

**Grandmaster Repertoire**

Michael  
Roiz  
**The  
Nimzo-Indian  
Defence**



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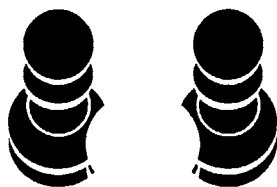
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*Grandmaster Repertoire*

# The Nimzo-Indian Defence

By

**Michael Roiz**



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First edition 2017 by Quality Chess UK Ltd

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# Grandmaster Repertoire — The Nimzo-Indian Defence

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Paperback ISBN 978-1-78483-027-4

Hardcover ISBN 978-1-78483-028-1

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website: [www.qualitychess.co.uk](http://www.qualitychess.co.uk)

Distributed in North America by National Book Network

Distributed in Rest of the World by Quality Chess UK Ltd through  
Sunrise Handicrafts, ul. Poligonowa 35A, 20-817 Lublin, Poland

Typeset by Jacob Aagaard

Proofreading by Colin McNab

Edited by Ian Kingston, John Shaw & Andrew Greet

Cover design by [adamsondesign.com](http://adamsondesign.com)

Cover photo by [capture365.com](http://capture365.com)

Printed in Estonia by Tallinna Raamatutrükikoja LLC

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# Key to symbols used

±	White is slightly better
∓	Black is slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+—	White has a decisive advantage
—+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
±	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
∞	unclear
↑	with the initiative
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate

# Preface

---

My madness for chess started in 1989, when as a six-year-old kid I saw my father playing with my uncle. Back then, I could see chess in almost everything, and I started to collect and explore every chess book I could find. Those were tough times in the Soviet Union and it was not easy to get good chess books, but my parents did their best to support my hobby. So in 1990 I was lucky enough to have plenty of books at my disposal, including David Bronstein's tournament book about the Zurich 1953 Candidates. There were many spectacular games in this book, but I was especially impressed by the Geller – Euwe encounter, where the former World Champion played the Nimzo-Indian and scored a memorable victory in counterattacking style, using the exciting motif of a rook sacrifice. The influence of this game was so significant that for the next ten years I avoided getting doubled c-pawns in my games!

When I look back on my childhood career, I can understand why I did not play 3.♘c3 with White and allow the Nimzo-Indian – it is one of most complex openings from a strategic point of view, and the arising positions are sometimes tough to handle, even for grandmasters, so it would be impossible for a young child. Even after many years of playing the Nimzo-Indian with both colours, and analysing various systems with top players (including preparing for the Anand – Gelfand World Championship match in 2012, where the Nimzo played an important role) I still fail to evaluate some positions properly, and so does the engine!

So when Quality Chess asked me to write a book on this opening, focusing on Black's side, I found this project very challenging and this appealed to me. Indeed, White has a large choice of possibilities even on the 4th move – therefore, a thorough evaluation of all the possible responses for Black is difficult to say the least.

The concept of this book is to enable players to feel knowledgeable enough in any system they may encounter when playing the Nimzo-Indian. So I offer a complete repertoire for Black after 3...♙b4.

I feel I have succeeded in improving my own understanding of the Nimzo-Indian, and I hope to share this knowledge with the reader. Best of luck in your journey with the Nimzo-Indian.

Michael Roiz  
Beer Sheva, December 2016

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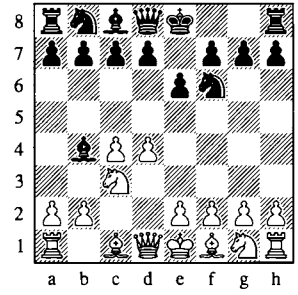
ChessPublishing

ChessBase Magazine

Gustafsson: *Grandmaster repertoire: 4.Qc2 against the Nimzo-Indian*, Chess24 2014

# Chapter 1

## Various 4th Moves



### Rare Options

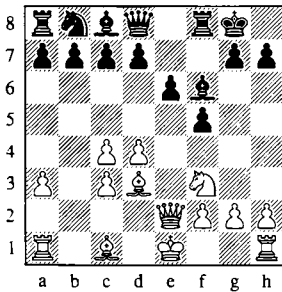
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3

3...♙b4

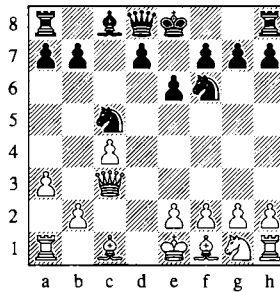
A) 4.e4?	8
B) 4.♙d3?! c5!	8
B1) 5.dxc5	9
B2) 5.d5?! 0-0	9
B21) 6.d6N	10
B22) 6.♙g5N	11
C) 4.♙f4 0-0 5.e3 d5 6.♘f3 c5	13
C1) 7.a3	14
C2) 7.dxc5	15

A) after 10.♘f3



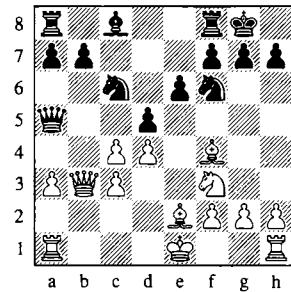
10...d6!N

B1) after 8.♙xc3



8...d6N

C1) after 11.♙e2



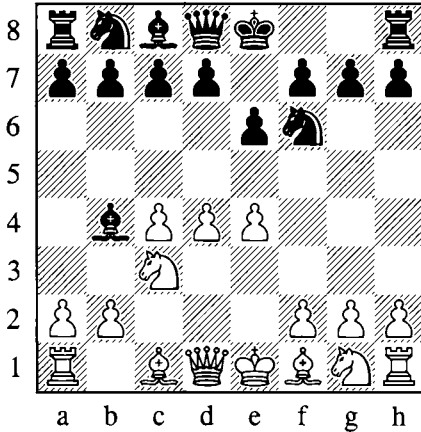
11...b6N

### 1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♖b4

We start our Nimzo-Indian journey with three rare and unpromising options: A) 4.e4?, B) 4.♞d3?! and C) 4.♙f4.

#### A) 4.e4?

This move is over-ambitious: White has absolutely no justification for sacrificing the central pawn.



#### 4...♗xc4 5.♞g4

White is obviously pinning his hopes on this double attack.

5.♞c2 is hardly an improvement: after 5...♗xc3 6.bxc3 ♙e7 7.♗f3 b6 8.♙e2 ♙b7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♙e1 c5+ White had no compensation for the pawn in T. Carlsen – Freydl, email 2007.

#### 5...♗xc3 6.a3

Even worse is 6.♙d2?! ♗d5 7.cxd5 ♙xd2+ 8.♗xd2 0-0-+ as in Schoengart – Tonndorf, Hamburg 2005.

#### 6...♙e7!

The most natural and effective.

#### 7.bxc3 0-0 8.♙d3

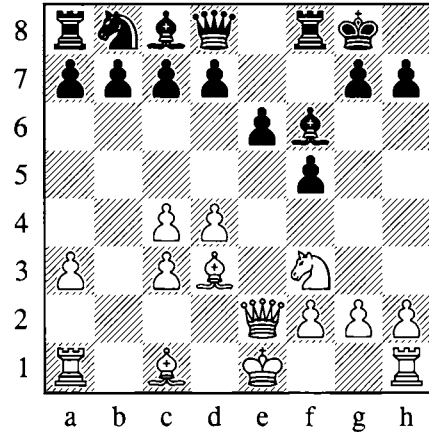
The other attacking attempt, 8.♙h6 ♙f6 9.♙d3, runs into 9...d5 10.♞g3 e5! and Black is winning.

### 8...f5

Killing any hopes of a kingside attack.

### 9.♞e2 ♙f6 10.♗f3

In Roeder – Volpert, Unterfranken 1987, the most convincing continuation would have been:



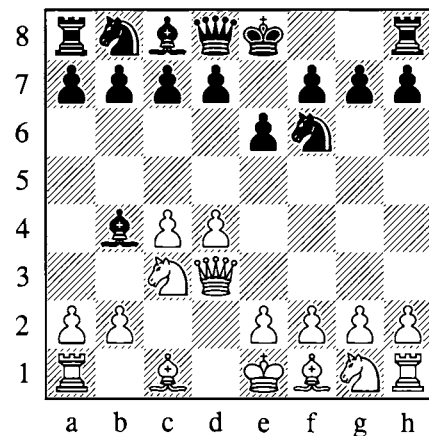
#### 10...d6!N

White cannot stop ...e6-e5, so Black will have a positional advantage on top of his extra pawn.

#### 11.0-0 e5 12.dxe5 dxe5+

White's position should collapse soon.

#### B) 4.♞d3?!



This move was employed by the famous Lithuanian player Vlasdas Mikenas, and thus is usually called the Mikenas System. More recently, Richard Palliser devoted a chapter to it in *Everyman's Dangerous Weapons: The Nimzo-Indian*. However, my analysis indicates that putting the queen in the centre like this is dangerous only to White, and it seems to be one of his worst 4th move options.

#### 4...c5!

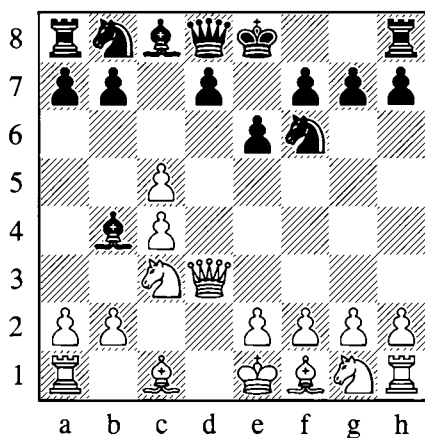
Challenging the centre seems the most principled reply.

Instead, both 4...d5 and 4...0-0 give White a chance to transpose to the Classical System with 5.a3 ♖xc3† 6.♗xc3; and in the latter case, he could go for a modified version of the 5.e4 system with the queen on d3 instead of c2.

White may react to the text move with **B1) 5.dxc5** or **B2) 5.d5?!**.

5.a3 ♖xc3† 6.♗xc3 is covered via the 4.♗b3 c5 move order – see the note on 5.a3 on page 18.

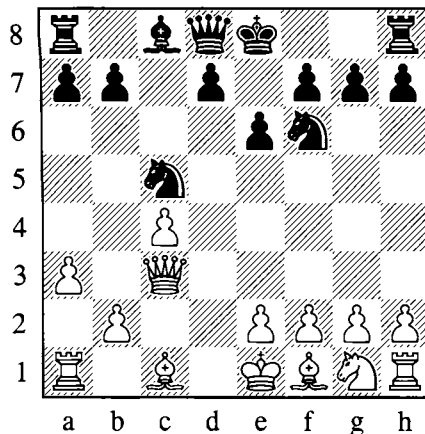
#### B1) 5.dxc5



Compared with the Classical System, the queen is placed terribly on d3 and will soon come under attack after:

#### 5...♗a6! 6.a3 ♗xc5 7.♗c2 ♖xc3† 8.♗xc3

We have reached a well-known theoretical position from the Classical System, but usually it is White's turn to move here! I think Black should proceed with:



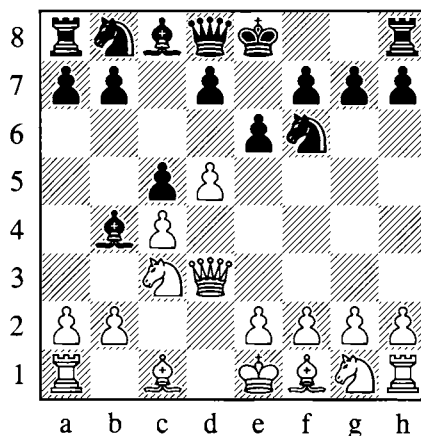
#### 8...d6N 9.f3

9.b4 is hardly an improvement: 9...♗a4 10.♗b3 ♖d7 11.♗f3 ♖c8 12.♖g5 h6 13.♖h4 g5 14.♖g3 ♗e4 and Black has the initiative.

#### 9...e5 10.e4 ♖e6 11.♖e3 ♖c8 12.♖d1 b5!♠

Making full use of the extra tempo. White's lack of development makes his position unpleasant.

#### B2) 5.d5?!



Palliser thinks this is White's best move, but entering into a Benoni type of position with such a misplaced queen invites more trouble.

**5...0-0**

There have not been many games from this position, so I will focus on Palliser's two main suggestions of **B21) 6.d6N** and **B22) 6.g5N**.

6.e4?!  $\text{xc3}\dagger$  7.bxc3 exd5 8.exd5 d6 9.d3  $\text{a5}$  10.e2  $\text{f5}\dagger$  highlights the awkward placement of White's queen.

**6.g2**

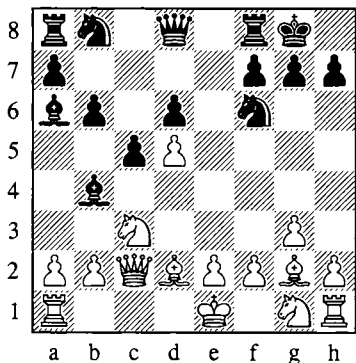
This move is rather passive, and Black easily builds an initiative by targeting the queen.

6...exd5 7.cxd5 d6 8.g3

A desperate attempt to complete the development of the kingside pieces.

8...b6 9.g2  $\text{a6}$  10.c2

We have been following the famous game Mikenas – Keres, Moscow 1949. A simple and strong continuation would have been:

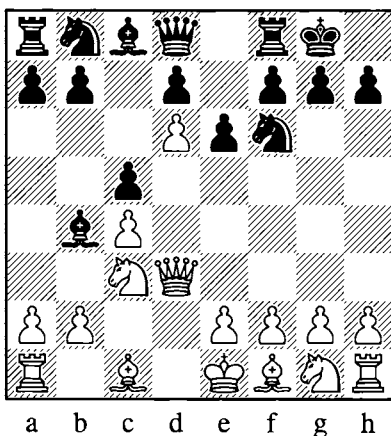


10...e8N 11.a3  $\text{xc3}$  12. $\text{xc3}$   $\text{e7}$  13.e3  $\text{e4}\dagger$

White has serious problems.

**B21) 6.d6N**

Palliser mentions this in passing as an interesting idea. To me it looks dubious for White, as Black has a significant development advantage with many promising continuations.



**6...b5!**

I especially like this aggressive option.

A good alternative is:

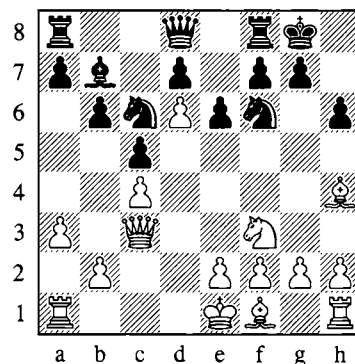
6...c6 7.d3 b6

Palliser briefly suggests that 7...e5 deserves attention, but I prefer the text move.

8.g5 h6 9.g4  $\text{b7}$  10.a3

10.e4 e5 11.a3  $\text{xc3}\dagger$  12.bxc3  $\text{a5}\dagger$  leaves White with no compensation for his pawn weaknesses, which can be exploited by ...e8-e6 and ...a6.

10... $\text{xc3}\dagger$  11.cxc3



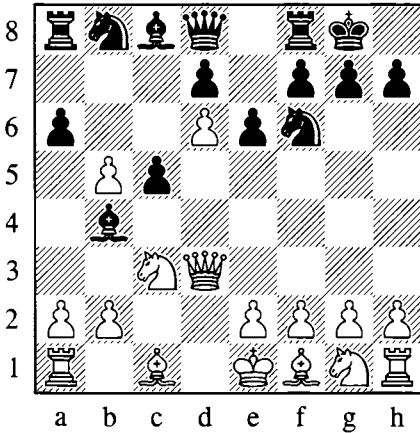
11...g5! 12.d3xg5

12.g3  $\text{e4}$  13.c2 f5 14.e3  $\text{f6}$  and the d6-pawn will soon fall.

12...hxg5 13.g5  $\text{e4}$  14.gxd8  $\text{xc3}$  15.e7  $\text{e4}$  16.f3  $\text{fe8}$  17.fxe4  $\text{xe7}$  18.dxe7  $\text{xe4}$

Black's superior pawn structure gives him the upper hand in the endgame.

7.cxb5 a6

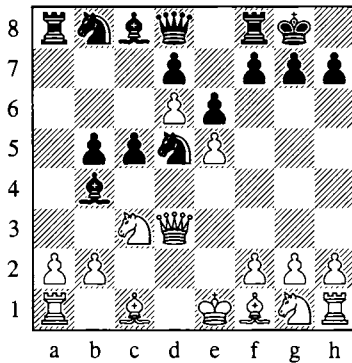


8.b6

This seems like the best of a bad bunch for White.

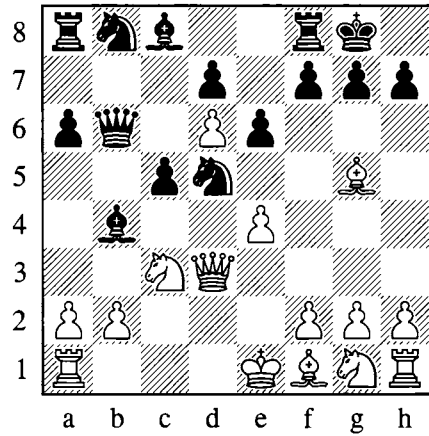
8.bxa6?! ♗xa6 9.♞c2 ♘c6 gives Black an overwhelming initiative, and White may already be objectively lost.

8.e4 This advance is the most logical continuation of White's previous ambitious play, but it simply doesn't work: 8...axb5 9.e5 ♘d5



10.♘f3 c4 11.♞c2 ♘c6 Followed by ...f6 and White's position is going to collapse.

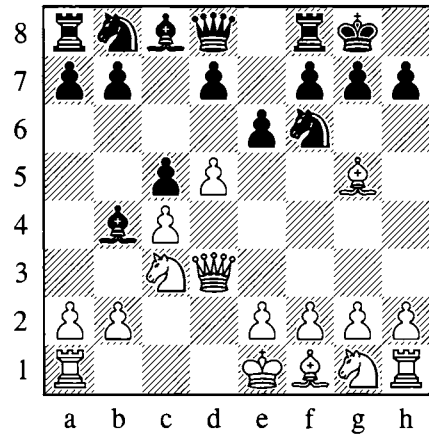
8...♞xb6 9.♗g5 ♘d5 10.e4



10...c4! 11.♞xc4 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗xd6

White has no compensation for the damaged pawn structure, and he is also behind in development.

B22) 6.♗g5N



Palliser gives this move as White's best, but I am not impressed by it.

6...exd5

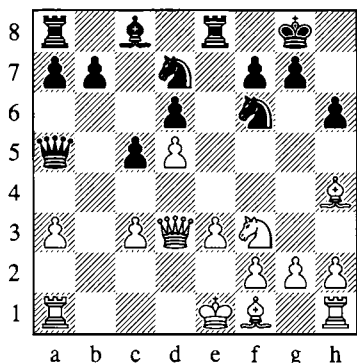
6...♗xc3? 7.♞xc3 ♘xd5 does not really work, as 8.♗xd8 ♘xc3 9.♗e7 ♞e8 10.♗xc5 ♘e4 11.♗a3 leaves White with the two bishops, as Palliser points out.

7.cxd5 d6 8.♘f3 ♘bd7

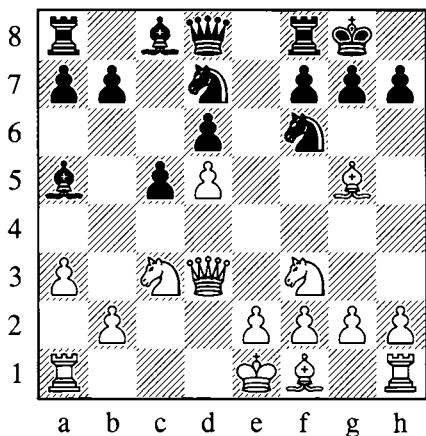
White has a bad version of the Leningrad System, as the misplaced queen offers Black lots of attractive options.

**9.a3 ♖a5**

9...♙xc3† might be even simpler: 10.bxc3 (10.♖xc3 h6 11.♙h4 g5 12.♙g3 ♘e4 13.♖c1 ♘df6) 10...h6 11.♙h4 ♙e8 12.e3 ♖a5



13.♙g3 (13.♘d2 simply loses a pawn after 13...♘e5 14.♖c2 ♘xd5) 13...♘e4 14.♘d2 ♘xg3 15.hxg3 b5 White is clearly in trouble: Black has a simple plan of ...c4 and ...♘c5, and the pawns on c3 and d5 are weak.



**10.e3**

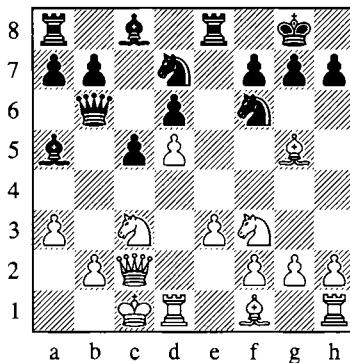
Palliser ends his analysis here, calling it a “tough and roughly balanced struggle.” I have already pointed out the favourable comparison with the Leningrad System, and Black can cause serious problems with:

**10...♖b6!**

Highlighting White’s lack of coordination.

**11.♙b1**

11.0–0–0 is the only way to keep the material balance for a while, but now the king is in danger. 11...♙e8! It makes sense to restrict the mobility of White’s knight before starting an attack. (11...♙b8 12.♘e4 is not so clear) 12.♖c2

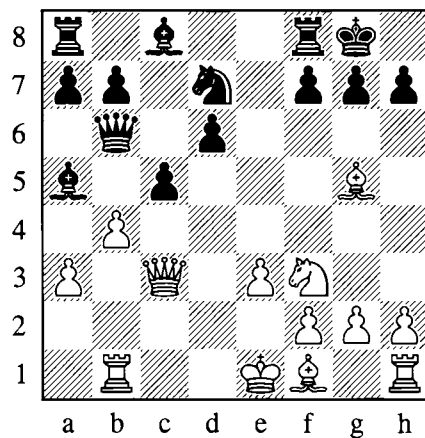


12...♙xc3 13.♖xc3 ♘e4 14.♖c2 ♘xg5 15.♘xg5 ♘f6

**11...♘xd5**

This leads to a tactical sequence where Black’s lead in development makes the difference.

**12.b4 ♘xc3 13.♖xc3**

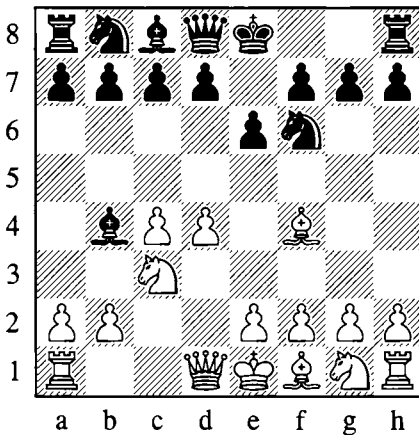


**13...♖e5! 14.♗xe5**

14.♗d2 cxb4 15.axb4 ♖c7! is a nice tactical resource, enabling Black to keep a healthy extra pawn.

**14...dxe5 15.♙e7 ♜e8 16.♙xc5 ♞g6 17.♞d1 ♙c7**

Material is level but White's coordination remains poor.

**C) 4.♙f4**

This looks like a natural way to develop – leaving the bishop on its initial square and playing 4.e3 is not to everyone's taste. However, this plan of development has a clear drawback: the bishop turns out to be quite vulnerable on f4 in many lines, and cannot take part in protecting the queenside pawns. In fact, I didn't find a single game with a top player on the white side.

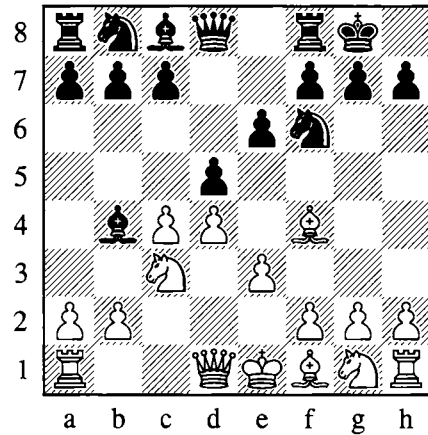
**4...0-0**

I don't see any reason to delay castling.

After the immediate 4...d5 White might consider 5.cxd5 ♗xd5 6.♙d2 0-0 7.♗f3 c5 8.♗xd5 ♙xd2† 9.♞xd2 ♞xd5 10.dxc5 ♞xc5, which leads to an equal and somewhat boring position.

**5.e3**

5.♗f3 d5 6.e3 transposes.

**5...d5****6.♗f3**

The alternatives hardly promise more:

6.a3 ♙xc3† 7.bxc3 c5 8.♙d3 ♞a5 9.♗e2 cxd4 10.exd4 dxc4 11.♙xc4 ♗c6 (11...b6 12.♙e5 ♗bd7 13.♙d6 ♜e8=) 12.0-0 e5 13.♙g3 ♙f5 yields Black an excellent position.

6.♞c2 c5 7.a3 ♙xc3† 8.bxc3 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♞a5† 10.♞d2 ♞xd2† 11.♗xd2 ♗c6 12.cxd5 ♗xd5 13.♙g3 ♙d7= White has some trouble completing his development.

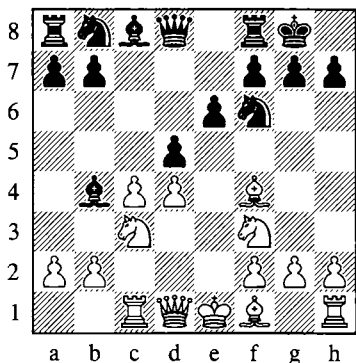
**6...c5**

Preparing ...♞a5, putting pressure on the queenside and reminding White that his dark-squared bishop is no longer able to defend that part of the board!

The main options to consider are **C1) 7.a3** and **C2) 7.dxc5**.

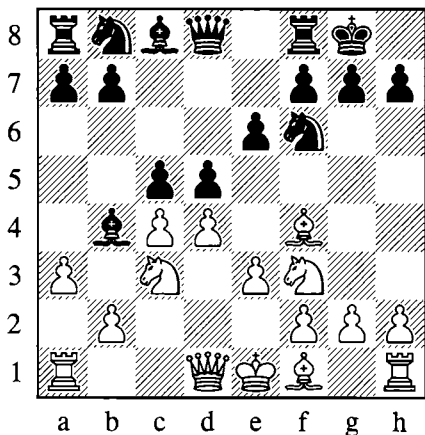
After 7.♙d3 cxd4 8.exd4 dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♗d5 10.♙d2 ♗c6 11.0-0 ♗b6 12.♙d3 ♗xd4 13.♗xd4 ♞xd4 14.♞c2 ♞h4 White doesn't get much for the pawn.

7.♖c1 cxd4 8.exd4 was played in Daenen – Potemri, email 2010. (Dubious is: 8.♗xd4?! ♞e7! 9.♗f3 ♞d8 10.♞c2 ♗c6 The lack of development causes White definite problems.) Now the simple:



8...b6N 9.♗d3 dxc4 10.♗xc4 ♗b7 would lead to a typical position from the 4.e3 system where Black has gained a couple of tempos.

C1) 7.a3



Spending an important tempo, but at least White grabs the bishop.

7...♗xc3† 8.bxc3 ♞a5

Not only attacking the c3-pawn, but also pinning it, so White cannot improve his pawn chain.

9.♞b3

After 9.♞c2 cxd4 10.exd4 ♗d7 11.♗e2 dxc4 12.♗e5 ♗d5 it's obvious that White can hardly profit from having the bishop on f4: 13.♗d2 ♞a4=

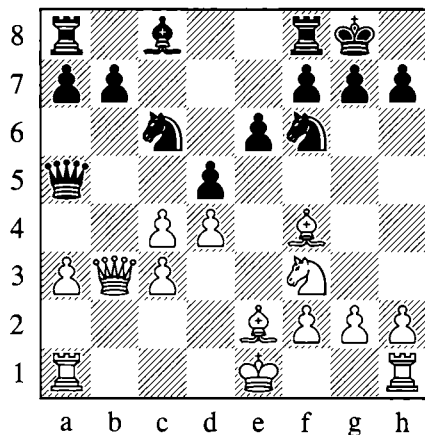
9...cxd4 10.exd4

After 10.♗d6 dxe3 11.♗xf8 exf2† 12.♗xf2 ♗e4† 13.♗e1 ♗xf8 14.♞b4† ♞xb4 15.cxb4 a5 Black should be better, as he has two clear pawns for the exchange.

10...♗c6 11.♗e2

11.cxd5 gives up the file too early: 11...exd5 12.♗d3 ♞e8† 13.♗e3 ♗g4=

11.♗d3 as in Jennen – Tonteri, Hastings 1982, allows Black to secure a stable advantage with some neat tactics: 11...♗xd4!N 12.♗xd4 e5 13.♞b4 ♞xb4 14.axb4 exd4 (less convincing would be 14...exf4 15.e5, with an unclear position) 15.cxd4 ♞e8† 16.♗d2 dxc4 17.♗xc4 ♗e6=



So far we are following Tarkowski – Krainski, Poland 2007. Black could have easily solved all his problems by means of:

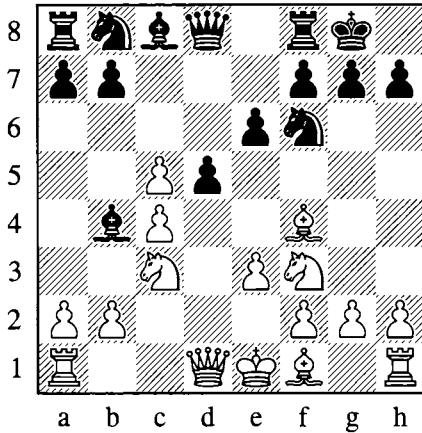
11...b6N 12.cxd5

Inferior is: 12.0-0?! ♗a6 13.♗d2 ♞ac8=

12...♖xd5 13.♗xd5 ♘xd5 14.♙d2 ♚b7 15.c4 ♜f6

I prefer Black in this endgame, since the hanging pawns are under pressure.

C2) 7...dxc5



7...♘e4 8.♞c1

The other way to support c3 is:

8.♗c2

This was played in Meyer – Mach, Germany 1991, and can also be well met by:

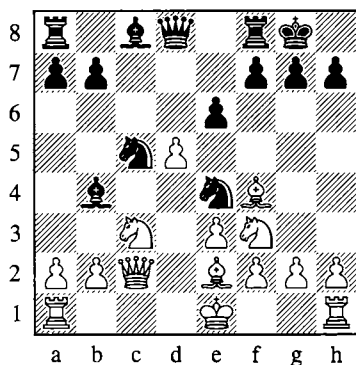
8...♘a6 9.cxd5

9.♙e2 ♘axc5 10.0-0?! (the better 10.cxd5 ♗xd5 would transpose to the line below)

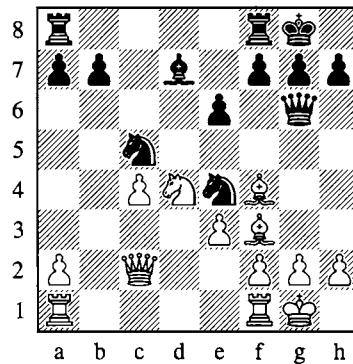
10...♙xc3 11.bxc3 f6! 12.♞fd1 e5 13.♞xd5 ♗e8 14.♙g3 ♙e6+

9...♘axc5 10.♙e2

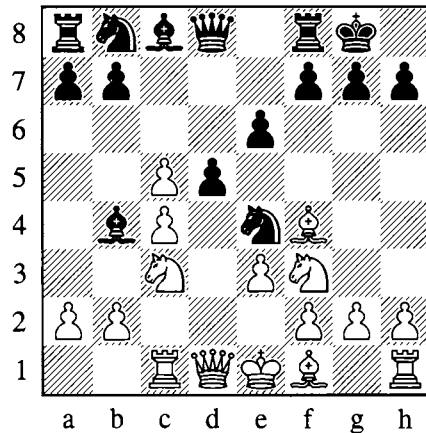
10.dxe6 ♙xe6 gives Black a serious initiative for the pawn, with ...♙f5 and/or ...♗a5 coming soon.



10...♗xd5 11.0-0 ♙xc3 12.bxc3 ♙d7 13.c4 ♗f5 14.♘d4 ♗f6 15.♙f3 ♗g6



Black has the better pawn structure and excellent piece play, which fully compensates for White's bishop pair.



8...♘a6!N

This way of regaining the pawn seems more attractive – it aims to complete the development of the minor pieces first.

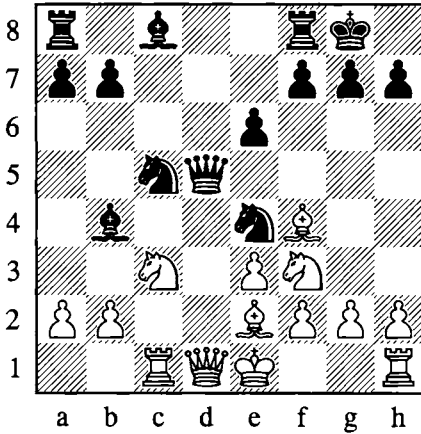
Less precise is 8...♗a5 9.♙d3 ♘xc3?! 10.bxc3 ♙xc3† 11.♘f1 and White had a serious initiative in Jose Abril – Shatko, Sant Boi 2016.

9.cxd5 ♘axc5 10.♙e2

Too greedy is 10.dxe6? ♗xd1† 11.♞xd1 ♙xe6+, with an enormous lead in development.

## 10...♞xd5

## Conclusion



This first chapter offers Black an easy start to Nimzo-Indian life, with three rare and unchallenging White options. 4.e4? sacrifices a vital central pawn in return for attacking chances that will never appear. 4.♞d3?! misplaces the queen on a vulnerable square while blocking White's natural development. 4.♗f4 is the closest in this chapter to a reasonable line, but the bishop is not ideal on f4, being slightly vulnerable and putting little pressure on Black.

## 11.♞xd5

11.0-0 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗a3 13.♞xd5 exd5 also reaches an approximately equal position with mutual pawn weaknesses.

## 11...exd5 12.♗e5

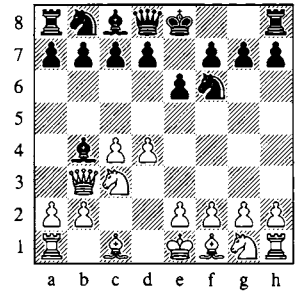
12.0-0 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♗a3 transposes to the preceding note.

## 12...♗a4 13.0-0 ♘axc3 14.♗xc3 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♗e6=

The arising endgame is equal but far from dead.

# Chapter 2

## Various 4th Moves



### 4. ♖b3

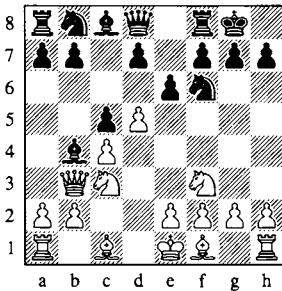
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♖b3

4...c5

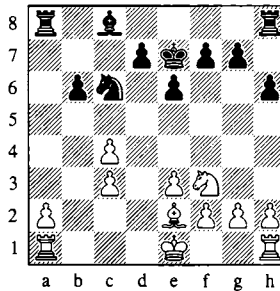
A) 5. ♙g5	19
B) 5. dxc5	20
C) 5. ♘f3 ♘c6	24
C1) 6.a3	24
C2) 6.e3	26
C3) 6.dxc5	27

note to move 5



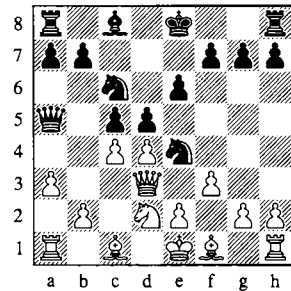
6...b5!N

B) after 13. ♙e2



13...♙a6!N

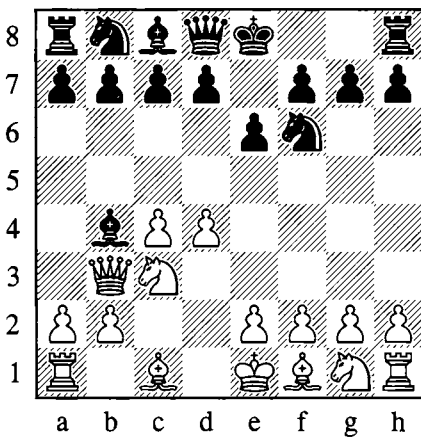
C1) after 10.f3



10...♘d6!N

### 1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 ♙b4 4.♞b3

This natural move is quite tempting. Indeed, in comparison to the Classical System, White not only avoids doubled pawns, but also attacks the opponent's bishop! However, as grandmaster practice proves, the queen is much more useful on c2 in the fight over the central squares than on b3. Still, this system was successfully employed by many great players of the past, such as Alekhine, Euwe and Bogoljubow. In recent years, it has been tried from time to time by strong grandmasters such as Van Wely and Epishin.



#### 4...c5

A multi-tasking move. Apart from protecting the bishop, the c5-pawn also challenges White's centre.

White's main continuations are **A) 5.♙g5**, **B) 5.dxc5** and **C) 5.♟f3**.

5.e3 ♟c6 6.♟f3 is a transposition to variation C2.

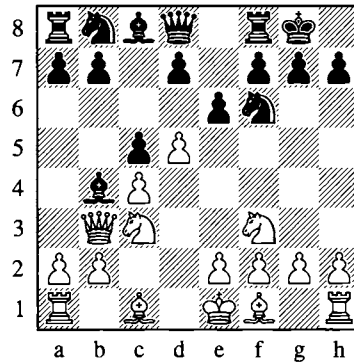
#### 5.d5!?

White has only developed one minor piece, while the queen might become a target on b3. It is not surprising that Black is able to put strong pressure on White's central pawns:

#### 5...0-0

5...b5!? also looks annoying for White.

#### 6.♟f3



This position occurred in Mecking – Goncalves, Campinas 2011. In my opinion, the most effective way to refute White's risky strategy is:

#### 6...b5!N 7.cxb5

The greedy 7.dxe6 invites even more trouble: 7...bxc4 8.exf7 ♜xf7 9.♞xc4 d5 10.♞b3 ♟c6, and Black is almost winning due to the enormous lead in development.

#### 7...exd5 8.a3 ♙a5 9.e3 ♙b7 10.♙e2 d6 11.0-0 ♟bd7

Black has full control over the centre.

#### 5.a3 ♙xc3 † 6.♞xc3

This position might also arise after 4.♞c2 c5 5.a3 ♙xc3 † 6.♞xc3.

#### 6...cxd4 7.♞xd4 ♟c6

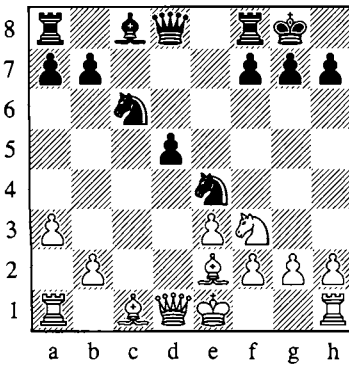
Alas, White must move the queen once more. Practice shows that the bishop pair does not always compensate for such a lack of development!

#### 8.♞d1 0-0 9.♟f3 d5 10.cxd5

10.e3 e5! 11.cxd5, as played in Kotronias – Pandavos, Peristeri 1993, seems even worse. Now Black should have kept the queen on the board in order to develop the initiative: 11...♟xd5!N 12.b4 e4 13.♟d4 ♟e5 14.♙b2 ♙g4 15.♞b3 ♞g5

#### 10...exd5 11.e3 ♟e4 12.♙e2

So far we have been following the game Golichenko – Laznicka, Pardubice 2009.

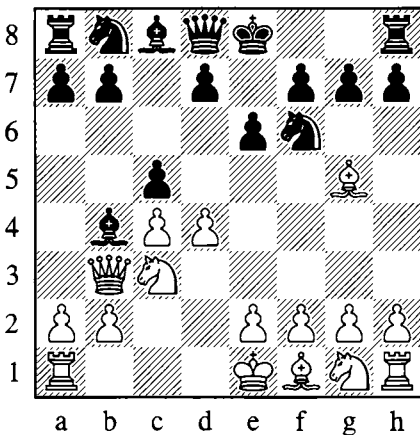


Now Black can choose between several attractive ways of handling the position, but I prefer:

12...♙f5N 13.0-0 ♜e8 14.♘d4 ♘xd4  
15.♗xd4 ♜c8

The activity of Black's pieces forces White to be careful.

#### A) 5. ♙g5



White's mixture of the Leningrad System with the queen on b3 makes a weird impression.

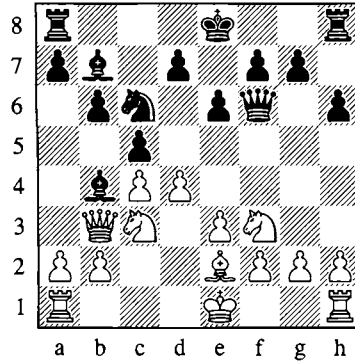
#### 5...h6 6. ♙h4

I also checked:

6. ♙xf6 ♗xf6

This may be the lesser evil from White's perspective. Still, giving up the dark-squared bishop is a clear positional concession, and Black has excellent prospects here too.

7.e3 b6 8.♘f3 ♙b7 9.♙e2 ♘c6

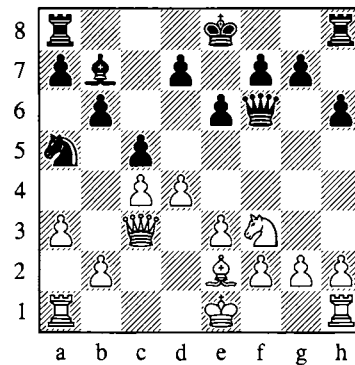


10.a3?!

Better was 10.0-0, but after 10...cxd4 11.exd4 ♙xc3 12.♗xc3 0-0 Black still gets an excellent position with chances to exert strong pressure on the c4-pawn.

We have been following the game Silva – Galego, Portugal 1998. Now Black missed a nice opportunity to exploit the lack of harmony in the opponent's camp:

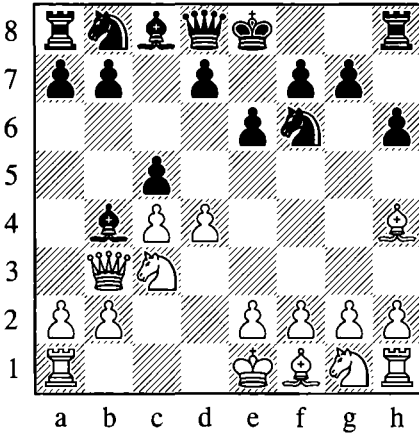
10...♘a5!N 11.♗c2 ♙xc3† 12.♗xc3



12...♙xf3! 13.♙xf3 ♜c8 14.♙e2 cxd4 15.exd4  
♘xc4 16.♙xc4 b5 17.b3 0-0 18.♗d3

18.0-0 d5 leaves White a pawn down in a lost position.

18...bxc4 19.bxc4 d5 20.cxd5 ♜fd8



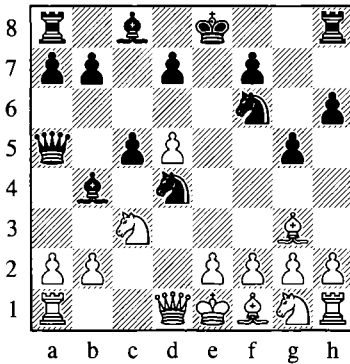
This position has occurred in a few games, but nobody has tried:

6...g5!N 7.♗g3 ♝c6

Now the absence of the queen from the d-file forces White to lose control over the centre:

8.dxc5

8.d5? allows Black to benefit from his enormous lead in development: 8...exd5 9.cxd5 ♝d4 10.♞d1 ♞a5



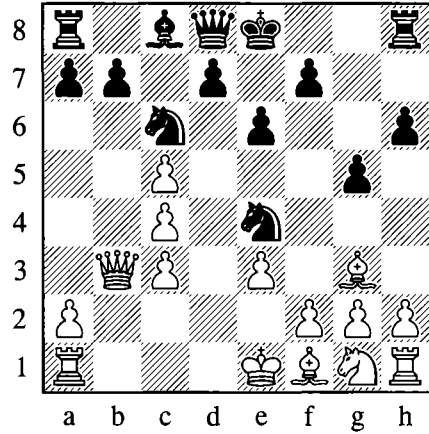
11.♞c1 ♞xa2-+

The text move transposes to a number of games. The next few moves are natural and obvious:

8...♝e4 9.e3 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3

In Agdestein – Hjartarson, Reykjavik 1996,

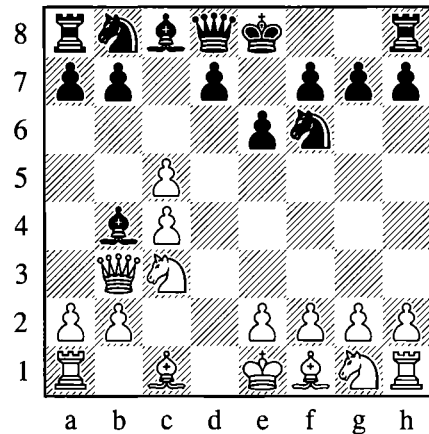
Black brought his queen out to a5, which was not really necessary. I believe Black should choose the following strategy:



10...♝xc5N 11.♞c2 e5 12.♝f3 d6♞

White is suffering; the passive g3-bishop and vulnerability of the doubled pawns makes his position quite difficult.

B) 5.dxc5



5...♝c6

I like this natural developing move – the knight eyes the exposed d4-square, and the c5-pawn can be collected later.

6.♗g5

A popular continuation – White hardly has any other way of developing the dark-squared bishop.

6.♗f3 ♖e4 transposes to variation C3.

Weak is: 6.g3?! ♖e4 7.♗f3 (7.♙g2? ♖d4! and White loses material) 7...♙xc3† 8.bxc3 ♖xc5 9.♖c2 b6 10.♙g2 ♙b7♞ White has no compensation for his ruined queenside structure.

6.a3 ♖d4

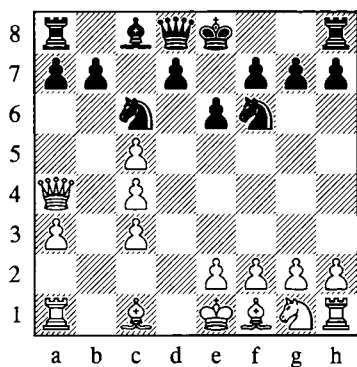
This tactical resource enables Black to treble White's pawns along the c-file.

6...♙xc3 7.♗f3 0–0 has been played in almost every game, but I would prefer to avoid the quiet character of play that arises.

7.♖a4

7.♖d1 ♙xc3† 8.bxc3 ♖c6 9.♗f3 ♖a5 also offers Black rich counterplay.

7...♙xc3† 8.bxc3 ♖c6



9.f3N

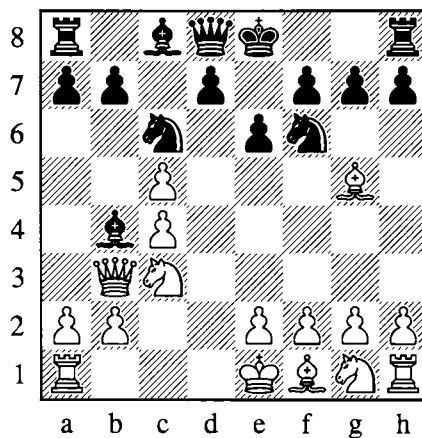
Weaker is 9.♙f4?! ♖e4 10.♖c2, as played in Goregliad – Salman, Long Island 1995, and now the simple 10...♖xc5N 11.♙d6 b6♞ leaves White with no compensation for the weak queenside pawns.

9...b6 10.♙e3 bxc5 11.♙xc5 ♖a5

11...♖c7! is another interesting option.

12.♖xa5 ♖xa5

Black has easy play against White's weak pawns.



6...h6 7.♙xf6

Leaving the bishop on the board leads to unfavourable consequences: 7.♙h4?! g5 8.♙g3 and we have transposed to variation A above; this was the actual move order of the Agdestein – Hjartarson game referred to there.

7...♖xf6

I was quite surprised to discover that this position has arisen in about fifty games! White has no advantage and it seems to me that even finding equality will be a challenge for him.

8.♗f3

The most common.

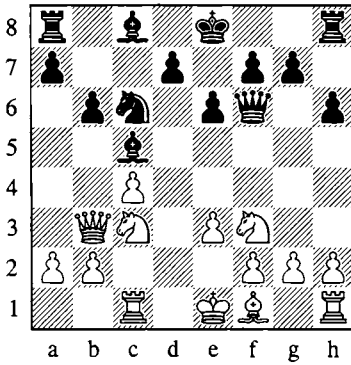
8.e3 has no real independent value, because after 8...♙xc3† 9.♖xc3 ♖xc3† 10.bxc3 b6 11.cxb6 axb6 White has nothing better than 12.♗f3, which would transpose to our main line.

8.♙c1

This move avoids any damage to White's queenside structure, but delaying the development of the kingside pieces is a high price to pay.

8...♙xc3 9.e3 b6 10.♗f3

Now Black should put his finger on the above-mentioned drawback of White's 8th move by means of:



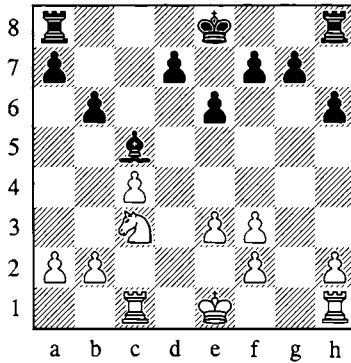
10...dxe5!

A novelty when I first analysed it, but it has since been played.

11.♔e2 ♖b7 12.♗d1

12.♘xe5 ♗xe5 13.0-0 ♗g5 is also excellent for Black.

12...♘xf3† 13.♔xf3 ♔xf3 14.♗xf3 ♗xf3 15.gxf3

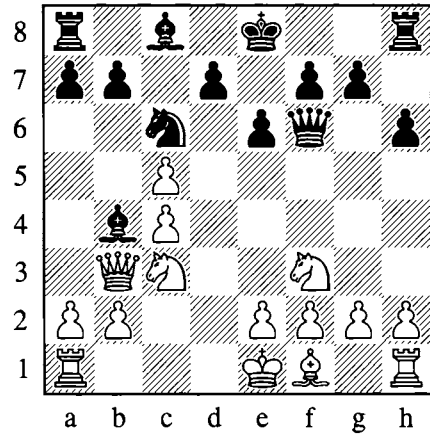


15...♙c8!N

In Zhou Jianchao – Wei Yi, China 2016, Black instead forced a drawish double-rook ending with 15...♙b4 16.♔e2 ♔xc3 17.♙xc3 ♙c8. The text move is more ambitious.

16.♔e2 ♔e7

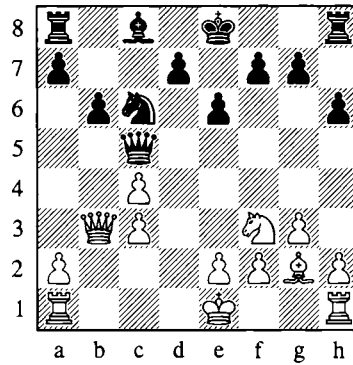
White will have to work hard to draw this endgame.



Now Black has a couple of reasonable ways of handling the position, but I definitely prefer:

8...♙xc3† 9.♗xc3

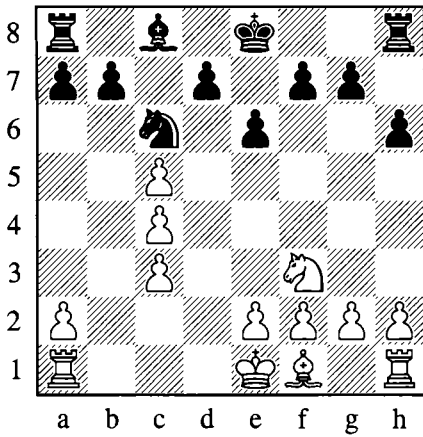
9.bxc3?! is inferior. My analysis continues: 9...♗e7N 10.g3 (10.♗b5 is an awkward attempt to keep the extra pawn, which can be strongly met by: 10...b6 11.cxb6 ♗a3! 12.♗b3 axb6) 10...♗xc5 11.♔g2 b6



This position resembles the Romanishin Variation, but White's dynamic play is significantly limited, so after 12.♘d2 ♘a5 13.♗b4 ♙b8 14.0-0 d6 Black can claim a clear advantage due to his better pawn structure.

9...♗xc3† 10.bxc3

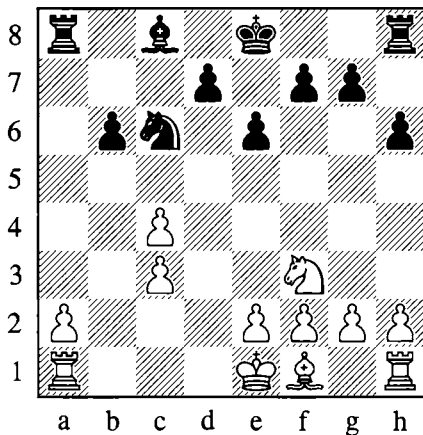
White is still a pawn up, but his queenside pawn structure is hideous. Black's best way forward is:

**10...b6!**

Black allows White to swap off one of his tripled pawns, but look at the benefits: White's a-pawn becomes a target, and the a8-rook and c8-bishop spring to life.

**11.cxb6 axb6**

Despite his extra pawn, White is undoubtedly the defending side in the endgame.

**12.e3**

In one game White tried:

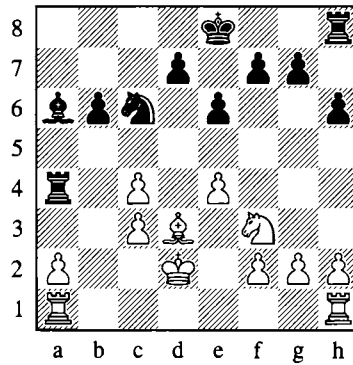
**12.e4**

This doesn't change the pleasant (for Black!) character of the position.

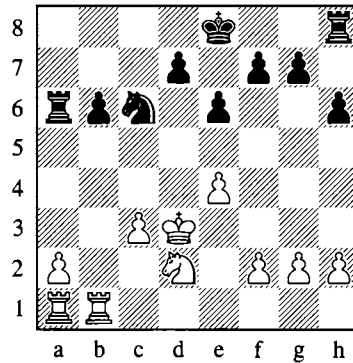
**12...♞a4 13.♙d3 ♙a6 14.♔d2**

I also examined 14.♘d2 ♘e5 15.♙c2?! (the computer points out that 15.♔e2 maintains

the balance, but it is psychologically difficult for human players to make such a move) 15...♞a3 16.♘b1 ♞a5 and White is in a difficult position.

**14...♙xc4 15.♙xc4 ♞xc4 16.♔d3 ♞a4 17.♞hb1 ♞a6 18.♘d2**

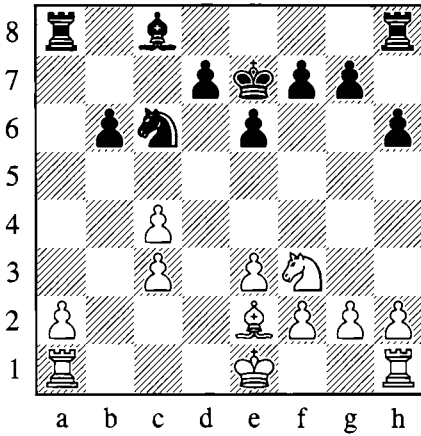
We have been following the game Gofshtein – Har Zvi, Israel 1998. Black could have maintained a small but clear advantage by means of:

**18...♔d8!N 19.♘c4 ♔c7**

Avoiding any unnecessary pawn exchanges on the queenside. White faces a thankless defensive task.

**12...♔e7 13.♙e2**

This position arose in the game Z. Varga – Z. Almasi, Kazincbarcika 2005, when Black could have set his opponent definite problems by means of:



13...♙a6! N 14.♚d2

14.0-0 ♖a5 15.♜d2 ♜hc8 16.♜fb1 ♜xc4 17.♜xc4 ♙xc4 18.♙xc4 ♜xc4 19.♜xb6 ♜xc3 20.g3 ♜ca3 results in a rook ending where White will have to work hard in order to save half a point.

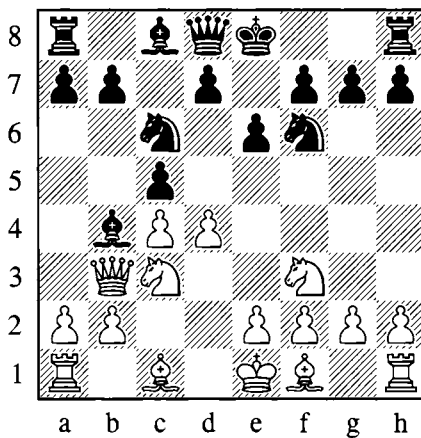
14...♜a5 15.♜hb1 ♜ab8!?

15...♜xc4† 16.♙xc4 ♙xc4 enables White to equalize with 17.a4.

16.♜b4 ♜hc8

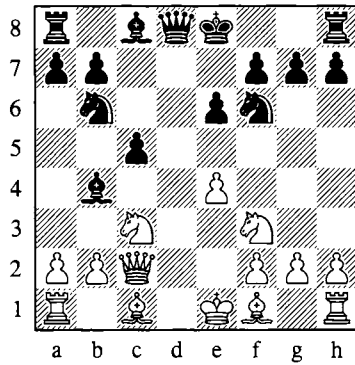
Intending ...♙xc4, with a lasting advantage due to the superior pawn structure.

C) 5.♜f3 ♜c6



This move forces White to clarify the situation in the centre. We will consider the minor alternatives C1) 6.a3 and C2) 6.e3, followed by the more popular C3) 6.dxc5.

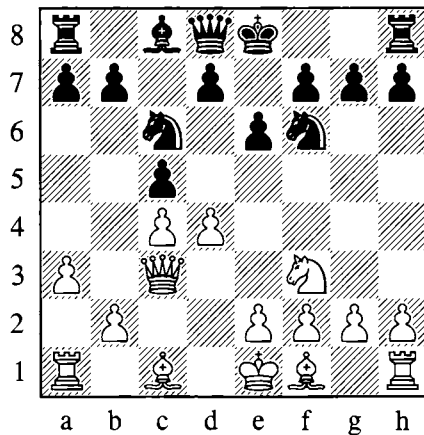
6.d5?! has been played a few times, but White is not ready for such ambitious moves, especially with his queen on a poor square. 6...♜a5 7.♜c2 This position occurred in Silva – Viterbo Ferreira, Matosinhos Lentas 2014, when Black had no reason to reject 7...♜xc4! N 8.dxe6 dxe6 9.e4 ♜b6.



There are no weaknesses in Black's camp, so White doesn't get sufficient compensation for the pawn after 10.a3 ♙xc3† 11.♜xc3 ♜bd7 12.♙d3 b6.

C1) 6.a3 ♙xc3† 7.♜xc3

It makes no sense to recapture with the pawn: 7.bxc3 0-0 8.♙g5 h6 9.♙xf6 (9.♙h4?! cxd4 10.cxd4 ♜a5†) 9...♜xf6 10.e3 b6



**7... ♖e4!**

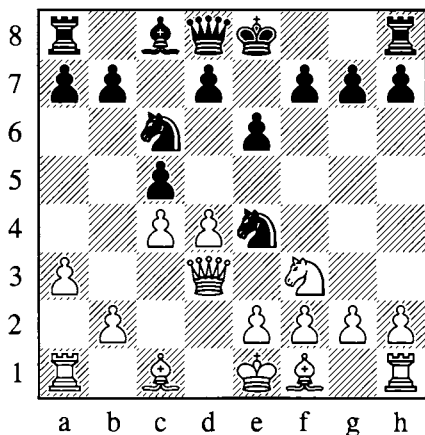
The queen is forced to leave the c3-square, so Black gets the opportunity to disturb White's king.

**8. ♖d3**

The following alternatives lead to the loss of a pawn:

8. ♖c2?! ♖a5† 9. ♖d2 ♖xd2 10. ♗xd2 ♖xd4≠

8. ♖e3?! ♖a5† 9. ♖d2 ♖xd2 10. ♗xd2 cxd4 11. ♖g3 ♖e5≠

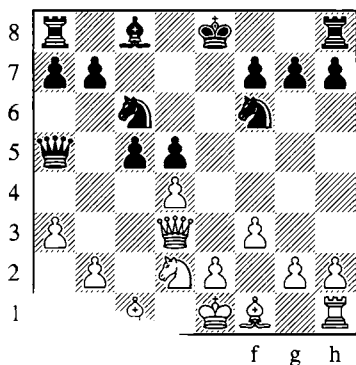


**8... ♖a5† 9. ♖d2 d5**

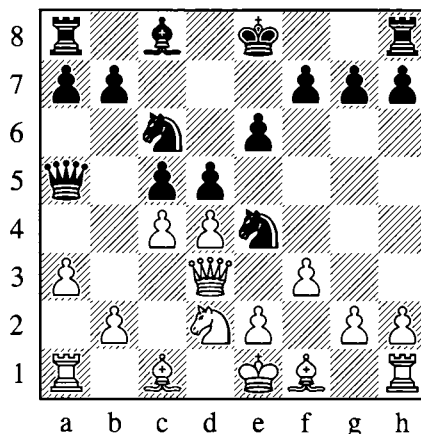
White still has the bishop pair, but Black's active piece play fully compensates for that.

**10. f3**

A better choice for White would be 10. cxd5N exd5 11. f3, but 11... ♖f6! still gives Black fine prospects, for instance:



12. dxc5 0-0 13. b4 (13. ♖c3?! ♖d8! 14. b4 d4 15. ♖c2 ♗e6 16. ♗b2 ♖d5 is too risky for White) 13... ♖xb4 14. ♖c3 ♖c6 15. ♖xa5 ♖xa5 Black has at least equal chances in the queenless position.



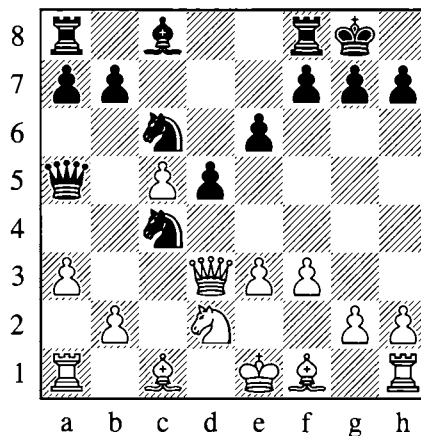
We have been following the game Ruckschloss – Pushkov, Cappelle-la-Grande 1995, in which Black retreated the knight to f6. A stronger continuation would have been:

**10... ♖d6!N 11. dxc5**

11. cxd5 c4! 12. ♖c3 exd5≠ is one of the ideas behind the previous move.

**11... ♖xc4 12. e3 0-0**

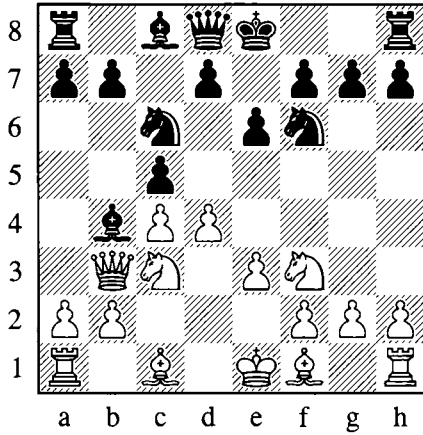
Black's lead in development gives him fine prospects, for instance:



13.♙f2 ♘4e5 14.♚c2 b6 15.♘b3 ♚a4

With a useful initiative.

**C2) 6.e3**



White supports his centre, but such a modest-looking move cannot pose Black any problems.

**6...d5**

There are some decent alternatives, but I see no reason for deviating from this natural advance. Now we will consider two ways of releasing the pressure in the centre.

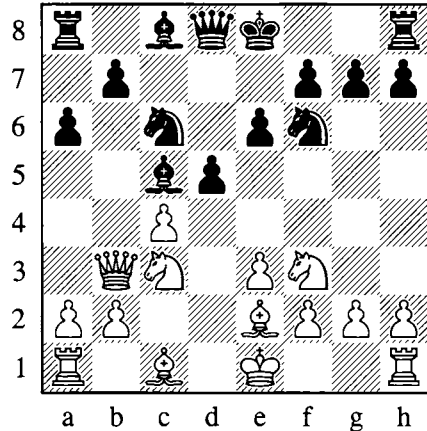
**7.dxc5**

7.cxd5 exd5 opens the path for the c8-bishop: 8.dxc5 0-0 9.♙e2 (9.a3 ♙xc5 leads to a normal IQP position except that White's queen is clearly misplaced on b3, so I prefer Black) 9...♙e6!? 10.♘d4 ♙xc5 11.♘xe6 fxe6 12.0-0 ♚e7 Black had the more pleasant game in Karpov – Kramnik, Nice (blindfold rapid) 1997.

**7...♙xc5 8.♙e2 a6!**

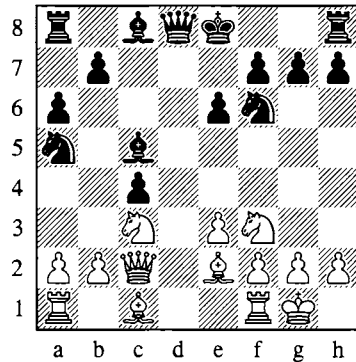
In my opinion this move is the most precise. This prophylactic move is always useful in positions with an isolated d5-pawn. At the same time, 9...♘a5 is now a clear positional threat.

In the event of 8...0-0 9.0-0 a6 White gets the additional opportunity to keep the tension by means of 10.♙d1, when 10...dxc4 11.♚xc4 ♚e7 12.a3 leads to a symmetrical position in which White's chances are slightly preferable.



**9.cxd5**

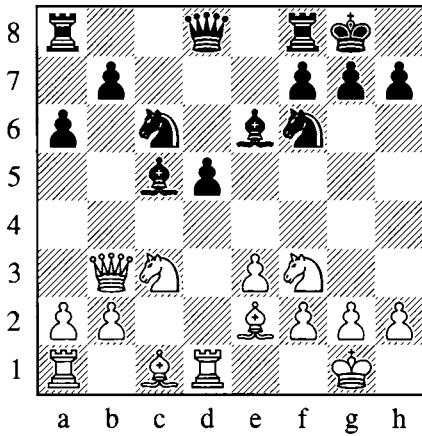
I also examined an interesting pawn sacrifice: 9.0-0!? ♘a5 10.♚c2 dxc4 (weaker is 10...♘xc4?! 11.e4 0-0 12.♙g5 with the initiative)



11.♙d1N (11.e4 occurred in Sava – Bondoc, Bucharest 2002, when 11...b5N would have called White's compensation into question) 11...♚c7 It's hard to believe that White's compensation offers more than equality. Play might continue: 12.♘e4 ♙e7 13.♙d2 b5 14.♙xa5 ♚xa5 15.a4 ♙b7 16.axb5 ♚xb5 17.♙xc4 ♚b6 18.♚a4† ♙c6=

**9...exd5 10.0-0 0-0 11.♞d1 ♕e6**

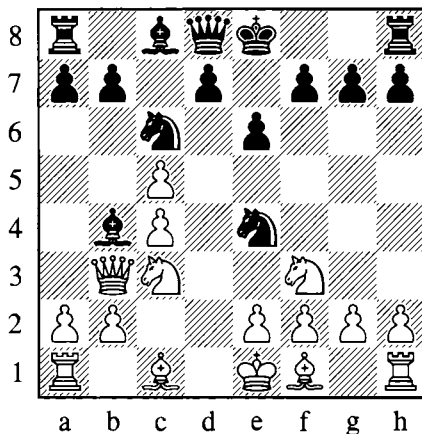
We can see another benefit of the prophylactic ...a6 move: the b7-pawn is poisoned.

**12.♘d4**

12.♟xb7?? ♘a5+ explains the above comment.

**12...♞e7 13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.♟a4 ♕d7**

Black was already better in Sandalakis – Rychagov, Paleochora 2015.

**C3) 6.dxc5 ♘e4**

I like this aggressive move, which threatens to damage White's structure. It practically forces 7.♕d2, but many will dislike giving up this bishop.

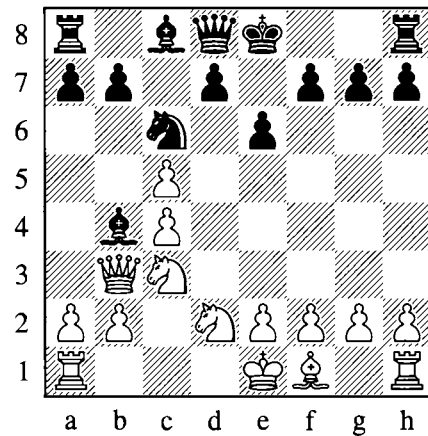
**7.♕d2**

We should also consider some minor alternatives:

7.♕e3 ♟a5 8.♞c1 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♕xc5 10.♕xc5 ♟xc5 was better for Black in Vezzosi – Gast, Switzerland 2002.

Also after 7.e3 ♕xc3† 8.bxc3 ♘xc5 9.♟c2 0-0 10.♕e2 b6 ♞ White had no compensation for the ugly queenside structure in Markovic – Kotic, Vojvodina 2010.

7.♟c2 looks unnatural – White has no reason to touch the queen again and again in the opening. Indeed, after 7...♕xc3† 8.bxc3 ♘xc5 9.g3 b6 10.♕g2 ♕b7 White once again lacks the activity needed to make up for his rotten pawn structure.

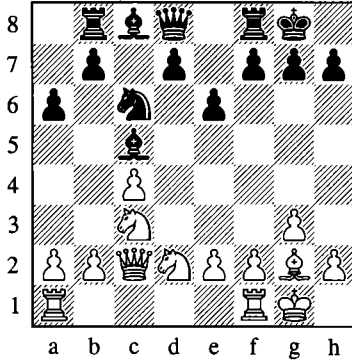
**7...♘xd2 8.♘xd2****8...0-0**

In most games Black has preferred 8...♕xc5, but I see no reason to hurry to recapture the pawn – the text move seems somewhat more flexible.

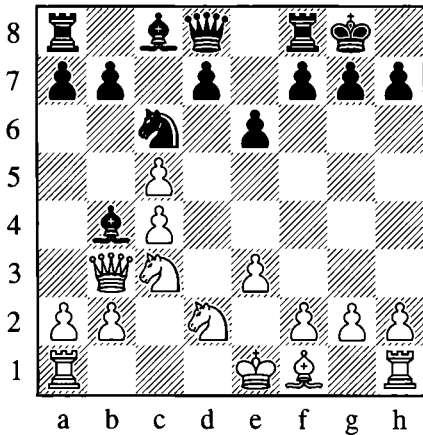
**9.e3**

Since Black's dark-squared bishop has no opponent, it makes sense for White to keep an eye on the d4-square.

The other way to develop is: 9.g3 ♖xc5 10.♗g2 a6 (10...b6!? 11.0-0 ♗b7 is also perfectly playable) 11.0-0 ♖b8. Black has an excellent version of the Hedgehog set-up. Now after 12.♙c2, as was played in Welling – B. Martin, Oakham 1994, Black should have played:



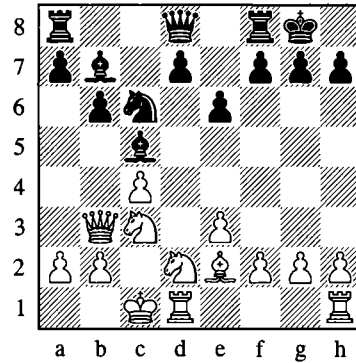
12...♗e7N 13.♞fd1 ♘e5 Objectively, the position is about equal, but Black's play looks easier from a practical point of view: White will have to watch out for the ...b5 break, and the bishop pair is a long-term asset.



9...♗xc5 10.♗e2

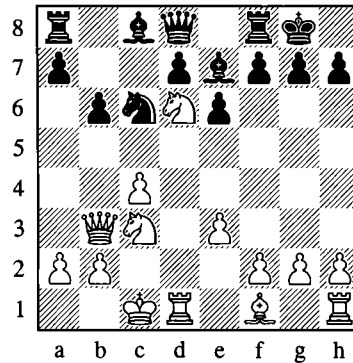
The most consistent. White's intentions are clear: he will castle and plonk one or possibly both rooks on the d-file, hoping to apply some pressure there. Here are some other possible continuations:

10.0-0-0?! is a poor choice: 10...b6 11.♗e2 (11.♘de4 ♗e7 transposes to the next note on 10.♘de4) 11...♗b7



Black was better due his bishop pair and safer king in Hanauer – Seidman, New York 1940.

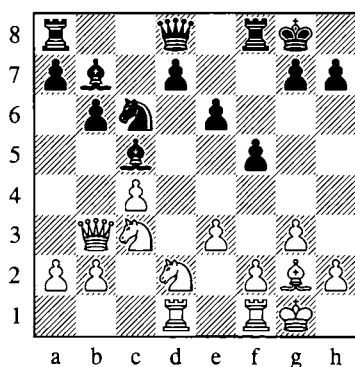
Also pointless is: 10.♘de4 ♗e7 11.0-0-0?! (11.♞d1 can be met by 11...♙c7, and if 12.♘b5 then 12...♙a5† 13.♘ec3 d5 14.cxd5 exd5 offers Black a promising initiative) 11...b6 12.♘d6 This position occurred in Giffard – V. Gurevich, Le Touquet 2002, when Black could have developed a queenside initiative by means of:



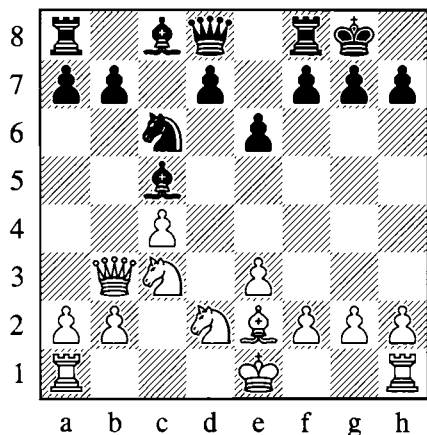
12...a6!N 13.♙c2 b5 14.c5 ♙c7 15.♗b1 ♗b7 Sooner or later, Black will swap off the strong knight on d6 and press ahead on the queenside.

10.♞d1 has also been played, but I don't see the sense for White in delaying the development

of his kingside pieces. A good continuation is 10...f5!? 11.g3 b6 12.♕g2 ♖b7 13.0–0 as in Epishin – Psakhis, Internet (blitz) 2004, when Black should have played:



13...♗c8!N 14.a3 ♘e5= With a fine position.



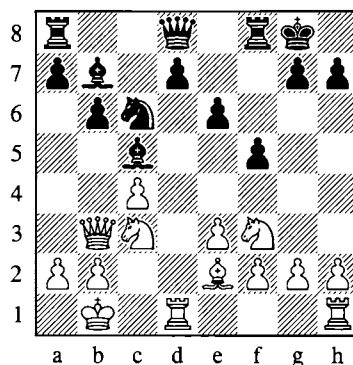
### 10...f5!

I like this aggressive approach – the e4-square is no longer available to White's knights, so the c5-bishop is secured for a while. Moreover, Black puts White's monarch under some pressure, as the ...f5-f4 advance is potentially dangerous.

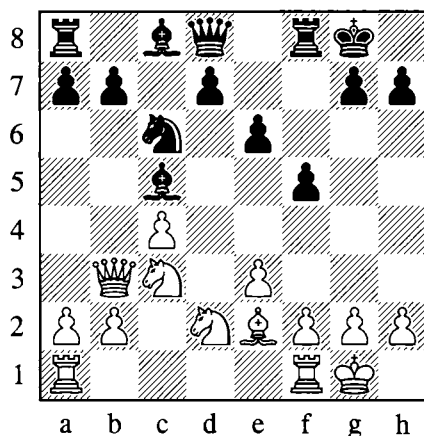
### 11.0–0

Just as on the previous move, 11.0–0?! is more dangerous for White than for Black. 11...b6 12.♘f3 ♖b7 13.♖b1 (hardly better is 13.♗d2 ♗e7 14.♗hd1 ♗ad8=, as was played in Alster – Piskov, Sofia 1949) This position arose

in Verlinsky – Romanovsky, Leningrad 1925, and now I suggest a natural improvement over Black's play:



13...♗c8N 14.♗c2 a6 15.♗d2 ♗c7= White suffers from the lack of a constructive plan, while the pressure along the c-file is rather annoying for him.



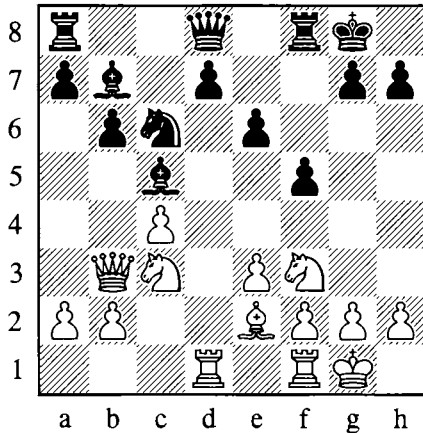
### 11...b6 12.♗ad1

An attempt to cover the long diagonal by means of 12.g3 ♖b7 13.♕f3 led White to an inferior position after 13...♗c8 14.♗ac1 ♘e5 in Donner – Bohm, Leeuwarden 1981.

12.a3 ♖b7 13.♗c2 ♗c8 14.♕f3?! (better was 14.♗ad1, but still after 14...♕e7 15.♘f3 ♘a5 Black's position would be preferable) 14...f4! gave Black a powerful initiative in Pakleza – Wojtaszek, Warsaw (rapid) 2007.

## 12...♙b7 13.♘f3

Obviously, there was no better spot for the d2-knight. This position has occurred in about twenty games, but Black has only found the strongest continuation in a couple of them.



## 13...g5!

This aggressive measure is fully justified by positional factors: both of Black's bishops put pressure on White's king, while the queen is offside on b3.

The most popular choice has been 13...♙e7, but it allows White to reduce Black's attacking potential with 14.♘a4.

## 14.♘a4N

This innovation is definitely the best reaction.

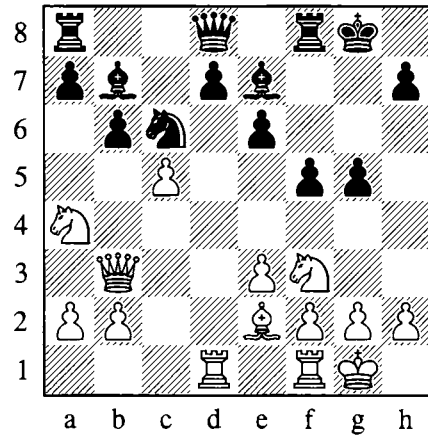
14.♘d4 ♖f6 15.♘db5 occurred in Sherwood – Pijl, email 2013, when 15...♙ad8!?N 16.♘d6 ♙a8 17.♘a4 ♙xd6 18.♙xd6 f4 would have given Black some initiative.

## 14...♙e7

In comparison to 13...♙e7, the e7-square is now vacant for this retreat.

## 15.c5

It looks like White will regain his harmony, but Black retains a fine position after:

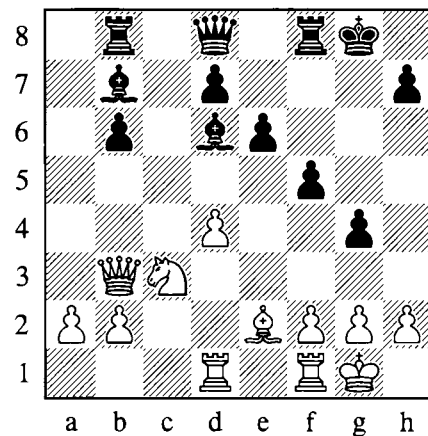


## 15...g4 16.♘d4 ♘xd4 17.exd4 ♙b8! 18.cxb6 axb6 19.♘c3

19.d5 ♙xd5 20.♙xd5 exd5 21.♙xd5† ♖h8 22.♙d3 ♙a8 doesn't yield White sufficient compensation for the material losses.

## 19...♙d6!

Black's powerful bishops and kingside space advantage make his position easier, at least from a human point of view. It is quite important that White has no time to chase away the bishop:



## 20.♘b5? ♙d5 21.♙c4 ♙xh2†! 22.♖xh2 ♙h4† 23.♖g1 ♙f6

With a decisive attack.

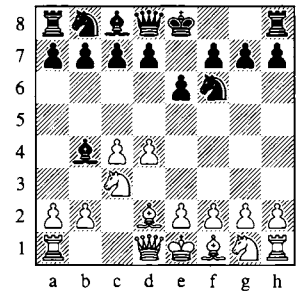
## Conclusion

If you are unfamiliar with the relevant opening theory, then 4.♖b3 is a tempting move: the queen supports the pinned c3-knight while attacking the offending bishop. The drawbacks become clear after we play a couple of moves. Black replies 4...c5 and generally follows up with ...♗c6, so the b4-bishop is never troubled. In contrast, White is frequently bothered by ...♗f6-e4 ideas, which is a major reason the c2-square is a far more popular destination for the white queen. As we saw in several variations in this chapter, if White plays ♕g5 then he often needs to answer ...h6 with ♕xf6, surrendering the bishop pair, as instead ♕h4 would allow ...g5 followed by ...♗e4, with the usual problems on c3.

Overall, 4.♖b3 cannot offer White more than equality, and often allows Black the chance to play for the advantage in interesting positions.

# Chapter 3

## Various 4th Moves



### 4.♘d2

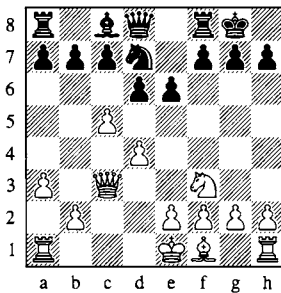
### Variation Index

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.♘d2

4...0-0

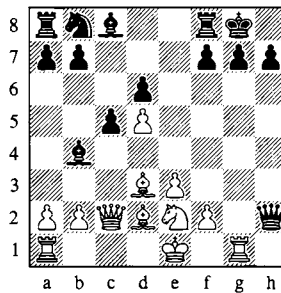
A) 5.♖c2	33
B) 5.a3	34
C) 5.e3	36
D) 5.♘f3 c5	38
D1) 6.a3	38
D2) 6.e3	40
D3) 6.dxc5 ♘xc5 7.g3 d5	43
D31) 8.♘g2!?!N	44
D32) 8.cxd5	45

B) after 10.c5



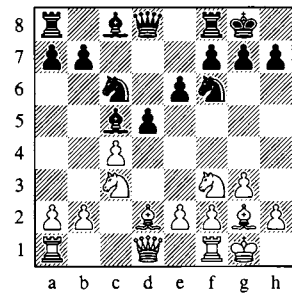
10...e5!N

C) after 12.♖c2



12...g6!N

D31) after 9.0-0!?!N



9...d4!

### 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♙b4 4.♙d2

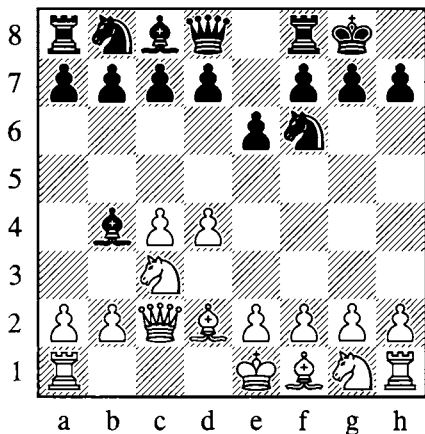
This is quite a harmless line. Still, it has been tried by such great players as Petrosian, Korchnoi and Ivanchuk, and is generally a sensible option if White wishes to avoid mainstream theory.

#### 4...0–0

Castling immediately is the most flexible choice. White has four main options:

A) 5.♖c2, B) 5.a3, C) 5.e3 and D) 5.♗f3.

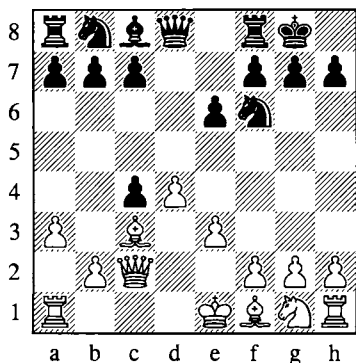
#### A) 5.♖c2



This mixed set-up looks rather passive, and Black gets a nice position by natural play in the centre.

#### 5...d5 6.e3

Harmless is: 6.a3 ♙xc3 7.♙xc3N (7.bxc3?! b6♞ makes even less sense for White, Nikolov – Kostov, Sofia 2012) 7...dxc4 8.e3



8...b5! 9.a4 ♙b7! 10.axb5 a6 11.bxa6 ♗xa6 12.♞c1 c5 13.♗f3 cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♞c8♞ With a useful lead in development for Black.

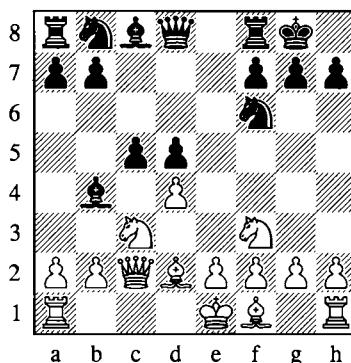
Also too passive would be:

6.cxd5?! exd5 7.♗f3

7.e3 ♞e8 8.♗f3 was played in Dolezal – Weinzettl, Prague 2007, when the simple 8...c6N 9.♙d3 ♙d6 10.0–0 ♞e7 would have yielded Black the better position. White's bishop is not at all well placed on d2.

And here Black has several good possibilities, but I favour the most active and aggressive:

7...c5!



#### 8.a3N

8.dxc5 ♙xc5 9.e3 ♗c6♞ Aleksandrov – Low, Al Ain 2013.

8...♙xc3 9.♙xc3 c4 10.b3

Black is simply better after a slow continuation such as 10.e3 ♗c6 11.♙e2 ♗e4 12.0–0 ♙f5♞.

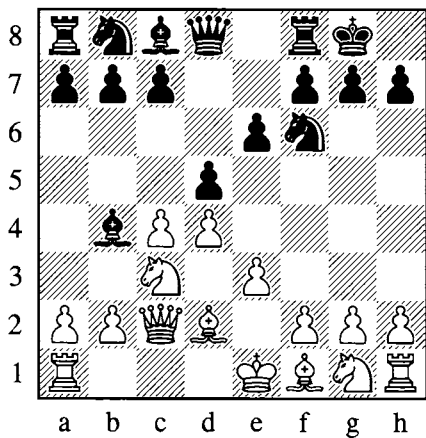
The text move (intending to meet 10...b5 with 11.a4) is a reasonable attempt to undermine our pawn chain, but we can emphasize White's slow development with:

10...♗e4!

With the following idea:

11.bxc4 ♙f5 12.♞b3 dxc4 13.♞xc4 ♗c6 14.e3 ♞c8

Black gets a dangerous initiative for the sacrificed pawn.

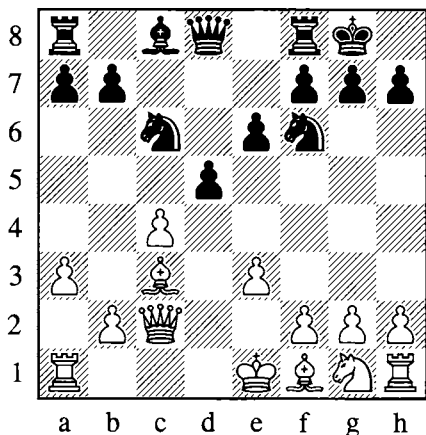


6...c5 7.a3 8.♙xc3 8.♙xc3

White has the bishop pair, but that achievement is only temporary, as his own dark-squared bishop will soon be hunted down.

8...cxd4 9.♙xd4 ♖c6 10.♙c3

We are following Forintos – Renman, Eksjo 1981. Now I like:



10...♖e4N

I also considered 10...d4, but there is no need to allow 11.0-0! e5 12.exd4 ♖xd4 13.♙xd4 exd4 14.♖f3, when Black must give up a pawn for uncertain compensation.

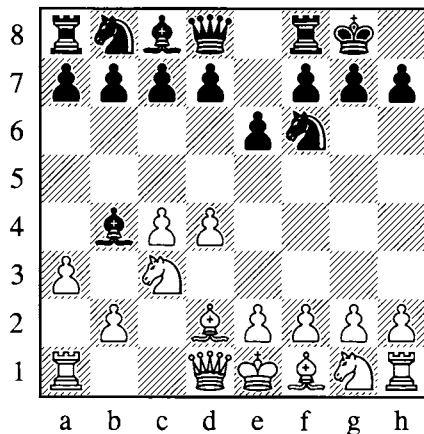
11.♙d1 ♖xc3 12.♙xc3 ♖e7!

This resource allows Black to avoid the isolated pawn and complete his development.

After 12...♙e7 13.cxd5 exd5 14.♙xd5 ♙e6 15.♙d1 ♙ac8 16.♖f3 Black's compensation is not obvious.

13.♖f3 ♙c7 14.♙d3 ♙d7=

B) 5.a3



Black doesn't mind swapping some minor pieces, so losing a tempo with this move to force simplifications is unlikely to yield much for White.

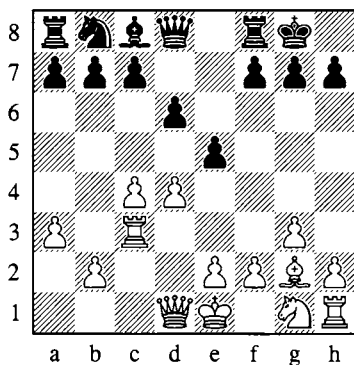
5...♙xc3 6.♙xc3 ♖e4

Black prepares to eliminate the bishop, and will set up a comfortable position with ...d6 and ...e5 at some point.

7.♙c2

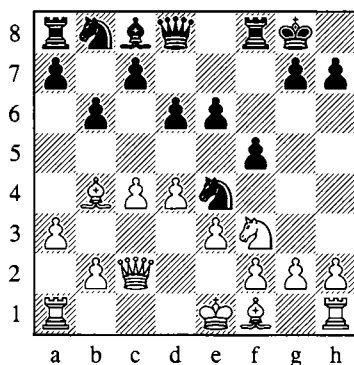
There are a couple of other options to consider:

7.♙c1 d6 8.g3 e5 9.♙g2 ♖xc3 10.♙xc3 gives Black a choice:

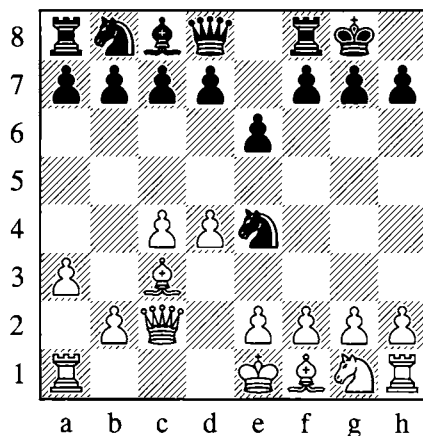


10...exd4 This is the simplest equalizer. (Also good enough is 10...♞e7?! 11.♘f3 e4 12.♘d2 f5 13.0-0 ♘d7, with a more complex but also roughly equal position.) 11.♞xd4 ♘c6 12.♞d2 a5 13.♘f3 ♞e8 14.0-0 ♔f5= Black had solved all his problems in Kveinys – Kengis, Lubniewice 1998.

7.♔b4 is an attempt by White to preserve the bishop pair, but it costs time and is unlikely to succeed anyway. For example: 7...d6 8.♞c2 f5 9.♘f3 b6 10.e3 (10.g3 ♔b7 11.♔g2 occurred in Llopis – Roca Galanza, Spain 1997, when 11...c5N 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.♔c3 ♘xc3 14.♞xc3 a5 15.0-0 a4 16.♞fd1 ♞a6= would have been excellent for Black.)



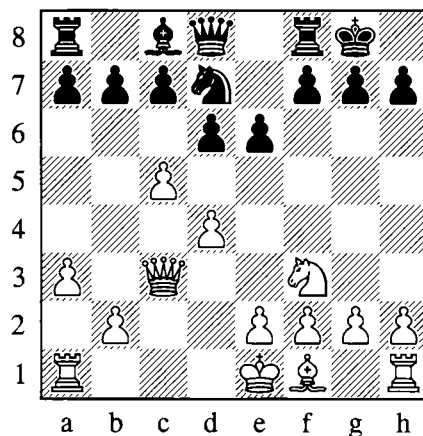
10...c5!N (10...♔b7 was played in Hernandez Delgado – Nemutlu, corr. 2006. It is better to drive the bishop back and get ready to eliminate it.) 11.♔c3 ♔b7 12.♔e2 ♘d7 13.0-0 ♘xc3 14.♞xc3 ♞e7= Black has no reason to worry.



7...♘xc3 8.♞xc3 d6 9.♘f3 ♘d7 10.c5 10.e3 ♞e7N 11.♔d3 e5= is harmless.

After 10.g3 ♞e7N 11.♔g2 e5 12.0-0 (or 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.0-0 e4 14.♘d4 ♘f6=) 12...e4 13.♘d2 f5 Black has a space advantage and the g2-bishop is blocked, so I do not like White's position.

The text move was played in Avshalumov – Huzman, Baku 1988. White is trying to play actively, but Black could have highlighted the uncastled king with the energetic continuation:



10...e5!N 11.cxd6

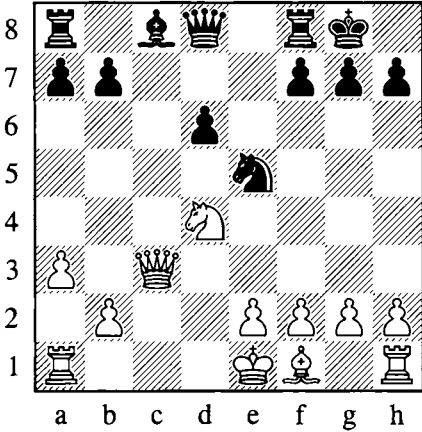
11.dxe5 dxc5 (11...♘c5 12.e3 ♘e4 13.♞c2 ♘g5 14.♘xg5 ♞xg5 15.exd6 cxd6= is also decent) 12.e3 ♞e7 13.♞d1 ♞e8 gives Black

comfortable play due to the weakness of the e5-pawn.

**11...cxd6 12.dxe5 ♖xe5 13.♘d4**

13.♘d4xe5 dxe5 14.♗xe5 ♜e8 15.♗c3 ♙f5 gives Black a dangerous initiative for the pawn.

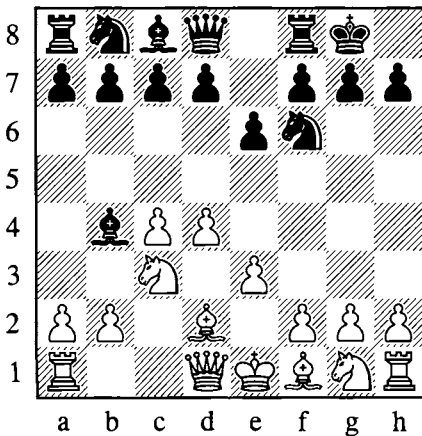
The text move looks like a sensible try to keep the centre closed, but Black can exploit his development advantage with:



**13...♙e6 14.e3 ♜c8 15.♗d2 ♗f6 16.♙e2 ♗g6! 17.g3 ♙h3**

White has some problems connected with his inability to castle.

**C) 5.e3**



**5...c5**

This advance seems especially well timed: in the event of a further ...cxd4 and exd4, Black will not have to worry about White's bishop emerging on an active square like f4 or g5, as this will entail the loss of a tempo.

**6.d5?!**

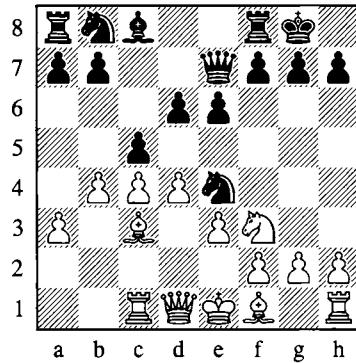
This advance definitely earns White an 'A' for Ambitiousness. It doesn't combine well with his previous moves though; not only is the bishop a bit passive on d2, but it also blocks White's defence of the d5-pawn.

6.♘f3 is the usual move, and it will be covered under the 5.♘f3 c5 6.e3 move order in variation D2.

A minor, harmless alternative is:

6.a3 ♙xc3 7.♙xc3 ♘e4 8.♞c1 d6 9.♘f3 ♗e7 10.b4

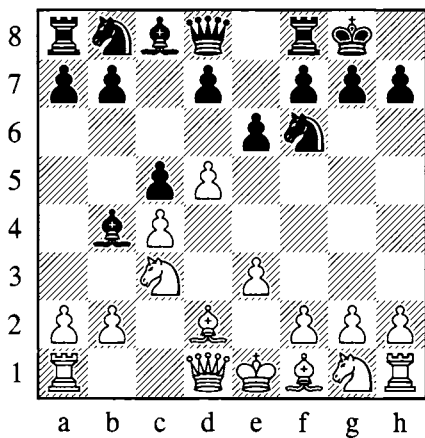
10.♙d3?! is inaccurate in view of 10...♘xc3 11.♞xc3 e5 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.♙e4 ♘d7 and Black is already slightly better.



**10...♘xc3N**

It's necessary to eliminate the strong bishop. 10...♘c6?! is dubious: 11.bxc5 dxc5 12.♙b2± Gurgenzidze – Karner, Tbilisi 1983. 11.♞xc3 b6 12.♙e2 ♙b7 13.0-0 ♘d7=

Black has a solid position and may consider some kingside activity by means of ...f5 and ...e5.

**6...d6**

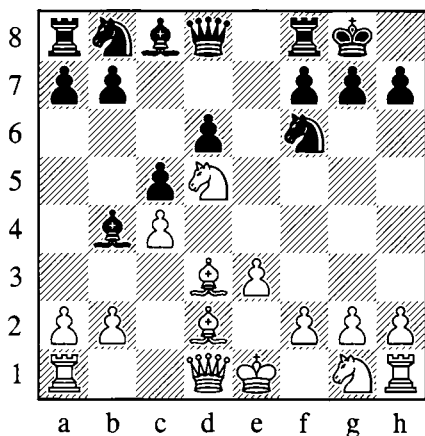
6...exd5 could certainly be considered as well. This takes away the option mentioned in the note to White's next move; on the other hand, there is something to be said for keeping the opponent guessing.

**7.♔d3**

7.dxe6 ♔xe6 shows a complete lack of ambition from White, and after 8.♖f3N ♘c6 9.♙e2 d5 Black is at least equal. Still, at least this would avoid the problems experienced by White in our main line below...

**7...exd5 8.♘d5**

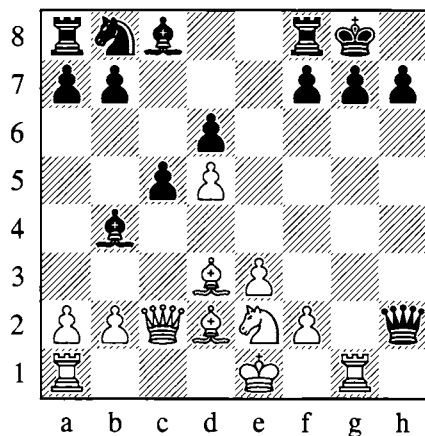
I also considered 8.cxd5N, when 8...♘bd7 9.♘ge2 ♘e5 10.♙c2 a6 11.a3 ♙a5 12.0-0 b5♣ gives Black everything he could have wished for from the Benoni structure.

**8...♘d5 9.cxd5 ♙g5 10.♘e2**

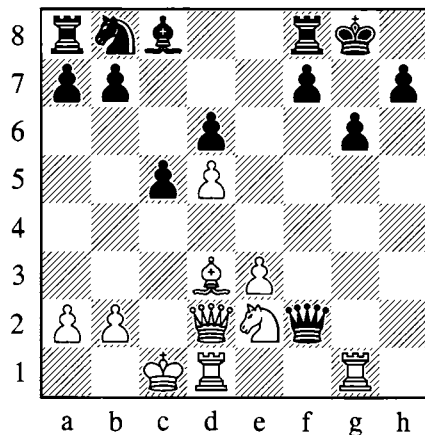
White is more or less forced to sacrifice a pawn or two and hope for the best.

**10...♙xg2 11.♖g1 ♙xh2 12.♙c2**

After deep analysis, I managed to find a significant improvement for Black.

**12...g6!N**

12...♘d7 13.0-0-0 ♔xd2† 14.♙xd2 h6?! 15.♘f4 ♙h4? 16.♖h1 ♙e7 17.♖dg1 gave White a venomous attack in Ulko – Tunik, Korolev 1999.

**13.0-0-0 ♔xd2† 14.♙xd2 ♙xf2**

Black is now three pawns up. It looks like White has some attacking chances, but Black

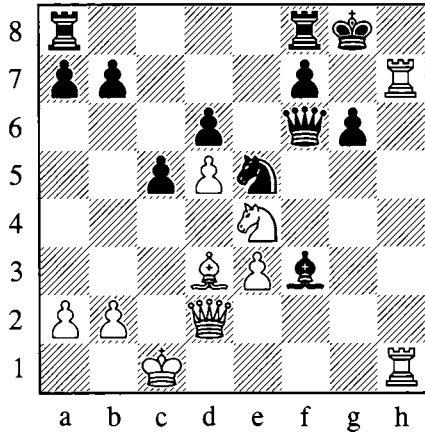
has full control over the dark squares, especially the e5-spot for the knight. For instance:

15.♖h1 ♜f6 16.♖h6 ♙g4 17.♞dh1 ♜d7  
18.♞xh7 ♜e5 19.♜g3 ♙f3!

Restricting the mobility of the g3-knight.

20.♜e4

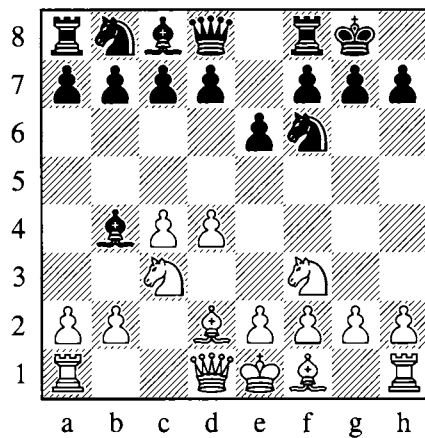
No better is: 20.♞1h6 ♞fb8 21.♙e4 ♜f8  
22.♞f2 ♜e7+



20...♜d3† 21.♞xd3 ♙xe4 22.♞xe4 ♞fe8  
23.♞g2 ♞e5 24.♞h2 ♞h5 25.♞xh5 gxh5  
26.♞xh5 ♞e8+

White's kingside initiative is under control, and Black has good chances to convert his extra pawn.

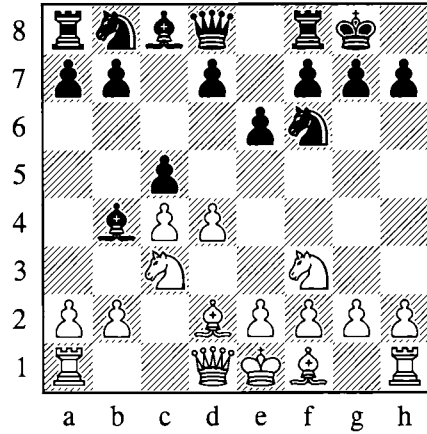
D) 5.♜f3



The most popular and flexible move. White delays the development of his bishop, keeping the fianchetto option in mind.

5...c5

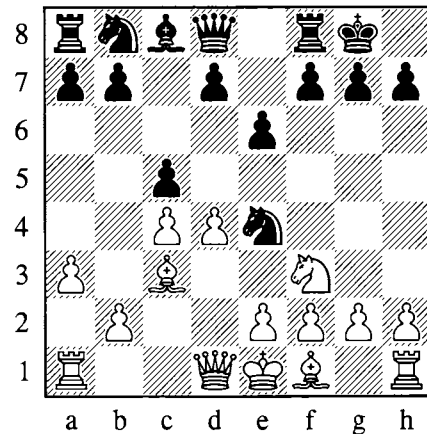
Although this is only Black's third most popular option according to the statistics, in my opinion it gives Black more dynamic chances than 5...b6 or 5...d5.



White has three main options: D1) 6.a3, D2) 6.e3 and D3) 6.dxc5.

D1) 6.a3 ♙xc3 7.♙xc3 ♜e4

Once again, Black should liquidate the powerful dark-squared bishop.



**8.♙c2**

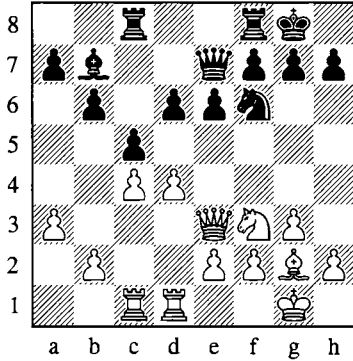
The other way to avoid doubled c-pawns is:

8.♙c1 b6 9.g3 ♗b7 10.♙g2 d6 11.0-0 ♘d7  
12.♙c2

12.b3 ♘xc3 13.♙xc3 ♙e7 was fine for Black in Schauffelberger – Gyimesi, Kemer 2007.

12.♙d3 ♘xc3 13.♙xc3 has occurred a couple of times; I suggest 13...♙e7N= with similar play to the main example below.

12...♙c8 13.♙fd1 ♘xc3 14.♙xc3 ♙e7 15.♙e3  
♘f6



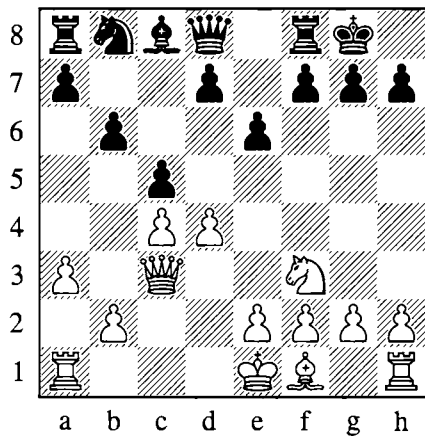
Having failed to obtain any advantage from the opening, White played too optimistically in the following example:

16.d5?! ♙ce8! 17.dxe6 fxe6♭

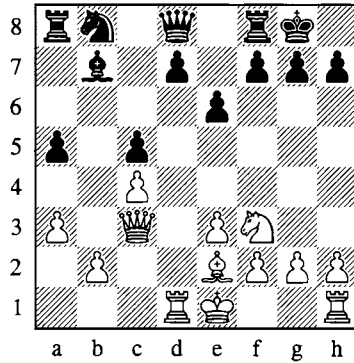
Black managed to seize the initiative in Djuric – Tiviakov, Formia 1995.

**8...♘xc3 9.♙xc3 b6**

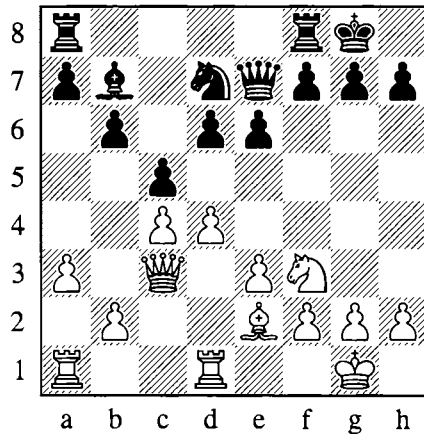
Black aims for a familiar set-up with the bishop on b7.

**10.e3**

In the event of 10.♙d1N ♗b7 11.dxc5 bxc5 White is unable to exert meaningful pressure along the d-file. An illustrative line is: 12.e3 a5 13.♙e2



13...♙a6! The rook defends d6 laterally and may eventually be used to exert pressure on the queenside. 14.0-0 d6 15.♙d2 ♘d7 16.♙fd1 ♙e7♭ White lacks any active ideas.

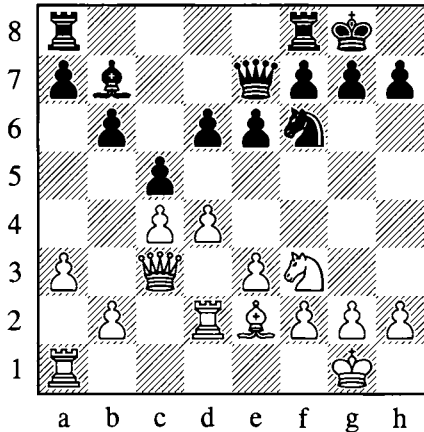
**10...♗b7 11.♙e2 d6 12.0-0 ♘d7 13.♙fd1 ♙e7****14.♙d2?!**

White should prefer something like 14.h3N, or any other neutral move, with equality. Doubling rooks along the d-file is obviously something White would like to do, but here it runs into:

14...♟f6!

Threatening a fork on e4.

14...d5 was equal in Ajrapetjan – Harutjunyan, Alushta 2007, but it would be a shame to miss out on the opportunity that has just been presented.



15.♞dd1

15.♞c2 ♞e4 16.♞dd1 is the same thing.

15...♞e4 16.♞c2

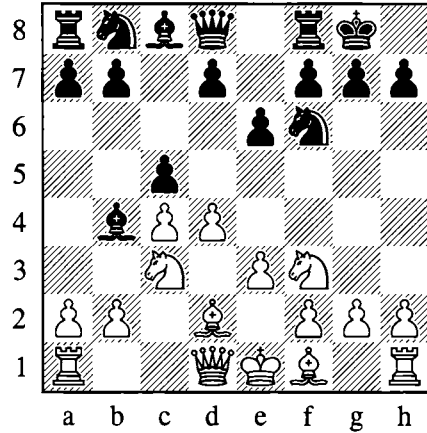
From here Black continued with the overly aggressive 16...♞g5?! in Musialkiewicz – Zmarzly, Wrocław 2007, when both players missed the idea of 17.♞xg5 ♞xg5 18.d5!, when White has no problems after shutting Black's bishop out of the game. (The trick is that 18...exd5? runs into 19.♞f3!±.)

A better continuation would be:

16...f5Nf

Keeping ...♞g5 and other attacking options available. The position is close to equal but clearly more comfortable for Black.

D2) 6.e3



6...cxd4

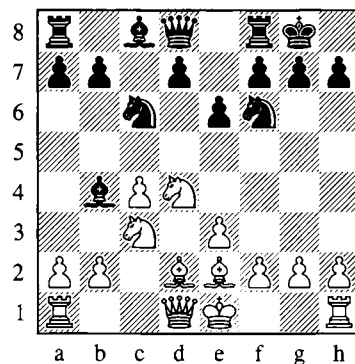
6...d5 has been played lots of times, but after 7.a3 ♞xc3 8.♞xc3 Black is just playing for equality without posing any real problems for his opponent.

7.exd4

We should also consider the knight recapture: 7.♞xd4 ♞c6 8.♞e2

8.♞d3 is harmless: 8...d5 9.cxd5 ♞xd4 10.exd4 ♞xd5 11.0-0 ♟f6= Zuberowski – Rusomanov, Skopje 1998.

8.a3 ♞e7 9.♞e2 d5 10.cxd5 ♞xd4 11.exd4 ♞xd5 gives Black a nice position against the IQP; after the further 12.♞f3 ♞b6 13.♞e3 ♞c4 14.0-0 ♞xe3 15.fxg3 ♞d7 the pawn structure had changed, but Black still had the better chances thanks to the bishop pair in Lenic – Ponomarev, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010.

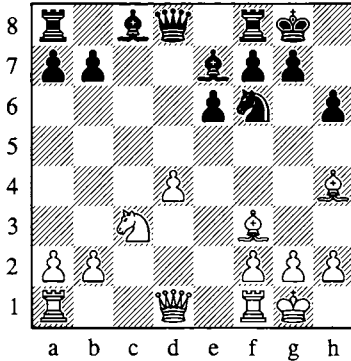


8...d5 9.cxd5 ♖xd4 10.exd4 ♜xd5

10...exd5 has occurred in several games but I see no reason to enter a boring position with a symmetrical pawn structure.

11.0-0 ♜f6 12.♗g5 h6 13.♗h4 ♗e7 14.♗f3

All this occurred in Gooss – Trockmann, Mittelfranken 2007. Now the simple approach works well:



14...♗d7N

The b7-pawn is not really en prise, as Black would be happy to activate his rook and take on b2.

