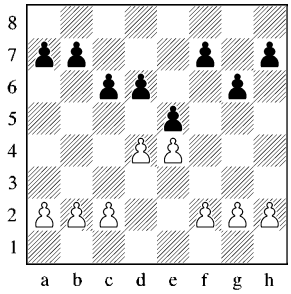
As a final piece of advice, I would ask you to be good to my old love, as she will surely repay you well!

Mihail Marin
Bucharest, September 2017

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Introduction

In the repertoire examined in this book there is a whole group of systems, most of them positional, featuring one of the most typical Pirc structures:



Before examining each system concretely, it is useful to become familiar with the most typical ideas for both sides.

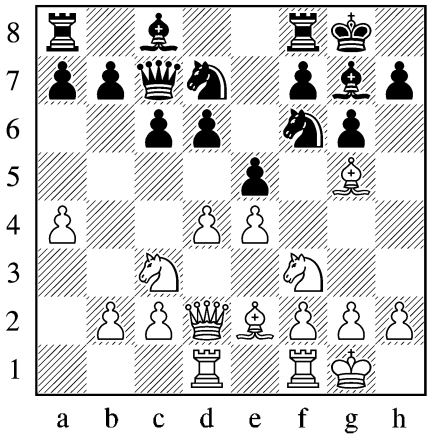
Black's most natural way to challenge White in the centre is with ...e7-e5, with multiple strategic implications.

For White it would be optimal to maintain the tension in the centre for as long as possible, as exchanging on e5 yields Black control over the c5-square, clearing the a3-f8 diagonal for a possible bishop regrouping with ...♗f8. The consequences of opening the d-file depend greatly on each side's development.

One of Black's main ideas is precisely to force White to release the tension. He can do that with two basic methods. The traditional one is to increase the pressure on e4 with ...♖e8.

Neelotpal – Koshy

Nagpur 1999



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10...♖e8

Threatening ...exd4 followed by ...♘xe4.

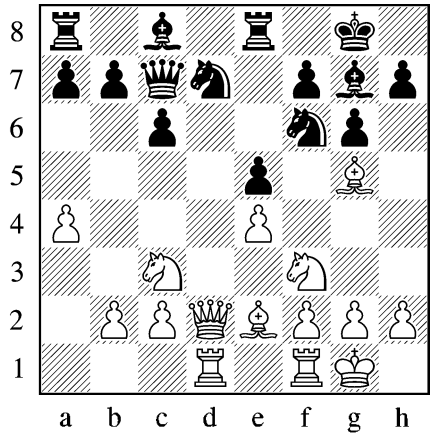
11.dxe5

The most typical and best reaction, although it fails to bother Black.

11.♗d3 not only exposes the bishop to ...♘c5xd3, but also weakens White's latent control over g4 and d4. 11...exd4 12.♘xd4 ♘c5 and now 13.f3 ♕b6 or 13.♖fe1 ♘g4 leaves White hanging in both cases.

White seldom blocks the centre, as this would transpose to an unfavourable version of the King's Indian with the c-pawn blocked by the knight and thus unable to sustain the positional attack. For example: 11.d5 cxd5 12.exd5 (Playing against the d6-pawn with 12.♘xd5 ♘xd5 13.♕xd5 is ineffective due to 13...♘c5, hitting a4 and e4 and planning ...♗e6) 12...a6 Followed by ...♘h5, with a threatening kingside majority.

11...dxe5



12.♕d6

The only consistent move, trying to increase the pressure along the d-file.

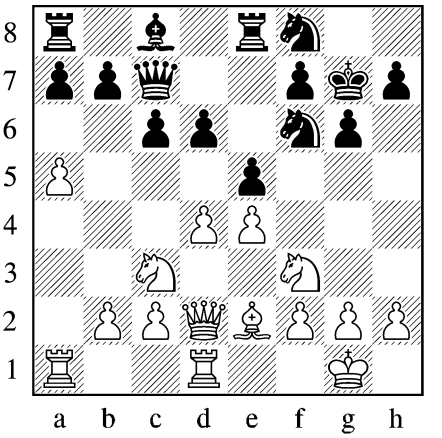
12...♕xd6 13.♖xd6 ♗f8 14.♖dd1 ♔g7

Black overprotects the knight, preparing his counterplay with ...♘c5, possibly after ...♗b4.

The other way to question White's stability in the centre is based on ...♗g4. This plan is far less common than ...♖e8, but under favourable circumstances it can work out well.

Gallagher – Wolff

Hastings 1990



13...♗g4 14.h3 ♗xf3 15.♗xf3 ♘e6 16.♘e2

For the time being White has managed to defend d4, but the following move would have forced him to take a decision at once:

16...h6!N

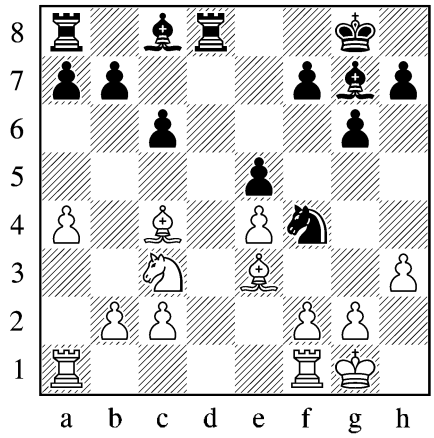
See Chapter 2, variation A1 on page 46.

Apart from the aforementioned invasion along the d-file, White's main plan after dxe5 is based on a4-a5, more or less paralysing Black's queenside. If Black does not find an antidote he will be doomed to passivity for the rest of the game.

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Browne – Mednis

El Paso 1973

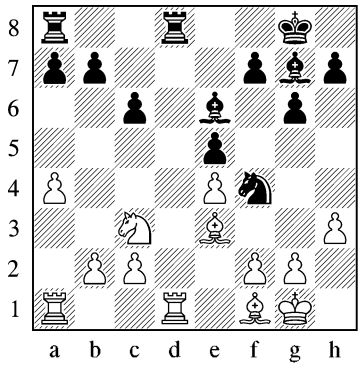


14.♖fd1 ♖e8?

Due to the hanging a7-pawn it looks as if Black cannot fight for the open file. But had he realized the long-term danger, he might have found the only active possibility:

14...♗e6!N 15.♗f1

15.♖xd8† ♖xd8 16.♗xe6 ♘xe6 17.♗xa7 ♖d2 18.♖c1 ♘d4 19.♗xd4 exd4 offers Black enough counterplay.



15...♗f6!

Planning to meet ♖xd8† with ...♗xd8 followed by ...♗b6, neutralizing the queenside pressure completely.

15...b6 does not solve the problems due to 16.♖xd8† ♖xd8 17.a5.

16.a5 ♖xd1 17.♖xd1 ♗d8!

Even with a loss of a tempo this is the best plan. 17...♗e7 18.♘a4, followed by ♘c5, is not entirely satisfactory.

18.♖a1 ♖b8

Preparing ...b6 to ease the pressure.

19.b4

19.♗xa7 ♖a8= retrieves the pawn.

19...b6 20.axb6 axb6 21.♖a7 b5=

Black has stabilized the position and the control over the a-file is not likely to offer White much.

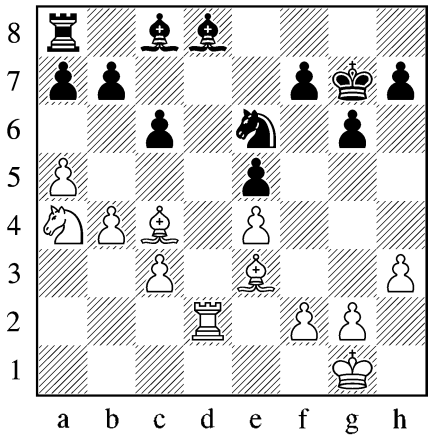
15.a5!

The dream situation for White. The only way to free the a8-rook from defending the a7-pawn is ...a6, but this would chronically weaken the queenside.

15...♘e6

15...♗e6 allows 16.♗xe6 ♘xe6 17.♖d7±.

16.♘a4 ♗f8 17.c3 ♗e7 18.b4 ♔g7 19.♖a2 ♖d8 20.♖xd8 ♗xd8 21.♖d2±



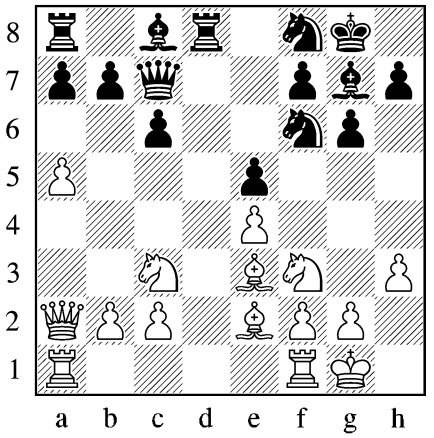
For practical purposes White is a whole rook up in the centre and on the kingside.

Sometimes White can even create hidden tactical threats with the pawn on a5 and the bishop on e3.

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Barbero – Mohr

San Bernardino 1989

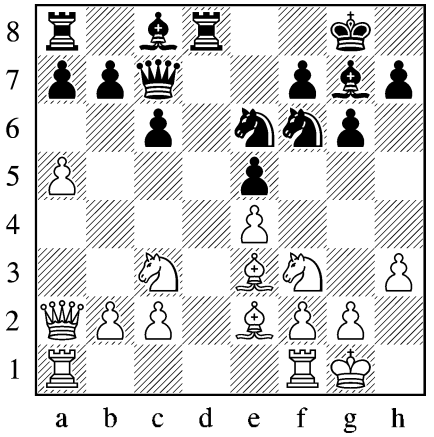


The picture is familiar, with the main difference that there are queens on the board.

13...♘e6?

This is not the only game in which Black blundered this way, but it is the highest-rated example.

13...♗e6 avoids the combination, but does not completely solve Black's problems, as after 14.♕a3 b5?! (a premature freeing attempt) 15.axb6 axb6 16.♕xa8 ♖xa8 17.♖xa8, followed by ♖fa1, White's rooks are stronger than the queen.



14.♗b6!

Simply winning an exchange.

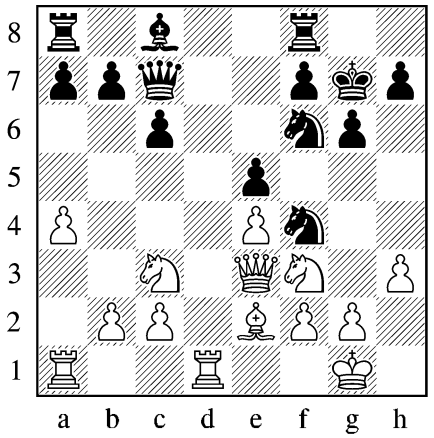
14...axb6 15.axb6 ♕xb6 16.♕xa8 ♕xb2 17.♕a3

Black's compensation proved insufficient for a draw.

Black's main achievement after the exchange on e5 is increased freedom of action. Optimally, he should install one of his knights on f4 or d4. He can achieve the former with either ...♘h5-f4 or ...♘c5-e6-f4. Neither is achievable with the centre under tension, as for instance ...♘h5 invites d4-d5 while ...♘f4 would in many cases lose a pawn to ♗xf4, since the c7-queen is obstructed by the d6-pawn. In the following game, Black obtained an excellent knight on f4 but then failed to capitalize on it.

Jakobsen – Thorvaldsson

Helsinki 1972



15...♘xe2†?

Unnecessarily exchanging the active knight.

16.♘xe2 ♖e8 17.♘g3±

With pressure on the e5-pawn and kingside attacking chances.

Instead, 15...♗xh3!N as recommended in

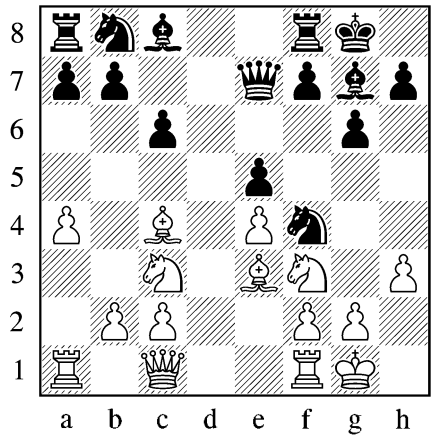
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Chapter 2, variation A1 on page 45, would have more or less forced a draw.

But while the effectiveness of bringing a knight to f4 depends on such tactical possibilities, ...♘d4 would immediately neutralize White's pressure along the g1-a7 diagonal, putting him under serious pressure at the same time.

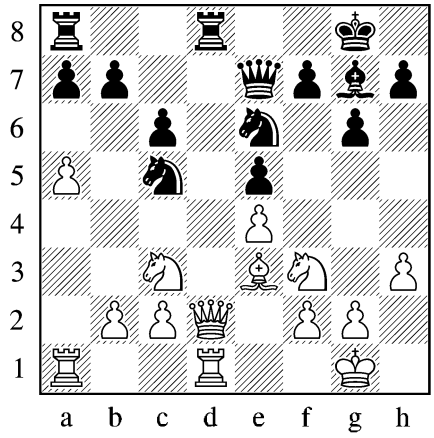
Zhang Ziji – Ding Liren

China 2015



The knight is unstable on f4, so Black prepares to transfer it to d4:

13...♗e6 14.♗xe6 ♘xe6 15.♖d1 ♘d7 16.♕d2 ♖fd8 17.a5 ♘dc5

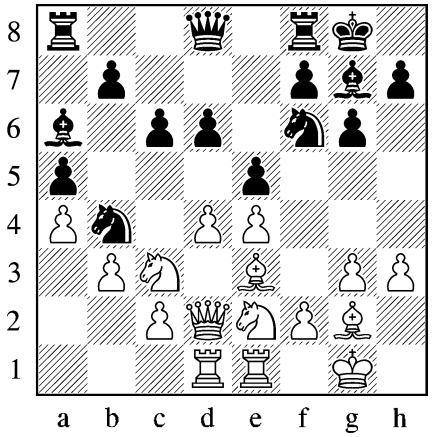


The second knight makes use of the consequences of the exchange in the centre.

18.♕e2 ♘d4 19.♕c4 ♘ce6

With great play for Black; see variation D4 of Chapter 2 on page 72.

However, forcing dxe5 is not Black's only constructive plan in this structure. There are ways of dealing with the central tension in the long run.



This is an important tabiya of Chapter 11. With the knight on e2 and the bishop on g2, the aforementioned plans are not available, but due to the reduced pressure in the centre Black has achieved comfortable development.

14...♕c7 15.f4 ♖ad8

An important point is that 16.dxe5 dxe5 attacks the queen, not offering White the tempo needed for f4-f5, while 16.f5 exd4 would hand Black the e5-square.

16.g4 ♖fe8 17.♘g3

After completing his development, Black is ready for concrete action already:

17...exf4 18.♗xf4 c5

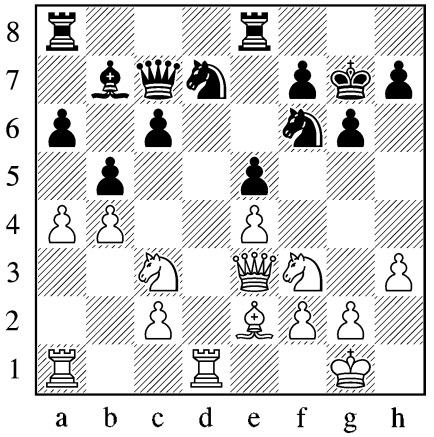
See line B222 of Chapter 11 on page 287.

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As the reader must have noticed, in all these examples White has played a2-a4. This is because, if permitted, Black's most promising plan is queenside expansion based on ...b7-b5.

Radovici – Marin

Tusnad 1997

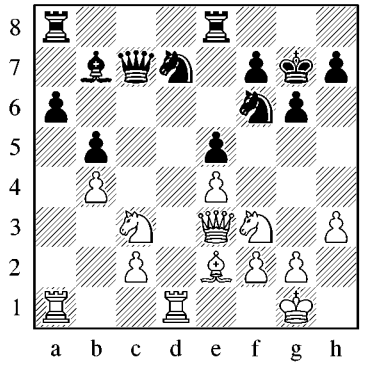


This is the maximum Black could dream of reaching from the opening. He has completely neutralized White's initial space advantage and has comfortable development.

17.♖d2?!

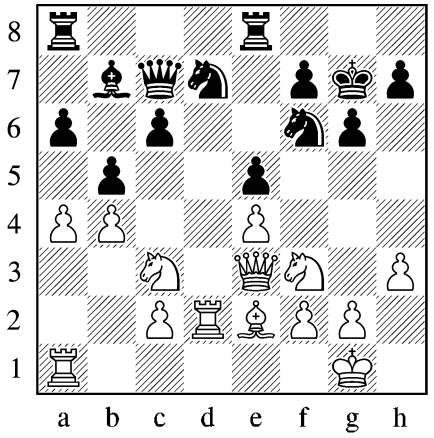
Underestimating the dynamic nuances of the position.

Now is a good moment to speak about the double-edged character of a2-a4 in this structure. Sooner or later White will be forced to take a decision, but the point is that after 17.axb5 Black does not necessarily have to maintain symmetry with 17...axb5 but can play 17...cxb5!, clearing the bishop's diagonal and the c-file.



White does not get much by occupying the d5-square: 18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.exd5 The c2-pawn is entirely edible, but more typically 19...♕d6∓ offers Black excellent stability and the more flexible structure.

Safest was 17.♘d2 c5 18.axb5 cxb4 19.♘a2, when White maintains approximate equality in a complicated position.



17...c5!

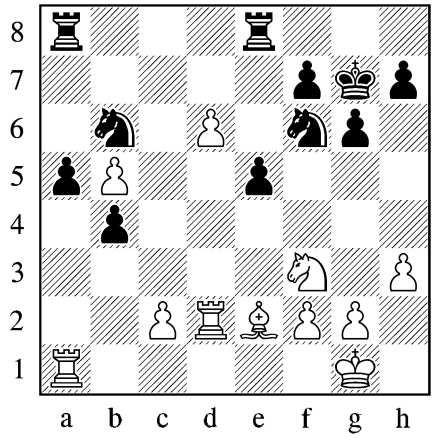
Inducing favourable structural changes.

18.axb5

Worse is 18.bxc5 b4! followed by ...♘xc5, leaving White with an awful queenside structure.

18...cxb4 19.♘d5 ♗xd5 20.exd5 a5 21.d6 ♕b6 22.♕xb6 ♘xb6∓

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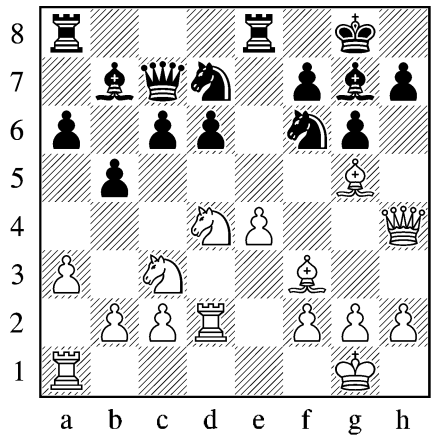


The structure is rather unusual, but Black's advantage is obvious as he has the better structure and two active knights. The main threat is ...♘e4-c3, with complete domination.

Queenside expansion can be effective even if Black releases the tension on the way.

De Firmian – Foygel

Seattle 2003



This position is examined in Chapter 1, variation C on page 25. Black's next move immediately endangers the e4-pawn:

15...c5!

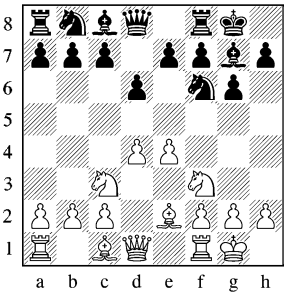
Forcing White to sacrifice on b5, with insufficient compensation.

The examples examined above cover the most typical (and frequent) Pirc structures, but they cannot exhaust this subject, of course. They are intended as a quick guide, helping the over-the-board player to find his orientation more easily, and I will explain the deeper nuances at the appropriate places throughout the book.

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Chapter 1

Classical System



Various 7th Moves

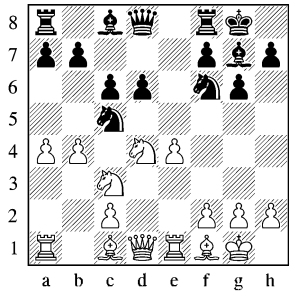
Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗e2 0–0 6.0–0

6...c6

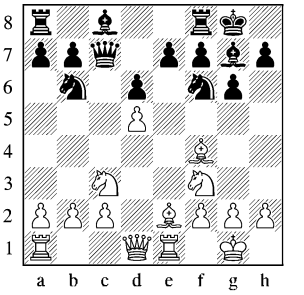
A) 7.e5 **16**
B) 7.♗f4 **19**
C) 7.♗g5 **23**
D) 7.♖e1 ♘bd7 **27**
D1) 8.♗f1 **27**
D2) 8.♗f4 ♕a5! **31**
D21) 9.♕d2 **32**
D22) 9.♘d2 **33**
D3) 8.e5 **35**
E) 7.h3 **39**

D1) note to 11.f3



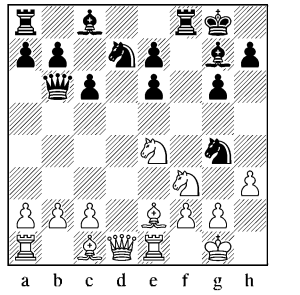
11...♘g4!N

D22) note to 11.♗f3



12...♕c5!N

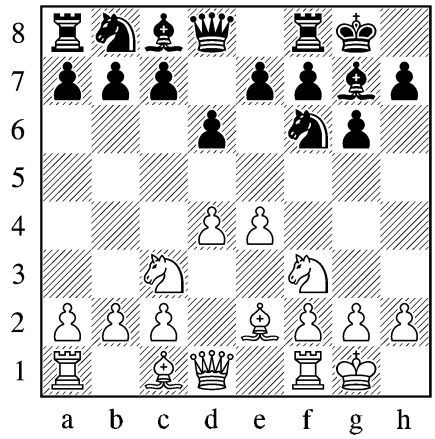
D3) note to 11.h3



12...♘df6!N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗e2 0–0 6.0–0



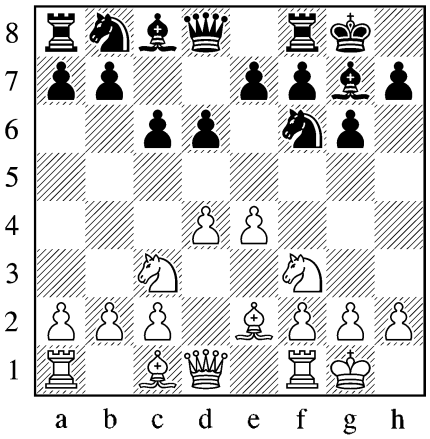
As against many other openings in which Black refrains from an early occupation of the centre with pawns (for instance several Sicilian systems and the King's Indian), the set-up based on ♘f3, ♗e2 and 0–0 is named the 'Classical System'. White does not claim a refutation of Black's hypermodern play, but relies on the fact that natural development should offer him chances for a minimal, yet stable, middlegame advantage.

Black is under no immediate pressure, but needs to complete his development and prepare his counterplay in the centre, most typically with ...e7-e5. Over the next few moves he should constantly be aware of White's potential threats of e4-e5 and, less frequently, d4-d5.

It is worth mentioning that mastering this variation with Black is equivalent to understanding the Pirc in general, as the strategic ideas typical of the Classical System are useful in most other positional set-ups.

Black has a relatively wide choice between viable variations. I have selected for our repertoire:

6...c6



This has not only been the most popular answer over many decades, but is also the one corresponding best to the classical spirit of the opening.

The last move is useful in many ways. What first comes to mind is the potential threat ...b7-b5. Black should not hurry with it, since in most cases e4-e5 would leave him underdeveloped and with a vulnerable queenside. But if White does not take measures against it, it will not be long before the pawn can advance safely, gaining queenside space and preparing ...♗b7, while indirectly attacking e4.

Another important idea behind 6...c6 is to clear the a5-d8 diagonal for the queen. On his way to prepare ...e7-e5 (and inhibit e4-e5) Black frequently needs ...♕c7 (and sometimes ...♕a5), while if the white bishop develops actively to, say, g5, then ...♕b6 could cause some problems defending d4 and b2.

In this chapter we will examine the early break **A) 7.e5**, the developing moves **B) 7.♗f4**, **C) 7.♗g5** and **D) 7.♖e1**, and finally the prophylactic pawn move **E) 7.h3**.

The main line, 7.a4, is the subject of the next chapter.

I should say a few words about move orders, as transpositions are frequent. When examining lines B, C and D, I will not consider an early a2-a4 or h2-h3, as these transpose to lines

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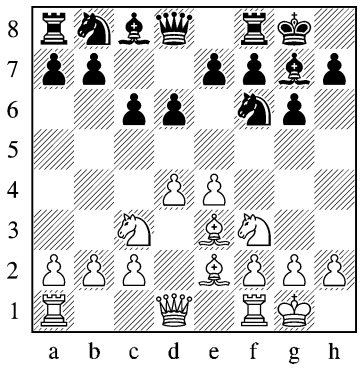
examined in either line E or the next chapter.

I will add a few words about my approach when building up the repertoire. Over the years when the Pirc was my exclusive weapon, I almost invariably answered all these moves with 7...♘bd7, even though I knew that in some lines 7...♕c7 enjoys the reputation of being a worthy alternative. When making my choice I let myself be guided by the classical principle that the queen should be among the last pieces to develop.

But in recent years I have discovered the virtues of 7...♕c7 in the lines where White does not focus on preparing e4-e5 (line E and the next chapter). If Black manages to carry out ...e7-e5, it is in many cases useful to retain the possibility of ...♗g4, which sometimes induces White to spend a tempo on h2-h3.

7.♗e3

You may wonder why this most natural developing move is not on the list above. The reason is that it allows:



7...b5! 8.e5

The standard reaction to an early queenside expansion, which in most cases favours White.

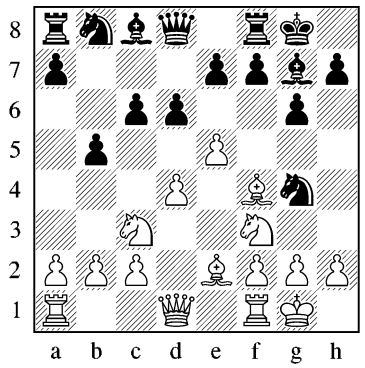
Passive play with 8.a3 allows Black to build up a flexible and active position with 8...♘bd7 9.♕d2 ♕c7 followed by ...e5.

8...♘g4

This is the point. The bishop does not stand well on e3 in connection with an early e4-e5.

9.♗f4

A forced loss of time.



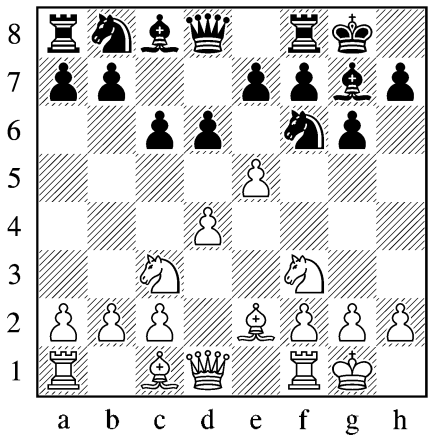
9...b4N 10.♘e4

Or 10.♘a4 dxe5 11.dxe5 ♕a5, with a double attack.

10...dxe5 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♗xe5 ♗xe5 13.dxe5 ♕d5 14.♕xd5 cxd5 15.♘c5 ♘d7 16.♘xd7 ♗xd7 17.♖fd1 e6

Followed by ...♖fc8, ...a5, and possibly ...♖ab8 and ...♗b5, with comfortable play.

A) 7.e5



A relatively rare continuation, failing to cause Black major problems.

7...dxe5 8.♘xe5

White is insufficiently well developed to make the ambitious pawn recapture work properly:

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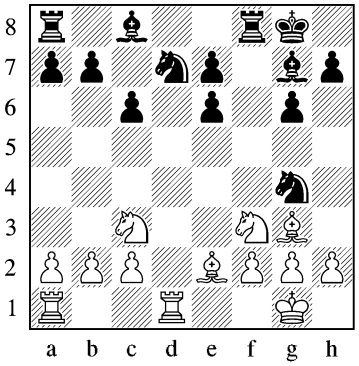
8.dxe5 ♕xd1

In view of White's later e5-e6, it is useful to exchange queens, ending White's attacking chances.

9.♖xd1 ♘g4 10.♗f4 ♘d7 11.e6

Obviously the only move, since White could not defend his pawn.

11...fxe6 12.♗g3



12...♘ge5

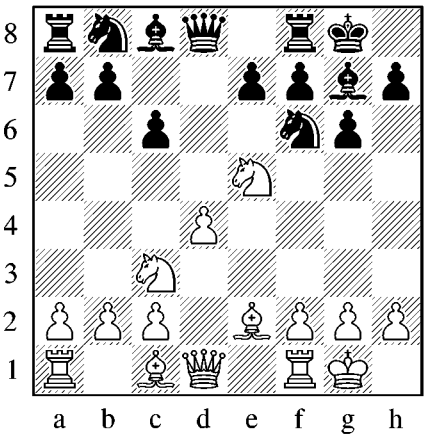
My favourite among many playable moves. Black prepares to transfer a knight to f7, covering such important squares as e5 and g5, and getting ready to jump to d6 later.

13.♘xe5

If 13.♘d4 ♘b6 White has to take a possible ...♘c4 into account.

13...♘xe5 14.♘e4 ♘f7 15.c3 e5

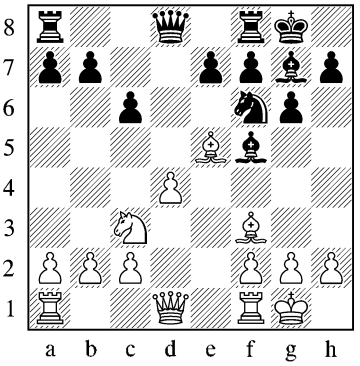
Followed by ...♗f5, with entirely adequate play.



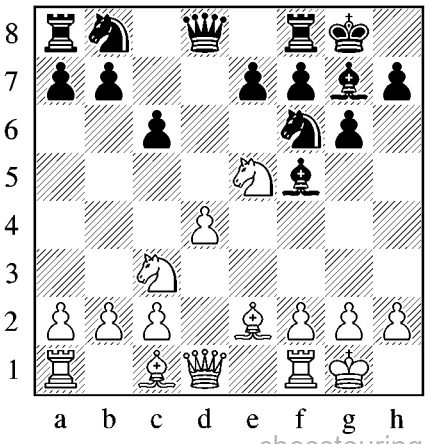
8...♗f5

The most active continuation. Before offering the exchange of the e5-knight with ...♘bd7, Black develops his bishop, preparing later simplifications with ...♘e4.

8...♘bd7 is a less flexible move order. After 9.♗f4 ♘xe5 10.♗xe5, as played in Balashov – Azmaiparashvili, Lvov 1990, Black should try 10...♗f5, although instead of replying 11.♖e1, transposing to the note to White's 9th move below, White can try 11.♗f3, preventing ...♘e4.



This position was reached by transposition in Jicman – Drljevic, Belgrade 2003. Even though Black has no immediate way of breaking in the centre, Pirc players need not be afraid of this position; Black can continue with 11...h5N followed by ...♗h6, with normal play.



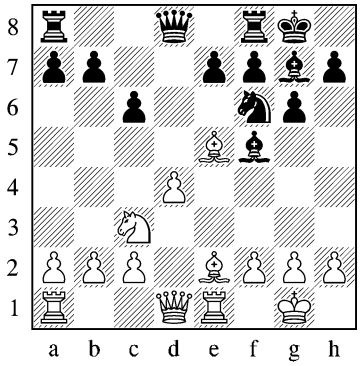
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9.♗f3

Controlling the e4-square.

9.♗f4 ♘bd7 10.♖e1 ♘xe5 11.♗xe5

This was played in Alvarez Ibarra – Azmaiparashvili, Euskadi 1991. Aside from the plan with ...h5 and ...♗h6 mentioned above, Black can equalize at once with:



11...♘e4N 12.♘xe4

Or if 12.♗xg7 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♔xg7= Black's better structure compensates for White's space advantage.

12...♗xe5 13.dxe5 ♗xe4=

The position has a marked drawish tendency.

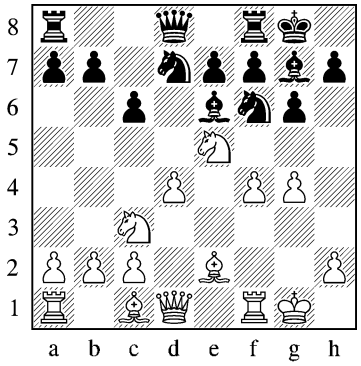
9.g4N

This aggressive lunge is premature due to White's incomplete development:

9...♗e6 10.f4

Otherwise it is hard to justify the previous move.

10...♘bd7

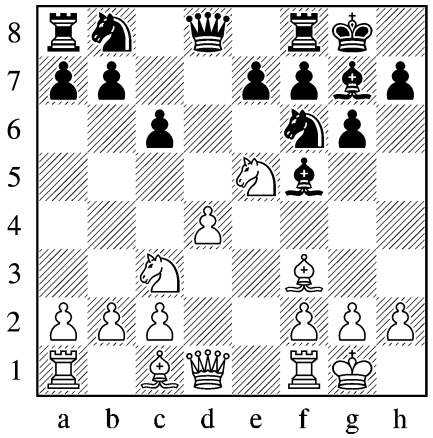


11.f5

11.♗f3 ♘xe5 forces 12.fxe5, since otherwise the g4-pawn would be hanging after the queen exchange. 12...♘d5= Exchanges on d5 would be followed by ...f6 with complete equality, while if 13.♘e4?! f6 14.♘c5 ♗c8∓ White's position would be hanging.

11...♗d5 12.♗e3 gxf5 13.gxf5 ♔h8

Followed by ...♕e8 and ...♖g8, with a stable position and counterplay along the g-file.



9...♘bd7 10.♗f4 ♘b6

The knight stands well on b6, preparing either ...♘fd5 or ...♘fd7, possibly followed by ...♘c4.

The last move is slightly more ambitious than 10...♘xe5 11.♗xe5, transposing to the note to Black's 8th move above.

11.♕d2 ♘fd7 12.♘g4

Exchanging knights would help Black's development:

12.♘xd7 ♕xd7 13.♖ad1 ♖ad8 14.♕c1

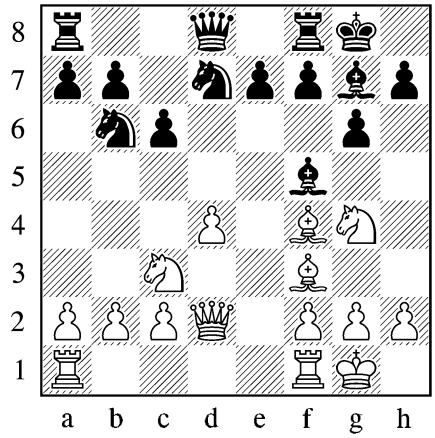
Avoiding the unpleasant pin along the d-file. 14.♕e2, with the same idea, runs into 14...♕e6 renewing the attack on d4, and if 15.♗e3 ♕c4∓ with a strong initiative.

14...♗g4∓

Exchanging the only black piece which

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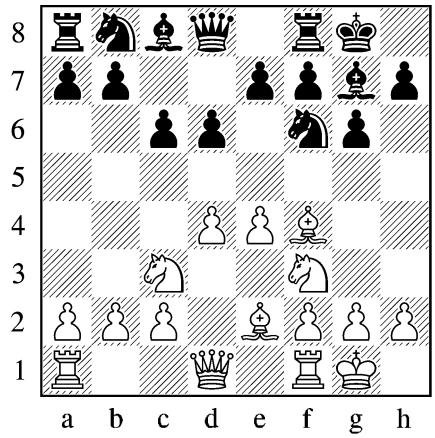
was not fulfilling any useful job, and keeping strong pressure on the centre.



12...♗xg4! 13.♗xg4 e5∓

Black had the initiative in Sutovsky – Beim, Rishon LeZion 1994.

B) 7.♗f4



By increasing his control over the e5-square, White strengthens the force of the thematic central break. However, if Black takes adequate measures then this plan may prove double-edged, as the bishop is not stable. Typically, it will need to move again after ...e7-e5.

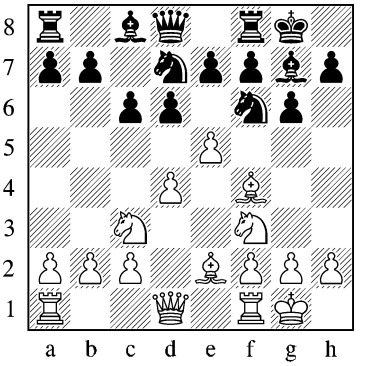
7...♘bd7

Placing the queen under pressure from the bishop right away is a bit too provocative: 7...♕c7 8.e5 ♘h5 9.♗g5± Black experienced certain problems with his coordination in Zvjaginsev – V. Onischuk, St Petersburg 2011.

8.♕d2

A rare and under-examined alternative deserves a mention:

8.e5



8...dxe5!

8...♘h5 looks like the natural refutation of White's hurried break. It seems that White simply loses a pawn, but the surprising 9.♗d2!!N avoids the queen exchange after general exchanges on e5, thus allowing White to regain the pawn with some initiative: 9...dxe5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♗xe5 12.♗xh5 gxh5 13.♕xh5±

9.dxe5 ♘g4 10.e6 fxe6

This position is similar to one examined in the note to White's 8th move in line A, with the difference that the queens are still on the board. This offers White some additional possibilities, but Black can hold his own by using the aforementioned plan of transferring a knight to f7.

11.♘g5!

Without queens this would be impossible, but now the bishop is indirectly defended in view of either ♘xe6 or ♗xg4. If 11.♗g3 ♘de5 then Black has fewer problems.

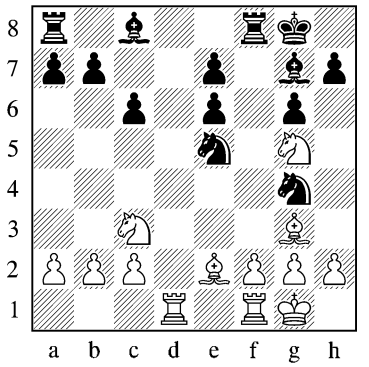
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11...♘de5 12.♕xd8

Once again the bishop retreat offers Black breathing space: 12.♗g3 ♘h6 13.♘ce4 ♘f5 with active play.

12...♖xd8 13.♖ad1 ♖f8 14.♗g3

In Klosterfrau – WieNie, Internet (blitz) 2007, Black's best defence would have been:



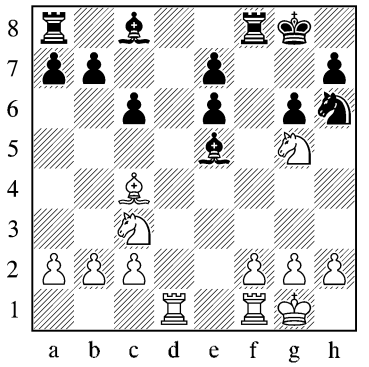
14...♘h6!N

Planning ...♘hf7.

15.♗xe5

The only active try, making the c4-square available for the other bishop.

15...♗xe5 16.♗c4



16...b5!

Black needs to force events before White increases the pressure with ♖fe1. The space gained by the last move will be useful later.

17.♗b3

Slightly more consistent than 17.♗xe6† ♗xe6 18.♘xe6 ♖f6 19.♘c5 ♖d6. The strong bishop and queenside counterplay compensate for the minor structural defect.

17...a5 18.♖fe1 ♘g4

A well-timed counterattack.

19.♘f3

After 19.h3 ♘xf2 20.♖xe5 ♘xd1 21.♘xd1 ♖f5 22.♖xf5 gxf5 the endgame offers chances for both sides.

19...♗xc3 20.bxc3 c5 21.♗xe6† ♗xe6 22.♖xe6 ♖fd8

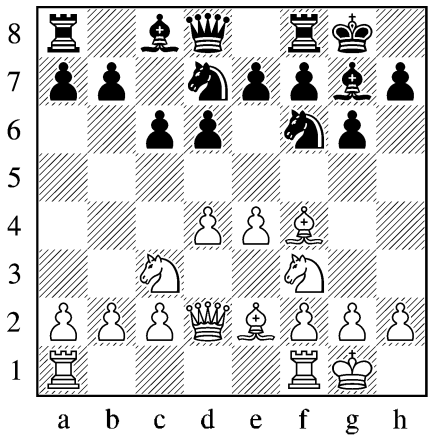
Pawns are equal and the mutual weaknesses counterbalance each other.

23.♖b1 ♘f6!

Planning ...♘d5.

24.♖xb5 ♖d1† 25.♖e1 ♖xe1† 26.♘xe1 ♘e4

With a probable draw.



8...♕c7

Now that Black has better control of the e5-square, this move is possible and at the same time necessary.

It is quite a pity that the tactics work out well for White after:

8...b5 9.e5

The passive 9.a3 offered Black great counterplay after 9...♗b7 10.♖ad1 c5 in Rogers – Smyslov, Groningen 1989.

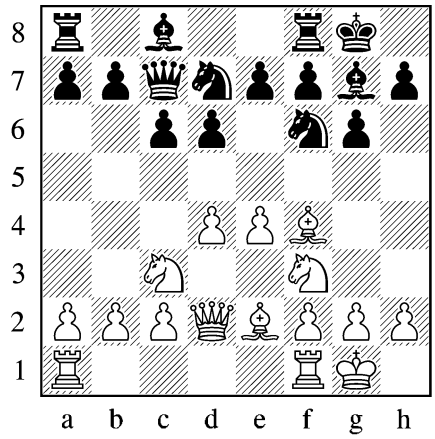
9...dxe5 10.dxe5 ♘h5 11.♗h6 ♘xe5!

It may seem as if Black has tricked his opponent, but the forced line has not yet ended.

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12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.♗xg7 ♘xf3† 14.♗xf3 ♔xg7 15.♗xc6 ♖b8 16.♗xb5±

In Rogers – Azmaiparashvili, Groningen 1989, Black failed to prove adequate compensation for the pawn.



9.e5

This is the last and relatively best moment at which White can break in the centre.

9.a4 e5 transposes to variation A1 of the next chapter.

9...♘h5 10.exd6

In a few other similar lines, a typical alternative to exd6 is ♗f4-g5. Small details induce radical changes in Black's best defensive line. Here is the first episode of this series:

10.♗g5 dxe5 11.♗xe7 ♖e8

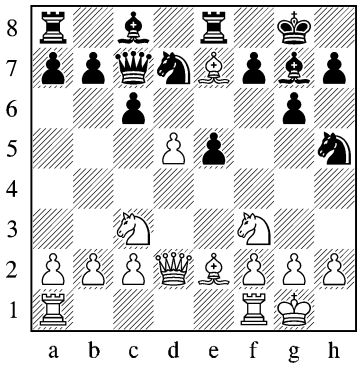
The apparently promising 11...exd4? 12.♗xf8 dxc3 runs into the intermediate move 13.♗d6!±.

12.d5!

The only challenging move.

12.♗h4? exd4 13.♘xd4 ♕f4–+ wins material.

12.♗g5 e4∓ offers Black the initiative at no cost.



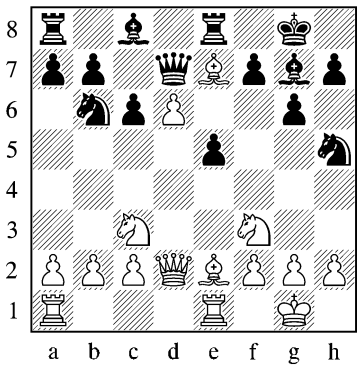
12...♘b6!N

This move was not considered in *Dangerous Weapons: The Pirc and Modern*. Black clears the queen's and bishop's paths to the kingside. At a later stage, after d5-d6 and ...♘f4, the knights could cooperate to occupy the d5-square, thus turning the white d-pawn into a weakness.

If 12...♘f4 13.d6, as played in a few games, the queen's prospects are less clear.

13.d6 ♕d7 14.♖fe1

Preventing ...♘f4 with 14.g3 is too slow: 14...♗f6 15.♗xf6 ♘xf6 16.♖fe1 ♘bd5 17.♘xd5 cxd5 18.♕b4 ♖e6 19.c4 ♕xd6= with simplifications and a probable draw.

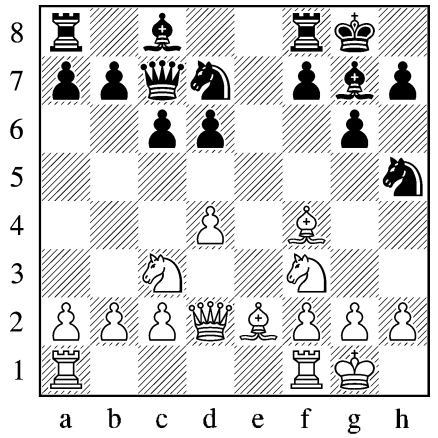


14...♘f4 15.♗f1 f6

The position is complex and offers chances to both sides. Black's main ideas are ...♗f8, undermining the d6-pawn, ...♘d5 (either knight) interfering on the d-file, and ...♕g4, causing White some kingside discomfort.

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10...exd6



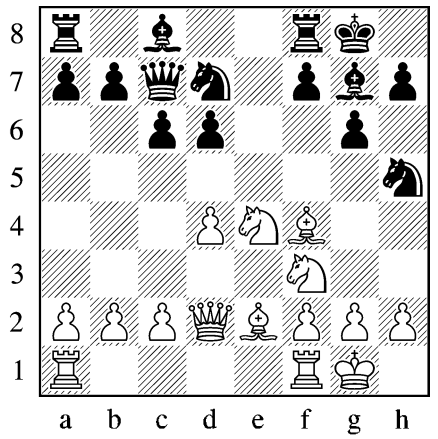
White has lost a big part of his space advantage and the structure has become almost symmetrical. In addition, his bishop is attacked. He needs to act energetically in order to avoid immediate equality.

11.♘e4

The only challenging move. Other continuations offer Black comfortable play:

11.♗g5 ♘b6 12.♖fe1 ♗e6= followed by ...♖ae8.

11.♗h6 d5 12.♗xg7 was agreed drawn here in Alekseev – Svidler, Sochi 2015. Play could continue 12...♘xg7 13.♖fe1 ♘b6 (or 13...♘f6=) with complete equality.



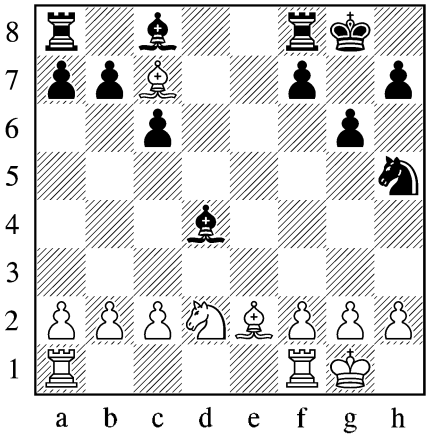
11...♘df6

The start of a short tactical sequence resulting in mass simplifications.

12.♗xd6

12.♘xd6? drops a piece to 12...♘xf4 13.♕xf4 ♘h5–+.

12...♘xe4 13.♗xc7 ♘xd2 14.♘xd2 ♗xd4



15.c3

White's only chance to maintain the tension is to exchange on h5:

15.♗xh5N gxh5 16.c3 ♗b6

This move order offers White a choice between transposing to our main line with 17.♗xb6 or keeping the bishop with:

17.♗f4

However, White's hopes of exploiting the absence of the enemy bishop from g7 are not justified, as the bishop pair is strong enough to compensate for the kingside weaknesses.

17...♖e8 18.♖fe1

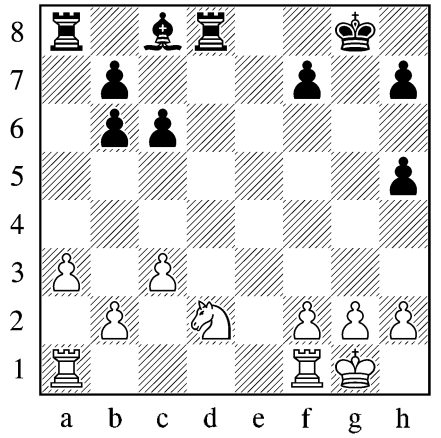
18.♘c4 ♖e2 offers Black counterplay since 19.♖ae1? allows 19...♗xf2†!.

18...♖xe1† 19.♖xe1 ♗e6=

White's queenside is also 'imperfect'. Black will soon transfer his bishop to e7 or f6 (via d8) with at least equal chances.

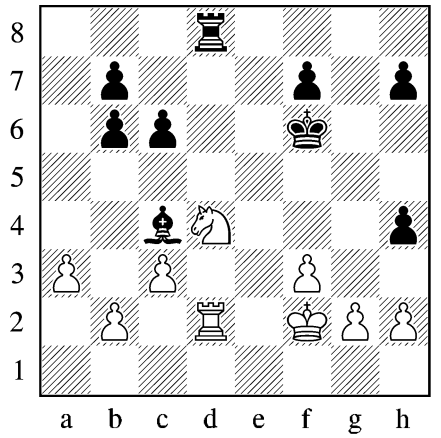
15...♗b6 16.♗xb6 axb6 17.♗xh5 gxh5 18.a3 ♖d8

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For those reluctant to play with doubled pawns, the ultimate course of the game may prove to them that Black has little to fear. The centre is open and the bishop has greater mobility than the knight.

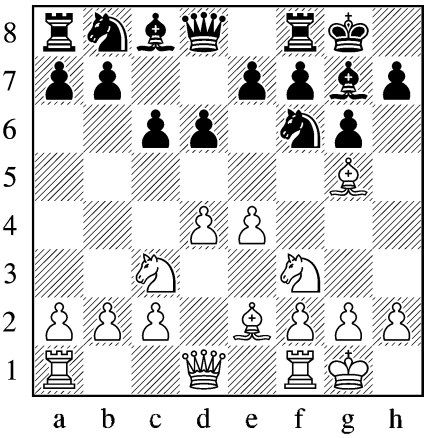
19.♖fd1 ♗f5 20.♘f1 ♗e6 21.f3 h4 22.♔f2 ♔g7 23.♘e3 ♗b3 24.♖d4 ♖xd4 25.♘f5† ♔f6 26.♘xd4 ♗c4 27.♖d1 ♖d8 28.♖d2



28...b5!N=

This is better than 28...♖d5, as played in Solak – T.L. Petrosian, Golden Sands 2014, when White could have posed some problems with 29.b3 ♗a6 30.c4, leaving the bishop passive on a6.

C) 7.♗g5



This does not put immediate pressure on Black, but avoids exposing the bishop to the knight's attacks, as both 7.♗e3 and 7.♗f4 do. It means that Black should choose his next move carefully in order to avoid problems after e4-e5.

7...♕c7!

Thinking abstractly, this may be chosen simply to avoid the pressure along the h4-d8 diagonal, but it also is the best move for very concrete reasons.

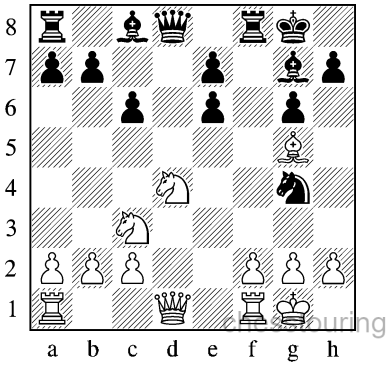
7...♘bd7

This allows:

8.e5 dxe5 9.dxe5 ♘g4 10.e6 fxe6

As mentioned above, the bishop is not hanging. Slightly later we will see that it is actually very useful on g5.

11.♘d4N ♘de5 12.♗xg4 ♘xg4



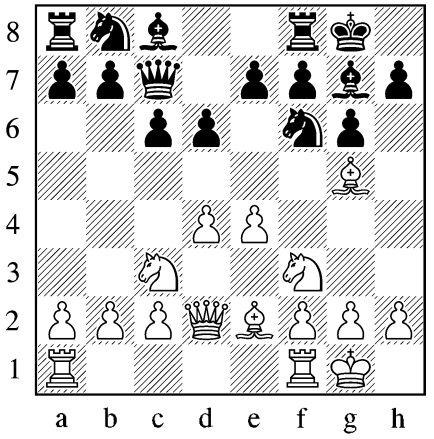
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13.♘xc6! bxc6
The point is that after 13...♕xd1 14.♘xe7† ♔f7 15.♖axd1± the knight is defended. And if 15...h6 White is just in time to save his hanging pieces with 16.♘xc8±.
14.♕xg4±

8.♕d2
This allows Black to start his queenside counterplay.

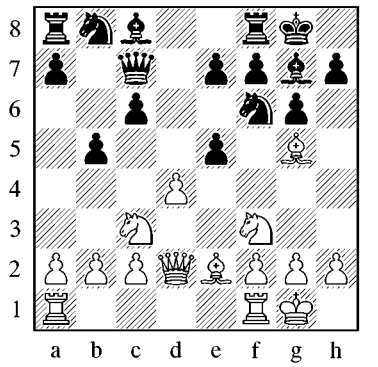
8.e5 is ineffective: 8...dxe5 9.♘xe5 (9.dxe5 ♘g4 wins the e5-pawn) 9...♘bd7= This can be compared with other lines where White plays an early e4-e5.

8.a4 is best, transposing to variation B of the next chapter.

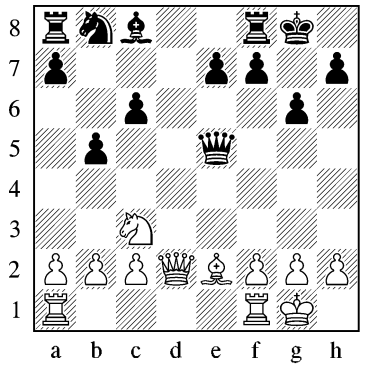


8...b5
Black can afford this ambitious move mainly because White has not increased the pressure in the centre with his last two moves.

9.a3
The complications arising after the central advance are not dangerous for Black:
9.e5 dxe5



10.dxe5
After the careless 10.♘xe5? Black wins a piece: 10...b4 11.♘a4 ♘e4 For once, the bishop is hanging on g5, too. 12.♕e3 ♘xg5 13.♕xg5 f6–+
10...♘g4 11.♗f4
White is forced to lose a tempo and look for compensation after general exchanges on e5.
11...♘xe5
Avoiding the trap 11...♖d8? 12.e6± as occurred in Varavin – Glyanets, Chelyabinsk 1989.
12.♘xe5 ♗xe5 13.♗xe5 ♕xe5



14.♖fe1N
Slightly more consistent than 14.♘xb5, absolving Black of all developing problems: 14...cxb5 15.♗f3 ♘c6 16.♗xc6 ♖b8 17.c3 ♗e6 18.♖fe1 ♕c5 19.♗f3 ♖fd8 20.♕f4 In Pham Xuan Dat – Tran Minh Thang, Ho Chi Minh City 2012, Black should have proceeded with his queenside attack with

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20...b4N∓.

14...♕f6 15.♗f3

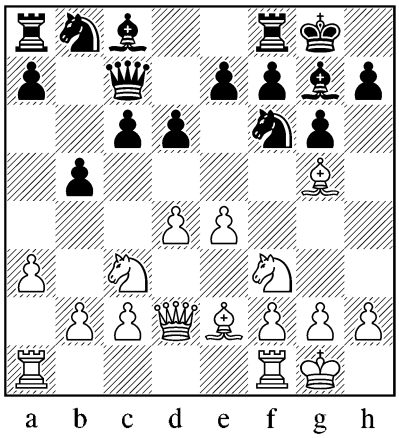
If 15.♘e4 Black can safely take the second pawn with 15...♕xb2, since the queen keeps defending the long diagonal.

15...♗f5 16.♕e3

Once again, retrieving the pawn on b5 speeds up Black's development: 16.♘xb5 ♘a6 17.♘a3 ♖ab8 18.♘c4 ♘b4= with counterplay.

16...♘d7 17.♕xe7 ♖ac8=

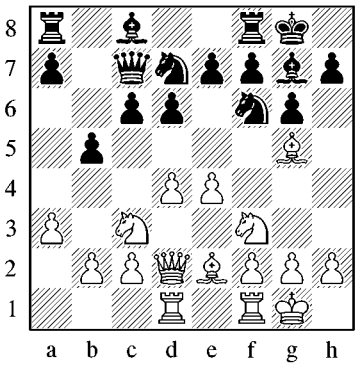
Black does not have the slightest problem.



9...♘bd7 10.♖fe1

White renews the threat of e4-e5 based on the X-ray action along the e-file.

Knowing White's plan in the main line (meeting ...e5 with d4-d5), 10.♖ad1 looks logical.



This has been played in a few games, but Black can improve on them with 10...a5N, taking full advantage of the rook's absence from a1 by renewing the threat of ...b4.

10.♖fd1 avoids this problem, but does not force Black to embark on concrete actions in the centre. He can play 10...♗b7= followed by ...a5 and/or ...e5 soon.

10.♕f4

This looks aggressive, but does not promise attacking chances.

10...e5 11.♕h4

11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♕h4 avoids the counterplay in the centre, but clears the b8-h2 diagonal, allowing 12...♘h5 followed by ...♘f4, when several white pieces are misplaced.

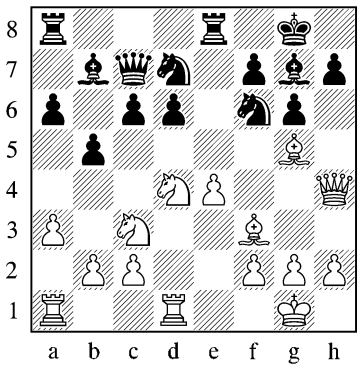
11...exd4

Not the only move, but quite a good one, taking advantage of White's imperfect coordination.

12.♘xd4 ♖e8 13.♖fd1 a6

Preparing ...c5.

14.♗f3 ♗b7



15.♖d2

15.♘b3 does not reduce the force of 15...c5; for instance 16.♘d2 ♖e6!?∓ followed by ...♖ae8 with strong pressure on the e4-pawn.

15...c5 16.♘dxb5!?

Otherwise 16...b4 would win the e4-pawn.

16...axb5 17.♘xb5 ♕b6 18.♘xd6 ♕xb2

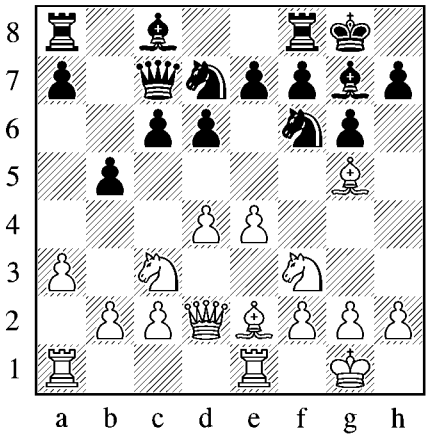
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19.♖ad1

In De Firmian – Foygel, Seattle 2003, Black prematurely agreed a draw, instead of continuing:

19...♗c6N 20.♘xe8 ♖xe8∓

Black's well-coordinated minor pieces are strong, while White has many vulnerable pawns.



10...e5

Parrying White's only threat and proceeding with the global plan of expansion.

The careless 10...a5 offers White some initiative after: 11.e5 dxe5 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♕xe5 14.♗f3 ♕c7 15.♘xb5±

11.d5!?

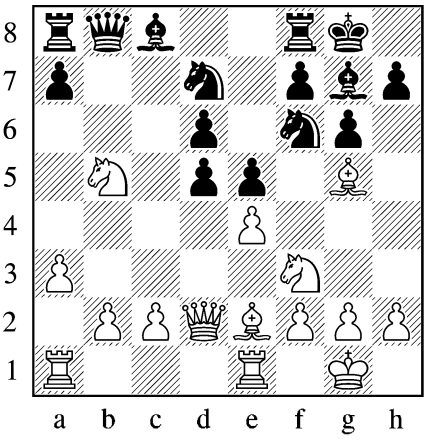
The only challenging move. Abstractly this justifies ♗g5, as in some cases the exchange on f6 would increase White's control of the light squares, but with the reserve knight on d7 it fails to yield the desired effect.

Quiet continuations do not bother Black, for instance: 11.♖ad1 a5N 12.b4 ♗b7 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♕d6 ♕xd6 15.♖xd6 axb4 16.axb4 ♖a3 17.♘b1 ♖a2= Black has a perfect regrouping and chances for counterplay.

11...cxd5 12.♘xb5

The only consistent continuation, as 12.exd5 a6∓ offers Black a strategically pleasant position.

12...♕b8

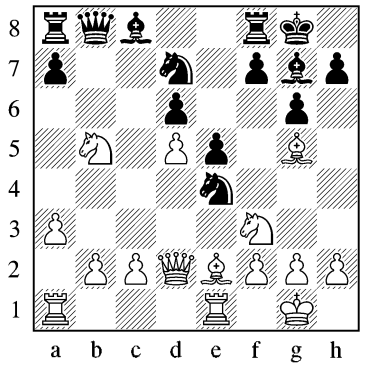


13.♗xf6

White does not avoid the bishop exchange with:

13.exd5 ♘e4

It will be up to Black to decide whether or not to take on g5.



14.♕b4

Trying to defend the b-file and keep Black busy with the defence of the d6-pawn.

Both 14.♕e3 f5 and 14.♕a5 ♘xg5 15.♘xg5 a6 16.♘c3 h6 17.♘f3 f5 allow Black to set his majority in motion. Soon the g7-bishop will exert strong pressure on White's

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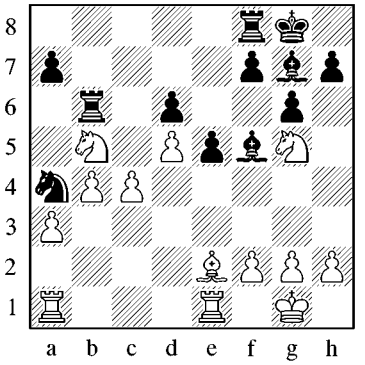
queenside, making the extra pawn irrelevant.

14...♘xg5 15.♘xg5 ♘c5 16.♘c3 ♗f5 17.♕xb8

This looks like a concession, but White clears the b5-square for the knight in order to renew the threat to d6.

17.♖ac1 e4∓ leaves the g5-knight misplaced.

17...♖axb8 18.♘b5 ♖b6 19.b4 ♘a4 20.c4



White has managed to connect his pawns, but they have left many weak squares behind in the process, allowing Black's minor pieces to 'dance' at their leisure.

20...h6 21.g4

Trying to fight back, for if 21.♘h3 e4 White is poorly coordinated.

Another possible intermediate move is 21.♗d1 ♘b2 22.♘e4 ♘xc4 23.♘xa7 ♖a8 24.♘c6 ♗xe4 25.♖xe4 ♖xa3, when the c6-knight and the b4-pawn at most compensate for Black's strong bishop and mobile majority.

21...♗d7 22.♘e4 ♗xb5 23.cxb5 f5 24.gxf5 gxf5 25.♘g3 e4 26.♖ac1 ♘c3

Black will regain the pawn soon with great play.

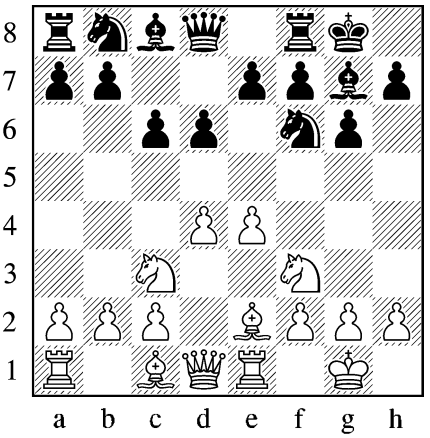
13...♘xf6 14.exd5

In Galego – McNab, Cappelle-la-Grande 1993, Black had many ways of proving his compensation for the pawn, the most natural being:

14...♘e4N 15.♕e3 f5

Followed by ...♗d7 and ...♖c8.

D) 7.♖e1



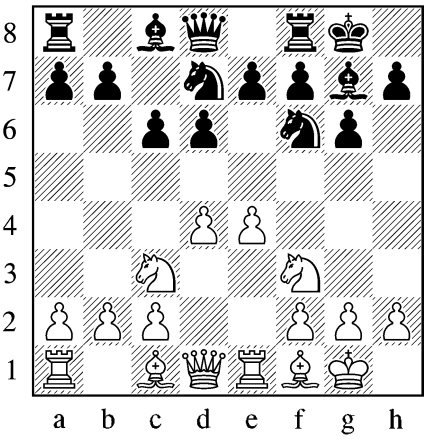
We are familiar with this apparently modest developing move from line C. White strengthens the threat of e4-e5, but this time Black is not prepared for ...e7-e5 yet.

7...♘bd7

7...♕c7 prematurely commits the queen, exposing it to the enemy bishop after 8.e5 dxe5 9.♘xe5 followed by ♗f4.

After 7...♘bd7 White can try the regrouping **D1) 8.♗f1**, the developing **D2) 8.♗f4** and the resolute **D3) 8.e5**.

D1) 8.♗f1



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White allows Black's planned ...e5, hoping that his flexible regrouping will allow him to keep his space advantage intact.

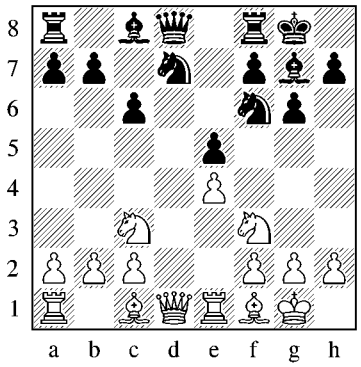
8...e5 9.a4

Parrying ...b5. This does not transpose to variation C of the next chapter since Black has played ...♘bd7 instead of ...♕c7.

If 9.♗e3, as in Hultin – Setterqvist, Sweden 2000, Black can immediately obtain counterplay with: 9...♘g4N 10.♗g5 ♕b6 The weakening of the f2-square tells, as the d4-pawn is pinned. 11.h3 exd4 12.♘a4 ♕a5 13.hxg4 ♕xa4 14.♗e7 ♖e8 15.♗xd6 ♘b6 16.g5 ♗g4= With perfect development and already a space advantage for Black.

9.dxe5 dxe5

This avoids Black's counterplay from the main line but, due to the time wasted on regrouping, White is insufficiently well developed to claim an advantage after the opening of the d-file. For instance:



10.a4

The typical 10.♕d6 is also ineffective after 10...♖e8. White would need to move his dark-squared bishop in order to meet the planned ...♗f8 with ♕d2, but one tempo is not enough to find a good square for the bishop's development. 11.♗g5 h6 more or less forces the bishop to retreat passively to h4, while after 11.♗e3 ♘g4 12.♗g5 ♕b6 Black's counterplay is obvious.

10...♕c7

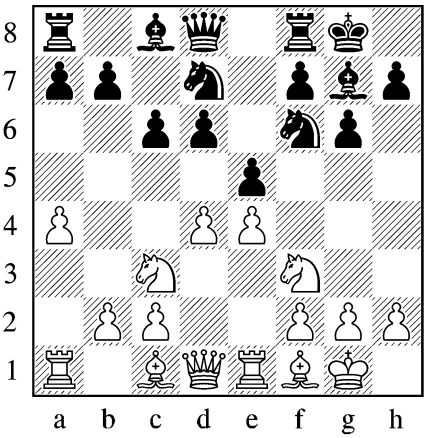
Black threatens ...♘c5, possibly followed by ...♗g4, ...♖ad8, ...♘e6 with a strong initiative. White can prevent this, though not for long, with:

11.♗e3

This position was reached in Holub – Mrnka, Czech Republic 2003. Black should have insisted on his main idea with:

11...♘g4N 12.♗g5 ♘c5

With at least equal play.



In line C of the next chapter, one of Black's main ideas is to delay ...♘bd7 in order to maintain the possibility of ...♗g4. This does not apply here anymore, but for dynamic purposes with the centre under tension ...♘bd7 is more useful than ...♕c7, allowing Black to start immediate counterplay.

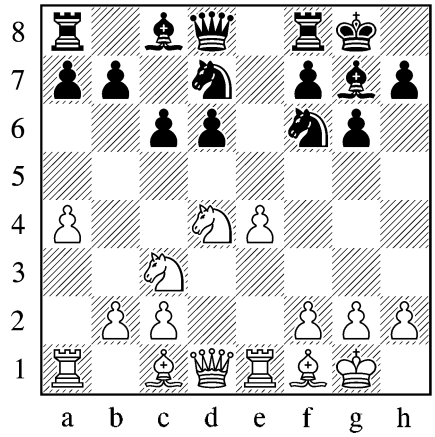
9...exd4!

Black should not delay his counterplay, as preparing it with 9...♖e8 runs into 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♗c4, causing Black some slight problems on f7. He would either have to weaken his kingside with ...h6 or else return the rook to f8, thus compensating for White's bishop repeatedly moving around. True, the position would remain entirely viable for

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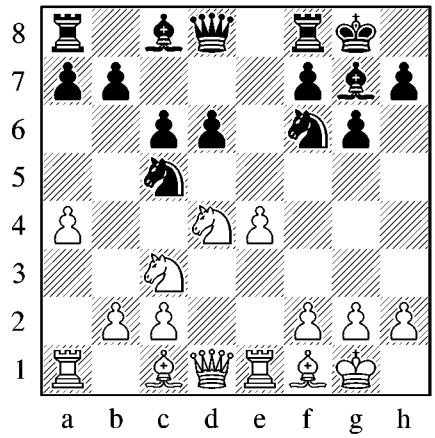
Black, but the main move is a simpler way to solve all the problems.

10.♘xd4



10...♘c5

Again the most accurate move order, for if 10...♖e8 White can take measures against ...♘c5 with 11.♘b3, as in Tregubov – Eismont, Kobanya 1992.



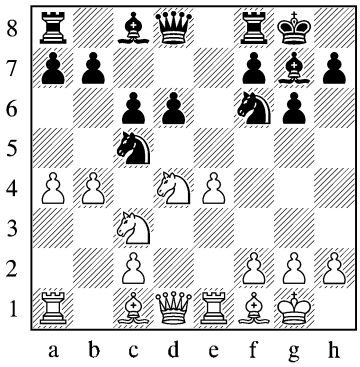
The last move not only plans to increase the pressure on the e4-pawn with ...♖e8, but also creates the threat of completely freeing Black's position with ...d6-d5.

11.f3

White accepts the inevitable.

11.b4?

This runs into unfavourable tactical complications.



11...♘g4!N

Once again the weakness of the f2-square causes White problems, especially in combination with the vulnerability of the long diagonal. This move is stronger than 11...♘e6, as played in Nolte – Murshed, Subic Bay 2009, when White could have maintained approximate equality with 12.♘xe6N ♗xe6 13.♗e3=.

12.♗e3

This seems like a sad move for White to play, but there is nothing better.

If 12.bxc5? ♕h4 Black wins on the spot.

12.h3 allows 12...♘xf2 13.♔xf2 ♕f6† 14.♘f3 ♕xc3–+ when Black has an extra pawn and the initiative.

After 12.f3 Black is ready to retreat with his c5-knight as the long diagonal is clear: 12...♘e6 13.♘ce2 ♘xd4 14.♘xd4 c5∓

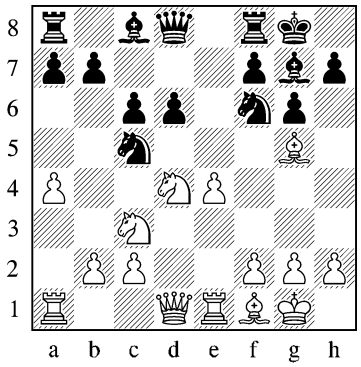
12...♘xe3 13.♖xe3 ♘e6∓

The strong g7-bishop is obviously the telling factor.

11.♗g5

This temporarily prevents ...d5, but leaves a series of dark squares vulnerable. In Aranovitch – Henze, Switzerland 2001, the simplest and strongest would have been:

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11...♕b6N 12.♖b1 ♖e8 13.a5

Before defending the e4-pawn, White needs to drive the queen away from the a7-g1 diagonal.

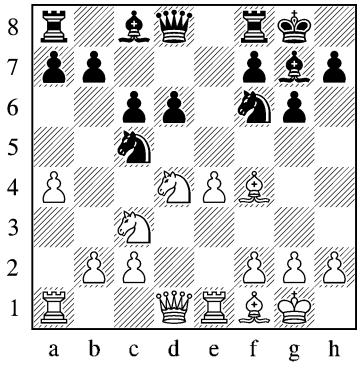
Instead, 13.f3 ♘e6 14.♗e3 allows 14...♘g4 15.fxg4 ♗xd4, with excellent chances for Black.

13...♕c7 14.f3 ♘e6 15.♘xe6 ♗xe6 16.b4 d5=

Black has at least equalized, since 17.♗xf6? ♗xf6 18.exd5 runs into 18...♗xc3∓.

11.♗f4

This is safer than 11.♗g5, but does not cross Black's plan. In Kaminski – Sznapik, Lubniewice 1993, Black for no good reason refrained from:



11...d5N 12.e5

The only way of keeping some tension.

12...♘fd7

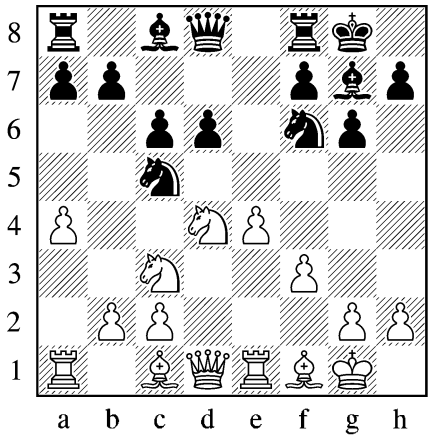
Planning ...♖e8 followed by ...f6 and/or ...♘e6.

13.b4

The structural modifications arising after this do not favour White.

13...♘e6 14.♘xe6 fxe6 15.♗g3 a5 16.b5 ♕e7

Black has comfortable play.



11...d5!N

Black should not delay this break, as playing in slow motion allows White to consolidate his space advantage: 11...a5 12.♗e3 ♖e8 (12...d5? already fails to 13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.♗xc5±) 13.♗f2± Pioch – Kunze, Berlin 1994.

12.e5 ♘e8

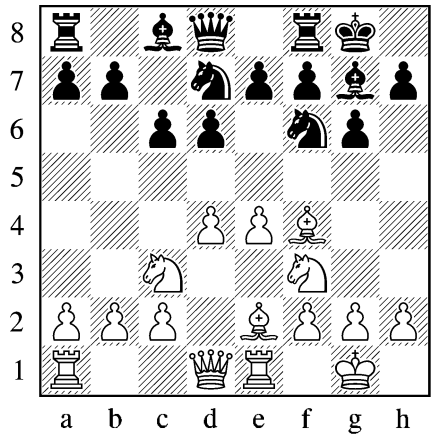
The difference with respect to the final variation from the note to White's 11th move above is that White can immediately consolidate his e5-pawn with f3-f4, so there is no reason to submit it to piece pressure. With its last move, the knight is heading for c7, helping its colleague to occupy the blockading e6-square.

13.f4 ♘c7 14.♗e3 ♘5e6=

Black will play ...f6 soon, with good chances for counterplay.

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D2) 8.♗f4



This familiar plan is best answered with a slightly atypical move:

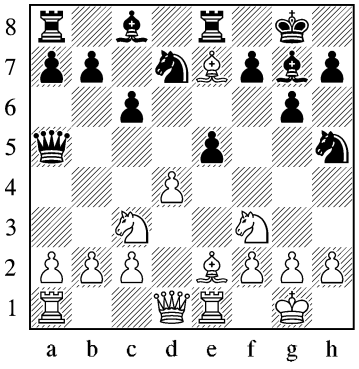
8...♕a5!

Black threatens ...e5 without placing the queen in the bishop's line of fire. In line B above, where White played ♕d2 instead of ♖e1, developing the queen to a5 would have run into 9.♘d5!.

White mainly chooses between **D21) 9.♕d2** and **D22) 9.♘d2**.

With the queen on a5 the central break is harmless:

9.e5 ♘h5 10.♗g5 dxe5 11.♗xe7 ♖e8



White does not have the resource 12.d5 that he had in line B.

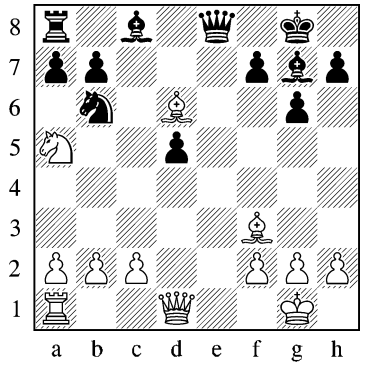
12.♗d6 exd4 13.♘xd4 ♘hf6 14.♘b3 ♕d8

The structure is symmetrical and the d6-bishop is not stable enough to allow White to retain his dominance. In contrast, the g7-bishop is likely to gain in strength.

15.♗f3 ♘b6 16.♖xe8† ♕xe8 17.♘a5 ♘fd5

Completely neutralizing White's initiative and demonstrating that some of his pieces are hanging.

18.♘xd5 cxd5

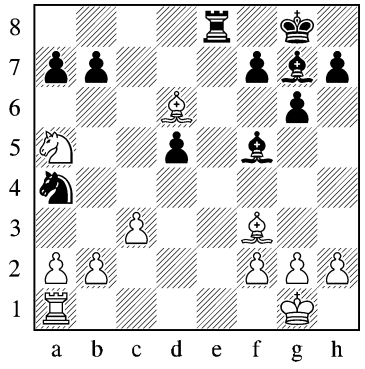


19.♕e1

If 19.♗xd5 ♕b5 20.♗xb7 ♗xb7 21.♘xb7 ♕xb2 22.♖b1 ♕xa2∓ Black has regained both pawns, keeping a potentially dangerous passer on the a-file.

I also considered 19.c3 ♗f5, planning ...♗e4, when Black has a lot of activity.

19...♗f5 20.♕xe8† ♖xe8 21.c3 ♘a4



22.♘xb7N

The careless 22.♗a3? allows 22...♘xc3! since 23.bxc3 ♗xc3 regains the piece with interest.

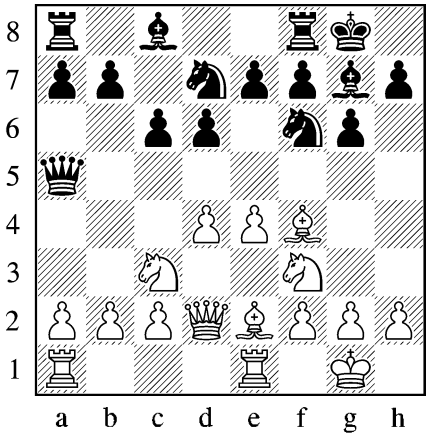
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Nogueiras – Azmaiparashvili, Madrid 1988, continued with 23.♘xb7?! when 23...♘b5 gave Black pleasant play, but 23...♘b1!N–+, completely paralysing White, would have won on the spot.

22...♘xb2=

With plain equality.

D21) 9.♕d2



The delayed queen's development allows Black to use the tension along the e1-a5 diagonal in his favour.

9...e5 10.♗h6

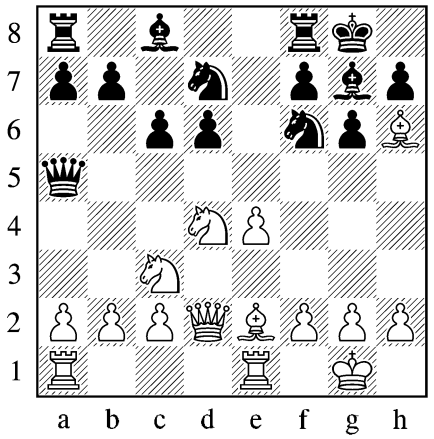
The only consistent move.

10.♗e3 just wastes a tempo: 10...♖e8N 11.dxe5 dxe5 with comfortable play.

The evaluation is the same if White releases the tension before exchanging bishops: 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♗h6 ♖e8 12.a4 ♘c5 (threatening ...♗g4 followed by ...♖ad8 and ...♘e6-d4) 13.h3 ♗e6=

10...exd4 11.♘xd4

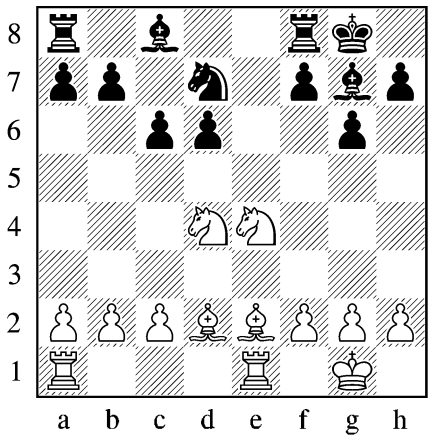
The untested intermediate move 11.♗xg7N allows a promising exchange sacrifice: 11...dxc3 12.♕h6 cxb2 (avoiding the trap 12...♘g4? 13.♗xc3!±) 13.♗xf8 ♘xf8 14.♖ab1 ♘xe4= Black has two pawns for the exchange and a compact structure.



11...♘xe4!

This small tactical trick provokes favourable simplifications.

12.♘xe4 ♕xd2 13.♗xd2



13...d5!

A strong intermediate move, attacking the second knight instead of capturing its colleague.

13...♗xd4 14.♘xd6 ♗xb2 15.♖ab1 allows White to hope for a tiny edge.

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14.♗b4

After 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.♘c3 ♘c5 White was only hoping to maintain equality in Christensen – Jensen, corr. 1989. Black can continue with ...♗f5 and ...a5.

14...♖d8 15.♘xc6

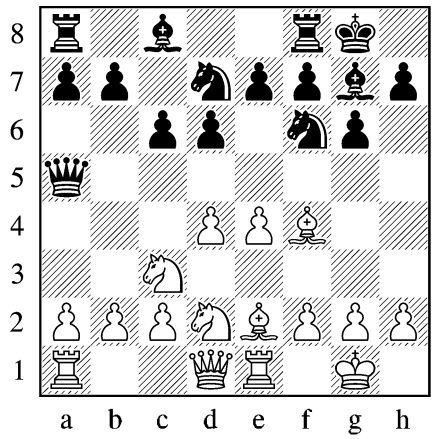
15.♘b5?, hoping for 15...cxb5 16.♘c3=, allows a promising exchange sacrifice: 15...dxe4 16.♘c7 ♖b8 17.♗e7 ♖f8 White's knight faces serious problems returning into play. 18.♖ad1 ♗e5 19.♗xf8 ♔xf8 20.♗g4 f5 21.♘e6† ♔e7 22.♘g5 ♘f6! 23.♗e2 ♗xb2∓ Black had two pawns for the exchange and a strong dark-squared bishop in A. Sokolov – Van der Wiel, Biel 1985.

However, 18...♗xb2!N would have been even stronger, gaining a full tempo over the game continuation.

15...bxc6 16.♘c3 a5

Black had at least equal play in Kamsky – Piket, Dortmund 1992.

D22) 9.♘d2



This anticipates Black's immediate threat of ...e5, which would run into ♘c4 followed by the occupation of the d6-square. But for other purposes the knight does not stand well on d2, and Black is flexible enough to change plans.

9...♕c7!

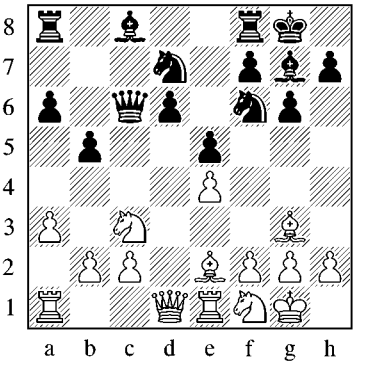
Since e4-e5 is not a threat any more, the queen stands well on c7. The last move creates two simultaneous threats: ...e5 and ...b5.

10.d5

The only way to parry both threats, but not really fitting in with the previous move since the knight belongs closer to the d4-square.

White has unsuccessfully tried several other moves. If allowed, Black will play ...b5, since e4-e5 is not a threat yet and he can start the fight in the centre a little later. For instance:

10.♗g3 b5 11.a3 e5 12.d5 a6 13.dxc6 ♕xc6 14.♘f1



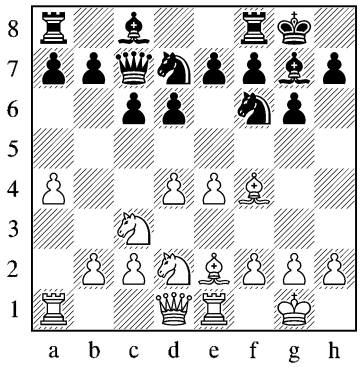
In Wedberg – Danielsen, Munkebo 1998, the most convincing regrouping would have been 14...♘b6N 15.♘e3 ♗e6=, with harmonious development and chances for queenside counterplay.

10.♘c4 leads to structural modifications freeing Black's position: 10...b5 11.e5 bxc4 12.exf6 ♘xf6N 13.♗xc4 ♖b8=

10.a4

Since ...b5 offers Black such easy play, this is the only logical alternative to the main move. Black needs to switch to the central plan:

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10...e5 11.dxe5

11.♗e3?! runs into the thematic 11...♘g4, for instance: 12.♗xg4 exd4 13.♗xd7 ♗xd7 14.♘c4N (14.♗f4 dxc3 15.♘c4 cxb2 16.♖b1 ♗e5 was excellent for Black in L.B. Hansen – Wojtkiewicz, Philadelphia 2006) 14...dxe3 15.♖xe3 d5 16.exd5 cxd5 Since 17.♕xd5 ♗e6 wins an exchange, White's best chance to stay close to equality is 17.♘xd5 ♕xc4 18.♘e7† ♔h8 19.♕xd7 – but even here, after 19...♕xc2 20.♕xb7 ♖ab8∓ Black's play is preferable since 21.♕xa7? ♕xb2 22.♖d1 ♗d4!–+ wins the exchange, based on the back-rank weakness.

11...dxe5 12.♗e3

This loss of time compensates for the tempo wasted by the black queen.

12.♗g3 is worse, since the bishop is far from the important squares: 12...♘c5 13.b4 ♘e6 14.♘c4 ♖d8 15.♕c1 ♘f4 16.♗f1 ♗e6∓ with a strong initiative for Black in Wedberg – Cu. Hansen, Stockholm 1996.

12...♖d8

Preventing the intrusion on d6 after ♘c4.

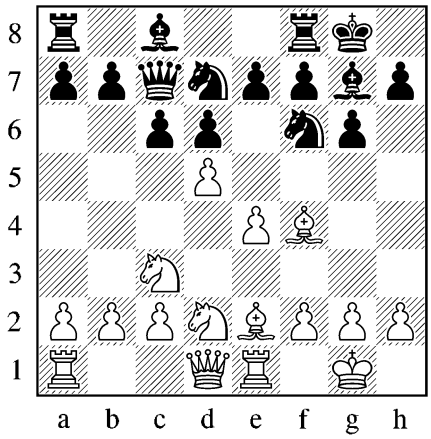
13.♕c1 ♗f8

Preparing ...♘c5.

13...♘f8 followed by ...♘e6 or ...♘g4 is also good.

14.♖d1 ♘c5 15.f3 ♗e6 16.♘c4 a5=

Black had regrouped perfectly and enjoyed almost absolute stability on the dark squares in Pigusov – Azmaiparashvili, USSR 1986.



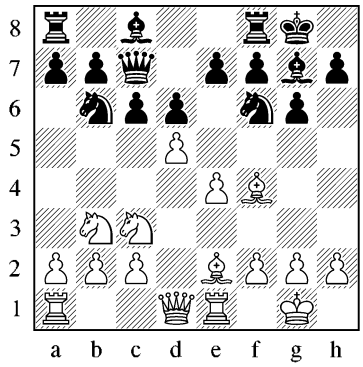
10...♘b6!

Black immediately attacks the d5-pawn, aiming among other things at preventing the manoeuvre ♘d2-f3-d4.

11.♗f3

Trying to keep things under control in the centre.

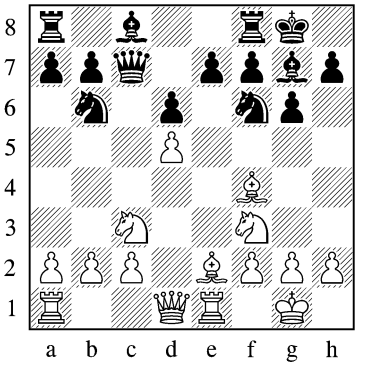
11.♘b3 exposes the knight to attack by the a-pawn without threatening ♘d4, since the d5-pawn would be hanging. And if he prepares the centralizing move with ♗f3, then ...♘c4 would cause trouble.



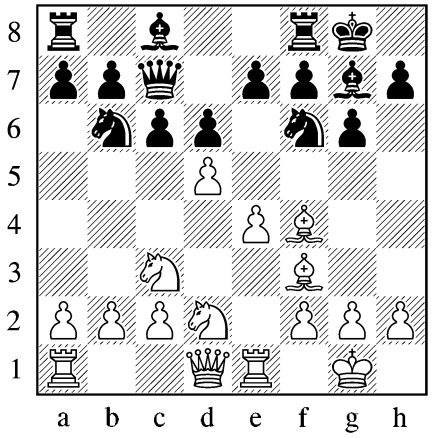
11...♗d7 12.♖b1 a5 13.h3 a4 14.♘c5 ♗e8∓ White was terribly fragile in Braga – Christiansen, Germany 1990.

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11.♘f3 cxd5! 12.exd5 was played in Koch – Long, email 2000, and here Black can improve with:



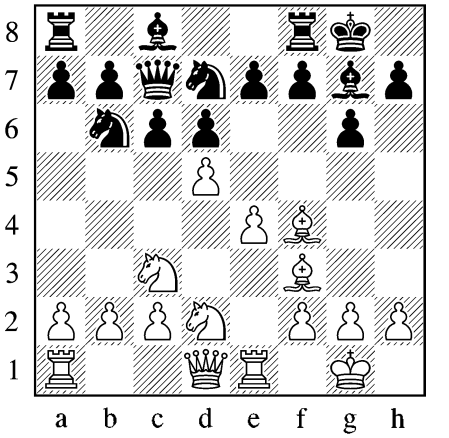
12...♕c5!N In order to save the central pawn, White needs to give up the bishop pair. 13.♗e3 ♕a5 14.♗xb6 ♕xb6 15.♘a4 ♕a5 16.c4 White has managed to consolidate his centre, but he is poorly coordinated and the g7-bishop is superb. One possible way of fighting for the initiative is: 16...e6 17.dxe6 ♗xe6∓



11...♘fd7

Immediately underlining the main drawback of White's last move: the vulnerability of the light-squared bishop.

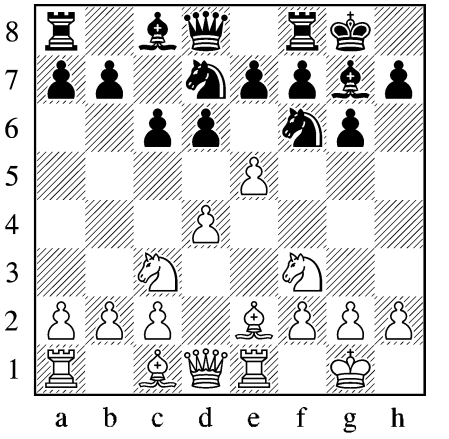
11...e5!? is 'only' good enough to equalize: 12.dxe6 ♗xe6 13.a4 a5 14.♗e2 In Brodsky – Korotylev, St Petersburg 1993, Black should have prepared the central break with 14...♕d8N 15.♘f3 d5=.



12.a4 a5 13.♗e3 ♘e5 14.♗e2 f5

Black had strong counterplay in Nunn – Pfleger, Germany 1987.

D3) 8.e5



This is the most ambitious continuation, involving a positional pawn sacrifice.

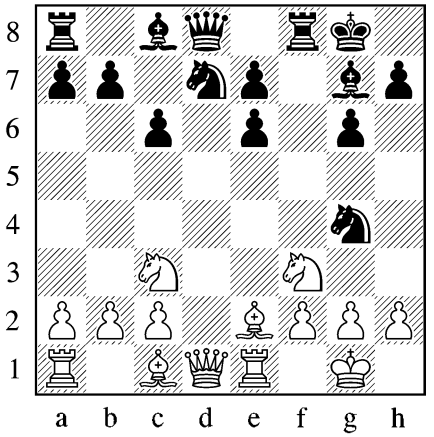
8...dxe5 9.dxe5

Inserting the knight exchange only frees Black's play: 9.♘xe5 ♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♕xd1 11.♖xd1 ♘d7 12.f4 (without queens the pawn sacrifice is completely harmless: 12.e6 fxe6

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13.♗c4 ♘f6=) 12...f6 Freeing the bishop and turning f2-f4 into a weakening move. 13.exf6 ♘xf6 14.♗e3 ♗g4 15.♗d4 ½–½ Solak – Tseshkovsky, Herceg Novi 2005.

9...♘g4 10.e6 fxe6

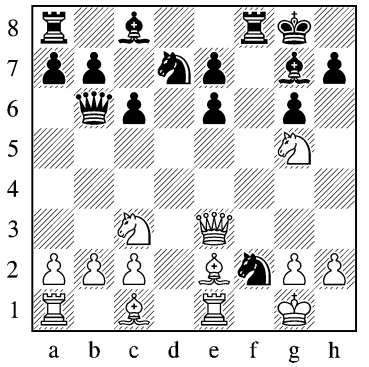


White doubtless has compensation for the pawn, but choosing the best plan and move order is not simple.

11.h3

Before undertaking any concrete action, White forces his opponent to make up his mind with respect to the knight.

The premature 11.♘g5? allows 11...♘xf2, when White fails to trap the knight: 12.♕d2 ♕b6 13.♕e3

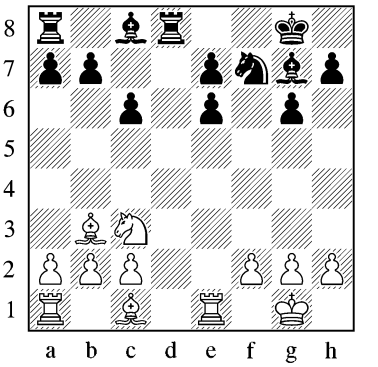


13...♘h3†! The knight is taboo due to ...♗d4, so ...♘xg5 is inevitable, leaving Black with two extra pawns.

11.♗c4

This allows Black to gain time to regroup: 11...♘de5 12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.♗b3 ♘f7

We are already familiar with this regrouping.



15.♗f4

15.♗xe6?? is impossible due to 15...♗xe6 16.♖xe6 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♖d1† mating.

15...♔f8

Getting away from the potential pin in order to prepare ...e6-e5.

16.♗xe6 ♗xe6 17.♖xe6 ♖d4 18.♖e4 ♖ad8 19.♔f1 b5

Black had some initiative in Bailet – Tkachiev, Belfort 2012.

11.♘e4

This centralizing move is not without venom.

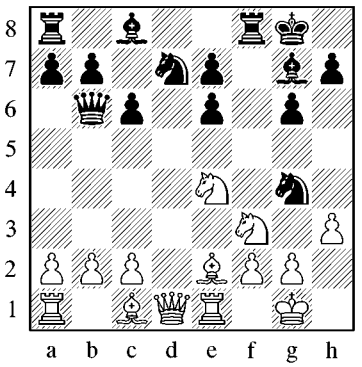
11...♕b6!?

Black uses the available tempo to attack f2.

The typical situation to be avoided arises after: 11...♘df6 12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.♘c5 b6 14.♘d3± White has a perfect regrouping, with an additional black weakness on c6 and a still-wandering knight on g4, Spasov – Dearing, Calvia (ol) 2004.

12.h3

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In Cooper – Yrjola, Novi Sad (ol) 1990, Black should have forced the exchange of the central knight with:

12...♘df6!N 13.♘xf6†

13.hxg4 ♘xe4 14.♖f1 e5 offers Black a strong initiative.

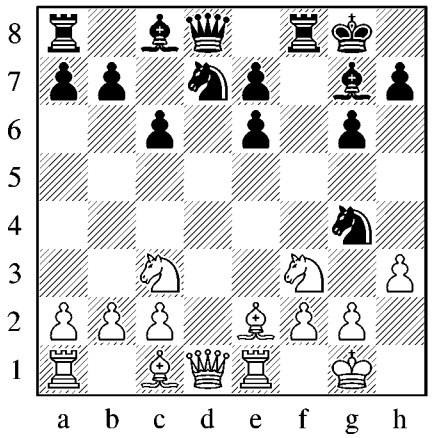
13...♘xf6 14.♖b1

Preparing the bishop's development.

If 14.♗c4 Black has an adequate antidote to the pressure on e6 in 14...♘d5 15.♗b3 a5 16.a4 ♕c7. Black has a stable position, as c2-c4 would leave the dark squares weakened after ...♘f4.

14...♘d5 15.♗g5 ♕c7=

Here too, Black has a stable position. In the absence of pressure along the a2-g8 diagonal, Black could even consider ...e6-e5 followed by ...♘f4.



11...♘ge5

Embarking on the familiar path.

12.♘xe5

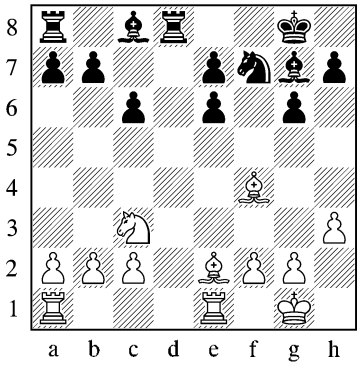
12.♘g5 ♘f6=, planning ...♘d5 and ...♘f7, is also entirely safe for Black. 13.f4?! This only drives the knight where it would go anyway, unnecessarily weakening White's structure. 13...♘f7 14.♕xd8 ♘xd8 15.g3 ♘d5∓ White had little if any compensation for the pawn in Zaitsev – Postny, Moscow 2002.

12...♘xe5 13.♕xd8 ♖xd8 14.♘e4

With this specific piece placement the knight seems to enjoy stability in the centre, but this will not last.

14.♗g5 is easily parried with 14...♔f8 followed by ...♘f7. The net result is that White has wasted a tempo on helping the king evacuate the a2-g8 diagonal, thus preparing ...e6-e5 under improved circumstances.

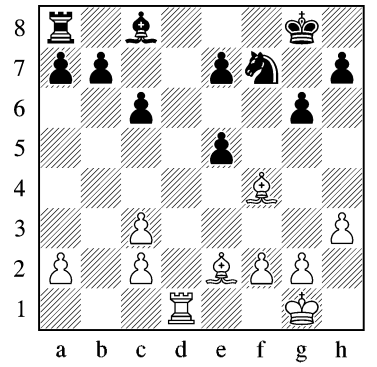
14.♗f4 ♘f7



15.♗d3

White strengthens his control over the e-file. 15.♗g3 leaves the d4-square undefended, allowing 15...♖d4 16.♘d1 e5∓ with active play in Okhotnik – Tkachiev, France 1996. The natural 15.♖ad1 ♖xd1 16.♖xd1 allows: 16...♗xc3! 17.bxc3 e5

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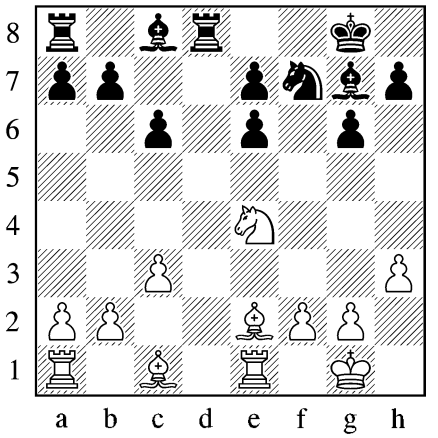


This is the optimal scenario for Black. Before clearing the diagonal for his bishop on c8 he exchanges his potentially bad bishop, spoiling White's structure on the way. 18.♗e3 ♗e6 19.a4 ♘d6∓ Black had an extra pawn and the better structure in Rozentalis – Azmaiparashvili, Lvov 1990. The bishop pair only offers chances to hold a draw.

15...e5 16.♗g3 ♗f5 17.♘e4 ♘d6∓

White did not have enough compensation for the pawn in Potkin – Art. Minasian, Batumi 2002.

14...♘f7 15.c3

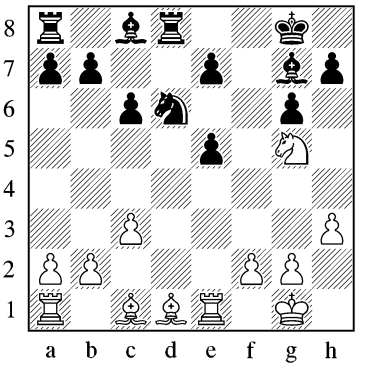


White has consolidated his position but is not yet fully mobilized. This gives Black the time to complete his development in more than one way.

15...b6

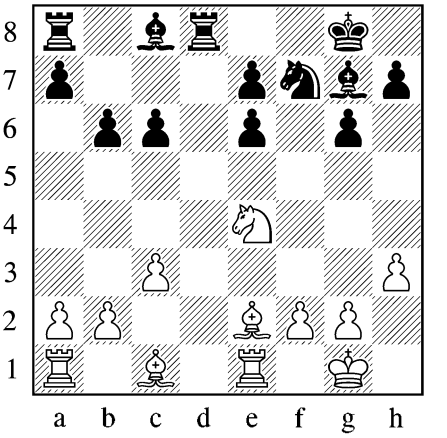
Black prepares the bishop's development without changing the kingside configuration.

15...♘d6 16.♘g5 e5 is also good, as White's initiative on the light squares is temporary: 17.♗d1



In Andersson – Cu. Hansen, Halmstad 1993, simplest would have been 17...♗f6N; for instance 18.♗b3† ♔g7 19.♘e6† ♗xe6 20.♗xe6 ♘f5= followed by ...♖d6 soon.

15...e5N is similar: 16.♗c4 ♔f8 17.♘c5 b6 18.♘e6† ♗xe6 19.♗xe6 ♖d6 20.♗b3 ♖ad8=



16.a4 c5 17.♘g5

The only way of fighting against ...♗b7, clearing the e-file and the long diagonal.

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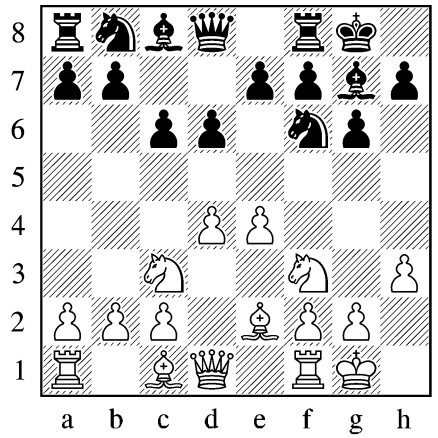
17...♘xg5 18.♗xg5 ♔f7 19.♗f3 ♖b8 20.♗f4 e5 21.♗xe5 ♗xe5 22.♖xe5

Torre – Cheparinov, Istanbul (ol) 2012, continued with 22...a5, which seems a bit too slow, even though Black achieved a draw anyway. More active is:

22...♖d2N 23.b4 cxb4 24.cxb4 ♗d7 25.♖ae1 e6

The vulnerability of the white queenside compensates for the isolated pawn on e6.

E) 7.h3



This is the second most frequent continuation and the only one which is almost as popular as 7.a4, which is examined in the next chapter.

The purpose of h2-h3 is not to prepare ♗e3, as in most cases White can comfortably meet an early ...♘g4 with ♗g5, leaving the knight looking strange. By controlling the g4-square White mainly strengthens the threat of e4-e5, in the hope of forcing the knight back to e8.

7...♕c7

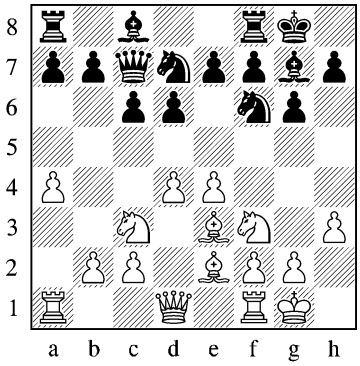
7...♘bd7

This has been my usual choice over the years. However, even though my results were more than satisfactory, I have spotted a few problems:

8.a4

Black intends to meet 8.e5 with a coherent regrouping: 8...♘e8 9.♗f4 dxe5 10.dxe5 ♘c7 11.♖e1 ♘e6 12.♗g3 I have had this position several times, but even though the blockading knight looks beautiful, I got a bit fed up with Black's lack of space.

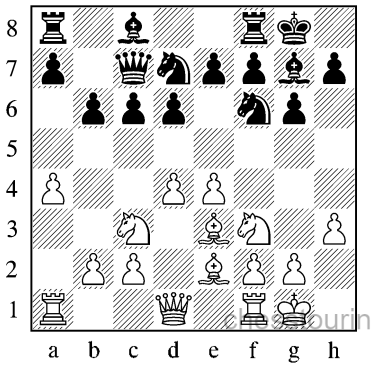
8...♕c7 9.♗e3



This position could also arise via the 7.a4 move order, which is characteristic of the next chapter. The reasons why I now prefer 7...♕c7 over 7...♘bd7, as explained here, also apply there.

9...b6

This is what I used to play almost exclusively. 9...e5 is more solid, but Black experiences some micro-problems: 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.a5 ♖d8 Preventing White's activity along the d-file. 12.♕b1 ♘f8 13.♕a2 Unfortunately, the most desirable move, 13...♘e6, loses the exchange: 14.♗b6 axb6 15.axb6, when Black is forced to play 15...♕xb6 since 15...♖xa2 16.bxc7 is even worse.



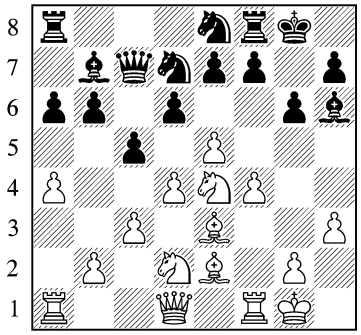
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10.♘d2

This is the critical move, preparing kingside expansion. Natural moves allow Black to carry out his plan unhindered: 10.♕d2 ♗b7 11.♖fe1 e5 followed by ...a6 and ...b5.

10...♗b7 11.f4 a6 12.e5 ♘e8 13.♘ce4 c5 14.c3 ♗h6

Apparently White cannot hold his centre any more, but there is a strong resource which puts Black in a passive position.



15.♕e1!N

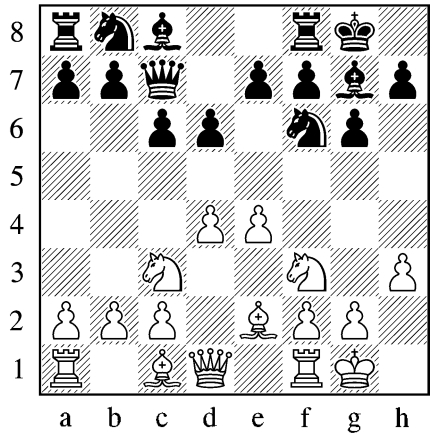
15.exd6 ♘xd6 16.♘xd6 exd6∓ offered Black excellent play due to his better development and the weakness of the e4-square in Braga – Marin, Andorra 2000.

15...♘g7

The point is that the planned 15...dxe5 16.dxe5 ♘xe5 runs into 17.♕h4+–.

16.g4±

White has consolidated his space advantage, depriving Black of any chance for counterplay.



8.♗f4

This only looks similar to line B. The insertion of h2-h3 offers Black additional ideas.

8.a4 e5 will most likely transpose to the next chapter. For example, 9.♖e1 is variation C2, while 9.♗e3 is variation D2.

Neutral moves allow ...e7-e5, for instance:

8.♗e3 e5 9.♕d2

This is too modest to pose problems, but other moves do not have independent value. For instance, 9.a4 and 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.a4 transpose, respectively, to variations D2 and D4 of the next chapter.

9...b5 10.a3 exd4N 11.♘xd4 ♗b7

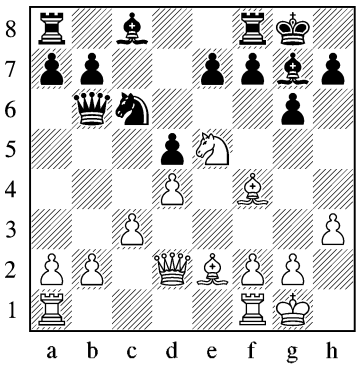
Black will follow a familiar plan: ...♘bd7, ...a6, ...♖fe8 and – when everything is ready for it – ...c6-c5.

8.e5 dxe5 9.♘xe5

9.dxe5 allows Black to gain time for his development: 9...♖d8 10.♗d3 ♘d5 11.♘xd5 cxd5 12.♗f4 ♘c6 13.♖e1 ♕b6 14.♕c1 ♘d4 15.♘xd4 ♕xd4= with approximate equality in a somewhat dull position, Volokitin – Grigoryan, Jerusalem 2015.

9...♘d5 10.♘xd5 cxd5 11.♗f4 ♕b6 12.♕d2 ♘c6 13.c3

White has some hopes for a kingside attack, but Black's plan turns the tables:



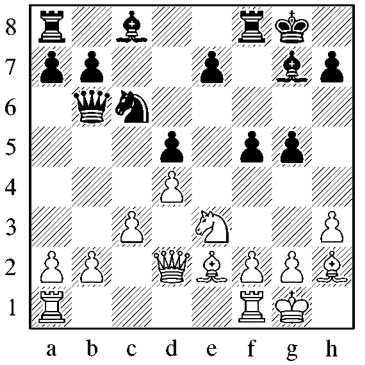
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13...f6 14.♘g4 g5 15.♗h2 f5!

The h2-bishop will inevitably stay out of play for a long time.

16.♘e3

16.♘e5 does not change anything essential: 16...f4 17.♘f3 h6 18.♗d3 ♗f5 19.♗xf5 ♖xf5 20.♖fe1 ♕c7 21.♖e2 ♕d7 22.♖ae1 ♖af8 Both sides are perfectly regrouped, but for practical purposes Black is a piece up.



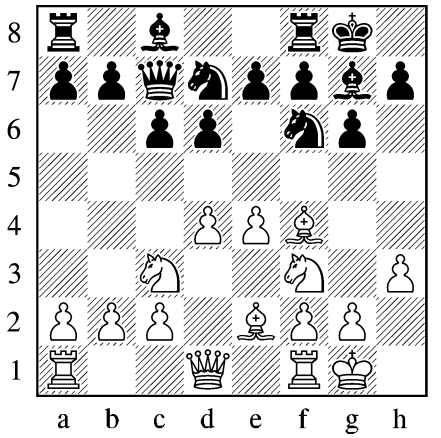
16...f4! 17.♘xd5 ♕d8 18.♗c4

18.♗f3 ♗e6 19.♘b4 ♘xb4 20.cxb4 ♗d5 does not offer White any reason for joy either.

18...♘a5 19.♘e3† ♘xc4 20.♘xc4 b5 21.♘a3 e5

With a strong initiative for Black in Dorfman – Zaichik, Moscow 1983.

8...♘bd7



9.e5

The only consistent move, since 9.♕d2 e5 followed by ...b5 and ...♗b7 offers Black optimal play.

9...♘h5

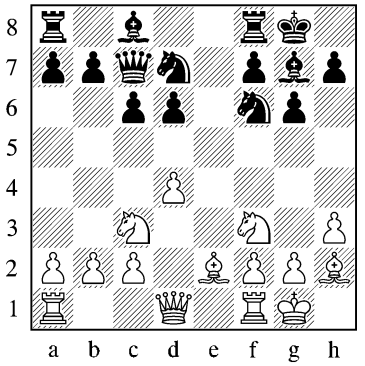
The most principled reaction, as after 9...dxe5 10.♘xe5 the queen would soon have to lose time.

10.♗g5N

Curiously, this typical move is a novelty.

10.exd6 exd6 11.♗h2 ♘hf6

This does not pose Black any problems. True, the pin along the h2-b8 diagonal looks a bit annoying, but after Black solves this problem the bishop will be somewhat passive on h2.



12.♘d2

Threatening ♘c4.

12.a4 was played in Pinkas – Mista, Polanica Zdroj 2004, and is best answered with 12...a5N= followed by ...♘b6.

12...♖e8

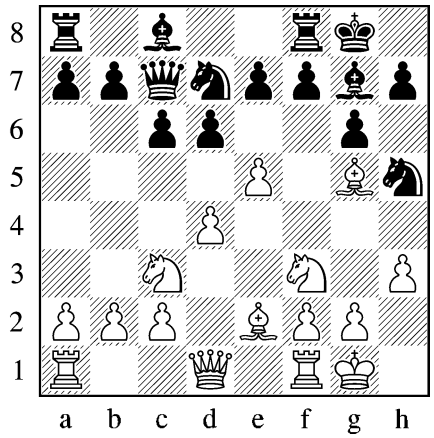
Preparing to defend the pawn with either ...♗f8 or ...♖e6 followed by ...♘b6.

However, 12...♘b6N is also possible, for instance 13.♘de4 ♘xe4 14.♘xe4 ♖d8 15.c3 ♕e7 16.♗d3 f5 17.♘d2 ♗e6=, with comfortable development.

13.♗f3 ♘b6 14.♘ce4 ♘xe4 15.♘xe4

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In Borik – Mohrlok, Germany 1977, the best way to defend d6 would have been: 15...♘c4N 16.b3 f5=



10...dxe5 11.♗xe7 exd4!?

There is nothing really wrong with the familiar 11...♖e8 12.d5 ♘b6, but the main move is more active.

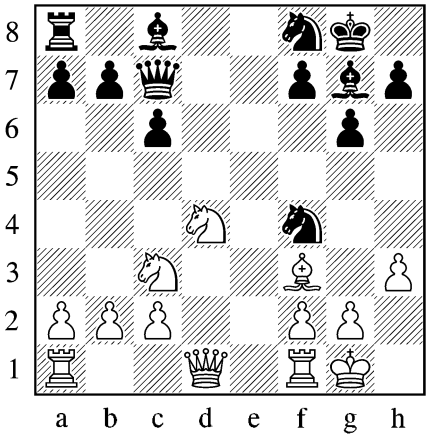
12.♗xf8 ♘xf8 13.♘xd4 ♘f4

White is a clear exchange up, but Black has strong pressure in the centre and on the kingside. The h3-pawn is an obvious target for sacrifices.

14.♗f3

After 14.♘f3 ♗f5 15.♖e1 ♕b6 16.♕c1 ♗h6 17.♕b1 ♗xh3 White should strive for approximate equality with 18.♗f1, yielding Black a pawn for the exchange and an active position. Instead, 18.gxh3?! ♘xh3† 19.♔h1 ♘xf2† 20.♔g2 ♘g4∓ leaves White very passive and with his king exposed to the combined attack of Black's whole army. White's extra rook is completely useless on a1.

After the text move, we see a familiar motif.



14...♗xh3! 15.♘de2

Once again, White should ignore the bishop. If 15.gxh3? ♘xh3† 16.♔g2 ♘f4† 17.♔g1 ♖d8–+ Black regains the d4-knight with two pawns for the exchange and a continuing attack.

15...♗f5 16.♘xf4 ♕xf4 17.♖e1 ♘e6=

The situation has calmed down, but Black's position remains excellent as all his minor pieces are stable and active.

Conclusion

Despite the apparent simplicity of White's play, the Classical System can lead to a wide range of positions.

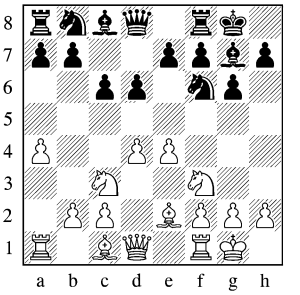
The lines based on a quick e4-e5 are slightly irritating, as they take Black out of the usual Pirc patterns. Objectively, there is no great danger, but Black needs to know what he is doing for a short sequence of moves. Small details may change the nature of Black's best reaction – compare for instance variations B and D, where Black reacts quite differently to White's ♗f4.

When White aims for straightforward development, Black will respond with ...e7-e5. We have already seen some examples of this, and will see many more in the next chapter.

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Chapter 2

Classical System



7.a4

Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗e2 0–0 6.0–0 c6 7.a4

7...♕c7

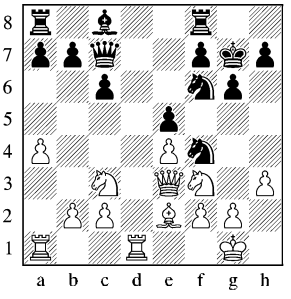
A) 8.♗f4 ♘bd7 44
- **A1) 9.♕d2** 44
- **A2) 9.e5** 47

B) 8.♗g5 e5 9.♕d2 ♘bd7 49
- **B1) 10.♖ad1** 49
- **B2) 10.♖fe1** 51

C) 8.♖e1 e5 54
- **C1) 9.dxe5** 55
- **C2) 9.h3** 58

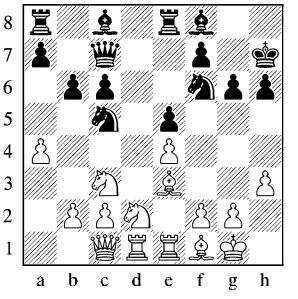
D) 8.♗e3 e5 60
- **D1) 9.♘d2** 61
- **D2) 9.h3 exd4** 62
  - **D21) 10.♘xd4** 63
  - **D22) 10.♗xd4** 65
- **D3) 9.♖e1** 68
- **D4) 9.dxe5** 70

A1) note to 10.♗h6



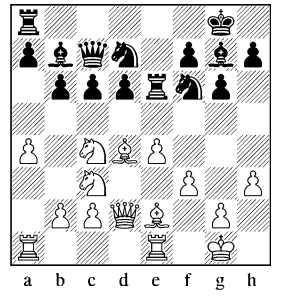
15...♗xh3!N

C2) note to 11.g3



17...♗b7!N

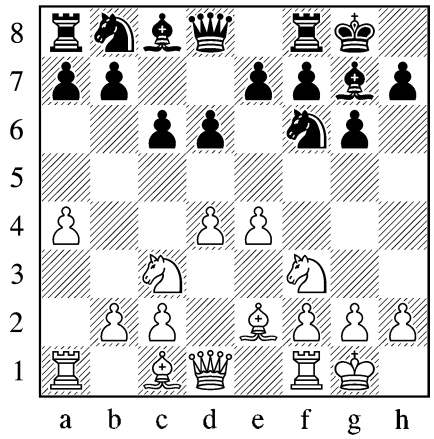
D22) after 15.♕d2



15...d5!N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗e2 0–0 6.0–0 c6 7.a4



This is not only the most popular continuation, but also the most principled one. Preventing ...b7-b5 once and forever is more useful than 7.h3, as in many lines White will try to save that tempo.

7...♕c7

I have explained the reasons why I prefer this move in the introduction to line E of the previous chapter.

We will examine **A) 8.♗f4**, **B) 8.♗g5**, **C) 8.♖e1** and **D) 8.♗e3**.

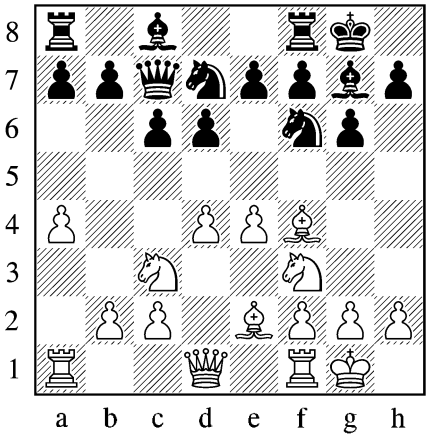
8.h3 e5 will most likely transpose to variations C2 or D2, after 9.♖e1 or 9.♗e3 respectively.

After 8.e5 dxe5 9.♘xe5 (9.dxe5 exposes the central pawn to 9...♖d8 10.♗d3 ♘g4 11.♗f4 ♘d7∓) 9...♘bd7 White should transpose to variation A2 with 10.♗f4, since the overambitious 10.f4 weakens his centre without offering realistic attacking chances: 10...♘d5 11.♘xd5 (White loses stability after 11.♘e4 c5) 11...cxd5 12.♗e3 ♘f6 13.g4 b6= followed by ...♗b7 and ...♘e4.

A) 8.♗f4

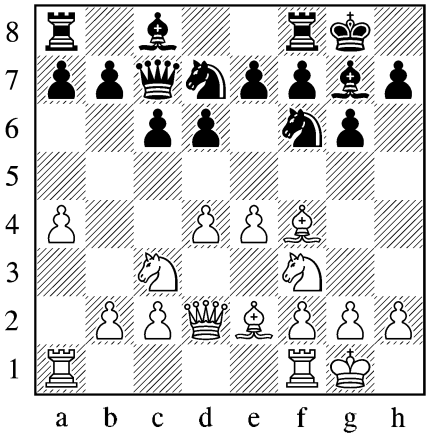
The reader is already familiar with this plan. Things will not get boring, though, since the small change in the picture greatly influences the subsequent play.

8...♘bd7



White has a choice between the developing **A1) 9.♕d2** and the resolute **A2) 9.e5**.

A1) 9.♕d2



This is similar to variation D21 from the previous chapter, with the difference that White has already prevented ...b5. In the short term a2-a4 is more useful than h2-h3,

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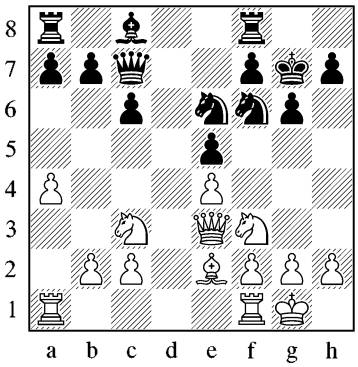
but Black has a way of making use of the g4-square.

9...e5 10.♗h6

10.dxe5

This clears the c5-square for the knight too early.

10...dxe5 11.♗h6 ♘c5 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7 13.♕e3 ♘e6



Black has completed the first part of his regrouping properly, threatening ...♘g4 and/or ...♘f4.

14.h3

There is no simple antidote to the knight jumps.

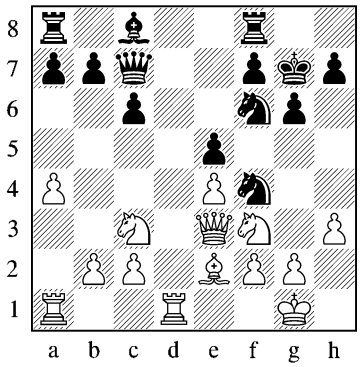
14.♖fd1 clears the f1-square for the bishop but leaves the f2-pawn vulnerable: 14...♘g4 15.♕c1 ♕b6∓

14.a5 prevents ...♕b6 but leaves the d4-square unattended: 14...♘g4 15.♕c1 ♘d4=

Finally, if 14.♖ad1 ♘f4 15.♗c4 ♗e6 16.♗xe6 ♘xe6= Black is by no means worse in this almost symmetrical position, as his queen's knight was better placed than White's in Notter – Turski, Stuttgart 2003.

14...♘f4 15.♖fd1

In Jakobsen – Thorvaldsson, Helsinki 1972, Black could have started a sacrificial attack already:



15...♗xh3!N 16.gxh3 ♘xh3† 17.♔g2 ♘f4†

White should agree to a draw by perpetual check with 18.♔g1= because the alternative is bad:

18.♔f1?

This takes the f1-square away from the rook, leading to severe consequences.

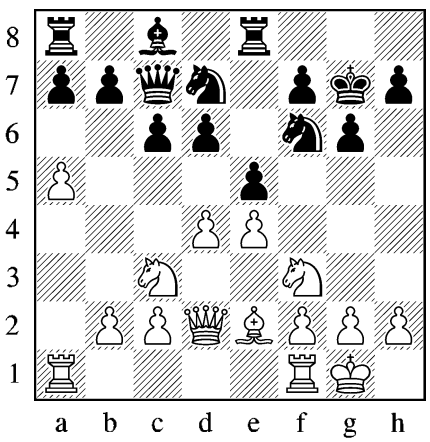
18...♘g4 19.♕c5

White's queen desperately tries to prevent ...♕b6.

19...♘e6 20.♕b4 a5 21.♕b3 ♘c5 22.♕a3 ♕b6∓

In view of the threat of ...♘b3 Black will soon have a rook and two pawns for two minor pieces, and a continuing initiative.

10...♖e8 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.a5



White prevents the stabilizing ...a5, increasing his space advantage. Apparently

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he has managed to avoid spending the tempo h2-h3, but Black's next move reopens the discussion around the g4-square.

12...♘f8!

Planning ...♗g4 followed by ...♘e6, with pressure on the dark squares.

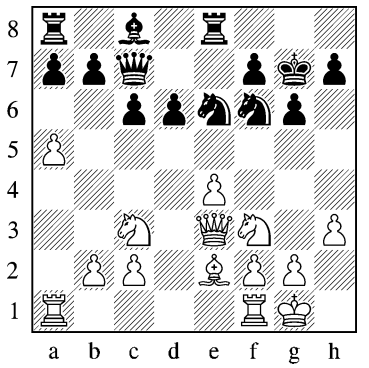
13.♖fd1

13.h3

This allows Black to start his counterplay in the centre.

13...exd4 14.♕xd4 ♘e6 15.♕e3

Preventing ...♘f4 and defending the e4-pawn in anticipation of ...♘c5.



15...d5 16.e5

If 16.exd5 cxd5 Black's pieces are well placed for the isolani structure, while the white queen is exposed.

16...♘d7 17.♖fe1 f6 18.exf6† ♘xf6 19.♗f1 ♗d7

With comfortable equality in Barlov – Lau, Palma de Mallorca 1989.

13.d5

This makes some sense because Black's last move has taken the knight far from the d5-square, but Black can keep his play fluent with:

13...♗g4 14.h3N

14.a6 cxd5 15.♘xd5 ♘xd5 16.exd5 b6 was balanced in Salzmann – De Smet, email 2004.

14...♗xf3 15.♗xf3 cxd5 16.♘xd5

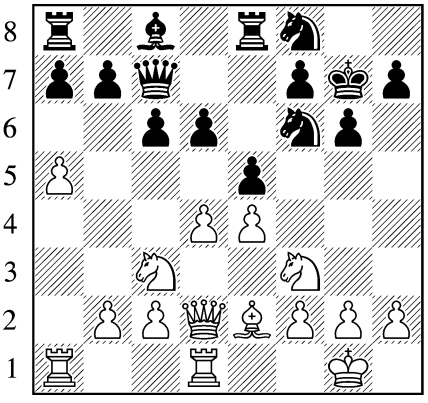
The critical continuation, aiming to keep control over the d5-square.

16.exd5 offers Black a kingside initiative after 16...a6 followed by ...♘6d7 and ...f5.

16...♘xd5 17.♕xd5 ♕xc2 18.♖fc1 ♕xb2

Black plans ...♘e6-d4, so White does not have anything better than forcing a draw by repetition.

19.♖ab1 ♕a3 20.♖a1=



13...♗g4 14.h3 ♗xf3 15.♗xf3 ♘e6 16.♘e2

The only way to keep the control over the d4-square.

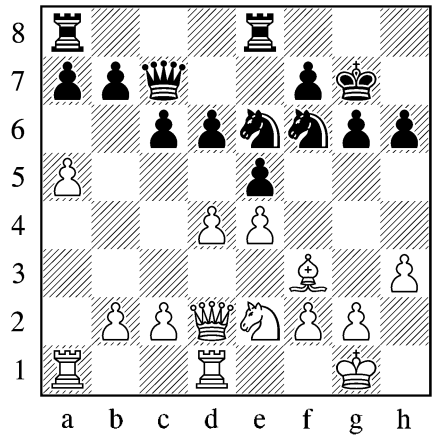
16...h6!N

A strong multipurpose move. The immediate threat is ...♘g5.

The natural 16...♖ad8 is also sound but fails to yield immediate counterplay: 17.♕e3 a6 18.c3 h6 The same idea as in the main line. 19.h4 ♕e7 ½–½ Gallagher – Wolff, Hastings 1990. There is no obvious way White can break Black's fortress, but play remains slightly one-sided.

The second, less obvious, idea of ...h6 is revealed by the following variation: 16...exd4 17.♘xd4 ♘c5 18.♘f5†! With the g5-square defended White does not have this trick, so he will simply lose the e4-pawn.

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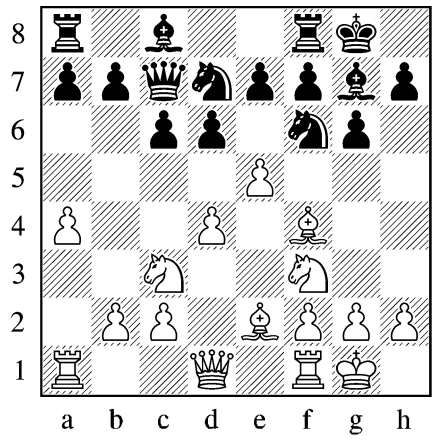
17.h4 exd4 18.♘xd4

18.a6 b5 does not change anything.

18...♘c5∓

Black wins the e4-pawn.

A2) 9.e5

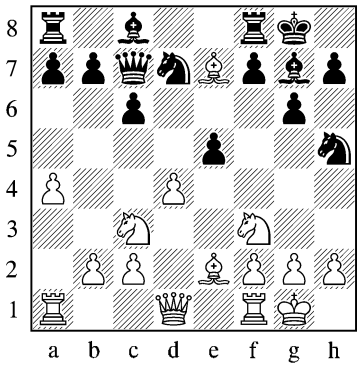


9...dxe5

The alternative is:

9...♘h5 10.♗g5 dxe5 11.♗xe7

The complications arising from this are less clear than in similar situations examined in lines B and E of the previous chapter. Still, in practice Black has scored reasonably well, so I will present some lines to enable the reader to form his own opinion.



11...♖e8!

One important difference with respect to Line E of the previous chapter is that after 11...exd4 12.♗xf8 ♘xf8 13.♘xd4 ♘f4 14.♗f3± Black lacks the target on h3.

12.d5 ♖xe7

12...♘b6 is a familiar theme from the notes to line B of the previous chapter, but it is hardly viable with the white pawn on a4.

13.d6 ♕d8 14.dxe7 ♕xe7

Black had reasonable, but possibly not full, compensation in Levitina – Ioseliani, Shanghai 1992, and Rozentalis – Beliavsky, Minsk 1983. For daring players this is an interesting variation, but objectively the main line is safer.

10.♘xe5

10.dxe5 ♘h5 wins the e5-pawn.

10...♘xe5 11.♗xe5

The critical move, forcing Black to waste a tempo with his queen.

11.dxe5N

Black has two possible ways of meeting this.

11...♘d5

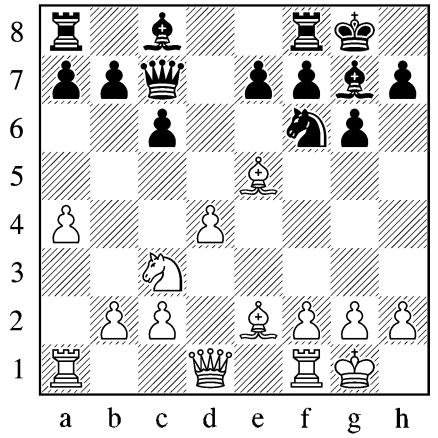
This leads to drawish simplifications.

If Black has higher ambitions he could try the regrouping 11...♘e8 12.♕d4 ♗f5 13.♖ac1 ♕a5 14.g4 ♖d8 15.♕e3 ♗e6 16.b4 ♕b6 17.♘e4 ♘c7 18.c4 ♗c8, followed by ...♘e6, with complex play.

12.♘xd5 cxd5 13.♕xd5 ♖d8 14.♕b3 ♗e6=

Black will soon regain the pawn on c2 or e5.

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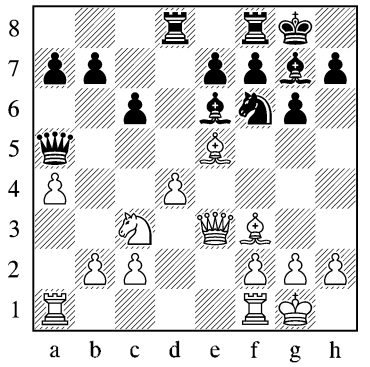
In line E of the previous chapter we avoid the similar position where h2-h3 has been played instead of a2-a4, but here the queen finds the necessary stability on a5 and b4, putting some pressure on d4 and b2.

11...♕a5! 12.♗c4

Preventing ...♗e6.

12.♗f3 ♗e6 13.♕d2 ♖ad8 14.♕e3

Evacuating the d-file, as 14.♖fe1 c5 offers Black counterplay.



In Rozentalis – N. Popov, Daugavpils 1983, Black's simplest route to equality would have been:

14...♘g4N 15.♗xg4 ♗xe5 16.dxe5

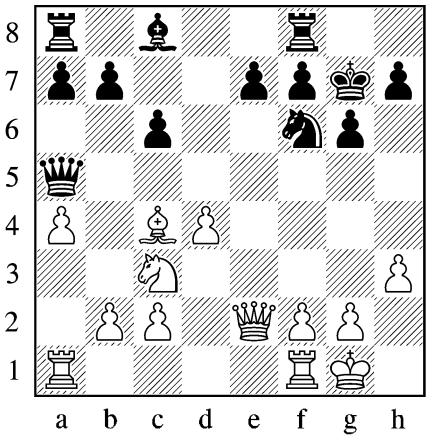
After 16.♗xe6 ♗xd4 17.♕e2 fxe6 18.♕xe6† ♔h8= Black's strong bishop compensates for the weakness on e7.

16...♗xg4=

12...♘g4

Black exchanges the active bishop, weakening the d4-pawn.

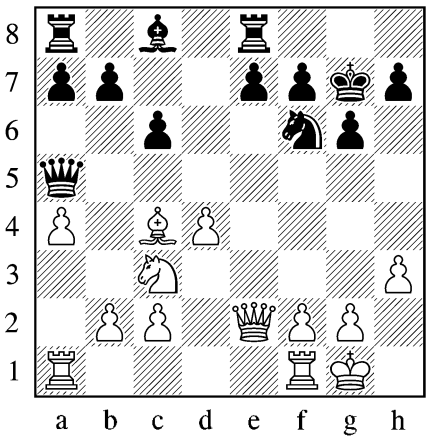
13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.h3 ♘f6 15.♕e2



15...♖e8!N

Black not only defends e7, but also threatens ...e5.

This is slightly more accurate than 15...♕b4 16.♗b3 ♗d7 17.♕e5 ♕d6 18.♖fe1 ♖fe8 19.a5 with just a symbolic advantage for White in Rozentalis – Tkachiev, Heraklio 2007.



16.♖ad1

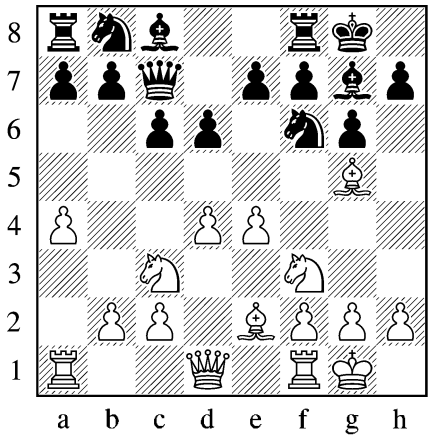
16.♖fe1 ♕b4= causes White queenside discomfort as the d4-pawn is hanging.

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16...e5 17.d5 ♕b4 18.♗b3 ♗d7=

With balanced play offering chances for both sides.

B) 8.♗g5

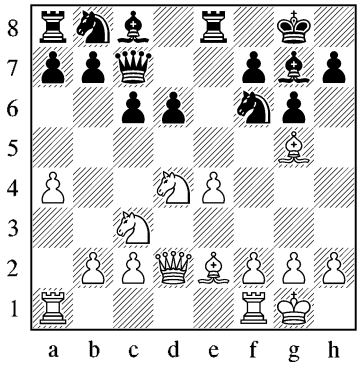


This is intended to carry more poison than the twin variation C of the previous chapter, as explained in the next comment.

8...e5 9.♕d2 ♘bd7

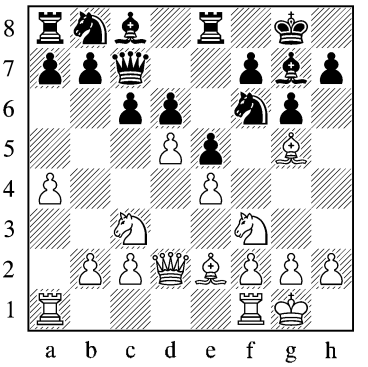
Black needs to deviate from the initially intended move order based on delaying the knight's development, as the bishop's presence on g5 reduces the effectiveness of the familiar plans. For instance:

9...exd4 10.♘xd4 ♖e8



White can ignore the threat to the e4-pawn with 11.♗c4N. With the e-file clear Black should not take the pawn: 11...♘xe4?! 12.♘xe4 ♖xe4 13.♖fe1± White has a huge lead in development.

I was also not completely happy with: 9...♖e8 10.d5!?



Usually the advance of the d-pawn is harmless, but here 10...cxd5 runs into 11.♗xf6 followed by 12.♘xd5.

10...♘bd7 11.♗c4 cxd5

11...♘b6 12.♗b3 cxd5 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.a5 does not improve matters for Black with respect to the fight for the d5-square.

12.♗xd5±

White maintains piece control over the d5-square.

However, since White does not control the g1-a7 diagonal as in the lines with ♗e3, Black does not need to worry about the problems mentioned in the note on 7...♘bd7 in line E of the previous chapter (see page 39).

White needs to develop his rooks. He can do that with **B1) 10.♖ad1** and **B2) 10.♖fe1**.

B1) 10.♖ad1

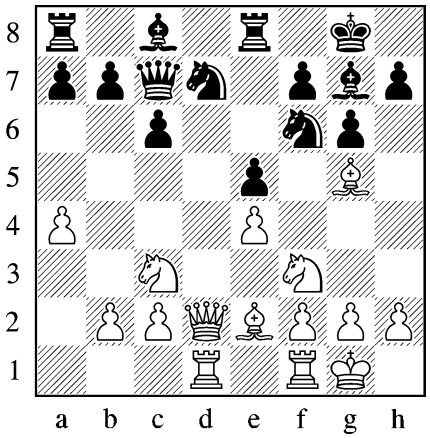
This looks like a strong centralizing move, but it does little for the defence of the e4-pawn. Besides, it gives up the positional idea a4-a5, making the a-pawn look like a slight weakness.

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10...♖e8 11.dxe5

11.d5 is not effective, as with the f6-knight defended by its colleague Black can safely play: 11...cxd5N 12.♘xd5 (12.♗xf6 ♘xf6 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♕xd5 ♗e6 15.♕xd6 ♕xc2∓ leaves the queenside vulnerable) 12...♘xd5 13.♕xd5 ♘c5! Taking full advantage of the bishop's absence from e3. 14.♗e3 ♗e6 15.♕xd6 ♕xd6 16.♖xd6 ♘xe4 17.♖dd1 f5= With active play.

11...dxe5



Black intends to play ...♘c5-e6, reaching the desired regrouping and gaining a tempo by attacking the bishop.

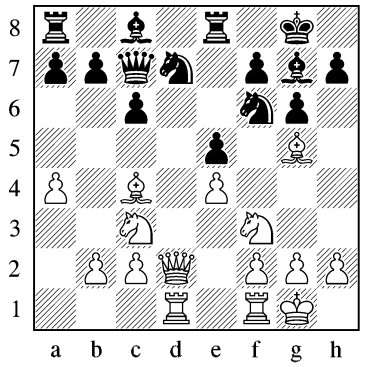
12.♕d6

Trying to give meaning to White's 10th move.

If 12.♕e3, as in Kengis – Cuijpers, Germany 1992, Black can obtain counterplay with: 12...h6N 13.♗h4 (only not 13.♗xh6? ♘g4–+) 13...♘h5 14.♗c4 ♘f4∓ White's dark-squared bishop is more of a spectator and Black can continue regrouping with ...♘f8-e6.

12.♗c4

This does not cross Black's intentions in any way.



12...♘c5 13.♕e3 ♘e6 14.♗h4 ♘h5 15.♘g5 ♘hf4 16.♘xe6 ♗xe6 17.♗xe6 ♘xe6 18.♘e2 ♕b6 19.♕xb6 axb6 20.b3

In Zhelnin – Bogdanovski, Katowice 1991, Black gradually misplayed this promising position and lost. Now was a good moment to get a slight queenside initiative with:

20...b5N 21.axb5 ♖a2 22.bxc6 bxc6 23.♖d2 ♗h6 24.♘c1

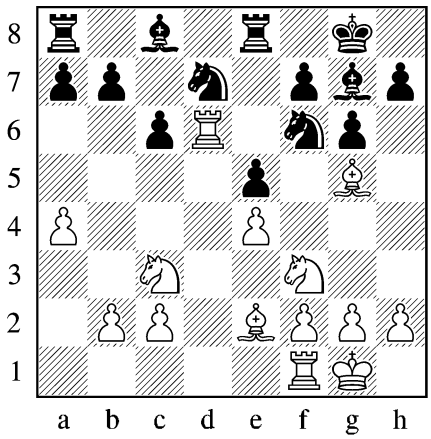
White plays the only moves to keep him in the game.

24...♗xd2 25.♘xa2 ♖a8 26.♘c1 ♘d4∓

Black threatens 27...♗xc1 28.♖xc1 ♘e2† and will soon regain the pawn, retaining active queenside play.

12...♕xd6 13.♖xd6

White has prevented ...♘c5 – but not for long, as we will see.



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13...♗f8!

Driving the rook away, based on 14.♖xf6 ♗e7, winning an exchange.

14.♖dd1

Sadly the rook needs to return to its previous location, as there are no other good squares along the d-file.

14.♖d2 ♗b4∓ creates an unpleasant pin, endangering the e4-pawn at the same time.

14.♖d3 also exposes the rook: 14...h6 15.♗h4?! g5 16.♗g3 ♘c5 White cannot defend the e4-pawn since 17.♖e3 ♘g4∓ traps the rook.

15.♗xf6∓ is better, though exchanging the bishop is an obvious positional concession.

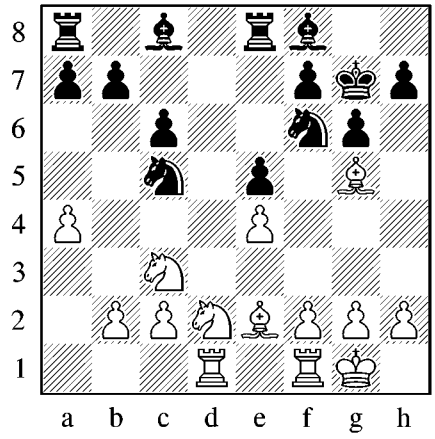
14...♔g7

A typical way of preparing ...♘c5.

15.♘d2

In Neelotpal – Koshy, Nagpur 1999, the most consistent continuation would have been:

15...♘c5N



16.f4

This may have been what put Koshy off continuing with the main plan.

After 16.f3 ♘e6 17.♗e3 ♘d4 18.♗d3 ♗e6= Black has excellent play.

16...exf4 17.♖xf4 ♘fd7 18.♖df1 f6

Black also retains adequate compensation for the pawn with 18...♘e5 19.♘c4 ♘xc4 20.♖xf7† ♔g8 21.♗xc4 ♗e6 22.♗xe6 ♖xe6, as the e4-pawn is doomed in the long run.

19.♗xf6† ♘xf6 20.♖xf6 ♗e6

Black threatens ...♗d6-e5 with annoying domination, so White should hurry to dismantle the strong minor piece set-up.

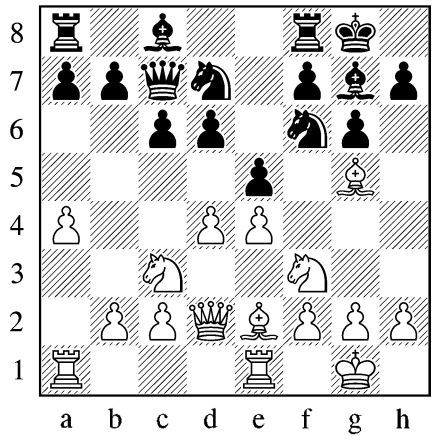
21.♗c4

But not 21.b4? ♘d7∓, attacking the rook and the b4-pawn.

21...♖ad8 22.♗xe6 ♖xd2 23.♖f7† ♔h6 24.♖xf8 ♖xe6=

Black will regain the pawn soon, with a probable draw.

B2) 10.♖fe1



White takes measures against Black's planned ...♖e8 in an attempt to keep the centre under control without releasing the tension.

10...♖e8 11.♗c4

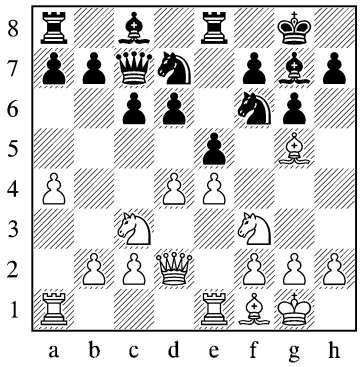
The most active continuation, not only

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putting light pressure on f7 but also strengthening control over the d5-square.

11.♗f1

This offers Black a choice.



11...b6N

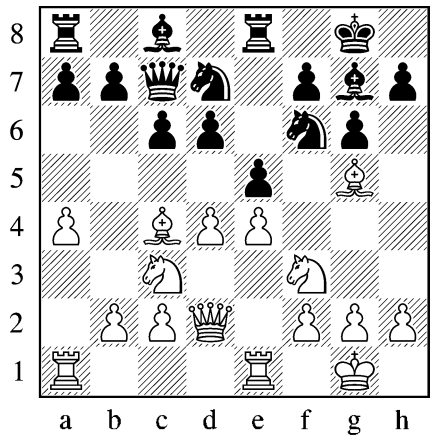
The most flexible continuation, but the same plan as in the main line is viable, too: 11...exd4 12.♘xd4 ♘c5 13.f3 ♘e6 14.♗e3 ♘xd4 15.♗xd4 ♗e6 16.♖ad1 ♖ad8= Black had completed his development harmoniously and did not face any problems in Winants – Atabayev, Baku (ol) 2016.

12.♖ad1 ♗b7 13.dxe5

Reducing the potential of Black's counterplay, for 13.♗c4 exd4 14.♘xd4 a6, followed by ...b5 and ...c5, endangers the e4-pawn.

13...dxe5 14.♗c4 a6=

Followed by ...b5 with a flexible position.

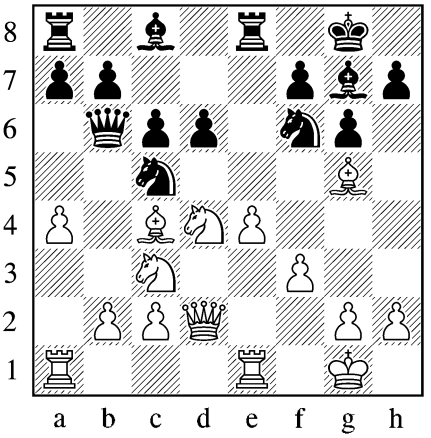


11...exd4N

Starting the attack against the e4-pawn. In practice Black has only tried 11...♘b6 and 11...♘f8.

One of the ideas behind White's last move is to meet 11...b6 with 12.d5, when the bishop participates in the fight for the d5-square.

12.♘xd4 ♘c5 13.f3 ♕b6

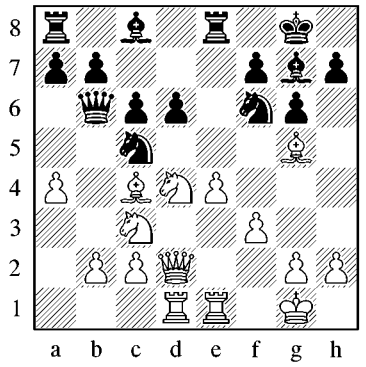


Setting up strong pressure on d4 and b2.

14.♗e3

14.♖ad1

This weakens the queenside defence.



14...♘fd7

An important step in preparing queenside counterplay.

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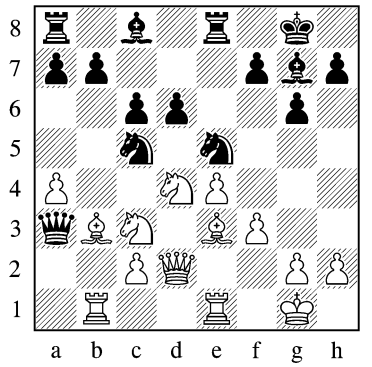
If 14...♕b4 15.b3 a6?, in similar fashion to the main line, White has 16.e5!± dxe5? 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6 18.♘e4+– winning material.

There is no refutation of 14...♕xb2, but over the board I would prefer to keep the threat in reserve.

15.♗e3 ♘e5 16.♗a2

16.♗b3 ♕b4 leaves White stuck.

16...♕xb2 17.♖b1 ♕a3 18.♗b3

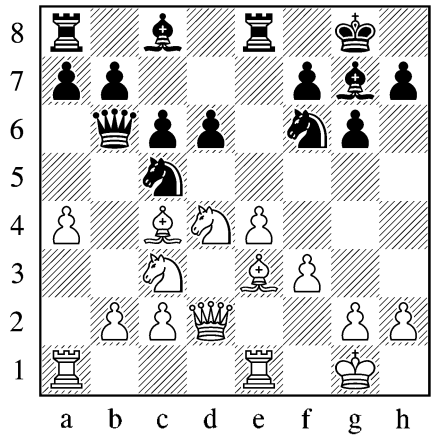


18...d5

The safest. Black clears the a3-f8 diagonal for the queen's retreat.

19.exd5 ♘xb3 20.♖xb3 ♕f8

Black has at least equal play.

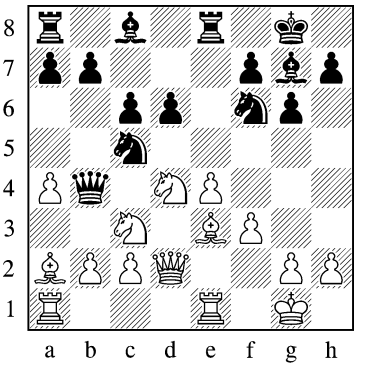


14...♕b4 15.b3

15.♗f1 allows Black to free his position immediately: 15...d5 16.exd5 ♘xd5= and if 17.♘xd5?! ♕xd2 18.♗xd2 ♖xe1 19.♖xe1 ♗xd4† then Black wins a pawn on either a4 or b2.

15.♗a2

This is somewhat passive and is best answered with:



15...a5

Planning ...♘fd7-b6, increasing the pressure on the a4-pawn.

16.♘de2 ♖d8

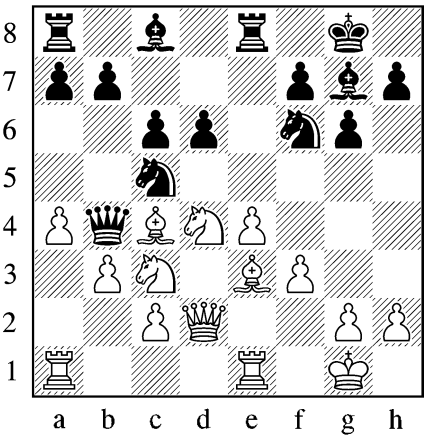
After the knight's retreat Black plans ...♗e6.

17.♘f4 ♘e8 18.♖ab1

18.♘d3 ♘xd3 19.cxd3 ♘c7 20.d4 ♗e6= is also comfortable for Black. White's centre is not too threatening, while Black has the b4-square and a perfect regrouping.

18...♘c7=

Followed by ...♗e6 or ...♘e6 soon.



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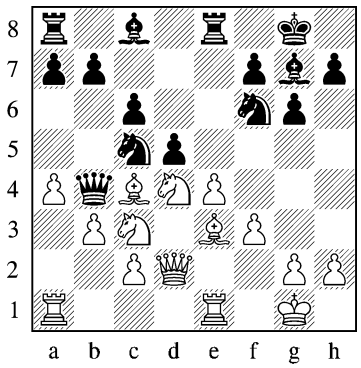
Black has achieved an active and stable position in the spirit of the Fianchetto King's Indian with ...e5 and ...exd4. But he should not rest on his laurels, as White's space advantage might tell in the long run.

15...a6

The best way to obtain counterplay.

15...d5

This thematic break is also playable, but Black does best to keep it in reserve.

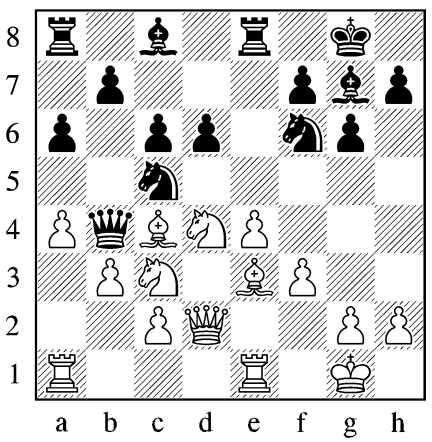


16.exd5 cxd5

The forced sequence initiated by 16...♘xd5 favours White: 17.♗xd5 ♖xe3 18.♖xe3 ♗xd4 19.♖d1 ♗xe3† 20.♕xe3± White retains a slight initiative, since 20...cxd5? 21.♘xd5 puts the king in deadly trouble.

17.♗f1 a6

Black's position is entirely viable, as the theoretical weakness of the isolani is compensated by White's queenside weaknesses.



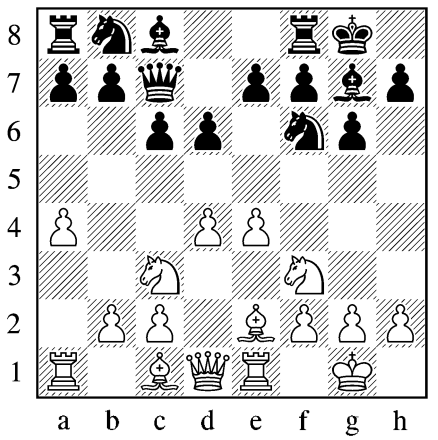
16.♖ad1

Preventing ...b5 would allow Black to carry out the aforementioned break in an improved form: 16.a5 d5 17.exd5 cxd5 18.♗f1 ♗d7 The a1-rook is tied to the defence of the a5-pawn.

16...♘fd7

Black clears the long diagonal in order to threaten ...b5 without allowing ♘xc6. This offers him entirely adequate counterplay.

C) 8.♖e1



The similarity of this move to line D of the previous chapter is only visual as White will not get to play either ♗f4 or e4-e5. His main idea is to overprotect the e4-pawn with ♗f1, thus reducing Black's chances for counterplay based on ...♖e8 and ...exd4.

8...e5

White has a choice between **C1) 9.dxe5** and **C2) 9.h3**.

Here are some minor alternatives:

9.d5 is not too dangerous. True, White should not be worse, but in the following game he made several questionable moves: 9...cxd5 10.exd5 ♘bd7 11.♘b5 ♕b8 12.c4 a6 13.♘c3 a5 14.b3 ♘c5 15.♗a3 b6 16.b4 axb4 17.♗xb4

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♗d7 18.♗xc5 bxc5 19.♖b1 ♕d8∓ Malisauskas – Neverovsky, Katowice 1993.

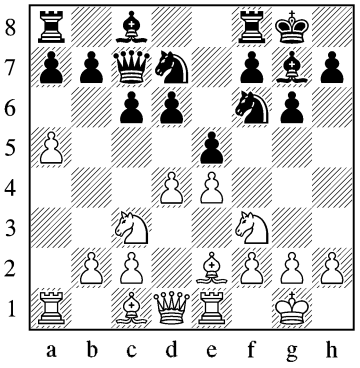
9.♗f1 ♖e8 10.h3 White cannot avoid this move any more. (If 10.g3 ♗g4, and now that the white bishop has more or less defined its intentions with the move of the g-pawn, the exchange on f3 favours Black.) 10...♘bd7 This is likely to transpose to variation C2.

9.a5

This looks like a useful half-waiting move, waiting for Black to play ...♘bd7 so that White can forget about ...♗g4. And yet this move allows Black to speed up his queenside counterplay.

9...♘bd7

This is the correct move order, as 9...♖e8?! defines the rook's intentions too early. 10.dxe5! dxe5 11.♗c4 There are some slight problems on f7 already. 11...♖d8 Too much moving around with the same piece while the queenside is undeveloped. 12.♕e2 ♘h5 13.g3 ♘a6 14.♗e3 h6 Preventing ♘g5. 15.♘h4± Suddenly it was White who was creating kingside threats in Zakharov – Zakharevich, Smolensk 1991.



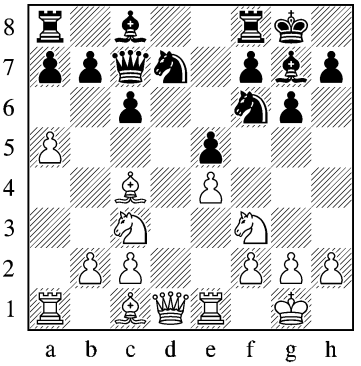
10.dxe5

10.a6?! b5 only facilitated Black's queenside expansion while turning the a6-pawn into a target in Kravchenko – Domogaev, Rasskazovo 2015.

10.♗f1 ♖e8 11.h3 transposes to the note to White's 10th move in variation C2 on page 58.

10...dxe5 11.♗c4N

The omission of h2-h3 makes itself felt after: 11.♗e3 ♘g4 Obtaining the c5-square for its colleague. 12.♗g5 ♘c5 13.♘d2 ♘e6 14.♗h4 In Goldstern – Boersma, Hilversum 1986, Black had managed to send the enemy bishop on a unfavourable path, and now was a good time to return to the standard regrouping with 14...♘f6N=.

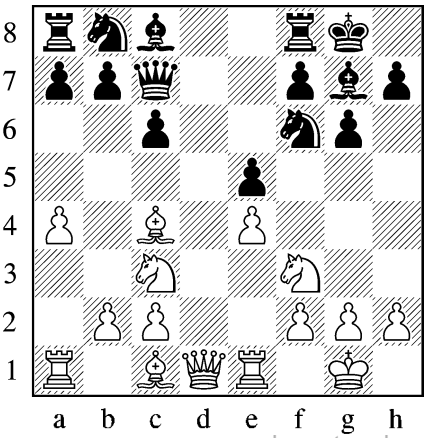


11...♘c5 12.♕e2 ♘h5

Black has excellent counterplay.

C1) 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♗c4

The early exchange in the centre makes sense only in connection with this active move.



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10...♘bd7

Black plans the familiar knight transfer to e6. There is not much new with respect to similar positions we have examined earlier, but here are a few typical examples:

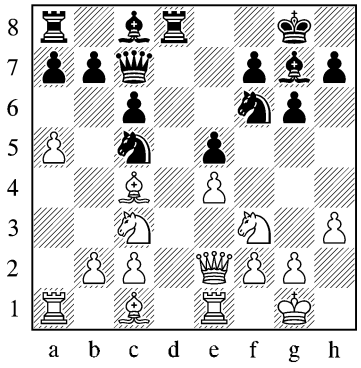
11.b4

White prevents the knight manoeuvre mechanically. Other moves offer Black simpler play. For instance:

11.♗e3 ran into the familiar 11...♘g4 12.♗d2 ♘c5, continuing the main plan unhindered in Schulzke – Gerigk, Germany 1997.

11.a5 ♘c5 12.h3 ♖d8 13.♕e2

In Sieiro Gonzalez – Zaichik, Camaguey 1987, Black should have continued the main regrouping plan:



13...♘e6N 14.♘a4

Anticipating the threat of ...♘d4.

14...b5 15.♗xe6 ♗xe6 16.♘c5 ♗c4 17.♕e3 ♘d7=

After exchanging the active knight Black does not have any problems.

11.♗g5 ♘c5 12.♕c1 ♗e6 13.♗f1 a5

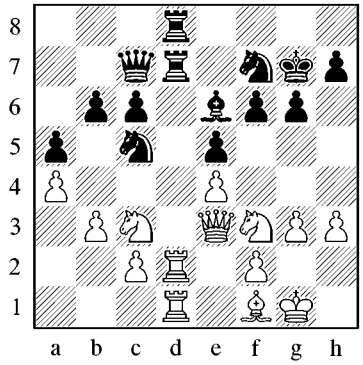
Black stabilizes his knight, planning a long regrouping.

The simpler 13...♗g4!?N 14.♘d2 ♗d7= followed by ...♘e6 would also have been quite good.

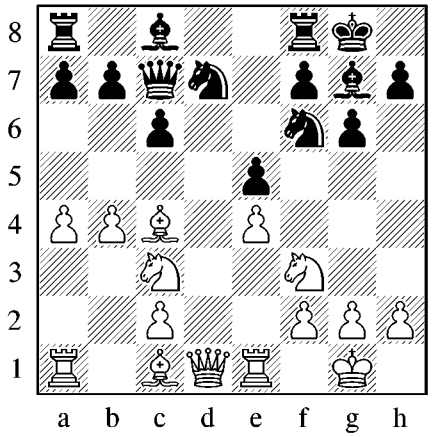
14.♕e3 b6 15.h3 ♘e8

A typical manoeuvre, heading for d6.

