Richard Pert

Playing the Ragozin

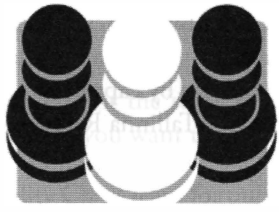
A Dynamic Repertoire

QUALITY CHESS

Playing the Ragozin

By

Richard Pert



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Playing the Ragozin

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Preface

The Ragozin is a Black opening against 1.d4. It uses the same pawn structure (...d5 and ...e6) as a Queen's Gambit Declined, but its distinguishing feature is the dynamic ...♗b4 move, pinning the knight on c3. The starting position of the Ragozin occurs after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4. This book also offers a complete repertoire after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4, as well as a repertoire against the Catalan plus other White options after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6.

Our target set-up is named after Viacheslav Ragozin, a Soviet grandmaster who lived from 1908-1962. Its popularity has risen greatly in the last ten or so years, during which it has gone from being a relatively obscure defence to a favourite of the world's elite. Levon Aronian is perhaps the foremost exponent of the opening. Having seen his success, several other elite players such as Magnus Carlsen, Vishy Anand, Anish Giri and Wesley So have also added it to their repertoires.

Similarly to my first book (*Playing the Trompowsky*, published by Quality Chess in 2013), this book is intended to provide a strong repertoire which can be used up to the highest level, but which is laid out in an easy-to-comprehend way. I have included lots of explanations and introductions to the different sections, in order to enable all players from club level upwards to grasp the key ideas quickly. Just as in my previous book, I have included a lot of my own blitz games from the Internet Chess Club, where I play under the handle "Antidrome".

Why play the Ragozin?

The big appeal for me is that the opening is relatively simple to learn, but still leads to a sound yet dynamic position, with chances to fight for the initiative right from the start. This book contains detailed analysis in some places, but as long as you are familiar with the ideas you should get a good game even if you can't remember all the exact moves. Most of the variations lead to either a strategic fight in the middle of the board, or a position in which Black plays for an attack against the white king while White tries to make inroads on the queenside. This is important to me, as I don't like to allow my opponent to attack my king straight out of the opening.

Personally I am not involved with chess full-time, as I have worked in finance for the last ten years and have two young children. That said, when I do turn up at the chess board, I still want to be able to compete with Grandmasters and International Masters, many of whom are chess professionals. The hardest area in which to compete with a professional player is in the opening, especially with Black. The Ragozin gives you a solid structure with a decent stake in the centre right away, and almost all of my recommended lines can be played competently by a strong player with minimal opening knowledge. At the same time, this book provides quite a lot of detail, giving you as much information as you want to take in.

I would like to thank the Quality Chess team for publishing my second chess book, and hope the readers will enjoy studying and playing the Ragozin.

Richard Pert
Billericay, November 2016

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Key to symbols used

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

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Book Structure

The book provides a complete Black repertoire after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6, and is split into seven parts, with a total of 22 chapters. I've tried to make the book as user-friendly as possible by giving a mini-introduction to each section, highlighting the main options and move orders. In several variations I have offered a choice of lines for Black, partly to cater for different playing styles, but also to enable you to vary your responses if you wish. I imagine most of you will want to start by learning just one line against each White option, and the introductory sections should make it easier to choose the most appropriate option for you. They also offer brief descriptions of the main plans for both sides. I strongly recommend that you take the time to read the introduction to each section before ploughing into the chapters. In many cases, just knowing the main plans can be sufficient for you to play the opening competently – though I have, of course, provided more detailed analysis as well.

The Ragozin

The starting position of the Ragozin occurs after the opening moves 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4. This is by far the biggest part of the book, accounting for five out of the seven sub-sections. This is the position you are likely to reach most commonly after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6, as it can also arise via the move order 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘f3 ♘f6. You will find a more detailed introduction to this system, including explanations of move orders and common themes, beginning on page 10. Here is a breakdown of the five sub-sections.

Part I – 5.cxd5

We start by considering this fixed central structure. White's most important continuation is 6.♗g5, and in Chapters 1 and 2 I present two responses for Black (6...♕d6!? and 6...h6, respectively), each of which has certain points in its favour. Chapter 3 deals with White's alternatives on move 6, the most important being 6.♕a4†.

Part II – 5.♗g5

This is White's most ambitious and theoretically critical continuation. I recommend 5...dxc4!, for reasons explained in the section introduction on page 80. Chapter 4 deals with the relatively minor options of 6.a3 and 6.e3, both of which you should be happy to see. The most challenging move is 6.e4, after which I have covered two options for Black. 6...c5 is a tried-and-tested approach which is covered in Chapters 5 and 6. It requires some theoretical knowledge but it leads to a

healthy position for Black in all variations. In Chapter 7 I have presented the more experimental option of 6...b5!?, which can lead to messy complications. There is not so much established theory and my analysis contains a lot of new ideas and novelties, so you can decide whether to include this in your repertoire as an alternative to 6...c5, or even as your primary choice.

Part III – 5.♕a4†

This queen check forces 5...♘c6. White often includes these moves in different variations, so watch out for the many possible transpositions! Chapter 8 deals with a few secondary options, including 6.♗g5, when 6...dxc4! is my choice, being consistent with the previous section. The main line is 6.e3 0–0, and the end of Chapter 8 deals with a few rare continuations from this important tabiya. White's two most important moves are 7.♕c2!? and 7.♗d2, which are analysed in Chapters 9 and 10 respectively.

Part IV – 5.♕b3

This queen move attacks the bishop while defending the c4-pawn. The active 5...c5 is my primary recommendation for Black. In Chapter 11 we will consider White's alternatives on move 6, as well as an interesting secondary option for Black, namely 6...a5!?. Chapter 12 is devoted to 6.dxc5, White's main response.

Part V – Other 5th moves

The final Ragozin section deals with White's various other options. Chapter 13 covers the Catalan-style 5.g3; then Chapter 14 discusses 5.e3, transposing to a Nimzo-Indian. Finally, Chapter 15 deals with the minor option of 5.♗d2 followed by the more significant sideline of 5.♕c2.

Part VI – 3.♘c3 ♗b4

The moves may sound like an introduction to the Nimzo-Indian, but remember our move order is 1.d4 d5 (rather than 1...♘f6) 2.c4 e6, when 3.♘c3 ♗b4 can be considered a kind of Nimzo-QGD hybrid. Black's third move is quite a rare choice in that position, but it has been used by some of the world's top players. The reason for playing 3...♗b4 as opposed to 3...♘f6 is that we don't want to give White the option of an early ♗g5 followed by e2-e3 and possibly ♘ge2, as the Ragozin-style ...♗b4 does not work as well there. In most cases we will wait for White to commit to e2-e3 or ♘f3 before playing ...♘f6 ourselves, in order to avoid that scenario.

White's most popular continuation is actually 4.♘f3, when 4...♘f6 takes us into the Ragozin. Obviously White has some other options on move 4, which will be analysed in this section of the book. The most important of them is 4.e3, when I recommend transposing to a Nimzo-Indian with 4...♘f6, leading to a positional battleground where I don't believe Black's chances are worse. From this position, several of White's 5th move options can be found in Chapter 16, while 5.cxd5 exd5 is analysed in Chapter 17. Then Chapter 18 deals with White's alternatives on move 4, the most important being 4.cxd5 and 4.a3.

Part VII – Alternatives after 3.♘f3 ♘f6

The final part of the book deals with White's other main ideas after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6. The most popular and challenging of them is the Catalan, which arises after 4.g3. I suggest meeting it with 4...♗b4†, staying as true as possible to our Ragozin theme. Full details can be found in Chapters 19 and 20.

4.♗g5 is another important option, when 4...♗b4† invites a transposition to the Ragozin after 5.♘c3. White can keep the game in independent territory with 5.♘bd2, which will be looked at in Chapter 21. Finally, 4.e3 is an exception to our rule, as I don't believe in giving a check on b4 to exchange White's bishop which has just been blocked in by e2-e3. Instead I consider 4...a6 more appropriate, and you can find it analysed in Chapter 22.

***

Finally, let me just point out that this book does not cover White's sidelines on moves 2 and 3. One of the advantages of the 1...d5 move order is that we cut out interesting systems like the Trompowsky (1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗g5), which was the subject of my first book for Quality Chess. Obviously White still has a number of options available after 1.d4 d5, but most of them are harmless and Boris Avrukh has already given excellent suggestions against them in *Grandmaster Repertoire 11 – Beating 1.d4 Sidelines*. Similarly, after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6, the two knight moves (3.♘f3 and 3.♘c3) are played in the overwhelming majority of games. Other options exist, but continuations such as 3.cxd5 exd5, 3.g3, 3.e3 and 3.♗f4 can be met with common-sense replies, keeping in mind potential transpositions to our main repertoire in the likely event of ♘f3 and/or ♘c3 being played in the near future.

Introduction to the Ragozin

Before presenting the main parts of the book, I would like to share a few thoughts about possible move orders. I will then show you an inspirational model game, followed by a brief discussion of a couple of recurring themes in the Ragozin. I will finish by previewing an important novelty I found, which enables Black to play for a win in what had previously been considered a forced drawing line.

Move Orders

This book advocates a repertoire with 1.d4 d5, followed by a combination of ...e6, ...♘f6 and 3...♗b4, with the exact move order depending on what White plays. However, this is not the only way to reach the Ragozin, and many of the top players prefer the move order starting with 1...♘f6. Here is a summary of the different move orders and options available to both sides.

1.d4 d5

The alternative is:

1...♘f6

This way Black cuts out the 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 variation, as covered in Part VI of the book. However, it only really makes sense for Ragozin players who are also happy to play a Nimzo-Indian.

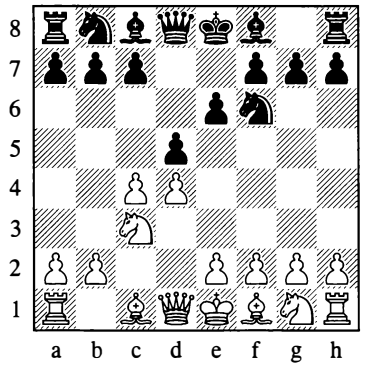
2.c4 e6 3.♘c3

3.♘f3 d5 reaches our target position as discussed in the main line below.

3...d5

3...♗b4 is a good choice if your repertoire already includes the Nimzo-Indian.

The text move leads to the Queen's Gambit Declined – a perfectly respectable opening of course, but this version (with ♘c3 having been played instead of ♘f3) is *not* something I would recommend as a means of reaching the Ragozin.



4.cxd5

4.♘f3 ♗b4 is a Ragozin of course, but the text move leads to a different type of game.

4...exd5 5.♗g5

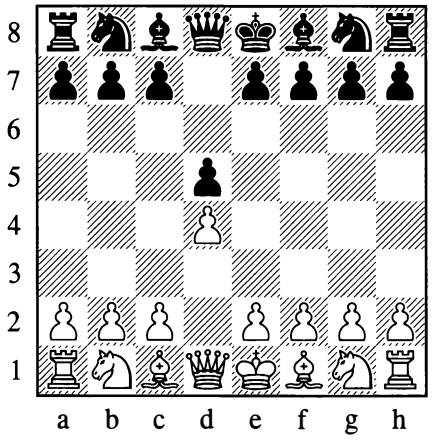
If instead we had a bishop on b4 rather than a knight on f6, the same move could be met rather satisfactorily by 5...♕xg5!.

5...♗b4

Black tries to maintain the Ragozin set-up, but it does not work so well here because White has not yet committed his knight to f3.

6.e3

White can follow up with ♗d3 followed by ♘e2, with later ideas of f2-f3, or he may consider an early ♕b3.



2.c4

2.♘f3 is best met by 2...♘f6, intending 3.c4 e6 with our standard position. If White goes for a sideline which does not involve c2-c4, we may be able to develop the light-squared bishop outside the pawn chain.

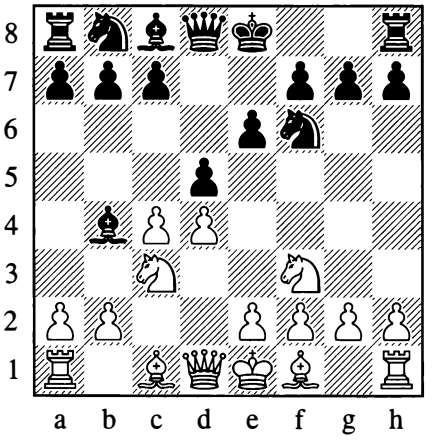
2...e6 3.♘f3

I recommend meeting 3.♘c3 with 3...♗b4!. Unlike the position discussed above under the 1...♘f6 move order, here White is deprived of the ♗g5 pin because we haven't developed our knight to f6 yet. 4.♘f3 is the most common reply, and after 4...♘f6 we reach our desired Ragozin. (White has tried various other moves such as 4,cxd5 and 4.e3, which will be covered in Part VI of the book.)

3...♘f6 4.♘c3

White has some other options such as 4.g3 (the Catalan), 4.♗g5 and 4.e3, all of which will be discussed in Part VII. Of course you may already have a favourite line against the Catalan, so you can pick and choose which of my recommendations you wish to follow in this section.

4...♗b4



We have arrived at the Ragozin – the main subject of this book, which is analysed in Parts I-V.

A Model Game

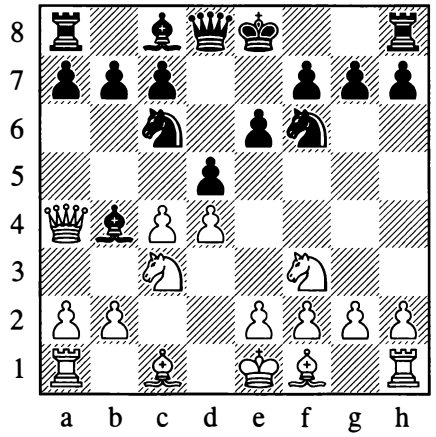
For some early inspiration, I've picked this fantastic 2013 game between two of the best players in the world.

Hikaru Nakamura – Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

Moscow 2013

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕a4† ♘c6

The point of White's last move is to force Black to put his knight on c6, obstructing the ...c5 break. This is a common position and will be covered in detail later in the book. I will not look too closely at the opening at this stage, and will instead focus on Mamedyarov's superb middlegame play.



6.e3 0–0 7.♗d2 dxc4

Taking on c4 is a standard plan, releasing the tension and planning ...e5 in the future.

8.♗xc4 a6

I believe 8...♗d6 to be a slightly more accurate move order but the game soon transposes anyway. Further details about move orders can be found in the theoretical part of the book.

9.0–0 ♗d6 10.♖ad1 e5

Black carries out his thematic pawn push, challenging White in the centre and freeing the c8-bishop. This position (and similar variations) will be analysed in Chapter 10.

11.dxe5

11.d5 ♘e7 12.e4 h6 13.♗e2 ♘g6 leads to another thematic structure; Black can either play for a kingside attack or challenge White's pawn centre by preparing the ...c6 break.

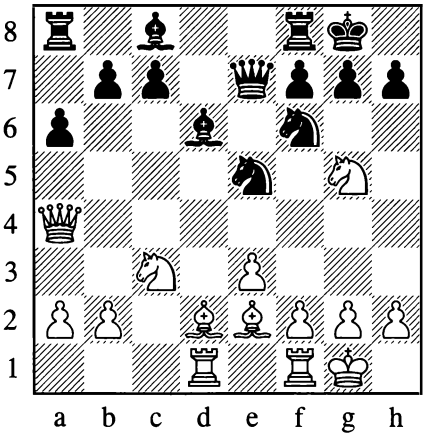
11...♘xe5 12.♗e2

12.♘xe5 ♗xe5 is also fine for Black, as White does not have any effective discovered attacks along the d-file.

12...♕e7 13.♘g5?!

Nakamura intends ♘e4 but the plan doesn't work.

White should have preferred the more conservative 13.♕c2, preventing ...♗f5. Play may continue 13...♘xf3† 14.♗xf3 ♖e8 intending ...♗g4, with roughly equal play.



13...♗f5!

Mamedyarov prevents White's plan.

14.e4

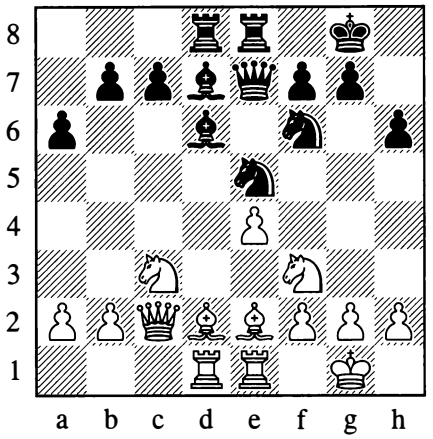
This drives the bishop away, but it loosens White's position and prevents White from carrying out his intended knight manoeuvre.

14.♘ge4? ♘xe4 15.♘xe4 b5! forces 16.♕c2∓ when White has been driven into an unpleasant pin.

14...♗d7 15.♕c2 h6 16.♘f3 ♖fe8 17.♖fe1 ♖ad8

Black has played very simply and developed all of his pieces. One of the big advantages of playing the Ragozin is that the moves are often

simple and easy to find. Now everything is in place; Black is sitting comfortably, and can play either in the centre or, as in this game, for a kingside attack!



18.g3

Nakamura anticipates the idea of ...♘xf3† and ...♕e5.

18...♘eg4!

Threatening ...♗c5. The pressure is building to boiling point!

19.h3?

Black has seemingly done nothing special but already White (the American number one at the time) is in trouble. That said, a further weakening pawn move is not the solution.

19...♘xf2!

Black's pieces are perfectly placed, so now is the time to strike. This piece sacrifice destroys White's kingside structure and opens up his king.

20.♔xf2 ♗xh3

White is in trouble, as both ...♗c5† and ...♘g4† are on the cards.

21.♔g1 ♗xg3

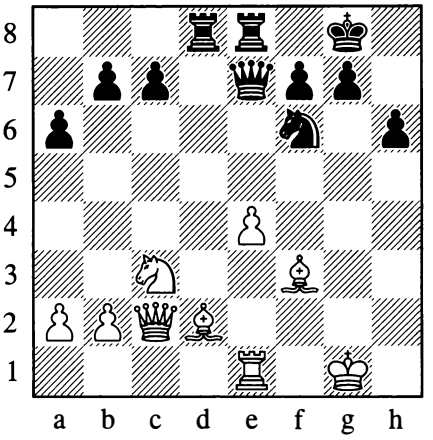
Material is back to being roughly level, but the white king remains terribly exposed.

22.♗f1 ♗xe1

Black sensibly takes the material on offer.

23.♖xe1 ♗g4 24.♗g2 ♗xf3 25.♗xf3

Now for the killer move...



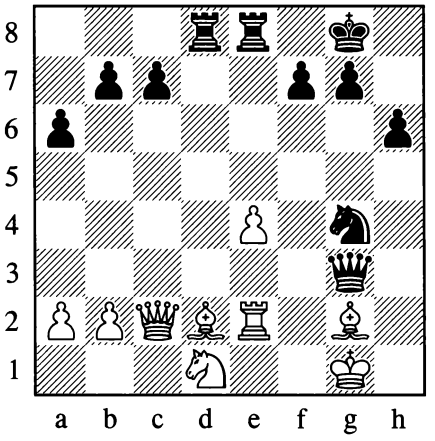
25...♕d6!

Mamedyarov hits the bishop on d2 while threatening ...♕g3†.

26.♖e2 ♕g3† 27.♗g2 ♘g4

The attack practically plays itself.

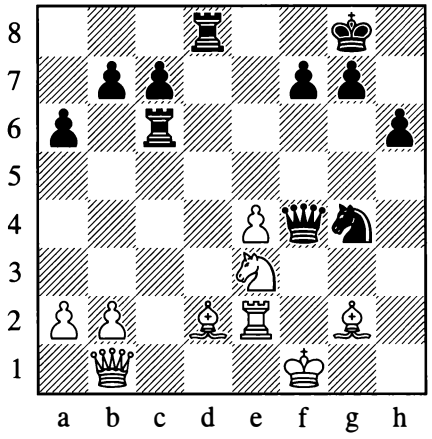
28.♘d1



28...♖e6!

Bringing a new piece into the attack.

29.♘e3 ♖c6 30.♕b1 ♕h2† 31.♔f1 ♕f4†



White had seen enough! The finish might have been 32.♔e1 (32.♔g1 ♖xd2–+) 32...♕g3† 33.♔f1 ♘h2† 34.♔g1 ♘f3† 35.♔f1 ♘xd2† and wins. Total annihilation – and mostly using simple developing moves. The beauty of the Ragozin is that so often Black ends up playing either in the centre or against the white king, meaning we get all the fun!
0–1

Theme 1: The c4-pawn

The book is centred around common themes. In the Ragozin starting position after four moves, White's c4-pawn is hanging, and how he deals with it will go a long way towards determining the structure and character of the game.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4

When playing the Ragozin, we position our bishop actively on b4 and then wait for White's response. The biggest issue which White has to resolve is what to do about the hanging pawn on c4. There are lots of different moves but in essence White has three different approaches to the problem:

1) He can exchange the pawn by trading on d5, but after ...exd5 the c8-bishop will be let loose, which may enable Black to drum up a kingside attack.

2) The second option is to maintain the tension while defending the c4-pawn with moves like e2-e3 or ♕b3, which will usually lead to a dynamic battle in the middle of the board.

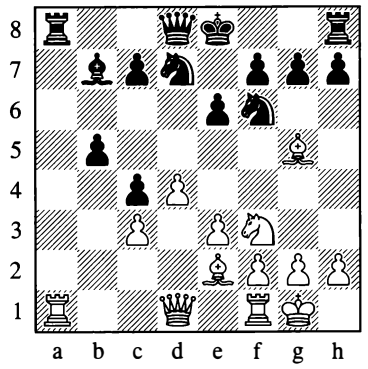
3) White's third option is to continue to leave the c4-pawn hanging. If he chooses this approach we will look for an opportune moment to capture it with ...dxc4, usually followed by ...b5 and ...♗b7, giving us an extra pawn and a strong light-squared bishop. In this section I will give a brief example of each scenario.

5.cxd5

White clarifies the centre and looks for queenside play.

5.♕b3 is a possible way to defend the c4-pawn, while also attacking the b4-bishop. 5...c5 6.dxc5 ♘a6 is my recommendation discussed in Chapter 12, when 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.♕xc3 ♘xc5 leads to a long and interesting game.

5.♗g5 is the main line. I have chosen to recommend the bold 5...dxc4, moving towards main line Vienna territory while staying consistent with our strategy of grabbing the c4-pawn if White allows it. 6.e3 (6.e4 is stronger, and will of course be discussed later) 6...b5 White is already under pressure to find some accurate moves to avoid being worse; he is, after all, a pawn down and we are about to land our bishop on the long diagonal. 7.♗e2 ♗b7 8.0–0 a6 9.a4 ♘bd7 10.axb5 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 axb5



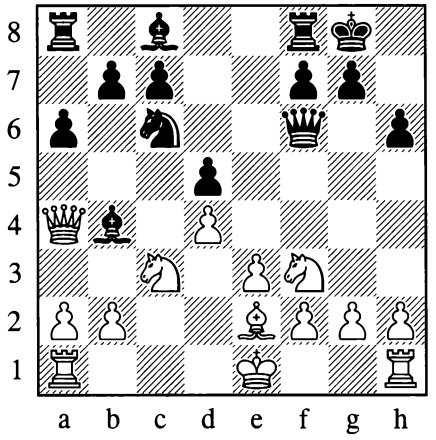
12.♖b1?! (12.♕c2 is equal according to the engines but Black's position is surely easier to play) 12...♖a5! 13.♘d2 ♕a8 Black is a pawn up with easy play.

5...exd5 6.♕a4†

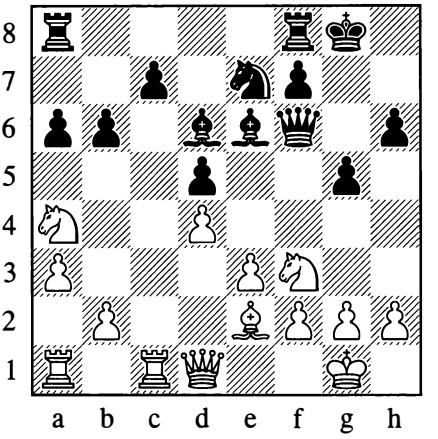
We saw the same idea on the previous move in the Nakamura – Mamedyarov game. White is preventing any ...c6 or ...c5 ideas, in the short term at least.

6...♘c6 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.e3 0–0 10.♗e2 a6

We have reached quite a popular position. White has stopped any ...dxc4 ideas and will most likely aim for a thematic minority attack on the queenside. I like Black's chances though – he has the two bishops, and the ...exd5 move has opened the path of the c8-bishop towards the kingside.



11.0–0 ♗e6 12.♖fc1 ♗d6 13.♕d1 ♘e7 14.♘a4 b6 15.a3 g5!



Black gets the attack going. Objectively the position may only be equal and it has been tested at the highest level, but let's be honest – Black is going to have all the fun on the kingside!

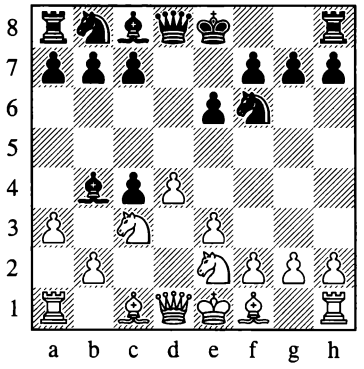
Theme 2: Reacting to a2-a3

When showing this repertoire to Ed, a gentleman whom I teach from time to time in London, he mentioned that he wasn't sure how to react to a2-a3. Under what circumstances should Black exchange his bishop for the knight on c3, and when should the bishop retreat? I think the simplest answer is that if White has played active, forcing moves, then you nearly always need to trade on c3, as this saves a tempo (as White will have to recapture) and can be followed by a move like ...c5 hitting the centre, or ...b5 to defend the extra pawn on c4. On the other hand, if White is playing cautiously and has made some minor concessions in anticipation of ...♗xc3, then you will probably want to drop the bishop back and keep the bishop pair. Let me give you some examples of each scenario.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3

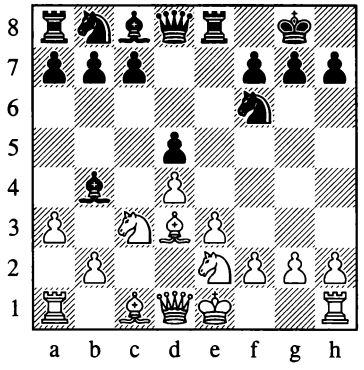
The other main direction is 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 ♘f6, and now we will see two examples where it makes sense to keep the bishop:

a) 5.♘ge2 dxc4 6.a3 White is ideally placed to recapture with the second knight on c3, so...



6...♗a5! 7.♘g3 b5 Black keeps his extra pawn and can continue developing in normal fashion. The onus is on White to justify his pawn sacrifice, which will not be easy as his knights look rather awkward.

b) 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♗d3 0–0 7.♘ge2 ♖e8 8.a3

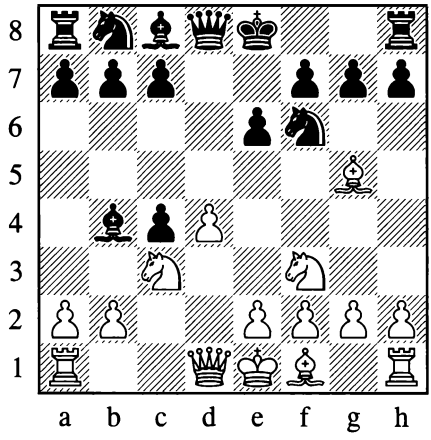


Look at how many concessions White has made: he has played e2-e3 (ruling out ♗g5); he has played ♘ge2 which is less active than ♘f3; he has played cxd5, allowing us to open the diagonal for our light-squared bishop; and he has spent a move on a2-a3. This makes it a perfect time to switch plans and keep the bishop. 8...♗d6! The bishop is well placed to support a future kingside attack.

3...♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5

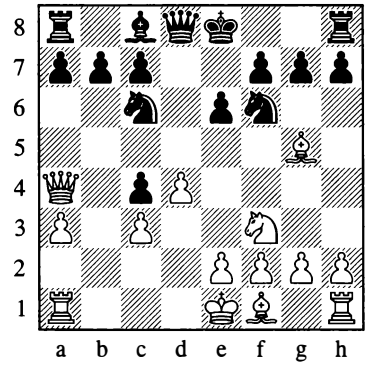
This is an active and ambitious choice, which also leaves the c4-pawn hanging. I recommend taking it, for reasons that will be discussed more fully in the introduction to Part II on page 80.

5...dxc4



6.a3

6.♕a4† ♘c6 7.a3 is another forcing continuation, when 7...♗xc3†! is the right choice, as it enables Black to keep hold of the c4-pawn. (Instead 7...♗e7?! 8.e3± allows White to recapture our pawn at his leisure, with a small but risk-free advantage.) 8.bxc3



8...♕d5! With ...b5 to follow.

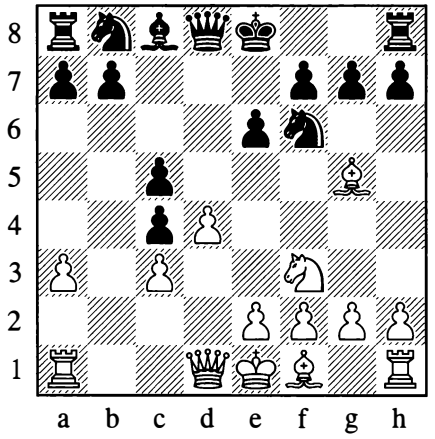
6...♗xc3†!

White has played only active moves so far, so we need to take on c3 and hit back in the centre.

6...♗e7? 7.e4± allows White to take complete control.

6...♗a5 7.e4 gives Black a worse version of a Vienna, as the extra a2-a3 move helps White.

7.bxc3 c5



8.e3 cxd4 9.exd4

Ideally White would prefer to recapture with the c-pawn, but 9.cxd4?! is well met by 9...♕a5†! 10.♕d2 c3. This is only possible because Black has played energetically and avoided losing time on the previous few moves.

9...♘bd7 10.♗xc4 ♕c7

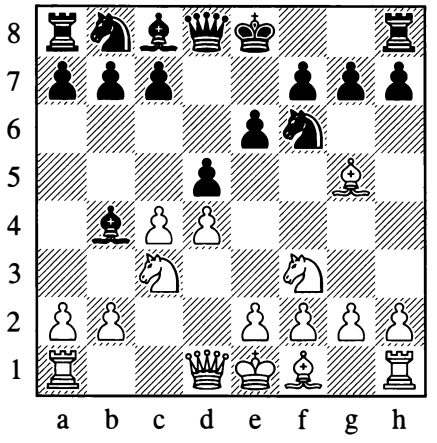
Black will benefit from long-term pressure against the backward c3-pawn after ...b6, ...♗b7 and ...♖c8, which will come in the fullness of time. See Chapter 4 for full details of these lines.

A Novelty to Avoid a Forced Draw

I am an amateur player and the majority of my games are against lower-rated players, so I am usually not happy to draw – even with Black. Therefore, when choosing an opening repertoire, I have to aim not only to reach a playable position, but also to avoid allowing any forced drawing lines. In this book I have gone out of my way to avoid any perpetual checks and other drawing lines, though I will of course point out where such possibilities exist. Here is one example where I found an interesting novelty to avoid exactly this type of problem.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5

Against most other moves, Black can get a playable position with minimal theoretical knowledge. I consider the text move to be the absolute critical test, and the one system I would recommend spending more time on. It will receive detailed coverage in Chapters 4-7.

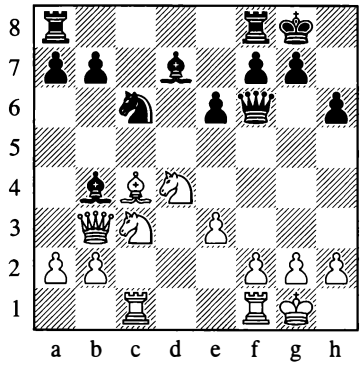


5...dxc4!?

Despite being a seemingly riskier approach – transposing into a main line Vienna – Black scores best with this move. According to my database, it is the only option with which

Black scores more than 50%. It also fits in with one of our major themes, namely capturing the loose pawn on c4 at the right moment.

5...h6 is popular amongst the world's elite, who are usually happy to draw with Black. Unfortunately, it seems to give White the option of a draw if he wants it, as the main line continues: 6.♗xf6 ♕xf6 7.e3 0–0 8.♖c1 dxc4 9.♗xc4 c5 10.0–0 cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♗d7 12.♕b3 ♘c6



13.♘xc6 ♗xc3 14.♖xc3 ♗xc6 15.♗b5 ♗d5 16.♗c4 ♗c6 17.♗b5= With a repetition.

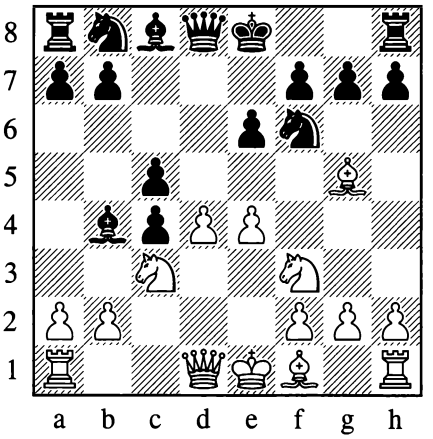
6.e4

Again a critical choice.

6.e3 has been played against me in several practical games, but 6...b5 gives Black excellent prospects. 7.♗e2 ♗b7 8.0–0 a6 9.a4 ♘bd7 10.axb5 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 axb5 is a possible continuation which was mentioned earlier on page 14.

6...c5

I have also included a secondary, offbeat repertoire involving 6...b5!?. For those who want to minimize their study time and/or surprise their opponents, this seems a reasonable option. See Chapter 7 for further details.



7.♗xc4 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♕a5 9.♗xf6

This is the most forcing option.

9.♗d2 is an equally important move to study. It leads to a more positional game, where White is hoping for a slight but enduring edge. See variation B of Chapter 6 for more details.

9...♗xc3† 10.bxc3 ♕xc3† 11.♔f1

11.♔e2?? ♕xc4† 12.♔f3 ♕c3† is winning for Black.

11...gxf6

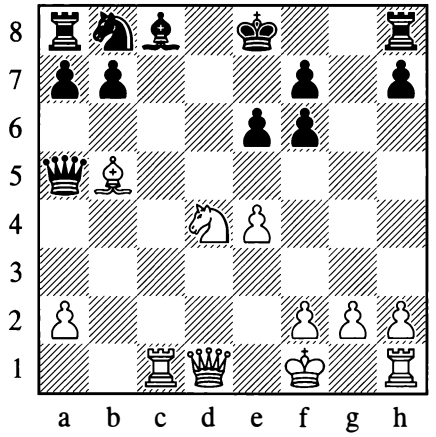
11...♕xc4†?? is no good here, as 12.♔g1 gxf6 13.♖c1+– exploits the hanging bishop on c8.

12.♖c1 ♕a5 13.♗b5†

This is absolutely the most critical line that you can encounter when playing on the Black side of this opening, and is one of the few areas where you need to memorize some details. At the highest level it can be regarded as an all-out drawing attempt by White, as the main line has been analysed out to a perpetual check.

13.h4 is the most common continuation, intending to develop the rook on h3. This will be discussed more in the theoretical section; here I will just mention that the main line

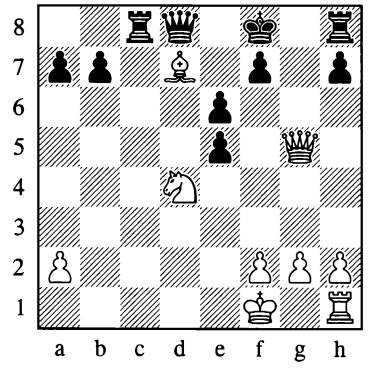
continues 13...♔e7 14.♖h3 ♘c6 15.♘xc6† bxc6 16.♖d3 ♖d8 17.♖xd8 ♕xd8 with approximate equality.



13...♘c6!N

In this well-known position I found this striking novelty to avoid an instant draw. I can't even tell you how many hours of study it took me to find this idea, as I was desperate to play this line of the Vienna whilst having a way of avoiding a forced draw.

13...♔e7 is the usual move, when the main line runs as follows: 14.e5 fxe5 15.♕h5 ♘d7 16.♕g5† ♔f8 17.♖xc8† ♖xc8 18.♗xd7 ♕d8 White can and must force a perpetual with:



19.♘xe6†! fxe6 20.♕h6† ♔f7 21.♕xe6† ♔f8 22.♕h6† (or 22.♕f5† ♔e7 23.♕e6† ♔f8=) 22...♔f7 23.♕e6†= This drawing line first occurred in 1988 according to my database, and it has been repeated in more than thirty games since. In Chapter 6 I have presented full analysis of this line as well; after all, a draw with Black can be considered a theoretical success, and there could be times when this would be a satisfactory outcome.

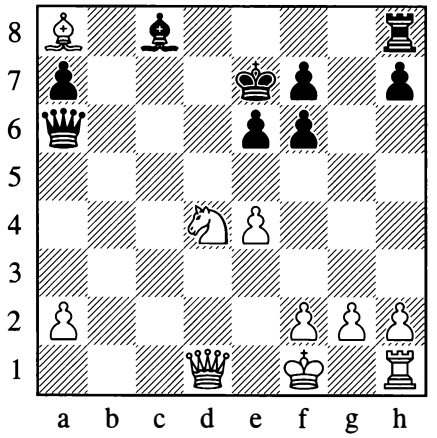
I double- and triple-checked all the variations in the above line after 13...♔e7, before finally coming all the way back to the start of the line and finding the text move. It initially looks like a blunder which loses material, but things are nowhere near that simple...

14.♖xc6

The critical test. Other tries are examined in Chapter 6.

14...bxc6 15.♗xc6† ♔e7 16.♗xa8 ♕a6†

White is a piece up for the moment, but his coordination is poor and the a8-bishop is short of squares.



17.♔g1

17.♕e2 ♕xe2† 18.♔xe2 (18.♘xe2?! ♗a6∓) 18...♗a6† 19.♔e3 ♖xa8 regains the piece to reach a roughly equal endgame.

17...♗d7⩱

White's bishop is trapped, and he must decide what to do about it. If he tries too hard to hang on to his extra material, he might easily fall into a hopeless position. Full details can be found in variation C32 of Chapter 6.

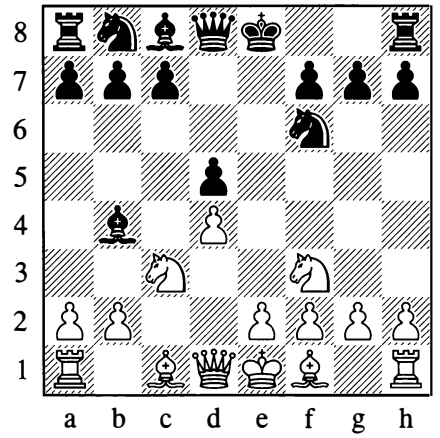
PART I

5.cxd5

Introduction to 5.cxd5 exd5

We will begin our investigation by looking at the fixed central structure which occurs after:

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.cxd5 exd5



White has opted to clarify matters in the centre before proceeding with further development. The advantage of doing so is that he immediately rules out the possibility of ...dxc4, which – as we will see later in the book – can be quite an effective way of creating confusion in the White camp. The downside, from White's perspective, is that Black gets a chance to develop his light-squared bishop to an active post on e6, f5 or g4.

I believe this puts the onus on White to play aggressively with moves like ♗g5. If he tries to take a positional stance then Black's active bishops should guarantee at least equality. In my personal experience, I've found this to be a common reaction to the Ragozin amongst club players seeking easy development, though of course it has been heavily tested at GM level too.

6.♗g5

The main move, immediately developing the bishop to its best square. I regard this move as White's only serious try for an advantage after 5.cxd5, although he has tried several other moves. Here is a brief list of the alternatives and where you can find them:

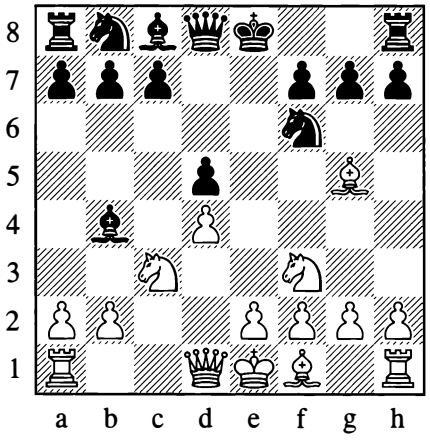
6.♕a4† can be found in Chapter 3. This is the only other move which has been played regularly at the highest level in this position, so I will say a bit more about it here.

The main line runs 6...♘c6 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.e3 0–0 10.♗e2 a6 11.0–0 ♗e6. World Champion Magnus Carlsen has played this for White but, with two strong bishops and active prospects on the kingside, I can't see how Black can be worse. That said, it is important to familiarize ourselves with the ideas, and you can find everything you need to know in the relevant chapter.

White has a host of minor moves including 6.♗f4, 6.a3, 6.♗d2 and 6.♕c2, all of which are covered in Chapter 3.

6.♕b3 c5 transposes to the 5.♕b3 Ragozin as covered in Chapter 11.

6.e3 0–0 is a harmless version of the Nimzo-Indian line covered in Chapter 17, where White prefers a set-up with ♗d3 and ♘ge2.

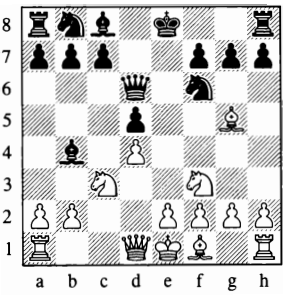


From this popular position I decided to cover two options for Black:

The rare but respectable **6...♕d6!?** is the subject of Chapter 1. Black steps out of the pin and prepares an immediate ...♘e4, asking White what he is going to do about it. Despite how little it is played, the move seems fully reliable and I have no hesitation in recommending it. Incidentally, Larry Kaufman does not mention the queen move in his repertoire book, only considering 6...h6 and 6...♘bd7.

6...h6 is a more popular option which will be covered in Chapter 2. This is a more adventurous move, immediately challenging the bishop with a view to meeting ♗h4 with a later ...g5 and ...♘e4. Our main line continues 7.♗h4 (7.♗xf6 is a less ambitious move which leads to equality, as shown in variation A of Chapter 2) 7...♘bd7 8.e3 g5 9.♗g3 ♘e4 with dynamic play; see variation B of Chapter 2 for full details.

Chapter 1

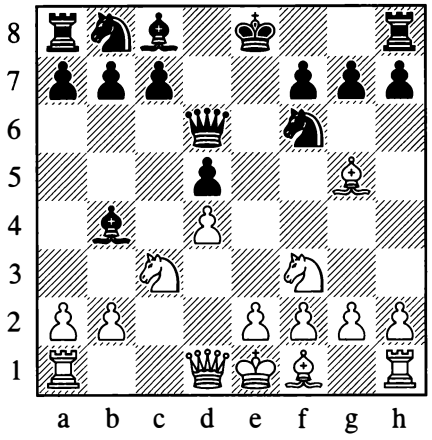


6.♗g5 ♕d6!?

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♗g5 ♕d6!?

A) 7.e3 **26**
B) 7.♗xf6 ♕xf6 **28**
B1) 8.e3 **28**
B2) 8.♕a4† **29**
B3) 8.♕b3 **30**
C) 7.♘d2 ♗f5 **31**
C1) 8.♗xf6?! **32**
C2) 8.e3 **34**
C3) 8.♘b5 **36**

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♗g5 ♕d6!?



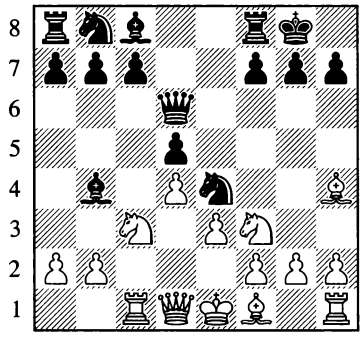
White has three ways of dealing with the ...♘e4 threat: he can ignore it with **A) 7.e3**, remove the knight with **B) 7.♗xf6**, or guard the e4-square with **C) 7.♘d2**.

7.♕c2?! ♘e4!N leaves White without a satisfactory answer.

7.♖c1 ♘e4 8.♗h4 0–0

8...♕h6!?N is interesting, with similar ideas as in the line below. However, after 9.e3 Black must avoid 9...♗g4? because 10.♕b3 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3± gives White too much counterplay. 9...0–0 is better, transposing to the line below.

9.e3



9...♕h6!N

A nice way to utilize the queen's placement on the sixth rank! Black gets ready to meet ♗g3 with ...♘xg3, as the h-pawn will now be pinned.

9...c5 was equal in Gorelov – Rashkovsky, Volgodonsk 1981, but Black can play more ambitiously.

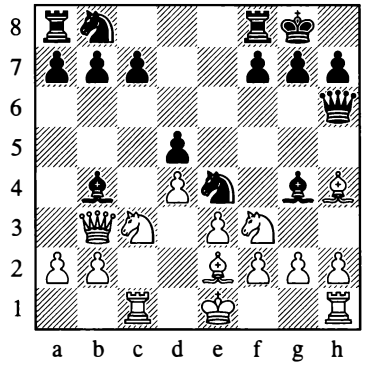
9...♗g4 10.♗e2 ♕h6! was the move order of the game quoted in the note to Black's 11th move below. However, White could have improved with 10.h3!, when it is not so easy for Black to make the ...♕h6 plan work.

10.♗e2 ♗g4

We have momentarily transposed to an old game, having avoided the improvement noted above.

11.♕b3

11.♗g3? ♘xg3 forces 12.fxg3, when 12...♕xe3 picks up a free pawn; there is also 12...♘d7!?, with a clear positional advantage.



11...♘c6!N

The strongest move, developing another piece and maintaining the tension.

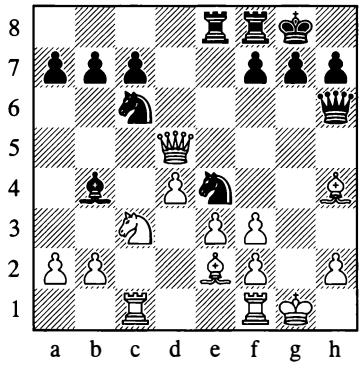
11...♗xc3† is playable, but after 12.bxc3 ♗xf3 13.gxf3 ♕xh4 14.fxe4 ♕xe4 15.♖g1 the situation was unclear in Banszky – Karafiath, Hungary 1967; White has decent compensation for the pawn.

12.♕xd5 ♖ae8

12...♖fe8 may transpose in a few more moves.

13.0–0 ♗xf3 14.gxf3

14.♗xf3?! ♗xc3 wins a piece for insufficient compensation.

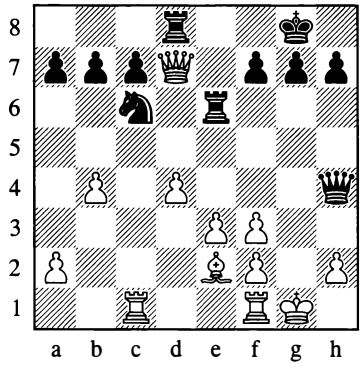


14...♘xc3 15.bxc3 ♕xh4!

15...♗a3 16.♕g5 ♕xg5† 17.♗xg5 ♗xc1 18.♖xc1∞ gives White an extra pawn and two strong bishops to compensate for the exchange.

16.cxb4 ♖e6 17.♕d7 ♖d8!

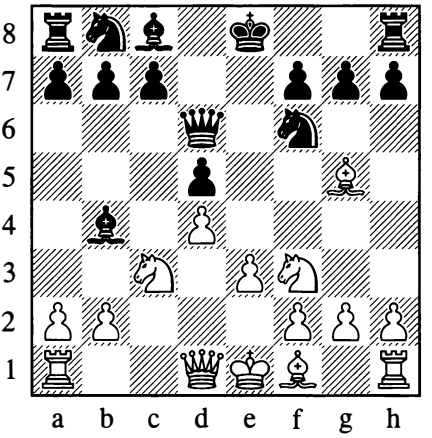
17...♖h6 can be met by 18.♕xc7 when White survives.



18.♕xc7 ♘xd4 19.exd4 ♖xe2↑

White's extra pawn is outweighed by his exposed king and Black's active pieces.

A) 7.e3



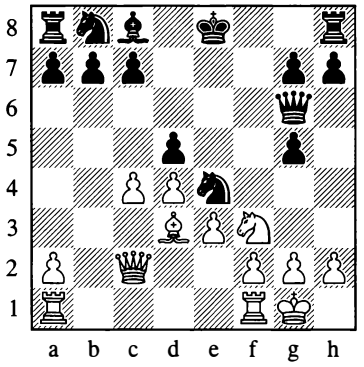
Quite a rare choice. It turns out that White can get away with ignoring the ...♘e4 idea, but he can hardly hope for an advantage.

7...♘e4 8.♗f4

8.♖c1N seems playable, if harmless. A logical continuation is 8...♘xg5 9.♘xg5 h6 10.♘f3 ♗g4 11.♗e2 ♘d7 12.a3 ♗xc3† 13.♖xc3 0–0 14.0–0 c6 with equal play.

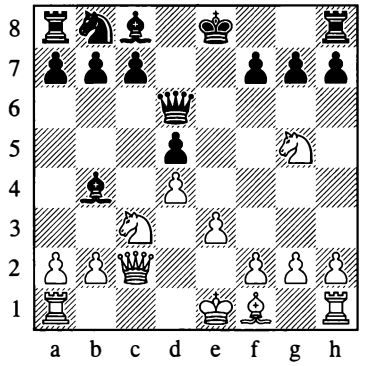
8.♕c2 gives Black a choice between a risky continuation and a sensible one:

a) 8...♕g6!? leads to wild play. My analysis continues: 9.♗d3 f6N The consistent move, targeting g2. 10.0–0! (10.♗h4 ♕xg2 11.♔e2 ♘xc3† 12.bxc3 ♗g4∓) 10...♗xc3 11.bxc3 fxg5 12.c4∞ This position is hard to evaluate – Black is a whole knight up but White has a serious initiative. A sample line runs:

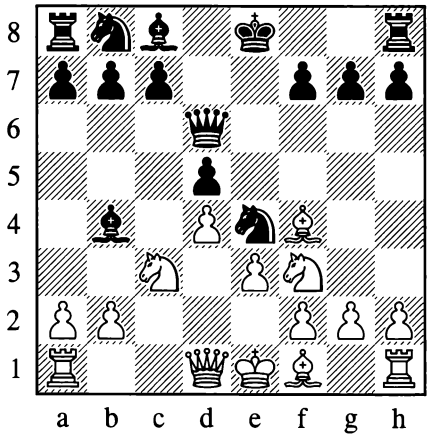


12...g4 13.♘e5 ♕h6 14.cxd5 ♘d6 15.♕xc7 0–0 16.♗g6 (16.♖ab1!?⩲ is also interesting) 16...hxg6 17.♕xd6 g5∞ White has obvious compensation, but any result is possible.

b) 8...♘xg5 is a far simpler solution, especially in conjunction with the following improvement: 9.♘xg5



9...♕g6!N (9...c6 10.♗d3 h6 11.♘f3 ♗e6 12.0–0 ♘d7 13.♖fc1± Beradze – Rambaldi, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015) 10.♕xg6 hxg6 11.♗d3 c6= Objectively it's equal, but Black can certainly try to make the bishop pair count.

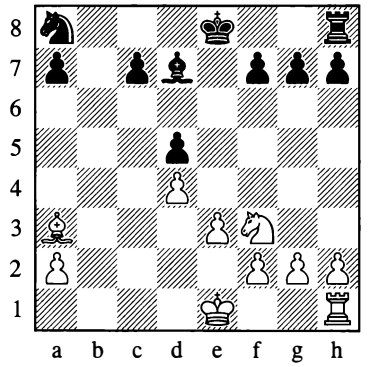


8...♘xc3

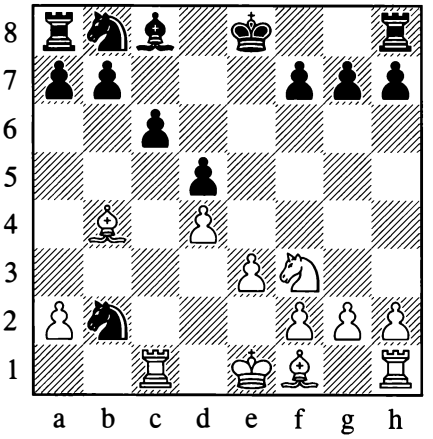
8...♕e7!?N is playable, a possible continuation being: 9.♕b3 0–0 10.a3 ♗a5 11.♗d3 (11.♕xd5 looks rather greedy: 11...♘c6 12.♕b3 g5 13.♗g3 ♗e6 14.♕c2 f5⩱) 11...c5 Threatening ...c4. 12.dxc5 ♗xc3† 13.bxc3 ♘xc5 14.♕c2=

9.♗xd6 ♘xd1† 10.♗xb4 ♘xb2 11.♖c1 c6

11...♘c6!? looks odd but there does not seem to be anything terribly wrong with it: 12.♗a3 ♘a4 13.♗b5 ♘b6 14.♖xc6 (or 14.♗xc6† bxc6 15.♖xc6 ♘c4 followed by ...♔d7) 14...bxc6 15.♗xc6† ♗d7 16.♗xa8 ♘xa8



17.0–0 ♘b6 18.♖c1 ♘c4 19.♖b1 ♘b6 White has a slightly better structure but it will be difficult for him to make much progress.



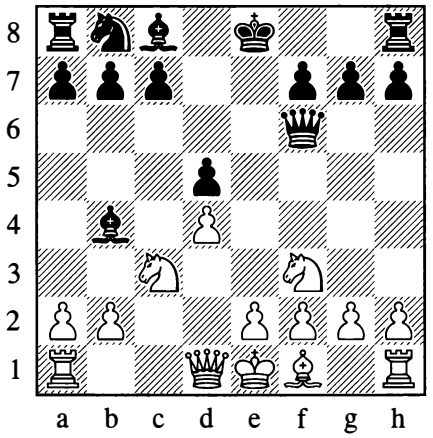
12.♖c2 ♘c4

12...♘a4!?∞ (intending 13.♗b5 ♘b6) is an ambitious attempt to hang on to the extra pawn, although White certainly has some compensation for it.

13.♗xc4 dxc4 14.♖xc4 ♗e6=

Black has returned the extra pawn to reach a safe and equal position – although there is obviously still plenty of scope for a stronger player to win with either colour.

B) 7.♗xf6 ♕xf6



This is a common try for White but I struggle to see how Black can be worse, given that he holds the two bishops. It is worth mentioning that an almost identical position can occur after 6.♗g5 h6 7.♗xf6 ♕xf6, as discussed in variation A of the next chapter. Generally the placement of the pawn on h7 instead of h6 will not alter the evaluation a great deal.

We will consider **B1) 8.e3**, **B2) 8.♕a4†** and **B3) 8.♕b3**.

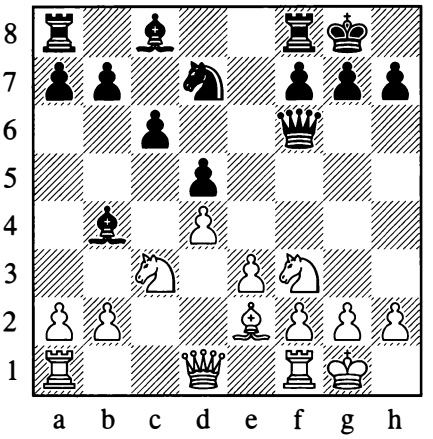
B1) 8.e3 0–0 9.♗e2

9.♗d3 ♗g4 is fine for Black.

9.♕b3 has a played a few times. I suggest 9...c5, which has occurred in several games in the similar position with the pawn on h6, which makes no real difference. See variation A1 of the next chapter on page 40 for full details.

9...c6 10.0–0 ♘d7

10...♗f5!? 11.♕b3 ♕e7= is also perfectly satisfactory.



11.a3 ♗d6 12.b4?!

It may seem harsh to call this natural move dubious, but White should be concentrating on equalizing.

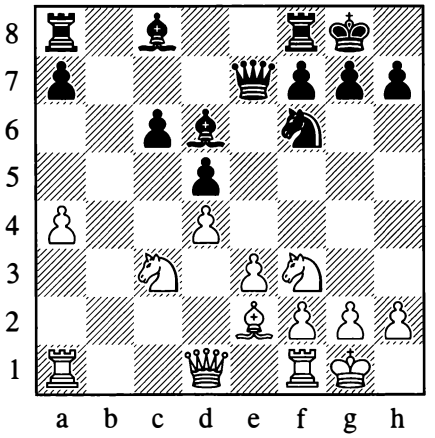
12.e4 dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♕e7 14.♘xd6 ♕xd6= would have been better.

12...♕e7 13.b5

The minority attack is an absolutely typical plan for this structure, so it is useful to see how Black deals with it.

13...♘f6 14.bxc6 bxc6 15.a4

This move saves the a-pawn but weakens the b4-square, a point highlighted by Black's next move.

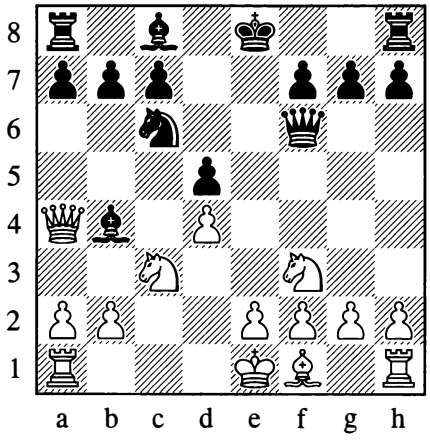


15...a5! 16.♘d2 ♗f5 17.♘b3 ♖fb8∓

Fier – Yu Yangyi, Dubai 2014. White's play from move 12 onwards was far from perfect; nevertheless, the way Black dealt with the minority attack and took over on the queenside is highly instructive.

B2) 8.♕a4† ♘c6

As we will see throughout the Ragozin section, White can include these moves at virtually any time he wants, until Black has castled.



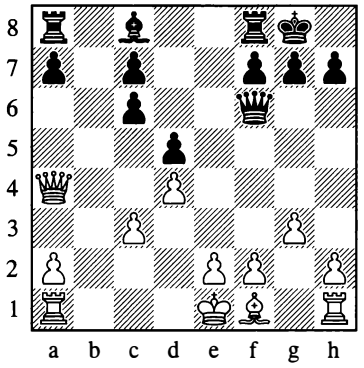
9.e3

9.♘e5?!

I encountered this move in a league match in 2016, and went on to win a most enjoyable game.

9...0–0 10.♘xc6 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 bxc6 12.g3

12.e3 ♕g6∓ occurred in another game, and after the further 13.♖c1 ♗f5 14.g4? ♗e4 White was already losing in Schnabel – Diez, Germany 1993.



12...a5!

Best, although 12...♗f5 13.♗g2 ♖fe8 14.♕a6 h5↑ is also promising.

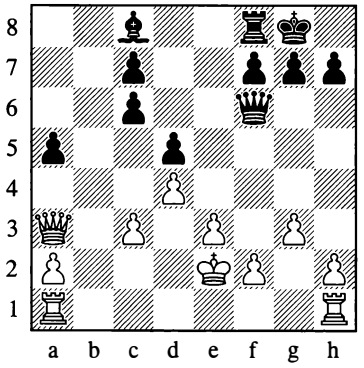
13.e3?

White had to try 13.♗g2 ♗a6 14.♗f3 ♖fe8 15.0–0 ♗xe2 16.♗xe2 ♖xe2 followed by grovelling to make a draw.

13...♖b8! 14.♗e2 ♖b2

White is unable to get his king to safety, and I was able to finish the game in good style.

15.♕a3 ♖xe2†! 16.♔xe2



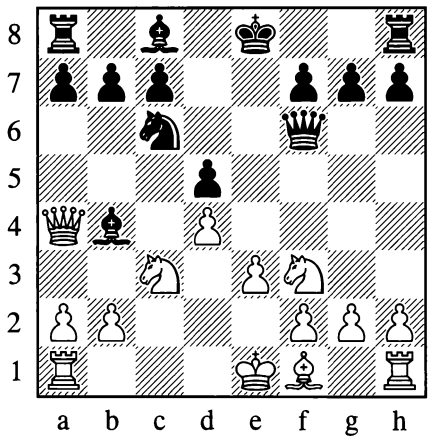
16...♗a6†

16...♗g4†! was even more accurate, when 17.♔f1 ♕f3 18.♖g1 ♕e2† 19.♔g2 ♗f3† 20.♔h3 f5 21.♕e7 ♕xf2–+ leads to mate.

The text move is perfectly sufficient though.

17.c4 ♗xc4† 18.♔d2 ♕xf2† 19.♔c1 ♗f1! 20.♕b2 ♕f3

White resigned in McMahon – R. Pert, London 2016, as Black is poised to win the h1-rook and, inevitably, the game.

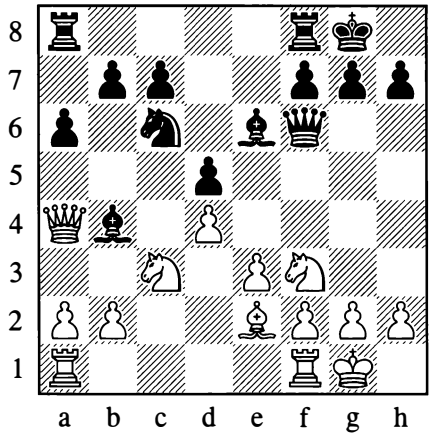


9...0–0 10.♗b5

10.♗e2 a6 11.0–0 ♗e6 is the same thing.

10...♗g4 11.♗e2 ♗e6 12.0–0 a6

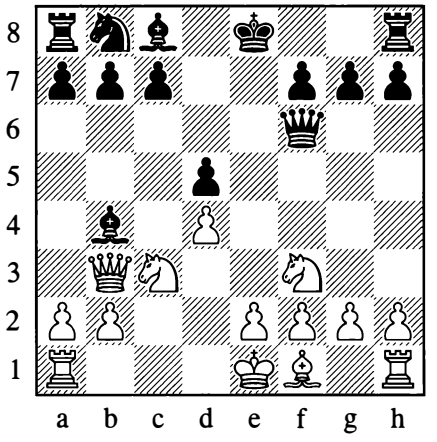
I will say more about this type of position in variation D of Chapter 3, which deals with 6.♕a4†. A brief example continued:



13.♖ac1 ♗d6 14.a3 ♘e7=

Cox – Fressinet, Isle of Man 2014. You can find an almost identical position on page 70, except that the pawn is on h7 here instead of h6. It makes no real difference to the evaluation, so I refer you to the later chapter for a more detailed discussion of such positions.

B3) 8.♕b3

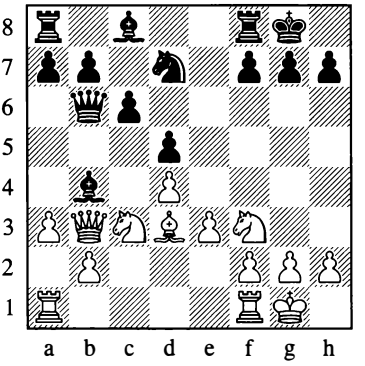


8...♕b6!

8...♕d6 has been played more frequently but I was unable to find equality after: 9.e3! (9.a3 is no problem: 9...♗xc3† 10.♕xc3 0–0 11.e3 ♗f5 12.♖c1 c6 13.♕b3 b6 14.♕b4 ♕e6 15.♕c3 ♖c8= followed by ...♘d7, Hort – Larsen, Hastings 1972) 9...♗f5!?N Otherwise ♗d3 gives White an ideal set-up. 10.♗e2 (10.♘h4!?) 10...0–0 11.0–0 c6 12.a3 ♗xc3 13.bxc3 White is slightly better.

9.a3

9.e3 leads to a normal game where chances are level. 9...c6 10.♗d3 ♘d7 11.0–0 0–0 12.a3

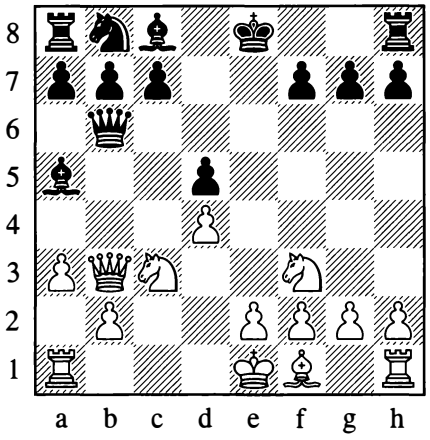


Here 12...♗e7 gave Black a good game in Wojtaszek – Izoria, Moscow 2005, but I would

prefer the more active 12...♗d6N. Objectively it's equal, but I would take Black's bishop pair if given the choice.

9...♗a5!?

9...♗xc3† 10.♕xc3 0–0 11.e3 ♗f5 is also okay for Black, and is similar to the Larsen – Hort game mentioned above. The text move is more ambitious, as Black wants to keep the bishop pair.



10.♕c2

10.♕xb6 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 axb6 12.e3 ♗e6 is equal, although Black can certainly try to exploit the weak a-pawn. Black could also consider 10...axb6!?, hoping to play ...c6 and ...b5 to preserve his bishop. Obviously 11.b4?? ♗xb4 is no good for White, but 11.♖c1! keeps things roughly balanced.

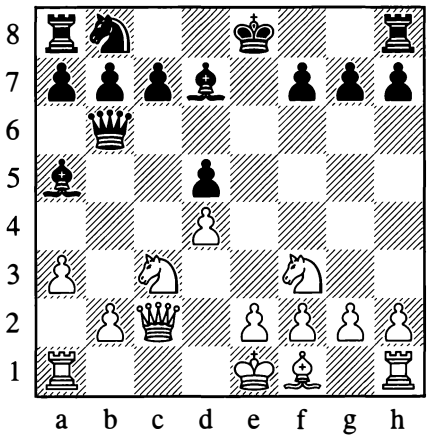
10...♗f5!

This is a common tactical theme which we will see in some other variations too.

11.♕a4†

11.♕xf5? ♕xb2 12.♖b1 (12.♖d1 ♗xc3† 13.♘d2 ♘c6–+; 12.♕c8† ♔e7 13.♕xh8 ♕xa1† 14.♔d2 ♕xc3†–+) 12...♕xc3† 13.♔d1 0–0 14.♕xd5 ♘c6∓ favours Black.

11...♗d7 12.♕c2



12...♗f5

This was played in the only game, in which Black was evidently satisfied with an early draw. Should you wish to play for a win, there are two decent options:

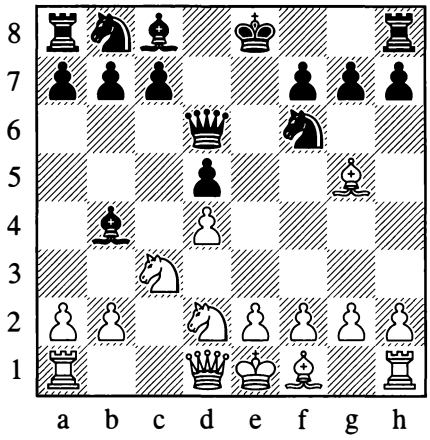
12...♗xc3† 13.♕xc3 0–0 14.e3 ♗f5 15.♗d3 ♗xd3 16.♕xd3 ♘d7 17.0–0 ♖fe8 18.♖ac1 c6 19.♖c2 ♘f6=

12...♕g6 13.♕xg6 ♗xc3† 14.bxc3 hxg6= In both cases, the chances are level but a lot of play remains.

13.♕a4† ♗d7 14.♕c2 ♗f5

A draw was agreed in Kasimdzhanov – Yu Yangyi, Sharjah 2014.

C) 7.♘d2



Arguably the critical try, as it pre-empts Black's plan while avoiding simplifications, but it is a concession to drop the knight back to an inferior square.

7...♗f5!

I believe this is Black's best approach, as he activates the bishop while delaying the decision as to whether to move the c-pawn one or two squares.

A solid alternative is:

7...c6 8.e3

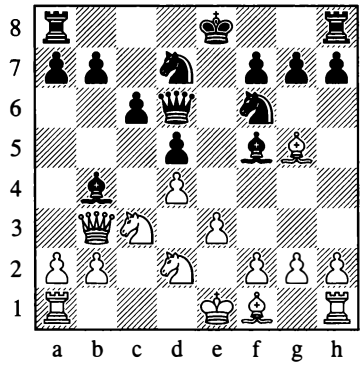
8.♕c2 h6 9.♘b5 ♗xd2† 10.♗xd2 ♕e7 11.♘c3 0–0 12.e3 c5 13.♘e2 ♘e4 14.dxc5 ♘c6= Inarkiev – Khalifman, Fuegen 2006.

8...♗f5 9.♕b3

9.a3 ♗a5 10.b4 ♗d8 was okay for Black in Kluger – Taimanov, Marianske Lazne 1962.

9...♘bd7

9...♕e7 occurred in Polugaevsky – Taimanov, Rostov-on-Don 1961, when 10.♗xf6N would have promised White a slight edge.



10.a3 ♗xc3

10...♗a5 11.♕xb7 0–0 gives Black some compensation for the pawn, but after 12.♗f4 ♕e6 13.♗e2 a6 14.♕b3 c5 15.♕a4 ♗xc3 16.bxc3 c4 17.0–0 ♖a7 White is better.

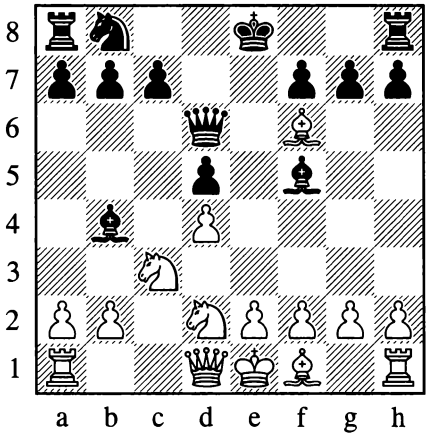
11.bxc3 b6 12.c4 0–0 13.♗f4 ♕e6 14.♗e2 c5

White had a tiny edge with the two bishops, but Black's position remained perfectly playable in Sanikidze – Harikrishna, Cappelle-la-Grande 2012.

After my recommended move, White's three main tries are **C1) 8.♗xf6?!**, **C2) 8.e3** and **C3) 8.♘b5**.

8.♖c1 c6 9.e3 ♘bd7 10.a3 ♗a5 11.♗f4 ♕e7 12.♗e2 0–0 13.0–0 h6N (13...b5?! 14.♘b3± Lorparizangeneh – Wang Hao, Abu Dhabi 2014) 14.b4 ♗b6 15.♘b3 ♖fe8 reaches a normal position with chances for both sides.

C1) 8.♗xf6?!



White thinks he can exploit the pressure on the d5-pawn to damage Black's kingside, but he is wrong!

8...♕xf6! 9.♘xd5?!

9.e3 c6 gave Black a pleasant game in Sviridova – Zhai Mo, Pune 2014, as White has yielded the bishop pair for nothing. Nevertheless, this is White's best continuation, effectively admitting the previous error.

The text move has not yet been tested, but we should of course check what happens if White grabs the pawn.

9...♕xd4 10.♘xc7†?

This excessively greedy move lands White in even greater strife.

The lesser evil is:

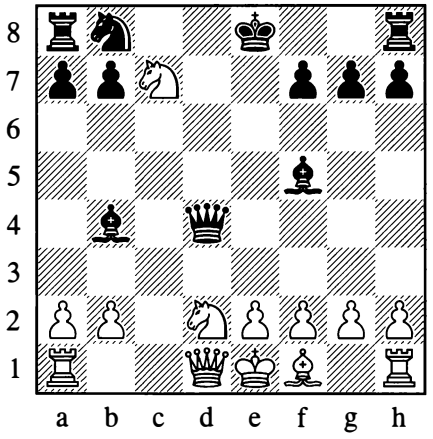
10.♘xb4 ♕xb4 11.♕b3

11.e3 is well met by 11...♘c6 when long castling is in the air.

11.e4 ♗e6 also favours Black. (11...♘c6!? is also possible, as 12.exf5? runs into 12...0–0–0 13.♗e2 ♖he8 followed by ...♘d4.)

11...♘c6∓

Black's lead in development ensures him of the initiative.



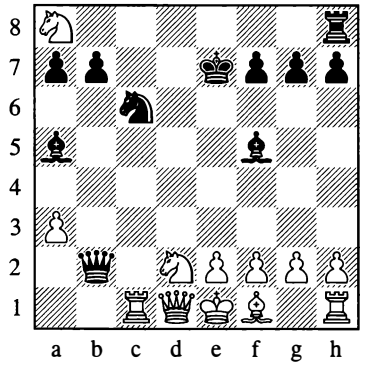
10...♔e7

Suddenly ...♖d8 is on the cards and White is in a world of trouble.

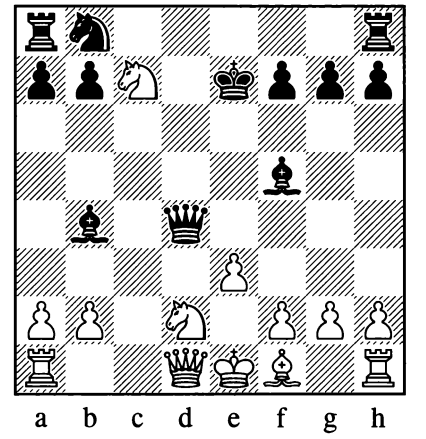
11.e3

11.♘xa8? ♖d8 wins trivially.

11.a3 ♗a5 does not change much, for instance: 12.♖c1 (12.♘xa8 ♕xb2–+) 12...♘c6 13.♘xa8 ♕xb2

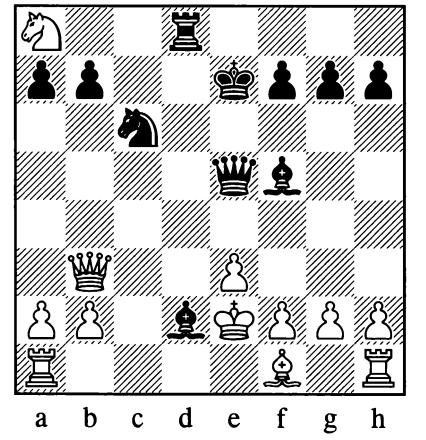


14.e4 ♗xe4 15.♗c4 ♖xa8 16.0–0 ♗xd2–+



11...♕e5 12.♘xa8 ♖d8 13.♕b3 ♗xd2† 14.♔e2 ♘c6

14...♗g4†!? is a good alternative, loosening e3, and after 15.f3 ♘c6 16.♕xb7† ♔f8 Black is also winning.



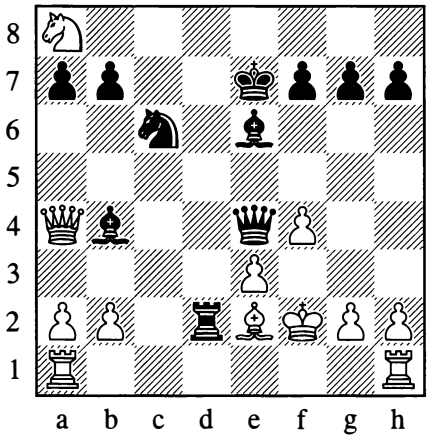
15.f4

15.♕xb7† ♔f8 (15...♖d7 16.♕xc6 ♗g4†–+) 16.♕xc6 ♗g4† 17.f3 ♕xe3† wins.

The text move is a sensible attempt by White to free some space for his king, but he remains too far behind in development to survive.

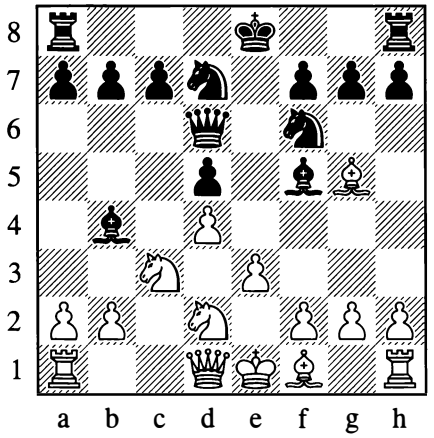
15...♕e4 16.♔f2 ♗e6 17.♕a3† ♗b4 18.♕a4 ♖d2† 19.♗e2

Black can seal the victory with a simple combination:



19...♖xe2†! 20.♔xe2 ♕xg2† 21.♔d3 ♕d2† 22.♔e4 ♕d5#

C2) 8.e3 ♘bd7



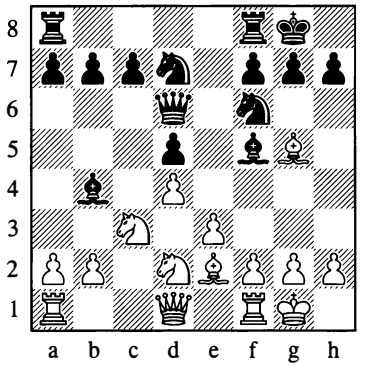
Black continues to delay any decision regarding the c-pawn.

9.♗f4

I checked three other moves:

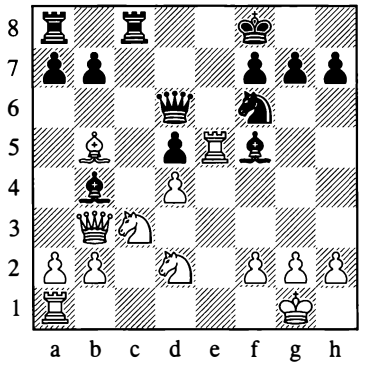
9.♘b5N♕b6 10.♗xf6 is a forcing continuation, but Black is fine after: 10...♗xd2† (10...♘xf6? 11.♘xc7†! ♕xc7 12.♕a4†± is a clever trick to be aware of; 10...gxf6!? could be considered though...) 11.♕xd2 ♘xf6 With easy equality.

9.♗e2 0–0 10.0–0 occurred in Malakhatko – Karavade, Abu Dhabi 2013, and here I suggest:

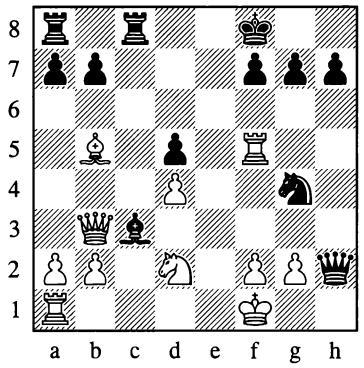


10...h6!N 11.♗f4 ♕e7 12.♖c1 (12.♗xc7 gets nowhere after 12...♖ac8 13.♗g3 ♗xc3 14.bxc3 ♖xc3=) 12...c6 13.a3 ♗d6 (13...♗a5!?) 14.♗xd6 ♕xd6 The position remains balanced.

9.♕b3 c5 10.♗xf6 ♘xf6 11.♗b5† ♔e7 leads to double-edged play: 12.0–0 cxd4 13.exd4 ♖hc8 14.♖fe1† ♔f8∞ In the game White committed an error. 15.♖e5?

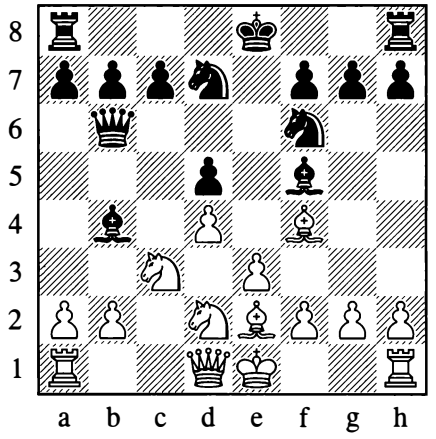


15...♘g4!N This strong move would have given White lots to think about. (15...♗g6 16.♗e2 ♕b6 was unclear in Xiu Deshun – Wei Yi, Xinghua 2013) 16.♖xf5 (16.♕xd5? ♘xe5–+) 16...♕xh2† 17.♔f1 ♗xc3



18.♕xd5 (18.bxc3? ♖e8–+) 18...♘f6 19.♖xf6 gxf6 20.♘f3 ♕h1† 21.♘g1 ♗xb2∓

9...♕b6 10.♗e2



10...c5!?

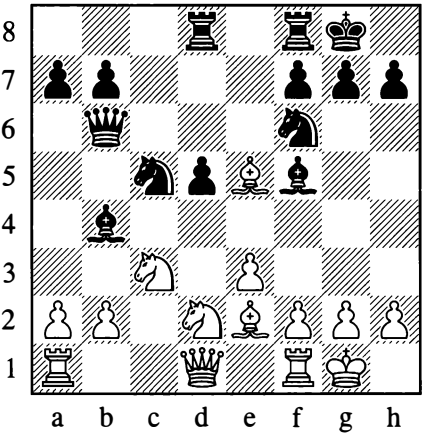
This dynamic move was Hou Yifan's choice.

10...0–0N also looks reasonable, although White may be tempted to try 11.g4!? (11.0–0 h6 12.♖c1 c6=) 11...♗e6 12.♖c1!? (12.g5 ♘e8↑) followed by h2-h3 with a double-edged game.

10...h6!?N is a slight refinement on the above line, allowing Black to meet 11.g4 with 11...♗g6∞ when g4-g5 is not an option. Alternatively, 11.0–0 0–0 12.♖c1 c6 13.a3 ♗e7 leads to a complex, roughly balanced middlegame.

11.dxc5 ♘xc5 12.♗e5 0–0 13.0–0 ♖ad8

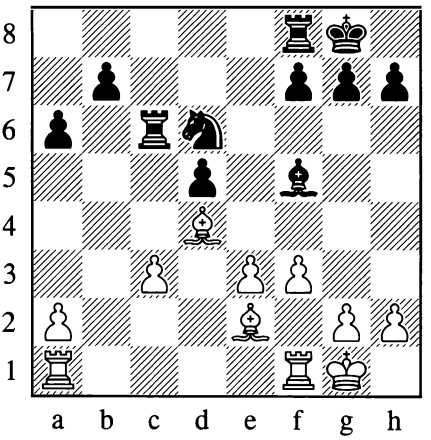
13...♖fd8 looks like a slight improvement which could potentially save a tempo on the game continuation.



14.♗d4 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♕c6 16.♕c1 ♘fe4 17.♘xe4 ♘xe4

The position is close to equal, and I have included the rest of the game between these two strong players for those who want to play through it.

18.f3 ♘d6 19.♕a3 a6 20.♕c5 ♖c8 21.♕xc6 ♖xc6

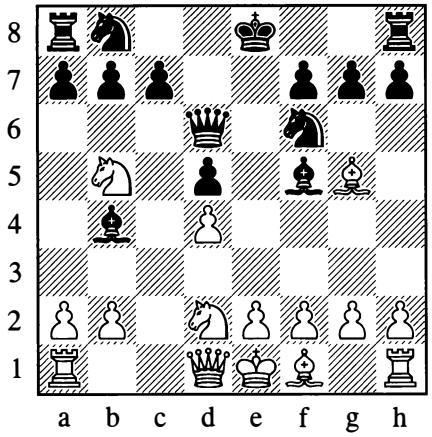


22.a4 h5 23.♖a2 ♖e8 24.♔f2 ♖e7 25.♖b2 ♘c4 26.♗xc4 ♖xc4 27.♖a1 f6 28.h4 ♗g6 29.♖b4 ♖ec7 30.♖xc4 ♖xc4 31.a5 ♗e8

32.♖a2 ♖a4 33.♖xa4 ♗xa4 34.g4 hxg4 35.fxg4 ♔f7 36.g5 fxg5 37.hxg5 ♔g6 38.♔g3 ♔xg5 39.♗xg7 ♔f5 40.♔f3 ♗d1†

½–½ Wojtaszek – Hou Yifan, Biel 2014.

C3) 8.♘b5



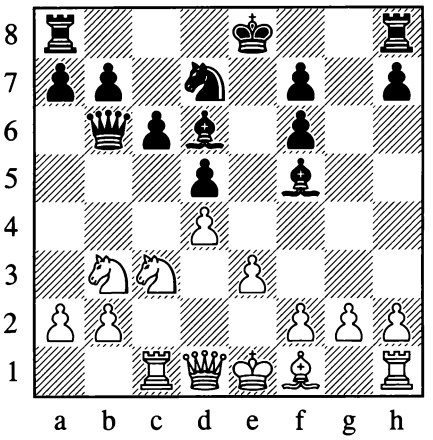
This rather critical move was Grischuk's choice, but it feels a bit artificial.

8...♕b6 9.♗xf6

White's idea is to use the attack on c7 to temporarily overload the black queen and force a weakening of his kingside structure. In return, Black can point to his strong bishop pair and lead in development.

9...gxf6 10.e3 c6 11.♘c3 ♘d7 12.♖c1 ♗d6 13.♘b3

Black has several safe moves available to get a solid game, but I would like to be a bit more adventurous.



13...a5!N

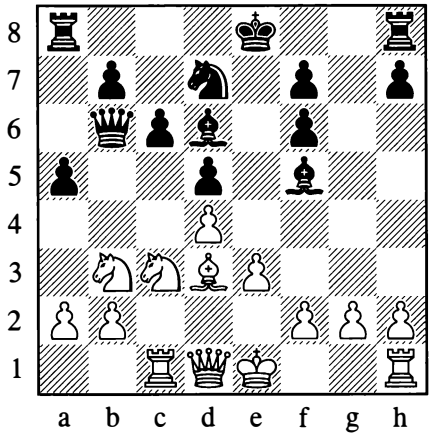
13...♕d8 14.♗d3 ♗g6 15.♕c2 ♕e7 16.0–0 0–0 17.♖ce1 ♗b4 18.♘d2 ♔h8 19.f4 ♖g8 20.f5 ♗h5± was the continuation of Grischuk – Yu Yangyi, Dubai 2014.

14.♗d3

14.♘a4? is no good: 14...♕b4† 15.♘d2 (15.♘c3 a4∓) 15...b5 16.♘c3 ♕xb2∓

14.♕d2 a4 15.♘a1 is playable, but hardly looks inspiring for White.

The text move is the computer's choice, developing a piece while relying on indirect defence of the b2-pawn. I still prefer Black's position though.



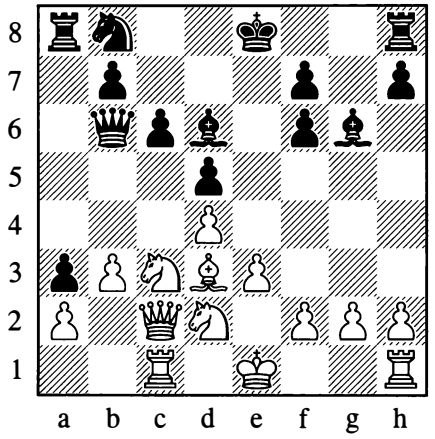
14...♗g6!

Unfortunately, grabbing the b2-pawn doesn't work: 14...♗xd3? 15.♕xd3 a4 16.♘d2 ♕xb2? 17.0–0 ♕b6 18.e4→ with a dangerous initiative for White.

15.♕c2 a4 16.♘d2 a3 17.b3 ♘b8!?

The knight is heading for b4.

17...♗b4∞ also leads to interesting play.



18.♘f3

18.♘xd5?! doesn't quite work after 18...cxd5 19.♕c8† ♕d8 20.♗b5† (or 20.♕xb7 ♘d7 21.♕xd5 ♗b4 22.♗b5 ♖a7∓) 20...♔e7 21.♕xb7† ♘d7∓ with ...♖b8 to follow.

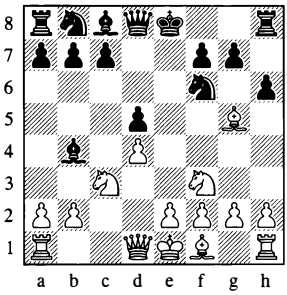
18...♘a6 19.♕d2 ♘b4∞

Black's chances are not worse in this complex position.

Conclusion

6...♕d6!? remains a relatively rare choice, but it deserves serious consideration. Not only is White is struggling to prove any advantage, but the line also doesn't demand a huge amount of theoretical knowledge from Black. I would not be at all surprised if 6...♕d6 becomes more popular in the near future.

Chapter 2



6.♗g5 h6

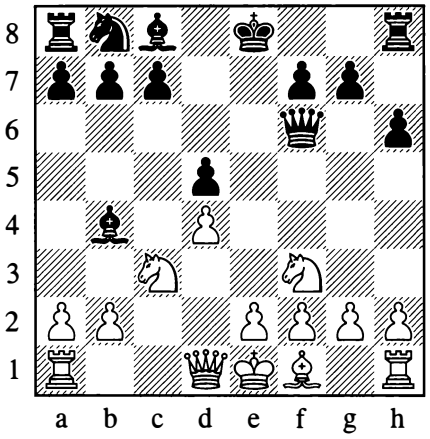
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♗g5 h6

A) 7.♗xf6 ♕xf6 8.♕b3 **39**
A1) 8...c5!? **40**
A2) 8...♕b6 **40**
B) 7.♗h4 ♘bd7 **42**
B1) 8.♘d2 **42**
B2) 8.♕c2 g5 9.♗g3 ♘e4 10.♘d2 ♘xg3 11.hxg3 c6 **44**
B21) 12.e3 **44**
B22) 12.a3 **45**
B3) 8.e3 g5 9.♗g3 ♘e4 **46**
B31) 10.♕b3 **47**
B32) 10.♘d2 **48**
B33) 10.♕c2 ♘b6 **50**
B331) 11.♗d3 **50**
B332) 11.♘d2 ♘xg3 12.hxg3 c6! **51**
B3321) 13.a3 **52**
B3322) 13.♗d3 **53**

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♗g5 h6

This is the main line, putting the question to the g5-bishop straight away. If it drops back to h4 then ...g5 is always on the cards, leading to murky play, which some White players will prefer to avoid. We will consider **A) 7.♗xf6** followed by the more ambitious **B) 7.♗h4**.

A) 7.♗xf6 ♕xf6

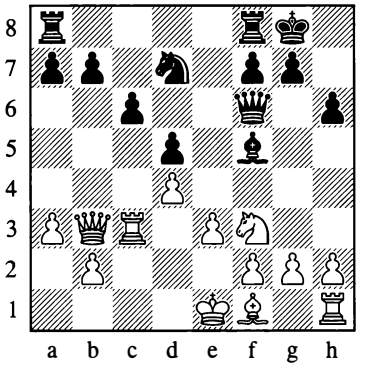


This way White simplifies the position. Objectively it's equal but, with the bishop pair and a board full of pieces, Black can get ready for a long game. The position is almost identical to the 6...♕d6 7.♗xf6 line from the previous chapter, the only difference being the pawn's placement on h6 instead of h7, so you should know a bit about these positions whichever line you choose.

8.♕b3

8.♕a4† ♘c6 is covered under the 6.♕a4† move order – see variation D2 of Chapter 3.

8.♖c1 0–0 9.a3 ♗xc3† 10.♖xc3 c6 11.e3 ♗f5= is fine for Black. It is worth adding that 12.♕b3 was well met by 12...♘d7! in Estremera Panos – Rodriguez Vargas, Vendrell 1993. In the game White declined the b7-pawn and got nowhere, but it's worth seeing what happens if he takes it:



13.♕xb7N ♖fb8 14.♕xc6 ♕xc6 15.♖xc6 ♖xb2 16.♗e2 ♖a2 17.♖c1 ♖b8∞ Black has a strong initiative for the pawn.

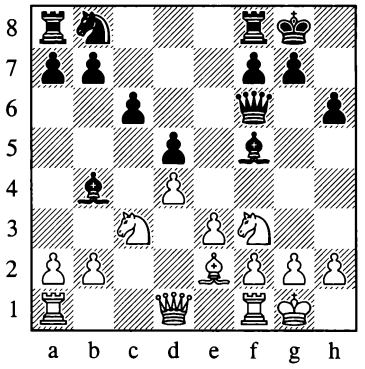
The main alternative is:

8.e3 0–0 9.♗e2

9.♕b3 gives Black a choice: 9...c5 transposes to the note on 9.e3 in variation A1, while 9...♕b6 10.♗d3 c6 transposes to the note on 9.e3 in variation A2.

9...c6 10.0–0 ♗f5

10...♗d6 is a good alternative, for instance: 11.e4 (11.♘e1?! ♖e8 12.♘d3 was too slow in Brunello – Socko, Legnica 2013; with the bishop pair and easy development, Black certainly can't be worse) 11...dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♕e7 13.♗d3 ♗e6=



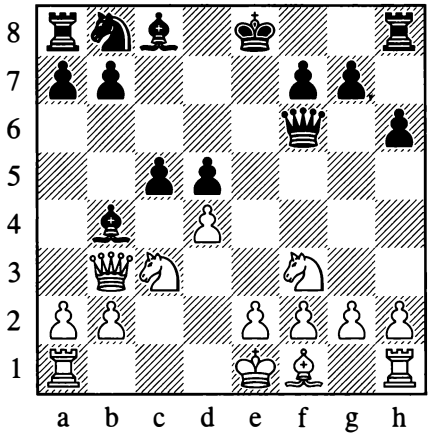
11.♕b3

11.a3 ♗d6 12.b4 was played in Navara – Farago, Deizisau 2005; I suggest 12...♘d7N 13.b5 ♕e6 14.bxc6 bxc6= intending ...♘f6.

11...♕e7 12.♘e5 ♘d7 13.♘d3
13.f4 a5∞
13...a5=

Let's return to 8.♕b3. Black has tested a number of responses, but **A1) 8...c5!?** and **A2) 8...♕b6** are my two favourites.

A1) 8...c5!?



This looks active and ambitious, but it often just leads to an equal endgame.

9.a3

9.dxc5 ♘c6 10.e3 ♗e6 is covered under 5.♕b3 – see variation A2 of Chapter 12.

9.e3 0–0 10.dxc5 (10.♗e2?! ♘c6 11.dxc5 ♗e6 12.♕c2 d4 13.exd4 ♘xd4 14.♘xd4 ♕xd4∓ Glavinac – Mitkov, Struga 2011) 10...♗xc3† 11.♕xc3 ♕xc3† 12.bxc3 ♗e6 13.♗b5 ♖c8 14.♔d2 ♖xc5 was another level endgame in Leko – Wang Hao, Ningbo 2011.

9...♗xc3† 10.♕xc3 ♘d7 11.♕e3†

This leads to a dull endgame. Other moves enable White to keep the queens on, but he found no advantage in either of the following games:

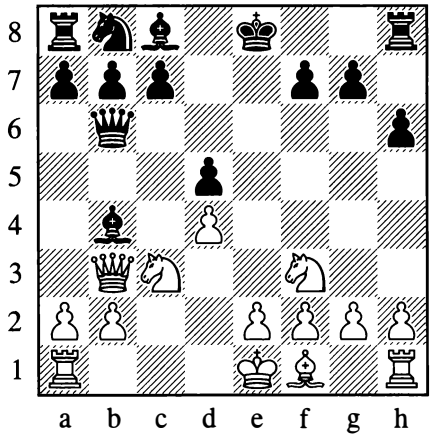
11.e3 0–0 12.♗e2 b6 13.0–0 ♗b7 14.♖ac1 c4 15.♘d2 b5 16.♗f3 ♕e7 17.♕a5 ♗c6 18.b3 ♕d6= Shirov – Giri, Hoogeveen 2014.

11.g3 0–0 12.♗g2 ♖e8 13.e3 b6 14.0–0 ♗b7= Giri – Hou Yifan, Shamkir 2016.

11...♕e7 12.♕xe7† ♔xe7 13.dxc5 ♘xc5 14.♖c1 ♔d6=

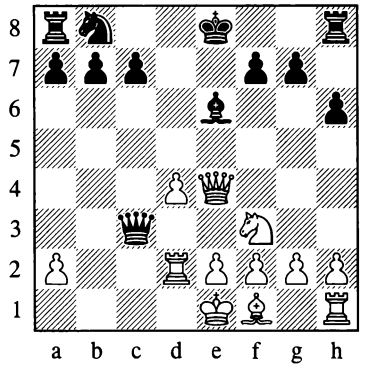
Nakamura – Radjabov, Tashkent 2014. We may conclude that 8...c5 is an efficient equalizer, but perhaps not an ideal choice for players aiming for more than a draw with the black pieces.

A2) 8...♕b6



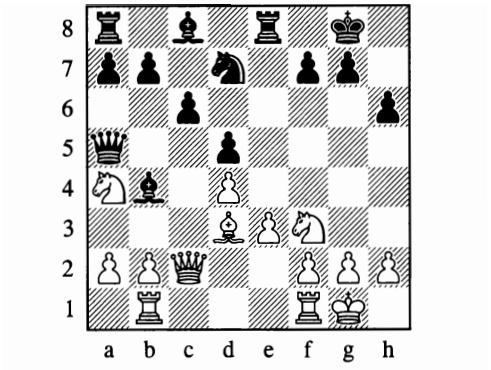
9.a3

9.♕xd5?! doesn't work: 9...♗e6 (9...♗xc3† 10.bxc3 ♕b2 11.♖d1 ♕xc3† 12.♖d2 ♕a1† 13.♖d1 ♕c3†=) 10.♕e4 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 ♕b2 12.♖d1N (A possible attempt to improve on 12.♖b1 ♕xc3† 13.♘d2 0–0, when Black had more than enough play for the pawn in Johanson – Grage, email 2003) 12...♕xc3† 13.♖d2



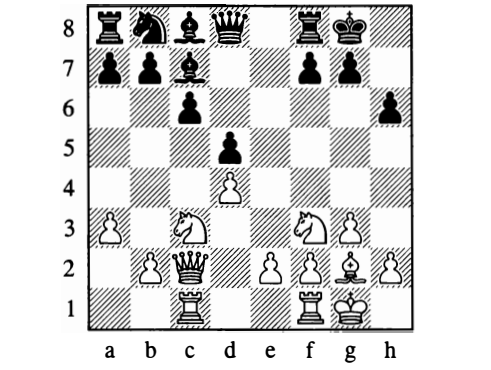
13...♘c6!? (13...♕a1† leads to a draw if Black wants it) 14.e3 (14.d5?? 0–0–0–+) 14...♘b4 15.♗e2 0–0∓ White remains under some pressure, with ...♗d5 on the cards.

9.e3 c6 10.♗d3 gives Black a choice of equal continuations: 10...0–0 (10...♗d6 11.♕c2 ♗e6 12.0–0 ♘d7 13.♖ab1 a5 14.a3 0–0= Stefanova – Hou Yifan, Istanbul [ol] 2012) 11.0–0 ♖e8 12.♖ab1 ♘d7 13.♘a4 ♕a5 14.♕c2



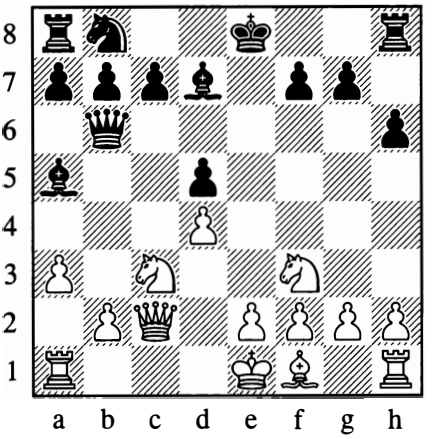
14...♗d6= Ipatov – Matlakov, Moscow 2012.

9.♖c1 c6 10.a3 ♗a5 11.♕c2 ♕d8 12.g3 0–0 13.♗g2 ♗c7 leads to mutual chances; Black has the bishop pair but White is better developed. 14.0–0



14...♗e6!N (14...♗d6?! occurred in Cramling – Lupulescu, Gibraltar 2012, but this is one bishop move too many for my taste!) 15.e4 dxe4 16.♘xe4 ♘d7 17.♖fe1 ♖e8 18.♖e3 ♗f5=

9...♗a5 10.♕a4† ♗d7 11.♕c2



11...♗f5!

We already encountered this idea in variation B3 of the previous chapter. Once again, a repetition is entirely possible, although either player can avoid it if he really wants to.

11...♗xc3†!?

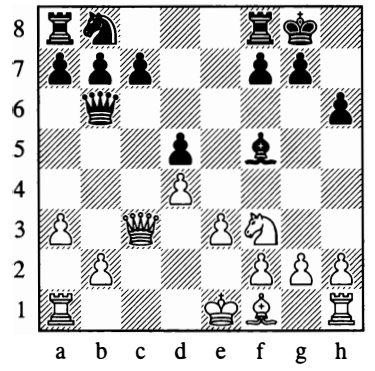
If you prefer to keep the game going, this is a sensible way of doing so.

12.♕xc3

12.bxc3 0–0 13.e3 c5 14.♖b1 ♕c7=

12...0–0 13.e3 ♗f5N

13...♖c8 14.♗d3 ♗b5= was also fine in Lou Yiping – Yu Yangyi, Reykjavik 2013.



14.♗e2

14.♗d3 ♗xd3 15.♕xd3 ♘d7 is also equal, but plenty of play remains.

14...♘d7 15.0–0 ♖fe8 16.♖ac1

16.b4 can be met by 16...c6 intending ...a5. 16...c6 17.♖fd1 a5=

And a normal game continues.

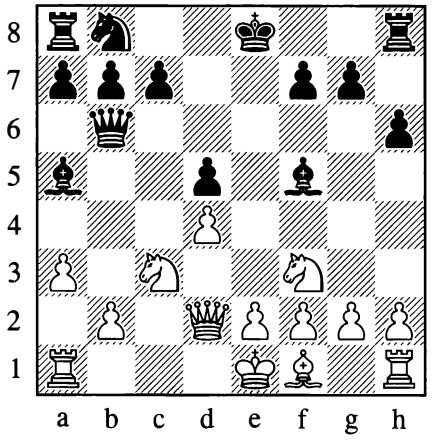
12.♕d2!?

White has tried this winning attempt in a couple of games.

Taking the bishop is more of a losing attempt: 12.♕xf5?! ♕xb2 13.♖b1 (13.♕c8†?? ♔e7 14.♕xh8 ♗xc3†–+; 13.♖d1 ♗xc3† 14.♘d2 ♘c6–+) 13...♕xc3† 14.♔d1 0–0 15.e3 ♕xa3 16.♕xd5 ♘c6∓ White was a pawn down with a misplaced king in Portisch – Khenkin, Saint Vincent 2005.

12.♕a4† ♗d7 13.♕c2 ♗f5 led to a draw in Istratescu – Gharamian, Metz 2014, and a few other games.

12.♕c1 is similar to the main line after 12...♕b3 or 12...♕e6N.



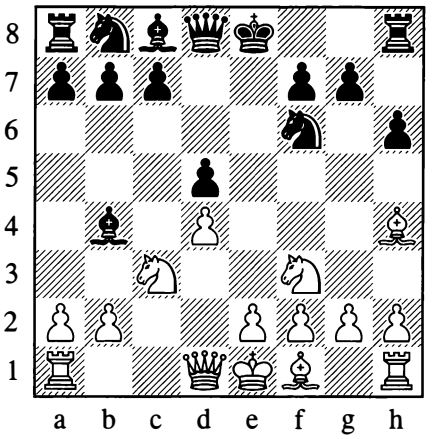
12...♕e6

12...♕b3!? is also good.

13.b4 ♗b6 14.e3 c6 15.♗d3 ♘d7=

Cmilyte – Hou Yifan, Beijing (blindfold) 2011. 7.♗xf6 is a solid approach from White, but it's not much of an attempt for an advantage.

B) 7.♗h4



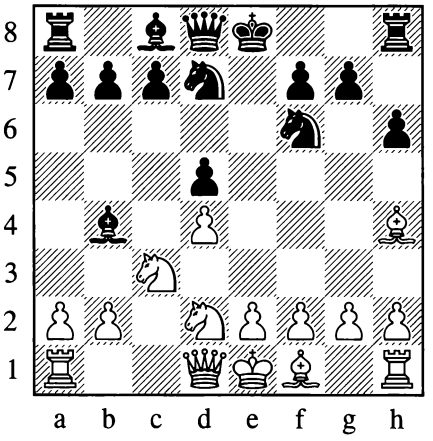
With this move White accepts the challenge and preserves his bishop.

7...♘bd7

The start of a dynamic system which was popularized recently by Aronian. Black develops a piece without doing anything committal, and prepares to play ...g5 and ...♘e4, with active piece play in return for some kingside weaknesses. This move is not mentioned by Kaufman, who only analyses 7...g5 and 7...c5.

White has three main options: **B1) 8.♘d2**, **B2) 8.♕c2** and **B3) 8.e3**.

B1) 8.♘d2



This prophylactic move anticipates the plan of ...g5 followed by ...♘e4. It suffers from an obvious drawback though, as Black can simply treat the position as a Queen's Gambit Declined, where the d2-knight should be slightly misplaced, having left the active f3-square.

8...♗e7!?

Black moves the bishop for the second time, but he actually gets a more comfortable version of a Queen's Gambit Declined, as White has effectively spent his extra tempo moving his king's knight to an inferior square. Black may try to exploit this by playing actively in the centre with ...c5.

8...c6 is a reasonable alternative, and after 9.e3 Black has two main options:

a) 9...♘f8

This looks tempting, but perhaps Black is being too clever for his own good.

10.♗d3 ♘g6 11.♗g3 0–0

11...♗d6 12.♕c2 ♗xg3 13.hxg3 ♘e7± Nakamura – Lenderman, Saint Louis 2012.

The text move is given by Ramirez but I cannot recommend it. White can secure an edge with:

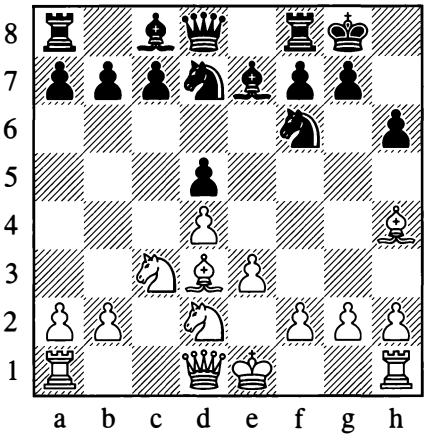
12.0–0!

Ramirez gives 12.♕c2?! ♘h5 13.♗xg6?! (13.a3±; 13.0–0!?±) 13...fxg6 14.♕xg6 ♘xg3 and whichever way White recaptures, Black has great compensation, for instance 15.♕xg3 ♗d6 16.f4 ♕b6 17.0–0–0 ♗f5∓. White has numerous improvement though, as I have noted.

12...♘e7 13.♕c2±

b) In view of the above, 9...0–0 seems a better bet, and after 10.♗d3 ♖e8 11.0–0 ♘f8 Black can hold ...♘g6 back, only playing it if and when it is needed.

9.e3 0–0 10.♗d3



10...c5!

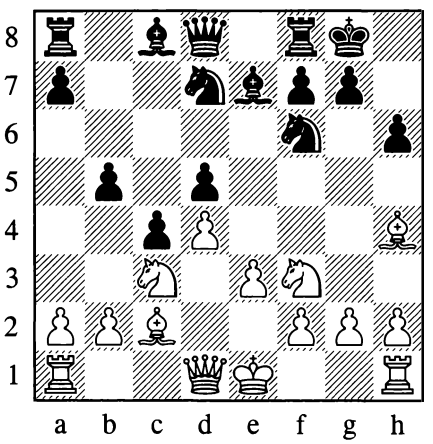
10...b6 11.0–0 ♗b7 12.♖c1 c5 13.♗f5 g6 14.♗h3 ♖e8 was also pretty sensible in Korobov – Matlakov, Sochi 2016, although White may be a touch better.

11.♘f3 c4N

11...b6 12.0–0 ♗b7 13.♖c1 ♘e4 was close to equal in Kotanjian – Barsov, Beirut 2011, but I prefer the text move.

12.♗c2 b5!

This is my idea, based on the following point:

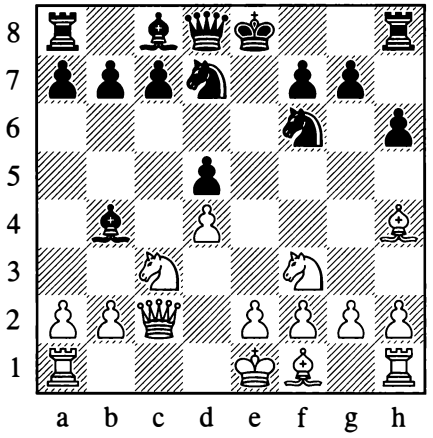


13.♘xb5?!

13.a3 ♕b6∞

13...♕a5† 14.♘c3 ♖b8 15.♖b1 ♗a3!→

B2) 8.♕c2



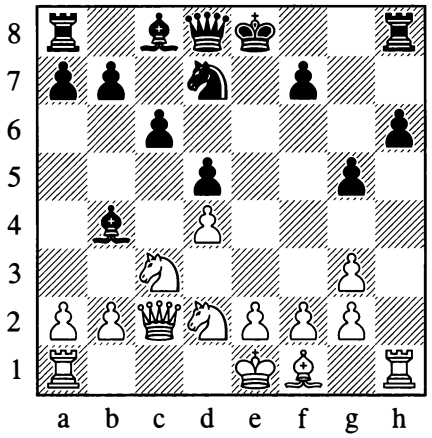
One of the ideas behind this move is to delay e2-e3, keeping the option of playing e2-e4 without loss of time in some lines.

8...g5 9.♗g3 ♘e4 10.♘d2

10.e3 transposes to variation B33 below.

10...♘xg3 11.hxg3 c6

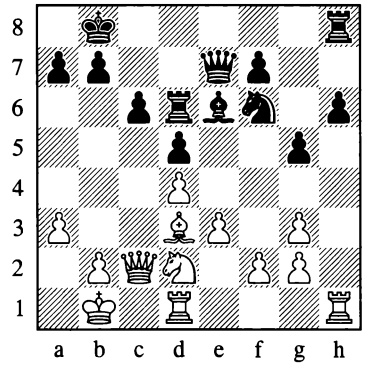
11...♘b6!? also looks fully playable. 12.e3 c6 13.a3 ♗f8 14.b4 a5 15.b5 c5 16.dxc5 ♗xc5 was the move order of the Vachier-Lagrave – Giri game, referenced on page 52 in the notes to variation B3321. Black can also play 13...♗d6 in the above line, and then 14.♗d3 ♗e6 was the move order of the Chuchelov – Eljanov game mentioned in the notes to variation B3322 towards the end of the chapter. The Ragozin is clearly an opening in which transpositions abound!



White can either develop with **B21) 12.e3** or prod the bishop with **B22) 12.a3**.

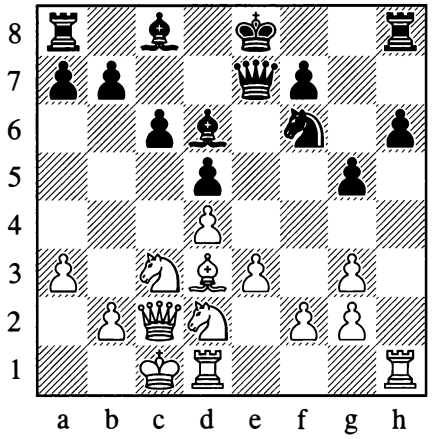
B21) 12.e3 ♘f6 13.♗d3 ♕e7 14.a3

Another high-level game continued 14.0–0–0 ♗e6 15.♔b1 0–0–0 16.a3 ♗d6 (16...♗a5 17.♘b3 ♗c7 is also playable) 17.♘b5 ♔b8 18.♘xd6 ♖xd6 and Black was fine. The game soon ended in a surprising repetition of moves:



19.♘b3 ♗c8 20.♘c5 ♘d7 21.♘a4 ♘b6 22.♘c5 ♘d7 23.♘a4 ♘b6 24.♘c5 ½–½ Vitiugov – Aronian, Sochi 2015.

14...♗d6 15.0–0–0



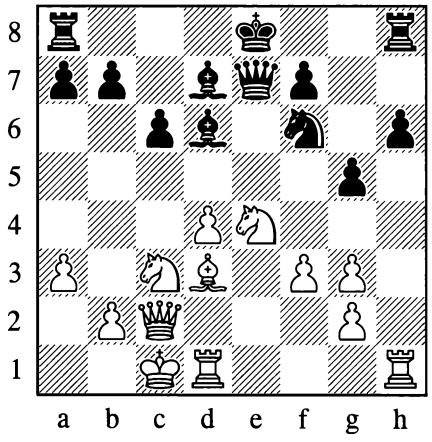
15...♗g4!?N

15...♗e6?! is the wrong square for the bishop in this particular position, as it leaves Black vulnerable to a central attack: 16.e4! dxe4 17.♘dxe4 ♘d5 (17...0–0–0? 18.♘xf6 ♕xf6 19.d5±) 18.♘xd5± Tregubov – Ponomariov, Odessa 2008.

15...♗d7!?N is a more solid alternative which also seems fine. The text move is the most ambitious, as Black provokes a pawn advance in the hope of opening the position for his bishops. A logical continuation is:

16.f3 ♗d7 17.e4 dxe4 18.♘dxe4

18.fxe4 ♘g4 19.e5 ♗c7∞ also leads to complicated play.



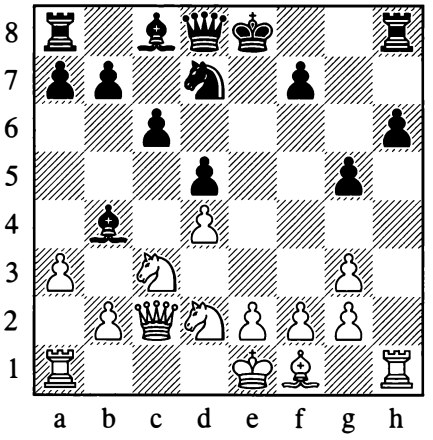
18...♘xe4 19.♘xe4

19.fxe4 ♗c7∞

19...0–0–0∞

All these lines could be analysed further, but my impression is that Black is doing pretty well, and his bishop pair and better pawn structure could make a difference later in the game.

B22) 12.a3



This is not really any better or worse than the previous line, but it is arguably more in the spirit of the 8.♕c2 variation, as White maintains the possibility of e2-e4.

12...♗e7!?

Many bishop moves are possible, and the choice is partly a matter of taste. Here are two alternatives which lead to contrasting types of positions:

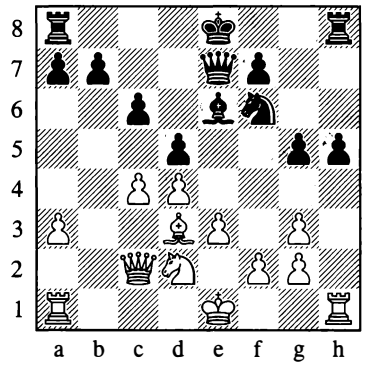
12...♗xc3

I was unable to find equality after:

13.bxc3!

13.♕xc3 ♘f6 14.e3 ♗f5!?N (14...♗e6 15.♗d3± Deac – Melkumyan, Zalakaros 2015) 15.♗d3 ♗xd3 16.♕xd3 ♕e7 17.♘f3 ♘e4 looks equal.

13...♕e7 14.e3 ♘f6 15.c4 ♗e6 16.♗d3 h5



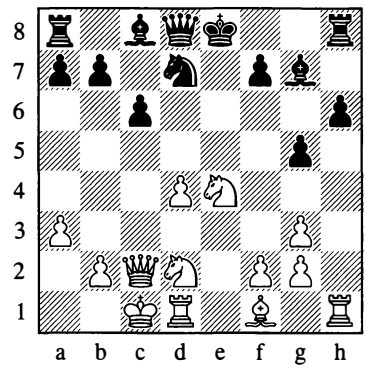
17.♘b3

17.c5 ♔f8 18.♘f3 ♘g4 19.♖b1 ♔g7± also leaves White with an edge although the position remains playable for Black.

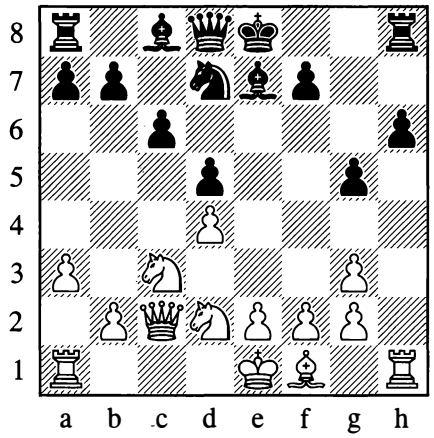
17...♔f8 18.♘c5 ♔g7 19.♘xe6† ♕xe6 20.♗f5±

Black eventually prevailed in Bacrot – Grischuk, Dubai (rapid) 2014, but White is definitely a bit better at this stage.

12...♗f8!? is a more interesting alternative to our main line, for instance: 13.0–0–0 ♗g7 14.e4 dxe4 15.♘cxe4



15...♘b6 (15...0–0!?N 16.♘f3 g4 17.♘h4 ♘f6∞ could also be investigated) 16.♘f3 ♗e6 17.♘c5 ♕c7 18.♘xe6 fxe6 19.♗c4 0–0–0 20.♗xe6† ♔b8⩲ Black had nice play for the pawn in Potkin – Khismatullin, Sochi 2015.



13.e4!?N

This seems like the critical move to consider.

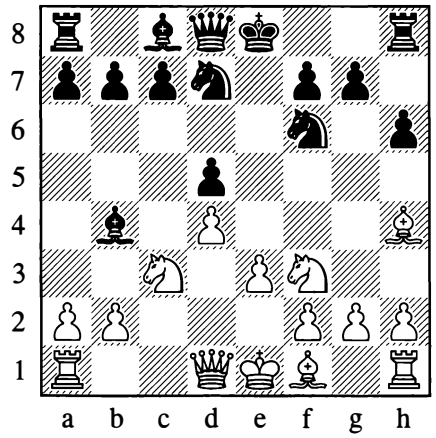
13.e3 ♘b6= was fine for Black in T. Schmidt – Gazi, corr. 2012; the position resembles some of the other variations in this chapter and may easily transpose.

13...♘b6∞

This interesting plan was suggested by Ramirez; the idea is to develop with ...♗e6 and avoid exchanging on e4.

B3) 8.e3

This has been the most popular move by some distance.



8...g5 9.♗g3 ♘e4

Black goes about his business of chasing down the g3-bishop. If White plays ♘d2 we will almost always respond by taking the bishop on g3, rather than grabbing a pawn on c3. Occasionally Black can go into full bishop-hunting mode with ...h5 and ...h4, but this is generally only possible if White plays particularly slowly and indecisively.

White's three main options are **B31) 10.♕b3**, **B32) 10.♘d2** and **B33) 10.♕c2**.

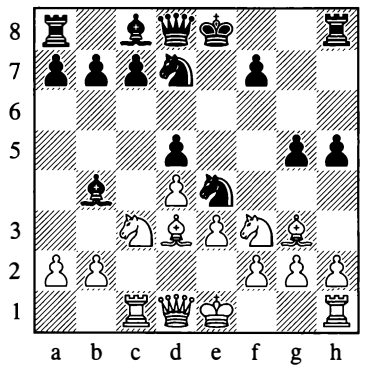
10.♖c1?!

This is too slow, and allows us to play aggressively with:

10...h5! 11.♗d3!?N

11.h4 g4 12.♘d2 occurred in Teske – Urban, Dresden 2014, and now 12...♘xg3N 13.fxg3 c6∓ would have been good for Black. 11.♕b3 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 c6! shores up the centre while ...h4 is still a threat. 13.♘d2?! ♘xd2 14.♔xd2 h4∓ Abasov – Roganovic, Bucharest 2009.

The text move seems as good a try as any to muddy the waters, but Black stays on top after:



11...h4 12.♗xe4 dxe4 13.♗xc7 ♕xc7 14.♘xg5 ♕c6!

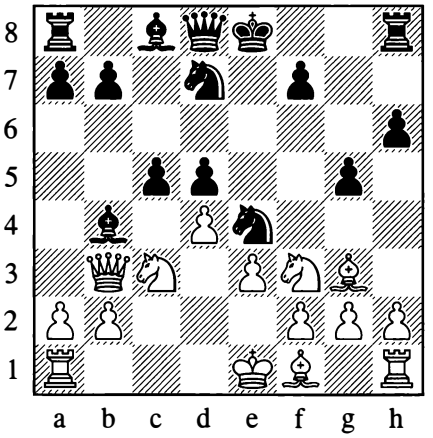
Intending ...♕g6.

15.♘xf7 ♔xf7 16.♕b3† ♕e6 17.♕xb4 ♘f6∓

Black's extra piece is worth more than the three pawns.

B31) 10.♕b3 c5

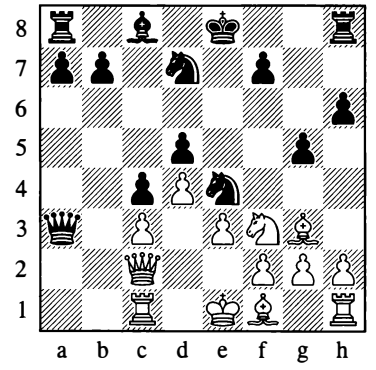
Black defends the bishop while commencing active play in the centre.



11.♖c1

11.dxc5 is nothing to worry about: 11...♕a5 12.a3 ♗xc3† 13.bxc3 0–0 (13...♕xc5 is also fine) 14.♕b4 ♕xc5 15.♕xc5 ♘dxc5 16.♘d4 ♗d7 17.c4 dxc4 18.♗xc4 ♖ac8= Ganguly – Yu Yangyi, Doha 2015.

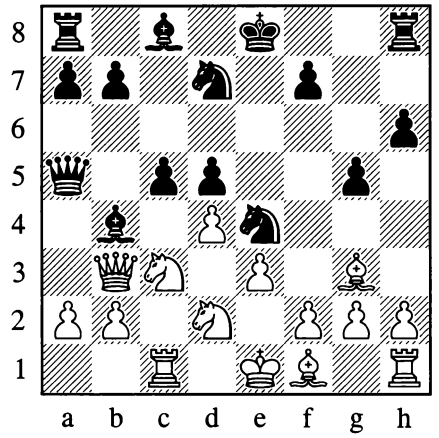
11.a3 implies a pawn sacrifice: 11...♗xc3† 12.bxc3 c4 13.♕b2 ♕b6 14.♕c2 ♕a5 15.♖c1 ♕xa3



16.♗e2? (16.♘d2 is the best chance, but Black is not worse after 16...♘xg3 [or 16...♘df6!?] 17.hxg3 b5∞) 16...♘b6 I found a game in the database, Ayyad – Gundavaa, Al Ain 2015,

ending abruptly here in 0–1. It would be premature to resign here, but White's opening has clearly been a failure.

11...♕a5 12.♘d2



12...♘xd2!N

12...♘xg3 13.hxg3 cxd4 14.exd4± left Black with some problems to solve in Ding Liren – Hou Yifan, Wijk aan Zee 2016. The text move is a natural improvement.

13.♔xd2 ♘f6∓

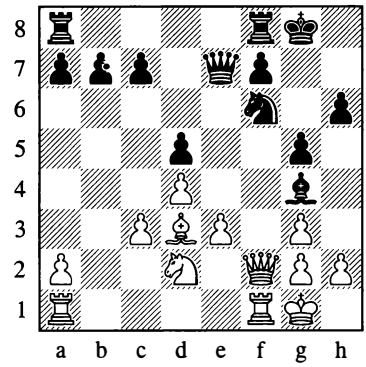
Black is doing well, thanks to White's misplaced king.

B32) 10.♘d2

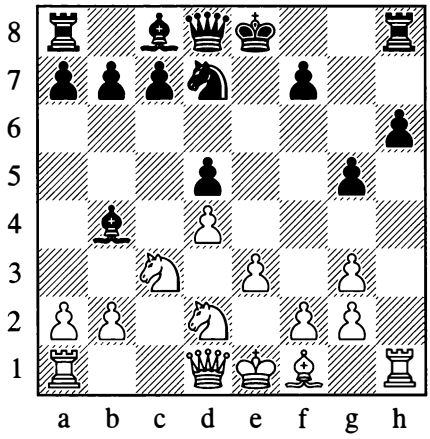
As I mentioned earlier, Black should generally not even think about grabbing a pawn on the queenside in such a situation, and should instead be happy to eliminate the bishop on g3.

10...♘xg3 11.hxg3

11.fxg3!? looks strange to me but it was the choice of Magnus Carlsen, so it deserves a closer look. 11...♗xc3!?N (11...♘b6 12.♗d3 ♕e7 13.♕f3 ♗e6 14.a3 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 0–0–0∞ Carlsen – Aronian, Stavanger 2014) 12.bxc3 ♕e7 This interesting continuation was proposed by Ramirez, whose analysis runs as follows: 13.♕f3 ♘f6 14.♗d3 ♗g4 15.♕f2 0–0 16.0–0



16...♗h5! 17.♖ae1 (17.♕xf6?! ♕xe3† 18.♔h1 ♕xd3 19.♕xh6 ♕g6∓) 17...♗g6 18.♗xg6 (18.♗f5 ♖ae8=) 18...fxg6∞



11...c6

11...♘b6!?

This move is similar and will often transpose. It's conceivable that Black may be able to save time by delaying ...c6 in certain scenarios, but generally he will want to play that move pretty soon. Another point worth mentioning is that the move ...♕e7 will not be a good reply to ♕b3 here, as the d5-pawn is not so well protected, which means that the further a2-a3 will force Black to give away his bishop.

12.♕b3

12.♗d3 ♗e6 13.♕c2 c6 transposes to our main line, and 12.♕c2 c6 is likely to do the same.

The text move is White's most logical attempt to exploit the point mentioned above. Black should respond with:

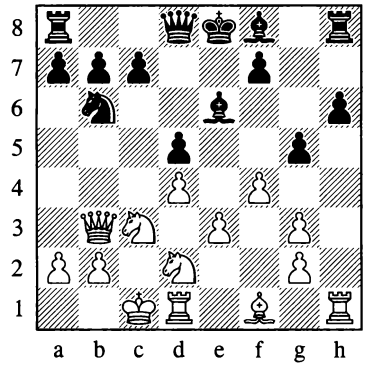
12...♗f8!

12...♕e7?! 13.a3 ♗xc3 14.♕xc3± is best avoided.

13.0–0–0

13.e4?! is premature and White quickly got into trouble in the following game: 13...dxe4 14.♘dxe4 ♗g7 15.0–0–0 0–0 16.f4 ♗g4 17.fxg5 ♗xd1 18.♕xd1 ♕xd4∓ Kreisl – Fressinet, Yerevan 2014.

13...♗e6 14.f4



14...c6!N

14...♕f6?! 15.a4! 0–0–0 16.a5 ♘d7 17.♗d3 gxf4 18.gxf4± was no fun at all for Black in Tomashevsky – Rodshtein, Tsaghkadzor 2015.

The text move is an important improvement, preparing to defend the b7-pawn using the queen on c7 if needed.

15.♘f3

15.a4 ♕c7∞

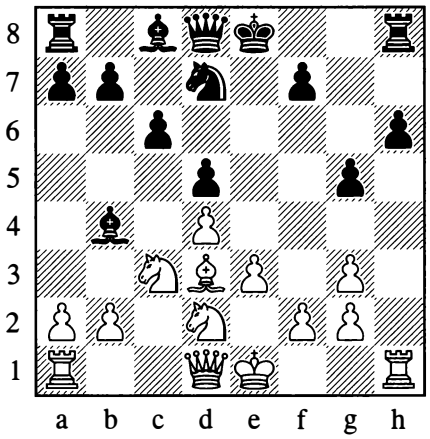
15...♗g7 16.a4 ♕c7 17.fxg5 hxg5 18.♖xh8† ♗xh8 19.♘xg5 ♗g4∞

With mutual chances.

12.♗d3

12.♕b3 occurred in S. Bekker-Jensen – Korley, Copenhagen 2014, when 12...♕e7N 13.♗d3 (or 13.a3 ♗d6=) 13...♘f6= would have been fine for Black.

12.a3N ♗e7 13.♗d3 ♘f6= also leads to normal play.

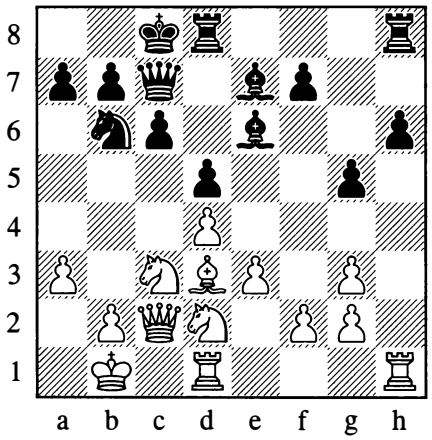


12...♘b6 13.a3

13.♕c2 ♗e6 transposes to variation B3322 below.

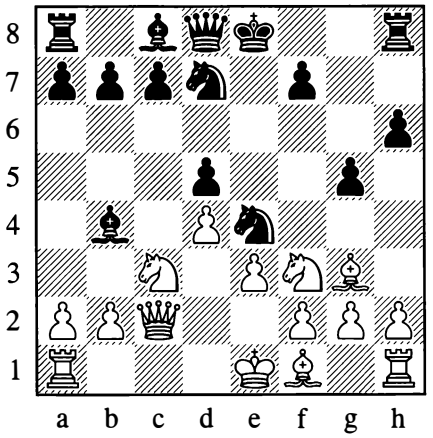
13...♗e7 14.♕c2 ♗e6 15.0–0–0 ♕c7 16.♔b1 0–0–0

The position remains balanced, as the following game demonstrates.



17.♖c1 ♔b8 18.♘a4 ♘xa4 19.♕xa4 h5=
Hagen – Krantz, Stockholm 2015.

B33) 10.♕c2



10...♘b6

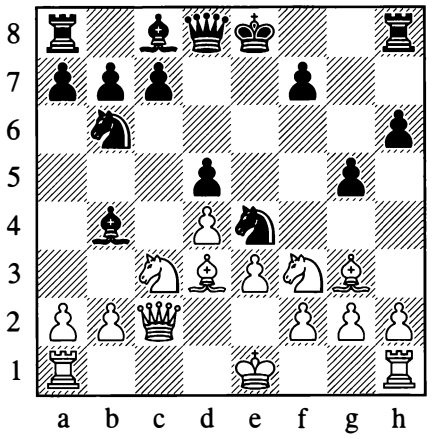
10...h5?!
This has been tried several times but I find it too risky.

11.♗d3!
11.h4 ♘xg3 12.fxg3 gxh4 13.gxh4 ♕e7 14.♗d3 ♘f6 15.0–0 ♗e6 16.♘g5 0–0–0⇄ Voveris – Moskvichev, corr. 2012.
11.h3 ♕f6 12.♗d3 ♗xc3† 13.bxc3 ♘xg3 14.fxg3 g4 was roughly level in Vachier-Lagrave – Grischuk, Stavanger 2015.
This position has occurred a few times via different move orders. The critical line continues:

11...h4 12.♗xe4 dxe4 13.♕xe4† ♔f8 14.♗e5 f6 15.♘xg5 ♗xc3† 16.bxc3 ♘xe5 17.dxe5 fxg5 18.f4
Itkis – Kalaitzoglou, Kallithea 2006. The position is objectively okay but practically difficult for Black, who must defend accurately to hold.

White can challenge the e4-knight with either **B331) 11.♗d3** or **B332) 11.♘d2**.

B331) 11.♗d3

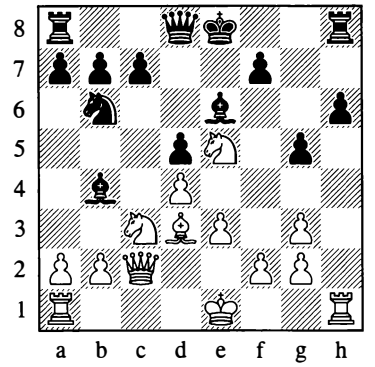


11...♗f5!?
This interesting move would be my choice.

11...♘xg3
This is playable too, but it gives White slightly more freedom than I would ideally like.

12.hxg3
12.fxg3!?N could also be considered, à la Carlsen! 12...♗e6 13.0–0 c6 14.♘e5 ♕e7 15.♗f5 White has a short-term initiative which Black will have to play precisely to control. 15...♘d7 16.♗xe6 ♕xe6 17.e4 dxe4 18.♘xe4 ♘xe5 19.dxe5 0–0–0= is a possible line involving accurate play.

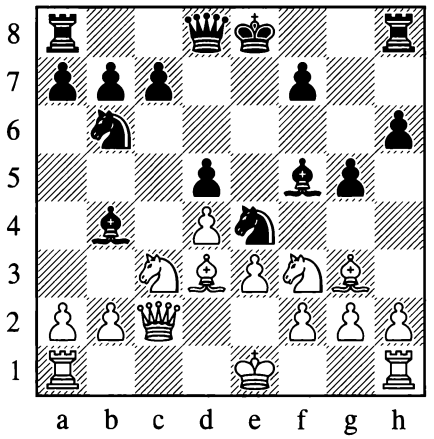
12...♗e6 13.♘e5
13.♗f5!? ♕f6 14.♗xe6 fxe6 15.0–0 c6 16.♘e5 gave White some initiative in Tan Zhongyi – Zhai Mo, Xinghua 2014.



13...♕e7 14.f4 0–0–0 15.0–0 ♔b8 16.a3 ♗d6 17.a4 gxf4 18.gxf4 ♖hg8 19.a5 ♘c4 20.♗xc4 dxc4 21.a6 ♗xe5 22.fxe5 c5 23.♖ad1 cxd4 24.exd4 ♖g4 25.d5 ♗c8

25...♗d7!?∞ is mentioned by Ramirez. 26.axb7 ♗xb7∞

Lysyj – Aronian, Tromso 2013.

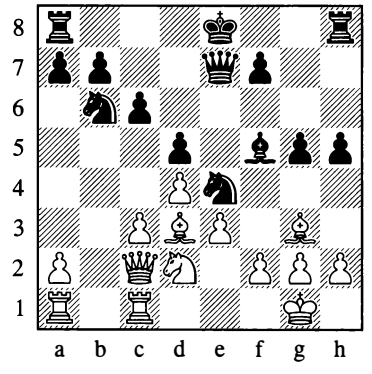


12.♘d2

This is the only move to have been tried, although the whole line is fresh and ripe for exploration. I checked two possible alternatives:

12.♘e5 f6 13.f3 ♗xc3† 14.bxc3 ♘xg3 15.hxg3 ♗xd3 16.♘xd3 ♕d6 17.g4 0–0–0∞

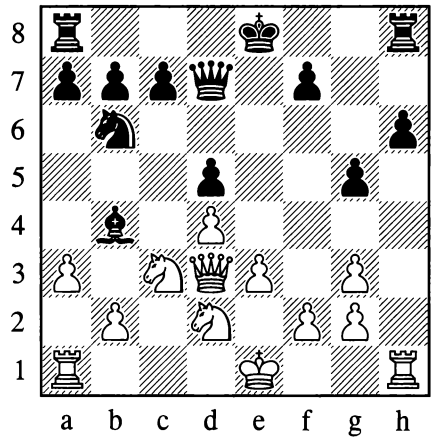
12.0–0!? ♗xc3 13.bxc3 ♕e7 14.♖fc1 c6 15.♘d2 h5 (15...♘c4!?∞)



16.♗xe4 ♗xe4 17.♘xe4 dxe4 18.h3 h4 19.♗h2 g4! 20.hxg4 ♖g8⩲ With a promising initiative for the pawn.

12...♘xg3 13.hxg3 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 ♕d7 15.a3

15.0–0–0?! 0–0–0 16.♘f3 ♘c4 17.♔b1 c6 18.♖c1 ♔b8∓ was pleasant for Black in Lorparizangeneh – Barsov, Rasht 2014.



15...♗e7 16.♘b3 0–0–0 17.0–0–0 ♔b8 18.♖he1 f5

Black is absolutely fine and it was White who had to be careful to maintain the balance in Grandelius – Yu Yangyi, Gibraltar 2016.

B332) 11.♘d2 ♘xg3

In the previous variation I was reluctant to make this exchange. Here it is a different story, as White does not have the same scope for short-term activity having played ♘d2 instead of the developing move ♗d3.

12.hxg3 c6!

12...♗e6 has also been played, and the two moves may easily transpose. The pawn move seems slightly more accurate though, as it enables the dark-squared bishop to retreat to d6 without fearing ♘b5.

We will analyse **B3321) 13.a3** and **B3322) 13.♗d3**.

B3321) 13.a3 ♗d6

13...♗f8!?

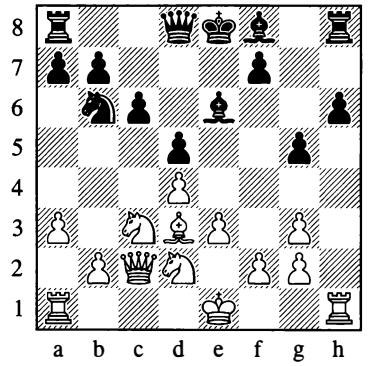
We have encountered this idea in some earlier variations and it is playable here too. However, Black is under some pressure in the following line:

14.♗d3

14.e4 ♗g7 (14...dxe4 15.♘dxe4 ♗g7 16.0–0–0 ♗e6 17.f4 ♕e7∞) 15.0–0–0 0–0∞

14...♗e6

GM Van Kampen has reached this position (via slightly different move orders) against two strong opponents.

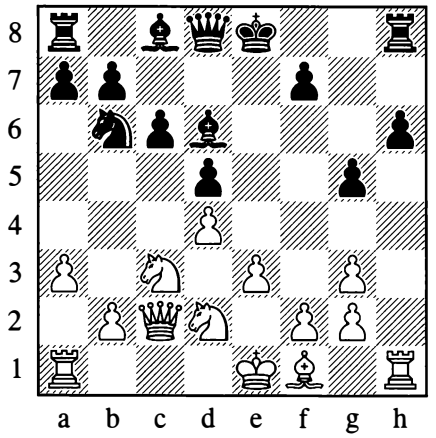


15.b4!

15.♘b3 ♕c7 16.♘c5 0–0–0 17.b4∞ was Edouard – Van Kampen, Doha 2014.

15...a5 16.bxa5 ♖xa5 17.a4 ♘d7 18.♖b1±

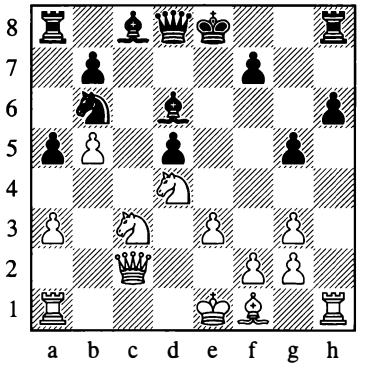
Eljanov – Van Kampen, Germany 2015.



14.e4

14.♗d3 ♗e6 transposes to variation B3322 below.

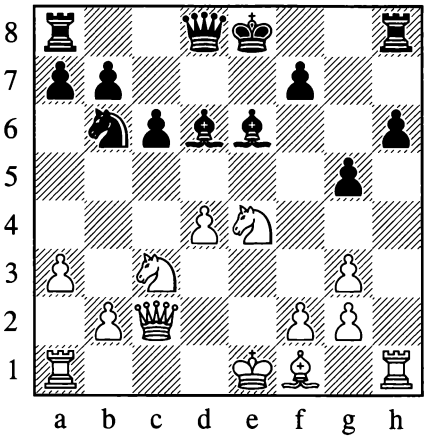
14.b4N can be met by 14...a5, when 15.b5 c5 16.dxc5 ♗xc5 transposes to a high-level game. Play continued: 17.♘b3 ♗d6 18.♘d4



18...a4! Taking some space and fixing the a3-pawn as a future target. 19.♗e2 ♕f6 20.♕d3 0–0 21.0–0 ♖d8= (21...♗d7!?N) Vachier-Lagrave – Giri, Shamkir 2015.

14...dxe4 15.♘dxe4 ♗e6

15...♗e7 16.0–0–0 ♔f8!? prepares ...♗f5 without allowing a discovered attack with a knight check. 17.♗e2 ♗f5∞



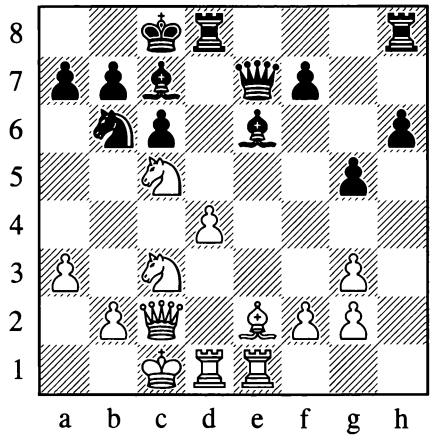
16.0–0–0 ♕e7 17.♗e2

17.♘xd6† ♕xd6 18.♘e4 ♕e7 19.♕c5 ♕xc5†

20.dxc5 ♘d7 21.♘xg5 ♗d5 22.♘h3 ♘xc5 23.♘f4 ♗b3 24.♖e1† ½–½ Ragger – Vitiugov, Tromso 2013.

The text move is White's latest try but it doesn't look critical.

17...♗c7 18.♘c5 0–0–0 19.♖he1



19...h5

19...♖xd4!?N 20.♖xd4 (20.♘xe6 ♖xd1† 21.♗xd1 fxe6 will be equal after White wins back the e6-pawn) 20...♕xc5⩲ is an interesting exchange sacrifice.

20.♘xe6 fxe6 21.♘e4 ♔b8 22.♕c5 ♕f7!N

This is the most accurate move, leading to easy equality.

22...♕h7 23.♘xg5 ♕h6 24.f4 h4 gave Black some play for the pawn in Svane – Dragun, Warsaw 2016, but the text move is much simpler.

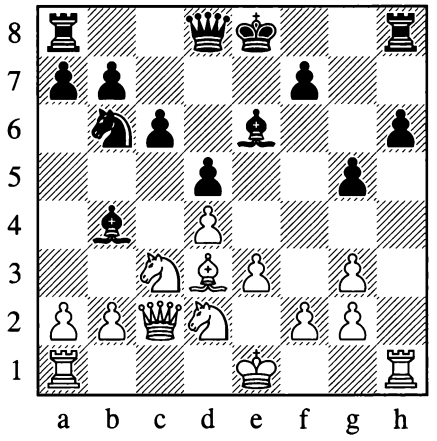
23.♘xg5

23.♕xg5 h4! followed by ...hxg3 gives Black fine play; obviously White cannot play gxh4 because ...♗f4† picks up the queen.

23...♕xf2 24.♗f3 ♗d6 25.♕c2 ♕xc2† 26.♔xc2 ♗xg3=

Black has no problems in the endgame.

B3322) 13.♗d3 ♗e6



14.a3

Even though this has scored poorly for White, I think he should challenge the Ragozin bishop and force Black to decide where it will go.

14.0–0–0?!

Ignoring the bishop gives Black a comfortable game, as the following lines show.

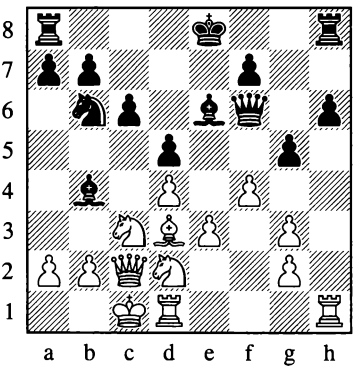
14...♕f6

Attacking f2.

15.f4

15.e4? ♕xf2∓ is a safe pawn grab, as Sherbakov points out.

15.♘f3 0–0–0 16.♘e5 ♔b8 17.♔b1 ♕g7∓ is a touch better for Black, who intends ...f6.



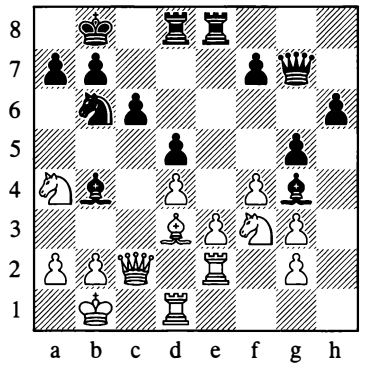
15...0–0–0 16.♘f3 ♔b8 17.♔b1 ♕g7 18.♖he1

18.f5!? ♗c8 19.g4 was worth considering according to Sherbakov, but after 19...♖he8↑ Black is still doing fine.

18...♖he8 19.♖e2?!

19.f5 ♗d7 20.g4 had to be played, although Black is still for choice.

19...♗g4 20.♘a4



20...♘xa4!N

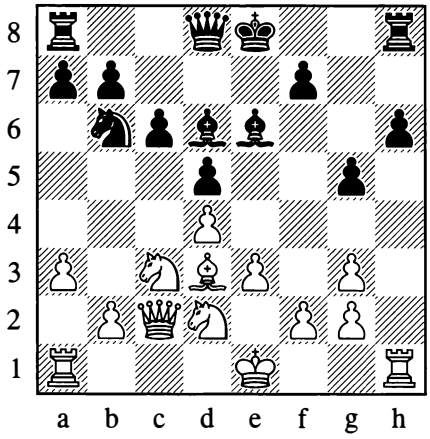
20...♗d6 was played in Kryakvin – Khismatullin, Taganrog 2014, when White should have taken his chance to play 21.♘c5 with only a slight disadvantage.

21.♕xa4 ♗d6∓

Black's bishops are excellent and he has a simple plan of piling up against White's weak kingside pawns.

14...♗d6

14...♗f8 transposes to the note to Black's 13th move in variation B3321.



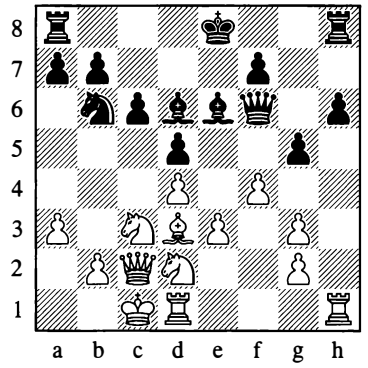
15.e4!?

Opening the centre must be the critical try, but Black is well placed to deal with it. Three other moves have been tried:

15.♗f5 ♕f6 16.♗xe6 ♕xe6 17.0–0–0 0–0–0= Zhou Jianchao – Gundavaa, Tagaytay City 2013.

15.b4 a5 16.b5 c5 17.dxc5 ♗xc5 18.♘b3 ♖c8= Matlakov – V. Popov, St Petersburg 2009.

15.0–0–0 ♕f6 16.f4 (16.♘b3 0–0–0 17.♔b1 ♔b8= Brynell – V. Popov, Stockholm 2009) Now in Chuchelov – Eljanov, Germany 2008, Black should have played:



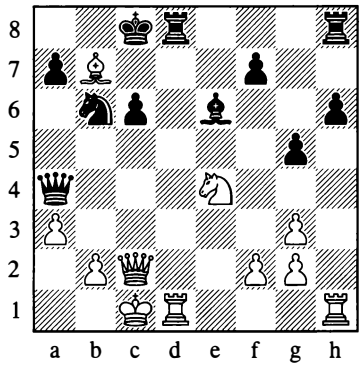
16...0–0–0!N The idea is 17.♘b5 (17.f5 ♗d7∞) 17...♗e7! and now White cannot play 18.♘xa7†? due to 18...♔b8 19.♕c3 ♗g4 20.♖de1 ♖de8!∓, intending to pick up the knight with ...♗d8 and ...♔xa7.

15...dxe4 16.♘dxe4 ♕e7 17.♘xd6†

17.0–0 0–0–0 18.b4 ♔b8 19.♘c5 h5→ gave Black good prospects on the kingside in Akkozov – Alekseev, St Petersburg 2014.

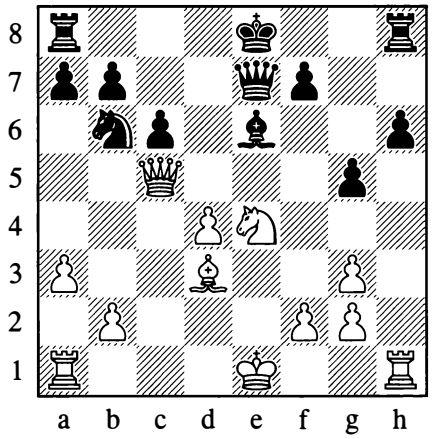
17...♕xd6 18.♘e4 ♕e7

18...♕xd4!? looks risky but it seems playable, for instance: 19.0–0–0 0–0–0 20.♗a6 ♕a4 21.♗xb7†



21...♔c7! 22.♖xd8 ♖xd8 23.♘c5 ♕xc2† 24.♔xc2 ♗f5†=

19.♕c5



19...♘d7!N

Improving over 19...♕xc5?! 20.dxc5± as played in Gupta – Gundavaa, Jakarta 2013.

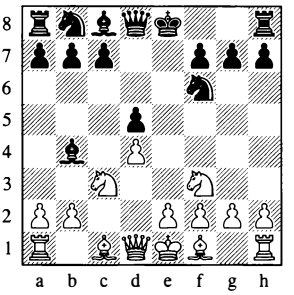
20.♘d6† ♔f8 21.♕b4 b6∞

White will soon have to retreat his knight from d6, and Black should be at least okay in the ensuing endgame after a queen exchange on b4.

Conclusion

6...h6 is deservedly the main line. The exchange on f6 is harmless, while 7.♗h4 can be met with the clever 7...♘bd7, strengthening Black's position in preparation for ...g5 and ...♘e4. This dynamic approach is becoming increasingly popular at the highest level and, given how hard it is for White to prove an advantage, I can see why. In return for weakening his kingside, Black usually obtains the advantage of the bishop pair, so his long-term prospects can often prove superior as long as he can nullify any short-term White initiative – and this chapter has shown how we can do just that.

Chapter 3



6th Move Alternatives

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.cxd5 exd5

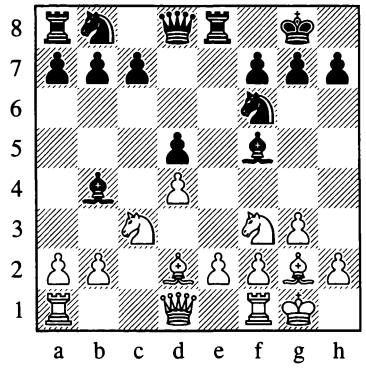
A) 6.a3 57
B) 6.♕c2 58
C) 6.♗f4 60
D) 6.♕a4† ♘c6 62
D1) 7.♘e5 62
D2) 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.e3 0–0 63
D21) 10.♖c1 ♕g6 66
D211) 11.♕b3 67
D212) 11.♕d1 68
D22) 10.♗e2 a6 11.0–0 ♗e6 12.♖fc1 ♗d6 13.♕d1 ♘e7 69
D221) 14.♖ab1 71
D222) 14.a3 72
D223) 14.♘a4 b6 73
D2231) 15.b4 74
D2232) 15.a3 75

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.cxd5 exd5

In the last two chapters we examined the main line of 6.♗g5, but White has several other options which we should be ready for. In this chapter we will look at **A) 6.a3**, **B) 6.♕c2**, **C) 6.♗f4** and **D) 6.♕a4†**.

6.♕b3 c5 will be covered under the move order 5.♕b3 c5 6.cxd5 exd5 – see variation B4 of Chapter 11.

6.♗d2 is playable, but it's too passive to challenge for an advantage. Here are a few brief lines: 6...0–0 7.g3 (Black also gets a good game after 7.e3 c6 8.♗d3 ♗d6 9.h3 ♖e8 10.♕c2 ♘bd7∞ with ...♕e7 and ...♘e4 to come, Bayarmandakh – Sharavdorj, Ulaanbaatar 2011) 7...♗f5 8.♗g2 ♖e8 9.0–0



9...♗a5!?N (9...♘c6 was also fine in Acevedo – L. Cortez, Merida 1997) 10.♕b3 ♗b6∞

A) 6.a3

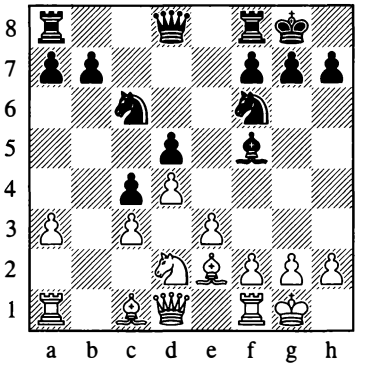
It looks a bit strange to play this so soon.

6...♗xc3†!

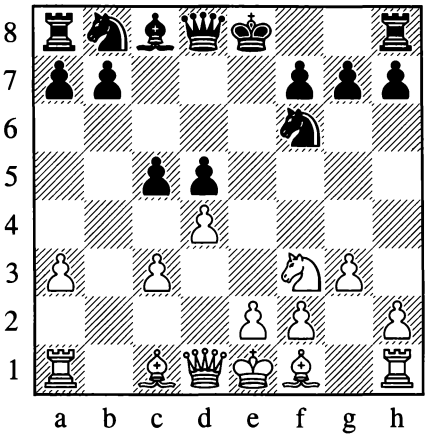
6...♗e7 leads to a version of the Queen's Gambit Declined where the extra a2-a3 move is of limited use. The text move is more critical though, and much more in the spirit of the Ragozin.

7.bxc3 c5 8.g3

8.e3 is well met by 8...c4!, gaining space and preventing the bishop from going to d3. 9.♘d2 0–0 10.♗e2 ♗f5 11.0–0 ♘c6



12.a4 ♖e8 13.♖e1 ♕c7 14.♘f1 Now 14...♘a5!N∓ would have been the most accurate, although 14...a6 15.f3 ♗g6 16.♘g3 h5 17.♗f1 h4∓ was still pleasant for Black in Florendo – Sadorra, Quezon City 2014.



8...0–0 9.♗g2 ♗f5

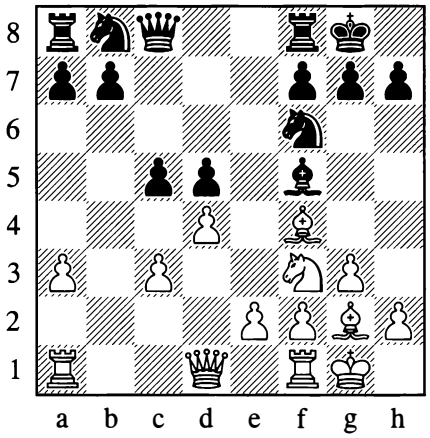
Black has a number of sensible ways to develop his pieces. Here are a couple of brief examples:

9...♘bd7 10.0–0 b6 11.♗f4 ♖e8 12.♘e5 ♗a6 would not be my first choice for Black, but it's still close to equal.

9...♖e8!? 10.0–0 ♘e4N seems fine, for instance: 11.♕c2 ♘c6 12.dxc5 ♕f6 13.♗e3 ♕xc3 14.♕xc3 ♘xc3=

10.0–0 ♕c8 11.♗f4

11.dxc5!? ♘a6 12.♘d4 ♗h3 13.♗xh3 ♕xh3 14.f3 ♘xc5 is fine for Black.

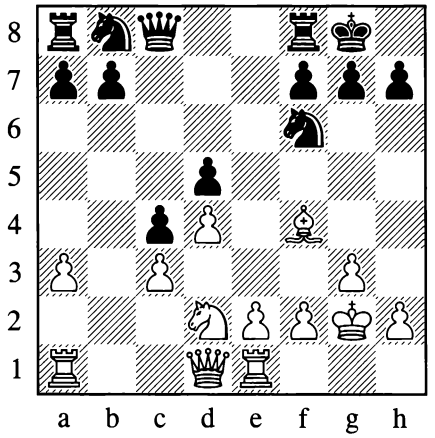


11...c4 12.♘d2 ♗h3

Not the only playable move, but it seems natural to force the bishop trade.

12...♖e8!?N 13.f3 ♘bd7 14.♖e1 ♕c6∞ leads to complicated play.

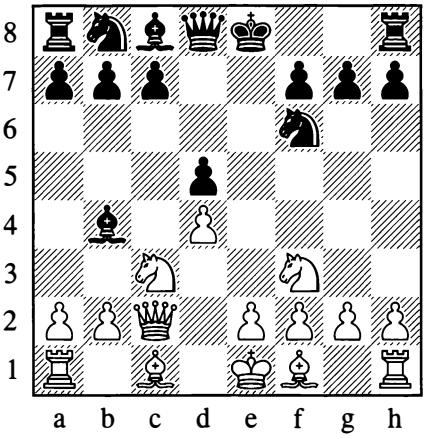
13.♖e1 ♗xg2 14.♔xg2



14...♖e8N=

14...♘c6 led to a great position for Black after 15.f3?! ♘h5 16.♗e3?! f5∓ in Colls Gelaberto – Naroditsky, Benasque 2015, but 15.♗g5!N would have given White decent prospects. The text move seems like the easiest route to a safe position.

B) 6.♕c2



This move transposes to a variation of the Nimzo-Indian (1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕c2 d5 5.cxd5 exd5) where White has continued with 6.♘f3 instead of the much more critical 6.♗g5. It has been an extremely rare choice against the Ragozin, so I will not spend too much time analysing it.

6...0–0

A good alternative is:

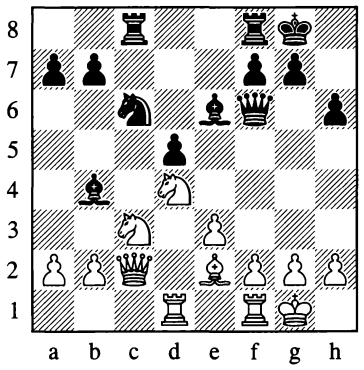
6...c5!?

The advantage of playing this immediately is that it becomes impossible for White to play both ♗g5 and e2-e3 before ...cxd4 comes. A few possible lines include:

7.♗g5

7.dxc5 d4 8.a3 ♗a5 9.b4 dxc3 10.bxa5 ♕xa5= was fine for Black in Farkas – Tanacs, Miskolc 2010, and a few other games.

7...cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♘c6 9.♖d1 h6 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.e3 0–0 12.♗e2 ♗e6 13.0–0 ♖ac8



14.♕b3

14.♘xe6?! fxe6 15.♕b3 ♗xc3 16.♕xc3 ♕xc3 17.bxc3 ♘a5 18.♖d3 ♖c6∓ Komljenovic – Moiseenko, San Sebastian 2011.

14...♗xc3 15.bxc3 b6=

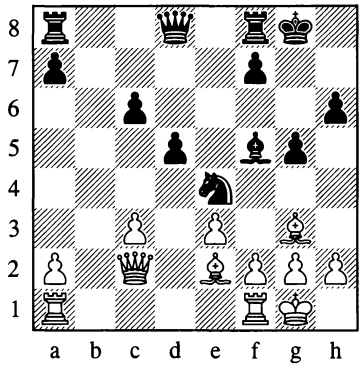
Levin – E. Romanov, St Petersburg 2007.

7.♗g5

We have reached a slightly more popular version of the Nimzo line but Black is still fine.

7...h6 8.♗h4 c5 9.dxc5

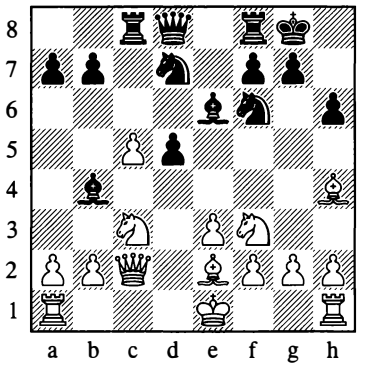
9.e3 cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♘c6 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♗e2 allows Black to free himself with the thematic 12...g5! 13.♗g3 ♘e4 14.0–0 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♗f5 when White has no advantage, for instance:



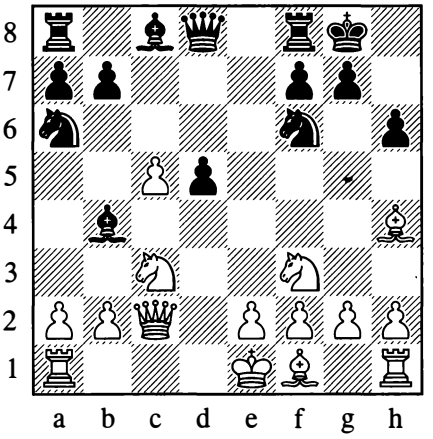
16.♗d3 ♖e8 17.f3 ♘xg3 18.hxg3 ♗xd3 19.♕xd3 ♖e6= Wojtaszek – Leko, Beijing (blitz) 2014.

9...♘a6

9...♗e6 10.e3 ♘bd7 11.♗e2 ♖c8 is also fine for Black, as the following examples illustrate:

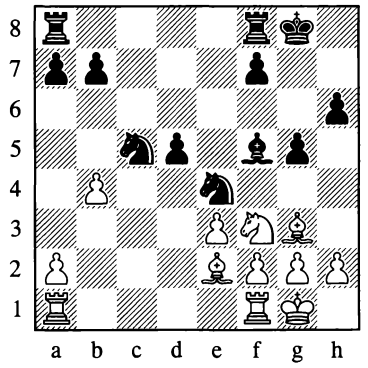


12.c6 (12.a3 ♗xc3† 13.♕xc3 g5 14.♗g3 ♘e4 15.♕d4 ♘dxc5 16.♖d1 ♕b6 17.0–0 ♘b3 ½–½ Zhou Jianchao – Yu Yangyi, Las Vegas 2014) 12...bxc6 13.0–0 ♕a5 14.♖ac1 c5= Shirov – Adams, Bilbao 2014.

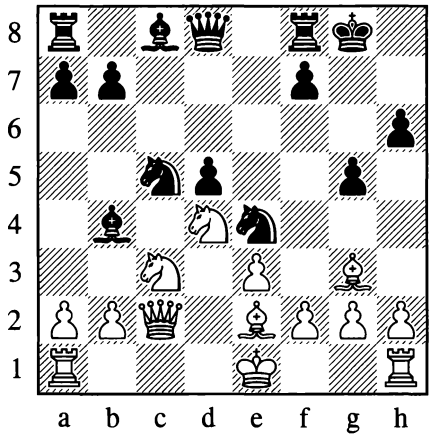


10.e3 ♘xc5 11.♗e2 g5 12.♗g3 ♘fe4 13.♘d4

Another high-level game continued: 13.0–0 ♗xc3 14.bxc3 ♗f5 15.♕b2 ♕b6 16.♕b4 ♕xb4 17.cxb4



17...♘c3! 18.bxc5 ♘xe2† 19.♔h1 ♖fc8 20.♘d4 ♘xd4 21.exd4 ♖e8= Gelfand – Karjakin, Sochi 2008.



13...♕f6 14.0–0 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♗f5

Once again, Black has enough activity to compensate for the slight loosening of his kingside. For example:

16.♕b2 ♗g6 17.c4 dxc4 18.♗xc4 ♖ac8=

Wojtaszek – Gharamian, Saint-Quentin 2014.

C) 6.♗f4

This move has become quite trendy in the past year or two, and has yielded good results for White among top GMs.

6...♘e4!?

This is the most critical and ambitious response.

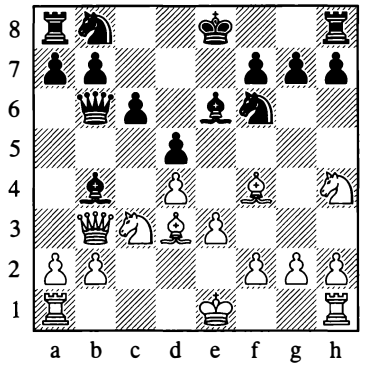
A more solid alternative is:

6...c6 7.e3

7.♕b3 ♕b6 8.a3 (8.e3 ♗f5 transposes to the line below) 8...♗e7 9.♕c2 ♘h5! solves Black's problems, for instance: 10.♗d2 0–0 11.e3 g6 12.♗d3 ♘g7 13.0–0 ½–½ Ragger – Hammer, Helsingor 2015.

7...♗f5 8.♕b3 ♕b6 9.♘h4 ♗e6 10.♗d3

Here I found a useful improvement:



10...♘h5!N

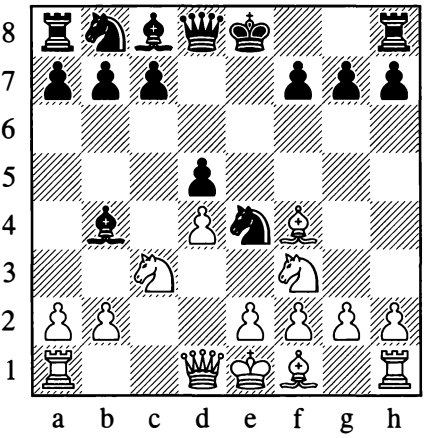
10...♘e4?! 11.♕c2 ♘d7 12.♘f3 ♘df6 13.0–0 ♗d6 14.♗e5± Harika – Berry, Isle of Man 2015.

11.♗g3

11.♗e5?! is an attempt to trap the knight, but it doesn't work: 11...♘d7 12.♗e2? ♘xe5 13.dxe5 d4–+

11...♘xg3 12.hxg3 g6=

Black is doing fine.



7.♖c1

7.♕b3?! is well met by 7...c5 8.e3 (or 8.♘d2 ♘xd2 9.♗xd2 ♘c6) 8...♕a5 9.♖c1 c4 10.♕c2 ♗f5 with fine play for Black.

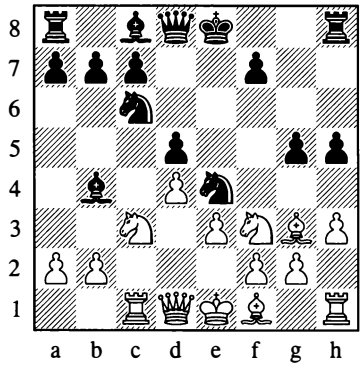
7...♘c6!

This move quite often features in the Ragozin, but Black usually plays it in response to a queen check on a4 rather than developing the knight to c6 voluntarily. It works nicely in this variation though.

8.♘d2

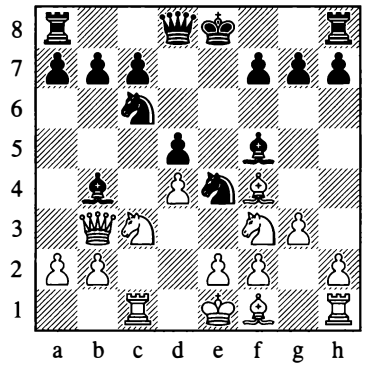
This is the computer's top choice.

8.e3 g5! 9.♗g3 h5 poses a difficult question to White: 10.h3 (10.h4? g4 11.♘e5 ♘xg3 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.fxg3 ♗d6∓; 10.♗d3? h4 11.♗e5 f6∓) This position occurred in Cornacchini – Hughes, email 2001, when Black should have continued:

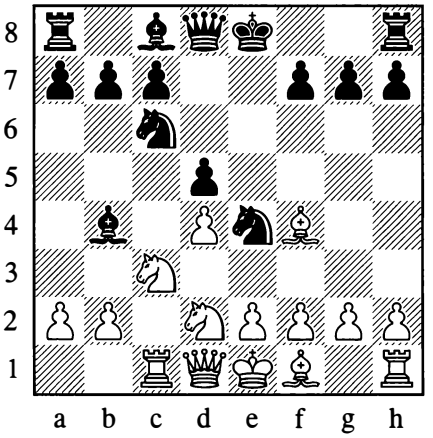


10...♘xg3N 11.fxg3 ♗d6 12.♔f2 h4 13.gxh4 gxh4 14.♗b5 ♗g3† 15.♔g1 ♕d6∞ With complex play.

8.g3 ♗f5 9.♕b3?! (White should have tried 9.♗g2N ♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♗a3 when Black wins the exchange but White gets some compensation after: 11.♖b1 ♗xb1 12.♕xb1 ♘a5 13.0–0 0–0 14.♘g5 g6 15.e4 ♗e7∞) The game continuation is the wrong plan for White, and Black obtained a great position after:



9...a5 10.a3 a4 11.♕a2 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♘a5 13.♘d2 ♘xd2 14.♗xd2 ♘b3∓ Glud – Hammer, Helsingor 2015.



8...g5!?