15.♞e2 ♗c6

Black has comfortable play. After the likely exchange on c6, his isolated pawn on c6 will not be any weaker than the one on d4.

7...b6

This move has two ideas. Preparing to develop the bishop on b7 or a6 is the obvious one, but I also want to prepare ...d5 without allowing White to get a strong pawn chain by advancing c4-c5.

8.a3

The most natural alternative is:

8.♗d3 ♗a6!?

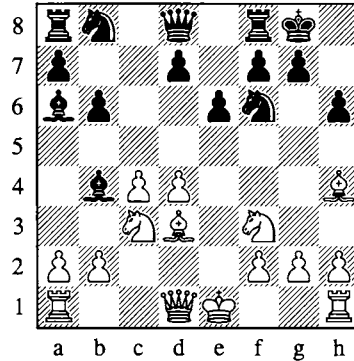
This move prepares a future exchange of the light-squared bishops in order to limit White's attacking potential and secure control over the d5-square in the future.

9.♗g5

9.0-0 d5 10.♜xd5 ♜xd5 11.cxd5 occurred in Gasztonyi – Barczay, Budapest 1965, when 11...♗xd2!N 12.♗xa6 ♜xa6 13.♞xd2 ♞xd5 would have exemplified Black's strategy.

9...h6 10.♗h4

This was Erenberg – Goczko, Budapest 2014. Now I suggest the natural improvement:

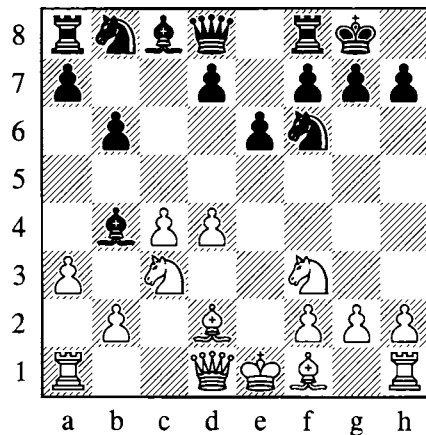


10...d5!N 11.cxd5 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♗xd3 13.♞xd3 exd5

Black is not worse, for example:

14.0-0 ♜bd7 15.♜e5 ♞c7

The pressure along the c-file fully compensates for White's centralized knight.



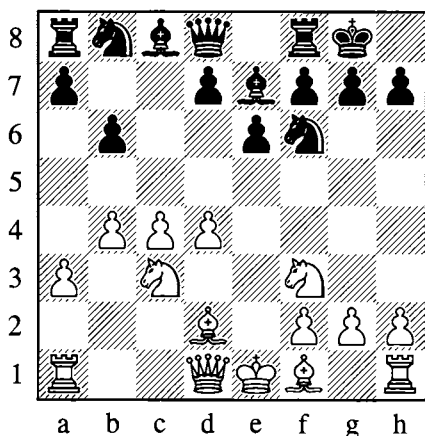
8...♗e7

I definitely prefer to keep the bishop on the board.

**9.b4**

9.♙d3N can be well met by: 9...♙a6! (9...d5? would be premature in view of 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♖c2! h6 12.♘xd5 exd5 13.0-0±) 10.♖e2 (10.b4 d5 11.b5 dxc4 12.♙xc4 ♙b7) 10...d5 11.cxd5 ♙xd3 12.♖xd3 ♘xd5

The text move is the only realistic way to avoid an IQP, as White is now ready to meet ...d5 with c4-c5. However, there is an obvious drawback as White loses more time. In Atia – Hussein, Al Ain 2008, a logical continuation would have been:



**9...a5!N 10.♖b1**

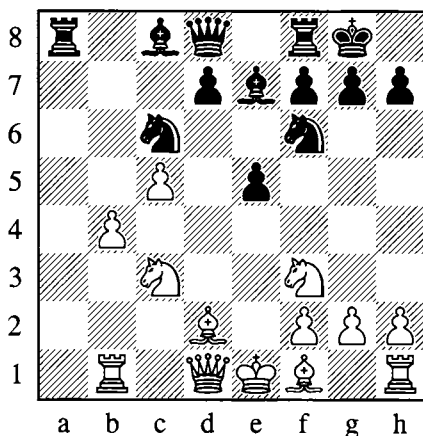
10.b5?! is inferior in view of 10...d5 11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♙d3 ♙b7 13.0-0 ♘d7, when everything is in order for Black.

**10...axb4 11.axb4 ♘c6 12.c5**

12.b5?! ♘a5 13.♙d3 ♙b7 14.0-0 ♖c7 leaves White under pressure on the queenside.

**12...bxc5 13.dxc5 e5!**

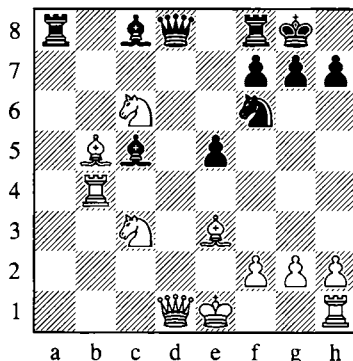
I like this aggressive idea – Black should be aiming to exploit his lead in development. Now White has to play precisely in order to avoid trouble.



**14.♙b5**

14.♙d3 d6 is pleasant for Black.

I also analysed 14.♙e3?! d5! 15.♙b5 ♘xb4! 16.♖xb4 d4 17.♘xd4 ♙xc5 18.♘c6 when Black has a beautiful idea:

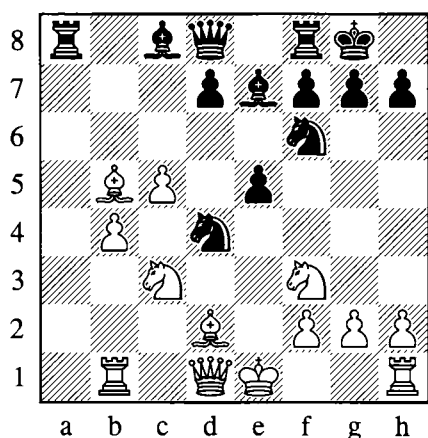


18...♙xb4! 19.♘xb4 (19.♘xd8 ♙xc3† 20.♗e2 [20.♗f1 ♙g4†] 20...♖a2† 21.♗f1 ♖a1) 19...♖a5 20.♖a4 ♖xa4 21.♙xa4 ♙b7 White is under pressure, since he lacks harmony between his pieces.

**14...♘d4**

Black could also consider 14...e4!?, when my analysis continues 15.♘g5 ♘d4 16.♙c4 d5 17.♙e3 dxc4 18.♖xd4 ♖xd4 19.♙xd4 ♙f5 20.0-0 ♖fd8 21.♙e3 ♖d3 22.♖fc1, reaching an extremely complex endgame.

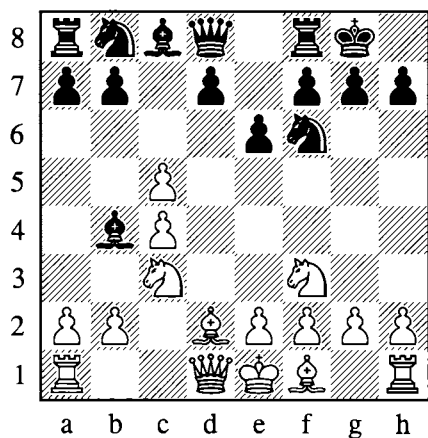
The text move is a simple way to ensure at least equal chances. A logical continuation is:



15.♖xd4 exd4 16.♗e2 d6 17.♗xd4 dxc5  
18.♗c6 ♖c7 19.0-0 ♙d6

Black obviously has nothing to worry about.

### D3) 6.dxc5



### 6...♗a6

6...♗a6 is another typical way of regaining the pawn, but after 7.e3 ♗xc5 8.♙e2 Black will most likely have to swap off his dark-squared bishop in an unfavourable situation. For instance, 8...a5 9.0-0 b6 10.a3 ♗xc3 11.♗xc3 ♗fe4 12.♙e1 a4 13.♗d4 ♙a6 14.f3 ♗d6 15.♖c1 was better for White in Mamedov – Goganov, Plovdiv 2012.

### 7.g3

Too passive is:

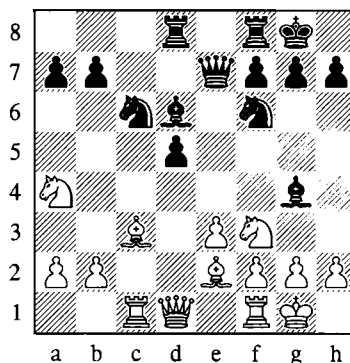
7.e3 d5 8.♖c1

White is not ideally placed to fight against the isolated pawn: 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♙e2 ♗c6 10.0-0 a6 11.♖c1 ♙a7 and Black was doing well in Grigoriadis – Sumets, Kavala 2014.

8...♗e7

Over-protecting the c5-bishop, though there was also nothing wrong with 8...♗c6!?

9.cxd5 exd5 10.♙e2 ♗c6 11.0-0 ♙g4 12.♗a4 ♙d6 13.♙c3 ♗ad8



14.♙d4?!

14.♗d4 ♙d7 with approximate equality.

14...♗e4

Black had a dangerous initiative in the classic game Petrosian – Portisch, Palma de Mallorca 1974.

White has also tried:

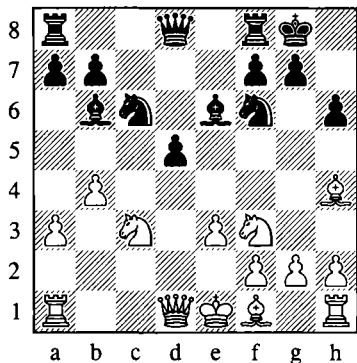
7.a3 d5 8.cxd5

8.e3 makes a poor impression – White's set-up looks rather passive. Black can choose between several attractive possibilities, but 8...♗c6 is the most ambitious: 9.b4 ♙d6 10.♗b5 ♙b8 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♙c3 ♗e4 and Black was better in Lajthajm – Ivanisevic, Ulcinj 2014.

8...exd5 9.b4

After 9.♙g5N ♗c6 10.e3 d4 11.♙xf6 gxf6 12.exd4 ♗xd4 13.♗xd4 ♖xd4 14.♖xd4 ♙xd4 White also doesn't get full equality.

9...♙b6 10.♙g5 ♘e6 11.e3 h6 12.♙h4 ♘c6



13.♘a4?

White is playing with fire!

13.♙b5N a5 14.♙xc6 bxc6 15.0-0= was safer.

13...g5! 14.♙g3 d4!

The lack of development put White in a critical situation in Varga – Babula, Plovdiv 2003.

7...d5

From this, the final branching point of the chapter, I examined the more ambitious D31) 8.♙g2!N as well as D32) 8.cxd5.

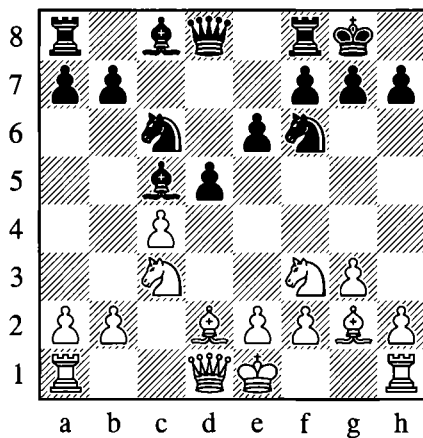
D31) 8.♙g2!N

This has not been tried here, although it does transpose briefly to another game.

8...♘c6

8...dxc4 9.0-0 ♘bd7 10.♙c2 offers White enough compensation.

The text move was played in Wallinger – Boehlig, Germany 1992, and it also transposes to a couple of other games. Each game continued 9.cxd5 exd5, reaching a position examined under variation D32 below. However, White could also seriously consider maintaining the tension with:



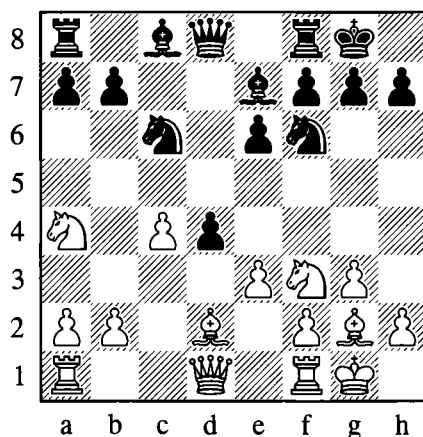
9.0-0!N

White plays in the spirit of the Catalan, offering a pawn sacrifice in order to free a path for the light-squared bishop.

9...d4!

In the event of 9...dxc4 10.♙a4 e5 11.♙g5 (11.♙xc4 ♙e7 12.♙g5 ♘e6 13.♙h4 h6 14.♙xf6 ♙xf6 15.♙xf6 gxf6 is about equal) 11...♙e6 12.♙ad1 ♙c8 13.♙xf6 gxf6 14.♘h4 White gets promising compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

10.♘a4 ♙e7 11.e3



11...dxc3

Too risky would be 11...d3?! 12.♙c3 and it's not easy to protect the advanced pawn. For instance: 12...♘e4 13.♖b1 e5 14.♙d1 ♙f5 15.♘e1±

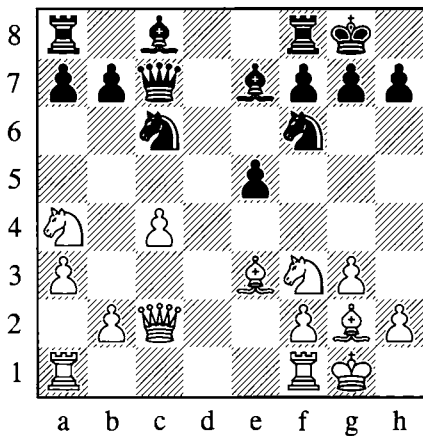
11...e5!? 12.exd4 exd4 13.♙e1 ♙e6 14.♙c1 (14.♖b3 ♖d7 gives Black enough counterplay) 14...♙c8 15.a3 reaches a highly complex position. However, it seems to me that White has the slightly easier game, as the d4-pawn is liable to become weak soon.

### 12.♙xc3 e5

Black has a solid position without weaknesses. The game may continue:

### 13.♖c2 ♖c7 14.a3

14.♘c3 ♙e6 15.♘b5 ♖c8= seems fine for Black.



### 14...h6

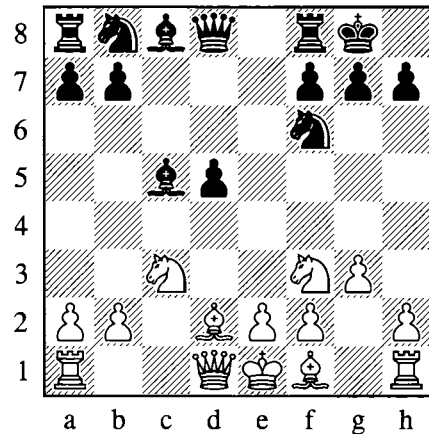
Securing a nice spot for the bishop.

14...g6!? is also a decent option.

### 15.b4 ♙e6 16.♘c5 ♙xc5 17.♙xc5 ♙fd8=

White's bishop pair is balanced out by Black's central control and well-coordinated pieces.

### D32) 8.cxd5 exd5



This allows Black to develop all the pieces quite easily.

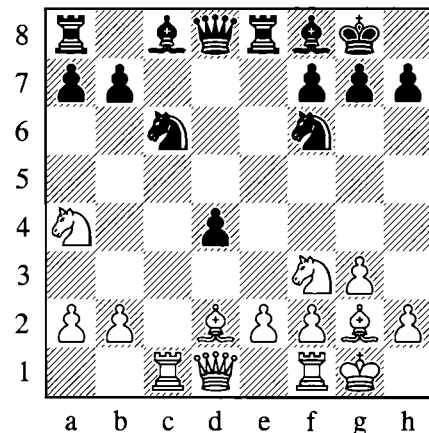
### 9.♙g2 ♘c6 10.0-0 ♙e8

If you put this rook back on f8 and White's dark-squared bishop on c1, we would arrive in one of the main variations of the Tarrasch Defence. Here Black is essentially a tempo up on that scenario, as his rook invariably goes to e8 in that line anyway, whereas White's bishop accomplishes nothing on d2.

### 11.♙c1

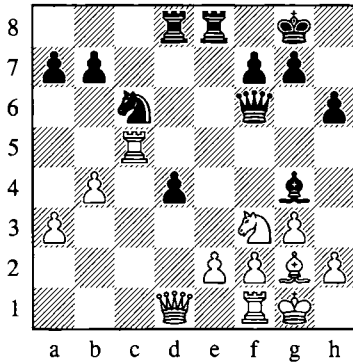
11.♘a4 ♙f8 12.a3 h6 13.♙c1 d4 14.e3 ♙g4 gave Black an excellent position in Goy – Langer, email 2013.

### 11...d4 12.♘a4 ♙f8



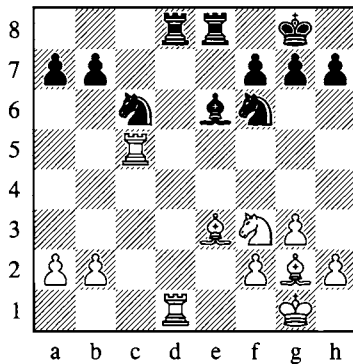
**13.b4**

The following miniature demonstrates a typical tactical motif for such a position:  
 13.♙g5 h6 14.♜xf6 ♖xf6 15.♘c5 ♜xc5  
 16.♞xc5 ♜e6 17.a3 ♞ad8 18.b4 ♙g4



19.♞c2?? d3! 20.♞xc6 dxe2 0-1 Wallinger – Boehlig, Germany 1992.

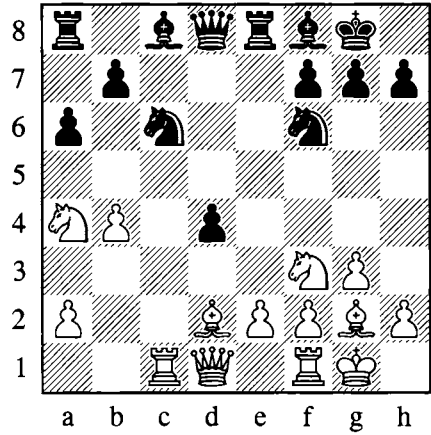
I also considered 13.e3N dxe3 14.♜xe3 ♜e6 15.♘c5 ♜xc5 16.♞xc5 ♖xd1 17.♞xd1 ♞ad8 when White must tread carefully to remain equal. The danger is illustrated after:



18.♘d4? (18.♞cc1! is better, when 18...♞xd1† 19.♞xd1 ♜xa2 20.♘d4= enables White to win back the pawn and equalize) 18...♘xd4 19.♞xd4 (19.♜xd4 ♞e7 leaves White stuck in an unpleasant pin) 19...♞xd4 20.♜xd4 ♞d8 and White has problems on the first rank.

**13...a6**

Also level is: 13...d3 14.exd3 ♖xd3N (or 14...♘xb4 15.d4, Stern – Keymer, Saarbruecken 2015, 15...♘c6N 16.♜e3 ♜e6=) 15.♘c5 ♜xc5 16.bxc5 ♙g4=

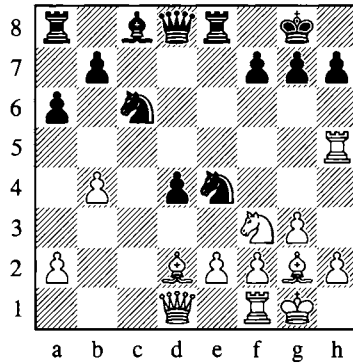


**14.♘c5 ♜xc5**

Now White should aim for equality with:

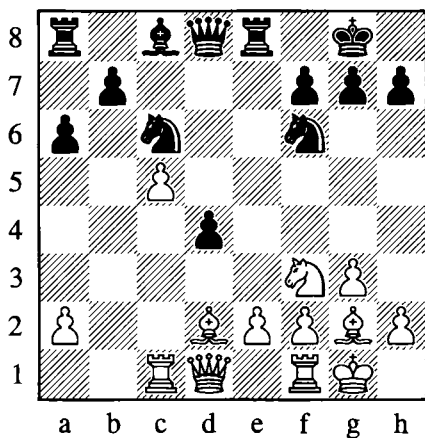
**15.bxc5N**

The more ambitious 15.♞xc5?! ♘e4 16.♞h5 was tried in Stern – Svane, Saarbruecken 2013. Here Black missed a chance to exploit the vulnerability of the rook by means of:



16...h6!N 17.a4 ♙g4 18.♞h4 ♙f5 19.b5 axb5 20.axb5 ♘e7

The text move doesn't look too inspiring for White, but it should enable him to keep the balance. For example:



### Conclusion

4.♙d2 is no threat to the Nimzo-Indian, as it is too passive a development. I recommend castling in reply, quite often followed by plans involving ...c7-c5. One general idea to note is that if White plays a2-a3, we usually take on c3, White recaptures with the bishop, then it is vital to immediately play ...♘e4 and take the bishop. If instead we allow White to keep the bishop pair then the feeble 4.♙d2 could be transformed into a promising try for an advantage.

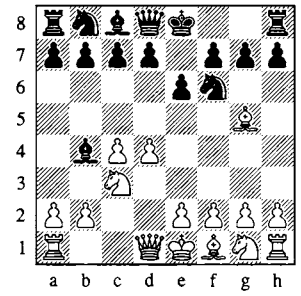
15...♘e4 16.♖c2 ♙f5 17.♘h4 ♘xd2

18.♖xd2 ♙g4 19.♗fe1 ♖d7=

Black is by no means worse.

# Chapter 4

## Various 4th Moves



### 4.♖g5

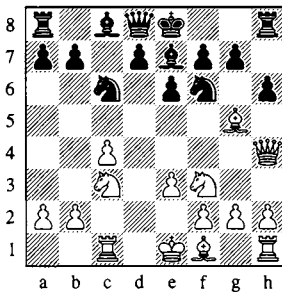
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♖g5

4...c5

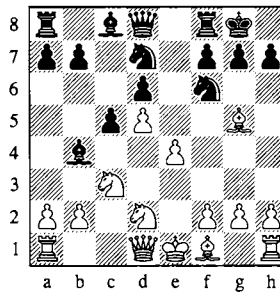
A) 5.♗c1	49
B) 5.d5 d6	51
B1) 6.♘f3	52
B2) 6.f3	54
B3) 6.e3 exd5 7.cxd5 ♘bd7	56
B31) 8.♗b5	57
B32) 8.♗d3 ♖a5 9.♘ge2 ♘xd5 10.0-0 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 c4!	59
B321) 12.♗f5?!	60
B322) 12.♗c2 0-0	61
B3221) 13.♘g3?!	62
B3222) 13.♗h4	63

A) note to 7.♗xf6



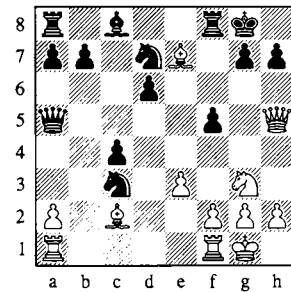
9...♗b6!N

B1) after 9.e4



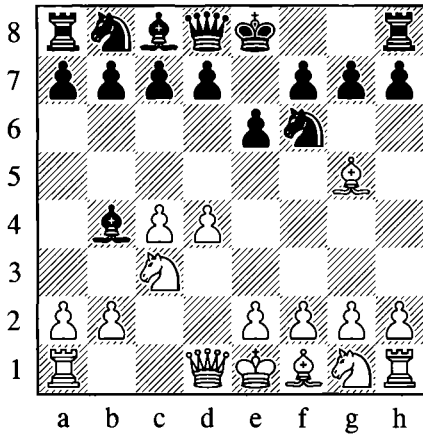
9...♗e8!N

B3221) after 15.♗e7



15...♗f7!N

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘g5



Known as the Leningrad System, this is one of White's most aggressive ways to tackle the Nimzo-Indian. White pins the opponent's knight in order to gain control over the important e4-square. Obviously, breaking the pin along the h4-d8 diagonal by means of ...♗b4-e7 would be a loss of tempo. Even though 4.♘g5 isn't popular any more at the highest level, some aggressive players such as Mamedyarov, Korobov and Moiseenko still use this weapon from time to time.

#### 4...c5

This is the most natural and direct way to exploit the white bishop's departure from the queenside.

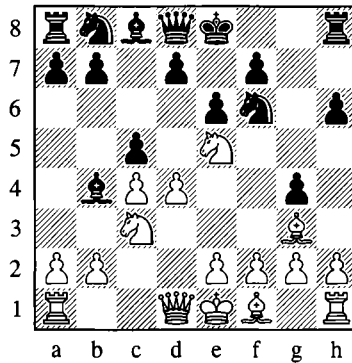
Black often starts with 4...h6 5.♗h4 before playing 5...c5. However, it is crucial for our repertoire that we refrain from ...h6 any time soon! When we get to the main lines, we will see that some of Black's ideas only work because of the exposed bishop on g5, and would be completely ineffective if this piece was on h4.

We will analyse the sideline **A) 5.♙c1** before moving on to the normal **B) 5.d5**.

After 5.e3? ♗a5 White is already in trouble due to the unpleasant pin and the vulnerable

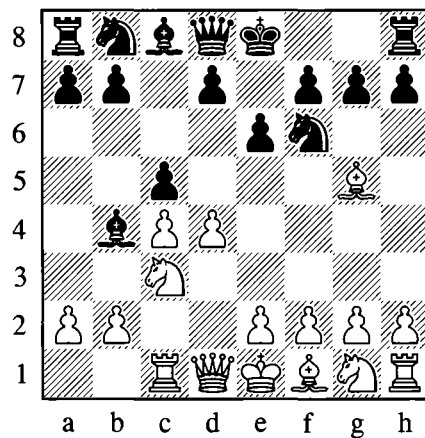
bishop on g5, which can be hit by either ...♘e4 or ...cxd4. Clearly, the g5-bishop is misplaced here.

5.♘f3 isn't in the spirit of the Leningrad System at all. 5...h6 6.♗h4? (6.♗xf6 is the lesser evil, although 6...♗xf6 7.e3 cxd4 8.exd4 ♗xc3† 9.bxc3 b6 10.♗e2 0-0 was comfortable for Black in Ye Rongguang – Nisipeanu, Groningen 1997) 6...g5 7.♗g3 g4 8.♘e5 In Elstner – Karabalis, Germany 2008, Black should have continued:



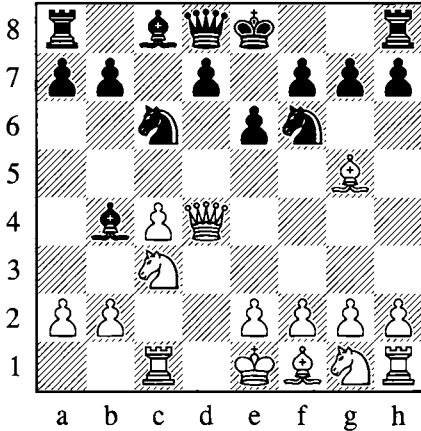
8...♘e4!N 9.♗d3 ♘xg3 10.hxg3 d6! 11.♘xg4 e5 White has serious problems, for instance: 12.dxe5 ♗xg4 13.0-0-0 ♗xc3 14.♗xc3 ♘d7 15.exd6 ♗g5† 16.♙d2 0-0-0†

#### A) 5.♙c1



This is not really in the spirit of the chosen system, but it has been tried by some strong players, most notably Viktor Korchnoi.

5...cxd4 6. ♖xd4 ♘c6



7. ♕xf6

This is White's safest approach.

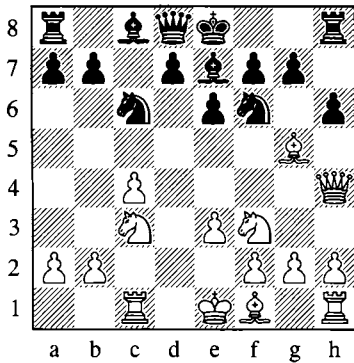
7. ♖h4?!

This is playing with fire, since White's set-up lacks the necessary coordination.

7...♗e7 8. ♘f3 h6 9. e3

We have been following Gonzalez Vassallo – Contreras, Santiago 2007. In the game, Black brought his queen to a5 and obtained a good position.

However, the following finesse would have been even stronger:



9...♝b6!N

Provoking White's next move.

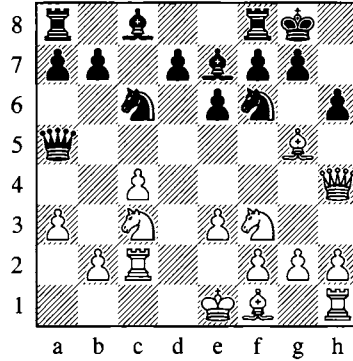
10. ♖c2

And now Black can get an improved version of the aforementioned game with:

10...♝a5! 11. a3

11. ♕d3? is now strongly met by 11...♘b4!, so White has to waste a tempo on the queenside.

11...0-0

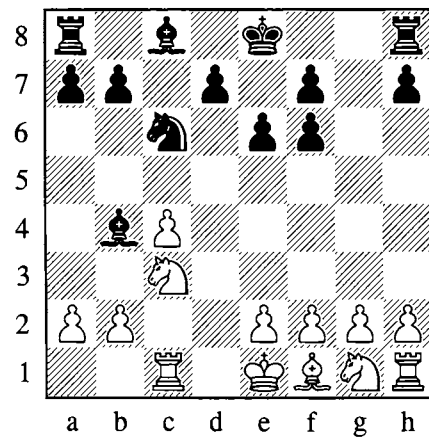


12. ♕xf6

With the bishop still on f1, the piece sacrifice is useless: 12. ♕xh6? gxh6 13. ♝xh6 ♖h5+ 12...♕xf6 13. ♖f4 ♗d8 14. ♕e2 d5

Black has the more comfortable position due to the bishop pair.

7...♝xf6 8. ♝xf6 gxf6

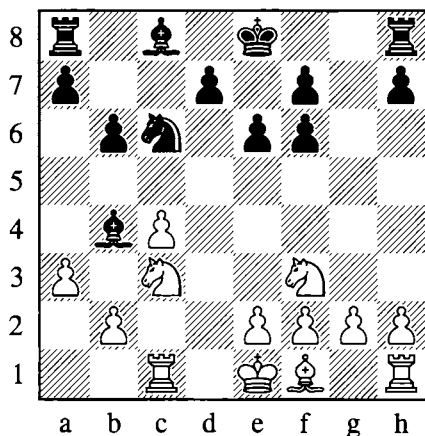


9. ♘f3

9.a3 ♙e7 10.e3N is slightly more precise, but Black still has excellent play after 10...b6.

### 9...b6 10.a3

This position was seen in Ionescu – Benjamin, Moscow 1987. In the game Black took on c3 and made a draw, but I would strongly prefer to keep the dark-squared bishop on the board:



10...♙e7!N 11.e3 ♙b7 12.♘d2

12.♙e2 ♞g8♞ is also good for Black.

### 12...f5 13.♙e2 ♘e5

White finds himself in a passive, unpleasant position.

#### B) 5.d5

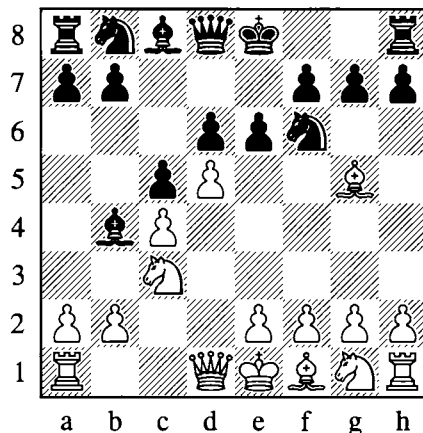
This is White's usual choice, and the only way to fight for an advantage.

### 5...d6

Let me repeat: do not be tempted to touch your h-pawn! The bishop on g5 may be White's greatest asset, as it yields an annoying pin, but it's also his greatest liability, as it can be tactically vulnerable.

Before we start analysing any variations, let me say something about the plan I have in store. Rather than the well-known scheme

of exchanging on c3, followed by setting up a dark-squared pawn wall with ...h6, ...e5 and ...g5, I will instead be proposing a more dynamic approach involving ...exd5, leading to a Benoni structure. One way to think of it is that we will be playing a so-called Snake Benoni where, instead of taking the rather convoluted route from f8-d6-c7-a5, our bishop has saved time by going to the queenside using one tempo instead of three. And as I mentioned previously, we will also look to target the bishop on g5 in some lines.



We will analyse the important options of **B1) 6.♘f3**, **B2) 6.f3** and **B3) 6.e3**, after first checking a couple of minor alternatives:

6.e4?! makes little sense, as after 6...♙xc3† 7.bxc3 h6 8.♙xf6 ♞xf6♞ White has no compensation for his damaged pawn structure.

### 6.♞c2

This is a slightly more interesting sideline, and has been used a few times by GM Nana Dzagnidze.

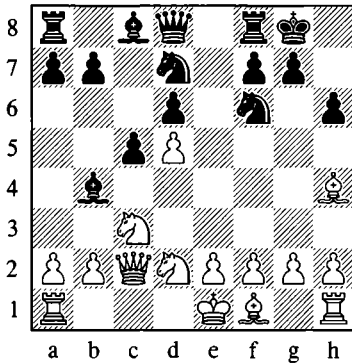
6...exd5 7.cxd5 h6

On this occasion you are allowed to prod the bishop.

8.♙h4 ♘bd7 9.♘f3 0–0 10.♘d2

This position was seen in Dzagnidze – N. Kosintseva, Hangzhou 2011. In my

opinion, the best way to meet White's somewhat slow method of development is:



10...Re8N

A natural move. Black is fighting against the e2-e4 advance and will put strong pressure on the d5-pawn.

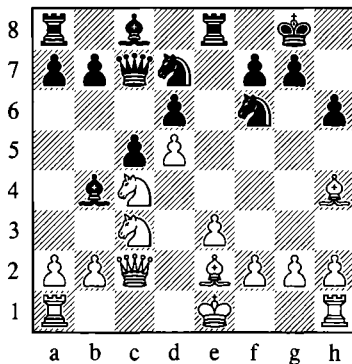
11.e3 ♖a5!

A concrete approach. White's next move is practically forced.

12.♟c4 ♚c7 13.♙e2

White has no time to secure the c4-knight:

13.a4 ♟xd5 14.♞d1 ♟7b6



13...b5!

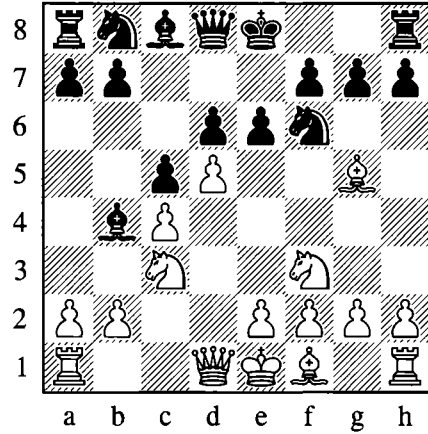
Instead, 13...♟xd5 14.♞d1 ♟7b6 15.♙g3 would yield White definite compensation for the pawn.

14.♟d2 a6

Black has obviously made significant progress on the queenside. Now there is more reason to grab the d5-pawn after:

15.0-0 ♙xc3 16.bxc3 ♟xd5

B1) 6.♟f3



This has been tried by several strong players – and the number rises again if we count the games where White has gone for a ♟f3 set-up with the moves ...h6 and ♙h4 included. Chris Ward advocated this set-up for White in a chapter of *Dangerous Weapons: The Nimzo-Indian*. The English GM mainly focuses on the version with ...h6 and ♙h4 included; he does briefly discuss the possibility of Black avoiding those moves, but concludes that in most cases it does not make much of a difference. However, I managed to find a precise sequence where Black can benefit from the exposed bishop on g5 – see the main line below for full details.

6...exd5 7.cxd5 ♟bd7 8.♟d2

The d2-knight has a couple of useful functions – it keeps an eye on the key e4-square and also unpins the second knight. This means the knight on c3 now protects d5, so the d5-pawn is protected. On the other hand, the knight on d2 blocks the queen from defending that pawn.

8.e4 looks more ambitious, but it forces White to exchange the powerful bishop: 8...h6 9.♙xf6 ♚xf6 (9...♟xf6!? also looks good:

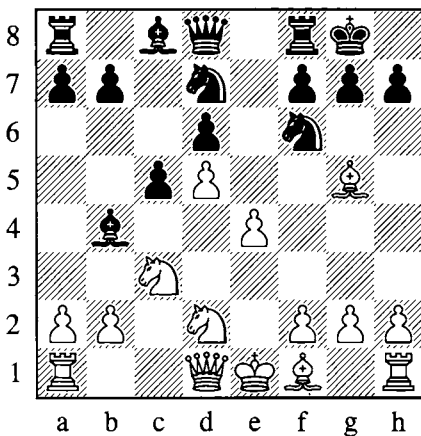
10.♙b5† ♙d7 11.♙xd7† ♚xd7 12.♚c2 0–0  
 13.0–0 ♜fe8) 10.♚c2 0–0 11.♙e2 ♘e5  
 12.0–0 ♘g6 Black was better in V. Georgiev –  
 Eames, Hastings 2008.

### 8...0–0 9.e4

After the modest 9.e3 h6 10.♙h4 ♘b6  
 11.♙d3 ♙xc3 12.bxc3 ♘bxd5) White does  
 not get sufficient compensation for the pawn.

9.a3, as was played in Petkevich – Gerchikov, St  
 Petersburg 1997, should be met by 9...♙xc3N  
 10.bxc3 ♚a5 11.c4 b5!, with a powerful  
 initiative due to the enormous development  
 advantage.

This position occurred in Kristiansen –  
 Schandorff, Denmark 2008. In my opinion,  
 the best way to make use of Black's lead in  
 development was:



### 9...♚e8!N

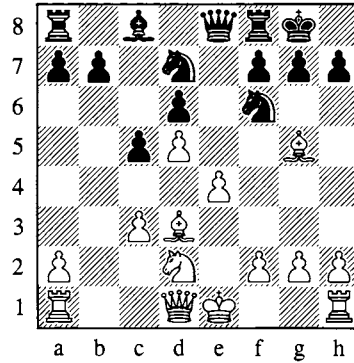
Avoiding the unpleasant pin and putting  
 strong pressure on the e4-pawn.

The aforementioned game continued 9...h6  
 10.♙h4, reaching a position which is also  
 covered by Ward via a different move order  
 with an earlier ...h6. Both the game and  
 Ward's analysis continued 10...♜e8 11.♙e2  
 ♚a5 12.f3 ♙xc3 13.bxc3, when Black can

capture the c3-pawn but White will have a lot  
 of compensation.

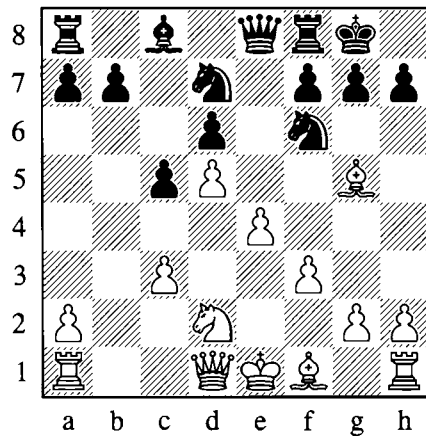
### 10.f3

The somewhat more natural 10.♙d3 is  
 strongly met by: 10...♙xc3 11.bxc3



11...♚e5! By exploiting the loose bishop on  
 g5, Black gets a clear positional advantage.  
 (11...♘xd5 is also possible, but White is very  
 much in the game after 12.0–0) 12.♙xf6  
 ♘xf6

### 10...♙xc3 11.bxc3



### 11...♘xd5!

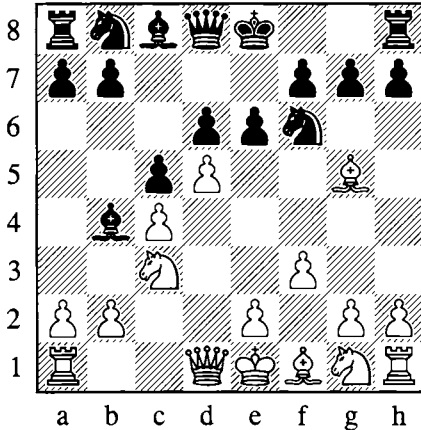
11...♚e5 is less effective here than in the  
 note above, as after 12.♙h4 ♚xc3 White does  
 not have a bishop hanging on d3, and the  
 f3-pawn is useful for supporting his centre.

On the other hand, capturing the d5-pawn works better here than in the note above.

After the text move the game goes on and the position is still complex, but White will struggle to justify the loss of a pawn and I strongly prefer Black. Play might continue:

12. ♖c4 ♜xc3 13. ♚xd6 b5 14. ♜e3 ♞b8

### B2) 6.f3



This move strikes me as over-ambitious. Mixing the 4.f3 and 4.♗g5 systems is a risky approach, but it has been tried by many strong grandmasters, including Epishin, Azmaiparashvili, Bauer and others.

### 6...h6!

In this variation there is not much to be gained from leaving the bishop on g5. On the other hand, as we will see, it is worth forcing the bishop to declare its intentions, as each possible retreat has some sort of drawback for White.

### 7.♗h4

Occasionally White has tried:

### 7.♗d2

This retreat makes a weird impression and doesn't suit White's aggressive intentions in this line.

### 7...0-0

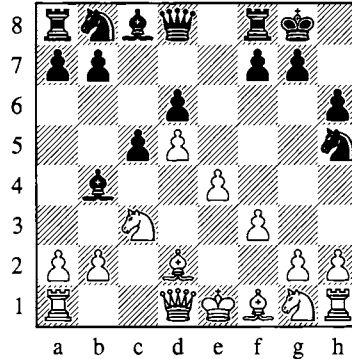
7...exd5 8.cxd5 0-0 9.e4 is another possible move order.

### 8.e4 exd5 9.cxd5

Now Black can immediately benefit from the lack of a pin on the f6-knight.

### 9...♜h5!

Threatening a check on h4 while preparing to put pressure on White's centre with ...f5.



### 10.g3

10.♜ge2 f5 11.♚c2 fxe4 12.fxe4, as played in Parker – Lautier, Mondariz 2000, can be strongly met by 12...♗g4!N 13.0-0-0 ♜d7.

### 10...f5

Black's play is very natural and consistent.

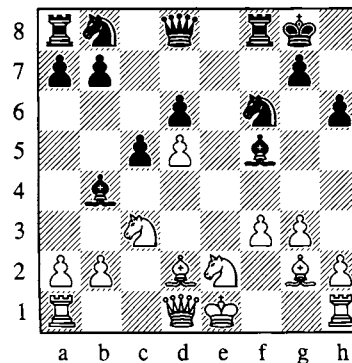
### 11.♗g2

11.♗d3 ♜d7 was even worse for White in Berhhorst – King, Hamburg 1985.

### 11...♜f6 12.exf5

Hardly better is 12.♜ge2 fxe4 13.fxe4 ♜bd7 14.0-0 ♜e5. Having occupied an important central square, Black keeps a stable edge.

### 12...♗xf5 13.♜ge2



We have been following the game Pedersen – Ostergaard, Aarhus 1991. Black had no reason to deviate from the most natural way to develop:

13...♖bd7N 14.0–0 ♖e5 15.a3 ♘a5

Black has the initiative.

### 7...exd5 8.cxd5 0–0 9.e4 ♖bd7

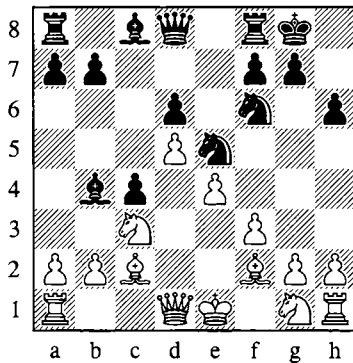
In this position the h4-bishop is clearly misplaced: the g1-a7 diagonal is exposed, so White would prefer to have the bishop on e3.

### 10.a3

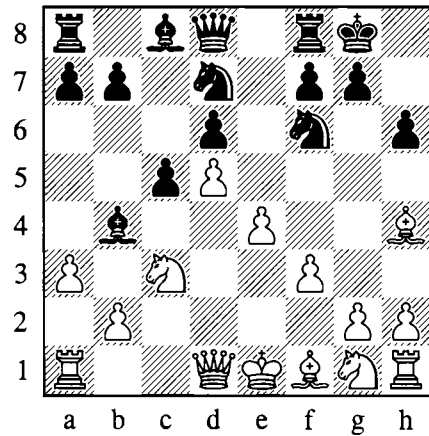
White can attempt to complete his development in a couple of other ways:

10.♖h3 ♖e5 11.♖f2 allows 11...♖g6 12.♙g3 ♖h5♯ when Black eliminates the important dark-squared bishop and gains the upper hand, as in V. Toth – Najdorf, Mar del Plata 1956.

10.♙d3 ♖e5 11.♙c2 (After 11.♖ge2 Black was able to exploit the above-mentioned drawback of putting the bishop on h4: 11...c4! 12.♙c2 ♙c5 and White got into trouble in Mohandesi – Barsov, Leuven 2002.) 11...c4 12.♙f2



We have been following the game Happel – Chabanon, Saint Affrique 1995. Now Black missed a nice chance to develop an initiative on the kingside: 12...♖h5!N 13.♖ge2 ♗g5 14.♖g3 ♖f4 15.0–0 ♙xc3 16.bxc3 h5♯



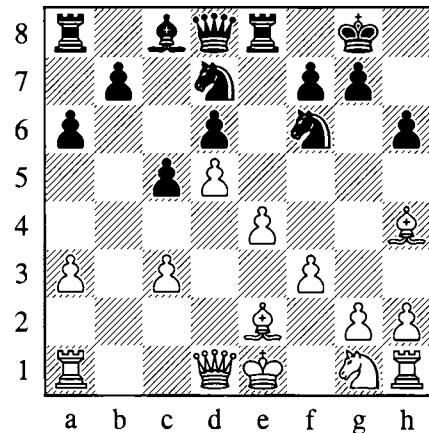
### 10...♙xc3+!N

10...♙a5 is also a decent option. For instance, 11.♙d3N a6 12.♖ge2 b5 13.0–0 ♖e5 with a good game for Black.

### 11.bxc3 ♗e8 12.♙e2 a6!

This is not so much intended to prepare ...b5 (although that might be a useful option at some stage); but rather to prevent White from utilizing the b5-square.

The immediate 12...♖e5 allows 12.♙b5 followed by ♖e2, when White manages to get his kingside in order.



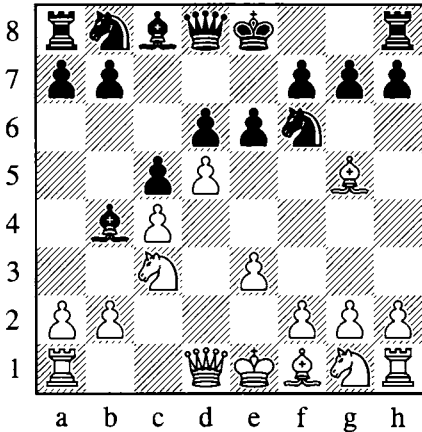
### 13.♖h3

After 13.a4?! ♖e5 White has serious problems with completing his development.

13...♖e5 14.♗f2 ♘g6 15.♙g3 ♗h5 16.0-0 ♜5

Black can eliminate the g3-bishop whenever he feels like it, and he has excellent prospects in the centre and on the kingside.

**B3) 6.e3**



This is the most common and flexible continuation. White has a few reasonable ways to develop his kingside pieces from here.

**6...exd5 7.cxd5 ♗bd7**

A flexible continuation. The f6-knight is protected now, so Black's queen is free to move. Now White is at a crossroads, with **B31) 8.♙b5** being the main alternative to **B32) 8.♙d3**.

8.♗f3?! ♜a5♞ immediately puts White in nasty pin trouble; Black has scored a perfect 6/6 from this position.

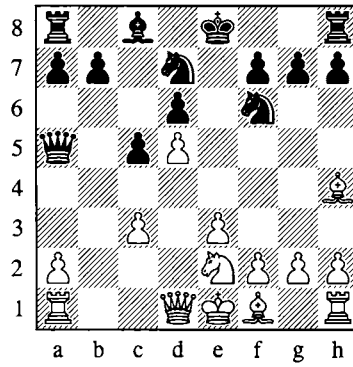
White can hardly spend another tempo for a prophylactic move like:

8.♙h4?! ♙xc3♠ 9.bxc3 ♜a5 10.♗e2

Other moves lead to the loss of a pawn:

10.♜c2 ♗xd5♞

Or 10.♜b3 ♗xd5 11.♙c1 ♗5f6♞.



10...0-0 11.f3 ♙e8

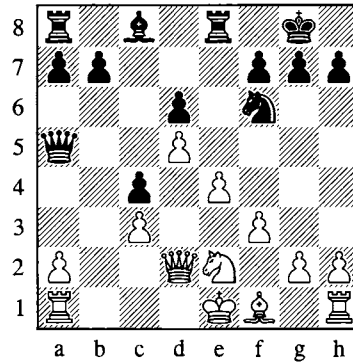
Now White faces serious problems with completing development.

12.♜d2 c4 13.♙xf6

The immediate 13.e4? is nicely refuted by 13...♗xe4! 14.fxe4 ♗c5 15.0-0-0 (15.♗g3 ♗xe4 16.♗xe4 ♙xe4♠→) 15...♙xe4 16.♙g3 ♙f5→, with a decisive attack.

13...♗xf6 14.e4

We have been following the game Milov – Pelletier, Switzerland 2014. Black should have played:



14...♙d7N 15.♗f4 ♜c5 16.♙e2 b5♞

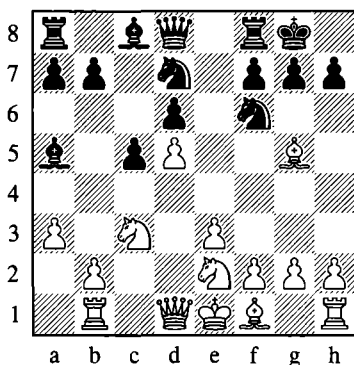
8.♗ge2?!

This looks awkward, as the f1-bishop is blocked now.

8...0-0 9.a3 ♙a5 10.♙b1

I was quite surprised to discover that this position has occurred in no fewer than seven games! White is trying to get rid of the

unpleasant pin by means of b2-b4, but it takes a long time.



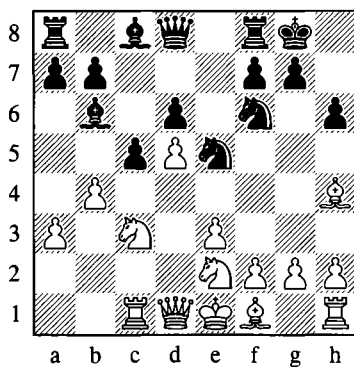
10...h6 11.♙h4 ♖e5 12.b4 ♙b6

The c3-knight is unpinned, but White's problems with development are not solved.

13.♞c1

13.♖c1 ♙f5 14.♞b3 ♞c8+ Black was much better in Axelrod – Nakar, Acre 2013.

We have been following Conquest – Emms, Oakham 1994, when Black could have obtained a huge advantage with:

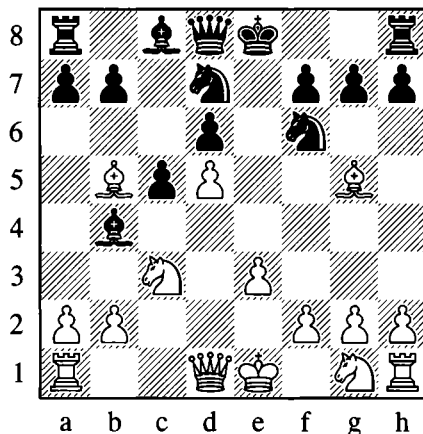


13...cxb4!N 14.axb4 a5! 15.b5 a4

Gaining access to the a5-e1 diagonal. White's position already seems lost, for instance:

16.♖xa4 ♞xa4! 17.♞xa4 ♖d3† 18.♗d2 ♙f5→

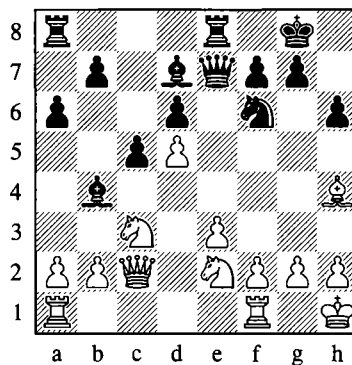
### B31) 8.♙b5



This is a challenging line which demands attention. In comparison to the main line with the bishop on d3, the d5-pawn remains quite protected. On the other hand, the b5-bishop is quite vulnerable.

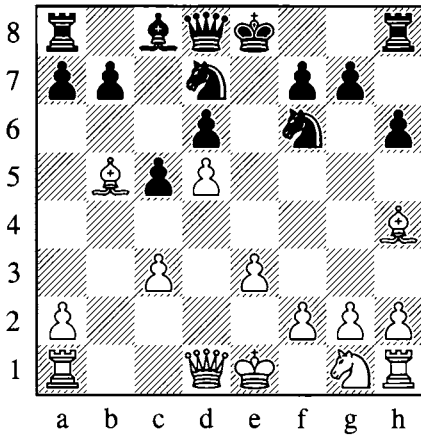
### 8...h6 9.♙h4 ♙xc3†

Also perfectly playable is: 9...a6!? 10.♙xd7† ♙xd7 11.♖ge2 0-0 12.0-0 ♞e8 13.♞c2 ♞e7 14.♗h1 White has scored surprisingly well from this position, but this in no way reflects the outcome of the opening, especially after:



14...g5! 15.♙g3 ♖h5 and Black's position was much more pleasant in L.C. Schmidt – Schatzberg, Germany 1994.

### 10.bxc3

**10...0-0!**

A natural improvement over Kramnik's play. This move has only been played in a couple of email games, never over the board. Black's development advantage should tell in all cases now.

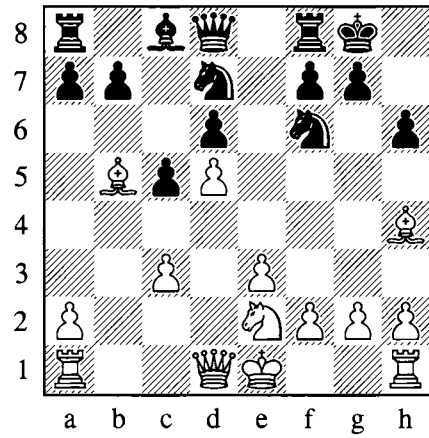
10...♖a5 11.♗xd7 ♜xd7 was also fine for Black in Korobov – Kramnik, Tromso 2013, but the text move seems more ambitious.

**11.♗e2**

Wasting one more tempo on the light-squared bishop with 11.♗d3 looks dubious. After 11...♖a5 (or 11...♖c7!? 12.c4 b5! 13.cxb5 a6 with the initiative) 12.♗e2 ♜xd5 ♞ White doesn't get any compensation for the pawn.

I also examined 11.♞c1 ♜b6 12.c4, but it leaves White undeveloped, so Black develops a powerful initiative after 12...a6 13.♗a4 ♜xc4! 14.♞xc4 b5.

The text move is the most natural continuation, and was played in both games. However, Black can immediately exploit the awkward placement of the b5-bishop by means of:

**11...♗b6!**

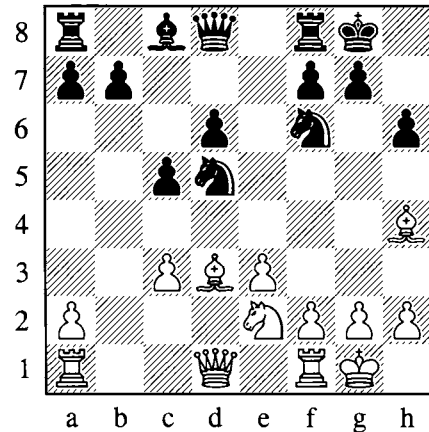
It turns out that there is no way to protect the d5-pawn.

**12.0-0**

Even giving up the dark-squared bishop doesn't save the pawn: 12.♗xf6 ♖xf6 13.♞d2 ♖e5 14.♞d1 a6 15.♗d3 ♜xd5 ♞

**12...♗bxd5 13.♗d3**

We have been following the game Vodicka – Larwinski, email 2012. Now I suggest the natural innovation:

**13...♗g4!N**

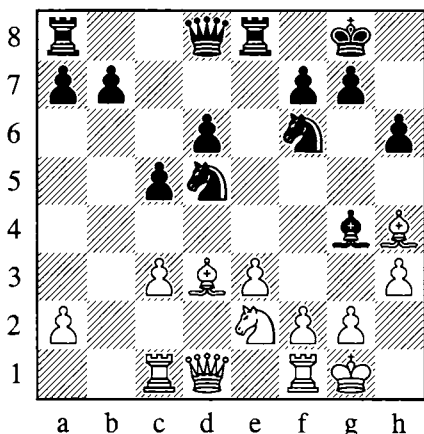
Indeed, why not develop a piece with tempo?

**14.♞c1**

14.f3 leads to an inferior endgame:  
 14...♖xe3 15.♙xf6 ♜xf6 16.fxg4 ♗xf1  
 17.♜xf1 ♜xf1† 18.♗xf1 d5

### 14...♞e8 15.h3

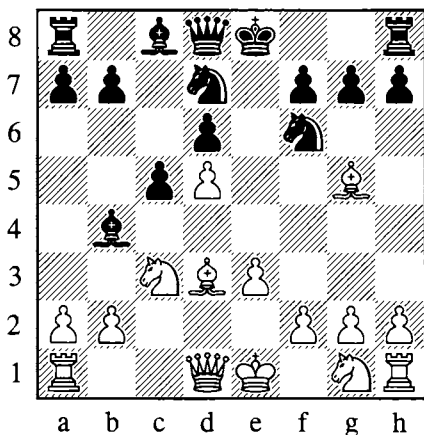
No better is: 15.♙b5 ♙d7 16.♙xd7 ♜xd7  
 17.c4 ♞e4



### 15...♙d7 16.c4 ♗b6 17.♗c3 ♙c6

Black has successfully completed his development and doesn't have any weaknesses, so White's compensation is questionable.

### B32) 8...♙d3



This is by far the most popular move. There is no better spot for the light-squared bishop, while the e2-square is now vacant for the knight.

The only drawback of this set-up is that the d5-pawn remains unprotected.

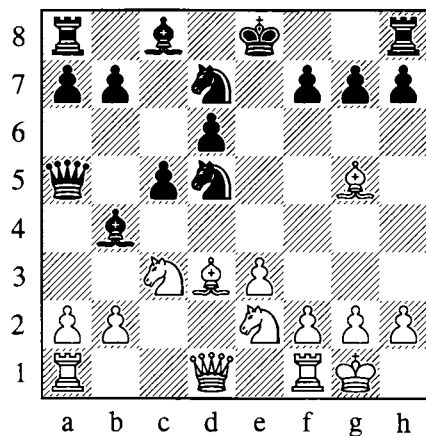
### 8...♜a5

The most popular and principled reply, with a double attack on c3 and d5.

8...♗e5 is another perfectly playable option, but it leads to a long strategic battle *à la* the Benoni, and is not to everyone's taste.

### 9.♗ge2 ♗xd5 10.0-0

This position is quite important for the whole line with 4.♙g5. The d5-pawn is gone, so what does White have in return? Well, the answer is: quite a lot! The d-file is open now, so the d6-pawn is under pressure. Apart from this, Black's queenside pieces are undeveloped and the king is still in the centre. Luckily for Black, there is a nice tactical resource:



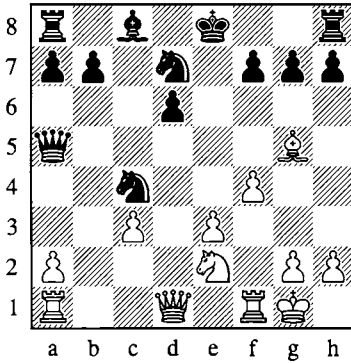
### 10...♙xc3 11.bxc3 c4!

The point! The vulnerability of the g5-bishop enables Black to regain coordination. Now we see how important it is not to hurry to attack the bishop with ...h6 earlier in the opening.

Instead, 11...♗5f6?! leaves Black with the above-mentioned problems. In the following game White was able to develop a powerful initiative: 12.c4 h6 13.♙h4 0-0 14.♞c1 ♜c7 15.♗c3 Baron – Riazantsev, Eilat 2012.

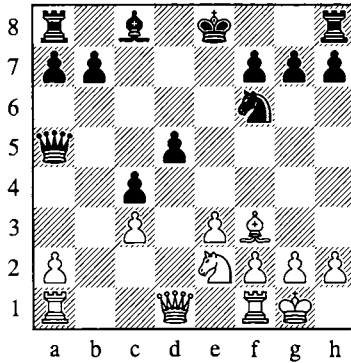
We will analyse **B321) 12.♙f5?!** and **B322) 12.♙c2**, after first considering a couple of minor lines:

12.♙xc4? drops a piece after 12...♘5b6, but it's worth continuing the analysis just a little further: 13.f4!?N (13.♙xf7† ♘xf7 gave White no real hope in the two existing games) 13...♘xc4



14.♚d4 The g7-pawn hangs, but Black can still secure a big advantage by returning some of his extra material with 14...♘de5! 15.fxe5 ♙e6f.

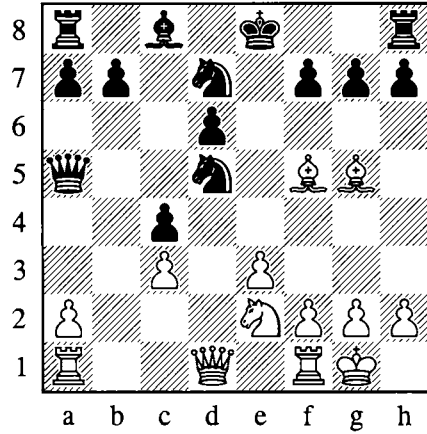
12.♙e4 allows Black to liquidate one of White's strong bishops: 12...♘5f6 13.♙xf6 ♘xf6 14.♙f3 d5



15.♚d4 (15.♘f4N may be better; still, after 15...♙e6 16.♚d4 0-0 17.a4 b6 18.♙fb1 ♚c5 Black is well out of danger in the endgame) 15...0-0 White had insufficient

compensation for the pawn in Ovetchkin – Lysyj, St Petersburg 2012.

**B321) 12.♙f5?!**



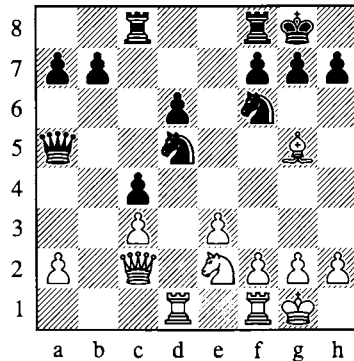
On a5 the queen keeps an eye on both bishops, so this is definitely amongst White's worst possibilities, even though it was once successfully employed by Jan Timman against Anatoly Karpov.

**12...0-0!**

12...f6?! was played in the above-mentioned game, but I do not see any reason to weaken our light squares while driving White's bishop to a safer square.

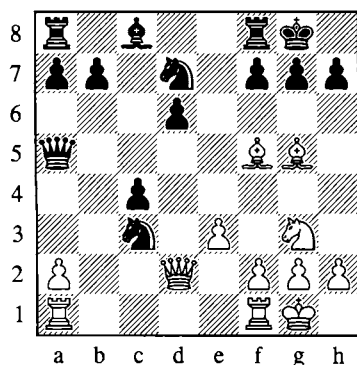
**13.e4**

The following line nicely illustrates the vulnerability of White's bishops: 13.♚c2 ♘7f6 14.♙xc8 ♙axc8 15.♙ad1



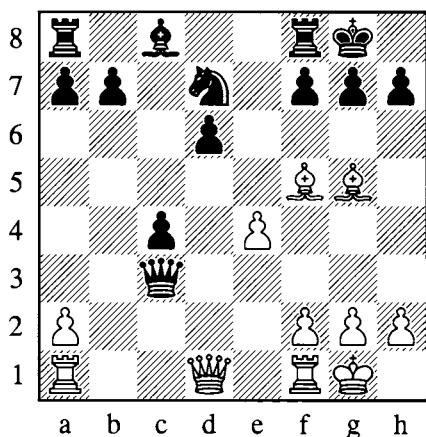
15... ♖xc3! 16. ♗xf6 ♜xe2† 17. ♖xe2 gxf6  
18. ♖f3 ♖e5†

Even worse is 13. ♖d2 ♖xc3 14. ♜g3, as was played in Yuneev – Dautov, Daugavpils 1989.



Now the best way to limit White's attacking potential was: 14... ♖c5!N 15. ♗xc8 (15. ♗c2 ♗e8 16. ♗f4 d5→) 15... ♗axc8 16. ♗ac1 ♖5a4 17. e4 ♗fe8 18. ♗fe1 b6→

13... ♖xc3 14. ♖xc3 ♖xc3



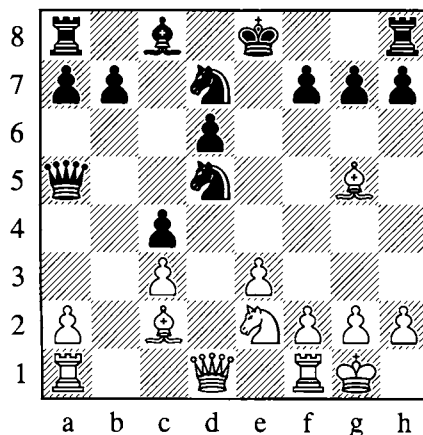
15. ♗c1

Hardly better was 15. ♖xd6 ♖e5 16. ♗f4 ♖xd6 17. ♗xd6 ♗e8†.

15... ♖e5 16. ♗xc4 ♖b6†

Jacob – Luther, Austria 2005. Black has simplified matters and keeps a solid extra pawn.

B322) 12. ♗c2



This is the best retreat.

12...0–0

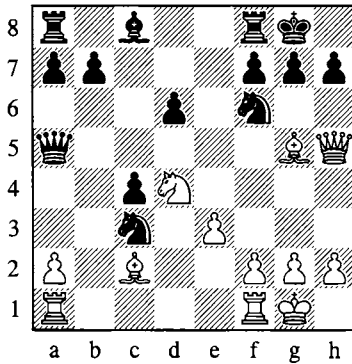
Having inserted the ...c4 move to protect the knight on d5, Black gets time to complete his development.

Clearly inferior is 12... ♖xc3?! 13. ♖xc3 ♖xc3 (after 13... ♖xg5? 14. ♖e4 White would restore the material balance while keeping the black king in the centre) 14. ♖xd6 ♖e5 15. ♗f4 ♖xd6 16. ♗xd6 ♖f6 17. ♗ab1! b6 18. ♗fd1 ♗e6 19. ♗a3 White had a powerful initiative for a mere pawn in Ulko – Lukjanenko, Voronezh 2005.

White has tried several moves here, but by far the most popular have been B3221) 13. ♖g3?! and B3222) 13. ♗h4.

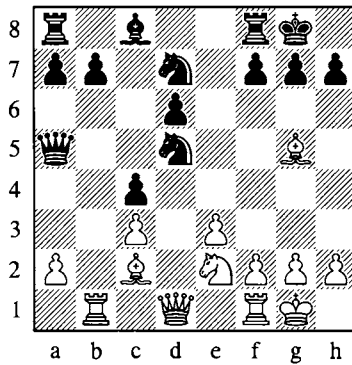
We should also check the following alternatives:

Dubious is: 13. ♖d4? ♖xc3 14. ♖h5 ♖f6 (possibly even stronger was 14... f5!? 15. ♗e7 ♖f6 16. ♖h4 ♗f7 17. ♗xd6 ♗d7†)



15. ♖h4 ♘ce4! 16. ♙xe4 ♘xe4 17. ♙e7 ♖e8  
18. ♗xe4 ♗e5! Black won the piece back  
and kept an extra pawn in Bareev – Dautov,  
Moscow 1990.

In the more recent game Ratkovic – Perunovic,  
Serbia 2015, White tried the fresh idea  
13. ♖b1?!, but it is unlikely to attract many  
followers. Black should have continued:



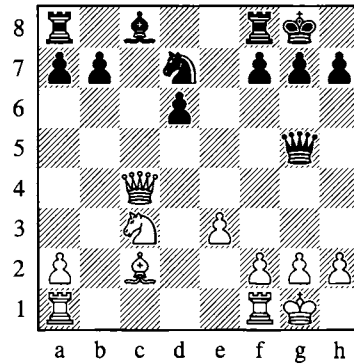
13... ♘7b6!N 14. ♗d4 ♘xc3 15. ♘xc3 ♗xg5

13. ♗d4 ♘xc3!

After 13... ♘7b6 14. ♙h4 ♙d7 15. a4 White  
has no more than sufficient compensation  
for the pawn, but Black's pieces lack  
breathing room.

14. ♘xc3 ♗xg5 15. ♗xc4

We have been following the game Dekker  
– Van der Werf, Dieren 1991. I suggest the  
following way of handling the position:



15... ♘c5!N 16. ♗fd1

16. ♘e4 is well met by 16... ♗e5 17. ♗fd1 b5!  
with the idea 18. ♗xb5 ♙f5.

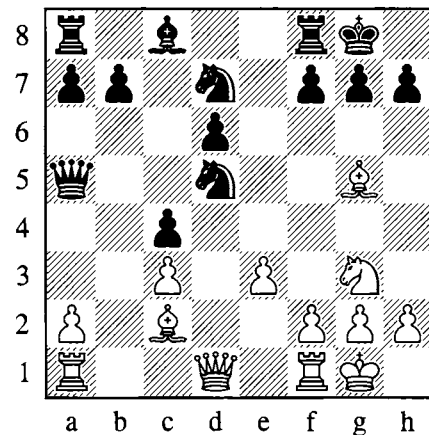
16... ♙e6 17. ♗e2

17. ♗d4 b6 18. ♘e4 ♗g6

17... ♗fd8 18. ♗d4 ♗e7 19. ♗ad1 h6

Despite the activity of White's pieces, he  
does not have full compensation for the  
pawn.

### B3221) 13. ♘g3?!



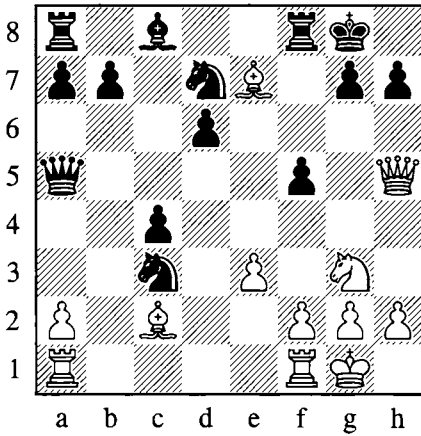
This has been played by many good players,  
but it leads White down a forcing path to a  
clearly inferior position after:

13... ♘xc3 14. ♗h5 f5! 15. ♙e7

Even worse is 15. e4? ♘xe4 16. ♗ad1 ♘df6+  
as in V. Georgiev – Leko, Istanbul (ol) 2012.

The text move was played in A. Mastrovasilis

– Wojtaszek, Gibraltar 2013, and could be strongly met by:



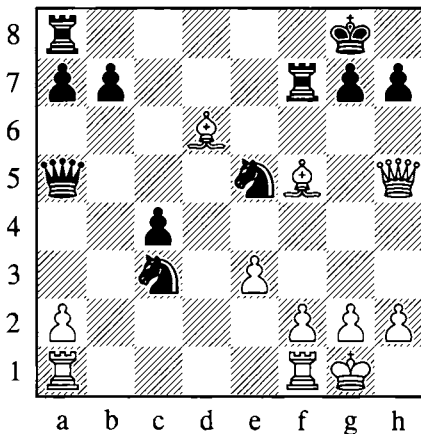
15...♙f7!N 16.♜xf5

16.♙xd6 ♜e5 17.♙xf5 ♙xf5 18.♜xf5 ♜f3†  
19.♝xf3 ♝xf5† leads to the same.

16...♜e5 17.♙xd6

No better is: 17.♜xg7 ♜f3† 18.♙h1 ♝xh5  
19.♜xh5 ♙xe7 20.gxf3 b5†

17...♙xf5 18.♙xf5

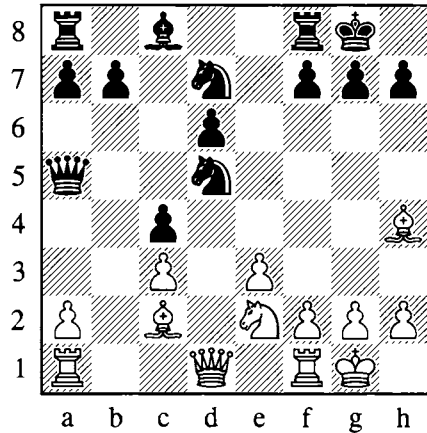


18...♜f3! 19.♝xf3 ♝xf5 20.♝xf5 ♜e2†  
21.♙h1 ♙xf5†

Despite the material balance, White finds himself in a very difficult position: Black's queenside passers are too strong.

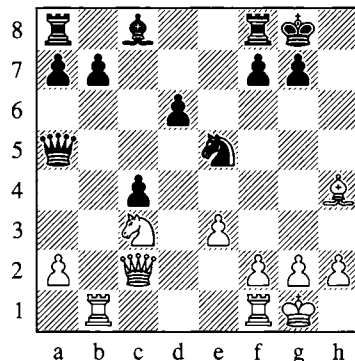
**B3222) 13.♙h4**

This has been the most popular choice, though it's a pity to waste a tempo in such a dynamic position. However, the lines above clearly illustrate the need for White to remove the bishop from the black queen's deadly gaze.



13...♜xc3 14.♜xc3

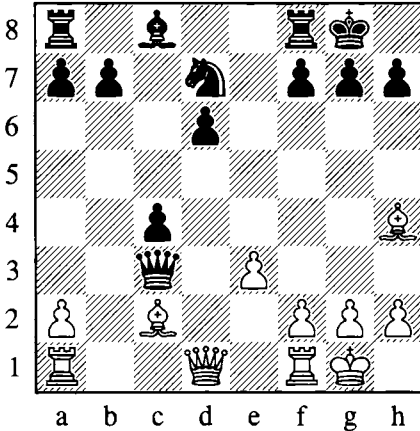
The following little tactic leads White to a clearly inferior position: 14.♙h7†?! ♙xh7 15.♝c2† ♙g8 16.♜xc3 ♜e5 17.♙ab1 (hardly better is 17.♙e7 ♙e8 18.♙xd6 ♜d3†, with a similar assessment to the line below) This position occurred in Chirila – Hernandez Carmenates, Houston 2013. A natural improvement over Black's play would be:



17...a6!N 18.♙e7 ♙e8 19.♙xd6 ♜d3† Even though there is material balance on the

board, Black's position is much better due to a strong d3-knight, which is supported by the queenside passers.

14...♖xc3



15.♞c1

Temporarily Black is two pawns up, but the activity of White's pieces shouldn't be underestimated.

After 15.♞e7 I like 15...d5! (15...♞e8 16.♞xd6 ♘f6 is also OK for Black) 16.♞c1 ♗e5 17.♞xf8 ♘xf8. Black has two pawns for the exchange, while White's heavy pieces are quite passive.

15...♗e5

There were several alternatives, but I believe keeping the queen in the centre is the most natural idea.

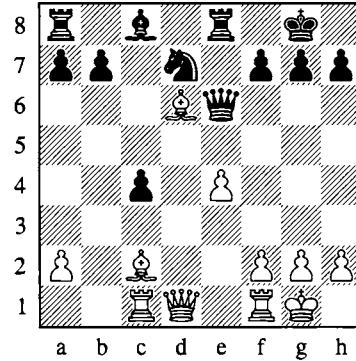
16.♞g3

16.e4 is an attempt to extend the kingside initiative by advancing the pawns, but it fails to achieve the goal after: 16...♗e6 17.f4 b5 18.f5 ♗h6 19.♞e7 ♞e8 20.♞xd6 ♞b7 21.♗d4 ♗f6

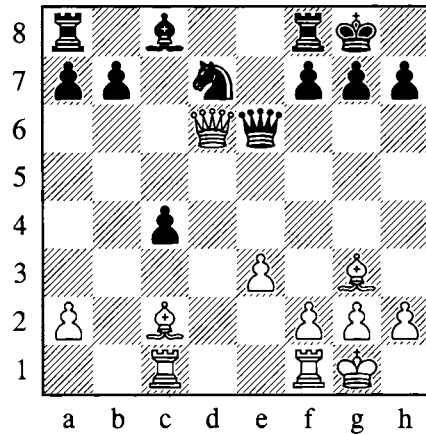
16...♗e6 17.♗xd6

Liquidating into an endgame looks like a concession, but 17.♞xd6 ♞e8 leaves White

with no real compensation for the pawn. For instance: 18.e4 (18.♞e1 also fails to impress after 18...b5 19.♗f3 ♘b6 20.♞cd1 ♗g4)



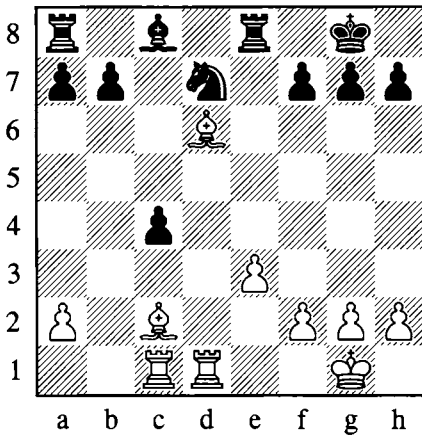
18...♘e5 (also good enough is 18...b5!? 19.f4 ♞b7 20.e5 ♗d5 21.♗g4 ♘c5) 19.f4 ♘d3 20.♞xd3 cxd3 21.♗xd3 ♗xe4. Despite the opposite-coloured bishops, White was unable to save the game in Hujbert – Andreev, Budapest 2013.



17...♗xd6 18.♞xd6 ♞e8 19.♞fd1

White could have won the pawn back by means of 19.♞d1N, but after 19...♘e5 20.♞xe5 ♞xe5 21.♞xc4 ♞e6 Black is completely fine.

We have been following the game Martinovic – Stevic, Croatia 2013. Now I suggest the following natural improvement over Black's play:



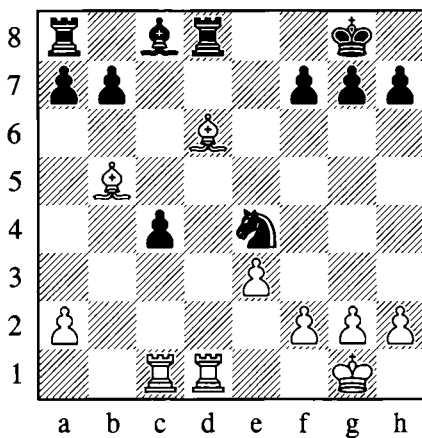
19...♘f6!N 20.♙a4 ♜d8 21.♙b5

After 21.♙xc4 White's lack of harmony leads to the loss of a pawn again: 21...♙e6 22.♙cd4 (22.♙c2?? ♘e4--+) 22...♙xa2

21...♘e4!

The most ambitious way of handling the endgame.

Instead, 21...♙e6 22.♙xc4 ♜ac8 23.♙xe6 fxe6 leads to equality.



22.♙e7 ♜xd1† 23.♙xd1 ♙e6 24.♙d4 ♘f6  
25.♙xc4 ♜c8 26.♙f1 ♘d5

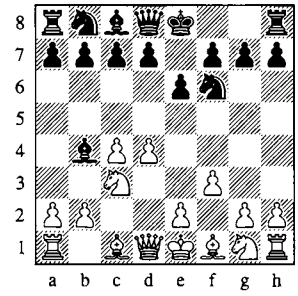
Black's pieces are much more active, though White should be able to hold with careful defence.

## Conclusion

4.♘g5 is an ambitious and aggressive approach from White, but the bishop's abandonment of the queenside gives Black ample counter-chances. The logical reply is 4...c5 when 5.♙c1 is rather harmless, so 5.d5 is the critical line. After 5...d6 there are various options but one tough test is 6.e3 exd5 7.cxd5 ♘bd7 8.♙d3. Black does indeed have a good antidote in 8...♙a5 9.♘ge2 ♘xd5 10.0-0 ♙xc3 11.bxc3 c4! but Black should pay close attention to this line and all the details I give about it. Black has no theoretical problems but if this variation caught you unawares over the board, then you might have a difficult job finding the answers. Doing your homework in advance will be rewarded against 4.♘g5.

# Chapter 5

## Various 4th Moves



### 4.f3

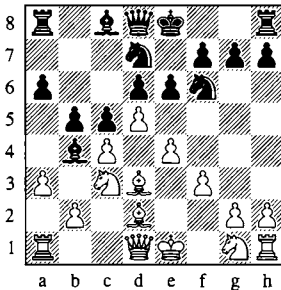
### Variation Index

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.f3

4...c5

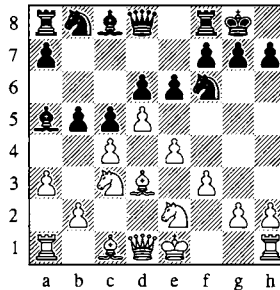
A) 5.a3 Bxc3† 6.bxc3 Nc6 7.e4 d6	67
A1) 8.Ne2	67
A2) 8.Be3	68
B) 5.d5 d6 6.e4 b5	69
B1) 7.cxb5	70
B2) 7.Bd2	70
B3) 7.a3	71
B4) 7.Bg5	72
B5) 7.Nge2	74
B6) 7.Bd3!?	75
B7) 7.dxe6 Bxc6 8.Bf4 0-0!	76
B71) 9.Bxd6	77
B72) 9.Bxd6	78

B2) after 9.a3



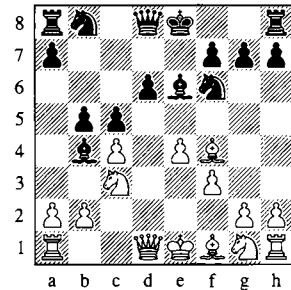
9...Ne5!N

B3) after 9.Nge2



9...exd5N

B7) after 8.Bf4



8...0-0!N

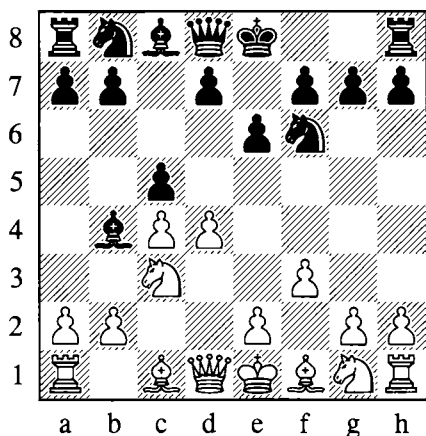
**1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♠b4 4.f3**

This move is one of White's most aggressive 4th move options. It was introduced into high-level practice by Grandmaster Efim Bogoljubow in 1931, but it gained popularity in the 1950s mainly due to the efforts of Mikhail Tal and Viktor Korchnoi. Black has a wide choice of possibilities, many of which lead to complex and irrational positions. Among the top modern players who frequently employ this move are Anand, Nakamura, Mamedyarov and Shirov.

**4...c5**

4...d5 has been the most popular choice, and 4...0–0 is another big move; both of these have certain points in their favour, but I found the text move the most attractive of all.

My recommended move is arguably the most ambitious reply to 4.f3. Black doesn't mind entering a Benoni-type position which offers White a pleasant space advantage. In return, Black aims to challenge the opponent's centre by means of ...b7-b5 or ...f7-f5, taking advantage of his lead in development.



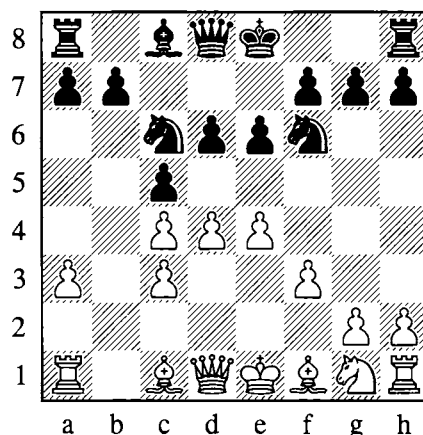
We will analyse two options, with **A) 5.a3** being the only adequate alternative to the standard **B) 5.d5**.

**A) 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3**

This takes the game along Sämisch paths (see Chapter 6), but the version that arises is comfortable for Black.

**6...♗c6 7.e4 d6**

Compared with the Classical Sämisch, Black puts strong pressure on the d4-pawn, so White has no time for his preferred set-up with ♠d3 and ♗e2.



The two main options are **A1) 8.♗e2** or **A2) 8.♗e3**.

After the more ambitious 8.♗g5 h6 9.♗h4 cxd4 10.cxd4 ♖a5† 11.♗f2 ♖d8! White would suffer from a lack of harmony. We will see a similar approach in the 4.e3 0–0 5.a3 line!

**A1) 8.♗e2 b6 9.♗g5**

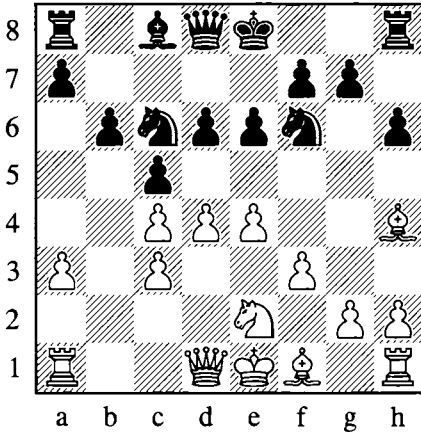
After 9.♗g3 0–0 10.d5 ♗a5 11.♗d3 ♗a6 12.♖e2 ♗d7! White was doomed to passive defence in Zakharov – Karpov, Moscow 1976.

**9...h6 10.♗h4**

After 10.♗e3, as was played in Gutman – Spassky, Germany 1986, Black had no reason to deviate from the most natural 10...♗a5N

11. ♖g3 ♗a6 12. ♗d3 cxd4 13. cxd4 ♝c8  
 14. ♝c1 0–0 15. ♜e2 ♞c7, forcing 16. c5 ♗xd3  
 17. ♜xd3 bxc5 18. dxc5 d5♞.

This position was reached in Merry – Jedynak, Isle of Man 2014. Now it makes sense to clarify the situation in the centre by means of:

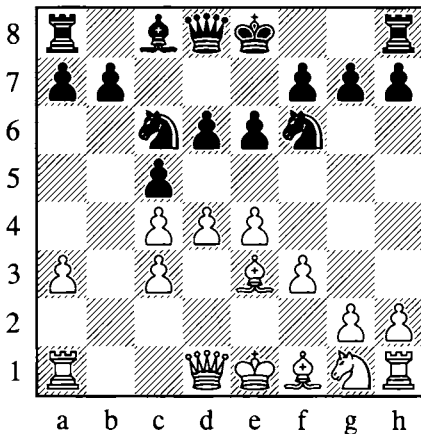


10...e5N 11. ♗f2

Black would benefit from having a closed type of position after 11. d5 ♗a5 12. ♗c1 g5 13. ♗f2 ♗h5♞.

11...0–0 12. ♗g3 cxd4 13. cxd4 ♗xd4  
 14. ♗xd4 exd4 15. ♜xd4 ♗e6 16. ♝d1 ♝c8=  
 Black has excellent play.

A2) 8. ♗c3



A sort of concession – instead of pinning the opponent's knight, the bishop is tied to defensive functions.

8...b6

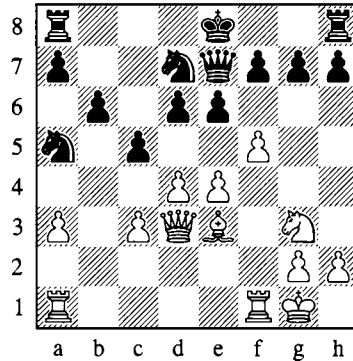
Since the pin on the f6-knight doesn't cause Black any concrete problems, it makes sense to attack the weak c4-pawn as soon as possible.

9. ♗d3

9. ♜a4 ♗d7 10. ♜c2 ♗a5 11. e5 dxe5 12. dxe5 ♗g8 leaves White with no compensation for an ugly pawn structure.

9...♗a5 10. ♗h3

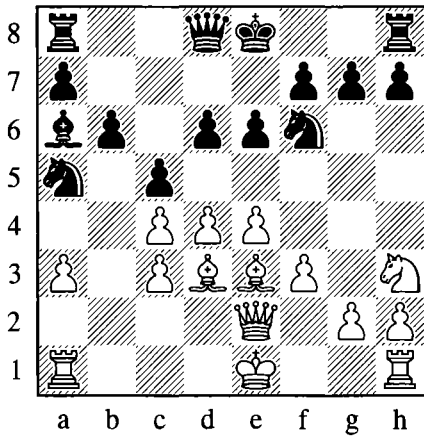
10. ♗e2 ♗a6 11. 0–0 ♗d7! A typical prophylactic manoeuvre – avoiding an unpleasant pin on the f6-knight significantly limits White's activity on the kingside. 12. f4 ♗xc4 13. ♗g3 ♜e7 14. f5 ♗xd3 15. ♜xd3, as was played in Danielsson – Koenig, Warsaw 1935, could be met strongly by:



15...0–0–0!N 16. ♜b5 e5♞ – Black's king feels quite safe on the queenside, when most of the opponent's pieces are blocked by the pawns.

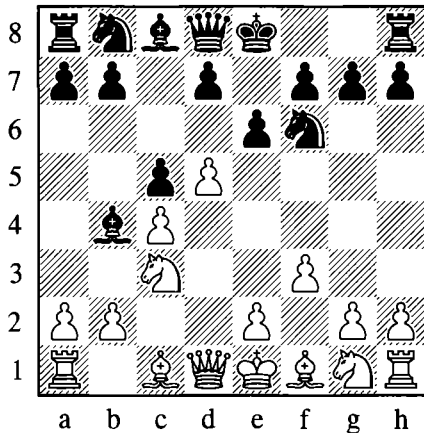
10...♗a6 11. ♜e2

So far we have been following the top-level game Spassky – Hübner, Bugojno 1982. Now Black should have neutralized the coming kingside pawn storm by means of:



11...cxd4N 12.cxd4 8c8 13.8c1 0-0 14.0-0  
15.d7 16.f4 e5

### B) 5...d5



No doubt this advance is the most principled reply – White seizes a lot of space and hopes to keep the massive pawn centre.

### 5...d6

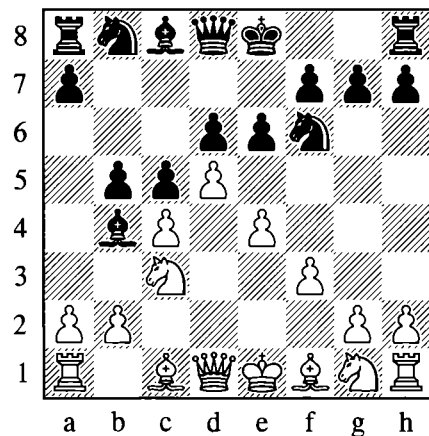
Surprisingly, this popular move was not even mentioned by Yakovich in *Play the 4 f3 Nimzo-Indian*. In most of the older games Black went on to either block the centre with ...e5 or go for a Benoni structure with ...exd5. Instead, I want to make life more difficult for White by undermining his pawn structure with ...b5.

The immediate 5...b5 is also possible. The usual reply is 6.e4, when 6...d6 transposes to our repertoire. (6...0-0 transposes to the note below; 6...bxc4 is the main line, but I am not so keen on it.)

5...0-0 6.e4 b5!? is another variation on the ...b5 theme; this way Black keeps the option of playing ...d5 in one move. The advantage of the early ...d6 is that we prevent e4-e5 while preparing to meet dxe6 by recapturing with the bishop.

### 6.e4 b5

According to the database, this move was introduced by GM Leonid Yudasin in 1990. It has still not been played in many games but I like the concept: Black is ready to give up a pawn in order to weaken White's pawn centre and exploit his lead in development.



The most principled response to this gambit idea is 7.dxe6, but I will also mention a range of other lines. So the main lines we will see are **B1) 7.cxb5**, **B2) 7.8d2**, **B3) 7.a3**, **B4) 7.8g5**, **B5) 7.8ge2**, **B6) 7.8d3!N** and **B7) 7.dxe6**.

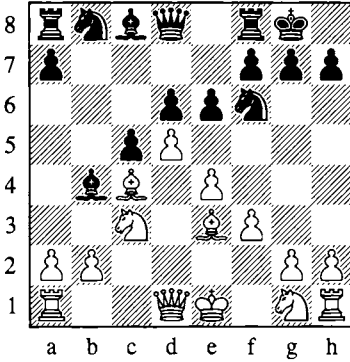
### 7.8c3?!

Considering that the centre is about to blow up, this way of developing seems too slow.

7...0-0

The most accurate move, postponing the capture on c4 to allow White to waste a tempo with his bishop.

8.♔d3 bxc4 9.♕xc4



9...♘d5!?

A standard tactical resource in this variation. Although the text move is fine, it is worth mentioning that the calmer 9...♘a6!?N also offers Black an excellent game.

10.♕xd5

10.exd5? ♖h4†-+ is the key point of course.

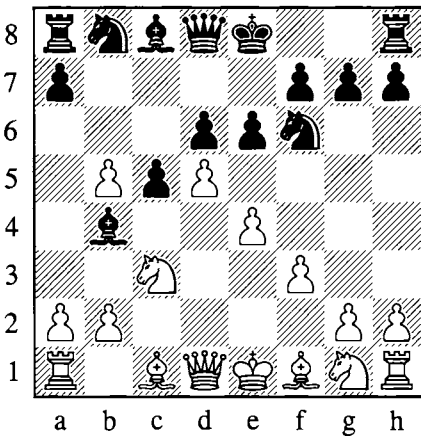
10...exd5 11.♖xd5 ♗b6 12.♘ge2

12.♗xa8? ♕b7-+

12...♘a6 13.♘f2 ♘c6

Lindqvist – Haapasalo, Jyvaskyla 1991.

B1) 7...cxb5



As in the Benko Gambit, White is ready to grab a pawn, hoping to neutralize Black's queenside activity. However, Black's lead in development and the open centre offer us much more dynamic play than in the above-mentioned opening.

7...exd5 8.exd5 0-0

The open e-file obviously benefits Black.

9.♕c4?

9.♔d3N a6 10.♘ge2 ♗b6 11.♕e3 was the lesser evil, giving back a pawn. Still, after 11...♞e8 12.♕f2 axb5 13.0-0 ♕xc3 14.bxc3 ♞a3 Black gets a comfortable position.

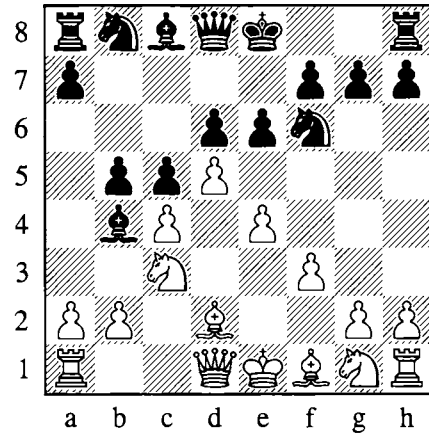
9...♘h5!

A powerful resource, which enables Black to extend his initiative. Obviously, White has no time for 10.♘ge2? ♖h4†, winning the bishop.

10.g3 ♗f6 11.♖c2 ♞e8† 12.♘f1 ♕f5

Black had a winning attack in Mann – Ploch, Stockerau 1992.

B2) 7...♔d2



Breaking the pin.

7...a6!

I do not like supporting White's development with 7...bxc4 8.♕xc4 e5 9.♘ge2 ♘bd7

10.0–0 0–0 11.a3± as in Krizsany – Lengyel, Hajduboszormeny 1996.

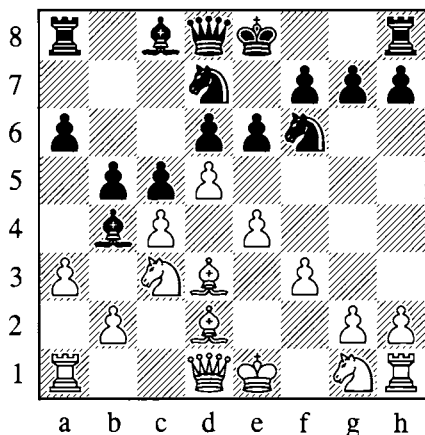
### 8.♙d3

Or 8.a3 ♙a5 9.b4 (9.dxe6 ♙xe6 10.cxb5 0–0 is too risky for White) 9...♙b6 10.cxb5 exd5 11.♙g5 d4 12.♘d5 ♙e6, with counterplay. White experiences definite problems developing the kingside pieces.

### 8...♘bd7 9.a3

Accepting the challenge now doesn't make any sense, since White would have to lose time retreating the bishop: 9.dxe6 fxe6 10.cxb5 ♘e5 11.♙e2 0–0, with the initiative.

Now in Gerard – De Sousa, France 1996, Black missed a clear way to seize the initiative:



### 9...♘e5!N 10.♙e2 ♙xc3 11.♙xc3 0–0

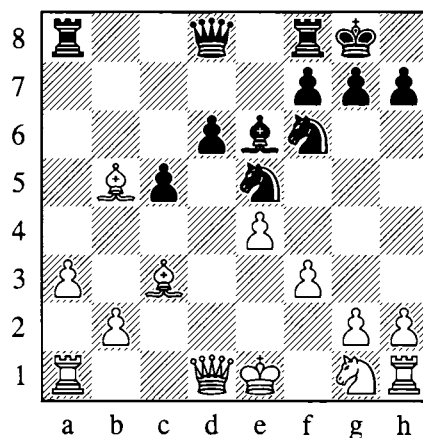
White has serious problems with development. Play might continue:

### 12.dxe6 ♙xe6 13.cxb5

After 13.♙xe6 dxe5 14.♖xd8 ♜fxd8 Black is clearly better in the endgame.

### 13...axb5 14.♙xb5

At first glance, the powerful c3-bishop gives White reasonable chances to consolidate. However, Black has a beautiful tactical resource:



### 14...♘xe4!

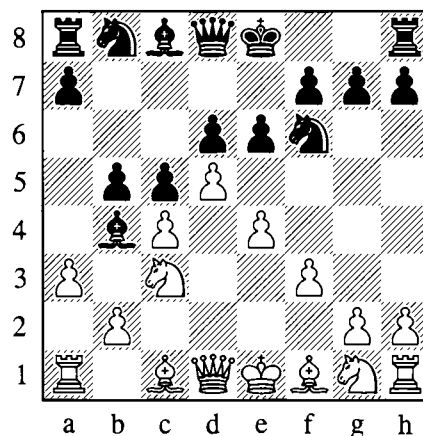
This enables Black to fan the flames of his initiative.

### 15.fxe4 ♖h4† 16.♔d2 ♗g5† 17.♔c2 ♜fb8

Black will regain the piece while keeping an overwhelming position:

### 18.a4 ♗xg2† 19.♘e2 ♗xe4† 20.♔c1 ♜xb5→

### B3) 7.a3

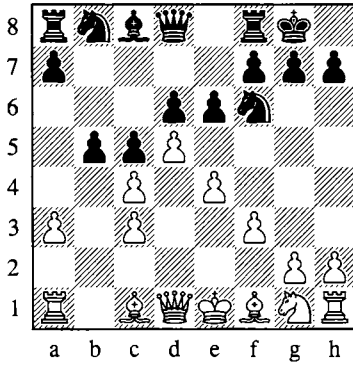


This move has only been played one game, but it's a reasonable option which forces us to make an important decision.

### 7...♙a5

In general, Black prefers to keep the dark-squared bishop on the board.

On the other hand, the value of a tempo in such sharp positions is exceptionally high, so 7...♙xc3†! 8.bxc3 0-0 deserves serious consideration as well. Play may continue:

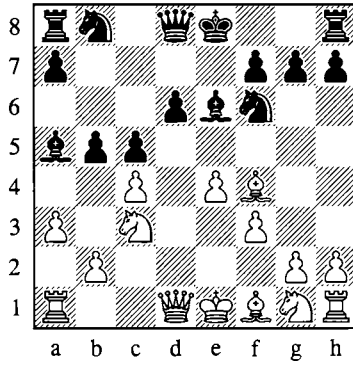


9.dxe6 (after 9.♙g5 h6 10.♙h4 ♜e8 11.♙e2 a6 White experiences the usual problems with developing the kingside pieces) 9...♙xe6 10.cxb5 a6 11.a4 ♜e8 Black has excellent compensation for the pawn due to his serious development advantage.

**8.♙d3**

I also examined:

8.dxe6! N ♙xe6 9.♙f4



9...bxc4  
9...♘c6!? 10.♙xd6 ♘d4 is also interesting.  
10.♙a4†

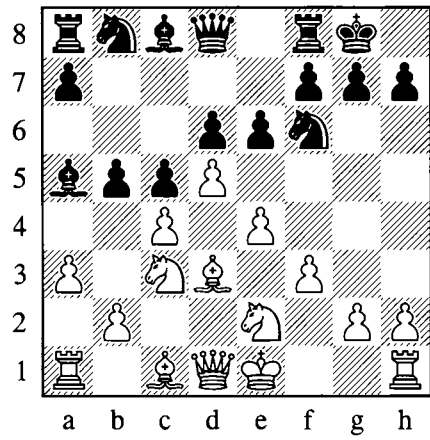
10.♙xd6?! ♙b6 11.♘ge2 ♘c6 gives Black some initiative.

A double-edged endgame would arise after:  
10.♙xd6 ♙b6 11.♙xb6 axb6 12.♘ge2 ♘c6  
13.0-0-0 0-0  
10...♘bd7 11.♙xd6 ♙c7 12.♙xc5 ♙e5  
13.♘ge2 ♙c8

Black gets interesting compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

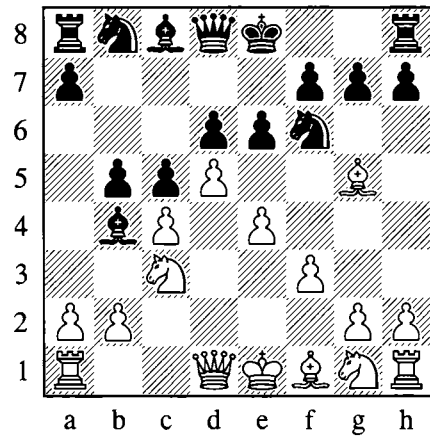
**8...0-0 9.♘ge2**

This position was seen in Frugah – Busch, Germany 1993. Now Black should have opted for:



9...exd5N 10.cxd5 a6 11.0-0 ♘bd7  
Black has comfortable play.

**B4) 7.♙g5**



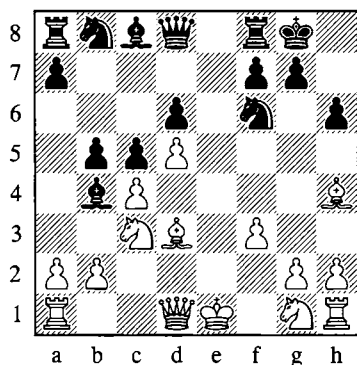
Pinning the f6-knight temporarily helps White to hold the centre, but it doesn't support the development of the rest of his minor pieces.

### 7...h6 8.♙h4 0-0

Now White has to release the pressure in the centre in order to complete the development of his kingside pieces.

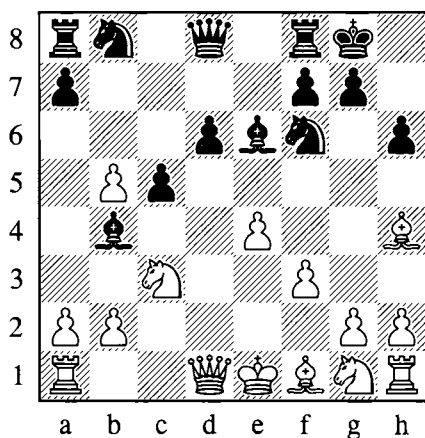
### 9.dxe6

9.♙d3 exd5 10.exd5 (after 10.cxd5 c4 11.♙c2 ♙c5! White's king is stuck in the centre, so Black gets a powerful initiative) This was played in Salmela – Luukkonen, Laukaa 1998. Now I suggest the following improvement:



10...bxc4N 11.♙xc4 ♙xc3† 12.bxc3 ♖bd7 13.♗e2 ♗e5 14.♙d3 ♗b8 15.0-0 g5 16.♙f2 ♗xd5† White has no compensation for the missing central pawn.

### 9...♙xc6 10.cxb5



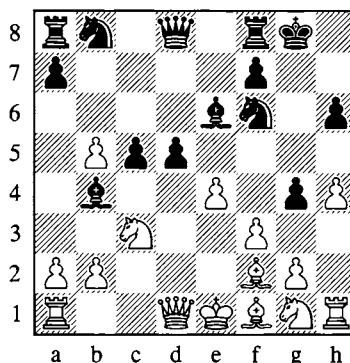
### 10...g5

Black is not afraid of ghosts! I believe White's lack of development should prevent him from exploiting the weaknesses created by this advance.

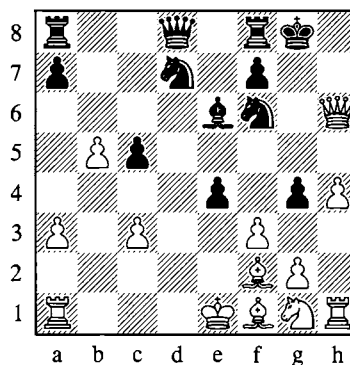
10...a6!? 11.bxa6 ♗xa6 also seems perfectly playable, but the text move is more forcing and definitely in the spirit of position.

### 11.♙f2 d5 12.♗ge2

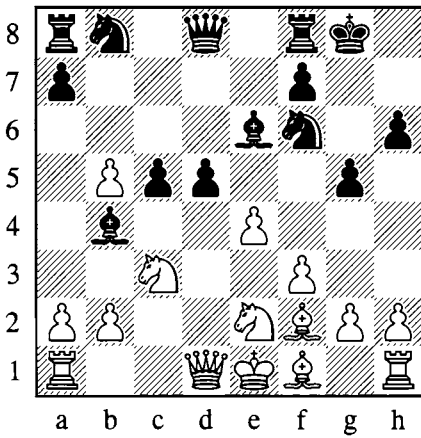
White can hardly afford any activity on the kingside in such a situation: 12.h4?! g4



13.a3 (The following line illustrates well Black's attacking potential: 13.exd5? ♗xd5 14.♗ge2 ♗f6, with a decisive attack.) 13...♙xc3† Exchanging the dark-squared bishop isn't really a concession – Black wins another tempo for developing the initiative! 14.bxc3 ♖bd7 15.♗d2 dxe4 16.♗xh6 The queen is the most powerful piece, but it doesn't bother Black on its own:



16...exf3 17.gxf3 ♖e8 18.♗e2 ♗c4 Black has the more dangerous attack.



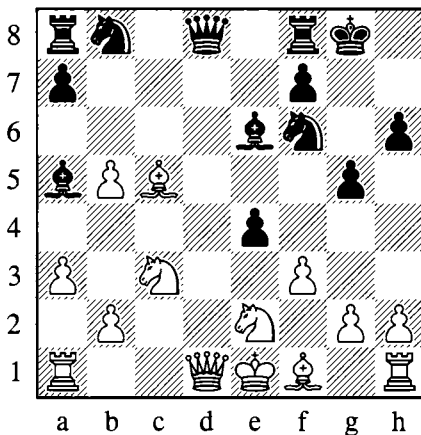
### 12...dxe4

Also possible is 12...d4 13.a3 ♗a5 14.b4 ♗c7 15.♖a4 d3 16.♗xc5 dxe2 17.♗xe2, but I do not like the character of the play that arises – White gets full compensation for the piece!

### 13.a3

The endgame arising after 13.♗xd8 ♖xd8 14.a3 ♗a5 15.♗xc5 ♖bd7 16.♗d4 ♖ac8 still offers Black full compensation for the pawn.

### 13...♗a5 14.♗xc5



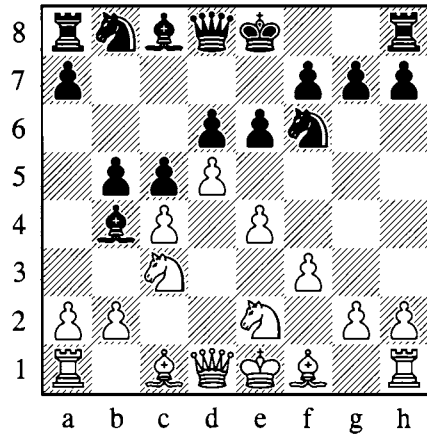
### 14...♖bd7!

In such dynamic positions, time is worth more than material!

### 15.♗xf8 ♗xf8

The lack of development and the vulnerability of the dark squares around the king put White under strong pressure.

### B5) 7.♗ge2



This is a rare move, but significant in that it has been played by 4.f3 specialist Sergey Volkov.

### 7...bxc4 8.♖f4

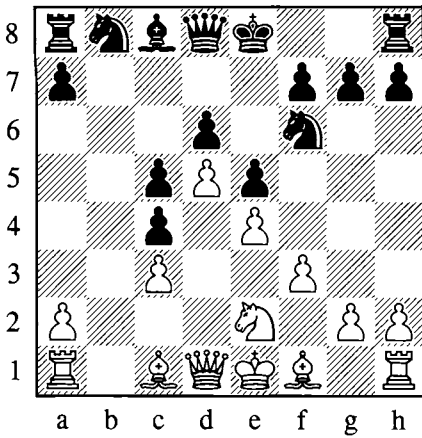
This is White's idea: he is willing to sacrifice a couple of tempos with his knight to provoke ...e6-e5 and thus secure his pawn centre.

### 8...♗xc3†

A solid alternative is 8...e5 9.♖fe2 ♖bd7 10.♖g3 ♖b6 11.♗e2 0-0∞ as in Baron – Ushenina, Jerusalem 2016.

### 9.bxc3 e5 10.♖e2

Now I suggest a simple developing move:



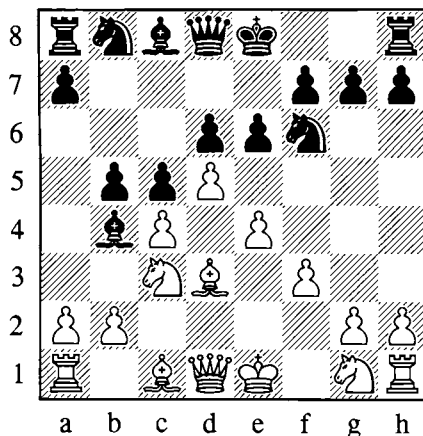
### 10...♖bd7N

10...♔a5 was played in Volkov – Bartel, Dubai 2015, but the queen is ineffective on a5, as shown after 11.♖g3!N. The tactical justification is: 11...♔xc3? 12.♕d2 ♔a3 13.♕xc4 0-0 14.♔b3! ♔xb3 15.axb3± Black's extra pawn will not last due to the plan of ♖f2 and doubling rooks on the a-file.

### 11.♖g3 ♖b6

This is similar to the Baron – Ushenina game mentioned above. Black's extra pawn is not so significant yet, but if White wants to win it back at once then he will have to give up the bishop pair.

### B6) 7.♕d3!?



This move has not yet been tried over the board. Visually, it looks like a loss of tempo if Black exchanges on c4, but it allows White to arrange his pieces most harmoniously.

### 7...0-0N

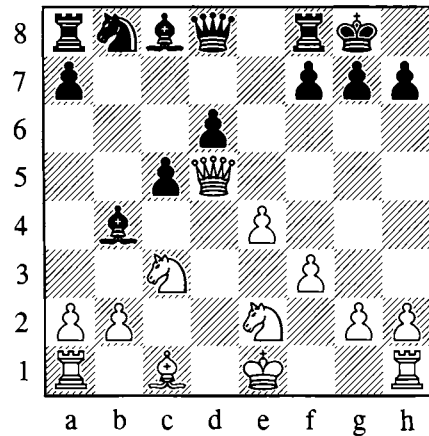
7...exd5 8.cxd5 a6 was seen in Galiano Martinez – Borst, email 2002, but I have something else in mind.