16.♗h6 ♗xh6 17.♕xh6 f6 18.♕e3 ♘d6 19.♖ad1 ♖ad8 20.♖d2 ♖d7 21.♖ed1 ♖fd8 22.b3 ♔g7 23.g3 ♘f7∓



The structure is almost perfectly symmetrical, but Black's minor pieces enjoyed superior mobility in Hernandez Onna – Karner, Tallinn 1975.



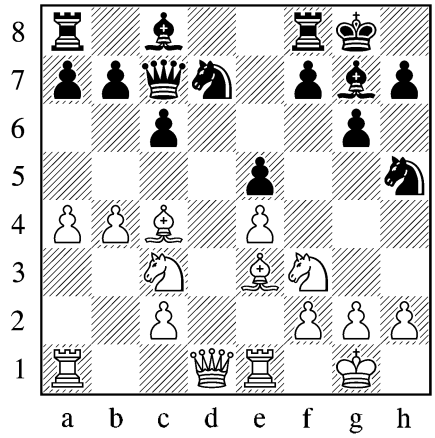
11...♘h5

The strategically desirable 11...a5 offers White the initiative after 12.♗a3, creating problems for Black in defending the f7-square after ♘g5.

12.♗e3

So far we have followed Vukcevich – Smyslov, Hastings 1976.

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12...♘f4N

Black has no reason to refrain from this active move.

13.a5

White has built up the typical queenside pressure. In order to free himself, Black needs to connect the rooks and play ...b5.

13...♘f6

Clearing the bishop's path.

14.h3

The only way to cross Black's plans.

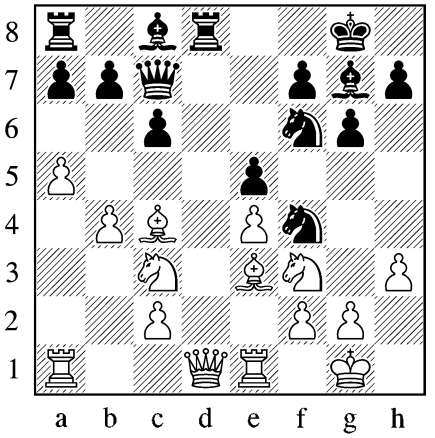
If 14.♕b1 ♗g4 15.♘d2 b5 16.axb6 axb6= Black equalizes completely.

14...♖d8

Planning a surprising tactical operation, justified by the considerable time wasted by White on pawn moves.

14...♗e6 allows 15.♗xf4 exf4 16.♗xe6 fxe6 17.e5 with the initiative.

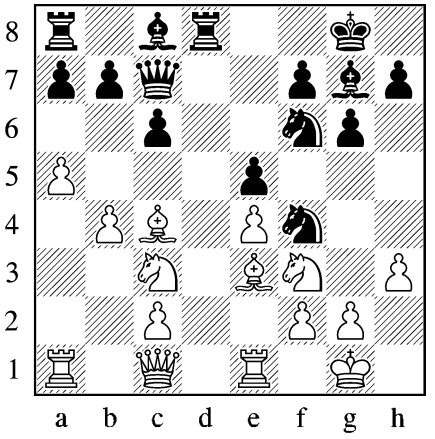
14...♘6h5 frees the c3-knight from the task of defending e4 and could be met with 15.♗f1 ♗e6 16.♘a4±, maintaining the queenside domination.



15.♕c1

Later the queen will be exposed on this square.

However, 15.♕b1 has other inconvenient problem: 15...♘6d5 16.♘xd5 cxd5 17.♗b3 h6 In the main line this would run into exd5 followed by ♗xh6, but with the queen on b1 the position is absolutely safe for Black.



15...♘6d5!

Taking advantage of White's imperfect coordination.

16.♘xd5

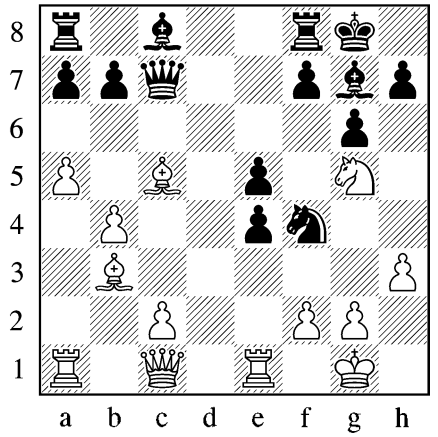
16.exd5 cxd5 regains the piece, retaining active play in the centre.

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16...cxd5 17.♗b3 dxe4 18.♘g5 ♖f8 19.♗c5

The critical move.

19.♘xe4 poses no problems after 19...♗f5.



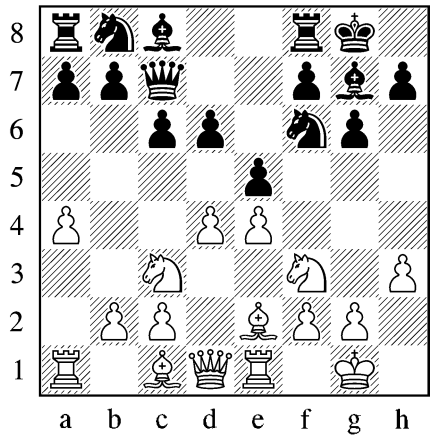
19...♗h6!

A strong intermediate move. The point is that after 20.♗xf8? ♗xg5 the threat of ...♘xh3† winning the queen does not allow White to save his bishop.

20.h4 ♗f5 21.♗xf8 ♖xf8

One pawn and a massive kingside space advantage offer Black excellent compensation for the exchange.

C2) 9.h3



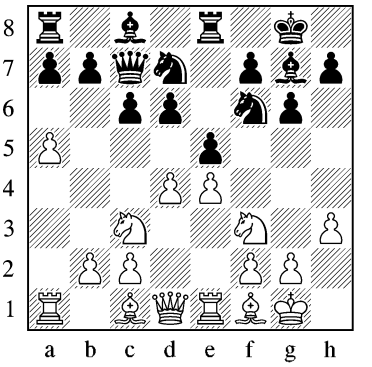
We have already seen, in some of the notes on page 55, that White cannot manage without this move for too long in these positions. That said, it is still a bit premature at this stage.

9...♘bd7

Since ...♗g4 is not an option any more, Black has no reason to delay the knight's development.

10.♗f1

White cannot prevent Black's queenside expansion with:
10.a5 ♖e8 11.♗f1



11...♖b8!

This is possible only because by spending several tempos to consolidate the e4-pawn, White has not yet played ♗e3.

12.♗e3 exd4

When releasing the tension Black might have wished to avoid: 12...b5 13.axb6 axb6 14.d5!? For instance, 14...♗b7 15.♕d2 b5 16.b4 ♖ec8 17.♖a3, when the central tension, with the b5-pawn vulnerable, may favour White.

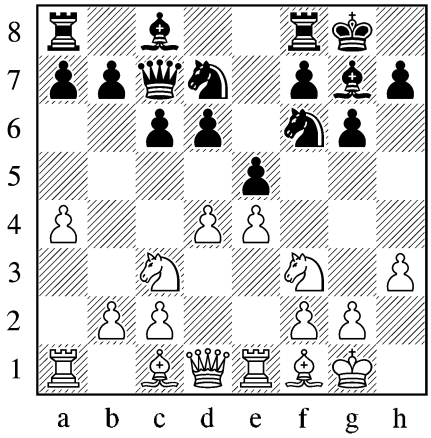
13.♗xd4 b5 14.axb6 axb6 15.b4

Preventing ...b5-b4 in advance.

15...b5 16.♖a7 ♖b7 17.♕a1 ♖xa7 18.♕xa7 ♗b7

With great play for Black in Priborsky – Fridman, Liverpool 2008.

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10...b6

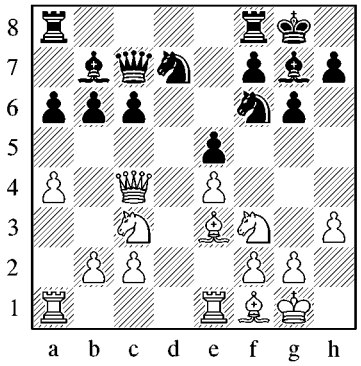
A key element in Black's play. The slow expansion with ...♗b7, ...a6 and ...b5 is practically impossible to stop.

11.g3

One of the games I had as a model when I started playing the Pirc went:

11.♗e3 ♗b7 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.♕d3 a6 14.♕c4

White is delaying but not really preventing ...b5.



14...♖ac8 15.♖ad1 b5 16.♕b3 ♖fe8 17.♘g5 ♖e7 18.g3 h6 19.♘f3

In Illescas – Spraggett, Terrassa 1990, the most flexible and objectively strongest continuation would have been:

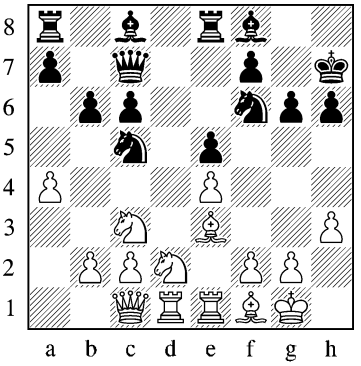
19...♖ee8N

Planning either ...♗f8 followed by ...♘c5, or ...♘f8-e6.

19...♗f8N followed by ...♖ee8 would also be fine, even though it abandons the plan with ...♘f8-e6.

And here is another game where Spraggett has Black:

11.♗g5 h6 12.♗e3 ♖e8 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♕d2 ♔h7 15.♖ad1 ♗f8 16.♕c1 ♘c5 17.♘d2



17...♗b7!N

This is the right move order, since after 17...a6 18.b4, as played in Krylov – Spraggett, Moscow (ol) 1994, Black had to return with his knight to d7, because 18...♘e6 19.b5 would have offered White some initiative on the light squares.

18.b4 ♘e6=

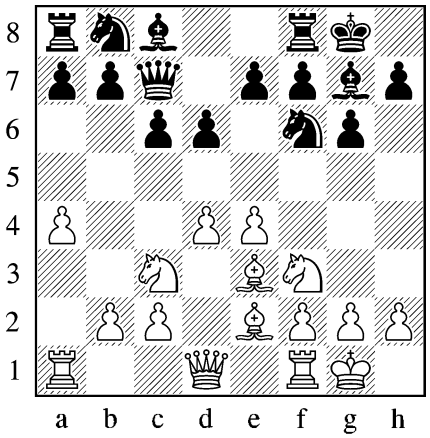
Black is doing fine. An important point is that, since the light squares are better defended than in the note above, Black can meet 19.b5 with 19...♖ad8 followed by ...♗c5 or ...♘d4, with excellent play on the dark squares.

11...a6 12.♗g2 ♗b7 13.♗e3 ♖fe8=

In Hj. Gretarsson – Illescas, Warsaw 2013, both sides had almost completed their regrouping. Black has achieved everything he could dream of, but I am a bit sceptical about White's play. In principle he has reached a position characteristic of the 4.g3 system, but having lost two tempos!

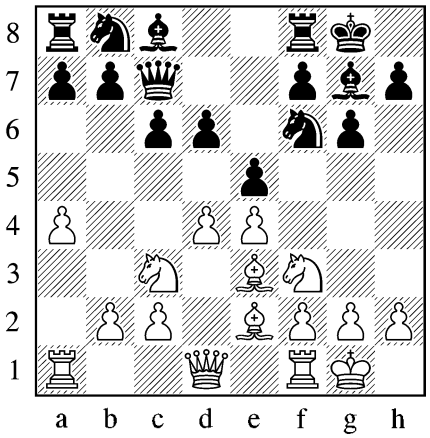
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D) 8.♗e3



This is the most logical, popular and strongest continuation. 7.a4 mainly makes sense to prepare the bishop's natural development without fearing ...b7-b5. Control over the g1-a7 diagonal could be telling if White manages to play a4-a5 and dxe5 under favourable circumstances, making it difficult for Black to complete his queenside development due to the hanging a7-pawn and the potential pin along the a-file.

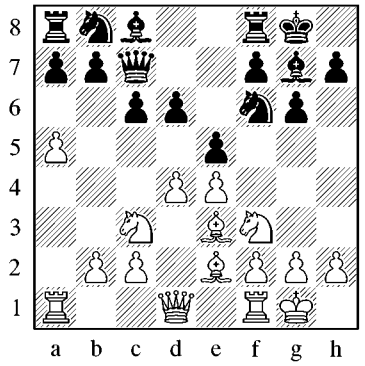
8...e5



White has tried a wide range of moves, the main options being **D1) 9.♘d2**, **D2) 9.h3**, **D3) 9.♖e1** and **D4) 9.dxe5**.

9.a5

This extremely rare option should be answered in a similar way to a4-a5 in variation D4:



9...♗g4

Now 10.dxe5 dxe5 transposes directly into the D4 line. Otherwise:

10.♕d2N exd4 11.♗xd4

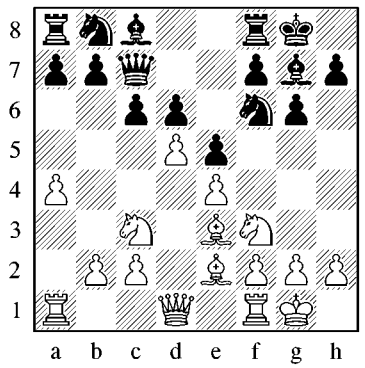
Immediately exchanging the light-squared bishops solves Black's space problems: 11.♘xd4 ♗xe2 12.♘dxe2 ♖e8 13.♘g3 ♘bd7 followed by ...♘e5 and ...b5.

11...♘bd7 12.h3 ♗xf3 13.♗xf3 b5

With the usual queenside counterplay.

9.d5

Even though it has been played in just one game, this deserves a mention.



9...cxd5!N

This is the best moment to start the fight for the d5-square, forcing White to declare his intentions.

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After 9...♘g4 10.♗g5 f6 11.♗h4 Black had problems on the light squares in Kuipers – Basrak, Rimavska Sobota 1992. The capture on d5 is out of question with the knight far from f6; ...c5 allows the manoeuvre ♘d2-c4; while maintaining the tension is problematic because of the weakness on d6.

10.exd5

White's minor pieces are not on the best squares to contribute to maintaining piece control over d5: 10.♘xd5 ♘xd5 11.♕xd5 ♘d7 12.♖fd1 ♘f6 13.♕xd6 ♕xd6 14.♖xd6 ♘xe4 15.♖dd1 ♗e6 16.♗d3 ♗d5 17.c4 ♗c6= with an interesting queenless middlegame and approximately equal chances.

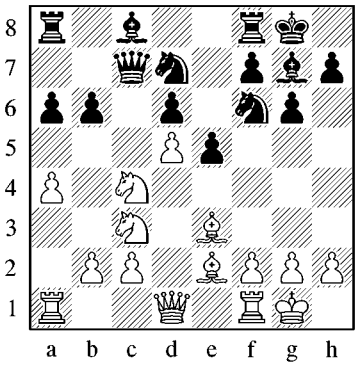
10...a6

Preparing ...♘bd7 by preventing ♘b5.

11.♘d2

White cannot hold the queenside blockade after 11.a5 ♘bd7 12.♘d2 b5 13.axb6 ♘xb6 14.♖a5 ♗b7 15.♗xb6 ♕xb6 16.♘c4 ♕c7=, with a potentially dangerous kingside majority and chances to set up pressure along the c- and b-files.

11...♘bd7 12.♘c4 b6



13.♖a3

A good square for the rook, allowing it to keep an eye on both wings.

13.f4 is premature due to 13...♘g4! 14.♗xg4 ♕xc4, with excellent play.

13...♖b8 14.h3

Preparing f2-f4.

14...♘e8 15.f4 f5

The position is complex and Black's chances are not worse.

D1) 9.♘d2

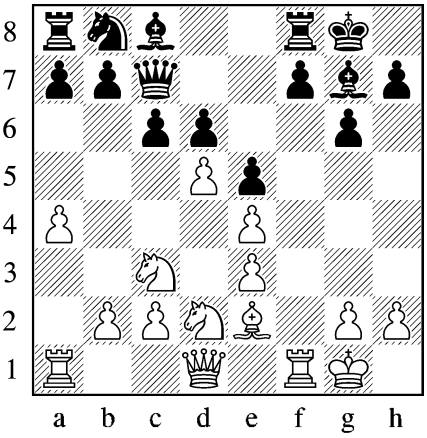
The knight is heading for c4, with the secret dream of invading the d6-square. But weakening control over d4 allows Black to equalize with a basic trick:

9...♘g4 10.d5!?

A far from obvious move, aiming to exploit Black's delay in development. However, the structural concession involved is also an important factor.

10.♗xg4 ♗xg4 11.♕xg4 exd4 offered Black great play in a simpler position in Gurgenidze – Chiburdanidze, Tbilisi 1991.

10...♘xe3 11.fxe3



I had this position with Black in a rapid game over the Internet in 2016 against Aleksandra Dimitrijevic. Not knowing how to deal with the pressure on the light squares and the relative weakness of the d6-pawn, I soon played ...c6-c5 and obtained a somewhat worse position.

11...♗h6!N

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For some reason I failed to notice this simple move, attacking the Achilles' heel in White's position.

I refrained from 11...♘d7 due to 12.dxc6 bxc6 13.♘c4, but once again Black saves the day by attacking e3 with 13...♗h6. While this is entirely viable, the move order suggested in the main line is more flexible.

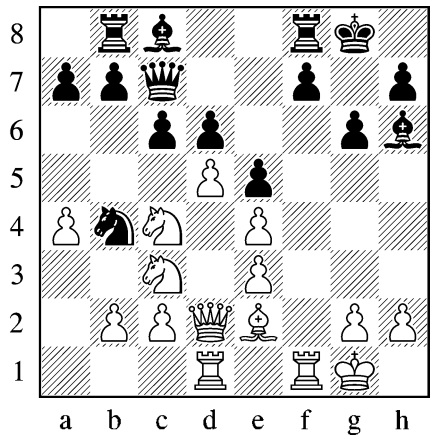
12.♘c4

If 12.♖f3 ♗g4 13.♖g3 ♗xe2 14.♕xe2, Black can exploit the lack of pressure along the d-file with 14...♘d7= completing development with comfortable play.

12...♘a6

Since ♗xa6 is no longer possible, the knight heads for the most active square.

13.♕d2 ♘b4 14.♖ad1 ♖b8



15.♔h1

If 15.dxc6 bxc6, then 16.♘xd6 ♖d8∓ creates a troublesome pin, while 16.♕xd6 ♕xd6 17.♖xd6 ♘xc2 regains the pawn while taking over the initiative.

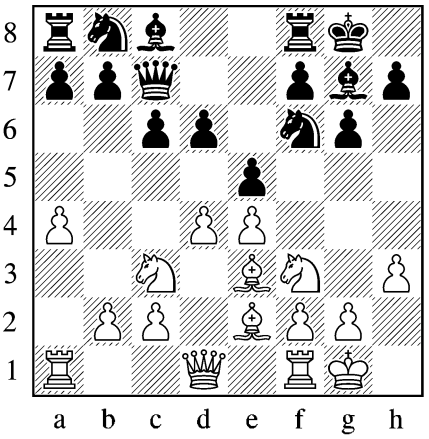
15...b5

The standard way to get counterplay, even if the structure is somewhat unusual here.

16.♘a3 bxa4=

Black has excellent prospects along the open queenside files.

D2) 9.h3

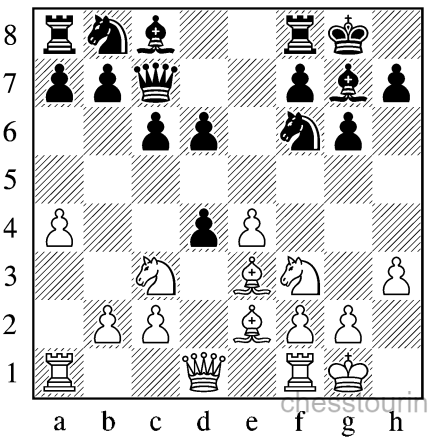


White prevents both ...♗g4 and ...♘g4, inviting Black to transpose to the troublesome line mentioned in the introduction to line E of the previous chapter.

9...exd4

Giving up the centre in the search for immediate counterplay is justified by the time spent by White on pawn moves.

Preparing ...exd4 with 9...♖e8 defines the rook's intentions too soon, allowing 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.a5!? without causing White problems along the d-file.



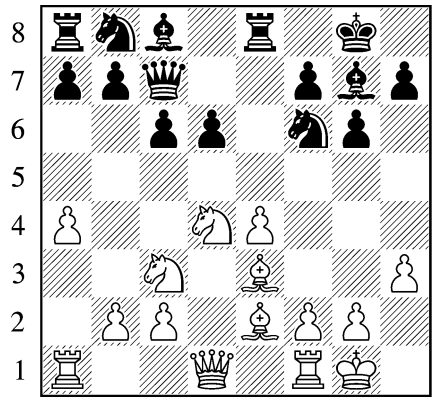
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White has a choice between **D21) 10.♘xd4** and **D22) 10.♗xd4**.

D21) 10.♘xd4

This leaves the e3-bishop exposed in many lines after Black's obvious answer:

10...♖e8



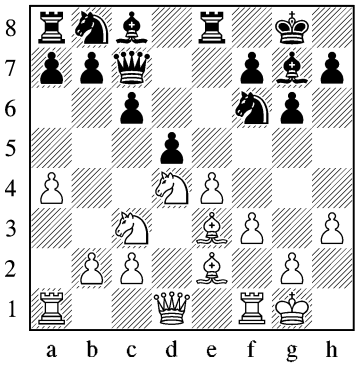
11.♗d3

Practice has shown that this exposes the bishop, not so much to ...♘bd7-c5xd3, which would strengthen the white centre in a way, but rather to ...c5-c4 (after some preparation of course). On top of that, Black has an immediate way of equalizing.

11.f3

As well as weakening the g3-square, this allows:

11...d5



12.♕d2N

The only reasonable move.

12.♗d3? unsurprisingly allows a typical combination: 12...♗xh3!∓ 13.gxh3? White should have just lived with having lost a pawn. 13...♕g3† 14.♔h1 ♕xh3† 15.♔g1 ♕g3† 16.♔h1 ♖e5 17.♘f5 The only defence. 17...gxf5 18.♗d4 ♖e6–+ Black had a material advantage and a continuing attack in Gislason – Waagmeester, corr. 1997.

12...♕e7

Before clearing the f-file with ...dxe4 Black brings the queen closer to the kingside, thus avoiding unnecessary complications.

13.♗g5 dxe4 14.fxe4 ♘bd7=

With pleasant play due to the control of the e5-square.

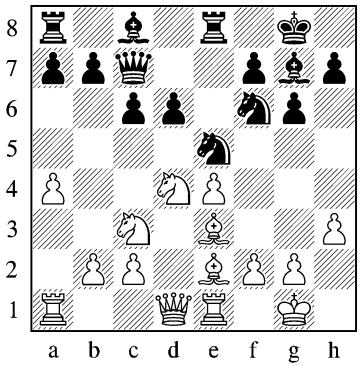
11.♗f3

This has several drawbacks. It exposes the bishop to ...♘bd7-e5, it blocks the f2-pawn and gives up the control over the f1-a6 diagonal.

11...♘bd7 12.♖e1

White has no time to prepare the bishop's retreat with 12.g3? because of 12...♘c5∓, winning the e4-pawn.

12...♘e5 13.♗e2



13...b6

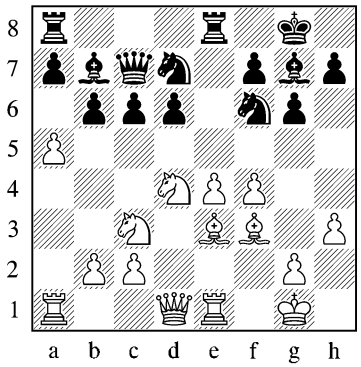
Black starts queenside counterplay, exploiting the fact that not much is happening in the centre.

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But if he is content with a draw he can more or less force a repetition with 13...♘ed7, when White has a choice between 14.♗f3 ♘e5 or 14.♗d3 ♘c5 15.♗f4 ♘h5 16.♗e3 ♘f6 17.♗f4.

In the last line, avoiding the repetition with the weakening 17.f3? once again allows the central break in optimal form: 17...d5!∓ Black has excellent chances, since 18.exd5? loses material to 18...♖xe3 19.♖xe3 ♕f4–+.

14.f4 ♘ed7 15.♗f3 ♗b7 16.a5



This is White's only serious attempt to prevent the slow queenside expansion with ...a6 and ...b5.

16...a6!?

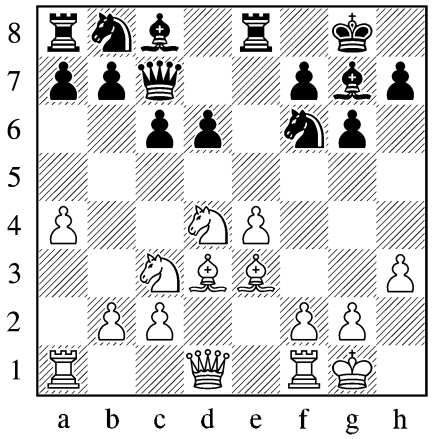
Slightly spoiling the queenside's structural integrity for the sake of piece activity.

16...b5? loses to 17.a6 ♗c8 18.♘xc6.

However, 16...♘c5 is a worthy alternative. A likely continuation is 17.axb6 axb6 18.♖xa8 ♗xa8 19.♗f2 d5, inevitably followed by the occupation of the e4-square, with adequate counterplay.

17.axb6 ♘xb6 18.♗f2 c5 19.♘b3 ♘c4 20.♖a2 ♘d7=

Black's strong pressure against the e4-pawn and the whole of the queenside compensated for his slightly weakened structure in Novikov – Eingorn, Kharkov 1985.



11...d5!?N

This novelty may not be necessary, but it is certainly an interesting idea, clearing the queen's path to g3.

The unanimous choice has been:

11...♘bd7

This is also good and has yielded excellent results.

12.♘b3

12.f4 weakens the centre without creating any threats. 12...a6 Controlling the b5-square, to give ...c5-c4 the contours of a real threat. 13.♘de2 In Wright – Botterill, Hastings 1970, Black could have blown the enemy centre apart with: 13...♘xe4!N 14.♗xe4 d5∓

12...b6 13.♕d2 ♗b7 14.♖ad1 ♖ad8

The most natural move, but 14...c5N 15.f3 d5 also equalizes.

15.♗f4 a6 16.♖fe1 b5

With excellent counterplay in Asgarov – Azaladze, Nakhchivan 2012.

12.exd5 ♗xh3!

This simple attack, with just a handful of pieces and with incomplete development, is possible only because of White's poor coordination and his hanging e3-bishop.

13.♕d2

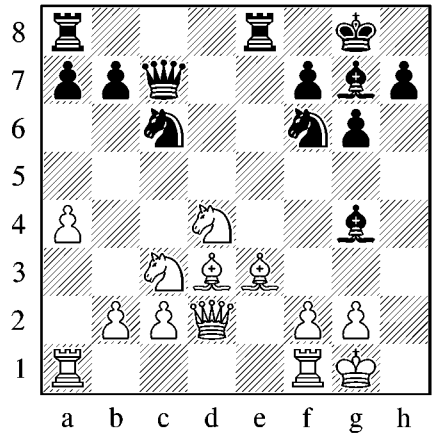
The lesser evil.

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13.gxh3?! allows more than just a perpetual: 13...♖xe3 14.fxe3 ♕g3† 15.♔h1 ♕xh3† 16.♔g1 ♕xe3† 17.♔g2 ♕xd4∓ Black has more than enough compensation for the exchange.

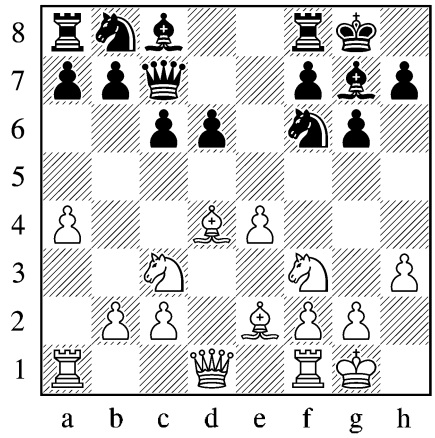
Things also look shaky for White after 13.dxc6 ♘g4 14.♘f3 ♘xe3 15.fxe3 ♗e6 16.cxb7 ♕xb7. Black's bishop pair and White's numerous weaknesses at least compensate for the pawn.

13...♗g4 14.dxc6 ♘xc6=



With comfortable development for Black.

D22) 10.♗xd4



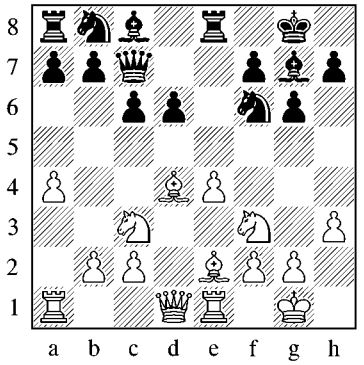
This allows White to defend the e4-pawn without weakening the kingside or allowing quick counterplay in the centre. But in the long run his minor pieces will be slightly misplaced, as the d4-square is designed for the knight while the f-pawn should be free to advance.

10...♖e8 11.♘d2

The most consistent move. White clears the path for the f-pawn in order to build up a kingside space advantage. But this is not without drawbacks either, as the queen becomes passive and the d4-bishop is exposed.

Indirect defences of the pawn tend to lead to plain equality:

11.♖e1



11...♘bd7

This is a typical situation in which pawn-grabbing is bad. White exchanges the g7-bishop and clears the e-file quickly, taking advantage of Black's delay in development: 11...♘xe4? 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7 13.♗c4 d5 14.♕d4† f6 15.♘xe4 dxe4 16.♖xe4± with a strong initiative.

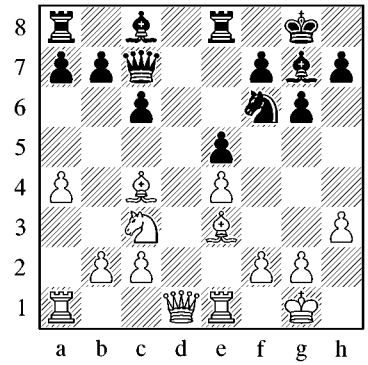
12.♗f1

After the knight's development the threat to the e4-pawn was real.

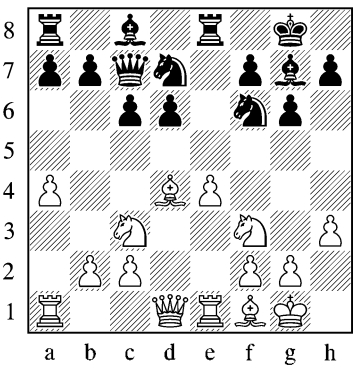
12.♗c4 looks like a more active way of defending the pawn, but after 12...♘e5 the bishop is exposed: 13.♘xe5 (White is more or less forced to make the structure

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symmetrical, as 13.♗b3 is answered by 13...♗e6=) 13...dxe5 14.♗e3



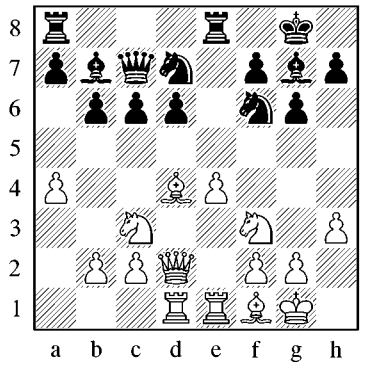
White's position looks a little more active, but Black has easy play. In the long run, his possibilities for manoeuvring are better, since White has some problems finding a role for his knight. 14...a5 Since a4-a5 with the intention of freezing Black's queenside is a permanent threat, this is the safest way to equality. 15.♕f3 ♗e6 16.♗xe6 ♖xe6 Black is prepared to start the fight for the d-file with ...♖d8 and ...♖ed6. 17.♘b1 An interesting Karpovian regrouping, but Black can do something similar. 17...♘d7 18.♘d2 ♗f8= Black was perfectly regrouped and ready to start his counterplay with ...b5 in Bartel – Skoberne, Warsaw 2013.



12...b6

12...♘e5 is less effective since White is not force to exchange knights, but can play 13.♘h2N followed by f2-f4 and later ♘g4 or g2-g4.

13.♕d2 ♗b7 14.♖ad1



14...♖ad8!

The most accurate move, completing development and preparing 15...♘e5, with the idea 16.♘h2 c5.

15.♕f4

It is not easy for White to make a constructive move. For instance, 15.♘h2 c5 16.♗xf6 ♘xf6∓ is pleasant for Black. The vulnerability of the e4-pawn and the general weaknesses on the dark squares are more relevant than the weakness on d5.

15...♘e5=

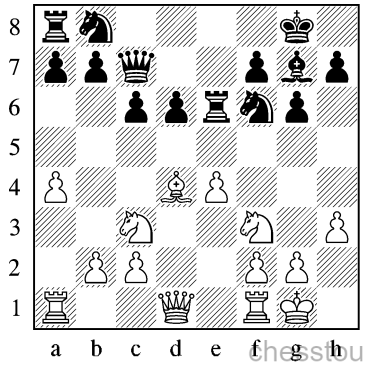
With perfect coordination and equal chances in Vestergard – Marquez Abreu, email 2009.

Once again the activation of the light-squared bishop is premature:

11.♗c4 ♗e6 12.♗xe6

12.e5 ♗xc4 13.exf6 ♗f8 only spoils White's structure.

12...♖xe6



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Black has easy play, his plan consisting of ...♘bd7 and ...♖ae8, with strong pressure on e4. In the following game White overestimated his kingside chances:

13.♘g5 ♖e7 14.f4 ♘bd7 15.♕d3 ♖ae8 16.♖ae1

White has seriously weakened his centre and in Goganov – Bodnaruk, St Petersburg 2016, Black should have started his counterplay with:

16...d5!N 17.e5 ♘h5 18.g3

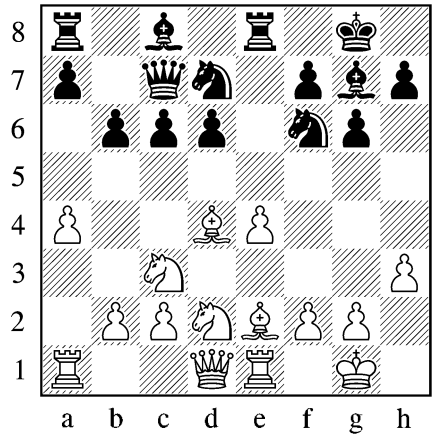
Defending the f4-pawn in view of the threat of ...h6.

18...f6 19.exf6 ♗xf6∓

Black has the better structure, the e4-square is weak and the c3-knight is passive.

11...♘bd7 12.♖e1 b6

In the absence of immediate threats in the centre, Black starts his slow queenside plan.



13.♘c4

The most active move, putting Black's only weakness, the d6-pawn, under pressure.

13.f4

This has the familiar drawback of chronically weakening the e4-square.

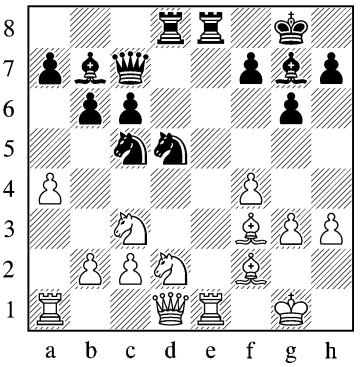
13...♗b7 14.♗f3 ♖ad8 15.♗f2 ♘c5 16.g3 d5

After Black has completed his development, this break is logical and strong.

17.exd5

Otherwise: 17.e5 ♘fe4 18.♗xe4 ♘xe4 19.♘dxe4 dxe4 20.♕e2 e3! The first step to clearing the long diagonal. 21.♗xe3 c5 22.♔h2 ♕c6∓ The annoying battery leaves White struggling despite his extra pawn. Black will break with ...f6 soon, clearing the path for his second bishop.

17...♘xd5



18.♗xd5

White keeps his knight for blockading purposes.

If 18.♘xd5 ♖xe1† 19.♕xe1 cxd5, as well as ...♘e4, Black threatens ...d4 or simply ...♗xb2, with an obvious advantage.

18...♖xe1† 19.♕xe1 cxd5 20.♘b5 ♕d7

Threatening the deadly ...d4 followed by ...♕d5.

21.♘d4 ♘e4∓

Black held a strong initiative in Blaskowski – Lobron, Germany 1976, though he could also have safely taken the h3-pawn.

13.f3 ♗b7 14.♘f1

This is more passive than the regrouping in the main line.

14...♖ad8 15.♕d2 ♘c5 16.♗c4 ♘e6

An important move. Before playing ...d5 Black forces the bishop to abandon the future blockading square.

17.♗f2 d5 18.exd5 cxd5 19.♗d3 ♘h5 20.♘b5 ♕b8 21.c3 ♘hf4∓

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Black was well regrouped for the isolani, controlling the d4-square and keeping annoying kingside pressure in Koopman – Van Wijgerden, Wijk aan Zee 1984.

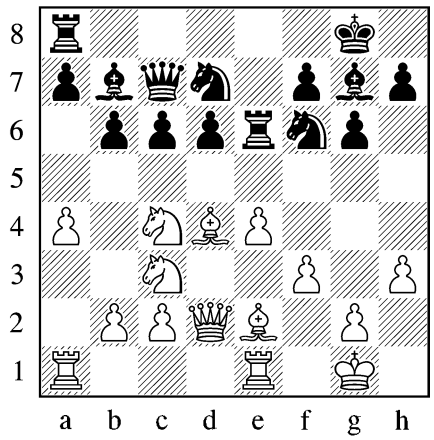
13...♖e6!

A simple yet safe way to defend the pawn.

Once again the central pawn is not edible: 13...♘xe4? 14.♘xe4 ♖xe4 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.♕xd6 ♕xd6 17.♘xd6 ♖d4 18.♖ad1 ♖xd1 19.♖xd1 ♘f6 20.♗c4±, with a persisting initiative in the endgame.

14.f3 ♗b7 15.♕d2

In Short – Van Wijgerden, Amsterdam 1982, now was a good moment to carry out the long-awaited central break:



15...d5!N 16.exd5 cxd5 17.♘e3

The intermediate 17.♘b5 does not change much: 17...♕b8 The queen only temporarily blocks the a8-rook. 18.♘e3 ♕f4 In view of the threat of ...♗h6, White needs to free himself from the pin. 19.♘f1 ♕xd2 20.♘xd2 ♖ae8 Black's activity at least compensates for the theoretical weakness of the isolani, especially since White will not be able to install a knight on d4.

17...♖ae8 18.♗b5

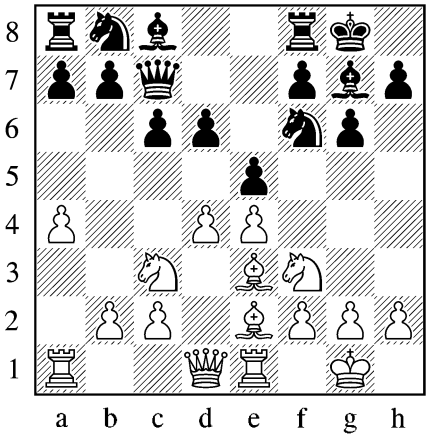
The only way to restrict Black's increasing activity.

If 18.♗f1 ♕f4 (threatening ...♗h6) 19.♘e2 ♕g5 20.♖a3 ♘e5 Black has an almost unbearable initiative.

18...♗h6 19.♕f2 ♕f4 20.♗xf6 ♖xe3∓

Black has broken the blockade and retains active play, while White's kingside is weak.

D3) 9.♖e1



White tries to keep the tension by making a more useful move than h2-h3.

9...exd4

The same approach as in variation D2 above.

9...♘g4

However, this also deserves attention.

10.♗g5N

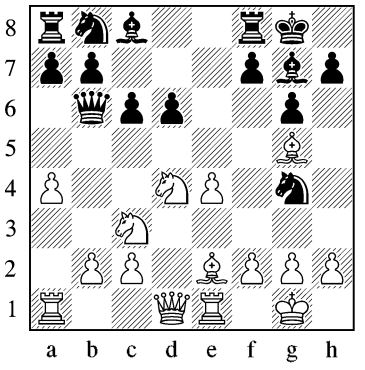
The critical move.

10.♗c4 ♘xe3 11.♖xe3 ♘d7∓ looked most unappealing for White in Zingaylo – Arutyunova, Lvov 2007.

10...exd4 11.♘xd4 ♕b6

This must have been what White feared in the aforementioned game, as Black sets up unpleasant pressure on b2 and along the g1-a7 diagonal, but things are not entirely clear.

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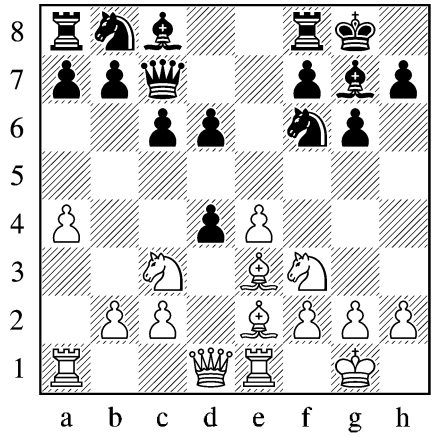


12.♗xg4 ♗xd4 13.♗e3 ♗xe3 14.♖xe3

Black needs to neutralize White's kingside initiative in order to take advantage of his small queenside achievements.

14...♗xg4 15.♕xg4 ♘a6=

Objectively, Black's queenside pressure should compensate for White's attacking chances, but subjectively I would be afraid of exposing my king.



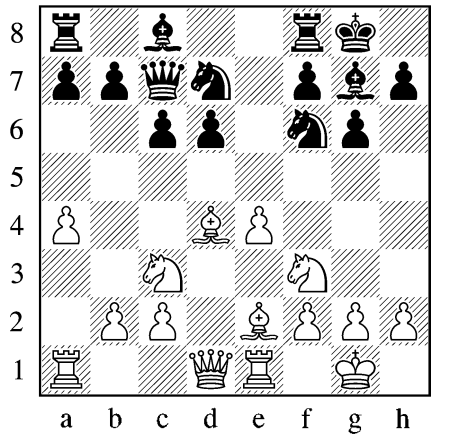
10.♗xd4

10.♘xd4 ♖e8 leaves White with the familiar problems defending the e4-pawn. The only difference to variation D21 is that after 11.♗d3 Black no longer has a combination with ...♗xh3, though 11...♘g4, eliminating a valuable enemy bishop, is a fine consolation.

10...♘bd7

The most restrictive move order. Dynamically ♖e1 is more useful than h2-h3, so Black should pay attention to his queenside development.

If 10...♖e8 he should expect 11.♗c4 ♗e6 (11...♘bd7 12.♘g5 also offers White some initiative) 12.e5 ♗xc4 13.exf6 ♖xe1† 14.♕xe1, taking control over the e-file, even though things are not clear after 14...♗f8.



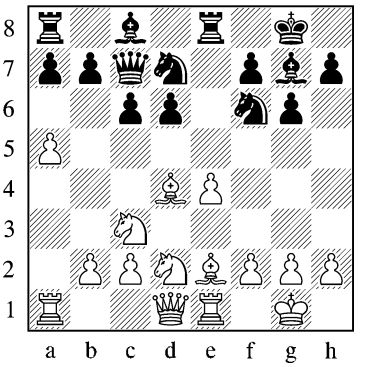
11.♘d2

The start of the same plan as that of Short in variation D22.

11.a5N

Aiming to freeze the enemy queenside. Black should react with:

11...♖e8 12.♘d2



12...♘f8

Planning ...♘e6 followed by ...d5.

13.♘c4 ♖d8

Defending the pawn and renewing the threat.

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14.♘e3 ♖e8

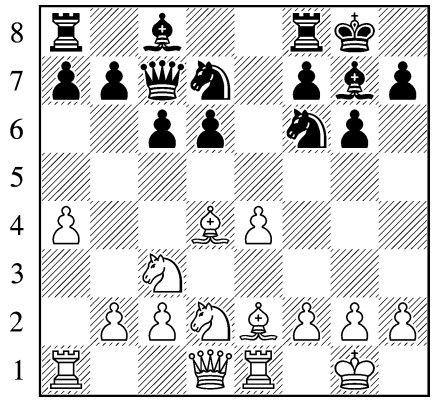
Obviously an invitation to a draw by repetition, as apart from ...♘xe4 Black threatens ...♘e6, exchanging the bishop.

15.♗c4

The only way to keep the game going.

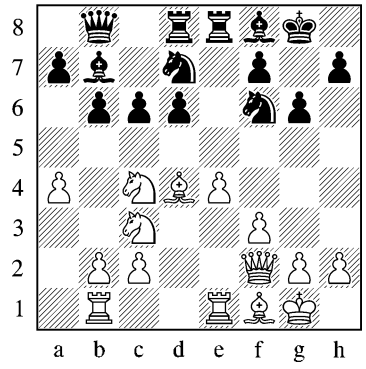
15...♗e6

After developing the bishop, Black will play ...b5 soon, solving all his problems.



11...♖e8 12.♘c4 ♘e5!?N

12...♗f8 is less active but still not bad. Black follows the same plan as in line D22, with the temporary bishop passivity not being too relevant: 13.f3 b6 14.♕d2 ♗b7 15.♖ab1 ♖ad8 16.♗f1 ♕b8 17.♕f2 In Lazic – Govciyan, France 2005, this would have been a good moment to break in the centre:



17...d5!N 18.exd5 cxd5 19.♘e3 (19.♘d2 fails to put pressure on d5, thus allowing 19...♘h5= followed by ...♘g7 [or ...♘f4] and ...♘e6) 19...♗c5=

13.♘e3

Alternatively: 13.a5 ♗e6 14.♘e3 ♗h6 Forcing White to weaken his kingside if he wants to play f2-f4. 15.g3 b5 16.b4 ♖ad8 17.f4 ♗g7 Gaining a tempo for regrouping based on the potential pin along the d-file. 18.♕c1 ♘eg4=

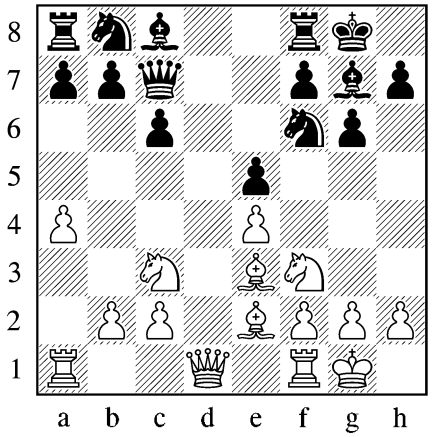
13...♗e6 14.f4 ♗h6 15.f5

15.fxe5 dxe5 16.♗c5 ♘d7∓ leaves White's pieces hanging and the dark squares weak.

15...gxf5 16.exf5 ♗d7=

Black will play ...d5 followed by ...♕d6 and ...♔h8 soon, with counterplay in an interesting position.

D4) 9.dxe5 dxe5



White avoids Black's counterplay in the centre, switching to the most typical structure for the Classical System.

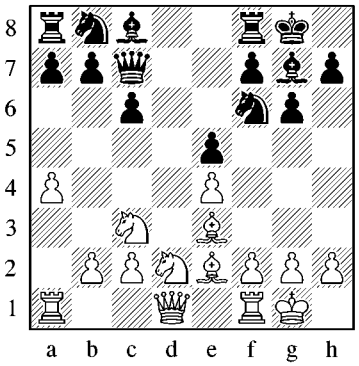
10.a5

A familiar move, aimed at making Black's queenside development problematic. White has tried several other moves:

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10.♘d2

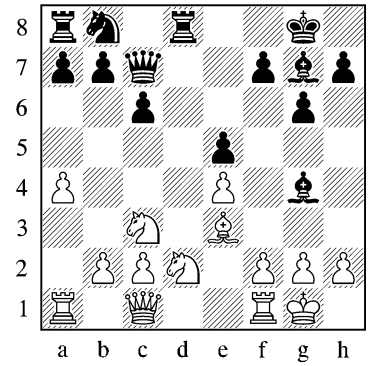
With the knight already on d7, this would most likely enable the intrusion to d6, but with the d-file clear Black can avoid that.



10...♖d8 11.h3

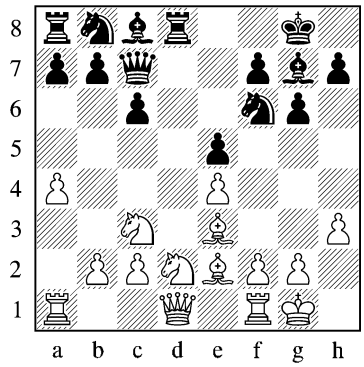
A necessary prophylactic move, preparing the queen's evacuation from the d-file.

a) If 11.♕c1 ♘g4 we see one more benefit from the chosen move order: 12.♗xg4 ♗xg4



After exchanging a minor piece, Black solves all the problems deriving from his slight lack of space. And by developing the bishop he also gets one step closer to meeting the next move with the freeing plan based on ...b6. 13.a5 ♘d7 14.♘b3 ♗f8 15.♘a4 In Williams – Evans, Haifa (ol) 1976, the most consistent move would have been 15...b6N, restricting the enemy knight, with at least equal play.

b) Or if 11.♕e1 ♘g4 12.♗c5, as in Romanov – Kurnosov, St Petersburg 2009, the simplest would have been 12...b6N 13.♗a3 ♘f6. The bishop stands badly on a3 and Black could even consider ...c5 followed by ...♘c6-d4. The weakness on d5 would be compensated by the fact that Black would practically be playing with an extra piece, at least for a while.



11...♘bd7 12.♕e1 ♘f8

Planning ...♘e6-d4.

13.f4

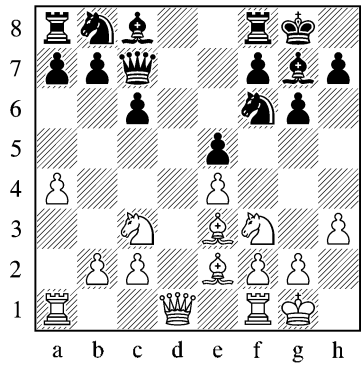
The only attempt to cross Black's plans. In Sax – Poutiainen, Teesside 1974, Black could have strengthened his control of the dark squares with:

13...♗h6N 14.♕h4 ♗xf4 15.♗xf4 exf4 16.♖ad1 ♘e8 17.♖xf4 ♗e6=

Followed by ...♘d7-e5.

10.h3

This immediately offers Black a target for counterplay.



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10...♘h5 11.♗c4

Less active is: 11.♖e1 ♘f4 12.♗f1 a5 Stabilizing the queenside. 13.♕c1 ♘d7 14.♖d1 ♖e8 15.g3 ♘e6 Black has achieved the optimal regrouping while White is still struggling to find a plan. 16.♗h6 ♕b6 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.♗g2 ♕c5= Black had pleasant play on the dark squares in Kostic – Skoberne, Boeblingen 2015.

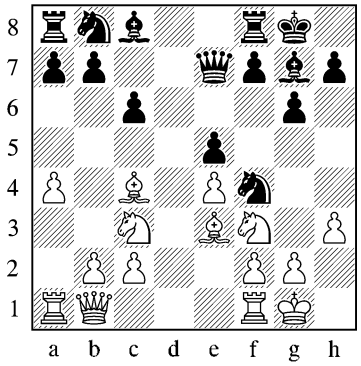
11...♘f4 12.♕b1

Black has more than one good continuation.

12...♕e7

Bringing the queen closer to the kingside and taking b4 under observation.

The simple 12...a5 is also good: 13.♕a2 ♘a6 14.♖ad1 In Ftacnik – Izoria, Las Vegas 2006, Black could have equalized comfortably with 14...♗e6N=.



13.♕c1

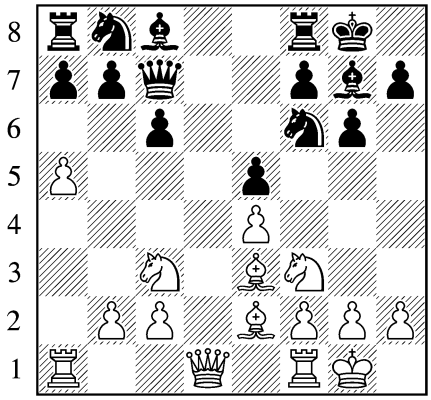
Baratosi – Khalifman, Plovdiv 2012, continued with 13.♖d1 ♘d7, somewhat delaying the rest of the queenside development. 13...a5N= or 13...♗e6N would have been better, with similar play to the other games included here.

13...♗e6 14.♗xe6 ♘xe6 15.♖d1 ♘d7

Black has completed development and White should settle for equality with:

16.a5N=

Instead, 16.♕d2? exposed the queen, offering Black the initiative after 16...♖fd8 17.a5 ♘dc5 18.♕e2 ♘d4∓ in Zhang Ziji – Ding Liren, China 2015.



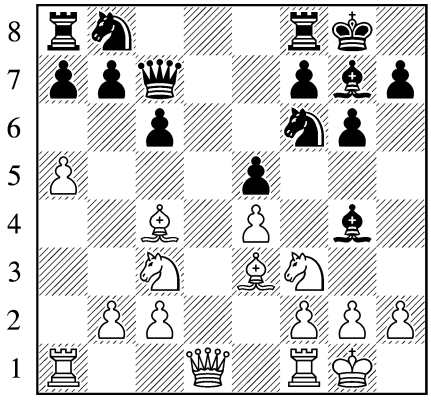
10...♗g4

A thematic move in the 7...♕c7 line. Black not only increases his control over the central dark squares, but also prepares to free his queenside from pressure with ...♘bd7 and ...b5.

11.♗c4

Aiming for an active placement of the queen and bishop.

If 11.h3 ♗xf3 12.♗xf3 the bishop is not doing anything special on f3. 12...♘bd7 13.♕d3 In Harandi – Ludgate, Haifa (ol) 1976, Black should have proceeded with his main plan with 13...b5N=.



11...♖d8 12.♕e2 ♕e7

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A familiar multi-purpose regrouping before developing the knight.

13.h3 ♗xf3 14.♕xf3 ♘bd7

The queenside expansion is imminent and White needs to find new horizons for his knight.

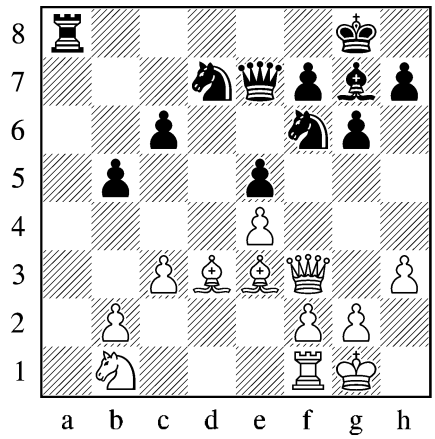
15.♘b1

White anticipates a black knight transfer to d4 by preparing c2-c3. However, this plan is too slow to offer anything special.

If 15.♘a4 ♖db8 Black manages to play ...b5 anyway.

15...b5 16.axb6 axb6 17.♖xa8 ♖xa8 18.c3 b5 19.♗d3

Black's position is comfortable, but it is interesting to follow one of the most creative top players in action:



19...♕f8

Preparing the bishop exchange with ...♗h6.

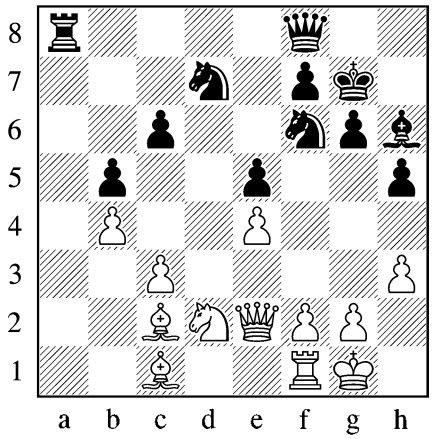
20.♗g5 h6 21.♗c1 h5

Renewing the threat.

22.♘d2

22.♗g5 would not prevent Black's plan due to 22...♘h7 23.♗e3 ♗h6=.

22...♗h6 23.b4 ♔g7 24.♕e2 ♖a2 25.♗b1 ♖a8 26.♗c2



26...c5!?

The position is basically equal, but with his last move Black even gains a slight initiative. After the liquidation of the queenside Black obtains a symbolic advantage, though in Harikrishna – Ivanchuk, Ningbo 2011, it did not result in more than a draw.

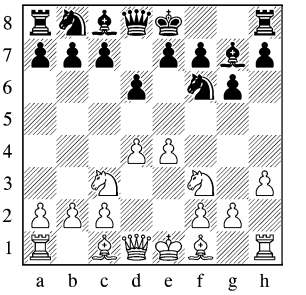
Conclusion

In the main lines with 7.a4, White aims to limit Black's queenside options rather than force through the e4-e5 advance. The most consistent lines are those aiming for development and restricting Black's possibilities, particularly variations C and D. However, Black is able to neutralize the initial pressure and obtain good chances for counterplay with an accurate move order. The main idea is to play ...e7-e5, force the exchange on e5 and then regroup optimally, bringing his knight(s) close to the f4- and d4-squares and solving the problem of the a7-pawn.

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4.♘f3



5.h3

Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.h3

5...0–0

A) 6.♗e3 c6 **76**

A1) 7.♕d2 **79**

A2) 7.a4 ♕c7 **83**

A21) 8.♕d2 **83**

A22) 8.a5 ♘bd7 **86**

A221) 9.♕d2 **86**

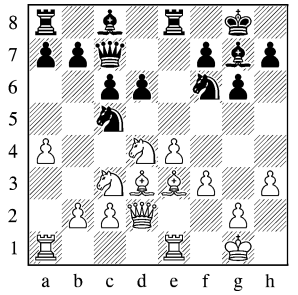
A222) 9.♗e2 **88**

B) 6.♗f4 **91**

C) 6.♗g5 **94**

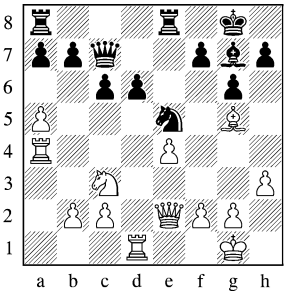
D) 6.♗c4 **96**

A21) note to 11...b6



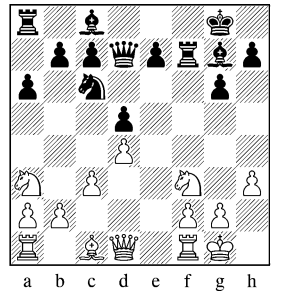
13...d5!?N

A222) after 19.♕xe2



19...♖e6!?N

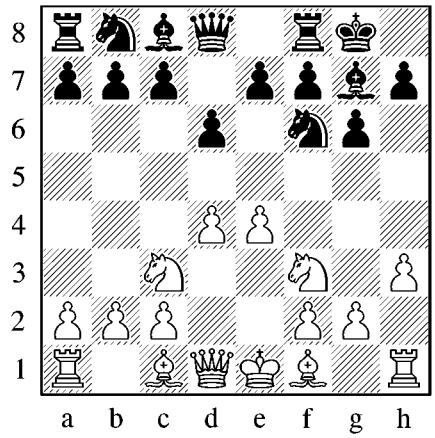
D) after 13.♘a3



13...e5N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.h3 0–0



The most obvious idea of White's last move is to prevent ...♗g4. This is important if play transposes to the Classical System with ♗e2 within the next few moves (for instance 6.♗e3 c6 7.♗e2 or 7.a4 followed by 8.♗e2). For players intending to meet the Classical Variation with 6...♗g4 or systems other than 6...c6 this could be a problem, but fortunately this is not the case for us.

However, delaying the f1-bishop's development has another more subtle idea. If Black plays in the spirit of the lines from Chapters 1 and 2, based on ...e5, White could exchange on e5 followed by ♗f1-c4, developing the bishop on the most active diagonal without wasting time. This would ensure a lasting initiative based on Black's slight delay in development.

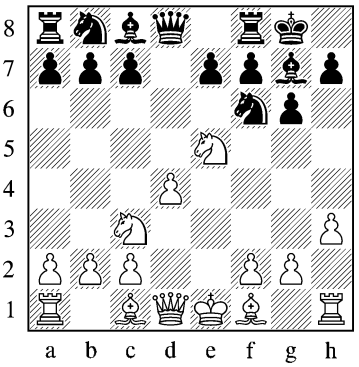
Another way of developing the bishop is ♗d3, allowing the quick knight transfer ♘c3-e2-g3, reaching a regrouping typical of closed variations in the Ruy Lopez. For this plan preventing ...♗g4 is essential, since ♕xf3 usually destabilizes White.

Finally, 5.h3 ensures some stability for the dark-squared bishop on e3 (and, in some cases, f4 or g5) by preventing ...♘g4. The absence of this potential threat is also relevant if White plays e4-e5 at an early stage.

However, rushing in with the central advance leads nowhere:

6.e5 dxe5 7.♘xe5

7.dxe5 ♕xd1† 8.♔xd1 ♖d8† 9.♗d2 ♘d5 gave Black comfortable play in Gavala – Majsik, Bratislava 1997.



7...♘d5!?

Played in the spirit of Alekhine's Defence.

8.♗c4

If 8.♘xd5 ♕xd5 the queen's activity is annoying. The immediate threat is ...c5, which cannot be parried easily, for instance: 9.c4 ♕e4† 10.♗e3 c5 White is underdeveloped and his position is hanging.

8...♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♘d7

Followed by ...c5 soon, with no worries for Black at all.

Of course, spending a tempo on a pawn move so early causes White some delay in development but, as we will see, Black has to react accurately in order to take advantage of this detail.

We will start by investigating **A) 6.♗e3**, which is by far the main move. In the corresponding section I will present both sides' main ideas and the types of structure Black should avoid or strive for, respectively.

The minor alternatives **B) 6.♗g5** and **C) 6.♗f4** are only partly similar, as Black can

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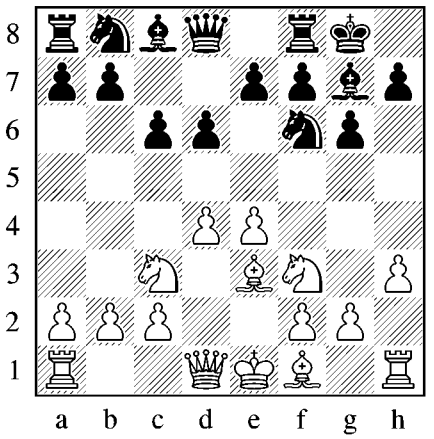
(and in the latter case should) meet these with different plans.

Finally, **D) 6.♗c4** is not recommended, as it allows Black to disrupt the white centre at once.

A) 6.♗e3

The most natural move, strengthening control of the d4-square and preparing to set up the queen-and-bishop battery along the c1-h6 diagonal. I recommend choosing the same set-up as against the Classical System with:

6...c6

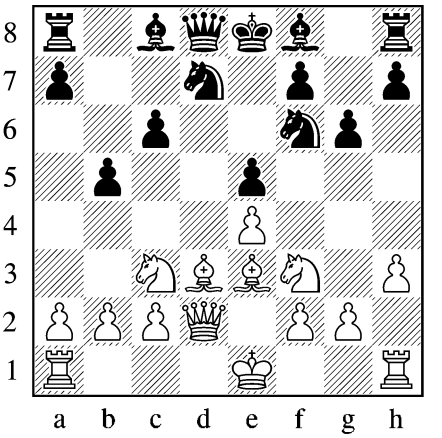


The start of a familiar plan, involving fighting for space with ...e7-e5 and ...b7-b5. However, Black has to choose the move order with care in order to avoid the position opening up in White's favour.

Before looking at the specific variations, I would like to give a selection of typical positions that can arise in this line. Here is a classic example of how things can go wrong for Black:

Nunn – Gelfand

Munich 1991

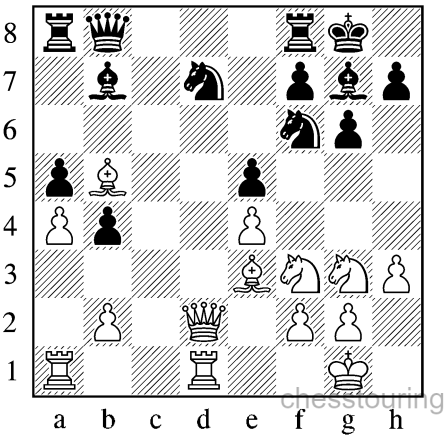


The move order was slightly different than in our main line, but the main thing is that Black has carried out both thematic moves at an early stage. His highest priority should be consolidating the squares taken under control with 9...♗b7, in order to answer 10.a4 with 10...a6.

9...♗g7?!

This allows White to gain control over the c4-square.

10.a4! b4 11.♘e2 a5 12.c3 c5 13.cxb4 cxb4 14.0–0 0–0 15.♖fd1 ♗b7 16.♗b5 ♕b8 17.♘g3



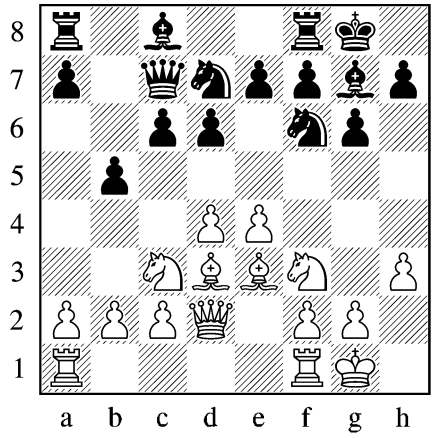
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White is perfectly regrouped and exerts pressure along the open files. Many of Black's minor pieces are either passive or hanging.

This does not make a2-a4 a universal reaction to ...b7-b5. In the absence of central tension, this could well turn against White as in the next fragment:

Al. Toth – Vujadinovic

Sombor 2009



10.a4?!

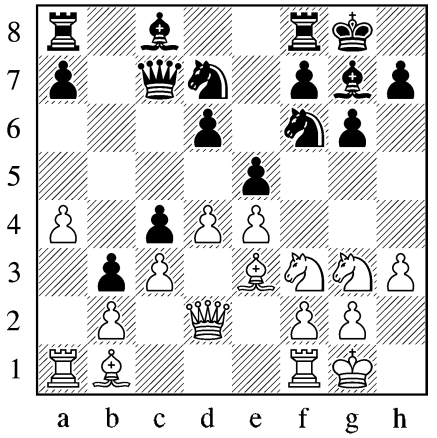
The idea of transferring the knight to g3 is right, but White should have done it without inserting a2-a4 and ...b5-b4.

10...b4 11.♘e2 c5 12.c3?!

Aiming to keep the centre's integrity, but objectively wrong in view of Black's plan.

White should have allowed Black to get a comfortable version of the Sicilian Dragon with 12.♘g3.

12...c4 13.♗b1 b3 14.♘g3 e5

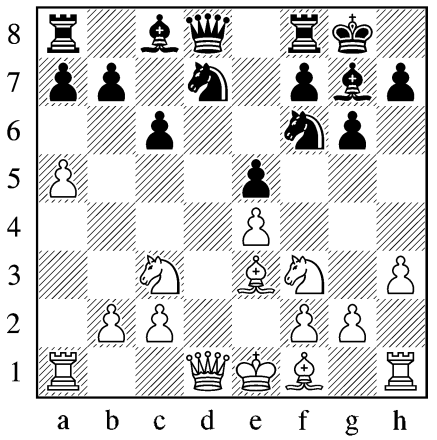


Now White must play for a long time with two immobile pieces: his b1-bishop and a1-rook. On top of that, the a-pawn is doomed in the long run. This is a typical situation in which engines evaluate the position as equal, but in fact White would be lucky to survive.

The thematic ...e7-e5 can prove premature even in the absence of a previous ...b7-b5:

Svidler – Art. Minasian

Yerevan 1996



10.♕d6!

A paralysing move, forcing Black to waste time getting rid of the intruder.

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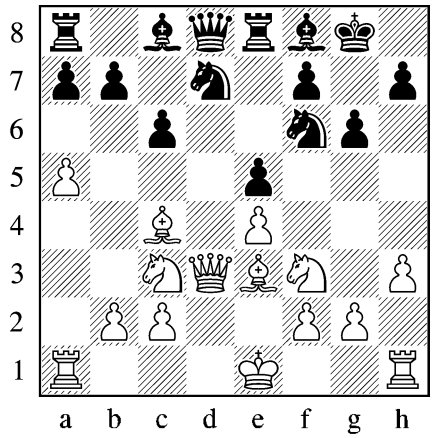
10...♖e8

Or 10...♘e8 11.♕a3 ♘c7 12.♖d1 ♘e6 13.♗c4 with strong pressure, Kudrin – Bologan, New York 1993.

11.♗c4

As in the line above, the bishop develops on the best square without losing time with ♗f1-e2-c4.

11...♗f8 12.♕d3

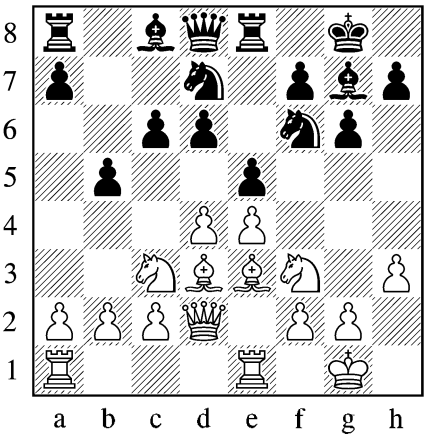


White has achieved an active regrouping and a considerable lead in development, with chances to start an attack against f7.

If Black plays ...e7-e5 before ...b7-b5 (giving him no time for ...♗b7 in order to meet a2-a4 with ...a7-a6) he should make sure he can recapture on e5 with pieces:

Rizouk – Peralta

Roquetas de Mar 2009



11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♖xe5 13.♖ad1 ♗b7 14.♗f4 ♖e6

The permanent threat of ...b5-b4 combined with the vulnerability of the e4-pawn immobilizes the white bishop on d3. Black could double rooks on the e-file and look for a way to set his queenside pawns in motion, thus opening the long diagonal for the light-squared bishop. All these factors offer him perfect compensation for his backward d6-pawn.

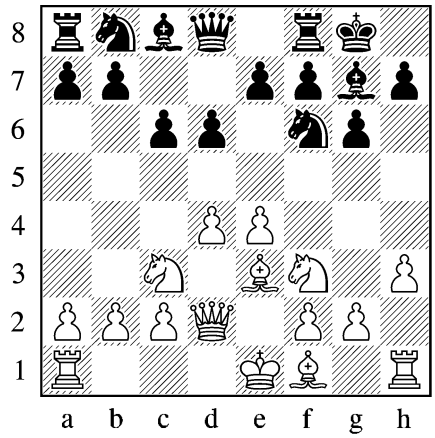
The optimal situation for Black is to keep his pawns on b5 and e5 no matter how White tries to open the position. I illustrated this situation in Chapters 1 and 2, so I will not labour this point.

We return to the position after 1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.h3 0–0 6.♗e3 c6.

White has two main moves: **A1) 7.♕d2** and **A2) 7.a4**. If 7.♗e2 ♕c7 play most likely transposes to the Classical System.

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A1) 7.♕d2



As shown in the note below, White does not have to prevent ...b5 yet. However, committing the queen so early deprives White of the idea ♕d1-d6, as in Svidler – Minasian above.

7...♘bd7

It is too soon to advance on the queenside:

7...b5

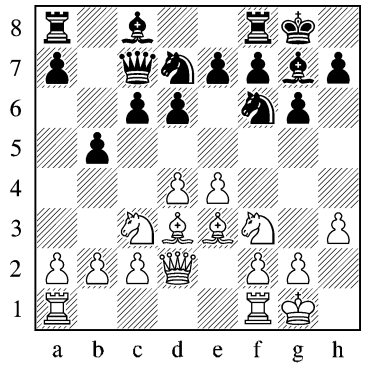
This is premature because Black will need too many tempos to prepare ...e5 under favourable circumstances, allowing White to regroup properly.

8.♗d3 ♘bd7 9.0–0 ♕c7

Preventing e4-e5.

After 9...♗b7 10.e5 b4 11.exf6 bxc3 12.fxe7± White wins a pawn. The similar line would not have worked one move earlier, since ...cxd2 would be check.

9...e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.a4 b4 12.♘e2 a5 13.c3 c5 14.cxb4 cxb4 transposes to Nunn – Gelfand, Munich 1991, as examined in the introduction.



10.♘e2!

Transposing to some kind of Ruy Lopez Breyer, with the important difference that White does not have to block the centre with d4-d5, depriving Black of the plan ...c5-c4 followed by ...♘c5.

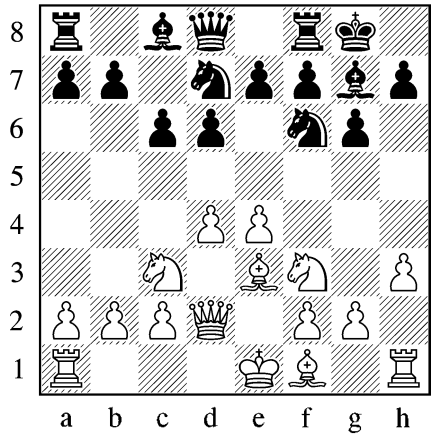
10...c5 11.c3 e5 12.♘g3 c4?!

Black has a solid but somewhat passive position. However, the last move only makes things worse.

Better is 12...a6, even though 13.a4 leaves White's position preferable.

13.♗c2 ♖e8 14.a4 bxa4 15.♗xa4 exd4 16.♘xd4

Black's opening play resulted in a complete fiasco in Kamsky – Mamedyarov, Sofia 2007.



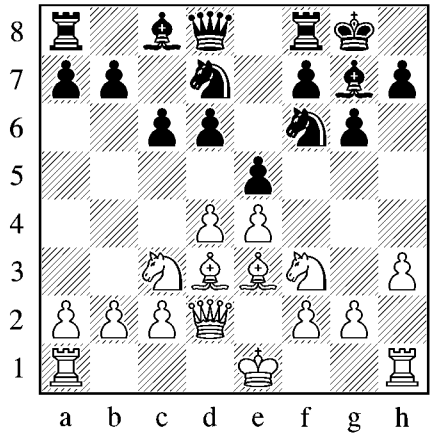
8.♗d3

Heading for the same plan as in the note above.

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8.a4 transposes to variation A21, while 8.e5 leads to early simplification and equality: 8...dxe5 9.dxe5 ♘d5 10.♘xd5 cxd5 11.♕xd5 ♘xe5=

8...e5!



Setting up a possible pawn exchange in the centre provides the only way to challenge the plan based on ♗d3. The black knight could jump to e5 or c5, attacking the d3-bishop and/or the f3-knight.

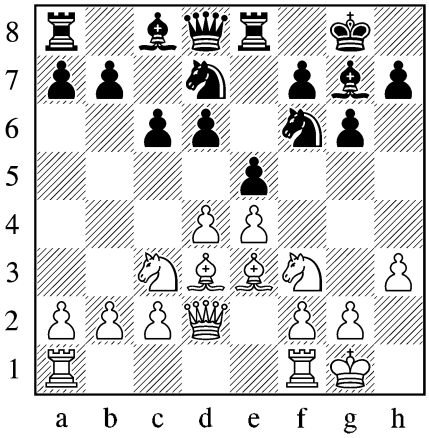
9.0–0

In the absence of a queenside target, 9.dxe5 only frees Black's position: 9...♘xe5 10.♘xe5 (10.♗e2 loses too much time and offers Black strong counterplay: 10...b5! and the e4-pawn experienced some trouble in Mekhitarian – Shoker, Sao Paulo 2011.) 10...dxe5 Followed by ...♕e7 and ...♗e6.

After the sharp 9.0–0–0 b5 Black's attacking prospects are more realistic than White's.

9.♗h6 ♖e8 and now 10.0–0 transposes to the note to White's 10th move below, while 10.♗xg7 ♔xg7 11.0–0–0 b5 offered Black a strong initiative in H. Smith – Mitrovic, Toronto 2002.

9...♖e8!



After overprotecting the e5-pawn Black is ready to execute his second positional threat: ...b7-b5. White has tried a wide range of moves, but none of them endangers Black.

10.a4

Preventing ...b5, but neglecting the central tension.

10.dxe5

This simplistic approach fails to challenge Black.

10...♘xe5

In principle 10...dxe5 is playable, too, but it offers White chances to retain some symbolic pressure: 11.a4 ♕e7 12.♗c4 ♘c5 13.♘g5 ♘e6 has occurred in a few games, with normal play for Black.

11.♘xe5 dxe5 12.a4 ♗e6 13.a5 ♘d7

This position was reached in Hossain – Rahman, Dhaka 2013. Black will play ...b6 soon, solving all his problems.

10.♖ad1

This centralizing move removes the potential pressure along the a-file, thus giving up the fight against:

10...b5

10...exd4 is also playable but less thematic: 11.♘xd4 ♘c5 12.f3 ♘xd3 13.cxd3 d5=

11.dxe5

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If 11.♘e2 exd4 12.♘fxd4 ♗b7 the pressure on e4 becomes threatening.

11...dxe5

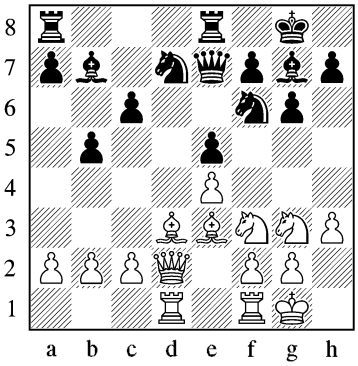
There is nothing wrong with 11...♘xe5N 12.♘xe5 dxe5, but the game move is perfectly playable since 12.a4 can be answered with 12...a6.

12.♘e2

Aiming to regroup while it is possible.

After, for example, 12.♖fe1 ♕e7 13.♗h6 ♘c5 14.a3 ♗b7= the pressure against e4 prevents ♘c3-e2.

12...♕e7 13.♘g3 ♗b7



Black has completed his development and maintained the integrity of his structure. The position is about equal, but in the long run it could turn to Black's favour after the typical manoeuvres ...♘c5, ...♘fd7 and ...♘e6.

14.c4?!

An overambitious move, weakening the d4-square without reason.

Gurevich recommends 14.b4!?N a5 15.a3=, more or less stabilizing the queenside.

Black can neutralize the active 14.♕a5 with 14...♕d8.

14...b4!

Keeping the d3-bishop passive.

15.a3 c5!?

Hoping to provoke White to clear the c5-square with axb4.

The more natural 15...a5 may just transpose.

16.♕c2 a5

In the presence of mutual weaknesses on d4 and d5, Black's position is preferable. He can transfer his d7-knight to d4 via either c6 or e6, whereas the d5-square is miles away for the white knights.

17.♖a1 ♘f8 18.♖a2 ♕c7 19.♖fa1 ♘e6 20.♘d2 ♘d4 21.♗xd4 exd4∓

With a space advantage and the bishop pair for Black in Wolff – M. Gurevich, Groningen 1993.

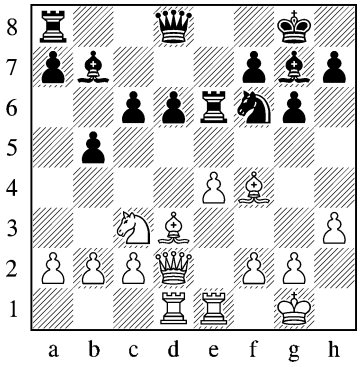
10.♖fe1

This is a smarter way to keep the tension than 10.♖ad1, but Black can proceed with the queenside expansion anyway:

10...b5 11.dxe5 ♘xe5!

Only not 11...dxe5 12.a4 b4 13.♘e2± Leko – Bologan Beijing (blitz) 2012, following the model of Nunn – Gelfand.

12.♘xe5 ♖xe5 13.♖ad1 ♗b7 14.♗f4 ♖e6



Facing the threat of increasing pressure on e4, White played:

15.e5

But this led to simplifications and plain equality after:

15...dxe5 16.♖xe5 ♖xe5 17.♗xe5 ♕e7 18.♗f4 ♖e8

Followed by a draw agreement nine moves later in Rizouk – Peralta, Roquetas de Mar 2009.

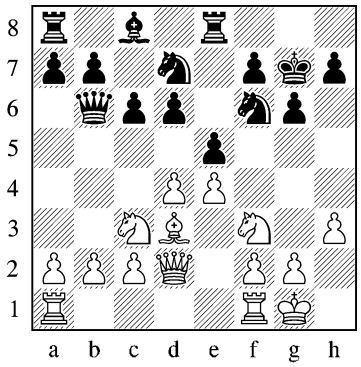
10.♗h6

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Finally, this attacking try weakens White's control over the d4-square, allowing:

10...♕b6 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7

Suddenly White has problems maintaining the central tension, while the b2-pawn may be edible in some lines.



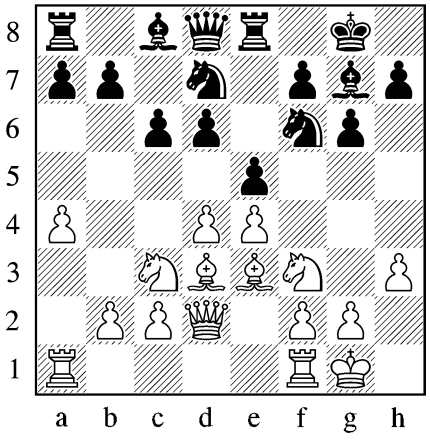
12.♘a4

If 12.♖fe1 exd4 13.♘a4 ♕c7 14.♘xd4 b5 15.♘c3 a6, preparing ...c5 and keeping the bishop on c8 for defensive purposes. The point is that after 16.♕g5 Black can defend with 16...♘e5 17.♘f5† ♗xf5 18.exf5 d5, with excellent play.

After 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 the threats of ...♘xf3† and ...♕xb2 force 13.♘xe5 dxe5, with great play on the dark squares and natural development with ...♗e6 and ...♖ad8.

12...♕c7 13.♖fe1 b5 14.♘c3 a6

Black had comfortable play in Gormally – McNab, England 2011.



10...d5!

The logical reaction to the last move. By preventing queenside counterplay, White has been unable to increase the pressure in the centre.

11.dxe5

Once more the rook proves useful on e8 after 11.exd5? e4, winning a piece in Moskovtsev – Sagnayev, Kustanay 2011.

11...♘xe4 12.♗xe4

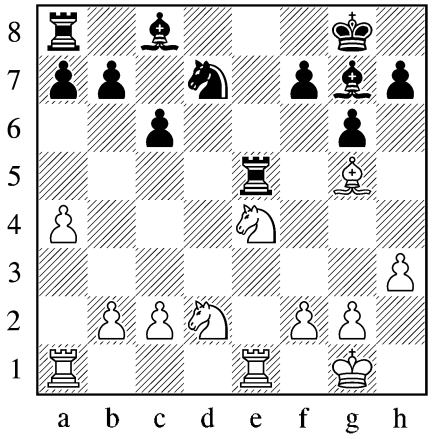
By keeping his queen's knight White tries to gain control over the dark squares.

12.♘xe4 poses no problems at all: 12...dxe4 13.♗g5 ♕c7 14.♗xe4 ♘xe5=

12...dxe4 13.♗g5

If this position was reached with 10.♖ad1 instead of 10.a4, then 13.♘xe4 would more or less win, but in the absence of the pin along the d-file Black at least equalizes with 13...♘xe5.

13...♕a5 14.♘xe4 ♕xd2 15.♘fxd2 ♖xe5 16.♖fe1



Black has the bishop pair, but is slightly underdeveloped. In De Vreugt – Hartoch, Bussum 2008, he should have played:

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16...♖e6N

Removing the rook from the exposed square and controlling f6 and d6.

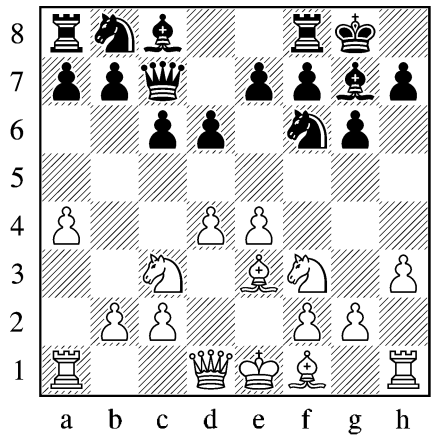
17.♖ad1 h6 18.♗e3 b6

Black has restricted the activity of White's minor pieces, and is entitled to hope that his bishops will tell in the long run.

A2) 7.a4

Preventing ...b5 radically and preparing to gain even more space with a4-a5.

7...♕c7



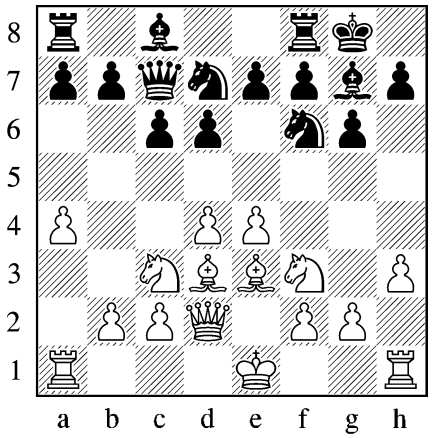
White can choose between **A21) 8.♕d2** and **A22) 8.a5**.

Other moves are less consistent:

8.e5 dxe5 9.dxe5 (9.♘xe5 ♗e6 10.♗e2 ♘bd7= leads to a familiar scenario from Chapter 1) 9...♖d8 10.♕c1 ♘d5 11.♘xd5 cxd5∓ After ...♘c6 White will face problems defending the central pawn.

8.♗c4 allows the typical 8...♘xe4 9.♘xe4 d5 10.♗d3 dxe4 11.♗xe4 ♘d7 12.0–0 e5 with comfortable play.

A21) 8.♕d2 ♘bd7 9.♗d3



This set-up is similar to that examined in line A1.

9...e5

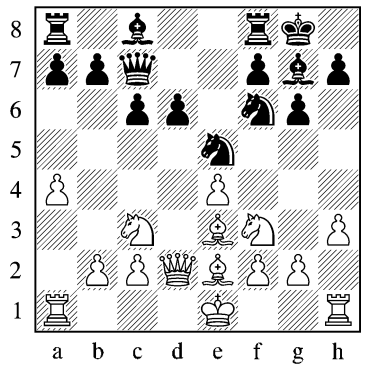
Black needs to react in a similar way too, since focusing on gaining queenside space with 9...b6 10.0–0 a6, planning ...♗b7 and ...b5, runs into 11.♘e2N followed by ♘g3.

10.0–0

10.dxe5

This should be answered with the familiar: 10...♘xe5 11.♗e2

The only way to fight for an advantage.



11...♖d8N

In Zhu Chen – T. Nguyen, Macau 2007, Black failed to equalize with 11...d5.

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Preparing the central break looks more to the point.

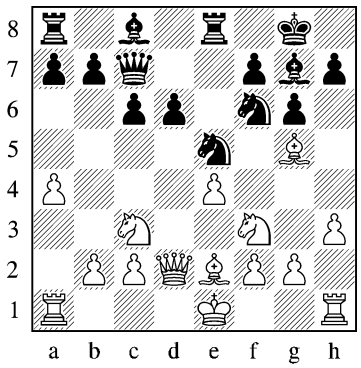
12.♗g5

12.0–0 d5 equalizes comfortably.

12.♗f4 prevents ...d5 but does not hinder Black's development: 12...♗e6 13.♘d4 ♗c4 14.0–0 ♗xe2 15.♕xe2 ♖e8 The white bishop blocks the f-pawn, thus assuring the e5-knight of at least temporary stability and affording Black the necessary time to start his counterplay.

12...♖e8

This is not a waste of time, since in certain lines White's dark-squared bishop and king are exposed. 12...♗e6 is a less favourable version of the line above, since White can play f2-f4 more quickly. Additionally, 13.♕f4 is somewhat annoying.



13.0–0–0

Increasing the pressure on the backward pawn, but exposing the king on a weakened wing.

13.0–0 ♘ed7 starts the typical counterplay against the e4-pawn.

The departure of the bishop from e3 makes 13.♖d1?! dubious: 13...♘xf3†! 14.♗xf3 ♘xe4 15.♗xe4 ♗f5 16.f3 d5∓

13...♘xf3 14.♗xf3 ♗e6 15.♕xd6

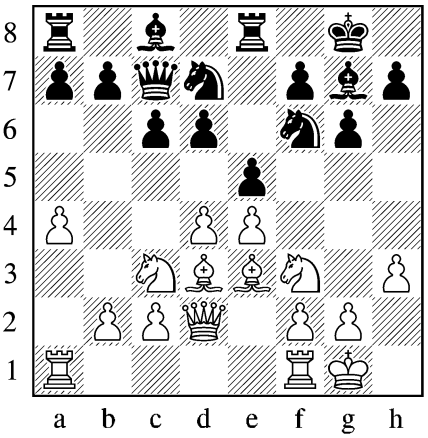
The principled continuation, trying to justify the previous moves.

15.h4 h5 maintains the status quo, while 15.♗h6 ♖ad8 makes ...d5 inevitable.

15...♕a5

Black gains a tempo due to the bishop's exposure and is ready to start his counterplay with ...♖ad8 and/or ...♘d7. All his minor pieces will be optimally placed (which does not apply to the f3-bishop and the c3-knight), while the a4-pawn is a target.

10...♖e8



11.♖fe1

As usual, White's main hope for retaining his space advantage is concentrating his forces in the centre.

11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♗e2 allows the typical 12...♘ed7.The tactics work out well for Black after 13.♗f4 ♘c5! 14.♗xd6 ♘fxe4 15.♗xc7 ♘xd2 16.♘xd2 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♖xe2, with no problems at all for Black in Shabalov – Firman, Denver 2003.

11.♗c4 wastes too much time. 11...♘b6 12.♗b3 Now in Balshan – Wright, Ybbs 1968, the simplest would have been 12...exd4N 13.♗xd4 ♗e6= followed by ...♖ad8.

Preparing ♗c4 with 11.a5 runs into the thematic 11...d5N=.

11...b6

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When given a choice during my years as a Pirc player, I usually preferred to keep the tension by switching to the queenside plan in similar situations. Confronted with Black's pawn hedgehog, White does not have obvious ways of increasing the pressure.

The point behind White's last move becomes obvious after 11...d5? 12.exd5 e4? 13.♗f4! followed by ♘xe4.

11...exd4

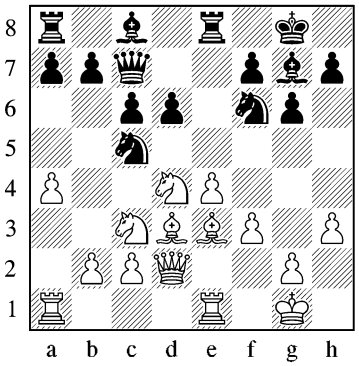
This is objectively just as good as the main move.

12.♘xd4

In Benjamin – Pader, New York 2005, White played 12.♗xd4, preparing to meet 12...♘c5 with the crushing 13.e5. Black should have answered with 12...b6N 13.♖ad1 ♗b7, followed by ...a6, ...♖ad8 and ...♘e5.

12...♘c5 13.f3

13.♗h6 a5 offered Black perfect stability on the dark squares in Andersson – McNab, corr. 1994.



13...d5!?N

Precise, but not the only possible continuation. Black is under no immediate pressure yet and can stay in manoeuvring mode with 13...♘xd3 14.cxd3 ♘d7, planning ...a5 followed by ...♘c5.

14.exd5 ♘xd3 15.cxd3

15.♕xd3 weakens the second-rank defence, allowing 15...♗xh3 with the idea 16.gxh3 ♕g3† 17.♔f1 ♕xh3†. White should accept the perpetual, as 18.♔e2? ♖ad8 offers Black crushing pressure along the central files.

15...♘xd5 16.♘xd5 cxd5=

White's relative weaknesses on h3, a4 and d3 prevent him from making the most of the central blockade.

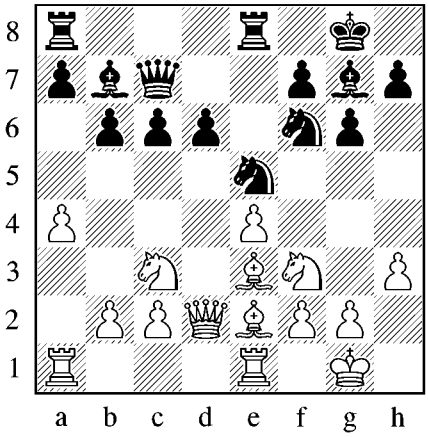
12.dxe5

Trying to make use of the slight lead in development.

12.♗c4 exposes the bishop. 12...exd4 13.♗xd4 White is preparing to meet 13...♘c5 with 14.e5!. Instead, Black should play 13...♘e5, as in O'Brien – Tortosa, email 2012, followed by either ...♗b7 or ...♗e6, with comfortable play.

12.♖ad1 does not bring anything positive, since the d-file is blocked by White's own bishop. Black can continue his plan with 12...♗b7 followed by ...a6 and ...b5, possibly with ...♖ad8 inserted in order to avoid danger along the d-file.

12...♘xe5 13.♗e2 ♗b7



14.♖ad1

Premature central activity would rebound: 14.♘d4 a6 15.f4? ♘ed7 16.♗f3 c5, winning the e4-pawn.

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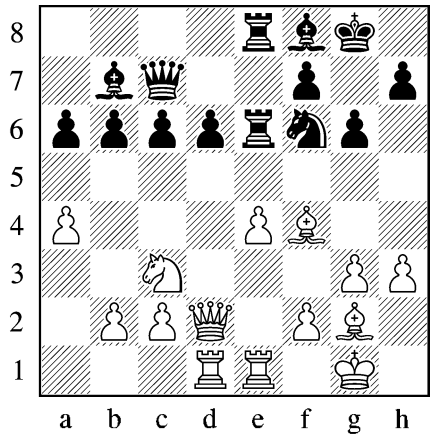
14...♘xf3† 15.♗xf3 ♖e6 16.♗f4 ♗f8

Black plans ...♖ae8 and ...a6. Due to the pressure on the e4-pawn, White cannot activate his f3-bishop easily. The most constructive way of doing it is not too threatening:

17.g3N

17.♖e3 ♖ae8 was comfortable for Black in Warzecha – Hempel, email 2012.

17...♖ae8 18.♗g2 a6=



Black's position only looks cramped. In fact, he has the better chances of carrying out a fluent plan involving ...b5 and ...♘d7-e5.

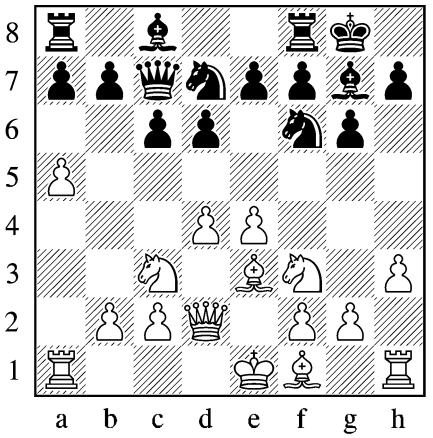
A22) 8.a5

The most principled continuation. Before making any commitment with his pieces, White prevents queenside expansion starting with ...b6 and encourages Black to focus on the central plan based on ...e5.

8...♘bd7

White can play **A221) 9.♕d2** or **A222) 9.♗e2**.

A221) 9.♕d2



This move is fully in the spirit of the 5.h3/6.♗e3 system. White continues to wait for Black's commitment before developing his light-squared bishop.

9...♖b8

This move is very dear to me, as I played it in my first game after turning the Pirc into my main weapon. Since White has delayed his kingside development waiting for the central break, Black switches to the queenside plan.

9...e5 is also quite okay. Then 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 (10...dxe5?! allows White to execute his main idea with 11.♗c4) 11.♗e2 transposes to the note on 11.♕d2 in line A222 below.

10.♗e2

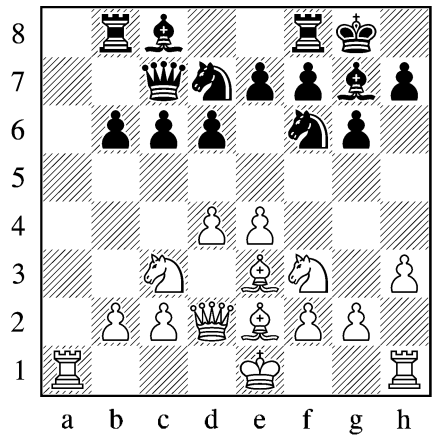
White keeps the d-file clear, reckoning with the fact that in the long run Black cannot do without ...e5 anyway.

10.♗d3 b5 11.axb6 axb6 12.0–0 (12.♘e2 was played in Koch – Nyvlt, email 2010, and now 12...e5N 13.c3 ♖e8 14.♘g3 d5 would offer Black active play due to the white king's presence in the centre.) 12...♗b7N This is most accurate because now the familiar plan of 13.♘e2 does not work on account of

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13...c5. The pressure on the e4-pawn and the threat of ...c4 prevent White from keeping his centre intact. In these lines we can feel the consequences of the time spent by White on preparing against ...e5.

10...b5 11.axb6 axb6



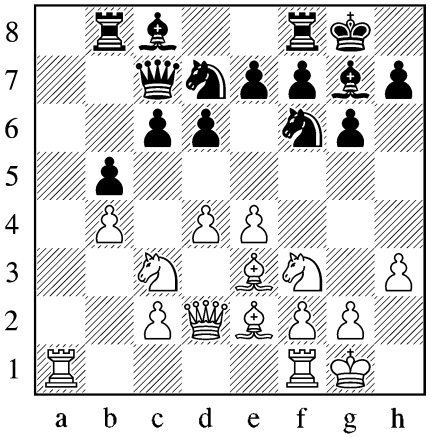
12.0–0

White cannot take advantage of the alignment of the queen and rook along the h2-b8 diagonal with 12.e5 dxe5 13.dxe5. True, the e5-pawn is taboo, but 13...♘d5 14.♘xd5 cxd5 15.♕xd5 ♘xe5 16.♘xe5 ♗xe5∓ offered Black the initiative in Novikov – Tal, Tbilisi 1988.

12...b5 13.b4

White needs to block the b5-pawn.

13.e5 b4 14.♘a4 (14.exf6 bxc3 15.♕xc3 ♘xf6 is comfortable for Black) 14...dxe5 15.dxe5 Black can take the pawn due to a small tactical trick: 15...♘xe5 16.♘xe5 ♘e4! Avoiding the loss of the exchange. 17.♕d4 (keeping the queen plus bishop battery does not help: 17.♕c1 ♗xe5) 17...♕xe5 18.♕xe5 ♗xe5 19.♗f3 ♘d6 Black does not mind returning the pawn, as his pieces are active and the queenside structure favours him.



13...♗b7!

I reckon that during my aforementioned game I was still worried about e4-e5, which made me play the premature:

13...e5 14.d5!N

Causing Black some problems with the b5- and d6-pawns.

The game went 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.♖fd1 ♗b7 16.♗h6 ♖a8 and due to the unfavourable placement of the c3-knight, I soon reached a promising ending in Nevednichy – Marin, Herculane 1996.

14...♗b7 15.♖fd1 ♖fc8 16.♖a3 ♗f8

Black is in no immediate danger as he has defended both weaknesses, but his position is now a bit passive. True, play remains double-edged, since White also has some problems along the c-file and could be left with a weakness on d5.

The improvement on my game keeps the threat of ...e5 alive while also preparing to fight for the a-file with ...♖a8.

14.e5N

White does not get much with this break, but other moves do not challenge Black either.

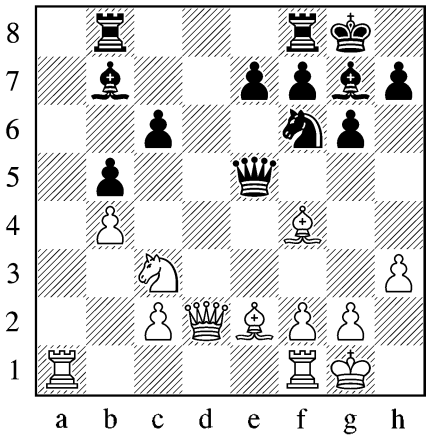
Anticipating ...e7-e5 with 14.♖fd1 can be answered with 14...♖a8, avoiding problems along the h2-b8 diagonal and leaving Black

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time to prepare the pawn advance at his leisure (for instance with ...♖fc8).

14.♗h6, as played in Grothe – C. Werner, corr. 1993, offers Black an important tempo: 14...e5N 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.d5 This is ineffective, but otherwise Black would have no problems whatsoever. 16...♖fc8 17.♖a3 ♘b6 In the absence of pressure along the d-file, Black already has the initiative.

14...dxe5 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 16.♘xe5 ♕xe5 17.♗f4



17...♘e4!

I am sure I did not notice this resource during the game. It becomes apparent that it is not only Black's pieces that are hanging.

18.♗xe5

18.♘xe4 simplifies the position without regaining the pawn: 18...♕xe4 19.♗xb8 ♗xa1 20.♖xa1 ♖xb8 21.♗f3 White has reasonable compensation for the pawn, based on the temporary passivity of the b7-bishop, but no more.

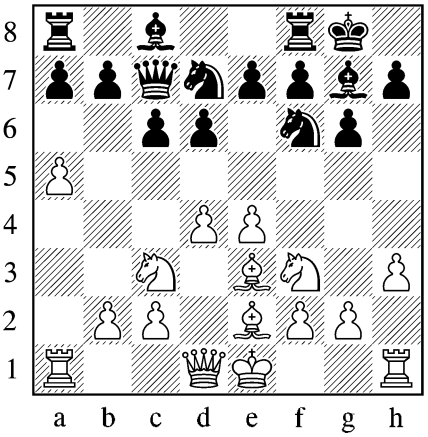
18...♘xd2 19.♗xg7

19.♗xb8 ♖xb8 with a double attack on c3 and f1.

19...♔xg7 20.♖fd1 ♖fd8

Once again, White's compensation should be just enough to maintain equality.

A222) 9.♗e2



After completing his queenside progress, White returns to the Classical set-up. This does not lead to a transposition to Chapters 1 or 2, though, due to the specific move order recommended there, based on delaying the b8-knight's development.

The text move looks less consequent than 9.♕d2, as it defines White's intentions regarding his bishop while there are still half-waiting moves available, but we will see that things are not entirely straightforward.

9...e5

Unfortunately, the same plan as recommended in line A221 above, 9...♖b8, does not work so well here: 10.0–0 b5 11.axb6 axb6 12.d5! ♘c5 13.♘d4 White will gain control over the b5-square, due to the fact that, unlike in the previous line, the white queen is not hanging after a knight capture on e4.

9...♖e8 10.0–0 e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 transposes to a Classical line we avoid in Chapter 2 – see the note to 9...exd4 in line D2 on page 62. At the end of that line, 11...♘bd7 would transpose to the current position.

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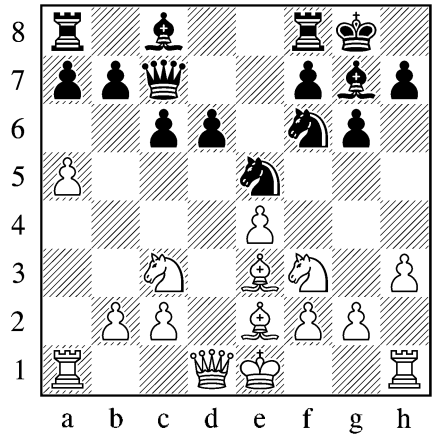
If Black recaptures with 11...♘xe5 then the rook puts less pressure on White than after ...♖d8 recommended below.

10.dxe5

10.0–0 exd4 11.♗xd4 leads to a position similar to that from line D22 in Chapter 2, with the insertion of a4-a5 and ...♘bd7. From a development point of view, Black's move is more useful, of course. 11...♖e8 12.♘d2 ♘f8 13.♖e1 In Khalifman – Mohr, Triberg 1991, Black could have taken over the initiative with: 13...♘e6N 14.♗e3 d5∓

10...♘xe5!

The continuation of Kobese – Marin, Baku (ol) 2016, confirmed what I already knew – after 10...dxe5 White can afford to 'lose a tempo' with 11.♗c4, causing Black problems with his development.



11.0–0

If 11.♕d2 ♖d8 12.♗g5 ♗e6 13.0–0 ♗c4= Black has little to complain about. He can soon play ...b5, with complete equality.

11.♘d2

This attempt to avoid the knight exchange is passive, allowing Black to start his central counterplay:

11...♖e8 12.0–0 d5 13.exd5

The part played by the rook on e8 is revealed after 13.f4? ♘xe4! and Black is doing well after 14.fxe5 ♘xc3 15.bxc3 ♕xe5–+ or 14.♘xe4 – either knight – 14...♘d7∓.

13...♘xd5 14.♘xd5 cxd5

White cannot enjoy playing against the isolani as he still needs to spend time safely blockading on d4.

15.♗d4

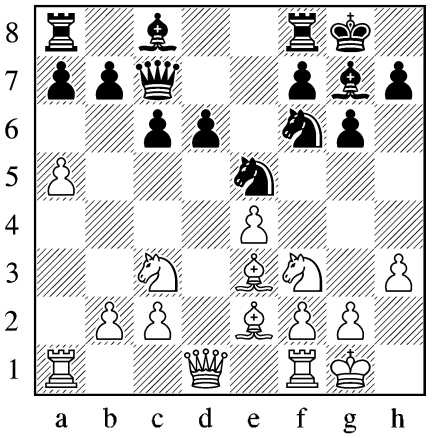
Or 15.♘f3 ♘c4 16.♗xc4 dxc4 17.♗d4 ♕f4!?=.

15...♘g4

15...♗f5 is also good: 16.c3 ♘d3 17.♗xd3 ♗xd3 18.♖e1 ♖xe1† 19.♕xe1 ♗xd4 20.cxd4 ♖c8= The control over the c-file compensates for the potentially bad bishop.

16.♗xg4 ♗xd4 17.c3 ♗g7 18.♗xc8 ♖axc8 19.♘f3 ♕c5 20.♕d3 a6 21.♖fd1 ♖cd8 22.♖a4 ♗f6 23.♖d2 ♖e6 24.g3 ♖d7

Black had little to fear in Aitbayev – Shanava, Tromso (ol) 2014, as he is perfectly well regrouped and the a5-pawn is also a source of worries for White.



11...♖d8!

Due to the considerable amount of time wasted by White on early pawn moves, he now faces slight problems regarding the queen's safety.

The Kaufman Repertoire for Black & White only considers 11...♘xf3† and 11...♖e8 here.

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12.♕c1

The most consistent.

12.♖e1 ♘xf3† 13.♗xf3 ♗e6 followed by ...b5 is just equal.

12.♕d2 d5 gave Black enough counterplay in Borst – Shields, email 2005.

12...♘xf3† 13.♗xf3 ♗e6 14.♗g5

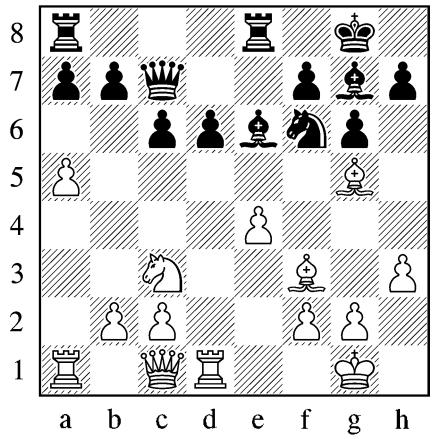
Neutral moves such as 14.♖d1 allow 14...b5 15.axb6 axb6=.

14...♖e8

Avoiding 14...b5? 15.axb6 axb6 16.♕f4± with a unpleasant pin.

15.♖d1

White has made the most of his cards, but Black has maintained his flexibility, as proven by the next move:



15...♘d7!

Preparing an indirect defence of the d6-pawn.

16.♕d2 ♘e5 17.♗e2

17.♕xd6? ♕xd6 18.♖xd6 ♘c4∓ retrieves the pawn while retaining the better structure and the initiative.

17...♗c4

By exchanging the bishops, Black solves all his space problems.

18.♖a4 ♗xe2 19.♕xe2

The other recapture keeps the pressure on d6 but weakens the defence of e4 and exposes the b2-pawn:

19.♘xe2 ♘d7! 20.♗f4

20.♕xd6? ♕xd6 21.♖xd6 ♘c5–+ followed by ...♘xe4 wins material.

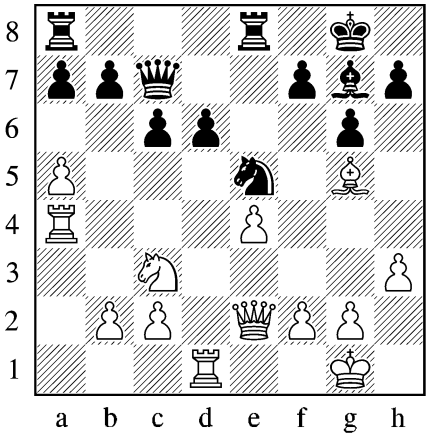
20...b5

Using the exposed placement of the a4-rook.

21.♗xd6

21.axb6 ♘xb6 22.♗xd6 ♕d7 leaves White terribly hanging, for instance: 23.♖b4 ♖ad8 24.♗f4 ♕e7 25.♗d6 ♕e6 26.♘f4 ♕c8∓ White is in trouble meeting threats such as ...c5 followed by ...♘c4, or ...♗e5.

21...♕b7 22.♖b4 c5 23.♖b3 ♖xe4=



19...♖e6!?N

Preparing ...♖ae8 followed by ...b5.

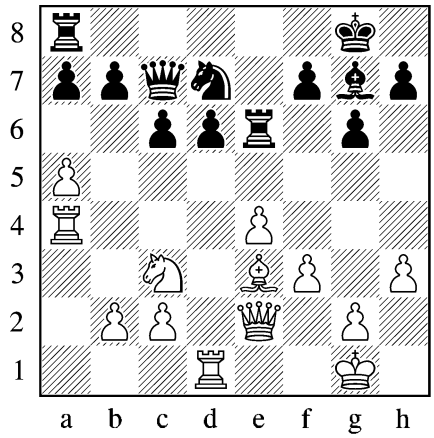
The hurried 19...b5?! led to problems after 20.axb6 axb6 21.♖xa8 ♖xa8 22.f4 ♘d7 23.♗e7! ♗f8 24.♗xf8 ♘xf8 25.♕d2 ♖d8 26.f5!?± in Larsen – Kavalek, Linares 1981.

20.♗e3

The only way of trying to cross Black's intentions.

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20...♘d7 21.f3

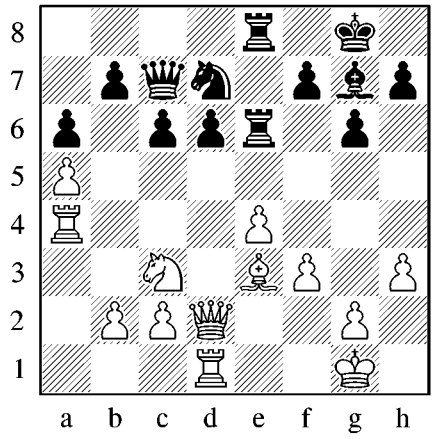


21...a6

Without light-squared bishops, this self-blocking move does not harm Black strategically as he will soon get active play in the centre.

21...♖ae8 22.♗xa7 ♗xc3 23.bxc3 d5 24.♕d2 ♘f6 is also possible, but to my taste riskier.

22.♕d2 ♖ae8



Black is fully mobilized and the threats ...f5 and ...d5 become annoying.

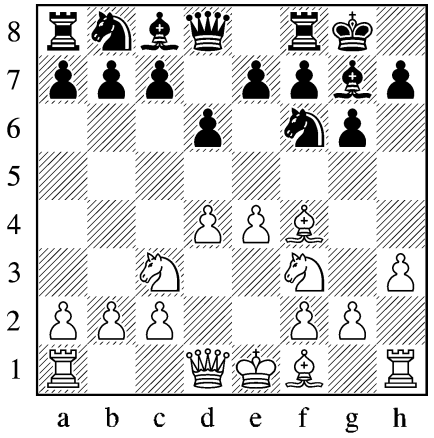
23.♗d4 ♗xd4† 24.♕xd4 ♘f6 25.♖b4 d5!

This pawn sacrifice is justified by the weakness of White's second rank.

26.exd5 ♘xd5 27.♘xd5 cxd5 28.♕xd5 ♖e2 29.♖xb7 ♕f4

Followed by ...♖8e5 with at least enough compensation for the missing pawns.

B) 6.♗f4



Optically this looks like the most aggressive bishop development, since it reinforces the threat of e4-e5, something quite relevant if Black reacts with 6...c6. But in the short term this move does not add anything dynamically, allowing Black to counterattack in the centre:

6...c5

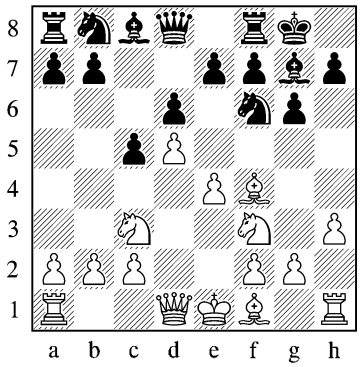
The threat of ...cxd4 followed by ...e5 forces White to release the tension at once.

7.dxc5

7.e5?! is ineffective due to 7...♘h5N followed by ...cxd4, dissolving White's centre.

The tempos wasted on h2-h3 and ♗f4 prevent White from staying in control after switching to the Schmid Benoni with:
7.d5

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7...b5!

A typical pseudo-pawn sacrifice.

8.♗xb5

8.♘xb5 ♘xe4 leaves the b5-knight struggling for a good path: 9.♗d3 a6 10.♘a3 ♗xb2 11.♗xe4 ♕a5† 12.♘d2 ♕xa3 White has no obvious compensation for the pawn.

8...♘xe4 9.♘xe4 ♕a5† 10.♘c3 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 ♕xb5 12.♘d2 c4

White's worries about the d5-pawn prevented him from taking advantage of the missing dark-squared bishop in Tempone – Giaccio, Mar del Plata 1992.

7...♕a5

The typical way to regain the pawn, leading to a comfortable Sicilian Dragon since the f3-knight blocks the path of the f-pawn, making White's position somewhat rigid.

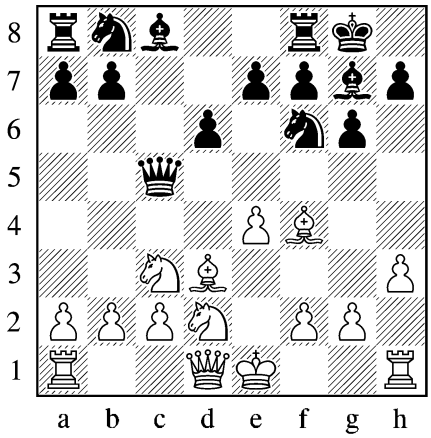
8.♘d2

Trying to fix the aforementioned problem, but wasting time.

It is obvious that pawn-grabbing is way too dangerous: 8.cxd6? ♘xe4 9.dxe7?! ♖e8∓ Black will regain the pawns soon, maintaining a strong initiative.

After 8.♗d3 ♕xc5 9.0–0 ♘c6 10.♖e1 ♗e6 11.a3 ♖ac8, with the possible plan of ...♘d7-e5, Black had comfortable play in Shirazi – D. Gurevich, Estes Park 1986.

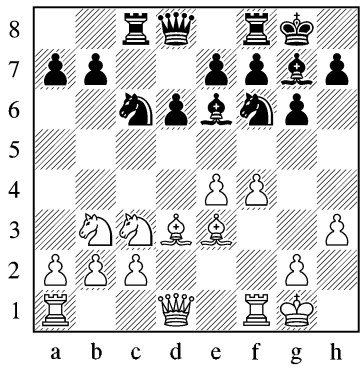
8...♕xc5 9.♗d3



9...♘bd7!?

Since White is prepared to harass the queen with his f4-bishop and d2-knight, it makes sense to keep open the path to c7.

However, 9...♘c6 is entirely playable, too: 10.♘b3 ♕b6 11.♗e3 ♕d8 12.0–0 ♗e6 13.f4 ♖c8

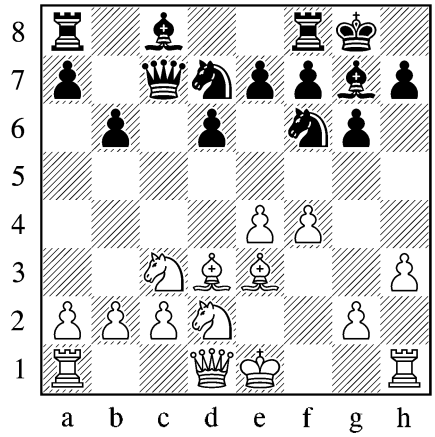


There are two small differences with respect to a classical Dragon tabiya: White has made the extra move h2-h3 (not necessarily a gain; it can sometimes be a weakness) and the bishop is on d3 instead of e2. The latter implies better support for the e4-pawn, but also exposes the bishop to attack by ...♘b4 (or after f4-f5, ...♗d7, to ...♘e5). The position is complex, but the chances are even.

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10.♗e3 ♕c7 11.f4 b6

Black chooses a flexible, hybrid Najdorf/Dragon set-up, aimed at putting strong pressure on e4.



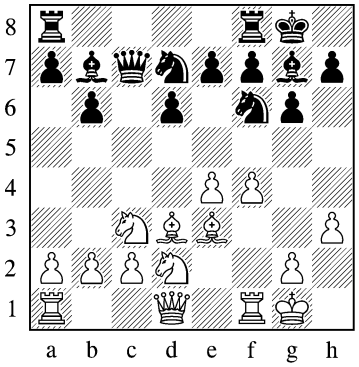
12.♘b3

In view of the threat of ...♘c5, keeping the knight on d2 seems to make more sense:

12.0–0

However, this also fails to impress.

12...♗b7



13.♕e2

The seemingly more active 13.♕f3 ♘c5 14.f5 runs into 14...e6, opening the position in Black's favour due to the exposed white queen.

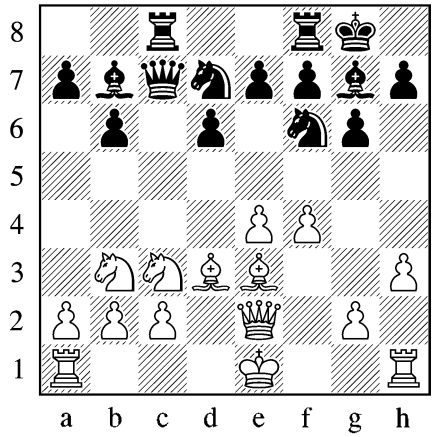
13...♘c5 14.f5

In the long run White cannot do without this move and at the moment he does not have many useful moves left. For instance, if 14.♖ae1 then 14...♖ac8.

14...♘xd3 15.cxd3 d5

Black has excellent play.

12...♗b7 13.♕e2 ♖ac8

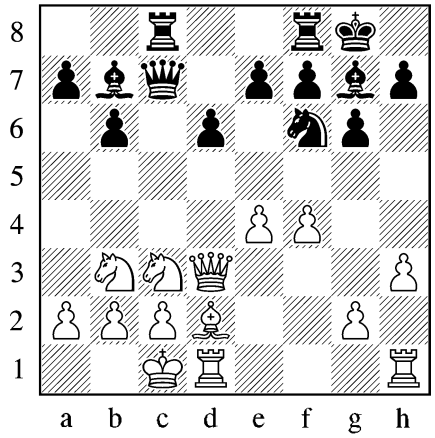


14.0–0–0?

Too ambitious. 14.0–0 more or less transposes to the above note.

14...♘c5 15.♗d2 ♘xd3† 16.♕xd3

The strategically desirable 16.cxd3 allows 16...b5 17.♔b1 ♘h5, clearing the long diagonal with gain of time. 18.♕f2 b4. The c3-knight is lost since its retreat allows mate in two with ...♕c2†.



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16...♘xe4!

A simple but elegant combination.

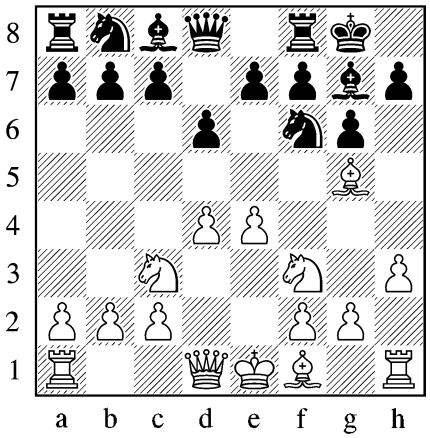
17.♘xe4 ♗a6

White resigned in Pandurevic – Bosiocic, Mali Losinj 2016. There is no satisfactory way of defending c2.

18.c4 ♗xc4 19.♕c2 ♗xb3 20.♕xc7 ♖xc7†

With decisive material gains.

C) 6.♗g5



Despite its visually aggressive character, this allows Black a wider choice than the previous alternatives. The bishop does not threaten much and could be exposed in certain lines, while failing to contribute to consolidating the d4-pawn.

I was surprised to discover that the next exotic and very rare move, reminiscent of the Grünfeld Defence, offers Black excellent play.

6...d5!?

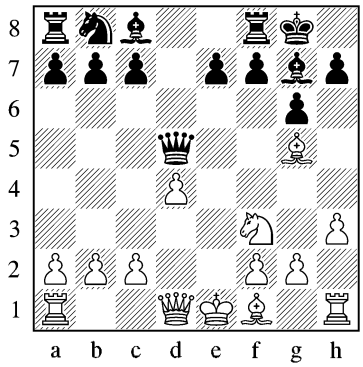
In fact, there is nothing wrong with playing in the spirit of line A with 6...c6 7.♕d2 ♕c7 8.a4 ♘bd7 9.a5 ♖e8.

I have some doubts though, with respect to 6...c5. True, 7.e5 cxd4 8.exf6 allows the typical Dragon trick 8...exf6!, but after the simple 7.d5 Black may face problems finding counterplay, since his compensation after the radical 7...b5 8.♗xf6 ♗xf6 9.♗xb5 is insufficient; for instance, 9...♕b6 10.♖b1! secured the bishop and the b2-pawn in Kovacs – Banas, Stary Smokovec 1972.

7.♗xf6

The critical move, accepting the offered pawn.

General exchanges turn ♗c1-g5 into a waste of time by freeing Black from the pressure along the h4-d8 diagonal:
7.exd5 ♘xd5 8.♘xd5 ♕xd5



Black threatens ...c5 and White has no way to take advantage of the seemingly exposed position of the queen.

9.c4 ♕a5† 10.♗d2

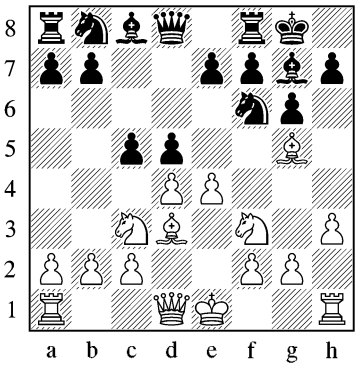
Or if 10.♕d2 the Grünfeld character of the position persists: 10...♕xd2† 11.♔xd2 ♘c6 12.d5 ♖d8 13.♖e1 f6 14.♗h4 g5 15.♗g3 e5 Black has cut the g3-bishop out of play, and is ready to undermine White's centre with ...c6.

10...♕b6 11.♗c3 c5

With his king still in the centre, White already faces major discomfort.

Maintaining the tension does not slow down Black's counterplay:
7.♗d3 c5

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8.dxc5

Under the new circumstances, pawn-grabbing looks risky: 8.♗xf6 exf6 9.exd5 f5 (planning ...♕b6) 10.dxc5 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 ♕xd5 Black will retrieve the pawn, maintaining the better structure.

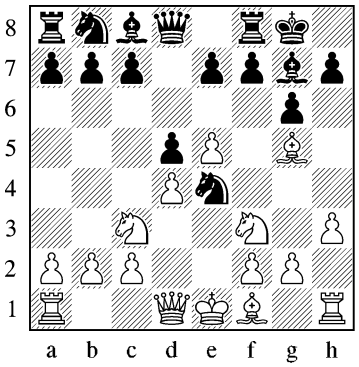
8...dxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4 ♗xb2

The neutral 10...♕c7 is good enough for comfortable equality.

11.0–0 ♕c7 12.♖b1 ♗g7=

White's better development compensated for the structural defects, but no more in Crawley – McNab, Barnsdale 1989.

With the bishop on e3 the most principled continuation would be 7.e5, but here after 7...♘e4 the bishop is hanging, forcing White to either waste a tempo or make some other sort of concession.

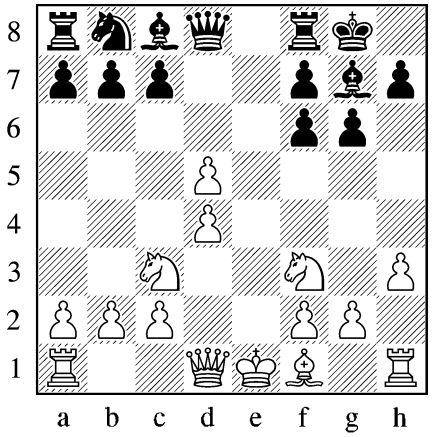


8.♘xe4 (or 8.♗f4 c5 with counterplay) 8...dxe4 9.♘h2 Sadly the g5-square is not available.

9...c5 Being underdeveloped, White cannot maintain the integrity of his centre.

7...exf6 8.exd5

8.♘xd5 allows Black to regain the pawn with an advantage: 8...f5 9.♘c3 fxe4∓ for if 10.♘xe4? ♖e8 Black wins a piece.



8...♘d7

Preparing to regain the pawn with ...♘b6.

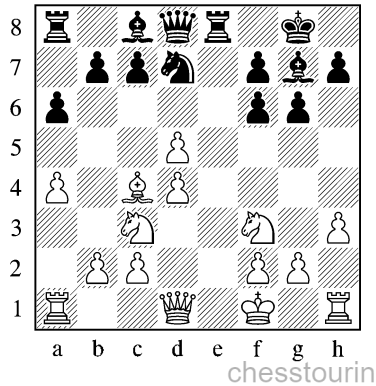
9.♗e2

9.♗c4N

This is more consistent, but also riskier. Keeping the extra pawn involves losing time and giving up the right to castle.

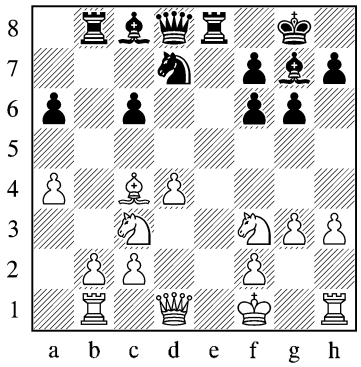
9...♖e8† 10.♔f1 a6 11.a4

Parrying the threat of ...b5, followed by ...♘b6 and ...♗b7, but weakening the queenside dark squares.



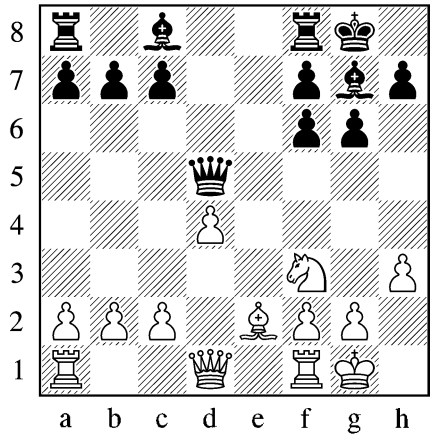
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11...c5!?
An original way to open files.
12.dxc6
12.dxc5 ♘xc5 13.g3 f5 14.♔g2 ♕b6, followed by ...♗d7 and ...♘e4, offers Black great play on the dark squares.
12...bxc6 13.g3 ♖b8 14.♖b1



14...c5 15.dxc5
Or if 15.d5 ♘b6 16.♗a2 ♗b7 (threatening ...c4) 17.a5 ♘c8, followed by ...♘d6, ...f6-f5 and not least ...♕xa5.
15...♘xc5 16.♕xd8
Alternatively 16.♔g2 ♕c7 17.♘d5 ♕c6 18.b3 f5 and White's position is precarious.
16...♖xd8 17.♔g2 ♗b7
Black has strong pressure on both wings.

9...♘b6 10.0–0 ♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♕xd5



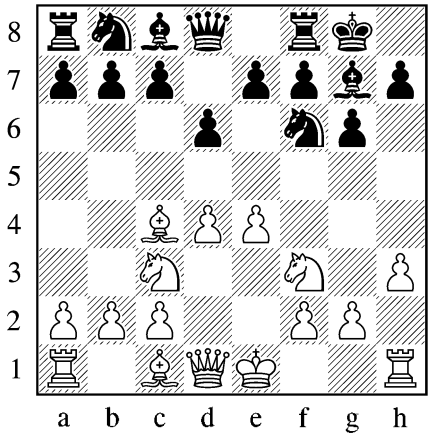
The structure resembles a mirrored exchange Ruy Lopez. Black's bishop pair compensates for White's central majority, while the doubled pawns are not necessarily a weakness. Moreover, the minor weakness induced by h2-h3 could add force to a massive kingside pawn attack.

12.c3
A solid approach.

12.c4 would gain space but weaken the long diagonal: 12...♕d8 13.♕b3 b6 14.♖ad1 ♗b7 15.d5 f5, with comfortable play on the dark squares.

12...b6 13.♘d2 ♖b8 14.♕b3 ♕g5 15.♘f3 ♕f4=
The position was balanced in Findlay – Taulbut, Ayr 1978.

D) 6.♗c4

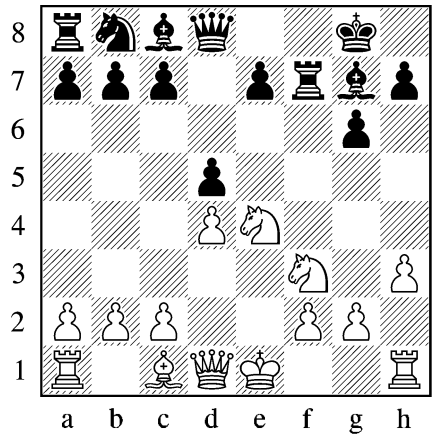


This seemingly active move offers Black a simple way to disrupt White's centre.

6...♘xe4! 7.♗xf7†
Giving away the bishop is too high a price to pay for weakening the king's residence, but 7.♘xe4 d5 8.♗d3 dxe4 9.♗xe4 c5 offers Black excellent counterplay.

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7...♖xf7 8.♘xe4 d5

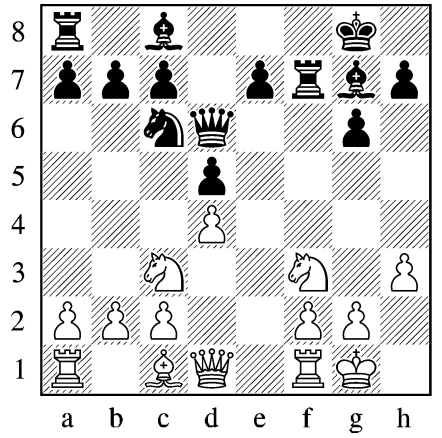


9.♘c3

Trying to inhibit the thematic ...e7-e5 by putting pressure on d5.

Black took over the initiative quickly after 9.♘g3 ♘c6 10.♗e3 e5∓, with a strong bishop pair and a central majority in Emhemed – Hillarp Persson, Calvia (ol) 2004.

9...♘c6 10.0–0 ♕d6



11.♘b5

Abdicating from the initial plan by releasing the pressure on d5.

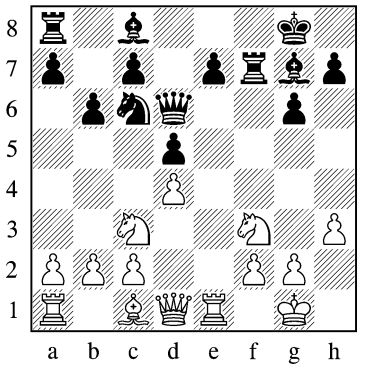
11.♖e1

This looks more consistent, but essentially White is still struggling.

11...b6!?

Planning ...♗b7, followed by ...♖af8 and ...e5.

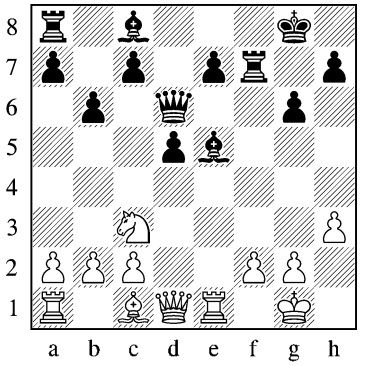
11...a6 followed by ...♗d7 appears logical but allows the equalizing 12.♘e5!? ♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♗xe5 14.♘xd5 ♗e6, when Black's bishop pair and activity are balanced out by the minor structural defect.



12.♘e5!?

Otherwise White would soon be suffocated.

12...♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♗xe5



14.♕xd5

14.♘xd5? allows a crushing attack with 14...♗h2† 15.♔h1 ♗b7–+.

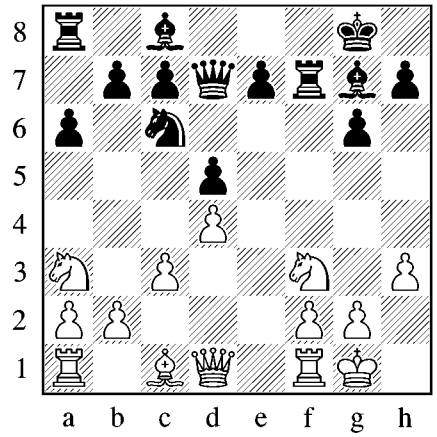
14...♗xc3 15.♕xd6 cxd6 16.bxc3 ♗f5

With a one-sided ending due to White's chronic weaknesses.

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11...♕d7 12.c3 a6 13.♘a3

In Kholmov – Rukavina, Dubna 1973, Black's simplest continuation would have been:



13...e5N 14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♗xe5 16.♘c2 ♕d6 17.♗h6 ♗d7∓

Black has two strong bishops and a mobile central majority.

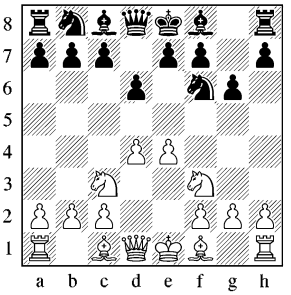
Conclusion

From the lines examined in this section, only A is really important. For players having 6...♗g4 or moves other than 6...c6 in their repertoire against the Classical System, the main line examined in this chapter may cause some problems. But since 6...c6 was our choice in Chapters 1 and 2, the 5.h3 line transposes to the same type of position, with the difference (favouring Black) that White has committed his h-pawn a bit earlier than he might wish. Just compare with Chapter 2, in which White does his best to omit h2-h3 and Black needs to use accurate move orders to provoke it!

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Chapter 4

4.♘f3



5th Move Alternatives

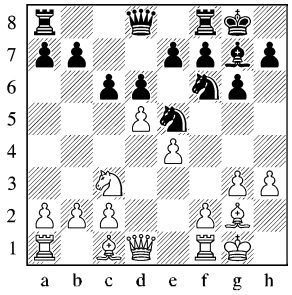
Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3

4...♗g7

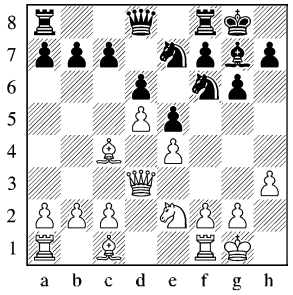
A) 5.♗g5 **100**
B) 5.g3 **101**
C) 5.♗c4 0–0 **103**
C1) 6.♗b3 **104**
C2) 6.0–0 **105**
C3) 6.♕e2 **107**

B) note to 9.0–0



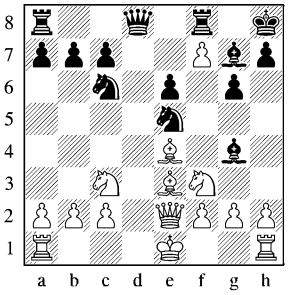
11...♕c7N

C2) note to 7.♗e3



11...♘d7N

C3) note to 13.h3



13...♗xf3!?N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3

This is played in many systems, so the choice about which lines to examine in this chapter is partly arbitrary. I will explain my criteria in each individual case.

4...♗g7

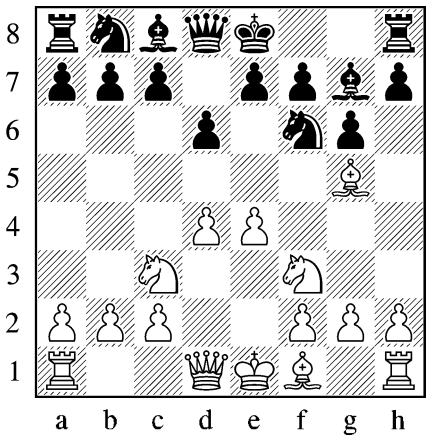
We will examine **A) 5.♗g5**, **B) 5.g3** and **C) 5.♗c4**.

5.♗e3 c6 transposes to Chapter 8.

5.♗f4 c6 transposes to Chapter 13.

I have preferred to examine the respective positions with ♘f3 in the separate 4.♗e3 and 4.♗f4 sections because they retain the general spirit of those systems, and it makes no sense to spread the lines across separate sections.

A) 5.♗g5



I chose not to examine this position in Chapter 12 because inserting ♘f3 does not correspond to the aggressive spirit of 4.♗g5.

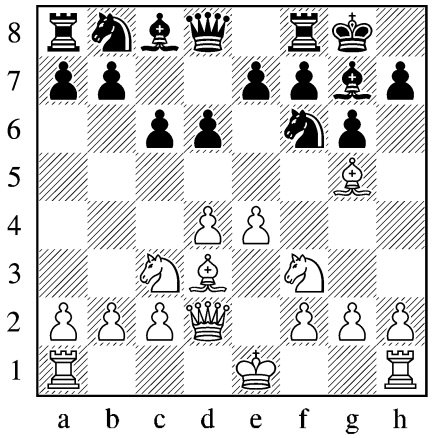
5...0–0 6.♕d2

There is no other reasonable way of avoiding a transposition to other systems.

6...c6 7.♗d3

7.♗h6 transposes to variation C of Chapter 8 on page 210.

7.0–0–0 should be met by 7...b5 when the following line looks logical to me: 8.e5 dxe5 9.dxe5 ♕xd2† 10.♖xd2 b4! 11.exf6N (11.♘a4?! ♘e4 12.♖d4 ♘xg5 13.♘xg5 ♗xe5 14.♖xb4 ♖d8 was great for Black in Benavente Gomez – Penades Ordaz, email 2005.) 11...bxc3 12.bxc3 exf6 13.♗e3 ♘d7= Black has comfortable play.



7...♘bd7 8.0–0–0 b5 9.e5

The typical reaction to Black's queenside attack.

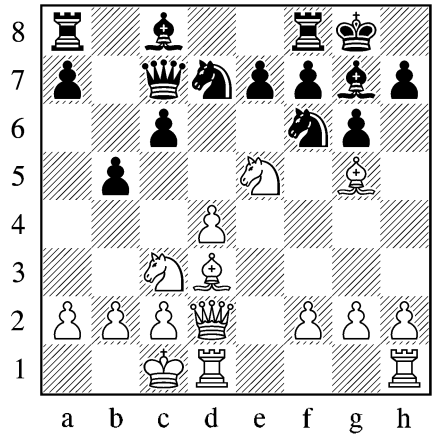
9.♔b1 was played in Roos – Kostbar, Mendig 1998, but after 9...b4N 10.♘e2 ♖b8 Black's initiative develops unhindered.

9...dxe5 10.♘xe5

10.dxe5 runs into: 10...♘g4 11.e6 ♘de5 12.♘xe5 ♘xe5 13.exf7† ♘xf7 14.♗e4!? Aiming to gain time for retreating the attacked bishop. 14...♕b6 15.♗e3 ♕a6 16.♔b1 ♗e6 Black is perfectly regrouped and, despite his structural defect, his chances for an attack against the king are more realistic than White's.

10...♕c7

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11.♗f4

In Lanchotti – Patino, Sao Caetano do Sul 1999, the simplest would have been:

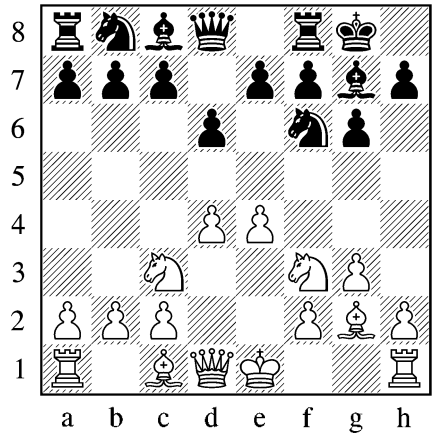
11...♘xe5N 12.♗xe5

12.dxe5 ♘h5 costs White the bishop pair, due to the hanging e5-pawn.

12...♕a5 13.♔b1 b4 14.♘e2 ♗e6

Black has a slight initiative, compensating for White's space advantage.

B) 5.g3 0–0 6.♗g2

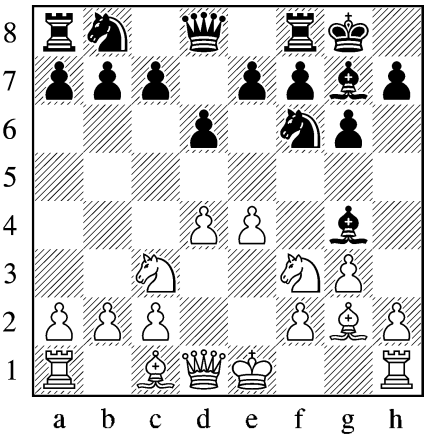


I am examining this set-up separately from the fianchetto system because play takes on a completely different character after Black's next move.

6...♗g4

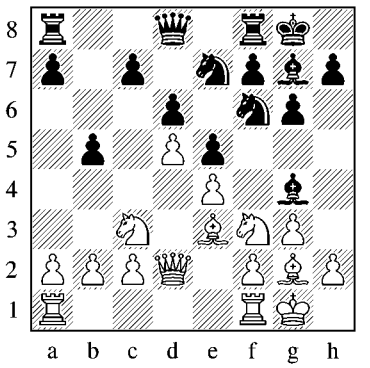
With the knight on f3, Black needs some effort to carry out ...e7-e5, and the last move is perfectly suited for this purpose.

In the Classical System, the line with 6...♗g4 is considered just as good as our repertoire choice of 6...c6 (Chapters 1 and 2). But here there are two differences making Black's play more comfortable – White has spent a tempo on g2-g3 and the knight is in a real pin now.



7.h3

Ignoring the bishop so as to develop more quickly offers Black easier counterplay than in the similar Classical System lines:
7.0–0 ♘c6 8.♗e3 e5 9.d5 ♘e7 10.♕d2 b5



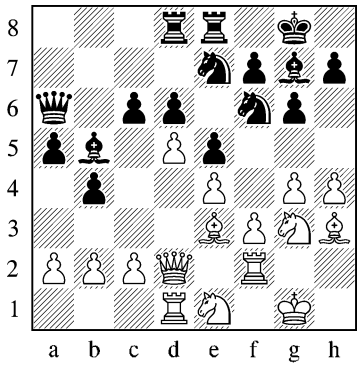
With the bishop on e2 Black needs to play ...♗d7 to prepare this move.

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11.♘e1 ♗d7 12.f3 ♕b8 13.♖d1 a5 14.♖f2 ♖d8

Preparing ...c6.

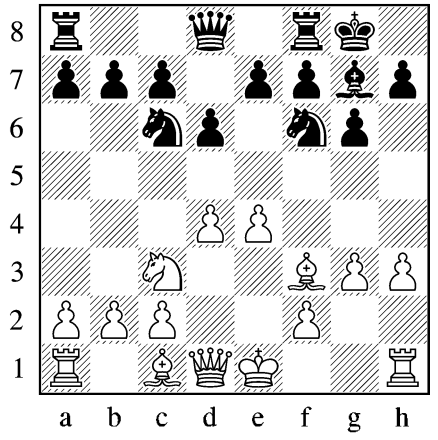
15.♗g5 ♖e8!? 16.g4 ♕b7 17.h3 b4 18.♘e2 ♗b5 19.♘g3 ♕b6 20.♗e3 ♕a6 21.h4 ♖ad8 22.♗h3 c6∓



Black was perfectly mobilized in Garcia Cano – Marin, Badalona 1997, and his central counterplay will develop more effectively than White's kingside attack.

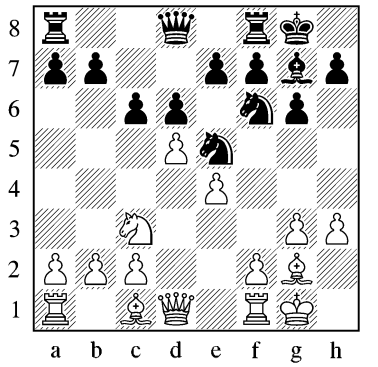
7...♗xf3 8.♗xf3 ♘c6

Putting pressure on the weakened d4-square.



9.0–0

9.d5 ♘e5 10.♗g2 c6 offers Black a couple of extra tempos compared to the similar Classical line (6...♗g4 7.♗e3 ♘c6 8.d5 ♗xf3 9.♗xf3 ♘e5). Moreover, the c4-square is weak. 11.0–0



In Purtov – Saveljev, Tomsk 2001, Black could have obtained good counterplay with 11...♕c7N 12.♖e1 ♖ac8 followed by ...♖fe8 (securing the e7-pawn in anticipation of a later exchange on d5), ...a6, ...cxd5 and ...b5.

Defending the d4-square with 9.♗e3 did not prevent the knight's intrusion to that square after 9...e5 10.d5 ♘d4 in Reti – Yates, Semmering 1926, since 11.♗xd4? exd4 12.♕xd4 ♘xe4!∓ would take full advantage of the king's remaining in the centre, mainly the result of wasting a tempo on g2-g3.

9...e5

Everything is now prepared for this central break.

10.d5

The principled answer, even though with the d4-square undefended it offers Black easy play.

The symmetrical structure resulting after 10.dxe5 dxe5 does not pose Black any problems either. 11.♗e3 ♘d4 12.♗g2 c6 13.♘e2 ♘e6 14.♕xd8 ♖fxd8 15.♖fd1 ♗f8 16.f3 ♗c5 Black's position was even the more pleasant in Pachow – Belov, Katowice 1993.

10...♘d4 11.♗g2 c6

The most logical continuation, fighting against White's space advantage while the central knight is still stable.

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12.dxc6 bxc6

Planning ...d5.

13.♘e2 ♘e6 14.♘c3

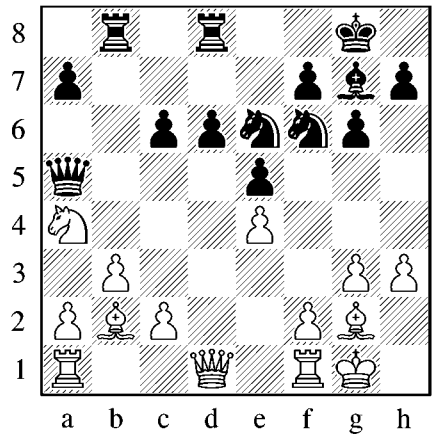
A clear sign that White is not really hoping for an advantage. Black could just repeat moves, of course, but he can aim for more.

14...♖b8 15.b3

Or 15.♕d2 ♕c7 16.b3 ♖fd8 17.♗b2 d5∓ with the initiative in the centre in Perez Perez – Smyslov, Dortmund 1961.

15...♕a5 16.♗b2 ♖fd8 17.♘a4!?N

17.♘e2, as played in Kholmov – Lutikov, Moscow 1972, really takes too much time. Black could have taken over the initiative with: 17...d5N 18.♗xe5 dxe4 19.♗c3 (One amusing point is that 19.♗xb8 ♖xd1 20.♖fxd1 ♕b5–+ wins one of the minor pieces. In the main line this resource is not available.) 19...♕f5 20.♕c1 ♘g5∓



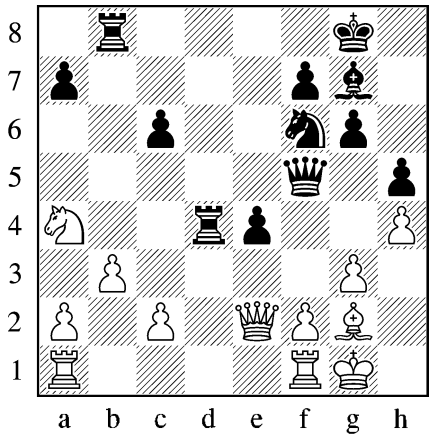
17...h5 18.h4

White cannot afford to allow ...h4, chronically weakening the kingside dark squares. But now Black can make use of the g4-square.

18...d5 19.♗xe5 dxe4 20.♗c3

After 20.♗xb8 ♖xd1 21.♖axd1 ♘g4∓ the kingside is suddenly in danger.

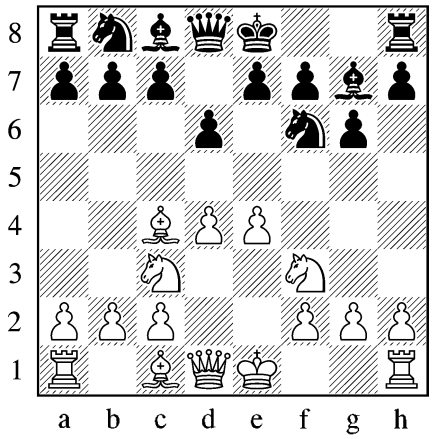
20...♕f5 21.♕e2 ♘d4 22.♗xd4 ♖xd4



23.♖ad1

Black's position is more pleasant, but this probably keeps White close to equality.

C) 5.♗c4

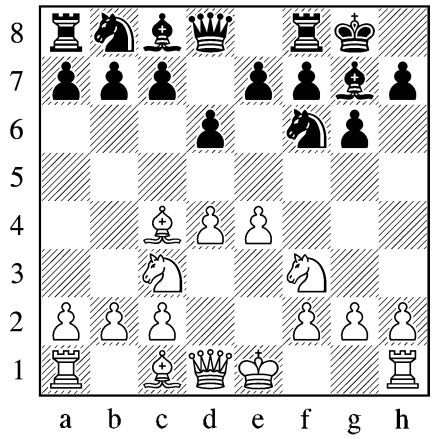


I will examine this line separately from line D of Chapter 3 and line A of Chapter 14, since Black's main plan involves ...♗g4, the same as in line B above.

5...0–0

5...♗g4? is premature due to 6.e5 dxe5 (6...♘fd7 7.♗xf7† ♔xf7 8.♘g5† is similar) 7.♗xf7† ♔xf7 8.♘xe5† followed by ♘xg4.

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White has a choice between **C1) 6.♗b3**, **C2) 6.0–0** and **C3) 6.♕e2**.

C1) 6.♗b3

An ultra-cautious move, wasting an important tempo to prevent ...♘xe4.

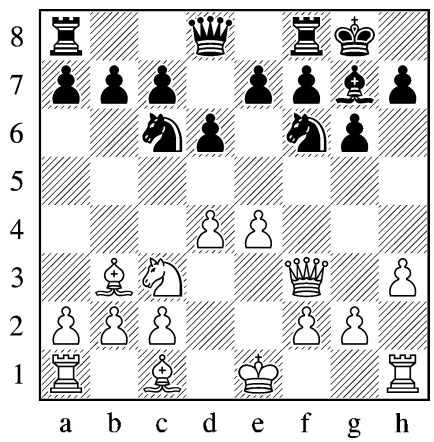
6...♗g4

A logical reaction. Unlike in the Classical System with 6...♗g4, the predictable exchange on f3 will force White to weaken control over the d4-square with ♕xf3.

7.h3

Other moves do not have independent value. For instance: 7.♗e3 ♘c6 8.h3 (8.0–0?! e5 puts White under great pressure) 8...♗xf3 9.♕xf3 transposes to the main line.

7...♗xf3 8.♕xf3 ♘c6

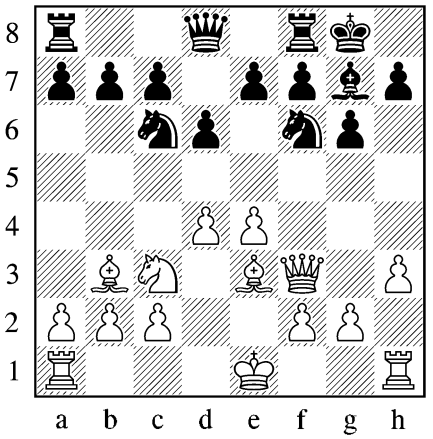


9.♗e3

This developing move is the most consistent.

9.d5 ♘d4 10.♕d1 c5 11.dxc6 ♘xc6 12.0–0 ♘d7= gives Black a comfortable version of the Sicilian Dragon.

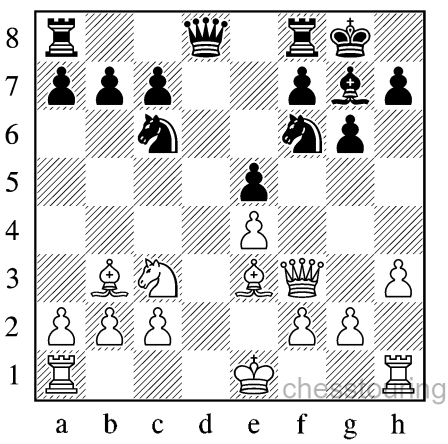
If 9.♘e2 e5 10.d5 ♘d4 11.♘xd4 exd4 12.0–0 ♘d7= the d4-pawn is not easy to attack, while the b3-bishop is passive. Black's knight will be stable on c5, while the counterplay with ...f5 (possibly after forcing f2-f3 by increasing the pressure on the e4-pawn) is promising.



9...e5 10.dxe5

10.d5 ♘d4 11.♕d1 has occurred in a few games, and now 11...♘h5N is good for Black. The bishop is not doing much on b3.

10...dxe5



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11.♘d5

This is harmless, but there is no challenging alternative.

The other way of preparing c2-c3 is more passive: 11.♘e2 ♕d6 12.0–0 ♖ad8 13.♗g5 In Vasiuhin – Murey, USSR 1967, the simplest would have been 13...h6N 14.♗h4 ♖d7, with excellent control of the d-file.

11...♘d4 12.♘xf6† ♗xf6 13.♕g4 ♔g7 14.c3 ♘xb3 15.axb3 ♕d3 16.♕e2 ♕xe2† 17.♔xe2 a6=

A draw was agreed soon in Spassky – Kotov, Sochi 1967.

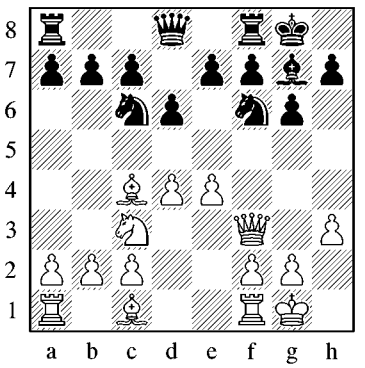
C2) 6.0–0 ♗g4

White is slightly better developed than in the previous line, but the c4-bishop is exposed, as we will see.

7.♗e3

The major alternative is:

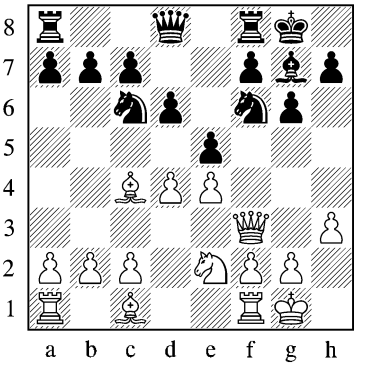
7.h3 ♗xf3 8.♕xf3 ♘c6



9.♘e2

9.♖d1 allows Black to simplify with 9...e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♕e2 ♘xc4 12.♕xc4 ♖e8, with comfortable play in Lizak – D. Popovic, Budapest 2017. White will experience some problems with the e4-pawn and will have to rearrange his rooks on the d- and e-files.

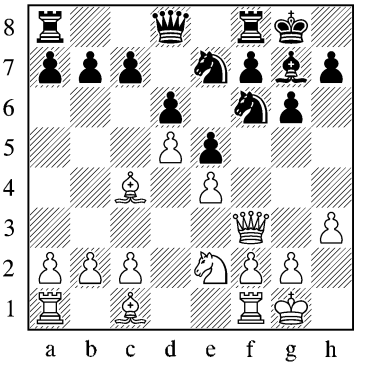
9...e5



10.d5

White's imperfect coordination leaves his centre hanging after: 10.c3 exd4 11.cxd4 ♕e7 12.♗d3 ♖fe8 13.♗g5 The only way to avoid losing a pawn. 13...h6 14.♗xf6 ♕xf6 15.♕xf6 ♗xf6 16.♖ac1 Black had comfortable play after 16...♖e7 in Kuebler – Graf, Germany 2017, but the simplest way to obvious equality is 16...♘b4N 17.♗b1 c5=, based on the fact that the b2-pawn is hanging.

10...♘e7



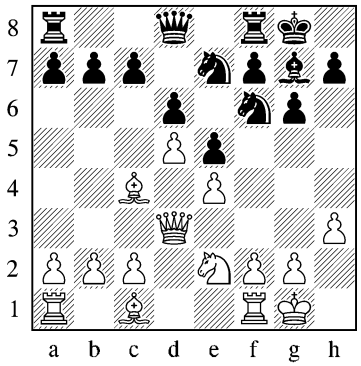
11.♕d3

Trying to regain coordination.

The aggressive 11.g4 weakens the dark squares. In Mangini – Cuellar Gacharna, Mar del Plata 1957, Black could have taken advantage of this with 11...♘d7N 12.♘g3 (preventing ...f5) 12...♘c8 13.♔g2 ♘cb6

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14.♗e2 ♕h4= followed by ...♗h6. Black has stabilized both wings, as his knights slow down the standard queenside pawn attack considerably.

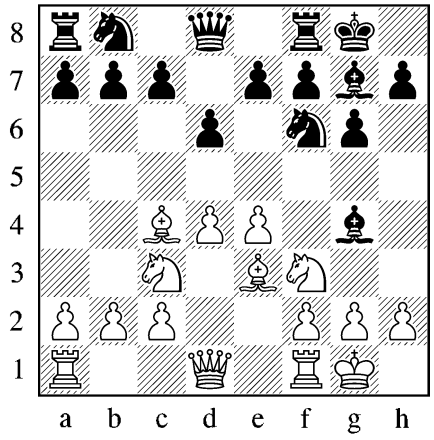


11...♘d7N

11...c6 activates White's light-squared bishop: 12.dxc6 bxc6 13.♗b3 d5 14.♘c3 White had the slightly more pleasant play due to his pressure on d5 in Kharitonov – Gagunashvili, Oropesa del Mar 1999.

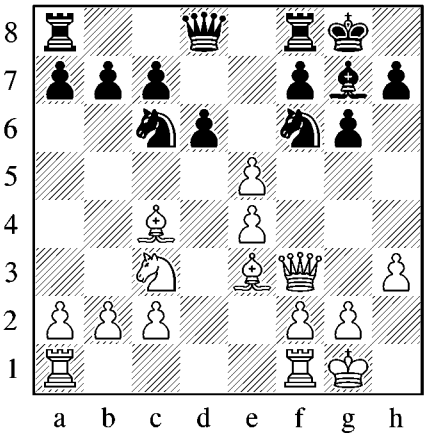
12.♗e3 f5 13.f3 f4 14.♗f2 g5 15.♕b3 ♕c8

White's queenside attack has not even started, while Black's kingside initiative will soon take on threatening contours. With the pawn on h2 instead of h3, the absence of the light-squared bishops would have left Black short of attacking ideas; but as it is, the kingside weaknesses offer him comfortable targets.



7...♘c6 8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♕xf3 e5 10.dxe5

10.d5 ♘d4 11.♕d1 c6 is comfortable for Black.



10...♘xe5!

Deviating from the normal course, as after 10...dxe5 11.♖ad1 White retained the initiative in Botta – Habibi, Samnaun 2008.

11.♕e2 ♘xe4!?

More or less forcing a draw.

Black can also play in slow mode by contenting himself with exchanging the active bishop: 11...♘xc4 12.♕xc4 ♖e8 13.♖ad1 a6 14.a4 ♖e6 15.f3 c6 16.♕b3 ♕c7 17.♕b6 ♕e7 Black had counterplay in the centre in Vallejo Pons – Gashimov, Beijing (rapid) 2011.

12.♘xe4 ♘xc4 13.♕xc4

13.♗g5 does not change much: 13...f6 14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.♕xc4† d5 16.♘xf6† ♖xf6 17.♕d4 ♕d6=

13...d5 14.♕b4 dxe4 15.♕xe4

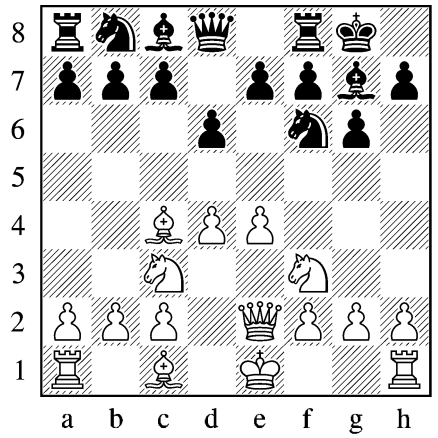
15.♕xb7 ♕b8 16.♕xe4 ♕xb2= is also fully equal.