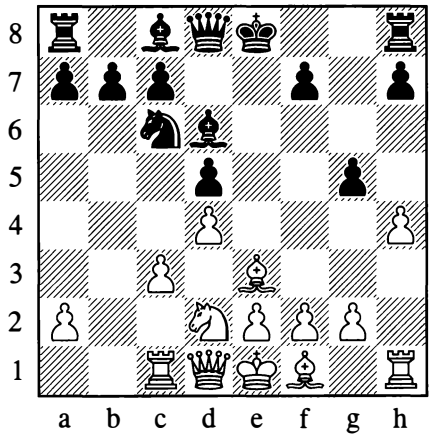
Definitely the most ambitious move.

Another game continued: 8...♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♗d6 10.♗xd6 cxd6!? An unusual but quite sensible recapture. (10...♕xd6 leaves White slightly for choice after 11.e3 ♗f5 [or 11...0–0 12.♗d3] 12.c4 dxc4 13.♗xc4 0–0 14.♕f3±) 11.e3 0–0 12.♗d3 ♗e6 13.0–0 ♖c8 14.♕b3 ♘a5 White had little if any advantage in Guo Qi – Dzagnidze, China 2016.

9.♗e3

9.♗g3 ♘xg3 10.hxg3 ♘xd4 11.e3 ♗xc3 12.♖xc3 ♘e6 13.♗d3 ♕f6 14.♕c2⩲ gives White some compensation for a pawn, but no real advantage as far as I can see.

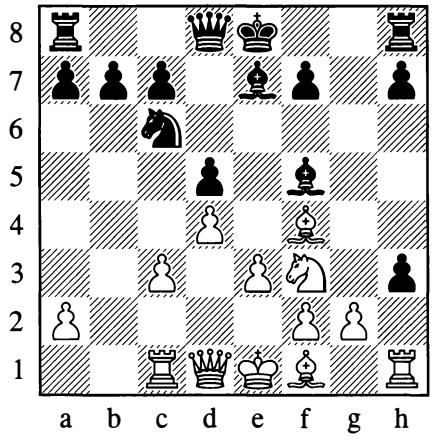
9...♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♗d6 11.h4



11...gxh4

11...♗f4!?N 12.♗xf4 gxf4 13.e4 fxe3 14.♕e2 ♕e7∞ deserves attention.

12.♘f3 ♗e7 13.♗f4 ♗f5 14.e3 h3



15.♖b1!

A great move to spot over the board!

15...♗d6 16.g3 ♗xf4 17.gxf4 ♗xb1 18.♕xb1 ♕d6 19.♗xh3∞

White had full compensation for the exchange but probably not more in Svane – Socko, Germany 2016.

D) 6.♕a4† ♘c6

Here we have a further split between **D1) 7.♘e5** and the more important **D2) 7.♗g5**.

D1) 7.♘e5 ♗d7

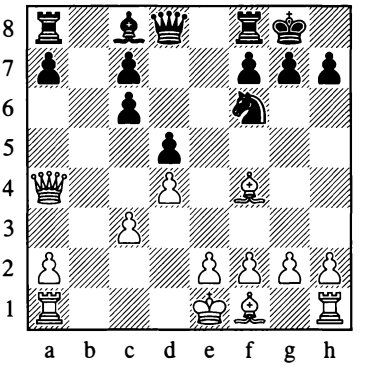
7...0–0!?

This move is rare but it looks quite promising:

8.♘xc6 ♗xc3† 9.bxc3 bxc6 10.♗f4

10.♗g5 ♕d6 11.♗xf6? is not a good plan as White falls too far behind in development. 11...♕xf6 We have transposed to the McMahon – Pert game given in the notes to variation B2 of Chapter 1.

10.♕xc6 ♗f5N looks like decent compensation to me: 11.f3 ♖e8 12.♗f4 ♕b8⩲



10...♗f5!?N

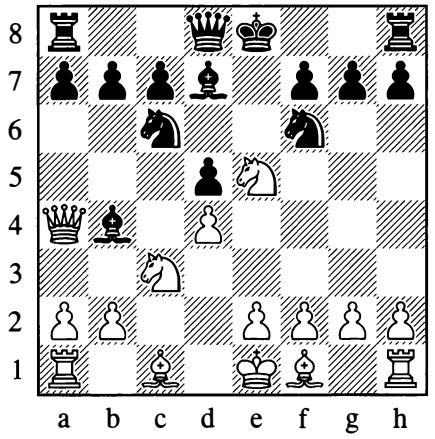
10...♗d7 was not so active in Al Zendani – Khader, Dubai 2011.

11.e3

11.♕xc6 ♕b8 12.♗c1 ♖e8⩱

11.f3 ♘h5 12.♗d2 ♗d7 followed by ...♕h4† is fine for Black.

11...♖b8 12.♗a6 ♘h5∞

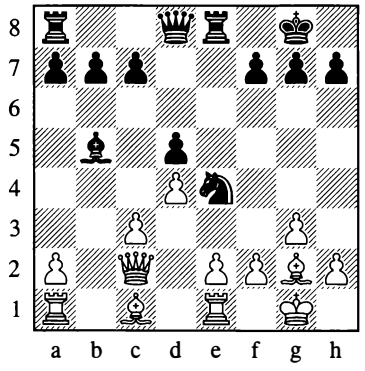


8.♘xc6

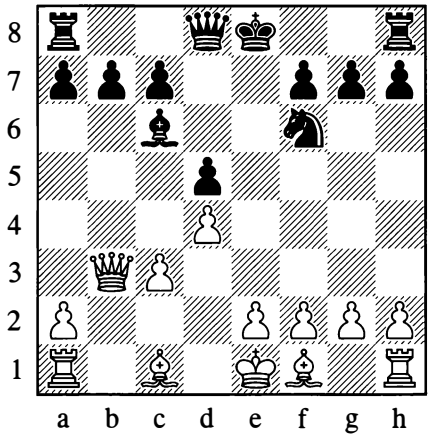
After 8.♘xd7 ♕xd7 the loss of the bishop pair is balanced out by Black's lead in development: 9.e3 ♘e4 10.♕c2 ♕e6 (the machine's suggestion of 10...♕g4!?N also looks fine) 11.a3 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 0–0 13.♗d3 f5 14.0–0 ♘a5= Vojinovic – Kasimdzhanov, France 2010.

8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♗xc6 10.♕b3

10.♕c2 ♘e4 11.g3 0–0 12.♗g2 ♖e8 13.0–0 ♗b5 14.♖e1 was seen in Severino – Sadorra, Quezon City 2014, and now I would like to improve Black's play with:



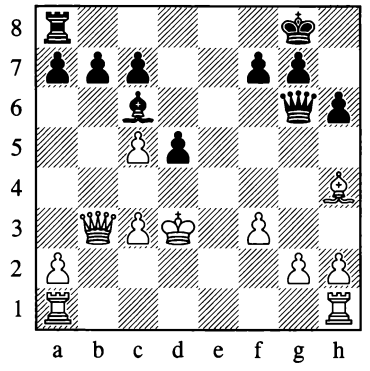
14...c5!?N With an unclear game. Another possible continuation is 14...♕f6!? hitting f2, and after 15.♗f4 g5 16.♗xe4 ♖xe4∞ the position remains double-edged.



10...0–0 11.♗g5 h6 12.♗h4 ♕d6 13.e3 ♖fe8 14.♗d3 ♘e4 15.♕b2

White prepares to castle by preventing the ...♘d2 fork.

15.f3 may lead to wild complications: 15...♘c5!? (15...♘f6 is a calmer alternative) 16.dxc5 ♖xe3† 17.♔d2 ♖xd3† 18.♔xd3 ♕g6†



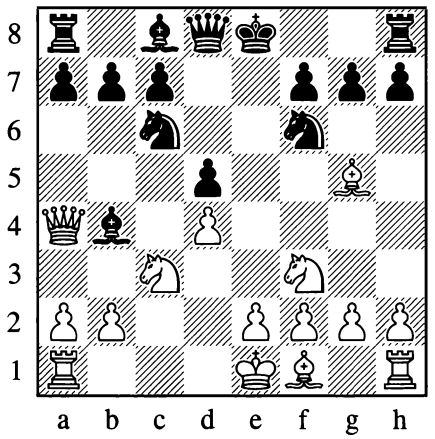
19.♔d4! ♕xg2 20.♕d1 ♖e8∞

15...♕d7 16.0–0 a6 17.♖fc1 ♘d6 18.♗g3 ♗b5∞

Sumets – Rindlisbacher, Zug 2013.

D2) 7.♗g5

This is the main line by far, and the most important theoretical branch of the chapter.



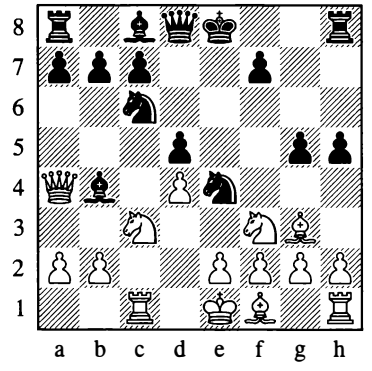
7...h6 8.♗xf6

Trading on f6 is the normal and best continuation.

8.♗h4?!

This retreat is inadvisable in this particular position, but Black needs to play precisely to take full advantage. I happened to be present during an informal blitz game between Seirawan and Aronian in which the American GM played the text move. White eventually won, despite the general banter indicating that both players thought Black was on top. The game isn't recorded but I believe I have managed to accurately recall the following fragment of it.

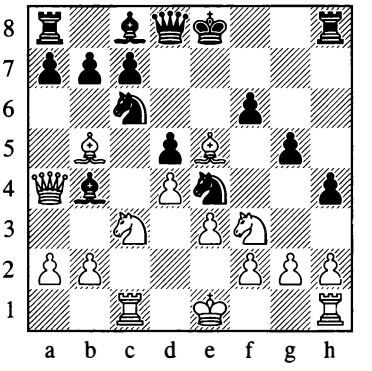
8...g5! 9.♗g3 ♘e4 10.♖c1 h5



11.e3

11.♘e5 has been tried several times: 11...♗d7 12.♘xc6?! (12.♕b3 h4 13.♕xd5 ♘d6 14.♘xd7 hxg3 15.♘e5 gxf2† 16.♔xf2 ♕f6† 17.♕f3 ♘xe5–+ Lanchava – Lalic, Benasque 1999; 12.♘xd7 ♕xd7 13.f3 ♘xg3 14.hxg3 ♗d6∓) 12...♗xc3† 13.bxc3 ♗xc6 14.♕b3 h4 15.♗e5 f6 16.f3 fxe5 17.fxe4 0–0 18.e3 ♔g7∓ Michalik – Movsesian, Czech Republic 2014.

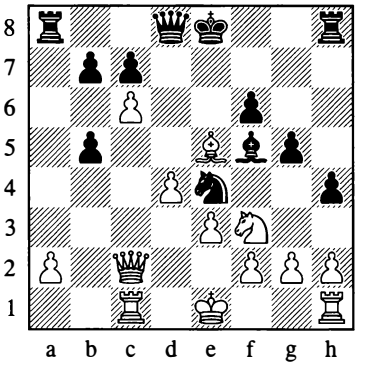
11...h4 12.♗e5 f6 13.♗b5



13...♗xc3†

13...♗d7! is more accurate as White is deprived of the c3-c4 resource. He will therefore lose his bishop for insufficient play, for instance: 14.♕b3 fxe5 15.♕xd5 ♘f6 16.♕b3 exd4 17.♘xd4 ♕e7∓

14.bxc3 ♗d7 15.c4 a6 16.cxd5 axb5 17.♕c2 ♗f5 18.dxc6

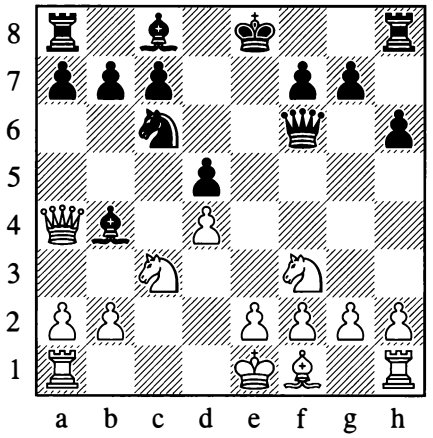


18...fxe5??

18...b6!∓ is an easy move to miss, especially in blitz, but it was the only way to maintain Black's advantage.

19.cxb7 ♖a6 20.♘xe5 0–0 21.♕xc7±
Seirawan – Aronian, St Louis (blitz) 2014.

8...♕xf6

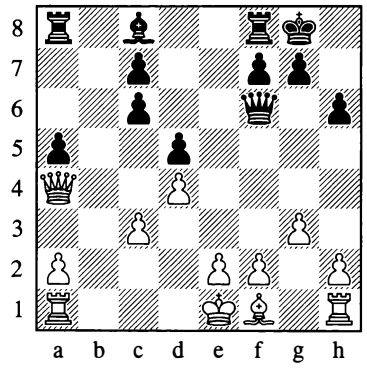


9.e3

9.♘e5?
As usual, this move leads to development problems for White.

9...0–0 10.♘xc6 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 bxc6 12.g3
Also after 12.e3 ♕g6∓ White is struggling to develop.

12...a5



13.♗g2
13.e3? is the same as the McMahon – Pert game mentioned in Chapter 1, except that the pawn is on h6 rather than h7. For a quick recap, the continuation was 13...♖b8 14.♗e2 ♖b2 15.♕a3 ♖xe2†! with a winning attack.

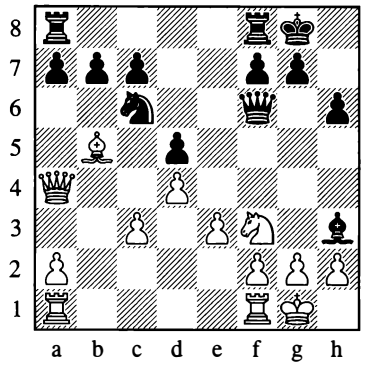
13...♗a6 14.♗f3 ♖fe8 15.0–0 ♗xe2 16.♗xe2 ♖xe2 17.♖ae1 ♖e4 18.♖xe4 dxe4 19.♖e1 ♕e6∓
White was a pawn down with a difficult defence in store, Husseinov – V. Gaprindashvili, Istanbul 2006.

9...0–0

White's two main options are **D21) 10.♖c1** and **D22) 10.♗e2**.

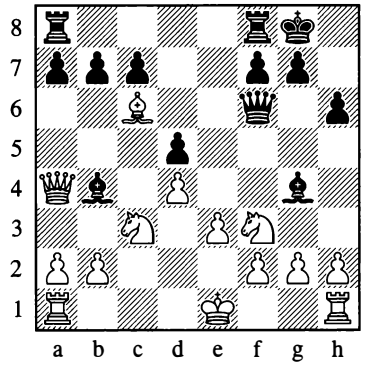
10.♗b5
This move doesn't really work, as Black has more than one good reply.

10...♗g4
The simplest, as it gives White nothing better than retreating the bishop to e2.
The second good option is 10...♗h3!? 11.0–0 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 when, in Miron – Lupulescu, Targu Mures 2014, Black should have played:



12...♕g6!N when my main line continues: 13.♘h4 ♕g5 14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.♕xc6 ♖ab8 16.♕xc7 ♕xh4 17.gxh3 ♖b6 18.♕e5 ♖g6† 19.♔h1 ♖g5 20.♕f4 ♕xh3 21.♖g1 ♖f5 22.♕g3 ♕xg3 23.fxg3 ♖e8 24.♖ae1 ♖f3
Black regains the pawn with a slightly more comfortable endgame, although it should be a draw.

11.♗xc6?!
11.♗e2 is necessary, although 11...♗xc3†!?N 12.bxc3 a6 13.0–0 b5 14.♕b3 ♕d6= gives Black easy play.



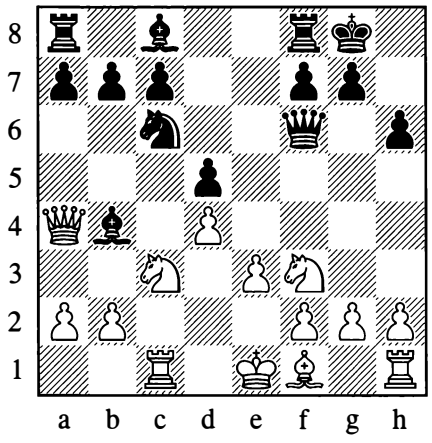
11...♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♗xf3 13.♗xb7N

13.gxf3 bxc6 14.♔e2 has been played a few times; Black has more than one decent continuation but 14...c5!?N↑ looks good to me.

13...♗xg2 14.♖g1 ♖ab8 15.♕c6 ♕f3 16.♕xc7 ♖fe8 17.♕g3 ♕xg3 18.hxg3 ♗e4 19.♗a6 ♖b2∓

Black's piece activity is worth more than a pawn.

D21) 10.♖c1



This is an old idea, intending a2-a3 followed by ♖xc3.

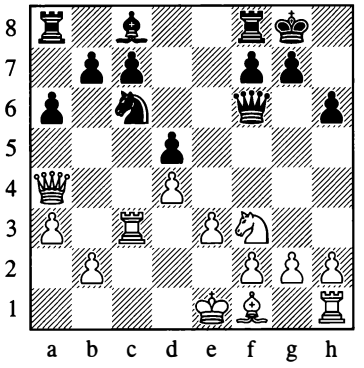
10...♕g6

10...♖d8 has been played by Kramnik but I don't like the idea of committing my rooks to the queenside – I'd rather keep them free for attacking!

An interesting alternative is:

10...a6!? 11.a3 ♗xc3† 12.♖xc3

And here my computer suggests a remarkable idea:



12...♘a7!?N

Black intends ...c6 followed by manoeuvring the knight to d6 – but what happens if White grabs the c7-pawn?

13.♖xc7

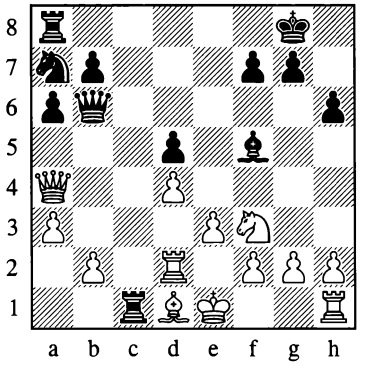
13.♗e2 c6 14.0–0 ♗f5 is fine for Black, as ...♘b5 is coming next.

13.♗d3 ♗f5 14.♗xf5 ♕xf5 15.♖xc7 (15.0–0 ♘b5=) 15...♕b1† 16.♕d1 ♕xb2 17.0–0 ♖fc8 is close to equal.

13...♕b6!

Targeting the b2-pawn and gaining a significant amount of time.

14.♖c2 ♗f5 15.♖d2 ♖fc8 16.♗e2 ♖c1† 17.♗d1



17...♕d8!? 18.0–0 b5 19.♕b3

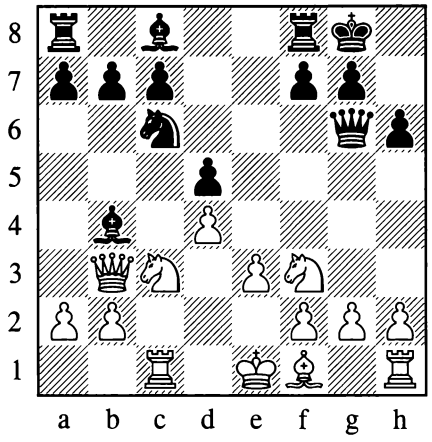
19.♕xa6?? ♗c8 wins the queen!

19...♘c6⩲

Intending ...♘a5 with an ongoing initiative for the pawn.

Returning to our main line, White may proceed with **D211) 11.♕b3** or **D212) 11.♕d1**.

D211) 11.♕b3



11...♖e8!?

I find this the most interesting move, keeping the rook as active as possible.

11...♖d8 is the solid alternative; after 12.a3 ♗f8 13.g3 ♘e7 the players agreed a draw in Timman – Naroditsky, Helsingor 2015, just as the real battle was set to begin.

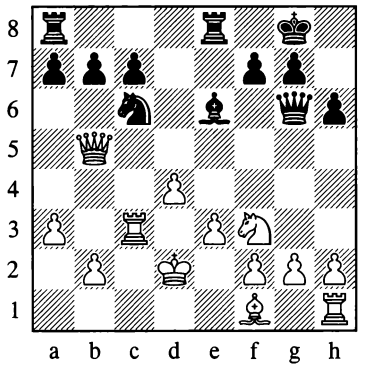
12.a3

12.♕xd5 has not yet been tried; after 12...♗e6 13.♕b5 ♗xa2= Black regains the pawn with a good position.

12...♗a5!?

This time Black offers a real gambit.

12...♗xc3† is also possible. My analysis continues: 13.♖xc3!?N (13.♕xc3 a6 14.g3 ♕f6 15.♗g2 ♗g4= Murzin – Akhmadeev, Kazan 2009) 13...♕b1† 14.♔d2 ♕g6 15.♕xd5 ♗e6 16.♕b5



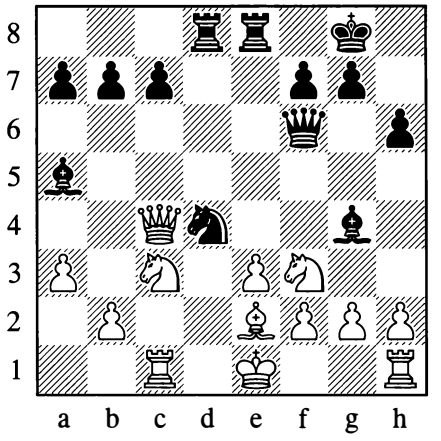
16...a6! 17.♕a4 (17.♕xb7? is too greedy: 17...♘a5 18.♕xc7 ♖ab8 19.b4 ♘b3†→) 17...♗d5⩲

13.♕xd5 ♗g4!

Without a hanging pawn on a2, there is no real point in putting the bishop on e6, so Black should prefer the more active development to g4.

14.♕c4 ♖ad8 15.♗d3 ♕f6 16.♗e2 ♘xd4!N

16...♗xf3 is good enough for equality after 17.♗xf3N (rather than 17.gxf3? ♘xd4∓ as in Kiselev – Naumkin, Moscow 1986) 17...♕xd4=. The text move is a try for an advantage.



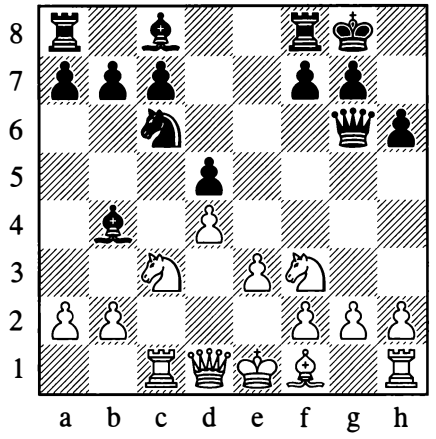
17.♘xd4 ♖xd4 18.♕xd4 ♕xd4 19.exd4 ♖xe2† 20.♔f1 ♖xb2∓

Black only has one pawn for the exchange,

but his pieces are tremendously active and White is under real pressure.

D212) 11.♕d1

The point of this move is to prepare a2-a3 followed by ♖xc3 without allowing a check on b1.



11...♗e6!?

Once again, I prefer not to move the f8-rook away from the kingside.

That said, 11...♖d8 is a solid choice, with 12.a3 ♗f8 13.h3 ♘e7 being the typical regrouping plan. After the further 14.♗d3 ♕f6 15.0–0 ♘f5 16.♗b1 ♘h4 the players agreed a draw in Feller – Fressinet, Nimes 2009.

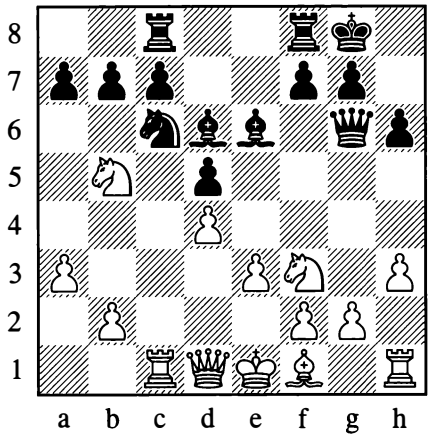
12.a3 ♗d6 13.♘b5 ♖ac8

Black anticipates the likely exchange on d6. I believe that his active pieces and open c-file should provide at least enough compensation for the slight damaging of his pawn structure.

13...♖fc8 was played in the Huss – Milov game quoted below, but it seems more logical to keep one rook on the kingside, especially when you see Black's next move in the main line below.

14.h3

White wants to play g2-g3, but first guards against ...♗g4 ideas.



14...f5!

Now that ...♗g4 has been ruled out, it makes sense to lead with this move to generate play on the kingside.

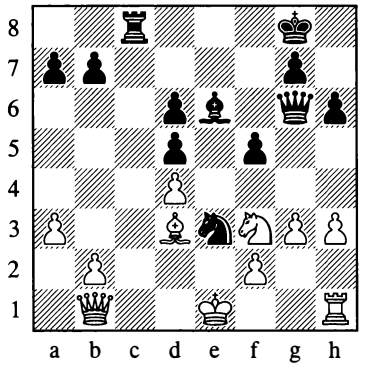
15.♘xd6 cxd6 16.g3 ♘a5 17.♖xc8 ♖xc8

The Swiss IM Huss has reached this position with White in two games.

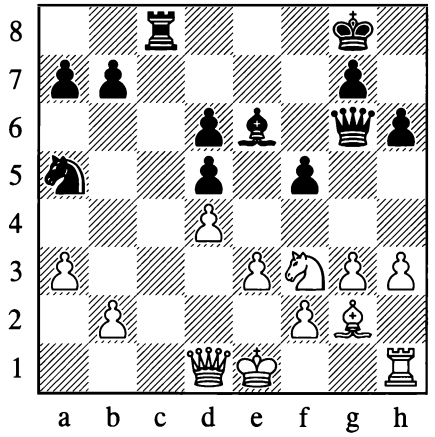
18.♗g2

This was his first try.

18.♗d3 was his attempted improvement but it didn't work out well after: 18...♘c4 19.♕b1? ♘xe3!



20.g4? ♘g2† 21.♔d2 ♘f4–+ Huss – Khenkin, Geneva 2007.



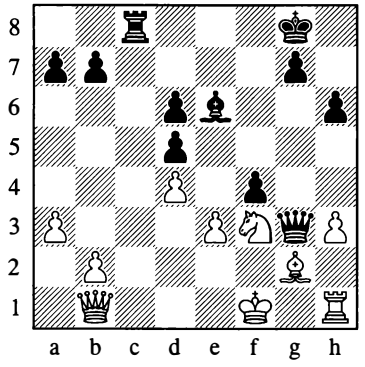
18...♘c4!?N

This would have given White something to think about.

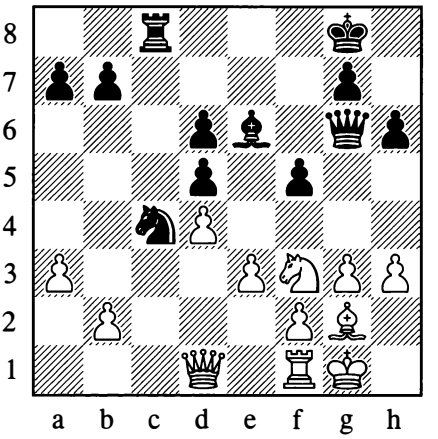
The game continued: 18...f4 19.exf4 (19.♘h4!?N is a computer suggestion which may bring White an edge with accurate play) 19...♕e4† 20.♔f1 ♕c2 (20...♘c4!?) 21.♕e1 ♕c1 22.♔g1 ♖c2⩱ Huss – Milov, Lausanne 2003.

19.0–0!

19.♕b1?! is dangerous after: 19...♘xe3!? (19...♖c6 intending ...♖b6 also looks promising) 20.fxe3 ♕xg3† 21.♔f1 f4

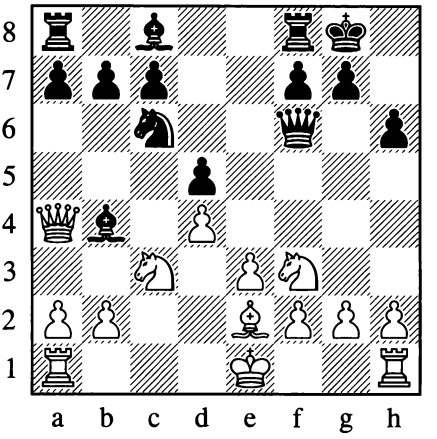


22.♕e1 (22.exf4? loses to 22...♕xf4 with threats of ...♖c1† and ...♗f5) 22...♖c2 23.♕xg3 fxg3∓ The position remains murky but more dangerous for White.



19...♘xb2 20.♕b3 ♘c4 21.♕xb7 ♕f7=

D22) 10.♗e2



10...a6

I slightly prefer this move order to 10...♗e6, although most of the time it transposes.

11.0–0

The most significant alternative is:

11.a3 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 b5!?

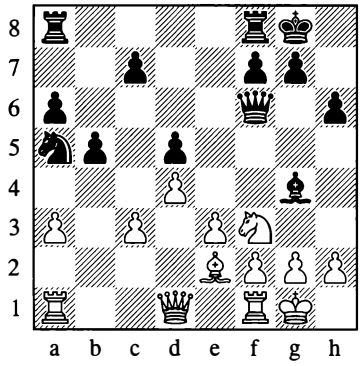
This is the reason why I favour the earlier ...a6. This approach was tried by my brother, GM Nick Pert, in his first outing with the Ragozin during the 2016 British Championship.

13.♕d1

13.♗xb5? axb5 14.♕xa8 ♗h3 turns out badly for White.

13.♕b3 ♕d6 14.0–0 .♗d7 (14...♗f5N also seems fine) 15.♘d2 ♘a5= Chatalbashev – Arnaudov, Sunny Beach 2015.

13...♗g4 14.0–0 ♘a5

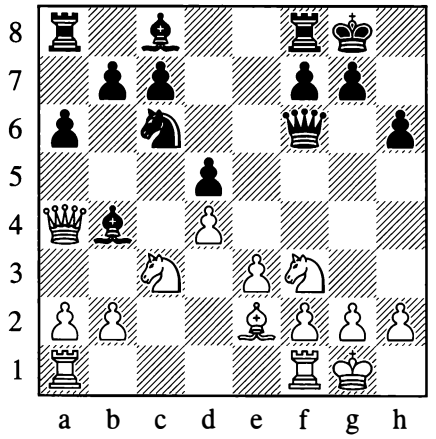


15.♘e5 ♗xe2 16.♕xe2 ♕d6 17.a4 ♘c4 18.♘d3 c6 19.♘c5 a5!

Chances are level, and White made a natural but slightly inaccurate move on the next turn.

20.axb5?! cxb5 21.g3 ♕c6∓

Black stood slightly better thanks to the passed a-pawn in Ward – N. Pert, Bournemouth 2016.



11...♗e6 12.♖fc1 ♗d6 13.♕d1

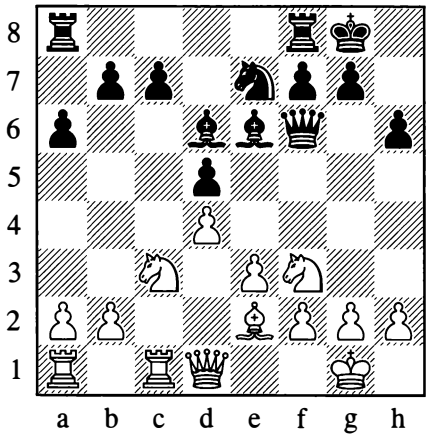
White has opted for this regrouping move in the great majority of games.

13.a3 is a natural alternative, when I would like to mention two contrasting approaches:

a) 13...g5 14.♕d1 ♖ad8 15.♘a4 was slightly more pleasant for White in Van Wely – So, Wijk aan Zee 2016; So's move order has a couple of drawbacks which I will say more about below. I analysed the game in more detail and actually found that Black is okay after a later improvement, but I think Black can make his life easier by avoiding this path altogether.

b) Instead I would like to recommend: 13...♖fe8 (or 13...♘e7 first, with similar ideas) 14.b4 (or the immediate 14.♕d1 ♘e7) 14...♘e7, when I doubt that White has anything better than transposing to variation D222 with 15.♕d1. White could certainly consider other moves, but Black should be fine as long as he has a firm grasp of the plans which will soon be explained.

13...♘e7



This is a typical regrouping move. However, Black's plan over the next few moves is not set in stone, and will vary according to personal preference, as well as what White does.

To understand some of the nuances of the position, let's begin by considering the

Van Wely – So game mentioned above, where Black played ...g5 and ...♖ad8. I would prefer to refrain from both of these moves for the time being. The ...g5 move can certainly be considered in some lines, but it's a committal move and not necessarily the most useful way to spend a tempo. I also think Black should leave the a8-rook on its original square for the moment, in order to be able to meet ♘a4 with ...b6, stopping the knight from going to c5. We will see this plan in variation D223 below.

In addition to the above points, I believe Black should avoid committing the f8-rook to the queenside, as this piece may instead be used for a kingside attack. Another useful idea to remember is that b2-b4 may be met by ...♘c8 followed by ...♘b6-c4, as shown in variation D222. If White does not commit to any particular plan, Black can improve his position with moves like ...♖fe8, ...g5 and ...♕g7, avoiding any premature moves with the a8-rook or e7-knight.

Now that we have some idea of the different plans and resources available, we will look at some concrete variations. White's three main options are **D221) 14.♖ab1**, **D222) 14.a3** and **D223) 14.♘a4**.

D221) 14.♖ab1

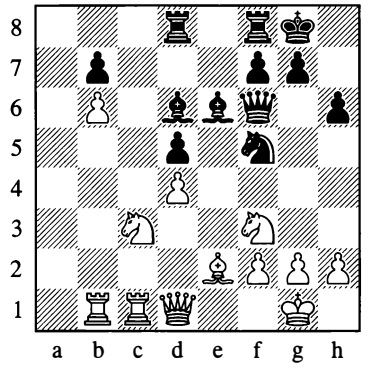
I encountered this move in a game in 2015.

14...♗f5

Possibly the most accurate move, although it could lead to a threefold repetition.

14...♘g6 15.b4 b5!?N 16.a4 c6∞ is an interesting way to keep the position more complex.

14...♖ad8!? was my choice when I encountered this variation. The game continued: 15.b4 c6 16.a4 ♘f5 17.b5 axb5 18.axb5 c5 19.b6 cxd4 20.exd4



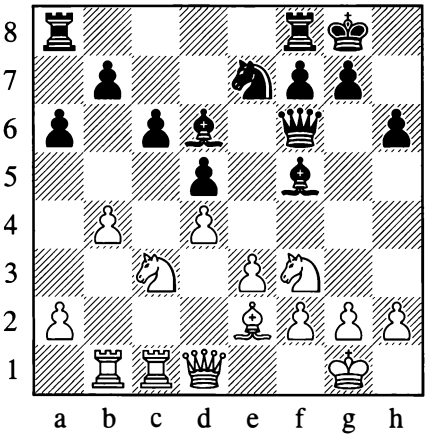
20...g5!? (20...♗f4N 21.♖c2 ♖c8=) 21.♘b5 ♗f4 22.♖c3 ♗d7?! (I should have preferred 22...♖c8N 23.♘c7 g4∞) 23.♘c7± Hill – R. Pert, Southend 2015.

15.♗d3 ♗g4 16.b4!?

16.♗e2!? invites a repetition.

16...c6 17.♗e2 ♗f5

17...♘g6 18.♘e1 ♗f5 19.♗d3 ♖fe8 20.a4 ♖ad8 21.b5 was objectively okay for Black in Arencibia Rodriguez – L. Bronstein, Buenos Aires 2005, but I don't think there is anything to be gained by allowing White to carry out his minority attack.



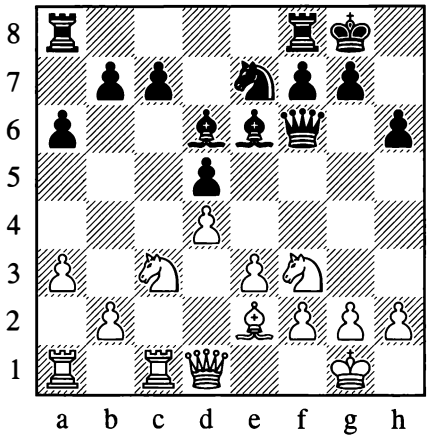
18.♗d3

18.♖b2?! allows 18...a5!∓ with ...♗a3 in the air.

18...♗g4 19.♗e2=

The game might end in a repetition. If you wish to play for more than a draw, then I would suggest move 14 as the place to deviate.

D222) 14.a3

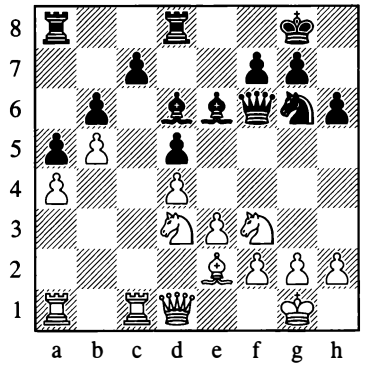


This has not been as popular as the variation below, but it has been tested by some strong players, including the world champ. White wants to establish his pawns on a3 and b4 before taking further action on the queenside.

14...♖fe8

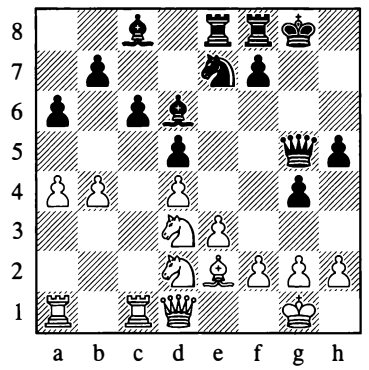
This is the most flexible waiting move.

14...♖fd8?! was Aronian's choice against Carlsen but it is too passive for my taste. It is worth showing a bit more of the game, as the world number one steadily builds his position while Black struggles to do anything. 15.b4 ♘c8 16.♘a4 b6 17.♘b2 ♘e7 18.♘d3 ♘g6 19.a4 a5 20.b5



20...♖e8 21.♖c3 ♗f5 22.♖ac1 ♖ad8 23.♘d2 ♖d7 24.g3 ♘f8 25.♗g4 ♘h7 26.♗xf5 ♕xf5 27.♕f3± Carlsen – Aronian, Wijk aan Zee 2015.

14...c6!? is a slightly different approach which also seems quite viable. The following recent game illustrates Black's chances quite well: 15.♘a4 ♖ae8 16.b4?! (16.♘c5 ♗c8 17.♕b3 seems a better try, when 17...♗g4!? is an interesting pawn sac: 18.♘xb7 [or 18.♕xb7 ♖b8 19.♕xa6 ♖xb2∓] 18...♖b8∓) 16...g5 17.♘c5 ♗c8 18.♘d3 g4 19.♘d2 h5 20.a4 ♕g5



21.b5 h4 22.bxa6 bxa6 23.e4 f6 24.exd5 cxd5 25.♘f1 f5↑ Black's kingside strategy worked perfectly in Schenk – Piorun, Germany 2016.

15.b4

This seems the most consistent move, and is in line with Carlsen's treatment of the position.

15.♘d2!?N

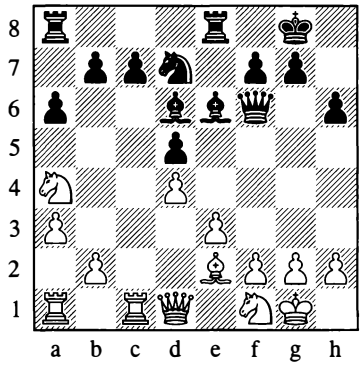
Nikos Ntirlis suggested this move. The idea is to make a useful prophylactic move, preparing ♘f1 to defend the kingside, while avoiding anything committal on the queenside (see the main line below for why this is important).

15...♘g6!?

My computer suggested this move, with the amazing idea of sending this knight on a long trip to d7, from where it can either support a ...c5 pawn break or go to f6 after ...♕e7.

15...g5 16.♘f1 ♕g7 17.♘a4 b6 18.♖c3 g4 19.♖ac1 h5 20.b4 could also be investigated. It looks playable but also quite tricky for Black, as he must watch out for a ♖xc7 exchange sac, as well as the tactical possibility of ♘c5.

16.♘f1 ♘f8 17.♘a4 ♘d7

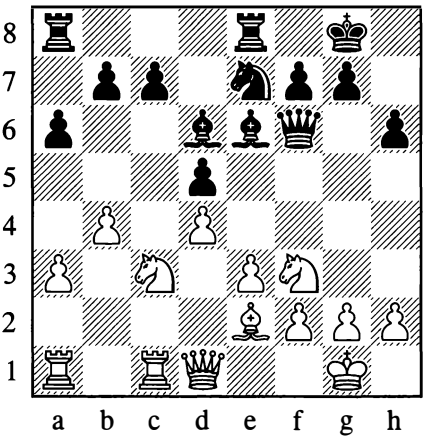


18.b4 b6 19.♘c3

19.♖c3 ♕e7 20.♖ac1 ♘f6 also seems decent for Black.

19...♕e7∞

Black can follow up with either ...c5 or ...♘f6, depending on White's approach.



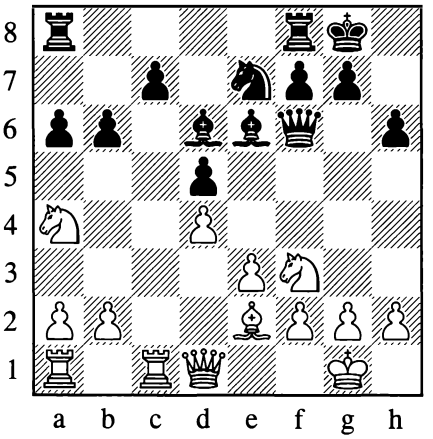
15...♘c8!N

This was suggested by Max Illingworth as a way to gain equal chances, and I like his approach of aiming for the c4-square. Black has the two bishops and is generally well developed, so why hold back?

16.♘a4 b5 17.♘c5 ♘b6∞

The knight is heading for c4, blocking out White's queenside play.

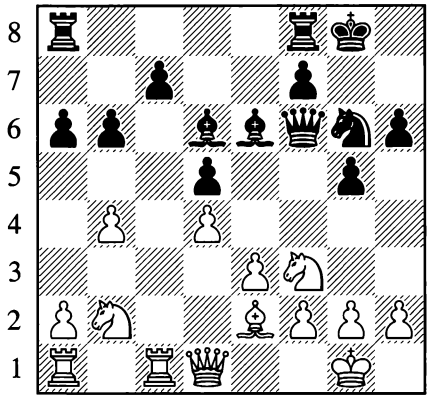
D223) 14.♘a4 b6



As I explained earlier, this move is the reason why I believe Black should generally keep the rook on a8 for as long as possible. Interestingly, this position was first tested as early as 1953, and it remains topical today. White has tried

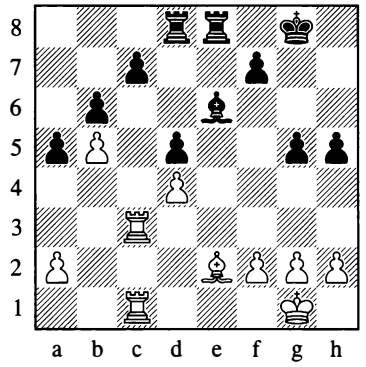
a bunch of moves but often the general plans will remain similar from one line to the next, so I have chosen to focus on **D2231) 15.b4** and **D2232) 15.a3**.

D2231) 15.b4 g5 16.♘b2 ♘g6



17.♘d3 ♕g7

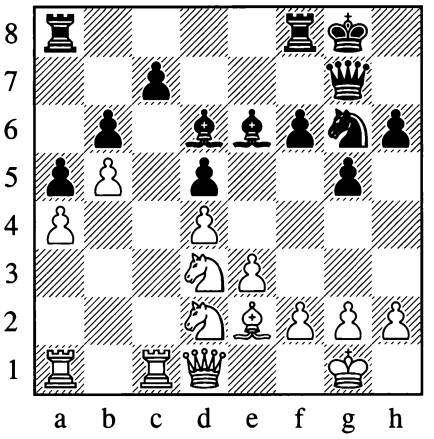
17...a5!? 18.b5 ♖fe8 19.♖c3 h5 20.♖ac1 ♖ad8 21.♘fe5 led to simplifications and a draw in the following game: 21...♘xe5 22.dxe5 ♗xe5 23.♘xe5 ♕xe5 24.♕d4 ♕xd4 25.exd4



25...♗g4 26.♗xg4 hxg4 27.♖xc7 ♖e2 28.h3 gxh3 29.♖1c6 ♔g7 30.gxh3 ♖xa2 31.♖xb6 ♖a4 32.♖bb7 ♖f8 33.♖a7 ♖xd4 ½–½ Roiz – Tomashevsky, Saratov 2011.

18.a4 a5 19.b5 f6 20.♘d2

20.♖c3N looks more sensible; after 20...h5 21.♖ac1 ♖ae8 22.♘d2 g4 the position remains unclear.

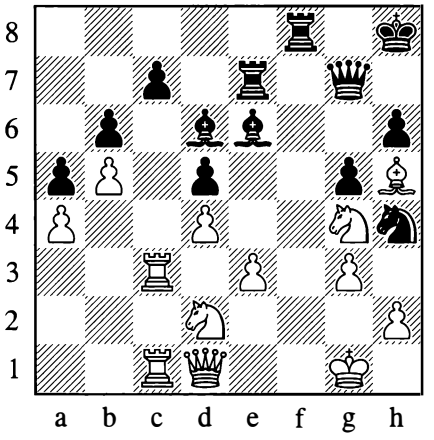


20...f5!

Exploiting the fact that White's knight is a move further away from the e5-square.

21.♖c3 f4 22.♖ac1 fxe3 23.fxe3 ♘h4 24.g3 ♘f5 25.♘f2 ♖ae8 26.♘f1 ♖e7 27.♗h5 ♔h8 28.♘g4 ♘h4! 29.♘d2

29.gxh4? gxh4 leaves White too exposed: 30.♔h1 (30.♖3c2 ♕g5–+) 30...♕g5 31.♘e5 ♗xe5 32.dxe5 ♖f2–+



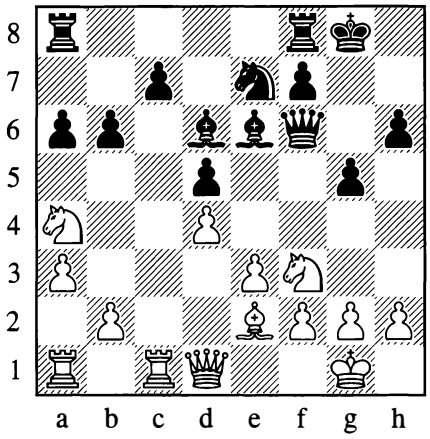
29...♗b4!N

The most accurate, although 29...♗f7∓ was also unpleasant for White in Werle – Gajewski, Wunsiedel 2016.

30.♘e5 ♗xc3 31.♖xc3 ♗h3∓

D2232) 15.a3 g5

Once again, Black sets his kingside counterplay in motion.



16.b4

This is the natural follow-up. I will mention a few other examples; the exact moves are not so important, but they are just meant to illustrate the general plans and possible piece manoeuvres.

16.g3

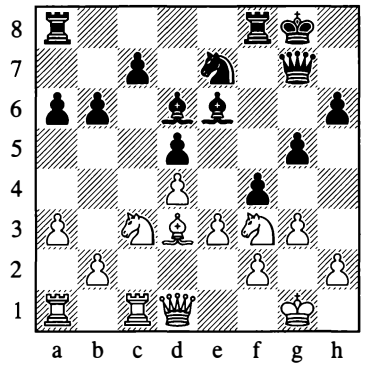
This move was played against me by IM Christof Sielecki in an online blitz game. He subsequently commented upon the game in a video on *Chessexplained*, his YouTube channel. During his commentary he was particularly negative about White's position, as he felt it was difficult for White to find something constructive to do, whereas Black's plan of pushing the f-pawn was straightforward and effective.

16...♕g7 17.♘c3 f5 18.♗d3?!

18.♕d2 is better. A possible continuation is: 18...f4!? (the preparatory 18...♘g6 also looks sensible) 19.gxf4 gxf4† 20.♔h1 ♔h8 21.♖g1 fxe3 22.fxe3 (22.♕xe3 ♕f6∓) 22...♕f6 23.♖af1 ♗h3 24.♖f2 ♕e6∞

18...f4!

White is already in serious trouble.



19.e4 fxg3 20.fxg3 ♗g4 21.♗e2 dxe4 22.♘e5?!

22.♘xe4 was necessary although 22...♔h8 is still clearly better for Black.

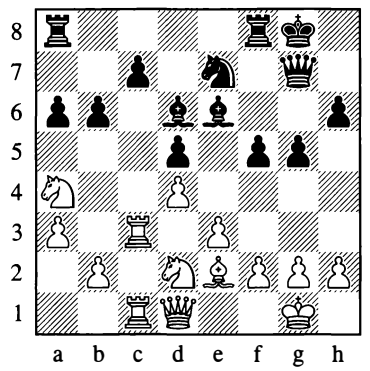
22...♗xe2 23.♕xe2 ♗xe5 24.dxe5 ♕xe5 25.♘xe4 ♘d5 26.♖d1 ♖ae8 27.♖xd5 ♕xe4 28.♕xe4 ♖xe4

I converted the extra pawn to victory in Chessexplained – Antidrome, Internet 2015.

16.♘d2

This move is waving a red flag at the f-pawn!

16...♕g7 17.♖c3 f5 18.♖ac1



18...♖a7!?

It is hard to say if this is the best move, but it could be a useful idea to remember in positions where you feel the ♖xc7 exchange sac could be a problem.

18...f4N is a good alternative: 19.♖xc7 fxe3

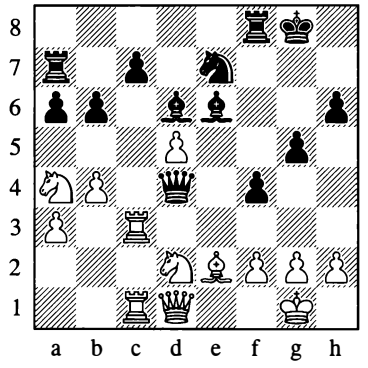
20.fxe3 ♗xc7 21.♖xc7 ♖ac8∓

19.b4 f4

I am not sure if it's helpful to include 19...a5!?N 20.b5 before playing 20...f4. After 21.e4 ♕xd4 the knight on a4 is slightly loose, but it's still defended by the queen on d1.

20.e4 ♕xd4 21.exd5

Now Black's most accurate continuation would have been:



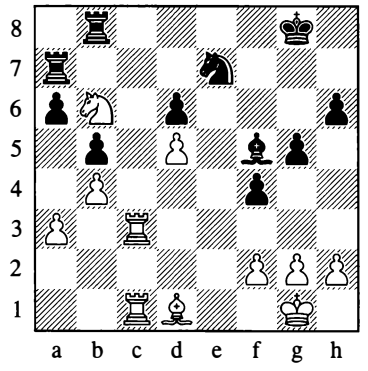
21...♗f5!N

21...♕xd5? soon led to a draw in Miton – Cornette, Germany 2016, but both players overlooked a nasty trick in 22.♘xb6! cxb6 23.♖d3 ♕e5 24.♘f3, when White wins back the piece with a huge advantage.

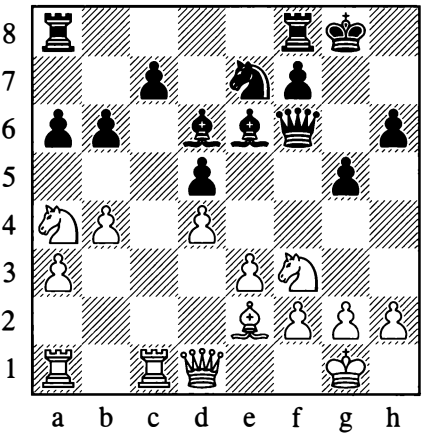
22.♘c4 ♕xd1† 23.♗xd1 b5 24.♘xd6 cxd6

White is under some pressure in the endgame. For instance:

25.♘b6 ♖b8



26.♖c7! ♖bb7! 27.♖xb7 ♖xb7 28.♘a8 ♖b8 29.♘c7 ♖c8∓

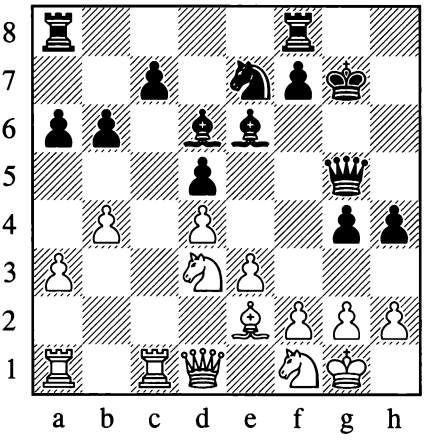


16...g4

Sometimes Black puts the knight on g6 before taking further action, but in this position it seems fine to plough ahead with the pawns.

17.♘d2 h5 18.♘f1 ♕g5 19.♘b2 h4 20.♘d3 ♔g7

20...♘g6!N→ would have prevented White's next move while planning ...f5-f4.

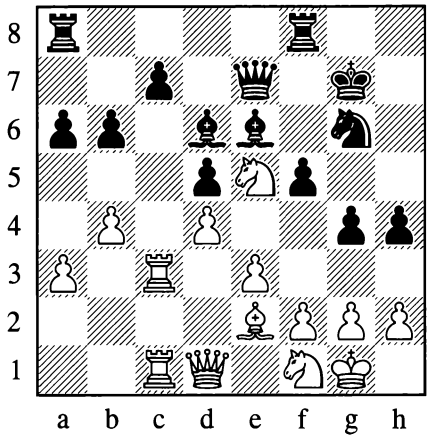


21.♘e5 f5!?

21...♗xe5 22.dxe5 ♖fc8 would have been roughly equal.

22.♖c3 ♘g6 23.♖ac1 ♕e7

23...♘xe5 24.dxe5 ♗xe5 25.♖xc7† ♗xc7 26.♖xc7† ♖f7 27.♖c6 ♕f6∞



24.♗d3?

24.♘c6= was correct.

24...♘xe5 25.dxe5 ♗xe5 26.♖c6 ♗d6 27.♗b1 a5 28.b5 ♖ac8∓

Sargissian – Fressinet, Huaian (blitz) 2016.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes our coverage of the 5.cxd5 exd5 branch of the Ragozin. This pawn trade saves White the bother of worrying about ...dxc4, but it's also a slight concession in that it gives the c8-bishop a clear view towards the kingside. If White does not follow up with critical, active moves (the most obvious one being 6.♗g5) then his chances for an opening advantage are diminished. The positions are still interesting of course; it seems to me that quite a few of the lines end up being theoretically equal but practically more pleasant for Black, thanks to his bishop pair and kingside attacking chances.

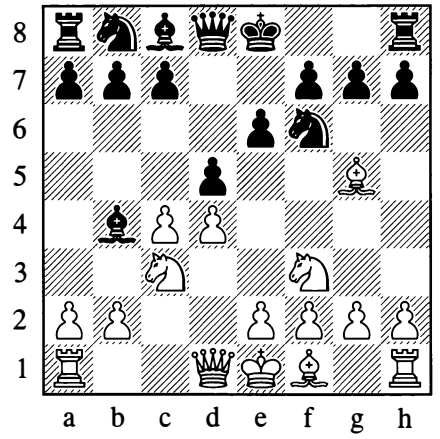
PART II

5.♗g5

Introduction to 5.♗g5 dxc4!

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5

This is the absolute main line and arguably the most critical move at White's disposal. White brings the bishop to its most active square and refrains from exchanging on d5, thus keeping the c8-bishop blocked in.



5...dxc4!

I really wanted to go for this move as it is consistent with our strategy elsewhere in the book, where we will look to play ...dxc4 and create an imbalance at the right moment. It does mean inviting a transposition to the main line of the Vienna Variation (which usually begins with 4...dxc4 – see the Vienna section below for more about this) but I promise that this is not as scary as it may sound. I personally have some experience playing the Vienna Variation but I have rarely had a chance to play the main line, as White has several ways to deviate from it, as noted below.

Another thing I have noticed when playing this line in tournaments, and even in blitz, is that after I play 5...dxc4, there is often a long pause from my opponent, who suddenly realizes he will have to transpose to some sort of Vienna. Many of these players then proceed with what they deem to be a safe move (usually 6.e3), in which case Black immediately gets a chance to fight for the advantage.

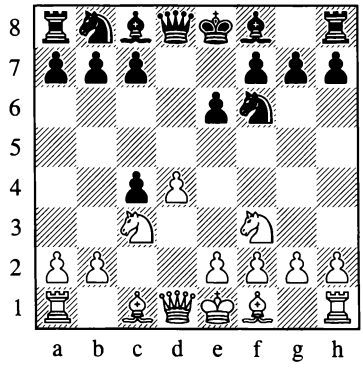
5...h6 is the 'pure Ragozin' move which many top players are currently using. Although clearly a good move, the problem is that it is hard for Black to play for a win in many of the lines. For example the current main line runs 6.♗xf6 ♕xf6 7.e3 0–0 8.♖c1 dxc4 9.♗xc4 c5 10.0–0 cxd4

11.♘xd4 ♗d7 12.♕b3 ♘c6 13.♘xc6 ♗xc3 14.♖xc3 ♗xc6 15.♗b5 ♗d5 16.♗c4 ♗c6 17.♗b5 ♗d5 18.♗c4 with an immediate draw. This is fine in certain situations, but hardly an ideal opening choice when facing a weaker opponent, or playing in an open tournament where a win is needed.

Comparing 5.♗g5 dxc4! with the Vienna Variation

"If the Vienna Variation is so great, why not play that instead of the Ragozin in the first place?" you may be tempted to ask.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 is a Vienna proper, when White has the following options:



a) 5.♗g5 ♗b4 reaches our target position.

b) 5.e3 is a common choice, leading to a version of the Queen's Gambit Accepted after 5...a6 6.♗xc4 (or 6.a4). Our move order avoids the QGA transposition.

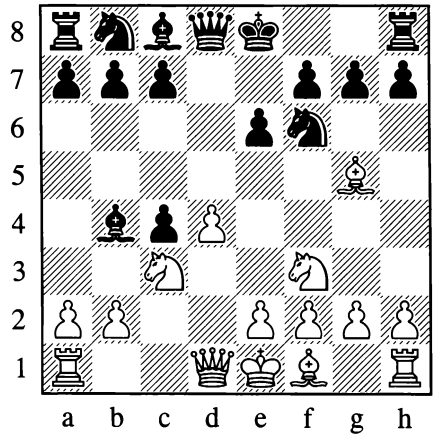
c) 5.e4 ♗b4 6.♗xc4!? (6.♗g5 transposes to our Ragozin repertoire) 6...♘xe4 7.0–0 is a modern, dangerous pawn sacrifice which has scored well, including at the top level. Our move order cuts this out.

d) 5.♕a4†!? leads to positions resembling the Semi-Slav; once again, our move order cuts this out.

The Vienna is still a good opening of course. On balance, however, I find White's alternatives in the Ragozin, such as 5.cxd5 and 5.♕a4†, less troublesome to deal with than the lines above. A final issue with the Vienna move order is that Black will have to find another system after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 without ♘f3. When you play the Ragozin, on the other hand, you can meet 3.♘c3 with 3...♗b4, when you can either transpose to a Ragozin (after a subsequent ♘f3) or at least reach a position of a somewhat similar character with the bishop on b4.

***

Before exploring any detailed variations, here is a brief summary of White's main options after **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4**:



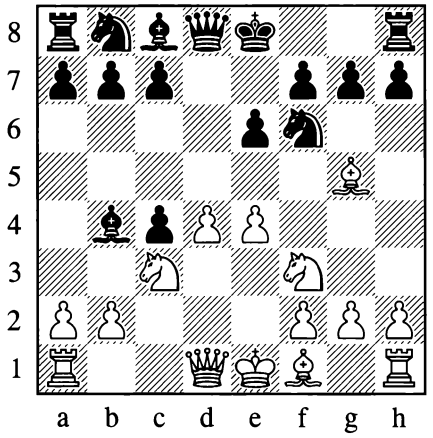
6.e4

6.a3 is a positional approach which will be looked at shortly.

6.e3 is played more often than it should be. Black can exploit this timid response with 6...b5!, obtaining an excellent game, as I will show in Chapter 4.

6.♕a4† ♘c6 will be analysed in Chapter 8 under the move order 5.♕a4† ♘c6 6.♗g5 dxc4.

6.♕c2 transposes to 5.♕c2 dxc4 6.♗g5, as covered in variation B3 of Chapter 15.

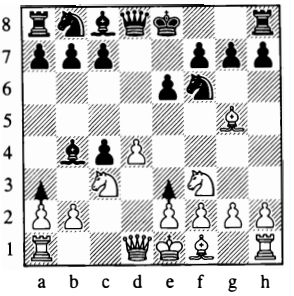


The text move is White's most ambitious and best choice. I have chosen to offer two options against it:

6...c5 is the main line, which I wholeheartedly recommend. It requires some precise opening knowledge as White has a number of choices, some of which are quite critical. That said, I believe a careful study of Chapters 5 and 6 will pay dividends. Many strong grandmasters continue to play this variation today, with generally fine results.

6...b5!? is a relatively unexplored sideline which may appeal to those who yearn for a complicated game while cutting down on opening theory. Although played occasionally at the top level, the lines are far from being worked out. It's definitely a line for adventurous players, but Chapter 7 shows that Black has reasonable chances, and there's a good chance that your opponents will have a hard time finding their way through the mess!

Chapter 4

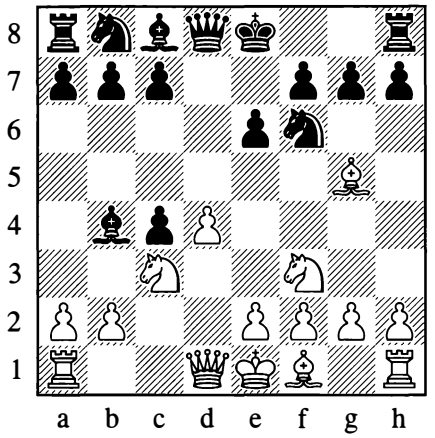


6.a3 & 6.e3

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4!

A) 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 c5 84
A1) 8.♕a4† 84
A2) 8.e3 86
B) 6.e3 b5 87
B1) 7.♘d2 88
B2) 7.♗e2 90
B3) 7.a4 c6 91
B31) 8.♘e5 91
B32) 8.♘d2 93
B33) 8.♗e2 ♗b7 9.0–0 a6 95
B331) 10.♘e4 96
B332) 10.♘e5 97

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4!



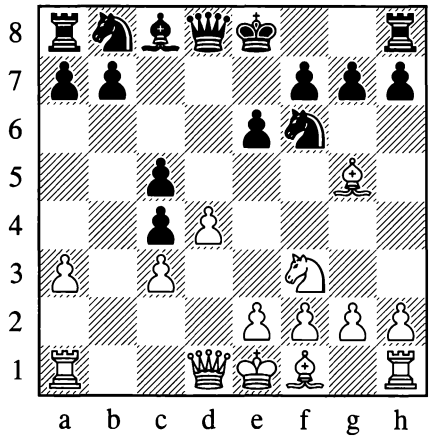
As I explained in the introductory comments, 6.e4 is White's only really ambitious continuation. Before we study it, the present chapter will deal with the lesser options of **A) 6.a3** and **B) 6.e3**.

A) 6.a3

White goes for a positional approach, hoping to profit from the bishop pair and strong pawn centre. The drawback is that it's a bit slow.

6...♗xc3† 7.bxc3 c5

I find this move the most appealing, although several others have been tried.



White has two main options: **A1) 8.♕a4†** and **A2) 8.e3**.

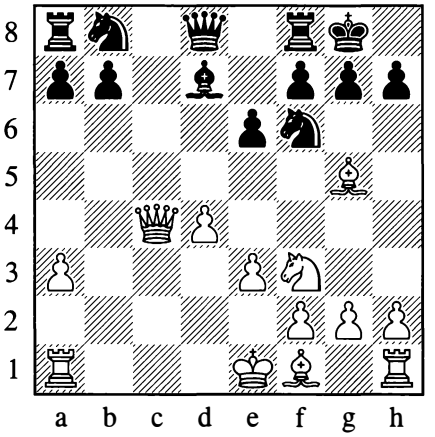
8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.e3 0–0 10.♗xc4 occurred in Van Wely – Thavandiran, Philadelphia 2010, and now 10...b6N 11.0–0 ♗b7 12.♗d3 ♘d7= would have given Black good play, as indicated by both Lysyj and Sherbakov.

A1) 8.♕a4† ♗d7 9.♕xc4

This continuation lacks bite: White regains his pawn but falls behind in development.

9...cxd4 10.cxd4 0–0 11.e3

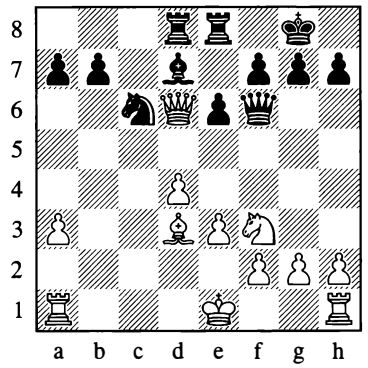
11.e4 can of course be met by 11...h6 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6, when White controls the centre but has lost his bishop pair. After the further 13.♗d3 ♖c8 14.♕a2 ♘c6 15.♕b2 ♗e8 16.0–0 ♖d8 17.e5 ♕f4 Black was doing fine in Bartel – Balogh, Warsaw 2007. The d4-pawn is under fire, while Black may also be able to play on the queenside with moves like ...♘a5, ...♗a4 and ...♖ac8.



11...♕a5†!?N

This new move is one of a few good options.

11...♘c6 has been played before and also seems perfectly fine, for instance: 12.♕c5 ♖c8 13.♗d3 ♖e8 14.♗xf6 ♕xf6 15.♕d6 ♖cd8



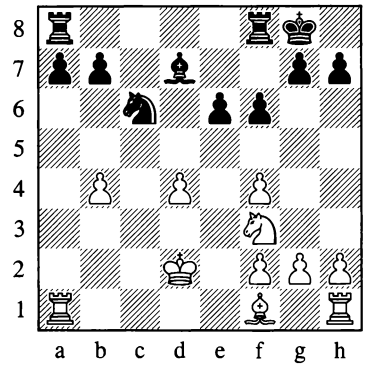
16.0–0 (16.♗e4 e5 17.♕xf6 gxf6 18.dxe5 fxe5= Javakhishvili – Macieja, Aix-les-Bains 2011) 16...e5 17.♕xf6 gxf6 18.d5 ♘e7 19.e4 ♘xd5 20.exd5 e4 21.♗e2 exf3 22.♗xf3 ♔f8 23.♖fc1 ♖c8= Mamedyarov – Aronian, San Sebastian 2006.

12.♕b4 ♕xb4† 13.axb4 ♘d5

Black goes after the b4-pawn; he can always throw in ...f6 before taking it in order to stop any ♗e7 ideas.

14.b5

14.♔d2 is harmless at best: 14...f6 15.♗f4 White must be ready to meet ...♘xb4 with ♗d6. (15.♗h4 ♘xb4∓) 15...♘xf4 16.exf4 ♘c6

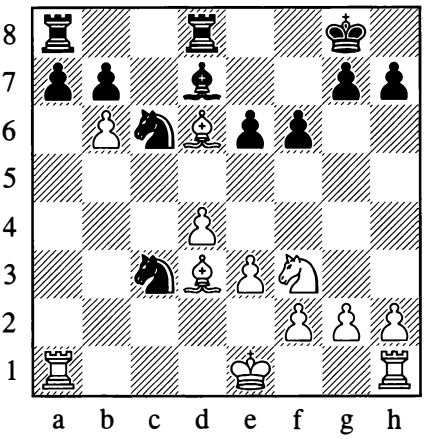


17.b5 (17.♗b5? ♖fd8∓) 17...♘e7 18.♗c4 ♖fd8=

14...f6 15.♗f4 ♘c3 16.♗d6 ♖d8 17.b6 ♘c6 18.♗d3!?

Preparing ♔d2.

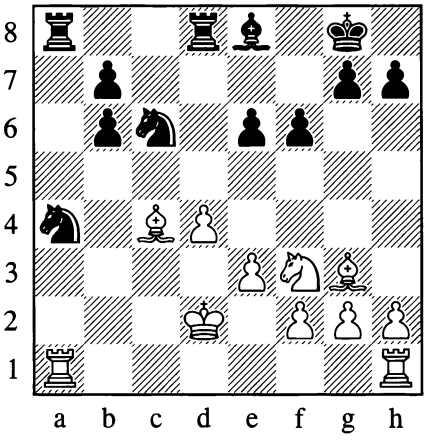
18.bxa7 would be a safer choice, although Black is doing fine after either recapture.



18...♗e8 19.♗g3

19.♗c7?! ♖dc8 20.♔d2 ♘d5∓

19...axb6 20.♔d2 ♘a4 21.♗c4



21...b5!?

21...♔f7 is a good alternative, with chances to make something of the extra pawn in the long run.

22.♗xe6†

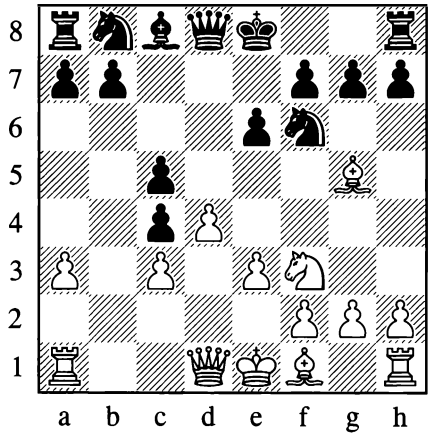
22.♗xb5? ♘xd4!∓

22...♗f7 23.♗xf7† ♔xf7↑

Intending ...b4, when Black's queenside activity looks more important than White's central pawns.

A2) 8.e3

As I mentioned earlier, this is more challenging than the previous variation.

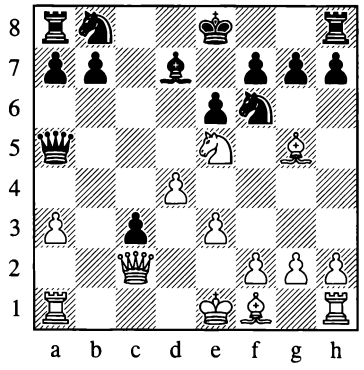


8...cxd4

8...♕a5?! has been played several times but Black's results have been poor. The text move is much safer.

9.exd4

9.cxd4?! has not yet been tried. It's just about playable, but needlessly risky for White. Play might continue: 9...♕a5† 10.♕d2 c3 11.♕c2 ♗d7 12.♘e5! Without this tactical resource, White would be in serious trouble.



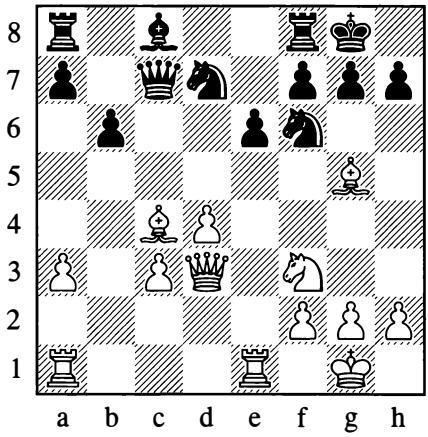
12...0–0 (White is ready to meet 12...♗a4 with 13.♘c4!, and if 13...♕xg5? 14.♕xa4† ♘c6 15.h4! Black's queen suddenly proves to be misplaced) 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♘c4 (14.♘xd7 ♘xd7 and Black is at least equal) 14...♕d5 15.♕xc3 ♘c6 The position is approximately equal, although White still has to be slightly careful due to his slow development and the open c-file.

9...♘bd7 10.♗xc4 ♕c7 11.♕d3

Roiz notes that 11.♕b3 0–0 12.0–0 b6 is equal.

11...0–0 12.0–0 b6 13.♖fe1

Roiz mentions that White gets nowhere after 13.♗h4 ♗b7 (13...♘h5!? is another good way to meet White's bishop manoeuvre) 14.♗g3 ♕c8 15.♖ac1 ♗xf3 16.gxf3 a6=.

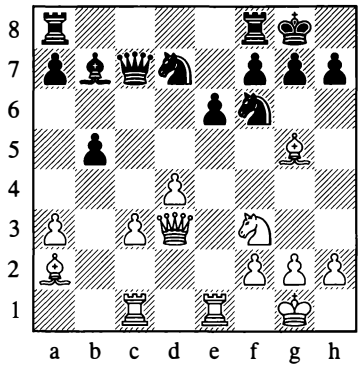


13...♗b7 14.♗a2 ♖fd8

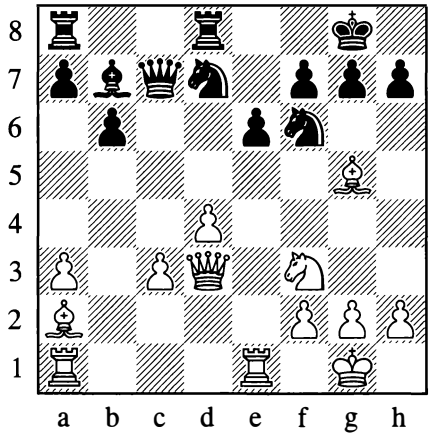
Black places the rook opposite the enemy queen and sets up a possible ...♘c5-e4 jump. There are a few other good continuations, with the choice mainly coming down to personal preference.

14...♖ac8 15.c4 ♖fe8 16.♖ad1 occurred in Roiz – Macieja, Santa Clara 2014. Here Roiz recommends 16...h6N 17.♗h4 ♘h5∞, when play remains balanced.

14...b5!? is another option mentioned by Roiz. Let me add a couple of illustrative lines: 15.♖ac1 (After 15.♕xb5 ♗xf3 16.gxf3 ♕xc3 17.♗e3 ♖fb8∞ White has the bishop pair, but look at his pawn structure...) This position occurred in T. Heinz – Stickler, Bavaria 2005. I think Black should have continued:



15...h6N 16.♗h4 ♗xf3!? Eliminating the knight before it jumps to e5 and starts an attack. 17.♕xf3 ♕a5 18.c4 ♕d2∞



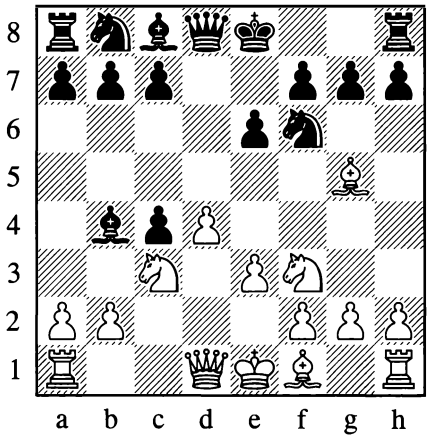
15.♕e3 b5 16.♖ac1 ♖dc8

16...♖ac8N is also playable; my main line continues 17.♘e5 ♘xe5 18.♕xe5 (18.dxe5?! ♕c6 19.f3 ♘g4 works out in Black's favour) 18...♕xe5 19.dxe5 h6 20.♗h4 ♖d2 21.♗xe6 fxe6 22.exf6 g5 23.♗g3 ♔f7 24.♗e5 ♗d5 25.♖cd1 ♖c2 26.h3 ♖c4= and it should be a draw due to the opposite-coloured bishops.

17.♗f4 ♕a5 18.♗d6 ♕b6=

Black had no problems in Lalith – Wojtaszek, Baku 2015.

B) 6.e3



This is a common choice among unsuspecting opponents who prefer not to get involved in the complexities of a main line Vienna. However, White's life will be anything but simple, as Black gets to keep his extra pawn while obtaining active prospects for his pieces.

6...b5

Unlike the 6.e4 b5 variation, White is unable to go on the offensive with e4-e5 here. Instead he will have to aim for some kind of piece play in the centre, possibly combined with moves like a2-a4 and b2-b3 to open lines on the queenside.

We will analyse **B1) 7.♘d2**, **B2) 7.♗e2** and **B3) 7.a4**, the last of which is the main line.

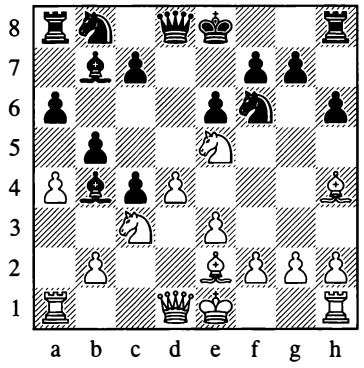
A rare sideline is:
7.♘e5 ♗b7 8.a4 h6!?

8...c6 transposes to the later variation B31. Black is doing well there, so this would seem the simplest option.

The text move is an attempt to take advantage of White's slightly inaccurate

move order. It seems good for Black, albeit rather complicated.

9.♗h4 a6 10.♗e2



10...♘bd7!N

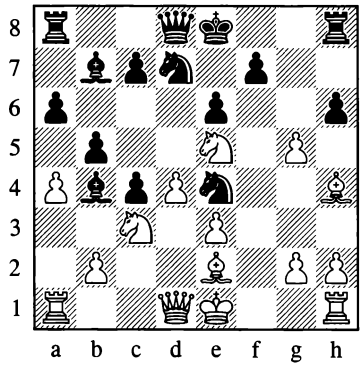
10...g5 has been played but after 11.♗g3!N (rather than 11.♗h5?! ♘xh5 12.♕xh5 ♖h7 13.♗g3 ♗xg2 14.♖g1 ♗b7 15.h4 ♘d7 16.♘xd7 ♔xd7∓ as in Scafarelli – Oren, Helsinki 1952) 11...♗xg2 12.♗f3 ♗xh1 13.♗xh1 ♘d5 14.♕h5 White has a strong initiative for the exchange.

11.f4

11.♗f3 ♘xe5 12.♗xb7 ♘d3† 13.♔e2 ♖b8 14.♗c6† ♔f8→ also favours Black.

11...g5 12.fxg5 ♘e4

12...♘d5 is likely to lead to the same thing.

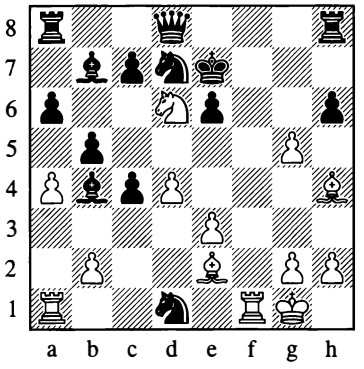


13.♘xf7! ♘xc3

13...♔xf7?? loses the queen after 14.g6†.

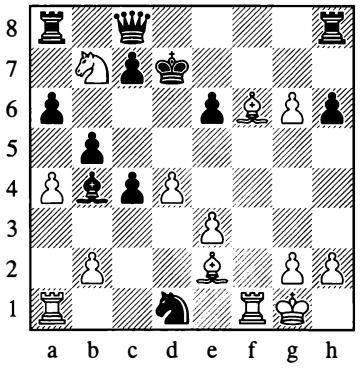
14.0–0! ♘xd1 15.♘d6† ♔e7!

After 15...♗xd6 16.♗h5† ♔e7 17.♖f7† (17.g6†? ♘f6 18.♗xf6† ♔d7 19.♗xd8 ♘xe3–+) 17...♔e8= White can (and must) force a draw.



16.♘xb7 ♕c8 17.g6† ♘f6 18.♗xf6† ♔d7

This looks incredibly murky but ultimately Black seems to be better, for instance:



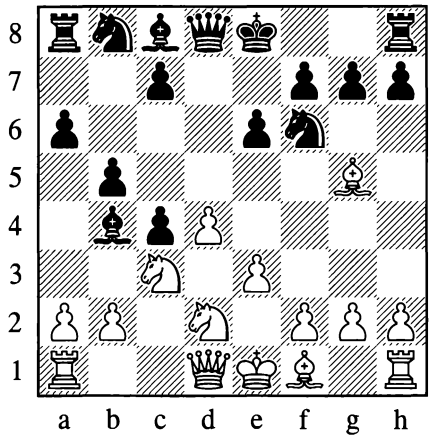
19.♗xh8 ♘xe3 20.♖f7† ♔c6 21.♗f3† ♘d5∓

White is running out of ideas. You certainly don't need to memorize this, especially as 8...c6 would have transposed to one of the main lines analysed later. Nevertheless, it was a fun line to analyse, and it should open your eyes to some of the amazing tactical possibilities which may arise in these positions.

B1) 7.♘d2 a6

7...c6 was played by Naroditsky in 2015 (as well as Stuart Conquest back in 1987!) but the text move looks better to me, as it keeps

the long diagonal open for the bishop when it arrives on b7.



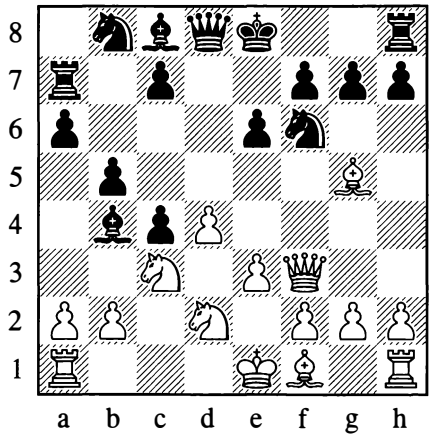
8.♕f3

This seems like the consistent follow-up.

8.a4 ♗b7 9.axb5 ♗xc3 10.bxc3 (10.bxa6?? is a blunder as 10...♗xd2† comes with check! 11.♕xd2 ♘xa6 and Black is a piece up.) 10...axb5∓ White will struggle to demonstrate compensation.

8...♖a7

8...c6!?N also looks promising for Black, for instance: 9.♘de4 ♘bd7 10.♗e2 0–0 11.0–0 h6 12.♗xf6 ♘xf6 13.♘xf6† ♕xf6 14.♕xc6 ♖b8∓ Followed by ...♗b7.



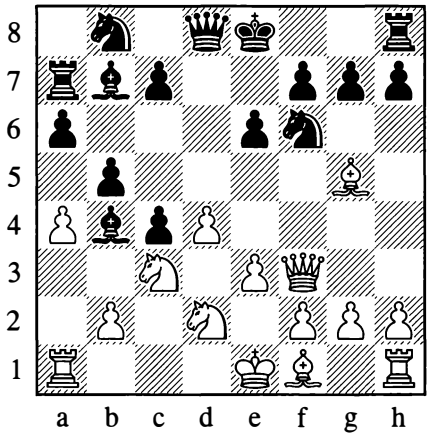
9.a4N

White needs an improvement on the following game: 9.e4? ♗b7 10.0–0–0 ♗e7 11.h4 ♘c6 12.d5 ♘d4 13.♕f4 h6 14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.dxe6 ♘xe6∓ Martino – Sakurai, Buenos Aires 1991.

The text move is more challenging, as White tries to take advantage of the misplaced rook on a7. Black should still be doing well though.

9...♗b7

9...♖b7∞ looks a bit clumsy, although Black's position is still okay.



10.♗xf6

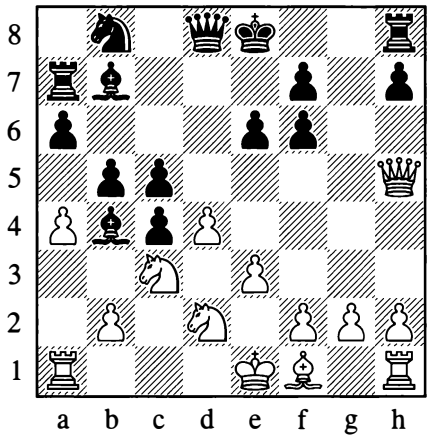
10.♕g3 ♖a8!?∓ also leaves White without enough compensation.

10...gxf6

After 10...♕xf6?! 11.♕xf6 gxf6 12.axb5 ♖a8 13.bxa6 ♖xa6 14.♖xa6 ♘xa6 15.f3 c5 16.♗xc4 ♔e7 17.♔f2 cxd4 18.exd4 ♖d8⩱ Black actually has reasonable compensation for the pawn – but there is no point in going for this when we could be a pawn up instead!

11.♕h5 c5!

11...c6 is a playable move, leading to an unclear game, but the text is stronger.



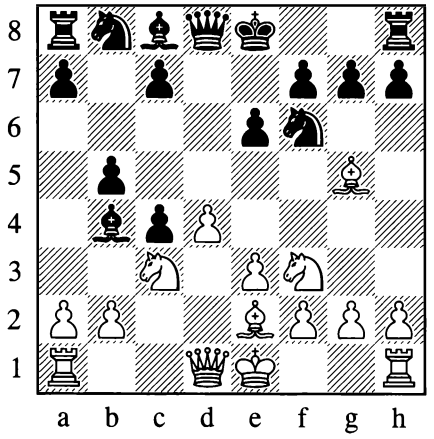
12.dxc5 ♕a5 13.♕d1 bxa4 14.♕xa4†

14.♖xa4 ♕xc5∓

14...♕xa4 15.♖xa4 ♗xc5∓

White will win back the c4-pawn, but Black's bishop pair gives him the better prospects in the endgame.

B2) 7.♗e2



7...♗b7

The most popular move, and it was my choice in an internet game.

7...♘bd7!? has been played a few times. A good example continued 8.0–0 c6 9.♕c2 ♗b7 10.♘e5 ♕b6 11.♘xd7 ♘xd7 12.♘e4 f5 13.a3 ♗e7 14.♗xe7 ♔xe7 15.♘g5 c5∞ with murky play in Lasinskas – Kolev, La Laguna 2009.

8.0–0 a6

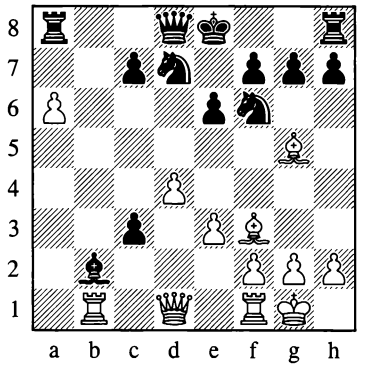
White's last move broke the pin on the c3-knight, so the b5-pawn needed to be defended.

9.a4

9.♘e5 can be met by 9...♕c8!?N (9...♘bd7 should also be fine) intending 10.♗f3 ♘fd7! when Black is ready to trade some pieces and ultimately exploit his extra pawn.

9...♘bd7 10.axb5 ♗xc3 11.bxc3

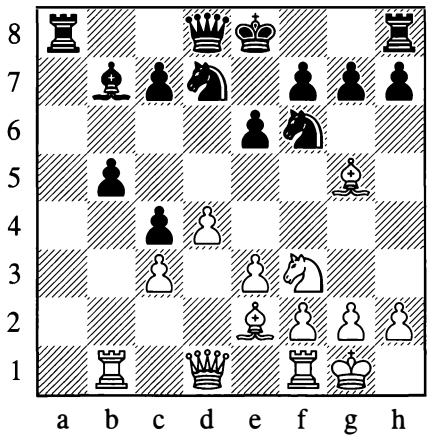
11.bxa6?? ♗xb2! occurred in one game from 1955, as well as a more recent blitz game in which an IM committed the same blunder against me: 12.♖b1 (12.axb7?? ♖xa1–+) 12...♗xf3 13.♗xf3 c3



14.♗xa8 ♕xa8 15.♗xf6 gxf6 16.♕a4 ♔e7 17.f3 (17.♕b4† c5 18.dxc5 ♖b8–+) 17...♖b8 18.♕c2 ♕xa6–+ HyperJao – Antidrome, Internet 2016.

11...axb5 12.♖b1

12.♕b1 ♖xa1 13.♕xa1 h6 14.♗f4 ♘d5 15.♕a3 ♕a8∓ left White a pawn down for insufficient compensation in Casal Salgado – Petkov, Ourense 2006.



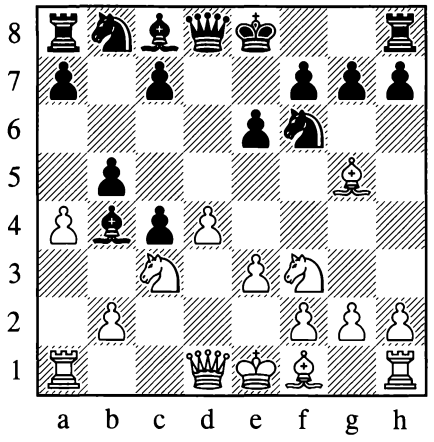
12...♖a5!

The best way to defend the b5-pawn. White is unable to exploit the pin along the b-file with ♗xc4 on account of the ...♗xf3 intermezzo. I reached this position in another online game, in which White's position quickly went downhill.

13.♘d2 ♕a8! 14.f3 ♘d5 15.♕c1 h6 16.e4 hxg5 17.exd5 ♗xd5 18.♘e4 ♗xe4 19.fxe4 ♕xe4–+

I went on to win comfortably in camelovich – Antidrome, Internet 2015.

B3) 7.a4



This must surely be White's best attempt to break up the queenside pawns. Unlike the variations above, Black is forced to defend the b5-pawn with ...c6 rather than ...a6 here, so the bishop will not be as active on b7.

7...c6

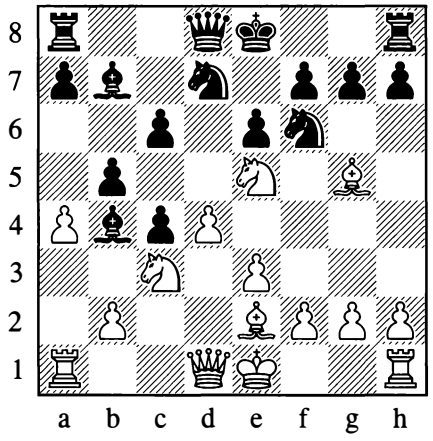
We will analyse **B31) 8.♘e5**, **B32) 8.♘d2** and **B33) 8.♗e2**.

8.axb5 cxb5 has been played several times, but Black's plans will remain essentially the same as in the lines below. White does not gain anything by exchanging on b5 so early, but he may pay a price for opening the long diagonal for Black's light-squared bishop.

B31) 8.♘e5

This move appears active and a few IMs have played it against me in blitz games, but I think it's a bit premature as Black can quickly challenge this knight with ...♘bd7.

8...♗b7 9.♗e2 ♘bd7



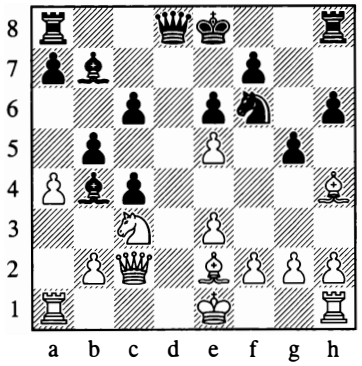
10.♘xd7

10.0–0?! ♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♕xd1 12.♖fxd1 ♗xc3 13.exf6 (13.bxc3 ♘e4∓) 13...♗xf6 14.♗xf6 gxf6∓ was great for Black in Chesslord – Antidrome, Internet 2016.

10.♕c2 h6 11.♗h4 ♘xe5

11...0–0N 12.0–0 a6∞ is playable but the text move is more forcing.

12.dxe5 g5

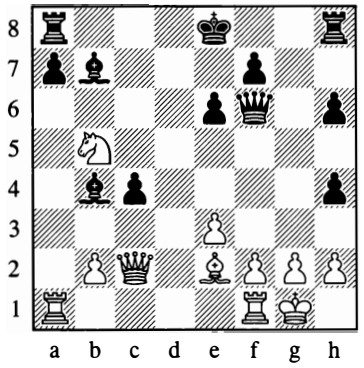


13.exf6 gxh4 14.0–0

14.♗f3 a6 15.0–0 occurred in HyperJao – Antidrome, Internet 2016, when 15...♕xf6!N would have been better for Black.

14...♕xf6 15.axb5?! cxb5 16.♘xb5?

The consistent move, but it doesn't work.



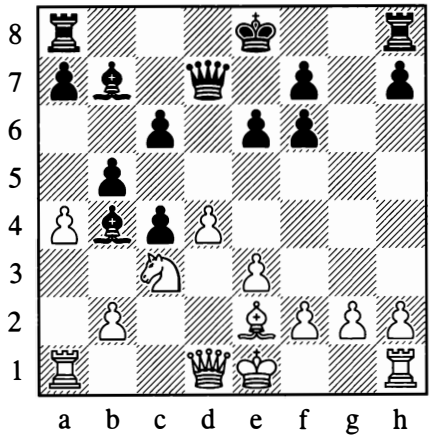
16...♕g5 17.♘c7† ♔f8

17...♔e7! 18.f3 ♖ac8 19.♕xc4 ♗c5–+ is more accurate, but my move was good enough.

18.f3 ♖g8 19.♖f2 ♗c5 20.f4 ♕e7 21.♘xa8 ♗xe3–+

Dromedar – Antidrome, Internet 2016.

10...♕xd7 11.♗xf6 gxf6



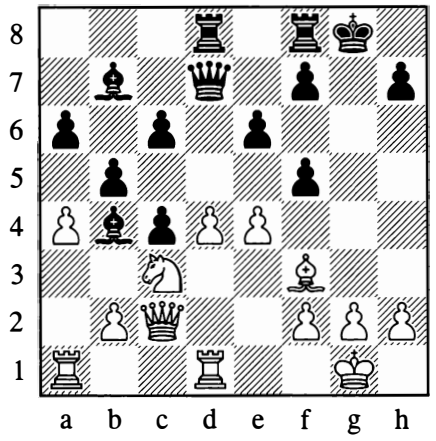
12.0–0 a6 13.♗f3 f5

13...0–0 was also pretty good for Black in Viseyskiy – Vigorito, Philadelphia 2000. However, I like the idea of gaining a bit of space in the centre and preparing to swap off one of the doubled pawns when e3-e4 comes.

14.♕c2 0–0 15.♖fd1 ♖ad8 16.e4N

It is hard to see how White can generate any play without this move.

16.♘e2?! ♗d6 17.e4 fxe4 18.♕xe4 f5∓ was a worse version for White in Atosz – Antidrome, Internet 2016.



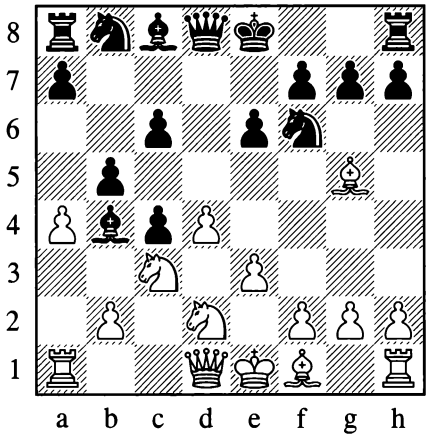
16...fxe4 17.♘xe4

Neither 17.♗xe4?! f5∓ nor 17.♕xe4 f5∓ is any improvement for White.

17...♕e7∓

Followed by ...f5.

B32) 8.♘d2



This move has a few ideas: it unpins the c3-knight, while preparing ♕f3 and possibly ♘de4 at some point. Still, Black has more than one good reply.

8...a6!?

This was Aronian's choice, which is significant in itself, given that he is the leading expert on the Ragozin. It leads to a fascinating exchange sacrifice.

8...♗b7

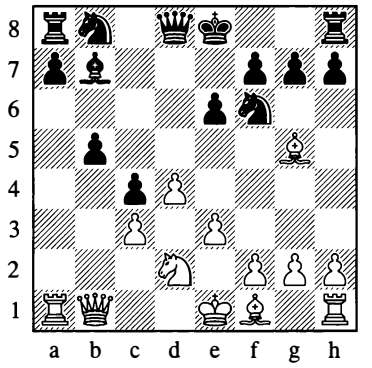
This typical developing move is also fine.

9.axb5

9.♗e2 ♘bd7 10.axb5 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 cxb5 12.0–0 (12.♖b1?! ♗xg2 13.♖g1 ♗c6 was better for Black in Jobava – Svetushkin, Melilla 2011) 12...0–0N 13.♕b1 ♕b6 14.e4 a6∞ and White's compensation is enough for equality at best.

9...♗xc3 10.bxc3 cxb5 11.♕b1

A typical device, attacking b5 while also threatening to take on c4, due to the pin along the b-file.



11...♕b6 12.♗xf6

In a later game White refrained from this exchange but got no advantage: 12.e4 ♘bd7 13.♗e2 0–0 14.0–0 ♕c6 15.♕b2 a6∞ Jobava – Jakovenko, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011.

12...gxf6 13.♖a2 ♘d7 14.♖b2 a6 15.♗xc4 ♗xg2 16.♖g1 ♗c6 17.♗f1 ♕c7∞

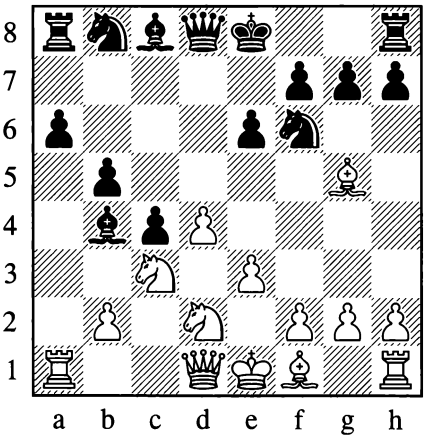
Dobrov – Yakovich, St Petersburg 2004.

9.axb5

9.♗e2 ♗b7 10.0–0 ♘bd7∓ reached a typical situation where White did not have enough for the pawn in Canovas Pordomingo – Sarasola, Tenerife 1990.

9.♕f3 occurred in Karr – Verat, Cannes 1996, when 9...♗b7!N∓ would have been good. There is no need to fear 10.axb5 axb5 11.♖xa8 ♗xa8 12.♘xb5?? because 12...♕a5! leads to decisive material gains.

9...cxb5



10.♘xb5

Any normal developing move will be met by 10...♗b7, when everything is in order for Black.

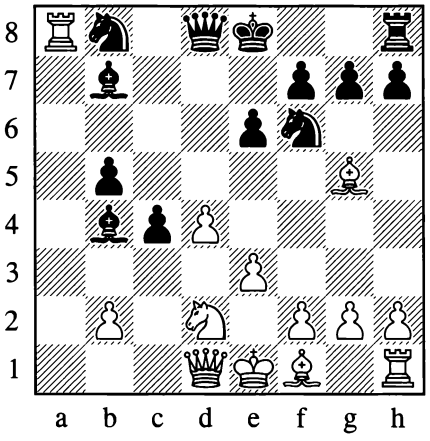
10.♕f3 can be met by 10...♖a7! intending 11.♗xf6 (11.♘xb5? ♗xd2† is similar) 11...gxf6 12.♘xb5? ♗xd2†! 13.♔xd2 ♕b6 14.♕xf6 ♖g8 and Black wins material.

10.♗xf6 gxf6 11.♘xb5 axb5 12.♖xa8 ♗b7 13.♖a1 transposes to the note to White's 12th move in the main line below.

10...axb5!

This is the idea of course, sacrificing the exchange for rapid development and the initiative.

11.♖xa8 ♗b7



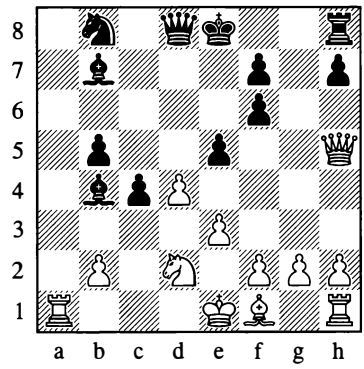
12.♖a1

Black also has excellent chances after:

12.♗xf6 gxf6 13.♖a1 e5 14.♕h5

14.dxe5 fxe5 15.♕e2?! occurred in Sacerio Laborde – Real Naranjo, Cuba 1998, when 15...♘d7!N followed by ...♘c5 would have given Black a huge initiative.

14.♗e2 exd4 15.0–0 dxe3 16.♘f3 exf2† 17.♔h1 was also not great for White in Brunello – Vallejo Pons, Reykjavik 2015, especially after 17...♗c5!?N∓.



14...0–0!N

The main point of this move is to threaten ...exd4, as ♕xb5 can no longer be played with check.

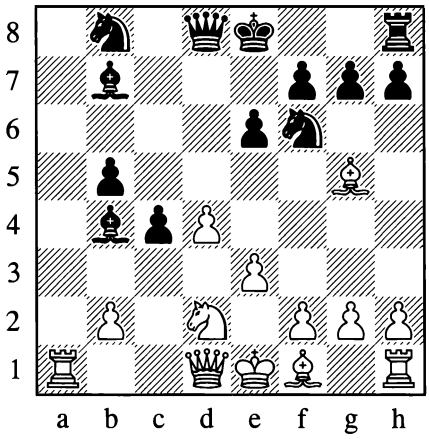
14...♘c6 led to a draw in the following game: 15.♖d1 exd4 16.♕xb5 c3 17.bxc3 dxc3 18.♕xb7 cxd2† 19.♔e2 ♕d5 20.♕c8† ♔e7 21.♕c7† ♔e6 22.♕f4 ♕b5† 23.♔f3 ♕d5†= Van der Werf – Piket, Amsterdam 2000.

15.♗e2

15.♖d1 exd4→ is similar.

15...exd4→

I would not like to defend White's position.



12...e5!?

This surprising move is the top choice of most engines.

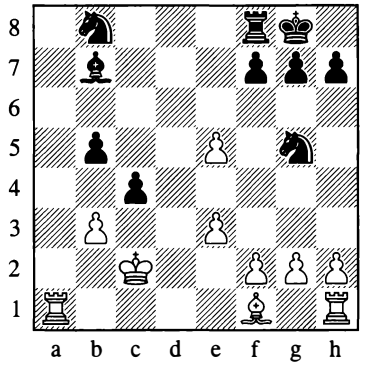
12...♘bd7 13.♗e2 ♗xg2 14.♖g1 ♗d5∞ also

led to interesting play in Korobov – Aronian, Dubai 2014.

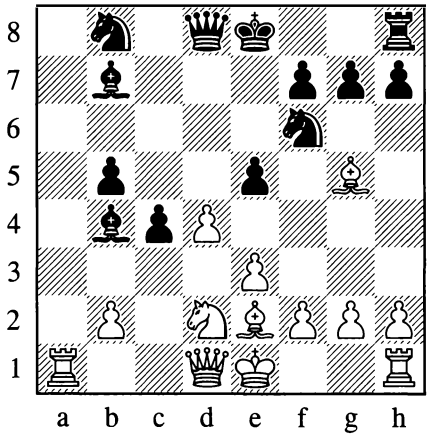
13.♗e2?

This was White's choice in the only practical encounter.

White should have returned some material as follows: 13.dxe5!N ♗xd2† 14.♕xd2 ♕xd2† 15.♔xd2 ♘e4† 16.♔c2 ♘xg5 17.b3 0–0 The endgame is roughly equal, for instance:



18.f3 (18.bxc4 bxc4 19.♗xc4?! ♗xg2 20.♖hg1 ♗e4† 21.♔c3 ♘e6∓) 18...♖c8 19.bxc4 bxc4 20.♗e2 ♘d7 21.♖a7 ♗c6 22.f4 ♘e6 23.♗f3 ♘b8 24.♖d1 g5 25.fxg5 ♔g7=



13...♕d5!N

13...exd4?! 14.0–0 ♗xd2 15.♕xd2 d3 was only about equal in Nordahl – Korneev, Gausdal 2005.

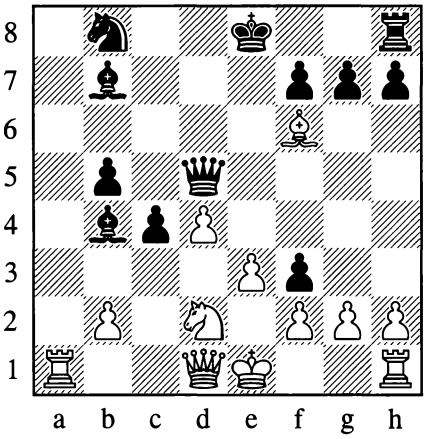
14.♗f3

14.♗xf6? runs into 14...♕xg2 of course.

14...e4

Hitting both bishops.

15.♗xf6 exf3



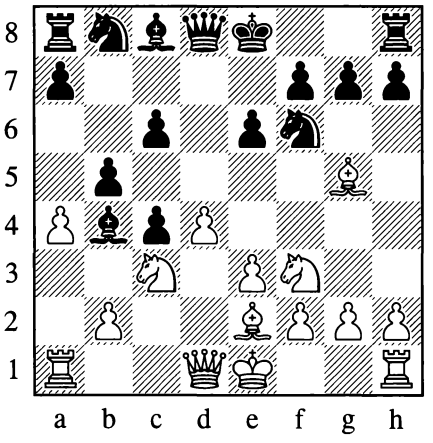
16.♗xg7

After 16.♕xf3 gxf6 17.♔e2 f5 the material is roughly equal, but Black is the clear favourite thanks to his superb bishops.

16...fxg2 17.♖g1 ♖g8 18.♗e5 ♘c6∓

White's position is a mess and his extra exchange does him no good at all.

B33) 8.♗e2

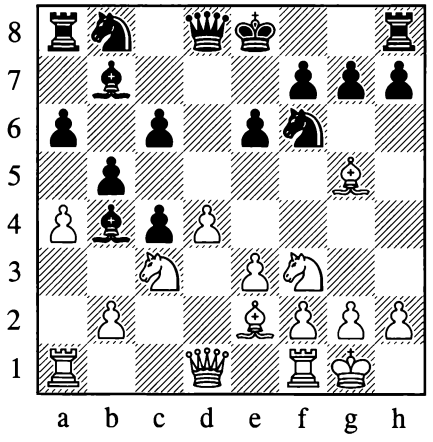


8...♗b7

8...♘bd7!? looks slightly odd but it has been chosen by several strong players, with generally excellent results. After 9.0–0 ♕b6 Black covers the e5-square with his knight and looks after the b5-pawn with his queen, and will follow up with ...♗b7. This seems fine for Black and you can certainly investigate it if you wish, but I will focus on the more obvious bishop development.

9.0–0 a6

9...♘bd7? is mistimed, as White can meet 10.axb5 ♗xc3 with 11.bxc6!±.



White has tried a bunch of moves from this position, but it seems to me that **B331) 10.♘e4** and **B332) 10.♘e5** are the only options we need to consider seriously.

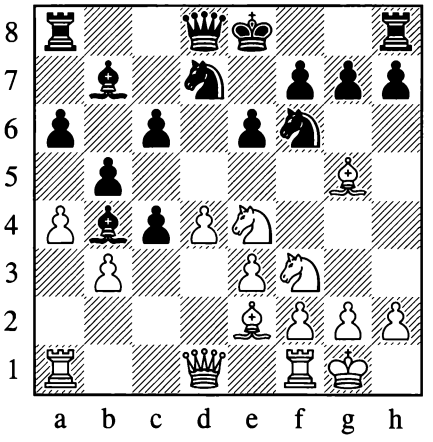
Here is one example showing how to deal with a lesser alternative: 10.♕c2 ♘bd7 11.e4 (11.♘e4?! and 11.♘e5 both transpose to the respective 11.♕c2 lines in the notes to the main variations below) 11...h6 12.♗h4 ♕b6 13.♖ad1 0–0 White had minimal compensation and went on to lose to an opponent rated more than 300 points below him in Sasikiran – Echavarria, Dos Hermanas 2004.

B331) 10.♘e4

It looks as though White is trying to exploit the pin on the f6-knight; however, the real purpose of this move is to remove the knight from the attack of the b4-bishop, thus preparing to break up Black's queenside with b2-b3.

10...♘bd7 11.b3!

Slower moves are not good enough. For example: 11.♕c2?! h6 12.♗h4 ♗e7 13.♘xf6† ♗xf6 14.♗xf6N (or 14.♗g3, Haczek – Demir, Bavaria 2002, 14...0–0∓) 14...♕xf6 15.b3 cxb3 16.♕xb3 0–0 17.♖fc1 ♕e7∓



11...cxb3

11...c3!?N is certainly playable but it seems more challenging to hang on to the extra pawn for the time being.

12.♕xb3

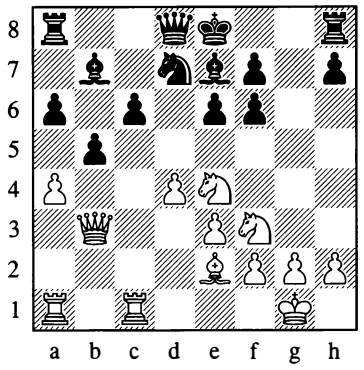
White is not helped by:

12.♗xf6?! gxf6!

12...♘xf6?! 13.♘xf6† ♕xf6 14.axb5!∞ was Whites idea.

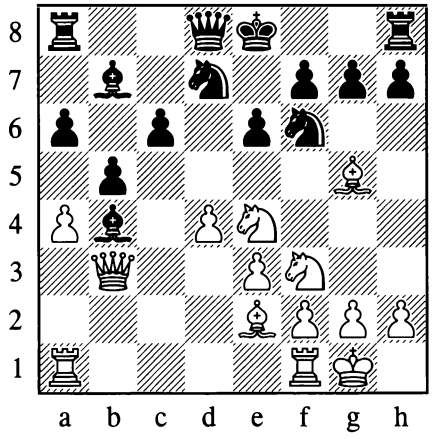
13.♕xb3 ♗e7 14.♖fc1

This happened in Boensch – Lukacs, Leipzig 1983, when, instead of 14...f5?!, Black should have played:



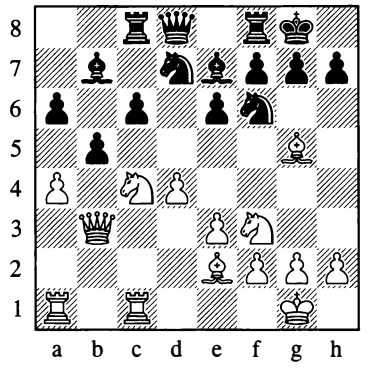
14...0–0!∓

Intending ...♔h8 and ...♖g8, with some advantage.



12...♗e7 13.♘xf6†

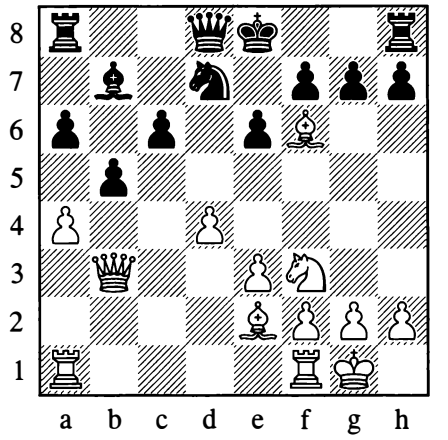
13.♘ed2?! 0–0 14.♖fc1 ♖c8 15.♘c4 runs into a strong yet surprising idea:



15...b4!N∓ Followed by ...c5. This improves over 15...♘e4? 16.♗xe7 ♕xe7, as played in Noyer – Khenkin, Geneva 2009, when 17.♘a5! would have been unclear.

13...♗xf6 14.♗xf6

A simple improvement is:



14...♕xf6N

14...♘xf6? occurred in Shaffer – Finney, Parsipanny 2009, when 15.♖fc1N± would have given White more than enough for the pawn. Instead Black should keep the knight near the queenside to cover the dark squares.

15.♖fc1 0–0∞

White has some compensation but personally I would prefer Black's position with the extra pawn.

B332) 10.♘e5 ♘bd7 11.f4

This is the usual move, supporting the knight.

11.♕c2

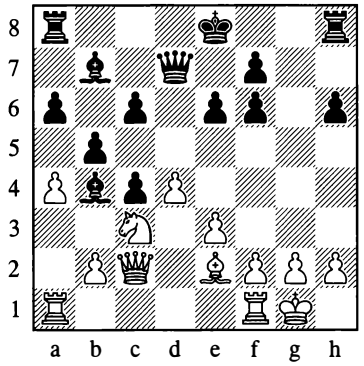
This has occurred in a number of games, via a few different move orders. Black has more than one good reply.

11...h6!?

I tried this move in an online blitz game.

11...♗e7 is a solid alternative which has yielded an excellent practical score for Black.

12.♗xf6 gxf6 13.♘xd7 ♕xd7



14.b3!?N

This makes more sense than 14.♗f3 0–0 15.♕e4?! (White could still have obtained a reasonable position with the b2-b3 plan) 15...f5 16.♕h4 ♔h7 17.e4 ♗e7 18.♕h5 b4 19.♘e2 fxe4 20.♗xe4† f5 and Black was better in Uitvreter – Antidrome, Internet 2016.

14...c5!?

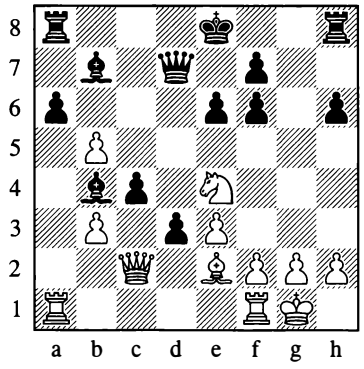
14...cxb3 15.♕xb3 ♗e7∞

15.axb5

15.bxc4 can be met by 15...cxd4 (15...♗xc3 16.♕xc3 b4∞) 16.♘e4 ♕c6 17.♗f3 ♕xc4 and Black is better.

15...cxd4 16.♘e4 d3

16...♗e7!?∞ is also possible.



17.♕xc4

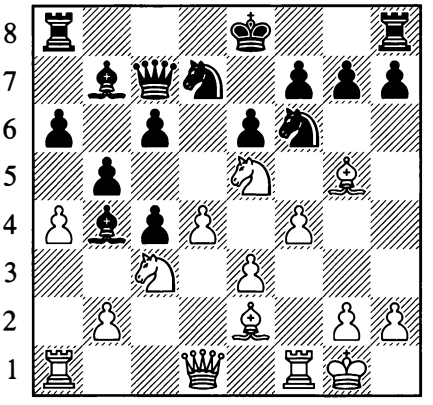
17.♘xf6†? ♔e7–+

17...♕xb5 18.♕xb5† axb5 19.♖xa8† ♗xa8 20.♗xd3=

The complications have subsided and the resulting endgame should be drawn. Interesting stuff – although 11...♗e7 would seem the easier option should you encounter this variation.

11...♕c7

11...♗e7 is playable here too, but developing the queen seems best.



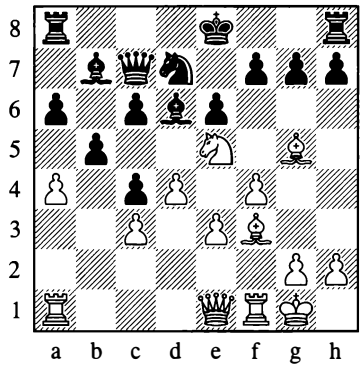
12.♗f3

12.♘xd7?! White shouldn't be exchanging – he is still a pawn down remember! 12...♕xd7 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♘e4 ♕e7 15.f5 exf5 16.♘g3 ♕xe3† 17.♔h1 0–0–0 18.♘xf5 ♕d2∓ Varga – Mihok, Budapest 2014.

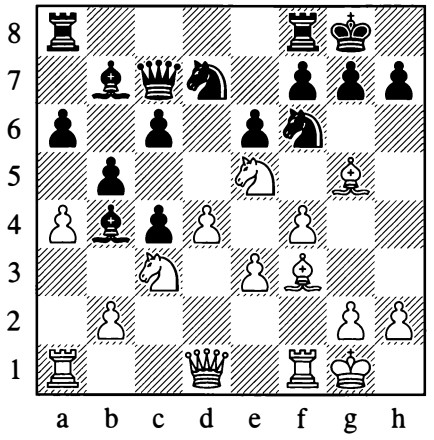
12...0–0!

This is the most flexible move, keeping the options of ...c5 or ...♘d5, depending on how White continues.

Let me show you an example of how things can go wrong for Black after a few inaccurate moves: 12...♘d5 13.♕e1! The queen is heading for the kingside. (13.♕c1? f6 14.♘xd7 ♕xd7∓ gave White nothing in Razin – Polivanov, Vinnitsa 2016) 13...♘xc3 (13...♘xe5 14.fxe5 ♗a5∞) 14.bxc3 ♗d6?! This allows White to build a menacing attack.



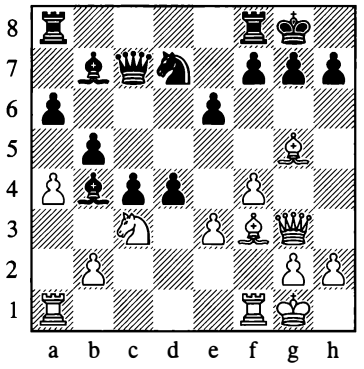
15.♕h4 0–0 16.♘xd7 ♕xd7 17.♗f6! ♖fe8 18.♗e4 gxf6? (18...♔f8! was the only way to stay alive, but clearly Black should be looking to deviate well before this point) 19.♕h6 c5 20.♗xh7† ♔h8 21.♗c2† ♔g8 22.♖f3+– Cramling – Shen, Istanbul 2009.



13.♕c2?!

This was tried in the only game, but it brought White no joy whatsoever.

13.♕e1N is a reasonable attempt to improve, but 13...c5! is a good reply, for instance: 14.♕g3 (14.♕h4 cxd4 15.exd4 ♕b6 16.♖ad1 ♖fe8 17.♕g3 ♗xf3 18.♕xf3 ♖ac8∓) 14...cxd4 15.♘xd7 ♘xd7



16.♗h6 g6 17.♗xf8 ♗xf8 18.exd4 b4∓ Black has more than enough compensation for the exchange.

13...♘d5 14.♖fe1?!

The obvious move, but it allows Black to demolish White's centre.

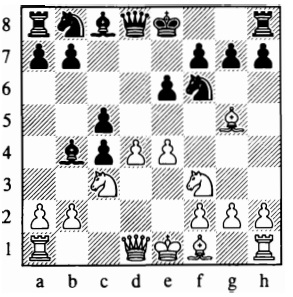
14...f6! 15.♘xd7 ♕xd7 16.♗h4 c5 17.♗xd5 exd5 18.axb5 axb5–+

Grigoriadis – Parligras, Kalamaria 2006.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with White's two main ways of avoiding the main lines after 5.♗g5 dxc4. In the event of 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 c5 White has can win back the c4-pawn easily enough, but Black gets a useful lead in development with active prospects, especially on the light squares. We then considered 6.e3, which I can't help feeling is an inferior move, as 6...b5 not only secures Black's extra pawn but also prepares to develop the bishop actively on b7. White still has some ideas of course, but in most of the variations he struggles to demonstrate full compensation.

Chapter 5



Alternatives after 6.e4 c5

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4! 6.e4 c5

A) 7.dxc5 101
B) 7.e5 cxd4 103
B1) 8.♕a4† 103
B2) 8.♘xd4 ♕a5 9.exf6 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3 ♕xg5 11.fxg7 ♕xg7 107
B21) 12.♕f3 ♘d7 13.♗xc4 0–0 107
B211) 14.♗e2 107
B212) 14.♗b3 108
B22) 12.♕d2!? 0–0 13.♗xc4 109
B221) 13...a6!? 109
B222) 13...♖d8 111

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4! 6.e4

This is the most challenging move of course.

6...c5

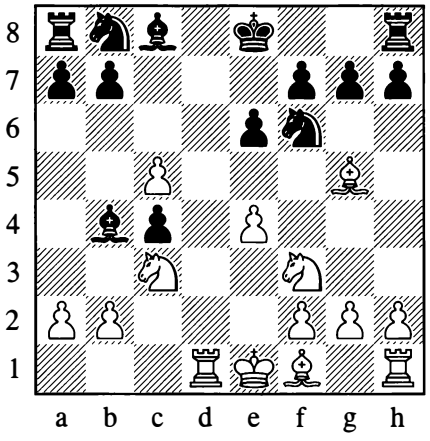
This is the main line and my primary recommendation, which continues to hold up well at the highest level.

6...b5!? is an interesting sideline which can be found in Chapter 7.

In this chapter we will examine two sidelines: **A) 7.dxc5** and **B) 7.e5**.

7.♗xc4 is the main line, which will be analysed in the next chapter.

A) 7.dxc5 ♕xd1† 8.♖xd1



8...♗xc3†!?

After spending some time looking at this position, I came to the conclusion that fracturing White's pawn structure at this early stage is Black's best approach, despite being extremely rare.

8...♘bd7

This move has been played in the great majority of games so far. My concern is that it allows:

9.♗d2!

Preventing Black from damaging White's queenside structure.

9...♘xc5

9...♗xc3 10.♗xc3 ♘xe4 11.♗xg7 ♖g8 12.♗d4 ♘dxc5 13.♘e5 (Gustafsson only considers 13.♗xc4 in his coverage of this line) 13...b6 14.f3± Matlakov – Landa, Ulan Ude 2009.

10.♗xc4 ♗xc3

10...0–0 11.e5 ♘fd7 has been played by Gustafsson, who provides more analysis on it in his Chess24 repertoire. Perhaps this is Black's best bet, but I still find his position slightly uncomfortable and prefer my main line.

11.♗xc3 ♘cxe4 12.♗b4

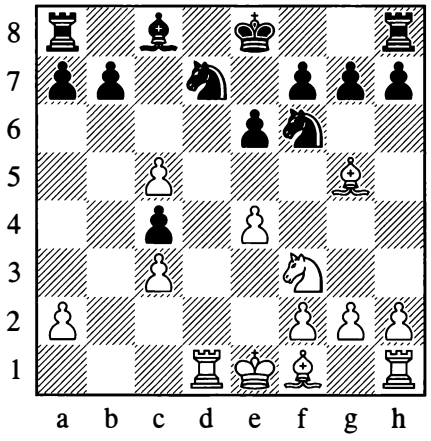
White has excellent compensation for the pawn, for instance:

12...♘d5 13.♗xd5 exd5 14.♖xd5±

Nyback – Kulaots, Jurmala 2012.

9.bxc3 ♘bd7

Ruslan Sherbakov did a good job of analysing this variation on ChessPublishing and I have included some of his analysis in what follows.

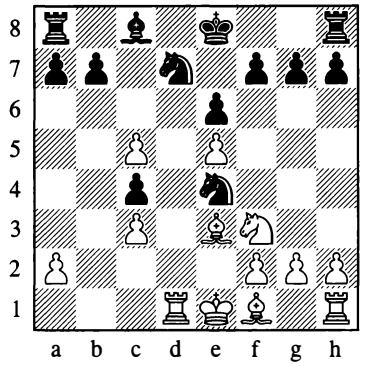


10.c6

10.♖d4 ♘xc5 11.e5 (11.♗xc4 h6 12.♗xf6 gxf6 13.e5 f5=) 11...♘d5 12.♗xc4 ♘e7 is unclear according to Sherbakov. White may

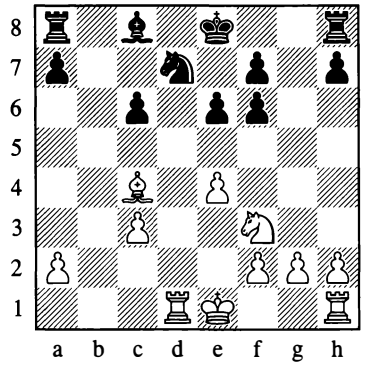
have the bishop pair, but Black has the better structure and his knights have some good squares available, so I don't think Black is worse at all.

10.e5 ♘e4 11.♗e3



11...♘dxc5 should be fine for Black, and there is even 11...♘xc3!? 12.♖d4 ♘xa2 13.♗xc4 ♘b4 14.♖d2 a5∞ as Sherbakov points out.

Perhaps White should include 10.♗xf6!?N gxf6 (10...♘xf6 11.♖d4!±) and only now play: 11.c6 bxc6 (11...♘b6!? could also be investigated) 12.♗xc4

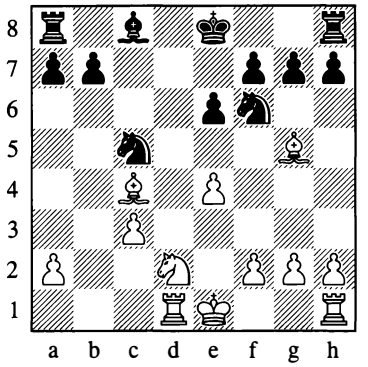


Sherbakov evaluates this position as slightly better for White but it looks equal to me. For example, 12...♘b6 13.♗b3 c5 14.♔e2 ♗b7 15.♔e3 ♔e7= and Black is fine; his kingside pawns are not really weak, and the pawn on f6 does a useful job in controlling the e5-square.

In the first practical test of this line White tried:

10.♘d2 ♘xc5 11.♗xc4

11.e5 ♘d5 12.♘xc4 f6 13.♘d6† ♔e7 14.c4 ♘c3 15.♗e3 b6= is fine for Black.



11...h6!N

11...♗d7 12.f3 ♖c8 13.e5 (13.♗e2 h6 14.♗e3 ♗a4 is close to equal) 13...♘d5 14.♗xd5 exd5 15.♘b1 ♗b5 16.♖xd5 ♗c4 17.♖d2 0–0⩱ was Ezsol – I. Almasi, Hungary 2001, but it's slightly more accurate to kick the bishop immediately.

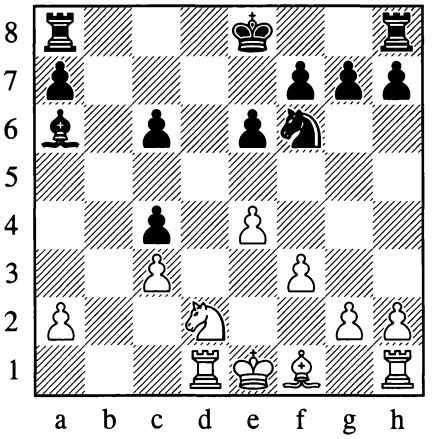
12.♗h4

12.♗xf6?! gxf6 13.f3 ♗d7 14.♔f2 ♔e7∓ favours Black.

12...♗d7 13.f3 ♖c8

Black has a slightly improved version of the Ezsol – Almasi game, as White has lost some options with his dark-squared bishop.

10...bxc6 11.♘d2 ♗a6 12.♗xf6 ♘xf6 13.f3



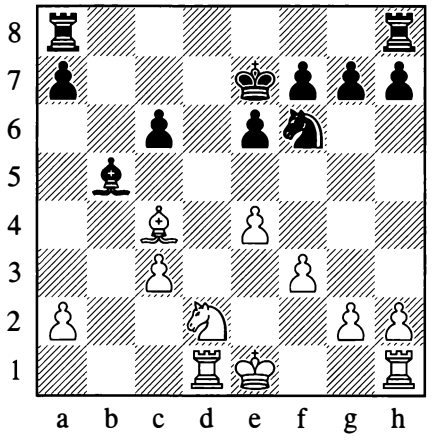
13...♔e7!?N

13...0–0–0 14.♗xc4 ♗xc4 (14...♖xd2?? does not work as 15.♗xa6† comes with check) 15.♘xc4 ♔c7 16.♔e2 ♖xd1 17.♖xd1 ♘d7 is also close to equal, P.H. Nielsen – L'Ami, Germany 2009.

13...♖d8!? also seems fine. For instance: 14.♘xc4 (14.♗xc4? can be met by 14...♖xd2! as the king is not on c8) 14...♖xd1† 15.♔xd1 ♗xc4 16.♗xc4 ♔e7= followed by ...♖b8.

14.♗xc4 ♗b5

Sherbakov evaluates the position as equal, which seems correct to me. Here are a few brief sample lines:



15.♔f2

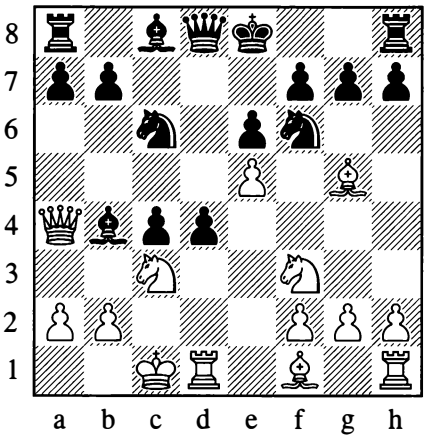
15.a4!? looks like an odd choice, although 15...♗xa4 16.♖a1 ♗b5 17.♗e2 ♗xe2 18.♔xe2 ♖hb8 19.♖a6 ♖b2 20.♖ha1 ♖d8 21.♖xa7† ♔f8 22.♖d1= still results in equality.

15...♖hb8 16.♗b3 ♘d7 17.♔e3 c5=

B) 7.e5 cxd4

White has two main options: **B1) 8.♕a4†** and **B2) 8.♘xd4**.

B1) 8.♕a4† ♘c6 9.0–0–0



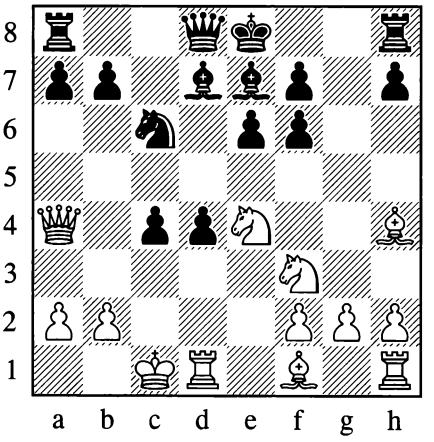
White goes all out for the attack! It looks scarier than it is, as Black can take the sting out of White's plan by sacrificing a piece for two pawns and the initiative.

9...♗d7 10.♘e4

10.♘xd4? ♗xc3 11.♘xc6 ♗xe5 12.♕b5 ♗c7 was already winning for Black in Mihaljevic – Nickoloff, Toronto 1993.

10.exf6? is also inadvisable for White: 10...gxf6 11.♘xd4 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 fxg5 13.♕xc4 ♕f6 14.♘b5 0–0∓ Budo – Levenfish, Leningrad 1937.

10...♗e7 11.exf6 gxf6 12.♗h4



12...a6!?

12...♖c8 has been the most popular choice, when White continues 13.♔b1.

The text move is a bit of a quirky sideline but it looks promising and has scored well so far. I prefer it to the older move, as it seems to me that ♔b1 is a more useful move than ...♖c8. Most of the time White is desperate to get his king out of the centre in this line, so why give him a chance to do it immediately?

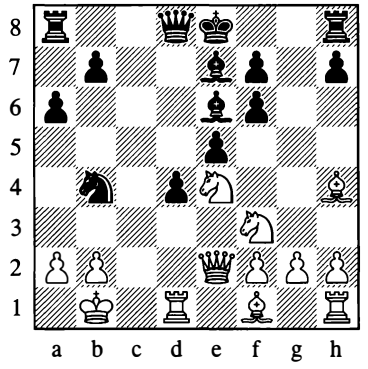
13.♕xc4

This is pretty much forced, otherwise ...b5 will give Black a winning position.

13...e5 14.♘xe5!

White sensibly returns his extra material before Black's attack becomes overwhelming.

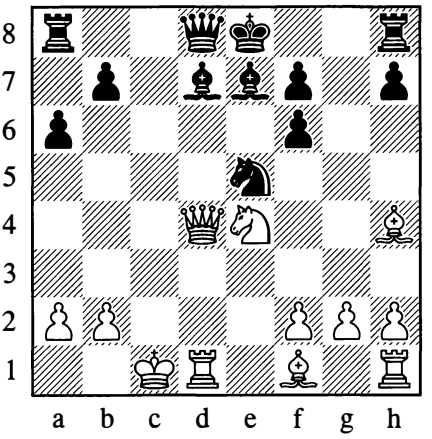
14.♔b1?! is the only other move to have been tried, but after 14...♗e6 15.♕e2 ♘b4 White is in trouble, for instance:



16.b3 (16.a3 ♕d5! is crushing) 16...♖c8 17.♘e1 ♕a5 18.♕b2 ♗f5 19.f3 ♘d5–+ The threats of ...♗a3 and ...♘c3† were too much for White in Rabadan Velasco – Kolev, La Roda 2008.

14...♘xe5 15.♕xd4

Material is level and the position is double-edged; Black's kingside structure looks ugly but he has good counter-chances thanks to his active pieces and White's exposed king.



15...♕c7†

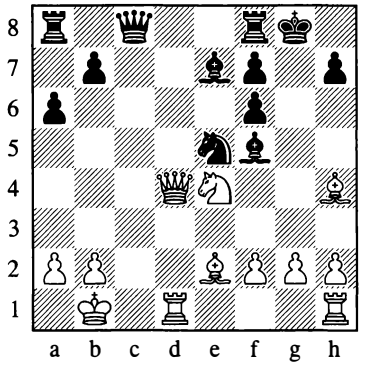
15...0–0!?

This seems like a viable alternative, as the following lines demonstrate.

16.♗e2

16.♗d3?! ♗g4 17.♕e3 ♗xd1 18.♖xd1 ♖c8† 19.♔b1 occurred in Kunin – Palac, Schwarzach 2013, when 19...♘xd3!N 20.♖xd3 (or 20.♕g3† ♔h8 21.♖xd3 ♕a5∓ intending ...♕f5) 20...♕c7∓ would have yielded Black a big advantage.

16...♕c8† 17.♔b1 ♗f5



18.f3

18.g4 ♗g6 is fine for Black as the attempt to trap the light-squared bishop with 19.f4?? fails to 19...♖d8 20.♕e3 ♗c5 21.♖xd8† ♕xd8 22.♕xc5 ♗xe4†–+ when Black picks up the rook on h1.

18.♔a1 can be met by 18...♕e6∞ intending ...♖ad8, Gerhards – Cotos, corr. 2008.

18...♕e6 19.♔a1 ♖ac8 20.g4 ♗g6∞

The position remains unclear and after the further 21.f4? ♖fd8, with ...♘xg4 ideas in the air, White was losing material in Koneru – Dzagnidze, Beijing (blitz) 2014.

16.♔b1

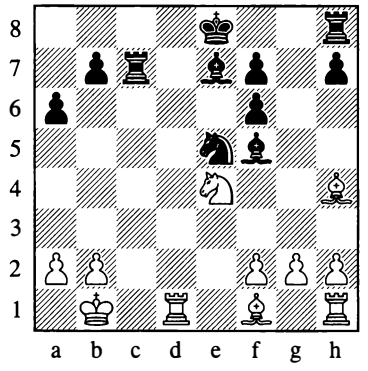
I also checked:

16.♕c3

The queen exchange leads to level play.

16...♖c8 17.♕xc7 ♖xc7† 18.♔b1 ♗f5

Black's activity compensates for the doubled f-pawns, and he will complete development with ...0–0 and ...♖fc8 – possibly with ...♔g7 included at some point, in order to give the f6-pawn additional protection.



19.f3 0–0 20.♗e2 ♖fc8 21.♖c1 ♘c4

21...♔g7= is also fine.

22.♗xc4 ♖xc4 23.b3

23.♖xc4 ♖xc4 24.♖e1 ♗g6 25.b3 ♖c6 26.♔b2 ♔g7 was also equal in Gozzoli – Landa, Nancy 2008.

23...♖4c6 24.♖xc6 ♖xc6 25.♖c1 ♖e6 26.♖e1 ♗b4=

Bergsson – Landa, Kallithea 2002.

16...♗f5

16...0–0–0?!

This may be playable but I don't like it, as White gets a chance to develop play against our king.

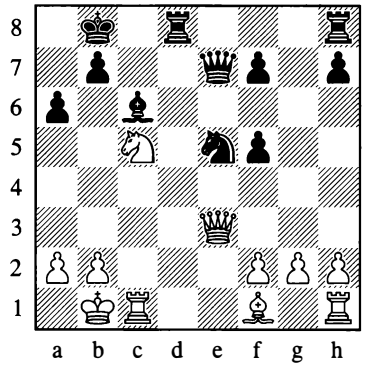
17.♖c1

17.♕e3 can be met by 17...♗c6 when White has nothing better than transposing with 18.♖c1.

17...♗c6 18.♕e3 f5 19.♗xe7 ♕xe7 20.♘c5

20.♘g3?! is the wrong direction for the knight, and Black should be fine after 21...♔b8! intending 21.♘xf5 ♕f6 with good play for the pawn.

20...♔b8



21.♕a3!N

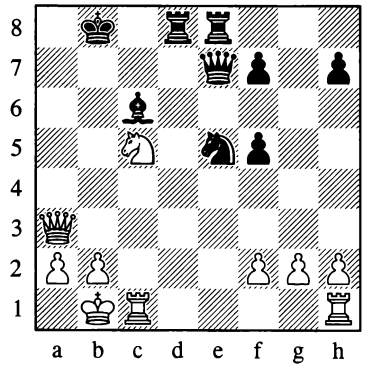
21.♗xa6 led to a more-or-less forced draw in the following game: 21...bxa6 22.♖he1 ♗e4† 23.♘xe4 fxe4 24.♕xe4 ♖he8 25.♖e3 ♕d7 26.♖b3† ♔a7 27.♕e3† ♔a8 28.♕e4† ♔a7 29.♕e3† ½–½ Lysyj – Wojtaszek, Stockholm 2010.

The text move looks more dangerous, for example:

21...♖he8

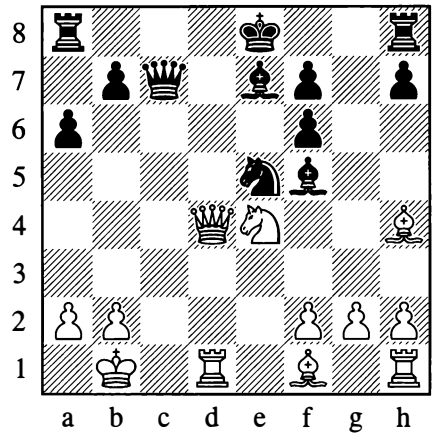
Avoiding the ♘xa6† cheap shot.

22.♗xa6! bxa6 23.♘xa6† ♔b7 24.♘c5† ♔b8



25.♖c3! ♕a7 26.♕b4† ♔c7 27.♖hc1

With a dangerous initiative for the sacrificed material.



17.♕a4†

I also analysed:

17.♗e2

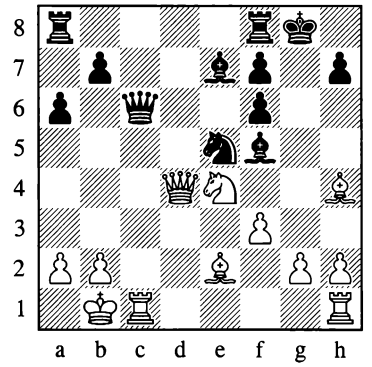
Some annotators believe White is better here but I'm not convinced.

17...♕c6N

17...♖d8 18.♕e3 0–0 19.♖c1 ♕d6 20.♔a1 ♗xe4 21.♕xe4 f5 22.♕f4 ♗xh4 23.♕xh4 ♘g6 was close to equal in Babula – Rogozenco, Germany 2014.

18.f3 0–0 19.♖c1

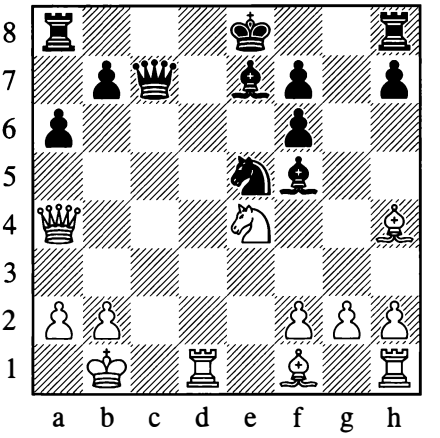
19.♔a1 ♖fd8 20.♕e3 ♖ac8 21.♖xd8† ♗xd8 22.♖d1 ♗e7 23.♘c3 ♘g6 24.♗g3 ♗c5 25.♕h6 ♗f8 26.♕h5 ♕e6=



19...♕e6 20.♖hd1 ♖fd8 21.♕e3 ♖xd1 22.♗xd1

22.♖xd1 ♖c8 is also equal.

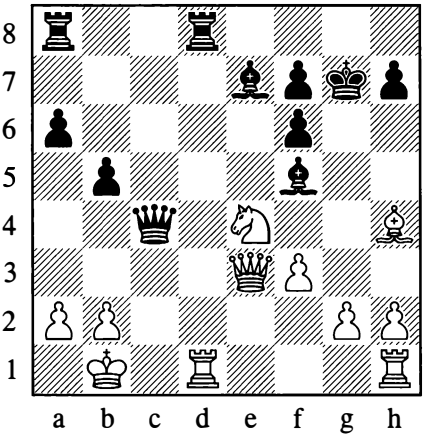
22...♘c4 23.♕e2 ♖c8 24.♔a1 b5 25.♗b3 ♔g7=



17...♔f8!

Losing the right to castle isn't a big deal, as the king can go straight to g7 next.

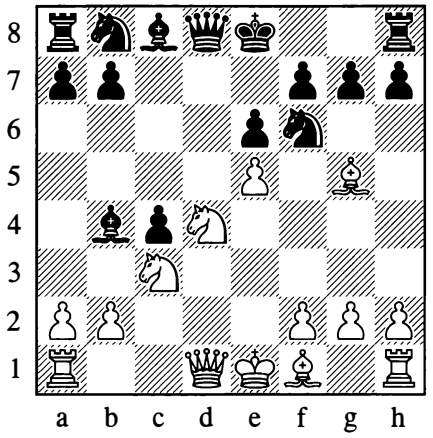
18.f3 ♔g7 19.♗e2 b5 20.♕d4 ♖hd8 21.♕e3 ♘c4 22.♗xc4 ♕xc4



23.♖c1 ♕e6 24.♖he1 ♖ac8 25.h3 ♖c4

By now Black had started to take over, and he eventually prevailed in Zhou Jianchao – Wang Hao, Xinghua 2010. White should probably prefer one of the equal lines noted earlier, but I still like Black's chances in this line after 12...a6.

B2) 8.♘xd4



This leads to a more solid position for White, but Black should be fine with accurate play.

8...♕a5 9.exf6 ♗xc3†

9...♕xg5?? leads to disaster after 10.♕a4† ♘c6 11.♘xc6 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♗d7 13.♕b4!+– (or 13.♕a5!+–) when White retains his extra piece.

10.bxc3 ♕xg5 11.fxg7 ♕xg7

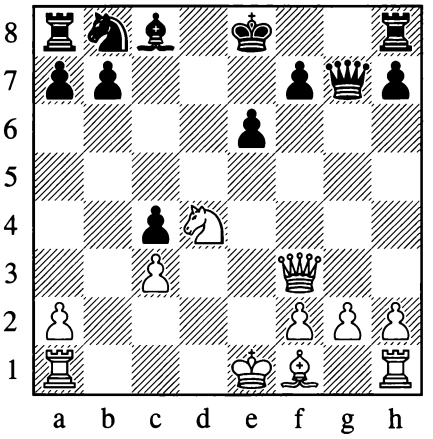
After a few obvious moves, White now faces a choice between **B21) 12.♕f3** and **B22) 12.♕d2!?**.

12.♗xc4?! is premature due to 12...♕xg2 when White does not have enough for the pawn, for instance: 13.♖f1 ♘c6 14.♘b5 (14.♘xc6 ♕e4† 15.♕e2 ♕xe2† 16.♔xe2 bxc6∓) 14...♕e4† 15.♗e2 ♕f4∓

12.♕a4†?! is too slow, and 12...♗d7 13.♕xc4 0–0N 14.♗e2 ♘c6∓ gives Black an easy game.

B21) 12.♕f3

This is the older move, which was used before White players realized they could put the queen on d2 and take on c4 without worrying about the g2-pawn being eaten. That said, the text move has been tried by a few strong GMs in recent years.



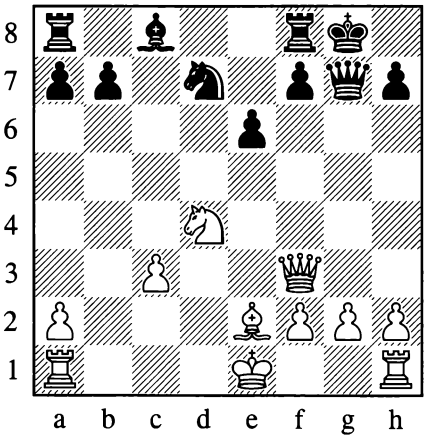
12...♘d7 13.♗xc4 0–0

13...♘e5? allows 14.♗b5†; but now that Black has castled, the knight move becomes a real threat.

White usually safeguards his bishop with either **B211) 14.♗e2** or **B212) 14.♗b3**.

14.♕e3 ♕e5 gave Black easy equality in Szabolcsi – Bus, Bytom 1988.

B211) 14.♗e2



This is hardly the most threatening move, and Black has a pleasant choice.

14...♘c5

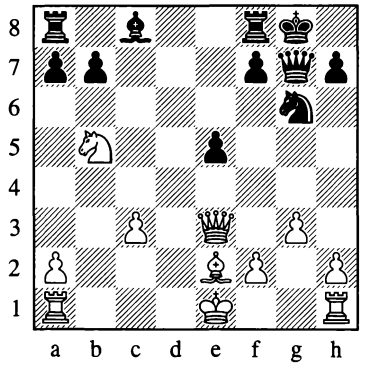
14...e5!? looks odd, but after 15.♘f5 ♕f6 16.♕h5 ♘c5 17.♘e3 ♗e6 18.0–0 b6∞ Black was okay in Edouard – L'Ami, Germany 2014.

14...♘e5 15.♕e3

15.♕e4 f5 16.♕e3 ♘g6 17.f4 ♘xf4N 18.♕xf4 e5 19.♗c4† ♔h8 20.♕g3 exd4 21.♕xg7† ♔xg7 22.cxd4 ♖e8† 23.♔f2 ♗e6 is close to equal.

15...♘g6 16.g3 e5 17.♘b5

17.♘f3 ♗h3 18.0–0–0 ♖ac8∞ was also rather messy in Polugaevsky – Inkiov, Zagreb 1987.



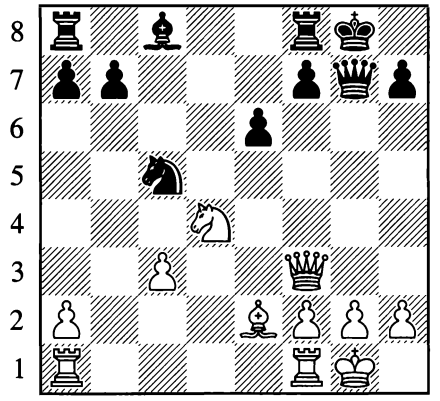
17...f5!?N 18.0–0–0 ♗e6∞

With a murky middlegame.

15.0–0

15.♕e3 b6= does not really help White, Vorobiov – Garcia Roman, Pardubice 2014.

In the event of 15.♘b3, Black's simplest reply is 15...♘xb3, straightening out White's pawn structure but gaining time. (15...♘a4!? can be considered if you wish to make the game more complicated.) 16.axb3 ♗d7 17.0–0 (17.♕xb7?? ♕xc3†) 17...♗c6 18.♕g3 ♖fd8=



15...b6!?

A clever move, enabling the bishop to go to its most promising diagonal.

16.♖fe1

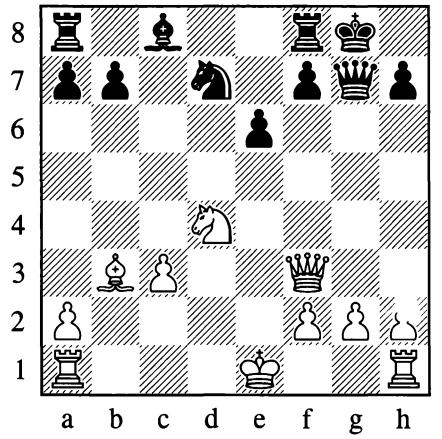
16.♕xa8? ♗b7∓

16...♗b7 17.♕h3 ♖ad8 18.♗f1 ♔h8∞

N. Gaprindashvili – Litinskaya, Tskhaltubo 1988.

B212) 14.♗b3

This seems like a more active square for the bishop.



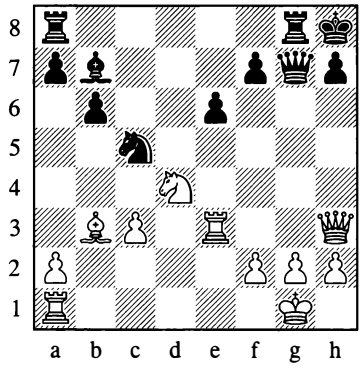
14...♘c5

Black posts the knight on its best square and gives himself the option of eliminating the bishop if it stays on b3.

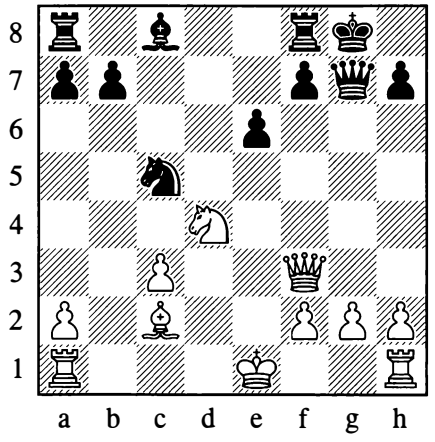
15.♗c2

Kiril Georgiev has scored 2/2 with this move.

15.0–0 allows Black to get a good position with a familiar trick: 15...b6! 16.♖fe1 (16.♕xa8? ♗b7∓) 16...♗b7 17.♕h3 ♔h8 18.♖e3 ♖g8



19.f3 (19.♖g3 ♕f6=) 19...♕f6∞ Klimov – Ovod, St Petersburg 2002.



15...e5!?N

This may look positionally risky but it works for tactical reasons.

15...♕e5† is a reasonable alternative: 16.♔f1 b6 17.♕g3† ♕xg3 18.hxg3 ♗a6† 19.♔g1 ♗d3 20.♗xd3 ♘xd3 21.♖d1 ♘b2 22.♖b1 ♘a4 23.♖b5 ♘xc3 (23...♘c5!N would have been equal) 24.♖g5† ♔h8 25.♖gh5↑ Black was under some pressure in Ki. Georgiev – Perunovic, Vrnjacka Banja 2005.

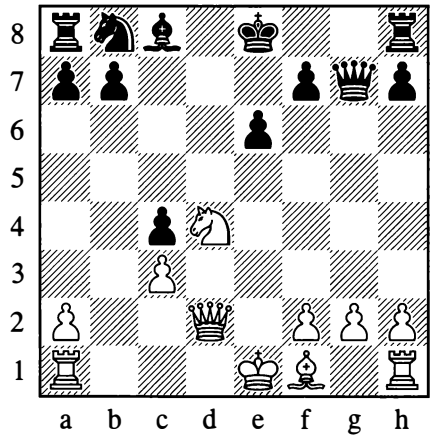
16.♘b3

16.♘f5?! e4! is the tactical point, and after 17.♘xg7 exf3 18.♘h5 ♖e8† 19.♔f1 ♖e5∓ White is positionally worse.

16...♗g4 17.♕g3 ♖ac8 18.0–0 ♗e6=

Black has a safe and harmonious position.

B22) 12.♕d2!?



The modern choice – White prepares ♗xc4, based on the fact that the g2-pawn is not really hanging.

12...0–0 13.♗xc4

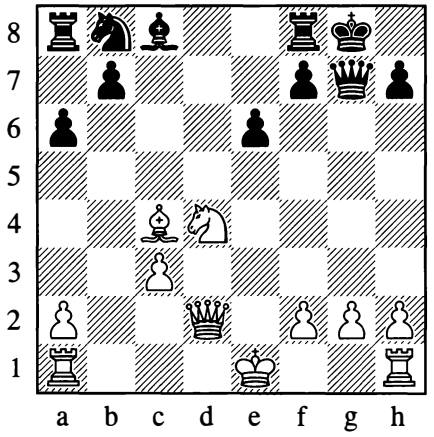
13...♕xg2?? 14.0–0–0 is out of the question for Black, as White's attack is too strong.

In this quite popular position I would like to present two options for Black: **B221) 13...a6!?** and **B222) 13...♖d8**.

B221) 13...a6!?

I looked at this move a long time ago when it was still a novelty, intending ...b5 and quick

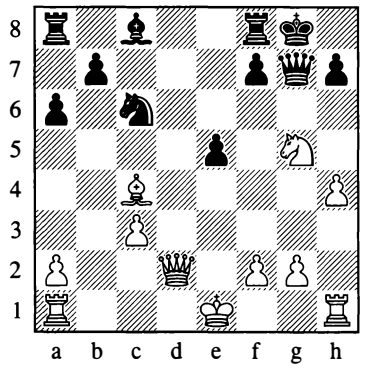
queenside play. Since then a few strong players have given it a go.



14.0–0

14.♗e2N has the idea to meet ...b5 with ♗f3, but Black can switch plans with 14...e5∞.

14.h4!? e5 15.♘f3 ♘c6 16.♘g5 occurred in Khenkin – Lauber, Neustadt an der Weinstrasse 2008. I think the best solution is:



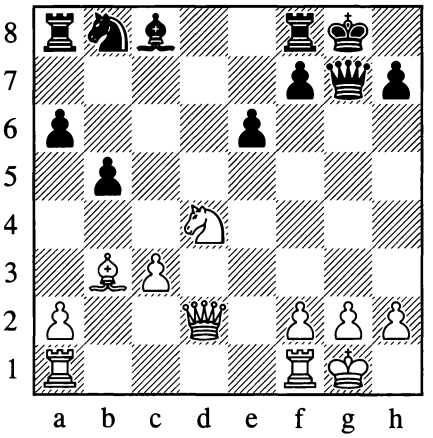
16...h6!?N∞ An important line is 17.♘e4 ♖d8 18.♘d6 ♘d4! 19.♗xf7† ♔h8∓ when the tactics work in Black's favour.

14...b5 15.♗b3

White has not managed to find an advantage with either of the other bishop retreats:

15.♗d3 ♗b7 16.f3 ♘d7 17.a4?! b4 18.♗e2 ♖fd8∓ Akobian – Tayar, Las Vegas 2009.

15.♗e2 ♗b7 16.♗f3 ♗xf3 17.♘xf3 ♘c6 ½–½ Delchev – Kolev, Sunny Beach 2007.



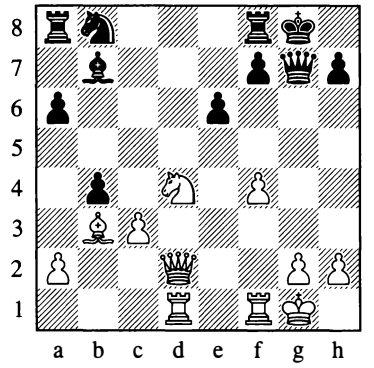
15...♗b7N

This was my idea when I first analysed 13...a6.

15...b4 was played in Ribli – Acs, Hungary 2002.

16.f3

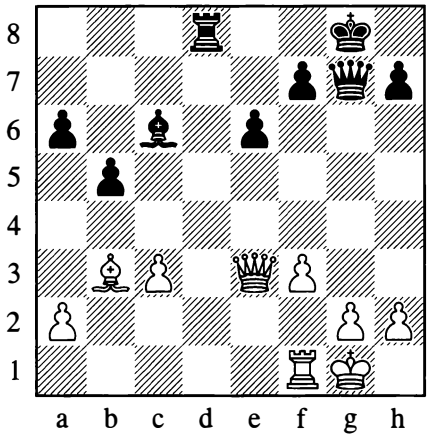
16.f4 gives Black a few decent options, the trickiest being: 16...b4!? (16...♘c6 17.♖f3 ♔h8= is also fine) 17.♖ad1 (17.cxb4?? ♖d8 18.♖ad1 ♖xd4 19.♕xd4 ♕xg2#)



17...bxc3 18.♕f2! (18.♕xc3?? ♕xg2#) 18...♘c6 19.♖d3 ♔h8∞

16...♘c6 17.♘xc6 ♗xc6 18.♖ad1 ♖ac8 19.♕e3 ♖fd8 20.♖xd8† ♖xd8

The position is balanced, for instance:



21.♕c5

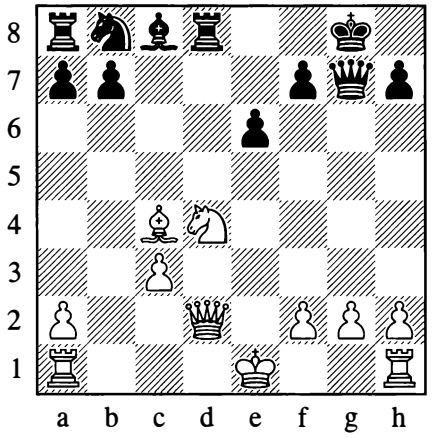
21.♗xe6?? is refuted by 21...♖e8.

21...♖d2 22.♖f2 ♕h6 23.♖xd2

23.♕xc6?? ♕e3 wins for Black.

23...♕xd2=

B222) 13...♖d8

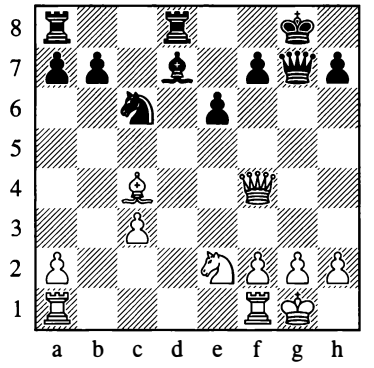


This has been the most popular choice and has achieved solid results. The immediate threat is ...e5, so White must move his queen somewhere.

14.♕e3

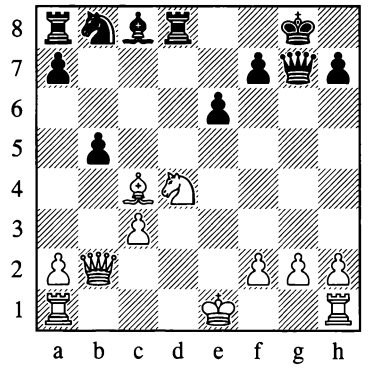
This has been almost universally played.

14.♕f4?! is a strange choice; now White will have to worry about ...e5 at the right moment, and he has also presented a target for a future ...♘c6-e7-g6. 14...♗d7 (14...e5?! does not win material because 15.♕h4 hits the rook on d8) 15.0–0 ♘c6 16.♘e2 (16.♘f3 can be met by 16...♘e7 followed by ...♘g6)



16...♘e5! 17.♘g3 (17.♗b3? ♗b5!∓ causes serious problems) 17...♗c6∓ Dziuba – Bruzon Batista, Calvia 2006.

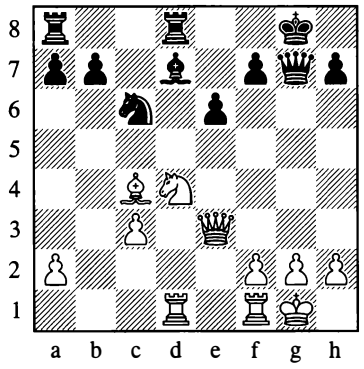
14.♕b2 gives Black a few good options, the most interesting being: 14...b5!?N (14...♕e5† 15.♗e2 ♘c6= was solid and good in Halkias – Gyimesi, Heraklio 2007; 14...b6!?= could also be considered)



15.♗xb5 e5 16.♘e2 ♗b7∓ Black has good compensation due to his lead in development.

14...♗d7 15.0–0 ♘c6 16.♘f3

16.♖ad1



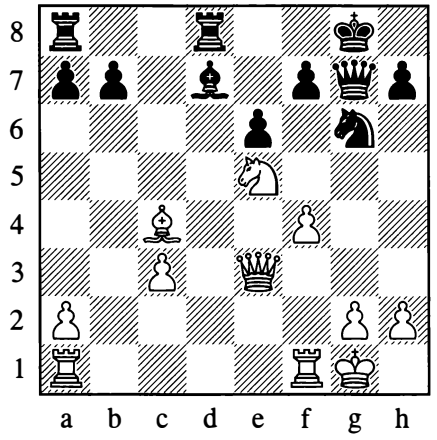
16...♘xd4N 17.♖xd4 ♗c6 18.f3 ♖xd4= gives Black easy equality.

16...♘e7

Transferring the knight from c6 to g6 is a normal manoeuvre in this type of position, providing shelter for the black king.

17.♘e5 ♘g6 18.f4

18.♘xd7 ♖xd7 19.♗b3 ♖c7 20.♖ac1 ♕e5 was fine for Black in Vitiugov – Khalifman, Tomsk 2006.



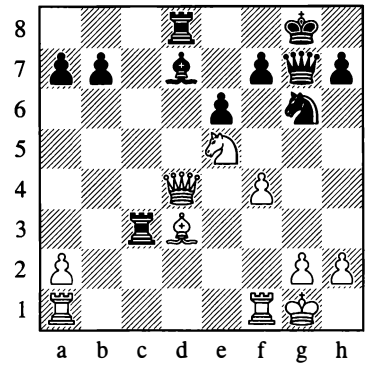
18...♖ac8 19.♗e2

19.♗b3 ♘xe5 20.fxe5 ♗b5! is a clever idea which forces White to settle for equality with 21.♖fd1, as the attempt to play aggressively with 21.♖f3? runs into 21...♖d3∓.

19.♗d3!?

This tricky move was used by Gelfand to score a quick victory over Giri, but Black should be fine with accurate play.

19...♖xc3 20.♕d4



20...♘xe5!N

The game continued 20...♘h4? 21.♗e4 ♖c7? 22.♕d6 ♖c2? 23.♕e7 ♖xg2† 24.♔h1 and Black resigned in Gelfand – Giri, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 2011.

21.♕xc3

21.♗xh7†? ♔xh7 22.♕xc3 ♘g4∓

21...♗c6

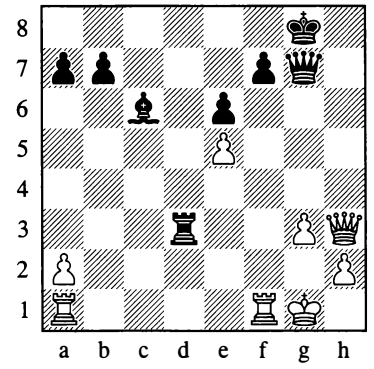
Threatening mate on g2 while hitting the bishop on d3.

22.♗xh7†!

Otherwise White is toast.

22...♔xh7 23.♕h3† ♔g8 24.fxe5 ♖d3 25.g3

25.♕xd3?? ♕xg2#



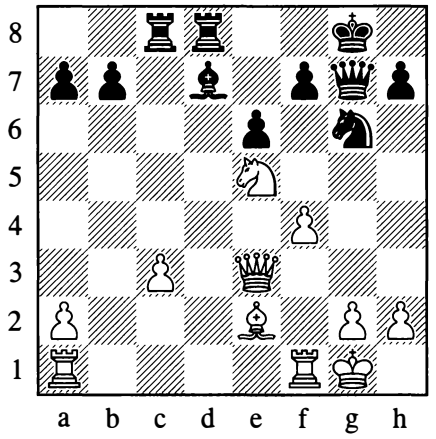
25...♖d2 26.♖ae1

26.♖f2 ♖xf2 27.♔xf2 ♕g6 28.♖e1 ♕c2† 29.♖e2 ♕c5† will lead to perpetual check.

26.♖f6 ♕g5 also looks like a draw.

26...♕g6 27.♖f4 ♕c2 28.♖g4† ♔f8 29.♕h8† ♔e7 30.♕f6† ♔f8=

With perpetual checks.



19...♗c6 20.♗f3

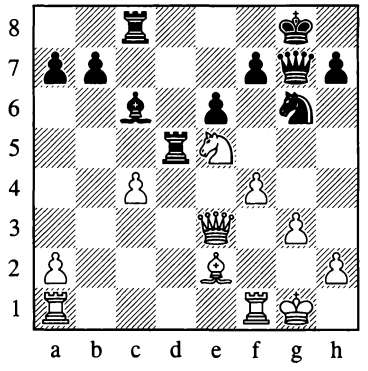
White can also keep the bishops on without really disturbing the equilibrium:

20.g3 ♖d5

Challenging the strong knight on e5.

21.c4

21.♘xc6 ♖xc6 22.♕xa7 (22.c4 ♕d4=) 22...♕xc3!N (22...♖xc3 23.♖ad1± Onischuk – Morozevich, Bursa 2010) 23.♗f3 ♖cc5! Black cuts off the white queen and soon forces a perpetual: 24.♗xd5 (24.♕xb7 ♖d2→ would be dangerous for White) 24...♕d4† 25.♔h1 ♕xd5† 26.♔g1 ♕d4†=

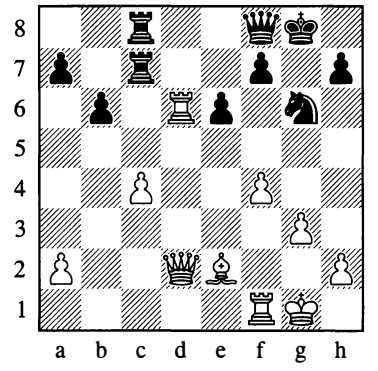


21...♖a5 22.♘xc6 ♖xc6 23.♕d2

23.♖ab1 b6 24.♕d2 ♕f6 25.♖fd1 e5 26.♖b5 ♖c5 27.fxe5 ♖xe5 28.♖b3 ♕e7 29.♗f1 ♕c5† was agreed drawn in Rodshtein – Macieja, Maalot-Tarshiha 2008.

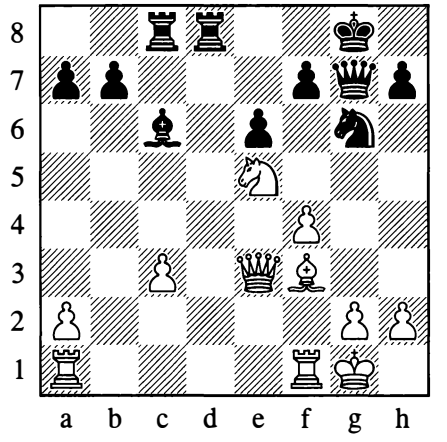
23.a3 ♖c8 24.♖ad1 ♕f8 25.♖f3 ♕c5 ½–½ was another peaceful outcome, Polak – Rogozenco, Czech Republic 2012.

23...♖ac5 24.♖ab1 b6 25.♖b3 ♖c8 26.♖a3 ♖5c7 27.♖d3 ♕f8 28.♖d6



28...b5!=

Kasimdzhanov – Khenkin, Germany 2008.



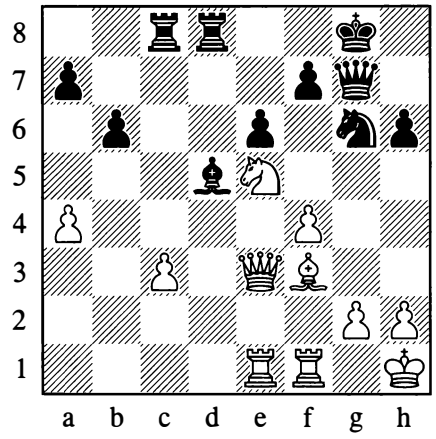
20...♗d5 21.♔h1

21.♗xd5 led to simplifications and another relatively short draw in the following game: 21...♖xd5 22.♕xa7 ♘xf4 23.♖xf4 ♕xe5 24.♖af1 ♖d7 25.♕f2 f5 26.♖d4 ♖xd4 ½–½ Kempinski – Ki. Georgiev, Moscow 2006.

21...b6 22.a4 h6 23.♖ae1?!

This was Ivanchuk's choice but it seems a bit too ambitious.

23.a5 would have been more prudent, intending to swap off one of White's weak pawns, and after 23...♘xe5 24.fxe5 ♕g5= a draw seems likely.

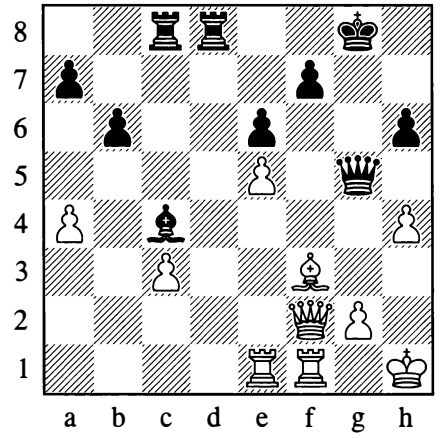


23...♘xe5 24.fxe5 ♕g5 25.♕f2 ♗c4

The position is murky but it seems more dangerous for White due to his weak pawns on the queenside.

26.h4

I think Black should have continued:



26...♕f5!N

26...♕g7 was unclear in Ivanchuk – Grischuk, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011.