### 8.♖ge2

After 8.dxe6 ♕xe6 9.cxb5 a6 10.bxa6 c4 11.♕c2 ♕c5 White's king is stuck in the centre, so Black is fine.

### 8...bxc4 9.♕xc4 exd5 10.♕xd5 ♖xd5 11.♔xd5

The a8-rook is trapped, but it leads to interesting complications:



### 11...♕c6 12.♔xa8 ♔b6

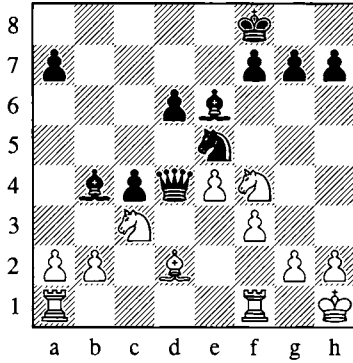
Now the queen is trapped!

### 13.0-0

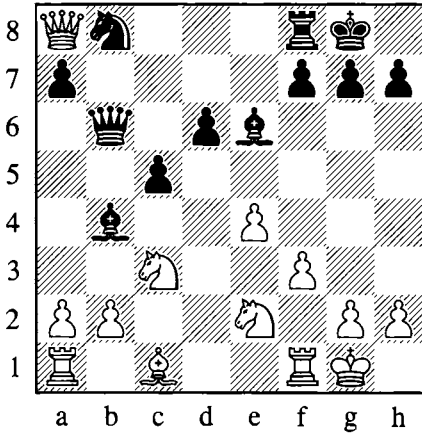
The following alternatives also offer Black sufficient counterplay:

13.♕e3 ♖c6 14.♔xf8† ♖xf8 15.0-0 ♕xc3 16.bxc3 ♔b2↗ Black's active queen is certainly not worse than the two rooks.

13.♔d2 ♖c6 14.♜xf8† ♜xf8 15.0-0 ♗e5  
 16.♜f4 c4† 17.♜h1 ♜d4 also gives Black  
 plenty of activity, for instance:



18.♜ad1 ♗d3 19.♜xd3 cxd3 20.a3 ♔c5 21.b4  
 ♔b6♞



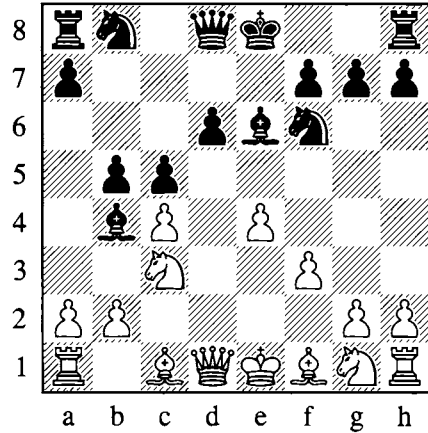
13...♗c6 14.♜xf8† ♜xf8  
 White has a small material advantage, but  
 it's not easy to neutralize the activity of all  
 Black's pieces.

15.♜f4  
 15.♜d1 c4† 16.♜h1 ♗e5 also offers Black  
 enough play.

15...♔xc3 16.bxc3  
 White should avoid 16.♜xe6†?! fx6  
 17.bxc3 c4† 18.♜h1 ♗e5 when Black has the  
 initiative.

16...♔c4 17.♜d1 ♗e5 18.♔d2 ♜b2  
 The penetration of Black's queen offers full  
 equality.

B7) 7.dxe6 ♔xe6

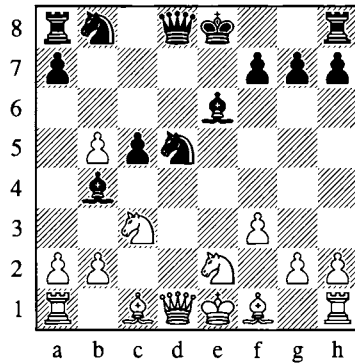


Black's development advantage is obvious  
 now, but the point behind White's last move  
 is revealed after:

8.♔f4  
 The important d6-pawn falls.

8.cxb5N  
 This is the other natural move to consider,  
 although it has not yet been tested in  
 practice.

8...d5  
 This seems perfectly playable for Black:  
 9.exd5 ♗xd5 10.♜ge2



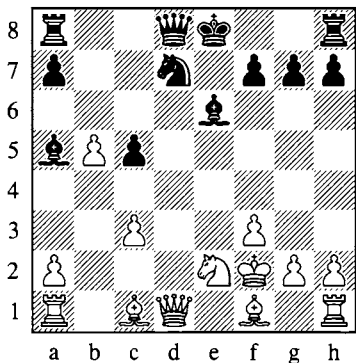
10...♞d7!

It would be a serious mistake to delay the development of the queenside pieces: 10...0-0? 11.♜f2! c4 12.♞xd5 ♙xd5 13.♙e3 ♜e8 14.♞c3± White stabilizes the position and keeps a safe extra pawn.

11.♜f2 ♞xc3 12.bxc3

12.♞xc3 0-0 13.♙e3 c4 offers Black excellent compensation for a pawn as well.

12...♙a5

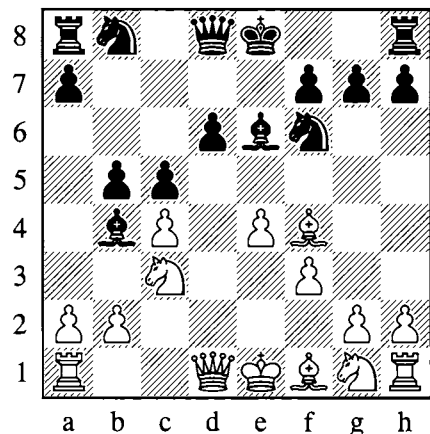


13.♞c2

13.♙e3 0-0 14.♞f4 ♜f6 15.♞xe6 ♜xe6 16.♞b3 ♜f6 leaves White in danger.

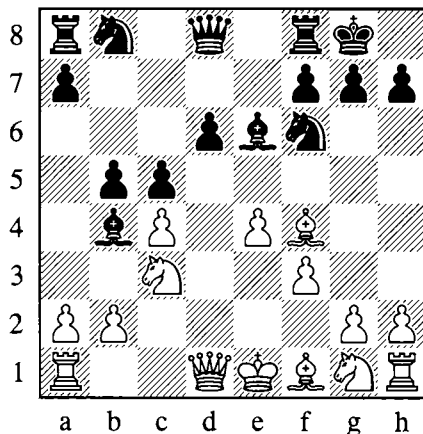
13...0-0 14.♙e3 ♜f6

Black has an active position and White's king is far from safe, while his extra pawn has little value.



8...0-0!N

This natural novelty is an improvement over 8...♞a5?!, which can be met strongly by: 9.♞ge2!N (9.♜f2 ♙xc3 10.bxc3 0-0 was unclear in Dreev – Yudasin, Manila 1990) 9...0-0 (9...♙xc4?! 10.♞xd6±) 10.a3 ♙xc3† 11.♞xc3 bxc4 12.♞xd6± Black has managed to regain the pawn, but the positional advantage is clearly on White's side.

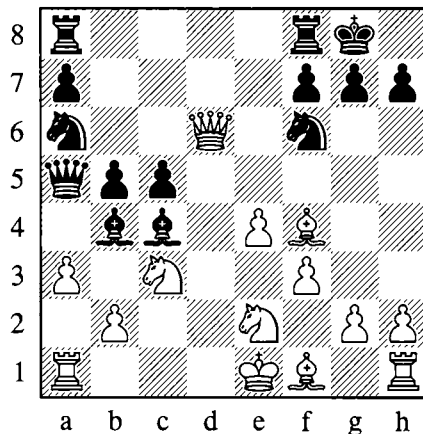


Now we have another split, as White may choose B71) 9.♞xd6 or B72) 9.♙xd6.

B71) 9.♞xd6 ♜a5 10.♞ge2 ♙xc4

This may seem scary for White, but his position is not as bad as it looks.

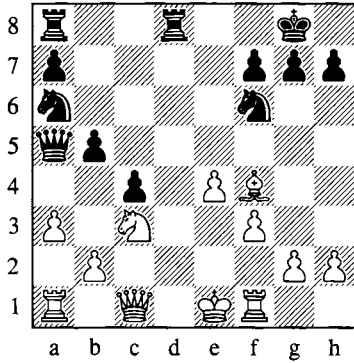
11.a3 ♞a6



**12. ♖g5!**

Not an easy move to find. The main idea behind it is to vacate the g3-spot for the queen.

12. ♖d1 ♜fd8 13. ♖c1 ♙xc3† 14. ♘xc3 ♙xf1 15. ♞xf1 c4

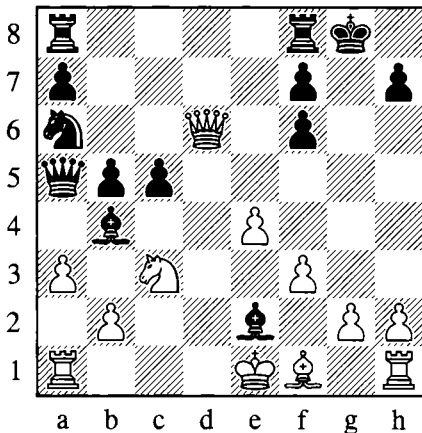


This puts White under some pressure, since the king is still in the centre.

**12... ♙xe2!**

12... ♞ad8 13. ♖g3 ♘h8 14. ♔f2 ♙xe2 15. ♙xe2 ♙xc3 16. bxc3 seems less precise – the potential of White’s bishops might tell in the long run.

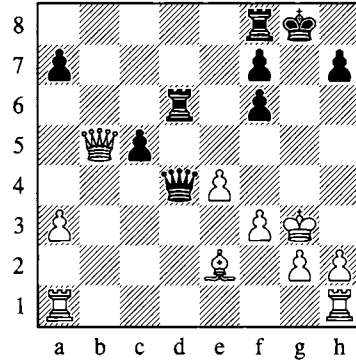
**13. ♙xf6 gxf6**



**14. ♖xf6**

This leads to a draw by perpetual.

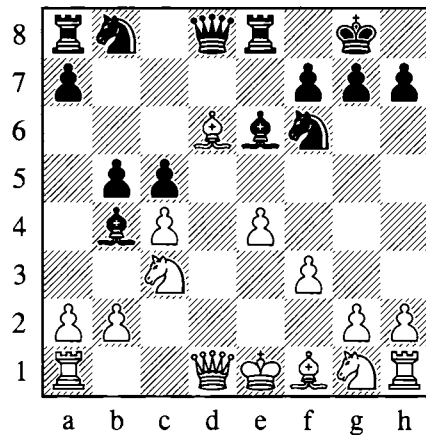
Let’s see what happens if White tries to prolong the game: 14. ♙xe2 ♙xc3† 15. bxc3 ♖xc3† 16. ♔f2 ♞ad8 17. ♖xa6 ♗d4† 18. ♔g3 ♞d6 19. ♖xb5 (19. ♖xa7 f5 20. ♞ad1 f4† 21. ♔xf4 ♞f6† 22. ♔g3 ♞g6†=)



19...f5! Black’s attack is sufficient to secure a draw at least. For instance, 20. h4?! ♞g6† 21. ♔h3 ♖f2 22. g4 fxg4† 23. fxg4 ♖e3† 24. ♔g2 ♖xe4† 25. ♔h3 ♞b6† and by now White would be wishing he had taken a draw.

14... ♙xf1 15. ♖g5† ♔h8 16. ♖f6† ♔g8=

**B72) 9. ♙xd6 ♞e8**



**10. cxb5**

This seems like the most consistent choice. Obviously White is going to suffer from

undeveloped pieces anyway, so why not grab a second pawn?

Black has nothing to worry about after:  
 10.a3 ♖xc3† 11.bxc3 ♖a5 12.♙xc5  
 (dubious is 12.♚d2? ♜d8! 13.e5 ♜e8†)  
 12...♚xc3† 13.♜f2 bxc4 14.♜e2 ♖a5  
 15.♙e3 ♜c6 The strong c4-pawn and active  
 pieces fully compensate for White's pair of  
 bishops.

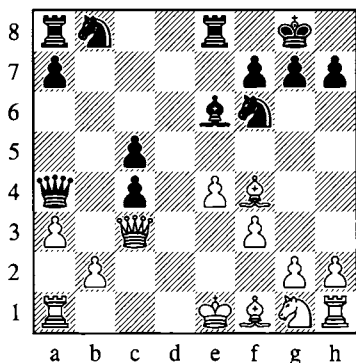
10.♙f4 ♖a5

Black has some reasonable alternatives, but keeping the queens on the board looks like an attractive idea.

11.♚c1

11.cxb5 a6 12.bxa6 c4 13.♚c2 ♜xa6 offers Black rich play which more than compensates for two pawns.

11...bxc4 12.a3 ♖xc3† 13.♚xc3 ♖a4



14.♜c1

After 14.♜e2 ♜c6 15.♜g3 ♜d4 Black is not worse, at least.

14...♜c6 15.♜e2

15.♙xc4? ♜xe4! 16.fxe4 ♙xc4-+

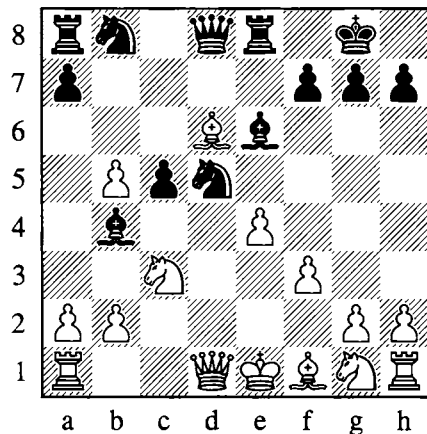
15...♜d7 16.♙g3 f5 17.♜f4 ♙f7

The pressure along the e-file forces White to liquidate into an equal endgame:

18.♙xc4 ♙xc4 19.♚xc4† ♚xc4 20.♜xc4 fxe4  
 21.fxe4 ♜d4=

10...♜d5!

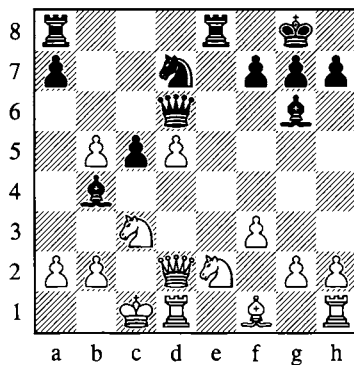
A little tactic which helps Black to make use of his development advantage and the unstable placement of the bishop on d6.



11.♙e5

11.exd5 ♙f5† 12.♜f2 ♚xd6 looks extremely dangerous, since Black has full control over the dark squares.

Too risky is 11.♚d2?! ♚xd6 12.exd5. Now Black can choose between several good-looking possibilities, but most natural seems 12...♙f5† 13.♜ge2 ♜d7 14.0-0-0 ♙g6. White's extra pawns have little value here, for instance:

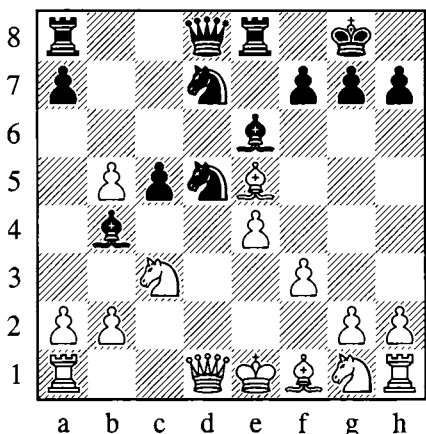


15.h4 h6 16.♜f4 ♙xc3 17.bxc3 ♙h7 18.♙d3  
 ♙xd3 19.♜xd3 a6 With an attack.

11...♜d7!

The vulnerable placement of White's bishops helps Black to complete his development.

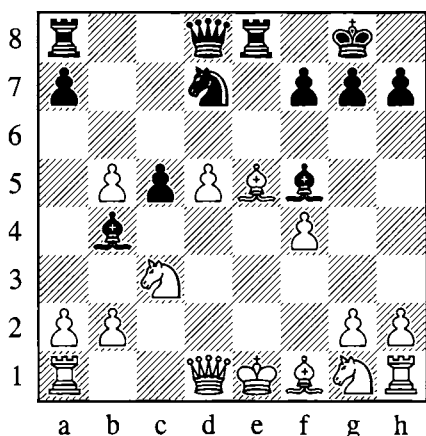
Another tempting try, 11...♞g5?!, can be strongly met by 12.f4! ♘xf4 13.♘f3 ♞g4 14.♙f2!, and White's set-up is becoming harmonious.



12.exd5 ♙f5!

The materialistic approach should be rejected: 12...♙xd5?! 13.♙f2 ♞xc5 14.♘xd5 ♙e1† 15.♞xe1 ♞xe1 16.♞xe1 ♞h4† 17.g3 ♞d4† 18.♘e3± And the unbalanced position seems better for White.

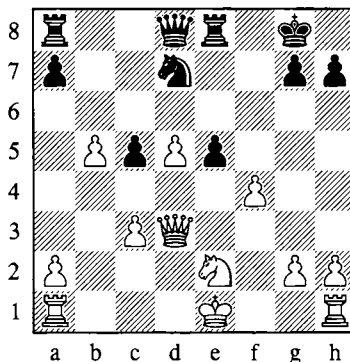
13.f4



13...♘xe5

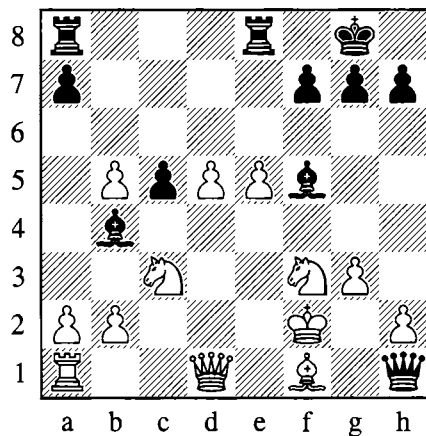
The text move seems most convincing.

Also quite playable is: 13...f6 14.♙d3 (14.d6 fxe5 15.♙c4† ♙h8 16.♘ge2 ♞h4† 17.g3 ♞h3 with counterplay) 14...♙xc3† 15.bxc3 ♙xd3 16.♞xd3 fxe5 17.♘e2



17...c4! 18.♞xc4 ♞c8 Black's counterplay is sufficient for equality: 19.♞d3 ♘c5 20.♞d1 ♞b6 21.d6 exf4 22.0-0 ♘e4† 23.♙h1 ♞xd6 24.♞xd6 ♘xd6 25.♘d4 ♞xc3=

14.fxe5 ♞h4† 15.g3 ♞e4† 16.♙f2 ♞xh1 17.♘f3



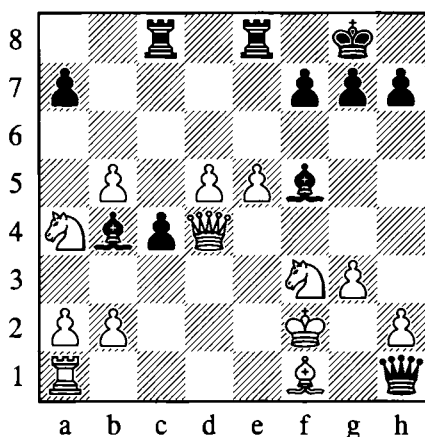
17...c4!

This practically forces both players to find the only moves.

My first intention was to liquidate into an endgame by means of 17...♔g4 18.♔g2 ♖xd1 19.♖xd1 ♗xf3 20.♗xf3 ♖xe5, but after 21.d6 ♖d8 22.♗c6± the passed d-pawn is a source of concern.

### 18.♖d4 ♖ac8 19.♗a4

It looks like White has consolidated and will benefit from the powerful central pawns and the trapped queen, but Black has an amazing resource:



### 19...h5!

Creating a strong threat of 20...♔g4, and thus keeping Black's counterplay alive.

### 20.h3 ♗xh3 21.♖d1

White gives up too much material after 21.♗xh3 ♖xa1 22.d6 ♖cd8±.

### 21...g5!

The same concrete approach – White doesn't have time to consolidate and attack the queen.

### 22.d6

After 22.♗xh3 ♖xh3 23.d6 g4 24.d7 gxf3 25.♗xf3 ♖cd8 26.dxe8=♖† ♖xe8 White's king is still in danger, so the position remains dynamically balanced.

### 22...g4

Now White must force a draw by perpetual:

### 23.♖f4

After 23.♗h4?! ♖h2† 24.♔g2 ♗xg2 25.♗xg2 ♖e6 White is in trouble.

### 23...gxf3 24.♖g5† ♗f8 25.♖h6† ♗g8=

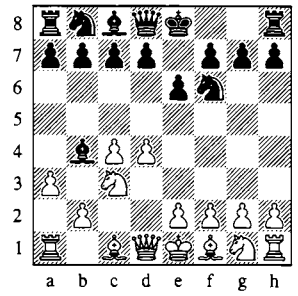
## Conclusion

4.f3 is a bold and ambitious attempt to build a big centre. We will meet it forcefully with 4...c5 when 5.a3 is harmless after 5...♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♗c6. So the real test is 5.d5 d6 6.e4, when I recommend fighting for the initiative with the sacrificial 6...b5. We saw no fewer than seven main options, but the most critical is 7.dxe6 ♗xe6 followed by hitting the exposed d6-pawn with 8.♗f4. After my suggested improvement 8...0–0!N White can take on d6 with either piece, but I am satisfied with Black's play in both cases.

Overall 4.f3 is a forceful try and my reply to it sharpens the struggle, so this is a chapter that should be studied carefully. With much of the chapter consisting of original analysis, you should have excellent chances to cause problems for your opponents across the board.

# Chapter 6

## Various 4th Moves



### 4.a3

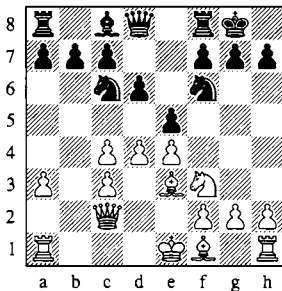
### Variation Index

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.a3

4...Bxc3† 5.bxc3 Nc6!?

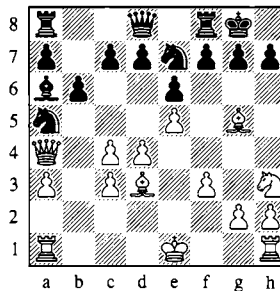
A) 6.♖c2	83
B) 6.e4!?	84
C) 6.♗g5	88
D) 6.e3	90
E) 6.f3 b6 7.e4 ♗a6	92
E1) 8.Nh3	92
E2) 8.e5	93
E3) 8.♗d3 Nc5	94
E31) 9.e5	94
E32) 9.♖e2	95
E4) 8.♗g5	97

A) after 9.♗e3



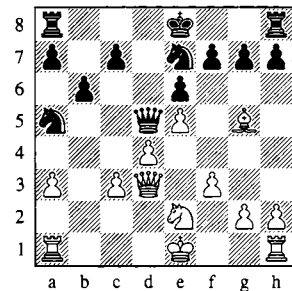
9...♖e8!N

E2) after 12.♗g5



12...d6!N

E31) after 14.♗g5

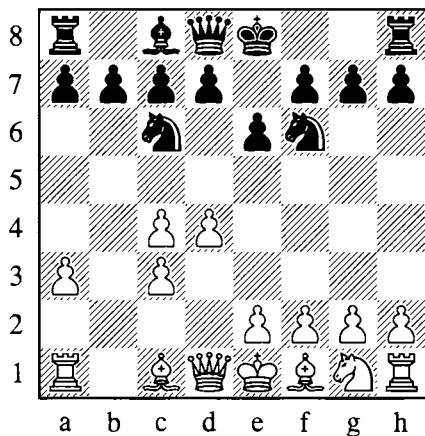


14...Nc6!N

### 1.d4 2.c4 e6 3.♖c3 ♗b4 4.a3

This system is named after Fritz Sämisch, one of the great players of the past. Sämisch had a lot of success with this aggressive concept, using it to defeat Capablanca and Réti, amongst others. White doesn't mind wasting a tempo in order to clarify the central structure and establish the bishop pair.

### 4...♗xc3† 5.bxc3 ♖c6!?



A relatively rare continuation, but I like this concept: Black is ready to exert strong pressure on the c4-pawn as soon as possible.

6...b6 can be played with similar ideas in mind, and it may easily transpose within a few moves. That said, I find it slightly more flexible to start by developing the knight.

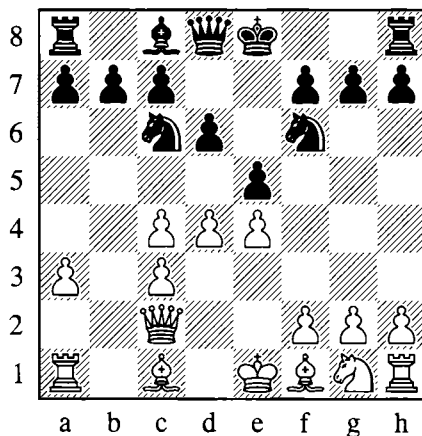
The main lines to consider are A) 6.♖c2, B) 6.e4!?, C) 6.♗g5, D) 6.e3 and E) 6.f3.

6.♖f3 is sometimes played, but after 6...b6 I don't see anything better for White than 7.♗g5, when 7...h6 8.♗h4 transposes to variation C.

#### A) 6.♖c2

Supporting the e2-e4 advance in this way is not without drawbacks.

### 6...d6 7.e4 e5



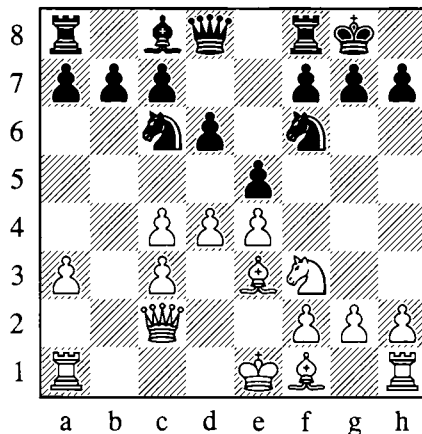
### 8.♖f3

The somewhat awkward 8.♖e2 0-0 9.f3 is well met by 9...♖h5! 10.g4 ♗h4† 11.♗d1 ♖f6. White's position lacks development, so there is no way to exploit the slight vulnerability of the queen on h4. 12.♗g1 ♗f2 13.♗d3 ♖a5† White was in trouble in Mikenas – Johner, Prague 1931.

### 8...0-0 9.♗e3

9.♗g5?! h6 10.♗h4 exd4 11.cxd4 g5 12.♗g3 ♖xe4 sees Black pick up a pawn for not much compensation.

The text move has occurred in a couple of games. I recommend:



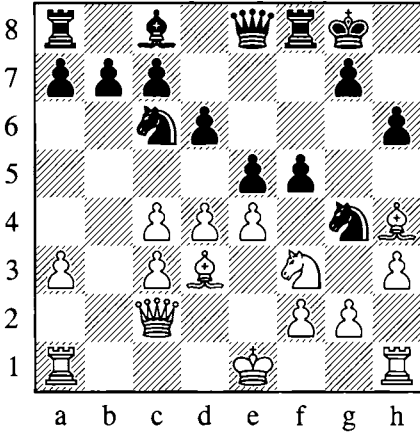
**9...♞e8!N**

Attacking the e4-pawn and removing the queen from a vulnerable spot.

**10.♙d3 ♖g4 11.♙g5 h6 12.♙h4 f5!**

This move forces favourable complications.

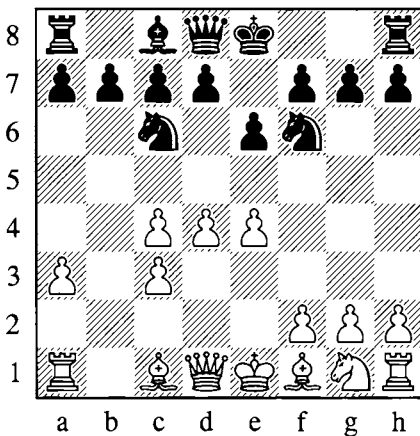
**13.h3**



13...exd4 14.hxg4 fxe4 15.♙xe4 ♜f4 16.♖d2 dxc3 17.♞xc3 ♜xe4† 18.♖xe4 ♞xe4† 19.♙f1 ♞xg4‡

Black has more than enough for the exchange.

**B) 6.e4!?**



A temporary pawn sacrifice that completely changes the nature of the game.

**6...♖xe4**

Accepting the challenge is the most principled reply.

**7.♞g4**

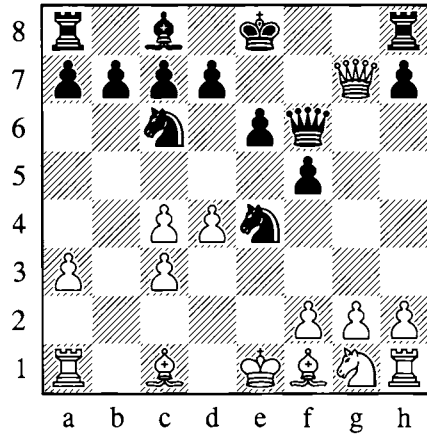
White manages to win the pawn back, but in doing so he allows us to force a queen exchange, which clearly favours Black.

**7...f5 8.♞xg7**

8.♞h5†? g6 9.♞h6 ♞f6 10.♖f3 b6 11.♙d3 ♙a6‡ leaves White with no compensation for the pawn.

**8...♞f6**

Obviously there is no way for White to avoid the exchange.



**9.♞xf6**

9.♞h6?! is inferior, as long as Black responds with: 9...♞xh6 10.♙xh6 ♞g8! (avoiding the simple trap: 10...♖xc3?? 11.d5 exd5 12.♙g7+—) 11.♖e2 b6 12.f3 ♖d6 13.♖g3 ♙a6‡

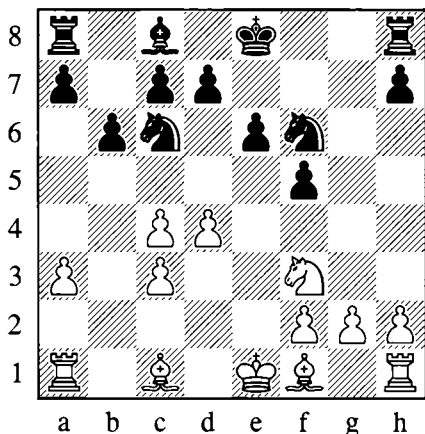
**9...♖xf6 10.♖f3**

It makes little sense to start with 10.♙f4 d6, when White has nothing better than 11.♖f3.

10.g3 makes Black's task even easier: 10...b6  
11.♙g2 ♚b7 12.♘h3 0–0–0

### 10...b6!

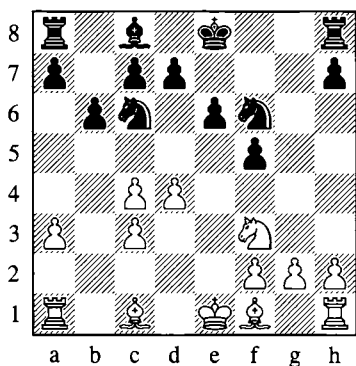
This enables Black to keep a flexible pawn structure (for comparison, 10...d6 would weaken the e6-pawn) and put pressure on the weak c4-pawn.



### 11.d5!?

A static character of the battle can hardly suit White, so this advance is a natural attempt to make the play more concrete.

Attacking the c7-pawn is illogical, since Black would benefit from opening up the c-file: 11.♙f4 ♙a6!

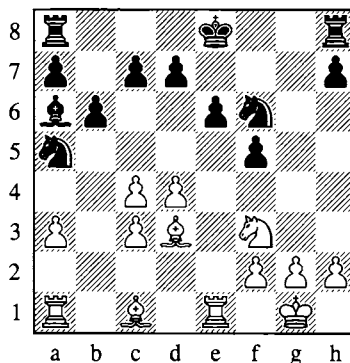


12.♙xc7?! ♜c8 13.♙d6 ♘a5 14.♙e5 ♔e7  
Black wins the pawn back and obtains a clear positional advantage.

A quieter way of handling the position is to complete development:

11.♙d3 ♙a6 12.0–0 ♘a5 13.♞e1

Now Black has a choice of decent options, but I especially like:



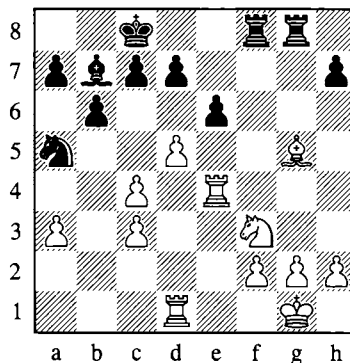
### 13...♘e4!?

Now White is forced to give up the light-squared bishop in order to keep the material balance:

14.♙xe4 ♜xe4 15.♞xe4 ♙b7!

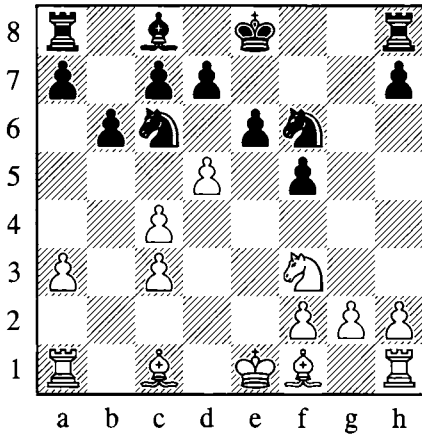
15...♙xc4 allows 16.♘e5 ♙d5 17.♞h4 when the pressure on the h7-pawn is rather annoying, though Black should still be okay.  
16.d5 0–0–0 17.♙g5 ♜df8 18.♞d1 ♞hg8

The b7-bishop is blocked at the moment, but it still exerts strong pressure. The continuation might be:



19.h4 h6 20.♙f4 b5!

Black grabs the pawn back and gets a better position.



11...d4

Declining the pawn seems safest.

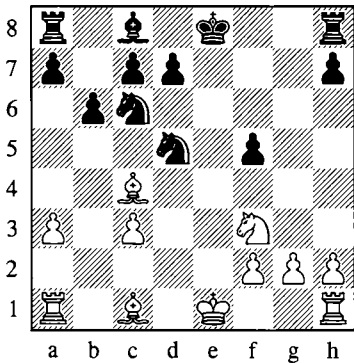
Taking on d5 is playable too:

11...exd5 12.cxd5 dxd5 13.c4

This must have been White's idea.

Weaker is: 13.d3 b7! 14.0-0 (after 14.xf5 0-0-0 White is in serious trouble - Black's pieces are much better mobilized)

14...0-0-0 15.c4 dde7 16.b2 hg8



The text move prepares to put Black's king under fire. However, the position is still perfectly playable for Black after:

13...dce7! 14.0-0 b7 15.e1

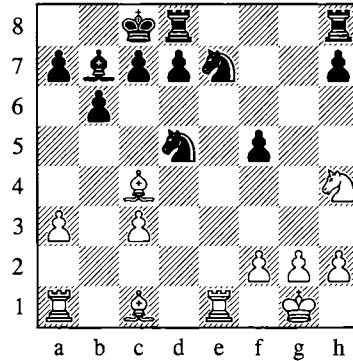
Black is also doing reasonably well after 15.g5 h6 16.h4 f4 17.f1 h7 18.xe7 xe7 19.dh4 f8 20.xe7 xe7 21.f5† f6 22.e3 e8, with counterplay.

15...0-0-0

White's initiative seems sufficient only to maintain the balance. For instance:

16.dh4!

Less effective is: 16.g5 de8 17.b3 h6 18.d2 f6



16...hg8! 17.f3!

17.d3 allows 17...d6! 18.f5 df4 19.f4 xf4 20.e7† b8 21.dg8 xg8 and Black is on top.

17...f4 18.f4

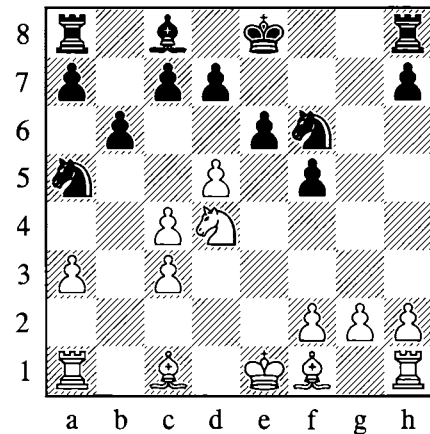
Or 18.d3 e3 19.xe3 fe3 20.c4 d5 21.xe3 dxc4 22.xc4 d5 with counterplay.

18...xf4 19.xe7 d5 20.b3 de8 21.e1 dh3=

Forcing a draw, as moving the king to f1 would invite a nasty check on a6.

12.d4

Here I found a useful improvement over a top-level game.



**12...0-0!N**

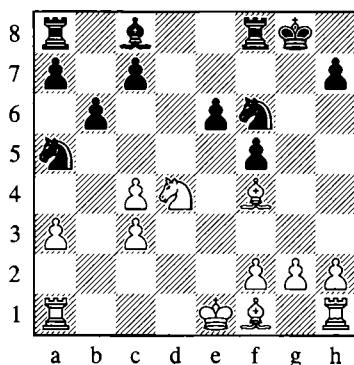
12...♔f7 13.dxe6† dxe6 14.♙f4 ♙a6 15.♘f3 led to unclear play in Jobava – Carlsen, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010.

The text move places Black's king on a safer square, so White's tactical resources are limited.

**13.f3**

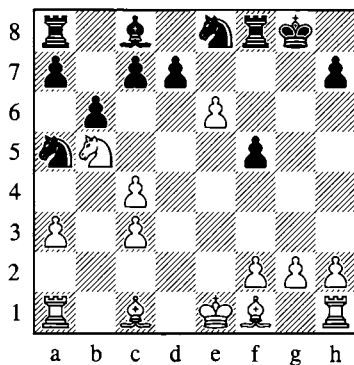
White's king is not so safe either, so it makes sense to prepare a home for it on f2.

Now, in comparison to the above-mentioned game, 13.dxe6 dxe6 14.♙f4 can be met strongly by:



14...♙a6! 15.♘b5 ♖ad8 and Black takes over the initiative: 16.♙xc7 ♗d7 17.♙e5 ♘e4 18.f3 ♘d2†

13.♘b5 ♘e8 also works out well for Black after: 14.dxe6 (14.♙h6 ♖f6 15.♙g5 ♖g6 16.♙f4 d6† doesn't help White)



14...♘b3! It is important to exchange the powerful dark-squared bishop. 15.♖b1 ♘xc1 16.exd7 ♙xd7 17.♖xc1 White has won a pawn, but after 17...c5! 18.♙e2 ♙c6† White finds himself in a difficult situation – his forces are uncoordinated and the b5-knight is in trouble.

**13...♙a6**

13...c5!? 14.♘b5 ♘b3 15.♖b1 ♘xc1 16.♖xc1 e5 also offers Black comfortable play, but the text move is more ambitious.

**14.dxe6**

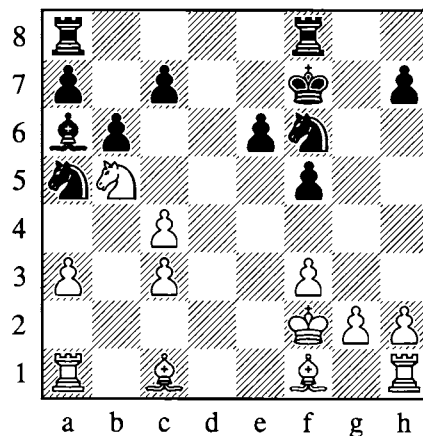
After 14.♙h6 ♖fe8 White has nothing better than 15.dxe6 dxe6, with similar play to the main line.

**14...dxe6 15.♔f2**

There is not much sense in 15.♘b5 ♖ad8 16.♙h6 ♖f7†, when the b5-knight can be pushed away.

**15...♔f7 16.♘b5**

After 16.♙h6 ♖fe8 17.♘b5 ♖e7 18.♙f4 e5 19.♙xe5 ♖xe5 20.♘xc7 ♙b7 21.♘xa8 ♙xa8† White is in trouble – all Black's pieces are active and ready to attack the weak pawns.

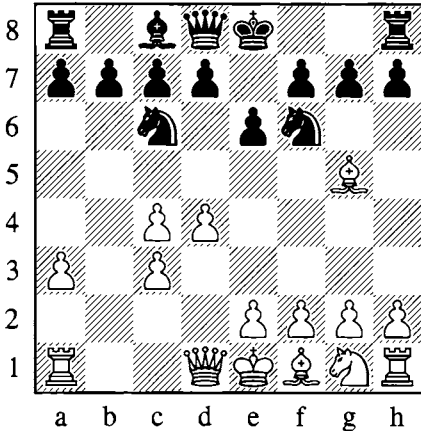
**16...♙xb5!**

It is worth straightening out White's pawn structure in order to gain time and liquidate White's most active piece.

17.cxb5 ♖b3 18.♖b1 ♜xc1 19.♗xc1 ♜d7

Black is better due to his superior minor piece and control over the dark squares.

C) 6.♗g5



The pin on the f6-knight is quite unpleasant, so White is trying to provoke some weakening reaction, like ...h6 and ...g5.

6...h6 7.♗h4

7.♗xf6?! is a serious positional concession:  
7...♗xf6 8.e4 d6 9.♜f3 e5

7...b6

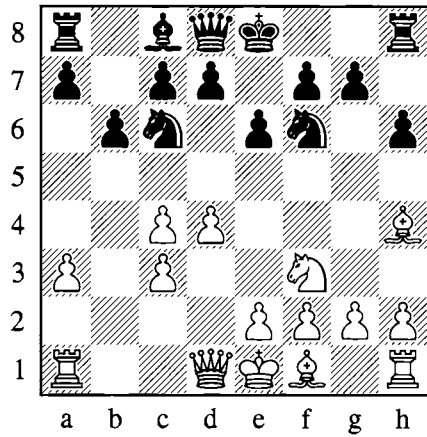
Since 8.e4 will now drop a pawn, Black feels free to develop the queenside pieces.

8.♜f3

The most consistent move – the knight is heading to d2, where it will protect the c4-pawn and support the thematic e2-e4 advance.

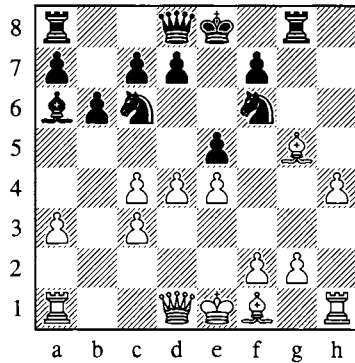
8.f3 ♗a6 9.e4 transposes to variation E4.

8.e3 is met by 8...♗b7, when the natural 9.♗d3? runs into 9...♜xd4! 10.cxd4 ♗xg2 with heavy material gains for Black. White should therefore prefer 9.♜f3, transposing to 9.e3 in the notes below.



8...♗b7!

This is an important moment, as the direct attack on the c4-pawn seems less effective: 8...♗a6?! This position has been seen in a couple of games, including at GM level. However, I managed to find a new way of developing White's kingside initiative: 9.e4!N g5 10.♜xg5! hxg5 11.♗xg5 ♗g8 12.h4 e5

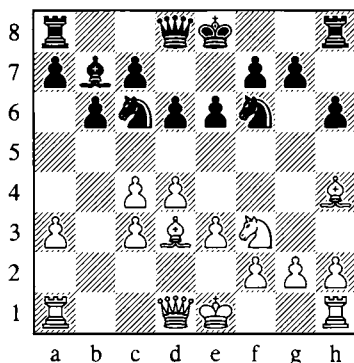


13.f4! ♗e7 14.♗f3 White has a venomous attack, and the pin of the f6-knight puts Black under unpleasant pressure. For instance, 14...exd4 15.e5 ♗xg5 16.hxg5 ♜g8 17.cxd4 yields White a decisive advantage.

9.♜d2

9.e3 d6 10.♗d3 (10.♜d2 g5 11.♗g3 ♗e7 transposes to the Bacrot – Carlsen game referred to under 10.e3?! in the notes to the main line below) This position was reached

in Smailovic – Blaeser, Luxembourg 1998, when Black missed a chance to eliminate the dark-squared bishop in a favourable situation:

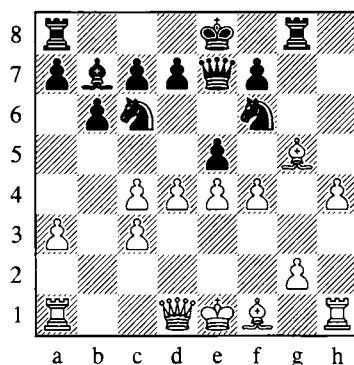


10...g5N 11.♙g3 ♖a5 12.0-0 ♜e4 13.♚c2 ♜xg3 14.fxg3 ♚e7↗ Perhaps it's dynamically balanced, but it seems to me that White has the more difficult task to prove that he has adequate compensation for the damaged pawn structure.

Compared with the note to Black's previous move, the following central expansion and piece sacrifice doesn't work:

9.e4?!N g5 10.♜xg5 hxg5 11.♙xg5 ♖g8 12.h4 12.♙h4 e5 13.f4 ♜h8 14.♙g5 ♚e7 15.fxe5 ♜xe5 16.dxe5 ♚xe5 17.♙xf6 ♚xf6↗ also leaves White with an ugly pawn structure.

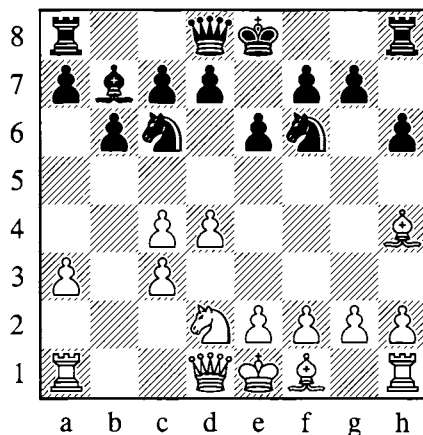
12...e5 13.f4 ♚e7



14.♚f3↗

Better is 14.fxe5, but then Black gives up the extra piece and gets a definite positional advantage: 14...♜xe5 15.dxe5 ♚xe5↗ 14...exd4 15.e5 ♜xe5 16.♚xb7 ♜f3↗+

The white king can choose which side of the board to be mated on.

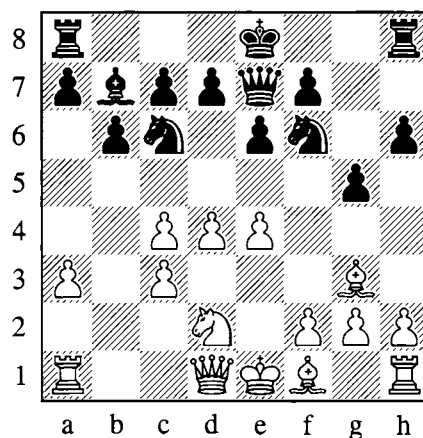


9...♚e7 10.e4

White ought to handle the position aggressively.

10.e3?! is too timid. Having taken a significant positional risk, White can hardly afford such slow play. 10...g5 It is no problem to break the pin in this way, as Black will soon be able to castle on the queenside. 11.♙g3 d6 12.h4 0-0-0 Black was already slightly better in Bacrot – Carlsen, Baku 2008.

10...g5 11.♙g3

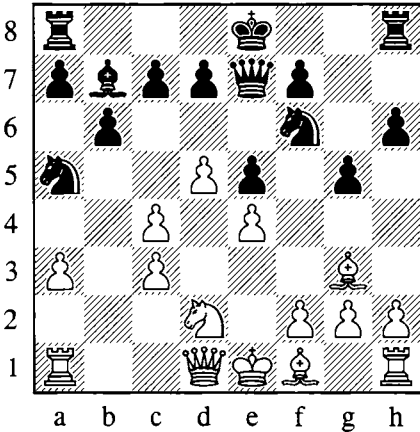


**11...e5!?**

A typical strategy – the pressure on the d4-pawn forces White to close the position, so the bishops become much less effective.

11...d6!? also deserves attention: 12.♔d3 0-0-0 13.♖b3 h5 14.h4 ♘d7 15.♗d2 f5 16.hxg5 fxe4 17.♙xe4 d5 18.♙d3 ♘de5 With interesting complications in Arreaga Orozco – Gramstad, email 2009.

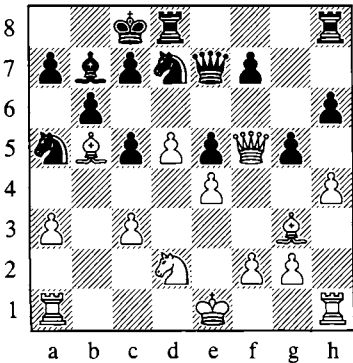
**12.d5 ♘a5**



**13.c5!?**

After 13.♙d3 d6 14.♘f1 0-0-0 15.♗e3 ♘d7 16.♗f5 ♗f6 White suffers from a lack of constructive ideas, while Black has a clear plan of regrouping the kingside pieces.

I also considered: 13.h4 0-0-0 14.♗f3 d6 15.c5!? dxc5 16.♗f5† ♘d7 17.♙b5



17...c6 18.dxc6 ♙xc6 19.♙xc6 ♘xc6 20.♘c4 ♘c7 White has some compensation for the pawn, but Black's chances are not worse.

The text move is an attempt to change the character of the position, but it can be well met by:

**13...♗xc5! 14.♙xe5 ♗e7 15.♙xf6**

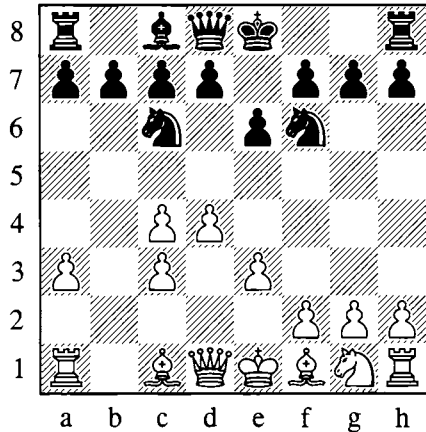
And not 15.♙d4? ♘xe4 16.♗e2 ♘xd2 17.♙xh8 ♘xf1 18.♘xf1 ♙xd5†.

**15...♗xf6 16.c4 0-0-0 17.♙c1 d6**

Black has comfortable play due to his control over the dark squares.

**D) 6.e3**

This move may appear slow, but it actually comes with aggressive intent, as explained in the next note.



**6...b6 7.♙d3 ♘a5!**

It makes sense to start with this move – the knight is heading to a5 anyway, whereas the light-squared bishop has other options too.

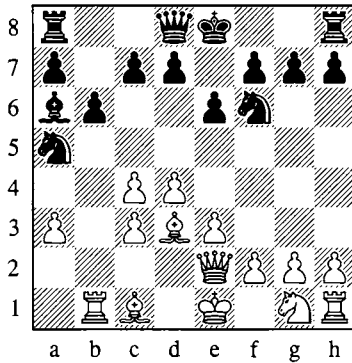
7...♙a6 looks obvious and has been by far the most popular choice, but it has a drawback: 8.e4 ♘a5 9.e5 ♘g8 10.♗g4! White may have lost a tempo with e3-e4, but he has actually benefitted from omitting f2-f3. Now Black must

make some sort of concession with 10...♔f8 or 10...g6, which I would prefer to avoid.

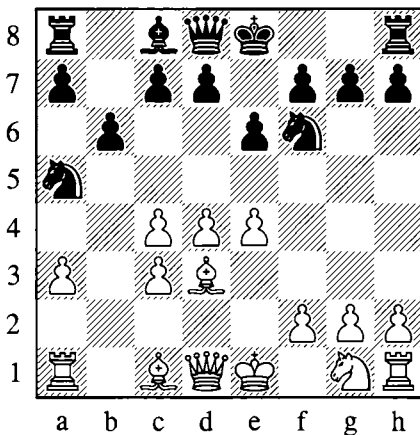
### 8.e4N

This is a novelty, but it's the most obvious move and it may easily still transpose back into one of the main lines.

The only preceding game saw: 8.♖b1?! White hardly can afford the luxury of spending a tempo on prophylactic measures in such a position. 8...♙a6 9.♚e2 This position was reached in M.V. Santos – Delgado Ramirez, Sao Paulo 2004, and here I like the thematic approach:



9...c5!N (9...d5!N is a good positional alternative) 10.e4 cxd4 11.e5 ♖g8 12.cxd4 ♗c8 13.♚g4 ♔f8♣ The c4-pawn will fall, and White doesn't have enough play on the opposite side.



### 8...♙b7!

The main idea behind this move is to provoke the f2-f3 advance, which will block the d1-h5 diagonal.

8...♙a6 leads back to the 7...♙a6 8.e4 ♖a5 line as mentioned above.

### 9.♚e2

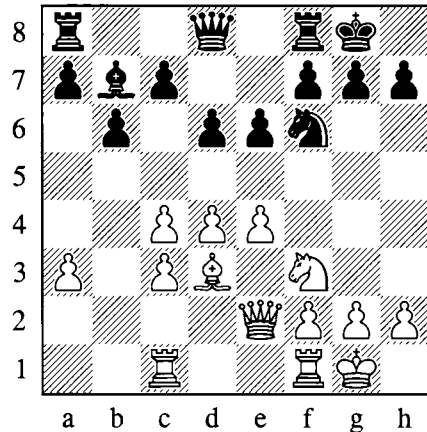
White should prefer 9.f3, when 9...♙a6 reaches a position covered via the move order 6.f3 b6 7.e4 ♙a6 8.♙d3 ♖a5 in variation E3.

The text move is an independent alternative but it has the significant drawback of leaving the b3-spot vacant for Black's knight.

### 9...♖b3 10.♖b1 ♖xc1 11.♖xc1 0-0

Now that the dark-squared bishop has been liquidated, White's attacking possibilities are heavily limited.

### 12.♖f3 d6 13.0-0



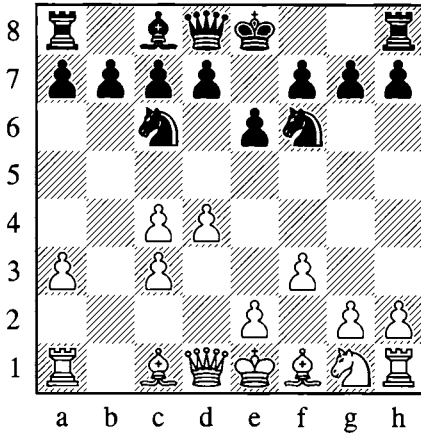
### 13...e5!

Black reaches a comfortable position, as grabbing the e-pawn only leads to hardship for White:

### 14.dxe5?! dxe5 15.♖xe5 ♗d6 16.f4 ♚xa3♣

White has a difficult position with many weaknesses.

## E) 6.f3



Definitely the most ambitious continuation – White wants to seize space in the centre before bringing his pieces into play.

By the way, the majority of games from this position have been reached via the move order 4.f3 d6 5.a3 xc3† 6.bxc3, which is why I have referred to Yakovich's book in some of the following variations. So why do we not aim for this position against 4.f3 as well? There are two reasons. Firstly, I really like the 4...c5 plan as covered in the previous chapter. And secondly, after 4.f3 d6, 5.e4! is a serious option which has been doing well for White.

## 6...b6 7.e4 a6

This popular position can also arise via a different move order – 5...b6 6.f3 a6 7.e4 d6.

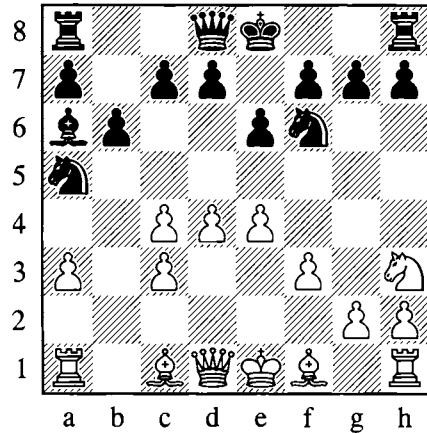
Now White is at a crossroads, with four main options: E1) 8.dh3, E2) 8.e5, E3) 8.d3 and E4) 8.g5.

Quite pointless is 8.e3?! d5 9.e5 dg8 10.a4 de7† as in Gross – Kabatianski, Germany 1998.

## E1) 8.dh3

This has been played twice by Russian Grandmaster Sergey Volkov, who is a real expert in such positions, so we should definitely pay attention to it.

## 8...a5



## 9.c5!?

9.a4 was tried in the later game Volkov – Ovetchkin, Internet (blitz) 2006. Now it was possible to expose the drawbacks of White's last move by simple means: 9...0-0N 10.g5 h6 11.h4 g5 12.f2 d6, followed by ...d7 or ...e8. White will not get any compensation after losing the c4-pawn.

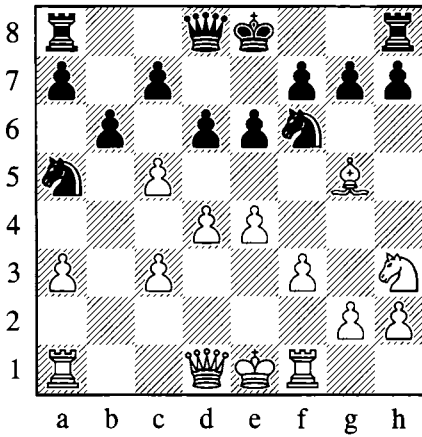
The text move sees the pawn get out of harm's way, but the price is high.

## 9...xf1 10.xf1 d6

White's king is stuck in the centre, while the c4-square still belongs to Black's knight.

## 11.g5

In Volkov – Shaposhnikov, Russia 2004, Black could have secured some advantage with:

**11...dxc5!?:N**

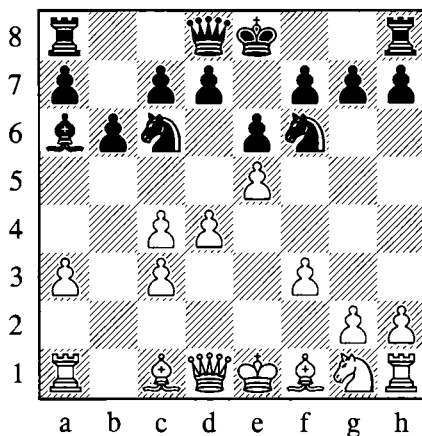
11...h6N is a good alternative: 12.♙xf6 (12.♙h4 can be met by 12...dxc5, when the inclusion of ...h6 only helps Black) 12...♗xf6 13.♖a4† ♕e7♞ Black will castle artificially, while White's pawn structure remains shaky.

**12.e5 h6 13.exf6**

13.♙h4 g5 14.♘xg5?? is impossible, as 14...♘d5 wins a piece.

**13...hxg5 14.fxg7 ♖g8♞**

Black will capture on g7, with an extra pawn and a clear advantage.

**E2) 8.e5**

Seizing a lot of space and forcing the knight's retreat looks very tempting. However, this advance is connected with an additional strategic risk.

**8...♘g8 9.♘h3**

9.♙d3 ♘a5 is covered via the 8.♙d3 move order in variation E31 below.

**9...♘a5 10.♗a4**

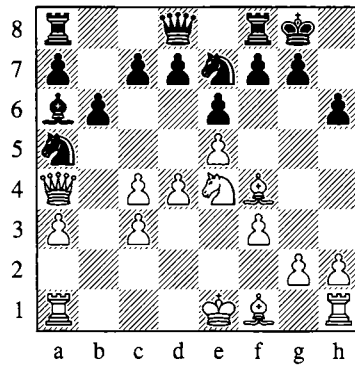
Alas, there is no other way for White to protect the weak c4-pawn and keep the light-squared bishop on the board.

**10...♘e7**

Black re-develops the knight and prepares to castle. This position has been well known since a spectacular victory by Kotov over Keres at the 1950 Candidates Tournament!

**11.♙d3**

The knight transfer 11.♘g5 h6 12.♘e4 doesn't really help White: 12...0-0 Now the d7-pawn is unpinned, so White's next prophylactic move is almost forced: 13.♙f4 Now Black can obtain a clear positional advantage by means of:



13...♗e8!N 14.♖f2 d5 Exchanging the queens is an indisputable achievement for Black. 15.♗xe8 ♖fxe8 16.cxd5 ♙xf1 17.♗hxfl In Kuna – Almarza Mato, email 2009, the players agreed a draw, but Black could have played on with 17...♘xd5♞.

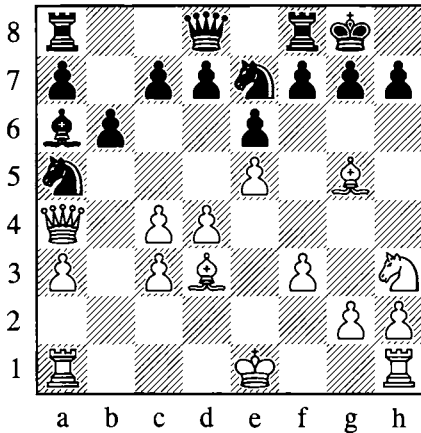
**11...0-0**

Yakovich recommended 11...h6 to prevent White's next, but there is actually no need.

**12.♙g5**

12.0-0 has been played a few times but after 12...d6!N Black is in excellent shape.

The text move has been played in several games, but I found a new idea which seems to refute White's aggressive strategy:

**12...d6!N**

Avoiding the weakening 12...h6 13.♙h4, as was played in the above-mentioned classic game. Let me show you how Alexander Kotov managed to develop a powerful attack: 13...d5 14.♙b1!! g5 15.♖c2 ♘g6? (correct was 15...f5 16.exf6 ♘f5 with unclear consequences) 16.♘f4! White went on to win in fine style in Kotov – Keres, Budapest 1950.

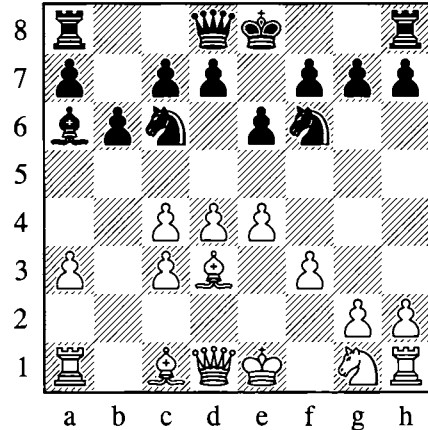
Similarly, 12...d5?! 13.♙b1! also gives White a dangerous attack. The text move is much better, as Black avoids blocking the centre and makes the e5-pawn into a second target (along with c4).

**13.♘f2**

I don't see anything better for White.

**13...dxe5 14.dxe5 ♖e8!♠**

This strong unpinning manoeuvre is an additional point behind Black's 12th move. White has no attack and no compensation for his terrible pawn structure.

**E3) 8.♙d3**

This more consistent mode of development is usually connected with the loss of the c4-pawn. As tournament practice shows, it is not easy to prove that White has long-term compensation.

**8...♘a5**

White may proceed with E31) 9.e5 or E32) 9.♖e2.

**E31) 9.e5 ♘g8**

Even though Black is forced to take a step back in development with this move, it doesn't help White to develop an initiative on the kingside. Indeed, White's pawn centre is becoming even more vulnerable and can be easily attacked by Black's d-pawn.

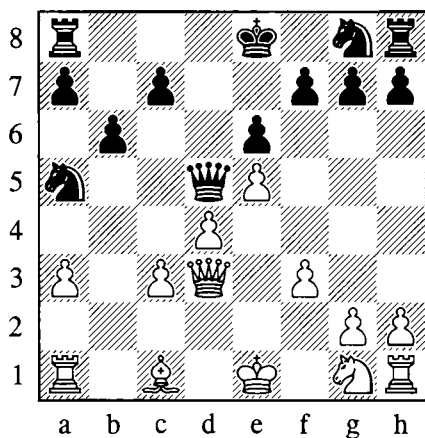
**10.♖e2**

The other way of protecting the pawn is too awkward: 10.♖a4? c5 11.♙e3 ♖c8♠ Kravchenko – Shaposhnikov, Yalta 1996.

**10...d5!**

I like this concept, as the ensuing bishop exchange will guarantee Black full control over the light squares.

Opening-up the c-file by means of 10...c5!? is another decent way of handling the position.

**11.cxd5 ♖xd3 12.♗xd3 ♖xd5****13.♗e2 ♗e7**

Finally Black manages to complete the development of the kingside pieces.

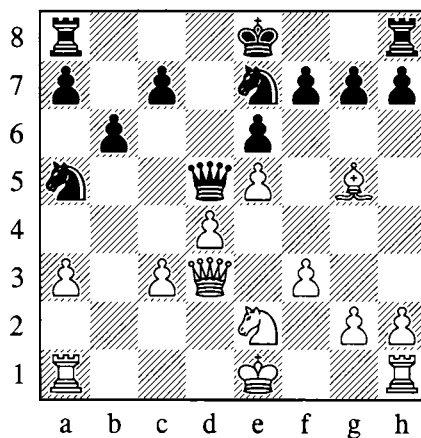
**14.♖g5**

The alternatives also lead White to an inferior position:

14.0-0?! ♗c4 15.♗e4 ♗d5± was great for Black in Posedaru – Ernst, Belgrade 2011.

14.♗f4 ♗c4 15.♗xc4 ♗xc4± gave Black the better endgame in De la Rocha Prieto – Rivas Pastor, Linares 1991.

The text move is the most aggressive, and was seen in Can – Saric, Sarajevo 2011. White's plan involves castling followed by pushing the f-pawn as soon as possible. I like the following prophylactic approach:

**14...♗g6!N**

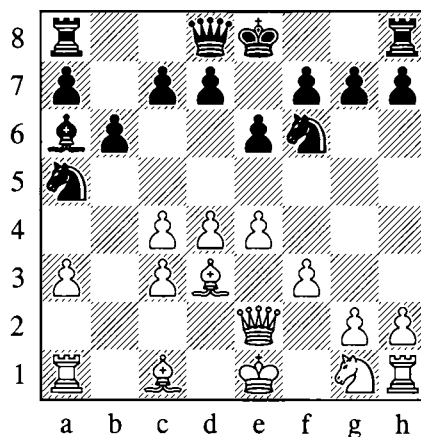
The threat of ...♗xe5 forces White to waste a tempo to protect the e5-pawn, so the attack slows down.

**15.♗d1**

Liquidating into an endgame with 15.♗e4 ♗xe4 16.fxe4 c5± would leave White with vulnerable central pawns and a passive knight on e2.

**15...h6 16.♖c1 ♗d8 17.♗c2 c5±**

Black is firmly in control.

**E32) 9.♗e2****9...c5!**

A standard way of developing queenside counterplay – opening-up the c-file is extremely annoying for White here.

Black has opted for 9...♖b3 10.♙b1 ♘xc1 11.♙xc1 in most games. However, my opinion is that releasing the pressure on the c4-pawn makes White's play much easier, despite the liquidation of the powerful dark-squared bishop.

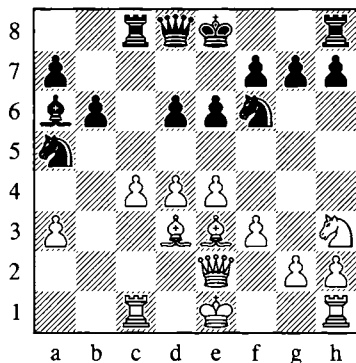
**10.♘h3!?**

This move has never been seen in practice, but it makes sense to complete development as soon as possible, even if the c4-pawn is lost.

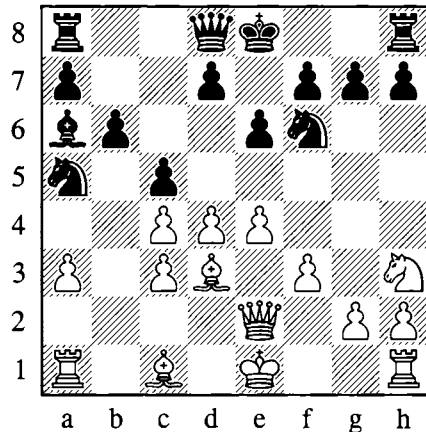
The following alternatives have been tested in tournament practice:

10.d5 was played in N. Adams – R. Burnett, Philadelphia 1996. With the centre now closed, it makes more sense to exchange the poor a5-knight: 10...♖b3N 11.♙b1 ♘xc1 12.♙xc1 0–0 13.♘h3 (13.e5? exd5 14.exf6 ♙e8–+) 13...e5 14.0–0 d6 In this complex position I prefer Black due to his better pawn structure.

10.♙e3 Avoiding the ...♖b3 fork and freeing the c1-square for the rook makes sense, but Black can force White on to the defensive: 10...cxd4 11.cxd4 d6 (there is no reason to let White get rid of the weak c4-pawn: 11...♙c8?! 12.c5! ♙xd3 13.♙xd3±) 12.♘h3 ♙c8 13.♙c1



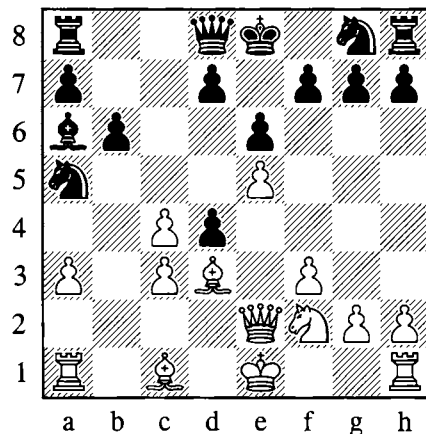
We have been following the game Kelires – Stamatououlos, Greece 2012. Here Black could have consolidated his positional advantage with 13...♘d7!N 14.0–0 0–0. White has no constructive ideas apart from 15.f4, but then 15...e5!♞ would significantly restrict the activity of all White's pieces.



**10...cxd4 11.e5!?**

The natural recapture 11.cxd4 ♙xc4! enables Black to win a pawn using a little tactical trick: 12.♙xc4 ♙c8 The c4-bishop cannot move (otherwise 13...♙c3† would win the a1-rook), so White is forced to fight for a draw in the endgame: 13.e5 ♘g8 14.♙d2 ♙xc4 15.♙xa5 ♙xe2† 16.♙xe2 bxa5♞

**11...♘g8 12.♘f2**



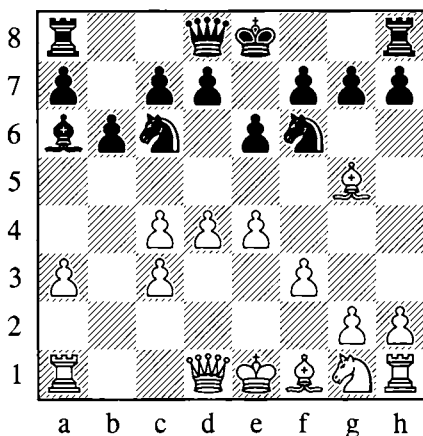
12...f5!

Ensuring that the knight will not reach d6.

13.cxd4 ♖c8 14.0-0 ♙xc4 15.♙d2 ♙xd3  
16.♗xd3 ♜e7

White is still in the game, but he does not have full compensation for the pawn.

E4) 8.♙g5



This is the most ambitious and challenging approach. Since it's hard to protect the c4-pawn anyhow, White concentrates on creating some threats on the other side of board, pinning the knight and forcing Black to think about e4-e5.

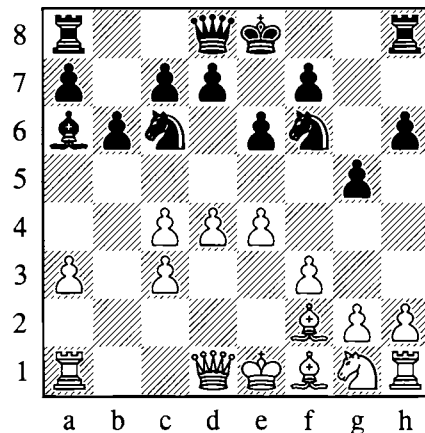
In the majority of games Black has preferred ...♜a5, either immediately or after chasing the bishop back to h4. Another option is to step out of the pin with ...♗c8. However, I would like to suggest a third idea:

8...h6 9.♙h4 g5!?

Provoking this weakening move is a definite achievement for White, as now he has a clear target for an attack on the kingside. However, he has still only developed a single piece, and Black is only a couple of moves away from long castling.

10.♙f2

The text move is much better than 10.♙g3?! ♜h5 11.♜h3 as was played in Padevsky – Platz, Halle 1954. Here Black should have played 11...♜a5!N 12.♗a4 0-0 13.c5 ♙xf1 14.♜xf1 f5, developing a powerful initiative.

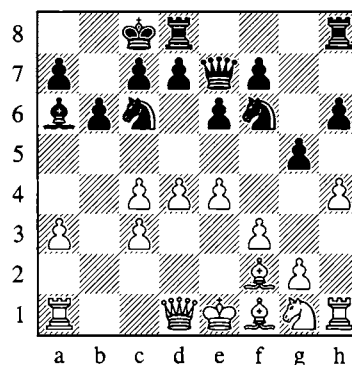


10...♜h5!

I really like this prophylactic concept. Black's priority for now should be reducing White's active possibilities on the kingside, as White's queenside weaknesses will not run away.

10...♜a5?! 11.h4 ♜h7 12.hxg5 ♗xg5 13.♜h3 gave White some initiative in Panov – Sidorov, Yalta 1995.

10...♗e7?! 11.h4 0-0-0

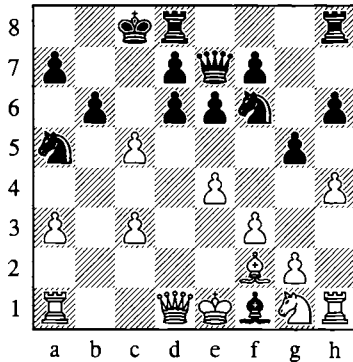


This appears more reasonable, but it also leads to some problems for Black after:

12.d5 ♖a5?!

The lesser evil was 12...♖e5 13.c5 ♙xf1  
14.d6 cxd6 15.cxd6 ♗f8 16.♙xf1 ♖e8  
17.hxg5 ♖xd6 18.gxh6±, with a slight edge  
for White in this complex position.

13.c5 ♙xf1 14.d6 cxd6



Now in Carlsen – Leko, Monte Carlo  
(blindfold) 2007, White could have obtained  
a clear advantage with:

15.cxb6!N axb6

Even worse is: 15...♙xg2? 16.bxa7 ♖b7  
17.♙b1† ♖a8 18.♗d4 ♖c6 19.♗b6+–

16.♙xf1 d5 17.♙xb6±

11.h4N

This is a novelty, but it's surely the most  
logical move.

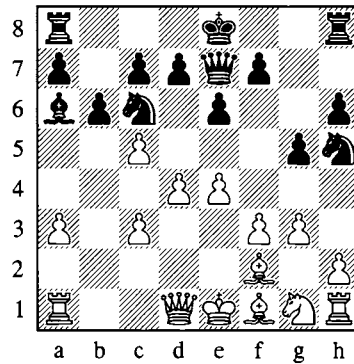
11.g3

This was played in Akvist – Nyberg, Sweden  
2010, but I don't see much sense in spending  
a tempo restricting the h5-knight. Black gets  
a good position after:

11...♗e7!N 12.c5

Getting rid of the weak c4-pawn is White's  
only reasonable idea.

After 12.h4?! 0–0–0 13.c5 ♙xf1 14.♙xf1 d5!  
Black's development advantage is becoming  
threatening.

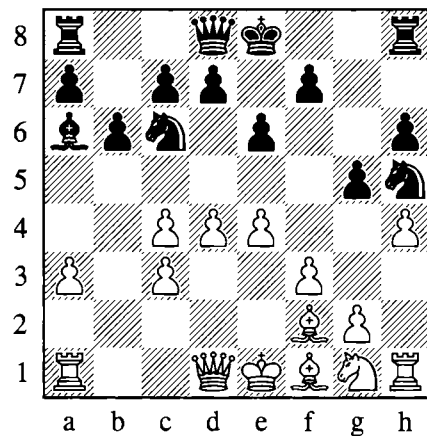


12...♙xf1 13.♙xf1 d5

13...bxc5 is playable, but after 14.d5 ♖d8  
15.h4 the black king is much less secure.

14.cxd6 ♗xd6

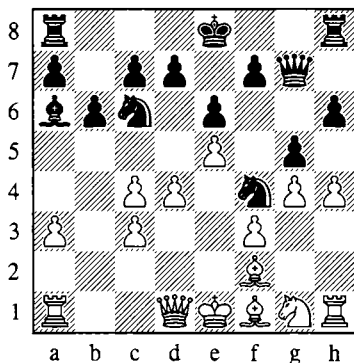
Followed by ...0–0–0, leading to a long  
strategic battle where Black's chances are  
certainly not worse.



11...♗f6 12.g4

This move looks like a concession, as the  
awkward h5-knight gets a great outpost.  
However, it seems like White's best option to  
force the play on the kingside.

12.e5 ♗g7 works out well for Black: 13.g4  
(13.♖h3 is well met by 13...f5!, exploiting the  
awkward placement of the h3-knight. After  
14.g4 fxg4 15.fxg4 ♖f4 16.♖xf4 gxf4 17.♙g1  
0–0–0 Black completes his development and  
takes over the initiative.) 13...♖f4



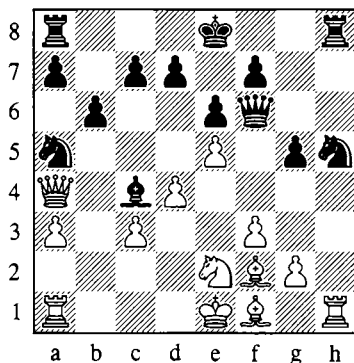
14.♖e2 ♜xe2 15.♙xc2 ♝a5 16.♞a4 0–0–0  
17.0–0–0 f5 It will be very difficult to activate White's pair of bishops, while the pressure on the c4-pawn is very annoying for him.

I also examined:

12.♞a4 ♝a5 13.♜e2!?

This pawn sacrifice isn't toothless and requires accurate handling by Black:

13...♙xc4 14.hxg5 hxg5 15.e5



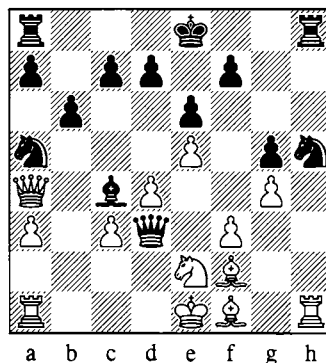
15...♞g6!

Leaving the h8-rook unprotected is concretely justified.

The natural-looking 15...♞g7?! allows 16.♙xh5! ♙xh5 17.♜g3 and after 17...♙h4 18.♙xc4 ♜xc4 19.♞xc4 ♞xe5† 20.♜e4 ♙xe4† 21.fxe4 ♞xe4† 22.♜f1± Black's pawns would not fully compensate for the bishop.

16.g4 ♞d3!

Exploiting the awkward placement of White's queen.



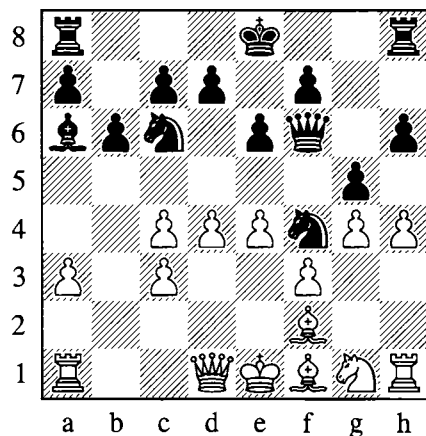
17.♞d1

17.♙xh5 ♙xh5 18.gxh5 ♙b3! 19.♞b4 ♜c4 20.♙g3 ♜d2 21.c4 ♜xf1 sees Black regain the piece with a big advantage.

17...♞xf3 18.♙xh5 0–0–0

Black has more than sufficient compensation for the piece, as White's king is stuck in the centre.

12...♜f4



13.♜h3 ♜xh3

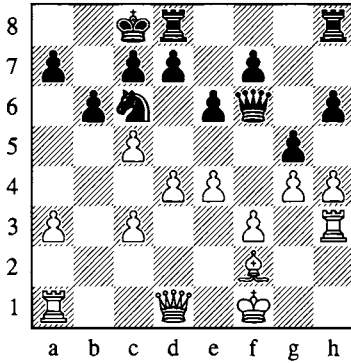
Exchanging the knights is part of Black's restricting strategy; now White's dynamic play is significantly limited.

I have also examined 13...♜g6 14.e5 ♞g7 15.h5 ♜ge7, but White has a powerful knight transfer: 16.♙g3! ♜a5 17.♜f2 ♙xc4 18.♙xc4 ♜xc4 19.♜e4 With a promising initiative for a pawn.

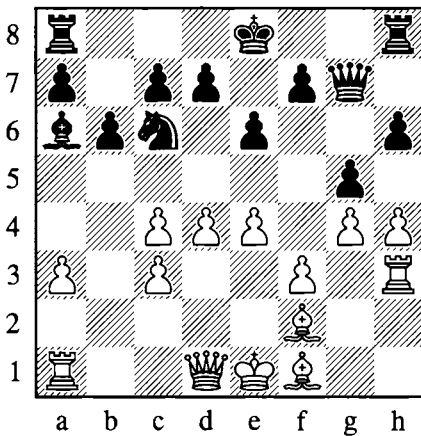
**14. ♖xh3 ♔g7**

A flexible continuation – freeing the way for the f-pawn makes a lot of sense, as the g5-pawn is somewhat vulnerable.

At first I rejected 14...0–0–0!? in view of 15.c5 ♕xf1 16.♗xf1 and it looks like White has made some progress on the queenside. However, Black can strike back with:



16...h5! 17.hxg5 ♔g6! (of course, not 17...♗xg5? 18.♕h4) 18.gxh5 ♖xh5 19.♖xh5 ♗xh5 Black is completely fine here as well.

**15. ♖h2**

This seems a reasonable attempt to play flexibly.

After 15.♕g3 0–0–0 16.♗a4 ♕b7 White is running out of useful ideas.

15.hxg5 hxg5 16.♖xh8 ♗xh8 17.♕g3 0–0–0 18.♗f2 d6 reaches a complex position where I prefer Black – there are clear targets in White's camp.

**15...h5!**

Less convincing seems 15...0–0–0 16.c5! ♕xf1 17.♗xf1 h5 18.d5 and White gets some attacking chances.

**16. ♖g2**

16.gxh5?! ♖xh5 17.♖g2 ♗h7 18.hxg5 ♖h1 19.♕g1 ♘a5

**16...hxg4**

16...♘a5!? is also possible.

17.♖xg4 f6 18.hxg5 fxg5 19.♗d2 ♘a5 20.♗xg5 ♗xg5 21.♖xg5 ♕xc4

Black has no weaknesses and cannot be worse here.

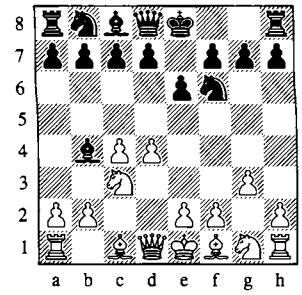
**Conclusion**

4.a3 is a direct, almost crude, answer to the Nimzo-Indian. After 4...♕xc3† 5.bxc3 White has the bishop pair, but he has paid a price in his doubled c-pawns and the tempo spent on a2-a3. I like the relatively rare 5...♘c6!? when we looked at a few options, but the most significant is 6.f3 b6 7.e4 ♕a6, which transposes to a more common position. Once again White has various options, but I would highlight 8.♕g5 as particularly worthy of attention, as it provokes Black into weakening his kingside with ...h6 and ...g5.

As is typical of sharp attempts to crush the Nimzo, Black has effective answers against 4.a3, especially if he is well prepared.

# Chapter 7

## Various 4th Moves



### 4.g3

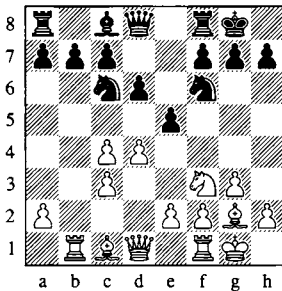
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4

#### 4.g3

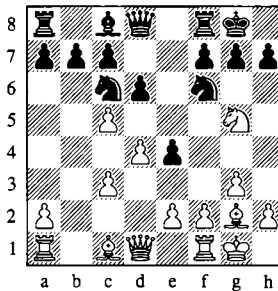
A) 4...♙xc3!?	5.bxc3 d6	6.♙g2 0-0	7.♘f3 ♘c6	8.0-0 e5!	102
A1) 9.♙b1					104
A2) 9.♙c2					104
A3) 9.c5					105
B) 4...c5					106
B1) 5.♙g2					106
B2) 5.d5					107

A1) after 9.♙b1



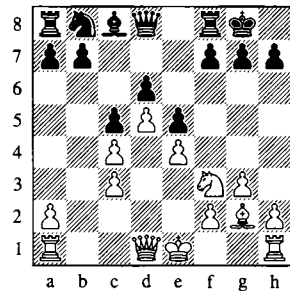
9...h6!N

A3) after 10.♘g5



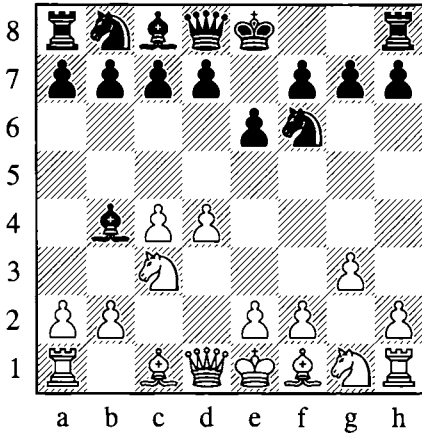
10...♙e8!N

B2) after 11.♘f3



11...f5N

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.g3



This move often leads to the main lines of the so-called Romanishin System, which will be covered in the next two chapters via the move order 4.♘f3 c5 5.g3. However, nowadays 4.g3 is considered less flexible than 4.♘f3, as it gives Black a couple of good options apart from the main 4...c5.

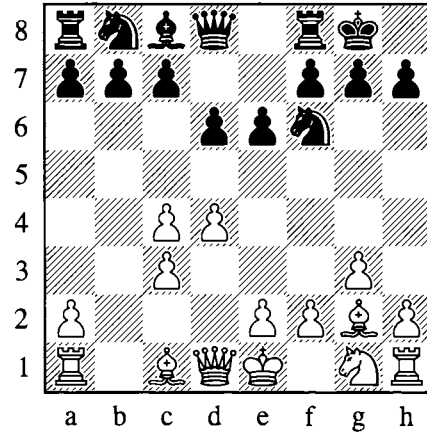
The fianchetto was first tried in the early 1920s, but was deeply explored and successfully employed much later by Ukrainian Grandmaster Oleg Romanishin, starting in the 1970s. White is aiming to put strong pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal and prevent Black from developing the light-squared bishop. In most cases, White should be ready to play very energetically, without being worried about sacrificing a pawn or two. This concept became especially popular after Kasparov's successful experience with 4.♘f3 in his second World Championship match against Karpov.

As just mentioned, 4.g3 allows Black to choose between several ways of avoiding the usual lines of the Romanishin Variation. So in this case I will offer a choice of replies: I believe A) 4...♗xc3! is one of the most attractive alternatives to the more usual B) 4...c5.

A) 4...♗xc3!?

Black is aiming to reach a complex, double-edged position where the weakness of White's doubled pawns might tell in the long run. It is important to note that the power of the g2-bishop is less effective when Black doesn't play ...c5.

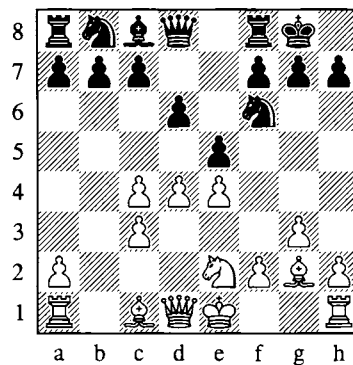
5.bxc3 d6 6.♗g2 0-0



7.♘f3

Dubious is: 7.♗b1 ♘c6 8.c5?! (8.♘f3 e5 9.0-0 transposes to variation A1 below) 8...dxc5 9.♗a3 as in Miana – Giardelli, Buenos Aires 1985, when 9...♗e8N 10.♗xc5 e5 gives Black the initiative.

The ambitious 7.e4?! e5 8.♘e2, as tried in Makarichev – Razuvaev, Moscow 1982, leaves the g2-bishop locked in for a long time.



Now Black could have exploited the permanent drawback of White's pawn structure by means of: 8...b6!N 9.f4 ♖a6 10.fxg5 dxe5 11.0-0 ♙xc4 12.♙g5 ♜bd7+ White does not get adequate play for the pawn.

7.♜h3!?

This has been seen only in some online engine games, but definitely deserves some practical tests.

7...♜c6!

Instead, 7...e5 8.f4 ♜c6 9.0-0 leads to a highly double-edged struggle.

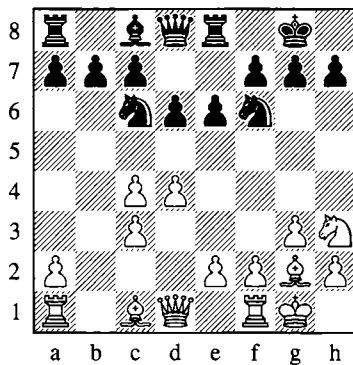
8.0-0

Now 8.f4 can be met by 8...d5!, getting control over the e4-square.

8...♙e8!

An excellent prophylactic move.

Once again, 8...e5 seems less flexible.



9.e4

9.f4 is well met by 9...d5! 10.♜f2 ♜a5 11.c5 b6 12.e4 dxe4 13.♜xe4 ♙b7 14.♜xf6+ ♙xf6+.

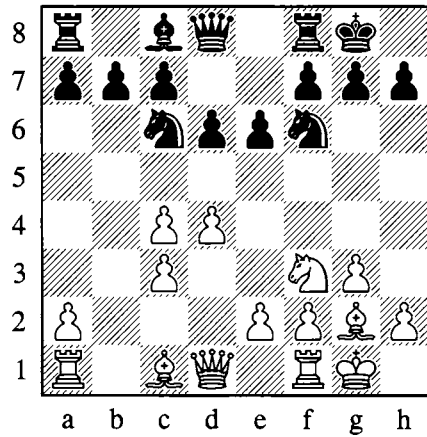
9...e5

Now the e4-pawn is under attack, so White has no time to pursue the initiative with f2-f4.

10.♙e1 ♜a5

Black has promising counterplay; the permanent weakness of the doubled pawns starts to tell.

7...♜c6 8.0-0



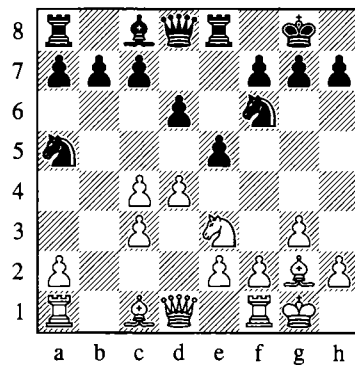
8...e5!

This move makes Black's play much more active and prevents White from seizing more space in the centre. Moreover, the further advance of the e-pawn might block the g2-bishop and yield Black some attacking possibilities.

White's main options are A1) 9.♙b1, A2) 9.♙c2 and A3) 9.c5.

The preparatory move 9.♙e1 was seen in I. Sokolov – Kurajica, Sarajevo 1987, and is again well met by 9...e4!N 10.♜d2 ♙e8 11.♜f1 h6+.

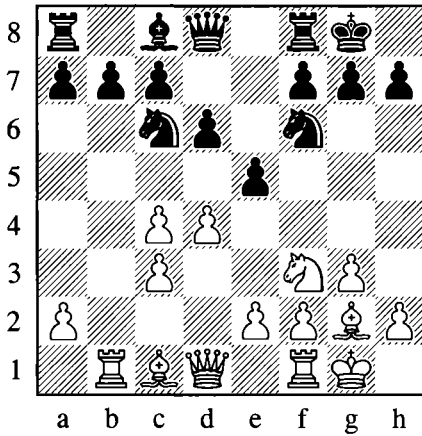
The following knight transfer to e3 seems somewhat slow: 9.♜e1 ♙e8 10.♜c2 ♜a5 11.♜e3 This was Van Laatum – Lee, Dieren 1989, when Black should have continued:



11...e4!N 12.♖a4 b6 13.c5 d5 14.c4 ♘xc4  
 15.♘xc4 dxc4 16.♗xc4 ♙e6 17.♗a4 ♗d5  
 With full control over the light squares.

**A1) 9.♙b1**

This position has been reached in several games, but so far nobody has played the strong prophylactic move:



**9...h6!N**

Black is not in a hurry; White has no direct threats, so it makes sense to restrict the minor pieces.

9...♙e8 10.♙g5!? h6 11.♙xf6 ♗xf6 12.e3 gave White easier play in Epishin – Barlocco, Di Roseto 2010. Unlike some other Nimzo variations, White's dark-squared bishop does not have many prospects in this structure, so it makes sense to restrict it.

Even though the text move has never been played, the resulting position has been reached a few times from the Four Knights variation of the English, where White has misplayed the opening; in that case, it is even Black to move!

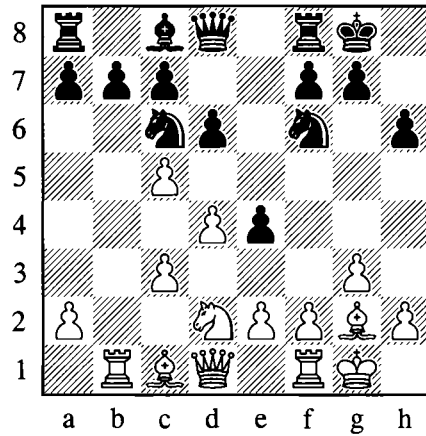
**10.c5!?**

I also checked 10.♗c2 ♙e8 11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♙xe5 13.♙f4 ♙f5 when Black has

excellent counterplay due to the opponent's weaknesses.

The text move seems like a reasonable attempt to swap off one of the weak pawns and open the position for White's bishops, but Black has a good answer.

**10...e4 11.♘d2**



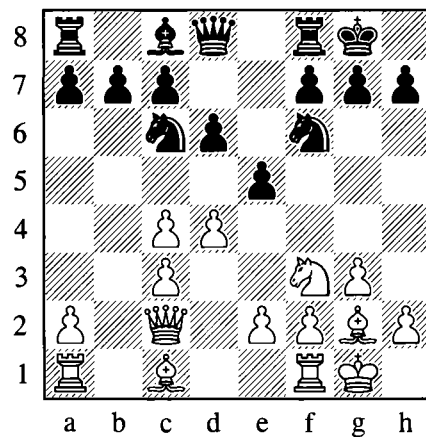
**11...♙e8!**

11...d5 is playable but the text move is much simpler.

12.cxd6 cxd6 13.c4 d5 14.e3 b6 15.cxd5 ♘a5

Black is firmly in control.

**A2) 9.♗c2**



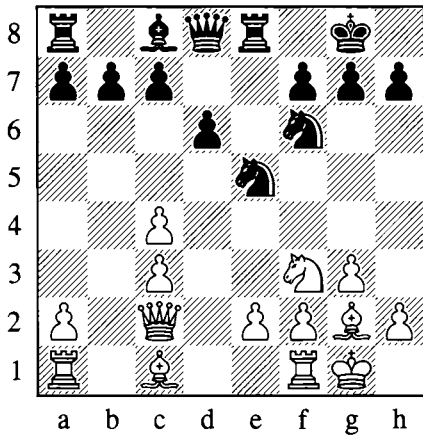
**9...♞e8 10.dxe5**

Dubious is: 10.♞d1?! e4 11.♟g5? (better was 11.♟d2 ♘f5 12.e3 ♟a5, but also then White's position doesn't look attractive) 11...♘f5 12.♞a4 ♞c8+ White's stranded knight and general lack of harmony meant that her position was already losing in Botsari – Kiriakov, Halkida 1996.

The text move should be met by:

**10...♟xc5!N**

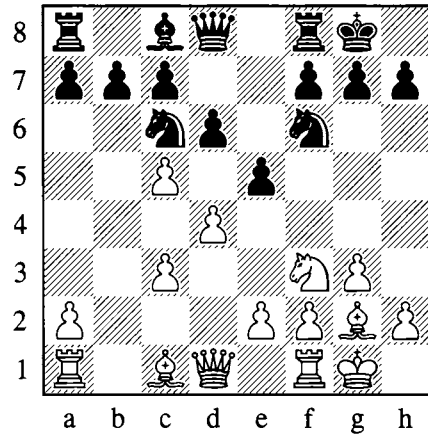
10...dxe5 11.♟d2 gave White reasonable prospects in Potapov – Spirin, Pardubice 2007. The text move makes it harder for him to justify his ugly pawn structure, for instance:

**11.♟xc5**

11.c5 ♟xf3† 12.♘xf3 dxc5 13.♞d1 ♞e7 doesn't give White full compensation for the pawn.

**11...♞xe5 12.♘f4 ♞e8 13.♞ad1 ♞e7 14.♞fe1 h6**

White's pair of bishops cannot compensate for the damaged pawn structure.

**A3) 9.c5**

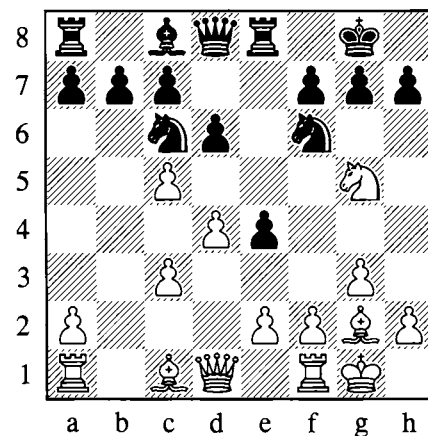
Among White's possibilities, this looks most ambitious: White is trying to get rid of the weak pawns and open up the position so that his bishops become more powerful. However, Black can interfere with those plans by means of:

**9...e4 10.♟g5**

We have been following the game V. Georgiev – Mancini, La Fere 2012. Now Black should choose:

**10...♞e8!N**

Echoing the earlier variation A1.

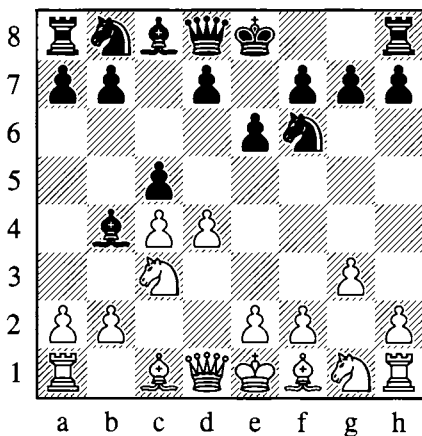


**11.cxd6**

11.d5 looks ambitious, but it merely yields Black the c5- and e5-squares for the knight: 11...♖b8 12.cxd6 cxd6 13.c4 h6 14.♗h3 ♕f5 15.♙b2 ♗bd7 With ...♗e5 to follow.

**11...cxd6 12.f3 exf3 13.exf3 d5**

Stabilizing the position. Black has good control over the light squares, especially the c4-outpost, while White's bishops are not really working.

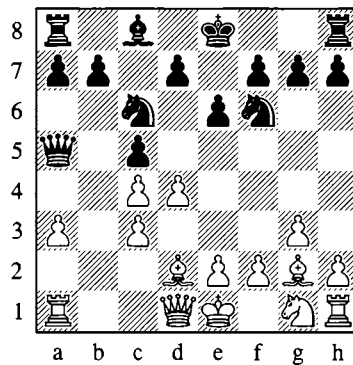
**B) 4...c5**

The two main options we will consider in this chapter are **B1) 5.♙g2** and **B2) 5.d5**.

Most significant of all is 5.♗f3, which will be discussed under the 4.♗f3 c5 5.g3 move order.

5.dxc5 is harmless at best; after 5...♙xc3† (but not 5...♗e4, as 6.♙d4! is annoying) 6.bxc3 ♙a5 Black must be at least equal.

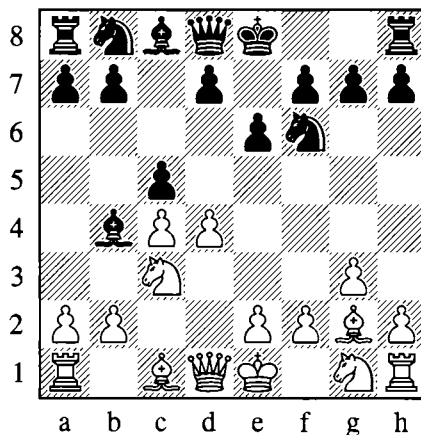
5.a3 seems slow – the extra tempo helps Black to put strong pressure on White's doubled pawns. 5...♙xc3† 6.bxc3 ♗c6 7.♙g2 (7.♗f3 transposes to variation E1 in the next chapter) 7...♙a5 8.♙d2 This position was reached in Foerster – Daum, Berlin 1999. Now I suggest a natural way to handle the position:



8...d6N 9.♗f3 e5 10.0-0 h6 11.d5 ♗e7 In this complex position Black's chances seem preferable – it will be difficult for White to make the bishops work.

**B1) 5.♙g2**

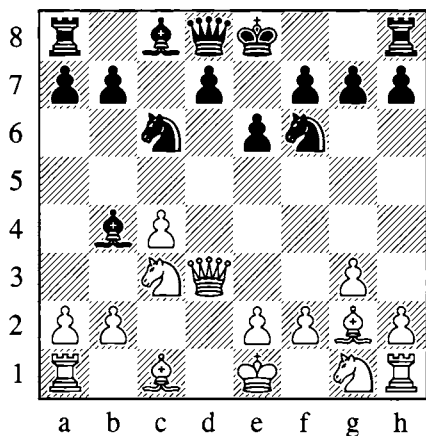
This speeds up Black's development and thus cannot be good.

**5...cxd4 6.♙xd4 ♗c6 7.♙d3**

White hopes to put pressure along the d-file, but wasting time by moving the queen again affords Black a significant lead in development.

Dubious is 7.♙e3, as was played in Delitzsch – Hammes, Fuerth 2001, in view of 7...d5!N 8.cxd5 ♗xd5 9.♙xd5 ♙xd5 10.♗f3 0-0 11.0-0 ♙f5. Black is clearly better due to the bishop pair and the potential weakness of White's king.

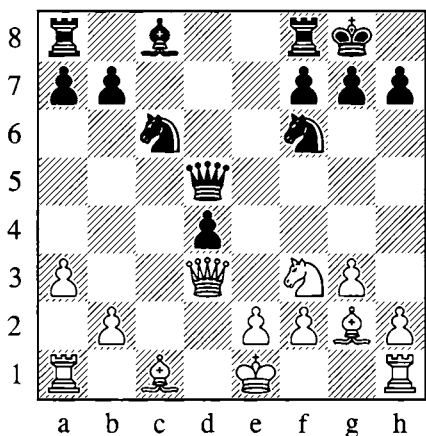
This position occurred in the game Adamis – Fidriiakis, Greece 2015. Now Black should have played:



7...d5!N 8.cxd5 exd5

Instead 8...dxd5 9.♘d2 ♙xc3 10.♙xc3 0-0 leads to an equal position with a symmetrical pawn structure.

9.a3 ♙xc3† 10.♗xc3 0-0 11.♖f3 d4 12.♗d3 ♗d5



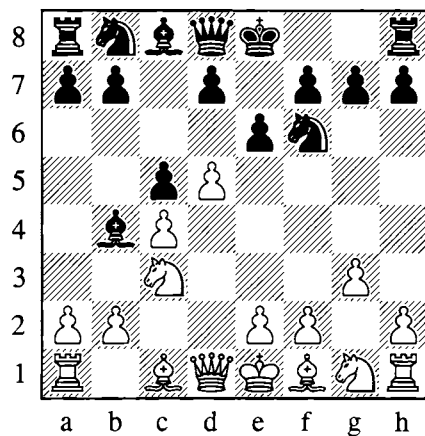
13.♖h4!?

Black is more comfortable after 13.0-0 ♙f5 14.♗d2 ♖fe8.

13...♗a5† 14.♙d2 ♗b6

Black's active piece play fully compensates for White's bishop pair.

B2) 5.d5



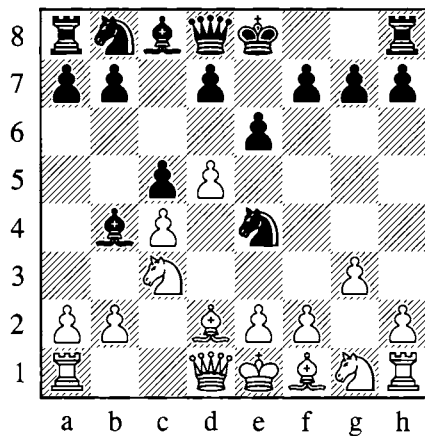
5...♖e4

Black has some other attractive possibilities, but I like this aggressive move.

6.♙d2

This move looks like a concession, but there is no other way to keep the material balance.

After 6.♗c2?! ♗f6! 7.♖f3 (even worse for White is 7.♖h3 ♖xc3 8.♙d2 ♖xd5† as was played in Vaganian – Karpov, Leningrad 1969) 7...♖xc3 8.♙d2 ♖xd5 9.cxd5 ♙xd2† 10.♖xd2 d6† White does not get adequate compensation for the pawn.

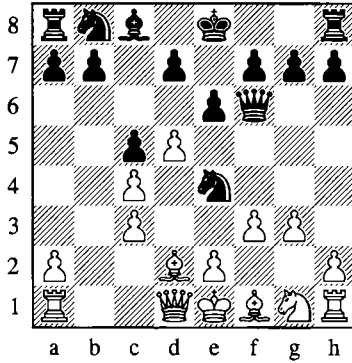


6...♙xc3 7.♙xc3

Hardly better is:

7.bxc3 ♖f6 8.f3!?:N

8.♗f3 ♘xc3 9.♖c1 ♘e4 10.♙f4 d6≠ didn't give White much for the missing pawn in Cativelli – Adla, Buenos Aires 1994.



8...♗xd2!

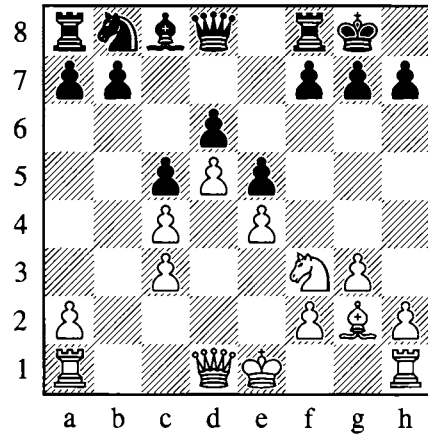
I do not like the unclear position after 8...♗xc3 9.♖c1 ♘a4 10.♗b1. In my opinion, the poor placement of the a4-knight might tell in the long run.

9.♖xd2 d6 10.♗h3 0-0 11.♗f2 e5 12.♙g2 ♖e7 13.0-0 f5

Black's position seems preferable due to the better pawn structure.

7...♗xc3 8.bxc3 d6 9.♙g2 e5 10.e4 0-0 11.♗f3

We have been following the game Kluger – Schneider, Eksjo 1977. Now I suggest the natural move:



11...f5N 12.exf5 ♙xf5 13.0-0 ♗d7 14.♗h4 g6

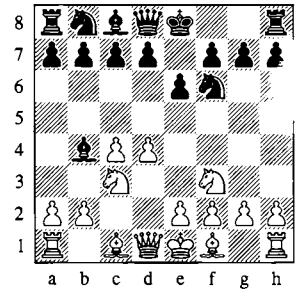
White suffers from a lack of active play, while the weakness of the doubled pawns might soon tell.

### Conclusion

This chapter dealt with 4.g3, and the first thing to note is that closely related lines can be reached after 4.♗f3 c5 5.g3, as will be covered shortly. By starting with 4.g3, White offers his opponent a little more freedom, and I decided to exploit that by giving two possible replies. Firstly, 4...♙xc3!?: avoids reaching the usual lines, and offers Black comfortable play after 5.bxc3 d6 6.♙g2 0-0 7.♗f3 ♘c6 8.0-0 e5!. Instead the main line is 4...c5 when the critical test is 5.♗f3. In this chapter we looked at 5.♙g2 and 5.d5, neither of which causes Black much trouble.

# Chapter 8

## Various 4th Moves



### 4. ♖f3

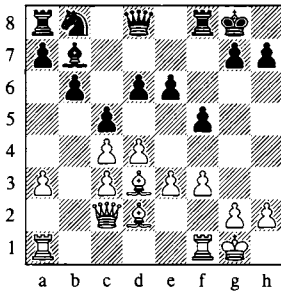
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♖f3

4...c5

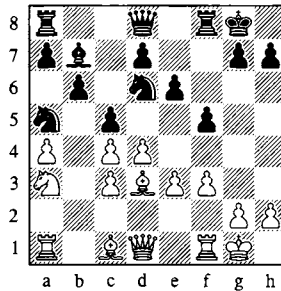
A) 5. ♖c2	110
B) 5. dxc5	111
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D) note to 10. ♘e1



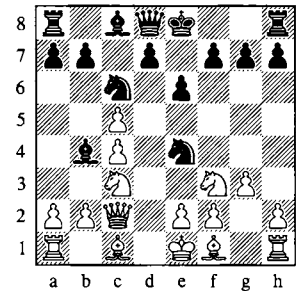
13... ♘c6!N

D) after 14. ♘a3



14... ♖e7!N

E3) after 7. ♖c2



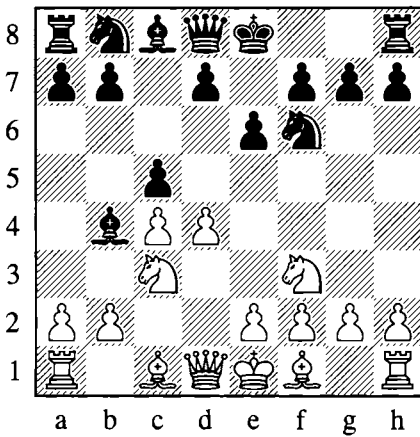
7... ♗xc3!N

**1.d4 2.f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 ♘b4 4.♞f3**

This move was first seen back in 1887(!), but it was mainly explored by the great players of the 1920s and 1930s: Alekhine, Euwe, Rubinstein and others. Developing the knight in this way keeps White's position quite flexible, and the dark-squared bishop can still be placed on g5 in the future. Nowadays this can be considered as an invitation to debate the Romanishin System – most White players prefer to enter it via this move order rather than with 4.g3.

**4...c5**

4...b6 is also highly topical, with a Nimzo/Queen's Indian hybrid, and moves such as 4...0-0 and 4...d5 are of course possible, the latter being a Ragozin. But I will recommend the text move, directly challenging the d4-pawn and keeping the game in pure Nimzo-Indian territory.



The options we will cover in this chapter are A) 5.♞c2, B) 5.dxc5, C) 5.d5, D) 5.a3 and E) 5.g3. The last move is by far the most important, and the analysis of it will continue into the next chapter as well.

There are three other significant moves, but each of them transposes to a separate variation. 5.♞b3 has been covered in variation C of

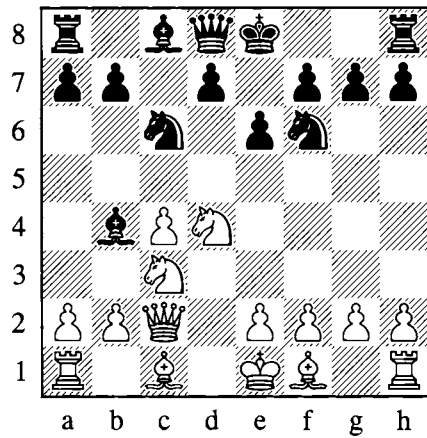
Chapter 2. 5.♞g5 is a harmless sideline of the Leningrad System – see the note on 5.♞f3 at the start of Chapter 4. And finally, 5.e3 0-0 is variation B of Chapter 10.

**A) 5.♞c2**

This leads to a harmless line of the Classical System with 4.♞c2 c5, where White responds with 5.♞f3 instead of the more critical 5.dxc5.

**5...cxd4 6.♞xd4 ♞c6**

White has to take care of the d4-knight, so it's obvious that the queen is misplaced on c2.



**7.♞xc6**

The modest 7.e3 0-0 8.♞e2 d5 9.♞xc6 bxc6 10.0-0 ♞e7 11.b3 e5 didn't pose Black any problems in Yakimenko – Popilski, Golden Sands 2014.