15...b6 16.♖ad1 ♕e8 17.♕xe8 ♖fxe8 18.b3=

With a symmetrical structure and complete equality in Bykova – Gaprindashvili, Moscow (1) 1962.

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C3) 6.♕e2



The most aggressive move, preparing e4-e5.

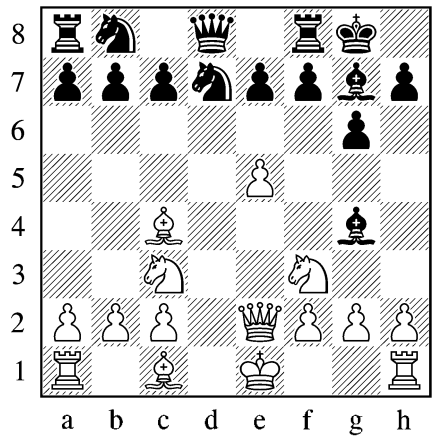
6...♗g4 7.e5

There is nothing better, as otherwise an exchange on f3 would involve White losing a whole tempo.

7...dxe5

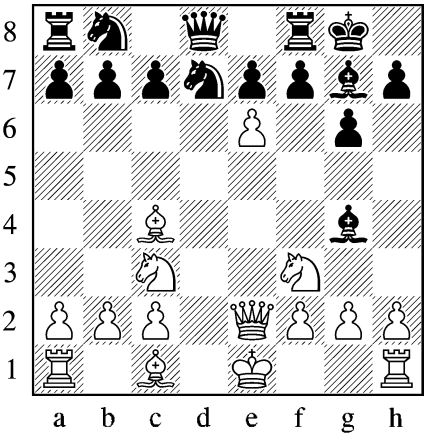
It is important to remove White's control over the e5-square, as after 7...♘fd7 8.e6 White has some initiative.

8.dxe5 ♘fd7



9.e6

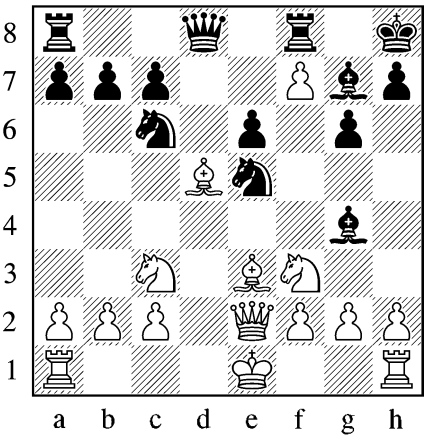
Delaying this break only plays into Black's hands, as after 9.♗f4 ♘c6 10.e6 ♘d4 the knight emerges into play forcefully while the bishop is exposed on f4: 11.exf7† ♔h8 12.♕d1 ♘b6 13.♗e2 ♖xf7 14.♘xd4 Otherwise White will get doubled pawns on f2 and f3. 14...♖xf4∓ Black is better developed and the g7-bishop is powerful, more than compensating for the slight structural defect.



9...♘e5!

This resource would not be available without the previous exchange on e5. The c4-bishop is under attack and White also faces problems on f3.

10.exf7† ♔h8 11.♗d5 ♘bc6 12.♗e3 e6



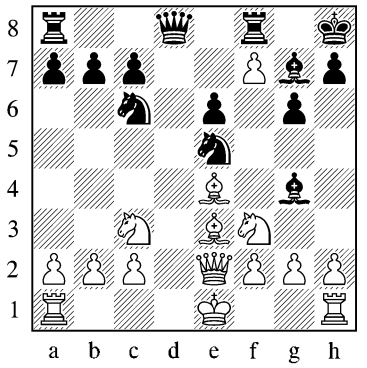
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13.h3

13.♗xc6 bxc6 weakens White's defence of the f3-square: 14.h3 ♘xf3† 15.gxf3 ♗h5 16.♘e4 ♖xf7∓ The f3-pawn was weak and White had problems finding a safe place for her king in B. Jaracz – M. Gurevich, Forni di Sopra 2011.

13.♗e4

This was tried in Roth – Steinbacher, Bavaria 2005.

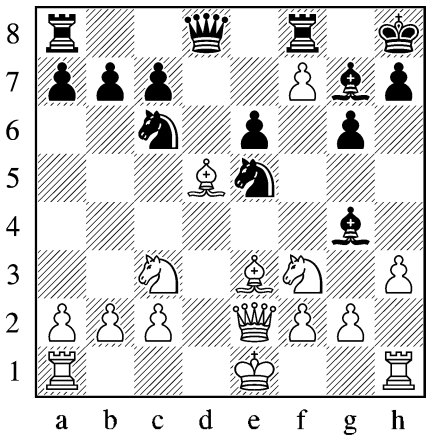


13...♗xf3!?N

13...♘xf3†!?N 14.♗xf3 ♗xc3† 15.bxc3 ♕f6 is also good, as the threat to c3 means White cannot avoid being saddled with doubled pawns on the kingside too.

14.♗xf3 ♘d4 15.♗xd4 ♕xd4 16.0–0 ♕b6

Black's pressure on the dark squares compensates for the slightly weakened kingside.



13...♗xf3

Black can also play according to the other pattern mentioned above: 13...♘xf3†N 14.♗xf3 ♗xc3† 15.bxc3 ♕f6=

14.♗xf3 ♘d4 15.♗xd4 ♕xd4 16.0–0

In Franzen – Lechtynsky, Sumperk 1984, Black should have defended his b7-pawn with:

16...♕b6N=

The evaluation is similar to the line above, with Black's dark-square pressure providing compensation for his slight structural weakness.

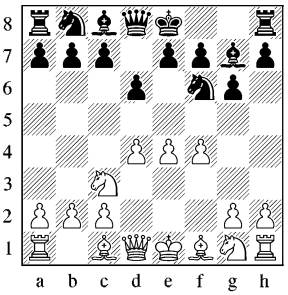
Conclusion

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, some of White's 5th move alternatives may transpose elsewhere in the book; for example, 5.♗e3 c6 and 5.♗f4 c6 are covered in Chapters 8 and 13 respectively. The remaining lines which are covered in this chapter do not pose Black any problems. A feature of the chapter is that I have recommended an early ...♗g4 in several of the lines, and examining the positions arising after this move is certainly useful for a wider understanding of the opening.

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Chapter 5

Austrian Attack



5th & 6th Move Alternatives

Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4

4...♗g7

A) 5.e5 **111**

B) 5.a3 0–0 6.♘f3 c5!? 7.dxc5 ♕a5 8.b4 ♕c7 **115**

B1) 9.e5 **116**

B2) 9.♗d2 **119**

C) 5.♗d3 ♘c6 **122**

C1) 6.e5 **122**

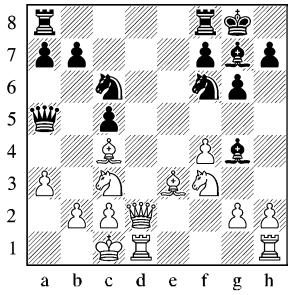
C2) 6.♘f3 **125**

D) 5.♘f3 c5 **126**

D1) 6.d5 **127**

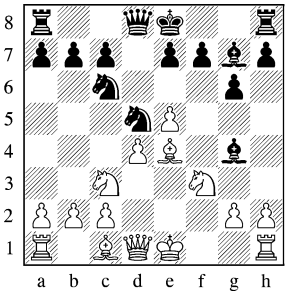
D2) 6.♗e2 **130**

A) note to 11.♔b1



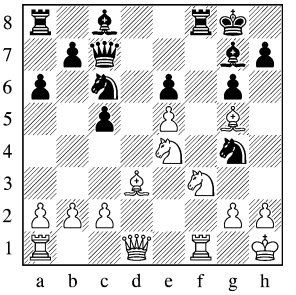
14...b5!N

C1) after 9.♗e4



9...♘xc3!N

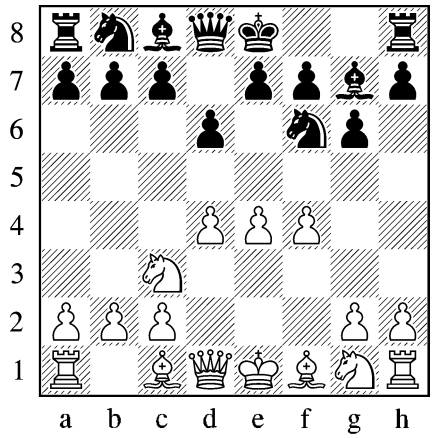
D1) after 14.♘e4



14...♗d7!N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♗g7



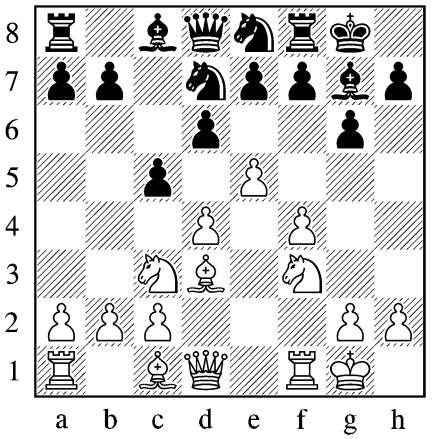
From the first moment I became interested in the Pirc Defence, I have always thought that the Austrian Attack is the most challenging system. White builds up a massive pawn centre, creating the positional threat of e4-e5, which in many cases leaves Black with a cramped position and offers White chances for a direct attack against the king.

Black's thematic break in the centre with ...e7-e5 is more problematic than in other systems, so he frequently resorts to ...c7-c5. After the centre stabilizes with d4-d5, White can consider the consistent attack based on ♕e1-h4, f4-f5, ♗h6 and ♘g5.

The only drawback of this system is that it slightly delays White's development, allowing Black to fight against the centre by dynamic means. White received a serious warning about the dangers awaiting him if he treats the centre superficially in one of the first recorded games with the Pirc Defence:

5.♘f3 0–0 6.♗d3 ♘bd7 7.e5 ♘e8 8.0–0 c5

White has not sustained his initial aggression with h2-h4, or e5-e6 followed by h2-h4, and Black has managed to undermine the centre very effectively. The next two moves are obvious concessions, giving up the shaky centre without a fight and activating the black knights.



9.exd6 ♘xd6 10.dxc5 ♘xc5

With great play for Black in Weiss – Paulsen, Nuremberg 1883.

Over the years I have systematically refrained from embarking on theoretical discussions in what is objectively the main line, 5...c5. My wish to avoid forced lines was backed up by my excellent results in the lines 5...0–0 6.♗d3 ♘a6 followed by ...c5, and 6.♗e3 b6, but over time I became aware that refraining from 5...c5 is equivalent to giving up hope of taking advantage of White's delayed development.

When writing this book I finally took the bull by its horns and made the early central break our repertoire line.

Returning to the position after 4...♗g7, White has a choice between the comparatively rare **A) 5.e5**, **B) 5.a3** and **C) 5.♗d3**, and the absolute main line **D) 5.♘f3**, which is introduced towards the end of this chapter before being examined further in the next two chapters.

Now and at later branching points I have covered the minor and unpopular lines in lesser detail, reserving space, time and energy for the critical variations.

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A) 5.e5

Due to White's completely undeveloped kingside, this is premature. After the insertion of 5.♘f3 0–0 the early central break is far more consistent, for two main reasons – ♘f3 is useful in offering White attacking chances after h2-h4, and the black king may become a target. But under the current circumstances Black has little to fear.

5...♘fd7

The most flexible answer, preparing to undermine the centre with ...c5.

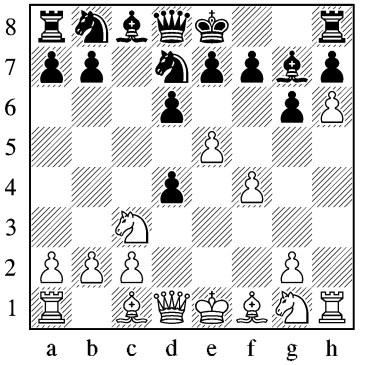
6.♘f3

White does not achieve anything positive with:

6.h4 c5 7.h5 cxd4 8.h6

Hoping to force ...♗f8.

8.♕xd4 loses a pawn without any compensation: 8...dxe5 9.♕f2 ♘c6 10.hxg6 hxg6 11.♖xh8† ♗xh8∓ Black had an extra pawn and normal development in Tredup – Oetzel, Krumpa 1972.



8...♗xe5!

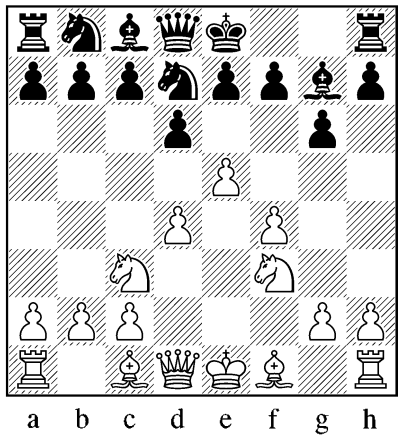
The best solution to the global tension. Black eliminates an important pawn, avoiding the opening of the h-file by hxg7 at the same time.

9.fxe5 dxc5 10.exd6

In Napoli – V. Moskalenko, Barcelona 2012, Black played 10...♕a5, retaining an advantage, but I would opt for the more flexible developing move:

10...♘c6N∓

10...0–0N∓ is also strong. With all his pieces on the first rank, White has no chances to exploit the weakness of the g7-square, so Black can safely enjoy his material advantage.



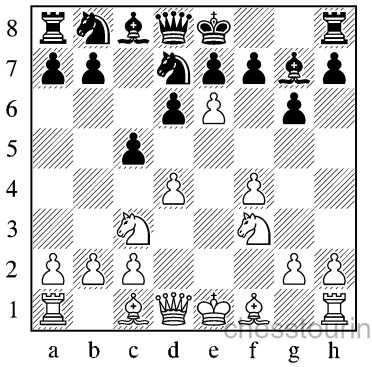
6...c5

Attacking the enemy pawn chain at its base, as recommended by Nimzowitsch.

7.exd6

White tries to stabilize the position and prove that the knight's retreat was a mere loss of time, since under the changed circumstances it will have to return to f6. But after the e5-pawn vanishes, the weakness of the e4-square becomes a telling factor. White has two main alternatives: a) 7.e6 and b) 7.dxc5.

a) 7.e6



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This gives up the vulnerable pawn to weaken Black's structure in the king's neighbourhood, but at the same time it clears the diagonal for the g7-bishop.

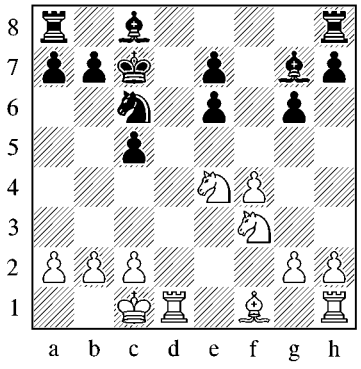
7...fxe6 8.♗e3

A new try by a top-level grandmaster to bring some fresh life to the position.

The old line went 8.♘g5 ♘f6 9.dxc5 ♘c6, with comfortable development. Black's more numerous pawn islands are compensated for by White's slight delay in development and the weaknesses left behind by his advancing pawns. A classical game between two Soviet grandmasters continued: 10.♗c4 Forcing Black to release the tension and weaken the e5-square. 10...d5 11.♗b5 d4 12.♗xc6† bxc6 13.♘e2 ♕a5† 14.♕d2 ♕xc5 15.♘xd4 ♕d5= Black's structure looks even more shattered than before, but the queen's activity, the bishop pair and the possibility of obtaining activity in the centre with either ...e5 or ...c5 offered Black entirely adequate play in Vasiukov – Tseshkovsky, Leningrad 1974.

8...♘c6 9.dxc5 ♘xc5 10.♗xc5 dxc5 11.♕xd8† ♔xd8 12.0–0–0† ♔c7 13.♘e4

13.♘b5† is harmless due to 13...♔b8, planning ...a6 and ...b5, when White does not have the resources to trouble the enemy king.



In Giri – Ivanchuk, Leon 2013, Black could have safely retained his extra pawn with:

13...b6N 14.♗c4 ♖f8 15.g3 e5∓

b) 7.dxc5

This is best met with the asymmetric:

7...dxe5

Fighting against White's main trump, his space advantage in the centre.

8.fxe5

White's hopes of depriving Black of the right to castle with 8.♘xe5 ♘xe5 9.♕xd8† are illusory due to 8...0–0!∓, as played in a few games. Black will retrieve the c5-pawn soon, most likely with ...♕a5, with free development and active play.

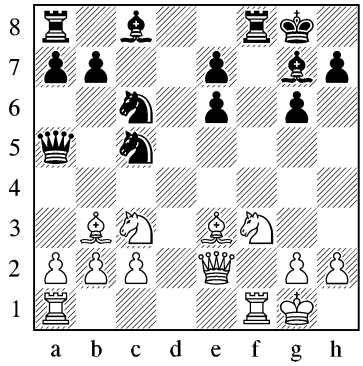
8...0–0 9.e6

The pawn was doomed anyway, so White uses it to provoke some positional damage.

9...fxe6 10.♗c4 ♘xc5 11.♕e2 ♘c6 12.♗e3 ♕b6 13.♗b3

Shielding the b2-pawn and threatening ♘a4.

13...♕a5 14.0–0



14...♘xb3

14...b6N, preparing ...♗a6, is a worthwhile alternative. After 15.♘b5 ♗xb2 followed by ...♗g7, White has compensation for the pawns but no real threats.

15.axb3 ♕h5!N

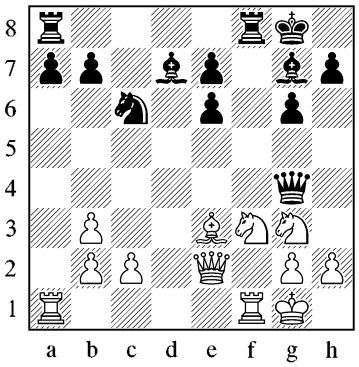
In the absence of White's king's bishop, the queen belongs on the light squares. On h5 it is not only safe, but also restricts White's attacking possibilities. The passive 15...♕c7, played in Bronstein – Tringov, Reykjavik 1974, could have caused Black some trouble in finding a safe square for the queen after 16.♘b5N.

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16.♘e4

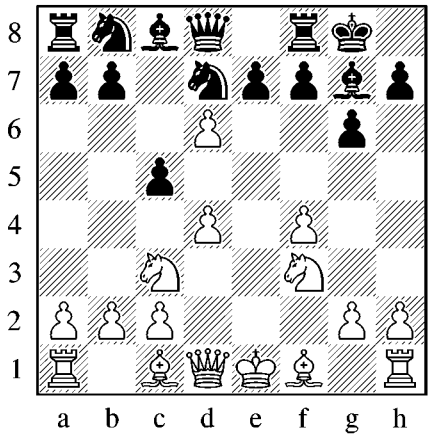
The only way to harass Her Majesty.

16...♗d7 17.♘g3 ♕g4=



Once again, White's compensation for the pawn due to his better structure is something that Black can perfectly well live with. One important aspect is that 18.♖a4 fails to bother the queen, since after 18...♘b4 there is no time for c2-c3 as the rook is hanging. And if 19.♖xa7 ♖xa7 20.♗xa7 ♘d5∓ Black has a lot of activity.

7...0–0



8.♗e3

White does better to develop, as pawn-grabbing offers Black the initiative:

8.dxe7? ♕xe7† 9.♗e2 cxd4∓

Black is better developed and his d-pawn ensures him a space advantage. Eliminating it turns a bad position into a worse one by opening the d-file for the enemy rook:

10.♘xd4? ♘b6 11.♘cb5 ♖d8 12.c3 a6 13.♘a3 ♘c6 14.♘ac2 ♗f5 15.♔f1

15.0–0 ♗xc2 16.♕xc2 ♗xd4† wins the bishop on e2.

15...♗xc2 16.♕xc2 ♘xd4 17.cxd4 ♖ac8–+

Black had a decisive initiative along the open files in Rakic – Petronic, Cetinje 1993.

8...exd6

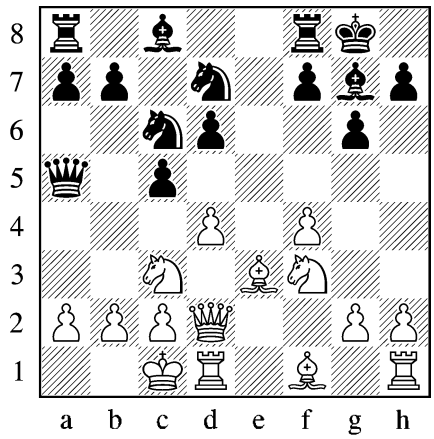
Returning the game to a normal course of development.

9.♕d2 ♘c6 10.0–0–0

This is not only the fastest way of getting the king away from the centre, but also the relatively best way of defending b2. The plan of castling short is slow, allowing Black to obtain a strong initiative with ...♕b6 followed by ...♖e8 and ...♘f6.

10...♕a5

Not only putting pressure on the a2-pawn, but also defending the c5-pawn in order to allow ...♘f6.



11.♔b1

11.a3

This does not create problems either.

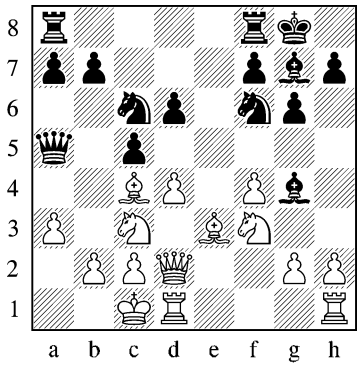
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11...♘f6 12.♗c4

Or if 12.♘b5 ♕xd2† 13.♖xd2 ♘e4N 14.♖d1 ♗f5 with comfortable play.

12...♗g4

Increasing the pressure on the d4-pawn and more or less forcing White to open the d-file.



13.dxc5

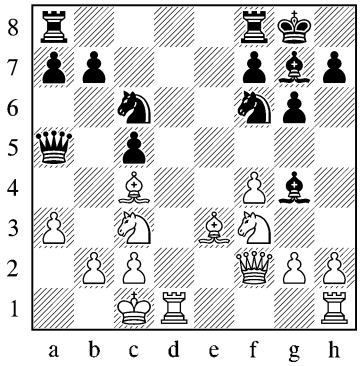
13.d5 ♘e7 followed by ...a6 and ...b5 will soon endanger not only the white king, but also the d5-pawn.

13...dxc5

Black has active play and it is already White who needs to be careful, but in Schaefer – Schlemermeyer, Germany 1993, he was not:

14.♕f2

However, Black missed his chance to start a dangerous attack:

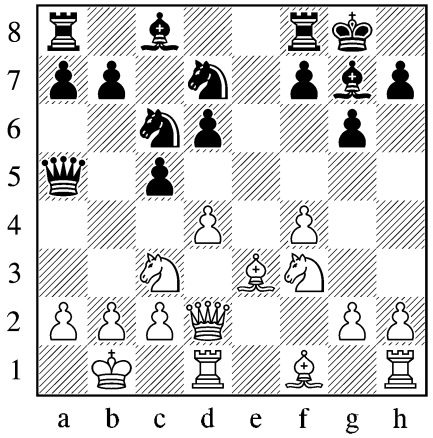


14...b5!N 15.♗xb5

15.♘xb5 ♖ab8 is no better, for if 16.♗d2 Black has 16...♘e4–+ winning material.

15...♘e4 16.♘xe4 ♕xb5 17.c3 ♘a5

Followed by ...♗f5, with nasty threats.



11...♘f6 12.h3

Preventing ...♗g4.

12...♖e8 13.♗c4N

Only in part an active move. White prepares to defend his king with ♗b3.

Under the present circumstances, the familiar manoeuvre 13.♘b5?, as played in A. Toma – Sfarlog, Predeal 2006, should have led to disaster after 13...♘b4!N 14.a3 ♘e4 15.♕e1 a6∓, when many white pieces, including the king, are vulnerable.

13...♗f5 14.♗b3

14.g4 can be met in many ways, but the simplest is 14...cxd4 15.♘xd4 ♘e4 16.♘xe4 ♗xe4 17.♖h2 d5, with a comfortable version of the isolani due to Black's control over the e4-square.

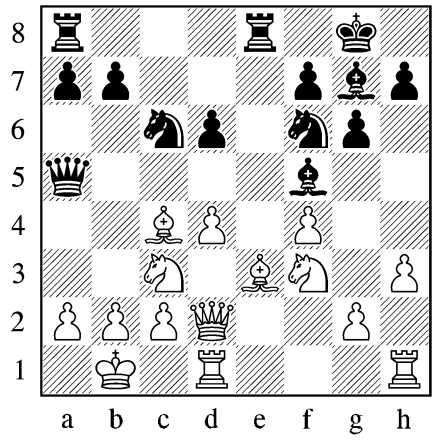
14...c4!

The fastest way of achieving counterplay. At the cost of one pawn Black clears the c-file and gains a tempo for advancing his b-pawn.

14...b5 would lose the c5-pawn with unclear consequences.

15.♗xc4

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15...b5! 16.♗b3

Taking the second pawn clears the b-file and allows Black to gain even more tempos for his attack.

16.♗xb5 ♘b4 17.♗xe8 ♖xe8 18.♖c1 ♘e4 wins the queen.

16.♘xb5 ♘b4 17.♘xd6

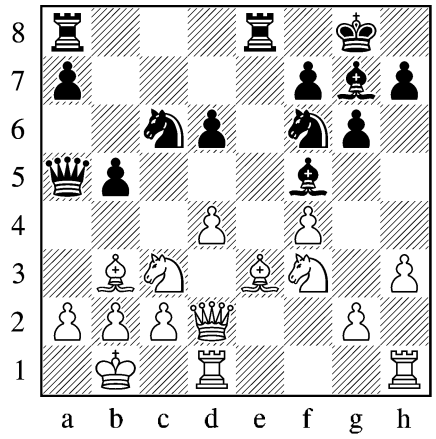
17.♖c1 ♖ac8 leaves White hopelessly hanging.

17...♘e4 18.♗xf7†

The brave bishop will perish soon, but 18.♘xe4 ♗xe4 19.♖c1 ♖ac8 20.♗b3 ♖xc2 offers Black a decisive attack.

18...♔f8 19.♘xe4 ♗xe4 20.♖c1 ♔xf7∓

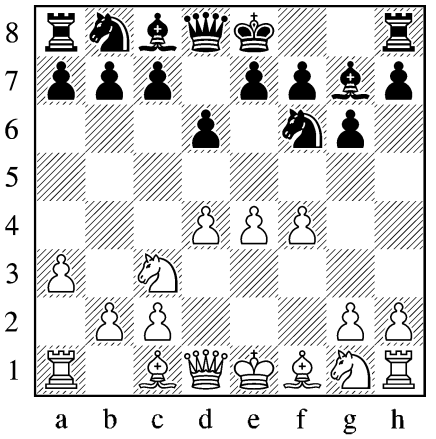
White has four pawns for the piece, but Black's pressure persists.



16...b4 17.♘e2 ♘e4 18.♕c1 ♕b5

Planning ...a5 or ...♘a5, with obvious compensation for the pawn.

B) 5.a3



Knowing that the main drawback of the Austrian Attack is the delay in White's development, this move looks completely illogical. Can White really afford to waste another tempo just like that?

However, things are a bit more complicated. Black's only way to make the position dynamic at an early stage is to break with ...c5, but then a2-a3 proves really useful by supporting b2-b4. This is a good illustration of the not-so-obvious truth that pawn moves can contribute to overall development.

5...0–0 6.♘f3 c5!?

During the long years when I had 6...♘a6 in my repertoire against the main line, I was ready to react with 6...♘a6, when 7.♗d3 c5 8.d5 ♗g4 9.0–0 transposes to my systems. But here, too, a2-a3 is useful, preventing ...♘b4 and thus allowing a quick queen transfer to the kingside starting with ♕e1. Or if 8...♘c7 preparing ...b7-b5, the a-pawn would slow down Black's queenside attack. I believe Black's position is viable anyway, but for this book I

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preferred to analyse a variation that suits the spirit of the main lines more faithfully.

7.dxc5 ♕a5 8.b4

The only way to give meaning to 6.a3. Otherwise White would be practically a tempo down with respect to the normal lines.

8...♕c7

Black pins the c5-pawn but, as we shall see, regaining the pawn will require a certain accuracy. White is underdeveloped, but Black's queen, having already spent two tempos, is likely to be exposed, so play may be expected to become rather sharp.

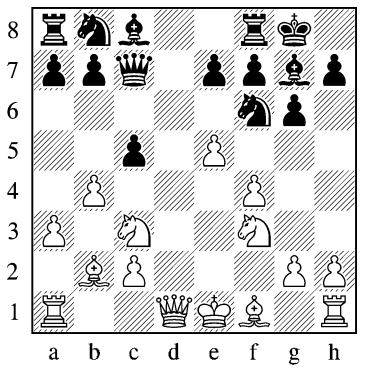
White can choose between **B1) 9.e5** and **B2) 9.♗d2**.

9.♗b2

This simplifies Black's task.

9...dxc5 10.e5

In Veys – Solozhenkin, Vaujany 2013, Black should not have refrained from:



10...♖d8!N 11.exf6!?

The only way to keep some life in the position.

11.♕c1 allows Black to solve his development problems with natural moves: 11...♘d5 12.♘xd5 ♖xd5 13.♕e3 ♗f5=

11...♖xd1† 12.♖xd1 exf6 13.♘d5 ♕d7 14.♘xf6†

Otherwise Black would step away either with his king (...♔h8) or his queen (...♕e8† or ...♕a4), leaving White with just reasonable compensation for the queen.

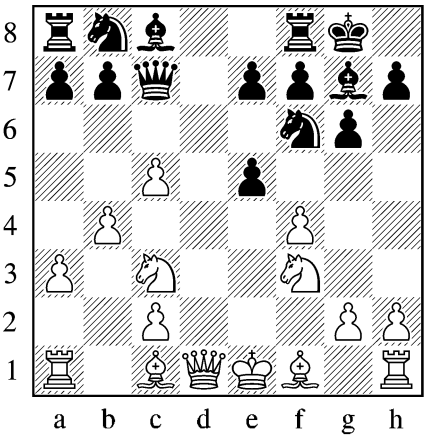
14...♗xf6 15.♖xd7 ♘xd7 16.♗xf6 ♘xf6 17.bxc5 ♗e6=

Black will retrieve the pawn soon, with perfect equality.

B1) 9.e5

This counter-break secures White's queenside space advantage, but gives up the centre.

9...dxe5



10.fxe5

The knight jump to b5 needs investigating at practically every step:

10.♘b5 ♕d7!N

Threatening to deprive White of the right to castle.

10...♕c6?! 11.♘xe5 ♕e4† 12.♕e2 ♕xe2† 13.♗xe2 ♘c6 14.♗b2 ♘d5 15.g3± allowed White to consolidate his extra pawn in Trent – Romanov, Chalkidiki 2003.

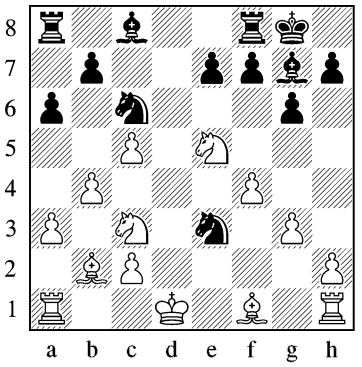
White has a choice now:

a) 11.♘xe5 ♕xd1† 12.♔xd1 ♘c6 13.♗b2

13.♘xc6? bxc6 14.♘d4 ♘g4–+ wins material.

13...♘d5 14.g3 a6 15.♘c3 ♘e3†

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16.♔c1

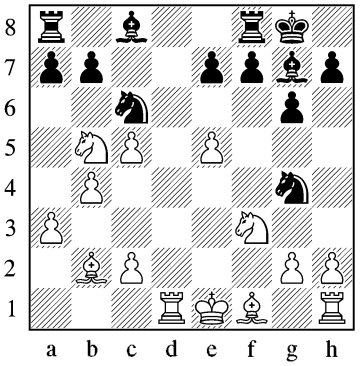
16.♔d2 fights against the intruding knight, but exposes the king, allowing Black to gain a tempo for developing his rook: 16...♘xf1† 17.♖hxf1 ♘xe5 18.fxe5 ♗h3 19.♖fe1 ♖fd8† Black holds the initiative due to White's poor coordination.

16...♗xe5 17.fxe5 ♗f5

Black will retrieve the pawn soon, and his initiative compensates for White's bishop pair.

b) 11.fxe5 ♘g4 12.♗b2 ♕xd1† 13.♖xd1 ♘c6

White has maintained the right to castle, but his e5-pawn is doomed.



14.♘c7

Trying to reactivate the errant knight.

14...♖b8 15.♘d5 ♗e6 16.h3

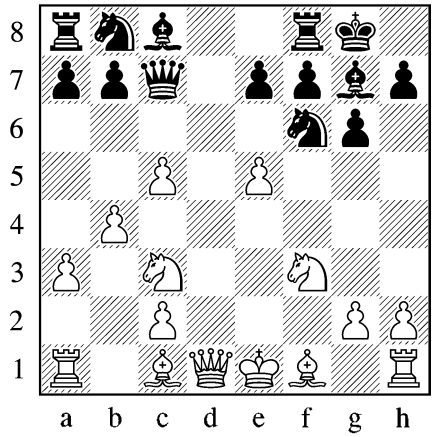
16.♗b5 fails to save the e5-pawn: 16...♗xd5 17.♖xd5 e6 18.♖d7 ♘cxe5=

16...♘cxe5 17.♘xe5 ♘xe5 18.♘xe7† ♔h8

Threatening ...♖fe8 with fatal consequences due to the X-ray pressure along the e-file.

19.♗e2 ♘f3† 20.♗xf3 ♗xb2

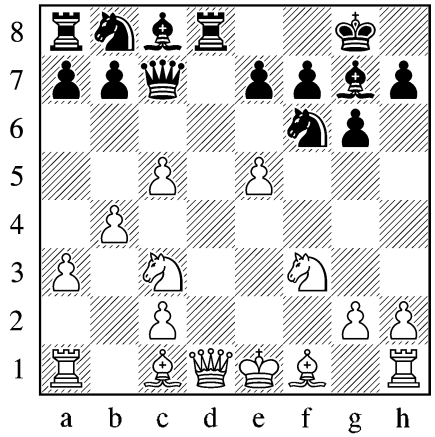
Because of the renewed threat of ...♖fe8, Black regains the pawn with approximate equality in a still complicated position.



10...♖d8

As in a previous line, it is useful to control the d-file before choosing a square for the knight.

10...♘g4 11.♘d5 ♕d7 12.♗f4 ♘c6 13.♗b5± was not entirely satisfactory for Black in Slingerland – De Wit, Haarlem 2011.

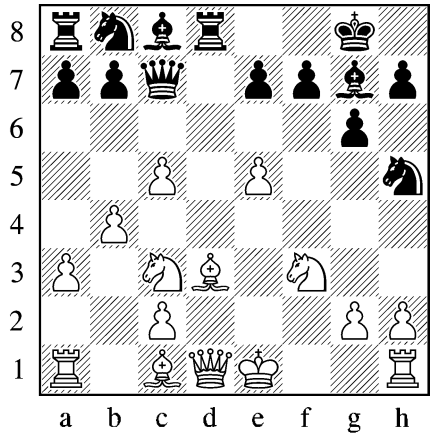


11.♗d3 ♘h5

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The knight will be temporarily passive, but it prevents ♗f4 and the knight would otherwise find itself on an unfavourable path.

For instance: 11...♘g4 12.♘b5 ♕d7 13.♕e2 a6 14.h3 axb5 (14...♘h6 15.♘bd4± leaves Black too passive) 15.hxg4 ♘c6 16.♗b2± Although the position is not entirely clear, Black's compensation for the pawn is not obvious to me.



12.♘b5

Now is the best moment for the knight jump.

12.0–0 ♘c6

This renders ♘b5 ineffective in view of ...♕b8.

13.♗b2 ♗g4

Black still has to be careful: 13...♘xe5? 14.♘b5! ♕b8 15.♗xe5 ♗xe5 16.♘xe5 ♕xe5 17.♕f3 ♗e6 18.♖ae1+– sees White gain an overwhelming initiative.

14.e6

White willingly gives away the doomed pawn in order to reduce Black's activity.

14...♗xe6 15.♘b5 ♕f4 16.♗xg7 ♘xg7=

Black has little to complain about.

12...♕d7

The queen is forced to block the bishop's development, but Black will soon gain a tempo with ...a6, helping him to regain his coordination.

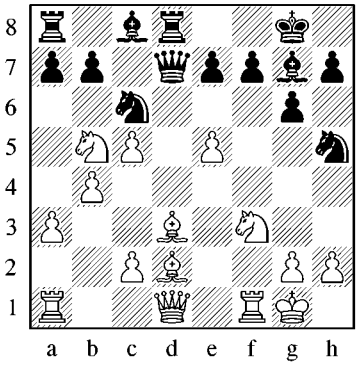
13.0–0 ♘c6 14.♕e1

The best way to defend the pawn, since 14.♗b2 a6 15.♘c3 ♘f4∓ allows the activation of the knight from the edge.

The familiar 14.e6 does not work due to 14...♕xe6, and 15.♘c7 is ineffective since the a1-rook is also hanging.

14.♗d2

This demands some accuracy.

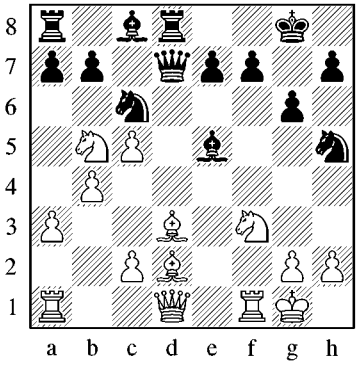


14...♗xe5!

This paradoxical move, giving away the fianchettoed bishop, is the only way to equalize completely. The alternatives are inferior:

14...a6? 15.e6! fxe6 16.♘c3±

14...♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♗xe5 16.♕f3±



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15.♖b1

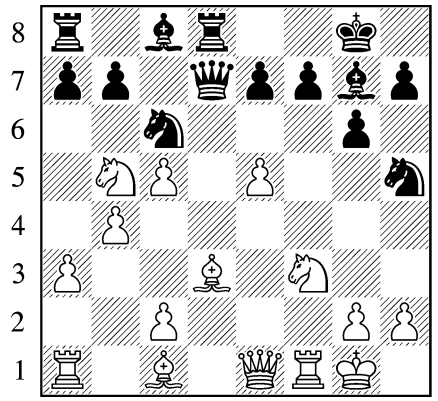
The point is that 15.♘xe5 ♘xe5∓ leaves White's bishops hanging.

15...♗f6 16.♕e1 b6!?=

The best way to continue developing and to neutralize White's space advantage on the queenside.

17.cxb6 axb6

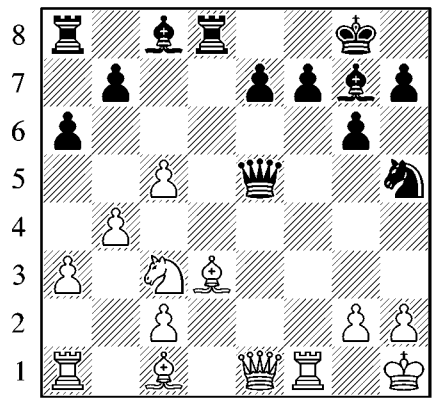
With complex play and mutual chances.



14...a6!

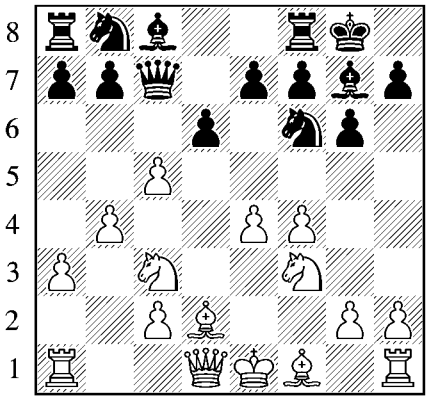
Black needs to make the d4-square available for the queen in order to retrieve the pawn.

15.♘c3 ♘xe5 16.♘xe5 ♕d4† 17.♔h1 ♕xe5=



Chances were even in Genzling – Solodovnichenko, Nancy 2014, though play could turn in either's side favour due to the highly asymmetric structure.

B2) 9.♗d2



This looks less natural than 9.♗b2, mentioned on page 116, but it has the merit of shielding the queen along the d-file.

9...dxc5 10.e5 ♖d8!N

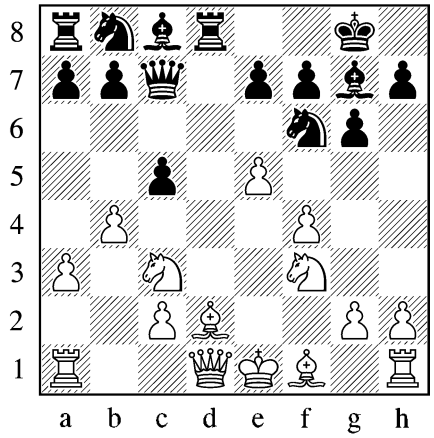
Nevertheless, Black reacts in the same way as after 9.♗b2, even though this already involves a piece sacrifice. This is not the only moment when Black needs to take radical measures.

Normal moves fail to equalize:

10...♘h5 11.♘d5 ♕d7 12.♗e3 ♖d8 13.c4 ♘c6 In Sedina – Gaponenko, Plovdiv 2014, White should have continued her development with 14.♗e2N±, making the h5-knight look miserable.

10...cxb4 is a less auspicious version of the piece sacrifice: 11.♘b5 ♕b6 12.exf6 ♗xf6 13.axb4 ♗xa1 14.♕xa1± Ivanchuk – Gardner, Edmonton 2015.

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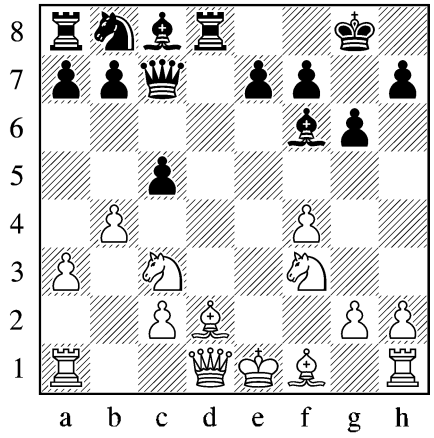
11.exf6

11.♕c1 ♘d5 is comfortable for Black.

Or if 11.b5, reducing the tension, Black's most flexible knight jump is 11...♘g4!? preparing to recycle it with ...♘h6 and to break in the centre with ...f6.

11...♗xf6

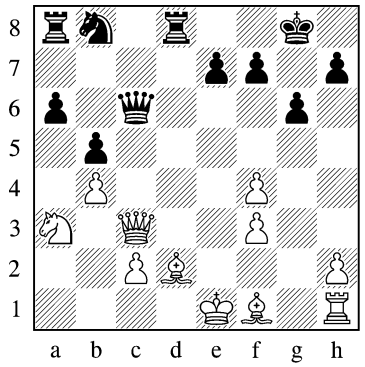
White is a piece up, but finds himself under a double pin, while his king is still in the centre.



12.♘e4

Other moves lead to a similar material balance and approximately equal chances.

12.♕c1 cxb4 13.♘b5 ♕c6 14.axb4 ♗xa1 15.♕xa1 ♗g4 16.♕c3 ♗xf3 17.gxf3 a6 18.♘a3 b5



19.h4

The fastest way to activate the rook.

19...♕xc3 20.♗xc3 ♘c6 21.h5 ♘d4

The material balance is about even and White's bishop pair is compensated for by Black's activity.

22.hxg6 fxg6 23.♔f2 ♖ac8 24.♗a1 ♘xc2 25.♗h3 ♖c6 26.♘xc2 ♖d2† 27.♔g3 ♖dxc2 28.♗d4 ♖c1=

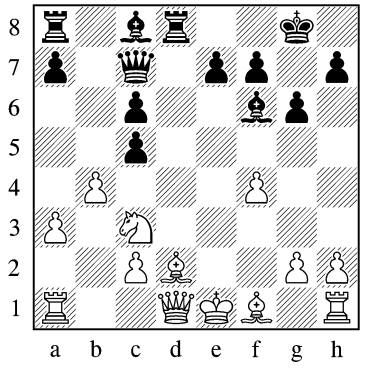
After the rook exchange, White has no way to play for a win.

12.♘e5 ♘c6

Immediately fighting against White's most active piece.

13.♘xc6 bxc6

Avoiding 13...♕xc6 14.♕f3!.



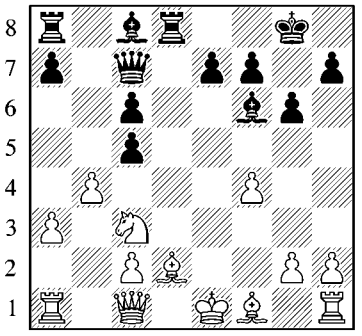
14.♕c1

Trying to keep the material advantage intact. If 14.♘e4 ♗xa1 15.♕xa1 cxb4 16.axb4 ♗f5 17.♘g3, Black can start his attack with:

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17...♖xd2 18.♘xf5 gxf5 19.♔xd2 ♕xf4† 20.♔d1 ♕g4† 21.♗e2 ♖d8† 22.♔e1 ♕xb4† 23.c3 ♕f4 Three pawns and the continuing attack compensate for the missing piece.

14.♕f3 allows a similar tactical operation: 14...cxb4 15.axb4 ♖xd2 16.♔xd2 ♕d6† 17.♔c1 ♗g4 18.♕e3 ♕xb4 19.♖a4 ♕xc3 20.♕xc3 ♗xc3 21.♖c4 ♗a5 22.♖xc6 ♗b6 Black has excellent compensation for the exchange due to better development, the strong dark-squared bishop and the vulnerable white king.



14...cxb4 15.axb4 c5 16.b5 ♗b7 17.♖a3

White has managed to free himself from the queenside pins but now starts to experience similar problems on the other wing.

17...e5 18.f5

Trying to keep the centre closed.

18...♗h4† 19.g3 ♗xh1 20.gxh4 gxf5

With material equality and highly unclear play.

12...♗xa1 13.♕xa1 cxb4 14.♗d3

14.axb4 ♕xc2 causes White some stability problems.

14...b3!

Undermining the newly developed bishop.

15.h4

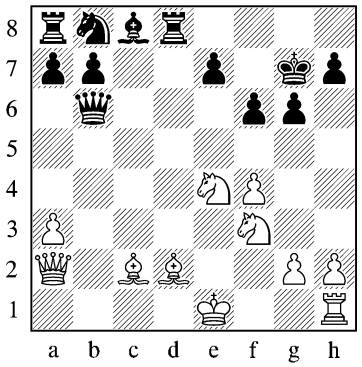
As in a previous line, this is the most effective way to get counterplay.

The main alternative is:

15.♘e5 f6 16.♘f3

Or if 16.♗c4† ♔g7 17.♗xb3 ♗f5!?∓ White's position is hanging.

16...bxc2 17.♕a2† ♔g7 18.♗xc2 ♕b6

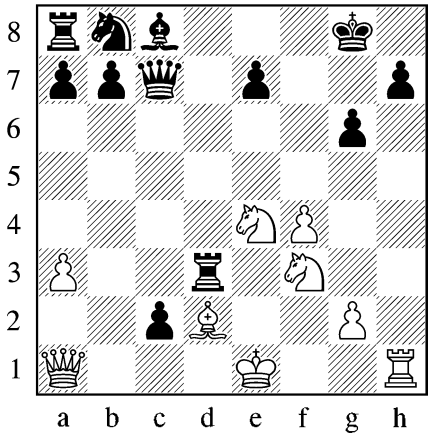


Preventing the king from castling, at least until Black makes progress with his development. A possible continuation is:

19.♘eg5 fxg5 20.♘xg5 ♕f6 21.♘e4 ♕b6

With a draw by repetition.

15...bxc2 16.h5 ♖xd3 17.hxg6 fxg6

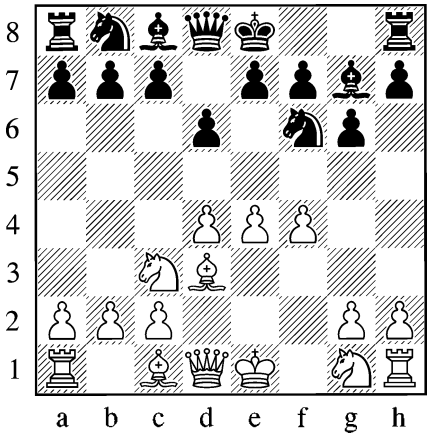


Both sides have progressed a lot in carrying out their plans, but now it is time for White to force a draw, since he is already an exchange down.

18.♕a2† ♔f8 19.♕b2=

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C) 5.♗d3



This slightly unnatural move order, developing the bishop earlier than the knight, has become popular at high levels recently. By overprotecting e4, White inhibits 5...c5, when after 6.dxc5 Black does not have anything better than 6...dxc5, offering White an advantage in the centre.

Black could of course play 5...0–0, but after 6.♘f3 play would transpose to the so-called closed variations, which are not part of our repertoire.

5...♘c6

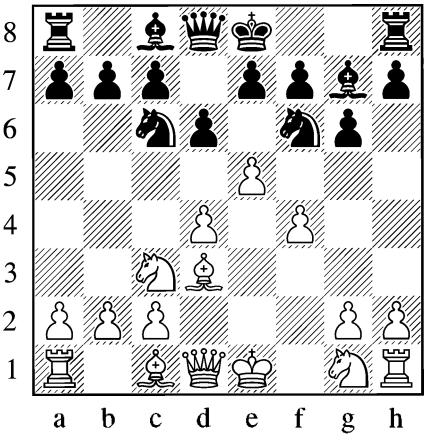
It is natural to start by attacking the undefended central pawn.

The other way of doing it is 5...e5, but recent top-level practice has shown that Black experiences some problems after: 6.dxe5 dxe5 7.♘f3 exf4 (after 7...♘c6 8.fxe5 ♘g4 9.♗g5 ♕d7 10.♕e2 followed by 0–0–0, Black's queen was awfully placed in Xie Jianjun – Tong Yuanming, Beijing 1997) 8.♗xf4 0–0 9.♕d2 ♘c6 10.0–0–0± Several games, including Karjakin – Wang Hao, Beijing 2013, have shown that White has attacking chances.

Now White can play the resolute **C1) 6.e5** or the developing **C2) 6.♘f3**.

6.d5 ♘b4 followed by ...c6 offers Black comfortable play.

C1) 6.e5



To orient ourselves in the present variation, it is useful to compare it to the more popular 5.♘f3 0–0 6.♗d3 ♘c6 7.e5 line. For the early fight in the centre, ♘g1-f3 is more useful than ...0–0, which makes the line examined in this section easier to handle with Black than the aforementioned set-up. In some cases Black may consider castling long.

6...dxe5 7.fxe5

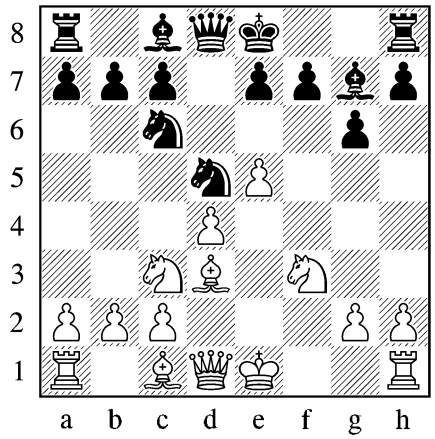
The most consistent move, keeping White's centre mobile.

After 7.dxe5 ♘d5 8.♘xd5 ♕xd5 9.♘f3 ♗g4 10.0–0 ♘b4 Black has easy play.

7...♘d5 8.♘f3

After 8.♘xd5 ♕xd5 White must play 9.♘f3 before c2-c3, since the g2-pawn is hanging. Now the simplest option for our purposes is 9...♗g4, which immediately transposes to the note to White's 9th move below. However, White's move order gives Black the additional option of 9...♘b4!? 10.c4 ♕c6, when he has enough counterplay on the light squares to compensate for White's strong centre.

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8...♗g4

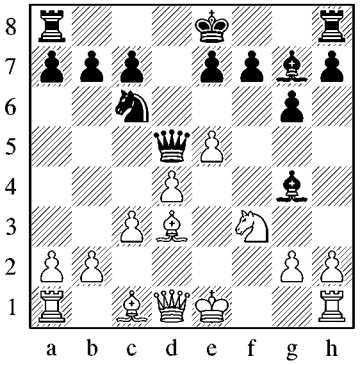
Black should not lower the rhythm of his attack against d4.

9.♗e4

A sensible alternative is:

9.♘xd5 ♕xd5 10.c3

Now Black can utilize the fact that he has not yet castled with:



10...0–0–0!N

Threatening ...♘xe5.

I was unable to find full equality after 10...f6, as was played in Ferraroni – Krause, corr. 1989.

It is useful to know that 10...0–0?! transposes to a well-known line of the 5.♘f3 0–0 6.♗d3 ♘c6 7.e5 variation, where White has amassed a huge score after 11.♕e2.

11.♕e2 ♗xf3

Now 11...♘xe5? loses material after 12.♗e4.

12.gxf3

12.♕xf3? loses a pawn to 12...♕xf3 13.gxf3 ♘xe5∓.

12...♘xd4!

Black has to make something happen before White completes his development.

13.cxd4 ♕xd4 14.♗c4 ♗xe5

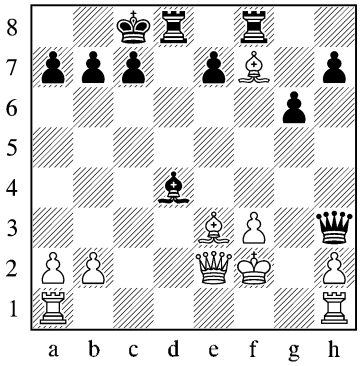
Black has three pawns for a bishop and an active position, while White is underdeveloped and his king is vulnerable. If we take into account that the potential endgame after all pieces are exchanged (with the exception of the pawns and the light-squared bishop) will be a draw, we can infer that Black's position is sound.

15.♗xf7!?

This is the most principled move, but of course risky.

15.♔f1 e6 16.♔g2 ♗f4 17.♗b3 ♗xc1 18.♖axc1 ♕d2 leads to a balanced endgame.

15...♕h4† 16.♔f1 ♕h3† 17.♔f2 ♗d4† 18.♗e3 ♖hf8



19.♗xd4

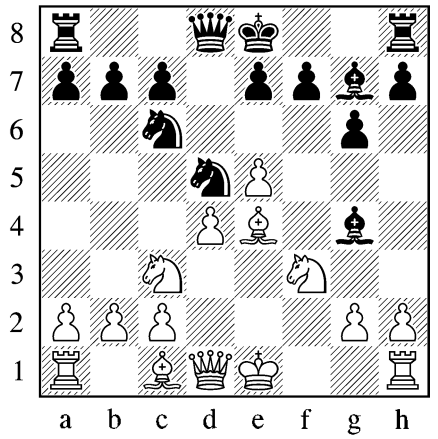
This is the only possible move order, since 19.♗b3? ♗xe3† 20.♕xe3 ♖d2†! 21.♔e1 (21.♕xd2? ♕xf3† 22.♔g1 ♕g4† 23.♕g2 ♕d4† mates on the next move) 21...♕g2 offers Black a strong attack.

19...♖xf7=

With such active major pieces, Black will not have problems forcing a draw by perpetual.

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Let us now return to 9.♗e4, which was played in Hauge – K. Lie, Fagernes 2016.



9...♘xc3!N 10.bxc3 ♘a5

The resulting structure is interesting, and bears a certain resemblance to the Grünfeld Defence. Despite White's massive centre, Black's chances, based on the breaks ...f6 and ...c5, are not worse.

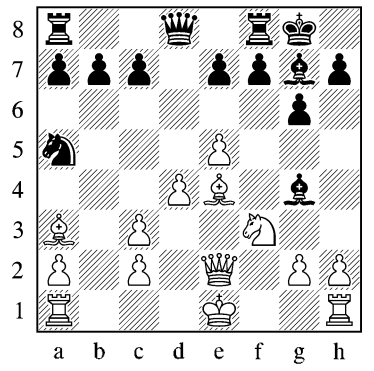
11.0–0

11.♗a3

This exposes the bishop too soon.

11...0–0 12.♕e2

In the event of 12.0–0 ♘c4, the threat of ...♘e3 forces the bishop to return.



12...c5!

This well-timed pawn sacrifice leaves White's queenside hanging.

13.♗xc5 ♖c8

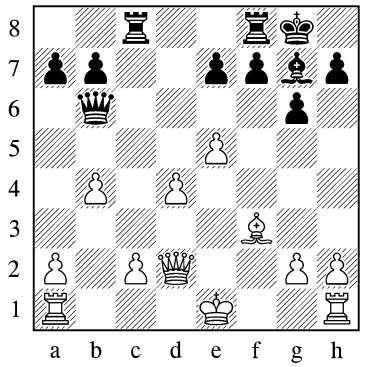
Threatening ...♗xe5.

14.♗b4 ♘c6 15.♕d2

Defending d4, for if 15.♗a3? ♕a5–+.

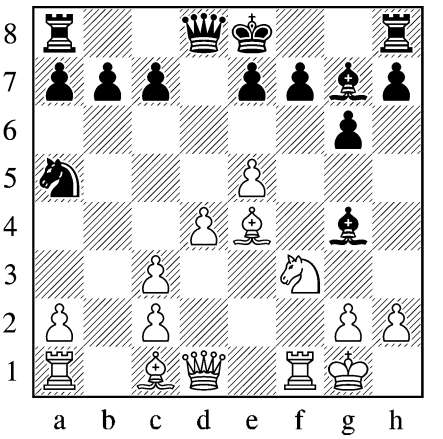
15...♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♘xb4 17.cxb4 ♕b6

Due to his lagging development, White cannot keep his extra pawn.



18.c3 ♖fd8

White does best to give up any hopes for an advantage with 19.0–0 ♗xe5, since 19.♕b2 ♕c7 20.♖c1 ♖xd4∓ makes things worse.



11...0–0 12.h3

Aiming for a central expansion.

The attacking plan based on 12.♕e1 runs into 12...f5, with adequate counterplay.

12...♗e6 13.d5 ♗c8 14.♕d4

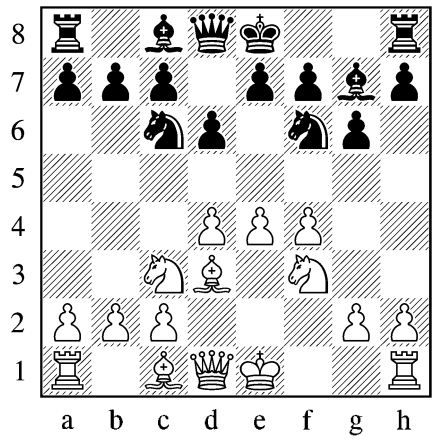
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White's central position looks impressive but, as so often in the Grünfeld Defence, his pawns are vulnerable.

14...b6 15.c4 c5 16.♕c3 f5 17.♗d3 e6

Black has excellent counterplay.

C2) 6.♘f3



So far this has been White's choice at grandmaster level.

6...♗g4

Once again, Black does well to delay castling so as to speed up the counterattack against White's centre.

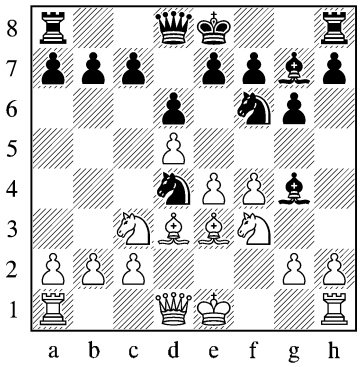
7.e5

White can no longer maintain his structural integrity.

7.♗e3 allows the thematic central break under favourable circumstances, since Black has achieved maximum pressure on d4: 7...e5 8.fxe5 dxe5 9.d5 ♘d4 10.♗e2 ♗xf3 11.♗xf3 0–0 12.♕d3 c6 13.dxc6 bxc6 14.0–0 ♕a5 With active play for Black in Karjakin – Stocek, Jurmala 2015.

7.d5 ♘d4 8.♗e3

This gives Black a comfortable choice:

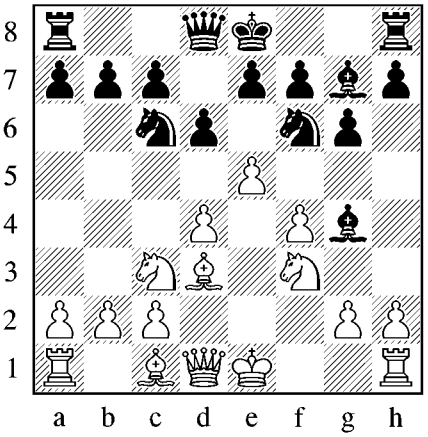


8...♘d7

Alternatively: 8...c5 9.dxc6 ♗xf3 10.gxf3 ♘xc6 11.♕d2 In Huschenbeth – Donchenko, Germany 2016, 11...d5N would have offered Black excellent play against White's weaknesses.

9.0–0 c6 10.♕d2 ♘xf3† 11.gxf3 ♗h3 12.♖fe1 ♘f6 13.dxc6 bxc6

With complex play and approximately equal chances in Rogers – Nijboer, Netherlands 1993.



7...♗xf3!

A well-timed exchange, forcing White to spoil his structure.

8.gxf3

The other recapture cannot be recommended: 8.♕xf3 ♘xd4

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Black is already better, for instance:

9.♕xb7

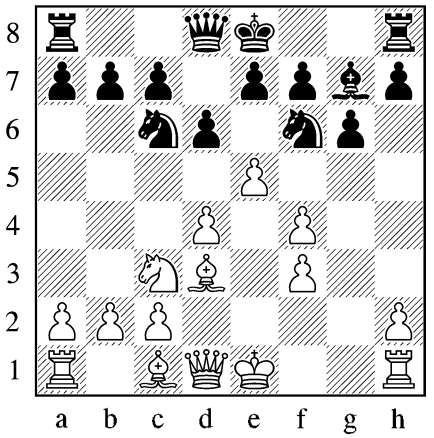
White cannot make use of the apparently hanging knights with 9.♕e3? dxe5 10.fxe5 due to 10...♘g4–+.

9...dxe5 10.fxe5 ♘d7

The e5-pawn is doomed and Black is better developed. White's attempt to fight for the initiative is likely to make things worse:

11.♘d5 0–0 12.♕xc7 ♘xe5 13.♘xe7† ♔h8 14.♕xd8 ♖axd8 15.0–0 ♖d7 16.♗g5 ♘xd3 17.cxd3 f6

Black won material in A. Kiss – Hever, Budapest 1981.



8...♘h5 9.♗e3 e6!

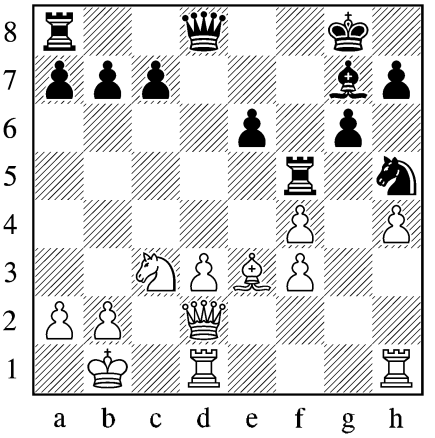
This is the Old Master's way of treating the position, apparently better than the modern version.

After 9...0–0 10.♕d2 White retained some vague chances of consolidating his space advantage in Karjakin – Ding Liren, Heixiazi 2015.

10.h4

Parrying ...♕h4†.

10...0–0 11.♕d2 dxe5 12.dxe5 ♘b4 13.0–0–0 ♘xd3† 14.cxd3 f6 15.exf6 ♖xf6 16.♔b1 ♖f5⇄

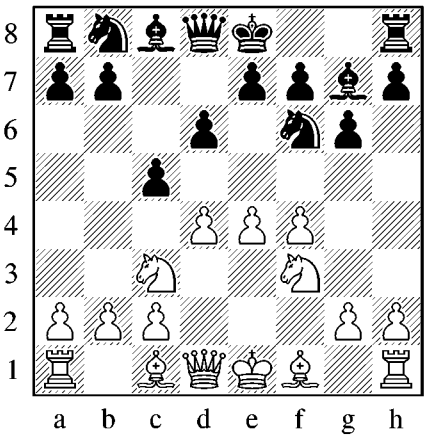


Black had the better structure and comfortable play on the light squares in Fedorowicz – Smyslov, New York 1989.

D) 5.♘f3

This is by far the most popular option, and it is logical that it is the main move, as it continues developing naturally.

5...c5



Against most other systems Black cannot break up the enemy centre so soon, but this is possible (and recommended) here, due to the time spent by White in building up his massive centre.

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In this chapter we look at the unpopular **D1) 6.d5** and **D2) 6.♗e2**.

The classical 6.dxc5 is the subject of the next chapter, and then the topical 6.♗b5† is covered in Chapter 7.

6.e5 ♘fd7 transposes to line A at the start of this chapter.

D1) 6.d5

This version of the Schmid Benoni with the pawn on f4 is not too challenging. Black is not forced to transpose to my old repertoire line with 6...♘a6, but can break in the centre with ...e6, keeping open all the options for the knight depending on White's answer.

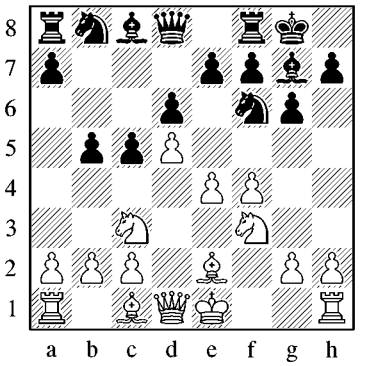
6...0–0 7.♗d3

The most consistent move, consolidating the e4-pawn.

7.♗e2

This keeps the d-file open, anticipating ...e6, but allows the active:

7...b5!

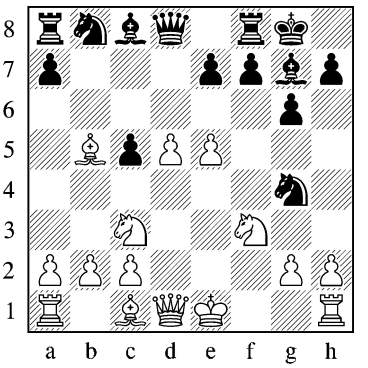


8.e5

8.♗xb5 ♘xe4 9.♘xe4 ♕a5† 10.♘c3 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 ♕xb5∓ leaves White with a chronic weakness on d5.

8...dxe5 9.fxe5 ♘g4 10.♗xb5

10.♗f4 fails to maintain the integrity of the centre after: 10...b4 11.♘e4 ♘d7∓



10...a6!

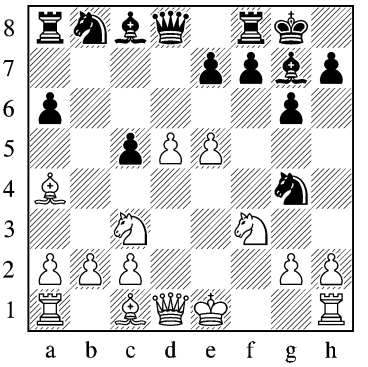
A strong intermediate move, forcing White to define his intentions with respect to the bishop.

10...♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♗xe5 12.♕e2 offered White the initiative in Artigas Bellapart – Gerona Maura, Valencia 1995.

11.♗a4N

A few games have gone 11.♗c4, and now Black's best is 11...♘d7!N 12.e6 ♘de5, with a serious initiative for the pawn. Moves such as ...♕b6 and ...c4 may be expected soon.

11.♗e2 is more passive, depriving White of the possibility ♕e2 and allowing 11...♘xe5 as, for instance, in Van Brummelen – Ootes, Utrecht 2015.



11...♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♗xe5 13.0–0

The point is that 13.♕e2 ♗xc3† 14.bxc3

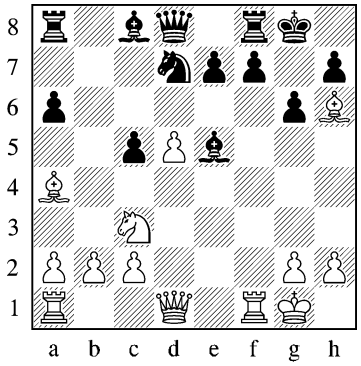
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♕a5 creates a double attack, and even after 15.♕c4 ♘d7∓ the bishop's placement is anything but optimal.

13...♘d7

13...♗d7 and 13...♕a5 are also playable, but the developing text move is the most principled.

14.♗h6



14...♖b8!

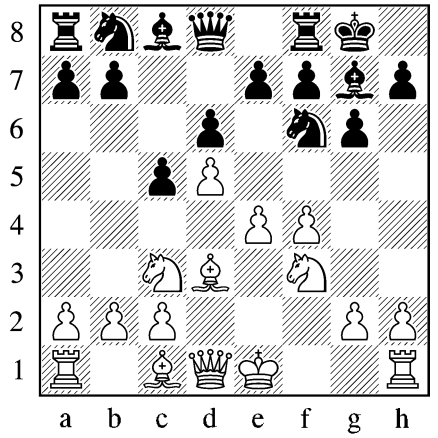
The best way of preventing White from gaining any kingside initiative.

15.♗xf8 ♕xf8 16.♗xd7 ♗xd7 17.♕c1

Parrying both ...♖xb2 and the kingside attack with ...♕h6.

17...♖b4

Followed by ...♕b8 and ...♖h4 with great compensation for the exchange. The bishops are superb and the white king is vulnerable.



7...e6

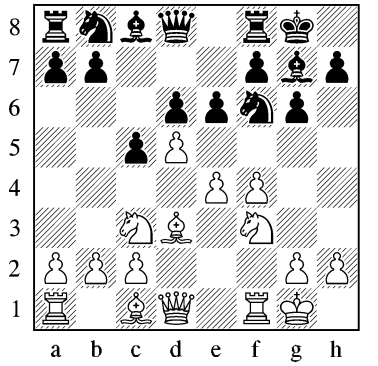
As mentioned above, it is useful to break in the centre before defining the knight's intentions – and before the white pawns become dangerous, of course.

8.dxe6

The only way of keeping some dynamism.

8.0–0

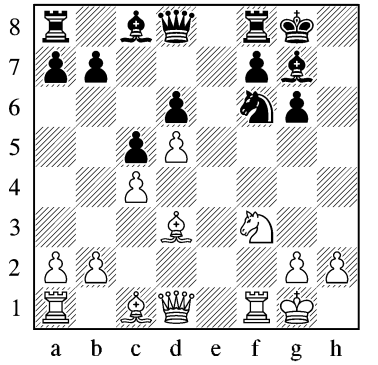
The exchanges on d5 will make the position static, with comfortable play for Black.



8...exd5 9.♘xd5

9.exd5 ♘a6 leads to an improved version of 'my' systems, as Black does not have to fear e4-e5 anymore. 10.f5 ♘b4 and White cannot sustain his attack along the b1-h7 diagonal.

9...♘xd5 10.exd5 ♘d7 11.f5 ♘f6 12.fxg6 hxg6 13.c4



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13...b5!

Black has stabilized the kingside and opens the queenside in his favour.

14.cxb5 ♕b6 15.♗c4 a6 16.bxa6 ♗xa6 17.♗xa6 ♖xa6

With a perfect version of the Benko Gambit, since the white queenside pawns and d-pawn are weak, Zaragatski – Naiditsch, Germany 1997.

8...fxe6

The most principled answer, keeping control of the centre even if it delays the bishop's development.

8...♗xe6 unnecessarily exposes the bishop to f4-f5, with reasonable attacking chances for White.

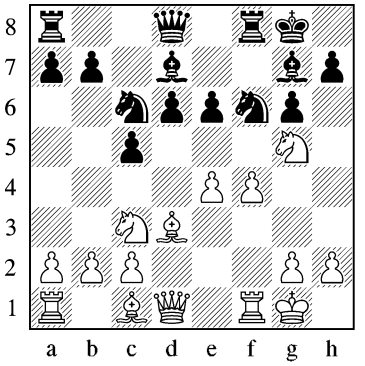
9.0–0 ♘c6 10.♔h1

A few games have featured:

10.♘g5

Black should continue developing and regrouping.

10...♗d7N



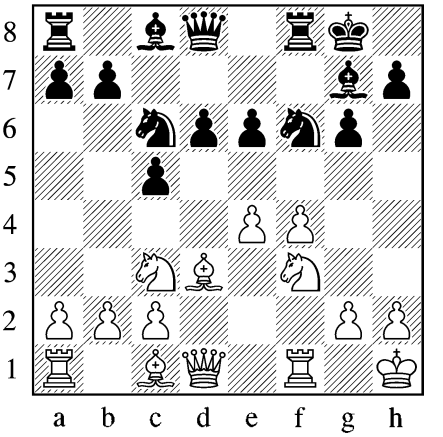
11.♕e1

11.f5 is neutralized by 11...♕e7, soon followed by ...♘e5.

Or if 11.♖e1 Black can try to exploit the rook's departure from the f-file with 11...♘h5 12.g3 ♘d4 13.♗e3 a6 14.a4 ♕e8, followed by ...♗c6 and ...b5.

11...♘b4

After exchanging the important bishop Black does not need to fear a kingside attack any more. On top of this, White must also reckon with the possibility of ...c4.



10...a6

Hoping either to weaken the b4-square or to gain queenside space.

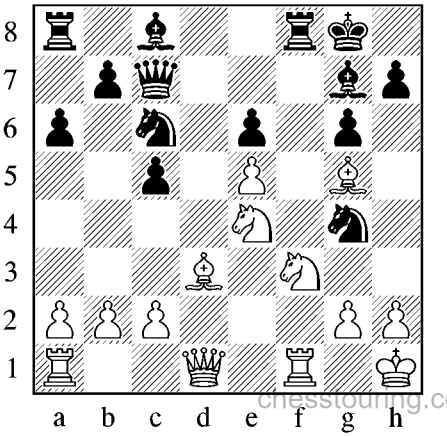
The untested 10...♕e7N followed by ...♗d7 is also entirely possible.

11.e5

The only challenging move, since 11.a4 d5 12.e5 ♘g4 13.h3 ♘h6 followed by ...♘b4 offers Black comfortable play.

11...dxe5 12.fxe5 ♘g4 13.♗g5 ♕c7 14.♘e4

So far we have followed Gligoric – Kottnauer, Hastings 1968.



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14...♗d7!N

As on so many occasions, developing is the best way to deal with early threats. In the game Black immediately captured on e5, but ♖xf8† a couple of moves later offered White attacking chances. By connecting rooks, Black avoids this problem.

15.♘f6†

This is what Kottnauer might have feared.

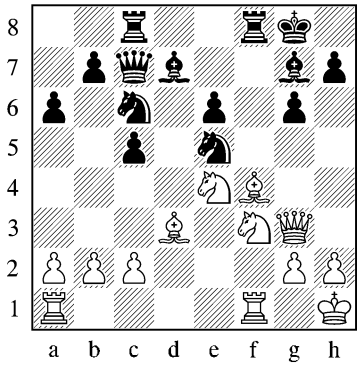
15.♘xc5 ♘cxe5 attacks the c5-knight and threatens ...♘xf3, when h2 would be hanging.

15.♕e1 ♘gxe5 16.♕g3 ♖ac8

By defending the queen, Black unpins the e5-knight and has no worries.

17.♗f4

The only way to apply any pressure.



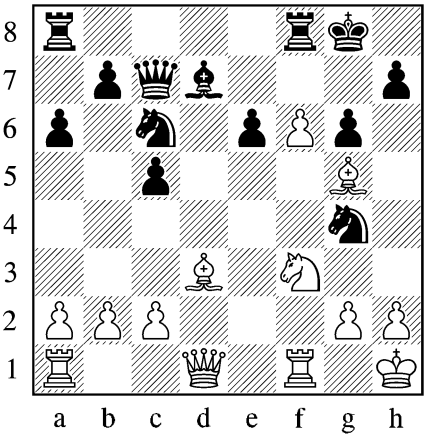
17...♖xf4!

Freeing Black completely of any worries of an attack and yielding him two wonderful bishops.

18.♕xf4 ♘xd3 19.♕xc7 ♖xc7 20.cxd3 ♘b4∓

Black has more than enough compensation for the exchange.

15...♗xf6 16.exf6



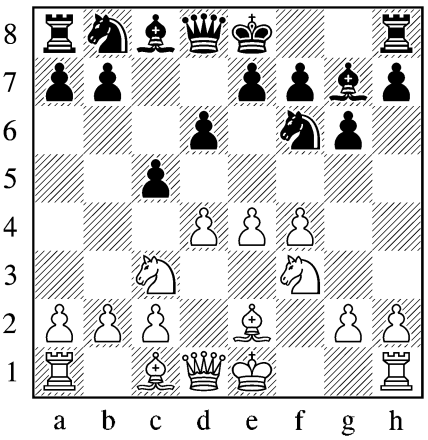
16...♘d4!

Suddenly the h2-square is in danger.

17.♕d2 ♘xf3 18.gxf3 ♘xf6

White's bishop pair offers him some compensation for the pawn, but with his king also vulnerable along the h1-a8 diagonal, he cannot be better at all.

D2) 6.♗e2



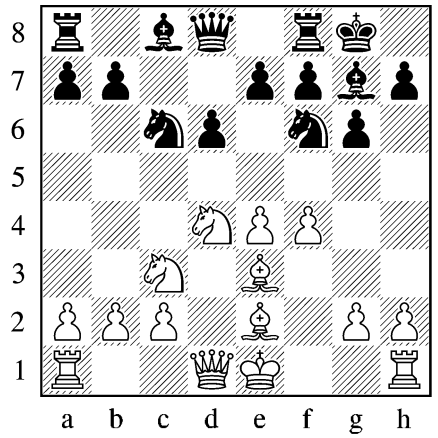
White intends to transpose to the classical Dragon, which is not really a frightening system. However, we do not need to study Dragon theory, since for this set-up f2-f4 is premature, allowing Black to achieve excellent play by setting up pressure on the centre earlier than usual in the main Dragon lines.

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6...cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♘c6 8.♗e3

8.♘b3 avoids the lines indicated below, but after 8...0–0 9.0–0 Black has 9...b5! with great play. The difference is that in the usual lines he has to prepare the advance of the b-pawn with ...a6. After 10.♗xb5?! Black dismantled the white centre with 10...♕b6† 11.♔h1 ♘xe4!∓ in Castaneda – D. Gurevich, Chicago 1994.

8...0–0



9.♕d2

9.0–0 ♕b6

This causes White problems on d4. The immediate threat is ...♘xe4.

10.♕d3

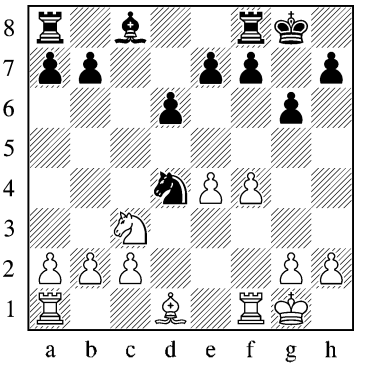
10.♘f5? ♕xb2–+ leaves the white knights hanging.

10...♘g4 11.♗xg4

After 11.♘d5 ♗xd4! 12.♘xb6 ♗xe3† 13.♔h1 ♗xb6∓ the three minor pieces enjoying reasonable stability are slightly stronger than the queen, as confirmed by practice and certified by engines.

11...♗xd4 12.♗xd4 ♕xd4† 13.♕xd4 ♘xd4 14.♗d1

This has long been known to be level, but possibly the most convincing way to equality is:



14...e5 15.♘d5 ♗e6 16.♘e7† ♔h8 17.c3 ♘c6 18.♘xc6 bxc6 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.♗b3 ♗xb3 21.axb3 a5

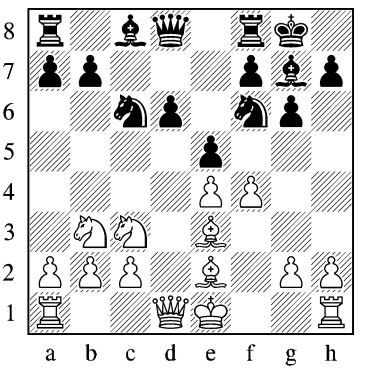
With a probable draw as both sides have weaknesses, Radulski – Azarov, Bad Wiessee 2010.

9.♘b3

Since I was very young I have known that this move order allows:

9...e5!

Obtaining the e5-square for the knight.



10.fxe5

Or 10.0–0 exf4 11.♗xf4 ♖e8 12.♕xd6 ♕b6† 13.♔h1 ♘xe4 14.♘xe4 ♖xe4 15.♗f3 ♖e6 16.♕d2 ♖e8 17.c3 ♗e6, with comfortable play for Black in Tiviakov – Bruzon, Bogota 2011.

10...♘xe5 11.0–0 ♘fg4

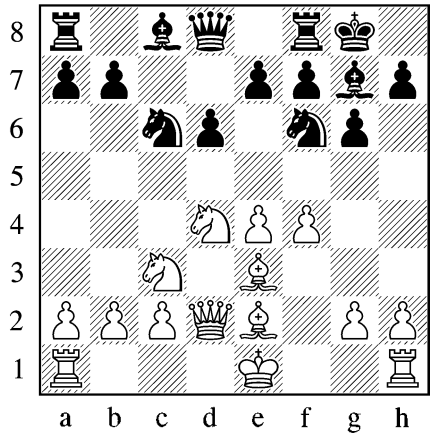
The neutral 11...♗e6N is also quite all right.

12.♗d4 ♗h6 13.♘d5 ♗e6 14.♗xg4 ♘xg4

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15.♘f6† ♘xf6 16.♗xf6 ♕b6† 17.♔h1 ♖ae8 18.♘d4 ♗g7 19.♗xg7 ♔xg7

With equal chances in Tiviakov – Van Kampen, Netherlands 2011.

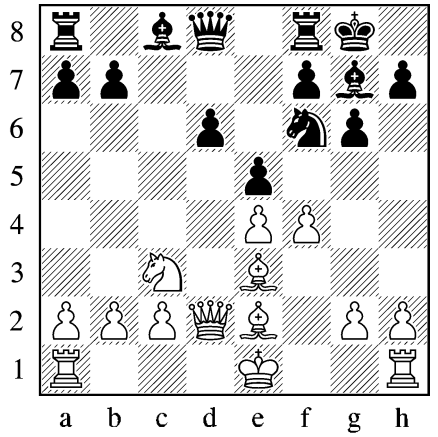


9...♘xd4

Preparing immediate counterplay in the centre.

10.♗xd4 e5 11.♗e3

White does not get much with 11.fxe5 either: 11...dxe5 12.♗e3 (12.♗xe5? is simply bad: 12...♕xd2† 13.♔xd2 ♘xe4† 14.♘xe4 ♗xe5∓ Black had retrieved the pawn and gained the bishop pair, while the white king was vulnerable in Kazonas – Jankauskas, Platelia 2000.) 12...♗e6 With normal play for Black in Fritsche – Dutra Neto, email 2009.



11...exf4 12.♗d4N

The only try to retain control of the position.

12.♗xf4 ♖e8∓ has left White with problems in the centre in several games.

12...d5!

The simplest – Black eliminates the weakness of the d-pawn, activating his position.

13.exd5 ♗h6

In order to keep the d5-pawn White needs to exchange on f6, but this offers Black excellent play on the dark squares and at least equal chances.

Conclusion

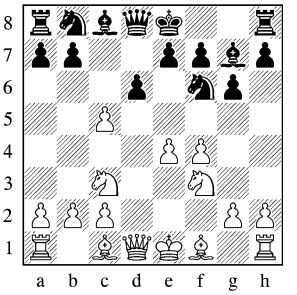
Even though other systems may have been more popular in recent years, I cannot avoid considering the Austrian Attack the main challenge against the Pirc. The lines covered in this chapter, however, are not the most critical, although it is important to know how to react to 5.a3 and 5.♗d3 to avoid being lured into lines outside our repertoire.

While 5...c5 is a logical reaction to 5.♘f3, it can lead to a wide range of interesting positions. The less common 6.d5 and 6.♗e2 lead to Schmid Benoni and Dragon positions, but with f2-f4 played somewhat prematurely, resulting in good versions for Black.

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Chapter 6

Austrian Attack



6.dxc5

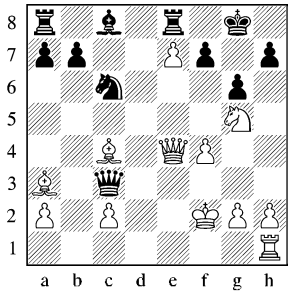
Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♗g7 5.♘f3 c5 6.dxc5

6...♕a5

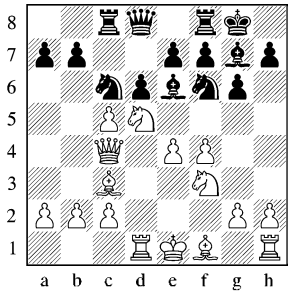
A) 7.♕d3 134
B) 7.♕d4 0–0 139
B1) 8.cxd6 139
B2) 8.♗d2 141
C) 7.♗d3 ♕xc5 8.♕e2 0–0 9.♗e3 ♕a5 10.0–0 ♗g4 147
C1) 11.♖ad1 ♘c6 12.♗c4 ♘h5 148
C11) 13.♖d5 149
C12) 13.♕d3N 152
C13) 13.♗b3 153
C2) 11.♕e1 157
C3) 11.h3 ♗xf3 12.♕xf3 ♘c6 162
C31) 13.♔h1 163
C32) 13.a3 167

B1) note to 13.♗c4



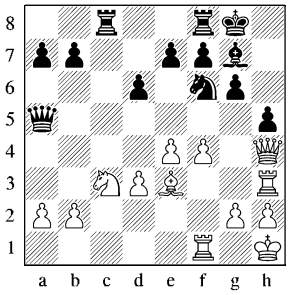
15...♕xa3!N

B2) note to 10.♕b5



12...♘b8!N

C2) after 17.cxd3



17...b5!N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♗g7 5.♘f3 c5 6.dxc5

This apparently simple move used to be the main line and remains one of White's best ways of fighting for a middlegame advantage.

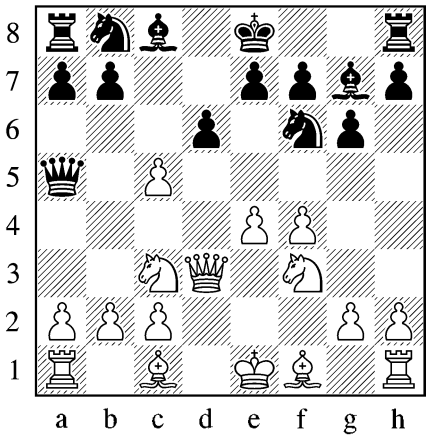
6...♕a5

The typical answer. Black intends to recapture on c5 with his queen, thus transposing to a Sicilian Dragon structure. White can choose between: **A) 7.♕d3**, **B) 7.♕d4** and the classical main line **C) 7.♗d3**.

7.cxd6? ♘xe4 is simply bad for White.

7.♗d2 introduces a plan based on castling long, which exposes White's king more than Black's: 7...♕xc5 8.♗d3 0–0 9.♕e2 ♘c6 10.0–0–0 ♘b4 11.♔b1 ♗e6 12.a3 ♘xd3 13.cxd3 In Sidorov – Khantuev, Angarsk 2015, Black could have developed his initiative with 13...b5!N∓.

A) 7.♕d3



Apparently a clumsy move, since this square is mainly designed for the bishop, but White has a concrete idea in mind. I am surprised that this variation has been so rare, because in grandmaster practice Black has not demonstrated convincing ways to equality.

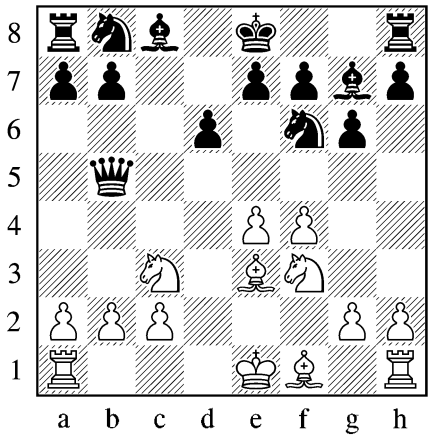
7...♕xc5

One important point is that 7...♘xe4? loses a piece: 8.♕b5† ♘c6 9.♕xa5 ♗xc3† 10.♕xc3!+–

8.♗e3 ♕a5 9.♕b5†

This is the point behind 7.♕d3. Even though in principle the queen exchange removes the danger of a kingside attack, White hopes that his slight lead in development will allow him either to break in the centre with e4-e5 or to gain kingside space with h2-h3, g2-g4-g5 and so on.

9...♕xb5



10.♗xb5†

The other recapture is not dangerous:

10.♘xb5

The threat of ♘c7† can be parried easily and the knight incursion only weakens the e4-pawn. As we will see, taking on a7 does not bring anything positive.

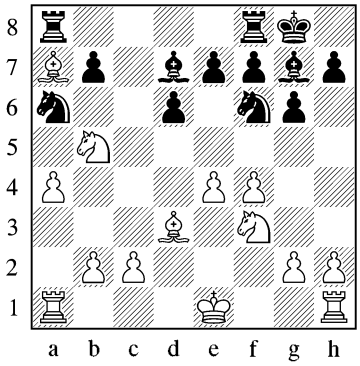
10...♘a6 11.♗d3 0–0 12.♗xa7

If 12.♘xa7 ♗d7 the knight does not have an easy way to return to play, as the e4-pawn is hanging. The immediate threat is ...♘c5, and consolidating the e4-pawn with 13.♘d2 offers Black too much play: 13...♘g4 14.♗b6 ♘c5 (even stronger than the simple 14...♗xb2) 15.♖b1 ♗d4–+ White's pieces are hanging badly.

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12...♗d7 13.a4

In Vargas Arteaga – Escobar Medina, Cartagena 2016, Black's best was:



13...♗c6N 14.♘d2 ♘b4 15.♔e2

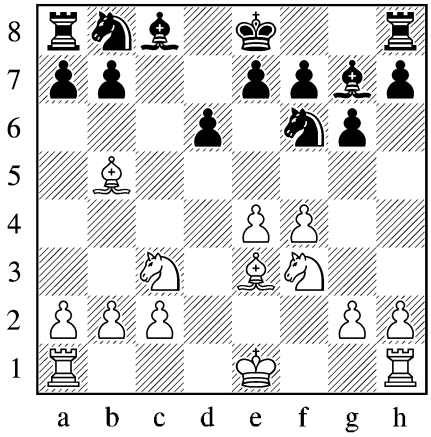
Or 15.0–0 ♘xd3 16.cxd3 ♗xb5 17.axb5 ♘xe4! 18.♘xe4 ♖xa7∓, regaining the pawn with a positional advantage in the ending.

15...♘h5

Attacking f4 and b2.

16.♗e3 ♗xb2 17.♖ab1 ♘xd3 18.cxd3 ♗g7∓

White will soon lose the a4-pawn, but his compact structure and space advantage allow him to hope for a draw.



10...♘c6

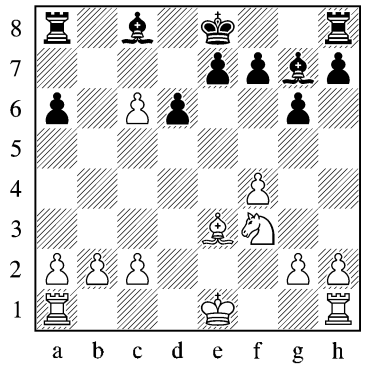
10...♗d7 11.♗xd7† ♘bxd7 12.0–0–0 leaves Black vulnerable to the central plan based on ♖he1 and e4-e5, since his d7-knight will be hanging if he castles short. He also needs to waste a tempo with ...a7-a6 if he wants to develop his queen's rook.

11.0–0–0

The knight advance is premature: 11.♘d5 ♘xd5 12.exd5 a6 13.♗xc6†

13.♗a4 b5 14.dxc6 bxa4 is pleasant for Black since the c6-pawn is more vulnerable than the a4-pawn, Stejskal – Melich, Czech Republic 1997.

13...bxc6 14.dxc6



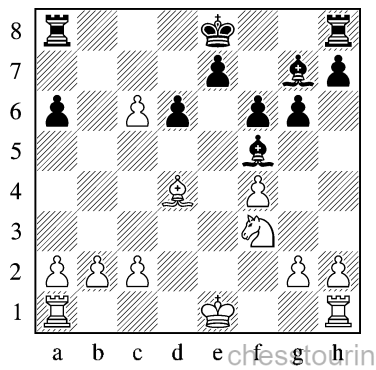
14...♗f5!?N

Slightly more accurate than 14...♗xb2, opening the b-file for the white rooks at a moment when Black is not fully developed: 15.♖b1 ♗c3† 16.♔f2 ♗e6 In Galiev – Gayduk, Uljanovsk 2008, White could have retained some initiative with 17.♗d4N followed by ♖b7 soon.

15.♗d4

Or 15.♘d4 ♗e4 followed by ...♖c8.

15...f6!



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It is best to keep the bishop pair, as later Black can expand his centre with ...e5. The extra pawn on c6 is as good as lost, for example:

16.c7 ♔d7 17.♗b6 a5!

Followed by ...♔c6.

Another premature central action would be:

11.e5 dxe5 12.fxe5

12.♘xe5 is parried with 12...♘g4!= attacking the bishop on e3, and thus not giving White the time for ♘xc6.

12...♘g4 13.♗xc6† bxc6 14.♗f4

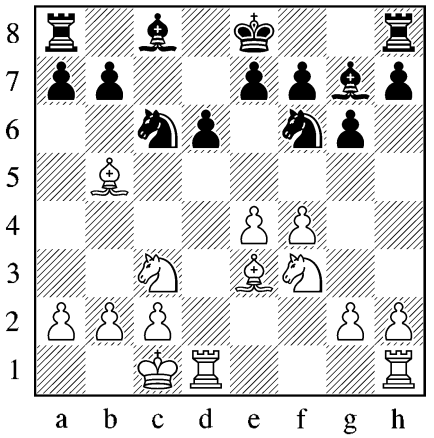
Black has the bishop pair and no worse a structure, but the question is whether he can return his knight to play via a decent path. The best solution is:

14...♖b8 15.b3

If 15.h3 Black has 15...g5 16.♘xg5 ♘xe5∓ with strong queenside pressure.

15...♖b4 16.g3 f6∓

After weakening White's position on both long diagonals, Black opens the centre in his favour.



11...♗g4

As we will see in variation C, the main line, this is a thematic move, reducing White's control in the centre. In this concrete position it also threatens to spoil White's structure.

11...0–0

This natural developing move runs into:

12.h3!

Preventing ...♗g4 and preparing g2-g4.

If 12.♖he1, as in Mueller – Thal, Stralsund 1975, Black could return to the right track with 12...♗g4.

12...♗e6 13.g4 ♖fc8 14.f5±

With a considerable space advantage for White.

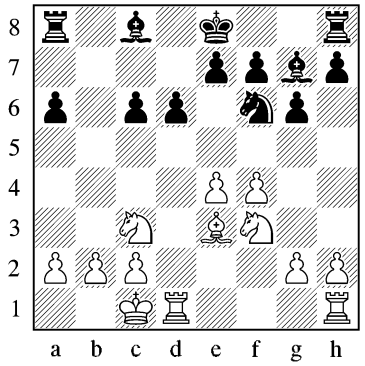
11...a6

With incomplete development, this is premature.

12.♗xc6†!

Much better than 12.♗d3, when in Radulov – Spassky, Amsterdam 1973, Black could have obtained active play with: 12...b5N 13.♖he1 ♗b7=

12...bxc6



13.e5!

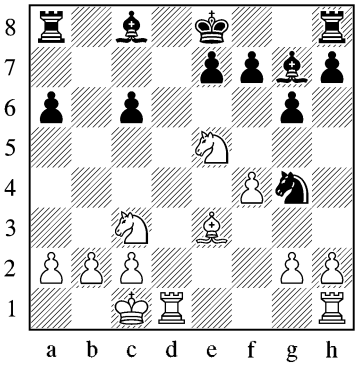
This pawn break is justified by the time wasted by Black on ...a6. Otherwise ...♘d7 or ...♗g4 would retain excellent play.

13...dxe5 14.♘xe5

Causing Black problems with his c6-pawn. 14.fxe5 is also interesting: 14...♘d7 15.e6N (15.♗f4 ♘c5 allowed a perfect blockade on e6 in S. Shaw – Kilichenko, email 2012) 15...fxe6 16.♘a4 White has excellent compensation for the pawn due to Black's numerous weaknesses and his potentially bad bishop on c8.

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14...♘g4



15.♗b6!

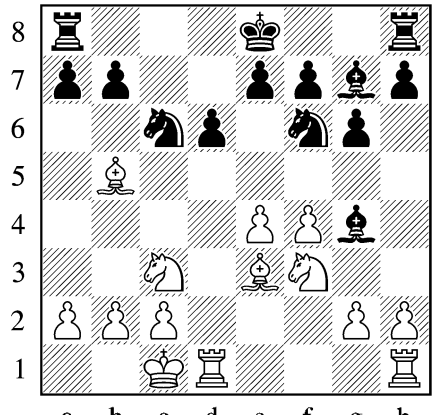
A strong intermediate move, threatening ♖d8 mate.

15...♗f5 16.♘xc6 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♗e4 18.♘a5 f5

In Nyberg – Mastronardi, email 2011, White should have played:

19.♖d2N ♔f7 20.c4±

White is perfectly regrouped for advancing his c-pawn, while Black's counterplay is not obvious.

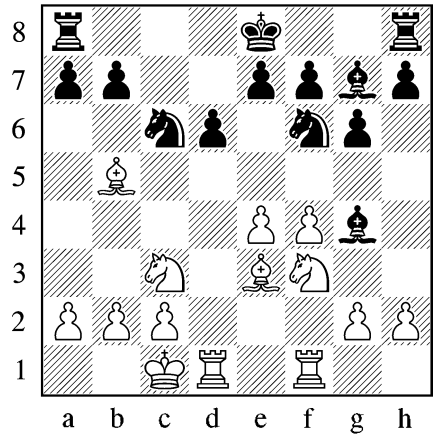


12.♖hf1!?N

Aiming to keep the structural integrity.

The only game in which 11...♗g4 was played continued with: 12.♘d5 ♘xd5 13.exd5 ♗xf3 14.gxf3 a6 15.♗e2 ♘b8 16.h4 ♘d7 17.h5 0–0–0 18.c3 ♗h6 Followed by ...♘f6 with equality in Van Leeuwen – Hasselmeyer, email 2011.

The centralizing 12.♖he1 does not work out too well either: 12...♘h5 (threatening both ...♗xc3 and ...♗xf3 followed by ...♗h6) 13.♘d5 ♗xf3 14.gxf3 0–0–0 Followed by ...e6 and ...♗h6 soon, as 15.♗xc6 bxc6 16.♘xe7†? loses the knight to 16...♔d7–+.



12...a6

Now is a good moment to clarify things regarding the b5-bishop.

12...0–0 13.h3 ♗xf3 14.♖xf3± keeps Black under some pressure.

13.♗e2

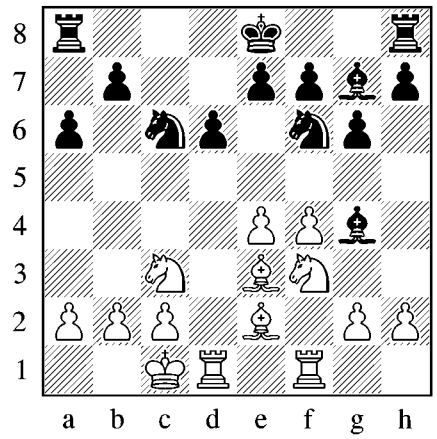
Hoping to recapture on f3 with the bishop.

The familiar operation 13.♗xc6† bxc6 14.e5 dxe5 15.fxe5 does not work so well any more, as after 15...♘d7 the e5-pawn is vulnerable and e5-e6 does not spoil Black's structure.

After 13.♗d3 ♖c8 14.h3 ♗xf3 15.♖xf3 ♘d7 Black threatens ...♗xc3 with good play against the doubled pawns. In the absence of queens, White's attacking chances, based on his bishops, are lower than in similar lines

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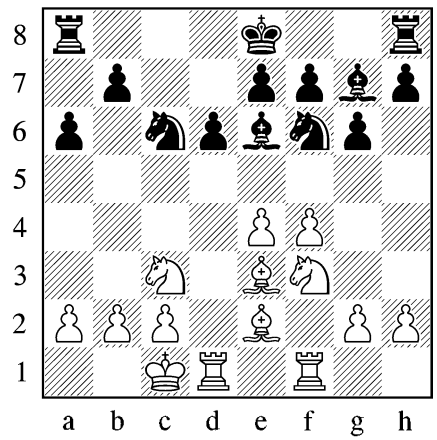
in variation C. 16.♘d5 e6 17.♘b6 ♘xb6 18.♗xb6 ♗d4 19.♗xd4 ♘xd4 20.♖f2 ♘c6 Black has simplified the position, solving his space problems. Next he will play ...♔e7 with a comfortable position.



13...♗e6!

Not an easy move to find. Black anticipates h2-h3, against which he is ready to play ...♘h5, putting pressure on the weakened squares. Besides, ...♘g4 is an issue now.

After 13...0–0?! 14.h3 ♗xf3 15.♗xf3 followed by g2-g4, White has an active position. One important point is that 15...♘d7 allows 16.e5!.



14.h3

If 14.♔b1 the most flexible response is 14...0–0, keeping all options open.

14.♘g5

Black's best reply is to return with the bishop:

14...♗g4!

The bishop exchange creates some weaknesses in White's camp, solving Black's problems of coordination at the same time.

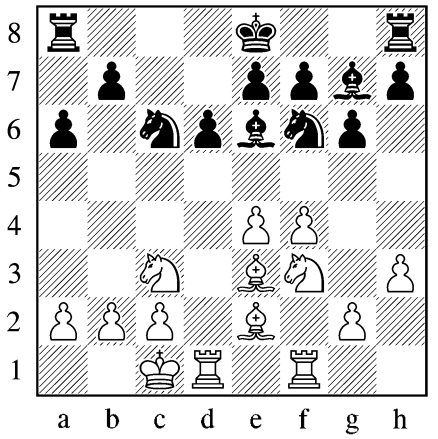
15.♖fe1

15.♗xg4 ♘xg4 16.♗g1 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 0–0 is pleasant for Black.

15.♘f3 is just a repetition.

15...0–0=

Things are calm on the kingside and Black plans ...♖fc8 followed by ...b5.



14...♘h5 15.f5!?

Trying to take advantage of the somewhat exposed black minor pieces.

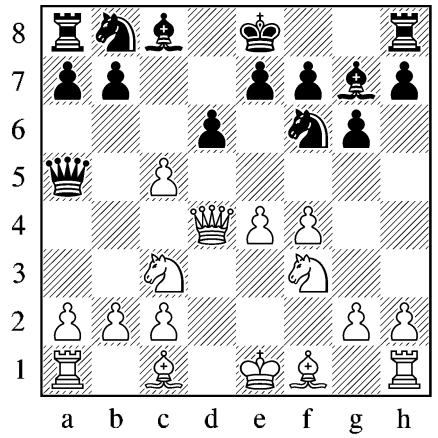
15.♘d5 ♖c8= is safe for Black.

15...gxf5 16.exf5 ♗xf5

The position is complicated, with chances for both sides. The main thing is that 17.g4? fails to win a piece due to 17...♘g3 18.gxf5 ♗xc3∓.

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B) 7.♕d4



This early queen centralization was recommended in *Beating Unusual Chess Defences: 1.e4* by Greet, and there was a period when it caused Black some problems. White defends the e4-pawn and hopes to force Black to play ...dxc5 (with or without a prior queen exchange on c5), which would offer White an advantage in the centre.

7...0–0

The most effective move, threatening not only ...♘c6 without fearing the pin by ♗b5, but also ...♘xe4.

The natural 7...♘c6 allows 8.♗b5, not only continuing with development, but also cutting the queen's communication with the c5-square. Here is a recent example: 8...0–0 9.♕a4 ♕d8 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.cxd6 exd6 12.♗e3 ♕e7 13.0–0–0 ♗b7 14.♖he1± With perfect centralization and an extra pawn for White in Bok – Tjiam, Belgium 2015.

White can choose between **B1) 8.cxd6** and **B2) 8.♗d2**.

B1) 8.cxd6

This leads to massive simplifications and a probable draw.

8...♘xe4! 9.♕xe4 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3 ♕xc3† 11.♔f2 ♕xa1

Black has won an exchange but, except for the queen, all his pieces are on the back rank. Moreover, his king is vulnerable. All these factors make the fight interesting and, as we will see, balanced.

12.dxe7 ♖e8 13.♗c4

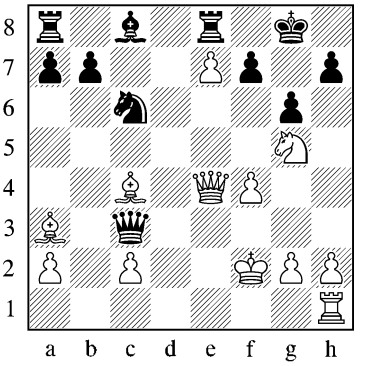
The most accurate move order.

13.♗a3

This prematurely exposes the bishop.

13...♘c6 14.♗c4 ♕c3 15.♘g5

In Berthelot – Martinez, Nantes 2006, Black should have bravely taken the bishop:



15...♕xa3!N 16.♗xf7† ♔h8!

Paradoxically, the king is safer in the corner. The point is that the enemy queen does not have any immediate checks along the long diagonal.

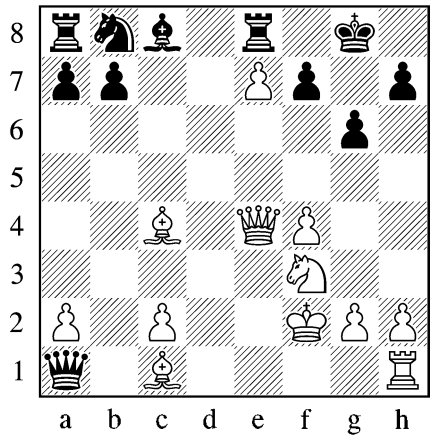
If 16...♔g7?, aimed at giving the king more freedom, then after 17.♗xe8 Black cannot play the desirable 17...♗f5? due to 18.♖c4+– threatening ♕f7†.

17.♗xe8 ♗f5∓

This is possible now, since 18.♕c4? ♖xe8

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19.♕f7 arrives one tempo too late due to, for instance, 19...♕xe7–+.



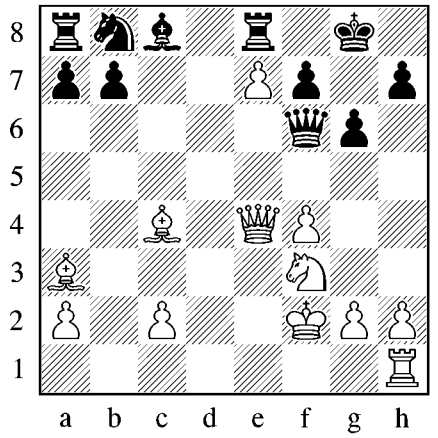
Black has to play a few accurate moves now.

13...♕f6

The careless 13...♘c6? loses by force: 14.♗xf7†! ♔xf7 15.♕c4† ♔g7 16.♕b3+– followed by ♗b2, as in Ramirez Carrizo – Aabling Thomsen, Barcelona 2015.

14.♗a3

Now that the queen has departed from enemy territory, activating this bishop is well timed.



14...♗e6!

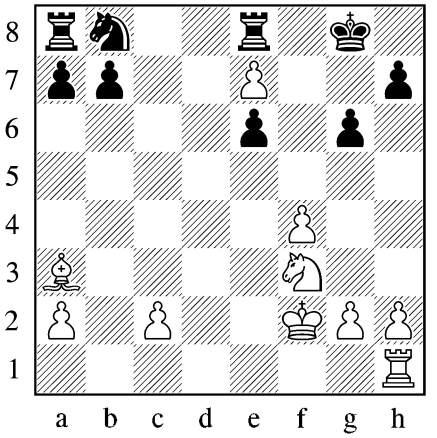
This strong move, not mentioned in *Beating Unusual Chess Defences: 1.e4*, was introduced by Kateryna Lagno in 2012.

Black has to once again delay the knight's development: 14...♘c6? 15.♘g5± offered White a strong attack in Pilavov – Zimmerman, Sochi 2006, and several other games.

15.♗xe6

15.♕xb7 leads to the same type of ending: 15...♘d7 16.♗b3 ♗xb3 17.axb3 ♕b6† 18.♕xb6 axb6 White's compensation was only enough for a draw in Smeets – Timman, Leiden 2015.

15...♕xe6 16.♕xe6 fxe6



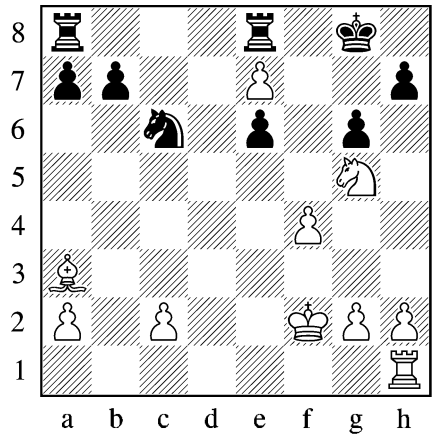
The e7-pawn restricts Black's activity but is not too threatening; besides, the bishop will soon experience some discomfort along the a3-f8 diagonal. Chances are about equal.

17.♘g5

More accurate than: 17.♘e5?! ♘c6 18.♘xc6 bxc6 19.♗d6 c5 20.♖b1 ♖ac8 21.♖b5 ♔f7 22.c3 White is struggling slightly as she can only try to maintain the fortress and cannot make progress, A. Muzychuk – Lagno, Kazan 2012.

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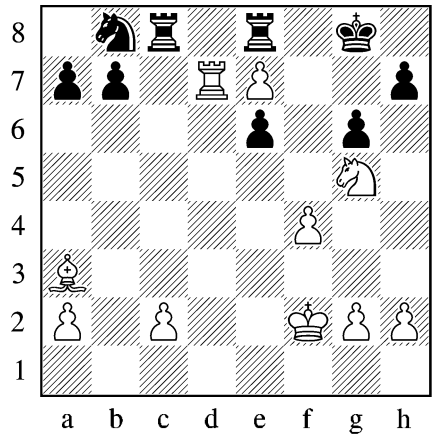
17...♘c6



18.♖d1

18.♘e4 leads to complete equality: 18...♘xe7 19.♘f6† ♔f7 20.♘xe8 ♔xe8 21.♖e1 ♖c8 22.♖xe6 ♖xc2† 23.♔f1 ♖c7 24.♔e2 ♔f7 25.♖xe7† ♖xe7† 26.♗xe7 ♔xe7 Visually Black has the better chances due to his queenside majority, but White was able to hold in G. Mohr – Kilgus, Austria 2014.

18...♖ac8 19.♖d7 ♘b8



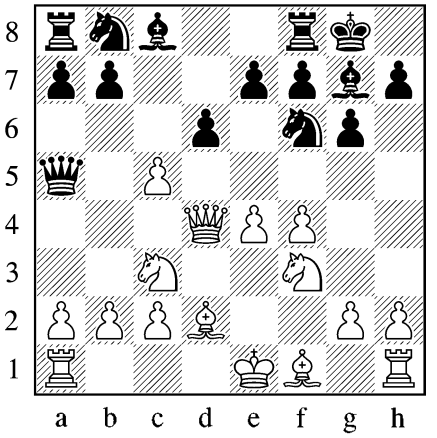
20.♖d2

20.♖xb7 leads to a dynamically balanced position after: 20...♖xc2† 21.♔f1 ♖xa2 22.♗d6 ♘c6 23.♖c7 ♘d4 Black can soon force a draw by checking along the a-file.

20...♘c6 21.♖d7 ♘b8 22.♖d2 ♘c6 23.♖d7 ♘b8

Drawn by repetition in Jovanovic – Medak, Bol 2015.

B2) 8.♗d2



White rids himself of the pin and threatens to harass the black queen with a knight jump, most likely to d5 or b5.

8...♘c6 9.♕c4

The most popular answer. Other moves leave the queen either passive or exposed.

9.♕g1 is way too passive: 9...♘b4N 10.♖c1 ♘xe4!? 11.♘xe4 ♗xb2 12.cxd6 ♗f5 Black has a strong initiative for the sacrificed material.

9.♕f2, as in Ninov – Peev, Ulcinj 1997, can be met by 9...♘g4N, and now 10.♕h4 ♕xc5 leads to a comfortable version of the Dragon, while 10.♕g1 transposes to the following line.

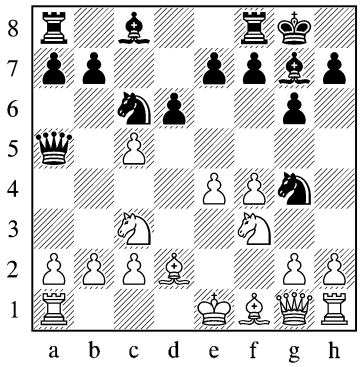
9.♕e3

This runs straight into:

9...♘g4 10.♕g1

In Kormos – Bognar, Hungary 2000, Black now could have allowed the structure White was initially aiming for:

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10...♕xc5N 11.♕xc5 dxc5

Black's play is justified since he has a lead in development already, due to the time wasted by the white queen.

12.h3

Developing moves expose the light-squared bishop: 12.♗d3 ♘b4 13.h3 c4= or 12.♗b5 ♘d4.

12...♗xc3!

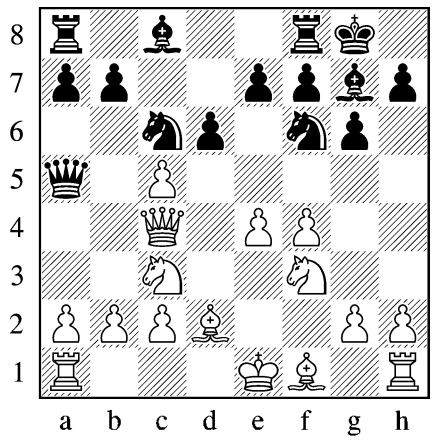
The simplest way to ensure space for the g4-knight.

13.♗xc3

13.bxc3 keeps the e3-square under control but spoils the structure without really troubling the knight: 13...♘f6 14.e5 ♘e4=

13...♘e3 14.♖c1 ♘xf1 15.♔xf1 b6=

Followed by ...♗b7, ...♖ad8 and, for safety reasons, ...f6.



9...♗e6 10.♕b5

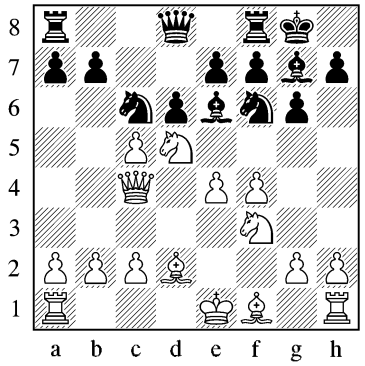
10.♘d5

The active option is parried by the calm:

10...♕d8

Black's healthy development and the hanging white pieces offer adequate compensation for the pawn.

Those who enjoy playing an exchange down may consider: 10...♕xc5 11.♕xc5 dxc5 12.♘c7 ♘xe4 13.♘xa8 ♖xa8 Black has reasonable compensation in view of the numerous available squares in the centre and his lead in development.



11.♖d1

Trying to maintain the tension.

If 11.cxd6 ♕xd6, Black's threat of regaining the pawn forces White to try: 12.♘xf6† ♗xf6 13.e5 (13.♕b5 ♘d4 offers Black too much play) 15...♗xc4 14.exd6 ♗xf1 15.♖xf1 ♗xb2 16.♖b1 ♗f6 17.dxe7 ♖fb8 Black already has the more pleasant play, due to his better structure.

11...♖c8!?

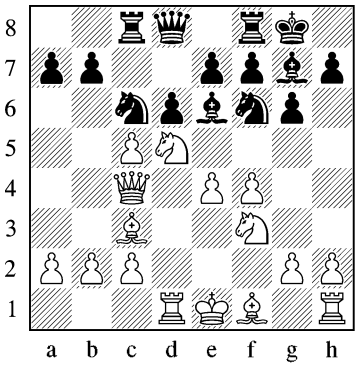
A strong developing move, creating threats along the c-file, such as ...♘b8-d7 regaining the pawn, or even ...dxc5, when recapturing may be dangerous.

12.♗c3

Releasing the tension would already imply sacrificing the queen: 12.cxd6 ♘xd5 13.exd5 ♘d4 14.dxe6 Relatively best, as otherwise ...♘xc2† would be killing. 14...♖xc4

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15.exf7† ♖xf7 16.♗xc4 ♘xf3† 17.gxf3 ♕xd6 18.♗xf7† ♔xf7∓ Strictly speaking, White has a material advantage, but most of his pawns are hanging and the queen is stronger than the uncoordinated rooks, especially with such an exposed king.



So far we have followed Maatman – Go, Hoogeveen 2011. Black's most effective continuation is:

12...♘b8!N

Black inevitably regains the pawn, for instance:

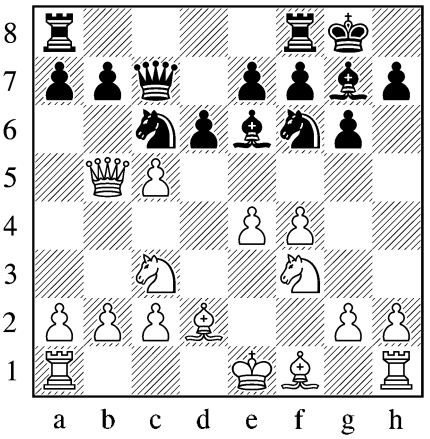
13.b4

13.♘xf6† ♗xf6 14.♕d3 ♗xc3† 15.♕xc3 ♘d7 16.b4 dxc5 17.b5 ♕b6∓ Black retains a lead in development.

13...♗xd5 14.exd5 ♘bd7 15.c6 ♘b6∓.

Black has excellent play against White's numerous weaknesses.

10...♕c7



11.♗d3

White was tempted by 11.♘g5 in Simmelink – Irmer, email 2011, but it weakens White's control in the centre. Black does best to reply 11...♘d7N 12.♘xe6 fxe6 13.cxd6 exd6, followed by ...♘c5 and ...♘d4, with a strong initiative for the pawn.

11.cxd6 exd6 opens the e- and c-files for Black. White may continue with a) 12.0–0–0, b) 12.♘d5 or c) 12.♗d3.

a) 12.0–0–0 offers Black a strong initiative by simple means: 12...a6 13.♕e2 ♖fe8∓ Followed by ...b5-b4 and possibly ...♗f5.

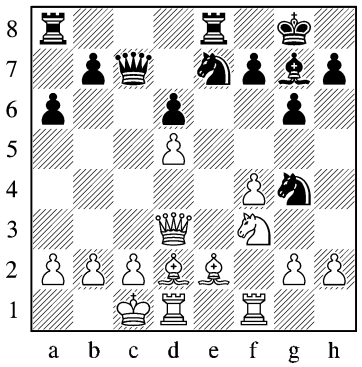
b) 12.♘d5

This premature activity plays into Black's hands.

12...♗xd5 13.exd5 ♖fe8† 14.♗e2 a6 15.♕d3 ♘e7 16.0–0–0

White cannot afford to defend the pawn with 16.c4? due to 16...♘f5–+, followed by ...♘e4 or ...♘g4.

16...♘g4 17.♖hf1



In Farkas – Anistratov, Austria 2015, Black's simplest route to an advantage was:

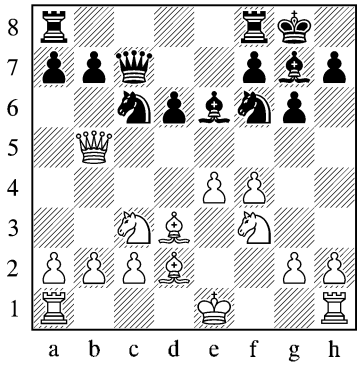
17...♘xd5N 18.♕xd5 ♖xe2∓

Material equality has been restored, and Black has overwhelming activity.

c) Instead of forcing matters White should consolidate his central pawn with:

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12.♗d3



12...h6!?

Threatening to put the queen in lethal danger with ...a6.

13.♗e3N

13.♘d5 ♗xd5 14.exd5 ♖fe8† gave Black more than enough compensation for the pawn in Crapulli – Cvak, email 2012.

The text move is the most natural way of parrying the threat, but the bishop is exposed now.

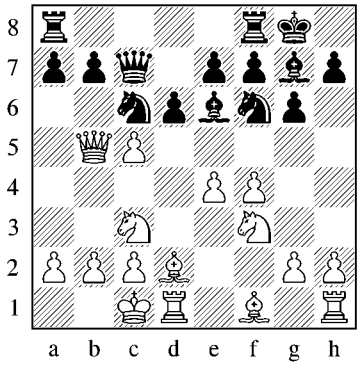
13...♖fe8 14.0–0 ♘g4 15.♗f2 ♘xf2 16.♖xf2 a6

After the bishop exchange, chasing the queen becomes an issue again, but White has a way out.

17.♘d5 ♗xd5 18.♕xd5 ♗xb2 19.♖b1 ♗g7=

11.0–0–0N

This untested option may be the most challenging continuation.



11...♖ac8!?

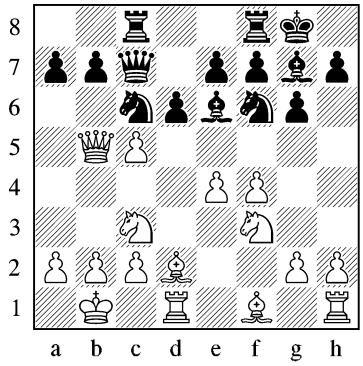
11...a6 12.♕b6 may cause Black problems regaining the pawn.

11...d5 12.e5 d4 13.♘e2 also looks problematic.

12.♔b1

The safest continuation.

After 12.cxd6 exd6 White is not sufficiently developed to attack: 13.f5 a6 14.♕a4 gxf5 15.exf5 ♗xf5 16.♗g5 ♘e4! A nice trick. 17.♘d5 (17.♘xe4 b5 followed by ...♗xe4 gives Black a decisive attack) 17...♕d7 18.♘b6 ♕e6 19.♗c4 ♕g6 By now it has become obvious that White's premature attack has rebounded and that the initiative is all Black's.



12...dxc5

This is the most promising way to maintain the initiative.

13.♕xc5 b6 14.♕a3

Paradoxically, this passive square is, for the time being, the safest.

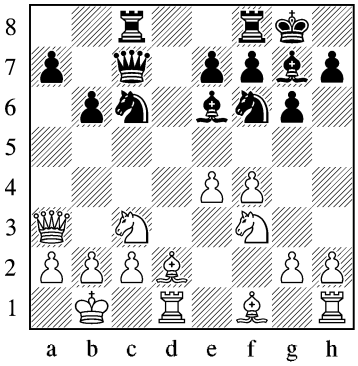
14.♕e3 allows 14...♘g4 15.♕e1 ♘b4 16.a3 ♗xc3 17.♗xc3 ♘a2 with the initiative. The point is that White cannot defend his bishop with 18.♖d3? due to 18...♕c4–+ followed by ...♘xc3† and ...♕a2.

14.♕b5 offers Black a tempo for free after 14...a6! followed by ...b5, since 15.♕xa6? allows 15...♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♘b4–+, with a winning attack.

If we think only of the queen, 14.♕g1 is the safest choice, but this leaves the queenside vulnerable: 14...♘b4 Threatening ...♗xa2†.

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15.♖c1 ♘xe4 With the queen on g1, this is certainly not the only good move, but it is definitely the most straightforward. 16.♘xe4 ♘xa2 17.♗d3 ♘xc1 (for the more ambitious, 17...♕d7 followed soon by ...♕a4 may be an even more tempting option) 18.♕xc1 ♖fd8∓ Material is about equal and Black maintains his attacking chances.

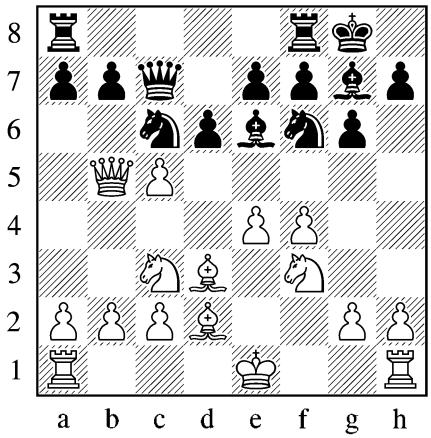


14...♘a5

Clearing the c-file and thus threatening ...♘xe4.

15.♗d3 ♘c4 16.♗xc4 ♗xc4 17.♗e3 b5

Black's simple attacking plan at least compensates for the pawn.



11...d5!

With the white queen isolated on the queenside, breaking in the centre is natural and strong.

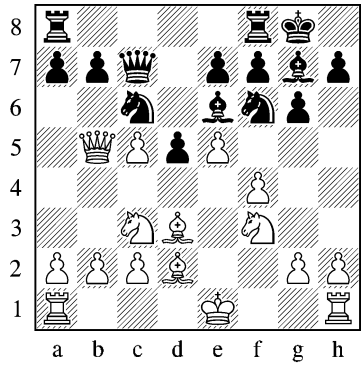
12.♘g5!?N

This is the most challenging move, even though it does not promise an advantage.

White does not get much by playing safely either: 12.0–0N dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♖fd8 14.♖ad1 ♘xe4 15.♗xe4 ♘d4 16.♘xd4 ♗xd4† 17.♔h1 ♕xc5=

12.e5?!

The only move tested in practice, but it should offer Black the better chances.

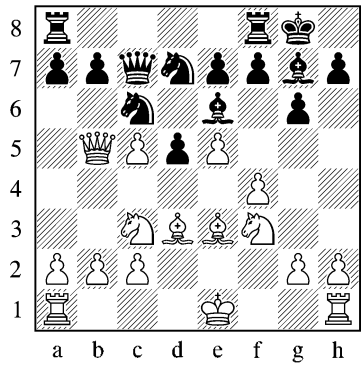


12...♘d7 13.♗e3

White needs to defend the c5-pawn in view of the threat of ...a6.

13.0–0?! a6 14.♕a4 ♘xc5∓ regains the pawn with the initiative.

13.♘a4 misplaces the knight, offering Black good play in many ways, for example: 13...♗g4 14.0–0–0 f6 15.exf6 ♘xf6 Followed soon by ...♗xf3 and ...♘d4.



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13...♗h6!N∓

After this accurate move, White cannot keep his centre intact.

The game went: 13...f6?! Black unnecessarily exchanges the e5-pawn, which should instead have become a target. 14.exf6 ♗xf6 15.0–0 ♗f7 16.♗f2 a6 17.♕b3 e6 18.♖ae1± White had stabilized his position, retaining the better chances in Shabalov – Felecan, Las Vegas 2014.

14.♘e2

Defending the bishop with 14.♔e2 allows 14...d4 15.♗xd4 ♗xf4, with a decisive attack against the poorly defended king, as the white queen is a mere spectator.

14...♘dxe5∓

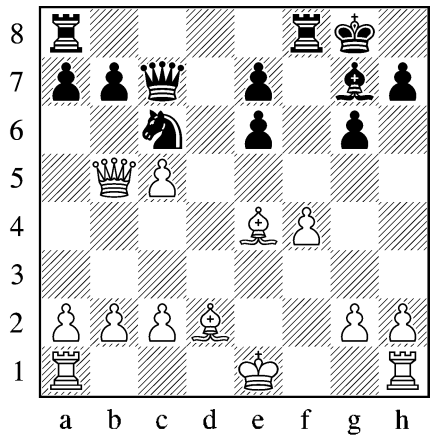
Black has regained the pawn, keeping the centre firmly in his hands.

12...dxe4 13.♘xe6

The principled continuation.

Both 13.♘cxe4 ♗d5 and 13.♘gxe4 ♘xe4 14.♗xe4 ♖fd8∓ offer Black the initiative in the centre.

13...fxe6 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♗xe4

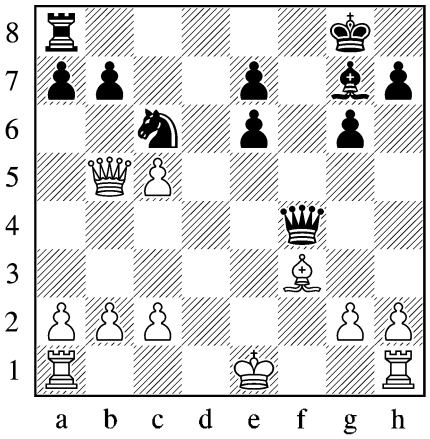


15...♖xf4!

Making use of Black's better development and the white king's delay in leaving the centre.

16.♗xf4 ♕xf4 17.♗f3

There is no time to eliminate the knight with 17.♗xc6 due to 17...♗xb2!?∓, for if 18.♕xb2? then 18...♕e3† 19.♔f1 bxc6–+ followed by ...♖f8† will deciside the outcome.



Black has excellent compensation for the exchange. There is more than one good move, but I suggest:

17...a6

Forcing the queen to make up her mind.

18.♕b3

18.♕xb7? leaves the king undefended, allowing 18...♕e3† 19.♗e2 ♖f8 winning.

18.♕e2 gives away an important pawn, after which Black's compensation also has a positional basis: 18...♗xb2 19.♕xe6† ♔g7 20.♖d1 ♕b4† 21.♔f1 ♕xc5=

18...♕e5†

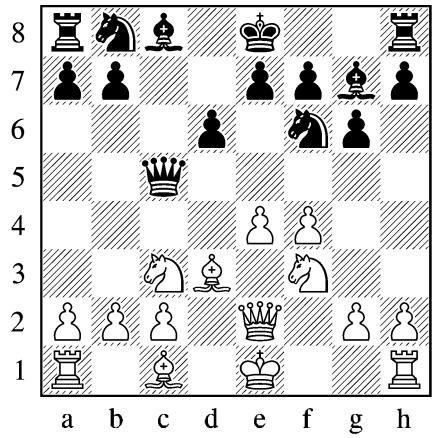
Taking advantage of the fact that ♕e2 is no longer available.

19.♔f1 ♖f8

Black has excellent attacking chances, ensuring approximate equality despite the material disadvantage.

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C) 7.♗d3 ♕xc5 8.♕e2



This is the classical approach. White does not try to refute Black's opening by means of long forced lines; instead, he keeps developing normally, relying on his chances of building up a positional kingside attack. As we will see later, the queen is not optimally placed on e2 and White will need to relocate it, but there is no other way of preparing ♗e3 followed by castling. In return, Black will also have to waste a tempo with his queen.

8...0–0 9.♗e3 ♕a5 10.0–0

10.h3

Preventing ...♗g4 is a rare alternative, but it requires some attention:

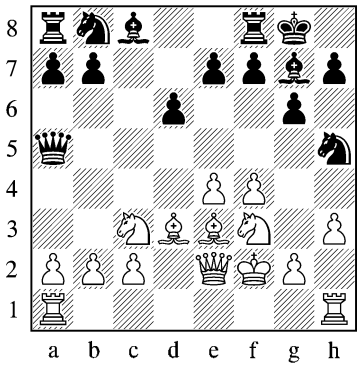
10...♘h5

Black wastes no time in attacking the weakened g3-square.

11.♔f2

This was played in a famous game by a then young prodigy.

11.♕d2 counts as a loss of time and is not challenging: 11...♗xc3 12.bxc3 ♘g3 13.♖g1 f5 Black had fine play on light squares, and White still needed time to get his king to safety in Larramendy – Blot, Montigny-le-Bretttonneux 2003. A direct attack with 14.♗c4† e6 15.♘g5 fails to 15...♘xe4.



Black has to make a choice between a) 11...e5 and b) 11...♗xc3:

a) 11...e5 12.f5 ♘f4 13.♕d2

This is better than 13.♗xf4 exf4 14.♕d2, as played in J. Polgar – Hennigan, London 1988, when Black missed the tactical chance: 14...♗xf5!N 15.exf5 ♕b6† 16.♔e2 ♖e8† 17.♔f1 ♕xb2 Black regains the piece with excellent play.

13...♘xd3† 14.♕xd3 gxf5 15.exf5 e4 16.♘xe4N

16.♕xe4 ♗xf5 17.♕xb7 ♘d7 was highly unclear in Boll – Koskinen, corr. 1986.

16...♗xf5 17.♗d4 ♖e8

Engines consider this position completely equal, but I am not especially thrilled as Black's structure is shattered.

b) I recommend first exchanging a pair of minor pieces with: 11...♗xc3 12.bxc3 e5!N (12...♕xc3 13.g4 has proved too dangerous for Black in a few games) 13.f5 Black no longer has a 'bad' bishop and can continue with 13...b6 followed by ...♗b7, with increasing pressure against e4. White's pawn attack based on g2-g4 can always be met with ...♘f4.

10...♗g4

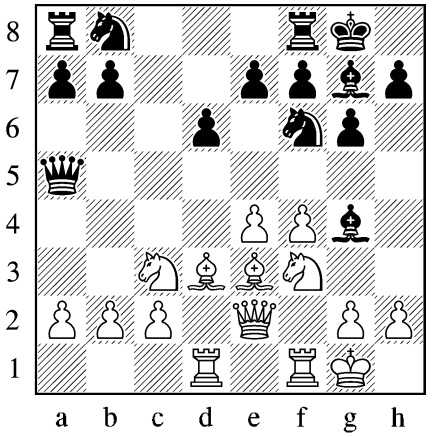
An important move in Black's general strategy. The f3-knight not only threatens to become an attacking piece after ♕e1-h4 and f4-f5, but also controls the important

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e5- and d4-squares. Since Black intends to play ...♘c6, it is useful to pin and later exchange this knight's rival.

White's main continuations are **C1) 11.♖ad1**, **C2) 11.♕e1** and **C3) 11.h3**.

C1) 11.♖ad1



According to general development rules, this is the most logical continuation. Before defining his plans, White activates his last piece. This line was famously played in the 17th game of the Spassky – Fischer, 1972 World Championship match in Reykjavik, and was subsequently submitted to thorough analysis. But in later games White started looking for other paths.

11...♘c6 12.♗c4

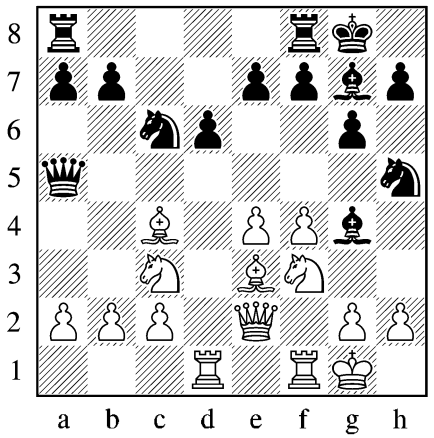
Another logical move, clearing the path for the newly developed rook and activating the bishop at the same time.

12.♕e1 was played in Grigoryan – Yilmazyerli, Jerusalem 2015, but with the rook already on d1, Black does not need to hurry with the exchange on f3. Instead, he could continue developing with: 12...♖ac8N 13.♔h1 (The careless 13.♖d2?! runs into 13...♗xf3, since the desirable 14.♖xf3?! allows 14...♘g4∓, exchanging the important bishop.) 13...♘d7 Black regroups in the spirit of line C3 below.

12...♘h5

Confronted with a new situation (he had never played the Pirc before and 11.♖ad1 was a novelty), Fischer hit on the right track. Due to White's strong centralization, Black cannot develop his counterplay by simple means. The idea of the text move is to threaten ...♗xc3, not only winning a pawn, but also questioning White's stability in the centre. True, one needs a bit of courage when deciding to give up the fianchettoed bishop, but analysis proves Fischer's intuition right.

The other way of attacking c3 is less effective: 12...♘d7?! 13.h3! (with the knight on h5 this loses an exchange to 13...♘g3) 13...♗xf3 14.♖xf3 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 If now 15...♕xc3?! White can reply 16.e5 with a strong initiative, based on the hanging d7-knight.



We will examine **C11) 13.♖d5**, **C12) 13.♕d3N** and **C13) 13.♗b3**.

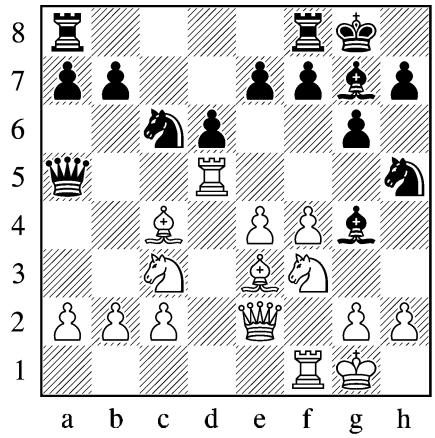
Other moves which defend c3 are weaker:

13.♕d2? allows the simple tactic: 13...♘xf4 14.♗xf4 ♕c5† 15.♔h1 ♕xc4∓ Black had won a pawn in Bordonada – Uddenfeldt, Nice (ol) 1974.

13.♖d3?! ♕b4 14.♗b3 ♗xc3 cost White the e4-pawn in Meetze – Mrkvicka, email 2000.

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C11) 13.♖d5

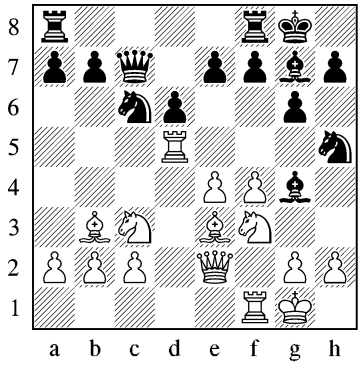


After the 1972 game, theoreticians intensively examined this active rook incursion to g5. White concentrates all his forces around the black king, but analysis proves that Black's position is solid enough to repel such a resolute attack.

13...♕c7 14.♖g5

A much later game continued with the cunning:

14.♗b3

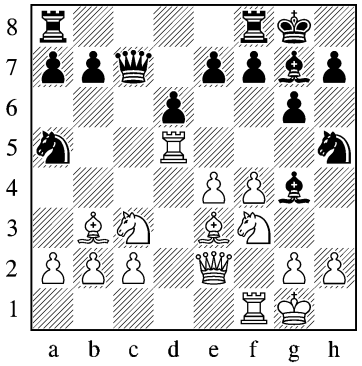


14...♘a5N

The safest way of neutralizing White's pressure.

White's last move invited 14...♗e6?, hoping to exchange the light-squared bishops, but this proved a major mistake after 15.♖xh5! gxh5 16.♗xe6 fxe6 17.♘g5± with a strong attack in Los – Jeremic, Bela Crkva 1983.

For adventurous players, 14...♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♘f6 is worth considering: 16.♖g5 The only way of indirectly avoiding the loss of the e4-pawn, but the rook may get into some danger now. 16...e6 Preparing ...h6 without allowing ♖xg6†. Black has the better structure and is well regrouped, but I would instinctively fear White's bishop pair. Engines do not have such inhibitions and consider the position as completely equal.

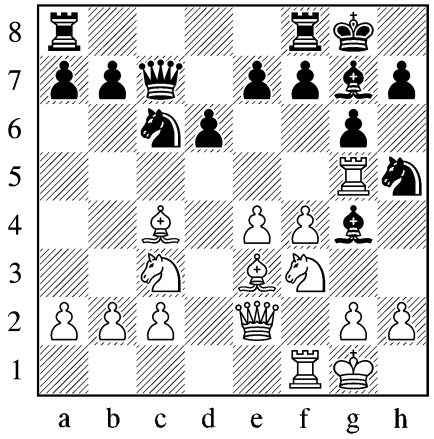


15.♖d3

Defending the c3-knight.

15...♘xb3 16.axb3 b6!?

Clearing the b7-square for the queen and planning ...f5 followed by ...♖ae8, with a harmonious position.



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14...♗xf3!

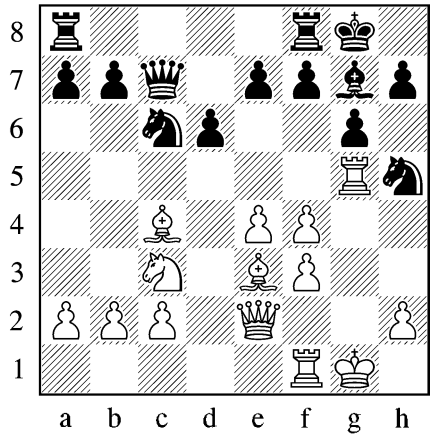
The most promising move.

14...♘f6 15.♗b3 a6?!, as played in Sikora Lerch – Rukavina, Decin 1977, would have allowed White to start a consistent attack with 16.f5N±. However, Black can improve earlier by means of 15...e6N 16.f5 ♖ae8, with double-edged play.

Krogius analysed 14...♘d4 15.♕d3 ♘xf3† 16.gxf3 ♗e6 17.♗xe6 fxe6 18.f5 with an initiative for White. This may not be entirely clear, but in any case the main move involves less risk and offers more chances for Black to take over the initiative.

15.gxf3

15.♖xf3 ♘d4 16.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 17.♔h1 allows an elegant combination: 17...♘xf4! 18.♖xf4 ♗xc3 19.bxc3 d5 A superb double attack. 20.e5 dxc4 21.♖xc4 (I would add that White's attack fails after 21.♖h4 ♖fd8 22.♕h5 ♔f8!∓) 21...♕b6∓ Black held a considerable advantage in Janjic – Stipkovic, corr. 1983, due to White's weaknesses.

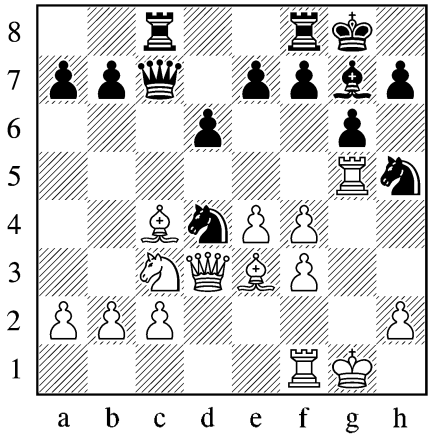


15...♘d4 16.♕d3

16.♗xd4 ♘xf4 (or 16...♗xd4† followed by 17...♘xf4) wins material due to the hanging bishop on c4 and rook on g5.

After the text move, White seems to have consolidated, but Black's answer does not allow him time to develop his initiative with ♘d5 and f4-f5.

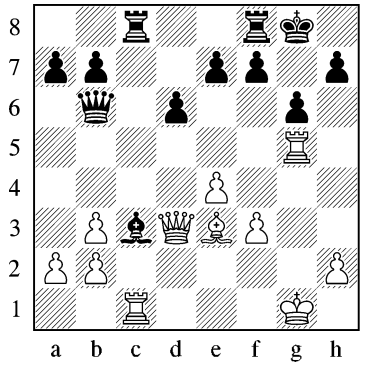
16...♖ac8



17.b3!N

The only way of staying in the game, even though White is walking a tightrope due to his exposed rook and bishop.

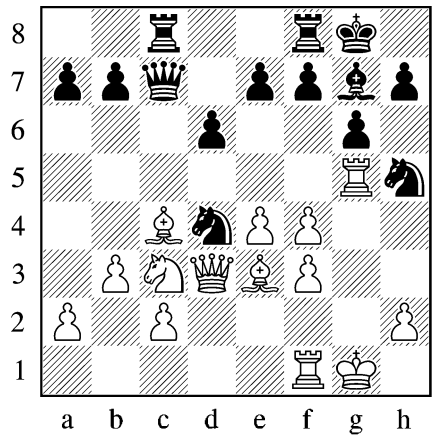
Neishtadt analysed the following tactical sequence: 17.♗b3? ♘xb3 18.cxb3 ♗xc3∓ Exchanges on c3 would yield Black an ending with an extra pawn, but 19.♖c1? only makes things worse after 19...♘xf4!, forcing White to clear the g1-b6 diagonal. 20.♗xf4 ♕b6† 21.♗e3



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21...♗d4!–+ The final touch, winning a piece. Some time later, Delisle – Glauser, corr. 1989, followed Neishtadt's analysis all this way, ending soon in a win for Black.

Another line given by Neishtadt goes: 17.♗d5 ♘e6 18.♗xe6 (18.♖xh5 gxh5 19.f5 ♘c5 20.♕d2 ♔h8 does not offer White enough attacking chances to compensate for the exchange) 18...fxe6 19.f5 Forced, since the f4-pawn is hanging. 19...♗xc3 20.fxg6 hxg6 21.bxc3 ♕xc3 22.♖xg6† ♔f7 23.♖g5 Now 23...♖g8∓ is even stronger than Neishtadt's 23...♘f6∓. Pawns are equal, but White's structure is completely ruined.



17...♘c6

Preparing to harass the bishop with ...♘a5, although this must be done with some care.

18.♔h1

White's only attacking chance is to double rooks along the g-file.

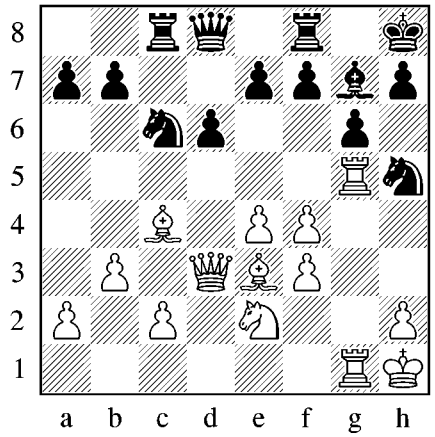
18.♘d5 ♕d8∓ only drives the queen to a stable square. Black can continue with ...e6 and ...♘a5.

18...♕d8

Still preparing ...♘a5, because 18...♘a5? 19.♘d5 ♕d8 20.♘xe7†! wins White a pawn.

19.♖fg1 ♔h8 20.♘e2

Evacuating the knight from the dangerous c-file.



20...a6

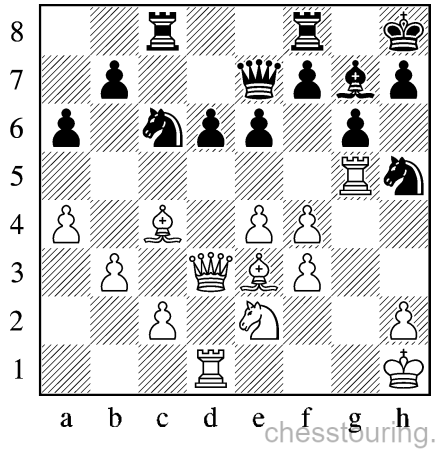
Black prepares his attack against the c4-bishop patiently.

20...♘a5 21.♗d5 e6 22.♖xh5 gxh5 23.♖xg7 ♔xg7 24.♗d4† ♔g8 25.♕e3 offers White enough compensation for the sacrificed exchange.

21.a4 e6

Everything is ready for ...♘a5 now. White has nothing better than switching to the d-file.

22.♖d1 ♕e7∓



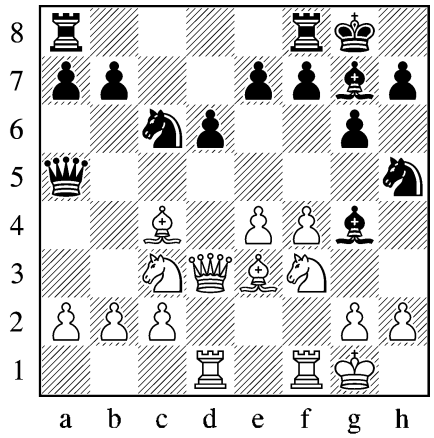
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Black is better coordinated and has the superior structure. His main plan is ...♖fd8 preparing ...d5, based on White's hanging pieces. The d6-pawn is taboo:

23.♕xd6? ♖fd8 24.♕xe7 ♖xd1†

Black wins a rook.

C12) 13.♕d3N



Even though never tried in practice, this deserves some attention. White safely defends c3, and taking advantage of the queen's exposure requires some imagination from Black.

13...♘b4

This makes sense only in connection with the next move.

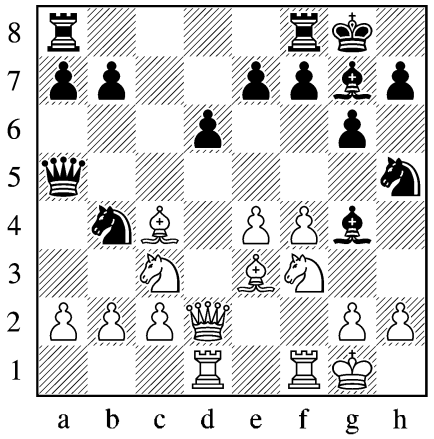
The engines are enthusiastic about the positions with doubled c-pawns. Here are two illustrative lines evaluated as equal, though I would be reluctant to try them out in practice:

13...♖ad8 14.♗b3 e6 15.h3 ♗xf3 16.♖xf3 ♖fe8 17.g4 ♗xc3 18.bxc3 ♘f6 followed by ...d5.

13...♖ac8 14.♗b3 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♘d8 16.c4 ♘e6 17.f5 ♘c5

In both lines Black's knights are stable, but I would advise against underestimating the bishops' force and White's attacking potential.

14.♕d2



14...♘xf4!

The consequences of this simple tactical blow are far harder to evaluate than it might seem.

15.h3!

Forcing the bishop to declare his intentions.

15.♗xf4 simply loses a pawn to 15...♕c5†∓.

Playing along the lines below, without forcing the bishop's retreat, offers Back an improved version of the queen sacrifice: 15.♘d5 ♘bxd5 16.♕xa5 ♘xe3 or 15.♗b3 ♘e6 16.♘d5 ♘xd5 17.♕xa5 ♘xe3. The difference is that on g4 the bishop is ready to exchange the important f3-knight, which supports the central break e4-e5, and in the latter line Black can answer ♗xe6 with ...♗xe6.

15...♗e6

15...♗xf3 16.♖xf3± leaves Black hanging, for if 16...♘e6 17.♘d5 the queen sacrifice does not work, as the e3-bishop is defended.

15...♗d7 and 15...♗c8 are more passive,

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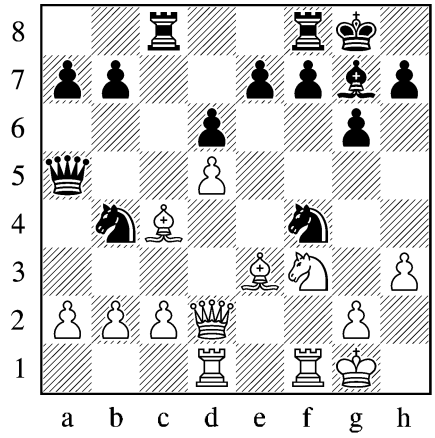
allowing 16.♗b3 ♘e6 17.♘d5 ♘xd5 18.♕xa5 ♘xe3 19.e5± when Black has problems building up a fortress.

16.♘d5

Despite the engines' slight scepticism, I do not see any danger for Black after 16.♗xe6 ♘xe6 17.♘d5 ♘xd5 18.♕xa5 ♘xe3 19.c3 ♘c5=, with perfect stability and enough material compensation for the queen in a still double-edged position.

16...♗xd5 17.exd5 ♖ac8

An interesting position in which both sides' pieces are hanging. Black will inevitably get three pawns for a piece, with approximate equality.



18.♗b3

The only alternative is: 18.a3 ♖xc4 19.axb4 ♕xd5 20.♕xd5 ♘xd5 21.♖xd5 ♗xb2 22.♗xa7 ♖a8 23.♗e3 ♖xb4 24.♖b1 ♖a2 Followed by ...f6 and ...♔f7, when Black will already be thinking of ways to advance his pawns.

18...♘fxd5 19.♗xd5 ♖xc2 20.♕e1 ♕b5

Attacking the central bishop and threatening ...♖e2.

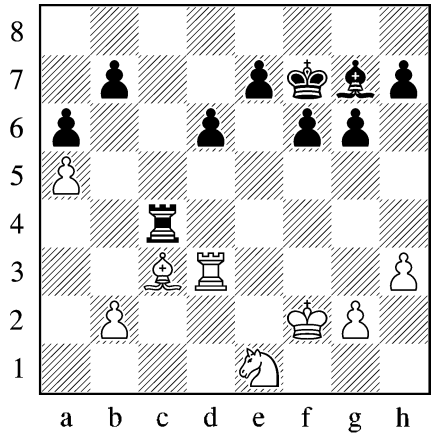
21.a4 ♕e2 22.♖f2!?

The best way to restrict Black's activity.

22...♕xe1† 23.♘xe1 ♖xf2 24.♔xf2 ♘xd5 25.♖xd5 a6 26.♗d4 f6!?

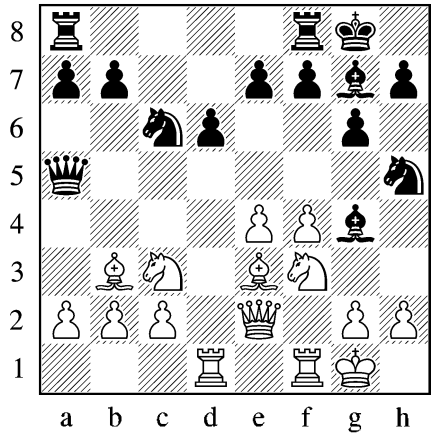
Until Black manages to activate his pieces with ...♖c8-c4 and ...♔f7, it is better to avoid the bishop exchange.

27.♗c3 ♖c8 28.♖d3 ♖c4 29.a5 ♔f7



With an approximately equal ending. A possible plan is ...♗f8 followed by ...e6 and ...d5 or, if the knight is far from d5, even ...e5, ...♔e6 and ...d5.

C13) 13.♗b3

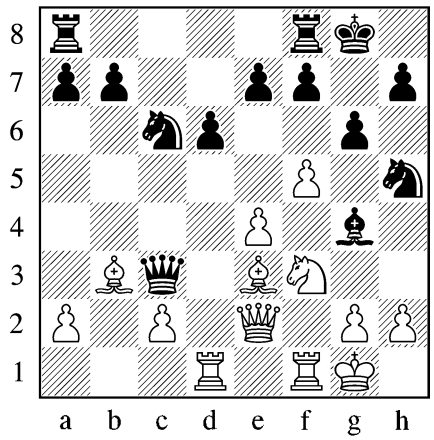


This was Spassky's choice, offering White some attacking chances for the pawn.

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13...♗xc3 14.bxc3 ♕xc3 15.f5

If 15.h3 ♘g3 White needs to exchange queens in order to avoid the loss of an exchange. This leaves him without any compensation for the pawn: 16.♕e1 ♗xf3 17.gxf3 ♕xe1 18.♖fxe1 ♖fc8 19.f5 In Nun – Sapi, Hradec Kralove 1978, Black should have prevented f5-f6 with 19...♘h5!N∓ followed by ...♘a5, exchanging one bishop and completely eliminating White's attacking chances.



15...♘f6

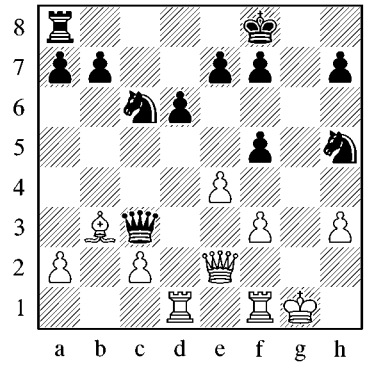
Fischer chose the most restrictive move order. Black returns the knight to its most stable square, attacking e4, while keeping the d4-square under control with the other knight.

Slightly later that same year, Hort deviated with 15...♘a5, probably thinking that exchanging the b3-bishop is part of Black's plan anyway and that the knight on h5 would inhibit h2-h3. 16.♗d4! Immediately occupying the offered square. 16...♕c7 17.h3 ♘xb3 18.cxb3 ♗xf3 19.♕xf3 In Gligoric – Hort, Skopje 1972, White had a more active version of our main line, since he had been spared the need to play ♖d3.

16.h3 ♗xf3 17.♕xf3

The most constructive move.

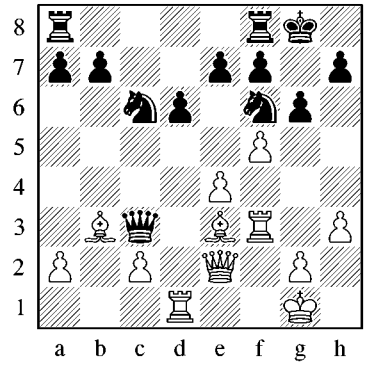
17.gxf3?! obstructs the f-file and weakens the whole kingside: 17...gxf5!? 18.♗h6 ♘h5 19.♗xf8 ♔xf8



Black has two pawns for the exchange and White's dark squares are weak. The situation persists after: 20.exf5 ♘g3 21.♕e1 ♕c5† 22.♖f2 ♘d4 23.♔g2 ♘gxf5∓

17.♖xf3

This has the drawback of leaving the e4-pawn undefended, although taking it requires some accuracy from Black.



17...a5

But not 17...♘xe4? 18.fxg6 hxg6 19.♗f2 ♕e5 20.♖e3 and White wins the knight.

18.a4 ♘e5 19.♖f4

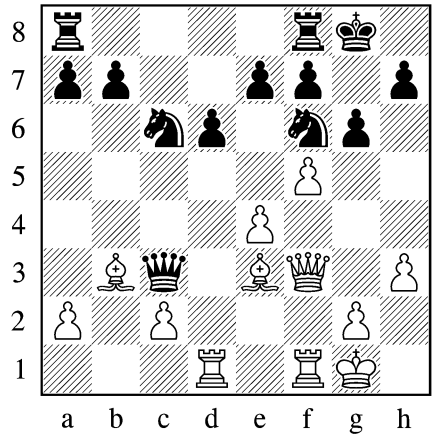
If 19.♖ff1 White can take the second pawn with 19...♘xe4.

19...g5 20.♖ff1 h6

With an extra pawn and perfect stability,

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since 21.h4? runs into: 21...♘eg4∓ 22.♗d4? ♕g3–+



17...♘a5

Now is a good moment to hit the b3-bishop, since ♗d4 entails exchanging queens.

17...♘e5 is less accurate due to 18.♕f4 followed by ♗d4.

18.♖d3

White unpins the bishop, but the rook is exposed on d3 to a possible knight's return to c6 and e5, while the back rank is weakened slightly.

After 18.fxg6 hxg6 19.♖d3 ♕c7 20.♗d5, as in Dunne – Grosky, corr. 1986, the safest is 20...♘c6N followed by ...♘e5 and ...♘xd5.

18...♕c7 19.♗h6

Spassky decides to create immediate threats.

If 19.♗d4 ♘xb3 20.cxb3 ♖ac8, Black is ready with his counterplay along the c-file. For instance, 21.♕f4 allows 21...♕c2, when regaining the pawn with 22.♗xf6!? exf6 23.♖xd6 leads only to complete equality.

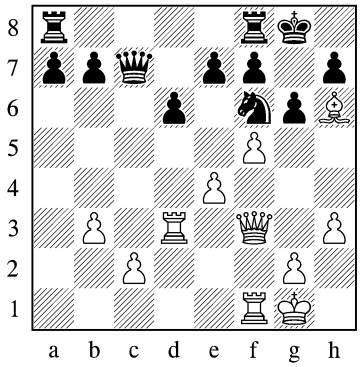
19...♘xb3 20.cxb3

The most natural move, taking the c-pawn out of the queen's range.

20.♗xf8 allows the intermediate 20...♘c5, when 21.♗h6 ♘xd3 22.cxd3 d5 weakens White's structure and keeps the extra pawn.

20.axb3N

This recapture also requires examining.



20...♕xc2

Black can also consider 20...♖fc8 21.c4 b5 with counterplay.

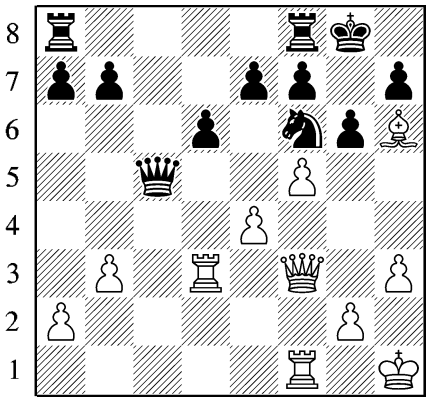
21.♗xf8 ♔xf8

Keeping the a7- and e7-pawns defended in view of the enemy rook's intrusion to the seventh rank.

22.♖c3 ♕xe4 23.♕xe4 ♘xe4 24.♖c7 b5=

Black has two pawns for the exchange and a compact structure, compensating for the enemy rook's activity.