27.♕g3† ♕g6 28.♕xg6† fxg6 29.♖f2 ♖f8∓

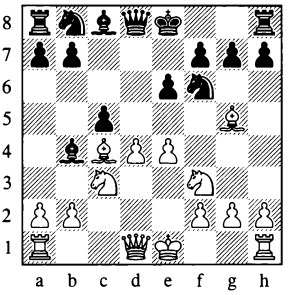
Black's superior structure gives him a risk-free advantage in the endgame.

Conclusion

The variations in this chapter are not the absolute main lines, but all of them contain some interesting points. 7.dxc5 leads to an immediate queen exchange but I found it necessary to recommend an extremely rare continuation with an early trade on c3. We then looked at 7.e5 cxd4, when 8.♕a4† ♘c6 9.0–0–0 leads to a complex situation where Black is temporarily two pawns up but then sacrifices a piece, only for White to sacrifice it back! It seems rather messy but practice and analysis shows that Black is doing well.

The rest of the chapter dealt with 8.♘xd4 ♕a5 9.exf6 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3 ♕xg5 11.fxg7 ♕xg7, leading to a roughly balanced position of mutual pawn weaknesses. 12.♕d2 0–0 13.♗xc4 is the main line nowadays, when 13...a6!? is a rare but fully playable move, while the more popular 13...♖d8 also continues to hold up well. The choice between these two moves may come down to whether or not you are content with a draw; if not, then 13...a6!? is less likely to lead to a forcing line culminating in a perpetual.

Chapter 6



7.♗xc4

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4!
6.e4 c5 7.♗xc4 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♕a5

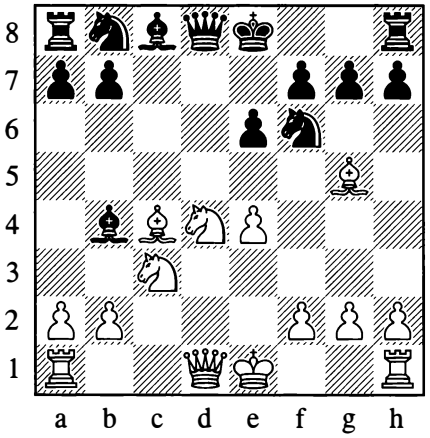
A) 9.♗b5† 118
B) 9.♗d2 ♕c5 10.♗b5† ♗d7 11.♘b3 ♕e7 12.♗d3 ♘c6 13.a3 ♗d6 14.0–0 0–0 121
B1) 15.♗g5 125
B2) 15.f4 127
B3) 15.♔h1!? 130
C) 9.♗xf6 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3 ♕xc3† 11.♔f1 gxf6 12.♖c1 ♕a5 133
C1) 13.♕g4 135
C2) 13.g3 136
C3) 13.♗b5† 138
C31) 13...♔e7 139
C32) 13...♘c6!?N 140
C4) 13.h4 ♔e7 14.♖h3 ♘c6 15.♘xc6† bxc6 16.♖d3 ♖d8 17.♖xd8 ♕xd8 143
C41) 18.♕b3 145
C42) 18.♕h5 146

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4! 6.e4 c5 7.♗xc4

We are entering the main line of the Vienna Variation.

7...cxd4 8.♘xd4

Already Black has to make an important decision regarding his move order. There are two main paths, and they can easily converge on the same position – but each option enables White to steer the game in another direction. After a detailed investigation, I decided to recommend the less popular of the two options.



8...♕a5

I prefer this move because it keeps the dark-squared bishop on the board for a little longer – this piece could still prove valuable for defensive purposes.

The most common move order is:

8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♕a5

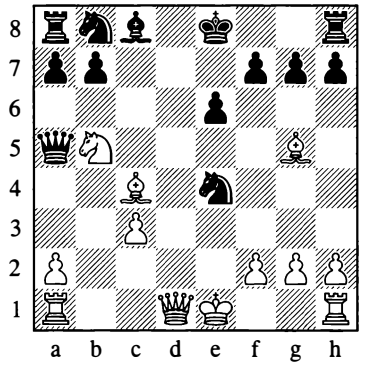
This can easily transpose to our repertoire after 10.♗xf6 ♕xc3† and so on, but White has some extra options which I would prefer to avoid.

10.♘b5!?

This is one such option. It may not look like a big difference, but if the bishop was still on b4 it would be doing a useful job covering key squares like d6 and even f8. See the note to White's 9th move in our main line for the comparison.

10.♗b5† is the most popular move, which also doesn't allow us into our repertoire. For example: 10...♗d7 11.♗xf6 ♗xb5? (11...gxf6 is necessary, when 12.♗xd7† and 12.♕b3 are both serious options which our chosen repertoire avoids) 12.♘xb5 gxf6 13.♖b1± Black's king was too exposed in Conquest – Dorrington, Hinckley 2008.

10...♘xe4



11.♕d4

This move gives White the option of forcing a draw after best play by Black – something I'm keen to avoid where possible.

Moreover, if White wants to play more ambitiously, 11.♗f4!? is an interesting way for him to look for long-term compensation, for instance: 11...0–0 12.0–0 ♘c6 13.♕c2 (another option is 13.♗c7 b6 14.♕f3⩲ as in Riazantsev – Macieja, Plovdiv 2012) 13...e5 14.♕xe4 exf4 15.♖fe1⩲ Pashikian – Laznicka, Yerevan 2014.

11...0–0 12.♕xe4 a6 13.♗e7

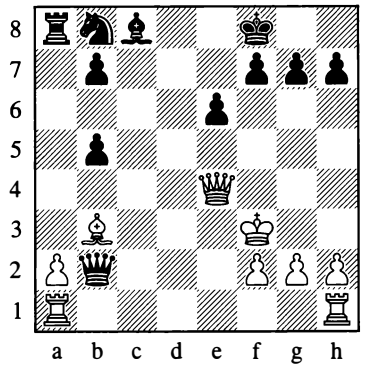
Clearly this move wouldn't be an option if we had kept the bishop on b4.

13...axb5 14.♗b4 ♕c7 15.♗xf8

15.♗xb5= is also perfectly playable for White.

15...♔xf8 16.♗b3 ♕xc3† 17.♔e2 ♕b2† 18.♔f3

Black should play for a draw with:

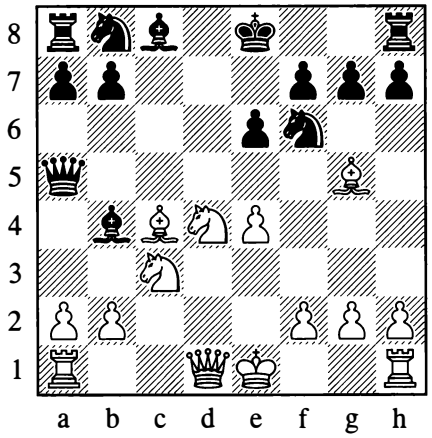


18...♕c3†

18...♘c6?! is an attempt to keep the game going, but 19.♖ad1 e5 20.♔g3± looks too risky for Black.

19.♕e3 ♕f6† 20.♔e2 ♕b2†=

Yu Yangyi – Macieja, Chicago 2016.



We have reached the main tabiya of the chapter, where White can choose between **A) 9.♗b5†**, **B) 9.♗d2** and **C) 9.♗xf6**. The second move is the only significant extra option available to White as a result of our decision to delay taking on c3.

Our chosen move order renders the following line virtually unplayable for White:

9.♘b5?

With our dark-squared bishop still alive and ready to help out with defensive duties, White's scheme packs much less of a punch.

Objectively the best reply is:

9...♘xe4!N

9...a6 is also pretty good, and was played in the only game to have featured White's last move. White has two options:

a) The game continued 10.♗xf6? gxf6 11.♘d6† ♔e7 12.♘xc8† ♖xc8 and White was already in big trouble in Glavinac – Atanasov, Struga 2005.

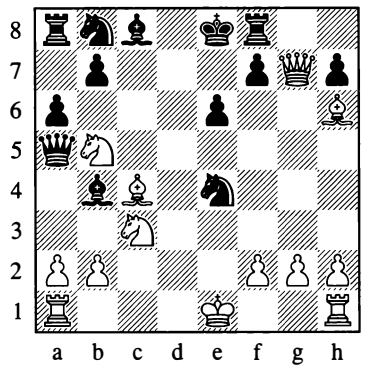
b) White can stay in the game with: 10.♘d6†!N ♔e7 (10...♗xd6 11.♗xf6!=) 11.♗d2! ♘c6 (The knight should not be touched: 11...♗xd6? 12.♘d5†; 11...♔xd6? 12.a3!) 12.f4! I suspect that Black is doing pretty well here too after 12...♖d8, but it seems easier just to gobble up the e4-pawn.

10.♕d4

10.♗f4? doesn't work here as we can take on c3 with the knight first: 10...♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♗xc3† 12.♗d2 ♗xd2† 13.♕xd2 ♕xd2† 14.♔xd2 ♘a6∓ Two pawns up – thanks very much!

10...a6 11.♕xg7 ♖f8 12.♗h6

Crucially, the bishop on b4 protects the rook on f8, allowing Black to continue capturing pieces.

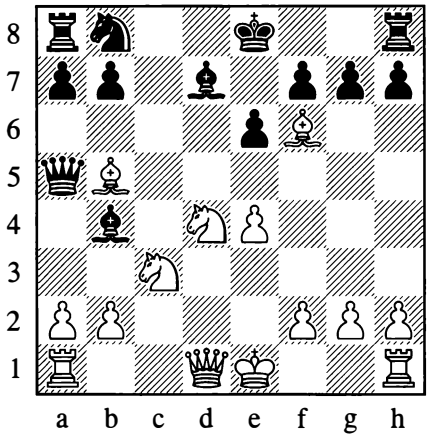


12...axb5 13.♗xb5† ♕xb5 14.♕xf8† ♗xf8 15.♘xb5 ♗b4†∓

Considering that 8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♕a5 10.♘b5!? enables White to force a draw if he knows what he's doing, while also offering ambitious White players the chance to keep

the game going with compensation for the sacrificed pawn, it feels like a big achievement to have ruled out the option of the early ♘b5. Now let's turn our attention to White's other possibilities.

A) 9.♗b5† ♗d7 10.♗xf6



10...♗xb5!?

This rare but interesting sideline is only possible thanks to the 8...♕a5 move order. Compare the 8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♕a5 10.♗b5† ♗d7 11.♗xf6 line discussed earlier, when it was noted that 11...♗xb5? is an error.

The main line is 10...gxf6 11.0–0 ♗xc3 12.♗xd7† ♘xd7 13.bxc3. Although Black has a sound position and should be able to make a draw, his winning chances are limited and there is a load of theory. Personally I think my recommended line is objectively just as good, while offering a few practical advantages. Black has more winning chances, as he avoids unnecessary simplifications and keeps the option of playing ...♗xc3 at a more favourable moment. The text move also demands significantly less theoretical knowledge than the main line.

11.♘xb5

Black's last move actually offered a pawn sacrifice. The way to accept it is:

11.♘b3!? ♕b6 12.♗xg7 ♖g8 13.♗d4 ♗xc3†

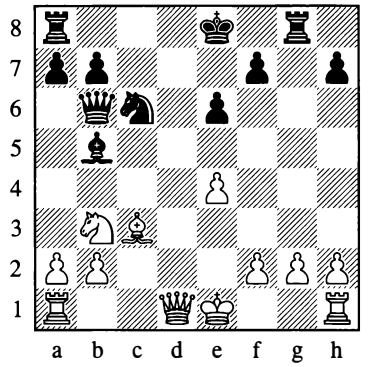
13...♕c6 is a decent alternative which has been played a few times.

14.♗xc3

14.bxc3 ♕c6 15.♕f3 ♘d7⩱

14...♘c6

Black's compensation comes from his lead in development and White's unsafe king.

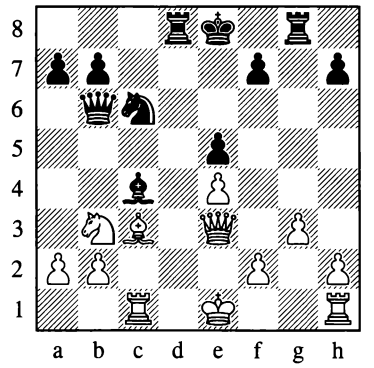


15.g3 ♗c4

15...♖d8!?N 16.♕f3 e5 17.♖d1 ♖g6 18.♖xd8† ♕xd8⩲ looks like excellent compensation with White's king still stuck in the centre.

16.♖c1 ♖d8 17.♕f3 e5 18.♕e3

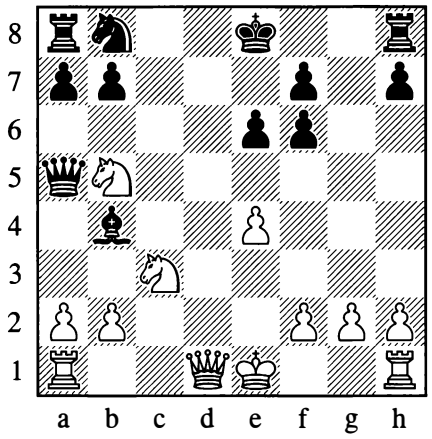
18.♘d2 ♗a6⩲



18...♕xe3† 19.fxe3 ♗xb3 20.axb3 ♖g4 21.♔e2 ♖xe4 22.♔f3 f5=

The endgame was roughly level in Tomashevsky – Vitiugov, Moscow 2010.

11...gxf6



12.0–0 ♘c6 13.a3

I also considered:

13.♕f3!?N

Challenging Black's pawn weaknesses.

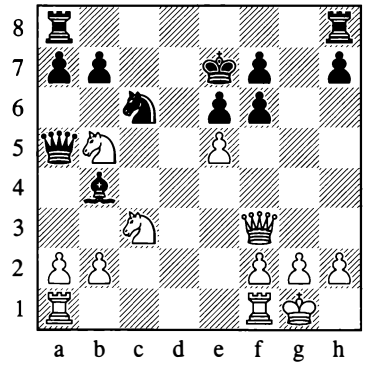
13...♔e7

The king often goes to e7 in the Vienna. It's reasonably safe there, and White's attempts to break through the centre only lead to a draw.

13...♗xc3!? 14.♘xc3 ♔e7= can be considered if you are determined to rule out the possibility of a forced draw.

14.e5!?

14.♖ad1 ♖hd8 15.e5 ♘xe5 16.♕xb7† ♔f8 17.♕e4 ♔g7∞

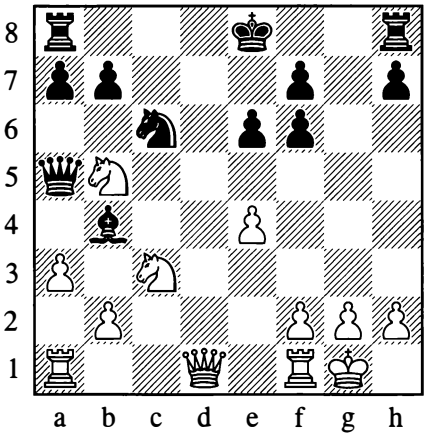


14...fxe5 15.♖ad1

15.♘e4 f5 16.♕g3 ♔f8 17.♕h4 fxe4 18.♕f6† is another route to a perpetual.

15...♖hd8 16.♘e4 ♖xd1 17.♖xd1 ♖d8 18.♕f6† ♔e8 19.♕h8† ♔e7=

With perpetual checks.



13...♗xc3 14.♘xc3

The position has simplified significantly. Black can place his rooks on the open g- and d-lines and keep his king in the centre, where it will remain well protected on either e8 or e7.

14...♖g8

A rare but fully playable alternative is:

14...♖d8!? 15.♕c1

After 15.♕f3 the players agreed a draw in Jankovic – Romanov, Harkany 2009; 15...♔e7= would be a sensible continuation.

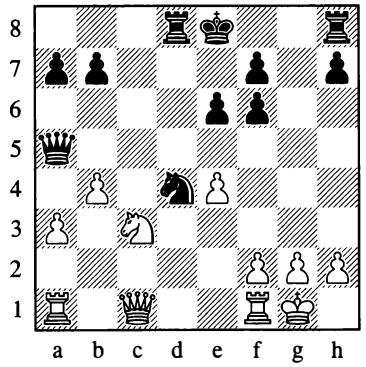
15.♕b3!?N may be best, although the position remains close to equal after 15...♕a6 or 15...♕c7.

The text move was tried against me in a blitz game by a well-known grandmaster, but he soon found himself in trouble due to Black's quicker development.

15...♘d4 16.b4?

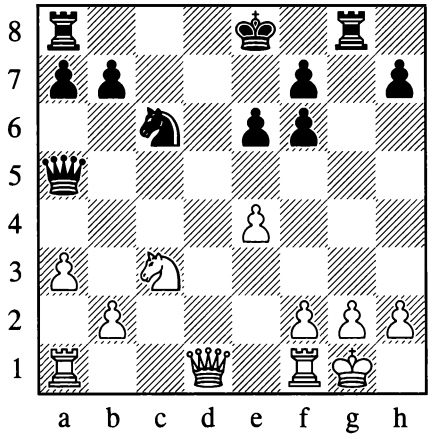
16.♕h6 was best, with equal play after 16...♕g5.

In Yardbird – Antidrome, Internet 2016, the most accurate continuation would have been:



16...♕c7!N∓

The dual threats of ...♘b3 and ...♕xc3† (followed by ...♘e2†) are difficult to stop.



15.f4

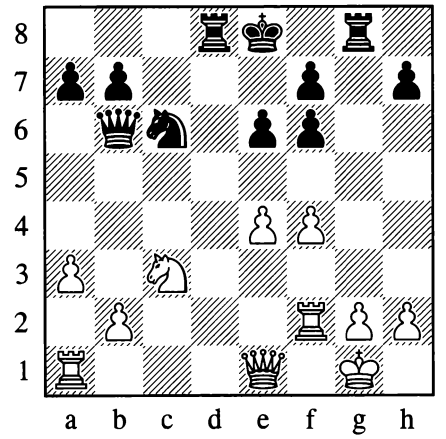
This seems a logical choice to try and get closer to the black king, but Black's active major pieces prove sufficient to hold the balance.

15.♕f3 is a more restrained approach. In Peng Zhaoqin – Turova, St Petersburg 2009, 15...♔e7N would have been the easiest way to secure an equal game.

15...♖d8 16.♕e1

16.♕e2N was a suggestion of Krasenkow but it hardly changes the assessment after 16...♕c5† 17.♔h1 ♘d4= intending 18.♕f2 ♘b3.

16...♕b6† 17.♖f2



17...♘d4!

The most accurate, preparing ...♘c2 or ...♘b3.

17...♖d3?! was Anand's choice but I think Black should be improving his knight before moving the well-placed rooks. 18.♕e2 ♕d4 This was Kramnik – Anand, Bonn (8) 2008, when 19.♘b5!N could have proved slightly annoying: 19...♕e3 (19...♕d8?! 20.e5±) 20.♕xe3 ♖xe3 21.♖d1 Preparing ♘d6†. 21...♖b3 22.♘c3 ♔e7 23.♖d3±

18.♕e3

18.♔h1N ♘b3 19.♖d1 ♖xd1 20.♘xd1 ♔e7 is given as equal by Shipov.

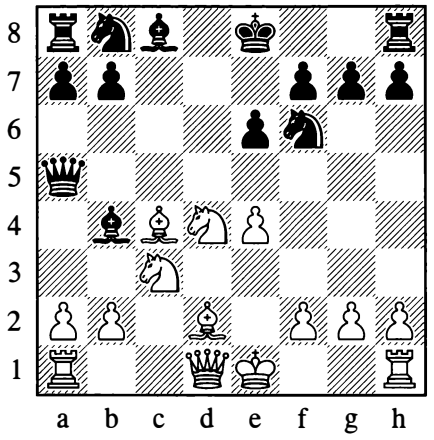
The text move led to simplifications and a draw in the following game.

18...♔e7 19.♖d1 ♘b3 20.♕xb6 axb6 21.♖xd8 ♖xd8=

Pelletier – Meier, Mulhouse 2011. Overall 10...♗xb5 seems fully viable and I'm surprised it hasn't been played more.

B) 9.♗d2

This has been White's most common choice – although variation C has occurred in more games overall, once you include those featuring the 8...♗xc3† move order.



It may seem strange to retreat the bishop, but White is protecting the c3-knight in the hope of obtaining a positional plus in the symmetrical pawn structure. It has been the choice of many top players, including Kasparov and Kramnik. As I mentioned earlier, this is the significant extra option available to White against our 8...♕a5 move order, so it should be considered carefully.

9...♕c5

Black should take the opportunity to harass White's hanging pieces.

10.♗b5†

This has been a universal choice so far.

10.♕b3!?N

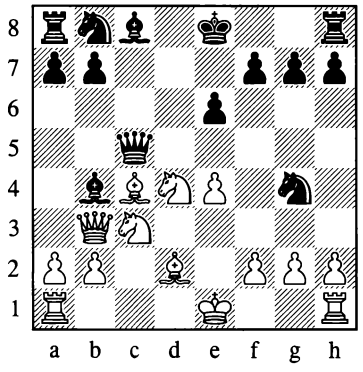
This novelty isn't the most obvious choice, but the computer indicates that it is playable, so I guess it's just a matter of time before someone gives it a try. It can lead to interesting tactical complications so it's worth having a look at the following lines and deciding which option you prefer for Black.

10...♘g4!?

Threatening ...♕xd4 followed by ...♕xf2†.

10...♕xd4?! 11.♕xb4 is a good trade for White, who will gain time against the black queen after long castling. A possible continuation is 11...♘c6 12.♕b3!? (12.♕a4 ♘g4 13.0–0–0 is a similar story) 12...♘g4 13.0–0–0 0–0 14.♗e1 ♕c5 15.♕b5!? Black can play with the queens on or off; either way, he stands worse because of White's bishop pair.

10...♘xe4!? is a decent option, for instance: 11.♗e3!? (11.♘xe4 ♗xd2† 12.♘xd2 ♕xd4 13.♖d1 0–0 14.0–0 ♘c6 15.♖fe1 ♕b6∞ White has some activity to compensate for the pawn, but it doesn't look like enough to claim an advantage) 11...♕e7 12.0–0 ♘xc3 (12...♗xc3!? 13.bxc3 0–0∞ is also playable) 13.bxc3 ♗c5 14.♘xe6 fxe6 15.♗xc5 ♕xc5 16.♗xe6 ♘c6 17.♗xc8 ♖xc8 18.♖ae1† ♘e7 19.♕xb7 ♕c7 20.♖xe7† ♔xe7 21.♕e4† ♔f8 22.♕f5†= With a perpetual.



11.♗b5†!?

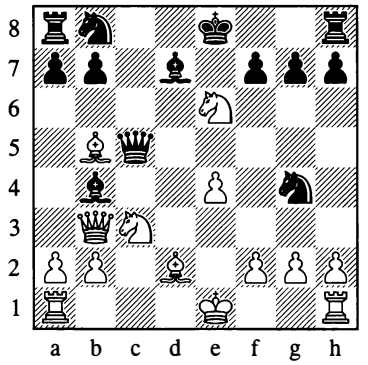
Initiating complications.

11.♗e3?! ♘xe3 12.fxe3 0–0 13.0–0 ♘c6 14.♘xc6 bxc6 is slightly more comfortable for Black.

11.f3 is playable although 11...♘e5 12.♘c2 ♗xc3 13.♗b5† ♗d7 14.♗xd7† ♘bxd7 15.♕xc3 0–0= gives Black an easy game.

11...♗d7 12.♘xe6!

Without this White would stand worse.

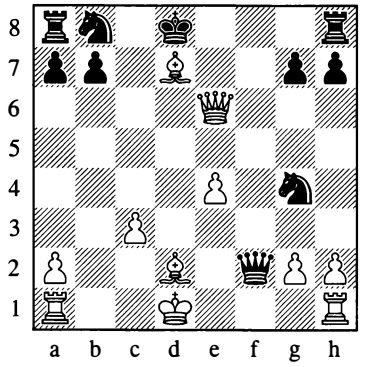


12...♕xf2† 13.♔d1 fxe6 14.♕xe6†

Another possible line is: 14.♗xd7† ♔xd7 15.♕xb4 ♖d8 16.♘d5! White must block the d-file, otherwise Black moves his king with an attack on the d2-bishop. 16...exd5 17.exd5 ♘e3† 18.♗xe3 ♕xe3 19.♕xb7† ♔d6 20.♖e1 ♕d3† 21.♔c1 ♕c4† 22.♔b1 ♕d3†= With a perpetual.

14...♔d8 15.♗xd7 ♗xc3 16.bxc3

16.♗xc3?? is impossible, as 16...♘e3† 17.♔c1 ♕c2 is mate.

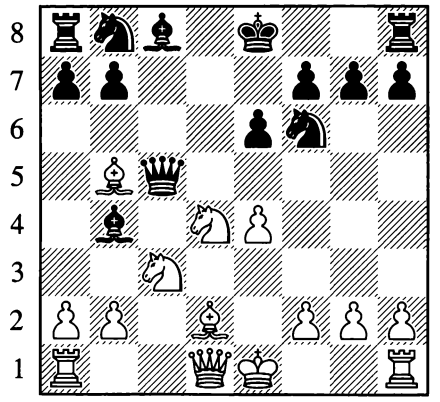


16...♕xg2!

With the knight on g4 defended, Black now threatens ...♘xd7. White should therefore move his bishop, with a likely draw, for instance:

17.♗a4 ♕xh1† 18.♔c2 ♕xa1 19.♗g5† ♘f6 20.♗xf6† gxf6 21.♕xf6† ♔c7 22.♕e5†

With another perpetual. Summing up, 10.♕b3!?N allows Black to count on an acceptable game after both 10...♘g4!? or 10...♘xe4!?, but it is worth knowing a few moves of the above analysis, as some of the moves would be tricky to find over the board.



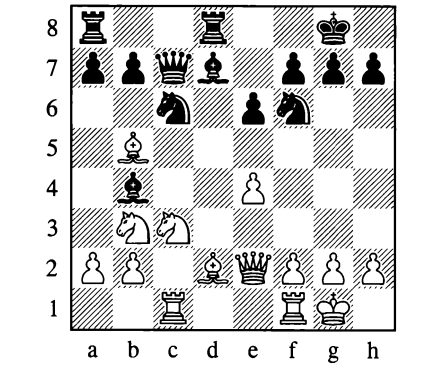
10...♗d7 11.♘b3 ♕e7

This is the main line and the most reliable choice. However, you may wish to consider the following interesting alternative:

11...♕c7!?

I'm hesitant to give this as my main recommendation as I don't like the idea of lining my queen up with a rook on c1. That said, White has to be very accurate to get an advantage, and Vallejo Pons was able to use the text move to notch an impressive win over Kramnik.

12.♖c1 ♘c6 13.0–0 0–0 14.♕e2 ♖fd8

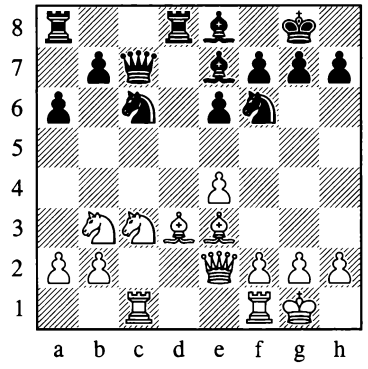


15.♗g5

15.♗d3N transposes to another game: 15...♖ac8 16.♗g5 ♗e7 17.f4 was the continuation of Borovikov – Colovic, Rethymnon 2012, and now 17...h6!?N 18.♗h4 e5 19.f5 ♕d6 followed by ...♘d4 looks close to equal; compare variation B2 below, where the same structure arises with slightly different piece placement.

15...♗e7 16.♗e3 a6 17.♗d3 ♗e8

Black's idea is to meet f2-f4 with ...♘g4, utilizing the unstable position of the bishop on d3, but Kramnik decides to go ahead and play it anyway.

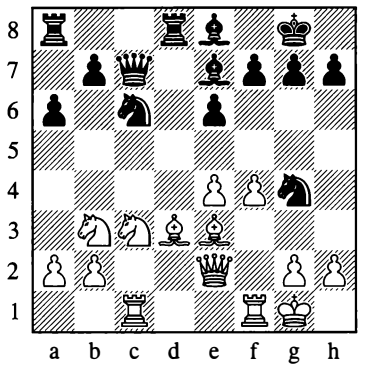


18.f4

18.♖fd1 protects the d3-bishop. 18...♕b8!?N (intending ...♘e5-g4) is an idea of Max Illingworth. (18...d6 19.g3 was pleasant for White in Hahn – Grube, email 2011.) 19.f4 (19.♗b6 ♖c8 20.♗b1 ♘d7 21.♗e3 b5 is solid enough for Black.) 19...e5 It seems to me that 20.g3!± is best, when White keeps control. (20.♗b6 exf4! 21.♗xd8 ♗xd8 was Max's idea, when Black has a pawn plus dark-squared domination for the exchange, with ...♘e5 and ...♗c6 to follow.)

18.♗b1!?N is given by Max as an even better way to prepare f2-f4. Indeed, after 18...♖ac8 19.f4 e5 20.g3± White has the better chances, although Black's position remains playable.

18...♘g4

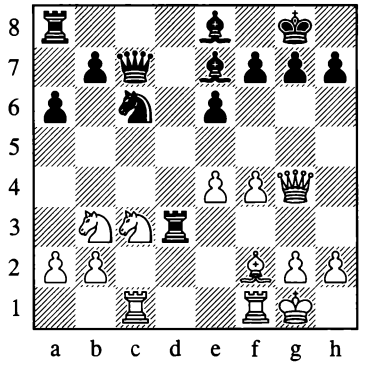


19.♕xg4

Illingworth's suggestion of 19.♘d5!N exd5 20.♕xg4 dxe4 21.♗xe4± keeps a slight plus for White.

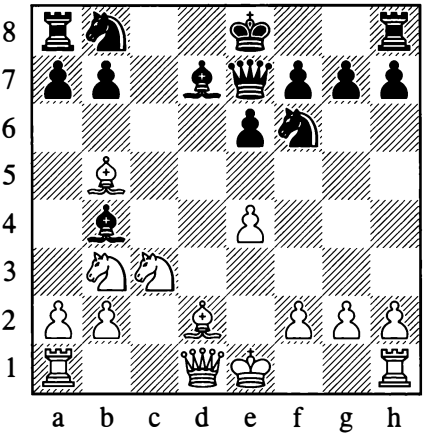
19...♖xd3 20.♗f2

20.♕e2 ♕d8 21.♘d5 doesn't win the exchange because of 21...♖xb3! 22.♘xe7† ♘xe7 23.axb3 ♗b5, as Max points out.



20...♕d8 21.e5 ♘b4 22.♘c5 ♖d2∞

Kramnik – Vallejo Pons, Tromso (ol) 2014.



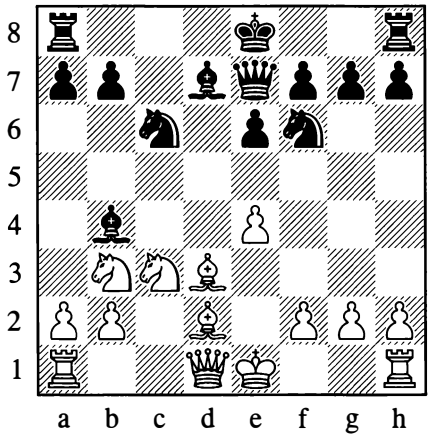
12.♗d3

A standard retreat in these types of positions. White has more space so he should generally try to avoid unnecessary exchanges. Other moves are playable but they make it easier for Black to equalize, for instance:

12.0–0 0–0 13.♕e2 (13.♗d3 ♘c6 transposes to the main line below; 13.e5N ♗xc3 14.♗xc3 ♘d5 gives Black easy equality) 13...♗xb5 14.♕xb5 ♘c6= Le Roux – Feller, Nimes 2009.

12.♕e2 0–0 13.♗d3 (13.0–0 transposes to the note above) 13...e5 Black was not worse in I. Sokolov – Dizdar, Dresden 1998.

12...♘c6

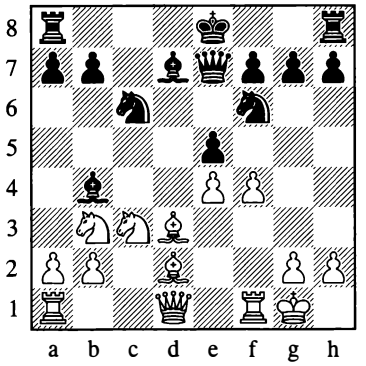


13.0–0

13.a3 ♗d6 usually comes to the same thing after both sides castle. 14.♗e3 has occasionally been tried, but after 14...0–0 15.0–0 ♖fd8 16.h3 ♘e5 17.♗e2 ♗c6 18.♕b1 ♘g6= Black was fine in Macieja – Wojtaszek, Kallithea 2009.

A rare but interesting alternative is:
13.f4!? e5 14.0–0

14.f5?! looks too ambitious. In Melkumyan – Colovic, Balaguer 2010, Black could have obtained some advantage with: 14...♖d8!N Threatening ...♗xf5. 15.♕e2 ♘d4 16.♘xd4 exd4 17.♘d5 ♗xd2† 18.♔xd2 ♕e5∓



14...♗g4!?N

14...♗e6 15.fxe5 ♘xe5 16.♗b5† ♘fd7? (16...♔f8 was necessary) This occurred in Harikrishna – Wang Yue, Guangzhou 2010, when 17.♘d5!N ♗xd5 18.♗xb4 ♕xb4 19.♕xd5+– would have left Black in a tangle.

14...♗xc3!?N 15.♗xc3 0–0= transposes to the 14.f4 line in the notes to the main line below.

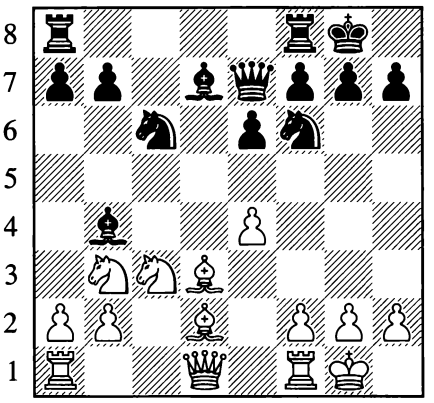
15.♕e1 ♖d8

Hitting the bishops seems reasonable.

16.♗c4 ♗e6 17.♗xe6 fxe6!=

Controlling the d5-square, with a good game for Black.

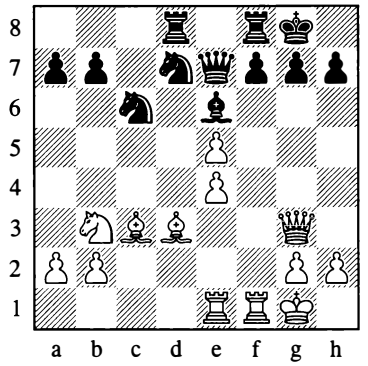
13...0–0



14.a3

White almost always looks to clarify the position of the dark-squared bishop. If he leaves it on b4 then he has to take into account ...♗xc3 at any given moment.

A good example is: 14.f4 ♗xc3!? 15.♗xc3 e5 16.♕f3 ♖ad8 17.♖ae1?! White should try something else, although Black is not worse in any case. 17...♗e6 18.fxe5 ♘d7 19.♕g3



19...♘dxe5!N (19...a6 led to unclear play in Genov – Gelashvili, Athens 2001. The text move is much cleaner.) 20.♗xe5 ♘xe5 21.♕xe5 ♖xd3∓ White has some pawn weaknesses and will have to struggle to equalize.

14...♗d6

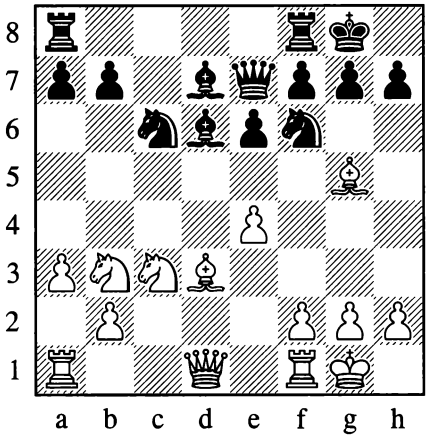
We have reached a popular position, which could easily have arisen via the 13.a3 ♗d6 14.0–0 0–0 move order.

White has three main options: **B1) 15.♗g5**, **B2) 15.f4** and **B3) 15.♔h1!?**.

15.♗e3N has not been played here, but it leads back to the Macieja – Wojtaszek game in the note to White's 13th move above.

B1) 15.♗g5

This has been tried by a few prominent players but, in view of Black's strong reply, it strikes me as a little clumsy.



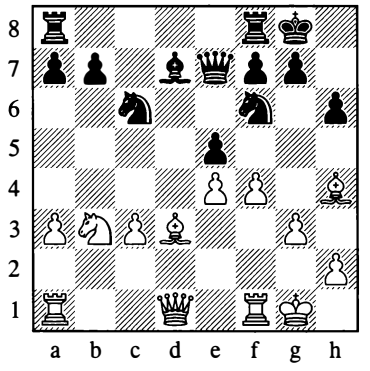
15...h6! 16.♗h4 ♗f4!

16...♗e5!?N looks playable, and after 17.f4 ♗xc3 18.bxc3 e5 19.fxe5 ♘xe5 20.♗xf6 gxf6 the position is unclear.

The text move seems most thematic to me, as it gets right in the way of White's main plan, which is to push the f-pawn to f4. Now White has to make a strange move like g2-g3 or ♘e2 to challenge the annoying bishop.

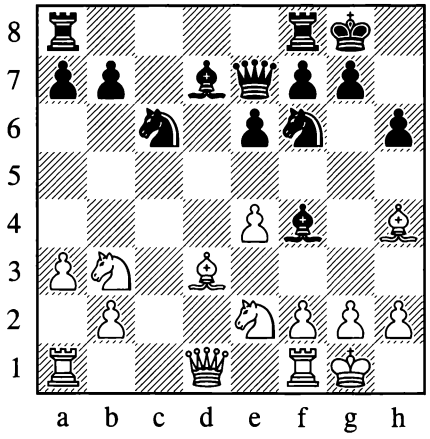
17.♘e2

17.g3N has not yet been tested. 17...♗e5 18.f4 ♗xc3 19.bxc3 e5 looks fine for Black, for instance:



20.fxe5 ♘xe5 21.♗xf6 gxf6 22.♘d4 ♖ac8∞ Black's kingside has been weakened but his minor pieces are well placed and his rooks will take up active posts on c8 and d8,

while White's remaining bishop looks a little awkward. The position is roughly balanced but I would slightly prefer Black. Compared to the previous note, it is useful to have provoked the g2-g3 move, as this slightly weakens White's kingside while making it harder for him to transfer his heavy pieces to the kingside along the third rank.



17...e5!

Black does not have to retreat the bishop, but can play more dynamically.

18.♘xf4

18.♘c3 g5 19.♗g3 ♗e6∓ gave Black easy play in Bacrot – Wang Hao, Beijing 2014. The rooks can take up active positions on d8 and c8, and White's minor pieces are awkwardly placed.

18...exf4

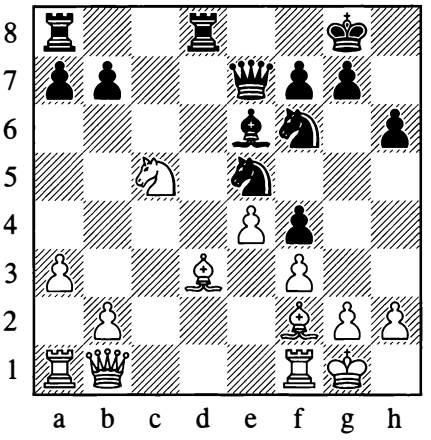
The change in the pawn structure frees the e5-outpost for the black pieces; there is also a threat of ...g5, trapping the bishop.

19.f3 ♗e6 20.♗f2 ♖fd8

Black already enjoys a lead in development, and now White has to find a way to deal with the awkward pin.

21.♘c5 ♘e5 22.♕b1

Now 22...♗c4?! led to equality in Kramnik – Lautier, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 1998, but Black has a much stronger move available.



22...♗h3!N

This unlikely shot causes White big problems. There are many threats in the air, including ...b6 to exploit the loose bishop on d3, as well as ...♘fd7 followed by ...♕g5.

23.gxh3

23.♗e2 ♘fd7 24.♘xd7 ♕g5!–+ wins the exchange for Black.

23...♘xf3† 24.♔g2

24.♔h1 b6∓ is horrible for White, as 25.♘b3? runs into 25...♕e6, hitting b3 and h3.

24...♘e5!

The simpler 24...♘d2∓ is also good; Black will regain some material and look for moves like ...♖ac8 or ...b6 to unsettle White.

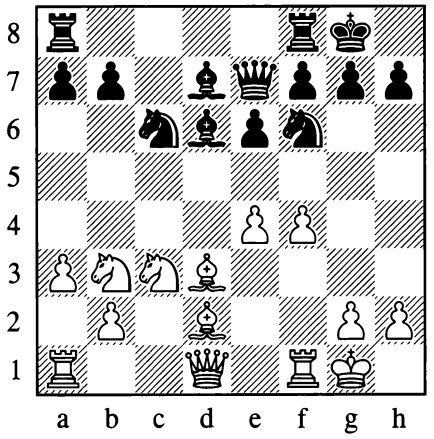
25.♖d1

25.♗c2 ♖ac8 is great for Black, as 26.♘b3? is refuted by 26...f3† 27.♔h1 ♕e6–+ with the familiar double attack.

25...b6 26.♘b3 ♘xd3 27.♖xd3 ♘xe4∓

Black has two pawns and a great initiative for the piece.

B2) 15.f4



This is White's most direct way of playing, as well as his most popular. He certainly cannot hope for an advantage without advancing the f-pawn at some point.

15...e5 16.f5

In a few games White has tried:

16.♘d5

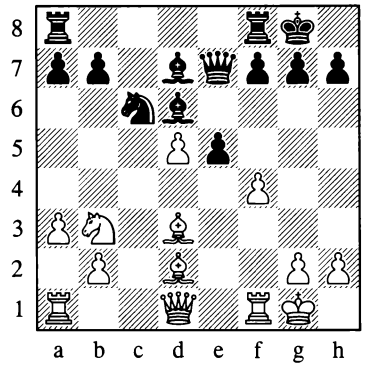
A very direct approach.

16...♘xd5

16...♕d8!? is also quite reasonable, for instance: 17.f5 (17.♘xf6† ♕xf6 18.fxe5 ♕xe5 19.♗f4 ♕e7=; 17.♖c1 ♗e6 18.♘xf6† ♕xf6 19.f5 ♗xb3 20.♕xb3 ♘d4=) 17...♘xd5 18.exd5 ♕b6† 19.♔h1 ♘d4=

17.exd5

17.fxe5?? loses a piece after 17...♘xe5 or 17...♕xe5.

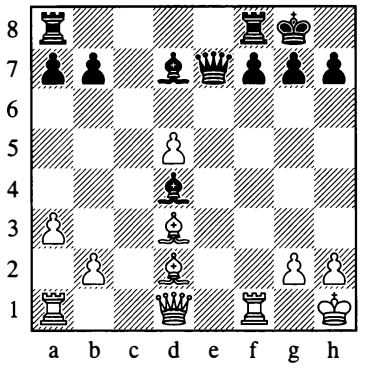


17...♘d4 18.fxe5

This is the critical try.

18.♖e1 leads to simplifications, as shown by the following email game: 18...♗a4! 19.♗xh7†! ♔xh7 20.♕b1† ♔g8 21.♘xd4 ♕c7 22.fxe5 ♗xe5 23.♘f3 ♖fe8 24.♘xe5 ♖xe5 25.♖xe5 ♕xe5 ½–½ Meissner – Stilman, email 2011.

18...♗xe5 19.♘xd4 ♗xd4† 20.♔h1



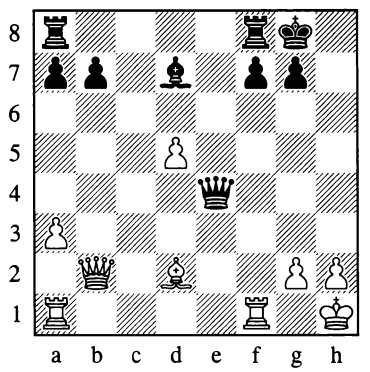
20...♗xb2!?N

The game continued: 20...a5 21.♕b3 ♗e5 22.♖ae1 (22.♗c3!?N promises White a tiny edge due to his space advantage but the position remains perfectly playable for Black) 22...♕d6= Fier – Kulaots, Rome 2011.

21.♗xh7†

21.♖b1 ♗xa3 22.♖xb7 ♗d6 23.♕h5 (23.♗c3?! ♕h4∓) 23...f5∞ leaves White with some compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but not enough to be better.

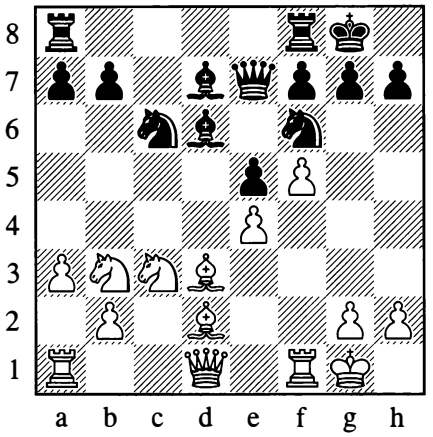
21...♔xh7 22.♕c2† ♔g8 23.♕xb2 ♕e4



24.♗c3

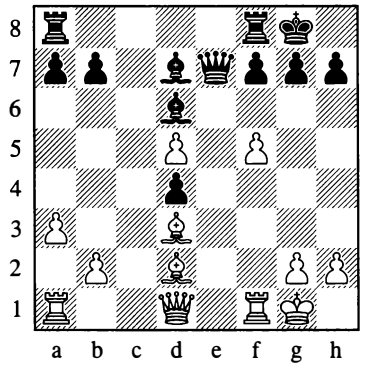
24.♕xb7 ♗e6! regains the pawn with easy equality.

24...f6 25.♖ad1 b6 26.♖fe1 ♕f5 27.d6 ♖ae8=



16...♘d4 17.♗g5

17.♘xd4?! exd4 gives Black the e5-square and opens the diagonal for his dark-squared bishop, meaning he is already at least equal. After 18.♘d5 the players agreed a draw in De Silva – Ingersol, email 2006. A sensible continuation would be: 18...♘xd5 19.exd5



19...♕e5! The most ambitious try. (19...♕h4 looks tempting, but 20.h3 ♕g3 21.♕f3 gives White safe equality) 20.♗f4 ♕xd5 21.♗xd6 ♕xd6 22.f6 g6 23.♕d2 ♖fe8 24.♕h6 ♕f8 25.♕h4 ♖ad8 White has some compensation but Black can certainly try to make his extra pawn count.

17...♗c6

Guarding the d5-square against a knight invasion.

18.♗c4

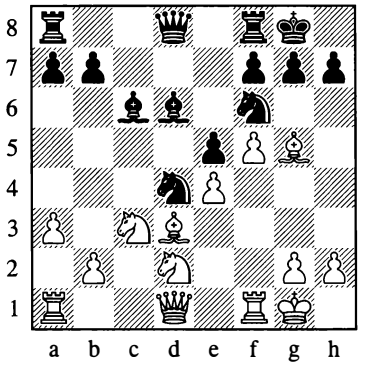
18.♘a5 is an option but the position looks quite reasonable for Black with the strong knight on d4. 18...h6 19.♗h4 ♗c7 Black vacates the d6-square for his queen in order to unpin. 20.♘xc6 bxc6 21.♕a4 ♗b6 22.♔h1 ♕d6= Dorfman – Ekstroem, France 1998.

18.♘d2

This attempt to reroute the knight has occurred in several games, but I struggle to see how Black can be in any danger with such a strong knight on d4.

18...♕d8

Again, Black's main issue is dealing with the pin being exerted by the g5-bishop. The text move, preparing ...♗e7, is another common theme in this structure.



19.♖c1

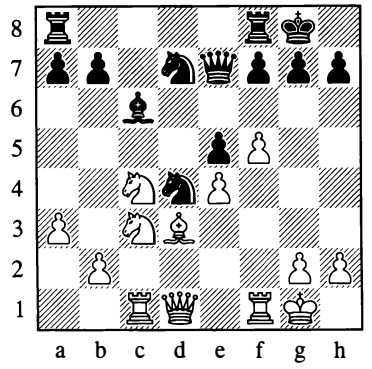
19.♘c4?! stops ...♗e7 but after 19...b5 20.♘xd6 ♕xd6 Black is out of the pin anyway. 21.♕e1 h6 22.♗xf6 ♕xf6∓ Bake – Jankowiak, corr. 2007.

19...♗e7 20.♘c4 ♘d7

20...h6!?N seems a reasonable move. 21.♗e3!? (21.♗h4 ♘d7 is similar to the main line, but the inclusion of ...h6 would appear to help Black slightly) The text move is an extra

option which White should probably take; nevertheless, 21...♗d6= looks fine for Black.

21.♗xe7 ♕xe7

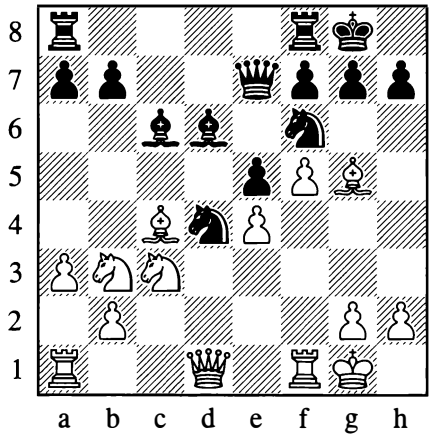


22.♘e2

22.b4?! ♘f6 23.♘a5 ♖fd8 24.♘xc6 bxc6 25.♘a4 a5∓ was good for Black in Dziedzina – Onder, email 2002.

22...♖fe8 23.♖e1 ♖ad8 24.♘xd4 exd4 25.b4 ♗b5 26.♘b2 ♗xd3 27.♘xd3 ♘e5=

Black was comfortably equal in Lehnhoff – Ingersol, email 2010.

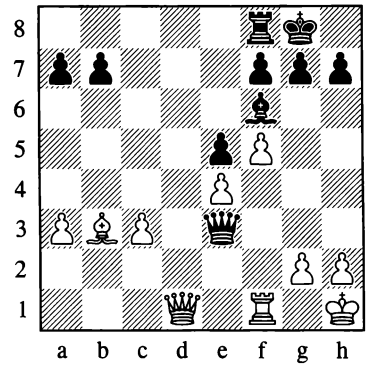


18...♕d8!

This clever retreat, preparing ...♗e7, is a nice way to deal with the pin on the f6-knight. Once the pin is broken, White will find it hard to claim any sort of advantage.

19.♘d5 ♗xd5 20.♗xd5 ♗e7 21.♗xf6 ♗xf6 22.♖c1

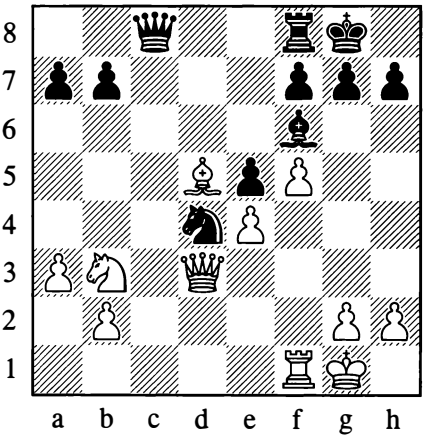
22.♔h1 was the original try from this position, but the game quickly simplified to a draw: 22...♖c8 23.♖c1 ♕b6 24.♖c3 ♖xc3 25.bxc3 ♘xb3 26.♗xb3 ♕e3



27.♕f3 ♕xf3 28.♖xf3 ♖c8 29.a4 ♖c5 30.g3 ♔f8 31.♖d3 ½–½ Wang Yue – Gelfand, Medias 2010.

22...♖c8 23.♖xc8 ♕xc8 24.♕d3

The position is essentially equal, but Black has to be slightly careful not to fall into a passive position against White's dominant bishop. The most accurate continuation is:



24...♕b8!N

Sidestepping a possible ♖c1 attack and preparing ...♖c8.

Swapping off Black's strong knight with 24...♘xb3?! feels a bit too compliant, and 25.♕xb3 b6 26.g3 ♕c7 27.♔g2± left Black under some pressure in L'Ami – Burg, Netherlands 2013.

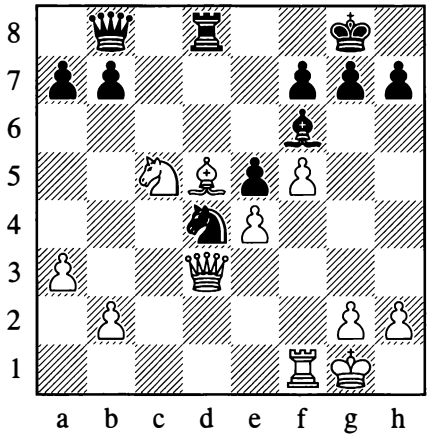
25.♘c5

Threatening ♘d7.

25.♖c1 ♖c8 is equal.

25...♖d8!

Guarding the d7-square and preparing ...b6. The b7-pawn is indirectly defended by some simple tactics.



26.g3

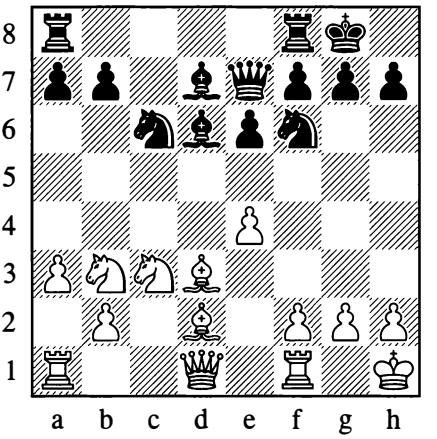
26.♗xb7?? ♗e7–+ wins a piece.

26.♘xb7?? ♖xd5∓ is not much better from White's perspective.

26...b6=

Black has no problems.

B3) 15.♔h1!?



This is White's latest and most sophisticated try, delaying the f2-f4 advance until a more favourable moment. It has been tried by a few top players, but Black has more than one decent reply.

15...♘e5

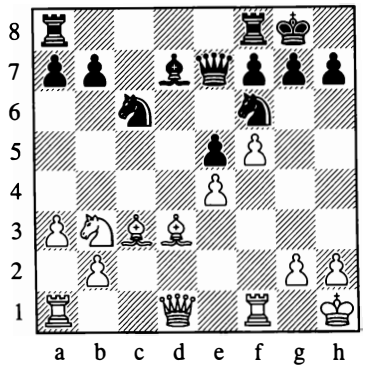
I will take this as the main line. Black uses the temporary availability of the e5-square to switch the knight across to the kingside with a gain of a tempo.

15...♗e5!?

This is also possible and has been played by Anand. Black gets in position to eliminate the c3-knight at the right moment so he can play ...e5 without the worry of a future ♘d5 jump. Maybe White is a touch better with his space advantage but it's hard to do much with it, as Kramnik found out in the following game.

16.f4 ♗xc3 17.♗xc3 e5 18.f5

18.♕f3 ♖fe8 19.♖ae1 ♖ac8 gave Black a solid position and he went on to draw with no apparent difficulty in Marquez Abreu – Benlloch Guirau, corr. 2013.

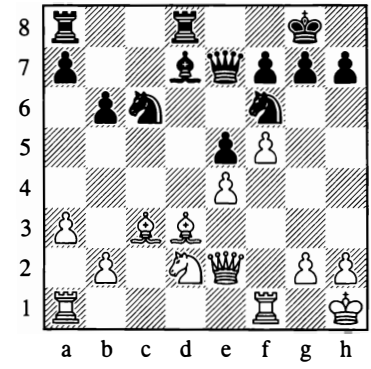


18...♖fd8 19.♕e2 b6!

Controlling the c5- and a5-squares and intending to post the bishop on the ideal b7-square.

20.♘d2

Edouard points out that launching an attack with 20.g4 could be met by 20...h6 21.♖g1 (21.h4 ♘h7 22.♗e1 a5⇄) 21...♘d4! 22.♘xd4 exd4 23.♗xd4 ♗c6 24.♗xf6 ♕xf6 when Black has more than enough play for the sacrificed pawn.



20...♗c8 21.♘f3 ♗b7

We have been following Kramnik – Anand, Bilbao 2010. White has the two bishops and more space but it is hard to do anything with them, and all of Black's pieces are well placed. The position is very close to equal and Anand had no problem holding the draw.

16.♗e2

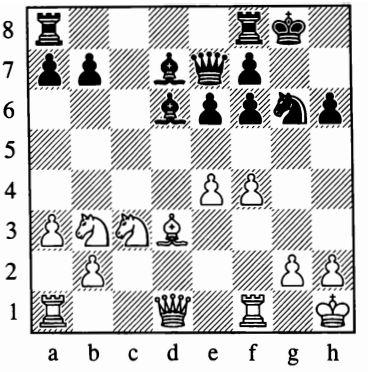
Another game continued:

16.♗g5 h6 17.♗xf6 gxf6

17...♕xf6?! 18.f4 ♘xd3 19.♕xd3 is awkward for Black.

18.f4 ♘g6

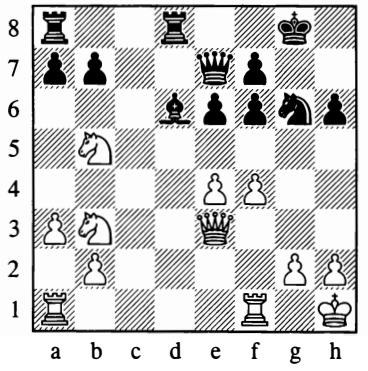
18...♘xd3!?N 19.♕xd3 ♗c7∞ could also be considered. For the time being Black is a bit cramped and has some weaknesses around his king, but he has the long-term advantage of the bishop pair.



19.♕d2 ♖fd8 20.♕e3 ♗c6

20...♗c7!?N is an interesting alternative which keeps the position more complex.

21.♗b5 ♗xb5 22.♘xb5



22...♖ac8!?N

22...♗b8± was playable but a bit passive in Grischuk – Gelfand, Monte Carlo 2011.

The text move is more accurate, as grabbing the a7-pawn would backfire on White:

23.♘xa7?!

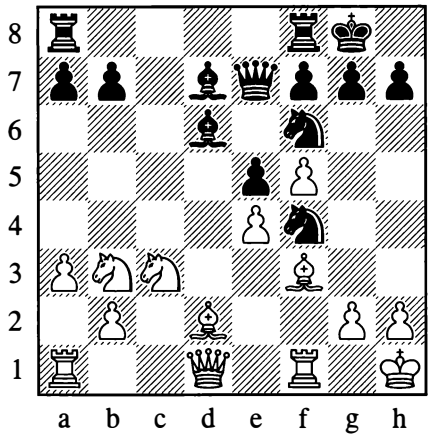
23.g3= is safer.

23...♖c2 24.♖ab1 ♘xf4! 25.♖xf4 ♗xf4 26.♕xf4 ♕d6

White has some problems due to his uncoordinated pieces and weak back rank.

16...♘g6 17.f4 e5 18.f5 ♘f4 19.♗f3

We have reached an important moment, where Black has to decide how to deal with the possibility of g2-g3.



19...h6!N

19...♗c6?! was played in Le Quang Liem – Shulman, Lubbock 2011, and one subsequent game. In his annotations, the Vietnamese super-GM points out that 20.♘a5!N ♖fd8 21.♘xc6 bxc6 22.♕c2± would have favoured White, on account of his bishop pair and superior pawn structure. He also points out that 22...♗c5 23.♘a4 ♘d3?! does not work due to 24.♗g5 ♗b6 25.♖ad1± when the knight is forced back.

The text move is useful for a few reasons. In some scenarios Black can consider meeting g2-g3 with ...♘h3, when the knight will have a safe retreat square on g5. Just as importantly, the knight might also run to d3, as the annoying reply ♗g5 will no longer be available. I actually had Black's 19th move in my notes from several years ago, but Le Quang Liem also recommends it in his annotations to the aforementioned game.

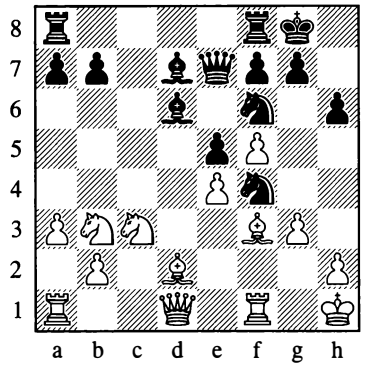
20.♗e3

Le Quang Liem gives a few lines after this move, which I will discuss below.

It seems to me that a more critical try is:

20.g3!?

Forcing Black to decide where to put his knight. I think the most accurate choice is:

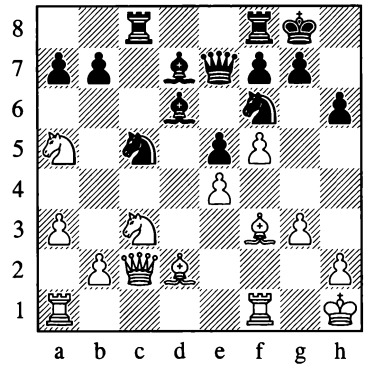


20...♘d3!

20...♘h3 looks riskier in view of 21.♗g2 ♘g5 22.h4 ♘gh7 23.g4 ♘e8 (perhaps 23...g5!? could be considered) 24.♕e1 ♕d8 25.♕g3 ♗e7 26.♗e1 ♗c6± and White's spatial advantage ensures a small pull.

21.♕c2 ♘c5 22.♘a5 ♖ac8

It seems to me that White's advantage is slim to non-existent. If he tries to force matters, he may fall into difficulties:



23.b4?!

Grabbing the b7-pawn will only give White more problems.

23...♘a4 24.♘xb7 ♖c7 25.♘xd6 ♕xd6 26.♖fd1 ♖fc8

White is in trouble on the c-file.

20...♗c6

20...♖fd8?! 21.g3 ♘h3 22.♗g2 ♘g5 23.h4 ♘gh7 24.g4 gives Black problems on the kingside, as Le Quang Liem points out.

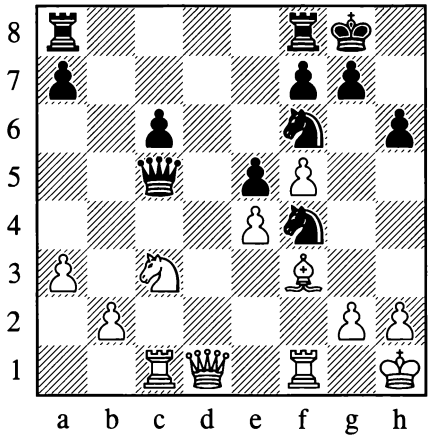
21.♘a5

If White does not try this, Black will simply develop his rooks and reach a comfortable position.

Le Quang Liem gives 21.♕c2 ♖fc8 22.♖ac1 a5 as unclear, which seems a reasonable assessment.

21...♗c5 22.♘xc6 bxc6 23.♗xc5 ♕xc5 24.♖c1

Black has to be slightly careful, but I think he is doing fine after the following improvement:



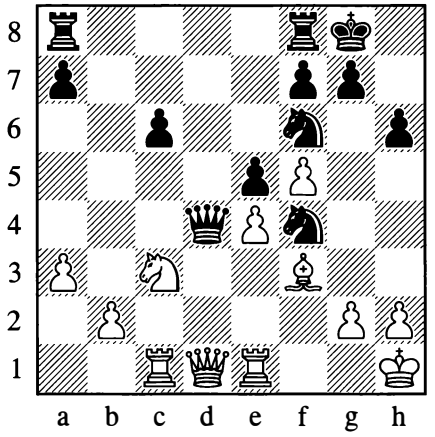
24...♕e3!

Le Quang Liem gives 24...♕a5 25.♕c2 ♖ad8 26.g3 ♘h3 27.♗g2 ♘g5 28.h4 ♘gh7 29.♗f3 ♖d4 30.♖fd1 as pleasant for White.

The immediate 24...♕d4?! is not so good, as the simple 25.♕xd4 exd4 26.♘a4 leaves Black under pressure.

25.♖e1 ♕d4

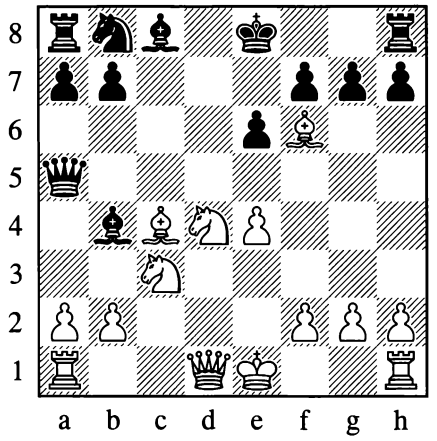
Now if White trades queens, he will lose an exchange to the ...♘d3 fork.



26.♘e2 ♘xe2=

White may recapture with either his rook or his queen, but the position remains about equal in either case. Black has one extra pawn island, but his pieces are active and he has the better minor piece.

C) 9.♗xf6



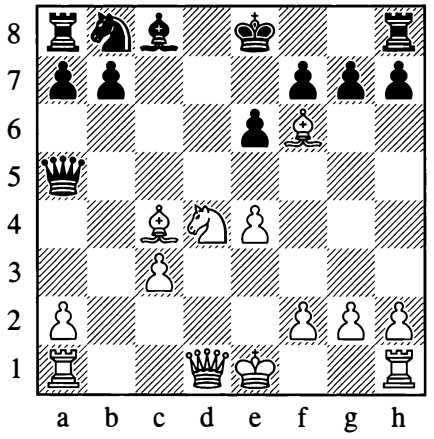
This is the most forcing and critical option.

9...♗xc3† 10.bxc3

After 10.♔f1 gxf6 11.bxc3 the simplest continuation is 11...♕xc3, transposing to the

main line. However, White's strange move order also gives Black the chance to deviate with 11...♗d7!?N or 11...♘d7!?N, when the position is about equal but White's king has made an odd move.

The position after the text move has occurred in a lot of games, many of which arrived here via the more common move order of 8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♕a5 10.♗xf6.

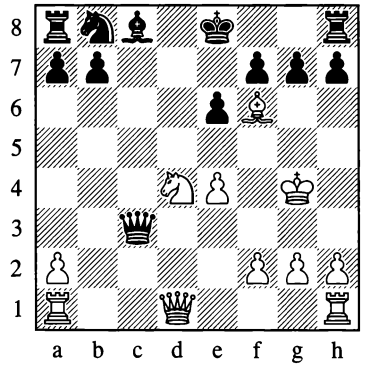


10...♕xc3†

At first sight it looks as though White has blundered, but he has a trick to save him.

11.♔f1

11.♔e2?? is not the answer: 11...♕xc4† 12.♔f3 ♕c3† 13.♔g4 (13.♔e2 loses to 13...♕b2† or even 13...b6!?–+)



13...e5† 14.♘f5 ♗xf5† 15.exf5 gxf6–+ Black kept his extra piece in Daly – Stummer, Budapest 1994.

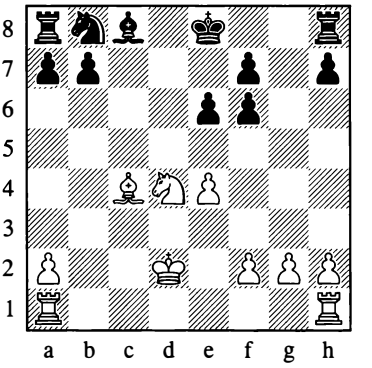
11.♕d2?!

This would be a good move if Black had to take the rook in the corner, but instead we can simply trade queens while keeping an extra pawn.

11...♕xd2†

11...♕xa1†?? 12.♔e2 ♕xh1 runs into 13.♘xe6 with a devastating attack. A possible finish is: 13...♘c6 14.♘xg7† ♔f8 15.♕d6† ♔g8 16.♕g3 ♔f8 17.♘f5 ♗xf5 18.♕g7† ♔e8 19.♕xf7#

12.♔xd2 gxf6



13.♘b5 ♘a6 14.♘d6† ♔e7 15.♘xc8† ♖axc8 16.♗xa6 bxa6 17.♖hc1 ♖hd8† 18.♔e3 ♖b8

All this happened in Lamprecht – Piket, Germany 2002. Black's extra, doubled pawn may not be worth a great deal, but it still gives him the more comfortable side of a likely draw.

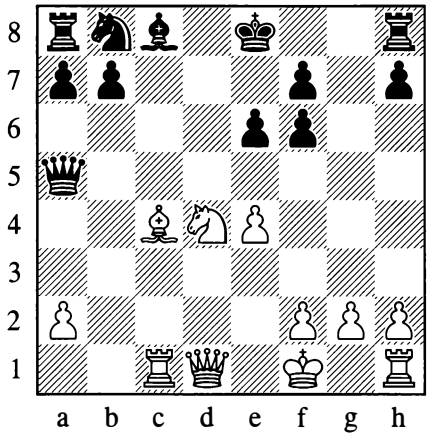
11...gxf6

Black should avoid 11...♕xc4†? 12.♔g1, when 12...gxf6? is impossible due to 13.♖c1+– and the bishop on c8 hangs.

12.♖c1 ♕a5

Let's take stock. White has gone for the most aggressive approach possible, exchanging his dark-squared bishop in order to accelerate his

development and weaken Black's structure. In return for these benefits, he has made some concessions, namely misplacing his king, thus blocking in the h1-rook, and sacrificing the c3-pawn. Black should aim to catch up on development with ...♘c6, ...♔e7 and ...♖d8, perhaps with ...♗d7 thrown in at some point. Exchanges are generally good for Black, as he is a pawn up, so swapping the b8-knight for the one on d4 makes sense – although the knight can also come into play via d7 in some lines.



White has four main options: **C1) 13.♕g4**, **C2) 13.g3**, **C3) 13.♗b5†** and **C4) 13.h4**.

An inferior alternative is:

13.♘b5?!

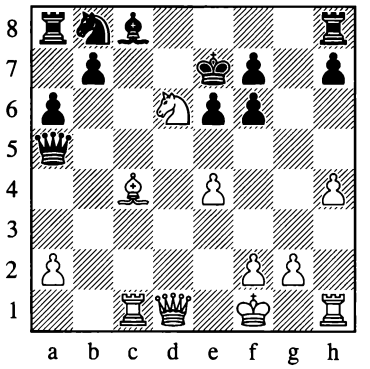
Threatening ♕d6, but Black can easily deal with it.

13...a6!

Forcing the knight into d6 but stopping it from ever reaching c7.

14.♘d6† ♔e7 15.h4

15.♗e2 ♘c6 16.♘c4 ♕c5 17.h4 ♖d8 was clearly better for Black in To – Tan, Budapest 2014



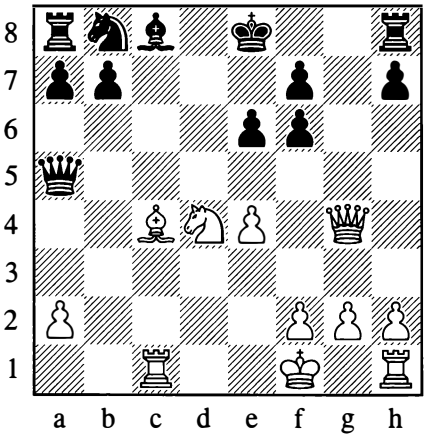
15...♘c6

15...♖d8?! 16.♘xc8† ♖xc8 17.♖h3 ♘d7 18.♗b3 ♕e5 allowed some of Black's advantage to slip away in Bacrot – Ivanchuk, Beijing (blitz) 2014. The text move is better, as Black gets ready to recapture with the 'correct' rook on c8.

16.♖h3 ♖d8 17.♖d3 ♕e5

This was Hebert – Kosyrev, Montreal 2001, which ends here with '0–1' according to the database. It would seem early to resign, if that's what happened, but Black is clearly in control and his extra pawn should ultimately decide the game.

C1) 13.♕g4



The database only contains a few examples of this move, including a very recent blitz game. White wants to cause trouble with ♕g7.

13...♘d7!?N

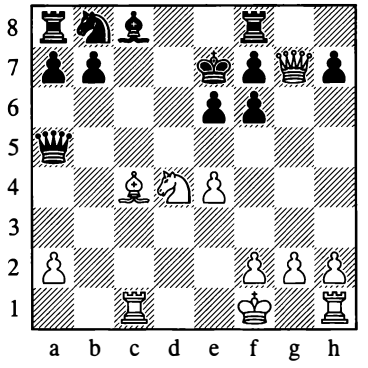
This seems a sensible choice, keeping ...♕g5 in reserve until a more opportune moment.

13...♕g5?! allowed 14.♕xg5 fxg5 15.♗xe6! ♘c6 16.♗xc8 ♖xc8 17.h4 g4 18.♘f5± with a pleasant endgame for White in L'Ami – Van Wely, Internet (blitz) 2016.

13...♔e7!?

This move looks provocative but the main line of my analysis ends in a forced draw.

14.♕g7 ♖f8



15.e5!?N

After 15.h4 ♕e5 Black was at least equal in Lemos – Krysa, Montevideo 2011.

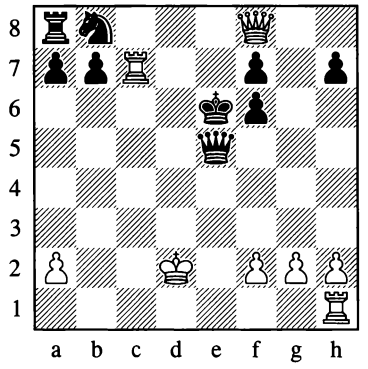
15...♕xe5 16.♘xe6 ♗xe6 17.♗xe6 ♕g5!

After 17...♕xe6? 18.♖e1 Black will lose his queen and the game.

18.♖c7†!?

After 18.♕xg5 fxg5 19.♗c8 ♘d7 White regains his pawn to reach an equal endgame.

18...♔xe6 19.♕xf8 ♕b5† 20.♔e1 ♕e5† 21.♔d2



21...♕d4†!

21...♕xc7 also leads to a draw after perfect play, but Black has to be more careful.

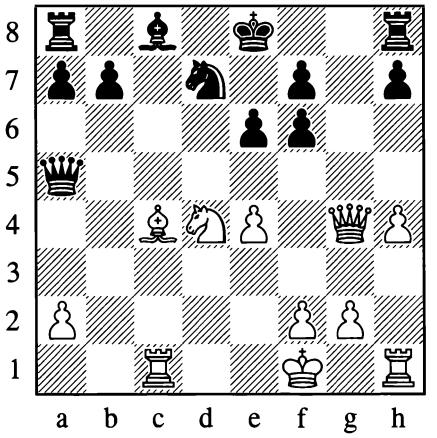
22.♔c2 ♕xf2† 23.♔b1 ♕b6† 24.♔a1 ♕d4†=

14.h4

This move is probably not best, but it's important to see how Black should handle the most ambitious approach, now that the ...♕g5 resource is not available.

14.g3 ♕g5= is safe enough for Black.

14.♕g7 leads to complex play after 14...♖f8∞ with ...♕e5 to follow.



14...♘e5 15.♕g7 ♖f8 16.♗e2

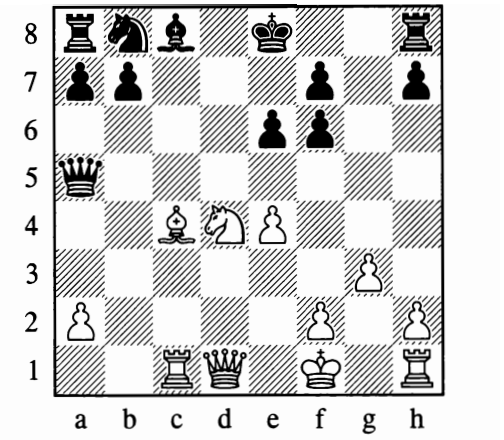
16.♕xf6?? ♘xc4 17.♖xc4 ♕a6! catches White in a fatal pin.

16...♔e7 17.♖h3 ♗d7∓

Black is still a pawn up and is ready to start counterattacking along the c-file.

C2) 13.g3

Ten years ago this move did not exist, but since then it has been tried by a few strong players, most notably Carlsen and Kramnik. Instead of the traditional h2-h4 and ♖h3, White prepares to put his king on g2 and develop the h1-rook by normal means.



13...♗d7 14.♔g2 0–0!

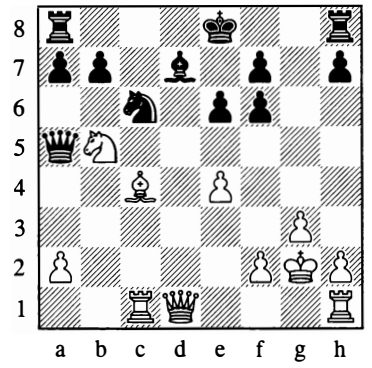
This seems like the best solution, delaying ...♘c6 for the moment and thus avoiding any ♘b5 or ♗b5 ideas.

14...♘c6

This is the obvious move but I am not so happy with it, as it gives White a choice between a sharp struggle and a small positional advantage.

15.♘b5!?

After 15.♗b5 ♖d8 16.♗xc6 ♗xc6 17.♘xc6 bxc6 18.♕f3 ♕e5 19.♖xc6 0–0 White had a risk-free edge, although Black went on to draw in Carlsen – Morozevich, Biel 2011.

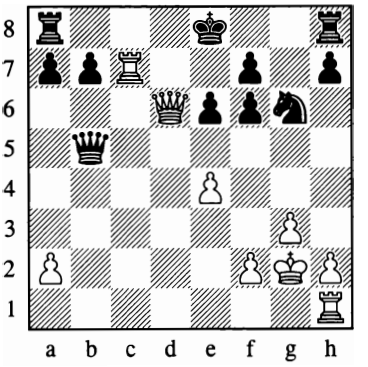


15...♘e5! 16.♕d6!

16.♘d6† ♔e7 17.♘xb7 ♕b6 18.♕b3 ♕xb3 19.♗xb3 ♖hc8 seems fine for Black.

16...♗xb5 17.♗xb5† ♕xb5 18.♖c7 ♘g6

Preventing mate on e7. Black's position looks scary but he has just enough resources to defend.



19.♖d1

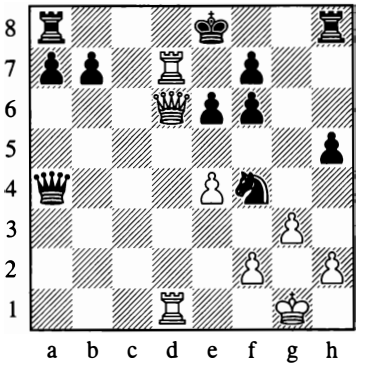
The slow 19.h4?? is refuted by 19...♖d8 20.♕a3 ♕e5, with both ...♕xe4† and ...♕d6 on the cards.

19...h5! 20.a4!

20.♖d7?? ♕b6 wins for Black, so White has to decoy the queen first.

20...♕xa4 21.♖d7 ♘f4† 22.♔g1

22.gxf4 ♕xe4† is the same thing.



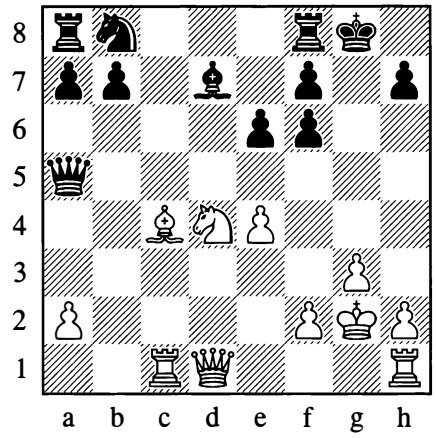
22...♘h3† 23.♔g2 ♘f4† 24.gxf4 ♕xe4† 25.♔f1 ♕h1†

25...♕c4† is another drawing option.

26.♔e2 ♕e4† 27.♔f1 ♕h1† 28.♔e2 ♕e4† 29.♔f1

½–½ Shimanov – Khairullin, Legnica 2013. A well-played game! Ultimately 14...♘c6 seems good enough for a draw, but the move

given in the main line seems fully playable while avoiding long, 'computerish' lines such as the one above.

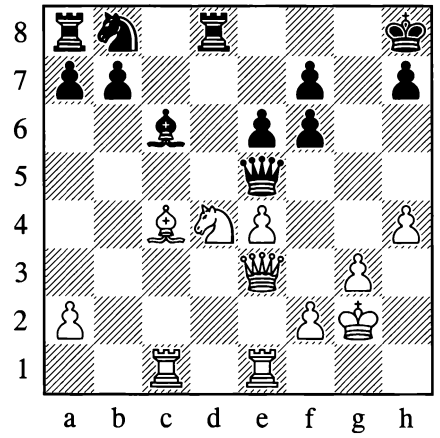


15.h4 ♔h8

15...♘c6N looks like a sensible alternative, as long as you don't mind an early draw, which could occur after: 16.♘b3 ♕b6 17.♕g4† (17.♕xd7?? ♖fd8 picks up the queen) 17...♔h8 18.♕f4 ♔g7 19.♕g4† ♔h8=

16.♕f3 ♕e5 17.♕e3 ♗c6 18.♖he1 ♖d8

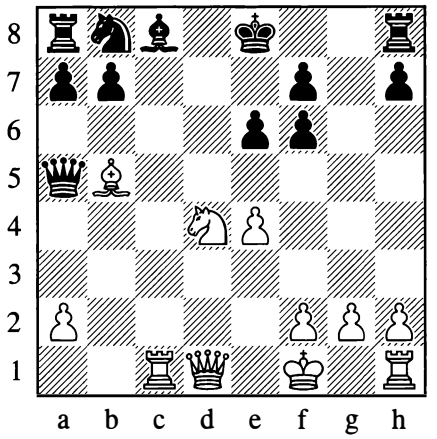
The computer indicates that White has just enough compensation for the pawn. He still has to find some accurate moves though, and in the following game he soon slipped into a worse position.



19.♘f3 ♕h5 20.♗e2?! ♕g6 21.e5 ♘d7 22.exf6 ♘xf6∓

Hracek – Wang Hao, Rhodes 2013.

C3) 13.♗b5†



This move leads to forcing play, with the main line resulting in a draw by perpetual check, as shown in dozens of games, the earliest being from 1988.

Your response to this move will depend on your attitude towards an early draw. If an easy draw with the black pieces is acceptable, then **C31) 13...♔e7** is a good move. If, on the other hand, you wish to keep the game going, then my new discovery of **C32) 13...♘c6!?N** will enable you to do so.

13...♘d7? is a mistake due to 14.♖xc8†! ♖xc8 15.♗xd7†, when recapturing on d7 would cost Black his queen to a discovered check. 15...♔e7 16.♗xc8 ♖xc8 was the continuation of Guimaraes Cunha – Frota, Fortaleza 1999, when 17.♔e2!N ♕xa2† 18.♕d2± would have given White every chance of converting his material advantage.

C31) 13...♔e7 14.e5!

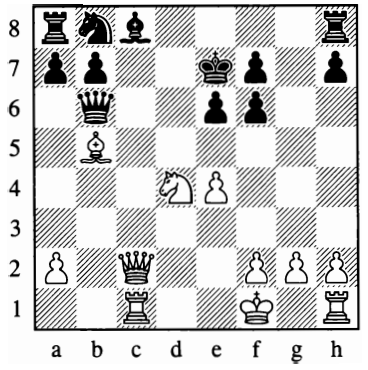
Alternatives leave White with insufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn. For example:

14.♕c2?!

Threatening a check on c5, but Black can easily prevent it.

14...♕b6

14...♘a6!?N also looks good, for instance: 15.♕e2 e5 16.♘b3 ♕b6 17.h4 ♗e6∓

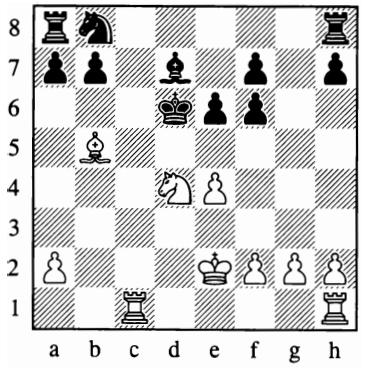


15.♕c3

15.♕c7†? Exchanging queens should not be feared by Black – we are a pawn up after all! 15...♗d7 16.♕xb6 axb6 17.♗c4 ♖a4∓ Violeau – Grizou, Pau 2012.

15...♗d7 16.♕b4† ♕d6 17.♕xd6† ♔xd6 18.♔e2

In Vaganian – Akopian, Groningen 1997, Black should have continued:



18...♖c8!N

Looking for immediate exchanges, as the extra pawn will be worth its weight in gold in the resulting endgame. Some sample lines run:

19.♖xc8 ♗xc8 20.♖d1

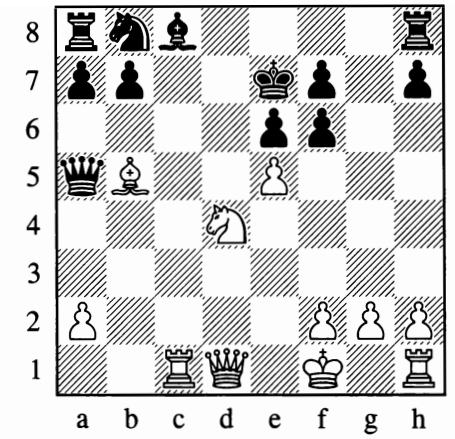
20.♖c1 ♗d7 21.♔e3 a6∓

20...♔e7 21.♖c1 ♗d7 22.♗xd7

22.♖c7 ♔d8 23.♖xb7? ♔c8∓

22...♘xd7 23.♖c7 ♖b8∓

White faces a difficult challenge to hold the endgame a pawn down.



14...fxe5 15.♕h5

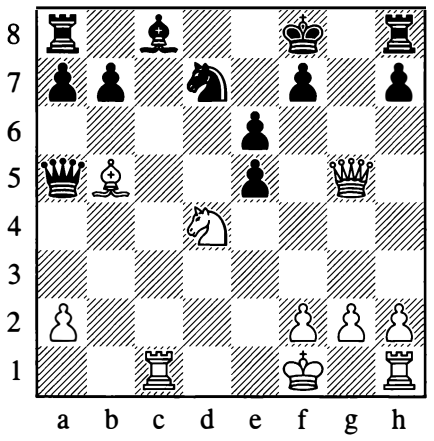
This is the only decent follow-up, and nothing else is ever played.

15.♕g4? invites a transposition to the main line below after 15...♘d7?, but Black can instead obtain a winning position with 15...h6!. The text move attacks the e5-pawn, thus limiting Black's options.

15...♘d7

15...exd4?? opens up the c5-square for the white queen: 16.♕g5†! f6 17.♕c5† ♔f7 18.♗e8† and Black was losing his queen in Rychagov – Kosyrev, Moscow 2000.

16.♕g5† ♔f8

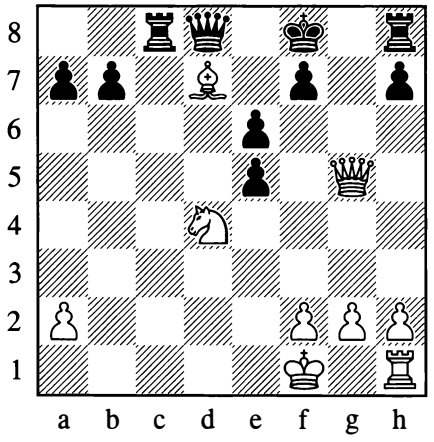


17.♖xc8†!

This is the right way to force a draw.

17.♕h6† allows Black to avoid the perpetual by means of: 17...♔e8!? (17...♔e7 leads to a draw if Black wants it: 18.♕g5† ♔f8=) 18.♕g7 ♖f8 19.♕xe5 ♕d2 20.♘b3 ♕b4 21.♕h5 a6∞ With murky play, Kaidanov – Panchenko, Lvov 1987.

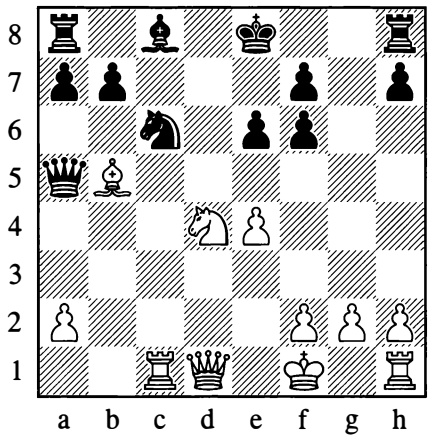
17...♖xc8 18.♗xd7 ♕d8



19.♘xe6†! fxe6 20.♕h6† ♔f7 21.♕xe6† ♔f8=

The database contains more than thirty drawn games from this position, from 1988 all the way up to 2016. White can proceed with 22.♕h6† or 22.♕f5†, with a perpetual in either case.

C32) 13...♘c6!?N



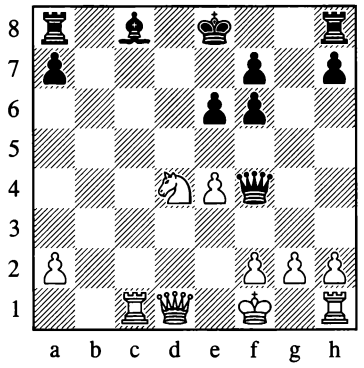
In this extensively tested variation, I found this novelty as an option to avoid the forced draw in the line above. As I explained in the Introduction, it took me endless hours of study to find this idea, as I was desperate to play the Vienna without enabling my opponents to memorize their way to a perpetual. The engines are unimpressed at first, as it looks as though Black simply loses a piece, but a closer inspection reveals that Black can either win it back or obtain a strong initiative for the material.

14.♖xc6

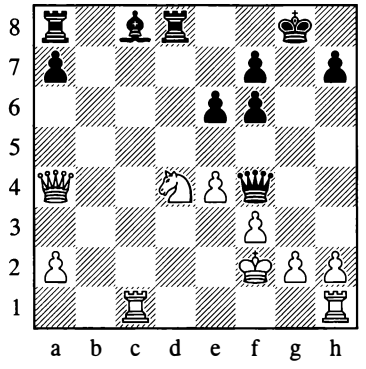
Taking the material is the critical test, and the most likely reaction in a game. Here are a few other possibilities:

14.♘xc6?? is obviously not an option due to 14...♕xb5†.

14.♗xc6†?! is rather tame. After 14...bxc6 15.♘xc6 ♕c7 16.♘d4 ♕f4 White's position is becoming difficult. For instance:

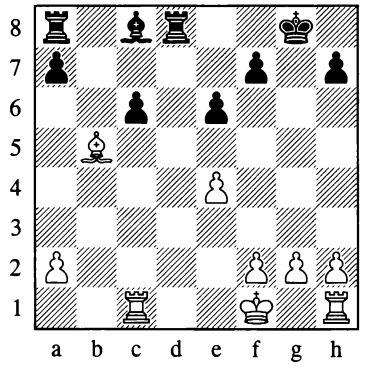


17.f3 Defending e4. (17.♕a4†?! ♗d7∓) 17...0–0 18.♔f2 ♖d8 Pinning the knight. 19.♕a4



19...e5! 20.♘e2 ♕h4† 21.g3 ♕h3 22.♕a5 ♗e6∓ White can do nothing to stop the black rooks from eventually invading.

14.♕f3!? looks odd but is playable. My analysis continues: 14...0–0 15.♕xf6 ♕d8 (15...♘xd4 leads to a perpetual: 16.♖c5 e5 17.♖xe5 ♘e6 18.♖g5† ♘xg5 19.♕xg5† ♔h8 20.♕f6†=) 16.♕xd8 ♖xd8 17.♘xc6 bxc6



18.♗c4= The endgame is about equal, but there is still plenty of play in the position. (The c6-pawn is poisoned: 18.♗xc6?? ♗a6† 19.♔g1 ♖ac8–+)

14...bxc6 15.♗xc6† ♔e7 16.♗xa8

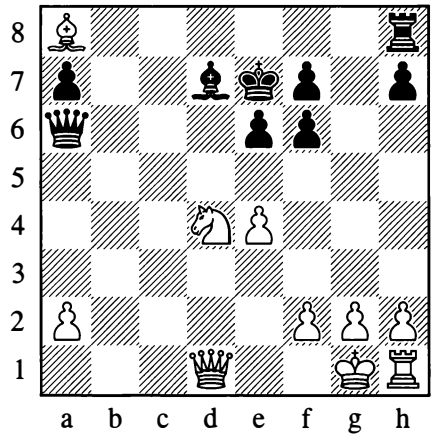
White has collected his material but he has some temporary coordination problems which we will look to exploit.

16...♕a6† 17.♔g1

17.♕e2 ♕xe2† 18.♔xe2 (18.♘xe2?! ♗a6 favours Black, since the attempt to keep the bishop with 19.♗c6 ♖c8 20.♗a4?? leads to disaster after 20...♖c1† followed by mate, as the knight is pinned) 18...♗a6† 19.♔e3 ♖xa8= Black picks up the a8-bishop and the game goes on. The endgame is roughly equal, but there are enough imbalances and pieces on the board to enable us to keep the game going.

17...♗d7

Trapping the bishop.



18.♗d5?!

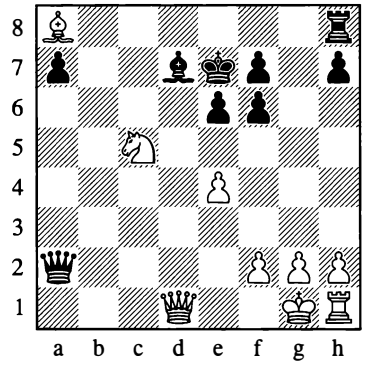
Not the best move, but perhaps the most important option for us to check. The bishop is trapped, so what could be more natural than selling its life for a price?

18.♘b3?

This is an ill-fated attempt to preserve White's material advantage. The threat is ♕xd7†, followed by ♘c5† with a nasty fork.

18...♕xa2! 19.♘c5?

White should prefer 19.h4 but after 19...♖xa8 20.♖h3 ♖c8 Black has a clear advantage with his extra pawn.



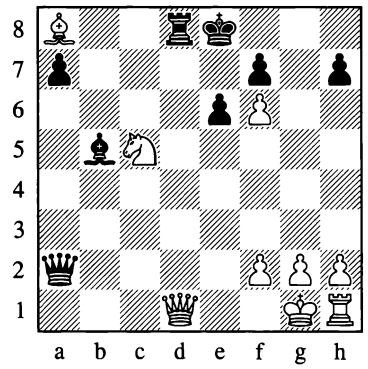
19...♗b5 20.e5

Trying to free the bishop.

20.♗b7? is refuted by 20...♖d8 21.♕e1 ♕c2 with ...♖d1 to follow.

20...♖d8 21.exf6† ♔e8

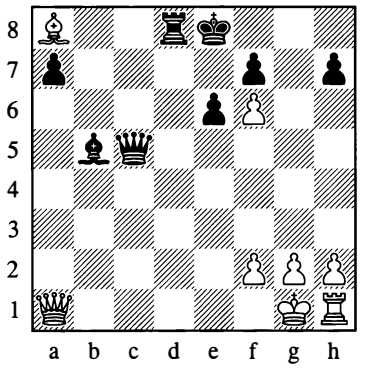
White's king is vulnerable to mating tricks along the back rank. Black can exploit this with some crafty queen moves...



22.♕e1

22.♕c1 ♕b2! 23.♕e1 ♕b4 transposes to the main line, with three fewer moves played.

22...♕a5! 23.♕c1 ♕a3 24.♕e1 ♕c3 25.♕b1 ♕b2 26.♕e1 ♕b4 27.♕a1 ♕xc5–+

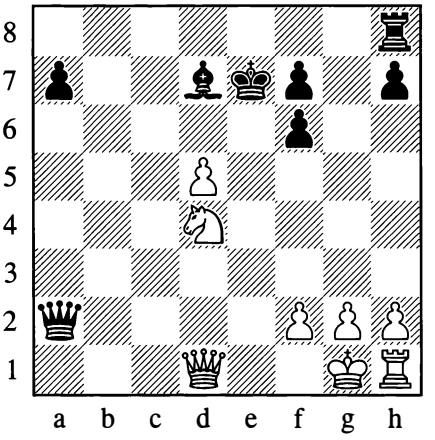


Material is temporarily equal but Black has a deadly initiative. The finish might be:

28.♗f3 ♖d2 29.♕e1 ♖xf2! 30.♕xf2 ♕c1† 31.♕f1 ♕xf1#

The surprising 18.e5!? fxe5 19.♘b3 actually seems to be White's best way to equalize. The continuation might be: 19...♖xa8 20.♕xd7† ♔xd7 21.♘c5† ♔c6 22.♘xa6 ♖d8 23.h4 ♔b5 24.♘c7† ♔c6= Black is in time to catch the knight.

18...exd5 19.exd5 ♕xa2



20.d6†

20.h4 ♕xd5 21.♔h2 ♖e8∓ and Black's extra pawn matters more than his damaged kingside.

20...♔f8 21.♘e2

21.h3 is met by 21...♕d5!∓, picking up the d6-pawn.

21...♗a4!

Black intends ...♔g7 followed by bringing his rook into play. White has some problems due to his poor king position.

22.♘c3

22.♕e1? ♔g7 23.♘g3 ♖b8 is winning for Black.

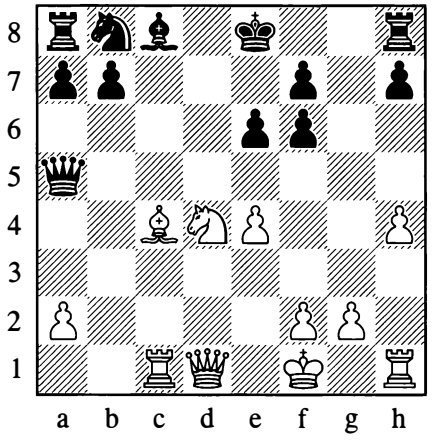
22...♗xd1 23.♘xa2 ♔g7 24.f3

24.♘c3 ♗b3 25.f3 ♖c8∓

24...♖d8∓

Black will pick up the d6-pawn. White may well be able to hold the endgame with perfect defence, but it will be no fun whatsoever for him.

C4) 13.h4



This is the most popular continuation, and a standard way of activating the h1-rook.

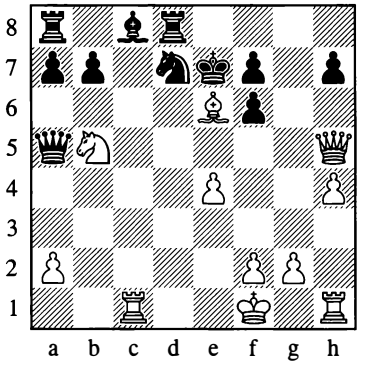
13...♔e7

The king defends the f6-pawn in advance, while making way for the rook to come to d8.

14.♖h3

This move is consistent, and the overwhelmingly most popular choice.

14.♘b5 is tricky but not so strong. 14...♖d8 15.♕h5 ♘d7 Stopping ♕c5†. 16.♗xe6



16...♘e5! 17.♖c7† ♗d7 18.♗xd7 ♖xd7 19.♖xd7† ♔xd7 20.♕d1† ♔e8 21.♕b3 ♖d8∓ White regained the sacrificed pawn but had serious problems with his piece coordination in V. Georgiev – Wells, Regensburg 1997.

14.♕g4

The queen is heading for g7.

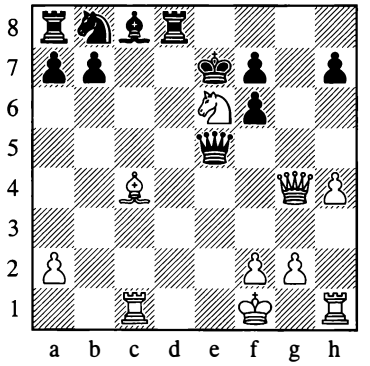
14...♖d8!?

This is a reasonable move although it leads to very murky play.

14...♘c6!N 15.♘xc6† bxc6= looks preferable.

15.e5 ♕xe5 16.♘xe6!

Now Black has to play:

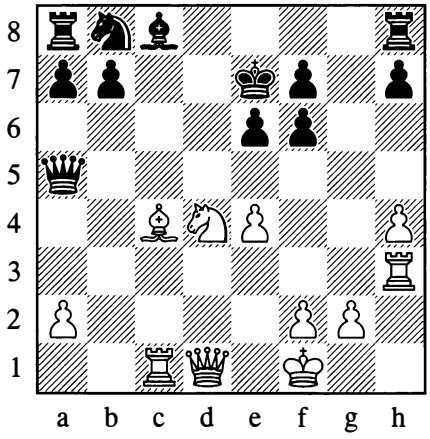


16...♖d6!N

16...♗xe6?! 17.♗xe6 ♖d4 (17...fxe6?! 18.♕g7† ♔e8 19.♕g8† ♔e7 20.♕xh7† ♔e8 21.♖h3 puts Black in serious trouble) 18.♕f3 was difficult for Black in Vallejo Pons – Sedlak, Aviles 2000.

17.♖e1 ♕a5∞

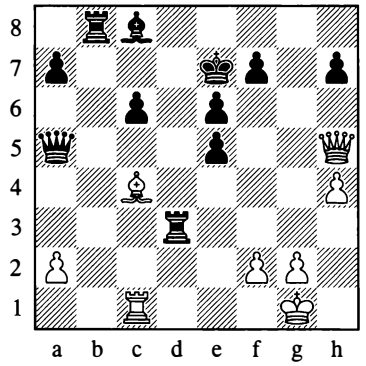
The position is a mess. You can analyse this in more detail if you wish, but it hardly seems worth the effort for such a rare continuation; that's why I suggest deviating at move 14 in the line above.



14...♘c6 15.♘xc6† bxc6 16.♖d3 ♖d8

Exchanging rooks makes a lot of sense – we are a pawn up, after all.

16...♖b8 is also playable and often transposes. 17.♔g1 ♖d8 18.e5!? is an independent continuation. (18.♖xd8 ♕xd8 19.♕h5 ♕d4 transposes to our main line) 18...fxe5 19.♕h5 ♖xd3



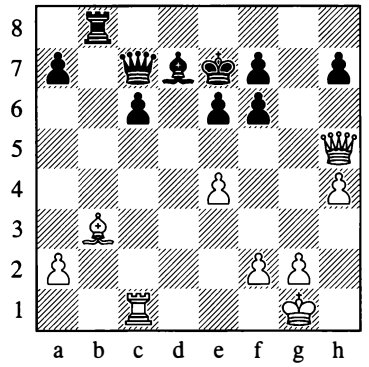
20.♕g5† (20.♗xd3 ♕d2 21.♖d1 ♕f4 22.g3 ♕f6 23.♕e2⩲) 20...f6 21.♕g7† ♔d6 22.♗xd3 ♕d2 23.♕f8† ♔c7 24.♕c5 ♗d7 25.♗xh7= Bagaturov – Palac, Batumi 1999.

17.♖xd8 ♕xd8

This position has been analysed extensively and debated in many games. The good news is that most of the moves are pretty easy to find over the board and often Black has more than one choice, so I wouldn't feel daunted by the analysis ahead. The general rule is to aim for activity with moves like ...♕d4, ...♖b8 and ...c5, while taking care to prevent any unpleasant checks from the white queen along the dark squares.

White's two main options are **C41) 18.♕b3** and **C42) 18.♕h5**.

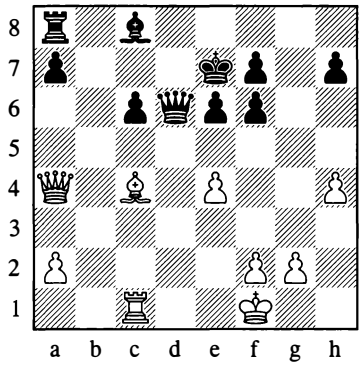
18.♕f3 has only been tried once, but it is worth showing a few more moves as the game has some instructive value. 18...♕c7 19.♔g1 ♗d7 20.♗b3 ♖b8 21.♕h5?!



21...♕e5! Black ignores the h7-pawn and activates his pieces. 22.♕xh7 ♖b4!∓ 23.♖e1 c5 Black has excellent chances on the queenside, and after the further 24.h5? c4 25.♗d1 ♖b1 he was already winning in Pakhomov – Stukopin, Dagomys 2009.

18.♕a4 ♕d6

This has been played a few times; so far White has a plus score, but Black's play can easily be improved as detailed below.



19.♖d1

19.♕a5 has only been played in one game, Akesson – De la Villa Garcia, Pardubice 2011, when 19...♕e5 20.♕a3† ♕d6 21.♕a5 led to a repetition and an early draw. Instead 19...♗d7N or 19...c5N would have kept things equal while keeping the game going for at least a bit longer.

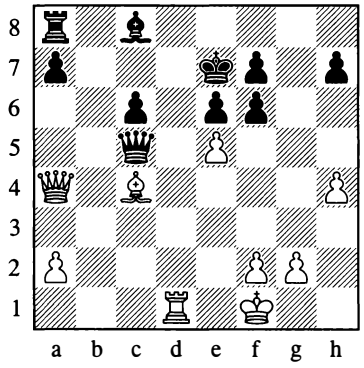
19...♕c5

19...♕c7 is also possible but we will focus on the more active queen move.

20.e5!?

20.♕b3 ♗d7 21.♔g1 ♖d8 22.♕d3 a5 ½–½ was the peaceful conclusion of Stoyanov – Roidov, corr. 2011. Black is restricted by the pin along the d-file, but White can't do much to improve his position.

The text move is a tricky attempt, which was played in Footner – Mohrlok, corr. 1987. A useful improvement is:



20...♖b8!N

White's idea was revealed in the game, when 20...fxe5 was met by 21.♗e2! intending ♕g4 with some initiative. Black should still be fine with careful play, but the text move is more convincing.

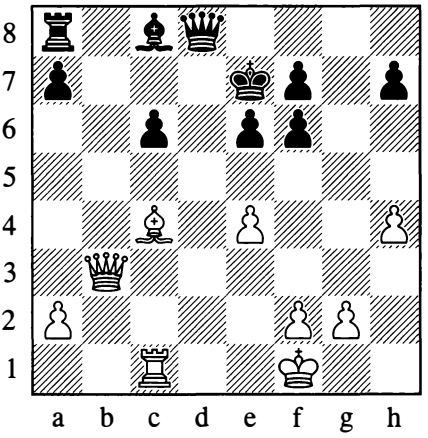
21.exf6†

21.♗e2 ♕xe5 22.♕xa7† ♖b7 23.♕a3† c5∓ also favours Black.

21...♔xf6 22.♗d3 ♖b4 23.♕a3 a5

Black has successfully activated his pieces and White does not have enough compensation.

C41) 18.♕b3



This move prevents ...♖b8 while also discouraging ...♗d7 on account of the annoying check on a3.

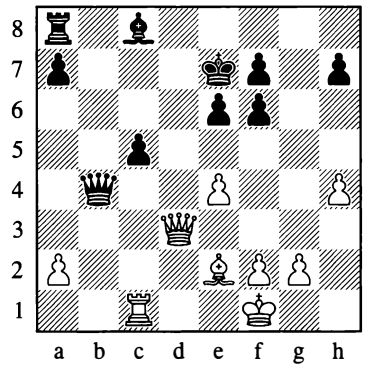
18...♕b6

A logical move, preparing to meet ♕a3† with ...c5, and thus ensuring that the king will remain on the optimal e7-square.

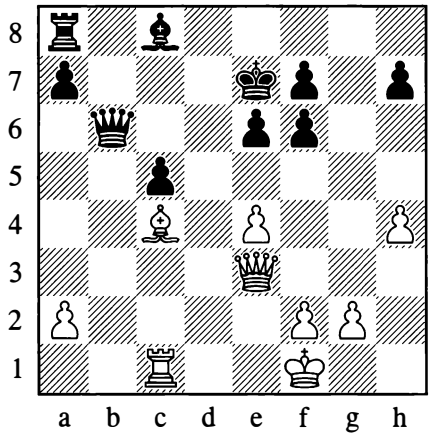
18...c5!?N looks an interesting idea, keeping the options of ...♕d6 and ...♕b6 available.

19.♕a3† c5 20.♕e3

20.♗e2 ♕b4 21.♕d3 occurred in Sasikiran – Rabiega, Internet (blitz) 2004, when Black's simplest solution would have been:



21...♗d7N 22.♖d1 ♗a4 23.♖b1 ♕d4=



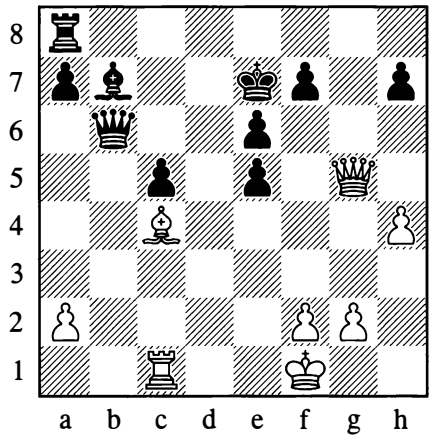
20...♗b7!?N

This looks like the cleanest route to equality. I favour the bishop on this square, as White will usually look to break with e4-e5, which will open the long diagonal for our bishop.

20...♗d7 21.e5 gave White some initiative in Sasikiran – Gustafsson, Internet (blitz) 2004, although Black should hold after a few accurate moves. (21.♔g1 is better for White according to Sherbakov but after 21...♕d6 22.♗e2 ♕d4 a repetition looks likely: 23.♕a3 ♕b4 24.♕e3 ♕d4=)

21.e5 fxe5 22.♕g5†

22.♕xe5? ♖g8 gives Black some attacking prospects on top of his extra pawn.



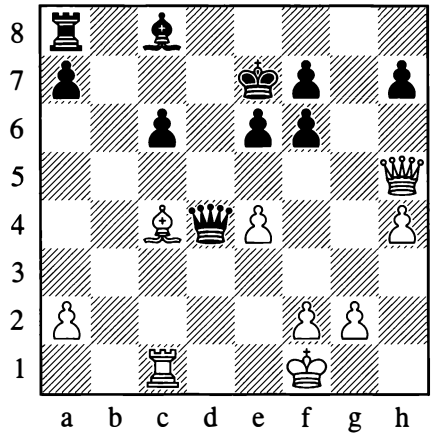
22...♔f8 23.♕h6†

23.♕xe5 ♖d8=

23...♔e7 24.♕g5† ♔f8=

The repetition seems like the logical outcome.

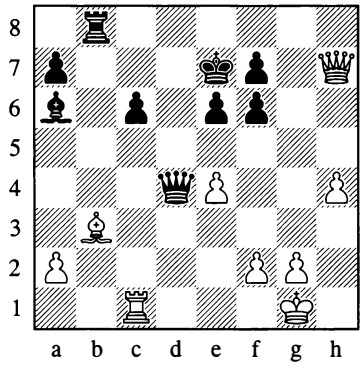
C42) 18.♕h5 ♕d4



Once again, Black should ignore the h7-pawn and focus on activating his pieces. Having centralized the queen, he will put the rook on the b-file and then look for a suitable way to develop his bishop and/or advance the c-pawn.

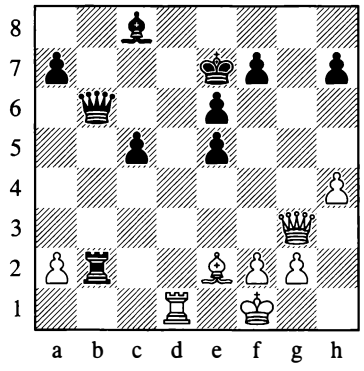
19.♔g1

19.♕xh7?! White snatches the pawn back but places his queen offside in the process. 19...♖b8 20.♗b3 ♗a6† 21.♔g1 In Karpov – Hübner, Skelleftea 1989, Black could have obtained some advantage with:



21...c5!N 22.♖d1 ♗d3!∓ Intending ...c4.

19.♗e2 is also harmless at best: 19...♖b8 20.♕a5 ♖b2 21.♖d1 (21.♕a3† doesn't help: 21...♔e8 22.♖d1 ♖d2 23.♖xd2 ♕xd2∓ Shariyazdanov – Sorokin, Sangli 2000) 21...♕b6 22.♕a3† c5 23.e5 fxe5 24.♕g3 In Obodchuk – Sorokin, Nizhnij Tagil 2007, Black played 24...♖b1 and allowed White to force a draw by checking on g5. Instead he could have played for a win with:



24...h6!N∓ Cutting out perpetuals, with chances to press with the extra pawn(s).

19...♖b8 20.♗b3 ♖b4

20...♗d7!? also offers easy equality, for instance: 21.♕xh7 Dzagnidze – Batsiashvili, Batumi 2016. 21...♕e5N 22.♕h6 ♕xe4=

The text move gives White a choice of taking on h7 or c6, neither of which should cause any real problems.

21.♕xh7

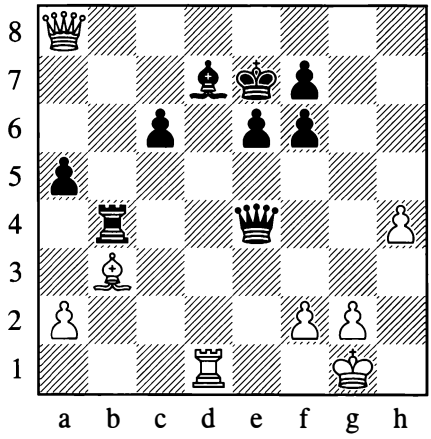
21.♖xc6 ♗d7 22.♖c7 ♕a1† 23.♔h2 ♕e5† (23...♕d4=) 24.♕xe5 fxe5 25.♖xa7 ♖xe4 26.♔g3 f5 27.f3 The endgame is equal and a draw was agreed in Relange – Delorme, Guingamp 2010.

21...a5

21...♕e5 is a fully playable alternative, centralizing the queen. 22.f3N (22.♗c2?! ♖c4 placed White in a slightly awkward pin in Pappier – Chovanec, email 2007) 22...c5=

22.♕g8 ♗d7 23.♖d1 ♕xe4 24.♕a8

Here I found a nice way to put White under pressure.



24...a4!N

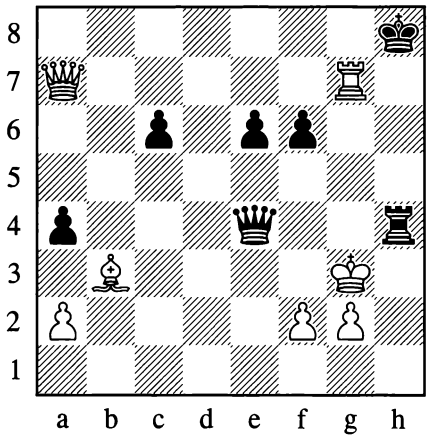
24...♖d4 25.♖xd4 ♕xd4 26.♕xa5 ♕xh4 27.♕a3†= forced a draw in Akesson – Landa, Bad Wiessee 2005.

25.♕a7 ♔f8! 26.♖xd7 ♕e1† 27.♔h2 ♖xh4†

28.♔g3 ♕e4

Threatening mate. White only has one way to force a draw.

29.♖xf7† ♔g8 30.♖g7† ♔h8



31.♕c7! axb3 32.axb3 e5

32...c5 33.♖g6!= forces a rook exchange, with an inevitable draw.

33.♕d8†! ♔xg7 34.♕e7†=

With a perpetual.

Conclusion

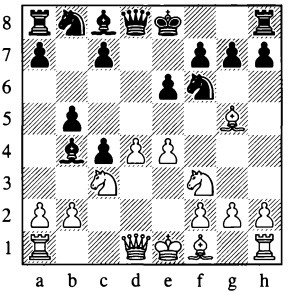
This is the longest chapter in the book – with good reason, as the variations are the most theoretically critical. After my chosen move order of 8...♕a5 – a major decision in itself – we started by analysing 9.♗b5† ♗d7 10.♗xf6, when 10...♗xb5!? cuts down on theory while leading to a fully playable position.

9.♗d2 is a major test of Black's system, and could be regarded as an attempt to take advantage of our chosen move order. The main line continues 9...♕c5 10.♗b5† ♗d7 11.♘b3 ♕e7 12.♗d3 ♘c6 13.a3 ♗d6 14.0–0 0–0, leading to a positional struggle where Black will look to neutralize his opponent's space advantage. Expect a long game, whatever the outcome of the opening.

We finished with the sharp 9.♗xf6, when the main line continues 9...♗xc3† 10.bxc3 ♕xc3† 11.♔f1 gxf6 12.♖c1 ♕a5, with a final split. 13.♗b5† is an important move to consider, when 13...♔e7 should lead to a forced draw if you want it, but 13...♘c6!?N is a new and interesting way to keep the game going. I don't think Black is worse in any of the ensuing lines, and White may get into trouble if he plays too materialistically. Finally, 13.h4 is White's most ambitious try, when most games continue 13...♔e7 14.♖h3 ♘c6 15.♘xc6† bxc6 16.♖d3 ♖d8 17.♖xd8 ♕xd8. Theoretically Black has no problems, and in many of the lines he can fight for the advantage, especially if White wastes too much time hunting the h7-pawn with his queen.

Overall I feel Black is doing well in all these variations. Still, if you are going to play 6...c5 I would say this is the most important chapter to be familiar with, due to the popularity and critical nature of the ensuing positions.

Chapter 7



6...b5!?

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4! 6.e4 b5!?

A) 7.e5 h6 **150**

A1) 8.♗h4 g5 9.♘xg5 hxg5 10.♗xg5 ♘bd7 **151**

A11) 11.exf6 **152**

A12) 11.♕f3 **153**

A2) 8.exf6 hxg5 9.fxg7 ♖g8 10.h4 **155**

A21) 10...gxh4 **157**

A22) 10...g4!? **158**

B) 7.a4 c5!? **161**

B1) 8.e5 **161**

B2) 8.axb5 cxd4 **164**

B21) 9.♗xf6 **164**

B22) 9.♘xd4 **166**

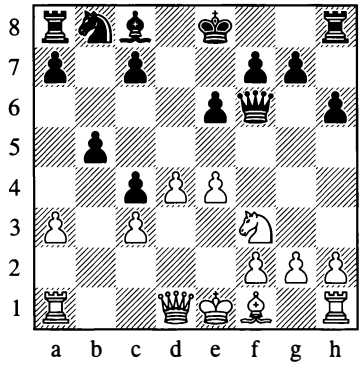
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4 6.e4 b5!?

This is the wildcard option! According to my database, it has only occurred in roughly one eighth of the number of games as 6...c5. There is an obvious resemblance to the Botvinnik Semi-Slav, but replacing the move ...c6 with ...♗b4 leads to some different possibilities, as well as a huge reduction in the volume of opening theory.

White's two main options are **A) 7.e5** and **B) 7.a4**.

7.♕c2 is covered in Chapter 15 under the move order 5.♕c2 dxc4 6.♗g5 b5 7.e4.

White's only other sensible move is:
7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3 h6 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6

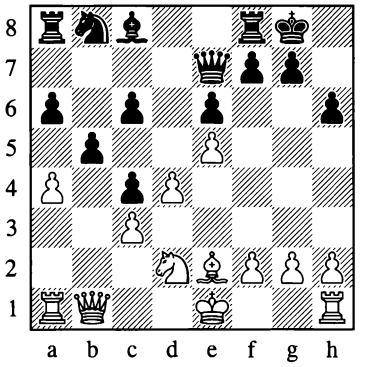


10.a4

10.♕b1 c6 11.♘e5 0–0 12.♗e2 ♕e7 13.0–0 a6 14.♕b4 ♕c7∞ offers White some compensation for the pawn but not enough for an advantage, Kummer – Ragger, Vienna 2010.

10...c6 11.♗e2 0–0 12.e5 ♕e7 13.♕b1 a6 14.♘d2

In I. Sokolov – Vasilevich, Reykjavik 2006, Black missed a powerful idea:



14...c5!N

Leading to dynamic counterplay, for example:

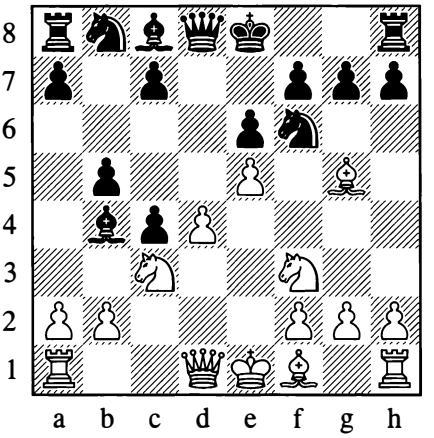
15.axb5

15.♗f3?! ♖a7 only helps Black: 16.axb5 axb5 17.♖xa7 ♕xa7∓

15...cxd4 16.cxd4 c3 17.♘e4 ♗b7

Black is at least equal; his pieces are active and he will keep a passed pawn on the queenside. (It could be on c3 or b5, depending on how White plays...)

A) 7.e5



Most White players prefer to start with a2-a4 with the idea of provoking ...c6, in order to block the long diagonal before the bishop arrives on b7. Nevertheless, the text move is the most direct way to force the play, so we should consider it carefully.

7...h6

White faces an important choice between **A1) 8.♗h4** and **A2) 8.exf6**.

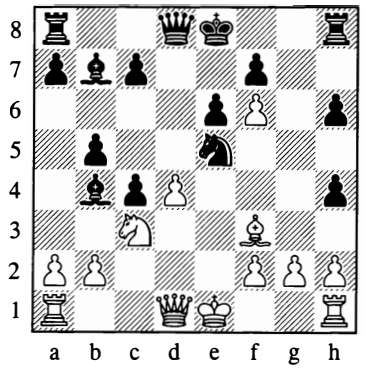
8.♗d2 is playable, but after 8...♗xc3 9.bxc3 ♘d5 Black has a solid position and White will have a hard time proving his compensation.

A1) 8.♗h4

This has been the most common choice but I find White's play rather speculative.

8...g5 9.♘xg5

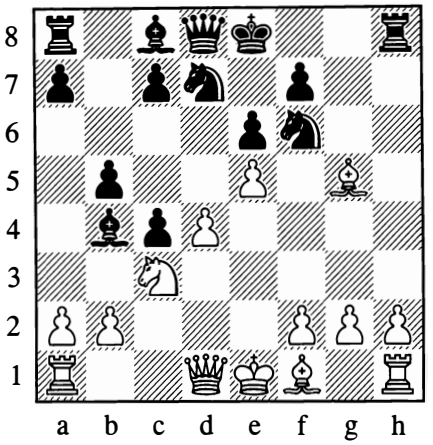
9.exf6? gxh4 leaves White a pawn down, with the f6-pawn still hanging. Black also benefits from a simple plan of development involving ...♗b7, ...♘d7 and ...♕xf6, leading to an extremely active position. 10.♘e5 (10.a4 ♗b7 11.axb5 ♕xf6 12.♘e5 ♘d7 13.♘xd7 ♔xd7 14.♖g1 ♔c8∓ Ubilava – Meister, Barnaul 1984) 10...♗b7 11.♗e2 ♘d7 12.♗f3 ♘xe5



13.♗xb7? (White should have settled for 13.dxe5, although Black is obviously doing well after 13...♕xd1†∓) 13...♘d3† 14.♔f1 ♕xf6–+ Kukov – V. Georgiev, Plovdiv 2010.

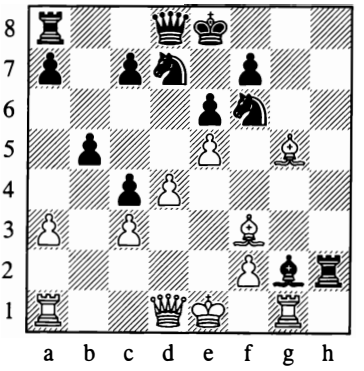
9...hxg5 10.♗xg5 ♘bd7

The position resembles a Botvinnik Semi-Slav but there are some slight differences in piece placement. It is especially useful for Black not to have committed to ...c6, as his bishop will get a clear view of the long diagonal when it arrives on b7.



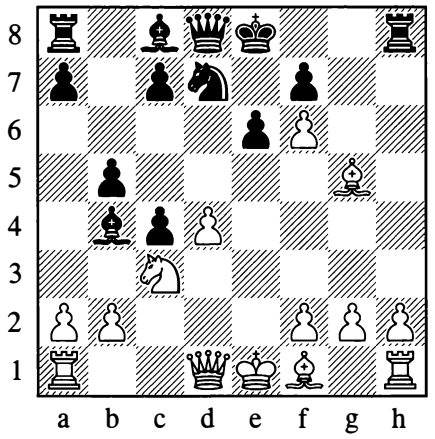
White's two main options are **A11) 11.exf6** and **A12) 11.♕f3**.

11.a3 was tried by my brother back in 2001; although he won quickly against a GM, there were some flaws in the game. 11...♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♗b7 13.♗e2?! (13.exf6N is better, though after 13...♘b6∞ Black has no reason to be dissatisfied with the outcome of the opening) 13...♗xg2 14.♖g1 ♖xh2 15.♗f3



15...♘xe5!N (15...♗xf3? 16.♕xf3 ♖h8 17.♕c6 ♔f8 18.exf6∞ N. Pert – Summerscale, Birmingham 2001) The text move is a strong improvement, leading to material gains for Black. For example: 16.dxe5 ♕xd1† 17.♖xd1 ♗xf3 18.♗xf6 ♗xd1 19.♖g8† ♔d7∓ White has a most unpleasant endgame in store.

A11) 11.exf6



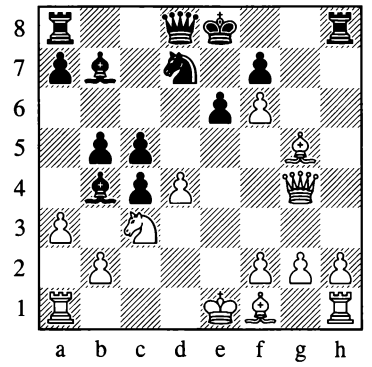
11...♗b7

White's last move allows us to occupy the long diagonal with the bishop, which is certainly something we should do.

12.a3

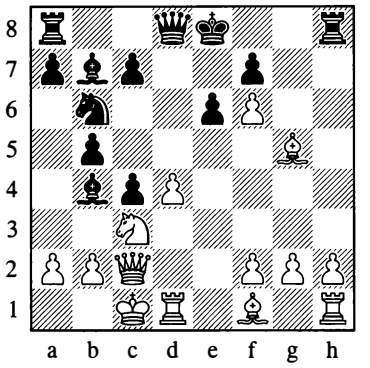
This is perhaps the most challenging move, immediately asking the question of the bishop. Two other possibilities are:

12.♕g4?! prepares long castling while putting the queen on a superficially aggressive square, but it allows Black to strike in the centre: 12...c5! 13.a3 (13.0–0–0? ♗xc3 14.bxc3 ♕a5 and White's queenside collapses: 15.♔b2 b4–+)

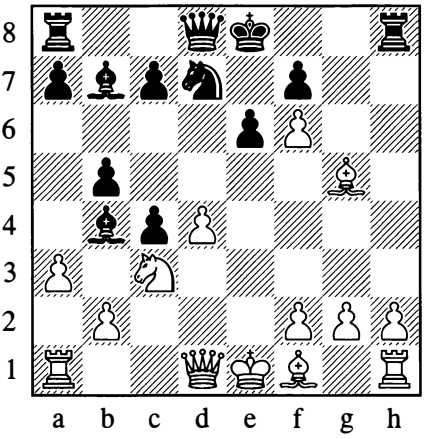


13...♕a5! 14.♖c1 ♗xc3† 15.♖xc3 ♖g8 16.dxc5 ♘xf6 17.♕h4 ♘e4∓ Black was well on top in Teschner – Schuster, Essen 1948.

12.♕c2 has been played a few times, intending long castling. I suggest the new idea: 12...♘b6!?N 13.0–0–0 (13.a3 gives Black a choice: 13...♗a5!? transposes to the note to White's 13th move in the main line below; and 13...♗xc3† 14.bxc3∞ is also playable)



13...♗xc3!? 14.bxc3 a5∞ Black has reasonable chances in a complex position; he can follow up by moving his queen and castling on the queenside, and he can develop an attack with ...b4 when the time is right.



12...♗a5!?N

12...♗xc3† 13.bxc3 c5 is also playable. 14.h4 ♕c7 15.♖h3 cxd4 16.♕xd4 0–0–0 17.♕xa7 ♘c5 gave Black good compensation for the pawn, and resulted in a hard-fought draw in Antonov – Spasov, corr. 2009.

I find the bishop retreat more appealing, as I like the idea of keeping my bishop for now and seeing how things develop. That's not to say that ...♗xc3 won't come later.

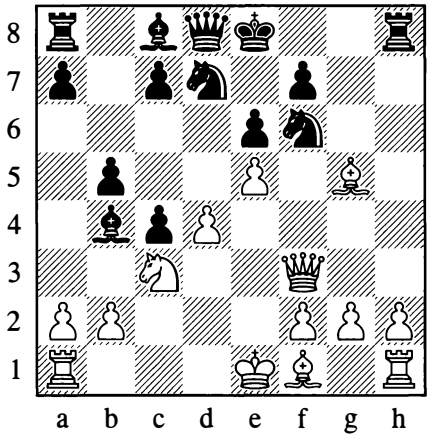
13.f3

13.♕c2 ♘b6 14.0–0–0 is well met by 14...♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♕d6↑, when ♔b2 is not an appealing option as ...♘a4† lays in wait.

13...♘b6 14.h4 ♕d7 15.♔f2 0–0–0∞

The chances look roughly balanced in this complicated position. Having made all the obvious developing moves, Black's next job should be to bolster his queenside with moves like ...♔b8 and ...a6.

A12) 11.♕f3



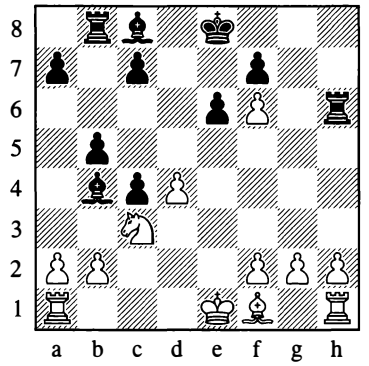
A logical move, activating the queen and provoking Black's rook to move, thus ruling out long castling.

11...♖b8

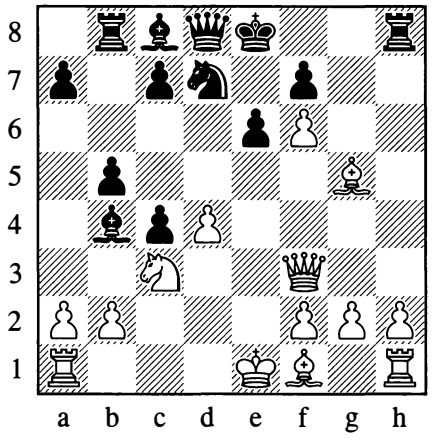
Black may have lost the right to castle on the queenside, but at least he is ready to play ...♗b7 with gain of tempo.

12.exf6

12.♗xf6? shows a total lack of ambition. After 12...♘xf6 13.♕xf6 ♕xf6 14.exf6 ♖h6 Black will quickly recoup his pawn deficit while keeping the advantages of the bishop pair and the advanced queenside majority. For example:

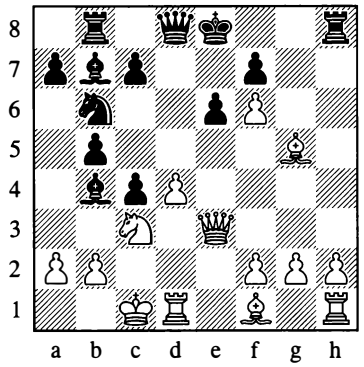


15.a4 (15.♗e2 ♗b7 16.f3 ♖xf6 17.a3 ♗a5 18.0–0–0 a6∓ Nelyubin – Filipenko, Izhevsk 2008) 15...a6 (15...bxa4!?N should also be good for Black) 16.axb5 axb5 17.♗e2 ♗b7∓ Geirnaert – Mohandesi, Namur 2006.



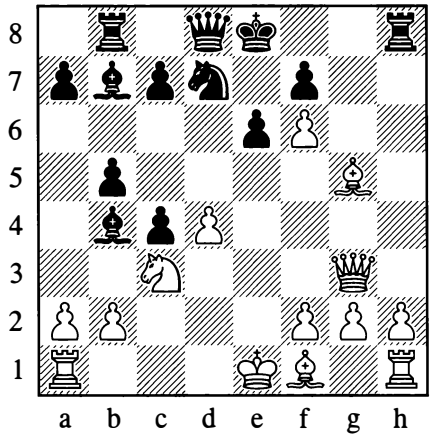
12...♗b7 13.♕g3

13.♕e3 is also playable although it provides a target for our knight. 13...♘b6 Heading for d5. 14.0–0–0 (14.h4 ♘d5 15.♕d2 c5 16.♗e2?? [16.a3∞ was better] 16...cxd4 and White resigned in Alcaide Luque – Gonzalez de la Torre, Zornotza 2012)



14...♘d5 15.♘xd5 ♕xd5 16.h4 ♖d8 17.♕e5 This was Korelov – Karasev, Leningrad 1963, and now 17...♕c6!?N∞ looks best, leading to a complex battle where neither king is altogether safe.

After the text move I found six games on the database, and all of them featured different moves from Black on the next turn! Clearly there is a lot of room for individual interpretation; that being said, my preference is:



13...a6!?

A useful waiting move, safeguarding the b5-pawn in preparation for ...♗d6 and ...♘b6-d5.

After 13...c5?! 14.dxc5 ♘xc5 15.♖d1 ♗d5 Black went on to win in Dias – Sulskis, Dresden (ol) 2008, but his position would have been quite unpleasant if White had found 16.♗d2!N.

13...♘b6 led to a win for Black in Nisula – Heino, Finland 1995. Still, the knight manoeuvre to d5 is not so effective without the queen on e3 as a target. The best continuation looks to be 14.♗e2N a6⩲, with ...♗d6 and ...♘d5 on the cards. This looks playable for Black, but I prefer the version in the main line below.

14.0–0–0

One of the advantages of Black's last move is that 14.♗e2?! is effectively ruled out due to 14...♗d6! 15.♕e3 ♗xg2∓.

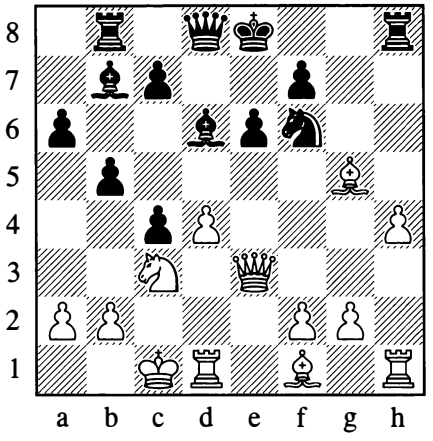
14...♗d6 15.♕e3 ♘xf6

15...♘b6!?N is also playable. A possible continuation is 16.d5 b4 17.dxe6 bxc3 18.♕xc3 ♗d5 19.exf7† ♔xf7∞ with a complete mess.

16.h4

16.d5 can be met by: 16...♘g4! 17.♕d2 f6 18.♕d4 exd5 19.♕xg4 fxg5∞

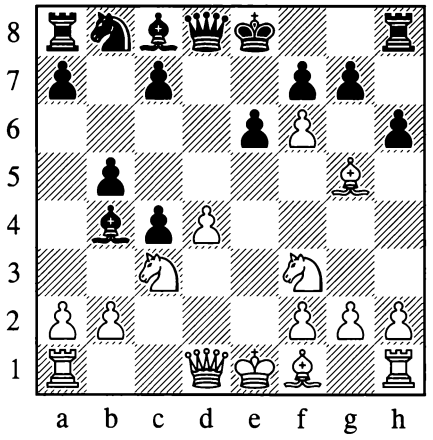
After the text move I found an important improvement for Black.



16...♗e7!N∞

Rather than 16...b4?!, when 17.d5! gave White a dangerous attack in Kraft – Matarykin, email 2006.

A2) 8.exf6



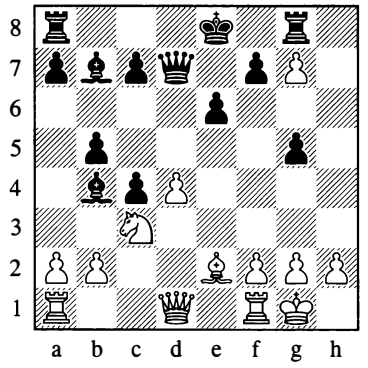
This is perhaps the more the critical option – I hope you are ready for some complications!

8...hxg5 9.fxg7 ♖g8 10.h4

This is a typical follow-up, which has been played well over a hundred times in the similar position with a2-a4 and ...c6 thrown in. Comparing the two variations, this version must favour Black, as his bishop will have a clear view of the long diagonal once it arrives on b7.

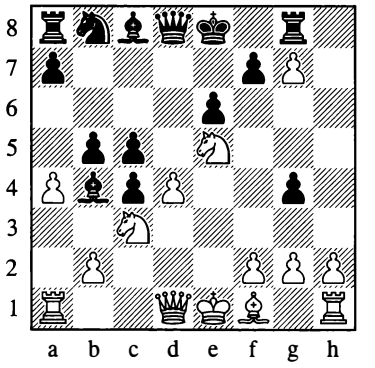
Other possibilities include:

10.♘e5 ♗b7 11.♗e2 ♘d7 12.♘xd7 ♕xd7 13.0–0 occurred in Novoselski – Mladenovic, Kraljevo 2014, when Black should have played:



13...0–0–0!N 14.a4 And now both 14...a6 and 14...♕xd4!? give Black clearly better chances.

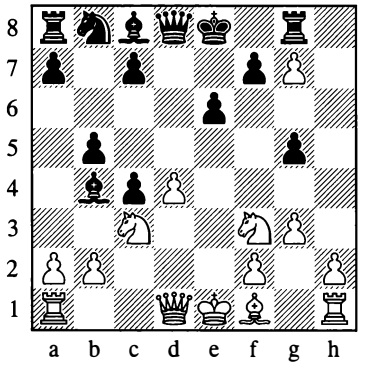
10.a4 should be met by: 10...g4!N (10...c6 transposes to one of the main lines after 7.a4 c6, which we would do well to avoid!) 11.♘e5 c5



12.♕xg4 (12.axb5 ♕xd4∞) 12...♕xd4 13.♕g3 ♘d7 14.♘c6 ♕f6∞

10.g3

This has done well for White in the position with a2-a4 and ...c6 thrown in, but here Black is perfectly placed to contest the long diagonal.



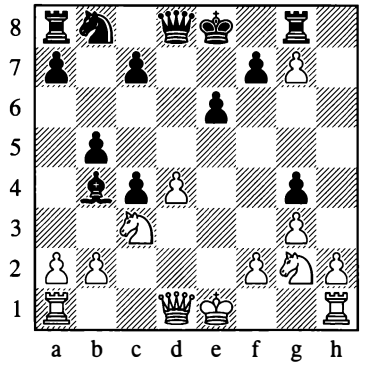
10...♗b7! 11.♗g2 g4

Now Black can force the exchange of light squared bishops.

12.♘h4 ♗xg2 13.♘xg2

In Zilka – Luch, Czech Republic 2012, Black played the reckless 13...c5? and got

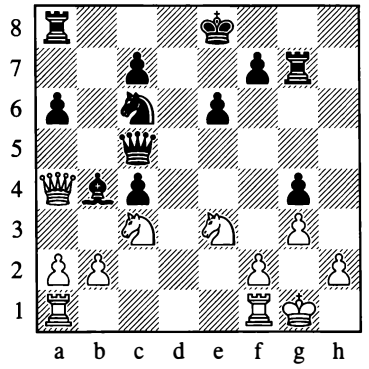
into trouble. It would have been far better to play:



13...♘c6!N 14.0–0 ♖xg7!

Not only removing a white pawn, but also defending the one on g4.

15.♘xb5 a6 16.♘c3 ♕xd4 17.♕a4 ♕c5 18.♘e3



18...♗xc3

18...♔e7!? is playable but seems unnecessarily complicated after 19.♖ac1∞.

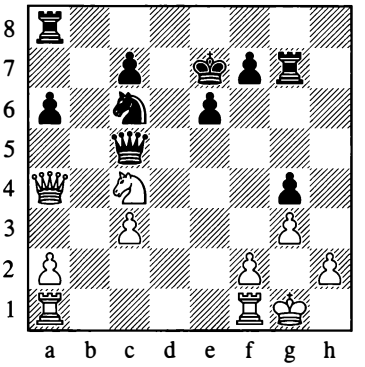
19.bxc3 ♔e7

Black is a pawn up and White will have to concede the initiative to regain it.

20.♘xc4

20.♕xc4 gives Black easy activity and a small edge after 20...♕xc4 21.♘xc4 ♖g5∓ (or 21...♖h8∓).

The text move is more critical but Black's centralized king turns out to be safer that White's.



20...♖h8 21.♖ad1 ♖xh2!

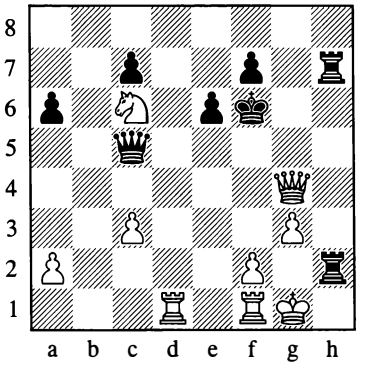
Black unleashes a vicious attack.

22.♘a5

22.♔xh2? loses to 22...♕h5† 23.♔g2 ♕h3† 24.♔g1 ♖h7 25.♖d7† ♔f6–+ with mate to follow.

22...♖gh7 23.♘xc6† ♔f6 24.♕xg4

24.♕f4†? ♕f5 wins.

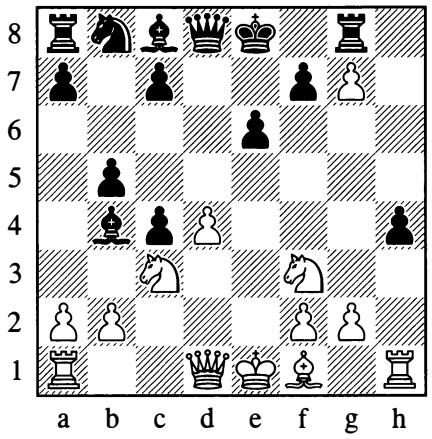


24...♖h1† 25.♔g2 ♖7h2† 26.♔f3 ♖xf1 27.♖xf1 ♕xc6†∓

Black will win a pawn at least.

Returning to the main line, both **A21) 10...gxh4** and **A22) 10...g4!?** look reasonable for Black. Both moves are playable, but I would characterize the first as safer and the second as riskier and more ambitious, so it is worth analysing both of them.

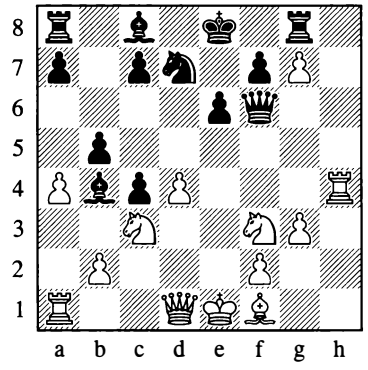
A21) 10...gxh4



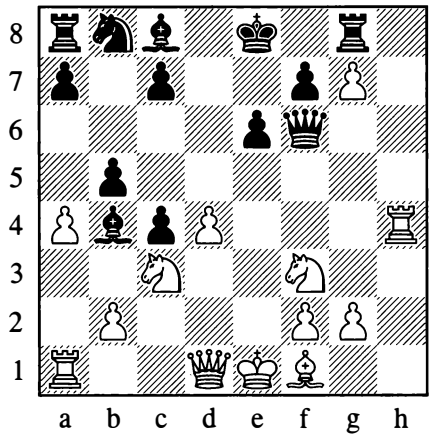
Eliminating the passed h-pawn is the safer choice.

11.♖xh4 ♕f6 12.a4

12.g3 ♘d7 13.a4 has also been played, when an obvious improvement is:



13...♗b7!N (13...c6?! was played in Almeida Quintana – Pazos Gambarrotti, Bogota 2012; this move transposes to a heap of other games, from which White has achieved a massive score after 14.♗g2±) 14.♗g2 bxa4 15.♖xa4 a5∞ Black has plenty of activity, and the b7-bishop is particularly happy without a pawn on c6.



12...♗b7!

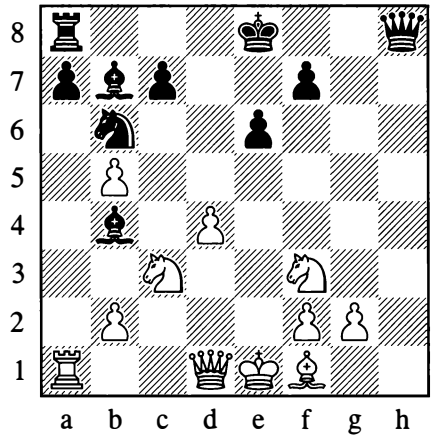
Once again, 12...c6?! should be avoided.

13.♖h8!?

13.axb5N is an obvious alternative; after 13...♘d7 14.♗xc4 ♘b6⩱ Black's active pieces compensate for his material deficit.

13...♖xh8 14.gxh8=♕† ♕xh8 15.axb5 ♘d7 16.♗xc4 ♘b6 17.♗f1

I think the most accurate continuation is:



17...♖d8!N

17...0–0–0 18.♘e5 ♕h4 19.g4 ♕h1 20.♕d3 ♗e4 21.♕e3 ♘d5 22.♕g3 occurred in Svetlov – Matlakov, St Petersburg 2009, when 22...f6!N would have maintained the balance.

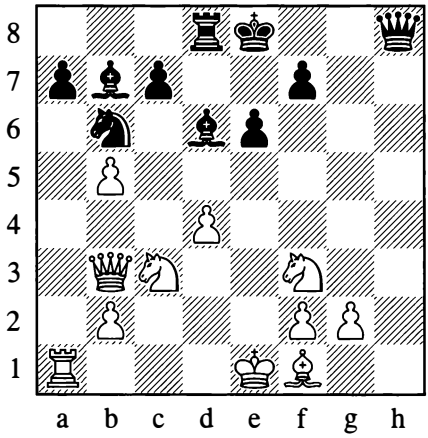
For instance, 23.♘c6 ♘xc3 24.bxc3 ♗xc6 25.bxc6 ♕e4† 26.♗e2 (or 26.♔d2 ♕xd4†=) 26...♕h1†= with perpetual checks.

Keeping the king in the centre seems like a better option to me, mainly because it defends f7 against future ♘e5 jumps.

18.♕b3

18.♘e5?! ♗c5∓ would suit Black perfectly.

18...♗d6



19.0–0–0

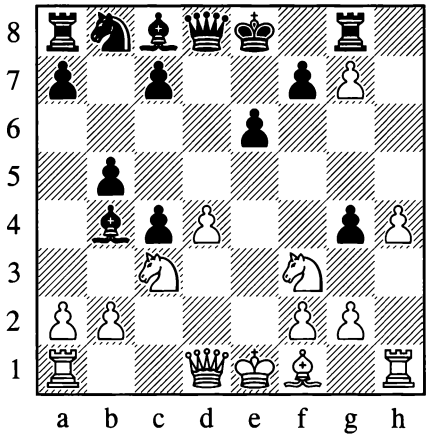
19.♗e2?! leaves the white king stranded in the centre: 19...♗xf3 20.gxf3 (20.♗xf3? ♕h1†–+) 20...♗f4∓

19.♘e2 ♗d5 gives Black a lot of activity for the pawn.

19...♗f4† 20.♔b1 ♗xf3 21.gxf3 ♖xd4

Black has won back the pawn, while keeping a slightly better position.

A22) 10...g4!?



Allowing the passed h-pawn to remain on the board is somewhat risky, but it seems quite playable and has yielded a positive score for Black so far.

11.♘e5

11.h5!? should be met by: 11...♖xg7! (but not 11...gxf3? 12.h6 and White's pawns are too dangerous: 12...♕g5 13.♕xf3 c6 14.♕h5+–) Now White has nothing better than 12.♘e5, with an immediate transposition to the main line below.

11...♖xg7 12.h5 f5

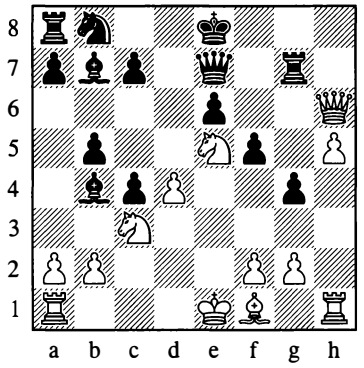
A common theme – defending the g4-pawn and enabling the black queen to deal with the advancing h-pawn when required.

13.a4

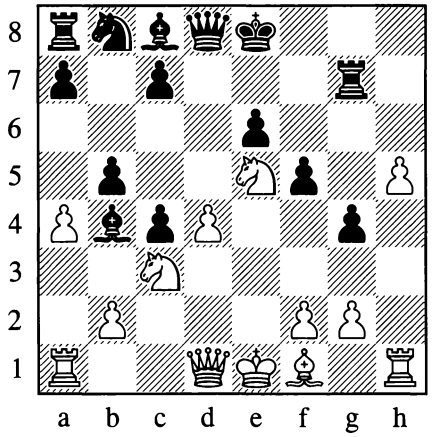
13.g3? makes no sense for White after 13...♗b7∓.

13.♗e2!?N is playable, and 13...c5 14.h6 ♖h7 15.♗xg4 ♕xd4 16.♗f3 ♗xc3† 17.bxc3 ♕xc3† 18.♔f1 ♕xe5 19.♗xa8 ♔e7∞ reaches a total mess.

Another game continued 13.♕d2 ♗b7 14.♕h6 ♕e7, and now White should play:



15.♕h8†N (15.a4?! a6 only weakened White's queenside in Gavrilov – Yakovich, Kazan 2005; besides, 15...♘d7!N∓ would have been even stronger for Black.) 15...♕f8 16.♕xf8† ♔xf8 17.a4 ♘c6!∞ The position is very murky but I don't believe Black is worse.



13...c5!

Once again, 13...c6 transposes to one of the 7.a4 c6 lines which I don't really trust.

14.dxc5

This has been played in both of the games to have reached the position so far.

It is also worth considering:

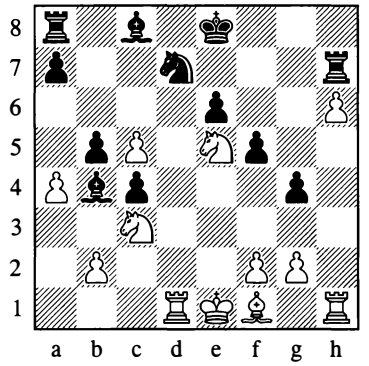
14.h6!?N

My opinion of this pawn move is that sometimes it helps White but sometimes it doesn't. It pushes the black rook to h7, from where it attacks the h-pawn, meaning White will have to guard it at all times – but that said, the pawn takes a step closer to promotion and forces Black to keep an eye on it.

14...♖h7 15.dxc5 ♕xd1†

15...♕c7?! runs into a powerful sacrifice: 16.♘xg4! fxg4 17.♕xg4 ♗xc3† 18.bxc3 ♕e5† 19.♔d2 and Black is under pressure.

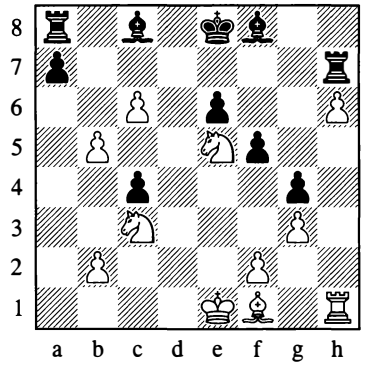
16.♖xd1 ♘d7



17.♖xd7!

17.♘xd7 ♗xd7 18.axb5 ♗xb5∓ favours Black.

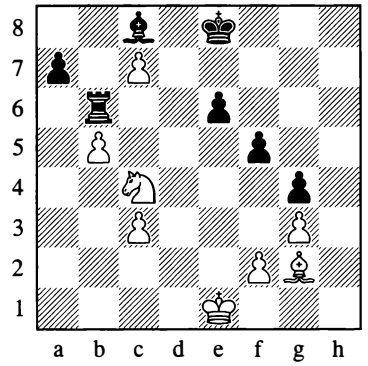
17...♗xd7 18.c6 ♗c8 19.axb5 ♗f8 20.g3



20...♖xh6

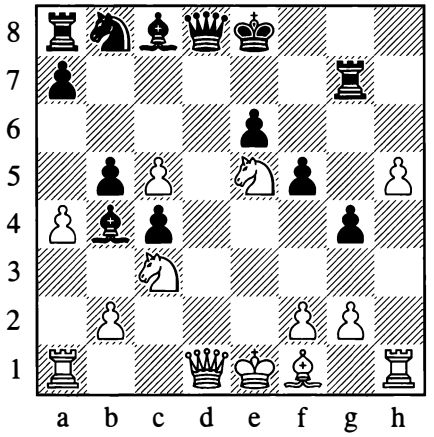
This leads to forcing play and eventual equality. The alternative is 20...♖b8!? 21.♗g2 ♔d8 22.0–0 ♔c7∞ when any result is possible.

21.♖xh6 ♗xh6 22.♗g2 ♗g7 23.♘xc4 ♖b8 24.c7 ♗xc3† 25.bxc3 ♖b6



26.♘xb6 axb6 27.c4 ♔d7 28.c5 ♔xc7 29.c6 ♔d6=

Neither side has any real winning chances in this endgame.

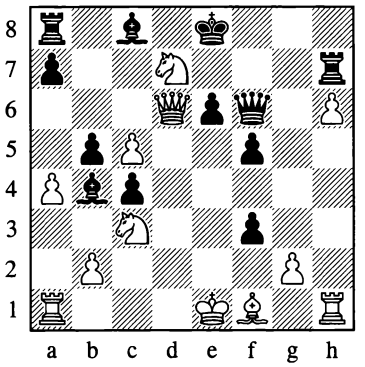


14...♕f6!

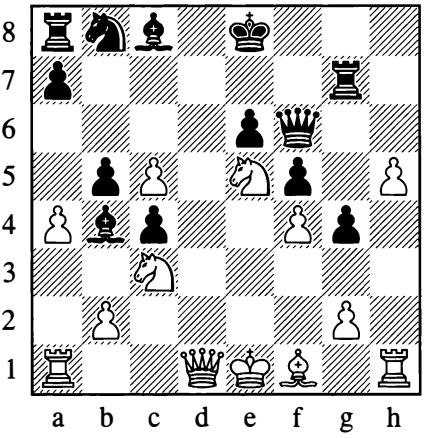
14...♕xd1†?! is not so good here; after 15.♖xd1 ♘d7 16.♖xd7! ♗xd7 (16...♖xd7 17.axb5↑) 17.c6 ♗c8 18.axb5 White has benefited from not including h5-h6, ...♖h7, which means Black is unable to pick up the h-pawn with ...♗f8. 18...♔e7 19.♗xc4±

15.f4

After 15.♕d6? ♘d7 White will find himself way behind in development in an open position: 16.h6 ♖h7 17.f4 gxf3 18.♘xd7



18...♖xd7!N (after 18...♗xd7?!∓ Black went on to win in Kozak – Aleshin, Pardubice 2005, but the text move is even more convincing) 19.h7 ♕h8–+



15...gxf3!N

15...♘d7∞ was decent for Black in Duessel – Grothe, Baden 2013, but the text move is stronger.

16.♘xf3 ♖d7 17.♕c1 ♗b7

Black has excellent chances due to his strong bishops and activity in the centre.

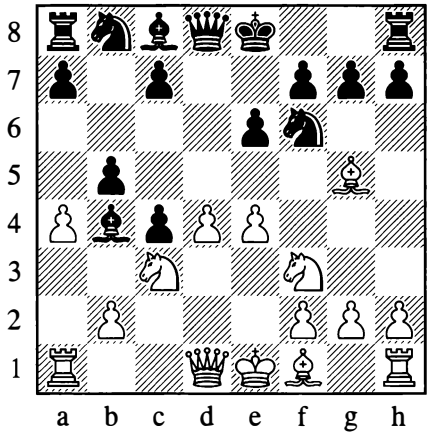
18.h6

18.axb5 ♗xf3 19.gxf3 ♕e5†∓ is also unpleasant for White.

18...♘a6! 19.h7 0–0–0∓

Black has clearly won the opening battle.

B) 7.a4



This is White's main choice, striking at our queenside structure.

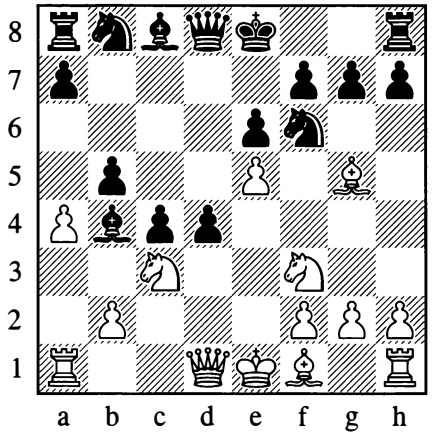
7...c5!?

7...c6 is by far the most popular move. The resulting position has been tested in over 300 games, with generally good results for White after 8.e5 h6 9.exf6 hxg5 10.fxg7 ♖g8 11.g3, followed by pressure down the long diagonal.

By contrast, my database only contains twelve games (including correspondence) after the text move, showing what a fresh idea it is to investigate. One of those games happens to involve leading Ragozin expert Aronian on Black's side, which says something in itself. I remember watching that game live, and Aronian was playing the opening instantly, indicating he had studied it advance. Due to the lack of games in this variation, much of what follows is my own analysis.

White may proceed with **B1) 8.e5** or **B2) 8.axb5**.

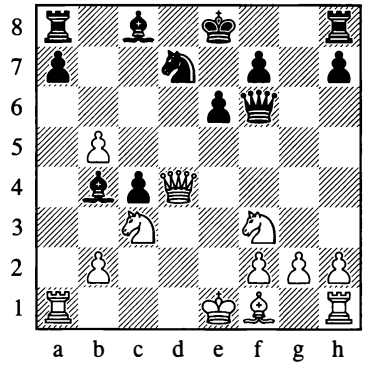
B1) 8.e5 cxd4



9.♘xd4N

This is already a new move, but it seems the most obvious choice. The position is similar to the mainstream Vienna positions that were examined in variation B of Chapter 5, but here the moves ...b5 and a2-a4 have been included.

9.exf6 leads to a good position for Black after some exchanges: 9...gxf6 10.♗xf6 (10.♕xd4 ♕xd4 11.♘xd4 fxg5 12.♘dxb5 ♘a6 13.♗xc4 ♗b7 gives Black an excellent game, with two bishops and the better pawn majority) 10...♕xf6 11.♕xd4 ♘d7 12.axb5



12...♗b7!N Reaching a complicated position where I slightly prefer Black's chances. (12...♕xd4 13.♘xd4 ♘b6 14.♘c6 ♗xc3†

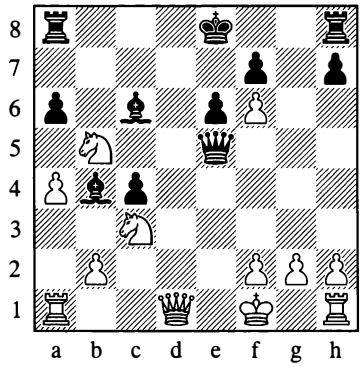
15.bxc3 a6= was also reasonable in R. Burnett – Bick, Tulsa 2008.)

9...♕d5!?

In Chapter 5 the black queen went to a5 to pin the e5-pawn, and here we see a modified version of the same idea.

10.exf6

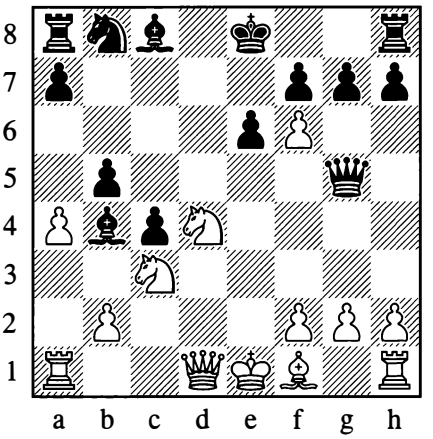
10.♗xf6 is nothing to worry about. My analysis continues: 10...gxf6 11.exf6 ♗b7 12.♘dxb5 ♕c5 13.♗e2 a6 14.♗f3 ♕e5† 15.♔f1 ♘c6 16.♗xc6† ♗xc6



17.♕d4 ♕xd4 18.♘xd4 ♗b7 Black is at least equal. He is a pawn down for time being, but his bishops are excellent and there is a good chance that the f6-pawn will fall at some point.

10...♕xg5

In Chapter 5 Black had to exchange on c3 before capturing on g5, in order to avoid a troublesome check on a4. Here there is no such check, so we can preserve the important dark-squared bishop – though of course the drawback is that the b5-pawn is hanging. Let's see how these plus and minus points stack up against each other.



11.♗e2!?

11.♘dxb5 ♕xf6!

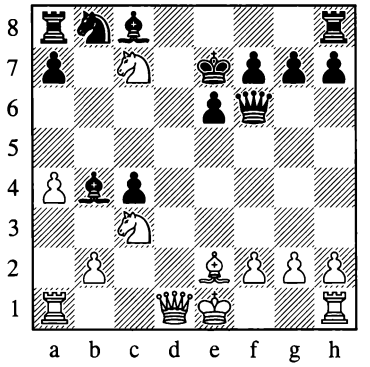
Surprisingly it looks as though Black can allow ♘c7† when in fact it is White who has to be careful.

11...0–0!? is another interesting option: 12.♕f3 (12.♘c7?? ♕e5† 13.♗e2 ♕xc7–+) 12...♗d7 13.♕xa8 ♗xb5 14.axb5? (14.♕xa7 ♕xf6∓) 14...♗xc3† 15.bxc3 ♕e5†–+

12.♘c7† ♔e7 13.♗e2

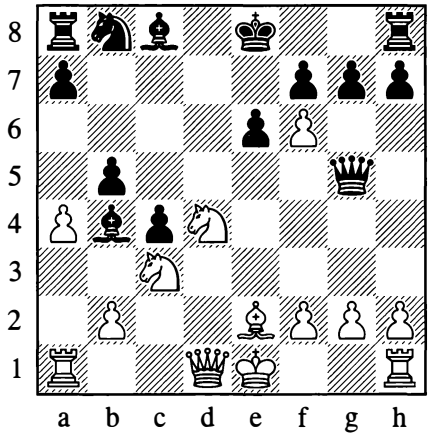
13.♘xa8? ♗xc3†–+

13.♕c2?? ♕e5† 14.♗e2 ♕xc7–+



13...♖d8 14.♕c2 ♗b7→

Will give Black excellent activity in return for the material.



11...a5!?

It is important to move this pawn so that we can meet ♗f3 with ...♖a7-d7.

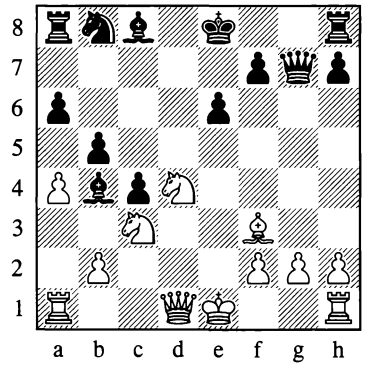
11...a6

This move is also playable, for instance:

12.fxg7 ♕xg7 13.♗f3

Grabbing the long diagonal.

Both 13.axb5 ♗b7∞ and 13.0–0 0–0 14.axb5 ♖d8∞ look pretty murky.



13...♖a7

Threatening ...♖d7.

14.axb5 ♕e5†

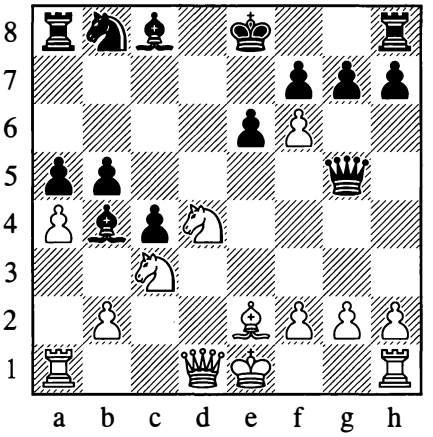
14...♖d7 15.♕a4! is messy.

15.♔f1

15.♘de2 ♖d7∞

15...♖d7 16.♕a4 ♗c5 17.♘de2 0–0∞

The position remains unclear and double-edged in all these lines.



Having the pawn on a5 makes the position a bit easier to handle, as Black takes some extra space and avoids having the a6-pawn pinned.

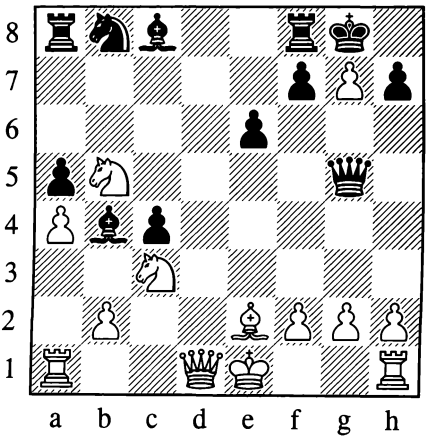
12.♘dxb5

I also checked 12.fxg7 ♕xg7 13.♘dxb5 0–0 14.♗f3 (14.♗xc4?! ♗b7→) 14...♖a6∞ when Black has nothing to complain about.

12...0–0 13.fxg7?

White should prefer 13.♗f3 ♖a6, with a likely transposition to the previous note after 14.fxg7 ♕xg7∞.

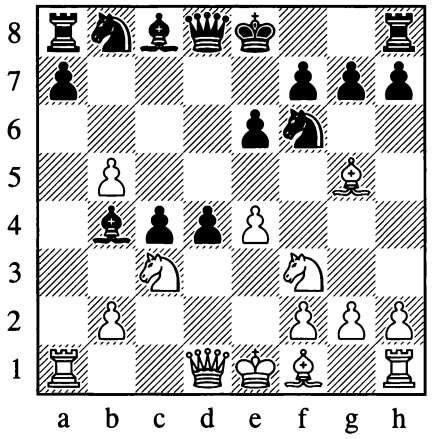
The text move is an inaccuracy which can be exploited by means of:



13...♖d8! 14.♕c2 ♕xg2 15.♖f1 ♘c6 16.♖d1 ♗b7

Intending ...♘e5, when things are becoming unpleasant for White's centralized king.

B2) 8.axb5 cxd4



From this position White has two sensible options: **B21) 9.♗xf6** and **B22) 9.♘xd4**.

9.♕xd4? is an obvious mistake in view of 9...♕xd4 10.♘xd4 ♘xe4∓.

B21) 9.♗xf6

This was Gelfand's choice. White eliminates the f6-knight in order to recapture on d4 with the queen without suffering the loss of a pawn as in the above variation.

9...♕xf6!?

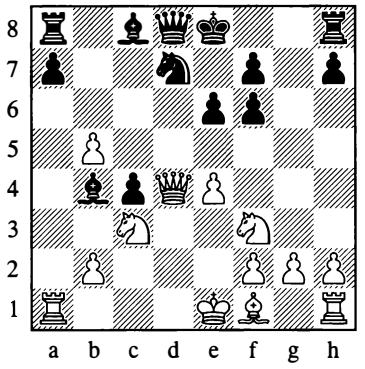
This led to defeats for Black in a 1989 game, as well as a correspondence game two decades later, but I think it is the best move if followed up correctly.

9...gxf6

This was Aronian's choice, and is also playable.

10.♕xd4 ♘d7

10...♕xd4 11.♘xd4 ♗b7 was played in Glek – Sveshnikov, Moscow 1983, which soon ended in a draw agreement after the rather mechanical 12.f3. Instead, the more dynamic 12.♗xc4!N ♗xe4 13.0–0 ♗b7 14.♖fe1 would have given White good chances thanks to his active piece play.