**7...dxc6 8.a3 ♞e7 9.♞f4 ♞a5!**

The ...e6-e5 advance will solve the problem of the c8-bishop. Black is already completely fine, and in the following game he was able to take over the initiative.

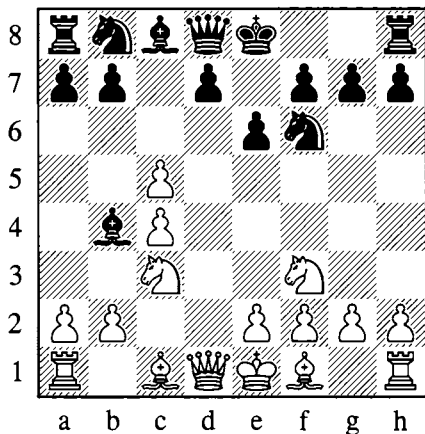
**10.e3?! ♞h5!**

Gaining the advantage of the bishop pair.

**11.♞d3 e5 12.♞g3 g6 13.♞e2 ♞xg3 14.hxg3 ♞e6**

Black was better in Fedoseev – Narayanan, Pune 2014.

### B) 5.dxc5



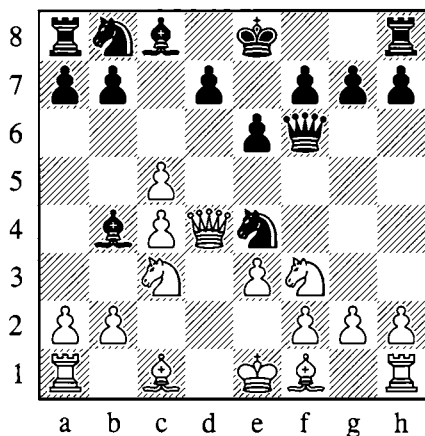
This offers comfortable play after:

#### 5...♟e4! 6.♞d4

Also harmless is 6.♙d2, as played in Marwitz – Kolesov, Germany 2003: 6...♙xc3N 7.♙xc3 ♟xc3 8.bxc3 ♟a6 9.g3 0–0 10.♙g2 ♟xc5 11.♟d4 ♞b8 White has to take care to equalize.

#### 6...♞f6 7.e3

7.♞xf6 gxf6 8.♙d2 ♙xc3 9.bxc3 ♟a6 gave Black comfortable play in Medvedev – Pantykin, Novokuznetsk 2009.



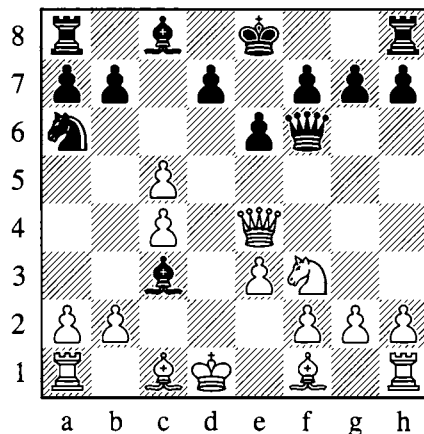
#### 7...♟a6!

It is too early for 7...♟xc3?!, as 8.♙d2! gives Black some problems to solve.

#### 8.♞xe4N

Inferior is 8.♙d2 ♙xc3 9.♙xc3 ♟xc3 10.bxc3 ♟xc5, and Black was obviously better in Ulanov – Molchanov, Togliatti 2014.

#### 8...♙xc3† 9.♟d1



#### 9...♙xb2!

Less convincing is 9...♟xc5 10.♞c2 ♙e5 11.♟xe5 ♞xe5 12.♙d2, when White's bishops may cause Black significant problems in the long run.

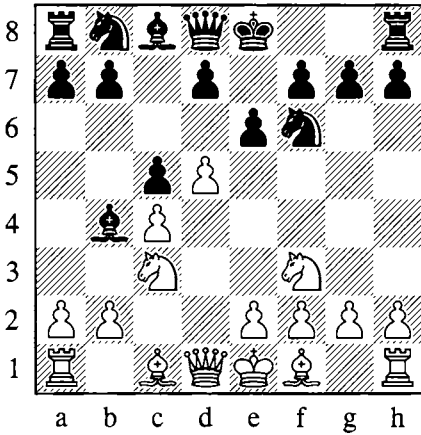
#### 10.♙xb2 ♞xb2 11.♞d4 ♞xd4† 12.exd4 b6!

Creating some breathing room for the bishop, while forcing the following exchange to the benefit of the rook on a8.

#### 13.cxb6 axb6 14.♟d2 ♙b7 15.♙e2 ♙e4=

Preventing ♞hb1. Both sides have a weak pawn in this endgame, and overall the chances are equal.

C) 5.d5



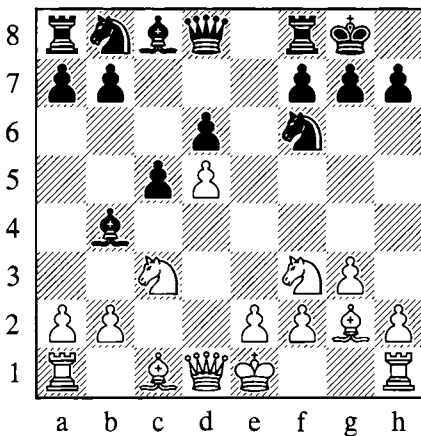
Gaining space does not seem to be effective in this situation – the d5-pawn becomes vulnerable when White cannot support it by e2-e4.

5...exd5 6.cxd5 d6 7.g3

7.♙g3 transposes to a line of the Leningrad System which was covered in variation B1 of Chapter 4.

7.e3 0–0 8.♙d3 will be covered via the 4.e3 move order – see variation B1 of Chapter 10.

7...0–0 8.♙g2



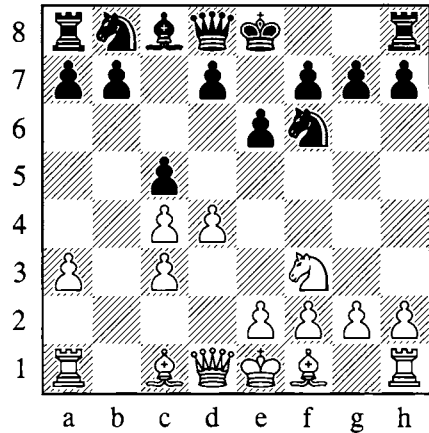
8...♗e4! 9.♙d2

9.♙c2 ♗f5 10.♗h4 ♗xc3 11.♗xf5 ♗xa2† 12.♙d2 ♗xd2† 13.♙xd2 ♗b4 14.♙c3 f6♯ doesn't offer White adequate compensation for the pawn.

9...♗xc3 10.bxc3 ♗d7

Black had excellent play in Fritz – Soelter, Lieme 2004, due to his control of the e4-outpost.

D) 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3



In comparison to the usual Sämisch System, White's active possibilities are limited – it's difficult for him to gain control over e4.

6...0–0

Since pinning the f6-knight isn't effective in this situation, there is no reason to reject this natural move.

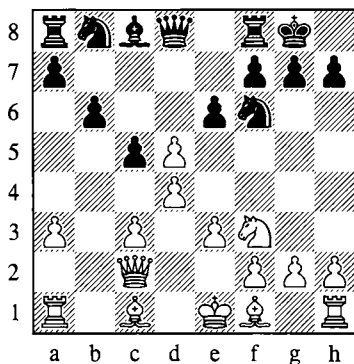
7.e3

It is amazing how one line can transpose to another in chess. Here is one more example:

7.♙c2 d5 8.e3

8.♙g5 is completely harmless after 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 dxc4 10.♙xc4 b6. This way of handling the position resembles the Classical System as covered later in the book. 11.e3 ♗a6 12.♙a4 ♗xf1 13.♙xf1 ♗bd7=

8...b6 9.cxd5



9...♙xd5

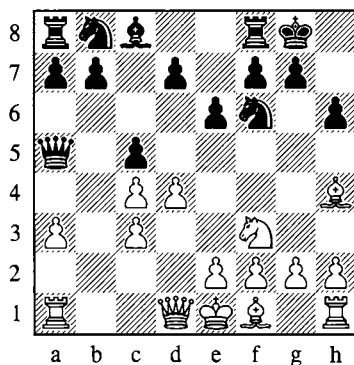
This suddenly takes the game into Classical paths – see variation B2 of Chapter 21, where this position arises after 4.♙c2 d5 5.cxd5 ♙xd5 6.e3 c5 7.a3 ♙xc3† 8.bxc3 0–0 9.♘f3.

Incidentally, 9...exd5!? 10.c4 cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♙b7 is also perfectly playable for Black.

Let's see why pinning the knight on f6 achieves nothing for White:

7.♙g5 h6 8.♙h4 ♙a5!

Exploiting the lack of harmony in White's camp.

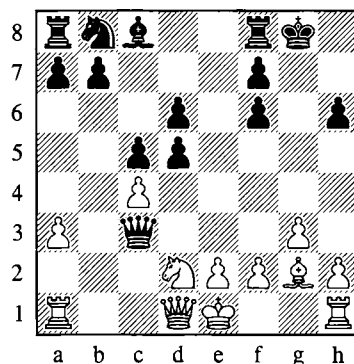


9.♙xf6?!

This pawn sacrifice is dubious, but it's the only way to fight for the initiative.

The passive 9.♙c2 is not in the spirit of the position: 9...♘e4 10.♙c1 d5 11.e3 cxd4N Black grabbed the a3-pawn in one game, but the text move is much easier: 12.♘xd4 ♘c6 13.cxd5 exd5 14.♙d3 ♙e8 15.0–0 ♙d7=

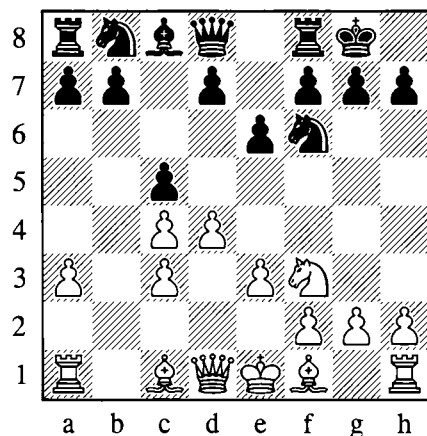
9...♙xc3† 10.♘d2 gxf6 11.d5 d6 12.g3 exd5 13.♙g2



This interesting position was reached in the game Ivanisevic – Kravtsov, Jerusalem 2015. White was trying to exploit the opponent's exposed kingside structure, but Black actually has no reason to deviate from the 'greedy' approach:

13...d4N 14.0–0 f5 15.♙b1 ♘c6 16.♙b3 ♙a5 17.e3 ♙e8†

The reduced material leaves White with insufficient attacking potential.



7...b6

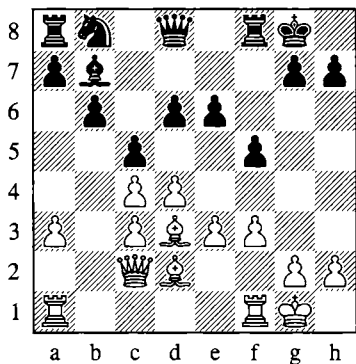
There is also nothing wrong with 7...d5, but I like the text move – it allows Black to keep control over the e4-square without letting White get rid of the weak c4-pawn.

**8.♔d3 ♘b7 9.0-0 ♖e4**

This theoretical position can be reached via various move orders. Practice proves that it is difficult for White to make the bishops work effectively.

**10.♖e1**

Also possible is 10.♖d2, but the immediate exchange of knights also doesn't bother Black: 10...♖xd2 11.♔xd2 f5 12.f3 d6 13.♖c2 (13.e4 fxe4 [13...f4!?] 14.fxe4 ♜xf1† 15.♖xf1 ♖c6 16.♖f2 ♖f6 offers Black a very comfortable endgame)

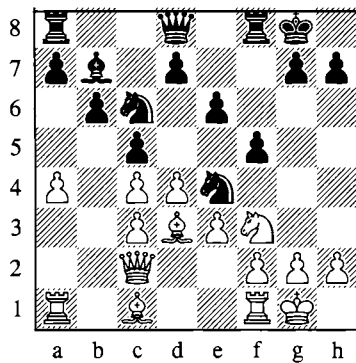


This was played in Orr – Joyce, Armagh 1994, and could be well met by: 13...♖c6!N 14.e4 f4 15.e5 h6 16.exd6 ♖xd6 With excellent play for Black.

**10.♖c2 f5 11.a4**

After 11.♖d2 ♖xd2 12.♔xd2 ♖c6 Black's chances were already preferable in Gevorgyan – Papin, Samara 2015.

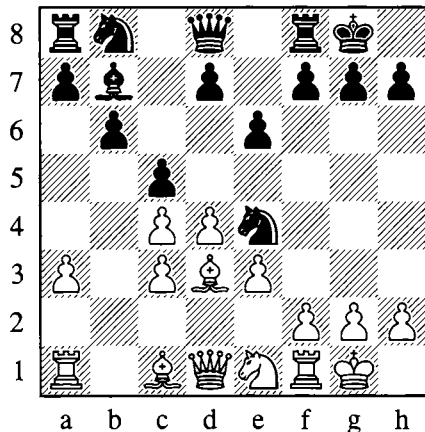
**11...♖c6**



**12.♖d2?!**

12.♔xe4N is better, but after 12...fxe4 13.♖d2 d5 Black has at least equal chances. 12...♖xd2 13.♔xd2 ♖a5 14.♖fe1 ♖f6=

Black had a better structure and the more harmonious position in Matinian – Bocharov, Voronezh 2015.



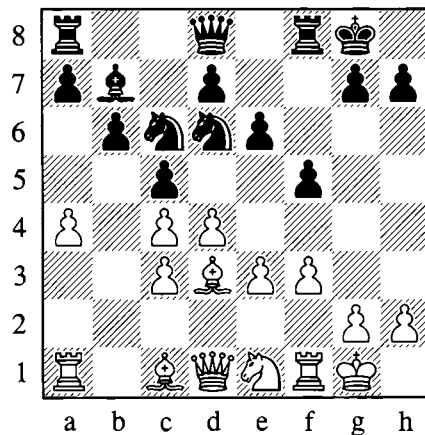
**10...f5!**

The same concept as in the lines above – White should not be allowed to push e3-e4!

**11.f3 ♖d6 12.a4**

After 12.♔e2 ♖e7 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♖b1 ♔c6 Black had a clear advantage due to his better pawn structure in Yurtaev – Timman, Yerevan (ol) 1996.

**12...♖c6**



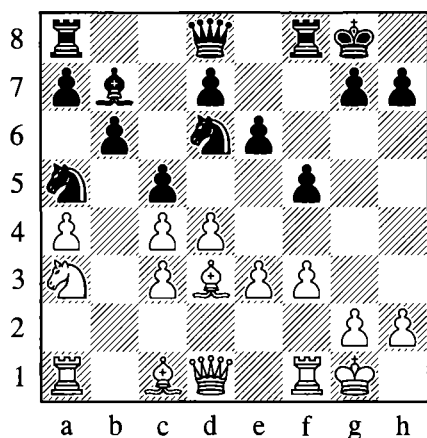
## 13.♟c2?!

White chooses the wrong way to handle the position – the c4-pawn isn't worth such measures.

Better was 13.dxc5 N bxc5 14.♟a3 ♟e5 15.♟xc5 ♜c7 16.♟xd6 ♜xd6 17.♟e2 ♜c7= when Black gets full compensation for the pawn, but not more.

## 13...♟a5 14.♟a3

This position arose in Lautier – Gelfand, Biel 1997, when Black's strongest continuation would have been:



## 14...♜e7!N 15.♜e2 e5!♠

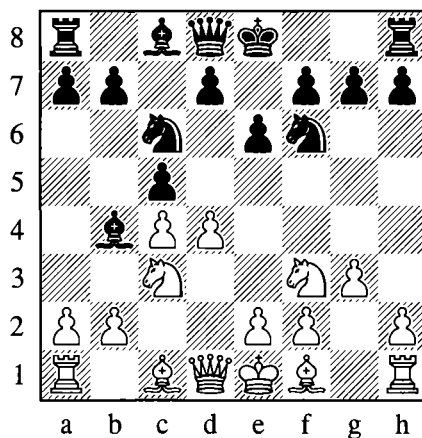
Securing a definite advantage.

## E) 5.g3

Finally we arrive at the main line, which can also be reached via 4.g3 c5 5.♟f3.

## 5...♟c6

This move is somewhat provocative – it looks like White is being invited to seize a lot of space with gain of tempo by pushing d4-d5. However, the pin on the c3-knight offers Black various tactical resources, so this idea is justified. Two more common moves are 5...cxd4 and 5...0-0, but after much analysis, I like what is happening after the knight move.



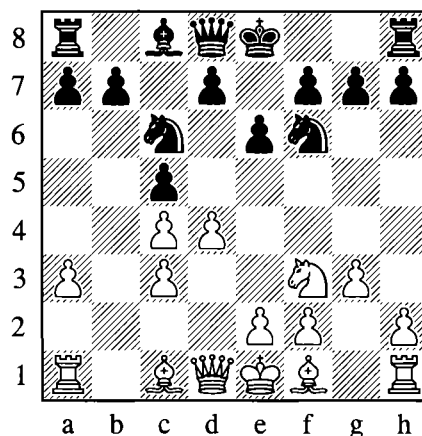
The lines we will consider in depth in this chapter are **E1) 6.a3?!**, **E2) 6.d5** and **E3) 6.dxc5**. The main line is 6.♟g2 and we will cover it in the next chapter.

6.♜d3?! runs into 6...cxd4 7.♟xd4 ♟e5, and after 8.♜c2 ♟xc4 9.♟g2 (9.♜b3 ♟xc3† 10.♜xc3 d5 11.♟g2 0-0♠) 9...0-0 10.0-0 d5 White did not have much for the missing pawn in Plastowez – Wiechert, Mannheim 1994.

## E1) 6.a3?!

This is too slow.

## 6...♟xc3† 7.bxc3

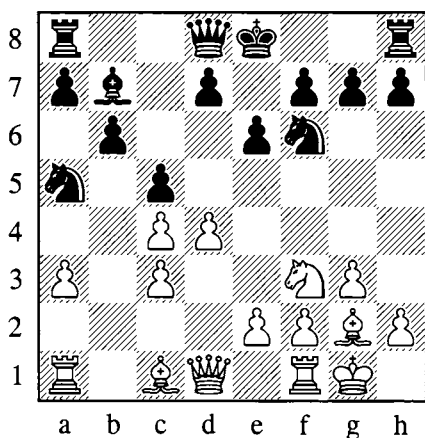


**7...b6**

It makes sense to neutralize the pressure along the long diagonal as soon as possible.

**8.♘g2 ♙b7 9.0-0**

9.♗e5 can even be met by: 9...♗xe5!?N (the simple 9...♗a5 is also fine) 10.♙xb7 ♗xc4 11.♙xa8 ♜xa8 12.0-0 ♞c6 Black's position seems preferable from the human point of view, since White's rooks are useless in the closed position that arises.

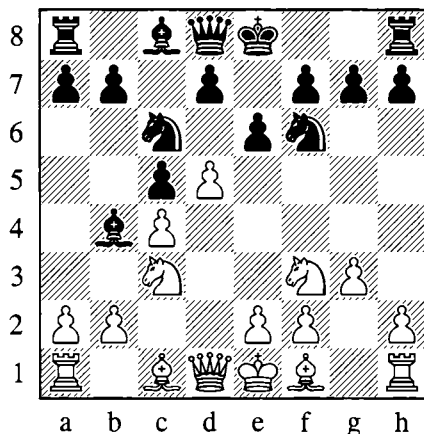
**9...♗a5****10.♙g5!?N**

This may be White's best attempt to justify his opening play, although it still doesn't inspire confidence in his set-up.

After 10.dxc5 bxc5 11.♙f4 ♗xc4♣ Black was obviously better in Starc – Morovic Fernandez, Pula 2000.

**10...♗xc4 11.♗e5 ♙xg2 12.♙xg2 ♗xe5  
13.dxe5 h6 14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.♞d6**

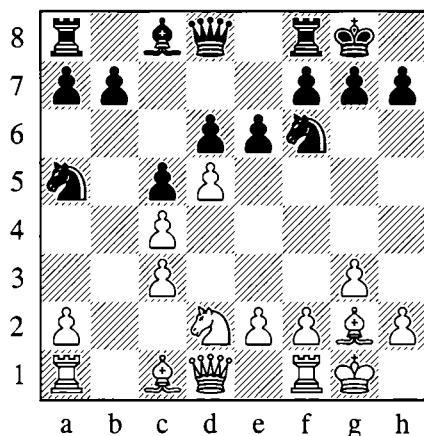
White has some compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but Black is the only one who can realistically fight for the advantage.

**E2) 6.d5**

Seizing space with gain of tempo is amongst White's most natural replies. However, closing the long diagonal helps Black to develop the queenside pieces and attack the c4-pawn.

**6...♙xc3† 7.bxc3 ♗a5 8.♗d2 0-0 9.♙g2 d6  
10.0-0**

After a series of obvious moves, Black now has to decide how to finish his development.

**10...b6!?**

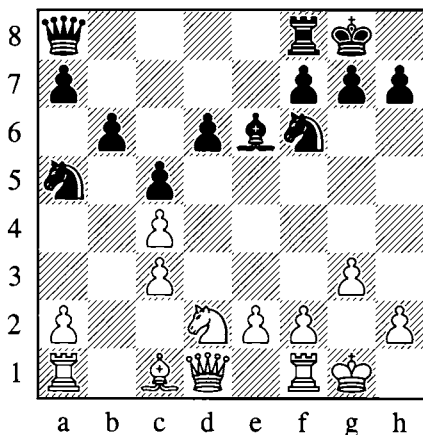
I like this concrete approach – White will not be given time to protect the c4-pawn.

10...♞e8 11.e4 b6 12.♞e1 ♙a6 13.♙f1 led to a long, strategic battle in Miladinovic – Short, Istanbul (ol) 2000.

**11.dxe6**

11.e4?! ♔a6 12.dxe6 fxe6 13.e5 dxe5  
14.♙xa8 ♚xa8♞ leads White to an inferior  
position.

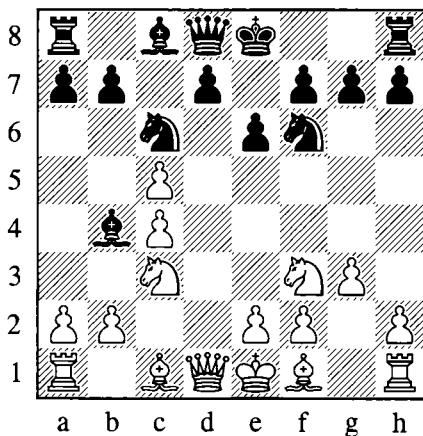
11...♙xc6 12.♙xa8 ♚xa8



13.f3 ♟xc4 14.♟xc4 ♙xc4♞

Black had an extra pawn plus long-term positional compensation for the exchange in Gulko – Kuzmin, Tashkent 1984. Black's minor pieces coordinate nicely, while it is not so clear what White should do with his rooks and bishop. The loss of the g2-bishop also means that White's king could be vulnerable in the long term.

E3) 6.dxc5



Releasing the pressure in the centre should be met with:

6...♟e4

I like this aggressive move. Since 7.♙g2 would simply drop material, White is obliged to waste a tempo to protect the knight.

7.♚c2

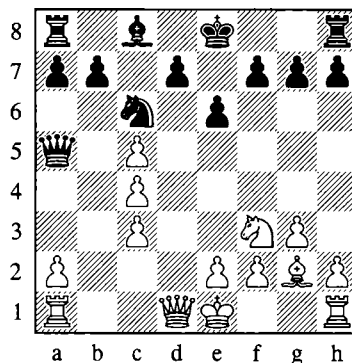
Clearly dubious is 7.♚d3?! as in Name – Jatoba de Oliveira Reis, Dois Irmaos 2008, in view of 7...♙xc3♠N 8.bxc3 ♟xc5 9.♚e3 b6 10.♙a3 d6 11.♙g2 ♙b7♞.

White's only other plausible continuation is:

7.♙d2 ♟xc3 8.♙xc3

8.bxc3 ♙xc5 9.♙g2 0-0 10.0-0 d6♞ simply leaves White with an ugly pawn structure.

8...♙xc3♠ 9.bxc3 ♚a5 10.♙g2



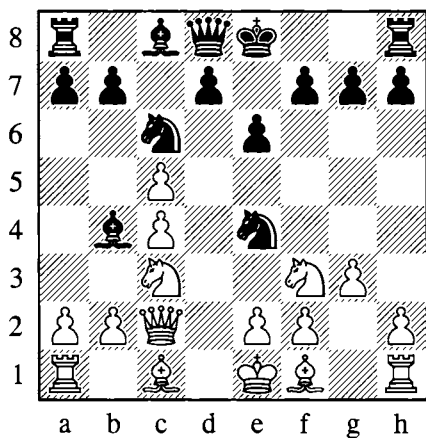
10...♚xc5!

The other capture would be a mistake: 10...♚xc3♠?! 11.♟d2 0-0 12.0-0 b6 13.e3 bxc5 14.♟e4 ♚xc4 15.♚d6 White has a powerful initiative, which more than compensates for the pawn.

11.♟d2 0-0 12.0-0 b6 13.♚a4 ♙b7=

Black had successfully neutralized the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal in Giorgadze – Novikov, Lvov 1986. Although the position is objectively equal, in a practical game it is White who will face the greater challenge not to end up in a bad endgame with a rotten queenside structure.

This position has been seen five times in practice. In all those games, the knights were exchanged on c3, seemingly automatically. I would like to suggest something better:



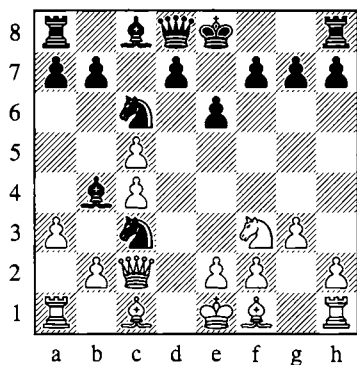
7...♙xc3!N

To understand the necessity for this improvement, we must consider the alternative.

7...♘xc3

In Farago – Dely, Budapest 1978, the obvious 8.bxc3 ♙xc5 led to a fine position for Black. However, I discovered a great new idea for White:

8.a3!!N



8...♘xe2†

8...♚xa5?! runs into 9.axb4! ♚xa1 10.bxc3 and White is clearly better, with ♙g2 and

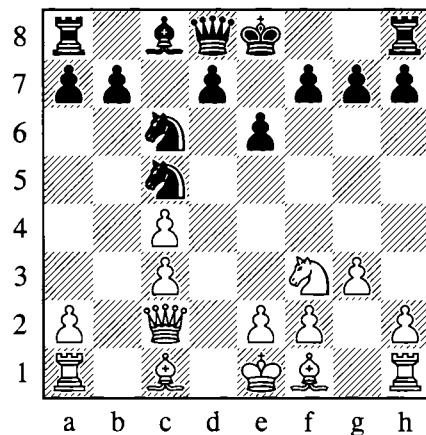
0–0 to follow shortly. Note how strong White's tripled pawns are!

8...♙xc5 is safer, but 9.♚xc3 0–0 10.b4 ♙e7 11.♙b2 ♙f6 12.♚d2± is pleasant for White. 9.axb4 ♘xc1 10.♚xc1 ♘xb4 11.♚c3 ♚f6 12.♚xf6 gxf6 13.♗d2 ♘a6 14.♘d4 ♘xc5 15.♙g2

White has at least enough compensation for two pawns; the poor bishop on c8 is going to have no moves for a long time.

8.bxc3 ♘xc5

Even though the knight is somewhat less effective in fighting for the dark squares, Black's position still looks quite attractive due to having stable squares for both knights and potential play along the c-file.

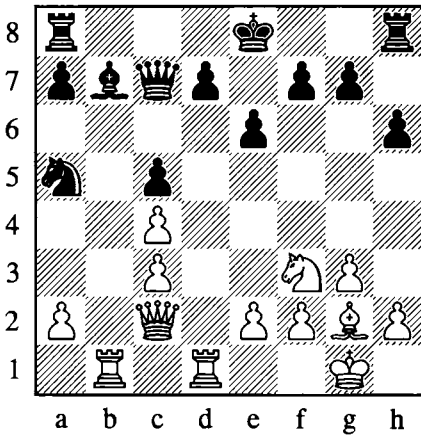


9.♙g2

9.♙e3 b6 10.♙xc5 bxc5 11.♙g2 ♙b7 12.♚b1 ♘a5 13.0–0 would transpose to the same position.

Black has better chances after: 9.♘d4 ♘e5 10.♙a3 d6 11.♚d1 ♙d7 12.♘b5 ♙xb5 13.cxb5 ♚c8±

9...b6 10.0–0 ♙b7 11.♙a3 ♘a5 12.♙xc5 bxc5 13.♚ab1 ♚c7 14.♚fd1 h6



By limiting White's active possibilities Black gets a comfortable position. I should mention that Black is not obliged to castle, as the king may feel safe in the centre, as in the following line:

15.♘d2 ♕xg2 16.♕xg2 ♖e7!?

Followed by ...♞ab8, intending to swap the rooks and put pressure on White's doubled pawns.

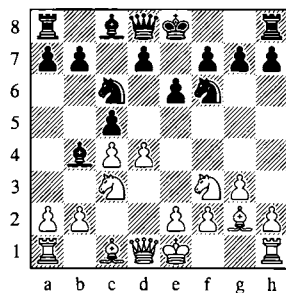
## Conclusion

4.♘f3 is one of the most ambitious ways of meeting the Nimzo. White keeps a flexible position and avoids blocking the dark-squared bishop, thus retaining the option of the annoying ♕g5 pin. I recommend the direct 4...c5, when the ambitious 5.d5 exd5 6.cxd5 illustrates the main drawback of having the knight on f3: it will be difficult for White to play e2-e4, which means that the d5-pawn will be vulnerable.

5.g3 is the most significant option, when I suggest the provocative 5...♘c6, putting pressure on the centre. Once again White has a choice, but in this chapter I looked at the relative sidelines, saving the main line for the next chapter. Black has a mostly comfortable ride in the variations examined here, although it's worth familiarizing yourself with the novelty on move 7 of variation E3, as the alternative could lead to problems if your opponent happens to be armed with the big improvement I found for White.

# Chapter 9

## Various 4th Moves



### 4. ♘f3 – Main Line

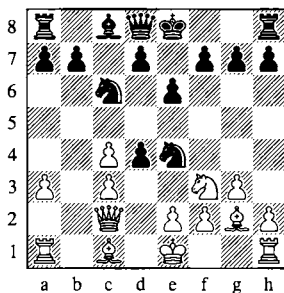
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♘f3 c5 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♙g2

6... ♘e4

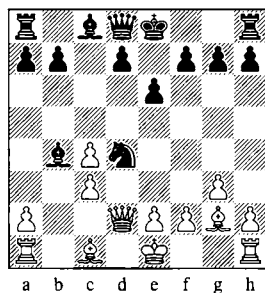
A) 7.d5	121
B) 7.♙c2 cxd4	122
B1) 8.a3!?	122
B2) 8.♘xd4	124
C) 7.♙d3 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♘e5! 10.♙c2 ♙e7	125
C1) 11.♙e4?!	126
C2) 11.♙a4?!	126
C3) 11.♙b3	127
D) 7.♙d2 ♘xd2 8.♙xd2 cxd4 9.♘xd4 0-0	129
D1) 10.♘c2	130
D2) 10.0-0 ♘e5 11.b3 a6	131
D21) 12.♘f3	133
D22) 12.♘c2	134
D23) 12.♙fd1	135
D24) 12.a3	137

B1) after 9.bxc3



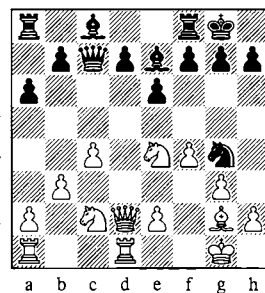
9... ♙a5!N

B2) after 10.♙d2



10... ♙c7!N

D22) after 15.♘e4?!



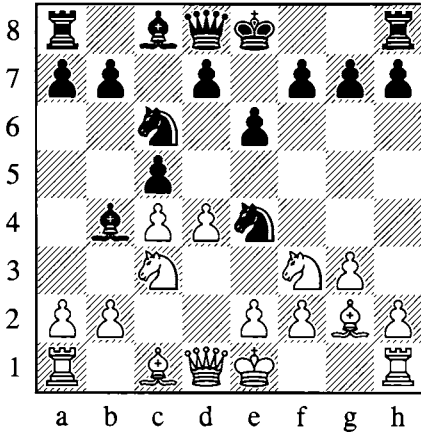
15...d5!N

1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 ♟b4 4.♟f3 c5 5.g3 ♟c6 6.♟g2

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is the critical test of our provocative knight development.

6...♟e4

This knight hop is by far the most common and consistent choice.

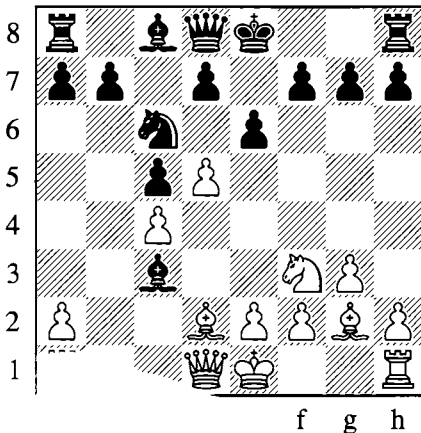


The options for White we will look at are A) 7.d5, B) 7.♟c2, C) 7.♟d3 and D) 7.♟d2.

A) 7.d5

This ambitious sacrifice has only ever been played in a couple of games, but it should not be ignored.

7...♟xc3 8.bxc3 ♟xc3† 9.♟d2



9...♟xa1!

On this occasion, the greedy approach is the best.

9...♟xd2† was played in Vargyas – Kovacs, Hungary 1994, when 10.♟xd2! N ♟e5 11.f4 ♟g4 12.♟f3 would have given White full compensation for the pawn due to his big space advantage.

10.♟xa1 ♟d4 11.♟xd4 cxd4 12.♟xd4 ♟b6!

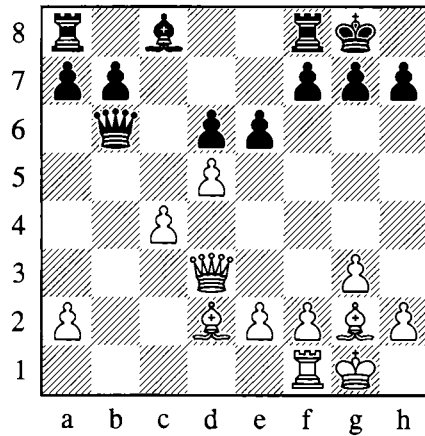
This accurate move forces the queen to leave the perfect d4-square.

Less precise is 12...0–0 13.♟c3 f6 14.d6! ♟b6 15.c5 ♟b1† 16.♟d2 ♟xa2† 17.♟e3, when Black's queenside pieces are paralysed.

13.♟d3

White is unable to capture on g7 because ...♟b1† leads to mate.

13...d6 14.0–0–0



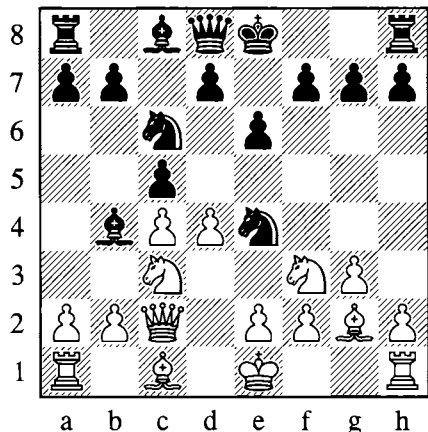
15.♟b1N

The over-optimistic 15.h4? e5 16.h5 h6 led White to a lost position in Zude – T. Kosintseva, Moscow 2005. The text move is a better try, but Black can retain the better chances by giving back the exchange:

15...♖a6! 16.dxe6 ♘xe6 17.♙xb7 ♖xa2  
18.♙xa8 ♙xc4

White still has some problems to solve.

B) 7.♖c2



This method of protecting the c3-knight is not without merits – the queen is comfortably placed on c2, and it attacks the knight on e4. However, the lack of control over the d4-square is an obvious drawback.

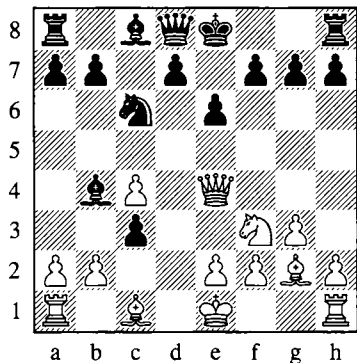
7...cxd4

Now White has two main options:

B1) 8.a3! and B2) 8.♘xd4.

A harmless sideline is:

8.♖xc4 dxc3



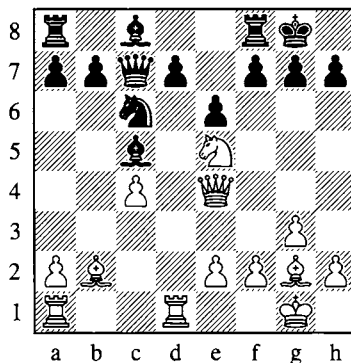
9.0–0N

9.b3? was played in Moebus – Miller, Augsburg 1997, when 9...d5N 10.cxd5 ♖xd5 would have left White a pawn down in a bad position.

9...0–0 10.♙d1 cxb2

If the drawing line below is not fully acceptable, I can also suggest 10...f5!? 11.♖c2 cxb2 12.♙xb2 ♙e7 with a complex battle.

11.♙xb2 ♙c5 12.♘e5 ♖c7



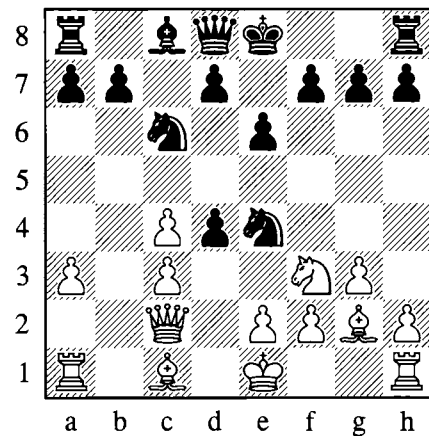
Black's position is very solid, so White has nothing better than forcing a draw by perpetual:

13.♖f4 d6 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.♙xg7 ♔xg7  
16.♖g5† ♔h8 17.♖f6† ♔g8=

B1) 8.a3!?

This original idea has been tried only once in practice, but it deserves attention.

8...♙xc3† 9.bxc3



**9...♙a5!N**

This tactical resource is an important novelty.

9...d5?! proved to be a mistake after 10.♘xd4 ♘d6 11.cxd5 ♘xd4 12.cxd4 exd5 13.0–0, when White was clearly better due to his preferable pawn structure and pair of bishops in Stoczek – Vavrak, Slovakia 2008.

**10.0–0 ♘xc3 11.e3**

Black is two pawns up at the moment but the c3-knight is in danger, so it is necessary to release the pressure at the cost of material.

**11...♙a4!**

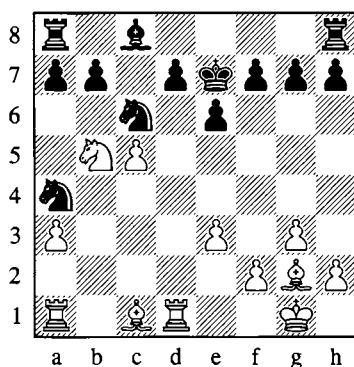
White is at a crossroads now.

**12.♙d3**

The alternative is:

**12.♙xa4 ♘xa4 13.♘xd4**

After 13.exd4 b6 14.d5 ♘a5 15.♘d4 ♙b7 16.♘b5 ♘xc4 17.♘c7† ♔e7 18.♘xa8 ♙xa8 19.♙e1 f6 Black's chances are preferable in this complex endgame.

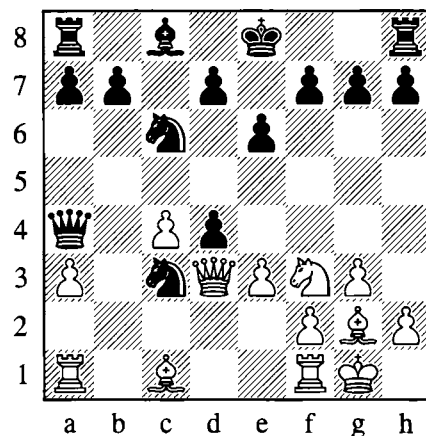
**13...♘b6! 14.c5 ♘a4 15.♘b5 ♔e7 16.♙d1****16...b6!**

Activating the light-squared bishop is Black's main task in the Romanishin System!

Instead, the greedy 16...♘xc5 17.a4!, followed by 18.♙a3, would offer White excellent play for two pawns.

**17.cxb6 axb6 18.♙d2 ♙b7†**

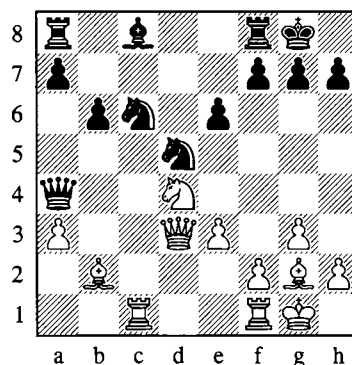
White is a pawn down and will have to fight for a draw.

**12...d5 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♙b2 0–0**

Black has two extra pawns, so it makes sense to get castled and force White to spend a tempo capturing on d4.

**15.♘xd4**

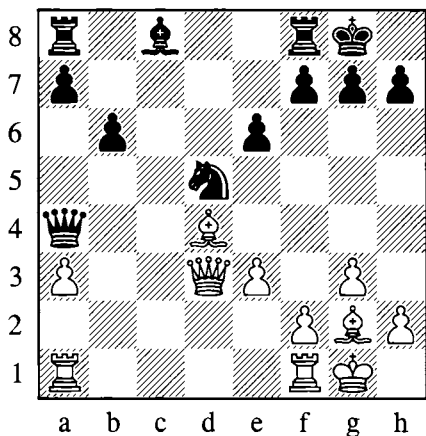
I also analysed: 15.♙ac1 b6 16.♘xd4



16...♙a6! (inaccurate is 16...♘xd4?! 17.♙c4! ♙e8 18.♙xd4 with a promising initiative) 17.♙d1 ♙xd1 18.♙fxd1 ♘xd4 19.♙xd4 ♙ac8 The endgame is absolutely safe for Black after 20.♙xc8 ♙xc8! – but not 20...♙xc8?!, when 21.♙a4! wins back the pawn while giving White a chance to press with the two bishops.

**15...♘xd4 16.♙xd4 b6**

Black is ready to complete his development, so White should force a draw by perpetual while he has the chance.

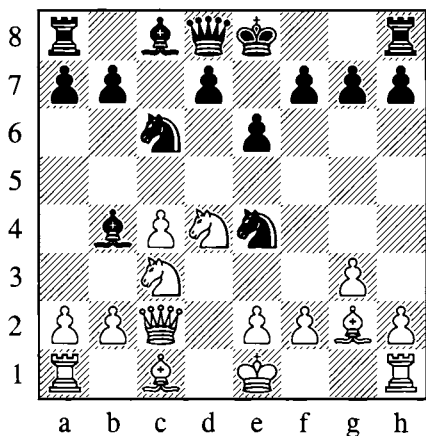


17. Qxd5

White should avoid: 17. Bfd1 Bb7 18. e4 Qf6

17... exd5 18. Qxg7 Qxg7 19. Qxd5 Qe6  
20. Qg5+ Qh8 21. Qf6+ Qg8=

B2) 8. Qxd4



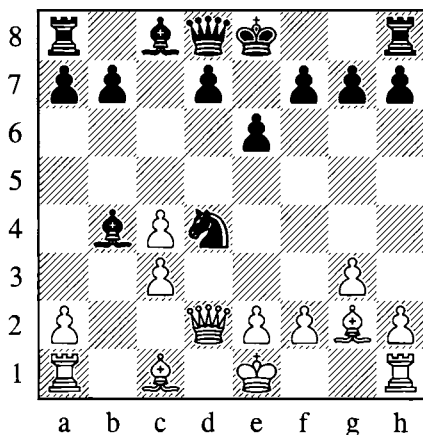
8... Qxc3 9. bxc3

Dubious is 9. Qxc6, as was played in Garcia Roman – Jedlicka, Pardubice 2015. Now the simple 9... dxc6N 10. bxc3 Qc5 11. 0-0 0-0

12. a4 e5 would offer Black a slight advantage due to his better pawn structure.

9... Qxd4 10. Qd2

Here I would like to bring a new idea to your attention:



10... Qc7?N

An interesting novelty, which has a tactical basis.

10... Qc2+ 11. Qxc2 Qc5 12. 0-0 0-0 occurred in Ubilava – Suba, La Roda 2013, when 13. Qd3!N Qc7 14. Bd1 Bd8 15. Qe3 Qxe3 16. Qxe3 Qxc4 17. Bd6 would have offered White interesting compensation for the pawn.

11. cxb4

11. Qxd4 e5 12. Qd3 Qc5 13. 0-0 d6 offers Black comfortable equality.

11... Qxc4 12. Bb1 0-0

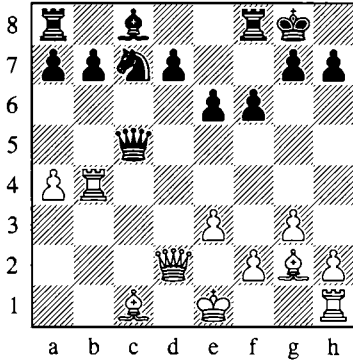
The pressure against the e2-pawn makes it hard for White to arrange castling.

13. Qb2

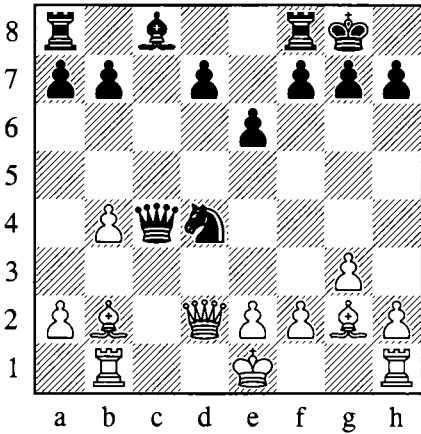
I doubt that White has anything better.

13. b5 gives Black a choice, with 13... f6! being the ambitious option. (If a draw is an acceptable result, then 13... d5 14. Qb2 Qxb5

virtually forces White to take a perpetual:  
 15.♙xg7 ♖xg7 16.♜g5† ♔h8 17.♜f6† ♖g8=  
 14.e3 ♘xb5 15.♙b4 ♜c5 16.a4 ♘c7



17.♙a3 ♜e8 18.0-0 ♘d5 19.♞c1 ♜a5  
 20.♞d4 ♜xd2 21.♞xd2 a5 White has some  
 compensation for the two pawns, but Black is  
 well and truly out of danger.



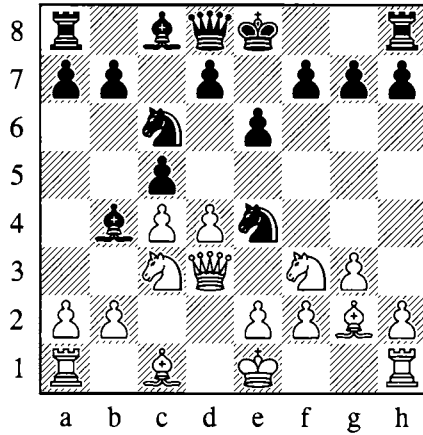
13...♜xb4!

A nice trick to force the queens off.

14.♜xb4 ♘c2† 15.♔d2 ♘xb4 16.♙xg7  
 ♖xg7 17.♞xb4 d5 18.♞c1 b6

The activity of White's rooks provides  
 sufficient compensation for the pawn, but  
 Black is by no means worse.

C) 7.♜d3



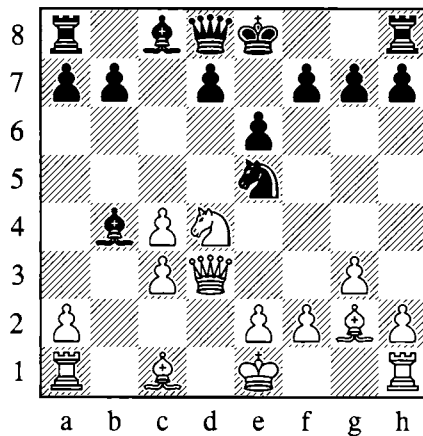
The advantage of putting the queen here  
 rather than on c2 is that the d4-square is  
 adequately defended. The drawback is that the  
 queen can be easily attacked by the opponent's  
 minor pieces, so White's dynamic play is  
 slowed down.

7...cxd4 8.♘xd4

8.♜xe4 has already been covered in the notes  
 to variation B above, via the 7.♜c2 move order.

8...♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♘e5!

As mentioned previously, Black now gains  
 an additional tempo for attacking White's  
 doubled pawns.

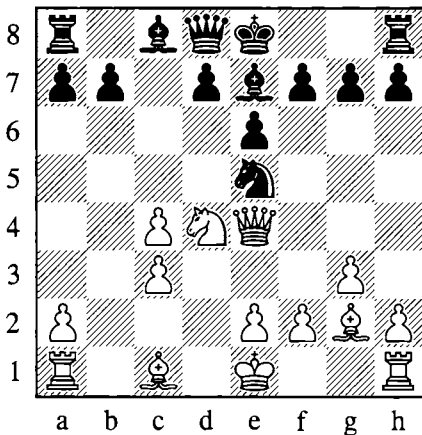


**10. ♖c2 ♙e7**

I consider this the most logical retreat. Another popular continuation here is 10...♙c5, but I prefer not to block the c-file without reason.

The main lines we will look at are C1) 11. ♖e4?!, C2) 11. ♖a4?! and C3) 11. ♖b3.

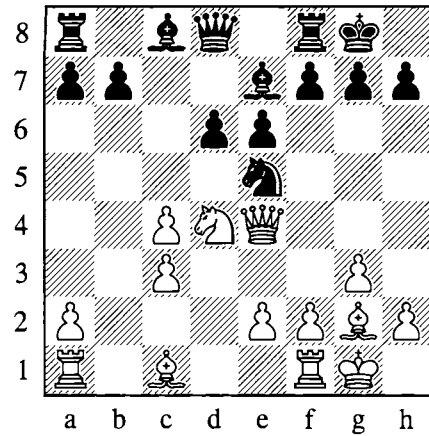
White's development advantage is rather symbolic here, so the following pawn sacrifice is not justified: 11.0-0?! ♗xc4 12. ♖d1 (12. ♖d3 ♖c7 13. ♖b1 a6) 12...0-0 ♞ Battaglini – Brunner, Mulhouse 2011.

**C1) 11. ♖e4?!**

The queen looks awkwardly placed here.

**11...d6!**

11...♗xc4 12. ♗xe6 d5 lets White off the hook by giving him two routes to equality: 13. ♗xg7+ (there is also 13. ♖xc4 ♙xe6 14. ♖b5+ ♖d7 15. ♖xd7 ♗xd7 16.0-0 with an equal endgame) 13...♗f8 14. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 15. ♙xd5 ♗b6 16. ♙h6 ♗xd5 17.0-0-0 ♗xc3 18. ♗f5+ ♗e8 19. ♗g7+ = With a perpetual.

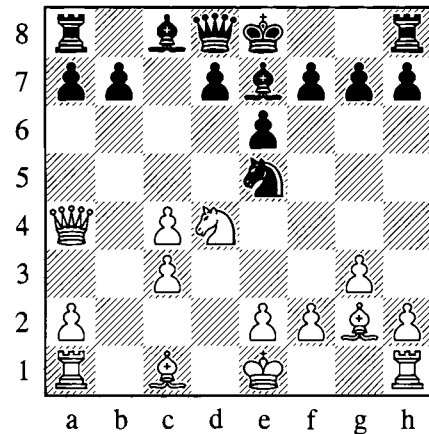
**12.0-0 0-0****13.c5**

I also examined: 13. ♖d1N ♗xc4 14. ♗f5 exf5 15. ♖xc4 ♙e6 16. ♖b4 ♖b8

White is trying to get rid of the weak pawn, but it runs into:

13...f5! 14. ♖f4 ♗g6 15. ♖e3 f4! 16. ♖e4 d5 17. ♖c2 ♙xc5

White had no compensation for the lost pawn in Vasilev – Suba, Collado Villalba 2003.

**C2) 11. ♖a4?!**

This is also unsuccessful.

**11...0-0 12. ♙f4**

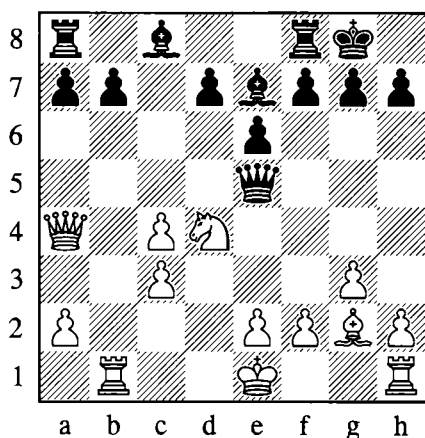
Hardly better is 12.♞b1 d6 13.♙xb7 ♞b8 14.♙e4 ♞xb1 15.♙xb1 ♞c7 as seen in Anton – Kolev, Albena 2011.

### 12...♞c7 13.♙xe5

This is the only way to relieve the pressure on the c4-pawn, but giving up the dark-squared bishop is a high price.

Even worse is 13.♘b5 ♞c5 14.♙e3?! ♞xc4 15.♞xc4 ♘xc4 16.♙xa7 d5, when White suffered from many weaknesses in Tikkanen – Zakhartsov, Olomouc 2007.

### 13...♞xe5 14.♞b1



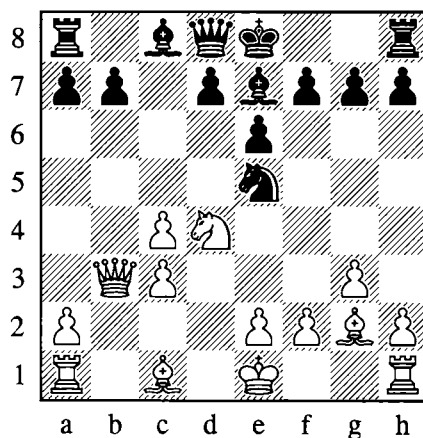
This was Guseva – Kashlinskaya, Skopje 2015. Now I suggest a natural novelty:

### 14...a6N 15.0–0 ♞b8 16.♞fd1 b6

Black consolidates a small but long-lasting positional advantage.

### C3) 11...♞b3

This is clearly the most harmonious way to protect the pawn, and it has been the most popular choice by far.



### 11...0–0

The somewhat slow 11...a6?! allows White to apply pressure along the b-file: 12.♙f4 ♞c7 (12...d6 13.c5 ♞c7 14.cxd6 ♙xd6 15.0–0±) 13.♘f3 f6 14.♘xe5 fxe5 15.♙e3 ♙c5 16.♙xc5 ♞xc5 17.♞b4± Sachdev – Georgiadis, Rijeka 2008.

### 12.♙f4

Chasing the knight away with 12.f4?! isn't in the spirit of White's system, as it closes the path for his dark-squared bishop. In the following game Black got the upper hand quite soon: 12...♘c6 13.♙e3 ♞c7 14.♘b5 ♞b8 15.c5 b6 16.cxb6 axb6 Stamenkovic – Mareco, Campinas 2011.

There is no independent value in 12.0–0 ♞c7, when White has nothing better than 13.♙f4.

### 12...♞c7!

Stepping into a pin looks somewhat provocative, but Black can break it at any moment.

12...d6?! would allow White to get rid of one of his weak pawns and open up the d-file: 13.c5! dxc5 14.♙xe5 cxd4 15.0–0±

### 13.0–0

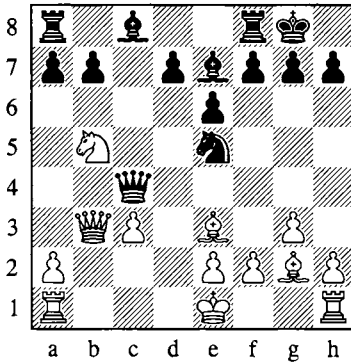
A natural-looking alternative is: 13.♘b5

This was played in Camarena Gimenez – Gonzalez Garcia, Benidorm 2008. I suggest a natural improvement:

13...♖c5!N

Unpinning the knight, so White is obliged to force matters:

14.♙e3 ♗xc4



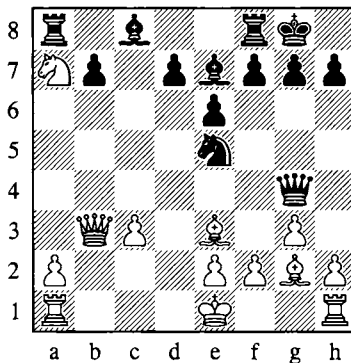
15.♘xa7

The alternative is: 15.♙d4 ♗xb3 16.axb3 ♘c6 17.♙b6 d5! (I do not like the following materialistic approach: 17...a6 18.0–0 d5 19.e4, and White gets sufficient compensation) 18.0–0 ♙d7 19.♘xa7 White regains the pawn, but it is Black who gets a minimal edge after 19...♘xa7 20.♙xa7 ♙f6 21.♙d4 ♙xd4 22.cxd4 ♙b5 23.♙f3 ♗fc8.

The text move appears tempting, but Black has a nice way to keep the dynamic character of play:

15...♗g4!

Instead after 15...d5 the prosaic 16.f4 ♗xb3 17.axb3 ♘g4 18.♙b6 ♙d7 19.0–0 offers White a safe position with chances for a small edge.



16.h3 ♗f5

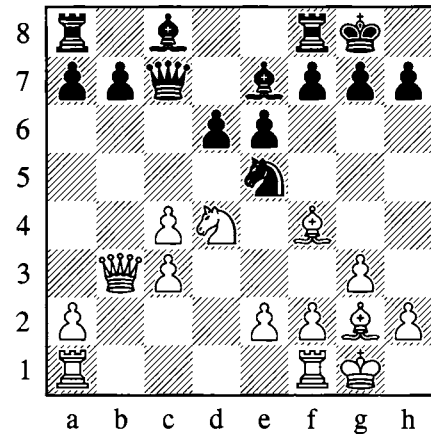
A decent alternative is: 16...♗h5!? 17.♘xc8 ♗axc8 18.♙xb7 ♗c7 19.♙g2 ♗fc8 20.♗c1 d5

17.♘xc8 ♗axc8 18.♙xb7 ♗c7 19.♙a6 ♙c5 20.♙xc5 ♗xc5

White has an extra pawn but his king is stuck in the centre, while most of his pieces are uncoordinated. I definitely prefer Black's chances.

13...d6

It is inadvisable to keep the e5-knight pinned for longer than necessary: 13...a6?! 14.♘f3! ♘xf3† (preferable was 14...d6 15.♘xe5 dxe5 16.♙e3± but White's pressure is annoying here as well) 15.♙xf3 e5 16.♙e3 ♙c5 17.♙xc5 ♗xc5 18.♗fd1 ♗c7 19.♗b4 White was clearly better in Gulko – Balashov, Tallinn 1983.



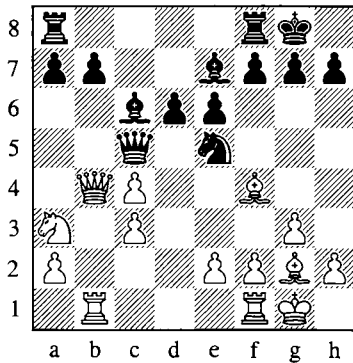
14.♘b5 ♗c5

A drawish endgame would arise after 14...♗xc4 15.♙xe5 ♗xb3 16.axb3 dxe5 17.♘xa7 f5 18.♘c6 ♗xa1 19.♘xe7† ♘f7 20.♗xa1 ♘xe7, but why should we exchange White's main weakness?

15.♙e3

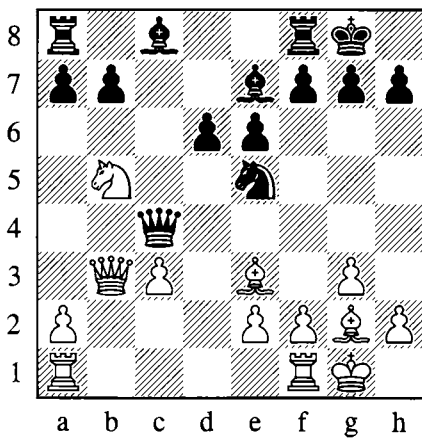
15.♘a3?! would obviously be an awkward way to protect the pawn. 15...♙d7 16.♗ab1 ♙c6 17.♗b4 occurred in Jianu – Macak,

Plovdiv 2008. Now the best way to take advantage of the poor placement of the a3-knight is:



17...♙xb4!N 18.cxb4 a5 19.b5 ♗xg2 20.♕xg2 ♜fc8. White will have trouble holding his position together in this endgame.

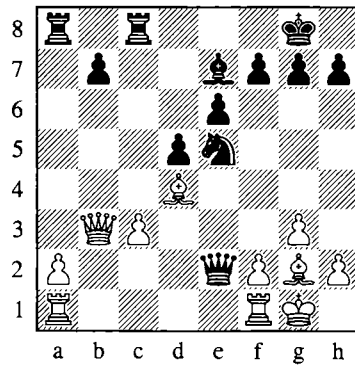
15...♙xc4



16.f4!N

This is the best chance to make White's position work.

The greedy 16.♖xa7?! only invites fresh trouble. 16...d5 17.♗d4 ♙xe2 18.♖xc8 ♜fxc8

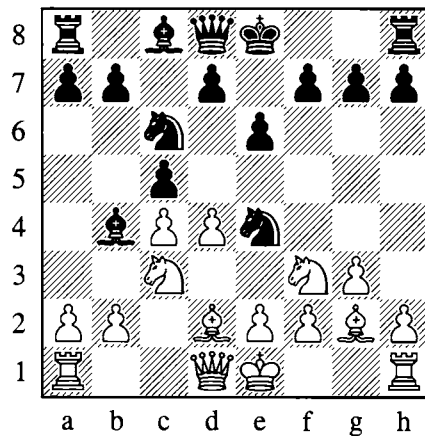


19.♙xb7?! (19.♜fe1 ♖f3+ 20.♗xf3 ♙xf3 21.♙xb7 ♗f6 leaves White with obvious weaknesses too, but it was the lesser evil) 19...♖c6. White's position was on the verge of collapse in Moiseenko – V. Gaprindashvili, Kocaeli 2002.

16...a6 17.♖xd6 ♙xb3 18.axb3 ♗xd6 19.fxe5 ♗xe5

White has some compensation for the pawn due to the undeveloped bishop on c8. Still, Black's position is completely safe.

D) 7.♗d2



The most common choice, which can deservedly be considered the main line.

7...♖xd2

Liquidating the powerful dark-squared bishop is an indisputable achievement for Black in the Romanishin System!

The alternative line 7...♗xc3 8.bxc3 0-0 offers White a lot of dynamic play, which fully compensates for the queenside pawn weaknesses.

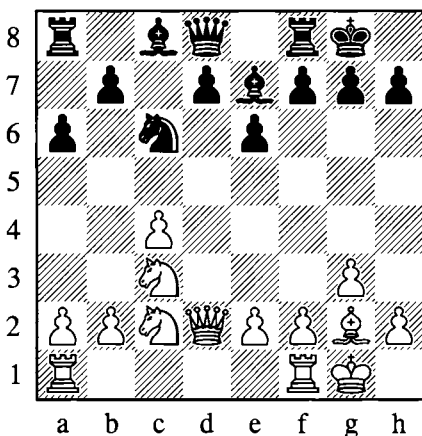
### 8.♖xd2 cxd4 9.♘xd4 0-0

We have reached the key position of the 5...♘c6 variation. Black has the bishop pair and is aiming to solve the problem of the passive c8-bishop. In turn, White will try to apply pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal and the d-file in order to disrupt the opponent's plans.

We will consider **D1)** 10.♘c2 ♗e7 11.0-0 a6

Avoiding the pin with 10.a3 ♗e7 11.0-0 does not have independent value: 11...♘e5 12.b3 (12.♖f4 ♘xc4 13.♘xe6 fxe6 14.♖xc4 d5= is toothless) 12...a6 and we have transposed to variation D24 below.

### D1) 10.♘c2 ♗e7 11.0-0 a6



White's set-up is rather harmless, but Black still needs to find the right way to get organized. The last move prepares to put the

queen on c7 without fear of harassment from the enemy knight.

### 12.♖fd1

The over-ambitious 12.♘e4 ♖c7 13.c5?! doesn't really prevent Black from completing his development: 13...b6 14.b4 ♖b8 15.♖fc1 bxc5 16.bxc5 ♘e5

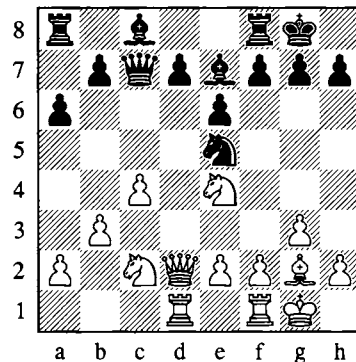
White might also consider:

### 12.♖ad1N ♖c7

Although White's last move was a novelty, this position has been reached via transposition in a few games.

### 13.♘e4 ♘e5 14.b3

Considering that White has committed his queen's rook to d1 rather than c1, it makes sense for Black to play actively on the queenside, as in the following game:

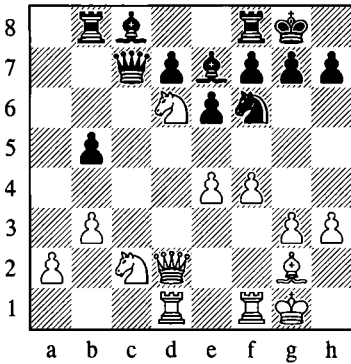


### 14...♖b8! 15.f4 ♘g4 16.h3

16.♗f3 ♘f6 is similar, but Black might also provoke complications with 16...f5!.

### 16...♘f6 17.♘d6 b5! 18.cxb5 axb5 19.e4

This position was reached in Rashkovsky – Khalifman, Minsk 1985. Black has several decent moves, but perhaps the clearest way to secure at least equal chances is:



19...♟d5?N 20.♟xb5

20.exd5 ♖xd6 is no problem, and 20.♟xc8 ♜fxc8 also gives Black the most comfortable side of equality.

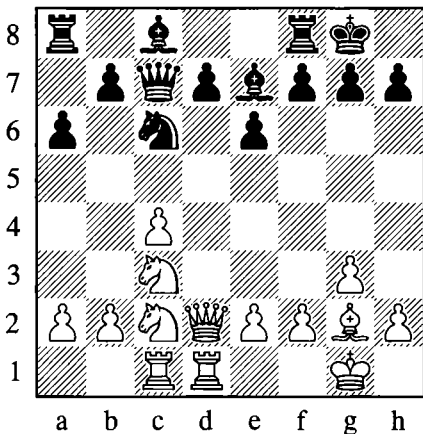
20...♞xb5 21.exd5 ♖a7† 22.♟d4 ♙c5 23.♞h2 ♙xd4 24.♞xd4 ♖xa2

The position is close to equal, but Black has some chances to press against the weak b-pawn.

12...♞c7 13.♞ac1

13.♟e4 ♟e5 14.b3 d6 15.♞ac1 ♞d8 was equal in Potapov – Platonov, Orel 1996.

This position was reached in Farago – Suba, Baile Herculane 1982. At this point it looks good for Black to play:

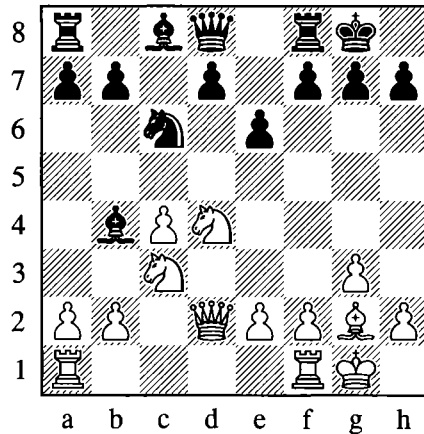


13...d6N 14.♟e3 ♟e5 15.f4 ♟d7 16.♟e4 ♞d8

I do not see any reason why Black should be worse here.

## D2) 10.0–0

This is the main line, keeping different options open for the knight on d4. After careful consideration, I believe Black's most accurate continuation is:



10...♟e5

Black is aiming to remove all the pieces from the long diagonal, so it makes sense to start with the knight and force White to take care of the hanging c4-pawn.

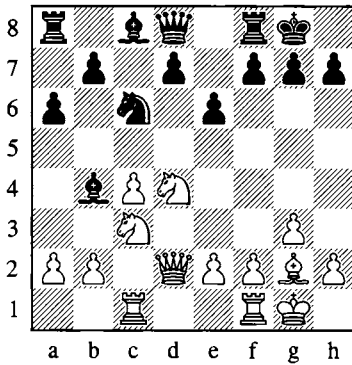
My first intention was:

10...a6

Preparing to put the queen on c7, as in variation D1 above. However, the fact that White has not yet retreated his knight to c2 yields him additional tactical resources.

11.♞ac1!

11.♟c2 ♙e7 transposes to variation D1 above, and 11.♞ad1N ♖c7 12.♟c2 ♙e7 converts to 12.♞ad1N ♖c7 in the notes to it. The text move is more problematic, as the following lines demonstrate.



11...d5!N

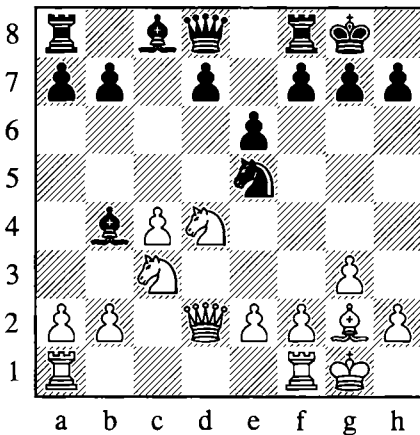
After 11...b8 12.f3d1± Black had trouble completing development in Moiseenko – Shkapenko, Warsaw 2006.

11...c7N transposes to a few games; after 12.a3 e7 13.f3d1!N Black is under pressure, since 13...d5 can be strongly met by 14.c5!.

The text move is a typical device to provoke b2-b3, but it can be strongly met with:

12.f4! dxc4 13.dxe6 fxe6 14.fxc4 e7 15.f3b3 b8 16.f3d1 b5 17.e3±

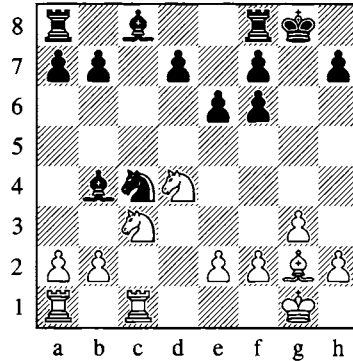
Black is under unpleasant pressure.



11.b3

A consistent way to protect the pawn, but it has an obvious drawback – it exposes the dark squares. However, it is still the best choice.

I have also examined 11.f4!N, which can be compared with the note above, but the absence of the moves ...a6 and aac1 helps Black. The most convincing way to equalize is to enter an endgame: 11...f6! 12.fxf6 gxf6 Doubling the opponent's f-pawns isn't a real achievement for White, and the c4-pawn cannot be defended. Play might continue: 13.f3c1 dxc4



14.d5 (after 14.d4 d5 15.fxf6+ g7 16.b3 d6 17.dh5+ h6 only Black can be better) 14...b6 15.a4 The activity of his pieces gives White reasonable compensation for the pawn, but after 15...d5 16.e4 dxe4 17.dxe4 d5 18.ed6 a6 Black is absolutely fine.

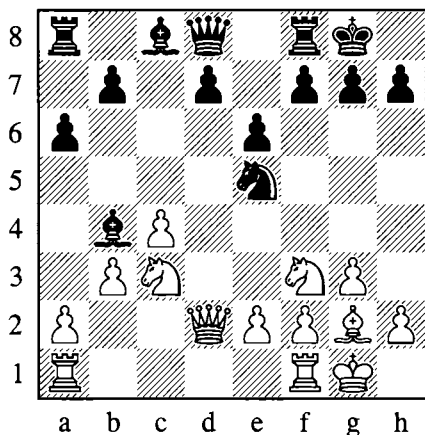
11...a6

Taking control over the b5-square is usually necessary when playing a Hedgehog structure.

I like the text move more than 11...a5 12.f3c1 e3, as was played in Ivanchuk – Bruzon Batista, Havana 2014, in view of 13.f3d1!N a6 14.d4 dxc4 15.fxa5 dxa5 16.d2 e7 17.d6 b8 18.dxd7 e7 19.f3d7, reaching an endgame where White can exert pressure without any risk.

White has a wide choice of continuations; we will consider D21) 12.f3, D22) 12.d2, D23) 12.f3d1 and D24) 12.a3.

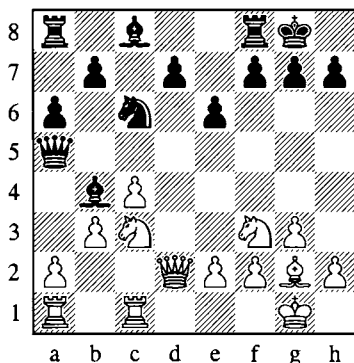
D21) 12.♟f3



This has been seen only once in practice, but it's a genuine attempt to fight for an opening advantage. I suggest the simple:

12...♟f3†N

12...♞a5 13.♞fc1 ♟c6 was seen in Grischuk – Ivanchuk, Sochi 2008, when White could have exploited the vulnerable placement of Black's pieces by means of:



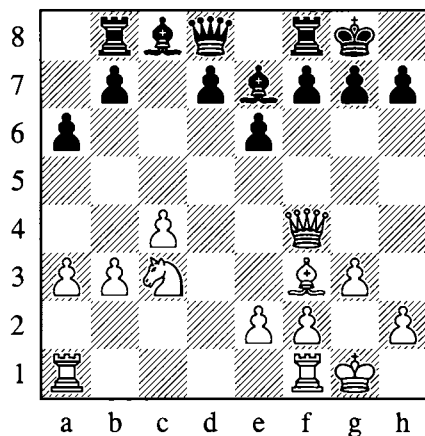
14.♟e1!N ♟e7 (14...d5 15.cxd5 exd5 16.a3! ♟xa3 17.♞c2 gives White a dangerous initiative) 15.♟d3 d6 (15...♞c7 16.c5± 16.♞ab1 ♟d7 17.b4±

13.♟xf3 ♞b8

As usual, solving the problem of the c8-bishop is Black's main task.

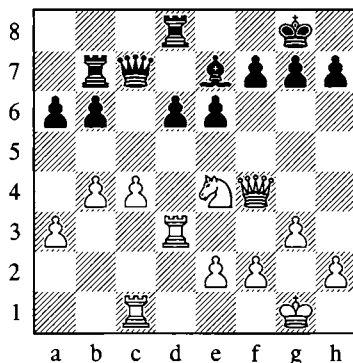
14.a3 ♟e7 15.♞f4

15.♟e4 d6 16.♞fd1 ♞c7= is comfortable for Black.



15...d6 16.♞fd1 ♞c7 17.♞ac1 b6 18.♟e4

After 18.b4 ♟b7 19.♟xb7 ♞xb7 20.♟e4 ♞d8 21.♞d3, trying to put some pressure on the d6-pawn, Black can simplify matters by means of:

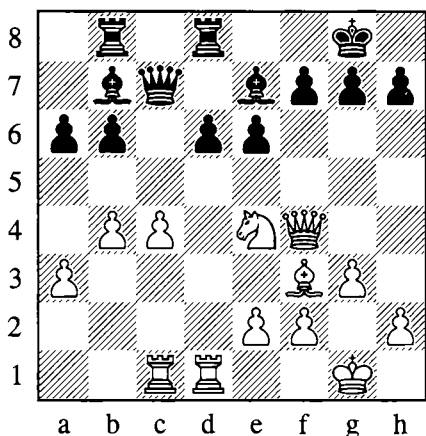


21...a5! 22.♞cd1 axb4 23.axb4 d5 24.♞xc7 ♞xc7 25.cxd5 ♞xd5 26.♞xd5 exd5 27.♞xd5 ♞c4 28.♞e5 ♟f8 29.b5 ♞b4= The activity of Black's pieces fully compensates for the missing pawn.

18...♞d8 19.b4 ♟b7

If the b8-rook was on c8, we could end the line here and conclude that Black has no problems. As things stand, we need to

check the following attempt to exploit the undefended queen:

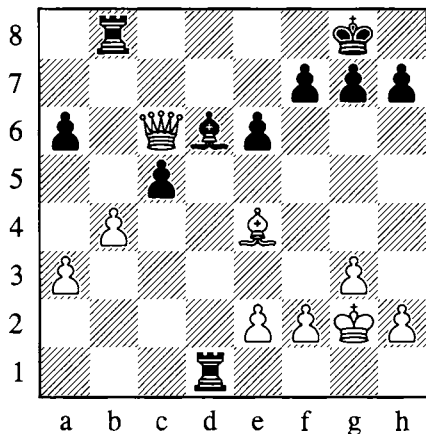


20.c5! ♙xe4 21.♙xe4 bxc5 22.♞xc5

22.bxc5? ♚a5! leads to the loss of a pawn for White, since 23.cxd6? blunders the exchange: 23...♙g5+–

22...dxc5 23.♞xc7 ♜xd1† 24.♚g2 ♙d6 25.♞c6

Despite having two rooks for a queen, Black's lack of coordination means that he still has to be slightly careful.



25...♞d4!

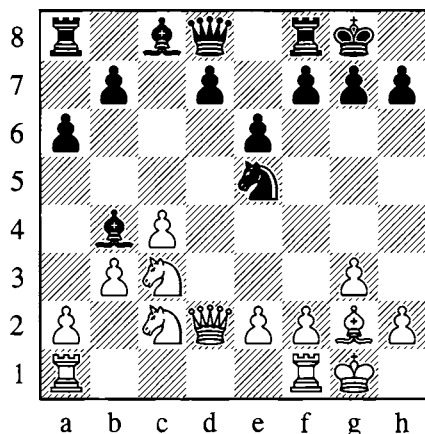
25...cxb4 26.♙xh7† ♚f8 27.♙d3 ♞d8 28.axb4 ♙xb4 29.♞a4! ♞1xd3 30.exd3 a5

reaches an endgame where White has some practical winning chances.

26.bxc5 ♙xc5 27.♙xh7† ♚xh7 28.♞xc5 ♞d2=

The activity of Black's rooks makes his position safe.

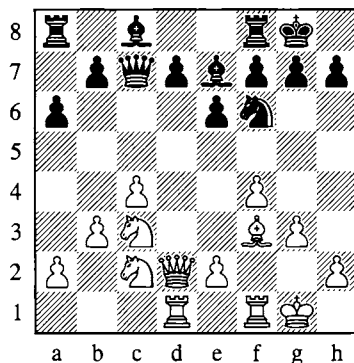
D22) 12.♘c2



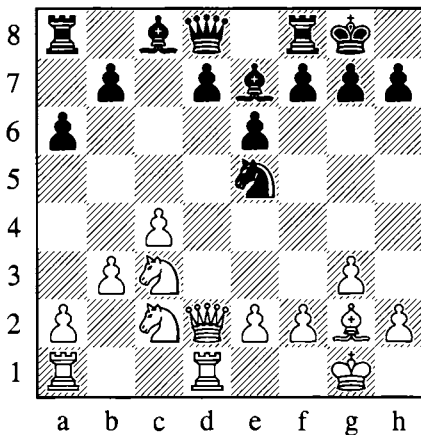
White can also push away the opponent's bishop in this way, but the c2-knight is placed quite passively, so Black shouldn't face serious problems.

12...♙e7 13.♞fd1

White can also try playing on the kingside with: 13.♞ad1 ♚c7 14.f4!N (14.♘e4 transposes to Rashkovsky – Khalifman, as referenced in the note to White's 12th move in variation D1) 14...♘g4 15.♙f3 ♘f6



16.g4!N (16.e4 d6 was roughly equal in Vorwerk – Wassilieff, email 2013; in general, I don't think Black has much to fear when White blocks the long diagonal for his bishop) 16...♟b8 17.g5 ♖e8∞ We have reached a double-edged position. White has gained some space and Black is temporarily passive; on the other hand, Black is solid on the kingside and he can look for ways to open the position and eventually exploit the holes in White's position, especially on the dark squares.



13...♞c7 14.f4

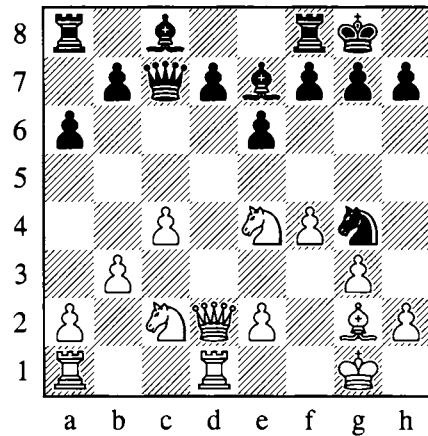
It looks odd to play this after moving the rook away from the f-file, but Mamedyarov must have felt it would be useful to keep the second rook on the queenside to keep Black's counterplay in check.

14.♞ac1 has been played a few times; after 14...♟b8 we reach a position covered in the note to White's 14th move in variation D23 below.

14...♞g4 15.♞e4?!

More to the point was 15.♞f3N ♞f6 16.e4 d6, but Black is by no means worse here.

We have been following the game Mamedyarov – Dominguez Perez, Huai'an (rapid) 2016. Now Black could have refuted his opponent's artificial strategy by means of:



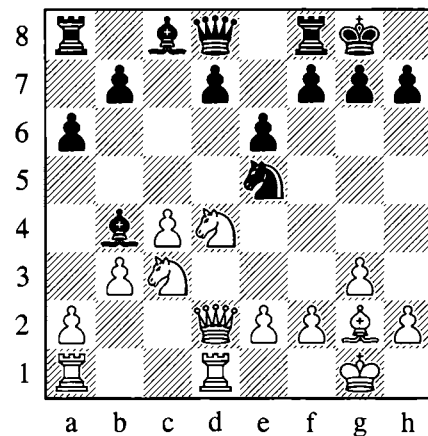
15...d5!N 16.cxd5 exd5 17.♞c3 ♜c5† 18.♞d4

Liquidating into an endgame after 18.e3 ♞xe3 19.♞xe3 d4 20.♞ed5 dxc3† 21.♞h1 cxd2 22.♞xc7 ♞a7 23.♞xd2 b6 doesn't fully solve White's problems either.

18...♞f6 19.♞h1 ♞d8 20.♞ac1 ♞d6

White suffers from the exposed dark squares around the king.

D23) 12.♟fd1



White can also ignore the pin for a while, but it doesn't look challenging.

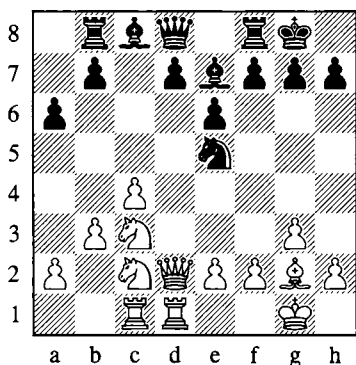
12...♟b8

Black has preferred 12...♖a5 in a few games, but I don't fully trust the early development of the queen, as a2-a3 tactics will be in the air.

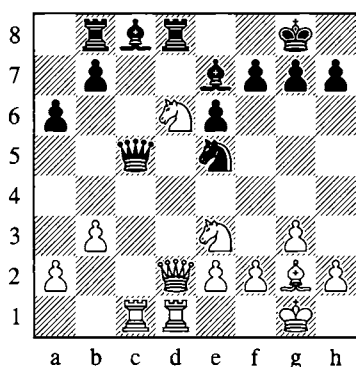
The text move seems safer: Black gets on with his main strategic plan of neutralizing the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal.

13.♘c2 ♙e7 14.♘e4

14.♙ac1 is a logical alternative. Black's soundest continuation is:

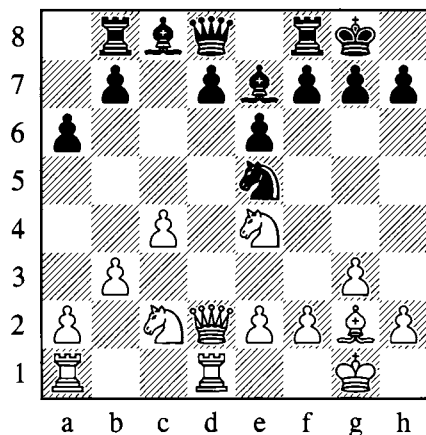


14...♗c7!N (15...b5 is slightly premature, and 15.♗e3! left Black with some coordination problems in Sandipan – Bindrich, Gibraltar 2010) 15.♘e4 d6! Black is ready to complete development with ...♙d8 and ...b6, so the following tactical sequence is critical: 16.♘xd6!? ♙d8 17.c5 ♗xc5 18.♘e3



18...♙xd6! (but not 18...♗xd6? 19.♗c3! when Black is in trouble) 19.♙xc5 ♙xd2 20.♙xc8† ♙xc8 21.♙xd2 ♙c1† With an equal endgame.

The text move differs from the note above: rather than bringing his last piece into play, White is moving an already-developed piece in the hope of invading on d6. This demands a more energetic response from Black:

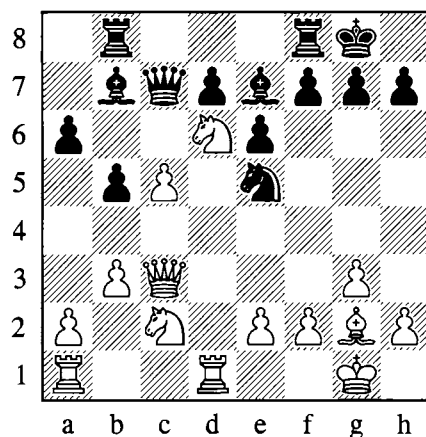


14...b5!

Inaccurate is 14...♗c7 15.♘d6 b5 16.cxb5 axb5 17.♙ac1±.

15.c5 ♗c7 16.♗c3 ♙b7 17.♘d6

We have been following Raupach – Firsching, email 2013. Now Black should have played:



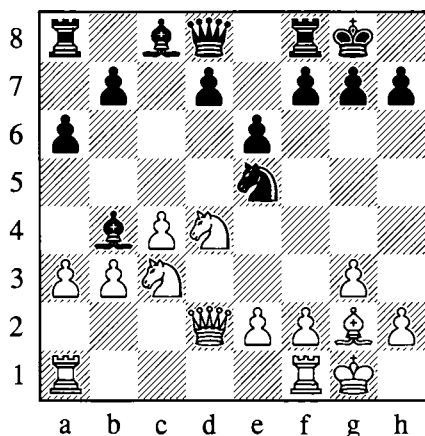
17...♙xg2N 18.♙xg2 ♙f6 19.♘e4 ♙e7 20.♙ac1

20.♘d6= would lead to a repetition.

20...♜fc8 21.♘b4 f6 22.f3 ♖a7 23.♘d6 ♜c7±

Black has enough breathing room for his pieces, while the knight on d6, though powerful, is not entirely stable.

D24) 12.a3



Chasing the bishop seems White's most natural way of breaking the pin. However, the presence of the pawn on a3 renders his queenside less stable.

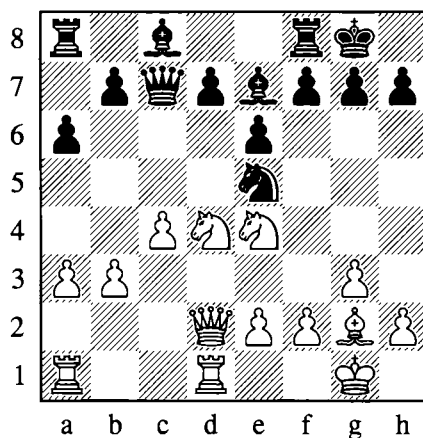
12...♙e7 13.♜fd1

Since the a1-rook has some defensive functions now, White puts the other rook on d1 in order to cause Black some concrete problems.

White doesn't really benefit from taking ultra-aggressive measures here. For example: 13.f4 ♘c6 14.e3 ♜b8 15.♜fd1 ♖c7, and Black has no reason for complaint. The standard counterplay based on the ...b7-b5 advance is still possible.

13...♖c7 14.♘e4

The quiet 14.e3 isn't challenging: 14...♜b8 15.♖b2 b6 16.♞ac1 ♙b7= and Black was fine in Thorsteins – Stefansson, Reykjavik 2013.



Here I found a natural way to improve Black's play from a high-level game.

14...d6!N

The more aggressive 14...f5 15.♘c3 ♜b8 16.e4 fxe4 17.♘xe4 b6 occurred in Vitiugov – Ivanchuk, Reggio Emilia 2012. Now White could have secured a solid space advantage by means of 18.f4!N ♘g6 19.b4 ♙b7 20.♞ac1±.

15.♞ac1 ♜d8

The last preparation before solving the problem of the c8-bishop.

16.e3 ♜b8

Black has a solid position and will prepare the thematic ...b5 break, which will make both of his bishops more effective.

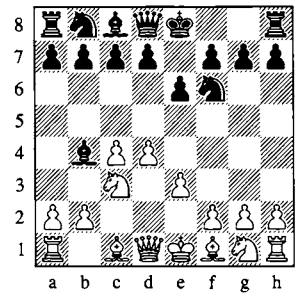
## Conclusion

After 6.♙g2 ♘e4, the sacrificial 7.d5 is interesting but ultimately favourable to Black, while 7.♖c2 and 7.♗d3 both have certain drawbacks: the former weakens the d4-square while the latter leaves the queen exposed, giving Black enough time to consolidate his position and put pressure on the weak doubled pawns. No doubt, 7.♙d2 is the best way of protecting the knight; it generally leads to a Hedgehog structure where Black has the bishop pair but

must work to neutralize the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal. Even though White has a couple of decent plans, such as manoeuvring the knight to d6 or advancing the queenside pawns to a3, b4 and c5, Black has every reason to feel happy: he has a solid, flexible position with two bishops, with potential for counterplay based on the ...b5 break.

# Chapter 10

## 4.e3



### Rare 5th Moves

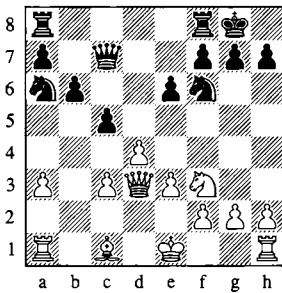
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3

4...0-0

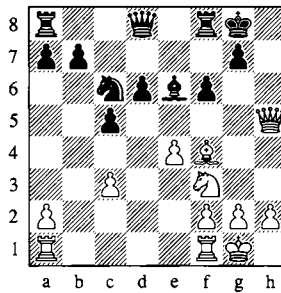
A) 5.♙c2 c5!	140
A1) 6.♙d3	141
A2) 6.a3	142
A3) 6.♘f3	142
B) 5.♘f3 c5	145
B1) 6.d5	145
B2) 6.♙d2	146
B3) 6.♙e2 d5	148
B31) 7.0-0	149
B32) 7.a3 ♙xc3† 8.bxc3 ♙c7 9.cxd5 exd5	150
B321) 10.0-0	151
B322) 10.dxc5N	151

A1) after 13.♙d3



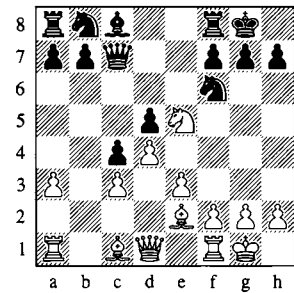
13...♘b8!N

B1) after 15.♙f4



15...♙e8!N

B321) after 11.♘e5



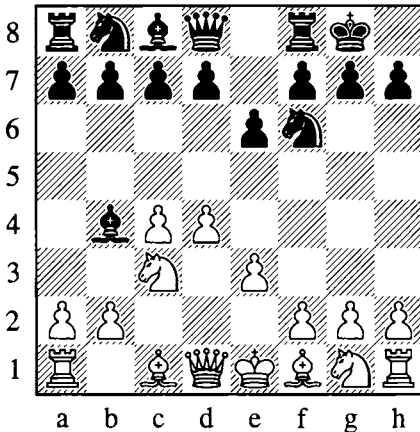
11...♘c6!N

### 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3

This is one of the 'Big Two' moves against the Nimzo-Indian (the other being 4.♗c2 of course). Even though the dark-squared bishop gets locked in for a while, White benefits from great flexibility in how he can develop his pieces. The Rubinstein Variation combines both solidity and ambition, which has helped make it a popular choice at all levels. We will spend this and the following six chapters analysing it.

#### 4...0-0

4...b6, 4...c5 and 4...d5 all have their supporters, but the text move is the most flexible of all, as well as the most popular. This is a huge branching point for the Nimzo-Indian.



In this chapter we will make a start on the Rubinstein by considering the rare lines **A) 5.♗c2** and **B) 5.♘f3**. The latter has the possibility to transpose to a huge main line, but for now we will only look at the independent options. Of course these two moves are not the most important lines:

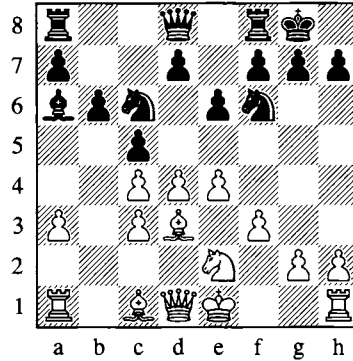
The unusual 5.♗d2 has been covered in Chapter 3.

5.a3 can be found in the next chapter.

5.♘ge2 will be discussed in Chapter 12.

5.♗d3 will be considered in Chapters 13-16.

5.f3?! Logically, this move should be connected with an e2-e4 advance, so it makes little sense here: 5...c5 6.a3 (6.♗d3 ♘c6 7.♘ge2 cxd4 8.exd4 d5 9.♗g5 dxc4 10.♗xc4 b6 ♞ Nguyen – De Sousa, Bagnoux 2002) 6...♗xc3 † 7.bxc3 ♘c6 8.♗d3 b6 9.♘e2 ♗a6 10.e4



10...♘e8! White's kingside play has slowed down, so Black gets an improved version of the Sämisch System. The last move is important to prevent the ♗g5 pin. 11.0-0 ♘a5 12.f4 f5 ♞ Black was better in Radjabov – P.H. Nielsen, Tripoli 2004.

#### A) 5.♗c2

This mixing of the Rubinstein and Classical variations makes a strange impression.

#### 5...c5!

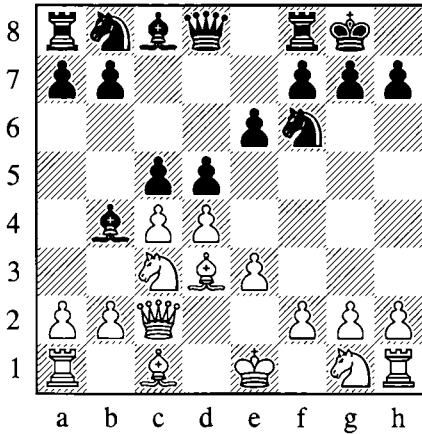
There is nothing wrong with 5...d5, but attacking the d4-pawn highlights the drawback of White's last move.

The three main replies we shall consider are **A1) 6.♗d3**, **A2) 6.a3** and **A3) 6.♘f3**.

6.dxc5 is mentioned by the analysis engines and is how White typically responds in the ♗c2 system when faced with ...c5, but the huge difference is that in those Classical lines White would not volunteer e2-e3 with the

bishop stuck on c1. Specifically, after 4.♖c2 c5 5.dxc5 0–0, White's best continuation is 6.a3 ♗xc5 7.♘f3, intending to develop the bishop actively on f4 or g5. Instead, the weird 6.e3 would transpose to our position after 6.dxc5. If you do face this position, then the simple 6...♗a6 already gives Black a comfortable game.

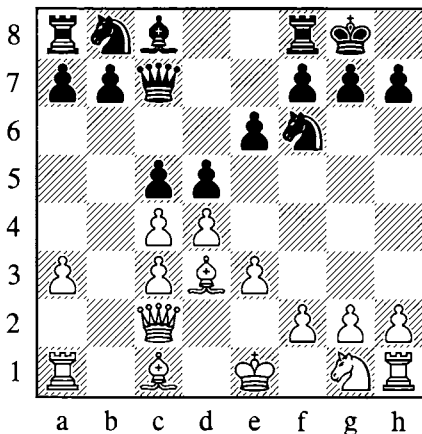
### A1) 6.♗d3 d5



### 7.a3

The poor placement of White's queen becomes obvious after 7.cxd5 exd5 8.dxc5 ♗c6 9.♘f3 ♗xc5 10.a3 ♗g4, as in Kraidman – Vadasz, Skara 1980.

### 7...♗xc3† 8.bxc3 ♖c7!?



Any normal developing move is fine, but this one particularly emphasizes the misplaced queen on c2.

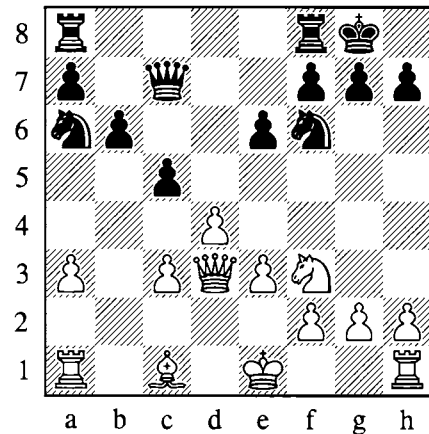
### 9.♘f3

9.♘e2, as was played in Michenka – Rigo, Slovakia 2009, leaves the d3-bishop no squares for retreat, and after 9...b6!N 10.cxd5 (10.0–0? runs into 10...dxc4 11.♗xc4 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♗a6–+) 10...c4 11.♗e4 exd5 12.♗f3 ♗c6 13.0–0 ♗a5♯ Black gets the better position.

### 9...dxc4 10.♗xc4 b6 11.♗d3

11.0–0? loses material after 11...cxd4 12.cxd4 ♗a6, so White must spend valuable time moving the bishop again.

### 11...♗a6 12.♗xa6 ♗xa6 13.♖d3

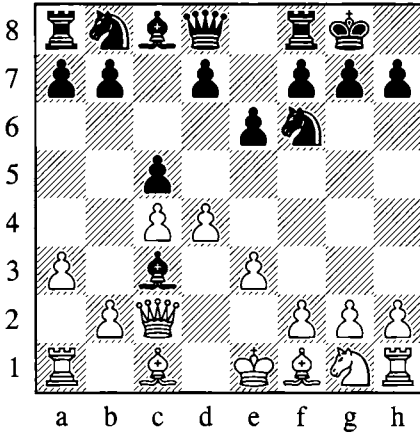


We have been following the game Luther – Grandelius, Cappelle-la-Grande 2008. Now I like the following way of regrouping the pieces:

### 13...♗b8!N 14.0–0 ♗c6 15.e4 h6

As a result of White's slow play, Black has managed to put strong pressure on White's central pawns.

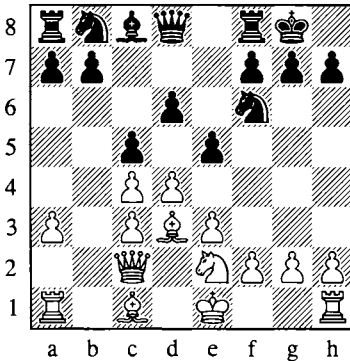
A2) 6.a3 ♖xc3†



7.♖xc3

This position resembles the Classical line with 4.♖c2 0-0 5.a3 ♖xc3† 6.♖xc3, but here it's easier for Black to take advantage of his lead in development.

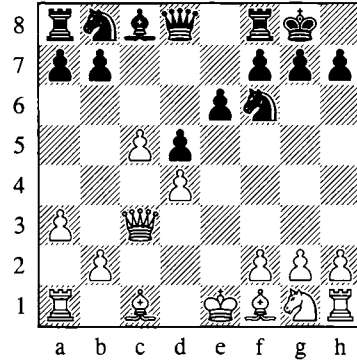
Switching to Sämisch paths by means of 7.bxc3 d6 8.♗d3 e5 9.♗e2 makes little sense. This position arose in Bank Friis – O. Vovk, Aarhus 1999.



Now Black should have continued 9...e4!N 10.♗xe4 ♗xe4 11.♖xe4 ♗c6 12.0-0 ♗a5, regaining the missing pawn with excellent play.

7...cxd4 8.exd4 d5 9.♗f3

Black's development advantage should tell after 9.c5 as in Dollahite – Tears, Fort Worth 1951. The correct response was:

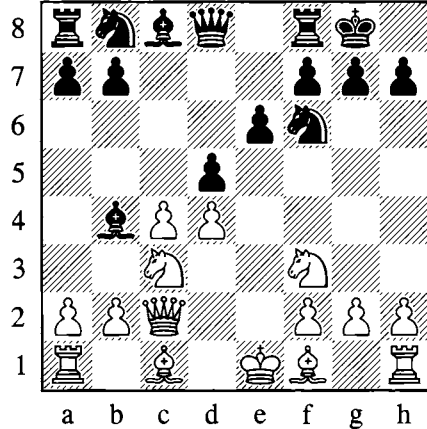


9...♗e4!N 10.♖c2 e5 11.♗f3 (11.dxe5 ♗c6 12.♗f3 leads to the same) 11...♗c6 12.dxe5 ♖a5† 13.♗d2 ♗xd2 14.♖xd2 ♖xc5 15.♗c1 ♖b6 16.♗e2 ♗e8♞

9...dxc4 10.♗xc4 b6 11.0-0 ♗b7 12.♗e5 ♗c6♞

White had no compensation for the vulnerable isolated pawn in Kraidman – David, Zürich 2011.

A3) 6.♗f3 cxd4 7.exd4 d5



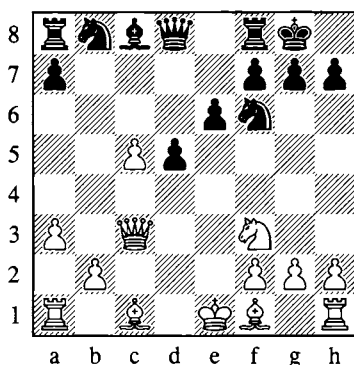
In comparison with normal positions with an isolated pawn, here the pressure on the d4-pawn is much more significant.

8.♗g5

There are also a few alternatives to consider: 8.cxd5 can be met in a few ways, but I prefer

8...exd5! when Black is at least equal.

8.c5 b6 9.a3 This seems consistent. (Instead after 9.cxb6 ♖xb6 10.♗d3 ♘c6 11.♗e3 ♗a6 Black was clearly better in Kracunov – Orlov, Sombor 2008.) 9...♗xc3† 10.♖xc3 bxc5 11.dxc5 Now 11...a5 gave Black a playable position in Simmons – Maggiora, email 2007, but much stronger would have been:

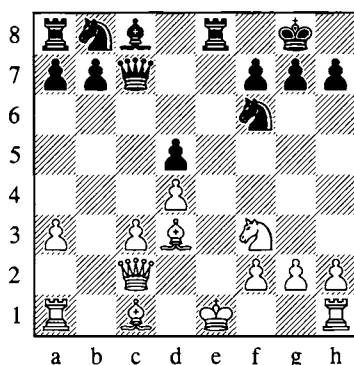


11...e5!N 12.b4 d4 13.♖b2 ♗d5 14.♗e2 ♘c6 15.0-0 e4 Black's powerful central pawns put White in a dangerous situation.

8.a3

White is taking a risk in playing such a move while already behind in development.

8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♖c7 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♗d3 ♖e8†



12.♗e5

The more modest 12.♗e3, as in Rozkovec – Vojta, Czech Republic 1998, should also

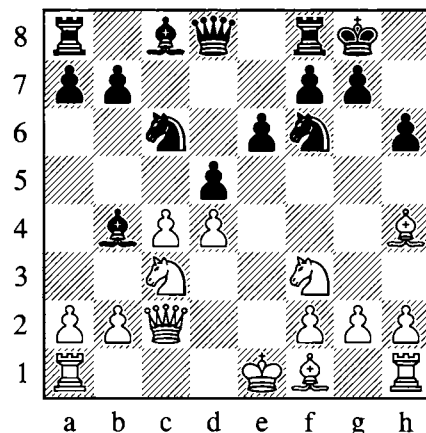
be met by: 12...b6N 13.0-0 ♗a6 14.♖fc1 (14.♗e5 ♗xd3 15.♖xd3 ♘c6†) 14...♗xd3 15.♖xd3 ♘c6 16.c4 ♗a5 17.cxd5 ♖d7† Black regains the pawn and keeps some positional advantage.

12...b6 13.0-0 ♗a6 14.♗xa6 ♘xa6 15.♗f4 ♖ac8 16.♖fc1 ♖b7

White had no compensation for the exposed queenside structure in Braga – Fernandez Romero, Albacete 2001.

8...h6 9.♗h4 ♘c6

This position, which is similar to the Panov Attack in the Caro-Kann, is very comfortable for Black, mainly due to the poor placement of the queen on c2. The following practical tests fully prove this assessment.



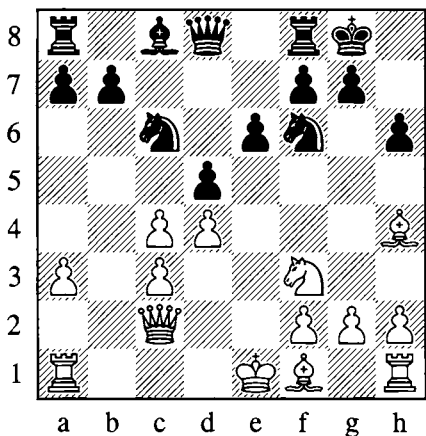
10.a3

10.♖d1 was well met by 10...g5!? 11.♗g3 ♘e4 12.♗d3 f5† in Stremavicius – Sheykhhasani, Maribor 2012.

Castling long does not help: 10.0-0-0 ♗e7 11.♗b1 b6 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.cxd5 exd5† Roussel-Roozmon – Maze, Montreal 2009.

10...♗xc3† 11.bxc3

I found eight games that reached this position, but Black only found the strongest continuation in one of them.



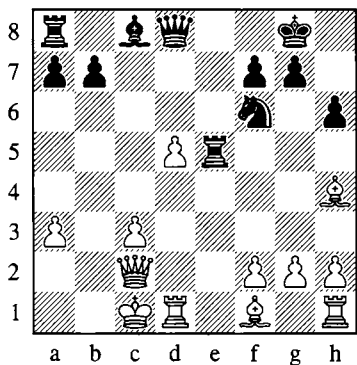
**11...e5!**

An excellent move to exploit White's lag in development.

**12.dxe5N**

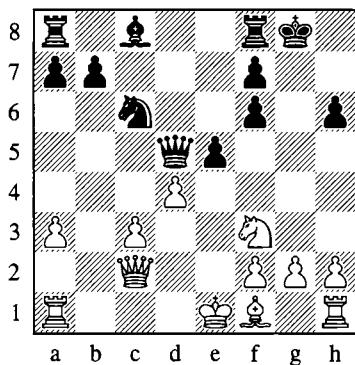
This is a logical attempt to improve, but it doesn't solve White's problems.

The game continued: 12.♘xe5 ♜e8 13.0-0-0 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♜xe5 15.cxd5



15...♙f5 16.♙d3 ♙xd3 17.♞xd3 g5 18.♙g3 ♞xd5 White was under pressure in Kameneckas – Kunzelmann, corr. 2008.

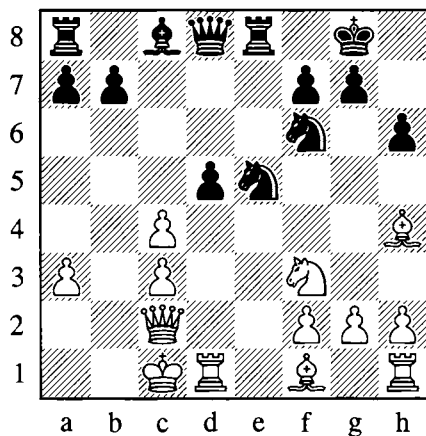
12.cxd5N ♞xd5 13.♙xf6 gxf6 does not really help White, as the doubled f-pawns are not enough to make up for the deficiencies in his position. For example:



14.♙e2 (14.dxe5?! ♘xe5 15.♘d4 ♜e8 16.0-0-0 ♙d7 is even worse) 14...exd4 15.0-0 ♞c5

**12...♜e8 13.0-0-0 ♘xe5**

If White exchanges knights on e5, we will return to the correspondence game noted above, so we should check to see if he can benefit from avoiding the trade.



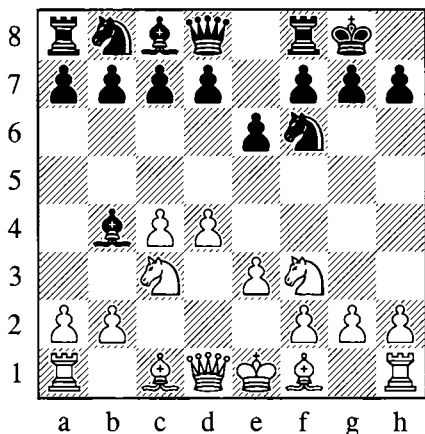
**14.♞xd5**

14.cxd5 allows Black to make use of the knight: 14...♘g6! 15.♙g3 ♙d7 16.♖b2 ♞a5 With excellent attacking chances.

**14...♘ed7 15.♙d3 ♞b6 16.♞b5 ♞c6**

White's extra pawn is relatively meaningless, but his shattered structure and unsafe king will be relevant for a long time to come.

## B) 5.♘f3



This position has been tested in a huge number of games, but it usually converts to the main lines after a subsequent 6.♙d3. Most strong players tend to put the bishop on d3 first, as that way White keeps his opponent guessing as to whether the knight will go to f3 or e2.

## 5...c5

The lines to consider in this chapter are **B1) 6.d5**, **B2) 6.♙d2** and **B3) 6.♙e2**. Of course, these moves do not tell the full story about this position...

6.♞c2 leads back to variation A3 above.

6.a3 ♙xc3† 7.bxc3 has been covered via the 4.♘f3 c5 5.a3 move order – see variation D of Chapter 8.

6.♙d3 d5 leads to the absolute main line of the Rubinstein Variation, as discussed from the start of Chapter 15.

## B1) 6.d5

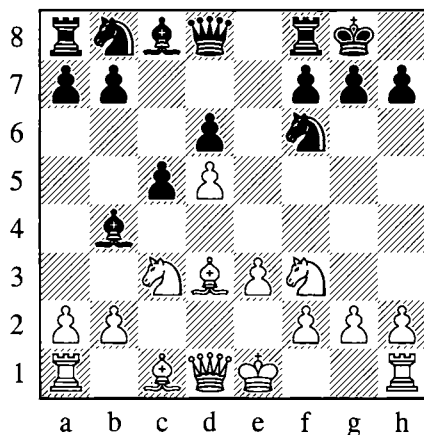
The presence of the pawn on e3 makes this advance less effective, as the d5-pawn doesn't receive enough support.

## 6...d6 7.♙d3

Or 7.♙d2 exd5 8.♘xd5 ♘xd5 9.cxd5 ♙xd2† 10.♞xd2 ♙g4† and Black had an edge in Rosenberg – Kacheishvili, New York 2008.

## 7...exd5 8.cxd5

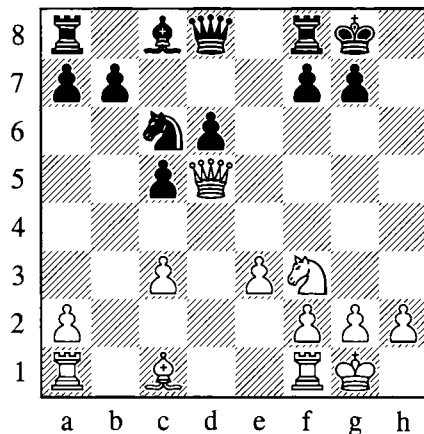
This position has been tested a few times at GM level, and was also advocated for White by IM Palliser in Chapter 9 of *Dangerous Weapons: The Nimzo-Indian* (via a slightly different move order involving 5.♙d3 c5 6.d5). The continuation I like most is:



## 8...♘xd5!

Palliser calls this “misguided” in view of an old game of Korchnoi, but Black's real mistakes came later.