20...♕c5† 21.♔h1



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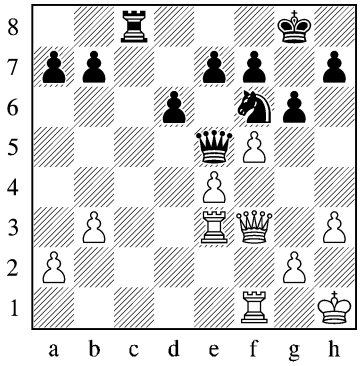
21...♖fc8!N

This was recommended by Timman in his comments to the original game.

Fischer sacrificed the exchange with:

21...♕e5 22.♗xf8 ♖xf8 23.♖e3 ♖c8

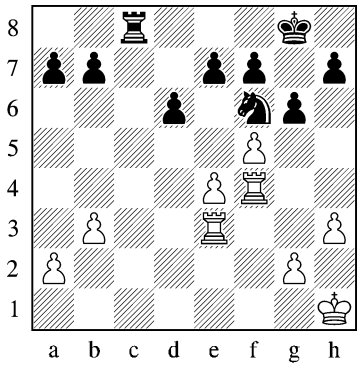
Black relies on his stability on the dark squares.



24.♕f4!N

This is a significant improvement over the game, which went 24.fxg6 hxg6 25.♕f4 ♕xf4 26.♖xf4 ♘d7 with a reliable fortress for Black, and a draw shortly after the adjournment in Spassky – Fischer, Reykjavik (17) 1972.

24...♕xf4 25.♖xf4



25...g5

Trying to take advantage of White's move order.

The difference with respect to the game is that if 25...♘d7 26.♖f2 ♖c1† 27.♔h2 ♘e5, then White has 28.f6, partly spoiling Black's stability.

26.♖ff3 ♖c5 27.♖c3 ♖e5 28.♖c7 ♖xe4 29.♖xb7 a5 30.♖a7 ♖e5 31.♖c3±

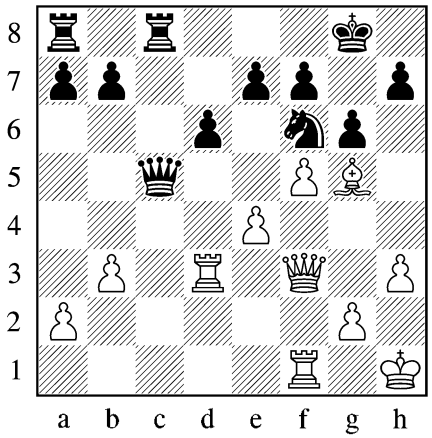
White's activity and queenside majority offer him winning chances.

Another possible way of improving over the game is 21...♖fe8N, for instance: 22.♗g5 ♕e5 23.♗xf6 ♕xf6 24.fxg6 fxg6 25.♕xf6 exf6 26.♖xd6 ♖xe4 27.♖d7 ♖f8 28.♖xb7 ♖f7= With a probable draw.

22.♗g5

White does best to exchange the strong knight, even though this leads only to equality.

Timman analysed 22.fxg6 hxg6 23.♖d5 ♕c3, starting counterplay before White creates concrete threats: 24.♕f2 (better than 24.♕f4 ♕b4! pinning the e4-pawn, and if 25.♖f5 ♕d4∓ planning ...♖c2) 24...♖c5∓ Black has neutralized White's attacking attempts.



22...♕e5 23.♗xf6 ♕xf6 24.fxg6 ♕xf3 25.gxh7† ♔xh7 26.♖fxf3 f6 27.e5!?

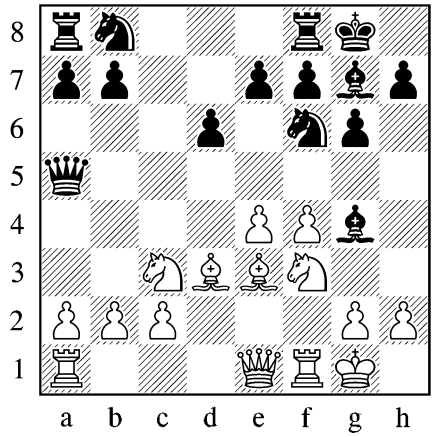
The only active try.

27...dxe5 28.♖d7 ♔g6 29.♖xe7 ♖c2 30.a4 b6=

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The strong central pawn compensates for White's slightly more active rooks.

C2) 11.♕e1



This is the start of a resolute attacking plan. By unpinning the knight, White more or less forces Black's answer:

11...♗xf3

Otherwise the bishop would be misplaced after ♘d2.

12.♖xf3

White has provoked the exchange without playing h2-h3, keeping the h3-square available for the rook in order to continue with ♖h3 and ♕h4. This is, however, a committal plan, and if Black manages to defend, White's major pieces might remain misplaced. Compared to the main line, covered under line C3, where White recaptures on f3 with his queen, he has less control in the centre.

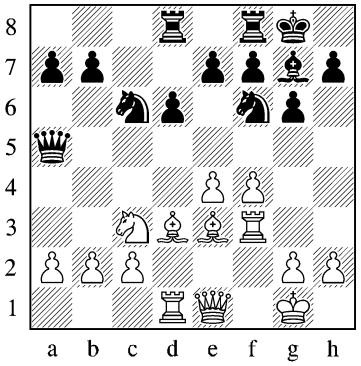
12...♘c6 13.♔h1

White clears the g1-square and evacuates the king from the slightly vulnerable diagonal in order to proceed with ♖h3 without fearing ...♘g4.

13.♖d1 ♖ad8N

This is Black's best answer, completing development and preparing the central break ...d5.

13...♘g4?! embarks on a risky adventure: 14.♗c1 ♕c5† 15.♔h1 ♗d4 16.♘d5 This eventually yielded White a win in Grigoryan – Yilmazyerli, Jerusalem 2015, but 16.♖d2!N would have been even stronger.



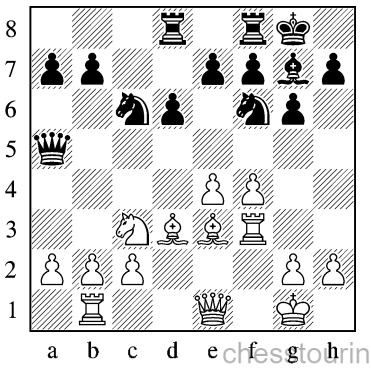
14.♖b1

This is the only way of fighting against Black's plan, by preparing b2-b4, but it means abandoning the aggressive set-up.

If 14.♗d2 Black can safely take the pawn with 14...♕b6† 15.♔h1 ♕xb2.

14.♖h3 runs into 14...♘g4, leaving White vulnerable on the dark squares.

14.♔h1 allows Black to demonstrate his main plan: 14...d5 15.e5 d4 16.exf6 exf6 17.♗d2 White needs to keep his bishop in order to avoid problems on the dark squares. 17...dxc3 18.♗xc3 ♕xa2 Black has an extra pawn and a solid position.



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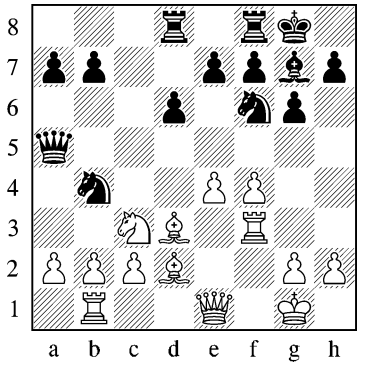
14...♘b4!

Reverting to a plan we will see again in the lines below.

If 14...d5 15.e5 d4 16.exf6, the generally desirable 16...exf6?! runs into 17.b4!±, for instance: 17...♕h5 18.b5 ♘b8 19.♗f2 dxc3 20.♕xc3± White has a lot of activity.

15.♗d2

White should not forget about Black's initial plan. 15.♔h1 allows: 15...d5 16.e5 d4∓



15...e6

Taking measures against f4-f5.

16.♔h1

16.f5 exf5 17.exf5 d5 offers Black active play in the centre.

16...♖fe8 17.♖h3 ♘xd3

Preparing the queenside attack with ...b5.

18.cxd3 b5 19.a3 ♕b6 20.♕h4 h5 21.♗e3 ♕b7

Black has regrouped perfectly and intends to continue his queenside attack with ...a5 and ...b4.

22.f5 ♘g4 23.fxg6 fxg6 24.♗g1 ♗f6=

Black has repelled the attack and maintained his positional harmony.

13...♖ac8

A useful move anticipating the opening of the c-file with ...♘b4 and ...♘xd3.

If 13...♘d7, planning ...♘c5 as in the next section, White's attack starting with 14.♖h3 is dangerous.

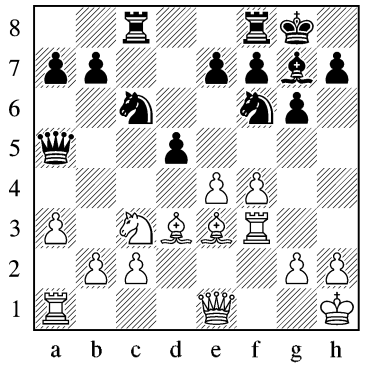
14.♖h3

Preventing ...♘b4 wastes time and slightly weakens the queenside:

14.a3

Black can already open the centre:

14...d5



15.e5

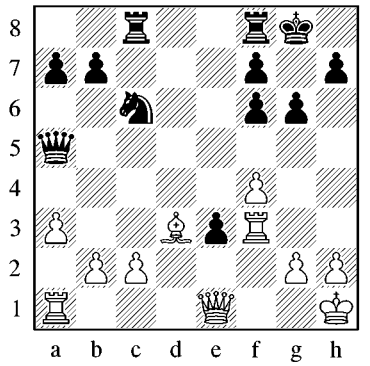
The critical answer.

15.♘xd5 leads to simplifications and a likely draw: 15...♘xd5 16.♕xa5 ♘xa5 17.exd5 ♗xb2 18.♖b1 ♗xa3 19.♗xa7 ♗c5 20.♖b5 This was agreed drawn in Baklan – Chernin, Panormo 2001, in view of 20...♗xa7 21.♖xa5 ♗c5=.

15...d4 16.exf6 ♗xf6

16...exf6 runs into the familiar 17.b4±.

17.♘e4 dxe3 18.♘xf6† exf6



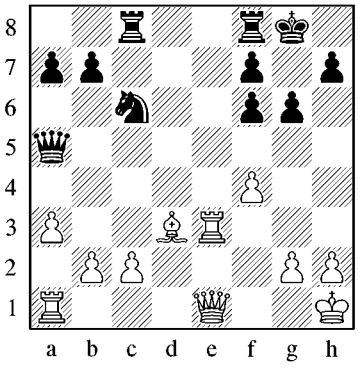
Now is a good moment to speak about this type of position, which is liable to arise in the current lines. White has a queenside

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majority, but Black's doubled pawns ensure perfect safety for the king, After ...f6-f5, the f4-pawn will need protecting with g2-g3, which slightly weakens the white king. At the same time the knight is very versatile. It may make use of the weaknesses created by the advancing queenside majority, or it could be transferred to e4. The superiority of the bishop over the knight is not so clear either. The bishop's only stable square is d3, but its activity is restricted there.

19.♖xe3

More natural than 19.♕xe3, which offers Black an additional tempo: 19...♖fe8 20.♕f2 f5 21.♖e3 ♖xe3 22.♕xe3 ♕d5 23.♖d1 So far we have followed Gaponenko – A. Hamdouchi, Baile Tusnad 2005, which ended in a draw after a long fight. Black's most active continuation would be 23...♕a2N 24.♕c1 ♘a5, when White already needs to be careful.



19...♕b6 20.♖b1 f5 21.c3 ♘d8

Preparing to transfer the knight to e6.

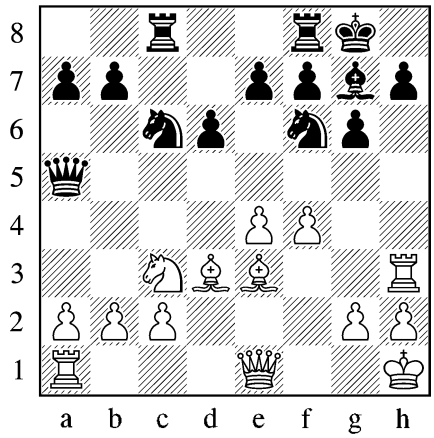
Another possible regrouping is 21...♘a5 22.♕e2 ♘b3 23.♖e1 ♘c5, planning ...♖cd8. As in the line below, the sacrifice 24.♗xf5 is not dangerous: 24...gxf5 25.♖g3† ♔h8 26.♕e5† f6 27.♕e7 ♖g8 28.♕xh7†! The only saving resource. 28...♔xh7 29.♖e7† ♔h6 30.♖h3† White delivers perpetual check.

22.♕e2N

22.♗xf5? was eventually crowned by success after: 22...gxf5 23.♖g3† ♔h8 24.♕e7 ♖g8? 25.♕e5† f6 26.♖xg8† ♔xg8 27.♕e8† Black resigned in De Firmian – Chernin, Moscow 1990, in view of 28.♕d7† winning the rook. However, the earlier 24...♕h6N 25.♕e5† f6 would have simply maintained Black's material advantage.

22...♘e6 23.g3 ♖ce8 24.♖e5 ♘g7

Black has neutralized White's pressure and will soon take over control of the e-file, with the more pleasant play.

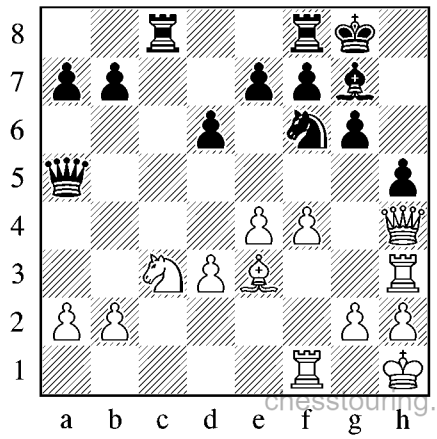


14...♘b4

The familiar counterattacking plan.

15.♕h4 h5 16.♖f1 ♘xd3 17.cxd3

So far we have followed Ahn – Verduyn, Belgium 2005.



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17...b5!N

The clearest way to obtain counterplay, taking advantage of the fact that the kingside is secure.

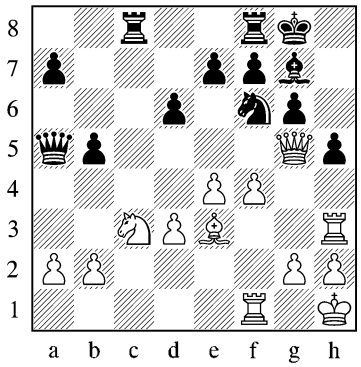
18.f5

The most consistent continuation of the attack.

18.a3 does not really stop Black's counterplay: 18...b4 19.axb4 ♕xb4 20.♗c1 a5 Followed by the further advance of the a-pawn.

18.♕g5

This pins and temporarily wins the b5-pawn, but leaves the h3-rook misplaced.



18...♕b4 19.♕xb5

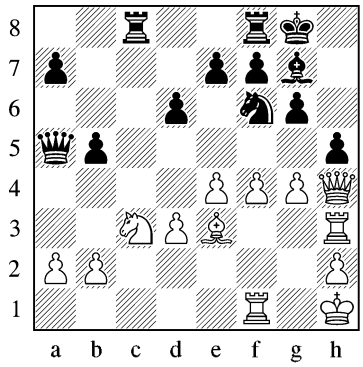
The apparently solid 19.♗c1, defending b2, is likely to cause White back-rank problems after 19...♘g4∓, threatening ...♗f6. Now 20.♕xb5? ♗xc3 nets Black a piece, while 20.♘d5? reveals the back rank issue: 20...♖xc1! 21.♖xc1 ♘f2† 22.♔g1 ♘xh3† 23.gxh3 ♕d2, with winning counterplay.

19...♕xb5 20.♘xb5 ♖c2 21.♗d4 ♖fc8!? 22.♘xa7 ♖b8=

After the inevitable bishop exchange with ...♘g4 or ...♘d7 Black will regain both pawns, as the h3-rook will need some time to return to the game.

18.g4

This does not work out well.



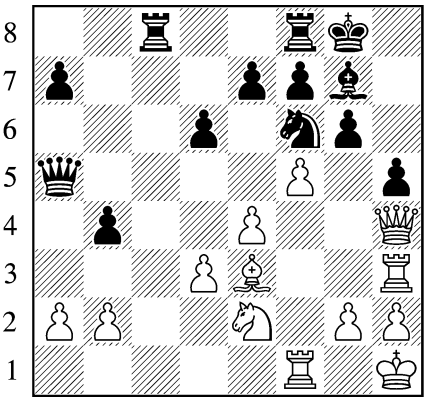
18...♘xg4 19.♘d5 ♘xe3 20.♖xe3

Inserting the intermediate 20.♘xe7† ♔h7 21.♖xe3 ♕d8 places the knight in an unpleasant pin: 22.♕g5 ♗h6 23.♕f6 ♖c7 Black can do better than forcing a draw by perpetually attacking the queen. 24.♘d5 ♖c2 Black has the more pleasant ending, due to the rook's activity.

20...♕d2 21.f5 ♗e5

Black plans either ...♖c1 or ...♖c2, with great counterplay.

18...b4 19.♘e2



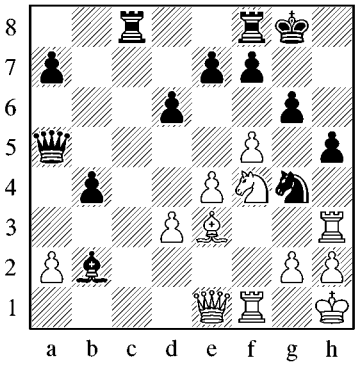
Both sides are quite advanced with carrying out their mutual plans, and the position is about equal. Black has many reasonable moves, including pawn-grabbing with 19...♕xa2 or 19...♖c2 followed by ...♖xb2, but possibly the most restrictive is:

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19...♘g4 20.♕xe7

Alternatively:

20.♘f4 ♗f6 21.♕e1 ♗xb2



22.♘xh5

White needs to hurry with his attack, as Black has easy progress on the queenside and the first rank is likely to become weak.

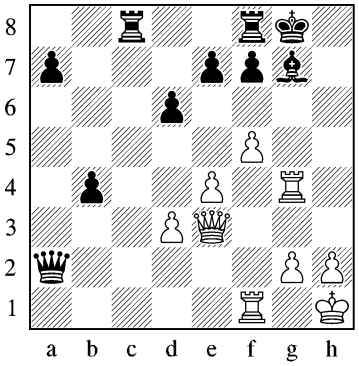
22...gxh5 23.♖xh5 ♘xe3 24.♖g5† ♗g7 25.♕xe3

25.♕g3? ♕e5 keeps an extra piece since, with his queen attacked, White is not in time to interfere on the long diagonal with f5-f6.

25...♕xa2

Planning ...♕b2, defending the bishop.

26.♖g4



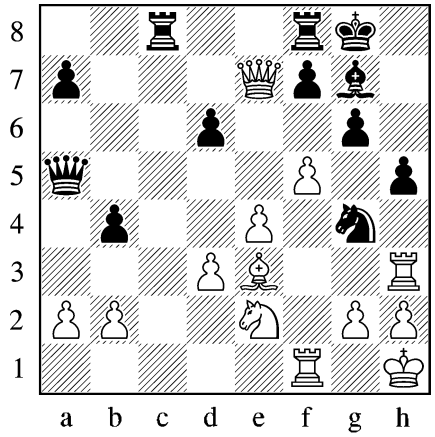
26...f6

Avoiding the trap: 26...♕b2? 27.f6! exf6 28.♕h6 f5 29.exf5+–

Facing the defence ...♖f7, White has nothing better than forcing a draw with:

27.♖xg7† ♔xg7 28.♕g3† ♔h7=

Unfortunately for White, the rook lift 29.♖f4?? is impossible due to the weak back rank, and if 29.h3?? ♖f7 (certainly not the only move) Black defends against the immediate threats and wins. Therefore White must settle for perpetual check.



20...♖c7 21.♕h4

21.♕xd6 ♗e5 almost traps the queen, forcing 22.♕d5 ♕xd5 23.exd5 ♖c2 with better prospects in the ending, despite the temporary material disadvantage.

21...♕xa2 22.fxg6 fxg6 23.♖xf8† ♗xf8 24.♕g5 ♘e5 25.d4

With his queenside destroyed and his back rank weak, White should hurry to force matters.

25.♖xh5 ♕xb2 leaves White without a good continuation.

25...♗e7 26.♕h6

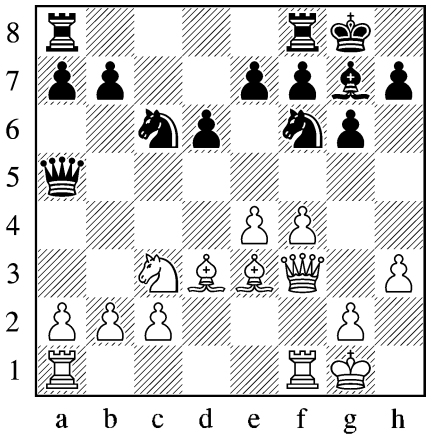
26.♕g3 ♘g4 wins for Black, due to White's awful coordination.

26...♗f8

With a draw by repetition.

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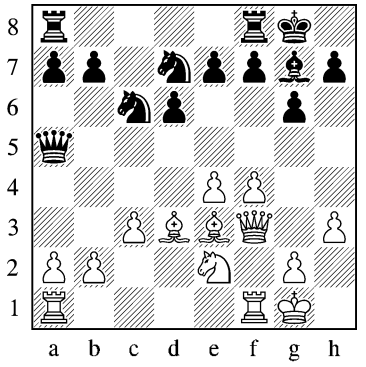
C3) 11.h3 ♗xf3 12.♕xf3 ♘c6



This is the most popular continuation. White keeps his coordination intact, hoping to generate an attack with a more consistent, albeit slower, character than in the previous section. The most popular moves now are **C31) 13.♔h1** and **C32) 13.a3**.

Here is a brief survey of the minor alternatives:

13.♘e2 is the start of a suicidal plan: 13...♘d7 14.c3??



Hoping to neutralize Black's queenside pressure, but losing a pawn. 14...♘de5! 15.fxe5 ♘xe5

Remarkably, many players, including grandmasters, have fallen into this trap, the most notable example being a game between two prominent figures of the past, Hübner – Korchnoi, Skelleftea 1989.

13.f5

This looks illogical, as it weakens the e5-square. But since advancing the f-pawn is part of White's long-term plan, it should be considered at earlier stages too.

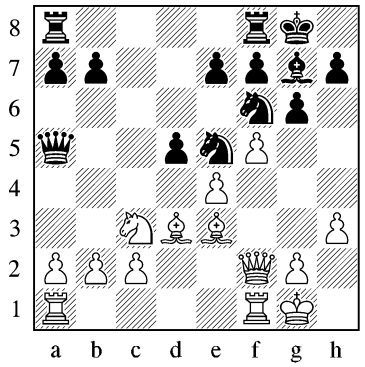
13...♘e5 14.♕f2

14.♕g3 prevents the central break recommended below but frees the queen's rook from the task of defending the a7-pawn: 14...♖ac8 15.♖ae1 ♘c4 16.♗xc4 ♖xc4 Black has good counterplay.

14...d5!

Black should hurry to dismantle the enemy centre before the attack starts taking shape (for instance after ♗g5).

14...b5 was played in Van Baarle – Klauner, West Berlin 1980, but this cuts off the queen's communication with the centre. The best way of proving that the last move mainly created weaknesses would be 15.a3N, when both 15...♘c4 16.b4 and 15...b4 16.axb4 ♕xb4 17.♖a2 a5 18.♖fa1 cause queenside problems for Black.



15.♖ae1N

It is essential to overprotect the e3-bishop in order to avoid all kinds of tactical tricks.

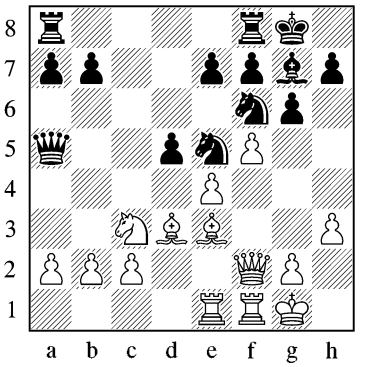
For instance: 15.g4? ♘fxg4 16.hxg4 ♘xg4 17.♕e1 ♘xe3 18.♕xe3 d4–+

15.♔h1? does not avoid the trick either:

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15...♘fg4 16.hxg4 ♘xg4 17.♕e1 (hoping for 17...♘xe3 18.♘xd5! with chances to maintain equality, but Black can do better) 17...d4∓ with preferable play due to the excellent control of the dark squares.

15.♗g5, as played in Helmert – Neumann, Germany 1996, is best met by 15...dxe4N, when both 16.♘xe4 ♖ad8 and 16.♗xe4 ♖ad8 offer Black good play in the centre.



15...e6!

Continuing to undermine the enemy pawn chain.

15...dxe4 16.♗xe4 is likely to offer White some light pressure.

15...♘fg4? does not work anymore: 16.hxg4 ♘xg4 17.♕h4 ♘xe3 18.♖xe3 d4 19.♖h3+–, keeping the extra piece.

16.fxe6 fxe6

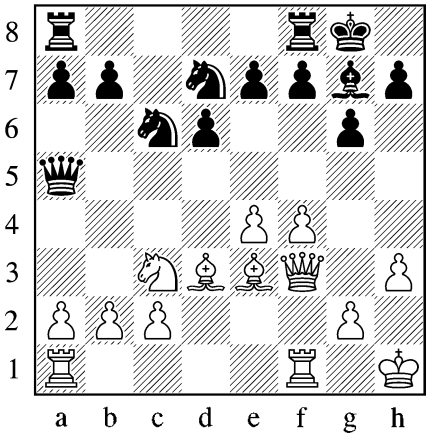
Black has active play, partly based on the enemy queen's exposure.

C31) 13.♔h1

White prepares to put some pressure on the enemy queen with ♗d2, avoiding the loss of a pawn after ...♕b6†.

13...♘d7

Since there is no danger of an attack along the h-file as in line C2, this is the most effective way of preparing the exchange of the d3-bishop. Keeping the queen's knight is useful because it controls d4 and defends e7. On top of this, the last move also creates the potential threat of ...♗xc3, familiar to us from the game Spassky – Fischer (line C13).



14.♗d2

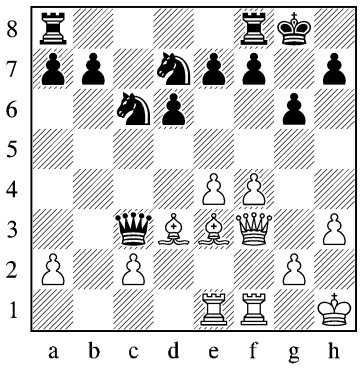
This is the consistent follow-up to White's previous move.

14.♖ae1

This developing move allows:

14...♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♕xc3

With the black queen defending the long diagonal, White's attacking prospects are not too worrying.



16.f5

Or if 16.h4 ♖ac8 (planning ...♘b4 or ...♘d4) 17.h5 ♘f6 18.hxg6 hxg6, the h-file opens rather in Black's favour.

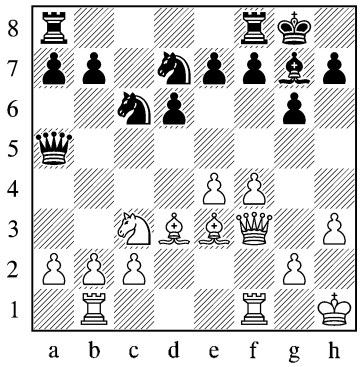
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16...♘ce5

Followed by ...f6 with an extra pawn and a solid position.

14.♖ab1

White indirectly defends c3 by putting X-ray pressure on b7.

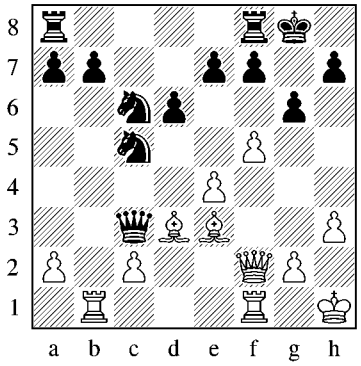


14...♘c5 15.f5

15.♗d2 allows Black to set up the fortress seen so often in the lines below: 15...♘xd3 16.cxd3 e6 17.♕f2 f5= Wege – J. Schmidt, Doernigheim 1994.

15...♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♕xc3 17.♕f2

Regaining the pawn with 17.♗xc5 dxc5 18.♖b3 offers Black control over the dark squares, while White's initiative is temporary: 18...♕e5 19.♖xb7 ♖ab8 20.♖d7 ♖bd8 21.♖xd8 ♘xd8 22.♗c4 ♘b7 23.fxg6 hxg6 24.♗xf7† ♔g7 25.♕b3 ♘d6 26.♗c4 ♖xf1† 27.♗xf1 ♕xe4 With a comfortable ending for Black, due to the exposed white king.



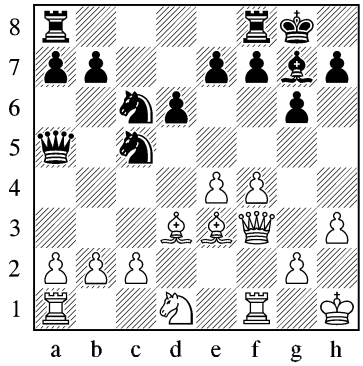
17...b6 18.♗h6 f6 19.♗xf8 ♔xf8 20.♖bd1 ♔g7

Followed by ...♘e5. Despite the missing exchange, Black has excellent play, as the position is static and White does not have an active plan.

14.♘d1

This aims to evacuate the minor pieces from the attacked squares, but the plan is too contorted.

14...♘c5



15.♗e2N

15.♗xc5 is an obvious concession: 15...♕xc5 16.c3 b5 17.a3 a5 18.♘e3 In A. Petrov – Gubanov, St Petersburg 1996, Black should have restricted the enemy knight with 18...e6N, since 19.f5?! runs into 19...♘e5 20.♕e2 b4∓, with a queenside initiative and great control over the dark squares.

15...♖ad8 16.a4

This is White's best attempt to maintain queenside stability.

16.a3?! runs into the annoying 16...♕a4!, attacking c2 and e4.

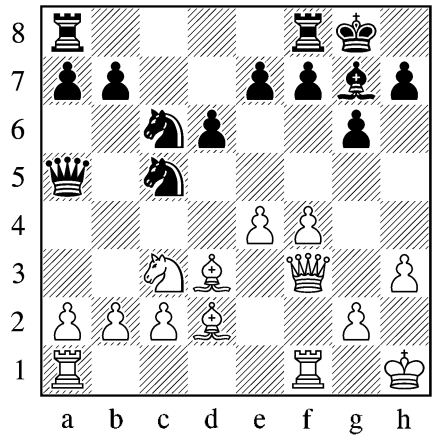
16.c3?! ♘b3 17.♖b1 ♕xa2 is also inferior for White.

16...♕b4

White has nothing better than 17.♗xc5 ♕xc5, with comfortable play for Black.

14...♘c5

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15.♖ad1

The most natural, but by no means the only move.

15.a3 ♘xd3 16.♕xd3

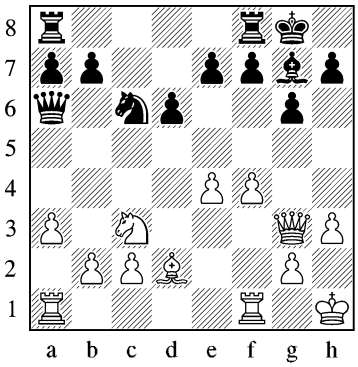
16.cxd3 ♕b6 17.♖ab1 transposes to variation C32.

16...♕a6

This solves all Black's problems by challenging White's control of the light squares.

17.♕g3

17.♕xa6 bxa6∓ followed by ...♖ab8, ...♖fc8 and ...♘d4 offers Black too much queenside play. Or if 17.g4 ♕xd3 18.cxd3 ♖fc8= Black has comfortable play, as the kingside attack is not dangerous in the absence of queens.



17...f5

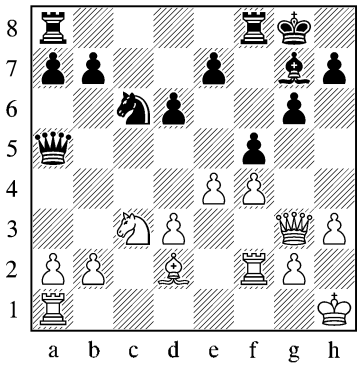
Black was not worse at all in Unzicker – Abramovic, Moscow 1982.

The following attacking plan gets nowhere for White:

15.♕g3 ♘xd3 16.cxd3 f5 17.♖f2

Due to the queen's activity along the fifth rank, the thematic attack based on 17.h4 rather favours Black: 17...♘d4 18.h5 fxe4 19.hxg6 ♕h5† 20.♕h2 ♕xh2† 21.♔xh2 e3 22.gxh7† ♔xh7 23.♗xe3 ♘c2∓ Black wins an exchange.

17.exf5 is best answered with 17...♕xf5 18.♖ae1 d5∓, with better coordination and a small space advantage for Black.



17...e6 18.exf5 exf5=

Black had no problems at all in Chandler – Torre, Manila 1977.

15.♗c4 ♖ac8

The bishop on c4 may become exposed after ...♘a4.

16.♖ad1

If 16.a3, as in Henao – Garcia Martinez, Bogota 1991, 16...♘a4N is even more effective than in the main line, as the queenside is weaker.

16...♘a4 17.♘xa4 ♕xa4 18.♗b3 ♕a6N

18...♕b5 19.♕f2 ♘d4= was also fine for Black in Van der Ploeg – Conterno, email 2011.

19.c3 ♘a5

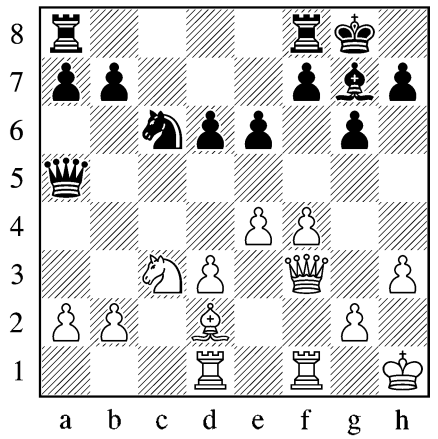
Black has excellent queenside counterplay.

15...♘xd3 16.cxd3 e6

This is the usual way of preparing ...f5.

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The rare 16...f5 deserves attention. I assume that players with Black wish to avoid: 17.♘d5 (17.a3 e6 transposes to the main line) However, Black can safely take the pawn. 17...♕xa2 18.♗c3 ♕b3 There is no obvious compensation for White.



17.a3

17.f5N

This remains untested so far, possibly because of the obvious:

17...exf5 18.exf5

18.♘d5 runs into 18...fxe4!∓.

18...♘d4

Apparently White loses the f-pawn, but things are not that simple.

19.♘d5

19.♕xb7? ♘xf5 20.♕f3 ♖ab8 yields Black the initiative.

19...♕xd2 20.♖xd2 ♘xf3 21.♖xf3

Black still needs some accuracy in order to avoid micro-problems.

21...♖fe8

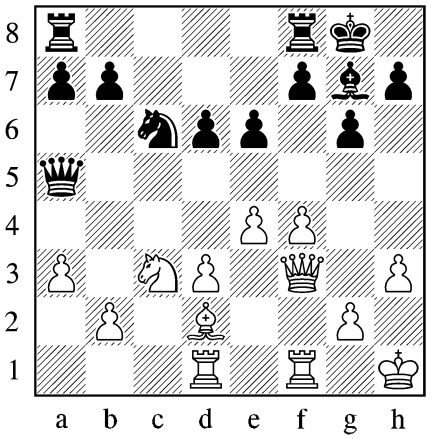
Preparing to attack the perfectly placed knight with ...♖e5.

22.f6 ♗h6 23.♖c2 ♖e5 24.♘e7† ♔f8 25.♖c7 ♖b8

Planning to exchange White's active rook with ...♖c5.

26.b4 ♗e3!

Followed by ...♗b6-d8 with equality.



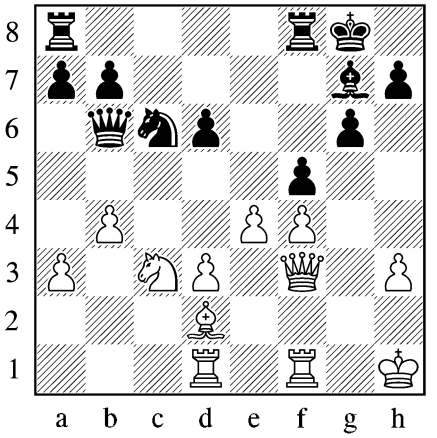
17...f5

Finally blocking White's mobile pawn chain.

18.g4

Exchanging the bishops with 18.♘e2!? ♕b5 19.♗c3 ♗xc3 20.bxc3 ♖f7= causes no problems, as M. Gurevich points out.

18...♕b6 19.gxf5 exf5 20.b4



20...♘e7!?N

I believe defending the d5-square is more accurate than 20...♘d4, although the latter move eventually yielded Black a win in Tischbierek – M. Gurevich, Ostend 1991.

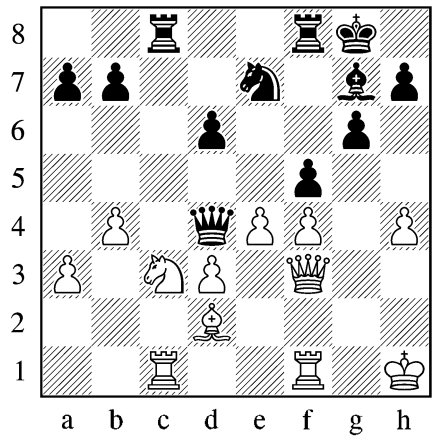
21.h4

White's only active plan.

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21...♖ac8 22.♖c1 ♕d4

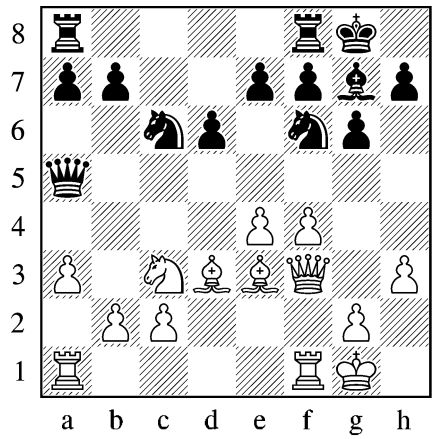
This is another idea of the novelty. The queen makes good use of the d4-square, tying her rival to the defence of the d3-pawn. In case of emergency, Black can strengthen his kingside defence with ...♕f6.



23.h5 gxh5!

Followed by ...♔h8, ...♗f6 and ...♖g8, with strong counterplay.

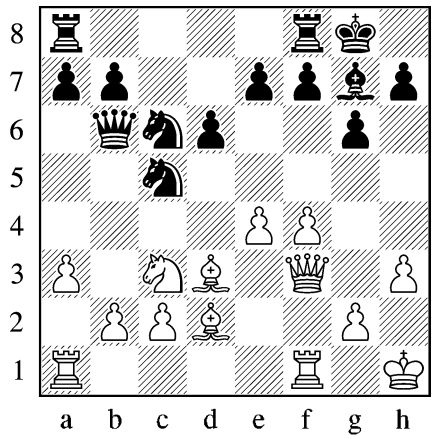
C32) 13.a3



This apparently modest move is even more popular than 13.♔h1. White indirectly defends the b2-pawn by creating a net for the black queen, but the character of the position and its evaluation do not change. We have seen that play can transpose here from line C32.

13...♘d7 14.♗d2 ♕b6† 15.♔h1 ♘c5

15...♕xb2? 16.♖fb1 ♗xc3 17.♖xb2 ♗xb2 18.♖b1 ♗g7 19.♖xb7± does not offer Black compensation for the queen.

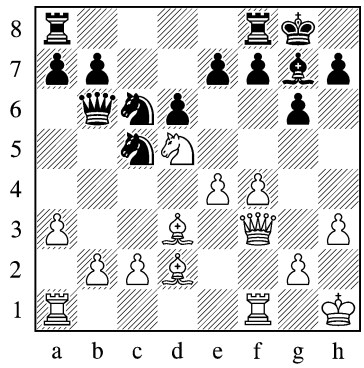


16.♖ab1

16.b4 does not induce any change in Black's general plan: 16...♘xd3 17.cxd3 ♘d4 18.♕d1 In Renner – Rudolf, Germany 1996, the simplest way to equality was 18...f5N=.

16.♘d5

This rare option deserves a closer look, even if it has never been tried by strong players.



16...♕d8

This is safer than: 16...♕xb2 17.♖ab1N ♕xa3

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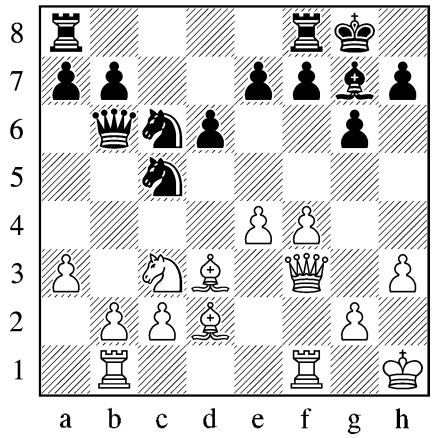
18.f5 ♖ae8 Black's extra pawns compensate for White's strong kingside pressure, but in practice defending this position may prove unpleasant.

17.♗c3 e6 18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.♘e3

This occurred in Heinel – Leichter, Bergisch Gladbach 1996. Black could have obtained a safe position with:

19...♕f6N 20.b4 ♘xd3 21.cxd3 ♖ac8 22.f5 ♕d4

Followed by ...♘e5 and possibly ...♖c3. The attack based on f5-f6† is not dangerous, as Black can defend the g7-square easily with ...♔h8 and, if needed, ...♖f8.



16...♘xd3 17.cxd3

Black answers 17.♕xd3 with the familiar 17...♕a6=, which we saw in an analogous position on page 165.

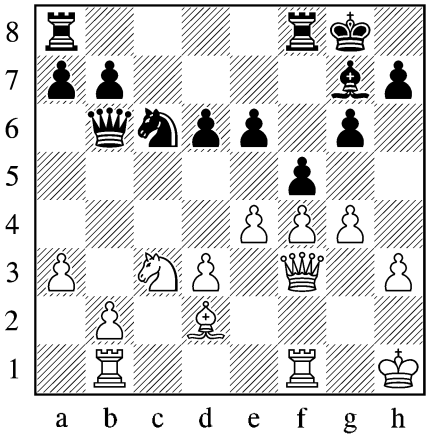
17...f5 18.g4

The most consistent continuation. White plans to increase his space advantage systematically. Premature activity does not promise much:

18.♘d5 ♕b3 19.♗c3 e6 20.♗xg7 ♔xg7 21.♘c3 d5 yielded comfortable equality in Balashov – Rustemov, Moscow 1995.

Against 18.exf5, the most active answer is the rare 18...♖xf5!, preparing to double rooks on the f-file: 19.♘d5N (19.b4 ♘d4 20.♕e3 ♖e8 21.♖bc1 ♕a6 was fine for Black in Corbat – Schweer, email 2006) 19...♕b3 20.♘e3 ♖f7 21.♗c3 ♖af8 22.♕e4 e5= Black has nothing to complain about.

18...e6



19.gxf5

If White is to strive for an advantage, he needs to maintain his centre.

19.exf5 is harmless: 19...exf5 20.♘d5 ♕b3 21.♗c3 ♖ae8=

19...exf5

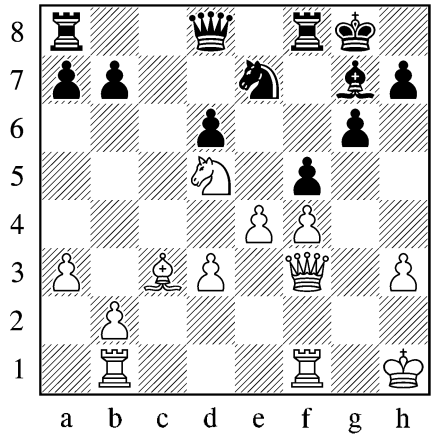
19...gxf5 20.♖g1 unnecessarily exposed the king in Fierz – Perissinotto, Mendrisio 1999.

20.♘d5 ♕d8 21.♗c3 ♘e7

I find this to be the most principled continuation, immediately taking measures against the active knight.

However, if Black wishes avoiding the ensuing complications, he can also complete his development with 21...♕d7N followed by ...♖ae8. For instance: 22.♗xg7 ♕xg7 23.b4 ♖ae8 24.b5 ♘d4 25.♕e3 b6 26.a4 ♘e6= Followed by either ...♘c7 or ...♘c5.

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22.e5

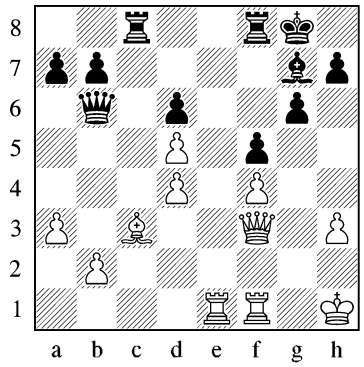
Trying to make use of White's slight lead in development.

Allowing the structure to be spoiled for the sake of illusory activity along the e-file is not advisable:

22.♖be1?! ♘xd5 23.exd5 ♖c8 24.d4?!

This is hard to understand, as the c3-bishop remains passive and the d4-pawn is weak. But even after the more logical 24.♗xg7 ♔xg7 25.♖e6 ♕b6∓ Black's position is preferable.

24...♕b6



25.♖e6

White probably noticed too late that defending the pawn would cause him to lose control over the open file: 25.♕f2 ♖fe8 26.♖e6 ♕b3 Attacking both d5 and e6. 27.♕f3 ♖xe6 28.dxe6 ♕xe6 29.♕xb7 ♕e4† 30.♕xe4 fxe4∓ Black has a typical good-bishop-versus-bad-bishop ending.

25...♗xd4 26.♕g2 ♗xc3 27.bxc3 ♔h8∓

Black had an extra pawn and the better structure in Oleksienko – Kryvoruchko, Lvov 2004.

22...dxe5 23.♘xe7† ♕xe7 24.♗b4

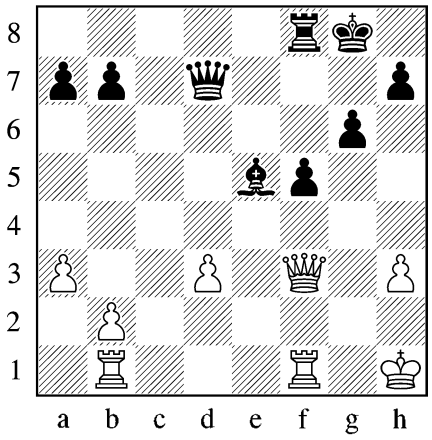
The unambitious 24.fxe5 allows Black to blockade the pawns with 24...♖ad8 25.d4 ♕f7, with complete equality.

24...♕d7

Slightly more active than 24...♕f7, although that also looks fine: 25.♗xf8 ♖xf8 26.fxe5 ♗xe5 27.♖fe1 ♗f6 28.♖bc1 ♖d8 The position was balanced in Glek – Chernin, Neu Isenburg 1991.

25.♗xf8 ♖xf8 26.fxe5 ♗xe5

A pawn and the better structure offer Black entirely adequate compensation for the exchange.



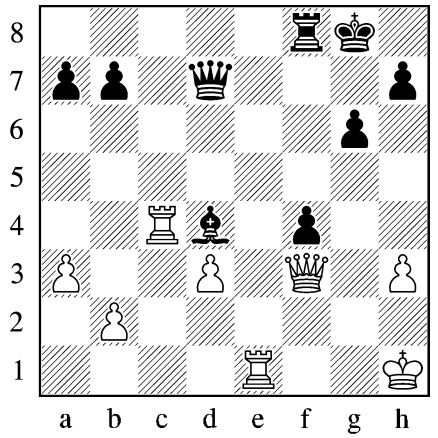
27.♖fe1 ♗d4 28.♖bc1 f4

An ambitious approach – Black thinks of invading the e3-square.

The solid regrouping with 28...♖f7 29.♖e2 ♔g7 30.b4 a6 leaves White short of active plans.

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29.♖c4



So far we have followed M. Pavlov – Kryvoruchko, Alushta 2005. Black could have gradually improved his position with:

29...b5N 30.♖c2 a5

Black has at least equal chances.

Conclusion

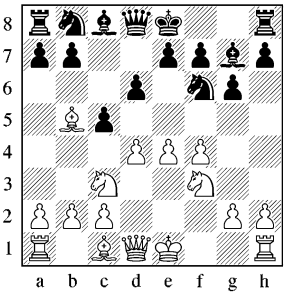
Lines A) 7.♕d3 and B) 7.♖d4 are a bit speculative and objectively not dangerous, but concretely they require precise play from Black. The reverse of the medal is that if Black handles the early phase well, he is entitled to count on pleasant counterplay.

The classical line C3 is strategically sound, but does not put immediate pressure on Black, allowing him to build up his counterplay at his leisure with ...♘d7-c5xd3.

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Chapter 7

Austrian Attack



6.♗b5†

Variation Index

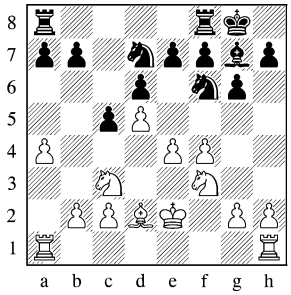
1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♗g7 5.♘f3 c5 6.♗b5†

6...♗d7

A) 7.♗xd7† ♘bxd7 172
- **A1) 8.e5** 173
- **A2) 8.d5** 176

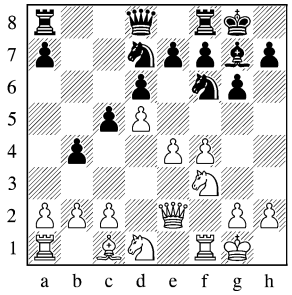
B) 7.e5 ♘g4 181
- **B1) 8.h3** 182
- **B2) 8.♗xd7† ♕xd7** 183
  - **B21) 9.h3** 184
  - **B22) 9.d5** 186
- **B3) 8.e6 fxe6! 9.♘g5 ♗xb5 10.♘xe6 ♗xd4!! 11.♘xb5 ♕a5†!** 188
  - **B31) 12.c3** 193
  - **B32) 12.♕d2** 197

A2) note to 9.0–0



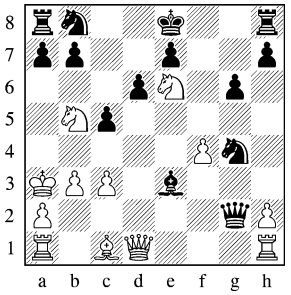
12...♘e8!N

A2) after 11.♘d1



11...♖e8!N

B31) note to 15.♔b1



17...♘f2!N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♗g7 5.♘f3 c5 6.♗b5†

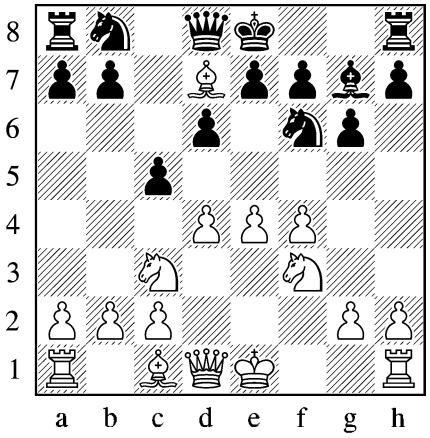
This is the modern approach, trying to challenge Black in forced play in most of the lines.

6...♗d7

Due to White's threatening centre, it would make no sense to develop the knight straight into the pin. By offering the bishop exchange, Black tries not only to reduce White's attacking potential, but also to weaken the light squares in the enemy camp, which may become relevant if the central pawns advance.

White has a choice between **A) 7.♗xd7†** and **B) 7.e5**.

A) 7.♗xd7†



White immediately confronts Black with an important choice.

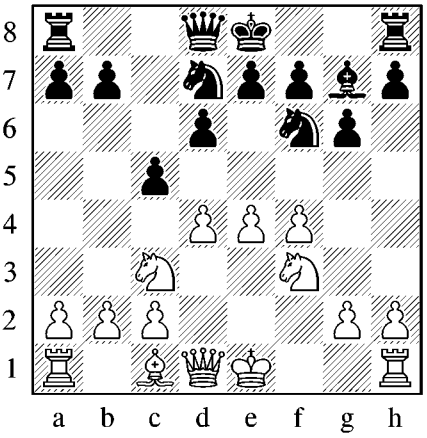
7...♘bxd7

I find this way of capturing the most logical, as it is a developing move.

However, there are at least two reasons why over the years 7...♘fxd7 has been by far the more popular. One of them is that after 8.d5 Black can play the thematic 8...b5 at once. The point is that the bishop's diagonal is open and Black can regain the pawn after 9.♘xb5 ♕a5† 10.♘c3 ♗xc3†.

Personally I would be worried about 9.♕e2 b4 10.♘d1 0–0 11.0–0 followed by ♘f2 and f4-f5, when one might feel that the knight belongs on f6.

The second reason will be explained below in line A1.



White's main continuations are **A1) 8.e5** and **A2) 8.d5**.

8.0–0

This offers Black a comfortable version of the Sicilian Dragon.

8...0–0

It is better to delay the exchange on d4, as White can meet 8...cxd4 with 9.♕xd4, threatening e4-e5 before Black is quite ready for it.

9.e5

The only independent attempt to bring some life into the position.

9.d5 transposes to variation A2.

9.♗e3? runs into 9...♘g4.

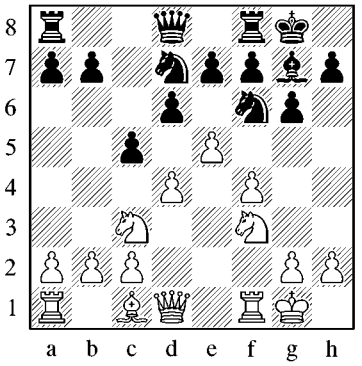
Or 9.♔h1 cxd4 and now:

a) 10.♘xd4 ♖c8 followed by ...a6 or ...♘b6 is comfortable for Black.

b) The ambitious 10.♕xd4 allows 10...♘g4, when the combined possibilities of ...♗xc3,

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...♖c8 and ...♘c5 will endanger the e4-pawn and leave White with weaknesses on the light squares in general.



9...♘h5 10.♗e3

10.g4 allows a tactical operation typical for variation A1: 10...♘xf4 11.♗xf4 cxd4 12.♘e4 dxe5∓ Black has more than enough compensation for the piece, as his pawns are threatening.

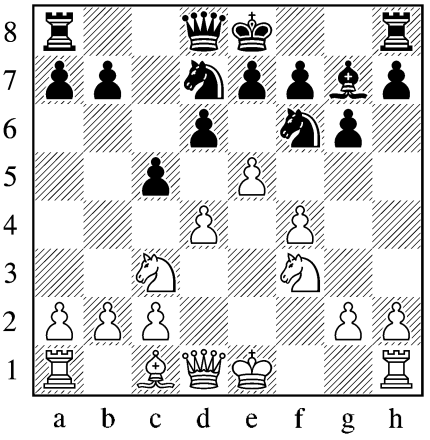
10...cxd4 11.♕xd4 dxe5 12.fxe5 ♘xe5!

A simple combination solving all Black's problems.

13.♘xe5 ♕c7 14.♘d5 ♕xe5 15.♕xe5 ♗xe5 16.♘xe7† ♔g7 17.♘f5†!? gxf5 18.♖xf5 ♗xb2=

Black had comfortably equalized in Nazarov – Tseshkovsky, Tashkent 2008.

A1) 8.e5



In the comments to his game with Black against Savon in the 1973 Soviet Championship, featuring 7...♘fxd7, Korchnoi explains that he knew perfectly well that the principled move was 7...♘bxd7, but at that time analysts had not discovered the solution to this move of White's.

8...♘h5!

As shown below, winning the knight costs White too dear. And not all knights on the edge are misplaced, Dr Tarrasch, as our hero puts pressure on f4!

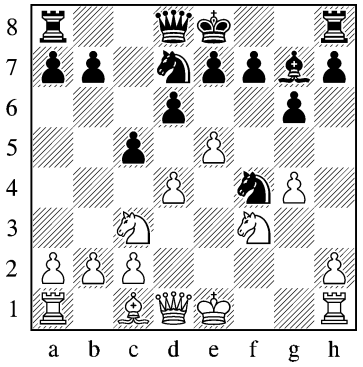
9.exd6

White cannot keep his centre intact.

9.g4?!

The main point is that this allows:

9...♘xf4!



10.♗xf4

It makes no sense to reject the sacrifice, as after 10.exd6 ♘e6N∓ Black is perfectly regrouped and better developed.

10...cxd4 11.♘e4

After 11.♕xd4 dxe5 12.♘xe5 ♘xe5–+ Black emerged from the complications with an extra pawn in Van Zwol – Richard, email 2000. The point is that the g7-bishop exerts an X-ray action after 13.♗xe5 ♕xd4.

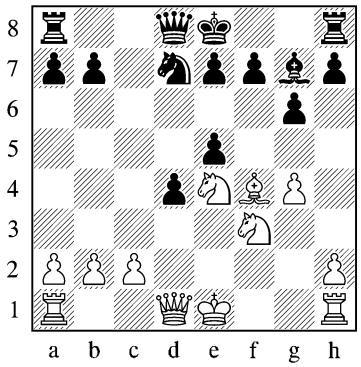
Or if 11.e6 fxe6 12.♘xd4 ♗xd4 13.♕xd4 e5 14.♗xe5 ♘xe5 15.0–0–0 ♕b6, White still

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needs to prove that he has compensation for the pawn.

11...dxe5

Black has three mobile pawns for the piece and his chances are preferable – in fact, he has scored 100% in the games in my database.



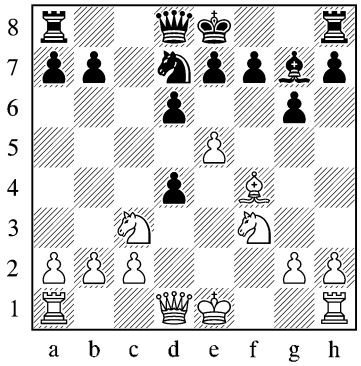
12.♗g3 ♕b6∓

Defending the e6-square in advance in order to prepare ...f5.

9.♗e3

This is a better attempt to keep the tension, but Black still responds with:

9...♘xf4! 10.♗xf4 cxd4



11.e6!

The only way to maintain approximate equality.

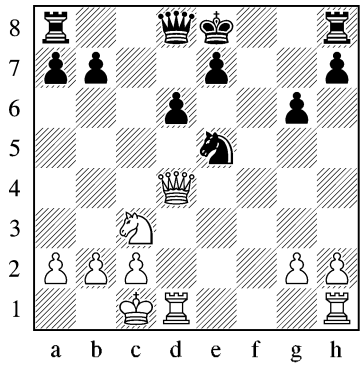
11.♘e4 dxe5 12.♗g5 ♕b6 13.0–0 f5 14.♘g3 e4 15.♘h4 was played in Shomoev – Mamedyarov, Jurmala 2015. Black's best was 15...e6!N, consolidating the f5-pawn and leaving White with two misplaced knights and no real chances for attack. For instance: 16.♘h5 ♗e5 17.♘f4 ♗f6 18.♗xf6 ♘xf6–+ followed by ...0–0–0 and ...g5.

11...fxe6 12.♘xd4N

12.♘e2 e5 13.♗g5 ♘c5∓ was unpleasant for White in Coyne – Conterno, email 2007.

12...♗xd4 13.♕xd4 e5 14.♗xe5 ♘xe5 15.0–0–0

We met a similar position in the previous line, but here the pawn on g2 instead of g4. This helps White because the pawn and the f3-square are not weak.



15...♕a5

Another benefit for White of not having the pawn on g4 is that he could meet 15...♕b6 with 16.♕h4, causing Black some problems with evacuating his king from the centre.

16.♘d5

If 16.♕h4 ♘c6, increasing the pressure on e7 with 17.♘d5 loses the a2-pawn under worse circumstances than in the main line, since the queen does not protect b2.

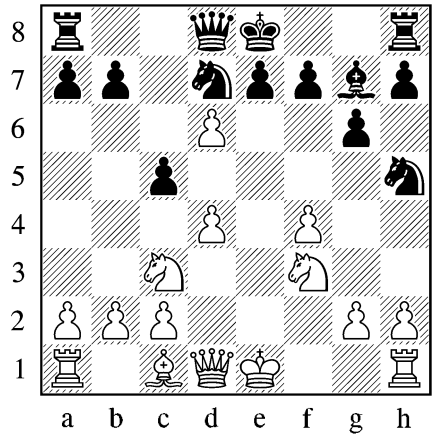
16...♕xa2 17.♘c7† ♔d7 18.♘xa8 ♖xa8

Black has two pawns for the exchange and White's king is no safer than its rival. A possible continuation is:

19.♖he1 ♘c6 20.♕g7 ♕a1† 21.♔d2 ♕a5† 22.c3 ♕g5† 23.♔c2 ♕f5† 24.♔c1 h5=

Black has defended all his weaknesses and has a stable position.

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9...0–0!

At this stage, development is more important than pawns.

9...exd6?! 10.♕e2†, as in Kristensen – Kassing, corr. 1990, causes Black some trouble.

10.0–0

In his turn, White should not be too greedy: 10.dxe7?! ♕xe7† 11.♔f2 cxd4∓ We are familiar with this situation from line A of Chapter 5 (see page 113). 12.♘xd4? only makes things worse for White after 12...♖fe8–+ followed by ...♖ad8 and ...♘c5, with a decisive initiative.

10...exd6

Black regains the pawn. Even though his structure looks vulnerable and his knights appear somewhat chaotically placed, White's weaknesses on the light squares, as well as his problems finding an active and stable square for the bishop, level the balance.

11.♗e3

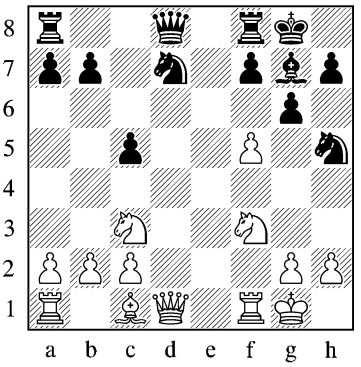
The bishop does not stand especially well on this square, but clearing its path to g5 costs a tempo that allows Black to organize his counterplay. For instance:

11.dxc5 dxc5

Black decides to maintain the integrity of his structure.

11...♘xc5N is also possible, controlling the e4-square.

12.f5



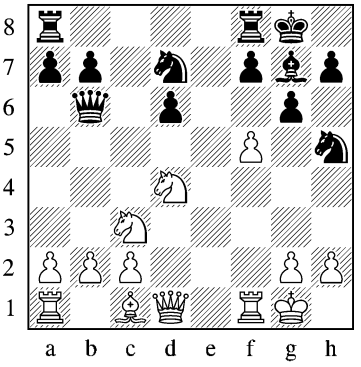
12...♘e5 13.♕xd8 ♖axd8 14.♗g5 ♘xf3† 15.♖xf3

In Sax – Ehlvest, Haninge 1990, the simplest way to equality was:

15...♗f6!?N=

11.f5 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♕b6

White experiences stability problems in the centre.



13.♘ce2

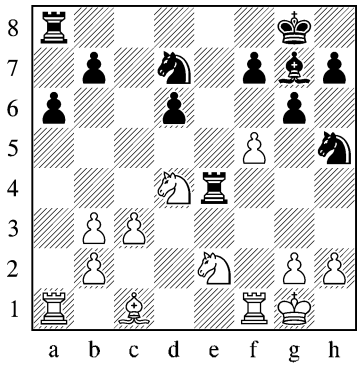
White's compensation for the pawns is insufficient after: 13.♗e3 ♖ae8 14.♘d5 ♕xb2 15.♖b1 ♕xa2 16.♘b5 ♘df6∓

13...♖fe8 14.c3 ♖e4

Naturally occupying the weak square and increasing the pressure on d4.

15.♕b3 ♕xb3 16.axb3 a6

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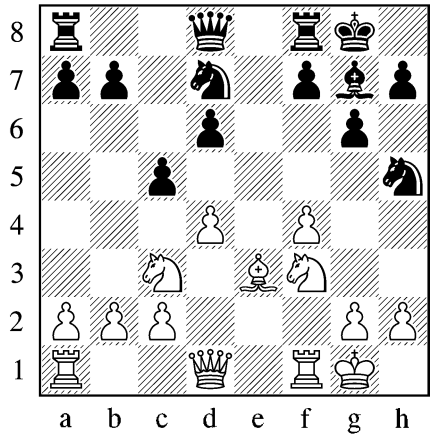
Black threatens ...♖ae8, with an obvious initiative. White's attempt to activate his pieces will leave him in a worse ending.

17.♘f4 ♘xf4 18.♗xf4 ♘c5 19.♖ad1 ♗xd4† 20.♖xd4 ♖xd4 21.cxd4 ♘xb3 22.fxg6 hxg6 23.♖d1

In Bareev – Ubilava Moscow 1989, Black should have played:

23...d5!N∓

Black keeps his extra pawn in an ending where the knight is likely to be stronger than the bishop.



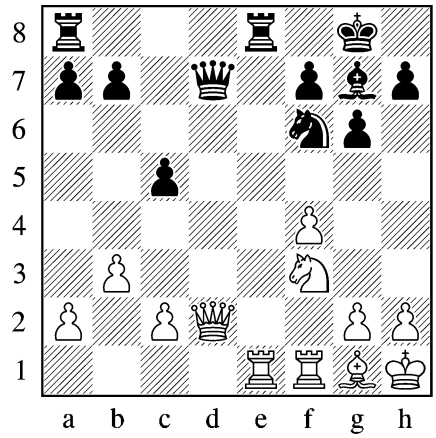
11...♖e8 12.♕d2 ♘hf6

The knight returns to its best square, controlling e4 and threatening ...♘g4.

13.♔h1 ♘b6 14.b3 ♘bd5 15.♘xd5 ♘xd5 16.♗g1 ♘f6

The knight once again takes control over e4.

17.♖ae1 ♕d7 18.dxc5 dxc5



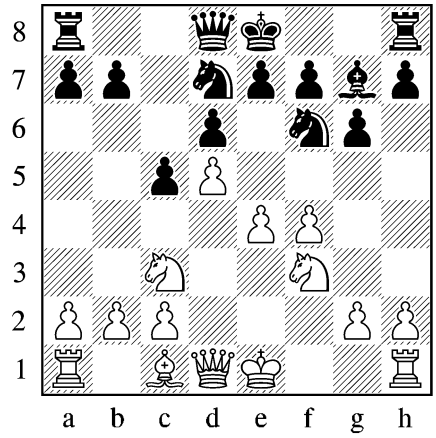
19.♕xd7

Or 19.♗xc5 ♕xd2 20.♖xe8† ♖xe8 21.♘xd2 ♖c8 22.♗xa7 ♖xc2=, with a probable draw.

19...♘xd7 20.♖xe8† ♖xe8 21.♖d1 ♖e7 22.♗f2 b6=

A draw was agreed in Carlsen – Mamedyarov, Moscow 2007.

A2) 8.d5

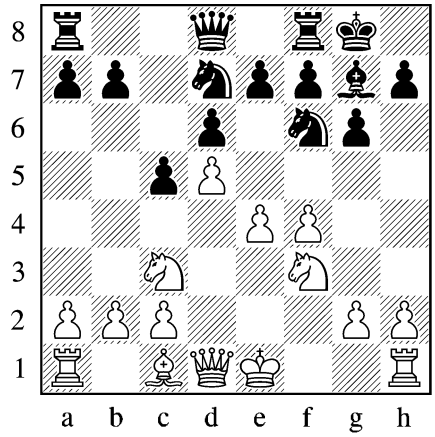


This transposition to the Schmid Benoni structure is more consistent than in line D1 of Chapter 5, since Black cannot break with ...e6 so soon.

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8...0–0

With the king in the centre, it is still dangerous to play the thematic 8...b5, due to 9.e5 dxe5 10.fxe5 ♘g4 11.e6 with a strong initiative for White. But Black does not need to hurry, since White can only prevent ...b5 by making some important commitments.

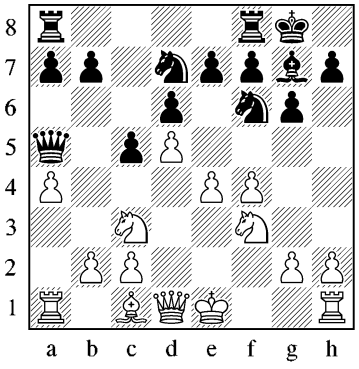


9.0–0

White has two important alternatives, both trying to prevent ...b5.

9.a4 ♕a5

Black creates the double threat of ...♘xe4 and ...b5.

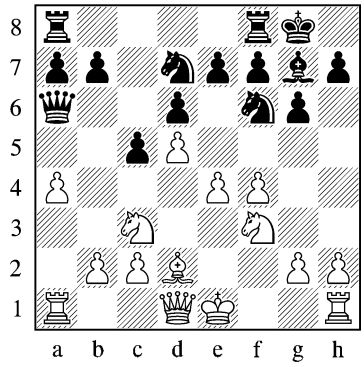


10.♗d2

The passive 10.♘d2 allows Black to start a somewhat slower plan: 10...♘e8 11.♕f3 Defending c3. 11...f5 12.exf5 ♖xf5 13.0–0 ♘c7 Black has a fluent plan based on ...♖af8 and ...♘b6, possibly combined with ...♗xc3, with excellent counterplay against White's weaknesses on d5 and f4.

10...♕a6

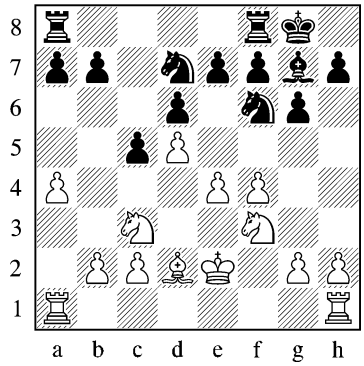
Preventing the king from getting castled, and planning to open the e-file with ...♖fe8 and ...e6.



11.♕e2

The other way of covering the f1-a6 diagonal, 11.♘b5, allows Black to sacrifice an exchange under favourable circumstances: 11...♘xe4! Eliminating an important pawn and weakening the whole central structure. 12.♘c7 ♕b6 13.♘xa8 ♖xa8 14.♖b1 c4∓ White's king still needs some time to get to safety and the d5-pawn is chronically weak.

11...♕xe2† 12.♔xe2



12...♘e8!N

The start of a flexible regrouping, preparing both the thematic breaks, ...b5 and ...e6.

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The premature 12...e6 13.dxe6 fxe6, played in Gharamian – Shoker, Metz 2014, could have caused some problems after: 14.♘g5N ♖fe8 15.♘b5±

13.♖he1 ♘c7 14.♔f2 a6 15.a5 b5

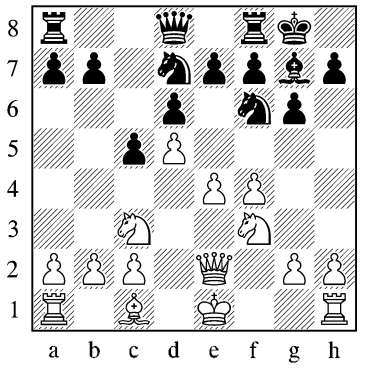
With the regrouping Black has carried out, 15...e6 16.dxe6 fxe6 is also possible.

16.axb6 ♘xb6 17.b3 f5∓

White experiences some trouble with the d5-pawn.

9.♕e2

This requires more accuracy from Black, who must try to prove that placing the queen on the e-file has made it vulnerable:



9...♖e8!

In practice Black has mainly tried 9...e6 10.dxe6 fxe6 11.0–0±, with a less-than-perfect version of this structure, since the queen's knight belongs on c6.

The text move is not mentioned by Khalifman in *Opening for White According to Anand, Volume 4*. Black plans ...e6, causing immediate problems along the e-file, so White is practically forced to prevent this break with:

10.f5N

This move forms part of White's global plan, but he does not usually play it at such an early stage.

After 10.0–0 e6 11.dxe6 ♖xe6, White tried 12.f5!? gxf5 13.♘g5 in Dudyev – Lohmann, email 2007, but 13...♖e7N 14.♖xf5 ♕b6 followed by ...♖ae8, would have left White's centre under serious pressure.

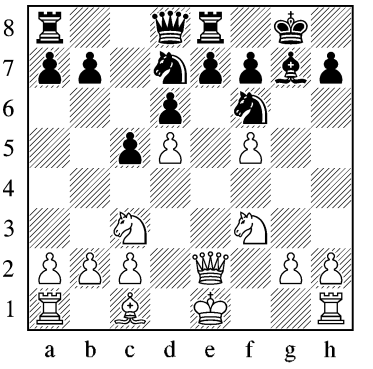
10...gxf5!

Weakening the d5-pawn.

11.exf5

With the current piece placement, the thematic 11.♘h4? is simply bad due to 11...e6!, threatening ...♘xd5 or ...♘xe4, since the h4-knight is hanging.

Or if 11.0–0 fxe4 12.♘h4 e6 13.dxe6 ♖xe6 14.♘f5 ♔h8!?∓ White's kingside pressure does not compensate for Black's extra central pawns.



11...c4

Black needs to hurry with the assault on d5 before White gets realistic kingside attacking chances.

11...♘b6?! is ineffective, since after 12.♘g5±, planning ♕f3, the d5-pawn is taboo: 12...♘bxd5?? 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♕h5 with a disaster for Black on the kingside.

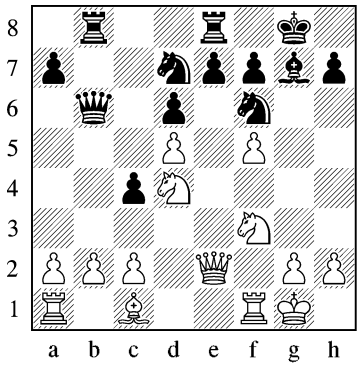
12.0–0 b5 13.♘xb5

Otherwise the d5-pawn will become a real weakness.

13...♕b6† 14.♘bd4 ♖ab8!?

A subtle move, increasing the pressure on b2, a detail which will become relevant later. 14...♕c5 is also playable: 15.♗e3 ♕xd5 16.♖ad1 ♕b7 17.b3 ♖ac8 Black has lots of squares available in the centre.

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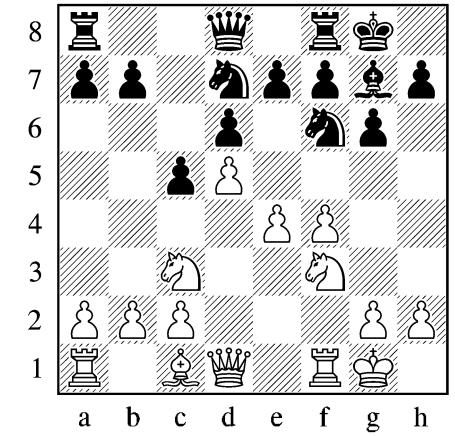
15.♔h1

One important point is that 15.♕xc4 runs into 15...♘e5!, when the only way to avoid the loss of a knight is 16.♕a4 ♘xd5. With the white queen far away from the kingside there is no attack available, and on the whole Black's position is comfortable.

After 15.c3 ♕c5 16.♗e3 ♕xd5 17.♖ad1 ♕b7= Black gains an important tempo by attacking b2, revealing one of the merits of ...♖ab8.

15...♕c5 16.♘c6 ♖b7 17.b4 ♕xd5 18.♘xe7† ♔f8 19.♘xd5 ♖xe2 20.♘xf6 ♘xf6

With a complicated fight and approximately equal chances.



9...b5!

There is no longer any restriction on playing this thematic move.

10.♕e2

Preparing the standard regrouping with ♘d1-f2.

With the kings castled, the central break is not dangerous:

10.e5 dxe5 11.fxe5 ♘g4 12.e6

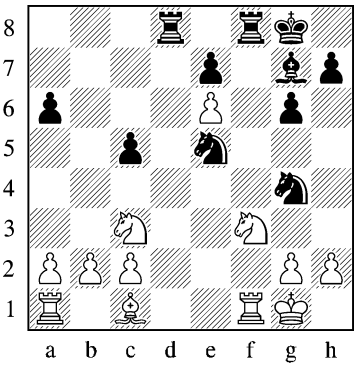
12.♘xb5 doesn't cause Black any problems: 12...♘dxe5 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 ½–½ Melamed – Hoffmann, Germany 2013.

12...fxe6 13.dxe6 ♘de5 14.♕xd8

White needs to exchange queens even though this helps Black's development, for if 14.♘xb5? ♕b6, threatening ...c4†, Black wins.

14...♖axd8 15.♘xb5 a6 16.♘c3

In Gubaydulin – Tseshkovsky, Tashkent 2008, Black's best would have been:



16...♖d6N

Threatening to spoil White's structure with ...♘xf3†, followed soon by ...♖xe6.

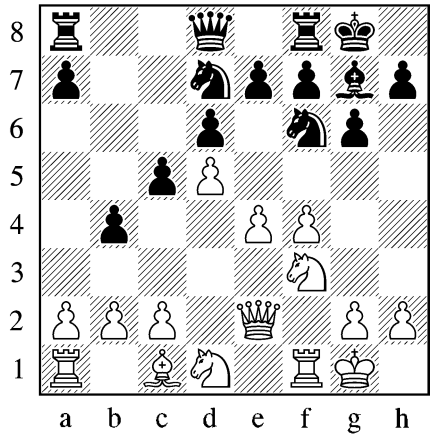
17.♘g5 ♖xf1† 18.♔xf1 ♘xh2† 19.♔e2 ♘hg4∓

With active play for Black.

10...b4 11.♘d1

Black has carried out his queenside plan successfully, but making further progress is not easy. None of the plans tried in practice has convinced me of its viability so I would like to suggest a new move, though the idea is familiar to us:

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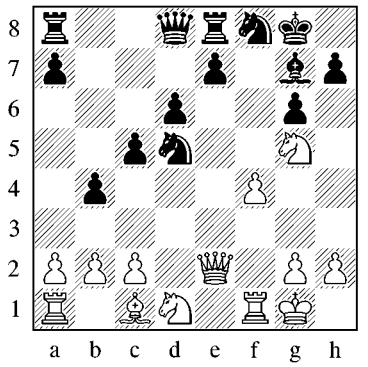
11...♖e8!N

After weakening the defence of the central pawns, it is just natural to prepare ...e6 under optimal circumstances. Confronted with dangers along the e-file, White needs to carry out one of the thematic breaks at once.

12.f5

The alternative is:

12.e5 ♘xd5 13.e6 ♘f8 14.exf7† ♔xf7 15.♘g5† ♔g8



16.♘e6

Exchanging the g7-bishop.

The attack based on 16.f5 is not that dangerous: 16...gxf5 17.♖xf5 e6 18.♖f1 ♘f6, followed by ...♕e7 and ...d5.

16...♕d7 17.♘xg7 ♔xg7

White does not have a simple way of taking advantage of the weakness of the long diagonal, since Black has many pawns on dark squares restricting the enemy bishop.

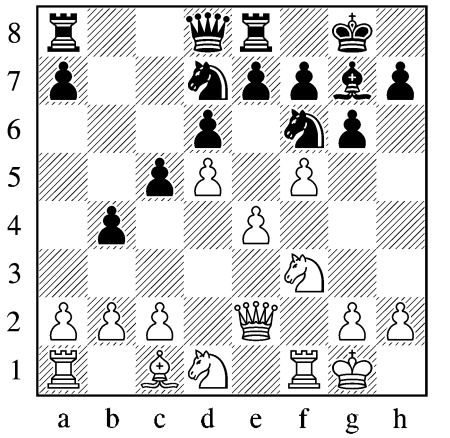
18.a3

Trying to undermine the pawn chain.

Black has at least equal chances after 18.b3 ♘e6 19.♗b2† ♘d4, when even after losing a pawn on d4 he would maintain the more flexible structure.

18...a5 19.♕f3 ♕e6 20.b3 ♘d7 21.♗b2† ♘7f6

Followed by ...♔g8 with an extra pawn and a solid position.



12...gxf5!

Another familiar move – Black undermines the d5-pawn before White consolidates it with c2-c4.

13.♘h4

The only way to build up an attack.

13...fxe4 14.♘f5 ♔h8

Planning ...♖g8 with counterplay along the g-file.

14...♗f8 may also work, but it looks a bit passive.

15.♘xg7

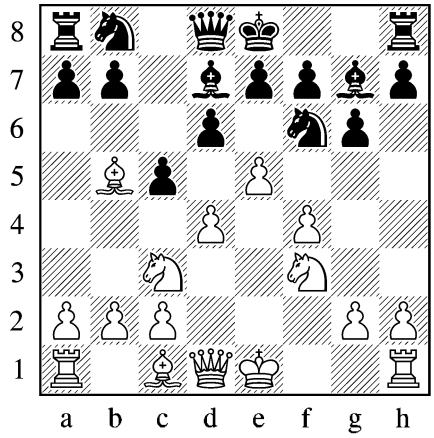
After 15.♘f2 ♖g8 16.♘xe4 ♘xe4 17.♕xe4 ♗f6, White does not have much to show for the pawn.

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15...♔xg7 16.♘f2 ♔h8 17.♘xe4 ♘xe4 18.♕xe4 f6∓

Black has neutralized the pressure completely and can think of converting his extra pawn.

B) 7.e5



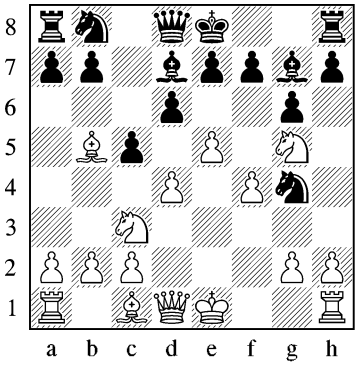
This has traditionally been considered the most challenging continuation. Play takes on a forcing character, with chances for both sides.

7...♘g4

White's main continuations are: **B1) 8.h3**, **B2) 8.♗xd7†** and the absolutely critical **B3) 8.e6**.

8.♘g5?!

This premature lunge deserves a brief mention.



8...cxd4!

This is the most effective reply, even though it is rare.

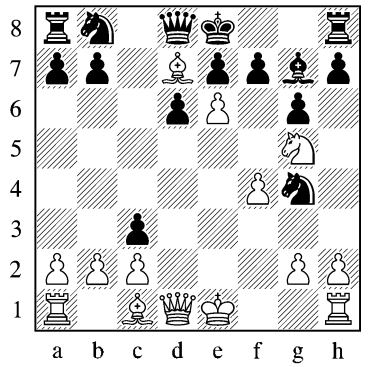
9.e6!?

The only way to maintain the tension.

In a couple of games, White played the insipid: 9.♗xd7†?! ♕xd7 10.e6 fxe6 11.♕xg4 dxc3∓

9...dxc3 10.♗xd7†

10.♘xf7?? is bad for many reasons, for instance 10...cxb2 11.♗xb2 ♕a5†–+ or simply 10...♕b6–+.



10...♔f8!

Certainly not 10...♘xd7?? 11.exf7† ♔f8 12.♘e6†, winning the queen.

11.b4N

White should avoid: 11.♘xf7? ♕b6 12.♕xg4 cxb2–+

11.b3 f5 12.h3 occurred in Koepcke – Schumacher, email 2003, and now Black should have played 12...♘f6N, with similar play to the lines below.

11...f5

Both sides have calmed things down on their vulnerable wings, but Black keeps an extra pawn and the more active position. The dangers surrounding the king are illusory.

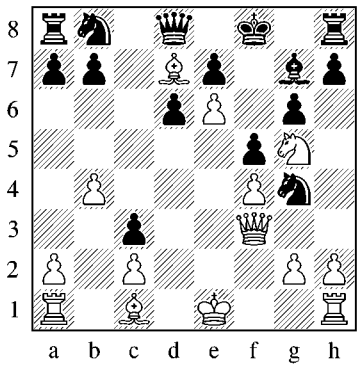
12.♕f3

It hardly needs saying that 12.♘f7 is ineffective due to 12...♕b6–+, threatening both mate in one and ...♘xd7.

Or if 12.h3 ♘f6 13.♘f7 ♕b6 14.♘xh8 ♘e4 15.♘xg6† hxg6 16.♕f3 ♘xd7 17.exd7

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♖d8† Black has fantastic compensation for the exchange.



12...♕c7

Engines consider 12...♘xd7 13.exd7 ♕xd7 14.♕d5 entirely safe for Black, but as a human it makes no sense to clear the e6-square so soon.

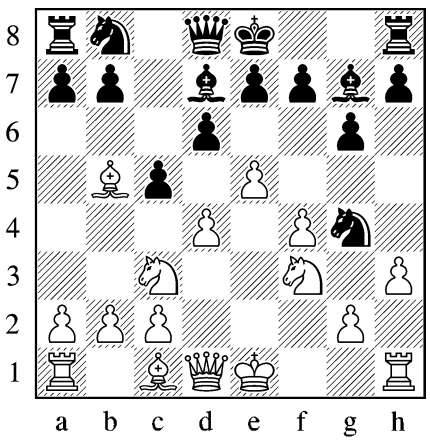
13.h3 ♘f6

After controlling the d5-square, Black now threatens ...♘bxd7.

14.♗a4 ♘c6†

Black has an extra pawn and a positional advantage due to the central weaknesses on d4 and e4, and his far-advanced pawn restricting White's pieces.

B1) 8.h3



White immediately starts the fight against the g4-knight.

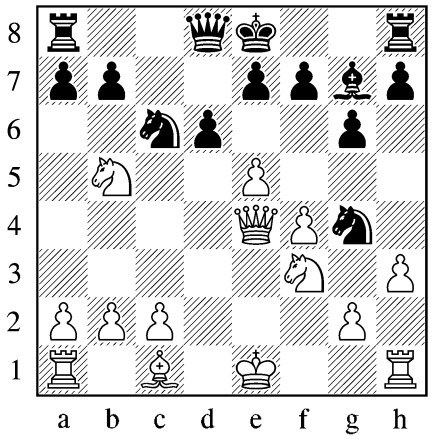
8...cxd4

Curiously, the sequence 8...♗xb5 9.♘xb5 ♕a5† 10.♘c3 cxd4 11.♕xd4 ♘c6 12.♕e4 ♘h6 transposes to the line which I mention (but don't recommend) in the note to 11...♕b6 below.

9.♕xd4 ♗xb5 10.♘xb5 ♘c6

But not: 10...♕a5†? 11.♕c3! The knight is taboo due to ♕c8 mate, while 11...♕xc3† 12.bxc3 wins at least an exchange with ♘c7†. Black has fallen into this trap more than a dozen times, though White has not always played 11.♕c3! in reply.

11.♕e4



11...♕b6!

This has rarely been seen in high-level games.

Long ago, the main discussion at grandmaster level continued 11...♕a5†?! 12.♘c3 ♘h6, but White does well after: 13.g4 0–0–0 14.♗d2 dxe5 15.fxe5 ♘xe5 16.♘xe5 ♖xd2 17.♔xd2 ♗xe5 18.♖ad1 f5 19.gxf5 ♘xf5 20.♔c1± Black had insufficient compensation for the exchange, as his king was vulnerable and his structure imperfect in Ljubojevic – Benko, Skopje (ol) 1972.

12.♕e2

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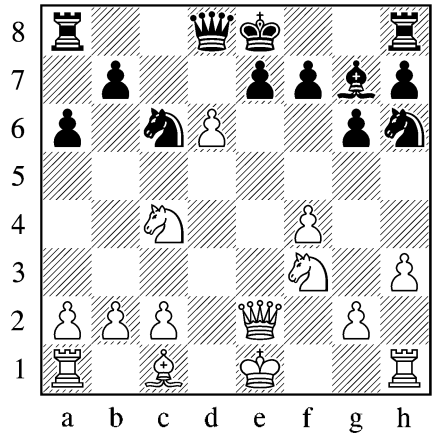
12.hxg4 ♕xb5 13.exd6 (13.♗d2?! dxe5 14.♗c3 0–0–0 offered Black excellent play in Delaney – P. Brown, Novi Sad [ol] 1990) Now in Guljas – Bockinac, corr. 1983, Black should have played 13...0–0N with at least equal chances, since 14.dxe7? ♖fe8∓ endangers the white king.

12...a6 13.♘a3

After 13.exd6, as played in Franzoi – Arias Rodriguez, corr. 1996, I recommend: 13...axb5N 14.d7† ♔xd7 15.hxg4 b4 16.♕d3† ♔c8= The black rooks' disconnection is not relevant, since the queen's rook is active along the a-file and can join its colleague on the d-file via a5-d5.

13...♘h6 14.♘c4 ♕d8 15.exd6

15.0–0 b5 16.♘e3 dxe5 17.fxe5 0–0 did not offer White any reason for joy in Driessen – Tellier, email 2011, as his central pawn had become vulnerable.



15...♘f5 16.d7†

This forces simplification to a roughly equal ending. Pawn-grabbing is dangerous, as is almost always the case in similar situations:

16.dxe7 ♘cxe7 17.♕f2 ♕d5 18.♘e3

In Plonczak – Panocki, Leba 2006 Black should have continued with:

18...♘xe3N 19.♕xe3 0–0–0 20.0–0 ♘f5

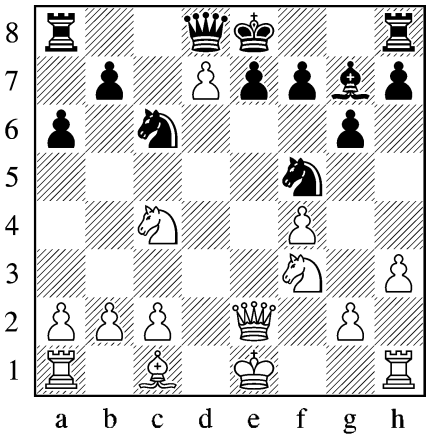
Black has overwhelming central activity, offering more than enough compensation for the pawn. For instance:

21.♕f2 ♗f8!

This explains why it was correct for Black to castle long – he needs the f8-square for his bishop.

22.♔h2 ♗c5 23.♕e1 ♖he8 24.♕c3 ♔b8∓

With a strong initiative for Black.



16...♕xd7 17.♘b6 ♕d8N

17...♘cd4 18.♘xd4 ♘xd4 19.♘xd7 ♘xe2 20.♘b6 ♘g3 21.♘xa8 ♘xh1= was totally level in Romualdi – Soh, email 2013.

18.♘xa8 ♘g3 19.♕d2 ♘xh1 20.♕xd8† ♘xd8=

Both knights will return to their camps, as 21.g4?!, trying to trap the h1-knight, can only cause problems for White after 21...h5!, either opening the h-file for the attack or gaining the f5-square for the knight.

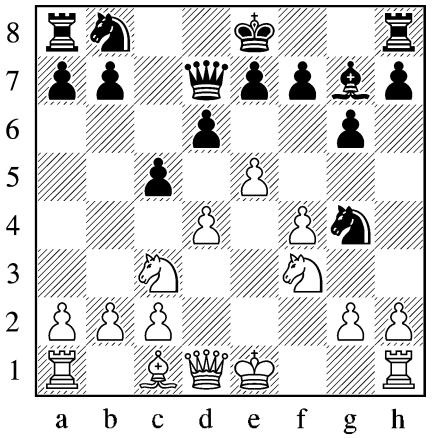
B2) 8.♗xd7†

Even though this appears to prematurely release the tension, it tends to lead to long forced lines. However, unlike in variation B3, there is no danger around the black king.

8...♕xd7

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An important point behind White's last move is that the generally desirable 8...♘xd7? loses to: 9.e6 fxe6 10.♘g5+–



We have a new branching point: **B21) 9.h3** or **B22) 9.d5**.

9.dxc5

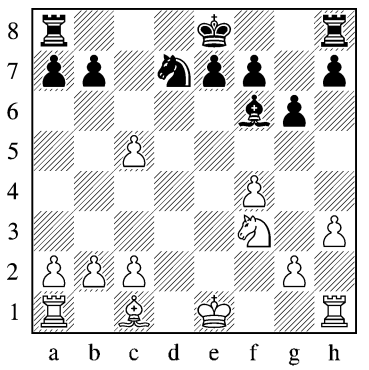
The comparatively rare option is harmless.

9...dxe5 10.♕xd7† ♘xd7 11.h3 e4!

Preventing White from gaining space with fxe5 after the knight retreat.

12.♘xe4 ♘gf6 13.♘xf6† ♗xf6

Black regains the pawn with comfortable play. For instance:



14.♗e3 ♗xb2 15.♖b1 ♗a3 16.♖xb7 ♗xc5 17.♔e2 ♗xe3 18.♔xe3 ♘c5 19.♖b5

19.♖c7 does not achieve much after 19...♘e6 20.♖c6 0–0 followed by ...♖fc8.

19...♖c8 20.♖a5 ♖c7=

Black had consolidated his queenside in Garcia Ramos – Gonzalez Amaya, Cadiz 2002, and will complete his development with ...0–0 and ...♖fc8.

B21) 9.h3

A slightly paradoxical move, allowing Black to gain time for his queenside development. White's main idea is that the g4-knight will soon have to retreat to h6, with unclear prospects for finding an active and stable square. We can also notice a certain similarity with line B1 above.

9...cxd4 10.♕xd4 ♘c6 11.♕d3

11.♕e4

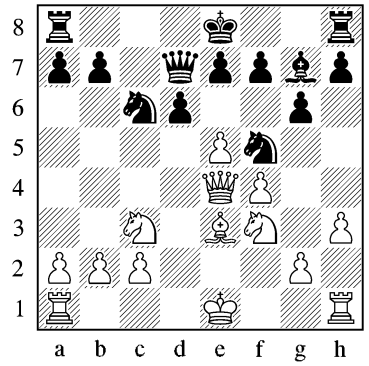
This looks more active, but has a hidden drawback.

11...♘h6 12.♗e3

The attempt to keep the enemy knight on h6 with 12.g4 fails after: 12...0–0–0 13.♗e3 dxe5 14.fxe5 f5! Black freed his knight from the edge and took over the initiative in Berkley – Benatar, email 2001.

12...♘f5

An important moment. White might want to leave the bishop on e3 in order to complete his development as soon as possible, but with the queen on e4 he needs to parry ...♘g3.



13.♗f2 dxe5 14.fxe5 ♘xe5!

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A small tactical trick, winning a pawn.

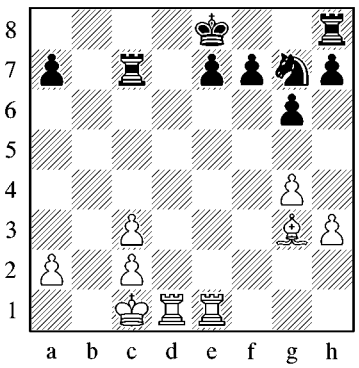
15.♘xe5 ♕e6

The knight cannot retreat due to ...♗xc3†, winning the queen. However, White maintains adequate compensation for the pawn.

16.0–0–0

16.♕a4† deprives the king of the right to castle, but after 16...♔f8 the king will sooner or later go to g7: 17.0–0–0 ♗xe5 18.g4N (18.♖he1 f6 19.g4 ♘d6 20.♗d4 ♘f7 21.♘d5 ♖c8 22.♕xa7 ♕xd5 23.♗xe5 ♕c6 24.♗c3 e5 25.h4 ♔g7 was fine for Black in Shpakovsky – Koegler, email 2011) 18...♘d6 19.♗d4 b5!? It is best to return the pawn for the sake of completing development before White's central pressure becomes too strong. If 20.♕b4 ♖c8 followed by ...♖c4, Black has obvious counterplay, while after 20.♘xb5 ♘xb5 21.♕xb5 ♗xd4 22.♖xd4 h5 Black is not worse at all, since his king is slightly safer than White's.

16...♗xe5 17.♖he1 ♗xc3 18.♕xb7 ♕c8 19.♕xc8† ♖xc8 20.bxc3 ♖c7 21.g4 ♘g7 22.♗g3

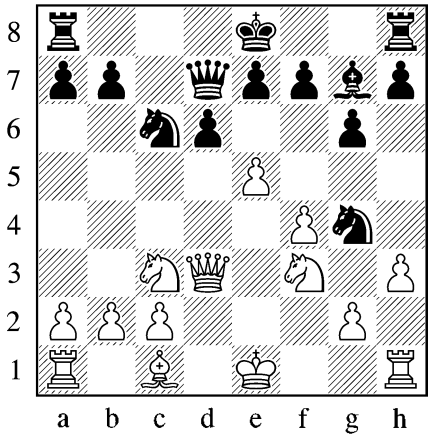


So far Black had played well in Shirov – Zaragatski, Germany 2015, but for no good reason he now abandoned the c-file with 22...♖b7?!.

Any move along the c-file would maintain approximate equality, for instance:

22...♖c6N=

Black's better structure compensates for White's slight initiative.



11...♘h6 12.♗e3 0–0!?N

In practice the main line has been:

12...♘f5 13.0–0–0!

This is possible now, since there is no fork with ...♘g3 available.

13...0–0–0 14.g4 ♘xe3 15.♕xe3 ♕c7

In Kosteniuk – Lagno, Beijing 2013, and several email games, White has started double-edged complications with 16.♘g5, but I am more concerned by:

16.e6!?N ♗xc3 17.♕xc3 f6 18.♔b1

White retains an annoying space advantage, even though objectively Black may have no problems.

My suggested novelty is more accurate than 12...0–0–0, since after a subsequent ...♕e6, ♘g5, the queen needs the c8-square.

13.0–0–0

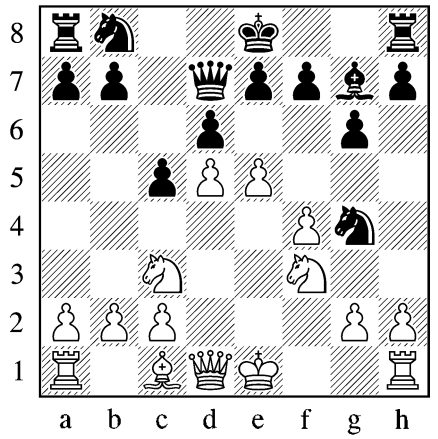
After 13.g4 ♕e6 14.♘g5 ♕c8 15.exd6 ♘b4 16.♕d2 ♖d8∓ Black has a strong initiative.

13...♕e6 14.♔b1 ♖ad8=

White can no longer keep his space advantage, as 15.♕e4?! runs into the familiar 15...♘f5∓.

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B22) 9.d5



This leads to a protracted positional struggle with surprisingly long forced variations, with only a few deviations for White along the way. The whole variation has been known for many years to be drawish. However, a certain amount of accuracy is needed from both sides.

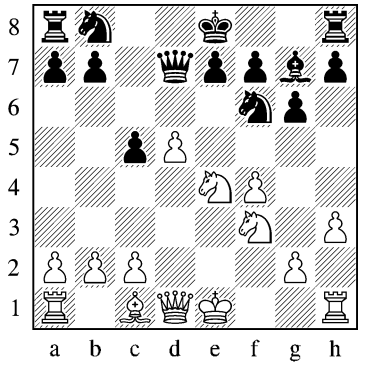
9...dxe5 10.h3 e4

A familiar resource.

11.hxg4

Far less challenging is:

11.♘xe4 ♘f6



12.♘xf6† ♗xf6 13.0–0 0–0 14.♗e3

The consolidating 14.c4 allows the undermining 14...e6. For instance: 15.♘e5 ♕d6 16.♕b3 ♘d7=, as played more than once.

Inserting 14.♘e5 ♕d6 before 15.c4 does not change the evaluation: 15...♘d7 16.♘g4 ♗d4† 17.♗e3 f5! Black exchanges the bishop for the knight in order to weaken the enemy king's position. 18.♗xd4 fxg4 19.♗c3 gxh3 20.g3 e6= The position was balanced in Eraschenkov – Tseshkovsky, Belorechensk 2007. White may seem to have a very strong bishop, but setting up the battery along the long diagonal is not likely, while White's king is no less exposed than Black's.

14...♗xb2

Leading to mass simplifications and an inevitable draw.

15.♖b1 ♗g7 16.♗xc5 ♖d8 17.c4 ♕c7 18.♗d4 ♕xc4 19.♗xg7 ♔xg7 20.♖xb7 ♕xd5=

Many games played in the late 1990s confirmed the evaluation of this ending as drawn.

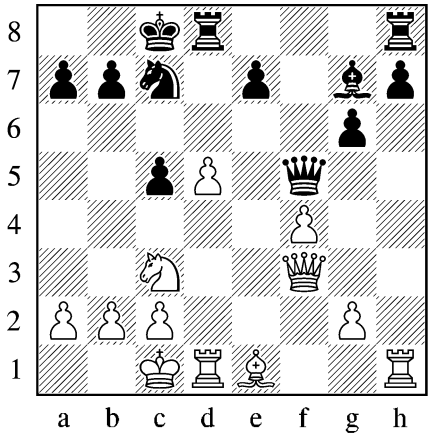
11...exf3 12.♕xf3 ♘a6 13.♗d2

Developing the bishop in such a way as to prevent Black from spoiling the queenside structure with ...♗xc3.

13...0–0–0 14.0–0–0 ♘c7 15.♗e1 f5

Starting the fight for the light squares.

16.gxf5 ♕xf5



17.g4

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Otherwise Black would play ...h5 with a perfect blockade, turning the white bishop into a bad one.

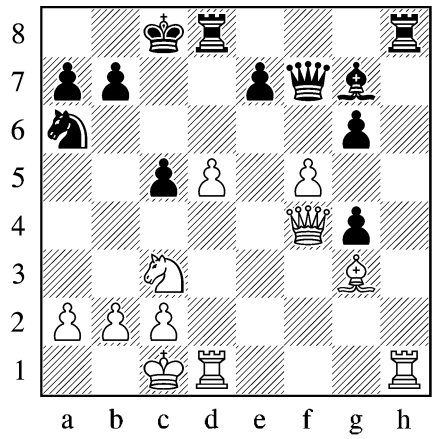
17...♕f7 18.♗g3

18.f5 h5 19.♗g3 transposes.

18...h5! 19.f5!

The fight for and against the blockade continues. White prepares to set up a battery along the h2-b8 diagonal, forcing the knight to return to a6 soon. But this will cost White a pawn, of course.

19...hxg4 20.♕f4 ♘a6



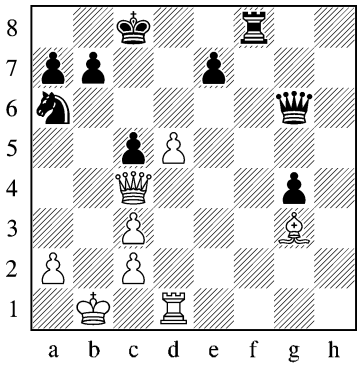
21.♘b5

21.fxg6

This has only been tried in a single over-the-board game.

21...♕xg6 22.♖xh8 ♖xh8 23.♔b1 ♖f8 24.♕c4 ♗xc3 25.bxc3

25.♕xc3 allows Black to activate his queen with 25...♕e4, endangering the d5-pawn at the same time: 26.♕g7 The only way to try to cause some trouble, but Black has an adequate answer. 26...♕f3 27.♖g1 ♕f1† 28.♗e1 ♕xg1 29.♕xf8† ♔d7 White is forced to deliver perpetual check staring with 30.♕f5†.



25...♖d8!N

Much better than the careless 25...♖f3?, which abandoned the back rank and allowed 26.d6+– in Tomczak – Panocki, Wroclaw 2007.

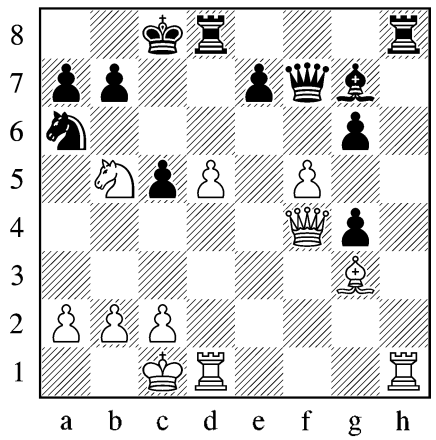
26.♖e1 ♖d7 27.♖f1 ♖d8

Even though Black's position looks passive, White cannot make progress due to his immobile structure. One possible attempt to gain space is:

28.a4

However, this allows Black to force a draw with:

28...♘c7 29.♕xc5 ♕b6† 30.♕xb6 axb6 31.c4 e6 32.♖f7 ♖d7 33.♖f4 exd5 34.♖xg4 dxc4 35.♖xc4 ♔d8 36.♖b4 ♘d5=



21...♖xd5 22.♖xh8† ♗xh8

Despite the relatively long forced sequence, there is still tension in this position.

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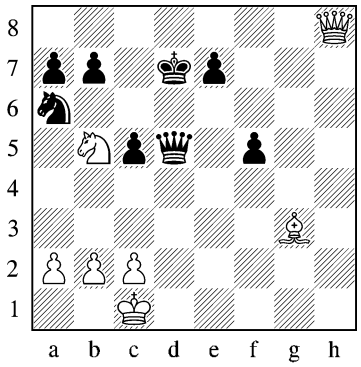
23.♖xd5

23.fxg6?! was a novelty in a game last year, but it is hardly inspired: 23...♕xf4† 24.♗xf4 ♖xd1† 25.♔xd1 ♗g7 Black has two passed pawns and the g6-pawn is doomed. 26.c3 ♔d7 27.♗g3 ♔e6 28.♘xa7 c4 29.♘c8 ♘c5∓ Black had a promising endgame in Gaponenko – Bodnaruk, Mamaia 2016.

23.♕xg4 gxf5 24.♖xd5 ♕xd5 25.♕h5 ♔d7!

A strong prophylactic move, freeing the black queen from having to parry the potential threat of ♕e8 mate.

26.♕xh8



26...♕g2!N

This is the right way to attack the bishop and threaten to harass the enemy king.

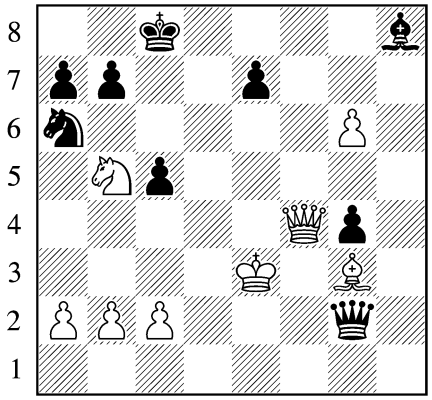
In Gharamian – Carlier, France 2006, Black overlooked that 26...♕f3? allows 27.♕h3! parrying all the threats and keeping the extra piece.

27.♕e5 ♕f1† 28.♔d2 ♕xb5 29.♕xf5†

Being a pawn down, White has nothing more than a perpetual.

23...♕xd5 24.fxg6 ♕h1† 25.♔d2 ♕g2† 26.♔e3

So far we have followed Palac – Skoberne, Rijeka 2007.



26...♔d8!N

Avoiding the capture on g4 with check.

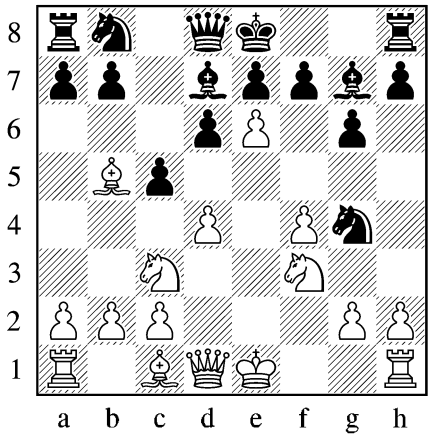
27.♕f8†

After 27.♕xg4 ♕xc2 28.g7 ♕c1† the white king cannot escape the perpetual check. For instance, 29.♔f2? would even lose to 29...♕xb2† followed by ...♗xg7.

27...♔d7 28.♕f5† ♔d8=

White has to content himself with a draw by perpetual check.

B3) 8.e6



The most aggressive move, which for long years caused Black problems in finding the right defence.

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8...fxe6!

For a long time theory evaluated this as losing on the spot, but Seirawan's novelty, mentioned below and apparently inspired by Chernin, changed the course of theory.

The old main line went 8...♗xb5 9.exf7† ♔d7. However, practice has shown that despite White's numerous weaknesses in the centre, Black is struggling with his king in the centre, and he still needs to regain the f7-pawn.

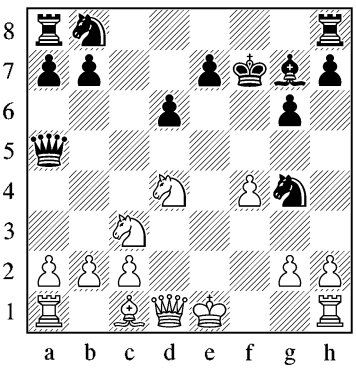
As ambitious players may consider it a drawback that White can force a draw after the text move, I offer some details of the following alternative, though I stop short of recommending it:

8...♗xb5 9.exf7† ♔f8

Black hopes that his king will find safety on the kingside.

10.♘xb5 ♕a5† 11.♘c3 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♔xf7

12...♘c6 gives White more options, for example: 13.♘e6† ♔xf7 14.♘xg7 ♘f6 15.♘e6 ♔xe6 16.0–0 ♔f7 17.♗e3 ♕f5 18.h3 h5 19.♕e2 ♖ac8 20.♖ad1± Even though the king is safer than on d7, White kept long-term pressure in Kozlitin – Kornev, Tula 2014.



13.0–0

The main alternative is: 13.♕xg4 ♗xd4 14.♗d2 ♕f5 15.♕f3 (the endgame after 15.♕xf5† gxf5 is fine for Black) 15...♕e6† 16.♘e2 ♘c6 17.c3 ♗b6 18.g4 In Nazhmeddinov – Anarkulov, Tashkent 2011, Black could have tried: 18...h5!?N 19.f5 gxf5 20.gxf5 ♕c4 In this complex position, neither side's king is entirely safe.

13...♕c5 14.♕xg4

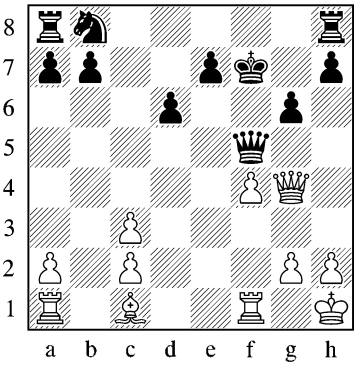
A solid alternative for White is: 14.♘ce2 ♗xd4† 15.♘xd4 ♘c6 16.c3 ♘xd4 17.cxd4 ♕f5 18.♕b3† d5 19.♖e1 ♕d7 The position was roughly balanced in Cornel – Launhardt, email 2013.

14...♗xd4† 15.♔h1 ♗xc3!

Black seizes the chance to damage White's structure.

16.bxc3 ♕f5

Offering the exchange of queens on this square is an important resource for Black in this line.



17.♕e2

White has also tried: 17.♕f3 ♘d7 18.♗e3 (18.♕xb7 ♖hb8 19.♕f3 ♘f6 20.♗e3 transposes) 18...♘f6 19.♕xb7 ♖hb8 20.♕f3 ♕xc2 21.♗d4 ♕e4 22.♕h3 ♕f5 23.♕h4 h5 Chances were balanced in Bjornsson – Thorarinsson, Reykjavik 2015.

17...♘d7 18.♖b1 b6 19.♗e3 ♖he8 20.♖b5 ♘c5 21.a4 ♔g8

Black had achieved equality in Karjakin – Mamedyarov, Nice (rapid) 2008.

9.♘g5 ♗xb5 10.♘xe6

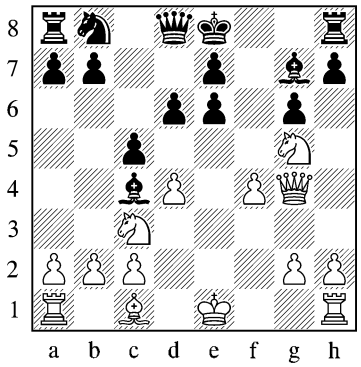
This keeps the fight alive until deep in the ending.

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10.♕xg4

White increases the pressure on e6, but allows the consolidating:

10...♗c4!



11.b3

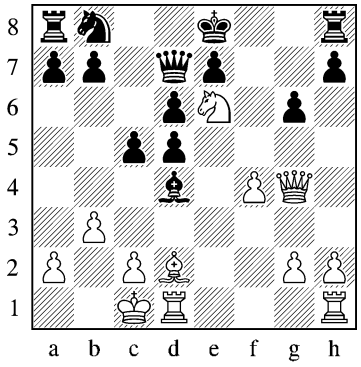
It is advisable to start the fight against this bishop at once.

After 11.♘xh7? ♔d7 12.♘g5 cxd4 13.♘f7 ♕a5, Black had a decisive counterattack and absolute safety for his own king in Kosanovic – Popchev, Stara Pazova 1988.

The simplistic 11.♘xe6? ♗xe6 12.♕xe6 has been played in a handful of games, but it just loses a pawn: 12...cxd4N+

11...♗xd4 12.♗d2 ♗d5 13.♘xd5 exd5 14.0–0–0 ♕d7 15.♘e6

This occurred in Nunn – Benjamin, Thessaloniki (ol) 1988, and several subsequent games. Black has two extra pawns and an impressive centre, but still needs to find a way to bring his king to safety. The simplest way of fighting against the annoying knight is:



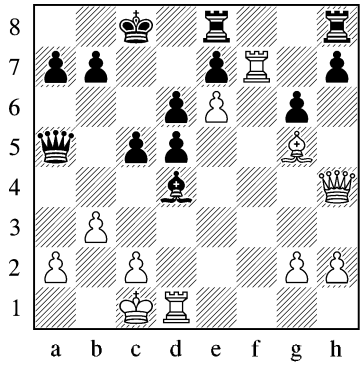
15...♘a6N 16.♖hf1 ♘c7 17.f5

The only way to retain compensation for the pawns.

17...♘xe6 18.fxe6 ♕c7 19.♖f7 0–0–0 20.♗g5 ♖de8 21.♕h4

White has achieved maximum activity, but Black is ready to counterattack.

21...♕a5



22.♖xd4!

Otherwise the bishop would become a lethal attacking piece in combination with the queen.

22...cxd4 23.♗xe7

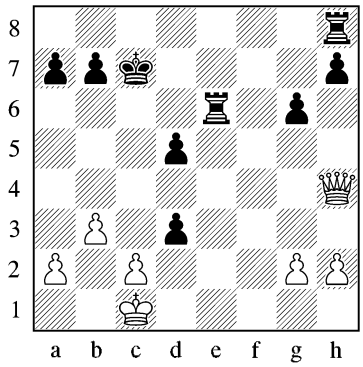
White has compensation for the material, but no more than that.

23...d3

Forcing a transposition to an approximately equal ending.

Black could also consider evacuating the king from the dangerous area with 23...♔b8!?.

24.♗xd6 ♖xe6 25.♖c7† ♕xc7 26.♗xc7 ♔xc7

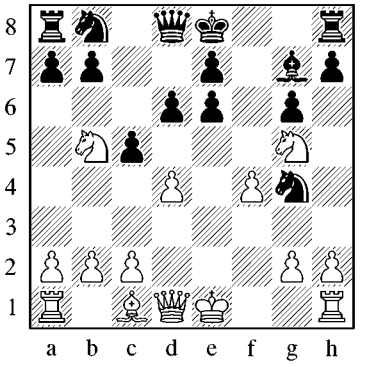


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Black keeps a small material advantage, but in all probability the endgame should be drawn due to the hyper-mobile queen.

10.♘xb5

This leads to simpler play with approximate equality.

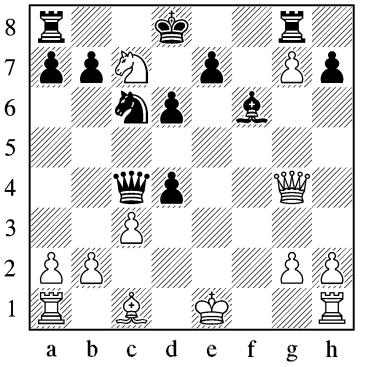


10...♕a5† 11.c3 ♕xb5 12.♘xe6

12.♕xg4 cxd4 13.♘xe6 ♕c4 14.♘xg7† ♔f7 is just a transposition.

12...♕c4 13.♘xg7†

The alternative is: 13.♕xg4 cxd4 14.f5 ♗f6 15.fxg6 ♖g8 16.g7 ♘c6 17.♘c7† ♔d8=

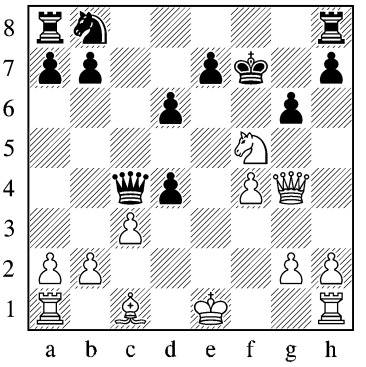


The games Shirov – Khalifman, Groningen 1990, and Watson – Shirov(!), Gausdal 1991, ended in draws by perpetual check, and rightly so. If 18.♘xa8? ♘e5–+ Black's attack is decisive.

13...♔f7 14.♕xg4 cxd4

Black does not hurry to take the knight, as White cannot save it anyway. Black's move is obviously useful as it destroys White's centre completely.

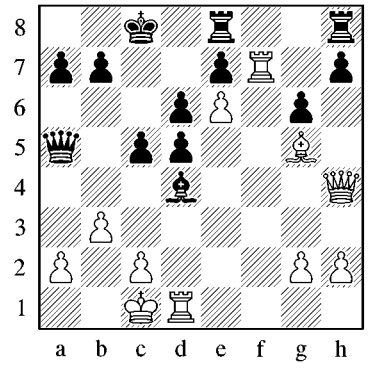
15.♘f5



15...♕e6†

The simplest way to regain the knight.

The main alternative is 15...h5, gaining an important tempo for the global blockade on the light squares, but offering White additional possibilities: 16.♕g5 ♕e6† 17.♘e3 dxe3 and now:



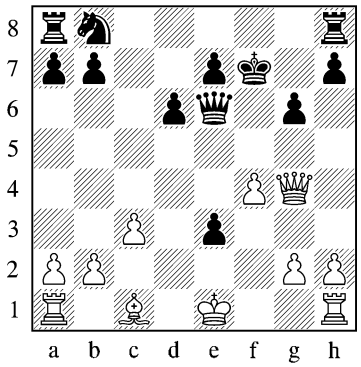
a) In Smeets – Nyback, Germany 2005, White hurried to display activity with 18.♕b5, but 18...♘d7 equalized.

b) Instead, the flexible 18.0–0 might be stronger. 18...e2 Otherwise the threat of f4-f5 could soon become dangerous. (White can meet 18...♘c6 with 19.♕b5) 19.♖e1 ♕c4 Preventing ♕b5 before developing the knight. 20.♕g3 ♘c6 21.♕f3 In Udvari –

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Dard, email 2007, Black's safest option was: 21...♖hf8N 22.♖xe2 ♔g8 The position is similar to the main line, but Black will need some time to transfer his queen to f7 or f5 in order to keep the light squares firmly in his hands.

16.♘e3 dxe3

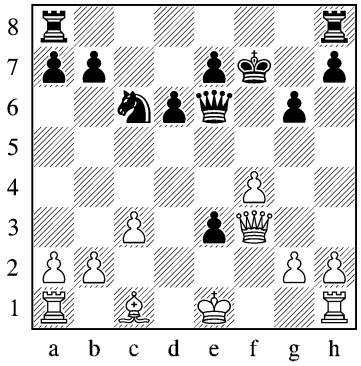


17.♕f3

17.♕xe6† is less ambitious: 17...♔xe6 18.♗xe3 ♘c6 Even though Black has not taken the opportunity to play the useful ...h7-h5 with gain of time, his position is absolutely safe without queens on the board. 19.0–0 ♖hf8 20.c4 ♔d7 21.g3 b6 22.♖fd1 ♖ac8 23.♔g2 ♖f6 Black has completed all his consolidating moves and, in Dorer – Daus, email 2013, the players agreed to a draw.

17...♘c6

The knight is excellent for defensive purposes. It enjoys absolute stability and is ready to use the weaknesses created by any reckless advance of White's queenside pawns.

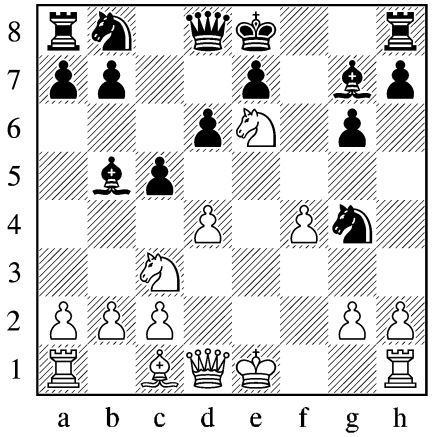


18.0–0 ♖hf8 19.♗xe3 ♔g8 20.b3

Necessary in order to develop the rook, but Black gets a target now.

20...a5 21.♖ae1 a4 22.♗c1 ♕f7 23.c4 axb3 24.axb3 ♖a2=

The active rook restricts White's active possibilities, while Black's structure is rock-solid. Dolmatov – Chernin, Moscow 1990, ended in a draw ten moves later.



10...♗xd4!!

This is the hidden point behind 8...fxe6. Black threatens to deliver perpetual check with ...♗f2†, ...♗e3† and so on.

11.♘xb5

The only reasonable way of fighting on.

In the stem game with this line, White was caught by surprise and accepted the draw with 11.♘xd8 ♗f2† 12.♔d2 ♗e3† 13.♔e1 ♗f2† in Sax – Seirawan, Brussels 1988. Since then, there have been plenty of other games that ended the same way.

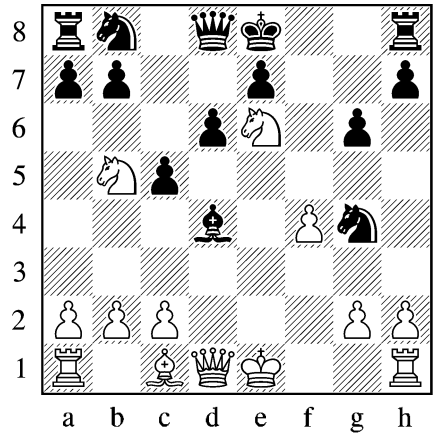
Other moves, occasionally played in games between lower-rated players, are worse. For instance:

11.♕xg4 ♗d7 12.f5 ♗xe6 13.fxe6 ♘c6 14.♖f1 was played in Erwich – Termeulen, Leiden

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2011, and now simplest is: 14...♗xc3N† 15.bxc3 ♕a5∓ Black will continue with ...0–0–0, with an extra pawn and the better structure.

Or if 11.♘xd4 ♗d7, Black has an extra pawn and a positional advantage.



11...♕a5†!

Black is not immediately threatening to take the knight, of course, as this would allow the fork with ♘c7†, but the last move prepares the checks with the bishop, since the white king will not be able to move to f1 or e2 due to ...♕xb5†.

White can play **B31) 12.c3** or **B32) 12.♕d2**.

12.♘c3? removed the threat on c7, allowing 12...♘f2–+ in Kessler – Lorenz, Troisdorf 2008.

B31) 12.c3

White clears the c2-square for his king, but the checks will not end there.

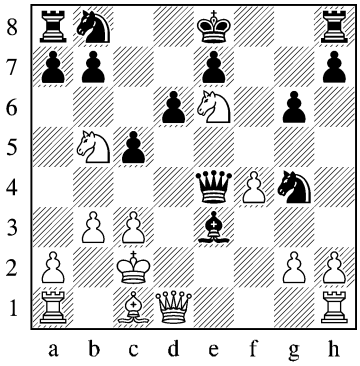
12...♗f2† 13.♔d2 ♗e3† 14.♔c2 ♕a4† 15.♔b1

The safest.

15.b3

This allows a quick queen switch to the kingside:

15...♕e4†

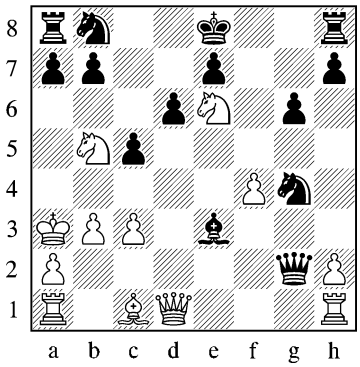


16.♔b2

After 16.♕d3 ♕xg2† 17.♗d2, as in L. Van Foreest – Go, Groningen 2012, Black does not have to exchange everything on d2, thereby freeing White from the pin, but can do better by starting the queenside play that is typical for the whole line: 17...♔d7N 18.♘ec7 a6 19.♘xa8 axb5 One important point is that after 20.♕xb5†?! ♘c6 21.♕xb7†? ♔e6, the threats of ...♘d4† and ...♘b4†, winning the queen, do not allow White time to defend the bishop.

16...♕xg2† 17.♔a3

This position has arisen in several games, but in none of them has Black chosen the most forceful way of reaching at least equality:



17...♘f2!N 18.♘xd6†!

The only chance.

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18...♔d7!

Not fearing any ghosts, as the discovered checks are not dangerous due to ...♘xd1.

18...exd6? 19.♕xd6 offers White a decisive attack.

19.♕e2 ♗xc1†!

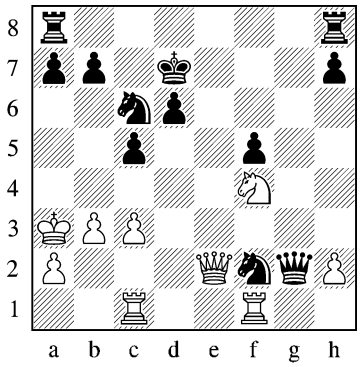
19...♕xh1 turns the game into something similar to Anderssen's Immortal Game: 20.♗xe3 ♕xa1 21.♘xc5† ♔xd6 22.♕c4 Black's position looks dangerous, but in reality White does not have more than a perpetual. A good way of forcing events is 22...♘d1!, threatening ...♕b2† with a decisive counterattack. 23.♕e6† ♔c7 24.♕xe7† ♔c8= Nevertheless, the whole line still looks scary. The main move is not only safer but also a stronger choice objectively, leaving White with the task of proving his compensation for the material.

20.♖axc1 exd6 21.f5

Defending the own knight before attacking its rival on f2.

If 21.♖hf1? ♕e4! Black keeps the extra piece.

21...♘c6 22.♖hf1 gxf5 23.♘f4

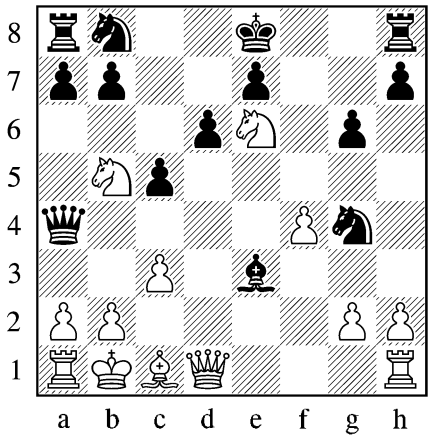


23...♕g8!

A better regrouping than 23...♕e4, when 24.♕xf2 would leave the black queen vulnerable.

24.♕xf2 ♖d8 25.♖cd1 ♔c8 26.♘d5 ♕f7

White has nothing better than taking on f5, with hopes of holding the ending a pawn down due to his strong knight.



Black has a choice regarding how to exchange queens. An important aspect is that the threat of ♘c7† persists, and Black needs to find the best way of proving compensation for the exchange.

15...♕e4†

This is the most promising continuation, fighting for more than just a draw.

The alternative is:

15...♕xd1 16.♖xd1 ♔d7 17.♘ec7 ♗xc1 18.♔xc1 ♘c6

The same operation as in the main line is inappropriate here: 18...a6 19.♘xa8 axb5 20.♘b6† ♔c6 21.♘d5± The knight has reached a decent square and Black's compensation for the exchange was only partial in Panarin – Abelian, Krasnodar 2002.

19.♘xa8 ♖xa8

Black's centre and the awkward position of the white knight are known to offer enough compensation.

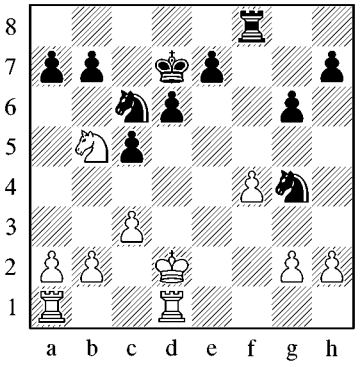
20.♔d2

20.c4?! clears the c3-square for the knight, but makes the d4-square available for the black knight and – even more importantly – offers Black a crucial tempo for his initiative: 20...♖f8 21.g3 g5! Either winning a pawn or clearing the e5-square for the knights and

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the f-file for the rook. 22.fxg5?! ♘ce5 23.b3 ♘e3 Now 24.♖g1 or 24.♖h1 are both met by 24...♖f2 followed by ...♘d3† with a mating attack. 24.♖d2 is no better after 24...♖f1† 25.♔b2 ♘5xc4†! and Black will soon have a decisive material advantage.

20...♖f8



21.h3N

If 21.g3, as in Ortega Ruiz – Agbabishvili, Gibraltar 2013, Black can take over the initiative with the familiar 21...g5!N∓.

Black also does well after: 21.♖f1?! ♘xh2 22.♖h1 ♘g4 23.♖xh7 ♖xf4∓ It is interesting to compare this with the variation given in the note to 19...a6 in the main line, in which the white rooks successfully defend the kingside pawns.

21...♘f6 22.♔e3 h5!?

Threatening ...h4 followed by ...♘h5-g3-f5, with a permanent blockade.

23.g3 h4 24.g4 a6 25.♘a3 e6

Threatening ...♘d5.

26.♖f1

26.c4? weakens the central squares, offering Black the initiative after 26...d5.

26...♘d5† 27.♔e4

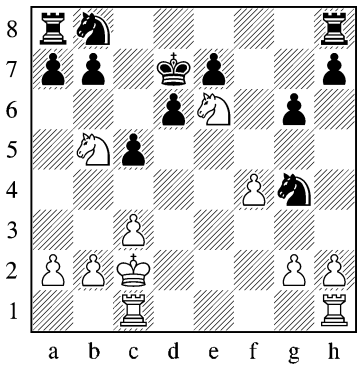
Due to the weakness on f4, Black can already force a draw by repetition:

27...♘f6† 28.♔d3 ♘d5=

16.♕c2 ♕xc2† 17.♔xc2 ♗xc1 18.♔xc1

The king moves out of the knight's range.

The queen's rook is needed on a1 in order to support a2-a4, as shown by: 18.♖axc1?! ♔d7



19.♖he1

White has nothing better than this.

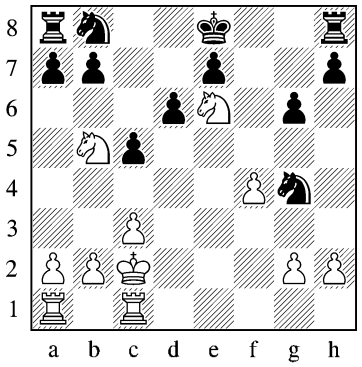
19.♘ec7? a6 20.♘xa8 axb5 21.a4 bxa4 22.♘b6† ♔c6 and now 23.♘xa4 b5 traps the knight, so White would have to play 23.♘c4∓, when two pawns for the exchange and a wonderful structure offer Black the advantage.

19...♘c6

White only had some vague compensation for the pawn in A. Lengyel – Resika, Budapest 2001.

18.♖hxc1N

This has not yet been tested. Its main drawback is that, at the right moment, Black will get a second pawn with ...♘e3†.



18...♔d7 19.♘ec7 a6 20.♘xa8 axb5 21.a4 bxa4 22.♖xa4 ♔c6

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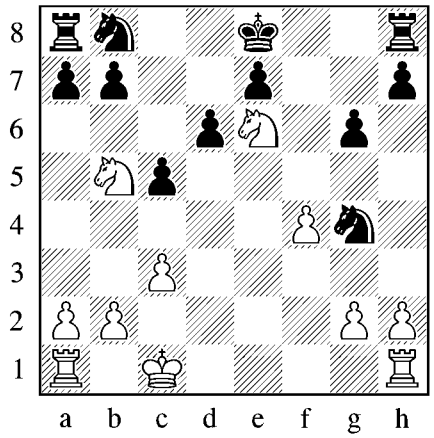
Threatening to trap the enemy knight with ...♘a6.

23.b4!? ♘e3†

Now is a good moment to switch to the kingside, since 23...♘a6?! runs into 24.♖b1, threatening b4-b5†.

24.♔d3 ♘xg2

With two pawns for the exchange and the more compact structure, Black has no problems at all.



18...♔d7 19.♘ec7 a6

With the current placement of the white rooks, the method examined in the line with 15...♕xd1 above does not work out well: 19...♘c6 20.♘xa8 ♖xa8 21.♔d2 ♖f8 22.♖af1± White has managed to defend the f-file without losing the h2-pawn.

20.♘xa8 axb5

White has two possible ways to save his knight.

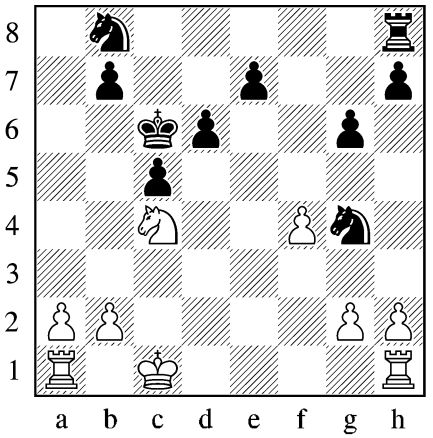
21.c4

This seems the safest solution, even though, from a strategic viewpoint, exchanging a central pawn for a wing pawn is unfavourable.

If 21.a4 bxa4 22.♖xa4 ♔c6 Black has the unpleasant threat of ...♘a6. 23.♖a7 (Rather a sad move to play, but 23.♖e1 ♘a6∓ simply won material for Black in Sadvakasov – Molner, Philadelphia 2008.) 23...c4! Preventing White's counterplay with b2-b4, and keeping all the trumps. 24.♖e1 e5∓ In Bauer – Chabanon, Nantes 1993, Black was a knight up in the main battle area since White's knight and queen's rook were far away from the action.

21...bxc4 22.♘b6† ♔c6 23.♘xc4

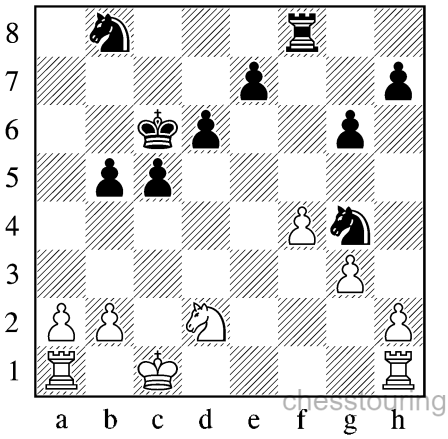
The knight has returned to freedom, but the structure greatly favours Black, leaving little doubt about his compensation.



23...b5

23...♖f8N 24.g3 ♘d7, followed by ...d5 and ...e5, also comes into consideration.

24.♘d2 ♖f8 25.g3



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25...e5!?N

Just one of several good moves.

In Moiseev – Simonenko, Tashkent 1988, Black unnecessarily sacrificed a pawn with 25...g5?! 26.fxg5 ♖f2. Presumably he missed or underestimated 27.a4!, which resulted in the activation of White's rook.

25...♔c7 followed by ...♘c6 is sound enough, and if 26.a4 b4.

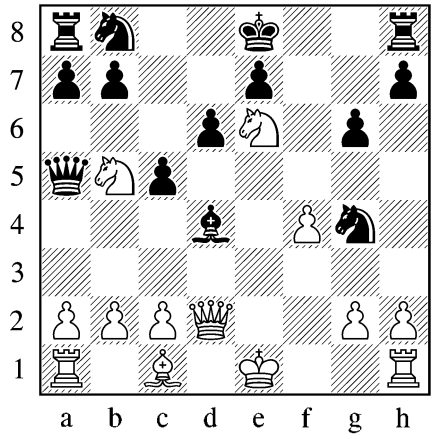
Finally, 25...♘a6 26.a4 ♘b4 is also quite reliable.

26.fxe5 ♘xe5 27.♔c2 ♖f2

Confronted with the prospect of the second black knight joining the attack, White does not have anything better than perpetually offering the exchange of rooks with:

28.♖af1 ♖g2 29.♖fg1 ♖f2=

B32) 12.♕d2

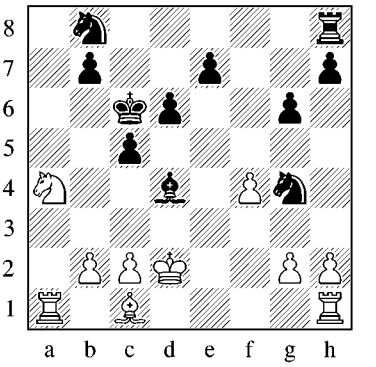


Apparently the most logical move, since after the forced queen exchange White makes progress with his development. But this does not solve his main problem: connecting the rooks.

12...♕xd2† 13.♗xd2

The other recapture looks rather weird: 13.♔xd2 ♔d7 14.♘ec7 a6 15.♘xa8 axb5 16.a4 bxa4 17.♘b6† ♔c6 18.♘xa4

Unlike a similar variation in line B31, the knight has an escape on c3.



18...e5!

Black is better developed, so he does well to open the position.

19.h3

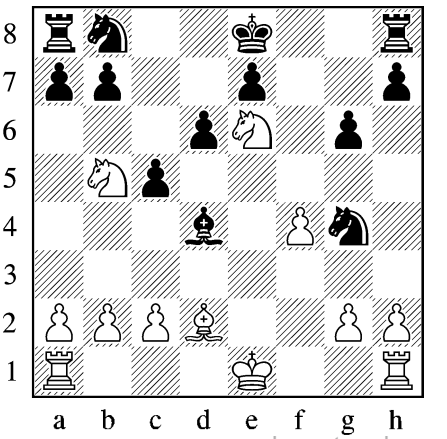
Also after 19.fxe5 ♗xe5 20.h3 ♘f6 21.♘c3 ♘bd7 22.♖f1 d5 Black holds the initiative.

19...♘f2 20.♖e1 exf4 21.c3 ♗e3† 22.♔e2 ♗xc1 23.♖axc1 ♘e4

Threatening ...b5.

24.c4 ♘d7 25.♔f3 ♘d2† 26.♔xf4 ♘e5∓

Black won a second pawn for the exchange and later the game in Nguyen – Kriebel, Novy Bor 2016.



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13...♔d7 14.♘ec7 a6 15.♘xa8 axb5 16.a4 bxa4 17.♘b6† ♔c6 18.♘xa4 ♘d7

18...b5?! only helps White to regroup with his knight: 19.♘c3 b4 20.♘d1 ♘d7 21.h3 ♘h6 22.g4± Kovchan – Lorenzo de la Riva, Barcelona 2013.

19.♘c3

This has proved dangerous in practice, with Black not finding the most convincing continuation.

A correspondence game went:
19.h3 ♘e3 20.♗xe3 ♗xe3 21.♖f1 ♖f8 22.g3 d5

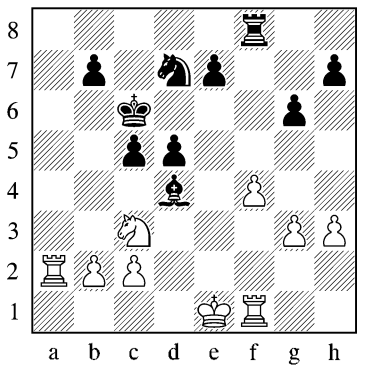
This central action is justified by White's lack of coordination.

23.♘c3 ♗d4 24.♖a2

Avoiding the doubled pawns does not offer White much, either.

For instance, after 24.♔d2 c4 25.♖ae1 ♗c5 26.g4 b5 Black has a space advantage, is perfectly regrouped and defends all the important pawns safely.

And if 24.♖a3 ♘b6 25.♘d1 ♘c4 26.♖a2 ♖f6, followed by ...♖e6†, Black has some initiative.

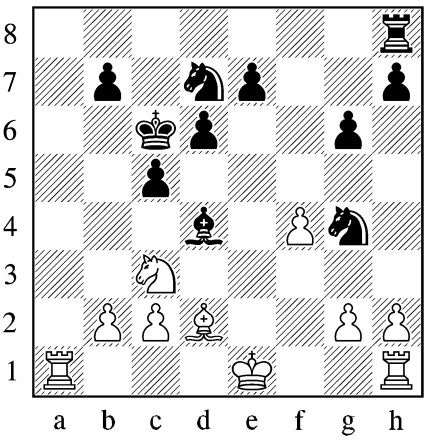


24...♗xc3† 25.bxc3 c4

With such a chronic weakness on c3, White cannot even dream of winning.

26.♖f3 ♘c5 27.♔f2 ♘e4† 28.♔g2 e6 29.♖a4 ♘c5 30.♖a2

½–½ Makovsky – Schramm, email 2012.



19...e5!N

Black should use the exposed position of the white king at once.

The slower 19...♘b6 leaves White on top for a long time, and even the draw agreement might have been premature in the following game: 20.♘d1 ♘c4 21.c3 ♗g7 22.♗c1 h5 23.0–0 h4 24.♖e1 ♗f6 25.h3 ♘h6 26.♘f2 ♘f5 27.♘g4 ♖f8 28.♘xf6 ♖xf6 29.b3 ♘b6 30.c4 ♘d7 31.♗b2 ♖f8 32.♗c3 ½–½ Radjabov – Ivanchuk, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2007.

20.h3

Aiming to drive the knight further away from the e5-square.

20.fxe5? plays into Black's hands: 20...♘dxe5 21.♘d1 ♖e8 22.♔f1 ♘c4∓

20...♗xc3!

An important intermediate move.

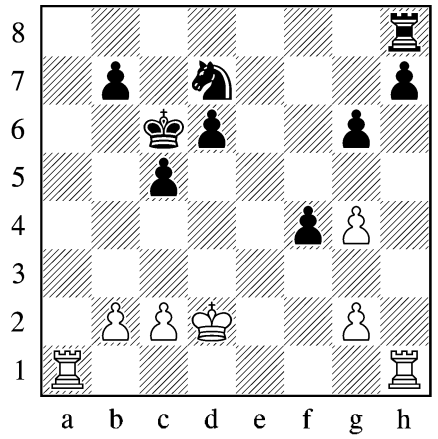
21.hxg4

21.♗xc3 allows the following knight incursion: 21...♘e3 22.♔d2 ♘xg2 23.fxe5 dxe5 24.♖hf1 Black has two pawns for the exchange, though the rook's invasion along the f-file looks annoying. Still, there is a way of keeping things under control. 24...♘h4 25.♖f7 ♘f5 26.♖d1 ♘d6 27.♖e7 ♘f5

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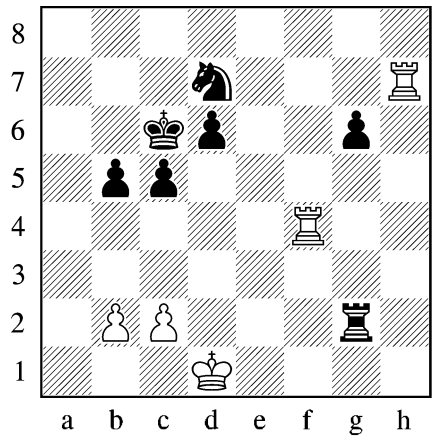
28.♖f7 ♘d6= White has to accept a draw by repetition since 29.♖ff1? ♖e8∓ followed by ...♘f5, ...♘b6 and ...e4 is good for Black.

21...♗xd2† 22.♔xd2 exf4



Black has two pawns for the exchange and the perfect e5-square for his knight. The following line does not change anything:

23.g5 ♖f8 24.♖xh7 ♖f5 25.♖f1 ♖xg5 26.♖xf4 ♖xg2† 27.♔d1 b5!?=



Conclusion

6.♗b5† is the most aggressive option, but it has a major strategic drawback: after the inevitable bishop exchange, White's light squares will be weak, creating the risk that his position becomes overextended.

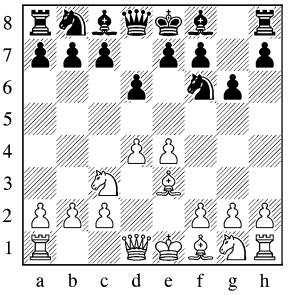
One possible problem for ambitious players is that White can force a draw in line B3, though when playing against an inferior opponent, one could always deviate with the suboptimal 8...♗xb5 9.exf7† ♔f8.

For many years I feared that the forced lines in this chapter would be hard to work out and keep up to date, but now I see their inner logic, which makes their handling easier for tournament players.

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Chapter 8

4.♗e3



5.♘f3

Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗e3 c6 5.♘f3

5...♗g7 6.♕d2 0–0

A) 7.0–0–0 b5 **203**

A1) 8.e5 **203**

A2) 8.♗d3 **206**

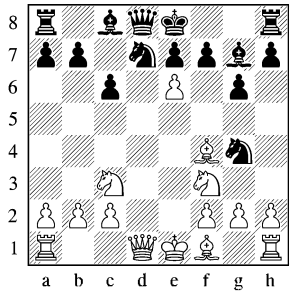
B) 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 **207**

B1) 8.♗h6 **207**

B2) 8.0–0 **208**

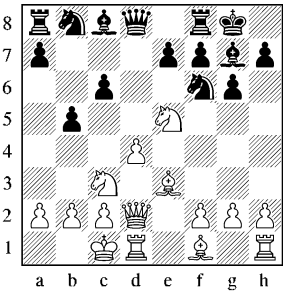
C) 7.♗h6 **210**

note to 6.♕d2



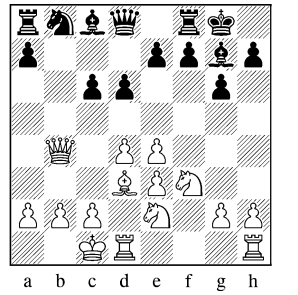
9...♕b6!!

A1) after 9.♘xe5



9...b4!N

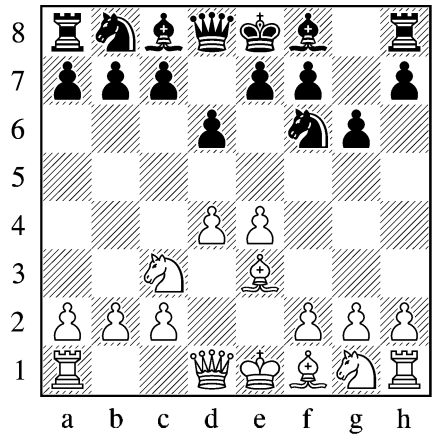
A2) after 11.fxe3



11...♘d7N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗e3



This fashionable system corresponds to a general tendency in hypermodern openings, including, among others, the English Attack in the Najdorf and Scheveningen Sicilians, and various ♗e3 set-ups against the King's Indian. White's main idea is 5.♕d2 followed by castling queenside, leading to mutual attacks on opposite wings.

In the Pirc Defence, this set-up has an even clearer target than in the aforementioned lines, since ♗e3-h6 will weaken the black king's defence, making the attack based on f2-f3 and h2-h4-h5 as dangerous as in the Sicilian Dragon.

At the same time, 4.♗e3 is flexible enough to allow switching to positional schemes, so Black should choose his antidote to the main plan carefully.

For years my main choice has been 4...c6. Delaying the bishop's development is logical, as it inhibits ♗h6, when ...♗f8xh6 would gain a tempo over the lines with an early ...♗g7. Moreover, there are many situations where the bishop proves useful on the a3-f8 diagonal.

For reasons explained on page 221 (line B of Chapter 9), I temporarily abandoned 4...c6 but, while working on this book, I managed to regain full confidence in it.

Before moving on, I will briefly explain the main problems with Black's most significant alternative:

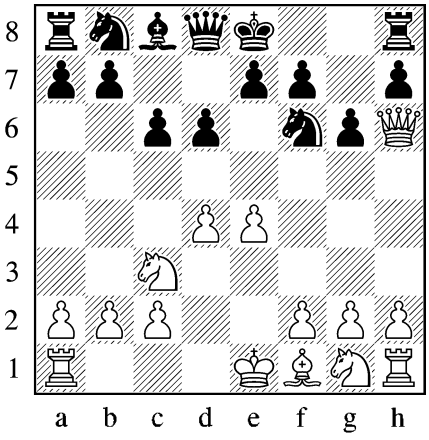
4...♗g7 5.♕d2 c6

I have successfully experimented with the double-edged 5...0–0 6.0–0–0 (White has to remain flexible, for if 6.♗h6 e5 or 6.f3 e5, Black obtains counterplay in the centre) 6...c6 7.f3 b5. However, I now find 4...c6 more flexible and complex.

6.♗h6

This is the most challenging line, to which I have been unable to find an antidote.

6...♗xh6 7.♕xh6



White does not have concrete threats yet, but Black's king is stuck in the centre. On the other hand, the queen's departure from the centre offers Black a free hand on the queenside and, as we know, the bishop exchange mainly favours Black strategically. Apart from the natural queenside expansion, Black could consider a kingside blockade on the dark squares, based on ...♖g8 and ...g5, causing the enemy queen some discomfort.

7...♕a5 8.♗d3 c5

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This is Black's main source of counterplay but, even during the games I played with this line, I had my doubts as to whether Black can really equalize after wasting two tempos with ...♗f8-g7xh6 and ...c7-c6-c5.

9.♘f3!

The most logical move, in the true Sicilian spirit. White uses every opportunity to develop.

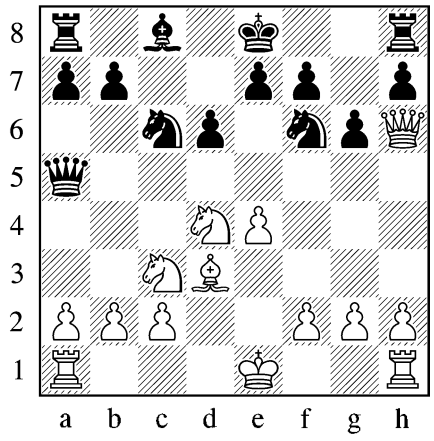
For a long time I thought the main problem would be 9.d5 ♘bd7 10.♘f3, but recently Jacob Aagaard assured me that Black was doing okay after: 10...c4 11.♗xc4 ♕c5 12.♗d3 (or 12.♗b5) 12...♕xf2† 13.♔xf2 ♘g4† Indeed, White may retain some tiny edge, but the position is full of life, offering chances for both sides.

9...cxd4

Black is forced to release the tension, helping White to centralize the knight, since 9...♗g4? 10.e5!N offers White a decisive attack, while after 9...♘c6 10.d5 ♘d4 11.♘d2± Black has no real counterplay.

10.♘xd4 ♘c6

10...♕b6 does not make much of a difference: 11.0–0–0 ♘c6 12.♗b5±



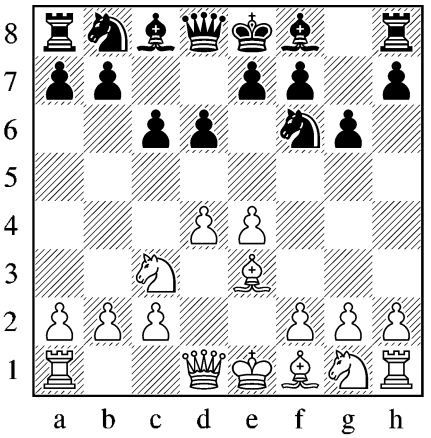
The most popular move has been 11.♘b3, when 11...♕b6 offers Black a viable position, but I could not find a satisfactory continuation after the rarer:

11.♗b5! ♗d7 12.0–0–0

White will continue with ♖he1, with perfect centralization.

Having mentioned these possibilities, the time has come to switch back to 4...c6.

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗e3 c6



In this chapter we will examine 5.♘f3, followed by 5.h3 in the next chapter, and finally 5.♕d2 in Chapter 10.

5.♘f3

This is a deviation from the initial plan, as White needs his pawn on f3 to make the attack dangerous. Play can transpose to Chapter 3 if White plays h2-h3 in the near future, but he can adopt several independent set-ups.

5...♗g7 6.♕d2

6.h3 0–0 is a direct transposition to variation A of Chapter 3.

6.a4 and 6.♗e2 will most likely transpose to the Classical System, as covered in Chapters 1 and 2.

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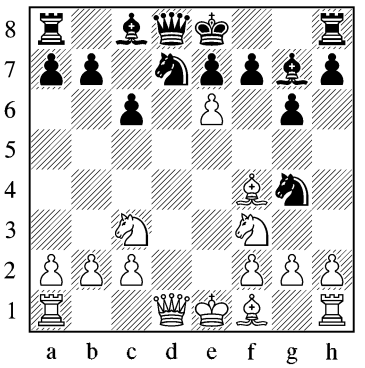
Without h2-h3, the central break does not work too well:

6.e5 ♘g4N 7.♗f4 dxe5 8.dxe5

8.♘xe5 ♘xe5 9.♗xe5 ♗xe5 10.dxe5 ♕b6, followed by ...♗e6, ...♘d7 and either ...♖d8 or ...0–0–0, offers Black comfortable development.

8...♘d7 9.e6

After 9.♗c4 ♘gxe5 10.♘xe5 ♗xe5 White is unable to regain the pawn on f7.



9...♕b6!!

There is nothing wrong with 9...fxe6, but the main move is much stronger, proving White's unprepared action in the centre to be premature.

10.exd7†

10.exf7† ♔f8 leads to similar play, but with the difference that the two sides have the same number of pieces.

10...♗xd7∓

Black threatens ...♕xf2 mate, as well as ...♕xb2, regaining the piece and retaining two extra pawns.

11.♕c1

The only way of parrying both threats.

11...♕xf2† 12.♔d1 0–0–0–+

Black's attack is decisive.

6...0–0

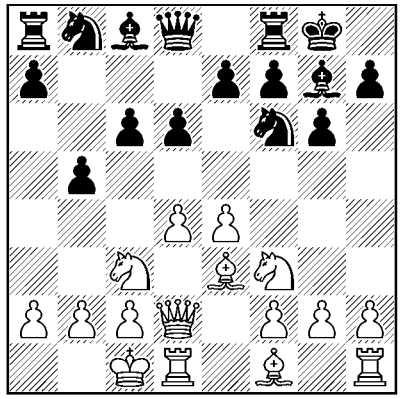
Since ♗e3-h6 is less effective when White has played an early ♘f3, Black can and should castle, leaving the choice between his two main plans, ...e5 and ...b5, for later.

We will examine **A) 7.0–0–0**, **B) 7.♗d3** and **C) 7.♗h6**.

A) 7.0–0–0

White increases the pressure on the d-file, discouraging ...e5. However, his king is slightly exposed, perfectly justifying Black's reaction:

7...b5



We have a further split: **A1) 8.e5** or **A2) 8.♗d3**.

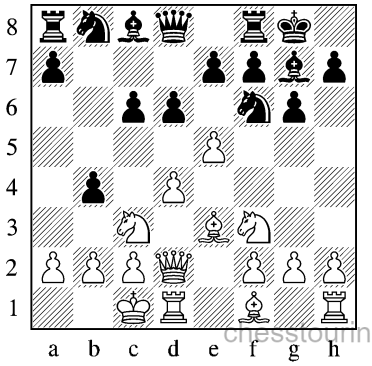
A1) 8.e5

White tries to exploit the slight delay in Black's development caused by his previous pawn move.

8...dxe5

Black cannot afford to play:

8...b4



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9.exf6N

This weakens Black's kingside defence.

9.♘e2?! ♘d5 was fine for Black in Heyne – Wierum, Verden 2009.

9...bxc3 10.♕xc3 ♗xf6 11.h4

With his remaining knight far from the kingside, Black is in some danger.

11...♗g4

11...h5 12.♗g5 is also pleasant for White.

12.h5!? ♗xh5 13.♖xh5 gxh5 14.♗d3

Followed by ♖h1 and/or ♘g5, when practically all White's pieces are targeting Black's poorly defended king.

9.♘xe5

The most consistent move, hoping to delay Black's development due to the hanging c6-pawn.

9.dxe5

This leads to balanced play.

9...♕xd2† 10.♖xd2 ♘g4 11.♗f4 ♘d7 12.♖e2

12.e6 fxe6 13.♗g5 ♘gf6 offers White no more than reasonable compensation for the pawn.

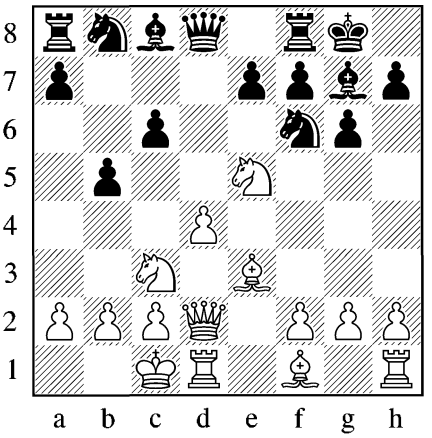
12...♗a6 13.♘d1

After 13.b4, Black opens the long diagonal with 13...f6.

13...♘c5 14.h3 ♘e6 15.♗d2 ♘h6 16.g4 ♖ad8 17.♗a5 ♖d7 18.♖e3 ♗b7=

Black's overall activity compensates for the temporarily misplaced h6-knight. After making some more progress with ...a6, ...c5 and ...♘f4, he will recycle his problem knight, starting with ...f6.

The position after the text move has occurred in a few games, most recently Nandhidhaa – Rajesh, Chennai 2012. The fastest way to get counterplay is:



9...b4!N 10.♘e2 ♘d5 11.♗h6 ♘d7!

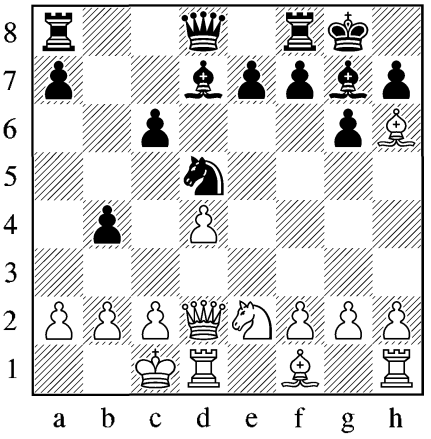
As we shall see, the c6-pawn is poisoned.

12.♘xd7

White has to release the tension otherwise Black's initiative would develop too quickly: 12.h4 ♕a5 13.♔b1 ♘xe5 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.dxe5 ♗e6∓ Followed by ...♖ad8 with huge pressure.

Or if 12.♘xc6 ♕b6 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.♘e5 ♕a5 15.a3 (15.♔b1 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♗e6 is no improvement) 15...♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♖d8∓, White's underdeveloped army cannot defend the king properly.

12...♗xd7



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13.♘g3

13.♗xg7 is a small concession offering Black comfortable equality: 13...♔xg7 14.♘g3 ♗e6 15.♗c4 ♕c7 16.h4 ♕f4=

13...♘c3!

Black needs to carry out his attack with great energy. The text move takes advantage of the fact that the h6-bishop is hanging.

The more natural 13...♕a5 14.♗c4 ♗e6 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.♖he1 confronts Black with the danger of a positional exchange sacrifice on e6.

14.bxc3

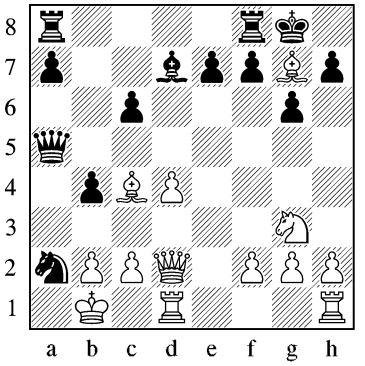
There is no time for the intermediate capture on g7:

14.♗xg7?! ♘xa2† 15.♔b1 ♕a5

The knight threatens to return to c3 with even greater effect.

16.♗c4

16.d5 covers the c3-square, but 16...♖ab8! renews the threat.



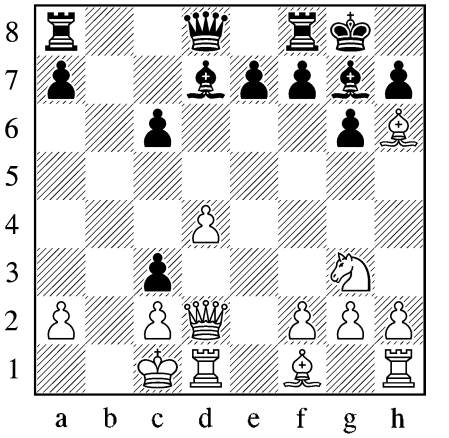
16...♘c3†! 17.bxc3 bxc3 18.♕c1 ♖ab8† 19.♗b3 ♖b6

Threatening ...♖a6.