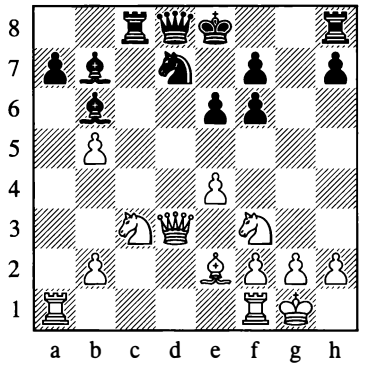


11.♕xc4

11.♗xc4N also looks reasonable for White: 11...♗b7 (11...0–0 12.0–0±) 12.0–0 Now ♗xe6 is an idea to watch out for, attacking the bishop on b4. (The immediate 12.♗xe6? doesn't work due to 12...♗xc3† 13.bxc3 fxe6∓.) 12...♗c5 13.♕d3± Black has nice bishops, but a pawn is a pawn!

11...♗c5 12.♗e2 ♗b7 13.0–0 ♖c8 14.♕d3 ♗b6

14...♘e5!?N, forcing the exchange of queens, is suggested by Krasenkow. Presumably then White should continue 15.♘xe5 fxe5 16.♕g3 ♕f6 17.♘a4 ♗d4 when Black has some compensation for the pawn, although White's chances still look preferable.



15.♖ad1N

15.♘a4?! ♘c5 16.♕xd8† ♖xd8 17.♘xc5 ♗xc5 18.♖fc1 ♗b6 was absolutely fine for Black in Gelfand – Aronian, Wijk aan Zee 2014.

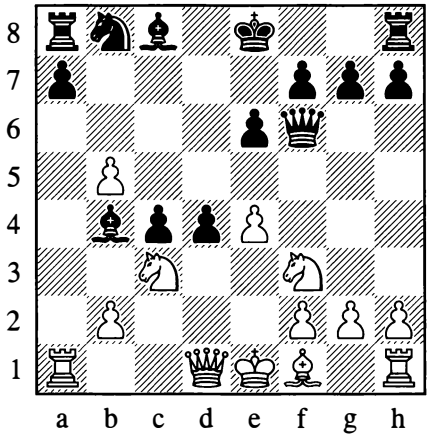
The text move was Krasenkow's suggested improvement. His analysis continues:

15...♘c5

15...♘e5!? might be a better try but I doubt that it's enough for equality.

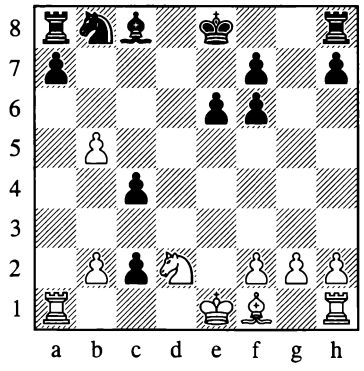
16.♕b1 ♕c7 17.b4 ♘d7 18.♘a4±

Recapturing the queen leads to similar play in some respects, but it seems preferable to keep the kingside structure intact.



10.♕xd4

10.e5 dxc3! is a neat idea: 11.exf6 c2† 12.♕d2 ♗xd2† 13.♘xd2 gxf6



14.♘xc4 ♘d7 15.♗d3 ♘b6 16.♘xb6 axb6 17.♔e2 ♗b7=

After the text move the c4-pawn is doomed. However, with two good bishops and generally active pieces, Black has decent compensation in the endgame.

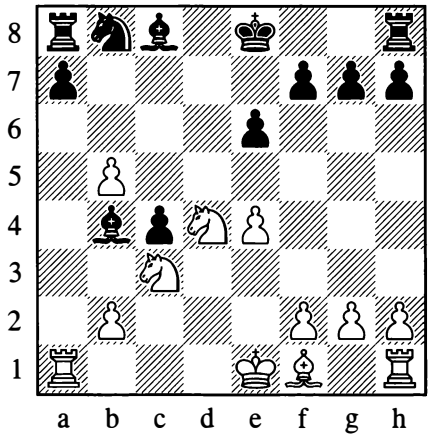
10...♕xd4

It seems a clear improvement for Black to keep his kingside pawns in order rather than take with ...gxf6.

10...♗b7!? 11.♕xf6 gxf6 was also not so bad for Black in Rashkovsky – Arencibia, Eger 1989. However, I don't see the point in allowing our kingside structure to be damaged with we can just exchange on d4 instead.

11.♘xd4

Here I found a useful refinement on a correspondence game.



11...♗c5!N

The point of this move is to disrupt White's coordination by forcing him to either retreat his knight or misplace his rook.

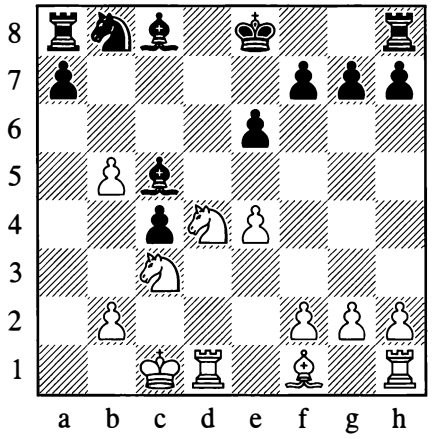
Compare the game continuation: 11...♗b7 12.♗xc4 ♔e7 13.♔e2 ♖c8 14.♗d3 ♘d7 (Black can regain the pawn with 14...♗xc3

15.bxc3 ♖xc3 but 16.♖hc1 leaves him under positional pressure) 15.♖hc1± White's rooks were ideally placed on the queenside and he went on to convert his advantage in Semov – Spasov, corr. 2009.

12.0–0–0

12.♘f3 ♗b7 13.♗xc4 ♘d7 14.0–0 ♖c8 15.♖fd1 ♔e7∞ gives Black just about enough compensation for the pawn. (15...♗xf2†?? unfortunately does not work as 16.♔xf2 ♖xc4 17.♖xd7! wins a piece.)

12.♖d1 ♔e7 13.♗xc4 ♗b7 14.♔e2 ♖c8∞ is decent compensation. Compared with the Semov – Spasov game, White's rooks are not so well placed.



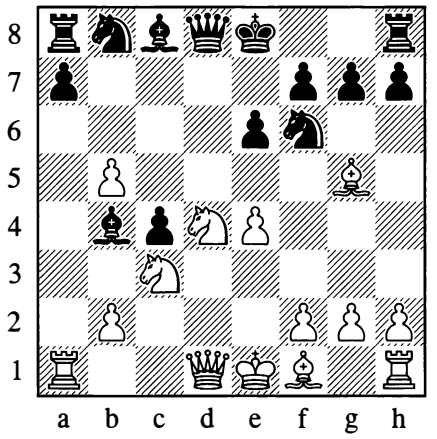
12...a6!

It is worth swapping off White's doubled pawn in order to open lines towards his king.

13.♗xc4 axb5 14.♗xb5† ♔e7

Followed by ...♗b7 and ...♖c8, when the open lines on the queenside offer Black excellent compensation.

B22) 9.♘xd4



9...h6!?N

After looking at this position for a while I thought this move looked interesting, putting the question to the bishop and asking White to clarify his intentions.

9...e5?! 10.♘c2± was unpleasant for Black in the stem game, Chernikov – Shereshevski, Belarus 1983.

9...♕b6 10.♗xf6 gxf6 11.♗xc4 0–0 12.0–0 is also not to my liking, Portych – Spasov, corr. 2010.

10.♗xf6

10.♗h4?! g5 11.♗g3 ♘xe4∓ can hardly be a good idea for White, but he has two other ideas which are worth considering:

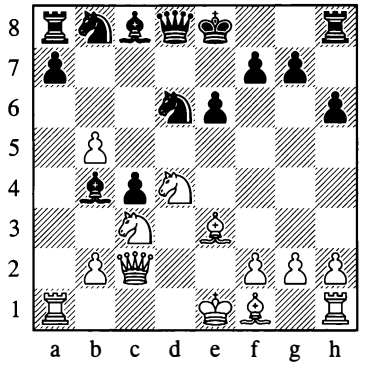
10.b6!? is a tricky move, setting up ♕a4† ideas, but it doesn't promise White an advantage: 10...hxg5 11.♕a4† (11.♖xa7?! is creative but not that strong: 11...♕xb6! 12.♖xa8 0–0 13.♗xc4 ♗b7 offers Black a great initiative for the material) 11...♘bd7 12.♕xb4 ♕xb6 13.♘db5 ♘c5 (13...♘g4!? 14.♘d6† ♔f8 15.♕xb6 ♘xb6 16.♘xc4 ♘xc4 17.♗xc4 ♔e7=) 14.♕xc4 0–0=

10.♗e3!? ♘xe4 11.♕c2

Now Black must choose whether to return the extra pawn or try and hang on to it.

11...♘d6!

11...♗b7 does not equalize: 12.♗xc4 ♕c7 (12...♗xc3† 13.bxc3 ♕c7 14.♗d3) 13.0–0! ♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♕xc4 15.cxb4 ♕d5 16.f3 0–0 17.♖a5± Black is under pressure in this line; so if he is going to be on the defensive, he may as well do it with an extra pawn in the bank!



12.♗e2 ♗b7 13.0–0 0–0 14.♖fd1 ♕e7⩲

White has good compensation for the pawn but Black remains solid enough.

10...♕xf6 11.♗xc4

White bags a pawn but Black has two strong bishops and easy development.

11...0–0 12.0–0 ♗b7!

I started by looking at 12...♖d8, which seems obvious, but found 13.♕b3 ♗c5 14.♘c6! (rather than 14.♘f3?! ♘d7, when Black has great compensation) to be slightly annoying. I analysed this in more detail and found that Black's position was still playable, but it is better not to go down this path at all.

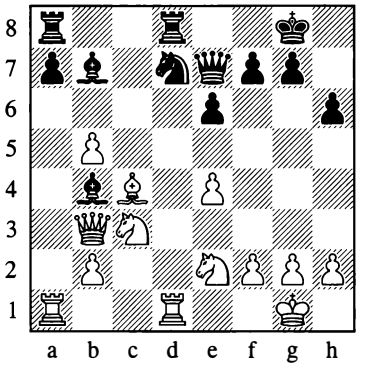
The text move is more prudent, covering the c6-square to prevent White's plan.

13.♕b3

This looks sensible although White has some other options.

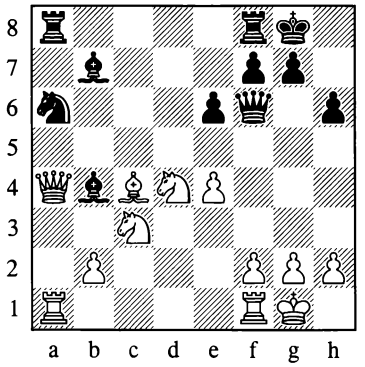
13.♖a4 ♖d8 14.♖xb4 ♖xd4 15.♕f3 ♕xf3 16.gxf3 ♘d7 17.♖d1 ♘e5 18.♖xd4 ♘xf3† 19.♔g2 ♘xd4 with a roughly equal endgame.

13.♘de2 ♖d8 14.♕b3 ♕e7 15.♖fd1 ♘d7 Black develops his last piece and intends to put the knight on b6 or e5 to harassing the enemy bishop. For example:

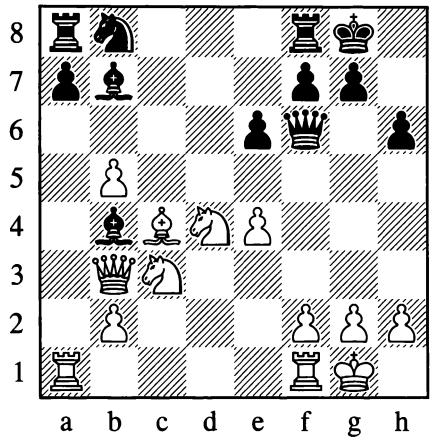


16.♘g3 ♘e5 17.♗e2 ♗d6∞ With ...♘g6-f4 and ...♕g5 to come.

13.♕a4 a5! 14.bxa6 (14.♖fd1 ♘d7⩲) 14...♘xa6



15.♖fd1 ♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♘c5 17.♕b4 ♖xa1 18.♖xa1 ♘xe4 Black wins back the pawn with equal chances, as 19.♕xb7?! ♕xf2† 20.♔h1 ♕e3∓ is dangerous only for White.



13...♗c5

13...♕xd4? 14.♕xb4 ♖c8 doesn't work on account of 15.♖a4!± when Black has yielded his strong bishop for nothing.

14.♘f3

This is the obvious move, and it occurred in one of my blitz games earlier this year.

14.♘xe6!? fxe6 15.♗xe6† ♔h8 16.♗d5 ♕e7∞ is an unclear alternative.

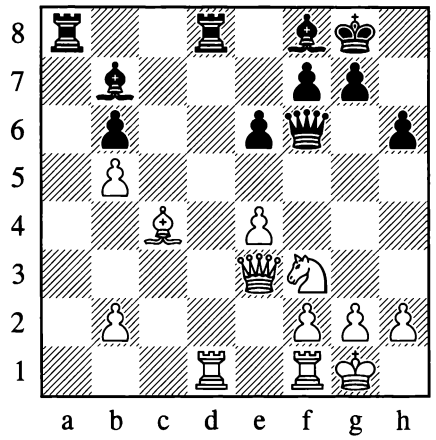
14...♘d7⩲

I think Black has enough compensation here. The game was only a blitz encounter, but I will show a few more moves for illustrative purposes.

15.♖ad1 ♖fd8 16.♘a4 ♗f8

16...♖ac8!? is the computer's idea; 17.♘xc5 ♘xc5 18.♖xd8† ♕xd8 19.♕e3 ♘xe4= would be a logical continuation.

17.♕e3 ♘b6!? 18.♘xb6 axb6



19.b3?!

19.♕xb6 ♗xe4 20.♕e3 ♗xf3 21.♕xf3 ♕xb2= should have been preferred.

The text move is the only way to keep White's material advantage, but it hands Black the initiative.

19...♗c5 20.♕e2 ♕f4⩱

White was under pressure in ercoleiaccone – Antidrome, Internet 2016.

Conclusion

6...b5!? is an interesting way to get a complex position without much established theory. 7.e5 gives Black an improved version of a Botvinnik Semi-Slav because his light-squared bishop will be actively placed on b7, without a pawn on c6 blocking its view. 7.a4 is the critical move, hoping to provoke ...c6. Instead I recommend the rare but interesting 7...c5!?, when the main line usually leads to positions where White wins a pawn but Black gets good compensation in the form of the bishop pair and active pieces. Overall I would say 6...b5!? could be worth having in your repertoire if you enjoy unbalanced and complicated positions. It also has some practical benefits, as it avoids heavy theory while presenting White with complex and unfamiliar problems early in the game.

PART III

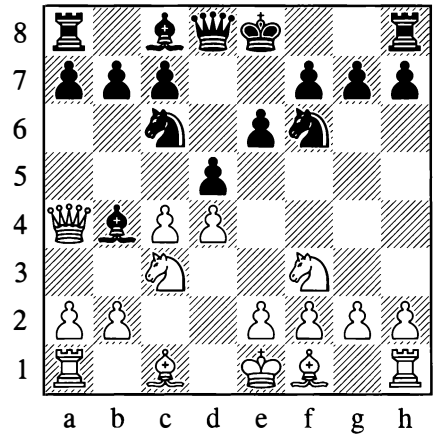
5.♕a4†

Introduction to 5.♕a4†

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕a4†

This move has developed over the years from a sideline into one of the main attempts by top players to challenge the Ragozin. White includes this check in order to force Black's knight to go to c6, where it gets in the way of the ...c5 pawn break.

5...♘c6



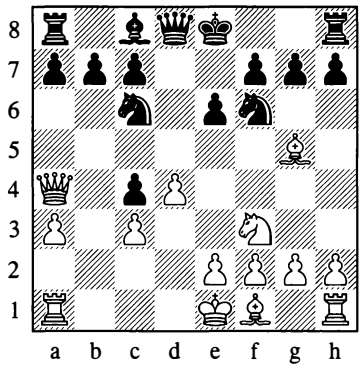
6.e3

This is White's main try, defending the c4-pawn and aiming for simple development and a small edge.

Before discussing other options, let us note that 6.cxd5 exd5 converts to 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♕a4† ♘c6, as covered in variation D of Chapter 3.

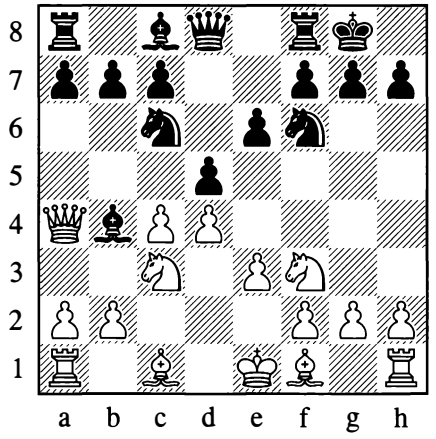
Chapter 8 will deal with minor options such as 6.a3 and 6.♘e5, neither of which is any real problem for Black.

6.♗g5 is more interesting, when 6...dxc4! is consistent with our strategy of grabbing the c4-pawn when given the chance. This position can also be reached via the 5.♗g5 dxc4 6.♕a4† ♘c6 move order, so it's important to know it. We will analyse it fully in variation C of Chapter 8. For now, I will mention a brief excerpt from a high-profile game: 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3



8...♕d5! 9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.♘d2 b5 Black already has a comfortable game, and White will struggle to demonstrate compensation for the pawn. Aronian had no problems holding the draw against Topalov, which secured him first place in the tournament, but he could certainly have played for the full point if he had wanted to.

6...0–0



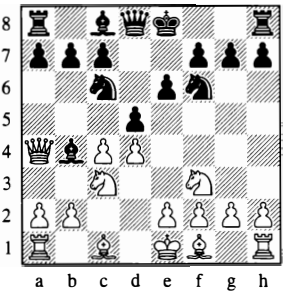
We have reached an important branching point. White's options are as follows:

The sidelines **7.h3** and **7.a3** (along with the inferior 7.♗d3?! and 7.♗e2) will be looked at in the final part of Chapter 8.

7.♕c2!? is a modern try, improving the queen and waiting for ...dxc4 so that the bishop can recapture in one go. In Chapter 9 I start by giving some background information on **7...dxc4 8.♗xc4 ♗d6**, before presenting two superior options in **7...♖e8!?** and **7...♗d6!?**, the latter being my main recommendation.

7.♗d2 is White's most popular choice. This time I suggest clarifying the central structure with **7...dxc4 8.♗xc4 ♗d6**, intending ...e5 with active play in the centre. This will be discussed fully in Chapter 10.

Chapter 8



6th & 7th Move Alternatives

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕a4† ♘c6

A) 6.a3 173
B) 6.♘e5 174
C) 6.♗g5 dxc4! 177
C1) 7.e4 177
C2) 7.a3 178
C3) 7.e3 ♗d7 8.♕c2 b5 180
C31) 9.a4 181
C32) 9.a3 182
D) 6.e3 0–0 183
D1) 7.h3 184
D2) 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3 ♘e4 185
D21) 9.♗d3 186
D22) 9.♕c2 187

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕a4† ♘c6

In this chapter we will look at **A) 6.a3**, **B) 6.♘e5** and **C) 6.♗g5**, followed by a few sidelines after the most common **D) 6.e3**.

6.cxd5 exd5 has already been analysed via the 5.cxd5 exd5 move order – see variation D of Chapter 3 on page 62.

6.♗d2 0–0

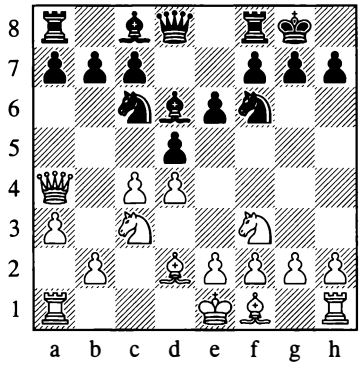
6...♗d7 has scored amazingly well for Black, but 7.♕c2 0–0 8.e3 transposes to a 6.e3 variation which lies outside of our repertoire.

7.a3

7.e3 converts to Chapter 10.

The text move was played in Wirig – Spassov, Sautron 2009, where Black retreated the bishop to e7. I would prefer to play in the style of Chapter 9, variation C, with:

7...♗d6N



8.c5

8.e3 dxc4 9.♗xc4 e5∞ gives Black a slightly improved version of the Chapter 10, as a2-a3 is hardly the most useful way for White to spend a tempo.

8...♗e7 9.e3 ♘e4 10.♕c2 f5 11.♗d3 ♗d7 12.0–0 a5∞

Black has a decent version of a Stonewall; the c4-c5 advance has taken the pressure off the centre, and Black can follow up by transferring either his queen or his bishop to h5.

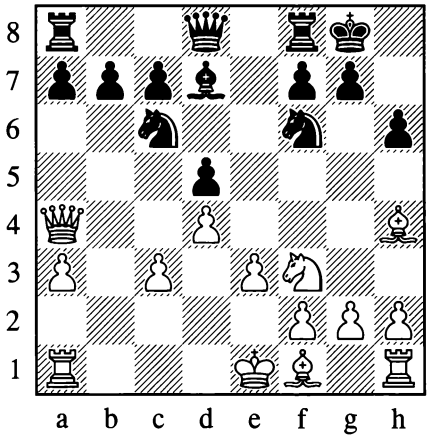
A) 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 0–0

7...♘e4 is a good alternative, cutting out the ♗g5 pins at source. Here are a few brief examples: 8.♗b2 (8.♗f4 0–0 9.♕c2 b6 10.cxd5 exd5 11.e3 g5 12.♗g3 ♗f5∞ L'Ami – Vishnu, Hoogeveen 2015) 8...♘d6 9.e3 dxc4 10.♗xc4 ♘xc4 11.♕xc4 ♕d5 12.♕e2 ♘a5 13.0–0 ♕c4 14.♕c2 ♕b3= Buhmann – Landa, Haguenau 2013.

8.♗g5

8.e3 transposes to variation D2.

8...h6 9.♗h4 ♗d7 10.cxd5 exd5 11.e3

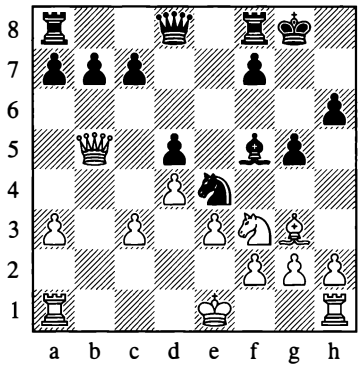


11...g5

11...♘e5!?N 12.♕b3 ♘xf3† 13.gxf3 b6 is unclear: White has the open g-file and a continuing pin on the knight, but his king lacks a safe haven.

12.♗g3 ♘e4 13.♕b3!?N

White should try to improve on the following game: 13.♗d3?! ♘e5 14.♕c2 ♘xd3† 15.♕xd3 ♗f5 16.♕b5

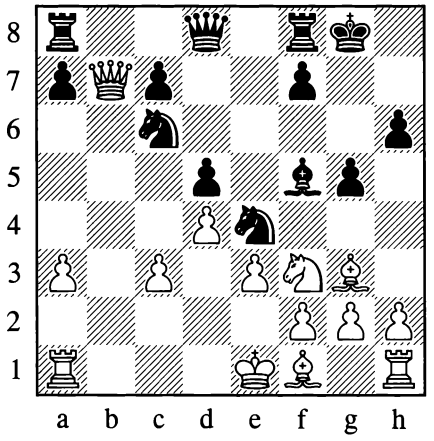


16...h5!N↑ With some initiative for Black. (Instead after 16...♕d7 17.♕xb7 ♖ab8 18.♕a6 ♖b6 19.♕a5 c5 20.0–0 ♖b5 21.♕a6 ♖b6 22.♕a5 ♖b5 23.♕a6 ♖b6 24.♕a5 the players agreed a draw in Topalov – Aronian, Stavanger [blitz] 2016.)

The text move looks more to the point, but Black can get an interesting position with the help of a pawn sacrifice.

13...♗f5 14.♕xb7

14.♗e2 ♘a5↑



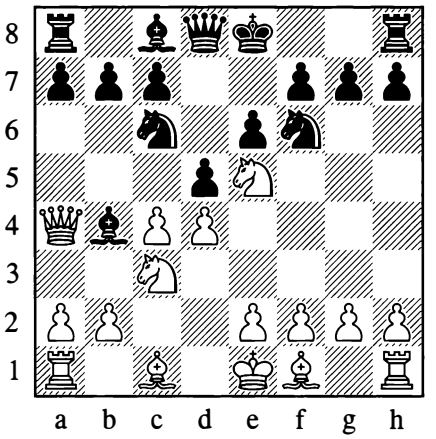
14...♘a5 15.♕b4

15.♕xc7 ♘b3 16.♖a2 ♖c8↑ gives Black a lot of activity.

15...c6∞

Black has decent compensation, with a lead in development and ...h5 on the cards.

B) 6.♘e5



Max Illingworth produced some excellent ChessPublishing notes on this variation, and I have referenced some of his ideas and analysis below.

6...♗d7

6...a5!?

This is the top suggestion of the engines, as Max points out. It looks outrageous but White does not seem to have a way to exploit it.

7.♘xc6

7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3 0–0 9.♘xc6 bxc6 transposes to the line below.

7.♗g5 0–0 8.e3 (White should probably prefer 8.♘xc6N bxc6 9.e3 c5 10.a3 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3, when 11...h6 looks roughly equal, while 11...♗a6!? transposes to the final position after 11.e3 c5! in the line below) Now in Fedorov – Akchelov, Novokuznetsk 1998, Black could have utilized some simple tactics by means of 8...♘xe5! 9.dxe5 ♕d7! 10.♕c2 ♘e4, with a fine position.

7...bxc6 8.a3N

8.♕xc6†?? ♗d7 9.♕b7 ♘e4 wins for Black.

8.♗g5 has been played, but 8...0–0 transposes to 7.♗g5 0–0 8.♘xc6 bxc6 as covered above.

8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 0–0 10.♗g5 ♗a6 11.e3 c5!∞

With roughly equal chances.

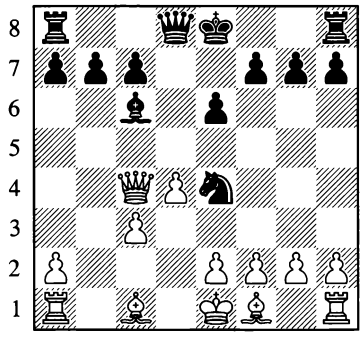
7.♘xd7

7.♘xc6

This is White's other try but it's not a serious one.

7...♗xc3† 8.bxc3 ♗xc6 9.♕b3 dxc4 10.♕xc4 ♘e4!

An important move to remember, sidestepping any ♗g5 pin. Already I prefer Black, for instance:



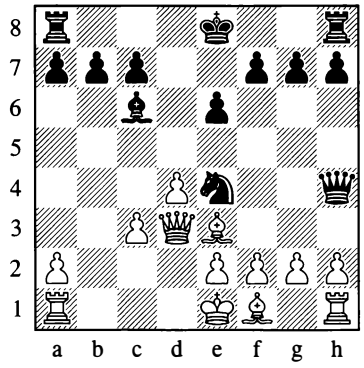
11.♗f4

11.♗e3 ♕h4∓ is the same thing with one less move played.

11.f3? ♕h4† wins material.

11...♕f6 12.♗e3 ♕h4 13.♕d3

13.h3 0–0 14.♖g1 ♗d5 15.♕d3 c5∓ was also excellent for Black in Shevelev – Mitkov, Paris 1993.



13...0–0–0

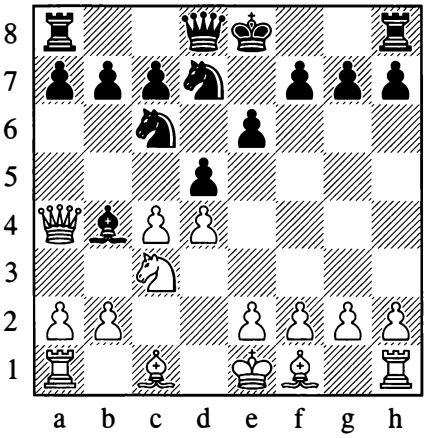
13...0–0!? is also good, for example: 14.g3 (14.♕c2 ♘d6∓) 14...♕h5 15.♗g2? ♘c5–+

14.♕c2 ♘d6 15.♕c1 f6∓

Dumpor – Palac, Rijeka 2001.

7...♘xd7!?

7...♕xd7 is more common but I like the idea of transferring the knight to b6. It is also Illingworth's top choice.



8.cxd5

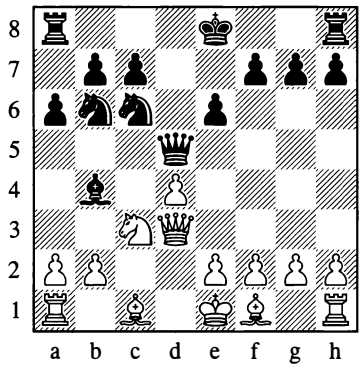
8.e3?! ♘b6 9.♕b3 dxc4 10.♗xc4 ♘xc4 11.♕xc4 ♕d5 12.♕xd5 ♗xc3† 13.bxc3 exd5∓ reached a dream endgame for Black in Schoene – Luther, Osterburg 2006; the knight will come to c4 and dominate White's bishop.

8...♘b6 9.♕b5 ♕xd5!?

This has only been tried in a single game so far, but it's an active choice which I believe deserves to be more popular. Illingworth is also a fan of it.

9...♘xd5 has been the usual choice but I don't fully trust Black's position. A recent example continued: 10.♗d2 a6 11.♕d3 ♗a5 12.a3 e5 13.dxe5 ♘xc3 14.♗xc3 ♕xd3 15.exd3 ♗xc3† 16.bxc3 ♘xe5± Hayrapetyan – Pashikian, Yerevan 2016.

9...a6!? 10.♕d3 ♕xd5 is similar to our main line. After 11.a3, in Granero Roca – Halkias, Benidorm 2009, it would have been interesting to try:



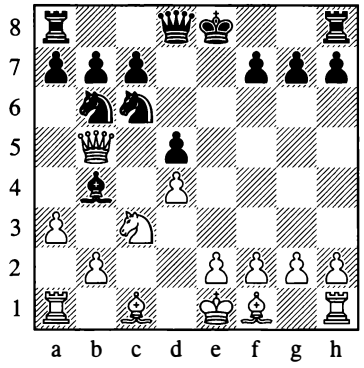
11...♗xc3†!?N 12.bxc3 f5! White's long-term advantage of the bishop pair is countered by his awkwardness in development and Black's control over the light squares.

9...exd5!?

Max mentions that this move leads to a pleasant structure for White, but it seems to me that Black's lead in development makes up for it.

10.a3!?N

10.e3 occurred in Filippov – Zvjaginsev, Elista 1997. I propose 10...♕g5!?N 11.g3 ♕f5 12.♗g2 a6 13.♕e2 0–0–0 14.0–0 h5 15.a3 ♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♖de8 when the position is unclear but not worse for Black.



10...♗xc3† 11.bxc3 0–0 12.g3

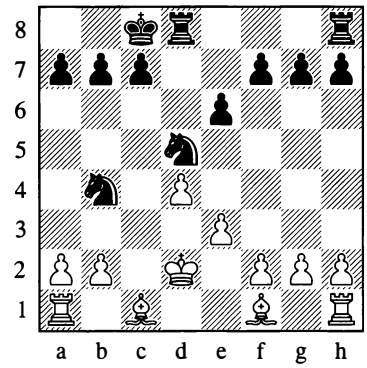
12.♗f4 ♕e7 is promising for Black, as White can't play e2-e3 due to ...g5 and ...f5-f4.

12...a6 13.♕d3 ♘a5=

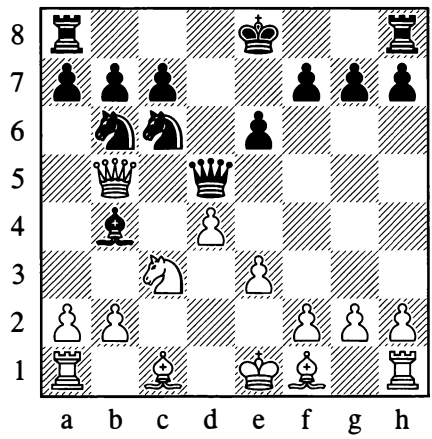
Black's grip over the c4-square leaves him in good stead.

10.e3

I also considered: 10.♕xb4!? ♘xb4 11.♘xd5 ♘6xd5 12.♔d2 0–0–0 13.e3



13...e5! 14.a3 ♘c6 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 16.♔c2 ♖he8= The position is balanced, as White lacks the development to make use of his bishops.



10...0–0–0!N

10...a6 was rather slow in Stremavicius – Michelle, Panevezys 2016.

I also considered 10...e5!?N, but found that 11.a3! (11.♕xd5 ♘xd5 12.♗d2 0–0–0 13.a3 exd4! 14.axb4 ♘dxb4 15.♖a4 dxc3 16.♗xc3 a5 17.♗xg7 ♖he8 ends up roughly equal) 11...♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♕e6 13.♗e2 0–0 14.0–0

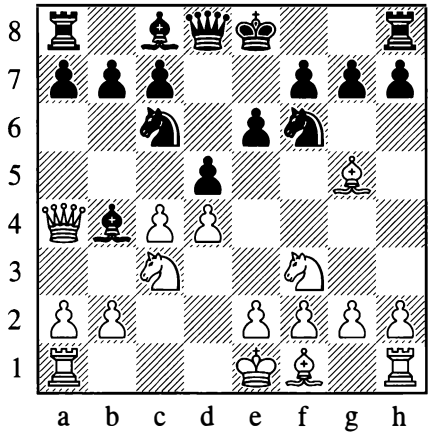
gives White chances for an edge due to his bishop pair and strong centre.

The text move is suggested by Illingworth, who gives the following important detail:

11.a3 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♘a5!=

Black has decent chances thanks to his control over the c4-square and White's difficulties completing development without exchanging queens.

C) 6.♗g5



6...dxc4!

A familiar concept, switching to a Vienna. Other options are too passive for my taste; besides, we need to know this position in case White follows 5.♗g5 dxc4 with 6.♕a4†, forcing 6...♘c6, when the present position is on the board.

White has three main options: **C1) 7.e4**, **C2) 7.a3** and **C3) 7.e3**.

C1) 7.e4 ♗d7

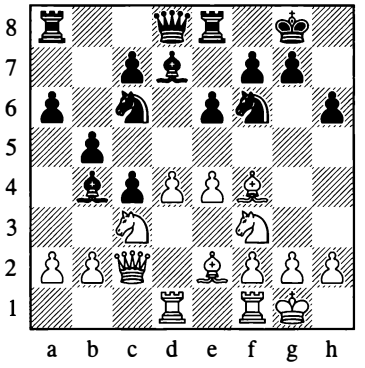
Unpinning the knight and threatening ...♘xd4.

8.♕c2 h6 9.♗d2

Despite first appearances, 9.♗xf6?! fails to win back the pawn due to Black's pressure on the d4-pawn. 9...♕xf6 10.e5 ♕f4 11.♖d1 b5∓ Li Ruofan – Krush, Khanty-Mansiysk 2012.

9...b5! 10.♘xb5

Another game continued 10.♗e2 a6 11.0–0 0–0 12.♖ad1 ♖e8 13.♗f4, and now Black came up with a nice idea:



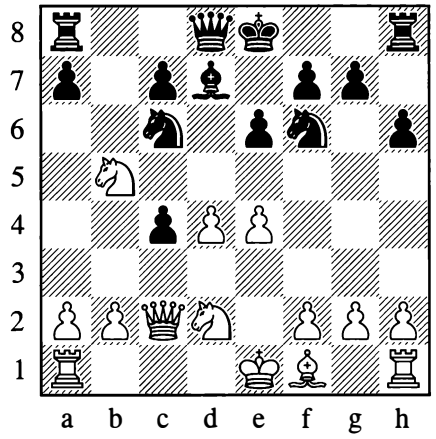
13...♗c8! Preparing to put the bishop on its ideal square. 14.a4 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♗b7 16.♖fe1 ♘e7 17.♗f1 ♘g6 18.♗c1 ♕c8 19.♗a3 ♘d7 20.h4 c5 21.♖b1 ♕c7∓ White was unable to prove his compensation in Krasenkow – Wells, Ohrid 2001.

10...♗xd2†

The point of Black's play is that both of White's possible recaptures have certain drawbacks.

11.♘xd2

11.♕xd2 does not help: 11...♘xe4 12.♕f4 ♘d6 13.♘xd6† cxd6 14.♕xd6?! (White should settle for 14.♗xc4 ♕a5†∓ as in Tanti – Seiler, email 2011) 14...♕a5† 15.♘d2 c3 16.bxc3 ♕xc3 17.♖d1 All this happened in the old game Vidmar – Bogoljubow, Bad Nauheim 1936, when 17...♘xd4!N would have been crushing.



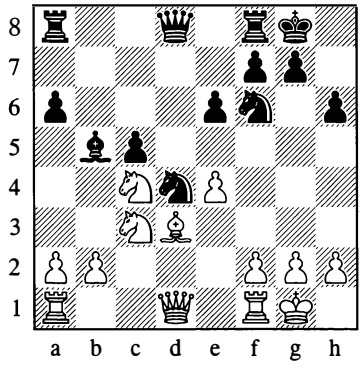
11...a6 12.♘a3

Black is also doing well after:

12.♘c3 ♘xd4 13.♕d1 c5 14.♘xc4

14.♗xc4 ♗c6 15.0–0 0–0 16.f3 ♕b6 17.b3 ♖fd8 18.♖f2 ♖d7 19.♘f1 a5∓ Iruzubieta Villaluenga – C. Horvath, Lisbon 2001.

14...0–0 15.♗d3 ♗b5 16.0–0



16...♖a7!N

Heading for d7. 16...♘d7?! 17.♕h5 ♖b8 18.b3 ♗xc4 19.♗xc4 ♕f6 was only equal in Shchekachev – Feller, Paris 2010.

17.e5 ♘d5 18.♘d6 ♕g5∓

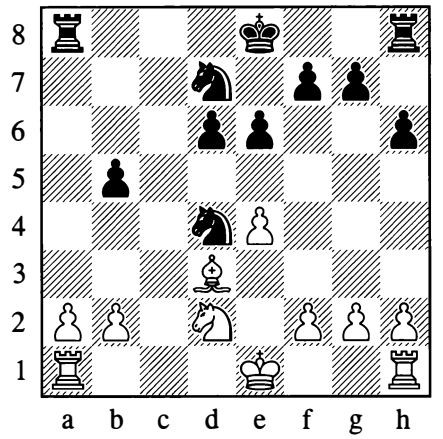
White is under unpleasant pressure.

12...♘xd4 13.♕xc4 ♗b5!

13...e5 14.♕c5 ♗e6 15.♖c1 ♘d7 16.♕xc7 ♗xa2 17.♕xd8† ♔xd8 18.♗c4 ♗xc4 19.♘axc4 ♔e7 was equal in Malakhov – Alekseev, Kaliningrad 2015.

The text move is more dynamic, and should lead to a favourable endgame for Black after:

14.♘xb5 axb5 15.♕c5 ♕d6 16.♕xd6 cxd6 17.♗d3 ♘d7

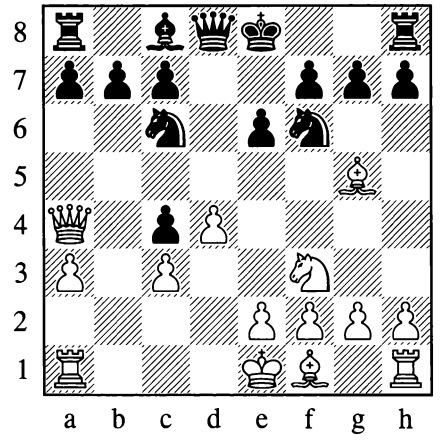


18.♘f3 ♘xf3† 19.gxf3 ♔e7 20.♔e2 ♖hc8 21.a3 ♘c5∓

Malaniuk – Beliavsky, Odessa 1989.

C2) 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3

White hopes to benefit from the bishop pair and the additional support for the d4-pawn, but in the meantime Black can secure his extra pawn with:



8...♕d5! 9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.♘d2

White has also tried:

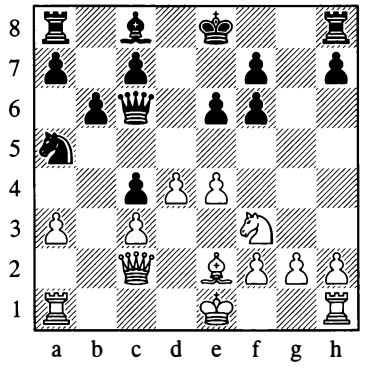
10.♕c2 ♘a5

10...f5 also looks sensible. 11.g3 b6 12.♗g2 ♗b7 13.0–0 0–0–0 14.♖fe1 was the continuation of Olszewski – Wojtaszek, Germany 2015, when 14...♘a5!N would have been most accurate, with similar play to the Howell – Hawkins game quoted below.

11.e4

11.g3?! is too slow, and 11...b6 12.♗g2 ♗b7 13.0–0 0–0–0 14.♖a2 f5∓ left Black clearly ahead in Howell – Hawkins, Aberystwyth 2014 – a crucial game during the 2014 British Championships, which ended with these two players sharing the title.

11...♕c6 12.♗e2 b6



13.d5!?

White can play more patiently with 13.♘d2 ♗b7 14.♗f3 0–0–0, but I am not convinced that he can claim full compensation for the pawn in that case.

13...♕c5

This was played in the only game from this position, and it's a good practical choice.

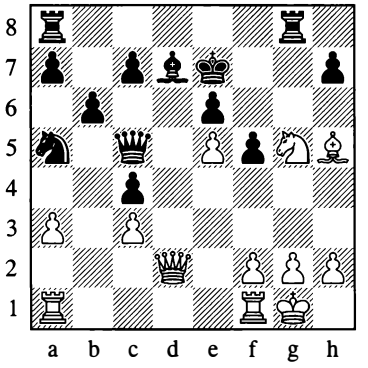
13...exd5!?N also leads to some advantage for Black if followed up correctly.

14.0–0 ♗d7 15.dxe6 fxe6 16.e5 f5 17.♘g5 ♖g8

17...♘b3!?N is the computer's top choice, based on some tactical points which you can delve into if you wish. The game continuation is also fine though, and is easier for a human player to understand.

18.♗h5† ♔e7 19.♕d2

So far Black has done more or less everything right, but here a big improvement is needed. The right way is:



19...♗c6!N

19...♕xe5? 20.♖ad1 gave White too much activity in Markus – Vallejo Pons, Dresden 2007. 19...♘b3? 20.♕f4! ♘xa1 21.♖d1!! also gives White a decisive attack.

20.♘f3

20.♗f3? h6 wins immediately.

20.♕f4 ♗xg2! 21.♔xg2 h6 22.h4 ♘c6∓ also leaves White in big trouble.

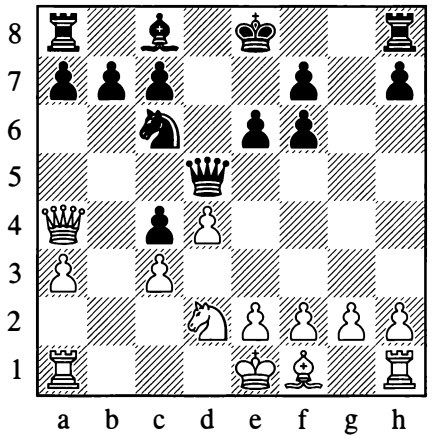
20...♗xf3 21.♗xf3 ♖ad8 22.♕f4

22.♕h6 runs into 22...♕xe5.

22...♔d7∓

Black keeps some advantage, as Krasenkow points out. He still has an extra pawn, and is finally ready to complete his artificial castling on the queenside.

Returning to the main line, the text move was Topalov's choice against Aronian in the final round of the 2015 Sinquefield Cup in Saint Louis. The former World Champion needed to win to climb up the rankings, whereas Aronian only required a draw to secure outright first. Black's set-up passed the test convincingly, as Topalov failed to make any impact, despite having obviously prepared for this opening.

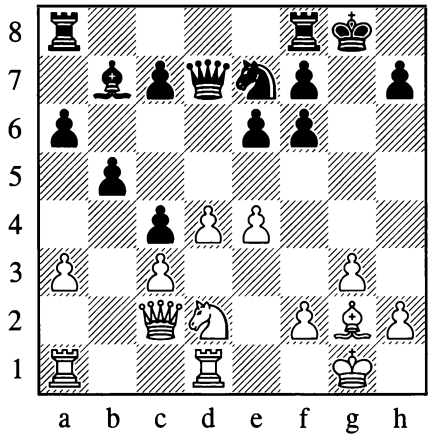


10...b5 11.♕c2 a6 12.e4 ♕d7

I was watching this game live and remember Aronian was playing quickly while looking totally relaxed, despite the enormity of the game, so he clearly has full confidence in Black's set-up.

13.g3 ♗b7 14.♗g2 ♘e7 15.0–0 0–0 16.♖fd1

White places his rook opposite Black's queen and prepares ♘f1-e3.



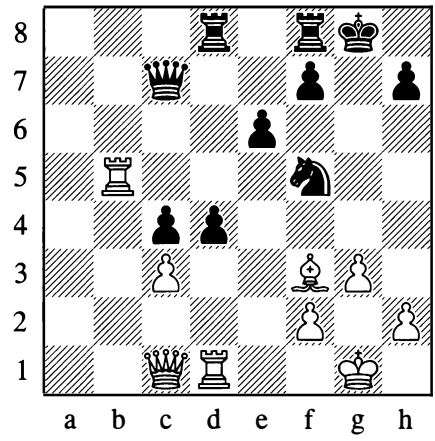
16...♖ad8 17.a4

Presumably Topalov rejected 17.♘f1 on account of 17...f5! 18.♘e3 ♗xe4 19.♗xe4 fxe4 20.♕xe4 f5 21.♕f4 ♘g6 22.♕g5 ♔h8∓.

17...c5

Black gets ready to swap off one of his doubled pawns. White is clearly struggling to demonstrate compensation.

18.axb5 axb5 19.♘f3 ♕c7 20.♖ab1 f5 21.exf5 ♘xf5 22.♖xb5 ♗xf3 23.♗xf3 cxd4 24.♕c1



24...dxc3

This leads to a draw, and thus was a suitable choice for Aronian to secure first place in the tournament.

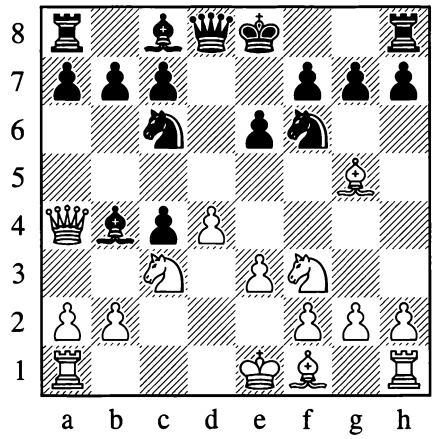
If Black had wanted to play more ambitiously, both 24...♔h8∓ and 24...h6∓ would have sufficed.

25.♖xf5 ♖xd1† 26.♗xd1 exf5 27.♕g5†=

The players agreed a draw after a few more checks in Topalov – Aronian, Saint Louis 2015.

C3) 7.e3

White secures the d4-pawn and opens a path for the f1-bishop, but we are going to make it as difficult as possible for him to recapture on c4.



7...♗d7

Threatening ...♘xd4.

8.♕c2 b5

White has two main ways to force the play on the queenside: **C31) 9.a4** and **C32) 9.a3**.

9.♗e2

This developing move has also been played, and gives Black a choice:

9...a6

9...♖b8 is similar. After 10.0–0 h6 11.♗h4 ♗e7 12.♖ad1 the game was strangely agreed drawn in Polak – Krejci, Vsetin 2015, but obviously the main battle lies ahead.

9...h6?! was my choice in a blitz game but it's inaccurate due to: 10.♗xf6! (10.♗h4 a6 11.0–0 ♗e7 was good for Black in MWeston – Antidrome, Internet 2016) 10...gxf6 (the problem is that 10...♕xf6 runs into 11.a4 when Black cannot defend with ...a6) 11.0–0 With good compensation for White, Malmstroem – Riepe, email 2002.

10.0–0

10.a4 transposes to variation C31 below.

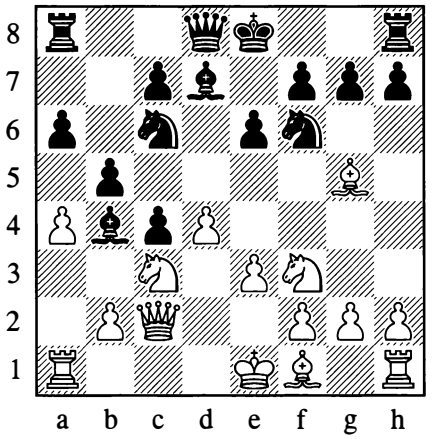
10...♗e7 11.♖fd1

Another premature draw agreement occurred here in Genov – Sulava, France 2009. The obvious continuation would be:

11...0–0

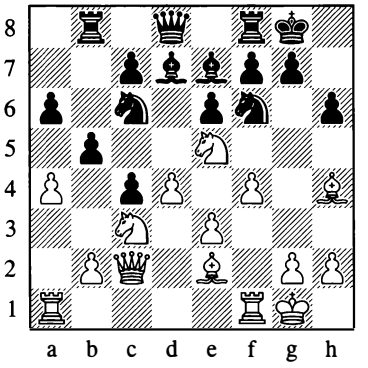
Both sides have their chances, but I would prefer Black with the extra pawn.

C31) 9.a4 a6



10.♗e2 ♗e7

10...♖b8!? was my solution in an internet blitz game: 11.0–0 h6 12.♗h4 0–0 13.♘e5 (13.axb5 axb5 14.♘e4 ♗e7 15.♘xf6† ♗xf6 16.♗xf6 ♕xf6∓) 13...♗e7 14.f4

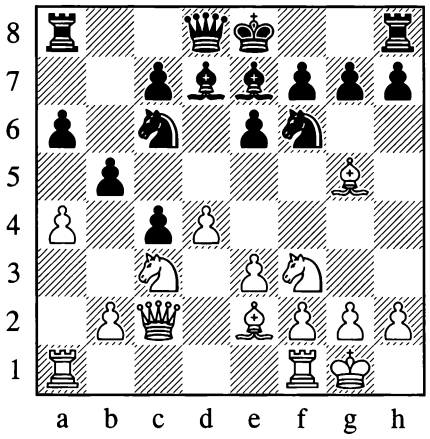


14...♘b4 (14...♘d5! would have been even better: 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.♕d2 ♘xe5 17.fxe5 ♗c6 18.♗f3 ♘xc3 19.bxc3 ♗xf3 20.♖xf3 b4∓) 15.♕d1 ♘bd5 16.♕c1 c5∓ Isokol – Antidrome, Internet 2015.

11.0–0

11.axb5 axb5 12.♖xa8 ♕xa8 13.♘xb5?! doesn't work due to 13...♕a1† 14.♗d1 ♕a5†

15.♘c3 ♘b4∓ followed by a nasty check on d3.

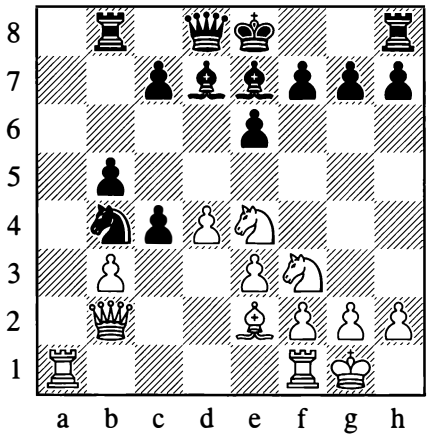


11...♖b8 12.axb5 axb5 13.♗xf6

13.b3?! b4 14.♘d1? c3–+ was a strange choice by White in Demin – Levin, Oberhausen 2010.

13...♗xf6 14.♘e4 ♗e7 15.b3 ♘b4 16.♕b2

Black's play can be improved by means of:



16...cxb3N

16...♗c6?! allows 17.d5! and suddenly White is causing problems: 17...exd5 18.♕xg7 ♖f8 19.♖fd1↑ Cmilyte – Kosteniuk, Beijing (rapid) 2013. There is no point in allowing this sort of thing.

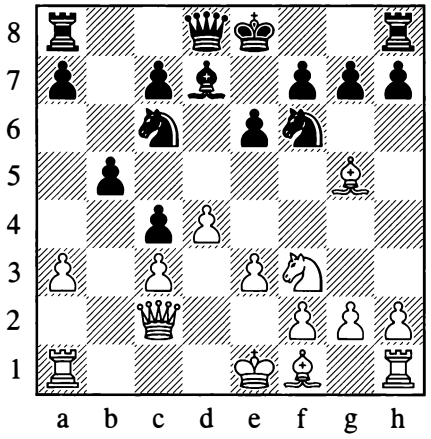
17.♕xb3 ♘d5∞

White has some compensation but, with an extra pawn and two bishops, it is hard to believe that Black can be worse.

C32) 9.a3

This move was tried against me in the 2016 British Championship.

9...♗xc3† 10.bxc3



Here I applied the lesson learned from the blitz game referred to in the earlier note on 9.♗e2. This time I wanted to play ...h6 but appreciated that after ♗xf6 I would not be able to recapture with the queen due to the annoying a3-a4 break, when ...a6 would not work due to the undefended rook on a8. Therefore the right approach is to shore up the queenside before playing ...h6 – but I suggest a slight refinement over my choice in the game.

10...a6!N

10...♖b8 11.a4 a6 was the game continuation.

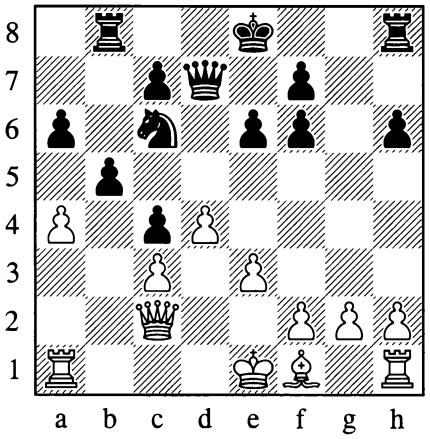
The text move is marginally more accurate. The difference could come into play if White decides not to attack b5 with a3-a4. In that case, Black may wish to deploy the rook on d8 rather than b8. He might even consider rerouting the bishop from d7 to b7, like in the Krasenkow – Wells game referenced on page 177. In either

of these scenarios, having a pawn on a6 will be more useful than the rook on b8.

11.a4 ♖b8

We are now back in the game.

12.♘e5 h6 13.♘xd7 ♕xd7 14.♗xf6 gxf6



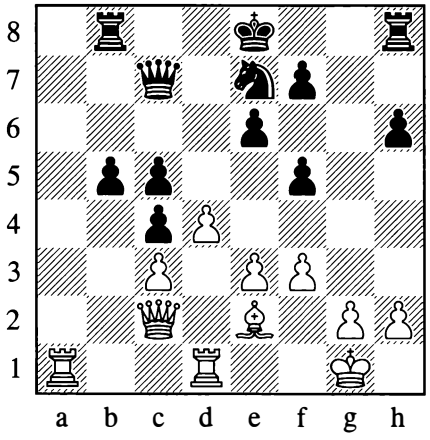
15.♗e2 f5

Black is a pawn up and it is down to White to prove compensation. My plan involves ...♘e7 and ...c5.

16.0–0 ♘e7 17.axb5 axb5 18.f3?!

18.♗f3 is a better try, although White will certainly not be getting his pawn back anytime soon.

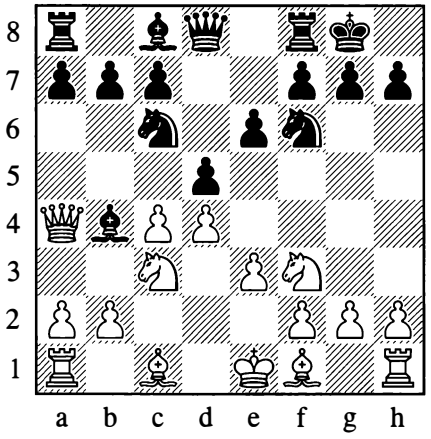
18...c5 19.♖fd1 ♕c7



20.♕d2 0–0 21.e4 cxd4 22.♕xd4 ♖fd8∓

White did not have enough compensation for the pawn in Osborne – R. Pert, Bournemouth 2016.

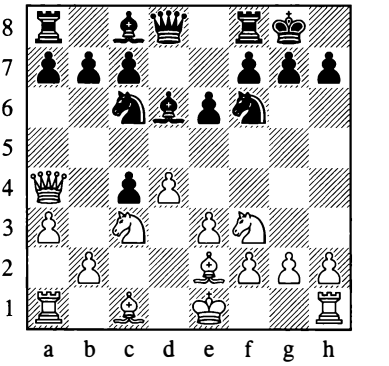
D) 6.e3 0–0



In this, the final section of the chapter, we will begin our study of the main line of the 5.♕a4† variation. In the following two chapters we will analyse the two main options of 7.♕c2 and 7.♗d2. Before then, we will deal with the relatively minor options of **D1) 7.h3** and **D2) 7.a3**.

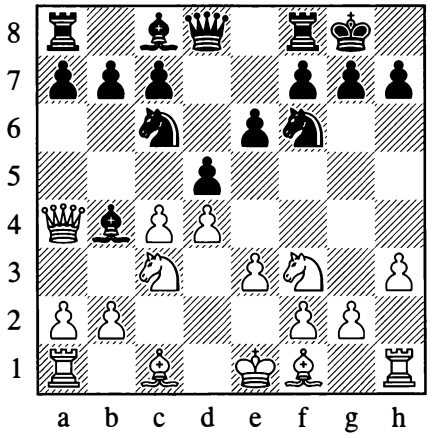
7.♗d3?! has been tried by a few strong players but it makes no sense, as 7...dxc4 8.♗xc4 ♗d6 simply leaves White a tempo down on Chapter 10, as his bishop is on c1 instead of d2.

7.♗e2 also fails to impress: 7...dxc4 8.a3 (8.♗xc4 transposes to the note above) 8...♗d6



9.♕xc4N (9.♗xc4?! gave White an even worse version of the standard position in Hilverda – Bluebaum, Berlin [blitz] 2015, as he has lost a tempo with the light-squared bishop *and* played a weird a2-a3 move. After 9...e5 Black is already fighting for the initiative.) The text move seems more consistent with White's previous play, but Black is still fine after something like: 9...e5 10.d5 ♘e7 11.0–0 h6 12.e4 c6 13.dxc6 ♘xc6 14.♗e3 ♗e6 15.♕d3 ♕e7=

D1) 7.h3



This strange-looking move has been tried by a few top players who are looking for a different kind of waiting move while holding on for ...dxc4, ♗xc4. Black has several ways to handle the position, as evidenced by the fact that the five grandmaster games have all featured different responses from the second player. My instinct is to try to strike in the centre as quickly as possible in order to highlight the slowness of White's last move. With that in mind, I would like to recommend:

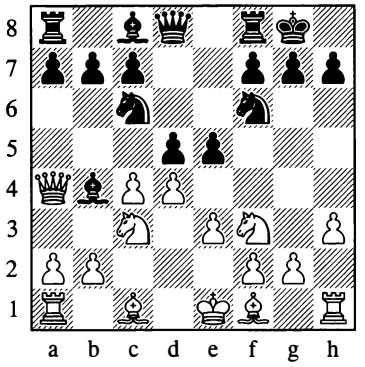
7...♗d7!?

Threatening ...♘xd4 – and when White retreats his queen, Black will follow up with ...♘e7 followed by a quick ...c5.

Of the four other options to have been tried, the most interesting is:

7...e5!?

Trying to rip open the centre before White can finish developing. I have included part of the game, along with a few notes to serve as the basis for further investigation.

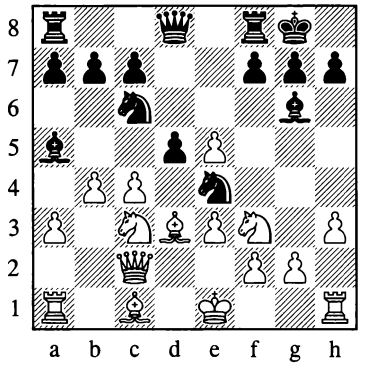


8.dxe5

8.♘xe5!?N also leads to double-edged play: 8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♘e4 11.cxd5 (11.♕c2 ♕g5 12.cxd5 ♕xe5 13.♗d3 ♕xc3† 14.♕xc3 ♘xc3 15.♗a3 ♖e8=) 11...♕xd5 12.♕d4 ♕c6⩱

8...♘e4 9.♕c2 ♗f5 10.♗d3 ♗a5 11.a3 ♗g6 12.b4!?

12.0–0 ♘xc3 13.♗xg6 fxg6 14.bxc3 ♖xf3 15.gxf3 ♕g5† 16.♔h1 (16.♔h2 ♘xe5 17.♕d1 ♘xc4∓) 16...♕h4 forces a draw.



12...♗xb4! 13.♗b2 ♗xc3† 14.♗xc3 ♘xc3 15.♗xg6 hxg6 16.♕xc3 dxc4 17.♕xc4 ♕e7 18.e6 ♕xe6 19.♕xe6 fxe6 20.♔e2 ♘a5∞

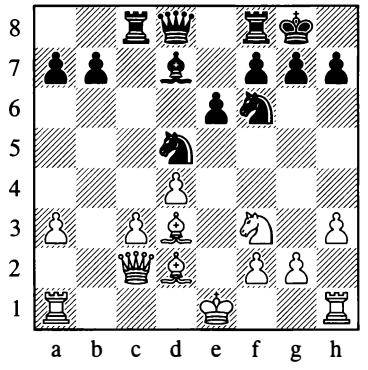
White had about enough compensation for the pawn in Abasov – Safarli, Baku 2015.

8.♕c2 ♘e7 9.c5?!

This was White's choice in the game; evidently he was keen to prevent the ...c5 plan, but it causes more harm than good. White should have preferred one of the following alternatives:

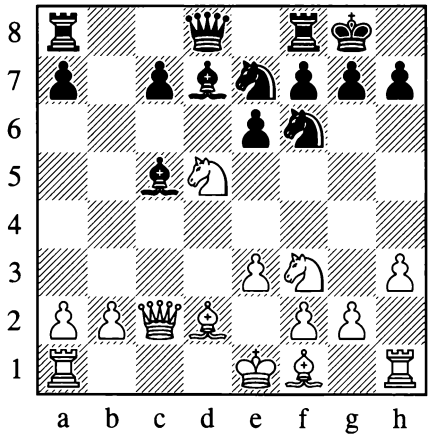
9.♗d2N dxc4 10.♗xc4 c5 with a balanced position.

9.cxd5 ♘exd5 10.♗d2 ♖c8 11.a3 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 c5 gives Black good counterplay. It is worth pointing out the following nice line: 13.♗d3?! (13.e4 is better although 13...♘b6∞ leaves Black with good prospects along the c-file and on the light squares) 13...cxd4 14.exd4



14...♘xc3! 15.♗xc3 ♘d5 16.♗xh7† ♔h8 17.♗e4 ♘xc3∓ White has some problems to solve.

9...b6 10.♗d2 bxc5 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.♘xd5



12...exd5!?N

12...♘exd5 13.♕xc5 ♘e4 14.♕d4 ♘xd2 15.♕xd2 c5 was equal in Kovalenko – Grandelius, Dubai 2015. The text move would have been more ambitious.

13.♕xc5 ♘e4 14.♕c2

14.♕d4? c5∓ only helps Black.

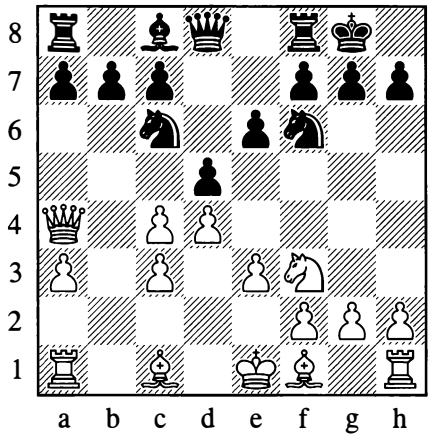
14...♗f5

14...f5!? 15.♗d3 c5 is also interesting.

15.♗d3 c5

The position is about equal but I like Black's activity.

D2) 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3



8...♘e4

8...♗d7 is also decent. A good illustrative game continued: 9.♕c2 ♘a5 10.cxd5 exd5 11.a4 ♖e8 12.♗d3 c5 13.dxc5 ♕c7 Black regains the pawn with a pleasant game. 14.♗a3 ♘c4 15.0–0 ♘xa3 16.♖xa3 ♕xc5= Kramnik – Grischuk, Moscow (blitz) 2009.

After the text move I considered two main options: **D21) 9.♗d3** and **D22) 9.♕c2**.

Another idea is:
9.♗b2 ♕e8!?

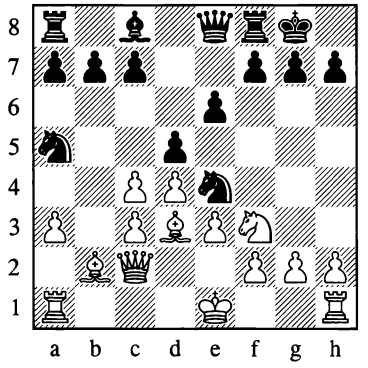
This interesting move has been played twice by Tatiana Kosintseva. Black delays the development of the c8-bishop development as she plans to bring it out via a different diagonal.

10.♕c2

10.♗d3? ♘e5! would be nasty for White.

10.♗e2 ♗d7 (10...♘xd4?? unfortunately doesn't work due to 11.♕xe8 ♘xf3† 12.gxf3! ♖xe8 13.fxe4+–) 11.♕c2 ♘a5∞ gives Black good prospects on the light squares.

10...♘a5 11.♗d3

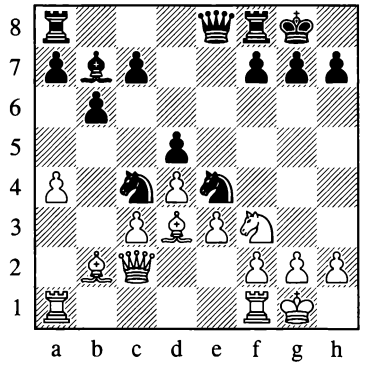


11...b6!

Improving over 11...dxc4?! 12.♗xe4 f5, which was creative but not quite correct in Cmilyte – T. Kosintseva, Konya (rapid) 2010.

12.cxd5 exd5 13.0–0 ♗b7 14.a4 ♘c4

It is obvious that Black has obtained a satisfactory position from the opening. Here is the rest of the game, where Black went on to make an easy draw against a formidable opponent:



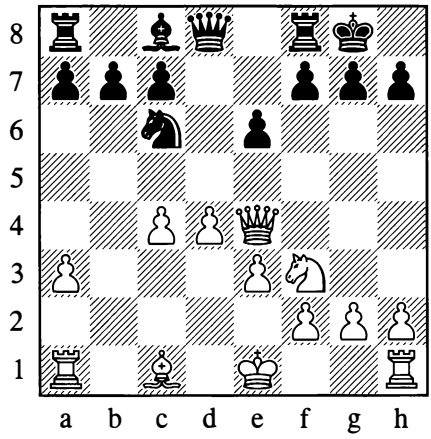
15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♕xe5 17.c4 ♕e6 18.cxd5 ♗xd5 19.♕xc7 ♘c5 20.♗e2 ♕g6 21.♕g3 ♖fc8 22.♖fc1 ♕xg3 23.hxg3 f6 24.♔f1 ♔f7 25.f3 ♗e6 26.♖c3

½–½ Van Wely – T. Kosintseva, Moscow 2010.

D21) 9.♗d3 ♘xc3

Certainly the most direct move, although 9...f5!?N∞ may be worthy of further investigation.

10.♕c2 ♘e4 11.♗xe4 dxe4 12.♕xe4



12...♘a5 13.♕c2 c5

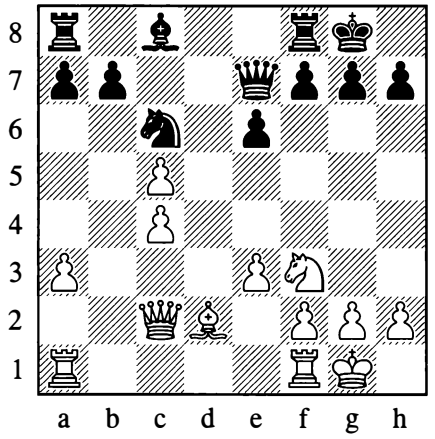
One way or another, Black will get a target to attack on the queenside.

14.dxc5

I also considered 14.♗d2N cxd4 15.exd4 b6 16.♗xa5 bxa5 17.0–0 ♗b7 18.♖fd1 ♗xf3 19.gxf3 ♖c8∞ when the mutual pawn weaknesses should more or less balance each other out.

14...♕e7 15.♗d2 ♘c6 16.0–0

Here I found a useful way to improve Black's play:



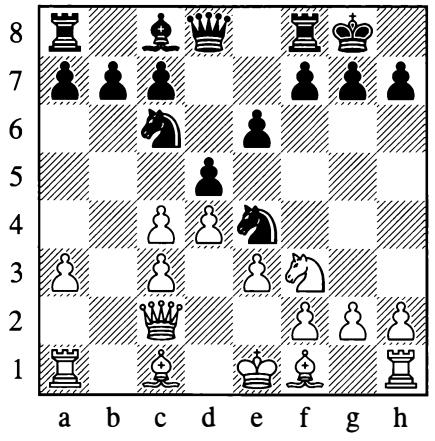
16...e5!N

16...♕xc5?! 17.♖fb1 h6 occurred in Mamedyarov – Fressinet, Huaian (rapid) 2016, when 18.♗b4!N ♘xb4 19.axb4 ♕c7 20.b5± would have put Black under some pressure.

17.h3 ♗e6

White's extra pawn is irrelevant; if anything, it is White who has to be careful to avoid being worse after the c5-pawn falls.

D22) 9.♕c2



9...♘a5

9...b6 is also quite logical and may easily transpose. One game continued: 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♗d3 ♖e8!? (11...♘a5 transposes to 11.cxd5 exd5 in the notes to the main line below) 12.0–0 ♘a5 13.a4 c5 14.♘d2 ♗f5 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4 16.dxc5 ♗xd3 17.♕xd3 ♘b3 18.♖a3 ♘xc5∓ Zhao Xue – Hou Yifan, Jinzhou 2009.

10.♗d3 b6! 11.♗xe4!?N

This has not yet been tested but it seems like a critical move to analyse.

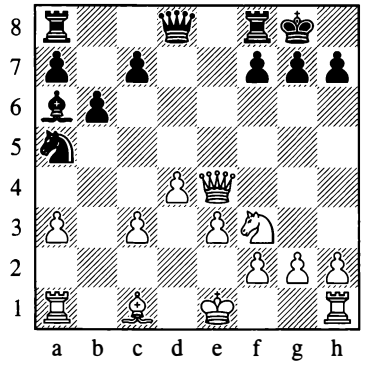
It is also worth checking:

11.cxd5 exd5 12.♗xe4?

White should prefer 12.0–0 with a normal game; Black can choose between 12...♗b7 and 12...♖e8, the latter of which transposes to the Zhao Xue – Hou Yifan game quoted above.

12...dxe4 13.♕xe4 ♗a6

Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn, as Ramirez points out. Here are a few sample lines:



14.♘d2

Or 14.h4 ♖e8 15.♕f5 g6 16.♕g5 f6 17.♕f4?! ♘b3 18.♖b1 ♕d5 19.♕xf6? ♕c4 with mate to follow.

14...♕d7! 15.a4

15.f3 ♖ae8 16.♕f4 ♕b5 17.♔f2 ♕e2† 18.♔g3 ♖e6 wins for Black.

15...♖fe8 16.♕c2 ♕g4–+

White's position is collapsing.

I also considered:

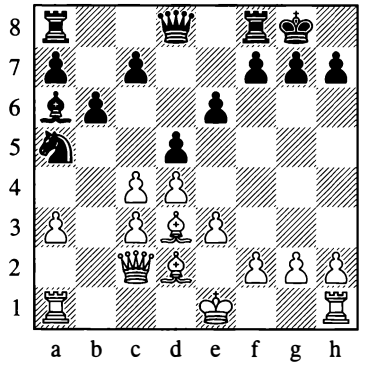
11.♘d2 ♘xd2!N

11...f5 12.cxd5 exd5 13.0–0 ♗b7 was equal in Granda Zuniga – Koneru, Zafra 2009. The text move is a significant improvement pointed out by Ramirez.

12.♗xd2

12.♗xh7†? ♔h8 13.♗xd2 f5 14.♗g6 ♕g5 is hopeless for White.

12...♗a6!



13.♗xh7†

Ramirez gives 13.cxd5 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 exd5∓. The text move may be a better try, but White is still in some trouble.

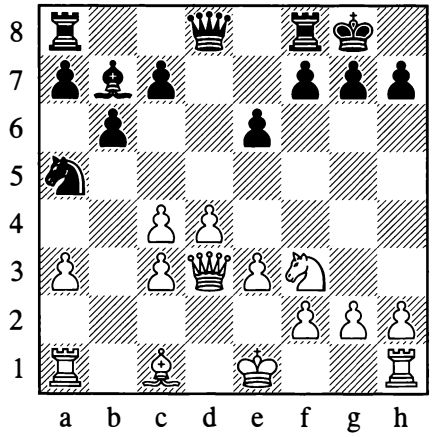
13...♔h8 14.♗d3

14.cxd5? f5 15.♗g6 ♕g5–+

14...♗xc4 15.0–0 f5∓

The light-squared bishops will soon disappear, leaving Black with the dominant minor piece.

11...dxe4 12.♕xe4 ♗b7 13.♕d3



13...♘b3!

Ramirez offers 13...♗a6 14.♘d2 (14.♘e5? f6∓) 14...c5 15.0–0 ♖c8 16.a4 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♘xc4 18.♗a3 ♖e8 (18...♘xa3?! 19.♕xa6=) 19.♖fc1 ♕d5 when the position is close to equal although Black has slightly more control.

The above line is perfectly decent in itself, but White is pretty solid in the ensuing position and should be able to hold on to equality. The text move poses more concrete problems.

14.♖b1 ♘c5!

This was the idea behind the last move, using the active minor pieces to exploit White's poor coordination.

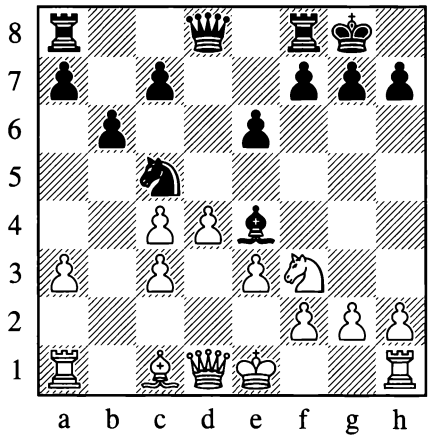
15.♕d1

The only move, keeping the b3-square under control.

15.♕c2? ♗e4 and 15.♕e2? ♗e4 16.♖a1 ♘b3 both lose material for White.

15...♗e4 16.♖a1

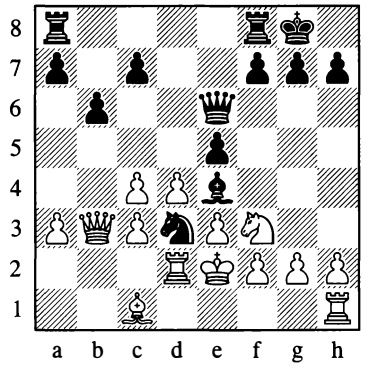
After 16.♖b5?! a6 White loses an exchange due to the forking possibility of ...♘d3†.



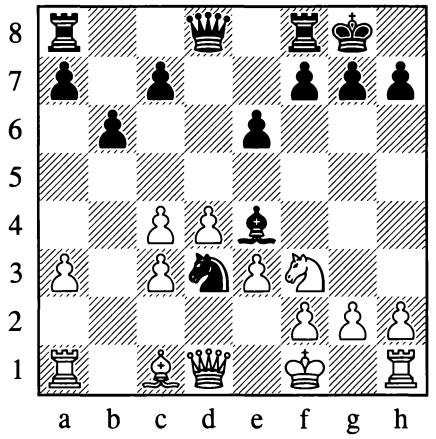
16...♘d3† 17.♔f1

17.♔e2 ♕f6 18.♖a2 e5! is also dangerous for White. For instance, after 19.♖d2 ♕e6

20.♕b3? Black can exploit White's lack of coordination with:



20...♕g4! 21.♖g1 ♕xg2!!–+



17...e5! 18.♖a2

18.♗d2 ♕f6 19.h4 ♕c6∓

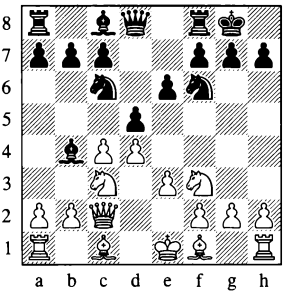
18...♘xc1 19.♕xc1 ♗d3†

Black wins back the pawn while keeping a clear advantage.

Conclusion

These sidelines don't look to be causing Black any problems. 6.a3 and 6.♘e5 are playable, but both moves are a little slow and neither is scary for Black. 6.♗g5 dxc4! transposes to the Vienna; White has several possibilities, but the general story is that Black gets to keep his extra pawn while White's compensation remains uncertain. We finished by checking a few sidelines after 6.e3 0–0, when both 7.h3 and 7.a3 fail to create any real problems, with Black taking over the initiative in many of the lines.

Chapter 9



6.e3 0–0 7.♕c2!?

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕a4† ♘c6 6.e3 0–0 7.♕c2!?

A) 7...dxc4 **191**
B) 7...♖e8!? **195**
C) 7...♗d6!? **197**
C1) 8.a3 **197**
C2) 8.h3 **198**
C3) 8.c5 **201**

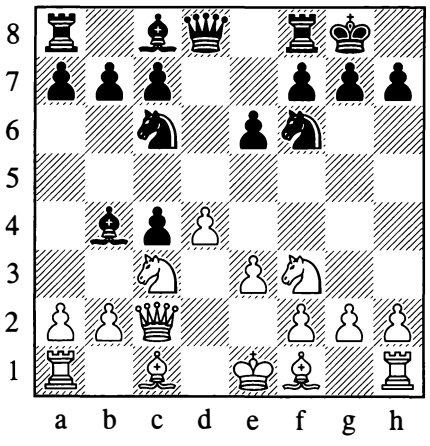
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕a4† ♘c6 6.e3 0–0 7.♕c2!?

This is essentially a waiting move: White improves his queen, which might otherwise have been targeted by ...a6/...b5 or ...♗d7 at some point, and waits for Black to take on c4 so that he can recapture with the bishop in one go. The queen move may not appear too threatening, but it has emerged as one of White's main attempts to get an edge against the Ragozin in recent years.

In this chapter I have taken the slightly unusual step of considering three main moves: **A) 7...dxc4**, **B) 7...♖e8!?** and **C) 7...♗d6!?**.

I am not a big fan of the first option; I believe it makes it too easy for White to complete development, and the first player keeps a nagging edge in all variations. However, I decided it was worth including it because the ...dxc4 structure can easily arise after one of Black's other options. If you are familiar with some of the main ideas and variations after the immediate 7...dxc4, you will be better able to appreciate why Black is getting an improved version in some of the later variations.

A) 7...dxc4



This has been Black's most popular choice, as well as the recommendation of Ramirez in his Ragozin DVD. When Black plays this way, he is essentially admitting that he is unable to find a better waiting move.

8.♗xc4 ♗d6

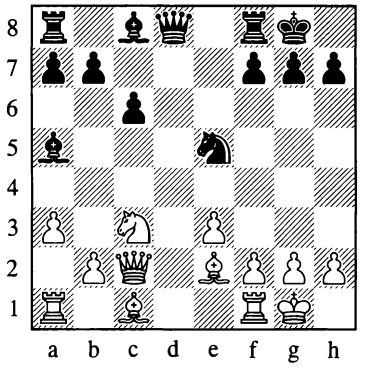
Black can also look to free his position immediately with:

8...e5

Max Illingworth previously recommended this move but now believes White can get an edge. I will include a shortened version of his ChessPublishing annotations.

9.dxe5 ♘g4 10.0–0 ♘cxe5 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♗e2 c6 13.a3 ♗a5

13...♗d6?! allows 14.f4! ♘g4 15.h3 and White mobilizes his e-and f-pawns.



14.♗d2

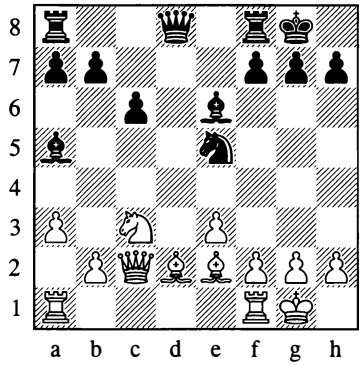
14.f4?! ♘g4 15.h3 ♘f6 is not so effective here, as e3-e4 allows ...♕d4†.

14...♗e6

Max mentions two other options:

14...♗f5 is well met by: 15.e4! ♗g4 (15...♗e6 16.♖ad1 ♖e8 17.b4 ♗b6 18.♘a4! is becoming unpleasant for Black) 16.♖ad1 ♗xe2 17.♘xe2 ♗xd2 18.♖xd2 ♕e7 19.♘d4± With f2-f4 to come.

14...♗g4!? 15.f3 ♗e6 16.♖ad1 ♕e7 17.♘d5! cxd5 18.♗xa5 ♖fc8 19.♗c3 ♘c4 20.♕d3± White's bishops give him the upper hand.



15.♖ad1 ♕e7 16.♘e4

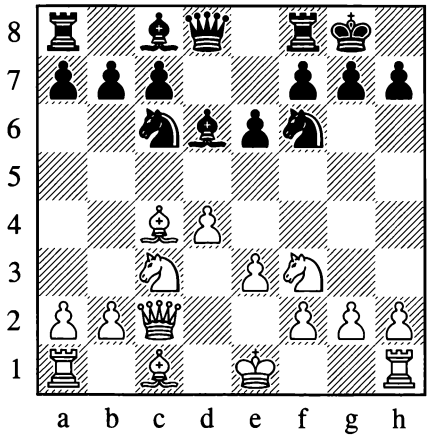
16.♘d5?! ♗xd5 17.♗xa5 ♕e6 is promising for Black, who will soon play ...b6 and ...c5.

16...♗xd2 17.♖xd2 ♖ad8 18.♖fd1 ♗d5 19.♘g3 g6 20.e4 ♗e6 21.f4 ♘g4 22.♕c3 ♖xd2 23.♖xd2 ♖d8

Apparently this was all played in a centaur game. Max concludes his excellent analysis of this line with:

24.b4 ♘f6 25.♖xd8† ♕xd8 26.h3±

I agree that Black will have to suffer to make a draw.



9.0–0

I don't see any special reason to delay this move. For example:

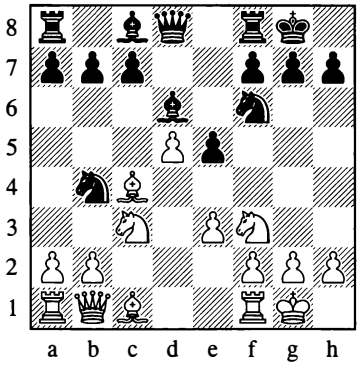
9.♘b5 is a typical idea which we will encounter in the next chapter, when Black generally retreats the bishop to e7 before chasing the knight away. Here things are a little different: White has already spent a tempo putting his queen on c2, so it makes sense for Black to continue 9...a6!?N 10.♘xd6 cxd6, followed by ...♗d7 and ...♖c8, with equal chances.

9.a3 has been played a few times but is less threatening than castling. We reach this position later via a different move order in variation C1 on page 197.

9...e5 10.h3!

Max mentions that 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♗xe5 is fine for Black, as 12.f4 can be met by 12...♗xc3! 13.♕xc3 ♖e8 with ...♘e4 to come.

10.d5?! is a mistake, as Black can take advantage of the position of the white queen: 10...♘b4! 11.♕b1



11...e4! 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♕xe4 ♖e8 14.♕b1 ♗g4 Black has good attacking chances for the pawn, as Illingworth points out.

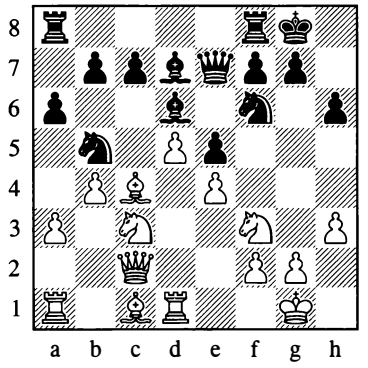
10...♗d7!

Max approves of this move, and Ramirez recommends it too.

10...exd4 11.exd4 has been played a few times, but Black is struggling to equalize.

10...a6!? is a sensible alternative. My analysis continues: 11.a3 ♗d7 12.♖d1 h6 13.b4 ♕e7

14.d5 ♘a7 15.e4 ♘b5!?N (15...♘c8 16.♗e3± Mamedyarov – Hou Yifan, Wijk aan Zee 2016) Trying to exchange the bad knight is a logical improvement, but White keeps an edge as follows:

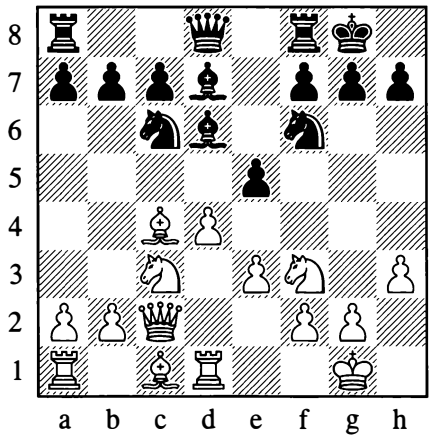


16.♘e2! Surely the right answer, avoiding exchanges. 16...♖ac8 17.a4 c6! Black's last move hopes for 18.axb5? cxb5∓, but 18.♕d3!± keeps an edge for White.

11.♖d1!

A nice waiting move, lining up with the black queen.

Max provides some analysis showing that 11.a3 ♕c8! is okay for Black. I won't include all the details; suffice it to say that the ...♗xh3 sacrifice is in the air, rather like in the note to move 14 below, except that in this version the a2-a3 move is not so useful for White.



11...♕c8

This has been tested in a couple of high-level games and it seems like Black's best bet, setting up ...♗xh3 ideas.

11...♕e7 is given by Ramirez but I'm not convinced after 12.a3!. My main line continues 12...a6 13.♗a2 ♖ad8 14.♗b1 g6 15.d5 ♘a7 16.e4 ♘b5 17.♘xb5 axb5 18.♗g5± and Black still has to work to untangle himself.

12.dxe5

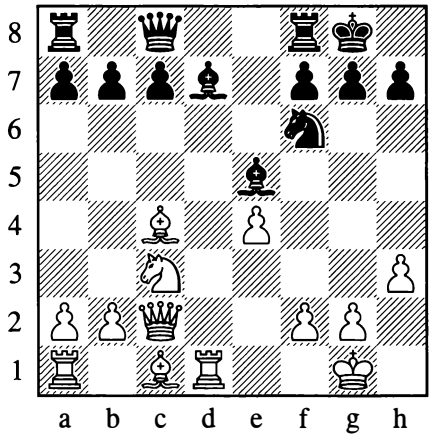
12.d5N ♘b4 13.♕e2 e4 14.♘d4 leads to unclear play after any of 14...a5!?, 14...c5!? or 14...♕e8!?.

12...♘xe5 13.♘xe5

Illingworth shows that 13.♗e2 is okay for Black after 13...♗f5 (but not 13...♗xh3? 14.gxh3 ♕xh3 15.♘g5 ♕h4 16.♕f5±) 14.e4 ♘xf3† 15.♗xf3 ♗g6 16.♘b5 ♗e5, with equal chances.

13...♗xe5 14.e4!

White begins to expand in the centre – which he has to do, if he is to fight for the advantage.



14...♗e6N

Offering a bishop trade seems sensible.

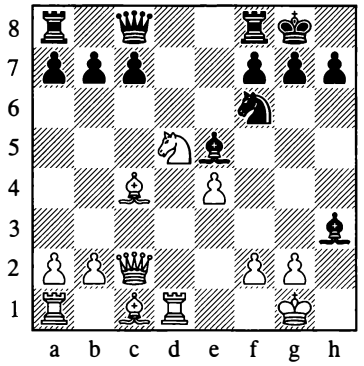
14...♗xh3?

This is a typical theme after ...♕c8 but it doesn't work here.

15.♘d5!N

Strongest, although 15.gxh3 ♕xh3 16.f3 also leads to an edge: 16...♕xf3 17.♕g2 ♕xg2† 18.♔xg2 ♖fe8 19.♔f3 ♗xc3 20.bxc3 ♖xe4 21.♗d3 ♖e6 22.♗f4± White's powerful bishops were more important than Black's many pawns in Swiercz – Moiseenko, Germany 2014.

Max points out the text move is best. I found no fault in his analysis, so I have included it below.



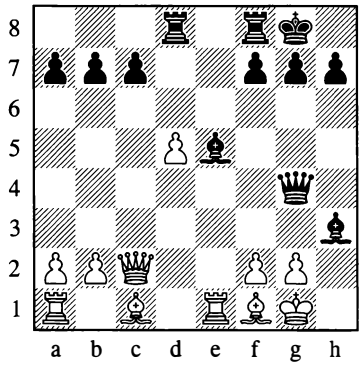
15...♕g4

15...♘xd5 16.♖xd5 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♕g4† 18.♔f1 ♖ae8 19.♗e3 c6 20.♖c5 ♕h4 21.♔e2 ♕g4† 22.♔e1 ♗d6 23.♖g5 ♕h4 24.♔e2± is also well and truly in White's favour.

16.♗f1

White is a pawn down but Black's queen and bishop are tied up.

16...♖ad8 17.♖e1! ♘xd5 18.exd5



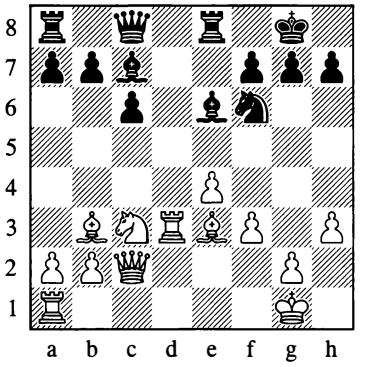
18...♖xd5

18...♖fe8 19.♖e3 picks up the bishop.

19.♕b3 ♗xg2 20.♗xg2 c6 21.♕h3±

A bishop is clearly worth more than three pawns here.

14...♖e8 is a slower approach, which was played in a recent high-level game. 15.f3 c6 16.♗e3 ♗e6 17.♗b3 ♗c7 18.♖d3 White maintains a small plus with the extra central pawn and control over the open file.



18...♗b6 19.♗xb6 axb6 20.♗xe6 ♕xe6 21.♖ad1 b5 22.a3 ♕e7 23.♕d2± White maintained an edge although Black went on to hold a draw in Wang Yue – Bu Xiangzhi, Danzhou 2016.

15.♗e2!?

This looks slightly odd but the idea is to play f2-f4 and then put the bishop on the ideal f3-square.

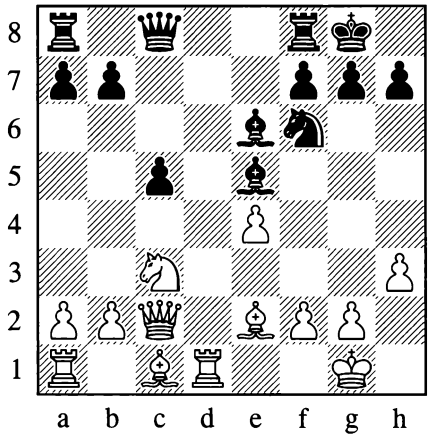
15.♗xe6 ♕xe6 16.f3 ♖fd8= is too simplistic to yield any advantage.

In the event of 15.♗b3, attempting a similar approach to Wang Yue in the above game, Black can play actively with: 15...c5! Intending ...c4. 16.♗xe6 ♕xe6 17.f3 ♖ad8= With a comfortable game.

Illingworth focuses on the more obvious retreat: 15.♗f1 c5 16.♘e2 ♕c6 17.f3

(17.f4?! ♗c7 18.♘c3 c4! Gives Black a lot of activity) 17...b5 (17...♖ad8 18.♗e3 b6 19.f4 ♗c7 20.♘c3±) 18.♗e3 ♖ac8 19.♖ac1 ♕b7 Max evaluates this as dynamically balanced but I still slightly prefer White; one good plan is ♘f4xe6, hoping to make use of the bishop pair.

15...c5!?



16.f4!

This bold approach looks best.

16.♗e3 covers the d4-square, but White's bishop provides a target for the black queen after a future sacrifice on h3. For instance: 16...b6 17.f4 ♗xc3 18.bxc3 ♗xh3! 19.gxh3 ♕xh3 20.♗f2 ♘g4 21.♗xg4 ♕xg4†= Black will either force a perpetual or pick up at least a third pawn for the bishop.

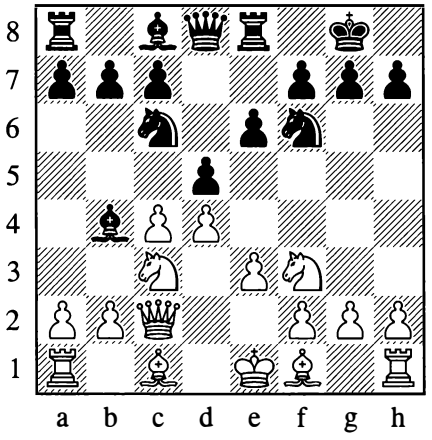
16...♗d4† 17.♔h2 ♖d8 18.♗f3±

White will follow up with ♘b5 or ♘e2 to remove the bishop on d4, and will maintain an edge with the bishop pair and modest space advantage. Black can certainly play this position but he remains slightly worse.

Now that we have familiarized ourselves with some of the lines arising after 7...dxc4, we will move on to what I believe to be two more interesting options. Personally I see 7.♕c2 as a waiting move, improving the white queen and just waiting for ...dxc4 to be played, after which White can recapture with ♗xc4 in one go and then complete his development. Even though Black is close to equality in some of the lines above, I find it a bit too compliant just to take on c4 and allow White to develop smoothly. Therefore I suggest playing a waiting move of our own; if White ever moves his bishop from f1, that will surely signal that the time has come to exchange on c4.

There are two such waiting moves that I would like to show you. The first is:

B) 7...♖e8!?



Definitely a useful move, supporting a future ...e5 break and giving the bishop a possible retreat square on f8 – although it will often go to d6 all the same. Several elite GMs have tried this move, including Kramnik, Aronian and Carlsen – who chose it in the summer of 2016 against his future World Championship opponent!

8.♗d2

Other moves have been tried, but I will focus on the most logical developer.

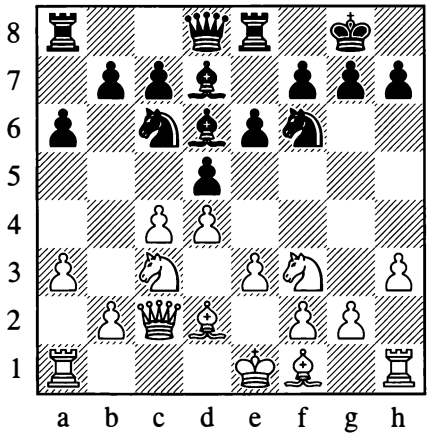
8...a6

8...♗f8!? 9.a3 e5 was another reasonable approach in Nakamura – Kramnik, London 2009.

9.a3 ♗d6 10.h3 ♗d7!?

10...h6 was the continuation of Nakamura – Aronian, Moscow 2016.

The text move was Carlsen's novelty, continuing the battle for the ...dxc4 tempo.



11.cxd5

Karjakin opts for a fixed central structure.

11.♖d1!?N

This is an obvious alternative, continuing to wait for Black to take on c4. I presume that Carlsen's idea was:

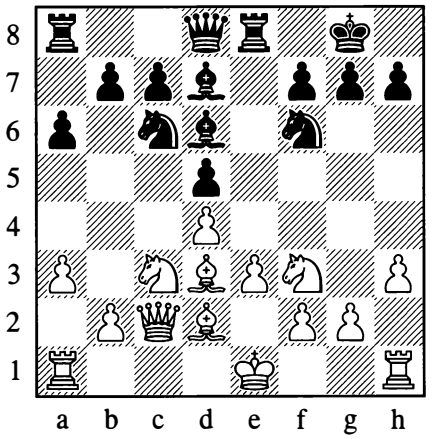
11...e5!? 12.cxd5

12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♖xe5 14.cxd5 c6!? (14...♘xd5=) 15.dxc6 (15.♗d3 cxd5=) 15...♗xc6⩲ offers Black great compensation.

12...exd4 13.dxc6 dxc3 14.cxd7 cxd2† 15.♘xd2 ♕xd7

The position is about equal.

11...exd5 12.♗d3



12...♘a7!

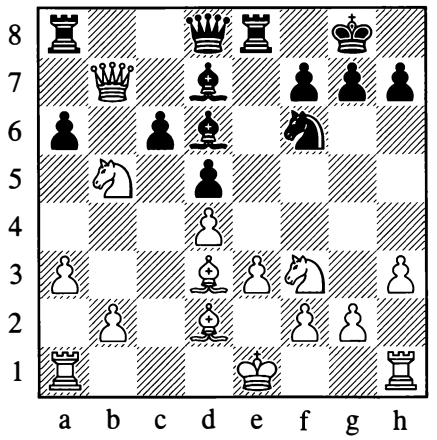
The knight is heading for b5. Already, it is clear that Black has no problems.

13.♕b3 c6 14.♕xb7?

White tries to play critically but this is not the solution.

14...♘b5 15.♘xb5

And here Black should have played:



15...cxb5!N∓

15...axb5?! let White off the hook and the game soon ended in a draw: 16.♘e5 ♖b8 17.♕a6 ♖a8 18.♕b7 ♖b8 19.♕a6 ♖a8 ½–½ Karjakin – Carlsen, Bilbao 2016.

The text move enables Black to catch the queen, for instance:

16.♘e5?! ♖e7 17.♘c6?! ♗xc6 18.♕xc6 ♖c7 19.♕b6 ♖c1†–+

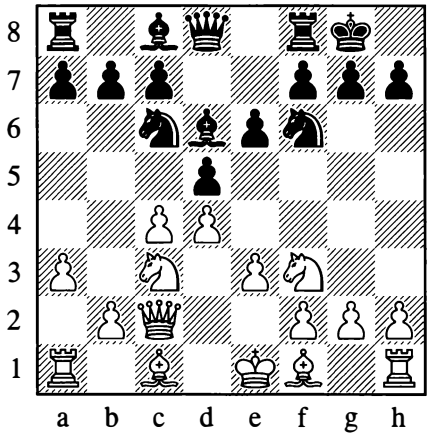
C) 7...♗d6!?

This is a very provocative move and perhaps not to everyone's taste. However, I have some fresh ideas in this line, making it my top pick. Once again though, even if you intend to follow this recommendation of mine, let me remind you that it is worth playing through variation A with 7...dxc4, as this will help you to understand when to exchange and when not to exchange on c4 in the present variation.

White's most important options are **C1) 8.a3**, **C2) 8.h3** and **C3) 8.c5**.

8.♗d3?! (or 8.♗e2?!) 8...dxc4 9.♗xc4 simply gives Black an improved version of variation A, as he is a whole tempo up.

C1) 8.a3

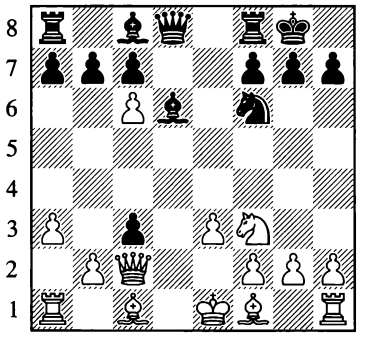


8...dxc4!

This seems like the best solution, as White has played a2-a3 a bit prematurely.

8...b6?! was recently chosen by Wojtaszek against Mamedyarov. However, White can win a pawn with: 9.cxd5!N (The game continued 9.h3 ♘e7; we will cover this via the 8.h3 move order in variation C2 below) 9...exd5 10.♘xd5 ♘xd5 11.♕xc6 ♗f5 12.♗e2 ♗e4 13.0–0 ♖e8± Black has some compensation, but I don't think it's quite enough.

8...e5!? is an interesting idea which could be explored further. For instance: 9.cxd5 (9.dxe5 ♘xe5 10.cxd5 ♖e8 11.♗e2 ♘xf3† 12.♗xf3 ♕e7 13.0–0 ♕e5 14.g3 ♗f5 offers Black reasonable compensation) 9...exd4 10.dxc6 dxc3



11.♕xc3 (11.♗d3 bxc6 12.♕xc3 ♗e6 13.0–0 ♗d5 14.♘d4 ♖e8 is given as unclear by Illingworth) 11...bxc6 12.b3 ♗e6 13.♗b2 ♖b8 14.♗c4 ♗d5 15.♕c2 ♘e4 16.0–0 Illingworth evaluated this as slightly better for White, but after 16...♖b6 it seems to me that Black has enough activity to compensate for the dodgy pawn structure.

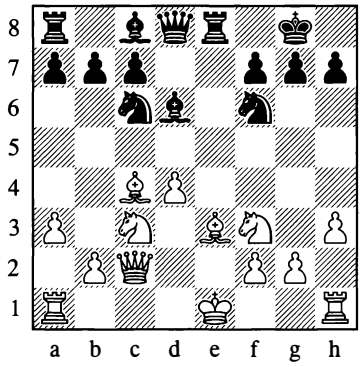
9.♗xc4

We have transposed to a position that might be reached via 7...dxc4 8.♗xc4 ♗d6 9.a3, instead of the more accurate 9.0–0.

9...e5 10.d5

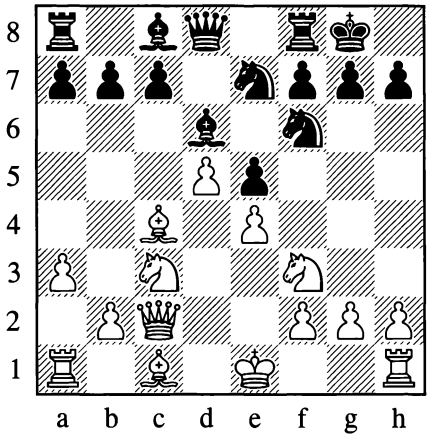
10.h3 looks weird but has been played a few times. 10...exd4 (10...♗d7!? occurred in Nakamura – So, Paris [rapid] 2016; this also seems decent for Black, as he gets a nice version of the main line of variation A) 11.exd4 ♖e8†

12.♗e3 In Hribersek – Radivojevic, corr. 1961, a good continuation would have been:



12...♗e6!?N 13.♗xe6 ♖xe6 14.d5 (14.0–0 ♖e8=) 14...♖xe3† 15.fxe3 ♘xd5 16.♘xd5 ♗g3† 17.♔e2 ♕xd5∞ With a pawn and the initiative for the exchange.

10...♘e7 11.e4



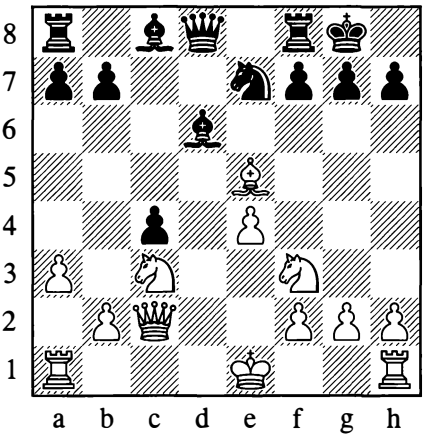
11...c6!?

11...a6 12.0–0 ♘g6 13.g3 h6 14.♖e1 ♗h3∞ is another possible direction, which was seen in Figura – Meister, Germany 2013.

12.♗g5

12.dxc6 ♘xc6 13.♗e3 ♗g4 14.♖d1 ♘d4 15.♗xd4 exd4 16.♖xd4 ♗xf3 17.gxf3 ♕e7↑ looks promising for Black.

12...cxd5 13.♗xf6 dxc4 14.♗xe5



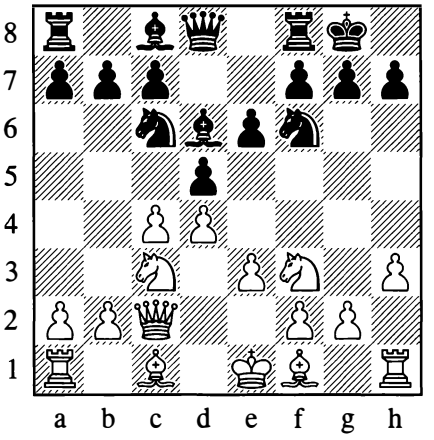
14...♗xe5!N

A decent improvement over 14...♘c6?! 15.♗g3 ♗xg3 16.hxg3 ♗g4 17.♖d1±, as in Michalik – Saric, Jerusalem 2015.

15.♘xe5 ♕c7∞

With a double-edged game.

C2) 8.h3

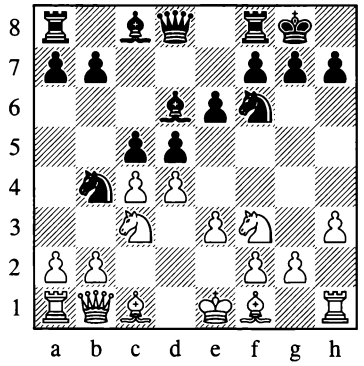


8...b6!?N

I have 'borrowed' this idea of Wojtaszek from his game against Mamedyarov, applying it in a way that cuts out White's chance to win a pawn.

8...dxc4 9.♗xc4 e5 was Hou Yifan's choice, when 10.0–0 leads back to variation A, which I prefer to avoid.

8...♘b4!?N is another interesting move which has the potential to cause White some problems. 9.♕b1 (9.♕b3 can be met by 9...b6 intending ...c5, and after 10.a3 dxc4 11.♗xc4 ♘bd5 12.0–0 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♗b7 14.♗d3 c5∓ I like Black's chances) 9...c5

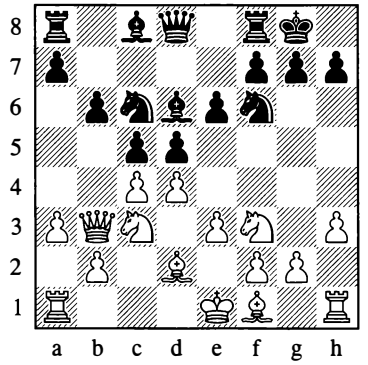


10.dxc5 ♗xc5 11.a3 ♘c6 12.cxd5 exd5 13.♗d3 d4!∞ Black has no cause for complaints.

9.a3

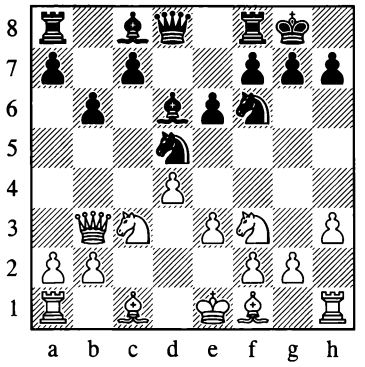
I will take this as the main line, as it continues White's waiting strategy and transposes to Mamedyarov – Wojtaszek.

9.♗d2 is conveniently met by 9...♘b4 10.♕b3 c5 11.a3 ♘c6 with good prospects for Black, for instance:

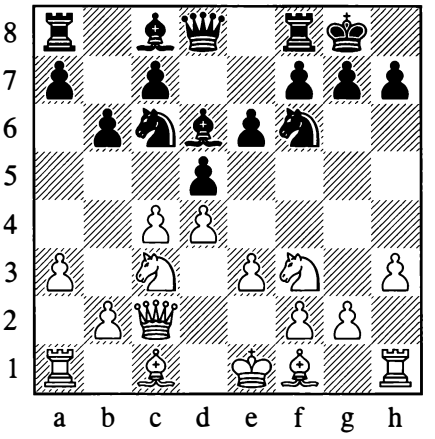


12.cxd5 exd5 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♘xd5 ♖b8↑

9.cxd5 does not win a pawn here because of 9...♘b4, when play may continue: 10.♕b3 ♘bxd5



11.♗d3 ♗b7 12.0–0 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 c5∓ It seems to me that White already has to think about how to equalize.



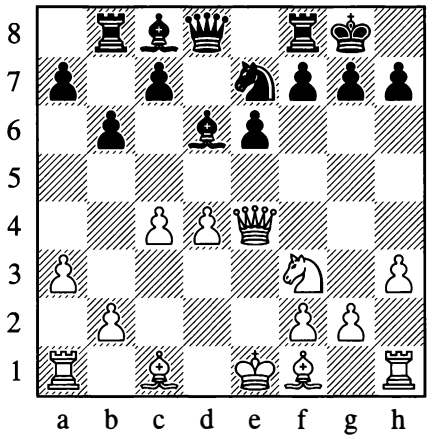
9...♘e7

This flexible move prepares ...c5 while keeping a few options open for the c8-bishop.

10.e4!?

Mamedyarov goes for the most ambitious continuation but I can't help feeling that White is making too many pawn moves.

10...dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♕xe4 ♖b8

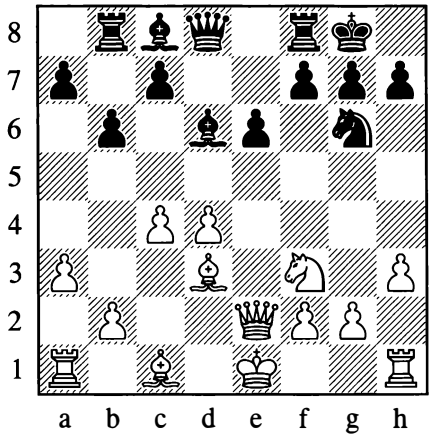


13.♗d3 ♘g6

13...♘f5!?N is also interesting and may transpose.

14.♕e2

Here the most accurate continuation would have been:



14...♘h4!N

I prefer the idea of eliminating the f3-knight before playing ...f5, so that it won't be able to jump to e5.

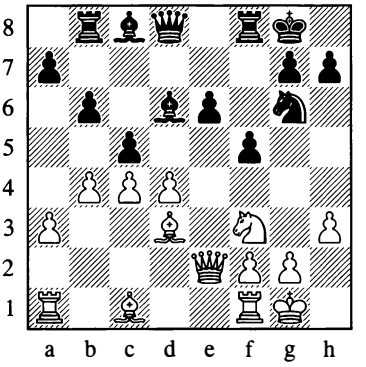
The game continued:

14...f5 15.0–0 c5

15...♘h4 is not so effective here as 16.♘g5!± hits the e6-pawn.

16.b4?!

16.♖d1!N would have kept things unclear. The text move gave Black a nice opportunity.



16...cxd4!N

16...h6? 17.♖b1± was good for White in Mamedyarov – Wojtaszek, Huaian 2016.

17.♘xd4 ♕f6 18.♘c6

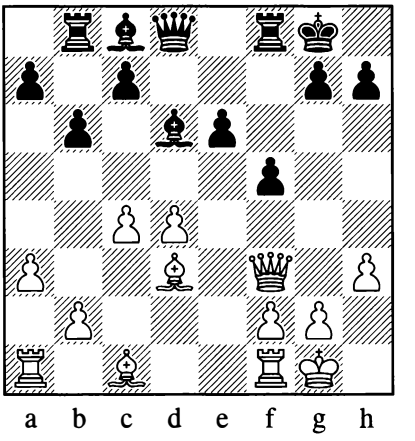
Otherwise ...♗e5 comes.

18...♕xa1 19.♗b2 ♕a2 20.♕c2 ♘e5 21.♘xb8 ♗xb8 22.♖a1 ♕xb2 23.♕xb2 ♘xd3∓

With three minor pieces for the queen, Black is for choice.

15.0–0 ♘xf3† 16.♕xf3 f5

16...c5!? could also be investigated.



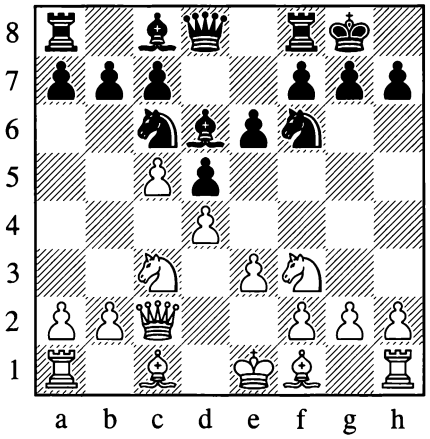
17.♗f4 ♗b7 18.♕e3

18.♕g3?! ♖f6 only helps Black.

18...♗xf4 19.♕xf4 c5∞

This all seems fine for Black, and 8...♘b4!?N is perhaps even more straightforward, so take your pick as to which option you prefer.

C3) 8.c5

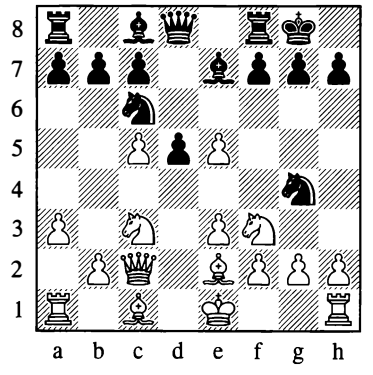


This seems to be the critical test, gaining space and forcing the bishop to go back.

8...♗e7 9.♗b5

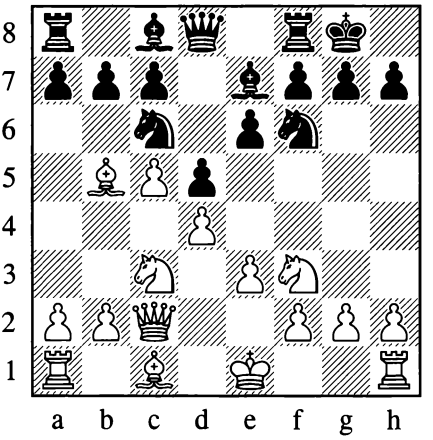
9.h3?! allows Black to carry out his positional threat: 9...b6! The same idea works well against just about any neutral move by White. 10.a3 bxc5 11.dxc5 a5∓ Dworakowska – Atalik, Plovdiv 2008.

9.a3 prepares to support White's pawn chain with b2-b4, but allows Black to play in the centre instead: 9...e5! 10.dxe5 ♘g4 11.♗e2



11...♘cxe5!N This simple improvement looks fine for Black. (11...♗xc5?! 12.0–0 ♘cxe5 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.♖d1 ♗d6 15.♘xd5± was not so pleasant in Cramling – Hagen, Stockholm 2016) 12.♘xe5 ♘xe5 13.0–0 c6 14.b4 (14.♖d1 can be met by either 14...♕c7= or 14...f5!?, stopping e3-e4) 14...♗f6 Black is doing well.

The text move has been White's most popular choice. Surprisingly, I was able to find a completely new idea for Black.



9...♘b4!?N

A few other options have been tried. 9...♗d7 10.a3 a6 11.♗d3 a5 12.♖b1 occurred in Ivanchuk – Alekseev, Riga 2014, while 9...♘b8 10.a3 b6 11.b4 a5 12.♖b1 c6 13.♗d3 was Bacrot – Aronian, Baden-Baden 2015. There is nothing terribly wrong with either of those options, but my new idea is more active and challenging for White.

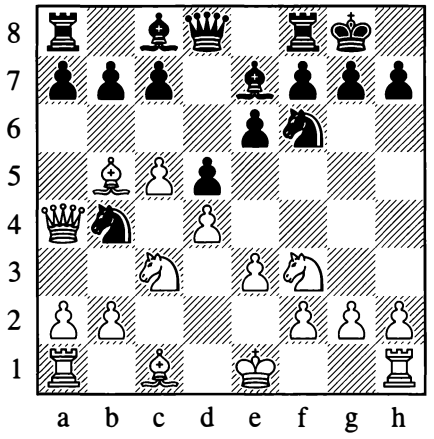
10.♕a4

This looks critical, as it challenges the knight while keeping b2-b4 available. I checked two other options:

10.♕b3 a6 11.♗e2 (11.♗a4? ♘d3†∓; 11.♕xb4 is covered in the note to White's next move in the main line below) 11...♘c6 12.0–0 b6!

13.cxb6 cxb6 14.♗d2 ♘a5 and White has nothing to show from the opening.

10.♕b1 a6 11.♗e2 (11.♗a4 ♗d7 12.♗xd7 ♘xd7 13.0–0 ♘c6 with ...f5, ...g5 and kingside pressure to come) 11...b6 12.a3 ♘c6 13.b4 bxc5 14.bxc5 e5 With good prospects for Black.



10...a6!

The key point, without which Black's last move would make no sense.

11.0–0!?

This bold move may be White's best. His other options are:

11.a3? axb5 12.♕xa8?? loses to 12...♘c2†.

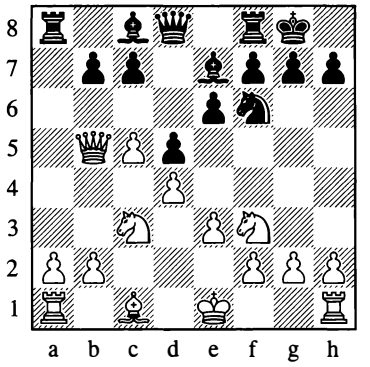
11.♗e2 ♘c6 12.0–0 ♗d7 13.♕c2 b6= Black breaks up White's pawn chain, along with any thoughts of an opening advantage.

11.♕xb4

White grabs a pawn but it doesn't come for free.

11...axb5 12.♕xb5

12.♘xb5? b6 13.0–0 bxc5 14.dxc5 ♘e4–+ and White is already busted.



12...b6!

Suddenly ...♗a6 is on the cards and White's king is going to get stuck in the centre.

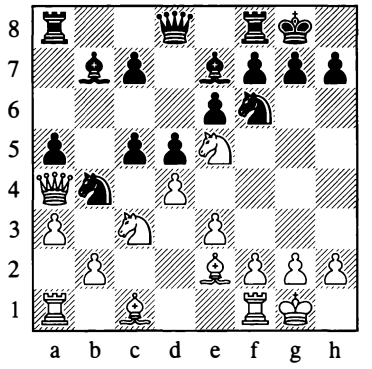
13.cxb6 ♗a6 14.♕b3 cxb6→

11...b6

11...♖b8!? 12.♗e2 ♘c6 is another idea, which might be followed up by ...♘e4 and f5.

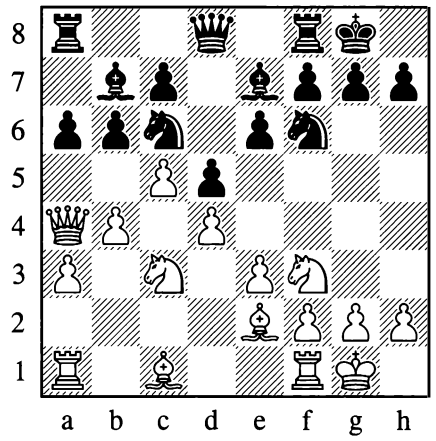
12.a3

12.♘e5 ♗b7 13.♗e2 bxc5 14.a3 a5! is a nice idea, a possible continuation being:



15.dxc5 ♗xc5 16.♕b5 ♘c2 17.♖b1 ♗b6∞ With ...d4 to come.

12...♗b7 13.♗e2 ♘c6 14.b4



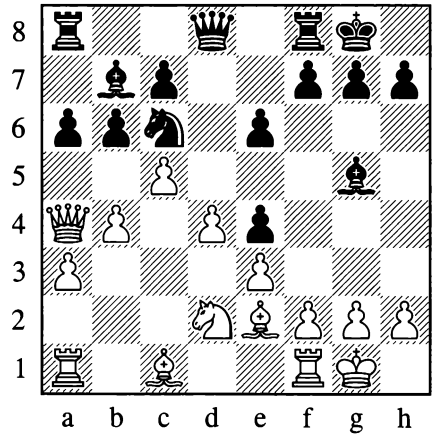
14...♘e4 15.♘xe4

15.♗b2 f5∞

15...dxe4 16.♘d2 ♗g5

16...f5?! does not work so well here: 17.♕b3 ♖f6 18.f3±

16...b5 17.♕b3 (17.♕c2 f5) 17...♕d5 is another way to keep the game roughly balanced.



17.♕c2

17.♘xe4?! ♘xd4∓

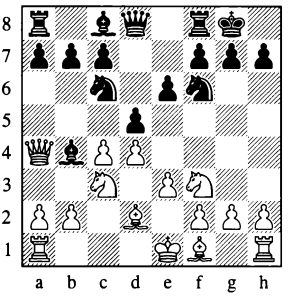
17...f5 18.♗c4 ♕d7 19.♕a2 ♖ae8∞

The position is complicated, with roughly equal chances.

Conclusion

7...dxc4 is a useful line to study as background information, but I suggest one of the other two lines to play over the board. 7...♖e8 looks like it has some legs, and it will be interesting to see if anyone else follows Carlsen's example. 7...♗d6 is my own favourite; it's a matter of taste, but personally I can't wait to give 9...♘b4!?N a whirl!

Chapter 10



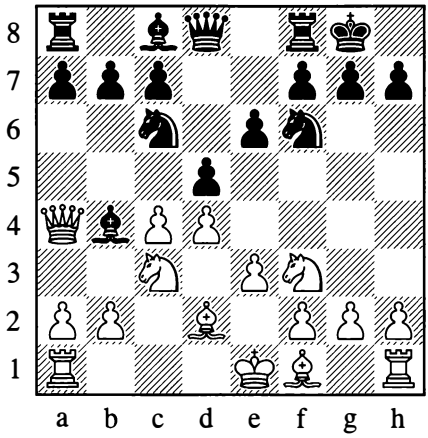
7.♗d2

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4
5.♕a4† ♘c6 6.e3 0–0 7.♗d2 dxc4 8.♗xc4 ♗d6

A) 9.h3?! 205
B) 9.0–0 e5!? 10.d5 ♘e7 207
B1) 11.e4 207
B2) 11.♕c2 208
C) 9.♕c2 e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♗xe5 210
C1) 12.♗d3 211
C2) 12.f4 212
D) 9.♘b5 ♗e7 213
D1) 10.♕c2 213
D2) 10.0–0 a6 11.♘c3 ♗d6 215
D21) 12.♖fe1 216
D22) 12.♖ad1 217
D23) 12.♕c2 219
D231) 12...e5 219
D232) 12...b5!? 221

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕a4† ♘c6 6.e3 0–0 7.♗d2

This has been the most popular move, and it remains a topical choice at the highest level.



7...dxc4

In the previous chapter I preferred to postpone this exchange in favour of a waiting move – so what's changed? Let me start by saying that waiting moves such as 7...a6 and 7...♖e8 are playable here too, and many strong players have tested these and other options. However, I find the text move an appealing choice because, compared with the previous chapter, White's ♗d2 move is less useful than ♕c2 in the ensuing structure. White's queen is not well placed on a4 and will often have to retreat to c2 anyway at some point, whereas the bishop may not be optimally placed on d2. For example, see variation A of the previous chapter, where White's rook makes use of the open d-file while the bishop stays on c1, with the possibility of moving to a more active square following e3-e4.

8.♗xc4 ♗d6

For a while I was unsure whether to recommend this immediate retreat or 8...a6 followed by ...♗d6, as the two lines often transpose – especially after 9.♘b5 ♗e7, when Black generally follows up with ...a6 and, after the knight retreats, ...♗d6. Eventually I decided the text move is slightly more accurate, as there are some non-♘b5 variations where Black has the useful option of doing without ...a6 and aiming for fast counterplay with ...e5.

We will analyse four options: **A) 9.h3?!**, **B) 9.0–0**, **C) 9.♕c2** and **D) 9.♘b5**.

A) 9.h3?!

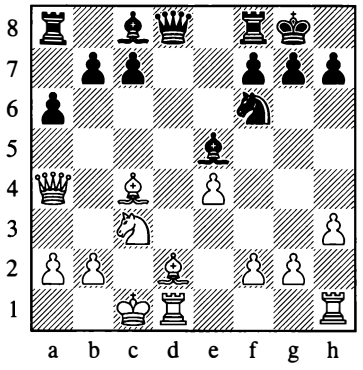
This has been tried by some strong players; White's idea is to play flexibly and keep the option of castling on either side, but I don't think this justifies the loss of time.

9...a6

Black makes a useful move and prepares ...e5, and possibly ...b5 depending on circumstances.

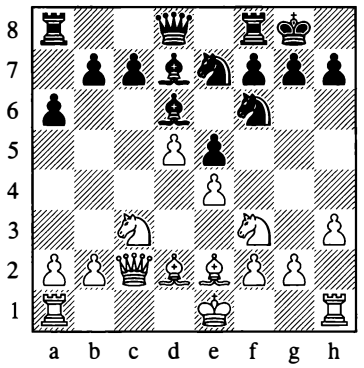
10.0–0

10.e4 should be met by 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♗xe5 13.0–0–0 and now the improvement:



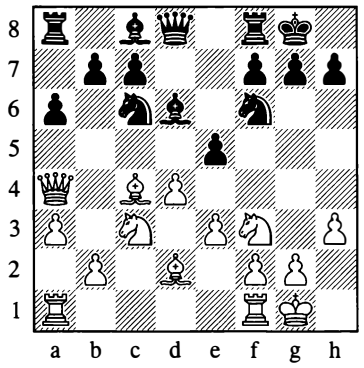
13...c5!N (13...♗d7? 14.♕c2± vindicated White's opening play in Gagunashvili – Grandadam, Zürich 2010) 14.f4 ♗d4 15.♔b1 b5! 16.♗xb5 axb5 17.♕xa8 ♕b6→ With a serious initiative for the sacrificed exchange.

10.♗e2 can be met by the typical sequence: 10...e5 11.d5 ♘e7 12.e4 ♗d7 13.♕c2



13...c6! The standard pawn break in this structure. 14.dxc6 ♗xc6 15.♗g5 ♘g6 16.♖d1 h6 17.♗e3 ♕e7∓ Dobrov – Yemelin, Serpukhov 2007.

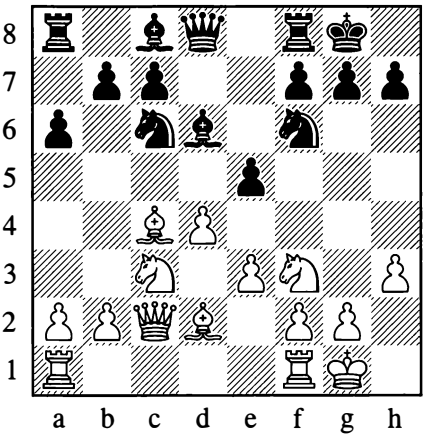
10.a3 e5 11.0–0 was tried against me in a blitz game, when I missed a strong idea:



11...♗xh3!N Protecting the rook on a8 and thus preparing ...b5. (11...exd4 12.exd4 ♗f5= is perfectly acceptable for Black; but 11...e4? proved to be a mistake after 12.♘g5± in Mrserious – Antidrome, Internet 2016) 12.gxh3 exd4 13.exd4 b5 14.♘xb5 axb5 15.♕xb5 ♕d7→

10...e5 11.♕c2

Avoiding any possibility of the ...♗xh3/... b5 trick. However, White has ended up in the kind of situation I described in the note to move 7: a harmless (at best) version of variation A of the previous chapter, where his queen has been forced back anyway, and the ♗d2 and h2-h3 moves do little to threaten Black.



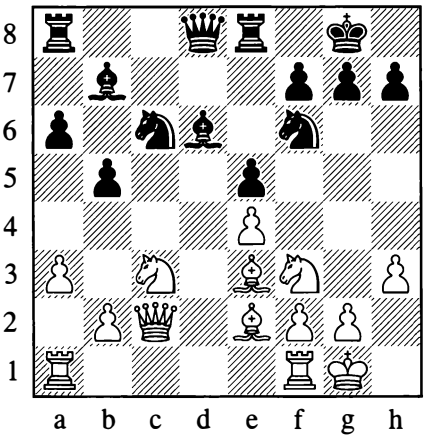
11...b5 12.♗e2 ♗b7 13.a3 ♖e8 14.d5

This may not be best, but White is struggling to maintain the balance in any case.

14...♘e7 15.e4 c6!

Obvious and thematic. I don't know what White was hoping for with his opening play, but this can't have been it!

16.dxc6 ♘xc6 17.♗e3



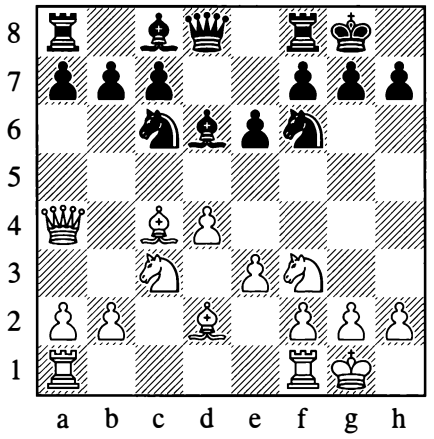
17...♘d4! 18.♘xd4 exd4 19.♗xd4 ♘xe4

The pawn structure is symmetrical but Black has a clear advantage in piece activity. The game continued:

20.♗f3 ♖c8 21.♖fe1 ♘xc3 22.♖xe8† ♕xe8 23.♗xc3 ♗xf3 24.gxf3 ♕e6 25.♖d1 ♖c5∓

Svidler – Giri, Tbilisi 2015.

B) 9.0–0



9...e5!?

9...a6 would transpose to the position after 11 moves in variation D2. There is nothing at all wrong with this, but it seems more principled to save time by omitting ...a6, thus attempting to exploit White's decision not to play 9.♘b5.

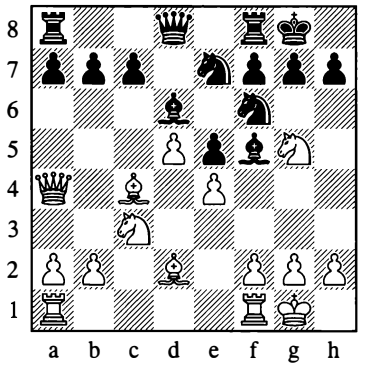
10.d5

This is not forced but it seems like the only really challenging idea for White.

10...♘e7

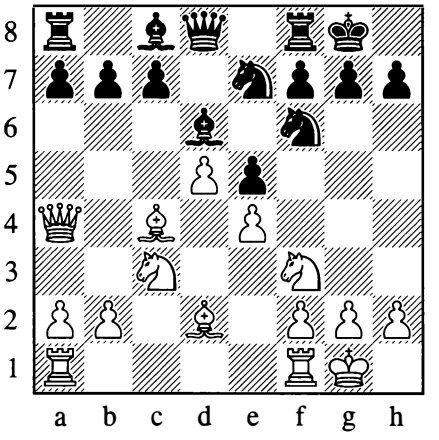
It is worth considering both **B1) 11.e4** and **B2) 11.♕c2**.

11.♘g5?! is well met by 11...♗f5!. Black deliberately provokes 12.e4 so that the knight will not have that square available (the same idea featured in the Nakamura – Mamedyarov game on page 11 in the Introduction). Here my choice would be:



12...♗g6!?N (12...♗d7 worked perfectly after 13.♕b3 ♖b8 14.f4? b5! 15.♗d3 exf4 16.♗xf4 ♘g6∓ in Kavutskiy – Yu Yangyi, Las Vegas 2014, but the improvement 14.a4 would have kept things roughly equal) 13.♖ae1 a6 14.♕c2 c6∓

B1) 11.e4



11...h6!?

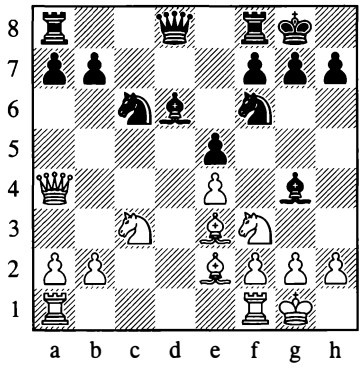
Black intends to strengthen his position and improve his pieces before playing ...c6.

A more direct way to challenge White's pawn centre is:

11...♗g4!? 12.♗e2 c6!

This also seems quite reliable.

13.dxc6 ♘xc6 14.♗e3



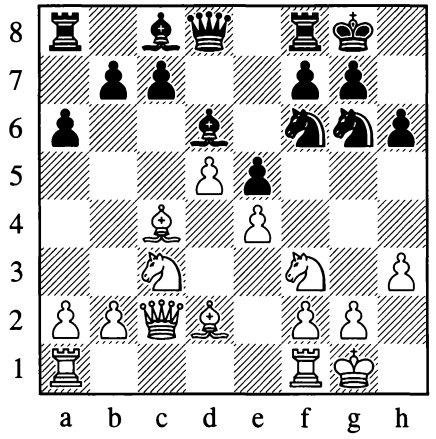
14...a6!N

14...♗xf3 15.♗xf3 ♘d4 16.♖fd1 ♗c5 17.♗xd4 exd4 left Black with an isolated pawn in one high-level game, although he found a way to sacrifice it for reasonable compensation: 18.♕b5 ♕e7 19.♘a4 ♗d6 20.♖xd4 ♕e5 21.♕xe5 ♗xe5 22.♖b4 b6± Black was able to hold the draw in Mamedyarov – Hammer, Bilbao 2014.

15.♖fd1 ♕e7

Black's position looks fine, for example: 16.♗g5 b5 17.♕b3 ♗xf3 18.♗xf3 ♘d4 19.♘d5 ♘xb3 20.♘xe7† ♗xe7 21.axb3 ♖fc8=

12.h3 a6 13.♕c2 ♘g6



14.♗e2?!

I think White should keep this bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal in anticipation of a future ...c6 break.

14.♖ac1N ♗d7 15.a3 b5 16.♗a2 would have been more ambitious. The ...c6 plan is obviously less attractive with the bishop on a2, so Black should instead go for kingside play with 16...♘h5, with mutual chances.

14...♕e7 15.♖fe1 ♗d7 16.♗e3 c6!

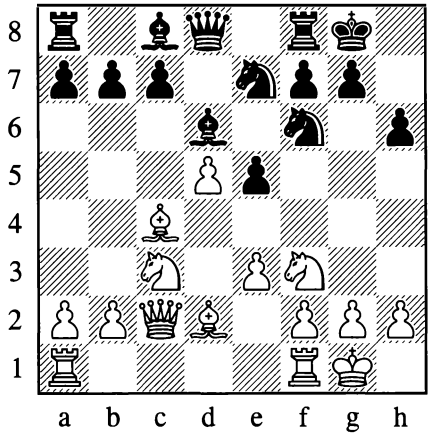
Once again, the standard pawn break works well.

17.dxc6 ♗xc6

With ...♖ac8 coming next, Black was fighting for more than equality in Ushenina – Koneru, Sharjah 2014.

B2) 11.♕c2 h6

11...a6 has also been played and is likely to come to the same thing.



12.h3 a6 13.a3 ♗f5!?

Black loses a tempo in order to lure White's e-pawn forwards.

13...b5!?

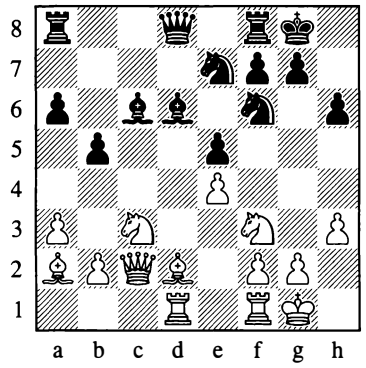
This move is slightly risky but it seems playable if followed up correctly.

14.♗a2 ♗b7 15.e4 c6

Black should hurry up and play this before White lands a rook on the d-file.

16.dxc6 ♗xc6 17.♖ad1

17.♖fd1 also seems reasonable, sticking the rooks on the open files. A sensible continuation is 17...♘g6 18.♗e3 ♕e7 19.♖ac1 ♖ac8 20.♕d2 ♖fd8 21.♘d5 ♘xd5 22.♗xd5 ♕b7 23.♗xc6 ♖xc6 24.♕d5 ♘e7 25.♕d3 ♗c7 and White has a tiny edge at most.



17...♘g6!N

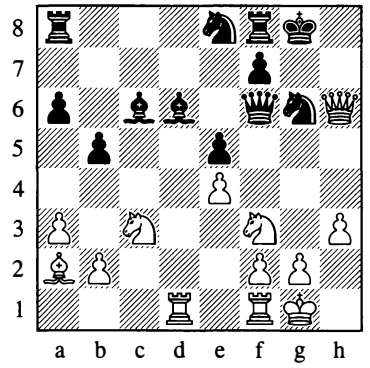
It is necessary for Black to improve on 17...♕c7, when 18.♗xh6! is a great shot. 18...♗xe4 (18...gxh6? 19.♕d2 ♗c5 20.♕xh6± was even harder for Black in Ki. Georgiev – Parligras, Skopje 2014) 19.♕d2 ♖ad8 20.♘xe4 ♘xe4 21.♕e3± Lupulescu – Vajda, Mamaia 2013.

The text move is a better solution, intending ...♕e7.

18.♗xh6!? gxh6 19.♕d2

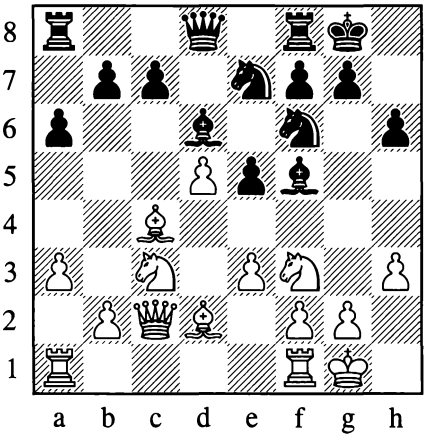
White can go for the sacrifice here too, but Black defends and maintains the balance after:

19...♘e8 20.♕xh6 ♕f6



21.♘h4!

Without this White would be in trouble. 21...♘xh4 22.♕xf6 ♘xf6 23.♖xd6 ♗xe4 24.♖xf6 ♗xg2 25.♖d1 ♔g7=



14.e4 ♗d7 15.♖fe1 ♘g6 16.♘d1

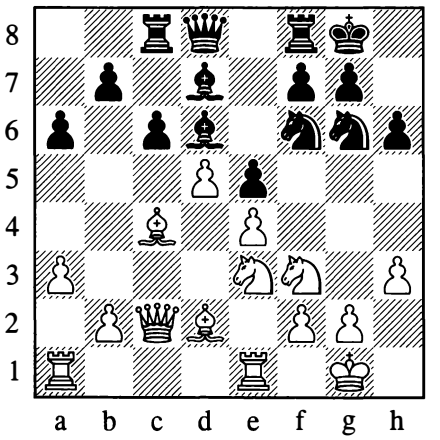
16.♖ac1 ♘h5 17.♘e2 ♕f6 leads to a typical situation with mutual chances.

16...c6

16...b5!?N 17.♗a2 ♖c8 18.♘e3 c6∞ was also worth considering.

17.♘e3 ♖c8

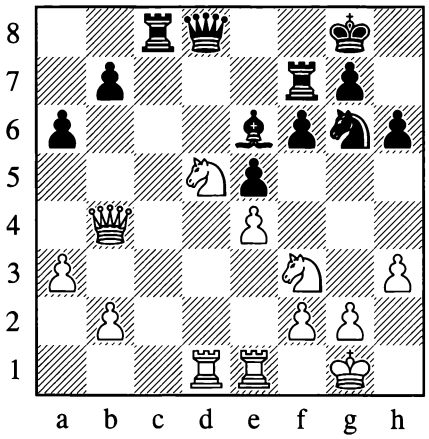
17...b5? is not possible now because 18.dxc6 ♗xc6 19.♗xf7† wins a pawn.



18.♗c3 cxd5 19.♗xd5 ♘xd5 20.♘xd5 ♗e6 21.♖ad1 f6

The game remains balanced: White has a nice outpost on d5 while Black has the two bishops and a solid position.

22.♕a4 ♖f7 23.♗b4 ♗xb4 24.♕xb4



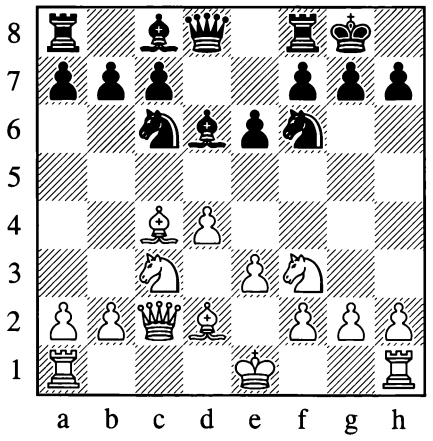
24...♕f8

24...♖d7!? also seems fine.

25.♕a4 ♖d8

Black was comfortable in Ponomariov – Anand, Bilbao 2014.

C) 9.♕c2



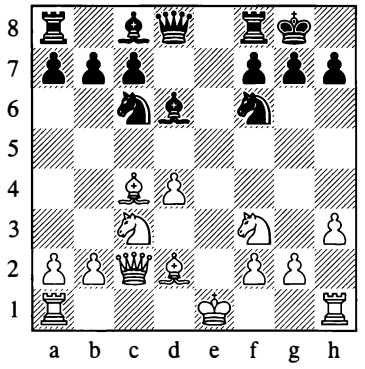
9...e5!?

Once again, 9...a6 is a perfectly reasonable move which transposes to a later variation (D1), with two fewer moves played.

The text move is an additional option which you may or may not wish to play against White's chosen move order. It can be compared with the 12.a3 e5 line in the notes to variation D1 on page 214, the only difference (apart from the move count) being that the moves a2-a3 and ...a6 have not been included here. This may favour Black in some lines, especially those where he puts on his queen on e7, as he does not have to worry about ♗b4 tricks when there is no pawn on a3. On the other hand, White can contemplate queenside castling here, which is not really an option in the later line because the pawns on a3 and a6 would accelerate Black's attack.

10.dxe5

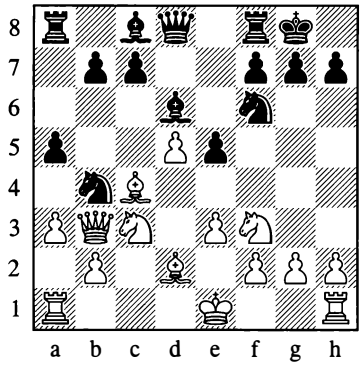
10.h3 was tried against me in a blitz game but it's too slow. After 10...exd4 11.exd4 the most accurate continuation would have been:



11...♘b4! (11...♖e8† 12.♗e3 ♗f4 13.♕d2 ♗xe3 14.fxe3 was only equal in Mrserious – Antidrome, Internet 2015) 12.♕b1 (12.♕d1 ♕e7† 13.♗e3 ♗f5∓) 12...♖e8† 13.♗e3 And now both 13...♗e6 and 13...♗f4 favour Black.

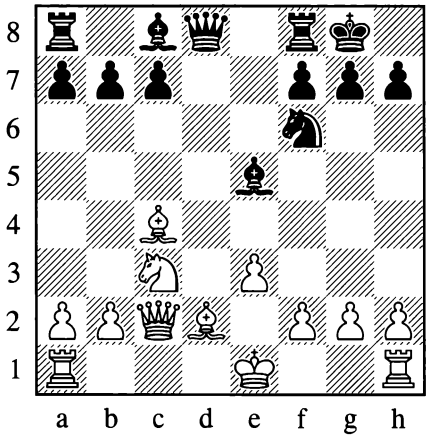
10.d5 ♘b4!?N is an interesting innovation. (10...♘e7 11.0–0 transposes to variation B2

above) 11.♕b3 a5 (11...c6!? 12.dxc6 bxc6∞ could also be investigated) 12.a3



12...e4!? (12...♘a6∞) 13.axb4 (13.♘d4?! a4 14.♘xa4 ♘bxd5∓) 13...exf3 14.gxf3 ♗xb4∞ Black's chances are not worse in this messy position.

10...♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♗xe5

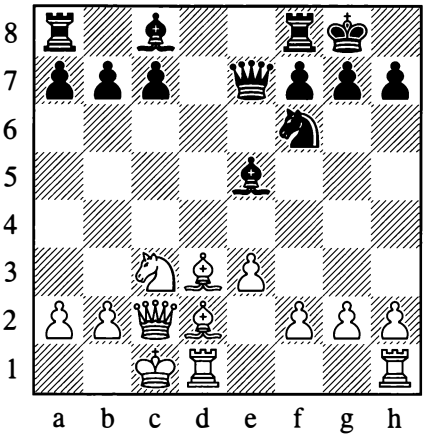


I analysed two tries for White: **C1) 12.♗d3** and **C2) 12.f4**.

C1) 12.♗d3 ♕e7 13.0–0–0

13.f4? allows 13...♗xf4 of course.

13.♘e4 can be met by 13...♘xe4 14.♗xe4 g6∞ when Black benefits from the fact that ♗b4 is impossible.

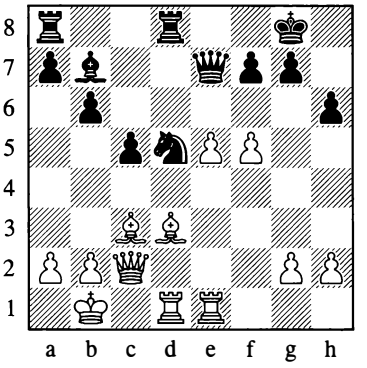


13...♖d8 14.♔b1 h6 15.e4 b6

I considered 15...♗d4 but concluded that 16.f3! (rather than 16.f4 ♗g4) 16...c5 17.g4 ♗e6 18.h4→ is rather dangerous for Black.

16.f4 ♗xc3 17.♗xc3 ♗b7 18.♗xf6

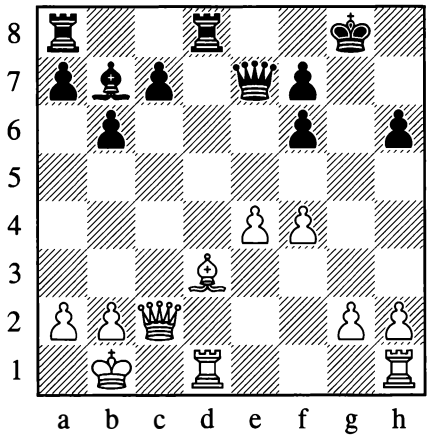
18.♖he1 c5 19.e5 ♘d5 20.f5 is another logical try, but Black obtains decent counterplay after:



20...♘xc3† (20...c4?! is unsatisfactory due to 21.♗xc4 ♘xc3† 22.bxc3± – but not 22.♕xc3? ♗e4†!∓) 21.bxc3 (21.♕xc3 ♖d4!∞) 21...b5∞

18...gxf6!?

18...♕xf6N 19.♕xc7 ♖xd3 20.♕xb7 ♖xd1† 21.♖xd1 ♖d8= reaches an endgame where Black's active queen should ensure the draw.



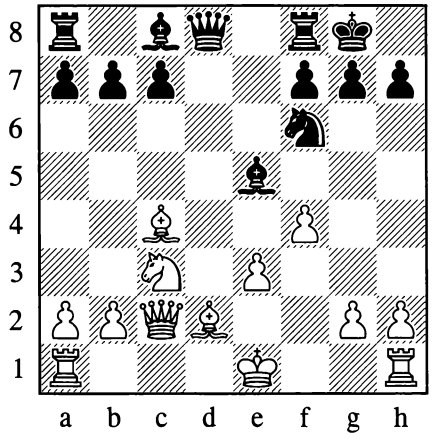
19.e5

19.♖he1 ♖d4 also leads to double-edged play.

19...fxe5 20.fxe5 ♕xe5 21.♖he1 ♕xh2∞

Holm – Vidit, Gibraltar 2016.

C2) 12.f4



This ambitious move was recently tried by Giri.

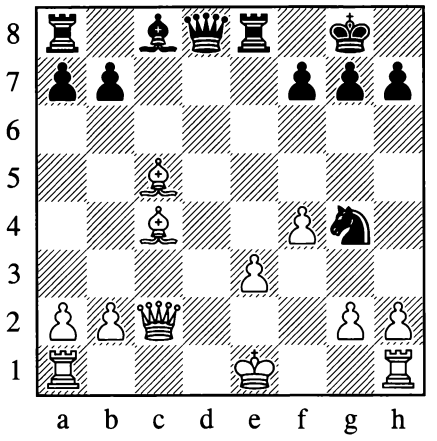
12...♗xc3

12...♗d6 is playable but after 13.0–0–0 ♗g4 14.♖de1 White has a promising position. 14...♗e6 is a sensible way to trade pieces, but after 15.♗xe6 fxe6 16.g4 ♕d7 17.♔b1→ White keeps some initiative.

13.♗xc3 ♘g4 14.♗d4 c5!

So plays critically – I get the impression that both players had looked at this in advance.

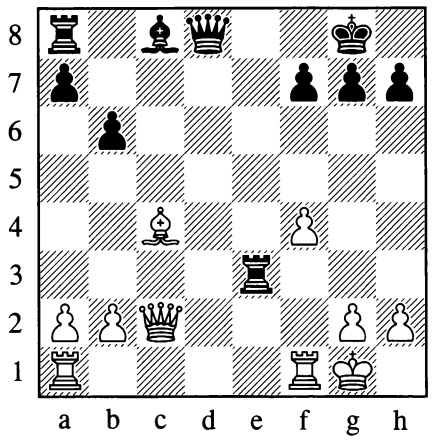
15.♗xc5 ♖e8



16.0–0 b6

16...♘xe3 was played in the earlier game Przezdziecka – Z. Tan, Guimaraes 2012. The text move is a small but worthwhile improvement, as the pawn is slightly more secure on b6 than on b7.

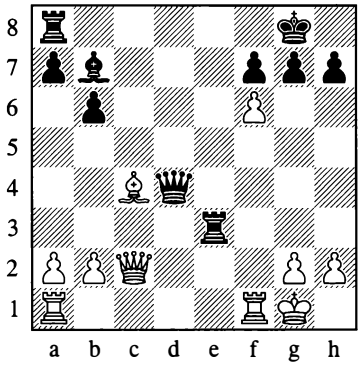
17.♗d4 ♘xe3 18.♗xe3 ♖xe3



19.♕f2

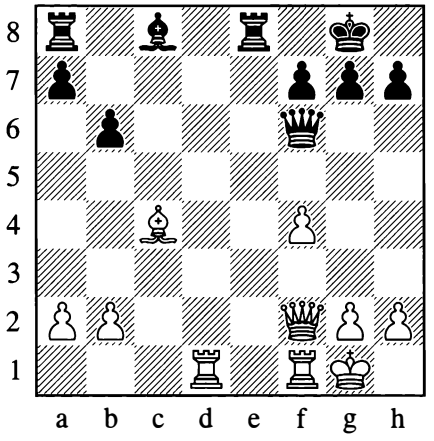
19.f5!? seems like the only real chance to cause problems but after 19...♗b7 20.f6 (or

20.♖ad1 ♕f6) 20...♕d4 Black should be okay. A possible continuation is:



21.♖ad1 ♖d3† 22.♔h1 ♖xd1 23.♖xd1 ♕xf6 24.♖f1 ♕d4 25.♖xf7 ♗d5=

19...♖e8 20.♖ad1 ♕f6



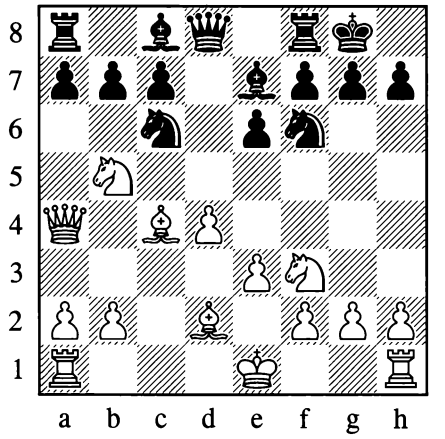
21.♕d4

21.f5 ♗b7 22.♖d7 ♖e7 23.♖fd1 ♖ae8 is fine for Black, as 24.♖1d6?! can be met by 24...♖e1† 25.♗f1 ♕e5∓.

21...♕xd4† 22.♖xd4 ♗f5=

The players soon agreed a draw in Giri – So, Paris (rapid) 2016.

D) 9.♘b5 ♗e7



This is Black's best response, preserving the bishop and preparing to chase the knight away. White may proceed with **D1) 10.♕c2** or **D2) 10.0–0**.

D1) 10.♕c2

This move can easily transpose to one of the later variations if White follows up with short castling, but both sides have the option of avoiding the transposition should they wish to.

10...a6 11.♘c3 ♗d6

This invites a transposition to a mainstream variation.

The independent alternative is:

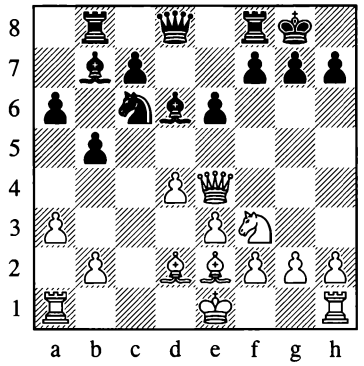
11...b5!?

Quite an attractive option, as Black steers the game in the direction of his own choosing, rather than giving White the choice. Objectively it seems perfectly playable, for example:

12.♗e2 ♗b7 13.a3 ♗d6 14.♘e4!?

14.0–0 transposes to the note on 14.a3 in variation D232 on page 221; and may be White's best.

14...♘xe4 15.♕xe4 ♖b8

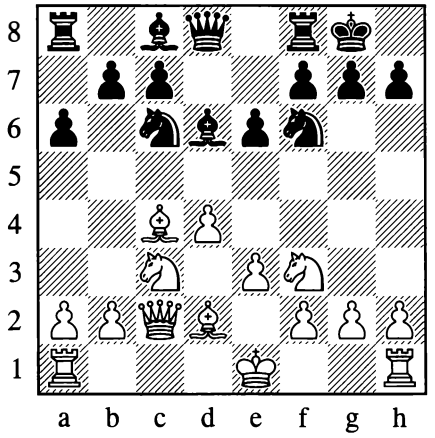


16.♕c2 e5 17.♗d3 g6 18.♗e4 ♕e8!

Not only defending the knight, but also setting up tactical threats against the bishop after ...exd4.

19.dxe5 ♘xe5 20.♗xb7 ♖xb7 21.♘xe5 ♕xe5↑

Black had slightly the easier side of equality in Fridman – Vitiugov, Germany 2012.



12.♘e4!?

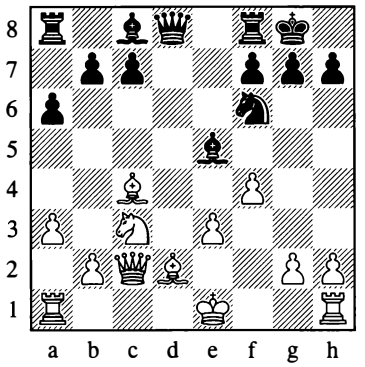
12.0–0 transposes to variation D23, so in this section we will consider White's independent possibilities.

Another idea is:

12.a3 e5 13.dxe5

13.d5 has been a common reaction but not necessarily a good one: 13...♘e7 14.h3 b5 15.♗d3 ♗b7 16.e4 c6 17.dxc6 ♘xc6 18.0–0 ♖c8 19.♗g5 ♘d4∓ worked out nicely for Black in Popilski – Y. Vovk, Cappelle-la-Grande 2013.

13...♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.f4



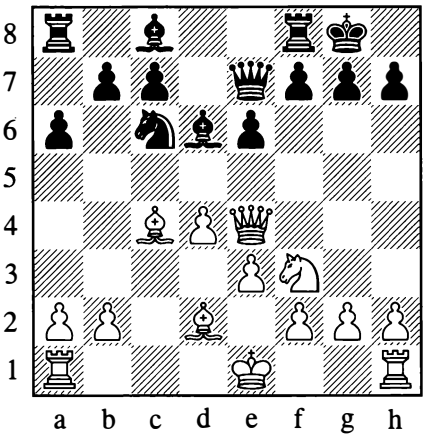
15...♗d6!N

15...♗xc3 16.♗xc3 ♕e7 17.0–0! ♕xe3† 18.♔h1 ♕b6 19.f5↑ was promising for White in Koneru – Hou Yifan, Tirana 2011.

The text move is an improvement suggested by Mikhalchishin, whose analysis runs:

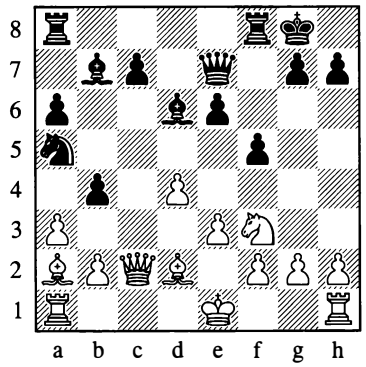
16.♗d3 ♖e8 17.0–0 ♗c5 18.♖ae1 h6 19.♗c1 ♕e7 20.♔h1 b5 21.e4 ♗b7∞

12...♘xe4 13.♕xe4 ♕e7



14.0–0N

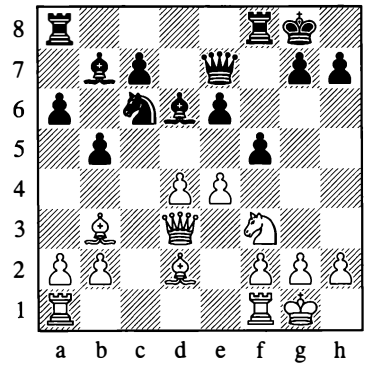
White needs to improve on the following game: 14.♗c3?! f5! 15.♕c2 b5 16.♗b3?! ♗b7 17.a3 b4 18.♗d2?! ♘a5 19.♗a2



19...b3! 20.♗xb3 ♗e4 21.♕d1 ♘xb3 22.♕xb3 ♖ab8∓ Javakhishvili – Milliet, Reykjavik 2015.

14...e5

14...f5!? 15.♕d3 b5 16.♗b3 ♗b7 also seems reasonable. It is worth mentioning the following tactical idea: 17.e4



17...♘b4! 18.♗xb4 fxe4 19.♗xd6 ♕xd6 20.♕e3 exf3 21.♕xe6† ♔h8 22.♕xd6 cxd6 23.♖fe1 fxg2 24.♖ac1 ♖ac8 25.♗e6 ♖xc1 26.♖xc1 ♗f3 The endgame should be a draw.

15.d5!?

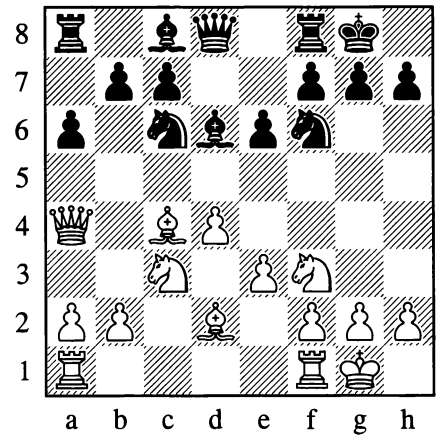
15.♖ac1 exd4 16.♕xe7 ♘xe7= gives Black no problems.

15.♗d5 exd4 16.exd4 ♕xe4 17.♗xe4 ♖e8 18.♖fe1 ♘e7= is also fine for us.

15...♘b8 16.♕c2 ♗g4∞

With a complex game where Black's chances are not worse.

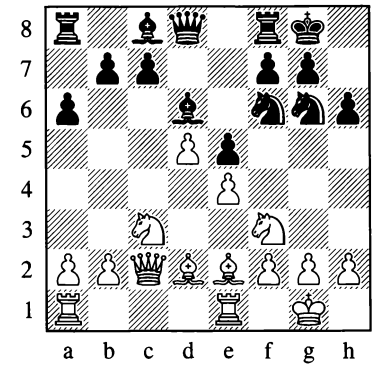
D2) 10.0–0 a6 11.♘c3 ♗d6



Both sides have spent two tempos moving their respective pieces back and forth, but White has made a small achievement in forcing Black to spend a tempo on ...a6. His three main options from this position are **D21) 12.♖fe1**, **D22) 12.♖ad1** and **D23) 12.♕c2**.

12.e4?! is never played, as the simple 12...e5 gives Black at least equal chances.

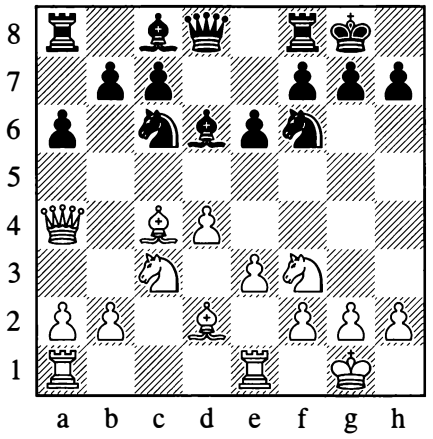
12.♗e2 e5 13.d5 ♘e7 14.e4 ♘g6 15.♖fe1 h6 16.♕c2 was played in one GM game. Black has a few ways of handling the position, but my preference is:



16...♗d7!?N Intending ...c6; as we have seen, this plan tends to be a good choice when White's bishop has vacated the a2-g8 diagonal.

(16...♘h5 17.g3 ♗g4 18.♗e3 ♕d7 led to normal play in Matlakov – Najer, Moscow 2010, but White's bishop on e2 is better suited for this type of position) 17.♖ac1 c6 18.dxc6 (18.♖ed1?! cxd5 19.♘xd5 ♘xd5 20.exd5 ♕f6∓) 18...♗xc6 19.♖ed1 ♕e7 20.♗e3 ♖ac8 Black is at least equal.

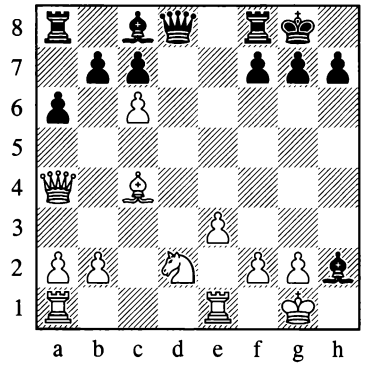
D21) 12.♖fe1



White is looking to support a subsequent advance of the e-pawn.

12...e5 13.d5 ♘e7

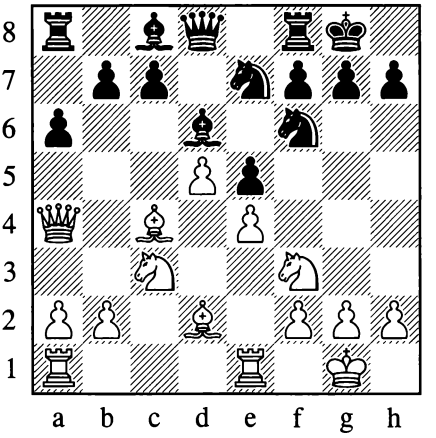
13...e4!? can sometimes be considered in such positions. It is certainly playable here, although 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.dxc6 ♘xd2 16.♘xd2 ♗xh2†



17.♔xh2 ♕xd2 18.cxb7 ♗xb7 19.♔g1 ♖ab8 20.♕a3 ♖bd8 21.♕c5 ♕d6 22.♕xd6 ♖xd6± left White with a small edge in Lenic – Moiseenko, Moscow 2010.

14.e4

Here I would be tempted to try:

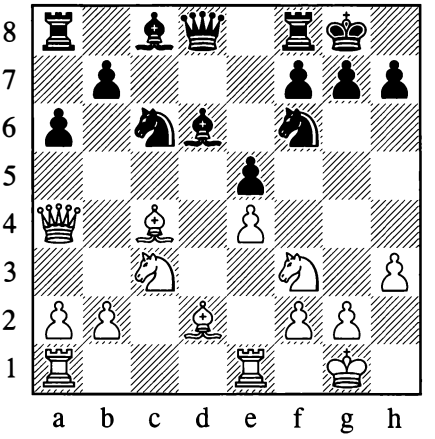


14...c6!?N

14...h6 15.♕d1 ♘g6 16.♖c1 ♗d7 was also quite reasonable in Lenic – Arutinian, Martuni 2010.

15.dxc6 ♘xc6 16.h3?!

16.♗d5 ♗g4= seems fine for Black. The text move may seem like sensible prophylaxis, but it runs into a familiar tactical trick.

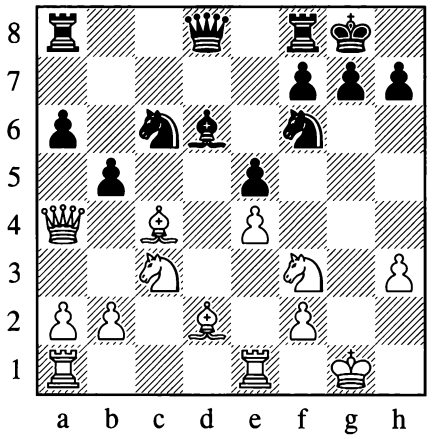


16...♗xh3!

This idea could easily come as a shock for White.

17.gxh3 b5

I have included a few additional lines for illustrative purposes.

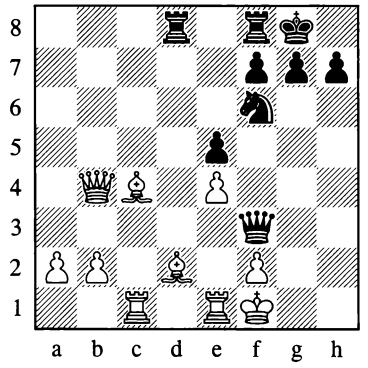


18.♘xb5 axb5 19.♕xb5 ♕d7 20.♖ac1

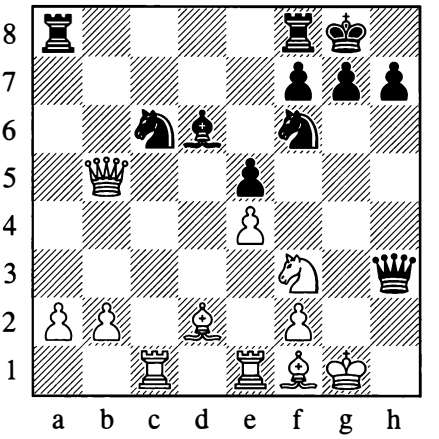
20.♔g2?? ♖fb8–+ and the queen is trapped.

20...♕xh3 21.♗f1!

21.♕xc6? ♕g4† 22.♔f1 ♕xf3 23.♕xd6 ♖ad8 24.♕b4?! (24.♕xe5 is the lesser evil although White is still in trouble after 24...♖xd2)



24...♘g4 25.♗e3 ♘xe3† 26.♖xe3 ♕h1† 27.♔e2 ♕xc1–+

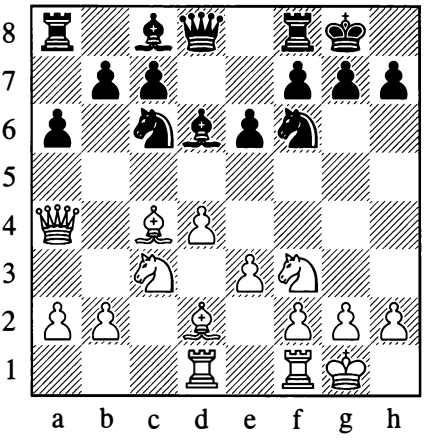


21...♕xf3 22.♖xc6 ♕g4† 23.♗g2 ♖fb8↑

White is under some pressure although he should be able to hold with accurate defence.

D22) 12.♖ad1

Despite the X-ray along the d-file, Black can safely proceed with his plan:

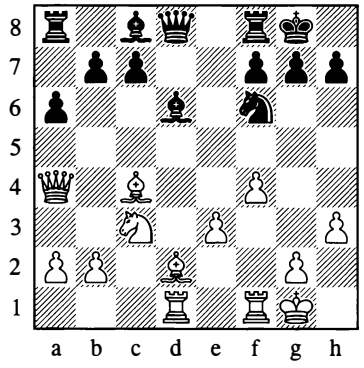


12...e5 13.dxe5

13.d5 is also possible but after 13...♘e7 14.e4 h6 15.♗e2 ♘g6 Black had good prospects in Gagunashvili – Serper, Las Vegas 2007. In the game Black focused his play on the kingside, but there is also the option of the ...c6 plan, as covered in several of the other variations in this chapter.