9.♙h7† ♘xh7 10.♞xd5 ♘g8 11.0-0 ♙xc3 12.bxc3 ♘c6



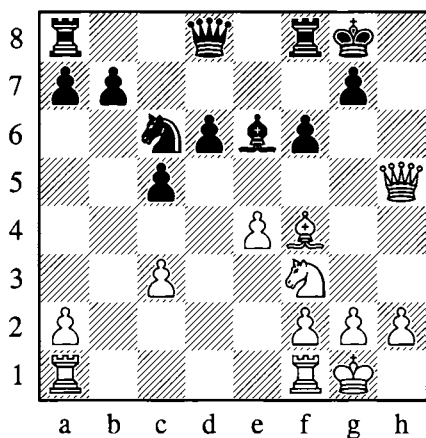
Interestingly, a couple more games reached this position via a slightly different move order. We will follow the example of a future World Champion from almost 60 years ago!

### 13.e4 ♖e6!

13...♙f6 14.♙g5 ♗g6 15.♞fd1 ♙g4 16.♘h4 ♙h5 17.f3 ♙e6 (17...♘e5!?) 18.g4 ♙xd5 19.gxh5 ♙e6 20.♞xd6± was Korchnoi – Parma, Soviet Union 1965, as quoted by Palliser. Even this would have been quite reasonable for Black after the improvement noted at move 17, but the text move is better still.

### 14.♙h5 f6 15.♙f4

Black also has good compensation after: 15.♞d1 ♙e8!?N (15...♙a5 was played in Knaak – Adamski, Polanica Zdroj 1979, but it feels strange to place the queen so far from the kingside) 16.♙xe8 ♞fxe8 17.♞xd6 ♞ad8=



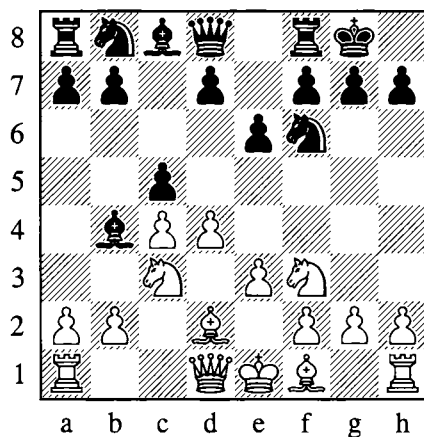
We have been following the game Antoshin – Spassky, Leningrad 1957. Now correct is:

### 15...♙e8!N 16.♙xe8 ♞fxe8 17.♙xd6 b6=

Black has superb compensation for a pawn, thanks to the vulnerability of White's pawns and Black's control over the light squares, especially c4.

## B2) 6.♙d2

White can hardly hope to fight for the advantage with such a move.



### 6...cxd4 7.exd4 d5

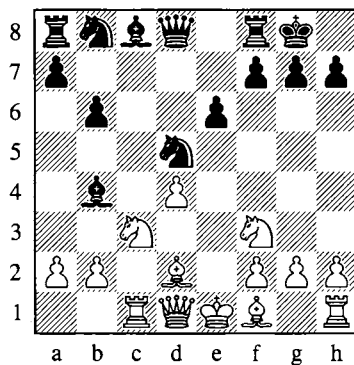
White's active possibilities are limited by the timid placement of his bishop.

### 8.c5

This is the only ambitious try – White is aiming to build a solid pawn chain, seizing a lot of space on the queenside. There are a few alternatives:

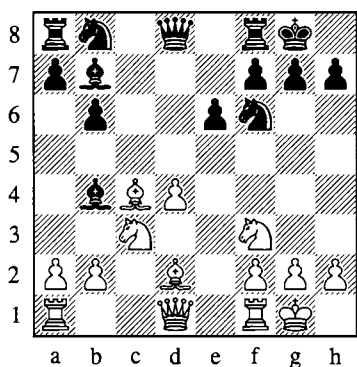
After 8.a3 ♙xc3 9.♙xc3 dxc4 10.♙xc4 b6 11.0-0 ♙b7= Black had full control over d5 in Makoli – Doettling, Kemer 2007.

8.♞c1 b6 9.cxd5 was played in Hort – Ribli, Manila 1976, when the natural 9...♘d5N would have given Black easy play, for instance:

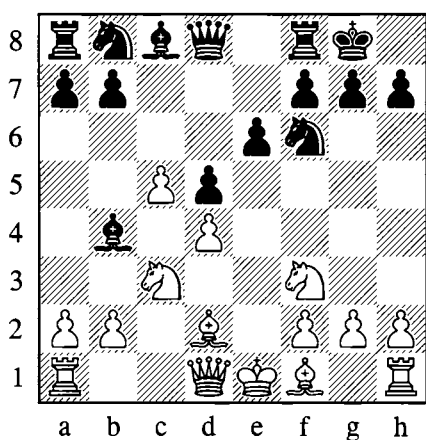


10.♖xd5 ♗xd2† 11.♞xd2 ♞xd5 12.♗c4 ♞e4†  
13.♞e3 ♗b7 14.0-0 ♖d7=

8.♗d3 dxc4 9.♗xc4 b6 10.0-0 ♗b7 Since the d2-bishop is clearly misplaced, Black is almost a tempo up compared with the main line – see Chapter 16, where the bishop goes to the much more sensible g5-square. A game continued:



11.♞e1 ♖bd7 12.a3 ♗xc3 13.♗xc3 ♖d5= Potapov – Kasimdzhanov, Tashkent 2009. Once again, control over the d5-square assures Black of a comfortable game.

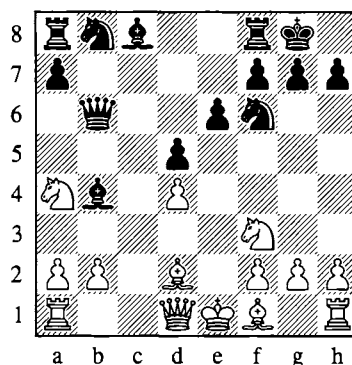


8...b6 9.a3

The most consistent.

9.cxb6 ♞xb6 has been played; but if White has to resort to this, it suggests that his whole strategy is flawed. 10.♖a4 This was A. Sokolov

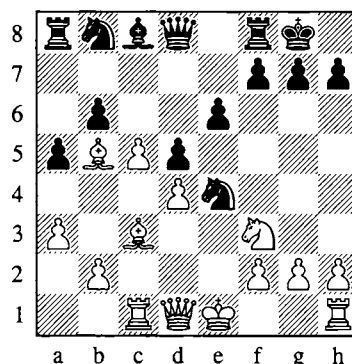
– Grund, Viernheim 1995. Simple and strong would have been:



10...♞d6N 11.♗d3 ♗xd2† 12.♞xd2 ♖e4  
13.♞c2 ♗a6 14.0-0 ♞c8 15.♞e2 ♗xd3  
16.♞xd3 ♖d7 White must fight for equality due to his inferior pawn structure.

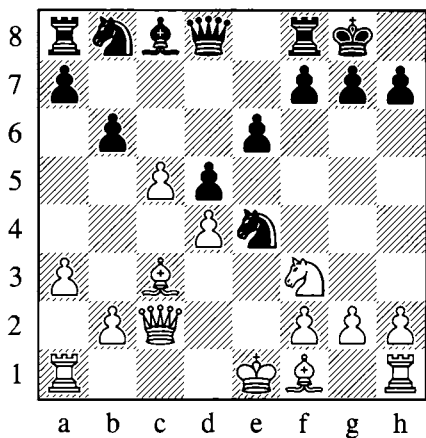
9...♗xc3 10.♗xc3 ♖e4 11.♞c2

Another way to protect the bishop, 11.♞c1, is also well met by 11...a5! 12.♗b5. We have been following the game Cossin – Godart, Saint-Quentin 2016, when Black should have played:



12...bxc5N 13.dxc5 ♗d7! 14.a4 ♞e7 15.0-0 ♞c8 With strong pressure on White's queenside pawns.

We have been following the game Sandipan – Eljanov, Doha 2014. Now I suggest the following way of handling the position:



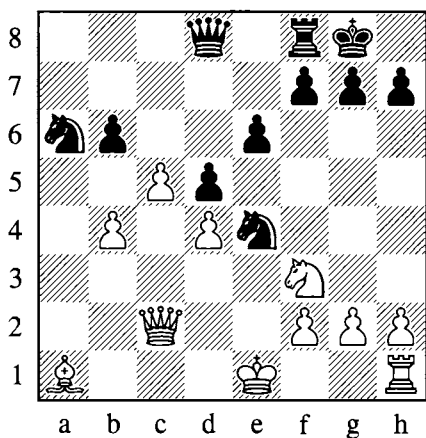
11...a5N 12.b4 axb4 13.axb4 ♖xa1†  
14.♗xa1 ♗a6!

It makes sense to get rid of the passive light-squared bishop.

15.♗xa6

15.b5?! runs into 15...bxc5! 16.♖a4 ♗b7  
17.dxc5 ♘xc5 18.♖d4 ♖f6 19.♖xf6 gxf6  
20.♗xf6 ♘bd7 and the lack of development  
causes White serious problems.

15...♘xa6



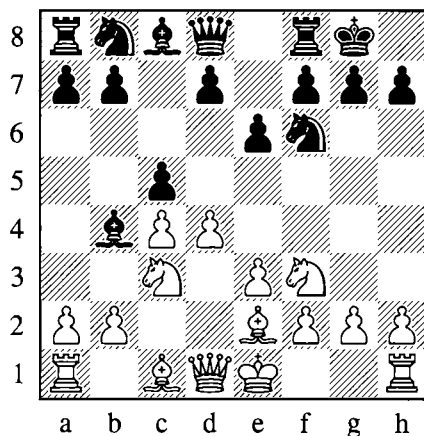
16.♗c3

Once again, dubious is 16.b5?! bxc5 17.0-0  
♘b4 18.♖a4 ♘d3 19.dxc5 ♘dxc5 20.♖b4  
f6.

16...♖d7 17.0-0 ♖b5

Black has been able to set up a stable  
blockade, so there is no reason to worry.

B3) 6.♗e2



This modest-looking move has been tried  
by many strong players, including Viktor  
Korchnoi.

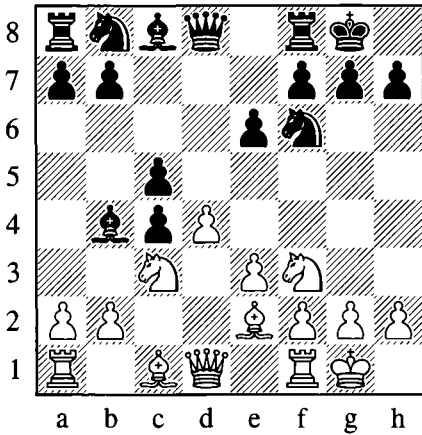
6...d5

The two main lines we will look at are  
B31) 7.0-0 and B32) 7.a3.

7.cxd5 is now well met by 7...cxd4! (7...exd5  
is possible, though after 8.dxc5 White has  
reasonable chances to put pressure on the  
isolated d-pawn) 8.exd4 ♘xd5 9.♗d2 ♘c6  
10.0-0 ♗e7 Black was fine in I. Ivanov – Suba,  
Hastings 1983, as the combination of White's  
IQP with the passive position of the e2-bishop  
looks really awkward.

7.dxc5 is harmless and rather dull after  
7...dxc4. Alternatively, to keep more life in the  
position, Black could instead try 7...♘bd7!N.

B31) 7.0–0 dxc4



8. ♖e5!?

I have to admit that this move is not without merit: it enables White to change the pawn structure so that both sides have a weakness.

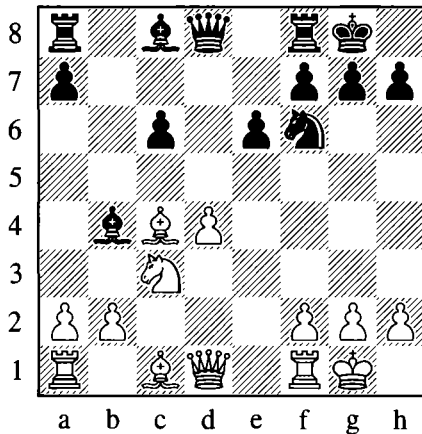
8. ♗xc4 cxd4 9. exd4 transposes to the main *tabiya*, as analysed in Chapters 15 and 16.

8...cxd4 9. exd4

So far this is Savic – Pavlovic, Valjevo 2012. Now I suggest:

9...♖c6N 10. ♖xc6 bxc6 11. ♗xc4

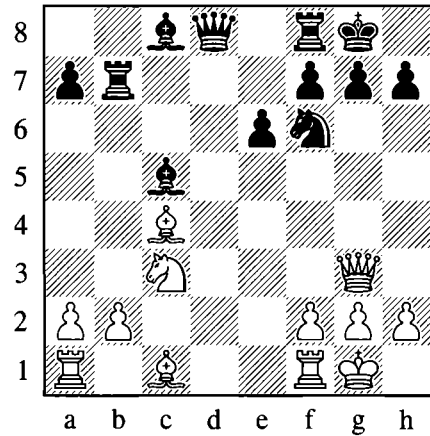
We have transposed to a game, Montilla Reyes – Guo Qi, Tromso (ol) 2014, where 11...♗a5 was played.



11...c5!N

If a draw is not an acceptable result, I can also suggest 11...♗b8 12. ♖a4 (12. ♗g5 h6 13. ♗h4) 12...♗d6 13. b3 ♖d5 with a balanced position – the pawns on d4 and c6 are equally weak.

12. ♗f3 ♗b8 13. ♗g3 ♗b7 14. dxc5 ♗xc5

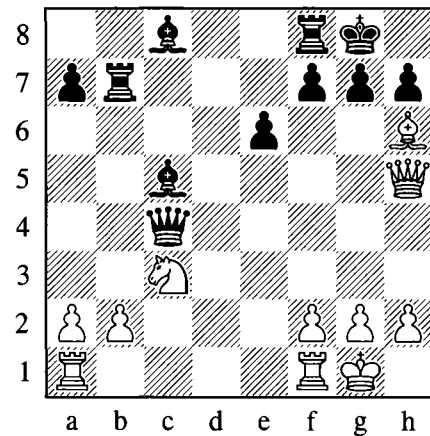


15. ♗h6

15. ♗g5 ♗c7 16. ♗h4 ♗e7 17. ♗d3 h6 18. ♖e4 ♖xe4 19. ♗xe7 ♗xe7 20. ♗xe4 g6= also gives White nothing.

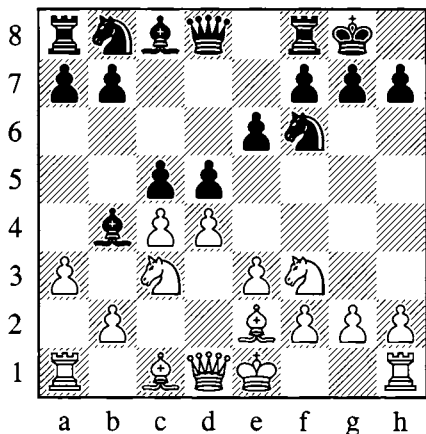
15...♖h5 16. ♗g4 ♗d4 17. ♗xh5 ♗xc4

And now White has nothing better than forcing a draw by means of:



18. ♗xg7 ♖xg7 19. ♗g5† ♖h8 20. ♗f6†=

**B32) 7.a3**



This aims to avoid the isolated pawn.

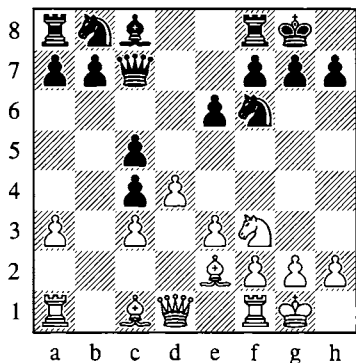
7...♙xc3† 8.bxc3 ♖c7

8...dxc4 might transpose to one of the most explored positions in the Nimzo-Indian after 9.♙xc4 ♘c6 10.0-0, but this is not part of our repertoire.

**9.cxd5**

I also examined:

9.0-0 dxc4



10.♘e5!N

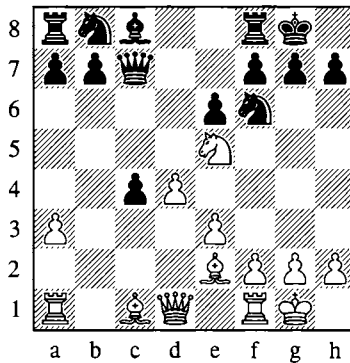
10.♖a4 b6 11.♗xc4 ♙a6 12.♗a2 ♙xe2 13.♗xe2 ♗b7 14.♘e5 ♘c6 was fine for Black in Troncoso Flores – Iniguez, email 2008.

Regaining the pawn turned out to be a

tough task for White after 10.a4 b6 11.♙a3 ♙a6 12.♗c2 ♗d8 13.♘e5 cxd4 14.cxd4 c3̄ in Basson – Wellen, email 2010.

10...cxd4 11.cxd4

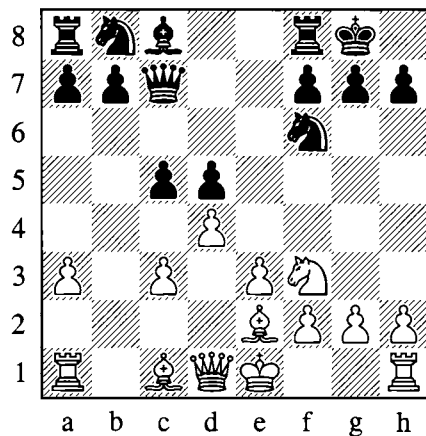
White is trying to regain the pawn and activate the bishops, but after:



11...b5! 12.a4 b4 13.♙xc4 ♘fd7! 14.♗e2 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♘c6 16.f4 ♙b7̄

Black is better due to the strong passed b-pawn.

**9...exd5**



So far, **B321) 10.0-0** is the only move to have been tested from this position, but **B322) 10.dxc5N** also deserves attention.

## B321) 10.0–0

This seems less comfortable for White in view of:

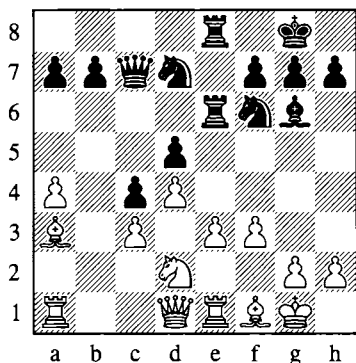
## 10...c4!

This ambitious move makes both of White's bishops passive and yields Black a clear superiority on the queenside.

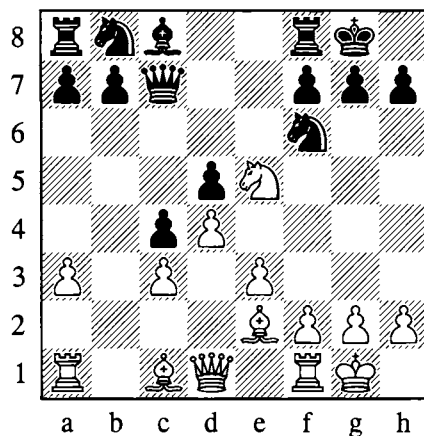
## 11.♖e5

11.♞c2, restricting the mobility of the c8-bishop, is not effective: 11...♖c6 12.♖d2 ♜e8 13.♗f3 ♗g4 ♠ Black was clearly better in Hrescak – Brkic, Split 2015.

11.♖d2 was played in Petschar – Exler, Austria 2012. Since White's main goal is to advance the e-pawn, I suggest 11...♗f5N 12.f3 ♖bd7 13.a4 ♗g6 14.♞e1 ♞fe8 15.♗f1 ♞e6 16.♗a3 ♞ae8, mobilizing all Black's forces. Play might continue:



17.e4 dxe4 18.♗xc4 e3! 19.♗xe6 exd2 20.♗xf7+ ♗xf7 21.♞xe8+ ♗xe8 22.♞xd2 ♗f7 Even though White has a rook and two pawns for the minor pieces, I still prefer Black due to his full control over the light squares.



## 11...♖c6!N

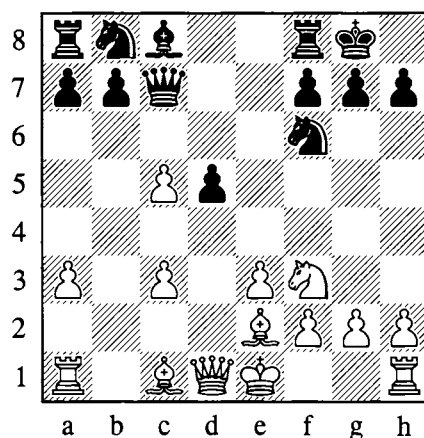
A natural novelty.

Also possible is 11...♖e4, as was played in B.A. Toth – Neagu, Calimanesti 2013. However, in that case White could have tried 12.♞c2N ♜e8 13.f3 ♖d6 14.h3 ♗f5 15.e4! dxe4 16.♞a2, with definite compensation for the pawn.

## 12.♖xc6 ♞xc6 13.♞c2 ♗g4 14.f3 ♗h5

Black's play seems much easier, as White lacks a clear plan to make his bishops work.

## B322) 10.dxc5N



Even though this move has yet to be tested, I believe it is the best choice. White is trying to open lines for his bishops.

**10...♖xc5**

10...♗bd7?! 11.c4 dxc4 12.♙xc4 ♗xc5= also looks perfectly playable.

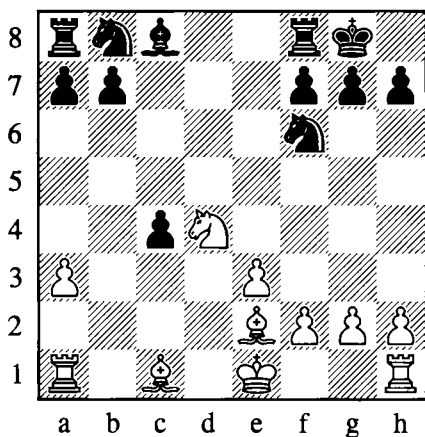
**11.c4**

11.a4 ♖xc3† 12.♙d2 ♖c7 offers White some compensation for the pawn, but Black is certainly not worse.

Also harmless is 11.♙b2 ♗c6 12.0-0 ♙g4, when Black's active piece play fully compensates for White's bishop pair.

**11...dxc4 12.♖d4 ♖xd4 13.♗xd4**

White intends to restore material equality and enjoy his bishop-pair advantage, but he will have to sacrifice some time and coordination while regaining the pawn after:

**13...c3! 14.♗b5 ♗c6 15.♗xc3 ♙e6 16.♙b2 ♖ac8 17.0-0 ♗a5**

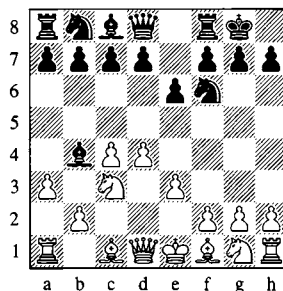
Black is fine; the exposed light squares along the c-file prevent White from putting his bishop pair to good use.

**Conclusion**

In the position after 4.e3 0-0 White can employ various set-ups, most of which will be covered in subsequent chapters. Amongst White's minor possibilities, 5.♗f3 c5 6.d5 is the most ambitious try, and it leads to interesting complications after 6...d6 7.♙d3 exd5 8.cxd5 ♗xd5, when the subsequent novelty 15...♖e8!N makes Black's position quite attractive. Another tricky set-up is 5.♗f3 c5 6.♙e2 d5, but the drawbacks of White's rather passive placement of both bishops are illustrated after both 7.cxd5 cxd4! 8.exd4 ♗xd5 and 7.a3 ♙xc3† 8.bxc3 ♖c7 9.cxd5 exd5, followed by ...c5-c4 if the opportunity presents itself.

# Chapter 11

## 4.e3



## 5.a3

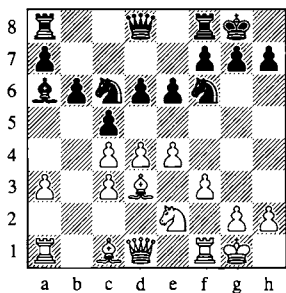
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0-0 5.a3

5...♙xc3† 6.bxc3 d6

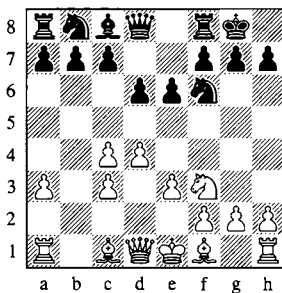
A) 7.f3	154
B) 7.♘f3	156
C) 7.♘e2	157
D) 7.♙d3 e5 8.♘e2 e4!	159
D1) 9.♙c2	160
D2) 9.♙b1	161

A) after 11.e4



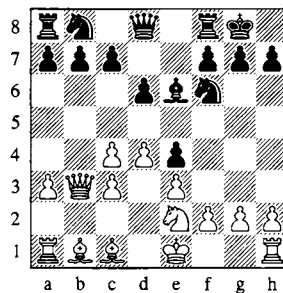
11...h6!N

B) after 7.♘f3



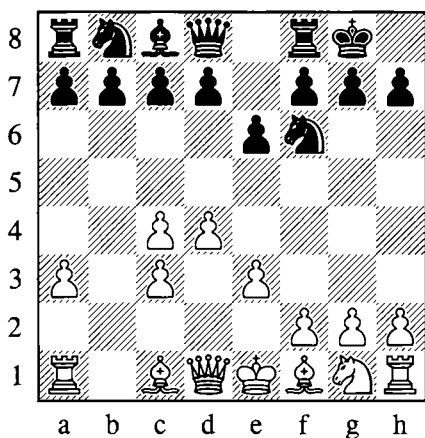
7...e5!N

D2) after 10.♙b3



10...c5!N

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♘b4 4.e3 0-0 5.a3  
 ♙xc3† 6.bxc3



This way of handling the position obviously resembles the Sämisch, as White spends a tempo to practically force the exchange on c3, putting his faith in the bishop pair and pawn centre. However, in my opinion, mixing the 4.e3 and 4.a3 systems makes little sense – sooner or later White will have to push e3-e4 anyway. Still, it has been employed by such strong players as Carlsen, Eljanov and Alekseev, among others.

### 6...d6

It would be a mistake to try and follow the plan from Chapter 6 against the pure Sämisch, as we have already committed to short castling.

There are reasonable alternatives, but I like the text move the most. Black is preparing ...e5 followed by activating the light-squared bishop as soon as possible, all of which fits in well with the early castling.

We will look at four options: A) 7.f3, B) 7.♗f3, C) 7.♗e2 and D) 7.♙d3.

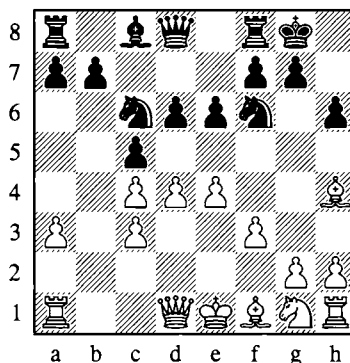
#### A) 7.f3

In comparison with the usual Sämisch,

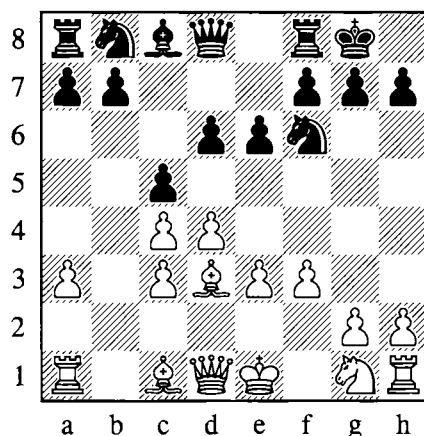
White's play is slowed down by the early e2-e3 advance.

### 7...c5 8.♙d3

The over-ambitious 8.e4 ♗c6N 9.♙g5 h6 10.♙h4 leaves White with undeveloped pieces. His only real achievement is the unpleasant pin of the f6-knight, which can be addressed as follows:



10...cx4! 11.cxd4 ♖a5† 12.♗f2 ♗d8! The threat of ...♗xe4† puts White in a difficult situation.



### 8...♗c6 9.♗e2

Developing the knight in a different way doesn't bother Black: 9.♗h3N b6 10.0-0 ♙a6 11.♗e2 ♗a5 12.♗f2 ♗c8 13.d5 ♗d7! and the weakness of White's queenside pawns starts to tell.

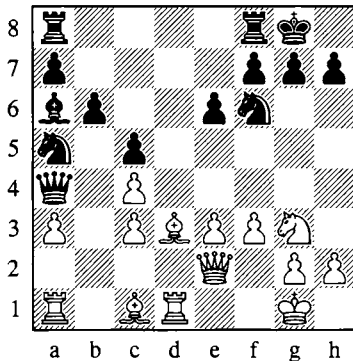
**9...b6 10.0-0 ♘a6 11.e4**

I also considered:

11.♖g3 ♘a5 12.dxc5

Hardly better is 12.♞e2, as played in Heranval – Yacob, France 2009. After 12...cxd4N 13.cxd4 ♖c8 White loses a pawn for nothing: 14.e4 ♙xc4 15.♙g5 h6†

12...dxc5 13.♞e2 ♞d7 14.♙d1 ♞a4



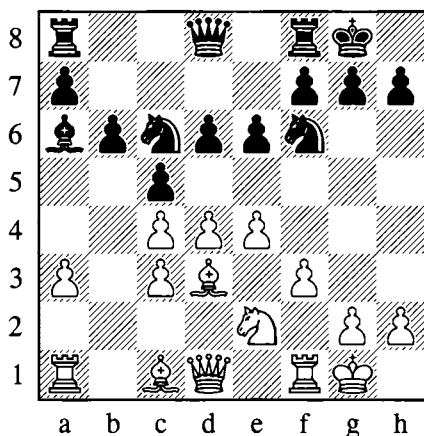
15.e4

15.♙c2 ♞e8 16.♙d3 ♙d8†

15...♙xc4 16.♙g5 ♙xd3 17.♙xd3 ♘d7†

White had no compensation for the pawn in Kunicki – Jakubowski, Wisla 2000.

This position has been seen in a couple of games. In my opinion, the best way to prove that losing a tempo is critical for a system as sharp as the Sämisch is:

**11...h6!N**

Avoiding the unpleasant pin on the f6-knight.

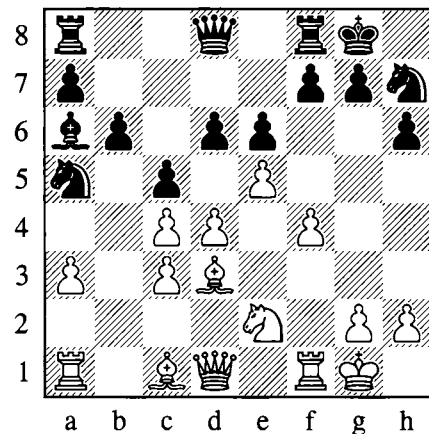
**12.f4 ♘a5 13.e5**

13.♞a4 cxd4 14.cxd4 ♖c8† also leads to the loss of a pawn.

**13...♘h7!**

This allows Black to win the pawn and consolidate.

13...♘d7 looks natural but is actually less convincing after: 14.exd6 cxd4 (14...♙xc4 15.f5! is dangerous for Black) 15.cxd4 ♙xc4 16.f5 ♘f6 17.♙xc4 ♘xc4 18.fxex6 fxe6 19.♞d3 ♘xd6 20.♙xh6 gxh6 21.♞g6† ♘h8 22.♘f4 White's attack is sufficient to maintain the balance.

**14.♞c2**

The following alternatives do not solve White's problems:

14.♘g3 ♙xc4 15.♙xc4 ♘xc4 16.♞e2 b5† leaves Black a pawn up with a fine knight.

14.f5 dxe5 collapses White's centre while stopping his hoped-for attack, particularly as 15.dxe5 ♙xc4 wins a pawn while making an exchange of queens likely.

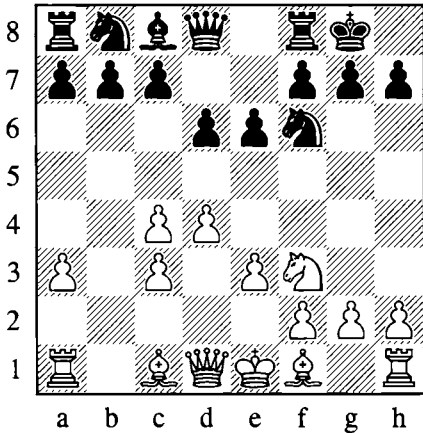
14...f5 15.g4

White's structure is crumbling so he might as well try this lunge.

15...xc4 16.xc4 xc4

White does not have enough for the pawn.

B) 7.f3



This move does not seem to be in the spirit of the position, but it was tried by Akiba Rubinstein so it deserves some attention. I like the following new way of handling the position:

7...e5!?

The most dynamic, although I should mention that there is nothing wrong with a normal continuation such as 7...e7 followed by ...e5.

8.f2

After 8.dxe5 dxe5 9.xxd8 xxd8 10.fxe5 f4 Black regains the pawn and gets excellent play, since 11.b2?! f4a6 12.f3 f6c5 13.d1 d6e6 14.e2 f4a4 15.a1 f6 puts White in a difficult position.

8.e2

This is another natural developing move which briefly transposes to an old

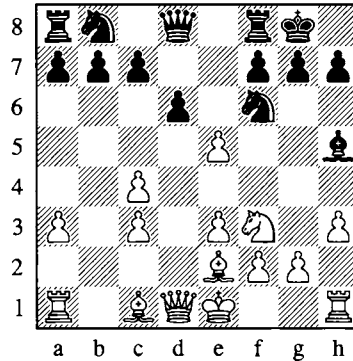
correspondence game, but it doesn't pose Black any problems either:

8...g4!?

After 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.fxe5 xe2 11.xxe2 d6 12.f3 e8 13.0 c5 14.d1 e6 Black obtains at least sufficient compensation for the pawn.

9...h5 10.dxe5

In the event of 10.0 c6 11.b2 e8 White's set-up seems too passive.



10...f4!

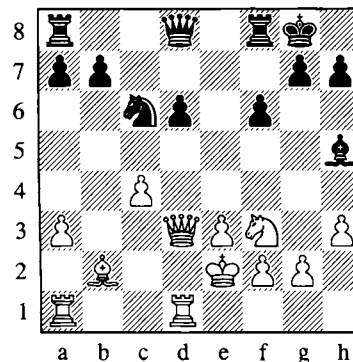
Admitting that the bishop pair is just as significant as the weakness of White's doubled pawns.

10...dxe5 is less convincing due to 11.xxd8 xxd8 12.g4 e4 13.gxh5 exf3 14.f3 when White's bishops may become powerful.

11.exd6

11.b2 dxe5 12.xxd8 xxd8 13.g4 g6 14.fxe5 f6c6 15.fgx6 hxg6 looks too passive for White.

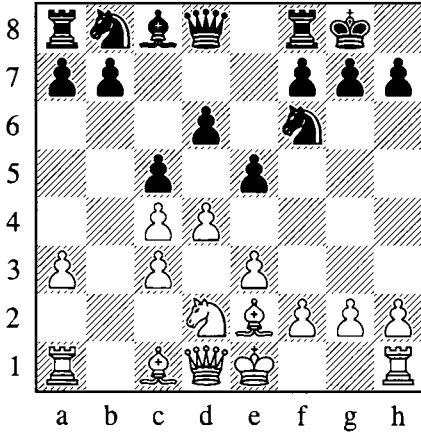
11...fxc3 12.d3 fxe2 13.fxe2 cxd6 14.d1 f6c6 15.b2 f6



16. ♖xd6 ♜b6

Black has good compensation in this unclear position.

8...c5 9. ♖e2

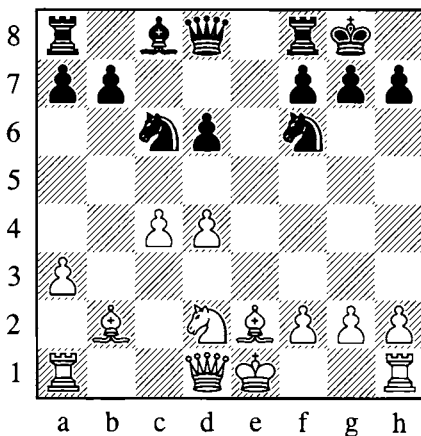


9...exd4!?

An interesting concept: Black is trading the better pawn structure for active piece play, while getting rid of White's space advantage.

10. cxd4 cxd4 11. exd4 ♖c6 12. ♖b2

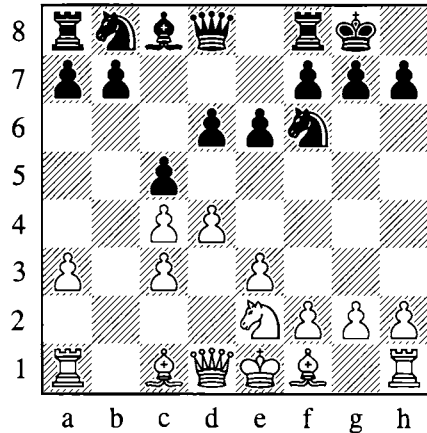
After 12.d5 ♖d4 13.0–0 ♗f5 14. ♖b2 ♜b6 Black forces an exchange of the opponent's dark-squared bishop and gains some positional advantage.



12... ♜b6 13. ♜b3 ♜xb3 14. ♖xb3 d5 15. c5 ♗e8

White's bishops are ineffective, so Black is by no means worse.

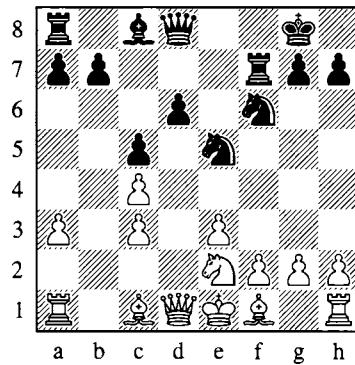
C) 7. ♖e2 c5



With White's knight heading for g3, it makes sense to attack the c4-pawn as soon as possible.

8. ♖g3

The ambitious 8.d5N isn't supported by White's undeveloped pieces, so after: 8... ♖bd7! 9. dxe6 ♖e5 10. exf7 ♗xf7



11. ♖g3 (11. ♖f4 ♖e4! 12. ♖d3 ♖xd3+ 13. ♜xd3 ♗f5) 11... ♖e6 12. ♖e2 ♖xc4 13. f4 ♖xe2 14. ♜xe2 ♖c6 15. 0–0 ♜d7 Black regains the pawn and gets the superior position due to his better pawn structure.

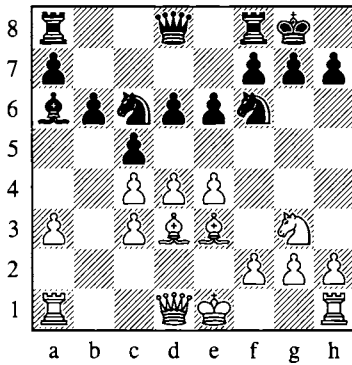
**8...♟c6 9.♞d3**

The lack of development prevents White from developing any initiative on the kingside after:

9.e4 b6 10.♞e3

10.♞g5 h6 11.h4 cxd4 12.cxd4 was seen in Oestreich – Zeitler, Buschhuetten 1967. Now the correct 12...hxg5!N 13.hxg5 g6! 14.gxf6 ♜xf6 15.♞e2 ♞a6 16.♞c1 ♟g7 would have put White in a difficult position.

10...♞a6 11.♞d3



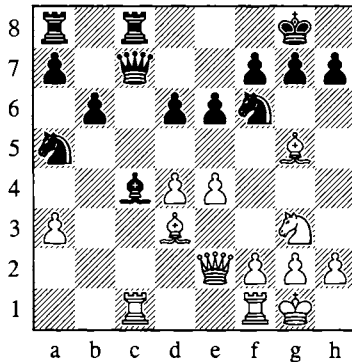
This was played in Averbakh – Matanovic, Rijeka 1963, and should be met by:

11...♞a5N 12.♞e2 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♜c7!

A precise move, preparing to put the king's rook on c8.

Instead, 13...♞c8 14.♞c1 ♜c7 15.0-0 ♞xc4 16.♞g5 ♞d7 17.♞h5 offers White interesting play for a pawn.

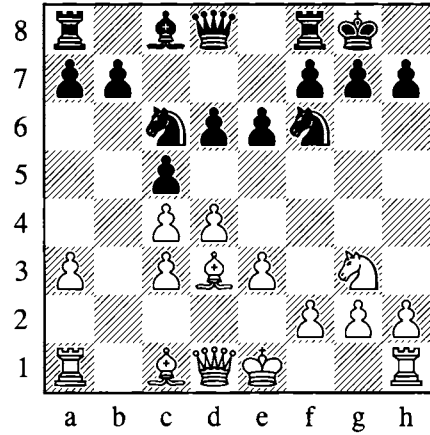
14.♞c1 ♞fc8 15.0-0 ♞xc4 16.♞g5



16...♞e8!

That's the point! The e8-knight is the key defensive piece now.

17.♞h5 ♞xd3 18.♞xd3 ♜d7



**9...b6 10.0-0 ♞a6 11.♞e2 ♞c8!**

Since the d4-d5 advance isn't possible, it's better to keep the tension for as long as possible.

11...cxd4 12.cxd4 ♞c8 13.♞b2 ♞a5 14.♞ac1 would allow White to consolidate and protect the c4-pawn; 14...d5 15.cxd5 ♞xd3 16.♞xd3 ♞xd5 is still okay for Black, but the text move poses more problems to White.

**12.♞b2**

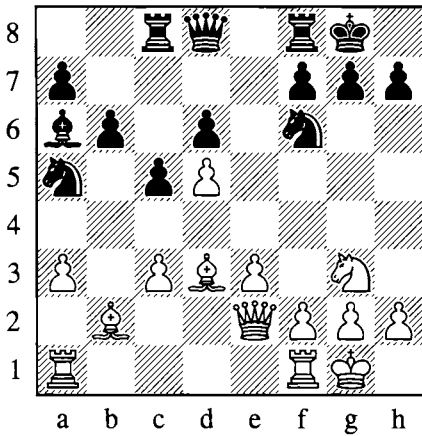
Obviously the dark-squared bishop is misplaced now, but White has to get ready to defend the c4-pawn, and 12.d5? ♞e5 is horrible for him.

**12...♞a5 13.d5**

13.♞ac1 d5 14.cxd5 ♞xd3 15.♞xd3 exd5 led White to a passive position in Golz – Radovici, Ploiesti 1957.

**13...exd5 14.cxd5**

This position was reached in Ribeiro – Belem, Fortaleza 1951. Now Black should have exchanged White's light-squared bishop:



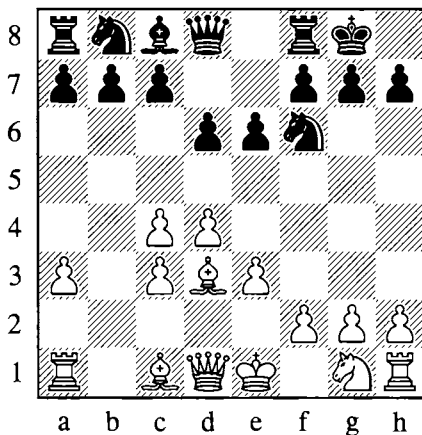
14...♙xd3 15.♖xd3

And then blocked the other one with:

15...c4! 16.♗f5 g6 17.♗f3 ♜e8 18.e4 ♘b3  
19.♞ad1 ♚c5

Black has strong pressure against the e4-pawn, and the c5-knight threatens to jump to d3 at any moment.

D) 7.♙d3

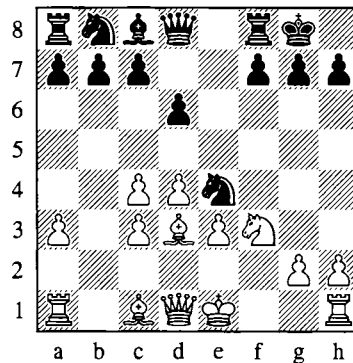


This is the most common and natural continuation.

7...e5 8.♘e2

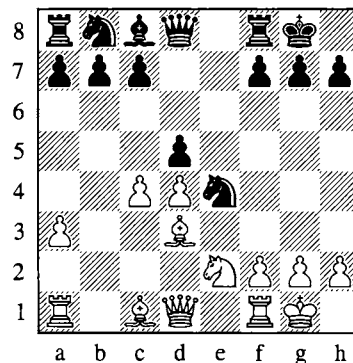
8.f3 doesn't stop the e-pawn: 8...e4! 9.fxe4 (I also examined: 9.♙c2 ♜e8 10.♘e2 ♙e6! It's no loss to expend a tempo in order to

secure the c5-spot for the knight. 11.d5 ♙c8 12.0-0 ♘bd7 13.♘g3 ♚c5 White's position is extremely risky from a strategic point of view.) 9...♘e4 10.♘f3

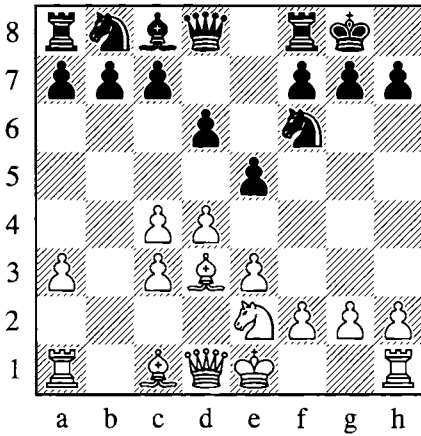


10...f5 11.♖c2 ♗e7 12.0-0 ♘d7 13.a4 c5 14.♘d2 ♘df6 Black's play in the game Eidelson – Minogina, Vitebsk 1985, was highly instructive. White was doomed to passive defence and eventually lost.

After 8.e4 Black may take advantage of his development advantage by means of: 8...exd4 9.cxd4 ♘xe4! 10.♘e2 (10.♙xe4 ♜e8 ♠ Tissari – Veingold, Jyvaszkyla 1999) 10...d5 11.0-0 Now in Ghyselen – Bomans, Westerlo 2010, Black should have played:



11...♜e8! 12.♖c2 ♙f5 13.cxd5 ♗xd5 14.♘f4 ♗d7 Intending to exchange the bishops by means of 15...♘d6. White has insufficient compensation for the pawn.



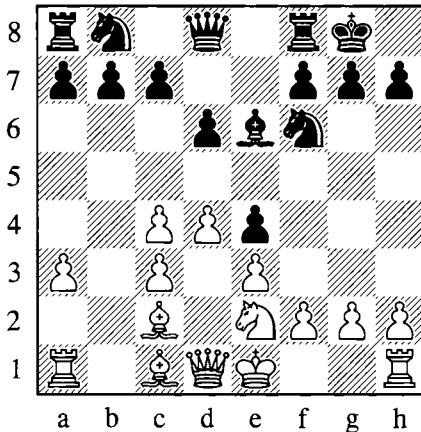
**8...e4!**

This advance is part of Black's restricting strategy – it makes both White's bishops look poor.

The two lines to look at are of course **D1) 9.♘c2** and **D2) 9.♘b1**.

**D1) 9.♘c2 ♙e6**

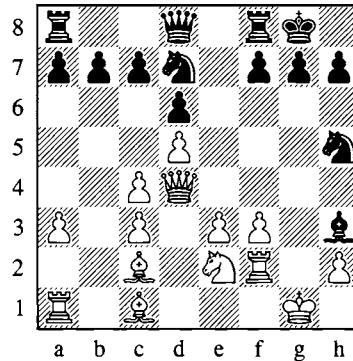
I like this natural developing move. Protecting the c4-pawn would slow down White's counterattack.



**10.♘g3**

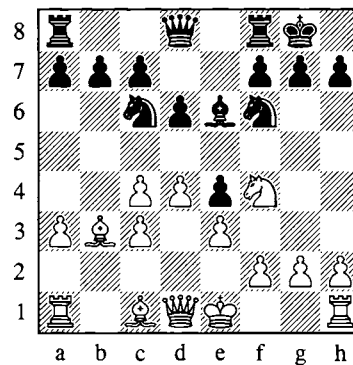
10.d5 is, once again, a positional concession.  
10...♙g4 11.0-0 ♘bd7 12.f3 exf3 13.gxf3 ♙h3

14.♙f2 ♘h5 15.♗d4 was seen in Perez Perez – Gragger, Marianske Lazne 1961, and now Black should have played:



15...♘e5!N 16.♙h1 (16.f4 ♘g4 17.♙f3 ♗h4 18.♙d2 ♙g2+) 16...c5 17.dxc6 ♘xc6 18.♗d5 g6♣ Securing a big positional advantage.

The attempt to protect the c4-pawn with 10.♘b3N fails after: 10...♘c6! 11.♘f4 (The tactical justification for Black's last move is 11.d5 ♘e5 12.dxe6 ♘d3† 13.♙f1 ♘g4♣ and White is in trouble; the text move is not much of an improvement though...)

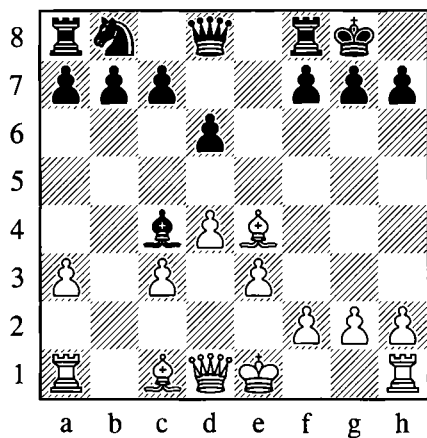


11...♘c8 12.f3 ♘a5 13.♙a2 (13.0-0 ♘xb3 14.♗xb3 b6♣) 13...b6 14.0-0 ♙a6♣ White's opening strategy has clearly failed.

**10...♙xc4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♙xe4**

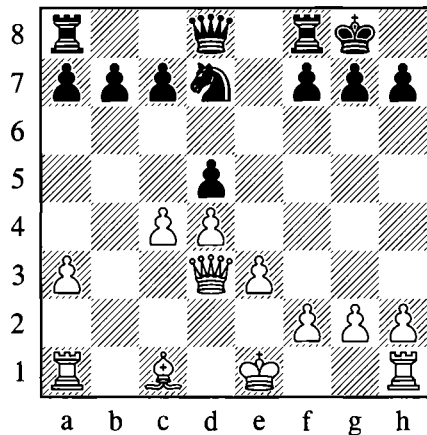
White has been able to get rid of the e4-pawn, but it is still not easy to activate the

dark-squared bishop. Moreover, the king is stuck in the centre, so there is no way to avoid the exchange of light-squared bishops, which will favour Black.



12...d5 13.♙d3 ♗xd3 14.♜xd3 ♖d7 15.c4

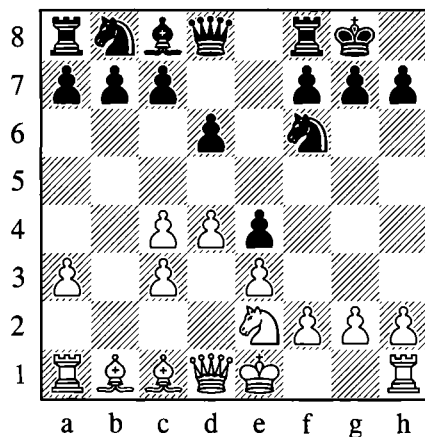
I also considered 15.0-0 ♖b6 16.e4 dxe4 17.♜xe4 c6, when Black gets some positional advantage due to his control over the light squares.



We have been following the game Podolny – Furman, Vilnius 1949. Now Black could have put White under some pressure by means of:

15...♖b6!N 16.cxd5 ♜xd5 17.0-0 c5

D2) 9.♗b1



This is the most common retreat. Most of White's pieces are located on the first rank now, but it's easier to protect the main weakness: the c4-pawn.

9...♗e6

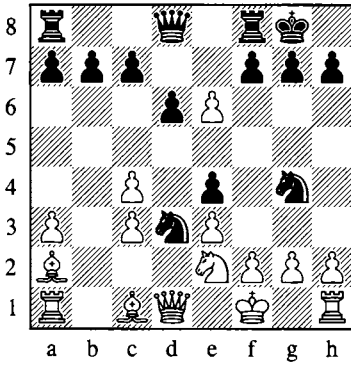
The same concept as in the preceding line.

9...b6!? is another decent way to handle the position.

10.♜b3

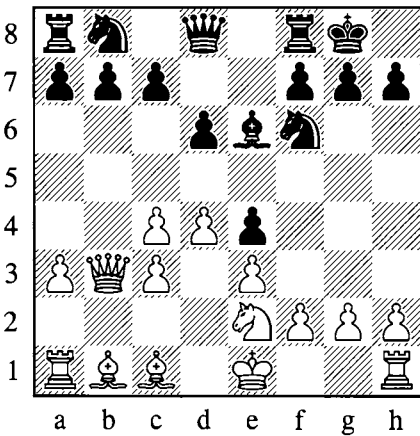
10.♖g3 ♗xc4 11.♖xe4 ♖xe4 12.♗xe4 leads back to variation D1 above, where 12...d5 gives Black the better game.

The ugly-looking 10.♗a2, as was played in Einarsson – Vidarsson, Hafnarfjörður 1996, can be met strongly by: 10...♖c6!N We saw exactly the same idea in the note to move 10 in the previous variation. The critical line continues: 11.d5 ♖e5 12.dxe6 ♖d3† 13.♖f1 ♖g4



14.d4 dxf2 15.e7! White needs to keep the f-file closed. 15...♖xe7 16.♗d2 ♖xh1 17.♜xd3 exd3 18.♔g1 ♜g3 19.hxg3 ♖g5. Despite the approximate material balance, Black's position is preferable due to White's hideous pawn structure.

Here I found a useful improvement over some existing games.



**10...c5!N**

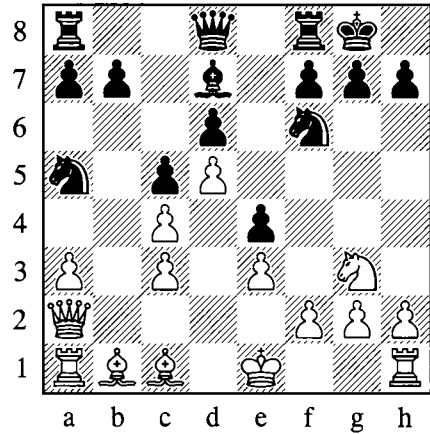
Black has usually preferred 10...b6, dating all the way back to the game Kotov – Pachman, Moscow 1946. However, I discovered that there is no need to spend a tempo safeguarding the b-pawn.

**11.♜g3**

After 11.♖xb7 ♖bd7 12.d5 ♗g4 13.♜g3 ♖b6 14.♖a6 ♜e8. Black's pieces are dominating and White's extra pawn is of no value.

11.d5 is also ineffective after 11...♗c8 12.♜g3 ♜e8.

**11...♜c6 12.d5 ♖a5 13.♖a2 ♗d7**



**14.♜xe4 ♜xe4 15.♗xe4 ♖g5**

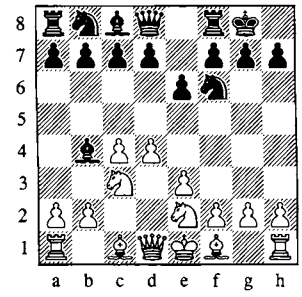
Even though White is a pawn up for now, his position makes a poor impression.

**Conclusion**

The character of play in this chapter is similar to the Sämisch Variation, but the inclusion of e2-e3 and ...0-0 has merits for both sides. Black has committed his king so ideas such as the ♗g5 pin have the potential to be more dangerous, but White's early e2-e3 may represent a loss of a tempo if the pawn subsequently advances to e4. It seems to me that 6...d6 followed by ...e5 is the best way of neutralizing White's bishops. Once this pawn reaches the e4-square it will be hard for White to develop any activity on the kingside, whereas Black's positional advantages are long-lasting.

# Chapter 12

## 4.e3



## 5.♘ge2

### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♘ge2

5...♞e8!?

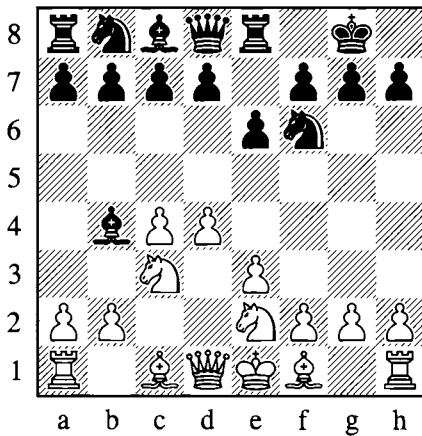
A) 6.g3	164
B) 6.a3 ♙f8	165
B1) 7.♘f4	165
B2) 7.g3 d5 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♙g2 a5 10.0-0 ♘a6	168
B21) 11.♙d2	169
B22) 11.♞c2	170
B3) 7.e4 d5! 8.e5 ♘fd7	170
B31) 9.c5?!	171
B32) 9.cxd5	172
B4) 7.♘g3 d5	175
B41) 8.cxd5	175
B42) 8.♙e2	177
B5) 7.d5 a5!	180
B51) 8.g3	180
B52) 8.♘g3 ♘a6	181
B521) 9.♙e2	181
B522) 9.♙d3	183

1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 ♞b4 4.e3 0-0  
5.♟ge2

This move was introduced and deeply explored by one of the greatest players of the past: Akiba Rubinstein. White avoids doubled c-pawns and keeps the pawn chain flexible. The drawback is that the development of the light-squared bishop is somewhat delayed,

5...♞e8!?

This move was introduced back in 1937, but it has become fashionable again in recent years. The main continuation is 5...d5 6.a3 ♞e7, whereas the text move secures a more comfortable square on f8 for the bishop's retreat. Of course, the rook move costs a tempo and does not immediately occupy the centre, so we have to consider various attempts by White to gain space in that area.



We will start by considering **A) 6.g3**, which is an attempt to deviate from the main line of **B) 6.a3**.

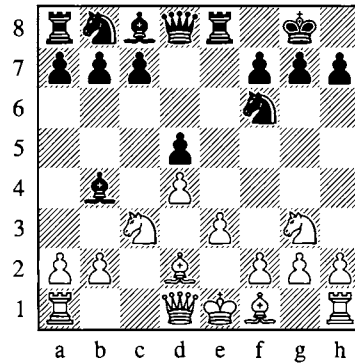
6.♞d2

For some reason, this natural-looking move has been seen in only one tournament game.

6...d5 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♟g3!N

8.g3 was played in Aleksandrov – Lopez Martinez, Lugo 2009. Now Black could have exploited the somewhat awkward

placement of the d2-bishop by means of: 8...♟bd7N 9.♞g2 ♟b6 10.0-0 c6 11.b3 ♞f5 12.f3 ♞a3



8...c5!

Since the d-file is blocked, this advance is more effective than usual.

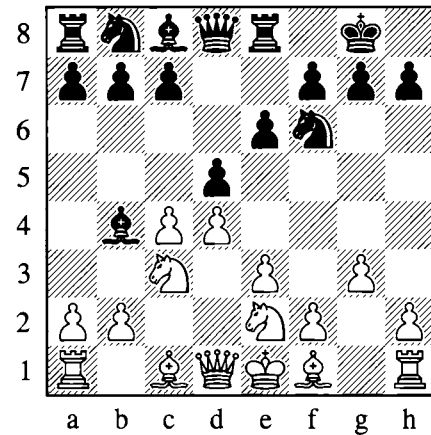
9.a3 ♞xc3 10.♞xc3 ♟c6 11.♞b5

Too passive is 11.♞e2! c4 12.0-0 b5

11...♞g4 12.♞d2 cxd4 13.♞xd4 ♟xd4 14.♞xd4 ♞a5† 15.♞b4 ♞xb4† 16.axb4 ♞e6=

The weakness of the b4-pawn yields Black sufficient counterplay.

**A) 6.g3 d5**



7.♞g2

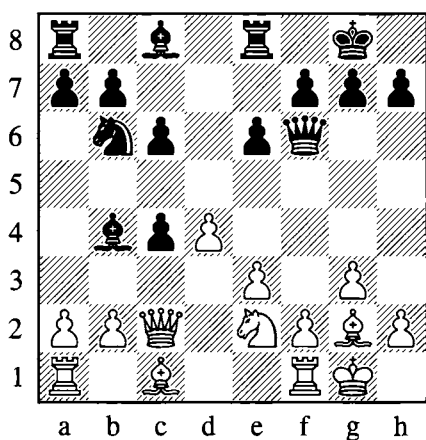
White should probably return to the usual paths with 7.a3 ♞f8, as covered in variation B2.

After 7.cxd5?! ♖xd5! 8.♞g1 ♖h5 9.h3 e5 10.g4 ♖h4♯ White was suffering from a lack of development in Bluvshstein – Onischuk, Montreal 2009.

### 7...dxc4 8.0–0

I also examined 8.♖a4N a5 9.a3 ♙d7 10.♖c2 ♙c6 11.♙xc6 ♙xc3† 12.♖xc3 ♟xc6 13.♖xc4 e5♯, when White manages to regain the pawn, but faces serious new problems.

8...c6 9.♖c2 ♟bd7 10.♟e4 ♟b6 11.♟xf6† ♖xf6



### 12.e4

No better is: 12.f4 ♖e7 13.a3 ♙a5 14.e4 c5 15.♙e3 cxd4 16.♟xd4 ♙d7♯

12...e5 13.♙e3 exd4 14.♙xd4 ♖e7♯

Black remained a pawn up in Giorgadze – Bacrot, Groningen 1997.

### B) 6.a3

This is the most natural and consistent choice.

### 6...♙f8

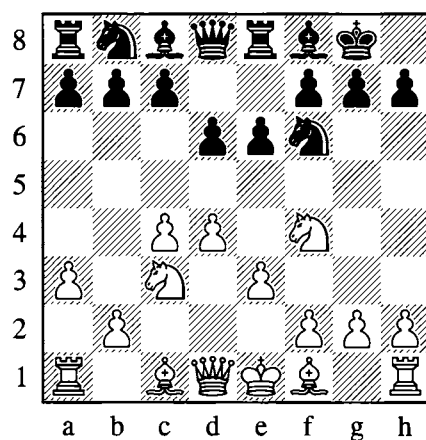
Now we have a major branching point; we will look at B1) 7.♟f4, B2) 7.g3, B3) 7.e4, B4) 7.♟g3 and B5) 7.d5.

### B1) 7.♟f4

White's set-up resembles the well-known theoretical line 5...d5 6.a3 ♙e7 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♟f4, where the pressure on the d5-pawn might be annoying sometimes, especially if White manages to advance the g-pawn. Therefore, I suggest:

### 7...d6!

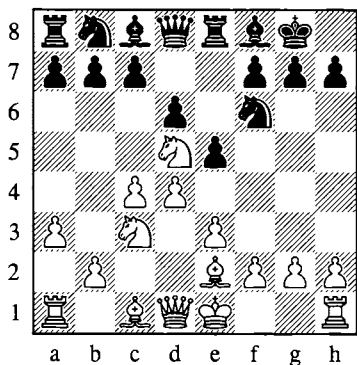
Rather than fixing the central structure with ...d5, Black sets up the possibility of ...e5. Now the f4-knight looks rather awkwardly placed.



### 8.♙d3

8.♟h5, as was played in Shirazi – Shchekachev, Paris 2014, looks artificial, and the simple 8...♟xh5N 9.♖xh5 e5 10.d5 e4 offers Black a better position.

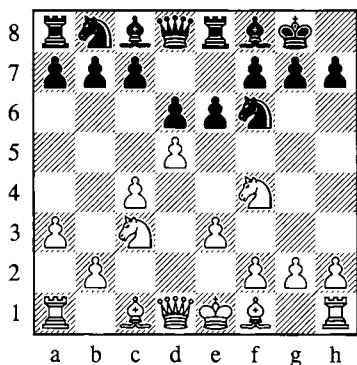
White has also tried: 8.♙e2 e5 9.♟fd5 (releasing the tension in the centre is a definite concession: 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♖xd8 ♜xd8 11.♟fd5 ♟e8! 12.0–0 ♟a6 13.♞d1 ♙e6♯ Black was better in Schandorff – P.H. Nielsen, Aalborg 2006) In Lutsko – A. Zhigalko, Minsk 2008, a good continuation would have been:



9...♞xd5N 10.cxd5 exd4 11.♞xd4 g6 12.0-0 ♔g7 13.♞d1 c5! It makes sense to get rid of the weak c7-pawn or neutralize White's space advantage. 14.dxc6 Otherwise Black gets a pleasant version of a Benoni. 14...♞xc6 The activity of Black's pieces fully compensates for the isolated pawn.

8.d5!N

This hasn't been played yet, but it's a typical idea and it seems like White's most ambitious try. I think the best response is:



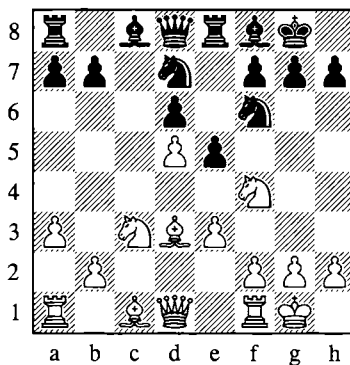
8...c6 9.♔d3

Too passive is: 9.♔e2 cxd5 10.cxd5 e5 11.♞h5 ♞hx5 12.♔hx5 e4 13.0-0 g6 14.♔e2 ♔g7. Black is also doing well after 9.dxe6 fxe6 10.e4 e5 11.♞h5 ♞hx5 12.♞xh5 ♔e6.

9...♞bd7!

The most precise.

9...cxd5 10.cxd5 e5 11.♞h5 ♞hx5 12.♞xh5 g6 13.♞d1 ♞d7 14.e4 offers White some space advantage. 10.0-0 cxd5 11.cxd5 e5

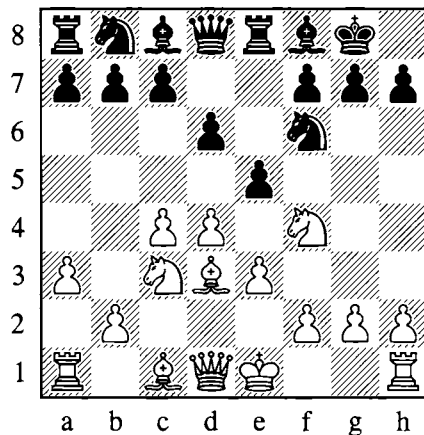


12.♞h5 e4 13.♞xf6 ♠ ♞xf6 14.♔e2 ♔f5

I prefer Black, who has definite attacking prospects.

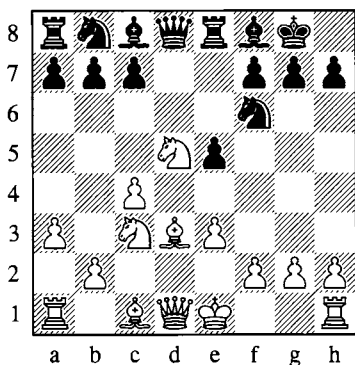
8...e5

Now the most challenging move is:



9.♞fe2N

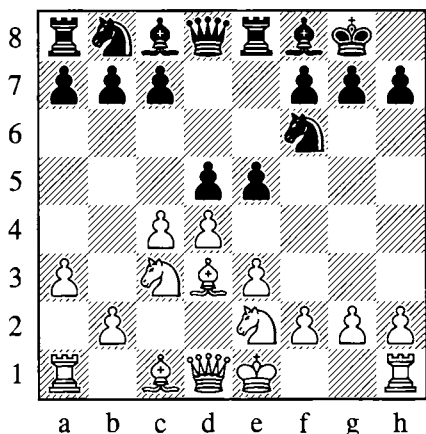
Previously 9.dxe5?! dxe5 10.♞fd5 was played in Moor – Mantovani, Switzerland 2005. Now Black could have exploited the lack of harmony in the opponent's camp by means of:



10...♟fd7!N 11.0-0 c6 12.♟b4 a5 13.♟ba2 ♟c5+ With a big positional advantage.

**9...d5!**

I don't like releasing the tension in the centre with 9...exd4 10.exd4 d5, since after 11.c5 b6 12.b4 a5 13.♞b1 the space advantage is on White's side.



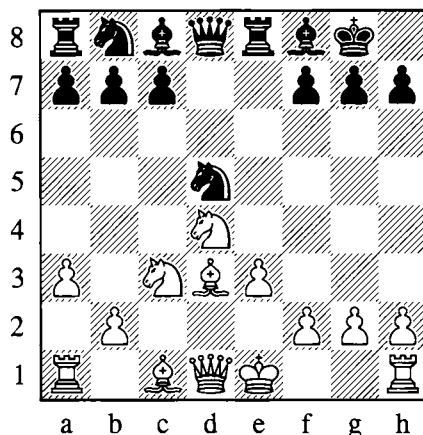
**10.cxd5**

This leads to some tricky tactics.

10.dxe5 allows an exchange of queens after 10...dxc4 11.♟xc4 ♞xd1† 12.♟xd1 ♞xe5= when Black is fine.

10.♟xd5 ♟xd5 11.cxd5 can hardly pose any problems after: 11...exd4 12.e4 (12.♟xd4 ♞xd5 13.0-0 ♟c6 14.♟xc6 ♞xc6 15.b4 ♟e6 16.♟b2 ♞ad8=) 12...♟d7 13.0-0 ♟c5 Black has plenty of activity.

**10...exd4 11.♟xd4 ♟xd5**

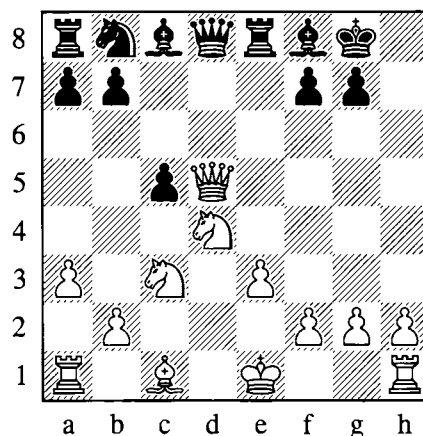


**12.♟xh7†**

The simple 12.♟xd5 ♞xd5 13.0-0 is unthreatening, as Black has easy development after, for example, 13...♟c6.

The vulnerability of Black's centralized knight enables White to grab a pawn with the text move, but Black gets full compensation.

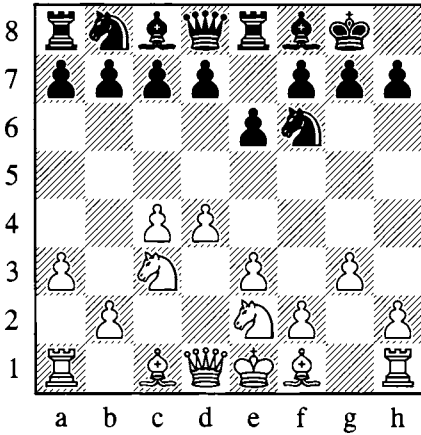
**12...♟xh7 13.♞h5† ♟g8 14.♞xd5 c5**



**15.♟de2 ♟c6 16.♞xd8 ♞xd8 17.e4 ♟e6**

Black has excellent play for a pawn, due to the powerful bishops and control over the b3-square.

**B2) 7.g3**

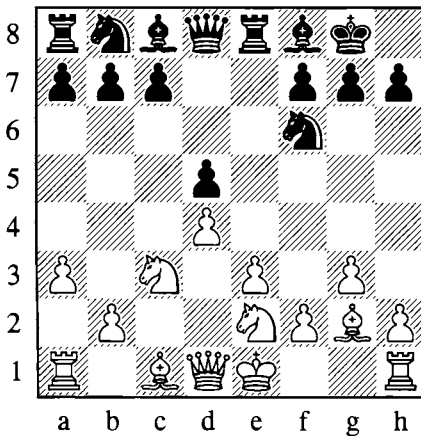


**7...d5 8.cxd5**

Instead 8.♔g2?! dxc4 9.♖a4 seems dubious – White manages to regain the pawn, but it takes a long time: 9...♗bd7 10.♗xc4 e5 11.0–0 e4 12.♗b3 ♖b6 13.♗c2 ♔f5. As a result, Black was able to seize a lot of space in I. Sokolov – Kryvoruchko, Antalya 2013.

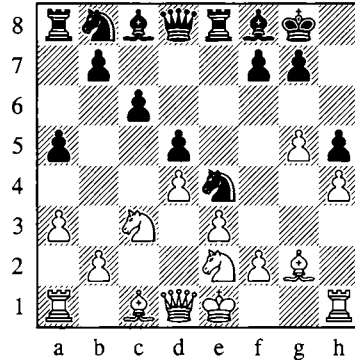
**8...exd5 9.♔g2**

Once again, the position resembles the well-known theoretical line with 5...d5 6.a3 ♔e7 7.cxd5 exd5 8.g3, where White's main plan is to prepare the e3–e4 advance. Obviously, in our case Black benefits from applying pressure along the e-file.



**9...a5 10.0–0**

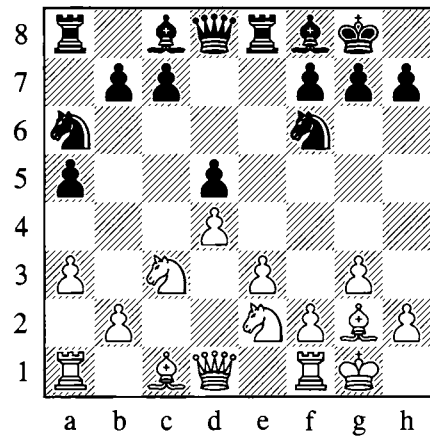
The ultra-aggressive 10.h3 c6 11.g4 is well met by 11...h5! 12.g5 ♗e4 13.h4. We have been following the game Vyzmanavin – Mochalov, Belarus 1983, where Black missed a strong idea:



13...♗d6!N 14.♗g3 g6. Black is firmly in control.

**10...♗a6**

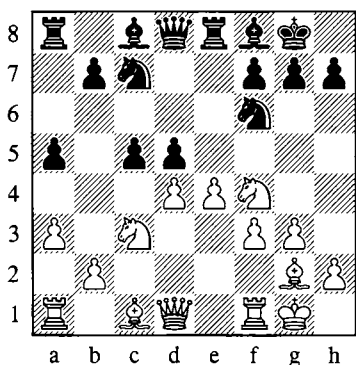
A typical manoeuvre: Black restricts White's activity on the queenside and prepares to meet the thematic f2–f3 advance with ...c7–c5.



White may proceed with **B21) 11.♔d2** or **B22) 11.♗c2**.

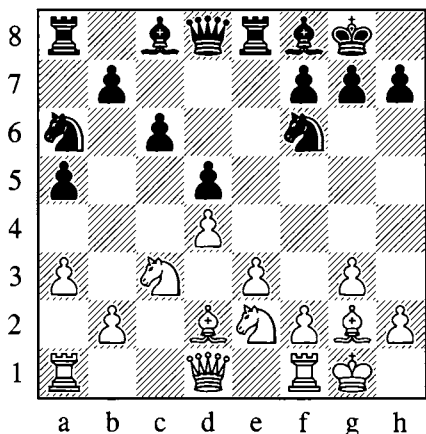
A minor alternative is 11.♗f4 c6. Provoking the ...c6 advance in this way is hardly a significant achievement for White, as we

can see after the further: 12.f3 ♘c7 13.e4?! A tempting but incorrect advance. 13...c5! White has lost control of the centre and found himself in an inferior position after:



14.e5 (14.♙e3 dxe4 15.♞xe4 c4 16.♙f2 b5) 14...cxd4 15.♞xd4 ♘d7 16.♞d3 ♜xe5 17.f4 ♞e8 18.♞xd5 ♞xd5 19.♞xd5 ♞b6† 20.♞h1 ♞f6† S. Bekker Jensen – Hammer, Borup 2008.

**B21) 11.♙d2 c6**

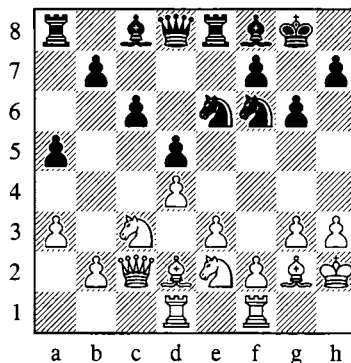


**12.♞c1**

As was mentioned earlier, 12.f3N should be met by 12...c5, and then 13.dxc5 ♘xc5 14.♞d4 ♙d7 offers Black comfortable play.

Black did not face any problems after 12.♞f4 ♙f5 13.f3 h5 14.♞f2 b5 15.♙f1 ♙d6 in Milov – Alekseev, Santo Domingo 2003.

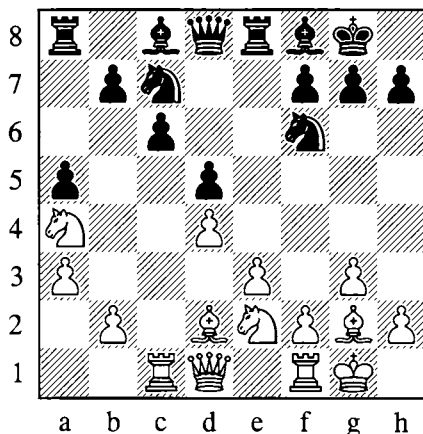
White's play in the following game seems too slow: 12.h3 ♘c7 13.♞c2 ♞e6 14.♞h2 g6 15.♞ad1 Aleksandrov – Lopez Martinez, Lugo 2009. Now Black could afford some aggressive measures:



15...b5!N 16.♞a2 ♞c7 17.♞ac1 b4 18.axb4 axb4 19.♞d3 ♙a6†

**12...♞c7 13.♞a4**

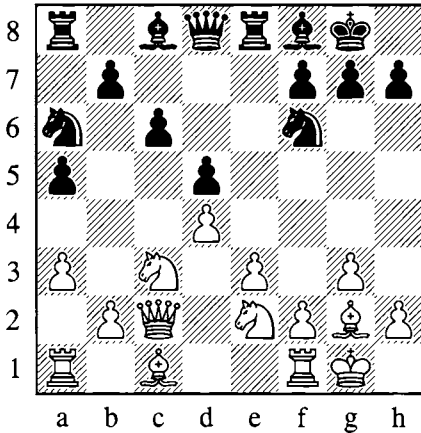
In the event of 13.f3 ♞e6 14.♙e1, intending to regroup the pieces and push e3-e4, Black is able to seize the initiative with energetic play: 14...b5! 15.♙f2 b4 16.axb4 axb4 17.♞a4 ♙a6 18.♞e1 ♙b5†



**13...♞e6 14.b4 ♞e4 15.♙e1 axb4 16.axb4 ♞d6†**

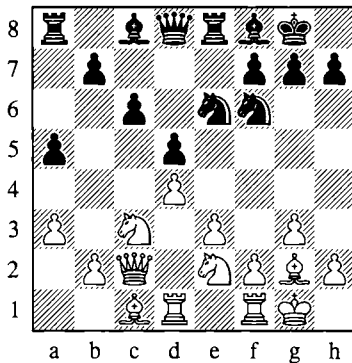
Black had valuable control over the light squares in Volkov – Morozevich, Moscow 2005.

## B22) 11.♖c2 c6



## 12.f3

Instead 12.♙d2 ♘c7 13.♞ad1 ♘e6 14.♙c1 seems too slow. It may look as if White had reached an optimal set-up in Pogosian – Moiseenko, Olginika 2011, but Black could have seized the initiative with a familiar plan:



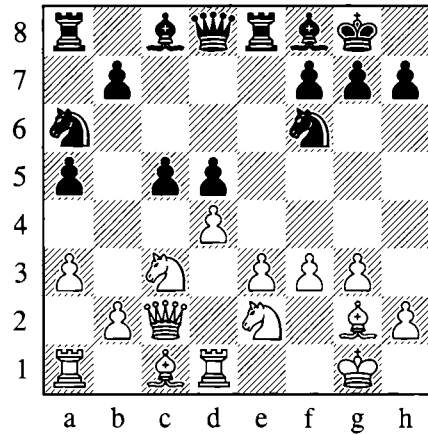
14...b5!N 15.b3 ♙a6 16.♞fe1 b4 17.axb4 axb4 18.♘a4 ♙b5= White's position turns out to be quite passive.

## 12...c5

Once the g2-bishop has been blocked, Black is better placed to accept the creation of an IQP. Moreover, the e3-pawn provides a target for counterplay.

## 13.♞d1

A typical confrontation in the centre had occurred in Reilly – Makarov, Yerevan 2004. Black should have kept the tension by means of:



## 13...♙d7N 14.g4

Or 14.♘f4 ♞c8 15.♞f2 ♙c6, with double-edged play.

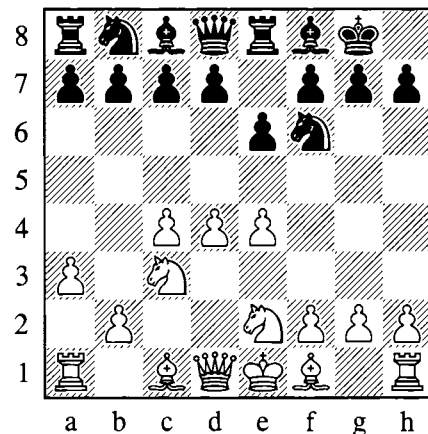
## 14...h6 15.h4?!

I will show this move just to illustrate what happens if White is over-ambitious.

## 15...♘h7! 16.♘xd5 ♞xh4 17.♘b6 ♞ad8=

White is being punished for exposing his king.

## B3) 7.e4



There hardly can be a more tempting move – White's pawn centre looks optimal, and the dark-squared bishop is now freed and ready to pin the opponent's knight. However, this advance provokes the following confrontation in the centre.

### 7...d5! 8.e5

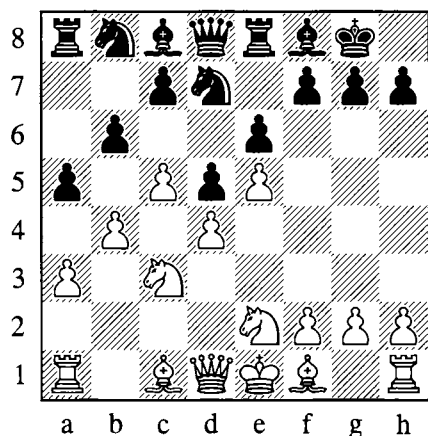
White's set-up looks rather ugly after 8.♙g5 dxe4 9.♘xe4 ♗e7 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 – it will be difficult to maintain the pawn centre in the long run.

8.cxd5 exd5 9.e5 ♘fd7 transposes to variation B32 below.

### 8...♘fd7

Now White can attempt to squeeze Black on either side of the board with **B31) 9.c5?! or B32) 9.cxd5.**

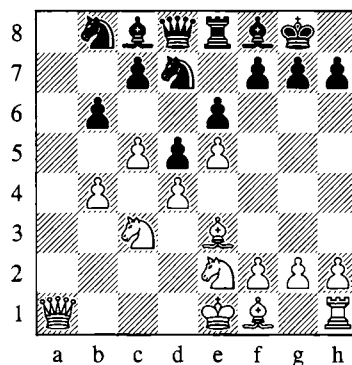
#### B31) 9.c5?! b6 10.b4 a5



This only invites serious trouble for White, as we can see from tournament practice.

### 11.♙b1

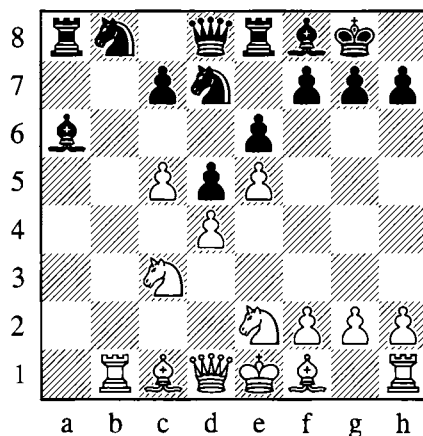
Even worse is: 11.♙e3?! axb4 12.axb4 ♙xa1 13.♙xa1



13...♘c6!N (a clear improvement over 13...bxc5 14.bxc5 ♗b7, which led to unclear play in Khismatullin – Zhrebukh, Voronezh 2008) 14.♙a4 ♗b7 15.b5 ♘cxe5! 16.dxe5 bxc5 White's position will collapse soon.

### 11...axb4 12.axb4 bxc5 13.bxc5 ♗a6!

Now it's obvious that White's king will be stuck in the centre for a long time.



### 14.♘g3?!

14.f4 would be the lesser evil, but even then after 14...♘c6 15.♙e3 f6 16.♙f2 ♙c4 White would be under strong pressure.

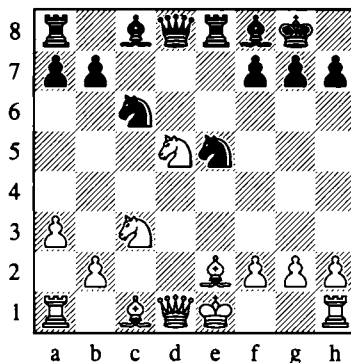
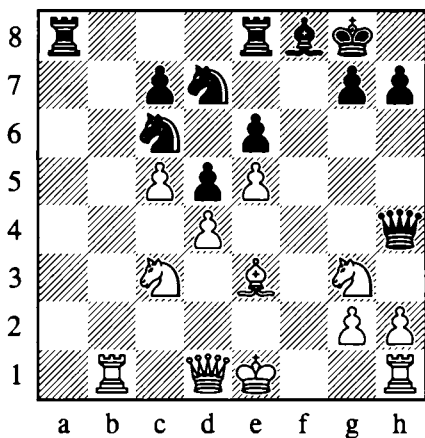
### 14...♙xf1 15.♘xf1

15.♙xf1 f6 – does not help White.

15...f6 16.f4 ♘c6 17.♘g3 fxe5 18.fxe5 ♙h4 19.♙e3

We have been following the game Konstantinov – Arsic, Paracin 2015. Black's easiest and most effective way to break through would have been:

10.♖xd5?! c5 only leads to a loss of time, and White will not remain a pawn up for long. Play might continue: 11.♗ec3 cxd4 12.♙xd4 ♖c6 13.♙d1 ♗dx5 14.♙e2



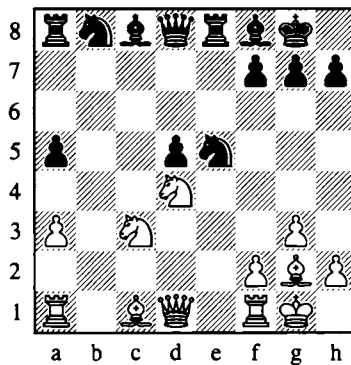
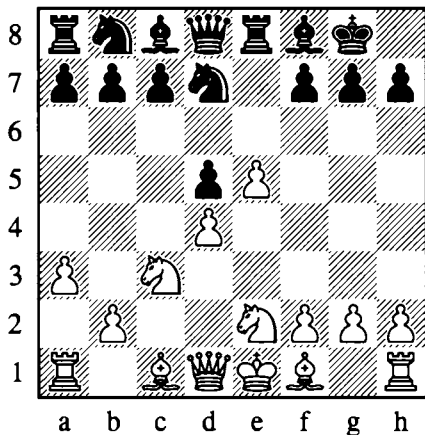
19...♗dx5!N 20.dxe5 d4

With a winning position at an early stage of the game.

14...♙e6! 15.0-0 ♗d6 and the pin on the d5-knight causes White a lot of problems.

The attempt to limit Black's active play by means of 10.b4?! is not effective either: 10...a5 11.b5 c5 12.bxc6 bxc6 13.g3 c5 14.♙g2 cxd4 15.♗xd4 ♗xe5 16.0-0

**B32) 9.cxd5 exd5**



**10.f4**

Over-protecting the key e5-pawn seems like White's best idea.

10.♙e3 c5 11.f4 is another possible move order.

16...♙g4! 17.♙b3 ♙c5 18.♙e3 ♙xd4 19.♙xd4 ♗f3+ 20.♙xf3 ♙xf3+ White had no compensation for the pawn in Le Roux – Oleksienko, Guingamp 2007.

**10...c5 11.♙e3**

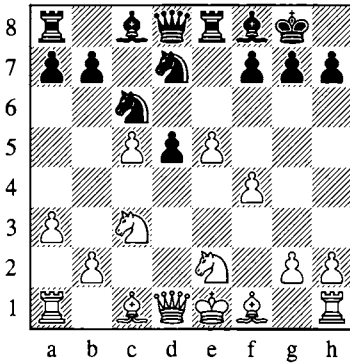
11.g3 ♗c6 12.♙e3 transposes to the note to White's next move.

11.dxc5!?

This should be met by:

11...♞c6!N

Less precise is 11...♞xc5 12.b4 ♞e6 13.♞xd5 a5 14.b5 ♖c5 15.♙e3, when Black still had to prove his compensation for the pawn in Sipila – B. Socko, Lisbon 2014.



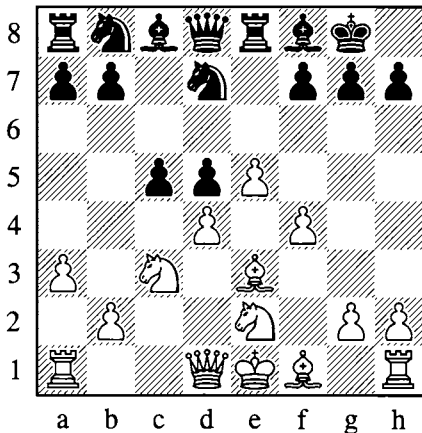
12.b4?

White should prefer 12.♙e3, transposing to our main line.

The greedy 12.♞xd5? ♞xc5 13.♞xd8 ♜xd8 14.♞g3 ♞b3 15.♞b1 ♙c5+ also invites a lot of trouble.

12...a5 13.♞b1 axb4 14.axb4 ♞dx5! 15.fx5 ♙f5 16.♞b3 d4

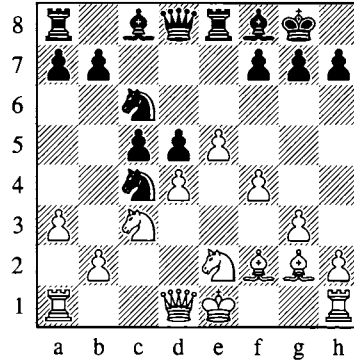
Black regains the piece with great effect!



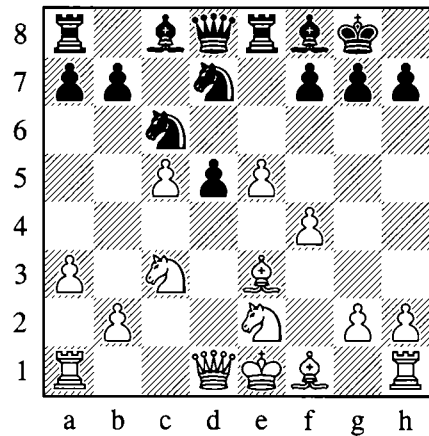
11...♞c6 12.dxc5

An attempt to complete the development

of the kingside pieces by means of 12.g3 as in Baginskaite – V. Ni, Saint Louis 2013, fails to: 12...♞b6!N 13.♙g2 ♞c4 14.♙f2



14...♙g4! 15.♙xd5 ♞xd4 and Black manages to develop a powerful initiative, since 16.♙xc4 is impossible: 16...♞f3+ 17.♞f1 ♙h3#



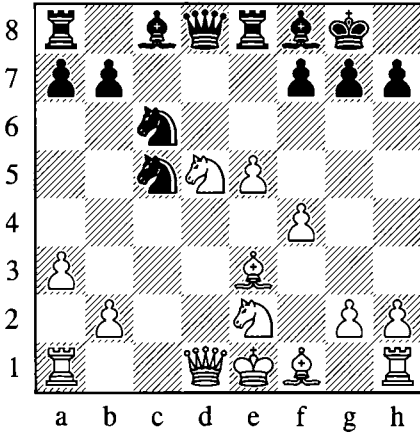
12...♞xc5

Weaker is 12...♙xc5?! 13.♙xc5 ♞xc5 14.b4 d4 15.bxc5 dxc3 16.♞xd8 ♜xd8 17.♞xc3, when claiming full compensation for the pawn turns out to be a tough task.

13.♞xd5

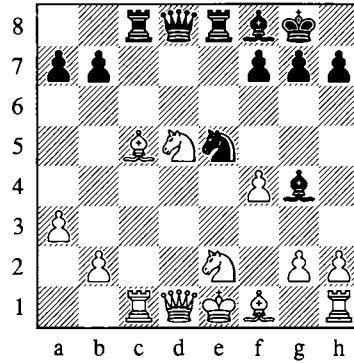
Apparently, 13.b4 is a safer way to maintain the balance. Play continues 13...d4! 14.♞xd4 ♞xd4 15.♞xd4 ♞xd4 16.♙xd4 ♞b3 17.♞d1 a5!, when White's lack of development prevents him from keeping the extra pawn:

18.♖d5 axb4 19.axb4 (bad is 19.♖c7? as in Pantzar – Haug, Stavanger 2016, in view of 19...♞d8!N 20.♗xa8 ♖xd4 21.axb4 ♖c2† 22.♗e2 ♙g4†→) 19...♙e6 20.♙e3 ♞ed8 21.♙c4 ♙xb4† 22.♗f2 ♖a5 23.♙a2 ♙f8 24.♖c3= With an equal endgame.



14...♖e4

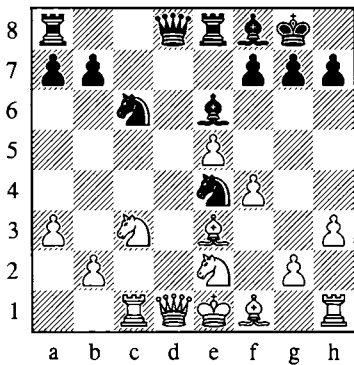
There is one more interesting tactical resource: 14...♖xe5!?N 15.♙xc5 ♞c8!



16.fxe5 (after 16.♙e3?! ♖c4 17.♞c3 b5! White would be almost paralysed) 16...♙xc5 17.b4 ♞xe5 18.♞xc5 ♞xc5 19.bxc5 ♞xd5 20.♞c1 ♞e7 The lack of harmony in White's camp offers Black full compensation for the piece.

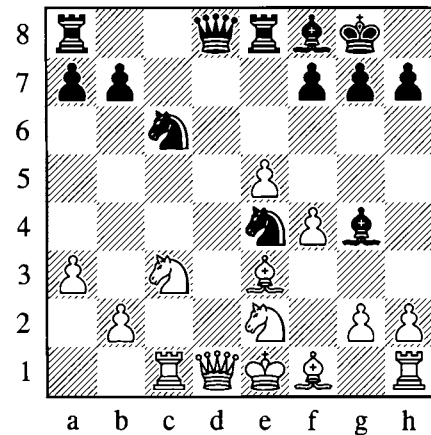
13...♙g4! 14.♞c1

The following game vividly illustrates the potential danger of White's position: 14.h3? ♙e6 15.♞c1 ♖e4 16.♖dc3 We have been following the game Shulman – Milov, Oak Brook 2007. Now Black missed a great opportunity to develop a crushing attack:



15.♖dc3

A desperate attempt to simplify matters.



15...♞h4†

I like this way of handling the position, as it allows Black to keep the position more tense.

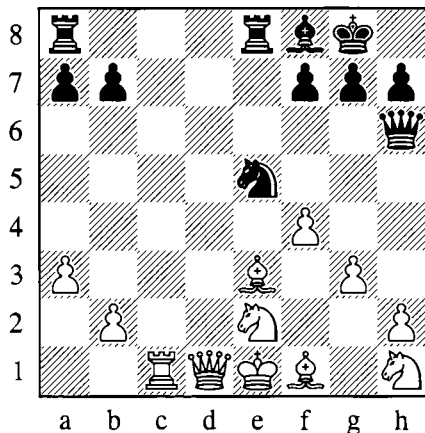
Instead, 15...♙c5 16.♞xd8 ♞axd8 17.♙xc5 ♖xc5 18.♖g3 f6 would regain the pawn and liquidate into an approximately equal endgame.

16...♞h4†!N 17.g3 ♖xg3 18.♙f2 ♞ad8! and there is no space for White's pieces: 19.♞c2 (19.♞a4 ♖xe5 20.fxe5 ♞xa4 21.♖xa4 ♖xh1→) 19...♖d4! 20.♖xd4 ♞xf4→

16.g3 ♖h6! 17.♞xe4

17.♞g2 ♜ad8 18.♞c2 ♞xc3 19.♞xc3 ♞g6 maintains Black's initiative.

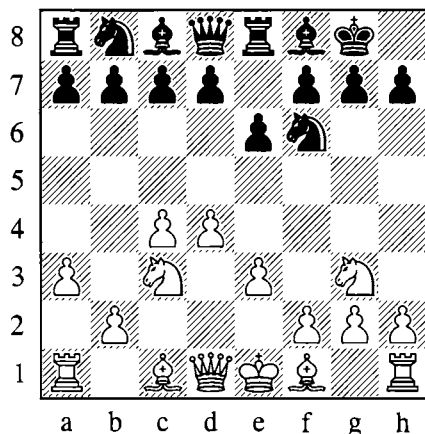
17...♞f3 18.♞f2 ♞xh1 19.♞xh1 ♞xe5



20.fxe5 ♞xe3 21.♞d4 ♞xd4 22.♞xd4 ♞xe5† 23.♞e2 ♞ae8

In this unbalanced position Black did not face any problems in Gonzalez Vidal – Ortega, Santa Clara 2014.

B4) 7.♞g3

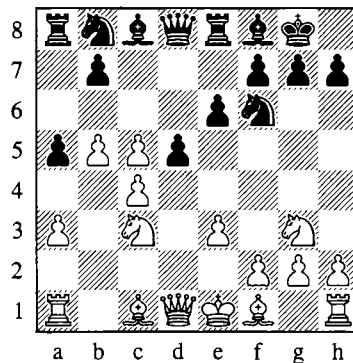


White is not trying to refute Black's set-up with this move, but instead aims to complete development and build upon his slight space advantage.

7...d5

The two main lines to consider are B41) 8.cxd5 and B42) 8.♞e2.

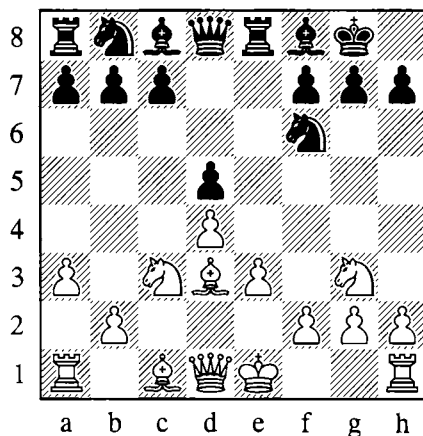
8.b4 a5 9.b5 c5 10.dxc5 was tried in Graf – Barsov, Tashkent 1987. Now Black should have solved his development problems with:



10...♞bd7!N 11.♞b2 (inferior is 11.cxd5?! ♞xc5 12.♞b2 exd5 13.♞e2 a4 14.0-0 ♞e6) 11...♞xc5 And White's lack of development forces him to fight for equality.

B41) 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♞d3

9.♞e2 b6 transposes to variation B42 below.



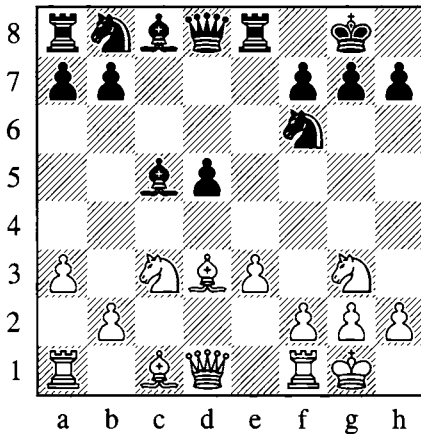
This method of development looks most ambitious, as it supports the future e3-e4 advance. However, blocking the d-file helps Black to challenge the centre.

**9...c5 10.dxc5**

10.0-0 ♖c6 11.♗c2, as was played in Kuruppu – Karas, Gyor 2014, should be met by: 11...♗g4N 12.f3 ♗e6 13.♖ge2 ♞c8 14.♗d2 cxd4 15.exd4 ♖a5

**10...♗xc5 11.0-0**

11.b4 ♗d6 12.♗b2 ♗e5 13.0-0 ♖c6 transposes to the main line below.

**11...♖c6 12.b4**

It doesn't make much sense to postpone development with 12.♖h5 ♗e6 13.♖f4 – after 13...d4! 14.♖xe6 ♞xe6 15.♖a4 ♗f8 16.exd4 ♞xd4 17.♗e3 ♞h4 Black was better in Lilienthal – Sokolsky, Kuibyshev 1942.

**12...♗d6 13.♗b2 ♗e5**

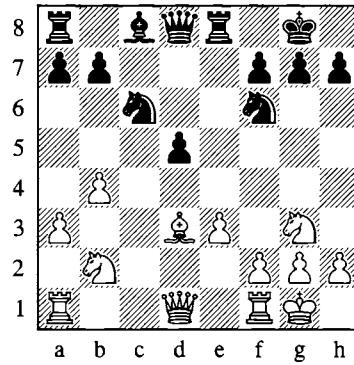
The fight over control of the blockading square (in this case, the d4-square) is one of the prevailing themes in positions with an isolated pawn. As practical tests prove, White cannot claim any advantage from this one.

**14.♞d2**

Instead a classic game continued:

14.♖a4 ♗xb2 15.♖xb2

Gligoric – Bronstein, Zürich 1953. Now I recommend the following pawn sac:



15...d4!N 16.b5

16.e4 a5 17.b5 ♖e5 leads to double-edged play.

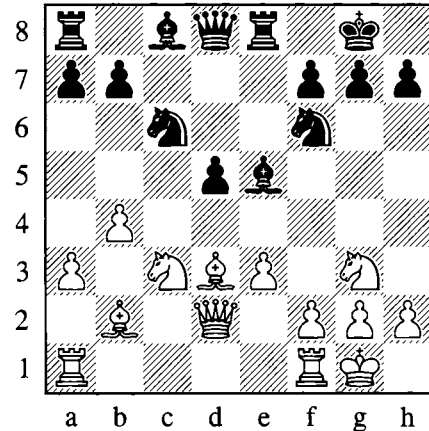
16...♖a5 17.exd4 b6

The passive placement of his pieces prevents White from benefiting from his extra pawn:

18.♖c4

Also level is: 18.♞a4 ♗e6 19.♞ac1 ♞d6 20.♞fe1 ♞ad8=

18...♗g4! 19.♖e2 ♖xc4 20.♗xc4 ♞c8 21.♗d3 ♖d5 22.♞d2 ♗xe2 23.♗xe2 ♖c3 24.♗g4 ♞c7=

**14...h5!**

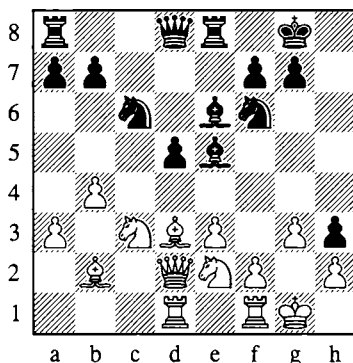
Exploiting the awkward placement of the g3-knight and developing a dangerous initiative on the kingside.

In my opinion, the lack of development of the queenside pieces is a good reason for avoiding 14...d4 15.exd4 ♗xd4 16.♞ad1.

For instance, after 16...♟g4 17.♞ce2 ♟xb2 18.♞xb2 ♞e7 19.h3 ♟d7 20.♞f4± White maintains a small but stable advantage.

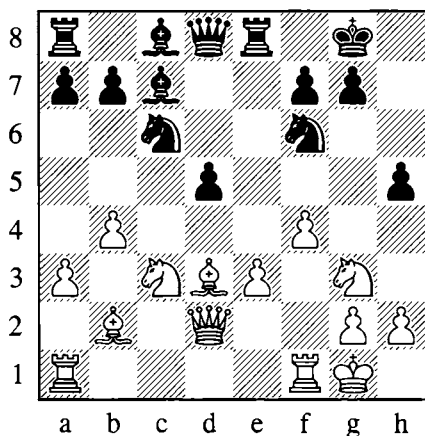
### 15.f4

15.♞ad1!±N is less drastic way to handle the position. Still, Black's position seems perfectly playable after: 15...h4 16.♞ge2 h3 17.g3 ♟e6



18.♞f4 (or 18.♟b1 ♞c8 19.f4 ♟xc3 20.♟xc3 ♟g4, with plenty of counterplay) 18...d4 19.♞xe6 ♞xe6 20.♞e4 dxe3 21.♞xf6† ♟xf6 22.fxe3 ♞b6 The position remains dynamically balanced.

### 15...♟c7



### 16.♞a4?!

A dubious decision – White cannot afford to move the knight away from the centre.

Better was 16.♞h1 h4 17.♞f5 ♟xf5 18.♟xf5 d4 19.♞b5, maintaining the balance.

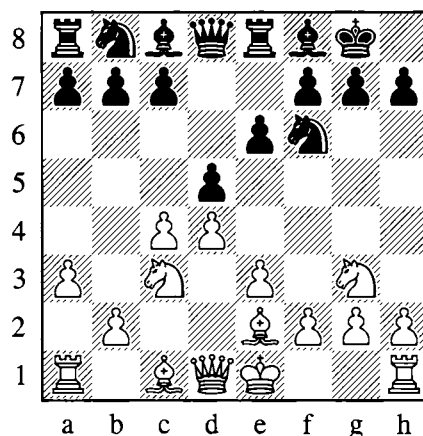
### 16...d4! 17.exd4 h4 18.♞e2 h3 19.♞g3

19.g3 is a better try, although 19...♟g4 20.♞ae1 ♞d5 21.♞f2 ♞ad8 still gives Black a promising initiative.

### 19...♞xd4

White was in trouble in Michalik – Swiercz, Czech Republic 2012.

### B42) 8.♟e2



This was Watson's recommendation in *A Strategic Chess Opening Repertoire for White*, but he only mentions 8...c5 for Black. I don't like that move at all, since 9.dxc5 ♟xc5 10.b4± followed by ♟b2 gives White easy play, while Black has wasted too much with his bishop, causing a delay in the development of the queenside pieces. Instead I would like to recommend:

### 8...b6!

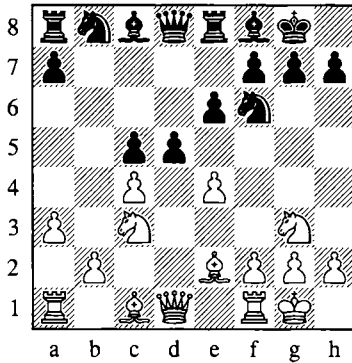
This move not only aims for a fianchetto, but also makes the counterattacking ...c5 advance more effective.

8...dxc4 9.0-0 c5 10.dxc5 ♟xc5 11.♟xc4 ♞xd1 12.♞xd1 ♞bd7, as played in Fier – Harikrishna, Eppingen 2015, seems

insufficient for equality in view of: 13.♙e2!N a6 14.♘ge4 ♙e7 15.♘d6±

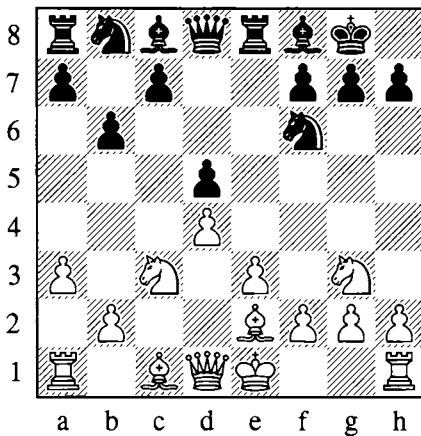
### 9.cxd5

9.0–0 c5 10.dxc5 bxc5 11.e4?! (11.cxd5 exd5 would transpose to our main line below) was played in Manolache – Cheparinov, Pontevedra 2004. Black should have continued:



11...dxe4!N 12.♘ge4 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4 ♙b7 14.♘c3 ♘c6 Black's split queenside pawns are not weak at all, and his knight will be excellent on d4.

### 9...exd5



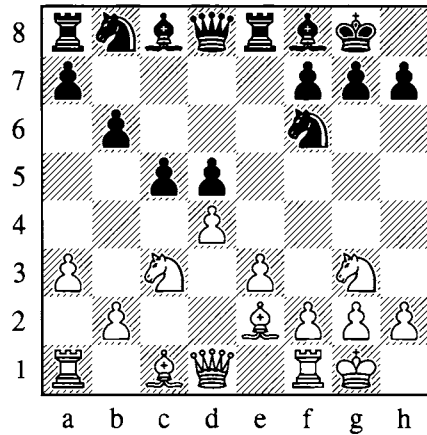
### 10.0–0

10.b4 c6 11.0–0, as was played in Schepetkova – Charochkina, Satka 2015, can be comfortably met by 11...♙a6N

12.b5 cxb5 13.♘xb5 ♘c6, when the weak c4-spot in White's camp yields Black excellent counterplay.

### 10...c5

With White's kingside knight on g3 instead of the normal f3, Black has more reason to create hanging pawns.



### 11.dxc5

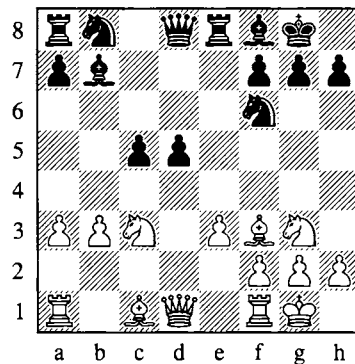
The attempt to keep the tension fails to pose Black any problems: 11.♙b5N ♙d7 12.a4 cxd4 13.exd4 a6 14.♙xd7 ♗xd7 15.♙g5 ♘e4 16.♘ge4 dxe4 17.♙e1 ♘c6 18.d5 ♘b4=

Another possible attempt to put pressure on the hanging pawns is:

11.♙f3 ♙b7 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.b3

13.e4 is harmless: 13...dxe4 14.♘cxe4 ♘xe4

15.♗xd8 ♗xd8 16.♘xe4 ♘c6 17.♘c3 ♗d7=



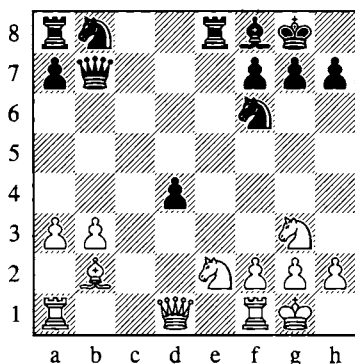
13...♞d7!

Protecting the bishop and getting ready to break open the centre.

14.♙b2

14.♞a2 is also well met by 14...d4! 15.♙xb7 ♞xb7 16.exd4 cxd4 17.♟ce2 ♟c6 18.♞d2 ♞ab8 19.b4 a5= and White cannot avoid an exchange of all the queenside pawns.

14...d4! 15.♙xb7 ♞xb7 16.exd4 cxd4 17.♟ce2 17.♞xd4 ♞xb3 18.♟ce4 ♟bd7 is slightly better for Black.

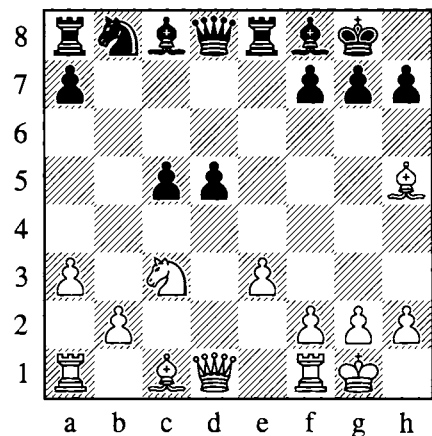


17...♟c6

The passed d-pawn is strong, so White has nothing better than:

18.♟xd4 ♟xd4 19.♙xd4 ♞ad8 20.♞a2 ♞e6 21.♞d2 ♙xa3=

11...bxc5 12.♟h5 ♟xh5 13.♙xh5



13...♙a6!N

A natural way of handling the position.