20.d5!? ♔xg7 21.♖d4 ♖fb8–+

There is no defence against ...♖xb3 or ...♖a6.

14...bxc3



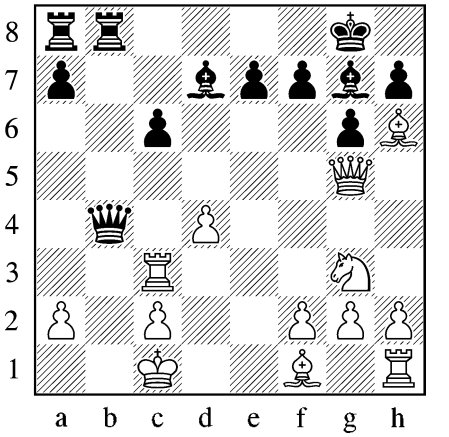
15.♕g5

Amazingly, the queen has not a single good square along the c1-h6 diagonal.

15.♕e3 runs into: 15...♕b6 16.♖d3 ♖fb8 17.♖xc3 ♗xd4∓

Or if 15.♕f4 ♕a5 16.♖d3 e5 17.dxe5 ♗xe5 18.♕e4 ♖fd8 followed by ...♖ab8, the white king is surrounded by danger on all sides.

15...♕b6 16.♖d3 ♖fb8 17.♖xc3 ♕b4



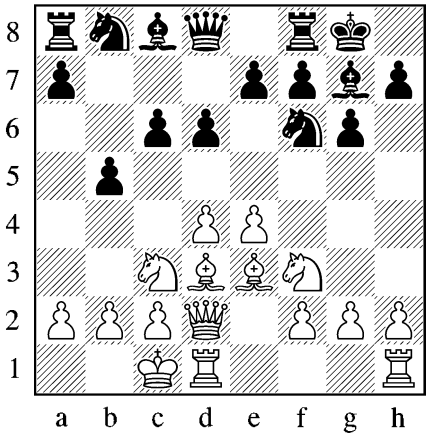
With ...♗xd4 to follow soon. For instance:

18.♘e2 ♗xd4 19.♘xd4 ♕xc3 20.♕e5 f6 21.♕e3 ♕b2† 22.♔d2 ♖b4 23.♘b3 ♗f5

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Black has a continuing attack for a minimal material investment.

A2) 8.♗d3



This looks consistent, but obstructing the d-file allows Black to exploit White's hidden vulnerability along the c1-h6 diagonal. By omitting h2-h3, White has exposed himself to ...♘g4, after which Black can continue to harass the bishop with ...f6 and ...e5, since the bishop needs to prevent ...♗h6. However, this plan only works with a precise move order.

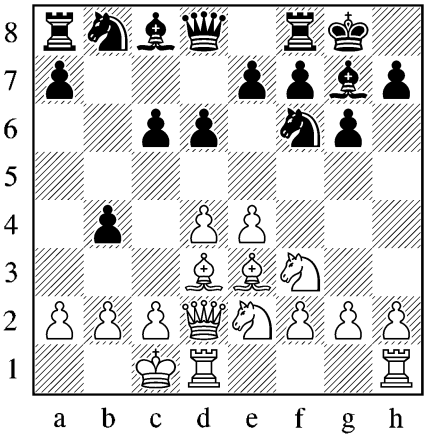
8...b4!

8...♘g4?! is premature: 9.♗g5 b4 (9...f6 10.♗f4 e5 11.dxe5 dxe5? allows 12.♗c4†!) In Hautier – Nanu, Metz 2002, White should have played: 10.♘a4N ♕a5 11.b3 f6 12.♗f4 e5 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♗e3± Black's initiative has subsided, but the weakness of the light squares remains.

9.♘e2

9.♘a4 exposes the knight to 9...♕a5 10.b3 ♘bd7, followed by ...♘b6.

9.♘b1 is too passive to be good. Black successfully switched to the slow mode with 9...a5 in Katranov – Baeten, Maastricht 2014.



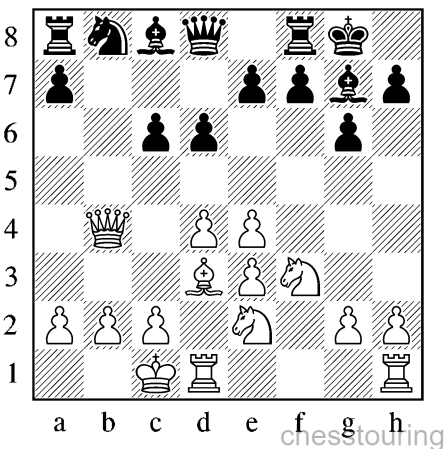
9...♘g4!

Now is the best moment to jump with the knight.

If 9...♕a5?! 10.♔b1 ♘g4 11.♗g5 ♘xf2 12.♗xe7 ♘xh1 13.♖xh1 ♗e6 14.b3±, White threatens ♗xd6 with overwhelming positional compensation for the exchange. 14...♕c7?! loses a pawn with insufficient compensation due to Black's lagging development: 15.♗xf8 ♔xf8 16.♕xb4±

10.♕xb4 ♘xe3 11.fxe3

The powerful g7-bishop and White's shattered structure offer Black long-term compensation for the pawn. In Babujian – Mahjoob, Mashhad 2010, he should have switched to slow, developing, mode with:

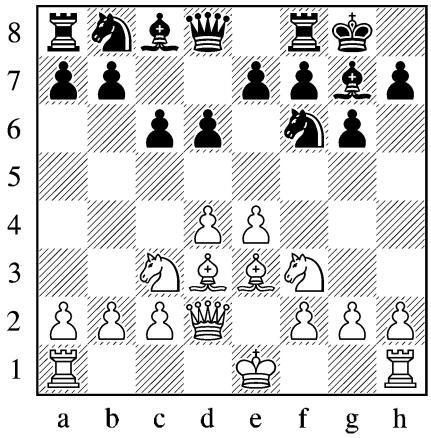


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11...♘d7N 12.♔b1 ♕c7 13.♕d2 c5 14.c4 ♖b8 15.♘c3 ♘b6

Attacking the c4-pawn and planning to undermine the d4-pawn with ...♗g4. The combined pressure on b2 offers Black excellent play for the missing pawn.

B) 7.♗d3

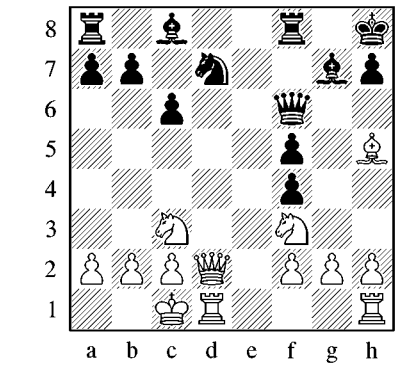


White plays in the spirit of some of the lines covered in Chapter 3, but omits h2-h3, hoping to gain a tempo for centralizing the rooks.

7...♘bd7

The main continuations are **B1) 8.♗h6** and **B2) 8.0–0**.

Since ...♘bd7 is more useful than ...b5, switching to 8.0–0–0 allows the familiar 8...♘g4 without reservations: 9.♗g5 f6 10.♗f4 e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♗c4† ♔h8 13.♗e6 exf4 14.♗xg4 f5 15.exf5 gxf5 16.♗h5 ♕f6



Black has excellent play on the dark squares.

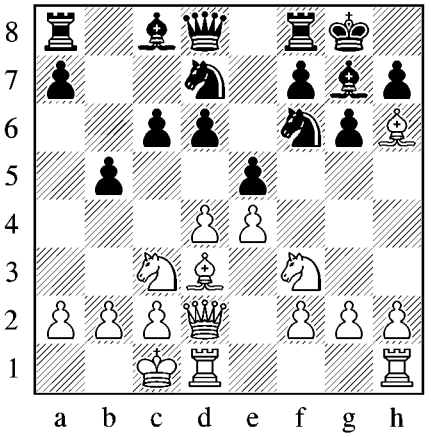
B1) 8.♗h6

As mentioned above, ♘f3 has greatly reduced White's attacking chances, so the bishop exchange mainly helps Black strategically after:

8...e5 9.0–0–0

9.dxe5 avoids future problems caused by ...exd4, but prematurely clears space for Black's pieces: 9...dxe5 10.0–0–0 b5 11.h4 ♗xh6 12.♕xh6 ♘g4 13.♕d2 In Eissing – Sparwel, Germany 2016, 13...♘c5N followed by ...♗e6 would have given Black comfortable play.

9...b5



10.♗xg7

Omitting this exchange at an early stage may result in delaying it indefinitely. For instance:

10.h4 exd4N 11.♘xd4 b4 12.♘a4

12.♘ce2 is similar: 12...♗xh6 13.♕xh6 ♘g4 14.♕f4 ♘de5 Black threatens to win material with ...c6-c5-c4.

12.♗xg7? bxc3 13.♕h6 ♘g4 lands White in trouble.

12...♗xh6 13.♕xh6 ♘e5

Planning ...♗d7 and ...c5, when Black's initiative develops quickly.

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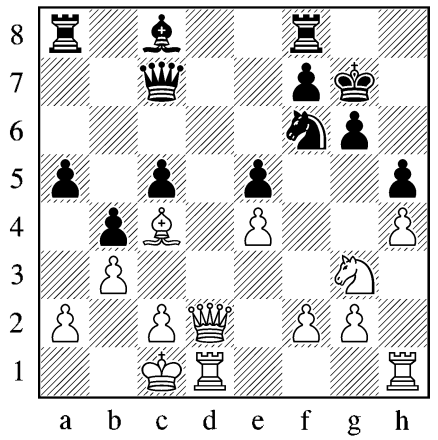
10...♔xg7 11.h4 exd4

The stabilizing 11...h5= is also good.

12.♘xd4 b4 13.♘ce2

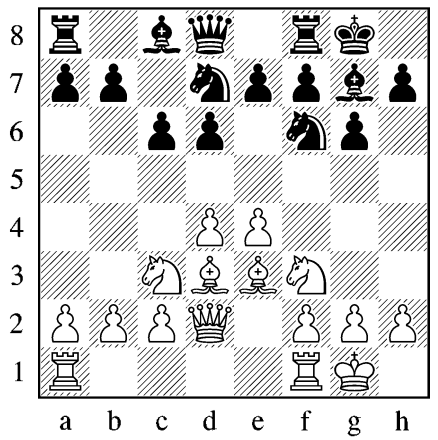
In Wakefield – Enin, email 2007, Black should have continued to advance his queenside pawns:

13...c5N 14.♘f3 ♕c7 15.b3 h5 16.♘g3 ♘e5 17.♘xe5 dxe5 18.♗c4 a5



Black will play ...a4 soon, with adequate counterplay.

B2) 8.0–0



White hopes to gain a tempo compared to the similar line from Chapter 3, but omitting h2-h3 allows Black to force matters in the centre.

8...♘g4!

Even though White does not face the same dangers along the c1-h6 diagonal that he did in line A2, driving the bishop away from the diagonal will be a strategic success.

8...e5 9.♖ad1, followed by ♖fe1, offers White chances of keeping the advantage in the centre.

9.♗g5

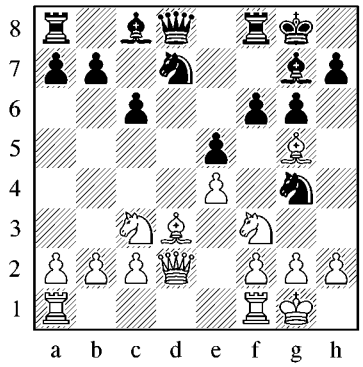
There are some differences compared to the main line if the bishop chooses the other square:

9.♗f4 e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♗g5

This is the only way to give play an independent character.

The alternative is: 11.♗g3 ♕c7 12.a4 a5 This is justified by the bishop's absence from e3, as the knight will be stable on c5 and there will be no pressure on the b6-square. Play is similar to that after 9.♗g5.

11...f6



12.♗c4†

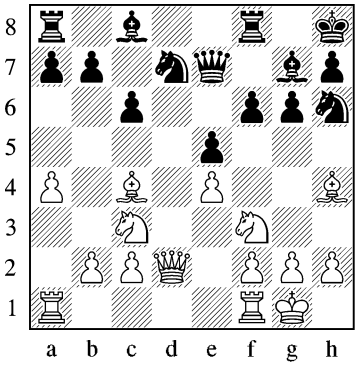
It is correct to make haste with this check, as after 12.♗h4 ♘c5 13.♗c4† Black has 13...♗e6 14.♗xe6† ♘xe6, controlling d4 and f4.

12...♔h8 13.♗h4 ♕e7

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The h4-bishop will be passive for a while, and the weakness created by ...f6 is balanced by Black having the f7-square available for his king's knight.

14.a4 ♘h6



15.♘e1

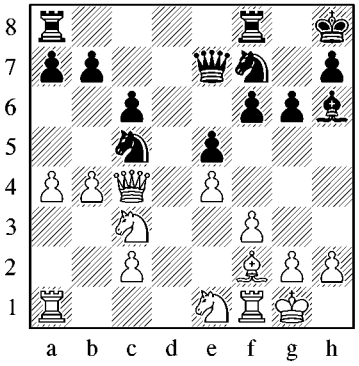
Preparing to recycle the bishop, but weakening control of the centre.

15...♘c5 16.f3 ♘f7 17.♗f2 ♗h6

17...♘g5 followed by ...♘ge6 is also good.

18.♕e2 ♗e6 19.b4 ♗xc4 20.♕xc4

Black can resort to some tactical tricks:



20...♕e6!?

The normal 20...♘e6 is also absolutely fine for Black.

21.♕e2

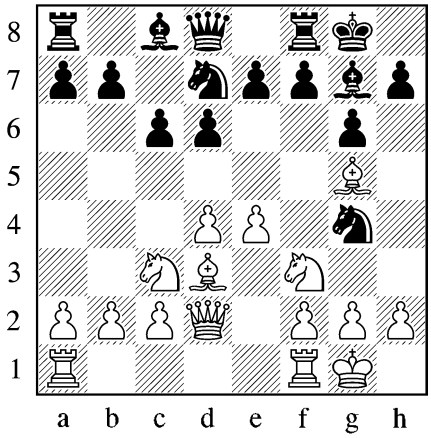
21.♕xc5 b6 unexpectedly traps the queen!

21...♖fd8

Threatening ...♖d2.

22.♘b1 ♘a6 23.♘d3 ♘c7

Black has active play.



9...h6

9...c5 is premature due to 10.♘d5.

10.♗h4

White has yet to try the other retreat: 10.♗f4N e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♗g3 ♕c7 13.a4 a5 The picture is familiar to us already. Play is balanced, for example: 14.♗c4 ♘gf6=

10...♘gf6N

Regrouping in this manner is not a waste of time, since the bishop stands worse on h4 than on e3.

The equally valid 10...c5 has been played in a couple of games, transposing to a comfortable Dragon or Schmid Benoni.

11.e5!?

This is the only way to cross Black's intentions.

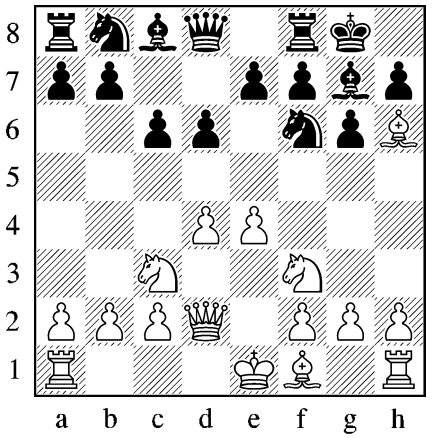
A neutral move such as 11.♖ad1 would be answered by 11...e5, with full equality.

11...dxe5 12.dxe5 ♘g4 13.e6 ♘de5 14.exf7† ♖xf7 15.♘xe5 ♘xe5

Black's initiative compensates for the damage to his structure.

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C) 7.♗h6



This only looks similar to variation B1. The small differences produce a change in the global scenario.

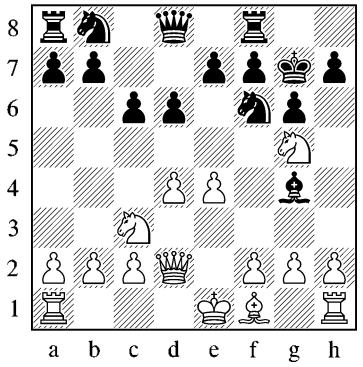
7...b5!

The reasons why this is the best way to react are not at all obvious.

As we will see later in the main line, the omission of h2-h3 makes ...♗g4, planning ...♗xf3, the best antidote to the dark-squared bishop exchange. However, is premature to play it now:

7...♗g4?! 8.♗xg7 ♔xg7 9.♘g5!

It is worth remembering this concept, as it can occur in a number of Pirc lines.



9...h6

This can be met by a strong intermediate move.

However, 9...e5 10.h3 ♗c8 11.0–0–0 also offers White some initiative.

10.h3! ♗h5

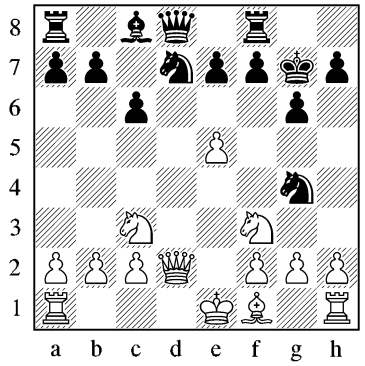
10...♗c8 11.♘f3 transposes to a normal set-up for White, while Black's waste of time with ...h6 is hard to justify.

11.♘xf7 ♖xf7 12.g4

White had a strong initiative in Fleck – Cuijpers, Germany 2012.

We will see in the main line below how the insertion of ...b5 and ♗d3 influences the evaluation of this plan.

7...♘bd7?! This attempt to transpose to variation B1 allows: 8.♗xg7 ♔xg7 9.e5! dxe5 10.dxe5 ♘g4 Judged superficially, this looks absolutely fine for Black. However, a deeper look reveals a problem. I considered three options:

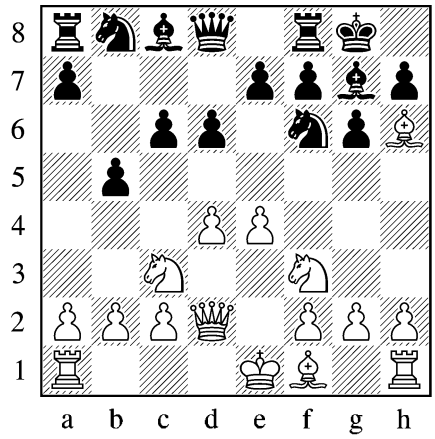


a) 11.♕f4? is simply bad because of 11...♕b6∓ with a double attack on b2 and f2, since 12.♕xg4 ♕xb2–+ regains the piece after grabbing an important pawn.

b) 11.e6 ♘de5! Suddenly it becomes obvious that White's pawn lunge was premature. 12.♘xe5 ♘xe5 13.♕e2 (13.♕xd8? ♖xd8 14.exf7 ♗f5∓ hands the initiative to Black) 13...♕d4 14.♖d1 ♕f4 15.exf7 ♗f5 Black has enough counterplay.

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c) Unfortunately for Black, the accurate 11.0–0–0!± takes full advantage of the fact that White has not played ♗d3 yet. The d7-knight is pinned and White will play e5-e6 next, with a strong initiative on the dark squares.



8.♗d3

The most common and natural way to defend the e4-pawn.

8.♗xg7 ♔xg7 9.♗d3 ♗g4 transposes to the note to White's 9th move in the main line.

8.e5

This advance does not promise much.

8...dxe5 9.♗xg7 ♔xg7 10.♘xe5

10.dxe5 ♕xd2† followed by ...♘g4 is fine for Black.

10...♕d6

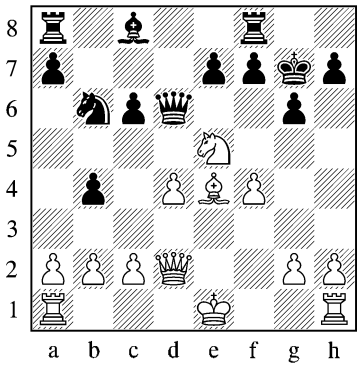
A good square for the queen – Black defends the c6-pawn and prepares to develop the knight without restricting Her Majesty's activity.

11.♗e2 ♘bd7 12.f4 ♘b6 13.♗f3 b4 14.♘e4

14.♘e2 ♗a6 also offers Black active play.

14...♘xe4 15.♗xe4

With his king still uncastled, this early central activity is not very effective.



15...f6!?

Not the only good move, but the most forcing one.

16.♘xc6

Other moves are simply bad. Both 16.♘d3? ♕xd4∓ and 16.♘f3 ♘c4∓ lose a pawn, since 17.♕c1? ♕e6–+ costs White his bishop.

16...♕e6 17.♕e2 ♗b7

White cannot keep the extra pawn, since his pieces are hanging.

18.d5

After 18.♗f3 ♕d6 19.♘e5 fxe5 20.♗xb7 ♖ab8 21.dxe5 ♕d4 22.♕e4 ♖xf4 23.♕xd4 ♖xd4 24.♗f3 ♖c8, Black regains the pawn with active play. For instance: 25.♖c1 ♘c4 26.b3 ♘xe5∓

18...♘xd5 19.♗xd5 ♕xd5 20.♘xb4 ♕xg2 21.♕xg2 ♗xg2 22.♖g1 ♗e4∓

Black had an edge in Vorotnikov – Bakhtadze, Moscow 1999. The bishop is stronger than the knight and Black's majority is likely to become threatening earlier than White's.

8.a3

This slows down the queenside counterplay, but precludes the possibility of safely castling queenside.

8...a5 9.♗d3

9.♗e2 ♗b7 puts the e4-pawn in danger.

9...♗g4

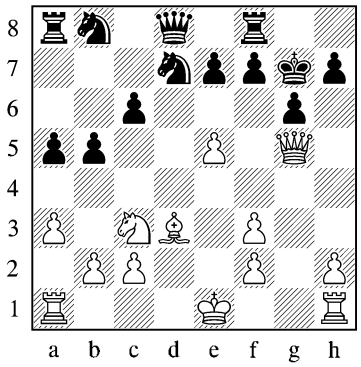
The same idea as in the main line, with the only difference that the players have inserted a2-a3 and ...a7-a5.

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10.♗xg7 ♔xg7 11.e5!?

An ambitious attacking plan.

11...dxe5 12.dxe5 ♘fd7 13.♕g5 ♗xf3 14.gxf3

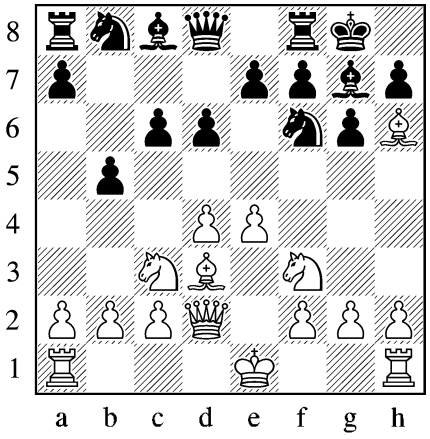


14...f6

This neutralizes White's kingside attacking chances and equalizes comfortably, but the cold-blooded 14...♘a6 15.h4 ♘ac5 may be even better: 16.h5 ♘xd3† 17.cxd3 f6 18.♕e3 g5 Black has secured his king and retains the better structure.

15.exf6† exf6 16.♕g3 ♕e7† 17.♔f1 ♘c5 18.♖e1 ♕d7 19.♖d1 ♕f7 20.♔g2 ♘bd7=

White's structural defects compensated for the weakness of the seventh rank in Stripunsky – Bologan, Azov 1996.



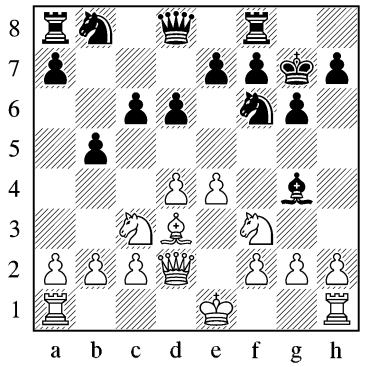
8...♗g4!

Now is a good moment for this thematic move.

9.h4

An aggressive move, hoping to prove the attack more relevant than the kingside weaknesses.

One important point is that the aforementioned antidote to ...♗g4 is no longer available: 9.♗xg7 ♔xg7



10.♘g5

10.e5 does not produce major changes compared to the game Stripunsky – Bologan quoted above. For instance: 10...dxe5 11.dxe5 ♘fd7 12.♕e3 In Adams – Shirov, Dos Hermanas 1995, Black could have avoided any problems with 12...♗xf3N 13.gxf3 ♕b6=, more or less forcing the queen exchange and retaining the more flexible structure.

10.♕f4 ♗xf3 11.♕xf3 keeps White's structure intact, but wastes too much time: 11...e5 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.0–0–0 ♕e7 Black has excellent play on the dark squares, and White's kingside attacking chances are illusory. 14.g4 ♘bd7 15.h4 ♘c5 16.h5 In Motta – Mascarenhas, Rio de Janeiro 1980, Black unnecessarily feared the opening of the h-file and played 16...g5?, making the f5-square available for the white knight. Instead, he should have just improved his position with, say, 16...a5N. In the worst case he could meet hxg6 with ...fxg6, turning the f2-pawn into a weakness, though ...hxg6 followed by ...♖h8 is often an option too.

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10...b4!

This is the key move that Black lacks if he plays ...♗g4 one move earlier. The knight has to retreat into the bishop's line of fire, allowing Black to exchange his unstable piece.

11.♘e2

11.♘a4 was elegantly refuted by 11...h6 12.h3 ♗d7 13.♘f3 c5∓ in Duppel – Kiefhaber, Schwaebisch Gmuend 2000.

11.♘b1 is awfully passive, making a big difference if play continues in similar way to that after 7...♗g4: 11...h6 12.h3 ♗h5 13.♘xf7 ♖xf7 14.g4 ♘bd7∓ With such poor development, White cannot make use of the kingside tension to generate an attack.

11...♗xe2

11...h6 12.♘f3 a5, as played in Squires – Bonoldi, email 2002, is also possible, of course.

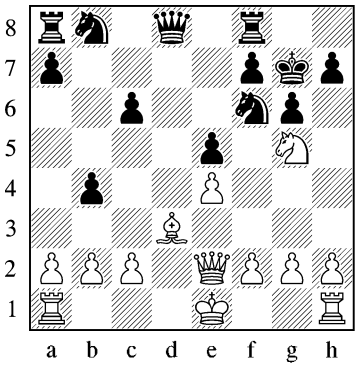
12.♕xe2

12.♗xe2 h6 wins the e4-pawn.

12...e5

Stabilizing Black's position and equalizing completely.

13.dxe5 dxe5

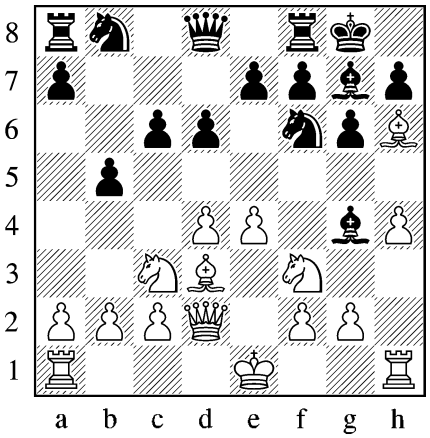


14.0–0–0

If 14.a3N then 14...c5, followed by ...♘c6, is the simplest reply, but the more ambitious 14...♘h5 15.♘h3 bxa3 16.♖xa3 ♘d7 is also fine. The passive h3-knight compensates for Black's weaknesses.

14...♘bd7

Black had comfortable play in Ansell – Chatalbashev, Hilversum 2008.



9...♗xf3 10.gxf3 e5

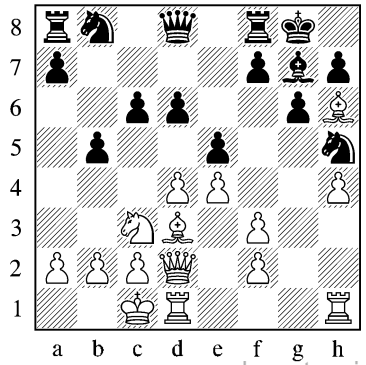
This is the set-up Black was aiming for. The exchange on f3 and White's planned dark-squared-bishop exchange create a chronic weakness on f4. White's attacking chances at most compensate for the strategic problems, despite the engines' initial optimism.

11.dxe5

Delaying this exchange does not make much of a difference:

11.0–0–0N ♘h5

11...exd4? unblocks the f-pawn. After 12.♘e2 the only consistent move is 12...c5, but this fails to block the h-pawn, allowing 13.h5± with a virulent attack.



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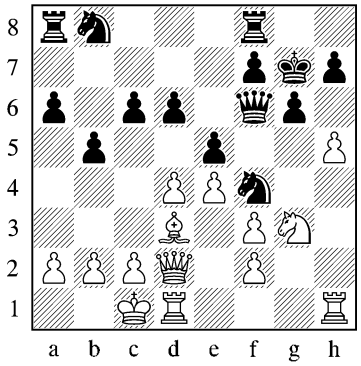
12.♘e2 ♕f6 13.♗xg7

I also checked 13.♘g3 ♗xh6 14.♕xh6 ♕f4† 15.♕xf4 ♘xf4= when Black reaches a comfortable ending.

13...♔xg7 14.♘g3 ♘f4 15.h5 a6

A necessary preparation for developing the knight, as 15...♘d7 runs into 16.dxe5 dxe5 17.♗xb5.

After 15...a6 Black is ready to meet the same operation with ...axb5, attacking a2. Besides, Black gets the possibility of strengthening the kingside defence with a well-timed ...♖a7.



16.♖dg1

Defending the a2-pawn with 16.♔b1 is too slow as it allows 16...c5, inevitably followed by developing the knight to either c6 or, if the white d-pawn advances, d7.

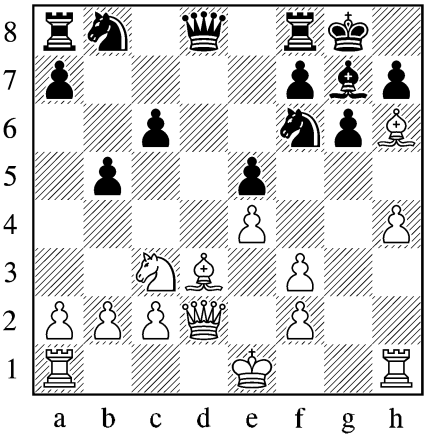
16...♔h8

We shall see a similar picture in the main line. White has no obvious way to strengthen his attack, for example:

17.hxg6 fxg6

White has no real attack and his weaknesses along the f-file may cause him a lot of trouble in a future endgame.

11...dxe5



12.0–0–0 ♘h5 13.♘e2 ♕f6=

Black has little to fear and his play is easier. Here is an illustration of how things can go wrong for White with natural play:

14.♖dg1 ♘d7 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.♘g3 ♘f4 17.h5 ♘c5 18.hxg6 fxg6 19.♘f5†?!

This only wastes time.

It was better to exchange the active knight with 19.♘h5† ♘xh5 20.♖xh5, even though Black's position remains preferable after: 20...♔h8∓

19...♔h8 20.♖h6 ♖ad8 21.♖gh1 ♖f7–+

White was facing imminent disaster on d3 in Marcovici – Van Baarle, Luxembourg 1989.

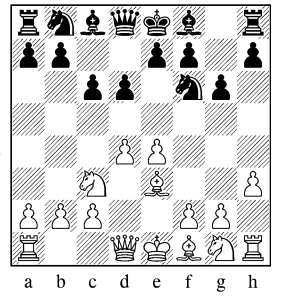
Conclusion

Due to its character being both aggressive and flexible at the same time, 4.♗e3 is one of White's most troubling systems. With the flexible 5.♘f3, White plays in the style of Chapter 3, and may transpose there if he plays h2-h3 in the near future. In this chapter, we concentrated on line where White tries to manage without h2-h3. However, we saw that in various lines Black can effectively use the availability of the g4-square with either ...♘g4 or ...♗g4, although I would stress that the accurate timing of these moves is important.

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Chapter 9

4.♗e3



5.h3

Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗e3 c6 5.h3

5...♘bd7

A) 6.g4 b5! **217**

A1) 7.a3 **217**

A2) 7.♗g2 **220**

B) 6.f4 e5 **221**

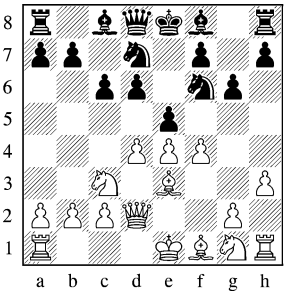
B1) 7.♕d2 **221**

B2) 7.dxe5 **222**

B3) 7.♕f3 **226**

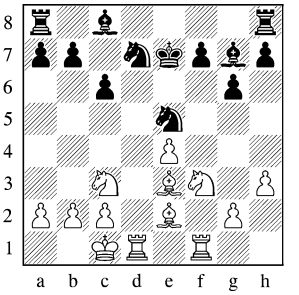
B4) 7.♘f3 **230**

B1) after 7.♕d2



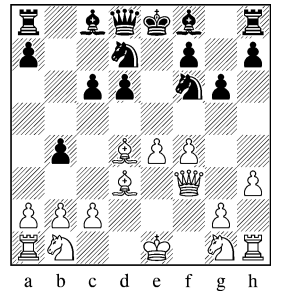
7...♘h5!N

B2) after 13.♖hf1



13...h5!?N

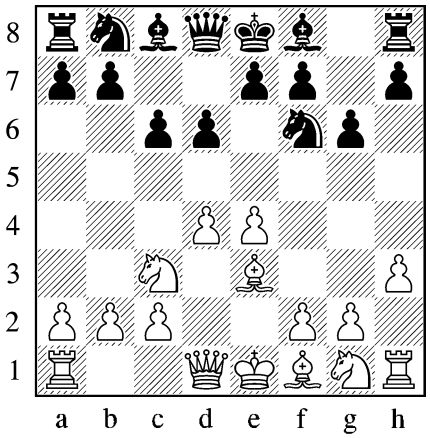
B3) note to 8.0–0–0



10...♗b7!N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗e3 c6 5.h3



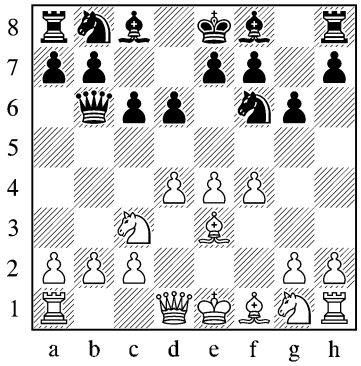
Visually, this looks similar to the set-up examined in Chapter 3. However, with the bishop on e3 instead of the knight on f3, it is usually a way of preparing f2-f4 or, more rarely, g2-g4.

5.f4

Rushing in like this (almost never played) exposes the bishop to ...♘g4. The simplest way of taking advantage of it is:

5...♕b6

White faces problems defending b2 and d4.



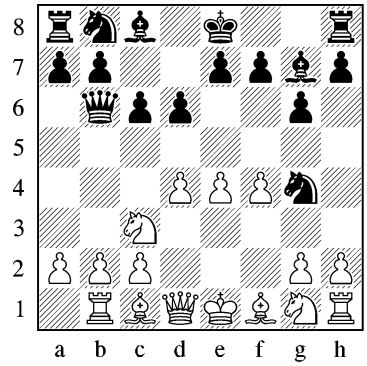
6.♖b1

This natural move does not turn out well.

6.♕c1 ♘g4∓ forced the exchange of the e3-bishop and left Black with great control of the dark squares in Kalod – R. Kaufman, Pardubice 2007.

White's best try may be to sacrifice the b-pawn for uncertain compensation: 6.♕d2 ♕xb2 (6...♘g4 is a safe alternative) 7.♖b1 ♕a3 8.♘f3 ♘bd7 9.♗d3 ♗g7 10.e5N ♘g4 11.♗g1 This position was reached in R. Schmidt – Khruschiov, Internet (blitz) 2003, and here I recommend 11...dxe5N 12.dxe5 ♘c5 with an edge for Black.

6...♘g4 7.♗c1 ♗g7



8.♘f3

8.h3 ♗xd4! attacks both white knights.

8.e5 dxe5 9.fxe5 fails to 9...♗xe5.

8...e5!

Taking full advantage of the lead in development gained over the last few moves.

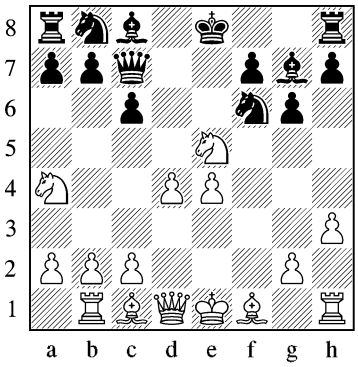
9.fxe5

9.h3 allows the intermediate move: 9...exd4! 10.♘a4 ♕a5† 11.c3 ♘e3–+

9.♘a4 does not solve White's problems either: 9...♕a5† 10.c3 exf4!N (10..b5 gave Black a quick win in Ludwig – Klein, Binz 1995, but 11.fxe5!N might have offered White decent compensation for the knight) 11.b4 ♕d8 12.♗xf4 0–0 Black will continue with ...f5 or ...♖e8, leaving White poorly coordinated and with his king exposed in the centre.

9...dxe5 10.♘a4 ♕c7 11.h3 ♘f6 12.♘xe5

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12...♘bd7!

This elegant continuation is strongest, even though there is nothing wrong with simply retrieving the pawn with 12...♘xe4.

13.♗f4

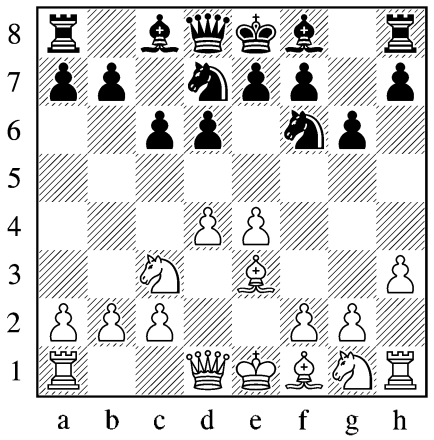
13.♘xd7? runs straight into trouble: 13...♕g3† 14.♔e2 ♘xe4 15.♘dc5 ♕f2† 16.♔d3 ♕xd4† 17.♔e2 ♗g4† 18.hxg4 ♕f2† 19.♔d3 0–0–0† White loses his queen.

13...♘h5∓

Followed by ...♘xe5, with an obvious strategic advantage to Black.

5...♘bd7

The most flexible move. Black would hardly have any other way to develop his knight in the future, but in some lines below the bishop will prove useful on the a3-f8 diagonal.



We will examine **A) 6.g4** and **B) 6.f4**.

A) 6.g4

White sometimes uses this extravagant plan, known as the Archbishop Attack, against various black move orders. It is intended partly as a massive pawn attack and partly as a way of disturbing the f6-knight.

6...b5!

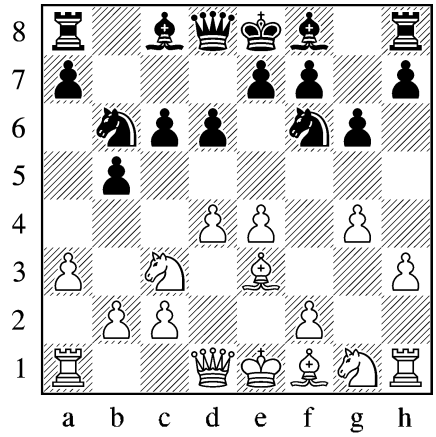
Since there is not much space available on the kingside, Black should conquer territories on the opposite wing. Another point is that a subsequent ...♘d7-b6 will make the d7-square available for the other knight. We will consider **A1) 7.a3** and **A2) 7.♗g2**.

7.g5 b4 8.♘ce2 ♘h5 9.♗g2 ♗b7 transposes to the note on 9.g5 in variation A2.

A1) 7.a3

This move slows down Black's pawn attack at the cost of a valuable tempo.

7...♘b6



8.♗d3!?N

I checked three other moves. Firstly, the prophylactic 8.b3, played in Tasev – Sorgic, Obrenovac 2010, is best met with 8...♗b7N 9.♗g2 a5, followed soon by ...b5-b4.

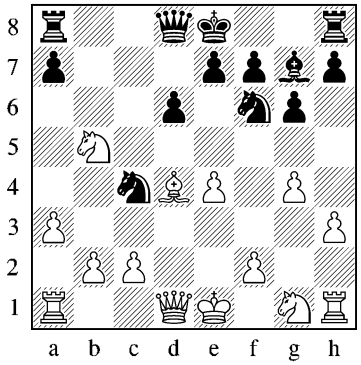
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With such poor development, White does not achieve much with:

8.d5 ♗b7 9.♗d4

This delays White's development even more, but it's the only way to win the b5-pawn, as otherwise the e4-pawn will be hanging.

9...♗g7 10.dxc6 ♗xc6 11.♗xb5 ♗xb5 12.♘xb5 ♘c4

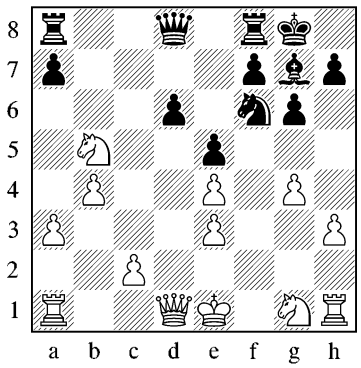


As well as threatening 13...♕a5† 14.♘c3 ♘xb2, retrieving the pawn with a great position, this also threatens the simple ...e5, since the d6-pawn is now defended.

13.b4

Such moves parry the immediate threats, but do not contribute much to White's positional wellbeing.

13...e5 14.♗e3 ♘xe3 15.fxe3 0–0

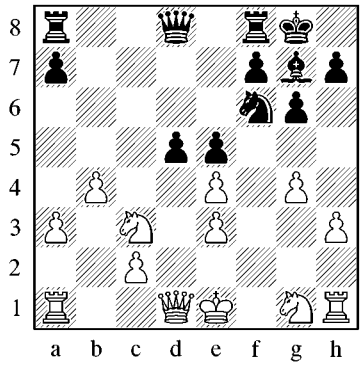


16.♘c3

Pawn-grabbing has disastrous consequences: 16.♘xd6? ♕b6 17.♘c4 ♕c6–+; or 16.♕xd6? ♘xe4 17.♕xd8 ♖fxd8 18.c4 ♖ac8 19.c5 a6 20.♘d6 ♘xd6 21.cxd6 ♖xd6–+

The text is a better attempt to keep White's position together, but it is already too late.

16...d5!



Clearing the long diagonal for the bishop.

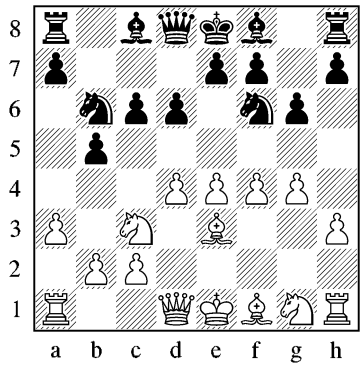
17.exd5 e4 18.♘ge2 ♘xd5

The simplest, but playing for a long-term initiative with 18...♘d7, threatening both ...♕h4† and ...♖c8, is also strong.

19.♕xd5 ♕h4† 20.♔f1 ♗xc3 21.♘xc3 ♕f6† 22.♔g1 ♕xc3 23.♕d4 ♕xc2∓

The material balance is even, but White's problems are obvious.

8.f4



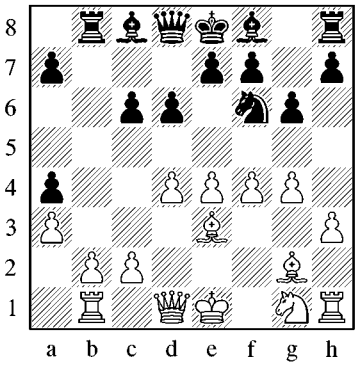
This immediate attempt to gain space allows Black counterplay with:

8...♘a4! 9.♘xa4 bxa4

Far from being weak, the a4-pawn contributes to Black's global control of the light squares.

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10.♗g2 ♖b8 11.♖b1



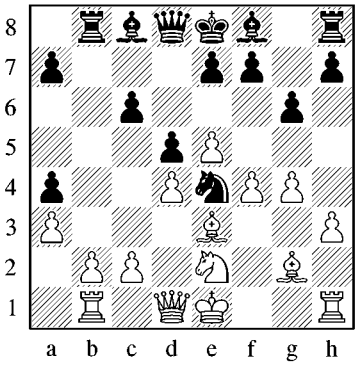
11...d5!

The second step towards stability on the light squares.

12.e5 ♘e4 13.♘e2

13.♕d3 f5 14.exf6 exf6 White wins a pawn but chronically weakens himself: 15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♕xe4† ♔f7 Threatening ...♗xa3. 17.♕d3 ♕d5 18.♖h2 h5∓ With a strong initiative.

The premature 13.♗xe4 allows Black to block the kingside and then develop his queenside play: 13...dxe4 14.♘e2 h5 15.g5 f5 16.♘c3 ♕a5 17.0–0 e6 18.♕d2 (threatening ♘xe4) 18...♕a6 Followed by ...♖h7-b7.



13...f5 14.♗f3

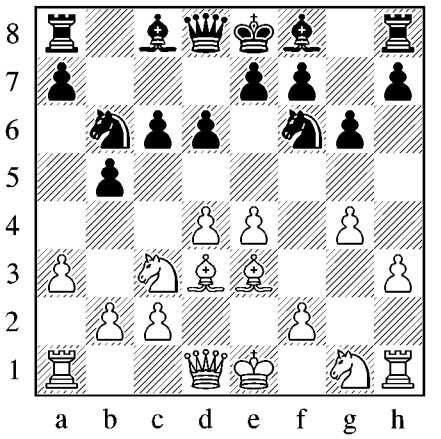
14.♗xe4 helps Black to improve his light-squared bishop: 14...fxe4 15.♘c3 h5 16.g5 ♕a5 17.♕d2 ♗f5 18.♔f2 e6∓

14...♕a5† 15.♔f1 e6

Followed by ...♗a6 and ...♗e7.

8...♗g7 9.f4 ♗b7 10.♘f3

White's position looks impressive, but Black can prove that the pawns' advance has weakened too many squares. Here is an illustrative line:

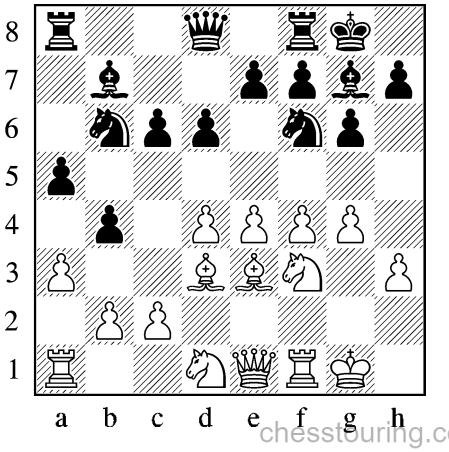


10...a5 11.0–0 0–0 12.♕e1

Heading for h4.

12...b4 13.♘d1

13.axb4 axb4 14.♖xa8 ♕xa8 activates Black's queen, setting up pressure along the long diagonal: 15.♘d1 c5! Black does not need to retreat either knight to d7 to prepare this break. 16.dxc5 ♘c8!? The knight will inevitably reach d6, targeting the chronic weakness on e4. 17.♕xb4 ♘xe4 Black has a strong initiative for the pawn.



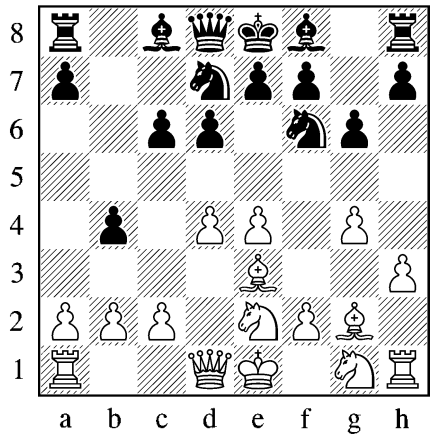
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13...♕c7 14.axb4 axb4 15.♖xa8 ♖xa8 16.♕xb4 ♘a4

Followed by ...c5, dismantling White's centre.

A2) 7.♗g2 b4 8.♘ce2

In Koepke – Donchenko, Nuremberg 2009, Black should have increased the pressure on the white centre:



8...♗b7N

Creating a virtual pin along the long diagonal and preparing to meet a2-a3 with ...a5.

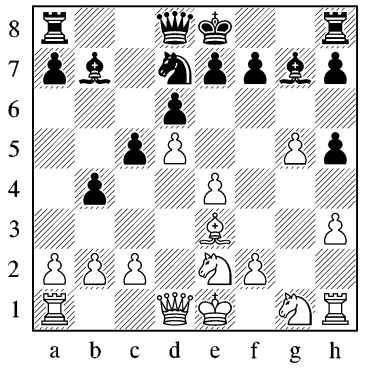
9.♘g3

Overprotecting the e4-pawn, and planning either g4-g5 or continuing with development.

9.g5 ♘h5 10.♗f3

Chasing the knight leaves White vulnerable on the light squares.

10...c5 11.d5 ♗g7 12.♗xh5 gxh5



13.♘g3

White is not sufficiently developed to afford such a passive move as: 13.♖b1 0–0 14.♘g3 e6 15.dxe6 Otherwise after ...exd5 the d5-pawn would be doomed. 15...♘e5 16.exf7† ♖xf7 Black has a huge lead in development.

13...♗xb2 14.♖b1 ♗c3† 15.♗d2 ♗xd2† 16.♕xd2 ♕a5 17.♖a1 ♘e5∓

If necessary, Black can safely castle queenside, while White's king does not have any safe location to dream of. Strategically, Black is clearly better.

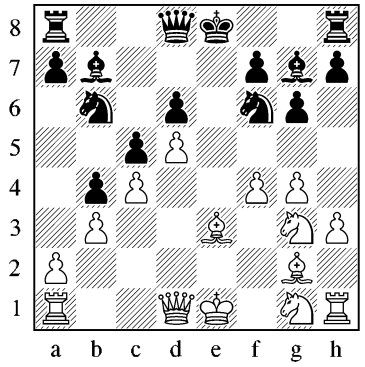
9.f4

This central expansion does not prevent Black's counterplay either.

9...c5 10.d5 ♗g7 11.c4

Trying to stabilize the queenside, because 11.♘g3 ♘b6 offers Black comfortable play.

11...♘b6 12.b3 e6 13.♘g3 exd5 14.exd5



White has retained his space advantage and restricted Black's queenside minor pieces. However, his position remains overextended and his development poor, while Black can easily recycle his bishop and knight with ...♗c8 and ...♘bd7.

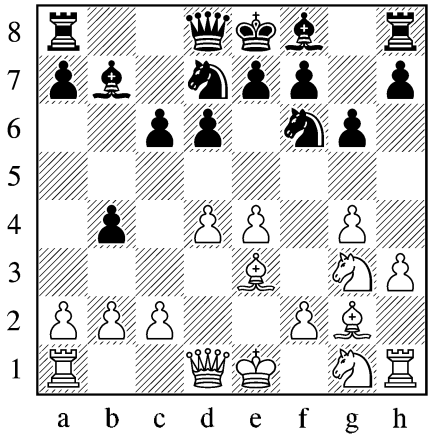
14...h5 15.♖c1

After 15.g5 ♕e7 16.♔f2 h4 17.♘f1 ♘e4† Black wins an exchange, for if 18.♗xe4 ♕xe4, both rooks are hanging.

15...♕e7 16.♔f2 0–0–0∓

Followed by ...♖de8 with the initiative.

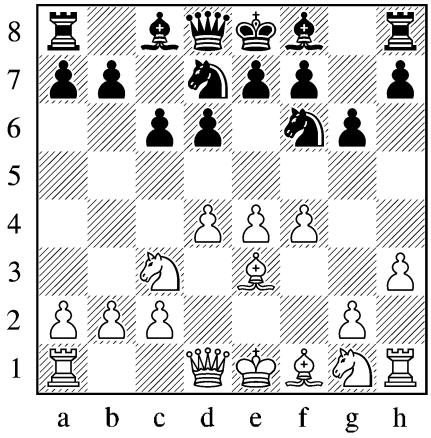
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9...h5 10.g5 h4 11.♘3e2 ♘h5 12.f4 c5 13.d5 ♗g7∓

Due to the tempos wasted by the white knight, Black has a dream version of a Schmid Benoni.

B) 6.f4



This is the most frequent plan, requiring high accuracy from Black in order to avoid being crushed by the central pawns.

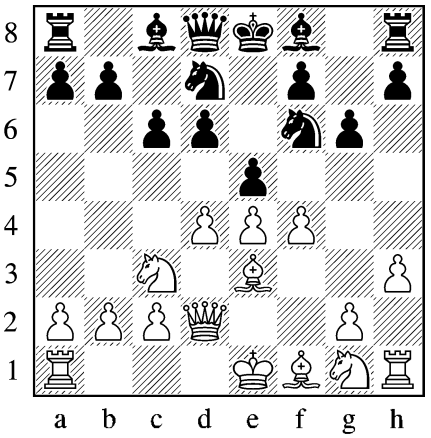
6...e5

I had played 6...b5 many times until I faced 7.a3! e5 8.♘f3 ♕e7 9.fxe5 dxe5 10.d5 in Fressinet – Marin, Andorra 2004, which I lost quickly. Many hours of analysis have revealed a paradox: White can control Black's counterplay with two apparently modest pawn moves, h2-h3 and a2-a3!

Black's problems in the above game were caused by the weakness of the b5-pawn, so he should keep ...b5 in reserve and start with the central plan.

White has four main options: **B1) 7.♕d2**, **B2) 7.dxe5**, **B3) 7.♕f3** and **B4) 7.♘f3**.

B1) 7.♕d2



This was played in Killar – Necada, Czech Republic 2001, but it is not the best way of completing development. The queen is exposed on d2, while failing to cover an important sector.

7...♘h5!N

Taking full advantage of the weakness induced by h2-h3.

8.fxe5

White can try to maintain his kingside stability with:

8.♘ge2

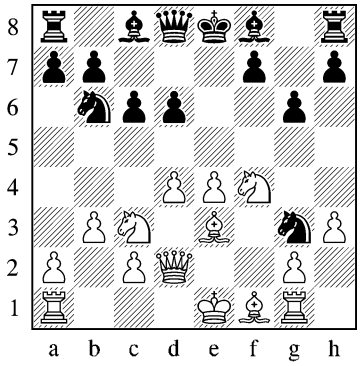
However, dangers appear on the other wing.

8...♘b6! 9.b3

After 9.♗f2 exf4 10.♘xf4 ♗h6 11.g3 f5∓ Black has the initiative.

9...exf4 10.♘xf4 ♘g3 11.♖g1

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11...d5!

Clearing the diagonal for the dark-squared bishop.

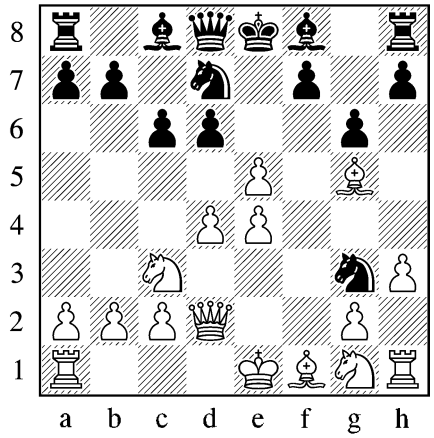
12.e5 ♗b4 13.♗d3

Apparently White has managed to consolidate, but Black has not exhausted his resources yet.

13...♘c4! 14.bxc4 ♕a5∓

8...♘g3 9.♗g5

Striving for counterplay, as 9.♖h2 ♘xf1 10.♔xf1 dxe5 offers Black excellent play.



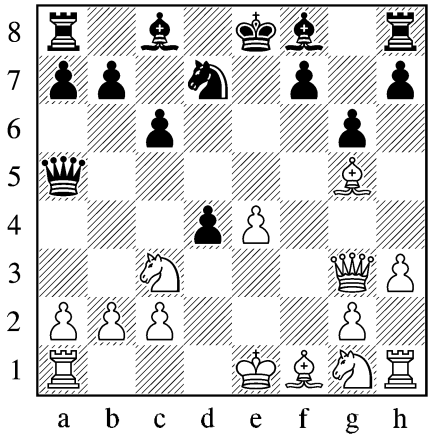
9...♕a5 10.♕f4 dxe5!

The centre is more important than the undeveloped rook.

10...♘xh1 11.♗c4! is unclear.

11.♕xg3 exd4

Black regains the knight and obtains the e5-square for his pieces.



12.♗d2 dxc3 13.♕xc3

13.♗xc3 ♗b4 only helps Black's blockading plan.

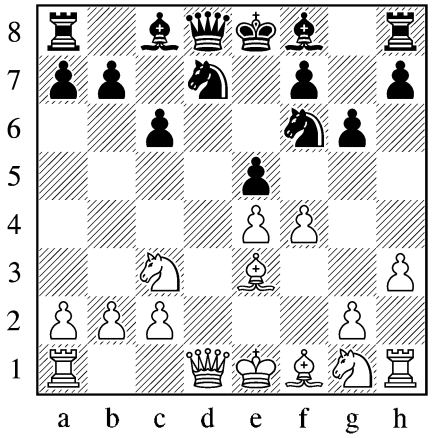
13...♕xc3 14.♗xc3 ♖g8 15.0–0–0 ♘c5

Followed by ...♗e6 and ...♗g7, with comfortable play.

B2) 7.dxe5

Releasing the tension so soon is justified only if followed by concrete action.

7...dxe5



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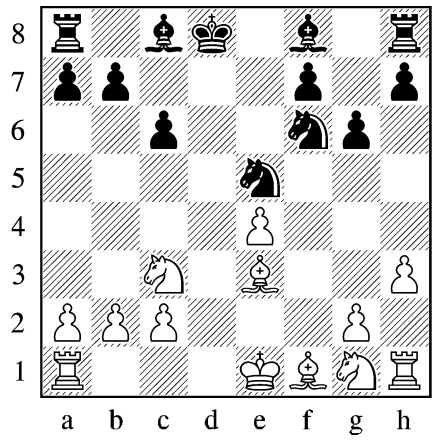
8.fxe5

Depriving Black of the right to castle.

White is not ready to start a slow kingside attack with 8.f5. Black has several promising continuations, but the simplest is 8...♗c5∓, playing for a blockade on the dark squares and solving the problem of the potentially bad bishop. White cannot avoid the exchange, because 9.♗g5? ♕b6 attacks g1 and b2 simultaneously.

8...♘xe5 9.♕xd8† ♔xd8

In the absence of queens, the king is relatively safe in the centre. True, His Majesty slightly disturbs the global coordination, but Black has the e5-square to compensate for this problem. We frequently see such situations in all sorts of variations of the Modern Defence, and in a wider context the situation is similar to the Berlin Defence of the Ruy Lopez.



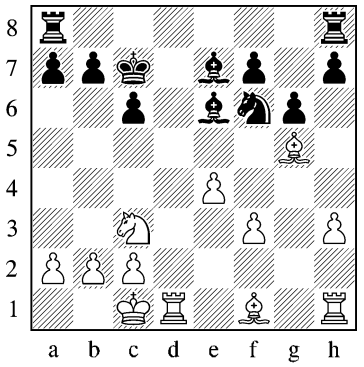
10.0–0–0†

White could play against the blockade with:

10.♗g5N ♗e7

Black removes the pin and plans either ...♘fd7 or ...♘h5. The bishop exchange would help Black to control the e5-square and also offer his king stability on e7, thus solving all the problems of coordination.

11.♘f3 ♘xf3† 12.gxf3 ♗e6 13.0–0–0† ♔c7



Black is planning to complete development with ...♖ad8.

14.♗f4†

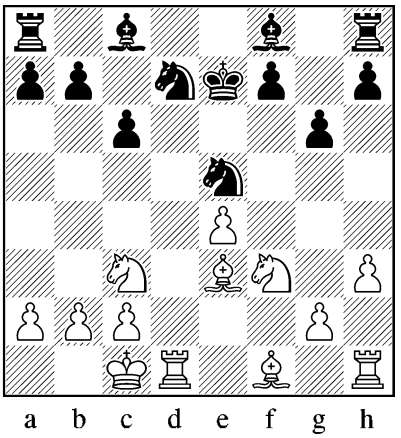
The only way to cross Black's plans, but it frees the knight from the pin.

14...♔c8=

Black can combine ...♖d8 with ...♘h5/d7 followed by ...f5, possibly turning White's centre into a weakness.

10...♘fd7 11.♘f3 ♔e7

The king uses the enemy pawn as an umbrella, feeling relatively safe in the centre.

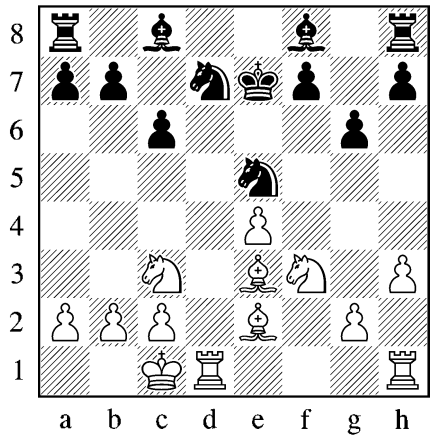


12.♗e2

After 12.♘xe5 White fails to achieve dynamic compensation for his weaker structure: 12...♘xe5 13.♗c5† (13.♗d4 ♗h6† 14.♔b1 f6 15.♗c5† ♔f7, followed by ...♗e6, is also comfortable for Black) 13...♔e6 14.♗d4

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Black can choose either 14...f6 or 14...♗d6, with perfect stability.



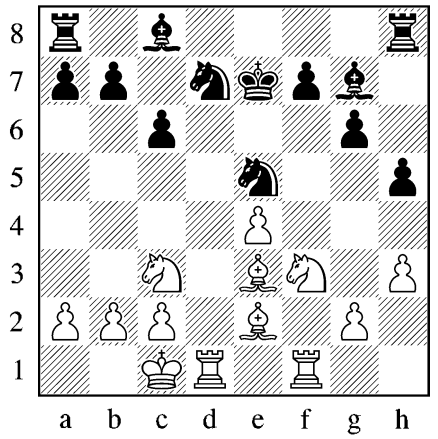
12...♗g7 13.♖hf1

After 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.♗c5† the e6-square is no longer safe, but Black has 14...♔e8 followed by ...♗e6, ...♘d7 and ...♗e5.

13...h5!?N

The primary aim of this move is to exchange the bishops with ...♗h6, but we will see that in some lines controlling the g4-square also helps Black.

If 13...♖e8 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.♗c4 f6, as in Nedev – Bogdanovski, Star Dojran 1991, White could retain some pressure with 16.g4N.



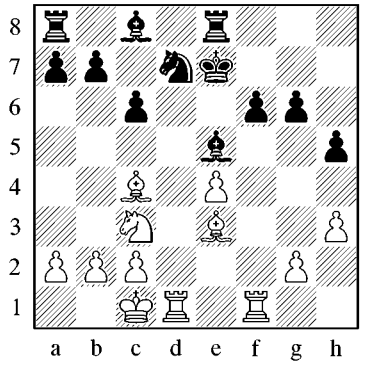
14.♔b1

Opposing the bishops on the long diagonal favours Black after:

14.♗d4 ♖e8 15.♘xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗c4 f6

The point is that White needs to waste a tempo in order to avoid the exchange.

17.♗e3



White intends ♘e2-d4. Note that ...♘b6 would allow a catastrophic check on c5.

17...♔f8!

Planning ...♔g7 followed by ...♘b6, reaching a perfect regrouping.

18.♗h6† ♔e7 19.♘e2

The only constructive move if White does not want to agree to a draw by repetition.

19...♘b6

Taking advantage of the bishop's absence from e3.

20.♗b3 ♗e6 21.♘f4 ♗xf4† 22.♗xf4 ♗xb3 23.axb3 ♖ad8=

Black has nothing to fear.

14...♘xf3

A good moment to release the tension, as Black does not have any constructive moves.

For instance, 14...♖e8? 15.♘xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗c4 f6 17.♘e2 gives White the initiative.

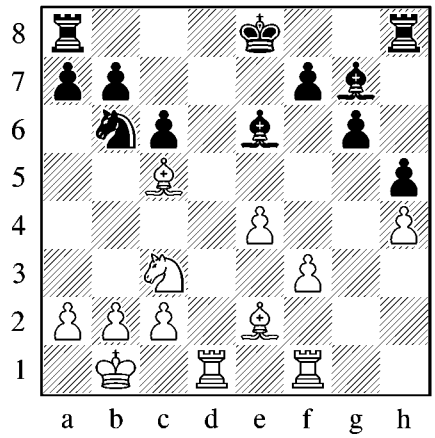
15.gxf3

15.♖xf3 ♘e5, followed by ...♗e6, is comfortable for Black.

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15...♘b6 16.h4 ♗e6 17.♗c5† ♔e8

White has strengthened his centre, but the h4-pawn is weak now.



18.f4

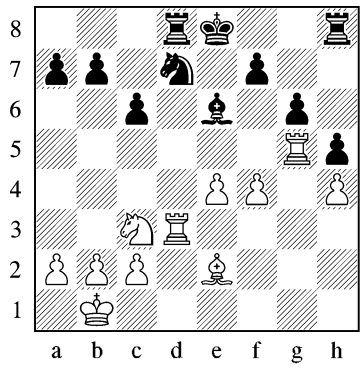
Overprotecting the g4-square wastes an important tempo:

18.♖g1 ♖d8 19.♖d3

The only way of maintaining some tension.

19...♘d7 20.♗e3 ♗f6 21.♗g5 ♔e7 22.f4 ♗xg5 23.♖xg5

After 23.hxg5 h4∓ the passed h-pawn is threatening.



23...♗g4

Black has solved his problems completely, for example:

24.♗xg4?! hxg4 25.♖xg4 ♘f6∓

Followed by ...♖xh4, and Black's position is already more pleasant.

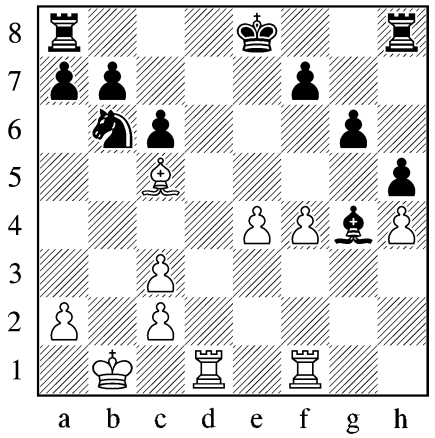
18...♗xc3

An important intermediate move.

18...♗g4 19.♗xg4 hxg4 20.e5 offers White the initiative, although the position remains double-edged due to the threatening g-pawn.

19.bxc3 ♗g4

Demonstrating the second idea behind the somewhat mysterious 13...h5!?N. After the bishop exchange, the light squares in White's territory will be vulnerable.



20.♖f2 ♖d8 21.♖d4

Trying to keep the tension and hoping to improve the structure.

21.♖xd8† ♔xd8 22.♗d3 avoids the bishop exchange, but Black has no worries after 22...♖e8, keeping an eye on the e4-pawn and taking the rook out of the dark-squared bishop's range The immediate threat is ...♘a4, but a slower plan, such as ...♘c8, ...b6 and ...♘d6, forcing the e-pawn to advance, is also promising.

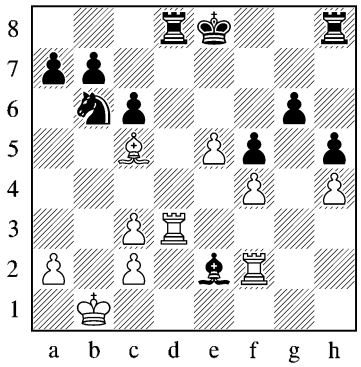
The other way to keep the tension is:

21.♖d3 f5

Stabilizing Black's grip on the light squares.

22.e5 ♗xe2

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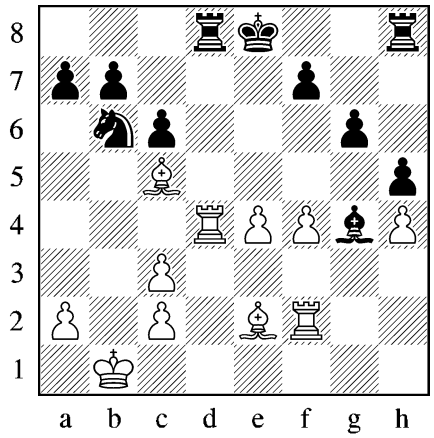
23.♖xd8†

A forced concession.

The careless 23.♖xe2? loses material to 23...♖xd3 24.cxd3 ♘a4, for both 25.♗d4 and 25.♗b4 run into 25...c5.

23...♔xd8 24.♖xe2 ♘d5

Black has a promising ending with a good knight against a bad bishop.



21...♗xe2

With this particular regrouping, attacking the centre with 21...f5 is less effective due to: 22.♗d3±

22.♖xe2 ♖xd4 23.cxd4 ♘c4∓

White has strengthened his centre, but his bishop is clearly weaker than the knight. Black plans ...♔d7 followed by ...♖e8, ...b6, ...a5 and, after pushing the bishop away from the a3-f8 diagonal, ...♘d6, achieving a perfect blockade on the light squares.

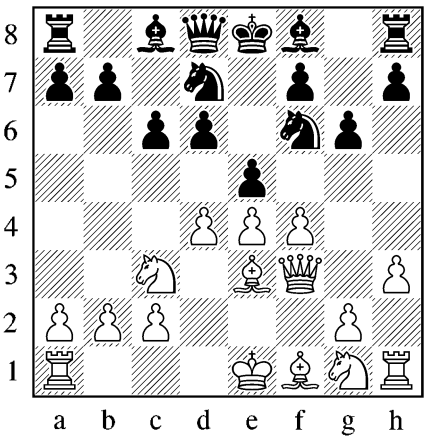
24.♗xa7

This is likely to cause additional trouble, as the bishop will be imprisoned.

24...b6! 25.c3 ♔d7 26.♔c2 ♔c7

White would have to look for a way to sacrifice the bishop for two pawns, with only partial compensation.

B3) 7.♕f3



This aggressive move bears the seal of the great attacking player, Mamedyarov. The queen defends the slightly weakened kingside and is ready to support the attack, but it deprives the knight of its most natural way of developing.

7...b5

As explained below, now is a good moment to advance the b-pawn.

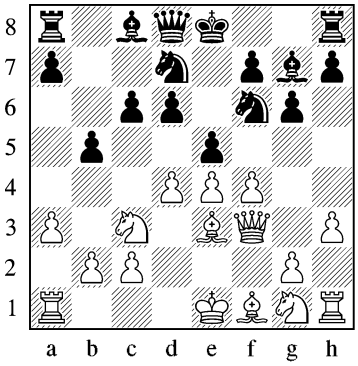
8.0–0–0

Stopping the b5-pawn with a2-a3 is not as effective as on the previous move:

8.a3 ♗g7N

In practice, 8...♗b7 and 8...♕e7 have been tried, but I consider it more important to prepare castling. Moreover, the queen may be deployed more actively on the queenside.

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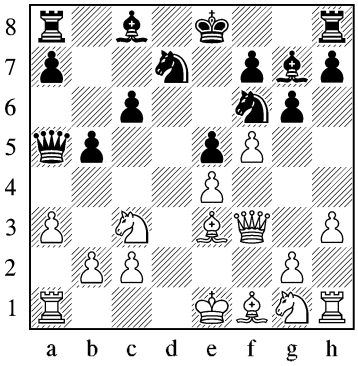
9.dxe5

One important point is that, unlike in my game with Fressinet, the central break 9.fxe5 dxe5 10.d5 causes White strategic problems after: 10...cxd5! The queen defends c7, preventing the intermediate ♘xb5. Meanwhile Black is ready for castling, and the central pawn will not have the white queen's support. 11.exd5 a6∓ Black will play ...♗b7 with active development and the better structure.

With a2-a3 having been played, 9.0–0–0 would expose the king to an attack starting with 9...♕a5.

9...dxe5 10.f5 ♕a5

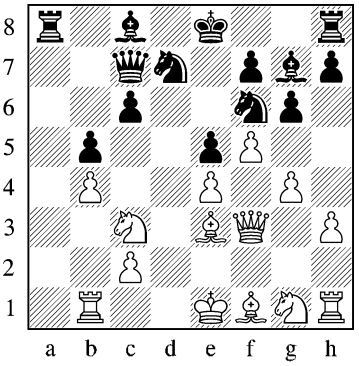
Threatening ...b4.



11.b4

Black now gets a queenside target, even though the enemy king is still in the centre.

11...♕c7 12.g4 a5 13.♖b1 axb4 14.axb4



14...gxf5!

Black uses his lead in development to clear up matters on the kingside.

15.♕xf5

15.gxf5 freezes the kingside, offering Black a free hand to regroup: 15...♖a3 16.♘ge2 ♗f8 Black may continue with ...♖g8, and is not worse at all.

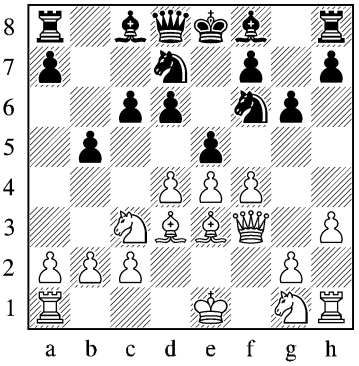
15.exf5 hands over the initiative in the centre: 15...e4! 16.♘xe4 0–0 With great attacking chances against the uncastled king.

15...♘c5 16.♕f3 ♘e6

Black has regrouped perfectly, taking the vital f4- and d4-squares under control.

8.♗d3

This neutral move allows Black to demonstrate his standard plan.



8...b4 9.♘b1

If 9.♘ce2N, Black needs to delay ...exd4, as this could be answered by ♘xd4, but the

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character of the position does not change much after 9...♗b7.

9...exd4 10.♗xd4

In Van der Lende – Houben, Bussum 2011, Black should have played:

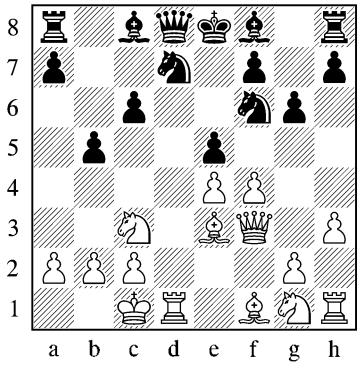
10...♗b7!N∓

This prepares to meet a2-a3 with ...a5, while creating the potential threat of ...c5 at the same time.

Mamedyarov chose:

8.dxe5 dxe5 9.0–0–0

This frees Black from worries regarding d4-d5.

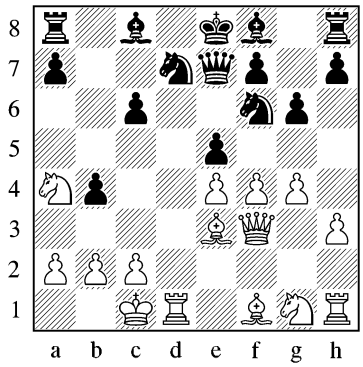


9...♕e7 10.g4

The other way of starting the attack, 10.f5, runs into a familiar defence: 10...gxf5 11.♕xf5 ♘b6 12.♕f3 ♖g8 13.g4 ♗e6 14.g5 ♘fd7 15.h4 b4 16.♘ce2 ♘c4 17.♗f2 a5 Despite his kingside weaknesses, Black's attacking chances are more realistic. In case of emergency, he can evacuate the king from the centre with ...0–0–0.

10...b4 11.♘a4N

11.♘b1?! is too passive to be good. After 11...exf4 12.♗xf4 in Mamedyarov – Shoker, Ningbo 2011, Black had no reason to refrain from the developing 12...♗g7!N, planning ...♘e5 followed by castling, with great play on the dark squares. The point is that 13.♗d6 runs into 13...♗h6†, forcing the bishop back: 14.♗f4 ♘e5 15.♕e3 ♗xf4 16.♕xf4 0–0∓



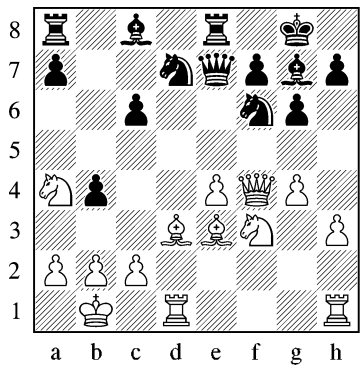
11...exf4 12.♕xf4

Trying to combine the pressure on c5 and e5.

After 12.♗xf4 ♘e5 13.♕e3 ♗g7 14.♘f3 ♘fd7, followed by castling, Black is perfectly stable.

12...♗g7 13.♗d3 0–0 14.♘f3 ♖e8 15.♔b1

Black has completed the first part of his development, but now needs to take a radical queenside decision in order to clear the path for his bishop.



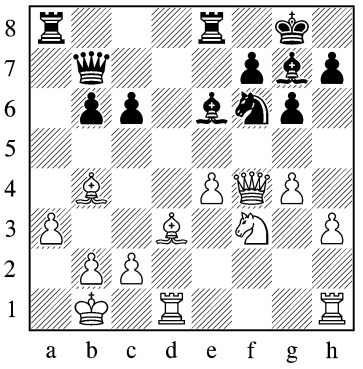
15...♘b6! 16.♗c5

Relatively best, for if 16.♘c5 ♘fd5 17.exd5 ♘xd5–+ Black wins material, while after 16.♘xb6 axb6 17.♗xb6 ♗e6–+ Black's attack along the a-file is decisive.

16...♕b7 17.♘xb6 axb6 18.♗xb4 ♗e6 19.a3

White has won a pawn, but Black has completed his development harmoniously and has queenside attacking chances.

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19...♘d7

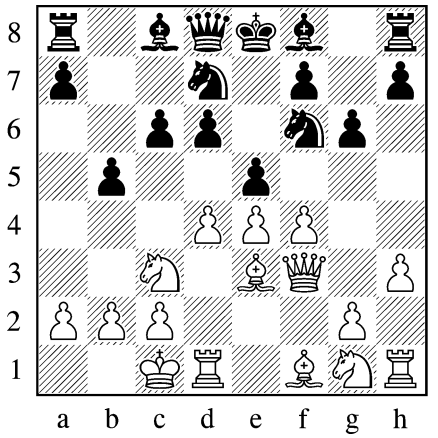
Threatening ...c5 followed by ...b5-b4.

20.♘g5 ♘c5 21.♘xe6 ♘xe6 22.♕d2

Ensuring the bishop can retreat to c3.

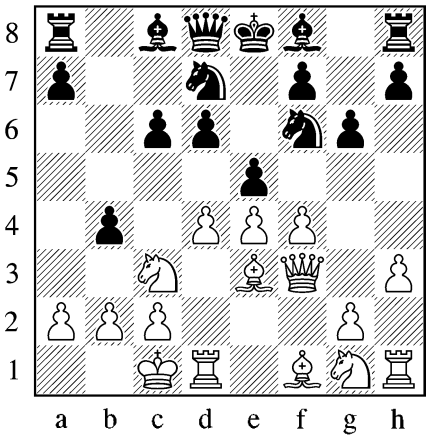
22...c5 23.♗c3 ♗xc3 24.♕xc3 b5 25.♖hf1 c4 26.♗e2 ♘g5=

Black will regain the pawn, with a probable draw.



8...b4!

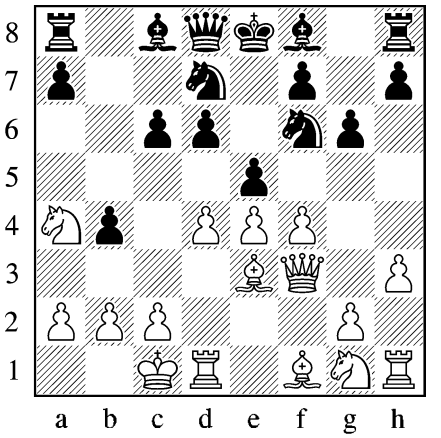
Black does not have time for half measures, as 8...♕e7 runs into the familiar 9.fxe5 dxe5 10.d5! b4 (If 10...cxd5 White has a choice between 11.♗g5, threatening ♘xd5, or simply 11.♘xb5. The black queen is misplaced, as in my game with Fressinet) 11.d6! This is the second difference compared to the line with 8.a3 above: the central pawn is supported by the rook.



9.♘a4N

Once again, jumping to a4 is the most consistent move.

9.♘ce2 ♕e7 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.f5 leads to a familiar situation: 11...gxf5 12.exf5 ♗b7 13.g4 In Wagener – Andersen, Szeged 1994, Black's strongest continuation was 13...0–0–0N, followed by either ...c5 or ...e4, with the initiative.



9...exf4!

Black concedes the centre in a such a way as to keep the d-file closed, in order to start playing against the a4-knight.

10.♗xf4 ♕a5 11.e5

The critical continuation.

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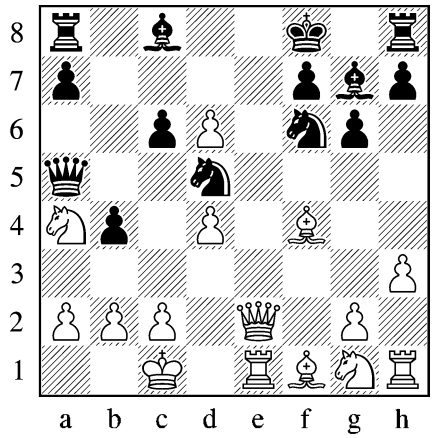
11.b3 ♗e7 12.♗h6 ♘b6 offers Black good play, based on 13.♗g7 ♕g5†! 14.♔b1 ♖g8 15.h4 ♕h5, avoiding the loss of a knight and retaining a normal position.

11...♘d5

11...dxe5? 12.♕xc6 is too dangerous.

12.exd6 ♗g7 13.♖e1† ♔f8 14.♕e2 ♘7f6

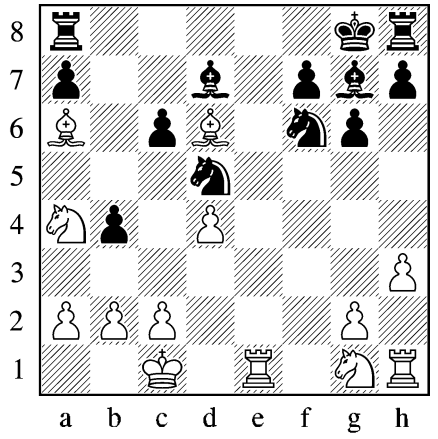
White's initiative has ended and he needs to find a way to save his hanging pieces.



15.d7!

Forcing the bishop to abandon control of the a6-square.

15...♗xd7 16.♕a6 ♕xa6 17.♗d6† ♔g8 18.♗xa6



18...♘e3!?

It is Black's turn to counterattack.

19.♘c5

19.♖xe3? loses the rook to 19...♗h6 20.♔d2 ♘d5.

19.♗xb4 ♘xg2 20.♖e2 ♘f4, followed by ...♘6d5, leaves the d4-pawn vulnerable and White's minor pieces poorly coordinated.

19...♗c8 20.g4 h5

Clearing the h7-square for the king.

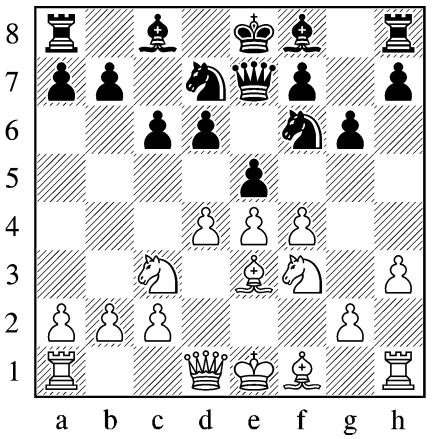
21.g5 ♘fd5=

With complicated and fairly balanced play.

B4) 7.♘f3

The most principled continuation, developing naturally and increasing the pressure in the centre.

7...♕e7



8.♗d3

With the pawn on b7, Fressinet's idea is less dangerous, though still interesting:
8.fxe5 dxe5 9.d5N

9.dxe5 is pointless, offering Black perfect stability: 9...♘xe5 10.♕d4 ♘fd7 11.0–0–0 ♗g7 12.♕d2 0–0 Black had an edge in

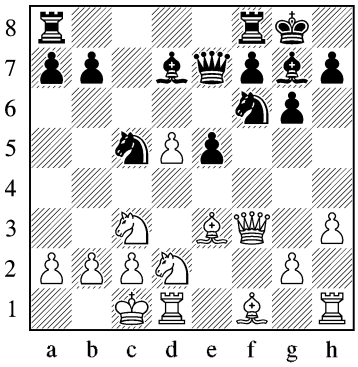
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Berend – Gulbas, France 2006.

9...♘c5!

Before exchanging pawns, it is useful to force White to defend the e4-pawn.

10.♘d2 ♗g7 11.♕f3 cxd5 12.exd5 0–0 13.0–0–0 ♗d7

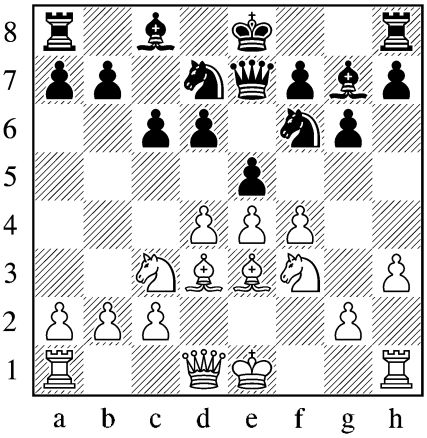


Black only needs a few moves (...♖ac8, ...♘e8-d6) to reach a perfect position, so White should undertake something concrete.

14.d6!? ♕xd6 15.♘de4 ♘cxe4 16.♖xd6 ♘xd6=

Black has enough material compensation for the queen and stable squares for his minor pieces. A possible regrouping is ...♗c6 and ...♘f5-d4.

8...♗g7



9.♕d2

The most aggressive plan.

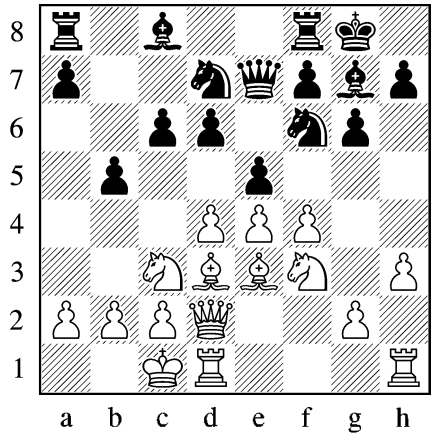
Castling kingside puts less pressure on Black: 9.0–0 0–0 10.♕d2 b5 11.a3 ♗b7 12.♕f2 exd4 13.♘xd4 In Zeman – Necada, Czech Republic 2003, 13...a6N∓ would have left White vulnerable to ...c5.

9...0–0N

This natural move has not been played in practice, but it makes sense to remove the king from the centre before launching the b-pawn.

10.0–0–0 b5

The pressure on e4 combined with the threat of ...b4 forces White to make some concession.



11.fxe5

The most consistent continuation.

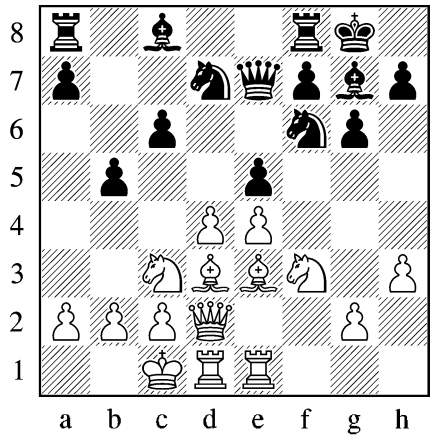
Omitting the exchange before centralizing the rook allows Black to carry out a familiar plan: 11.♖he1 exd4 12.♗xd4 b4 13.♘b1 c5 14.♗f2 ♗b7∓ Black has pressure on e4 and may soon attack b2.

11.a3 a5 fails to stop the b-pawn, resulting only in a queenside weakening.

11...dxe5 12.♖he1

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White's development looks impressive, but his position has a hidden defect: his king is less safe than Black's. But in order to use this detail to keep the balance, Black needs to play with a certain accuracy.



12...a6

For subtle reasons, this is the best way to prepare for the opening of the centre. Black threatens ...exd4 followed by ...c5, without committing any of his pieces. As we shall see in the lines below, this is important if White exchanges on e5.

12...♗b7 looks flexible, but after 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♕xe5 15.♗f4 ♕e6 16.e5 ♘d5 17.♘xd5 ♕xd5 18.♔b1, the bishop would belong on e6, blocking the e-pawn and attacking a2.

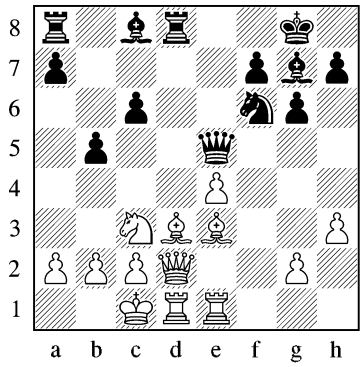
12...♖d8

Hoping to take advantage of the rook's opposition to the enemy queen.

13.dxe5

13.♗xb5!? is also interesting, based on the pin along the d-file: 13...cxb5 14.dxe5 ♗b7 15.exf6 ♘xf6 16.♗d4 Black may not have entirely adequate compensation for the pawn, as White is perfectly coordinated.

13...♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♕xe5



15.♗f4 ♕e6

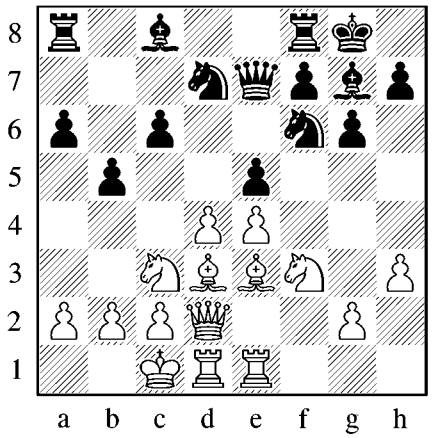
In this position, the generally desirable 15...♕e7? unfortunately runs into 16.e5 followed by 17.♗g5, so Black is forced to place his queen on a less natural square.

16.♔b1

White anticipates ...b4, but Black can now play:

16...♕e7

The position is playable for Black. To understand why the text move is now possible, see the note on 13.♔b1 just below; the only difference here is that Black's pawn is still on a7.



13.♕f2

Threatening 14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.♗c5.

With the bishop on c8, general exchanges on e5 are not worrying: 13.dxe5 ♘xe5

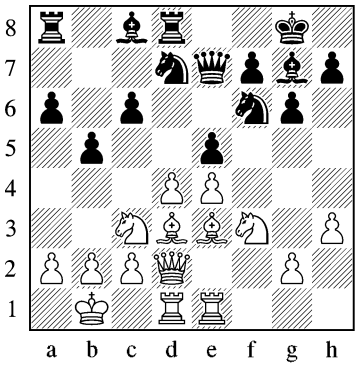
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14.♘xe5 ♕xe5 15.♗f4 ♕e6 16.e5 ♘d5 17.♘xd5 ♕xd5 18.♔b1 ♗e6=

13.♔b1

For hidden tactical reasons, this allows:

13...♖d8!

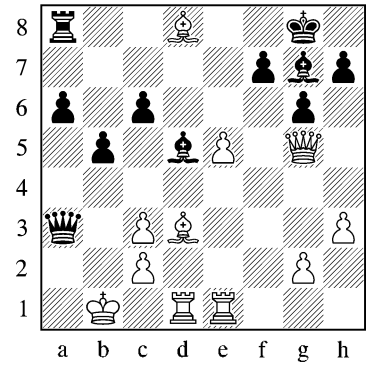


14.dxe5

If White keeps making neutral moves such as 14.g4, Black can develop his bishop with 14...♗b7.

14...♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♕xe5 16.♗f4 ♕e7 17.e5 ♘d5 18.♘xd5

The point is that after 18.♗g5 Black has 18...♘xc3†! 19.bxc3 ♕a3 20.♗xd8 ♗e6 with a winning attack: 21.♕g5 Parrying the mate in two and defending the bishop. 21...♗xa2† 22.♔a1 ♗d5† 23.♔b1



23...♖a7!? (Preventing ♗e7 and making use of the extra move ...a7-a6 compared to the line with 12...♖d8 above. It would not be correct, though, to claim that this is an essential difference, as 23...♗f8, followed by ...♖b8, would also win.) 24.h4 ♖b7–+ Followed by 25...b4 or 25...♗a2† 26.♔a1 b4.

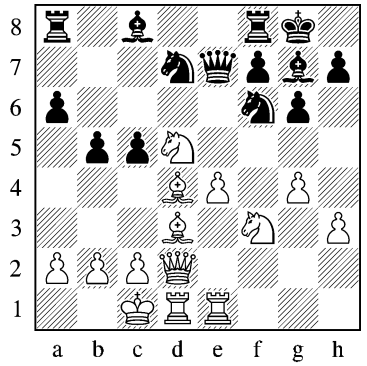
18...♖xd5 19.♕e3 ♗e6

Black has comfortable play.

13.g4

After a neutral move such as this, Black has no reason to delaying opening the centre.

13...exd4 14.♗xd4 c5 15.♘d5



15...♕e6

15...♕d6? is worse: 16.♘xf6† ♗xf6 17.♗xf6 ♕xf6 18.e5±

16.♘g5

16.♘c7? ♕xa2 wins for Black.

With the queen on e6 Black can answer 16.♘xf6† with 16...♘xf6, as there is no fork with e4-e5.

16...♕d6 17.♘xf6† ♘xf6

Black has at least equal play.

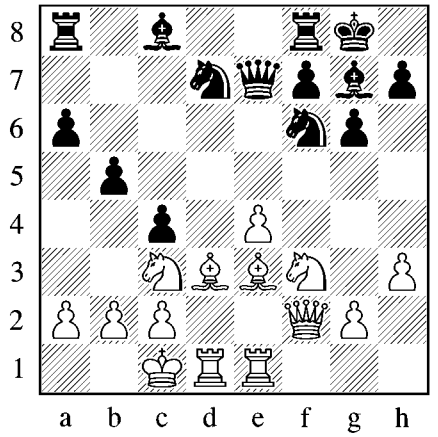
13...exd4 14.♗xd4 c5 15.♗e3

Black can also hold his own in the sharp position arising after: 15.♘d5 ♘xd5 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.exd5 ♕d6 18.♘d2 Fighting against the blockade. 18...c4 19.♗e4 ♗b7 20.♗f3 ♘f6 (20...♖fe8 21.♘e4 ♕b6 is also good) 21.♘e4 ♘xe4 22.♖xe4 ♖ae8 23.♕d4† ♔g8 With no worries for Black.

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15...c4

White is about to lose the initiative, so he should react before Black completes his development.



16.♗xc4!? bxc4 17.e5 ♖b8!

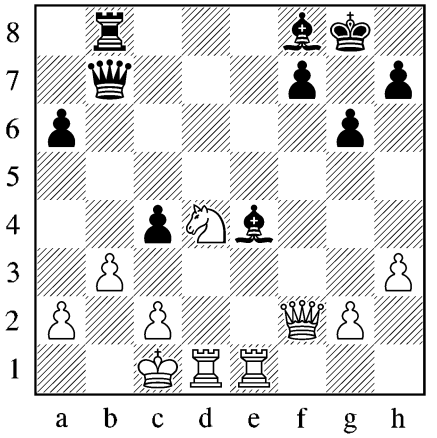
Striving for counterplay.

Holding on to the material advantage with 17...♘e8?! 18.♘d5 ♕e6 19.♕h4 offers White a strong attack.

18.exf6 ♘xf6 19.♗c5

19.♗a7 ♗e6 20.♗xb8 ♖xb8 is similar.

19...♕b7 20.b3 ♗f5 21.♘d4 ♘e4 22.♘xe4 ♗xe4 23.♗xf8 ♗xf8



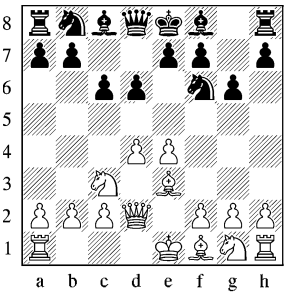
Two strong bishops and the vulnerable white king yield Black full compensation for the exchange.

Conclusion

The modern variation with 5.h3 and 6.f4 was the focus of this chapter, aiming to reach an improved version of the Austrian Attack. It leads to vibrant play and chances for both sides. Black should be doing fine if he knows the basic rule of not exposing his b-pawn too soon with ...b7-b5.

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Chapter 10



4.♗e3

5.♕d2

Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗e3 c6 5.♕d2

5...♘bd7

A) 6.0–0–0 **236**

B) 6.f3 b5 **239**

B1) 7.♗h6?! **240**

B2) 7.0–0–0 **242**

B3) 7.a4 **244**

B4) 7.♗d3 **246**

B5) 7.d5 **249**

B6) 7.h4 **251**

B7) 7.g4 ♗g7! 8.h4 h5 9.g5 ♘h7 **253**

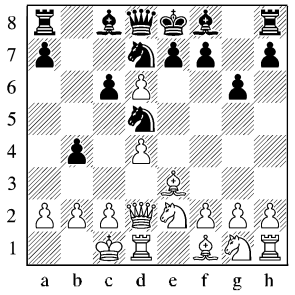
B71) 10.♘h3 **258**

B72) 10.♘ge2 **261**

B73) 10.f4 **263**

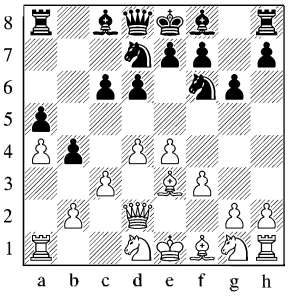
B74) 10.a4 **267**

A) note to 8.exf6



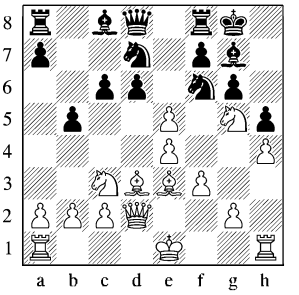
9...♘7f6!N

B3) note to 9.♘h3



9...e5!N

B6) after 11.dxe5



11...♘xe5!N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗e3 c6 5.♕d2 ♘bd7

In this section we will examine only White's attacking continuations, as 6.♘f3 ♗g7 usually transposes to other lines. For instance:

7.♗d3 0–0 transposes to variation B of Chapter 8.

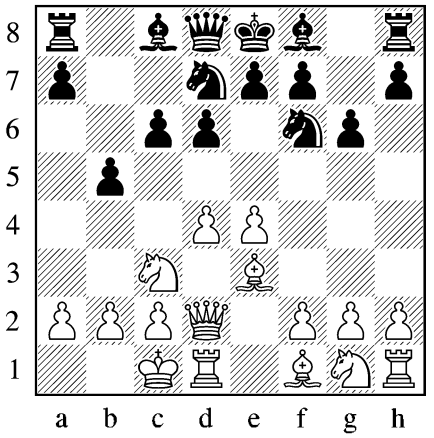
7.h3 0–0 transposes to variation A1 of Chapter 3.

7.♗h6 does not have independent value either: 7...0–0 8.0–0–0 ♕a5 9.♔b1 transposes to variation A of Chapter 13.

Or if 7.0–0–0 0–0 8.e5, Black achieves adequate play with: 8...♘g4 9.exd6 exd6 10.♗g5 ♕c7 11.♗d3 b5=

We will examine **A) 6.0–0–0** and **B) 6.f3**.

A) 6.0–0–0 b5



This usually transposes to variation B2 after 7.f3, but play can take an independent course if White tries to make use of his pressure along the d-file.

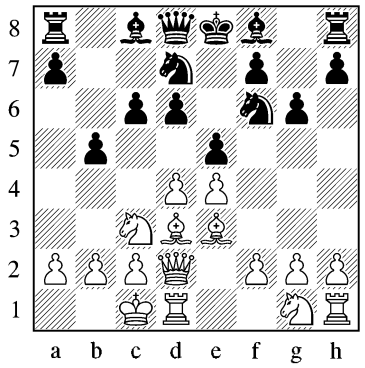
7.e5

7.♗d3

This obstructs the d-file, allowing Black to play in the centre.

7...e5

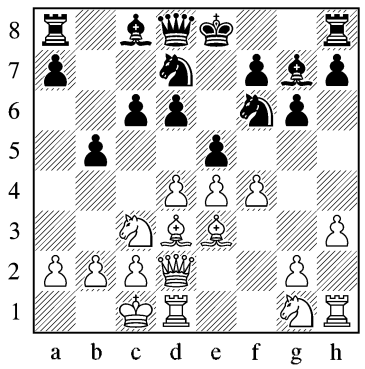
After the game, my opponent suggested 7...b4 8.♘ce2 ♘g4!?N, leading to interesting play after: 9.♕xb4 ♘xe3 10.fxe3 ♗h6 11.♕d2 0–0 Black will continue with ...♕c7, ...♖b8 and ...c5, with a lasting queenside initiative. White's attacking prospects are less clear and he has to worry permanently about his e3-pawn.



8.h3 ♗g7 9.f4?!

Trying to transpose to variation B4 of Chapter 9, but with this move order Black can manage without ...♕e7.

After 9.♘f3 0–0 10.dxe5 the players abruptly agreed a draw in Kovchan – V. Onischuk, Kharkov 2011. However, continuing with 10...dxe5 would have left White short of constructive plans, while Black has good attacking chances.



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9...exd4!

The typical way to prepare the queenside attack, taking advantage of the fact that ♘xd4 is not available.

10.♗xd4 b4 11.♘ce2 c5 12.♗e3 ♕a5 13.♔b1 0–0 14.♘f3 ♘b6

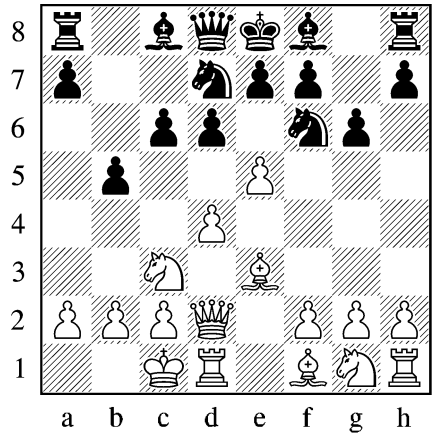
There is little White can do against Black's simple attacking moves.

15.♘c1

The attempt to play for space with 15.c4? is refuted tactically by 15...♘xe4! 16.♗xe4 ♘xc4 17.♕c1 ♗e6, with a decisive attack.

15...c4 16.♗xb6 ♕xb6 17.♗xc4 ♘xe4 18.♕e1 ♘f2∓

Black won the exchange with a continuing attack in Guerra Bastida – Marin, Andorra 2003.



7...b4!

A forced pawn sacrifice, but quite a promising one.

7...dxe5? 8.dxe5 ♘g4 9.♗d4 ♗h6 10.f4

This leaves White with a crushing space advantage. Black cannot use the pin along the c1-h6 diagonal to free himself, for instance:

10...♕c7

10...♘dxe5? loses a piece to 11.h3.

11.♔b1N

11.♘f3?! f6 12.h3?! ♘gxe5 allowed Black strong counterplay in Maros – Klein, Pardubice 1996.

11...b4 12.♘a4 c5

Taking the d4-square under control.

If 12...♘gxe5 13.♗xe5 ♘xe5 14.♕d4, White pins and wins the knight.

13.h3 ♘gxe5 14.♗xe5 ♘xe5 15.♕d5!

Revealing the drawback of 12...c5.

15...♘c6 16.♗b5 ♗b7 17.♘xc5±

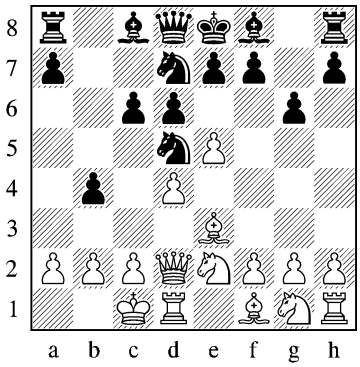
White has overwhelming pressure.

8.exf6

There is no way back for White:

8.♘ce2 ♘d5

The black knight turns into a dangerous attacking piece. Beside the positional threat of ...♘xe3, Black can consider ...♘c3 after a few preparatory moves.



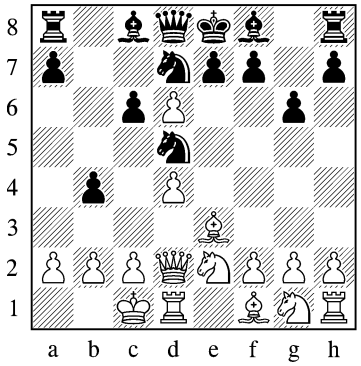
9.exd6?!

After 9.♘f3 ♕a5 10.♔b1 ♖b8 11.♔a1 ♗g7, White cannot hold his centre any more. For instance: 12.♗h6 ♘c3 13.bxc3 bxc3 14.♕xc3 ♕xc3† 15.♘xc3 ♗xh6 16.exd6 exd6 17.♖e1† ♔f8 18.♘e4 d5 Black has active play and the safer king.

Against 9.♘f4N, Black should be willing to sacrifice a pawn for the sake of rapid development: 9...♘xe3 10.♕xe3 ♗h6! 11.exd6 ♘f6 12.dxe7 ♕xe7 13.♔b1 In view of the threat of ...♘d5, this is the only way of keeping the extra pawn. 13...♕xe3 14.fxe3 ♘g4 15.♘gh3 0–0 16.♖e1 ♗b7

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Followed by ...♖fe8 and ...♖ad8. White's coordination is far from optimal, making his centre vulnerable.



9...♘7f6!N

Black should not expose the e-file while his development is incomplete. After 9...exd6?! 10.♘f4 White had the initiative in Sankalp – Havenga, Chalkidiki 2005.

10.dxe7

Otherwise Black could play ...♕xd6, with a promising position.

10...♗xe7 11.♘f4

This leads to disaster, but it is difficult to suggest a good alternative.

11...♘c3!

The long-awaited blow.

12.bxc3

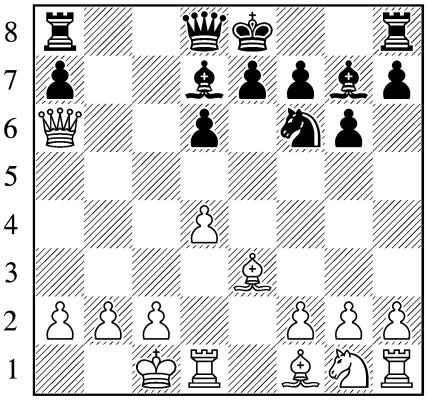
12.♗c4 ♕a5 does not change much.

12...♕a5–+

With the exception of the king's rook, all Black's pieces are participating in the attack. This is one more case where the king's bishop is useful on its initial diagonal.

8...bxc3 9.♕xc3 ♘xf6 10.♕xc6† ♗d7 11.♕a6 ♗g7

Black has a clear attacking plan along the open queenside files, involving practically all his pieces. At the same time, his king will not experience any problems after castling.



12.♗c4

Transferring the bishop to b3 is the best defensive plan.

12.♔b1 0–0 13.♘f3 ♖b8 14.♗d3

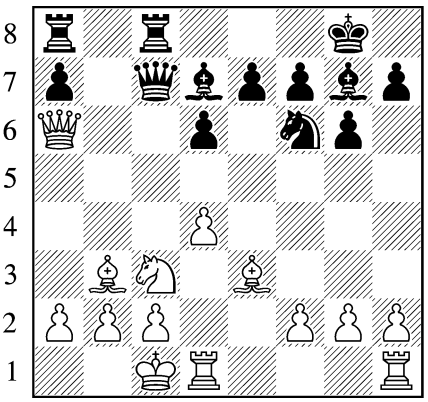
At a later stage, the bishop will be exposed here, but for the time being it is useful in preventing ...♘e4 or ...♗f5.

Preventing ...♘g4 with 14.h3 wastes a valuable tempo: 14...♕c7 15.♗d3 ♘d5 16.♗d2 ♘c3† 17.♗xc3 ♕xc3 18.b3 ♖fc8 Black threatens ...♗c6xf3 followed by ...♗xd4.

14...♕c7 15.c4 ♖fc8 16.♔a1 e5 17.♗e2 ♘g4∓

Black has a dangerous initiative.

12...0–0 13.♘e2 ♕c7 14.♗b3 ♖fc8 15.♘c3



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15...♖ab8!N

Consistently following the main plan.

The careless 15...♘g4? 16.♘d5 ♕d8 17.♗g5± turned the tables in L. Rojas – Castro Rojas, Buenos Aires 2005.

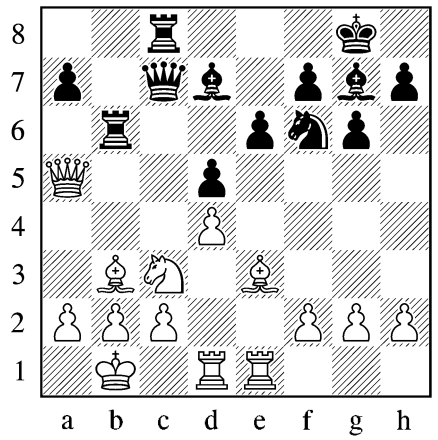
16.♖he1 ♖b6 17.♕a5

17.♕e2 a5 is also promising for Black.

17...d5 18.♔b1

18.♘xd5? exposes the king too much: 18...♘xd5 19.♕xd5 ♗e6 20.♕c5 ♕b7 21.♕g5 (or 21.♕a5 ♗xb3 22.axb3 ♖a6 23.♕g5 ♕xb3 and Black wins) 21...♗xb3 22.axb3 ♖xb3 Black will play ...♖xb2 next, winning.

18...e6!



Black intends a long regrouping with ...♗f8, ...♘e8-d6 and ...♕b7. White faces a protracted, joyless defence.

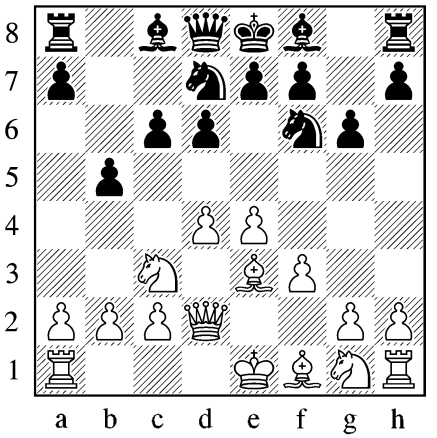
B) 6.f3

The classical way of treating the ♗e3 set-up. In fact, the most common move order in the past started with 4.f3, radically preventing an early ...♘g4.

When I first started to play the Pirc on a regular basis, I intuitively felt that this would be one of the most pleasant variations for Black. The system is similar to the King's Indian Sämisch Attack, but White's space advantage is more limited than in the King's Indian. The absence of immediate pawn contact allows both sides to display their best strategic skills in the long run. However, after having played numerous games against this line (most of them quite successful), I understood that White is entitled to have a similarly pleasant feeling – after all, he can combine strategic elements with attacking ideas, without the necessity of embarking on long, forced (and super-analysed) variations.

Practice has also taught me that it is essential for Black to correlate the order in which certain 'typical' moves are played with White's concrete play. More than once, I have failed to find the correct answer over the board somewhere in the move range 8-10, which is indicative of the complexity of the position in general.

6...b5



Now, more than ever, it makes sense to delay the king's bishop's development.

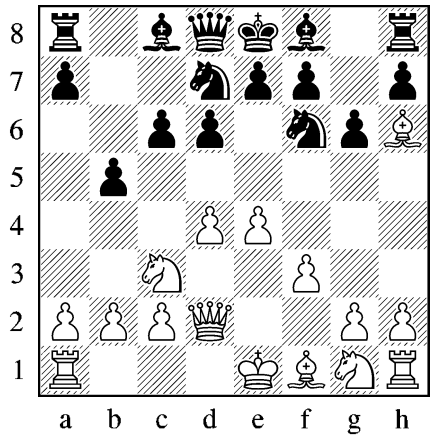
Both sides have plenty of plans at their disposal. White can consider breaking in the centre with e4-e5 or d4-d5, consolidating the centre with pieces, or launching a kingside

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attack with h2-h4 and g2-g4. In some cases he can anticipate Black's queenside attack with a2-a4, meeting the natural ...b4 by retreating the knight and then playing c2-c3. Black's thematic pawn moves are ...b4, ...c5, ...e5 or, less typically, ...d5. Many times, either ...a5 or ...a6 is an important complement to the main plan.

We will examine **B1) 7.♗h6?!**, **B2) 7.0–0–0**, **B3) 7.a4**, **B4) 7.♗d3**, **B5) 7.d5**, **B6) 7.h4** and finally the main line **B7) 7.g4**.

B1) 7.♗h6?!



This rare move loses a tempo compared to similar lines in which Black plays ...♗g7.

7...b4 8.♘d1

The most flexible answer.

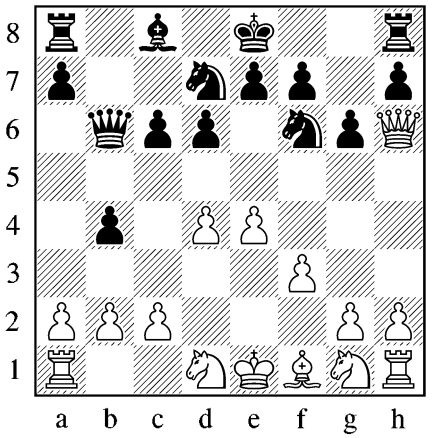
In the absence of central tension created by ...e5, the c5-square is not an issue, making 8.♘a4 somewhat pointless: 8...♗xh6 9.♕xh6 ♘b6 10.♘xb6 ♕xb6 11.0–0–0 a5 12.♔b1 ♗e6 Black is better developed and his attack, based on ...a4 followed by either ...a3 or ...b3, has clear shape. If necessary, he can evacuate the king from the centre by castling queenside, but for the time being there is no danger around.

8.♘ce2 places the knight too far from the c4-square: 8...♗xh6 9.♕xh6 ♕a5 10.♘h3N (10.♕d2 0–0 11.♘f4 ♖b8 was also good for Black in Rosser – Dempster, email 2011) 10...c5 11.d5 ♗a6 12.♘f2 ♖c8 13.♘g3 c4∓ Black has seized an annoying queenside space advantage.

8...♗xh6

If White has no real chances for an attack, it is always good to force the queen to leave the centre.

9.♕xh6 ♕b6



10.♕d2

We can see that White has only lost time.

10.♘e2 does not solve the problem of the d4-pawn because of 10...♗a6, which more or less forces the queen's retreat anyway.

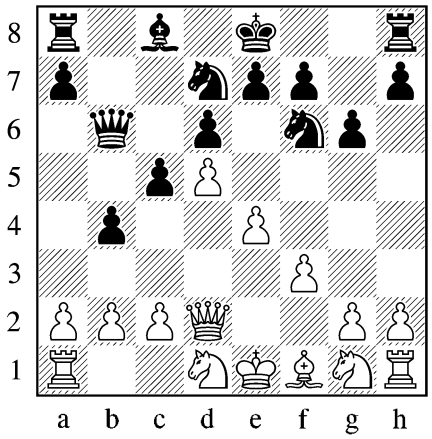
10...c5 11.d5

The most consistent move, taking space and trying to keep the position blocked in order to gain time to complete his development.

11.c3 bxc3 12.bxc3 cxd4 13.cxd4 e5 offers Black excellent play on the dark squares.

Or 11.♘e2 a5 12.♘e3 ♗a6 with active play for Black.

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Form this position, London – Molner, Parsippany 2006, continued 11...a5, with reasonable play. Personally, I would be keen to challenge White's space advantage as soon as possible.

11...e6!?N

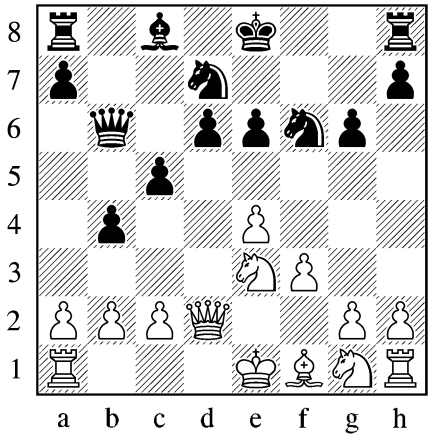
Another way to implement the same idea is 11...0–0!?N 12.♘e3 ♘e5, followed by ...e6.

12.dxe6

White is not interested in being landed with a weak pawn on d5, of course.

12...fxe6 13.♘e3

Taking measures against ...d5.
13.a3 0–0 14.axb4 cxb4 15.♘e3 would be met by 15...♘e5, followed by ...a5-a4.



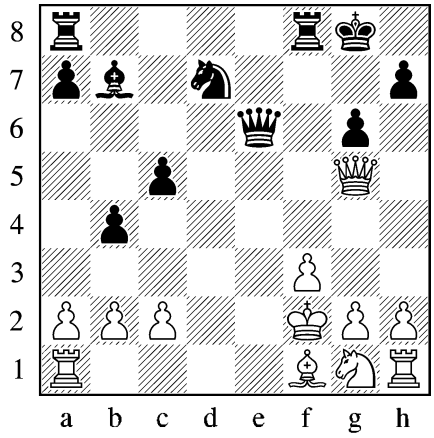
13...d5!

Black's superior development entitles him to follow his plan, even at the cost of a pawn.

14.exd5 exd5 15.♘xd5 ♘xd5 16.♕xd5 ♗b7 17.♕g5

It is essential to prevent Black from castling queenside as 17.♕d2 0–0–0 18.0–0–0 ♘f6 offers him a strong initiative along the central files: 19.♕e1 ♖xd1† 20.♕xd1 ♖d8 21.♕e1 ♕a5 22.♗c4 (White cannot send his queen on an active mission with 22.♕e6† ♔c7 23.♕xf6, because this would leave the king completely undefended: 23...b3! Black threatens ...♕e1 mate, as well as ...bxa2 winning.) 22...♗d5 23.♗xd5 ♘xd5 24.♔b1 ♘e3∓ Black wins the queen on the next move.

17...♕e6† 18.♔f2 0–0



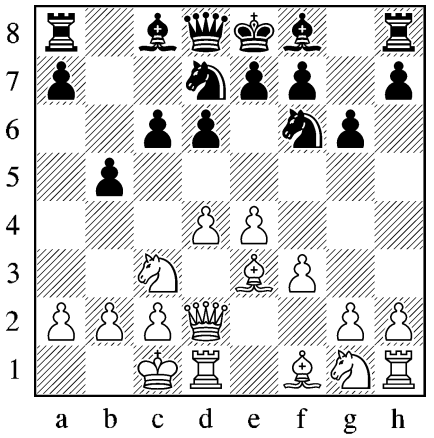
Black is far ahead with his development, and threatens to complete his mobilization with ...♖ae8 and ...♘e5. White's main hopes are connected with the black king's somewhat exposed position.

19.♖e1 ♕xa2 20.♖e7 ♖f7 21.♖xf7 ♕xf7

Black has regained the pawn and has at least an equal game. In the endgame, his queenside majority, with the a-pawn as a dangerous candidate for promotion, may be telling.

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B2) 7.0–0–0

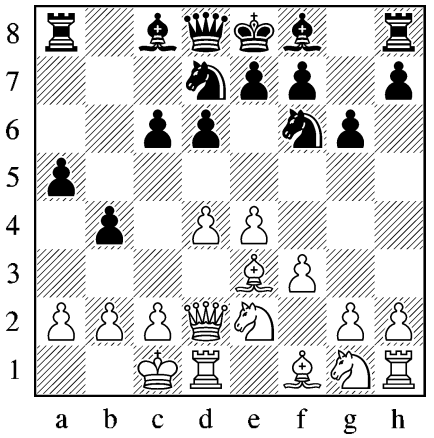


This may look as if it is committing the king too early, but Black's attack does not develop quickly enough to put the white king in immediate danger. Black needs to make some progress with his development and take measures against the central breaks, as White's pressure along the d-file could become threatening.

7...b4 8.♘ce2

Since the c5-square is not an issue, 8.♘a4 only helps Black to speed up his attack: 8...♕a5 9.b3 ♘b6 10.a3 ♘xa4 11.axb4 ♕c7 12.bxa4 a5 13.b5 In Baars – Menten, email 2005, 13...cxb5N 14.♗xb5† ♗d7 would have given Black good attacking chances, as pointed out by Chernin.

8...a5



9.g4

With his development incomplete, White should refrain from premature aggressiveness in the centre based on:

9.e5?

White's main opening idea is to keep the e4-pawn well defended, but now he is rushing forward with it, without any support from the pieces.

9...♘d5 10.exd6 e6!

Keeping the e-file closed.

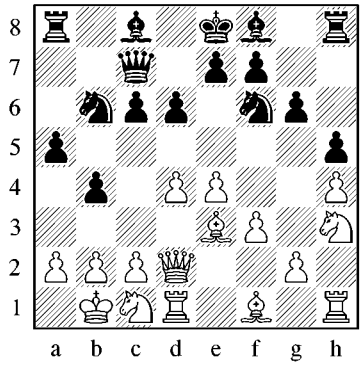
11.h4 ♘7b6 12.♘g3 f5!∓

Black had a safe central blockade in Golubev – Chernin, Eupen 1995, and White's minor pieces were restricted. Black could soon continue the queenside attack at his leisure.

9.♔b1 ♘b6 10.♘c1

This regrouping is too slow to be dangerous. Besides, the knight is rather ineffective as a defending piece, since it fails to protect the most vulnerable spot in the position – the b2-square.

10...♕c7 11.h4 h5 12.♘h3



12...♗g7

Black should not give his bishop away with 12...♗xh3 13.♖xh3 ♗g7 14.♗d3 ♖b8 15.♕e2. In Matikozian – Casella, Burbank 2004, this had two negative consequences. First of all, Black's thematic ...c5 would weaken the light squares, allowing ♗b5†. And secondly, if Black castles then g2-g4

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followed by ♗g5 will question his entire kingside stability.

13.♘g5

The knight stands nicely here, but it takes an important square away from the bishop.

13...0–0 14.♕f2 ♖b8 15.♗d3 ♘a4 16.♘e2 c5

Black had a strong initiative in Pinol Fulgoni – Raeber, Switzerland 2003.

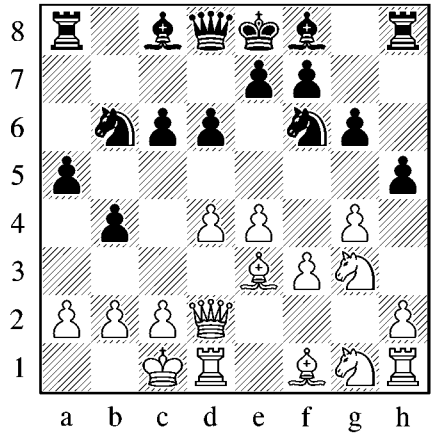
9...♘b6 10.♘g3

The most natural way to prevent ...♘c4. White threatens g4-g5 followed by h2-h4-h5, with the initiative along the h-file.

Blocking the f-pawn with 10.♘f4 makes little sense: 10...h5 11.g5 ♘fd7 12.♘g2 d5 The same plan as in the main line. 13.♗d3 e6 14.f4 In Wei Chenpeng – Hess, Chalkidiki 2003, Black should have played 14...dxe4N 15.♗xe4 ♘d5 16.♘f3 a4, with a stable kingside and a promising queenside initiative.

10...h5!

Radically crossing White's plans.



11.g5

Once again the central break 11.e5? is not justified positionally: 11...♘fd5 12.gxh5 ♘xe3 13.♕xe3 ♗h6 14.f4 ♘d5∓ Black regains the pawn, with the initiative on the dark squares.

White does not have time to unblock the kingside after: 11.gxh5 ♘xh5 12.♘xh5 ♖xh5 13.h4 ♗g7 14.♗d3 (a necessary waste of time, since the desirable 14.♘e2 allows 14...♘c4∓) 14...c5 15.dxc5 dxc5 16.♗b5† ♗d7∓ Black has the more compact structure and a threatening queenside space advantage.

11...♘fd7 12.h4

More or less forced, in order to ensure the stability of the knight on g3.

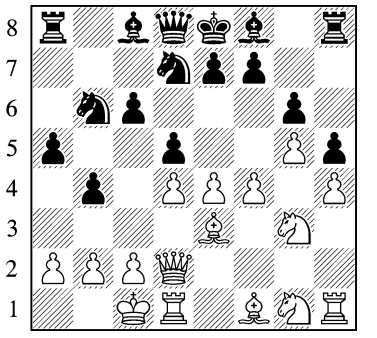
12...d5!?

For a 100% Pirc player, this may not be an easy move to find, but Chernin is also a French specialist. By switching from a dark-squared to a light-squared strategy, he aims to block the kingside position, in order to retain his chances on the other wing intact.

13.♗d3

13.f4!?

As pointed out by Chernin, this was the only chance to keep the kingside open. However, the ensuing tactics hold just as much danger for White as for Black, as we will see.

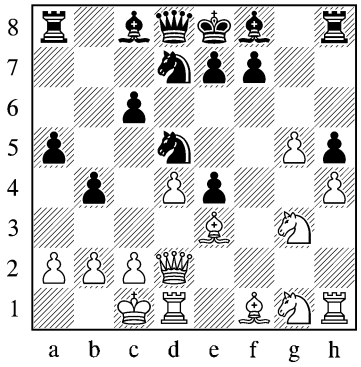


13...dxe4 14.f5N

If 14.♘xe4, as in Baratosi – L. Marin, Arad 2016, then Black should play: 14...♘d5!N 15.♘f3 ♗g7 Black's king will be entirely safe after castling, while dark clouds will gather over his rival soon.

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14...gxf5 15.♘xf5 ♘d5 16.♘g3



17...♘7f6!

Based on a small tactical trick and threatening ...♘g4, this is even stronger than Chernin's 16...♘7b6 17.♘xe4 ♗f5 18.♘g3 ♗g6=.

17.♗f4

After 17.gxf6? ♘xe3 Black wins, as the knight is taboo due to ...♗h6.

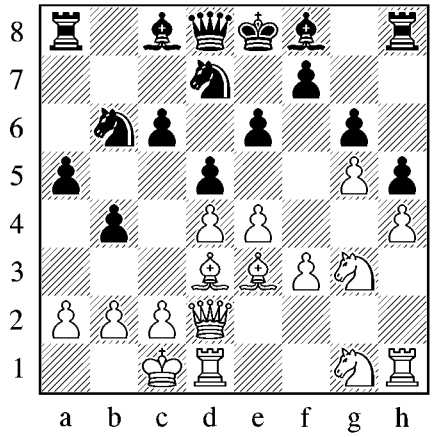
17.♔b1? loses the bishop to 17...♘g4 18.♗f4 e3.

17...a4

Black has a dangerous initiative.

13...e6!

Black is rock-solid on the kingside and takes full advantage of not having moved his king's bishop, which will be quite active on its original diagonal.



14.♔b1 ♕c7 15.♘1e2 ♗a6 16.♘f4 ♘c4 17.♕e2 ♘xe3 18.♕xe3 ♗xd3 19.cxd3!?

Controlling the e4- and c4-squares and opening the c-file, but this does not cause Black any inconvenience.

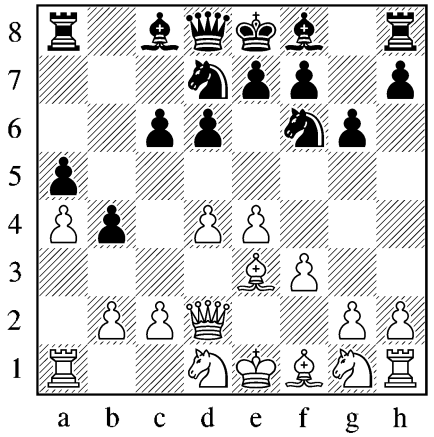
19...♗d6 20.♘ge2 ♘b6∓

Black has the more flexible pawn structure and the safer king position. These elements more than compensated for White's space advantage in Tolnai – Chernin, Austria 1994.

B3) 7.a4

Even though ...b4 is part of Black's global plan, some may think that provoking it at such an early stage could bring White some benefit. And yet the last move not only weakens the queenside slightly, but also wastes an important tempo.

7...b4 8.♘d1 a5



9.♘h3

A golden rule of the Benoni Sämisch says that a premature ...♘bd7 should always be answered with ♘h3-f2, as it offers White harmonious development with minimal time expenditure, yielding him an opening advantage. But in the more flexible King's Indian and the Pirc, where Black has a choice

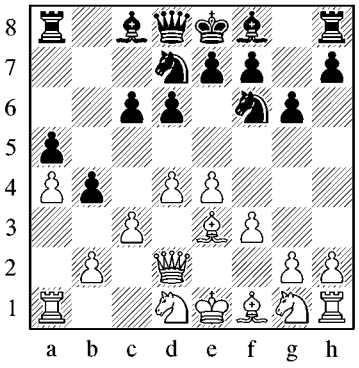
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between several ways of attacking the centre, this way of developing the knight is not always effective.

If White intends to develop his knight to e2, he needs to obstruct the d-file with 9.♗d3, after which 9...e5 10.♘e2 ♗g7 offers Black easy play.

9.c3

This does not contribute to White's development, allowing Black to ignore the threat to the b4-pawn and react in the centre.



9...e5!N 10.cxb4

10.dxe5 dxe5 defends the b4-pawn, showing that delaying the bishop's development was useful.

10...exd4 11.♗xd4 axb4 12.♕xb4

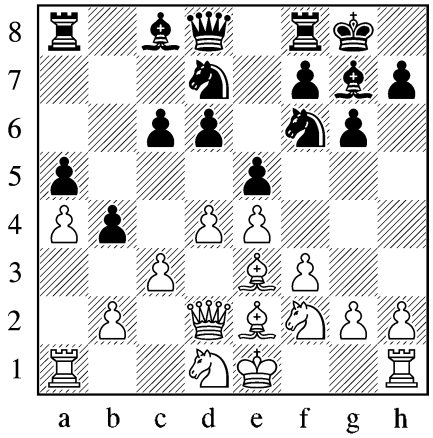
Otherwise Black has no problems at all.

12...d5 13.♕c3 ♖b8 14.♕xc6 ♗b4† 15.♘c3 0–0

Black has a huge lead in development, outweighing the missing pawns.

9...♗g7 10.♘hf2 0–0 11.♗e2 e5 12.c3

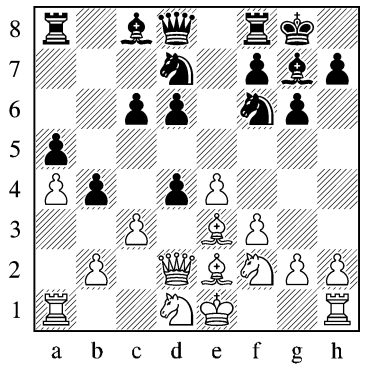
With no knight controlling d4, White was facing the threat of ...exd4 followed by ...c5, and therefore he needs to consolidate his central pawn.



12...bxc3

This is safe enough but, if it can be justified dynamically, I tend to avoid releasing the queenside tension so easily. From this point of view, Black can consider the more ambitious:

12...exd4!?N



13.♗xd4

After 13.cxd4 c5 (planning ...cxd4 followed by ...♘c5 with queenside pressure) 14.d5 ♘b6, Black has a comfortable Benoni set-up as White's knights are far from the c4-square.

13...♖e8

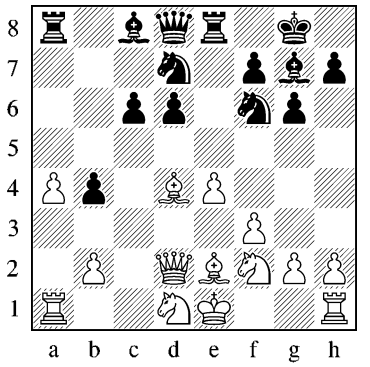
Controlling the e5-square in order to play ...d5 without fearing e4-e5.

14.cxb4

14.0–0 d5 15.exd5 ♘xd5 offers Black superior central activity.

14...axb4

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15.0–0

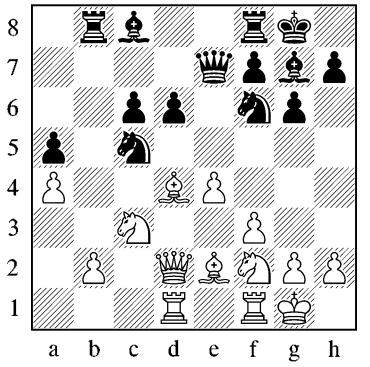
15.♕xb4 runs into: 15...♘xe4! 16.♗xg7 (16.♘xe4? c5∓) 16...c5 17.♕a3 ♘xf2 18.♔xf2 ♔xg7∓ Black's structure is better, while the white king's situation is aggravated by the weakness of the dark squares.

15...c5 16.♗e3 d5 17.exd5 ♖e5∓

Black will regain the pawn soon, with an active position.

13.bxc3

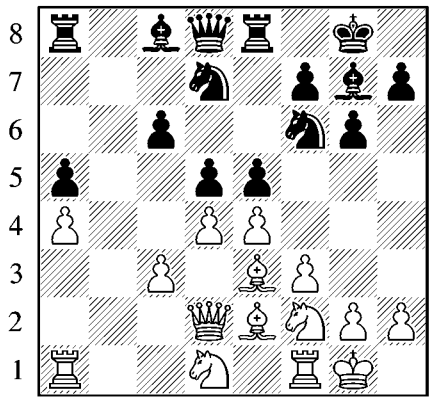
Later, another Georgiev deviated against the same opponent with 13.♘xc3, but without success: 13...♖b8 14.♖d1 exd4 15.♗xd4 ♕e7 16.0–0 ♘c5



17.♗e3 (17.♗xc5 dxc5 18.f4 ♗e6 leaves White's queenside vulnerable) 17...d5 Playing for safe equality. (Black could also consider 17...♘e8 followed by ...♗e6.) 18.exd5 cxd5 19.♗b5 ♖d8 20.♘e2 ♘b3 21.♕d3 ♕b4= Kr. Georgiev – Torre, Saint John 1988.

13...♖e8 14.0–0 d5

The position is almost symmetrical, but there is plenty of play left, as both sides need to find good squares for one minor piece each – the d1-knight and the c8-bishop.



15.dxe5 ♖xe5!N

Better than 15...♘xe5 16.f4, with a slight initiative for White in Ki. Georgiev – Torre, Leningrad 1987.

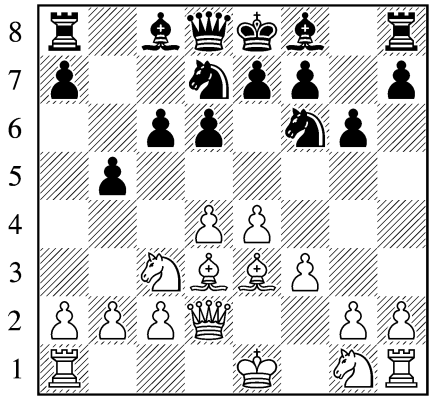
16.♗d4 ♖e8

16...♖e6!?=, as suggested by Georgiev, is also good.

17.exd5 ♘xd5=

With no problems at all for Black.

B4) 7.♗d3

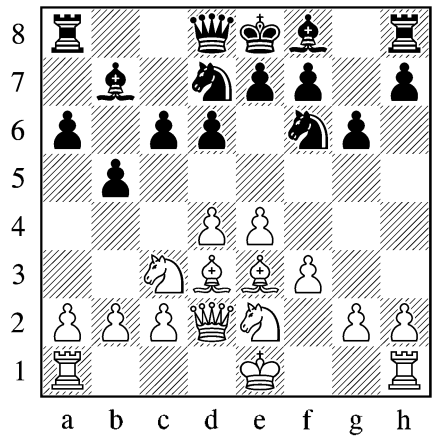


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This solid move removes the pressure along the d-file, allowing Black to prepare his pawn breaks at his leisure.

7...♗b7 8.♘ge2 a6

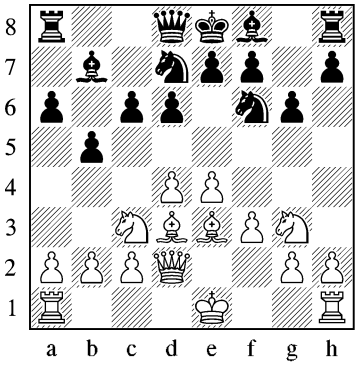
Preparing ...c5.



9.♘d1

A cautious move, planning to meet ...c5 with c2-c3. But the knight retreat makes ...e5 stronger.

9.♘g3 does not offer the knight any active possibilities:

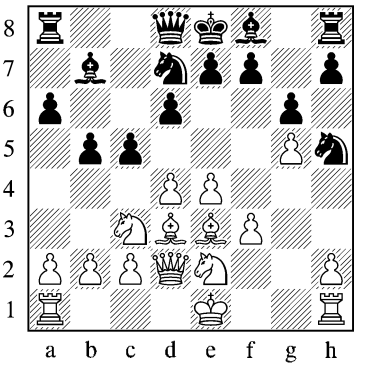


9...h5!? Not only creating the possibility of ...h4 but also preventing ♗h6. (9...c5N is also good.) 10.a3 ♗g7 11.♖d1 ♕c7 12.0–0 c5 13.dxc5 ♘xc5 Black had an excellent version of the Sicilian Dragon in Braylovsky – Ibragimov, New York 2002.

9.g4

White intends g4-g5 followed by ♘g3, but does not force Black to deviate from his plans:

9...c5N 10.g5 ♘h5



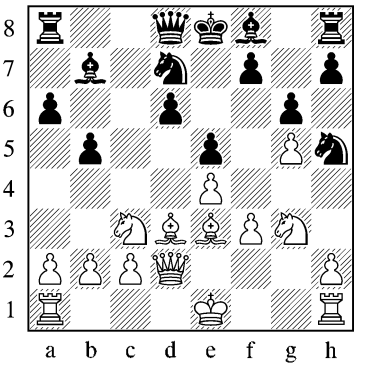
11.♘g3

11.dxc5 is an obvious concession, activating Black's knight: 11...♘xc5 12.♘g3 ♘xg3 13.hxg3 ♗g7 14.0–0–0 ♕a5 Black's queenside activity compensates for the weakness of the h7-pawn. 15.♗xc5 ♗xc3 This is safest. 16.bxc3 dxc5=

11...cxd4 12.♗xd4 e5!

Preparing the next move.

13.♗e3



13...♘f4 14.♗xf4 exf4 15.♕xf4 h6

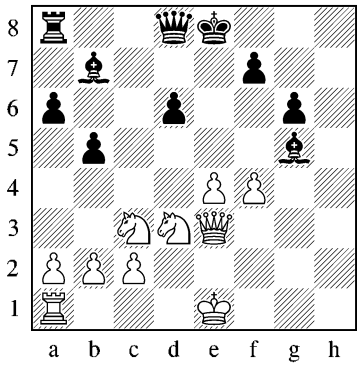
Black has excellent play on the dark squares, compensating for the missing pawn.

16.h4

16.gxh6 is met by 16...♘c5+, defending the d6-pawn and preparing ...♗xh6.

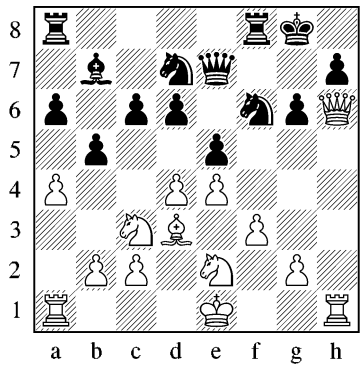
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16...hxg5 17.hxg5 ♖xh1† 18.♘xh1 ♗e7
Preventing 0–0–0.
19.♘f2 ♘e5 20.♕e3 ♗xg5 21.f4 ♘xd3† 22.♘xd3

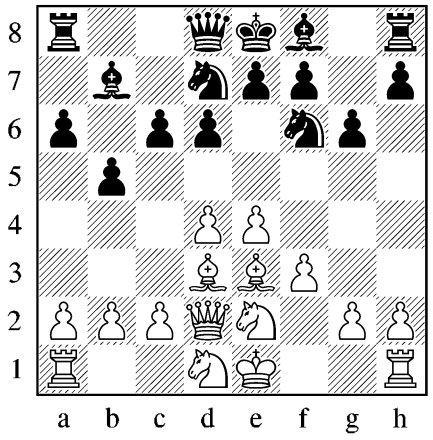


22...♗f6
Threatening to spoil the queenside structure with ...♗xc3. It is better to keep the check from h4 in reserve, as after 22...♗h4† 23.♔d2 the king overprotects c3, clearing the path for the rook at the same time.
23.e5 dxe5 24.♘xe5
After 24.fxe5 ♗g5 25.♘f4 ♖c8∓ both kings are in the centre, but White's is obviously more exposed.
24...♔f8 25.♖d1 ♕e8
Black has two strong bishops and a safe king. An important point is that the knight check fails:
26.♘d7†? ♔g7 27.♕xe8 ♖xe8† 28.♔f1 ♗xc3 29.bxc3 ♖h8∓

9.a4
This prevents the planned ...c5, but causes some problems in connection with White's plan of castling queenside.
9...♗g7
9...b4? 10.♘d1± turns ...a6 into a mere loss of time.
10.♗h6
White plays for the attack, but the exchange of the dark-squared bishops favours Black from a strategic point of view.
10...0–0 11.h4 e5 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7 13.h5 ♕e7 14.hxg6 fxg6 15.♕h6† ♔g8



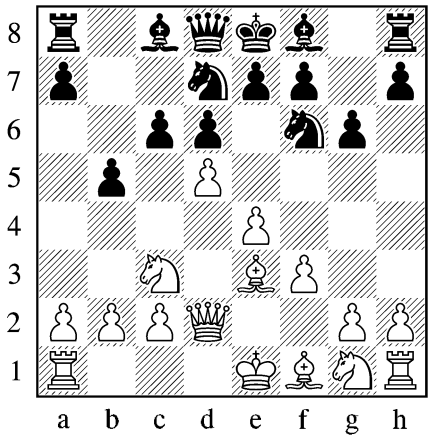
16.dxe5
Avoiding 16.0–0–0 exd4 17.♘xd4 c5 followed by ...c4, winning a piece.
16...dxe5 17.0–0–0 ♘c5 18.♕g5 ♖ae8
Black has regrouped perfectly and is ready to take over the initiative.
19.axb5?
This adds to the king's existing problems.
19...axb5 20.♘g3 ♘e6 21.♕h4 ♘f4 22.♗f1 ♖a8
Black had a winning counterattack in Mithrakanth – Marin, Calcutta 1997.



9...e5 10.c3 ♗g7 11.♘f2 0–0 12.0–0 d5 13.a4 ♖e8
Both sides have equal claims over the centre. The position was complicated but basically equal in Hecht – Forintos, Siegen (ol) 1970.

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B5) 7.d5

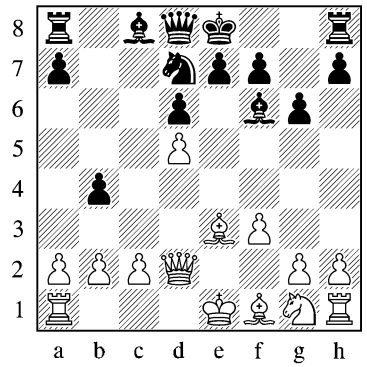


This slightly premature attempt at exploiting the relative weakness of the b5-pawn is the third most popular continuation, but a rare guest in grandmaster games. White is not well enough developed to take over the initiative by such simple means.

7...cxd5 8.♘xd5

The most consistent move.

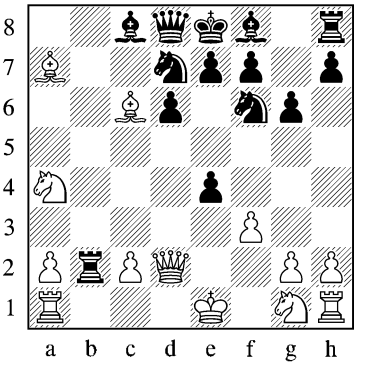
8.exd5?! leads to a strategically pleasant position for Black: 8...b4 9.♘e4 ♗g7 10.♘xf6† ♗xf6∓



And now 11.♕xb4?! ♖b8, followed by ...♖xb2, would make matters even worse for White.

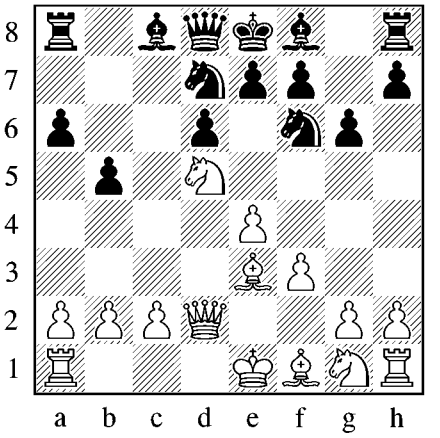
If 8.♘xb5 a6 9.♘c3 dxe4, White has nothing to compensate for his damaged central structure.

8.♗xb5 is the start of another unsuccessful adventure: 8...dxe4 9.♗c6 ♖b8 10.♗xa7 ♖xb2 11.♘a4



It may look as if White's minor pieces have invaded the enemy queenside, but they are poorly coordinated. 11...♕c7 Probably the best among many promising moves. 12.♘xb2 ♕xc6–+ Black had overwhelming compensation for the exchange in Capo – Wolff, Adelaide 1988.

8...a6



9.a4

The best attempt to develop some initiative.

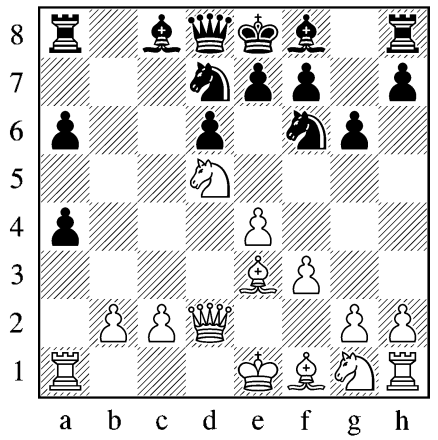
9.♕c3?! only apparently pins the knight: 9...♘xd5! 10.exd5 (but not 10.♕xh8? ♘xe3–+, with a material advantage and attacking chances)

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10...♘f6 11.a4 b4 12.♕d2 (12.♕xb4 ♘xd5 13.♕d4 ♘xe3–+ is hopeless for White) 12...♕a5 13.♗c4 ♗b7 14.♖d1 ♗g7 15.♘e2 ♕xa4 White had no compensation for the lost pawn in Durao – Marin, Benasque 1997.

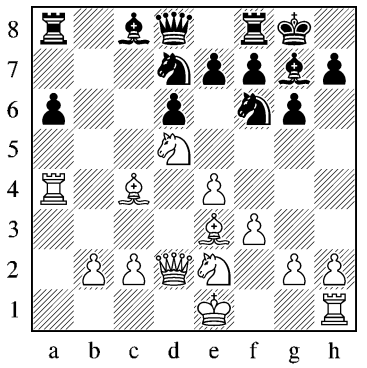
9...bxa4

Slightly spoiling the queenside structure, but opening the b-file for counterplay and forcing the enemy rook onto an exposed square.



10.♘xf6†

Refraining from this exchange offers Black additional possibilities for counterplay:
10.♖xa4 ♗g7 11.♗c4 0–0 12.♘e2



12...♘xd5!

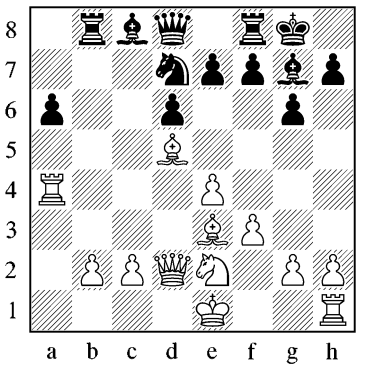
The other knight remaining on d7 will enable ...♘b6 or ...♘c5.

13.♗xd5

White fails to maintain his space advantage after 13.exd5 ♘b6 14.♖b4 ♘xc4 15.♖xc4 e6∓, opening the position for the strong bishops.

13...♖b8

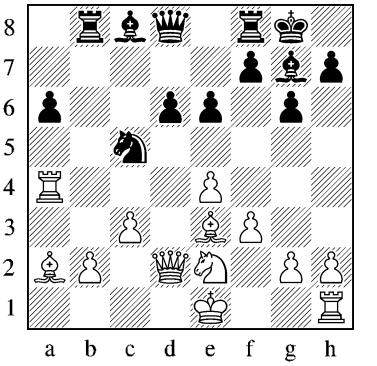
Suddenly White experiences serious queenside problems, mainly due to his delay in development.



14.♖b4

14.b4 weakens the c4-square chronically: 14...♘b6 15.♖a5 ♕c7 16.0–0 In Metz – Huisl, Doernigheim 1974, Black should have exploited his better structure with 16...♘xd5!N 17.exd5 ♕c4∓.

14.c3 weakens the d3-square, allowing a small trick in one line: 14...e6 15.♗a2 ♘c5



The point is that 16.♖a3 loses to 16...♖xb2!, so White has to play 16.♖b4 when 16...♖a8∓, followed by ...a5, endangers the white rook.

14...♖xb4 15.♕xb4 ♕c7 16.c3 a5 17.♕c4 ♘c5

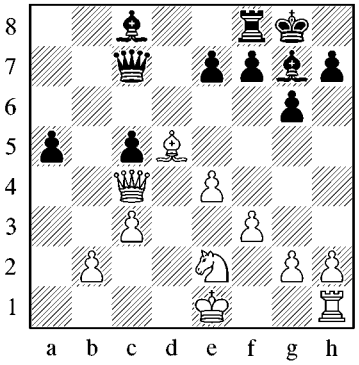
Threatening ...♗a6.

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18.♗xc5

18.b4? fails to defend the vulnerable diagonal: 18...axb4 19.cxb4 ♗a6 20.b5 ♕a5†–+

18...dxc5



Structurally, White's position looks great, but his king is in the centre and the d5-bishop is exposed.

19.♕a4 ♗d7 20.♕a2 ♗b5 21.♗c4 ♗xc4 22.♕xc4

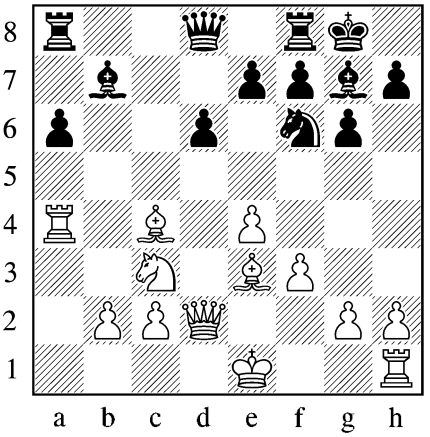
White has managed to keep the blockade on the c4-square, but he cannot save his b-pawn:

22...♖b8 23.b3 ♕b6∓

Grove – K. Schmidt, Helsingor 2015.

10...♘xf6 11.♖xa4 ♗g7 12.♗c4 ♗b7 13.♘e2 0–0 14.♘c3

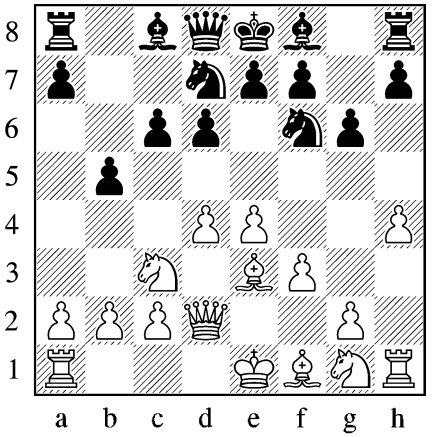
White seems to be getting active, but Black's central counterplay arrives just in time.



14...e6! 15.0–0 d5 16.exd5 ♘xd5 17.♗xd5 ♗xd5 18.♘xd5 ♕xd5 19.♕xd5 exd5 20.♗d4 ♖ab8

½–½ Anjuhin – Nouro, Finland 2006.

B6) 7.h4



This flexible move creates two main positional threats: g2-g4 and ♗h6. Its main drawback is that Black can parry them with one stroke.

7...h5!

Half measures do not help.

If 7...♗g7 8.♗h6 ♗xh6 9.♕xh6 White gains a useful tempo (h2-h4) over variation B1.

7...♘b6 8.g4 reaches a position which we avoid in variation B7.

8.♘h3

The knight is heading for the inviting g5-square. If Black reacts accurately, it will fail to create serious threats but, as revealed below, there are hidden dangers along the way.

8...♗g7!

Since the kingside is safe now, Black should castle as soon as possible, leaving queenside play for later and avoiding the dangers connected with e4-e5.

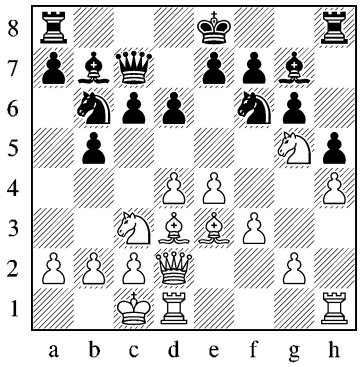
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I am not ashamed to show how I learned at my own expense that delaying castling is an unfortunate idea:

8...♕c7 9.♘g5 ♘b6?

9...♗g7 is better.

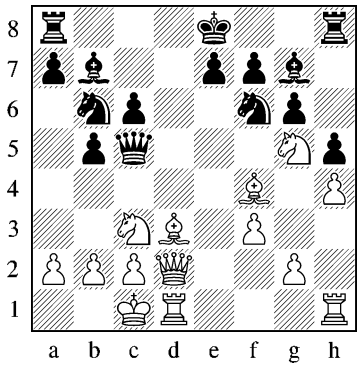
10.♗d3 ♗b7 11.0–0–0 ♗g7



12.e5 dxe5?!

12...b4 is somewhat better, but Black would still face problems after 13.♘e2.

13.dxe5 ♕xe5 14.♗f4 ♕c5



As pointed out by Aagaard, in Brunello – Marin, Edinburgh (blitz) 2007, White could have won with:

15.♘e6!!N fxe6 16.♗xg6† ♔f8 17.♕d8† ♘e8 18.♗b8!! ♗h6† 19.♔b1 ♔g7 20.♗xe8+–

The bishops' infiltration on the back rank is impressive.

9.♘g5 0–0 10.♗d3

Played in the spirit of my blitz game above.

10.0–0–0 avoids the main line plan based on ...e5, but offers Black a clear queenside target: 10...♘b6 11.♗d3 ♕c7 12.♖dg1 White prepares g2-g4 slowly. In Kr. Georgiev – Grigorov, Bulgaria 1984, Black should have started his attack with 12...b4N 13.♘e2 c5, with at least equal chances.

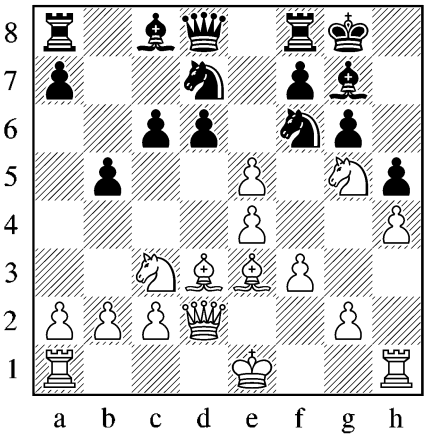
Castling short after advancing the h-pawn is not very consistent: 10.♗e2 ♕c7 11.0–0 ♗b7 12.♘d1 e5 13.♘f2 a6 14.♖fd1 ♖ad8 15.a4 d5 Black had equalized comfortably in Galego – McNab, Manila (ol) 1992.

10...e5!

Since White has no pressure on the d-file at all, this is the best way of preventing any tactical problems based on e4-e5.

11.dxe5

If 11.0–0–0, Black can start his typical counterplay with: 11...exd4 12.♗xd4 b4 13.♘e2 c5 14.♗f2 ♘e5=



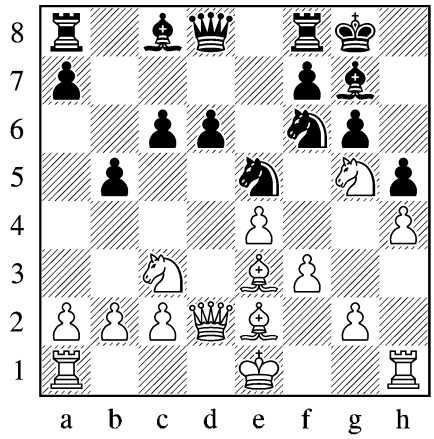
11...♘xe5!N

Stronger than 11...dxe5? as played in Kocwin – I. Belov, Katowice 1993, when White can stabilize the queenside in his favour with 12.a4!N±. Compare this with the similar situation that we avoided in Chapter 3 (see Nunn – Gelfand on page 76).

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12.♗e2

Wisely clearing the d-file before Black's attack gets started, since 12.0–0–0?! b4 13.♘a4 ♕a5 14.b3 ♘fd7, followed by ...♘b6, offers Black a strong initiative.



12...♘e8!

Black can afford such a seemingly passive move only because White has wasted time with his bishop.

The important point is that after 12...♕e7 13.0–0–0 ♖d8, the pin of the d6-pawn restricts Black's counterplay. For instance, after 14.♔b1 ♘c4 15.♗xc4 bxc4 16.♗d4 ♖b8 17.♔a1, the generally desirable 17...c5? drops a pawn to 18.♗xc5!+–.

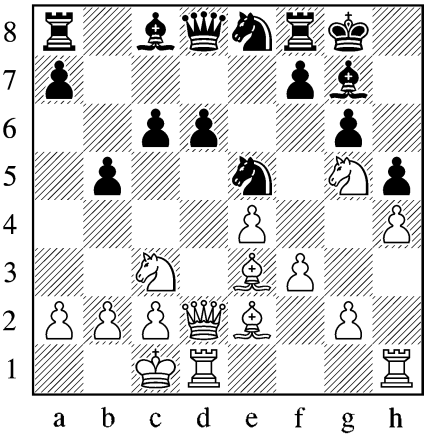
After the text move, White can no longer prevent Black's counterplay, and the knight will return to f6 later, after Black has made considerable queenside progress.

13.0–0–0

The most principled continuation, but also a risky one.

13.0–0 allows: 13...f6 14.♘h3 ♗xh3! The effect of the rook being missing from h1. 15.gxh3 f5 Black has good counterplay.

Black has excellent play after: 13.a4 b4 14.♘d1 ♕a5 15.0–0 d5!? 16.exd5 ♘d6! Recycling the knight with a strong initiative. 17.dxc6 ♖d8 18.c7 ♕xc7 19.♕xb4 ♕xc2 White's extra pawn is not too relevant while his pieces are badly placed.



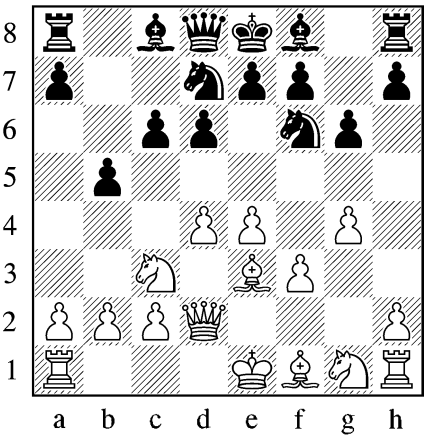
13...b4 14.♘b1

14.♘a4 creates the usual problems with the knight: 14...♕a5 15.b3 ♘d7 16.♔b1 ♘b6 17.♘b2 ♗c3 Followed by ...d5, with the initiative.

14...♕a5 15.a3 c5

Black has excellent attacking chances.

B7) 7.g4



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This is by far the most popular line and surely the critical one with this Sämisch Attack move order. White starts a massive pawn attack aimed at gaining space and causing Black coordination problems. He will decide later where to castle, how to develop his king's knight and whether or not to include a2-a4, which illustrates this line's maximum flexibility.

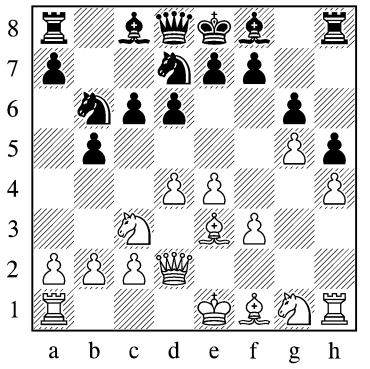
7...♗g7!

Now is a good moment to continue kingside development.

During my initial long years as a Pirc player, I mainly relied on the widely approved:

7...♘b6 8.h4 h5 9.g5 ♘fd7

Abstractly, Black's idea is perfectly logical, as both his knights are developed naturally.



10.d5!