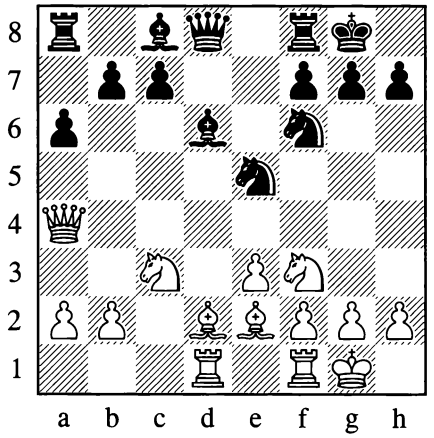
13...♘xe5 14.♗e2

After 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 the d-file is opened up, but White has no good discovered attack against the black queen. After the further 15.f4 ♗d6 16.h3 a simple improvement is:



16...♗f5!N Black takes control over the e4-square while threatening ...b5, since the a8-rook is now defended. (It is worth mentioning that the thematic 16...♗xh3?! does not work so well here – after the further 17.gxh3 b5 18.♘xb5 axb5 19.♕xb5 ♖b8 20.♕f5 White was better in Pujari – Bakre, Pune 2014.)

After the text move Black has a choice of playable lines.



14...b5!?

This may not be objectively any better than the alternative, but it's an interesting move which is worth including for the sake of variety. The simple option is:

14...♕e7

This is a normal move, and was played in one of my favourite Ragozin games of all time – see the model game in the Introduction on page 218. (The move numbering is different because of the ♘b5-c3 and ...♗e7-d6 manoeuvres in the present variation. Best play continues:

15.♕c2N

After 15.♘g5?! ♗f5∓ Black went on to score a splendid victory in Nakamura – Mamedyarov, Moscow 2013.

15...♘xf3† 16.♗xf3 ♖e8=

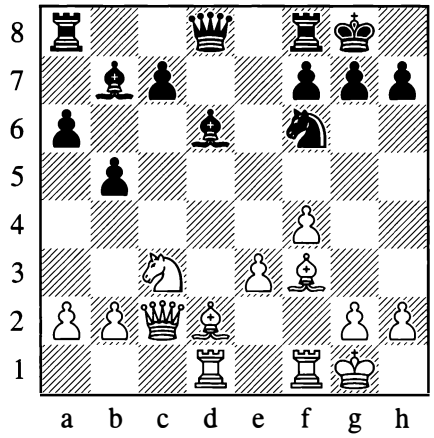
Followed by ...♗g4, with a comfortable game for Black. (The immediate 16...♗g4= is fine too.)

15.♕c2

15.♘xb5?? ♘xf3† 16.♗xf3 ♗d7 wins a piece.

15.♗xb5?! ♘xf3† 16.gxf3 ♗h3 gives Black dangerous attacking chances.

15...♗b7 16.♘xe5 ♗xe5 17.f4 ♗d6 18.♗f3



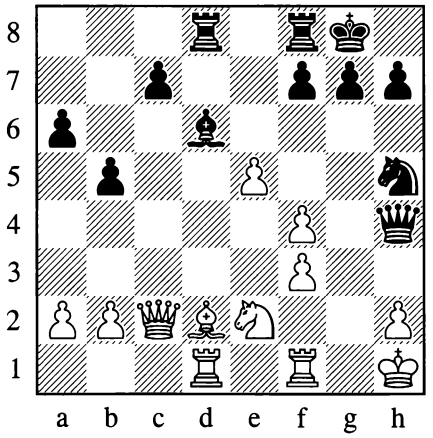
18...♗xf3!N

18...♕c8? 19.e4 ♖e8 20.e5± was unfortunate for Black in Fedoseev – P. Smirnov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013.

19.gxf3!?

19.♖xf3 gives Black comfortable play after 19...♕e7= with ...b4 to come.

19...♕e7 20.e4 ♖ad8 21.♔h1 ♘h5 22.♘e2 ♕h4 23.e5



23...♕h3!?

This may end up leading to a perpetual.

23...♗e7 also leaves the position unclear but roughly balanced.

24.exd6

24.♗e3 should be met by 24...♗e7= intending ...f6.

24...♖de8 25.♘c3 ♘g3† 26.♔g1 ♘e2† 27.♘xe2!?

26.♔h1 ♘g3† is an immediate draw.

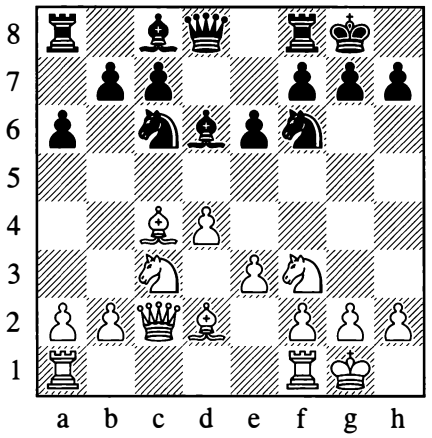
27...♖xe2

Threatening mate, so White's reply is forced.

28.♖f2 ♖xf2 29.♔xf2 ♕xh2† 30.♔f1 ♕h1† 31.♔f2=

White must accept the draw. (31.♔e2?? would give Black an extra half-point after 31...♖e8† 32.♔d3 ♕xf3† 33.♔d4 c5† 34.♕xc5 ♖e4† 35.♔d5 ♖c4† 36.♔e5 ♕e4 mate!)

D23) 12.♕c2

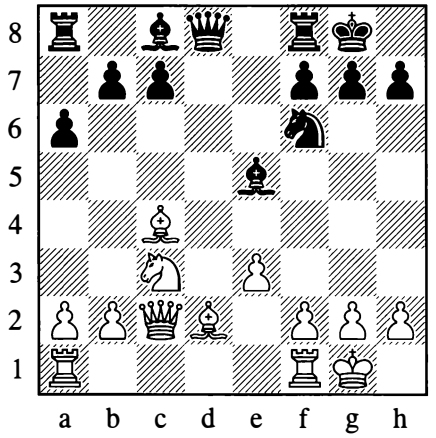


This has been White's most popular choice, and the position has arisen via a few different move orders. I decided to include two contrasting options for Black: **D231) 12...e5** is the most obvious move, but **D232) 12...b5!?** is a promising alternative which had been used successfully by some strong GMs.

D231) 12...e5 13.dxe5

13.d5 is less challenging; the natural 13...♘e7∞ leads to standard play, but Black can also consider 13...♘b4!?∞ to gain time against White's queen, with ...c6 coming next.

13...♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5



15.f4

This has been White's usual choice; it is hard to see any other way for him to attempt to cause problems.

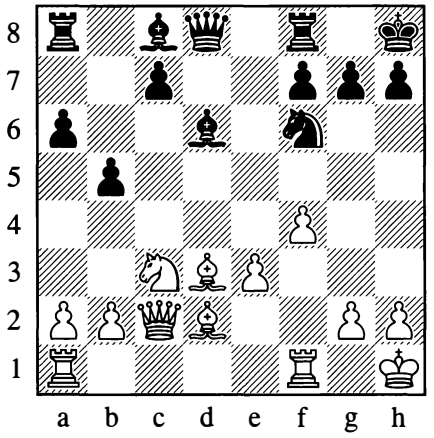
15...♗d6 16.♗d3 ♔h8!?

This seems like the best way to deal with White's kingside ambitions.

16...h6 is playable, although 17.♘e4! is slightly annoying. 17...♘xe4 18.♗xe4 ♕e7 19.♗c3 c6 20.♖f3 f6 21.♖g3 ♗e6 22.♕e2 ♔h8 23.♗c2 ♗g8 24.♕g4 The position is objectively okay for Black, but he still had to weather some initiative in Krasenkow – Prusikin, Germany 2007

16...♕e7 occurred in Moser – Gross, Austria 2011, when 17.♔h1!?N would have been a logical way of preparing e3-e4. 17...♗c5 18.h3± White is ready to march forwards in the centre.

17.♔h1 b5



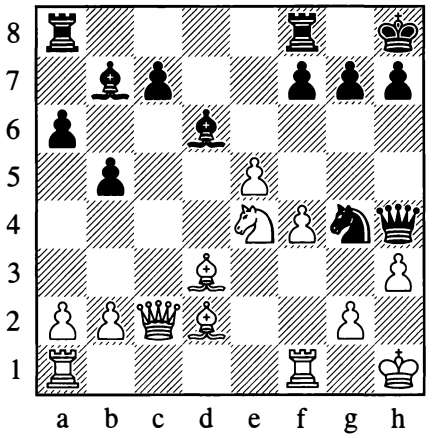
18.e4!N

18.♘e4 ♗f5! shows why the king went to h8. After the further 19.♘xf6 ♗xd3 20.♕xd3 ♕xf6 21.♗c3 ♕e6 22.e4 f6 23.b3 the position was equal and the players agreed a draw in Radjabov – Kramnik, Dortmund 2003.

The text move is a good try for an advantage, although White will have to follow it up precisely.

18...♗b7 19.e5 ♘g4 20.h3 ♕h4 21.♘e4!

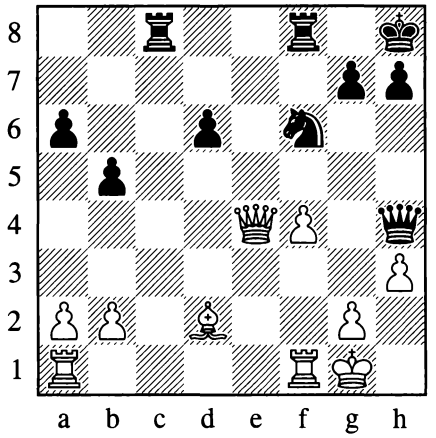
The only move; instead 21.♗e4?? ♕g3! 22.hxg4 ♕h4† 23.♔g1 ♗c5†–+ would be disastrous for White.



21...f5! 22.exd6 cxd6 23.♔g1!

23.♗e1 ♕h5 does not really help White.

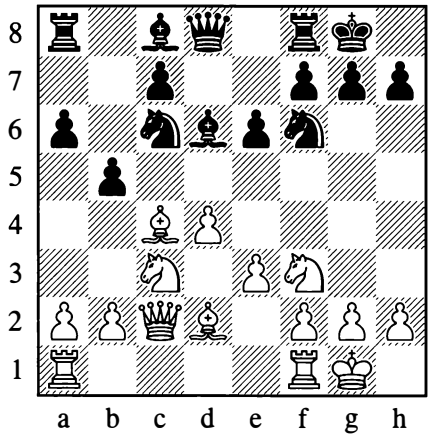
23...fxe4 24.♗xe4 ♖ac8 25.♕d3 ♗xe4 26.♕xe4 ♘f6±



If White makes it this far through the minefield, he is rewarded with a slight advantage.

D232) 12...b5!?

Although the previous line is playable for Black, it seems as though White can press for an advantage if he is sufficiently well prepared. The text move makes it harder for him to do that, although the position can become rather complicated and tricky for both sides.



13.♗e2

This has been the usual choice, although White could also consider:

13.♗b3 ♗b7

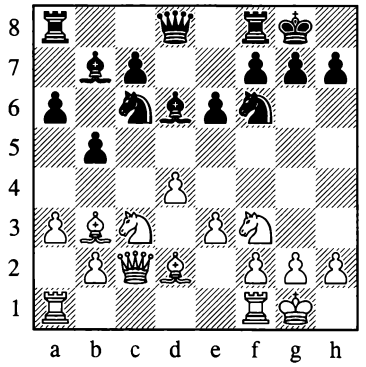
I briefly checked 13...♘b4 but after 14.♕b1 it is not clear what the knight is doing.

14.a3!?N

A useful waiting move.

14.e4 e5 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 was fine for Black in Aranha Filho – Sienkiewicz, corr. 2011.

14.♖ac1?! ♘a5∓ is certainly not an improvement for White.

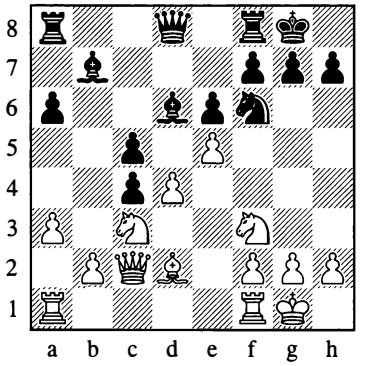


14...♘a5!?

14...e5∞ is another possible direction.

15.♗a2 ♘c4 16.♗xc4 bxc4 17.e4 c5! 18.e5!?

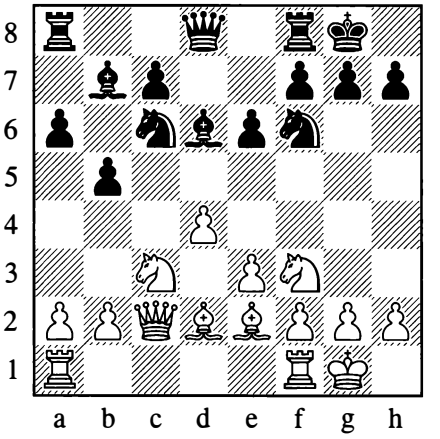
18.♗e3 cxd4 19.♗xd4= leads to calmer play.



18...cxd4 19.exf6 ♗xf3 20.gxf3 ♕xf6 21.♘e4 ♕xf3 22.♘xd6 ♕g4†=

With perpetual checks. Obviously this is just a sample line; the whole line is roughly balanced but the game could go in all sorts of different directions.

13...♗b7



14.♘e4

White has also tried:

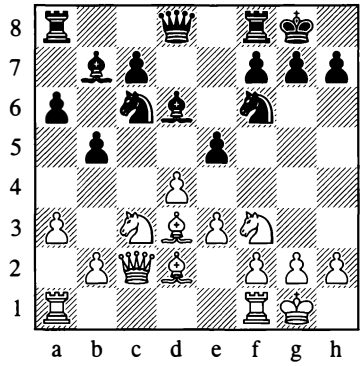
14.a3

A few other games arrived here via transposition.

14...e5 15.♗d3

15.♖ad1 exd4 16.exd4 h6 17.♖fe1 ♖e8 18.h3 ♘e7∞ gave Black a decent position in Sasikiran – Drozdovskij, Beijing (blitz) 2008, with ...c5 possibly on the cards in the near future.

15.d5 ♘e7 16.e4 h6= followed by ...c6 was safe enough for Black in Sachdev – Zdebskaja, Beijing (rapid) 2008. An interesting alternative would be 16...c6!?N 17.♗g5 cxd5 18.♗xf6 gxf6 19.♘xd5 ♗xd5 20.exd5 ♖c8⇄ followed by ...e4 and ...f5, with a dynamic position reminiscent of the Sveshnikov Sicilian.



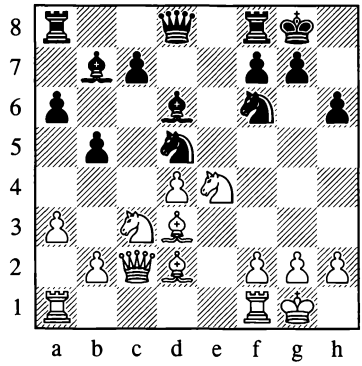
15...exd4 16.exd4 ♘e7 17.♘g5!?N

17.♘e4 ♘xe4 18.♗xe4 ♗xe4 19.♕xe4 ♕d7= was pretty harmless in Krasenkow – Arutinian, Wroclaw 2012.

The text move looks like a natural attempt to improve, but the following line seems fine for Black.

17...h6 18.♘ge4 ♘ed5

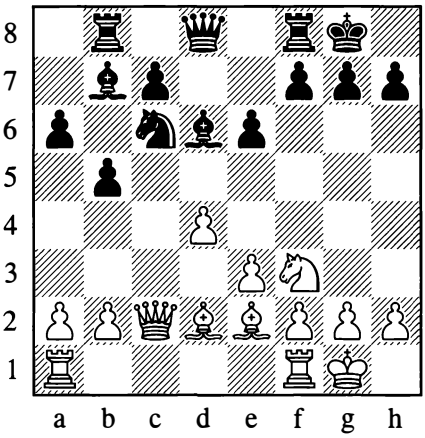
18...♘c6!? is playable too.



19.♘xd6 cxd6 20.♖fe1 ♖c8 21.♖ac1 b4 22.axb4 ♘xb4 23.♕b1 ♘xd3 24.♕xd3=

With a level game.

14...♘xe4 15.♕xe4 ♖b8 16.♕c2



16...f5!N

Black should avoid:

16...e5?

This is a thematic move, so it is important to see why it does not work so well in this particular position.

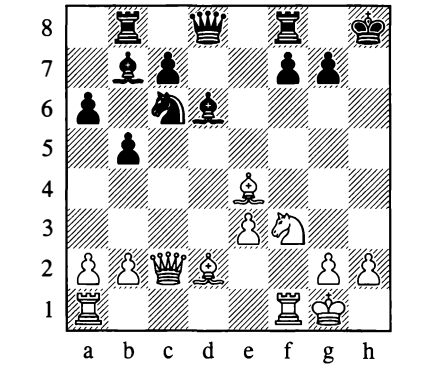
17.♗d3! exd4

17...h6 18.♗h7† ♔h8 19.♗e4± wins a pawn.

18.♗xh7† ♔h8 19.♗e4 dxe3 20.fxe3!

20.♗xe3 ♘b4 was equal in Mozharov – Movsesian, Pardubice 2015.

The text move is more accurate and the resulting position holds considerable danger for Black.



20...♕e8?

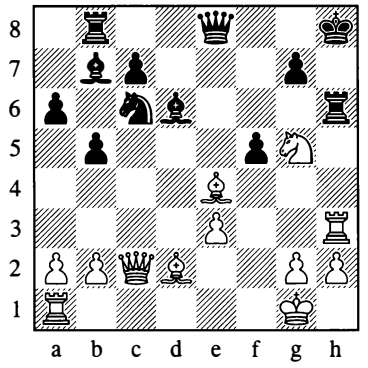
20...♕f6N is better although 21.♖ac1± maintains some pressure.

The text move allows White to launch a powerful attack.

21.♘g5! f5

Or 21...♕e5 22.♖f3.

22.♖f3 ♖f6 23.♖h3† ♖h6



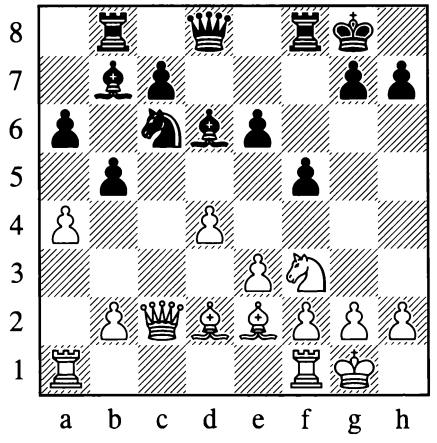
24.♗xc6!N

24.♗xf5?! 'only' gave White a big advantage in Sakaev – Vitiugov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007. The text move should win by force, for example:

24...♗xc6 25.♖xh6† gxh6 26.♕xf5 hxg5 27.♗c3† ♔g8 28.♕xg5† ♔f7 29.♕f6† ♔g8 30.♕g7#

17.a4

17.♖ac1 ♕f6 18.♕b3 g5!→ looks good for Black.



17...♘e7 18.axb5 axb5 19.♖fc1 ♗e4 20.♕d1

20.♕b3 ♗d5 leads nowhere for White.

20...♘g6∞

Black has decent prospects on the kingside.

Conclusion

7.♗d2 is a reasonable move but the bishop is not terribly active, so Black gets a pretty comfortable game after the straightforward 7...dxc4 8.♗xc4 ♗d6. White has a few playable moves, but he may as well throw in 9.♘b5 ♗e7 in order to force Black to spend a tempo on ...a6. It seems to me that the most critical continuation is 10.0–0 a6 11.♘c3 ♗d6 12.♕c2, when Black has a choice. 12...e5 leads to interesting play but my analysis indicates that White can fight for an advantage in a sharp position by improving over the Radjabov – Kramnik game from 2003. However, 12...b5!? seems like a good choice; Black's practical results have been excellent so far, and I found a useful improvement with 16...f5!N in the main line, which gives Black active prospects on the kingside.

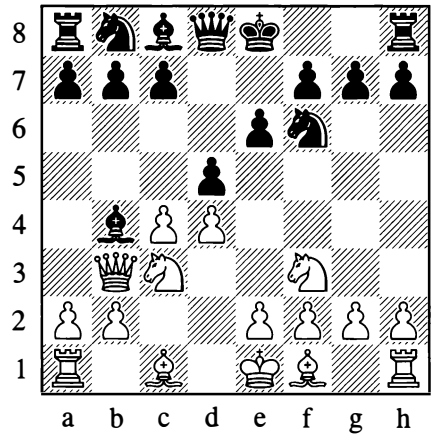
PART IV

5.♕b3

Introduction to 5.♕b3

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕b3

This interesting move has started to pick up in popularity of late. White looks to protect himself against doubled c-pawns while picking up a tempo attacking the bishop on b4.



5...c5

As White is bringing his queen out early, I would like to play dynamically in the centre, so this active response makes perfect sense.

5...a5!? is a playable, easy-to-learn alternative which is covered in a short section at the start of the next chapter.

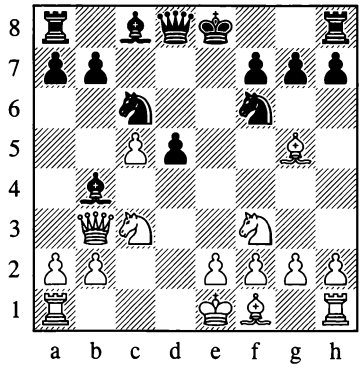
6.dxc5

This is White's main try for an advantage, and it will be covered in Chapter 12.

6.a3?!, 6.e3 and 6.♗g5 are relatively easy to handle.

The only really serious alternative to the main line is:
6.cxd5 exd5 7.dxc5 ♘c6

7...♕a5!? is an interesting alternative which I also analyse in the next chapter.
8.♗g5

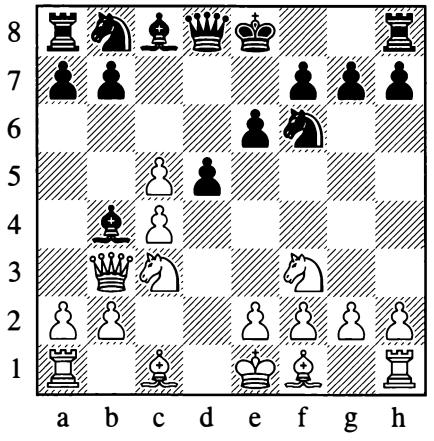


8...♗e6!

8...h6 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 is a reasonable alternative, and the resulting position can also be reached via the move order 6.dxc5 ♘c6 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.cxd5 exd5. Being able to aim for the same variation against two different White options (6.cxd5 and 6.dxc5) is a good way to reduce one's study time, and I analyse it in Chapter 12 for that very reason. However, I think Black can do better by choosing separate lines against both of those options. Further details can be found in the next two chapters.

9.0–0–0 0–0 10.e4 dxe4! 11.♖xd8 ♗xb3

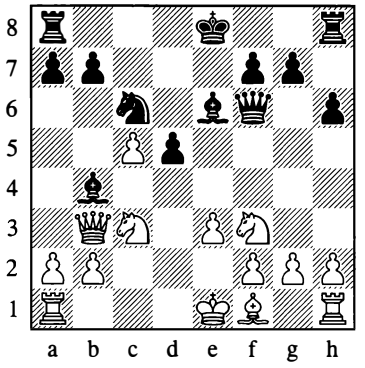
It's complicated, but Black is not worse. See B42 of Chapter 11 for the full picture.



6...♘a6!

This is not so common but it seems like the most convincing equalizer to me.

In the first part of Chapter 12 I cover the more popular 6...♘c6. The main line continues: 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.cxd5 exd5 (This position can also arise via the 6.cxd5 move order, as mentioned in the earlier note on 8...h6.) 10.e3 ♗e6



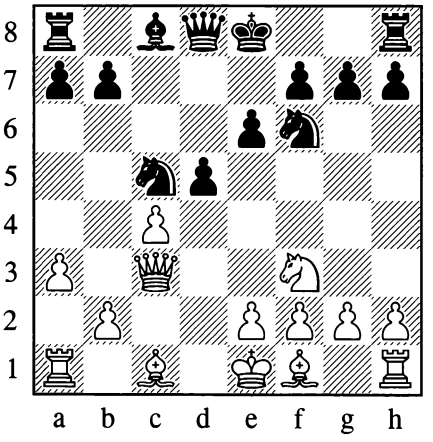
11.♗b5 ♗xc5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5 13.♕xd5 ♗b4†! White has won a central pawn but is forced to misplace his king. In variation A22 of Chapter 12 I show that this is playable for Black – but overall I feel he has an easier time after my main recommendation.

7.a3

7.♗g5?! ♕a5! 8.♗xf6 ♘xc5! is a useful trick to remember.

7...♗xc3† 8.♕xc3 ♘xc5

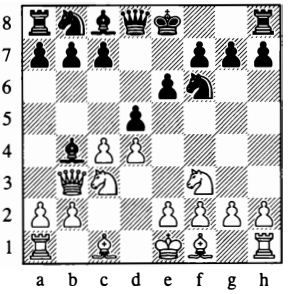
All this will be analysed in Chapter 12. For now, I will just mention that the normal continuation is:



9.cxd5 ♕xd5 10.♗e3 ♘ce4

Black's lead in development is enough to compensate for White's bishop pair.

Chapter 11



Sidelines

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕b3

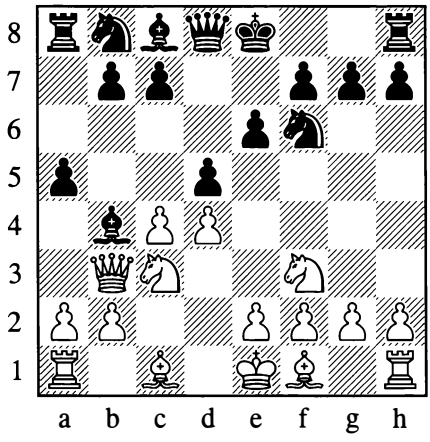
A) 5...a5!? 230
B) 5...c5 232
B1) 6.a3?! 232
B2) 6.e3 234
B3) 6.♗g5 235
B4) 6.cxd5 exd5 7.dxc5 236
B41) 7...♕a5!? 237
B42) 7...♘c6 238

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕b3

This chapter deals with some of the less common pathways in the 5.♕b3 system. We will start by considering an interesting sideline for Black in **A) 5...a5!?**, followed by some of White's minor alternatives after my main recommendation of **B) 5...c5**.

A) 5...a5!?

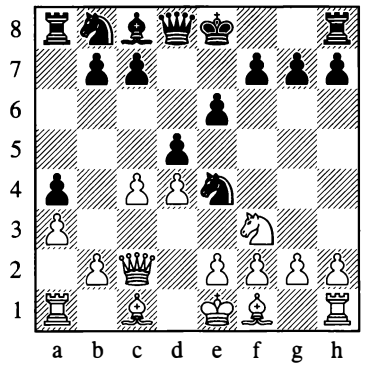
This has only been played in about ten games so far, compared with nearly 300 games with 5...c5. The text move does not put White's centre under immediate pressure, but it maintains a solid position and gives Black the possibility of gaining space on the queenside with ...a4 in some lines.



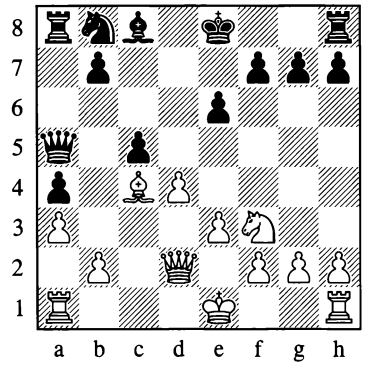
6.♗g5

Pinning the knight is the most natural choice.

6.a3 a4! is a nice tactical point. (6...♗xc3† 7.♕xc3 ♘e4 8.♕c2 0–0 9.e3 b6 was close to equal in Dragun – Vitiugov, Wroclaw 2014) 7.♕c2 (7.♕xb4? ♘c6 8.♕c5 ♖a5 9.♘b5 ♘e4–+ and Black catches the queen) 7...♗xc3† 8.♕xc3 ♘e4 9.♕c2 Black has more than one decent continuation.



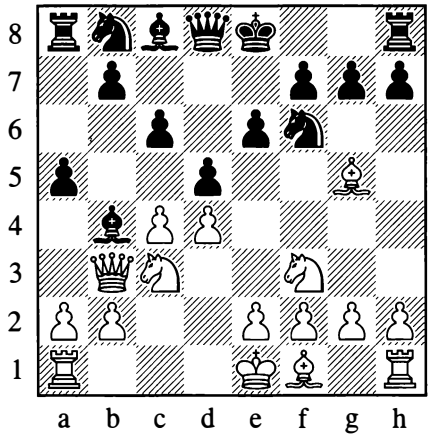
9...c5 (There is also 9...0–0N 10.e3 b6, just like in the Dragun – Vitiugov game, except that Black has the extra ...a4 move which gains space and improves Black's control over the light squares) 10.e3 ♕a5† 11.♗d2 ♘xd2 12.♕xd2 dxc4 13.♗xc4 In Pasztor – Z. Papp, Budapest 2000, Black should have continued with:



13...cxd4N 14.♘xd4 ♕xd2† 15.♔xd2 ♗d7= Intending ...♘c6 and ...♔e7, with a comfortable game.

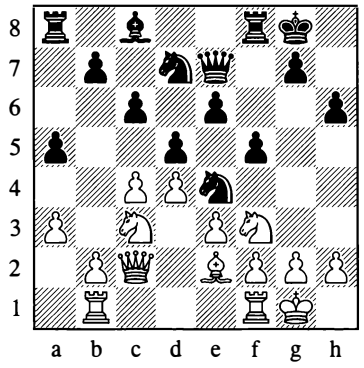
6...c6

6...♘c6 is mentioned by Ramirez. However, 7.a3 a4 8.♕c2 ♗xc3† 9.♕xc3 0–0 10.e3 ♘a5 11.♘d2 was slightly better for White in Toprover – Leonidov, Voronezh 1997, so I prefer the text move.



7.a3

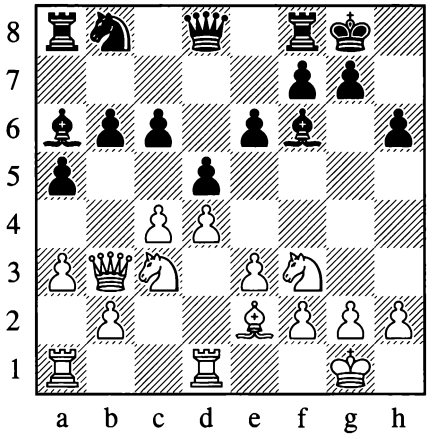
Quite a high-level game continued 7.e3 ♘bd7 8.a3 ♗e7 9.♗e2 h6 10.♗h4 0–0 11.0–0 ♘e4 12.♗xe7 ♕xe7 13.♕c2 f5 14.♖ab1 and here Black could have obtained equal chances with:



14...b6!N= Preparing to develop the bishop on b7, or possibly a6. (14...♘d6 led to an eventual victory for Black in Grandelius – Topalov, Warsaw 2013, but White could have obtained somewhat better chances in a complicated position after 15.c5!N.)

7...♗e7 8.e3 h6 9.♗h4 0–0 10.♗e2 b6 11.0–0 ♗a6 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♖fd1

This position occurred in one game, where Black had the right idea but muddled up his move order. The correct sequence is:



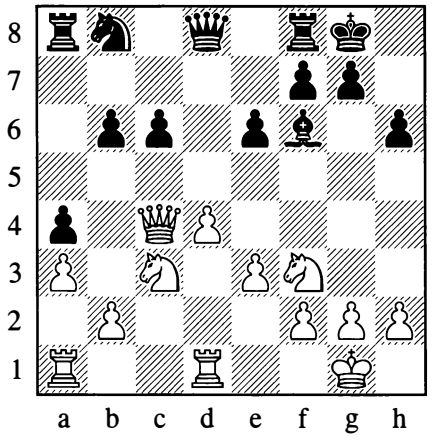
13...dxc4N

13...a4?! allowed 14.♕xa4! dxc4 15.♕c2± in Le Roux – Vuilleumier, Geneva 2013.

14.♗xc4 a4

Now White doesn't have the option of taking on a4 in view of the ...b5 fork.

15.♕a2 ♗xc4 16.♕xc4



16...b5 17.♕e2 ♘d7 18.♖ac1 ♕b6∞

It's a double-edged middlegame. Black has a backward c-pawn, and is unable to free his position with ...c5 or ...e5 right now. On the other hand, Black's minor pieces can guard the c5-outpost and he has gained some space on the queenside while fixing White's pawns there. Looking ahead, Black can try to prepare

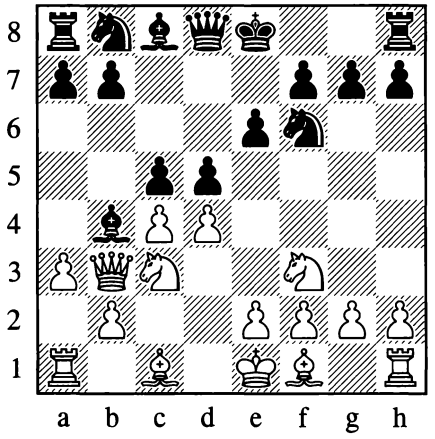
either ...c5 or ...e5, or even ...b4 to exert pressure along the b-file.

B) 5...c5

Now we turn our attention to White's alternatives against our main move – remembering that 6.dxc5 will be covered in the next chapter.

In the rest of this chapter we will consider **B1) 6.a3?!**, **B2) 6.e3**, **B3) 6.♗g5** and **B4) 6.cxd5**.

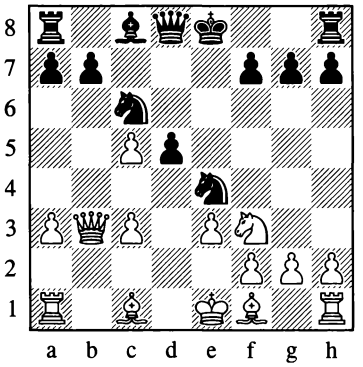
B1) 6.a3?!



White is thinking about the bishop pair, but he loses time and allows Black to gain ground in the centre.

6...♗xc3† 7.♕xc3

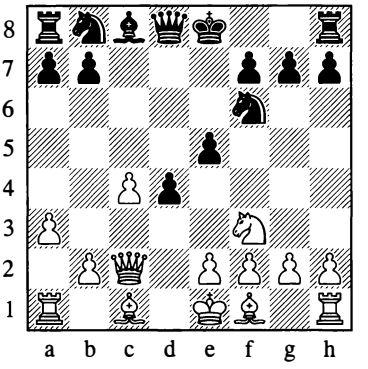
Black also gets easy play after: 7.bxc3 ♘c6 8.cxd5 exd5 9.dxc5 ♘e4 10.e3



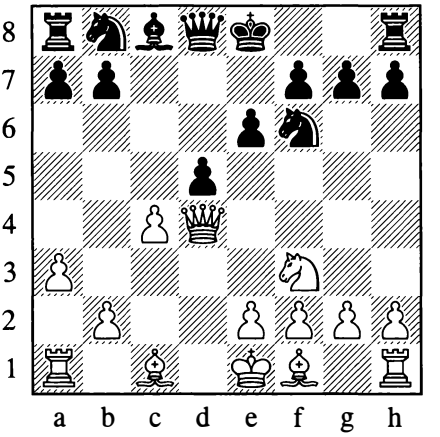
10...0–0!?N Followed by ...♘xc5 and Black is at least equal. (10...♕a5 also worked out well after 11.♗b2 0–0 12.♕b5 a6 13.♕xa5 ♘xa5 14.♖d1?! ♗e6∓ in Milchev – Alvarez Pedraza, Torredembarra 2011.)

7...cxd4 8.♕xd4

8.♘xd4?! e5 9.♘f3?! (9.♘b5N may be the lesser evil although 9...0–0 10.cxd5 ♘xd5∓ gives Black the more pleasant position thanks to his lead in development) 9...d4 10.♕c2 White is asking for trouble, especially after the following improvement:



10...e4!N (10...♘c6 also gives Black a good position, although 11.e4!? at least granted White some central stability in Kochetkov – Maiorov, Minsk 2008) 11.♘d2 ♕e7→ White is in considerable danger.



8...♘c6 9.♕h4

Interestingly, this position has mostly arisen via the move order 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♗b4† 4.♘bd2 c5 5.a3 ♗xd2† 6.♕xd2 cxd4 7.♕xd4 ♘c6 8.♕h4 d5. In our version it is Black to move instead of White, so we have every reason to feel confident.

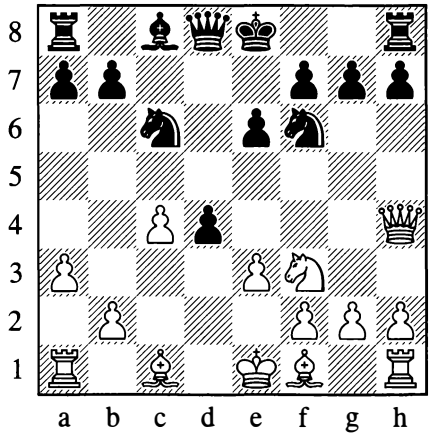
9...d4

9...h6!?N also looks like a sensible option, for instance: 10.e3 e5 11.cxd5 ♕xd5 12.♗c4 ♕d6∞

10.e3

This was played in the only game on my database, but opening the centre carries obvious risks.

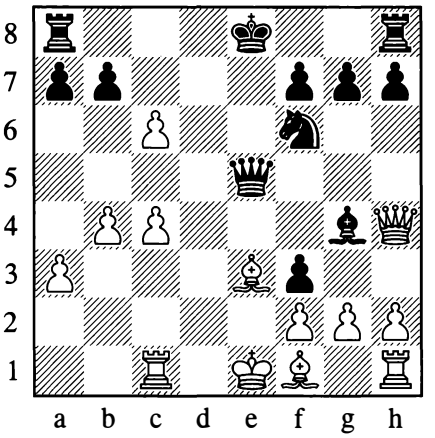
10.b4N makes more sense to me, though after 10...0–0 11.♗g5 e5∞ Black can certainly be satisfied with the outcome of the opening.



10...e5 11.exd4 e4

11...♗g4!?↑ is also promising.

12.d5 exf3 13.dxc6 ♗g4 14.♗e3 ♕a5† 15.b4 ♕e5 16.♖c1



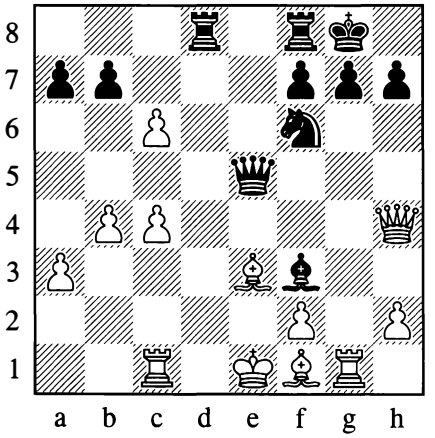
16...0–0!N

16...♕b2? 17.cxb7 ♖d8 led to a quick win for Black after further errors on both sides in Tindall – A. Toth, Canberra 2009. At this stage though, White could have refuted Black's attack by means of 18.gxf3!N ♗xf3 19.b8=♕! 0–0 (19...♖xb8 20.♕f4+–) 20.♕xd8 ♖xd8 21.♗d3! ♖xd3 22.0–0 with a decisive material advantage.

17.gxf3

17.cxb7? ♖ae8 leaves White without a good defence, for instance: 18.gxf3 ♗xf3 19.♖g1 ♕b2–+

17...♗xf3 18.♖g1 ♖ad8



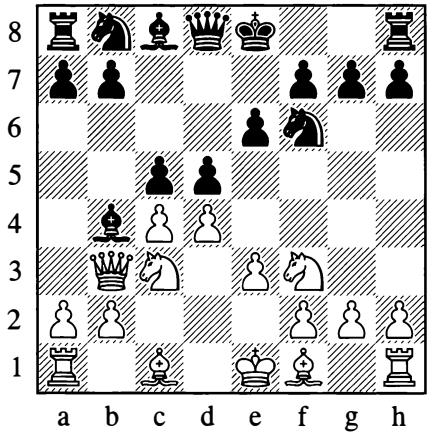
19.♗e2!

The only move, as 19.cxb7?? ♕c3† leads to an immediate mate.

19...♗xe2 20.♔xe2 bxc6∞

The situation remains unclear, although White's king still looks far from comfortable. Although 6.a3?! does not quite lead to an advantage for Black by force, I can't imagine why anyone would want to play it.

B2) 6.e3



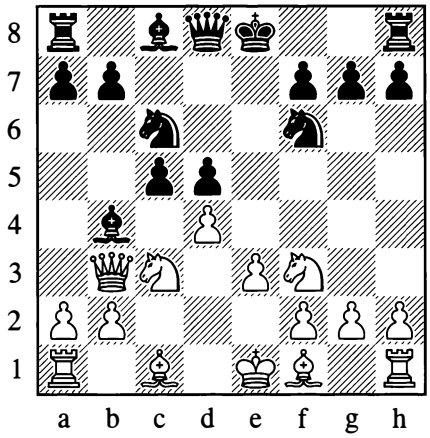
This is too slow to cause any problems. Common-sense development should give Black a fine position, so I will just give a few relevant examples.

6...♘c6 7.cxd5

7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3 looks strange. 8...0–0 (the immediate 8...♘a5 is also good) 9.♗e2 ♘a5 10.♕a2 ♘e4 11.♗d2 dxc4 12.♗xc4 ♘xc4 13.♕xc4 b6 14.0–0 ♗b7∓ G. Johansson – Grandelius, Sweden 2010.

7.dxc5 0–0 8.♗d2 ♗xc5 9.cxd5 exd5 10.♖c1? (10.♗e2 ♗e6∓) 10...d4! 11.♘d1 ♘e4 12.♗d3 ♘xd2 13.♘xd2 ♗b4–+ was a disaster for White in Deutsch – Zubov, Petah Tiqwa 2010.

7...exd5



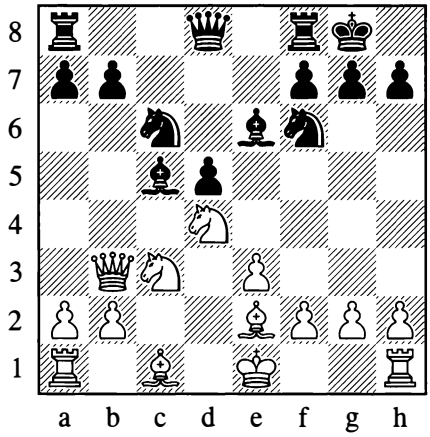
8.dxc5 0–0 9.♗e2

9.♗d2 ♗xc5 transposes to the previous note.

9...♗e6!?

This is not the only decent move, but it's the most dynamic.

10.♘d4 ♗xc5



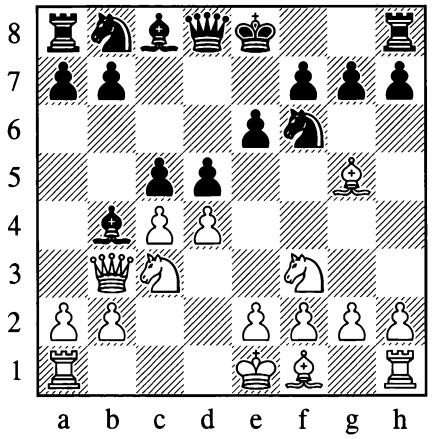
11.♘xe6 fxe6 12.0–0

12.♕xb7? ♘b4 wins material.

12...♕e7∓

Black's central control, active pieces and open f-file were more relevant than White's bishop pair in Karpov – Kramnik, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 1997.

B3) 6.♗g5



This is not the most common move order but it's an important one to consider, as it can easily transpose to certain 5.♗g5 lines which fall outside of our repertoire.

6...dxc4!?

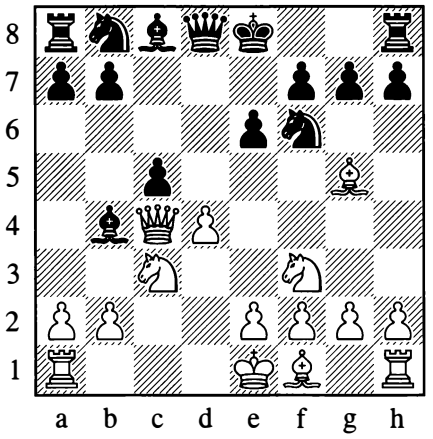
A rare move, but it's the one that makes the most sense for us.

Both 6...♘bd7 and 6...h6 7.♗xf6 ♕xf6 transpose to popular variations which usually occur via the 5.♗g5 move order, neither of which are covered in this book.

6...♘c6 is a sensible choice, but you need to be aware that 7.dxc5 transposes to 6.dxc5 ♘c6 7.♗g5, as covered in variation A of the next chapter. If you prefer, as I do, to meet 6.dxc5 with 6...♘a6, as analysed in variation B of the next chapter, then the text move makes more sense.

7.♕xc4

I only found three games from this position, with 7...♗xc3†, 7...♕d5 and 7...♘c6 having been played. I prefer a fourth option:



7...cxd4!N

I like the idea of exchanging in the centre while White is not quite developed.

I also considered the surprising 7...b5!?N 8.♕xb5† ♘bd7 when Black looks to have the makings of decent compensation. Unfortunately, after the accurate 9.e3 0–0 10.♗e2 ♖b8 11.♕d3 ♗a5 12.0–0! I was unable to find equality for Black.

8.♖d1!?

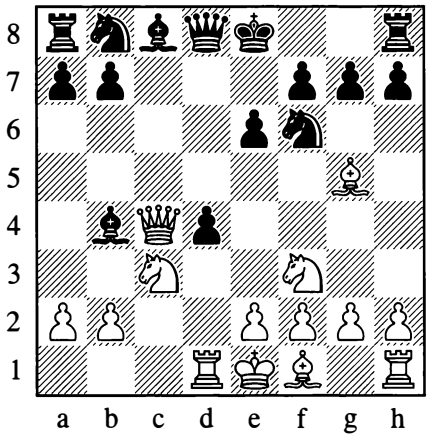
This seems like the most ambitious try, although we are obviously exploring brand new territory so I have included a few more sample lines:

8.♘xd4 ♘a6 9.e3 (9.e4 ♗d7 10.e5? ♕a5∓) 9...♗d7 intending ...♖c8 with active play for Black.

8.♗xf6 gxf6 9.♘xd4 ♘a6 10.e3 ♗d7 11.♕b3 ♕b6 12.♗xa6 ♗xc3† 13.♕xc3 ♕xa6∞ Black's pawns have been slightly weakened but his pieces are active and White is unable to castle for the time being.

One of the points of Black's last move is to meet 8.♕xb4 with 8...♘c6!, gaining a tempo for development. 9.♕a3 dxc3 10.♕xc3 (10.bxc3 ♗d7 11.e3 ♕a5 12.♕xa5 ♘xa5

13.♗d3 ♖c8=) 10...♗d7⇄ Black's lead in development makes up for White's bishop pair.

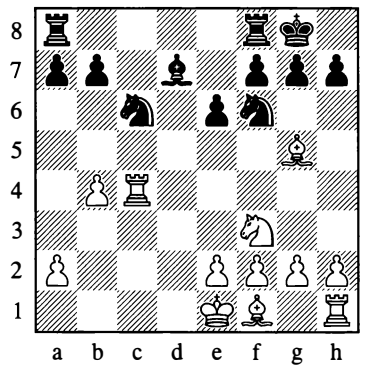


8...♗xc3†!

With this dynamic move, Black gives up the bishop pair and improves White's structure (as the b2-pawn will become a proud central pawn on d4), but shuts down the activity of the white rook along the d-file and prepares to develop counterplay on the queenside.

9.bxc3 0–0 10.cxd4

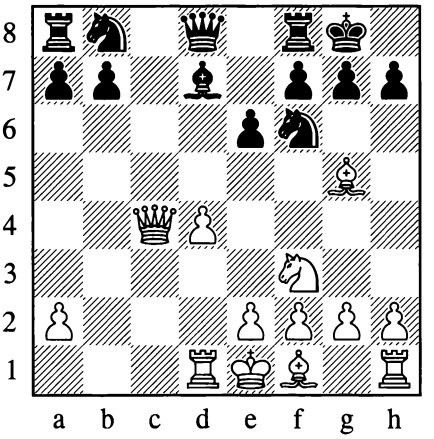
10.♖xd4?! is met by 10...♕e7, intending ...e5. White has some problems, for instance: 11.♕b4 ♕xb4! Another dynamic move, improving White's structure but gaining time for development. 12.cxb4 ♘c6 13.♖c4 ♗d7



14.e3 (14.a3 b5 15.♖c1 a5∓) 14...b5∓ White's lack of development counts against him.

10...♗d7!

This is the most flexible developing move.



11.e4

11.e3?? ♕a5†! would be a disaster for White.

11...h6 12.♗xf6 ♕a5†!? 13.♘d2 gxf6∞

Black's kingside weaknesses are not easy to attack; meanwhile, he has a lot of active possibilities on the queenside.

B4) 6.cxd5

This is the second-most-popular continuation (after 6.dxc5).

6...exd5 7.dxc5

7.e3 ♘c6 transposes back to variation B2 above.

7.♗g5 is sometimes played. There are two replies worth mentioning:

a) 7...♘c6 is simplest, when 8.dxc5 transposes to 7.dxc5 ♘c6 8.♗g5, as covered in variation B42 below.

b) 7...h6!? is a reasonable alternative, when White has two possibilities:

b1) 8.♗h4?! is too cooperative: 8...g5 (8...♘c6

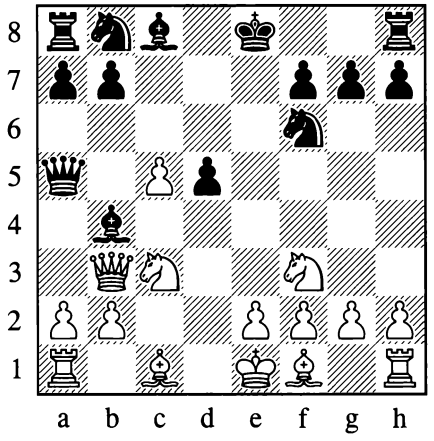
is also sensible) 9.♗g3 ♕a5!?N 10.dxc5 ♘e4 11.♖c1 0–0 12.e3 ♘d7 13.a3 ♗xc3† 14.bxc3 ♘dxc5 Black has some initiative, and 15.♕xd5?? is impossible due to 15...♖d8 16.♕a2 ♘xc3 and Black wins.

b2) White should prefer 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6, which converts to variation A1 of Chapter 2, where the same position arises after 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♗g5 h6 7.♗xf6 ♕xf6 8.♕b3!? c5. This is fully playable for Black although it does have a tendency to lead to rather dry equality, which is why I also cover 8...♕b6 as an alternative to 8...c5 in that chapter.

After the text move it is worth considering **B41) 7...♕a5!?** and **B42) 7...♘c6**.

B41) 7...♕a5!?

This is an interesting way to avoiding some of the complications of the main line, and it is relatively untested so far.



8.♗d2

8.♗g5?! can now be met by 8...♘e4∓.

8...♘c6 9.e3

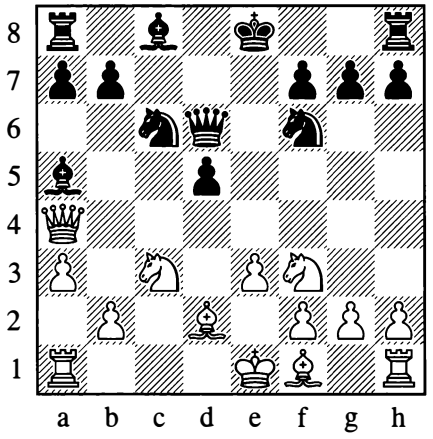
9.a3? d4 is problematic for White.

9...♕xc5 10.a3 ♗a5 11.♕a4

11.♕b5?! ♕d6 gives White a slightly worse version of the main line, as his queen is misplaced. After the further 12.♗e2 0–0 13.0–0 a6 Black was doing well in K. Tan – Medina, Penang 2012.

11.♖c1 0–0 12.♕a4 ♕e7 (12...♕d6N also looks okay) was roughly equal in Hernandez – Crespo, Chubut 2014.

11...♕d6



12.♘d4!?N

12.♗d3 0–0 13.0–0 a6 14.♕h4 h6 15.♘e2 ♗xd2 16.♘xd2 ♗g4 17.♘c3 ♘e5 was roughly level in Almeida Quintana – Vehi Bach, Barbera del Valles 2010.

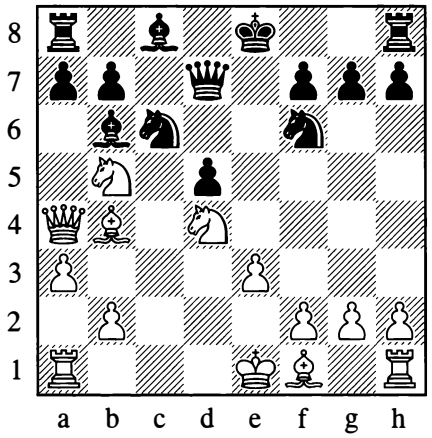
The text move is recommended by Sherbakov but I don't believe Black has too many problems.

12...♗b6

12...0–0 13.♘xc6 ♗xc3 14.♗xc3 bxc6 is close to equal but I don't see any need to give up the bishop pair.

13.♘cb5 ♕d7 14.♗b4!?

This seems like the only real chance to cause problems but Black has enough resources to deal with it.



14...♘xd4 15.exd4

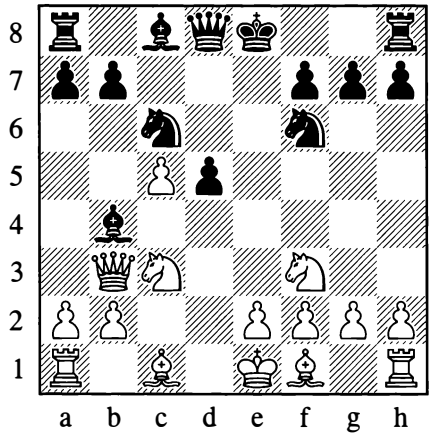
15.♘d6†?! ♔d8 16.♕xd7† ♔xd7 17.exd4 a5 can only be dangerous for White.

15...♕e6† 16.♗e2 ♗d7 17.0–0 a6 18.♖fe1 ♘e4! 19.f3 0–0–0 20.fxe4 axb5∞

The position is messy and double-edged, although the computer calls it dead equal.

B42) 7...♘c6

This natural developing move has been the usual choice.



8.♗g5

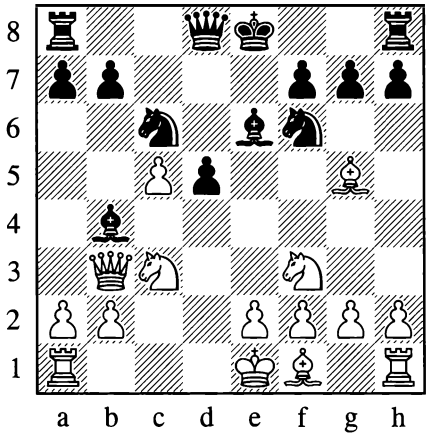
8.a3 ♗xc5= is nothing to worry about.

8.♗e3?! defends the c5-pawn but is rather slow. After 8...♘e4 9.a3 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3 0–0 White was lagging behind with the development of his kingside in Fricke – John, corr. 2004.

8...♗e6!

8...h6 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 transposes to variation A2 of the next chapter and is a playable option for those looking to cut down on theory – although I must emphasize that this particular line is not my main recommendation for Black.

After the text move it is White who needs to tread carefully to equalize.



9.0–0–0

This has been played in all the games so far, and I don't see a better way for White to deal with the threat of ...d4.

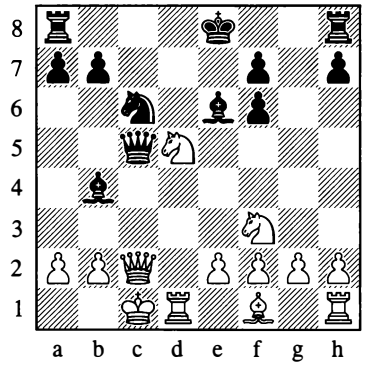
9...0–0

After 9...d4?! 10.♕a4 ♕e7! Black's position cannot be refuted directly, but White can secure a positional advantage after 11.♘xd4 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 ♕xc5 13.♘xe6!?N (13.♗xf6 ♕xc3† 14.♔b1 gxf6 15.♘xe6 fxe6 16.e3 was also a touch better for White in Marculescu – Correa de Almeida, corr. 2009) 13...♕xc3† 14.♕c2 ♕xc2† 15.♔xc2 fxe6 16.f3± as pointed out by Sherbakov.

9...♕e7!?

This is a more reliable back-up to the main line. Play continues:

10.♗xf6 gxf6 11.♘xd5 ♕xc5† 12.♕c2

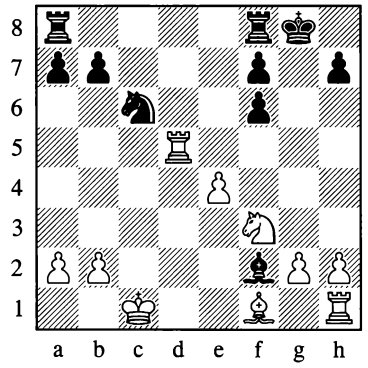


12...♗xd5

12...0–0–0!?N also looks interesting: 13.e4 ♕xc2† 14.♔xc2 ♗c5 With active ideas such as ...f5, ...♘b4† and ...♖hg8 in the air, Black has definite compensation for the pawn.

13.♕xc5 ♗xc5 14.♖xd5 ♗xf2 15.e4 0–0!?N

15...♖g8 16.♔b1 ♖d8 occurred in two games, Zhang Ziyang – Hou Yifan, Xinghua 2010, and Harika – Arutinian, Dubai 2010, when 17.g3!N ♘d4 18.♗g2± would have secured a small edge for White. The text move is the computer's top choice, and a natural attempt to improve Black's play.

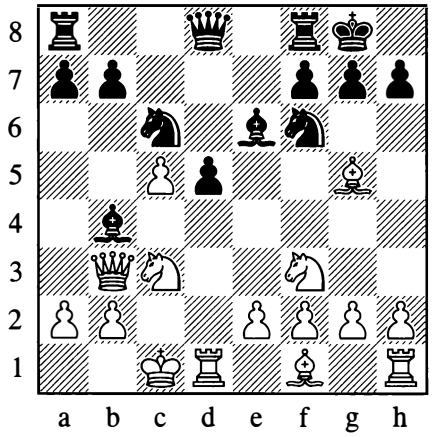


16.♗b5

16.♔b1 ♖fe8 enables Black to pick up the e-pawn.

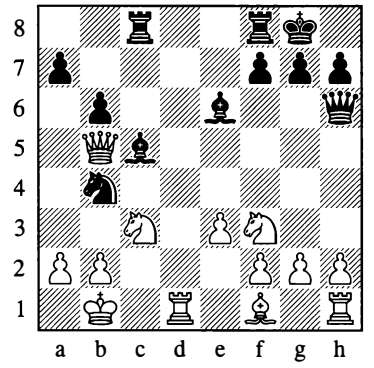
16...♘b4 17.♖d7 a6 18.♗a4 ♘xa2† 19.♔b1 b5!

White may be able to claim a tiny edge, but a draw is the most likely result.



10.e4

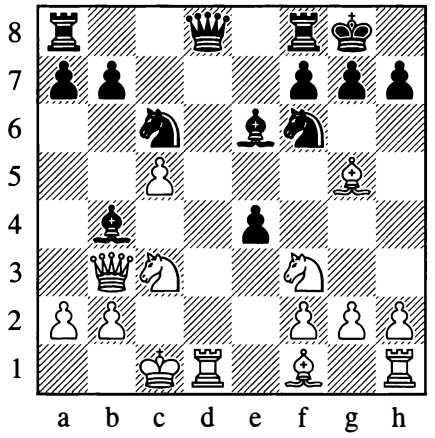
10.♗xf6?! ♕xf6 11.♘xd5 is too greedy, and 11...♕h6† 12.e3 ♗xc5 gives Black more than enough compensation. For example: 13.♕b5 ♖ac8 14.♔b1 (14.♕xc5 ♗xd5 15.♔b1 [15.♕xd5?? ♘b4†–+] 15...♕g6†∞) 14...b6 15.♘c3 ♘b4



16.♘d4? A blunder, but Black had plenty of activity for the pawn in any case. 16...♖fd8 17.♘xe6 ♖xd1† 18.♘xd1 ♕g6† 19.♗d3 ♘xd3 20.e4 ♕xe4 21.f3 ♕g6 22.♘xc5 ♘xc5† 23.♔a1 ♘b3†! 0–1 Shimanov – Vidit, Chennai 2011.

10...dxe4!

Black exposes his own queen but also opens a line of attack towards the white queen on b3.



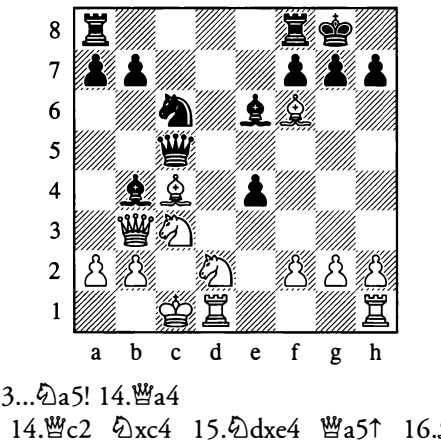
11.♖xd8

Clearly inferior is:

11.♗c4? ♕e7 12.♘d2

12.♗xe6 ♕xe6 (12...exf3!?∓) 13.♕xe6 fxe6 14.♘d2 ♘g4 15.♘dxe4 ♘xf2 16.♘xf2 ♖xf2 17.♖d2 (17.♖d7 ♗xc3 18.bxc3 ♖xg2∓) 17...♗xc5 18.♖xf2 ♗xf2∓

12...♕xc5 13.♗xf6



13...♘a5! 14.♕a4

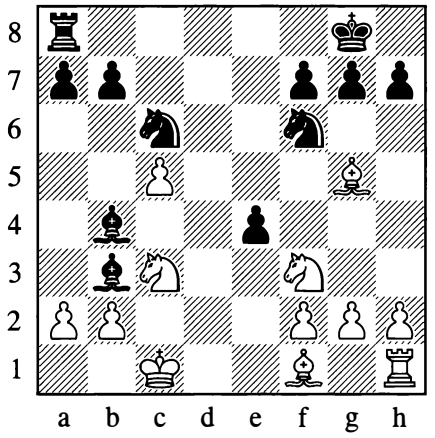
14.♕c2 ♘xc4 15.♘dxe4 ♕a5↑ 16.♗d4 ♖ac8 17.♖he1 ♗f5∓

14...♘xc4 15.♘dxe4 ♕b6 16.♘d5 ♗xd5 17.♖xd5 ♖fc8 18.♔b1 gxf6 19.♕d7 ♗f8 20.♖b5 ♕c6 21.♕xb7 ♕xe4†

0–1 Boros – C. Balogh, Hungary 2011.

11...♗xb3 12.♖xa8 ♖xa8

Now White must make the right decision to avoid being worse.



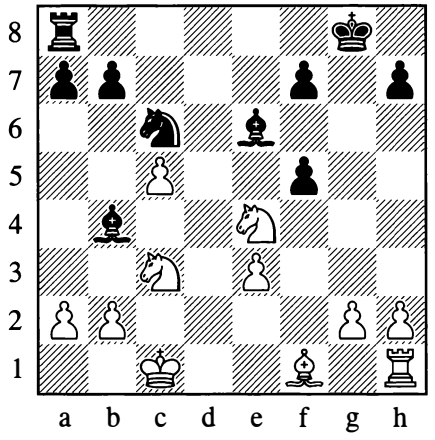
13.♘d2

13.axb3?! exf3 14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.♘d5 ♗xc5 16.♘xf6† ♔g7 17.♘e4 ♗e7 18.gxf3 ♘d4↑ is good for Black, as Sherbakov points out.

13...♗e6 14.♗xf6 e3!?

14...gxf6 15.♘dxe4 f5 16.a3 fxe4 17.axb4 ♘xb4 18.♘xe4 ♔g7= also looks sensible.

15.♘de4 gxf6 16.fxe3 f5



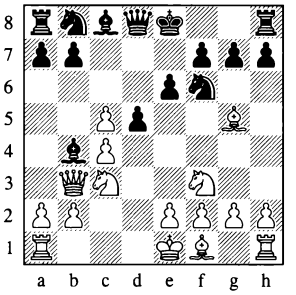
17.a3! fxe4 18.axb4 ♘xb4 19.♘xe4 ♖c8=

In Karthikeyan – Aleksandrov, New Delhi 2012, White was unable to prevent ...f5 and ...♖xc5(†), regaining the pawn with a balanced position.

Conclusion

5...a5!? is certainly playable, and could be a convenient choice to have in your repertoire. Still, 5...c5 seems like the right choice to analyse as our main line. 6.a3?! and 6.e3 are both toothless, while 6.♗g5 is not particularly critical either, although it does present some move-order challenges; I think that 6...dxc4!? makes the most sense for us. We finished up by checking 6.cxd5 exd5 7.dxc5, when both 7...♕a5!? and 7...♘c6 are playable, so you can choose whichever one you like the most. On a general note, quite a lot of the variations in this chapter have involved Black gaining time against the white queen, which highlights the main drawback of White's chosen system.

Chapter 12



5...c5 6.dxc5

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕b3 c5 6.dxc5

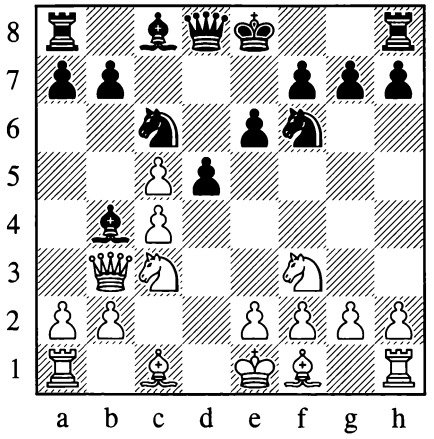
A) 6...♘c6 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 **243**
A1) 9.e3 **244**
A2) 9.cxd5 exd5 10.e3 ♗e6!? 11.♗b5 ♗xc5 **247**
A21) 12.0–0 **248**
A22) 12.♘xd5 **248**
B) 6...♘a6! 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.♕xc3 ♘xc5 **251**
B1) 9.b4 **252**
B2) 9.cxd5 ♕xd5 10.♗e3 ♘ce4 **254**
B21) 11.♕e5 **254**
B22) 11.♕d4 **256**

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕b3 c5 6.dxc5

This is White's most popular and critical reply. His aim is to break up Black's centre without yet committing to cxd5, which would open up a path for the c8-bishop.

We will start by analysing **A) 6...♘c6**, before moving on to my main recommendation of **B) 6...♘a6!?**.

A) 6...♘c6



This is the most common reply; it leads to interesting play and has scored well so far. Some of the ensuing positions can also be reached via the 6.cxd5 move order, making it a convenient repertoire choice. Personally I think it's worth the extra effort learning the 6...♘a6 variation in conjunction with variation B4 of the previous chapter against 6.cxd5; nevertheless, the present variation might appeal to some readers.

7.♗g5

This is the most popular move by far.

The next-most-common choice is:

7.e3?!

This looks too timid, and Black easily gets a comfortable game.

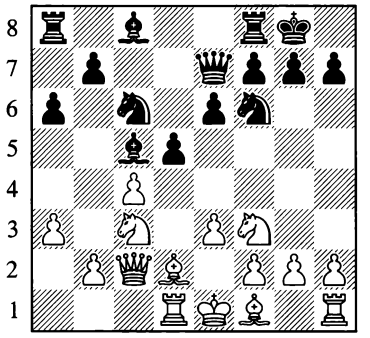
7...0–0 8.♗d2 ♗xc5 9.♖d1

9.♕c2 can be met by 9...d4!N 10.exd4 (10.♘a4 dxe3 11.fxe3 ♗e7∓) 10...♘xd4 11.♘xd4 ♕xd4 12.♗e3 ♕e5 13.0–0–0 ♗xe3† 14.fxe3 ♕xe3†∓ and White's compensation is not sufficient.

9...♕e7

9...d4!? 10.♘a4 b6 11.♘xc5 bxc5 12.♕a3 (12.exd4 cxd4 13.♗d3 e5∓) 12...♕b6∞ also leads to interesting play.

10.♕c2 a6 11.a3



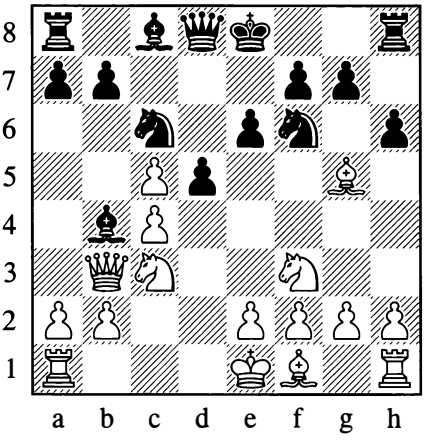
11...dxc4N

This seems simplest, although 11...♗a7 12.b4 ♗d7 13.♕b3 d4!? 14.exd4 e5∞ was an interesting way to put pressure on White in Van Wessel – Winants, Netherlands 2012.

12.♗xc4 b5 13.♗d3 ♗b7 14.0–0 ♖ac8∓

Black has the more harmonious position.

7...h6



8.♗xf6

8.♗h4

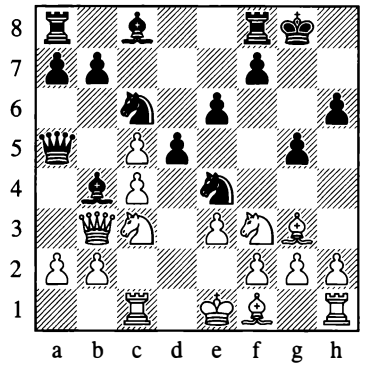
This move has never been played, probably because White players consider it insufficiently forcing and too much of a liability to give Black the ...h6 move for free. A logical continuation would be:

8...g5

8...0–0!? is also sensible now that ...h6 is on the board. For example: 9.0–0–0 ♗xc3 10.♕xc3 g5 11.♗g3 (11.♘xg5? hxg5 12.♗xg5 ♘e4! 13.♗xd8 ♘xc3∓) 11...♘e4 12.♕a3 ♕f6 13.e3 (13.h4? g4 14.♘h2 ♘xf2∓) 13...b6∞ With extremely murky play.

9.♗g3 ♘e4 10.e3 ♕a5 11.♖c1 0–0

11...♘xc5 12.♕c2 ♕xa2 is playable but it feels too greedy. 13.cxd5 exd5 14.♗b5⩲



12.♗e2

12.h4? backfires after 12...♘xg3 13.fxg3 ♕xc5∓.

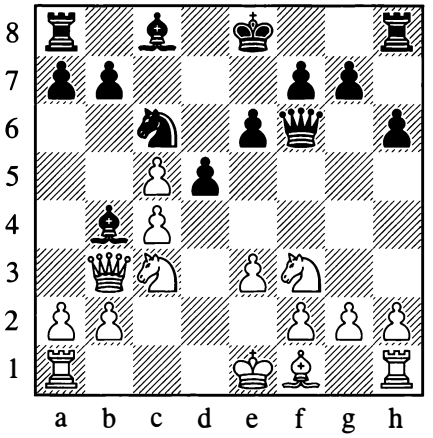
12.cxd5?! merely opens a path for Black's light-squared bishop: 12...exd5 13.♗e2 ♗e6∓

12...♗xc3† 13.bxc3 ♕xc5∞

8...♕xf6

White has a choice between **A1) 9.e3** and **A2) 9.cxd5**.

A1) 9.e3



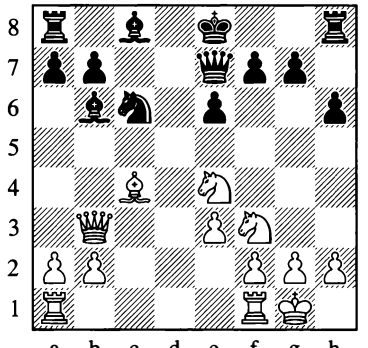
9...dxc4

Black preferred 9...a5 and went on to equalize in L'Ami – Cheparinov, Wijk aan Zee 2006, but 10.0–0–0!N dxc4 11.♕xc4± would have made life harder.

10.♕xc4

This is the more challenging option, taking a pawn while defending c5.

I also checked: 10.♗xc4 ♕e7!? 11.0–0 ♗xc5 12.♘e4 ♗b6



13.♖ad1 (13.♖fd1 0–0 14.♖ac1 ♘a5=) 13...0–0 14.♕c3 ♗d7 15.b4 ♖fd8 with equal chances.

10...♕e7

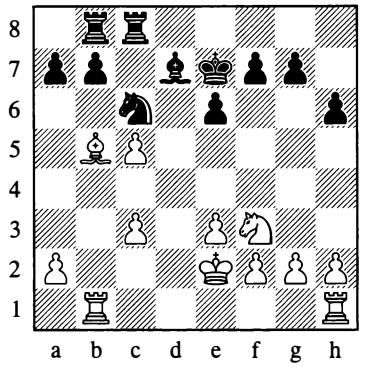
A playable alternative is:

10...♗xc3† 11.♕xc3 ♕xc3† 12.bxc3 ♗d7

Black remains a pawn down for the time being, but White will struggle to prove an advantage due to his weak c-pawns.

13.♖b1 ♖b8 14.♗b5 ♔e7 15.♔e2 ♖hc8

White's best chance looks to be:



16.♖b2!N

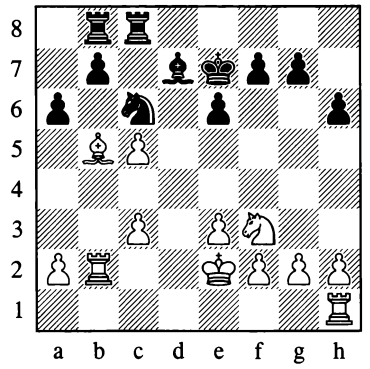
The game continued 16.♘d4?! a6 17.♗xc6 ♗xc6 and the weakness of the c-pawns meant that Black was fine in Barbot – Rindlisbacher, Ruzomberok 2014.

The text move is more challenging; White intends to pile up on the b-file, but Black has more than one route to equality.

16...a6!

16...♘a5? would be a mistake: 17.♗xd7 ♔xd7 18.♘e5† ♔e7 19.♖d1 ♖c7 20.♖b5 ♘c6 21.♖d7†!±

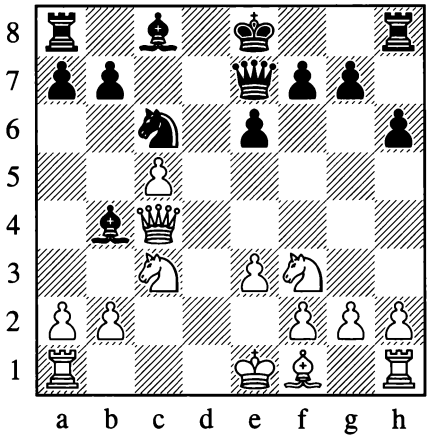
16...b6!? seems fine though: 17.cxb6 ♖xb6 18.♖b3 ♖cb8 19.♗xc6 ♗xc6 20.♖hb1 ♗d5 21.♖xb6 axb6 22.a4 ♖c8= The game might end in a repetition after 23.♔d3 ♖d8 24.♔e2 ♖c8.



17.♗a4 f6 18.♖hb1 ♘d8!

This accurate move solves the last of Black's problems. The game is heading for a draw, for instance:

19.♗xd7 ♔xd7 20.♖d1† ♔e8 21.♖d6 ♖xc5 22.♖xa6 ♖xc3=



11.a3!?N

This is the computer's top choice.

11.0–0–0 ♕xc5 12.♕xc5 ♗xc5 13.♗b5 ♗d7 14.♔b1 0–0–0= was fine for Black in Akobian – Krush, Gibraltar 2011.

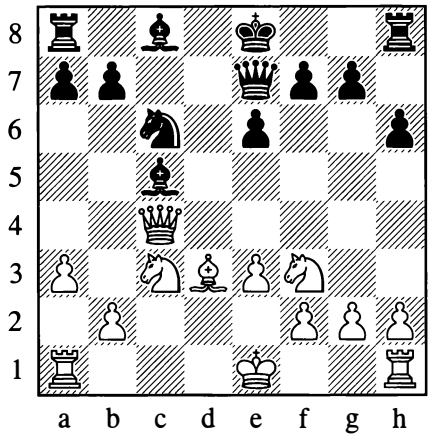
11.♘e5!?N is another move to consider, but after 11...♗xc5 12.♘xc6 bxc6 Black's bishop pair compensates for the slight damaging of his pawn structure.

11...♗xc5

In *A Cunning Chess Opening Repertoire for White*, Graham Burgess remarks that "With the queens still on the board, White has some prospects of putting his development advantage to use, and maybe even exploiting Black's slight vulnerability on the b1-h7 diagonal." This sounds a bit vague, especially without any further analysis, but let's have a look anyway at how the game may develop.

12.♗d3

If White wants to create threats on the b1-h7 diagonal, then presumably this is where his bishop should go.



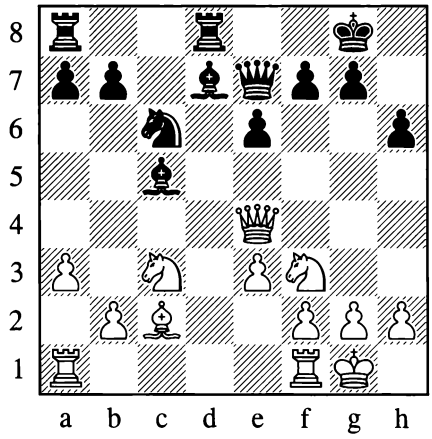
12...0–0 13.0–0

13.♕e4?! is easily met by 13...f5 14.♕c4 ♗d7 15.0–0 ♖ac8 when Black has no problems on the kingside, and is at least equal with his two bishops.

13...♖d8 14.♗c2 ♗d7 15.♕e4?!

I actually think that powering up on the b1-h7 diagonal (à la Burgess) is a mistake. All it seems to do is provoke ...f5 free of charge, giving Black the chance to develop a kingside initiative.

15.♖ad1 is a more respectable approach which maintains the balance. 15...♗e8 16.b4 ♗b6 17.♘a4 ♗c7= Black is ready to meet ♘c5 with ...b6.



15...g6!

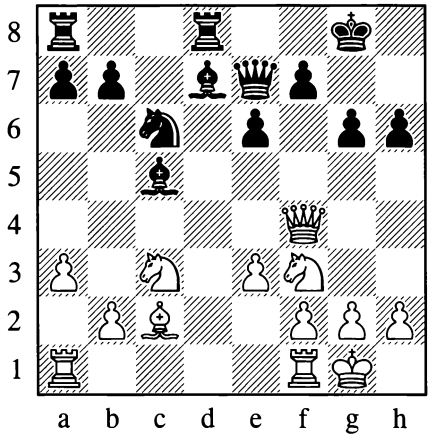
It is useful to start with this move. Now if and when we play ...f5, we have bolstered our f-pawn against White's e3-e4 push.

15...f5 is also possible, albeit less flexible. 16.♕c4 g6 Black needs to support the f5-pawn against the aforementioned pawn break, as well as ♗xf5 tricks. 17.e4 (17.♖ad1 ♖ac8 18.♕a2 ♔h8 looks perfectly reasonable for Black) 17...♖ac8 White is too underdeveloped to do anything destructive, for instance: 18.♖ad1 (18.exf5 ♘b4! threatens ...♗xf2†, and after 19.♕e2 ♘xc2 20.♕xc2 gxf5 21.♘e5 ♗c6 22.♕e2 ♔h7 the position is equal. Still, White should probably go for this...) 18...♘b4! 19.♕b3 (19.axb4?? ♗xf2†–+) 19...♘xc2 20.♕xc2 ♗c6∓

16.♕f4

16.h4?! is too primitive: 16...f5 17.♕c4 (17.♕f4 is met by 17...♔h7, when Black has ...e5 and ...g5 ideas in the air, while it is not clear what White's plans are) 17...♖ac8 18.♖ad1 ♗d6∓

16.♖ad1 is probably good enough to keep things equal, although 16...♖ac8 17.♕f4 g5!? forces White to be careful. 18.♕g3! (18.♕e4 f5 19.♕c4 ♗b6 20.♕b3 [20.♗xf5?? ♘d4–+] 20...♔h8∓) 18...f5 19.♘a4 ♗e8 20.♘xc5 ♕xc5 21.♗b3 ♗f7=



16...g5! 17.♕g3 f5!

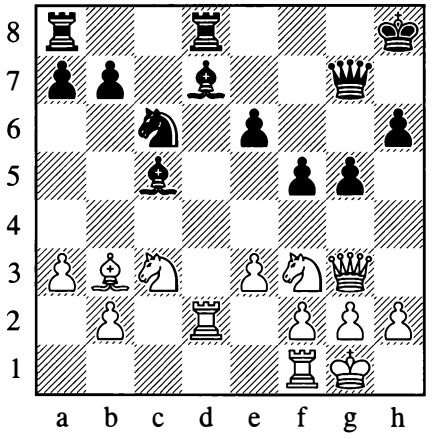
Clearly Black is the one who is better positioned to generate play on the kingside.

18.♖ad1

18.e4? ♗d6∓

18...♕g7 19.♗b3 ♔h8 20.♖d2

20.♘b5?! e5! is unpleasant for White.

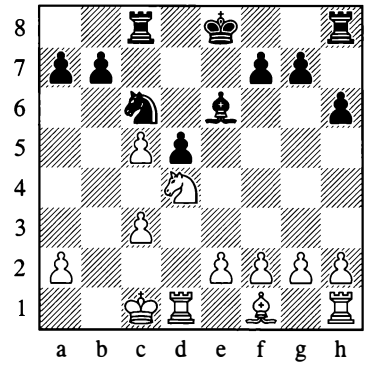


20...♗e8 21.♖fd1 ♖xd2 22.♖xd2 g4

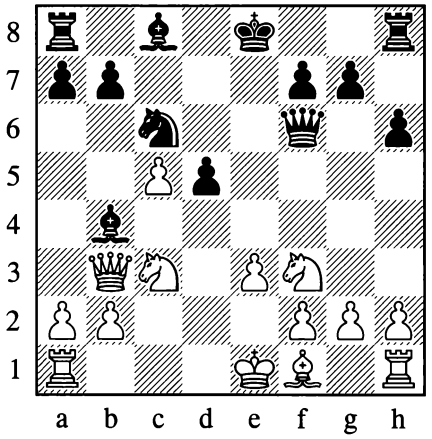
Black clearly has some initiative, and he has several ideas in the air such as ...♕f6, ...♖d8, or even ...♗xa3. White is not losing but he will have to work hard for equality.

A2) 9.cxd5 exd5 10.e3

10.0–0–0 leads to simplifications and an equal position after: 10...♗xc3 11.♕xc3 ♕xc3† 12.bxc3 ♗e6 13.♘d4 ♖c8



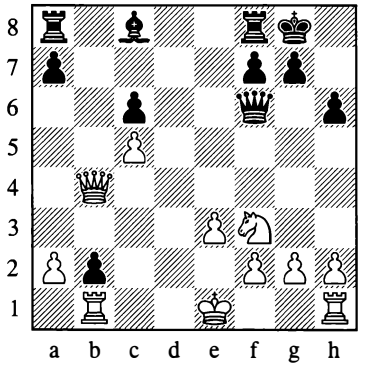
14.♘b3 (14.e3 ♘a5 15.♘b3 ♘xb3† 16.axb3 ♖xc5 17.♔d2 ♖a5 was also level in Vorobiov – Pavlov, Moscow 2010) 14...♘e5 15.e3 0–0 16.♔b2 ♘d7 17.♖d4 ♘xc5 18.♘xc5 ♖xc5 19.♗d3 The players agreed a draw in this equal position in Mirzoev – Gelashvili, Antakya 2010.



10...♗e6!?

This leads to an interesting pawn sacrifice.

10...0–0 has been the more common choice, leading to a forcing line: 11.♗b5 d4 12.♗xc6 dxc3 13.♕xb4 cxb2 14.♖b1 bxc6



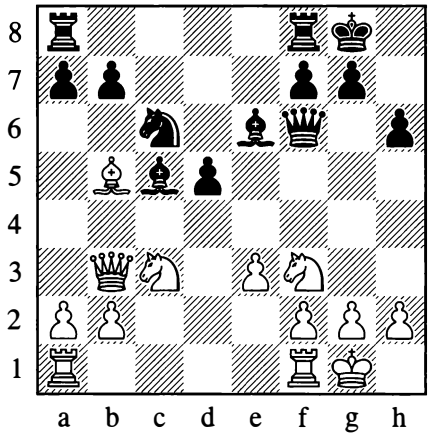
15.0–0!± White has achieved a huge practical score from this position. (15.♕xb2?! is less accurate in view of 15...♕g6 16.0–0 ♗h3 17.♘h4 ♕h5 18.♕b4 ♗g4∞ when Black has plenty of counterplay).

11.♗b5 ♗xc5

White must choose between developing with **A21) 12.0–0** and accepting the sacrifice with **A22) 12.♘xd5**.

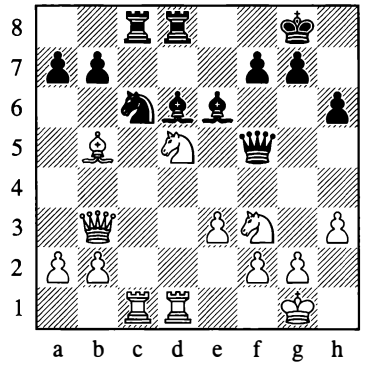
12.♕a4?! is a bad idea: 12...0–0 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♕xc6 ♗a3! 15.♖b1 (15.bxa3? ♖fc8!–+) 15...♖fc8 16.♕a4 ♗xb2 17.♖xb2 ♕xc3†∓ Ravi – Shyam, Kolkata 2015.

A21) 12.0–0 0–0



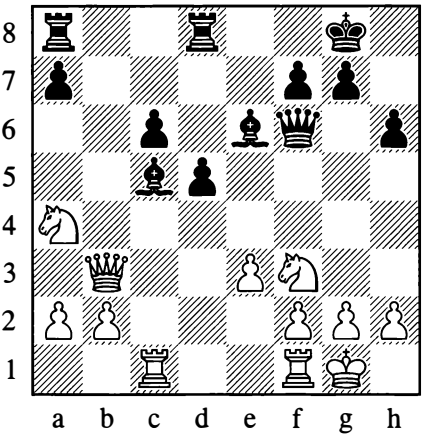
13.♖ac1

13.♘xd5? would be a terrible idea due to 13...♕f5 when there is no check on c7. After 14.♖ac1 ♗d6 15.♖fd1 ♖fd8 16.h3 ♖ac8 White's knight is stuck in an inescapable pin. (16...♗f8!? 17.♗c4 ♘a5 18.♕a4 ♘xc4 19.e4 ♕xe4 20.♖xc4 ♕e2∓ also works) The continuation might be:



17.♗e2 (17.♗c4? ♘a5–+) 17...♗xd5 18.♖xd5 ♕xd5 19.♕xd5 ♗h2† 20.♔xh2 ♖xd5∓

13...♖fd8 14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.♘a4

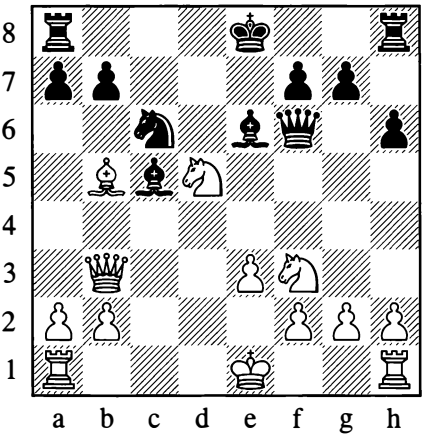


15...♗d6!N∞

15...♖ab8 16.♕c3 ♕xc3 17.♖xc3 ♗e7 18.♘d4± left Black under positional pressure in Vijayalakshmi – Tan Zhongyi, Al Ain 2015.

The text move would have avoided unnecessary simplifications and maintained roughly equal chances, with Black's bishop pair compensating for the weakness of the c6-pawn and c5-outpost. Note that 16.♖xc6? d4 17.♕d1 ♗d7 18.♖c1?! dxe3 19.fxe3 ♗b5–+ would be disastrous for White.

A22) 12.♘xd5



White takes up the challenge and eats the pawn, which must be the critical choice.

12...♗xd5 13.♕xd5 ♗b4†!

Misplacing White's king is the idea behind the sacrifice. Whether or not it is enough for full compensation is a matter for debate, so it's worth investigating and making up your own mind.

14.♔f1 0–0 15.♕b3

White may also try to fix his king position with:

15.g3 a6!?N

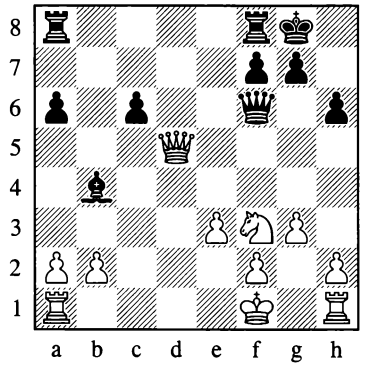
An interesting attempt to take advantage of the white queen's new defensive obligations towards the f3-knight.

Burgess quotes the following game: 15...♖ad8 16.♕e4 ♗a3 (16...♖fe8 17.♕f4 ♕xb2 18.♔g2±) 17.♗xc6 ♗xb2 18.♖b1 bxc6 19.♔g2 ♖b8 20.♖hd1 and White had a positional plus in T.L. Petrosian – Rahman, Dubai 2013.

16.♗xc6

16.♗e2?! ♕xb2∓ is no good for White.

16...bxc6

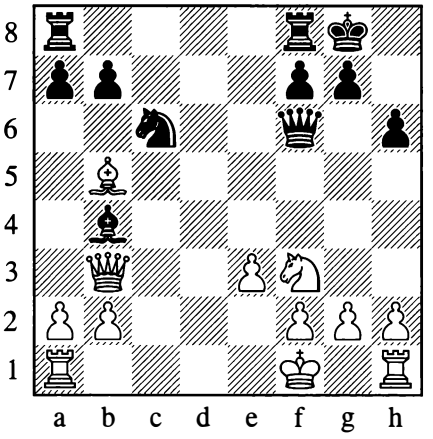


17.♕d1

17.♕e4?! is too greedy, and 17...♖ae8 18.♕xb4 ♕xf3 19.♔g1 ♖b8 20.♕c3 ♖fd8 21.h4 ♕e2∓ makes White suffer.

17...♕xb2

I think Black is okay – the pawn structure is the same as in the Petrosian – Rahman game, but White's coordination is not so great and Black is ready to bring a rook to the d-file with gain of tempo.



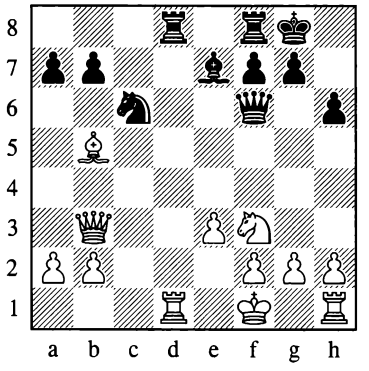
15...♗e7

I also looked at 15...♗a5!?. However, instead of 16.♗e2, as played in Halsz – Bokros, Hungary 2015, 16.♔e2!N is a useful improvement, aiming to develop the h1-rook. 16...♘e5 17.♖hd1 a6 18.♗d3 ♘xf3 19.gxf3± Black is struggling to prove full compensation.

16.♗e2

White wants to play g2-g3 and ♔g2, but he needs to defend f3 first.

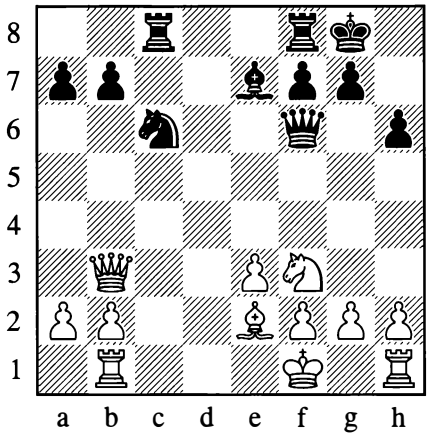
16.♖d1 occurred in L'Ami – Wojtaszek, Legnica 2013, and now 16...♖ad8!N looks best. If White continues in routine fashion then Black will solve his problems with ease. For example:



17.♗e2 ♖xd1† 18.♗xd1 ♘e5 19.♘xe5 ♕xe5 20.♗f3 ♖d8 21.g3 ♖d2 22.♔g2 ♖xb2=

16...♖ac8 17.♖b1!

17.g3 can be met by 17...♘a5 18.♕b5 ♖c5= and the b2-pawn falls.



17...♕f5!N

17...♖fd8 18.g3 ♘a5 19.♕a4 ♘c4 20.♔g2 ♘d2 21.♖bc1 ♘xf3 22.♗xf3± enabled White to consolidate the extra pawn in Bukavshin – Dauletova, Taganrog 2014.

The text move is more challenging. Black hits the rook on b1 and interferes with White's plan of g2-g3 and ♔g2 by preparing a disruptive check on h3.

18.♗d3

18.♖d1 ♗f6 19.g3 ♕h3† 20.♔g1 ♖fd8 is evaluated by the engine as slightly better for White, but I can't imagine many players feeling totally comfortable on White's side with the rook stuck on h1.

18...♕f6

It may look as if Black is wasting time, but he has diverted the enemy bishop from the defence of f3, once again obstructing the g2-g3 plan.

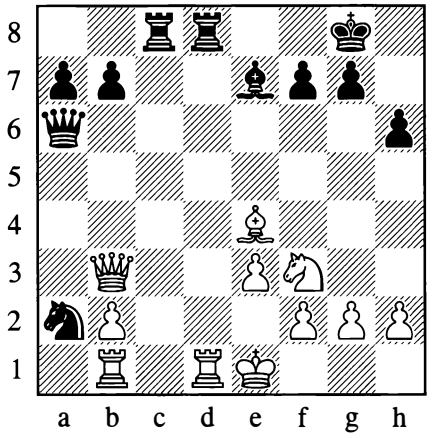
19.♔e2!?

Walking the king back to the centre may be White's only route to an edge.

19.♗e2 ♕f5= is a repetition.

19.♕xb7 ♘b4 20.♗e2 ♘xa2 21.♕e4 (21.g3 ♘c1! 22.♗d1 ♕f5 23.♖a1 ♕h3†⩲ leaves White struggling to complete development) 21...♖fd8 22.g3 ♘c1 23.♗b5 ♘b3 24.♔g2 ♘d2 25.♘xd2 ♖xd2 26.♖hf1 ♖cc2⩲ I think Black has enough compensation.

19...♘b4 20.♖hd1 ♖fd8 21.♗e4 ♕a6† 22.♔e1 ♘xa2



23.♗xb7

23.♖a1?? is refuted by 23...♖xd1† 24.♕xd1 ♗b4† 25.♘d2 ♖d8–+ and White is hopelessly tangled up.

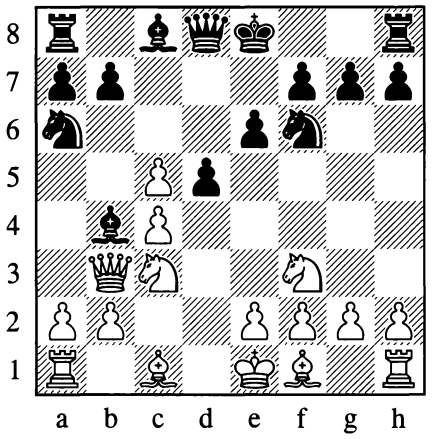
23...♕a5† 24.♔f1

24.♔e2? exposed White to a fork from a most unusual checking square: 24...♖xd1 25.♖xd1 ♘c1†! and Black wins material.

24...♖b8 25.♖xd8† ♗xd8 26.♔g1±

After many accurate moves, White has kept an edge thanks to his extra pawn.

B) 6...♘a6!

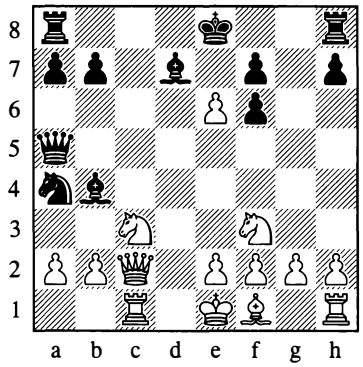


This is my first choice. It has not been anywhere near as popular as the previous variation but I believe it has been under-rated.

7.a3

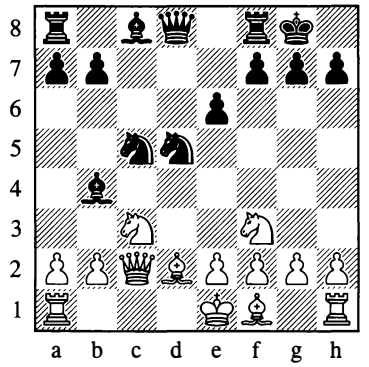
Other moves get nowhere for White, for instance:

7.♗g5?! is mistimed. 7...♕a5! 8.♗xf6 ♘xc5! 9.♕c2 gxf6 10.cxd5 ♘a4 11.♖c1 ♗d7 12.dxe6 and now Black should prioritize activity over pawn structure with:

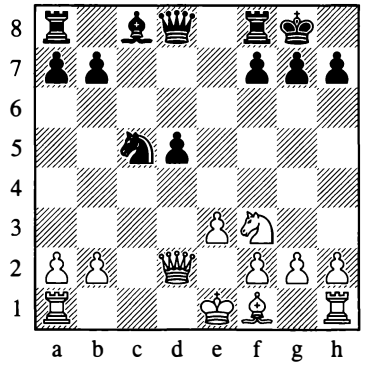


12...♗xe6!N (12...fxe6 still left White under pressure, but after 13.♘d2! ♖c8 14.♘db1 White was able to keep his position together in Socko – Movsesian, Germany 2014) 13.a3 White has to do something before he is killed by ...♖c8. (With the black bishop on e6, 13.♘d2 ♖c8 14.♘db1? can now be refuted by 14...♗xa2–+) 13...♗xc3† 14.bxc3 ♖c8∓ Black will, at the very least, win both of White's queenside pawns.

7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♗d2 ♘xc5 9.♕c2 0–0 is fine for Black, for instance:

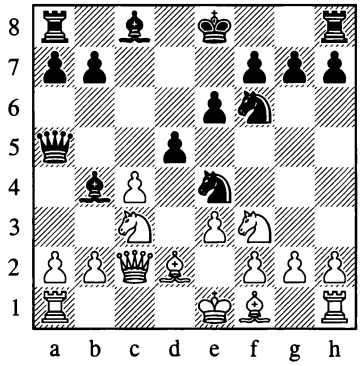


10.♘xd5 (10.e4? ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♗a5 12.♗e2 ♗d7! 13.0–0 ♗a4 is unpleasant for White) 10...♗xd2† 11.♕xd2 (11.♘xd2 ♕xd5 12.e4 ♕d6 13.♖d1 ♕e7 14.♗e2 e5=) 11...exd5 12.e3



12...♘e4 13.♕d4 ♗g4 14.♘e5 ♗e6 15.♗d3 ♕a5† 16.b4 ♕a3 17.0–0 ♘c3 18.♖fe1 ♖ac8= Black had plenty of activity to make up for the isolated pawn in Goy – Giesemann, email 2012.

7.e3 ♕a5 8.♗d2 ♘xc5 9.♕c2 ♘ce4



10.♖c1 (10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.cxd5 ♘xd2 12.♘xd2 0–0 13.a3 exd5 14.♖c1 ♗d6= S. Ernst – Lauber, Germany 2015) 10...♘xd2 11.♘xd2 ♗d7 12.a3 ♗xc3 13.♕xc3 ♕xc3 14.♖xc3 ♔e7 15.♗d3 ♖hc8= Bartel – Gajewski, Warsaw 2011.

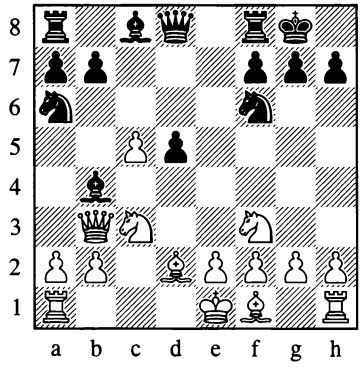
7.♗d2

This seems too passive to offer White any real hope for an advantage.

7...0–0 8.cxd5 exd5!?N

8...♘xd5 9.♘xd5 ♗xd2† 10.♘xd2 ♘xc5 11.♕c4 ♕xd5 12.♕xd5 exd5 13.♖c1 b6 14.e3 ♗f5 was equal in Koneru – Hou Yifan, Sharjah 2014.

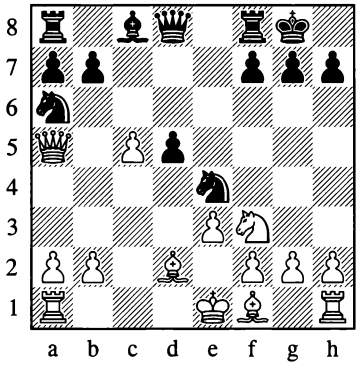
The text move keeps the position more complex. A sample continuation is:



9.e3 ♗xc3!? 10.♕xc3

10.♗xc3 ♘xc5 11.♕c2 ♘fe4 12.♗b4 (12.♗d4 ♕a5†) 12...b6 13.♗e2 a5 14.♗a3 ♗f5 gives Black plenty of activity.

10...♘e4! 11.♕a5

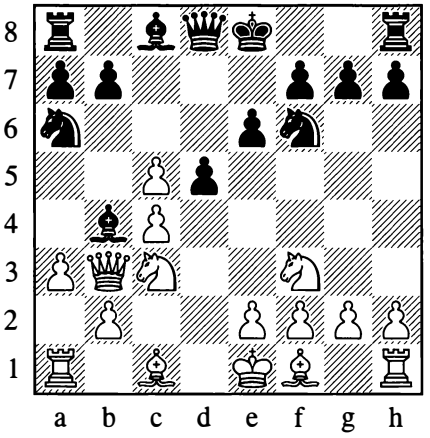


11...b6! 12.cxb6 axb6 13.♕a4 ♗b7 14.♗e2 ♘ac5 15.♕c2 ♘xd2 16.♘xd2

16.♕xd2? ♘b3!–+

16...d4→

With a strong initiative for the sacrificed pawn.



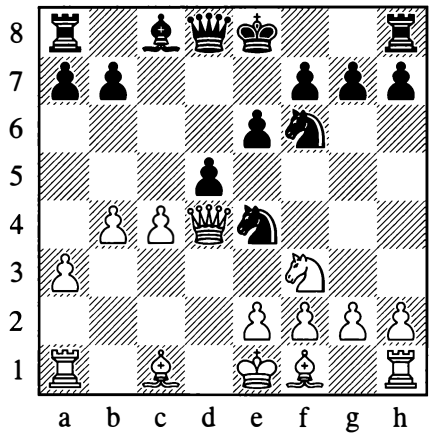
7...♗xc3† 8.♕xc3 ♘xc5

White's two most logical moves are **B1) 9.b4** and **B2) 9.cxd5**.

B1) 9.b4

There are no examples of this move on the database but I encountered it in an online blitz game. It's certainly a natural move to consider – especially taking into account that the position strongly resembles a known variation of the Nimzo-Indian. The only difference is that Black has played ...d5 instead of ...0–0 here.

9...♘ce4 10.♕d4

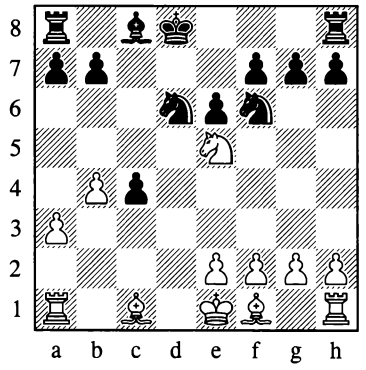


10...dxc4!?

10...0–0 would transpose to a variation of the 4.♕c2 Nimzo which is theoretically fine for Black, but it is tempting to try and take advantage of the fact that we have been able to play ...d5 more quickly.

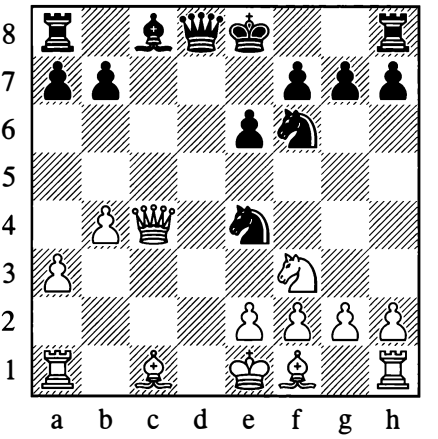
11.♕xc4

The alternative is 11.♕xd8† ♔xd8 12.♘e5 ♘d6!? when White has to find the right way to demonstrate compensation for the pawn. The best continuation looks to be:



13.♗b2 (13.f3?! ♘d7∓) 13...♗d7 14.♖d1 ♔e7 15.♖xd6 ♔xd6 16.♘xf7† ♔e7 17.♘xh8 ♖xh8∞ With a double-edged endgame.

Black's most accurate continuation is:



11...♗d7!N

In the blitz game I chose 11...0–0 12.♗b2 ♗d7, but it is better to develop the queenside quickly.

12.♗b2 ♖c8 13.♕d4

Black's next objective should be to disrupt White's development by planting a major piece on c2; the only question is which piece to use.

13...♕c7!?

Aiming to penetrate with the queen.

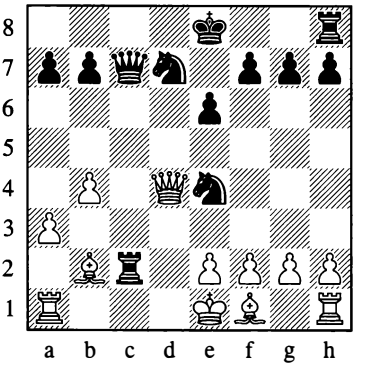
The alternative is:

13...♖c2 14.♘e5

14.e3? is impossible due to 14...♘xf2.

14.g3 0–0 15.♗g2 ♗a4 16.0–0 ♖xe2 17.♖ac1 b6∓

14...♕c7 15.♘xd7 ♘xd7

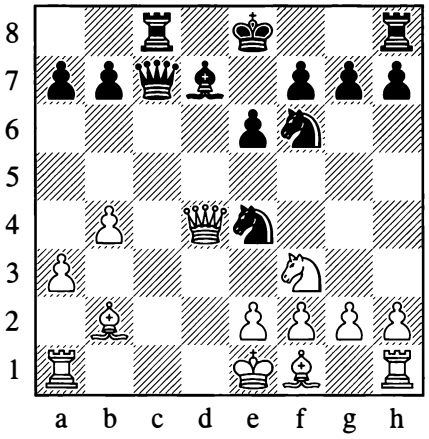


16.♖d1

16.♕xg7? ♘df6! gives Black a deadly attack: 17.♕xh8† (17.♗xf6 ♖c1† 18.♖xc1 ♕xc1#) 17...♔e7 18.♖d1 ♖xb2 and White can resign.

16...e5! 17.♕xe4 ♖xb2 18.♕f3 ♘f6

White's position is not nice at all.



14.e3 ♕c2 15.♗e2 0–0

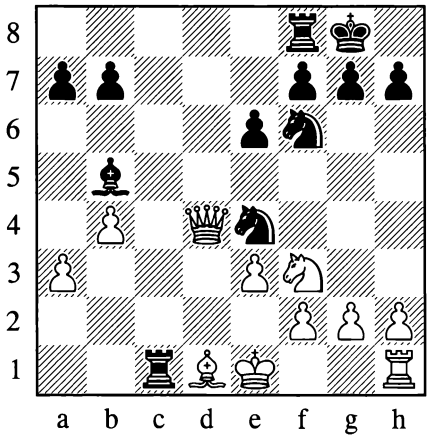
White's king is tied to the defence of the e2-bishop, so he needs to address this before he can castle.

16.♖c1

White has nothing better, but Black gets a great initiative by giving up his queen.

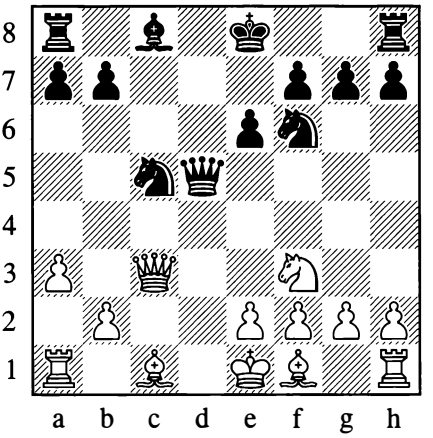
16...♕xc1† 17.♗xc1 ♖xc1† 18.♗d1 ♗b5!

White is in trouble, for instance:



19.a4 ♗xa4 20.0–0 ♘c3 21.♕d2 ♗xd1 22.♘d4 e5∓

B2) 9.cxd5 ♕xd5



10.♗e3

Developing while hitting the knight seems the most logical idea.

10.b4 ♘a4!?N looks a good move (10...♘b3 is also fine, and led to a quick draw in the following game: 11.♖b1 ♘xc1 12.♖xc1 ♗d7 13.e3 0–0 14.♗c4 ♕d6 15.0–0 ♖ac8 ½–½ Nyzhnyk – Swiercz, Denizli 2013) 11.♕e5 0–0 12.♕xd5 ♘xd5 13.♗d2 ♗d7=

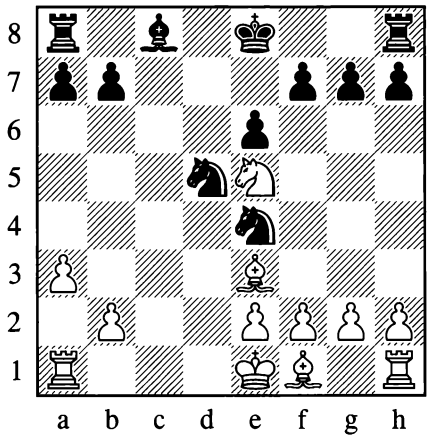
10...♘ce4

White has tried both **B21) 11.♕e5** and **B22) 11.♕d4**.

B21) 11.♕e5 ♕xe5

Burgess recommends this line for White but only considers a game where Black castled and failed to equalize. The text move is better, as Black activates his pieces and keeps his king in the centre, which is the best place for it after the queen exchange.

12.♘xe5 ♘d5



Chasing the enemy bishop, while preparing to gain space in the centre with ...f6 and ...e5 if a suitable opportunity presents itself.

13.♗c1

13.♗d4?! f6∓ is awkward for White.

13...♗d7!

Trading the second bishop for a knight is no problem, as Black is ahead in development and his knights have some excellent squares available.

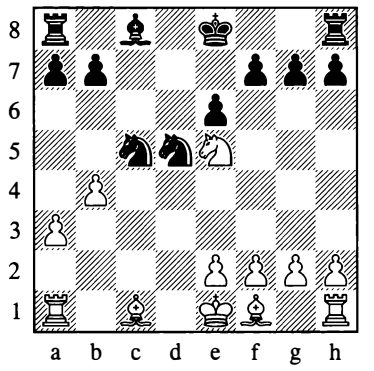
13...f6 14.♘d3 is less appealing, as White will follow up with f2-f3 and e2-e4, with good chances to exploit his bishop pair.

13...♘c5

This move has been played a few times with solid results, but White can cause problems with the improvement:

14.b4!N

14.f3 ♘b3 15.♖b1 f6 16.♘c4 and now 16...♘xc1? 17.♖xc1± was good for White in Gledura – Dragun, Katowice 2016, but either 16...e5N or 16...b6 would have been fine for Black.

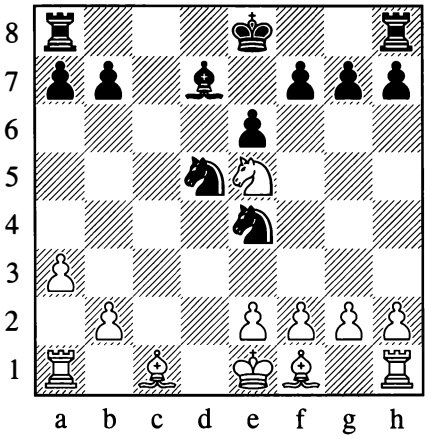


14...♘b3

14...♘a4 15.♗d2 f6 16.♘c4 ♘db6 17.♘a5 e5 18.g3± and White's bishop pair gives good chances.

15.♖b1 ♘xc1 16.♖xc1 f6 17.♘c4 ♔e7 18.e4 ♘b6 19.♘a5±

Black still has some problems to solve.



14.f3

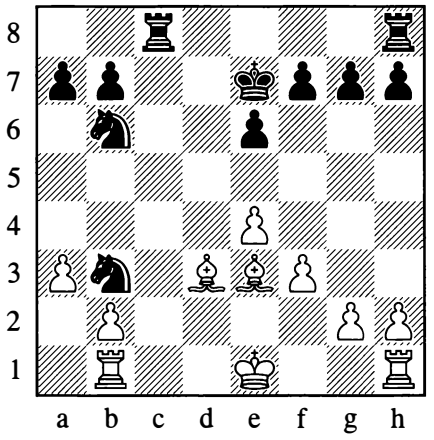
14.♘xd7 ♔xd7 14.f3 ♘c5= didn't change the evaluation in Fridman – Naroditsky, Riga 2016.

14...♘c5 15.e4 ♘b3 16.♖b1 ♘b6 17.♗e3 ♖c8 18.♘xd7 ♔xd7 19.♗d3

A recent game continued 19.♗e2 ♔e7 20.0–0 ♖hd8 21.♖fd1 e5 22.♖xd8 ♖xd8 23.♗d1 ♘d4= and White was unable to do much with the bishop pair in Bu Xiangzhi – Leko, Danzhou 2016.

19...♔e7

We are following the stem game with 13...♗d7!, where Jon Ludvig Hammer goes on to show that White's two bishops are nothing to fear.

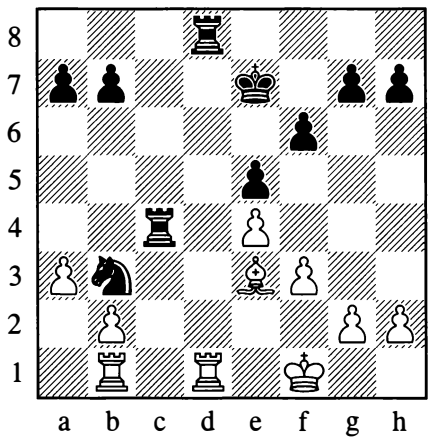


20.♔e2 e5 21.♖hd1 ♖hd8 22.♔f1 f6 23.♗b5 ♘c4

23...♘d4= is also fine.

24.♗xc4 ♖xc4

White had no choice but to swap off the annoying knight, but his remaining bishop is unlikely to cause Black any harm.

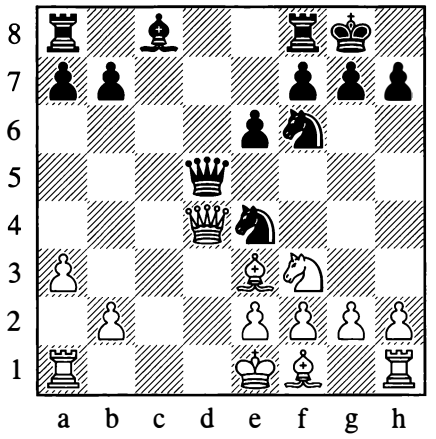


25.♖xd8 ♔xd8 26.♖d1† ♔c7 27.♖d3 ♘c5 28.♖d5 b6=

Goganov – Hammer, Yerevan 2014.

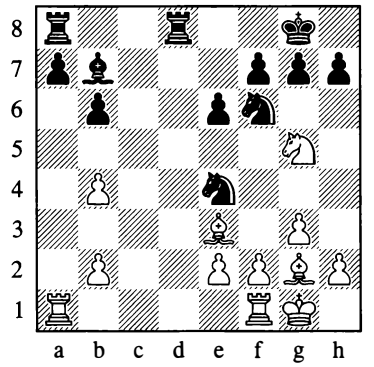
B22) 11.♕d4 0–0

This time the queen exchange would be inadvisable as White's bishop would be well placed after recapturing on d4. Fortunately, the plan of castling works better here than after 11.♕e5, as White cannot gain time with ♖d1.



12.♕xd5

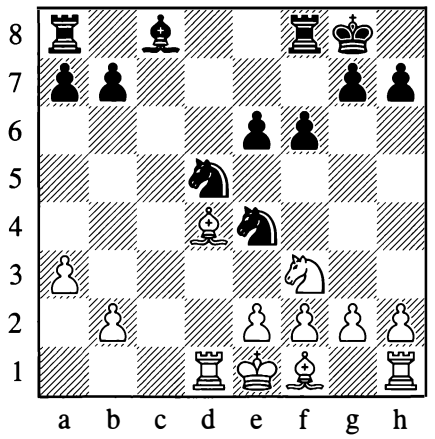
12.g3 is a reasonable alternative but Black showed a convincing path to equality in the following game: 12...b6 13.♗g2 ♗b7 14.0–0 ♕b5 15.♘g5 ♖fd8 16.♕b4 ♕xb4 17.axb4



17...♘d6 18.♗xb7 ♘xb7 19.♖fc1 ♘d6= Bu Xiangzhi – Predke, Moscow 2016.

12...♘xd5 13.♗d4 f6 14.♖d1

Here I found an important improvement.



14...♖d8!N

In the one game from this position, Black played 14...♗d7 but soon fell into trouble after: 15.♘d2 f5?! (15...♘xd2 16.♖xd2 ♖fd8 17.e4 ♘b6 would have been the lesser evil, when Black is only marginally worse) 16.♘xe4 fxe4 17.g3 ♔f7?! 18.♗g2± Svane – Smerdon, Vaxjo 2014.

The point of the text move is that White wants to play ♘d2 to free his position. By placing the rook on the d-file, Black sets up tactical motifs involving the loose bishop on d4.

15.♘d2

White should proceed with his plan, otherwise ...e5 will be unpleasant.

15...♘g5!?

15...♘b4!? is a clever tactic which leads to simplifications and a fully equal game.

The text move is more ambitious, as Black avoids exchanges and tries to exploit White's temporary lack of coordination. I have included some sample lines to show how the game might go.

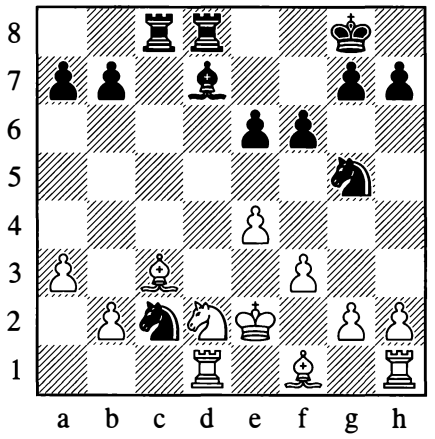
16.e4 ♘b4 17.♗c3 ♘c2† 18.♔e2 ♗d7!?

Threatening ...♗b5†.

18...e5= is a solid alternative.

19.f3 ♖ac8

White has to be careful here. The immediate threat is ...♘xa3.



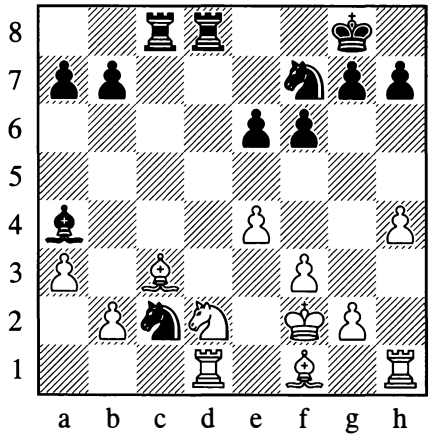
20.♔f2

20.♖c1?! ♗a4 21.h4 ♘f7 22.♘b1 (22.♔f2?? ♖xc3 23.bxc3 ♖xd2†–+) 22...♘d4† with some initiative for Black.

20...♗a4!?

20...♘xa3 is tempting but White can maintain the balance as follows: 21.♘b3 ♘c4 22.♗xc4 ♖xc4 23.♖d2 ♖c7 24.e5 fxe5 25.♗xe5 ♖cc8 26.♖c1 ♗c6 27.♖xd8† ♖xd8 28.♘a5=

21.h4 ♘f7



22.♗c4! ♖xd2† 23.♖xd2 ♖xc4 24.♖c1=

White will win back the material to reach a completely equal endgame.

Conclusion

The position after 5.♕b3 c5 6.dxc5 has been gaining in popularity but I don't see any reason to fear it. 6...♘c6 is the most popular move, when the main line sees Black sacrificing a pawn to prevent White from castling. This may appeal to some players, but White seems to be able to keep an edge with accurate play, and the whole line demands quite detailed preparation from Black as well. That is why I have chosen 6...♘a6! as my main recommendation. It is relatively easy to learn, and generally leads to positions where Black's lead in development and well-placed knights are enough to nullify White's pair of bishops.

PART V

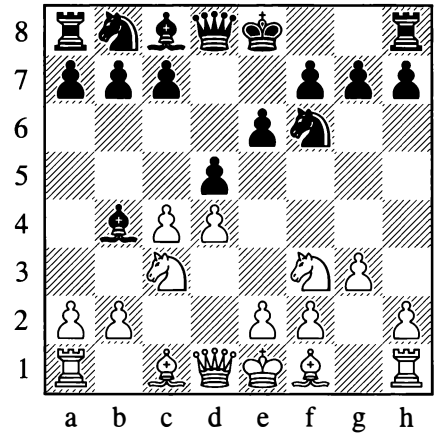
Other Ragozin Lines

Introduction to Other Lines

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4

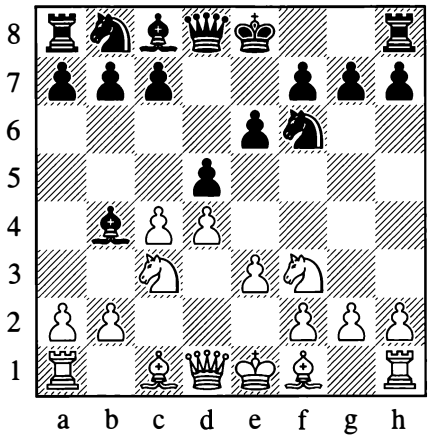
In the first four sections we analysed 5.cxd5, 5.♗g5, 5.♕a4† and 5.♕b3. This section will conclude our coverage of the Ragozin by dealing with all of White's other plausible moves. There are three chapters, arranged in the following way:

5.g3 steers the game into Catalan territory, and will be discussed in Chapter 13. This position can also be reached via the Catalan move order 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♗b4† 5.♘c3, so it's important to know how to react.



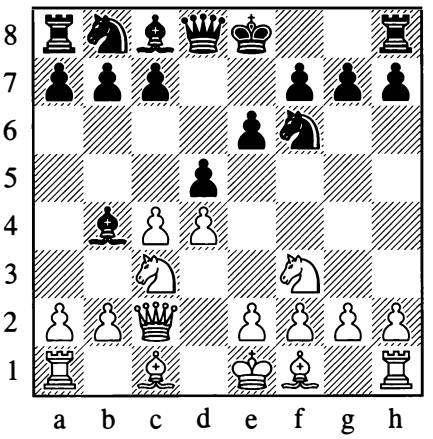
5...dxc4! This is not only a good move in its own right; it's also consistent with our approach for this book, with Black looking to capture on c4 at an opportune moment to create confusion in the White camp. Here it makes a lot of sense, as White is not well positioned to win the pawn back, as his bishop is heading to the long diagonal. The main line continues **6.♗g2 ♘c6 7.0–0 0–0 8.a3 ♗e7 9.e4 ♘a5** when White controls the centre but remains a pawn down. Black will generally follow up with ...a6 (or ...♖b8) to prepare ...b5, and is well placed for queenside activity with moves like ...♗b7, ...♘b3 and, when the time is right, ...c5.

5.e3 can be found in Chapter 14. White's last move is a popular continuation which takes the game into Nimzo-Indian territory. Those of you who already play the Nimzo may have something lined up here but, for those who don't, I offer an interesting set-up which does not come with too much heavy theory and yet has still proven its worth at the highest level. The plan runs as follows:



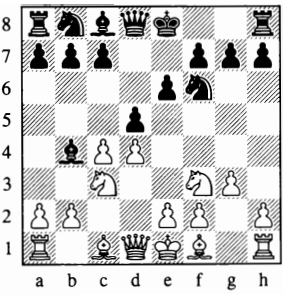
5...0–0 6.♗d3 b6 7.0–0 ♗a6 Black intends to exchange the light-squared bishops and follow up with ...c5 when the time is right. The main line continues **8.cxd5 exd5 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6** when Black intends ...♖e8, ...♗f8, ...♕c8 (if needed to protect the knight on a6) and finally ...c5, with an active game. I have provided plenty of detail in Chapter 14, although you should be able to count on a reasonable position even with light reading, as the same plan tends to work pretty well against most of White's options.

Finally, **5.♕c2** (along with 5.♗d2 and any other miscellaneous moves) will be picked up in Chapter 15. Our response is a familiar one:



5...dxc4! A key theme in this book is taking on c4 at the right moment, and here it looks a strong approach. White's two most active continuations are **6.♗g5** and **6.e4**, both of which can be met by **6...b5** (intending to meet 7.a4 with 7...c6 in either case). In most of the lines White does not have time to win his pawn back and, although he can claim some compensation in the murky positions that ensue, Black's chances look preferable to me.

Chapter 13



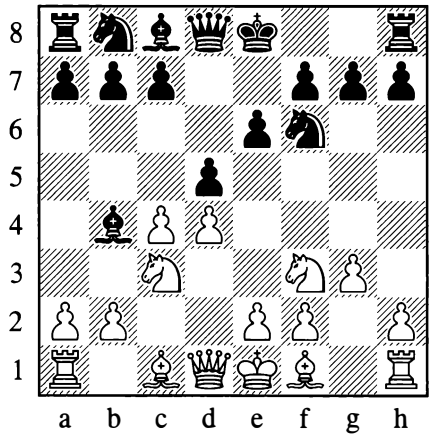
5.g3

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.g3 dxc4! 6.♗g2 ♘c6 7.0–0 0–0

A) 8.e3 263
B) 8.♗g5 264
C) 8.a3 ♗e7 9.e4 ♘a5 266
C1) 10.♗f4 266
C2) 10.♕e2 268
C21) 10...♘b3!? 268
C22) 10...c6 269
C3) 10.♗e3 269
C31) 10...♖b8!? 270
C32) 10...a6 271
C321) 11.♕e2 271
C322) 11.♕c2 272

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.g3

White's last move steers the game into Catalan waters. Although Catalan lines with ♘c3 are generally not regarded as being among the most testing, we are liable to reach this position via both the Ragozin and Catalan move orders, so it is important to know what to do.



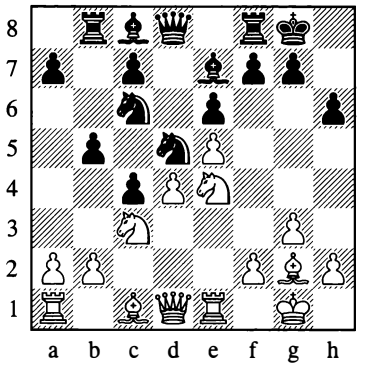
5...dxc4!

I like this response – with the knight on c3 and the bishop heading for g2, it will be hard for White to recapture on c4. Most of the time he makes no real effort to do so, instead focusing on development and central control.

6.♗g2 ♘c6 7.0–0 0–0

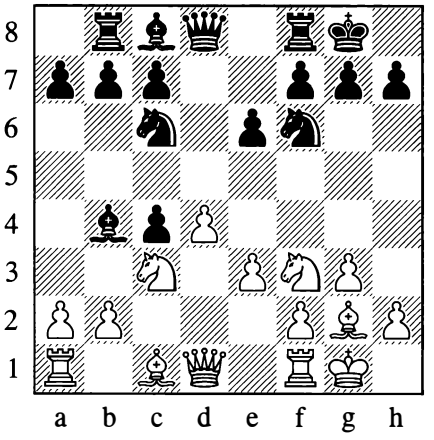
White's three main options are **A) 8.e3**, **B) 8.♗g5** and **C) 8.a3**.

8.♖e1 This direct approach was tried by Danny Gormally but it backfired in the following game: 8...♖b8 9.e4 b5 10.e5?! Consistent, but White's best approach is to play more solidly and try to equalize. 10...♘d5 11.♘g5 h6 12.♘ge4 ♗e7



13.♕h5?! Again White is committing to the attack, but it simply doesn't work against accurate play. 13...♘xd4 14.♗xh6 gxh6 15.♖ad1 c5 16.♖xd4 cxd4 17.♕xh6 ♖e8! White's attack was not strong enough in Gormally – Kosten, Torquay 2013.

A) 8.e3 ♖b8



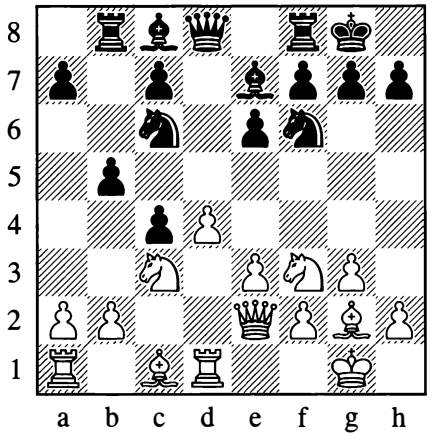
9.♕e2

9.♘d2 e5 is fine for Black, for instance: 10.d5 (10.♗xc6? exd4!∓) 10...♗xc3 (10...♘a5!?∞) 11.dxc6 ♗xd2 12.♗xd2 ♗g4 13.f3 ♗h5 (13...♗e6!?∞) 14.♗b4 ♖e8= Zhao Xue – Xu Yuanyuan, Beijing 2005.

9...b5 10.♖d1 ♗e7!?

An interesting move, freeing the b4-square for the knight.

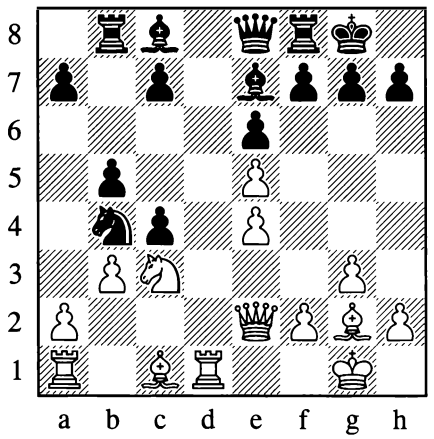
10...♕e7!? also seems reasonable, for instance: 11.e4 e5 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♕xe5 14.♗f4 ♕e7 15.a4 a6 16.axb5 axb5 17.h3 ♗e6∞ Akshayraj – Moradiabadi, New York 2014.



11.e4 ♘b4 12.♘e5 ♘d7! 13.b3

13.♗e3? a6 14.♘g4 ♗b7 15.f4 c5 16.a4 ♘d3 17.axb5 axb5 18.♘xb5 occurred in Garza Marco – Golod, Benasque 2013, when 18...♗c6!N 19.♘a3 ♖xb2–+ would have been the most convincing way to refute White's play.

13...♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♕e8



15.bxc4N

This improves over 15.♗e3?! when, in Ulibin – Hauchard, Cappelle-la-Grande 1995, 15...♗a6!N 16.♗xa7 ♖a8 17.♗e3 ♕c6 18.bxc4 bxc4∓ would have left Black in control, as the knight will be great on d3.

15...bxc4 16.♕xc4 ♗a6 17.♕xc7 ♖c8

17...♘c6!? is also worth considering.

18.♕a5 ♕c6!

Fighting for the initiative.

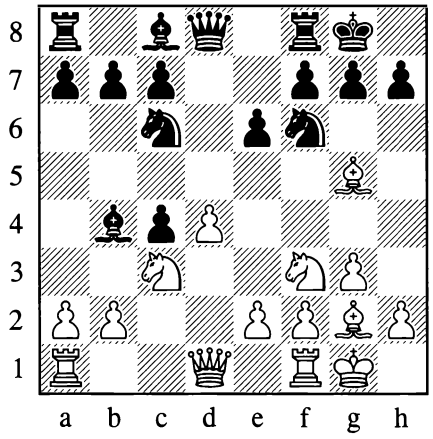
18...♖xc3 19.♗d2 ♖c5 only leads to equality.

19.♗a3 ♕xc3 20.♗xb4 ♗xb4 21.♕xa6 ♕xe5 22.♕xa7 ♖c2

Black has lots of activity for the pawn and will almost certainly pick up the f2-pawn, leaving White with an unpleasant defensive task.

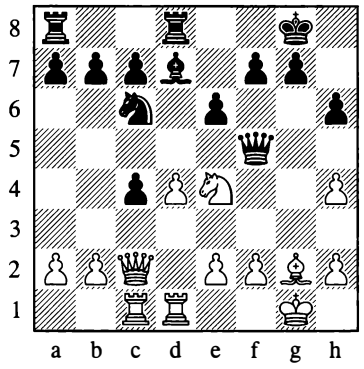
B) 8.♗g5

This time White develops his bishop outside the pawn chain before playing e2-e3. The drawback is that Black will have the bishop pair (not to mention the extra pawn) after the exchange on f6.



8...h6 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 10.e3

After 10.♘e4 ♕f5!? it is not so easy for White to regain his pawn. For example: 11.♕c2 ♖d8 12.♖fd1 ♗e7 13.♖ac1 ♗d7 14.♘h4 ♗xh4 15.gxh4

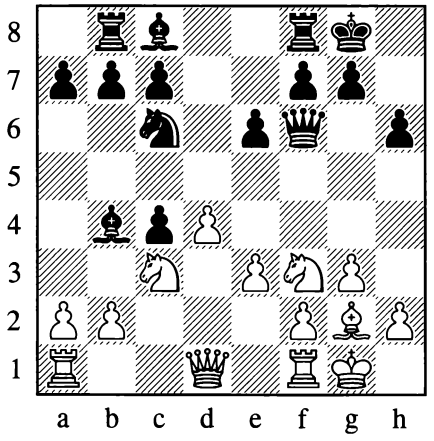


15...e5!? (15...b5N∓ is also good) 16.dxe5 ♕xe5 17.♕xc4 This occurred in Cori Tello – Epishin, Pamplona 2010, when the straightforward 17...♕xb2N 18.♘c5 ♗f5 would have given Black a clear advantage.

10...♖b8!

Intending ...b5 or ...b6 at the right moment.

I had planned to recommend 10...♕e7 but Andreikin found a nice way to improve White's play: 11.♕e2! (11.♘d2 ♘a5 12.♕c2 ♖b8 13.a3 ♗d6 14.♘b5 ♗d7 15.♕c3 b6 16.♘xd6 cxd6 17.♕b4 ♖fc8 18.♖fc1 ♗c6∓ was the game I intended to follow: Moradiabadi – Efimenko, Dubai 2014) 11...♘a5 12.♘e5 c5 13.♖ad1 cxd4 14.♖xd4 ♗d6 15.♘xc4 ♘xc4 16.♕xc4 ♖b8 17.♖fd1± Andreikin – Ly, Reykjavik 2016.



11.♘d2

I also considered:

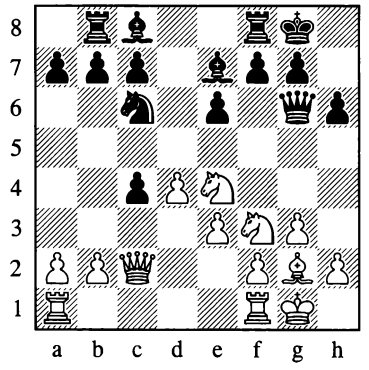
11.♘e4 ♕g6!?N

11...♕e7 12.a3 ♗d6 13.♘fd2 ♘a5 14.♕a4 b6 15.♘xc4 ♘xc4 16.♕xc4 ♗b7 17.b4 e5 was equal in Sandipan – Khalifman, Moscow 2016.

The text move seems like an interesting alternative, keeping the e7-square free for a bishop retreat.

11...♕d8!? has the same idea, but I prefer to try and use the queen actively.

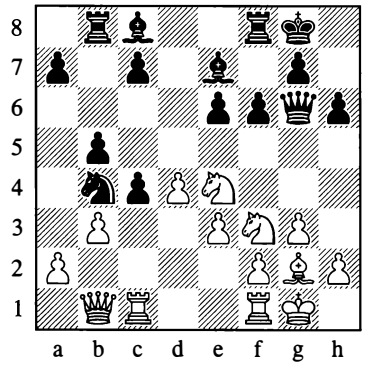
12.♕c2 ♗e7



13.b3!

White should admit that he is not going to regain his pawn and aim for compensation.

13.♖ac1 b5 14.b3 ♘b4! 15.♕b1 f6! is good for Black, for instance:



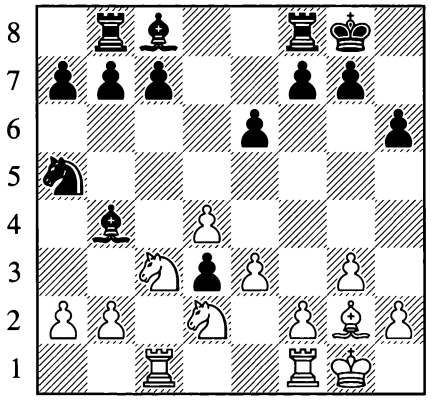
16.bxc4 bxc4 17.a3 ♘a6 18.♕c2 ♗xa3 19.♖a1 ♗b2 20.♖ab1 c3∓

13...cxb3 14.axb3 ♗d7∞

White has decent compensation but Black has no major weaknesses, so the chances are roughly equal.

11...♘a5 12.♕h5 ♕f5 13.♕e2 ♕d3 14.♕xd3 cxd3 15.♖ac1

Here I found a big improvement for Black:



15...b5!N

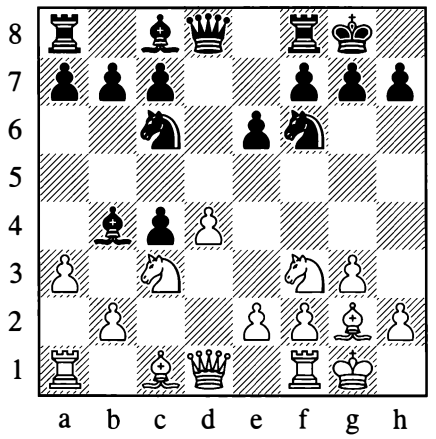
Controlling the c4-square, thus preparing a future knight jump.

15...b6 16.a3 ♗e7?! 17.b4 gave White some advantage in Fridman – Neiksans, Tallinn 2016.

16.a3 ♗e7 17.b4 ♘c4∓

White has some problems to solve.

C) 8.a3



This can be considered the main line of the Ragozin-Catalan hybrid. Black has tried all four playable moves, but I prefer the simple bishop retreat:

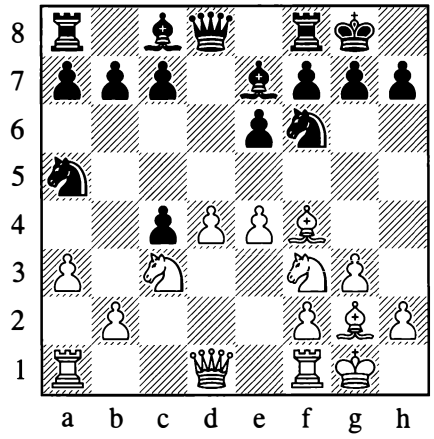
8...♗e7 9.e4 ♘a5

This has been the preferred move order amongst elite grandmasters.

I have often wondered why 9...a6 has only rarely been tried by strong players, as this way Black maintains pressure on the d4-pawn in the short term before switching the knight to a5. I believe the reason lies in the 10.♗f4 set-up, when it is useful for Black to keep the option of ...c6 and ...b5, so that he will not have to worry about the defence of the c7-pawn. In such positions, the ...a6 move is not required.

We will analyse **C1) 10.♗f4**, **C2) 10.♕e2** and **C3) 10.♗e3**.

C1) 10.♗f4



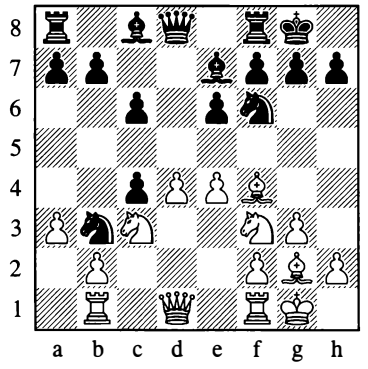
10...c6!?

This is the most ambitious move, aiming for a ...b5 set-up as described above.

Despite the comments in the note to Black's previous move, 10...a6 is a respectable move, but it seems logical to try and do without it here.

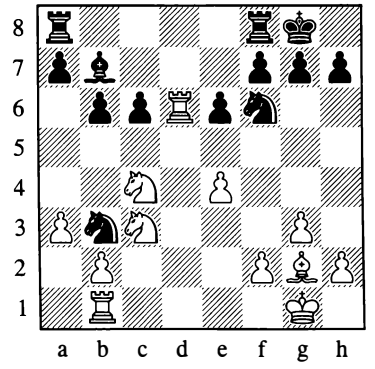
A safe and reliable alternative is:
10...♘b3 11.♖b1 c6

11...c5 has been tried a couple of times but I'm unconvinced. 12.dxc5 ♘xc5 13.♘e5 ♘d3 14.♘xd3 ♕xd3 This occurred in Battaglini – Bakre, Calvi 2011, and now 15.♕c1!N would have left Black's queen looking silly, while the gap in development is significant.



12.♘e5

In the event of 12.♕e2 b5 13.♖bd1 ♗b7 it's hard to see what the bishop is doing on f4.
12...♕xd4 13.♕xd4 ♘xd4 14.♖fd1 ♘b3 15.♘xc4 b6 16.♗d6 ♗xd6 17.♖xd6 ♗b7



18.♖bd1 h6 19.f4 ♖ab8 20.♔f2 b5 21.♘e3 a5∞

The last few moves are far from forced; in any case, White has some compensation but I don't think he is better.

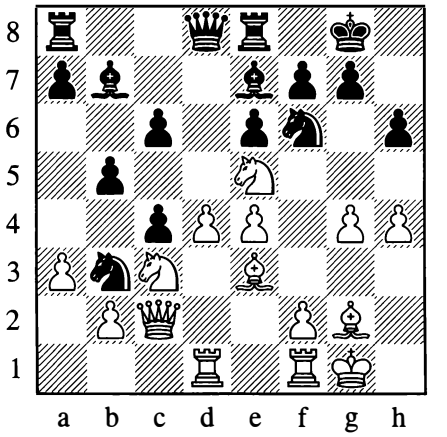
11.♕c2

11.♕e2 transposes to variation C22 below.

11...b5 12.♖ad1 ♗b7

I only found one game from this position. Both players proceeded quite logically, so we will follow it until the critical moment.

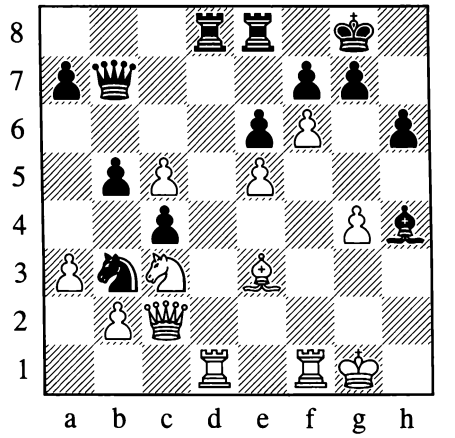
13.h4 h6 14.♘e5 ♖e8 15.g4 ♘b3 16.♗e3



16...♘d7!

This is a common idea to exchange the strong knight. Here it's especially effective, as it also uncovers an attack on the h4-pawn.

17.♘xd7 ♕xd7 18.e5 ♖ad8 19.f4 ♕c8 20.f5 ♗xh4 21.f6 c5 22.♗xb7 ♕xb7 23.dxc5

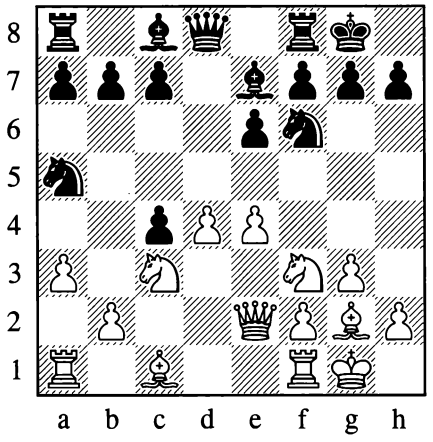


All this happened in Bachmann – Gonzalez Vidal, Montevideo 2015. White has done a reasonable job of complicating the game, but Black could have taken control with a couple of well-timed exchanges:

23...♖xd1!N 24.♕xd1 ♗g5! 25.♗xg5 hxg5 26.fxg7

Black keeps the better chances after 26...♔xg7 or 26...♘xc5.

C2) 10.♕e2



It is worth considering both **C21) 10...♘b3** and **C22) 10...c6!**.

C21) 10...♘b3

Hitting the rook before it can escape to d1 is a logical plan.

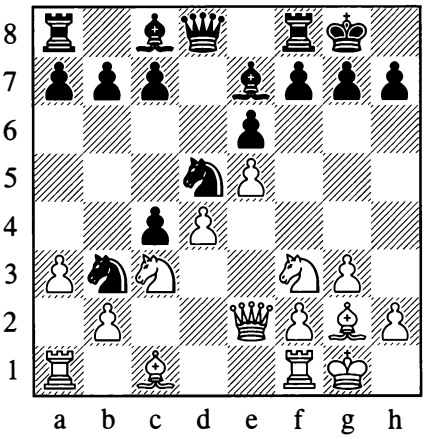
11.e5

This appears to be a specialty of Sandipan; the Indian GM played it three times in 2010.

11.♖b1 ♘xd4 12.♘xd4 ♕xd4 13.♖d1 ♕c5 14.♗e3 ♕a5 15.♗d2 ♕a6!? (15...♕c5 leads to a repetition after 16.♗e3=) 16.e5 ♘d7 reached a complex position where White had about enough compensation for the sacrificed pawns in Barle – Sisniega, Manila (ol) 1992.

11...♘d5

After 11...♘xa1 12.exf6± White will pick up the trapped knight, and his minor pieces will be strong in the middlegame.



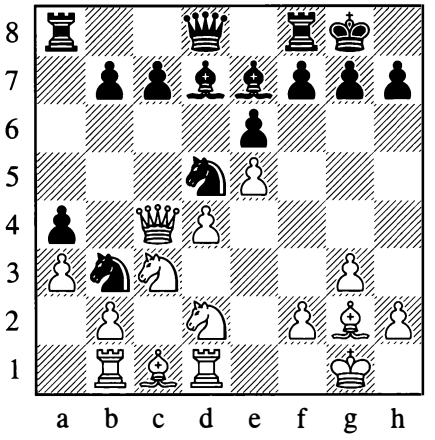
12.♖b1 a5!?

It is worth mentioning Sandipan's two other games:

12...b5?! is unnecessary, although 13.♘xb5 ♖b8 14.♕xc4 ♘xc1 15.♖fxc1 ♗a6 16.a4 ♖b6 17.♕c2 ♗xb5 18.axb5 ♖xb5 left Black only marginally worse in Sandipan – Bacrot, Gibraltar 2010.

12...♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♘xc1 14.♖fxc1 c5 15.♕xc4 ♖b8 16.♖d1 ♕c7= was perfectly decent for Black in Sandipan – Gajewski, Cappelle-la-Grande 2010.

13.♕xc4 a4 14.♖d1 ♗d7 15.♘d2



15...♘a5!N

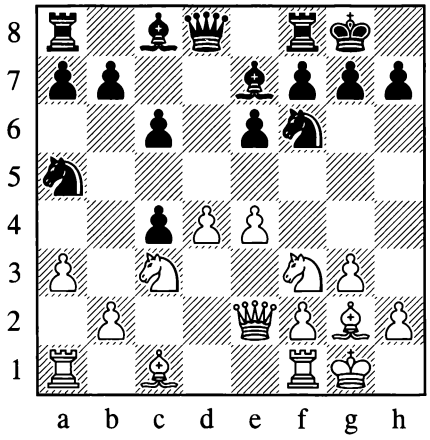
15...♘xd2?! 16.♗xd2 ♗c6 17.♘e4± left Black under some pressure in Sandipan – Vera Gonzalez Quevedo, Cappelle-la-Grande 2010.

16.♕d3 ♗c6=

Black's minor pieces are well placed on solid outposts, making up for the slight lack of space in his position.

C22) 10...c6!

This is the most ambitious move. Once again, Black simply intends to play ...b5 and hold on to his extra pawn.



11.♗f4 b5 12.♖ad1 ♗b7

Black holds on to his pawn and with accurate play White is probably struggling to prove compensation.

13.♘e5

13.♖e1 has been played a couple of times; I suggest 13...♘b3!N when the pressure on the d4-pawn makes it harder for White to move the f3-knight. Here too, White is struggling to prove his compensation.

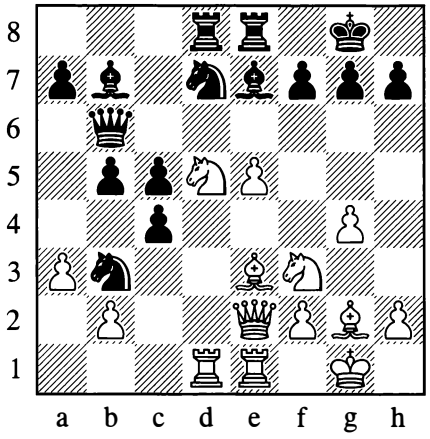
13...♖e8 14.g4 ♘d7

Once again we see this important theme of challenging the e5-knight.

15.♘f3 ♕b6 16.♖fe1 ♖ad8 17.e5 ♘b3 18.♗e3 c5!

Having centralized all of his pieces, Black utilizes his spare pawn to challenge for the centre.

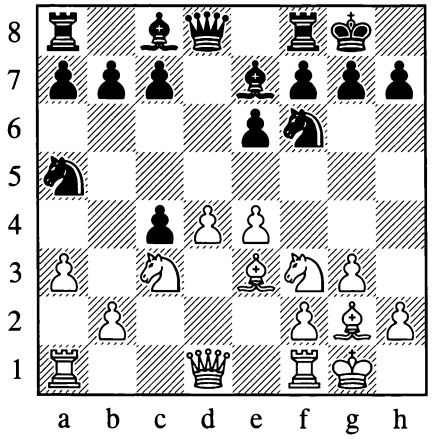
19.d5 exd5 20.♘xd5



20...♗xd5 21.♖xd5 ♘f8∓

S. Ernst – Movsesian, Wijk aan Zee 2013. The loss of the light-squared bishop does not matter, as the rest of Black's pieces coordinate perfectly – and he is still a pawn up.

C3) 10.♗e3



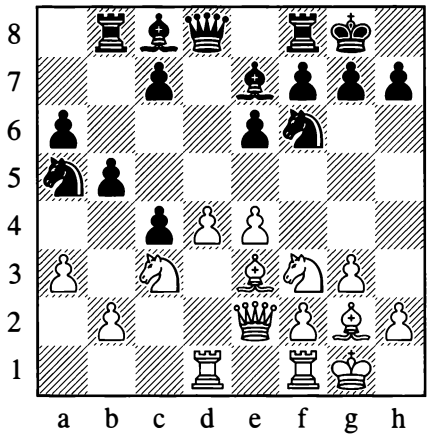
Here too, I will offer two options for your consideration: **C31) 10...♖b8!?** and **C32) 10...a6**.

C31) 10...♖b8!?

This is a new idea from the most recent World Championship challenger.

11.♕e2 b5 12.♖ad1 a6

Both sides have played all the standard moves here and it is time to see how the battle will develop.



13.d5!?

White is a pawn down, so it makes sense for him to act quickly before Black gets fully coordinated.

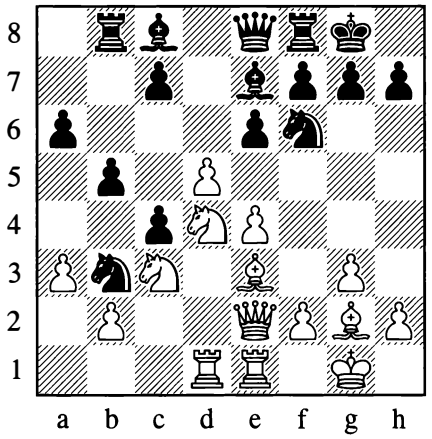
13...♕e8!

A good choice, taking the queen off the d-file and avoiding 13...exd5? 14.e5.

14.♖fe1 ♘b3 15.♘d4N

The is the computer's top choice, and thus a likely attempt to improve White's play.

15.♗f4 ♖b7 16.h3 ♘c5 17.dxe6 fxe6 18.♘e5 ♖b6 led to a double-edged position in Onischuk – Karjakin, Baku 2015, but objectively White did not have full compensation for the pawn.



15...♘xd4

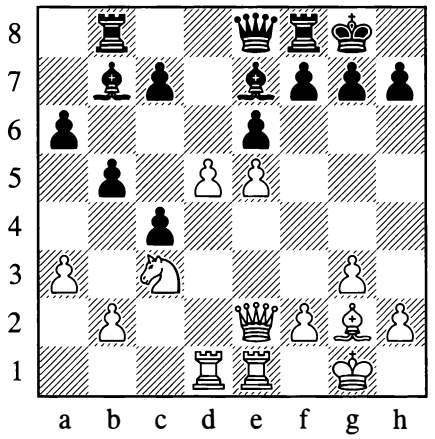
15...e5!? 16.♘c6 ♖b7 17.♘xe5 ♗d6 18.♘c6 ♘g4 is an interesting concept, returning the extra pawn in order to remove White's dark-squared bishop. However, I feel White has the edge thanks to his strong central structure.

16.♗xd4 ♗b7 17.♗xf6

17.f4 exd5 18.exd5 ♗d6 19.♕c2 ♕d8 20.♘e4 ♘xe4 21.♗xe4 g6 leaves White without much to show for the missing pawn.

17...♗xf6 18.e5 ♗e7

The position is dynamically balanced; White has a nice initiative in the centre, but Black still has an extra pawn plus the two bishops. Here is an illustrative line:



19.d6

This is not the only move but it's the most forcing, so it makes sense to check it.

19...cxd6 20.exd6 ♗f6 21.♗xb7 ♖xb7 22.♘e4 ♕d8

22...♗d8!? could also be considered.

23.♕d2 ♖d7 24.♘c5 ♖a7 25.♘e4

25.h4? is met by 25...♕b6 26.♘e4 ♗e5∓ and White's compensation is fading fast.

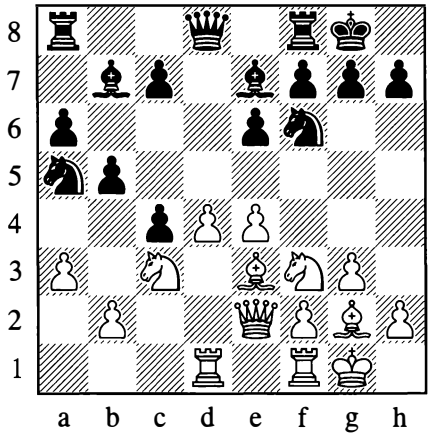
25...♖d7 26.♘c5 ♖a7=

This drawing line was hardly forced, but it's a good indication that the whole line is roughly balanced.

C32) 10...a6

This has been the usual choice, after which White must decide where to put his queen before playing ♖ad1. **C321) 11.♕e2** has been tried by some strong players but **C322) 11.♕c2** is more potent.

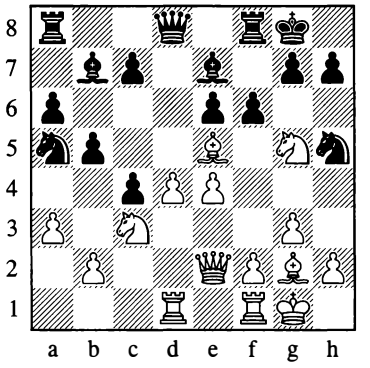
C321) 11.♕e2 b5 12.♖ad1 ♗b7



13.♘e5

13.d5 is a typical move to consider, but 13...exd5 14.exd5 ♖e8∓ shows the drawback of the queen's placement on e2.

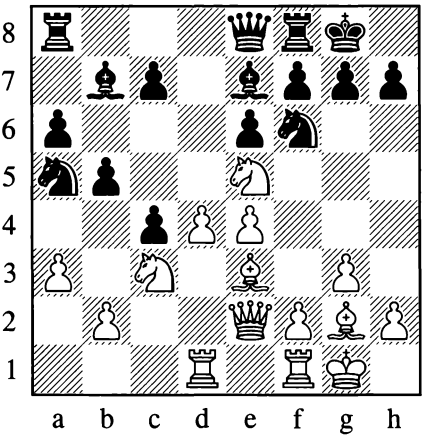
13.♗f4?! seems strange, considering that the bishop went to e3 just a few moves ago. 13...♘h5 (13...♘b3N also looks good, when the pressure on the d4-pawn prevents White's knight from going to e5) 14.♗e5!? f6 15.♘g5!? Enterprising stuff, but Black keeps the advantage with careful play:



15...fxg5 16.♕xh5 ♘c6 17.♕g4 ♕d7 18.h4 ♖ad8 19.hxg5 ♘xe5 20.dxe5 ♕c6∓ Li Chao – Tkachiev, Jakarta 2011.

13...♕e8

Stepping off the d-line and making space for the rook to go to d8.



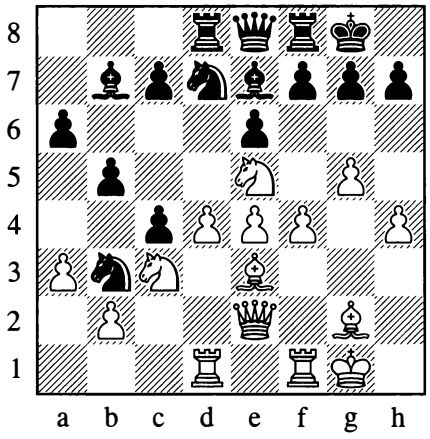
14.f4N

After 14.♗g5?! ♖d8 15.♘g4 ♘xg4 16.♕xg4 ♗xg5 17.♕xg5 ♘b3 18.♕e5 ♖d7 19.♗h3 ♕e7 20.♖fe1 ♕d6 21.♕h5 ♖dd8∓ Black was

in complete control in Kanter – Beliavsky, Yerevan 2014.

The text move seems like the most natural attempt to improve White's play.

14...♖d8 15.g4 ♘b3 16.g5 ♘d7 17.h4

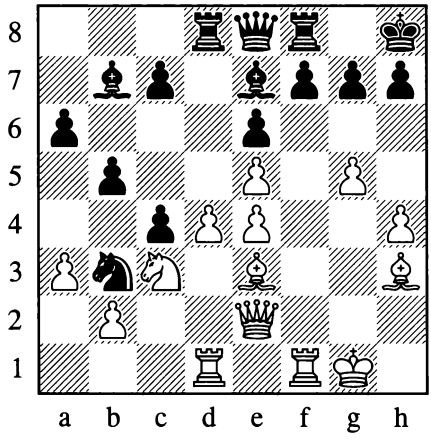


17...♘xe5

Exchanging the knight looks best – White is a long way from mounting a serious attack along the f-file, and Black can break up White's structure with ...f6 if he wishes.

17...f6!? leads to wild complications after 18.♘xc4! fxg5 19.hxg5 c5! 20.d5 ♘d4∞. The computer rates the position slightly in Black's favour, but in reality it's a complete mess.

18.fxe5 ♔h8 19.♗h3

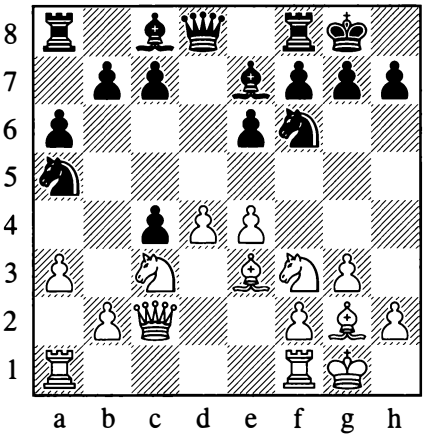


19...♗c8∓

I prefer Black, although the position remains complicated. Possible plans include ...c5 to attack the centre, queenside play with ...a5 and ...b4, or a kingside break with ...f6.

19...c6!?∓ is a good alternative, intending ...a5, ...♗a6 and ...b4.

C322) 11.♕c2



This seems like the better choice overall. White avoids putting his queen on the e-file, which may be opened after a future d4-d5 break, and also sets up future threats against the h7-square.

11...b5

This is the most logical move order.

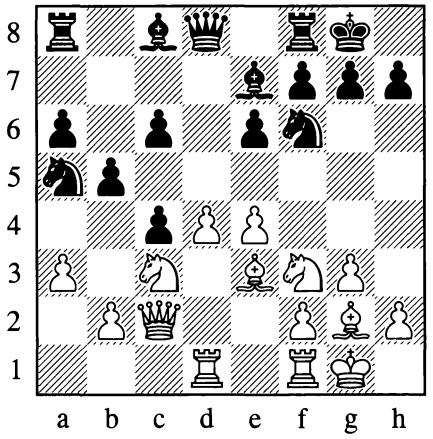
11...c6 might lead to the same thing after 12.♖ad1 b5, but White could also deviate with 12.♘a4!?N b5 13.♘c5 ♘d7 14.♖ad1 ♕c7 15.♗f4 ♕a7∞. The text move rules out the latter option and thus seems slightly more accurate.

12.♖ad1

12.d5 exd5 13.♖ad1 would be a strange move order, although Black does not seem to have anything better than transposing to the main line with 13...c6.

12...c6

12...♗b7 13.d5 leads to complex play. The text move is safer, as it enables Black to swap some pieces after the central break.



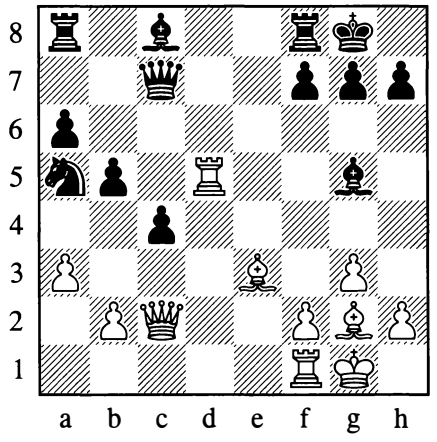
13.d5!

I think White should get on with his central play before Black strengthens his position further. If White goes for a slower build-up, Black can proceed just as we saw in variation C321.

13...exd5 14.exd5 ♘xd5 15.♘xd5 cxd5 16.♘g5

This is essentially forced, as other moves would leave White without much to show for his material investment.

16...♗xg5 17.♖xd5 ♕c7

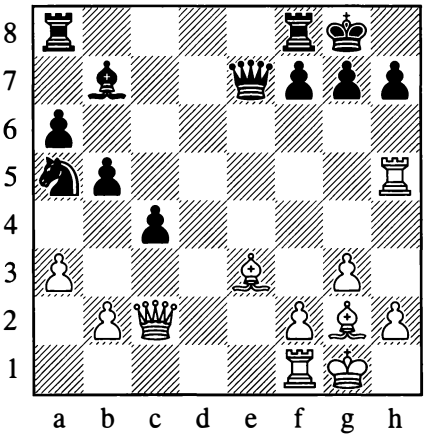


18.♖c5!

White should force the black queen to e7 to set up ♗c5 ideas.

18.♖xg5?! ♗b7 19.♖h5 g6 favours Black.

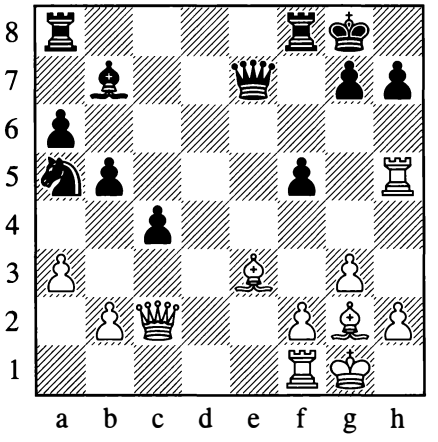
18...♕e7 19.♖xg5 ♗b7 20.♖h5



20...f5!?N

This seems like the safest continuation, preventing ♗c5 and returning the extra pawn in order to neutralize White's initiative.

20...g6 21.♗c5 ♕e6 22.♗xb7 ♘xb7 (22...gxh5!?N 23.♗xa8 ♖xa8∞ deserves attention) 23.♗xf8 gxh5 24.♗b4⩲ gave White an ongoing initiative for the pawn in Akshat – Debashis, Kolkata 2014.



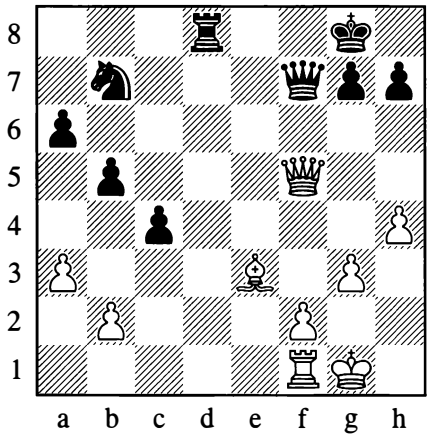
21.♗xb7 ♘xb7 22.♖xf5 ♖xf5 23.♕xf5 ♖d8!?

23...♖e8 is also playable although it does give away the d-file after 24.♖d1.

24.h4

24.♗g5 fails to achieve the goal after 24...♕d7.

24...♕f7=

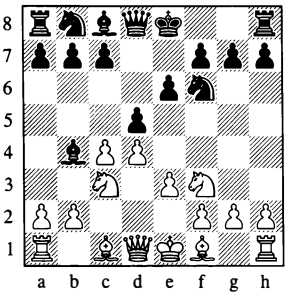


The position is equal, although in a practical game Black could certainly try to make something of his mobile queenside majority.

Conclusion

The Catalan is a popular opening these days, so it's hardly surprising that a version of it exists against the Ragozin too. Fortunately Black obtains a good position by following our familiar plan of ...dxc4 followed by defending the extra pawn with ...♘c6-a5 and/or ...b5. In several of the lines we have the freedom to choose between two good options, so overall there is not much to fear from White's set-up.

Chapter 14



5.e3

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.e3 0–0

A) 6.♕c2 276
B) 6.♗d2 278
C) 6.♗d3 b6 7.0–0 ♗a6 281
C1) 8.♕e2 282
C2) 8.♘e5 283
C3) 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6 284
C31) 10.♕a4 286
C32) 10.♗d2 287
C33) 10.♕d3 ♕c8 11.♗d2 ♖e8 291
C331) 12.a3 291
C332) 12.♖ac1 293

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.e3

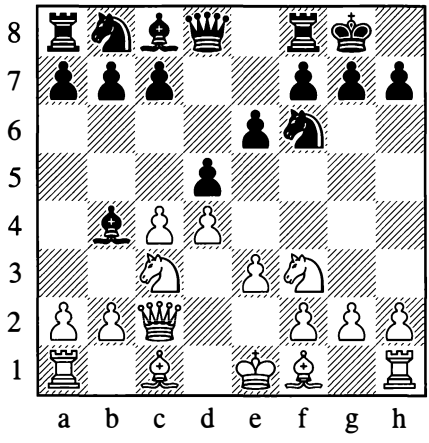
This move steers the game into Nimzo-Indian territory. This particular variation is not the most threatening for Black, and he has many ways to obtain a playable position. Those of you who already play the Nimzo may already have a preferred way of handling this variation. For those who do not, I have selected a set-up which has proved fully playable at the highest level, while being relatively simple to learn. The basic plan is to castle and then develop the light-squared bishop to a6 as quickly as possible.