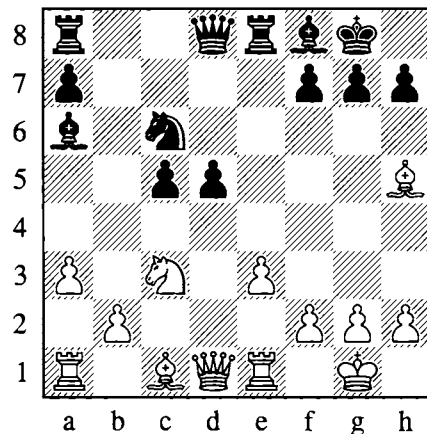
The previously played 13...♙b7?! 14.♙f3± was too passive for Black in Berovski – Dobrev, Shumen 1995.

14.♞e1

Over-optimistic is: 14.♙f3?! ♙xf1 15.♞xf1 ♟d7! (instead 15...♟c6 16.♙xd5 ♞c8 17.♙d2 offers White more compensation) 16.♙xd5 ♞b8

14...♟c6!

This pawn sacrifice allows Black to complete development and exploit the light-square weaknesses in the opponent's camp.



15.♟xd5

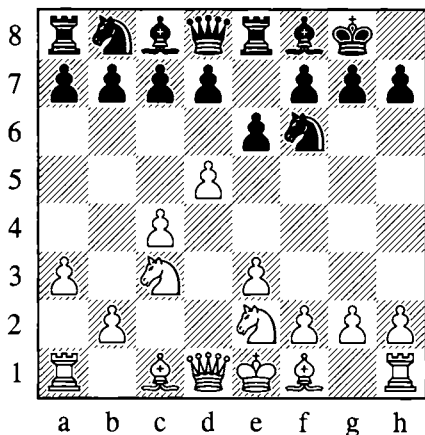
15.♞xd5 ♟e5 16.♙e2 ♙xe2 17.♞xe2 ♞b8 leads to a double-edged battle.

15.♙f3 leads to a similar character of play: 15...♟e5! 16.♙xd5 ♞b8 17.e4 ♞h4! The c1-bishop is tied to protecting the b2-pawn, whereas Black has a few dangerous ideas, such as transferring the rook to h6.

15...♙c4 16.♟c3 ♞b6 17.♞a4 ♙b3

White experiences serious problems with the development of his queenside pieces.

## B5) 7.d5



7...a5!

Securing the excellent square c5 for the knight, where it will also put unpleasant pressure on the weakened b3-spot.

The two main options are **B51) 8.g3** and **B52) 8.♖g3**.

8.♘d4 This natural-looking move has never been seen in practice. The vulnerability of the d5-pawn should tell after: 8...exd5 9.cxd5 ♖a6 10.♗e2 c6 11.0-0 ♘c7 12.dxc6 dxc6

## B51) 8.g3

This means of development looks most consistent – the d5-pawn will be well protected, and the fianchetto will allow White to castle quite soon.

8...♖a6 9.♗g2 ♘c5 10.0-0

White can instead attempt to keep the pawn structure more flexible with:

10.b3

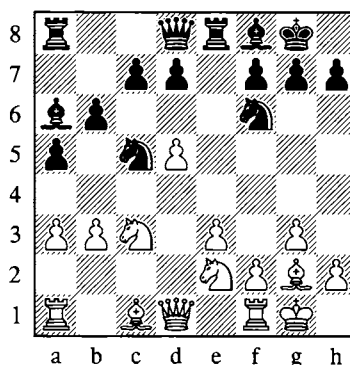
This was recommended by Lars Schandorff in *Playing 1.d4 – The Indian Defences*, but it can be strongly met by:

10...exd5

This move was not considered by the Danish GM.

11.cxd5 b6! 12.0-0 ♗a6

White suffers from the unpleasant pin on the e2-knight and the vulnerability of the d3-square.



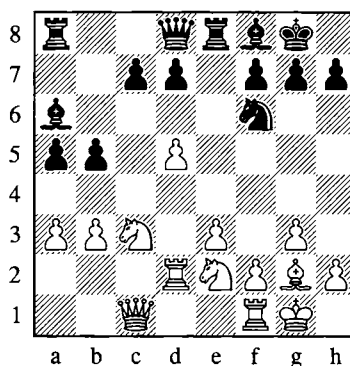
13.♙a2

Hardly better is: 13.a4 ♘fe4 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♙c2 ♘c5 Steingrímsson – Grandelius, Reykjavik 2014.

13...♘d3

I like this concept – after liquidating the c1-bishop, Black will have control over many dark squares.

14.♙d2 ♘xc1 15.♙xc1 b5

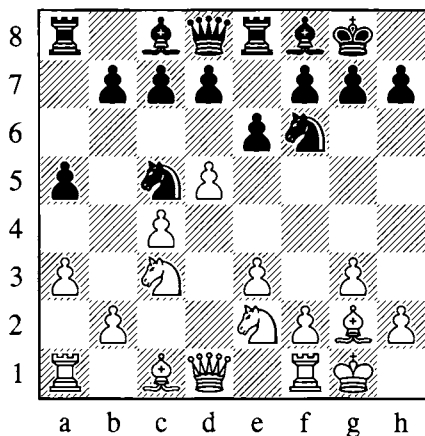


16.♘a2?!

16.♙fd1 N b4 17.axb4 axb4 18.♘a4 would have maintained the balance.

16...b4

Black had the edge in Hammes – Brunner, Skopje 2015.



10...a4 11.♖c2 d6 12.♙d2 ♙d7

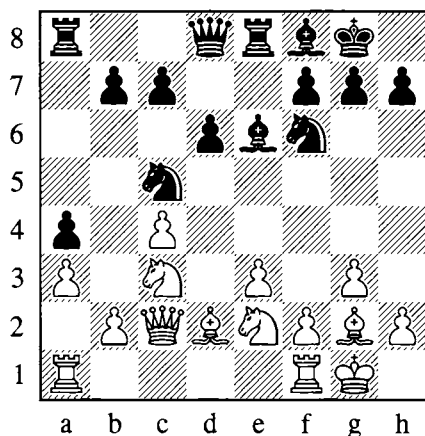
Black should also be okay after 12...♟b3  
13.♞ad1 exd5 14.cxd5 ♙d7.

13.dxc6

Releasing the tension in the centre looks like a concession, but I do not see a better alternative.

The natural 13.♞ad1?! c6! 14.e4 exd5 15.exd5 cxd5 16.cxd5 ♟g4 leads White to a passive and inferior position.

13...♙xe6

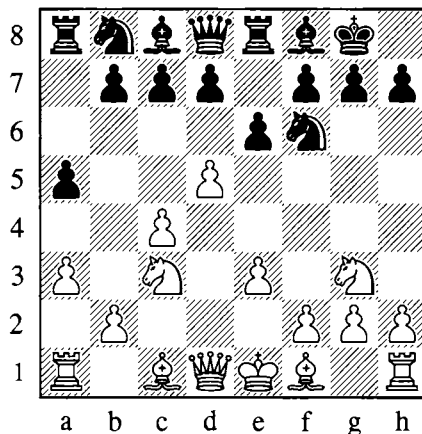


14.♟d5 c6 15.♟xf6† ♞xf6 16.♟d4 ♙d7

The vulnerability of the c4-pawn and ideal placement of the c5-knight afforded

Black excellent play in Dubov – Jakovenko, Ekaterinburg 2013.

B52) 8.♟g3



This is the most popular way to handle the position. The knight is freeing the way for the bishop and taking control of the important e4-square.

8...♟a6

Now the two main lines are B521) 9.♙e2 and B522) 9.♙d3.

White cannot afford to delay development even more with 9.♞b1?! in view of 9...exd5 10.cxd5 c6! 11.♙e2 b5 12.dxc6 dxc6, and White was already in trouble in Berezjuk – Markos, Czech Republic 2002.

I also examined 9.b3 exd5 10.♟xd5 (10.cxd5 c6 11.♙e2 b5!♣ would force White to release the tension in a worse situation) 10...♟xd5 11.cxd5 c6 12.♙e2 ♟c7 13.dxc6 dxc6 14.♞c2 ♙e6, when Black has excellent play.

B521) 9.♙e2 ♟c5 10.0–0

There are a couple of serious alternatives:

10.b3

This prophylactic move can be met by:

10...a4

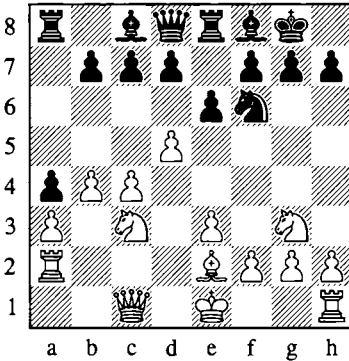
In my opinion, liquidating the dark-squared bishop is the most challenging reply.

11.b4 ♖b3 12.♞a2

Or 12.♞b1 ♖xc1 13.♞xc1 exd5 14.cxd5 c5! 15.bxc5 (15.0-0 cxb4 16.axb4 ♙xb4 17.♗xa4 ♚a5 18.♚d4 ♚xa4 19.♞c4 ♚a5 20.♞xb4 ♚xd5= leads to major simplifications) 15...♙xc5 16.0-0 ♚a5 with promising counterplay.

12...♖xc1 13.♚xc1

We have been following the game Thingstad – Predojevic, Norway 2016. In my opinion, Black should have activated the dark-squared bishop by means of:



13...exd5N 14.cxd5 c5! 15.0-0

15.bxc5 ♙xc5 16.0-0 d6 is also okay for Black.

15...cxb4 16.axb4 ♙xb4 17.♞xa4 ♞xa4 18.♗xa4 ♚a5

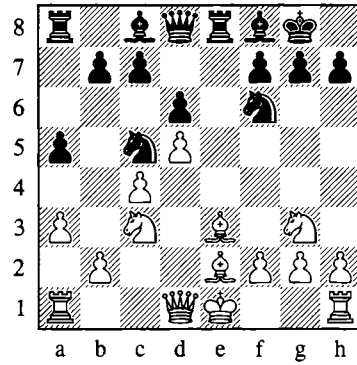
Black has counterplay.

Another natural continuation is:

10.e4 d6 11.♙e3

After 11.0-0 exd5 12.exd5 g6 13.♚c2 ♙g7 14.♙d2 a4! Black's position seems preferable due to the awkward placement of the g3-knight.

11...exd5 12.exd5

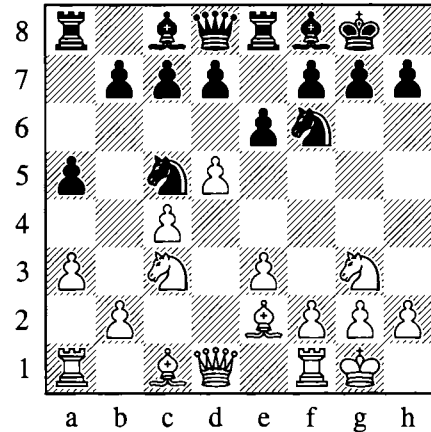


12...g6

Another attractive idea is 12...♞e3!N 13.fxe3 ♚e7, when Black has excellent compensation due to his superb control over the dark squares.

13.0-0 ♙g7 14.♞b1 ♙d7 15.b4 axb4 16.axb4 ♗fe4 17.♗gxe4 ♖xe4 18.♖xe4 ♞xe4

The activity of both Black's rooks put White in an unpleasant situation in Zueger – Greenfeld, Munich 1987.



10...a4

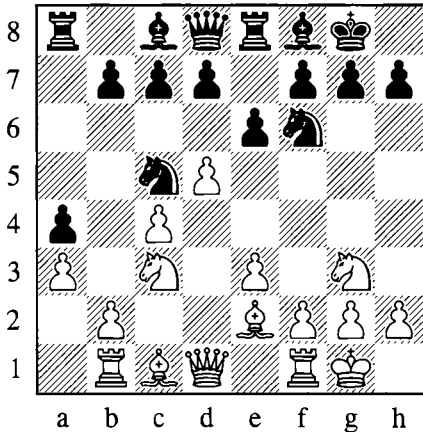
Black is ready to exchange the important dark-squared bishop, so White's next move is almost forced.

11.♞b1

In the event of 11.e4 ♖b3 12.♞b1 ♖xc1 13.♞xc1 exd5 14.exd5 g6 15.♗xa4 h5! the strong dark-squared bishop offers Black

sufficient compensation for the pawn, at the very least.

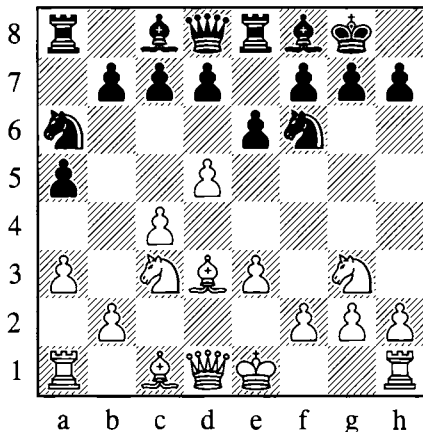
This position was reached in Kuzubov – Pavlov, Nakhchivan 2016. Now I suggest the following plan of activating all Black's minor pieces:



11...♟d6!?N 12.e4 exd5 13.exd5 ♟e5  
14.♟e3 d6

The poor placement of the g3-knight and Black's control over the e-file puts White in an uncomfortable situation.

B522) 9.♟d3



A double-edged continuation. The bishop is placed more actively here than on e2, but

White will have to expend another tempo after ...♟a6-c5.

9...♟c5 10.♟c2 exd5 11.cxd5

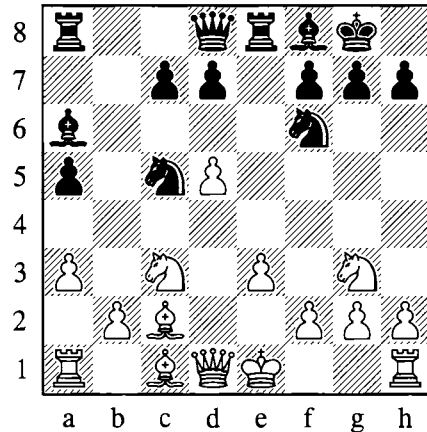
White is ready to complete development and push the central pawns, but...

11...b5! 12.♟xb5

Grabbing the pawn is the most principled reply.

After 12.0-0! ♟b7 13.♟d4 b4 14.axb4 axb4 15.♟xa8 ♟xa8 16.♟xb4 ♟xd5 17.♟h4 h6 Black was better in Ipatov – Eljanov, Dubai 2014.

12...♟a6 13.♟c3



13...♟b8!?N

I like this ambitious new approach.

The previously played 13...c6 14.b4 ♟b7 15.dxc6 dxc6 16.♟xd8 ♟exd8 17.♟b1 axb4 18.axb4 ♟d6 19.f3 ♟b5 20.♟ge2 ♟xc3 21.♟xc3 ♟db8 led to an equal endgame in Aleksandrov – Granda Zuniga, Pavlodar 2015.

14.♟b1

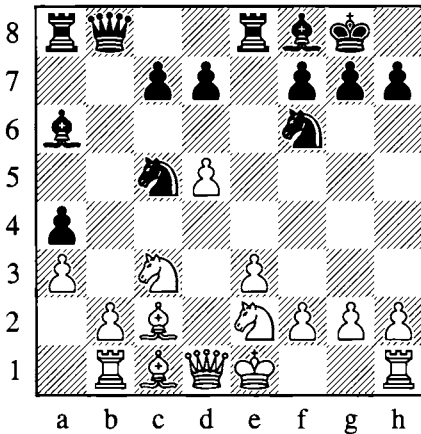
14.♟ge2 ♟d6 15.0-0 c6 16.g3 ♟e5 puts White under strong pressure – both of Black's bishops are extremely powerful.

**14...a4!**

It's vital to secure the c5-knight.

**15.♟ge2**

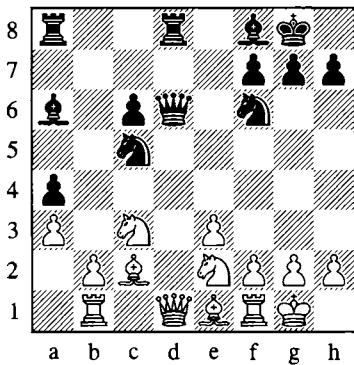
And certainly not 15.e4? as White cannot afford such an 'active' move: 15...c6! 16.dxc6 d5 and Black's attack is almost decisive.



**15...c6 16.0-0**

It's better not to be too greedy.

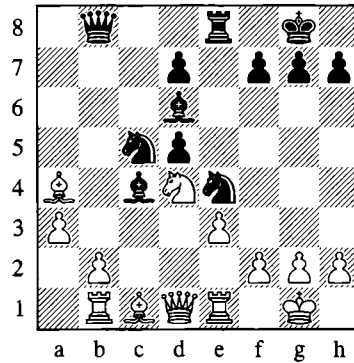
The following line illustrates well White's troubles with development: 16.dxc6? dxc6 17.0-0 ♜d8 18.♙d2 ♞d6 19.♙e1



19...♞c7 20.♞c1 ♟d3 21.♙xd3 ♙xd3 22.♞a1 ♟g4! White's awful development makes it impossible for him to defend his kingside, for instance: 23.f4 ♙c5 24.♞f3 ♞b6 25.♙d2 ♞e8--

**16...cxd5 17.♞e1 ♙c4 18.♟xa4**

After 18.♟d4?! ♟fe4 19.♟xa4? ♞xa4! 20.♙xa4 ♙d6 the massive attack by all Black's forces decides the game on the spot:



21.g3 ♟xf2! 22.♞xf2 ♙xg3†! 23.hxg3 ♟e4†--

**18...♟xa4 19.♙xa4 ♙xa3**

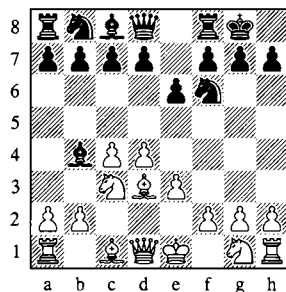
The activity of Black's pieces fully compensates for the slightly inferior pawn structure.

**Conclusion**

The Rubinstein System is a perfect weapon for positional players and leads to a long strategic battle, where both players have different plans at their disposal. In comparison to the main line with 5...d5 6.a3 ♙e7, my recommendation of 5...♞e8 6.a3 ♙f8 gives Black a more flexible set-up, but delaying the ...d5 advance yields White some aggressive options. However, since 7.e4 is strongly met by 7...d5!, and 7.d5 offers Black promising play on the dark squares, it may be that White has nothing better than playing patiently with 7.g3 or 7.♟g3. The arising positions are strategically complex, but if Black chooses the correct moment to initiate counterplay with ...c5 (or, in some variations, ...b5), he will have no cause for complaints.

# Chapter 13

## 4.e3



## 5.♔d3

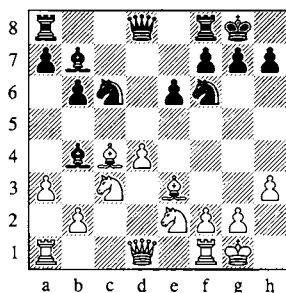
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♔d3

5...d5

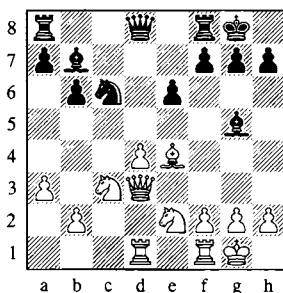
A) 6.♘ge2 dxc4 7.♙xc4 c5	186
A1) 8.a3	186
A2) 8.0-0 cxd4 9.exd4 ♘c6	187
A21) 10.a3	189
A22) 10.♙g5	190
B) 6.cxd5 exd5 7.♘ge2 ♜e8	192
B1) 8.♙d2	193
B2) 8.0-0 ♙d6	195
B21) 9.♘f4	195
B22) 9.♙d2	196
B23) 9.a3	198
B24) 9.f3	198

A2) note to 10th move options



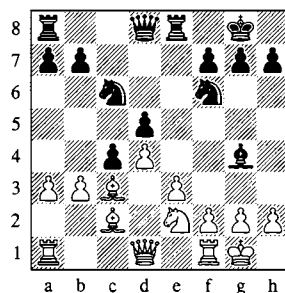
12...♙d6!N

A22) after 15.♙e4



15...♙5!N

B1) after 13.b3



13...♙a5!N

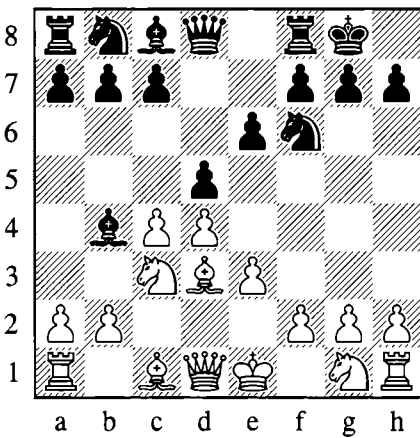
1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♘b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♙d3

This is White's most popular continuation. The bishop comes to its most active square, while the knight may go to e2 or f3.

5...d5

Taking space in the centre is Black's most popular reply.

5...c5 is a major alternative which sometimes leads to the same positions after a subsequent ...d5, while wholly independent options include 5...b6 and 5...d6.



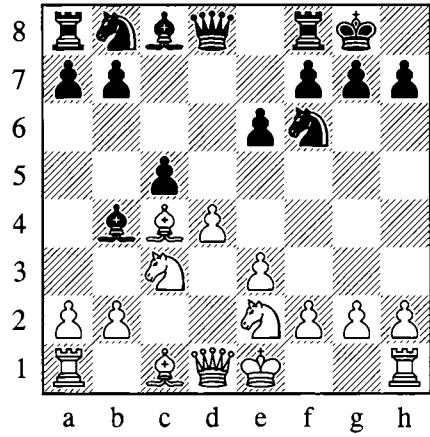
In this introductory chapter to the 5.♙d3 set-up we will focus on A) 6.♗ge2 and B) 6.cxd5.

6.a3 will be discussed in the next chapter, while the most important 6.♗f3 is covered in Chapters 15 and 16.

A) 6.♗ge2 dxc4

Another common variation is 6...c5 7.cxd5 cxd4 8.exd4 ♗xd5 9.0-0 ♗c6, but I don't like the position after 10.♗xd5 exd5 11.♗f4, when White can claim a risk-free edge.

7.♙xc4 c5



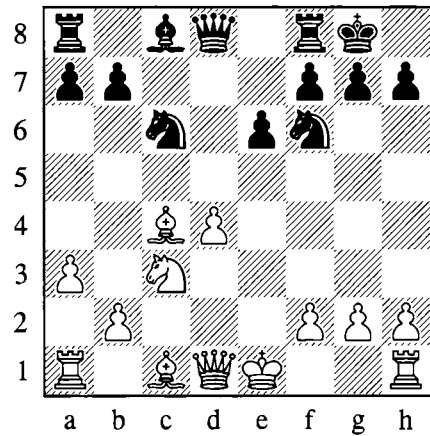
White must choose between A1) 8.a3 and A2) 8.0-0.

A1) 8.a3 ♙xc3† 9.♗xc3

9.bxc3 transposes to variation C of the next chapter.

9...cxd4 10.exd4 ♗c6

White has nothing better than protecting the isolated pawn with:



11.♙e3

Of course, such a modest method of development doesn't suit White's attacking ambitions, so Black gets comfortable play. By the way, the text move actually transposes to

another well-known theoretical line of the Nimzo where it is usually White to move after 4.e3 c5 5.♘ge2 cxd4 6.exd4 d5 7.a3 ♙xc3† 8.♗xc3 dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♗c6 10.♙e3 0–0. That particular line is slightly favourable to White, but in our version the extra tempo means that Black has no problems whatsoever.

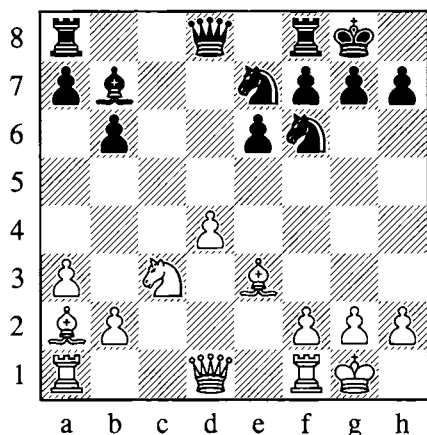
### 11...b6 12.0–0 ♙b7 13.♙a2

After 13.♗d3 h6 14.♗ad1 ♖c8 15.♙a2 ♗e7 Black was already better in Gruenberg – Enders, Dresden 1985.

13.♙d3 ♗e7 14.♙g5, as played in Christiansen – Hjartarson, Dubai (ol) 1986, can be comfortably met by 14...♗ed5N with equal chances.

### 13...♗e7

Once again this move plays an important role, preventing White from opening the position with d4-d5.

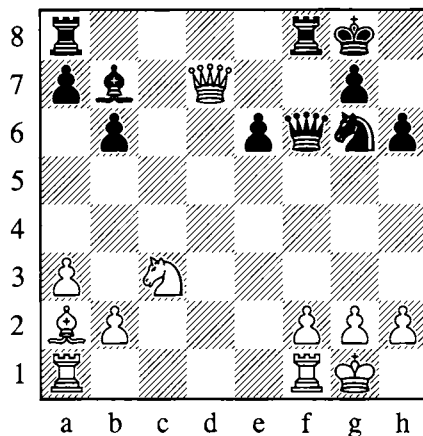


### 14.♙g5 ♗g6 15.d5

Finally it comes, but White has to exchange the powerful dark-squared bishop after:

### 15...h6! 16.♙xf6 ♗xf6 17.dxc6 fxc6 18.♗d7

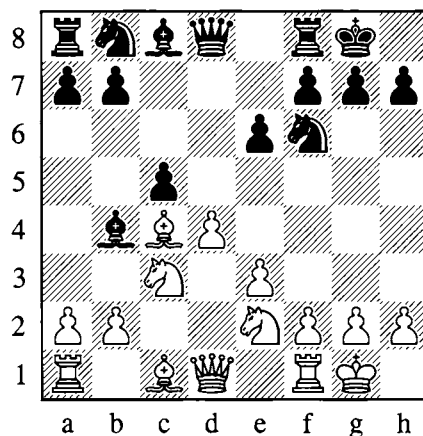
A prophylactic move such as 18.f3 can be met by 18...♗ad8, when Black's piece activity matters more than the isolated e-pawn.



### 18...♙g2! 19.♗xe6† ♗xe6 20.♙xe6† ♗h7 21.♗xg2 ♗f4† 22.♗g3 ♗xe6

Black was doing well in Wiedenkiller – Carlsson, Borlange 2014.

### A2) 8.0–0

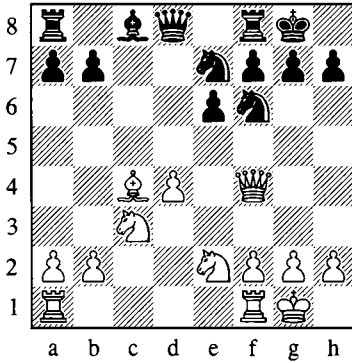


### 8...cxd4 9.exd4 ♗c6

This position with the isolated d4-pawn is similar to the main *tabiya* from Chapters 15 and 16. However, the somewhat modest placing of the e2-knight severely limits White's attacking possibilities.

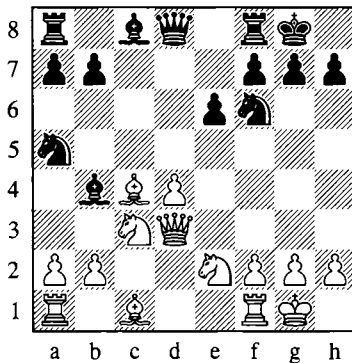
The two main moves are A21) 10.a3 and A22) 10.♙g5, but I will also mention a few alternatives:

10.♙f4 ♘d6 11.♚d2 ♙xf4 12.♗xf4 ♖e7  
 Forget any notion about White benefitting from the exchange of his 'bad' bishop. Such exchanges almost always benefit the side playing against the isolated pawn, and in the following example Black soon took control:



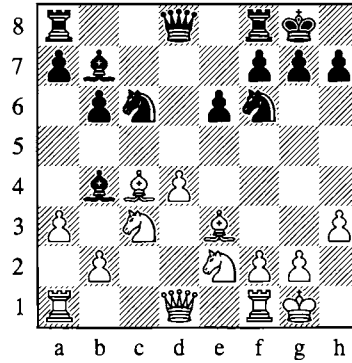
13.♞ad1 b6 14.♞d3 ♙b7 15.♞h3 ♖g6 16.♗e3 ♗d6 Hoensch – Knoedler, Germany 1987.

10.♗d3 The queen's transfer to the kingside is one of White's main attacking ideas in such positions. However, in this variation it has a concrete drawback: 10...♖a5! That's the point! Black manages to liquidate the light-squared bishop and thus limit White's attacking potential.



11.♙b5 ♘d7 12.♙g5 ♙e7 13.♞fd1 ♙xb5 14.♗xb5 a6 15.♗d3 ♖c6 White had to take care in order to equalize in Graf – Mchedlishvili, Batumi 2002.

Positions with an isolated pawn always contain strategic risk, so White cannot afford slow play. For instance, 10.h3 b6 11.♙e3 ♙b7 12.a3 was seen in the high-level game Vaganian – Tukmakov, Reggio Emilia 1987. Now Black should have played:

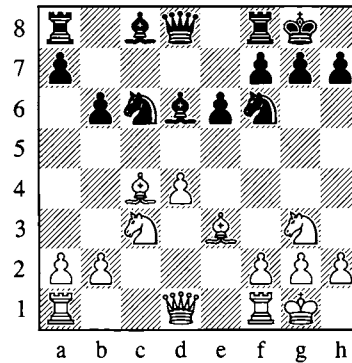


12...♙d6!N 13.♙a2 (13.d5? ♖a5 14.♙a2 exd5 leads to the loss of a pawn) 13...♞c8 14.♙g5 (once again, 14.d5 fails to solve White's problems: 14...exd5 15.♖xd5 ♖a5) 14...♙e7 15.♞c1 ♖d5 16.♙xe7 ♖cxe7

Another pretty harmless continuation is:

10.♙e3 ♘d6 11.♖g3 b6

There are only two moves left before Black can complete the perfect set-up with 12...♙b7 and 13...♖e7.



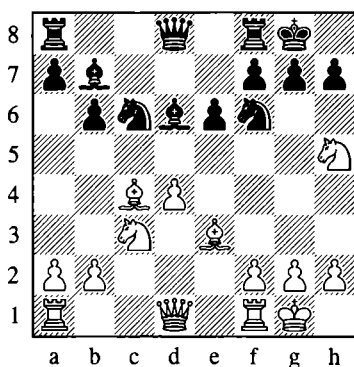
12.♖h5

Weaker is 12.♗e2?! ♙xg3 13.hxg3 ♖xd4 and White had no compensation for the pawn in Aarland – Ekeberg, Oslo 2008.

I also checked 12.d5N exd5 13.♖xd5 ♗g4!?

14.♞c1 ♔e6, with a sharp position where Black is not worse.

12...♗b7



13.♖xf6+N

13.a3 is rather slow, and 13...♔e7 14.♖f4 ♞b8! (intending ...♞d8) was good for Black in Christensen – Skorna, corr. 2001.

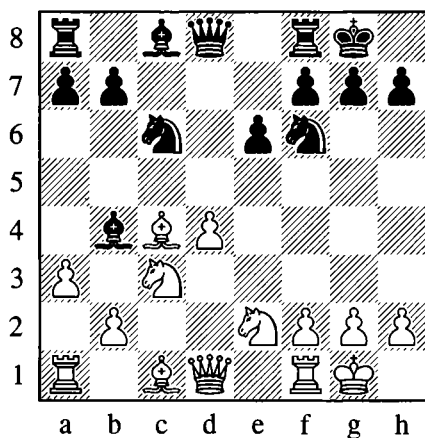
13...♞xf6 14.♞g4

And of course not: 14.♖e4? ♔xh2+ 15.♕xh2 ♞h4+ 16.♕g1 ♞xe4+

14...♞g6=

Black doesn't face any problems.

### A21) 10.a3



10...♔d6!

There is nothing wrong with 10...♔e7, but I prefer to focus on the drawbacks of the knight

on e2. In particular, now 11.♔g5? doesn't work in view of 11...♔xh2+!

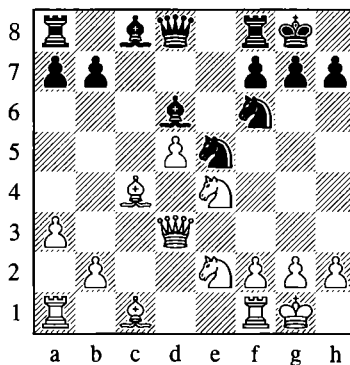
11.♞d3

Once again, slow play will not suffice: 11.h3 h6 12.♔e3 ♖e7 13.♞d3 ♔d7 14.♞ad1 ♔c6+ and Black was better in Alatortsev – Bukhtin, Moscow 1976.

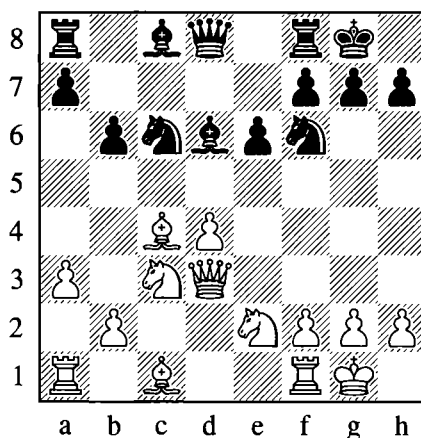
11...b6

This move is sound and reliable, but in my main line it has the drawback of allowing a forced draw.

To avoid that outcome, I also examined: 11...e5!? This aggressive reply is connected with an interesting pawn sacrifice. 12.d5 e4! 13.♖xe4 ♖e5



14.♖xf6+ ♞xf6 15.♞b3 ♖xc4 16.♞xc4 ♔d7 17.♖g3 ♞fe8 Black's powerful bishops provide full compensation for the pawn.

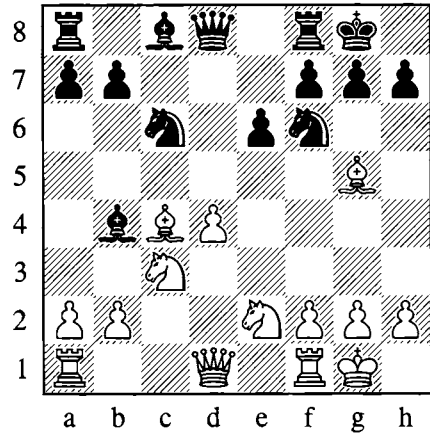


**12.♞d1 ♖b7 13.♞h3 h6**

This is not the only move, but it's the simplest way to prove that Black has no theoretical problems.

**14.♙xh6N**

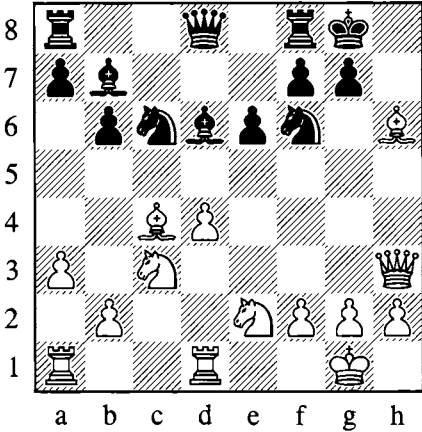
If White does not go for the draw then he is more likely be worse than better. For example, Rakhmanov – Georgiadis, Dubai 2015, continued 14.♘g3 and now the simple 14...♘e7N would have given Black a comfortable position.



**10...♙e7 11.a3**

This is a multi-tasking prophylactic move: White secures a good spot for the retreat of the c4-bishop and restricts the mobility of the c6-knight.

As before, 11.♞d3 can be well met by: 11...♘a5! 12.♖b5 a6 13.♙a4 b5 14.♙c2 g6 15.♞ad1 ♖b7 – White has lost time preventing the bishop from being exchanged, so Black has been able to make a lot of progress on the queenside.



**14...gxf6 15.♞xh6 ♘g4**

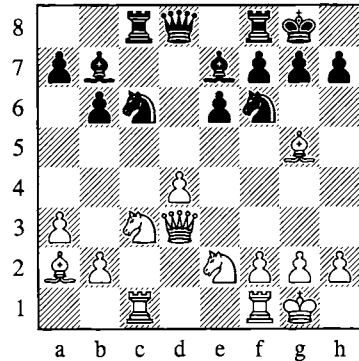
I don't see much point in risking 15...♘h7?! 16.♘e4 ♘e7 17.d5! with a strong attack. It's probably still a draw with best play, but it's messier and more dangerous. If you wish to avoid the early draw, then go for the alternative at move 11 rather than this.

**16.♞h5 ♘f6 17.♞h6**

With a draw by repetition coming soon.

**A22) 10.♙g5**

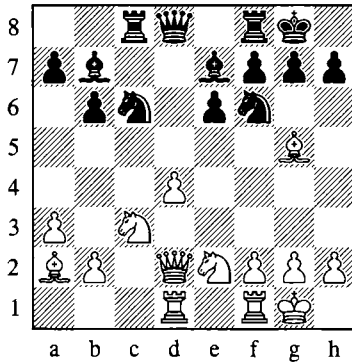
The most popular and logical move, developing the last minor piece and pinning the knight.



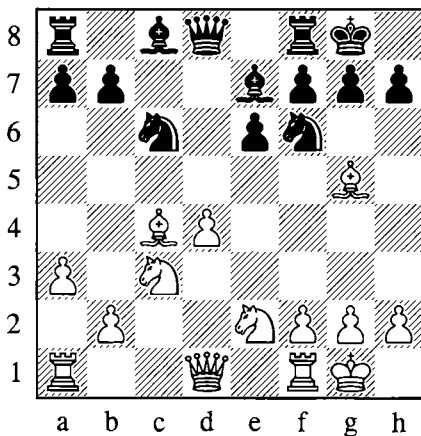
14...♘d5! 15.♙xe7 ♘cxe7 – Once again, Black

benefits from the exchange of dark-squared bishops and solid control over the blockading d5-square.

Also too slow is: 11.♚d2 b6 12.♞ad1 ♙b7 13.a3 ♞c8 14.♙a2



14...♗d5! 15.♙e3?! White tries to keep the position complex by avoiding a straightforward bishop exchange, but now Black can get active on the queenside: 15...♗a5! 16.♚d3 ♚d7 17.♞c1?! ♞fd8 De Vira – Womacka, Olomouc 2004.



11...b6 12.♚d3 ♙b7 13.♞ad1

Now, with the d4-pawn protected, White is ready to target the opponent's king with ♚h3.

13...♗d5

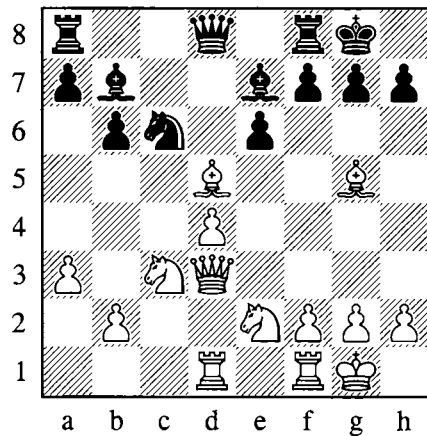
This is the right moment to release the tension!

14.♙xd5

White relinquishes the bishop pair, banking on his more active pieces.

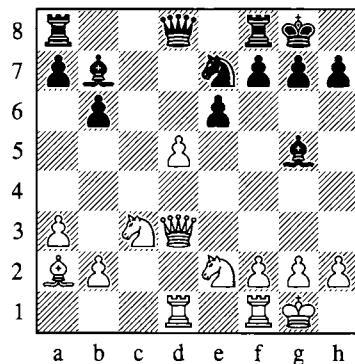
As usual, the bishop trade with 14.♙xe7?! ♗cxe7 favours Black.

Black also has nothing to worry about in the event of: 14.♙c1 ♗xc3 15.♗xc3 (inferior is 15.bxc3?! ♗a5 16.♙a2 ♞c8 17.♞fe1 ♚c7 and White was suffering from a weakened pawn structure in Nadeian – Khademi, Teheran 2014) 15...♙f6 16.♗e4 ♗a5 17.♙a2 ♙d5 18.♙xd5 exd5= Khudiyakov – Alexeev, Alushta 2007.



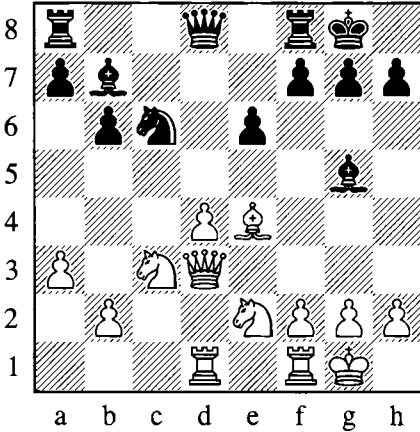
14...♙g5 15.♙e4

Clearly inferior is: 15.♙a2?! ♗e7 16.d5 What else? Now in Sarosi – Tompa, Hungary 2005, Black could have played:



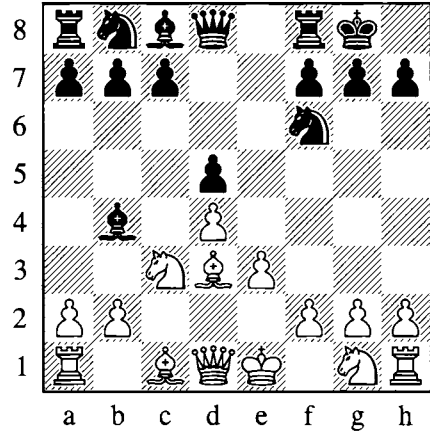
16...♖xd5 17.♗xd5 ♕xd5 18.♕xd5 ♜xd5  
19.♞xd5 exd5 20.♝xd5 ♜fe8 and Black is better.

We have reached a critical position from the game Torre – Petursson, Biel 1985. Black should have continued:



**B) 6.cxd5 exd5**

This early fixing of the central structure leads to a completely different type of struggle.



**7.♗ge2**

Even though this position was first seen back in 1932(!), this system gained some popularity in the 1980s, due to the efforts of Grandmaster Mikhail Gurevich. At the moment, White's set-up looks somewhat passive, especially the dark-squared bishop. However, the plan of f2-f3 and e3-e4 could lead to serious attacking potential, so Black has to watch out and be ready to counter with a timely ...c5.

**15...f5!N**

This weakening move allows Black to gain an important tempo for consolidation.

15...h6?! 16.d5 exd5 17.♕xd5 leaves Black under strong pressure.

**16.♕f3 ♞d7**

The e6-pawn is no weaker than the one on d4.

**17.♝fe1 ♜ad8**

The queen on d3 is clearly misplaced, so White has to spend more time moving it.

**18.♞b1 ♜fe8 19.♗g3**

19.d5? would be a serious mistake due to 19...♗e5.

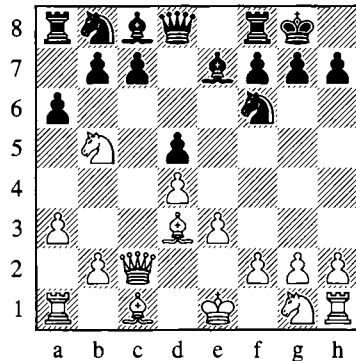
**19...g6! 20.d5 exd5 21.♕xd5† ♖h8**

It will not be easy for White to demonstrate compensation for the opponent's powerful bishops.

Chasing the bishop would be premature:

7.a3 ♕d6 8.♗b5 ♕e7 9.♞c2 a6!

I like this concrete approach, but there is also nothing wrong with 9...c6 10.♗c3 ♝e8.



10.♘c3

After 10.♘xc7?! ♚a7 11.♙d2 ♙d6 12.♞c1 b6 the knight would be trapped. Even though White can grab two more pawns with 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♙xh7† ♔h8 15.♙d3 ♞c7, Black is still better.

10...c5 11.dxc5 ♙xc5 12.♘f3

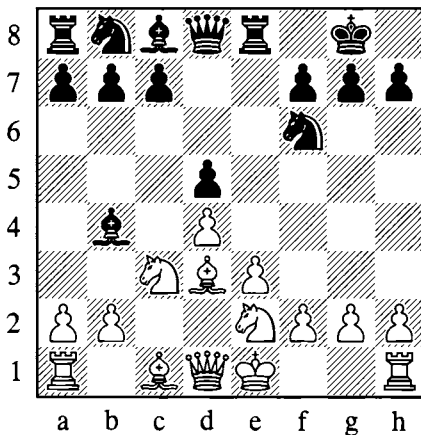
Too artificial is 12.♘ce2 ♙a7 13.♙d2 ♘c6 14.♙c3 ♞e8, and Black was better in Rakhmanov – Iturrizaga Bonelli, Linares 2014.

12...♘c6 13.0–0 ♙g4

White's pieces were not well placed for fighting against the isolated pawn in Diekers – Rother, Bavaria 2002.

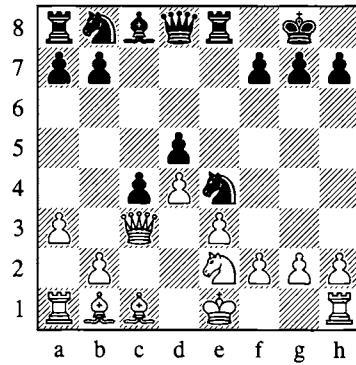
7...♞c8

This is the most common move for good reason: it maintains flexibility by putting the rook on obviously the correct square while leaving it until later to define Black's queenside pawn structure, in particular the destination of the c-pawn.



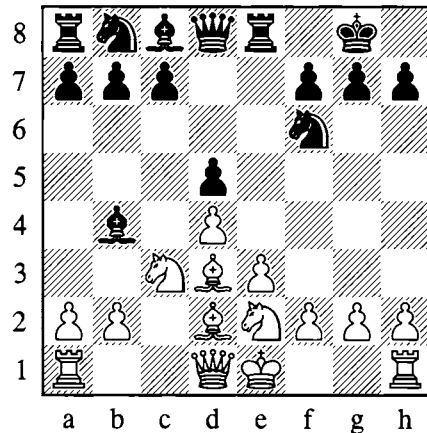
The two main moves to consider are **B1) 8.♙d2** and **B2) 8.0–0**.

In the event of 8.♞c2 the immediate break in the centre seems effective: 8...c5!? 9.a3N (after 9.dxc5 ♘c6 10.0–0 ♙xc5 11.a3 ♙b6 Black had excellent play in Shengelia – Berkes, Hungary 2010) 9...♙xc3† 10.♞xc3 c4 11.♙b1 ♘e4



12.♙xe4 (12.♞c2 ♙f5 13.♞d1 ♘c6 14.0–0 ♞d7) 12...♞xe4 13.b3 cxb3 14.♞xb3 ♘c6 15.♙d2 b6 16.♞c1 ♙b7 17.0–0 ♙a6 Black is at least equal.

**B1) 8.♙d2**



Delaying castling in this way can be well met by:

**8...c5!?**

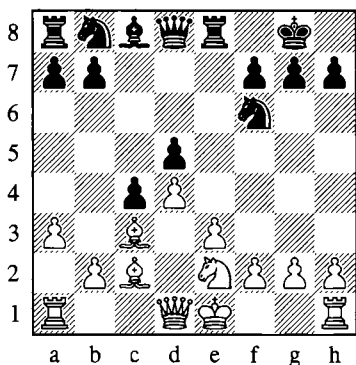
In general, I prefer not to exchange the dark-squared bishop for the knight on c3 in this central structure, but in this specific situation it is the best way to prove that the d2-bishop is misplaced.

**9.0–0**

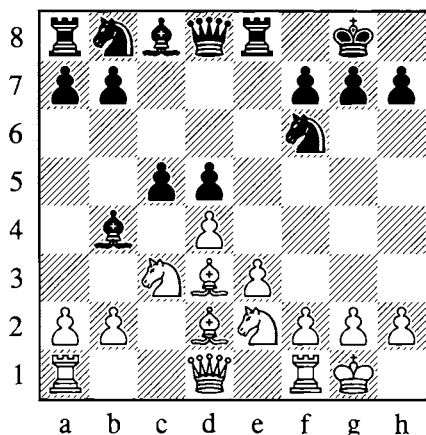
Completely toothless is: 9.dxc5 ♙xc5 10.♘b5 (10.0–0 ♘c6 11.♞c1 a6=) 10...♘c6

11.♞c1 ♖b6 12.0-0 ♗g4 13.♙c3 a6 14.♜bd4  
♜xd4 15.exd4 ♜e4♣ Milanovic – Ki. Georgiev,  
Skopje 2016.

9.a3!♣ might transpose to our main line, but  
it also has some independent significance:  
9...♙xc3 10.♙xc3 c4 11.♙c2



11...♙g4! Since the f5-square is not free for the  
bishop, it's important to find another way for  
it to get into the game. John Watson does not  
mention this move in *A Strategic Chess Opening  
Repertoire for White*. 12.f3N (12.0-0 ♜c6  
transposes to the main line below) 12...♙h5  
13.♜f2 ♗g6 14.g4 ♜c6 15.h4 b5 16.♜f4 a5  
The queenside pawn majority starts to gather  
momentum, so Black is by no means worse.



9...♜c6 10.a3

10.♞c1 as in Conquest – Stefansson,

Reykjavik 1992, can be strongly met by  
10...c4!♣N 11.♙b1 a6 12.f3 b5♣ when Black's  
play is faster.

10...♙xc3 11.♙xc3 c4

This advance makes White's dark-squared  
bishop passive again.

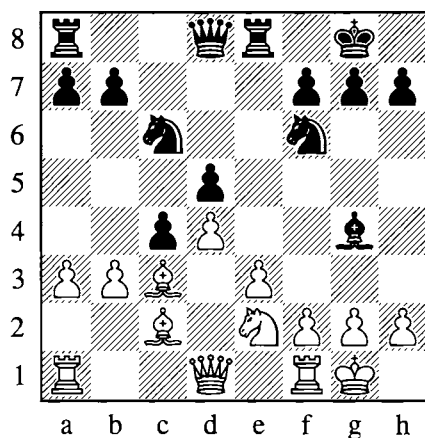
12.♙c2 ♗g4!

Once again Watson does not cover this  
...♗g4 idea, giving instead 12...a5, which  
occupies a square I want to reserve for a piece.

13.b3

Or 13.f3 ♙h5 14.♞d2 ♗g6♣ gives Black  
pleasant play.

This interesting position was reached in  
Stocek – Navara, Havlickuv Brod 2015. In my  
opinion, Black should have played:



13...♜a5!N 14.b4

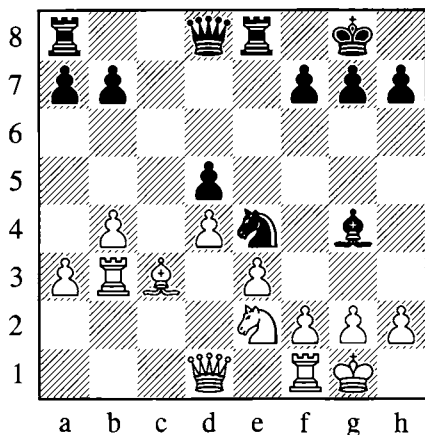
14.♙xa5 ♞xa5 15.bxc4 dxc4 16.f3 ♗d7  
17.e4 b5 leads to double-edged play with  
roughly equal chances.

14...♜b3!

This brave move is connected with a  
positional pawn sacrifice.

Instead, 14...♜c6?! 15.f3 ♙h5 16.b5 ♜b8  
17.♞d2 yields White a promising position.

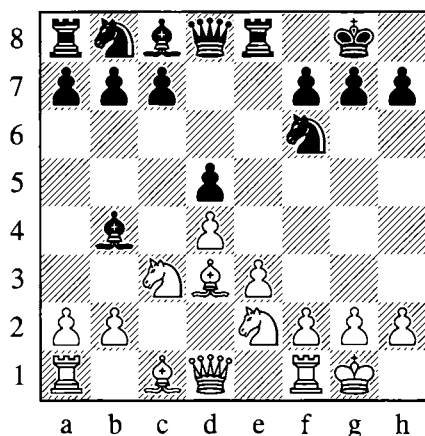
15.♙xb3 cxb3 16.♞b1 ♖e4 17.♞xb3



17...♞g5 18.♞d3 ♞ac8

Black has full compensation for the pawn, due to his control over the c-file and the light squares.

**B2) 8.0–0**



The most natural and common move.

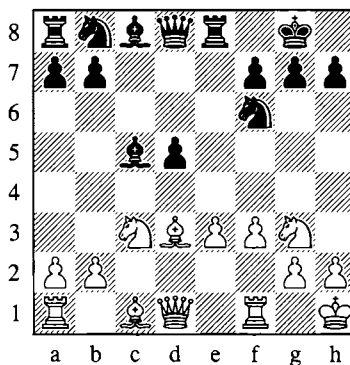
**8...♙d6**

The bishop has little to do on b4, especially if Black is planning to challenge the opponent's centre with ...c7-c5. In addition, its presence on d6 yields some attacking resources, such as ...♖g4 or even ...♙xh2† followed by ...♖g4†. In most cases we will not be in a hurry to

launch an attack like this, but it's good to know that the ideas exist, and White will still have to worry about them.

The most challenging options are: **B21) 9.♖f4**, **B22) 9.♙d2**, **B23) 9.a3** and **B24) 9.f3**.

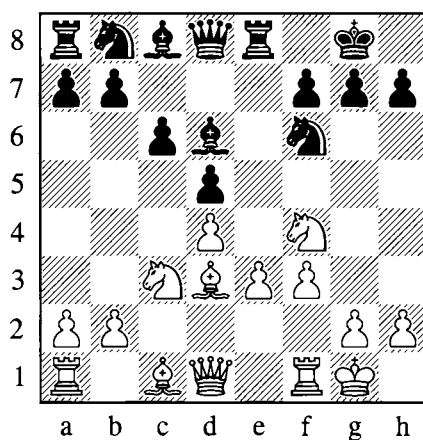
9.♖g3 can hardly bother Black: 9...c6 10.f3 c5 11.dxc5N (11.♖ce2?! ♖c6 was just worse for White in Shariyazdanov – Lukacs, Budapest 1996) 11...♙xc5 12.♖h1



12...♙xe3 13.♙xe3 ♞xe3 14.♙e4 ♖c6 15.♖xd5 ♖xd5 16.♞xd5 ♞xd5 17.♙xd5 ♖e7 18.♙c4 ♙e6=

**B21) 9.♖f4 c6 10.f3**

Normally when the pawn arrives on f3, Black will be quick to counter with ...c5. Here the d5-pawn is under pressure, so another plan is needed.



**10...b6!**

Solving the problem of the passive bishop on c8.

**11.a3**

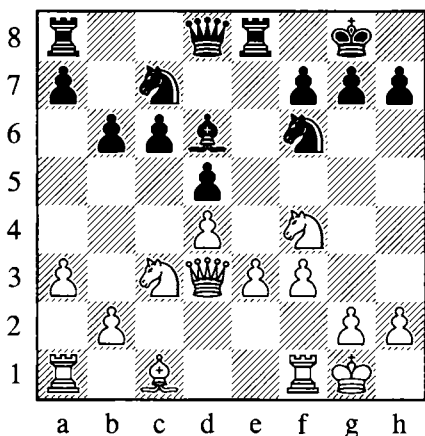
This was played in the only game where Black's last move was played, but it is rather slow.

11.e4? simply loses a pawn: 11...dxe4 12.fxe4  $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{xf4}$  13. $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{xf4}$   $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{xd4}$ † 14. $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{h1}$   $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{g4}$  15. $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{d2}$   $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{d8}$ ‡

11. $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{c2N}$  is a natural attempt to improve; still, after 11... $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{a6}$  12. $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{d1}$   $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{xd3}$  13. $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{xd3}$   $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{e7}$  14. $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{d2}$   $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{bd7}$ ‡ Black has no reasons to worry.

**11... $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{a6}$  12. $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{xa6}$   $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{xa6}$  13. $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{d3}$   $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{c7}$**

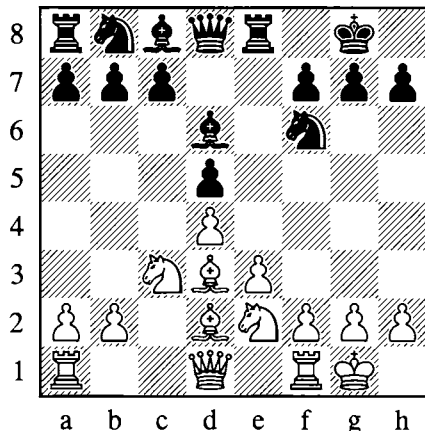
Having gained no advantage from the opening, White played too optimistically with:



14.e4?  $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{xf4}$  15. $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{xf4}$   $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{c6}$  16. $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{e5}$  dxe4 17.fxe4  $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{g4}$ ‡

White was in trouble in Gavrish – Aroshidze, Sigtas 2015.

**B22) 9... $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{d2}$**



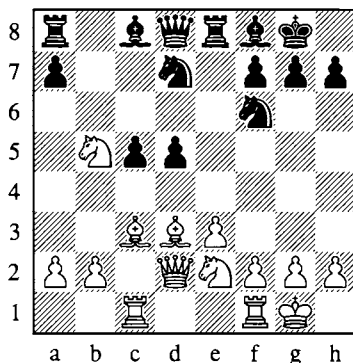
This flexible move develops a piece and postpones the f2-f3 advance for a moment. Now I like:

**9...b6!?**

This move is rare, but I find it an attractive plan for developing counterplay.

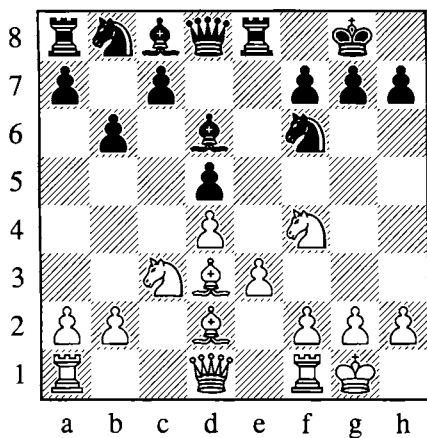
**10.d4**

An alternative is: 10. $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{c1N}$  c5 11. $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{b5}$   $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{f8}$  12.dxc5 bxc5 13. $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{c3}$   $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{bd7}$  14. $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{d2}$



14...a5! It's important to cover the a5-square. 15.a4  $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{b7}$  16. $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{fd1}$   $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{b6}$ = White cannot put especially strong pressure on the hanging pawns, while Black's set-up looks harmonious.

After the text move Black went for 10...c6 in R. Jacobs – Nyvlt, email 2013. I prefer:



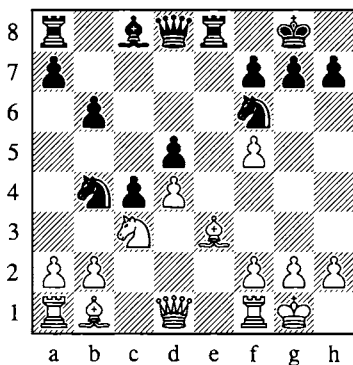
**10...♙xf4?N**

Since ...c7-c5 is coming, Black can feel free to exchange the important bishop and destroy the opponent's pawn chain.

**11.♙xf4 c5 12.dxc5**

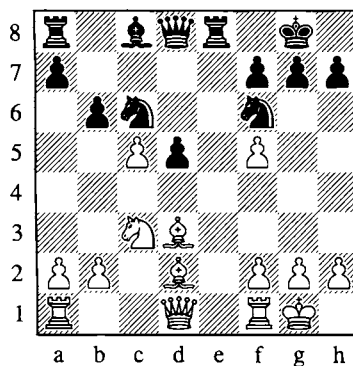
Releasing the tension is a reasonable decision – White has the bishop pair, so it makes sense to open up the position. The following alternatives are hardly more promising:

12.♙e3 c4 13.♙c2 ♖c6 14.f5 ♖b4 15.♙b1



15...♖e4 16.a3 ♖d3! 17.♙xd3 cxd3 18.♙xd3 ♙xf5= Black has no problems.

12.f5 ♖c6 13.dxc5 can be met by:



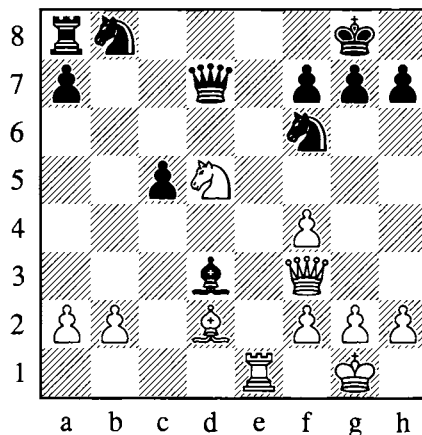
13...d4! 14.♖a4 ♖e5 15.♙b5 ♙d7 16.♙xd7 ♖fxd7 17.cxb6 axb6 18.b3 ♙f6 with promising counterplay.

**12...bxc5 13.♙e1 ♙a6 14.♙xe8† ♙xe8 15.♙f3**

Black's pawn structure is much better, so White hopes to take advantage of his lead in development.

**15...♙d7 16.♙e1 ♙xd3 17.♖xd5!**

White should avoid 17.♙xd3?! ♖c6̄.

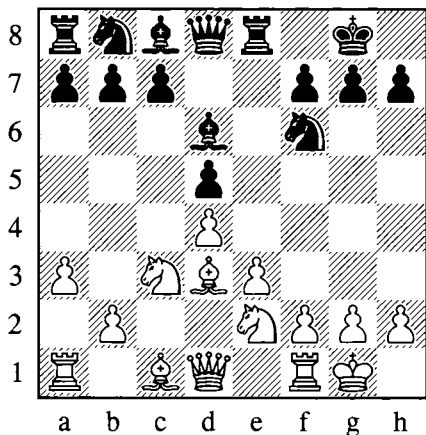


This tactical resource aims to favourably change the character of the play. However, Black can get two minor pieces for a rook after:

**17...♖c6! 18.♖e7†! ♖xe7 19.♙xa8† ♖c8 20.♙c3 ♙b5 21.♙xf6 ♙c6 22.♙b8 gxf6**

In this unbalanced position Black should be fine.

## B23) 9.a3



## 9...c6

The aggressive 9...d4!? certainly contains a drop of poison, but I have chosen a calmer approach.

## 10.♖c2

This was tried once by former World Champion Garry Kasparov.

## 10...b6!?

10...xh2† was played in a memorable encounter between Garry and a computer and ended in a quick but spectacular draw: 11.ϕxh2 ϑg4† 12.ϕg3 ♖g5 13.f4 ♗h5 14.ϑd2 ♗h2† 15.ϕf3 ♗h4 16.ϑxh7† ϕh8 17.ϑg3 ϑh2† 18.ϕf2 ϑg4† 19.ϕf3 ϑh2† ½-½ Kasparov – Comp Deep Junior, New York (5) 2003. Even though the result wasn't bad for Black, improvements for White have been pointed out – and in any case, I do not see the need for such drastic measures.

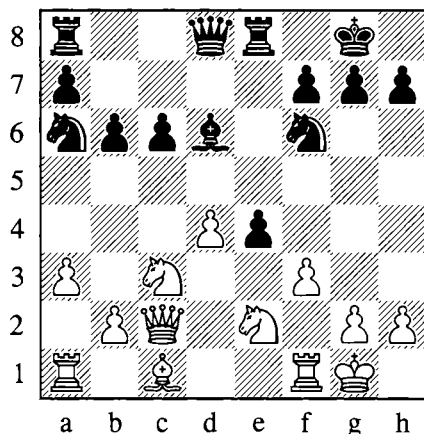
## 11.f3 ϑa6N

11...c5!? also led to interesting play in Jambrich – Kupec, Slovakia 2003. The critical continuation looks to be 12.dxc5!?N bxc5 13.ϑxd5 ϑxd5 14.ϑxh7† ϕh8 15.ϑe4 ♖xe4 16.♗xe4 ϑe6 with double-edged play.

## 12.e4 dxe4 13.ϑxa6

The natural 13.fxe4?! is now strongly met by 13...ϑe5! and White loses an important pawn.

## 13...ϑxa6

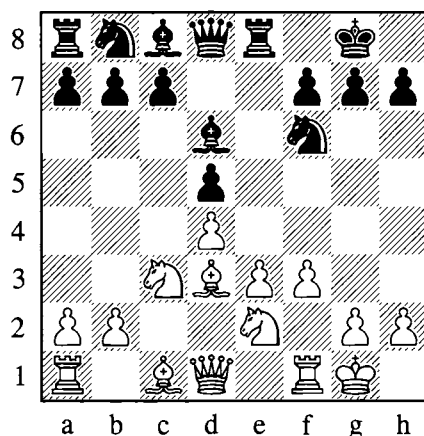


## 14.ϑxe4

After 14.fxe4 c5 15.ϑg5 ϑxh2† 16.ϕh1 cxd4 17.ϑxf6 gxf6 18.ϕxh2 dxc3 19.ϑxc3 ϑc5† White doesn't get full compensation for the pawn.

14...♞c8 15.ϑg5 ϑe7 16.ϑxf6 ϑxf6 17.♞ad1 ϑe7=

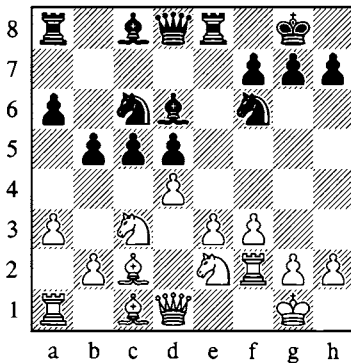
## B24) 9.f3



**9...c5! 10.♖e1**

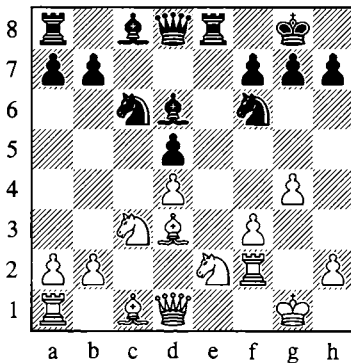
A more solid way of handling the position seems toothless: 10.♘b5 ♙f8 11.dxc5 ♙xc5 12.♘bd4 ♘c6 13.♙d2 ♖b6 Black was by no means worse in Gelfand – Carlsen, Moscow 2007.

The prophylactic 10.a3 ♘c6 11.♗f2 was tried by one of the main experts in this system, but it doesn't look very attractive. 11...a6 12.♙c2 b5

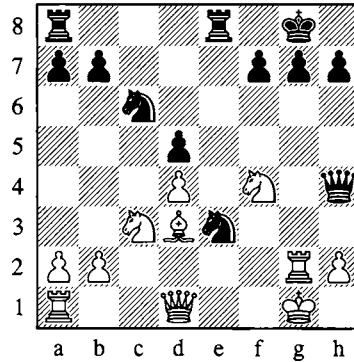


13.g4 b4 14.axb4 ♘xb4 15.♙a4 ♙d7 16.g5 ♙xa4 17.♘xa4 ♘d7= The lack of harmony and the exposed king caused White serious problems in M. Gurevich – Hjartarson, Akureyru 1988.

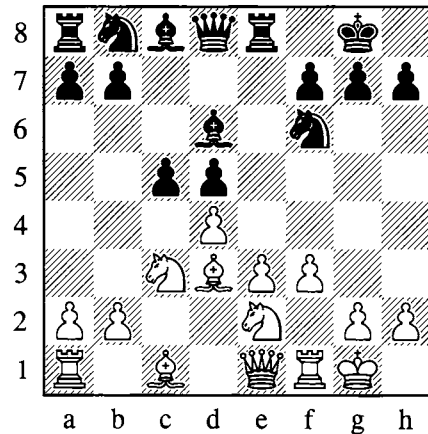
10.♗f2 ♘c6 11.g4?! has been tried by some grandmasters, but White can hardly afford such drastic measures at this early stage of the game. 11...cxd4 12.exd4



12...♙xg4! 13.fxg4 ♘xg4 14.♗g2N The best chance. (14.♗f3? ♖h4 15.h3 ♘h2 16.♗f2 ♖xh3 led White to a hopeless position in Barsov – Hoerstmann, Zwolle 1997) 14...♖h4 15.♙f4 ♙xf4 16.♘xf4 ♘e3



17.♖f3 ♘xd4 18.♖g3 ♘xg2 19.♙xg2 ♖xg3† 20.hxg3 ♙ad8= White will be able to regain the d5-pawn, but Black's kingside pawns secure him a clear advantage.

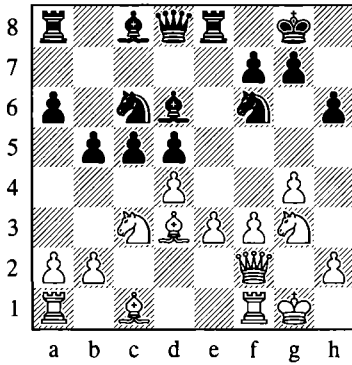
**10...♘c6 11.♖h4**

The queen transfer is aimed at creating serious threats on the kingside, but most of White's pieces cannot support the attack.

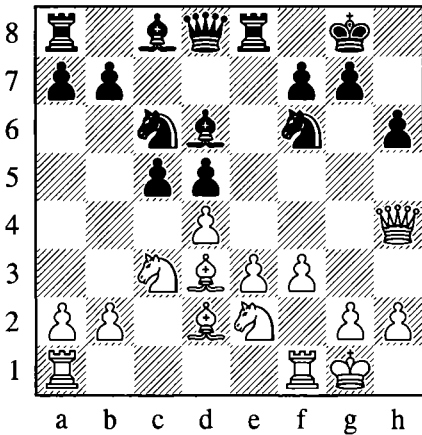
**11...h6 12.♙d2**

White gets nothing special with the aggressive advance: 12.g4 a6 13.♖f2 b5 14.♘g3 This position was reached in

Giorgadze – Hjartarson, Yerevan (ol) 1996, when Black should have continued:



14...♖b6!N 15.♟ce2 a5 16.♙d2 b4 With a clear positional advantage.



12...♟b4

This move forces White to lock in the a1-rook for a while.

12...c4!? 13.♙b1 a6 14.♟h1 b5 15.a3 ♟b7 also deserves attention, with a complex battle in which Black's chances are not worse.

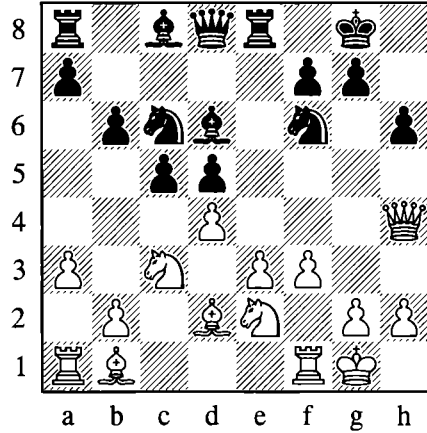
13.♙b1

13.♙b5? ♟d7 14.♙xd7 ♖xd7 would decrease White's attacking potential and yield Black a clear advantage.

13...b6 14.a3

This move exposes some light squares in White's camp, but it's impossible to leave the knight on b4 for a long time.

14...♟c6



15.♙c2

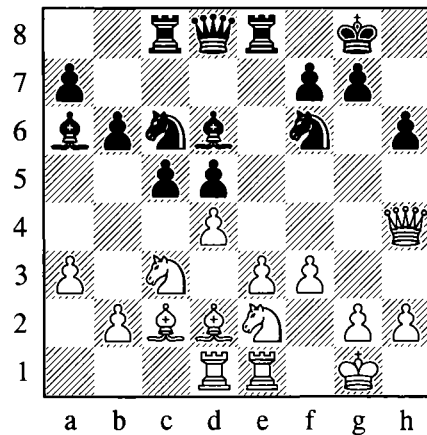
It was safer to cover the a6-f1 diagonal with 15.♙d3N; still, after 15...♙b7 16.♖ad1 ♜c8 17.♞fe1 ♙e7 18.♖h3 ♙f8 Black has no problems.

15...♙a6 16.♞fe1 ♜c8

All Black's pieces are perfectly mobilized now.

17.♖ad1?

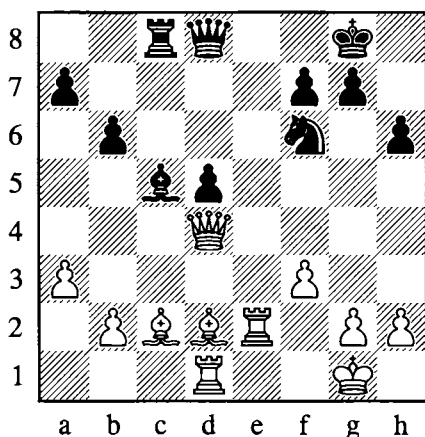
Much better was 17.♟h1N ♟a5 18.dxc5 ♙xc5 19.♟d4, maintaining the balance.



17...♙xe2! 18.♘xe2

18.♙xe2 cxd4 19.exd4 ♘xd4 simply wins a pawn.

18...cxd4 19.exd4 ♙xe2! 20.♙xe2 ♘xd4  
21.♗xd4 ♙c5



White had to fight for a draw until the end of the game in Gelfand – Lautier, Cap d'Agde 1996.

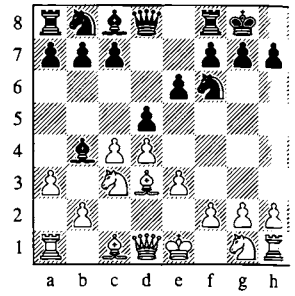
## Conclusion

After 5.♙d3 d5 6.♘ge2 White's knight is less active than it would be on f3, but the idea is not without merits, as it avoids doubled c-pawns and may enable the knight to find a meaningful role on the kingside via f4 or g3. Nevertheless, after 6...dxc4 7.♙xc4 c5 the placement of the knight on e2 limits White's attacking possibilities and offers Black comfortable play against the soon-to-be-isolated d-pawn.

A more challenging scheme is 6.cxd5 exd5 7.♘ge2, switching to a Carlsbad structure, where White's play is mainly based on advancing the central pawns by means of f2-f3 and e3-e4. Black will generally want to be ready to meet f2-f3 with ...c5, but the bishop's presence on d6 also yields some attacking chances on the kingside. In general, this variation leads to a tough positional fight, but objectively Black should not have much difficulty equalizing.

# Chapter 14

## 4.e3



## 6.a3

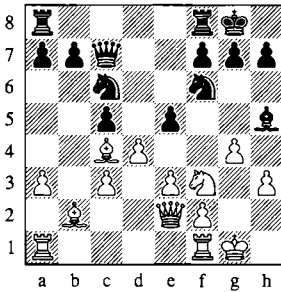
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♙d3 d5 6.a3

6...♙xc3† 7.bxc3 dxc4 8.♙xc4 c5

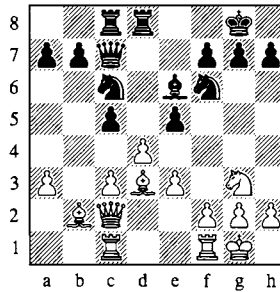
A) 9.♙b2	203
B) 9.♙d3	204
C) 9.♘e2 ♖c7	206
C1) 10.♙a2	206
C2) 10.♙d3	210
D) 9.♘f3 ♖c7	212
D1) 10.♖c2	214
D2) 10.♖d3	214
D3) 10.♙a2	215
D4) 10.♙e2	217

A) after 14.g4



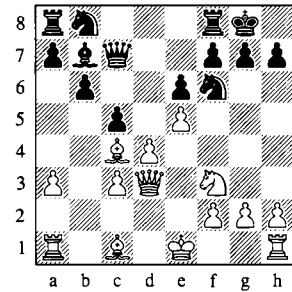
14...♘xg4!N

C2) note to 13.e4



15...♘a5!N

D2) after 12.e5

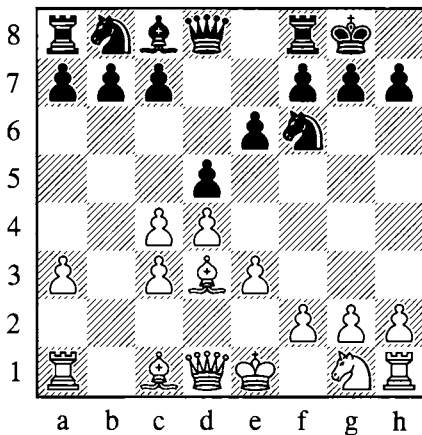


12...♙e4!N

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♘b4 4.e3 0–0  
5.♙d3 d5 6.a3

A double-edged continuation. Compared to the Sämisch System, there is less strategic danger in the doubled pawns, since the presence of Black's pawn on d5 will enable White to repair his structure. On the other hand, White spends a valuable tempo and enables Black to build a useful lead in development.

6...♙xc3† 7.bxc3



7...dxc4

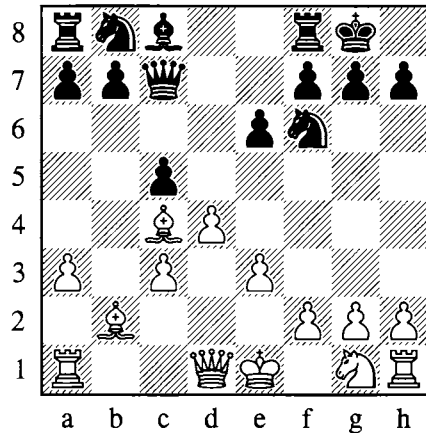
Forcing White to move his bishop for a second time.

7...c5 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♗e2 leads to a well-known variation which may arise via a few different move orders. Even though Black's recent results have not been too bad, I still don't really trust his position. Indeed, White's bishops may support the creation of a powerful and mobile pawn centre. Botvinnik's masterpiece (Botvinnik – Capablanca, Holland 1938) is a perfect example highlighting the strategic danger of Black's set-up.

8.♙xc4 c5

Black prepares ...♗c7, developing the queen while targeting the bishop. We will analyse A) 9.♙b2, B) 9.♙d3, C) 9.♗e2 and D) 9.♗f3.

A) 9.♙b2 ♗c7



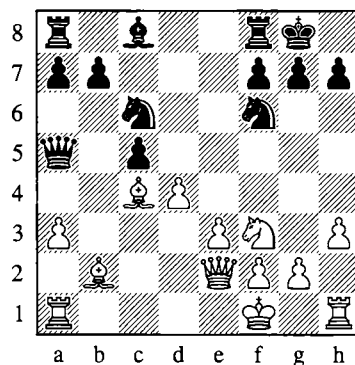
10.♗e2

10.♙d3 transposes to variation B below.

10.♙e2 was once employed by the great Botvinnik, but it has little independent value – after 10...♗c6N White has nothing better than 11.♗f3 ♗d8 12.0–0, when we have transposed to the 12.♙b2 line mentioned in the notes to variation D4.

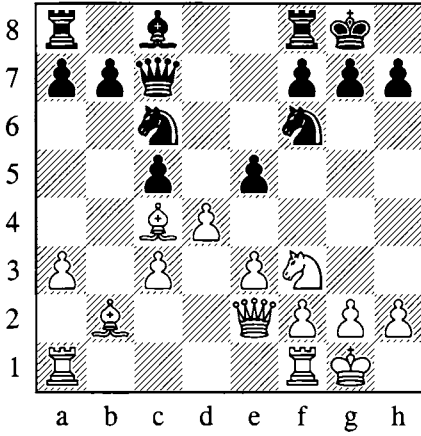
10...♗c6 11.♗f3 e5 12.0–0!?

12.h3 is more accurate; still, in Borsi – Tompa, Hungary 2002, Black could have targeted the uncastled king with: 12...exd4!N 13.cxd4 ♗a5† 14.♗f1



14...♙e6! 15.♙xe6 fxe6 16.♗g1 ♗ad8 Black has excellent counterplay.

The text move avoids the queen check that occurred in the above line, but allows something even more unpleasant:



12...g4! 13.h3

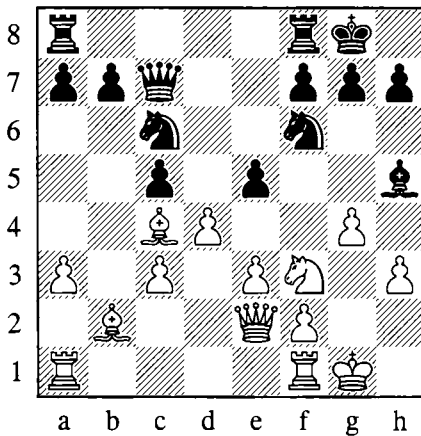
13.d5? e4! 14.dxc6 ♖xc6 has given Black an easily winning position in a couple of games.

13...h5!

Much weaker is 13...xf3?! 14.♖xf3 cxd4 15.cxd4 exd4 16.exd4±, when White's bishops were powerful in Lund – De Verdier, Bugibba 2011.

14.g4

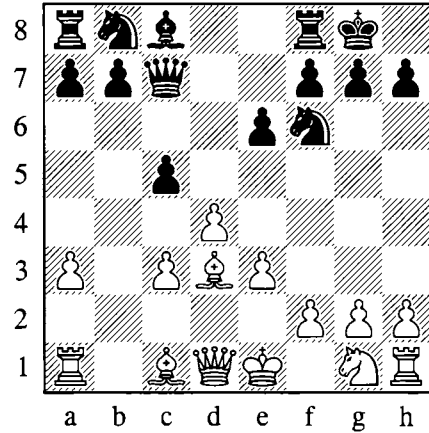
We have been following the game Cruz Lledo – Cerrato Torrijos, Padrun 2011, where Black missed a golden opportunity:



14...xg4!N 15.hxg4 ♙xg4 16.♙d5 ♖ad8 17.♙e4 ♜d6

With an enormous attack.

B) 9.♙d3 ♖c7



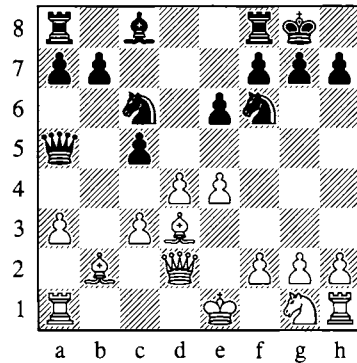
10.♙b2

The threat of ...cxd4 followed by ...♖c3† meant that White's choices were limited. The only other logical option is 10.♗e2, which transposes to variation C2.

10...♗c6 11.♗f3

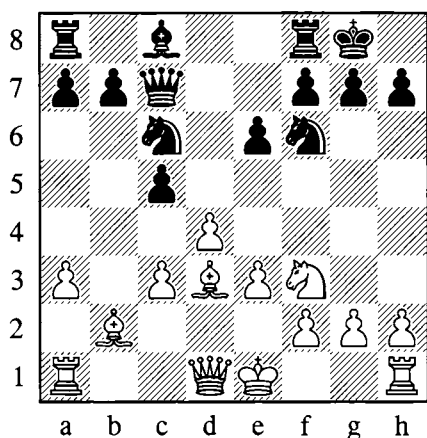
11.♗e2 e5 12.0-0 converts to variation C2 again.

11.e4?! is premature. 11...♖a5! 12.♖d2 Now in Milov – Guido, Genova 2003, Black should have played:



12...b6!N 13.♗e2 ♙a6 14.♙xa6 ♖xa6

15.f3 ♖a5 Exposing all the drawbacks of White's set-up.

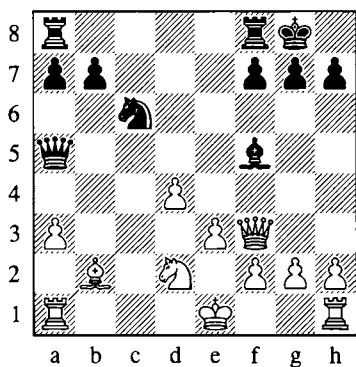


11...e5!

A well-timed advance: Black shouldn't let White complete his development and establish his central superiority.

12.dxe5

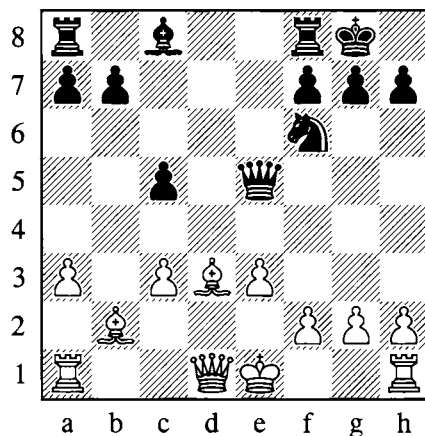
The attempt to keep the tension in the centre by means of 12.♖c2 turns out to be risky: 12...cxd4 13.cxd4 e4! 14.♙xe4 ♖xe4 15.♗xe4 ♗a5† 16.♘d2 ♙f5 17.♗f3



17...♗b5! Forcing White's king to remain in the centre. 18.♙c3 ♗fe8 19.d5 ♖e7 20.a4 ♗a6 21.d6 ♗xd6 Black was somewhat better in T.E. Carlsen – Fenwick, corr. 2007.

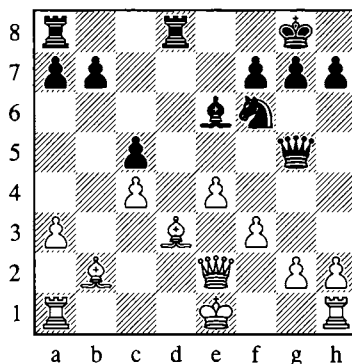
12...♖xe5 13.♖xe5 ♗xe5

This type of position is typical of cases when Black manages to free himself with the ...e6-e5 advance.



14.♗c2

14.♗e2 ♗d8 15.c4 ♗g5 16.f3 ♙f5! I like this provocative move. 17.e4 (17.♙xf5 ♗xf5 18.0-0 ♗e6 19.♗fd1 ♗xd1† 20.♗xd1 ♖d7 followed by ...♖b6 would also guarantee Black comfortable equality) 17...♙e6 White's position becomes less safe with the pawn on e4, as Black's knight gets some potential outposts.



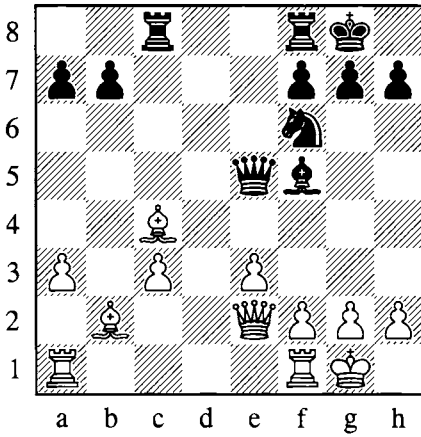
18.♗d1 (18.0-0? ♖h5! is nasty) 18...♗d7 19.g3 ♗ad8 20.0-0 h6. Despite the bishop pair, it is White who suffers from a lack of activity.

14...c4!

A brilliant pawn sacrifice to delay White's development.

15.  $\text{♙xc4}$   $\text{♜f5}$  16.  $\text{♚e2}$   $\text{♝ac8}$  17. 0-0?!

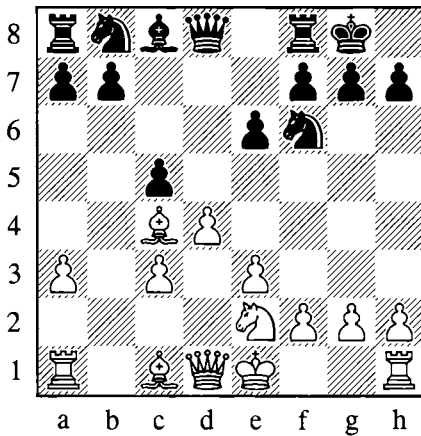
Better was 17.  $\text{♙b3}$   $\text{♞e4}$  18. 0-0  $\text{♞xc3}$   
19.  $\text{♚e1}$   $\text{♚b5}$  20.  $\text{♙xc3}$   $\text{♚xb3}$  21.  $\text{♙d4}$  with  
equality.



17...  $\text{♞g4!}$  18.  $\text{g3}$   $\text{♚c5}$  19.  $\text{♙d3}$   $\text{♙xd3}$  20.  $\text{♚xd3}$   
 $\text{♚h5}$  21.  $\text{h4}$   $\text{♞e5}$

Black had a powerful initiative in Milov –  
Lautier, Biel 1997.

C) 9.  $\text{♞e2}$



White covers the c3-spot and keeps the  
f-pawn mobile. This important position might  
also arise after 6.  $\text{♞ge2}$   $\text{dxc4}$  7.  $\text{♙xc4}$   $\text{c5}$  8.  $\text{a3}$   
 $\text{♙xc3}$ † 9.  $\text{bxc3}$ .

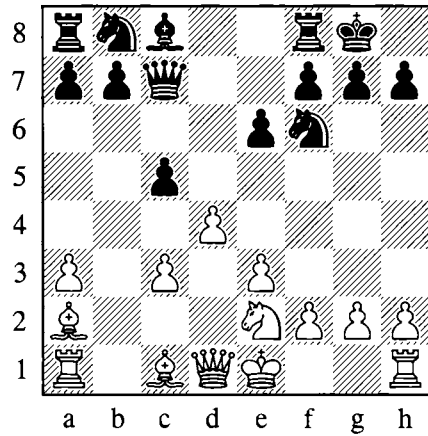
9...  $\text{♚c7}$

There are two main options to consider:  
C1) 10.  $\text{♙a2}$  and C2) 10.  $\text{♙d3}$ . Each has good  
and bad points, as we will soon see.

10.  $\text{♚d3?!}$  makes a poor impression, and Black  
can choose between different ways of exploiting  
the awkward placement of White's pieces. For  
instance, 10...  $\text{e5!?$  11. 0-0  $\text{e4}$  12.  $\text{♚c2}$   $\text{cxd4}$   
13.  $\text{cxd4}$   $\text{♙e6}$  14.  $\text{♙b3}$   $\text{♝c8}$  15.  $\text{♚xc7}$   $\text{♝xc7}$   
16.  $\text{♙xe6}$   $\text{fxe6}$ , with excellent prospects in the  
arising endgame.

C1) 10.  $\text{♙a2}$

Compared to the other retreat, this option  
discourages the ...e5 advance, as White's bishop  
will then be perfectly placed. However, it also  
has a drawback, which becomes apparent after  
Black's reply.



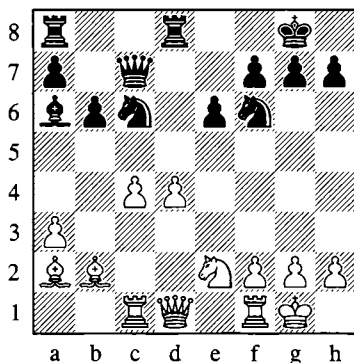
10...  $\text{b6!}$  11. 0-0  $\text{♙a6}$

It turns out that now Black has another  
attractive way to activate the bishop. The  
pressure along the a6-f1 diagonal exposes the  
somewhat passive placement of the knight on  
e2.

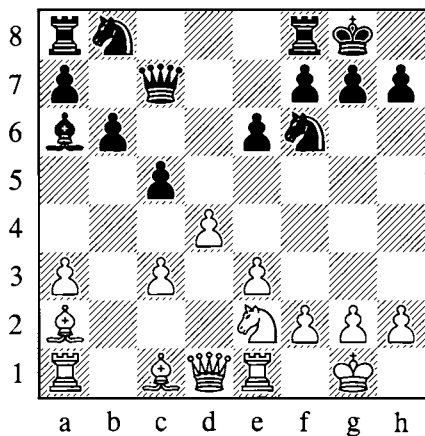
12.  $\text{♝e1}$

Sidestepping the pin is the most natural  
continuation.

Harmless is: 12.♙b2 ♘c6 13.♖c1 ♖fd8 14.c4 cxd4 15.exd4 This position was reached in Tregubov – Efimenko, Muelheim 2016, and now the most logical continuation would have been:



15...b5!N 16.d5 (16.c5 b4 17.axb4 ♘xb4 is statically bad for White) 16...bxc4 17.♙xc4 ♙xc4 18.♖xc4 exd5 19.♖c2 ♗d6 White's compensation for the pawn is uncertain.



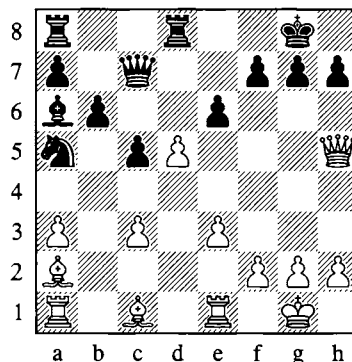
12...♘c6 13.♘g3

White's attacking abilities are connected solely with the e3-e4 advance. Therefore Black should apply strong pressure to the d4-pawn.

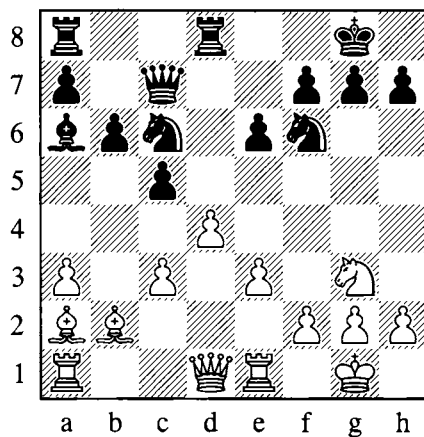
13...♖fd8 14.♙b2

14.♘h5?! is dubious; exchanging the knights only makes Black's position more comfortable. 14...♘h5 15.♗xh5 ♘a5 16.d5 We have

been following the game Aleksandrov – Itkis, Kishinev 1998. Now Black should have played:



16...♙c4!N 17.♙xc4 ♘xc4 18.e4 f6! 19.dxe6 ♗e7 20.♗h3 ♖e8 Black regains the pawn and secures a positional advantage due to his better pawn structure and superb knight.



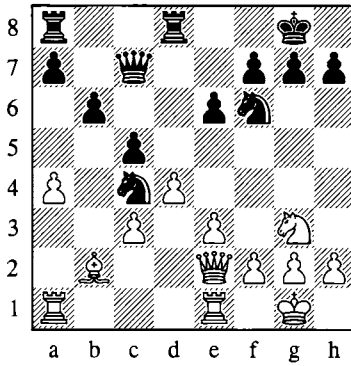
14...♘a5

Black is aiming to occupy the exposed light squares in White's camp.

15.e4

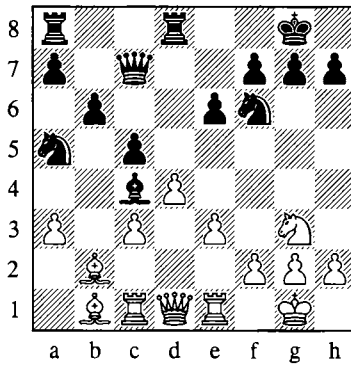
The most consistent.

15.a4 makes little sense now. 15...♙c4 16.♙xc4 ♘xc4 17.♗e2 Ki. Georgiev – Hjartarson, Linares 1988. In my opinion, the most practical decision would be:



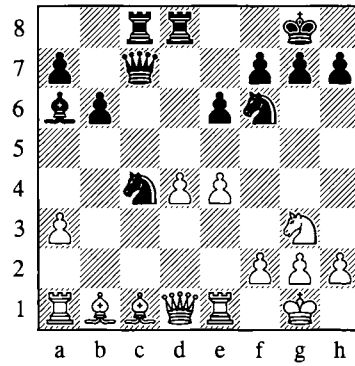
17...xb2?! 18.xb2 ♖ac8 White is under pressure along the c-file.

15.♖c1 ♕c4 16.♘b1 is a natural regrouping. (Exchanging the bishops seems a clear concession: 16.♘xc4 ♘xc4 17.♗b3 ♘a5 18.♗d1 ♖ac8 19.♗e2 h6 20.h3 ♗c6= Volke – Petursson, Radebeul 2016.) Now in Horowitz – Rossolimo, Havana 1952, Black could have exploited the awkward placement of White's pieces by means of:

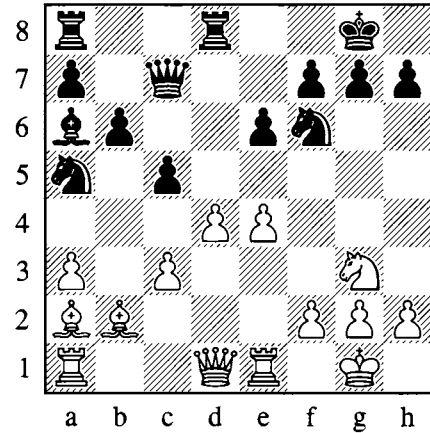


16...♘b3! 17.♖c2 e5 18.f3 ♗d7 19.♖f2 ♖ad8 20.♗c2 g6= White is under pressure in the centre and he has problems organizing any active play.

15.♘b1 ♖ac8 16.e4 ♘c4 17.♖c1 cxd4 18.cxd4 occurred in Marin – Dokhoian, Budapest 1988. Now I suggest a simple improvement over Black's play:



18...♗d7N The pressure on the d4-pawn is too strong, so the next few moves are forced: 19.d5 exd5 20.e5 ♘e4 21.♘xe4 dxe4 22.♗xd7 ♖xd7 23.♘xe4 ♖c5 24.f4 ♘b7 The activity of Black's pieces fully compensates for White's bishop pair.



15...♖c4 16.♖xc4

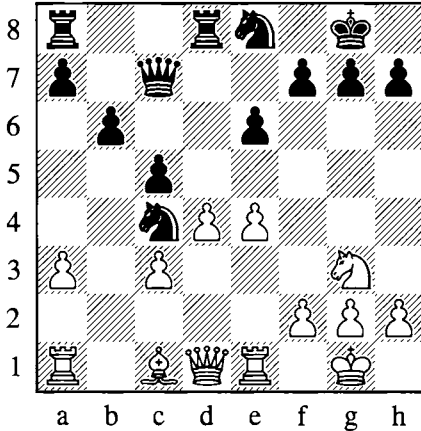
16.e5, as played in Bhat – Aroshidze, Balaguer 2008, is connected with serious strategic risk. I suggest the following regrouping of the pieces: 16...♘d5N 17.♘b1 ♘b3 18.♖a2 ♘e7! This accurate move severely limits White's attacking possibilities, so Black should be better.

16...♘xc4 17.♖c1

Since the pressure on the d4-pawn has been released, White feels free to move the bishop from such a passive spot.

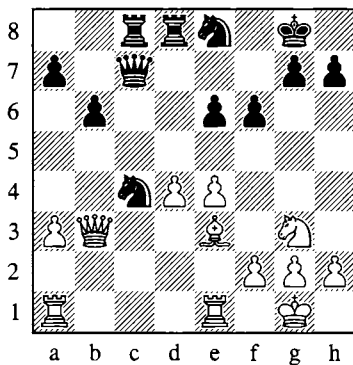
**17...♖e8!**

This prophylactic approach is typical of several lines in the Nimzo-Indian: avoiding the unpleasant pin on the f6-knight is an important measure.

**18.e5**

Just as before earlier, this advance seems risky from a positional point of view. Still, it makes White's attacking potential more significant.

The quieter 18.♔g5, provoking the 'weakening' 18...f6 advance, is less effective: 19.♕e3 ♖ac8 20.♞b3 cxd4 21.cxd4 This position arose in Rakhmanov – Agopov, Finland 2016, and here it would have made sense to play:



21...♞d7!N Leaving the d6-spot vacant for the knight. 22.♞ad1 ♖ed6 23.♕c1 ♖b5 24.d5 e5 White's kingside activity is slowed down and

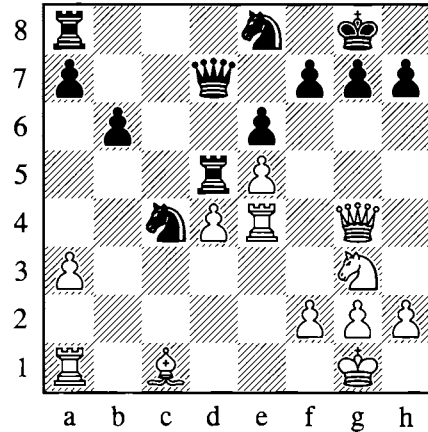
Black has good prospects on the queenside, so I prefer Black's chances.

**18...cxd4 19.cxd4 ♖d5 20.♞g4?!**

20.♞f3N ♖c8 21.♕e3 was correct. In this case Black has some positional advantages, but White maintains the balance due to the passive placement of the knight on e8.

**20...♞d7 21.♞e4**

It looks like most of White's pieces are ready to join the attack, but...

**21...♖cd6!**

This excellent tactical resource enables Black to force simplifications.

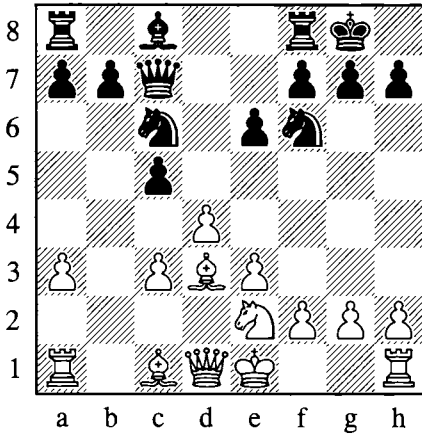
**22.♞f4**

22.exd6 f5 is the idea. White can keep the material balance with 23.♖xf5 exf5 24.♞g5 (24.♞h3 ♖xd6) but after 24...h6 25.♞e7 ♖xd6 26.♞xd7 ♖xd7 27.♞e5 ♖xd4 28.♕e3 ♖d3 29.♞xf5 ♖ad8 he still has to work to secure a draw.

**22...♖f5 23.♖xf5 exf5 24.♞xf5 ♞xf5 25.♞xf5 ♖xd4 26.♕e3 ♖d5**

Black had the better endgame in Zajogin – Brodsky, Minsk 1997.

C2) 10.♙d3 ♘c6

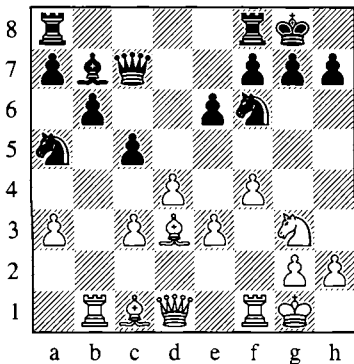


With White's bishop on the other diagonal and the knight on the slightly passive e2-square, it makes sense to challenge the pawn centre by all possible measures!

11.0-0

The presence of White's king in the centre tells after 11.e4? cxd4 12.cxd4 ♘xd4! with the idea 13.♘xd4? ♚c3†.

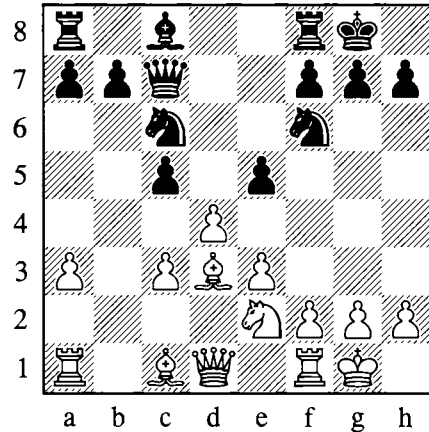
The restricting 11.f4 has the drawback of exposing the light squares, giving Black good play after: 11...b6 12.0-0 ♙b7 13.♘g3 ♘a5 14.♖b1!N (14.♚e2?! ♘b3 and White felt compelled to give up the exchange in Huguet – Casas, Buenos Aires 1951, since 15.♖b1 ♘xc1 16.♖bxc1 ♖ac8 would put White under strong pressure along the c-file)



14...♖ac8 15.♚e2 ♖fd8 16.♙b2 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♙d5 18.f5 ♙c4! 19.♖bc1 ♙xd3 20.♚xd3 ♘c4 Black's control over the c4-square offers excellent counterplay.

11...e5

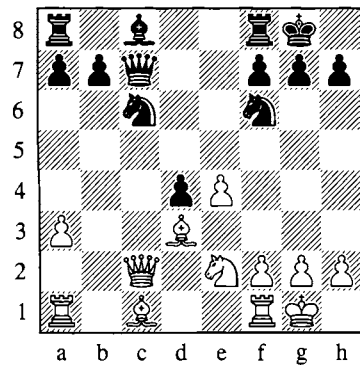
This position has been tested many times at a high level. Tournament practice shows that the activity of Black's pieces prevents White from benefiting from the mobile pawn centre, while the bishops remain quite passive in most cases.



12.♙b2

White can also try to change the character of the play with an interesting pawn sacrifice: 12.e4! cxd4 13.cxd4 exd4 14.♚c2

This position was reached in Bagirov – A. Ivanov, Frunze 1979. White's attacking potential, which is based on f2-f4 and e4-e5, shouldn't be underestimated, so I suggest:



14...♠g4!N 15.f4

15.e5 is playable but harmless: 15...♠gxe5

16.♠xh7† ♖h8 17.♠e4 d3 18.♠xd3 ♜xd3

19.♜xd3 ♜e5 20.♠f4 ♠f5=

15...♠e6 16.h3 ♜e3 17.♠xe3 dxe3 18.♜c1

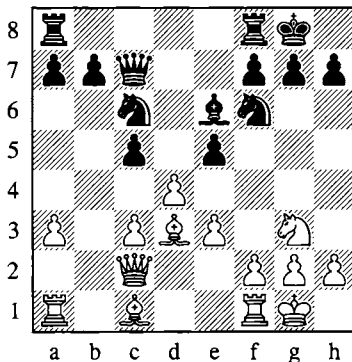
White manages to regain the pawn but Black is doing well after:

18...♜fd8 19.♜xe3 ♜b6=

12.♜c2 ♠e6 13.♠g3

Releasing the tension with 13.dxe5?! is a clear concession: 13...♜xe5 14.♜f4 ♜xd3 15.♜xd3 ♜ad8 16.♜xe6 fxe6 17.♜c4 ♜c6 and Black was better in Aleksandrov – Polgar, Dresden (ol) 2008.

White also faces clear positional problems after: 13.♜b1 ♜ac8 14.♠f5 ♠xf5 15.♜xf5 ♜fd8 16.♠b2 ♜d7† Reshevsky – Piesina, Vilnius 1978.



13...♜fd8 14.♠b2 ♜a5N

Apparently this is a new move but it looks absolutely normal. Play might continue:

15.f4

A desperate attempt to develop counterplay.

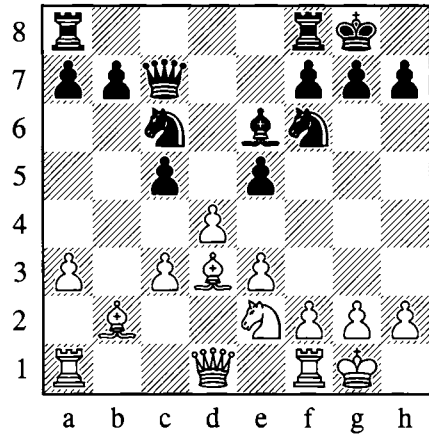
15...c4 16.♠e2 exd4 17.cxd4 ♜ac8 18.f5 ♠d5

19.e4 c3!

White is in trouble.

12...♠e6

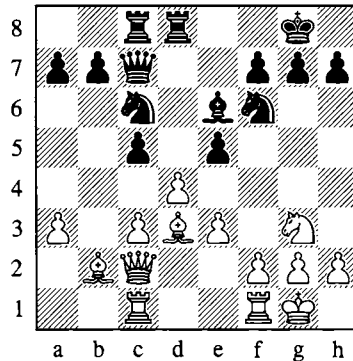
The bishop is perfectly placed here, where it takes control of the weak light squares in White's camp.



13.e4

This has only been played once but it seems like the most natural move to consider.

Alternatives do not cause any problems. For instance, 13.♜c1 ♜fd8 14.♜c2 ♜ac8 15.♠g3, as in Ploehn – Scheipl, Bavaria 2000, can be strongly met by:

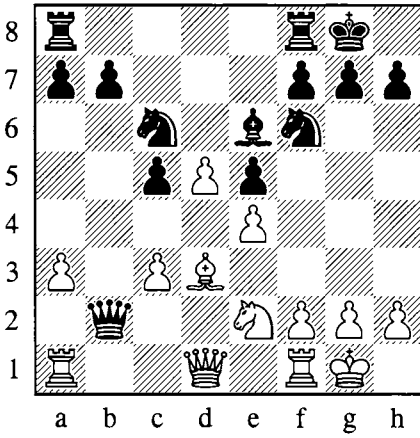


15...♜a5!N 16.dxe5 c4! 17.♠e2 ♜xe5† and White finds himself in a passive position.

13...♜b6 14.d5

14.♜c1 looks too awkward and after 14...♜a5! 15.d5 ♠g4 16.c4 ♠xe2 17.♠xe2 ♜b3 18.♜c2 ♜xa1 19.♜xa1 ♜d6† White has insufficient compensation.

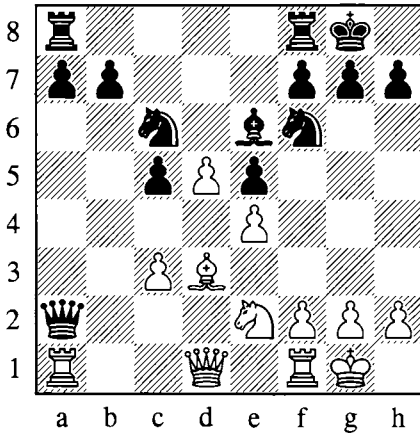
14...♜xb2



15. Bb1N

15.dxe6 B ad8 16.exf7+ Bxf7 17.Bb1 Q xa3 18.Qc2 Q b4! 19.cxb4 Q xd3 20.Qxd3 Bxd3+ left Black a pawn up in Lees – Doudon, France 1997.

15... Qxa3 16. B a1 Q b2 17. B b1 Q a2 18. B a1



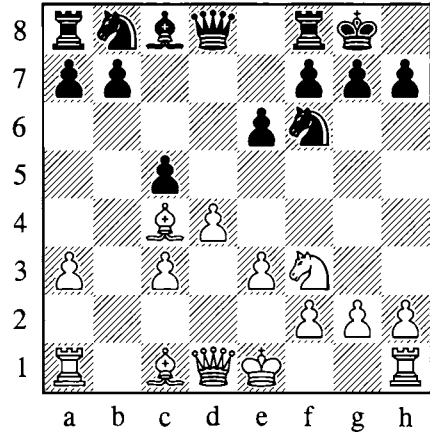
18... Qxd5!?

It seems to me that Black has enough reasons not to accept a draw too early!

19. Bxa2 Qxa2

In this unbalanced position White's play seems more difficult, at least from a practical point of view.

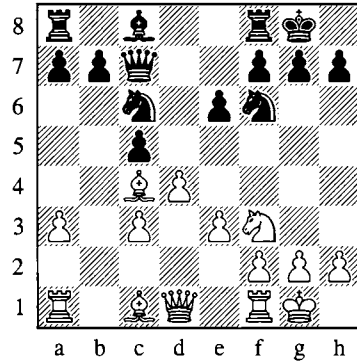
D) 9. Qf3



9... Qc7

Once again, we start by targeting the bishop on c4.

It is important to recognise the difference between this and another major variation in which the moves 0-0 and ... Qc6 have already been played. The line in question usually arises after: 4.e3 0-0 5. Qd3 d5 6. Qf3 c5 7. 0-0 Qc6 (I will be recommending 7... cxd4 in the next two chapters) 8. a3 Qxc3 9. bxc3 dxc4 10. Qxc4 Qc7



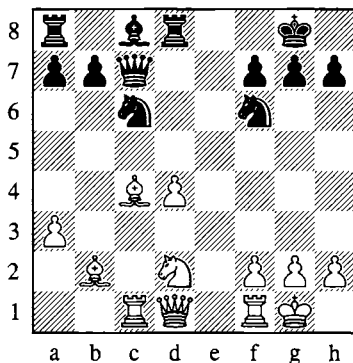
This position has occurred in thousands of games; Black usually follows up with ... e5 in the near future. The version in our repertoire is easier for Black to handle, for a few reasons. To begin with, the c4-bishop is in more immediate danger, and the possibility of a queen check on

c3 reduces White's options. Moreover, Black enjoys some additional flexibility; depending on how White plays, Black may revert to the ...♖c6/...e5 plan, but he may also develop the knight to d7 and bishop to b7 or a6.