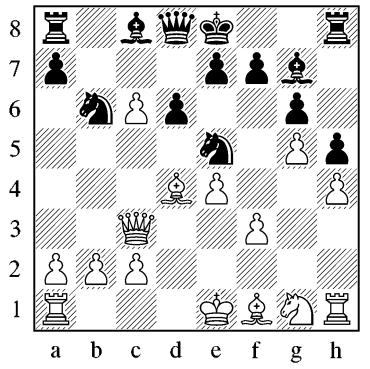
However, this takes full advantage of the bishop not being on g7, as Black cannot solve the queenside problems by the usual means, for instance:

10...♘e5

10...b4 11.dxc6 bxc3 12.♕xc3 ♘e5 13.♗d4 ♗g7 transposes.

11.♗d4 b4 12.dxc6 bxc3 13.♕xc3 ♗g7

13...♕c7 14.a4!, as in Tuomainen – V. Onischuk, Stockholm 2016, is similar.

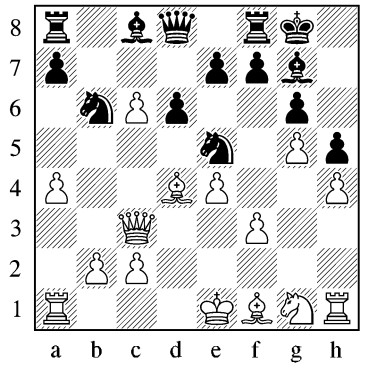


14.a4!!

A fantastic move, not only creating the potential threat of a4-a5 but also, more importantly, depriving the knight of the a4-square.

After 14.f4 ♘a4 15.♕a3 ♕a5† 16.b4 ♕c7 17.♕xa4 ♘d3†! 18.♗xd3 ♗xd4, the strong Pirc bishop offers Black enough counterplay.

14...0–0



15.f4!

The most accurate move order.

If 15.a5 ♘bd7 16.f4? ♘c5 17.fxe5 ♘xe4 18.♕e3 dxe5, then Black is much better. In this line, White can improve with 16.cxd7 ♗xd7, but then the need to prevent ...♖c8 forces 17.♗a6, when 17...♗c8 is liable to lead to a repetition of moves.

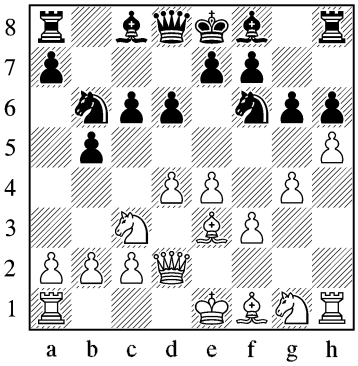
15...♕c7 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.♗e3

Black's lead in development does not provide full compensation for the far advanced (and extra) c6-pawn, for instance:

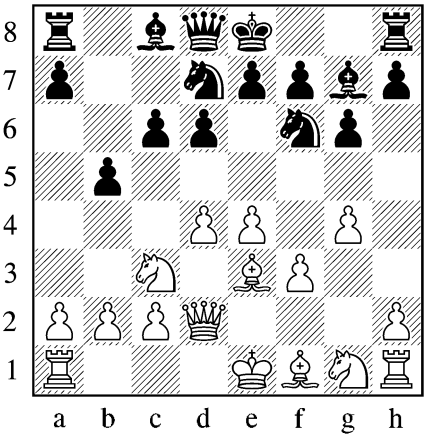
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17...♗e6 18.a5N
18.♘f3 ♖fd8 19.♘d2 ♖d6 20.a5 ♘d5!? 21.exd5 ♗xd5 22.♖g1 ♖xc6 was unclear in Sabadell i Ximenes – Garcia Rodriguez, email 2010.
18...♘c8 19.♘f3 ♘d6 20.♘d2
Followed by b2-b4.

After 7...♘b6 8.h4, I also examined the occasionally played 8...h6. Even though my long 'negotiations' with the engines regarding its evaluation ended successfully, I did not manage to convince myself that I would be glad to play this with Black after the untested but logical 9.h5N.

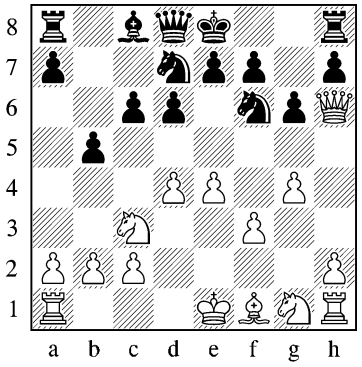


After both 9...g5 and 9...gxh5 10.gxh5, I felt that something was definitely missing from the opening's usual beauty.

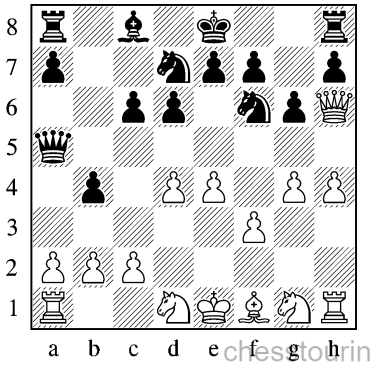


8.h4
The consistent continuation of the attack.

8.♗h6 ♗xh6 9.♕xh6
This gains a tempo compared to line B1, but the merits of g2-g4 are unclear. In this kind of position, White usually plays h2-h4-h5 without involving his g-pawn, while the weakening of the f4-square plays into Black's hands.



9...♕a5 10.h4N
10.♕d2 does not pose any problems: 10...♗b7 11.h4 h6 12.♘h3 b4 13.♘d1 c5 Black had taken the initiative in Delbaere – M. Gurevich, Brussels 1995.
10...b4 11.♘d1
After 11.♘ce2 c5 12.d5 ♘e5 13.h5 ♖g8! 14.hxg6 hxg6∓, Black plans a perfect blockade with ...g5, and if 15.g5?! ♘h5–+ then White's queen can return to play only by means of an insufficient exchange sacrifice with ♖xh5.



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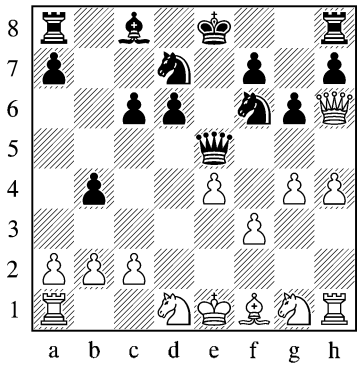
11...e5!

With most of his pieces on the back rank, White cannot maintain stability in the centre.

12.dxe5

12.♕d2 d5∓ blows White's centre apart.

12...♕xe5



13.♕g5

The consistent 13.h5? runs into 13...g5–+, threatening to trap the queen with ...♘g8, and if 14.♕g7 ♖g8 15.♕h6, then Black wins with either 15...♘xe4 16.fxe4 ♕xe4† 17.♘e2 ♕xh1 or simply 15...d5.

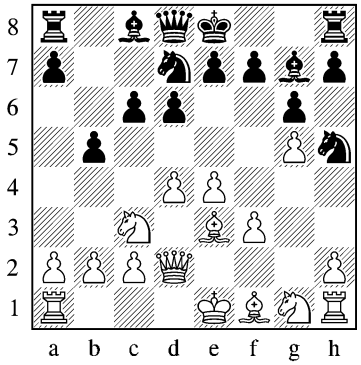
13...♕g3† 14.♘f2 h5 15.gxh5 ♘xh5∓

Black has stopped the attack, while retaining the better structure.

8.g5

This pawn thrust is an important alternative.

8...♘h5



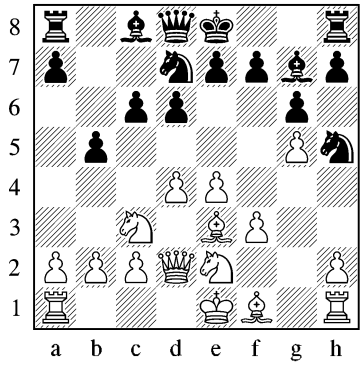
9.♘ge2

White hopes to provoke a knight exchange on g3, yielding him lasting pressure against the backward h7-pawn.

Using the other knight for this purpose leaves the kingside underdeveloped. After 9.♘ce2 there are two possibilities:

a) If Black uses the same plan as in the main line with 9...e5 10.♘g3 ♘f4, as in Wallace – Lindgren, Stockholm 2015, White can play 11.0–0–0N±, for if 11...♕xg5 then 12.♘h3!.

b) Instead, Black should focus on the weakened queenside: 9...♘b6 10.♘g3 ♘xg3 11.hxg3 ♗d7 12.♖h4 f5 13.♕h2 ♕c7 14.♖xh7 0–0–0 15.0–0–0 White's extra pawn is not too relevant for the moment, as he cannot create a passer. Black can start his attack with 15...fxe4N (15...♔b8 was a bit too slow in Atlas – Nijboer, Fuegen 2006) 16.fxe4 c5, for if 17.dxc5 then 17...♘a4 18.c3 b4 and White is in trouble.



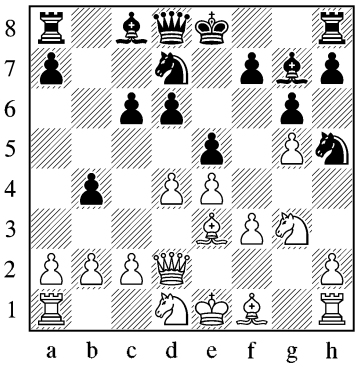
9...b4 10.♘d1 e5 11.♘g3

If 11.♘f2, as in Arbakov – Karasev, Leningrad 1971, Black gets strong counterplay on the dark squares with: 11...exd4N 12.♘xd4 c5 13.♘b5 0–0 14.c3 ♘e5 15.♗e2 ♕b6 16.♕xd6 bxc3 An interesting tactical moment. 17.bxc3 (17.♕xb6 cxb2! and Black wins) 17...♘xf3†! Black regains an important pawn. If 18.♗xf3 there is nothing wrong with 18...♕xb5∓,

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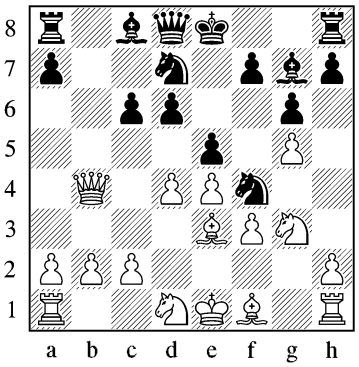
but even stronger is 18...♗xc3†!, overloading the knight and winning.

Against 11.d5, as in S. Bojkovic – Zakharov, Vrnjacka Banja 1963, 11...c5N is the simplest. Black plans ...0–0 followed by ...f6, while 12.♘g3 ♘f4 13.♗xf4 exf4 14.♕xf4 0–0∓ offers Black the usual overwhelming Sämisch King's Indian compensation due to his strong bishop.



11...♘f4 12.♕xb4

Clearing the path for the monster on g7 is dangerous: 12.♗xf4 exf4 13.♕xf4 ♗xd4 14.♕xd6 ♗e5 15.♕d2 ♘c5 16.♕xd8† ♔xd8 The e5-bishop dominates the position and several white pawns are weak. The immediate threat is ...♗f4, regaining the pawn. 17.♗c4 ♗e6 18.♗xe6 ♘xe6 19.♘e2 ♔c7 Black threatens ...h6, soon regaining the h2-pawn. 20.a3!? a5 21.axb4 axb4 22.♖xa8 ♖xa8 23.h4 ♖a1 Black has at least enough play for the pawn.



In E. Sveshnikov – V. Sveshnikov (!), Bratto 2013, the best way to defend the d6-pawn was:

12...d5!N

Taking full advantage of Black's superior mobilization.

13.h4

Defending the g5-pawn.

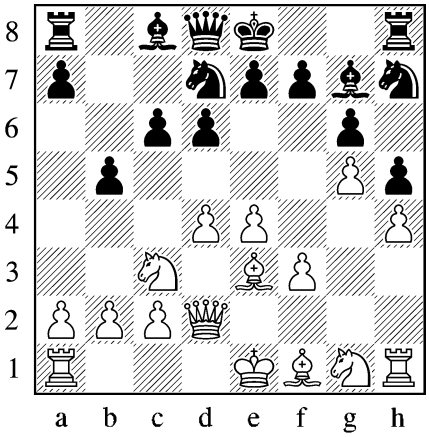
13...♕c7 14.♕d2 ♘e6∓

White's position is hanging and it is hard to see how he will bring his king to safety.

8...h5 9.g5

9.gxh5?! is pointless, as after 9...♘xh5 White has no obvious way of unblocking the kingside.

9...♘h7



For many years I have lived with the impression that retreating with the knight to h7 leaves Black with insufficient counterattacking potential, even though lifelong Pirc specialist Predrag Nikolic played like this under slightly different circumstances. Recently, I discovered that Colin McNab has frequently played this concrete variation.

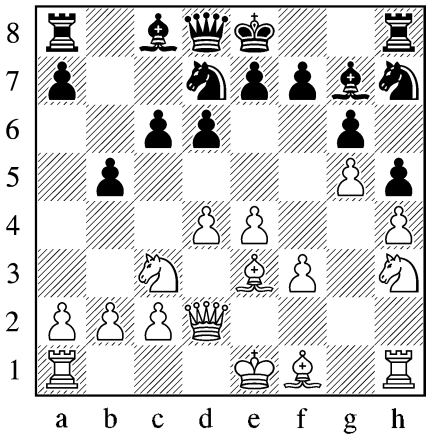
Freezing the kingside is a major achievement for Black, as White's main way to make progress on this wing is by sacrificing a piece on h5, a plan which is not easy to carry out and has double-edged consequences. In order to ensure

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the knight's successful recycling via f8-e6 Black needs to adopt Chernin's plan from variation B2, based on ...d6-d5. Sometimes the knight may replace its colleague on d7, and in a few cases it can support a counterattack based on ...f6.

In practice White has tried four main continuations: **B71) 10.♘h3**, **B72) 10.♘ge2**, **B73) 10.f4** and **B74) 10.a4**.

B71) 10.♘h3



As we know, this is a typical way to develop the knight in the Sämisch schemes, but in this line it is somewhat slow, allowing Black to castle before carrying out his global regrouping.

10...0–0

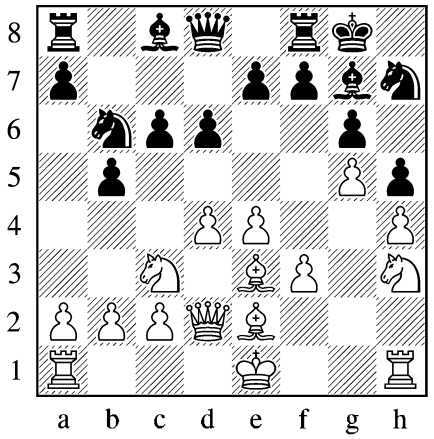
The following game is a perfect illustration of Black's possible problems if active queenside operations are started with his king's knight out of play: 10...a6 11.♘f2 ♕c7 12.♗e2 0–0 13.f4 b4 14.♘a4 c5 15.0–0–0 cxd4 16.♗xd4 e5 17.fxe5 ♘xe5 18.♘b6 ♖b8 19.♘d5± White had achieved complete domination in Ciocaltea – D. Gurevich, Beersheba 1982.

11.♗e2N

Preparing kingside castling looks sensible.

After 11.0–0–0 ♘b6 12.♘f4 b4 13.♘b1 a5, Black's attack was progressing smoothly in V. Ivanov – A. Larsen, email 2008.

11...♘b6

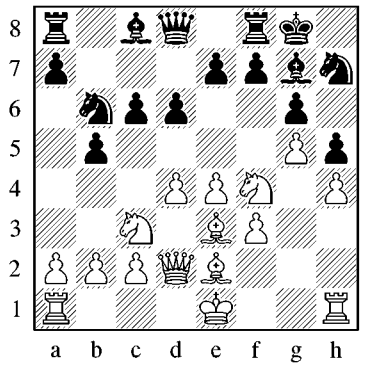


12.♘f2

The most natural move.

12.♘f4

Taking measures against Black's planned ...d5, but exposing the knight to ...e5.



12...♕c7 13.b3

Preparing ♘d3.

13.0–0 e5 forces the knight to retreat to a passive position: 14.♘g2 ♖e8 15.f4 b4 16.♘d1 exd4 17.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 18.♕xd4 c5 19.♕d3 ♗b7 20.♗f3 ♘f8 21.f5 Preventing ...♘e6 but weakening the e5-square. 21...c4

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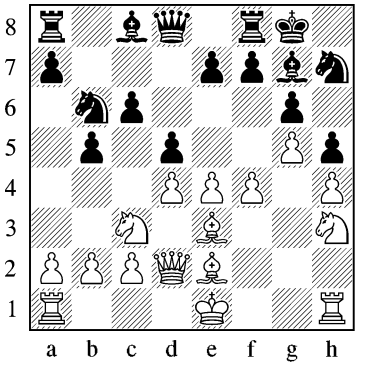
22.♕d4 ♕c5 Black plans ...♘fd7-e5, with at least equal chances.

13...e5 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.♘d3 ♖d8=

Black will soon achieve an optimal regrouping with ...♘f8-e6, targeting the important f4- and d4-squares.

With the knight on h3, advancing the f-pawn is not too effective:

12.f4 d5



Threatening to win a pawn or simply get control over the light squares with ...b4 and ...dxe4.

13.e5

White is not well enough prepared for 13.f5 b4 14.♘d1 dxe4 15.fxg6 fxg6 16.♘f4 ♗f5 17.♕xb4 e6∓, followed by ...♖f7 and ...♘f8, or possibly ...♘d5. Black has a solid position, while White faces problems defending his centre and finding a safe location for his king.

13...♘c4 14.♕c1

After 14.♗xc4 bxc4 15.♘f2 ♗f5, Black can continue with ...♕c8, ...♖d8, and ...♘f8, and then either ...♘e6 or ...♘d7 followed by ...e6 and ...♗f8. Black has perfect stability on the light squares, with prospects of also undermining the dark squares with ...c5.

14...♖e8

Since White's central pawns are blocked on dark squares, it makes no sense to exchange the e3-bishop unless this guarantees the undermining of the centre with ...c5 and maybe ...f6. The text move clears the knight's path to e6.

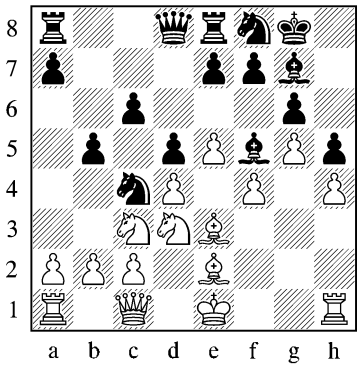
15.♘f2

The knight is not easy to expel from c4, for if 15.♗f2 ♘f8 16.b3? then 16...♕a5+– exploits the hanging knight on c3.

15...♘f8 16.♘d3

The only way to make use of this knight. 16.♗d3 c5∓ is excellent for Black.

16...♗f5

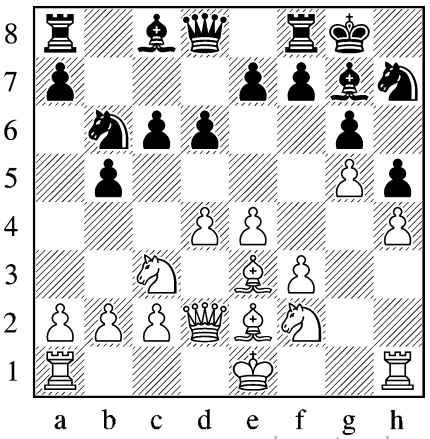


17.♗f2

If 17.♘c5, Black has a pleasant choice between the simple 17...♘e6 and winning a pawn with 17...♘xe3 18.♕xe3 ♗xc2, although the latter may offer White some compensation along the c-file.

17...♘e6

Black has comfortable play.



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12...a5!?

Since White's plan develops slowly, Black can afford to spend time on such prophylactic moves, too. The main idea is that after a later ...b4 the b-pawn is defended, allowing Black to react immediately in the centre.

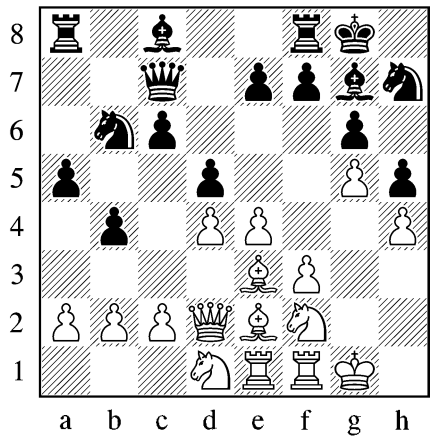
However, there is nothing wrong with 12...♖e8 or 12...d5, of course.

13.0–0 d5 14.♖ae1

The most natural way of keeping the tension.

14.exd5 b4 15.♘ce4 ♘xd5 offers Black easy play, while if 14.♗d3? e5∓ White's centre is hanging.

14...b4 15.♘cd1 ♕c7

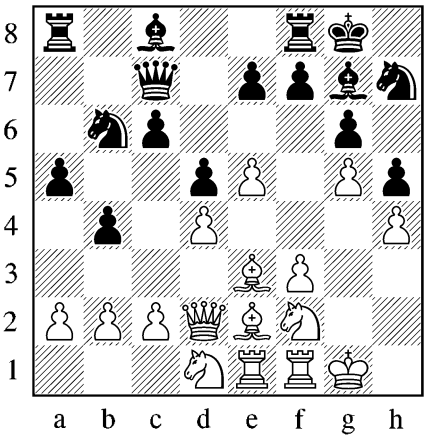


16.e5

The safest way of preventing ...♕g3†, though it doesn't threaten Black at all.

16.♗f4 runs into 16...e5 17.♗g3 dxe4 18.fxe4 ♕d8!, unpinning the e5-pawn and putting White's centre in trouble.

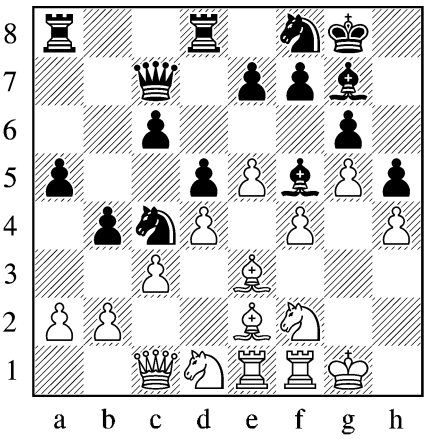
The consistency of Black's global plan is revealed after the neutral 16.♔g2 dxe4 17.fxe4 ♖d8 18.c3 ♘f8, followed by ...♘e6 with unbearable pressure on d4.



16...♖d8!

Better than 16...♖e8, since it supports a central break with ...c5.

17.f4 ♘c4 18.♕c1 ♘f8 19.c3 ♗f5



Black has a promising position. Here are a few illustrative lines:

20.cxb4

20.b3 ♘a3 threatens ...♘c2.

20...♘e6 21.♗xc4

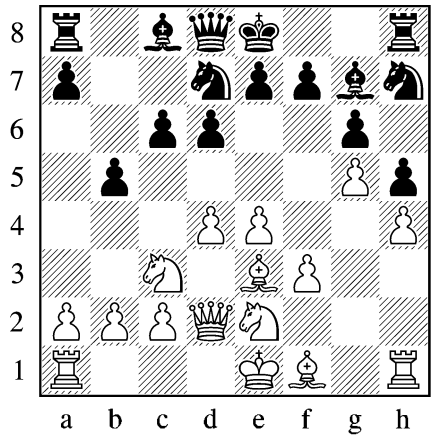
21.b3 ♘xe3! A justified exchange, since the pawn on d4 has lost its natural support from the c-pawn. 22.♕xe3 axb4 White faces problems with his d4- and a2-pawns.

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21...dxc4 22.♕xc4 axb4∓

Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn.

B72) 10.♘ge2



This seems a less natural way to develop the knight, as it stands in the bishop's way, but it has more poison than night be expected. The hidden plan is to meet ...d5 with e4-e5, followed by placing the knights on g3 and f4 and playing ♘xh5. This can prove dangerous if Black castles hurriedly, but he has a better move order.

10...♘b6 11.b3

White's main plan includes ♗g2, so he needs to defend the c4-square.

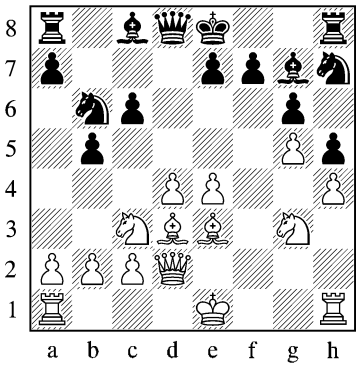
11.♘f4 0–0 12.♗e2 transposes to the note on 12.♘f4 in variation B71 above.

11.♘g3 d5 12.♗d3 dxe4

The text ensures White cannot maintain the integrity of his centre.

Black can also play more speculatively with 12...0–0, with the permanent threat of ...♘c4, trading the knight for one of the enemy bishops.

13.fxe4



13...♗xd4

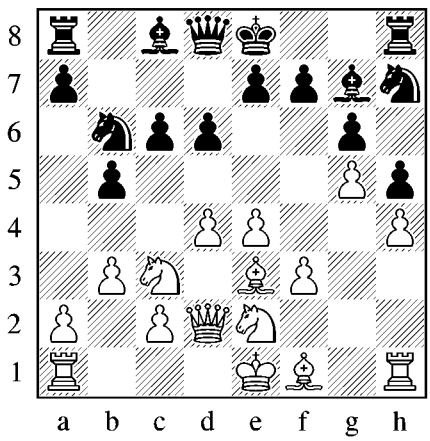
This works out well tactically, though 13...♗g4 (preventing 0–0–0) is also playable, when White's problems in the centre persist.

14.♗xb5 ♗xe3 15.♗xc6† ♗d7 16.♗xd7† ♕xd7 17.♕xe3 ♘c4

Black will regain the pawn on b2 with at least equality, since defending the pawn lands White in trouble:

18.♕c1?! 0–0 19.b3 ♘e5 20.♕f4 f6∓

Black has more than enough play for the pawn.



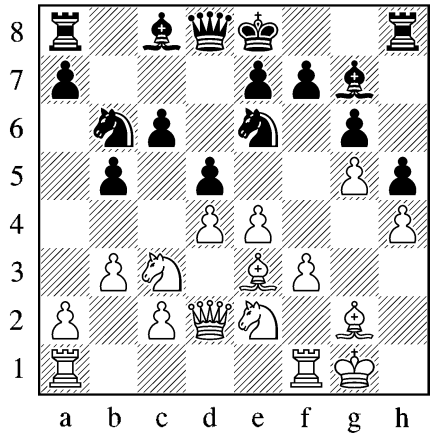
11...d5!N

The following line illustrates White's hidden idea: 11...a5 12.♗g2 d5 (12...a4 was played in Radulov – Milev, Sofia 1963, but it is too slow) 13.0–0 0–0 14.♘g3 ♕c7 15.e5 e6 16.♘ce2 ♖d8 17.♘f4 White will play ♘fxh5 with a dangerous attack.

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12.♗g2 ♘f8 13.0–0 ♘e6

Due to his somewhat inflexible development, White will soon need to take a decision in the centre.

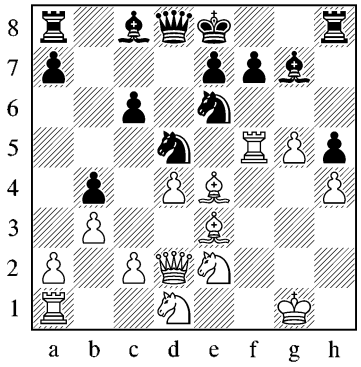


14.a4

This requires the highest accuracy from Black.

14.♖ad1 aims to prepare ♘g3 by overprotecting the d4-pawn, but it leaves the c3-knight short of good squares: 14...b4 15.♘b1 a5=

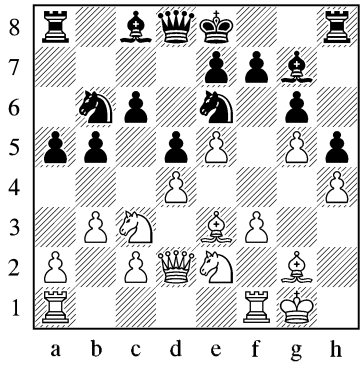
The attack starting with 14.f4 is not frightening: 14...b4 15.♘d1 dxe4 16.♗xe4 ♘d5 17.f5 gxf5 18.♖xf5



18...♘f8! The knight improves its position with gain of time. 19.♖f2 ♘g6 Black has regrouped perfectly.

Blocking the centre is not dangerous before Black has castled:

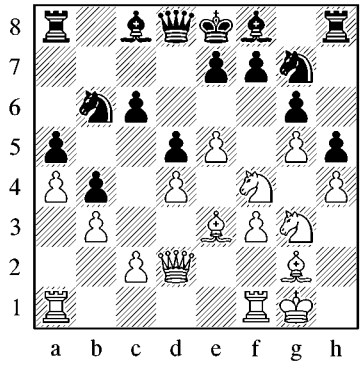
14.e5 a5



15.♘g3

15.f4 takes the f4-square away from the knights and is easily parried with 15...♘c7.

15...♗f8 16.a4 b4 17.♘ce2 ♘g7 18.♘f4



18...e6!

The bishop has to content itself with the f1-a6 diagonal, because after 18...♘f5 19.♘xf5 ♗xf5 20.e6! fxe6 21.♗h3 Black would have serious problems defending the e6- and g6-pawns.

19.♘d3 ♗a6 20.♖fc1 ♘d7 21.c3 bxc3 22.♕xc3 ♖c8 23.♗f1 ♗e7=

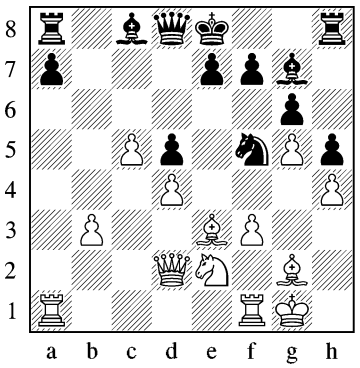
Followed by ...0–0.

Black can neutralize White's initiative after:

14.exd5 ♘xd5 15.♘xd5 cxd5 16.a4 ♘c7 17.axb5 ♘xb5 18.c4 ♘d6 19.c5 ♘f5

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The knight has finally reached a dream square.



20.♗f2 0–0 21.b4 ♗d7 22.♘c3 a6

Black plans to stabilize with ...♗c6 or ...e6, followed by ...♕b8-b7 and ...♖fd8.

23.♘xd5?!

This runs into some trouble:

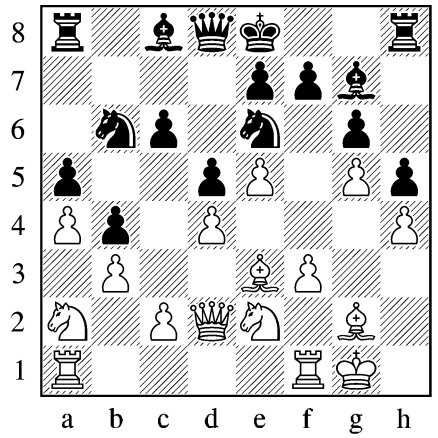
23...♗c6

Simpler than 23...♗b5 24.f4, when White obtains compensation for the exchange.

24.♘b6 ♘xd4∓

Black has eliminated an important pawn, retaining a strong centralized position. The a8-rook is taboo due to ...♘xf3†, winning the queen.

14...b4 15.♘a2 a5 16.e5



16...♗f8

The safest plan, clearing the g7-square for the knight, though 16...0–0 is also possible: 17.c3 bxc3 18.♘axc3 (18.♕xc3?! ♗a6 19.♖fe1 c5 lets Black seize the initiative) 18...♗a6 19.f4 f5 20.exf6 exf6 21.f5 gxf5 22.g6 White certainly has compensation for the pawn, but possibly not enough for an advantage.

17.c3 bxc3 18.♕xc3 ♗d7!

Once again, Black needs to overprotecting the e6-square, because 18...♗b7 19.♗h3 ♘g7 20.e6! offers White too much play.

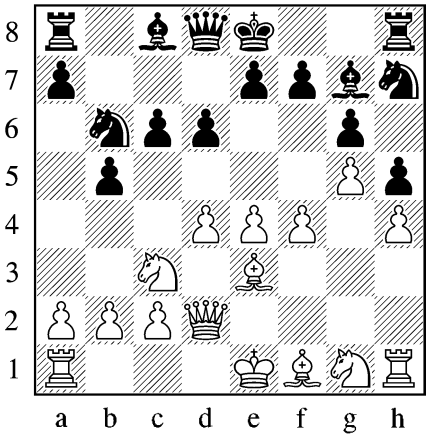
19.♘ac1 ♘g7 20.♘d3 e6 21.♖fc1 ♗e7

Black has completed his minor-piece regrouping and will continue with ...0–0, ...♕c7 and ...♖fb8, with entirely satisfactory play.

B73) 10.f4

White prepares to develop the knight in the most active way, but weakens the e4-square earlier than in the previous lines, adding force to the thematic break ...d6-d5.

10...♘b6



11.♘f3 0–0

Although ...♘c4 forms part of Black's plan, forcing ♗xc4 and thus weakening the light squares (including e4), Black should wait until

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White develops his bishop in order to gain a tempo.

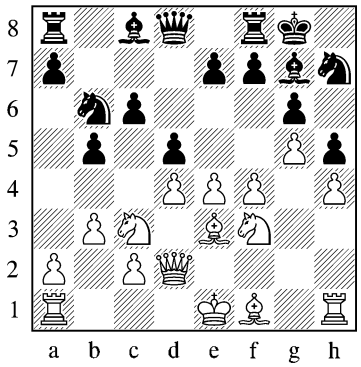
12.♗d3

White can prevent the knight jump with:

12.b3

However, advancing pawns on both wings uses up a considerable amount of time.

12...d5

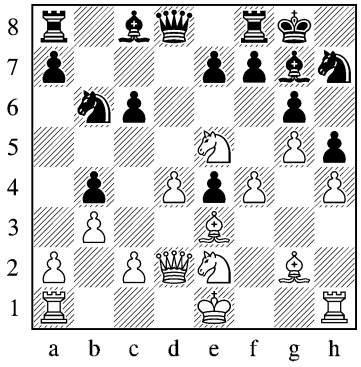


13.♗g2

After the weakening of the a1-h8 diagonal, 13.♗d3 causes White problems in the centre: 13...b4 14.♘e2 ♗g4 15.0–0 c5 Black has strong counterplay. If 16.dxc5?! ♗xa1 17.cxb6 axb6 18.♖xa1 ♗xf3 19.exd5 ♕xd5∓, Black is not only an exchange up, but is also likely to be first to create threats along one of the long diagonals, despite the absence of the g7-bishop.

13...b4 14.♘e2 dxe4 15.♘e5

In Swan – McNab, Hawick 1995, Black should have played:



15...♗f5!N

Continuing with development and defending the pawn.

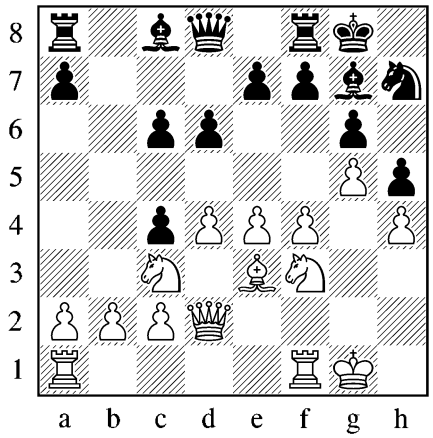
16.♘g3 ♕c7 17.♗xe4

If 17.♕xb4 ♘d5 18.♕d2 f6 19.♘xf5 gxf5∓ then White loses stability, since 20.♘g6 leaves the knight caged after 20...♖fd8.

17...♗xe4 18.♘xe4 ♘d5=

Black enjoys perfect stability and can regroup with the familiar ...♖fd8 and ...♘f8.

12...♘c4 13.♗xc4 bxc4 14.0–0



14...♖e8!?N

Preparing ...♘f8-e6.

There is no need to rush in with 14...d5, since this allows White some central activity: 15.♘e5 dxe4 16.♘xe4 ♕d5 17.♘c3 ♕e6 In Norwood – McNab, Eastbourne 1990, White could have obtained attacking chances with 18.f5!N gxf5 19.♘e2.

15.♕e2

Going straight for the c4-pawn seems like a critical try, so I have taken it as my main line.

White has several other plausible moves; I have analysed a) 15.♖f2, b) 15.♘e2, c) 15.b3 and d) 15.f5.

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a) Mechanically concentrating forces on the kingside does not produce the desired effect: 15.♖f2 ♘f8 16.f5 gxf5 17.♖af1 ♘g6 and Black has regrouped perfectly.

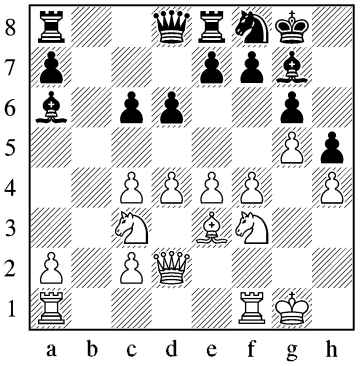
b) 15.♘e2 ♗h3 16.♖f2 ♘f8 17.♘g3 d5 18.f5 dxe4 19.fxg6 ♘xg6 20.♘xe4 ♕d7 is likewise a fine regrouping for Black, giving him much the safer king.

c) 15.b3

This pursues the aim of winning the c4-pawn, since 15...cxb3 16.axb3 would improve White's structure. Just as in the main line, however, Black can ignore the threat.

15...♘f8! 16.bxc4 ♗a6

Black regains the pawn, obtaining a wonderful diagonal for his bishop. Stubbornly defending c4 would only cause White trouble, for instance:



17.♕d3 d5 18.exd5 cxd5 19.♘xd5 ♖c8

Black wins at least an exchange.

20.♘d2 ♖xc4 21.♘xc4 ♕xd5 22.♘b6

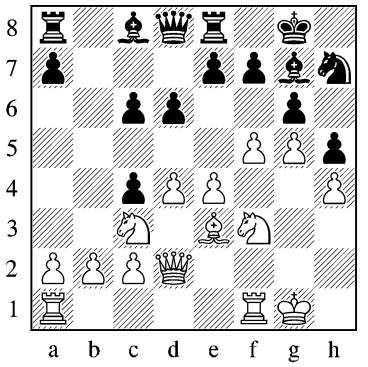
This last trick is fated to fail.

22...♕b7 23.♘c4 ♕c8

The knight is lost.

d) 15.f5

White is not well enough prepared for this attacking thrust.



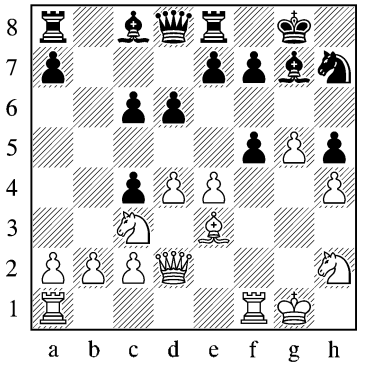
15...gxf5!

Obtaining the g6-square for a minor piece is more relevant than the slight kingside weakening.

16.♘h2

The most consistent move order, since 16.♕e2 weakens the defence of the d4-pawn: 16...♕b6 17.♖ab1 f4 18.♗xf4 e5 19.g6!? Weakening the a2-g8 diagonal in order to ensure the subsequent retrieval of the pawn on d4. 19...fxg6 20.♗e3 exd4 21.♘xd4 ♕c7! (avoiding 21...♗xd4? 22.♕xc4†) With an extra pawn, two bishops and the safer king, Black is winning, since 22.♕xc4† runs into 22...d5 followed by ...♕g3†.

If 16.exf5 ♗xf5, Black will continue with ...♗g6, strengthening his kingside and completing his development.



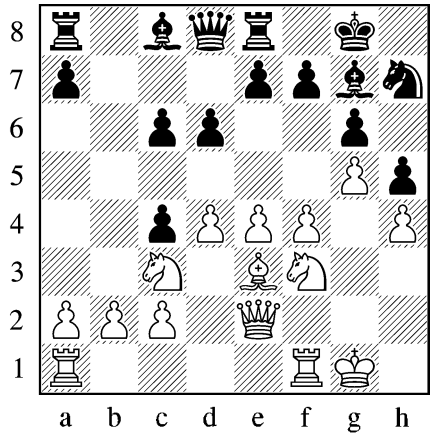
16...e6!

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Helping the knight join the attack with 16...fxe4 17.♘xe4 would make little sense.

17.♕e2 ♘f8 18.♕xh5 ♘g6

White's attack is stuck and Black has improved his coordination. He could continue with ...c5, meeting dxc5 with ...♗b7, starting a counterattack along the weakened diagonal.



15...♘f8!

Reckoning that when White takes the offered pawn, it will leave the white king exposed.

16.♕xc4 ♕d7

Not the only good move, but the most straightforward one. Black defends the c6-pawn, threatening not only the obvious ...♕g4†, but also ...a5 followed by ...♗a6.

17.♕e2

After 17.♔f2 a5 18.♖g1 ♗a6 19.♕a4 ♖eb8 20.♕a3 ♖b4, Black's pressure across the whole board provides ample compensation for the pawn.

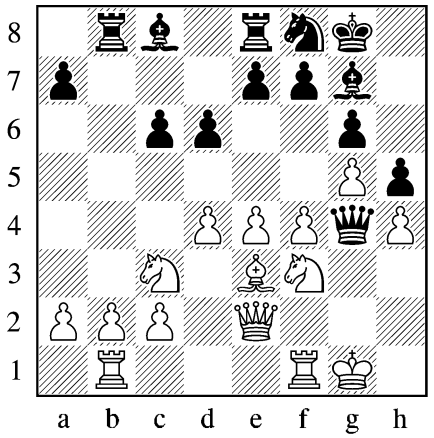
17...♖b8!

As revealed later, inserting this move and White's answer greatly helps Black.

18.♖ab1

18.b3 c5, followed by either ...♗b7 or ...♘e6, causes White additional trouble.

18...♕g4†



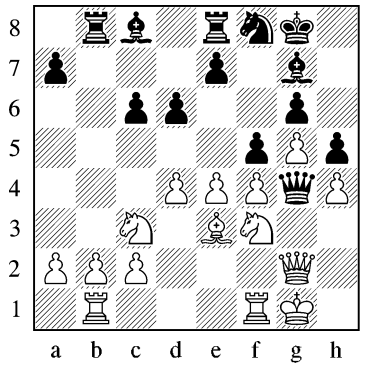
19.♔f2

Hoping to expel the queen with ♖g1.

19.♕g2

This natural move meets an aggressive response:

19...f5!



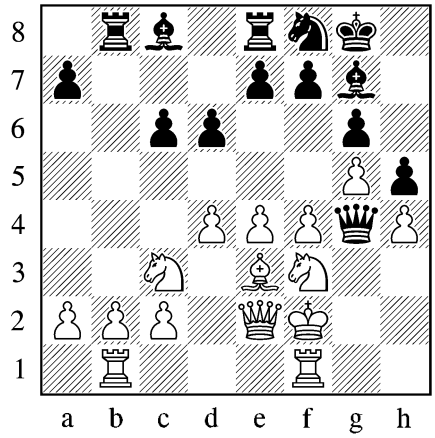
20.gxf6

After 20.e5 ♘e6, Black regains the pawn, for instance: 21.♔h2 ♘xf4 22.♕xg4 fxg4 23.♗xf4 gxf3 24.♖xf3 ♗f5= White cannot save the c2-pawn, because 25.♖f2? ♖b4 shatters the centre. The intermediate 17...♖b8! is fully justified in this line.

20...exf6 21.♖fe1 d5 22.e5 ♗f5 23.♖e2 ♘e6

Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn.

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19...♘e6 20.♕d2

20.♖g1 allows 20...♘xf4∓.

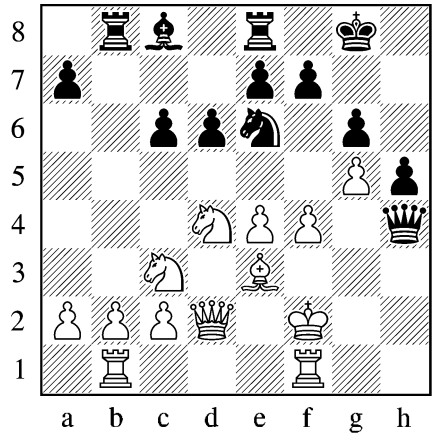
20...♗xd4!

Black's perfect coordination and the exposed enemy king make such tactical blows possible.

21.♘xd4

After 21.♗xd4 ♘xf4, Black threatens ...♗a6 and ...c5 to tighten the net around the king: 22.♖h1 c5 23.♖bg1 ♘h3† 24.♖xh3 ♕xh3 25.♗e3 ♖xb2∓ This is the second time that the rook has proved useful on the b-file. The material balance is about even, but White's structure is weak and his king exposed.

21...♕xh4†



22.♔g1

White has to accept a draw by perpetual.

22.♔g2 ♘xd4 23.♗xd4 ♗h3† 24.♔g1 ♕g3† 25.♔h1 ♗xf1 26.♖xf1 ♖xb2∓ leads to a familiar situation.

The same goes for 22.♔e2 ♗a6† 23.♔f3 ♕h3† 24.♔f2 ♘xd4 25.♗xd4 ♗xf1 26.♖xf1 ♖xb2∓.

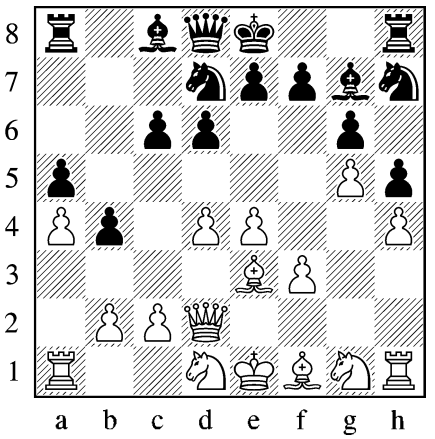
22...♕g3†

Draw.

B74) 10.a4

In many lines Black willingly plays ...b5-b4, so provoking it at such an early stage, when Black has not yet defined his intentions in the centre, is not the best use of a tempo.

10...b4 11.♘d1 a5



12.c3

The logical sequel to the previous operation.

12.♗d3

After this neutral move, Black can modify his plan:

12...e5!?N

Even though he uses a different pawn than usual to undermine the centre, Black's main

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plan remains recycling his knight with ...♘f8-e6.

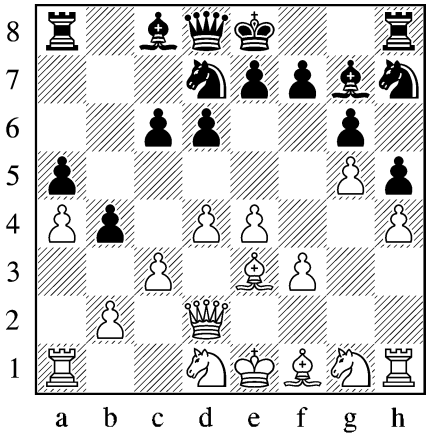
12...d5 13.e5 ♘b6 is not so good when White can defend the c4-square: 14.b3 ♘f8 15.c3 bxc3 16.♕xc3 ♗d7 17.♘e2± gave White an edge in Ciocaltea – Vujakovic, Zagreb 1979.

13.♘e2 exd4 14.♘xd4

14.♗xd4 does not force the immediate bishop exchange, as after 14...♘e5 the knight enjoys some stability in the centre: 15.♕e3 0–0 16.♘f2 ♖e8 17.0–0–0 ♘f8 Black has decent play.

14...♗b7 15.♘f2 0–0 16.0–0 ♘c5 17.♗c4 ♖e8 18.c3 bxc3 19.bxc3 ♘f8

Followed by ...♘fe6 and possibly ...d5, with no worries for Black at all.



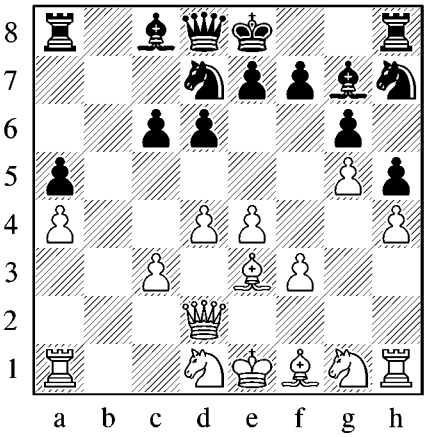
12...bxc3!N

Even though this looks like a concession, the exchange of pawns weakens the c4-square, allowing Black to carry out his main plan under favourable circumstances.

The apparently more consistent 12...♖b8 actually wastes a tempo: 13.♗d3 e5 14.f4 bxc3 15.bxc3 exd4 16.♗xd4 0–0 17.♘f3 ♘c5 18.♗xc5 dxc5 In David – McNab, Debrecen 1992, White should have played 19.e5N±, restricting the g7-bishop and planning the invasion of the f6-square.

13.bxc3

13.♘xc3 ♖b8 offers Black play along the b-file.



13...d5!

Preparing the knight jump to b6 then c4.

14.e5

14.♗d3 can be met by 14...e5, solving all the opening problems.

14...♘hf8 15.♗d3 ♘b6 16.♘e2 ♘c4 17.♗xc4 dxc4 18.♘g3 ♘e6=

Black has a comfortable version of the familiar structure.

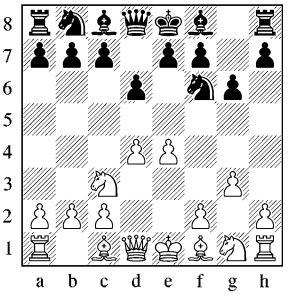
Conclusion

The Sämisch Attack, combining ♗e3 with f2-f3, leads to a heavy strategic battle with many possible tactical twists. Black's main task is keeping his knight play fluent, an issue best illustrated by the approach I recommend in line B7, where the knight retreats to the h7-square, but may later re-emerge with ...♘f8-e6.

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Chapter 11

Various 4th Moves



Fianchetto System

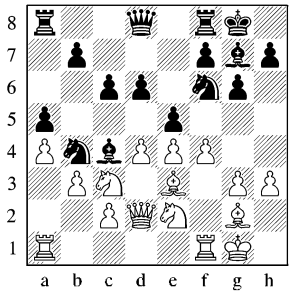
Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.g3 ♗g7 5.♗g2 0–0 6.♘ge2

6...e5

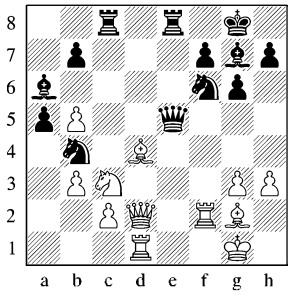
A) 7.0–0 c6 8.a4 a5 271
A1) 9.♗g5N 271
A2) 9.b3 272
B) 7.h3 c6 274
B1) 8.0–0 274
B2) 8.a4 a5 9.0–0 ♘a6 10.♗e3 ♘b4 11.♕d2 ♗e6 279
B21) 12.f4 281
B22) 12.♖ad1 ♗c4 13.b3 ♗a6 14.♖fe1 ♕c7 283
B221) 15.♘c1 284
B222) 15.f4 286
B223) 15.g4 290

B21) note to 13.♖f2



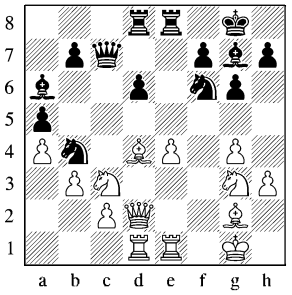
13...♗xe2!N

B21) after 21.♗d4



21...♕xg3!N

B222) note to 19.e5!?



21...♖c8N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.g3

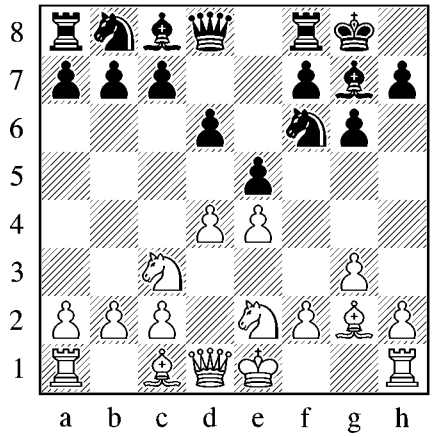
This solid variation involves a similar approach to that of the Classical System. White does not put immediate pressure on the centre, but hopes that natural development will offer him a long-term edge.

The system involves a slower development than the Classical, since White has spent two tempos on developing his king's bishop, but on the other hand the e4-pawn is safely defended, thus neutralizing the attempts at counterplay based on ...exd4 and ...♖e8.

4...♗g7 5.♗g2 0–0 6.♘ge2

The seemingly more active 6.♘f3, which transposes to variation B of Chapter 4, has the drawback of allowing a pin to be created by 6...♗g4. The text move avoids this problem but creates a new one: Black can start fighting for central space unhindered.

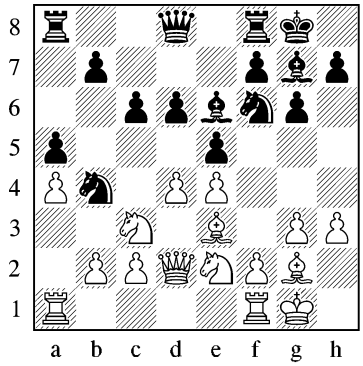
6...e5



Plans based on ...c5, starting with 6...♘a6 or 6...♘bd7, have enjoyed temporary bursts of popularity, but I find the immediate break in the centre the most logical.

During my long years as a Pirc player, I have always met the fianchetto system with the plan examined in this chapter. Black has several alternatives along the way, but I do not see any reason to deviate from my favourite plan. Black will play 7...c6, threatening to expand with ...b5. After the logical a2-a4, Black has a fluent developing plan: ...a5, ...♘a6-b4, ...♗e6-c4, ...♕c7 and ...♖ad8.

In order to get a better understanding of the way I have organized the analytical material, it is important to know that the following main tabiya is examined in line B2, and all its subsequent branches.



Even though Black does not threaten to break in the centre before completing his development, White cannot fully enjoy his space advantage, since his e2-knight is passive, restricting the mobility of the major pieces at the same time. Activating the knight is essential but also time-consuming, usually allowing Black to obtain counterplay in one way or another.

All the lines I examine in the first part of the chapter are early White attempts to gain some benefit from omitting h2-h3 or a2-a4. While a small delay in playing the former usually leads to a transposition, refraining from the latter generally offers Black excellent play after ...b5.

Returning to the position after 6...e5, since Black is not yet threatening a queenside expansion, White has a choice between **A) 7.0–0** and **B) 7.h3**.

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A) 7.0–0

White keeps developing without paying attention to the g4-square. Since Black's set-up suggested in variation B is flexible and consists of a long series of moves, I do not see any reason to deviate from it. I believe that White will have to play h2-h3 at some later point anyway, thereby transposing to the main lines.

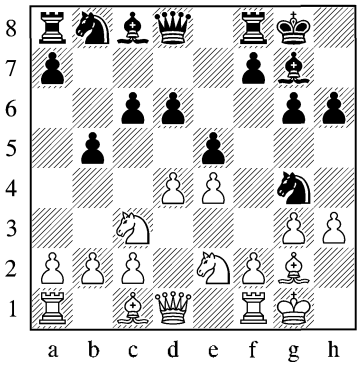
7...c6

The attempt to punish the omission of h2-h3 with 7...♘c6 leads to a slight problem: 8.dxe5 (White is forced to release the tension since 8.♗e3 runs into 8...♘g4) 8...dxe5 9.♗g5 White has chances to invade the d5-square.

8.a4

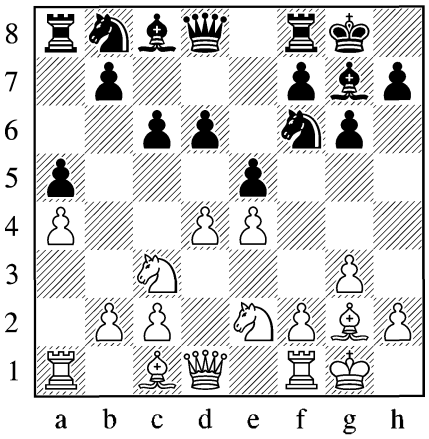
If 8.♗e3 ♘g4 9.♗c1 (obviously forced), Black has a choice between 9...♘f6 with a repetition, and 9...b5 with a possible transposition to line B1.

8.♗g5 is slightly trickier: 8...h6 9.♗e3 ♘g4 10.♗c1 b5 11.h3



11...exd4! (With his pawn on h7 Black could simply retreat his knight, but 11...♘f6 12.a3 ♗b7 13.♗e3 ♘bd7 14.♕d2 ♔h7 15.♖ad1 yields White an important developing tempo.) 12.♘xd4 ♘e5 Black has promising queenside play.

8...a5



Since 9.♗e3 runs into 9...♘g4, and 9.h3 transposes to line B2, we will examine only **A1) 9.♗g5N** and **A2) 9.b3**.

A1) 9.♗g5N

This natural move has not yet been tried in this particular position.

9...♘a6

Black does best to ignore the pin.

After White has prevented Black's queenside expansion, chasing the bishop away is less advisable: 9...h6 10.♗e3 ♘g4 11.♗c1 ♘a6 12.h3 exd4 (12...♘f6 13.♗e3 transposes to a line we avoid in line B2, since it will later yield White a tempo after ♕d2) 13.♘xd4 ♘e5 14.b3 ♘b4 15.♗e3 White will continue with ♕d2, ♖ad1, ♖fe1 and finally f2-f4. Black has no immediate worries, but his chances for counterplay are uncertain.

10.♕d2 ♘b4 11.♖ad1 ♕b6!?

For once it is wise to change the customary move order.

11...♗e6 exposes the bishop to: 12.f4 exd4 13.♘xd4 ♕b6 Black threatens ...h6, forcing the bishop to retreat to the unappealing h4-square, but White can avoid this. 14.f5 ♗c4 15.♖f2 ♘g4

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16.f6 ♗h8 17.♖f4 ♘e5 (threatening ...♘bd3) 18.♕f2 White's attacking chances are not totally clear, but it is annoying to play with the king's bishop immobilized on h8.

12.h3

Finally White has to advance his rook's pawn.

If 12.f4 ♘g4 or 12.♖fe1 ♘g4, White has problems defending d4 and c2.

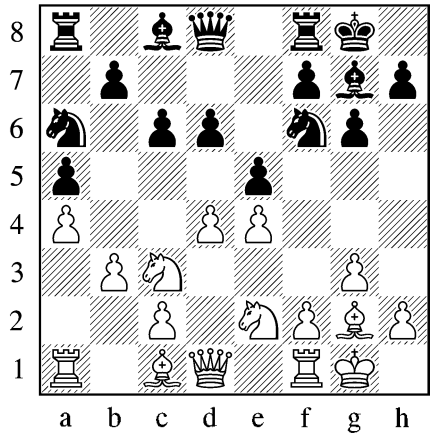
12...♗e6 13.♖fe1 ♗c4

We have transposed to the 10.♗g5 line in the notes to variation B2; see page 280.

A2) 9.b3

This looks like a flexible set-up, but the bishop will have little to do on either b2 or a3.

9...♘a6



10.♗b2

White has also tried the apparently more active:

10.♗a3

This is likely to lead to a loss of time later, since Black can obstruct the bishop with ...♘b4.

10...♖e8 11.♕d2 ♘b4 12.♖ae1 ♕b6

A comfortable and active square for the queen, with the bishop far from e3.

13.♗b2 ♗e6

Black intends to complete his development with ...♖ad8, when ...d5 will become a major issue.

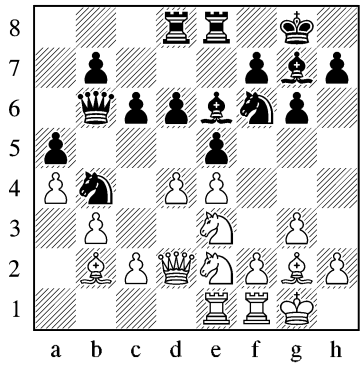
14.♘d1

A typical manoeuvre, aimed at giving some life to the b2-bishop.

14.f4? runs into 14...♘xc2 15.♕xc2 exd4, regaining the piece in view of the threat of ...d3†, and keeping two extra pawns after ...dxc3 and ...♗xb3.

14.♔h1 ♖ad8 15.f4 is strongly met by: 15...♘g4! 16.h3 (16.♘d1 f5∓ and 16.f5 ♗h6+ are also good for Black) 16...♘xc2! 17.♕xc2 ♘e3 18.♕d2 exd4 19.♘d1 ♘xf1 20.♖xf1 c5 After the inevitable capture of the b3-pawn, Black will have a rook and three pawns for two minor pieces, while the b2-bishop is very passive.

14...♖ad8 15.♘e3



15...♘g4!

Leaving White with problems defending c2 and d4.

16.h3

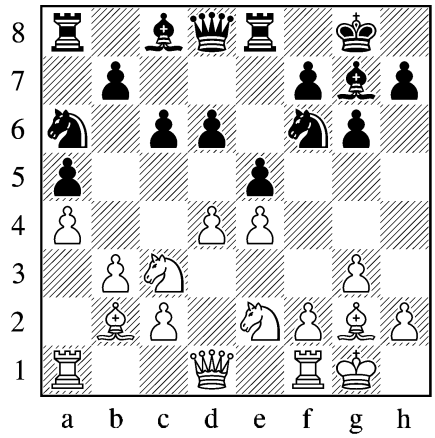
16.♘xg4 ♗xg4 does not solve White's problems.

16...♘xe3 17.fxe3 d5∓

Black had achieved harmonious development and the initiative in the centre in Timman – Donner, Amsterdam 1973.

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10...♖e8



11.♕d2N

More flexible than:

11.♖e1 ♘b4 12.♘a2

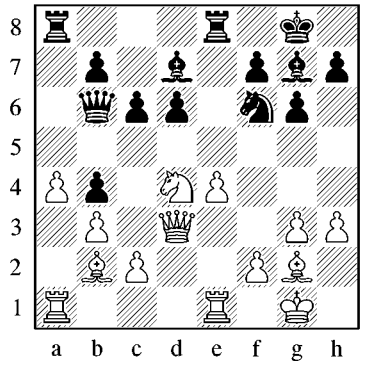
White hurries to exchange the active knight, rather landing in familiar problems with 12.♕d2 ♘g4.

12...exd4 13.♘xb4 axb4 14.♘xd4 ♕b6 15.h3 ♗d7

Defending the b5-square in order to threaten ...c5 followed by ...♗c6, with strong pressure on the e4-pawn.

16.♕d3

Black had achieved a favourable queenside position in Melcher – Lorscheid, Germany 1995. The most active continuation would have been:



16...d5N 17.exd5

17.e5 ♘e4 18.f4 f6∓ dissolves White's centre.

17...♘xd5 18.♗xd5 cxd5∓

White cannot benefit from blockading the isolani, since both his wings are weak and the knight is pinned.

11...♘b4 12.♖ad1 ♗e6 13.f4

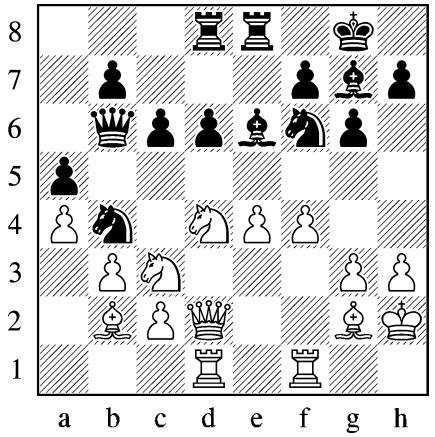
13.♖fe1 ♕b6 14.h3 ♖ad8 followed by ...d5 leads to a familiar pattern.

13...♕b6 14.h3

Preparing a gradual gain of space with g3-g4.

14.f5 tends to hand the centre to Black: 14...♗d7 15.♔h1 ♖ad8 16.h3 gxf5 17.exf5 exd4 18.♘xd4 d5 The central majority will start advancing before White can launch his attack with g3-g4-g5.

14...exd4 15.♘xd4 ♖ad8 16.♔h2



16...♗c8

Preparing the following knight manoeuvre.

17.♖fe1 ♘d7

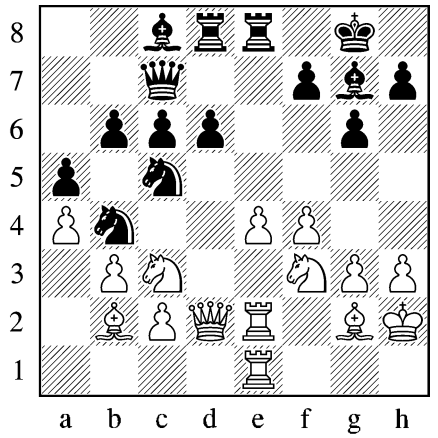
Threatening 18...♗xd4 19.♕xd4 ♕xd4 20.♖xd4 ♘xc2.

18.♖e2 ♘c5

Threatening ...♘cd3.

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19.♘f3 ♕c7 20.♖de1 b6

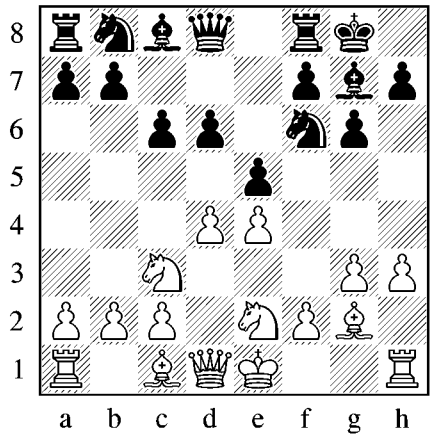


Followed by ...♗a6, with the continuing harassment of the white pieces offering Black adequate counterplay.

B) 7.h3

This is the most popular move. We know that from the perspective of our main plan it makes little difference if White takes the g4-square under control now or slightly later, but the idea is to prepare to answer 7...♘c6 with 8.♗e3.

7...c6



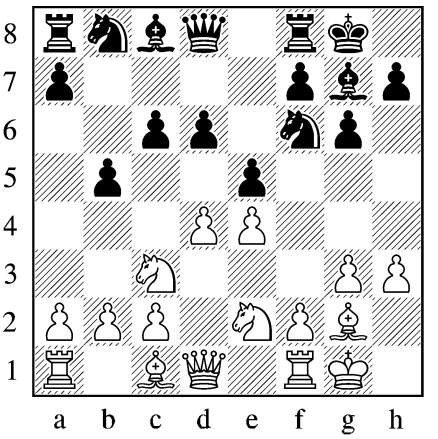
White faces another important choice: **B1) 8.0–0** and **B2) 8.a4**.

B1) 8.0–0

As in line A, White hurries with his development without paying attention to prophylactic pawn moves. The difference is that here Black can take advantage of this carelessness at once:

8...b5

We know from Chapter 1 that reaching this set-up spares Black any opening problems, ensuring him a flexible position with good queenside counterplay.



9.a3

It appears that White must waste a tempo on a pawn move anyway.

9.♗e3

Ignoring the possibility of ...b4 allows Black to start his counterplay with:

9...exd4!

The correct move order!

If 9...b4 10.dxe5! dxe5 11.♘a4, White controls the c5-square.

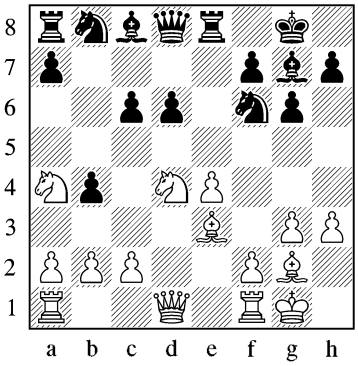
10.♘xd4N

After 10.♗xd4 b4 11.♘a4 ♖e8 12.f3 c5 Black was already better in Vidarsson – He. Gretarsson, Reykjavik 2004,

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10...b4 11.♘a4 ♖e8

The pressure against the central pawn is annoying.



12.c3

Hoping for 12...bxc3 13.♘xc3, consolidating the centre.

If 12.f3?! d5 White's centre is vulnerable.

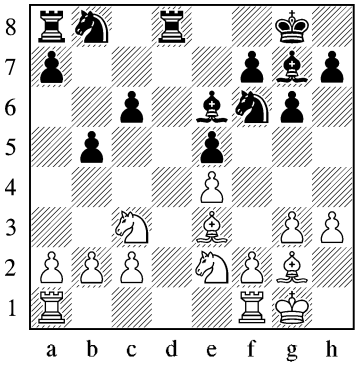
12...♘xe4 13.cxb4 ♘xg3!

Keeping the extra pawn.

Releasing the central tension offers Black free development:

9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♕xd8 ♖xd8 11.♗e3 ♗e6

This is a logical reaction to the premature exchange in the centre, since Black no longer needs to fear d4-d5.



12.f4

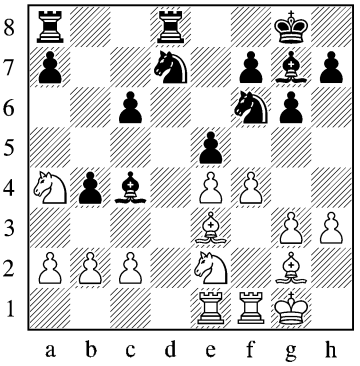
The manoeuvre initiated by 12.♘c1 is too slow: 12...♘bd7 13.♘d3 a5 Black has ideal development and good pawn play.

The text looks active, but does not solve the problem of the e2-knight. In A. Szabo – Dolana, Zalakaros 2016, Black could have continued with:

12...b4N 13.♘a4 ♗c4

Starting the fight for the c5-square – a subsequent ...♗b5 will question the stability of the a4-knight.

14.♖ae1 ♘bd7



15.f5

Invading the c5-square with 15.♘c5 helps Black to clear paths for most of his pieces: 15...♘xc5 16.♗xc5 exf4 17.gxf4 ♘h5 Attacking the b2-pawn and threatening ...♗xe2 followed by ...♘g3, or simply ...♖d2.

15...♗b5 16.b3 ♗f8 17.g4 ♘e8

Freeing the d7-knight from the defence of the f6-knight helps to prepare ...♗c5.

18.♘b2 ♗c5

After the bishop exchange, White's attack is not too effective, while Black's control over the dark squares offers him excellent prospects in any endgame.

9...♗b7 10.♗g5

White tries to add force to d4-d5, or else provoke ...h6.

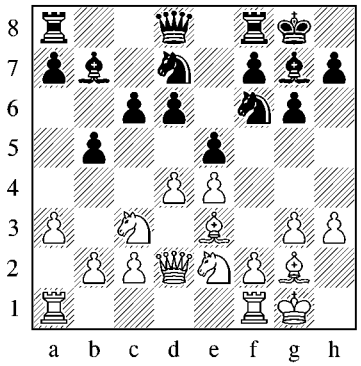
10.♗e3

This neutral move gives Black a free hand in his development.

10...♘bd7 11.♕d2

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If 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♘c1, as in Weiss – Kotz, Austria 2011, then 12...♕e7N 13.♘d3 a5 14.b4 ♖fd8 offers Black harmonious development.



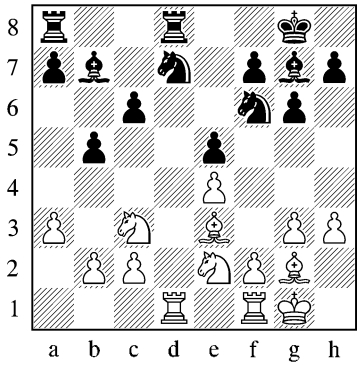
Black has tried a variety of options here, but I favour the direct:

11...exd4N 12.♘xd4 ♖e8

Planning ...a5 followed by ...b4 and ...c5 undermining the e4-pawn, or simply ...♘b6 or ...♘e5, heading for the c4-square.

Even after the black bishop's commitment to b7, releasing the tension does not promise much:

10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♕xd8 ♖xd8 12.♗e3 ♘bd7 13.♖ad1



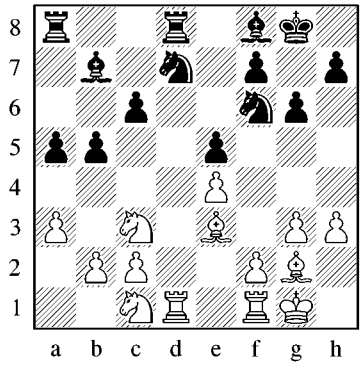
13...♗f8

The standard regrouping. Since there is not much to be done on the long diagonal, the bishop prepares the favourable exchange with ...♗c5, supporting ...b4 along the way.

14.♘c1

14.f4 is most simply met with 14...♔g7, overprotecting the knight in in case the f-file is opened: 15.f5 a5 16.g4 h6 Since h3-h4 is not easy to prepare, this slows down White's positional attack considerably. 17.♘c1 ♗c5 Black has excellent play on the dark squares.

14...a5



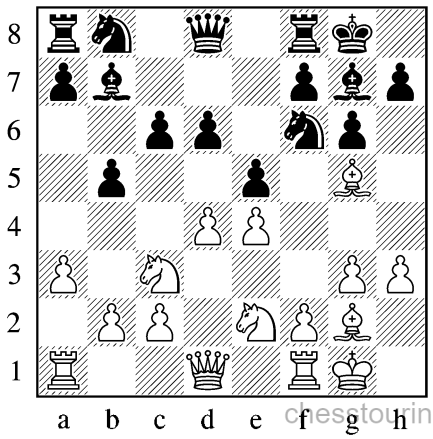
15.g4?!

This only weakens the dark squares. The threat of g4-g5 is illusory, since Black intends to relocate his knight anyway.

15.♘d3N is more logical, but Black does not face any problems after 15...b4 16.axb4 axb4 17.♘b1 ♗a6, possibly followed by ...♘e8-c7-e6.

15...b4 16.axb4 axb4 17.♘3e2 ♗a6 18.f3 ♘c5 19.b3 ♘e6 20.♔f2 ♘d7∓

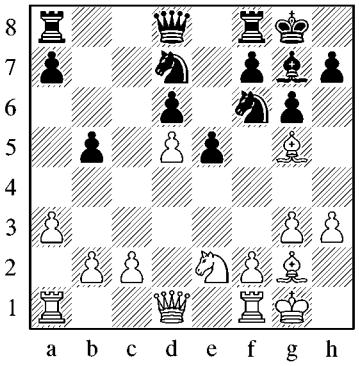
With active play and the better structure for Black in Mieles Palau – Marin, Calvia (ol) 2004.



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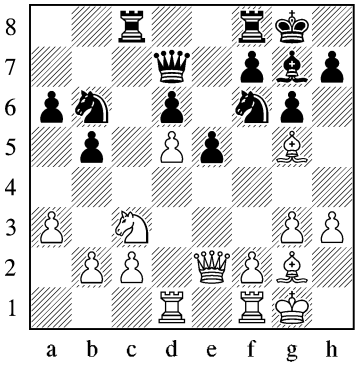
10...♘bd7 11.♕d2

Advancing in the centre is overambitious: 11.d5 cxd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5 13.exd5



This highly asymmetrical position offers Black clear plans on both wings. Sooner or later, the black majority on the kingside will start to advance, but for the moment it is important to prevent White carrying out active queenside operations based on a3-a4 or ♘c3-a2-b4-c6.

13...♘b6 14.♘c3 ♕d7 15.♕e2 a6 16.♖ad1 ♖ac8



17.♖d3

White must be wary of exchange sacrifices on c3.

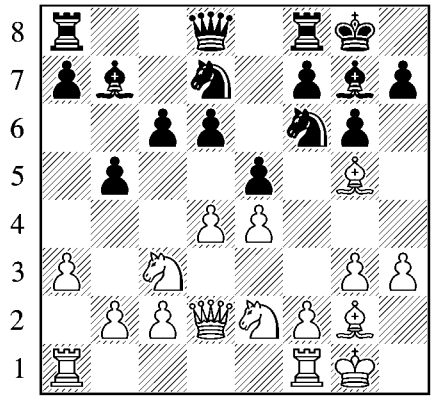
17.♘a2 allows the tactical blow: 17...♕f5 18.♗xf6 ♖xc2∓.

If 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6 18.♘a2 a5, Black has perfect control on both wings.

17.a4 invites 17...♖xc3 18.bxc3 ♘xa4, with full compensation for the exchange.

17...♖fe8

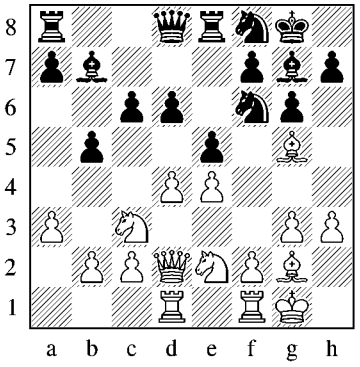
Black had excellent play in Kallio – Marin, Gothenburg 2000, in view of the permanent threats ...e4 and ...♘c4.



11...♕c7

Certainly not the only good move.

One textbook illustration of what Black should avoid is: 11...♖e8 12.♖ad1 ♘f8?! (Any neutral developing move, including 12...a5, would do, but taking the knight far from the d5-square gives White an advantage.)



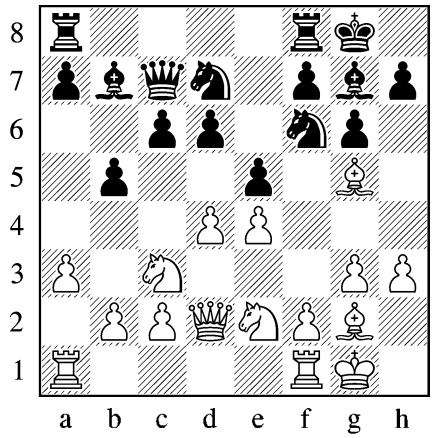
13.d5! cxd5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5 15.♗xf6 ♕xf6 16.♕xd5± With a perfect position for White due to his control of the light squares in Gufeld – I. Belov, Moscow 1992.

Black could start concrete play already:

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11...exd4N 12.♘xd4 a5 13.♖fe1 ♖e8 14.♖ad1 ♕b6 (only not 14...♕c7? 15.♘dxb5 cxb5 16.♘xb5 ♕b6 17.♘xd6, giving White three pawns for the piece and a strong initiative) 15.♗e3 b4 16.♘a4 ♕c7 Black has comfortable play.

Equally good is 11...a5N, as preparation for the opening of the centre.



12.♗h6

The bishop exchange is double-edged; White aims for attacking chances, but Black obtains good counterplay on the dark squares.

However, Black also has great play after 12.♖ad1 a5.

12...a5 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.g4

Preparing an attacking plan based on ♘g3 and ♘d1-e3.

The superficially active 14.f4 does not do much for the e2-knight: 14...b4 15.♘d1 ♗a6∓

14...b4 15.♘d1 c5

After the bishop exchange, this is the most logical plan, increasing Black's control of the dark squares.

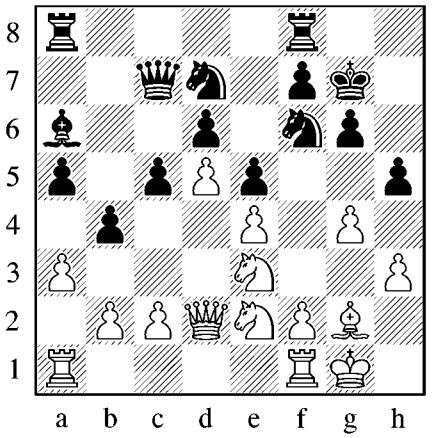
16.d5

This is also logical, as White must at least try to restrict the enemy bishop.

16.dxe5 dxe5 17.♘g3 ♖fd8 offers Black free play.

16...♗a6 17.♘e3 h5

Preparing this pawn break with 17...♖h8 also comes into consideration, with a possible transposition to the game continuation.

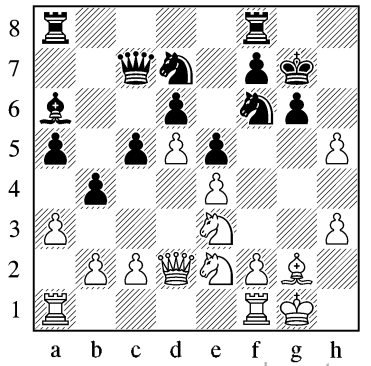


18.♘g3!?

Threatening 19.♘ef5†, with a mating attack.

18.g5 just leaves White with weaknesses on the dark squares: 18...♘h7 19.h4 f6 20.gxf6† ♖xf6, followed by ...♖af8 and ...♕d8.

Although it is ugly strategically, 18.gxh5 deserves to be mentioned.



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18...♗xe2! (not 18...♘xh5? 19.♘f5†!) 19.hxg6!? White wins a pawn due to the threat of ♘f5†, but the strategic concessions are more important. 19...fxg6 20.♕xe2 ♘h5 Black has full compensation in view of his perfect control of the dark squares.

18...♖h8

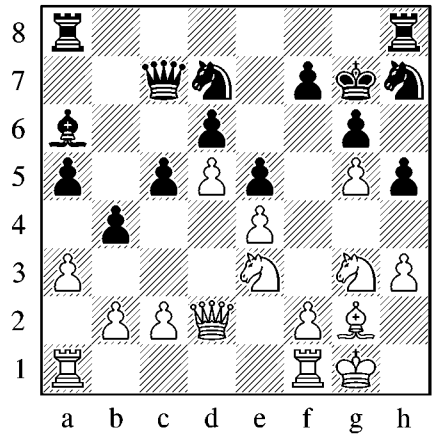
Protecting not only the h5-pawn, but also the h6-square, thus parrying both of White's threats.

19.g5?!

A dubious sacrifice.

Better is 19.♖fe1, although Black gets excellent play with: 19...h4 20.♘gf1 Hoping to regroup with ♘h2-f3, to control the g5-square. 20...♗xf1 21.♖xf1 ♘h7∓ Black will continue with ...♕d8 and the occupation of the g5-square.

19...♘h7



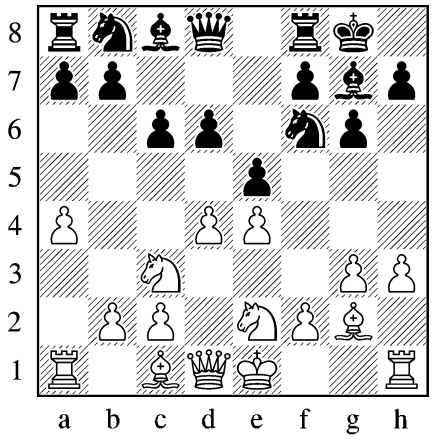
20.h4

It is already too late to maintain material equality: 20.♖fe1 h4 (but not 20...♘xg5? 21.♘ef5† and White wins) 21.♘gf1 (21.♘ef5† gxf5 22.♘xf5† ♔g8 does not offer White realistic attacking chances) 21...♕d8 Black wins the g5-pawn.

20...♗xf1 21.♖xf1 ♖hf8∓

Black went on to win in Kirov – Vogt, Leipzig 1980.

B2) 8.a4



The conclusion from the previous section was clear: White does best to spend a tempo restraining Black's queenside play.

8...a5

Black stabilizes the queenside and prepares to transfer the knight to the excellent b4-square.

The plan based on gradual queenside expansion involves losing a tempo compared to line B1. Things are not entirely clear, but the following line illustrates Black's possible problems:
8...b6 9.0–0 ♗b7 10.♗e3 ♘bd7 11.♕d2 a6 12.♖ad1 ♕c7

One important point is that after 12...b5? 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.g4, the threat of g4-g5 leaves the d7-knight hanging. White's extra tempo for ♖ad1 is crucial in this case.

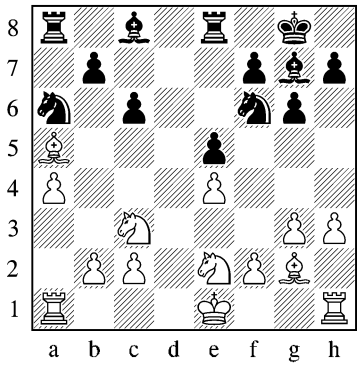
In Planas Torrea – Malo Guillen, Spain 2012, White should have played:
13.dxe5N dxe5 14.♕d6

White has some initiative.

9.0–0

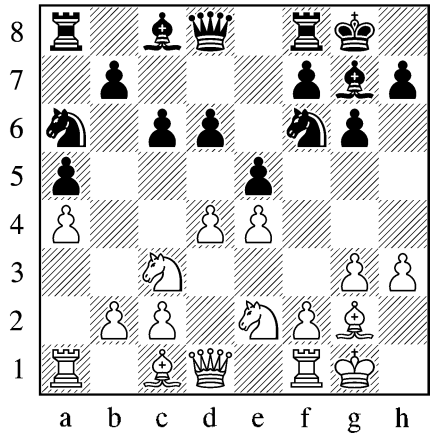
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Targeting the b6-square at once with 9.♗e3 does not prevent Black's manoeuvre: 9...♘a6 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♕xd8 ♖xd8 12.♗b6 ♖e8 13.♗xa5



13...♘d7 14.♘d1 The threat of trapping the bishop with ...b6 forces White to leave the a4-pawn undefended. 14...♘ac5 15.♗b4 ♖xa4 Black had achieved comfortable equality in Garcia Cano – L. Marin, Cullera 2002.

9...♘a6



10.♗e3

This is by far the most common move.

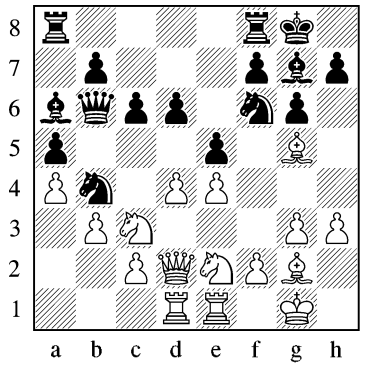
10.♗g5

As usual, this demands some accuracy of us.

10...♘b4

As in some previous lines with ♗g5, Black refrains from ...h6 and continues in the style of the main line, to which play may later transpose.

11.♕d2 ♗e6 12.♖ad1 ♗c4 13.♖fe1 ♕b6 14.b3 ♗a6



15.♔h2

Preparing f2-f4.

The immediate 15.f4? is premature due to 15...♘h5∓, when no fewer than three white pawns are vulnerable, on g3, d4 and c2.

After the better 15.♗e3 ♕c7, play has simply transposed to the position after 14 moves in variation B22.

15...♖ad8 16.f4 h6!

Underlining the exposed placement of the bishop.

17.♗h4

If 17.♗xf6?! ♗xf6 18.fxe5? ♗g5, the only way to save the queen is 19.♘f4, losing the knight to 19...dxe5.

17...♖fe8∓

White's position is overextended and he has to watch out for 18...♗xe2 19.♘xe2 exf4, targeting the e4-pawn.

10...♘b4 11.♕d2

White is not well enough prepared for:

11.g4 h5!

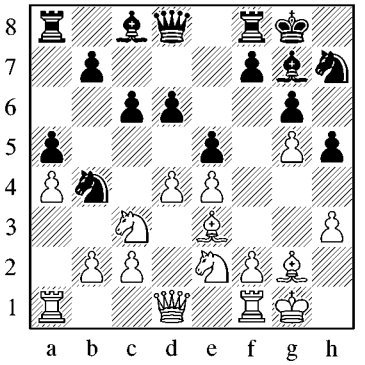
11...♗e6 12.d5 more or less justified White's 11th move in L. Vajda – Kaabi, Hungary 1996.

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12.g5

Keeping the tension with 12.f3 does not favour White. In Mateuta – Jovanovic, Patras 1999, Black should have played: 12...exd4N 13.♗xd4 (or 13.♘xd4 d5 14.e5 ♕e7 and Black wins the e5-pawn) 13...♗h6 White faces obvious problems in completing his development.

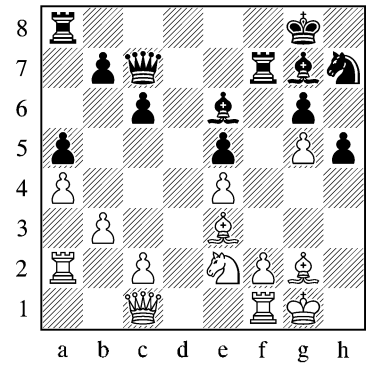
12...♘h7



13.dxe5

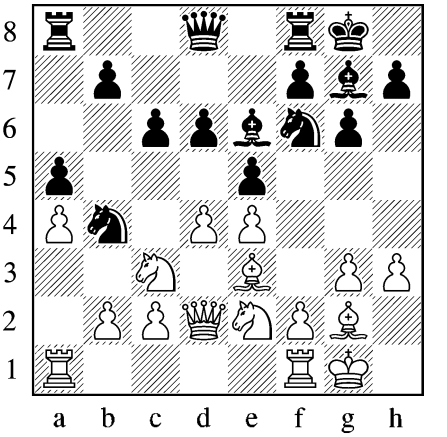
13.♕d2 loses a pawn to 13...exd4 14.♘xd4 ♗xd4 15.♗xd4 ♘xg5. The bishop pair does not offer adequate compensation, since the kingside weaknesses also offer Black tactical ideas – for instance, 16.♔h2? ♗xh3! resulted in a quick win for Black in Popchev – Ivanisevic, Belgrade 2003.

13...dxe5 14.♕c1 ♗e6 15.b3 f6 16.h4 fxg5 17.hxg5 ♖f7 18.♘a2 ♘xa2 19.♖xa2 ♕c7



White had no active plan in Bosch – Marin, Sitges 2000, and the only open question is how Black will exploit the kingside weaknesses.

11...♗e6



Planning ...♗c4. White has a choice between **B21) 12.f4** and **B22) 12.♖ad1**.

Defending the c4-square neglects White's development, allowing an immediate central break:

12.b3 d5 13.exd5

If 13.dxe5 ♘xe4 14.♘xe4 dxe4, White has no obvious way to take on e4, due to the hanging h3- and c2-pawns, while the white e5-pawn is weak. White tried 15.♘d4 in Stupak – Gelashvili, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010, but 15...♕d7N 16.♘xe6 ♕xe6 would have given Black an edge.

13...♘fxd5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5

With at least equality for Black in L. Vajda – Marin, Bucharest 1997, and several later games.

B21) 12.f4

The impact of this ambitious move on the centre is smaller than White might wish.

12...♗c4 13.♖f2

Immediate attacking attempts get nowhere: 13.f5 weakens the e5-square after 13...exd4,

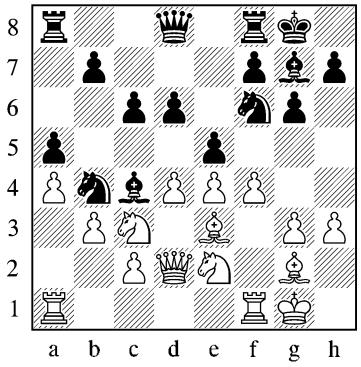
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while 13.dxe5 dxe5 gives White no time to continue his kingside advance with 14.f5 due to the hanging c2-pawn.

The more consistent 13.♖ad1 will transpose to lines below. After 13...♕c7 14.b3 ♗a6, we have reached the note to White's 14th move in variation B22, when the further 15.♖fe1 leads into variation B222.

13.b3

This offers Black a pleasant choice:



13...♗xe2!N

This effectively proves that White's last move was premature.

When facing this position I reacted with 13...♗a6 14.♖f2 exd4 15.♗xd4 d5, with excellent play in Bellon – Marin, Cullera 2002, in view of: 16.e5 ♘d7 Threatening to win a piece with ...c5. 17.♗e3 ♖e8 Black will continue with ...f6, and White's pieces are obviously misplaced.

14.♘xe2

14.♕xe2 ♘h5!∓ leaves White's pawns hanging.

14...♖e8 15.c3

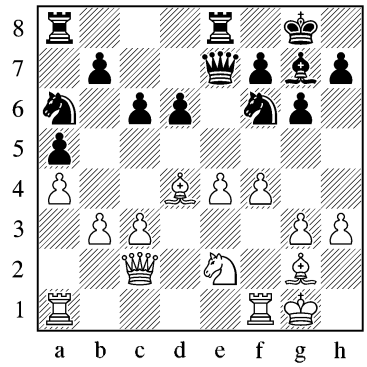
15.♘c3 ♘h5 leads to a familiar picture.

15...exd4 16.♗xd4

The only way to keep the e4-pawn.

16...♘a6 17.♕c2 ♕e7

With his knight badly placed, White has to make a concession in order to avoid losing the e4-pawn.

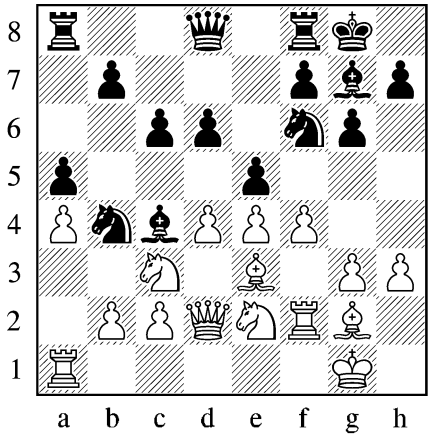


18.♗xf6

If 18.e5 dxe5 19.♗xe5 ♘h5 20.♗xg7 ♔xg7∓, followed by ...♖ad8, Black has the initiative in the centre.

18...♗xf6 19.♖ae1 ♘c5 20.♘c1 ♕e6∓

Due to the hanging b3-pawn, White is forced to keep his knight on the unappealing c1-square, while the f6-bishop is a potential danger because of the weaknesses of the dark squares.



13...exd4 14.♘xd4

The natural recapture, aiming to inhibit ...d5 in view of e4-e5-e6.

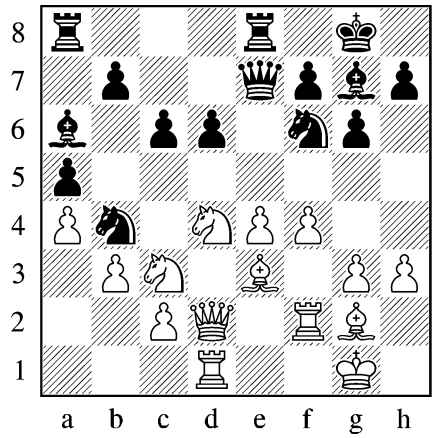
14.♗xd4 makes less sense: 14...d5 15.exd5 ♘bxd5 16.b3 ♘xc3 17.♖xc3 ♗d5 Black had the more pleasant play due to White's numerous weaknesses in a symmetrical structure in Van Hengel – Nijboer, Vlissingen 2005.

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14...♖e8 15.b3 ♗a6 16.♖d1

16.♖e1 takes measures against the pressure along the e-file, but fails to maintain control: 16...♕c7 17.♔h2 ♖ad8 18.g4 d5 19.e5 ♘e4 20.♘xe4 dxe4 Threatening ...c5. 21.♕c1 ♘d5 Black threatens (among other things) ...g5, and 22.♗xe4 does not work in view of 22...♘xe3 23.♕xe3 ♗xe5! 24.fxe5 ♕xe5†, regaining the d4-knight with an extra pawn.

16...♕e7



17.♘db5!?

A radical attempt to solve the problem of piece congestion.

17.g4 allows: 17...♘xe4 (the strengthening 17...♖ad8 is also fine) 18.♘xe4 d5 19.♘xc6 The only way to avoid losing a pawn. 19...bxc6 20.♗c5 ♕c7 Black has excellent play.

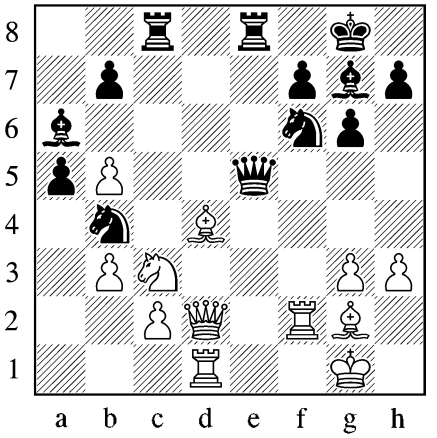
17...cxb5 18.axb5 ♖ac8 19.e5?!

This thematic break does not work out well against Black's best play.

White should have tried: 19.bxa6N ♖xc3! 20.♕xc3 ♘xe4 I can understand that White wanted to avoid this, but there is a way for him to survive. 21.♕e1 ♘c3 22.♗d2 ♘xd1 23.♕xd1 The simplest option is 23...bxa6, eliminating the potentially dangerous pawn. In view of Black's weaknesses, White has compensation for the material deficit, but no more.

19...dxe5 20.fxe5 ♕xe5 21.♗d4

In Harutjunyan – Arutinian, Gyumri 2009, Black failed to find the best line:



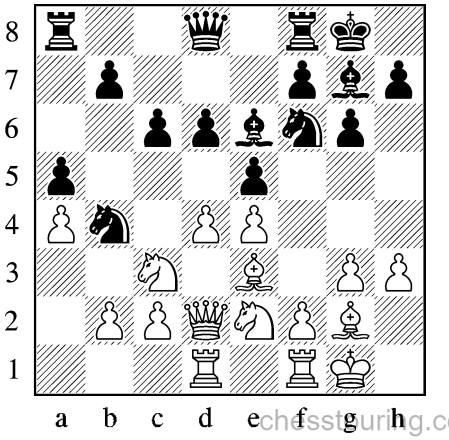
21...♕xg3!N 22.bxa6

22.♖xf6 may well be what Black feared, but it is unsound; 22...♗xb5! 23.♖f3 (23.♘xb5 ♖xc2 and Black wins) 23...♗xd4† 24.♕xd4 ♖e1† Black emerges from the complications with two extra pawns.

22...♖cd8∓

Black has a strong initiative.

B22) 12.♖ad1



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The strongest move, aiming to complete development before undertaking anything active.

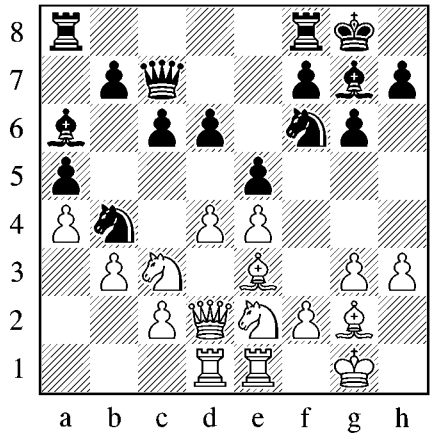
12...♗c4

When White has centralized his rook, the central break is less convincing: 12...d5 13.exd5 ♘fxd5 14.♘xd5 ♗xd5 15.c3 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♘d5 17.dxe5 ♗xe5 18.♗d4 ♗xd4 19.♘xd4 White had the slightly more active play in Franzoni – Strikovic, Yerevan (ol) 1996.

13.b3 ♗a6 14.♖fe1

14.f4 is somewhat sounder than on move 12, but it is still ineffective: 14...♕c7 15.dxe5N (15.♖fe1 transposes to variation B222) 15...dxe5 16.f5 ♖ad8 17.♕c1 ♖xd1 18.♖xd1 ♖d8 19.♖xd8† ♕xd8 20.g4 ♗f8 21.♘g3 ♘d7 22.♕d2 ♕c7= Black intends ...♗c5 next.

14...♕c7



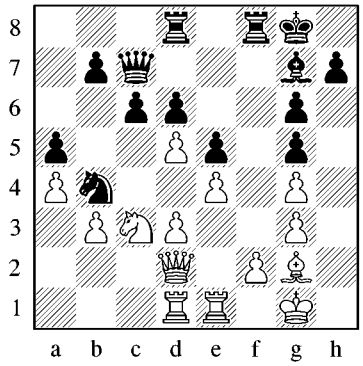
With his army fully mobilized, White can try three main plans: **B221) 15.♘c1**, **B222) 15.f4** and **B223) 15.g4**.

B221) 15.♘c1

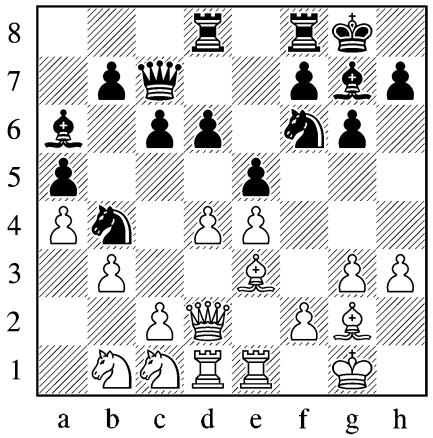
Obviously this is only a temporary location for the problem knight. On the next step, White can choose between activating it with ♘d3 or using it to control d3 in order to expel Black's active knight with ♘b1 and c2-c3.

15...♖ad8 16.♘b1

16.♘d3 is too simplistic to bother Black: 16...♗xd3 17.cxd3 ♘g4! A typical trick. 18.♗g5 (after 18.hxg4 exd4, Black regains the piece with great play on the dark squares) 18...f6 19.hxg4 fxg5 20.d5



In Christiansen – Marin, Internet (rapid) 2002, the most logical continuation was 20...♕b6N, increasing control over the dark squares, with preferable play for Black.



After the text move, Black's knight seems to be in sudden danger.

16...d5!

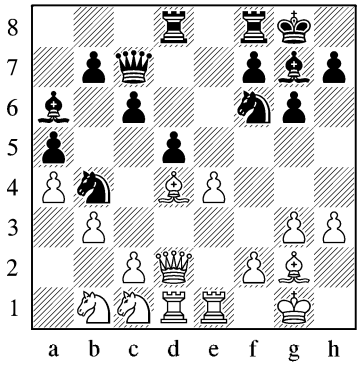
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The logical reaction to the double knight retreat.

16...exd4 17.♗xd4

Inserting this exchange before breaking in the centre allows slightly unfavourable complications.

17...d5



18.♗xf6!N

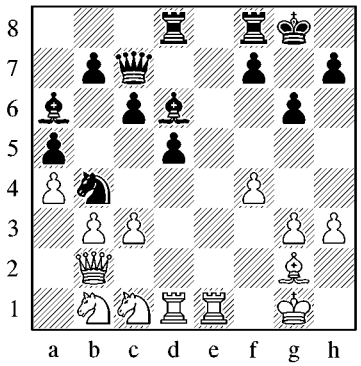
18.exd5?! cxd5 19.c3?! ♘e4 offered Black the initiative in Gorovets – Demchenko, Moscow 2012.

18...♗xf6 19.e5 ♗xe5 20.c3 ♗d6 21.♕b2!

21.cxb4?! ♗xb4 yields Black a minimal material advantage and an active position.

21...♗e5 22.f4 ♗d6

After 22...♗g7 23.♕d2, White wins the knight under better circumstances than in the main line.



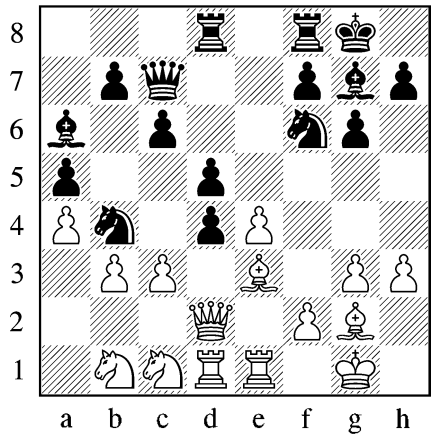
23.♔h2!

If 23.cxb4 ♗xb4, the e1-rook does not have any favourable squares for escaping from the bishops' domination. After the more or less forced 24.♘d2 ♕b6† 25.♔h2 ♕f2, Black gets some dominance, compensating for the material deficit.

23...♕b6 24.cxb4 ♗xb4 25.♖g1

White can continue with ♗f1, when Black may have problems proving entirely satisfactory compensation for the piece.

17.c3 exd4



18.♗f4

The only way to avoid a worse position.

18.♗xd4 ♘xe4 19.♕b2

19.♗xe4 dxe4 leaves the d4-bishop pinned.

19...♗xd4 20.♖xd4 c5 21.cxb4

Black retains a small material advantage and a dominating position after: 21.♖dxe4 dxe4 22.cxb4 cxb4 23.♗xe4 ♖fe8∓

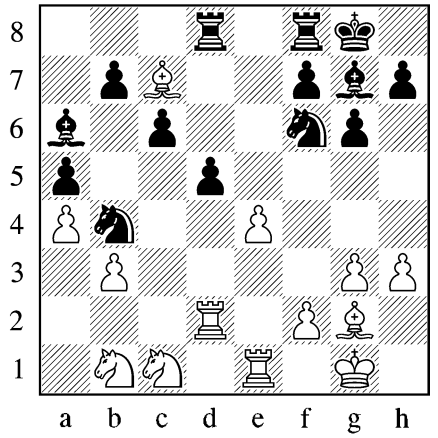
21...cxd4 22.b5 ♗xb5 23.axb5 ♕b6∓

The rook and two pawns are stronger than two minor pieces, especially considering White's poor coordination.

18...dxc3 19.♗xc7 cxd2 20.♖xd2

The threat of ♗xa5 attacking the b4-knight looks annoying, but with such perfect mobilization Black has more than one way to cope with it.

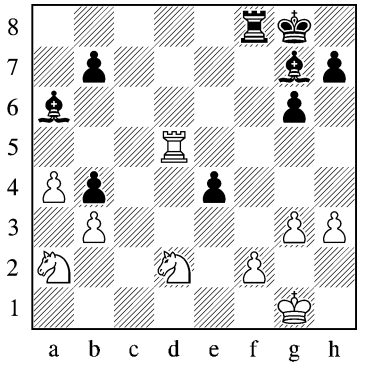
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20...♗h6

20...b6, with similar play to the main line, is also reasonable.

20...♖de8 is equally good: 21.♗xa5 ♘xe4 22.♗xe4 c5 23.♗xb4 cxb4 24.♖xd5 f5 25.♘a2 ♖xe4 26.♖xe4 fxe4 Threatening ...e4-e3, based on the fork on f1, winning a piece. 27.♘d2



Black's pawns are weak and the a6-bishop is likely to become vulnerable after ♘xb4, but Black has just enough dynamism to keep the balance. 27...e3 28.fxe3 ♗h6 29.♘xb4 ♗xe3† 30.♔h1 ♗f1 31.♘xf1 ♖xf1† Black delivers perpetual check.

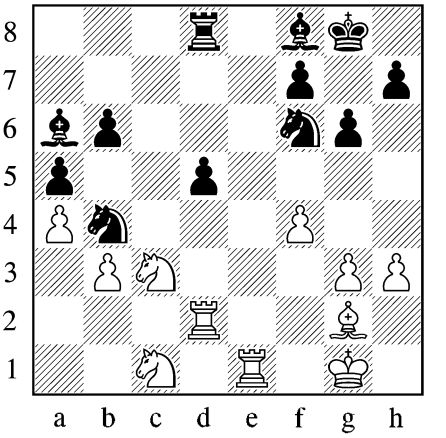
21.f4 b6

An entirely sound exchange sacrifice, based on the weakness of the dark squares in White's territory.

22.♗xd8

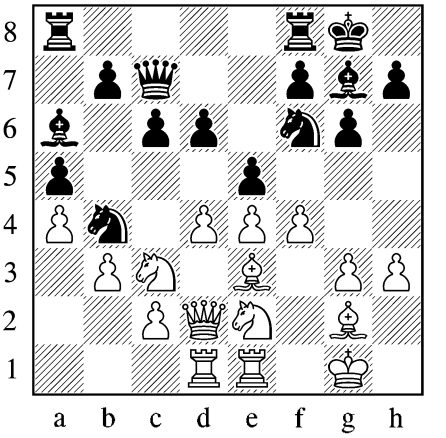
22.♗xb6 does not offer much either: 22...♖b8 23.♗xa5 ♘xe4 24.♗xe4 ♖fe8 Once again, this pin offers Black comfortable play.

22...♖xd8 23.exd5 cxd5 24.♘c3 ♗f8



With great piece play for Black, who eventually won in Stupak – Valles, Beirut 2015.

B222) 15.f4



Before clearing the g3-square for the knight, White increases the tension in the centre, but this is likely to backfire.

15...♖ad8

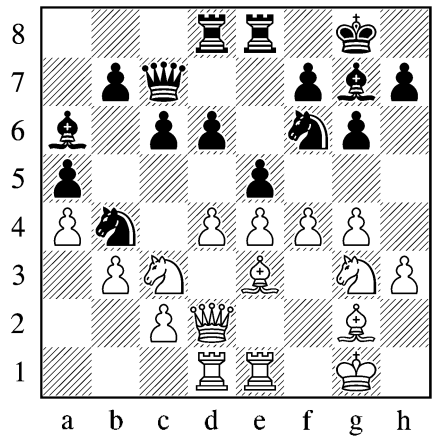
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The major-piece opposition along the d-file means that White does not have time for the generally desirable dxe5 followed by f4-f5.

16.g4 ♖fe8 17.♘g3

17.f5 is premature due to 17...d5!∓.

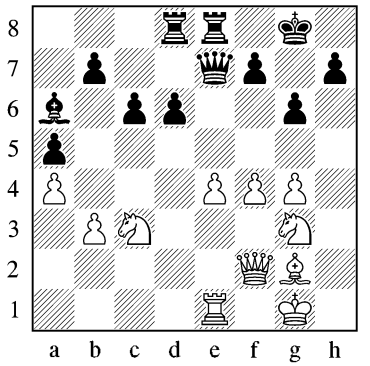
After the text move, White threatens g4-g5 followed by f4-f5, with a certain amount of pressure.



17...exf4

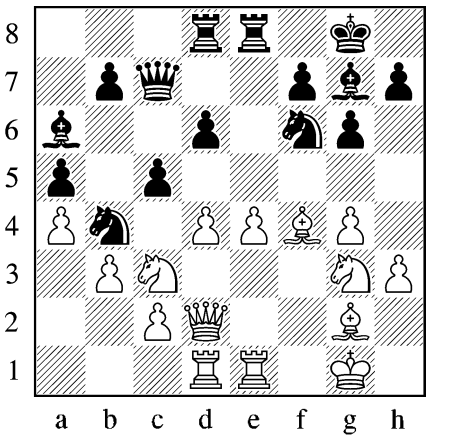
This is the simplest reaction to White's massive advance, which has weakened several dark squares, including d4, making ...c5 a logical plan.

17...♘xg4!? leads to a series of captures: 18.hxg4 exd4 19.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 20.♕xd4 ♘xc2 21.♕f2 ♘xe1 22.♖xe1 ♕e7



An unclear position has arisen, with rook and two pawns against two minor pieces. Personally, I would be slightly afraid of a kingside attack and worried by the absence of obvious active plans for Black.

18.♗xf4 c5



19.e5!?

The only way to fight for the initiative.

19.dxc5

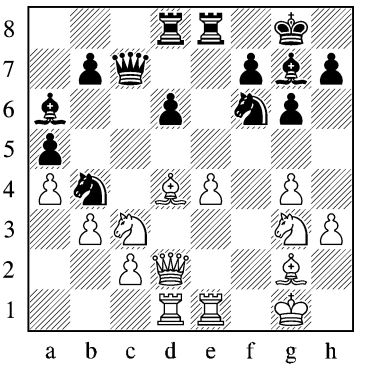
This leaves the c3-knight vulnerable.

19...♕xc5† 20.♗e3

The only way to avoid ...♘xg4.

20.♖e3? g5 traps the f4-bishop.

20...♕c7 21.♗d4



In Cuartas – Gagunashvili, Istanbul (ol) 2012, Black should have increased his

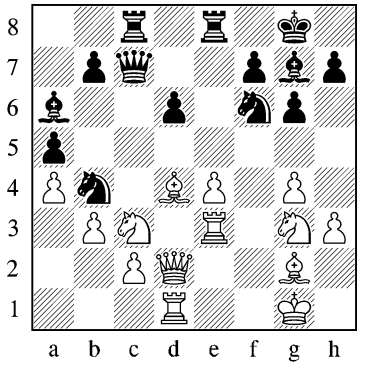
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pressure on the c3-knight with:

21...♖c8N 22.♖e3

The passive retreat 22.♘ge2 offers Black excellent play on the dark squares: 22...♘d7 23.♗xg7 ♔xg7∓

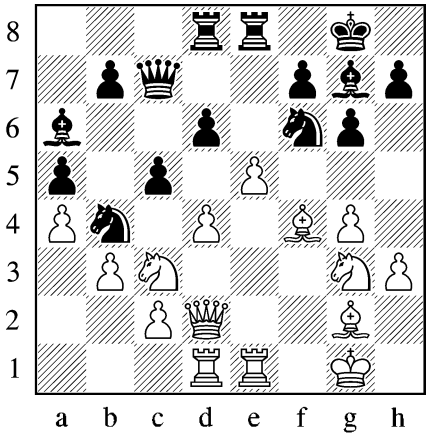
22.♔h1 does not solve White's problems either: 22...♘xg4 23.♘d5 ♕d8! The best square for the queen, as we will see. 24.♗xg7 ♔xg7 Black wins a pawn, since 25.hxg4 ♕h4† makes things even worse for White.



White seems to have stabilized his position somewhat, but this is deceptive:

22...♘xc2! 23.♕xc2 ♘d5!!

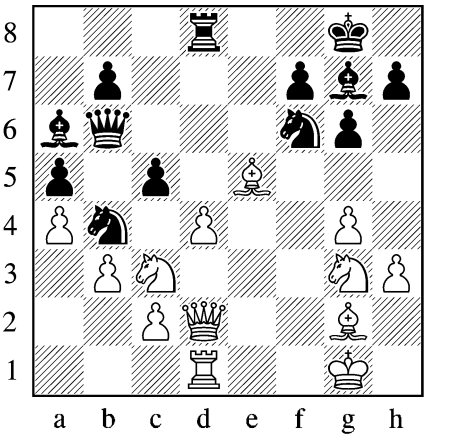
The double pin along the e- and c-files causes White material losses.



19...dxe5 20.♖xe5

20.♗xe5? loses material to 20...♖xe5 21.♖xe5 cxd4–+.

20...♖xe5 21.♗xe5 ♕b6



22.♕f4N

The most challenging move, threatening ♗c7.

22.♕f2 applies less pressure, allowing Black to choose between 22...cxd4 and 22...c4!?, clearing space for the queenside minor pieces.

22.d5

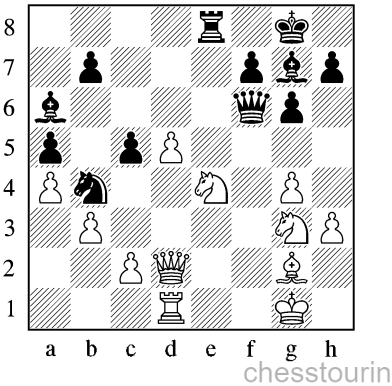
Creating a passed pawn is a principled choice, but it offers Black a valuable tempo to start his counterplay.

22...♖e8 23.♗xf6

23.♗f4 is met by 23...c4†, followed by ...cxb3 and ...♘d3.

23...♕xf6 24.♘ce4

In L. Vajda – Marin, Bucharest 1997, Black's best would have been:

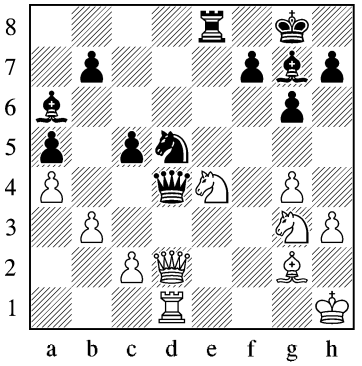


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24...♕d4†N 25.♔h1

Simplifying would only cause White trouble: 25.♕xd4 ♗xd4† 26.♖xd4 cxd4 27.♘f6† ♔f8 28.♘xe8 ♔xe8 29.♗e4 ♔d7∓ Black wins the d5-pawn soon. It is interesting to notice that the a6-bishop dominates the knight, preventing ♘e2xd4.

25...♘xd5



26.♘xc5

26.♕e1 or 26.♕c1 both hope for 26...♕e5? 27.♖xd5, but they are both refuted by 26...♕e3!∓.

26...♕xc5 27.♗xd5 b6

Followed by ...♗c8 with preferable play for Black, due to his two bishops and the weakened white kingside.

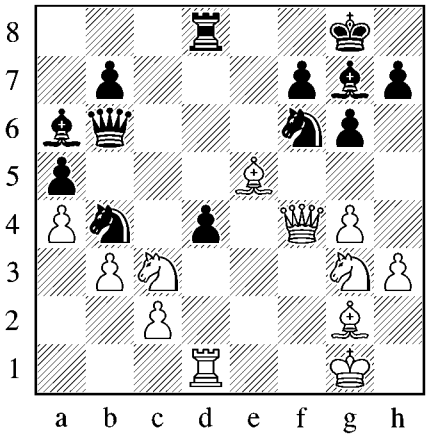
22...cxd4!?

The most principled reaction, entailing a queen sacrifice.

Parrying ♗c7 is likely to hand over the initiative on the dark squares, even though the consequences are not entirely clear. For instance:

22...♘e8 23.♗xg7 ♔xg7 (23...♘xg7 24.♘ge4 leaves the f6-square vulnerable) 24.♕e5† ♕f6 25.♘ge4 ♕xe5 26.dxe5 ♖xd1† 27.♘xd1 ♘xc2 28.♘xc5 With a more pleasant ending for White.

22...♘fd5 may be less scary than it looks: 23.♘xd5 ♘xd5 24.♗xd5 ♖xd5 25.♗xg7 ♔xg7 26.c4 ♖xd4 27.♖xd4 cxd4 28.♘e4 d3† 29.♕f2 ♕xb3 Due to the far advanced d-pawn and the vulnerable white king, White does not seem to have more than a perpetual.

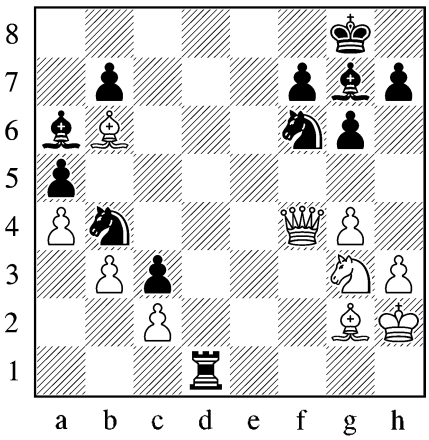


23.♗c7

23.♗xd4 is inoffensive: 23...♕e6 24.g5 ♘fd5 offers Black great counterplay.

23...dxc3† 24.♗xb6 ♖xd1† 25.♔h2

Black's material disadvantage is minimal and his activity fully compensates for it.

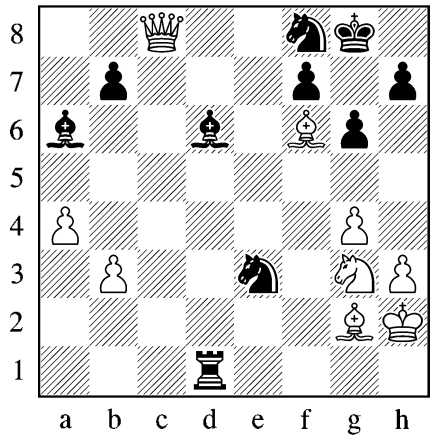


25...♘d7 26.♗xa5 ♘xc2 27.♕c7

White needs to hurry to neutralize the c3-pawn.

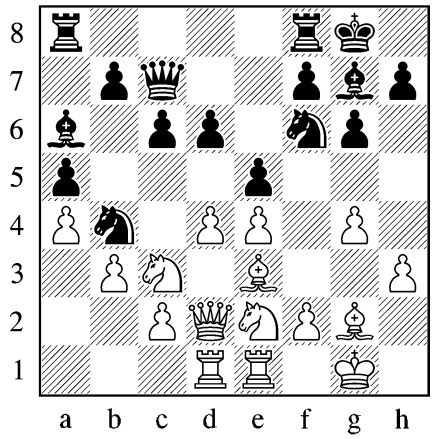
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27...♗e5 28.♕c8† ♘f8 29.♗xc3 ♗d6 30.♗f6 ♘e3



Due to his active pieces, Black can count on obtaining at least a draw by perpetual.

B223) 15.g4

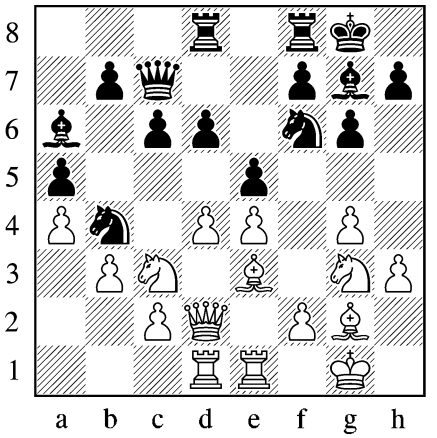


This is a more restrained version of the previous line. White aims for a kingside expansion without loosening his position with f2-f4, but the reduced pressure against the e5-pawn enables Black to equalize by breaking open the centre.

15...♖ad8 16.♘g3

Threatening g4-g5.

16.g5, as played in Solak – Firman, Albena 2014, is premature due to 16...♘h5N, with comfortable play for Black.

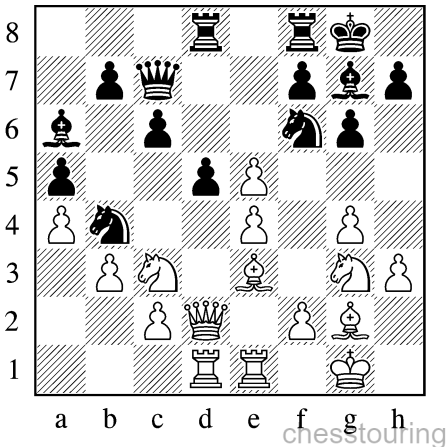


16...d5!

Black should not delay concrete action, since after 16...♖fe8 17.g5! ♘d7 18.d5± White's space advantage became annoying in Van der Weide – Nijboer, Rotterdam 1998.

17.dxe5

17.exd5 tends to lead to simplifications: 17...♘fxd5 18.♘xd5 ♘xd5 19.♗h6 ♗xh6 20.♕xh6 ♘c3 21.♘e4N (White forced a draw with 21.♖d2 exd4 22.♘f5 gxf5 23.♕g5† in Legahn – Pugh, email 1999) 21...♘xe4 22.♖xe4 ♖xd4 23.♖dxd4 exd4 24.♖xd4 ♖e8 With comfortable equality.



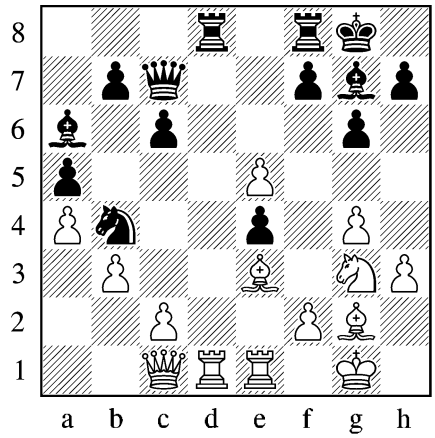
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17...♘xe4!

The careless 17...dxe4? allows White to get too much material for the queen: 18.exf6! ♖xd2 19.fxg7 ♖xd1 20.gxf8=♕† ♔xf8 21.♖xd1+–

18.♘cxe4 dxe4 19.♕c1

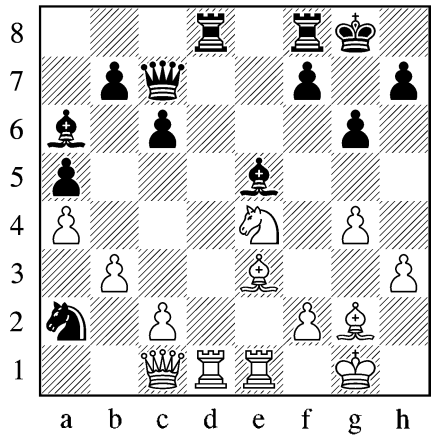
Even after retreating to this passive square the queen is not safe from being harassed, as Black always has ...♘a2.



19...♗xe5 20.♘xe4

White does not have enough resources to start a successful attack with: 20.♗h6 ♘a2 21.♕e3 ♖xd1 22.♖xd1 ♘c3 23.♖e1 ♖e8 24.♘xe4 ♘xe4 25.♗xe4 ♖e6 Followed by ...b6 and ...♗g7, with approximate equality and a probable draw.

20...♘a2



21.♕a3

White must already be careful, for if 21.♕b1 ♘c3 22.♘xc3 ♗xc3 23.♖xd8 ♖xd8 24.♖d1 ♗e2 25.♖xd8† ♕xd8 26.♗f1 ♗f3∓ Black's position would be more active.

21...♘b4 22.♕c1

There is no better way to defend the c2-pawn.

22.♖c1? is too passive: 22...f5 23.gxf5 gxf5 24.♘g5 ♖fe8∓

22...♘a2 23.♕a3 ♘b4 24.♕c1

Drawn by repetition in Spasov – Marin, Pale 1997.

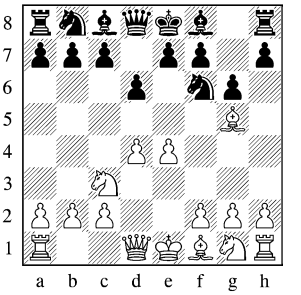
Conclusion

I find the Fianchetto System to be one of the most pleasant for Black – the fluency of his play is simply charming. But of course he needs to know how to react when the positional tension has reached its peak, especially in the main lines covered in variation B2.

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Chapter 12

Various 4th Moves



4.♗g5

Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗g5

4...c6

A) 5.♕d2 ♘bd7 6.f4 d5! 294

A1) 7.e5 297

A2) 7.exd5N 299

B) 5.f4 ♗g7 6.♕d2 b5 7.♗d3 0–0 8.♘f3 ♗g4 300

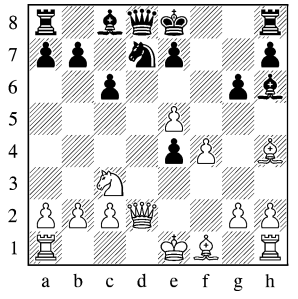
B1) 9.0–0–0 305

B2) 9.0–0 306

B3) 9.e5 314

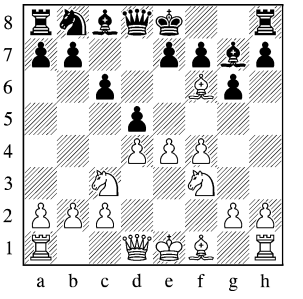
B4) 9.f5 318

A1) after 12.dxe5



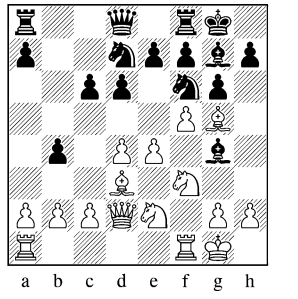
12...e3!N

B) note to 6.♕d2



7...exf6!N

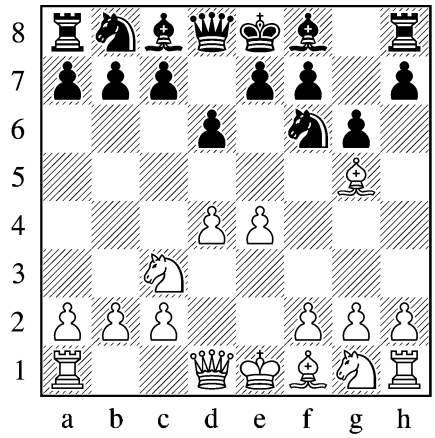
B4) after 11.0–0



11...d5!N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗g5



I have always considered this to be White's most aggressive set-up. While retaining the main idea behind 4.♗e3, namely ♕d2 and ♗h6, White also exerts annoying pressure on the h4-d8 diagonal, adding force to the thematic e4-e5 break.

On the other hand, the bishop is more exposed on g5 than on e3, and Black can consider chasing it with ...h6, ...g5 and ...♘h5. Another important detail is that Black may be able to gain a tempo by answering e4-e5 with ...b5-b4 attacking the c3-knight, based on being able to answer exf6 with ...exf6, with an attack on the g5-bishop. Moreover, the d4-pawn is slightly vulnerable after either ...c6-c5 or ...♕b6.

The best way to keep Black's play consistent with his reaction to 4.♗e3 is:

4...c6

Previously, I have usually (if not always) focused on:

4...♗g7

However, lately I have become less sure about it. The critical variation is:

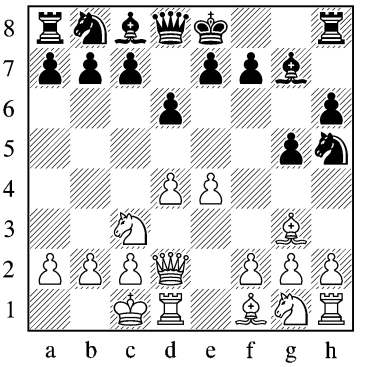
5.♕d2

In order to avoid 5...c6 6.♗h6, transposing to a line I would rather avoid (as explained on page 201), Black needs to start chasing the bishop.

5...h6 6.♗h4 g5

Otherwise White would play f2-f4 soon, and Black will be deprived of the intermediate ...exf6 mentioned above.

7.♗g3 ♘h5 8.0–0–0



8...♘c6

I gave up 8...♘d7 because of: 9.e5 dxe5 10.dxe5 e6 11.♕e2! Facing this novelty convinced me that Black has problems in this line. 11...♘xg3 12.hxg3 ♕e7 13.f4± Black was suffering in Motylev – Marin, Bucharest 2001.

9.♘ge2 ♗d7 10.♕e3

The critical move, preparing to meet ...♘xg3 with ♘xg3. This was played in, for instance, Leko – Topalov, Frankfurt 1999. I had in my repertoire Chernin's recommendation:

10...e5 11.dxe5 ♘xe5

However, things are not easy for Black after:

12.♗xe5N ♗xe5 13.g3 g4 14.♘f4

White has a considerable lead in development.

White has a choice between **A) 5.♕d2** and **B) 5.f4**. Other moves are less dangerous or have no independent value.

5.e5?!

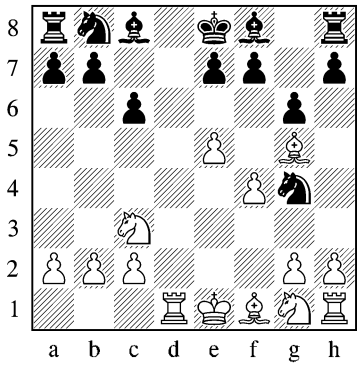
This is obviously premature.

5...dxe5 6.dxe5 ♕xd1† 7.♖xd1 ♘g4 8.f4

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This gains space but weakens the e3-square and leaves the g5-bishop misplaced.

8.♘f3 is preferable, though only slightly, and 8...♗g7 transposes to the line just below.



8...♘e3

8...f6N is a worthy alternative: 9.exf6 exf6 10.♗h4 ♗h6 11.♗g3 ♘e3∓ White's early expansion has left him with just weaknesses on the light squares. After the forced exchange of the f1-bishop, this will be a relevant detail.

9.♖d2 ♗f5 10.♗d3 ♗xd3 11.cxd3 ♘d7

Black had excellent play on the light squares in Khvedelidze – Gagunashvili, Tbilisi 2001.

5.♘f3 ♗g7

The central break once again proves premature:

6.e5?!

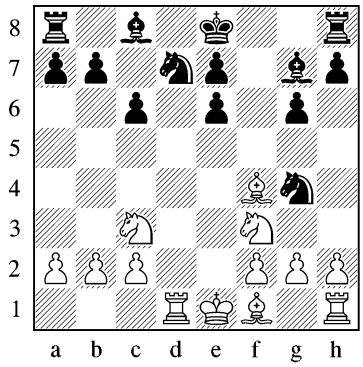
6.♕d2 is more sensible, when 6...0–0 transposes to variation A of Chapter 4 on page 100.

6...dxe5 7.dxe5 ♕xd1† 8.♖xd1 ♘g4 9.♗f4 ♘d7 10.e6

The pawn was doomed anyway, so White's best chance is to spoil Black's structure.

10...fxe6

This structure arises in many lines of the positional systems, but here White has wasted a tempo with his queen's bishop and will inevitably lose another one after ...0–0 or ...♘b6-d5.



11.♗c4

11.♘g5 ♘b6 followed by ...♘d5 does not make a big difference.

11...♘b6 12.♗b3 ♘d5 13.♗d2

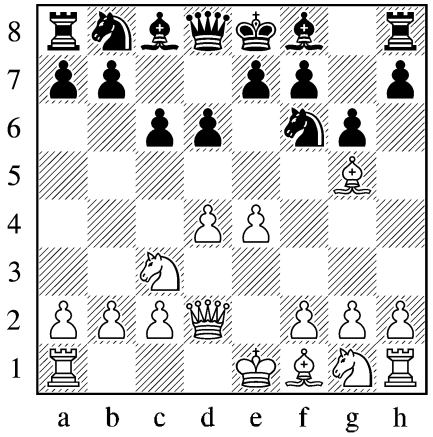
After 13.♘xd5? exd5 Black was a clear pawn up in Barreira – Muehlberger, Internet (blitz) 2003.

In Jowett – Dearing, Birmingham 2005, Black should have played:

13...♘e5N 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5

The pressure along the long diagonal prevents White from installing his knight on e4. Black's slight difficulty in developing his light-squared bishop hardly provides compensation for White's missing pawn.

A) 5.♕d2



White prepares ♗h6, thus inhibiting an early ...♗g7 and at the same time maintaining

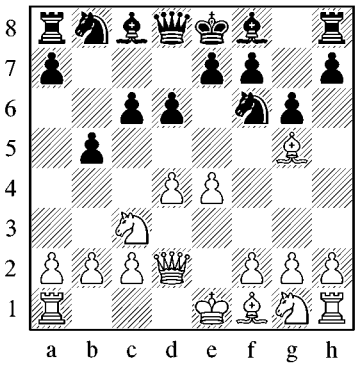
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the possibility of later switching to an f2-f4 plan. As revealed in the next note, the text move also prepares an improved version of e4-e5 compared to those examined above.

5...♘bd7

This is rather unusual and is not mentioned in *Playing 1.e4 – Caro-Kann, 1...e5 & Minor Lines*, but I find it to be the most accurate.

The vast majority of games continue with: 5...b5



Now 6.♗d3 ♗g7 7.f4 is most popular, transposing to line B.

However, after long hours of analysis I have failed to find an antidote to:

6.e5!

Here are some critical points of my analysis, just in case readers wish to try their luck in finding an improvement.

6...b4

The typical reaction.

a) White's main idea is to meet 6...dxe5 7.dxe5 ♕xd2† with 8.♗xd2, followed by f2-f4, gaining space without weakening the e3-square or cutting off the bishop's retreat.

b) 6...h6 is interesting, but apparently not good enough after 7.♗f4 ♘h5 8.♗e3 dxe5 9.dxe5 ♕xd2† 10.♗xd2 and now:

b1) 10...♗g7 11.f4 g5 12.g3 was unpleasant for Black in Kononenko – Rasik, Pardubice 2012.

b2) 10...♘d7N is an attempt to improve. If Black had time to regroup with ...♘g7-e6 and ...♘b6, he would be fine, but the resolute 11.g4 ♘g7 12.♗g2 unexpectedly wins a pawn.

7.exf6 bxc3 8.♕xc3 exf6 9.♗f4!

Only this move, taking the d6-pawn under observation, can cause Black problems.

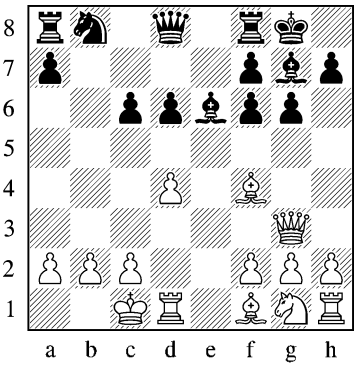
9...♗g7

In Fuller – Pein, London 1979, White should have played:

10.0–0–0!N 0–0 11.♕g3

11.h4 is premature, since after 11...h5 12.♕g3 Black has 12...♗g4!, aiming to defend the b8-knight with gain of time in order to play ...d5. The only way to prevent that is 13.f3, but this weakens the dark squares and cuts the queen off from the queenside. 13...♗e6 14.♗xd6 ♘d7 Black will soon have dangerous threats against the enemy king. Now and in similar situations it is dangerous to grab the exchange, since this would turn Black's dark-squared bishop into a strong attacking piece after ...♗xf8.

11...♗e6



12.h4!

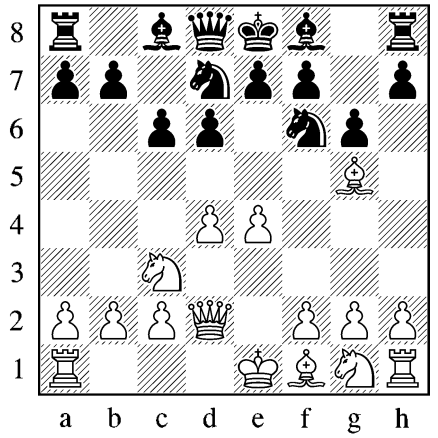
Now is a good moment to weaken Black's kingside.

After 12.♗xd6 ♗xa2 13.b3 a5, Black obtains strong counterplay.

12...h5 13.♗xd6 ♗xa2 14.b3 a5 15.♗c4

Black will face problems defending the g6-pawn properly.

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6.f4

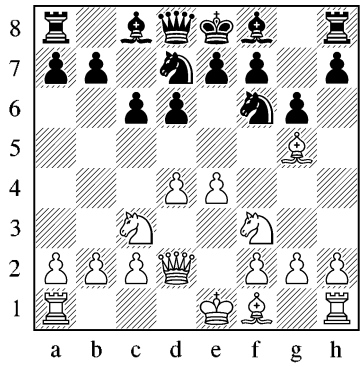
Anticipating things a little, this is intended as a tricky move order. In line B Black delays ...♘bd7 in order to answer ♘f3 with ...♗g4, which is impossible now.

The aggressive 6.0–0–0 is best met with: 6...♕a5 Eliminating the potential pin along the d-file. (If 6...b5? 7.e5! b4 8.exf6 bxc3 9.♕xc3 ♘xf6, White obtains a large advantage with 10.♖e1 ♗g7 11.♕xc6† ♗d7. As we know from variation A of Chapter 10, Black has enough compensation for one pawn in this structure, but here he loses a second one to 12.♕xd6.) 7.f4 b5 8.e5 b4 9.exf6 bxc3 10.♕xc3 ♕xc3 11.bxc3 ♘xf6 Black has comfortable play.

For a player familiar with the Sämisch Attack examined in Chapter 10, 6.f3 b5 offers Black comfortable play. The point is that the g5-bishop blocks the advance of the g-pawn, while also depriving the king's knight of this square, adding force to ...h5 after either g2-g4 followed by h2-h4, or simply h2-h4 on its own.

6.♘f3

Since Black has delayed his bishop's development, this does not necessarily transpose to the lines covered in variation A of Chapter 4.



6...h6!

Black's main problem is that 6...♗g7 runs into 7.e5 dxe5 8.dxe5 ♘g4 9.e6, with a dangerous initiative for the pawn. However, in the absence of the plan based on ♘ge2, Black can now chase the bishop.

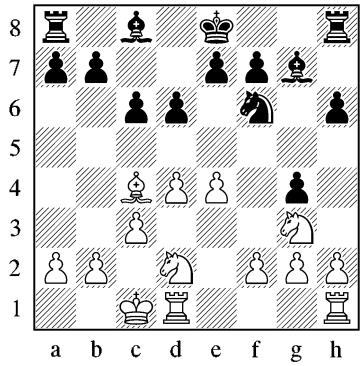
7.♗f4 g5 8.♗g3

8.♗e3 does not prevent the bishop's exchange: 8...♘g4 9.0–0–0 ♗g7 10.♔b1 ♕a5 11.h4 ♘xe3 12.♕xe3 g4 13.♘d2 b5 Black has strong counterplay in which the g7-bishop's dominance on the dark squares will play an important part.

8...♘h5 9.0–0–0 ♕a5 10.♗c4 g4 11.♘e2!?

An interesting way of consolidating the d4-pawn. The queen exchange is inevitable if White moves his f3-knight, due to ...♕g5.

11...♕xd2† 12.♘xd2 ♗g7 13.c3 ♘xg3 14.♘xg3 ♘f6



After parrying both ♘f5 and ♘h5, Black has little to fear in this queenless middlegame.

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He will expand on the kingside with ...h5 and ...♗h6, and his king will either stay in the centre or castle queenside. Additionally, ...b5 or ...d5 will always be possible.

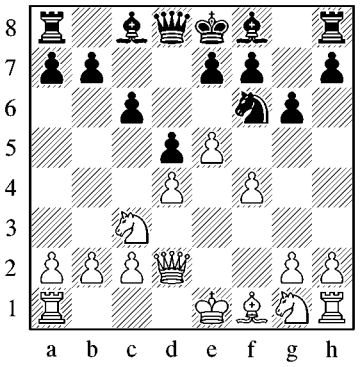
6...d5!

The only way to take advantage of White's move order and cross his aforementioned plan.

In this virtually unexplored position, I consider the critical options to be **A1) 7.e5** and **A2) 7.exd5N**.

7.♗d3 offers Black a comfortable version of a Caro-Kann structure in which the f4-pawn is more of a weakness than a contribution to an attack: 7...dxe4 8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.♗xe4 ♗g7 10.♘f3 ♘f6 11.♗d3 0–0 12.0–0 ♕d6= Black is planning to attack the centre with ...c5.

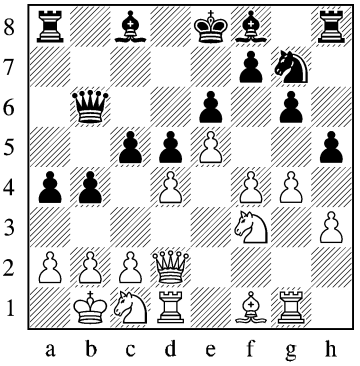
In the main lines we will see that White's bishop often ends up looking odd on h4, so it makes sense to consider exchanging it before advancing the e-pawn:
7.♗xf6 ♘xf6 8.e5



8...♘h5!

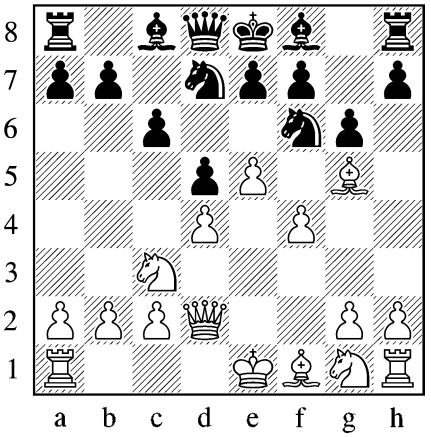
If 8...♘e4 9.♘xe4 dxe4 10.♕e3, Black will have problems activating his bishops, and after 10...f5 11.exf6 exf6 12.♕xe4† ♔f7 13.♗c4† ♔g7 his compensation does not look quite sufficient.

With the text, Black plans ...♘g7, ...h5, ...e6 and ...c5, or if White castles queenside, ...a5-a4 and ...b5-b4. In the absence of his dark-squared bishop, White will face problems maintaining his stability. Here is an illustrative line:
9.g3 ♘g7 10.0–0–0 h5 11.h3 b5 12.♘f3 a5 13.♖g1 e6 14.g4 a4 15.♘e2 b4 16.♔b1 ♕b6 17.♘c1 c5



Black is safe on the kingside, while his queenside counterplay is rather effective.

A1) 7.e5



In the Austrian Attack, with his bishop on c1 or e3, Black would happily block the centre, but here this is comfortably answered by:

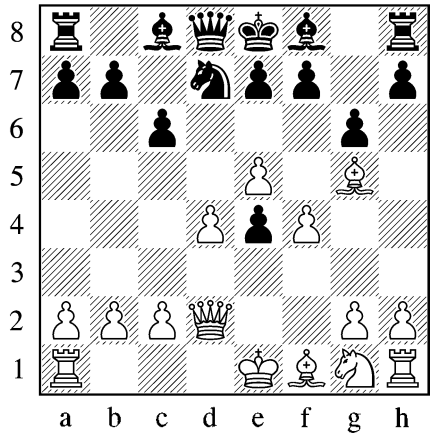
7...♘e4!

The g5-bishop will be exposed to ...f6.

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8.♘xe4 dxe4

Shortly after writing what I expected to be the final version of this book, I reached this position in a game.

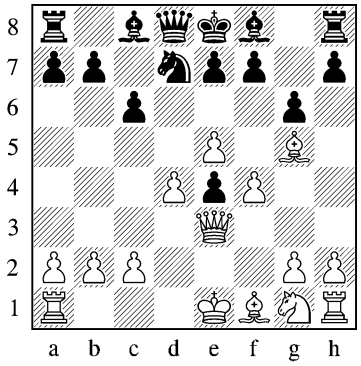


9.♘e2

My investigations had focused on:

9.♕e3N

The e4-pawn hinders White's normal development, so he tries to eliminate it as soon as possible. However, this wastes time with almost all White's pieces on their initial squares.



9...f6 10.♗h4

It appears that White cannot take the pawn under favourable circumstances: 10.exf6?! exf6 11.♕xe4† ♔f7 12.♗h4 ♗b4† 13.♔f2 ♘b6 Followed by ...♖e8, with a strong initiative.

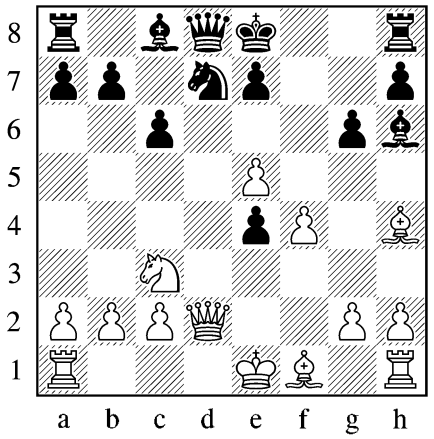
10...♘b6 11.exf6

Here too, taking the pawn does not offer White any advantage: 11.♕xe4 ♗f5 12.♕e3 White defends the d4-pawn directly, while the threat of exf6 defends the c2-pawn indirectly. 12...♘d5 Black will continue with ...fxe5 and ...♗h6, with a considerable lead in development which at least compensates for the missing pawn.

11...exf6 12.♕xe4† ♔f7 13.0–0–0 ♗f5

Black's better coordination and free development, combined with the weaknesses created by f2-f4 and White's lack of harmony, offer him pleasant compensation for the pawn.

9...f6 10.♗h4 ♗h6 11.♘c3 fxe5 12.dxe5



12...e3!N

This improvement on my play is Black's best way of keeping his counterplay alive.

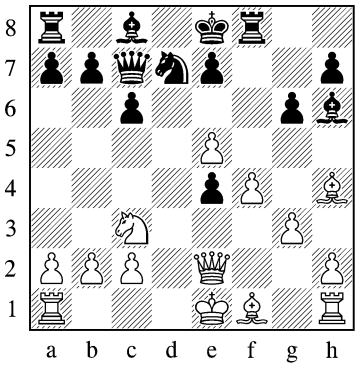
12...♖f8?

Leaving the king in the centre with queens on the board was overoptimistic of me, although it came close to paying off.

13.g3 ♕c7 14.♕e2?

Too ambitious. White wants to win a pawn, but he in turn is neglecting development. White can improve with 14.♘xe4!N ♘xe5 15.♗g2 ♗f5 16.0–0 ♘c4 17.♕e2± with a clear positional advantage.

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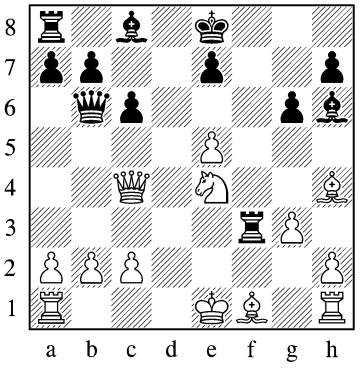
14...♘xe5! 15.fxe5 ♖f3!

Suddenly the white king is vulnerable.

16.♕c4

16.♘d1 ♕xe5 17.♗g2 ♗g4 is just crushing.

16...♕b6 17.♘xe4



17...♗f5!N

In Landa – Marin, Porto Mannu 2017, I played 17...♗g4, blundered a few moves later and was mated.

18.♕c5

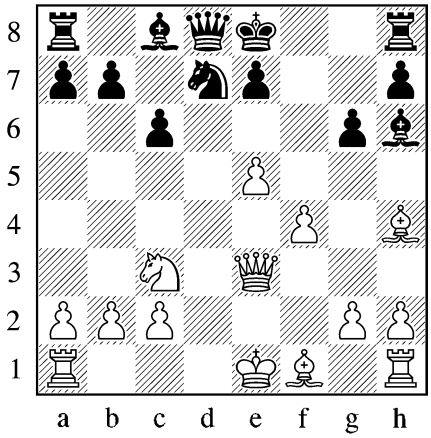
During the game Landa was hoping that this would keep him in the game, but he had overlooked an important detail:

18...♖e3† 19.♔f2 ♖xe4!–+

The white queen is pinned, preventing the intended mate on e7.

13.♕xe3

Or 13.♕d4 ♕b6 14.0–0–0 ♕xd4 15.♖xd4 ♘f8 16.g3 ♘e6 17.♖d3 g5 with mutual chances.



13...♕b6 14.♕xb6 axb6 15.g3

15.♗g3 ♖f8 16.♘e2 keeps the extra pawn but leaves White awfully passive after 16...♘c5∓.

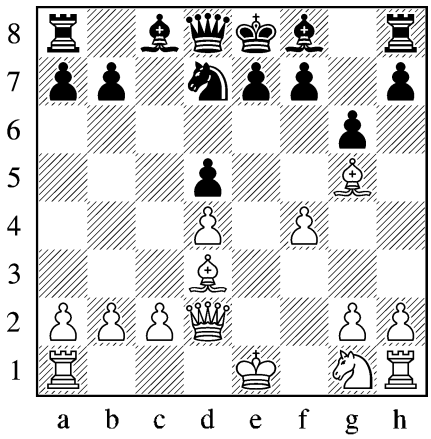
15...♘xe5 16.fxe5 g5 17.♗xg5 ♗xg5

Black's active bishops and the weakness of the e5-pawn offer him entirely adequate compensation for the pawn.

A2) 7.exd5N ♘xd5

A familiar idea – once this knight moves away from the f6-square, the bishop on g5 is left out of play.

8.♘xd5 cxd5 9.♗d3



9...f6

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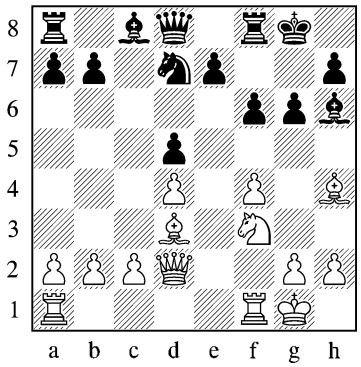
Preparing the most active development of the f8-bishop.

10.♗h4 ♗h6 11.♘e2

Overprotecting the potentially weak f4-pawn.

11.♘f3 0–0 12.0–0

This natural sequence is met effectively by a slightly different plan.



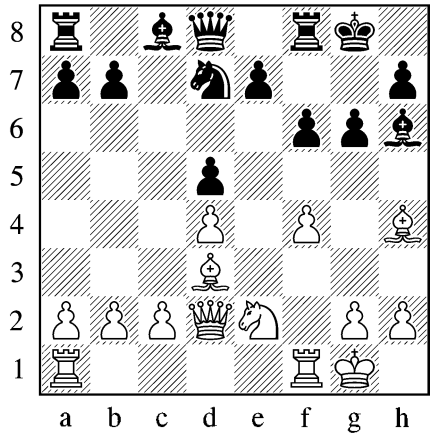
12...♘b6 13.♖ae1

13.b3 offers Black the time to organize an attack against the f4-pawn: 13...♕c7 14.♗g3 e5 Black has a strong initiative.

13...♘c4 14.♗xc4 dxc4=

The position is strategically unbalanced, but Black can be satisfied. The c8-bishop will reign over the light squares, inhibiting the consolidating ♗f2 followed by g2-g3.

11...0–0 12.0–0



12...e5

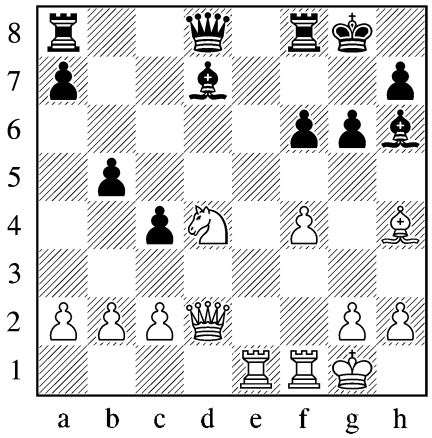
12...♘b6 is adequately met by 13.b3, since the f4-pawn is already well defended.

13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘d4 ♗d7 15.♗e2

Preparing b2-b3.

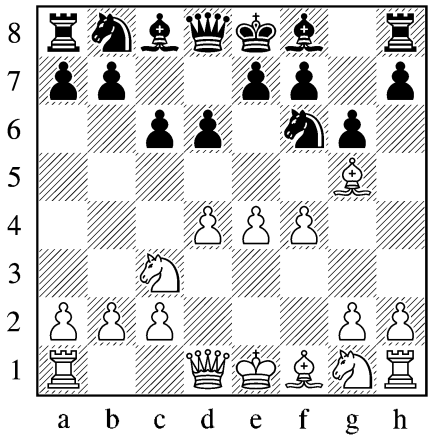
If 15.♖ae1 ♕c7 16.b3 ♘xd3 17.cxd3 ♖fe8, White cannot enjoy his blockade as the f4-pawn is a permanent source of worries.

15...♘c4 16.♗xc4 dxc4 17.♖ae1 b5



With balanced play, offering chances for both sides.

B) 5.f4



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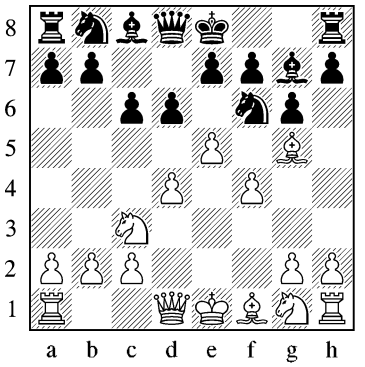
As can be inferred from line A, if White intends to play f2-f4, he should do it at once. His centre looks impressive, but now more than ever the fight becomes double-edged, since the bishop can no longer retreat to e3, thus leaving the d4-pawn vulnerable.

5...♗g7 6.♕d2

White should choose his move order carefully.

6.e5

White is not suitably prepared for this advance, due to the inadequate defence of the squares weakened by it. Black has more than one good response:



6...♘g4!N

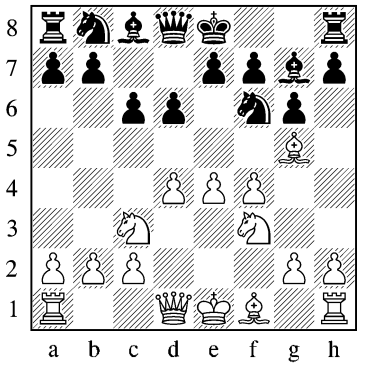
This is the most ambitious answer but, after the weakening of the e4-square, the simple 6...♘d5 also works. 7.♘xd5 cxd5 8.♕d2 ♘c6 9.0–0–0 (9.♘f3 f6 10.exf6 exf6 11.♗h4 0–0 12.0–0–0 is just a transposition) In Shirazi – Jolivel, Metz 2001, Black should have played: 9...0–0N 10.♘f3 f6 After the release of the tension, Black will inevitably install a piece on the e4-square. 11.exf6 exf6 12.♗h4 ♗f5 13.♗d3 ♕d7 14.♖he1 ♖ae8 15.♗xf5 ♕xf5 16.♗f2 ♖e4 17.g3 ♖fe8 Black has comfortable play on the light squares.

7.♕e2 dxe5 8.dxe5 h6 9.♗h4 g5

Black has dangerous counterplay.

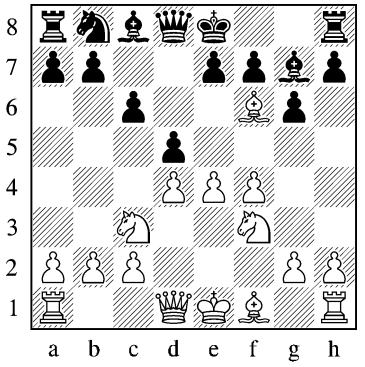
6.♘f3

The may look more natural than the main line, but it offers Black a good version of the familiar central break.



6...d5! 7.♗xf6

7.e5 ♘e4 reveals the drawbacks of White's early knight development, as after 8.♘xe4 dxe4 the knight would have to return to g1, with a strong initiative for Black after ...f6 and ...c5. In Yakovich – Zozulia, Isle of Man 2005, White preferred 8.♗d3, when the simplest for Black is: 8...♘xg5N 9.fxg5 (after 9.♘xg5?! ♕b6 Black is attacking both the b2- and d4-pawns) 9...0–0 10.♕d2 c5 11.dxc5 ♗g4 With a perfect version of the Advance Caro-Kann for Black.



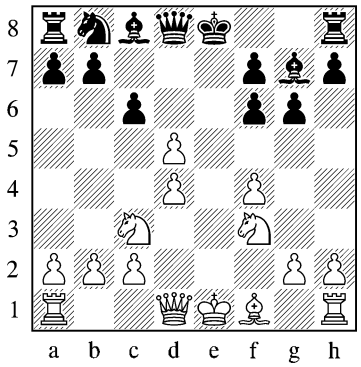
7...exf6!N

The best answer, since 7...♗xf6 8.e5 offered White a solid space advantage in Efimov – Tseshkovsky, Yerevan 1977.

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8.exd5

Maintaining the tension reaches some sort of mirrored Exchange Ruy Lopez where f2-f4 counts as an important weakness: 8.♗d3 dxe4 9.♘xe4 0–0 10.c3 f5∓ Followed by ...♖e8†, ...♘d7-f6 and ...♗e6-d5, possibly with ...c5 in between. The bishop pair and control over the e4-square offer Black excellent play.



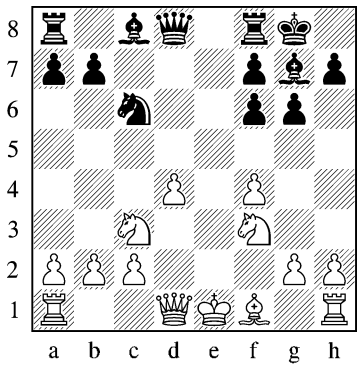
8...0–0!

Black should not fear the loss of a pawn, since that will just speed up his development. If 8...cxd5? 9.♕e2†, Black has to give up the right to castle, since 9...♗e6 runs into 10.f5.

9.dxc6

Black also has excellent play after 9.♕d2 ♖e8† 10.♗e2 cxd5 11.0–0 and now 11...♘c6 12.♖ae1 ♗f5∓, followed by ...♗e4 and ...f5. Another possible plan is 11...♗e6 followed by ...a6, avoiding the pin with ♗b5, and then ...♘d7, ...f5 and ...♘f6-e4.

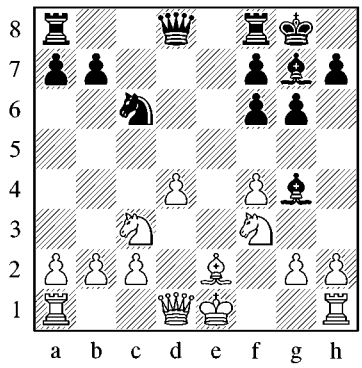
9...♘xc6



10.♗e2

White has no good way of keeping his extra pawn. For instance: 10.d5 ♖e8† 11.♗e2 ♘e7 With threats such as ...♘f5-e3 and ...♕b6. 12.♗b5 ♗d7 13.♗xd7 ♕xd7 14.0–0 ♖ad8 15.♕d2 f5 16.♖ad1 ♗xc3 17.♕xc3 ♘xd5 18.♕b3 ♕c6 19.g3 ♘f6∓ Black's control over the e4-square and the weakened white kingside are more relevant than White's queenside majority.

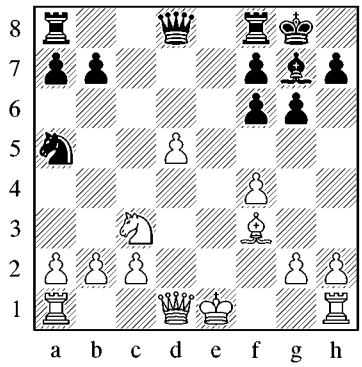
10...♗g4



11.d5

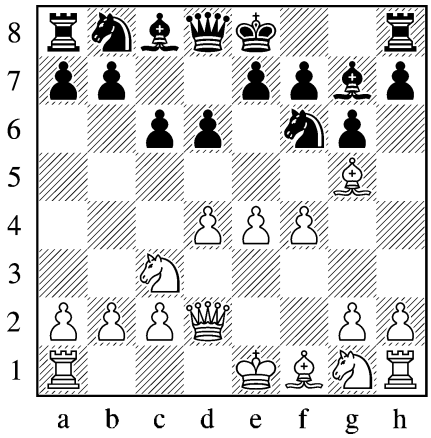
After 11.0–0 ♗xf3 12.♗xf3 ♕xd4† 13.♕xd4 ♘xd4∓, the b7-pawn is taboo due to ...♖ab8 followed by ...♖xb2, and meanwhile the c2-pawn is hanging. White should probably just let the pawn go, since 14.♗e4 f5 15.♗d3 wastes too much time. Black can play 15...♘e6∓ followed by ...♖ac8, ...♖fd8 and ...♘c5, with ...♗xc3 a constant possibility.