5...0–0

We will analyse **A) 6.♕c2**, **B) 6.♗d2** and the main line of **C) 6.♗d3**.

6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 b6 is likely to lead to one of the lines examined later. For instance, 8.♗d3 (8.cxd5 exd5 9.♗d3 ♗a6 is the same) 8...♗a6 9.cxd5 exd5 10.0–0 and we have transposed to 9.a3 ♗xc3 10.bxc3 in the notes to variation C3.

A) 6.♕c2



White seems to be going for a hybrid of the 4.♕c2 and Rubinstein variations against the Nimzo, with an early ♘f3 thrown into the mix.

6...b6

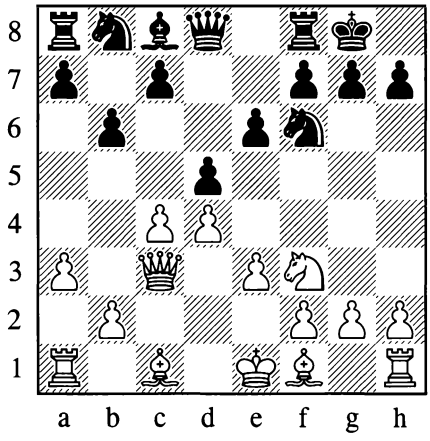
Any sensible move can be played, but we will stick to our main plan.

7.a3

7.cxd5 exd5 8.♗d3 ♗a6= reaches a harmless version of variation C3, as White has played ♕c2 instead of the more useful 0–0.

7...♗xc3† 8.♕xc3

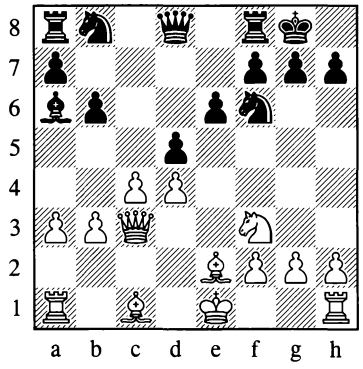
8.bxc3?! is surprisingly common but it is totally inconsistent with the earlier ♕c2. After the simple 8...♗a6 9.cxd5 (9.♘d2 c5∓ also gives Black easy play) 9...♗xf1 10.♔xf1 exd5∓ we have reached a normal type of position except the white king is misplaced.



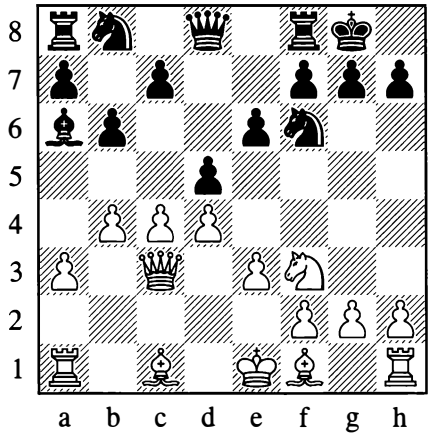
8...♗a6 9.b4!

The only challenging option.

9.b3 c5 gives Black easy play, for instance: 10.♗e2 cxd4 11.exd4



11...♘c6!N (11...♘bd7 12.0–0 ♖c8 13.♘d2 dxc4 14.bxc4 e5 was equal in Riazantsev – Inarkiev, Chelyabinsk 2016; the text move is more ambitious) 12.0–0 ♖c8! With moves like ...b5 and ...♘a5 on the cards, White is on the back foot.



9...dxc4!?

A rare choice, but it occurred in the third game of a mini-match between Grachev and Bartel, which makes me think it is a decent option for Black.

9...♗xc4 10.♗xc4 dxc4 11.♕xc4 ♕d5 is more common, but after 12.♕xd5 ♘xd5 13.♗d2 ♘d7 14.♔e2 c5 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.♖hc1 ♖fc8 17.♖c2 ♘5b6 18.♖ac1 White kept a small edge in Nakamura – Giri, Tashkent 2014.

10.♗xc4 ♘e4 11.♕c2 ♗xc4 12.♕xc4 ♕d5

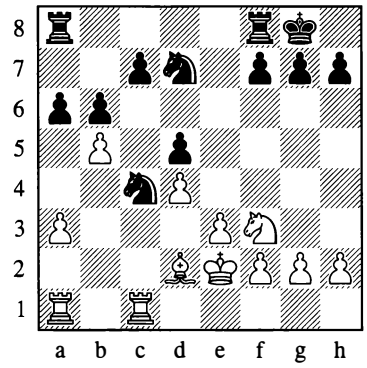
Compared with the previous note, Black is helped by the inclusion of the ...♘e4 move.

13.♕c2

In a later game White decided to swap queens:

13.♕xd5 exd5 14.♗d2 ♘d6 15.♔e2 ♘d7 16.♖hc1 ♘c4 17.b5 a6

White has to be careful to maintain equal chances. He can do it with:



18.♗b4!N

18.a4?! ♖a7! enabled Black to take over the queenside: 19.♘e1 ♖fa8 20.♖ab1 axb5 21.axb5 ♖a2∓ Dubov – Rodshtein, Moscow 2011.

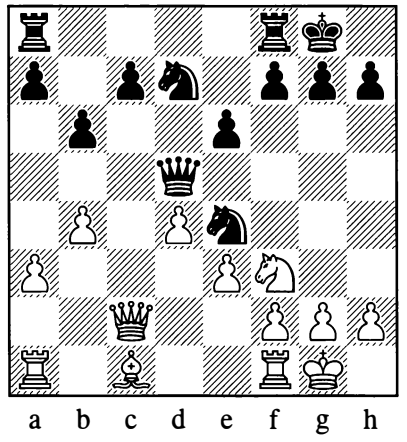
The text move is a clever intermezzo to free the d2-square for the f3-knight, at a moment when the f8-rook cannot go to a8 in one move.

18...♖fc8 19.a4 c6

19...♖a7?! 20.♘d2! favours White.

20.bxc6 ♖xc6=

13...♘d7 14.0–0



14...f5!?N

Black stabilizes the strong knight and relies on indirect defence of the c7-pawn.

The game continued 14...♖fc8 15.♗b2 ♘d6 16.♖ac1 a5 17.♘e5 ♘xe5 18.dxe5 ♘e8

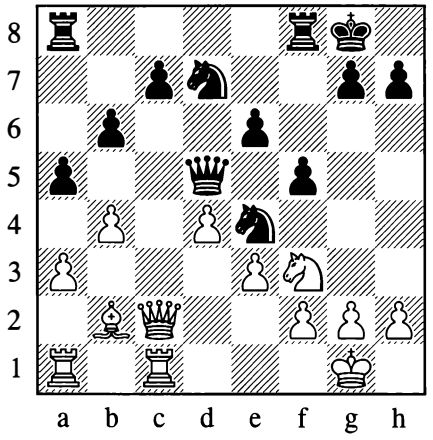
19.♖fd1 ♕b5 20.♕c6 and the players agreed a draw in Grachev – Bartel, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009.

15.♗b2

15.♕xc7?! ♖fc8 16.♕f4 ♖c2∞ is huge compensation for a pawn.

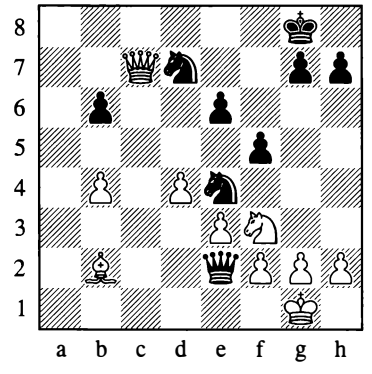
15...a5! 16.♖fc1

16.♕xc7?? is even worse here then on the previous move: 16...♖fc8 17.♕f4 ♖c2 18.♖ab1 axb4 19.axb4 ♖a2–+



16...axb4 17.axb4 ♖xa1 18.♖xa1 ♖c8 19.♖a7 ♕b5 20.♗a3

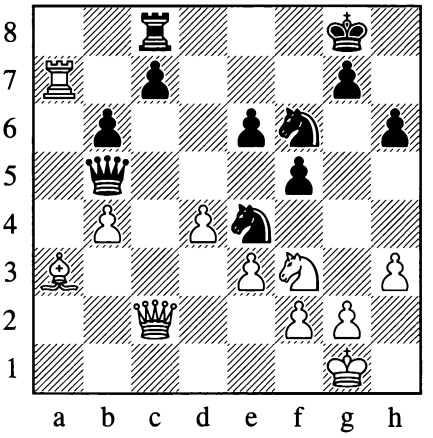
20.♖xc7 ♖xc7 21.♕xc7 ♕e2 gives Black a minimum of a draw after:



22.h3 ♕xb2 23.♕xd7 ♕xf2† 24.♔h2 ♕g3† 25.♔h1 ♘f2† 26.♔g1 ♘xh3† 27.♔h1 ♘f2†=

20...h6 21.h3 ♘df6

The knight is heading for d5.



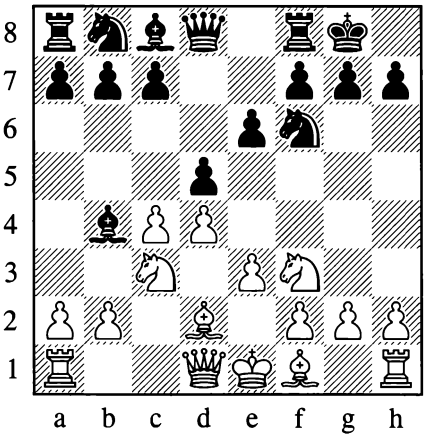
22.♘e5

22.♖xc7? ♖xc7 23.♕xc7 ♕e2 would be a terrible idea for White.

22...♘d5⇄

Both sides have certain advantages, but I think White has more problems to deal with: his bishop is poor, the b4-pawn is weak, and Black's knights are excellent.

B) 6.♗d2



This variation can also arise via a 5.♗d2 move order, as covered in the next chapter.

6...b6

Once again, this plan works well.

6...c5 is playable of course, but I was actually unable to find full equality for Black. In case you wish to investigate this yourself, I have included two fragments of recent games to serve as a starting point: 7.a3 ♗xc3 8.♗xc3 ♘e4 9.♕c2 (9.♖c1 ♘xc3 10.♖xc3 cxd4 11.♘xd4 a6 12.♘f3 dxc4 13.♗xc4 ♕xd1† 14.♔xd1± Gajewski – Tomczak, Poznan 2016) 9...♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♘d7 11.♗d3 h6 12.cxd5 exd5 13.♕b2 ♕e7 14.0–0 ♘f6 15.♖fb1 c4 16.♗c2 ♘e4 17.a4 ♖e8 18.a5 ♘d6 19.♕b4± Aronian – Anand, London 2015.

7.cxd5

White has also tried:

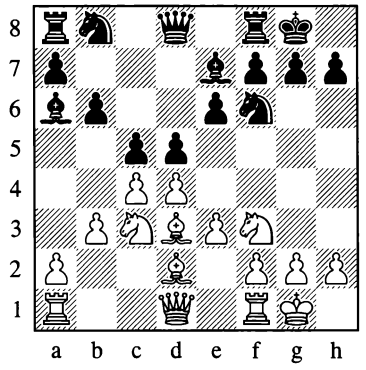
7.♗d3 ♗a6 8.b3

This is not at all scary, and Black has several ways to get a good position.

8...♗e7

8...c5!? 9.0–0 cxd4N (9...♘c6 10.a3 ♗a5∞) 10.exd4 dxc4 11.bxc4 ♘c6∞ also looks quite tempting.

9.0–0 c5

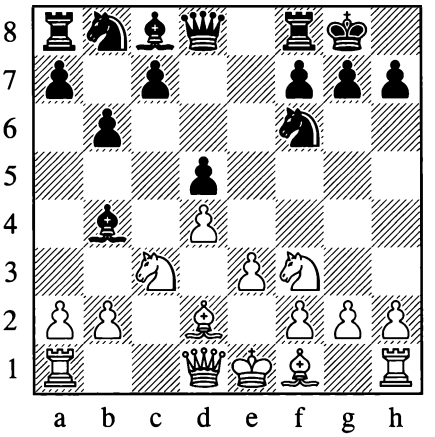


10.♕e2N ♘c6 11.dxc5 dxc4

11...bxc5 and 11...♘b4!? look playable too.

12.♗xc4 ♗xc4 13.♕xc4 ♗xc5 14.♖fd1 ♖c8=

7...exd5



8.♗d3 c5!?

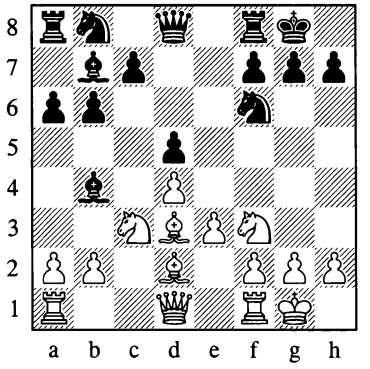
8...♗a6 has hardly ever been played but it looks like a perfectly good option, after which 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6 10.0–0 transposes to the later variation C32.

I would like to draw your attention to the most popular move in the position, as it is one I would prefer to avoid:

8...♗b7

This move is certainly playable, but personally I would be worried about the possibility of a future kingside attack after allowing the d3-bishop to live.

9.0–0 a6



10.♘e5!

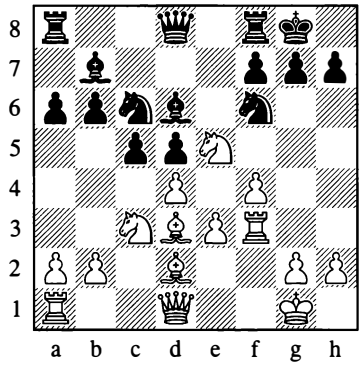
This is the plan that scares me.

10.♖c1?! is too cautious. The following game shows how Black can deal with a slower

version of White's attack: 10...♗d6 11.♘e5 c5 12.f4 ♘c6 13.♕f3 cxd4 14.♘xc6 ♗xc6 15.exd4 b5 16.f5 b4 17.♘e2 ♗b5 18.♗g5 ♗xd3 19.♕xd3 ♗xh2† 20.♔h1 ♗d6∓ Koop – Roiz, Dresden 2015.

10...♗d6 11.f4 c5 12.♖f3 ♘c6?!

12...♘bd7 would have avoided what follows.

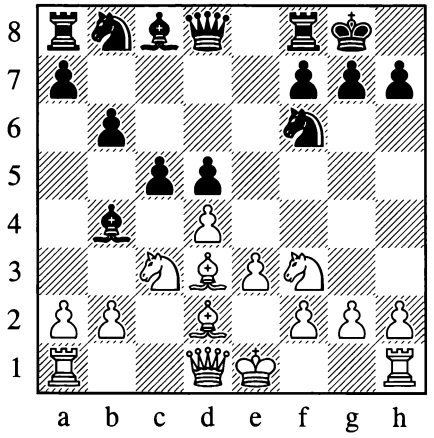


13.♘xd5! ♗xe5 14.♘xf6†

14.fxe5!?N ♕xd5 15.exf6→ looks dangerous too.

14...♗xf6 15.♗xh7† ♔xh7 16.♖h3† ♔g8 17.♕h5 ♗h4 18.♖xh4 f6 19.d5 ♘e7 20.e4→

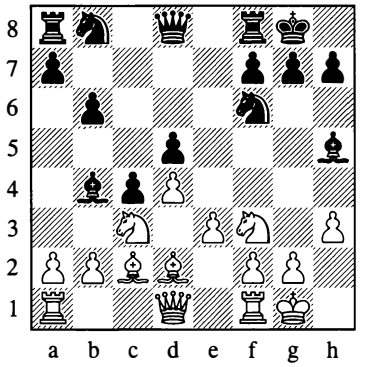
Black was unable to cope with the practical problems in Bareev – Renet, Yerevan (ol) 1996. Overall I would say that 8...♗b7 is fine for Black if he knows what he is doing, and you can certainly find ways to improve upon the above game – but personally I'd rather end my analysis here and mark it in the 'Too Scary' box!



9.♘e5!?

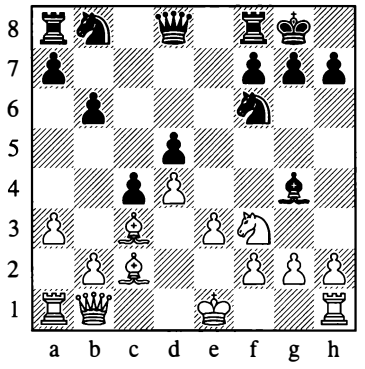
This is my computer's top choice, preventing any ...♗g4 ideas. Other possibilities include:

9.0–0 gives Black a choice: 9...c4!? (9...♗a6 is the easiest solution, when 10.♗xa6 ♘xa6 transposes to the later variation C32) 10.♗c2 ♗g4!? 11.h3 ♗h5



12.a3N (12.g4?! ♗g6 13.♗xg6 hxg6 was good for Black in Balta – Schakel, corr. 2011) 12...♗xc3 13.♗xc3 ♘c6 14.♖e1 ♖c8∞ With a roughly balanced game.

9.a3 ♗xc3 10.♗xc3 c4 11.♗c2 ♗g4 12.♕b1!? (12.h3 ♗h5 13.0–0 transposes to the line above)



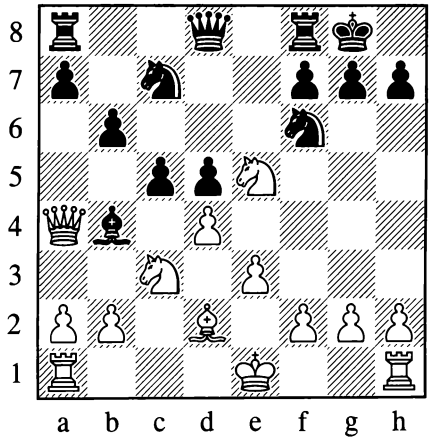
12...♗xf3 13.gxf3 ♘c6 14.♗a4 ♘e7 15.♖g1 a5 16.♔e2 ♖b8 17.♕e1 ♕d6 18.♗c2 ♖fe8∞ A complex, double-edged middlegame had arisen in I. Sokolov – Vazquez Igarza, Montpellier 2015. Black eventually lost this game, but it

seems to me that he has at least equal chances at this stage.

9...♗a6!

By contrast to the Bareev – Renet game, I suggest removing White's light-squared bishop in order to safeguard against a future kingside attack.

10.♗xa6 ♘xa6 11.♕a4 ♘c7

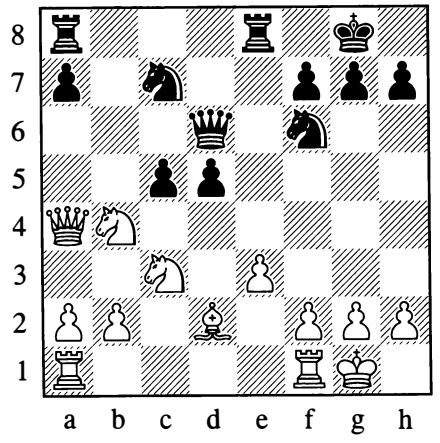


12.dxc5 bxc5!?N

This is the more ambitious way to recapture.

12...♗xc5 13.0–0 ♖e8 14.♘f3 ♕c8= was safe and solid in Urbanec – Keres, Prague 1943.

13.0–0 ♖e8 14.♘c6 ♕d6 15.♘xb4



15...♘g4!

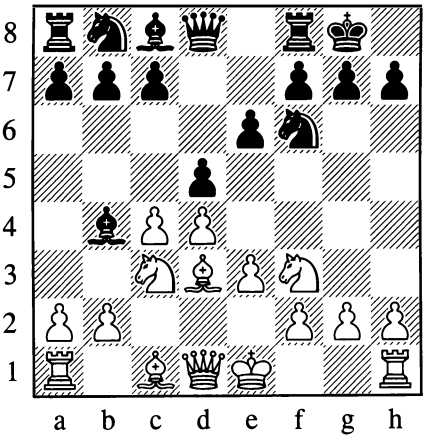
A useful zwischenzug to weaken White's kingside.

16.g3 cxb4 17.♘e2 a5 18.♖ac1 ♘e6→

Black has good prospects to develop an initiative, either on the kingside light squares or in the centre with a timely ...d4.

C) 6.♗d3

This has been the most popular move by far. Black's main reply is 6...c5, but I prefer to stick with our thematic plan of developing the bishop on a6.



6...b6 7.0–0

7.cxd5 exd5 should convert to variation C3 after 8.0–0 ♗a6.

7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3 ♗a6 9.cxd5 exd5 10.0–0 is covered on page 284 – see 9.a3 ♗xc3 10.bxc3 in the notes to variation C3.

7...♗a6!?

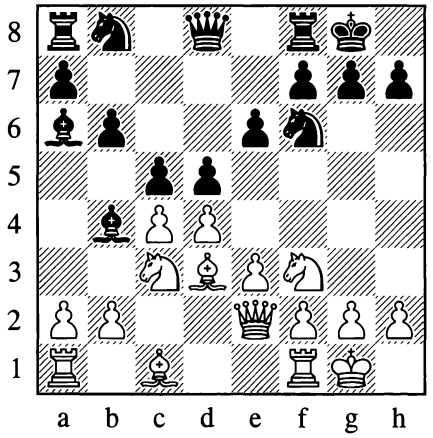
7...♗b7 is the main line by far; the resulting position has occurred in more than 1700 games on my database.

By contrast, the text move has occurred in fewer than a hundred games at the time of writing. The theory of this variation is still

in its infancy but it has been tested by several strong GMs in the past couple of years. The first time that I was really drawn to this line was when watching Carlsen play it against Mamedyarov in the final round of the 2015 World Rapid Championship, where he used it to seal another world title. (The actual move order of the game was 7.cxd5 exd5 8.0–0 ♗a6, which is covered under variation C3 below.)

We will analyse **C1) 8.♕e2**, **C2) 8.♘e5** and **C3) 8.cxd5**.

C1) 8.♕e2 c5

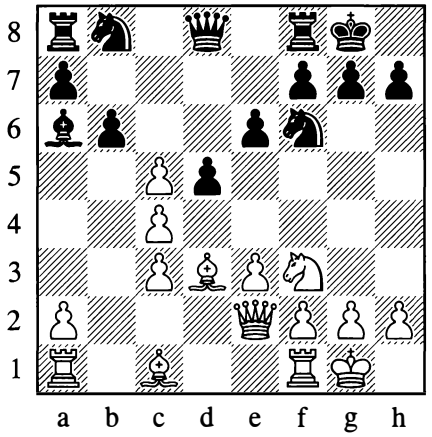


9.dxc5

White has tried a few other moves but I don't see any trace of an advantage for him.

One recent game continued: 9.♖d1 cxd4 10.exd4 dxc4 11.♗xc4 ♗xc4 12.♕xc4 ♗xc3 13.bxc3 ♕d5 14.♕d3 ♖c8 15.♗b2 ♘bd7= Black has a comfortable position and soon took over after the following inaccuracy by White: 16.♘d2? ♘e5! 17.♕a6 ♘c4 18.♘xc4 ♕xc4∓ F. Unzicker – Werle, Germany 2016.

9...♗xc3 10.bxc3

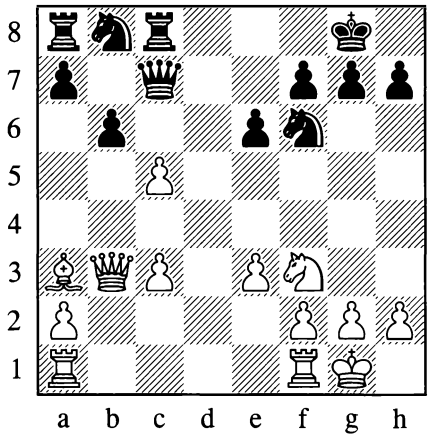


10...dxc4!?N

This seems like the safest way to proceed.

I also considered 10...bxc5 11.♖d1 ♘c6 (11...♘bd7N could be an improvement) as played in Krush – G. Jones, Gibraltar 2016, when White missed a promising pawn sac: 12.e4! dxc4 13.♗c2 ♕c7 14.♗g5→ White is quite well placed to develop a kingside initiative.

11.♗xc4 ♗xc4 12.♕xc4 ♕c7 13.♗a3 ♖c8 14.♕b3

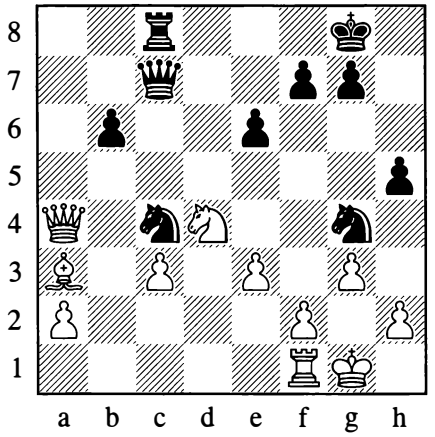


14...♘bd7!?

14...bxc5= is absolutely fine of course.

The text move is an interesting pawn sacrifice where Black gets enough compensation for comfortable equality. Here is a sample line:

15.cxb6 ♘xb6 16.♖ac1 ♘c4 17.♕a4 ♖ab8 18.♘d4 ♖b6 19.♖b1 ♘g4 20.g3 h5 21.♖xb6 axb6



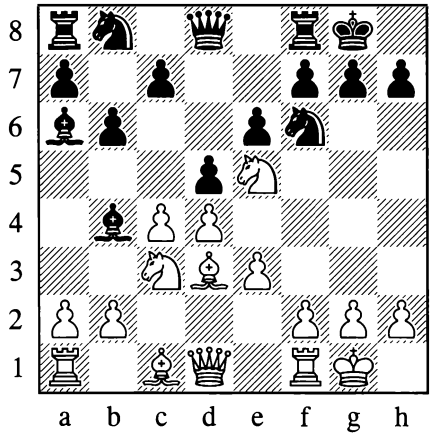
22.♗b4 ♘d2 23.♖d1 ♘e4 24.♖f1

24.f3? ♘xh2 wins for Black.

24...♘d2 25.♖d1 ♘e4 26.♖f1 ♘d2=

With a repetition.

C2) 8.♘e5



This was tried against me in a recent internet game.

8...♘fd7!?

Challenging the strong knight is simple and strong.

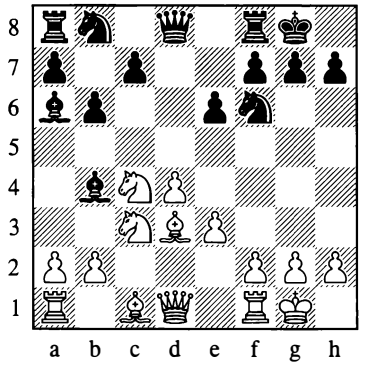
Another route to equality is:

8...dxc4 9.♘xc4

9.♗xc4 ♗xc4 10.♘xc4 c5 is fine for Black, while attempts to delay recapturing the pawn only lead to trouble for White:

9.♗c2?! doesn't provide enough compensation after 9...c5! 10.♕f3 ♘bd7 11.♕h3 ♗b7∓.

9.♗e2?! c5 10.♗f3 cxd4 11.♕xd4 (11.♗xa8? dxc3∓; 11.exd4 ♘d5 gives Black comfortable equality, but perhaps White should settle for this...) 11...♕xd4 12.exd4 ♗xc3 13.bxc3 (13.♗xa8? ♗xd4∓) 13...♘d5 14.♗d2 ♖c8 15.a4 ♘c6 16.♘xc6 ♖xc6 17.a5 b5∓

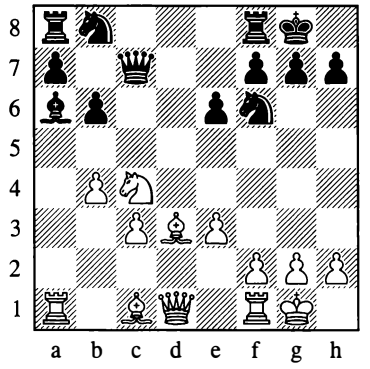


9...c5 10.a3

10.♘e5 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 ♘bd7=

10...cxd4 11.axb4 dxc3 12.bxc3 ♕c7

12...♕d5!? also looks reasonable.

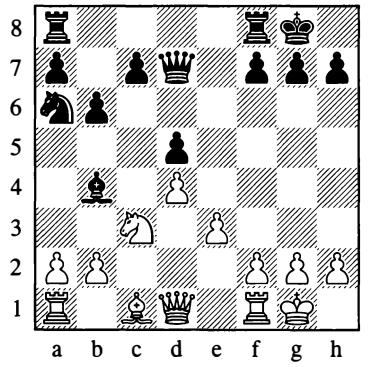


13.♕b3 ♖d8 14.♗e2?!
14.♖d1 ♗b5=
14...♗b5∓

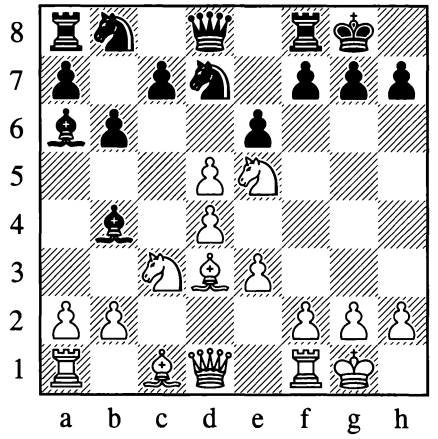
A draw was agreed here in Bernasek – Babula, Havlickuv Brod 2015, but Black could have played on.

9.cxd5

9.♘xd7 would have been more testing although 9...♕xd7 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♗xa6 ♘xa6 still seems fine for Black, for instance:



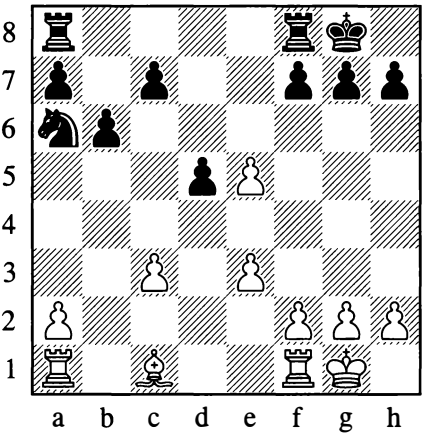
12.♕d3 ♗xc3 13.bxc3 ♕a4= Black has enough control of the light squares and he may even fight for the advantage if he manages to improve his knight without allowing counterplay.



9...♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♗xc3

The mass exchanges lead to a favourable endgame for Black.

11.♗xa6 ♘xa6 12.bxc3 ♕xd5 13.♕xd5 exd5

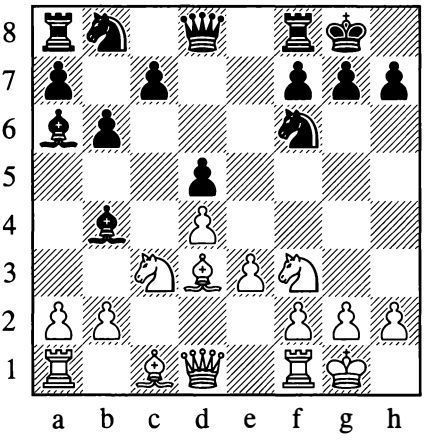


14.♗a3 ♖fe8 15.f4 c5∓

Zil – Antidrome, Internet 2016.

C3) 8.cxd5 exd5

This is the main line, which sometimes arises via the 7.cxd5 move order.



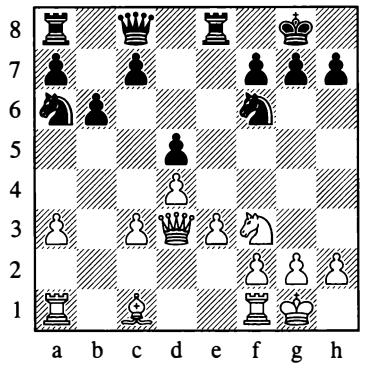
9.♗xa6

This has been by far the most common choice.

White has occasionally tried:

9.a3 ♗xc3 10.bxc3 ♖e8 11.♗xa6 ♘xa6 12.♕d3 12.c4 dxc4 13.♕a4 ♕c8 14.♕xc4 is the same thing.

12...♕c8

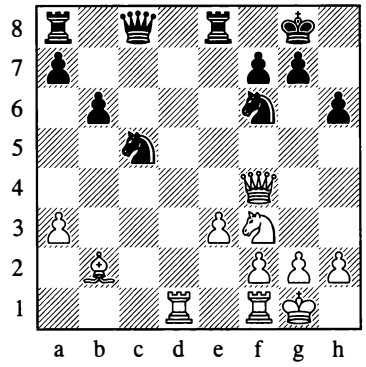


13.c4

13.a4 c5 gives Black easy play.

13...dxc4 14.♕xc4 c5 15.♗b2 cxd4 16.♕xd4 ♘c5 17.♖ad1 h6 18.♕f4

Here I found a useful improvement:



18...♖e4!N

18...♘fe4 19.♘d4 ♘a4 occurred in Wang Yue – Harikrishna, Huaian 2016, and now instead of 20.♗a1?! ♘ec3, when Black was fine, with ...♕c4 and ...♖ac8 coming next, White could have obtained some advantage with 20.♖c1!N±, denying Black the c3-square.

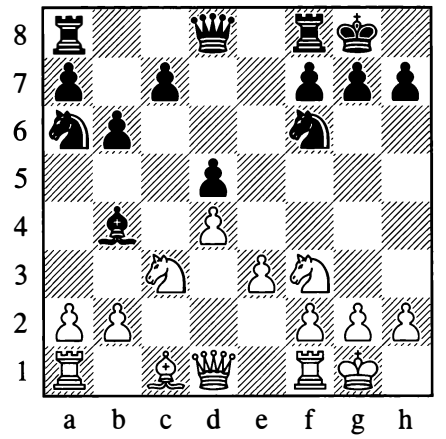
19.♕d6

The attempt to lure the rook away from the centre with 19.♕g3 ♖g4 20.♕d6?? runs into 20...♘ce4 21.♕e5 ♖xg2†! with a deadly attack.

19...♕e8! 20.♗xf6 ♖e6 21.♕d8 ♖xf6=

With a level endgame.

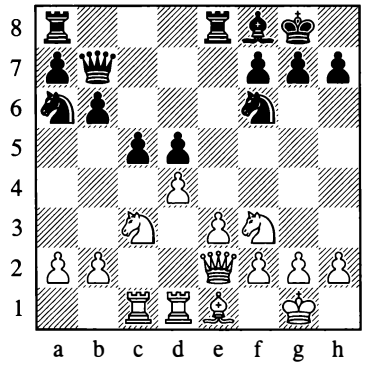
9...♘xa6



White has tried several plans from this position – probably a sign that he hasn't settled on a good way to obtain an edge. Black's plan will generally involve ...♖e8 and ...♗f8, followed by queenside expansion with ...c5. If White attacks the a6-knight then Black should generally defend it with ...♕c8, as the knight needs to remain where it is to support the ...c5 push.

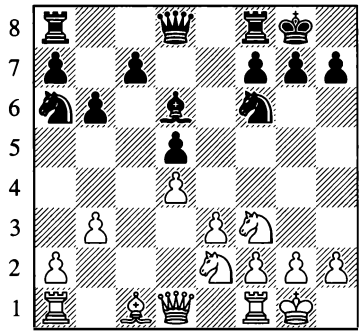
White's three main options are **C31) 10.♕a4**, **C32) 10.♗d2** and **C33) 10.♕d3**.

10.♕e2 is similar to variation C33 but, considering that Black's rook is heading for e8 anyway, it is hard to see how White can be better off with his queen on the e-file. In the following game White got no advantage: 10...♕c8 11.♗d2 ♖e8 12.♖ac1 ♗f8 13.♖fd1 ♕b7 14.♗e1 c5

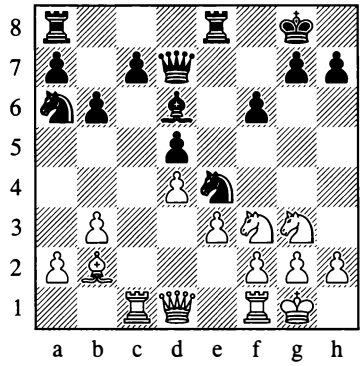


15.dxc5 bxc5 16.♕b5 ♕c8 17.♕a5 ♕b7 18.♕b5 ♕c8 19.♘a4 ♖b8 20.♕a5 ♕b7 21.b3 ♘e4 22.♘d2 ♘f6 23.♘f3 ♘e4 24.♘d2 ♘f6 25.♘f3 ½–½ Tomashevsky – Bluebaum, Doha 2015. Evidently Black was happy to repeat moves against his higher-rated opponent, but he could also have played on in a balanced position.

10.♘e2 ♗d6 (10...♖e8N is also playable, when 11.b3 ♘e4 12.♗b2 ♗d6 reaches the line below) 11.b3

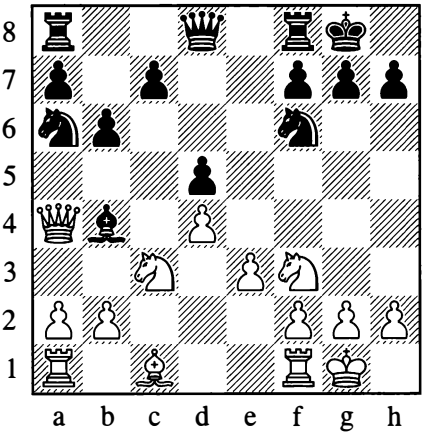


11...♖e8!?N (11...♘b8 12.♗b2 ♘bd7 was also reasonable in Iordachescu – Gajewski, Reykjavik 2015, but I don't see any special reason to reroute the knight just yet) 12.♗b2 ♘e4 13.♖c1 f6 14.♘g3 ♕d7∞



Black is well placed in the centre and he has a few ways of getting organized on the queenside, such as ...c6 followed by ...♘c7, or even ...♘b8 followed by ...a5.

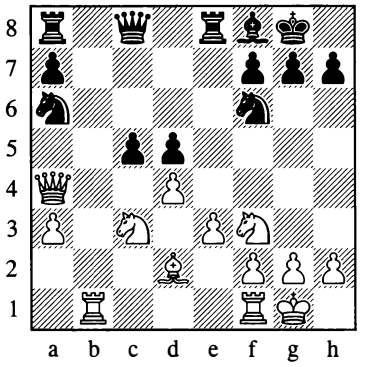
C31) 10.♕a4



This was White's usual choice in the early days of this variation, and it certainly seems like the most natural attempt to play actively on the queenside.

10...♕c8 11.♗d2 ♖e8 12.♖fc1

12.a3 ♗f8 13.b4 does not prevent Black's plan: 13...c5 14.bxc5 bxc5 15.♖ab1



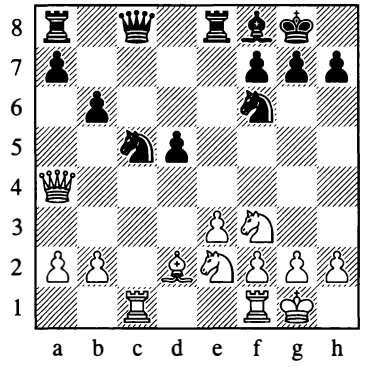
15...c4! White has to be very careful once he allows Black to establish this protected passed pawn. 16.♖b2 ♘c7 17.♖fb1 a6 18.♖b6 ♖e6 19.♖xe6 fxe6∓ Topalov – Ponomariov, Zug 2013. The position is close to equal but the long-term trump of a protected passed c-pawn makes me favour Black.

12.♖ac1 ♗f8 13.♘e2 c5

13...♗d6 is playable but riskier, and after 14.b4 c5 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.♖fd1 ♘e4 17.♗c3 ♕e6 18.bxc5 ♘axc5 19.♕d4 ♕h6 20.♘g3± Black was under some pressure in Dragun – Gajewski, Poznan 2015.

The text move continues Black's standard plan. If White ignores it, Black will be able to think about ...c4 followed by further queenside expansion.

14.dxc5 ♘xc5

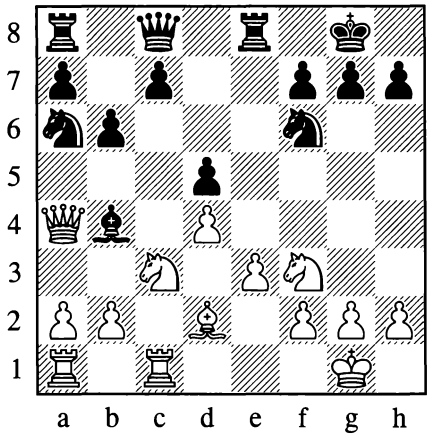


15.♕c2 ♕a6 16.♘c3?!

16.♗c3N would have been better, with equal play after 16...♘fe4.

16...♖ac8∓

Black's active pieces gave him the easier game in Hillarp Persson – Socko, Stockholm 2016.

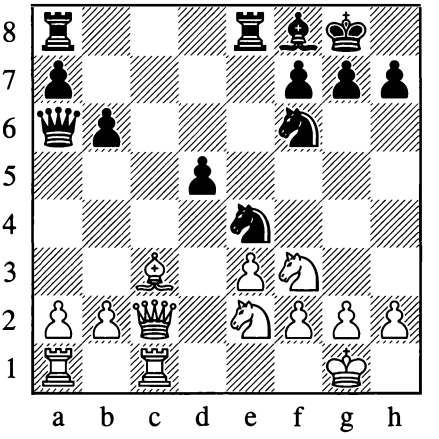


12...♗f8 13.♘e2 c5

13...♗d6!? has been tried here too; perhaps one could argue that it is more suitable here compared to the note above after 12.♖ac1. After 14.b4 c5 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.♖ab1 ♘e4 17.♗e1 ♕e6 18.bxc5 ♘axc5= White had no advantage in Korobov – Zhang Zhong, Doha 2015. You can investigate this in more detail if you wish, but it seems to me that the normal ...c5 plan works fine, so I will keep that as the main line.

14.dxc5 ♘xc5 15.♕c2 ♕a6 16.♗c3 ♘ce4

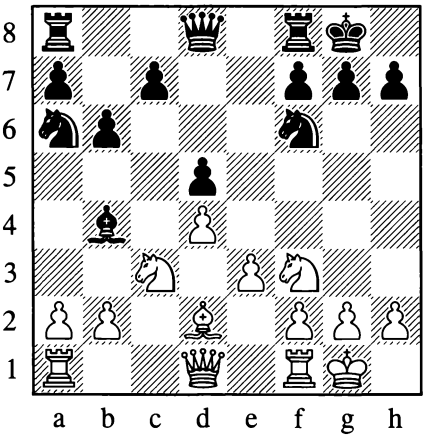
16...♘fe4!?N also looks sensible.



17.♗xf6 ♘xf6 18.♘f4 ♗d6 19.♕d3 ♕b7 20.♘e2 g6 21.♖d1 ♖ac8=

Rodshtein – Almasi, Tsaghkadzor 2015.

C32) 10.♗d2



This time White develops normally and refrains from attacking the a6-knight for the time being.

10...c5!?

10...♖e8 is the normal treatment and is perfectly playable. However, I'm not entirely sure about the position after: 11.♖c1 ♗f8 (11...c5 is a decent move, but if Black is going for this idea then we may do it immediately, as it's not clear if the rook will be best placed on e8 or d8) 12.♘e5 c5 13.♗e1 ♘c7 14.f4 This was Wojtaszek – Harikrishna, Huaian 2016. It seems to me that White's position is easier to play, even though he does not have much (if any) of an objective advantage.

The text move has only ever been played once, although the resulting position has arisen via transposition in a few other games. Since White has not taken the opportunity to attack the knight on a6, I like the idea of playing ...c5 immediately to create a flight square on c7.

11.♕a4

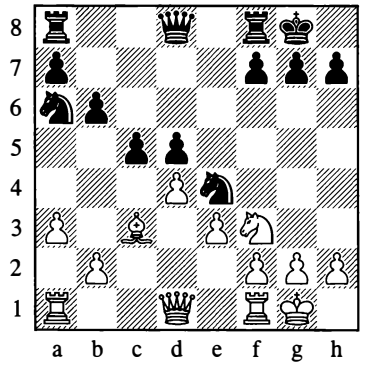
11.♘e5 ♗xc3 12.♗xc3 ♘e4= looks fine for Black.

11.a3

This also fails to put Black under any pressure.

11...♗xc3 12.♗xc3 ♘e4

We will follow an email game for a few more moves.



13.♕a4 ♕c8

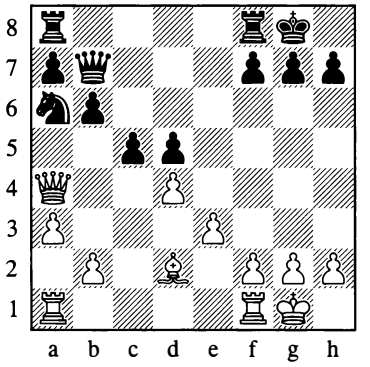
13...♘c7!?N 14.dxc5 bxc5 15.♖ad1 ♕e7 16.♗a5 ♖fd8 looks a little awkward, self-pinning the knight, but in truth it is probably just equal after the further ...♖ac8 and ...♘f6.

14.♘d2 ♘xd2!?N

14...♖e8 15.♖ac1 ♕b7 16.♘xe4 ♖xe4 17.♕d1 ♖ae8= was also fine in Szenczy – Van Bommel, email 2007.

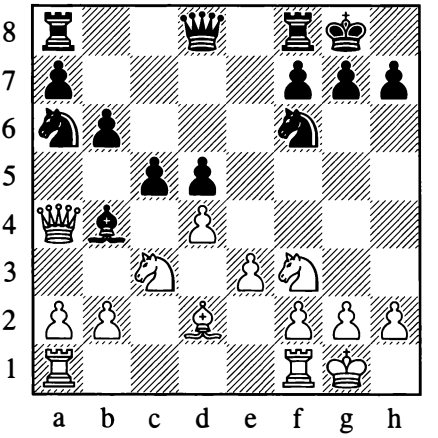
15.♗xd2 ♕b7

With the positional threat of ...c4 and ...b5. The immediate 15...c4?! isn't ideal as 16.b3! breaks up the pawn chain.



16.dxc5 ♘xc5 17.♕b5 ♖fd8=

The isolated pawn is not really a problem, and Black can improve his position with ...♖ac8 and ...a6, or even ...♕d7, exchanging queens and finding a home for the knight on b3.



11...♘c7

11...♘b8 has been played a few times but the text move seems more consistent to me.

12.dxc5 bxc5

After 12...♗xc5 Black went on to hold a draw in Sciarretta – Osipov, email 2012, but I find it more interesting and ambitious to play with hanging pawns.

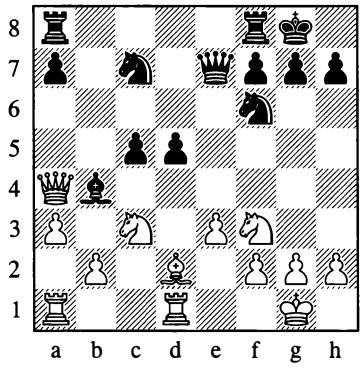
13.a3

This was played in the only game from this position, so I will take it as the main line.

I also considered:

13.♖fd1 ♕e7 14.a3

14.♖ac1 ♖fd8 15.a3 a5! transposes to 15.♖ac1 ♖fd8 in the notes below.



14...a5!

A useful theme to remember in these positions.

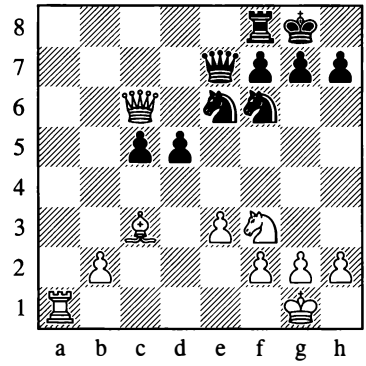
14...♗xc3 15.♗xc3 ♘e4 16.♗a5!± would be slightly annoying.

15.axb4

15.♖ac1 ♖fd8 16.♕c6 (16.♗e1 can be met by 16...h6∞ or 16...♘e6∞) White can go pawn grabbing but Black should have enough compensation: 16...♗xc3 17.♗xc3 ♘e4 18.♗e5 ♖ac8 19.♕b6 ♘e6 20.♕xa5 f6 21.♗g3 ♕b7 22.♖c2 ♕b3 23.♖dc1 ♖a8 24.♕e1 c4∞

15...axb4 16.♕c6 ♖xa1 17.♖xa1 bxc3 18.♗xc3 ♘e6

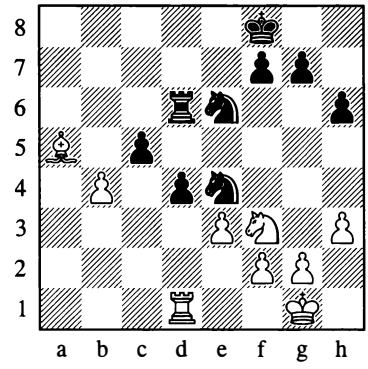
The simplifications have resulted in an equal position. For example:



19.h3

19.♗xf6 achieves nothing: 19...♕xf6 20.♕xd5 ♕xb2=

19...h6 20.♖d1 ♖d8 21.b3 ♘e4 22.♗a5 ♖d6 23.♕a8† ♕f8 24.♕xf8† ♔xf8 25.b4 d4



26.exd4

26.bxc5 is met by 26...♖a6 27.♗b4 dxe3 28.fxe3 ♖a4= with ...♘6xc5 to follow.

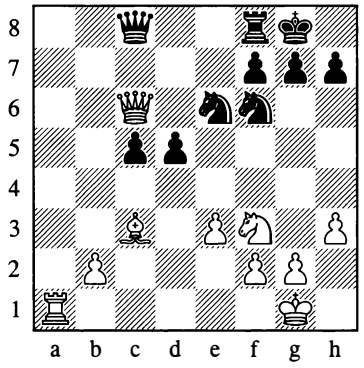
26...cxd4 27.b5 ♖d5 28.♖b1 ♘c3 29.♗xc3 dxc3 30.♔h2 c2 31.♖c1 ♖xb5 32.♖xc2=

With an almost certain draw.

13...♗xc3

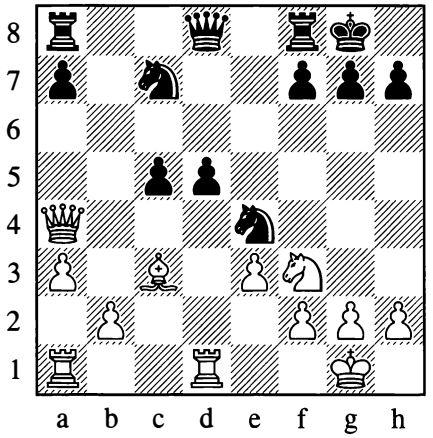
13...a5!? is possible here too, although things are slightly different without the moves ♖fd1 and ...♕e7 included. Play may continue 14.axb4 (14.♖fd1 ♕e7 transposes

to the previous note) 14...axb4 15.♕c6 bxc3 16.♗xc3 ♖xa1 17.♖xa1 ♘e6 18.h3 ♕c8



White has only the tiniest advantage.

14.♗xc3 ♘e4 15.♖fd1

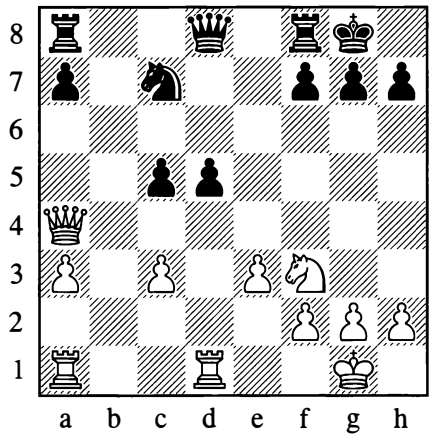


15...♘xc3!

15...♕e7 transposes back to one of the 13.♖fd1 lines, where I commented that 16.♗a5!± would be annoying.

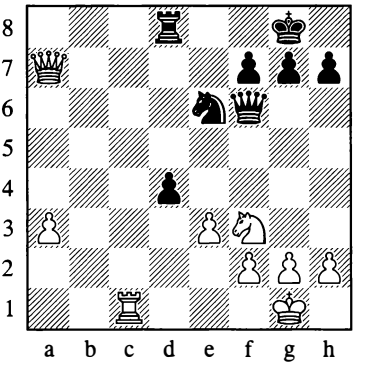
15...♖c8!?N was my initial plan as it set a couple of minor tricks, namely 16.♕xa7? ♘xc3 17.bxc3 ♘b5 followed by ...♘xc3 with advantage to Black, as well as 16.♗a5 ♕f6!, when 17.♗xc7? (17.♕c2=) 17...♖xc7 18.♖xd5? ♕xb2 wins material. However, I eventually rejected it on account of 16.♖ac1!±, when Black struggles to prove full equality as he now has to worry about the a7-pawn.

16.bxc3



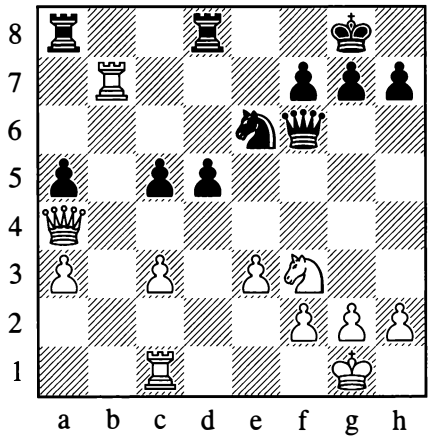
16...♕f6 17.♖ab1 ♖fd8 18.♖b7 ♘e6 19.♖c1 a5!?N

The game continued: 19...d4 20.cxd4 cxd4 21.♖xa7 ♖xa7 (21...♖ac8!?N 22.♖xc8 ♖xc8 23.h3 dxe3 24.fxe3 ♕d8 25.♕d7 ♖c1† 26.♔f2 ♖c2† 27.♔f1 ♕xd7 28.♖xd7 g6 29.♖a7± should be a draw with best play, but Black still has some work to do) 22.♕xa7



22...d3 23.♕b6 d2 24.♖d1 ♕c3 25.♕b1± Black had just enough compensation to hold a draw in Jenneborg – Goreczny, email 2014, but it's not the kind of position I would aim for.

The text move seems more straightforward, as Black safeguards the a-pawn while preparing to liquidate with a future ...d4 break. For example:



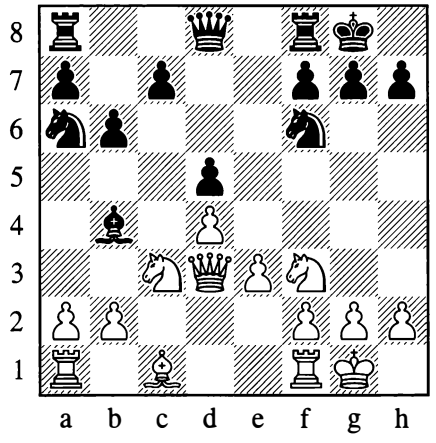
20.♕b5

20.♖b5 can be met by 20...c4!= intending to activate the knight on c5.

20...h6 21.h3 d4 22.cxd4 cxd4 23.♘xd4 ♘xd4 24.exd4 ♖xd4

With an equal endgame.

C33) 10.♕d3



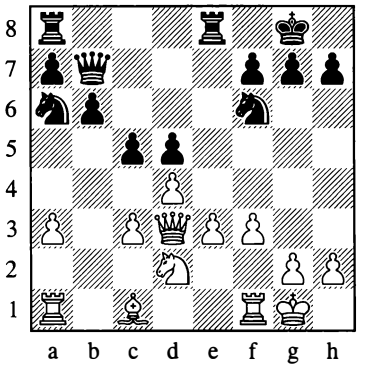
This has been played twice by Mamedyarov, plus a few other strong players in the past couple of years.

10...♕c8 11.♗d2

This is the usual follow-up, preparing to post a rook on c1.

11.b3 can be met by 11...♗xc3!?N (11...♕b7 was also okay in Zude – Marin, Helsingor 2016) 12.♕xc3 ♘e4 13.♕d3 ♘b4= followed by ...c5.

11.a3 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 c5 13.♘d2 (13.♘e5 c4 14.♕c2 occurred in Gilevich – Brancaleoni, Civitanova Marche 2016, and now 14...♘b8!?N looks nice for Black) 13...♖e8 14.f3 ♕b7

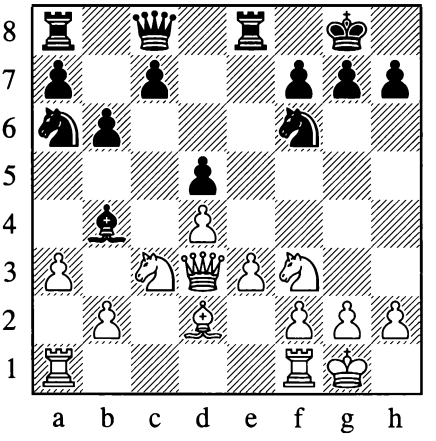


15.♗b2 c4 (15...♘c7!?N) 16.♕e2 ♖e6 17.♖fe1 ♖ae8 18.♘f1 ♘h5 19.♕d2 f5∓ Black had a nice clamp in Johannessen – Leko, Tromso 2013.

11...♖e8

White has tried **C331) 12.a3** and **C332) 12.♖ac1**.

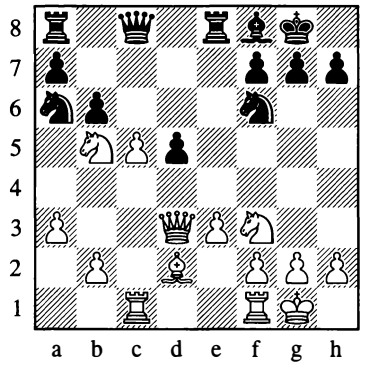
C331) 12.a3



12...♗f8

12...♗xc3 is not ridiculous but it feels like a concession; after 13.♗xc3 c5 14.dxc5 ♘xc5 15.♕d1 (15.♕d4? ♘b3) 15...♘fe4 16.♕xd5 ♘xc3 17.bxc3 ♘e4 18.♖ac1 ♕c7± Black is struggling to find full compensation for the pawn.

12...♗d6!?N seems decent though, for instance: 13.♘b5 (13.b4 c6!? 14.♖ac1 ♘c7 followed by ...♘e6 looks reasonable for Black) 13...♗f8 It's not clear if having the knight on b5 helps or not. A sample line is: 14.♖ac1 c5 15.dxc5



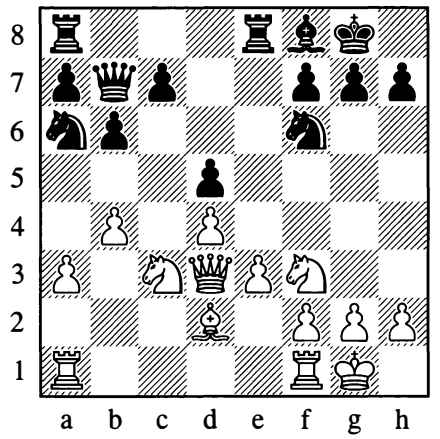
15...bxc5 (15...♘xc5!? 16.♕e2 a6 17.♘bd4 ♕b7= also looks respectable) 16.♗c3 c4 17.♕d2 ♕c6 Guarding f6, hitting b5 and preparing ...♘c5. 18.♗xf6 ♕xb5=

13.b4

13.♖ac1 has not been played here but it immediately transposes to variation C332 below.

13...♕b7

It is too early for 13...c5?, as the d5-pawn is loose: 14.dxc5 bxc5 15.♘xd5 ♘xd5 16.♕xd5 ♖b8 17.♖fc1±



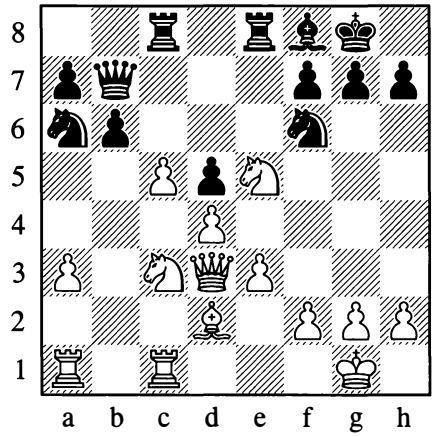
14.♖fc1 ♖ac8

After 14...c5!?N 15.bxc5 bxc5 16.♖ab1 ♕c8 Black has lost two tempos with the queen, which is not as ridiculous as it may seem, as we have prevented White from winning a pawn with dxc5 followed by ♘xd5. Play might continue: 17.♕b5!? (17.dxc5 ♘xc5 18.♕e2 ♕d7=) 17...♘c7 18.♕c6 ♖e6 19.♕b7 c4∞

15.♘e5

15.♖ab1!?N can be met by 15...c6 16.♘e5 ♘b8 17.a4 ♗d6 18.f4 ♕e7 19.b5 (or 19.♘e2 ♘e4∞) 19...c5 with mutual chances.

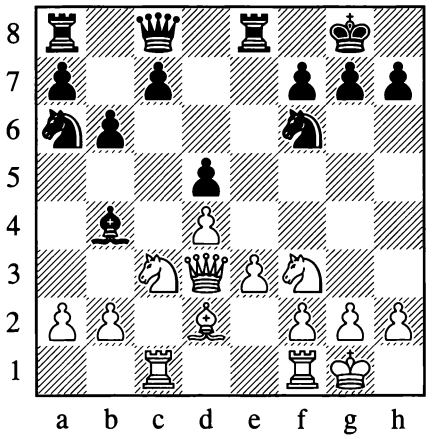
15...c5 16.bxc5



16...♘xc5! 17.dxc5 ♖xe5 18.cxb6 axb6=

Ni Hua – Harikrishna, Doha 2015.

C332) 12.♖ac1



12...♗f8

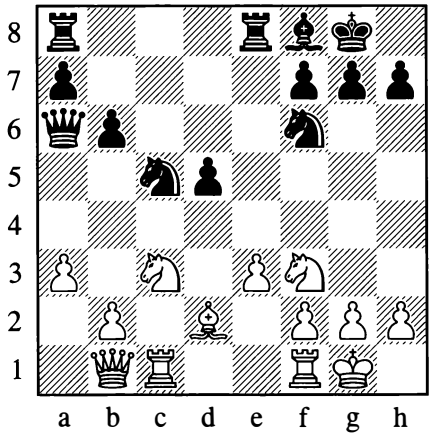
This is our usual plan, and it was the choice of both Carlsen and Harikrishna.

12...c5!?N looks like a sensible novelty, intending to gain space while harassing White's queen with ...c4. After 13.b3 ♕b7 (13...♗a3!? 14.♖cd1 ♘b4 15.♕e2 ♘c6 16.♘b5 ♕a6 is close to equal) 14.♘b5 ♖ad8= Black looks fine to me.

13.a3

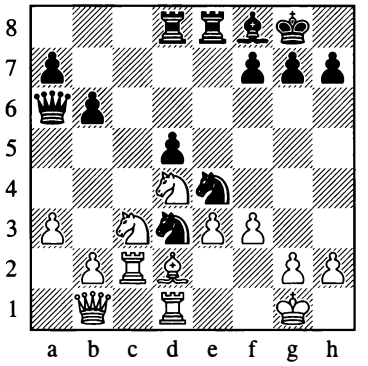
Mamedyarov played this in both games, evidently wishing to prevent the knight from coming to b4.

13...c5 14.dxc5 ♘xc5 15.♕b1 ♕a6



16.♘d4 ♖ac8

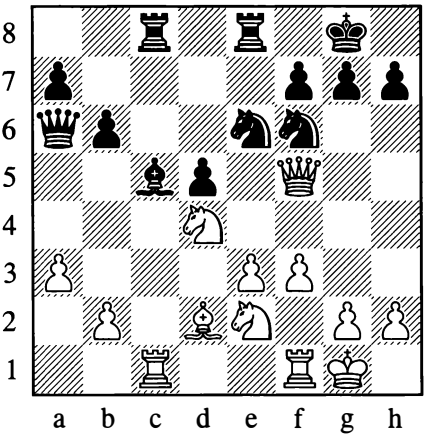
16...♘fe4 17.♖c2 ♖ad8 18.♖d1 ♘d3 19.f3 occurred just two days later, when Black should have continued:



19...♘xc3N (rather than 19...♘xd2? 20.♖cxd2 ♘e5 21.♘c2 ♘c4 22.♖xd5 ♖c8 23.e4± as in Mamedyarov – Harikrishna, Berlin 2015) 20.♖xc3 ♘e5 White has a tiny advantage at most.

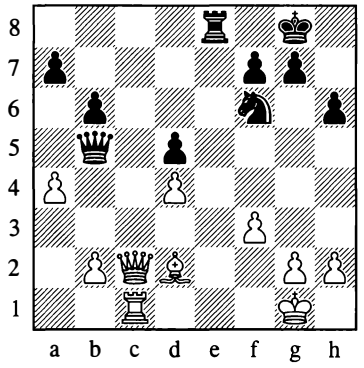
17.f3 ♘e6 18.♘ce2 ♗c5 19.♕f5

Now the most accurate continuation is:



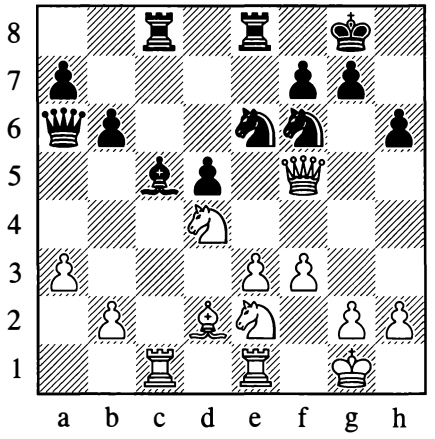
19...h6!N

19...♗xd4 is certainly playable but there is no real need to release the tension so soon. 20.♘xd4 ♘xd4 21.exd4 ♖xc1 22.♖xc1 ♕b5 23.♕c2 h6 24.a4



24...♕a6 (24...♕d7!?N seems reasonable; after 25.b3 ♕d6 White will have to work hard to turn his tiny edge into something meaningful) 25.b3 ♘d7?! Black went on to hold in Mamedyarov – Carlsen, Berlin (rapid) 2015, but 26.♕f5!N ♘f6 (or 26...♕b7 27.♗f4) 27.♗xh6 would have made things trickier for him.

20.♖fe1



20...♗xd4 21.♘xd4 ♘xd4 22.exd4 ♖xc1 23.♖xc1

Black has a better version of Mamedyarov – Carlsen, as he has gained the ...h6 move for free.

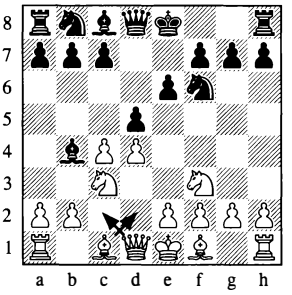
23...♕e2!? 24.♕c2 ♘h7=

The knight is heading for f8 and later e6. Black is fine, as his pieces are active and his knight is not really worse than White's bishop in this pawn structure. (Note that 25.♖e1 does not win material as 25...♕b5= defends the rook on e8.)

Conclusion

Black's set-up involving ...b6 and ...♗a6 seems quite promising, and the recent pickup in popularity backs that up. So far, White has not found any clear path to an advantage. There are some minor details, such as understanding the correct timing of ...c5, or deciding whether to put the bishop on d6 or f8, which can make the difference between a slightly worse position or one with equal chances. Still, in most cases you can always count on a generally decent position, and it seems to me that this is the kind of set-up where you need to know the plans more than the exact moves. Black quite often has two or more options of roughly equal strength, so you can interpret the position in your own way.

Chapter 15



5.♗d2 & 5.♕c2

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4

A) 5.♗d2 **296**

B) 5.♕c2 dxc4! **297**

B1) 6.a3 **297**

B2) 6.e3 **298**

B3) 6.♗g5 b5 **300**

B31) 7.e4 **301**

B32) 7.a4 **302**

B4) 6.e4 **304**

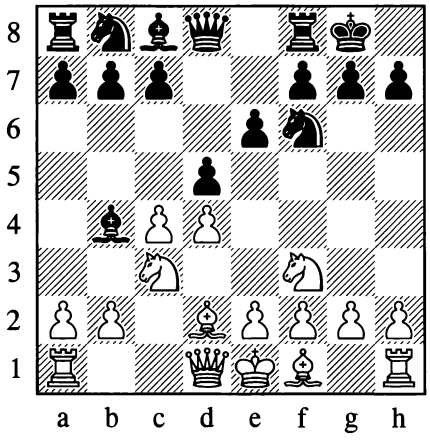
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4

We conclude our study of the Ragozin by considering **A) 5.♗d2** and **B) 5.♕c2**.

5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 is covered under the 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.a3 ♗xc3† 5.bxc3 ♘f6 6.♘f3 move order – see variation F1 of Chapter 18 on page 361.

A) 5.♗d2 0–0

5...dxc4 6.e3 ♗xc3 7.♗xc3 b5 8.a4 is not to my liking. In the main line below, we will get this position with an extra tempo.



6.a3

Quite a rare line – White hopes to benefit from the bishop pair without damaging his pawn structure.

By far the most common choice has been 6.e3, which transposes to variation B of the previous chapter.

6...♗xc3

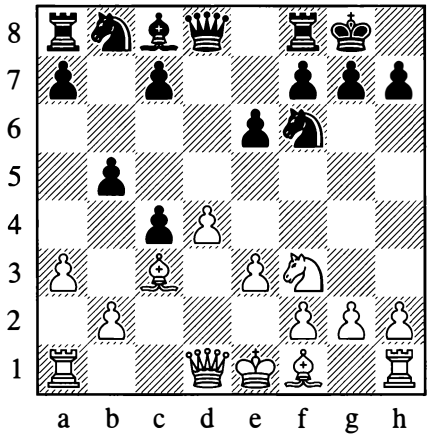
6...♗e7!? leads to a weird version of the Queen's Gambit Declined. White's bishop has gone to d2 instead of the more active f4- or g5-squares, but he has gained the a2-a3 move for free. If you know a bit about the QGD then you could certainly consider playing this way.

7.♗xc3 dxc4

7...♘e4!? also looks entirely reasonable, but I will stick to our normal plan of eating the c4-pawn when the opportunity presents itself.

8.e3 b5

I briefly considered 8...♕d5, but found 9.♘d2!?N b5 10.♗e2 slightly annoying, as Black has to play the awkward-looking 10...♕c6. Black can and probably should give back the c4-pawn with 9...♗d7, with equal chances, but I would prefer to pose White as many problems as possible.

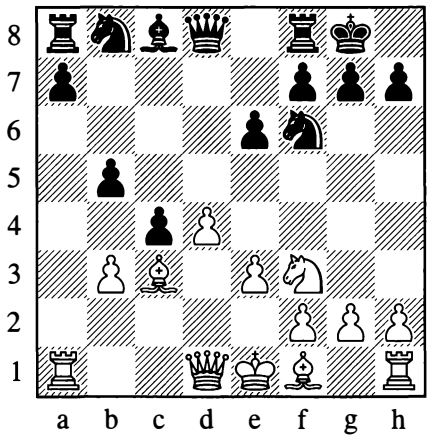


9.a4 c6 10.axb5

10.b3?! leaves the c3-bishop looking particularly vulnerable. 10...♘d5 11.♕d2 cxb3 12.axb5 cxb5 13.♗xb5 ♕b6∓ was problematic for White in Machalova – Kovacs, Trencianske Teplice 2005.

10...cxb5 11.b3

This occurred in Frotscher – Waibel, Leimen 2001. The position resembles a Noteboom. White should be able to win back his pawn on the queenside, but Black has a nice lead in development, keeping in mind that White has wasted time on a3-a4. My suggestion is:



11...a5!?N

This move is directed against ♗b4 and ♗a5.

11...♕e7!?N is also sensible. Then 12.bxc4 b4 13.♗b2 a5 14.♗d3 ♗b7 takes us into one of the main lines of the Noteboom with Black having ...♕e7 as an extra move, which must be of some use.

12.bxc4 bxc4

12...b4?? would allow 13.♗xb4+– of course.

13.♗xc4 ♕c7 14.♕d3 ♗b7∞

Black has a nice lead in development and ideas of ...♖c8 and ...♗xf3 are on the table.

B) 5.♕c2

This position can also be reached via a Nimzo-Indian, where White answers 4.♕c2 d5 with 5.♘f3, rather than the much more challenging 5.cxd5 or 5.a3.

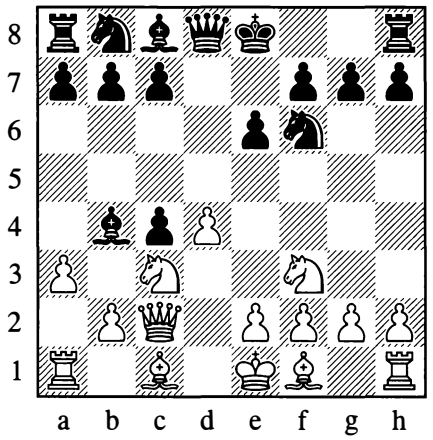
5...dxc4!

Once again we should be happy to transpose to a good version of the Vienna Variation.

The Vienna move order would be 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.♕c2 (5.e4 is clearly the main move for White, and 5.e3 is also respectable) 5...♗b4. Simply put, White has more useful ways to spend a tempo than putting his queen on c2 – though his position remains playable of course.

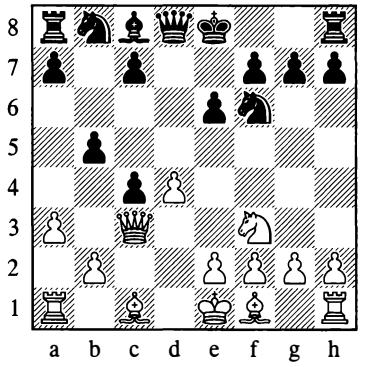
We will analyse **B1) 6.a3**, **B2) 6.e3**, **B3) 6.♗g5** and **B4) 6.e4**.

B1) 6.a3



6...♗a5!?

6...♗xc3† is also possible of course, and leads to more mainstream positions: 7.♕xc3 (7.bxc3 c5 8.e3 0–0 9.♗xc4 ♕c7 10.0–0 b6 11.♕e2 ♗b7 led to typical Nimzo-esque play in I. Sokolov – Wells, London 2008) 7...b5



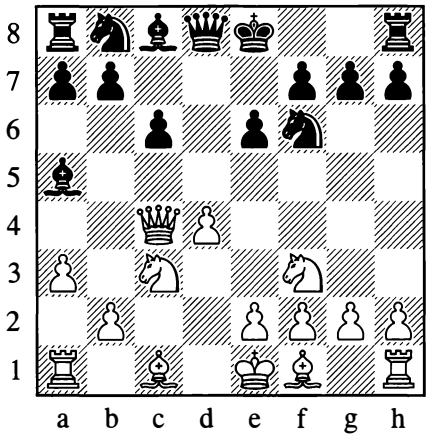
8.a4 c6 9.g3 ♗b7 10.♗g2 ♘bd7 11.0–0 0–0 12.b3 cxb3 13.♗a3 ♖e8 14.♕xb3 a6 15.♖fd1⩲ Eljanov – Palac, France 2007.

7.♕a4†

7.e4 b5 is covered on page 305 – see 7.a3 ♗a5 in the notes to variation B4.

7...c6 8.♕xc4

Here I suggest a modest improvement.



8...0–0N

After 8...b5!? 9.♕d3 b4!? 10.axb4 ♗a6 11.♕c2 ♗xb4 12.e4 ♗xf1 13.♔xf1 ♘bd7 14.g3 h6 15.♔g2 0–0 the players soon agreed a draw in Shipov – Johannessen, Tromso 2006, but White's position remains slightly more comfortable at this stage.

9.g3

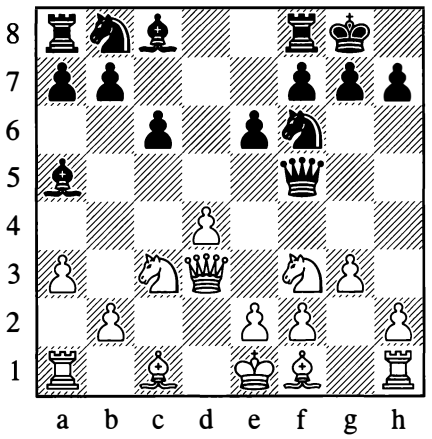
9.e4? allows 9...♘xe4∓ of course.

9...♕d5

9...♘bd7 10.♗g2 ♖e8 is another possible direction.

10.♕d3 ♕f5!?

A similar idea can occur in the Nimzo-Indian after 4.♕c2 d5 5.cxd5 ♕xd5 6.♘f3 ♕f5!?. Black allows a slight damaging of his pawn structure in order to improve his control over the central light squares.

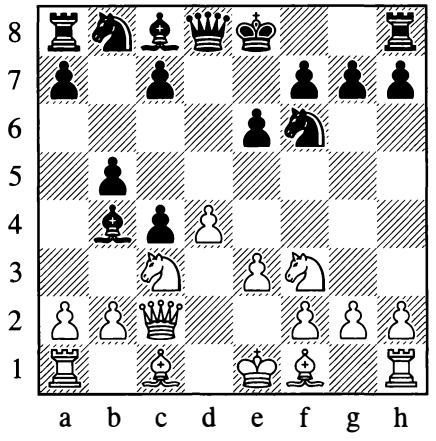


11.♕xf5 exf5=

If we imagine the aforementioned Nimzo-Indian line continuing 7.♕xf5 exf5 8.a3 ♗a5 9.g3 0–0, we have reached the same position having gained the useful move ...c6 for free. White has also lost out on some of the more challenging options available in the Nimzo line, so it's safe to say that Black is doing fine.

B2) 6.e3 b5

This resembles variation B of Chapter 4, but here White has played ♕c2 instead of the earlier ♗g5, which means he can at least play ♗d2 to break the annoying pin when needed.



7.a4 c6

Now the position resembles the Noteboom Variation, which starts after the opening moves 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.a4 ♗b4 6.e3 b5. Here the position is the same, except that each side has an extra move: White has played the less-than-essential ♕c2 while Black benefits from the more useful developing move ...♘f6.

8.♗d2 a5!

Not the only playable move, but I find it the most logical. Black is following the same path as in the Noteboom, intending to use the ♕c2 and ...♘f6 moves to his advantage.

9.axb5 ♗xc3 10.♗xc3

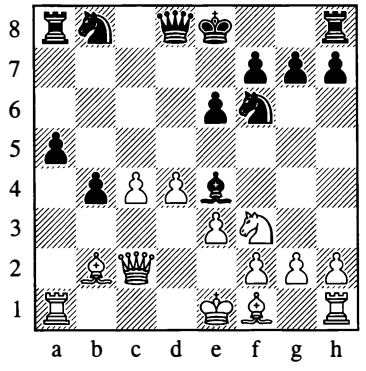
10.♕xc3 cxb5 11.b3 ♗b7 12.bxc4 b4 13.♕c2 transposes to our main line.

10...cxb5

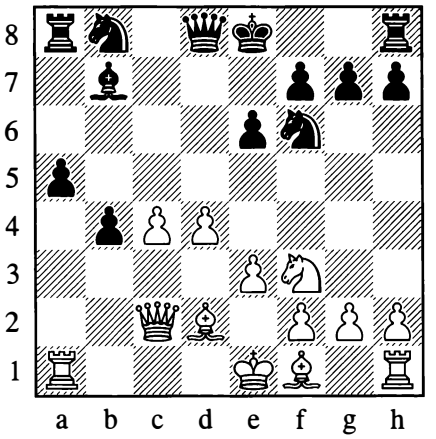
Black is well on the way towards a considerably improved Noteboom.

11.b3 ♗b7 12.bxc4 b4 13.♗d2

Usually White would prefer 13.♗b2 in these positions, but 13...♗e4! emphasizes White's misplaced queen. For example:



14.♕d2 (14.♗d3 ♗xd3 15.♕xd3 a4! and the passed pawns are already becoming a problem for White) 14...♘bd7 15.♗e2 0–0 16.0–0 ♕e7 17.♖fc1 a4∓ When the bishop goes to b2, Black should always be on the lookout for a chance to advance his queenside pawns.



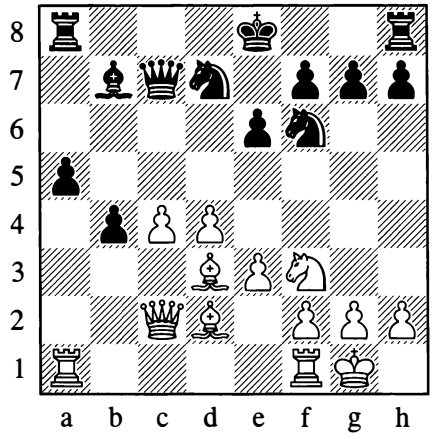
In the Noteboom proper, White usually recaptures with his bishop on c3 and then retreats it to b2, where it points towards the kingside. Here White has had to put it on d2 to avoid the problems of the note above. A second difference is that his queen has gone to c2 instead of the more essential developing move ♗d3. In short, Black is already at least equal.

13...♘bd7

13...0–0 14.♗d3 ♘bd7 15.0–0 ♕c7 is another valid move order.

14.♗d3 ♕c7 15.0–0

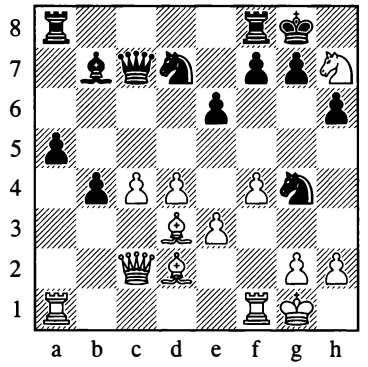
15.e4 should be met by 15...e5, when 16.0–0 0–0 transposes to the main line below. Alternatively, 16.d5 was played in Steiner – Geier, Forchheim 2003, when 16...♘c5N∓ is obvious and strong for Black.



15...0–0 16.e4

Non-forcing moves like 16.♖fc1 and 16.c5 can both be met by 16...♖fb8, getting behind the passers.

The following game contained some nice instructive points:
16.♘g5 h6 17.♘h7 ♘g4 18.f4

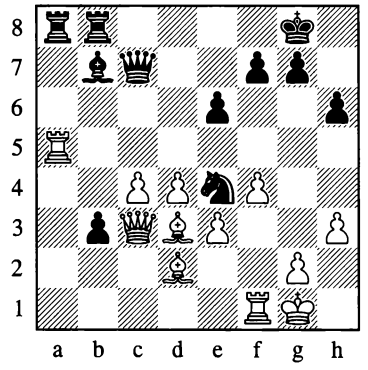


18...♖fb8!

18...♖fd8 19.h3 was messier, though still pretty good for Black in Paschall – P. Horvath, Budapest 2004.

The text move is more accurate, thanks to the following tactical point:
19.h3 b3! 20.♕c3

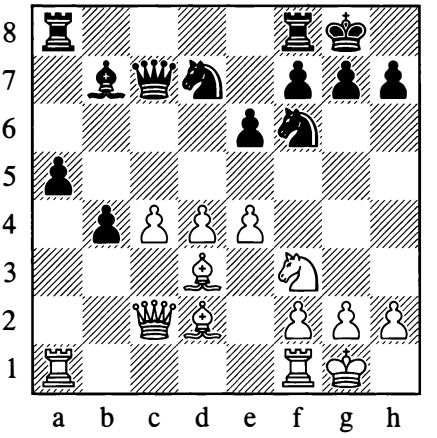
20.♕xb3 ♗xg2∓
20...♘gf6 21.♘xf6† ♘xf6 22.♖xa5 ♘e4!



23.♖xa8

23.♗xe4 ♕xa5–+
23...♘xc3 24.♖xb8† ♕xb8 25.♗xc3 ♗a8 26.♔f2 f5∓

White soon gave up in Blondel – Epinoux, corr. 2012.



16...e5!

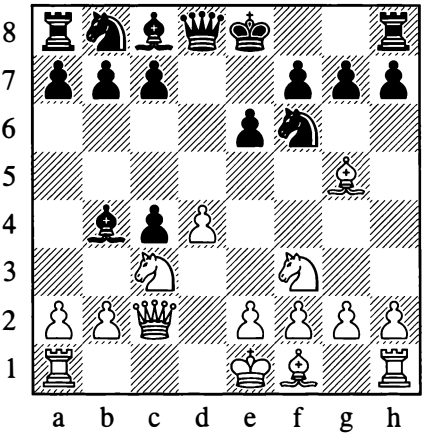
It is worth remembering to meet the e3-e4 advance in this way when possible. Once again, we see why White normally prefers to put his bishop on b2 in the Noteboom.

17.♖fe1 ♖fe8∓

Halldorsson – Van der Werf, Reykjavik 1996.

B3) 6.♗g5

This has been played a couple of times by Mamedyarov. There is an obvious parallel with the 5.♗g5 dxc4 variation, though White would not normally be in such a hurry to put his queen on c2.



6...b5

Even though White is not yet attacking the c4-pawn, it makes sense to defend it in advance, while also preparing to develop the bishop on the ideal b7-square.

White's two main options are **B31) 7.e4** and **B32) 7.a4**.

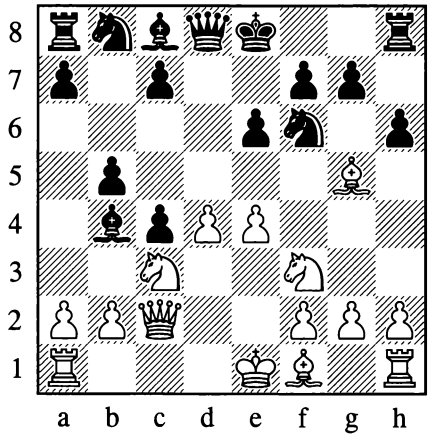
7.e3?! reaches a version of the 5.♗g5 dxc4 6.e3 b5 line, as covered in variation B of Chapter 4. White is struggling to find equality there at the best of times, and he is not helped by having played the premature 7.♕c2?!.

B31) 7.e4

This position has sometimes been reached via the 5.♗g5 dxc4 6.e4 b5!? variation, as covered in Chapter 7 – although it's obvious that 7.♕c2 is not the way to put pressure on Black from that position. According to my database, White has achieved a pitiful score of less than 20% from here.

7...h6

It is helpful to clarify what White plans to do with his bishop.

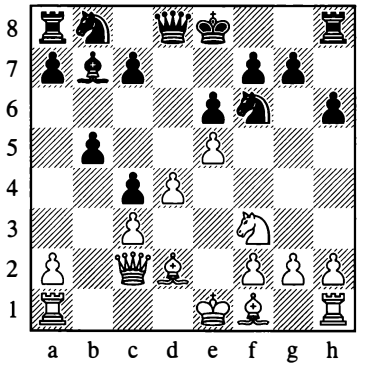


8.♗xf6

This seems best.

8.♗h4? is giving Black too much: 8...g5! 9.♗g3 ♗b7 and White is already under terrible pressure in the centre. 10.e5 (10.0–0–0 ♗xc3 11.♕xc3 ♘xe4–+ Minguela Munoz – Rusev, Cambados 2008) 10...♘e4 11.a3 ♗a5 12.0–0–0 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♕e7 14.♕b2 ♘d7–+ Klein – Shliperman, New York 1995.

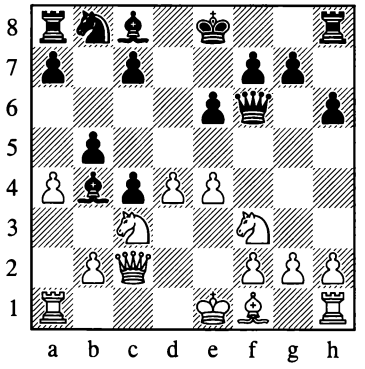
8.♗d2 is not so bad, but Black is still doing well after: 8...♗xc3 9.bxc3 ♗b7 10.e5



10...♘e4! (Better than 10...♘d5, when 11.♕b1! would be annoying) 11.a4 a6 12.♖b1 ♗c6 13.♗c1 0–0 14.♗e2 ♘d7∓ White was struggling to prove compensation in Marzolo – Guliyev, Paris 2004.

8...♕xf6 9.♗e2

9.a4 gives Black the attractive extra option of:



9...♘c6!?N (9...c6 is the standard response, when play is likely to transpose to our main

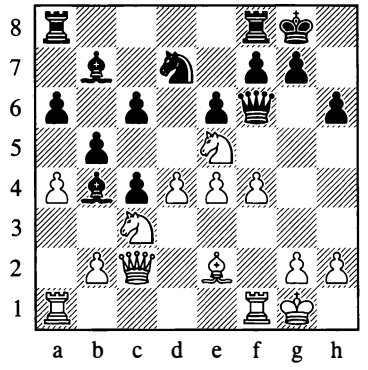
line after 10.♗e2 ♗b7 11.0–0 a6) 10.♖d1 a6 Having lured the rook to d1, Black can play this move as there is no pin along the a-file. 11.♗e2 e5!? With clearly better chances for Black.

9...♗b7 10.0–0 a6 11.a4 c6 12.e5

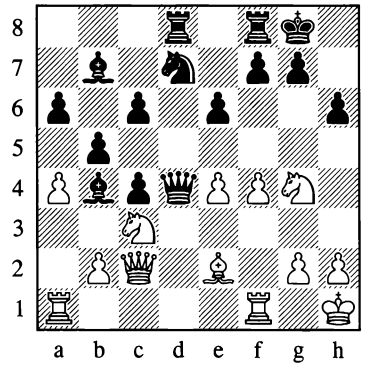
Other moves are no better:

12.♖fd1 0–0 13.e5 ♕e7 14.♘e4 ♘d7 15.♕c1 f5 16.exf6 ♘xf6 17.♘xf6† ♖xf6∓ Esedov – P. Horvath, Chalkidiki 2000.

12.♘e5 0–0 13.f4 is an attempt to build a space advantage, but 13...♘d7! is a clever response:

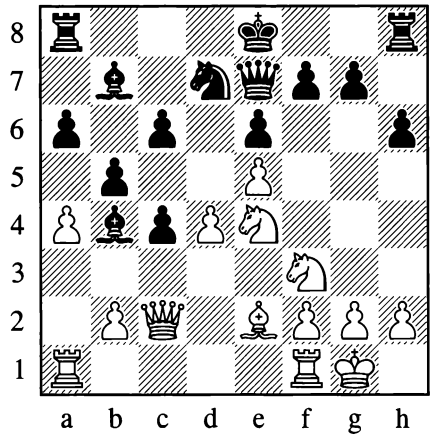


14.♔h1 (14.♘xd7? ♕xd4†–+ is the point) 14...♖ad8 15.♘g4 This occurred in Petkov – Ki. Georgiev, Sibenik 2006, and now there was no reason to refrain from 15...♕xd4!N. For instance:



16.♖ad1 (or 16.e5 ♘c5 17.♖ad1 ♘d3–+) 16...♕b6 17.f5 exf5 18.exf5 f6–+ White has nothing like enough play for the two missing pawns.

12...♕e7 13.♘e4 ♘d7

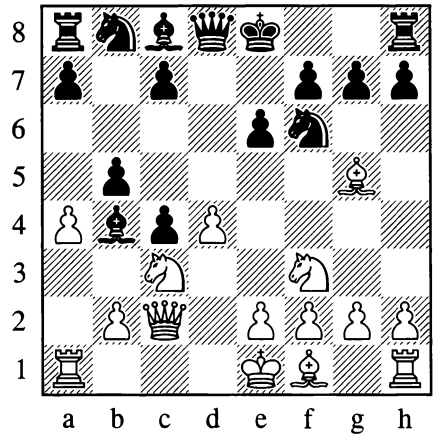


14.b3 cxb3 15.♕xb3 0–0 16.♖ab1 a5 17.♘fd2 ♗a6

White did not have enough compensation for the pawn in Rej – Xie, Canberra 2006.

B32) 7.a4

This seems more logical than the previous option. Rather than converting to a typical e2-e4 set-up having spent an important tempo on ♕c2, White attacks our pawn chain and hopes to develop pressure on the long diagonal.

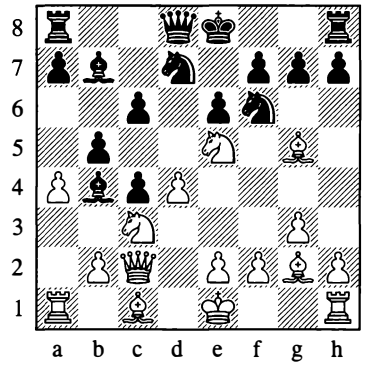


7...c6 8.g3

8.e4 h6 is similar to the previous variation and may well transpose. This was actually the move order of the Petkov – Georgiev game quoted above.

8...♗b7 9.♗g2 ♘bd7 10.0–0

10.♘e5 should be met by:



10...♕c8!N, when Black keeps his queen safe and stands slightly better. The more obvious 10...♕b6 ran into trouble after 11.0–0 h6? (11...0–0 is better, although 12.♗e3!? is still a bit annoying) 12.♗e3!↑ in Flores Alvarez – Schwartzman, Mar del Plata 1936.

10...♕b6

Without the white knight on e5, this move works fine, as ♗e3 can always be met by ...♘d5.

11.e4

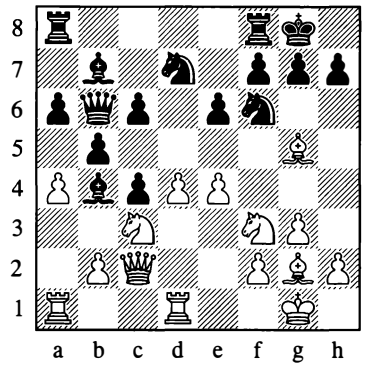
This was Mamedyarov's choice. Another game continued:

11.♖fd1 0–0

After 11...a6!?N, 12.♘e5!? looks best.

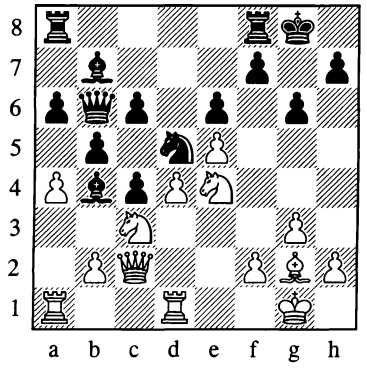
12.e4 a6

I considered 12...h6 in order to cut out any ♘g5 ideas, but 13.e5! is a decent reply: 13...♘d5 (13...hxg5 14.♘xg5∞) 14.♗xh6! gxh6 15.♕d2 White has enough counterplay, as 15...♔g7 16.♘xd5! regains the piece.



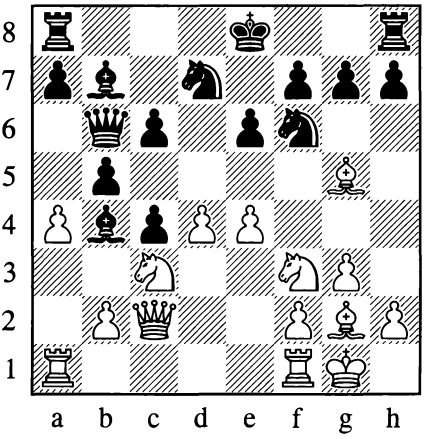
13.♗xf6 ♘xf6 14.e5 ♘d5 15.♘g5 g6 16.♘ge4N

16.h4?! ♗e7 17.♘ce4 ♖ad8 18.♕e2 h6∓ gave White nothing in Puzko – Potkin, St Petersburg 2014.



16...♗e7 17.♕c1 ♔g7!∓

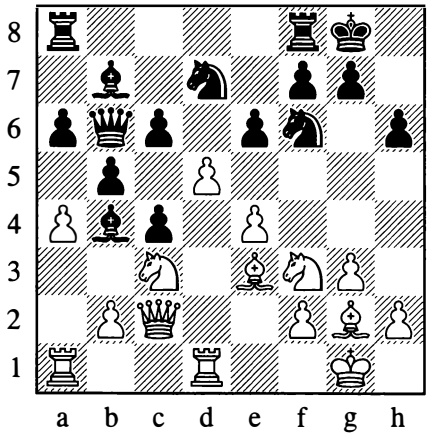
Preventing ♕h6, and leaving White with insufficient compensation.



11...a6 12.♖fd1 h6!?

12...0–0 leads back to the previous note, and is perfectly playable. Instead Carlsen decides to drive the bishop back before castling.

13.♗e3 0–0 14.d5



14...♗c5!N

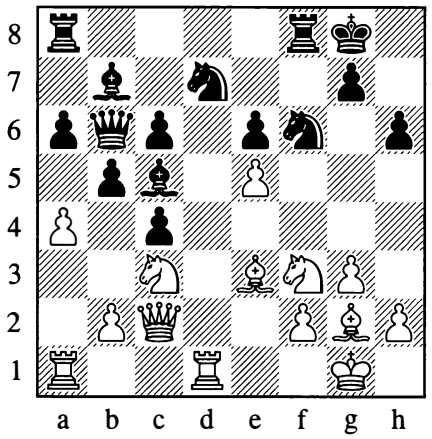
14...c5!? led to an eventual success for Black in Mamedyarov – Carlsen, Shamkir 2014, but the position is extremely double-edged and it's not ideal having the bishop blocked out of play on b4. The text move avoids this problem and forces White to make a tough decision: he must either exchange a pair of bishops or spend time moving the bishop from e3, leaving Black with pressure against the f2-pawn.

15.dxe6

15.♗xc5 ♘xc5 16.d6 doesn't give White enough compensation: 16...♘b3 17.♖ab1 c5 18.e5 ♘d7 19.♘e4 ♖ad8∓ Despite the strong d-pawn, Black is a pawn up and actively placed, with ...♘d4 coming soon.

15...fxe6 16.e5

16.a5 ♕c7 17.♘d4 ♗xd4 18.♗xd4 c5∓ also leaves White with insufficient compensation.

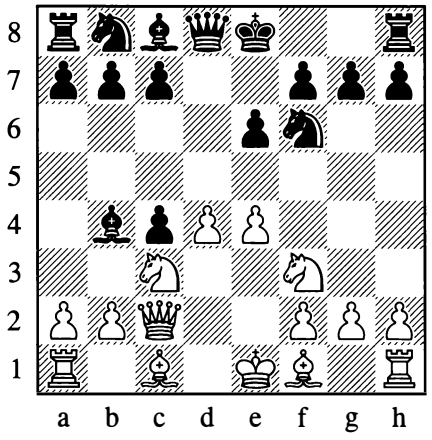


16...♘d5 17.♗f4 ♖f7∓/∓

17...♗c8 18.♕d2 b4 19.♘e4 c3∓ is given by Ftacnik in his ChessBase annotations, but the text move looks more logical to me. It's still a messy position but Black must be at least slightly better, with an extra pawn, pressure on the f-file, and the possibility of landing a knight on d3 at some point.

B4) 6.e4

This position is sometimes reached via the Vienna move order of 4...dxc4 5.e4 ♗b4, when 6.♕c2 is a somewhat rare alternative to the more challenging options of 6.♗g5 and 6.♗xc4!?.



6...b5

The typical move, defending c4 and preparing to deploy the light-squared bishop on b7.

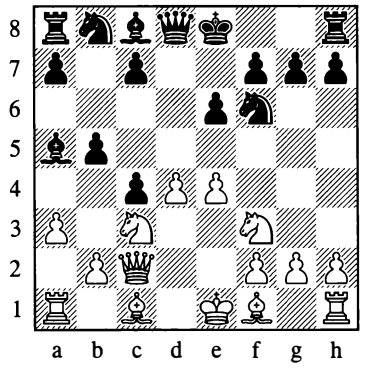
7.a4

This is by far the most common move. It makes sense to provoke ...c6 in order to block the long diagonal for Black's light-squared bishop.

7.♗g5 leads back to variation B31.

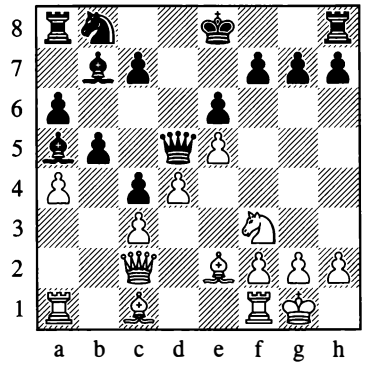
7.e5 ♘d5 8.a4 c6 transposes to 8.e5 ♘d5 in the note to White's next move.

It is also worth considering:
7.a3 ♗a5



White has driven the bishop further away from the kingside; on the other hand, after a future ...♘xc3, White will not pick up a tempo with bxc3.

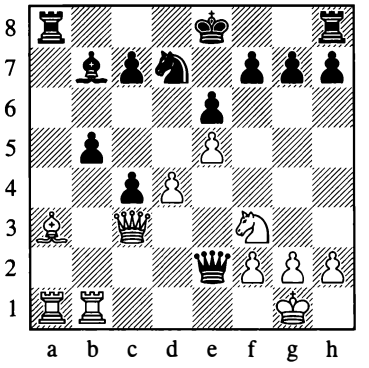
8.e5 ♘d5 9.♗e2 ♗b7 10.0–0 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♕d5 12.a4 a6



13.axb5

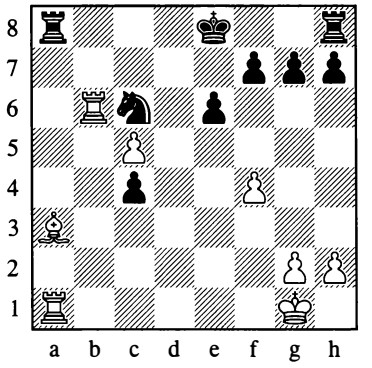
I also checked: 13.♘e1N ♘c6 14.♗f3 ♕d7 15.♗a3 b4! 16.♗xb4 (16.cxb4 ♘xd4 is dangerous only to White) 16...♗xb4 17.cxb4 ♘xd4 18.♕xc4 ♘xf3† 19.♘xf3 ♗xf3 20.gxf3 0–0=

13...axb5 14.♗a3 ♘d7 15.♖fb1 ♕e4 16.♕d2 ♗xc3 17.♕xc3 ♕xe2



18.♕b4 c5 19.dxc5 ♗c6 20.♘d4 ♕e4 21.♘xc6 ♕xc6 22.♕xb5 ♘xe5 23.f4 ♕xb5 24.♖xb5 ♘c6 25.♖b6

Up to this point Black had played perfectly in Stocek – Luch, Czech Republic 2013. Here he could have sealed the victory with:



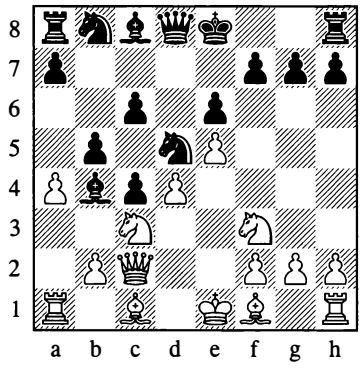
25...♔d7!N 26.♖b7† ♔c8 27.♖xf7 c3–+

7...c6 8.♗e2

8.♗g5 transposes to 8.e4 in the notes to variation B32 – which might itself transpose to variation B31 after 8...h6 and so on.

8.e5 ♘d5

This gives rise to an interesting kind of transposition:

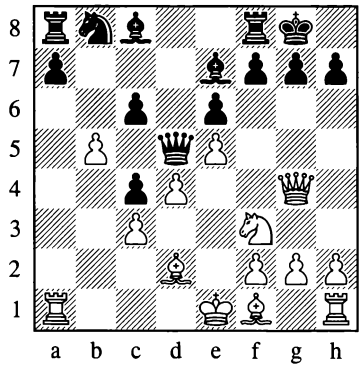


We have reached a weird version of the Geller Gambit in the Slav (1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.e4 b5 6.e5 ♘d5 7.a4 e6) with the extra moves ♕c2 and ...♗b4 included, which can't harm Black's chances too much. A game continued:

9.♗d2 ♘xc3

9...a5!?N would be more ambitious.

10.bxc3 ♗e7 11.♕e4 0–0 12.axb5 ♕d5 13.♕g4



13...f5!

It is worth remembering this idea when the white queen goes to g4.

14.exf6 ♗xf6 15.b6!N

15.♕g3?! cxb5∓ was excellent for Black in Lorparizangeneh – Pashikian, Jermuk 2014.

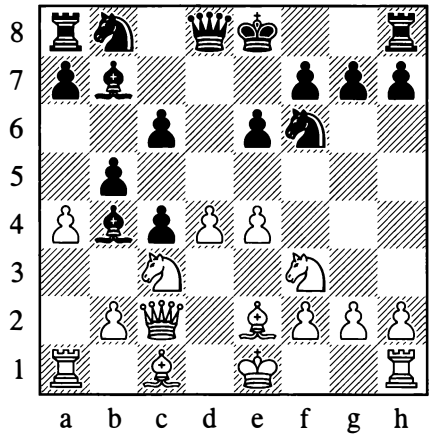
15...♘d7 16.♖xa7

16.bxa7?! e5↑

16...♘xb6=

8...♗b7

This position has actually arisen in more than a hundred games, most of them through a Slav or Triangle set-up where White decides to give up the c4-pawn. The chances of this position arising via a Ragozin are slim, so I will keep the coverage relatively brief. Besides, Black's plan of development (...a6, ...♘bd7, ...0–0, possibly with a prophylactic ...h6 thrown in) tends to remain constant – it is White who faces the more difficult choice as to how to go about proving his compensation.



9.0–0 a6 10.b3!?

This is a thematic idea, though rare in this particular position. White wants to open the queenside files.

The most popular continuation has been:

10.♗g5 h6 11.♗h4 ♘bd7

White will find it difficult to justify his pawn sacrifice, as the following examples illustrate.

12.♖ad1

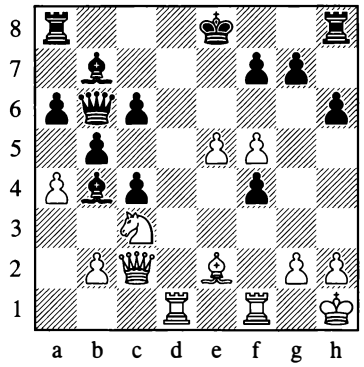
12.e5 g5 13.♗g3 ♘h5 14.♘e4 ♕b6 15.a5 ♕a7 16.♖fd1 ♗e7 17.♖ac1 ♘xg3 18.hxg3 occurred in Nyzhnyk – Klein, Plovdiv 2012, and here 18...♖d8!N looks correct. Black is at least slightly better, and can follow

up with ...c5 or ...0–0 depending on what White does.

12...♕b6 13.♘e5 ♘xe5

Black can also consider 13...0–0 14.f4, as in Stefanova – Cosma, Nadole 1995, and now 14...♘xe5N 15.fxe5 ♘d7∓.

14.dxe5 ♘d7 15.♔h1 ♘xe5 16.f4 ♘g6 17.♗g3 e5 18.f5 ♘f4 19.♗xf4 exf4 20.e5



20...♗xc3 21.bxc3 0–0 22.f6 ♕e3 23.fxg7

In Kanarek – Grandadam, Athens 2012, the natural recapture would have been strong: 23...♔xg7N∓

White does not have enough for the two pawns.

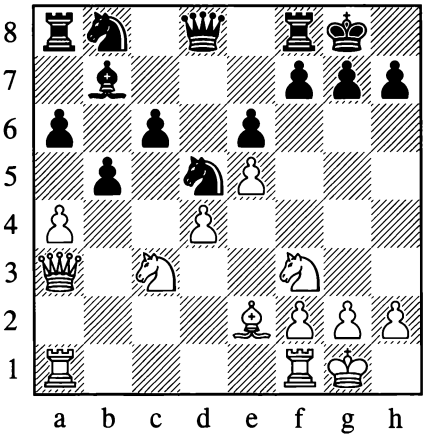
10...cxb3 11.♕xb3 ♗e7

11...♗xc3!?N 12.♕xc3 ♘xe4 wins a second pawn, albeit for obvious compensation. A logical continuation would be: 13.♕e3 ♘f6 14.♗a3 ♘d5 15.♕d2 f6!∞ Cutting out knight jumps to e5 and g5, while making room for the king to go to f7.

12.♗a3 0–0 13.e5 ♗xa3

13...♘d5∞ is also possible.

14.♕xa3 ♘d5



15.♘e4?!

15.♘xd5 would have maintained sufficient compensation; I would be tempted to take some space in the centre with 15...exd5, although 15...♕xd5 is equally playable.

15...b4 16.♕c1 a5∓

Li Chao – Jakovenko, Istanbul (ol) 2012.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with a couple of sidelines against the Ragozin. 5.♗d2 0–0 usually transposes to one of the e2-e3 variations, unless White plays 6.a3, in which case we get a good game by exchanging on c3 followed by the typical ...dxc4. 5.♕c2 has been tried by some strong players, but 5...dxc4! works well again. The main lines are 6.♗g5 and 6.e4, both of which lead to complex positions, but the fact that White has spent a tempo on the early ♕c2 means that Black can generally count on a fine game.

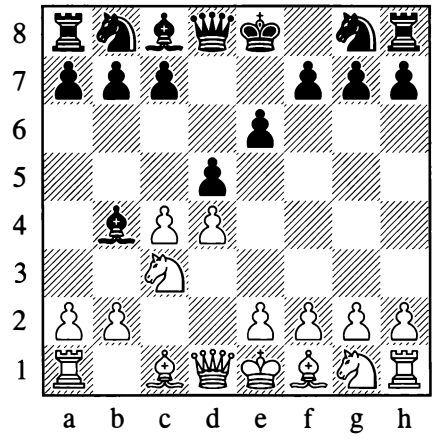
PART VI

3.♘c3 ♗b4

Introduction to 3.♘c3 ♗b4

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4

This move is a bit unusual but it makes perfect sense for a Ragozin player. White's most popular response has been 4.♘f3, when 4...♘f6 leads straight to our desired Ragozin. In the following three chapters we will deal with White's various other ways of meeting Black's last move.



4.e3 is the most important alternative, and it will be analysed in Chapters 16 and 17. All of White's other options will be covered in Chapter 18. Here is a brief introduction to both topics.

4.e3

I recommend meeting this move with:

4...♘f6

Transposing to the 4.e3 d5 variation of the Nimzo-Indian. This is relatively straightforward to learn and play, and it maintains compatibility with our Ragozin repertoire from earlier in the book. For instance, 5.♘f3 would lead straight to Chapter 14.

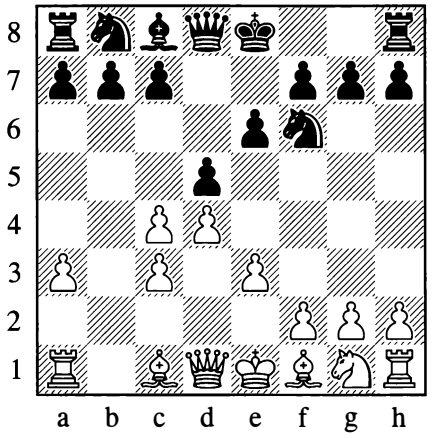
Instead of transposing to a previous chapter by moving the knight to f3, a more challenging plan is to develop this knight to e2 – usually after having put the bishop on d3. Given the chance, White would like to follow up with f2-f3, intending central and/or kingside play. In the following chapters, we are going to do everything possible to stop White from carrying out this plan! Here is a summary of the main options and where you can find them.

5.a3

5.♘ge2 dxc4 is a timely capture of the c4-pawn, which is consistent with our strategy throughout the book. White must decide between playing with uncertain compensation or going to some inconvenience to regain the lost pawn.

5.♗d3 e5! is the kind of move which will make your opponent jump out of his chair! This unexpected pawn break throws a spanner in the works of White's plans and looks to turn the tables right from the outset, as Black presses for an initiative.

5...♗xc3† 6.bxc3

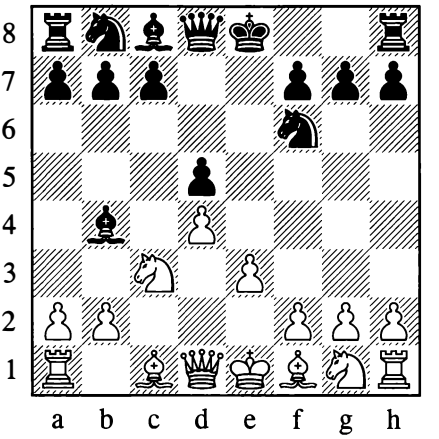


6...c6!?

An interesting little sideline. White will nearly always exchange on d5 at some point, in order to get rid of his doubled c-pawns. The text move prepares to recapture with the c-pawn and open up direct access to White's backward c3-pawn, while maintaining an extra central pawn by comparison with the ...exd5 structure.

White can clarify the central structure much sooner by means of:

5.cxd5 exd5



This exchange enables White to proceed unhindered with his plan of ♗d3 and ♘ge2, but it comes at a price of opening up the diagonal of our light-squared bishop. The main line continues:

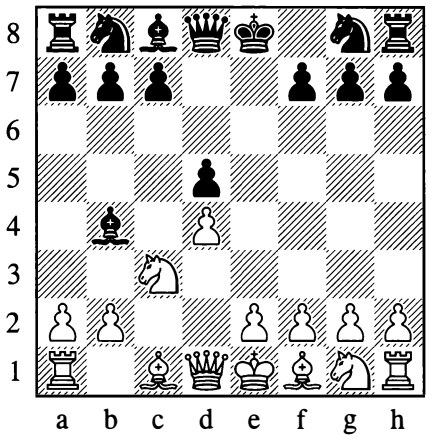
6.♗d3 0–0 7.♘e2 ♖e8

Black is ready to meet f2-f3 with ...c5, challenging for the centre before e3-e4 ever becomes a problem. If White develops normally and leaves his f-pawn at home, Black may even launch a quick attack with ...♗d6 and ...♘g4!?. See Chapter 17 for full details.

***

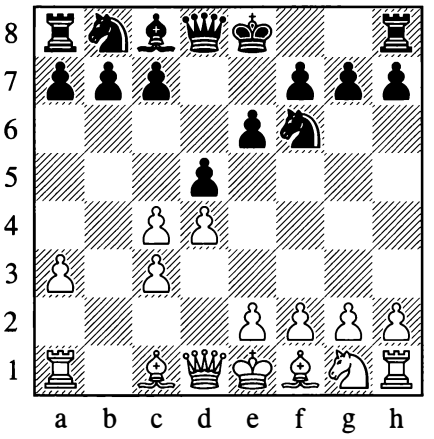
Returning to the position after **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4**, Chapter 18 will wrap up this section of the book by considering White's alternatives to 4.♘f3 and 4.e3. The two most important options are as follows:

4.cxd5 exd5 reaches a typical QGD structure, and is recommended in a few White repertoire books.



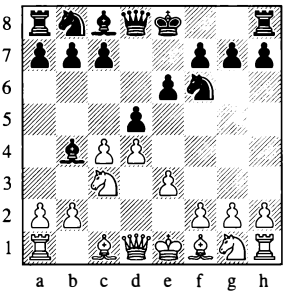
5.♗f4 This is the usual continuation, developing the bishop actively before playing e2-e3. I recommend the flexible **5...c6**, followed by ...♘e7. Black can follow up solidly with moves like ...♗f5 and ...♗d6, but it is also possible to play more adventurously with ideas involving ...♘g6, ...h5-h4 and long castling.

4.a3 is the other major option, when **4...♗xc3† 5.bxc3 ♘f6** reaches another type of Nimzo.



6.cxd5 exd5 is the main continuation. Here too, White would like to build a strong central position with e2-e3, ♗d3 and ♘e2, and once again I will show how to interfere with that plan. See Chapter 18 for full details.

Chapter 16



Alternatives after 4.e3 ♘f6

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 ♘f6

A) 5.♘e2 dxc4!? 6.a3 ♗a5 **314**
A1) 7.♕a4† **315**
A2) 7.♘g3 **316**
B) 5.♗d3 e5! **317**
B1) 6.dxe5 **318**
B2) 6.♘e2 exd4 7.exd4 dxc4 8.♗xc4 0–0 9.0–0 ♘c6 **320**
B21) 10.h3 **320**
B22) 10.♗g5 **321**
C) 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 c6!? **321**
C1) 7.f3 **322**
C2) 7.♘f3 **323**
C3) 7.♗d3 **324**
C4) 7.cxd5 cxd5 8.c4 0–0 **325**
C41) 9.cxd5 **326**
C42) 9.♘f3 **327**
C5) 7.a4 **328**

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 ♘f6

In this chapter we will deal with three options: **A) 5.♘e2**, **B) 5.♗d3** and **C) 5.a3**.

5.cxd5 will be covered in the next chapter, while 5.♘f3 converts to Chapter 14.

5.♗d2 is covered on page 350 under the 4.♗d2 ♘f6 5.e3 move order – see the note to White's 5th move in variation A of Chapter 18.

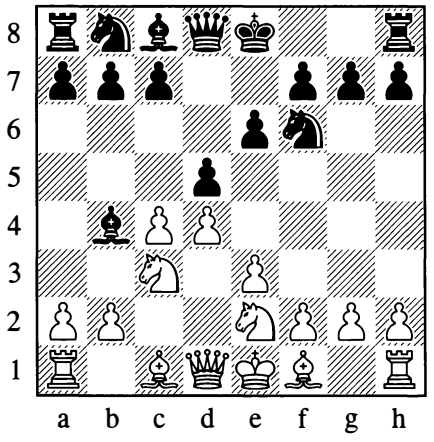
5.♕a4† ♘c6 will almost certainly transpose back to Ragozin territory, for instance: 6.♗d2 (6.♘f3 0–0 is variation D of Chapter 8) 6...0–0 7.♘f3 – see Chapter 10.

5.♕c2 gives Black a choice:

a) 5...0–0 is likely to transpose elsewhere; for instance, 6.♘f3 leads straight to variation A of Chapter 14 on page 276, while 6.a3 ♗xc3† is likely to lead to the same sort of thing, as it's hard to believe that the knight has a better square available than f3.

b) Alternatively, 5...c5!? may not transpose directly to our repertoire, but gives Black a comfortable version of a Nimzo-Indian, which can be played without any specialist knowledge. White's early e2-e3 and ♕c2 moves do not combine well at all.

A) 5.♘e2



This move invites a transposition to one of the main lines of the Nimzo-Indian after 5...0–0. However, our chosen move order gives us an extra option which is consistent with our theme.

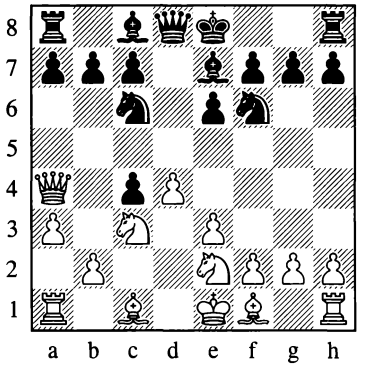
5...dxc4!? 6.a3

This is the usual follow-up to White's previous move.

6.♕a4†?!

This isn't a good choice as White's moves do not coordinate well together.

6...♘c6 7.a3 ♗e7



8.♘g3N

A game continued 8.♕xc4 0–0 9.b4 e5 10.d5 ♘b8 11.e4 c6 12.♘g3 b5 13.♕b3 a5∓ and Black was on the front foot in Yang – Arnold, Saint Louis 2012.

The text move is a reasonable attempt to recapture on c4 with the bishop, but Black has a convincing answer.

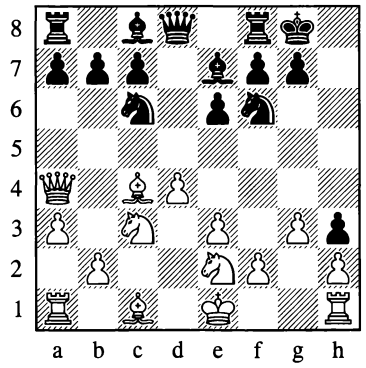
8...h5!

Here hurries Harry the h-pawn!

9.♗xc4

9.h4 e5! 10.dxe5 ♘g4∓ is also good for Black.

9...h4 10.♘ge2 h3 11.g3 0–0

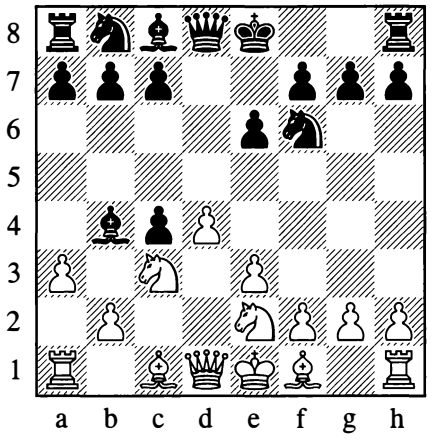


12.f4!?

White could try this in order to prevent 12.0–0 e5!∓.

12...a6!?

Intending ...♘a7 and ...♗d7-c6, with fine prospects on the light squares.



6...♗a5

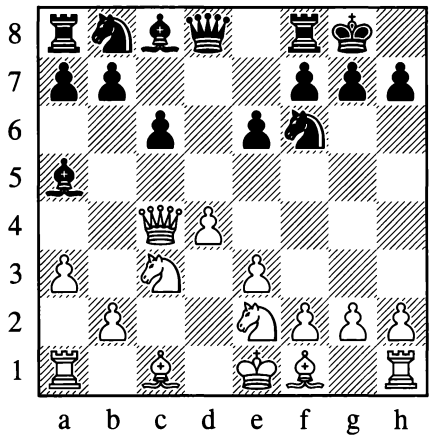
Taking on c3 would be too cooperative of course.

White may proceed with **A1) 7.♕a4†** or **A2) 7.♘g3**.

A1) 7.♕a4†

White quickly regains the pawn, but spends a couple of important tempos with his queen.

7...c6 8.♕xc4 0–0

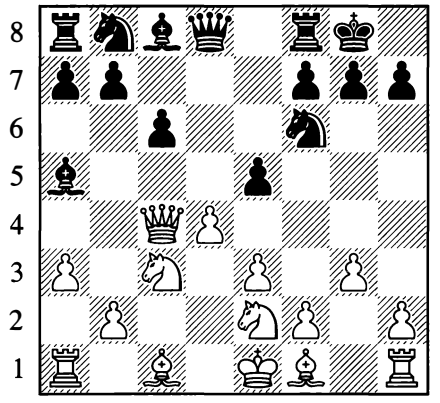


9.g3

9.♘g3 occurred in an old game: 9...♘bd7 10.f4 ♘b6 11.♕d3 c5 12.dxc5 ♕xd3 13.♗xd3 ♗xc3† 14.bxc3 ♘a4= Euwe – Capablanca, Amsterdam 1931.

9...e5!

An excellent move, opening the position while White is behind in development.

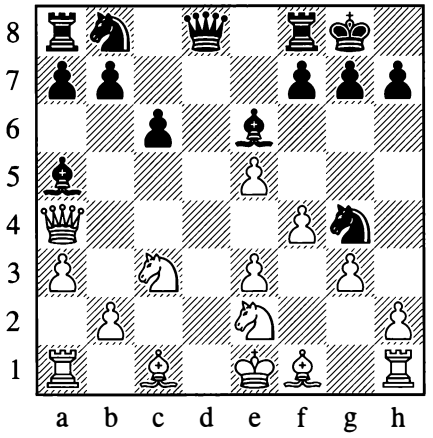


10.dxe5

10.♗g2 is well met by: 10...♗e6 11.♕d3 ♘bd7 (there is also 11...exd4 12.♕xd4? [White should prefer 12.exd4 although Black is still at least equal] 12...♘bd7 13.♘f4 ♗b3∓ as in Van den Bersselaar – Pavlovic, Gibraltar 2006) 12.b4 ♗b6 13.0–0 exd4 14.exd4 ♘e5∓ Sivuk – Deac, Jerusalem 2015.

10...♘g4 11.f4 ♗e6 12.♕a4

12.♕d4 ♗d5 13.e4? is refuted by 13...♗b6!.

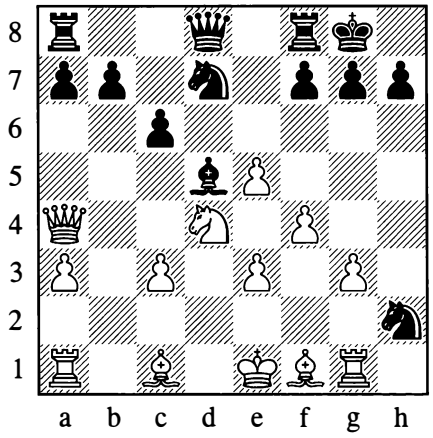


12...♘d7N

12...♘a6 is also good. 13.♘d4 ♗d5 14.♖g1 was the continuation of Maisuradze – Idani, Dubai 2015, and now 14...♘xh2!N would have been good for Black after 15.♗e2 ♗xc3† 16.bxc3 ♘c5, transposing to the main line below.

The text move is a small refinement, removing the possibility of ♗xa6 in the above line. (This would have worked out well for Black anyway, but why allow it at all when we don't need to?)

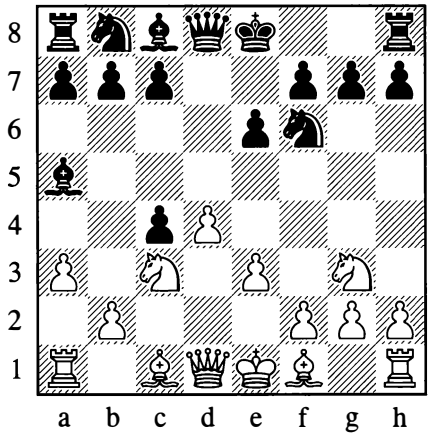
13.♘d4 ♗d5 14.♖g1 ♗xc3† 15.bxc3 ♘xh2



16.♗e2 ♘c5 17.♕c2 ♗e4 18.♕a2 b5⩲

The position is messy, but Black is better because of his safer king and control over the light squares.

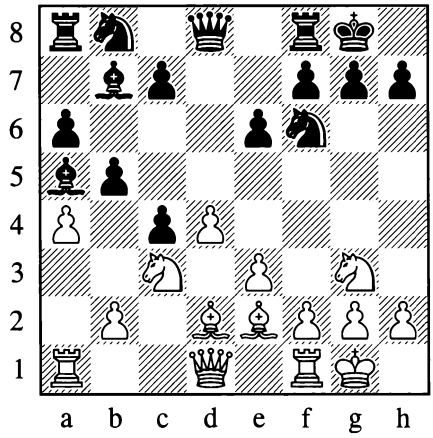
A2) 7.♘g3



7...b5

Another game continued 7...c5 8.♗xc4 ♘c6 9.0–0 cxd4 10.exd4 ♕xd4 11.♘b5 ♕xd1 12.♖xd1 0–0 13.♗e3 a6 14.♘d6 ♗c7 15.♘ge4 ♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♖d8 17.♖xd8† ♗xd8 18.♖d1⩱ when White had compensation but Black was still okay in Yusupov – Wirig, Germany 2015. I would prefer to hang on to the extra pawn though.

8.♗d2 a6 9.♗e2 ♗b7 10.0–0 0–0 11.a4



11...♘bd7N

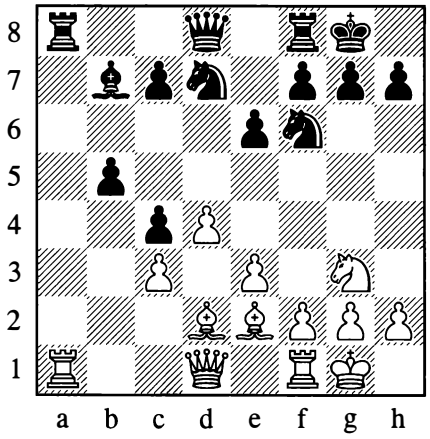
11...c6 is also possible. 12.♗f3 ♘bd7 13.axb5 axb5 14.♘xb5 ♗xd2 15.♕xd2 occurred in Praveen Kumar – Sundararajan, Mumbai 2010, and now 15...cxb5N 16.♗xb7 ♖xa1 17.♖xa1 ♘c5 18.♖a8 ♕d6 19.♖xf8† ♔xf8∓ would have favoured Black. Still, the text move feels more natural to me.

12.axb5 ♗xc3 13.bxc3

13.bxa6?? loses material: 13...♗xd2 14.axb7 ♖xa1–+

13.♗xc3 axb5∓ favours Black too.

13...axb5

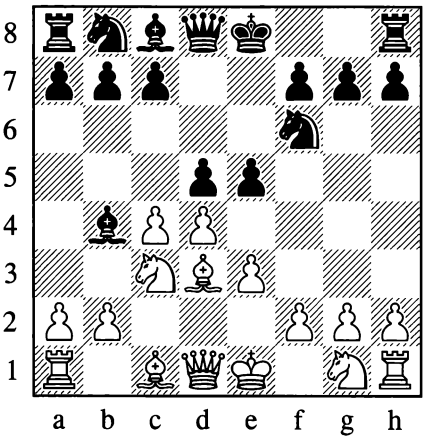


14.♖b1 ♖a5!∓

With ...c5 to come. Note that 15.♗xc4?! is no good due to 15...♗xg2 (15...bxc4 16.♖xb7 ♘b6 is also excellent for Black) 16.♔xg2 bxc4∓.

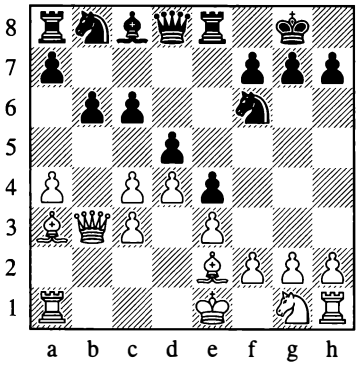
B) 5.♗d3 e5!

5...0–0 6.♘e2 allows White to transpose to standard e3-Nimzo territory.



The text move is a rare option, but a dynamic and strong one. White's main replies are **B1) 6.dxe5** and **B2) 6.♘e2**.

6.a3?! seems mistimed: 6...♗xc3† 7.bxc3 e4 8.♗e2 c6 9.a4 0–0 10.♕b3 b6 11.♗a3 ♖e8



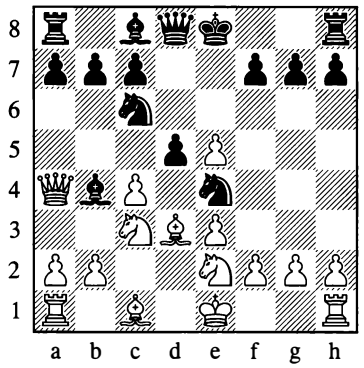
12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♗b5 ♗d7 14.♘e2 ♘c6 15.♗b4 a6 Black was at least equal in Rajlich – Fridman, Wroclaw 2009.

6.♕a4†?! ♘c6 7.dxe5 ♘e4!?

7...dxc4 transposes to 7.♕a4†?! ♘c6 in the notes to variation B1 below.

8.♘e2?

White had to try 8.♗xe4 dxe4 9.♘e2, although 9...♗xc3† 10.♘xc3 ♕g5!∓ is still promising for Black.



8...♘c5 9.♕c2

9.♕d1 dxc4 10.♗xc4 ♘xe5∓ is a variation mentioned by Emms.

9...♘xe5 10.♗xh7 g6–+

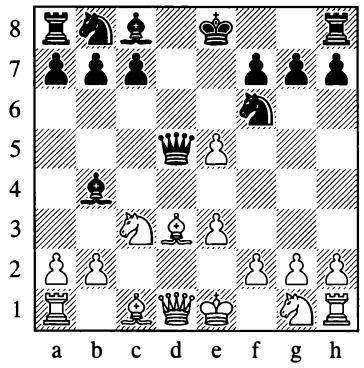
White was losing in Pieniazek – Sulypa, Legnica 2012.

6.cxd5 ♕xd5

White must decide what to do about the attack on the g2-pawn, bearing in mind that 7.♘f3?? is impossible due to 7...e4.

7.dxe5

This looks best, and was played in Gavasheli – V. Georgiev, Izmir 2006. Black's safest reply is:



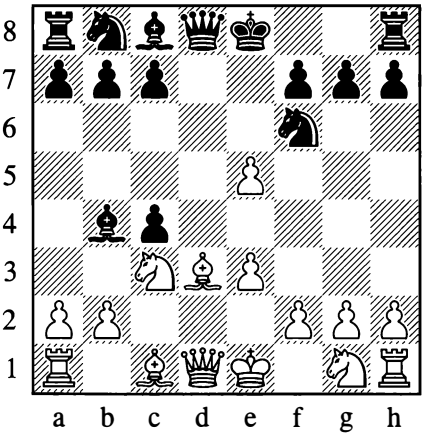
7...♕xg2!N

7...♘e4!?N is playable but risky: 8.♘e2 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 (9.♘xc3? ♕xg2∓) 9...♕xg2 10.♖g1 ♗xc3† 11.♗d2 ♗xd2† 12.♕xd2 ♕xh2 13.0–0–0 ♕xe5 14.♗b5†→ Black has three extra pawns, but White's initiative looks quite threatening.

8.♕f3 ♕xf3 9.♘xf3 ♘d5 10.♗d2 ♘xc3=

B1) 6.dxe5 dxc4!

Forcing White to make another difficult decision.

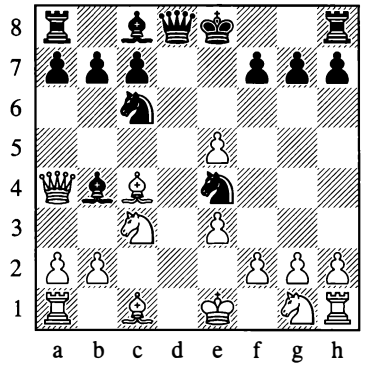


7.♗xc4

7.♕a4†?!

This has been White's most popular choice, but it's not a good move.

7...♘c6 8.♗xc4 ♘e4

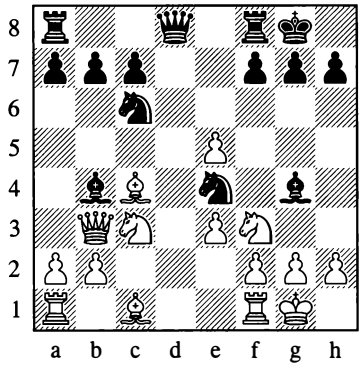


9.♕b3

9.♘f3 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♗xc3† 11.♔e2 0–0 12.♗a3 ♗xa1 13.♖xa1 ♗d7∓ Milanovic – Kurajica, Sarajevo 2006.

9.♘e2 occurred in Lekic – Pertlova, Bol 2010, and now 9...♘c5!N 10.♕c2 ♘xe5∓ would have been excellent for Black.

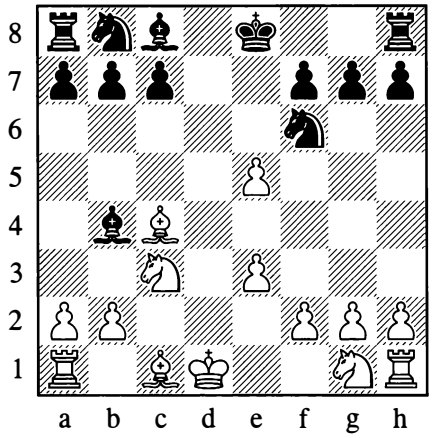
9...0–0 10.♘f3 ♗g4 11.0–0



11...♗xf3 12.gxf3 ♘c5 13.♕c2 ♘xe5∓
Alexandrova – Nemcova, Porto Carras 2011.

7.♗e2 is not so bad, but Black is still at least equal after: 7...♕xd1† 8.♗xd1 ♘fd7 9.♘f3 ♘c6 10.♗a4 0–0 11.♗xc6 bxc6 Black was ready to pick up the e5-pawn with ...♖e8 in Pischikov – Socko, Warsaw 2013.

7...♕xd1† 8.♔xd1



8...♗xc3!

The less accurate 8...♘g4?! was played in Zhai Mo – Tan Zhongyi, China 2016, when 9.♘d5!N± would have caused some problems for Black.

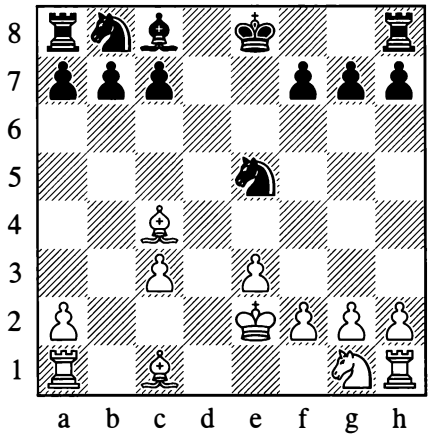
9.bxc3 ♘g4

Emms evaluated the position as equal, which seems about right. We will follow a correspondence game where Black was able to get the upper hand.

10.♔e2

10.e6!?N ♗xe6 11.♗xe6 fxe6 12.♔e2 ♘d7 13.♘f3 0–0–0 looks about equal.

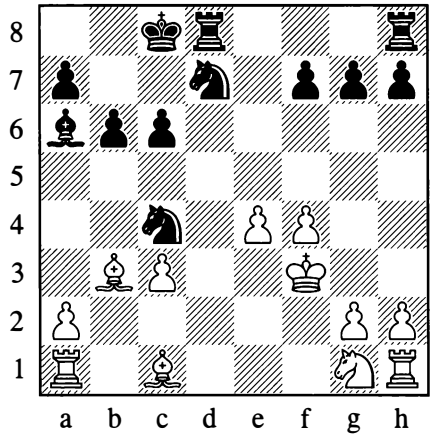
10...♘xe5



11.♗d5

11.♗b3 occurred in Byrne – Juergens, Radebeul 2016, when 11...b6!N would have been at least as good for Black as the main game below.

11...c6 12.♗b3 b6 13.e4 ♗a6† 14.♔e3 ♘bd7 15.f4 ♘c4† 16.♔f3 0–0–0

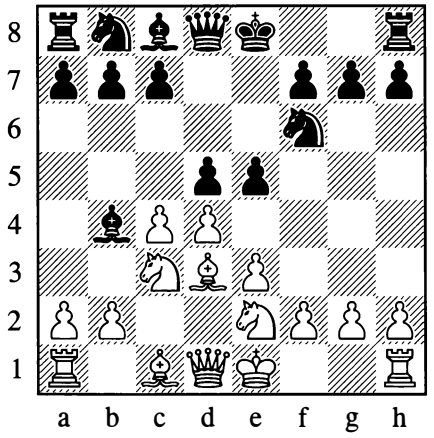


17.♗c2 ♖he8 18.♘h3 ♘c5⩲

Black's excellent pieces gave him the upper hand in Hutschenreiter – Lyashenko, corr. 2006.

B2) 6.♘e2

Seeing that White had no advantage after taking on e5 and was in danger of being worse in several of the lines above, the text move seems a sensible way of declining the gambit.



6...exd4 7.exd4

7.♘xd4 gives Black an easy game after 7...c5 with the idea of ...dxc4 and ...♕xd1†.

7...dxc4 8.♗xc4

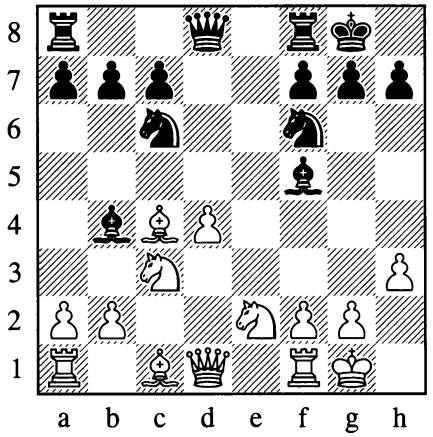
This position can be reached via a Queen's Gambit Accepted after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 e5 4.♗xc4 exd4 5.exd4 ♗b4† 6.♘c3 ♘f6 7.♘e2. However, in that opening 7.♘f3 would be a more natural and active choice.

8...0–0 9.0–0 ♘c6

After a few obvious moves, White must decide on a plan of action. I analysed two main options: **B21) 10.h3** and **B22) 10.♗g5**.

B21) 10.h3 ♗f5

The bishop is well placed here, as long as Black keeps an eye on any g2-g4 ideas.



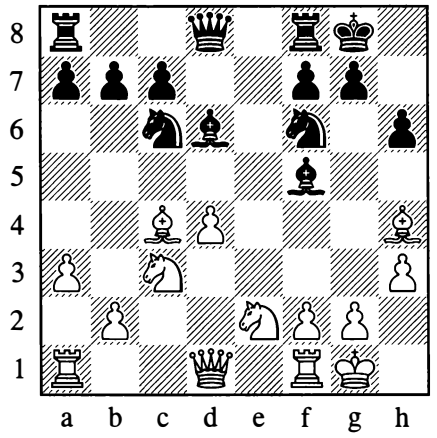
11.a3 ♗d6!

11...♗e7 is too passive, and invites 12.g4! ♗g6 13.f4→ with a promising initiative for White.

12.♗g5

12.g4? is no good here because of 12...♗xg4! 13.hxg4 ♘xg4 when Black crashes through, for instance: 14.♔g2 ♕h4 15.♘g3 ♕h2† 16.♔f3 ♘xf2 17.♖xf2 ♕xg3†–+

12...h6 13.♗h4



13...a6!N

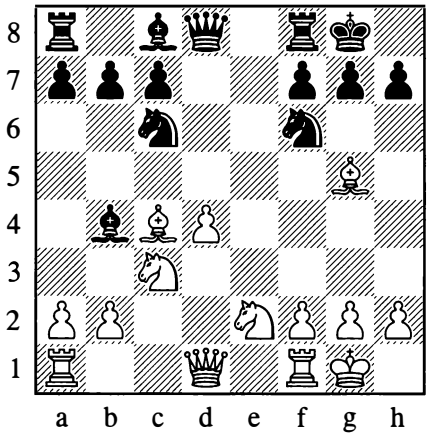
13...♗e7 14.♖e1 occurred in Alterman – Wells, Groningen 1997, when Psakhis suggests the improvement 14...♕d7!?N 15.♘g3 ♗e6! 16.♗xe6 (16.d5? loses a pawn after 16...♘xd5 17.♗xd5 ♗xh4) 16...fxe6 with an unclear game.

I think the text move is more accurate, as Black can avoid ...♗e7 altogether in some circumstances, as ...g5 is more appropriate. For example:

14.♖e1 g5!? 15.♗g3 ♗g6∞

Black has gained some space while solving the problem of the pin, and his kingside is not really weak.

B22) 10.♗g5



10...h6

It makes sense to play this as early as possible. If White is given time to follow up with ♕d2, then we will have to think twice about playing ...h6 due to the possibility of ♗xh6 with an attack.

10...♗e7 has been more common, when 11.♕d2 (11.♕d3 ♘a5=) 11...a6!?N 12.a3 ♗f5 is close to equal. Still, I prefer to force White to make an immediate decision regarding the bishop.

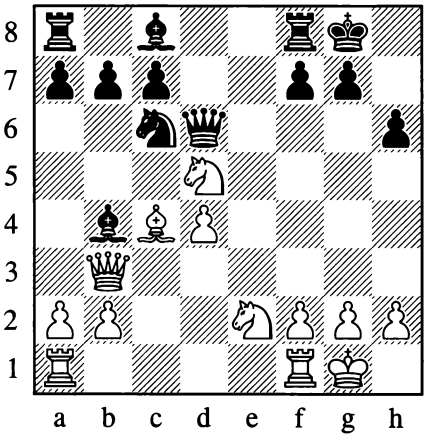
11.♗xf6N

11.♗h4 has been played a couple of times, when 11...♗e7= is fine for Black.

It is worth checking the text move to see what happens when White tries to force the play.

11...♕xf6 12.♘d5 ♕d6 13.♕b3

13.♘g3 ♘a5= is fine for Black.



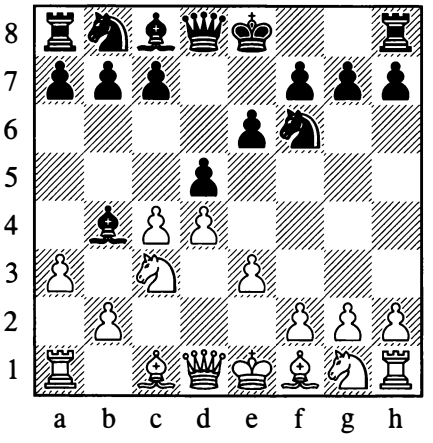
13...♗e6!

This solves all of Black's problems and forces White to think about equalizing.

14.♘xb4 ♗xc4 15.♕xc4 ♕xb4

White should be able to draw this position, but Black has some chances to press against the IQP.

C) 5.a3



This is a popular choice, and is recommended in several White repertoire books. After the exchange on c3, White wants to build a strong position in the centre with cxd5, ♗d3, ♘e2 and 0–0, followed by f2-f3 and eventually e3-e4.

5...♗xc3† 6.bxc3

At this important branching point, I have chosen to recommend an unusual but attractive idea.

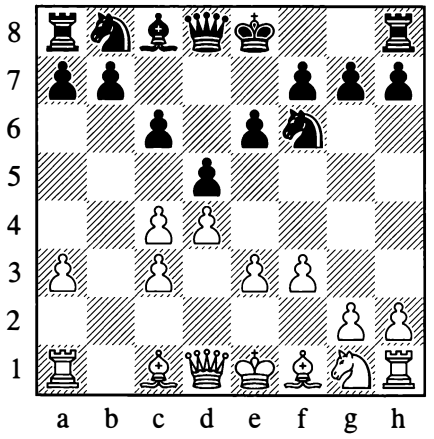
6...c6!?

A very interesting sideline. Kaufman does not mention it at all in his repertoire book, only giving 6...c5.

White's entire plan (as outlined in the note to move 5 above) involves cxd5, based on the assumption that Black will recapture with the e-pawn. Rather than allow this, our last move prepares to recapture with the c-pawn, maintaining a central pawn on e6 and opening the c-file towards White's backward pawn. If White does not exchange on d5 voluntarily, Black will provoke it with ...b6 and ...♗a6.

I checked five options for White: **C1) 7.f3**, **C2) 7.♘f3**, **C3) 7.♗d3**, **C4) 7.cxd5** and **C5) 7.a4**.

C1) 7.f3

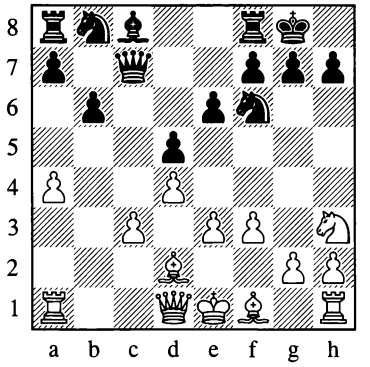


This position can also be reached via the 4.f3 Nimzo-Indian, although that would have involved White's last move being 7.e3, when other options such as 7.e4 and 7.♗g5 were available.

7...0–0 8.♗d3

8.cxd5 cxd5 does not really change anything; Black will carry on with the usual ...b6 plan, with a likely transposition to one of the lines below.

8.♘h3!? b6 9.cxd5 cxd5 10.a4 ♕c7 is a battle for a tempo: Black is waiting for ♗d3 before playing ...♗a6, while White is trying to make as many useful moves as possible while leaving the bishop on f1. 11.♗d2 Now in Bareev – Rozentalis, Leningrad 1990, it would have made sense to try:

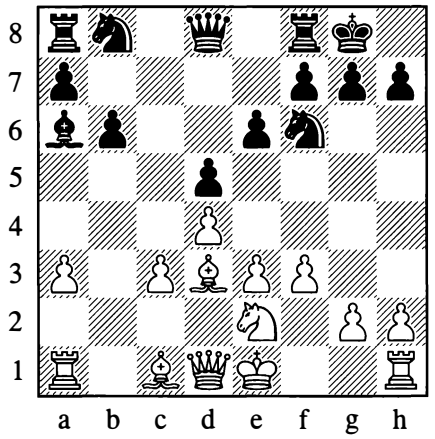


11...e5!?N With an interesting and balanced position.

8...b6 9.cxd5

Another game continued: 9.♘e2 ♗a6 10.cxd5 ♗xd3!? (10...cxd5 transposes to our main line below) 11.♕xd3 cxd5 12.c4 White decides to swap off the weak c-pawn while he has the chance. 12...dxc4 13.♕xc4 ♕d7 14.e4 ♖c8∞ Black had enough counterplay on the queenside in Moskalenko – Tiviakov, Benidorm 2009.

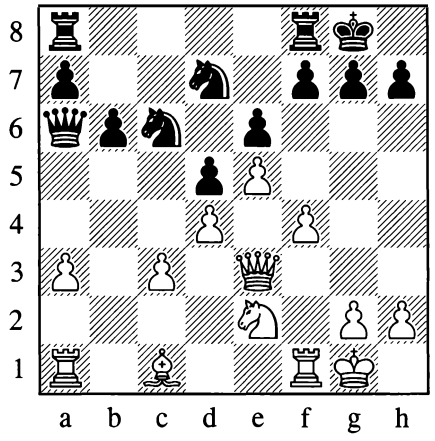
9...cxd5 10.♘e2 ♗a6



11.0–0 ♕c8 12.e4

White has to generate some play in the central and kingside regions, otherwise Black will take over on the queenside and on the light squares.

12...♗xd3 13.♕xd3 ♕a6 14.♕e3 ♘c6 15.e5 ♘d7 16.f4



16...f5!

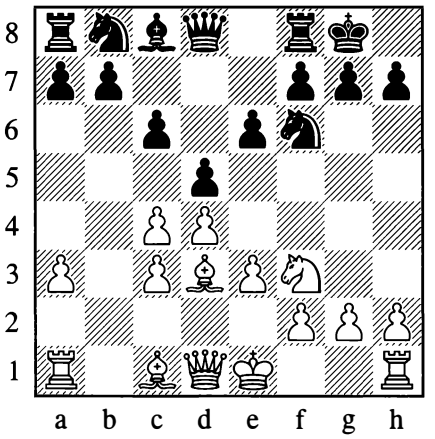
Black ensures himself of some breathing room on the kingside.

17.exf6 ♖xf6∞

Yu Yangyi – Tomashevsky, St Petersburg 2012.

C2) 7.♘f3 0–0 8.♗d3

This line was recommended by Lars Schandorff, and was also debated by Gawain Jones and Yu Yangyi in two games in 2013.



8...b6 9.cxd5

Jones tried this in the second game.

The first encounter continued: 9.a4 ♗a6 10.♗a3 dxc4!? (10...♖e8 is a good alternative, leading to normal play) 11.♗c2 ♖e8 12.e4 ♘bd7 13.e5 ♘d5 14.h4 f5∞ The position was murky but not worse for Black in Jones – Yu Yangyi, Gibraltar 2013.

9.0–0 seems harmless: 9...♗a6 10.cxd5 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 cxd5 12.a4 ♘c6 13.♗a3 ♖e8 Threatening ...♘a5 with a positional edge. 14.c4 ♘a5 15.cxd5 ♕xd5= With good prospects on the light squares.

9...cxd5 10.♕e2

A logical move, fighting against the ...♗a6 plan.

10...♘e4!?

An interesting reaction to White's last move. Black hits the c3-pawn and gets ready to hit any ♘e5 jumps with an immediate ...f6.

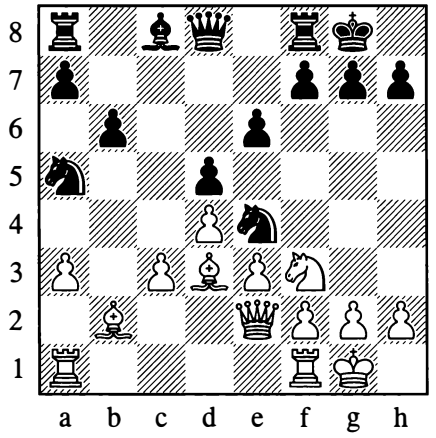
10...♗b7 has been tried in a few games as well, intending ...♕c8 and ..♗a6. However, Schandorff points out that 11.♗b2 ♕c8 12.♖c1 is slightly better for White.

10...a5!? is an interesting way to insist on a quick ...♗a6. After 11.0–0 ♗a6 12.c4 dxc4 13.♗xc4 ♗xc4 14.♕xc4 the position was close to equal, although White still had a potentially strong bishop and an extra central pawn in Maisuradze – Nemcova, Porto Carras 2011.

11.♗b2

11.0–0 ♘xc3 12.♕c2 ♘e4 13.♗xe4 dxe4 14.♕xe4 ♕d5 looks fine for Black.

11...♘c6 12.0–0 ♘a5



13.♘d2

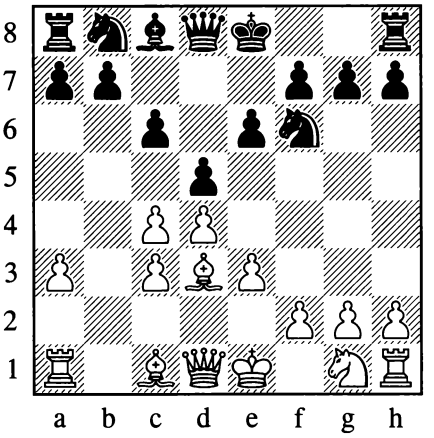
13.♘e5!?N f6 14.f3 ♘d6 15.♘g4 also looks pretty double-edged.

13...♗b7 14.a4 ♕c7∞

Black had decent prospects on the light squares in Jones – Yu Yangyi, Reykjavik 2013. I would say the important thing in this line is not to be too stubborn about exchanging bishops with ..♗a6, as Black's bishop also has the potential to play a useful role from b7.

C3) 7.♗d3

Black can, of course, meet this move with the typical plan of 7...0–0 followed by ...b6. However, I like the following idea even more:



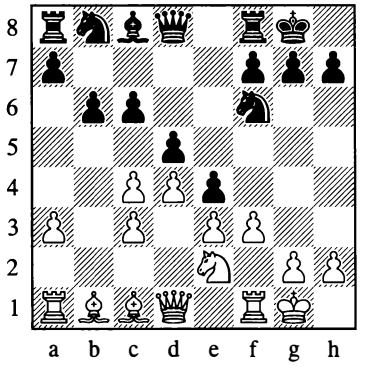
7...e5!

This move again!

8.dxe5?!

This is the most important reaction for us to consider, even though it's probably not White's best. The alternatives are:

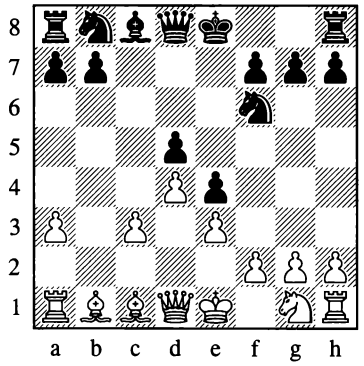
8.♘e2 e4 9.♗b1 0–0 10.0–0 b6 11.f3



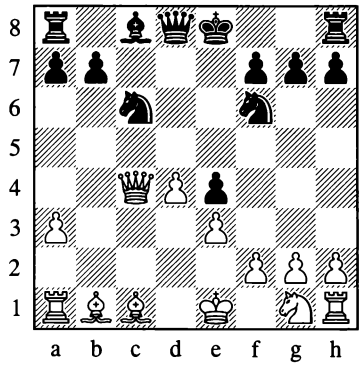
11...♗a6!N (11...♖e8 12.♘g3 exf3 13.gxf3 ♗h3 14.♖e1 ♘bd7± was fractionally better for White in Iljiushenok – Pustovoitova, Moscow 2016) 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.fxe4 ♘xe4

14.♗xe4 dxe4= Followed by with ...♘d7 and ...♘f6, with good prospects on the light squares.

8.cxd5 also fails to cause any problems after: 8...e4! 9.♗b1 cxd5



10.c4?! (10.♘e2 is better, although 10...0–0 11.0–0 ♘c6 is still pleasant for Black) 10...dxc4 11.♕a4† ♘c6 12.♕xc4 In Sertic – Kurajica, Sibenik 2010, Black should have continued:



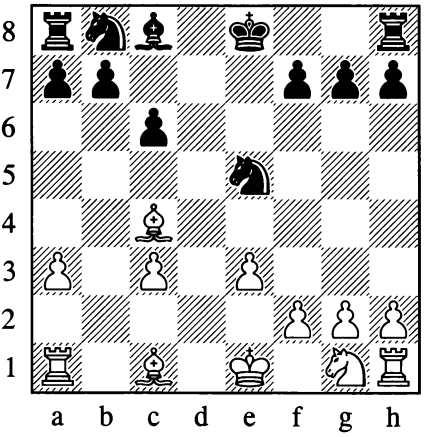
12...0–0!N 13.♘e2 ♗e6 14.♕a4 a6∓ It will be hard for White to get his bishops working, as Black is rock-solid on the light squares.

8...dxc4 9.♗xc4

9.♗e2?! ♕xd1† 10.♗xd1 ♘e4 11.♘e2 ♘d7 12.♗c2 ♘dc5 13.f4 f6 14.exf6 ♘xf6∓ was excellent for Black in V. Georgiev – Kurajica, Solin 2006.

9...♕xd1† 10.♔xd1 ♘g4 11.♔e1 ♘xe5

White is struggling to equalize, as the following example demonstrates:



12.♗e2 ♗f5 13.f3 ♘d3† 14.♗xd3 ♗xd3 15.e4 ♘d7 16.♗e3 f5! 17.exf5 ♗xf5∓

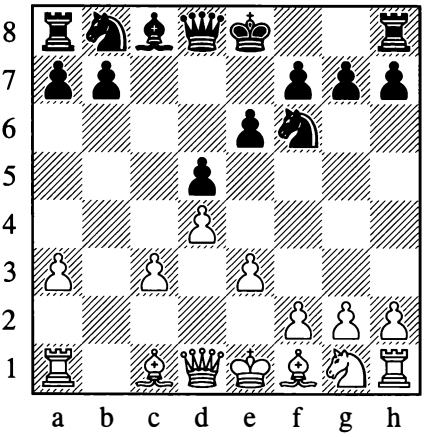
Aleksandrov – Yu Yangyi, Dubai 2014.

C4) 7.cxd5

This is an important option. White plays ambitiously, trading off one (and possibly both) of his weak pawns before catching up on development.

7...cxd5

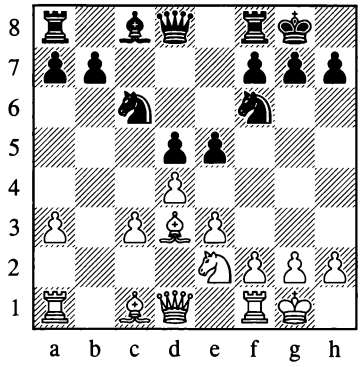
Obviously we should recapture in a way that's consistent with the previous move.



8.c4

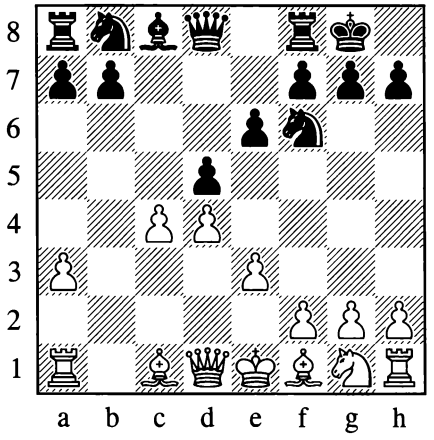
White looks to improve his structure but it feels a bit slow to me.

That said, 8.♗d3 0–0 9.♘e2 enables Black to switch plans with 9...♘c6 10.0–0 e5!, with easy play, for instance:



11.f3 (11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♗c2 ♕c7 13.f3 ♗d7 14.a4 ♖fe8= Vaisser – Kurajica, Rijeka 2011) 11...♖e8 12.♘g3 h6 (12...h5!?N 13.♖b1 ♕e7 also looks interesting) 13.♖a2 ♗d7 14.♖e2 ♖c8= Fier – Laxman, Dubai 2015.

8...0–0

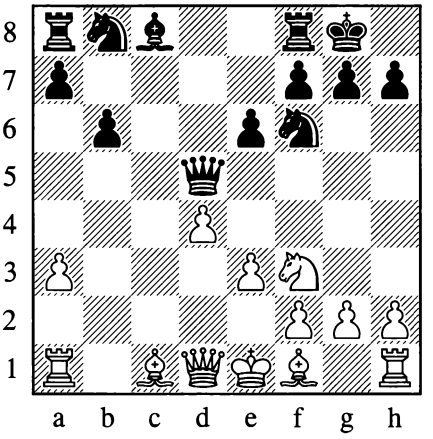


White can either exchange immediately with **C41) 9.cxd5** or continue developing with **C42) 9.♘f3**.

C41) 9.cxd5

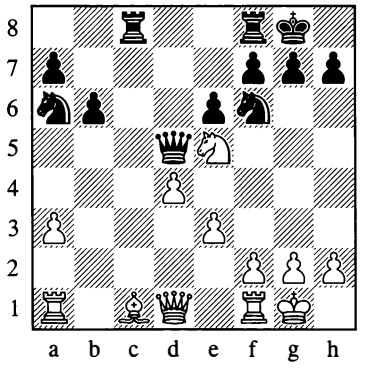
This was played against me in a rapid game in 2016.

9...♕xd5 10.♘f3 b6



11.♗d2

In the game I got a fine position after: 11.♗d3 ♗a6 12.♗xa6 ♘xa6 13.0–0 ♖ac8 14.♘e5



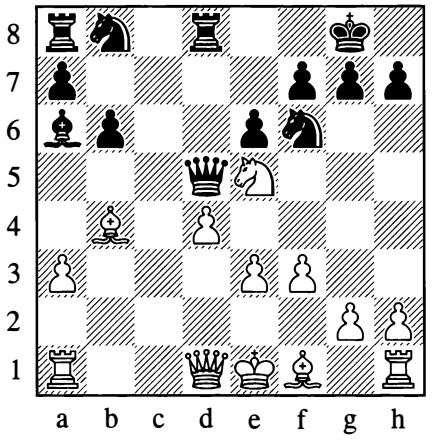
14...♘c5! 15.♖b1 ♘ce4 16.♗b2 ♕a5 17.♖c1 ♕b5 18.♖c2 ♘d5∓ Sands – R. Pert Essex (rapid) 2016.

11...♘e4

Since White has not yet moved the bishop from f1, Black postpones ...♗a6 for a few moves.

12.♗b4 ♖d8 13.♘e5 ♗a6 14.f3 ♘f6

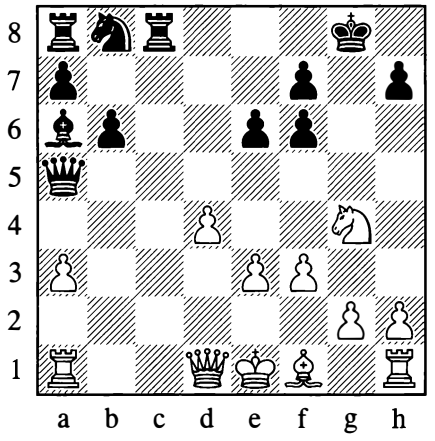
14...♘d6!?∞ could also be investigated.



15.♗e7 ♖c8 16.♗xf6

16.e4!?N ♘xe4! 17.♗xa6 ♘c3 18.♗xc8 (18.♕d3? ♘xa6 19.♕xa6 ♕xd4–+) 18...♘xd1∞ is roughly equal but very murky.

16...gxf6 17.♘g4 ♕a5†



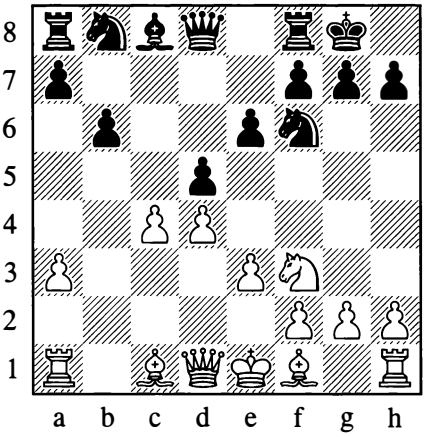
18.♔f2?!

White is playing ambitiously, but 18.♕d2N= would have safer.

18...♔g7∓

Neither king is completely safe, but Black had the better chances due to his lead in development and the lack of harmony in White's position in Aleksandrov – Ly, Pavlodar 2015.

C42) 9.♘f3 b6

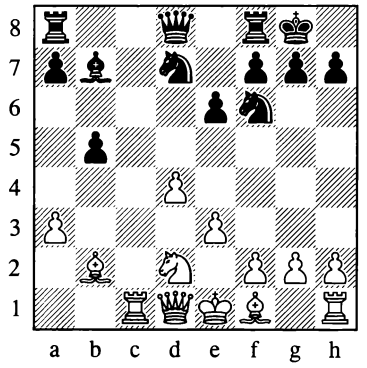


10.a4!?N

This has not yet been tested, but it was recommended by Kornev in his 1.d4 repertoire series for Chess Stars.

10.cxd5 ♕xd5 leads back to the previous variation.

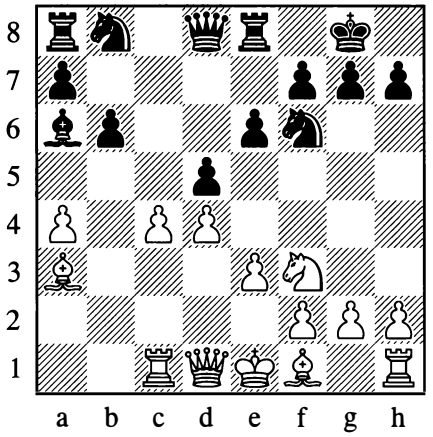
The other main option is: 10.♗b2 ♗a6 11.♖c1 ♘bd7 12.♘d2 dxc4 13.♘xc4 b5 14.♘d2 ♗b7



Black already has a pleasant position, and 15.♗xb5?! ♗xg2 16.♖g1 ♕b8 17.♖xg2 ♕xb5∓ was not helping White in Fier – Wirig, Montpellier 2015.

10...♗a6 11.♗a3 ♖e8 12.♖c1

Kornev evaluates this as better for White, but I think Black's development advantage should make up for White's bishop pair and extra central pawn. The computer points out a nice way for Black to obtain counterplay:

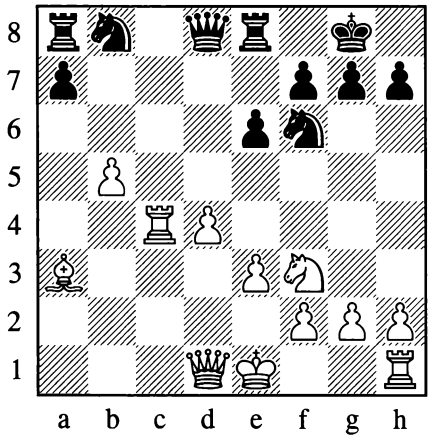


12...dxc4 13.♗xc4 ♗xc4 14.♖xc4 b5!

A neat idea, opening a path for the queen to give a check on a5.

15.axb5

Declining the pawn with 15.♖c1? would be a mistake due to 15...♕a5† 16.♘d2 ♘bd7 17.0–0 ♖ac8∓, when Black can collect the a4-pawn at his leisure.



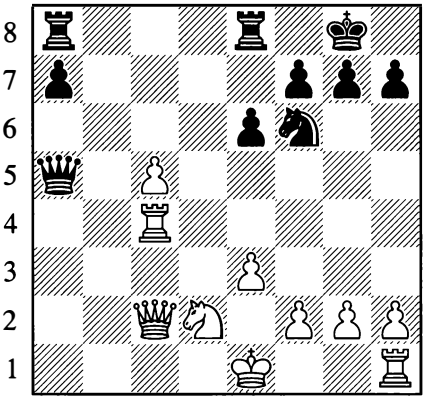
15...♕a5† 16.♗b4 ♕xb5 17.♕c2

17.♕e2?! allows 17...♘c6 18.♗d2 a5∓.

17...♘bd7 18.♗c5

18.0–0? ♘b6–+ is another trick that White must avoid.