White must decide how to safeguard the hanging bishop; his main options are D1) 10.♖c2, D2) 10.♖d3, D3) 10.♗a2 and D4) 10.♗e2.

10.♗d3? is positionally desirable, as the bishop controls the e4-square and points towards the kingside. Unfortunately for White, here it is refuted by 10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♖c3†, when he suffers huge material losses. It is worth mentioning that the ♗d3 plan is one of White's most important options in the analogous variation mentioned in the previous note, so eliminating this plan already counts as a significant achievement for Black.

10.♞d2 looks really artificial—the knight blocks the dark-squared bishop and relinquishes control over some key central squares. 10...e5 The most natural and tempting reaction. 11.0–0 ♜d8 12.♗b2 ♞c6 13.♞c1 cxd4 14.cxd4 exd4 15.exd4



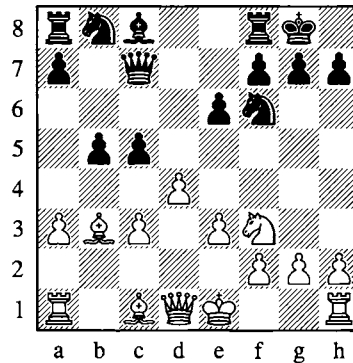
This position occurred in Kaloskambis – Sigalas, Athens 2004. Even though grabbing the d4-pawn is playable, I prefer 15...♗f5!N 16.♞f3 ♗e4, when Black is firmly in control.

10.♗b3

I was surprised to discover how rarely this retreat has been tested in practice, as the bishop on b3 is placed somewhat more actively than after the more common 10.♗a2.

10...b5!N

I see no reason to deviate from the plan seen in variation D3 below.



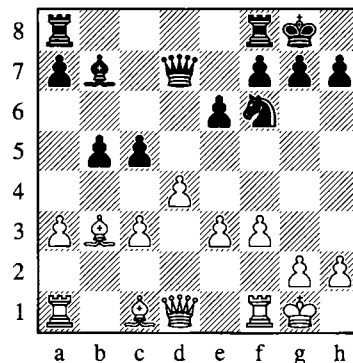
11.0–0

I examined another principled reaction to Black's novelty: 11.a4 cxd4 12.cxd4 b4 13.0–0 a5 14.♗b2 ♞bd7 15.♞c1 ♖d8 16.♞d2 (16.♞e5 ♞xe5 17.dxe5 ♞d5 offers White no real attacking chances) 16...♗b7 17.f3 ♗d5 18.♗c2 ♞b6 The strong, protected b4-pawn yields Black sufficient counterplay on the queenside.

11...♗b7 12.♞e5

After 12.♖e2 ♞c8! 13.♗d2 ♞bd7 White's active play has been delayed for a long time.

12...♞bd7 13.♞xd7 ♖xd7 14.f3



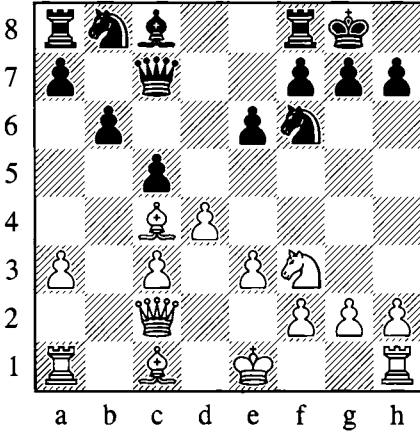
14...♙d5!

Perfect timing, before White gets a chance to shut the bishop out of the game with e3-e4.

15.♙c2 ♙c4 16.♜f2 ♜fd8 17.♙b2 a5 18.e4 ♜ac8

White has seized some space in the centre, but most of his pieces are passive and in no position to support an attack on the kingside.

**D1) 10.♜c2 b6**

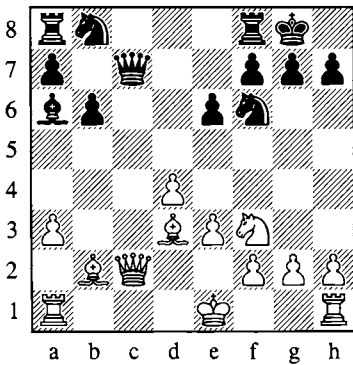


11.♙d3

This involves a loss of time but there is nothing better:

11.0-0? cxd4! 12.cxd4 ♙a6 just drops material.

11.♙b2 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♙a6 13.♙d3 was tried in the classic game Petrosian – Unzicker, Gothenburg 1955. Simple and strong would have been:



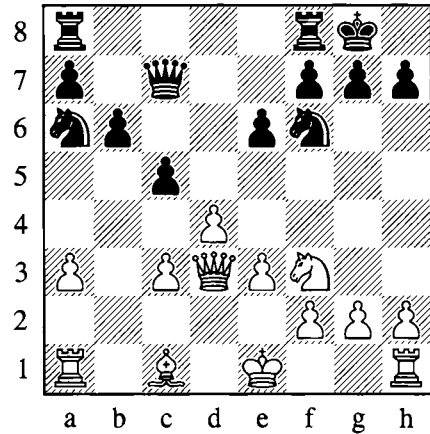
13...♜xc2N 14.♙xc2 ♘c6 15.♜c1 ♜ac8 With better chances for Black.

11...♙a6 12.♙xa6

12.0-0?! cxd4 forces 13.exd4, when 13...♙xd3 14.♜xd3 ♜c8 gives Black a clear positional advantage, with pressure on the backward c-pawn and control over the blockading c4- and d5-squares.

12...♘xa6 13.♜d3

Now I like the following method of regrouping the pieces:



13...♘b8N

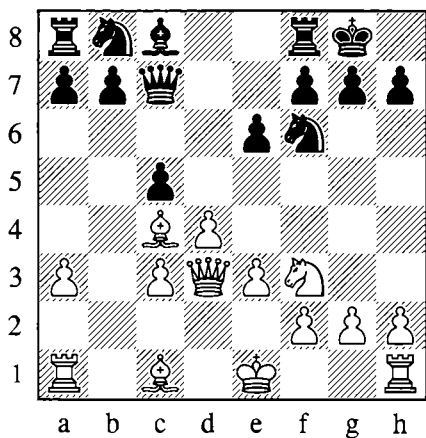
13...♜b7 14.0-0 ♜fd8 15.♜e2 ♜ac8 16.♙b2 ♘b8 also gave Black comfortable play in Medina Garcia – Pomar Salamanca, Palma de Mallorca 1965.

14.0-0 ♘c6 15.e4 h6

As a result of White's slow play, Black has managed to put strong pressure on White's central pawns.

**D2) 10.♜d3**

This time our bishop will not be able to go to a6, but it will find an excellent home on b7 after:

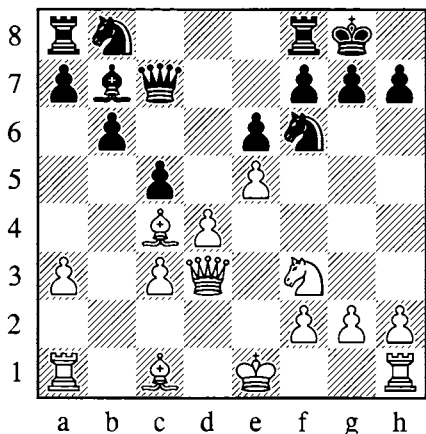


10...b6 11.e4

After 11.0-0 ♖b7 12.♘d2 ♘c6 13.♙a2 ♜fd8 14.♚e2 cxd4 15.cxd4 e5♣ Black was able to punish White for passive play in Mirzoev – Pogorelov, Salou 2005.

11...♙b7 12.e5

As a result of White's over-aggressive play, Black gained control over the light squares in Li Shilong – Lupulescu, Golden Sands 2012. However, the sharp character of the position forces Black to play precisely. The correct continuation is:



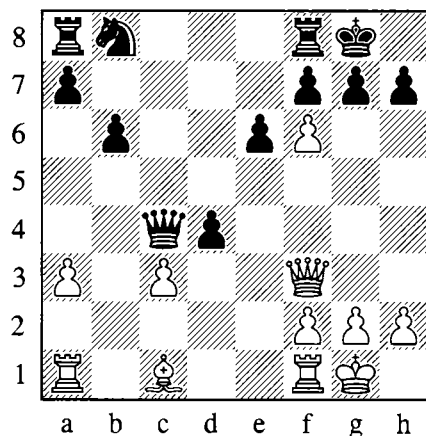
12...♙e4!N 13.♚e2 ♙xf3 14.♚xf3

Even worse is 14.gxf3?! ♘d5 15.♜g1 ♜c8 16.♙h6 g6 17.♙xd5 exd5 18.♚e3 ♘c6♣ and

the attack comes to an end, whereas White's king is permanently exposed.

14...cxd4 15.0-0 ♚xc4 16.exf6

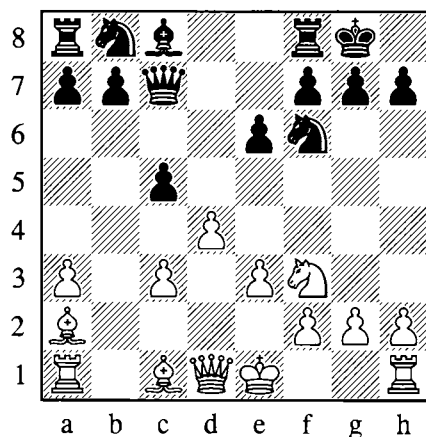
16.♚xa8? ♘c6 17.♚b7 ♜b8 18.♚c7 ♘d5 19.♚d7 dxc3+ leaves Black with two pawns for the exchange, plus dominant pieces and a monstrous pawn on c3.



16...♚d5 17.♚g3 g6 18.♜d1 ♘c6 19.♚f4 ♚e5♣

Black succeeds in liquidating into a better endgame.

D3) 10.♙a2



Just as in the earlier variation C1, White hopes that the bishop will be well placed after

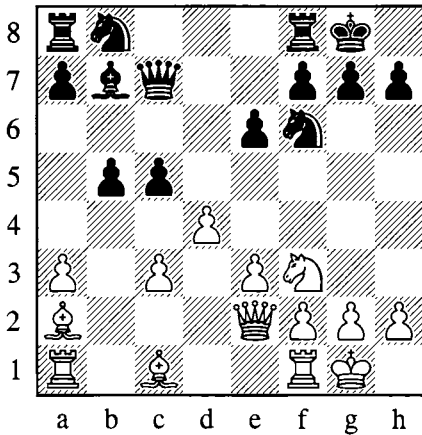
Black pushes with ...e5. Although that plan is still playable, I find the following continuation more logical:

**10...b5!? 11.0-0 ♖b7 12.♙e2**

White should not indulge in pseudo-aggressive measures like 12.♘g5?! ♜bd7 13.f3 h6 14.♘h3 ♙d5 15.♙b1 ♙c4 16.♞f2 e5, when Black was clearly better in Savchenko – Predke, Moscow 2015.

Also somewhat awkward is 12.♙b1 ♜bd7 13.♙e2 ♘e4 14.♙b2 ♙c6 15.♙d3 ♞ab8 and Black has managed to set up a perfect blockade over the light squares.

The text move seems like the most natural – White attacks the b5-pawn and starts to fight for the extremely important e4-square. Here I would like to deviate from a couple of correspondence games by means of:



**12...♞c8!?N**

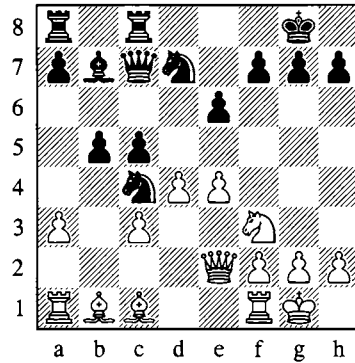
I like this flexible mode of development – Black keeps the knight on b8 for a while, so the b5-pawn remains indirectly protected. At the same time, White has to deal with the possibility of the c-file opening up at any moment.

**13.♙d1**

Removing the rook seems logical; now the b5-pawn really is hanging.

13.♙b2 ♜bd7 14.♞fc1 ♜b6 15.♘e5 ♘fd7 gives Black good prospects.

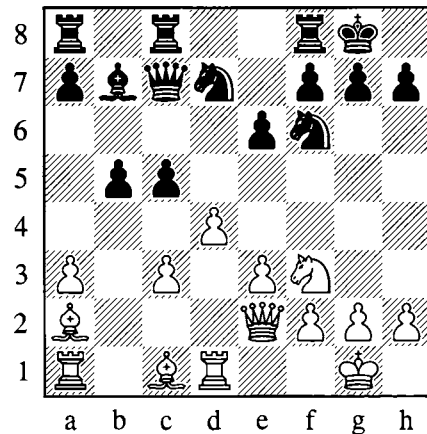
I also considered: 13.♙b1 ♘c6 (13...♘e4 can be met by 14.♙b2) 14.♙b2 (14.♙xb5 ♘a5 gives Black a lot of compensation for the pawn) 14...♘a5 15.e4 ♘c4 16.♙c1 ♘d7



17.♙d3 (17.a4 cxd4 18.cxd4 b4 19.♙d3 a5) 17...♘db6 18.♞e1 h6 Here too, it will be hard for White to build a meaningful attack as Black is so active on the queenside.

**13...♘bd7!**

It turns out that, having such well-developed pieces, Black does not need to spend time on prophylactic moves!



**14. ♖xb5**

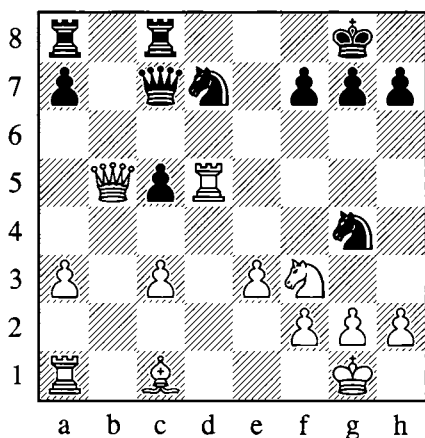
Grabbing the pawn is practically necessary – White's pieces lack harmony, so there are no other useful ideas.

**14... ♖g4!**

Black's threats are serious, so White's next move is practically forced.

**15. d5 ♗xd5 16. ♗xd5 exd5 17. ♖xd5**

White has won a pawn, but the undeveloped a1-rook and c1-bishop allow Black to extend the initiative:

**17... ♖df6 18. ♖d1 ♗e4 19. ♖c4 ♖d8 20. ♖f1 ♖e7 21. h3 ♗gf6**

Black has full, long-lasting compensation for the pawn.

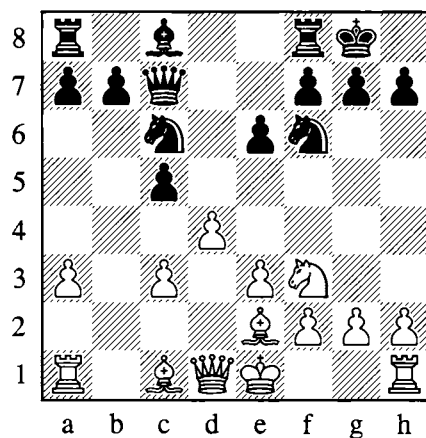
**D4) 10. ♗e2**

This has been played by many strong grandmasters. In my opinion, however, it is not in the spirit of the chosen system – the bishop on e2 is placed rather passively, so it is easier for Black to take the light squares under control now.

**10... ♗c6**

There is nothing wrong with 10...b6 11.0-0 ♗b7, b7-c6 that the more direct approach

is justified against the timid ♗e2 set-up. After White's next move we will transpose to one of the lines from the variation mentioned on page 212 in the note to Black's 9th move.

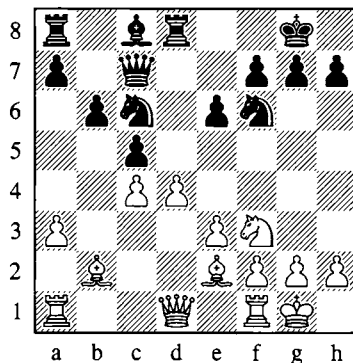
**11.0-0 ♖d8**

Black is perfectly prepared for the ...e5 advance, so White will have to move the queen sooner or later.

**12. ♖c2**

12. ♗b2 e5 13. ♖c1 is toothless. (13. ♖c2 ♗g4 transposes to our main line) 13... ♗g4 14. h3 ♗h5 15. ♗xe5 ♗xe2 16. ♖xe2 ♗xe5 17. dxe5 ♖xe5 18. c4 ♖e6= D. Guseinov – Lagashin, Moscow 2009.

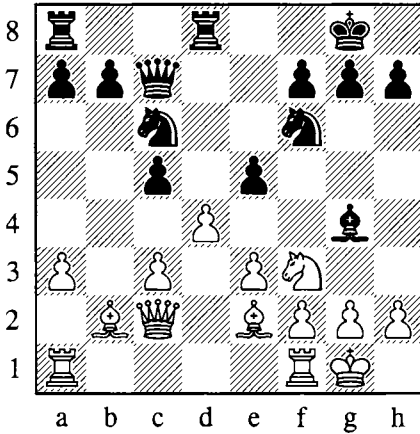
12. c4 b6 13. ♗b2 This position was tested a few times at a high level, including Pisman – Tal, Riga 1954. In my opinion, it makes sense to keep the tension in the centre by means of:



13...♖a5N 14.♚c2 ♘b7 15.♘e5 (15.♟fd1 cxd4 16.exd4 ♜ac8 17.♘d2 ♟f4) 15...♘d7 16.♘d7 ♜xd7=

**12...e5 13.♘b2 ♘g4**

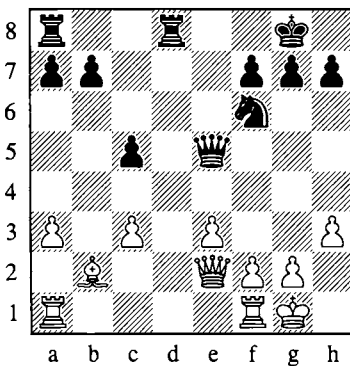
Black's forces are perfectly mobilized, so White cannot keep the tension any longer.



**14.dxe5**

White may also start by nudging the bishop: 14.h3 ♘h5 15.dxe5

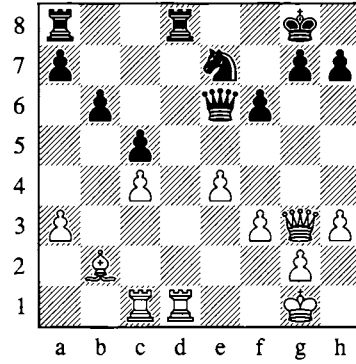
White's inaccurate play invited serious trouble in the following high-level game: 15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♘g6 17.♟b3?! ♘e4! 18.c4 ♘d2 ♞ Laznicka – Karjakin, Dubai 2014. 15...♘e5 16.♘e5 ♘xe2 17.♟xe2 ♟xe5



18.c4 ♟e6 19.♟fd1 ♘e4 20.♜ac1 b6 21.f3 ♘g3 22.♟f2 ♘f5 23.e4 ♘e7 24.♟g3 f6

The position is about equal: the active bishop

on b2 doesn't really bother Black, while the c4-pawn is a permanent cause of concern. The game Mozharov – Zhidkov, Moscow 2006, saw White trying to complicate matters by means of:



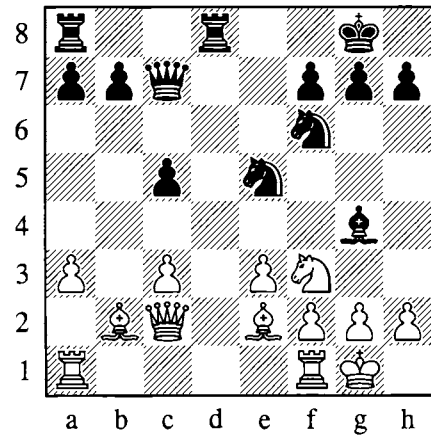
25.f4! ♟xe4 26.♘xf6

But this wouldn't pose Black any problems after:

26...♜xd1 ♞ 27.♜xd1 ♘g6 28.♘b2 ♟xf4 29.♟xf4 ♘xf4 30.♞d7 ♘h5

White's compensation for the pawn offers no more than a drawish rook endgame.

**14...♘xe5**

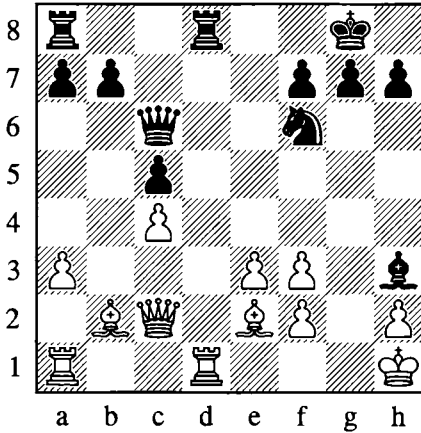


15.c4 ♘xf3 ♞ 16.gxf3 ♘h3 17.♟fd1

White is relying on the bishop pair, but the exposed kingside structure offers Black sufficient counterplay:

17...♖c6! 18.♔h1!N

This is more precise than 18.♖c3, when 18...♘e8! 19.♔h1 ♕e6 20.♖g1 f6 21.♖g3 ♜d7 22.♖ag1 ♜ad8<sup>7</sup> was better for Black in Khalifman – Kramnik, Linares 2000.



18...♘g4 19.♜xd8† ♜xd8 20.e4

The position is tricky for both sides, but the correct outcome looks to be a draw after:

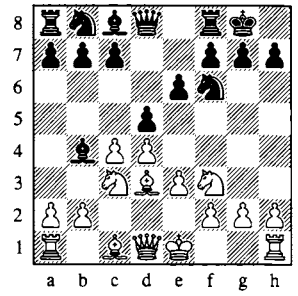
20...♘f2† 21.♔g1 ♖h6! 22.♔xf2 ♜d2  
23.♖c3 ♖g5 24.♔e1 ♜d4 25.♔f2 ♜d2=

## Conclusion

6.a3 is another way for White to aim for a strong pawn centre plus the bishop pair. Indeed, in comparison to the Sämisch, the presence of Black's pawn on d5 enables White to repair the damage to his pawn structure. However, White's slow development enables Black to develop significant counterplay along the c-file and solve the problem of the light-squared bishop. Throughout the chapter, we have seen how Black can use these attributes to prevent White from utilizing his strong pawn centre to build an attack.

# Chapter 15

## 4.e3



## 6.♘f3

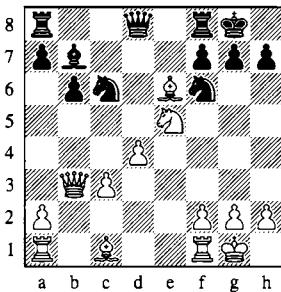
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♗d3 d5 6.♘f3

6...c5

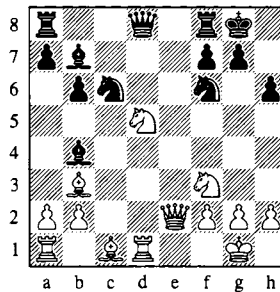
A) 7.cxd5	221
B) 7.0-0 cxd4 8.exd4 dxc4 9.♗xc4 b6	223
B1) 10.a3	224
B2) 10.♗d3	225
B3) 10.♘e5	226
B4) 10.♖b3	227
B5) 10.♖e2	228
B6) 10.♞e1	230

B3) after 13.♗xe6!?



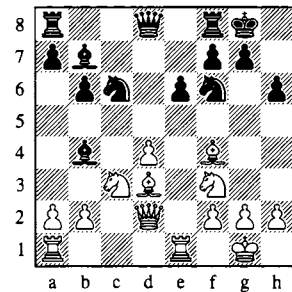
13...♗c7!N

B5) after 14.♘xd5



14...♗c5!N

B6) after 13.♖d2



13...♘e7!N

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 ♜b4 4.e3 0–0  
5.♙d3 d5 6.♟f3

This move leads into some of the absolute main lines of the Nimzo-Indian.

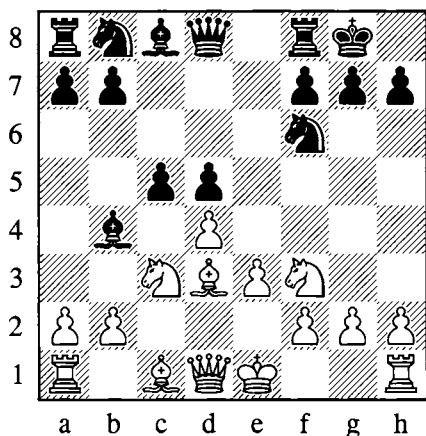
### 6...c5

Virtually every sensible-looking move has been tried by strong players, but the text move is the most classical response, challenging White in the centre.

We will analyse **A) 7.cxd5** and **B) 7.0–0**.

7.a3 is the only other significant move, but in that case 7...♙xc3† 8.bxc3 dxc4 9.♙xc4 transposes to variation D of the previous chapter.

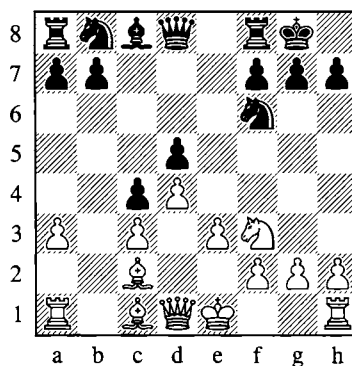
#### A) 7.cxd5 exd5



### 8.dxc5

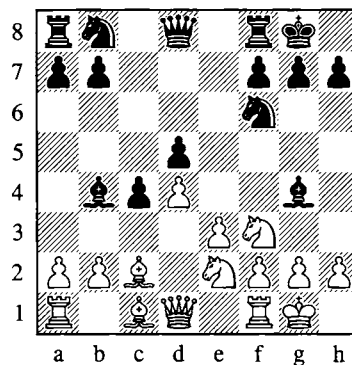
This approach is similar to another fashionable line, 7.0–0 ♟c6 8.cxd5 exd5 9.dxc5, where sometimes Black finds it hard to prove that active piece play fully compensates for the isolated d-pawn. In comparison to that line, Black now benefits from not having the knight on c6!

8.a3?! cannot be recommended for White. 8...♙xc3† 9.bxc3 c4 10.♙c2 Now simple and strong is:



10...♟e4! 11.♙xe4N This seems like the only way to challenge Black's last move. (11.♙b2 ♙f5 12.0–0 Lindstrom – Tasic, email 2009, 12...♟c6N 13.♟d2 ♟xd2 14.♙xd2 ♙xc2 15.♙xc2 b5) 11...dxe4 12.♟d2 ♙g5! 13.♟f1 ♙d5 White has a passive position with a misplaced king.

8.0–0 c4 9.♙c2 ♙g4 10.♟e2, as played in Farid – Nguyen Anh Dung, Jakarta 2015, leaves most of White's pieces passive. Black has no reason to reject:



10...♙xf3N 11.gxf3 ♞e8 12.b3 cxb3 13.axb3 ♙d7 14.♙a3 ♟c6 With excellent play.

### 8...♟bd7!

This resource enables Black to save a tempo rather than moving the dark-squared bishop again. Moreover, the knight will be placed quite actively on c5, taking control of the important e4-square.

**9.♔d2**

9.0-0 ♖xc5 10.♙e2 seems too passive after 10...♗ce4 11.♗b5 ♙d7, when Black was at least equal in Alatortsev – Levenfish, Moscow 1940.

**9...♗xc5 10.♙e2**

White is keeping his queenside pawn chain flexible, but the pieces are placed rather passively and don't put strong pressure on the isolated pawn.

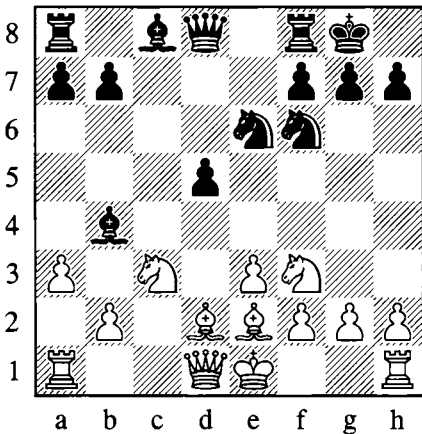
**10...♗e6**

It's important to secure a safe retreat for the b4-bishop.

**11.a3**

After 11.0-0 a6 12.♗b3 ♙e7 13.♞fd1 b5 14.♙e1 ♙b7 15.a3 ♞c8 Black's excellent piece play provided full compensation for the isolated pawn in Krush – Wojtaszek, Doha 2015.

We have been following the recent top-level game Harikrishna – Topalov, Stavanger 2016. I think Black should have opted for the most active:



**11...♙d6!?!N**

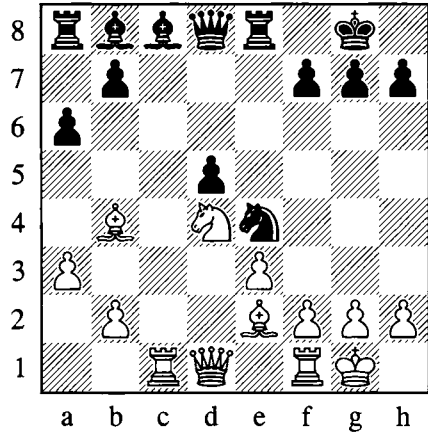
Black is ready to play ...a6 with a harmonious position, so the following line appears critical:

**12.♗b5 ♙b8 13.0-0 a6 14.♗bd4 ♗xd4 15.♗xd4 ♗e4 16.♙b4**

16.♞c1 ♞e8 17.♙e1 ♗d6 18.f4 ♙d7 doesn't promise White any advantage.

**16...♞e8 17.♞c1**

Also harmless is: 17.♗b3 a5 18.♙c3 a4 19.♗b5 ♙e5 20.♞ac1 ♗xc3 21.bxc3 ♞a5 22.♗b2 ♞c5=



**17...♙e5 18.f3!?**

The most challenging.

18.♗b3 a5 19.♙e1 ♗d6 20.♗f3 ♙f6 looks comfortable for Black.

**18...♗d6 19.♞c5! ♗f5!**

It was possible to trap the rook by means of 19...b6 20.♞xd5 ♙b7, but after 21.♞xe5 ♞xe5 22.e4 I prefer White.

**20.♗xf5 ♙xf5**

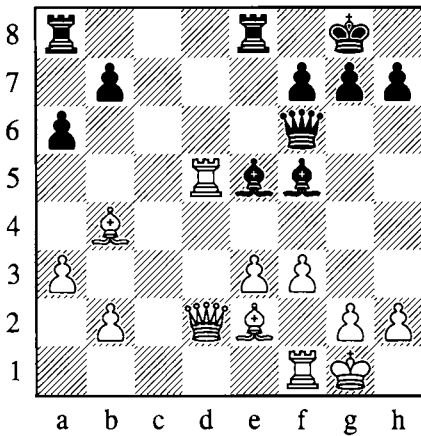
White can grab the d5-pawn, but Black gets sufficient counterplay in all cases.

**21.♞xd5**

After 21.♗xd5 b6 22.♗xd8 ♞axd8 23.♞c6 a5 24.♙c3 ♙xc3 25.♞xc3 ♞d2 Black regains the pawn to reach an equal endgame.

**21...♗f6 22.♗d2**

22.f4 ♙xb2 23.♙d3 ♙xd3 24.♖xd3 ♖e6 is balanced.



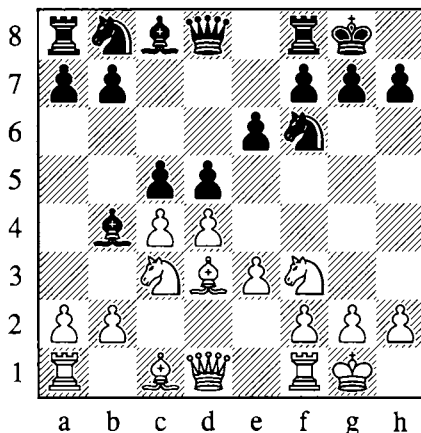
22...♞ad8 23.b3 h6 24.f4

24.♞d1 ♞xd5 25.♖xd5 ♖h4 26.h3 ♖g3 27.♜f1 ♖h2 is equal claims the computer, but practically more dangerous for White.

24...♙c7 25.♙c5 ♙b6

Black has full compensation; his pieces are more active and White has numerous pawn weaknesses.

B) 7.0–0



7...cxd4 8.exd4 dxc4 9.♙xc4 b6

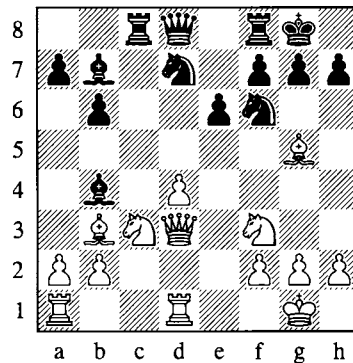
We have reached the main *tabiya* of what is widely known as the Karpov System. This

position is also frequently reached via the Panov Attack against the Caro-Kann. Black's last move obviously prepares to post the bishop on b7, while the b8-knight remains flexible: it often goes to d7, but I also like the idea of bringing it to c6 in some variations. At the moment Black is playing against an isolated queen's pawn, but it is not uncommon to convert to a hanging pawns structure after an exchange on c3.

In this chapter we will study the following options: B1) 10.a3, B2) 10.♙d3, B3) 10.♘e5, B4) 10.♖b3, B5) 10.♖e2 and B6) 10.♞e1.

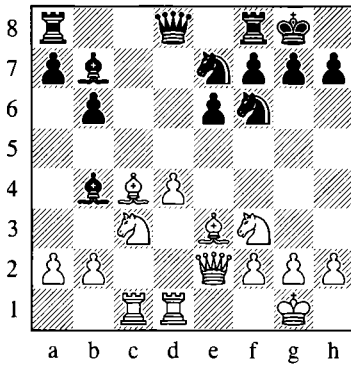
10.♙g5 is the main move, which is covered separately in the next chapter.

10.♖d3 ♙b7 11.♞d1 ♘bd7 12.♙g5 ♞c8 13.♙b3 is a harmless continuation which occurred in Peter – Schmitzer, Hessen 1998. A good plan for Black could have been:



13...♖c7!N Stepping out of the pin. 14.♘b5 (14.♞ac1 ♖b8 is also preferable for Black) 14...♖b8 15.♙h4 ♙d6 16.♘xd6 ♖xd6 White's bishops do not provide full compensation for the isolated pawn.

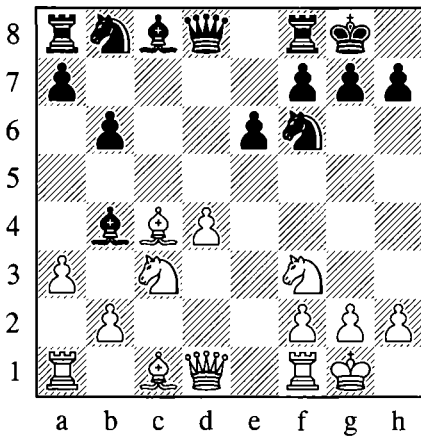
10.♙e3 seems too passive. 10...♙b7 11.♞c1 ♘c6 12.♖e2 ♘e7 This typical move secures control over the d5-square. 13.♞fd1 This was I. Sokolov – Wojtaszek, Haguenau 2013, and now simple and strong would have been:



13...d5 14.♔g5 (14.♗xd5 ♖xd5 15.a3 ♔e7) 14...h6 15.♗xd5 (15.♔h4 ♗f4 16.♞e3 ♜c8 17.♙b3 ♗fg6) 15...♔xd5 16.♔xe7 ♔xe7 17.♗e5 ♜c8 Black has the better position, with chances to press against the IQP.

### B1) 10.a3

This move looks principled, as White hopes to profit from the bishop pair and the strengthening of his pawn centre. However, losing a tempo at such an early stage leads to some inconveniences.



### 10...♔xc3

This exchange is practically forced – Black cannot let White carry out d4-d5, especially when the bishop isn't yet on b7.

### 11.bxc3 ♞c7!

That's the point! The vulnerability of the c3-pawn forces White to deviate from his optimal set-up with ♔d3 followed by c3-c4.

### 12.♞e2

White insisted on 12.♔d3 in L. Guliev – Abasov, Baku 2011, but the blunt 12...♞xc3N 13.♔g5 ♗bd7 14.♜c1 ♞a5 would have left White with no real compensation for the pawn.

12.♞d3 ♙b7 13.♔a2 (13.♔g5 ♜c8 14.♗d2 ♗d5) 13...♗bd7 14.h3 ♜ac8 15.c4 seems quite pointless. White's set-up looks artificial and Black can exploit it by means of 15...e5! as in L. Guliev – V. Gaprindashvili, Adana 2006.

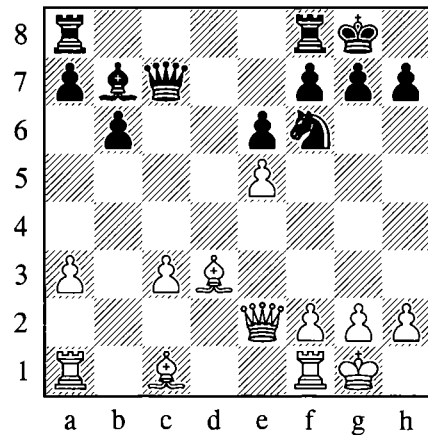
### 12...♙b7 13.♗e5 ♗c6 14.♔d3

White accepts a structural weakening in the hope of progressing his attack.

### 14...♗e5

14...♜ad8?! gave White a chance to consolidate with 15.f4! in Inkiov – Marciniak, France 2011.

### 15.dxe5



### 15...♗d7!N

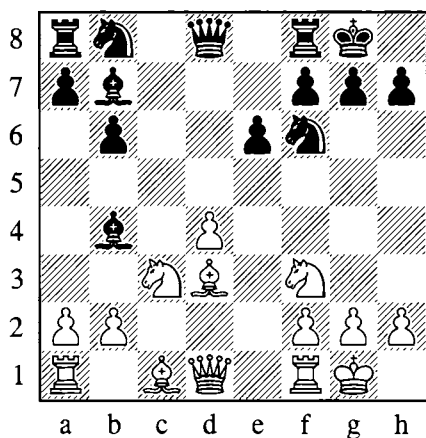
15...♞c6 16.f4 ♗e4 is fine, but after 17.♔xe4 ♞xe4 18.♞xe4 ♔xe4 19.♔e3 Black has no more than a symbolic advantage, and

the players soon agreed a draw in Siebert – Von Saleski, email 2000. The text move keeps more winning chances alive.

### 16.♟f4 ♘c5

Black has a clear positional advantage due to the better pawn structure.

#### B2) 10.♟d3 ♟b7



### 11.a3

11.♞e1 converts to the later variation B6, and 11.♟g5 is covered under 10.♟g5 ♟b7 11.♟d3, in variation A of the next chapter.

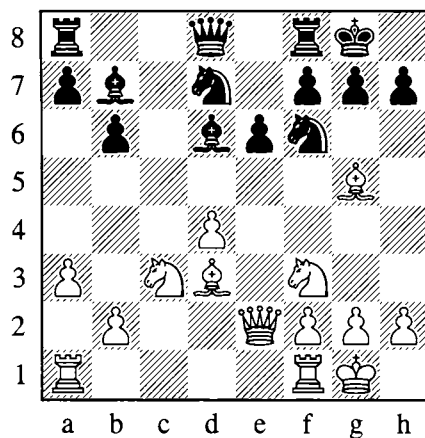
The text move sees White aim for a modified version of the plan from the previous variation. Here his bishop is safely on d3, so the plan of exchanging on c3 and putting the queen on c7 loses its bite. Instead it looks better to continue with:

### 11...♟d6!?N

I was quite surprised that this typical retreat hasn't been tried yet. The bishop is more active on d6 than on e7, and White's bishop would be better on c4 than d3 in the ensuing position.

### 12.♟g5 ♘bd7 13.♞e2

13.♘e4?! ♟e7 leads only to simplifications, so the weakness of the d4-pawn becomes more significant.



### 13...h6 14.♟h4 ♟f4!

The bishop is perfectly placed, covering many important squares.

### 15.♘e4

Pinning the f6-knight seems to be White's only dangerous idea.

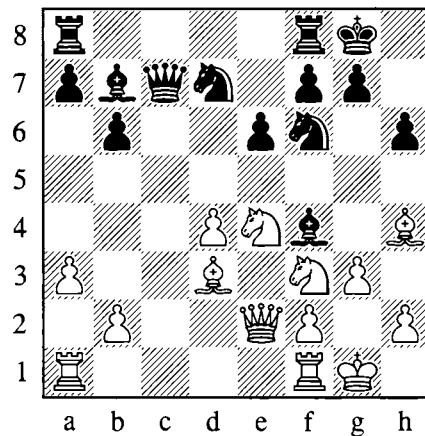
15.♘e5? drops a pawn now: 15...♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♟xe5 17.♞xe5 ♞xd3 18.♟xf6 ♞g6!±

### 15...♞c7!

Black should not fear a slight compromising of his kingside structure, as White does not have any real attacking potential.

### 16.g3

16.♘xf6† ♘xf6 17.♟xf6 gxf6 18.♟e4 ♟xe4 19.♞xe4 f5 20.♞e2 ♞fd8± and Black has the upper hand.



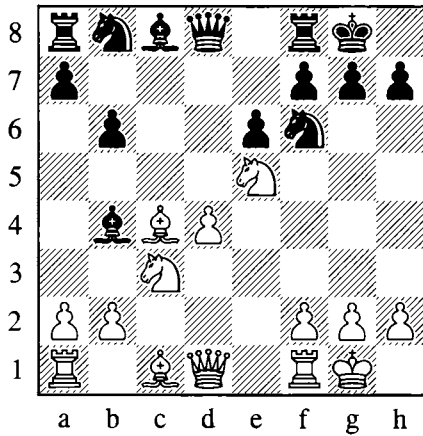
16...♖c6!

Finally forcing favourable simplifications.

17.♙xf6 ♜xf6 18.♞fe1 ♜xe4 19.♙xe4 ♞xe4  
20.♞xe4 ♙xe4 21.♞xe4 ♙d6

White will have to work to hold the endgame.

B3) 10.♜e5



This looks active and aggressive, but White is spending time moving an already developed piece, and it is often Black who can look to seize the initiative.

10...♙b7 11.♞b3

11.♙g5 transposes to variation B of the next chapter.

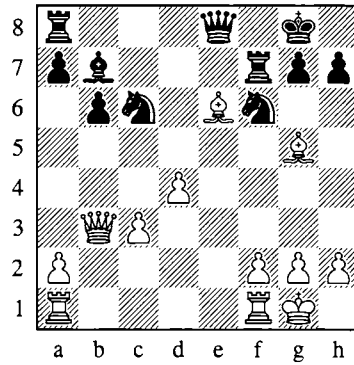
11...♙xc3 12.bxc3 ♜c6

Challenging the active knight while creating the annoying positional threat of ...♜a5.

13.♙xe6!?

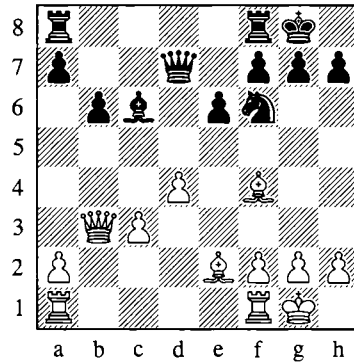
This seems like the only challenging idea, but Black has more than one decent reply.

13.♜xf7?! is a slightly inaccurate version of the same sort of idea. 13...♞xf7 14.♙xe6 ♞e8 15.♙g5

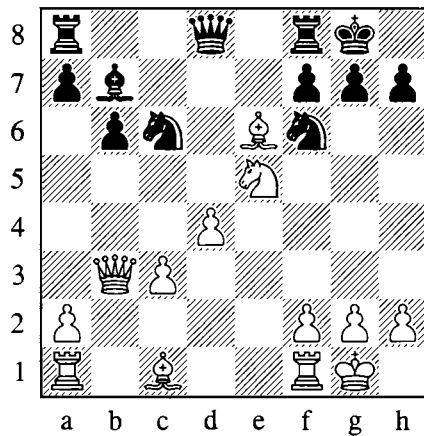


15...♜a5! 16.♙xf7† ♞xf7 17.♞xf7† ♜xf7  
18.♙xf6 ♗xf6 Black's chances are better due to his domination over the light squares.

13.♜xc6 ♙xc6 is already at least equal for Black, for instance: 14.♙e2 ♞d7 15.♙f4



15...b5! 16.♞fe1 a6 17.♞b2 ♜d5= Black was able to set up a solid blockade on the light squares in Davidov – Dimitrov, corr. 2010.

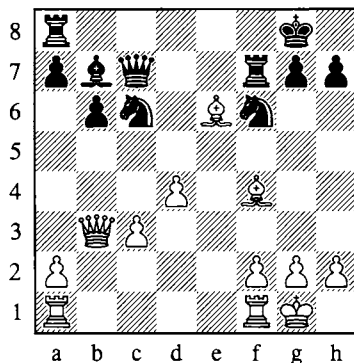


**13...♞c7!N**

13...♟xe5 14.dxe5 fxe6 15.♞xe6† ♔h8  
16.exf6 ♟xf6 17.♞e2 ♞f8 18.f3 ♟e8 19.♞f2  
♟f6 gave Black decent compensation for the  
pawn in Malushko – Summers, corr. 2013.  
There is nothing much wrong with following  
that game, but I like the text move even more.

**14.♟xc6**

Dubious is: 14.♟xf7?! ♟xf7 15.♟f4



15...♞e7! Black should eliminate the light-  
squared bishop rather than the dark-squared  
one, so that his own bishop will be able  
to dominate the light squares. (15...♞xf4  
16.♟xf7† ♔h8 17.f3 ♟a5 18.♞c2 enables  
White to maintain the balance.) 16.♟g5 ♟a5  
17.♟xf6 ♞xf6 18.♟xf7† ♞xf7 19.♞xf7†  
♔xf7 Even though White has a slight material  
advantage, he is doomed to a passive defence.

**14...♞xc6 15.♟h3 ♟c8!**

The bishop has done its job on the long  
diagonal, and now exchanges itself in order  
to allow the rook to come to c8 with gain of  
tempo.

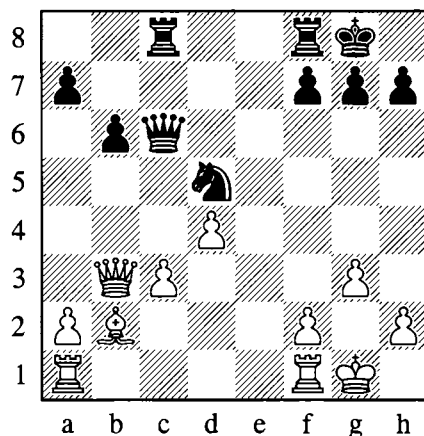
**16.♟xc8 ♟axc8 17.♟b2**

17.♟d2 runs into 17...♟e4 18.d5 ♞c4  
19.♞xc4 ♟xc4 20.♟fd1 ♟d8, regaining the  
pawn in a favourable situation. The arising  
endgame is drawish, but White will still have  
to be careful!

**17...♟d5 18.g3**

18.♟ac1? ♟f4+ wins material for Black.

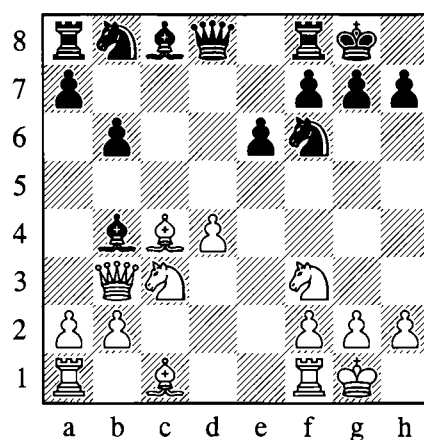
The text move looks ugly, but the f4-spot must  
be guarded.

**18...♟fe8!?**

18...♟xc3 19.♟xc3 ♞xc3 20.♞a4= leads to  
simplifications.

**19.♟fe1 b5**

Black's control over the light squares  
and superior minor piece offer him full  
compensation for a pawn.

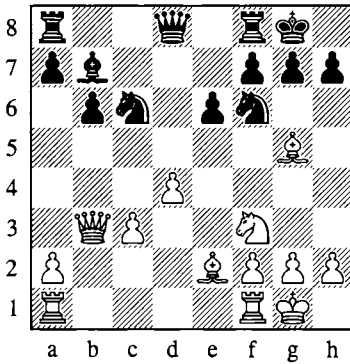
**B4) 10.♞b3****10...♟xc3 11.bxc3**

In comparison to variation B1, it looks as though White has made an active developing move rather than a useless pawn move. However, the queen proves to be misplaced on b3, so it turns out that White actually loses time.

**11...♠c6 12.♚d1**

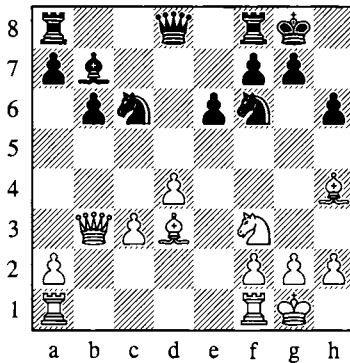
Admitting that White's 10th move was pointless.

12.♙e2 is too passive. 12...♙b7 13.♙g5 occurred in Aleksandrov – Grigoriants, Warsaw 2005, and now Black could have seized the initiative by means of:



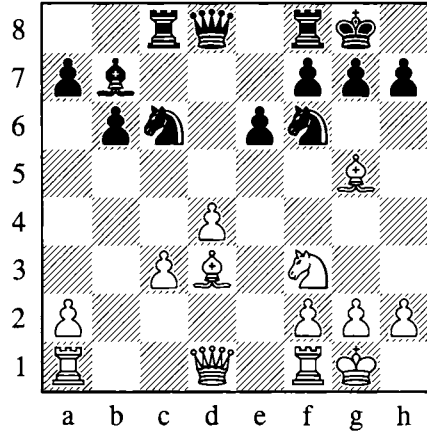
13...♘a5N 14.♚b2 ♝c8 15.♝ac1 ♚d5! 16.♙xf6 gxf6. Once again, the doubled f-pawns are of little consequence as the rest of Black's pieces are so well placed.

Another game continued 12.♙d3 ♙b7 13.♙g5 h6 14.♙h4, Zilka – Kravtsov, Yerevan 2013. Now I prefer the following way of handling the position:



14...♘a5N 15.♚d1 ♝c8 16.♝c1 ♚d5! 17.♙xf6 gxf6 18.♝e1 f5 Here too, Black's play seems somewhat easier – the pressure on White's queenside pawns is quite unpleasant, whereas Black's king still feels safe.

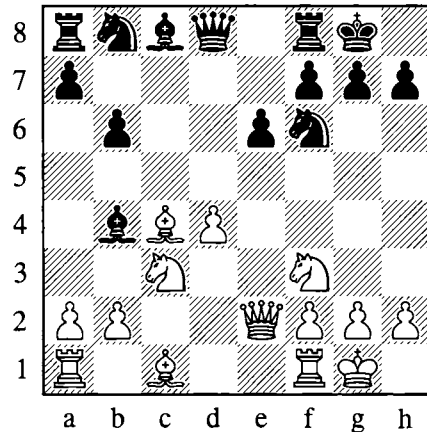
**12...♙b7 13.♙g5 ♝c8 14.♙d3**



14...♘e7! 15.♙xf6 gxf6 16.♝c1 ♘g6 17.♝e1 ♝c7 18.♘d2 f5

Black had the better position in Sipila – Alekseev, Jerusalem 2015.

**B5) 10.♚e2**



**10...♙b7**

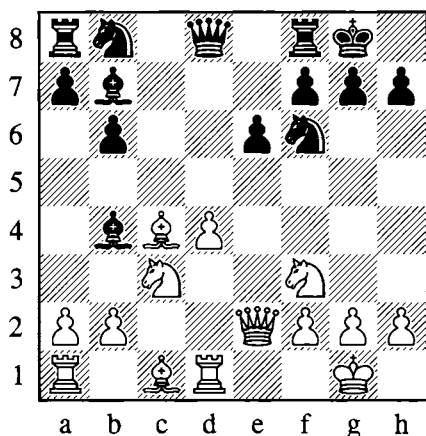
This is the most natural, although 10...♘c6!?

11.♞d1 ♖a5 12.♙d3 ♙b7 13.♙g5 ♙e7 seems a reliable alternative.

### 11.♞d1

11.♙g5 transposes to variation C of the next chapter.

White's set-up became popular in roughly the middle of the 20th century. The main idea behind it is to prepare for the d4-d5 advance. In particular, 11...♖bd7 can be met with 12.d5, so in most games Black has preferred to deviate from those complications with 11...♙xc3 12.bxc3 ♖bd7. However, I take a different view. Since exchanging the dark-squared bishop is something of a concession, it makes sense to postpone the development of the queen's knight for a while. Therefore I recommend:

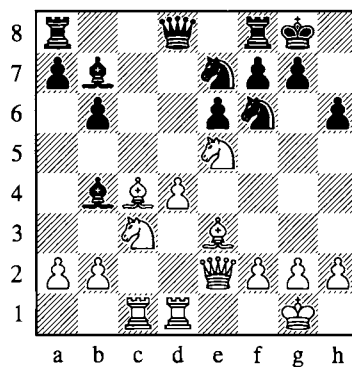


### 11...h6!

It is surprising that this natural prophylactic move has only been tested in a few games. White's attacking abilities are severely limited now.

### 12.♙b3

The more aggressive 12.♖e5 ♖c6 13.♙e3 ♖e7 14.♞ac1, as played in Batchimeg – Dzagnidze, Dilijan 2013, could have led to an inferior position for White after:



14...♞c8!N 15.♙a6 ♙xa6 16.♞xa6 ♖ed5 17.♖xd5 ♖xd5

White may try to force the exchange on c3 by means of:

12.a3!?N ♙xc3 13.bxc3

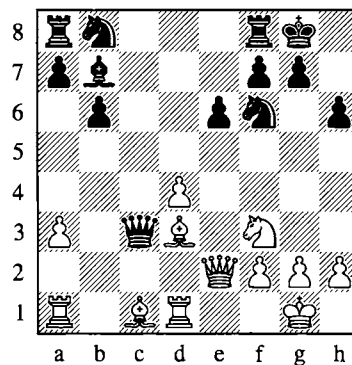
But in doing so, he loses an important tempo. Black has a good position after:

13...♞c7 14.♙d3

14.♖e5 ♖bd7 15.♙d3 ♖xe5 16.dxe5 ♖d7 is good for Black, for instance: 17.♙f4 ♞fd8

18.♞g4 ♖xe5 19.♞g3 f6 20.♙xh6 ♖f8 21.♙f4 ♞xc3

14...♞xc3



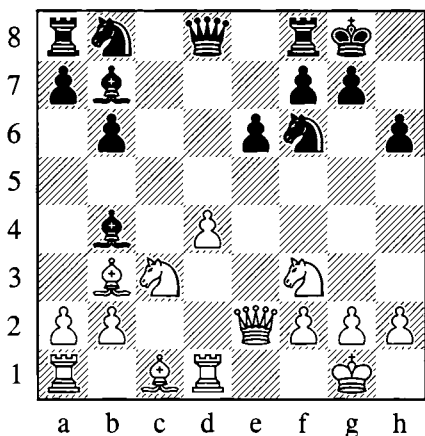
15.♙xh6

The over-aggressive 15.♙b2?! ♞c7 16.d5 ♖xd5 17.♞ac1 ♞e7 18.♞c4 f5 19.♖e5 ♞d8 leaves White no real compensation for two pawns.

15...gxh6 16.♞e3

This more or less forces a draw by repetition:

16...♙xf3 17.♚xf3 ♖d5 18.♞ac1 ♜a5  
19.♞g3† ♗h8 20.♞h4 ♗g7=



12...♖c6

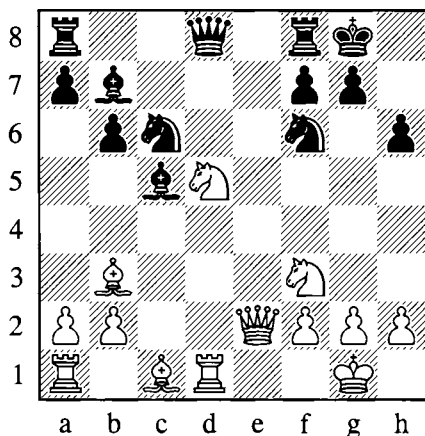
Black is well developed and ready to improve his position with ...♖a5 or ...♖e7, so White should not hesitate to get rid of the isolated pawn.

13.d5 exd5 14.♖xd5

We have been following the game Agdestein – Kramnik, Stavanger 2014. Now Black should have played:

14...♙c5!N

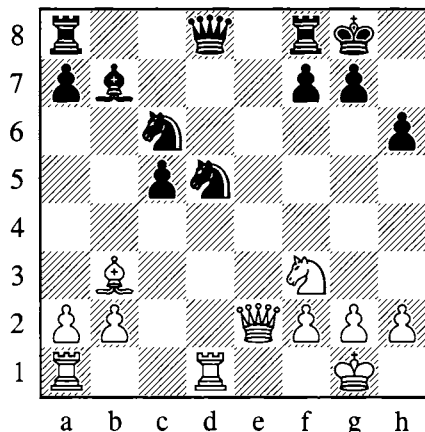
Instead, 14...♖xd5?! 15.♙xd5 ♜f6 16.♙e3± left Vladimir under some pressure.



15.♙e3 ♖xd5 16.♙xc5

Both 16.♙xd5 ♜e7= and 16.♙xd5 ♜e7 17.♞ad1 ♞ad8= are fine for Black.

16...bxc5



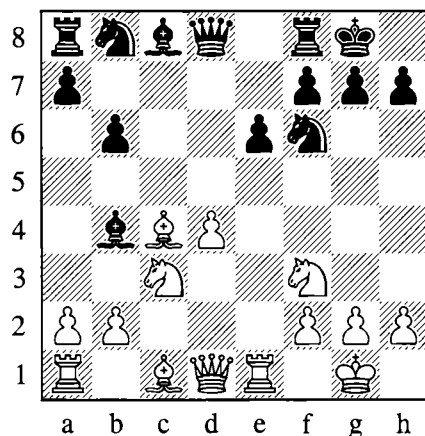
17.♙xd5

17.♙xd5? turns out to be a blunder: 17...♖d4!-+

17...♜b6 18.h3 ♞ad8=

The activity of Black's pieces fully compensates for the slight weakening of his pawn structure.

B6) 10.♞e1



In most cases, this move leads by transposition to the main lines with 10.♗g5. In this section, we will deal with some lines with independent value.

### 10...♗b7 11.♗d3

11.♗g5 transposes to variation D of the next chapter.

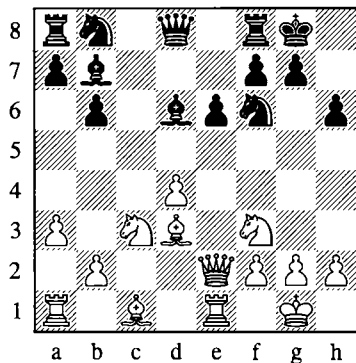
The text move looks natural – White removes the bishop from the more exposed c4-square, where it could be attacked by the opponent's rook, and hopes to use its power for developing some kingside initiative. The drawback is that White reduces his control over the d5-square, which means that there is no need to exchange the b4-bishop.

### 11...h6

Just as in variation B5 above, this prophylactic move allows Black to limit the opponent's attacking abilities and secure control over the d5-square.

### 12.♗f4

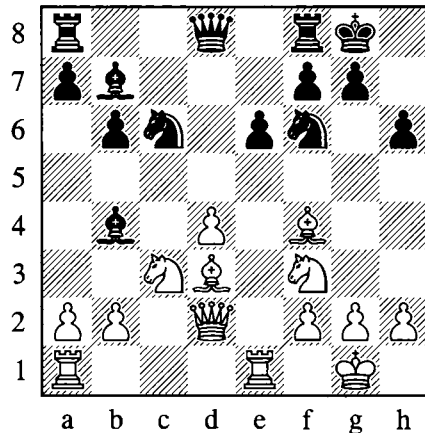
12.a3 ♗d6! 13.♖e2, as played in Korobov – Lysyj, Legnica 2013, can be well met by:



13...♖c6!N 14.♖e4 ♖a5 15.♖xd6 ♖xd6 and White finds himself in a passive position.

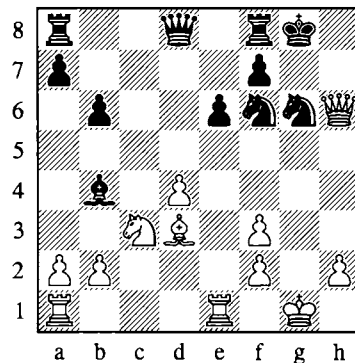
### 12...♖c6 13.♖d2

We have been following the game Salem – Yu Yangyi, Incheon 2013. With the dangerous ♗xh6 motif in the air, it makes sense to bring one more piece to the defence. Therefore I suggest:



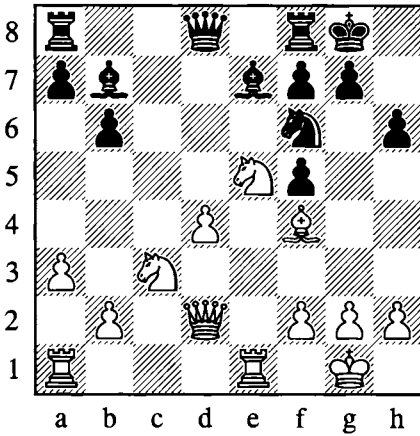
### 13...♖e7!N 14.♖e5

14.♗xh6? doesn't work after 14...♗xf3! 15.gxf3 gxf6 16.♖xh6 ♖g6, for instance:



17.♖h1 ♗xc3 18.bxc3 ♖d5 19.♗e4 ♖h5 20.♖xh5 ♖xh5 21.♗xa8 ♖xa8

### 14...♖f5 15.a3 ♗e7 16.♗xf5 exf5



17.♙d3 ♘e4 18.f3 ♘xc3 19.bxc3 ♜c8

In this complex position, Black has reasonable chances of taking over the initiative. The unopposed light-squared bishop is an especially useful asset.

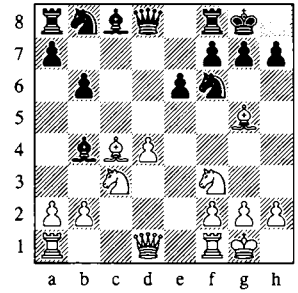
## Conclusion

In this chapter we dealt with some of White's less popular options after 6.♘f3 c5. Some players prefer to fight against an isolated pawn, so 7.cxd5 exd5 8.dxc5 may appeal to them, but 8...♘bd7! enables Black to place his pieces actively; in particular, the knight coming to e4 is quite annoying for White, so the pressure on the d5-pawn is not too great a concern.

7.0-0 is the normal move, and after 7...cxd4 8.exd4 dxc4 9.♙xc4 b6 the shoe is on the other foot, since it is now White who must play with an isolated pawn. Of the various possibilities we explored in this chapter, 10.♙e2 ♙b7 11.♞d1 is the most challenging, as it forces Black to watch out for the d4-d5 advance. I find 11...h6! to be the most convincing reply, in conjunction with the novelty at move 14 to improve on Kramnik's play. On a more general note, the presence of an isolated d-pawn puts White under some strategic pressure. If Black manages to complete development and establish control over the d5-square, White is likely to find himself having to work hard for a draw.

# Chapter 16

## 4.e3



## 10. ♖g5 – Main Line

### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0-0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♘f3 c5  
7.0-0 cxd4 8.exd4 dxc4 9.♙xc4 b6 10.♙g5

10...♙b7

A) 11.♙d3	234
B) 11.♘e5 ♘bd7!	235
B1) 12.♘xf7!?N	236
B2) 12.♘xd7	238
C) 11.♙e2 ♘bd7	239
C1) 12.d5	240
C2) 12.♘e5	241
C3) 12.♙ac1	242
D) 11.♙e1 ♘c6	244
D1) 12.♙d3	245
D2) 12.a3	246
E) 11.♙c1 ♘c6	249
E1) 12.d5	249
E2) 12.♙d3	250
E3) 12.♙d3	250
E4) 12.a3	252
E5) 12.♙e1	252

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e3 0–0 5.♙d3 d5 6.♘f3 c5 7.0–0 cxd4 8.exd4 dxc4 9.♙xc4 b6 10.♙g5

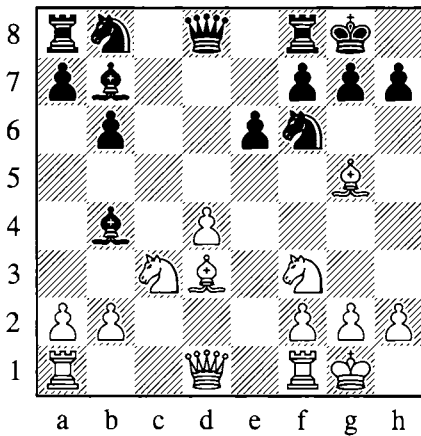
This is White's most popular continuation, setting up an annoying pin. Depending on circumstances, Black may counter it by retreating his bishop to e7, but he can also consider playing with doubled f-pawns in some variations.

### 10...♙b7

First things first! Before addressing the pin on the knight, Black brings the light-squared bishop to the obvious square. White has five main contenders: A) 11.♙d3, B) 11.♘e5, C) 11.♙e2, D) 11.♙e1 and E) 11.♙c1.

#### A) 11.♙d3

White takes the bishop out of harm's way and points it towards the kingside.



### 11...♘c6

Often the knight goes to d7 in this structure. However, in the main theoretical lines of this chapter, I favour a set-up with the knight on c6. I suggest doing the same against this sideline, to allow for transpositions.

### 12.a3

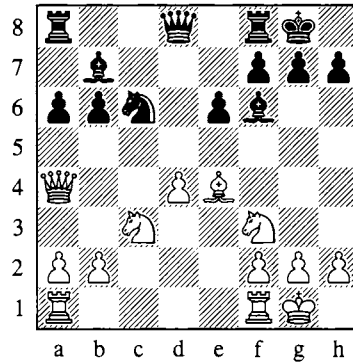
12.♙e1 and 12.♙c1 transpose to the later variations D1 and E3, respectively.

12.♙c2 should be met by the typical 12...♙e7, breaking the pin. I don't see anything better for White than 13.a3, transposing to the main line below.

A fairly toothless alternative is:

12.♙e4 ♙e7 13.♙xf6 ♙xf6 14.♙a4 a6!?

14...♘a5 15.♙xb7 ♘xb7 16.♙fd1 ♘d6 is also fine for Black.



### 15.d5N

15.♙xc6? b5 16.♙xb5 axb5 17.♙d1 b4 18.♘e2 ♙xf3 19.gxf3 ♙a5+ leaves White with too many weaknesses.

The previously played 15.♙fd1?! is also inaccurate: 15...b5 16.♙c2 g6 17.a3 ♙c8+ Black was better due to his strong bishops in Portisch – Gheorghiu, Crans Montana 1976.

15...exd5 16.♘xd5 ♙e8 17.♙ad1 b5 18.♙c2 g6=

White's active knight makes up for Black's bishop pair, but it's not enough for him to claim any advantage.

### 12...♙e7 13.♙c2 h6

Another decent option is 13...♘d5!? 14.♙d3 g6 15.♙h6 ♙e8 16.♘e4 ♘f6 and Black had comfortable play in Krivoshey – Jakubek, Kosice 1997.

### 14.♙h4

14.♙f4 ♙d6 15.♘e5, as was played in Karpatchev – Munkhgal, Moscow 2012,



This looks like a natural move but it runs into some tactics.

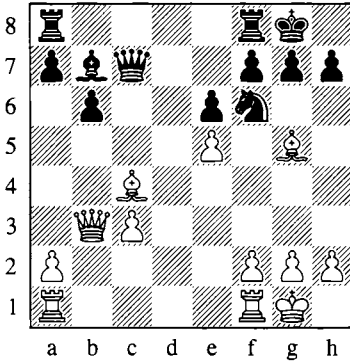
12...♙xc3! 13.bxc3

13.♖xc3 ♘e4! forces a favourable endgame:  
14.♙d8 ♘xc3 15.♙e7 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♗fc8

Now Black can exploit the lack of harmony in White's camp by means of:

13...♘e5 14.dxe5 ♖c7!!

A simple but beautiful tactic.



15.exf6

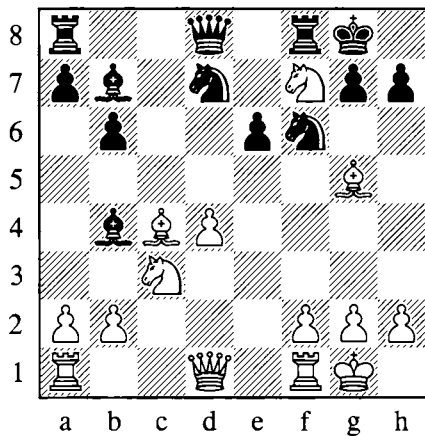
Also after 15.♙xf6 gxf6 16.exf6 ♖h8 17.♙e2 ♗g8 18.g3 ♖e5 Black regains the pawn in a favourable situation.

15...♖c6! 16.f3 ♖c5† 17.♖h1 ♖xg5 18.fxg7

This was Maloberiti – Petters, email 2000, and now Black is better after the simple recapture:

18...♖xg7N

**B1) 12.♘xf7!?**



I was surprised to discover that nobody has tried this thematic sacrifice. Black should be at least equal with precise play, but he will have to navigate some wild-looking positions, some of which involve an 'active' king!

12...♖xf7!

12...♗xf7 13.♙xe6 is playable, but Black has to be careful and White is not really behind in material. The text move forces White to play more accurately to justify his last move.

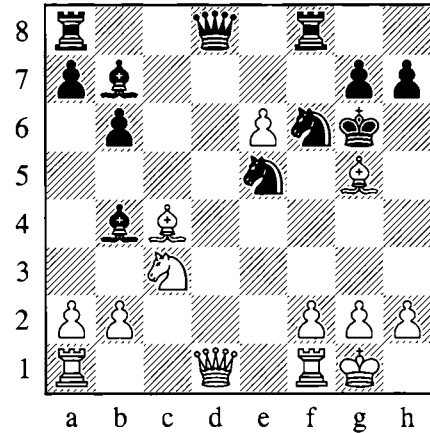
13.d5

13.♖b3? ♙xc3 14.♙xe6† ♖g6 15.♖c2† ♙e4 16.♖xc3 h6 leaves White with insufficient compensation for the piece.

13...♘e5!

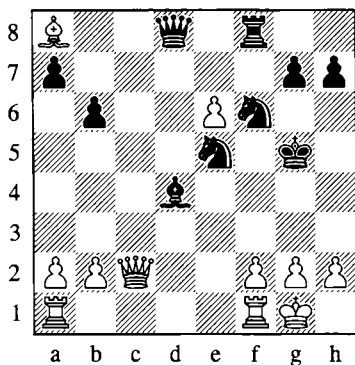
13...e5 14.d6† ♖g6 15.f4! exf4 16.h4! is too scary.

14.dxe6† ♖g6



15.♖c2†

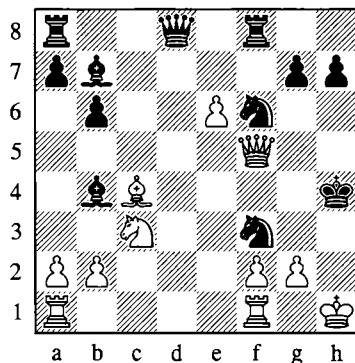
15.♙d5 could backfire after 15...♙xc3 16.♖c2† ♖xg5 17.♙xb7 ♙d4 18.♙xa8, when Black can suddenly launch a counterattack with:



18...♘fg4! 19.♚d2+ ♔h5 20.e7 ♚b8! 21.g3 ♚xa8 22.exf8=♚ ♚xf8 With a massive storm of all Black's pieces against the king.

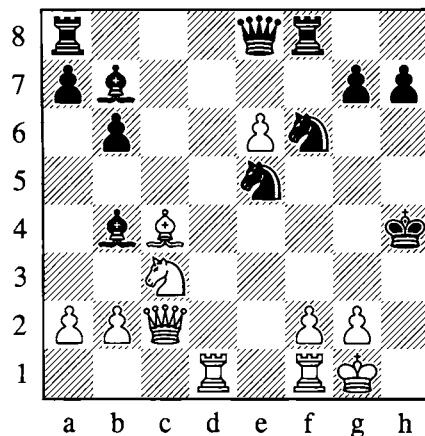
**15...♙xg5 16.♞ad1**

A funny position might arise after 16.h4† ♙xh4 17.♞f5? (better is 17.♞ad1 ♚e8, transposing to the main line below) 17...♘f3† 18.♙h1 (18.gxf3 ♚d2 19.f4 h6! is winning for Black too; the last move covers the g5-square in preparation for a knight move)



18...♘g4! 19.g3† ♙h3→ A rare case in which the king feels completely safe in the opponent's camp!

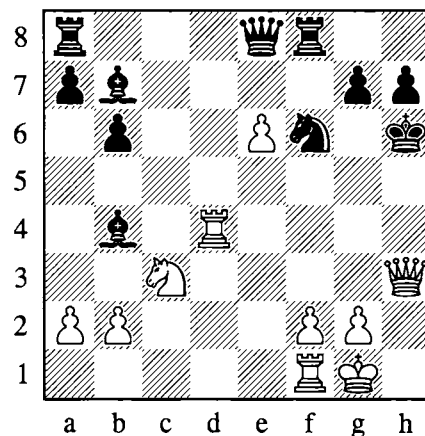
**16...♚e8 17.h4† ♙xh4**



**18.♞d4† ♙g5 19.♚d2† ♙g6**

The king returns to something resembling a normal position.

**20.♙d3† ♘xd3 21.♚xd3† ♙h6 22.♞h3†**



**22...♘h5!?**

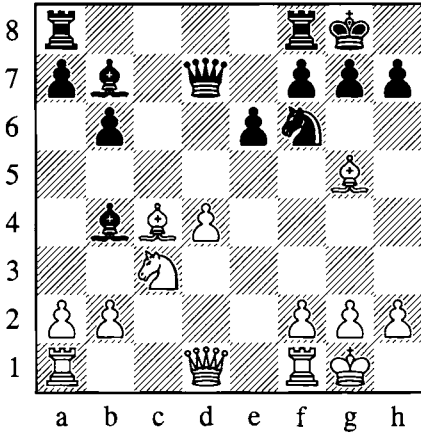
This is an interesting winning attempt.

22...♙g6= is the safe option, when White has nothing better than a perpetual.

**23.♞xb4 ♚e7 24.♞d4 ♞ad8 25.♞xd8 ♞xd8 26.g4 g6**

Black is not worse in this sharp position; his bishop is excellent and his king is no longer any weaker than White's.

B2) 12. ♖xd7 ♜xd7



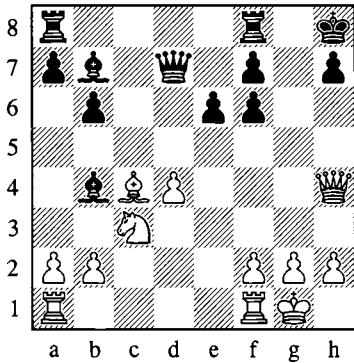
13. ♙xf6

Of course, White's previous move was connected with this exchange.

13...gxf6 14.d5

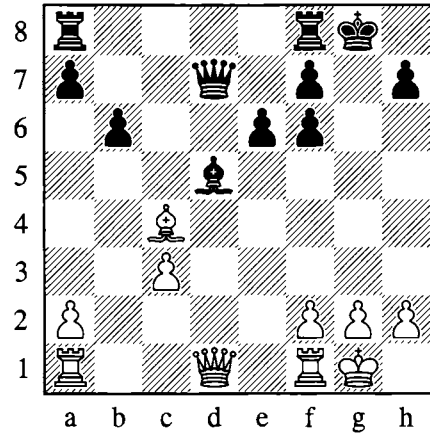
This temporary pawn sacrifice is the best way of handling the position.

14. ♖g4 ♗h8 15. ♜h4, as played in Arutinian – Sherbakov, Moscow 2006, can be strongly met by:



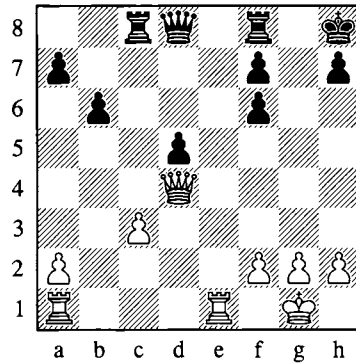
15... ♗g8!N 16.d5 exd5 17. ♙d3 ♗g7 18. ♗ad1 ♖g4 19. ♖xg4 ♗xg4 and White would have to play precisely in order to keep the balance.

14... ♙xc3 15.bxc3 ♙xd5



16. ♖g4 ♗h8 17. ♜h4  
A quiet draw offer.

Black also doesn't face any problems after 17. ♖d4 ♖d8 (17... ♗g7 18. ♗ad1 ♖c6= is also possible, since 19. ♗d3?! runs into 19... ♙e4! ♣) 18. ♙xd5 exd5 19. ♗f1 ♗c8. Moreover, two small inaccuracies led White to a difficult position after:

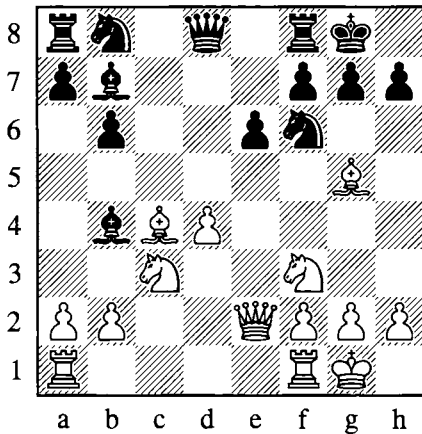


20. ♗e3?! ♗c4 21. ♖d3?! ♗xc3! 22. ♖xc3 d4 23. ♖d3 dxe3 24. ♖xe3 ♗e8 ♣ Simonet Pons – Schandorff, Bled (ol) 2002.

17... ♙xc4 18. ♖xf6 ♗g8 19. ♖g5 ♗h8

A draw was agreed in Shirov – Giri, Hoogeveen 2014.

## C) 11.♙e2



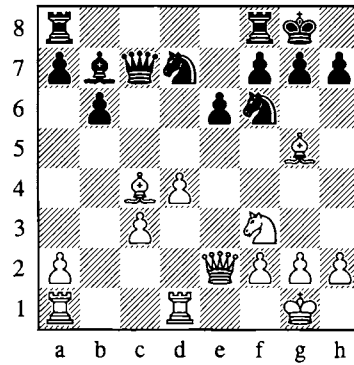
This move has been known since 1920, but it gained some popularity after the World Championship match in Moscow 2012, where Boris Gelfand used it to put Vishy Anand in all sorts of trouble.

## 11...♘bd7

11...♘c6 makes less sense when the queen has already vacated the d1-square, and after 12.♙ad1 White already threatens d4-d5. 12...♘a5 13.♙d3 h6 was seen in Kashlinskaya – Saduakassova, Skopje 2015, and now White could have utilized the poor placement of the knight on a5 by means of 14.♙xf6!N ♙xf6 15.♘e4 ♙d8 16.a3 ♙e7 17.b4 ♘c6 18.♘g3, keeping some initiative.

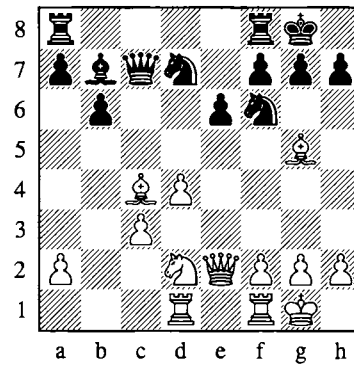
After the text move White has tried several ideas, but we will focus on the most logical options of C1) 12.d5, C2) 12.♘e5 and C3) 12.♙ac1.

12.♙fd1 makes d4-d5 into a serious threat, so the following exchange makes perfect sense: 12...♙xc3 13.bxc3 ♙c7



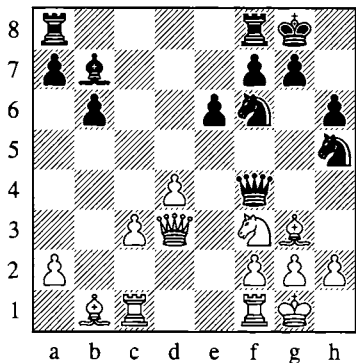
14.♘d2 (after 14.♙ac1 ♙xf3 15.gxf3 ♘h5♞ White was suffering from a couple of pawn weaknesses in Arnold – Perez, Saint Louis 2012) 14...♘d5 15.♙g4 ♘f6 16.♙h4 h6 17.♙xf6 ♘xf6♞ Fedoseev – Movsesian, Dubai 2014.

12.♙ad1 can be met in much the same way: 12...♙xc3 13.bxc3 ♙c7 14.♘d2 Now in Plaskan – Pasko, Kemer 2009, Black could have obtained some advantage with:



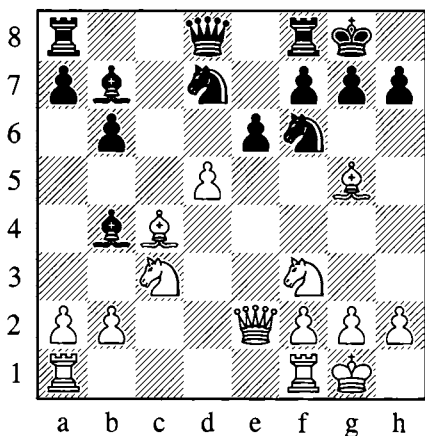
14...h6!N 15.♙h4 ♘d5 16.♙g3 ♙c6♞ White must either give up a pawn or make a positionally unfavourable exchange on d5.

12.♙d3 h6 13.♙h4 occurred in Pyrich – Farrell, Scotland 1994, when Black could have obtained a good position with a typical plan: 13...♙xc3N (13...♙e7!N 14.♘e5 ♘d5 also looks decent) 14.bxc3 ♙c7 15.♙ac1 ♘h5 16.♙b1 ♙f4 17.♙d3 ♘df6 18.♙g3



18...♙e4! (18...♜xg3 19.fxg3 ♖e4 20.♗d2 ♗d5 21.♜e5 ♜e4 22.♗d3 b5 23.♟f4 f5 leads to double-edged play) 19.♙xf4 ♙xd3 20.♙xd3 ♜xf4= Liquidating into a comfortable endgame.

C1) 12.d5

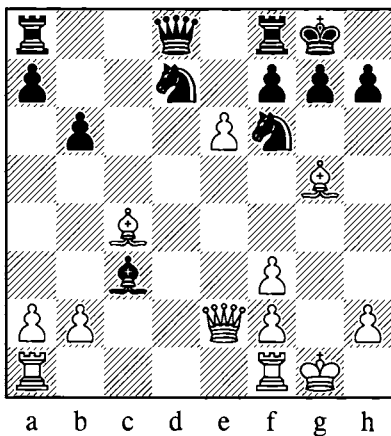


This rare but important move leads to interesting complications, but they are acceptable for Black:

12...♙xc3

Much weaker is: 12...exd5?! 13.♜xd5 ♙e8N (13...♙xd5?! 14.♙xd5 was downright unpleasant for Black in Bindrich – Houriez, Puerto Madryn 2009) 14.♗c2 ♙d6 15.♙ad1 ♙c8 16.♗d3 With some initiative.

13.dxe6 ♙xf3 14.gxf3



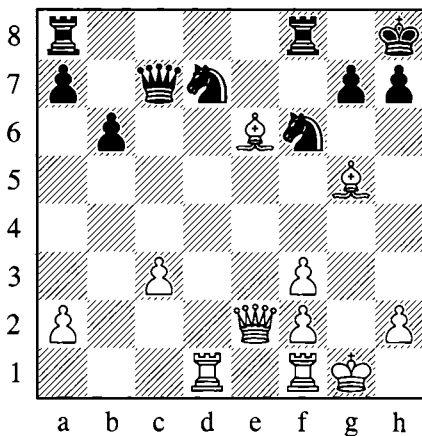
14...fxe6

14...♙d4? needlessly allowed White to win material with 15.e7 in Poobalasingam – V. Hansen, Tromso 2008.

15.♙ad1

15.bxc3 ♜c5 16.♙xe6† ♜xe6 17.♗xe6† ♜h8 is similar to the main line, and the loss of one of the bishops can hardly help White.

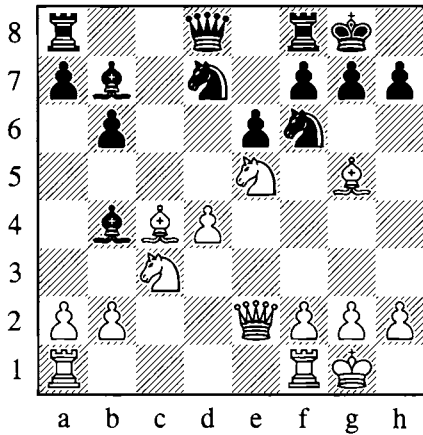
15...♗c7 16.♙xe6† ♜h8 17.bxc3



17...♙ae8 18.♗c4 ♗b7

Despite his extra pawn and bishop pair, White had too many weaknesses to hope for an advantage in Arizmendi Martinez – Gharamian, Cappelle-la-Grande 2016.

## C2) 12.♘e5



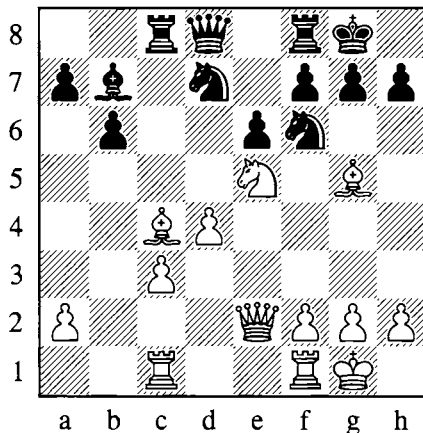
This most aggressive option is well met by:

## 12...♙xc3 13.bxc3 ♜c8

Just as in variation B above, Black is not worried about the doubling of the f-pawns that could result from exchanges on d7 and f6, as White's remaining pieces would be in no position to carry out an attack.

## 14.♞a1

This has been by far the most common continuation, but Black has more than one good reply.



## 14...♞c7!?

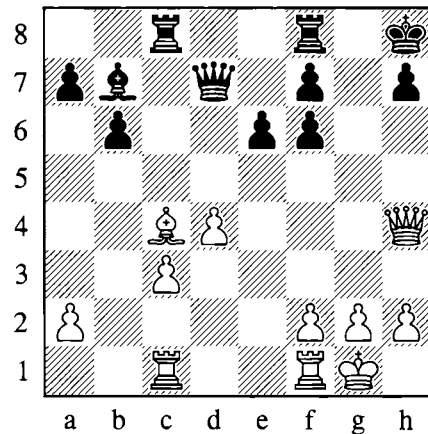
Another decent option is 14...♘e5 15.dxe5 ♞c5, when the lesser evil for White would be forcing a draw by means of: 16.♙d3! (16.f4? ♞xc4 17.exf6 g6 gave Black a clear positional advantage in Hawkins – Kramnik, London [rapid] 2014) 16...♞c7 17.♙xf6 gxf6 A draw was agreed in Avotins – Chripko, email 2008, in view of: 18.♞g4† ♖h8 19.♞h4 f5 20.♞f6†=

## 15.♘xd7 ♞xd7 16.♙xf6 gxf6

The position is equal but far from dead. In the following game, White went wrong by trying to force a draw too quickly:

## 17.♞g4†? ♖h8 18.♞h4

White hopes to give up his bishop to force a perpetual, but he has overlooked an important detail.



## 18...♞g8! 19.♞xf6† ♞g7+

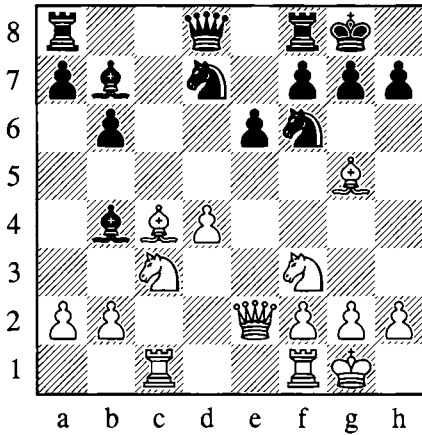
White must either give up a piece or succumb to a cute mating attack, as occurred in the game:

## 20.♙e2 ♞e7 21.♞xe7 ♞xg2† 22.♖h1 ♞g1†!

## 23.♖xg1 ♞g8† 24.♙g4 ♞xg4#

Szelag – Socko, Rostock 2015.

C3) 12.♞ac1



The most consistent. Since the isolated pawn is less vulnerable with Black's knight on d7 instead of c6, White is free to develop his rook in a way that combines active and prophylactic duties. In particular, the c3-knight is over-protected, and the c7-square is no longer safe for Black's queen.

12...♞b8!

This elegant way of avoiding the pin and solving the problem of the d8-queen is one more example of Vladimir Kramnik's deep home preparation. Black takes control of the important b8-h2 diagonal, while the blocked a8-rook is only a temporary problem.

Here is a fragment of the World Championship game which sparked a lot of the recent attention on this variation:

12...♞c8 13.♙d3 ♜xc3

13...♙e7 and 13...h6 deserve attention as well.

14.bxc3 ♞c7 15.c4 ♙xf3? 16.♞xf3 ♞fe8

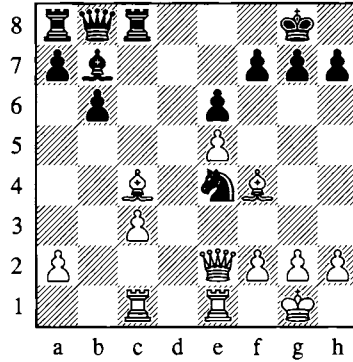
Anand must have intended 16...e5, only now realizing that 17.♙f5! would lead to huge problems for him.

17.♞fd1 h6 18.♙h4

White was much better in Gelfand – Anand, Moscow (9) 2012.

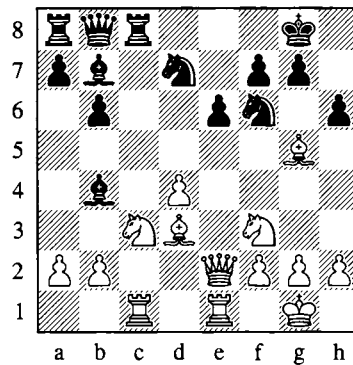
13.♞fd1

The black queen is keeping an eye on the key e5-square, so 13.♙e5?! only invites trouble: 13...♙xe5 14.dxe5 ♙xc3 15.bxc3 ♙e4 16.♙f4 ♞c8 17.♞fe1



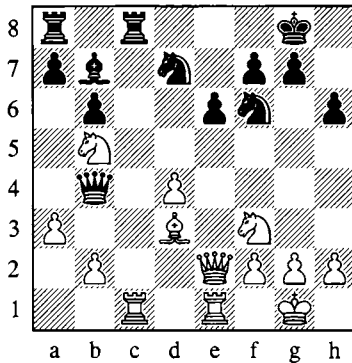
This position arose in Dambacher – Henrichs, Maastricht 2015. Had Black played 17...♞c5!N 18.♙d3 ♙xc3 19.♞g4 ♞f8, White would not have had adequate compensation for the pawn.

13.♞fe1 ♞c8 14.♙d3 h6! and now either bishop retreat carries a drawback:

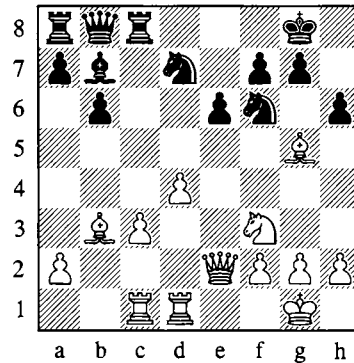


15.♙d2 (15.♙h4 exposes the f4-square, so 15...♙h5! 16.♙b5 ♙df6 17.♙e5 a6 18.♙a4 ♙d6 offers Black comfortable play) 15...♞d6 Connecting the rooks and activating the queen. 16.♙b5 ♞e7 17.♙xb4 ♞xb4 18.a3. We have been following the game Peralta – Rizouk, Barcelona 2015. Now Black could

have neutralized the temporary activity of White's pieces by means of:



with: 15.d5 ♖xd5 16.♗xd5 ♜xc1 17.♙xc1 ♙xd5 18.♙xd5 exd5 19.♞xd5 ♖f6=) 15.bxc3 h6



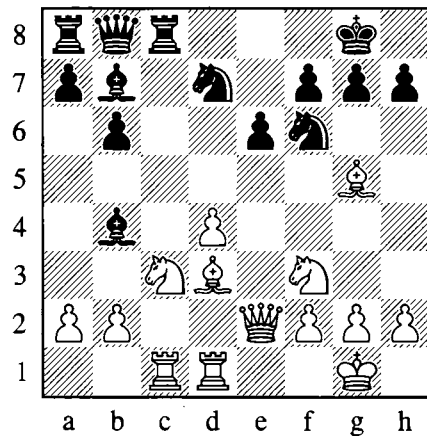
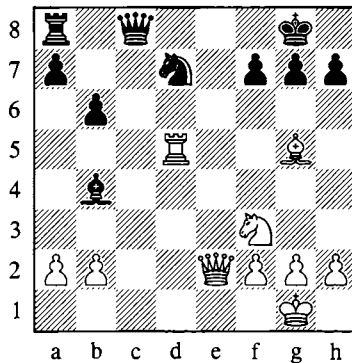
18...♞f8!N 19.♞xc8 ♜xc8 20.♗d6 ♜c6 21.♗xb7 ♜xb7 22.♗e5 ♜d5 The position is still about equal, but the weakness of the d4-pawn might tell in the long run.

16.♙xf6 (16.♙h4 ♜f4 17.♙g3 ♜g4 18.♞e1 ♗h5=) 16...♗xf6 17.♗e5 ♞c7 18.c4 ♗d7 19.♞c3 ♗xe5 20.♞xe5 ♞d7 The position is equal, but plenty of play remains.

### 13...♞c8! 14.♙d3

White safeguards the bishop and points it towards the kingside. On the other hand, Black obtains full control over the d5-square.

Black is well prepared for the thematic advance: 14.d5 ♖xd5 15.♗xd5 exd5 16.♙xd5 ♙xd5 17.♞xc8† ♜xc8 18.♞xd5



18...♞c6 19.♞d1 ♗f6 20.♞d8† ♞xd8 21.♞xd8† ♙f8=

### 14...♙d6

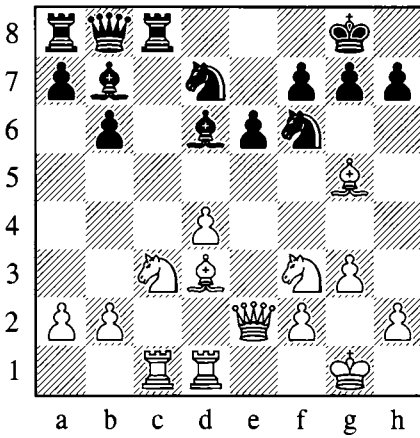
The bishop no longer has much of a role on b4, so Black relocates it to a stable square in the centre.

### 15.g3

15.h3 h6 16.♙xf6 ♗xf6 17.♗e4 ♙e7 gives Black easy play.

14.♙b3 is also harmless. 14...♙xc3!? This is the ambitious option. (If a draw is an acceptable result, then 14...♙d6 invites simplifications

I also considered 15.♙a6 h6 (15...♙xa6 16.♞xa6 ♙f4=) 16.♙d2 ♞c7 17.♙d3 ♗d5 18.♗e4 ♙f4 and Black is doing well.

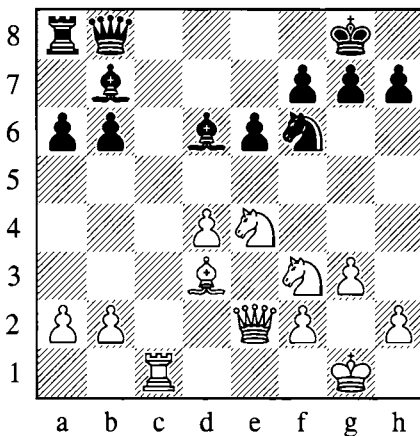


15...a6

15...h6 16.♙xf6 ♜xf6 17.♞e4 ♝xc1 18.♝xc1 ♜d8 19.♞xf6† ♜xf6 20.♙e4 ♜e7 is another route to an equal position.

16.♙xf6 ♜xf6 17.♞e4 ♝xc1 18.♝xc1

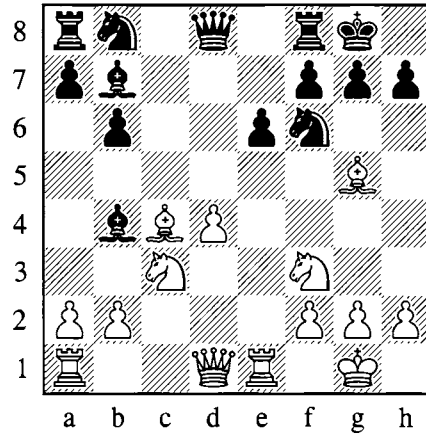
We have been following the top-level game Gelfand – Kramnik, London 2013. The position is roughly equal, but Black could have made things mildly unpleasant for his opponent with:



18...♙e7N 19.♞xf6† ♙xf6 20.♙e4 g6

It should be a draw, but White still has to think about the potential weakness of the isolated pawn.

D) 11.♝e1



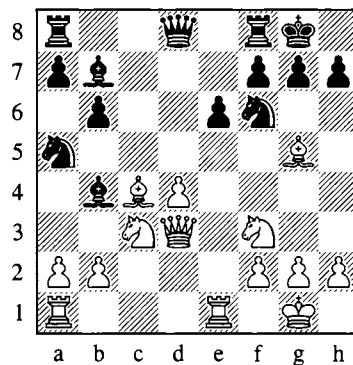
11...♞c6

11...♞bd7 is much more popular, but the text move appeals to me. The knight puts pressure on the d4-pawn and may later move towards the kingside via e7.

We will look at two options: **D1) 12.♙d3** is a harmless alternative to **D2) 12.a3**.

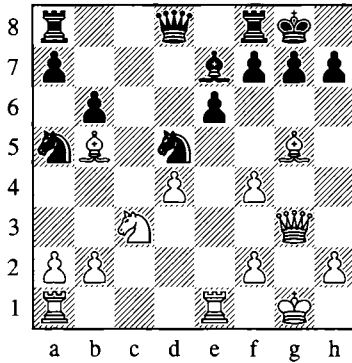
12.♝e1 transposes to variation E5.

12.♜d3, as tried in Ivanchuk – Van Wely, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2002, can be well met by: 12...♞a5!N



13.♙b5 ♙xf3 14.gxf3 (in the event of 14.♜xf3 ♜xd4 15.♝ad1 ♜g4 16.♜xg4 ♞xg4

17.♞e4 ♙xc3 18.bxc3 ♘f6 19.♙xf6 gxf6)  
 White has insufficient compensation for the  
 pawn) 14...♙e7 15.f4 ♘d5 16.♞g3

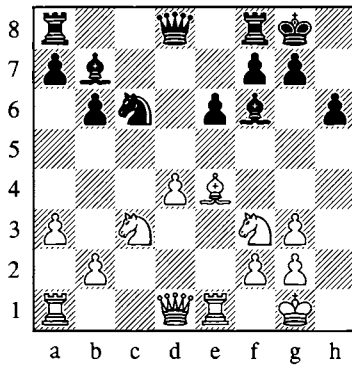


16...♘xc3 17.bxc3 ♙xg5 18.fxg5 ♞c8 White  
 no longer has doubled pawns, but his position  
 still contains numerous holes and weaknesses.

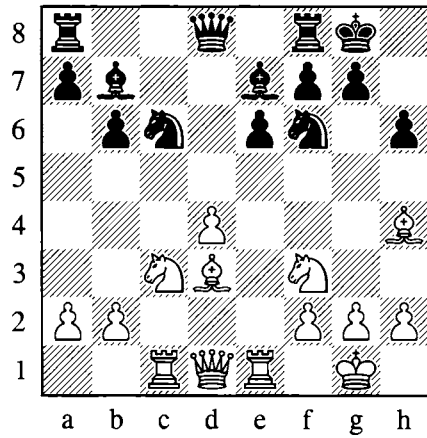
**D1) 12.♙d3 h6 13.♙h4 ♙e7 14.♞c1**

This is the only move to have been tried.

14.a3N may be a touch more precise, although  
 Black seems fine after: 14...♘h5 15.♙g3 ♘xg3  
 16.hxg3 ♙f6 17.♙e4



17...♞d6! This leads to an approximately equal  
 position. (I prefer to avoid 17...♞b8 18.d5!  
 exd5 19.♘xd5 ♙xb2 20.♞a2 ♙f6 21.♞d2  
 with dangerous complications.) Now 18.d5 is  
 toothless: 18...exd5 19.♘xd5 ♞fd8=



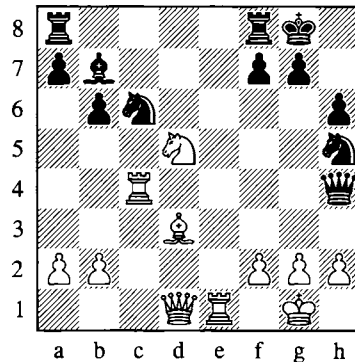
**14...♘h5!**

The exchange of dark-squared bishops  
 would make Black's set-up more harmonious.  
 This approach was also successfully employed  
 by former World Champion Anatoly Karpov  
 in such situations. I remember his impressive  
 victory over Viktor Korchnoi in their 1981  
 World Championship match in Merano.

**15.♙g3**

15.♙xe7 ♘xe7 16.♘e5 ♘f4 is unpleasant  
 for White.

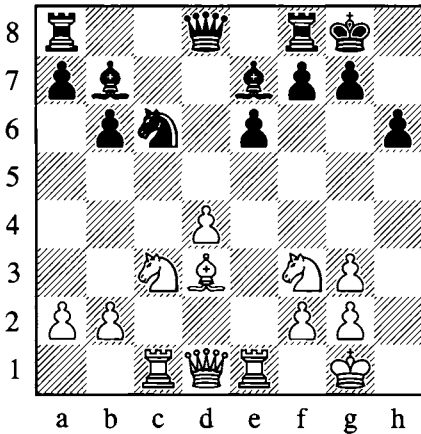
15.d5!?N is not quite correct, but it is worth  
 taking a quick look at the remarkable idea  
 connected to it: 15...exd5 16.♘xd5 ♙xh4  
 17.♘h4 ♞xh4 18.♞c4 White almost regains  
 the piece while keeping an active position, but  
 Black can counter with:



18...♖g5! 19.h4 ♜xd5! 20.♗h7† ♕xh7  
21.♜xd5 ♖f6 I believe Black's three pieces are worth more than a queen here.

### 15...♖xg3 16.hxg3

We have been following the game Barsov – Demianjuk, Moscow 2015. Now Black missed a great opportunity to create problems for his opponent:



### 16...♗g5!N 17.♞a1

17.♖xg5 ♜xg5 18.d5 exd5 19.♖xd5 ♞ad8  
20.♖f4 ♖b4† is also problematic for White.

### 17...♗f6 18.♗e4 ♞b8 19.d5 exd5 20.♗xd5 ♜d7†

White has swapped off his isolated pawn, but Black's bishop pair gives him the upper hand.

## D2) 12.a3

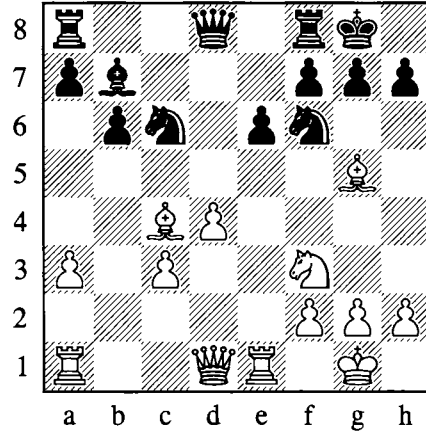
This is a more challenging move, forcing Black to decide what to do with the bishop.

### 12...♗xc3!

12...♗e7 has been more popular. Then 13.♗a2 ♖d5 was played once by the great expert Anatoly Karpov, but I do not like it in view of: 14.♗xd5 ♗xg5 (14...exd5 15.♗xe7 ♖xe7 16.♞c1 also yields White a small but

lasting advantage due to the passive bishop on b7) 15.♗e4 ♗f6 16.♜a4! ♖a5 17.♖e5 ♜e7 18.♞ad1± White was better in Naiditsch – Bluebaum, Deizisau 2012.

### 13.bxc3



### 13...h6!N

I find it surprising that such a natural move is a novelty.

The previously played 13...♞c8 14.♜d3 ♖e7 seems weaker, as it doesn't force White to exchange his bishop. Indeed, after 15.♗b3 ♖g6 16.♞ad1 ♜c7 17.♗xf6 gxf6 18.c4± White was well prepared for the key d4-d5 advance in Wojtaszek – Socko, Berlin (blitz) 2015.

### 14.♗h4

This seems like the only principled reply.

14.♗f4 leaves Black at liberty to occupy the light squares: 14...♞c8 15.♗d3 ♖a5 16.♞c1 ♖c4 with excellent play.

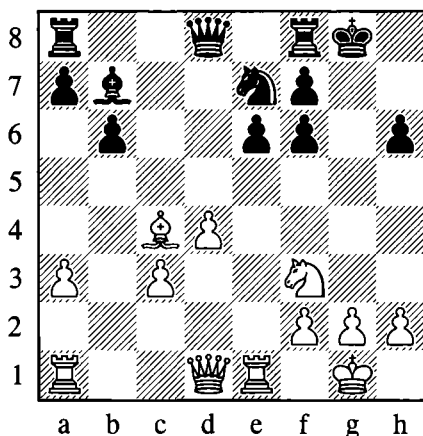
### 14...♖e7!

A typical manoeuvre – with the support of Black's queenside knight, Black's king will be considerably safer following the damaging of the pawn structure.

**15.♙xf6**

Again, the most challenging move.

After 15.♙d3 ♖f5 16.♙xf5 exf5 17.♙xf6 ♗xf6 18.♖e5 ♜ac8 19.c4 ♜fe8 the pressure along the a8-h1 diagonal and the vulnerability of the d4-pawn prevent White from enjoying his better pawn structure.

**15...gxh6****16.♙b3**

After 16.♗d3 ♗c7 17.♙b3 ♗f4! 18.♙c2 f5 19.♖e5 ♗g5 (it makes sense to provoke g2-g3, so that White's rook will not have access to the kingside) 20.g3 ♜ac8 21.c4 ♜fd8 ♞ Black's pieces are perfectly mobilized for attacking the opponent's centre.

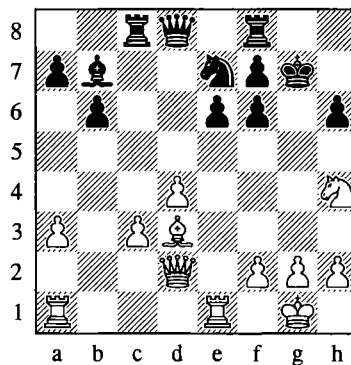
White may also try to develop a direct attack with:

16.♙d3 ♜c8 17.♗d2

After 17.♜c1 ♗d6 18.♗d2 ♖g7 19.♖h4 ♖d5! 20.c4 ♗f4 Black manages to liquidate into a comfortable endgame.

17...♖g7 18.♖h4!?

The idea of activating the rook along the third rank is dangerous. However, Black is well placed to trade punches on the kingside with:

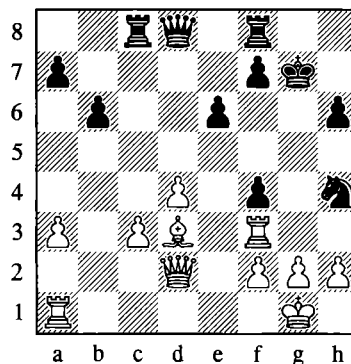


18...f5! 19.♜e3 f4 20.♜h3 ♖g6! 21.♖f3

After 21.♖xg6 fxg6 22.♜e1 ♜f6 White would suffer from the awkward placement of the rook on h3.

21...♙xf3 22.♜f3 ♖h4!

As usual, combining strategy and tactics!



23.♜h3

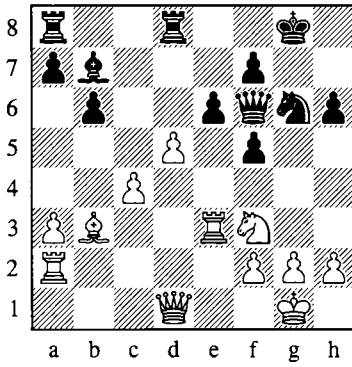
23.♜xf4?? ♗g5 24.g3 ♖f3!→ is a nice detail.

23...♗g5 24.♙e4 e5 25.♖h1 f5 26.♙d5 ♜fd8 27.♗a2 exd4 28.cxd4 ♗f6 ♞

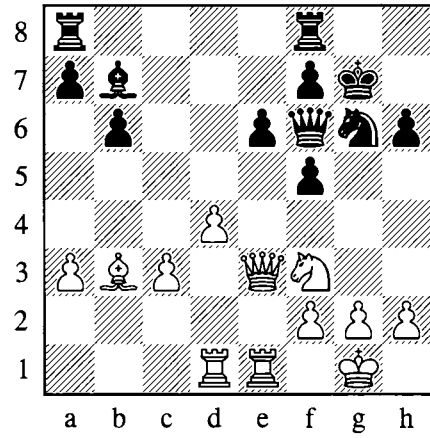
With such active pieces, Black should not be worse.

**16...♖g6 17.♗d3**

After 17.♜e3 f5 18.c4 ♗f6 19.d5 White manages to block the powerful bishop for a while, but it doesn't offer any advantage: 19...♜fd8 20.♜a2



20...b5! 21.♠d2 bxc4 22.♙xc4 e5 23.♚a1 ♜ac8 The position is dynamically balanced. A sample continuation is: 24.♙b3 ♚g7 25.♜xe5 ♜xe5 26.♚xe5 ♞c1† 27.♞d1 ♞xd1† 28.♙xd1 ♞xd5= Leading to a drawn endgame.



**20.d5!?**

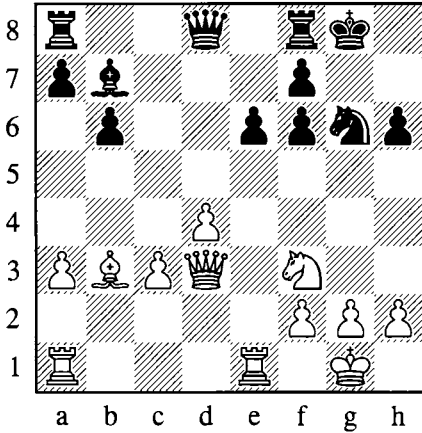
20.c4 is well met by the prophylactic 20...♞fe8! and if 21.♜e5 then 21...♚g5 is equal.

**20...f4!**

Interrupting the harmony of White's pieces.

**21.♚e2 ♙xd5 22.♙xd5 exd5 23.♞xd5 ♚xc3**

White's piece activity gives definite compensation for the pawn, but he has no advantage. For example:



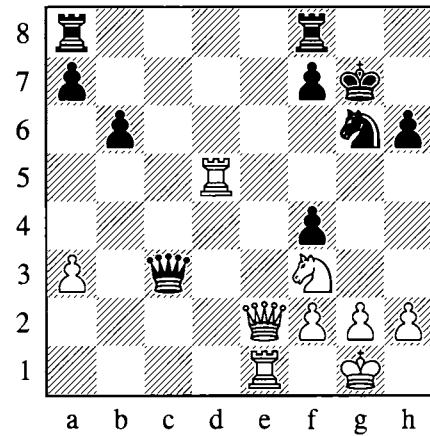
**17...f5 18.♚e3**

In the event of 18.♞ad1 ♚f6 19.c4 ♚g7 20.♚e3 ♞ac8 White's play is slowed down, since 21.d5? exd5 22.cxd5 loses on the spot to: 22...♞c3! 23.♞d3 ♞xd3 24.♚xd3 ♜f4 25.♚f1 ♙a6+

**18...♙g7 19.♞ad1**

The impulsive 19.d5?! ♙xd5 20.♞ad1 f4 21.♚c1 ♞c8† leaves White with insufficient compensation for the pawn.