11...♗xf3 12.♗xf3 ♘a5∓



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White has problems meeting Black's plan based on ...f5, ...♘c4, ...♕b6 and ...♖ac8, with a strong initiative on the dark squares.



6...b5 7.♗d3

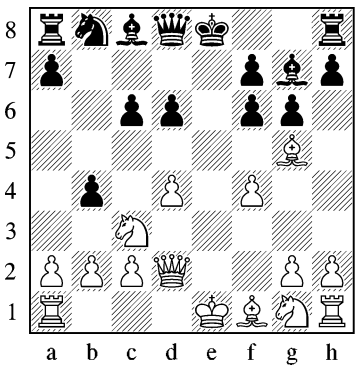
By far the most popular way of parrying the threat of ...b4 followed by ...♘xe4.

7.e5

This runs into the typical:

7...b4 8.exf6 exf6

Black will regain the piece with excellent play.



9.♗h4

One important point is that 9.♕e3†N ♕e7 10.♘e4 is ineffective due to 10...♔f8, with the double threat of ...fxg5 and ...d5, regaining the piece.

9.♕e2†?! avoids this problem, but the queen is awfully placed on e2, making 9...♔d7! followed by ...♖e8 unpleasant to meet.

9...bxc3 10.♕xc3 ♕e7†

10...0–0N also gives Black an edge.

11.♔d2?!

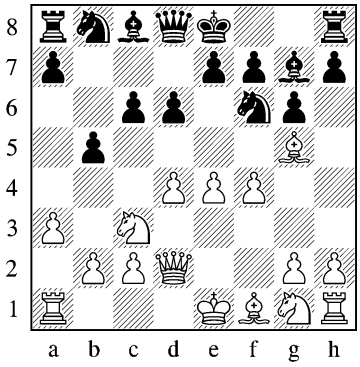
The king will not be safe on the queenside.

11...0–0 12.♖e1 ♕b7 13.♔c1 ♗e6 14.♗c4 ♗xc4 15.♕xc4 ♘d7 16.♘f3 ♖ab8∓

Black had a strong queenside attack in Istratescu – Firman, Albena 2015.

7.a3

Even though not very popular, this deserves a brief mention. White slows down Black's queenside play, since preparing ...a5-a4 followed by ...b4 would take too much time, given the possible dangers in the centre. However, White is more or less giving up the plan of castling queenside. This leaves him needing to prepare to castle kingside, but Black can use this time to organize his pressure against the centre.



7...0–0 8.♗d3

Once again, 8.♘f3 develops the knight too soon, offering Black the possibility of breaking with: 8...d5 9.♗xf6 exf6 10.exd5 In Antonio – Kasmiran, Jakarta 2011, Black should have played: 10...♖e8†N 11.♗e2 cxd5 12.♘xb5 Otherwise Black would have great play for nothing. 12...♘c6 White faces obvious problems of coordination. With the threats of ...a6 or ...♖b8 in the air, White has no obvious way of saving his d4-pawn after ...♗g4 and ...f5.

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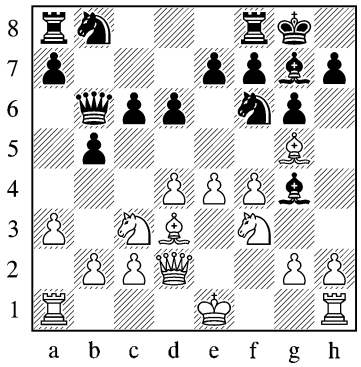
8...♕b6

When Black has played ...b5, this is a comfortable square for the queen.

9.♘f3N

9.e5 ♖e8 10.♘ge2 was played in Winants – Ootes, Netherlands 2011, and now 10...♘d5N 11.♘xd5 cxd5 would have given Black comfortable equality.

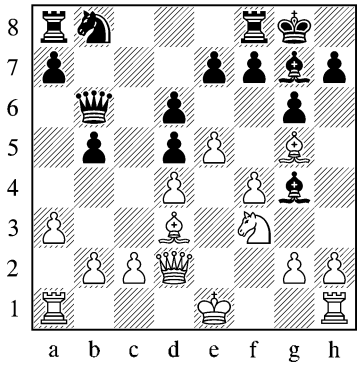
9...♗g4



10.e5

10.f5 indirectly defends the d4-pawn, since 10...♗xf3 11.gxf3 ♕xd4? 12.♗e3 ♕e5 13.f4 traps the queen. However, Black can do better with 11...♘bd7, planning ...a5, ...b4 and ...c5, when White will have a hard time finding a safe place for his king.

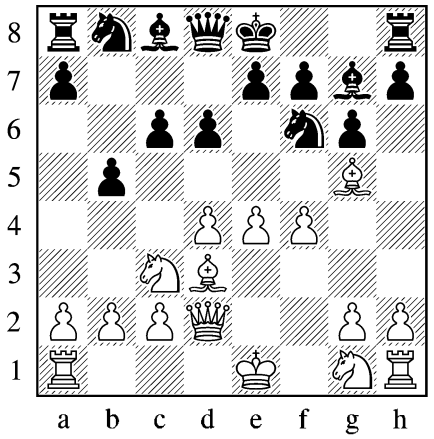
10...♘d5 11.♘xd5 cxd5



We are familiar with this structure already. In view of the threat of ...f6, Black has no problems at all. One important issue is that pawn-grabbing offers Black excellent counterplay:

12.♗xe7 ♖e8 13.♗h4 ♘c6 14.c3 ♗xf3 15.gxf3 ♗h6

Black regains the pawn with great play.



7...0–0 8.♘f3

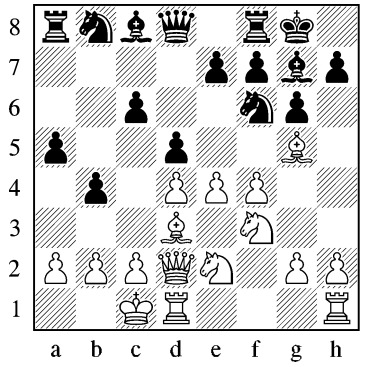
The time has come to develop the knight.

8.a3 transposes to the note on 7.a3 just above.

8.0–0–0

This allows Black to start counterplay:

8...b4 9.♘ce2 a5 10.♘f3 d5!



11.♗xf6

11.e5 ♘e4 12.♕e3 was played in Reichmann – J. Schmidt, Germany 2010, and now 12...a4!?N 13.♗xe4 dxe4 14.♕xe4 b3, followed by ...♗f5 and ...f6, would have yielded more than enough play for the pawn.

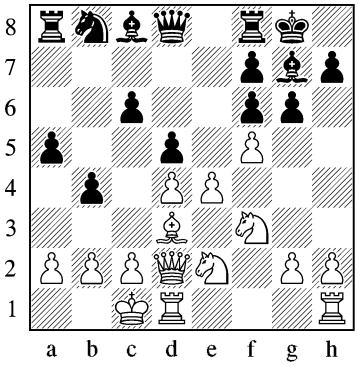
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11...exf6!

A familiar reaction.

12.f5

White could also try: 12.exd5 cxd5N 13.f5 White needs to prevent ...f5 at any cost. 13...♘c6 14.h4 b3!? (the fastest way of starting the attack, though a neutral move such as 14...♖e8 is also good) 15.axb3 ♘b4 Black intends ...♘xd3 followed by ...a4, with a dangerous initiative.

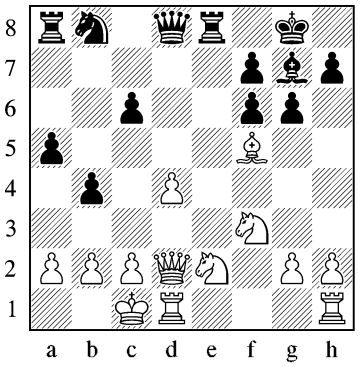


In Cigan – P. Schmidt, Austria 2009, Black could have obtained excellent play with:

12...dxe4N 13.♗xe4 ♖e8 14.♗d3

If 14.♘g3, Black has the promising positional exchange sacrifice 14...♖xe4 15.♘xe4 ♗xf5 16.♘c5 ♕d5 17.b3 ♘a6∓, with two strong bishops and queenside threats.

14...♗xf5!? 15.♗xf5



15...♕d5!

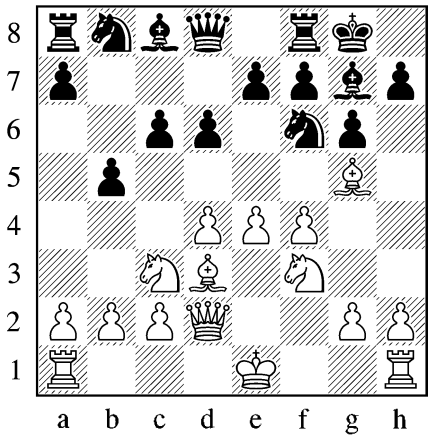
The point behind Black's previous move. Of course, 15...gxf5 would be horrible.

16.♗d3 ♕xa2 17.♕f4 ♘d7

Black threatens to develop his attack with ...♘b6 and ...a4, so the king should evacuate the danger area immediately.

18.♔d2 a4 19.♖a1 ♕d5∓

White's extra piece does not make itself felt, while his king is insecure in the presence of opposite-coloured bishops. Black has two extra pawns and fluent play, including ...f5, ...a4, ...c5 and ...♘b6.



8...♗g4

This is one of the most important tabiyas of the whole 4.♗g5 system, and definitely the most important with the move order I am recommending for Black.

White has a choice between getting castled with either **B1) 9.0–0–0** or **B2) 9.0–0**, or else starting an attack in the centre with **B3) 9.e5** or **B4) 9.f5**.

B1) 9.0–0–0

This generally plays into Black's hands, as the king is not necessarily safe on the queenside, while Black's next move is useful anyway.

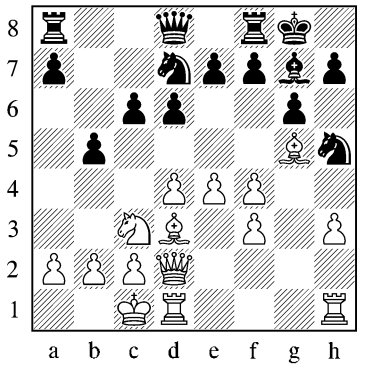
9...♘bd7 10.f5

10.♔b1 was too slow to be challenging in Sun Fanghui – Wang Xiaohui, China 2013, and 10...♕b6N 11.♘e2 c5 would have given Black an obvious initiative.

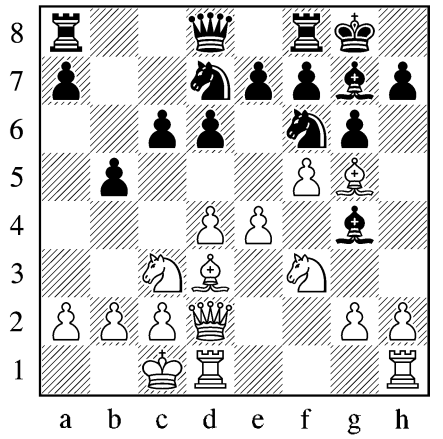
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10.e5 runs into the thematic 10...b4 11.♘e2 ♘d5, planning ...f6 with unclear play. Pawn-grabbing is dangerous: 12.exd6?! f6 13.dxe7 ♕xe7 14.♗h4 ♘e3∓ Black was better in Stratil – Szajna, Brno 1984, as he was at least regaining the pawn with ...♘xg2.

10.h3 spends a tempo to force an exchange that does not necessarily strengthen the centre: 10...♗xf3 11.gxf3 ♘h5 Attacking the d4-pawn and threatening ...f6 followed by ...♗h6.



12.♘e2 Dealing with both threats, but neglecting the queenside. In Palit – Chatalbashev, Leiden 2015, the fastest way to obtain counterplay was: 12...♖b8N 13.f5 c5= Black's natural queenside attack offers him equal chances.



Now is a good moment for Black to start his queenside counterplay.

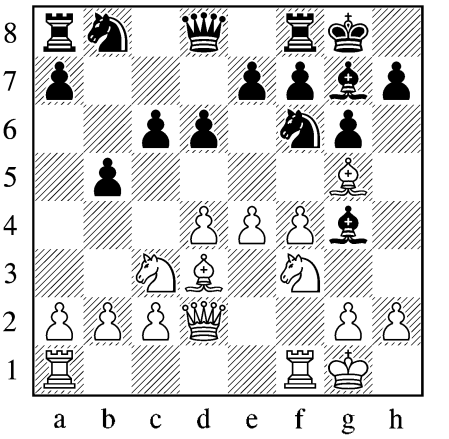
10...b4 11.♘e2 ♕a5 12.♔b1 c5

Black had at least equal chances in M. Ippolito – Uhoda, Paris 2000. One important point is that White cannot proceed with his kingside attack:

13.♗h6? c4! 14.♗xc4 ♘xe4∓

Black wins at least a pawn.

B2) 9.0–0



This looks less aggressive than castling queenside but, despite White's lack of ostentation, his attack based on e4-e5 or f4-f5 should not be underestimated. One important aspect is that by overprotecting the f3-knight he does not have to fear structural defects after ...♗xf3.

The only drawback of this plan is exposing the d4-pawn to a pin, and Black should take advantage of this at once.

9...♕b6 10.♘e2

The most popular and consistent way of dealing with the pressure on the d4-pawn.

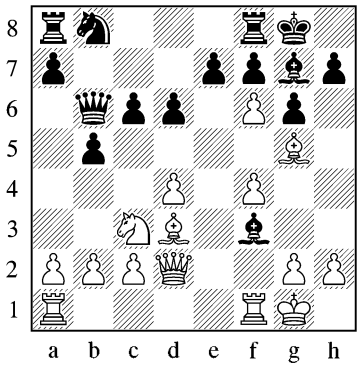
Amusingly, 10.♕f2? does not really defend the pawn. 10...♗xf3 11.♕xf3 (the point is that 11.gxf3? allows 11...♘xe4!) 11...♕xd4† 12.♔h1 ♘bd7∓ White had little more than symbolic compensation for the pawn in Feygin – Cuijpers, Germany 1999.

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The untested 10.♕e3? ♗xf3 11.gxf3 meets a slightly different refutation – 11...♘xe4? does not work anymore due to 12.♕xe4, but 11...♘g4!∓, winning 'only' the d4-pawn, is good enough.

Ignoring the threat to the d-pawn does not pay off:

10.e5? ♗xf3 11.exf6



11...♕xd4†!N

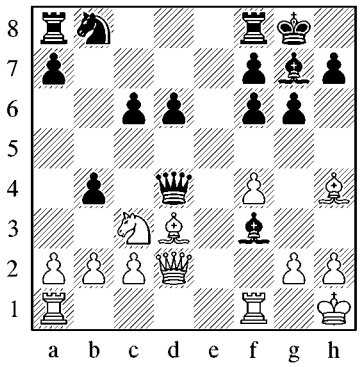
This is the right move order, since if 11...exf6 12.♗h4±, as in Lamm – Hoi, Reykjavik 1990, White is ready to meet ...♕xd4† with ♗f2.

12.♔h1 exf6 13.♗h4

Black has won two pawns, but needs some accuracy due to his lagging development and exposed bishop and queen. The best way to settle things is:

13...b4!

Offering to return one pawn.



14.♖xf3

If the knight jumps into the bishop's range on e2, the exchange would help Black speed up his development, while if 14.♘a4 ♗e4, White does not have any compensation at all.

14...bxc3 15.bxc3 ♕b6

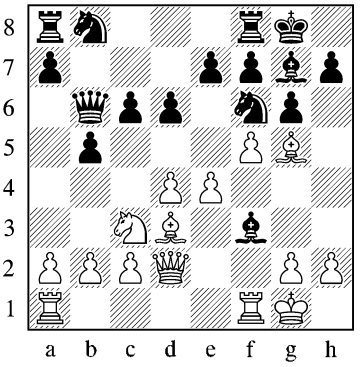
Black intends ...♘d7, ...d5 and ...f5.

16.f5

This delays the g7-bishop's activation, but provides the knight with the excellent e5-square after:

16...♘d7∓

10.f5 is a sounder pawn sacrifice, as White can meet ...♕xd4† with ♗e3, but it is hardly troubling. After 10...♗xf3 we should consider both recaptures:



a) 11.♖xf3?!

This allows Black to capture the pawn without misplacing his queen.

11...♕xd4† 12.♗e3 ♗h6!N

The simplest way to neutralize any shadow of a White attack.

12...♕b4, as played in Ramiro Ovejero – Martin Alvarez, San Sebastian 2010, unnecessarily misplaces the queen.

The daring might also try 12...♕e5!?N, leaving White with no obvious way of harassing the queen, because 13.♗f4 ♕c5† 14.♗e3 ♗h6! is an even better version of the main line. After 15.♗xc5 ♗xd2∓ White needs to waste a tempo retreating with his bishop.

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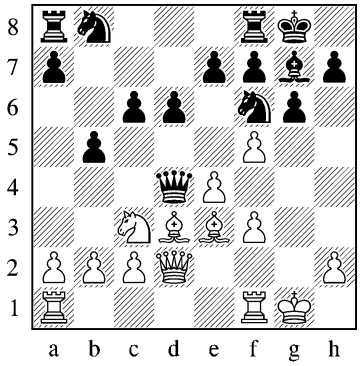
13.♗xd4 ♗xd2∓

Black will complete his development with ...♘bd7, and is simply a pawn up.

b) 11.gxf3!N

This is an improvement, as after the pawn grab it forces the queen to go to b4.

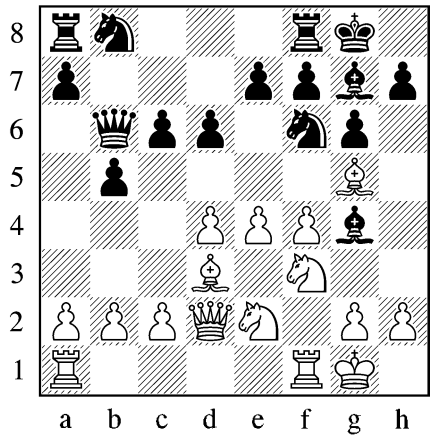
11...♕xd4† 12.♗e3



Both 12...♕e5? and 12...♗h6? run into 13.f4, so Black needs to play:

12...♕b4 13.a4 bxa4 14.♖xa4 ♕b7 15.♖fa1 ♘bd7=

The best White can hope for is to regain the pawn, but even then Black's structure would be more flexible, compensating for White's space advantage and bishop pair.



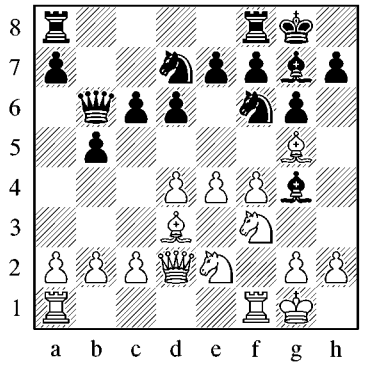
10...c5

In a certain sense, this is a deviation from the logical course of the game, as Black starts to undermine the centre with his queenside underdeveloped. However, the threats along the g1-a7 diagonal are likely to yield an essential tempo for completing his development.

I failed to find entirely satisfactory play after the most popular and seemingly logical continuation:

10...♘bd7

The main problem is that after breaking with ...c5, Black will not be able to increase the pressure with ...♘c6.



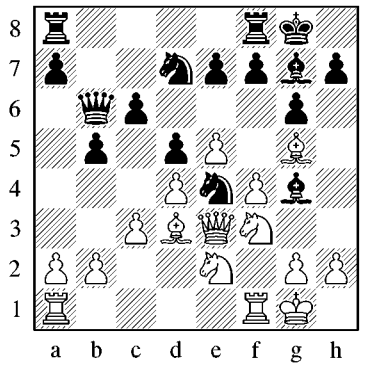
11.c3

I find this best, even though for some reason 11.♔h1 is the most common continuation.

11...d5

11...c5 has been played in a few games, but with 12.f5N White continues his attack unhindered.

12.e5 ♘e4 13.♕e3



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13...♘xg5N

13...f6? 14.♗h4 ♗f5 15.h3, followed by g2-g4, was excellent for White in Kosashvili – Beim, Rishon LeZion 1994.

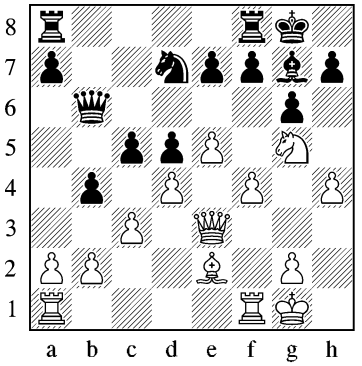
14.♘xg5

Better than 14.fxg5 f6, when 15.e6?! runs into 15...♘e5∓.

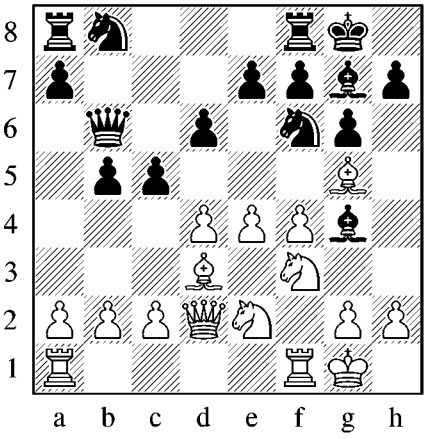
14...c5

The careless 14...f6?! allows 15.♘xh7 ♔xh7 16.e6 ♘b8 17.f5, with an overwhelming attack.

15.h3 ♗xe2 16.♗xe2 b4 17.h4±



Due to the passive d7-knight, White has no worries in the centre and can continue the positional attack at his leisure.



11.e5

Trying to take advantage of White's lead in development.

With the given move order, White failed to consolidate his centre after 11.c3 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♘c6 15.♗c2 e5 in Frolyanov – Byambaa, Khanty-Mansiysk (blitz) 2013.

11...d5!

This has twice been Peralta's choice when facing this line, although he has also twice deviated with:

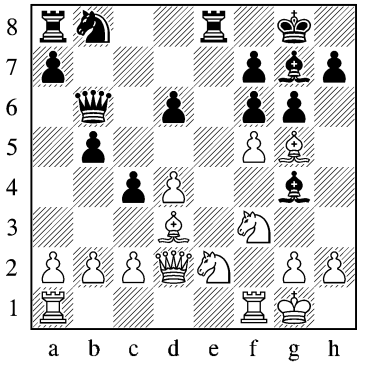
11...♖e8?!

The critical option for White is:

12.exf6N exf6

Black's idea is the same as in the main line, controlling the e4-square so that the d3-bishop can be trapped. The abstract concept is deep, as is customary for Peralta – Black parries a concrete threat with a mysterious developing move. The problem is that he weakens the f7-square and exposes the rook, giving White a dangerous attacking possibility:

13.f5! c4



14.fxg6!

This intermediate move is possible only because the rook is vulnerable to a pawn fork. If now 14...cxd3 15.gxf7† ♔xf7 16.♕xd3, Black cannot win a piece with 16...fxg5 due to 17.♘xg5† (or 17.♕xh7), with a decisive attack.

14...hxg6 15.♗xg6! fxg6 16.♗h6±

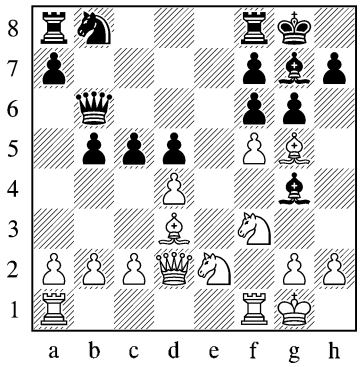
Black is behind in development and his king is vulnerable.

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12.♘g3

This is the most interesting continuation. Apparently White is playing solidly, clearing the e2-square for the bishop, but this forces Black to provoke complications in order to avoid being pushed back by the enemy pawns.

The familiar combination 12.exf6 exf6 13.f5 does not work under the current circumstances.



13...c4∓ 14.fxg6? cxd3 15.gxf7† ♔h8!∓ The rook is not hanging, so the king can move away to safety.

12.c3 ♘e4

This offers Black an improved version of the line given after 10...♘bd7 above.

13.♕e3 cxd4 14.cxd4 ♘xg5 15.fxg5

Also after 15.♘xg5, Black can develop his knight actively: 15...♘c6 16.♘f3 f6 17.h3 ♗xf3 18.♖xf3 ♗h6 Black has annoying pressure against the white centre.

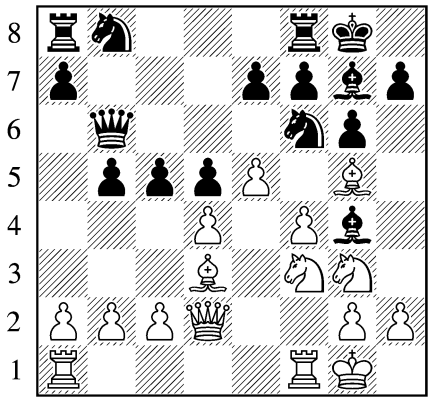
15...♘c6 16.h3

A draw was agreed here in De la Riva – Peralta, Andorra 2006.

A subsequent game continued:

16...♗xf3 17.♖xf3 ♖ae8 18.♕f2 ♘b4 19.♗b1 f6=

The position was level in Anreiter – Pyrich, email 2010.



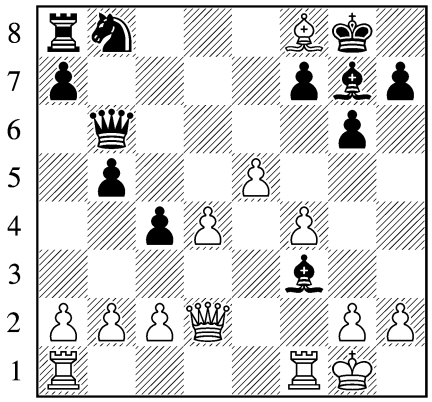
12...c4 13.♗e2 ♘e4 14.♘xe4

14.♕e3? leaves the g5-bishop misplaced after: 14...♘xg3 15.hxg3 f6 16.♗h4 ♘c6 17.c3 h6∓ Black can choose the best moment to win the bishop with ...g5.

14...dxe4 15.♗xe7!

Due to the threat of ...f6, White has no choice.

15...exf3 16.♗xf3 ♗xf3 17.♗xf8



Black has a choice regarding which bishop to keep. Both alternatives seem reasonable.

17...♗e4N

Since White's central pawns are on dark squares, it makes sense to keep the light-

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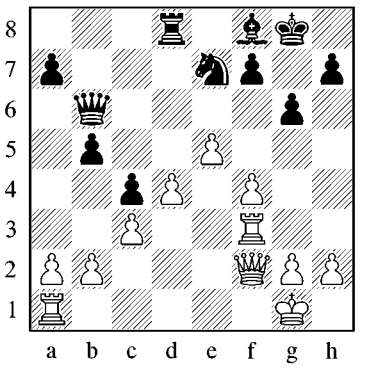
squared bishop, but the alternative looks viable too:

17...♗xf8 18.♖xf3 ♘c6 19.c3 ♖d8 20.♕f2N

20.♔h1 ♘e7 21.♖e1 ♕e6 22.♕f2 ♖d7 23.♖g1 h5 24.h3 f5 25.exf6 ♕xf6 was balanced in T. Nguyen – Tan Zhongyi, Baku (ol) 2016.

20...♘e7

The knight will safely block the centre, but Black still needs to find a solution to the kingside pawn storm.



21.g4

White cannot do without this, but the drawback of this resolute plan is the weakening of the f4-square.

21...♘d5

Or 21...f5 22.exf6 ♕xf6 23.♖e1 ♘d5 when Black seems to hold his own.

22.f5 g5!?

Ensuring the f4-square for the knight.

18.♗xg7 ♔xg7

Black still needs some time to transfer his knight to d5, which, combined with ...♗f5 and ...h5, would leave him in control of the game. White needs to hurry to unblock the position.

19.♖ae1

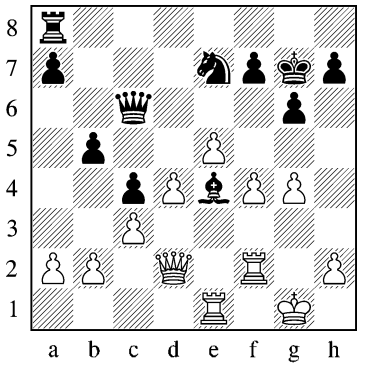
19.g4

This allows Black to regroup with gain of time, without really threatening f4-f5.

19...♘c6 20.c3 ♘e7 21.♖ae1

After 21.♖fe1 ♕c6 22.♕e3 ♗d3 23.f5 gxf5 24.♕g5† ♕g6∓, Black is doing well, because 25.♕xe7? ♕xg4† would give him a winning attack.

21...♕c6 22.♖f2



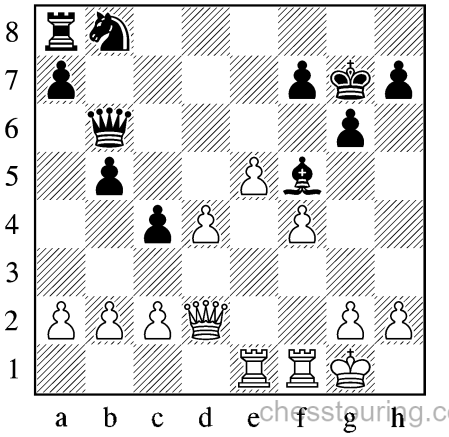
22...♖g8!!

This not only inhibits f4-f5, but also prepares ...♔f8 followed by ...h5, and suddenly it could be the white king who is in danger. If attacked, the bishop will retreat to d5 in order to keep an eye on the enemy king.

19...♗f5

Trying to prevent or at least delay g2-g4 followed by f4-f5.

Black cannot keep control over both of the important diagonals: 19...♕c6 20.♕e2 ♗f5 is met by 21.g4 followed by f4-f5.

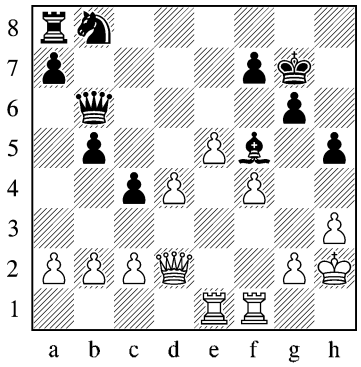


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20.g4!?

The critical test of the whole variation.

Slow play allows Black to complete his development and maintain stability:
20.h3 h5 21.♔h2



21...♘a6!

Planning ...♖d8 and ...♘c7-d5, but White will not allow it, of course.

The insertion of h2-h3 and ...h5 means that the plan given below (against 20.♔h1) does not work here: 21...♘c6 22.d5 ♕d4 23.♕xd4 ♘xd4 24.c3 ♘c2 25.♖e2 ♗d3 26.♖ff2 ♗xe2 27.♖xe2 ♘a1 28.♔g3 b4 29.cxb4 ♖b8 30.d6 ♔f8 31.♔h4! This is the difference! The king infiltrates through the weakened kingside.

22.d5 ♘c5

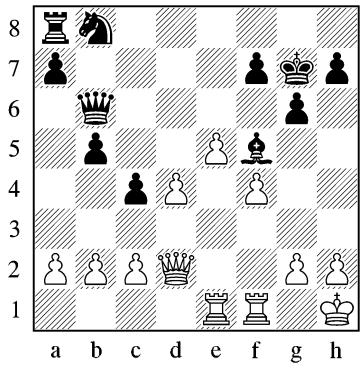
Black's position is quite stable and the central pawns are not dangerous. ♕d4 can always be met with ...♘a4 or ...♘d7, and slowly advancing the queenside pawns. White is best advised to refrain from headstrong kingside action:

23.♕e2 a5 24.g4? hxg4 25.hxg4 ♖h8† 26.♔g3 ♗e4 27.d6 ♕d8 28.g5 ♕d7

Black has decisive threats.

20.♔h1

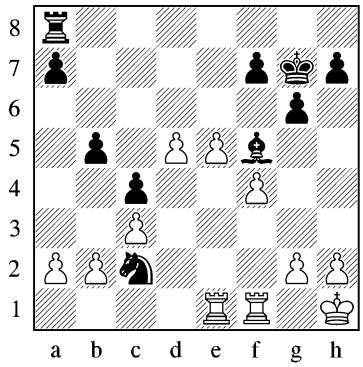
This induces some changes in how Black should react.



20...♘c6!

This plan works out well now, but Black cannot play in a similar way as above: 20...♘a6? 21.g4! ♗xg4 22.f5 ♗xf5 23.♖xf5 gxf5 24.♕g2† White wins an exchange. With the king on g1 this tactical operation would not work, since ...♕g6 would pin the white queen.

21.d5 ♕d4 22.♕xd4 ♘xd4 23.c3 ♘c2



If the rook moves along the back rank, 24...♘e3 will win the d5-pawn, so White's next move is the best chance to keep some tension.

24.♖e2 ♗d3 25.♖ff2 ♗xe2 26.♖xe2 ♘a1

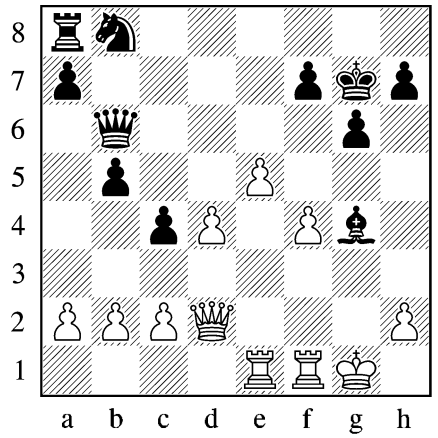
Black has a material advantage, but the knight cannot get out easily.

27.♔g1 b4 28.cxb4 ♖b8 29.♔f2 ♖xb4 30.♔e3 ♖a4 31.d6 ♔f8

White's compensation for the small material disadvantage should suffice only for a draw.

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20...♗xg4



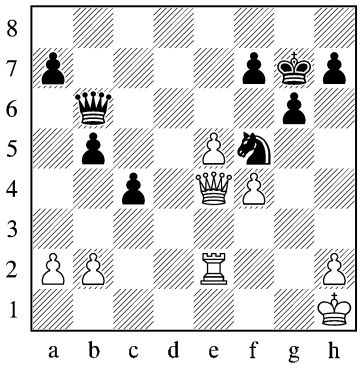
21.♕g2

The combination mentioned above can only be made to work with some modification, and it does not trouble Black: 21.f5 ♗xf5 22.♖xf5 gxf5 23.e6 Necessary in order to cut the queen's connection to the kingside. 23...fxe6 24.♕g2† ♔f6 25.♕xa8 ♕xd4† 26.♔h1 ♕d2 Material is balanced and the white king is no safer than Black's. A draw by perpetual is the most likely result.

21...♘c6 22.f5

Trying to make use of all the available resources.

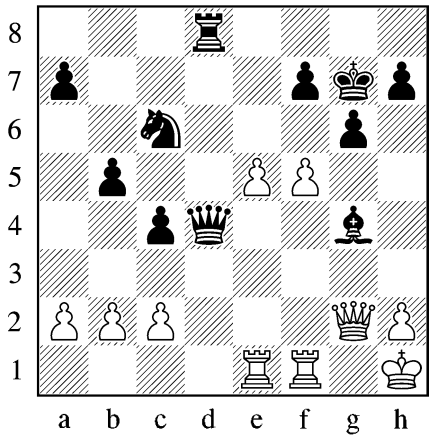
In the event of 22.♕xg4 ♘xd4 23.♔h1 ♘xc2 White manages to keep the extra exchange with a series of only moves, but Black gets enough positional compensation: 24.♖e2 ♘e3 25.♕f3 ♘xf1 26.♕xa8 ♘e3 27.♕e4 ♘f5 The knight is absolutely stable and the white king is exposed. On top of that, the queenside majority could become threatening. The only thing Black needs to avoid is an exchange of queens.



28.e6 The only constructive plan, opening the kingside. 28...fxe6 29.♕xe6 ♕b7† 30.♔g1 ♔h6= The knight provides perfect defence for the king and can quickly join the queen to start a counterattack.

22...♕xd4† 23.♔h1 ♖d8

Evacuating the long diagonal and thus unpinning the knight.

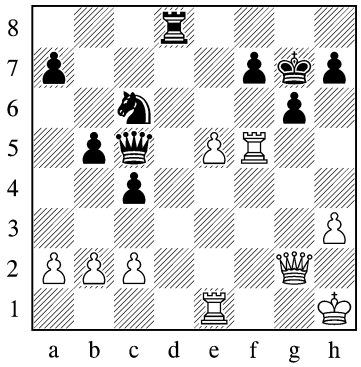


24.♕xc6

Other moves do not change the evaluation:

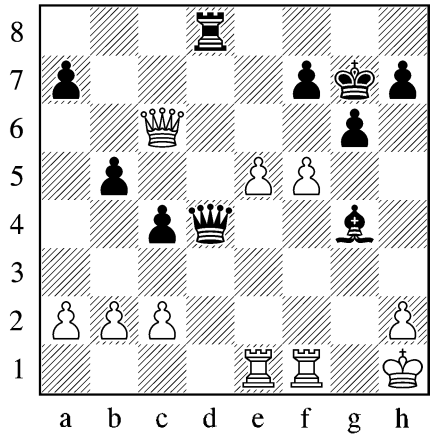
24.h3 ♗xf5 25.♖xf5 ♕c5 Defending the knight and keeping the e5-pawn under observation. Despite his seemingly active position, White is somehow stuck. The rooks have to defend the e5-pawn and the queen needs to pin the g-pawn. Under such circumstances, regrouping to increase the pressure is impossible.

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26.♕g5 ♔g8 27.♖ef1 ♕d5† 28.♔h2 ♖d7 29.c3 ♕e6 We have reached a so-called positional draw, where neither player can make progress.

Black is safe after the thematic break 24.e6, too: 24...fxe6 25.f6† ♔f7 26.♕xc6 ♕d5† 27.♕xd5 ♖xd5= Followed by ...♗f5 and ...♔xf6, with two pawns for the exchange and perfect coordination.

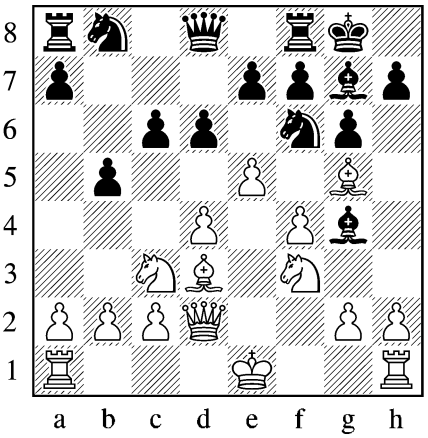


24...♗xf5 25.♕f6† ♔f8=

The vulnerability of his own king forces White to give a perpetual.

B3) 9.e5

A few decades ago, this was the plan that persuaded me to avoid this move order with Black. However, recently I discovered that the reason the plan appeared so strong was Black's inaccurate reaction in high-level games.

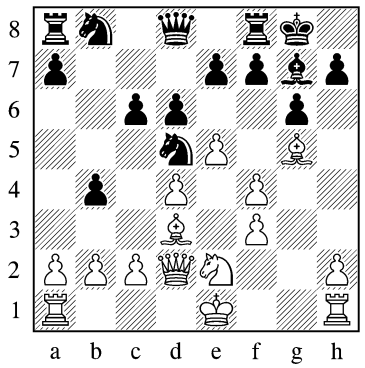


9...♗xf3!

The old main line went:

9...b4 10.♘e2 ♗xf3 11.gxf3 ♘d5

At first sight, Black's play looks logical, as he occupies a central square with his knight. However, in the line I recommend, White will have to play ♘e2 anyway, so ...b5-b4 is just a loss of time when Black's development is incomplete. Moreover, the black knight would stand better on h5, blocking the advance of the h-pawn. The specific problem for Black occurs after:



12.f5!

This has been played only once.

12...dxe5

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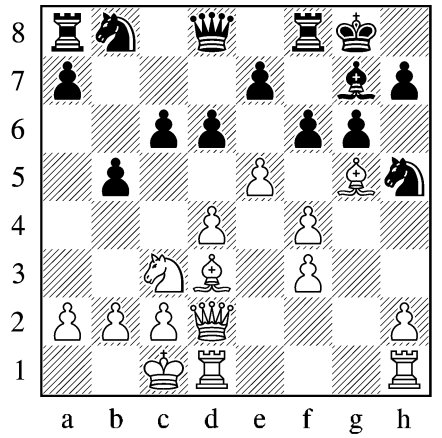
Kulish – Turova, Kolontaevo 1997, continued with 13.h4, but it looks even stronger to play:

13.fxg6N hxg6 14.h4 exd4 15.h5

White's attack is quite advanced, while Black still needs to complete his development.

10.gxf3 ♘h5 11.0–0–0 f6

The typical counterplay in the centre. With this particular structure, driving back the enemy bishop leaves the f4-pawn vulnerable.



12.exf6

The simplest way to repel the imaginative but unsound attack 12.f5? is: 12...fxg5 13.♕xg5 e6 14.f6 ♘d7 15.♘e4 ♘dxf6 16.exf6 ♗xf6∓ Black has an extra pawn and the superior structure.

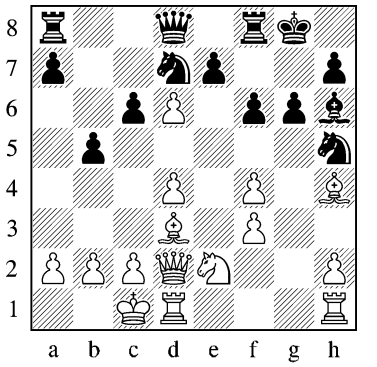
Delaying the exchange of pawns allows Black additional options:

12.♗h4N ♗h6 13.♘e2

Unlike in the main line, White cannot ignore the threat with 13.♔b1 due to 13...fxe5∓.

13...♘d7 14.exd6

After 14.exf6 ♘dxf6 15.♗g5 ♗xg5 16.fxg5 ♘d5, Black has perfect development and the more compact structure.



14...♘b6!

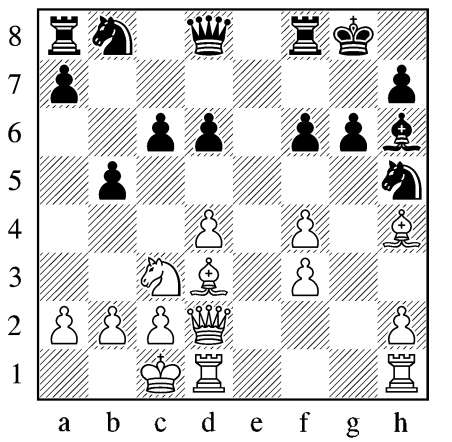
A necessary yet sound pawn sacrifice.

14...exd6 15.♔b1 leads Black astray from the set-ups recommended in the main line. The d4-d5 break is in the air and 15...d5 16.♕c3 would unpin the f4-pawn with gain of time, thus threatening f4-f5.

15.dxe7 ♕xe7 16.♔b1 ♘d5 17.♗g3 a5=

White's extra pawn is as good as doomed, and Black has ideal development.

12...exf6 13.♗h4 ♗h6



14.♔b1!?

An interesting pawn sacrifice, which Black is not forced to accept.

The 'normal' move is:

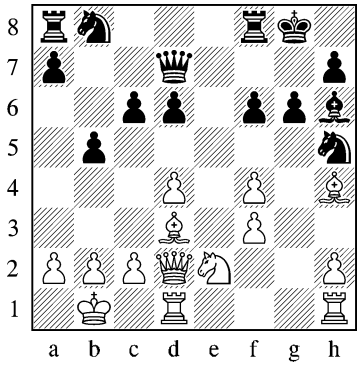
14.♘e2 ♕d7

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An original move, associated with several ideas. Black unpins his f6-pawn and consolidates the b5-pawn in view of the permanent threat of d4-d5. In some lines the queen may go to h3, causing White some stability problems.

Playing as the main line with 14...d5 is perfectly okay, and may well transpose to lines considered below.

15.♔b1



15...a5!N

The best way to use the queen's placement. Black prepares to transfer the knight to d5, starting with ...♘a6, without fearing d4-d5. If 15...f5?!, as played in Gonzalez Perez – Karlsson, Badalona 2010, White could get a stable positional advantage with: 16.♗g5N ♗xg5 17.fxg5 ♘a6 18.c4 ♘c7 19.cxb5 cxb5 20.♘g3 ♘xg3 21.hxg3±

16.♖hg1

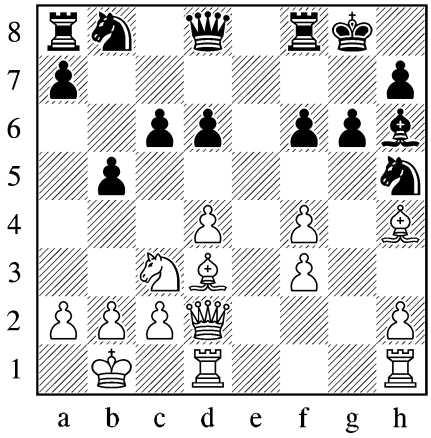
16.♘g3 is an interesting way of forcing matters: 16...♘xf4 17.♘h5!? (17.♘e2 ♕h3!∓) 17...gxh5 18.♗g3 ♘xd3 19.♕xh6 ♕g7 20.♕xg7† ♔xg7 21.♖xd3 ♘a6 22.♗xd6 ♖fd8 23.♗g3 ♘b4 Followed by ...♘d5, with a decent position for Black.

16...♘a6 17.d5

Depriving the black knight of the d5-square will soon present it with the c5-square. But other continuations are not challenging either: 17.♕xa5 ♘c5 18.♕c3 ♘xd3 19.♕xd3 ♖fe8 Black is perfectly coordinated and has attacking chances along the a-file. The missing pawn is not that important, as the f4-pawn is chronically weak. 20.f5? does not work due to 20...♖e3 21.♕d2 ♕xf5∓.

17...c5 18.♘g3 ♘xg3 19.hxg3 c4 20.♗f1 ♘c5 21.g4 f5 22.♗h3 fxg4 23.♗xg4 ♕f7 24.♗g5 ♗xg5 25.fxg5 b4

Black has at least equal play, as his queenside attack looks slightly more dangerous than White's on the kingside.



14...d5N

With development incomplete, I feel it is wisest to stabilize the position.

14...♘d7 15.♘e2 was slightly uncomfortable for Black in Sandor – Z. Szabo, Budapest 1994, as White has ideas of d4-d5, as well as ♕c3 followed by f4-f5.

14...♘xf4? is simply bad due to 15.♘e2.

14...♗xf4 looks playable, but in principle it is better to retain the possibility of ...♘xf4, as the bishop is unstable on the f4-square. A possible continuation is 15.♕g2 ♕d7 16.d5 ♗e5 17.dxc6 ♘xc6 18.♘d5, with good compensation for White.

15.♖hg1

Maintaining the policy of sacrificing the f4-pawn.

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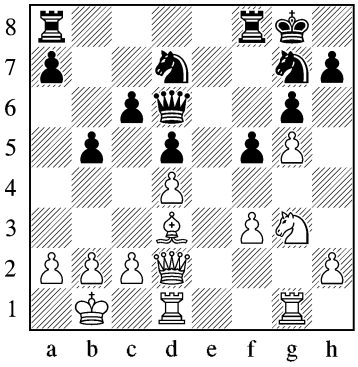
15.♘e2

This makes sense too, as in some cases White can try to unblock the kingside with ♘g3.

15...♕d6 16.♖hg1 f5 17.♘g3 ♘g7

If 17...♗xf4?! 18.♕e1, the threats of ♗e7 and ♘xh5 force Black to exchange his bishop with 18...♗xg3 19.hxg3, when White's bishop pair and lead in development give him the advantage.

18.♗g5 ♗xg5 19.fxg5 ♘d7



White has improved his structure and gained some space, but his minor pieces are not too active. Black's coordination is perfect, as one knight will go to b6 and the other safely defends the kingside. If White opens the h-file the black king will be safe on f7, while the f5-pawn is secured against positional piece sacrifices. In the long run, the knight could go to e6, exerting pressure on f4 and d4.

20.h4 ♘b6 21.f4

21.b3 a5 offers additional attacking ideas.

21...♘c4 22.♗xc4

Ignoring the knight cannot offer an advantage: 22.♕f2 ♖fe8 23.h5 Black can now continue his slow attack with ...a5-a4, or more or less force a draw with 23...♘xb2 24.♔xb2 ♕b4† 25.♔c1 ♕a3† 26.♔d2 ♕a5† 27.c3 b4=.

22...bxc4

Black intends ...♖ab8, with obvious counterplay.

15...♕e8

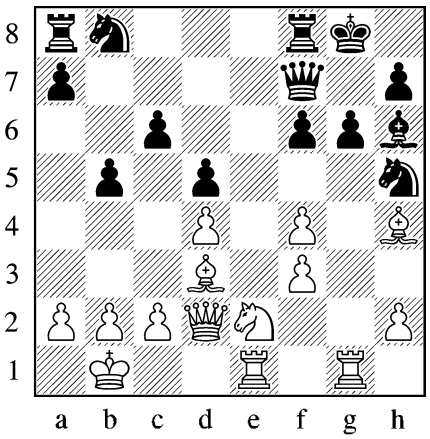
Overprotecting the g6-pawn, because 15...♘d7? 16.♗xg6 hxg6 17.♖xg6† ♗g7 18.♕g2 followed by ♕g4 wins for White.

16.♖de1

16.♗f5 is harmless as Black has with ...♘g7 available to prevent the intrusion on the e6-square: 16...♕f7 17.♖de1 ♘g7 18.♗h3 ♘d7 19.♘e2 f5= Followed by the familiar regrouping with ...♘b6 and ...♘e6.

16...♕f7 17.♘e2

Hoping to pose some queenside problems with ♕b4 or ♕a5.



17...a5!

Parrying both threats and planning to proceed with ...f5 and ...♘d7. In some cases ...♖a7-e7 could also be an idea.

18.♕c3

The only consistent continuation.

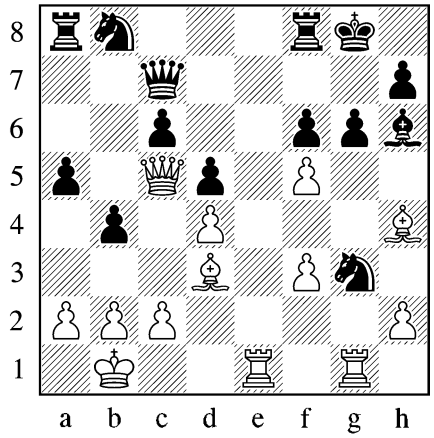
18...b4 19.♕c5 ♕c7

The queen experiences some danger on c5, but White has just enough resources to maintain equality.

20.♘g3 ♘xg3 21.f5!

A great idea, but Black has a fine reply.

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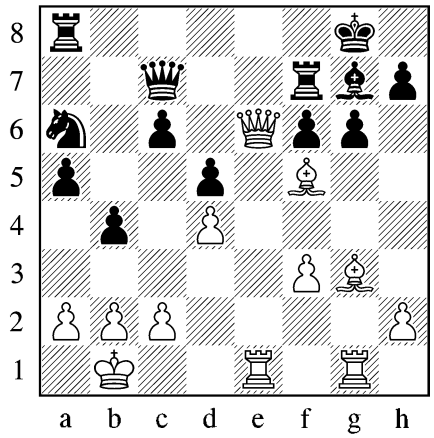
21...♘a6! 22.♕e7

But not 22.♗xa6? ♘xf5!, when both of White's bishops are hanging.

22...♘xf5 23.♗xf5 ♗g7 24.♕e6†

24.♗e6† is ineffective, as after 24...♔h8 25.♕xc7 ♘xc7 the bishop is not stable: 26.♗d7 ♖a6 Followed by ...♘b5, ...f5 and ...a4-a3.

24...♖f7 25.♗g3



25...♕d8

The careless 25...♕b6? runs into 26.h4, and if 26...gxf5 27.♗d6, the threats of ♖xg7† and ♕e8† offer White a decisive attack.

26.♗d3 ♕b6

After eliminating the danger the queen returns to its normal path, defending c6 and attacking d4.

27.h4 ♕xd4

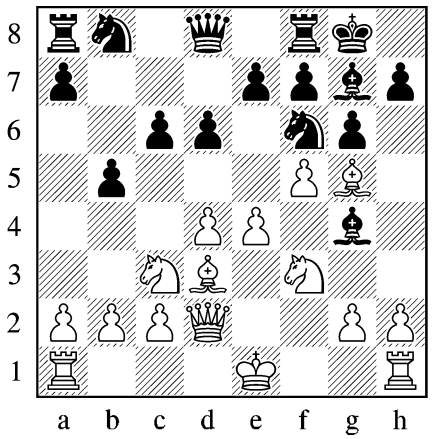
27...f5 is also good: 28.♗e5 ♘c7 29.♗xc7 ♕xc7 30.h5 ♔f8! Unpinning the rook and preparing the next move. 31.hxg6 ♖f6 32.♕e5 The only way to prevent ...hxg6. 32...♕xe5 33.dxe5 ♖xg6= With a probable draw due to the opposite-coloured bishops.

28.♕xc6 f5!

The only move, but rather a good one. Due to the threatened mate on b2, White has nothing better than delivering a perpetual with:

29.♕xa8† ♖f8 30.♕xf8† ♔xf8 31.♗d6† ♔g8 32.♖e8† ♔f7 33.♖e7† ♔g8=

B4) 9.f5



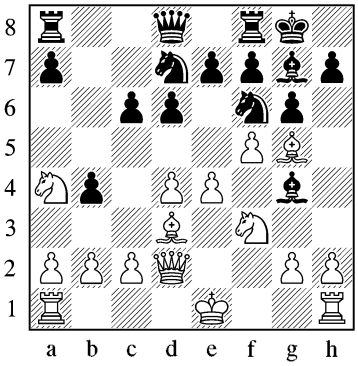
This aggressive move, aiming at weakening the king's defence with ♗h6 and a well-timed fxg6, seems to be the latest trend for White in this variation. The main drawback of this plan is that his dark squares may become weak, especially with ...♗xf3 being a constant possibility.

9...b4 10.♘e2

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This is unanimously played. White transfers the knight closer to the kingside, hoping to strengthen his attack. Even though they have not been tried in practice, the alternatives are worth investigating.

10.♘a4N practically gives up hope of a massive kingside attack, but intends to cause Black some problems playing the thematic ...c5 break. 10...♘bd7

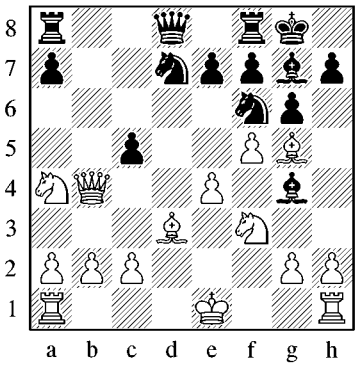


Black prepares the pawn break, ignoring the hanging pawn. White has to choose between a) 11.♕xb4?! and b) 11.0–0.

a) 11.♕xb4?!

This is rather risky.

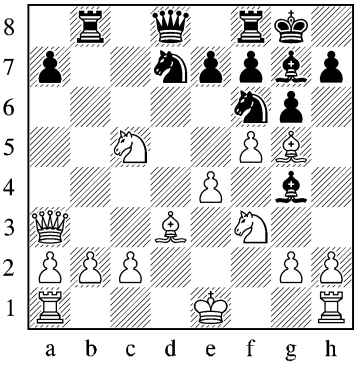
11...c5 12.dxc5 dxc5



13.♘xc5

After 13.♕a3 c4 14.♗xc4 ♘xe4 15.♗xe7 ♕c7 16.♗xf8 ♖xf8, the uncastled king and the poorly coordinated pieces leave White vulnerable to Black's initiative, despite the big material advantage. Here is an illustrative line: 17.♗d3 ♘g3! 18.hxg3 ♕xg3†–+ There is no safe shelter for the white king.

13...♖b8 14.♕a3



14...♘xe4!

Once again, White's chaotic piece placement allows tactical blows.

15.♘xe4 ♗xb2 16.♕xe7 ♗xa1 17.♕xd8 ♖fxd8 18.♔d2

If 18.♗xd8 ♖b1†, Black wins the h1-rook.

18...f6

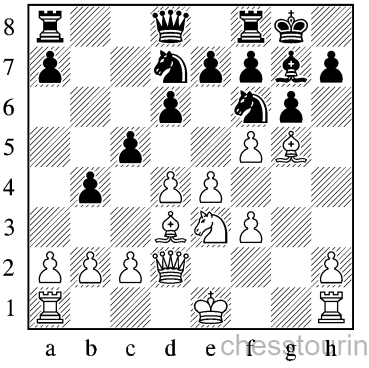
Black has an extra exchange and the initiative against the insecure white king.

b) Instead of grabbing the pawn, 11.0–0 is better, with approximate equality: 11...c5 12.dxc5 dxc5 13.♖ad1 ♕c7 14.b3 ♘b6 15.♗f4 ♕c8=

10.♘d1

This spends too much time regrouping.

10...♘bd7 11.♘e3 ♗xf3 12.gxf3 c5



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13.c3

Pawn-grabbing is even worse than above: 13.dxc5 ♘xc5 14.♕xb4?! ♖b8 15.♕a3 Hoping in vain to keep the extra pawn. 15...♘fxe4! This trick works even better than above since the e7-pawn is not hanging. 16.♗xe4 ♗xb2–+

13...bxc3 14.bxc3 e6!

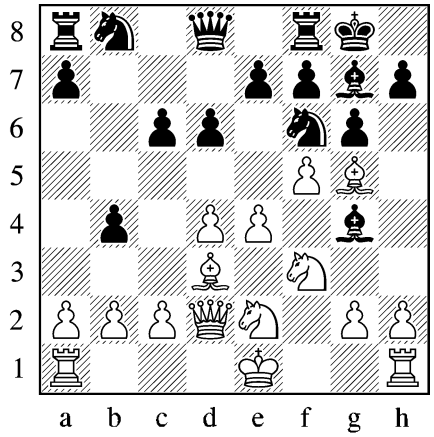
Questioning White's space advantage and clearing the path to the weakness on f4.

15.fxe6 fxe6

Threatening ...♘xe4!, thus highlighting White's lack of communication between the wings with the knight on e3.

16.♘c2 ♕c7 17.0–0 ♘h5

With great counterplay against White's centre.



10...♘bd7

The most logical move, continuing with development before breaking in the centre.

10...d5?!

This premature break was played in a relatively recent grandmaster game, but it could have led to problems.

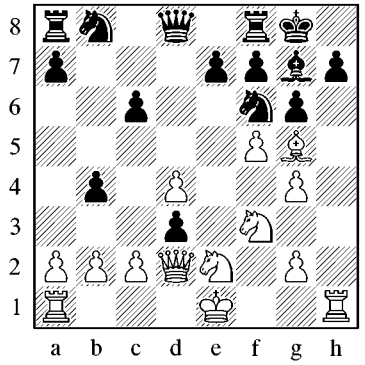
11.h3

The best way to maintain the integrity of the centre.

11...dxe4

I might be tempted to try something chaotic, such as 11...♗xf3N 12.gxf3 c5 13.exd5 ♘bd7, based on White's imperfect structure and his difficulties in finding a safe place for his king.

12.hxg4 exd3



13.cxd3!!N

This paradoxical move, completely spoiling the pawn structure, keeps the queen on the attacking track.

13.♗xf6?! offers Black easy play: 13...exf6 14.♕xd3 ♖e8 15.♔f2 ♘d7 16.♖h3 ♕e7 Black's position was already more comfortable in Vallejo Pons – Spraggett, Gibraltar 2014.

13...♘bd7

13...♘xg4 14.♕f4 speeds up the queen's transfer to the h-file.

14.fxg6 fxg6 15.♗h6±

White has a strong attack.

11.0–0

There is no point in deviating from the initial plan for the sake of one pawn:

11.♕xb4 c5N

11...♖b8 also gave Black decent play in Kling – Suedel, corr. 1986.

12.♕d2

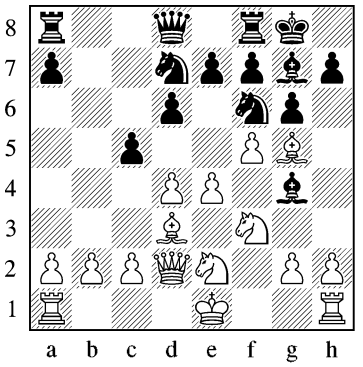
Relatively best.

12.dxc5? is way too risky, as usual: 12...♖b8 13.♕a3 ♘xc5∓ White has no defence against ...♘fxe4.

12.♕a3 places the queen on a uncomfortable

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square, leaving the dark squares vulnerable at the same time: 12...cxd4 13.♘exd4 ♕b6 14.♗e3 ♗xf3 15.gxf3 ♘g4 16.fxg4 ♗xd4 17.♗xd4 ♕xd4 18.0–0–0 ♘e5 19.♖hg1 ♖fb8 Black's queenside initiative outweighs the missing pawn.



12...c4!

Eliminating the e4-pawn.

13.♗xf6 ♘xf6 14.♗xc4 ♘xe4 15.♕e3 d5 16.fxg6

White is forced to release the tension since the f5-pawn was hanging, but this clears the path for the black e-pawn.

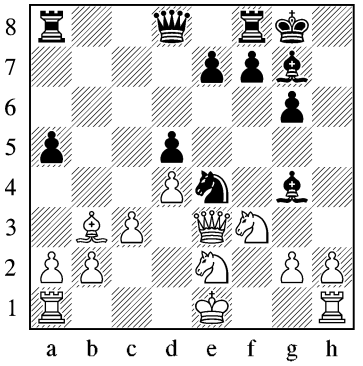
16...hxg6 17.♗b3

After 17.♗d3 ♕b6∓, Black threatens both ...♕xb2 and ...e5.

17...a5 18.c3

Strategically, the most flexible reaction to Black's queenside attack.

If 18.a4 e6 followed by ...♖b8-b4, White's bishop and his whole queenside would be in a delicate situation.



18...e5!

Taking full advantage of the king still being in the centre.

19.0–0

Relatively best. Taking the pawn leads to trouble:

19.♘xe5 ♗xe2 20.♔xe2 Avoiding the nasty ...♕h4†. 20...♗xe5 21.dxe5 a4 22.♗c2 ♕c7∓ Black has a dangerous combined attack along the e- and b-files.

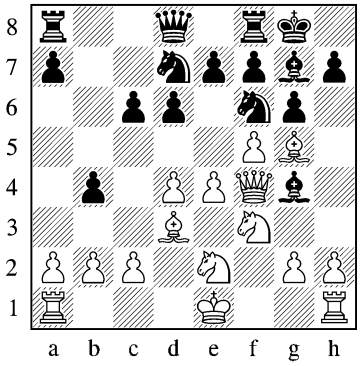
19.dxe5 a4 20.♗c2 ♗xf3 21.♕xf3 The best way of dealing with the check on h4. 21...♕b6 22.♖b1 ♗xe5∓ Once again, the white king is stuck in the centre.

19...a4 20.♗c2 a3!

The pressure on the dark squares at least compensates for the missing pawn.

11.♕f4N

Of White's untried moves, this is the most consistent, requiring a certain accuracy from Black on the way to obtaining counterplay.



11...♗xf3 12.♕xf3 c5 13.c3 ♕b6 14.♗e3

Defending the g1-a7 diagonal, because 14.0–0 cxd4 15.cxd4 d5 would deprive White of the desirable e4-e5 due to ...♘xe5. Instead, 16.exd5 ♘e5 17.♕g3 ♘xd3 18.♕xd3 ♘xd5∓ gives Black a pleasant blockade on d5.

14.♕h3 looks constructive, but wastes too much time. Black has several good continuations but my favourite is 14...♖ae8!,

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completing development and preparing to break in the centre: 15.0–0 cxd4 16.cxd4 e5 17.fxe6 ♖xe6 18.♗e3 ♕b7 19.♘g3 ♘d5 Black has great counterplay.

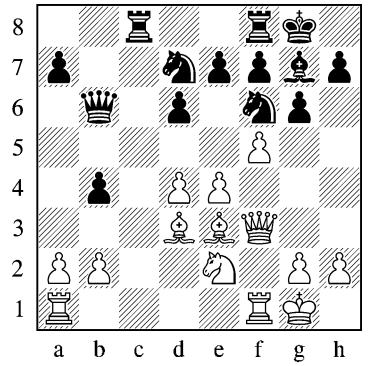
14...♖ac8

A generally useful move, waiting for White to castle.

15.0–0

15.♖d1 avoids the problem from the main line, but leaves the queenside vulnerable to 15...♕a5.

15...cxd4 16.cxd4

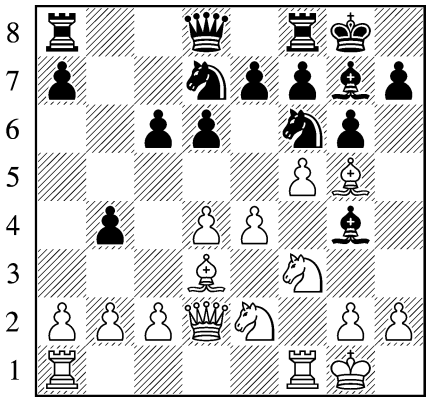


16...♘g4!

A nice trick, exchanging a minor piece and turning the white centre into a target.

17.♕xg4 ♘e5

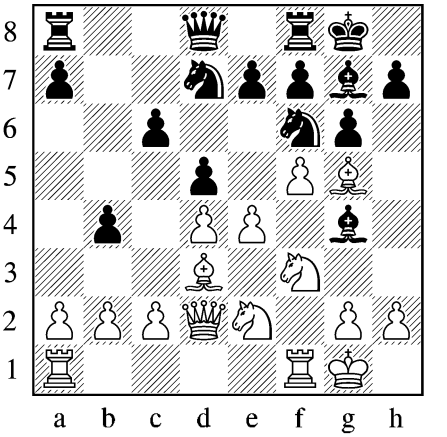
Followed by ...♘xd3.



11...d5!N

Now is a good moment to shake White's stability in the centre.

11...c5 is also playable, but less critical: 12.c3! bxc3?! Opening the b-file for no good reason. (12...♕b6N looks better, as the queen is safe on b6 and Black can open the b-file only after ...♖ab8 in order to proceed with ...♕b2.) 13.bxc3 ♕a5 14.♕f4 White had a kingside initiative in Browne – Hort, Madrid 1973.



12.exd5

Hoping that pawn-grabbing will compensate for the strategic problems in the centre.

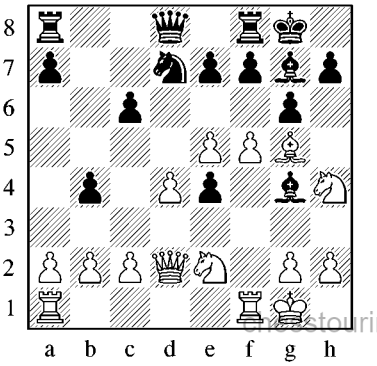
12.♕f4 dxe4 13.♗xe4 ♘xe4 14.♕xg4 ♘df6 is pleasant for Black.

12.e5

This leaves White's centre vulnerable after:

12...♘e4 13.♗xe4 dxe4 14.♘h4

Defending the f5-pawn.

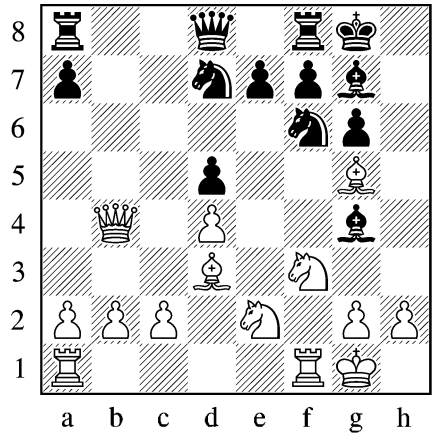


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14...♘xe5! 15.dxe5 ♕xd2 16.♗xd2 ♗xe2∓
Black's extra pawn may be temporary, but he has the two bishops while the h4-knight is miserably placed.
17.♖f2 ♗a6 18.f6 exf6 19.exf6
If ...♗h8 were forced, the bishop might never get out, but Black has a strong intermediate move:
19...♖fe8! 20.fxg7 e3∓
Black will soon be a pawn up in the ending.

Inserting the exchange on f6 before advancing the e-pawn does not essentially change anything: 12.♗xf6 ♘xf6 13.e5 ♘e4 14.♗xe4 dxe4 15.♘h4 ♗xe5∓

12...cxd5 13.fxg6 hxg6 14.♕xb4



14...♖b8 15.♕a3 ♗xf3 16.♖xf3
16.gxf3 e5 is similar.

16...e5
The g1-a7 diagonal is vulnerable and the b2-pawn is hanging in many lines. Black has great compensation for the pawn.

Conclusion

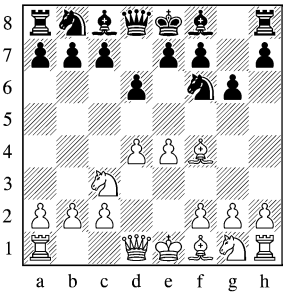
Among the aggressive systems, 4.♗g5 is the one which exposes White to the highest degree to Black's counterplay based on the simultaneous weakening of the b2- and d4-pawns, as well as the bishop's exposure to ...f6 or ...exf6. These factors apply if White plays f2-f4, as otherwise play may transpose to more peaceful systems covered in other chapters.

It is important for Black to know the precise moment at which to play moves such as ...b5, ...b4, ...c5, ...♗xf3 or even ...d5. There are plenty of such examples in lines B2 and B4.

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Chapter 13

Various 4th Moves



4.♗f4

Variation Index

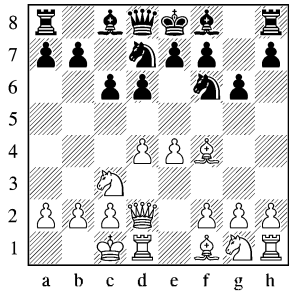
1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗f4

4...c6 5.♕d2 ♘bd7 6.♘f3 ♗g7! 7.0–0–0 ♕a5

A) 8.♔b1 **331**

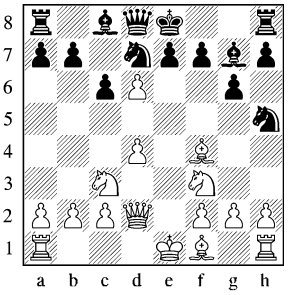
B) 8.e5 **333**

note to 6.♘f3



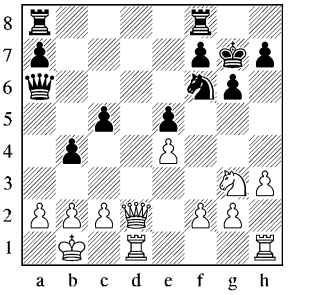
6...♕a5!N

note to 7.0–0–0



8...♘xf4!N

A) note to 11.e5



19...♖ae8!?N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♗f4

This relatively rare move bears a close connection with both 4.♗e3 and 4.♗g5. One of White's main plans is ♕d2 followed by ♗h6, transposing to the aforementioned systems, so Black should choose his early move order carefully. Additionally, the bishop is well placed on f4 for preparing an early break with e4-e5, as it controls the e5-square and, no less importantly, it is not exposed to ...♘g4, nor ...h6 followed by ...g5. True, in case of emergency, Black can attack the bishop with ...♘h5, but if this does not bring any specific benefit, the knight may well end up in a passive situation.

I must confess that over the years this has been one of the most troublesome variations for me. I have only faced it on rare occasions, so I did not have the motivation to analyse it thoroughly, relying on the fact that I could improvise over the board. In practice, this policy worked out well, but it could hardly satisfy the purpose of a repertoire book, so I eventually came up with a coherent antidote, which I will present below.

It is worth mentioning that this variation sometimes arises via an unusual move order: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 An increasingly popular move, even at high levels. 2...g6 3.♘c3 d6 4.e4.

4...c6

The same plan as against 4.♗e3 and 4.♗g5 – Black delays the development of his bishop in anticipation of ♕d2.

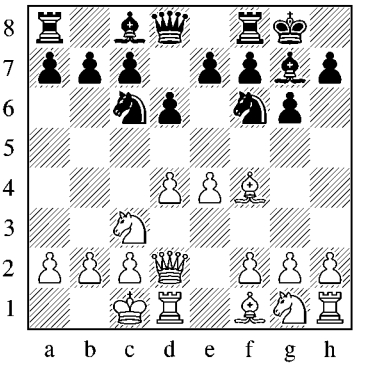
At one point, I considered the following system:

4...♗g7 5.♕d2 ♘c6

Thinking logically, the bishop on f4 invites this knight development. The d4-pawn is relatively weak and Black can answer d4-d5 with the intermediate ...e5.

6.0–0–0 0–0

I was surprised to find that this position has become a frequent guest in top-level blitz games in recent years.

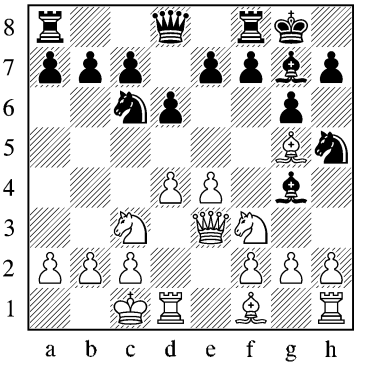


7.♘f3

7.♗h6 e5 8.d5 ♘d4 should cause Black no worries.

7...♗g4 8.♕e3 ♘h5 9.♗g5N

This is more challenging than 9.♗h6 ♗xh6 10.♕xh6 ♗xf3 11.gxf3 e5 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.♗e2 ♕h4, with a promising blockade on the dark squares in Grischuk – Nepomniachtchi, Beijing (blitz) 2014.



9...♗xf3 10.gxf3 f6 11.♗h4

Or 11.♗h6 e5, with chances to take advantage of White's spoiled structure.

11...♕d7

Planning ...e5.

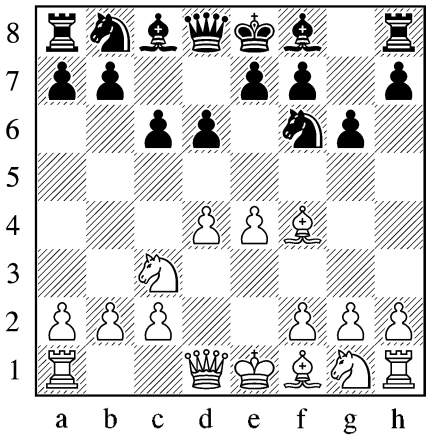
12.d5 ♘e5 13.♗e2 f5 14.f4 ♗h6 15.♗xh5 fxe4 16.♘e2 ♕f5 17.♗xe7 ♖f7 18.♗g5 ♗xg5

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19.fxg5 gxh5 20.♘g3 ♕xf2 21.♕xe4 ♖f4 22.♖df1 ♕xf1† 23.♖xf1 ♖xe4 24.♘xe4 ♔g7=

Black's king is active and his kingside pawns are no weaker than White's.

Everything has been fine so far, but two things worry me in this line. First of all, 6.♗b5 partly takes the steam out of Black's plan of taking the control of the dark squares, but even more concerning is 7.f3. White prepares his Sämisch attack slowly, while Black does not have a way to activate his queen, since ...c6 is impossible. Although the results have favoured Black, I do not feel keen to play this position.



5.♕d2

The most flexible move, creating the potential threat of ♗h6 and keeping e4-e5 and 0–0–0 in reserve.

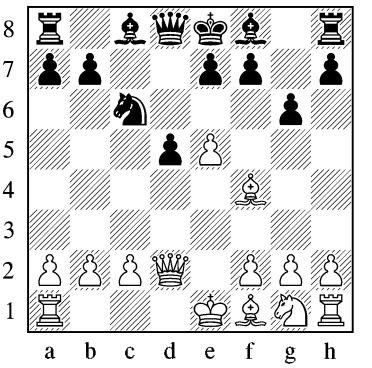
White does not get much by hurrying with the central break:

5.e5 dxe5 6.dxe5 ♘d5 7.♘xd5

If 7.♗c4, Black should not fall into the trap 7...♘xc3 8.♗xf7!†, but can instead play 7...♗e6 with equal chances.

7...cxd5 8.♕d2 ♘c6

This is one of the exceptions when the bishop does not stand well on the f4-square after e4-e5. True, it defends the central pawn, but it prevents its consolidation with f2-f4 and cannot take part in the fight for the d4-square.



9.0–0–0 ♗e6 10.♘f3 ♗g7 11.♗h6

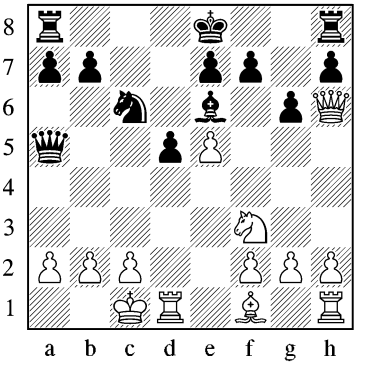
If 11.♘d4, Black has the flexible 11...♗d7, followed by ...♕b6.

11.♘g5 does not bring White much either: 11...♗f5 12.♕xd5 ♕xd5 13.♖xd5 ♗xc2= Black regains the pawn with comfortable play.

11.♗b5 aims to increase White's control over the d4-square, but is not too consistent, since ♗xc6 would strengthen Black's centre and clear the b-file for his counterattack: 11...♕b6 12.♘d4 ♗d7 13.♕e3 0–0 14.h4 ♖ac8 15.♔b1 ♖fd8= White cannot avoid mass simplifications since 16.♗xc6 bxc6 17.h5 c5 18.♘f3 d4 would offer Black the initiative.

11...♗xh6 12.♕xh6 ♕a5=

Preparing to castle queenside.



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13.♖d3?!

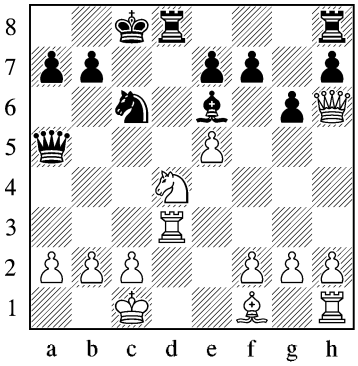
An unnatural move, spoiling White's coordination.

13.a3N 0–0–0 would have kept the position level.

13...d4∓ 14.♘xd4?

Entering a nasty pin.

14...0–0–0



15.♕e3

The point is that 15.♘xc6? ♕e1† leads to mate.

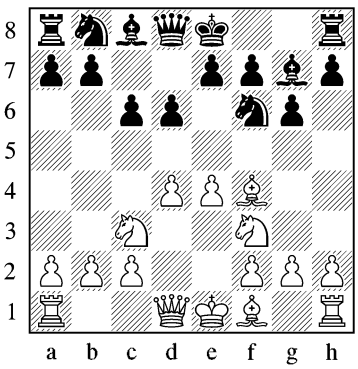
In Jaunooby – Polaczek, England 2016, Black's most convincing continuation would have been:

15...♘xd4N 16.♖xd4 ♕xa2 17.♕c3† ♔b8 18.b3 ♖xd4 19.♕xd4 ♖c8 20.♕b2 ♗xb3–+

Black reaches a won ending.

The other way to carry out an early central break is:

5.♘f3 ♗g7



6.e5

6.♕d2 ♘bd7 transposes to the main line.

6...dxe5

6...♘h5 also works, for instance 7.♗e3 dxe5 8.♘xe5 ♘d7, and now relatively best is 9.♘f3. However, Black will in turn lose time retreating the h5-knight. The main continuation is somewhat more flexible.

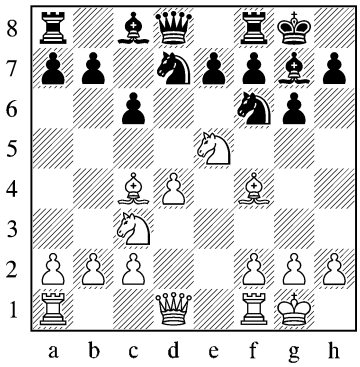
7.♘xe5

7.dxe5 ♕xd1† 8.♖xd1 has been played a few times, but White would face problems with his e5-pawn after: 8...♘h5N 9.♗e3 ♗g4∓

7...0–0 8.♗c4

8.♗e2 ♘bd7 9.0–0 transposes to the note on 8...♘bd7 in variation A of Chapter 1 on page 17.

8...♘bd7 9.0–0



9...♘h5

This is the simplest way to relieve White's light pressure.

10.♘xd7 ♕xd7!?

Preparing to develop the bishop on the long diagonal.

11.♗e3

In Kuehn – Galdunts, Bad Wiessee 2013, Black's simplest route to full equality was:

11...♘f6N 12.h3

Parrying ...♘g4.

12...b5 13.♗b3 a5 14.a3 ♖d8 15.♖e1 ♗b7 16.♕d3 e6=

With his minor pieces poorly placed, White cannot enjoy his slight space advantage.

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5...♘bd7 6.♘f3

After Black has increased his control over the e5-square, White is not ready for:

6.e5 ♘h5 7.e6?!

A typical blitz move, which does not offer White too much compensation for the pawn.

However, Black keeps comfortable play after: 7.exd6 ♘xf4 8.♕xf4 exd6 9.0–0–0 ♕f6 10.♖e1† ♔d8 In the absence of White's dark-squared bishop, the king will be safe on the c7-square. 11.♕d2 d5 12.♘f3 ♔c7=

7...fxe6 8.♗e3 ♗g7 9.0–0–0

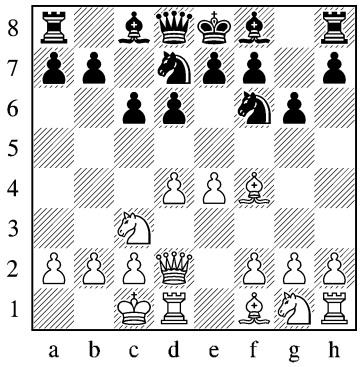
In Grischuk – V. Onischuk, Almaty (blitz) 2016, Black should have played:

9...e5N

This leads to a position with an entirely sound extra pawn for Black.

6.0–0–0

This requires some accuracy from Black. It is still too early for 6...♗g7 due to 7.♗h6, so he has to find the best way to start the queenside counterattack.



6...♕a5!N

6...b5?! runs into a unexpected problem, based on the bishop's presence on the f4-square: 7.e5 b4N (7...♘h5?! 8.exd6 ♘xf4 9.♕xf4 gave White a clear advantage in R. Dumitrescu – Vladut, Amara 2007) 8.exf6 bxc3 9.♕xc3 ♘xf6 We are familiar with this type of situation from variation A of Chapter 12 (see the note on 6.0–0–0 b5? on page 296). Immediately grabbing the c6-pawn would offer Black ample compensation, but 10.♖e1! is hard to meet, for if 10...♗g7? 11.♕xc6† ♗d7 12.♕xd6, White wins a second pawn.

7.e5

The critical test.

7.♔b1 e5 8.♗e3 b5 leads to active play for Black.

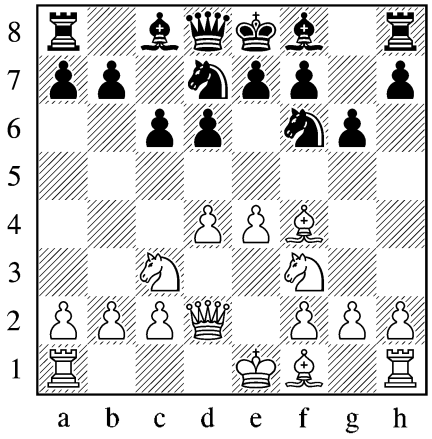
If 7.♘f3, Black has a choice between 7...♗g7, transposing to the main line, and 7...b5, starting counterplay at once.

Switching to the Sämisch set-up with the bishop on f4 is not too threatening either: 7.f3 b5 8.♔b1 b4 9.♘ce2 ♗a6 10.♘c1 ♗xf1 11.♖xf1 e5 12.♗e3 c5 13.dxc5 dxc5 Black is planning ...c4 and, if necessary, ...0–0–0.

7...dxe5 8.dxe5 ♘h5 9.e6

This more or less forced pawn sacrifice offers White compensation, but not more.

9...fxe6 10.♗h6 ♘df6 11.♔b1 e5 12.♗c4 ♗d7 13.♘f3 0–0–0=



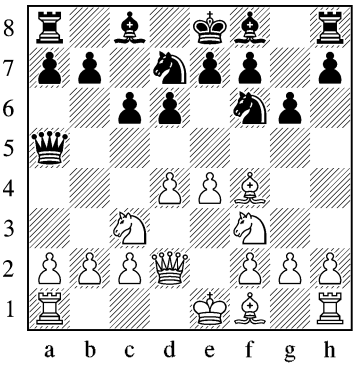
6...♗g7!

From Chapter 8 we are familiar with the fact that after ♘g1-f3 the threat of ♗h6 is less strong, so Black can (and in this position should) develop his bishop.

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6...♕a5

This looks a natural way to prepare ...e5, and I have tried it in a game. However, I was surprised to find out to my cost that White's central break works out well, based on small tactical details.



7.e5! dxe5 8.dxe5 ♘g4

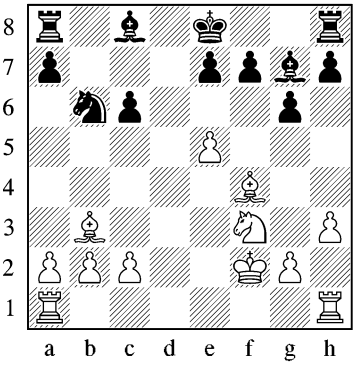
If 8...♘h5 9.♗e3 ♘g7, as in Gavrilov – Tseshkovsky, St Petersburg 2001, White could retain a strong initiative with 10.♗c4N ♘b6 11.♗b3 ♘e6 12.h4.

9.♘e4!?

The thematic 9.e6N is also promising as Black is underdeveloped: 9...fxe6 10.h3 ♘gf6 11.♗c4 ♘d5 12.0–0±

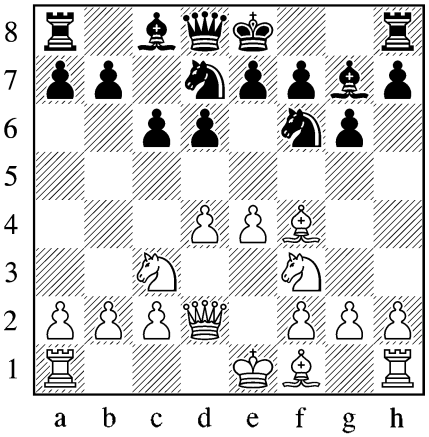
9...♕xd2† 10.♘exd2 ♗g7 11.♘c4 b5 12.h3 ♘xf2 13.♔xf2 bxc4 14.♗xc4 ♘b6 15.♗b3±

White's position is more pleasant, and my attempt at harassing the b3-bishop simply lost a pawn.



15...c5?! 16.♗e3! c4 17.♗xb6 cxb3 18.axb3±

This was Hamdouchi – Marin, Sitges 1999, but since I eventually managed to achieve a draw, this game did not yet give me the motivation to search for the best move order, and I continued experimenting...



7.0–0–0

7.♗e2 0–0 8.0–0 transposes to variation B of Chapter 1.

7.e5

Though rarely played, this is interesting and requires radical measures from Black.

7...♘h5!?

An interesting pawn sacrifice.

If 7...dxe5 8.dxe5 ♘h5, then:

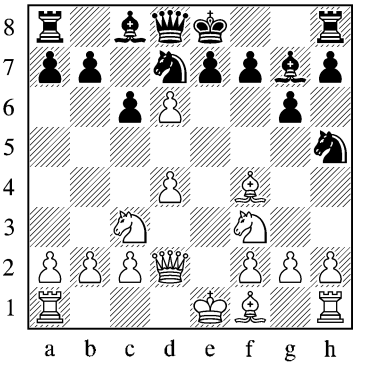
a) White cannot play 9.♗h6 due to 9...♘xe5!, based on 10.♗xg7 ♘xf3† or 10.♕xd8† ♔xd8 11.0–0–0† ♘d7.

b) However, White has the strong 9.e6! fxe6 10.♗h6. With queens on the board, the weaknesses on the dark squares endanger the black king, while after 10...♘e5 11.♕xd8† ♔xd8 12.0–0–0† ♘d7 13.♗xg7 ♘xg7 14.♗d3, White will set up an annoying blockade on the e5-square. Black would prefer his king's knight to be on f7, but on g7 it just stands badly. Players with defensive skills may not be concerned about playing this position, but the text move is more ambitious.

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8.exd6

In Bolhari – Martins, Lisbon 2014, Black should have played:



8...♘xf4!N 9.♕xf4 ♘f6

9...♘b6 is also worth investigating.

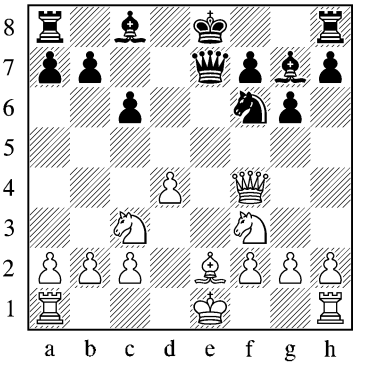
10.dxe7 ♕xe7†

Black has the bishop pair and free development, and due to the misplaced c3-knight, the d4-pawn is vulnerable. This leaves White unstable on the dark squares, offering Black long-term compensation for the pawn.

11.♗e2

The queen is exposed on the e-file after: 11.♕e3 ♗e6 12.♗d3 0–0 13.0–0 It would make little sense to castle queenside, since after a well-timed ...c5 the white king would have to endure the g7-bishop's pressure. 13...♖fe8 14.a3 Preventing ...♕b4. 14...♖ad8 15.♖fe1 ♕c7 16.♕d2 ♗g4 17.♖xe8† ♘xe8= Black will regain the pawn soon.

The same assessment applies to 11.♕e5 ♗e6=.



11...0–0 12.0–0

12.0–0–0 is met by 12...♗e6 13.♔b1 ♖fe8 14.♖he1 ♕d8!, followed by the queen's transfer to the queenside.

12...♗f5 13.♖fc1

This looks unnatural, but after 13.♖ac1 ♕b4 Black soon regains the pawn.

13...♖ad8 14.h3 c5

Just one of the playable moves. Black clears the diagonal for his bishop, setting up strong pressure against the enemy queenside.

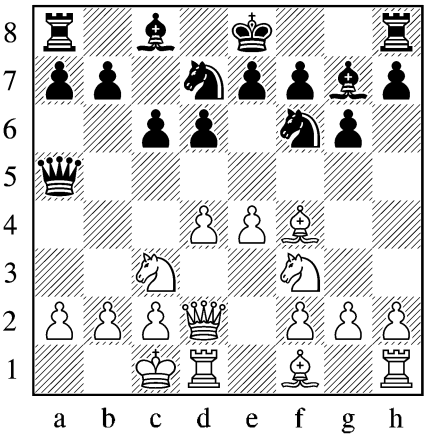
15.dxc5 ♕xc5

Black has obvious compensation for the pawn.

7...♕a5N

This queen move is a novelty here, although play may transpose into games reached via other move orders.

Once again, Black should refrain from starting the pawn storm with 7...b5 due to 8.e5N b4 9.♘e2 ♘d5 10.♗h6, with attacking chances.

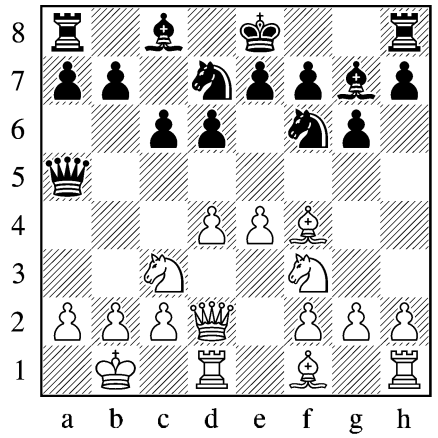


After this unusually long introduction, we finally have a split between the neutral **A) 8.♔b1** and the resolute **B) 8.e5**.

8.♗d3 releases the latent pressure along the d-file, allowing 8...e5 with equality, as in Stocek – Medic, Pula 2002.

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A) 8.♔b1



This slow approach does not pose concrete problems for Black.

8...0–0 9.♗h6

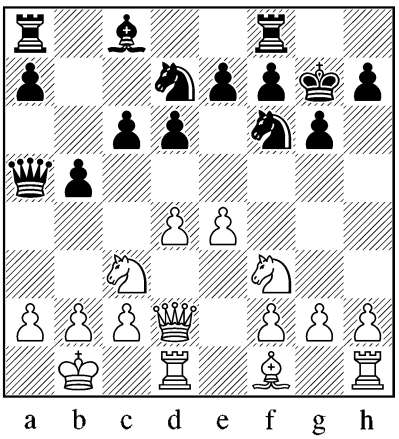
The only constructive plan. Play has now transposed to a rare variation which sometimes arises from the 4.♗e3 move order. However, this position was not examined in Chapter 8, since my recommended move order there did not include an early ...♕a5.

9...b5 10.♗xg7

The thematic combination 10.♘d5 ♕xd2 11.♘xe7† does not promise any advantage: 11...♔h8 12.♗xg7† ♔xg7 13.♘xd2 In Peschlow – Schaefer, Germany 1998, Black should have played 13...♘g4N, followed by ...♘xf2 with equal chances.

It is always a question as to whether White can delay the exchange of bishops until he plays h4-h5. Since White does not control the g4-square with his f-pawn (as in the Sämisch set-up), Black can take advantage of a delayed exchange: 10.♗d3N e5 11.h4 ♗xh6! 12.♕xh6 ♘g4 13.♕d2 ♘df6 Black has consolidated his kingside and cleared the diagonal for his bishop. Later he could also consider ...h5. White's attempt to proceed with his attack by sacrificial means is not effective: 14.h5 ♘xh5 15.♖xh5 gxh5 16.♖h1 f6 17.♖xh5 ♕c7 White does not have enough resources to endanger the black king.

10...♔xg7

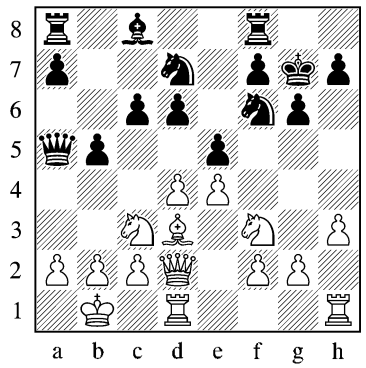


11.e5

The only way to question Black's stability on the dark squares.

11.♗d3 e5 12.h3

12.h4 was not dangerous after 12...h5 in Myrvold – Hermansson, Gausdal 1993.



12...b4

Black could already consider releasing the tension with: 12...exd4 13.♘xd4 b4 14.♘ce2 c5 15.♘b3 (or 15.♘f3 ♘b6 with counterplay) 15...♕b6 Black intends ...♘e5,

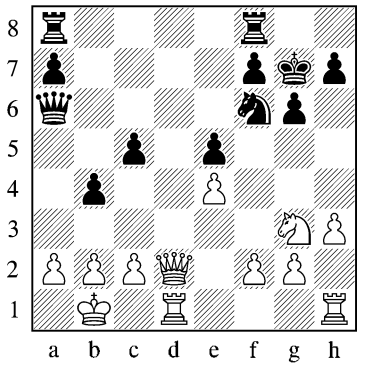
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followed by either ...c4 or ...a5-a4, with good play.

13.♘e2 c5

Strengthening the control over the dark squares. The weakening of the c4-square is not relevant with the white knights far from it.

14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5 dxe5 16.♗c4 ♗a6 17.♗xa6 ♕xa6 18.♘g3



19...♖ae8!?N

Preparing to defend the sixth rank. White's rooks have no squares on which to infiltrate, so the d-file is not that important now.

18...♖fd8?! could have led to problems in Zhornik – Kryvoruchko, Lvov 2006, after 19.♕g5N attacking the e5-pawn as well as threatening knight checks.

19.♕g5 ♖e6 20.h4 h5 21.♘f5† ♔g8 22.f3 ♘h7 23.♕g3 c4.

Black has parried the immediate threats and is starting to create his own.

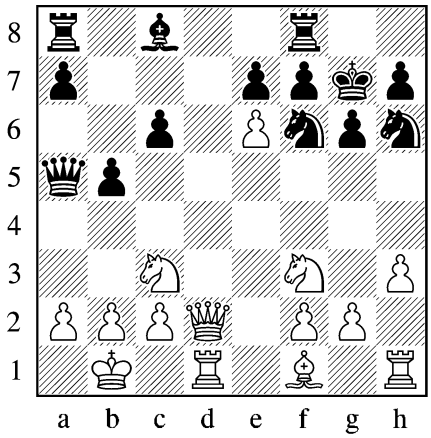
11...dxe5 12.dxe5 ♘g4 13.e6

There is no way back, as 13.♕d4 b4 drops the pawn anyway and 14.e6†?? would only make things worse by helping Black to develop: 14...♘df6 15.♘e4 ♗xe6–+

13...♘df6 14.h3

White needs to kick the enemy knight away even though this speeds up Black's regrouping, because 14.exf7? loses material to 14...b4 15.♘e2 ♘xf2.

14...♘h6



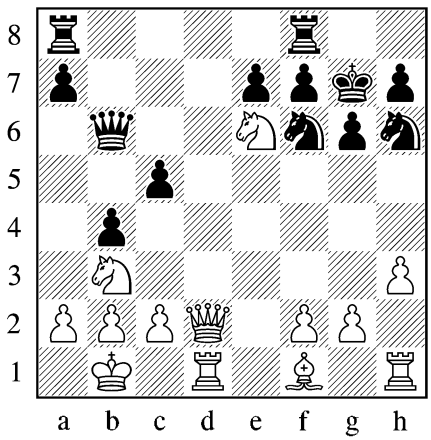
15.♘d4

Trying to delay Black's regrouping.

The attempt to harass the knights with 15.g4?! fails to a series of intermediate moves: 15...b4 16.♘e2 ♗xe6 17.♘c1 ♗d5 18.♗g2 ♘hg8∓ White has little to show for the missing pawn.

Black gets a harmonious position after: 15.exf7 b4 16.♘e2 ♘xf7 17.♘c1 ♗e6 18.♗d3 ♗d5=

15...b4 16.♘ce2 c5 17.♘b3 ♕b6 18.♘f4 ♗xe6 19.♘xe6†



19...♕xe6N

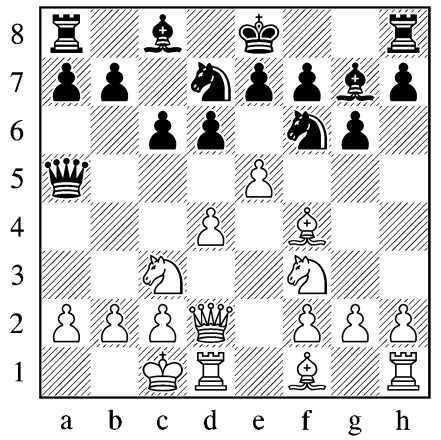
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More natural and simpler than 19...fxe6, as played in Monin – Ignatiev, St Petersburg 1998, although that also secured approximate equality.

20.♘xc5 ♕b6 21.♘d3 ♖fd8

Black has comfortable play and his attacking chances are at least as realistic as White's.

B) 8.e5



Play now takes on an independent character. Even though this position has never been played in a game, this resolute action in the centre requires examination.

8...dxe5 9.dxe5 ♘g4 10.♖e1

Indirectly defending the apparently doomed pawn.

The thematic 10.e6 fxe6 does not work so well here, as the long diagonal is open for the g7-bishop, which may threaten to take on c3 at a suitable moment. Moreover, the g4-knight not only prevents ♗h6 and keeps f2 under pressure, but is also ready to embark on a favourable rerouting, for instance via e5-f7-d6 or f6-d5.

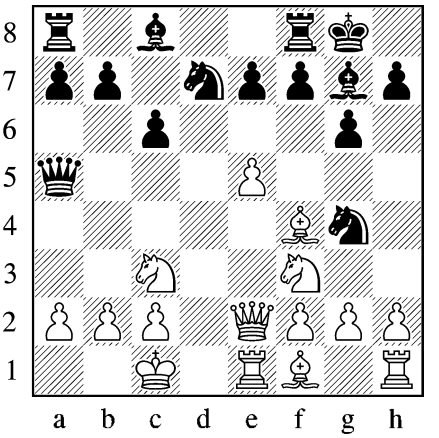
10...0–0

Taking the pawn either way is risky: 10...♘dxe5 11.♕e2 f6 12.h3 ♕b4 13.♗d2 ♘h6 14.♘e4 ♕b6 15.♘eg5 0–0 16.♘xe5 fxe5 17.♕e4 White intends ♗c4†, with more than enough compensation for the pawn.

10...♘gxe5 11.♕e3 f6 12.h4 offers White excellent attacking chances.

11.♕e2

The only way to defend the pawn, because if 11.♕d4 ♖d8 the queen is vulnerable.



Apparently Black is in trouble, as after h2-h3 the knight will end up on an unfavourable path. And yet the tempos spent by White on ♖e1 and ♕e2, together with the lack of coordination caused by this regrouping, enables Black to fight for the initiative by resorting to material sacrifices.

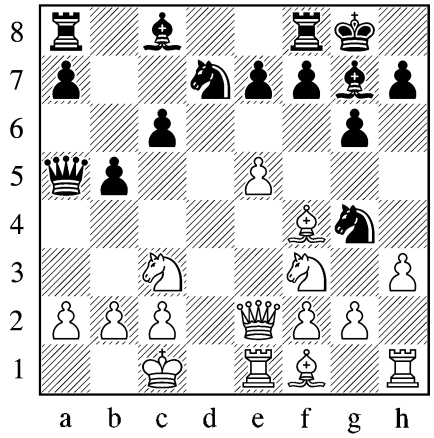
11...b5

Played as if nothing was happening on the kingside.

12.h3

12.a3 b4 13.axb4 ♕xb4 speeds up Black's attack, as the f4-bishop is hanging.

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12...b4 13.♘b1

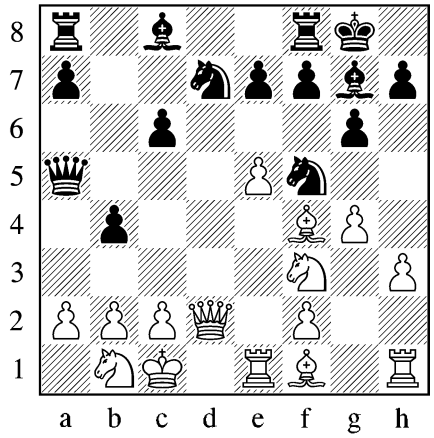
Forced, since 13.♘e4 simply loses the most important pawn to 13...♘gxe5.

13...♘h6 14.♕d2

14.g4 ♘b6 is likely to transpose after 15.♕d2, since if White does not play this, Black would attack in the same way but without being a piece down.

14...♘f5 15.g4

White has trapped the errant knight, but his coordination is chaotic and the queen's knight is immobile. As the analysis below demonstrates, Black's attack, carried out with natural moves, offers him enough compensation.



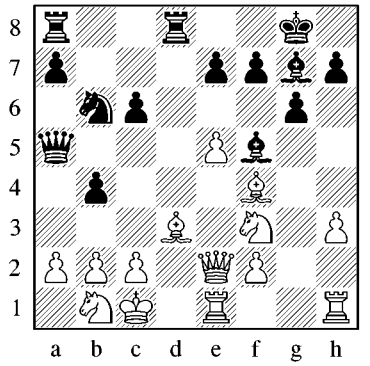
15...♘b6! 16.gxf5

This offers the bishop an excellent attacking square, but White cannot delay the capture for too long.

One of White's problems is that trying to catch up in development may only make things worse, for instance:

16.♗d3 ♖d8 17.gxf5 ♗xf5 18.♕e2

After 18.a3 c5∓ Black threatens ...c4.



18...♖xd3!

The f5-bishop is stronger than a rook.

19.cxd3 ♖d8 20.♖d1 ♕xa2–+

White has no adequate defence against ...c5-c4, possibly combined with ...♘a4.

16.a3 c5 17.♗e2?

White should transpose to the main line with 17.gxf5 ♗xf5.

The text move allows our bishop to become extremely effective along the long diagonal:

17...♗b7 18.gxf5

18.♖d1 allows, among other things, the amusing 18...♘d6 19.exd6 ♗xf3–+, because 20.♗xf3 ♘c4 attacks the queen and threatens ...♗xb2 mate!

18...♖ad8 19.♕e3 ♘d5 20.♕e4 ♘c3

White can parry ...♘a2 mate only by giving up his queen.

21.♕c4 ♗d5–+

16...♗xf5 17.a3

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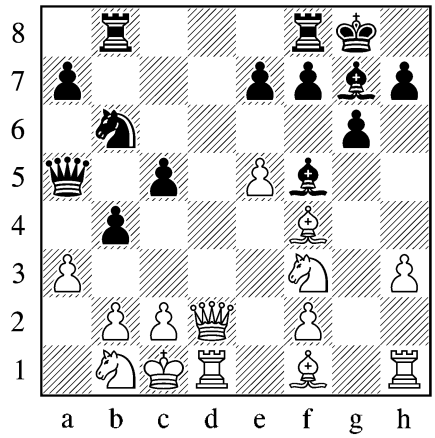
Sooner or later this will be necessary, since Black has the simple threat of ...c5 followed by ...♕xa2.

17...c5 18.♖d1

Trying to avoid ...♖fd8, which would cause serious problems with finding a safe square for the queen.

18...♖ab8

Adding more wood to the fire. Black's main plan is ...♘a4 followed by ...♘xb2, but White should also be concerned about ...bxa3 if his queen moves away.



19.♕e1

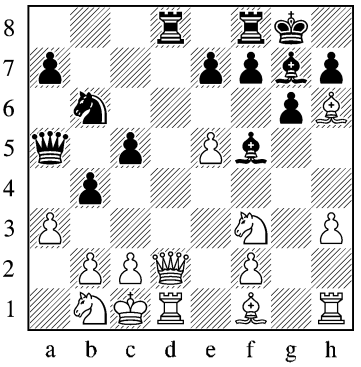
Preparing ♗d3. I examined a whole host of alternatives:

19.e6? wins an exchange but clears the long diagonal, turning the bishop on g7 into an attacking monster: 19...fxe6 20.♗xb8 ♖xb8∓ Black has powerful threats, such as ...♕a4 followed by ...♗h6 to set up mate on c2, or simply ...♘a4.

19.♗h6?

This leaves White's position hanging.

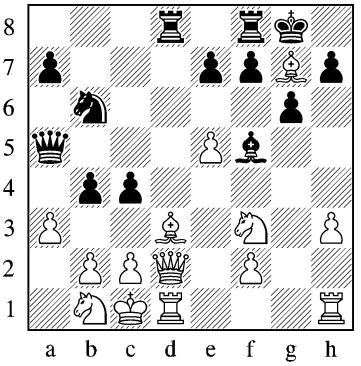
19...♖bd8



20.♗d3

20.♕xd8? loses material to 20...♗xh6†. White has no time to start a counterattack: 20.♕f4 ♖xd1† 21.♔xd1 ♖d8† 22.♔c1 ♘d5 23.♕h4 ♗xe5! Decoying the only defender of the e1-square. 24.♘xe5 bxa3 Threatening ...♕e1 mate. 25.♗g2 axb2† (but not 25...a2?? 26.♗xd5! a1=♕ 27.♕xe7 and White wins) 26.♔xb2 ♖b8† 27.♔c1 ♕a1 28.♔d2 ♕xe5–+ Black has three pawns for the piece and a continuing attack.

20...c4 21.♗xg7



21...cxd3!?

21...♔xg7 22.♕xb4 ♕xb4 23.axb4 cxd3 'only' regains the piece with a huge advantage.

22.♗xf8 dxc2

The threat of ...cxb1=♕ mate forces White to give his queen away.

23.♕xc2 ♖c8 24.♕xc8 ♘xc8 25.♗h6 ♗e4–+

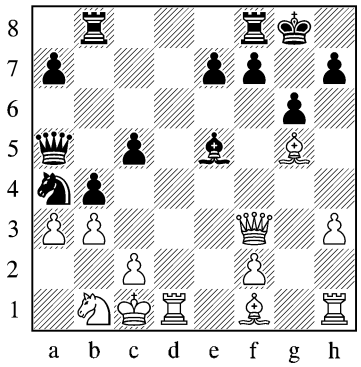
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White's material advantage is only temporary, as many of his pieces are hanging. Black wins at least a knight, keeping a decisive attack.

19.♗g5!?

This is an interesting attempt at defending the d-file with ♗xe7 followed by ♗d6.

19...♗e4 20.♕e3 ♗xf3 21.♕xf3 ♘a4 22.b3 ♗xe5



23.axb4

Worse is: 23.bxa4 bxa3 24.♕xa3 c4! Inserting the pawn into the attack and clearing the fifth rank in order to increase the impact of ...♗b2†.

23...♖xb4 24.♖d7

Due to the threat of ...♗b2†, White needs to clear the d1-square for his king. As the rook soon retreats, the text move may look like a waste of time, but 24.♖d5 ♗b2† 25.♔d1 would allow Black to gain an important tempo for the attack with 25...♘b6, preparing ...♕a2.

24...c4!?

A familiar pattern.

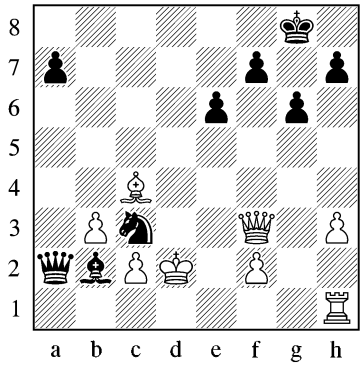
25.♖d5 ♖d8!

The queen is taboo due to ...♗b2† mate.

26.♗xc4

Or 26.♖xd8† ♕xd8 27.♗d2 cxb3 28.cxb3 ♕d4 29.♗xb4 ♕b2† 30.♔d1 ♕xb1† 31.♔e2 ♕c2† with perpetual check.

26...♗b2† 27.♔d1 ♖xd5† 28.♗xd5 ♖d4† 29.♗d2 ♖xd2† 30.♘xd2 ♘c3† 31.♔e1 ♕a1† 32.♘b1 e6 33.♗c4 ♕xb1† 34.♔d2 ♕a2



Black has perfect dominance of the dark squares and if he could bring his queen back into play he would have chances to take over. The best White can do is:

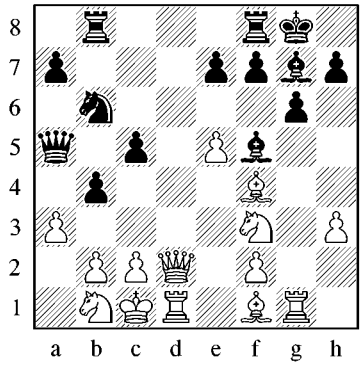
35.♗xe6 fxe6 36.♕c6!=

Black cannot avoid the perpetual check.

It is useful to investigate a half-waiting move such as:

19.♖g1

Preparing h3-h4-h5 without fearing ...♗g4 or ...♗e4. This best reveals to us Black's general attacking plan.



19...♘a4

Not only attacking the b2-pawn, but also threatening ...♖fd8.

20.♗c4

There is no time for: 20.h4? ♖fd8! 21.♕e1 ♖xd1† 22.♕xd1 bxa3 White is defenceless,

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for instance, 23.bxa3 ♖xb1† 24.♔xb1 ♘c3† winning the queen.

20...♗e6 21.♗xe6

This leaves the kingside minor pieces vulnerable, but White would not manage to consolidate his queenside with: 21.♗b3 ♕a6! Unpinning the b4-pawn. 22.♗xa4 bxa3 23.♘xa3 ♕xa4 24.c3 ♗f5 Threatening ...♕xa3 or, if the white queen moves away, simply ...♕b3-a2.

21...fxe6 22.♘g5

Unpinning the bishop and trying to create some kingside threats.

22...♘c3

Threatening ...♘a2 mate.

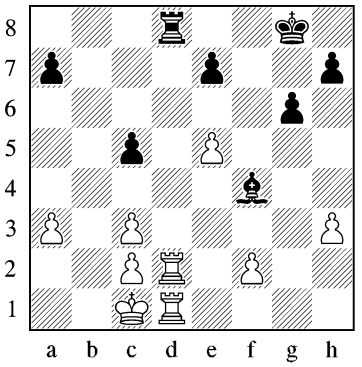
23.♘xc3

Other moves are even worse:

After 23.bxc3 bxa3 White cannot take the a-pawn, so it will promote.

23.♖de1 ♘a2† 24.♔d1 ♖bd8 and Black wins the queen.

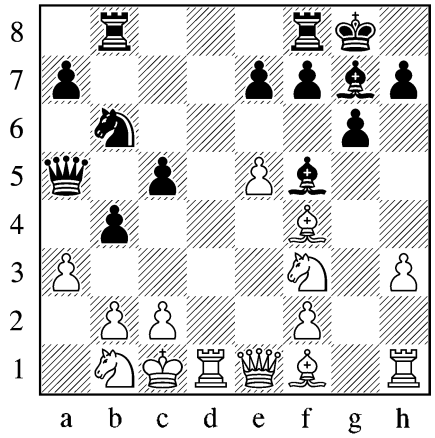
23...bxc3 24.♕xc3 ♕xc3 25.bxc3 ♖xf4 26.♘xe6 ♗h6 27.♘xf4 ♗xf4† 28.♖d2 ♖d8 29.♖gd1



The simplest win, avoiding the necessity of calculating the pawn ending (which is won anyway), is:

29...c4–+

White will soon lose a rook as a result of zugzwang.



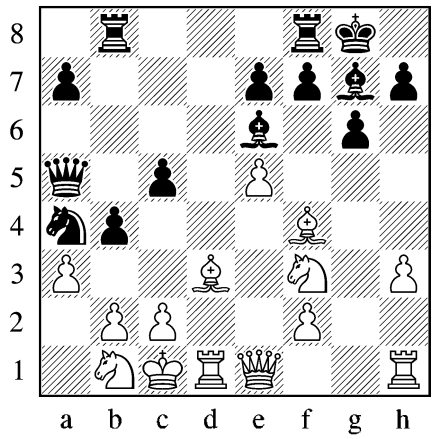
19...♘a4 20.♗d3

I also considered 20.♗c4?! ♗e6! 21.♗b3 ♕a6 22.axb4 ♗xb3 23.cxb3 cxb4 24.♖d4 ♕c6† 25.♔d2 ♕xf3 26.bxa4 ♖fd8 and Black has a winning attack.

20...♗e6!

Controlling the a2-square in order to threaten ...♘xb2.

20...♘xb2? is premature: 21.♔xb2 bxa3† 22.♔a1 ♕b6 23.♕c3 With the bishop on e6, Black would mate with ...♕b2†.



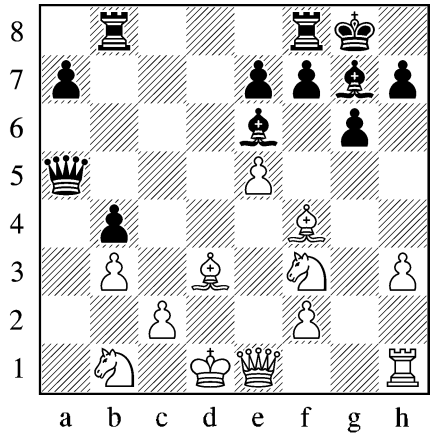
21.b3 ♘c3 22.axb4

22.♘xc3? loses quickly to 22...bxc3 23.♔b1 ♗xb3.

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22...cxb4 23.♔d2 ♘xd1 24.♔xd1

Black has regained the sacrificed material. A rook and a pawn are roughly equivalent to two knights, but Black should continue playing energetically in order to prevent White from consolidating in what has become a predominantly static position.



24...♖fd8 25.♘bd2 ♖bc8 26.♔e2 ♖xc2!? 27.♗xc2 ♕a6† 28.♔e3 ♕b6† 29.♔e2 ♕a6† 30.♔d1 ♕a1†

With a draw by perpetual check.

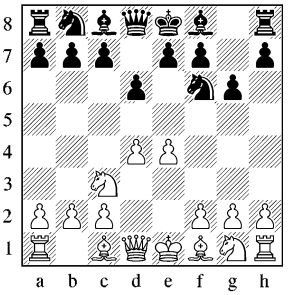
Conclusion

Even though this line is not popular, it requires careful play in the early phase of the opening. Black must constantly take account of the possibility of e4-e5, and sometimes he needs to sacrifice material in order to neutralize White's initiative. Moreover, the correct timing of the thematic ...b7-b5 advance is crucial. However, if he reacts well to the early central pressure, Black is likely to obtain great counterplay.

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Chapter 14

Various 4th Moves



Minor Lines

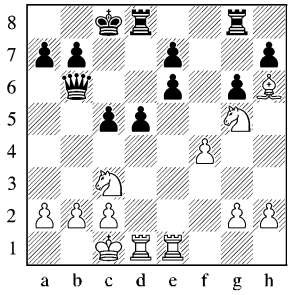
Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3

3...g6

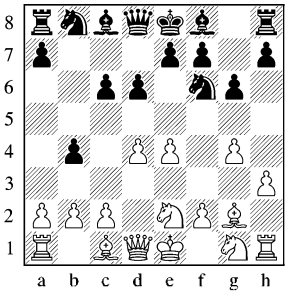
A) 4.♗c4 **340**
B) 4.h3 **343**
C) 4.♗e2 ♗g7 **345**
C1) 5.e5 **345**
C2) 5.♗e3 **346**
C3) 5.g4 **350**
C4) 5.h4 c5 6.dxc5 ♕a5 **352**
C41) 7.♕d3 **353**
C42) 7.♗d2 **354**
C43) 7.♔f1 **356**

A) note to 17.♘e5N



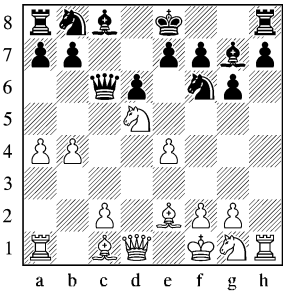
17...d4!N

B) after 7.♘ce2



7...a5!N

C43) note to 8.♗e3



11...♕d7!N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6

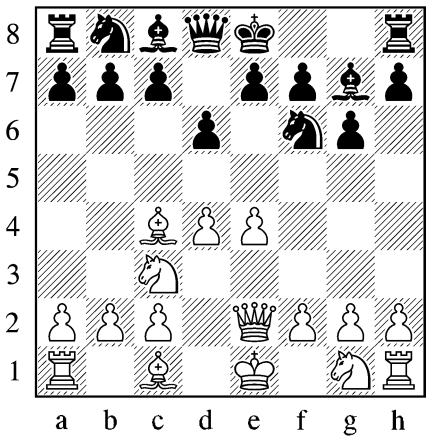
In this chapter, we will examine a few continuations on move 4, which require some accuracy from Black despite being unpopular. We have **A) 4.♗c4**, **B) 4.h3** and **C) 4.♗e2**.

A) 4.♗c4

This can easily transpose to line D of Chapter 3, or line C of Chapter 4, if White plays ♘f3 soon. However, he can treat this line more aggressively.

4...♗g7 5.♕e2

This is the only important deviation from the lines mentioned above. White parries the potential threat of ...♘xe4 and prepares the resolute advance of the e-pawn.



5...♘c6

The most active reply, attacking the weakened d4-pawn immediately.

6.e5

This leads to interesting complications.

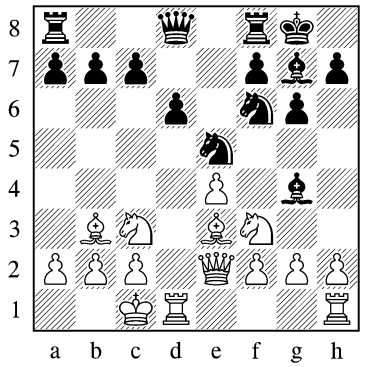
6.♗e3 runs into 6...♘g4, gaining the bishop pair.

6.♘f3

Even though this does not transpose to the other lines mentioned above, it allows the usual counterplay:

6...♗g4 7.♗e3 0–0 8.0–0–0 e5 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.♗b3

White has kept his active bishop and some space advantage, but the pin on the knight causes some trouble.



10...♗h5!?

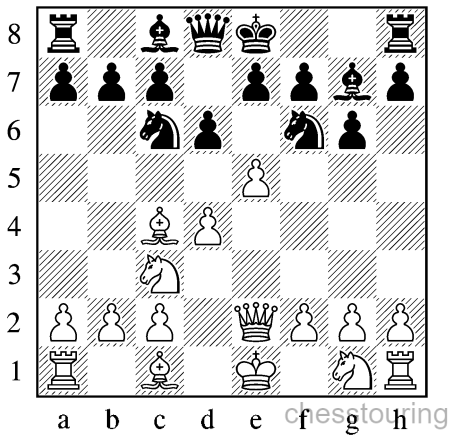
In view of the likely ...♘xf3, the bishop stands well on the h5-square, partly paralysing White. The voluntary retreat anticipates h2-h3, something White cannot manage without for too long.

11.♖hg1 c6 12.h3 ♘xf3 13.gxf3

In J. Sanchez – Dzhumaev, Creon 2006, Black's strongest move would have been:

13...♖e8N∓

Black prevents e4-e5, keeping many plans and small threats in reserve, for instance ...♘xe4, ...♘d7-e5, ...d5, or ...b5 followed by ...a5.



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6...♘xd4

This has traditionally been considered risky, and in practice it has not scored too well, but the whole line examined in this section has rarely been played at grandmaster level. In fact, it is the simplest way of solving Black's problems.

6...♘g4

This provocative move is interesting, but it requires some effort to get adequate counterplay, for instance:

7.♗b5

Reducing Black's pressure on the centre. True, White wastes some time with his bishop, but Black's king's knight will also be jumping around a lot.

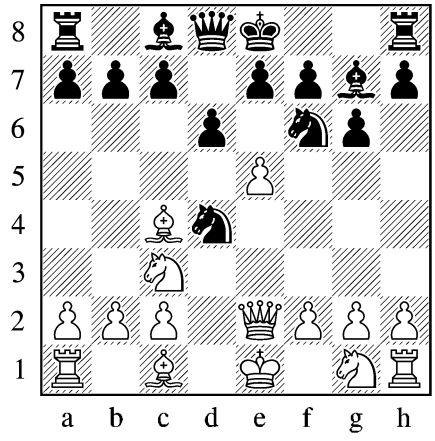
7.e6 ♘xd4 8.exf7† ♔f8 9.♕d1 ♗f5 is good for Black.

7...0–0 8.♗xc6 bxc6 9.h3

This is the correct move order, as 9.♘f3 allows: 9...c5 10.dxc5 ♘xe5∓

9...♘h6 10.♘f3

In order to break White's grip on the centre, Black can sacrifice a pawn with ...c5, but is is far from clear whether this will equalize completely.



7.exf6

This positional queen sacrifice is obviously forced.

7...♘xe2 8.fxg7 ♖g8 9.♘gxe2 ♖xg7 10.♗h6 ♖g8 11.0–0–0

White has three minor pieces for a queen and two pawns, meaning that Black has a material advantage. However, Black is underdeveloped, so a certain degree of accuracy is needed.

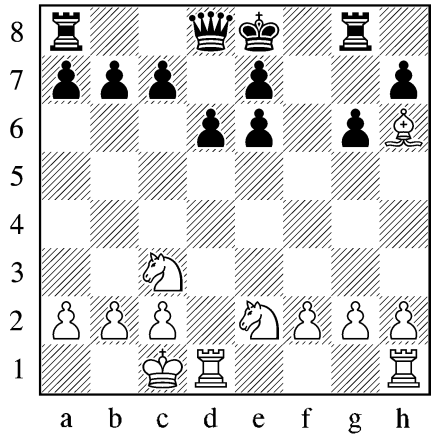
11...♗e6

The most logical move, reducing the piece pressure at the cost of spoiling the pawn structure slightly.

12.♗xe6

Refraining from the exchange makes little sense, as if 12.♗d3 Black can insist with 12...♗f5∓.

12...fxe6

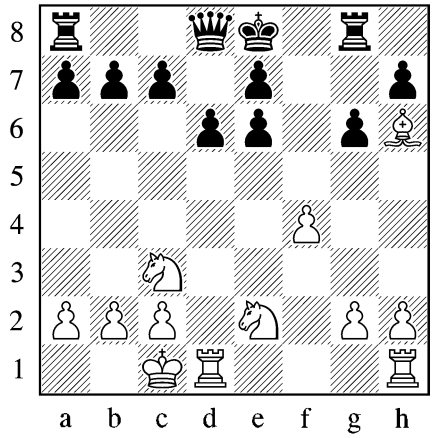


13.f4

Preventing both ...e5 and ...g5.

After 13.♖he1, Black can gain some activity at the cost of a pawn: 13...g5 14.♘d4 e5 15.♘f3 ♕c8 16.♗xg5 c6 17.♘e4 In Canamas Soler – Sabadell i Ximenes, email 2008, Black should have continued his development with 17...♕e6N∓. White is still material down with virtually no counterplay, and can only hope to put up some resistance against the threatening central pawn mass.

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13...c5

Restricting the e2-knight and preparing the queen's development.

14.♖he1 ♕b6

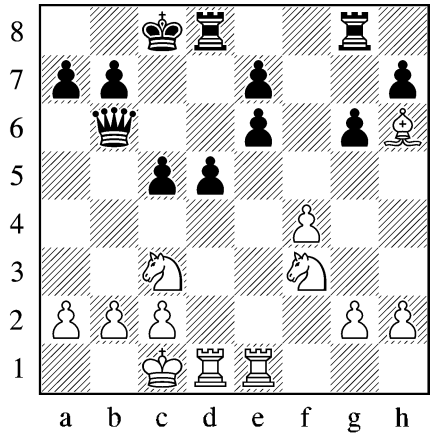
The hyper-ambitious 14...d5?! was played in Loschi – Bolignano, Italy 1991, but it could have resulted in trouble after 15.f5N gxf5 16.♘f4, with a strong initiative.

15.♘g1

The best way of activating the knight.

After 15.♘g3 d5 16.♗g5 ♖g7 17.♖e5 0–0–0 18.♖de1 ♖d6, as in Castiglione – Fiacan, Slovakia 2013, the knight is more passive than in the main line.

15...d5 16.♘f3 0–0–0



17.♘e5N

The knight not only blockades the doubled pawns, but also inhibits the advance of the queenside majority.

17.♘g5 was played in Stoll – Blodig, Pang 1977, now Black should have exploited this favourable moment to grasp the initiative with: 17...d4!N 18.♘ce4 (18.♖xe6 ♕a5 wins the a2-pawn with attacking chances) 18...c4∓ Followed by ...♖d5 and ...c3.

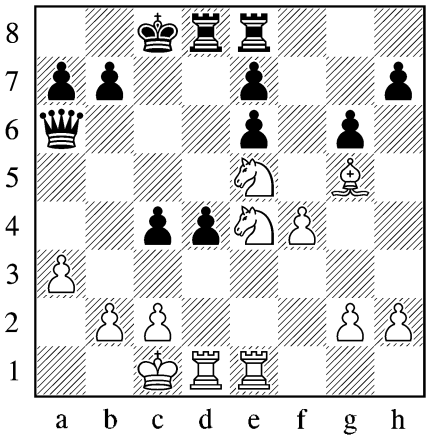
17...♕a6

Things are safe and stable in the centre, but Black has some chances on the queenside. The immediate threat is ...d4, winning the pawn on a2.

18.a3

18.♔b1 brings the king closer to a dangerous area. Black can follow the same plan as in the main line below, or could bring in new forces with 18...♖d6!?, possibly followed by ...b5-b4 and then doubling the major pieces on the a-file.

18...d4 19.♘e4 c4 20.♗g5 ♖ge8



It is unclear yet whether Black will manage to create decisive threats, as White is quite

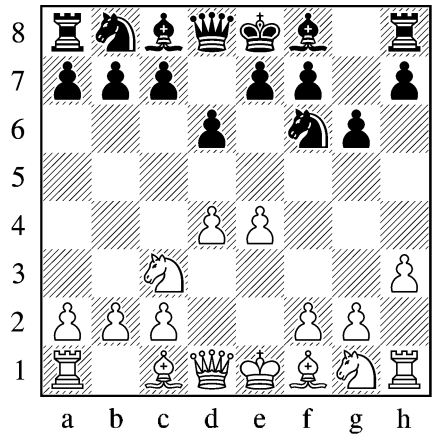
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stable in the centre. But in principle only Black can hope to make progress, for instance with ...♖d5, ...♔b8 and ...♖c8. For White it would be safest to look for equality, for instance with:

21.♘f3 ♕b6 22.♘e5=

Forcing a repetition.

B) 4.h3



Played at such an early stage, this has independent value only if White plays g2-g4 within the next few moves.

4...c6

This flexible move is my usual recommendation against aggressive set-ups.

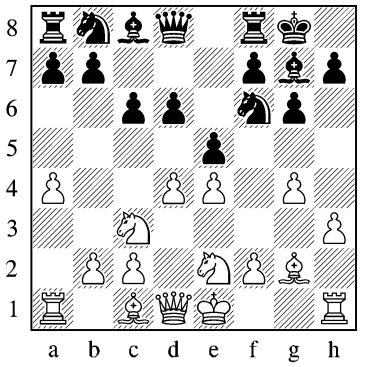
5.g4

5.♗e3 transposes to Chapter 9, while 5.♘f3 ♗g7 6.♗e3 0–0 leads to variation A of Chapter 3.

5.a4

This move order may also be used as an attempt to transpose to an improved version of the Fianchetto System by playing g2-g4 without loss of time. However, the early kingside weakening offers Black additional ideas.

5...♗g7 6.g4 0–0 7.♗g2 e5 8.♘ge2



8...exd4!

Playing in the spirit of the line recommended against the Fianchetto System would simply grant White an extra tempo: 8...a5 9.0–0 ♘a6 10.♗e3 ♘b4 11.♕d2 A similar position, but with White's pawn still on g3, arises in variation B2 of Chapter 11.

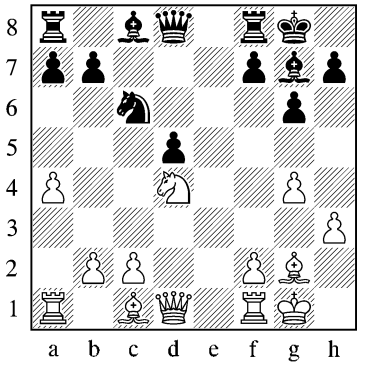
9.♘xd4 d5!

Due to the weakening of the white kingside, Black can safely take on an isolani.

10.exd5

10.e5 ♘e4 11.♘xe4 dxe4 12.♗xe4 ♗xe5∓ leaves White exposed in the centre and on the kingside.

10...♘xd5 11.♘xd5 cxd5 12.0–0 ♘c6



13.♘e2

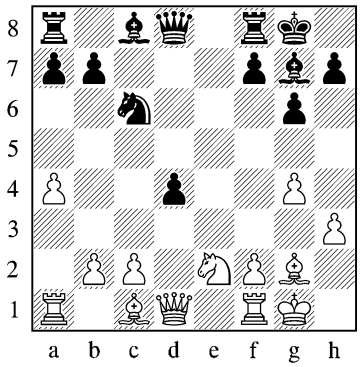
13.c3 ♘xd4 14.cxd4 ♗e6= leads to dull equality.

One important point is that with the pawn on g3, White could consolidate his control of the d4-square with 13.♗e3, but the

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way things stand, Black can counterattack with 13...h5! 14.gxh5 ♕h4. For instance: 15.♘xc6 bxc6 16.hxg6 ♗xh3 17.♕f3 ♗e6 18.gxf7† ♖xf7 19.♕g3 ♕xg3 20.fxg3 ♗xb2 With mass simplifications and a probable draw.

13...d4



14.♖a3

Also after the more natural 14.♘f4 ♖e8 15.♗d2 ♗d7 16.♘d3 ♘e5= Black does not have any particular problems.

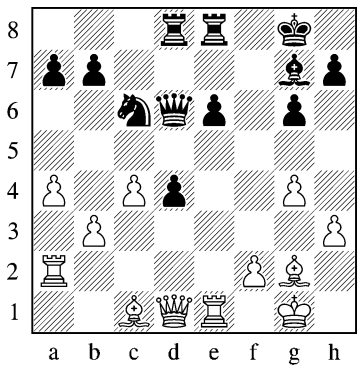
14...♗e6 15.♘f4 ♗c4 16.♖e1 ♕d6

16...♖e8 17.b3 ♗a6= is a valid alternative, in the spirit of our repertoire against the main line of the Fianchetto System.

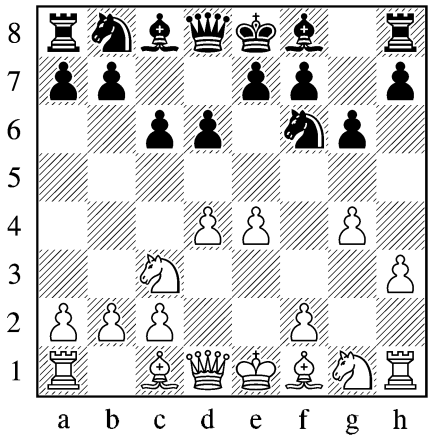
17.b3 ♗e6

17...♗a6?! 18.c4 leaves the bishop misplaced.

18.c4 ♖ad8 19.♘xe6 fxe6 20.♖a2 ♖fe8=



The mutual weaknesses – White's on the dark squares and Black's on the light ones – cancelled each other out in Bolacky – Karlik, Czech Republic 2007.



5...b5 6.♗g2 b4 7.♘ce2

I also analysed the untested:

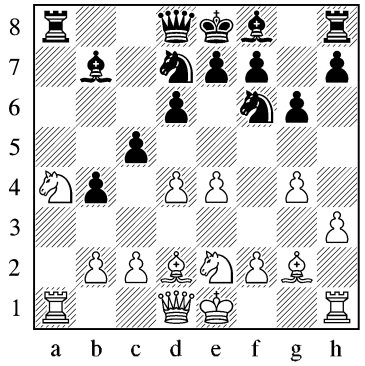
7.♘a4N

Black should prepare his queenside counterplay before White's space advantage becomes threatening.

7...♗b7 8.a3 a5 9.♘e2 ♘bd7 10.axb4

Trying to undermine Black's queenside. Proceeding with the kingside regrouping with 10.♘g3 runs into 10...h5 11.g5 h4, a familiar issue in line A of Chapter 9.

10...axb4 11.♗d2 c5



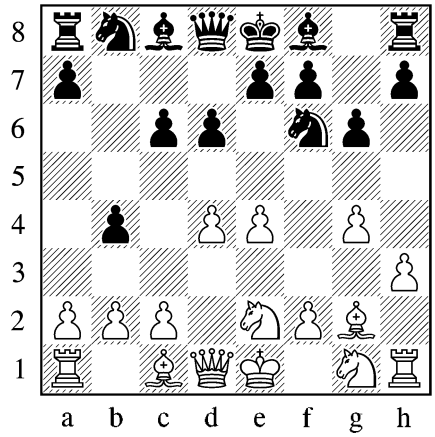
12.d5

The principled answer. After 12.dxc5 dxc5 Black's minor pieces are more active than White's.

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12...e6 13.♗f4 exd5 14.exd5 ♖a6 15.0–0 ♗g7=

Black has a comfortable version of the Schmid Benoni, as the d5-pawn is vulnerable and the a4-knight passive.



7...a5!N

Consolidating the b4-pawn is essential.

If 7...♗g7, as in Rodriguez Vila – Leitao, Santos 2006, and a couple of other games, White should undermine Black's queenside with 8.a3!N±.

8.♘g3

8.a3 ♗a6 defends the b4-pawn, activating the bishop at the same time.

8...h5 9.g5 ♘fd7 10.h4 e5

Black is flexible and solid. White's attempt to gain space is easily parried:

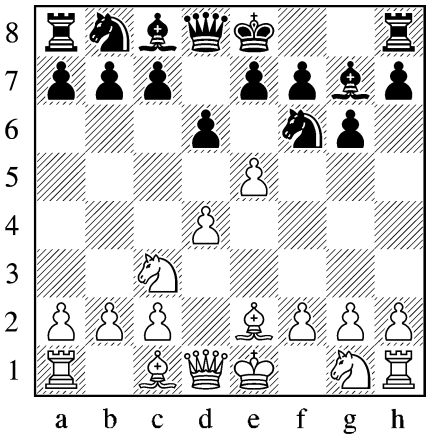
11.f4 c5! 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.f5 ♘c6 14.♘f3 ♘b6 15.♕xd8† ♔xd8 16.♗e3 ♔c7=

White's kingside space advantage looks impressive, but Black's queenside play is no less effective.

C) 4.♗e2 ♗g7

White's fourth move will lose its independent character, transposing to other chapters, if he plays ♘g1-f3 within the next few moves, but it is usually connected with early kingside activity, based on control over the d1-h5 diagonal. We will examine **C1) 5.e5**, **C2) 5.♗e3**, **C3) 5.g4** and **C4) 5.h4**.

C1) 5.e5



This early central break is not completely without poison.

5...♘fd7

The most flexible answer.

As I had occasion to experience myself, 5...dxe5 6.dxe5 ♕xd1† 7.♗xd1 justifies White's idea, as the queen exchange has not deprived him of the right to castle: 7...♘fd7 8.f4 f6 9.exf6 exf6 10.♗e2 ♘b6 11.♗e3 0–0 12.♘f3 ♘c6 13.0–0–0 In this almost symmetrical position, White retains some initiative, which eventually resulted in a win in Murey – Marin, Ramat Aviv 2000.

6.exd6

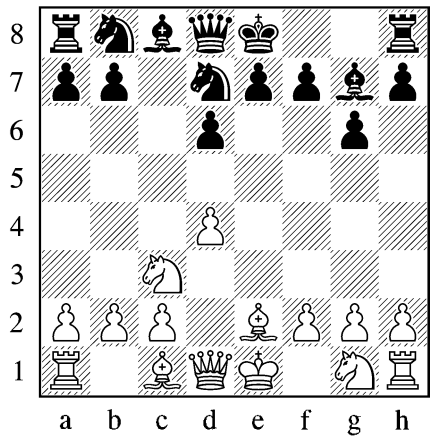
White cannot maintain the tension under favourable circumstances, as 6.f4 c5 leads to

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a version of the Austrian Attack where ♗e2 is not really useful for the fight in the centre.

6...cxd6

We have reached a sort of Alekhine Defence hybrid where the queen's knight stands in the way of the c2-pawn, thus preventing White from applying pressure in the centre.



7.♘f3

The aggressive 7.♗e3 ♘f6 8.g4 runs into the familiar: 8...h5 9.gxh5 (9.g5 ♘g4 is good for Black, as White cannot avoid ...♘xe3. For instance: 10.♗c1 e5 11.h3 exd4∓) 9...♘xh5 10.♕d2 d5 11.0–0–0 ♘c6 12.♗f3 ♘f6 13.♘ge2 ♗g4 14.♗g2 ♗h3 15.♗xh3 ♖xh3 16.♘f4 ♖h7 Black stood well in Shapiro – Zaichik, Parsipanny 2002. He has the better structure and can soon castle queenside to bring his king to safety.

7...a6

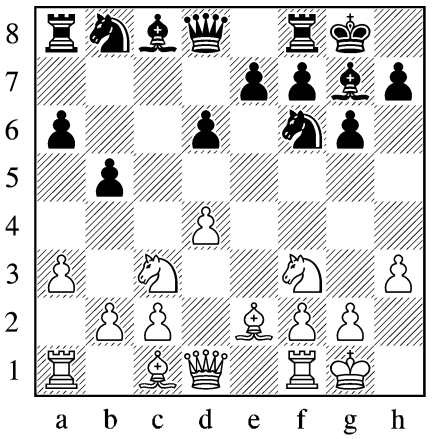
Preparing queenside counterplay.

7...0–0 8.0–0 ♘f6 9.h3 d5?!, as in Murey – Keene, Beersheba 1978, is less accurate as it transposes to some sort of Exchange Caro-Kann with an extra tempo for White. However, 9...a6 would transpose to the main line.

8.0–0 ♘f6 9.h3 0–0 10.a3

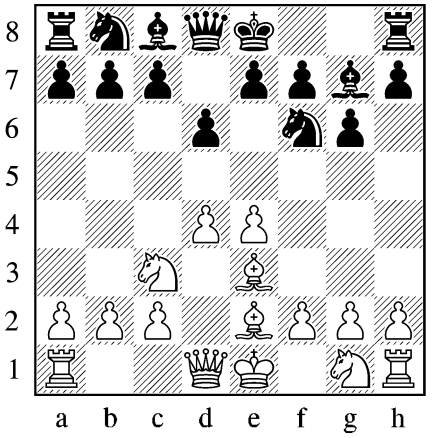
Preventing the queenside expansion with 10.a4 weakens the b4-square, allowing 10...♘c6. For instance: 11.d5 ♘b4 12.a5 b5 13.axb6 ♗b7 The d5-pawn experiences some problems.

10...b5



Black was planning ...♗b7, followed by ...♘bd7, with comfortable development in Vrban – Tahirov, Hastings 2006.

C2) 5.♗e3



This bears some similarity with the 5.♗e2/6.♗e3 King's Indian system, popularized in recent years by Riazantsev. Before launching his kingside pawn attack White makes a useful

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developing move, waiting for Black to commit himself.

5...c6

For similar reasons as in the 4.♗e3 systems, Black should not hurry to castle, preparing queenside counterplay instead.

6.h4

White has a few other aggressive attempts:

6.f4

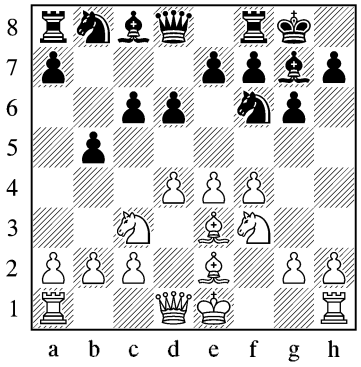
In this Austrian Attack set-up, the white king's bishop is on a slightly unnatural square.

6...0–0 7.♘f3

7.e5 ♘d5 8.♘xd5 cxd5 9.c3 ♘c6 10.♘f3 ♗f5 was equal in Slobodjan – Markowski, Germany 2009.

7...b5

Aiming to take advantage of the e4-pawn being less well defended than is usual in the Austrian Attack.

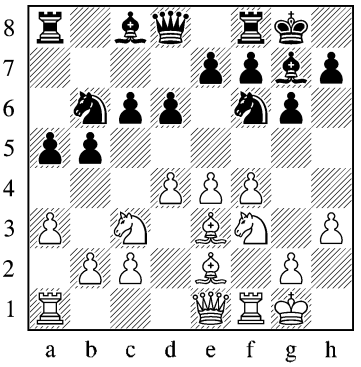


8.a3

After 8.e5 ♘g4 9.♗g1 f6 10.h3 ♘h6 11.♗h2 dxe5 12.fxe5 ♘f5, White's centre was under pressure in Kunz – Brodbeck, Loewenstein 1997.

8...♘bd7 9.0–0 ♘b6 10.h3 a5 11.♕e1

Supporting the e-pawn with 11.♗d3N= is sensible, but is hardly an attempt for an advantage.



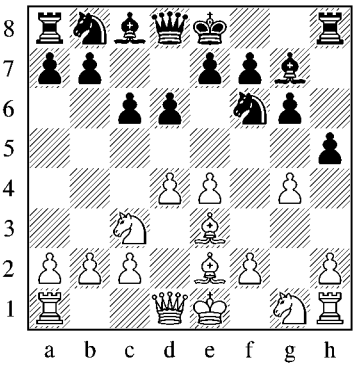
11...b4 12.axb4 axb4 13.♖xa8 ♘xa8 14.e5 bxc3 15.exf6 ♗xf6 16.♕xc3 ♗d7

The position was close to equal in Iskov – Poulsen, Copenhagen 1977, but I would be happy with Black's better structure.

6.g4

One of the reasons why delaying castling is a good idea is that this can be answered with:

6...h5!



7.g5

The most ambitious continuation, because 7.gxh5 ♘xh5 8.♕d2 b5 9.0–0–0 ♘d7 offers Black kingside stability and queenside counterplay.

7...♘g4

Trying to trap this knight will fail tactically.

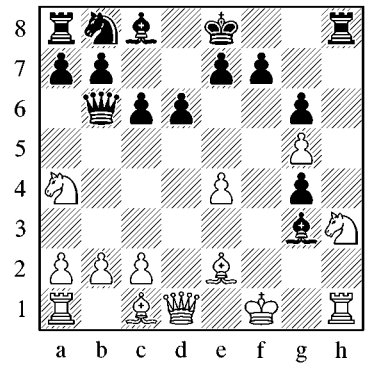
8.♗f4?

White is best advised to play 8.♕d2N, even though it can simply be met by 8...♘xe3, with comfortable play for Black.

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8.♗xg4 hxg4∓ favours Black strategically.

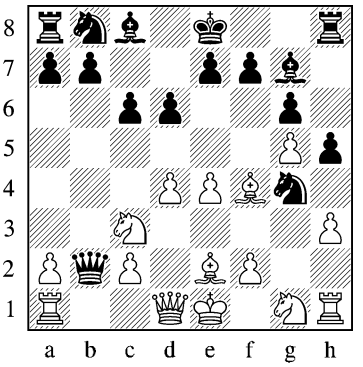
The untested 8.♗c1? allows spectacular counterplay: 8...♕b6 9.h3? (9.♘f3 e5!∓) 9...♗xd4! 10.hxg4 ♗xf2† 11.♔f1 ♗g3 12.♘h3 hxg4 13.♘a4



13...♖xh3!! A temporary queen sacrifice, winning material. 14.♘xb6 ♖xh1† 15.♔g2 ♖xd1 16.♗xd1 axb6 17.♔xg3 ♖a4–+ With three extra pawns in the ending.

8...♕b6 9.h3 ♕xb2

9...♗xd4? 10.hxg4 ♗xf2† 11.♔f1 does not work here, since Black does not have ...♗g3.



10.♗d2 ♘xf2 11.♔xf2 ♗xd4† 12.♔g2 ♗xc3 13.♖b1 ♕xb1 14.♕xb1 ♗xd2–+

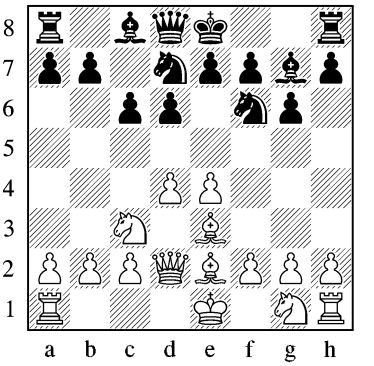
A rook, bishop and three pawns were obviously stronger than the queen in Meis – Hendriks, Dieren 2002.

6.♕d2

Due to the tempo spent on ♗e2, the plan based on this move is slower and less dangerous than in the 4.♗e3 lines.

6...♘bd7

As usual in such situations, we choose the most flexible move.



7.g4

This is one of the main ideas of 4.♗e2, but here it does not work out well.

White has tried a variety of alternatives:

a) 7.h4 b5 8.a3 h5 offered Black kingside stability and good queenside prospects in Cappello – Kiffmeyer, Groningen 1970.

b) 7.0–0–0 b5 is like a rather weird Sämisch set-up, with the e2-bishop far from its best square as it obstructs the g1-knight without bringing anything positive. For example: 8.e5 b4 9.exf6 bxc3 10.♕xc3 ♘xf6 11.♕xc6† ♗d7 12.♕a6 0–0 The position is similar to one examined in variation A of Chapter 10 (see page 238), and the observation remains that the bishop on e2 is not especially useful. Black has excellent attacking chances along the open queenside files.

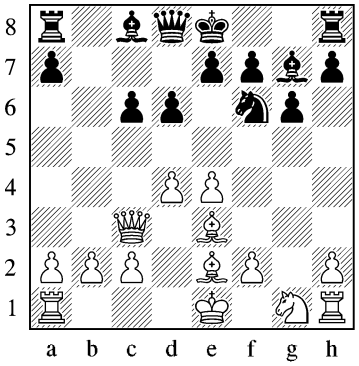
c) 7.♗h6 ♗xh6 8.♕xh6 is ineffective after 8...♕a5. Now 9.♗d3 would simply lose a tempo compared to the line mentioned at the start of Chapter 8 on page 201, and 9.♕e3 would allow Black to castle. 9.0–0–0?! is even worse, as after 9...b5 the e4- and a2-pawns are under threat, and 10.a3 b4 11.axb4 ♕a1† 12.♔d2 ♕xb2 yields Black the initiative. One trick is that 13.♖b1? runs into 13...♘xe4†!–+.

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d) Finally, after 7.f4 b5 8.a3 ♘b6 White has to allow ...♘c4, causing a weakening of the light squares after ♗xc4, since 9.b3 a5 10.♗f3 ♘g4 would be excellent for Black.

7...b5 8.g5 b4 9.gxf6 bxc3 10.♕xc3 ♘xf6

Black has a comfortable position, and any pawn-grabbing from White will land him in trouble:



11.e5

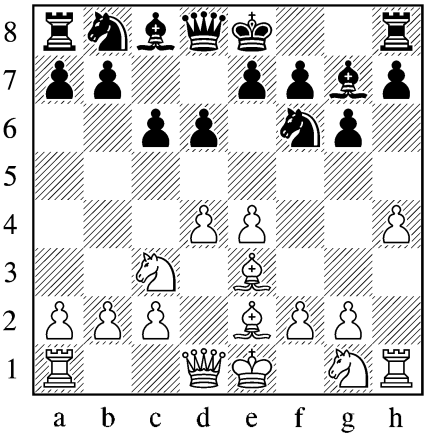
11.♕xc6† ♗d7 12.♕a6 ♘xe4 immediately retrieves the pawn with an obvious advantage.

11...♘g4 12.♗xg4

12.♕xc6† ♗d7 13.♕c3 dxe5∓ also regains the pawn.

12...♗xg4 13.♕xc6† ♗d7 14.♕e4 dxe5 15.dxe5 0–0∓

White's extra pawn does not compensate for the weakness of the light squares and Black's lead in development.



6...h5

Stabilizing the kingside and creating the potential threat of ...♘g4. The latter underlines a drawback of combining the plan of h2-h4 with ♗e3.

7.♘h3

7.f3 once again offers Black a comfortable version of the Sämisch Attack: 7...b5 8.♕d2 ♘bd7=

After 7.♘f3 ♘g4 8.♗g5 ♕b6, Black is attacking the b2-pawn, and threatening ...e5, based on the vulnerability of the f2-square.

7...♘g4

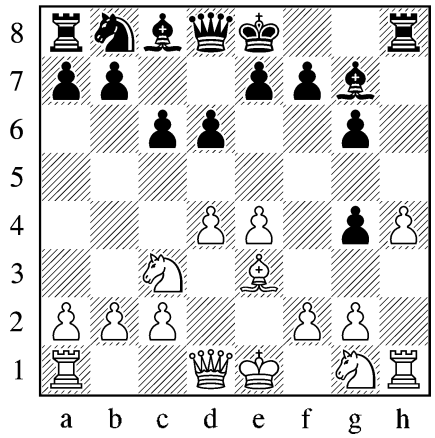
A familiar pattern.

8.♗xg4

8.♗g5 ♕b6∓ is even worse than in the similar line above, as the d4-pawn is not defended.

8...hxg4 9.♘g1

9.♘f4 lost a pawn to 9...g5 in Held – Muelli, Zürich 1989.



9...♕b6 10.♘ge2

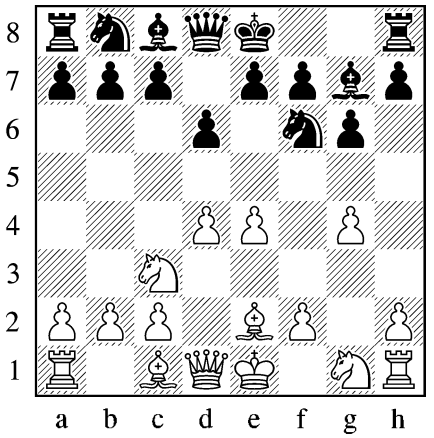
Or 10.♖b1 ♘d7 11.♘ge2 ♕c7∓, followed by ...e5.

10...♕xb2 11.♖b1 ♕a3 12.g3 ♕a5 13.0–0 ♘d7 14.♖b3 ♕c7 15.♘f4 e5

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White did not have compensation for the pawn in Meyer – Fridman, Berlin 1996.

C3) 5.g4



White intends to gain huge amounts of space with g4-g5 and h2-h4-h5. However, the potentially weak g4-pawn allows Black to break in the centre.

5...d5

I find this relatively rare move far more effective than the main line of 5...c5, when White can maintain the positional tension with 6.d5.

6.e5

The most principled reaction.

6.f3 dxe4 7.fxe4 (7.g5 exf3 wins Black a pawn, in view of 8.♗b5† ♘fd7) 7...c5 8.g5 (8.dxc5 ♕xd1† 9.♗xd1 ♘xg4∓ regains the pawn while keeping the better structure) 8...♘fd7 Black has good play on the dark squares.

6.exd5 ♘xd5∓ leads to a weird version of the Scandinavian Defence, where White cannot easily justify g2-g4.

6...♘e4

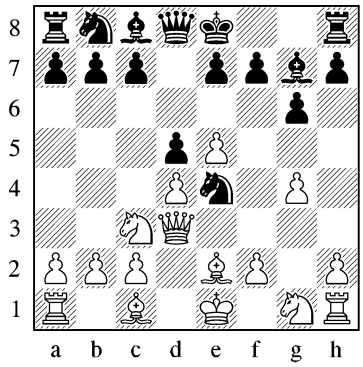
As we will see in several lines, this daring knight jump works out well precisely because of the weaknesses created by the early g2-g4.

7.f4

7.♘xe4 dxe4 leaves White with his centre hanging and facing difficulties developing his knight: 8.♗e3 c5 9.dxc5 (9.c3 is best met by: 9...♘c6N 10.h4 Preparing ♘h3 without fearing ...h5. 10...♕a5∓ Black has the initiative.) 9...♕xd1† 10.♖xd1 ♘c6 11.h3 ♘xe5∓ Black had regained the pawn, retaining better development and the superior structure in Zapolskis – Maze, London 2016.

7.♕d3

This fails to relieve the central tension.



7...c5!

7...♘xc3 8.bxc3 strengthened White's centre, leaving Black with problems activating the g7-bishop in Ponater – Topp, Hamburg 1999.

8.dxc5 ♘xc3 9.bxc3

9.♕xc3 ♘c6 10.f4 f6 11.exf6 ♗xf6 12.♕d3 ♗h4† 13.♔f1 e5∓ offers Black too much initiative for the pawn.

9...♗xe5∓

White did not have anything to show for his shattered structure in Poulsen – K. Schulz, Wunsiedel 2014.

7.♘b1

White retracts the knight in the vain hope of trapping the e4-knight.

7...e6 8.h4

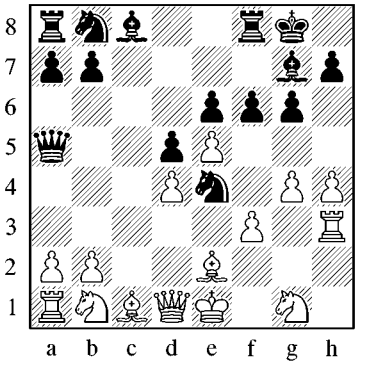
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Preventing ...♕h4, but weakening the g3-square entails spending another tempo before attacking the knight with f2-f3.

8...c5 9.c3 0–0!?N

Not the only good move, as Black has various ways of sacrificing material for the initiative.

10.♖h3 cxd4 11.cxd4 f6 12.f3 ♕a5†



13.b4

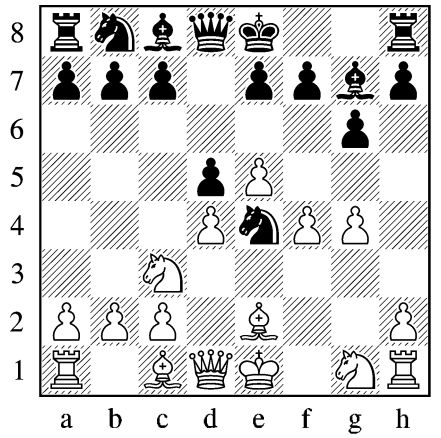
The only way to stay in the game, as 13.♔f1 simply loses a pawn to 13...fxe5.

13...♕xb4† 14.♔f1 fxe5 15.♗a3 ♕xd4 16.♕xd4 exd4 17.♗xf8 ♔xf8 18.fxe4

Otherwise Black's next move would be even stronger.

18...d3 19.♘c3 dxe2† 20.♘gxe2 ♘c6∓

Black has two pawns for the exchange, and a strong bishop pair.

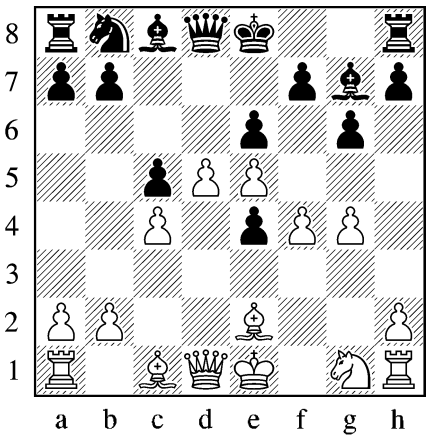


7...c5 8.♘xe4 dxe4 9.d5

The only way to maintain some tension.

9...e6 10.c4

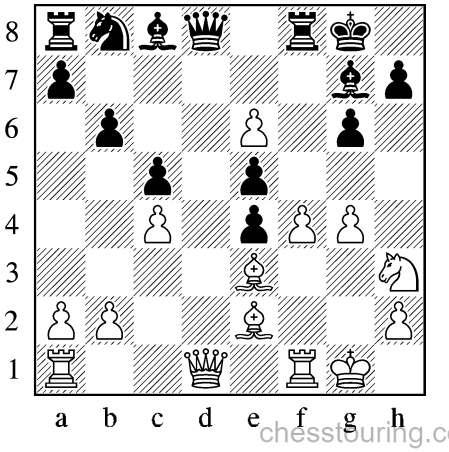
If 10.d6 ♕h4† 11.♔f1 g5 12.♗e3 0–0, White will have problems keeping his centre intact due to the threats of ...f6 and ...♘c6 or ...♗d7-c6.



In Smeets – Mamedyarov, Internet (blitz) 2007, Black should have attacked the enemy centre at once:

10...f6N 11.♘h3 fxe5 12.0–0 0–0 13.♗e3 b6 14.dxe6

After 14.fxe5 ♖xf1† 15.♗xf1 ♗xe5 16.dxe6 ♕xd1 17.♖xd1 ♘c6 18.♘g5 h6 19.♗g2 hxg5 20.♗xe4 ♗xe6 21.♗xc6 ♖f8=, the ending is likely to be a draw.

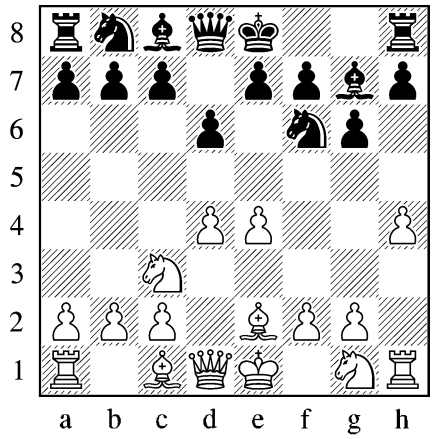


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14...♕xd1 15.♖axd1 ♘c6 16.f5 ♘d4

With complex play and approximately equal chances.

C4) 5.h4



Traditionally, this is the main idea of 4.♗e2. White threatens h4-h5, not only creating some attacking chances but also gaining space.

5...c5

The most principled reaction.

The same method as in line C3 does not work out well here: 5...d5? 6.e5 ♘e4 7.♘xe4 dxe4 8.h5 gave White the initiative in White – De Magalhaes, email 2008.

Blocking the kingside is less effective than in line C2, as White's queen's bishop is not exposed to ...♘g4. After 5...h5 6.♘f3 we have a type of Classical System, with mutual weakening of the g5- and g4-squares. The position is viable for Black, but I believe that the text move is more convincing.

6.dxc5

The main alternative is:

6.d5 0–0

Other moves have been tried here, but I find castling the most flexible.