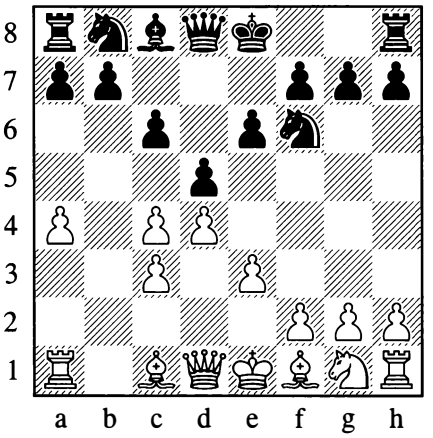
18...♕a5† 19.♘d2 ♘xc5 20.dxc5



20...♖ed8 21.♔e2 ♖ac8 22.♖b1 ♘d7=

White has a strong passed pawn but Black is well developed, and can look to harass the white king on the a6-f1 diagonal. Overall the chances are balanced.

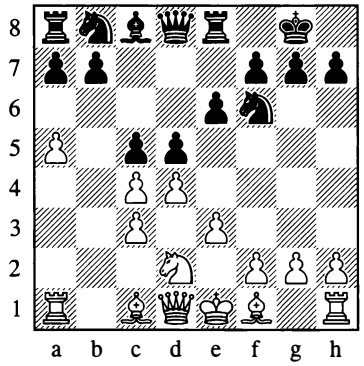
C5) 7.a4



This is White's latest try, activating the dark-squared bishop.

7...0–0 8.♗a3

8.a5 is directed against the ...b6 plan but is rather slow. Black can switch plans to good effect with: 8...c5! 9.♘f3 ♖e8 10.♘d2?! (10.♗e2N= was better)



10...♘c6 11.♘b3 cxd4 12.cxd4 e5! 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.cxd5 ♗g4→ White was dangerously behind in development in Aleksandrov – Ar. Smirnov, Viljandi 2015.

Caruana has tried:

8.♘f3 b6 9.cxd5 cxd5

The normal recapture seems fine.

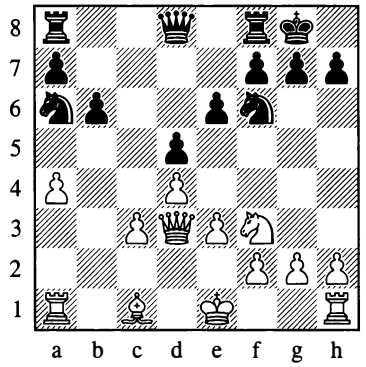
Hou Yifan's 9...exd5!? appears inconsistent, although Black can argue that a2-a4 is not the best use of a tempo in this structure. 10.♗d3 (10.♗a3!?N ♖e8 11.♗d3 is a possible improvement although Black's position remains quite playable) 10...♗a6 11.0–0 c5 12.♘e5 ♖e8 13.a5 ♗xd3 14.♘xd3 This was Caruana – Hou Yifan, Dortmund 2015, when 14...♘bd7!N would have been equal.

10.♗d3

10.♗a3 ♖e8 transposes to our main line after 8.♗a3.

10...♗a6 11.♗xa6 ♘xa6 12.♕d3

In Henrotte – Laarhoven, Maastricht 2010, Black retreated the knight to the questionable c7-square. A simple improvement is:



12...♘b8N 13.♗a3 ♖e8 14.c4 ♘c6=

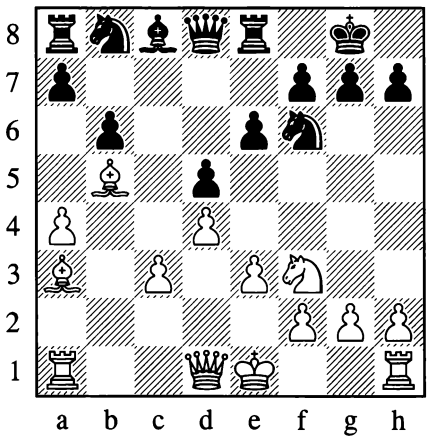
Black has no problems.

8...♖e8 9.♘f3 b6 10.cxd5

10.♗d3 ♗a6 11.♘d2 has been tried but 11...c5!?N looks like a good answer. For example: 12.0–0 ♘c6 13.♕e2 cxd4 14.cxd4 e5∞

10...cxd5 11.♗b5!?

White temporarily misplaces his bishop in order to lure Black's bishop to d7, preventing the ...♗a6 plan.



11...♗d7 12.♗e2

Practice has also seen:

12.♗d3 ♘c6

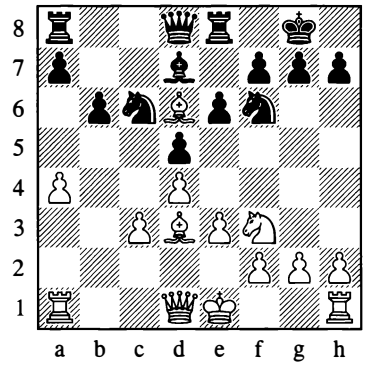
Intending ...e5.

13.♗d6

13.c4 e5 14.cxd5 ♘xd4! 15.exd4 e4 was fine

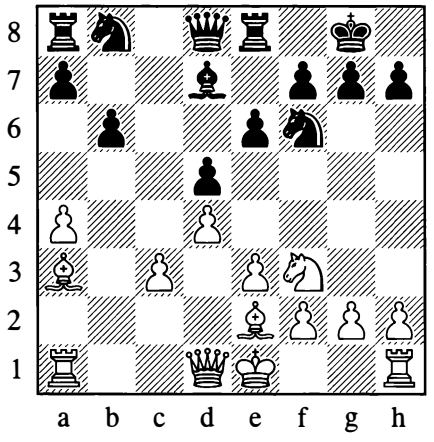
for Black in Macieja – Rozentalis, Ermioni 2006.

13.0–0 e5 14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♖xe5 is also about equal.



13...♘e4 14.♗xe4 dxe4 15.♘d2 e5∞

With decent counterplay for Black in Zhao Jun – Hou Yifan, Xinghua Jiangsu 2011.



12...♗c8!?

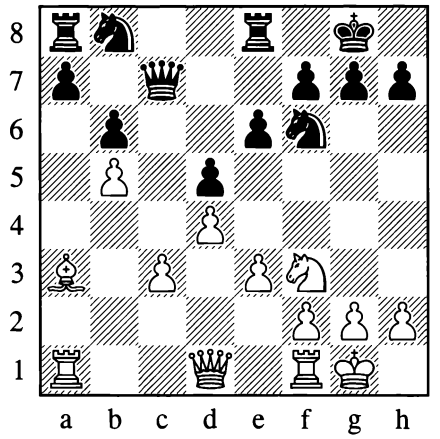
Black can afford to lose a tempo to carry out his normal plan.

If you prefer not to allow White to repeat the position, then 12...♘c6!?N 13.♖c1 ♘e4 looks like a good alternative.

13.0–0 ♗a6 14.♗b5

This is a typical idea, hoping to benefit from the improved pawn structure after Black exchanges bishops. It's not a real problem though, as the following game demonstrates.

14...♗xb5 15.axb5 ♕c7



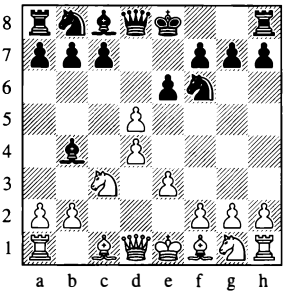
16.♕b3 ♘e4 17.♖fc1 ♖c8=

Black was fine in Tomashevsky – Rahman, Baku 2015.

Conclusion

The position after 4.e3 ♘f6 is an important test of our repertoire, which doubles up as an option for Nimzo-Indian players against the Rubinstein Variation of that opening. 5.♘e2 is a playable move, but the 5...dxc4 pawn grab works nicely. 5.♗d3 is a popular option, but my recommendation of 5...e5! is both theoretically sound and practically difficult for White to handle. We finished by checking the critical 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3, when the modern 6...c6!? seems like an ideal solution. So far White has not found a reliable route to an advantage, and Black's moves tend to be pretty easy to understand, making the whole set-up easy to learn and play.

Chapter 17



5.cxd5

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 ♘f6 5.cxd5 exd5

A) 6.♘e2 **332**

B) 6.♗d3 0–0 7.♘e2 ♖e8 **335**

B1) 8.♗d2 **336**

B2) 8.0–0 ♗d6 **339**

B21) 9.a3 ♘g4!? **339**

B211) 10.h3? **340**

B212) 10.♘f4 **342**

B22) 9.♗d2 **343**

B23) 9.f3 c5 **346**

B231)10.♘b5 **346**

B232) 10.♕e1 **346**

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 ♘f6 5.cxd5 exd5

White immediately clarifies matter in the centre so that he can implement his desired set-up. This does, however, open a path for our c8-bishop free of charge!

We will analyse **A) 6.♘e2** and **B) 6.♗d3**.

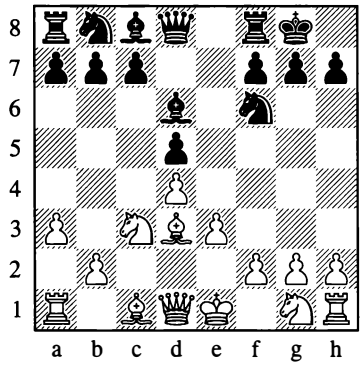
6.a3 ♗d6

White has committed himself to e2-e3 and cxd5, so why not change tack and hang on to our bishop?

That said, there is nothing at all wrong with 6...♗xc3† 7.bxc3, when we immediately transpose to variation F33 of Chapter 18.

7.♗d3 0–0

Now 8.♘ge2 ♖e8 leads to normal play; this position is covered under 8.a3 ♗d6 in the notes to variation B. In the following game my opponent tried something different:



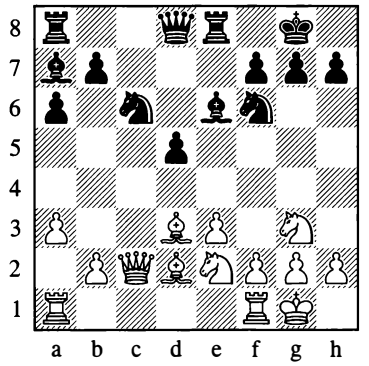
8.♘b5!?

Okay, so White hits the bishop before ...♖e8 is played, so the bishop has to drop back to e7 rather than the more convenient f8-square. On the other hand, it enables us to play the useful ...a6 with a tempo, so it's not clear who will benefit most.

8...♗e7 9.♘e2 a6 10.♘bc3 ♖e8 11.♘g3 c5 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.0–0 ♘c6

Black is comfortably equal, and over the next few moves my opponent fails to get properly coordinated.

14.♕c2 ♗a7 15.♗d2 ♗e6 16.♘ce2



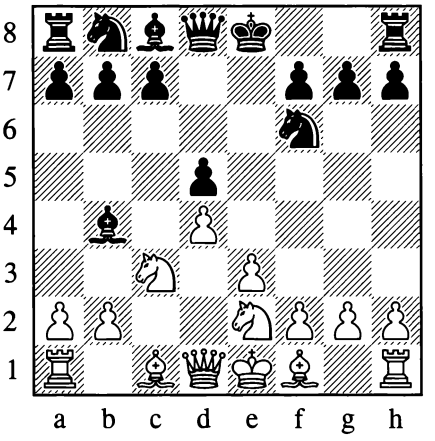
16...d4!

White should have traded some pieces on d4 and tried to make a draw. Instead my opponent tried to play ambitiously but got into more serious trouble after:

17.e4? ♘e5∓

With a dream position for Black in Harakis – R. Pert, London 2005.

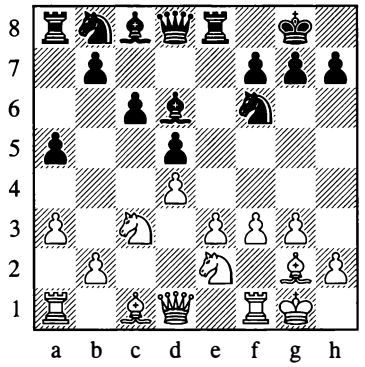
A) 6.♘e2



Having clarified the central structure, White can play this move without worrying about ...dxc4. The knight blocks the bishop on f1, but White's idea is to develop it on g2.

6...0–0 7.g3

7.a3 ♗d6 8.g3 is a small refinement, chasing the bishop early in order to deny us the option of ...♗f8. The general character of the position remains the same though, and Black is doing well: 8...c6 9.♗g2 ♖e8 10.0–0 a5 11.f3



11...c5! a common theme – wait for f2-f3 and then play ...c5. 12.♘b5 ♗f8 13.♗d2 ♘c6 14.♖c1 ♕b6 with a decent position for Black in Dubov – Sargissian, Dubai 2014.

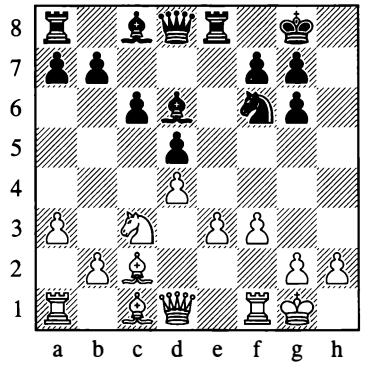
Another possible set-up for White is:

7.♘f4 c6 8.♗d3 ♖e8 9.0–0 ♘bd7 10.f3 ♘f8

Preparing to swap off White's active knight.

11.♗c2 ♘g6 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.a3 ♗d6

Black is doing well, as White is unable to carry out e3-e4 with the desired effect.



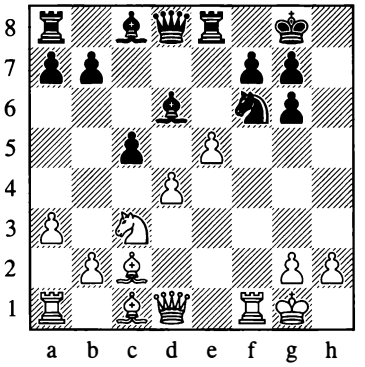
14.e4N

The critical test, but Black is well placed to meet it.

14.b4 a5∓ was also great for Black in Milanovic – Ivanisevic, Bar 2015.

14...dxe4 15.fxe4 c5! 16.e5

16.d5 ♗g4 17.♕e1 ♕c7∓ is comfortable for Black, who will aim to get his knight to e5 at some point.

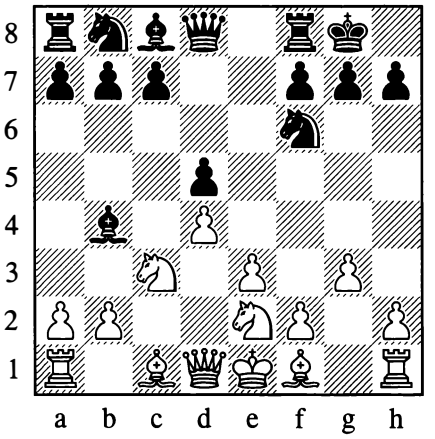


16...♗g4!

16...cxd4?! 17.exd6 dxc3 18.bxc3 would be unclear.

17.♕d3 cxd4 18.exd6 dxc3 19.bxc3 ♗f5–+

Black will pick up the d6-pawn, with both a material and a positional advantage.



7...♖e8 8.♗g2 ♗f8 9.0–0 c6

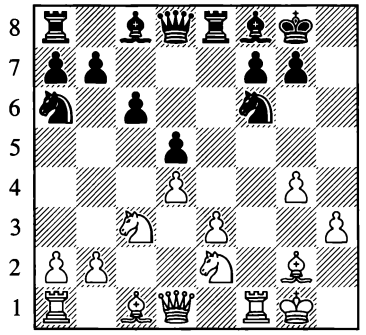
Black supports the centre and keeps in mind the ...♘a6-c7-e6 manoeuvre. Despite his last move, he should generally look to meet f2-f3 with ...c5, attacking the enemy centre.

10.a3

Several other options have been tried:

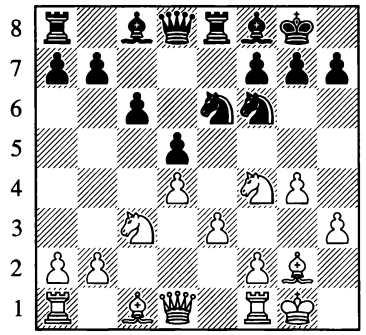
10.♔h1 ♘a6 11.a3 ♘c7 12.♕c2 a5 13.♗d2 b5 14.f3 ♗a6 15.♖fe1 ♘e6∞ Aleksandrov – T. Kosintseva, Moscow 2009.

10.h3 ♘a6 11.g4 h5!? 12.f3 hxg4 13.fxg4!? brings about an unusual structure.



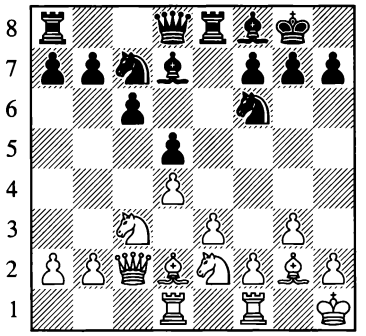
13...♘c7 14.♘g3 ♘h7 15.♗d2 g6 16.♕f3 ♗e6 17.♗e1 ♗g7 18.♖d1 ♕e7 19.♖d2 ♖ad8∞ Arkhipov – Geller, Moscow 1983.

10.♘f4 ♘a6 11.h3 ♘c7 12.g4 ♘e6



13.♘ce2?! (13.♘d3 looks better, although 13...h5!? 14.gxh5 ♘g5∞ still gives White plenty to think about) 13...♘xf4 14.♘xf4 ♘e4∓ Black had a harmonious position with excellent central control in Jacimovic – A. Petrosian, Novi Sad 1988.

10.♕c2 ♘a6 11.♗d2 ♘c7 12.♖ad1 ♗d7 13.♔h1 occurred in Winants – Riazantsev, Belgium 2005. Black has a few decent ideas but, considering the position of White's queen, I think it makes sense to continue:

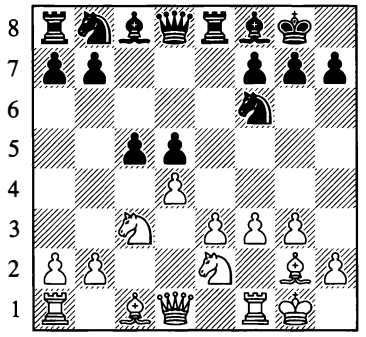


13...♘e6!?N 14.f3 ♖c8 15.e4 c5∞

Finally, a few games have seen:

10.f3 c5!

An instructive point, changing plans in response to f2-f3. It's important to get this move in before White has time for e3-e4-e5.

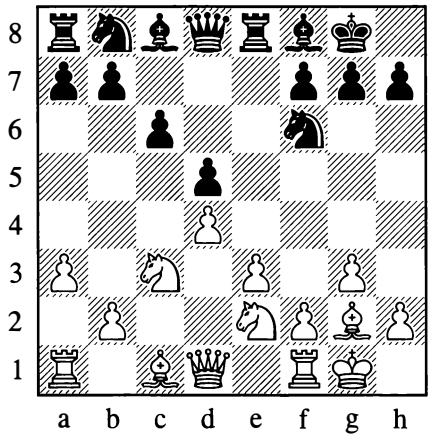


11.g4

11.♖e1 ♘c6 12.g4 h6 13.♗d2 a6 14.♘a4 c4 15.♘g3 b5 16.♘c3 ♘b4 17.♗f1 ♗d6∓ Ganaus – Maksimovic, Obrenovac 2008.

11...h6 12.h3 ♘c6 13.♖f2 ♖b8 14.♗f1 b5 15.dxc5 ♗xc5 16.♘d4 ♗xd4 17.exd4 b4 18.♘e2 ♗a6∓

M. Houska – Lalic, Islington 1998.



10...♘a6

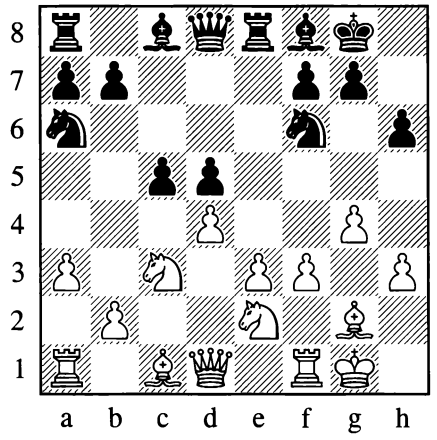
10...a5 is also possible, for instance: 11.♕c2 ♘a6 12.♗d2 ♘c7 13.♖ad1 ♗g4 14.f3 ♗h5∞ Winants – Moiseenko, Kusadasi 2006.

The text move transposes to a high-level game which we will follow for a few more moves.

11.f3 c5

The standard response to f2-f3.

12.g4 h6 13.h3

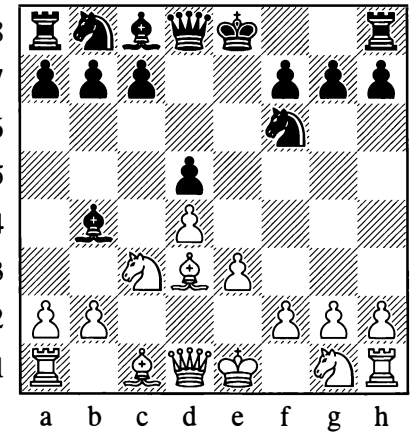


13...b6 14.♘g3 ♗b7 15.f4 ♖c8∞

With ...♘e4 on the cards, Black's position was quite satisfactory in Carlsen – Adams, London 2009.

B) 6.♗d3

This is the main line, preparing to develop the knight on e2 without obstructing the bishop.



6...0–0 7.♘e2 ♖e8

This is the most flexible developing move. White sometimes tries to expand on the queenside with a2-a3 and b2-b4, but he also can play centrally with f2-f3 intending e2-e4. Black's minor pieces can be developed in a few different ways, so it is good to avoid committing them for at least another move, as White's next move could reveal something about his plans.

White's two main options are **B1) 8.♗d2** and **B2) 8.0–0**.

I have also encountered:

8.a3 ♗d6

Unlike variation A above, the ...♖e8 move is not intended to prepare ...♗f8 – at least not immediately. The bishop is best placed on d6, where it points towards the kingside. In variation A this was not so relevant, as the g3-pawn was a barrier.

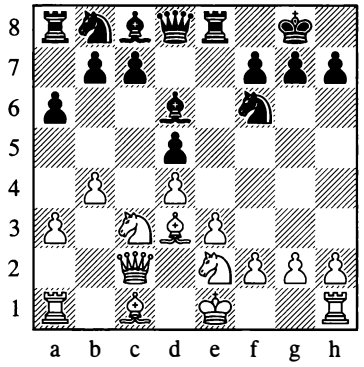
9.♕c2

9.♘b5 looks mistimed, as now we have the convenient retreat 9...♗f8, with ...a6 to come.

9.b4 may be slightly premature in view of: 9...a5!?N 10.b5 ♘bd7 11.0–0 c5∞

9...a6 10.b4

Alexis Harakis tried this against me in another of our London League games.



10...♘bd7 11.f3

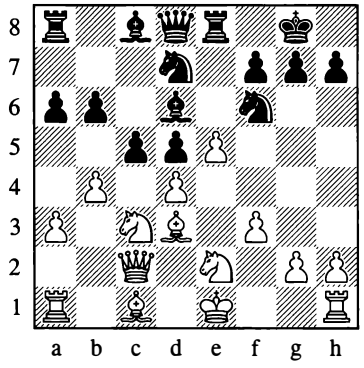
It seems to me that White is asking too much of his position, trying to expand both on the queenside and in the centre, when he is still a few moves away from completing his development.

11...b6 12.e4 c5! 13.e5!?N

After 13.0–0?! c4∓ White was losing material in Harakis – R. Pert, London 2005.

13.dxc5 bxc5 14.bxc5 ♘xc5 15.exd5 ♘xd3† 16.♕xd3 a5 17.♗g5 ♗a6–+ would be a disaster for White.

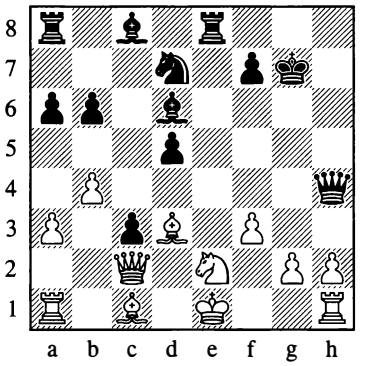
The text move seems like the only real chance. Still, Black is better after:



13...cxd4

13...♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♗xe5 15.♗g5 h6 16.♗xf6 ♕xf6 17.0–0 ♗b7∓ is not so clear.

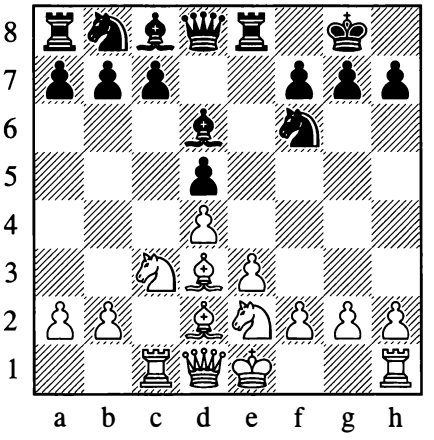
14.exf6 dxc3 15.♗xh7† ♔h8 16.fxg7† ♔xg7 17.♗d3 ♕h4†



18.♔d1 ♘f6 19.♘xc3 ♗d7∓

White has an extra pawn but his position is a mess, and there are too many threats such as ...♖c8, ...d4, ...♘d5 and so on.

B1) 8.♗d2 ♗d6 9.♖c1



John Watson advocates this approach in *A Strategic Chess Opening Repertoire for White*. There is definitely some logic to delaying castling, especially when you see what happens to the white king in some of the later variations in the chapter.

9...c6 10.♕c2

10.0–0 leads straight to variation B22.

10.f3 is well met by 10...b6 11.0–0 (11.e4? dxe4 12.fxe4 ♘g4∓) 11...c5 (11...♗a6N also looks good) 12.♘b5 ♗f8 and Black was doing well in Napalkov – Vidalina, corr. 2005.

10...♘a6

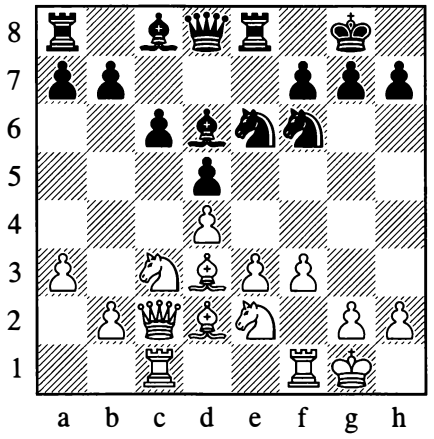
10...♘bd7 has also been tried, but the text move forces White to spend a tempo dealing with the threat of ...♘b4.

11.a3

11.♗xa6 bxa6 hardly seems like a good trade for White, as Black's active prospects on the light squares should provide at least enough compensation for his damaged structure.

11...♘c7 12.f3 ♘e6 13.0–0

Finally White castles, having avoided the kind of swift attacking possibilities that we will examine later. Here I found a promising new idea for Black.



13...g6!N

13...c5?! 14.dxc5 ♗xc5 15.b4 was more pleasant for White in Grischuk – L'Ami, Wijk aan Zee 2011, as mentioned by Watson in his book.

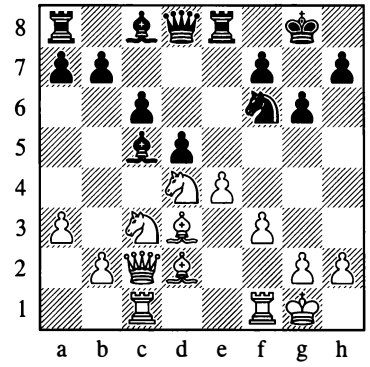
The text move is my suggested improvement. It prepares a useful positional plan of ...♘g7 and ...♗f5, supported by some attractive tactical resources.

14.♗e1

Transferring the bishop to f2 is the typical way to strengthen White's position before advancing in the centre.

14.b4?! is well met by 14...a5! 15.b5 (15.bxa5 ♖xa5∓) 15...c5∓.

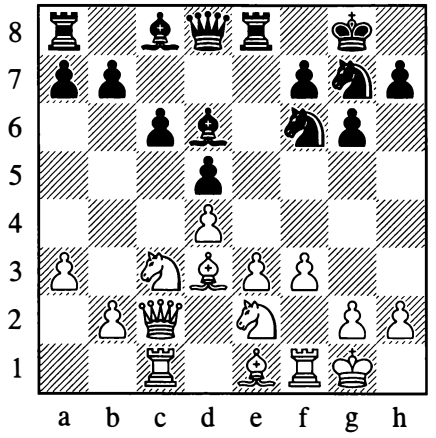
14.e4 seems premature: 14...♘xd4!? (14...dxe4 15.♘xe4 ♗c7= is a safe alternative) 15.♘xd4 ♗c5



16.♘ce2 ♗xd4† 17.♘xd4 dxe4 18.♗xe4 ♕xd4†∞

14...♘g7

Continuing with the plan while attacking e3.



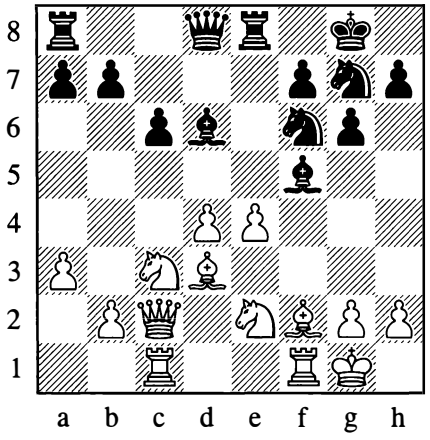
15.♗f2

It is too early for 15.e4 dxe4 16.fxe4 on account of 16...♘g4!∓.

15...♗f5!?

This seems provocative but I have a nice tactical idea in mind. 15...♗c7, 15...a6 and 15...♗d7 are all playable too.

16.e4 dxe4 17.fxe4



17...♘g4! 18.h3

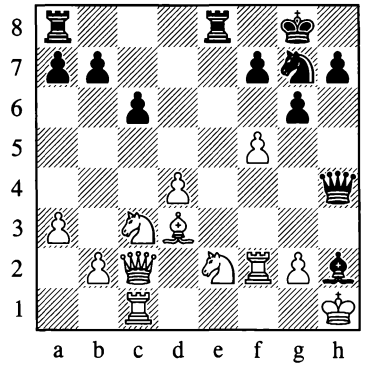
18.g3 ♗e6= is fine for Black, as he will be able to eliminate the important bishop on f2 at a moment of his choosing.

18.exf5?

This is what we are hoping for!

18...♗xh2† 19.♔h1 ♘xf2† 20.♖xf2 ♕h4

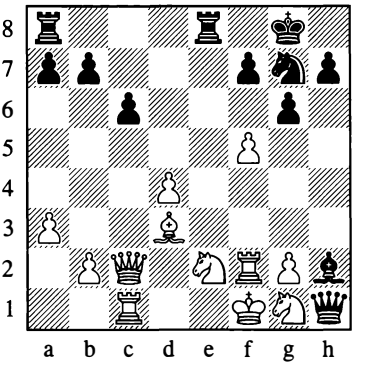
White has serious problems dealing with the discovered check.



21.♘g1

21.♖f3 ♖e3! is a nice detail, the point being: 22.♖xe3? (22.♖h3 is better, although 22...♖xh3 23.gxh3 ♕xh3 is still unpleasant for White) 22...♗g3† 23.♔g1 ♗f2† 24.♔f1 ♗xe3–+

21...♗c7† 22.♘h3 ♕g3 23.♔g1 ♕h2† 24.♔f1 ♕h1† 25.♘g1 ♗h2 26.♘ce2

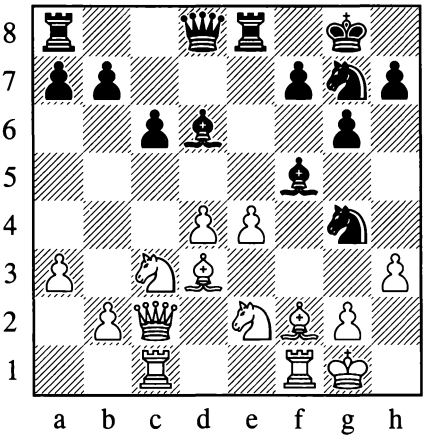


26...♘h5! 27.♖f3 ♖xe2! 28.♔xe2

28.♕xe2?? ♕xg1#

28...♕xg2† 29.♔d1 ♕xg1†∓

With two pawns for the exchange, plus an ongoing initiative.



18...♘xf2 19.♖xf2 ♗e6 20.e5

20.♖cf1 f5!? is roughly equal.

20...♗e7 21.♘e4 ♗d5 22.♗c4

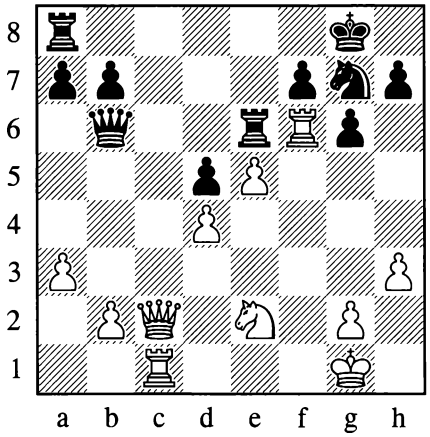
22.♘f6† is too early to cause problems:

22...♗xf6 23.exf6? (23.♖xf6=) 23...♘h5 24.♖cf1 ♖e6∓ and the f6-pawn is a weakness.

22...♕b6 23.♘f6† ♗xf6 24.♗xd5

24.exf6?! ♗xc4 25.♕xc4 ♘e6∓

24...cxd5 25.♖xf6 ♖e6

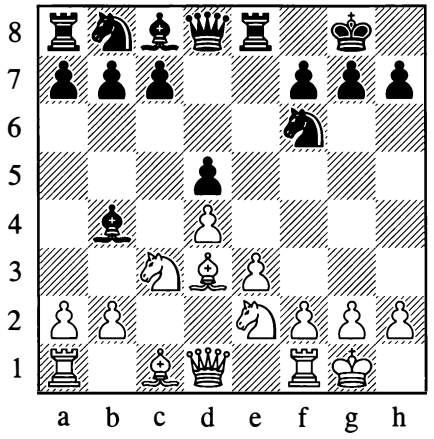


26.♖cf1 ♖xf6 27.♖xf6 ♘e6=

Both sides have minor weaknesses and a draw would be the natural outcome.

B2) 8.0–0

This is the most natural and popular move, but it does offer us a clear target.



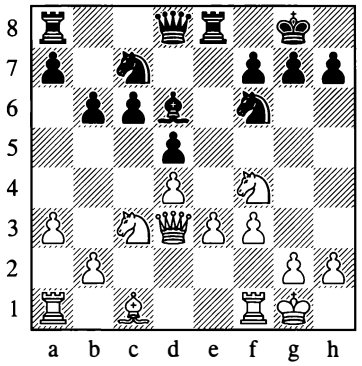
8...♗d6

I suggest putting the bishop on its best square before committing any of the other pieces.

We will analyse three main moves: **B21) 9.a3**, **B22) 9.♗d2** and **B23) 9.f3**.

9.♘g3 c6 10.f3 c5! is a common theme, hitting the centre once f2-f3 is played. 11.♘ce2 ♘c6 12.♔h1 h6 13.a3 a5∞ (13...c4!? is also interesting) and Black was at least equal in Shariyazdanov – Lukacs, Budapest 1996.

9.♘f4 c6 (9...♗xf4!? 10.exf4 ♘c6 11.♗c2 ♘e7 12.h3 ♗f5 13.♗xf5 ♘xf5 14.g4 ♘d6∞ was pretty double-edged in Brunello – Hamitevici, Isle of Man 2015) 10.f3 b6 11.a3 ♗a6 12.♗xa6 ♘xa6 13.♕d3 ♘c7= Having failed to obtain any advantage, White played too ambitiously in the following game:



14.e4? ♗xf4 15.♗xf4 ♘e6 16.♗e5 dxe4 17.fxe4 ♘g4 18.♖ad1 ♕g5∓ Gavrish – Aroshidze, Sitges 2015.

B21) 9.a3

This is something of a waiting move; the position can also arise via transposition after an earlier a2-a3.

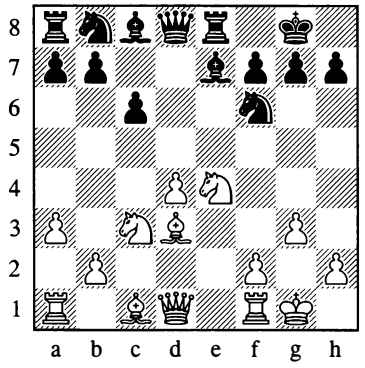
9...♘g4!?

This bold attacking plan became famous after Peter Acs used it to score a spectacular victory over Van Wely in 2002, as featured in variation B211 below. Objectively it seems fully playable, and in a practical game it could be incredibly dangerous for White.

If you prefer something more solid, then 9...♘bd7 is a good choice. A sensible continuation would be 10.b4 b6 (10...c6 is also reasonable) 11.♖b1 a6 12.f3 c5 13.bxc5 bxc5= as in E. Levin – Iordachescu, Budva 2009.

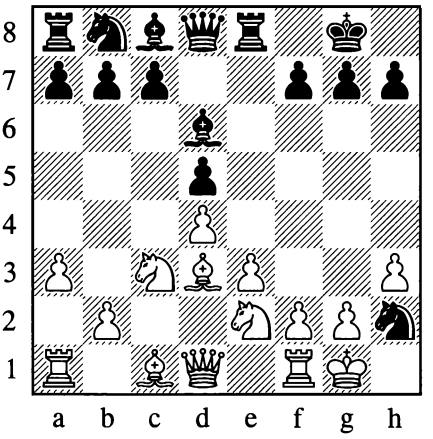
White may respond with **B211) 10.h3?** or **B212) 10.♘f4**.

10.g3N has not been tried here but it looks playable, rather like in variation B22 below. A logical continuation would be: 10...c6 11.e4 dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♗e7 13.♘2c3 ♘f6



14.♖e1 ♘bd7 15.♗f4 ♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♘f6 17.♕b3 ♘d5= With a solid blockade of the isolated pawn.

B211) 10.h3? ♘h2!



This is the point behind the previous move. Black intends to give up a whole knight in order to rip open the white kingside.

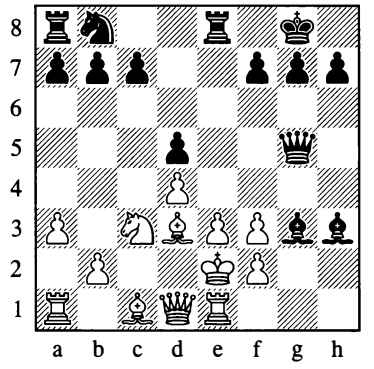
11.♖e1 ♘f3† 12.gxf3 ♕g5† 13.♔h1

A couple of years after the stem game, White suffered an equally brutal defeat:

13.♘g3? ♗xg3 14.♔f1

McShane points out that 14.fxg3 ♕xg3† 15.♔h1 (15.♔f1 ♗xh3† 16.♔e2 ♕g2#) 15...♕xh3† 16.♔g1 ♕g3† 17.♔h1 ♖e6! 18.e4 ♖g6 leads to a quick mate.

14...♗xh3† 15.♔e2

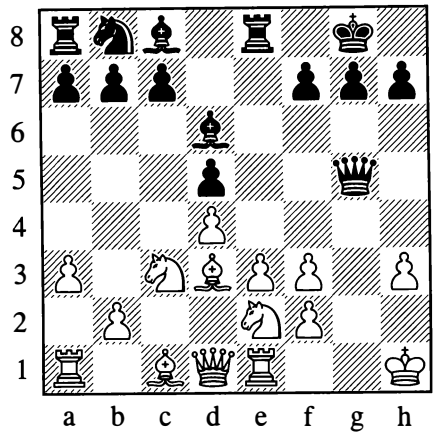


15...♗xf2!

With total devastation. The remaining moves were:

16.♖h1 ♗xe3 17.♗xh7† ♔f8 18.♘e4 dxe4

19.f4 ♗xf4
0–1 Tqeshelashvili – Xu Yuhua, Elista 2004.



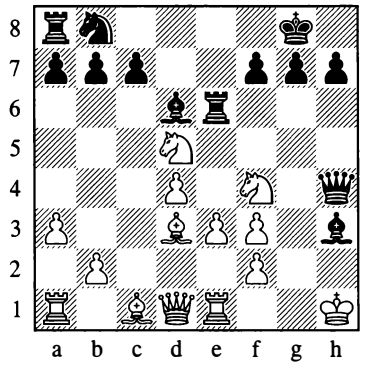
13...♕h4

Black is already doing extremely well. The original game attracted a lot of attention and the key variations have already been pointed out by other commentators, so I will keep the annotations fairly light.

14.♔g1N

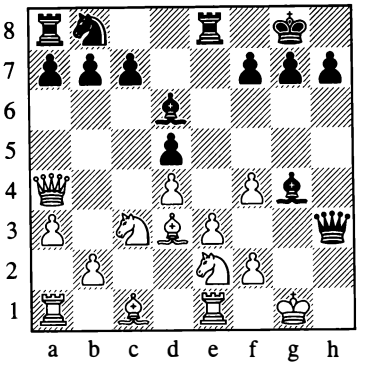
This seems like the best attempt to survive.

14.♘f4? ♗xh3 15.♘cxd5 ♖e6! gave Black a crushing attack in the stem game, which ended:

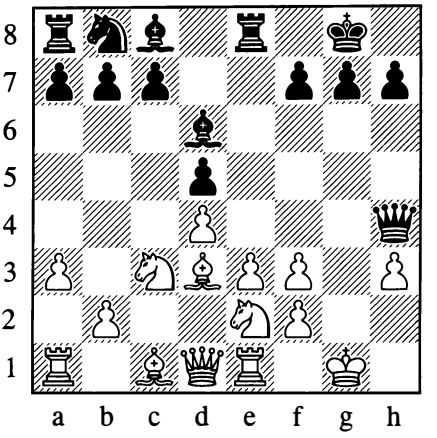


16.♘xe6 ♗f5† 17.♔g1 ♕h2† 18.♔f1 ♗g3! 0–1 Van Wely – Acs, Hoogeveen 2002.

14.f4 blocks out the dark-squared bishop but allows the light-squared one to take centre stage: 14...♕xh3† 15.♔g1 ♗g4! 16.♕a4



16...♗f3! 17.♖xe8† ♗f8 Followed by mate on g2 or h1, as given by McShane.



14...♗xh3

14...♕g5†? repeats the position, but we should not be playing for a draw here.

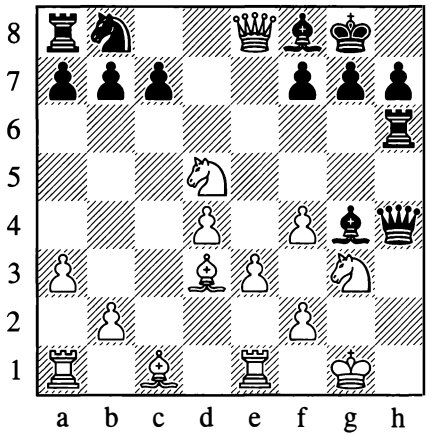
15.f4 ♗g4 16.♕a4

16.♕b3 ♗f3 17.♘g3 ♗xf4! 18.♘ce2 ♗d6 19.♕xb7 ♘d7 20.♗f5 ♘f6–+ is a nice winning line given by Stohl.

16...♖e6!

Unlike the earlier note on 14.f4, the 16...♗f3?? sacrifice does not work here. After 17.♖xe8† ♗f8 White has time to defend with 18.♘g3 ♕h3 19.♗f1, as McShane points out.

17.♘g3 ♖h6 18.♕e8† ♗f8 19.♘xd5



19...♘d7!

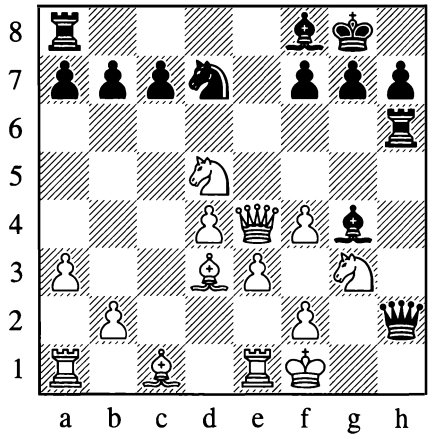
McShane points out that 19...♗f3? does not work because 20.♘e7†! forces a queen exchange.

The English GM gives 19...♘c6! in his annotations, and it wins for Black in much the same way as the text move. Still, we may as well keep the option of ...♘f6, bringing another piece into the attack.

20.♕e4

20.♕xa8? allows 20...♗f3 followed by mate on h1.

20...♕h2† 21.♔f1

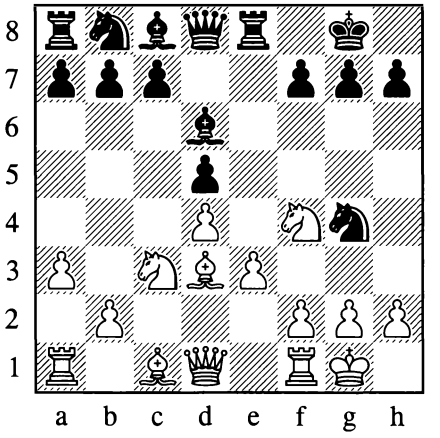


21...♖e8!–+

And since 22.♕xe8 runs into 22...♗f3 followed by mate, White must give up his queen while still facing a massive attack on the kingside.

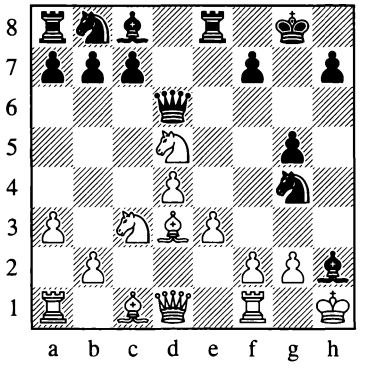
B212) 10.♘f4

This is the safer and better option for White.



10...c6

10...g5 is given as unclear by McShane but White seems to have the upper hand after: 11.♘fxd5 (11.h3!? gxf4 12.hxg4 fxe3 13.♘xd5± also looks good for White) 11...♗xh2† 12.♔h1 ♕d6



13.♗e2! f5 (13...♗g1? 14.♘f6†! is the point behind White's previous move: 14...♕xf6 15.♔xg1+–) 14.♗xg4 fxg4 15.e4 ♕h6

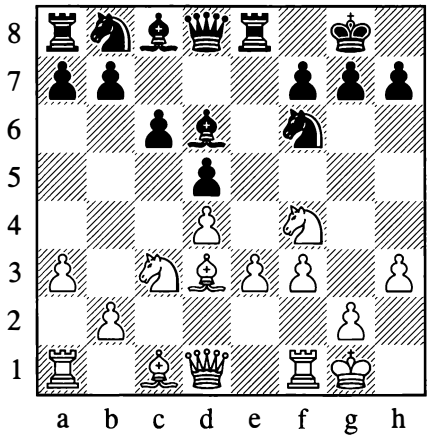
16.♗xg5 ♕xg5 17.♔xh2 c6 18.♘e3 g3† 19.♔g1 gxf2† 20.♔xf2±

11.h3

11.e4!?N has not been tried. Play might continue: 11...dxe4 (11...♘xh2!? is a wildly unclear alternative) 12.♘xe4 ♗c7 13.♖e1 ♗f5 14.h3 ♗xe4 15.♖xe4 ♖xe4 16.♗xe4 ♘f6 17.♗f3 ♘bd7= when White has the two bishops but Black is nicely coordinated.

11...♘f6 12.f3

And now we have an important improvement:



12...♗xf4!N

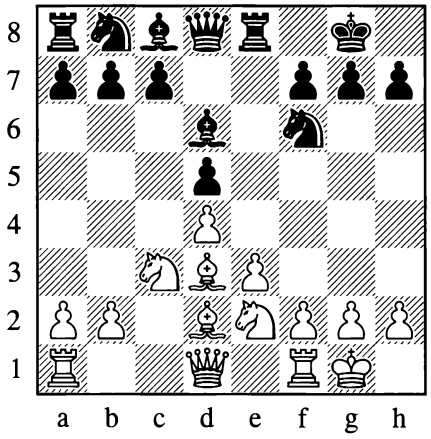
12...b6 allows a promising pawn sacrifice: 13.e4! dxe4 14.fxe4 ♗xf4 15.♗xf4 ♕xd4† 16.♔h1 and Black was unable to neutralize his opponent's initiative in Fineboim – Mander, email 2014. I spent some time analysing this and did find some improvements for Black, but this whole path just doesn't appeal.

13.exf4 b6∞

A double-edged middlegame has been reached. This central structure was touched upon briefly in a note on page 339, after 9.♘f4 ♗xf4 10.exf4. Comparing the two positions, here Black has gained the move ...c6, while White has gained a2-a3, f2-f3 and h2-h3; the two missing tempos are from Black's knight moving to g4 and back. Black's immediate plan is to trade the light-squared bishops; he will then look to improve his queen's knight and possibly advance his queenside majority. White can try advancing on the kingside but he is a long way from building a successful attack, and he will need to be careful not to leave weaknesses behind. Endgames are likely to favour Black because of his superior structure.

B22) 9.♗d2

If White wishes to expand in the centre, it is reasonable to think he may be able to do without f2-f3.



9...c6

This time we will strengthen our centre before trying anything on the kingside.

9...a5!? is a valid alternative, for instance: 10.♖c1 b6 11.♘g3 ♗a6 12.♗xa6 ♘xa6 13.♕a4 ♘b4∞ Naiditsch – Hou Yifan, Dortmund 2015.

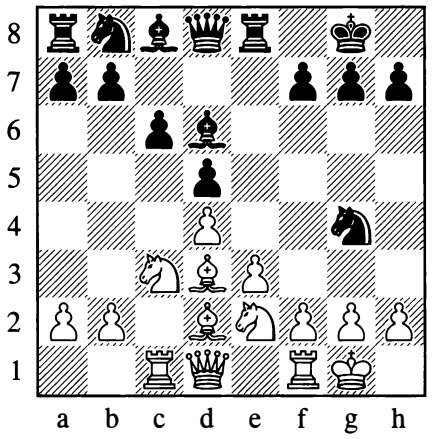
10.♖c1

10.f3 meets with our standard response: 10...c5! 11.♕e1 ♘c6 12.♕h4 ♗e7 13.♕f2 ♘b4 14.♗b1 b6∞ Sorm – Luther, Bad Homburg 2008.

10...♘g4!?

Once again we see this tricky attacking plan.

10...♘bd7 followed by ...♘f8 is a safe alternative, leading to a solid position.



11.h3

11.♘f4!?N has yet to be tested; a sensible reply would be 11...♘a6 (11...g5!? might be objectively playable, but 12.♘h3 ♗xh2† 13.♔h1 ♗c7 14.e4 looks awfully risky!) 12.h3 ♘f6 followed by ...♘c7-e6 with a solid position.

The main alternative is:

11.g3 ♘f6!?

The loss of time is justified by the weakening of White's kingside light squares.

11...♘d7 is a perfectly decent move, as 12.e4N dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♗e7= is nothing to worry about.

I would also be tempted to try 11...♘a6!?N, when 12.♗xa6 bxa6 13.♘a4 ♕c7 gives Black light-squared compensation for the damaged structure.

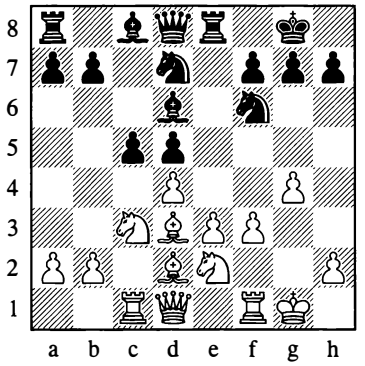
12.f3 ♘bd7

12...c5!N= would be the standard way to meet White's last move.

13.g4 c5?!

This move is less effective here, as the b8-knight can't come to c6 to attack the centre.

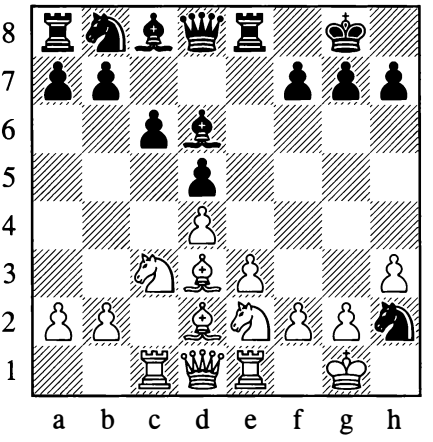
13...♘f8N∞ would have been more consistent with Black's previous move.



14.♕e1 cxd4 15.exd4 ♘b6 16.♕h4 h6 17.b3 ♗d7±

Even though Black eventually won in I. Sokolov – Aroshidze, Barcelona 2012, his position at this stage can be shown as an example of what to avoid. Instead you can take your pick from the alternatives and improvements suggested.

11...♘h2! 12.♖e1

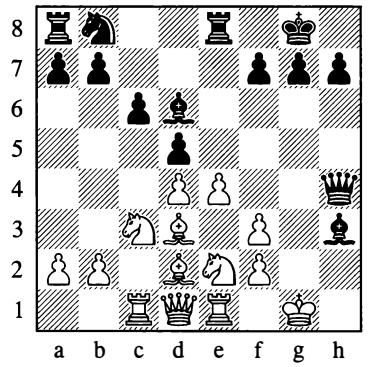


12...♘f3†!

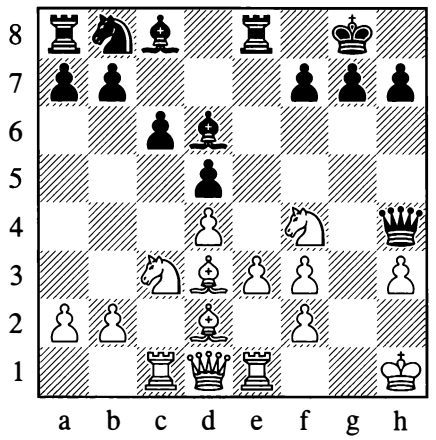
Just as in variation B211, this is the big idea.

13.gxf3 ♕g5† 14.♔h1 ♕h4 15.♘f4!

15.♔g1?! ♗xh3 (15...♕g5†= repeats the position but Black can do better) 16.e4 (16.f4? ♗g4–+)



16...♗h2†! 17.♔xh2 (17.♔h1? ♗f1! 18.♖xf1 ♗g3† 19.♔g1 ♕h2#) 17...♗g4† 18.♔g1 ♗xf3∓ White must give up his queen with 19.♘g3 to avoid being mated.



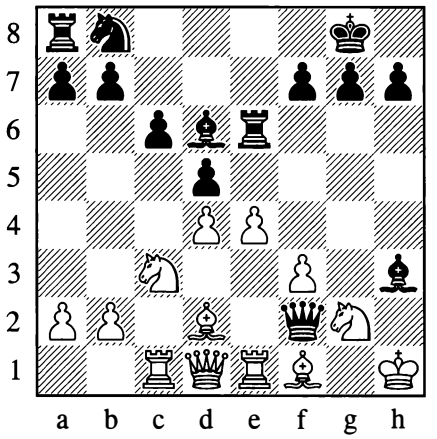
15...♗xh3

15...♔h8!?N could also be investigated, threatening ...g5, when ♖g1 will no longer work.

16.♘g2 ♕xf2 17.♗f1 ♖e6

Threatening ...♗xg2† followed by ...♖h6† and mate.

18.e4



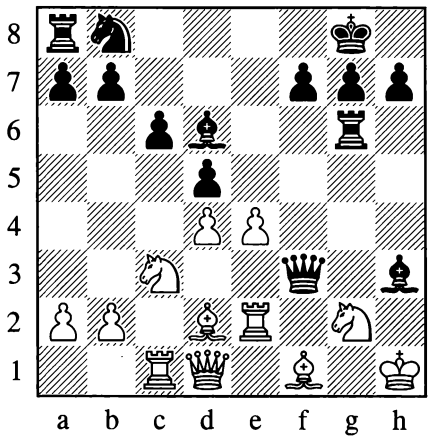
18...♖g6!N

18...♕g3? allowed White to escape with 19.e5 ♗xg2† 20.♗xg2 ♕h4† 21.♔g1 ♕xd4† 22.♗e3 ♕xd1 23.♖exd1± in Khismatullin – Anand, Berlin (rapid) 2015.

19.♖e2

19.♕e2? ♗xg2† 20.♗xg2 ♖xg2∓

19...♕xf3



20.e5

20.exd5 ♗e6! 21.♔g1 (21.dxe6?? ♕h3† 22.♔g1 ♗h2† 23.♔f2 ♕g3#) 21...♕h3 22.♖e5 ♗xe5 23.dxe5 cxd5 leaves White with a material disadvantage as well as a dodgy king position.

20...♗c7∞

We could analyse this position all day but I think this is a sensible place to end the line. Clearly there's a lot going on but I don't believe Black is worse, and the position (plus the whole variation in general) looks practically more dangerous for White.

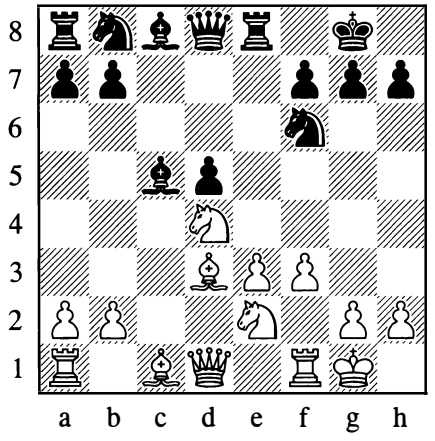
B23) 9.f3 c5

This should come as no surprise, considering the amount of times we have seen the same idea in this chapter. White's two most popular continuations have been **B231) 10.♘b5** and **B232) 10.♕e1**.

B231) 10.♘b5

White's idea is to gain time to put the knight on d4.

12...♗f8 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.♘bd4

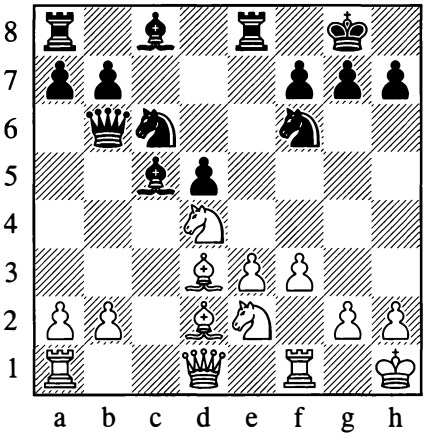


12...♘c6 13.♗d2

Another game continued 13.♔h1 ♘e5 14.b3 ♘xd3 15.♕xd3 a5 16.♘g3 b6 17.♖d1 ♕e7 18.♕d2 h5!? with unclear play in Xiu Deshun – Yu Yangyi, Xinghua 2013.

13...♕b6 14.♔h1

White is offering a pawn in return for the bishop pair and initiative.



14...♗d7!N

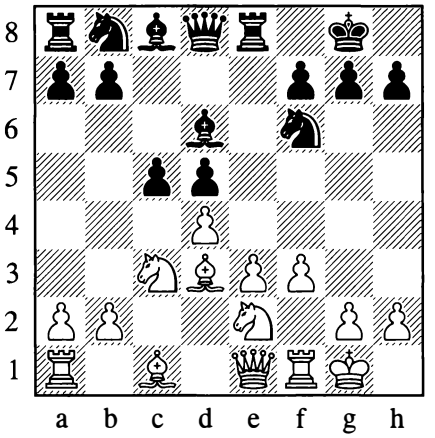
14...♘xd4 15.exd4 ♗xd4 16.♘xd4 ♕xd4 17.♗c3 ♕f4 18.♗b5⩱ was playable for both sides in Gelfand – Carlsen, Moscow 2007. Instead I would prefer to improve my pieces while maintaining the tension.

15.♖c1 ♖ac8

Black has a comfortable version of the IQP structure, as the f3-pawn is out of place. For that reason, it is White who has to search for equality.

B232) 10.♕e1

This has been the most popular choice and it seems a better bet than the previous variation.



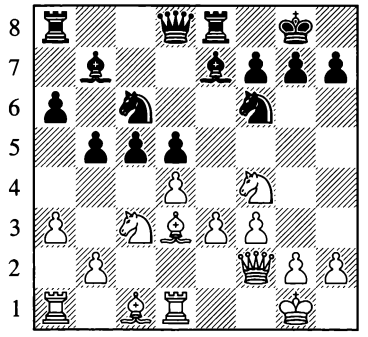
10...♘c6 11.♕h4 ♗e7

Pushing White's queen back appears prudent, although it is certainly not the only move.

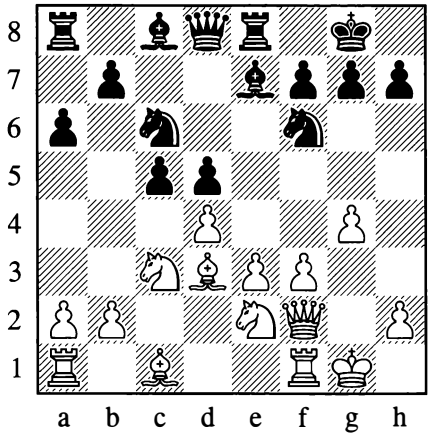
11...h6!? is a decent alternative.

12.♕f2 a6 13.g4

Another game continued: 13.a3 b5 14.♘f4 (14.♔h1 b4 15.axb4 ♘xb4∞ Aleksandrov – Kiselev, Wisla 1992) 14...♗b7 15.♖d1



15...♘a5! Eyeing up the light squares on the queenside. 16.♗c2 In Dambacher – Janssen, Dieren 2003, Black exchanged on d4, but I don't see any reason to release the tension just yet. Instead 16...♖c8!N would have improved another piece, with at least equal chances for Black.



13...b5

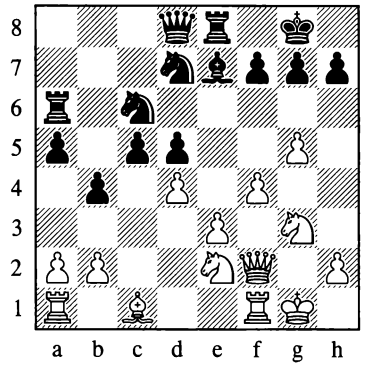
Commencing counterplay.

Black can also consider fortifying his kingside, as in the following game: 13...g6!? 14.♘g3 ♖f8!? (14...♗e6N is also sensible) 15.h3 (15.g5 ♘e8∞) 15...b5 16.b3 ♗b7 17.♘ce2 ♘d7 18.♗b2 ♗f6∞ Kosten – Mitkov, Elgoibar 1995.

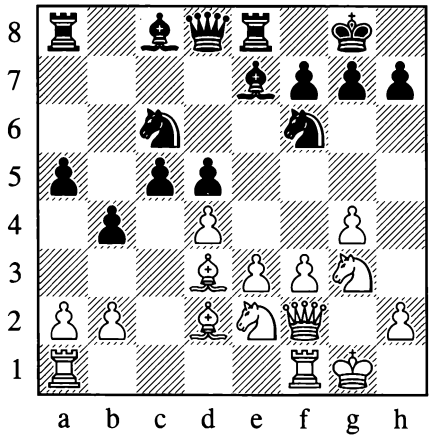
14.♘g3 b4 15.♘ce2 a5 16.♗d2

White brings his last pieces into play.

In a couple of games he has tried pressing ahead on the kingside with: 16.g5 ♘d7 17.f4 ♗a6 18.♗xa6 ♖xa6



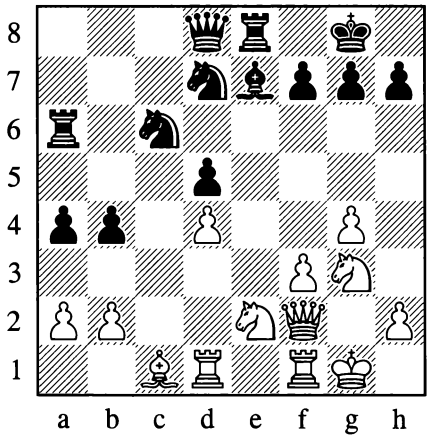
19.h4 (after 19.♗d2?! ♘b6!∓ the knight was heading for c4 in Giorgadze – Almasi, Yerevan [ol] 1996) 19...♘f8 20.f5 ♗d6∞ M. Gurevich – Polugaevsky, Reggio Emilia 1992.



16...♗a6 17.♗xa6 ♖xa6

It is useful to swap off the d3-bishop, which might otherwise have proved a dangerous attacker. Moreover, the rook may prove useful along the 6th rank in some variations.

18.♖ad1 a4 19.♗c1 cxd4 20.exd4 ♘d7



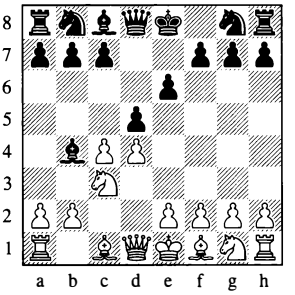
21.♘f4 ♘f8 22.♖fe1 g6∞

The game remained dynamically balanced in Milanovic – D. Radovanovic, Banja Vrucica 2012.

Conclusion

5.cxd5 exd5 gives rise to a fixed central structure, followed by a period of quiet development, for the next few moves at least. Perhaps the biggest recurring theme of the chapter is that when White plays f2-f3, preparing e3-e4, you should almost always counter with ...c5. There are some notable exceptions, such as variation B1, where I suggested a different solution which was better suited to that particular position. Aside from that, it is worth familiarizing yourself with the ...♘g4 plan, which has the potential to lead to a ferocious attack.

Chapter 18



Various 4th Moves

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4

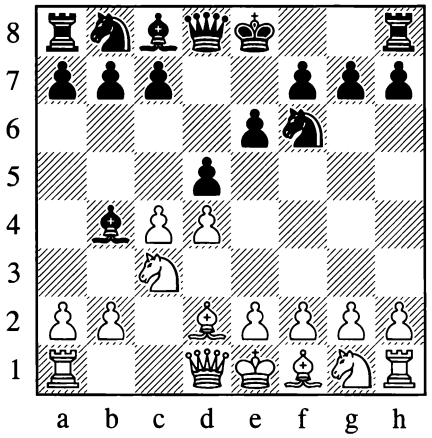
A) 4.♗d2 **350**
B) 4.♕a4† **350**
C) 4.♕b3 **352**
D) 4.♕c2 **353**
E) 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗f4 c6 6.e3 ♘e7 **356**
E1) 7.h4!? **357**
E2) 7.♗d3 ♗f5 **358**
E21) 8.♘e2 **358**
E22) 8.♘f3 **359**
F) 4.a3 ♗xc3† 5.bxc3 ♘f6 **360**
F1) 6.♘f3 **361**
F2) 6.♗g5 **362**
F3) 6.cxd5 exd5 **364**
F31) 7.♗g5 **364**
F32) 7.f3 **365**
F33) 7.e3 **367**

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4

This chapter will deal with the relative sidelines of **A) 4.♗d2**, **B) 4.♕a4†**, **C) 4.♕b3** and **D) 4.♕c2**, followed by the more popular options of **E) 4.cxd5** and **F) 4.a3**.

A) 4.♗d2 ♘f6

This is likely to transpose to some other part of the book. In this section we will deal with a few independent possibilities.



5.a3

5.♘f3 leads to a sideline of the Ragozin – see variation A of Chapter 15.

5.cxd5 exd5 6.e3 0–0 7.♗d3 ♖e8 8.♘ge2 is variation B1 of Chapter 17.

5.e3 0–0 6.a3 (6.♘f3 is variation B of Chapter 14) 6...♗xc3 7.♗xc3 b6 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♖c1 ♗b7 is about equal, for instance: 10.♘f3 ♘d7 11.♗e2 ♕e7 12.0–0 ♖fd8 13.♗d2 c5 14.♗b5 ♘5f6= Korchnoi – Pelletier, Flims 2012.

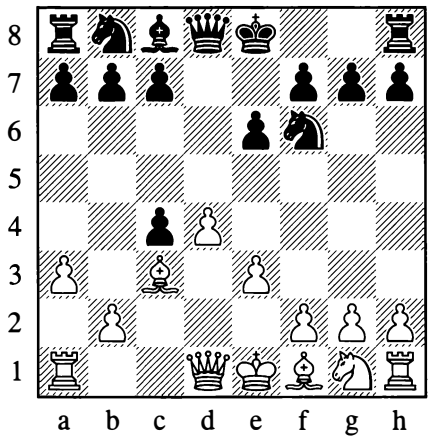
5...♗xc3 6.♗xc3 dxc4!?

This looks like an interesting way to challenge White's unusual set-up.

6...0–0 7.e3 is the Korchnoi – Pelletier game quoted above.

7.e3

7.♕a4† occurred in Castellanos – Pareja, Barranquilla 1999. Black has a few tempting replies: the obvious one is 7...♗d7N 8.♕xc4 ♗c6, or even 8...a6!? with ideas of ...♗b5; there is also 7...♕d7!?N 8.♕xc4 b6, when ...♗a6 could be annoying for White.



7...♕d5!?N

7...b5 worked out well for Black in M. David – Doudon, France 2000, but I am a little wary about weakening the dark squares when White's bishop has the potential to become powerful. The text move avoids any such problem while still holding on to the extra pawn.

8.♘e2 0–0 9.♘f4 ♕c6 10.♗e2 ♘d5 11.0–0 ♘d7∞

White still has some work to do to regain his pawn. Meanwhile Black can eliminate the c3-bishop at a moment of his choosing, and can continue developing by means of ...♘b6 and ...♗d7.

B) 4.♕a4† ♘c6 5.cxd5

5.♘f3 ♘f6 leads back to Part III of the book.

5...exd5

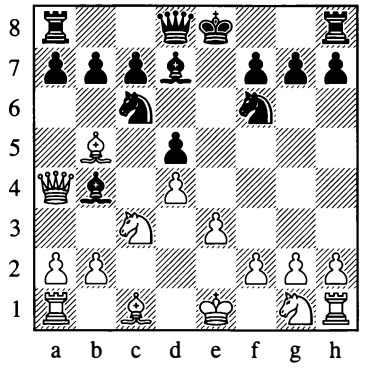
This position could also arise via the 4.cxd5 exd5 move order, as covered in variation E of

this chapter. Here we don't have the option of ...c6, but we do have a development advantage.

6.♗f4

6.♘f3 ♘f6 once again takes us back to Ragozin territory; see variation D of Chapter 3.

White has also tried:
6.e3 ♘f6 7.♗b5 ♗d7



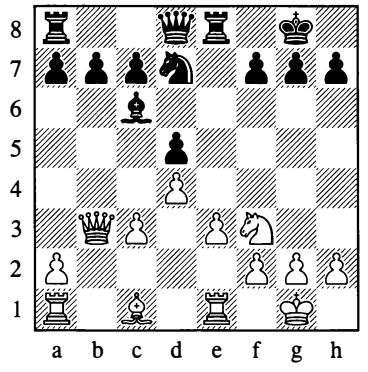
8.♗xc6

8.♘f3 ♗d6 is comfortable for Black, who intends ...a6 next.

8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♗xc6

Black already has the easier game due to his light-square control.

10.♕b3 0–0 11.♘f3 ♘d7 12.0–0 ♖e8 13.♖e1

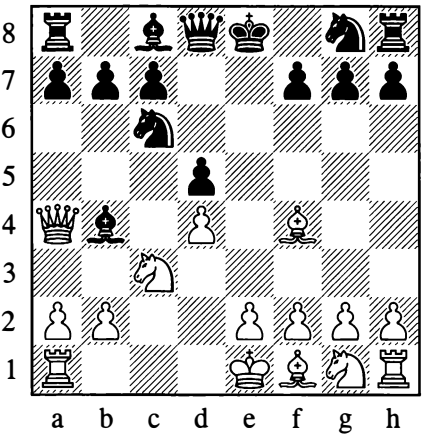


13...♘b6!?N

13...♖e6 14.♗a3 ♕f6 15.♖e2 ♖ae8∓ was also good for Black in An. Timofeev – V. Popov, St Petersburg 2008.

14.♘e5 ♗a4 15.♕b4 f6∓

Black will be able to get a knight to c4.



6...♘f6!

In variation E I recommend a set-up with ...c6 and ...♘e7. However, with the other knight already on c6 and the white queen on a4, I prefer a more active plan to make better use of Black's development advantage.

7.e3 ♘e4

Hitting c3 while setting up ...g5 and ...h5, targeting the strangely placed bishop on f4.

8.♗b5

8.♖c1?! ♕h4! 9.♖c2 (9.g3?! ♕e7 leaves the white bishop short of squares) 9...0–0 10.♘f3 ♕e7∓ favours Black.

8...♗xc3†

8...♗d7!?

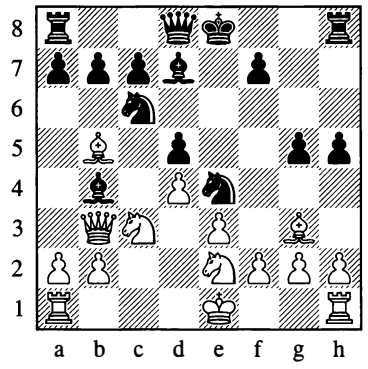
This is a reasonable alternative, but the main line of my analysis leads to a forced draw after:

9.♘e2!N

9.♗xc6 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3 ♗xc6 is not so pleasant for White: 11.♕a3 g5 12.♗g3 h5 13.f3 ♘xg3 14.hxg3 ♕d7 15.g4 ♕e6 16.♔d2 h4 17.♘h3 ♖g8 18.♘f2 a6∓ Oyunbaatar – Munkhgal, Ulaanbaatar 2016.

9...g5 10.♗g3 h5 11.♕b3

11.h4?! ♘xg3 12.♘xg3 gxh4 13.♘e2 ♗d6! 14.♕b3 (14.♘xd5?? isn't an option due to14...a6–+) 14...a6∓

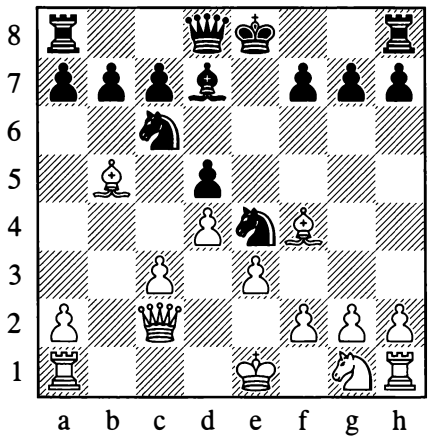


11...♗xc3† 12.♘xc3 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 h4

This should lead to a perpetual after: 14.♕xd5 hxg3 15.♗xc6 gxf2† 16.♔e2 ♗xc6 17.♕e5† ♔d7 18.♕f5†=

9.bxc3 ♗d7 10.♕c2

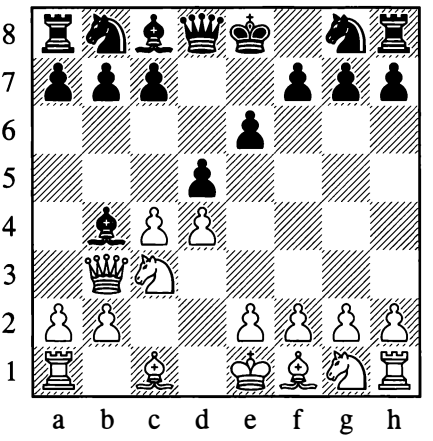
In Gevorgyan – Barsov, Tashkent 2011, the best and most energetic continuation would have been:



10...g5!N 11.♗g3 h5↑

Black has a promising initiative.

C) 4.♕b3



This resembles the 5.♕b3 Ragozin as covered in Part IV of the book, but the play actually takes on a completely different character.

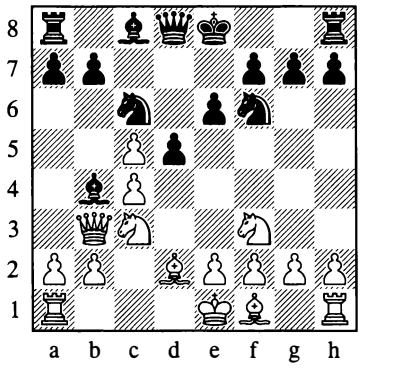
4...c5 5.dxc5 ♘c6!

Unlike the position from Chapter 12 with the knights on f3 and f6, 5...♘a6?! 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.♕xc3 doesn't work here, as Black has no time to recapture on c5 because g7 is hanging.

6.a3

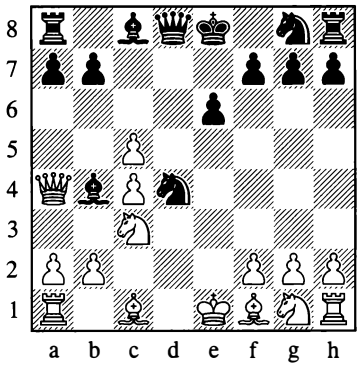
Trying to transpose to Ragozin territory with 6.♘f3?? is not an option, as 6...d4!–+ wins a piece.

6.♗d2?! ♘f6 is unpleasant for White, for instance: 7.♘f3 (7.e3 d4 8.exd4 ♘xd4 9.♕d1 e5 10.♘f3 0–0 11.h3 ♖e8 12.a3 ♗xc5 13.♗e3 ♗f5 14.♖c1 a5∓ left Black well on top in Duchov – Baburin, Kstovo 1994)

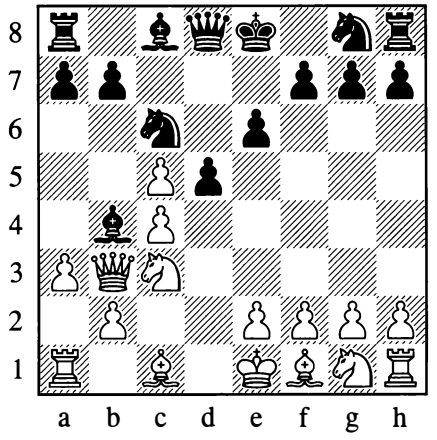


7...d4 8.♘e4 ♘xe4 9.♗xb4 0–0 10.g3 a5 11.♗a3 a4 12.♕b6 Black has excellent prospects after 12...♕e7N, with ...f5 and ...e5 to come.

6.e3 is well met by: 6...d4 7.exd4 ♘xd4 8.♕a4† (8.♕d1N looks safer although 8...♗xc5 leaves Black comfortably equal)



8...♗d7!N (8...♕d7 9.♕d1= Chernuschevich – R. Bagirov, Herculane 1994) 9.♕d1 ♕h4! 10.♗e3 ♘f5 11.♘f3 ♘xe3 12.♘xh4 ♘xd1 13.♖xd1 ♘f6∓

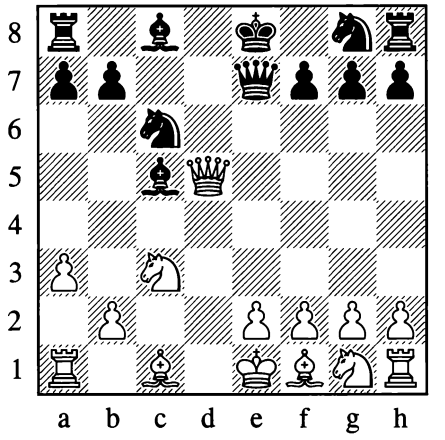


6...♗xc5!N

6...♗a5 and 6...♕a5 have both been played. Neither of these options is bad, but the text move is the most interesting, as Black sacrifices a pawn to fight for the initiative.

7.cxd5 exd5 8.♕xd5 ♕e7

The position resembles a Von Hennig-Schara Gambit – an opening I have some experience in. Here Black has a much better variation than normal, as White has wasted time on ♕b3xd5, rather than ♕xd5 in one go. A likely continuation is:

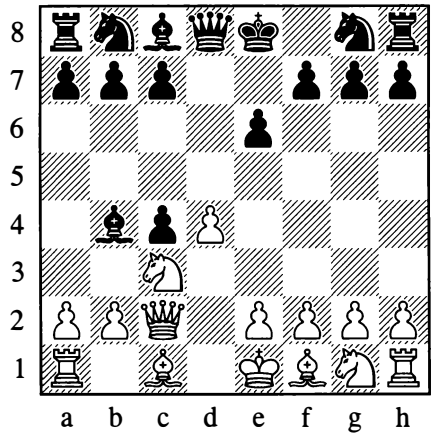


9.♘f3 ♘f6 10.♕d1 0–0⩲

Black has a big lead in development and excellent compensation, with ...♖fd8 ...♗f5 and ...♖ac8 to come.

D) 4.♕c2 dxc4

This move is consistent with our theme of taking on c4, while also avoiding the main lines of the 4.♕c2 Nimzo-Indian, which would arise after 4...♘f6.



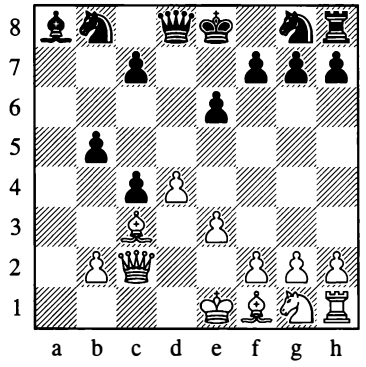
5.e3

5.♘f3 ♘f6 leads back to variation B of Chapter 15.

5.a3 has hardly ever been tried. 5...♗xc3† is a reasonable move which was played in the few games from this position thus far, but I would be tempted to try 5...♗a5!?N, keeping more tension. A fresh and interesting position has arisen, although it could easily transpose to variation B1 of Chapter 15 after a subsequent ♘f3 and ...♘f6.

5...b5 6.a4

6.♗d2 allows Black to defend b5 with ...a6 keeping the diagonal open for the c8-bishop: 6...a6 7.a4 ♗b7 8.axb5 ♗xc3 9.♗xc3 (9.♕xc3 axb5 10.♖xa8 ♗xa8 11.b3 ♘f6 12.bxc4 bxc4 13.f3 c5) 9...axb5 10.♖xa8 ♗xa8



11.b3 ♘f6 12.bxc4 bxc4 13.♘f3 (13.♗xc4?? ♗xg2–+) 13...♗e4 14.♕a4† ♘bd7=

6...c6 7.♗d2

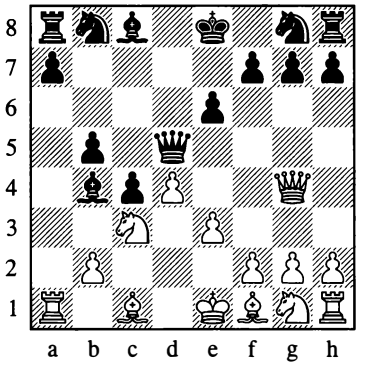
7.axb5 cxb5

It seems a little strange for White to open up the long diagonal so soon. In the following GM game his idea was to transfer the queen to the kingside:

8.♕e4

8.b3 a5 9.bxc4 ♗xc3†!? (the simple 9...dxc4N is also good) 10.♕xc3 b4 gave Black a good version of a Noteboom in Munkhbayar – T. Cox, Budapest 2010. See variation B2 of Chapter 15 for more about this structure.

8...♕d5 9.♕g4



9...g6!N

9...♔f8 10.♗d2 ♗xc3 11.♗xc3 ♗b7 12.♗b4† ♘e7 13.♘e2 ♘bc6 14.♘c3 ♕d8∞ was messy in Markos – Dizdar, Austria 2008. The text move weakens the dark squares a little, but it's more important to avoid misplacing the king, as occurred in the game.

10.♗d2

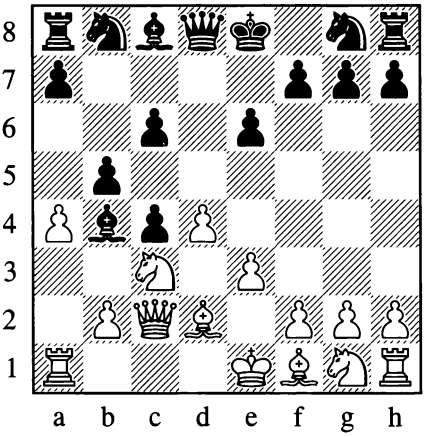
10.♗e2 ♗b7 11.♗f3 ♕d7∓

10...♕b7 11.♗e2

11.♘e4 ♕e7∓

11...♘e7 12.♗f3 ♘bc6 13.♘ge2 0–0∓

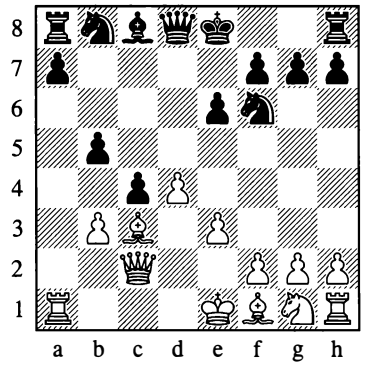
White does not have enough compensation for the pawn.



7...♗b7!?N

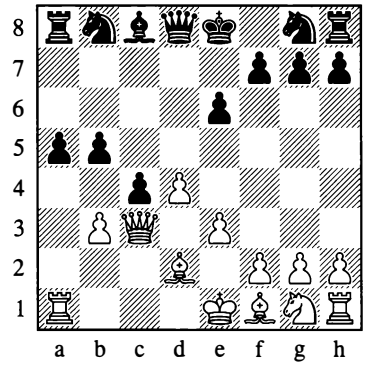
An interesting approach, leading to Noteboom-style positions.

7...♘f6 allows White to fight for an edge with: 8.axb5N (8.♘ge2?! ♕b6 9.g3 ♗b7 10.♗g2 0–0 11.0–0 ♘bd7 12.♘e4 ♗xd2 13.♘xd2 a5 14.♖fb1 ♘d5∓ left White struggling to prove compensation in Witek – Aleksandrov, Warsaw 2008) 8...♗xc3 9.♗xc3 cxb5 10.b3

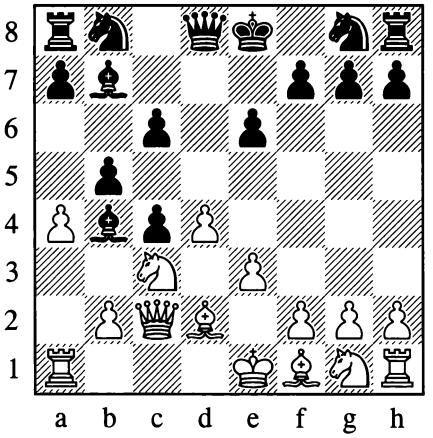


Compared with variation B2 of Chapter 15, White has gained a tempo on the queenside by delaying ♘f3, which means that Black does not have time to establish the Noteboom queenside passed pawns with ...a5 and ...b4. Instead after 10...♗b7 11.bxc4 bxc4 12.♘f3 0–0 13.♗b4 ♖e8 14.♗xc4 ♗e4 the position is close to equal; however, Black still has to be careful due to White's bishop pair.

I also considered: 7...a5!? 8.axb5 ♗xc3 9.♕xc3 cxb5 10.b3



10...b4!? (the normal continuation would be 10...♗b7 11.bxc4 b4, leading to the Noteboom structure as in our main line below) 11.♕xc4 ♗a6 12.♕c2 ♗xf1 13.♔xf1 ♘d7± White has the better structure and slightly better chances; nevertheless, his misplaced king makes the position quite double-edged.

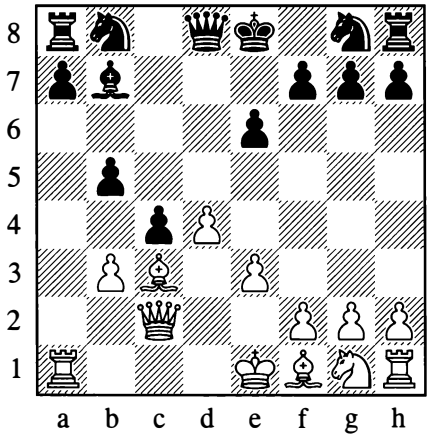


8.axb5 ♗xc3 9.♗xc3

9.♕xc3 cxb5 10.b3 a5 11.bxc4 b4 12.♕c2 reaches the same position as our main line below.

9...cxb5 10.b3

Unlike the 7...♘f6 line above, the rook on a8 is defended, meaning Black has time to establish the Noteboom-style queenside passed pawns with:

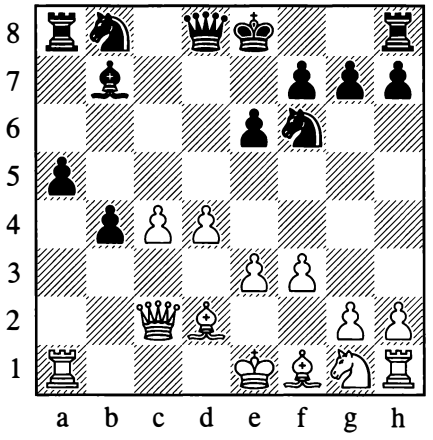


10...a5 11.bxc4 b4 12.♗d2

12.♗b2 ♘f6 also leads to uncharted territory after 13.f3!? or even 13.♘h3!?.

12...♘f6 13.f3!?

13.♘f3 transposes to variation B2 of Chapter 15 on page 299. The text move is a reasonable attempt to take control of some light squares, making use of the fact that the knight has not yet gone to f3. A good reply is:



13...e5! 14.d5

14.dxe5?! ♘fd7 15.f4 ♘c5∓ gives Black great compensation.

14...♕c7 15.e4 ♘bd7 16.♘h3 0–0 17.♘f2 ♘c5∞

With a complex, roughly balanced position.

E) 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗f4

This is the usual choice, developing the bishop before playing e2-e3.

5.♘f3 ♘f6 transposes to the 5.cxd5 exd5 Ragozin, as covered in the first part of the book.

5.e3 ♘f6 transposes back to the previous chapter.

5.♕a4† ♘c6 has already been covered in variation B.

5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘f6 transposes to variation F3, near the end of this chapter.

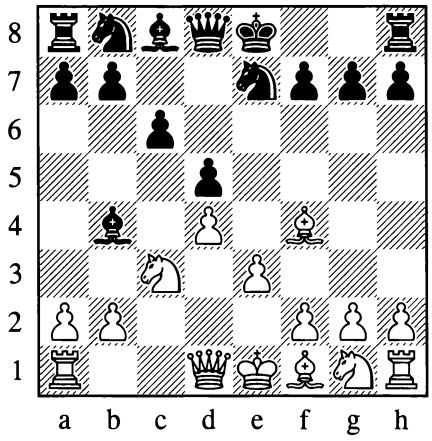
5...c6

I find this to be the most accurate and flexible move. Our plan is to develop the king's knight on e7 and then look at options such as ...♗f5, or ...♗d6, or even ...♘g6 followed by ...h5-h4, depending on what White does.

Interestingly, in *A Practical White Repertoire with 1.d4 and 2.c4 – The Complete Queen's Gambit*, GM Kornev mentions the immediate 5...♘e7 and suggests meeting it with 6.♕a4† in order to force the inconvenient development of the b8-knight to c6. He does not mention the plan of 5...c6 followed by ...♘e7 at all though.

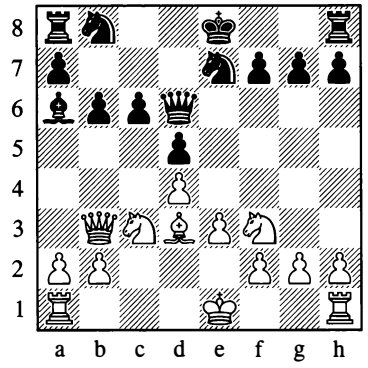
John Watson also recommends this set-up for White (though without the 6.♕a4† finesse mentioned above) in *A Strategic Chess Opening Repertoire for White*. The American IM doesn't mention 5...c6 either – although his recommendation for White does briefly transpose to one of our positions from variation E22 below.

6.e3 ♘e7



White has two main plans: he can gain space on the kingside with **E1) 7.h4!?**, or develop normally with **E2) 7.♗d3**.

7.♕b3 enabled Black to equalize pretty easily in the following game: 7...♗d6 8.♗xd6 ♕xd6 9.♗d3 b6 10.♘f3 ♗a6



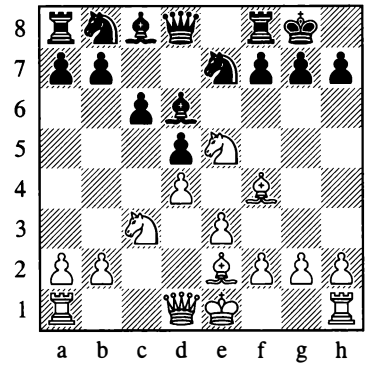
11.♗xa6 ♘xa6 12.0–0 0–0 13.♖ac1 ♘c7 14.♖fe1 ♘e6= Navara – Hou Yifan, Prague 2013.

I also checked:

7.♘f3 0–0

The immediate 7...♗d6 also looks decent.

8.♗e2 ♗d6 9.♘e5



9...♘g6!?N

Black needs to play this move some time soon.

Compare the game: 9...a5 10.h4 ♘a6?! 11.g4 ♘c7 12.♕c2 ♔h8?! 13.h5± Having neglected to play ...♘g6 for several moves, Black no longer had the option in Moiseenko – Aleksandrov, St Petersburg 2014.

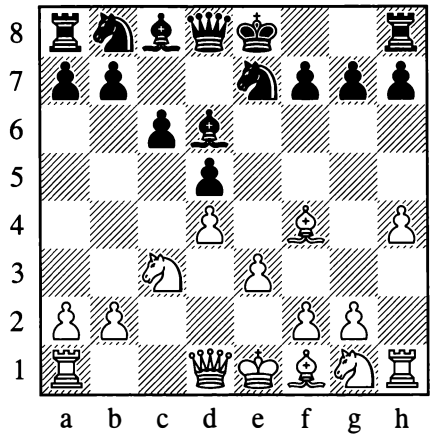
10.♗g3 ♘xe5!?

10...♖e8= is safe and solid.

11.dxe5 ♗c5∞

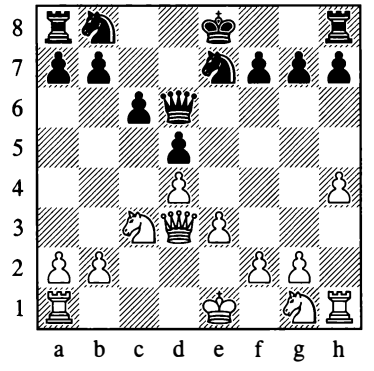
With a double-edged position.

E1) 7.h4!? ♗d6



8.♕f3

Another game continued: 8.♗xd6 ♕xd6 9.♗d3 ♗f5 10.♗xf5 ♘xf5 11.♕d3 ♘e7

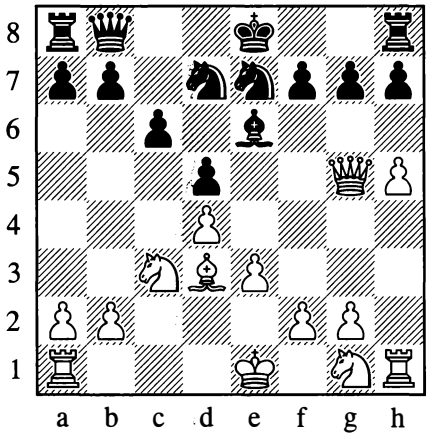


12.♘f3 ♘d7 13.h5 0–0–0 14.0–0–0 ♔b8= The exchanges resulted in a level position in Ju Wenjun – Guo Qi, Xinghua 2014.

8...♗xf4

8...h5!?N looks like a reasonable alternative, for instance: 9.♗d3 ♗f5 10.♗xf5 (10.♗xd6 ♗xd3∞) 10...♘xf5∞

9.♕xf4 ♗e6 10.h5 ♘d7 11.♗d3 ♕b8 12.♕g5



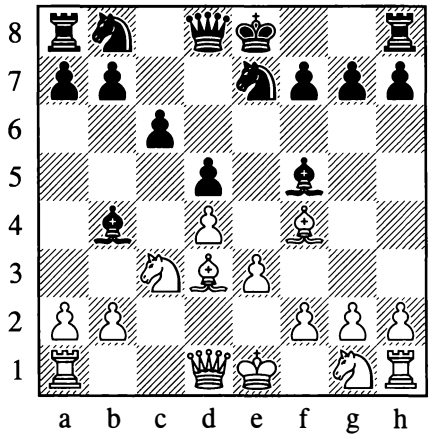
12...♕d6!?N

12...♔f8 13.g4 h6 14.♕h4 gave White good chances on the kingside in Shomoev – C. Balogh, Moscow 2012.

13.♕xg7 0–0–0∞

With a lead in development and an open g-file, Black has decent compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

E2) 7.♗d3 ♗f5



Having this move available was one of the main reasons for putting the knight on e7. White may proceed with **E21) 8.♘e2** or **E22) 8.♘f3**.

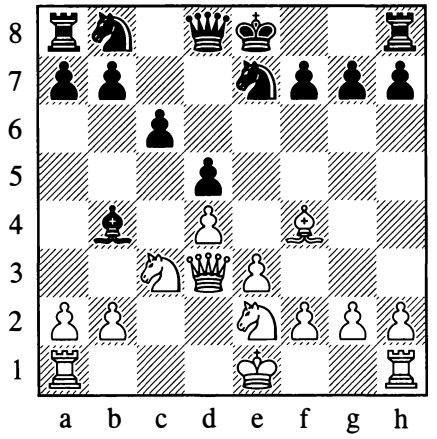
E21) 8.♘e2 ♗xd3

Black's specific move order doesn't seem to matter too much here, but it is important to know that there are two main plans. The simple option is to go for some combination of ...0–0 and ...♗d6, looking to neutralize any White attacking chances by exchanging both sets of bishops. Alternatively, Black can aim for a more complex position with a plan involving ...♘g6 and ...h5, followed by queenside castling at some point. Here are two recent examples:

8...0–0 9.a3 ♗d6 10.0–0 occurred in Schekachikhin – Barsov, Moscow 2015, when 10...♗xd3N 11.♕xd3 ♗xf4 12.♘xf4 ♘g6= would have been simple and solid.

8...♗d6 9.♗xf5 ♘xf5 10.♕b3 ♕e7 11.0–0–0?! (11.0–0 is normal) 11...♗xf4 12.♘xf4 0–0 13.♖he1 ♘a6 14.f3 ♖ad8∞ The position looks murky but easier for Black to handle, Nabaty – Lupulescu, Jerusalem 2015.

9.♕xd3

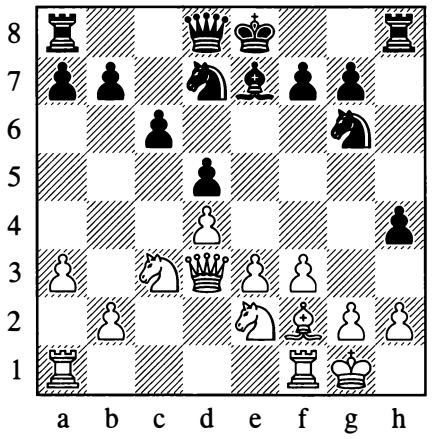


9...♘g6 10.♗g3 ♘d7 11.a3 ♗e7 12.0–0 h5!?

Black goes for the complicated option.

12...0–0N= would have been safe enough.

13.f3 h4 14.♗f2



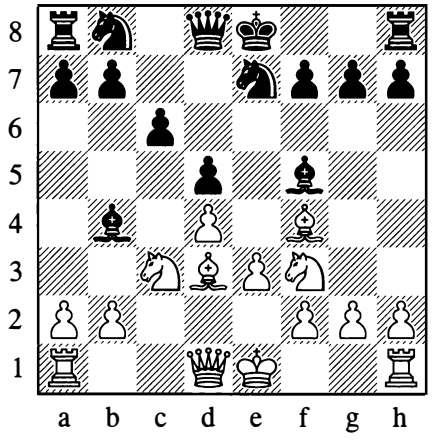
14...♘b6!?N

The game continued: 14...♘f6 15.e4 (15.h3!?N is a possible improvement) 15...dxe4 16.fxe4 ♘g4 (16...h3!N∞) 17.♖ad1 ♕d7 18.h3 ♘xf2 19.♖xf2± Schleining – Batsiashvili, Gaziantep 2012.

15.e4 h3 16.g3 dxe4 17.fxe4 ♘e5∞

With a double-edged middlegame.

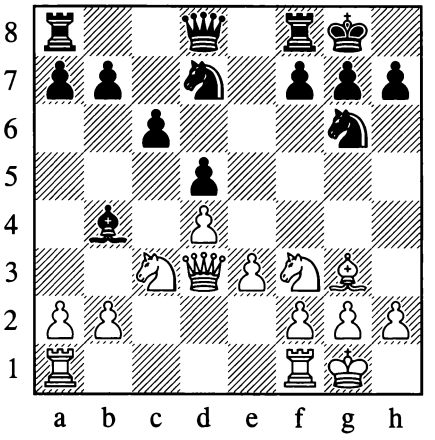
E22) 8.♘f3



8...0–0 9.0–0 ♗xd3 10.♕xd3 ♘g6

Watson reaches this position via a slightly different move order, and suggests 10...♗d6 11.♖fe1!? for White. I don't see any particular problems for Black after 11...♘a6 – but I will focus on a different move for Black anyway, following a game of Alekseev from 2015.

11.♗g3 ♘d7

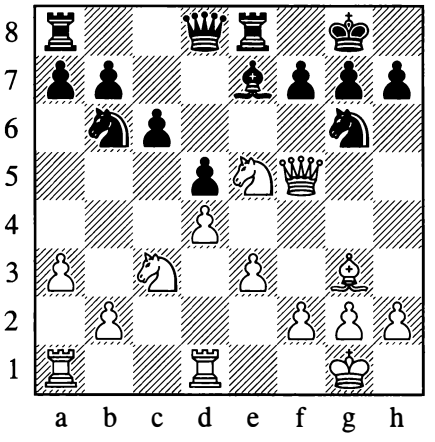


12.a3 ♗e7 13.♖fd1 ♖e8 14.♕f5 ♘b6

Black has a solid position and his last move makes it hard for White to arrange his thematic minority attack, as b2-b4 will give the knight a ready-made outpost on c4.

15.♘e5?!

White tries to play actively in the centre instead, but it might have done him more harm than good after the strongest reply:



15...♘xe5!N

15...♖f8?! let White off the hook, and after 16.♘d3 the position was equal again in Nabaty – Alekseev, Jerusalem 2015.

16.dxe5

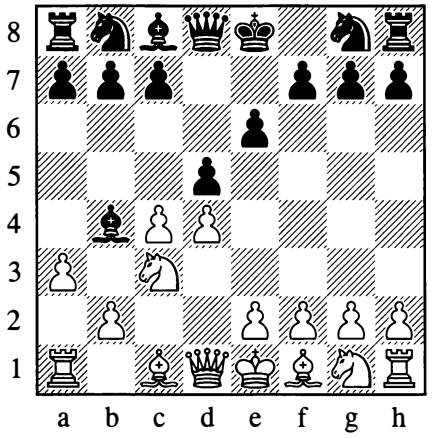
Presumably this was White's idea.

After 16.♗xe5 ♘c4 17.♖ab1 g6 Black is at least equal and the strong knight is a bit annoying for White.

16...♘c4 17.♕c2 ♕b6∞

White will have to work hard to maintain the balance.

F) 4.a3



4...♗xc3† 5.bxc3 ♘f6

This transposes to a variation of the Nimzo-Indian where Black meets 4.a3 ♗xc3† 5.bxc3 with 5...d5. This is unusual but perfectly playable, and ties in quite well with our 4.e3 ♘f6 repertoire from the previous two chapters.

If you want something almost completely off the beaten track, an interesting option is:

5...c6!?

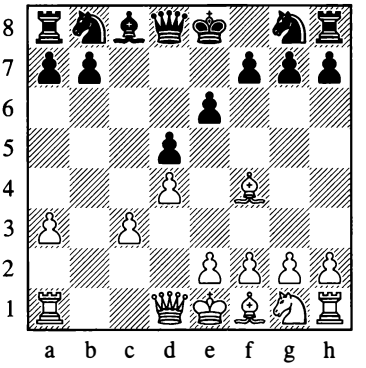
We have already encountered this plan in Chapter 16. Black is getting ready to recapture on d5 with the c-pawn.

6.cxd5

6.e3 ♘f6 immediately transposes to variation C of Chapter 16.

6...cxd5 7.♗f4!?N

This has not been played yet, but it seems like a reasonable attempt to make use of the fact that e2-e3 has not yet been played.

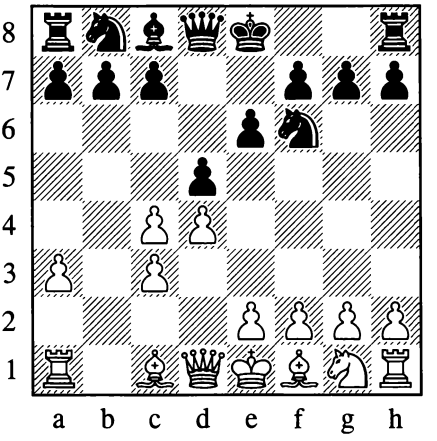


7...♘f6

7...♕a5 8.♗d2 ♕c7 9.e3 ♘f6 10.c4! dxc4 11.♗xc4!± gives White an edge, as the c4-bishop is untouchable due to the ♖c1 skewer.

8.e3 0–0 9.♗d3 b6

Given the chance, Black will play ...♗a6 next. The position resembles variation C from Chapter 16, although the bishop on f4 changes things a little. It's hard to say if Black can claim full equality, but his position is certainly playable, so you could consider this as a viable low-theory option.

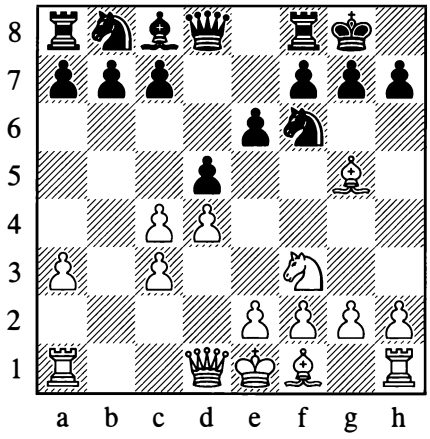


White has three main options: **F1) 6.♘f3**, **F2) 6.♗g5** and **F3) 6.cxd5**.

6.e3 takes us back to variation C of Chapter 16, where I recommend 6...c6!?.

F1) 6.♘f3 0–0 7.♗g5

7.e3 leads to Chapter 16 again.



7...♘bd7 8.e3 c5 9.♗d3

9.cxd5 exd5 has occurred in quite a few games via different move orders, but it seems to me that Black gets a comfortable position with mostly simple moves. For instance, 10.♗d3 ♕a5 11.♕c2 c4 12.♗f5 ♘e4 13.0–0 ♖e8 and Black was at least equal in Nagy Dani – Lindsalu, corr. 2003.

9...♕a5!

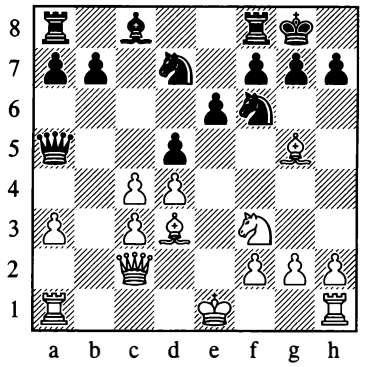
Combining an attack on the c3-pawn with breaking the pin on the f6-knight.

10.0–0

This has been a rare choice, but it looks like the most logical.

10.♕c2?! cxd4 11.exd4

This has occurred in a few games, but in each case Black missed a good chance to create problems for his opponent:



11...e5!N

Forcing White to make an unpleasant decision.

12.♗xf6

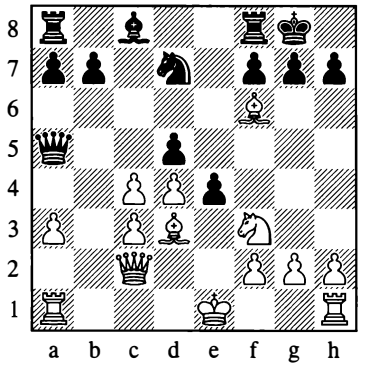
12.cxd5? e4! is already winning for Black.

12.dxe5? dxc4 13.exf6 cxd3 14.♕xd3 ♖e8†∓ and White is in trouble.

12.♗e2 may be best, although 12...exd4 13.♘xd4 dxc4 still leaves White struggling to equalize.

12...e4!

This is the main point behind the previous move.



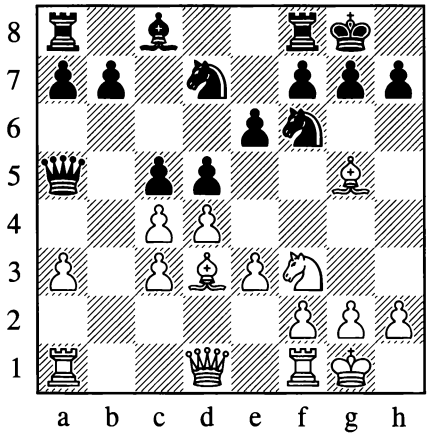
13.♗g5

13.0–0? is obviously no good due to 13...exd3 14.♕xd3 ♘xf6 and Black emerges with an extra piece.

13...exd3 14.♕xd3 dxc4 15.♕xc4 ♘b6 16.♕b4 ♖e8† 17.♗e3 ♕a6∓

Black has great light-square control and White is still unable to castle on the kingside,

so Black has more than enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

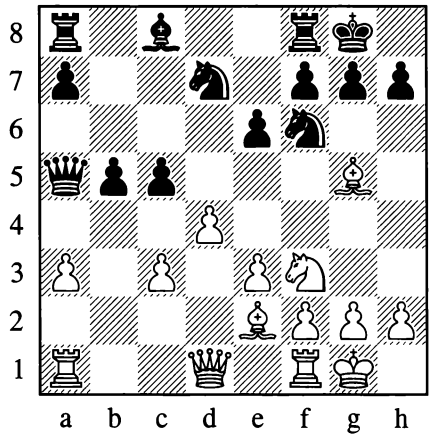


10...dxc4 11.♗xc4 b5

11...♕xc3 12.♖c1 ♕xa3 13.dxc5 ♕a5 14.♕d4⩲ gave White decent compensation for the pawn in Gunina – Aleksandrov, Moscow 2007.

12.♗e2

This position was reached in Herrera Beiza – Sanchez Osorio, Chile 2009. Now instead of removing the tension and wasting time with 12...c4?, Black should have continued:



12...♘e4N 13.♕c2

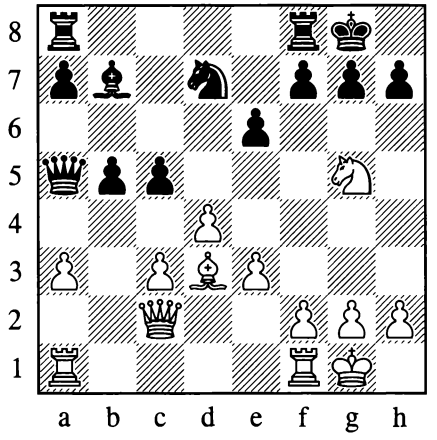
13.♗d3 ♗b7 14.a4 b4= gives Black easy play.

13...♗b7 14.♗d3 ♘xg5

14...f5!?∞ is an interesting alternative, with ...c4 to follow.

14...♘xc3!? could also be considered.

15.♘xg5

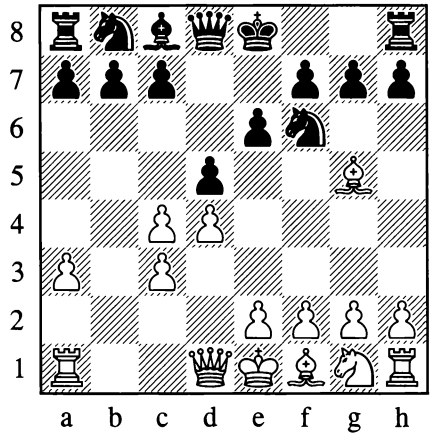


15...h6 16.♗h7† ♔h8 17.♗e4 ♗xe4 18.♘xe4 ♕c7=

With comfortable equality.

F2) 6.♗g5

It is always tempting to pin the knight, but Black has a good reply:



6...c5

Preparing ...♕a5, taking advantage of the fact that the bishop has moved away from the queenside.

7.cxd5

7.♗xf6 ♕xf6 8.e3 0–0 9.♘f3 ♘c6 10.♗e2 ♖d8 11.♕b3 b6 was comfortable for Black in Ascic – Kristovic, Zagreb 2006.

7.♕c2 dxc4!?N

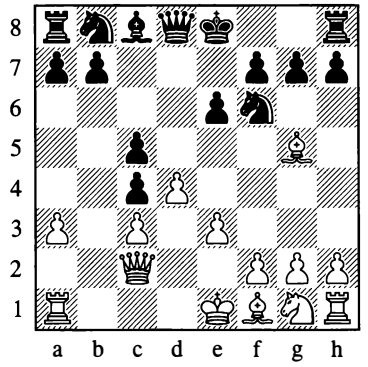
Just as in several other parts of this book, grabbing the pawn works well.

8.e3

8.e4 cxd4 9.♗xc4 (9.e5? ♕a5∓ pins the e-pawn) 9...dxc3 and I don't see how White can claim full compensation.

8.♘f3 may be best, although 8...♘bd7 still makes it hard for White to win his pawn back or claim full compensation.

The text move prepares to recapture on c4, but Black can spoil the plan with:



8...cxd4! 9.exd4

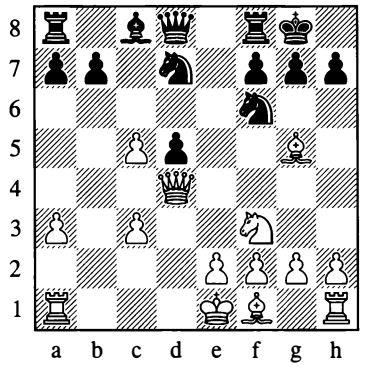
9.cxd4?? ♕a5† picks up the bishop on g5.

9...♕d5

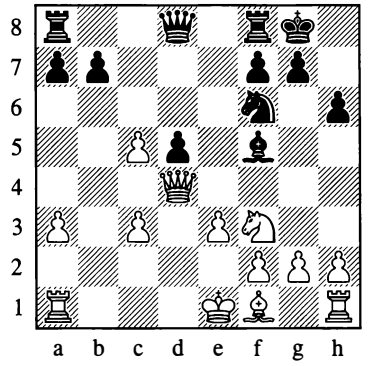
And Black is better.

7...exd5 8.♘f3

8.dxc5 ♘bd7 9.♕d4 0–0 10.♘f3 occurred in Nikolaidis – Simeonidis, Kallithea 2006. This would have been a good moment to chase the bishop with:



10...h6!N 11.♗xf6 (11.♗h4 is well met by 11...♖e8 when the ...♖e4 jump has real bite, as the bishop will be vulnerable on h4: 12.e3 ♖e4 13.♕d1 ♘xc5∓) 11...♘xf6 12.e3 ♗f5 White has to be careful, for instance:



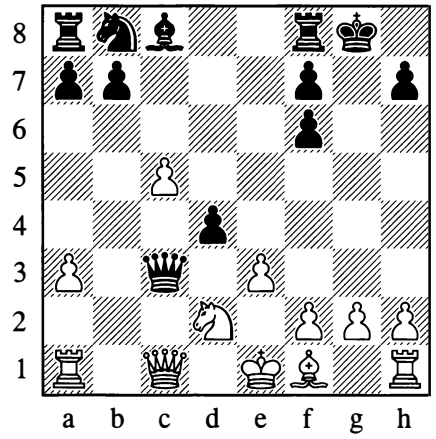
13.♗d3?! (13.♕b4 is better, though I still like Black's position after 13...♖c8∞) 13...♗xd3 14.♕xd3 ♖c8∓ The c3-pawn is a clear target.

8...0–0 9.e3 ♕a5!?

This is the most ambitious and complicated continuation.

9...h6N 10.♗h4 ♘bd7 11.♗e2 ♕a5= is a simple route to a good position.

10.♗xf6 ♕xc3† 11.♘d2 gxf6 12.dxc5 d4 13.♕c1



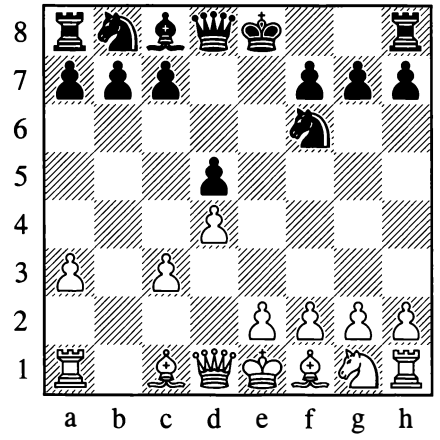
13...♗f5!N

13...♕a5 14.♗d3 dxe3 15.fxe3 ♖d8 16.♕c2 ♘d7 17.0–0 ♕xc5 led to unclear play after 18.♗xh7† in Nikolic – Bluebaum, Berlin 2015, but 18.♘e4!N may promise an edge for White.

14.♕xc3 dxc3 15.♘c4 ♖c8

With a complicated but roughly balanced endgame.

F3) 6.cxd5 exd5



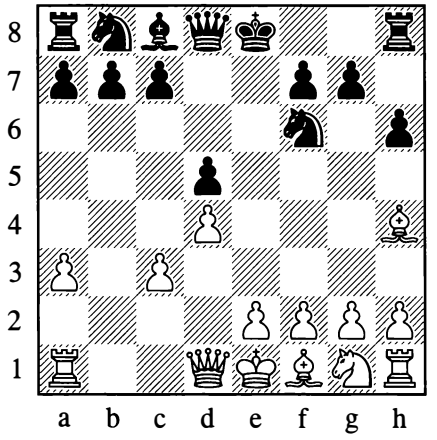
Despite being only the third choice in terms of popularity, in some ways this is White's most challenging option. One advantage for White is that it takes away the option of ...dxc4; another is that Black no longer has a chance to meet e2-e3 with ...c6 followed by ...cxd5, as in variation C of Chapter 16. On the positive side for Black, we now have a chance to develop our bishop actively on f5.

White's most important options are **F31) 7.♗g5**, **F32) 7.f3** and **F33) 7.e3**.

F31) 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗h4

8.♗xf6 is harmless. 8...♕xf6 9.e3 0–0 10.♗d3 occurred in Frank – Rezsek, Zalakaros 1995, when 10...♗f5N= would have been simple and good.

This position has been reached in several games, but so far nobody has tried:



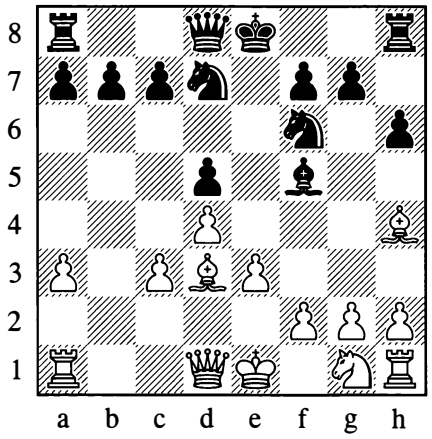
8...♗f5!?N

This looks like a decent novelty, activating the light-squared bishop to its strongest post and intending ...0–0, ...♘bd7 and ...c5.

9.e3

The greedy 9.♕b3 can be met by 9... ♘bd7! 10.♕xb7 0–0∞ and, with ...c5 on the cards, Black has huge compensation.

9...♘bd7 10.♗d3

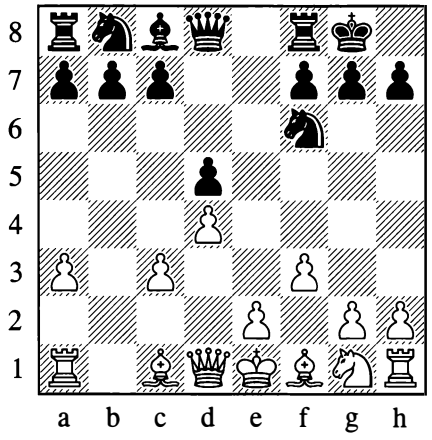


10...♗xd3 11.♕xd3 c5=

Black has no problems at all.

F32) 7.f3 0–0

This position has arisen in hundreds of games, almost all of them via the Nimzo-Indian move order of 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.f3 d5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 0–0 7.cxd5 exd5.



8.e3

White's ideal set-up involves ♗d3 and ♘e2 from here, so we should look to disrupt this plan in one way or another.

8...♘h5!?

I should mention that 8...♗f5 is a good alternative which is covered in variation F33 below, via the 7.e3 move order. If you want to cut down on preparation time, you can simply play this set-up against both of White's move orders.

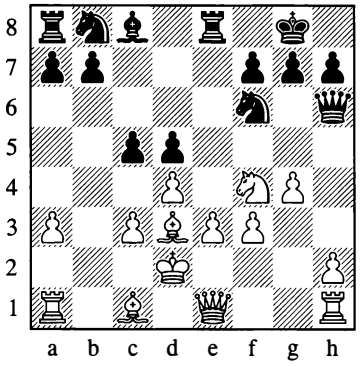
The text move is an interesting option which is only available against White's move order involving an early f2-f3. I have played it myself, and will include some analysis of it here to give you the option of doing the same.

9.♕c2

This is White's most popular reply, preparing to meet ...♕h4† with ♕f2. The two main alternatives are:

9.g3 ♖e8 (9...f5!? is another interpretation of the position) 10.♗d3 c5 11.♘e2 b6 12.0–0 ♘f6 Black's loss of time with the knight is justified by the fact that White does not have the g3-square available for his knight. That explains his next move: 13.g4 ♗a6 14.♘g3 ♗xd3 15.♕xd3 ♘c6∞ Volkov – Meribanov, Yerevan 2014. White would prefer his g-pawn on its original square in such a position.

9.♘e2 ♖e8 10.g4 ♕h4† 11.♔d2 ♘f6 12.♕e1 ♕h6 13.♘f4 c5 14.♗d3



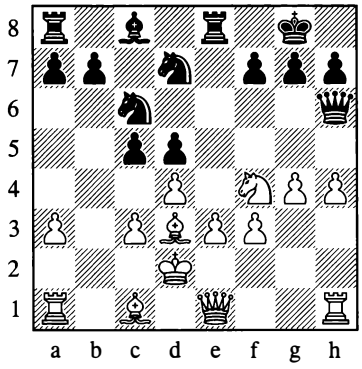
14...♘c6!?N

14...b6 led to extreme complications after: 15.h4 ♘fd7 16.♗g6 hxg6 (16...♕xf4? 17.exf4 ♖xe1 18.♖xe1 hxg6 19.♖e8† wins material)

17.g5 ♕h7 18.h5 ♔f8 19.hxg6 ♕g8∞ Volkov – Socko, Stockholm 2014.

15.h4 ♘d7

The point of my novelty is that the idea used by White in the above game no longer works:

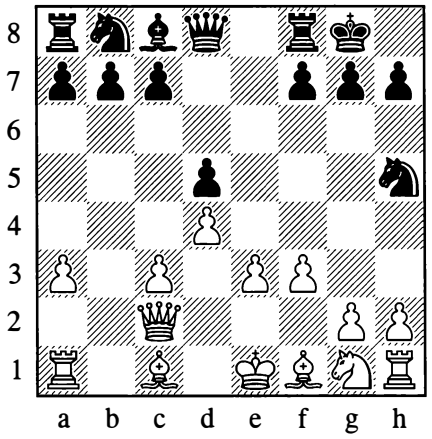


16.♗g6?

Instead 16.g5 ♕d6∞ keeps the position unclear.

16...♕xf4 17.exf4 ♖xe1∓

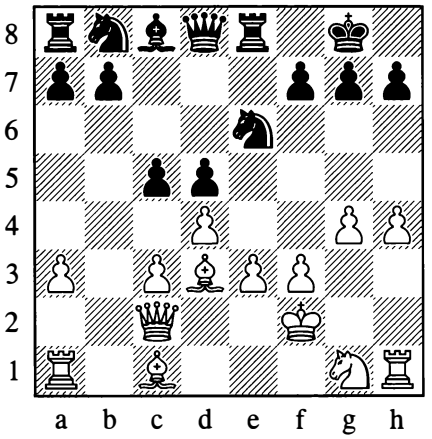
And Black wins material.



9...♖e8 10.g4

10.♗d3?! ♕h4† 11.♕f2 ♘f4! is a nice tactical trick, after which 12.♗f1 ♕f6∓ left Black with a pleasant development advantage in Volkov – Tomashevsky, Rijeka 2010.

10...♘f4 11.h4 c5 12.♔f2 ♘e6 13.♗d3



13...♘f8!

Defending h7 without weakening the kingside. I was the first to play this over the board in 2010, although I later found out that it had previously been tested in some correspondence games. It has since been used successfully by a couple of 2700 players.

14.♘e2 ♘c6

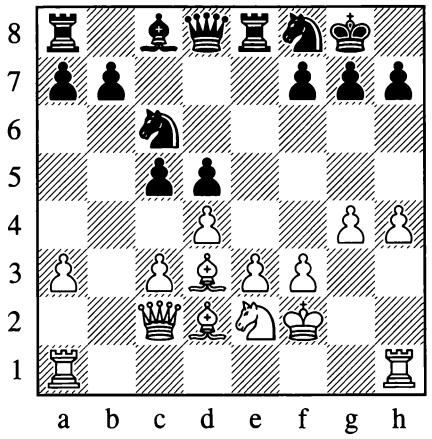
Black has a few possible ways of playing. This is perhaps the most flexible of them, waiting for the right moment to play ...c4.

14...b6 15.♘f4 ♗a6 16.♗d2 ♗xd3 17.♕xd3 ♘e6 18.dxc5 ♘xf4 19.exf4 bxc5∞ was Addison – R. Pert, Canterbury 2010.

14...c4 15.♗f5 ♘c6 16.a4 g6 17.♗xc8 ♖xc8 18.♗a3 ♘e6 19.♘g3 a6 20.♖ab1 ♖b8∞ was the later game Timofeev – Almasi, Legnica 2013.

15.♗d2

15.dxc5N ♘e5∞ is playable for White, but his central structure has been ruined and it's no wonder that no human player has wanted to try this.



15...c4!?N

15...♗d7 followed by ...♖c8 was also sensible in Johannessen – Vitiugov, Plovdiv 2010.

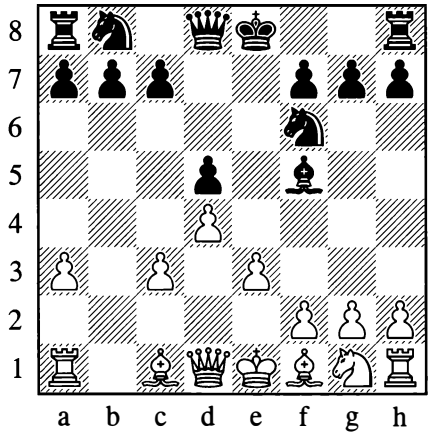
16.♗f5 ♘a5 17.♖ab1 ♘b3

Black is at least equal, for instance:

18.♘c1?! ♘xd2 19.♕xd2 ♗xf5 20.gxf5 ♕d7∓

White's pawns are weak and Black's king is safer.

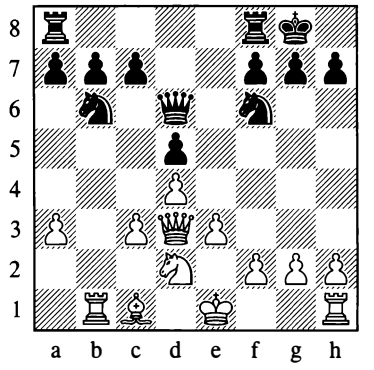
F33) 7.e3 ♗f5



I like the idea of developing the bishop here before ♗d3 prevents it.

8.f3

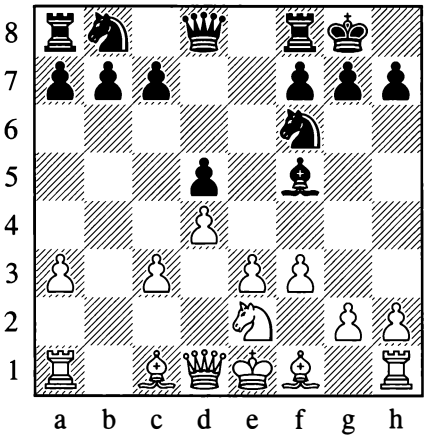
After 8.♗d3?! ♗xd3 9.♕xd3 0–0 White must take care to avoid being positionally worse. For instance: 10.♖b1 ♘bd7 11.♘f3 (11.♖xb7? ♘b6∓ traps the rook) 11...♘b6 12.♘d2 ♕d6



13.c4? (White had to try 13.f3 c5∞ or 13.0–0 ♘g4!?∞, although Black is at least equal in either case) 13...dxc4 14.♘xc4 ♕d5! 15.♘xb6 ♕xg2∓ T. Rahman – Murshed, Dhaka 2012.

8...0–0 9.♘e2

Rather than trade bishops on d3, White is planning an ambitious kingside expansion with g2-g4, challenging our well-placed bishop.



9...c5

I spent some time looking at 9...♖e8 but now slightly prefer the text move, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it is nice to strike in the centre

quickly, in order to counter White's kingside build-up. Secondly, Black might react to g2-g4 and h2-h4 with ...h5, effectively forcing g4-g5, at which point the knight can drop back to e8.

9...♖e8

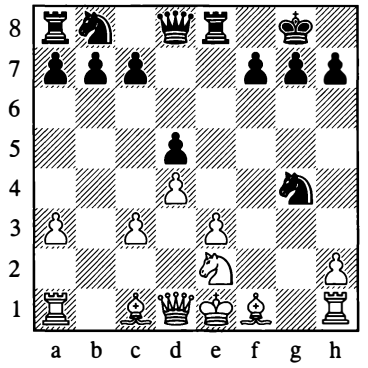
This move is also playable of course. I will present a brief summary of the main possibilities.

10.g4 ♗xg4!?

This piece sac is the most critical continuation, attempting to make full use of the rook on e8.

10...♗e6 11.♘f4 c5 can also be considered; as can 10...♗g6, intending 11.♘f4 c5, or 11.♗g2 h6.

11.fxg4 ♘xg4



12.♖a2!

I have a feeling this is White's best, although I haven't analysed the position especially deeply. Other possibilities include:

a) 12.♕d3 was seen in D. Berczes – Chernyshov, Budapest 2006, when 12...♕h4†N 13.♘g3 ♘d7 14.♗e2 ♘df6 would have given Black good play for the piece.

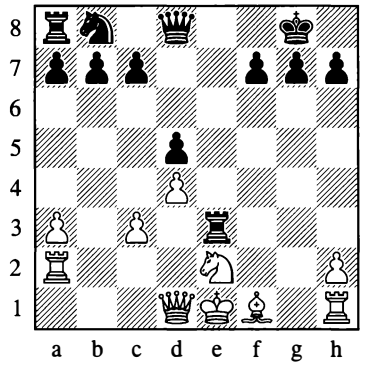
b) 12.♘g3 ♘xe3 13.♗xe3 ♖xe3† 14.♔d2 ♕g5 15.♔c2 occurred in Hackner – Dale, Sheffield 2011, and now 15...c5!N 16.♕h5 ♕xh5 17.♘xh5 cxd4 18.cxd4 ♘c6∞ would have given Black sufficient compensation.

c) 12.♖g1!?N also looks very murky after 12...♕h4† 13.♘g3 c5∞.

12...♘xe3!N

12...♘c6 was played in Khenkin – Kuzmin, Leningrad 1991, when the computerish 13.♘g3!N ♘xe3 14.♕f3!± would have been good for White.

13.♗xe3 ♖xe3



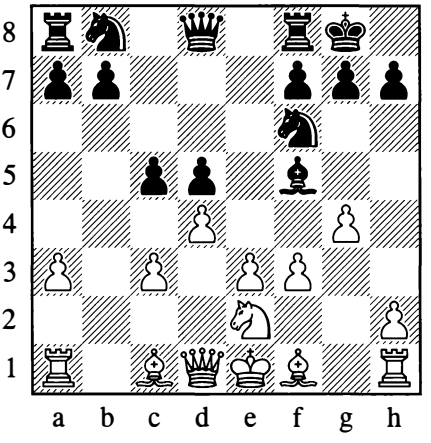
14.♖g1

14.♔f2!? ♕e7 15.♕c1 is another way of playing.

14...♕h4† 15.♖g3 ♘d7∞

Any result is possible.

10.g4



10...♗g6!?

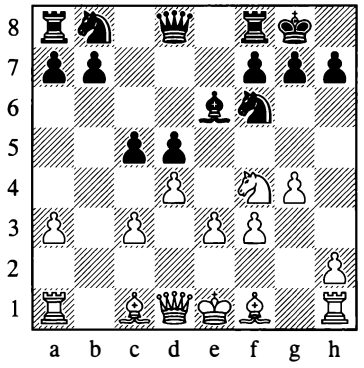
Placing the bishop in the path of White's kingside pawns looks provocative, but it seems to work fine.

10...♗e6

This move is also playable, but I think White can secure an edge with the rare continuation:

11.♘f4!

After 11.♘g3 ♘c6 12.♗d3 ♖e8 13.0–0 h6 14.♖a2 ♕a5 15.♗d2 c4∞ Black was not worse in Hausner – Pezerovic, Bavaria 2005. 11.♗g2 ♘c6 12.0–0 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♖c8 14.h3 ♘a5∞ also led to a balanced game in Harika – Hou Yifan, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010.

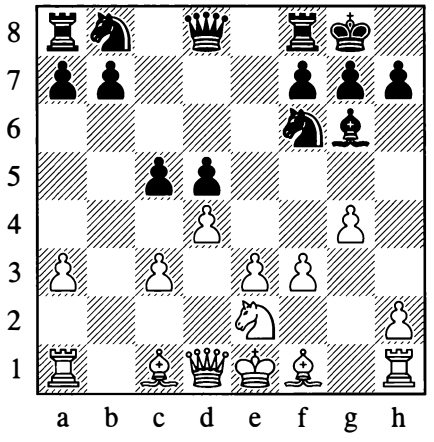


11...♘c6

11...c4 12.♗g2±

12.♗d3 ♖c8 13.0–0 ♘e8 14.♖a2±

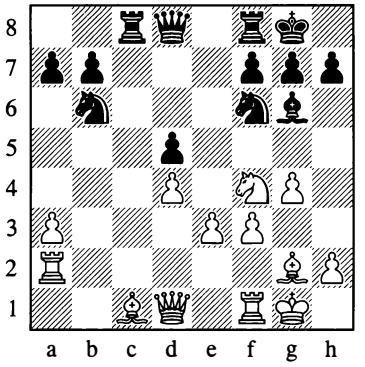
White had a small pull in Smolen – Hera, Slovakia 2006.



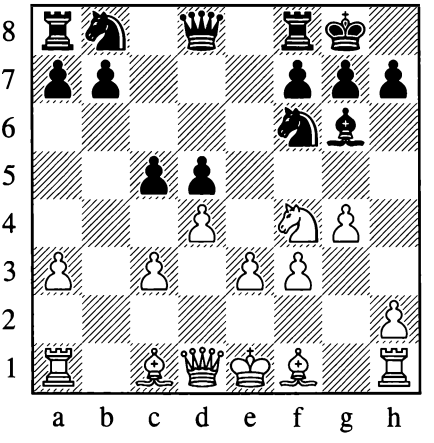
11.♘f4

11.h4 h5 12.g5 ♘e8 leaves White with nothing better than 13.♘f4, when 13...♘c6 transposes to the main line below.

11.♗g2 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♘bd7 13.0–0 ♘b6 14.♘f4 ♖c8 15.♖a2 occurred in one game, and now I like:



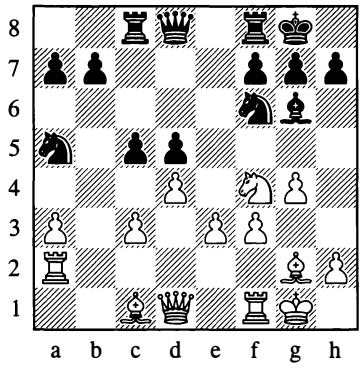
15...♖c6!?N (15...♖e8 worked well for Black in the game: 16.h4 ♕c7 17.g5? [17.♕b3!N ♗c2 18.♕b4∞ was correct] 17...♘h5∓ Stanciu – Mindlin, Iasi 2011) 16.h4 ♕c7∞ And the c2-square becomes available for the bishop.



11...♘c6 12.h4

This is the most aggressive choice, pressing ahead on the kingside.

White can also play to improve his pieces with: 12.♗g2 ♖c8 13.0–0 ♘a5 14.♖a2

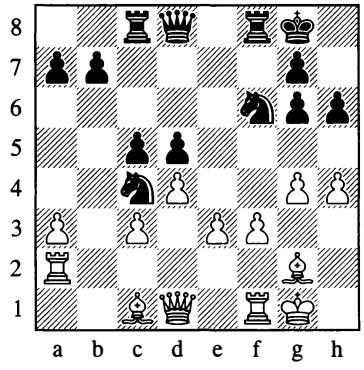


14...♘c4!?N

14...h6?! should not be played unprovoked. At least wait for White to play h2-h4 first! 15.♘xg6 fxg6 This position was reached in Malaniuk – Ivanchuk, Lvov 1988, when 16.e4!N± would have given Black some problems.

14...cxd4N 15.cxd4 ♘c4 is similar to my recommendation and is likely to transpose, but it seems normal to maintain the central tension for a few more moves.

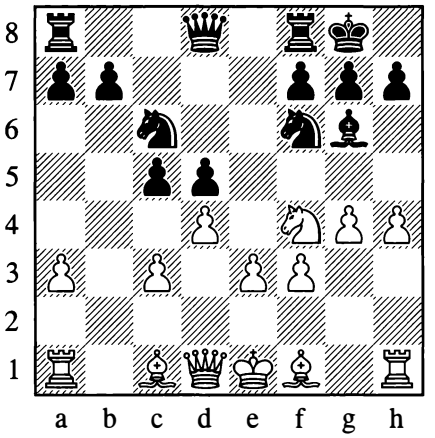
15.h4 h6 16.♘xg6 fxg6



Compared to the Malaniuk – Ivanchuk game, Black has improved his queenside knight whereas White has loosened his kingside by advancing his h-pawn. The continuation might be:

17.♕d3 cxd4 18.cxd4 ♖c6!∞

The rook provides indirect defence of the g6-pawn, as ♕xg6 will be met by ...♘e4. The position remains unclear.



12...h5 13.g5 ♘e8 14.♔f2 c4!?∞

The players reached a complex middlegame with mutual chances in Hillarp Persson – Rozentalis, Gausdal 2006. Black has stabilized his position and followed up by placing one knight on e7, supporting g6 and d5, and the other on d6.

Conclusion

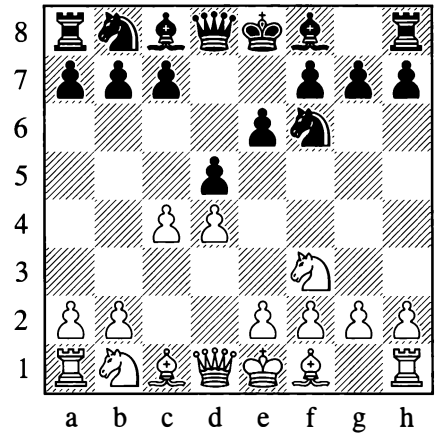
This chapter started by dealing with the rare moves 4.♗d2, 4.♕a4†, 4.♕b3 and 4.♕c2; all of them are playable, but they also suffer from certain drawbacks. We then spent some time looking at the popular 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗f4, when 5...c6 6.e3 ♘e7 gives Black a flexible position with nice prospects. Finally, 4.a3 ♗xc3† 5.bxc3 ♘f6 leads to the most strategically complex positions of the chapter, especially after 6.cxd5 exd5. The main rule for Black is to find some way of disrupting White's smooth plan of development involving ♗d3, ♘e2 and f2-f3, and I have shown some effective methods of doing just that.

PART VII

Catalan and other 4th moves

Introduction to the Catalan and other 4th moves

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6



In this final section we are going to look at White's various alternatives to 4.♘c3 in the above position. In the majority of cases I will advocate a repertoire with 4...♗b4†, maintaining our theme and inviting a transposition to a Ragozin.

By far the most theoretically critical option in this section of the book is:

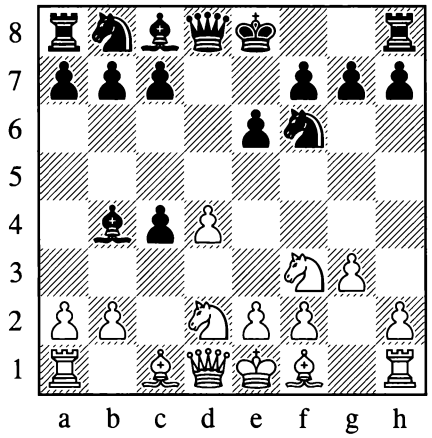
4.g3

This move introduces the Catalan system. This opening has long enjoyed a healthy reputation, but it has become especially popular in the ten or so years, thanks in part to the outstanding results of former world champion Vladimir Kramnik. The recent upsurge has also been helped along by Anand's successful use of this weapon during his thrilling 2010 World Championship match against Topalov.

4...♗b4†

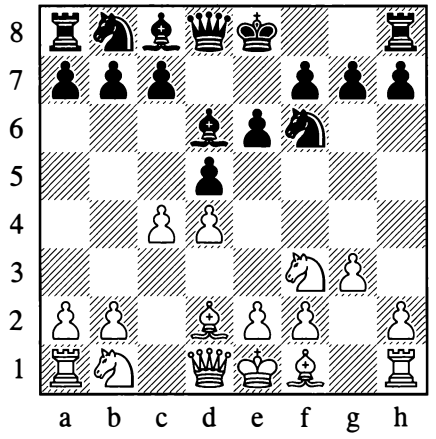
Sticking with our theme. Now 5.♘c3 takes us back to a 5.g3 Ragozin, as covered in Chapter 13. Leaving that move aside, the material will be divided as follows.

Chapter 19 discusses **5.♘bd2**, when **5...dxc4** is my recommendation.



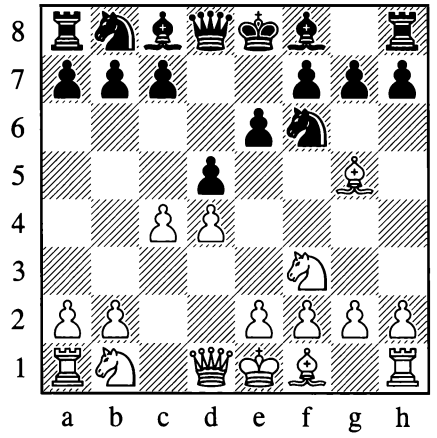
Yet again, we grab this pawn. Depending on how White plays, we may or may not try to hold on to it with ...b5.

Chapter 20 deals with the more popular **5.♗d2**, when **5...♗d6!?** is my choice.



This is an interesting, modern approach, which has been used successfully by several of the world's leading players. It is one of the few lines in the Catalan in which Black can genuinely fight for the initiative rather than merely trying to equalize and make a draw. If White plays an early ♗g5 then Black can try to exploit his bishop pair after an exchange on f6. If White plays something else, then Black may look for a good moment to switch to a Stonewall set-up with ...c6, ...♘e4 and ...f5.

Returning to move 4 after **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6**, Chapter 21 will deal with a pair of bishop moves: **4.♗f4** and **4.♗g5**, the latter being the more popular and important of the two. I suggest meeting it with the Ragozin-style bishop development:



4...♗b4† 5.♘bd2

This is White's main independent try.

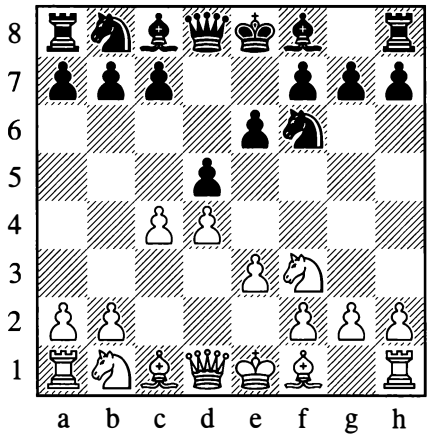
5.♘c3 is the most common choice, transposing directly into a 5.♗g5 Ragozin.

5...dxc4

Once again, we will grab the pawn on offer and look to hold on to it with ...b5 and later ...♗b7. White will have to work hard to demonstrate compensation.

***

Finally, Chapter 22 will end our investigation by dealing with a couple of pawn moves after **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6**. First we will analyse **4.cxd5 exd5**, with a rather tame version of the Carlsbad structure. The main focus of the chapter is **4.e3**, when I made an interesting choice:

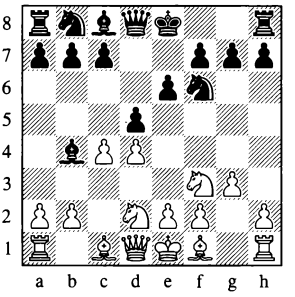


4...a6!?

Since White's last move blocked in his dark-squared bishop, this is the one major variation in the book where it makes absolutely no sense to play 4...♗b4†?!, as 5.♗d2± is simply good for White.

Although Black has many decent options, I especially like the text move. Depending on how White proceeds, Black may follow up with ...c5, but he also has the option of ...dxc4 followed by ...b5, which can lead to a pleasant version of a Queen's Gambit Accepted if timed correctly.

Chapter 19



Catalan with 5.♘bd2

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♗b4† 5.♘bd2 dxc4

A) 6.♕c2 **376**
B) 6.♗g2 0–0 **377**
B1) 7.0–0 b5 **378**
B11) 8.♘e5 **379**
B12) 8.a4 **380**
B2) 7.♕c2 a5!? **381**
B21) 8.0–0 **381**
B22) 8.♕xc4 **383**

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♗b4† 5.♘bd2

Let me remind you that 5.♘c3 reaches the 'Catalan-Ragozin' set-up which was examined in Chapter 13.

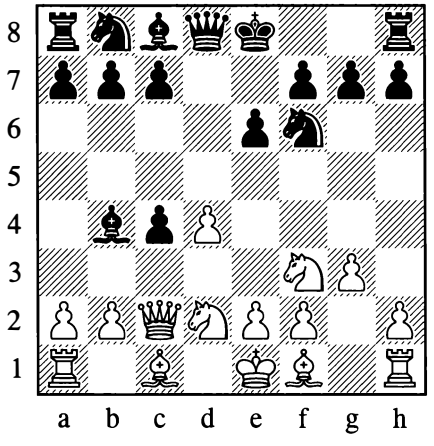
5...dxc4

White has two main options: he can go after the c4-pawn immediately with **A) 6.♕c2** or carry on developing with **B) 6.♗g2**.

6.a3 is hardly ever played: 6...♗xd2† 7.♗xd2 gives Black at least equal chances after 7...♗d7 or 7...♕d5!?.

6.♕a4†?! is even worse: 6...♘c6 7.a3 (7.♗g2 ♖b8! followed by ...b5 makes the white queen look silly) 7...♗xd2† 8.♗xd2 ♕d5! and Black was clearly better in Jongsma – Langeweg, The Hague 1968.

A) 6.♕c2



This move is played quite regularly but White isn't scoring particularly well with it.

6...b5

Black could also play 6...c5 with an equal game, but it looks logical to defend the extra pawn and ask White what he intends to do about it.

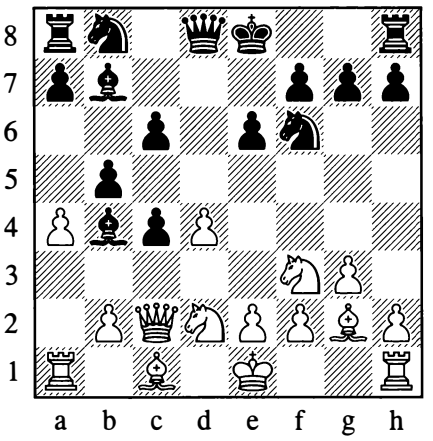
7.a4

White should play this immediately, otherwise Black will play ...♗b7 and ...a6, when his bishop will enjoy a clear view of the long diagonal.

7...c6 8.♗g2 ♗b7

8...a5 is a thematic move in these positions, freeing space for the rook and securing the bishop on b4. After 9.0–0 0–0 we transpose exactly to the later variation B21, where this position is reached after 6.♗g2 0–0 7.♕c2 a5!? 8.0–0 b5 9.a4 c6.

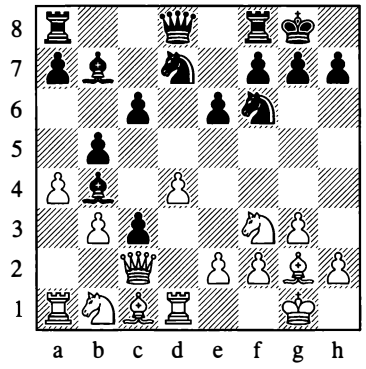
The plan of ...b5 followed by ...♗b7 is a useful extra option against the particular move order chosen by White in this variation. The main difference is that the early ...b5 doesn't work so well when both sides have already castled, as Black falls prey to a thematic ♘g5 trick, winning material due to the attack on the long diagonal combined with the prospect of mate on h7. See 7...b5? in the notes to variation B2 for the specific line.



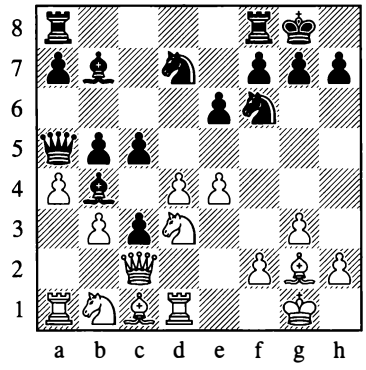
9.0–0 0–0 10.b3

This seems like the critical test.

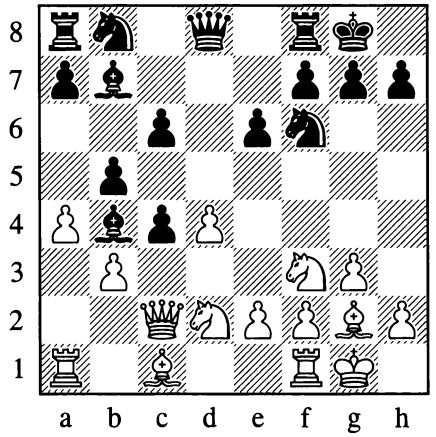
10.♖d1 is a slower approach. 10...♘bd7 11.b3 (11.♘g5 a6 12.b3 c3 13.♘b1 h6∓ was no improvement for White in Putka – Alekseev, Wroclaw 2014) 11...c3 12.♘b1



12...♕a5 (12...c5!? 13.♘xc3 ♖c8!?N 14.♘xb5 cxd4∞ is also interesting) 13.♘e1 ♘d5 14.♘d3 c5 15.e4 ♘5f6 The position is messy but good for Black, for instance:



16.dxc5 ♘xc5 17.♘xb4 ♕xb4 18.♘xc3 ♘xb3 19.♕b2 a5∓ Black kept his extra pawn and stood better in S. Ernst – Illner, Amsterdam 2012.



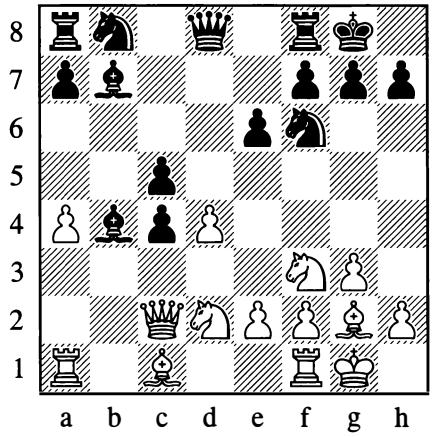
10...c5!

10...c3!? 11.♘b1 c5 (or 11...bxa4!?) is perfectly playable, and will be covered shortly via a different move order under variation B12. However, against the current move order with an early ♕c2, the text move is a stronger option.

11.bxc4

11.axb5?! is well met by 11...c3, as 12.♘b1?? ♗e4–+ would be a disaster for White.

11...bxc4



12.♗b2 ♗xd2 13.♕xd2 cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♘bd7 15.♖fc1 ♗d5∓

White did not have enough compensation in Korley – Gajewski, Reykjavik 2015.

B) 6.♗g2

This is the main line, developing the Catalan bishop before worrying about the c4-pawn.

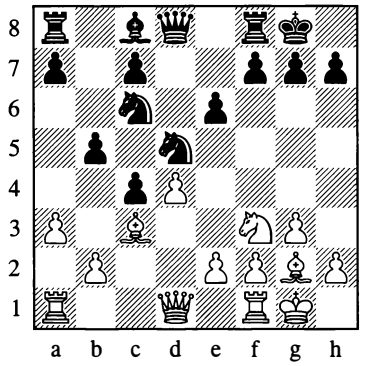
6...0–0

6...c3 has been played but White gets a strong initiative for the material.

6...b5 has been the most popular move and would also be a good choice, but castling is my personal preference.

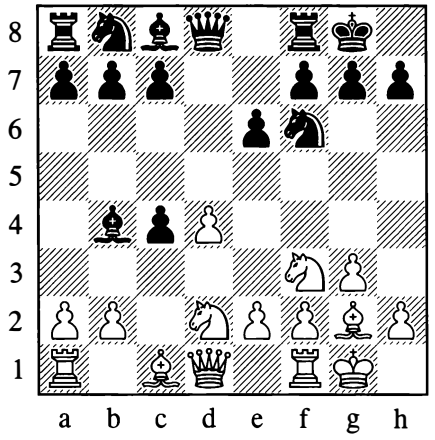
White's two main options are **B1) 7.0–0** and **B2) 7.♕c2**.

7.a3 ♗xd2†! 8.♗xd2 ♘c6 9.♗c3 ♘d5 10.0–0 b5 is good for Black, for instance:



11.e4 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♖b8 13.♕e2 ♘a5 14.♖ad1 ♕e7 15.♕b2 ♘b3 16.♖fe1 ♖b6 17.♘d2 ♘xd2 18.♖xd2 a5∓ Arjun – Panelo Munoz, Montcada 2013.

B1) 7.0–0

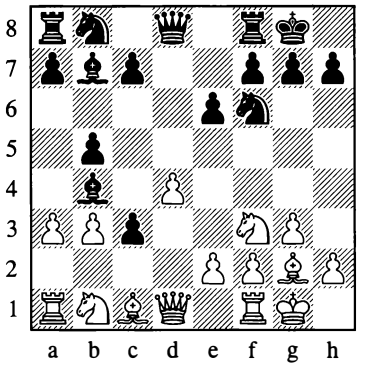


7...b5

Black defends his extra pawn in typical fashion. Since White has committed his queen's knight to d2 rather than c3, he will find it hard to apply additional pressure to the b5-pawn.

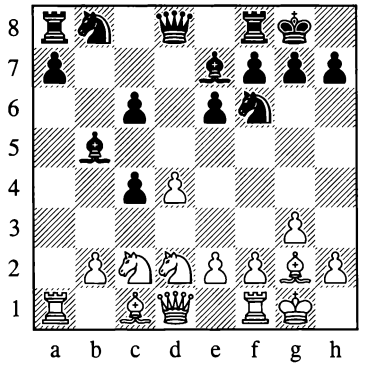
We will analyse the sideline **B11) 8.♘e5** followed by the more popular **B12) 8.a4**.

8.b3?! is flawed in view of: 8...c3 9.♘b1 ♗b7 10.a3



10...♗e4 11.♘e1 ♗xg2 12.♘xg2 (12.♔xg2 ♗a5∓) 12...♗a5 and White was struggling to equalize in Gijswijt – Arnaudov, Haarlem 2011.

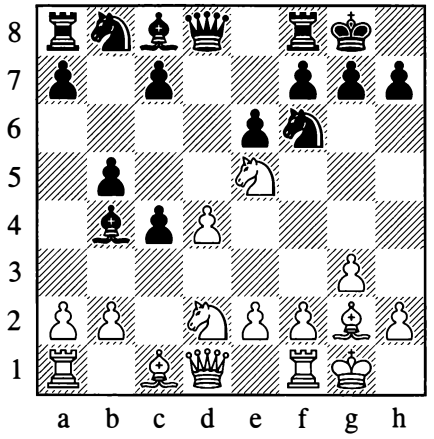
8.♘e1!? is a more restrained knight move but it has its merits, as the knight avoids being hit by ...f6 and may find a good home on c2. The recent and, so far, only practical test continued: 8...c6 9.a4 ♗a6 10.♘c2 ♗e7 11.axb5 ♗xb5



12.♘b1 ♘bd7 13.♗d2 a5 14.♕e1 a4∞ Dubov – Yu Yangyi, Moscow 2016.

B11) 8.♘e5

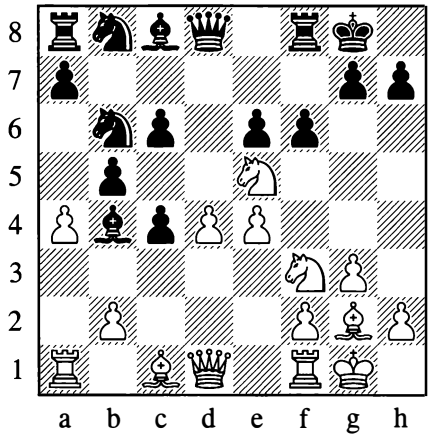
The knight leaps forwards, but Black can block the long diagonal with ...♘d5 and later play ...f6 to chase the knight away.



8...♘d5 9.a4 c6 10.e4

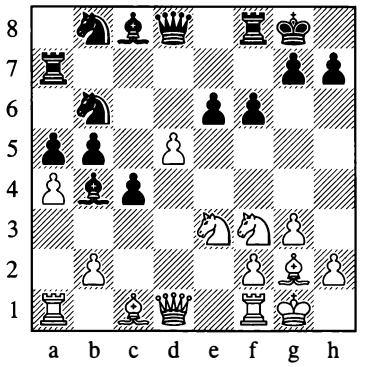
10.♕c2 ♗b7 11.♘e4 f6 12.♘f3 ♘a6!N is good for Black. The point of the last move is to retreat the b4-bishop and play ...♘ab4, although there is no hurry to do so, and Black may wish to develop the queen and a8-rook before doing anything else.

10...♘b6 11.♘df3 f6



12.a5

12.♘g4 was recently played against me in a blitz game. 12...a5 13.♘e3 ♖a7 14.d5 cxd5 15.exd5 and here I should have played:



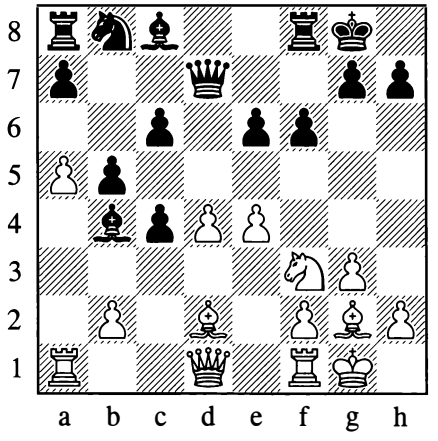
15...bxa4!N (15...♖d7∞ was Fitzcarraldo – Antidrome, Internet 2016) 16.dxe6 ♕xd1 17.♖xd1 ♗xe6∓ Despite the messy pawn structure, Black is still two pawns up.

12...♘6d7

So White gets to exchange his knight rather than retreat it – but he has been forced to close the queenside, leaving Black with a solid extra pawn.

13.♘xd7 ♕xd7 14.♗d2

I think the most accurate move is:



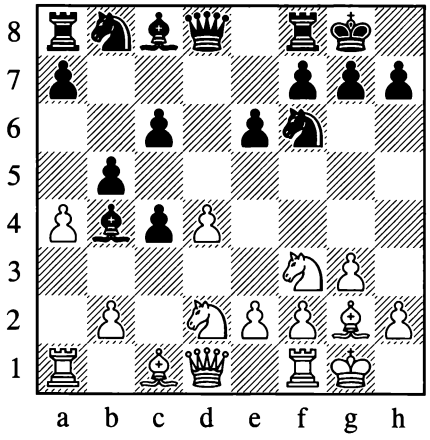
14...♘a6!N

14...c5!? is also pretty good: 15.dxc5 ♗xd2 16.♘xd2?! (16.♕xd2 ♕xd2 17.♘xd2 e5∓) 16...e5∓ Petrik – Luch, Czech Republic 2011.

15.♗xb4 ♘xb4 16.e5 ♗b7∓

White does not have enough compensation.

B12) 8.a4 c6



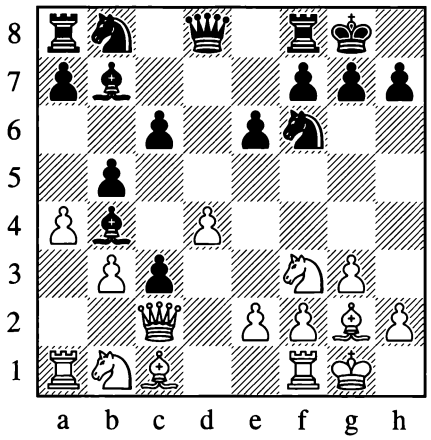
9.b3!?

A rare move order, but possibly the most accurate.

9.♕c2 ♗b7 leads back to variation A. There are all kinds of transpositions as the queen can go to c2 at almost any turn from moves 6 to 11; however, I think White does best to delay it, for the reason explained in the next note.

9...c3 10.♘b1 ♗b7 11.♕c2

This position can also arise via the 6.♕c2 move order, after 6...b5 7.a4 c6 8.♗g2 ♗b7 9.0–0 0–0 10.b3, and now 10...c3!? 11.♘b1, as mentioned in the notes to variation A. However, in that line 10...c5! was a stronger option for Black. By delaying ♕c2, White avoids that particular problem.



11...c5

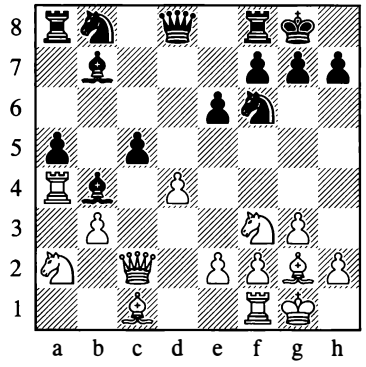
Challenging White's central pawn while opening the long diagonal for the bishop.

11...bxa4!?

This is an equally good alternative.

12.♖xa4 c5 13.♘xc3 a5 14.♘a2

14.dxc5 ♘bd7 15.♗a3 ♗xc5 16.♗xc5 ♘xc5 17.♖c4 ♕b6 was fine for Black in Lissang – Grandelius, Stockholm 2014.



14...♗e4 15.♕d1?!

15.♕b2 is a better square for the queen, and after 15...♘bd7 the position is balanced.

15...♘bd7 16.♘xb4 cxb4 17.♗b2 ♘b6 18.♖a1 ♕d5∓

Caruana – Gelfand, Amsterdam 2010.

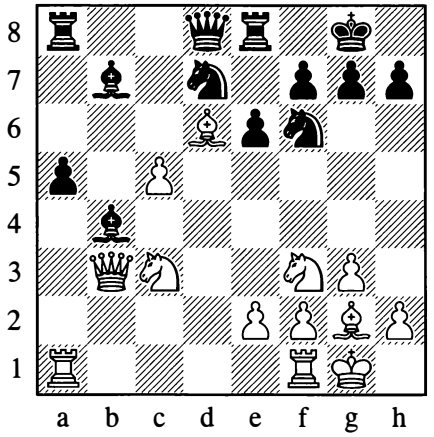
12.♘xc3 bxa4 13.dxc5 axb3!?

The position remains roughly equal after this

move, but each side will have a passed pawn on the queenside.

13...♗xc5 14.♘xa4 ♗e7= kept things more symmetrical and led to a quick draw in Alburt – Christiansen, Greenville 1983.

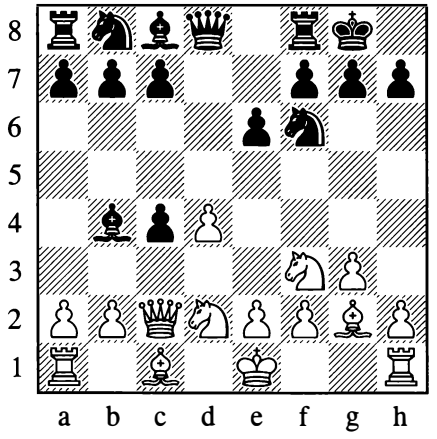
14.♕xb3 a5 15.♗f4 ♘bd7 16.♗d6 ♖e8



17.♖fd1 ♕c8 18.♘a4 ♘e4 19.♖ac1 ♗d5 20.♕e3 ♘xd6 21.cxd6 ♕a6

It's still dynamically equal at this stage, but Black's unbalancing strategy paid off and he went on to win in Landa – Movsesian, Czech Republic 2015.

B2) 7.♕c2



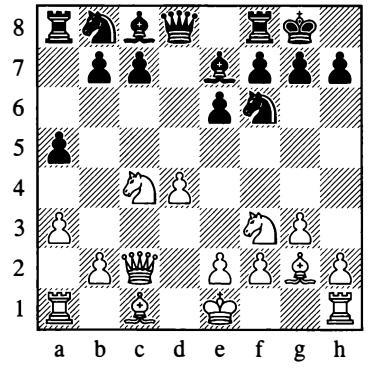
7...a5!?

This move has several uses: it grabs some space on the queenside, supports the b4-bishop and improves the scope of the rook.

7...b5? is not so effective against this move order, due to the thematic trick: 8.a4 c6?! 9.axb5 cxb5 10.♘g5!+– Because Black has castled, ...♘d5 is impossible due to mate on h7. Please remember this motif, as it can occur in many different opening variations involving a kingside fianchetto by White.

We will analyse **B21) 8.0–0** followed by the more obvious **B22) 8.♕xc4**.

A harmless alternative is:
8.a3 ♗e7
8...♗xd2†!?N also makes sense: 9.♗xd2 b5 10.a4 c6 11.♘e5 ♘d5 12.0–0 f6 13.♘f3 ♗b7∞
9.♘xc4



9...b5!?N
9...b6 10.0–0 ♗b7 was also fine for Black in Tsolakidou – Balokas, Paleochora 2015.
10.♘ce5 ♗b7 11.0–0 ♗e4 12.♕b3 ♕d5 13.♕xd5 ♘xd5=

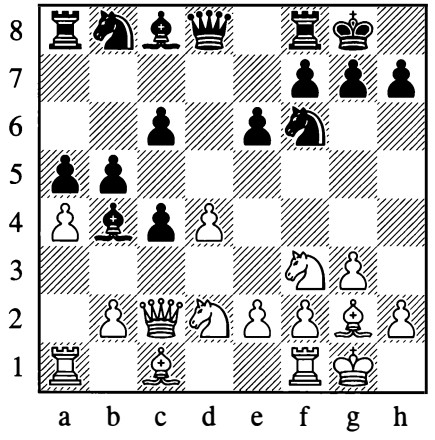
B21) 8.0–0 b5 9.a4

This seems like the only critical move.

9.♘g5?! is ineffective here, as Black can simply move his rook. 9...♖a6 10.♘de4 Trying to create an attack doesn't cause problems after: 10...♘xe4 11.♕xe4 f5∓

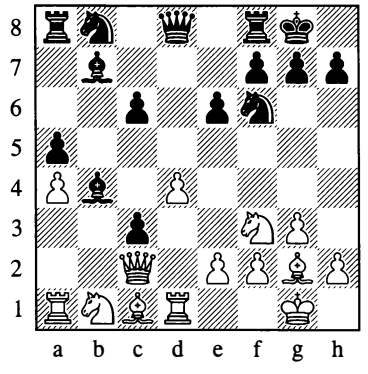
9.e4?! also fails to impress: 9...♗b7 (9...a4!?N is a good alternative, preventing a2-a4 and consolidating Black's extra pawn) 10.e5 ♘d5 11.♘e4 h6∓ Haba – Jaracz, Erbendorf 2009.

9...c6



10.b3

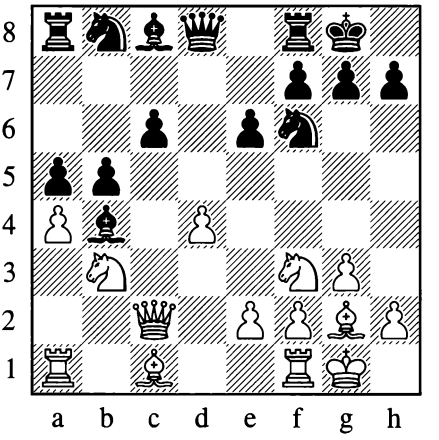
10.♖d1 was played in Nakamura – Golod, Internet (blitz) 2006. My suggestion would be 10...♗b7!N, intending: 11.b3 c3 12.♘b1 bxa4 13.bxa4



13...c5! 14.dxc5 ♕c8 And only Black can be better.

10...cxb3 11.♘xb3

White certainly has compensation for the pawn, but Black should not be worse. There are a few possible continuations, but my preference is:



11...bxa4!? 12.♖xa4 ♗a6

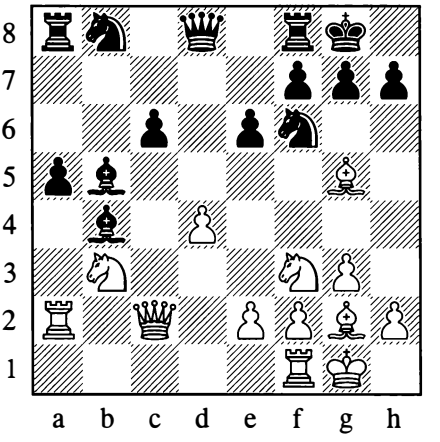
With the usual ...♗b5 plan.

13.♗g5

After 13.♗a3 ♗b5 14.♗xb4 ♗xa4 15.♗xf8 ♕xf8 the best White can hope for is to be equal after winning back a pawn.

13...♗b5 14.♖a2

Here I found an interesting way to fight for the advantage:



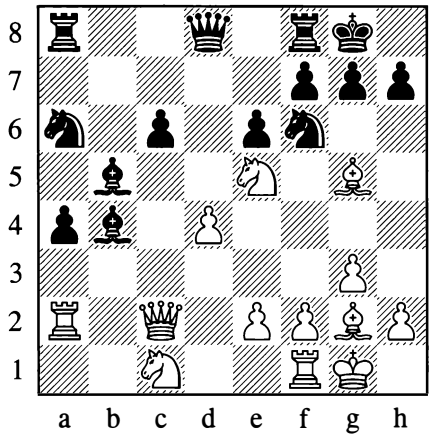
14...♘a6!N

To understand this move, we should first check the similar line: 14...♘bd7 15.♘e5 a4!?N (15...♖c8 was equal in Raetsky – A. Sokolov, Geneva 2011) 16.♘xc6 axb3 (16...♕b6?! 17.♘xb4±) 17.♘xd8 bxc2 18.♖xa8 ♗xe2 19.♖c1 ♗d1∞ It's a weird position, but it should be equal as long as White finds the right way to give up the exchange on c2.

Having the knight on a6 rather than d7 would help in the above line, as ♘e5 has less impact, as the subsequent ♘xc6 will not attack an unprotected bishop on b4. This is rather a subtle point, and perhaps overkill when preparing against a rare opening line, but it's an interesting point nonetheless. Objectively, it makes the difference between fighting for an advantage with Black or allowing White to escape with equality.

15.♘e5 a4 16.♘c1

16.♘xc6? is not really an option here due to 16...♕b6! 17.♘d2 (or 17.♘c1 ♖fc8–+ and Black wins material) 17...♘d5 18.♗xd5 exd5 19.♘e7† ♗xe7 20.♗xe7 ♖fe8∓ Black will have an extra pawn and a dominant position.



16...♕e8

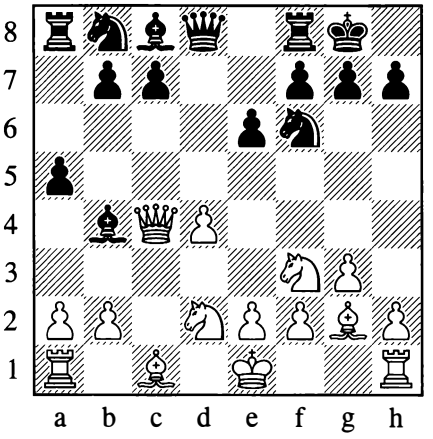
16...♖c8 17.♘cd3 ♕xd4∓ is also good.

17.♗xf6 gxf6 18.♘g4 ♗e7∓

Black has an extra pawn plus the two bishops, and can chase the knight away with ...f5 or ...h5.

B22) 8.♕xc4

Recapturing the pawn is safer and more popular. The drawback is that White's queen is a bit exposed, which explains our next move.



8...b6 9.a3

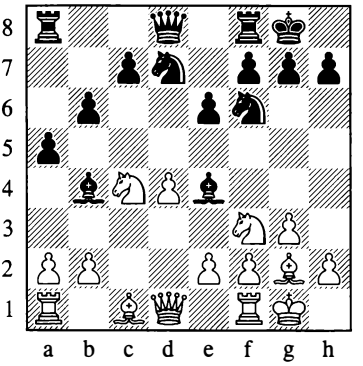
White can also make a pre-emptive retreat:

9.♕c2 ♗b7

Without the queen on c4 as a target, there is not so much point in putting the bishop on a6.

10.0–0 ♘bd7 11.♘c4 ♗e4 12.♕d1

This position was reached twice by Zhou Jianchao (not the most famous Chinese GM, but still rated over 2600) as Black.



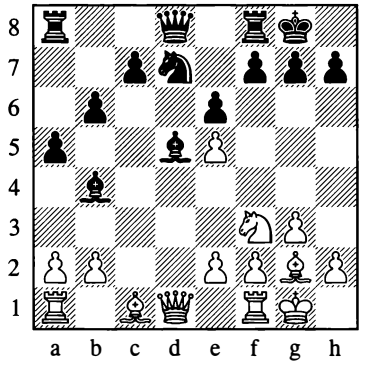
12...♗d5

This was his second try.

12...b5 was his first attempt, after which 13.♘ce5 ♘xe5 (13...♕c8!N= followed by ...♕b7 looks better) 14.dxe5↑ left him struggling to contain White's initiative in Bai Jinshi – Zhou Jianchao, Xinghua 2016.

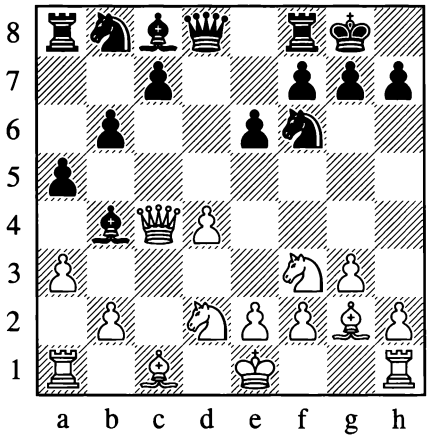
13.♘ce5 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♘d7

14...♘e4!?N also deserves consideration.



15.♕c2 ♗e7 16.♖d1 c5 17.e4 ♗c6 18.♘d2 ♕c7 19.f4 b5∞

Zeng Chongsheng – Zhou Jianchao, Xinghua 2016.

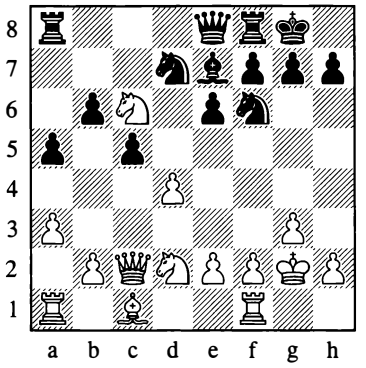


9...♗e7

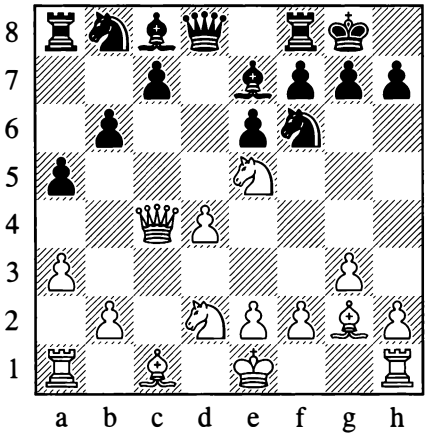
Black does best to retreat this bishop before deciding whether to put the light-squared bishop on a6 or b7.

10.♘e5

10.♕c2 is similar to the note to White's previous move. Once again, now that he has pre-empted ...♗a6, it makes more sense to put the bishop on the long diagonal. 10...♗b7 11.0–0 ♘bd7 12.♘e5 ♗xg2 13.♔xg2 c5 14.♘c6 ♕e8



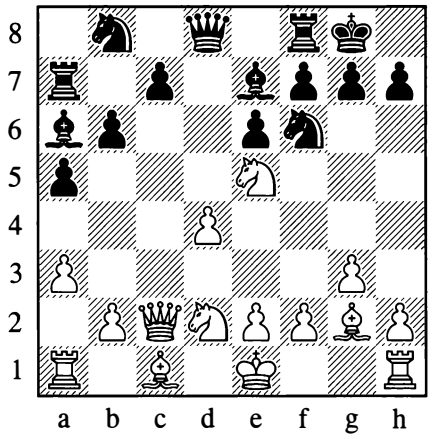
15.♘f3 cxd4 16.♘cxd4 (16.♘fxd4?! ♗c5∓ is only going to leave White's knights in trouble) 16...♖c8 17.♕a4 ♘c5 18.♕xe8 ♖fxe8 19.b4 ♘ce4= Korchmar – Goryachkina, Moscow 2016.



10...♗a6

10...♖a7!? doesn't make a lot of difference, as ...♗a6 is likely to follow. 11.♘df3 ♗a6 12.♕a4 (12.♕c2 reaches the main line below) 12...c5 13.♗f4 ♘d5∞ was fine for Black in Petrik – Hracek, Slovakia 2010.

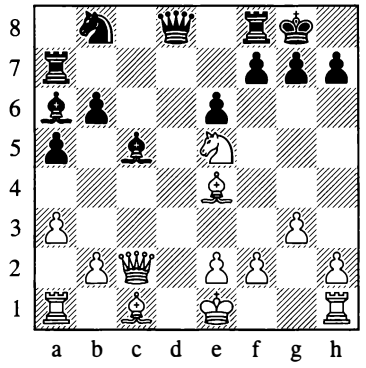
11.♕c2 ♖a7



12.♘df3

This move defends the d4-pawn while safeguarding e2, thus enabling White to castle without losing a pawn.

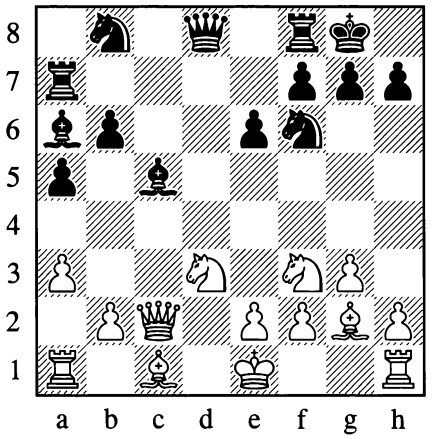
I also considered: 12.♘e4!?N c5!? (12...♕xd4∞ is also possible of course; White's lead in development offers about enough compensation for the pawn, but Black should not be worse.) 13.dxc5 ♘xe4 14.♗xe4 ♗xc5



15.♗xh7† ♔h8 16.♗f4 ♖c7⩲ Black has great compensation.

12...c5 13.dxc5 ♗xc5 14.♘d3

14.0–0?! ♖c7 leaves White's queen awkwardly placed.



14...♖c7!N

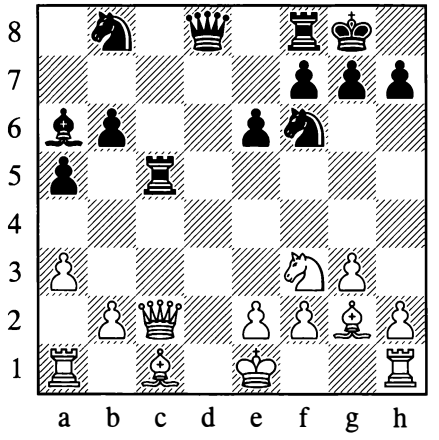
14...♗xd3 15.♕xd3 ♕xd3 16.exd3 ♘d5 17.♔e2 ♖c7 18.♗d2 ♘c6 was equal in Donchenko – Wojtaszek, Germany 2016.

The text move is a try for an advantage. Play may continue:

15.♘xc5

15.♕b3 ♗d6∓ puts White under some pressure, with ...♗c4 coming next.

15...♖xc5



16.♕b1

16.♕b3?! ♗c4∓

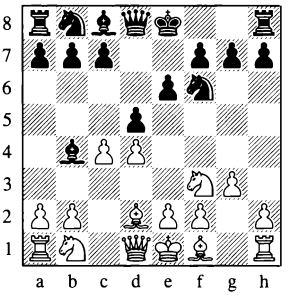
16...h6

Black is certainly not worse. White may have the bishop pair, but he is behind in development and will have to find a way to arrange castling without dropping the e2-pawn.

Conclusion

5.♘bd2 is not a bad move, but 5...dxc4 is a good move for Black – especially as it's in keeping with one of the primary themes of this book. We can safely meet 6.♕c2 with 6...b5, keeping in mind the 10...c5! finesse, which promises Black the better game. Our main line continues 6.♗g2 0–0 7.♕c2, when 7...b5? would be a mistake, but 7...a5!? is an attractive idea. If White ignores the c4-pawn then we can defend it safely with ...b5, while if he takes it with 8.♕xc4, then 8...b6 highlights his exposed queen. It seems to me that Black is at least equal in the main variations, and often has chances to fight for the advantage.

Chapter 20



Catalan with 5.♗d2

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♗b4† 5.♗d2 ♗d6 6.♗g2 c6

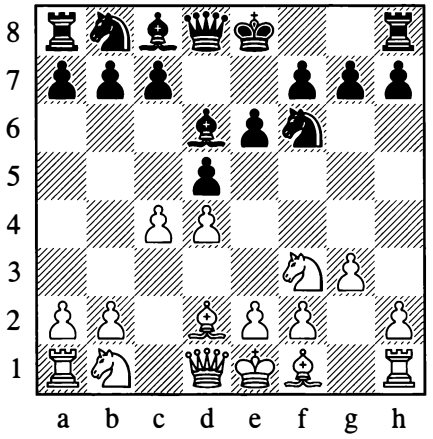
A) 7.b3 **390**
B) 7.♘c3 0–0 **391**
B1) 8.0–0 **391**
B2) 8.♗g5 h6!? 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 10.0–0 ♕d8!? **394**
B21) 11.e3N **394**
B22) 11.e4 **395**
C) 7.♕c2 ♘bd7 8.0–0 0–0 **396**
C1) 9.♘c3 **397**
C2) 9.♗g5 **399**
C3) 9.♖d1 ♘e4 **401**
C31) 10.♗c1 **401**
C32) 10.♗e3!?N **402**
C33) 10.♗e1 **404**

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♗b4† 5.♗d2

This is the main line, and Avrukh's recommendation.

5...♗d6

So why did we check on b4, only to drop back to d6 immediately? The answer is to deny White's knight on f3 access to the d2-square, from where it can support an e2-e4 pawn break. The specific line I have in mind is 4...♗d6 5.♗g2 c6 6.0–0 0–0 7.♘c3 ♘bd7 8.♘d2!±, when White is ready to play e2-e4 with a clear edge. According to my database, he has achieved an obscenely high score of just over 80% from this position.



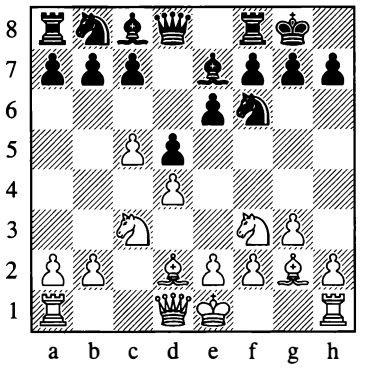
6.♗g2

Having played g2-g3, it is hard for White to manage without putting the bishop on g2, although he occasionally tries to force through some other plan. Here are two such examples:

6.c5

If White is going to play this move then it makes sense to try it immediately, otherwise Black will have time for ...c6 followed by dropping the bishop back to c7.

6...♗e7 7.♘c3 0–0 8.♗g2



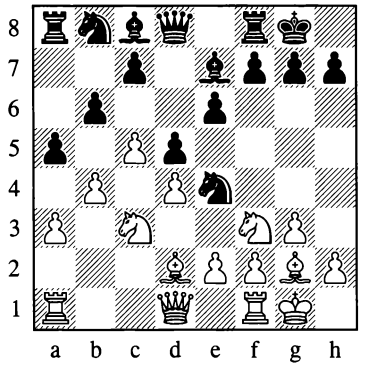
8...b6!

Challenging White's pawn chain makes a lot of sense.

9.b4 a5 10.a3 ♘e4 11.0–0?!

11.♘xe4? is not really an option, as 11...dxe4 12.♘e5 ♕xd4 13.f4 ♗b7 leaves Black a pawn up.

11.e3 f5 gave Black a pleasant version of a Stonewall in Murden – Zelovic, corr. 2006. I checked the text move to see if White could improve his prospects by speeding up his development, but Black can create problems with:



11...axb4 12.axb4 ♖xa1 13.♕xa1 ♘xd2 14.♘xd2 ♘c6! 15.♘a2

The only way to defend b4 and d4.

15...♗a6∓

White's strategy has not been a success at all.

6.♘c3

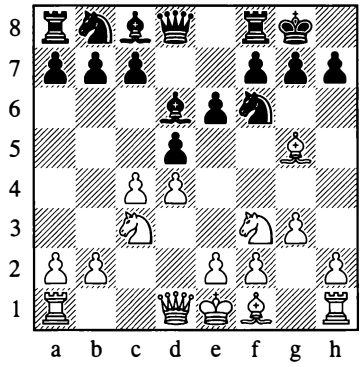
This was the move order chosen by Avrukh,

although he soon follows up with ♗g2, transposing to one of our main lines.

6...0–0 7.♗g5

7.♗g2 c6 8.0–0 converts to variation B1 below.

7.♕c2 is well met by 7...c5!, as Avrukh points out.

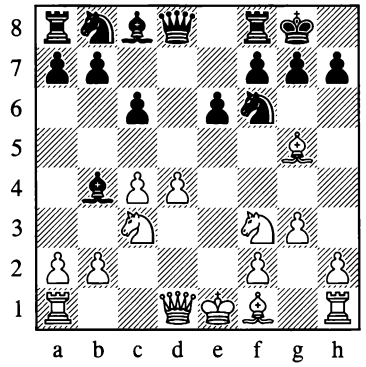


7...c6 8.e4

8.♗g2 is given by Avrukh; we will come back to this position under variation B2 below.

8...dxe4 9.♘xe4 ♗b4† 10.♘c3

White has carried out the e2-e4 advance but his kingside remains undeveloped. Black can highlight this with:



10...e5!?N

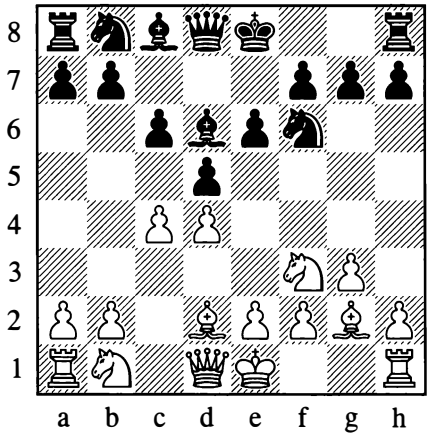
10...h6 is also decent. 11.♗d2 was seen in Ju Wenjun – Admiraal, Wijk aan Zee 2016, and now 11...c5N 12.a3 ♗xc3 13.♗xc3 ♘e4 would have been equal.

10...c5!? could also be investigated.

11.dxe5 ♕xd1† 12.♖xd1 ♘e4 13.♗d2 ♘xd2 14.♔xd2 ♗g4 15.♗e2 ♘d7=

Black will win back the pawn with a comfortable game.

6...c6



We will analyse **A) 7.b3**, **B) 7.♘c3** and **C) 7.♕c2**.

7.0–0 0–0 will transpose to one of the main lines below.

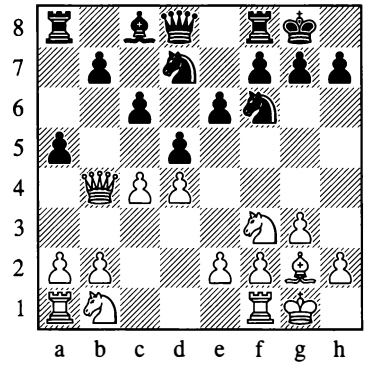
White has also tried:

7.♕b3 0–0 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♗b4!?

White plays for a favourable bishop trade, but the plan is rather slow.

9.♘c3 is covered on page 393 – see 9.♕b3 in the notes to variation B1.

9...♗xb4 10.♕xb4 a5



11.♕c3

Roiz points out that 11.♕b3 b6 12.♘c3 ♗a6 13.cxd5 cxd5 also gives Black easy equality.

11...b6 12.♘bd2 ♗b7 13.♘e5 c5

Black's light-squared bishop is not so bad after all.

14.♘xd7 ♕xd7 15.♖fd1 ♖fc8=

Birnboim – Roiz, Beersheba 2014.

A) 7.b3 ♘e4

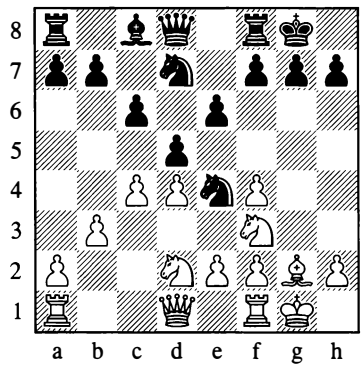
This is one of our main plans, preparing to establish a Stonewall structure with ...f5.

8.0–0 0–0

Black can also consider delaying castling, as in the following game: 8...♘d7!? 9.♘c3 f5 10.♘xe4 fxe4 11.♘g5 ♘f6 12.f3 h6 13.fxe4 hxg5 14.e5 ♗e7 15.exf6 gxf6 16.♕c2 f5 17.a3 ♗f6∞ S. Ernst – I. Sokolov, Amsterdam 2013.

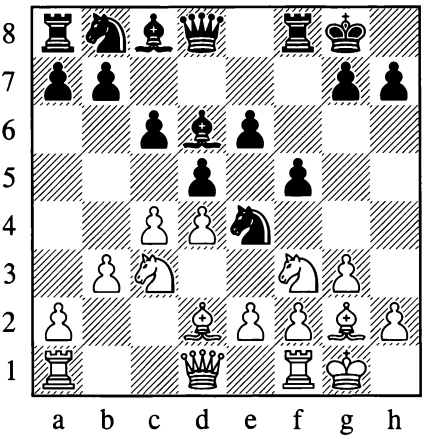
9.♘c3

9.♗f4 ♗xf4 10.gxf4 is pretty harmless. 10...♘d7 11.♘bd2 and now 11...f5 was equal in Askerov – Goganov, St Petersburg 2016, but I would be tempted to try:



11...♘c3!?N 11.♕e1 b5 With ideas of ...b4 and ...a5, gaining some space on the queenside and keeping ...f5 in reserve.

9...f5

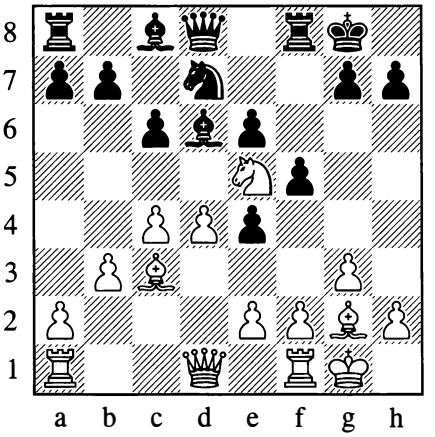


10.♘xe4

10.♕c2 ♘xd2 (Black can also consider 10...♘d7, heading for f6) 11.♘xd2 ♘d7 12.a3 ♘f6 13.e3 ♗d7 was equal in Gledura – Ashwin, Saint Louis 2016.

10...dxe4 11.♘e5 ♘d7 12.♗c3

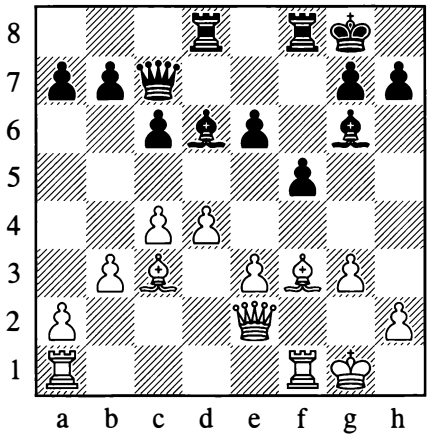
12.♗f4 ♕c7 13.♘xd7 ♗xd7 14.♗xd6 ♕xd6= is fine for Black. His bishop is no worse than White's, and he can look to prepare ...e5.



12...♕c7 13.♘xd7 ♗xd7

The position is pretty level, but the slight imbalance in the pawn structure means that the game is still interesting.

14.♕d2 ♖ad8 15.e3 ♗e8 16.f3 exf3 17.♗xf3 ♗g6 18.♕e2



18...♕e7!N

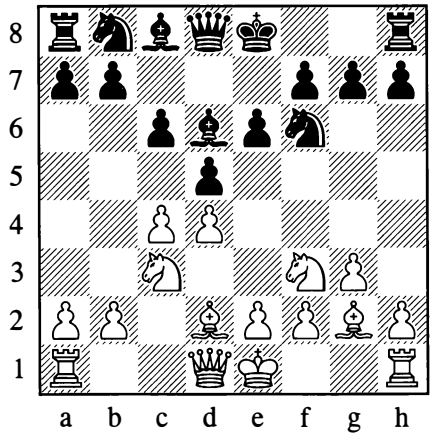
18...c5 19.♖ad1 b6 was the continuation of Kulaots – Kryvoruchko, Gjakova 2016, when 20.d5!± would have given White an edge.

The text move prepares to transfer the queen to g5 in some situations. Another purpose is shown after:

19.♖ae1 e5∞

And White is unable to force the bishop off the b8-e5 diagonal with c4-c5.

B) 7.♘c3



This is a popular and active approach.

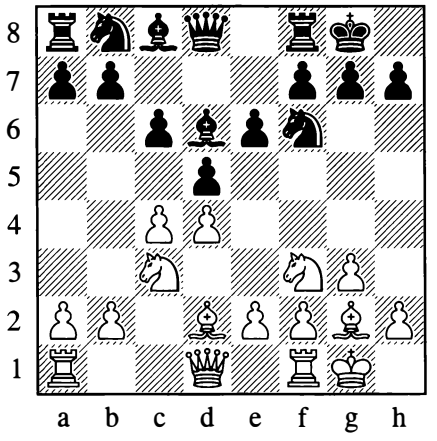
7...0–0

7...♘bd7 has been the more common choice. The two moves can easily transpose to one another, but having the knight on d7 can make it difficult to play ...♘e4 in many situations, as after ♘xe4 dxe4, followed by ♘g5, Black will not be able to defend the e4-pawn, because ...f5 is not playable as the e6-pawn would not be protected.

White's two main options are **B1) 8.0–0** and **B2) 8.♗g5**.

8.b3 ♘e4! shows the advantage of our chosen move order; in the event of 9.♘xe4 (9.0–0 f5 gives Black a nice version of the Stonewall set-up examined later) 9...dxe4 10.♘g5 f5→ Black is doing well.

B1) 8.0–0



8...♘bd7

This is Black's most common continuation. Let me remind you that in the similar position with the bishop on c1, White would obtain an easy advantage with the plan of ♘d2 followed by e2-e4, but now he has to come up with something else.

Although Black's last move was the most natural developer, it does have the slight drawback of making the ...♘e4 plan harder to carry out, due to the loose e6-pawn as

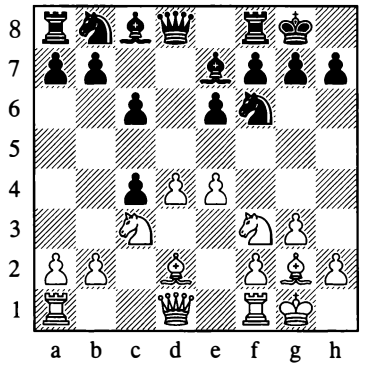
explained in the note to the previous move. On the plus side, the knight controls the important ...e5-square, enabling Black to counter e2-e4 with ...e5 in some situations.

Before going any further, I would like to mention an interesting alternative:

8...dxc4!?

I always like to keep a close eye on what Kramnik is up to, and the fact that he has played this move means it must be okay, despite being quite provocative. The idea is relatively untested but I will present a few lines to serve as a starting point for your own research.

9.e4 ♗e7



10.a4!

Preventing ...b5 is surely White's best idea. After 10.♕e2?! b5 White is struggling to prove compensation, and Kramnik soon took control: 11.♖fd1 ♗b7 12.♗g5 ♘bd7 13.h4 h6 14.♗f4 ♖e8 15.♗h3 b4∓ Khotenashvili – Kramnik, Doha 2015.

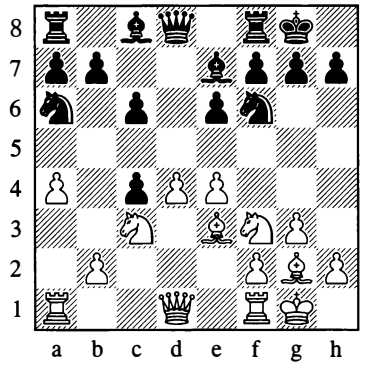
10...♘a6

I also checked: 10...c5 11.e5 (11.d5!? exd5 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 ♕xd5 14.♖e1 ♘c6 15.♘e5 ♕d6 16.♘xc4 ♕d3 17.♘a5⩲) 11...♘d5 12.dxc5 ♘a6 13.♕e2 ♘xc5 14.♕xc4 a5 Intending ...b6 and ...♗a6. 15.♕g4 Threatening ♗h6. 15...f5 16.exf6 ♗xf6 17.♖ad1 ♗d7± This looks playable for Black although White can probably claim a small edge due to his better structure.

11.♗e3

11.♕e2 can be met by 11...♘b4 12.♕xc4 b6∞ intending ...♗a6.

11.♗f4!? is another option.



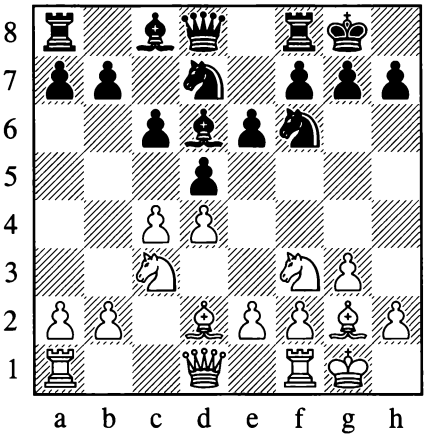
11...♘b4 12.♘e5!

12.♕e2 ♘g4! leads to dynamic play after 13.♗f4 e5 14.dxe5 g5! 15.♗d2 ♘d3∞.

The text move prevents ...♘g4 while attacking c4.

12...b6 13.♘xc4 ♗a6±

The position is certainly playable for Black, but still a touch better for White due to his extra space.

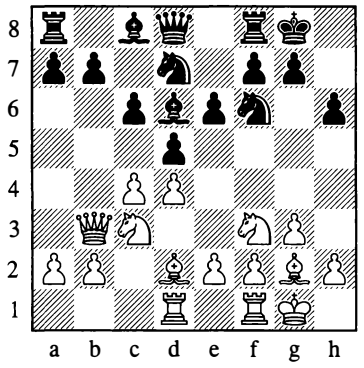


9.e4!?

White's move order gives him this interesting option. Here is a summary of the alternatives:

9.♕c2 is covered later in variation C1.

9.♕b3 h6!? prevents the e2-e4 plan from the main line, as White no longer has the g5-square for his knight. 10.♖ad1 is a logical continuation, and now I like:



10...♖b8!?N With ...b5 in mind. (10...♕e7 11.♖fe1 dxc4 12.♕xc4 e5 13.e4 ♘b6 led to more normal play in Tkachiev – I. Sokolov, Dubai 2014) 11.♖fe1 b5 12.c5 ♗c7 13.a3 a5∞

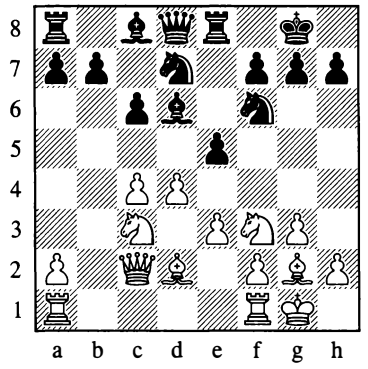
9.b3!? ♖e8

As mentioned earlier, 9...♘e4? is no good with the knight on d7 in view of 10.♘xe4 dxe4 11.♘g5±.

9...b6 10.e4 ♗e7 11.♖e1 ♗b7 12.e5 ♘e8 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♗f1± was pleasant for White in Harikrishna – Vazquez Igarza, Benasque 2012.

10.♕c2 dxc4 11.bxc4 e5 12.e3

Here I found an interesting new idea:



12...♗c7!?N

Taking the bishop off the d-file seems like a sensible precaution. A sample continuation is:

13.♖fd1 exd4 14.♘xd4

14.exd4 ♘b6=

14...♕e7 15.♘f5 ♕e6∞

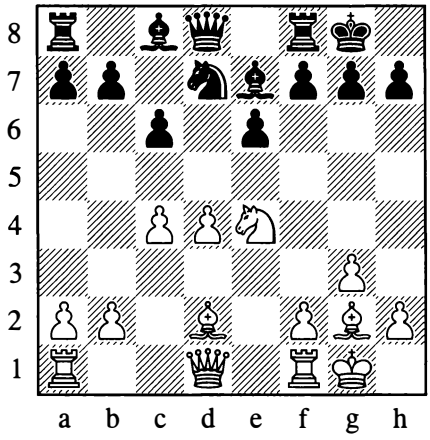
Hitting c4, with mutual chances.

9...♘xe4!

This seems like the most accurate solution.

9...dxe4 is more common but 10.♘g5 ♗e7 11.♗f4!N is an annoying improvement, preventing Black from freeing his position with ...e5. If White is allowed to play ♘xe4 unhindered he will have a pleasant edge, so the following line appears critical: 11...♘b6!? 12.b3 ♘e8 13.♘gxe4 g5!? 14.♗e3 f5 15.♘c5 f4± It's an interesting position, but it feels better for White as Black is a little loose.

10.♘xe4 dxe4 11.♘g5 ♗e7 12.♘xe4



12...f5!?N

12...e5 13.d5 f5 14.d6 fxe4 15.dxe7 ♕xe7 16.♗xe4 ♘f6 17.♗g2 ♗f5 18.♕e2± was a touch better for White in Le Quang Liem – Papaioannou, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010.

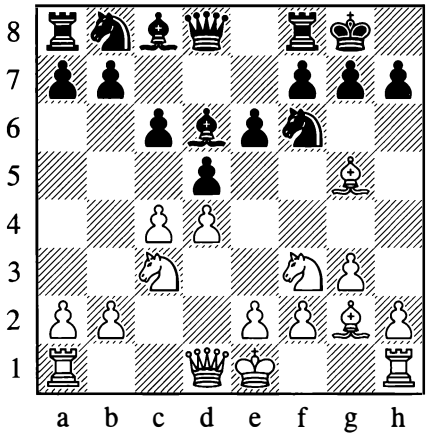
The text move keeps the position more double-edged, for instance:

13.♘c3 e5 14.d5 e4∞

With a complex game. White has some chances on the queenside, but Black has gained some space in the centre and shut the Catalan bishop out of the game for the time being.

B2) 8.♗g5

White is preparing e2-e4. This is an important option, especially considering that it was Avrukh's recommendation in *Grandmaster Repertoire 1A – The Catalan*. I propose meeting it with:



8...h6!?

This is a new move which is starting to pick up in popularity – in fact, it's so new that it wasn't even mentioned in Avrukh's book, which was published in 2015.

9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 10.0–0

10.e4 is premature in view of 10...dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♗b4†.

10...♕d8!?

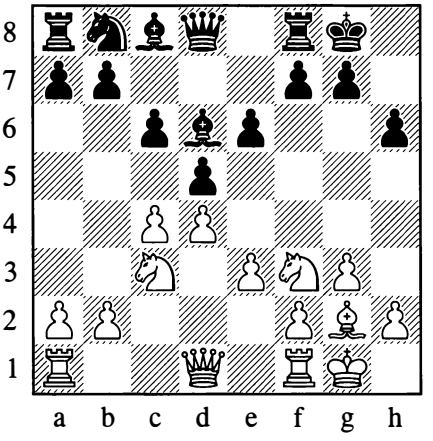
This move is rare but quite logical, as Black removes his queen from a future ♘xe4 attack. 10...♗c7 is more common but I like the queen move more, as Black immediately sets up the possibility of ...f5 followed by ...♘d7-f6 with a Stonewall set-up.

White has two main ideas: he can keep the centre closed with **B21) 11.e3N** or strike immediately with **B22) 11.e4**.

Other moves exist of course, but the character of the position is unlikely to differ much from the first variation below; it's only really the e2-e4 plan that needs to be considered separately.

B21) 11.e3N

This has been analysed by Max Illingworth, and I have referred to some of his suggestions below.



11...♘d7

White's last move reveals that he is not intending to put a pawn on e4, so we may as well postpone ...f5 just to keep White guessing.

A completely different but equally valid approach is:

11...b6!?

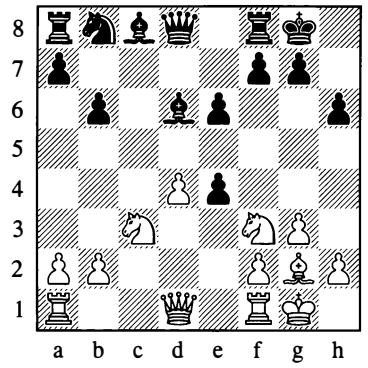
Preparing ...♗a6. White's only way to fight for the initiative is to switch plans and open the centre, as in the lines below.

12.cxd5

Another option is: 12.e4 dxc4 (or 12...♗a6!? 13.exd5 cxd5 14.cxd5 ♗xf1 15.♕xf1 exd5 16.♘e5 ♗xe5 17.dxe5 ♘c6 18.♗xd5 ♘xe5=)

13.d5 e5 14.♕e2 cxd5 15.exd5 ♗f5 16.♕xc4 ♘d7 17.♘b5 ♘f6 18.♘xd6 (18.♕c6?! ♗c5∓) 18...♕xd6 19.♕c6 ♖ad8 20.♕xd6 ♖xd6 21.♘xe5 ♘xd5= Obviously this wasn't all forced, but I get the impression that the whole line should be about equal.

12...cxd5 13.e4 dxe4



14.♘e5! ♗a6

14...f5? 15.♘xe4!± is something to avoid.

15.♗xe4

15.♖e1?! f5 16.♘xe4? does not work: 16...fxe4 17.♗xe4 ♗xe5 18.dxe5 ♘d7 19.♗xa8 ♕xa8 20.♕xd7 ♕f3–+

15...♗xf1 16.♕xf1 ♗xe5 17.dxe5 ♘d7 18.♗xa8 ♕xa8=

12.♕e2

12.♘d2 protects the c4-pawn while preparing to meet 12...f5 with 13.f4. Illingworth gives the brief continuation 13...♘f6 14.♘f3 ♗d7 15.♘e5 ♗e8 with chances for both sides, which seems reasonable to me.

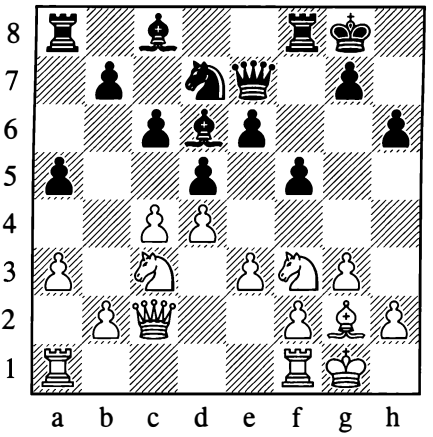
12...f5

12...dxc4?! 13.♘d2! is good for White.

13.a3 a5

13...b6? fails tactically to 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.e4! fxe4 16.♘xe4 dxe4 17.♕xe4, attacking a8 and e6.

14.♕c2 ♕e7



15.♘d2

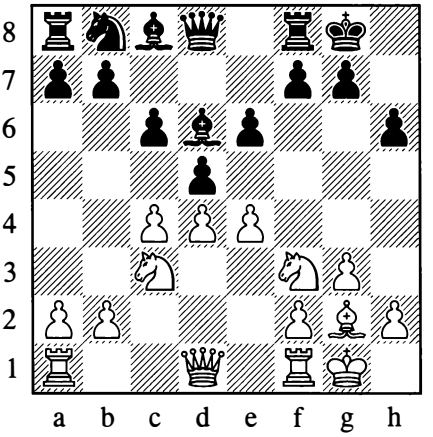
Max points out that Black should be happy to see 15.c5?! ♗c7. White already needs to play 16.♘h4 ♕f7 17.f4 to prevent ...e5, but then 17...b6! 18.cxb6 ♘xb6⇄ offers good counterplay on the queenside, and ...g5 may become an option at some point.

15...♖b8 16.cxd5 exd5 17.♘e2 g5∞

With balanced play.

B22) 11.e4

This is the more forcing option but Black is well placed to neutralize White's activity.

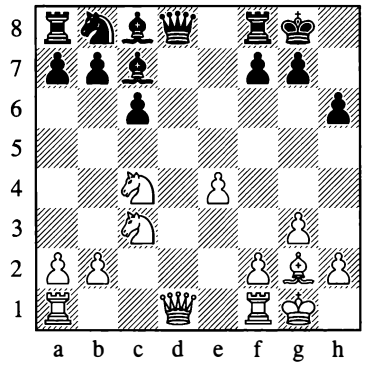


11...dxc4 12.♘d2

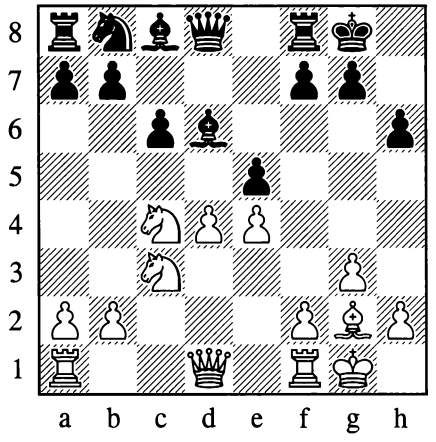
12.a4N ♘a6 13.♘d2 e5 14.d5 ♗c5 15.♘xc4 ♕g5 16.♔h1 ♘b4= is a line mentioned by Illingworth.

12...e5 13.♘xc4

13.dxe5N is also looked at by Max. As usual, the line he gives is accurate, so I will reproduce it below: 13...♗xe5 14.♘xc4 ♗c7 (14...♗d4!? could also be worth considering)



This could transpose to the game quoted below if White exchanges on d8; alternatively, 15.e5!? ♕e7 16.♕e2 ♗e6 17.f4 ♘d7 18.♔h1 ♖ad8 is about equal.

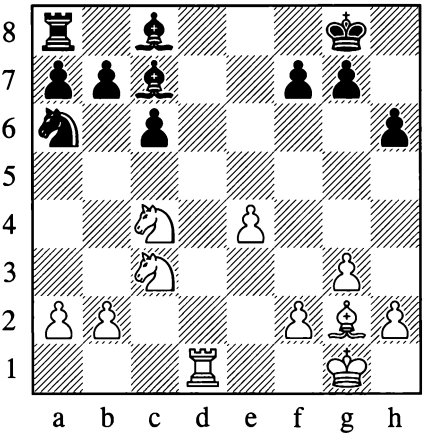


13...exd4 14.♕xd4 ♗c7

This soon led to exchanges and a level endgame in the only game of note in this variation.

15.♕xd8 ♖xd8 16.♖fd1 ♖xd1† 17.♖xd1 ♘a6

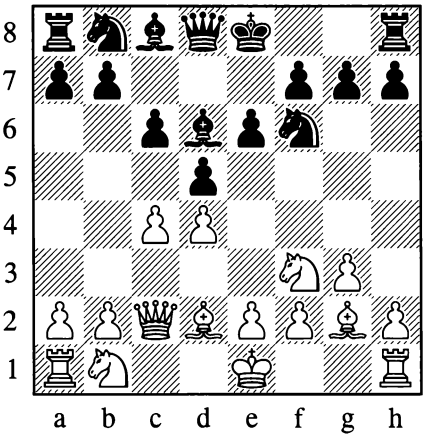
17...♗g4!?N also looks fine.



18.♘d6 ♗g4 19.f3 ♖d8=

Gledura – Bluebaum, Karpacz 2015.

C) 7.♕c2

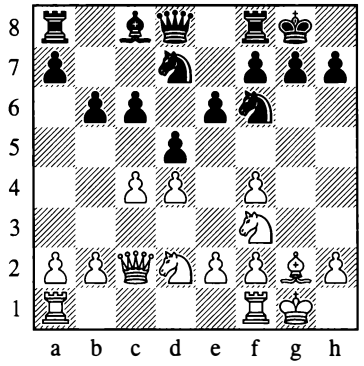


This is a typical Catalan move, and one of the most important options for us to consider.

7...♘bd7 8.0–0

8.♗f4 is playable but rather committal. 8...♗xf4 9.gxf4 0–0 10.♘bd2 b6 11.0–0 (11.e3 a5 12.0–0 ♗a6 13.♖fd1 c5 14.dxc5 ♘xc5

15.cxd5 ♗d3∓ gave Black the more active pieces in Bellia – Bove, Milan 2015)

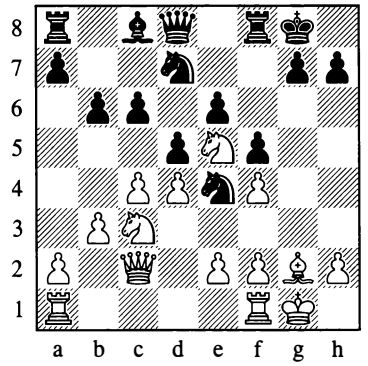


11...♗a6 12.♘e5 c5 13.♕a4 ♗b7 14.♖fd1 cxd4 15.♘xd7 ♘xd7 16.cxd5 d3 17.e3 ♘c5 18.♕d4 ♗xd5= Gross – Pingitzer, Austria 2003.

8...0–0

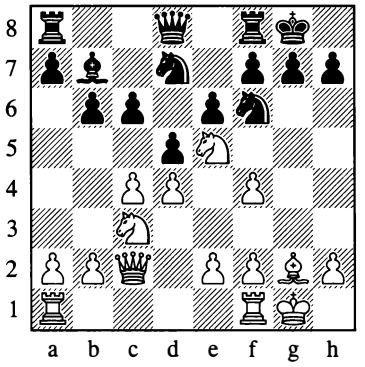
Now we have a further division between **C1) 9.♘c3**, **C2) 9.♗g5** and **C3) 9.♖d1**. We will analyse these moves after first checking a couple of minor possibilities:

9.b3 ♘e4 10.♘c3 f5 11.♗f4 ♗xf4 12.gxf4 b6 13.♘e5 was played by one opening expert last year, but Black solved his problems pretty convincingly:



13...♘xe5 14.fxe5 ♗a6 15.♖ad1 ♖c8 16.f4 ♕e7 17.♘xe4 fxe4 18.♕d2 ♔h8= Ragger – Mamedyarov, Vienna 2015.

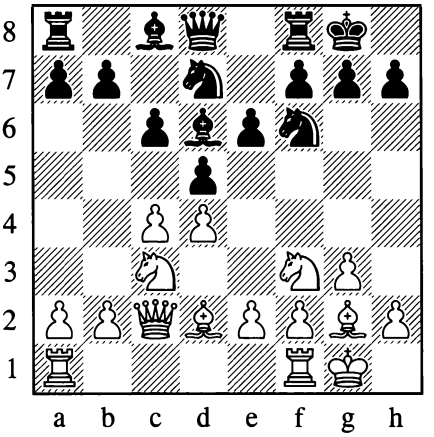
An earlier game continued: 9.♗f4 ♗xf4 10.gxf4 b6 11.♘e5 ♗b7 12.♘c3



12...♘e8!? Heading for d6 is an interesting plan, although I'm not sure if it's best. (12...♖c8N is a good alternative) 13.♕a4!? ♘xe5 14.fxe5 f5 15.f4 ♘c7 Black was just fractionally worse in Wojtaszek – Fridman, Wroclaw 2010.

C1) 9.♘c3

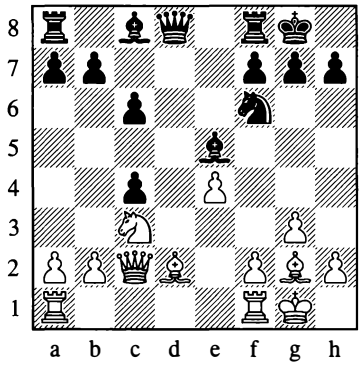
White tempts us to capture the c4-pawn. We may as well take up the offer, otherwise e2-e4 is likely to lead to an edge for White.



9...dxc4 10.♗g5

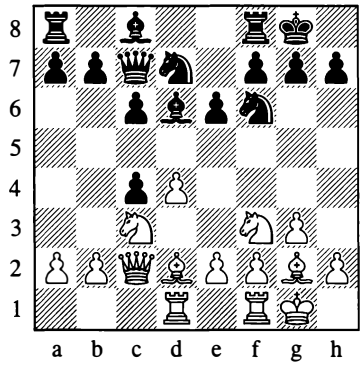
This has been the most popular choice.

10.e4 gets nowhere after 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♗xe5, for instance:



13.f4 ♗d4† 14.♔h1 ♘g4↑ Gritsenko – Zvjaginsev, Vladivostok 2014.

10.♖ad1 has scored well, but Black has no particular problems after 10...♕c7, for instance:



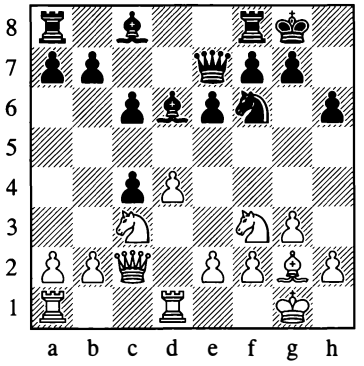
11.♘g5!?N (11.e4 e5 gave Black easy equality in Boruchovsky – Slavin, Jerusalem 2015) 11...h6 12.♘ge4 ♗e7 13.♗f4 e5 14.dxe5 ♘xe5= Black can break the pin with ...♘h5 whenever he needs to.

10.♖fd1 ♕e7

Notice how we put the queen on c7 in the note above and e7 in the present line. In each case, the queen avoids moving to the file that the second white rook might move to.

11.♗g5 h6 12.♗xf6 ♘xf6

This position has been reached in a few games via different move orders.



13.♘d2

13.♘e5?! ♗xe5 14.dxe5 ♘d7 15.f4 f6 16.exf6 ♘xf6 favoured Black in Hammer – Gavrilov, Stockholm 2010.

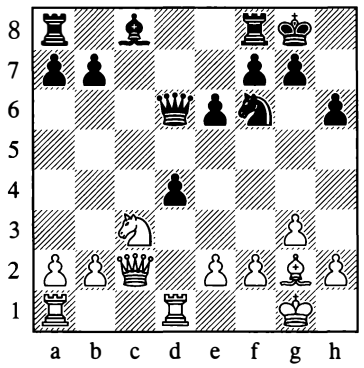
13...c5

13...e5!? 14.d5 ♗c5!?N is an intriguing alternative, threatening ...♗xf2†!. (The last move improves on 14...cxd5 15.♘xd5 ♘xd5 16.♗xd5 c3 17.♕xc3 when White was slightly better in Lputian – Arencibia, Biel 1993.)

14.♘xc4 cxd4 15.♘xd6

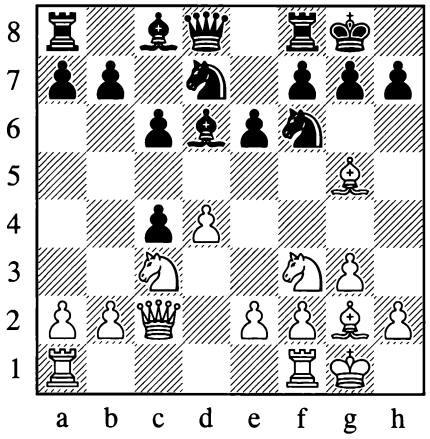
15.♘b5!?N could be considered, though 15...♗c5 gives White no more than a tiny edge, if that.

15...♕xd6



16.♘b5 ♕b6 17.♘xd4 e5 18.♘b3 ♗g4 19.♕c5 ♗xe2 20.♖e1 ♗a6 21.♕xe5 ♖ac8

Black had good play in Cordova – Onischuk, Puebla 2013.

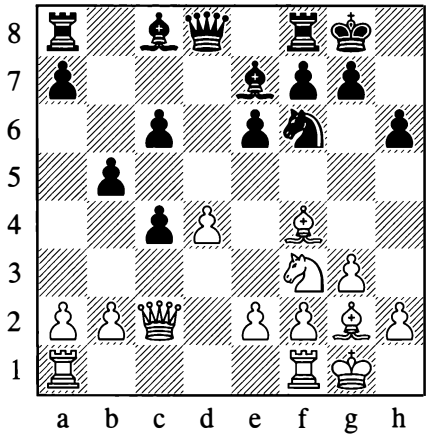


10...h6 11.♘e4!?

11.♗xf6 yields the bishop pair and so it's hard to see how White can be better. For example: 11...♘xf6 12.e4 ♗e7 13.a4 b6 14.♘e5 ♕c7 15.♘xc4 ♗a6= Baramidze – Grandelius, Germany 2014.

11...♗e7 12.♘xf6† ♘xf6 13.♗f4 b5!?

13...♘d5!?N∞ is an interesting alternative, giving back the c4-pawn without a fight in return for exchanging on f4.



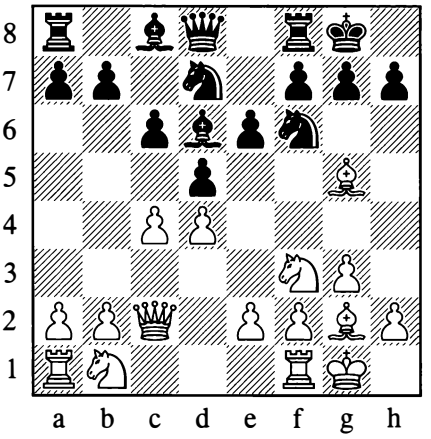
14.♘e5 ♗b7

Black has returned the extra pawn in a way that gives him easy development and good play on the light squares.

15.♘xc6 ♕e8 16.♘xe7† ♕xe7 17.e4 ♖ac8 18.♖fe1 ♖fd8=

Grigoryan – Moiseenko, Legnica 2013.

C2) 9.♗g5



We have already dealt with some lines where White trades this bishop for the knight on f6. Here there are some slight differences: Black will recapture with the knight rather than the queen, avoiding the loss of time that comes with returning the queen to d8. On the other hand, White can develop his queen's knight to d2 rather than c3, so that the c4-pawn will not be hanging.

9...h6 10.♗xf6 ♘xf6 11.♘bd2

Play for e2-e4 is the obvious plan and the only one likely to threaten Black, so I will not spend time looking at anything else.

11...b6 12.e4 ♗e7 13.e5

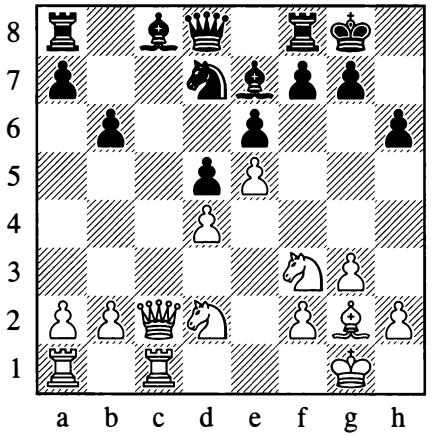
White has tried a bunch of other moves, but I will focus on the critical one.

13...♘d7 14.cxd5 cxd5

A similar position is often reached in one of the main lines of the Closed Catalan. The main difference is that White's dark-squared bishop had been traded for a black knight, which should favour Black in the

medium-to-long term. Of course, the absence of the bishop on c1 means that White can quickly occupy the c-file, so it is important to make sure White can't cause us any immediate pain on the queenside.

15.♖fc1

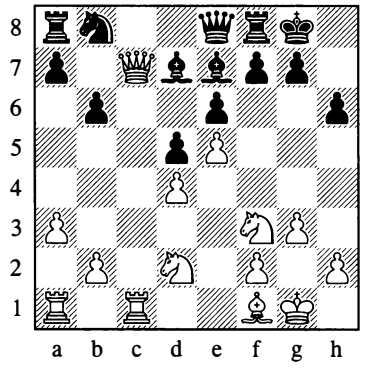


15...♘b8!

If followed up correctly, this move enables Black to solve all his problems and perhaps even fight for the advantage.

16.♗f1

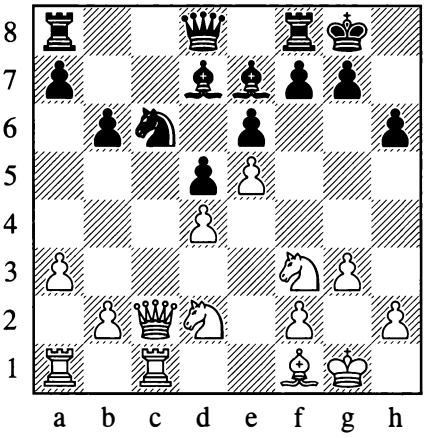
16.♕c7 is mentioned by Illingworth, whose analysis continues: 16...♕e8 17.a3 ♗d7 18.♗f1 (if the queen retreats, Black can play ...a5 with somewhat better chances)



18...♘c6 19.♗a6 ♗d8 20.♕d6 ♗e7 21.♕c7 Black can choose between forcing a draw with 21...♗d8= and keeping the game going with 21...♖b8!? 22.♘b3 ♗d8 23.♕d6 f6 24.exf6 ♗xf6∞.

16...♗d7 17.a3 ♘c6

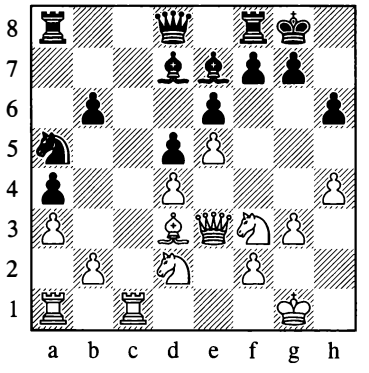
Predojevic called this position equal and Illingworth expanded upon that analysis. Some practical testing has also occurred, and it all points to the conclusion that Black is doing well.



18.b4

18.♗a6 is well met by 18...♖b8 intending ...b5.

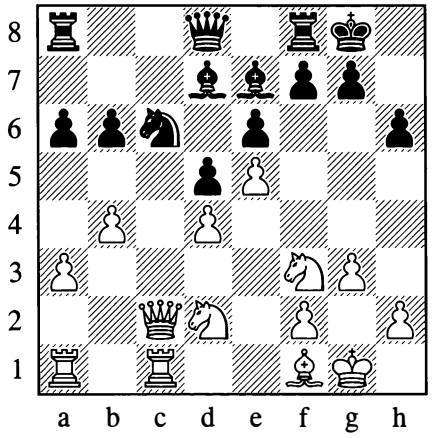
A recent game continued: 18.♕d3 a5 19.♕e3 (19.♗e2N b5 20.♗d1 a4 21.♗c2 g6 22.h4 h5∓ is a similar story) 19...a4 20.♗d3 ♘a5 21.h4



This was Zubritskiy – Goganov, St Petersburg 2016, when 21...b5!N followed by ...♘c4 would have given Black slightly better chances. Black's strategic plan in such positions should be to advance the queenside pawns and avoid worrying too much about the kingside, as White is unlikely to muster a serious attack. The lack of a dark-squared bishop is a serious handicap in this regard.

18...a6!

18...a5 19.b5 ♘a7 20.♕b2 was playable though perhaps slightly worse for Black in Istratescu – Nevednichy, Alba Iulia 2016. I would prefer to avoid blocking the queenside.



19.♘b3!?N

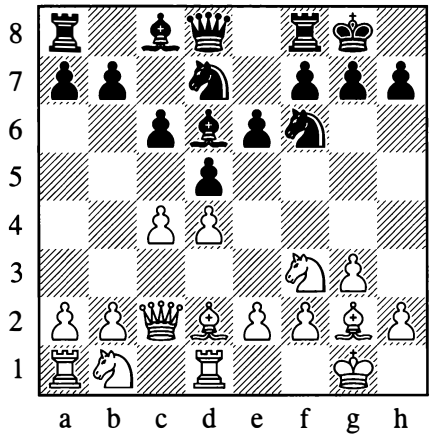
19.♕b2 ♕b8 20.♖c3 ♖c8 21.♖ac1 ♕b7 22.h4 ♘a7 gave Black no problems in Paunovic – Kobo, Elgoibar 2015.

The text move looks like a reasonable attempt to improve, but Black has a nice resource:

19...♘a7! 20.♗xa6 ♘b5 21.♗xb5 ♗xb5=

Black has excellent compensation for the pawn, with two bishops and targets on the queenside – and potentially the kingside too, if the position ever opens up.

C3) 9.♖d1



Another typical Catalan move, avoiding anything committal while developing the rook in anticipation of a future ...c5 or ...e5 break.

9...♘e4

Preparing our Stonewall set-up. This is very much the kind of position where positional understanding and knowledge of plans is more important than memorization of concrete variations. I have focused on three moves, **C31) 10.♗c1**, **C32) 10.♗e3!?N** and **C33) 10.♗e1**, to show how to choose an appropriate plan against whichever set-up White may adopt.

10.♘c3 has been a popular choice but it gives Black the interesting extra option of 10...♘xd2!? 11.♘xd2 f5 12.e3 ♘f6, as in Denishev – Matlakov, St Petersburg 2014. Obviously 10...f5 is perfectly fine too, when White usually follows up with some bishop move in any case.

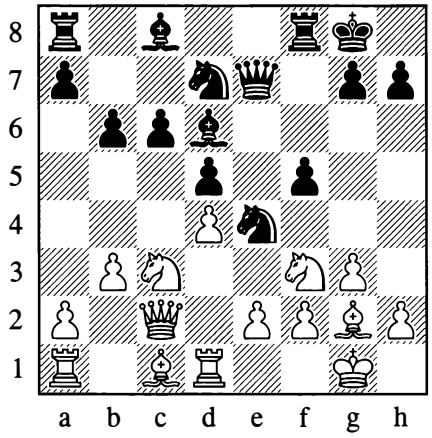
C31) 10.♗c1

This looks a little odd, but there are some other variations of the Catalan where it is quite normal for the bishop to retreat to c1 and then go to b2.

10...♕e7 11.♘c3 f5 12.b3 b6

The queenside fianchetto is one of the main ways in which Black may solve the problem of the light-squared bishop.

13.cxd5 exd5

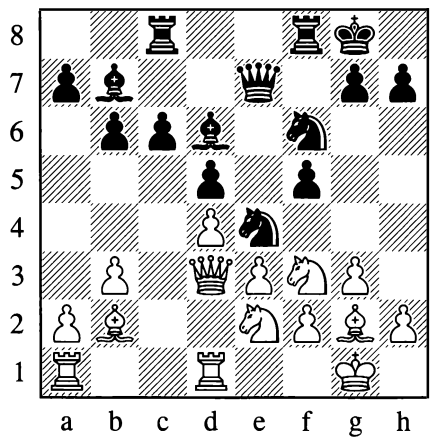


14.e3?!

Surprisingly, this natural move is a mistake.

14.♗f4N would have maintained the equilibrium, but it is hard to make such a move when the bishop moved from d2 to c1 such a short time ago.

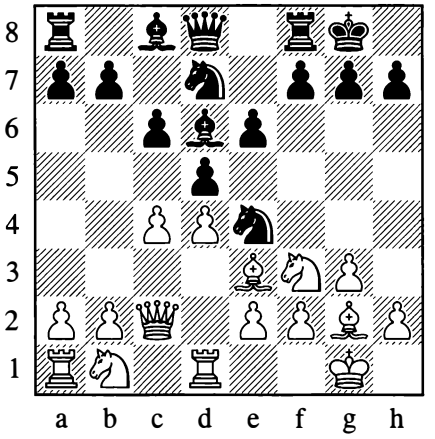
14...♗b7 15.♗b2 ♖ac8 16.♕d3 ♘df6 17.♘e2



17...♘g4! 18.♖f1 c5∓

Black succeeded in taking over the initiative in Inarkiev – Gelfand, Sochi 2014.

C32) 10.♗e3!?N



Max Illingworth states that he really likes this novelty of Predojevic. The idea is that White won't be able to play e2-e4 anyway against the Stonewall set-up, so blocking the e-pawn isn't a big deal – and in the meantime, White's bishop has moved to a square where it avoids obstructing any of the other pieces.

10...f5 11.♘c3

Max also analyses:

11.♘bd2 ♕e7 12.♖ac1 b6 13.c5?!

This isn't the best move, but it's important to check this kind of forcing move to see where it leads.

13...bxc5 14.♘xe4 fxe4 15.dxc5 ♗c7 16.♘d4

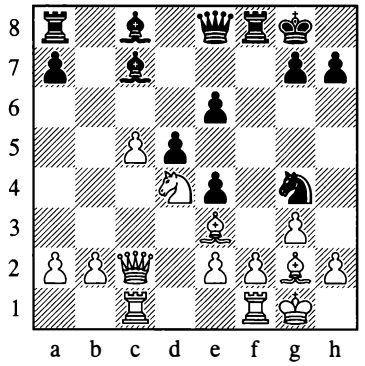
It looks as though Black has a problem with the c6-pawn, so you can see why a White player might be tempted to try this. Fortunately, we have a convincing reply:

16...♘f6! 17.♘xc6 ♕e8 18.♘d4 ♘g4∓

Max evaluates Black's counterplay as extremely promising. I agree with the assessment, but would like to dig a little deeper to show some of the resources available to both sides.

19.♖f1

Now Black must make an important decision.



19...♕h5!?

This may be the best way forward.

My first thought was that 19...♗xg3 looked good, as 20.hxg3?? ♕h5 wins trivially. Unfortunately, 20.fxg3! does not work out so well for Black. My main line continues 20...♖xf1† 21.♗xf1 ♕h5 22.h4 ♕e5!? (22...♘xe3?! 23.♕c3±) 23.♗f2 ♘xf2 24.♔xf2 e3† 25.♔g2 ♕xd4± when the position remains messy but the computer favours White.

19...e5→ could be a good alternative to the main line.

20.h3 ♘xe3 21.fxe3 ♖d8→

Black has more than enough play for the sacrificed pawn.

11...♕e7 12.♖ac1

Predojevic evaluates the position as slightly better for White, but Illingworth continues analysing further. I will focus on what I believe to be the most promising path for Black.

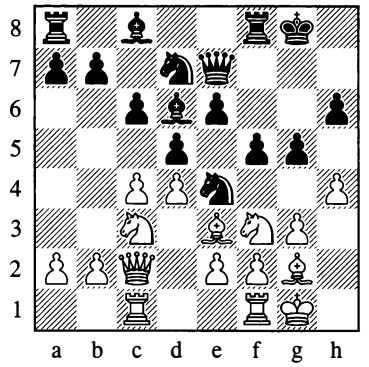
12...h6!

Preparing ...g5 seems like the right way to counter the bishop on e3, as White will constantly have to be on the lookout for ...f4 ideas.

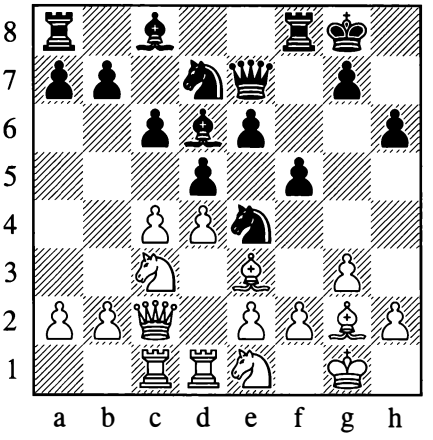
13.♘e1

13.a3 g5 14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.♘d2 ♘f6 16.c5 ♗c7 17.♘c4 ♘d5→ is a line given by Max, which looks promising for Black.

13.♖f1!? is a funny computer move, intending to meet 13...g5 with 14.h4. I think Black should continue with:

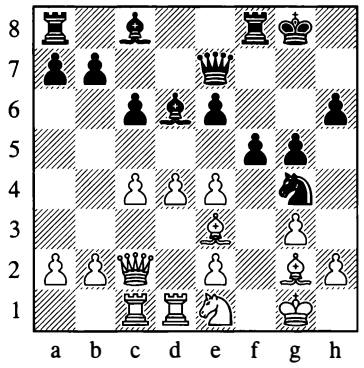


14...♕g7!? 15.hxg5 ♘xg5⇄ The slight weakening of Black's pawn structure is balanced out by the opening of the kingside files.



13...g5 14.f3

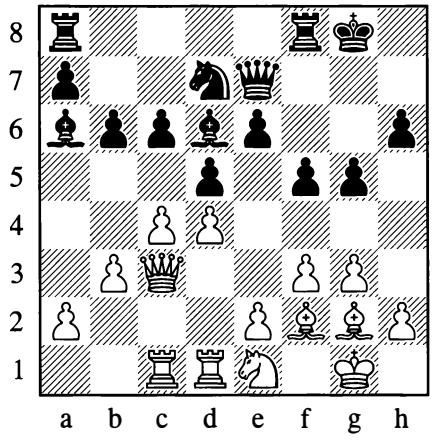
Another interesting line is: 14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.f3 ♘f6! 16.fxe4 ♘g4



17.♗d2 fxe4 18.c5 ♗c7 19.♗xe4 ♘f2 20.♘f3! ♘xd1 21.♖xd1 ♗d7∞ White has decent positional compensation for the exchange, but I don't believe Black is worse.

14...♘xc3 15.♕xc3 b6 16.♗f2 ♗a6 17.b3

White's position is harmonious, although his Catalan bishop does not look too happy. In any case, we have reached a point where Black can take concrete action to solve his problems:



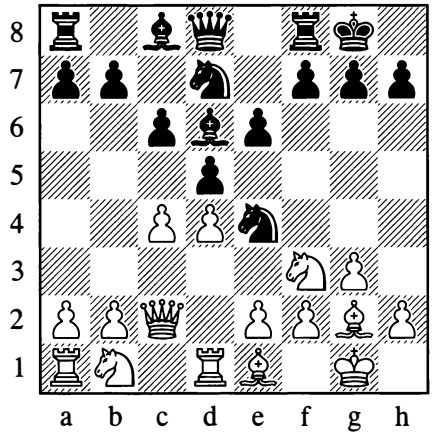
17...♗b4 18.♕a1 dxc4! 19.bxc4 c5

It is worth remembering that "Stonewall" is just a name; in variations such as the present one, Black's pawn formation actually proves to be highly flexible and dynamic!

20.f4 ♖ad8 21.♘d3 ♗a3 22.♖c3 cxd4 23.♗xd4 ♗c5=

Black is fine.

C33) 10.♗e1



With the rook already on d1, this is arguably the most natural place to put the bishop.

10...f5 11.♘c3

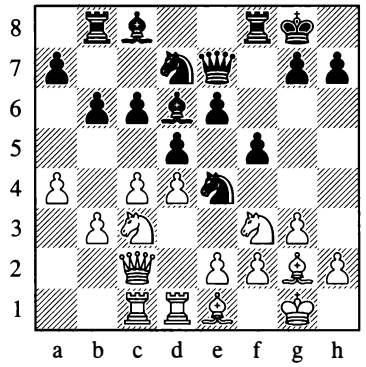
This position has occurred a few times via different move orders. White has tried two other knight moves:

11.♘bd2 occurred in A. Schneider – Utasi, Hungary 1984, when 11...♕e7N would have been natural and good.

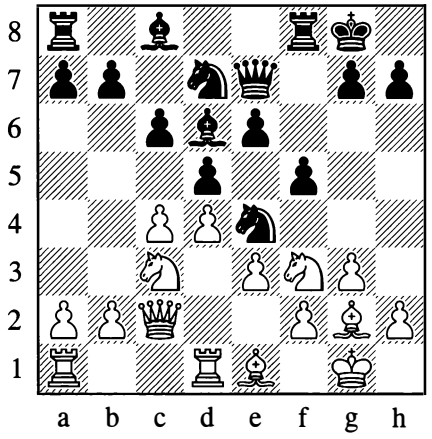
11.♘fd2 was played in D. Nguyen – I. Sokolov, Jakarta 2012; once again, 11...♕e7N seems a good choice. A possible continuation is 12.f3 (presumably this was White's idea) 12...♘xd2 13.♘xd2, and now 13...f4!? is an active choice which would give White plenty to think about, although the simple 13...♘f6 also looks fine.

11...♕e7 12.e3

Another game continued: 12.♖ac1 ♖b8!? I like this idea, preparing to gain space on the queenside with ...b5. 13.a4 b6 14.b3 Now in Bjerke – Kjolberg, Fagernes 2016, the simplest choice would have been:



14...a5!N∓ Ruling out any prospect of a queenside initiative by White. Black will develop his bishop to b7 or possibly a6, followed by seizing the initiative on the kingside with ...g5.

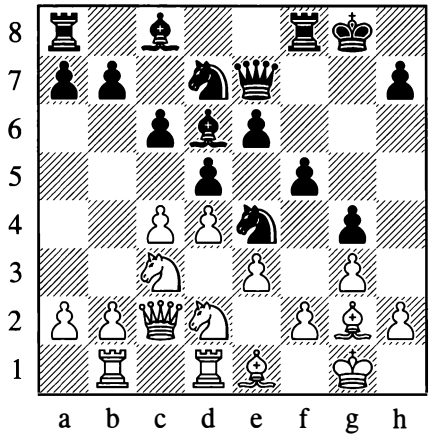


12...g5!?

12...b6= is a good move here too. However, it's good to know that Black's position is robust enough to justify a more adventurous approach as well.

13.♖ab1 g4 14.♘d2

In Tunik – Demianjuk, Moscow 2016, a good continuation would have been:



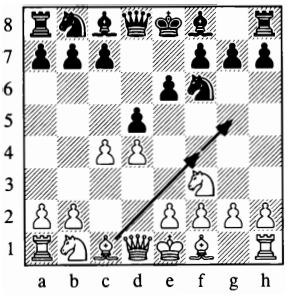
14...♘g5!N⇄

Eyeing up the light squares on the kingside. Black has the makings of a strong initiative there, with ideas such as ...h5-h4 and ...♘f6-e4 in the air.

Conclusion

Meeting 5.♗d2 with 5...♗d6 is a modern and quite attractive idea, which presents White with more challenges than moving the bishop to d6 directly. After the normal 6.♗g2 c6, 7.♘c3 0–0 8.♗g5 is one of White's main tries, but the recent invention of 8...h6!? 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 10.0–0 ♕d8 seems fully respectable. The other main direction is 7.♕c2 ♘bd7 8.0–0 0–0, when White has tried a number of different moves. I like the flexibility of Black's set-up: depending on what White does, we may get to play for long-term chances with the two bishops, or we might grab the c4-pawn and strike in the centre with ...e5. And finally, the Stonewall set-up with ...♘e4 and ...f5 seems quite appealing as well.

Chapter 21



4.♗f4 & 4.♗g5

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6

A) 4.♗f4 dxc4 **407**
A1) 5.♕a4† **407**
A2) 5.e3 **408**
B) 4.♗g5 ♗b4† 5.♘bd2 dxc4 **409**
B1) 6.♕a4†?! **409**
B2) 6.e3 **410**
B3) 6.a3 **413**
B4) 6.♕c2 b5 7.a4 c6 **414**
B41) 8.g3 **414**
B42) 8.♗xf6 **415**

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6

In this chapter we will look at the two immediate bishop developments: **A) 4.♗f4** and **B) 4.♗g5**. The latter is more common by a margin of roughly 30 to 1.

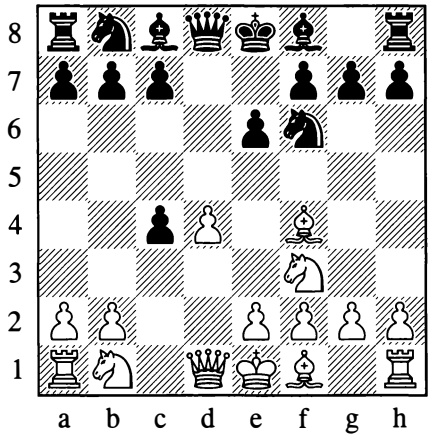
A) 4.♗f4

A rare move, partly because its intent is too vague, and it commits the bishop before Black's central plan is clear. The bishop on f4 also does not have the same venom as when it is on g5, pinning the f6-knight and helping to prepare an e4-advance.

4...dxc4

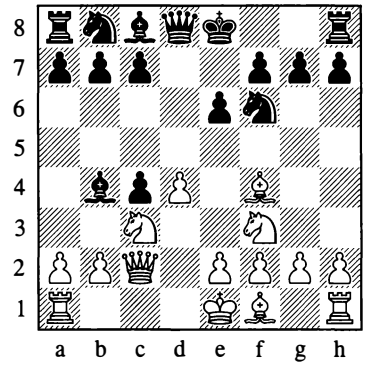
This is probably the simplest solution; f4 is a fine square for White's bishop in a Queen's Gambit Declined, so we have no intention of playing that. But for good reason there are no ♗f4 main lines against the Queen's Gambit Accepted. The bishop is out of place on f4 and it can be hit by a later ...♘d5.

Instead 4...♗b4† is also possible, but I like the directness of the text move.



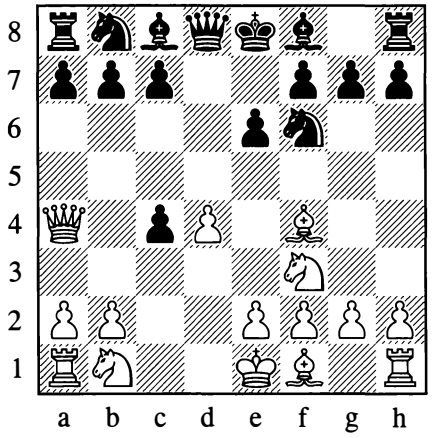
Now the two main attempts to regain the pawn are **A1) 5.♕a4†** and **A2) 5.e3**.

Instead the indirect 5.♘c3 ♗b4 6.♕c2 (6.e3 ♘d5! transposes to variation A2) offers Black a good chance to be greedy:



6...a6!?N 7.e3 (7.e4?! b5 8.♗e2 ♗b7∓ leaves White in an awkward position as he doesn't really want to play e4-e5 allowing ...♘d5; 7.0–0–0? b5→; 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3 b5 9.e3 ♗b7∓) 7...b5 8.♗e2 ♗b7∓ Black looks comfortable.

A1) 5.♕a4†



5...♘bd7

There are various sensible ways to block the check, but the text move feels most harmonious; the c8-bishop is destined for b7.

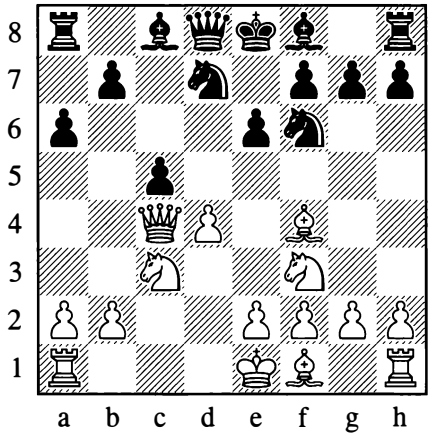
6.♕xc4 c5

With ...a6 and ...b5 to come, which ensures Black gets a good flowing opening.

7.♘c3

Of course White could try many moves, but let's just check the direct option. Instead 7.e3 a6 with ...b5 to come, places no pressure at all on Black.

7...a6



8.dxc5

This is White's best, but it's hardly inspiring.

8.e4? is too loose: 8...b5 9.♕d3 (even worse is 9.♕b3? cxd4 10.♘xd4 e5–+) 9...♗b7 And with the threats of ...b4 and ...c4 in the air, White can't hold his centre. For example: 10.d5 c4 11.♕c2 ♗b4∓

8.a4? stops nothing at all: 8...b5! 9.♕d3 (9.axb5?? axb5–+ is the point when both the queen and a1-rook are hanging) 9...cxd4 10.♕xd4 ♗c5∓ Hoang – P. Smirnov, Ho Chi Minh City 2016.

8...♗xc5 9.b4

White could play solidly with 9.e3, but Black is totally comfortable after castling and ...b5.

9...b5 10.♕b3 ♗e7=

In Bertok – Kliska, Zagreb 1998, Black was at least equal.

A2) 5.e3 ♗b4†

We could certainly consider 5...b5, but let's play our traditional check.

6.♘c3

Even worse looks 6.♘bd2?! b5∓ with ...♗b7 to come.

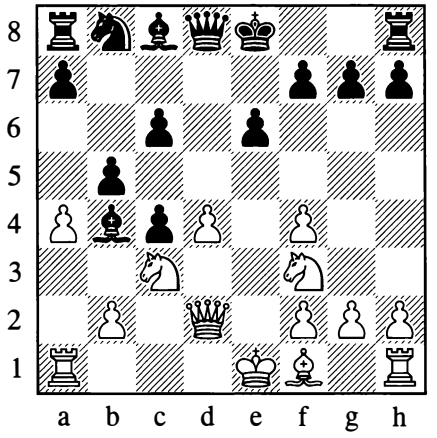
6...♘d5!

Exploiting the awkwardly-placed f4 bishop.

Once again 6...b5 is also reasonable: 7.♕c2 ♗b7 8.♗e2 ♘bd7 9.0–0 a6∞ Cantrell – Koepcke, Saint Paul 2000.

7.♕d2 ♘xf4 8.exf4 b5 9.a4 c6

Black is a pawn up *and* has the bishop pair. Where is White's compensation? Maybe he can dream of targeting the c6-pawn, but I don't believe it works.



10.g3

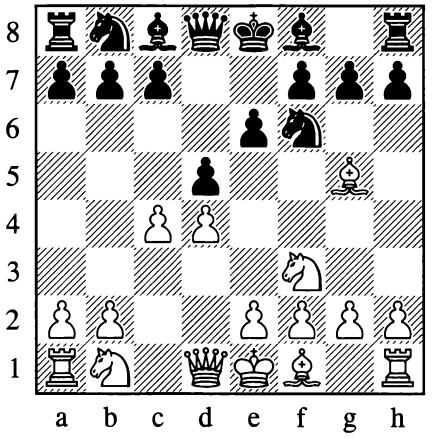
The fianchetto at least puts the bishop on a sensible square.

Instead 10.♘e5?! f6 11.♘f3 wastes two moves provoking a pawn move which does Black no great harm. For example, 11...♘d7 12.g3 ♘b6 13.♗h3 ♘xa4 14.0–0 0–0–+ was already winning for Black, with his two extra pawns, in Lubczynski – Aleksandrov, Warsaw 2004.

10...♗b7 11.♗g2 ♘d7 12.0–0 0–0 13.♕e3 ♕b6∓

White is struggling to prove that he has full compensation for the pawn.

B) 4.♗g5



Sometimes White tries to mix things up by changing the move order around to give himself extra options. Of course he will only be able to do this if he plays ♗g5 systems against other Black options such as the Queen's Gambit Declined with ...♗e7.

4...♗b4†

Of course we play our bishop move.

5.♘bd2

This is the only real independent try of note.

5.♘c3 is White's most common choice, transposing to the 5.♗g5 Ragozin – see Part II on page 79.

5.♗d2?!

White loses a move and doesn't get a lot in return.

5...♗e7

Yes, both bishops have moved twice, but ours is on a sensible square while White's is just in the way on d2. Black can already claim solid equality, as the following examples illustrate:

6.♘c3

6.e3 0–0 7.♘c3 dxc4 8.♗xc4 a6 9.a4 c5 10.0–0 b6 11.♕e2 ♗b7= In Epishin – Drozdovskij, Ourense 2009, Black had a comfortable QGA-style position.

6...0–0 7.♕c2 c5!?

Safe and solid is: 7...dxc4 8.e3 c5 9.dxc5 ♘a6 10.♗xc4 ♘xc5 11.0–0 b6= Dao Thien Hao – Le Quang Liem, Ho Chi Minh City 2009.

8.dxc5 d4

A fun attempt to liven up the game.

9.♘e4 ♘xe4 10.♕xe4 ♘c6 11.b4

Otherwise we play ...♗xc5.

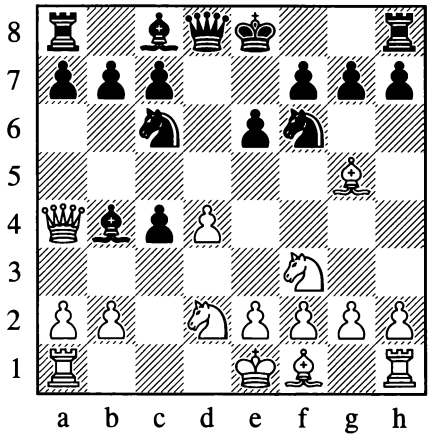
11...f5

Black has good compensation with his big centre.

5...dxc4

Now the options to consider are: **B1) 6.♕a4†?!**, **B2) 6.e3**, **B3) 6.a3** and **B4) 6.♕c2**.

B1) 6.♕a4†?! ♘c6



The queen check is inadvisable as Black blocks with a good developing move, while the c4-pawn is very much alive.

7.e3

Or 7.a3?! ♗xd2† 8.♗xd2 ♕d5!∓ with ...b5 on the cards. So 9.♕c2 intending to meet ...b5 with a4. 9...♘xd4 (9...a5!?N could come in handy later in controlling the b4-square: 10.e3 b5 11.a4 ♘b4 12.♕c1 c6 13.♗e2 0–0∓) 10.♘xd4 ♕xd4 11.e3 ♕e4∓ White of course gets the c4-pawn, but that still leaves him struggling to prove sufficient compensation for the remaining pawn deficit.

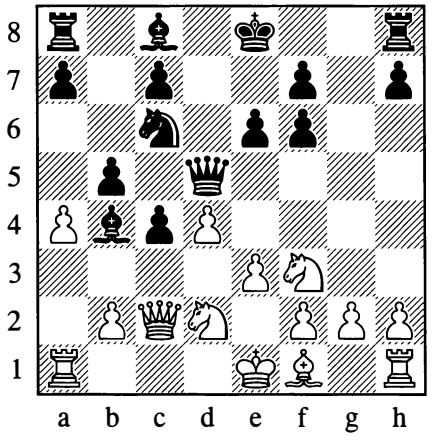
7...♕d5

I prefer the centralizing text move, which threatens to win a piece with ...♗xd2†, but also fun is: 7...♗d7!? For example: 8.♕c2 b5 9.a3 ♗xd2† 10.♘xd2 e5 11.dxe5 ♘xe5∞ Dubov – Matlakov, Jerusalem 2015.

8.♗xf6 gxf6 9.♕c2

The c4-pawn is still safe: 9.♗xc4?? ♕xc4

9...b5 10.a4



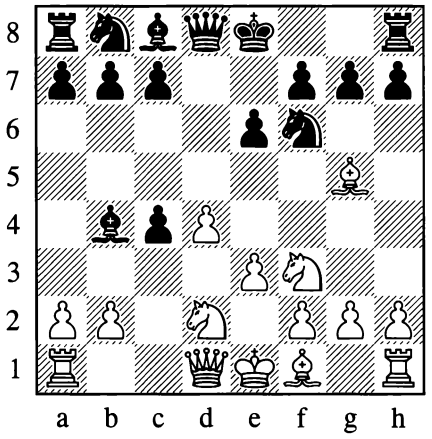
10...♘a5!N

10...♗a6 has been seen, but then when White plays axb5 Black must reply ...♗xb5 at once, as the bishop is hanging. We do want our bishop available to take on b5, but d7 is a better route, as we shall see below.

11.axb5 ♗d7∓

Now we can see the point: since our bishop is not en prise, we are threatening the nasty ...♘b3, exploiting the pin. In the ...♗a6xb5 line, White would be in time to castle before this threat became real.

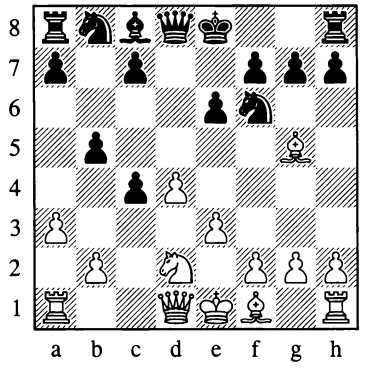
B2) 6.e3



This move doesn't lead to an advantage for White but the positions are very interesting. For our main line we will follow a logical and high-level game:

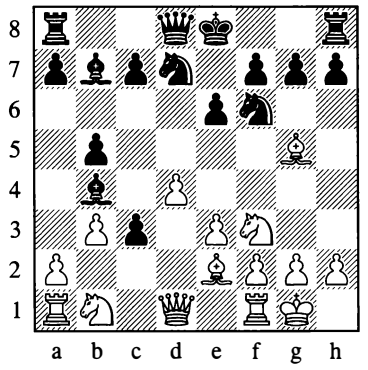
6...b5 7.a4

After 7.a3 ♗xd2† then 8.♘xd2 is the critical recapture – using the knight to help break up Black's queenside pawns (8.♕xd2?! a6 9.♗e2 ♗b7∓ is comfortable for Black). So far this is Goncalves – Kropff, Florianopolis 2016, and now I suggest:



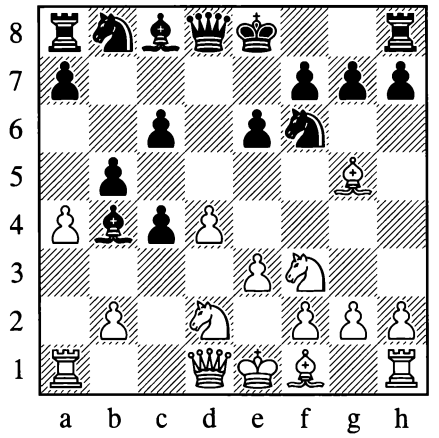
8...♗b7N 9.b3 c5! 10.bxc4 cxd4 11.exd4 bxc4 12.♖b1 ♗d5 13.♕a4† ♘c6 14.♗xc4 0–0= This looks like easy equality.

7.♗e2 ♗b7 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.b3 c3 10.♘b1 was Wempe – V. Georgiev, Wijk aan Zee 2005.



10...h6N 11.♗xf6 ♕xf6 12.a3 ♗d6 13.♘xc3 (13.♗xb5 is probably going to end in a perpetual check after: 13...c2 14.♕xc2 ♗xf3 15.♗xd7† ♔xd7 16.gxf3 ♕g5† 17.♔h1 ♕h5 18.f4 ♕f3†=) 13...a6= White has a better pawn structure but Black has the two bishops; the chances look equal.

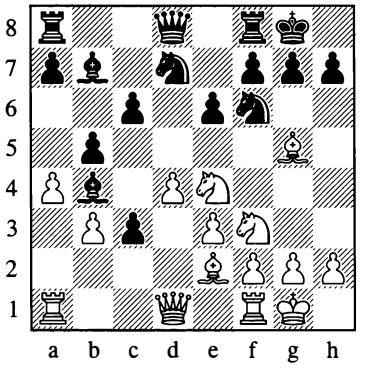
7...c6



8.♕c2

We can also check what happens after simple kingside development:

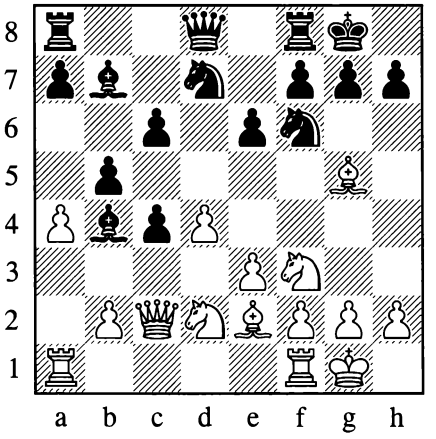
8.♗e2 ♘bd7 9.0–0 0–0 10.b3 c3 11.♘e4 ♗b7



Now 12.♕d3N would have been more testing (instead 12.♘xf6†?! ♘xf6 13.axb5 cxb5 14.♗xb5 ♕b6 15.♗c4 ♘e4∓ and Black stood better in Taboas Rodriguez – Aranda Marin, Madrid 2016). After the text move, Black is still fine after either 12...bxa4 13.♖xa4 a5∞ or 12...c5 13.♘xf6† ♘xf6 14.axb5 ♕d5 15.♗xf6 gxf6=.

8...♗b7 9.♗e2 ♘bd7 10.0–0 0–0

If White doesn't try to break up Black's queenside then Black can continue to improve with moves such as ...h6, ...a5, ...♖c8 or sometimes simply ...c5. So the emphasis is on White to act quickly to try to retain compensation for the pawn.



11.b3 c3 12.♘e4 h6 13.♗h4

The obvious alternative was:

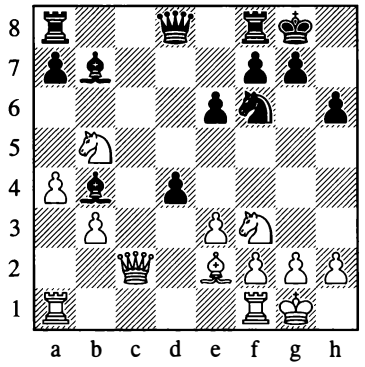
13.♗xf6

Sumets analysed this position. I have selected the lines he believes are best for Black and included them:

13...♘xf6 14.♘xc3 c5!?

Or 14...a6!? 15.♘e5 ♖c8 16.♗f3 (16.♘d3?! c5) 16...♕e7 17.♘e4 c5 18.♘xf6† gxf6 19.♘g6 fxg6 20.♕xg6†= with perpetual check.

15.♘xb5 cxd4

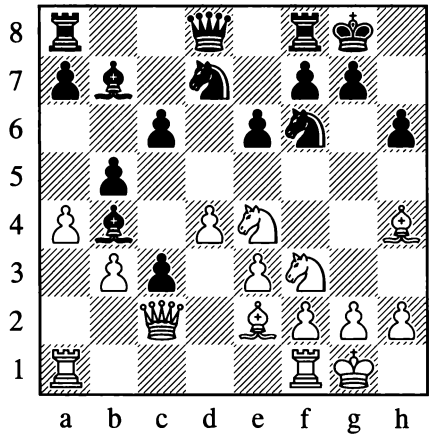


16.♘bxd4

Similar is: 16.♘fxd4 ♖c8 17.♗c4 ♕a5⩲

16...♖c8 17.♗c4 ♗e4 18.♕e2 ♘d5⩲

Black has good compensation for the pawn.

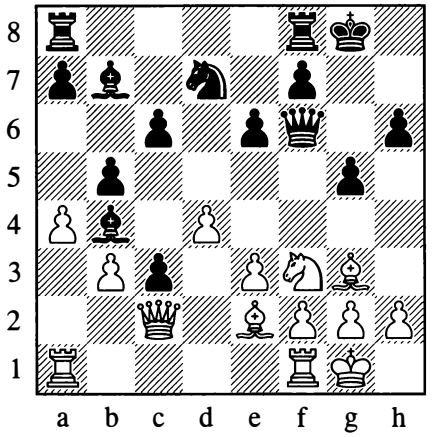


13...g5 14.♘xf6† ♕xf6!?N

14...♘xf6 was the stem game and after 15.♗g3 c5∞ a tense encounter was ahead in Nakamura – Morozevich, Moscow 2013.

The text was suggested by Sumets, and his analysis runs:

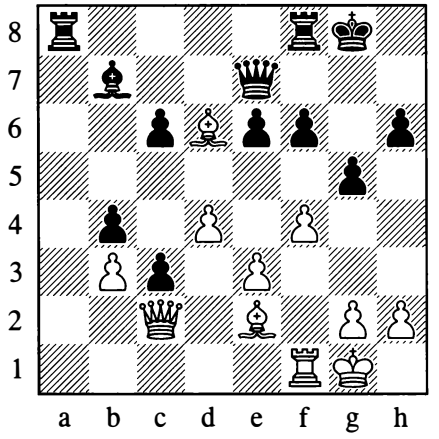
15.♗g3



15...bxa4

Or 15...a6!?∞ and the game goes on.

16.♖xa4 a5 17.♘e5 ♘xe5 18.♗xe5 ♕e7 19.f4 f6 20.♖xb4 axb4 21.♗d6

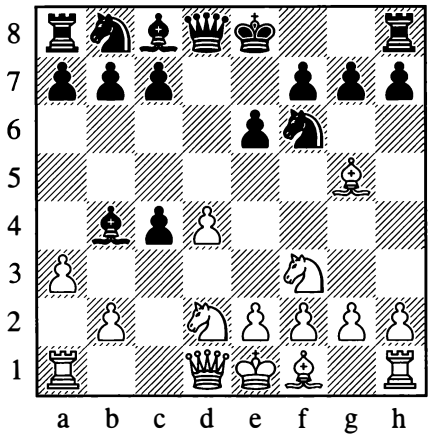


21...♕xd6

21...♕g7∞ avoids the perpetual, but it leads to a messy position which could be dangerous for either side!

22.♕g6†=

B3) 6.a3



6...♗xd2† 7.♕xd2

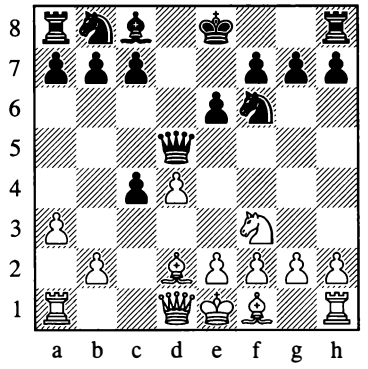
We should also consider the other recapture:

7.♗xd2

And now I suggest:

7...♕d5!

The other line is: 7...b5 8.e3 c6?! I never like playing this move unless I have to, as it closes the diagonal for the bishop, which will likely end up on b7. 9.a4 ♘bd7? Just ignoring White's plan is unwise. 10.axb5 cxb5 11.b3± Black's queenside was falling apart in Hebden – Smerdon, Liverpool 2007.



The queen sits nicely here; it cannot be attacked and supports both the c4-pawn and the rook on a8, which is useful against any future a4xb5.

8.e3 ♘bd7 9.♖c1

Or 9.♕c2 b5 10.a4 a6∓ with ...♗b7 next.

9.a4 a6 has been seen, when Black is ready to play ...b5 when required. This may be one of White's better options at this point, but he is trying to level the game rather than pressing for an advantage, in my opinion.

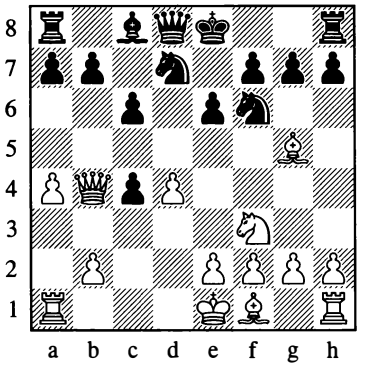
9...b5 10.b3 cxb3 11.♖xc7 ♗b7 12.♖c3 ♘e4∓

7...c6 8.g3

White had a familiar choice between fianchettoing to prepare castling or immediate queenside play:

8.a4 ♘bd7 9.♕b4

After 9.e3 Tsesarsky's analysis runs 9...b5 10.b3 cxb3 11.axb5, but now I like: 11...cxb5!? This seems stronger than the move suggested by Tsesarsky (11...♗b7 12.♕b4⇄ was Tsesarsky). 12.♗xb5 ♕b6 13.♖a5 Otherwise Black can progress with ...a5 and ...a4. 13...0–0∓ White has some problems to overcome to regain his material.

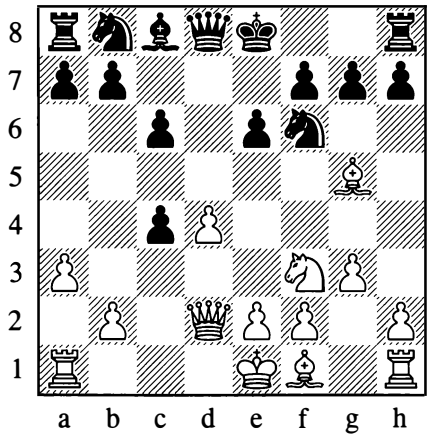


9...h6

9...♕b6!?N 10.♕a3 c5∞ is a messier option, but the text move looks very reliable.

10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.e3 a5 12.♕xc4 0–0 13.♗e2 e5 14.0–0 exd4 15.♕xd4 ♕e7=

In Torre – Ivanchuk, Istanbul (ol) 2000, Black was comfortably level.



8...♘bd7 9.♗g2 b5 10.0–0 ♗b7

Only one game has reached this position, so we could stop here, calling it unclear but roughly balanced. But let's see a few more moves, for illustration and fun.

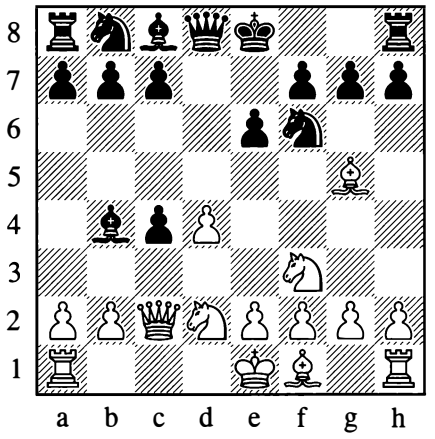
11.b3

Also logical is 11.a4 0–0 12.♘e5 ♕c8 13.♖fc1. White is going all-out to break up the queenside (instead 13.e4 a6 14.f4 transposes to Ipatov – Brkic, Gjakova 2016, which is wholly unclear; Black's extra pawn is secure, but White's centre is imposing). After the text move one possibility is: 13...a6 14.b3 c5 15.♗xf6 ♘xf6 16.♗xb7 ♕xb7 17.bxc4 ♘e4= The queenside is likely to be liquidated. But note this is just a sample line; many alternatives were possible along the way.

11...cxb3 12.♕b4 h6 13.♗xf6 ♕xf6 14.♘d2 a5

White was struggling to rustle up enough compensation for the pawn in Hebden – Schenk, Birmingham 2005.

B4) 6.♕c2

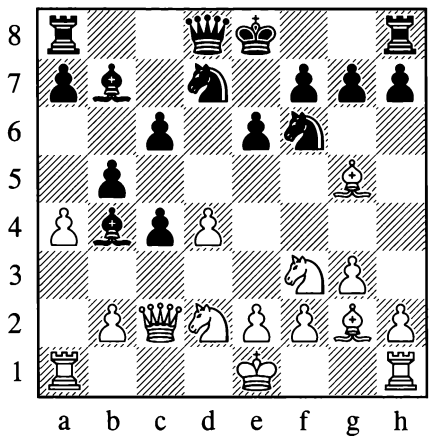


6...b5 7.a4 c6

We refuse to make it easy for White to regain the pawn. Now White's two main options are **B41) 8.g3** or **B42) 8.♗xf6**.

8.e4?! h6 causes White to give up the bishop pair for no gain after 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6. For example: 10.♗e2 0–0 11.0–0 ♘d7 12.b3 c3 13.e5 ♕e7 14.♘e4 bxa4 15.♖xa4 a5∓ Sandipan – Morozevich, Dresden (ol) 2008.

B41) 8.g3 ♗b7 9.♗g2 ♘bd7

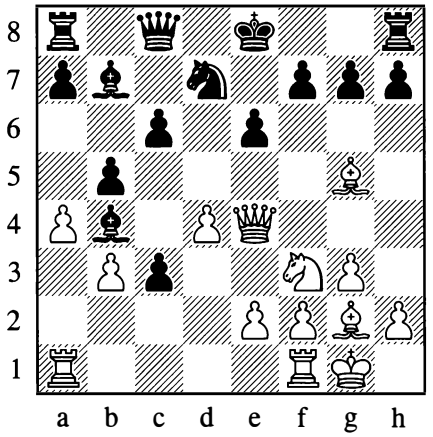


10.0–0

With the text move we continue to follow a top-level game.

10.♘e5 ♕c8 11.0–0 0–0 12.b3 tries for instant queenside play, but Black can handle it in typical style: 12...c5 13.♗xb7 ♕xb7 14.bxc4 ♗xd2 15.♗xd2 b4∓ Krasenkow – Gajewski, Warsaw 2014.

10...♕c8 11.b3 c3 12.♘e4 ♘xe4 13.♕xe4



13...0–0N

Or 13...c5 14.♕g4 h5∓ with a complex position, although one in which Black should not be worse, Mamedyarov – Eljanov, Elista 2008.

The text was suggested as a simpler solution for Black by Postny – his analysis runs:

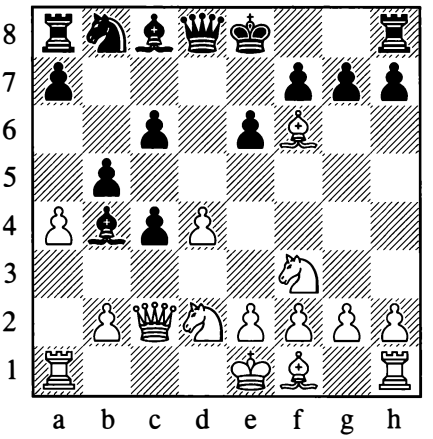
14.♘e5 h6 15.♗f4

15.♗xh6? does not work in view of 15...f5!.

Even worse is: 15.axb5? f5! 16.♕f3 ♘xe5 17.dxe5 hxg5 18.bxc6 ♗a6 19.c7 ♕xc7 20.♖xa6 ♖ac8–+

15...♘f6 16.♕c2 a5∓

B42) 8.♗xf6

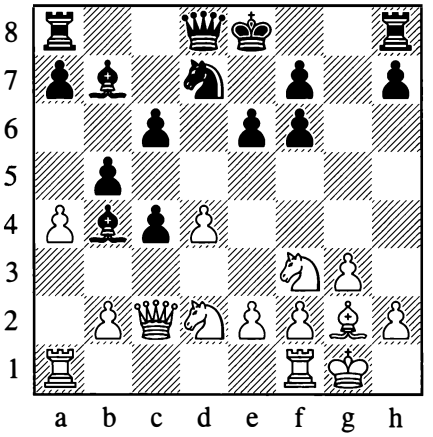


This is a kind of trick which we should be well aware of.

8...gxf6

The idea is 8...♕xf6? 9.axb5 cxb5?? 10.♕e4! picking up the rook.

9.g3 ♗b7 10.♗g2 ♘d7 11.0–0



11...a5!

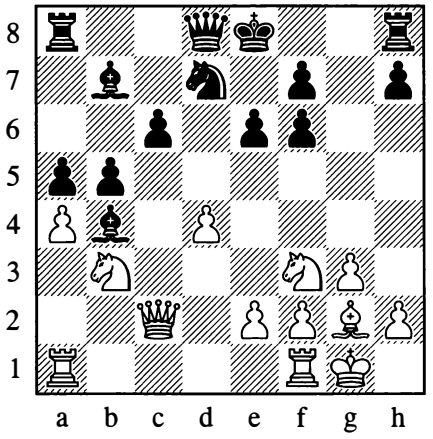
A nice move, supporting the b4-bishop and grabbing a stake on the queenside squares.

11...a6 is the alternative, but after 12.b3 cxb3 13.♘xb3 0–0 14.♘e1± followed by a hop to d3, White enjoys some pleasant queenside pressure.

12.b3

12.♖fd1 is too slow: 12...♘b6 13.axb5 cxb5 14.♘e4 f5!N (14...♕e7∓ is also not bad, as in Bakk – Sarosi, Hungary 2008) 15.♘c5 ♗d5∓

12...cxb3 13.♘xb3



13...bxa4 14.♖xa4

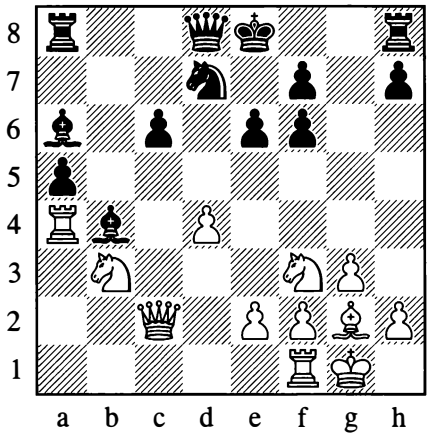
Here Black has a choice: he can go for a plan involving ...♗a6-b5 supporting the a-pawn, or he can play for a ...c5 break; I much prefer the former.

14...♗a6

This is the computer's choice and the move of a well-known theoretician.

The problem with 14...c5 is: 15.dxc5! (and not 15.♘xc5?! ♘xc5 16.dxc5 ♖c8 17.♖xb4 axb4 18.♕a4† ♗c6 19.♕xb4 0–0= Y. Vovk – Moiseenko, Kiev 2011). 15...♖c8 16.♖d1 ♗c6 (16...♕c7 17.♕a2! ♗c6 18.♘fd4 ♗xa4 19.♕xa4 0–0 20.♘xe6!±) 17.♖aa1 0–0±

14...0–0 is also possible with the ...♗a6-b5 manoeuvre to come, although Black does lose some options playing this way, as he may prefer to get in the move ...a4 as quickly as possible. Now 15.♘e1 to d3 makes sense when 15...♗a6 to b5 is standard play. Instead 15.♖d1?! is no problem for Black: 15...♗a6 16.♖aa1 ♗b5 17.♘c5 ♕e7 18.♘xd7 ♕xd7∓ Arsovic – Pavlovic, Kavala 2008.

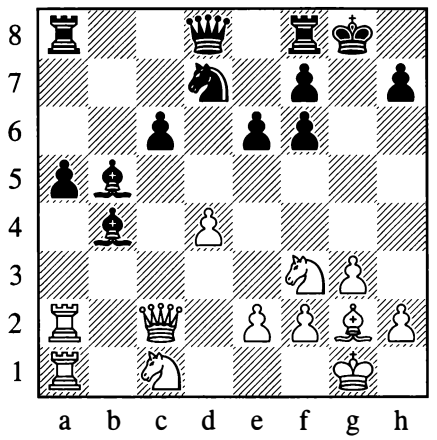


15.♖a2 ♗b5 16.♖fa1

After 16.♘e1?! Black can strike immediately with 16...a4! when White is not in a position to play ♘c5 supported by another knight on d3. 17.♘c5 ♘xc5 18.dxc5 0–0 19.♘d3 ♕d4 20.♖b1 ♗a5 21.♘b2 ♕c3∓ Black is simply a pawn up.

16...0–0 17.♘c1

If 17.♘e1 then 17...a4! is of course the logical answer, hitting the knight before its jump to c5 can be supported by its colleague from d3.



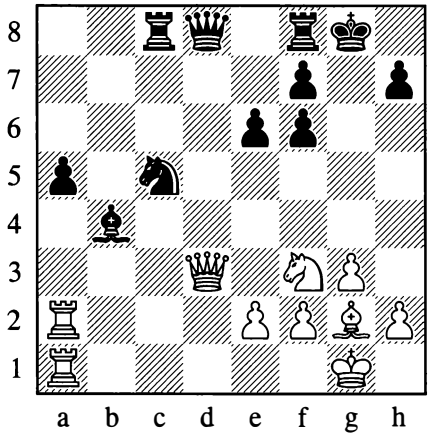
17...♖c8

A plausible alternative is: 17...a4!? 18.♘d3 ♗e7∓

18.♘d3 ♗xd3 19.♕xd3 c5 20.dxc5

If 20.d5 ♘b6 21.dxe6 then 21...♕xd3!? is a safe option, when the exchange of queens removes any possible danger (21...fxe6!? is the more ambitious choice). 22.exf7† ♖xf7 23.exd3 ♖d8∓

20...♘xc5



21.♕e3 ♔g7

21...♕d5!?∓ bringing the queen to the kingside may have been better.

22.h4 ♕d6∓

Black was happy in Rapport – Wojtaszek, Biel 2015.

Conclusion

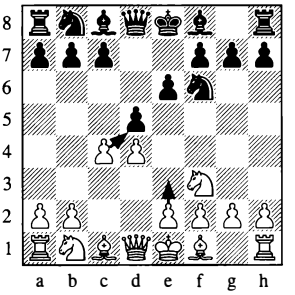
In this chapter we considered two bishop-developers after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6: to f4 or g5.

4.♗f4 is rare and harmless; in reply, I suggest the logical 4...dxc4. The bishop makes no sense on f4 in such set-ups, and is even prone to attack by a later ...♘d5.

4.♗g5 is far more common and serious. I recommend 4...♗b4† 5.♘bd2 (of course 5.♘c3 transposes to the main lines) and now 5...dxc4 when White has a range of options. In general Black has no reason to fear any move. White has various ways to regain the pawn and equalize, or instead there are plenty of lines where White can play in gambit style, but whether he has full compensation is a debate.

So 4.♗g5 ducks the theoretical challenge of trying to bust the Ragozin; White simply hopes for a playable game.

Chapter 22

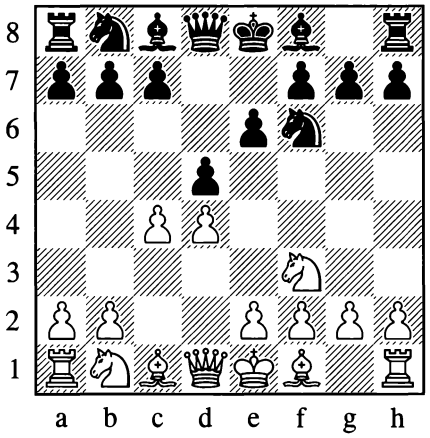


4.cxd5 & 4.e3

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6

A) 4.cxd5 419
B) 4.e3 a6 420
B1) 5.♘bd2 421
B2) 5.♘c3 dxc4 6.♗xc4 b5 421
B21) 7.♗d3 422
B22) 7.♗b3 ♗b7 8.0–0 c5 424
B221) 9.e4 424
B222) 9.♕e2 425
B3) 5.b3 c5 426
B31) 6.cxd5 426
B32) 6.♗b2 cxd4 7.exd4 ♘c6 8.♗d3 g6!?
9.0–0 ♗g7 10.♘bd2 0–0 427
B321) 11.♘e5 428
B322) 11.♖c1 430

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6



In this final chapter we will cover two rare pawn moves: **A) 4.cxd5** and **B) 4.e3**.

A) 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5

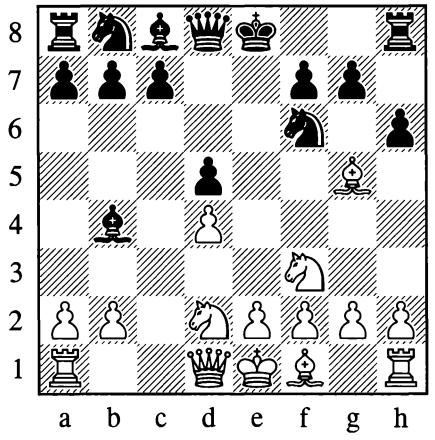
Of course 5.♘c3 ♗b4 transposes to the 5.cxd5 exd5 Ragozin from Part 1 (see page 22).

5...♗b4† 6.♘bd2

White finds a different square for his knight than usual, but it is hardly scary.

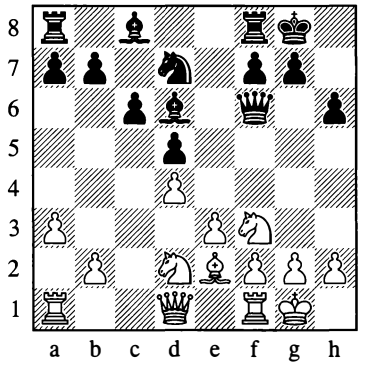
6...h6

Forcing the bishop to make a decision.



7.♗h4

Naturally the alternative is 7.♗xf6 ♕xf6. Black has a comfortable version of the Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit, with the bishop pair thrown in as a bonus. Black's plans will be based on kingside play. Let's see a couple of sample lines: 8.e3 0–0 9.♗e2 c6 10.0–0 ♘d7 11.a3 ♗d6



12.b4 Trying to create a weakness on the queenside with b4-b5, as is traditional in the Exchange Variation. (Instead 12.e4N attempts to liquidate. For example, 12...dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♕e7 14.♕c2 ♘f6 15.♘xd6 ♕xd6= and Black could try to exploit the isolated d4-pawn, but there is not much in the game.) 12...♖e8 13.b5 ♘f8 14.bxc6 bxc6 With balanced play in Jedynak – Inkiov, Marseille 2006. The weakness of c6 is offset by Black's bishop pair and active prospects on the kingside.

7...♗f5

It's as simple as that: the exchange on move 4 has allowed our bishop to find a good active square on f5. The only possible downside would be if White could target the b7-pawn, but as we shall see, Black has a plan to deal with that.

8.e3 ♘bd7 9.♕b3

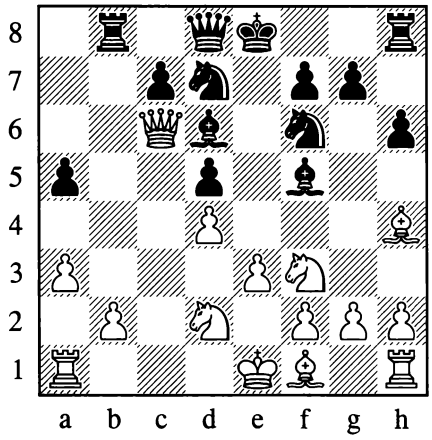
So, as mentioned above, this is the only real test.

9.♗e2 0–0 10.0–0 is sensible play, but it puts zero pressure on Black (Note that White has to be wary of the pin. For example, 10.♘e5?? g5 11.♗g3 ♘xe5 12.♗xe5 ♘e4–+ is a piece-losing disaster.) 10...♖e8= Black has easy equality with moves such as ...c6 and ...a5 on the way, and maybe dropping the dark-squared bishop back to d6.

9...a5 10.a3 ♗d6 11.♕xb7

Once again this is the only way to ask questions, as a line such as 11.♗e2 0–0 12.0–0 ♕b8 followed by ...c7-c6 is easy for Black.

11...♖b8 12.♕c6



12...0–0!

Simple development is best.

Instead the weakening 12...g5?! 13.♗g3 ♖xb2 has a clever tactical idea in that 14.♗xd6 cxd6 15.♕xd6?? is not possible, as after ...♖b6 the queen cannot escape. But if instead White plays 14.♗e2 and soon drops his queen back to c3, then we will later regret the ...g5 lunge.

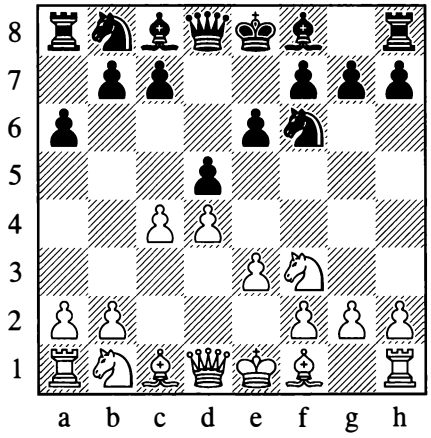
13.♕c3 ♖b6 14.♗e2 ♕a8▭

Black has great compensation with moves such as ...♖c6 threatened.

B) 4.e3 a6

This little pawn move leads to an independent line I am using to plug a hole in our repertoire. In all other variations we are looking to play ...♗b4, but here my belief is that 4...a6 is a stronger move. Black sets up future ...dxc4 and ...b5 ideas. Admittedly the play is in somewhat different style to the rest of the repertoire (in fact in this line it's often like a Queen's Gambit Accepted and sometimes it's a direct transposition), but sometimes you need to be flexible and just play the right move.

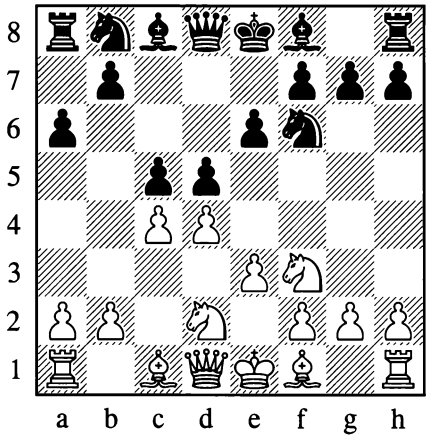
So why not 4...♗b4† as usual? Unfortunately this move doesn't make much sense here. White has blocked in his c1-bishop so I'm just not keen to exchange it.



Now the main options are: **B1) 5.♘bd2**, **B2) 5.♘c3** and **B3) 5.b3**.

5.a3 is a tame move that causes no problems. For example: 5...dxc4 6.♗xc4 b5 7.♗a2 White tries to make sense of the a2-a3 move, but the bishop is no star on a2. 7...♗b7 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♕e2 c5 Black was comfortably level in Drazic – Korneev, Bergamo 2008; Black's usual setup is queen to c7 and bishop to d6.

B1) 5.♘bd2 c5



6.cxd5?!

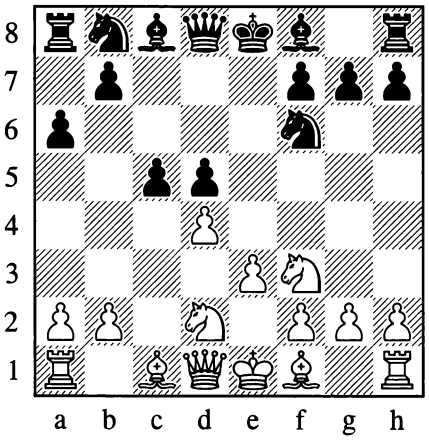
I think this is a weak move, opening up the c8-bishop.

6.b3 will soon convert to the 5.b3 line covered in variation B3.

6.dxc5 leads to a dead-level position. And games do not get any deader than the following example: 6...♗xc5 7.a3 dxc4 8.♗xc4 b5 9.♗e2 0–0 10.b4 ♗e7 11.♗b2 ♗b7 12.0–0 ♘bd7 13.♖c1 ♖c8 14.♖xc8 ♕xc8 15.♕b1 ♕b8 16.♖c1 ♖c8 17.h3 h6 ½–½ Margvelashvili – Naroditsky, Internet 2015. If you need to win, then Black can certainly keep more tension than appeared in this perfectly symmetrical game.

6...exd5

We can see that Black is likely to have an IQP soon, but we will have the traditional flowing development to compensate for our potentially weaker structure. In fact, this looks to me a comfortable version for Black of normal IQP positions. The play could go in any of a hundred ways, so we need no more theory. Instead let's see a couple of sample lines.



7.dxc5

A natural move to limit Black's choice of structures, but now our pieces step smoothly into play.

If instead 7.b3 then we can see how an absolutely top-class player handled the position: 7...cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♗b4 Provoking the white queen to an exposed square on the c-file. 9.♕c2 0–0 10.♗e2 Now in Gustafsson – Anand, Germany 2006, Black chose the move 10...♗d7, with the idea ...♘c6 and then ...♗xc6 if required; Black was easily level and soon became better. But also interesting is the ambitious 10...♘e4!?N.

7...♗xc5 8.♗e2 ♘c6 9.0–0 0–0 10.♘b3 ♗b6 11.♗d2 ♘e4→

In Buhmann – Socko, Austria 2012, the game had hardly started and yet Black had already taken over the initiative.

B2) 5.♘c3

This enables Black to transpose to a pleasant version of a Queen's Gambit Accepted.

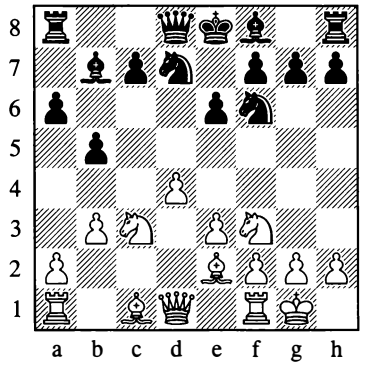
5...dxc4 6.♗xc4 b5

When this structure arises via the QGA move order, White generally doesn't hurry to develop his knight to c3. Some of the most

threatening variations involve an early a2-a4 to challenge the b5-pawn. With the knight already on c3, a2-a4 is generally pointless as ...b4 hits the knight and causes White to lose valuable time.

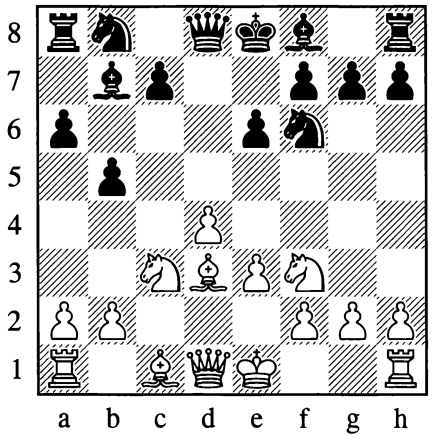
We will analyse **B21) 7.♗d3** and **B22) 7.♗b3**.

7.♗e2 is too timid to offer White much hope of an advantage: 7...♗b7 8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.b3 (9.♗d2?! is much too passive: 9...♗d6 10.♖c1 0–0 11.♕e1 ♕e7 12.♘b1 e5 13.♗a5 exd4 14.♘xd4 ♕e5∓ Nikolic – Carlsen, Berlin [blitz] 2015)



9...c5 10.♗b2 ♗e7 11.♕c2 ♖c8 12.dxc5 ♘xc5 13.♖ad1 ♕b6 14.♕b1 b4= Black was fine in Nepomniachtchi – Karjakin, Sochi 2014.

B21) 7.♗d3 ♗b7



8.0–0

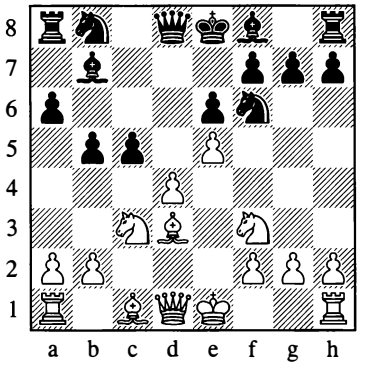
8.b3 ♘bd7 9.♗b2 c5 gives Black easy equality.

8.e4

This is more ambitious, but Black is well placed to challenge White's pawn centre with:

8...c5 9.e5

Or 9.dxc5 ♘c6 10.0–0 ♘d7!? with ...♘xc5 to come.

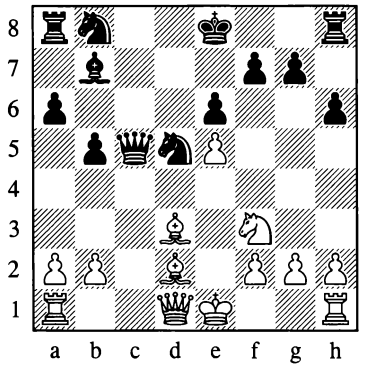


9...♘d5

9...cxd4!? 10.♘xb5 has occurred in a couple of games. There are a few possible continuations, but perhaps the simplest is: 10...♘fd7!? 11.♘bxd4 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♕a5† (12...♕xd4?? loses the queen to 13.♗b5†+–) 13.♔f1 ♕xe5=

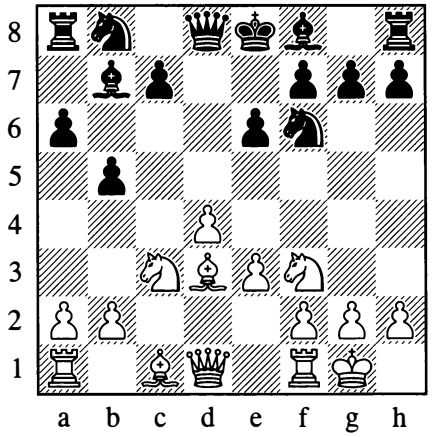
10.♗g5 ♕b6 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.♘e4 h6 13.♘xc5 ♕xc5 14.♗d2

Black can maintain a good position with:



14...♘b4!N∞

Rather than14...♘c6?! 15.♖c1± as in Wang Hao – Lu Shanglei, China 2015.



8...c5

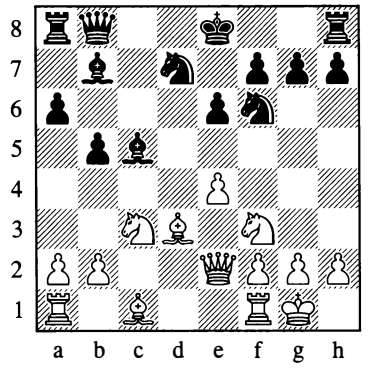
This move makes the e3-e4 advance harder for White to carry out.

9.♕e2

White also gets no advantage after:

9.dxc5 ♗xc5 10.♕e2 ♘bd7 11.e4 ♕b8

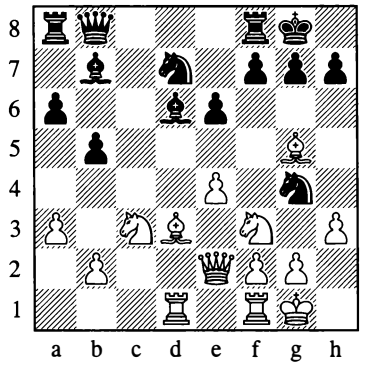
The queen often goes here in the QGA, controlling some central squares while anticipating the arrival of a white rook on the d-file.



12.♗g5 0–0 13.♖ad1

13.♖ac1 ♖c8 14.♗b1 ♘e5 was also fine for Black in Hernandez Carmenates – Khenkin, Havana 2008.

13...♗d6 14.a3 ♘g4 15.h3



15...♘ge5

15...h6!?N could also be considered.

16.♘xe5 ♘xe5

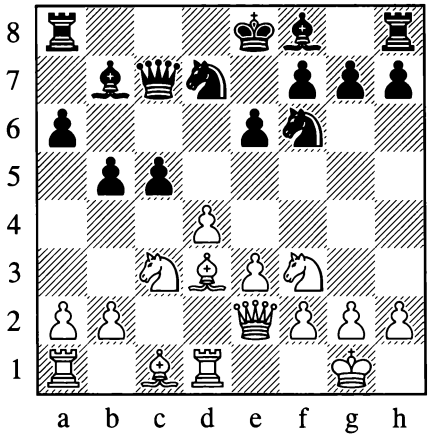
Black was at least equal in D. Rombaldoni – Ki. Georgiev, Arvier 2010.

9...♘bd7 10.♖d1

10.♗d2?! is too passive: 10...♗e7 11.♖fd1 0–0 12.♖ac1 ♕b6 13.♗b1 ♖fd8 14.♗e1 ♖ac8∓ Vachier-Lagrave – Alsina Leal, San Sebastian 2011.

10...♕c7!?

The thematic 10...♕b8 is safer, and after 11.h3 ♗e7 12.b3 0–0 Black was not worse at all in Ikonnikov – Van Wely, Spijkenisse 2011.



11.♗d2 ♖c8 12.♖ac1 ♕b8

This isn't really better or worse than the note above; it's just another way of arranging the pieces on the queenside. In the following game it led to an interesting pawn sacrifice:

13.a4!? c4 14.♗b1 b4 15.♘a2 c3 16.bxc3 b3 17.♘b4 a5∞

Black's past b-pawn and potential piece outposts on the queenside yielded good compensation in Markos – Zilka, Austria 2013.

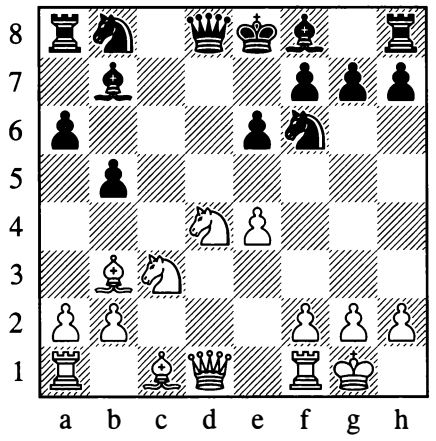
B22) 7.♗b3

This has been a less common choice via this particular move order, but it has the potential to transpose to more popular variations of the QGA after a few more moves.

7...♗b7 8.0–0 c5

We have reached another branching point; White's two main options are **B221) 9.e4** and **B222) 9.♕e2**.

B221) 9.e4 cxd4 10.♘xd4

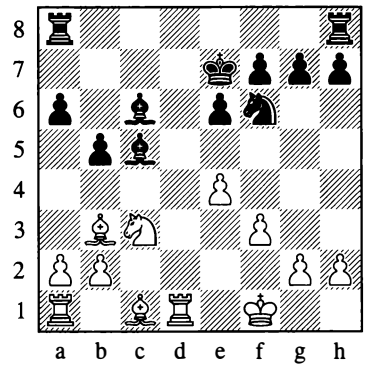


10...♘c6

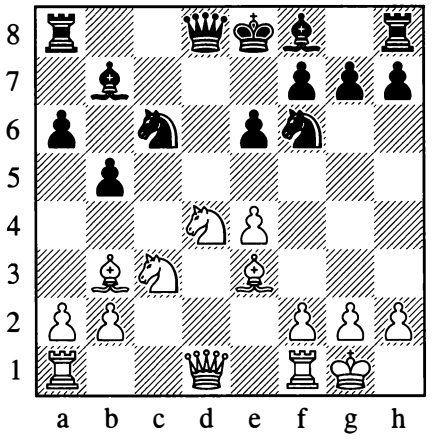
This knight often goes to d7 in the QGA, but here it makes more sense to challenge the enemy knight in the centre.

11.♗e3

After 11.♘xc6 ♕xd1 12.♖xd1 ♗xc6 13.f3 ♗c5† 14.♔f1 ♔e7 Black's king stays in the centre for the endgame. A high-level game went:



15.♗g5 (15.♗f4N ♖hd8 16.♖ac1 ♖ac8 17.♖xd8 ♔xd8 18.♘e2 ♗b7 is also equal) 15...h6 16.♗h4 g5 17.♗f2 ♗xf2 18.♔xf2 ♖hc8= Ponomariov – Anand, Moscow 2009.



11...♘xd4

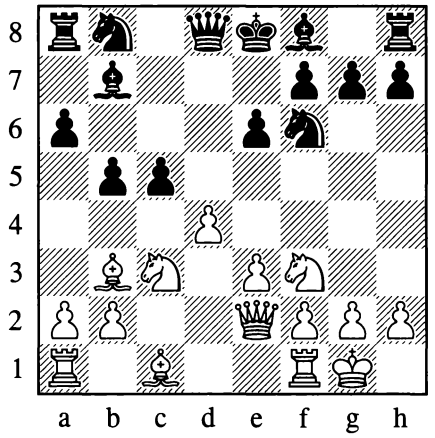
11...♗e7 should be good enough to equalize. However, 12.♘xc6 ♗xc6 leaves our bishop slightly misplaced on c6, and it may well have to drop back to b7 at some point. That's why it seems slightly more accurate to trade on d4.

12.♗xd4 ♗e7 13.f3 0–0 14.a4 ♕b8 15.♕e1 b4∞

Black was not worse in Wojtaszek – Kulaots, Warsaw 2013.

B222) 9.♕e2

This is the main line, preparing to put the rook on d1.



9...♘bd7 10.♖d1 ♕b8

Black has tried moving the queen to c7 and b6 as well, but I think she is safest on b8.

11.d5

Many other moves have been played, but I feel it would be excessive to analyse all of them when 4.e3 is such a rare move order. The text move has been by far the most popular choice, and it's clearly the most forcing and critical move, so I will focus on that and let you check the minor alternatives for yourself should you wish to.

11...♘xd5

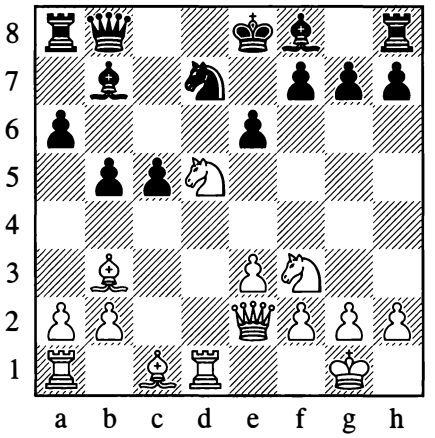
This is the safest equalizer.

11...exd5 might transpose, but 12.e4!? is an extra option which I don't see any point in allowing.

I would also like to draw your attention to 11...c4!? 12.dxe6 fxe6 13.♗c2 ♗d6, when Black has an active Meran-style position. 14.e4 0–0 15.h3 ♕c7 16.a3 ♖ae8↑ Black's position has a lot of dynamic potential and he has achieved a healthy plus score from here. I decided to analyse the safe line to ensure full theoretical soundness; but I would strongly suggest checking out this line too.

12.♘xd5

12.♗xd5 exd5 13.♘xd5 ♗xd5 14.♖xd5 transposes.



12...♗xd5 13.♗xd5

13.♖xd5?! is a bit too speculative: 13...exd5 14.♗xd5 ♖a7 15.♘g5?! (15.e4 is better although 15...♗e7 still leaves White struggling for compensation) 15...♘e5 16.f4 ♗e7 17.♕h5 g6∓

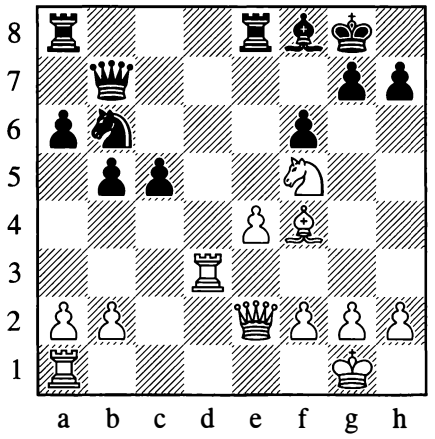
13...exd5 14.♖xd5

14.e4!? d4 15.b4 ♘e5 16.bxc5 ♘xf3† 17.♕xf3 ♗xc5 18.♕f5 ♗e7 19.♗f4 ♕b6= was seen in Pavlovic – Drasko, Belgrade 1998. White has enough activity to regain his pawn, but not to claim any advantage.

14...♗e7 15.e4 ♕b7 16.♗g5 f6 17.♗f4 0–0 18.♘h4 ♘b6

This happened in one of my games against IM Brian Kelly and led to an easy draw after:

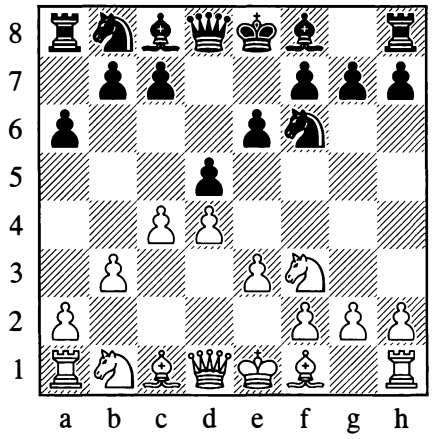
19.♖d3 ♖fe8 20.♘f5 ♗f8



21.f3 c4 22.♖d2 ♘d5 23.♗d6 ♗xd6 24.♘xd6 ♕b6† 25.♕f2 ♕xd6 26.♖xd5 ♕c7 27.♖ad1 ♖ad8 28.♕d4

½–½ Kelly – R. Pert, Birmingham 2006.

B3) 5.b3



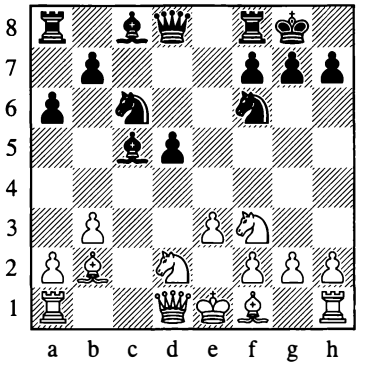
This is the trendy response, and it certainly makes sense to get ready to recapture on c4 with the b-pawn, avoiding the QGA transposition from the previous section.

5...c5

I like this active continuation. White's two main ideas are **B31) 6.cxd5** and **B32) 6.♗b2**.

6.♗d3 is likely to transpose to the second main line, as White can hardly do without the bishop on b2. For instance, 6...♘c6 7.♗b2 cxd4 8.exd4 and we are straight into variation B32.

6.dxc5?! ♗xc5 only speeds up Black's development. For example: 7.♘bd2 0–0 8.♗b2 ♘c6 9.cxd5 exd5



10.♗e2 ♕e7 11.0–0 ♖d8 12.a3 d4 13.exd4 ♘xd4 14.♘xd4 ♗xd4 15.♗xd4 ♖xd4∓ Xu Yinglun – Ding Liren, China 2015.

B31) 6.cxd5 exd5

I prefer to recapture with the e-pawn in order to free the light-squared bishop. Overall I don't really believe in this variation for White, as it accelerates Black's development.

That said, 6...♘xd5 has also been played at the highest level: 7.♗e2 ♘c6 8.0–0 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♘xd4 10.♕xd4 ♗e7 11.♗b2 ♗f6 12.♕d2 ♗d7 13.♖d1 ♗c6 14.e4 ♘f4∞ Fressinet – Carlsen, Paris 2016.

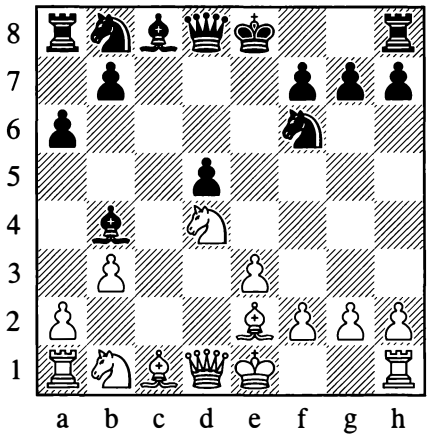
7.♗e2

This was tried against me in a rapidplay tournament in 2016.

7...cxd4! 8.♘xd4

Other recaptures make no sense. Now we will see the reason for the early exchange on d4.

8...♗b4†!



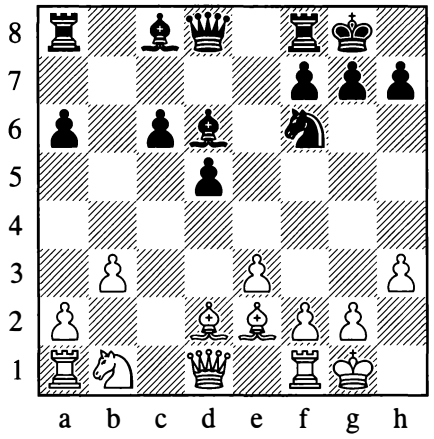
9.♗d2 ♗d6

Now the d2-bishop looks funny as it really wants to be on b2. We could stop here and conclude that Black has easily equalized from the opening, but I will include the continuation of my game for illustrative purposes.

10.h3?!

White was obviously worried about the kingside, but he should not have weakened himself voluntarily.

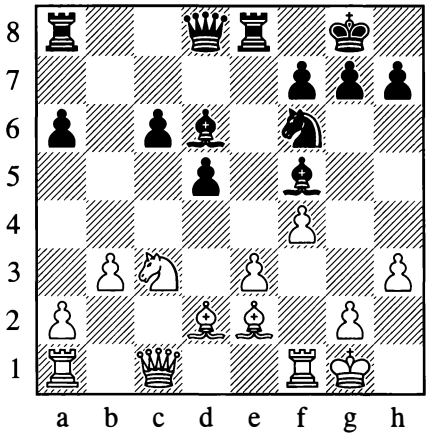
10...0–0 11.0–0 ♘c6 12.♘xc6 bxc6



13.♘c3 ♖e8 14.♕c1 ♗f5 15.f4

This looks (and is) weakening, but the computer confirms it is White's best try, as otherwise Black's attack will rage.

For example: 15.♕b2 ♗c7 16.♘a4 ♘e4 17.♖ac1 ♖e6!→ and White is in trouble.

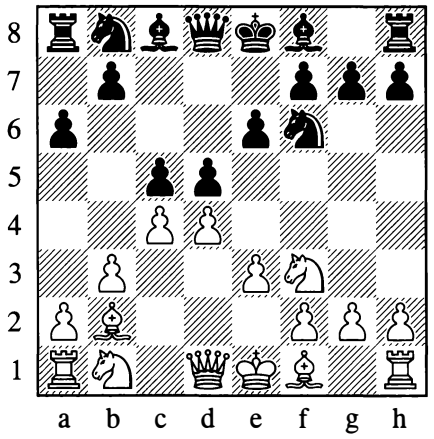


15...♕e7 16.♗f3?! ♗a3 17.♕e1 ♗b2∓

I was winning material in Brett – R. Pert, Essex (rapid) 2016.

B32) 6.♗b2

Maintaining the tension is more challenging, but I have a nice line to recommend against it.



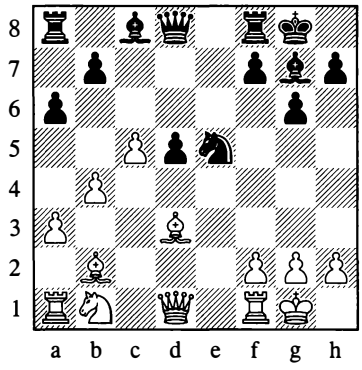
6...cxd4 7.exd4 ♘c6 8.♗d3 g6!?

Switching to a kingside fianchetto is not the most obvious plan, but it is starting to pick up in popularity. White's bishops on b2 and d3 are pointing towards the kingside, so it makes sense to set up a solid defensive barrier.

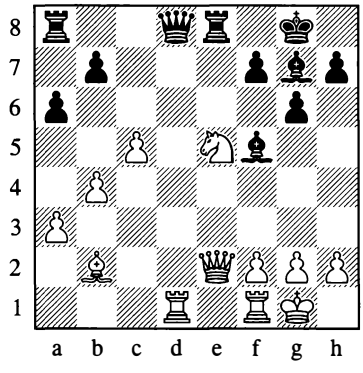
9.0–0 ♗g7 10.♘bd2

10.a3 has been played but it has no independent significance after 10...0–0N, as White will surely convert to one of the lines covered below by means of c4-c4 or ♘bd2.

10.c5 0–0 11.a3 sees White gaining space on the queenside, but 11...♘d7! is a good answer, preparing counterplay with ...e5. A high-level game continued: 12.b4 e5 13.dxe5 ♘dxe5 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5



15.♗e2 ♗f5 16.♘d2 d4 17.♘f3 d3 18.♘xe5 dxe2 19.♕xe2 ♖e8 20.♖ad1



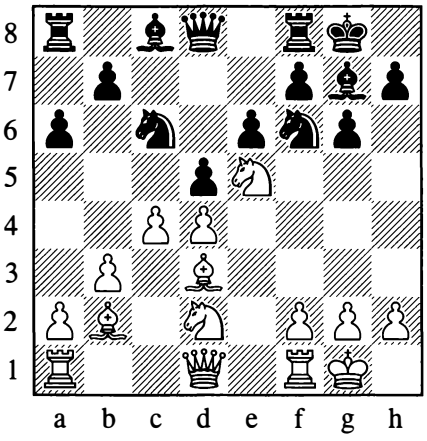
20...♕e7 (20...♕c8!?∞ threatens ...f6 and leads to more complicated play, although it's still objectively equal after some computer lines) 21.g4 ♗c8 22.♕d2 ♗xe5 23.♗xe5 ♗xg4 The position should be equal, although Black went on to exploit White's exposed kingside in Bacrot – Yu Yangyi, Dubai (rapid) 2014.

10...0–0

White has tried a bunch of different moves, but most of them lead to roughly the same sort of position. I decided to analyse two main options. **B321) 11.♘e5** does change the character of the position and was played in a super-GM game, so it deserves a closer look. We will then move on to the more popular **B322) 11.♖c1**.

11.♖e1 b6 is similar to variation B322 and may well transpose, as White will surely want to put the rook on c1 at some point. I did consider 11...♘b4N as well, since 12.♗b1 would leave the rook temporarily stuck on a1, but it's not clear what the knight is doing after 12.♗f1.

B321) 11.♘e5



11...♘d7!?N

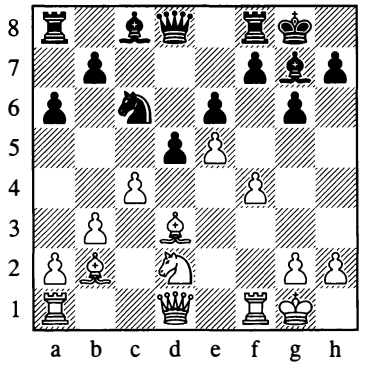
I like this method of challenging the knight.

11...♗d7 was Black's choice in Karjakin – Topalov, Stavanger 2014, and now Marin points out that 12.♖c1!N± would have given White good chances.

12.♘xc6

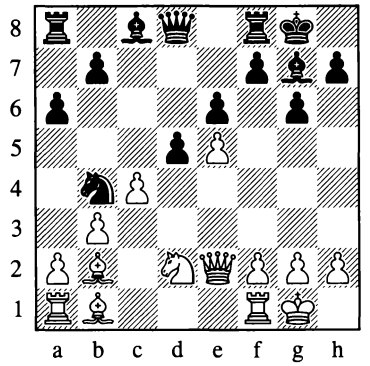
12.♖e1 ♘dxe5 13.dxe5 ♗d7 (13...♘b4!? 14.♗e2 ♘c6 is fine if you don't mind repeating the position) 14.♘f3 dxc4 15.♗xc4 ♘e7= and Black has nice outposts for his pieces.

12.f4 ♘dxe5 13.dxe5 (13.fxe5?! runs into 13...♘xd4! 14.♗xd4 dxc4 15.♗c5 cxd3 16.♗xf8 ♕xf8 17.♘f3 ♗d7 when Black has fine prospects; he has two strong bishops and two pawns for the exchange, and White has no obvious way to win the d3-pawn.)



13...f6! This should lead to easy equality, for instance: 14.♕e2 fxe5 15.fxe5 ♗d7 16.♖xf8† ♕xf8 17.♖f1 ♕c5† 18.♔h1 ♖f8=

Finally, I also checked:
12.♕e2 ♘dxe5 13.dxe5 ♘b4 14.♗b1



14...♘c6!?

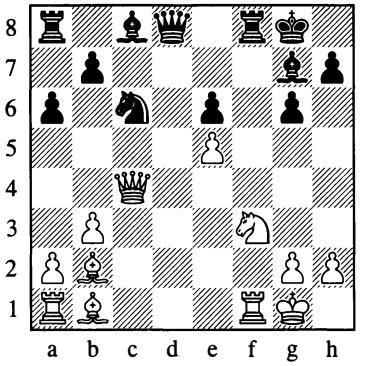
Asking White whether he can find a better move than 15.♗d3 repeating.

Black can avoid the repetition with something like 14...♕c7 15.a3 ♘c6 16.f4 b5!? 17.cxd5 exd5, when White has no more than a tiny edge.

15.f4

15.a3 f6=; 15.♗d3 ♘b4=

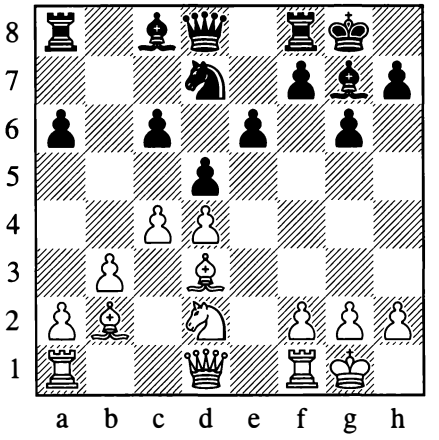
15...f6 16.♘f3 dxc4 17.♕xc4 fxe5 18.fxe5



18...♕b6† 19.♔h1 ♕b5 20.♕xb5 axb5 21.♗d3 b4=

Followed by ...♖a5, when the position is equal although it's maybe White who has to be slightly more careful to protect his pawn weaknesses.

12...bxc6

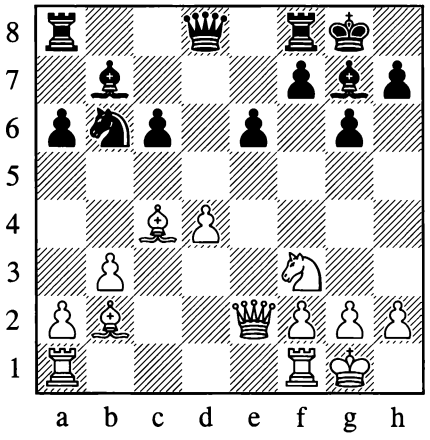


13.♘f3 dxc4 14.♗xc4 ♗b7

Black is ready to free himself with ...c5, which should solve his opening problems. For example:

15.♕e2 ♘b6!?

15...c5 16.♖ad1 ♗xf3 17.♕xf3 ♕c7= is also level.



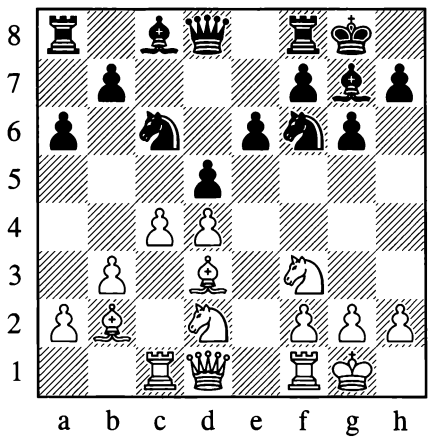
16.♗a3

16.♗d3?! c5 17.♗e4 ♗xe4 18.♕xe4 ♕d5∓ does not help White at all.

16...♖e8 17.♖fd1 ♕c7 18.♖ac1 ♘xc4 19.♕xc4 a5

Black's bishop pair makes up for the slight weakness of his queenside pawns. If you find this too double-edged, you have the option of 15...c5 with a more simplified game.

B322) 11.♖c1



This is the main line. Despite the rook's presence on the c-file, Black can still carry on developing normally with:

11...b6! 12.♖e1

12.cxd5 ♘b4 is the point, when 13.♗b1 ♘bxd5= gives Black easy play.

12.♗a3

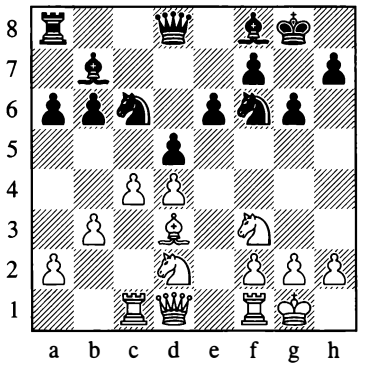
White attacks the f8-rook while controlling the b4-square, thereby making cxd5 into a real threat. However, Black has two good replies. The most interesting is:

12...♗b7!?N

This amazing idea of the machine just gives up the exchange for positional compensation. 12...♘e7 is a safe alternative, when 13.♘e5 ♗b7 14.c5 bxc5 15.♗xc5 ♖e8 16.b4 ♘d7 17.♘xd7 ♕xd7 was close to equal in Shengelia – Feher, Austria 2012.

13.♗xf8 ♗xf8

The bishop is strong on the dark squares and the d4-pawn is loose.

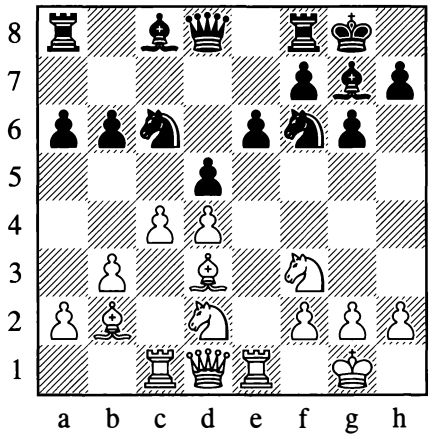


14.cxd5

14.♕e2 gives Black a choice between picking up the d4-pawn with 14...dxc4 followed by ...♘xd4, or maintaining the tension with a move like 14...♗h6!? or 14...a5!?.

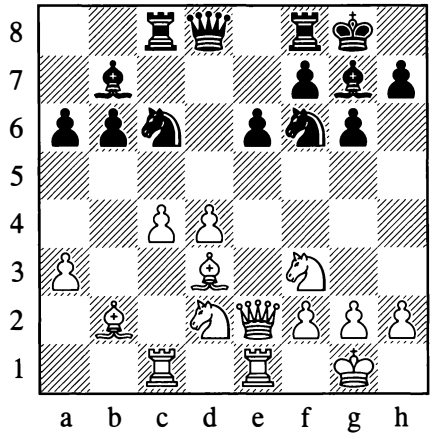
14...♘xd5

Black has excellent compensation on the dark squares.



12...♗b7 13.a3 ♖c8 14.♕e2 dxc4 15.bxc4

Now 15...♖e8 16.h3 ♕c7 17.♕e3 ♘e7 18.♘e5 ♘f5 19.♗xf5 exf5∞ led to complex play in Radjabov – Carlsen, Berlin 2015. This could certainly be repeated, but I would tend to prefer:



15...♕c7N

Followed by ...♖fd8, with balanced chances.

Conclusion

For our last chapter I covered two rather unusual pawn moves after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6.

The independent lines after 4.cxd5 are harmless, as following 4...exd5 Black has gained the option of developing the light-squared bishop to an active square on f5. The potential pitfall would be a ♕b3 idea, hitting the b7-pawn, but as we saw, sacrificing that pawn offers excellent compensation.

4.e3 is in general not a threatening move, but it does encourage us to depart from normal Ragozin-style play. After all, with White's dark-squared bishop locked in, offering to exchange it with ...♗b4† makes little sense. So instead I recommend 4...a6 as the most principled reply. It's true that after ...dxc4 and ...b5 ideas, the play can resemble or even transpose to the Queen's Gambit Accepted. But the lines we reach are not currently considered the critical tests of the QGA. Thus Black can expect a comfortable position with fairly straightforward play. Finally, 5.b3 keeps more tension in the position but 5...c5 offers Black a healthy game, whether in an active IQP position or the interesting fianchetto set-up discussed at the end of the chapter.

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A) 7.e3 *26*
B) 7.♗xf6 ♕xf6 *28*
  B1) 8.e3 *28*
  B2) 8.♕a4† *29*
  B3) 8.♕b3 *30*
C) 7.♘d2 ♗f5 *31*
  C1) 8.♗xf6?! *32*
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  B3) 8.e3 g5 9.♗g3 ♘e4 *46*
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D1) 7.♘e5 *62*
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D21) 10.♖c1 ♕g6 *66*
D211) 11.♕b3 *67*
D212) 11.♕d1 *68*
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D2231) 15.b4 *74*
D2232) 15.a3 *75*

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A) 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 c5 *84*
A1) 8.♕a4† *84*
A2) 8.e3 *86*
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B1) 7.♘d2 *88*
B2) 7.♗e2 *90*
B3) 7.a4 c6 *91*
B31) 8.♘e5 *91*
B32) 8.♘d2 *93*
B33) 8.♗e2 ♗b7 9.0–0 a6 *95*
B331) 10.♘e4 *96*
B332) 10.♘e5 *97*

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4! 6.e4 c5

A) 7.dxc5 *101*
B) 7.e5 cxd4 *103*
B1) 8.♕a4† *103*
B2) 8.♘xd4 ♕a5 9.exf6 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3 ♕xg5 11.fxg7 ♕xg7 *107*
B21) 12.♕f3 ♘d7 13.♗xc4 0–0 *107*
B211) 14.♗e2 *107*
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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 dxc4! 6.e4 c5 7.♗xc4 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♕a5

A) 9.♗b5† *118*
B) 9.♗d2 ♕c5 10.♗b5† ♗d7 11.♘b3 ♕e7 12.♗d3 ♘c6 13.a3 ♗d6 14.0–0 0–0 *121*
B1) 15.♗g5 *125*
B2) 15.f4 *127*
B3) 15.♔h1!? *130*
C) 9.♗xf6 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3 ♕xc3† 11.♔f1 gxf6 12.♖c1 ♕a5 *133*
C1) 13.♕g4 *135*
C2) 13.g3 *136*
C3) 13.♗b5† *138*
C31) 13...♔e7 *139*
C32) 13...♘c6!?N *140*
C4) 13.h4 ♔e7 14.♖h3 ♘c6 15.♘xc6† bxc6 16.♖d3 ♖d8 17.♖xd8 ♕xd8 *143*
C41) 18.♕b3 *145*
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A) 7.e5 h6 *150*
A1) 8.♗h4 g5 9.♘xg5 hxg5 10.♗xg5 ♘bd7 *151*
A11) 11.exf6 *152*
A12) 11.♕f3 *153*
A2) 8.exf6 hxg5 9.fxg7 ♖g8 10.h4 *155*
A21) 10...gxh4 *157*
A22) 10...g4!? *158*
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B1) 8.e5 *161*
B2) 8.axb5 cxd4 *164*
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A) 6.a3 *173*
B) 6.♘e5 *174*
C) 6.♗g5 dxc4! *177*
C1) 7.e4 *177*
C2) 7.a3 *178*
C3) 7.e3 ♗d7 8.♕c2 b5 *180*
C31) 9.a4 *181*
C32) 9.a3 *182*
D) 6.e3 0–0 *183*
D1) 7.h3 *184*
D2) 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3 ♘e4 *185*
D21) 9.♗d3 *186*
D22) 9.♕c2 *187*

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕a4† ♘c6 6.e3 0–0 7.♕c2!?

A) 7...dxc4 *191*
B) 7...♖e8!? *195*
C) 7...♗d6!? *197*
C1) 8.a3 *197*
C2) 8.h3 *198*
C3) 8.c5 *201*

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕a4† ♘c6 6.e3 0–0 7.♗d2 dxc4 8.♗xc4 ♗d6

A) 9.h3?! *205*
B) 9.0–0 e5!? 10.d5 ♘e7 *207*
B1) 11.e4 *207*
B2) 11.♕c2 *208*
C) 9.♕c2 e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♗xe5 *210*
C1) 12.♗d3 *211*
C2) 12.f4 *212*
D) 9.♘b5 ♗e7 *213*
D1) 10.♕c2 *213*
D2) 10.0–0 a6 11.♘c3 ♗d6 *215*
D21) 12.♖fe1 *216*
D22) 12.♖ad1 *217*
D23) 12.♕c2 *219*
D231) 12...e5 *219*
D232) 12...b5!? *221*

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕b3

A) 5...a5!? *230*
B) 5...c5 *232*
B1) 6.a3?! *232*
B2) 6.e3 *234*
B3) 6.♗g5 *235*
B4) 6.cxd5 exd5 7.dxc5 *236*
B41) 7...♕a5!? *237*
B42) 7...♘c6 *238*

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕b3 c5 6.dxc5

A) 6...♘c6 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 *243*
A1) 9.e3 *244*
A2) 9.cxd5 exd5 10.e3 ♗e6!? 11.♗b5 ♗xc5 *247*
A21) 12.0–0 *248*
A22) 12.♘xd5 *248*
B) 6...♘a6! 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.♕xc3 ♘xc5 *251*
B1) 9.b4 *252*
B2) 9.cxd5 ♕xd5 10.♗e3 ♘ce4 *254*
B21) 11.♕e5 *254*
B22) 11.♕d4 *256*

PART V – Other Ragozin Lines

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.g3 dxc4! 6.♗g2 ♘c6 7.0–0 0–0

A) 8.e3 *263*
B) 8.♗g5 *264*
C) 8.a3 ♗e7 9.e4 ♘a5 *266*
C1) 10.♗f4 *266*
C2) 10.♕e2 *268*
C21) 10...♘b3!? *268*
C22) 10...c6 *269*
C3) 10.♗e3 *269*
C31) 10...♖b8!? *270*
C32) 10...a6 *271*
C321) 11.♕e2 *271*
C322) 11.♕c2 *272*

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.e3 0–0

A) 6.♕c2 *276*
B) 6.♗d2 *278*
C) 6.♗d3 b6 7.0–0 ♗a6 *281*
C1) 8.♕e2 *282*
C2) 8.♘e5 *283*
C3) 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6 *284*
C31) 10.♕a4 *286*
C32) 10.♗d2 *287*
C33) 10.♕d3 ♕c8 11.♗d2 ♖e8 *291*
C331) 12.a3 *291*
C332) 12.♖ac1 *293*

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗b4

A) 5.♗d2 *296*
B) 5.♕c2 dxc4! *297*
B1) 6.a3 *297*
B2) 6.e3 *298*
B3) 6.♗g5 b5 *300*
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B32) 7.a4 *302*
B4) 6.e4 *304*

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 ♘f6

A) 5.♘e2 dxc4!? 6.a3 ♗a5 *314*
A1) 7.♕a4† *315*
A2) 7.♘g3 *316*
B) 5.♗d3 e5! *317*
B1) 6.dxe5 *318*
B2) 6.♘e2 exd4 7.exd4 dxc4 8.♗xc4 0–0 9.0–0 ♘c6 *320*
B21) 10.h3 *320*
B22) 10.♗g5 *321*
C) 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 c6!? *321*
C1) 7.f3 *322*
C2) 7.♘f3 *323*
C3) 7.♗d3 *324*
C4) 7.cxd5 cxd5 8.c4 0–0 *325*
C41) 9.cxd5 *326*
C42) 9.♘f3 *327*
C5) 7.a4 *328*

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A) 6.♘e2 *332*
B) 6.♗d3 0–0 7.♘e2 ♖e8 *335*
B1) 8.♗d2 *336*
B2) 8.0–0 ♗d6 *339*
B21) 9.a3 ♘g4!? *339*
B211) 10.h3? *340*
B212) 10.♘f4 *342*
B22) 9.♗d2 *343*
B23) 9.f3 c5 *346*
B231)10.♘b5 *346*
B232) 10.♕e1 *346*

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4

A) 4.♗d2 *350*
B) 4.♕a4† *350*
C) 4.♕b3 *352*
D) 4.♕c2 *353*

E) 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗f4 c6 6.e3 ♘e7 *356*
E1) 7.h4!? *357*
E2) 7.♗d3 ♗f5 *358*
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F2) 6.♗g5 *362*
F3) 6.cxd5 exd5 *364*
F31) 7.♗g5 *364*
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A) 6.♕c2 *376*
B) 6.♗g2 0–0 *377*
B1) 7.0–0 b5 *378*
B11) 8.♘e5 *379*
B12) 8.a4 *380*
B2) 7.♕c2 a5!? *381*
B21) 8.0–0 *381*
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A) 7.b3 *390*
B) 7.♘c3 0–0 *391*
B1) 8.0–0 *391*
B2) 8.♗g5 h6!? 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 10.0–0 ♕d8!? *394*
B21) 11.e3N *394*
B22) 11.e4 *395*
C) 7.♕c2 ♘bd7 8.0–0 0–0 *396*
C1) 9.♘c3 *397*
C2) 9.♗g5 *399*
C3) 9.♖d1 ♘e4 *401*
C31) 10.♗c1 *401*
C32) 10.♗e3!?N *402*
C33) 10.♗e1 *404*

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6

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A1) 5.♕a4† *407*
A2) 5.e3 *408*
B) 4.♗g5 ♗b4† 5.♘bd2 dxc4 *409*
B1) 6.♕a4†?! *409*
B2) 6.e3 *410*
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B) 4.e3 a6 *420*
B1) 5.♘bd2 *421*
B2) 5.♘c3 dxc4 6.♗xc4 b5 *421*
B21) 7.♗d3 *422*
B22) 7.♗b3 ♗b7 8.0–0 c5 *424*
B221) 9.e4 *424*
B222) 9.♕e2 *425*
B3) 5.b3 c5 *426*
B31) 6.cxd5 *426*
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B321) 11.♘e5 *428*
B322) 11.♖c1 *430*

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Richard Pert

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