7.h5

This allows the typical queenside counterplay, but preventing it requires spending another tempo on a pawn move, allowing the opening of the centre with ...e6. For example: 7.a4 e6 8.h5 exd5 9.exd5 ♖e8 10.hxg6 In Brandics – C. Horvath, Hungary 1991, the safest would have been 10...fxg6N 11.♘f3 ♘a6, followed by ...♘b4 with excellent counterplay.

7.g4 should also be answered by the central break: 7...e6 8.g5 ♘e8 9.h5 ♕e7 10.♘f3 ♘c7 Black prepares ...exd5 by taking measures against the white knight recapturing. 11.dxe6 ♗xe6 12.♗f4 ♖d8 Black will develop with ...♘c6 next, with excellent play.

7...b5!

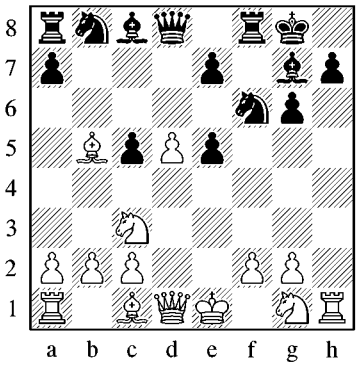
A typical pseudo-sacrifice when White delays his kingside development.

8.hxg6 fxg6 9.e5

The most ambitious answer, as 9.♗xb5 ♘xe4 10.♘xe4 ♕a5† 11.♘c3 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♕xb5∓ left White with a weak centre in R. Mueller – Andersen, Germany 2005.

9...dxe5 10.♗xb5

In Ramirez – Kacheishvili, Wheeling 2012, Black should have continued developing:



10...♘bd7N 11.♘f3 e4 12.♘g5 ♘e5 13.♗f4

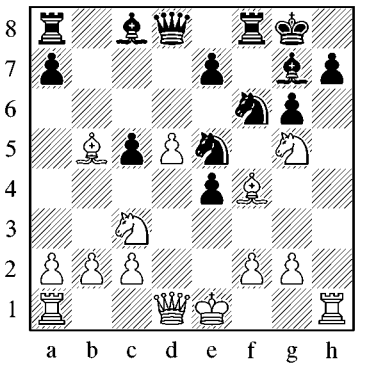
Developing is the best idea for White, too. Pawn-grabbing leads to trouble: 13.♘cxe4? ♘xe4 14.♘xe4 ♕a5† 15.♘c3 ♘g4∓ Attacking the f2-pawn and threatening to

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win a piece with ...♗xc3†.

Or 13.♗e2 ♖b8 14.♘gxe4?! ♘xe4 15.♘xe4 ♖b4, followed by ...♖d4, with the initiative for Black due to his superior development.

13.0–0 ♖b8 causes White similar problems, while exposing his king to ...♘eg4, followed by ...♕d6 or ...e3.



13...♘h5 14.♗xe5

14.♗e3 runs into the familiar 14...♖b8.

14...♗xe5 15.♘gxe4

The daring 15.♘xh7 leads only to a draw after 15...♗xc3† 16.bxc3 ♔xh7 17.♖xh5. However, Black can instead try to keep things complicated with: 15...♖f4 Threatening ...♗g4. 16.g3 ♗g4 17.♗e2 ♘xg3 18.fxg3 ♖f3 19.♗xf3 ♗xf3 20.♕c1 ♕d6 21.♖h3 ♗xg3† 22.♔f1 ♗g4 The game is likely to end in a draw by perpetual anyway, but there are some dangers for White along the road.

15...♖b8

Black has strong activity as compensation for the pawn.

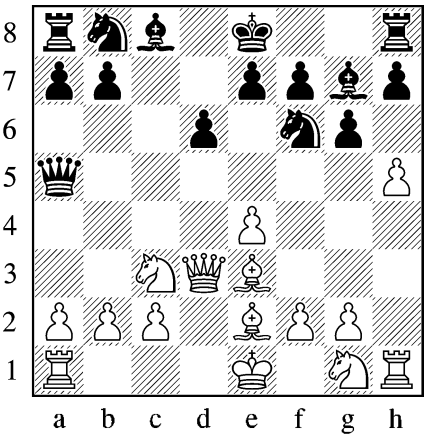
6...♕a5

White's three main possibilities, which all involve removing the threat of ...♘xe4, are **C41) 7.♕d3**, **C42) 7.♗d2** and **C43) 7.♔f1**.

C41) 7.♕d3

White overprotects the c3-knight in anticipation of Black's later ...♘xh5, but the queen is exposed on the d3-square.

7...♕xc5 8.♗e3 ♕a5 9.h5



9...♘xh5

The thematic response, clearing the bishop's diagonal in order to spoil White's structure.

Ignoring the attack could lead to problems after 9...0–0 10.hxg6. Both 10..hxg6 11.♕d2 followed by ♗h6, and 10...fxg6 11.♕c4† ♔h8 12.♘f3 put the black king in danger.

10.♗xh5 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3

11.♕xc3 gives up White's attacking dreams, conceding Black a pleasant ending: 11...♕xc3† 12.bxc3 gxh5 13.♖xh5 ♘c6 14.f4 In Reprintsev – V. Onischuk, Lutsk 2016, strongest would have been: 14...♗g4N 15.♖h6 Otherwise Black would continue with ...h5. 15...f5∓ Black has great play on the light squares.

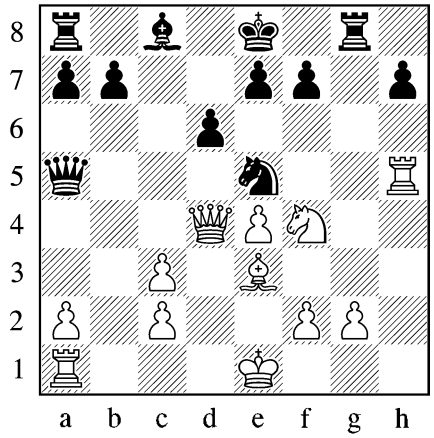
11...gxh5 12.♘e2 ♖g8 13.♘f4 ♘c6∓

Black has the better structure and an extra pawn, which White cannot regain easily. For instance:

14.♖xh5? ♘e5 15.♕d4

15.♕d2 restricts the king, running into: 15...♖xg2! 16.♖xe5 ♖g1† 17.♔e2 Sadly the only move, exposing the king to 17...♕a6†!–+ followed by ...♖xa1.

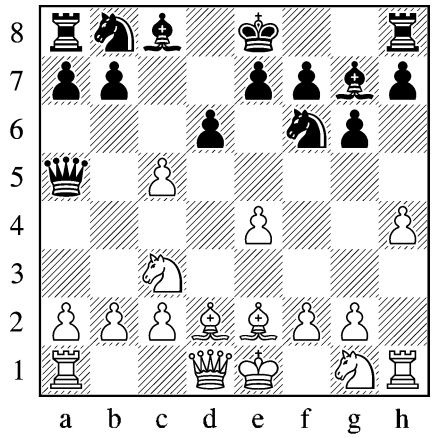
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15...♖xg2!–+

Black was winning in Vujic – Pantovic, Obrenovac 2004. The rook is taboo due to ...♘f3† and 16.♖xe5 runs into 16...dxe5 attacking the queen.

C42) 7.♗d2



This looks solid, as it eliminates the danger of ...♗xc3. However, the bishop stands in the way of the queen and if it later moves away with ♗e3, the king will again be exposed along the e1-a5 diagonal.

7...♕xc5 8.h5 0–0!

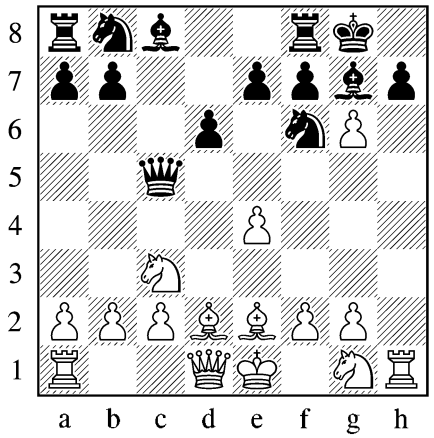
Due to White's congested position, developing is best.

9.hxg6

This forces Black to spoil his pawn structure, but also opens the f-file for his counterattack.

The main drawback of White's 7th move is visible after: 9.♘h3 d5! By opening the centre Black forestalls any kingside dangers. 10.exd5 (or 10.hxg6 hxg6 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♕xd5 13.♘f4 ♕d6=) 10...♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♕xd5 12.♘f4 ♕d6 Black had comfortable equality in Repp – Oppenrieder, corr. 1989.

If 9.♗e3 ♕b4, White experiences problems with his e4- and b2-pawns.



9...fxg6!

9...hxg6 10.♕c1 offers White attacking chances.

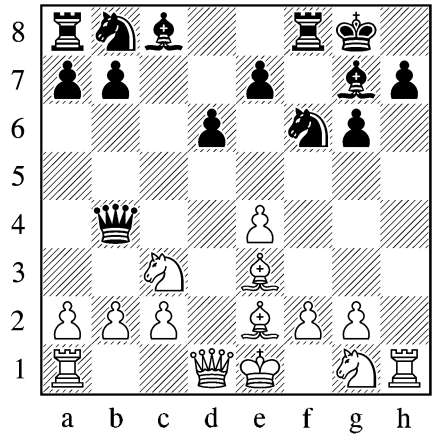
10.♗e3

After 10.♘h3?! ♗xh3 11.♖xh3, Black played 11...♘g4?! in Romero Holmes – Gamboa Alvarado, San Jose 2013, when the unexpected 12.♗c4!† ♕xc4 13.♕xg4 resulted in a messy position. The right way to attack the f2-square was 11...♘d5!N∓, spoiling White's structure with a subsequent ...♘xc3 and eliminating any danger to the black king.

10...♕b4

The familiar reaction.

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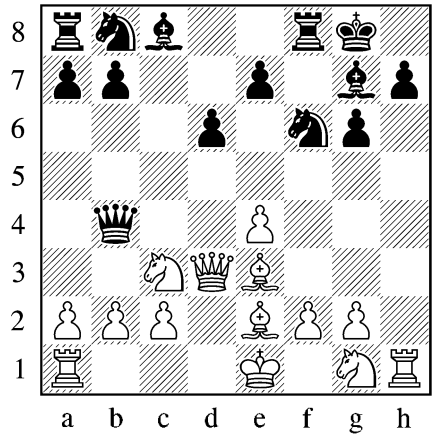
11.♕d3N

Relatively best.

11.♕d2 sets up the battery along the c1-h6 diagonal at once, but it takes the d2-square away from the king. Black replies 11...♘g4 and now:

a) 12.0–0–0 ♗xc3 13.bxc3 ♕a3† forces: 14.♔b1 ♗e6 15.c4 ♘xe3 16.fxe3 ♘d7–+ Black will continue with ...♘b6 or ...♘e5, and ...♖ac8, when his attack is faster.

b) 12.♗xg4 ♗xg4∓ is a better try, but White is still left with the king in the centre while having to worry about ...♕xb2.



11...♘g4

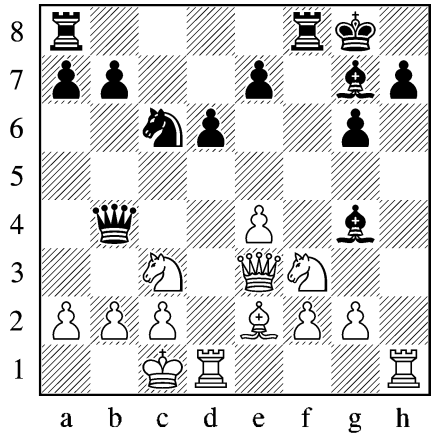
Even though things are less clear after this knight incursion than in the previous line, I just prefer this in principle to pawn-grabbing.

11...♕xb2 seems objectively fine for Black, but it is irritating to hand the initiative to White: 12.♖b1 ♕a3 13.♘f3 ♘c6 14.♘g5 ♘e5 15.♕d2 h6 16.f4 ♘eg4 17.♖b3 ♕a5 18.♗c4† ♔h8 White may well have no more than a perpetual with ♘f7†, either now or shortly.

12.0–0–0 ♘xe3

12...♗xc3 13.bxc3 ♕a3† does not work so well now due to 14.♔d2±. White's king is safe and he can already think of his attack starting with ♕c4†.

13.♕xe3 ♘c6 14.♘f3 ♗g4



Black is well developed and his bishop pair compensates for the slightly spoiled structure. White can try to mess things up with:

15.e5!?

Obstructing the g7-bishop in order to prepare ♘d5, while also preparing to pin the other bishop with ♖h4.

15...♖ae8

Just completing development.

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16.♘d5

16.♖h4 ♕f4 is absolutely fine for Black.

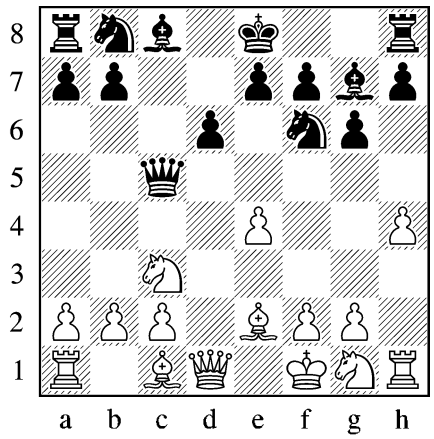
16...♕c5

With unclear play and chances for both sides.

C43) 7.♔f1

The most popular and principled move. Since White has started such an early attack, it is unlikely that he will get castled, and the king is relatively safe on the f1-square.

7...♕xc5



8.♗e3

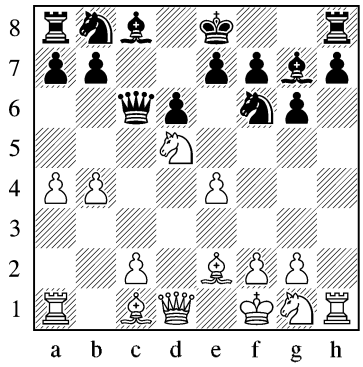
White does not achieve much by refraining from this move.

I also checked:

8.h5 ♘xh5 9.♘d5

9.♗xh5 is similar to the main line: 9...♗xc3 10.bxc3 gxh5 11.♕d4 ♕b5†!?N If White blocks the check with 12.c4 then 12...♕e5 offers the queen exchange under better circumstances. If instead 12.♘e2 f6 followed by ...♘c6, Black has the better structure and normal development, even if the extra pawn will be lost along the way.

9...♘f6 10.b4 ♕c6 11.a4



11...♕d7!N

There is no need for the spectacular 11...♘xd5?! 12.♗b5 ♘c3 13.♗xc6† ♘xc6, without full compensation for the queen in Bach – Hodgson, Bad Woerishofen 1993.

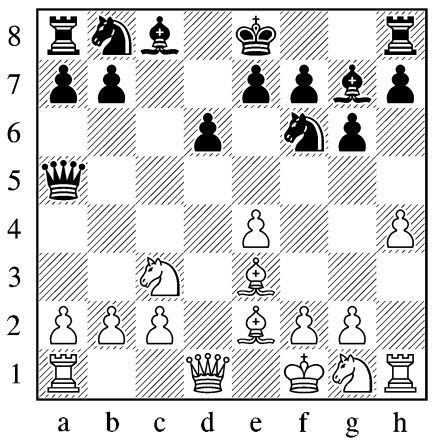
12.♗h6

12.♖a3 h5 consolidates the kingside.

12...♗xh6 13.♖xh6 ♘xd5 14.exd5 ♕f5

White does not have enough compensation for the pawn.

8...♕a5



9.h5

It's now or never!

After 9.♘h3 ♘c6 10.♘f4 h5, Black had a comfortable version of the Dragon in Hoffterheide – M. Mueller, Germany 2009.

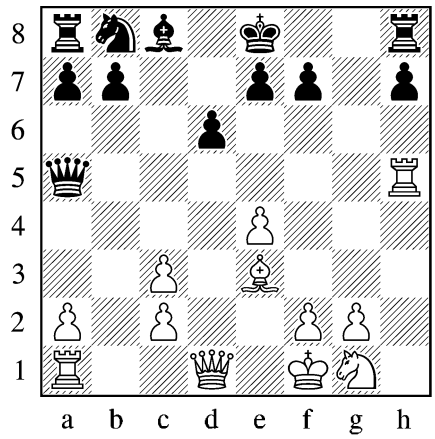
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9...♘xh5 10.♗xh5 ♗xc3

A familiar theme.

11.bxc3 gxh5 12.♖xh5

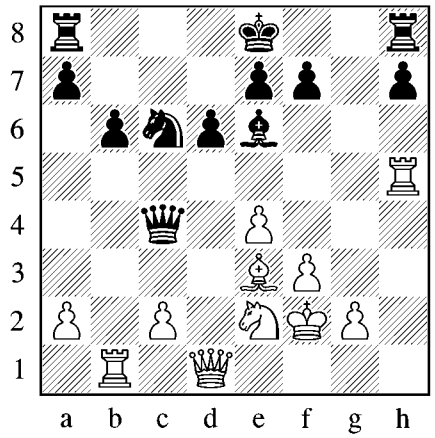
12.♘e2 defends the c3-pawn but delays taking on h5, allowing Black the time to proceed with his development. 12...♘c6 13.♘f4 In Colom Sienes – Malo Guillen, Spain 2011, Black should have played: 13...♖g8!N Removing the rook from the long diagonal before playing ...♘e5. 14.♖xh5 ♘e5 15.♖xh7 ♕xc3∓ Pawns are equal, but Black has the better structure and the more harmonious regrouping. His king also has better prospects of reaching safety by castling queenside.



12...♕xc3 13.♘e2

After 13.♖d4 ♕xd4 14.♗xd4, as in Marrero Lopez – Linares Napoles, Cali 2009, the simple 14...f6N∓ would have offered Black the better ending. The extra pawn is not easy to retrieve and Black's structure is better in any case.

13...♕c4 14.f3 ♘c6 15.♔f2 ♗e6 16.♖b1 b6∓



White did not have compensation for the pawn in Lhagvasuren – Azmaiparashvili, Moscow 1986.

Conclusion

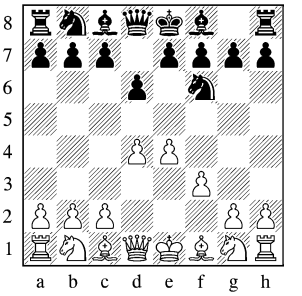
The minor lines examined in this chapter are characterized by early White aggressiveness at the cost of neglecting the natural course of development. This tends to offer Black counterplay earlier than he would expect when playing the Pirc.

The most consistent of the options is variation B, aiming for a solid kingside expansion, but its slowness offers Black the time to start his own pawn play.

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Chapter 15

Rare 2nd & 3rd Moves



3.f3

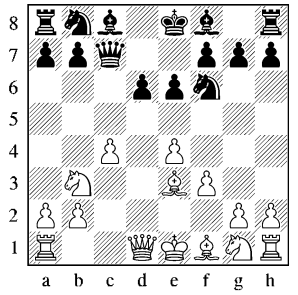
Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.f3

3...c5

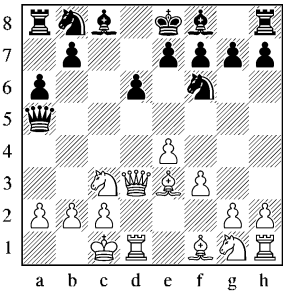
A) 4.dxc5 **359**
B) 4.c3 **365**
C) 4.♘e2 **368**
D) 4.d5 **371**

A) note to 5.♘c3



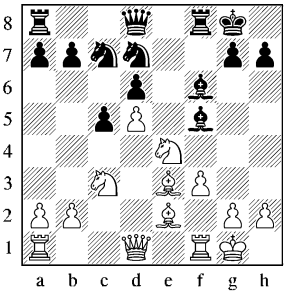
8...d5!N

A) note to 8.♘ge2



8...♘bd7!?N

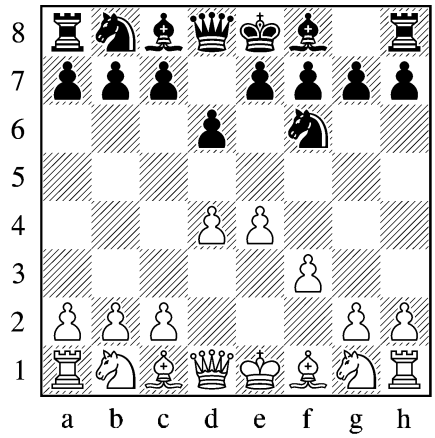
D) note to 7.♗d3



14...♗e5!N

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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.f3



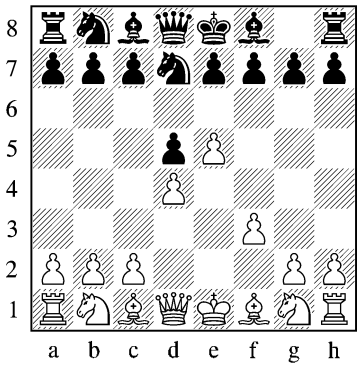
The obvious purpose of this move is to keep the path free for the c-pawn in order to transpose to King's Indian Sämisch set-ups. Logically, this should appeal only to players who have this system in their repertoire with White. The appeal of White's 3rd move might even be restricted further, since play may also transpose to the Benoni, the Sicilian or even the French!

3...c5

I have always considered this to be the most principled answer, but I must admit that this is partly subjective, as over the years I have had excellent results in the f2-f3 Benoni – see line D. If White refrains from d4-d5, his king's knight usually faces problems finding a favourable route due to the early advance of the f-pawn. Another negative effect of f2-f3 is that in some lines the king will be stuck in the centre with the black queen on c5.

For players with the King's Indian in their repertoire, 3...g6 is the most natural choice.

Or if the French Defence complements the Pirc in your repertoire, 3...d5 4.e5 ♘fd7 is quite possible.



True, Black has wasted a tempo with his d-pawn, but White more or less has to do the same with his f-pawn in order to ensure a decent development for his knight: 5.f4 e6 6.♘f3 (6.♘d2 c5 7.c3 ♘c6 8.♘df3 transposes to the Tarrasch Variation, though it is worth mentioning that from the French move order, ♗d3 is more topical than f2-f4) 6...c5 7.♘c3 Reaching one of the most fashionable French Steinitz lines.

Since ...c5 is useful in the French with a blocked centre, our choice of 3rd move does not rule out a transposition to a French structure, but in my recommended move order Black holds ...d6-d5 in reserve until White has committed his king's knight.

After 3...c5 White has a choice between **A) 4.dxc5**, **B) 4.c3**, **C) 4.♘e2** and the most principled **D) 4.d5**.

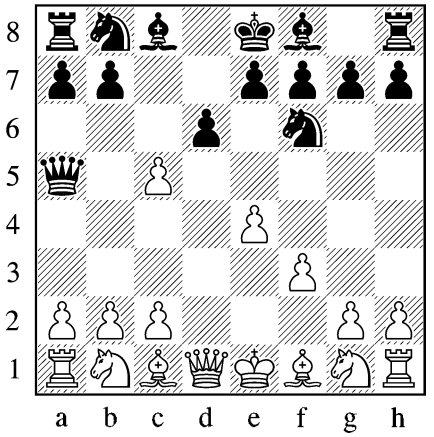
A) 4.dxc5

White forces a transposition to a Sicilian structure, thus avoiding once and for all the danger of landing in a weird version of the French after ♘e2 and ...d5. The text move is in the spirit of Chapter 6. The difference is that, due to f2-f3, the only reasonable square for the king's knight is d4, implying that White will play a version of the English Attack a tempo down after ♘e2-d4.

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4...♕a5†

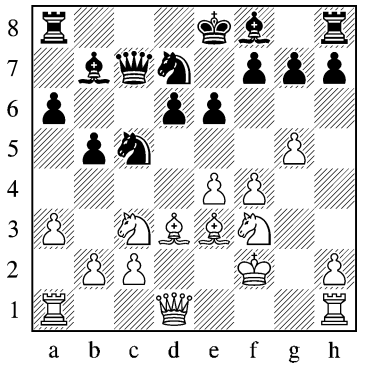
The typical Pirc reaction. For such a minor line, the number of White replies tried out in practice is surprisingly high.



5.♘c3

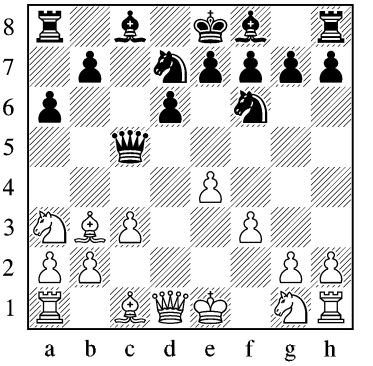
The most natural and doubtlessly best continuation, as in the Sicilian the knight belongs on c3. White has several ways to keep the c-pawn's path clear, with the intention of transposing to a Hedgehog or Maroczy structure, but these involve important concessions regarding overall harmony.

5.♔f2 avoids committing any piece, but the king does not stand well in the centre: 5...♕xc5† 6.♗e3 ♕c7 7.♘c3 a6 8.g4 e6 9.g5 ♘fd7 10.f4 b5 11.a3 ♗b7 12.♘f3 ♘c5 13.♗d3 ♘bd7



As well as the usual queenside play, Black could soon consider questioning the white king's safety with ...d5 or ...f5 in Svistunov – Fedorov, Moscow 1996.

5.c3 clearly does not fit in White's main plan – both his knights are struggling now: 5...♕xc5 6.♘a3 ♘bd7 7.♗c4 a6 8.♗b3

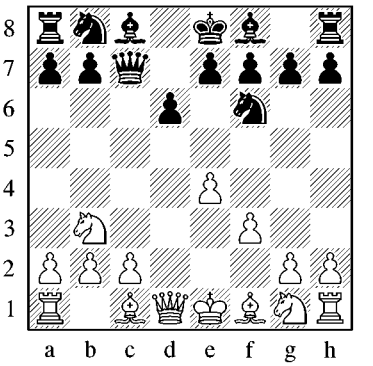


8...b6!? Not the only plan, of course, but quite a solid one. Black avoids any later problems connected with a2-a4. 9.♕e2 ♗b7 10.♗e3 ♕c6= The position was balanced in Wexler – Pelikan, Chacabuco 1965.

5.♘d2

This is more natural than 5.c3, but has the same drawback – the knight will not control the d5- and b5-squares.

5...♕xc5 6.♘b3 ♕c7



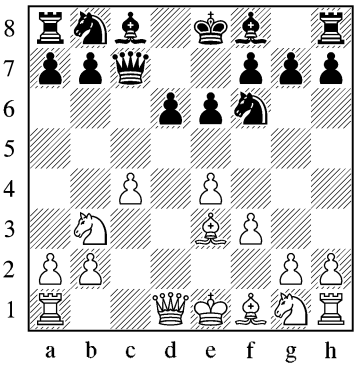
White's development is far inferior to normal

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Sicilian lines, making Black's play easy. Here is just a typical example:

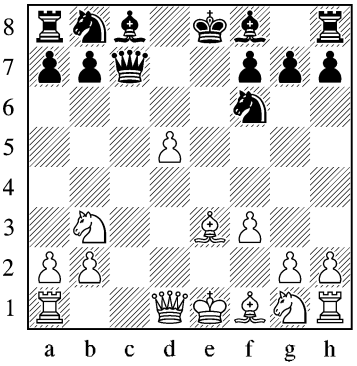
7.c4 e6 8.♗e3

In Stertenbrink – Odendahl, Germany 1988, Black could have played the typical Hedgehog break earlier than usual in this structure:



8...d5!N 9.cxd5 exd5 10.exd5

I also considered: 10.♖c1 ♘c6 11.exd5 ♕e5 12.dxc6 Otherwise Black regains the pawn, retaining some initiative. 12...♕xe3† 13.♕e2 ♗b4† 14.♔d1 ♘d5 15.cxb7 ♕xe2† Amusingly, piece captures allow ...♘e3 mate, while after 16.♔xe2 ♗xb7 Black has huge compensation due to his better development and White's weaknesses on the dark squares.



10...♗b4†

The consequences of centralizing the queen are less clear than above: 10...♕e5 11.♔f2 ♘xd5 12.♗d4 White has some initiative.

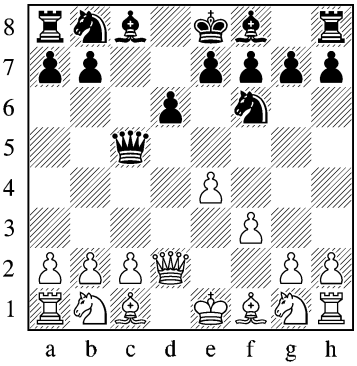
11.♔f2 0–0

Black has excellent play, while White's prospects of keeping the extra pawn and completing development satisfactorily are slim.

5.♕d2

This awkward move, blocking the c1-bishop, is one of the less inspired experiments of the 10th World Champion.

5...♕xc5



6.c4

6.♕c3 is not dangerous, as in the Sicilian Black can only dream of exchanging queens so early: 6...♘bd7 7.♗e3 ♕xc3† 8.♘xc3 a6 9.g4 h6 Play proceeds along English Attack patterns, but the absence of queens relieves Black of any dangers. 10.h4 e6 11.0–0–0 b5 12.♘h3 ♗b7 13.a3 ♖c8 14.g5 ♘h5 15.♖g1 ♘e5 16.♗e2 Drazic – Strikovic, Elgoibar 2016, continued 16...g6 when 17.gxh6N would have created unnecessary (though tolerable) problems with the d6-pawn. Simpler is 16...hxg5N 17.hxg5 g6=.

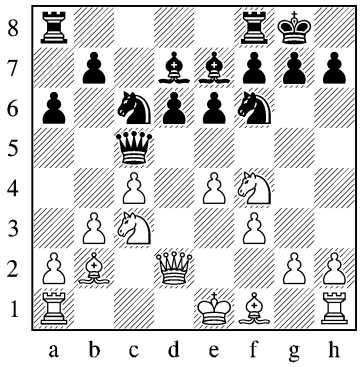
6...e6 7.♘c3 ♗e7 8.b3

White's global plan to restore his harmony is logical but time-consuming. Furthermore, he does not have an obvious way of arranging to castle kingside.

8...0–0 9.♗b2 a6 10.♘ge2 ♘c6 11.♘f4 ♗d7

In the meantime, Black has completed his development and the thematic Hedgehog break of ...b5 becomes an issue.

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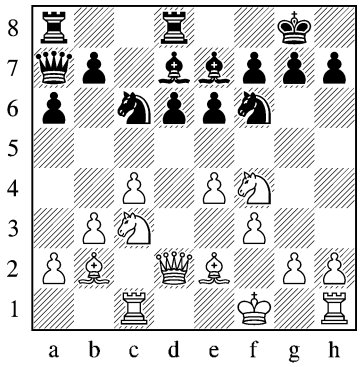
12.♗e2 ♖fd8 13.♖c1 ♕a7

Parrying the threat of ♘cd5 while keeping the g1-a7 diagonal under control.

14.♔f1

Another extravagant move.

However, the more natural 14.g4 does not spare White from problems: 14...b5 15.g5 ♘e8 16.h4 ♘e5 Black has the initiative.



In Spassky – Tseshkovsky, Moscow 1999, Black could have started his queenside play at once:

14...b5N 15.cxb5 axb5 16.♗xb5 d5

With the king in the centre, the opening of the centre is quite dangerous.

17.exd5 ♘b4 18.♗xd7 ♖xd7∓

Black has many attacking ideas, such as ...e5 followed by ...♘fxd5, ...♗c5, or the simple ...♘fxd5.

5...♕xc5

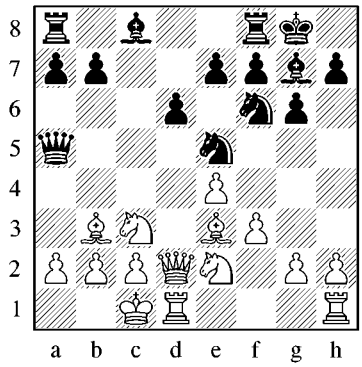
Because the e3-square is undefended, making ♗e3 unavailable, White has to make an unnatural developing move.

6.♕d3

This prepares ♗e3, but in the long run the queen will be exposed on this square, entailing a loss of time.

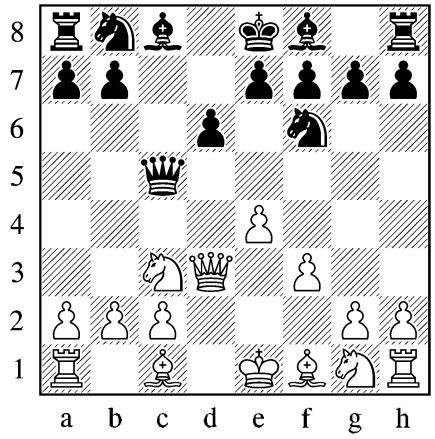
6.♗b5† only helps Black's development and leaves the c4-square vulnerable, without bringing anything positive: 6...♗d7 7.♕d3 a6 8.♗xd7† ♘bxd7 9.♗e3 ♕c6 10.♗d4 e6 11.♘ge2 ♗e7 12.0–0 0–0 13.♖ad1 ♘e5 14.♕d2 ♖ac8 15.b3 b5∓ Black had active play in Shchukin – Vorotnikov, St Petersburg 1997.

6.♗f4 transposes to a variation of the Trompowsky with White having lost a tempo (1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗g5 ♘e4 3.♗f4 c5 4.f3 ♘f6 5.dxc5 ♕a5† 6.♘c3 ♕xc5 7.e4 d6 reaches this position, but with White to move). White aims at inhibiting the Scheveningen set-up based on ...e6, but Black is flexible enough to switch to the Dragon: 6...g6 7.♕d2 ♗g7 8.0–0–0 0–0 9.♗e3 ♕a5 10.♗c4 ♘c6 11.♘ge2 ♘e5 12.♗b3



In Anand – Scholz, Frankfurt (simul) 1994, Black should have played 12...♗e6!N followed by the invasion of the c4-square, with active play.

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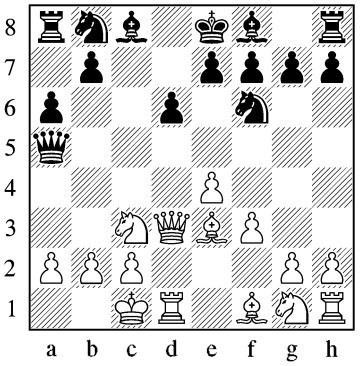
6...a6 7.♗e3 ♕a5

In the absence of a knight on d4 with the permanent threat of ♘b3, the queen stands well on this square, inhibiting queenside castling in view of ...b5-b4.

8.♘ge2

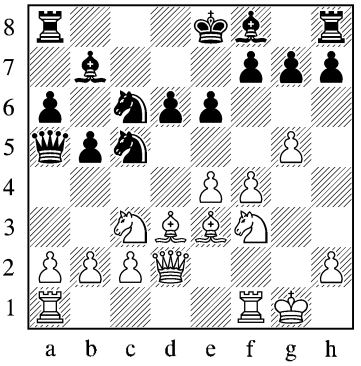
White does best to develop.

8.0–0–0, as played in a couple of games, wastes too much time.



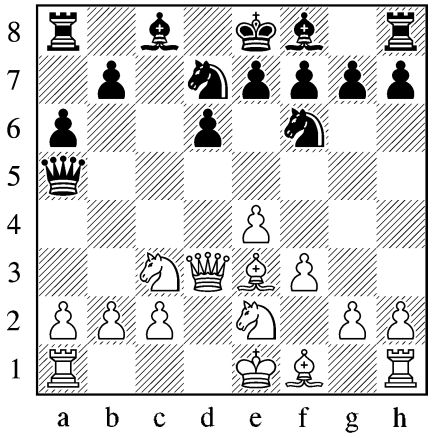
8...♘bd7!?N 9.g4 h6 10.h4 b5 11.♔b1 e6 Black's activity is likely to take concrete contours earlier than White's, based on ...b4, ...♘e5 and ...d5.

The pawn storm with 8.g4 ♘c6 9.g5 ♘d7 10.f4 is also premature with incomplete development. 10...b5 11.♕d2 e6 12.♗d3 ♗b7 13.♘f3 ♘c5 14.0–0 In Kierzek – Balashov, Acqui Terme 2015, the simplest way to achieve active counterplay was:



14...b4N 15.♘e2 ♘xd3 16.cxd3 d5 Black will inevitably activate his b7-bishop after ...dxe4, since 17.e5?! allows the thematic pawn sacrifice 17...d4∓ followed soon by ...♕d5, with annoying pressure along the long diagonal.

8...♘bd7



9.♘d4N

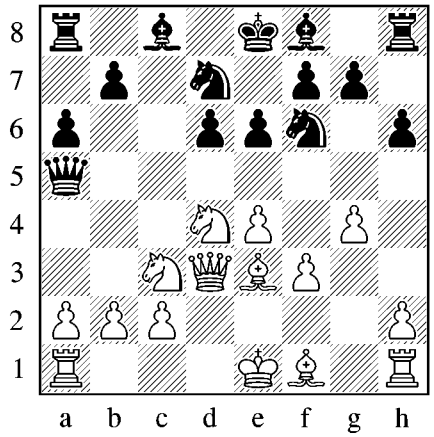
This is the most logical move.

The prophylactic 9.♕d2 spends a tempo prematurely: 9...e6 10.♘d4 b5 11.g4 h6 12.h4 In Khenkin – Strikovic, Andorra 2007, Black could have started active operations in the centre with: 12...b4N 13.♘ce2 d5∓

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9...e6 10.g4 h6

Play continues along the same paths as in the game quoted just above.

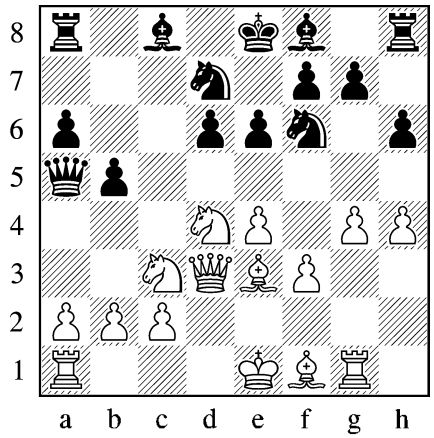


11.h4

Once again, castling speeds up Black's queenside play: 11.0–0–0 b5 12.a3 ♗b7 13.h4 d5 Black has at least equal play.

11...b5 12.♖g1

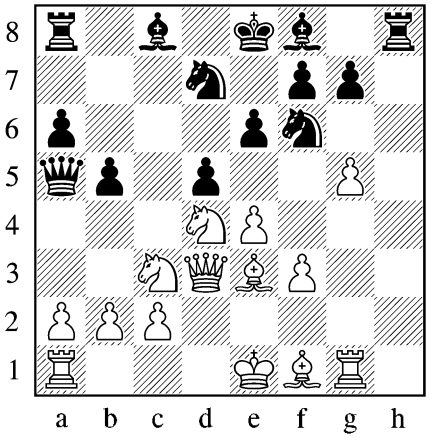
It seems that, due to the threat of g4-g5, White has chances to take over the initiative, but the exposed position of the white queen will offer Black an important tempo.



12...d5! 13.g5

13.exd5 ♘e5 14.♕d2 b4 15.♘d1 (more or less forced, since 15.♘ce2? ♘c4∓ and 15.♘e4 ♘xf3† 16.♘xf3 ♘xe4 17.♕d4 ♕xd5 18.♕xd5 exd5 19.0–0–0 ♗e6∓ favour Black) 15...♕xd5 Black is rather active and White needs to spend a tempo parrying the threat of ...♕xd4 followed by ...♘xf3†.

13...hxg5 14.hxg5



14...dxe4!

An important intermediate move, clearing the d5-square for the attacked knight.

15.♕d2

Or: 15.fxe4 ♘c5 16.♕d2 The only way to indirectly defend the e4-pawn. 16...b4 17.gxf6 bxc3 18.bxc3 gxf6 With obvious strategic problems for White.

15...♘d5 16.♘b3 ♕b4!

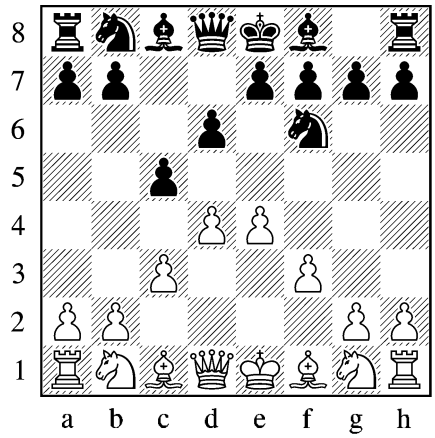
Keeping the d5-square indirectly defended.

17.a3 ♕d6 18.♘xe4 ♕c7 19.♗f2 ♕f4

19...♖h2 is a good alternative. Either way, Black has comfortable play.

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B) 4.c3



This apparently solid move, assuring White of an imposing centre, has the important drawback of restricting the queen's knight in a similar way that f2-f3 does to its colleague.

4...e6

The most flexible move, keeping the possibility of transposing to a French with ...d5 if White commits one of his knights.

Once again a transposition to the Sämisch King's Indian is possible: 4...cxd4 5.cxd4 g6 6.♘c3 ♗g7 7.♗e3 0–0 8.♗d3 e5 Since keeping the tension with 9.♘ge2 allowed 9...exd4 10.♘xd4 ♘c6 11.0–0 d5 with full equality in Schuck – Hermesmann, Hamburg 1992, White's best is 9.d5, reaching a genuine King's Indian tabiya.

5.♗d3

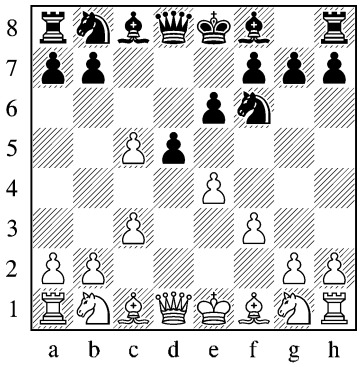
White may hope to reach a favourable structure and prevent the enemy king from getting castled with:

5.dxc5

However these hopes will be in vain due to:

5...d5!

This early reaction in the centre involves a pawn sacrifice and highlights White's delay in development.



6.e5

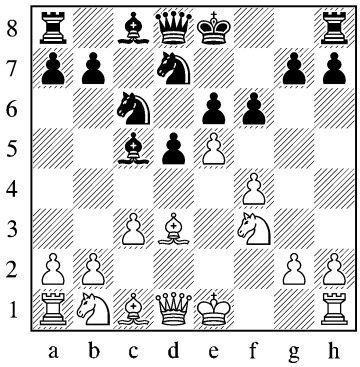
Transposing to a rather unfavourable version of the French.

Pawn-grabbing is dangerous: 6.exd5 ♗xc5 7.dxe6 ♕e7 Black will soon have a strong initiative along the central files, while the white king has no easy escape from the centre.

6...♘fd7 7.f4 ♗xc5

Black has regained the pawn, maintaining his lead in development.

8.♘f3 f6 9.♗d3 ♘c6∓



White is struggling to keep his space advantage and his control of the dark squares, yielding Black the initiative in Shibut – Khachiyan, Minneapolis 2005.

Developing the c1-bishop leaves the queenside vulnerable:

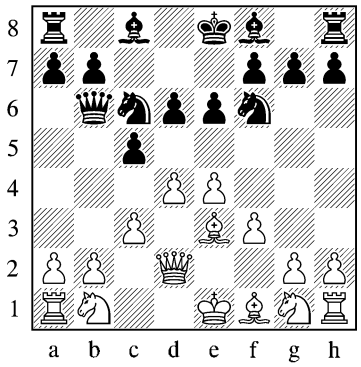
5.♗e3 ♕b6!? 6.♕d2

6.♘d2 is a commitment that justifies: 6...d5 7.e5 ♘fd7 Compared to the usual French

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lines, White does not have comfortable ways of defending the b2-pawn.

6...♘c6



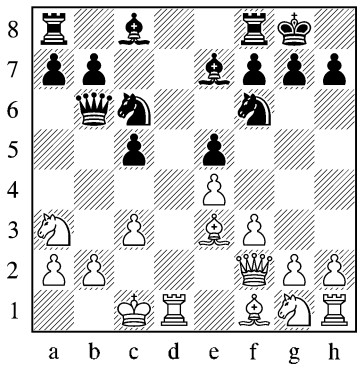
7.dxc5

The structure resulting from this exchange generally favours White, but here his delay in development causes some problems.

Other moves once again allow a favourable transposition to the French, for instance: 7.♘h3 d5 8.e5 was played in Gallagher – Lanchava, Isle of Man 2004, and now I recommend 8...♘g8!?N= followed by ...cxd4, ...♘ge7-f5 and ...h5.

7...dxc5 8.♘a3 ♗e7 9.0–0–0 0–0 10.♕f2 e5!?

This might seem to help White, since it weakens the d5-square, but Black is in time to control all the important squares.



11.♔b1 ♘a5 12.♘h3 ♕c6 13.♕g3N

Trying to create some threats to distract Black's attention from the vital squares.

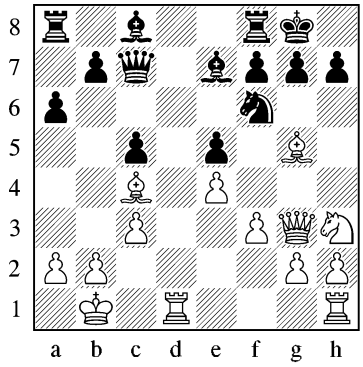
13.♘c4 ♘xc4 14.♗xc4 b5 offered Black a strong initiative in Vallejo Pons – Peralta, Albox (rapid) 2005.

13...♕c7 14.♘c4

14.♘b5 ♕b8 leaves the knight passive on the b5-square. Black threatens ...a6 followed by ...b5, and after the relatively best 15.c4 ♘c6, the mutual control of the d4- and d5-squares maintains approximate equality.

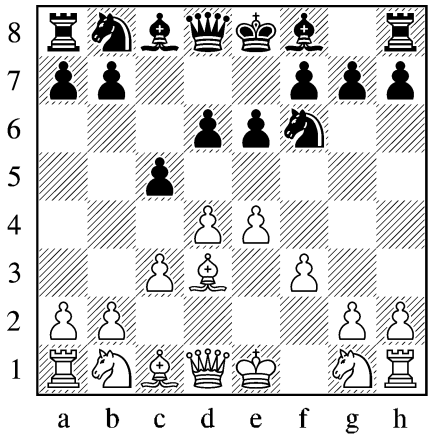
14...♘xc4 15.♗xc4 a6 16.♗g5

This is essential in order to install the other bishop on d5.



16...b5 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6 18.♗d5 ♖b8

Followed by the massive advance of the queenside pawns, with reasonable counterplay.



5...♘c6 6.♘e2 ♗e7

Black maintains his flexibility, reckoning that after castling the threat ...cxd4, cxd4 ♘b4

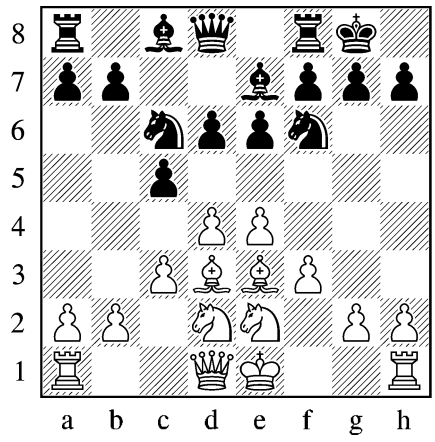
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could cause White some problems with his bishop.

6...d5 transposes to an unusual – yet viable for White – version of the French: 7.e5 ♘d7 8.f4 ♕b6 9.♗c2 The bishop rarely lands on the c2-square in this structure, but Black has no obvious way to take advantage of this detail.

7.♗e3 0–0 8.♘d2

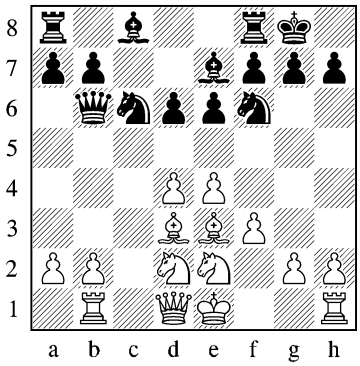
Clearing the path for the bishop's retreat, because 8.0–0 cxd4 does not allow White to keep his space advantage under favourable circumstances: 9.cxd4 (9.♘xd4 e5 10.♘e2 d5 gave Black the initiative in Cepon – Mikac, Skofja Loka 1998) 9...♘b4 10.♗b5 ♗d7 11.♗xd7 ♕xd7 12.♘bc3 d5= Black is striving for a French structure after having exchanged his potentially bad bishop, gaining some time along the way. The position offered equal chances in Sriram – Sahu, Calcutta 1997.



This position has been reached a few times, and Black has only chosen slow developing moves. While this is an entirely reasonable policy, it makes sense to start the fight against White's centre by concrete means.

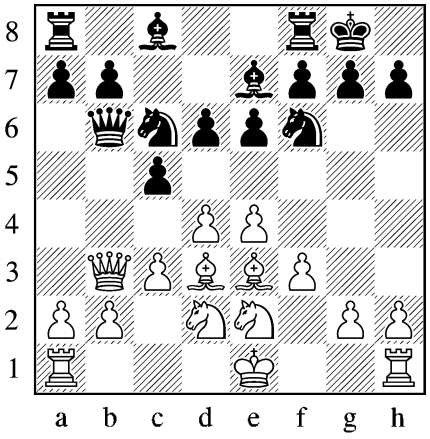
8...♕b6N 9.♕b3

9.♖b1 cuts the bishop's retreat off, allowing the familiar: 9...cxd4 10.cxd4 (10.♘xd4 d5∓ gives Black the initiative in the centre. With the bishop hanging on e3, discovered attacks are not dangerous, for instance: 11.♘f5?! ♗c5∓)



10...♘b4 11.♗c4 d5∓ With unpleasant problems for White.

Stabilizing the position with 9.♘c4 ♕c7 10.dxc5 dxc5 11.a4 does not bring White much either, mainly because the c4-knight does not enjoy the support of his colleague. For example: 11...b6 12.0–0 ♖d8 13.♕c2 ♗a6 White's minor pieces are passive and the d3-bishop is already exposed to the threat of ...♖xd3. Black has at least equal play.



9...♕c7!?

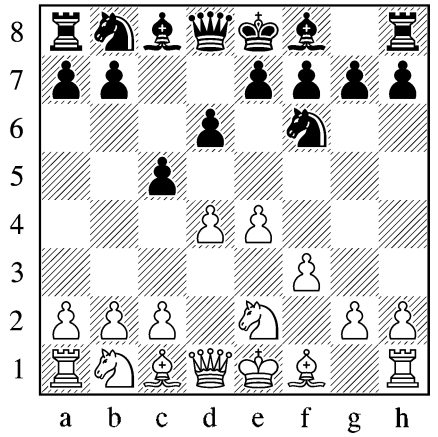
Threatening 10...d5, with the idea 11.e5 c4!.

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10.♕c2 ♗d7 11.0–0 ♖fc8

Due to the unfavourable placement of the white queen, Black has enough queenside counterplay to compensate for White's space advantage.

C) 4.♘e2



White hopes to transpose to the Sicilian, even though the early f2-f3 does not form part of the traditional main lines.

4...e6

Keeping the game within Pirc territory, with the permanent possibility of later transposing to a favourable French, as in line B.

4...cxd4 5.♘xd4 reaches a position that has recently become extremely popular via the Sicilian move order, famously featuring in the final tiebreak game in the 2016 Carlsen – Karjakin world championship match.

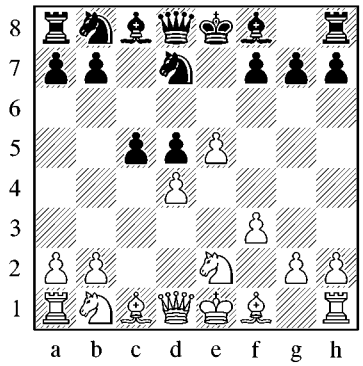
5.♗e3

If 5.dxc5, Black can play in the style of line A with 5...♕a5†, but even better is the familiar 5...d5N, when White has nothing better than 6.♗e3 transposing to the main line.

5.c4

White cannot keep his space advantage in this way, due to the immediate break:

5...d5 6.cxd5 exd5 7.e5 ♘fd7



8.f4

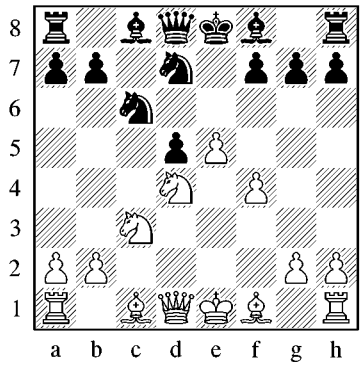
If 8.dxc5, as in Bunta – Dobre, Calimanesti 2014, Black could get an overwhelming lead in development with 8...♗xc5N 9.♕xd5 0–0.

8...♘c6 9.♘bc3

This allows a typical, yet not very obvious, tactical blow.

However, consolidating the d4-pawn with 9.♗e3 exposes the bishop: 9...♘b6 Black threatens ...♘c4 and clears the path for the c8-bishop. For instance: 10.b3 ♗g4 11.♕d2 f6 White cannot keep his centre intact any more, and 12.dxc5 fxe5! 13.cxb6? runs into 13...d4, with ...♗b4 looming.

9...cxd4 10.♘xd4



10...♘dxe5!

A simple trick based on 11.fxe5 ♕h4†.

11.♘db5

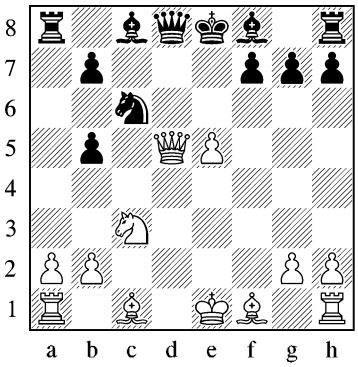
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11.♘xc6 ♘xc6 12.♕xd5 ♗e6 gave Black a lead in development and turned the advance of the white f-pawn into a weakness in Lodhi – Hodgson, Dhaka 1993.

The active 11.♗b5 was played in Seirawan – Adams, Bermuda (7) 1999, but it should fail to equalize: 11...a6N 12.♗a4 b5 13.♗b3 ♗c5 14.♗e3 ♗xd4 15.♗xd4 ♗g4 16.♕d2 ♘c4 17.♗xc4 dxc4∓ White can retrieve the pawn on g7, but his weaknesses on the light squares are more relevant than Black's on the dark ones.

11...a6 12.fxe5 axb5 13.♕xd5

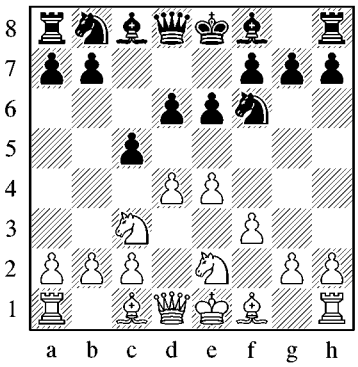
In Sengupta – Sowray, Hastings 2015, the simplest way to maintain the initiative would have been:



13...♕b6N 14.♕xb5 ♕d4∓

White has little to compensate for his exposed king.

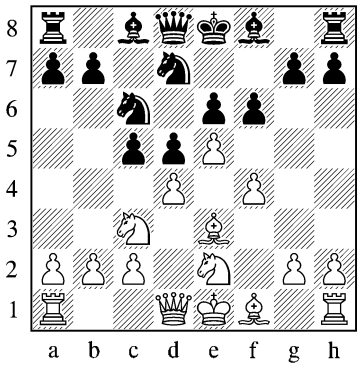
5.♘bc3



White persists in tempting Black to transpose to a Sicilian, but this commits the second knight, justifying the thematic:

5...d5 6.e5 ♘fd7 7.f4 ♘c6 8.♗e3 f6

After this well-timed break, White starts to lose his stability. His knights should be either on c3 and f3, or on e2 and d2.



9.exf6 ♕xf6 10.g3N

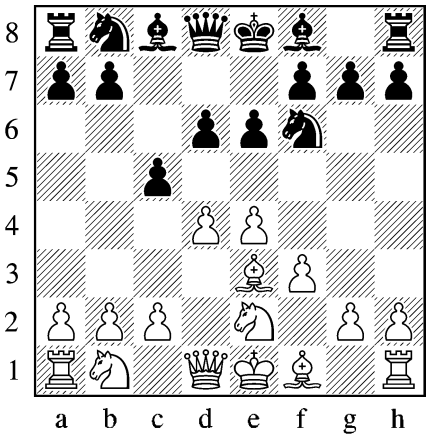
The pseudo-active 10.♘b5 ♕d8 11.c3, played in Hoose – Lueckerath, Wuppertal 1994, could have resulted in queenside problems for White after 11...♕b6N∓.

10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♗c5

White loses ground in the centre, for instance:

12.♘ce2 e5∓

Black holds the initiative.



5...d5

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Even though White controls the c5-square better than in the line just above, this central break is still effective.

6.dxc5

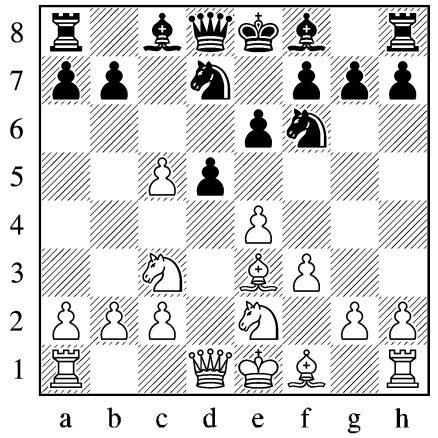
Or 6.e5 ♘fd7 7.f4 ♘c6 and now 8.♘bc3 transposes to the note on 5.♘bc3 above, while 8.c3 ♕b6 leaves White facing the usual queenside problems.

6...♘bd7

The players are not too interested in resolving the pawn tensions at this stage of the game – development is more important.

7.♘bc3

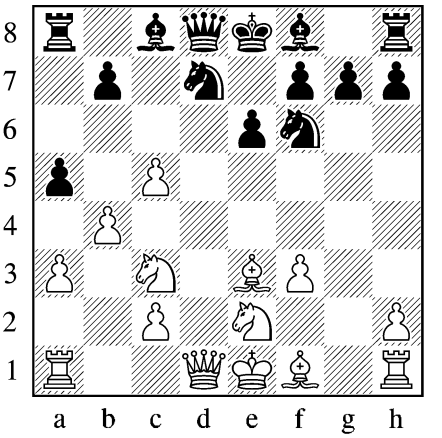
7.exd5 ♘xd5 8.♗d4 ♗xc5 safely regains the pawn with equal play, as 9.♗xg7? ♕b6 would put the white king in lethal danger. The immediate threat is 10...♗f2† 11.♔d2 ♕e3 mate, while after 10.♗d4 ♘e3 11.♗xe3 ♗xe3, followed by ...♗f2†, ...0–0 and ...♖d8, Black would have a winning attack.



7...dxe4 8.b4 a5N

This is simpler than the ultra-sharp 8...b6!? 9.c6 ♗xb4 10.cxd7† ♗xd7. At the cost of a piece, Black had obtained freer development and the possibility of taking his king to safety, while the white king remained under attack in Galkin – Kramnik, Moscow 2011.

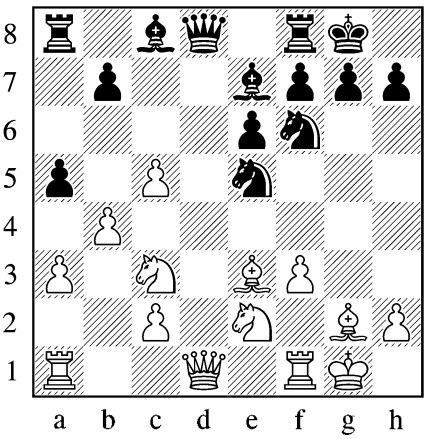
9.a3 exf3 10.gxf3



10...♗e7

The tempting 10...axb4 11.axb4 ♖xa1 12.♕xa1 b6 is slightly inferior: 13.♕a7! (This unconventional way of defending the c5-pawn is more or less forced, since 13.c6? ♘e5∓ wins a pawn and keeps excellent attacking chances.) 13...bxc5 14.bxc5 ♗e7 15.♗g2 0–0 16.0–0 ♘e5= Black's more compact structure compensates for White's queenside activity.

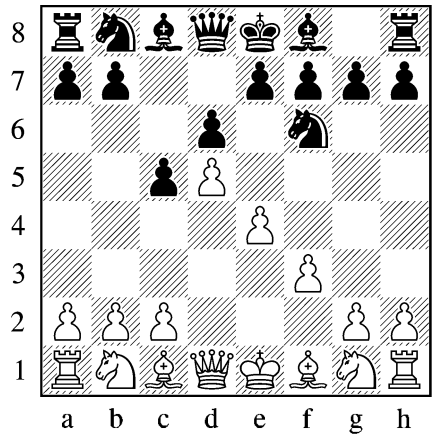
11.♗g2 0–0 12.0–0 ♘e5∓



As in the note above, Black has the better structure, but things are slightly safer on the queenside.

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D) 4.d5



This is the most principled move, in the spirit of the Sämisch set-up.

4...e6 5.c4

The most consistent continuation.

Giving up the centre in the hope of using the relative weakness of the d6-pawn is not effective: 5.dxe6 ♗xe6 6.c4 ♘c6 7.♘c3 g6 After getting castled, Black will prepare the invasion of the d4-square with ...♘d7 and/or ...♕b6.

5.♘c3

This results in a structure typical of the Schmid Benoni, but f2-f3 does not fit well into this set-up. Instead of consolidating White's space advantage it only causes White problems in developing normally. Besides, in the long run White will not be able to prevent ...b5.

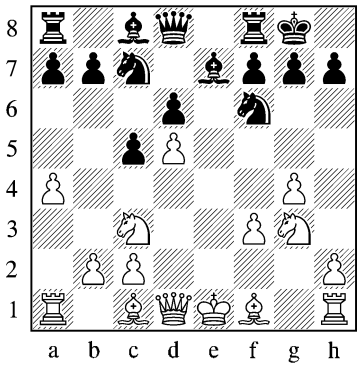
5...exd5 6.exd5 ♗e7 7.♘ge2 ♘a6 8.g4

Trying to give meaning to f2-f3.

8...♘c7 9.♘g3

With the black king not yet castled, 9.g5 is premature due to 9...♘d7 10.h4 h6∓, with dangerous counterplay.

9...0–0 10.a4

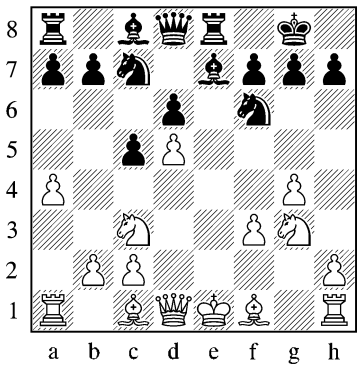


10...♖e8N

Black needs to take measures against White's main idea of g4-g5.

After 10...b6 11.g5 ♘d7 12.f4 ♖e8 13.♔f2, White obtained some light pressure in Soffer – Gavrikov, Berlin 1990.

Another possible improvement is 10...♘fe8N 11.♗d3 ♗f6 12.0–0 a6, keeping the white kingside pawns under control and preparing queenside counterplay.



11.♗e2

White needs to defend the e-file.

11.g5? just loses the pawn after 11...♘d7∓.

11...♘d7 12.0–0 a6 13.♘f5 ♖b8 14.a5 b5 15.axb6 ♘xb6 16.♘xe7† ♕xe7

Due to the threats of ...♗b7 or simply ...♘bxd5, White has to look for a way to maintain material equality.

17.♗f4 ♘bxd5 18.♘xd5 ♘xd5 19.♕xd5 ♕xe2 20.♗xd6 ♖xb2 21.♖f2 ♕e6=

With a probable draw.

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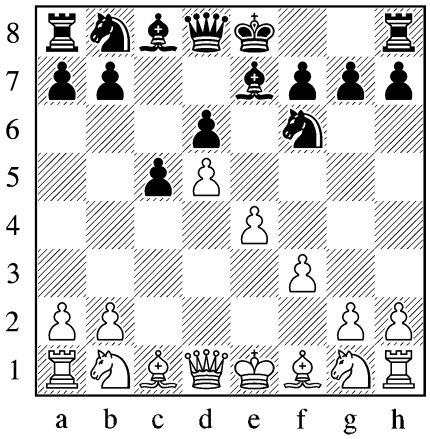
5...exd5 6.cxd5

Capturing with the e-pawn casts doubts over the merits of f2-f3: 6.exd5 ♗e7 7.♗d3 0–0 8.♘c3 ♘a6 9.♘ge2 In Lanzani – Cardon, Sas van Gent 1982, Black's simplest regrouping was 9...♘d7N 10.b3 ♘e5 11.♗c2 f5, followed by ...♗f6, ...♗d7 and ...♘c7, stabilizing the kingside and keeping chances for active queenside play.

6...♗e7!?

As mentioned at the start of the chapter, I find transposing to a genuine Benoni with 6...g6 more than satisfactory. However, this would mean examining a heavily analysed tabiya of a different opening, so for this book I am suggesting a different path.

The merits of the text move are not only subjective. Black speeds up his development, which is a logical reaction to White's 'slow mode' implied by f2-f3. Later, the bishop may get onto the long diagonal with ...♗f6, without the usual kingside weakening entailed by ...g6. Moreover, the bishop can occasionally venture to h4, causing White some problems with coordination.

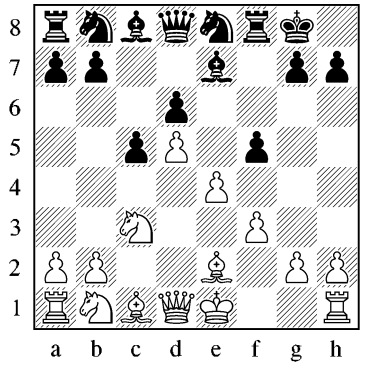


White experiences the usual Sämisch micro-problems with his development. The main issue is finding a good square for his king's knight, but this also involves taking a decision regarding the king's bishop. Since he has not played ♘b1-c3 yet, White can try to reach a flexible set-up with ♘e2-c3, followed by either ♘d2, or a2-a4 and ♘a3. But this is rather time-consuming, allowing Black to speed up his counterplay based on the tempo saved by ...♗e7.

7.♗d3

This is the fastest way of developing, but in the long run the bishop will be exposed to ...♘e5, or ...♕c7 and ...c4.

Trying to solve the problem of the king's knight offers Black time to prepare ...f5. For instance: 7.♘e2 0–0 8.♘ec3 ♘e8 9.♗e2 f5



10.exf5

Maintaining the tension is dangerous, as it allows Black to carry out the plan of a safe blockade on the dark squares: 10.0–0 ♗f6 11.♘d2 f4 12.♘c4 ♘d7 Black will continue with ...♘e5 and later ...g5, with a dangerous kingside initiative. White's queenside play is far less clear.

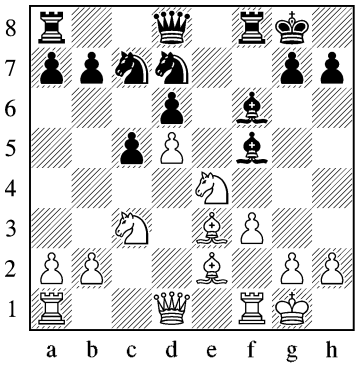
10...♗xf5 11.0–0 ♘d7 12.♗e3 ♘c7

Black has carried out a subtle knight regrouping. The last move not only enables the plan based on ...b5, but also puts pressure on the d5-pawn, with the plan of ...♗f6-e5 and ...♘f6.

13.♘d2 ♗f6 14.♘de4

In Omar – Solak, Baku 2013, Black should have kept his bishop with:

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14...♗e5!N 15.♕d2

15.f4 forces the exchange of the bishop, but weakening the light squares is too high a price to pay: 15...♗xc3 16.♘xc3 ♘f6∓ Black has a harmonious position and plans to complete his development with ...♕d7 and ...♖ae8. The over-ambitious 17.g4? runs into 17...♕e8, for example: 18.♗f2 ♘xg4 19.♗xg4 ♕g6 20.h3 h5 Black wins a pawn and the d5-pawn is likely to become chronically weak, while the white king is in danger.

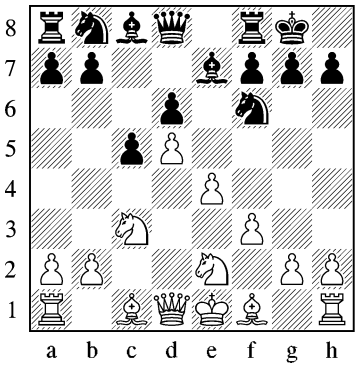
15...♘f6

Black has an active, harmonious set-up with at least equal chances.

The alternative developing plan for the knights is:

7.♘c3 0–0 8.♘ge2

If allowed, White will play ♘g3, ♗e2, 0–0 and later either f3-f4 or ♘h1-f2. Black is just in time to prevent these plans.



8...♘h5!

Suddenly White does not find it easy to continue his kingside development.

9.g4!?

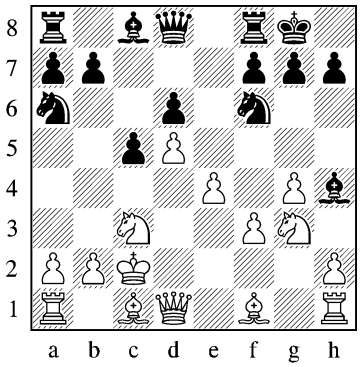
A principled but double-edged move.

The more restrained 9.g3N, aiming to complete his development comfortably, allows Black to combine play on both wings with 9...♘a6 10.♗g2 ♘c7 11.a4 f5 12.exf5 ♗xf5 and now:

a) Black's minor pieces are safe, as 13.g4? ♗h4† 14.♔d2 ♕g5† wins.

b) White needs to continue his development instead: 13.0–0 ♘f6 14.g4 ♗d7 15.♘g3 h6 Preventing g4-g5 and allowing a later invasion on the dark squares with ...♘h7 and ...♗h4. 16.♗e3 b5= Black has adequate counterplay.

9...♗h4† 10.♔d2 ♘f6 11.♘g3 ♘a6 12.♔c2



White has solved his coordination problems, with one exception – his king is still wandering. In Gelfand – Kramnik, Sochi (blitz) 2014, Black unnecessarily sacrificed a pawn with 12...b5 and eventually lost. He could have prepared the queenside attack slowly, as White still needs quite a few tempos to complete his development.

12...♖b8N 13.♗f4

The only way to put some pressure on Black, creating the threat of e4-e5.

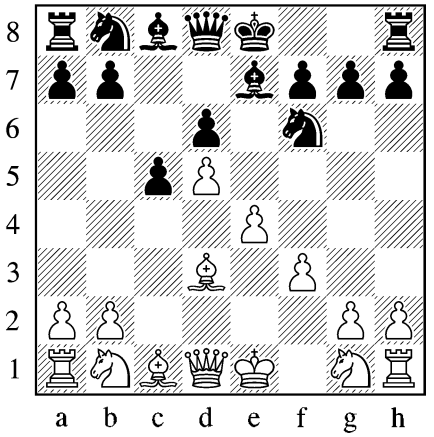
13...♘e8

Preparing to block the d-pawn with ...♘d6 if White opens the centre.

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14.♖c1 ♘ac7 15.a4 a6 16.a5 b5 17.axb6 ♖xb6 18.♔b1 ♖b4

Followed by ...♗f6 and possibly ...♘b5, with an obvious initiative.



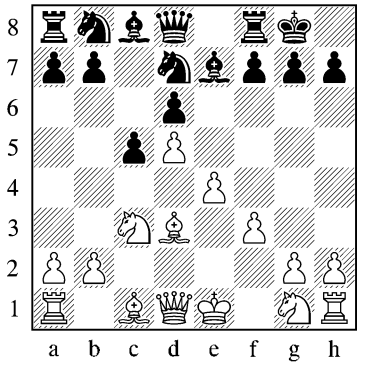
7...0–0

Once again, White has a significant choice regarding his king's knight.

8.♘e2

The alternative is:

8.♘c3 ♘fd7

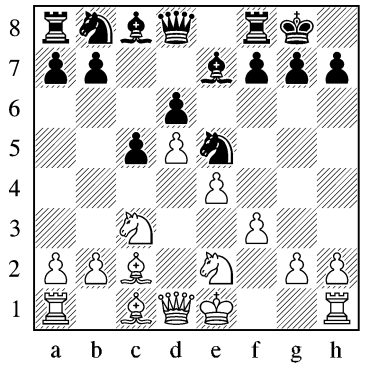


9.♘ge2

Clearing the f3-square for the knight is time-consuming: 9.f4N ♗h4† Forcing the weakening of the light squares on the kingside. 10.g3 ♗f6 11.♘f3 c4!? Slow plans based on ...♘a6 may also work, but this radical move is the most effective. 12.♗xc4 Otherwise Black will soon build up a massive queenside attack with ...b5. 12...♖e8 13.0–0 Due to the pin along the e-file, White had no chance of keeping his extra pawn anyway. 13...♗xc3 In the Benoni, Black would be reluctant to carry out this exchange since it would weaken his king, but with the pawn on g7, things are safe. 14.bxc3 ♖xe4 15.♗d3 ♖e8 16.c4 White has maintained his space advantage and has the bishop pair, but his numerous weaknesses prevent him from claiming an advantage. 16...♘f6 17.♗b2 ♗g4 18.♕d2 ♘bd7= With comfortable equality.

9...♘e5 10.♗c2

In Hoffman – Ruben, Internet (blitz) 2004, Black's most effective way to obtain counterplay would have been:



10...♗h4†N 11.♘g3

11.g3? allows a promising piece sacrifice: 11...♘xf3† 12.♔f2 ♘e5 13.gxh4 ♕xh4† 14.♘g3 ♗g4 15.♘ce2 ♗f3. Black has two pawns for the piece and active possibilities on both wings. With his king vulnerable, White does not find it easy to coordinate properly. Black's overall plan includes ...♘a6-b4, ...♖ae8 and at the right moment ...f5, clearing the pieces' path to the enemy king.

11...♘a6 12.0–0 ♗d7 13.♕e2 ♖e8

Black has harmonious development on both wings.

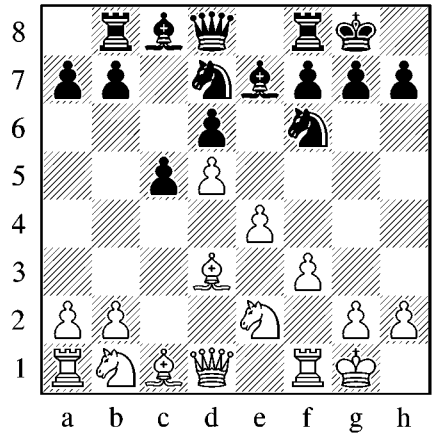
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8...♘bd7 9.0–0

Krisztian Szabo considers 9.♘ec3 ♘e5 10.♗e2 more flexible, but this costs a tempo, allowing the standard plan of undermining the centre with: 10...♘e8 11.f4 ♘g6 12.0–0 f5=

9...♖b8

Black could also speed up his queenside play with: 9...♘e5 10.♗c2 (10.♘bc3 ♘xd3 11.♕xd3 ♘d7, followed by ...♗f6, offers Black a comfortable Benoni set-up) 10...b5 11.f4 ♘ed7!? Returning here with the knight might look like a waste of time, but the knight should remain close to the c4-square so that plans with a2-a4 will not succeed in blockading the queenside. 12.♘g3 ♘b6 Black has decent play.



10.a4 a6 11.♘ec3

An important link in the most coherent plan, aiming for global harmony with a2-a4 and ♘a3.

If 11.♘bc3, the aforementioned idea is even more effective, as White's queenside is slightly weak: 11...♘e5 12.♗c2 b5 13.axb5 axb5 14.f4 ♘g6!= With the c4-square safely defended, the knight does not have to retreat to its previous location, as in the similar line above.

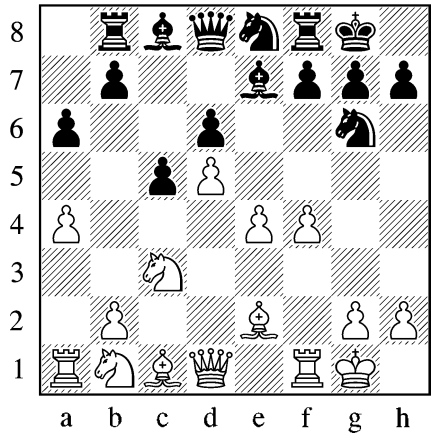
11...♘e5 12.♗e2

White is still a few tempos away from completing his development, so Black has the time to switch to kingside play.

12...♘e8

Preparing the familiar ...f5.

13.f4 ♘g6



14.♘a3

White can take measures against the ...f5 break, but they are not likely to be effective for very long. For example:

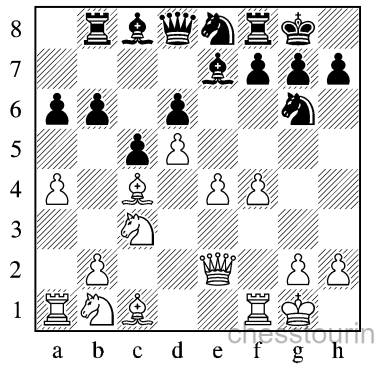
14.♗c4 b6

Ensuring queenside structural flexibility before preparing for ...f5.

The idea behind White's previous move is to meet 14...f5?! with 15.e5.

15.♕e2

Trying to keep both wings under control, but with incomplete development this is hard to achieve.



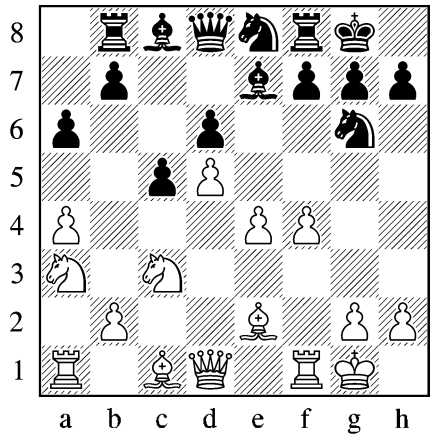
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15...♘c7! 16.♗e3 ♔h8 17.♘d2 f5 18.exf5 ♗xf5=

Black has adequate counterplay, as pawn-grabbing would involve a considerable loss of time:

19.♗xa6?! ♗f6 20.♗c4 ♖e8∓

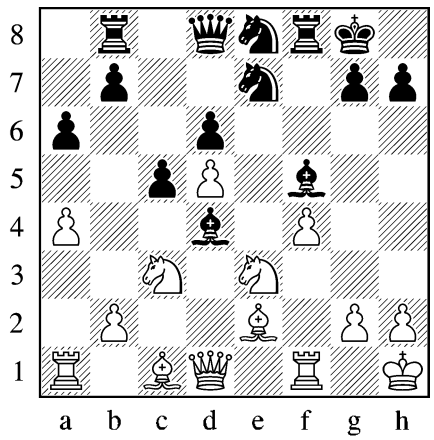
Black will soon retrieve the pawn with ...♘e7 and ...♗xc3, leaving White with just weaknesses.



14...f5 15.exf5 ♗xf5

Black's plan has been crowned with success, but it is interesting to follow the next regrouping phase:

16.♘c4 ♗f6 17.♔h1 ♗d4 18.♘e3 ♘e7=



Black had full equality in Giri – Caruana, Elancourt 2013. He not only plans to increase the pressure on the d5-pawn with ...♘f6 and possibly ...b5, but is also ready to meet ♘xf5 with ...♘xf5, with radical activation of the knight.

Conclusion

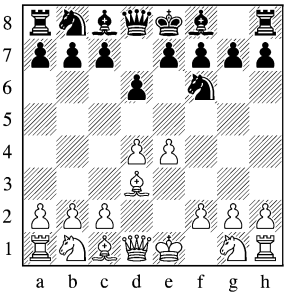
3.f3 is a sound move, potentially causing some move-order problems to players who do not have the King's Indian or the Benoni in their repertoire against 1.d4.

However, from all the possible answers to 3...c5, only 4.d5, covered in line D, maintains White's flexibility. The alternatives are likely to cause problems with the fluency of White's development. While transposing to a f2-f3 Benoni is a good option for Black, the pseudo-Benoni lines examined above are entirely viable, offering good prospects for unbalanced middlegame play with chances for both sides.

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Chapter 16

Rare 2nd & 3rd Moves



3.♗d3

Variation Index

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♗d3

3...e5

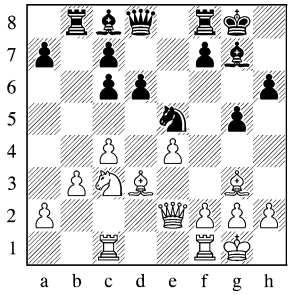
A) 4.♘e2 **378**

B) 4.c3 d5! 5.dxe5 ♘xe4 6.♘f3 ♘c6 7.♘bd2 ♘c5 **379**

B1) 8.♗c2 **383**

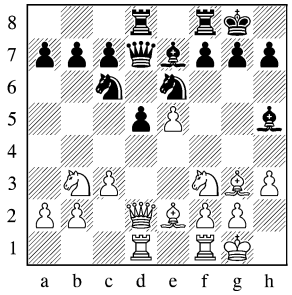
B2) 8.♗b1 **385**

A) note to 7.♘c3



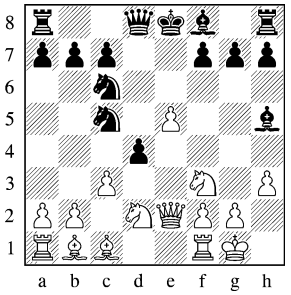
15...h5!N

B) note to 7.♘bd2



15...a5!N

B2) note to 11.cxd4



11...♕d5!N

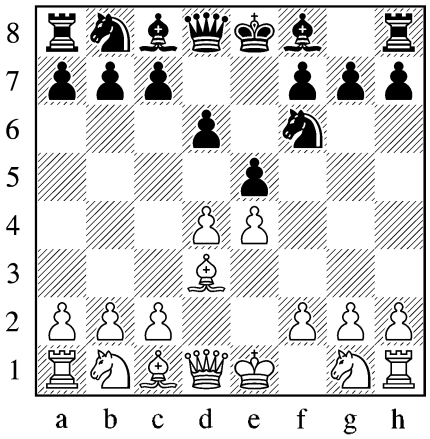
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1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♗d3

White intends to maintain maximal central flexibility, aiming to transpose to a solid Modern set-up after 3...g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.0–0 0–0 6.c3, when Black does not find it easy obtaining counterplay.

Compared with 3.f3, the long-term idea behind the system examined here is more harmonious, as it does not prevent natural kingside development. However, in the short term the bishop's presence in front of the queen offers Black the possibility of breaking in the centre sooner than one would expect in the Pirc.

3...e5

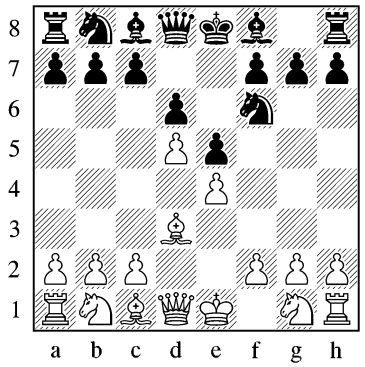


From the point of view of development, **A) 4.♘e2** is logical, but **B) 4.c3** is the main line and the most coherent strategic idea.

4.♘f3 can be met by 4...exd4 5.♘xd4, transposing directly to variation A.

4.d5

For King's Indian or Old Indian players, this is not threatening at all, as White rarely develops the bishop to d3 so early in these openings.



4...g6 and 4...♗e7 are entirely playable, but if Black wishes to give play an independent character he can try:

4...c6 5.c4 b5 6.dxc6

After 6.cxb5 cxd5 7.exd5 ♗b7, Black soon regains the d5-pawn. For instance: 8.♗c4 ♕c7 9.♗b3 ♗xd5!= Based on the hanging bishop on c1.

6...bxc4 7.♗xc4 ♘xc6 8.♘c3 ♗e7 9.♘f3N

9.♘ge2 0–0 10.0–0 ♗e6= was also fine for Black in Geissert – Boehnisch, Burg 1965.

9...0–0 10.0–0 ♗e6=

The structure resembles the Najdorf variation of the Sicilian. White has little chance of establishing firm control over the d5-square, while Black has enough counterplay along the open queenside files.

A) 4.♘e2

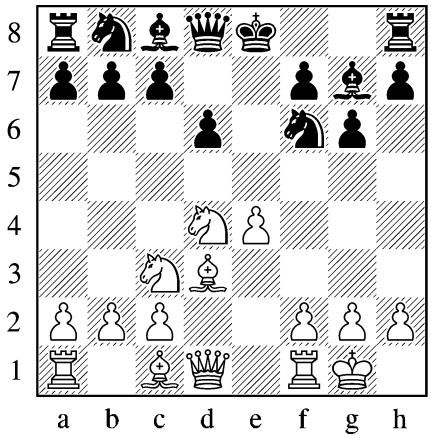
This allows Black to transpose to a comfortable Pirc/Philidor structure with the white bishop sub-optimally placed on d3.

4...exd4 5.♘xd4 g6 6.0–0 ♗g7 7.♘c3

Playing for space with 7.c4 consumes a tempo and weakens the d4-square: 7...0–0 8.♘c3 ♘c6 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♗g5 h6 11.♗h4 ♖b8 12.♕e2 g5 13.♗g3 ♘g4 14.♖ac1 ♘e5 15.b3 In Kiselev – Morozevich, Moscow 1992, Black probably refrained from the active 15...h5!N because he feared 16.f4, but after 16...h4! Black would have the initiative. More

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solid is: 16.f3 h4 17.♗f2 h3 18.g4 Preventing ...g4. 18...c5 Black has great play on the dark squares all over the board.



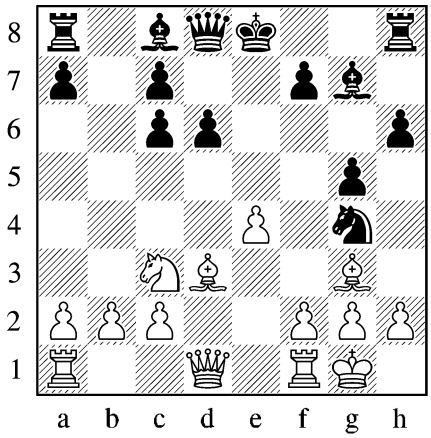
7...♘c6 8.♘xc6 bxc6 9.♗g5

This allows the typical kingside expansion.

With the king's bishop on d3 rather than e2, the more solid 9.♗e3 runs into 9...♘g4.

9.h3 0–0 10.♗e3 was too slow in Sepulveda – G. Lopez, Matinhos 1994, and Black should have immediately put her centre in motion with 10...d5=.

9...h6 10.♗h4 g5 11.♗g3 ♘g4



Once again, the bishop's absence from the e2-square allows this consolidating manoeuvre. With the dark squares firmly under control, Black has little to fear, even though his king is still in the centre.

12.h3 ♘e5 13.♘e2

13.f4 weakens the kingside without offering attacking chances: 13...gxf4 14.♗xf4 ♕h4 15.♕e2 ♗e6= Black will be even able to choose between castling kingside or starting an attack with ...♖g8 and ...♗f6.

13...♘xd3 14.♕xd3

In Lautier – Kramnik, Biel 1993, Black grabbed the b2-pawn, leading to an unclear situation, but a safer option is:

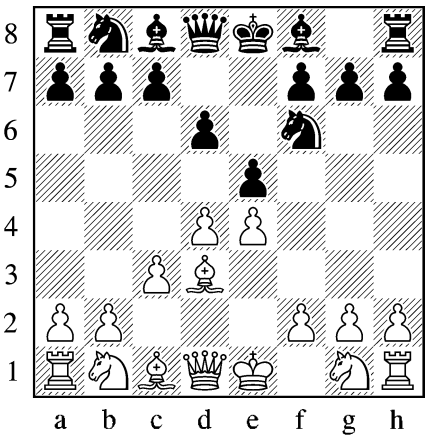
14...0–0N

Planning ...f5 and keeping the threat to the b2-pawn in reserve. The position is at least equal for Black, for example:

15.f4 g4

Black maintains his stability on the kingside.

B) 4.c3



4...d5!

This early break is possible precisely because of the moves that define White's plan – the

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bishop obstructs the queen and c2-c3 is partly a loss of time.

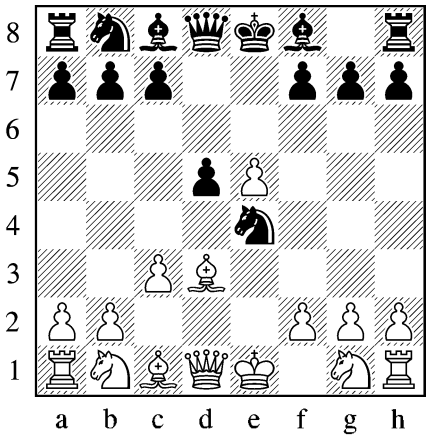
4...g6 5.♘f3 ♘c6 would most likely transpose to the aforementioned Modern line.

5.dxe5

The only critical option.

5.exd5 ♕xd5 and 5.♗g5 dxe4 6.♗xe4 ♗e7 are both pleasant for Black.

5...♘xe4



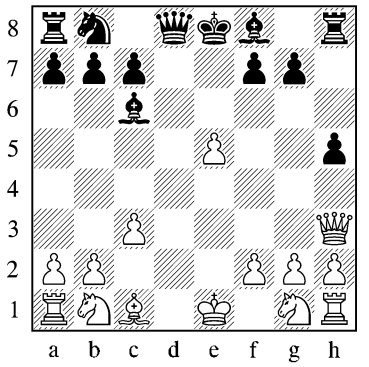
6.♘f3

Pawn-grabbing is likely to put White in danger:

6.♗xe4 dxe4 7.♕a4†

7.♕xd8† ♔xd8= is level.

7...♗d7 8.♕xe4 ♗c6 9.♕g4 h5 10.♕h3



With the exception of the queen, all of White's pieces are on the back rank. The e5-pawn is vulnerable and the light squares (particularly d3 and g2) are weak.

10...♕d7!

Aiming to exchange the main defender of the white kingside.

11.e6

The only move to keep White in the game. After 11.♕xd7† ♘xd7∓ Black regained the pawn with a positional advantage in I. Popov – Stojanov, Sofia 2005.

If 11.f3 then Black's strongest reply is 11...♗d5N∓, threatening ...♗e6 followed by ...♘c6 and ...0–0–0, with a powerful initiative. White is more or less forced to exchange queens, with a similar evaluation as above.

11...♕xe6† 12.♕xe6† fxe6 13.♘f3N

13.f3?! ♘d7 14.♗e3 ♘e5∓ gave Black the initiative in Richterova – Hajek, Czech Republic 2014.

13...♘d7 14.♗e3 h4=

Despite his slightly damaged structure, Black is by no means worse, as his bishops are so strong.

6...♘c6

The structure has become typical of the Open Spanish, with some differences which we will highlight later when both sides' plans have acquired a more concrete shape.

7.♘bd2

The most active move, immediately putting pressure on Black's active knight.

7.0–0

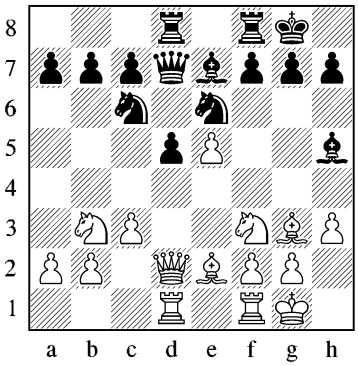
White aims to develop the queen's bishop actively before playing ♘bd2.

7...♗g4 8.♗f4 ♗e7 9.h3 ♗h5 10.♗e2 0–0 11.♘bd2 ♘c5 12.♘b3 ♘e6 13.♗g3 ♕d7 14.♕d2 ♖ad8 15.♖ad1

In A. Sokolov – Van der Sterren, Thessaloniki (ol) 1984, both sides had developed their

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forces harmoniously. Black's position is perfectly stable but, since White's space advantage persists, Black needs to find an active plan.



15...a5!N

Preparing queenside expansion.

16.a4 ♕c8 17.♕e3 b6

A multipurpose move, preparing not only ...♗c5 followed by ...bxc5, but also getting ready to meet ♘d4 with ...♘cxd4 followed by ...c5. As White does not have an obvious plan of action, the position is balanced. For instance:

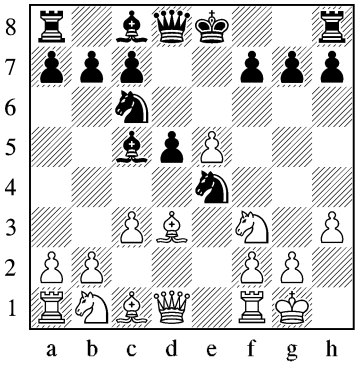
18.♖d2 ♗g6 19.♖fd1 ♕b7=

Black can ignore the threat to d5-pawn, as taking it would lose an exchange to ...♗c2.

7.h3

Preventing ...♗g4 in this way uses an important tempo, allowing Black to take a lead in development.

7...♗c5 8.0–0



8...♗f5!

An important move, preventing ♘bd2 in view of ...♘xf2!.

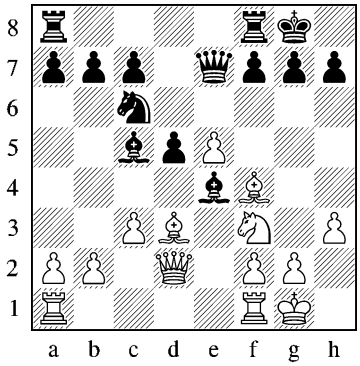
9.♕c2

In Escalante Ramirez – Gong, Khanty-Mansiysk 2016, Black should have sustained his slight initiative with:

9...♕e7N 10.♗f4 0–0

There are several promising continuations, including 10...f6, or 10...♖g8 followed by ...g5-g4, but the text move is safest.

11.♘bd2 ♘xd2 12.♕xd2 ♗e4



13.b4

This is White's only way to save the e5-pawn. I also considered 13.♕e2 ♗xf3 14.♕xf3 ♘xe5 15.♗xh7† ♔xh7 16.♕h5† ♔g8 17.♗xe5 ♖ae8 18.♖ae1 ♕d7= and Black has no problems at all.

13...♗b6 14.b5 ♘d8 15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♘g5

The e4-pawn seems to be in danger, but it is not so simple to get at it. Besides, White must permanently watch for the latent threat of ...e3.

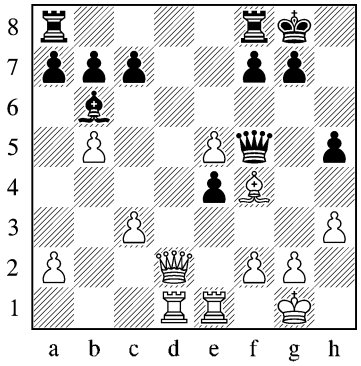
16...♘e6! 17.♘xe6

17.♘xe4? ♕h4 18.g3 ♕xh3∓ regains the pawn, with excellent attacking chances.

17...♕xe6 18.♖fe1 ♕f5 19.♖ad1 h5

Due to the need to defend the bishop and the f2-pawn, White cannot easily organize the siege of the e4-pawn.

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20.♗g3 a6

Opening a new front.

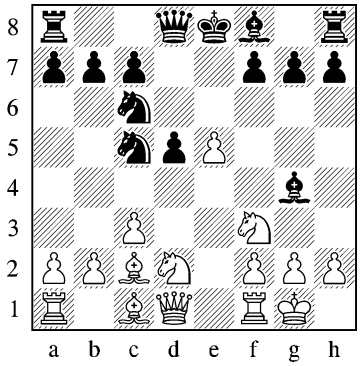
21.a4 axb5 22.axb5 ♖a3

Black has at least equal play.

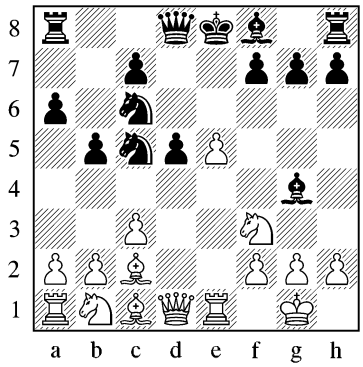
7...♘c5

The start of a coherent regrouping, based on ...♗g4 and ...♘e6. Now that White has a choice, it is the right moment to talk about the similarities with, and differences from, the Open Spanish.

We will take as a reference the starting point of line B1 below: 8.♗c2 ♗g4 9.0–0



Due to Korchnoi's efforts, in his matches with Karpov and later in the 1980s, the following Spanish line became very topical, and it has not lost its relevance in modern times: 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.c3 ♘c5 10.♗c2 ♗g4 11.♖e1



In our Pirc line, Black regains the tempo spent on twice pushing his d-pawn by moving the queen's bishop directly to g4. The main difference is that in the Pirc, his queenside pawns are on their initial squares. Superficially, this is a drawback, since in the Ruy Lopez these pawns guarantee Black some queenside space advantage, but on the other hand ...b5 entails a serious weakening. White can typically cause problems with a2-a4, while after ♘d4, ...♘xd4, cxd4, the c5- and c6-squares are weak. Moreover, in some lines based on ...d4, the knight on c6 is hanging after ♗e4.

Concretely, the most important additional option for Black in the Pirc is queenside castling, thus neutralizing White's typical kingside attacking plans based on his strong Spanish bishop.

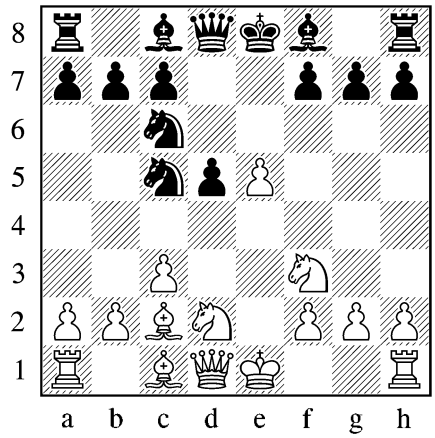
Returning to our splitting point, White has a choice between **B1) 8.♗c2** and **B2) 8.♗b1**.

8.♗b5 involves a loss of time and justifies Black's spending a tempo on provoking the exchange of the bishop with: 8...a6 9.♗xc6† bxc6 10.0–0 In Yegiazarian – Hamdouchi, Ubeda 1999, the simplest way to equalize was 10...♘e6N, followed by ...♗e7, ...0–0, ...♗b7 and, somewhere along the way, ...c5. The blockading knight on e6 insures Black against any dynamic dangers.

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8.♗e2 takes measures against ...♗g4, but it is quite passive. In P. Popovic – Chernin, Moscow (ol) 1994, Black reacted with 8...d4 and gradually equalized, but there are other ways of retaining promising play. My favourite is the natural 8...♗e7N 9.0–0 0–0 10.♘b3 ♗g4 11.♖e1 ♘e6, with similar play as in Sokolov – Van der Sterren, mentioned in the note on 7.0–0 above. If 12.♘bd4 ♘cxd4 13.cxd4 c5, Black has excellent counterplay.

B1) 8.♗c2

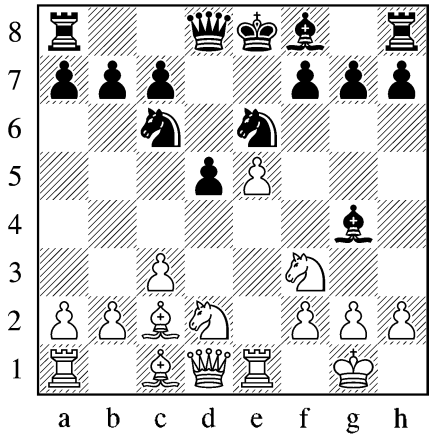


This natural move may lead to an almost exact transposition to the Ruy Lopez, with the only difference being the queenside pawn placement.

8...♗g4 9.0–0 ♘e6!?

Most games have continued with 9...♗e7 10.♖e1, reaching the aforementioned transposition. However, I would prefer to take full advantage of the absence of queenside weaknesses by focusing on castling on that side.

10.♖e1



10...♕d7N

This is typical of the Ruy Lopez, where its main idea is to consolidate the d5-pawn with ...♖d8, strengthening the threat of ...d4 at the same time. In the Pirc, I recommend it as a way of preparing queenside castling, thereby placing the rook on d8 anyway and transferring the king into safety.

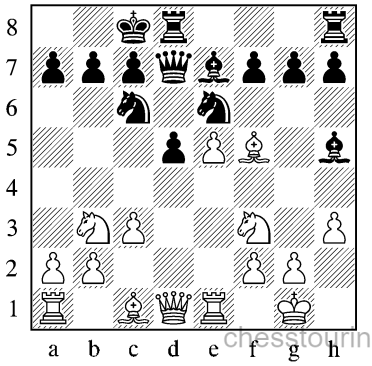
11.♘f1

Anticipating queenside castling with 11.b4 is parried by 11...a6, leaving White exposed to ...d4, when the b4-pawn would be hanging.

The other possible Ruy Lopez plan is:
11.h3 ♗h5 12.♘b3 0–0–0 13.♗f5

A typical move, aiming at weakening Black's control over the d4- and c5-squares. The latter is less threatening than in the Ruy Lopez, since here the c5-square is less weak.

13...♗e7



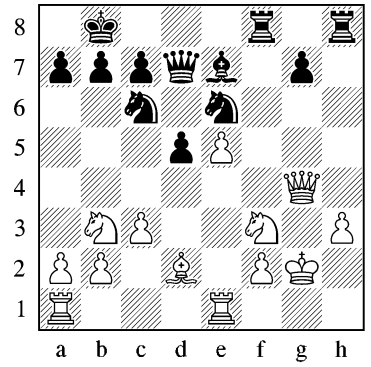
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14.♕d3

14.♘bd4 helps Black to speed up his counterplay: 14...♘cxd4 15.cxd4 g5 16.♗e3 ♖dg8 Black has perfect stability in the centre and excellent attacking chances.

14...♔b8 15.♗d2 ♗g6 16.♖ad1

With the black king on the g8-square, 16.g4 would be the most consistent strategic plan, but as things stand it exposes the white king too much: 16...♖df8 Controlling the f-file before breaking with ...h5. 17.♔g2 h5 18.♗xg6 fxg6 19.♕xg6 hxg4 20.♕xg4



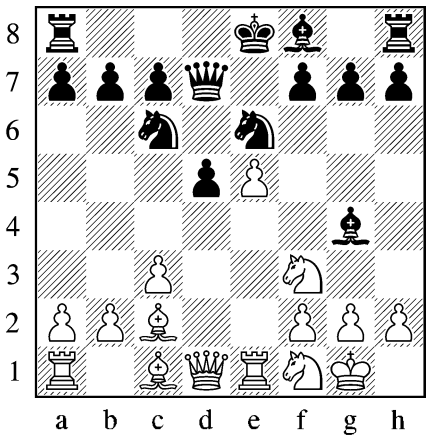
20...♖f5!!∓ Black has excellent play on the light squares, since 21.♕xf5? ♘f4† 22.♕xf4 ♕xh3† leads to mate.

16...♗xf5 17.♕xf5 g6 18.♕d3 g5

18...f6 is also good.

19.♕f5 h5

Black has excellent attacking chances.



11...0–0–0 12.h3 ♗h5 13.b4

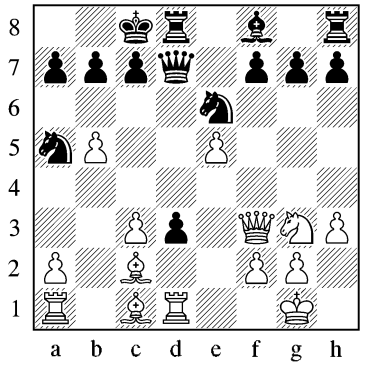
Since the knight does not block the b-pawn, White can start an attack at once, but Black is well prepared for it.

13...d4

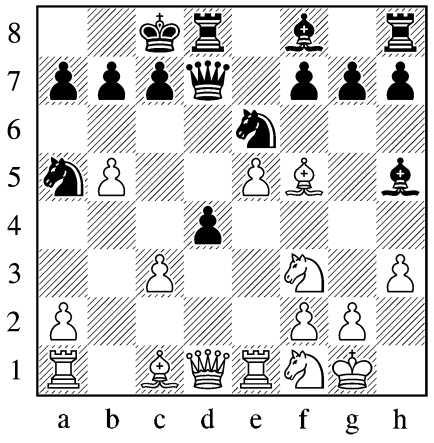
As usual, a flank attack is best answered in the centre.

14.b5 ♘a5 15.♗f5

I also checked 15.♘g3 ♗xf3 16.♕xf3 d3 17.♖d1 when the d3-pawn appears doomed, but Black has an elegant way of unpinning it:



17...♘d4! 18.cxd4 dxc2 19.♖d2 ♘c4 20.♖d2 ♕xd4∓ Black has excellent control of the centre and play on the dark squares.



15...dxc3 16.♕a4 b6 17.♗g5 ♗e7 18.♗xe7 ♕xe7 19.♘d4 ♔b8=

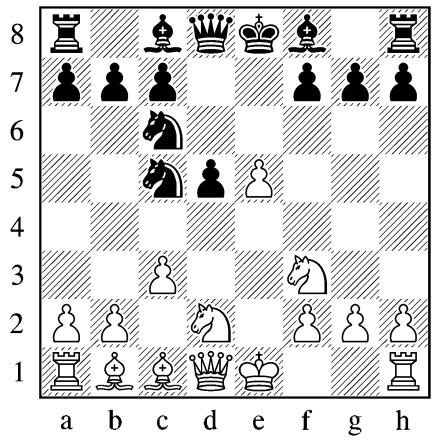
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The position is complicated, and one important aspect is that the a5-knight safely defends the king. The direct attacking attempt does not work:

20.♘c6†? ♘xc6 21.bxc6 ♗g6–+

The c6-pawn is weak, and ♕a6 can always be met with ...♘c5.

B2) 8.♗b1



White keeps the c2-square and the d1-a4 diagonal clear for the queen. If Black hurries to castle kingside, ♕c2 could cause some problems. However, the bishop is passive, allowing Black to carry out the central break under favourable circumstances.

8...♗g4

8...g6 9.0–0 ♗g7, as played in a handful of games, is also good. In the Ruy Lopez, this plan is generally risky, as White can sacrifice a pawn with ♘d4, and if ...♘xe5 then f4-f5, attacking the e6-bishop. But here the bishop is safe on c8, so White does not have anything better than embarking on a positional fight with: 10.♘b3 In Smagin – V. Ivanov, Moscow 1995, Black's best response would have been 10...♘e6N 11.♖e1 0–0 12.h4 h5 13.♗d3 a5 14.a4 b6, with mutual chances.

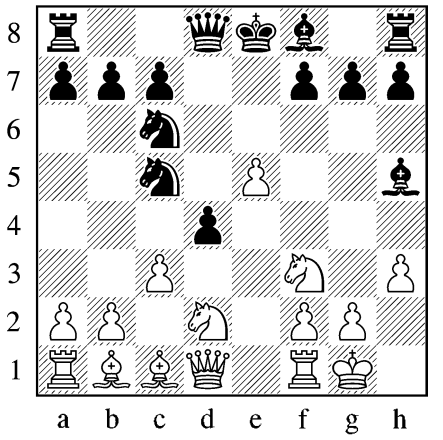
9.0–0 d4!

Not the most frequent move, but the simplest route to equality.

The same plan as examined in line B1 does not work out so well here: 9...♘e6 10.♕b3!? This is the difference – Black will not find it easy to continue with the plan of castling queenside. If 10...♘c5 11.♕b5 a6 12.♕e2, White has effectively won a tempo for developing the queen.

10.h3 ♗h5

White has several ways of meeting the central break, most of them typical of the Ruy Lopez, too.



11.cxd4

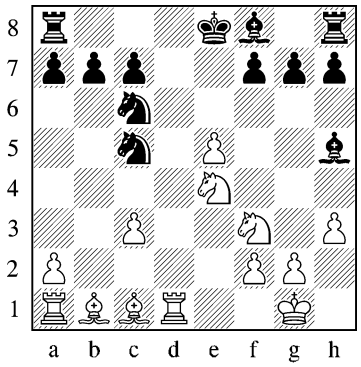
The neutral 11.♕e2, as played in Itkis – Erzhanov, Eforie Nord 2014, is best answered with the centralizing: 11...♕d5!N 12.cxd4 (12.♘b3 d3 13.♕e3 ♗xf3 14.♕xf3 ♕xf3 15.gxf3 0–0–0∓ offers Black the initiative) 12...♘xd4 13.♕e3 0–0–0 Black's better development and control over the d-file compensates for White's space advantage.

11.♘e4N

This allows Black to weaken White's queenside structure.

11...dxc3 12.bxc3 ♕xd1 13.♖xd1

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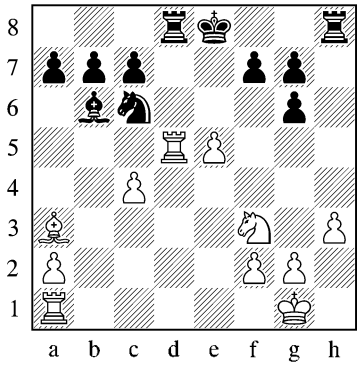
13...♗g6

The best way to fight for the light squares. After 13...♗xf3 14.gxf3±, Black cannot easily block the kingside pawns.

14.♘xc5 ♗xc5 15.♗xg6 hxg6 16.♖d5 ♗b6

Black is doing fine strategically, but White can try to keep the enemy king in the centre.

17.♗a3 ♖d8 18.c4



18...♖xd5!

Being well coordinated, Black can afford this apparent strengthening of White's centre. In fact, the pawns are slightly vulnerable.

19.cxd5 ♘d4

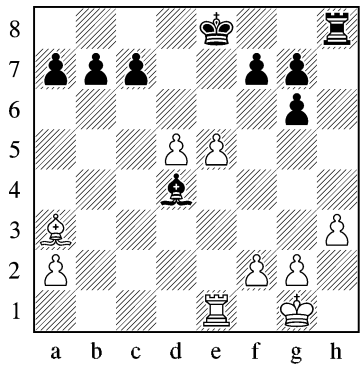
Threatening both ...♘xf3†, winning the h3-pawn, and the fork ...♘c2.

20.♘xd4 ♗xd4 21.♖e1

The most consistent move.

If 21.♖b1, the simplest is 21...♖h5=.

21.♖c1 is well met by: 21...♔d8 22.e6 (22.♖e1?! ♖h5∓ is even worse for White) 22...fxe6 23.dxe6 ♗f6∓ The e6-pawn is more of a weakness than a strength.



21...♖h4

Threatening ...♗b6 followed by ...♖a4.

21...♖h5?! is ineffective due to 22.♖e4!±, keeping the centre intact.

22.g3!

It is essential to prevent the rook's transfer to the queenside.

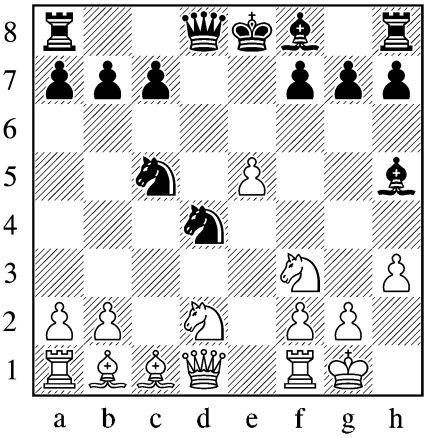
22...♖xh3 23.♔g2 ♖h5 24.♖e4 ♗a1

White can force a draw by perpetually attacking the bishop, starting with:

25.♖e1=

Alternatively, the ambitious 25.f4 allows 25...g5, when White has reasonable compensation for the pawn, but no more.

11...♘xd4



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12.g4

12.b4 prematurely weakens the queenside: 12...♘ce6 13.♗e4 c6 Now 14.♕a4? a5∓ led to obvious strategic problems for White in Bulmaga – Jianu, Medias (rapid) 2016. Instead, 14.a3 is an improvement, but Black has excellent play after 14...a5 anyway.

12...♗g6

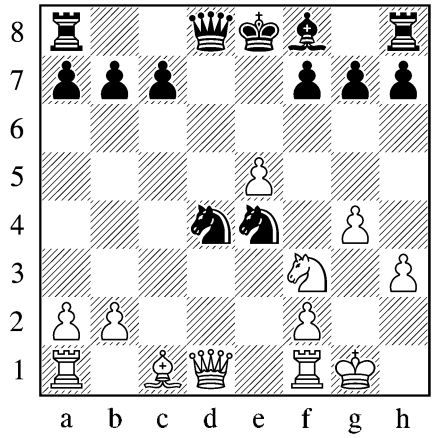
In Kuporosov – Roemer, Seefeld 1999, the players agreed a draw. The position is objectively equal, but play remains interesting.

13.♘e4!?

The best try.

If 13.♘xd4 ♕xd4 14.♘f3 ♕c4, Black is quite active.

13...♗xe4 14.♗xe4 ♘xe4

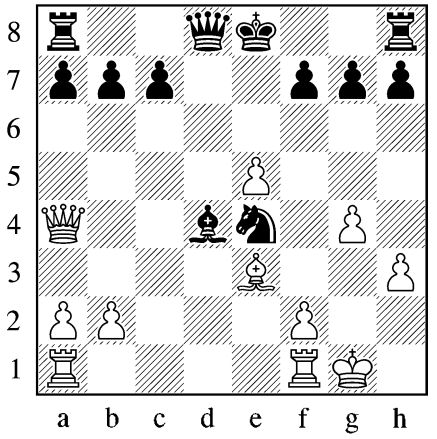


15.♘xd4

15.♕a4† ♕d7 16.♕xd7† ♔xd7 17.♘xd4 does not cause Black problems after 17...♖e8= followed by ...h5, as White is not sufficiently well developed.

15...♗c5 16.♗e3 ♗xd4 17.♕a4†

Apparently, this wastes a tempo, but White will later try to make use of the weakening caused by Black's reply.



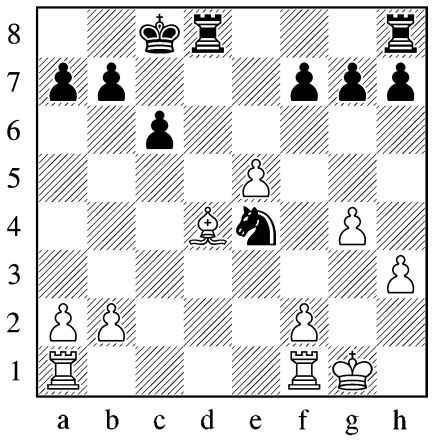
17...c6

After 17...♕d7?! 18.♕xd7† ♔xd7 19.♖ad1 c5 20.♗xd4 cxd4 21.♖xd4† ♔e6 22.♖xe4 h5± Black should hold the endgame, but it makes no sense to play such a one-sided position.

18.♕xd4

Due to the kingside weaknesses, keeping the queens on the board with 18.♗xd4 can only be dangerous for White. If nothing else, Black can play: 18...♘d2 19.♖fd1 ♘f3† 20.♔f1 ♕d5 21.♗c3 ♘h2† 22.♔g1 ♘f3† With a draw by perpetual check.

18...♕xd4 19.♗xd4 0–0–0



20.♗xa7

This is the idea behind the earlier ♕a4†.

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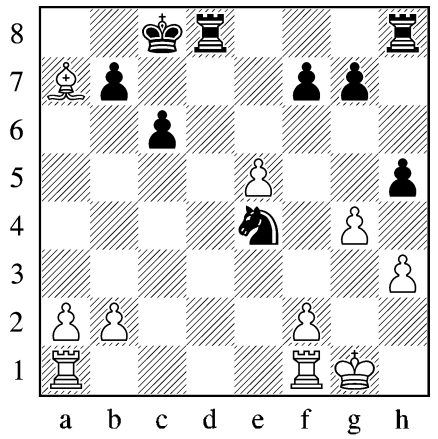
With the pawn still on c7, this would lose the bishop to ...b6.

20.♖fd1 h5= causes Black no problems at all.

20...h5

Black is better coordinated and starts kingside counterplay, yielding him complete equality.

Black should also be doing okay after 20...♘d2 21.♖fd1 ♘f3† 22.♔g2 ♘xe5 23.♗d4 f6, but it is better not to offer White the theoretical advantage of bishop versus knight in the endgame.

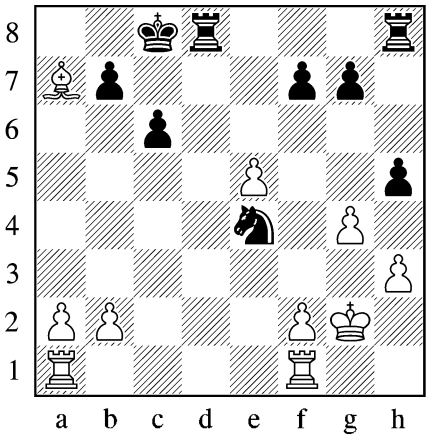


21.♔g2

This is the most natural way to consolidate, though objectively it is no more effective than the alternatives:

21.♖fd1 hxg4 22.hxg4 (22.♖xd8† ♖xd8 23.hxg4 ♕d2 offers Black pressure on both wings) 22...♖de8 Black regains the pawn, keeping an active position, because 23.f4? ♕h3 (threatening ...♖g3†) 24.g5 ♖eh8 causes trouble for White.

In the event of 21.♖fe1 ♘g5 22.♔g2 hxg4 23.hxg4 ♕h4 24.♔g3 ♕h3†, the only way for White to avoid a repetition is a little risky: 25.♔f4 ♘e6† 26.♔e4 ♕d2 Black holds the initiative.



21...hxg4 22.hxg4 ♕h4 23.♖fd1

23.f3 allows 23...♖d2† 24.♗f2, when Black can choose to simplify to a drawn ending with: 24...♘xf2 25.♖xf2 ♖xf2† 26.♔xf2 ♕h2† 27.♔e3 ♖xb2=

23...♖xg4† 24.♔f3 f5=

There is still some play in the position, but a draw seems likely.

Conclusion

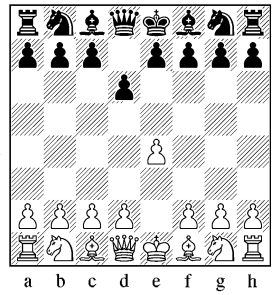
This is only of only a few parts of the book where Black completely deviates from normal Pirc patterns. While I may be a little subjective as an experienced Open Spanish player, there is no doubt that the early reaction in the centre is the best way to meet White's delaying his knight's development.

The main fresh idea in the variations I examined is Black's possibility of castling long, either before opening the centre, as in line B1, or after it, as in line B2. Generally speaking, Black achieves counterplay more easily than in the Spanish, and in a more active way than in the normal Pirc lines.

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Chapter 17

Rare 2nd & 3rd Moves



Anti-Pirc Systems

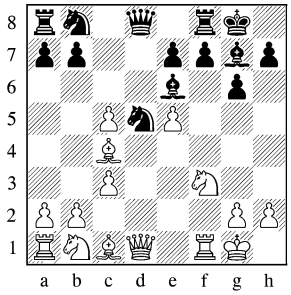
Variation Index

1.e4

1...d6

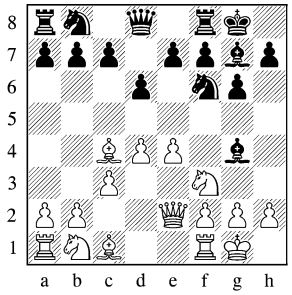
A) 2.♘c3 **390**
B) 2.f4 **392**
C) 2.c4 **395**
D) 2.♗c4 g6 3.♘f3 ♗g7 **397**
D1) 4.d4 **397**
D2) 4.0–0 **398**

B) note to 8.♗c4



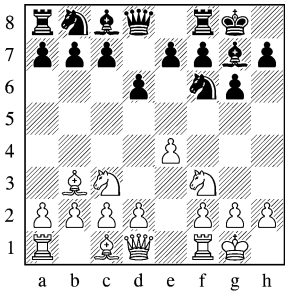
10...♘xc3!N

D1) after 7.c3



7...♘bd7N

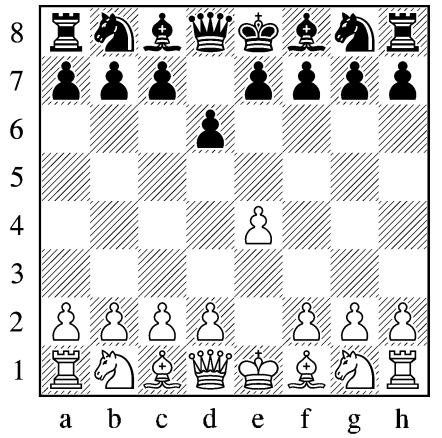
D2) after 6.♗b3



6...♗g4N

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1.e4 d6



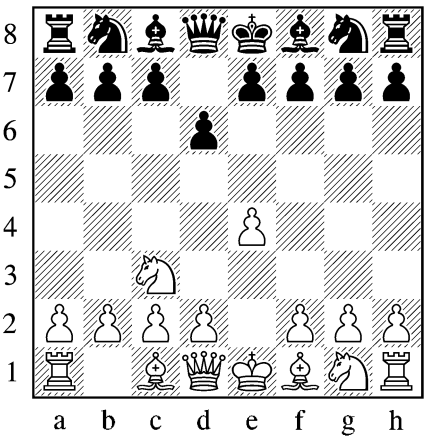
Apart from the opening's general character, another important factor that induced me to add the Pirc to my repertoire was that White has virtually no possibility of steering me away from my favourite schemes. Against the Sicilian there are numerous lines, such as 2.c3, 3.♗b5(†) or 4.♕xd4, that lead to completely different play than in the main systems. We have a similar situation after 1...e5, when Black has to travel a long way before reaching his preferred line, for instance the Breyer or Zaitsev systems.

In the Pirc, White has no way to prevent his opponent from implementing his intended fianchetto set-up, but by refraining from 2.d4 he can try to play in the spirit of the Closed Sicilian. This is not really unpleasant for Black, as the Closed Sicilian (or reversed English) schemes do not put pressure on him, so I see no reason to refrain from ...c5 in the near future.

The Closed Sicilian has been examined in several Quality Chess books. *Experts on the Anti-Sicilian*, edited by Jacob Aagaard and John Shaw, and *Grandmaster Repertoire 6A – Beating the Anti-Sicilians* by Vassilios Kotronias, have a Closed Sicilian repertoire for Black, while *The Modern Tiger* by Tiger Hillarp Persson, gives lines for Black after 1.e4 g6 2.♘c3 ♗g7, answering both 3.f4 and 3.g3 with 3...c5.

For all these reasons, I will restrict myself to offering just a few guidelines to White's main alternatives on move 2. We have: **A) 2.♘c3**, **B) 2.f4**, **C) 2.c4** and **D) 2.♗c4**.

A) 2.♘c3



This is the classical Closed Sicilian approach. White consolidates the e4-pawn and prepares to develop the kingside in a way that offers chances for kingside pressure in the middlegame.

2...g6 3.f4

Actually, the genuine Closed Sicilian is characterized by fianchettoing the bishop:

3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 c5

Frankly speaking, if Black only wants simple equality he can play 4...e5, soon reaching a completely symmetrical position.

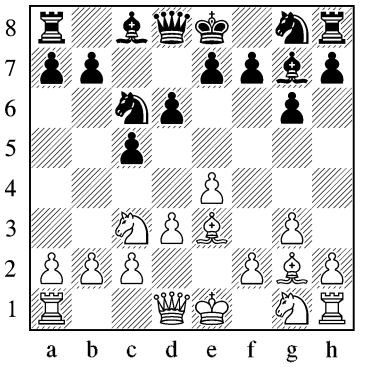
5.d3 ♘c6 6.♗e3

White hopes for 6...e6 and 7...♘ge7, when ♕d2 followed by ♗h6 and h4-h5 would offer him attacking chances.

6.♘ge2 is met most simply by 6...e5.

6.f4 e6 7.♘f3 transposes to the note on 5.d3 in the main line below.

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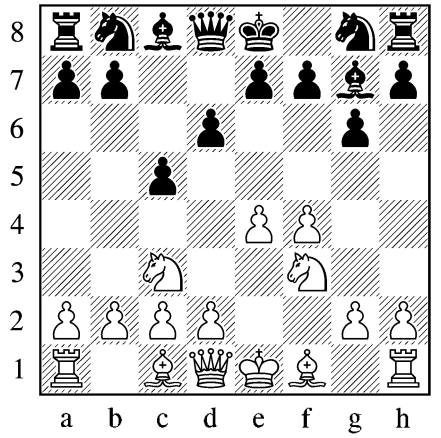
6...e5

The safest move, in the spirit of Botvinnik's triangle set-up in the English Opening – please refer to my *Grandmaster Repertoire* trilogy on that opening.

7.♕d2 ♘ge7 8.♘ge2 ♘d4

Practice has shown that Black has little to fear.

3...♗g7 4.♘f3 c5



5.♗c4

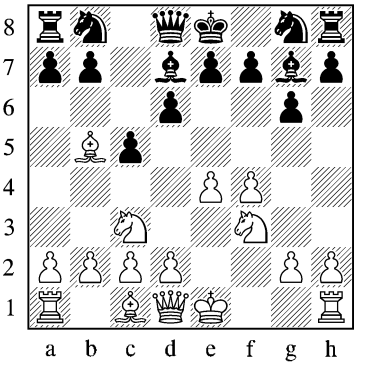
White commits to the Grand Prix Attack.

5.d3 ♘c6 6.g3 transposes to the main line of the Closed Sicilian. I recommend 6...e6 7.♗g2 ♘ge7 8.0–0 0–0 9.♗e3 b6, even though 9...♘d4 10.♖b1 ♖b8 11.♘e2 ♘xf3† 12.♗xf3 b6, followed by ...♗b7 and later ...f5, is also comfortable for Black.

5.♗b5†

This is comfortably met with:

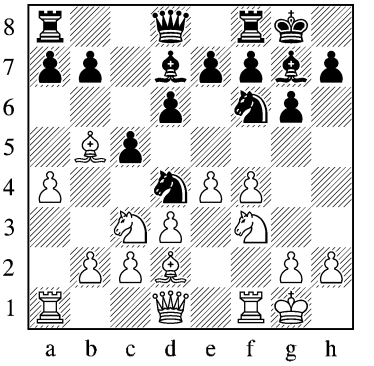
5...♗d7



6.a4

6.♗xd7† ♕xd7 only helps Black's development, increasing his control of the light squares: 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d3 f5!? (Not the only move, of course, as 8...e6 followed by ...♘ge7 is entirely safe too, but the most ambitious one.) 9.♕e2 ♘h6 Black had excellent stability on both the light and dark squares in Kindermann – Cvitan, Germany 1999.

6...♘c6 7.0–0 ♘f6 8.d3 0–0 9.♗d2 ♘d4



10.h3

Slightly overambitious.

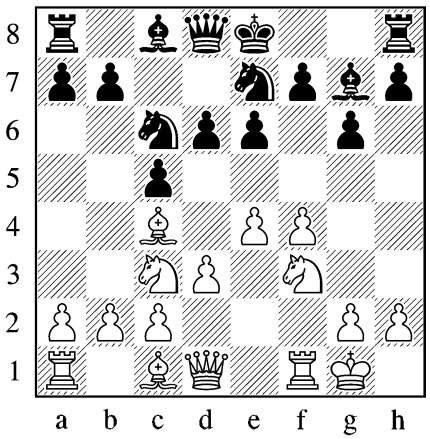
Safer is 10.♗xd7 ♘xd7 11.♘xd4 cxd4 12.♘e2 ♖c8, even though Black has pleasant play along the c-file.

10...♘xb5 11.axb5 ♘e8 12.f5 ♘c7

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White may have some compensation for the pawn in view of his attacking chances, but in Forster – Kasparov, Zürich 2001, he failed to prove that it was enough.

5...♘c6 6.0–0 e6 7.d3 ♘ge7



8.♕e1

There was a time when 8.f5 caused Black some problems, but objectively White does not have enough compensation for the pawn. Here is how Black should react to the main line: 8...exf5 9.♕e1 h6 10.♕g3 ♗e6 11.♗xe6 fxe6 12.exf5 ♗xc3!N Enabling Black's next capture. 13.bxc3 gxf5 14.d4 ♕d7∓ Black has an extra pawn and the more compact structure. After castling queenside, his king will be at least as safe as White's. He must be a little careful with his central pawns, though, as they could be subjected to some pressure.

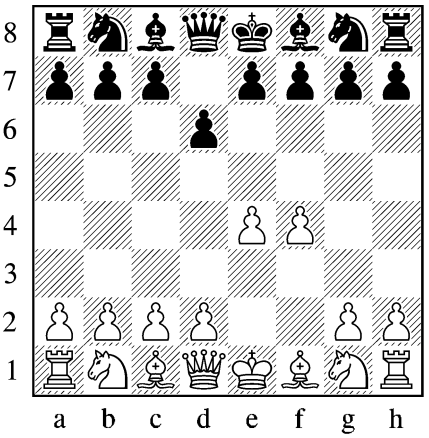
8...0–0

This is a completely safe position for Black. I will present a few more moves of a game by one of the greatest Sicilian specialists of all time.

9.♗b3 ♘a5 10.♗e3 b6 11.♗f2 ♗b7 12.♗h4 ♘xb3 13.axb3 ♕d7 14.♕g3 f5 15.♖ae1 ♘c6 16.exf5 gxf5∓

Black had great play on the light squares in Tiviakov – Kasparov, Wijk aan Zee 2001.

B) 2.f4



Even though this can transpose to line A, it is a slightly trickier move order.

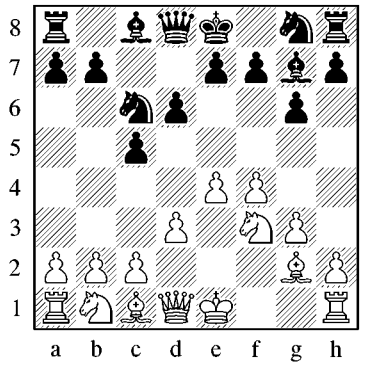
2...g6 3.d4

Transposing to a slightly overambitious system against the Modern.

3.♘f3 ♗g7 4.d3 c5

This may transpose to a pseudo-Closed Sicilian, as White can later play c2-c3 instead of ♘c3.

5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2



6...e6

This is my favourite, as it offers Black maximum flexibility, although 6...e5 is just as good objectively.

7.0–0 ♘ge7 8.c3 0–0 9.♗e3 b6 10.d4

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This central advance would be less effective if White developed his queen's knight before playing it, as Black could then consider ...cxd4 without having to worry about clearing the c3-square.

If 10.♘a3 ♗a6 11.♖e1, Black can even consider the ambitious 11...b5, harassing the knight.

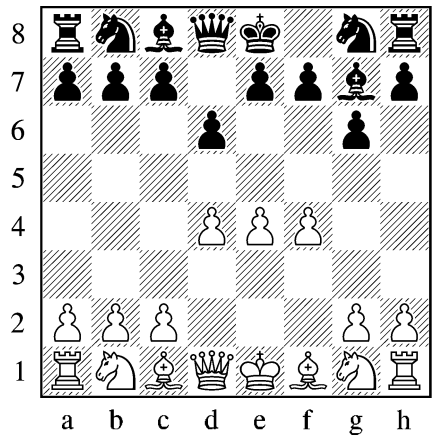
10...♗a6 11.♖e1 ♕c7

Black retains all his options for breaking in the centre with ...cxd4, ...f5 or ...d5, while things are less clear for White, despite his massive centre. For instance, dxc5 would typically be answered by ...bxc5, increasing Black's control of the centre.

12.d5 exd5 13.exd5 ♘a5

Black had a comfortable version of the Benoni in Fransson – Carlsson, Norrkoeping 2011, as all his minor pieces were active.

3...♗g7



4.♘f3

White is unable to deter ...c5 with:

4.c3 ♘f6 5.♗d3

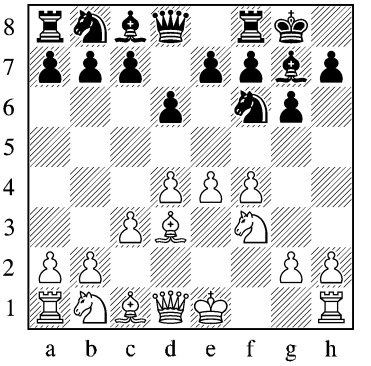
This is an important commitment, because if Black manages to play ...c5 and ...cxd4, the thematic ...♗g4 will be stronger.

However, White is insufficiently well developed to make 5.e5 effective after 5...dxe5, and now:

a) 6.dxe5 ♕xd1† 7.♔xd1 ♘d5 followed by ...f6 handed Black the initiative in Prochazka – Horak, Czech Republic 2000.

b) After 6.fxe5 ♘d5, the only way to avoid transposing to the main line is 7.c4 ♘b6, reaching an Alekhine Four Pawns Attack with an extra tempo for Black.

5...0–0 6.♘f3



6...c5!

A principled move. If taking this pawn were to force ...dxc5 in reply, White would get a strategically favourable position, but Black actually intends to sacrifice a pawn.

7.dxc5

7.0–0 causes White problems with maintaining control over the d4-square: 7...cxd4 8.cxd4 ♘c6 9.♘c3 ♗g4 10.♗e3 e5 11.fxe5 dxe5 12.d5 ♘d4 13.♕d2 In this position, I recommend 13...♘e8N, followed by ...f5 and ...♘d6, with a safe blockade and kingside counterplay.

Without a knight on the c3-square, 7.d5 offers Black a comfortable Benoni: 7...c4 8.♗c2 e6 9.dxe6 ♗xe6 10.0–0 ♖e8 11.♘a3 ♕c7 12.♖e1 ♘bd7 13.♗e3 a6= White's control over the d4-square only just compensates for Black's more harmonious development and the weakness of the e4-pawn.

7...♘bd7!

The complement to Black's previous move – after the opening of the e-file, the e4-pawn will be chronically weak.

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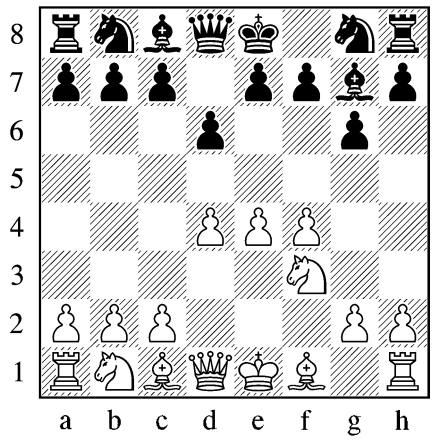
8.cxd6 exd6 9.0–0 ♘c5 10.♖e1

10.♕c2 is no better: 10...♖e8 11.♘bd2 ♗d7 12.♘d4 ♖c8 13.♔h1 ♕e7 Black had a strong initiative in Hodgson – Norwood, Plymouth 1989.

10...♕b6 11.♘d4 ♖e8

Black will regain the e4-pawn with an edge, since attempts to defend it lead to trouble, for example:

12.♕c2?! ♘g4 13.h3 ♗xd4† 14.cxd4 ♕b4∓



4...c5

The typical Austrian Attack reaction.

5.c3

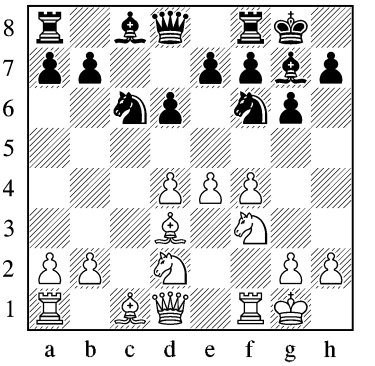
If 5.d5 ♘f6, White has nothing better than transposing to a sideline of the Austrian Attack with 6.♘c3 – see variation D1 of Chapter 5 on page 127.

5.dxc5 ♕a5† 6.♗d2 ♕xc5 7.♘c3 ♘f6 transposes to a passive version of the 6.dxc5 Austrian Attack – see the note on 7.♗d2 on page 134.

5...♘f6 6.e5

6.♗d3 cxd4 7.cxd4 0–0 8.0–0 transposes to the position reached after 7.0–0 cxd4 8.cxd4 in the note to White's 4th move above.

6.♘bd2 is too passive to cause problems: 6...cxd4 7.cxd4 0–0 8.♗d3 ♘c6 9.0–0 White is behind in development and things are not likely to improve soon. Black has many good moves, but I will just mention:

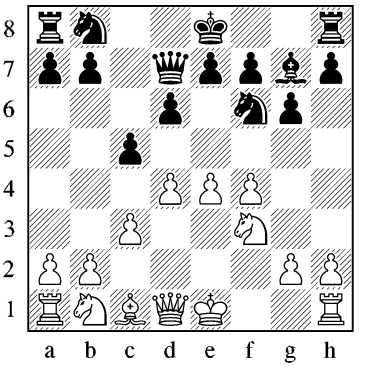


9...a5!?N Black anticipates ♘b3 as an answer to ...♘g4 and prepares to gain space with ...a4.

6.♗b5†

This only helps Black's development.

6...♗d7 7.♗xd7† ♕xd7



8.e5

After the bishop exchange, White is not able to keep his centre intact: 8.♕e2 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 ♘e4 11.♘bd2 f5 12.exf6 ♘xf6= Black has good play on the light squares.

8...dxe5 9.dxe5

The other recapture does not trouble Black: 9.fxe5 ♘d5 10.dxc5 Otherwise ...cxd4 will leave White with weaknesses on the light squares. 10...♘c6 11.♕e2 ♕g4∓ Black will

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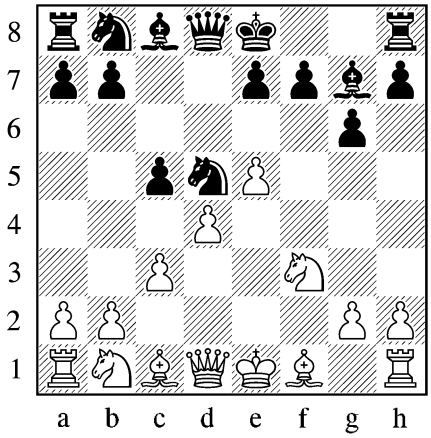
retrieve the pawn while keeping the better structure.

9...♕xd1† 10.♔xd1 ♘d5 11.♔c2 ♘c6=

Black will play ...f6 soon, with active play.

6...dxe5 7.fxe5 ♘d5

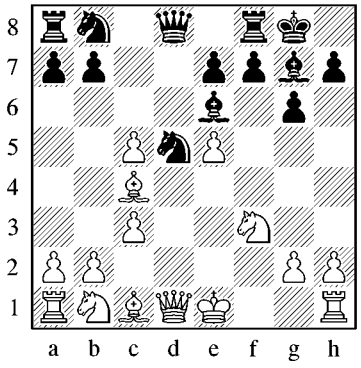
Due to the early commitment of the white c-pawn, Black has excellent play in the centre.



8.♗c4

8.c4 is a loss of time, handing the initiative to Black: 8...♘b4 9.d5 ♗f5 10.♘a3 ♘d7 11.♗f4 ♕b8 White was losing the e5-pawn in Estevez Morales – Adorjan, Graz 1972, because 12.♕e2? would allow the crushing 12...♘d3†.

8.dxc5 0–0 9.♗c4 ♗e6



10.♘a3

White has played 10.0–0?! in several games, but Black has yet to choose the strongest response: 10...♘xc3!N 11.♕xd8 ♖xd8 12.♗xe6 ♘e2† 13.♔f2 ♘xc1 14.♗xf7† ♔xf7 15.♖xc1 ♘c6∓ Black regains the pawn, keeping a strong bishop, as 16.♖e1 runs into 16...♘b4, threatening both ...♘c2 and ...♘d3†. Then 17.♖e2 is no solution due to 17...♖d1∓.

10...♘c6 11.♕e2 ♕b8∓

Black regained the pawn, keeping the better structure and active play in Tylevich – Chase, Boxborough 1999.

8...♗e6

Threatening ...♘xc3.

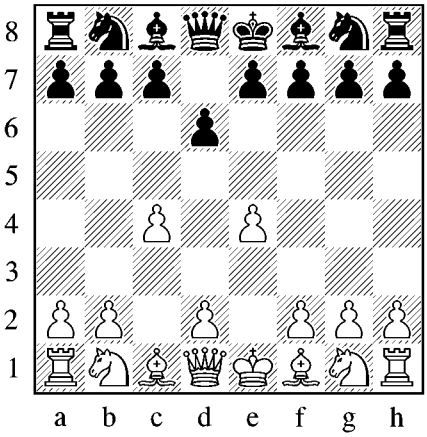
9.♗b3N

White was tempted by 9.♘g5?! in Gaurang – Campbell, London 1993, but Black's lead in development means that he can permit the doubling of his pawns: 9...cxd4 10.cxd4 ♘c6 11.♘xe6 fxe6 12.0–0 ♕b6∓ White's centre is under massive pressure.

9...cxd4 10.cxd4 ♕a5† 11.♗d2 ♕a6

Black has excellent play.

C) 2.c4



White may be aiming to transpose to the King's Indian.

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2...c5 3.♘c3

Heading for a Triangle set-up in the Closed English.

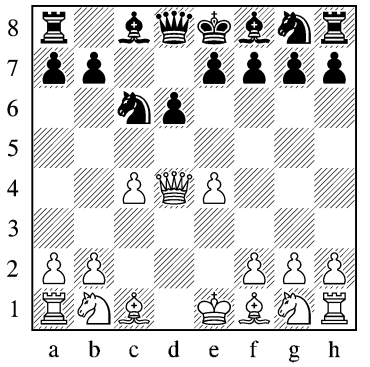
3.♘f3 ♗g4, followed by ...♘c6 and ...g6, offers Black excellent control of the d4-square.

3.d4 cxd4 4.♕xd4

This does not make as much sense after:

4...♘c6

With the f1-a6 diagonal obstructed by the c-pawn, there is no ♗b5 available. Play transposes to some sort of Maroczy with White a few tempos down.



5.♕e3

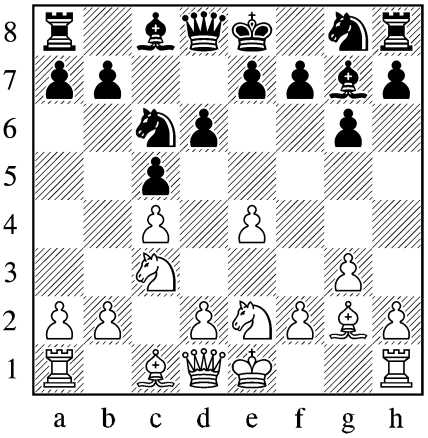
Playing in the spirit of the following Sicilian line: 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♕xd4 a6 5.c4 ♘c6 6.♕e3 The difference is that Black has saved time by not playing ...a6.

5.♕d1 is more passive: 5...g6 6.♗d3 ♗g7 7.♘e2 ♘f6 8.♘bc3 0–0 9.0–0 a6 Black has excellent chances of carrying out ...b5 after ...♗d7 and ...♘e5.

5...g6 6.♘f3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 ♗g7 8.♗e2 0–0 9.0–0 ♘g4 10.♕d2 ♘ge5

Black will soon take control over the d4-square, with excellent play.

3...♘c6 4.g3 g6 5.♗g2 ♗g7 6.♘ge2



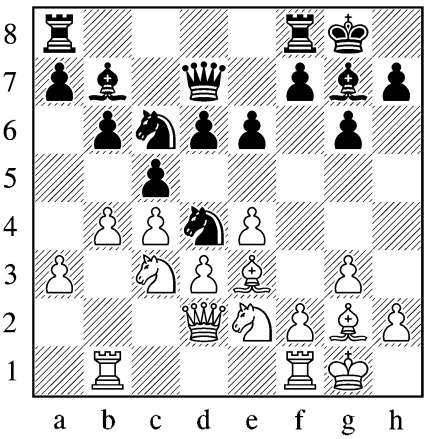
6...e6!?

Just one of several good moves.

6...♘f6 is viable, but would transpose straight into a line I examined from White's point of view in *Grandmaster Repertoire 4*.

If Black is content with simple equality he can maintain the symmetry almost forever: 6...e5 7.0–0 ♘ge7 8.d3 0–0 9.a3 a6 10.♖b1 ♖b8 11.b4 cxb4 12.axb4 b5 13.cxb5 axb5=

7.0–0 ♘ge7 8.d3 0–0 9.♗e3 ♘d4 10.♖b1 ♘ec6 11.a3 b6 12.b4 ♗b7 13.♕d2 ♕d7



Followed by ...♖ae8 and ...f5, with flexible play.

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D) 2.♗c4

This does not necessarily transpose to the Grand Prix Attack, as White can keep the pawn on f2 and develop with ♘f3 and ♘c3, in the spirit of the English Four Knights 4...♗c5 system.

2...g6 3.♘f3

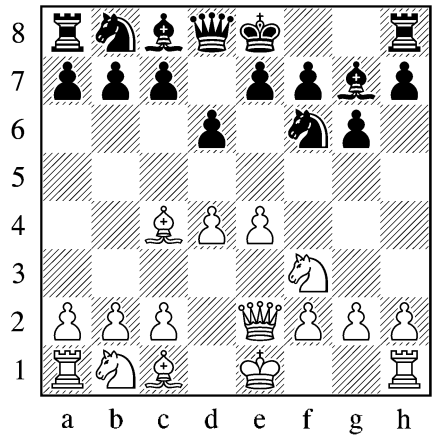
After 3.d4 ♗g7, White may play 4.♘c3 ♘f6, transposing to variation A of Chapter 14, or 4.♘f3 leading to variation D1 below.

3...♗g7

White can enter a line of the Modern Defence with **D1) 4.d4**, or continue in Anti-Pirc style with **D2) 4.0–0**.

D1) 4.d4 ♘f6 5.♕e2

After 5.♘bd2 0–0, Black threatens ...♘xe4, more or less forcing 6.♗b3 c5 7.dxc5 dxc5 8.0–0 ♘c6= with slightly unnatural White development. The bishop is exposed to ...♘a5, and from the b3-square it fails to keep the enemy queenside pawns under observation.



5...0–0 6.0–0

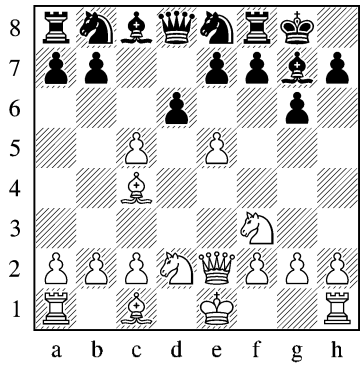
In *Playing 1.e4 – Caro-Kann, 1...e5 & Minor Lines*, Shaw recommends the less common: 6.e5 ♘e8 7.♘bd2!?

7.h3 is more popular, but then 7...c5 is okay for Black. For example, 8.c3 ♘c7 9.dxc5 d5 and now:

a) 10.♗b3 ♘d7 11.0–0 ♘xc5 12.♖d1 b6 13.♗f4 ♗b7 was unclear in Tesic – Ruggieri, corr. 2016.

b) 10.♗d3 was played in Negi – Hillarp Persson, Malmo 2007, and in *The Modern Tiger*, Hillarp Persson recommends 10...♘d7!N as being fine for Black, because 11.b4 a5 12.0–0 f6 13.exf6 ♖xf6 14.♗b2 e5 15.♗c2 b6 would give Black great compensation for the pawn.

7...c5 8.dxc5



8...♘c6!?N 9.exd6 exd6 10.0–0

Shaw points out that 10.cxd6?! ♘xd6 gives Black the initiative after, for example, 11.0–0 ♖e8 12.♕d1 ♘xc4 13.♘xc4 ♗g4.

10...dxc5 11.♘e4

Shaw claims that White keeps a microscopic advantage with this move, but I think Black can achieve full equality with:

11...♗f5!?

11...b6 12.♗f4± would be slightly uncomfortable for Black.

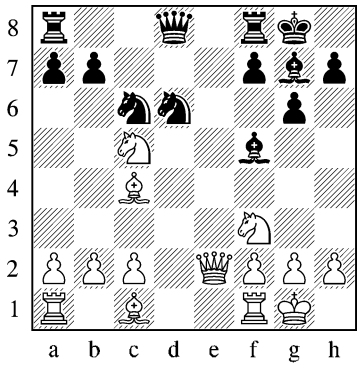
12.♘xc5

12.c3 ♗xe4 13.♕xe4 ♘d6 14.♕d3 ♘xc4 15.♕xc4 b6= is totally level.

12...♘d6

Black will target White's uncoordinated minor pieces, and aim for pressure against the undeveloped queenside.

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13.♗b3

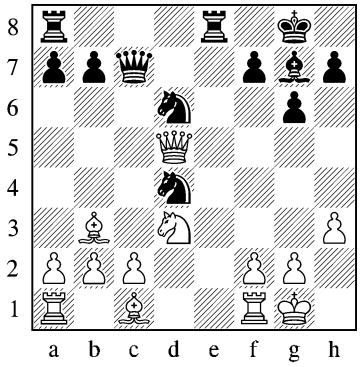
After 13.♗d3 ♗g4, it is not clear how White should break the annoying pin, for example: 14.♕e3 ♖c8 15.♕f4 ♗xf3 16.♕xf3 ♘d4 17.♕d5 b6 18.♘a6 ♘xc2∓ Black has regained the pawn, with good play.

13.♖d1 is well met by: 13...♖e8 14.♕f1 ♕c7 Black's pressure along the c-file offers good compensation for the pawn.

13...♖e8 14.♕d1 ♗g4 15.h3

15.♗d5 ♕f6 16.h3 ♗xf3 17.♕xf3 (17.♗xf3 ♘d4 is similar) 17...♕xf3 18.♗xf3 ♘d4 gives Black enough play for the pawn.

15...♗xf3 16.♕xf3 ♘d4 17.♕d5 ♕c7 18.♘d3



18...♘xc2!?

The d6-knight is indirectly defended, as White's d3-knight will also be hanging.

19.♗xc2 ♕xc2 20.♗f4

20.♕xd6 ♖ad8 21.♕b4 ♕xd3= is equal, though White should take care not to fall for: 22.♕xb7?? ♕xf1†! 23.♔xf1 ♖d1#

20...♕c4!?

The simplest route to equality.

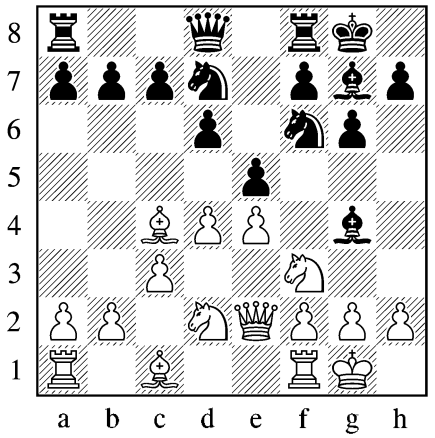
21.♕xd6 ♖ed8 22.♕e7 ♕xd3 23.♕xb7 ♕d4=

Black regains the b2-pawn, with a level position.

6...♗g4 7.c3 ♘bd7N

This seems to me like the natural square for the knight, though 7...♘c6 has been the usual choice.

8.♘bd2 e5



Black has achieved a comfortable position and threatens to start his counterplay with ...exd4 followed by ...♖e8.

9.h3 ♗xf3 10.♘xf3

10.♕xf3 exd4 11.cxd4 c5 leaves White underdeveloped and with his centre vulnerable.

10...exd4 11.cxd4 d5 12.exd5 ♘b6=

Black obtains a comfortable position playing against the isolani.

D2) 4.0–0 ♘f6 5.♘c3 0–0

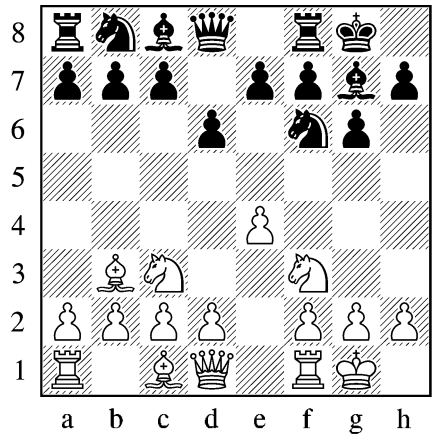
Black hurries to create the positional threat ...♗g4.

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5...c5 aims for the aforementioned English line with reversed colours, but it also offers White the opportunity to transpose to a positional Dragon line with 6.d4 cxd4 7.♘xd4. Black is doing fine here, but allowing this line means stepping well away from the Pirc repertoire.

6.♗b3

There is no time for 6.h3 due to the familiar 6...♘xe4 7.♘xe4 d5, with a likely transposition to comfortable ♗c4 Pirc lines.



6...♗g4N 7.h3 ♗xf3 8.♕xf3 ♘c6

Planning ...♘d4.

9.♘e2

9.♕e3 ♘d7 10.♘e2 ♘a5 does not change much.

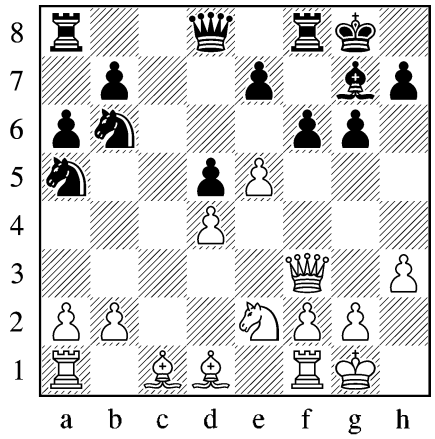
9...♘a5 10.♗a4

Allowing the exchange of the bishop would free Black of any worries.

10...c5 11.d3 a6 12.c3 d5 13.e5

Otherwise Black would continue the queenside expansion with ...b5 and so on.

13...♘d7 14.d4 cxd4 15.cxd4 ♘b6 16.♗d1 f6



Black has better development and a strategically comfortable position.

Conclusion

The Anti-Pirc systems do not succeed in taking us away from the usual development plan, with play on the dark squares and the g7-bishop as our main hero.

Building up a massive centre with e2-e4, f2-f4, d2-d4 and c2-c3, as in the main line of variation B, allows Black active counterplay.

I find the Closed Sicilian approach (g2-g3, with or without a knight on c3) the most consistent, as featured in the notes to lines A and B, but these are the kind of positions that I find pleasant playing with either colour.

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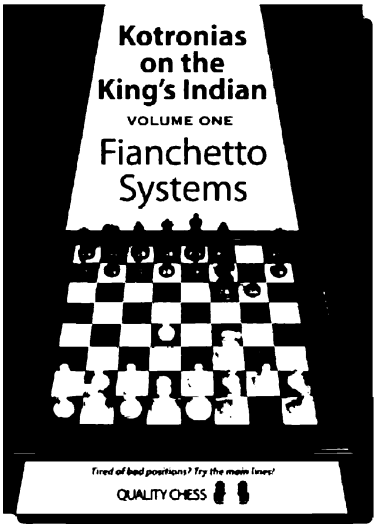
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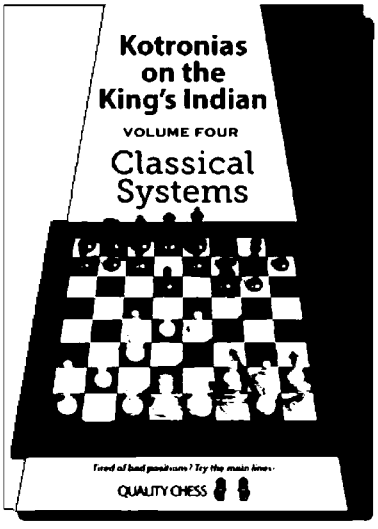
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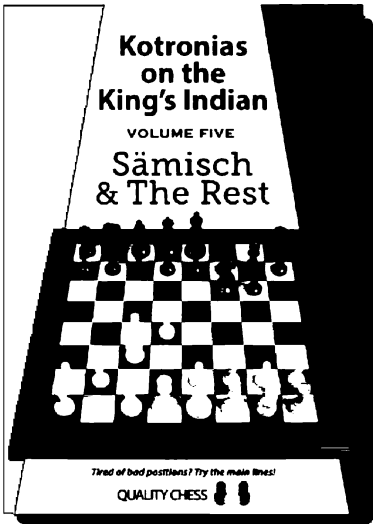
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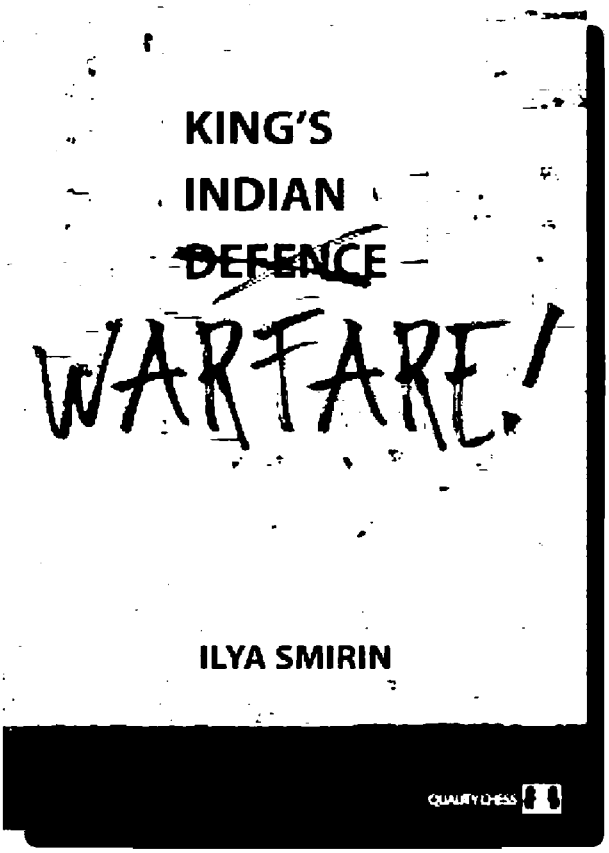




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In his epic **Kotronias on the King's Indian** series, Grandmaster Vassilios Kotronias has produced a masterpiece, tackling all major variations. The author supplements the hard analysis by sharing his expert knowledge of typical manoeuvres and positional motifs.

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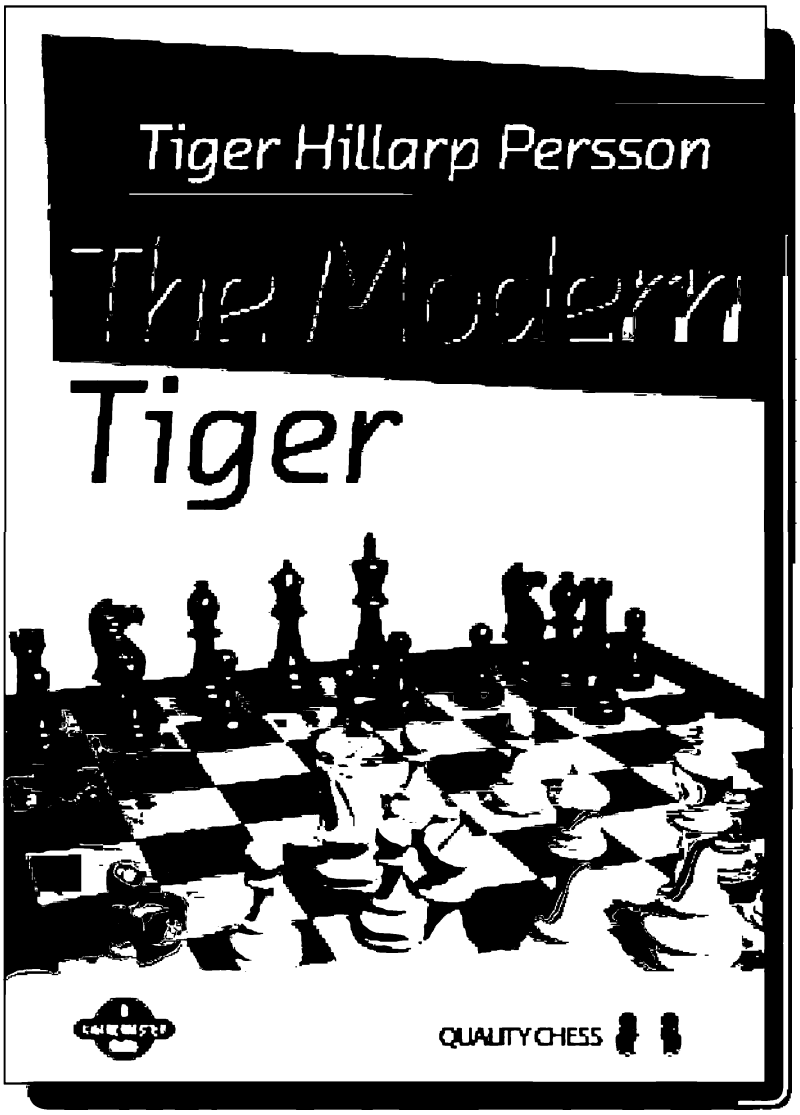
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