**19...♚f6**



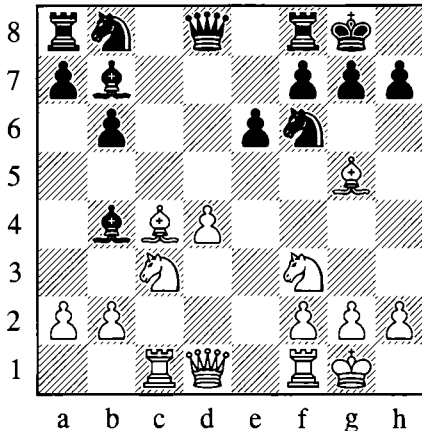
**24.♚d1 ♞fe8 25.♞f1 ♚f6**

The greedy 25...♚xa3?! 26.♜d4 is not recommended.

**26.♞d6 ♞e6 27.♞d7 ♞e7=**

## E) 11.♞c1

This is the most popular continuation. Once again, Black must decide how to develop the queen's knight.



## 11...♞c6

There is nothing wrong with 11...♞bd7 12.a3 ♙xc3 13.♞xc3, but in this line the mobile rook on c3 offers White some attacking prospects. That's why I prefer the text move.

We will look at five options: E1) 12.d5, E2) 12.♞d3, E3) 12.♙d3, E4) 12.a3 and E5) 12.♞e1.

## E1) 12.d5

For some reason, this tempting advance has been tried only once in tournament practice. It can lead to interesting complications.

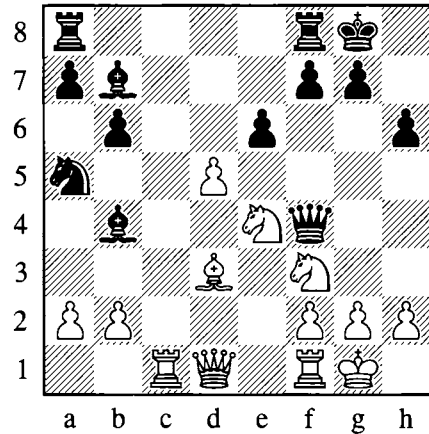
## 12...♞a5 13.♙d3N

This is better than 13.♞e4? as played in Yuksel – Baskara, Kayseri 2010, when 13...♙e7!N 14.d6 ♙xe4 15.dxe7 ♞xe7 would have left White with no compensation for the pawn.

## 13...h6

13...exd5 14.♙b1! offers White promising compensation.

## 14.♙xf6 ♞xf6 15.♞e4 ♞f4

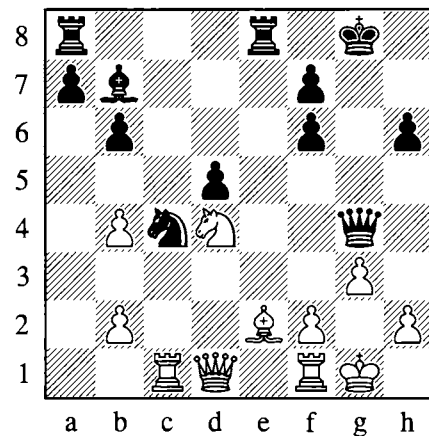


## 16.a3 exd5 17.g3 ♞g4 18.♞f6†! gxf6 19.axb4 ♞c4 20.♙e2

Also after 20.♙b1 ♞e5 21.♞xe5 ♞xd1 22.♞fxd1 fxe5 23.♞c7 ♞ab8 Black is out of danger.

## 20...♞fe8 21.♞d4

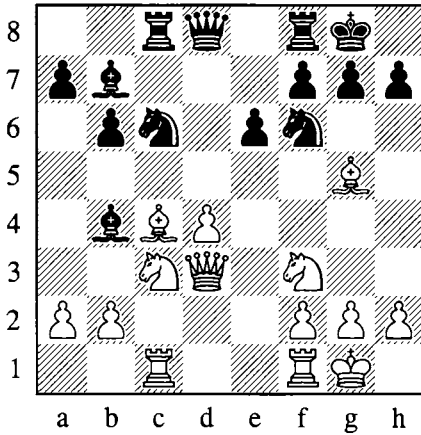
It looks as though White is developing a powerful initiative, but Black can fight back with:



## 21...♞xe2! 22.♞xe2 ♞e5

The weakness of the light squares gives Black plenty of counterplay.

## E2) 12.♖d3 ♜c8



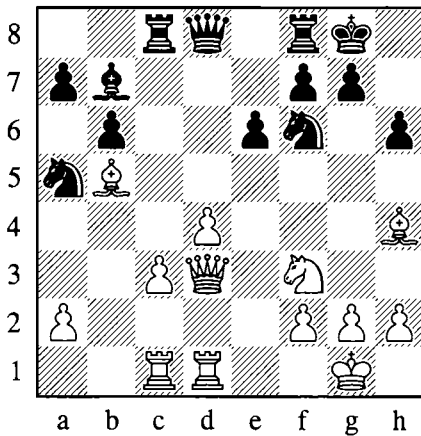
## 13.♞f1

13.♞e4 ♗e7 leads to unfavourable exchanges, after which White will have no compensation for the isolated d4-pawn.

## 13...♞a5

A typical motif – attacking the bishop is often effective when the d3-square is unavailable.

## 14.♗b5 h6 15.♗h4 ♗xc3 16.bxc3



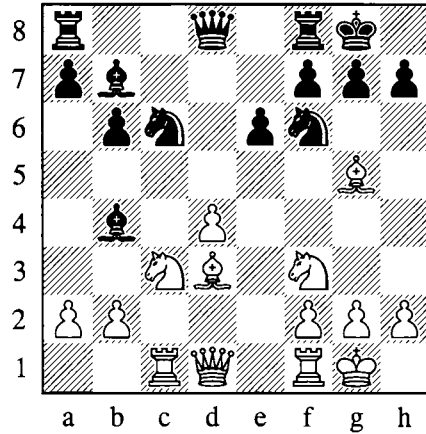
## 16...♖d5!

White cannot afford to lose control over the c4-square, so the next move is forced.

## 17.c4 ♖h5 18.♗xf6 gxf6 19.d5 exd5 20.c5 ♞c4

White had insufficient compensation for the pawn in Aronian – Caruana, Wijk aan Zee 2015.

## E3) 12.♗d3



This move has been tried by several strong players, but it often transposes to variation E5 after a subsequent ♞e1.

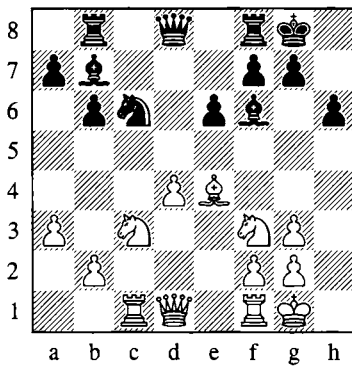
## 12...h6 13.♗h4 ♗e7

Black prepares the thematic bishop exchange, which will simplify the position and establish full control over the d5-square.

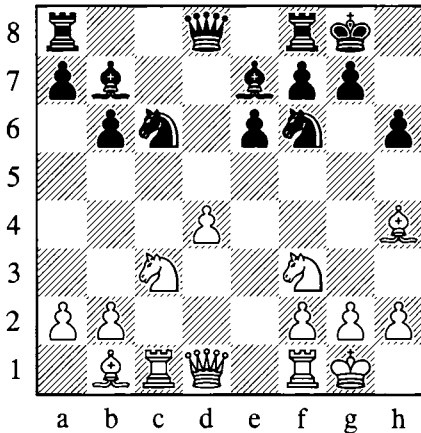
## 14.♗b1

14.♞e1 ♜c8 15.♗b1 transposes to variation E5.

14.a3 has been tried in a couple of games. I suggest our usual approach: 14...♞h5N 15.♗g3 (15.♗xe7 ♞xe7 is simply better for Black) 15...♞xg3 16.hxg3 ♗f6 17.♗e4 ♞b8



The pressure on the isolated pawn practically forces White to play 18.d5 exd5 19.♙xd5, but then after 19...♘a5 20.b4 ♙xc3 21.♙xb7 ♙b2 22.♙b1 ♙xb7 23.♙xb2 ♘c4 Black's position is preferable due to his more active knight.



#### 14...♙c8 15.a3

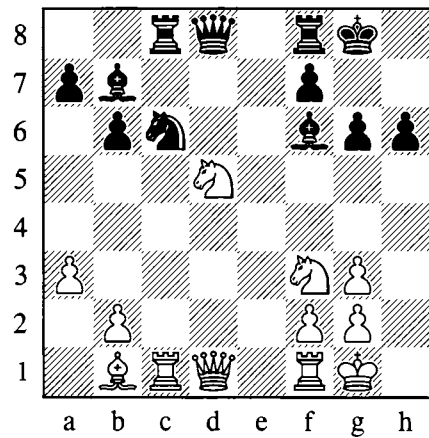
Covering the b4-spot, so that the queen can go to d3 without fearing harassment from the enemy knight.

15.♙e1 is another transposition to variation E5.

#### 15...♘h5 16.♙g3

16.♙d3?! achieves nothing: 16...g6 17.♙g3 ♘xg3 18.hxg3 ♙f6 19.♙cd1 ♙g7 20.♙fe1 ♘e7 Van der Stricht – Burg, Belgium 2015.

16...♘g3 17.hxg3 ♙f6 18.d5 exd5 19.♘xd5 g6



#### 20.♙a2!N

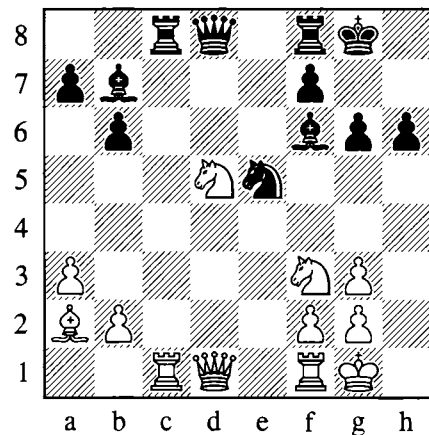
Supporting the powerful knight is the best way of handling the position.

20.♘xf6† ♙xf6 21.♙d2 ♘g7 22.♙c3 ♙fd8 23.♙xf6† ♘xf6 led White to an inferior endgame in Leenhouts – Ernst, Vlissingen 2015.

#### 20...♘e5!

20...♙xb2 21.♙c2 ♙g7 22.♙d2 would give White full compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

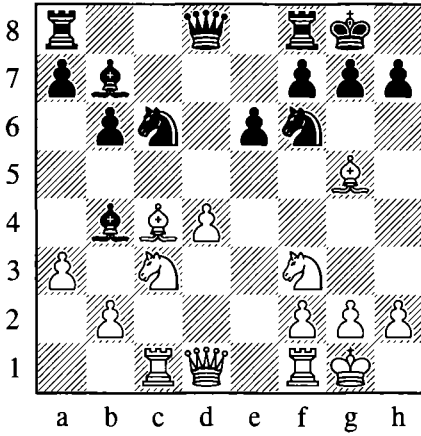
The text move is simpler – Black is inviting favourable simplifications.



21.♙xc8 ♙xc8 22.♙e1 ♘xf3† 23.♙xf3 ♘g7= White has nothing better than liquidating into an equal endgame.

## E4) 12.a3

This has been the most popular choice but Black is well equipped to meet it.



12...♙xc3 13.♞xc3

13.bxc3 has no logical connection with the rook on c1, and after 13...♞c8 14.♞e2 ♞d6! Black is at least equal.

13...♞c8

13...♘e7 has been played a few times but it makes more sense to delay it for another move. Keeping the knight on c6 means that White is tied to protecting the isolated pawn, and he has no way to take advantage of pinning the other knight.

14.♞d3

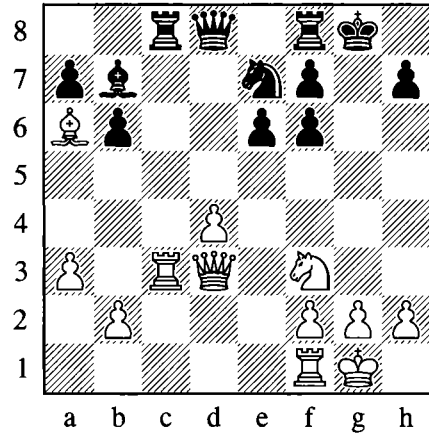
14.♙a2 ♘e7 15.♞xc8 ♞xc8 16.♘e5 ♘fd5 was ideal for Black in Radjabov – Karpov, Buenos Aires 2001.

14...♘e7!

Now is the time to open a path for the light-squared bishop, while solidifying Black's control over the d5-square.

15.♙xf6 gxf6 16.♙a6

We have been following the game Potkin – Alekseev, Moscow 2012. Natural and strong would have been:



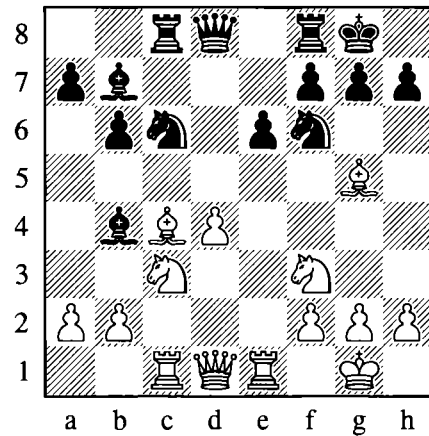
16...♙xa6! N 17.♞xa6 ♘d5 18.♞c4

After 18.♞xc8 ♞xc8 19.♞xa7 ♞c2 Black will regain the pawn with a positional advantage, since 20.b4?! ♞c6 does not help White at all.

18...♞xc4 19.♞xc4 ♞d7 20.♞c1 ♘e7

Black has a small but lasting positional advantage, as the IQP is a more significant weakness than Black's damaged kingside.

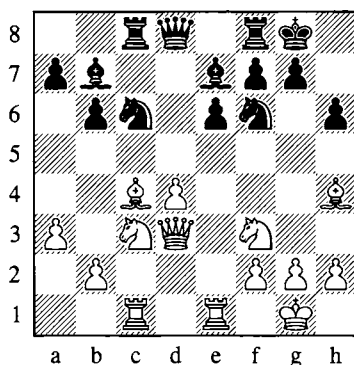
## E5) 12.♞e1 ♞c8



Once again, Black develops the rook and menaces the hanging bishop on c4, forcing White to waste time on prophylaxis.

13.♙d3

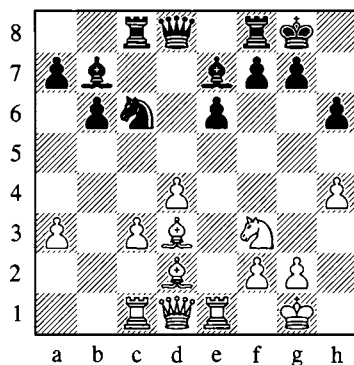
13.♚d3N isn't without drawbacks either: 13...h6 14.♙h4 ♙e7 15.a3 We have transposed to a game, in which Black made use of a familiar device:



15...♖h5! 16.♙xe7 (16.♙g3N ♖xg3 17.hxg3 ♙f6 18.♙cd1 ♖e7) 16...♖e7 17.♖e2 ♖g6 18.g3 ♖f6 Black had a comfortable position playing again the isolated pawn in Pribyl – Matejka, corr. 2005.

### 13...♙e7 14.♙b1

I also considered: 14.a3 ♖d5 As we often see in this variation, the exchange of dark-squared bishops makes Black's play easier. 15.h4!? This aggressive move is connected with attacking ambitions, but they are not realistic. 15...♖xc3 16.bxc3 h6 17.♙d2 So far we have been following Henrichs – Walter, Germany 2012, and here Black should have played:

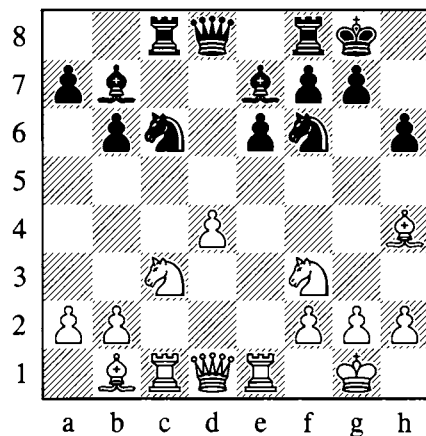


17...♖a5! Aiming at the c4-square and thus provoking White's next move. 18.♖e5 ♙xh4

19.♙e3 f5 20.♙h3 ♙g5 With a healthy extra pawn.

### 14...h6 15.♙h4

15.♙xf6 ♙xf6 16.♚d3 g6 leads nowhere for White.



### 15...♖h5!

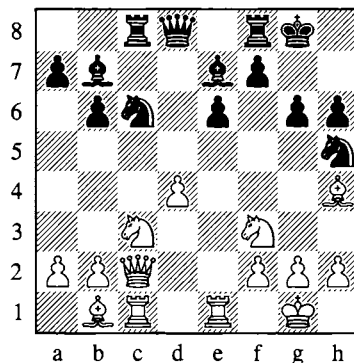
The same approach as in some of the notes above, as well as the earlier variation D1 – the exchange of bishops will benefit Black.

### 16.♙g3!

This is the only way for White to maintain the balance.

16.♚d3?! g6 17.♙g3 ♖xg3 18.hxg3 ♙f6 was pleasant for Black in Bindrich – Meier, Dresden 2015.

### 16.♚c2?! g6



17.♞xe6

The quiet 17.♞xe7 ♜xe7 18.♞e5 ♞f4 also leads to a bad position for White.

18...♞f4!

This cold-blooded reply allows Black to grab the material in a comfortable situation.

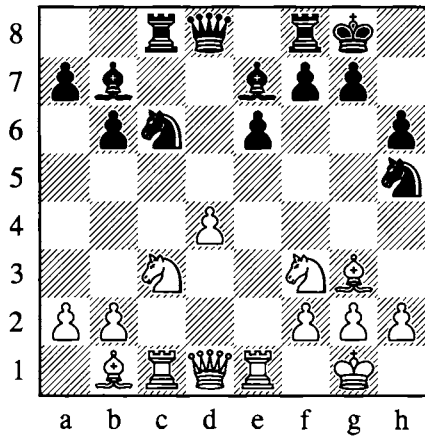
18.♞xe7

18.♞e4 ♞b4 19.♞d2 ♞xe4 20.♞xe4 ♞xh4 21.♞xf4 ♞g5+

18.♞xe7 ♞xe7 forces White to give up the exchange with 19.♞e4, since 19.♞e3? ♞f5 would be even worse.

18...♞xe7 19.♞d2 g5+

Black was much better and eventually won in I. Sokolov – Leko, Wijk aan Zee 2013.



16...♞xg3 17.hxg3 ♞g5N

This is the simplest way to ensure an equal position.

17...♞f6!? is more complex: 18.d5 ♞xc3 19.dxc6 ♞xe1 20.cxb7 ♞xc1 21.♞xc1 ♞b4 22.♞c2 g6 23.♞e5 The position looks messy, but it soon resulted in a draw in Aberbach Peltzman – Sukhorskij, email 2014.

18.♞xg5 ♞xg5 19.d5 exd5 20.♞xd5=

## Conclusion

There is no doubt in my mind that 10.♞g5 is the best way of developing active play – with the Nimzo bishop far away on b4, the pin becomes quite annoying. After the natural reply 10...♞b7 there is a variety of possible set-ups, but White's main intentions are:

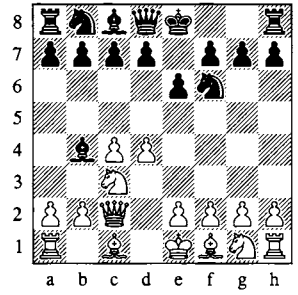
1) getting control over the d5-square and/or pushing d4-d5 at a suitable moment;

2) creating threats on the kingside, utilizing a powerful knight on e5 (which may sacrifice itself on f7, supported by the bishop on c4) and perhaps a transfer of heavy pieces along the third rank.

In his turn, Black benefits from harmonious development and pressure on the isolated pawn, and it's useful to keep in mind that straightforward bishop and knight exchanges will almost always favour Black. There are a few concrete lines to memorize, such as 11.♞e5 ♞bd7 followed by 12.♞xf7!?N or 12.♞xd7, but Black is doing well in the arising complications. 11.♞e2 seems a good try for White, as it makes our usual set-up with ...♞c6 less effective, but then Kramnik's excellent 12...♞b8! enables Black to neutralize the thematic d4-d5 break. After the most common 11.♞c1, Black gets a good game with 11...♞c6, which can generally be followed up by ...♞c8 and ...♞e7 in the near future.

# Chapter 17

## 4. ♖c2



### Various 5th Moves

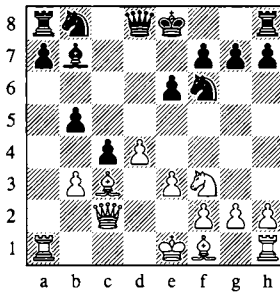
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♖c2

4...d5

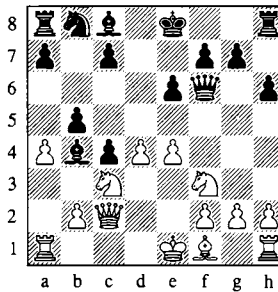
A) 5.e3	256
B) 5.♙g5	257
C) 5.♘f3 dxc4	258
C1) 6.♙g5	259
C2) 6.e4	260
C3) 6.a3	261

C) note to 6th move



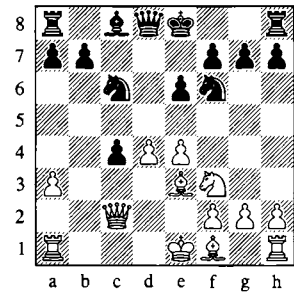
11...♙e4!N

C1) note to 7.a4



9...♘c6!N

C3) note to 10.♙xc4



10...♘a5!N

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♗b4 4. ♖c2

This is known as the Classical System, and is arguably the most theoretically challenging answer to the Nimzo-Indian. The main idea of the queen move is to prepare a2-a3 without suffering from doubled c-pawns. The queen may also support the e2-e4 advance.

4...d5

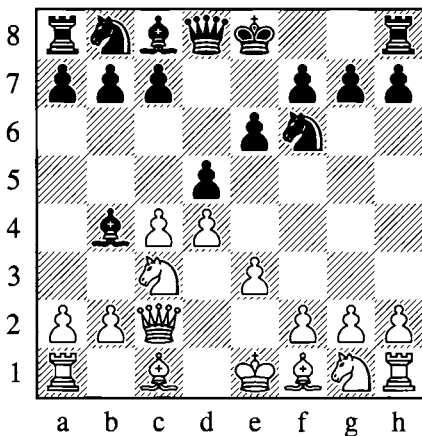
Black has a number of other options, with 4...0-0 and 4...c5 deserving a mention as the other two 'big moves'. I cannot claim that the text move is objectively superior, but it's the one I have chosen to recommend for this book. Black is fighting for the light squares in the centre, preventing e2-e4 and forcing White to decide what to do about the hanging c4-pawn.

In this chapter we will deal with three comparatively rare lines: A) 5.e3, B) 5. ♗g5, and C) 5. ♘f3.

5.a3 is the first of the major options, which will be discussed in Chapters 18-20.

5.cxd5 is the most challenging move of all, and will be covered in Chapters 21-24.

A) 5.e3



As often happens, mixing the Classical and

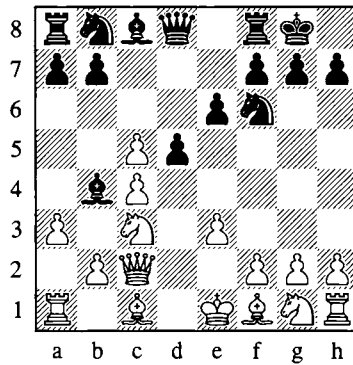
Rubinstein systems doesn't make much sense, but this is still White's third most popular choice! We won't have to spend much time on it though, as my recommended solution is likely to transpose to a harmless line which has already been analysed in another part of the book.

5...c5 6. ♘f3

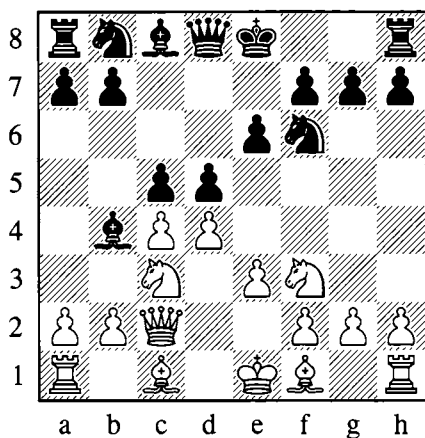
I checked two other continuations:

6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 (7. ♖xc3 cxd4 8.exd4 dxc4 9. ♗xc4 0-0 10. ♘f3 transposes to variation A2 of Chapter 10, where Black stands better as he has an improved version of a normal IQP position) 7...0-0 This position has been covered on page 112 – see 7. ♖c2 d5 8.e3 in the notes to variation D of Chapter 8; although that line itself may soon transpose to variation B2 of Chapter 21!

6.dxc5 0-0 should enable Black to equalize quite easily. 7.a3 This position has been reached in two games. In my opinion, the simplest solution is:



7... ♗xc5N 8. ♘f3 dxc4! (8... ♘c6 transposes to the note to Black's next move in the main line below, where 9.b4 ♗d6 10. ♗b2 gives White good prospects) 9. ♗xc4 a6 10.b4 ♗e7 11. ♗b2 b5 12. ♗d3 ♗b7= In this position, with symmetrical pawn structures, Black has no reason to worry.

**6...cxd4!**

This is the most accurate move order.

**6...♠c6**

This has been by far the most popular move, and was even used by Nimzowitsch to score 1½/2 against Reti and Capablanca! However, it gives White the annoying option of:

**7...dxc5!**

7.a3 ♠xc3† 8.bxc3 0–0 is similar to the main Rubinstein lines from Chapter 14, but the presence of White's queen on c2 (instead of the bishop on d3) makes Black's task easier. The games Korchnoi – Yusupov, Switzerland 2008, and L. Horvath – Ragger, Mureck 2004, are good examples of Black's chances.

**7...0–0 8.a3 ♠xc5 9.b4 ♠d6 10.♠b2**

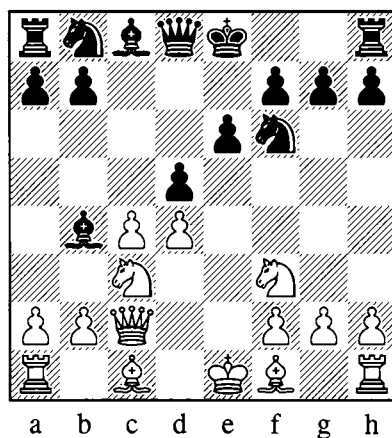
This theoretical position can be reached via different move orders, and first occurred as early as 1909! Solving the problem of the c8-bishop is not an easy task here. For instance:

**10...♠e5 11.0–0–0 ♖e7 12.♠b5!**

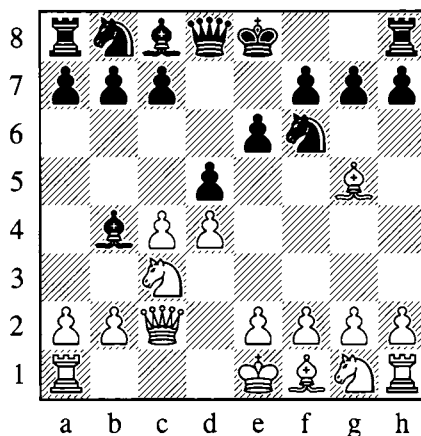
White obtained a dangerous initiative in the classic game Tal – Aronin, Moscow 1957.

**7...exd4**

After 7.♠xd4 0–0 White is equal at best. In practical terms, Black has an easy position with a lot of freedom, and has achieved a heavy plus score.

**7...0–0**

We can end the line here, as Black's last move reaches a position analysed via the Rubinstein move order – see variation A3 of Chapter 10.

**B) 5...♠g5**

This looks like a natural move, but it is connected with a dubious pawn sacrifice.

**5...dxc4**

Why not? It's surprisingly hard for White to regain the pawn, so he will have to search for compensation.

**6.e3**

6.♠f3 converts to variation C1.

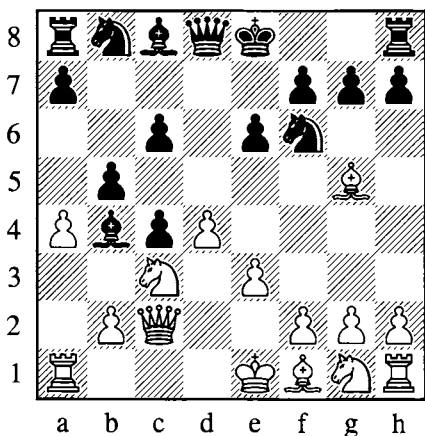
6...b5

This is not merely a materialistic approach – the extra c4-pawn greatly restricts White’s pieces, and the last move prepares to develop the bishop on b7.

7.a4

White should hurry up and play this in order to force ...c6. If White delays it, Black will play ...♗b7 and then be ready to meet a2-a4 with ...a6, when the light-squared bishop will have a perfect view of the long diagonal.

7...c6



8. ♗xf6

White is happy to destroy the opponent’s pawn structure at the cost of exchanging the powerful bishop.

After 8. ♗e2 ♗b7 9. ♗f3 a6 10. ♖ge2 ♖bd7 11. 0-0 ♗b6 Black was a sound pawn up in Levitas – Sokolsky, Leningrad 1938.

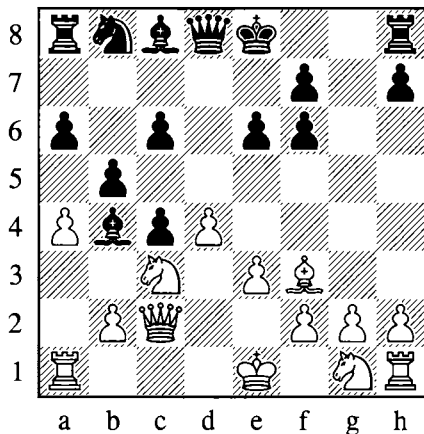
8...gxf6

Avoiding a thematic trap: 8... ♗xf6? 9. axb5 cxb5? 10. ♗e4+- and the rook is trapped.

9. ♗e2 a6 10. ♗f3

This position occurred in Wehmeier – Kotronias, Munich 1993. Now I suggest

the following natural way to complete development:

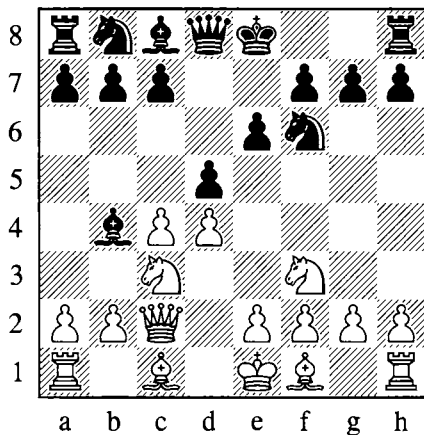


10... ♗b7N 11. ♖ge2 ♖d7 12. 0-0 ♗b8  
13. axb5 axb5 14. b3 cxb3 15. ♗xb3 ♗e7  
16. ♖f4 0-0

Even though White retains some compensation, I still prefer Black – there are no real weaknesses in his camp, while the queenside passed pawn should tell in the long run.

C) 5. ♖f3

This position might also be reached via the Ragozin move order of 1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4. ♖c3 ♗b4, and now the somewhat premature 5. ♗c2.

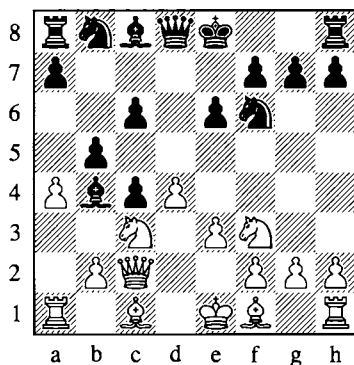


**5...dxc4**

Once again, Black should be happy to grab an important pawn.

White may proceed with **C1) 6.♖g5**, **C2) 6.e4** or **C3) 6.a3**.

I also considered the modest-looking:  
6.e3 b5 7.a4 c6



This transposes to a version of the Noteboom variation, which occurs after the opening moves 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 c6 4.♟c3 dxc4 5.e3 b5 6.a4 ♖b4. The main line continues 7.♖d2 a5 8.axb5 ♖xc3 9.♖xc3 cxb5 10.b3 ♖b7 11.bxc4 b4 12.♖b2, with an extremely double-edged game ahead. Going back to move 7 of the Noteboom line, the less-than-optimal 7.♞c2 would transpose to our position.

8.♖d2

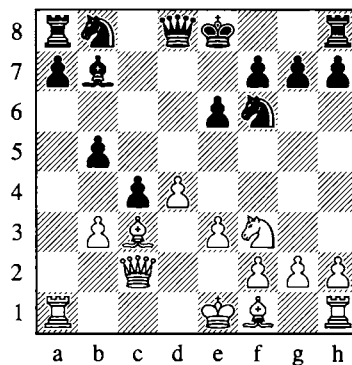
White has nothing better, but he is almost a tempo down on the Noteboom line, as there is no real point in putting the queen on c2 at this stage.

8...♖b7 9.axb5 ♖xc3 10.♖xc3

I also examined 10.♞xc3N cxb5 11.b3 a5 12.bxc4 b4 13.♞c2 ♟bd7 14.♖d3, and now 14...e5! leads to favourable complications. For instance, 15.dxe5? ♖xf3 16.exf6 ♞xf6 17.0-0 ♞g5 18.g3 ♟c5 is already losing for White.

10...cxb5 11.b3

This was played almost a century ago in Vilardebo Picurena – Noteboom, Prague 1931. Black could have taken full advantage of the premature development of White's queen with:

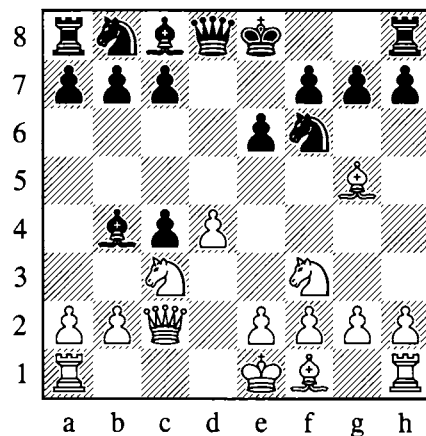


11...♖e4!N 12.♞d1 a5 13.bxc4 b4 14.♖b2 ♟bd7 15.♖e2 0-0 16.0-0 ♞c7

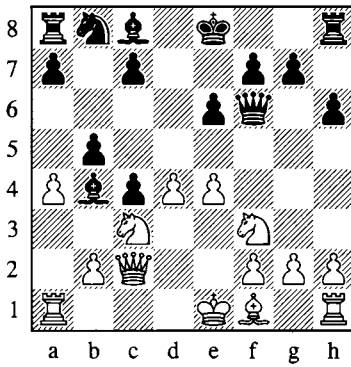
The two strong queenside passed pawns allow Black to seize the initiative.

**C1) 6.♖g5**

This is a reasonable move, but once again the set-up with an early ♞c2 is rather slow.

**6...b5 7.a4**

7.e4 h6 8.♖xf6 ♞xf6 9.a4, as played in Esedov – P. Horvath, Chalkidiki 2000, can be strongly met by:



## C2) 6.e4

Once again, the position can be compared with another opening. 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 dxc4 5.e4 ♗b4 is the well-respected Vienna Variation, when White's main tries are 6.♗g5 and the sacrificial 6.♗xc4!?. Instead of those moves, 6.♖c2 would be a slow and relatively harmless move, which transposes to our line – so once again Black should be doing well.

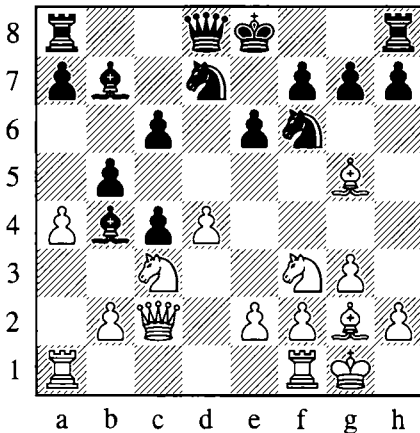
9...♘c6!N 10.e5 ♖f4 11.♖d1 ♗a6

## 7...c6 8.g3

White also failed to get anything concrete after 8.axb5 cxb5 9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.♖e4 ♖d5 in Postl – Lerner, Graz 1995.

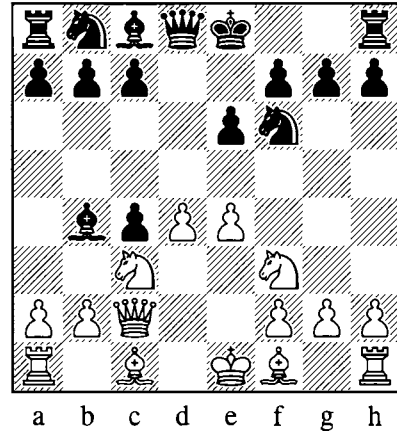
## 8...♗b7 9.♗g2 ♘bd7 10.0-0

10.♘e5, as played in Flores Alvarez – Schwartzman, Mar del Plata 1936, should be met by 10...♖c8 11.0-0 0-0.



## 10... ♖b6 11.e4 a6

A complicated middlegame was reached in Mamedyarov – Carlsen, Shamkir 2014, but White did not really have enough for the pawn.



## 6...b5 7.a4

Once again, if White is to cause problems, he should play this move before the bishop arrives on b7. Now Black has a couple of options, but my preference is:

## 7...♗b7!?

I like this counterattacking concept. Black is ready to give up his extra pawn, but it forces White to lose control over the d5-square.

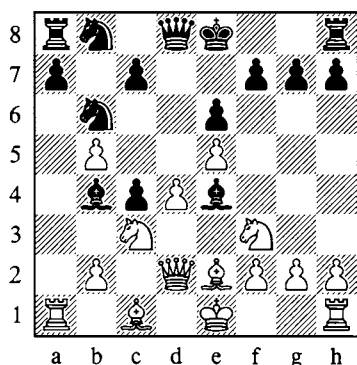
7...c6 8.♗e2 ♗b7 9.0-0 a6, as played in lots of games, leaves White with long-lasting compensation due to the strong pawn centre. Still, Black's position is by no means worse here, so the choice is one of personal taste.

## 8.axb5!?

The most dynamic move, giving up a central pawn in order to open up the queenside.

The alternative is:

8.e5 ♖e4 9.♗d2 ♜d5 10.axb5 ♜b6 11.♙e2



11...c6!

Dynamic factors are the most important here. The b5-pawn was a potential weakness, but securing the c6-square for the knight is crucial.

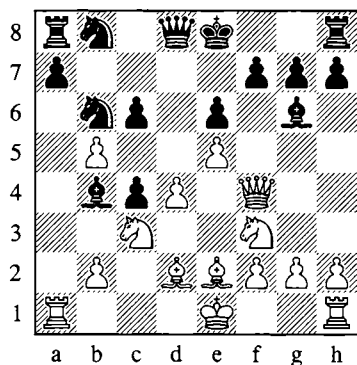
12.♗f4

In the event of 12.0-0 ♙g6 13.bxc6 ♜xc6 14.♗f4 0-0 Black's pieces are perfectly developed.

12...♙g6 13.♙d2?!

A dubious pawn sacrifice.

Better was 13.bxc6 ♜xc6 14.0-0, transposing to the note above.

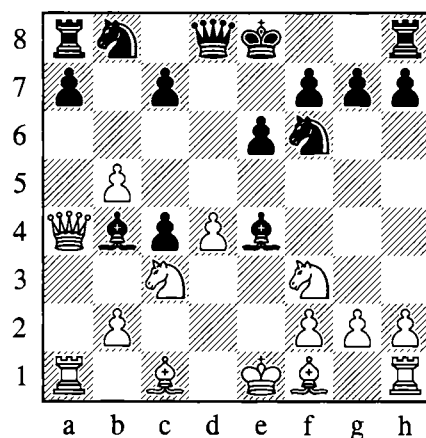


13...♙g6 14.bxc3 14.bxc3 ♜d5 15.♗g3 cxb5 16.h4 h5

Black had an extra pawn and full control over the light squares in Bergez – Duhayon, Charleroi 2003.

8...♙xc4 9.♗a4

This original position was reached in Rajlich – Berczes, Budapest 2006. In my opinion, the best way to protect the dark-squared bishop is:



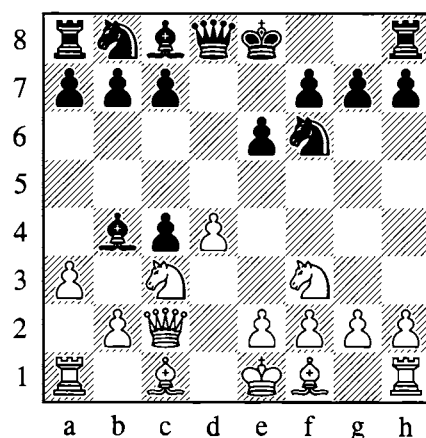
9...♗e7N 10.♙e2

10.♙xc4 ♙xf3 11.gxf3 ♜bd7 leaves White with no compensation for the damaged pawn structure.

10...♜bd7 11.0-0 ♜b6 12.♗d1 ♙b7 13.♙g5 ♗d6

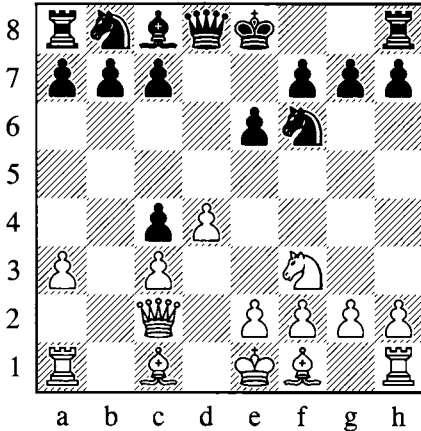
Black has comfortable play due to his excellent piece development and pressure on the isolated pawn.

C3) 6.a3



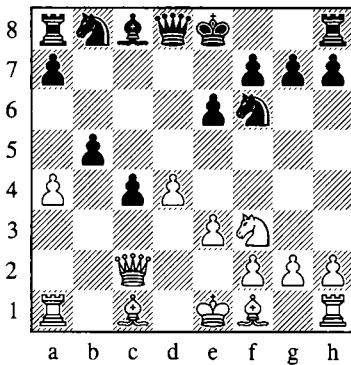
**6... ♗xc3 † 7.bxc3**

7. ♖xc3 has no independent value, since 7...0-0 would transpose to Chapter 19. Moreover, 7...b5!? 8.a4 c6 might even force White to fight for equality.



**7...c5 8.e4**

The more modest 8.e3, as played in I. Sokolov – Wells, London 2008, is well met by 8...cxd4!N 9.cxd4 b5. White can regain the lost pawn with 10.a4, but this entails a serious strategic concession:



10...b4 11. ♗xc4 0-0 12.0-0 ♗b7 The strong passed pawn offers Black an excellent position.

**8...cxd4 9.cxd4 ♖c6**

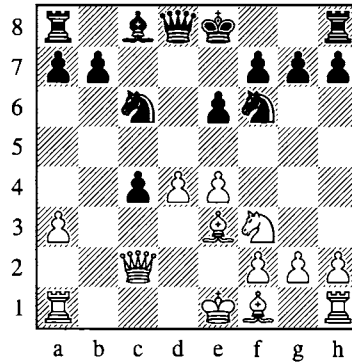
White's position looks promising due to his powerful bishops and mobile pawn centre.

However, the lack of development prevents him from fighting for an advantage.

**10. ♗xc4**

The sacrifice of a central pawn is a necessary measure.

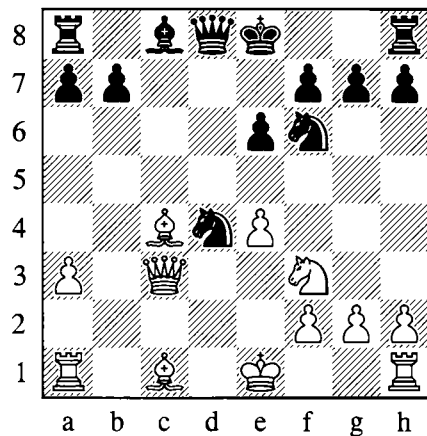
10. ♗e3?! occurred in Hilverda – Borovikov, Paderborn 2013, when Black should have protected the pawn with:



10... ♖a5!N 11.e5 (11. ♗xc4 ♖xc4 12. ♖xc4 ♖xe4) 11... ♖d5 12. ♗xc4 ♖xc4 13. ♖xc4 ♗d7 Black dominates the light squares.

**10... ♖xd4 11. ♖c3**

White's bishops are very powerful, so Black should be careful.



**11... ♖c6!**

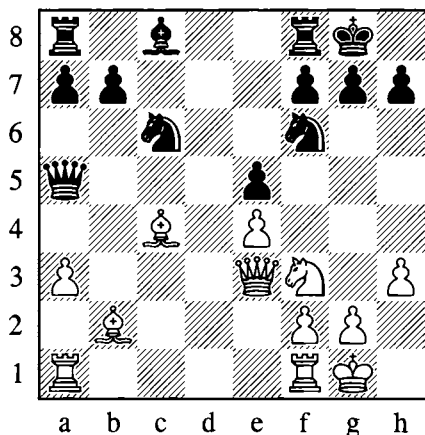
11...♖xf3?! 12.gxf3 0–0 13.♖g1 offers White a promising initiative.

### 13.0–0 0–0 13.♖b2

The pressure along the a1–h8 diagonal is quite unpleasant, but Black can neutralize it with:

### 13...♗a5! 14.♖e3 e5 15.h3

This position was reached in Vanheiden – Meissen, email 2013. Now I recommend the following natural innovation:

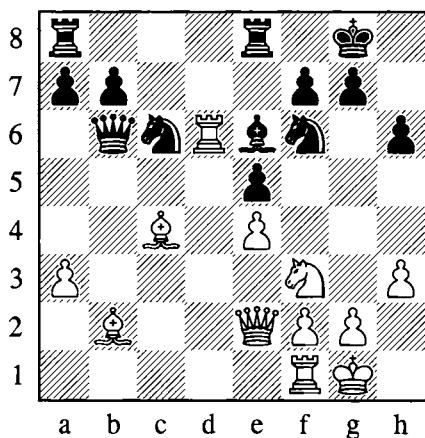


### 15...h6N 16.♖ad1 ♖e8 17.♖d6 ♗b6!

This defensive resource prevents White from developing a powerful attack by means of ♖xf6.

### 18.♗e2 ♖e6!

Black returns the extra pawn in order to neutralize the activity of White's bishops.



### 19.♖xe6 ♖xe6 20.♖xe6 fxe6 21.♖xe5 ♖d4! 22.♗d2 ♖d8

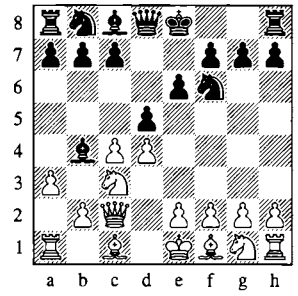
Black is by no means worse due to his active piece play.

## Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with a few sidelines after 4.♗c2 d5. White only has so many sensible moves, especially with the c4-pawn hanging. Indeed, after 5.♖g5 dxc4, followed by ...b5, Black should be able to keep a healthy extra pawn without compromising his position too much. Of the lines where White gives up the c4-pawn, his best option might be 5.♖f3 dxc4 6.a3 ♖xc3† 7.bxc3, but then the abandonment of White's queen from the d-file makes the centre unstable, so 7...c5 offers Black excellent play.

# Chapter 18

## 4. ♖c2



### 5.a3

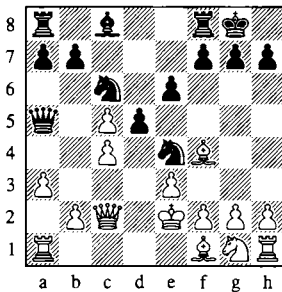
## Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♖c2 d5 5.a3

5...♙xc3† 6.♗xc3 0-0

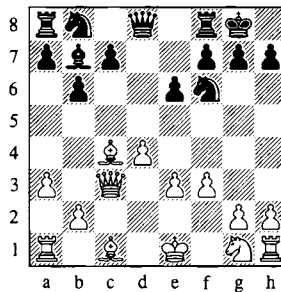
A) 7.cxd5 ♘e4! 8.♗c2 exd5	265
A1) 9.e3	266
A2) 9.♙f4 ♘c6 10.e3 ♗e8 11.♘f3 g5! 12.♙g3 g4 13.♘e5 ♘xe5	267
A21) 14.♙xe5	269
A22) 14.dxe5N	270
B) 7.e3 b6	272
B1) 8.cxd5	273
B2) 8.♘f3 ♙a6	275
B21) 9.b3	275
B22) 9.b4	276

note to move 7



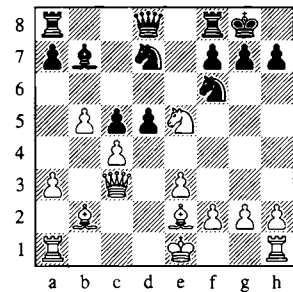
11...e5!N

B) note to move 8



10...c5!N

B22) after 14.♘xe5?!



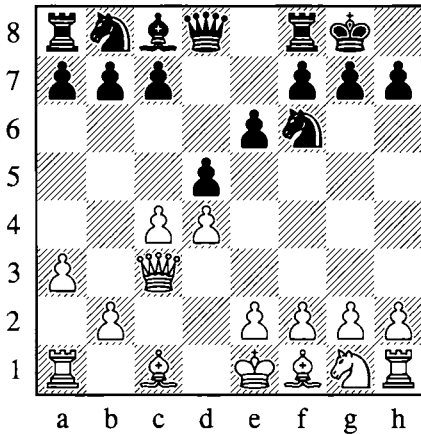
14...♘xe5!N

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 ♙b4 4.♖c2 d5 5.a3

This is the first of White's two major options. I suggest the natural and popular continuation:

5...♙xc3† 6.♖xc3 0–0

6...♞e4, 6...dxc4 and 6...c5!? all have their supporters, but I like the flexibility of castling immediately while maintaining the option of any of these moves.



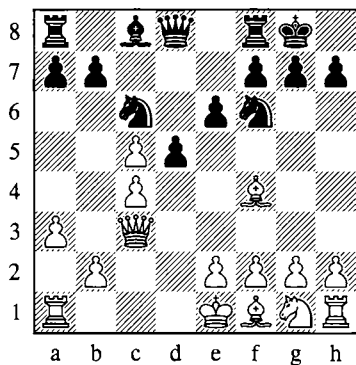
In this chapter we will focus on two significant sidelines: **A) 7.cxd5** and **B) 7.e3**.

7.♞f3 and 7.♙g5 are the two main moves, analysed in Chapters 19 and 20 respectively.

7.♙f4

This rare move has achieved a heavy score for White, but it allows Black to fight for the initiative with:

7...c5! 8.dxc5 ♞c6



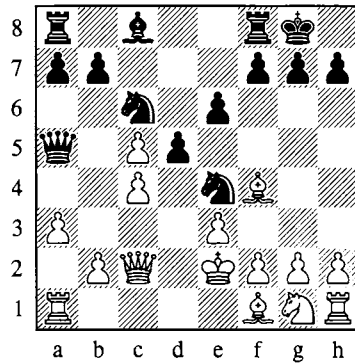
9.e3?

9.b4 e5! 10.♙xe5 d4 11.♙xf6 ♖xf6 offers Black a great initiative for the sacrificed pawns.

9.♞f3!N ♞e4 10.♖c2 ♖a5† 11.♙d2 ♖xc5 12.e3 ♞xd2 13.♞xd2 is enough for White to hang on to equality.

9...♞e4 10.♖c2 ♖a5† 11.♞e2

In Berkovich – Borisov, Omsk 2010, Black could have developed a crushing initiative with:



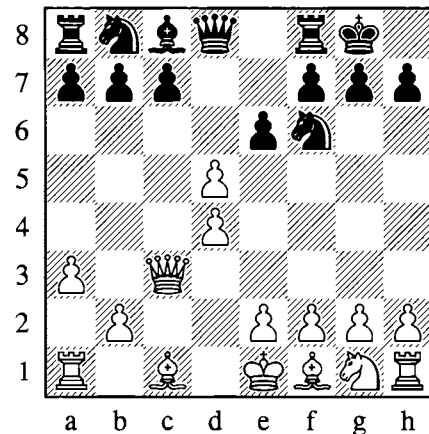
11...e5!N 12.cxd5

12.♙g3 ♙f5 is even worse for White.

12...♙f5! 13.♖c1 exf4 14.dxc6 fxe3–+

White's king is fatally exposed.

**A) 7.cxd5**



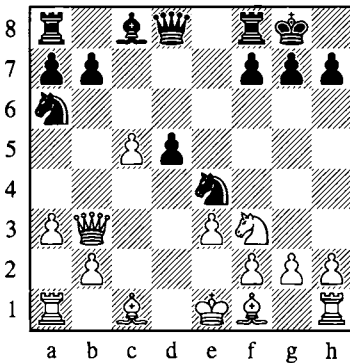
7...♞e4!

This intermediate move prevents White from pinning the knight and renders White's development more problematic.

**8. ♖c2**

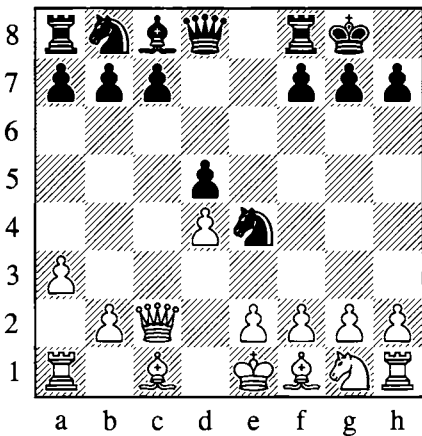
Definitely the best retreat.

8. ♖b3?! misplaces the queen, as the following game illustrates: 8...exd5 9. ♖f3 c5 10. dxc5 ♖a6 11. e3? (11. ♖d1 ♖axc5 12. b4 ♖f6 13. ♖d4 was the lesser evil, but even then Black's lead in development forces White to fight for equality after 13...♖b3 14. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 15. ♖b1 ♖xc1 16. ♖xc1 ♖d7 17. e3 ♖fc8?)



11...exd5 12. ♖d1 ♖d7 13. ♖d4 ♖a4 14. ♖f3 ♖b3 15. ♖xb3 ♖xb3→ Black's lead in development decided the battle in Kiriakov – Sjugirov, Sochi 2015.

**8...exd5**



We will analyse A1) 9.e3 and A2) 9. ♖f4.

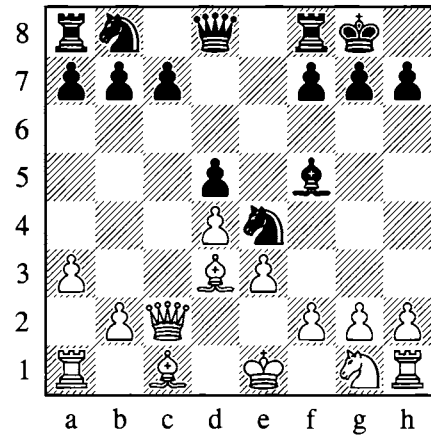
9. ♖f3 ♖f5 10. ♖b3 ♖c6+ gives Black a lead in development and good prospects on the light squares.

**A1) 9.e3**

This was played by Kramnik against Anand in the stem game with 7...♖e4!. Playing this way is a significant concession, as White's dark-squared bishop will now be locked in for a long time.

**9... ♖f5 10. ♖d3**

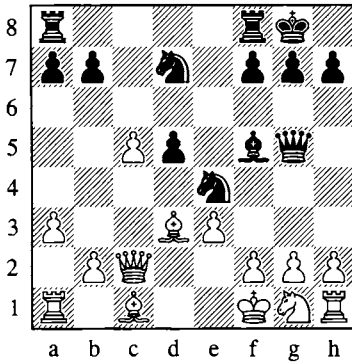
This position was reached in Kramnik – Anand, Nice (rapid) 2009, and a number of subsequent games. For some reason, nobody found the strongest continuation for Black:



**10... ♖g5!N 11. g3**

11. f3 ♖h4+ 12. ♖f1 ♖g3+ 13. hxg3 ♖xd3+ 14. ♖xd3 ♖xh1+ doesn't offer White any compensation for the exchange.

11. ♖f1 is hardly an improvement: 11...c5! 12. dxc5 ♖d7



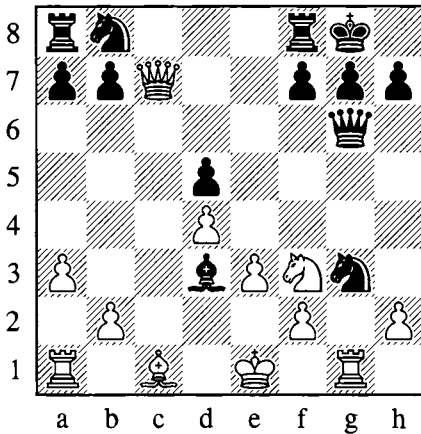
13. ♖f3 (even worse is 13.b4 ♖e5 14. ♖f3 ♖xf3 15.gxf3 ♙h3+ 16. ♗e1 ♙g2 17. ♗f1 ♖g5+) 13...♙f6 ♣ Black manages to regain the pawn and develop a powerful initiative.

### 11...♙g6 12. ♖f3

Attempting a tactical solution. There is nothing better, as Black's next move can hardly be prevented anyway.

### 12...♖xg3 13. ♗g1 ♙xd3 14. ♙xc7

White will recapture on g3 to restore the material balance, but Black can establish a clear positional advantage with:

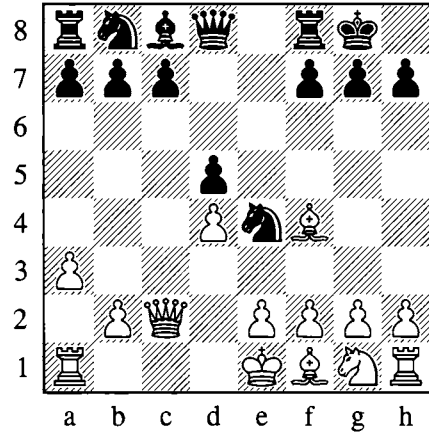


### 14...♙e2! 15. ♗xg3 ♙a6 ♣

With full control over the light squares.

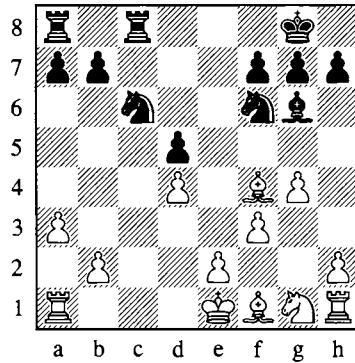
### A2) 9. ♙f4

This is a more ambitious mode of development. However, the f4-bishop isn't secure, so Black gets some extra tactical resources.



### 9...♖c6

9...♙f5 was tried in some grandmaster games, but I don't like it because of: 10. ♙xc7 ♙xc7 11. ♙xc7 ♗c8 12. ♙f4 ♖c6 13. f3 ♖f6 14.g4 ♙g6



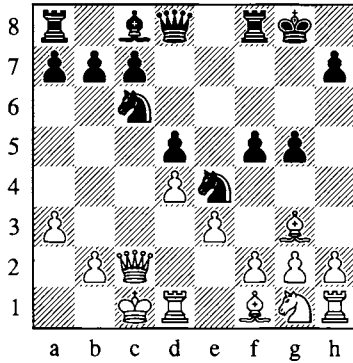
15.e3!N (15.h4 ♖xd4 16. ♗d1 ♖e6 ♣ gave Black decent play in Al Sayed – Moradiabadi, Ha Long City 2009) 15...♖a5 16.h4 ♖b3 17. ♗d1 ♙c2 18. ♖e2 White may not be able to claim an advantage, but he will certainly have adequate compensation for the exchange.

### 10.e3

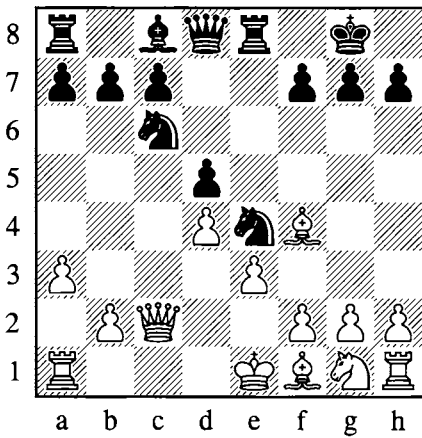
Statically, White's position is better due to the bishop pair and pressure along the c-file. However, there are also dynamic factors in the position!

**10... ♖e8**

The more aggressive 10...g5!? also seems playable. 11. ♖g3 f5 12. 0-0-0 This position was reached in Karpov – Anand, Corsica (rapid) 2009, and now I recommend:



12... ♖e7N 13. ♖d3 f4 14. f3 ♖d6 15. exf4 gxf4 16. ♖f2 ♖f5 ♞ With a complex, double-edged battle.



**11. ♖f3**

White doesn't have any adequate alternatives.

11. ♖e2?, as tried in Kotanjian – Zhao Xue, Moscow 2011, should be met by 11... ♖f5N

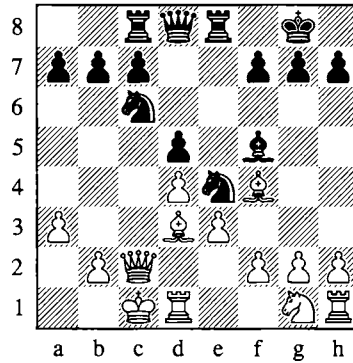
12. ♖d1 g5! 13. ♖g3 h5 14. h4 ♖g4! ♞ and White is in trouble.

**11. 0-0-0?!**

This is too risky, as the king will not be safe on the queenside.

**11... ♖f5 12. ♖d3 ♖c8!**

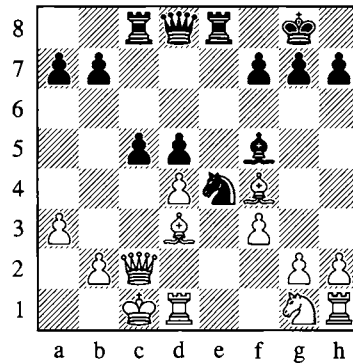
The most consistent way to prove the significance of the above-mentioned factor is to prepare a line-opening piece sacrifice.



**13. f3**

The prophylactic 13. ♖b1 still runs into: 13... ♖xd4! 14. exd4 c5 15. dxc5 ♖xc5 16. ♖a4 ♖c3! 17. ♖d4 ♖xd3 18. ♖xd3 ♖d6! The threat of ...♖b5 prevents White from develop her kingside pieces, so after 19. ♖xd6 ♖xd3† 20. ♖xd3 ♖e1† 21. ♖a2 ♖xd6 Black gets a clear advantage.

**13... ♖xd4! 14. exd4 c5**

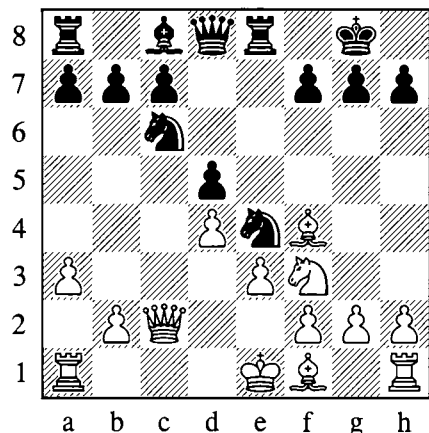


**15. fxe4**

Hardly better is 15.♖b1 c4 16.♙xe4 dxe4, with an enormous attack.

15...dxe4 16.♙c4 cxd4 17.♖b1 ♙e6

White was in trouble in Mkrtchian – T. Kosintseva, Nalchik 2010.



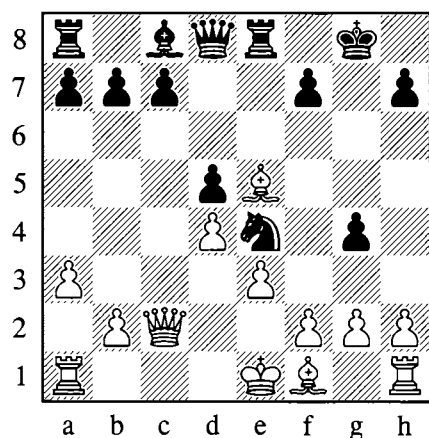
11...g5!

Black has to play energetically in order to make use of the development advantage.

12.♙g3 g4 13.♗e5 ♘xe5

So far A21) 14.♙xe5 is the only move to have been tested, but it is also important to examine A22) 14.dxe5N.

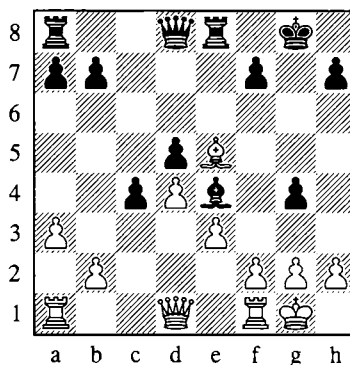
A21) 14.♙xe5



14...c5 15.♙d3 ♙f5 16.♚e2?!

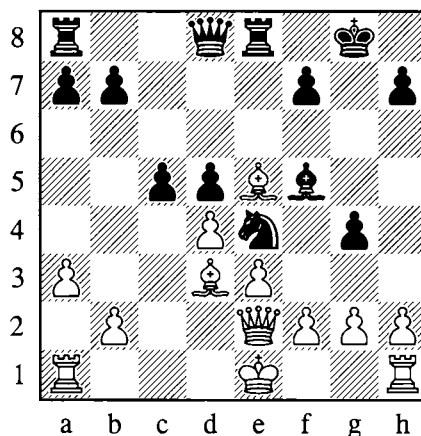
This was Carlsen's choice, but delaying castling is a risky decision.

16.0–0 is safer, although Black is still at least equal: 16...c4 17.♙xe4 ♙xe4 18.♚d1 (after 18.♚d2 ♙e6 19.f3 gxf3 20.gxf3 ♙g6† 21.♖h1 ♚h4 Black's king would feel safer than the opponent's...)



18...♙e6 19.♖h1 ♙g6 20.f3 gxf3 21.gxf3 ♚g5 22.♚d2 ♙f5 23.♙g1 ♚h5 24.♚f2 f6 25.♙f4 ♖f7 Black was absolutely fine in Bendana Guerrero – Serner, corr. 2011.

Black is also doing well after 16.♙xe4N ♙xe4 17.♚d1 ♚g5 18.0–0 c4, but that would still have been an improvement for White over the text move.

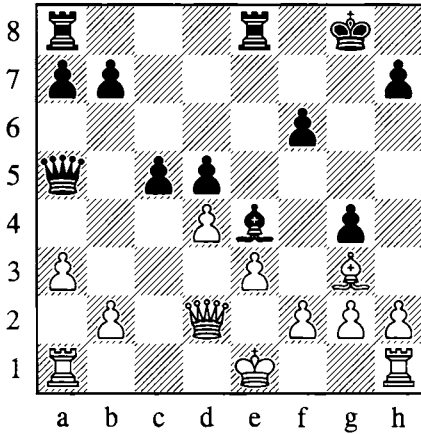


16...f6 17. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 18. ♖g3

18. ♖xg4?! ♖h8 19. ♖g3 ♖a5† 20. ♖f1 cxd4 leaves White facing a strong attack.

18... ♖a5† 19. ♖d2

We have been following the top-level game Carlsen – Kramnik, Moscow 2009. Now Black should have played:



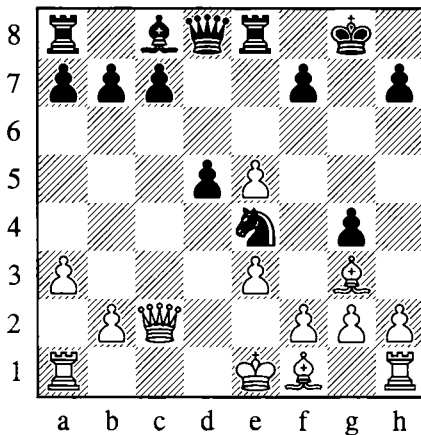
19... ♖a6!N

White's king is stuck in the centre.

20.f3 gxf3 21.gxf3 ♖xf3 22. ♖f1 ♖h5†

We could analyse further but it's obvious that White is under pressure, being a pawn down with an exposed king.

A22) 14.dxe5N



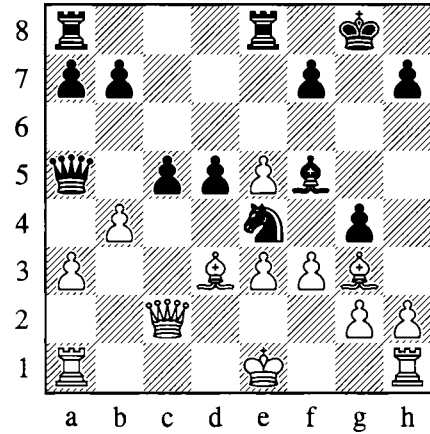
14... ♖f5 15. ♖d3 c5!

I like this counterattacking approach.

The more modest 15... ♖g6 16. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 17. ♖c2 ♖g5 18.f3 gxf3 19.gxf3 ♖g6 20. ♖f4 ♖h4† 21. ♖f2 ♖xf2† 22. ♖xf2 offers White a slight advantage in the endgame.

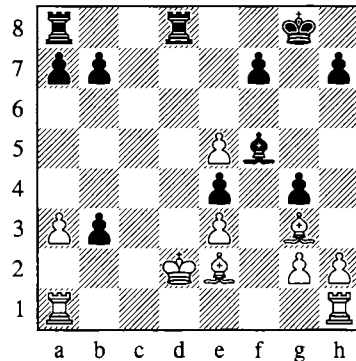
16.f3 ♖a5† 17.b4

After 17. ♖f1 ♖xg3† 18.hxg3 ♖xd3† 19. ♖xd3 ♖a6 20. ♖xa6 bxa6 21.f4 c4 Black gets plenty of counterplay along the b-file.



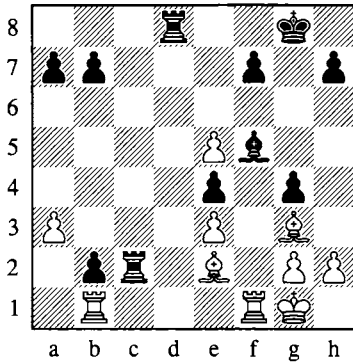
17...cxb4 18.fxe4 dxe4 19. ♖c4

19. ♖e2? b3† 20. ♖d2 ♖xd2† 21. ♖xd2 ♖ed8† gives Black a huge initiative for the piece, as the following lines demonstrate:

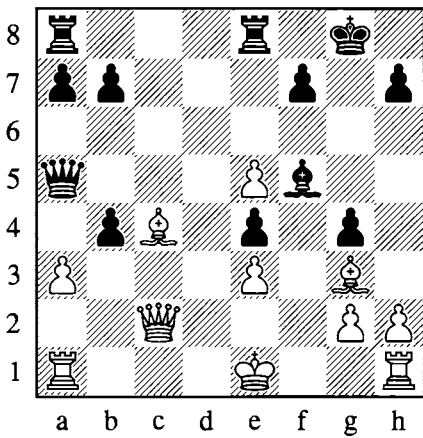


22. ♖e1 (22. ♖c3 ♖ac8† 23. ♖xb3 ♖c6† 24. ♖a4 ♖d2-+ Despite the limited material,

Black has succeeded in developing a decisive attack.) 22...b2 23.♖b1 ♜ac8 24.♖f1 ♜c1† 25.♔f2 ♜c2 26.♔g1



26...♜dd2! 27.♖xf5 ♜c1† 28.♖f1 ♜xb1 29.♖xb1 ♜xe2⚡ White will have to give up his bishop for the b-pawn, leaving Black with an extra pawn and good winning chances in the rook endgame.

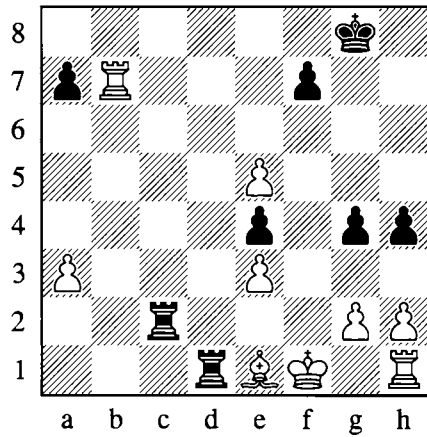


19...b3† 20.♚d2 b2 21.♖b1 ♚xd2† 22.♔xd2 ♜ac8 23.♙b3 ♜ed8† 24.♔e2

After a pretty forcing sequence, Black can refuel his initiative with:

24...♙e6! 25.♖xb2 ♙xb3 26.♖xb3 ♜c2† 27.♔f1 ♜d1† 28.♙e1 h5! 29.♖xb7 h4

The activity of Black's pieces forces White to be careful. The main threat is ...g3 with a mating net.



**30.e6!**

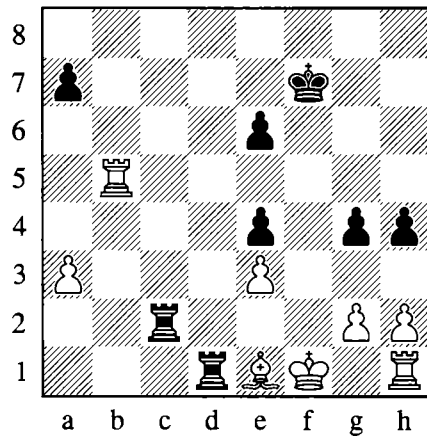
White has no time for 30.♖xa7?? g3 31.hxg3 hxg3→ when it's all over.

**30...fxe6 31.♖b5!**

The only defence!

**31...♔f7**

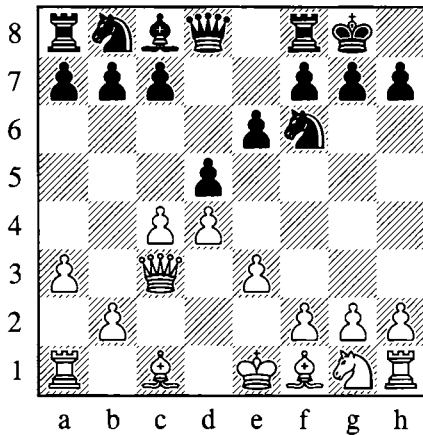
31...g3 would lead to the same outcome: 32.♙g5† ♔f7 33.hxg3 hxg3 34.♖h7† ♔f6 35.♖xg3 ♜cc1 36.♖h6† ♔f5 37.♙gg6 ♜xe1† 38.♔f2 ♖f1† 39.♔g3 ♜c3=



32.♙g5 ♜xe1† 33.♔xe1 ♜c1† 34.♔d2 ♖xh1 35.♙xg4 ♖xh2=

Black's extra pawn is meaningless, and the endgame is a simple draw.

## B) 7.e3



This move looks somewhat passive – the c1-bishop is blocked now. However, it allows White to keep the tension in the centre, while the bishop can be placed on b2 in the future.

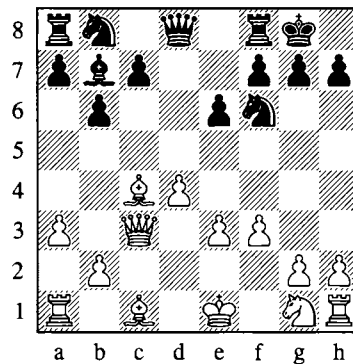
## 7...b6

Not only preparing a fianchetto, but also supporting the thematic ...c5 advance.

We will examine two main options: **B1) 8.cxd5** is the principal alternative to **B2) 8.♘f3**.

8.b3 has no independent value: after 8...♙a6 9.♙b2 ♘bd7 White has nothing better than 10.♘f3, when 10...c5 reaches a position covered on page 275 – see 10.♙b2 ♘bd7 in the notes to variation B21.

8.♙d3 dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♙b7 10.f3, as played in M. Ernst – Berry, London 2010, cannot be recommended for White. White's development is too slow, so Black can seize the initiative by means of:



10...c5!N 11.dxc5 ♘bd7! 12.♘e2 ♙c8 White is behind in development and his pieces are vulnerable on the c-file.

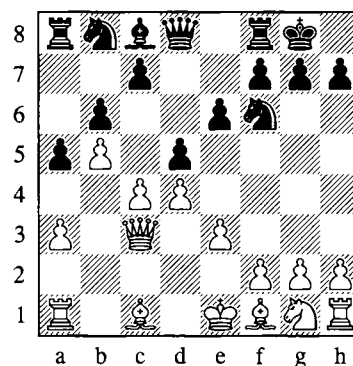
## 8.b4

This ambitious move has occurred in a couple of games, but it seems over-optimistic. I like the following way of handling Black's position:

## 8...a5!N 9.b5

9.♙b2?! invites further trouble: 9...axb4 10.axb4 ♘e4 11.♖c2 ♙xa1† 12.♙xa1 ♖e7 13.c5 ♘c6 White is far behind in development and his queenside pawns are under fire.

9.♘f3 axb4 10.axb4 ♘e4 11.♖b2 ♙xa1 12.♖xa1 ♙b7 13.c5 ♘d7 14.♙d3 ♖a8 offers Black rich play along the a-file.



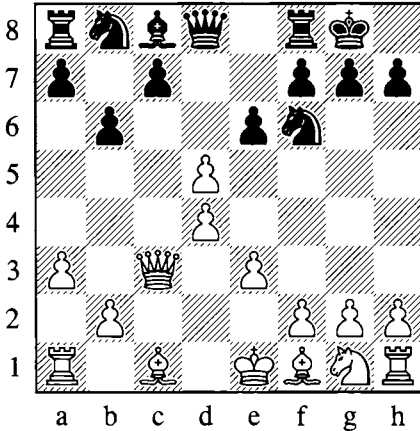
9...c5! 10.dxc5 ♘e4 11.♖c2 ♘xc5 12.cxd5 ♙b7!

A promising pawn sacrifice

13.dxe6  $\text{dxe6}$  14. $\text{d}f3$   $\text{d}d7$

With ... $\text{c}c8$  coming next, Black's lead in development is becoming rather threatening.

### B1) 8.cxd5



### 8... $\text{d}xd5$ !?

I like this move, since it forces White to spend another tempo moving his queen and leaves the long diagonal open.

8... $\text{exd5}$  has been more popular, but I think the static character of the position should suit White here.

### 9. $\text{c}c2$

Another possible retreat is:

### 9. $\text{d}d2$ N

This hasn't been tested in practice yet. The following line illustrates that the queen is placed rather awkwardly on d2:

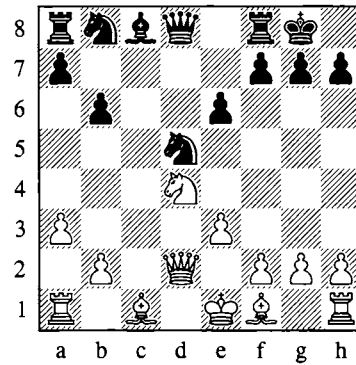
### 9...c5

I do not see a reason to delay this thematic advance.

### 10. $\text{d}f3$

After 10.dxc5 bxc5 11. $\text{d}f3$   $\text{c}b6$  12. $\text{c}c4$   $\text{c}a6$  13. $\text{c}c2$   $\text{c}xc4$  14. $\text{c}xc4$   $\text{d}c6$  the pressure along the b-file fully compensates for the weakness of the c5-pawn.

### 10...cxd4 11. $\text{d}xd4$

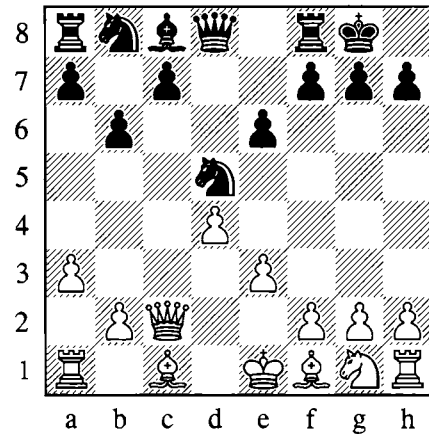


### 11...e5!

Also possible is 11... $\text{c}b7$ , but I prefer the more aggressive concept.

### 12. $\text{d}f3$ e4 13. $\text{d}d4$ $\text{c}b7$ 14.b3 $\text{d}d7$ 15. $\text{c}b2$ $\text{d}e5$

The activity of Black's pieces fully compensates for White's bishop pair.



### 9... $\text{c}b7$ !

I was surprised to discover that this natural developing move has hardly ever been seen in practice.

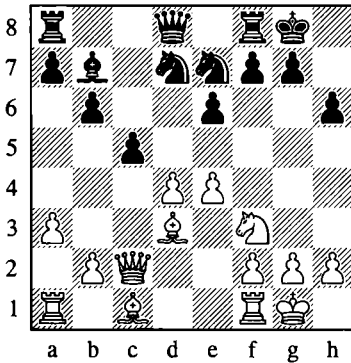
9... $\text{c}a6$  10. $\text{c}xa6$   $\text{d}xa6$  11.e4  $\text{d}e7$ , as played in Carlsen – Kramnik, Moscow (rapid) 2011, doesn't look attractive: 12. $\text{c}c4$ !N  $\text{c}c8$  13.b4 c5 14.dxc5 bxc5 15.b5  $\text{d}b8$  16. $\text{c}b2$ ± White is better due to the powerful bishop and pressure on the weak c5-pawn.

10. ♖f3

This natural developing move is the only option to have been tested so far. I checked three alternatives:

10. e4N ♖f6 11. e5 ♖d5 12. ♖f3 ♖e7 13. ♖d3 h6 offers Black excellent play thanks to his control over the d5-square.

10. ♖d3N h6 11. ♖f3 c5 12. 0-0 (12. dxc5 can be met by 12... ♖d7!, just as in some of the lines below) 12... ♖d7 13. e4 ♖e7



14. ♖e3 cxd4 15. ♖xd4 ♖c8 16. ♗e2 ♖c5= White is forced to exchange the dark-squared bishop, so Black gets comfortable play.

10. b4N ♖d7 11. e4

11. ♖f3?! c5 12. bxc5 bxc5 leaves White with undeveloped pieces.

11... ♖5f6 12. f3 c5 13. dxc5 bxc5

Black's development advantage fully compensates for White's bishop pair. The following line is hardly forced, but it nicely illustrates Black's dynamic resources:

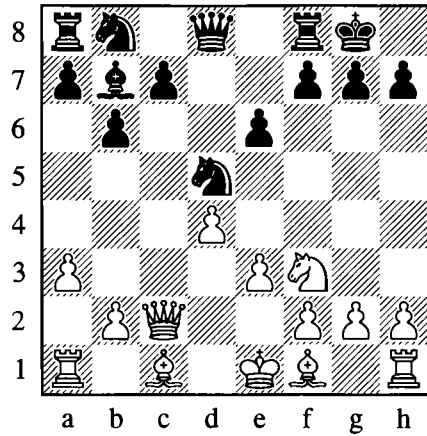
14. ♖e3 cxb4 15. axb4 a5 16. b5 ♖c8 17. ♗d2 ♖xe4! 18. fxe4 ♗h4† 19. ♖f2

19. ♗f2?! ♗xe4† 20. ♖f3 ♖c3-+

19... ♗xe4† 20. ♗e3 ♗b4† 21. ♗d2 ♗e4†=

With perpetual checks.

We have been following Le Quang Liem – Kaufman, Saint Louis 2014. I managed to find a clear improvement over Black's play:



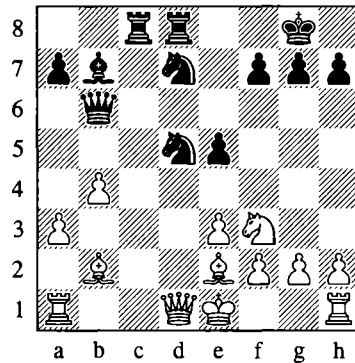
10...c5!N 11.dxc5

The ambitious 11. e4?! backfires after 11... ♖f6 12. ♖d3 c4! 13. ♗xc4 ♖xe4†.

11. ♖d3 h6 transposes to the 10. ♖d3N line in the notes above.

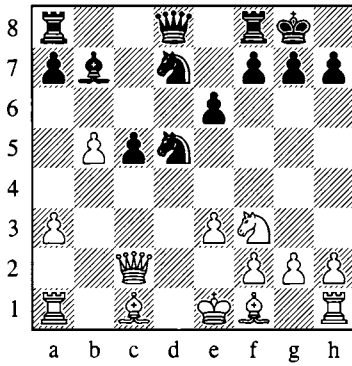
11... ♖d7 12. c6

The greedy 12. cxb6?! ♖c8 13. ♗d1 ♗xb6 leaves White under strong pressure – it will be not easy for him to complete development. For instance: 14. b4 e5 15. ♖b2 ♖fd8 16. ♖e2



16... ♖xb4! 17. axb4 ♖c5!†

I also checked 12. b4 bxc5 13. b5, which is a typical way to block the open file while establishing a powerful outpost on c4. However, Black can thwart this plan with:

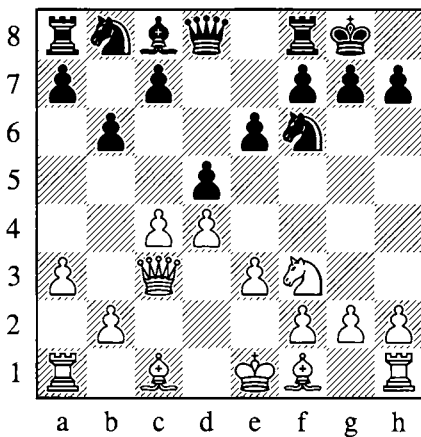


13...c4! 14.♖xc4 ♜c8 15.♗h4 ♗xh4 16.♘xh4 ♘c5 17.♙b2 ♘b3 18.♞d1 ♞c2 With an obvious initiative for Black.

12...♞c8! 13.♙b5 ♘e7

Black will regain the pawn while retaining a lead in development.

**B2) 8.♘f3**



This is the more solid continuation. White prioritizes the development of the kingside pieces, hoping to exploit the bishop pair in the long run.

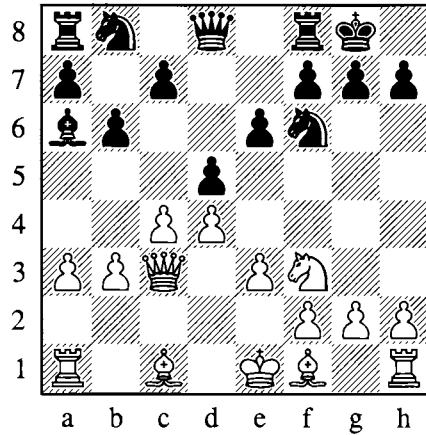
**8...♙a6**

8...♙b7 is a decent choice too, but the text move seems somewhat more active.

**B21) 9.b3** is a standard way of handling the position, while **B22) 9.b4** is more ambitious.

**B21) 9.b3**

This over-protects the c4-pawn.



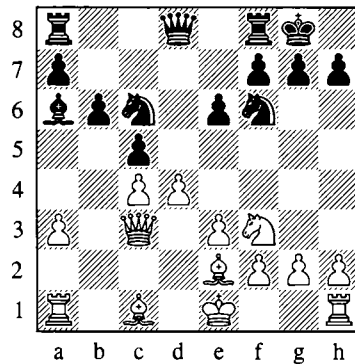
**9...c5!**

For some reason, 9...♘bd7 has been a more frequent choice. However, challenging the centre at once seems a principled approach.

**10.dxc5**

After 10.♙b2 ♘bd7 11.♞d1 ♞c8 12.♘d2 ♗e7 Black was already better in Mkrтчian – Xu Yuhua, Nanjing 2009.

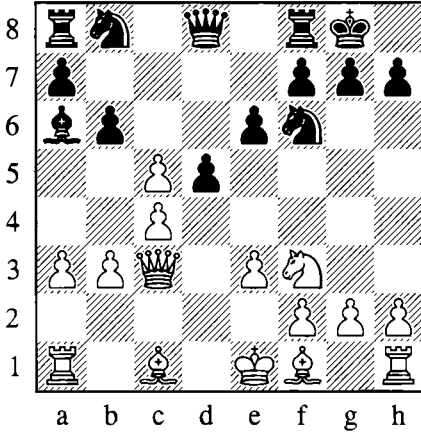
In the event of 10.♙e2N dxc4 11.bxc4 Black may benefit from the decision on move 9 to avoid committing the knight to d7: 11...♘c6!



12. ♘b2 (12. dxc5 may be safer, but after 12... ♖e4 13. ♖c2 ♖xc5 I still prefer Black due to the better pawn structure) 12... cxd4 13. exd4 ♙c8 14. ♙c1 ♖e4 15. ♖e3 ♖d6 ♞ Black exerts strong pressure against the hanging pawns.

13... ♘xc4 14. ♖xc4 ♖c6 15. ♘b2 ♞d3! =

The activity of Black's pieces stops White from benefiting from having a strong dark-squared bishop.



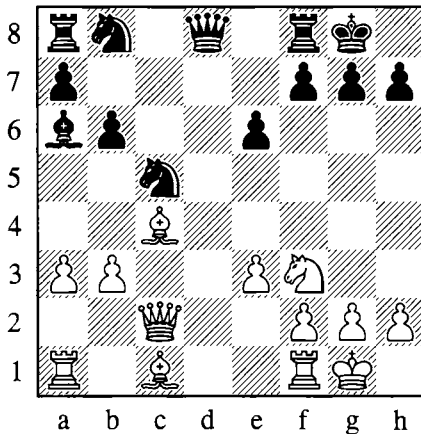
10... dxc4! N

After 10... bxc5 11. ♘b2 ♖bd7, as played in Leyva – Lima, Dresden (ol) 2008, White could have played 12. ♙d1! N ♘b7 13. ♘e2 when Black would be doomed to passive defence.

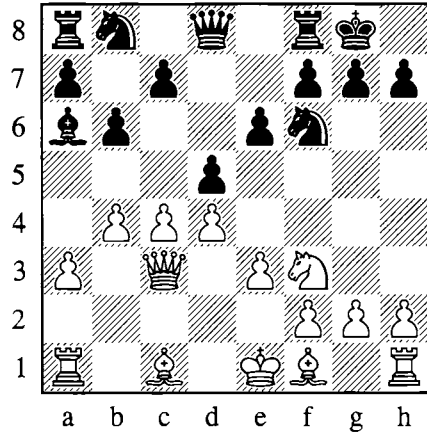
11. ♘xc4

After 11. b4 ♖d5 12. ♖c2 bxc5 White drops a pawn.

11... ♖e4 12. ♖c2 ♖xc5 13. 0-0



B22) 9. b4



This is the most ambitious concept: White seizes space on the queenside and tries to make the ...c5 break more problematic.

9... ♖bd7

On this occasion I favour this natural developing move.

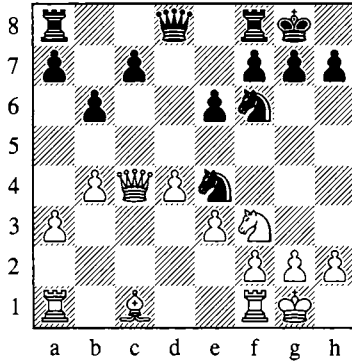
9... ♘xc4 looks like a concession, as it supports White's development, so 10. ♘xc4 dxc4 11. ♖xc4 ♞d5 12. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 13. ♘d2 ♖d7 14. ♖e2 c5 15. dxc5 bxc5 16. ♙hc1 ♙fc8 17. ♙c2 gave White a small but stable advantage in Nakamura – Giri, Tashkent 2014.

If Black wishes to trade queens then 9... dxc4!? 10. ♘xc4 ♖e4 11. ♖c2 ♘xc4 12. ♖xc4 ♞d5 gives him an improved version of the above line; the game Dubov – Rodshtein, Moscow 2011, is a good example of Black's chances. This looks perfectly playable, but I will focus on the more ambitious plan of preparing ...c5.

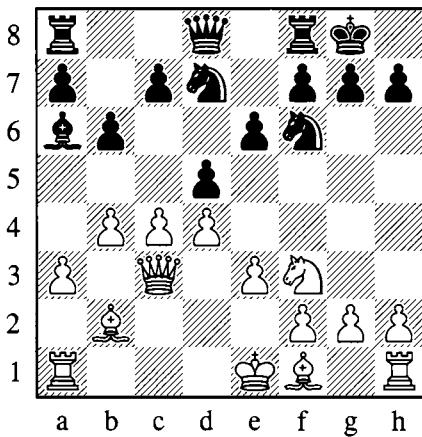
10. ♘b2

10.b5N has not yet been tested but it's a natural enough move. My analysis continues: 11...♙b7 11.a4 (11.cxd5 ♙xd5 12.a4 ♜e8 13.♙b2 ♜c8 followed by ...c5 also offers Black comfortable play) 11...c5 12.bxc6 ♙xc6 13.♙a3 ♜e8 14.cxd5 ♙xd5=

10.♙d3, as played in Selisek – Kunej, Ptuj 2008, can be well met by: 10...dxc4N 11.♙xc4 ♖e4 12.♗c2 ♙xc4 13.♗xc4 ♖df6 14.0–0



14...♗d5! The queen is perfectly placed in the centre. 15.♗c2 (the greedy 15.♗xc7?! is refuted by 15...♜fc8 16.♗e7 ♖c3! and Black dominates the board) 15...c5 16.dxc5 bxc5 17.♙b2 cxb4 18.axb4 ♜fc8=



10...c5 11.dxc5

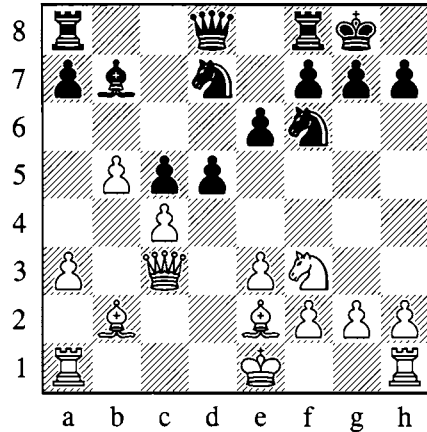
White is virtually forced to release the tension in this way, otherwise the opening of

the c-file is likely to cause problems with the queen on c3.

11...bxc5 12.b5 ♙b7 13.♙e2

White needs to catch up with the development of his kingside pieces.

The over-optimistic 13.a4?! e5! 14.cxd5 ♖xd5 15.♗d2 e4 led White to an inferior position in Laurent – Frayssinet, Paris 2010.

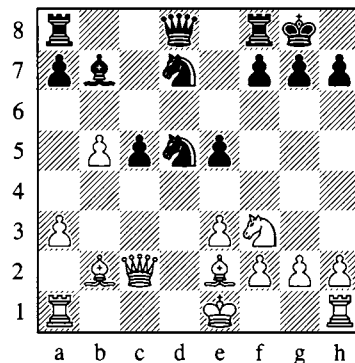


13...e5!

The same idea works well here too.

14.♖xe5?!

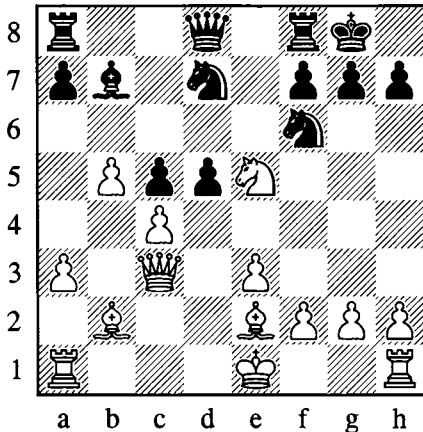
14.cxd5N ♖xd5 15.♗c2 would be safer, but even then Black can fight for the initiative with:



15...c4! 16.♙xc4 (16.♖xe5 ♖xe5 17.♙xe5 ♜e8 also offers Black rich play for the pawn)

16...♖c8 17.♖e2 ♖a5† 18.♖d2 ♖xd2†  
 19.♗xd2 ♗5b6 Black regains the pawn and  
 gets excellent play.

We have been following the game Vera  
 Gonzalez Quevedo – Barlov, La Laguna 2007.  
 Now Black should have continued:



14...♗xe5!N 15.♖xe5 ♖e8 16.♖f5 ♖a5†  
 17.♗f1 ♗e4

With a powerful initiative.

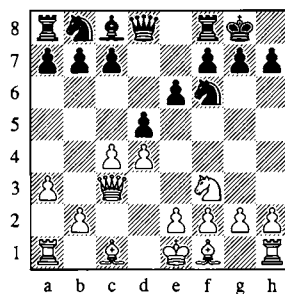
## Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with some rare but significant lines after 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.♖xc3 0–0. First, 7.cxd5 should be met by 7...♗e4! followed by ...exd5, preventing any ♗g5 pin and making Black's development advantage more significant. Since 9.e3 is too passive, 9.♗f4 seems White's best way of completing development, but then Black gets some extra tactical possibilities based on a timely ...g5. Even though the arising positions are somewhat unusual, it seems to me that White faces the greater danger.

The quiet 7.e3 avoids the problems experienced by White in the aforementioned variations; on the other hand, it leaves the dark-squared bishop locked behind the pawn chain for a long time. After 7...b6 Black is ready to develop the bishop on b7 or a6 according to circumstances, and will choose a proper moment to launch a counterattack with ...c5. White may suffer from the vulnerable placement of the queen on c3, especially in the main line with 8.♗f3 ♗a6 9.b4 ♗bd7.

# Chapter 19

## 4. ♖c2



## 7. ♘f3

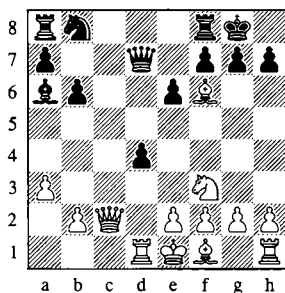
### Variation Index

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♙b4 4. ♖c2 d5 5. a3 ♙xc3† 6. ♗xc3 0-0 7. ♘f3

7...dxc4 8. ♗xc4 b6

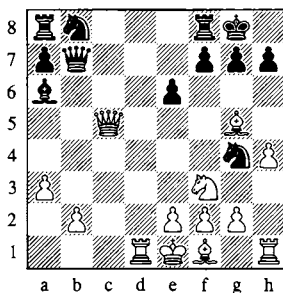
A) 9. g3	280
B) 9. ♙f4 ♙a6! 10. ♗xc7 ♗d5	281
B1) 11. ♗d6?!	281
B2) 11. ♗c2	282
C) 9. ♙g5 ♙a6	283
C1) 10. ♗c2	283
C2) 10. ♗c3 h6	286
C21) 11. ♙h4	286
C22) 11. ♙xf6	287
C3) 10. ♗a4 c5	288
C31) 11. ♗d1	288
C32) 11. dxc5 bxc5	289
C321) 12. h4!?	289
C322) 12. ♗d1	292
C323) 12. ♗c1	294

C31) after 13. ♙xf6



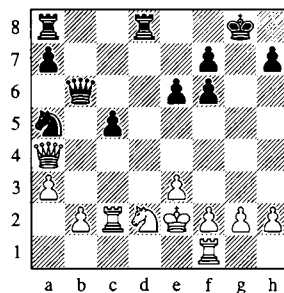
13...d3!?:N

C321) after 15. ♗xc5



15...f6!?:N

C323) after 18. ♘d2



18...♗d5!?:N

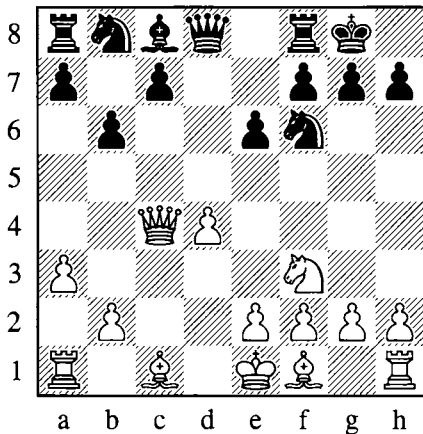
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♘b4 4.♖c2 d5 5.a3 ♘xc3† 6.♗xc3 0-0 7.♗f3

This is the first of the two main options we will consider from this position. White develops flexibly, and will decide later whether to place his bishop on f4 or g5.

7...dxc4

This is the standard response. Opening up the position may favour White's bishop pair in the long run, but there are also dynamic considerations: White is forced to recapture with the queen, so Black will gain extra time for development.

8. ♖xc4 b6



Black prepares ...♗a6, developing with gain of tempo. White may proceed with A) 9.g3, B) 9.♗f4 or C) 9.♗g5.

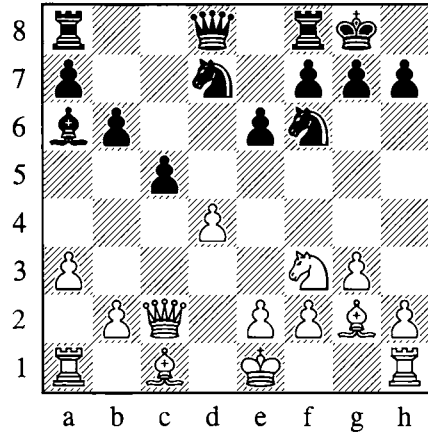
A) 9.g3

Putting the bishop on the long diagonal doesn't bother Black here, since the problem of the c8-bishop has been solved.

9...♗a6

There is nothing wrong with 9...♗b7, as has also been tried by some top players, but the text move seems more active.

10. ♖c2 ♗bd7 11. ♗g2 c5

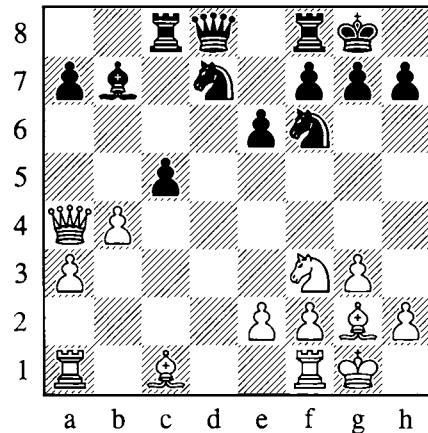


12.b4

After 12.0-0 ♖c8 13.♖d1 ♗e7 Black had the easier game in Fodor – Manca, Budapest 2009. It will not be easy for White to find an adequate spot for the queen.

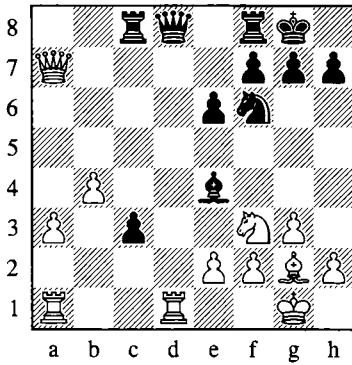
12...♖c8 13. ♖a4 ♗b7 14.dxc5 bxc5 15.0-0

We have been following the top-level game Aronian – Topalov, Bilbao 2008. Now I suggest the following natural improvement over Veselin's play:



15...♗e4N 16. ♗b2 c4 17. ♖ac1

The greedy 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6 18.♖xa7 c3 19.♗fd1 can be met by:



19...c2! 20.♖xd8 ♜fxd8 21.♘d4 c1=♙†  
22.♖xc1 ♜xc1† 23.♙f1 h6 Black's position is  
by no means worse.

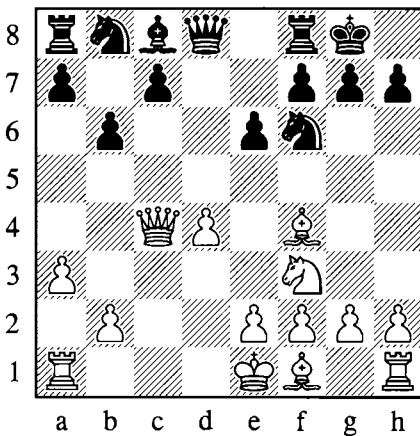
### 17...♞c7!

Covering the seventh rank and freeing a path  
for the queen.

### 18.♞fd1 ♞c8♞

Black has reached a harmonious set-up, and  
White will have to keep a watchful eye on the  
passed c-pawn.

### B) 9.♙f4



### 9...♙a6!

A typical concept: fast development is more  
important than the c7-pawn!

### 10.♞xc7

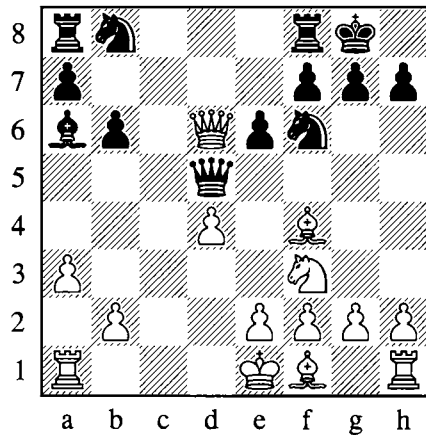
Toothless is: 10.♞c2 ♘bd7 11.♞d1 (the  
over-ambitious 11.e4?! ♙xf1 12.♞xf1 c5  
13.♙d6 ♞e8 14.e5 ♘d5 led White to an inferior  
position in Morozevich – Kramnik, Moscow  
2009) 11...♞c8 12.g3 c5 13.♙g2 ♙b7=  
M. Gurevich – Adams, Khanty-Mansiysk  
2007.

### 10...♞d5

With the c-file open, White's king feels less  
comfortable in the centre.

We will analyse B1) 11.♞d6?! and B2) 11.♞c2.

### B1) 11.♞d6?!



I was quite surprised to discover that this has  
been the most popular choice by far, as it really  
isn't a good move.

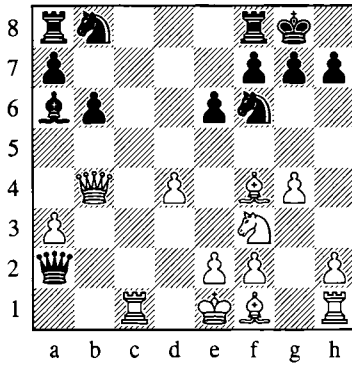
### 11...♞f5! 12.g3

No better is:

12.g4 ♞c2 13.♞c1 ♞xb2 14.♞b4

14.g5 ♘d5 15.♙d2 ♘c6 16.e3 ♙xf1  
17.♞xf1 ♘a5† was unpleasant for White  
in Ki. Georgiev – Illescas Cordoba, Andorra  
2012.

14...♞a2



15. ♖d2N

After 15. ♖d6? ♜d8 the threat of ... ♘d5 forced White into a humiliating bishop retreat in Eames – G. Buckley, Brentwood 2008. The text move is better, but Black still has fine prospects after:

15... ♗xa3 16. ♖g2

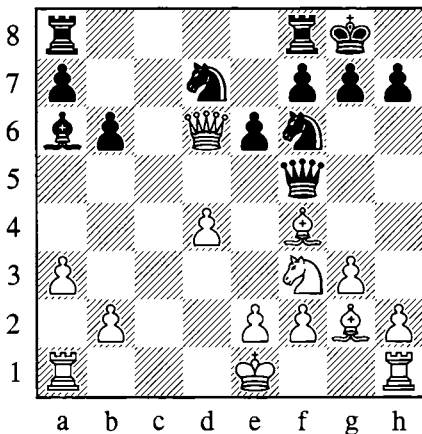
The best White can do is to castle and hope for some long-term compensation for the pawn. Nevertheless, after:

16... ♖b7 17. 0-0 ♖e4 18. ♘e5 ♖xg2 19. ♗xg2 ♘bd7 20. ♘c6 ♜fe8

I still prefer Black; he keeps an extra pawn, and the queenside passed pawns could be huge in a future endgame.

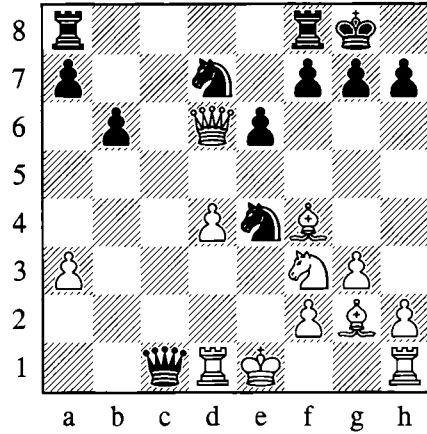
12... ♘bd7 13. ♖g2

We have been following the game Gordievsky – Kachar, Moscow 2012. In this critical position, Black overlooked a powerful sacrificial resource:



13... ♖e2!N 14. ♗xe2 ♗b5† 15. ♗e1 ♗xb2 16. ♜d1 ♘e4 17. ♜d2 ♗c1† 18. ♜d1

Black has a draw in his pocket, but he can aim for more by means of:

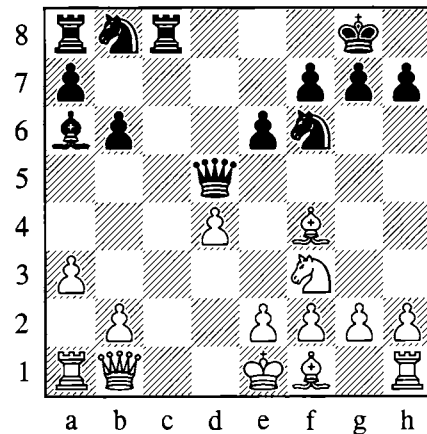


18... ♗c2! 19. ♜d2 ♘xd2 20. ♘xd2 ♜a8 21. ♗b4 ♘f6

Ordinarily two bishops would outgun a rook and two pawns, but Black's superior coordination, king safety and pawn structure swing the balance in his favour.

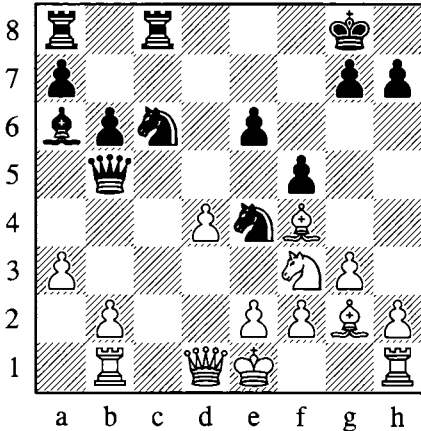
B2) 11. ♗c2 ♜c8 12. ♗b1

12. ♗d1 ♘c6 13. e3 ♖xf1 14. ♗xf1 ♘a5 gave Black a great initiative in Flear – Franco Alonso, San Sebastian 2011.



**12...♘e4!N**

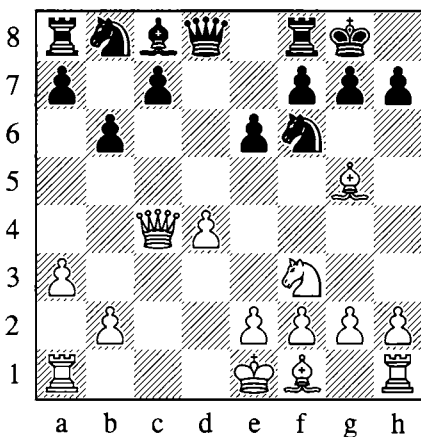
After 12...♘bd7 13.e4 ♖b7 Black had full compensation in Likavsky – Bosiocic, Austria 2009, but I prefer the more aggressive option.

**13.g3 ♘c6 14.♙g2 f5 15.♗d1 ♖b5 16.♞b1****16...♞d8**

Calmly shifting the rook to oppose White's queen, while making room for the other rook to go to c8 at some point. White has nothing better than:

**17.0-0 ♗xe2**

Black is fine; he has restored material equality, and his active pieces are at least as important as White's bishop pair.

**C) 9.♙g5**

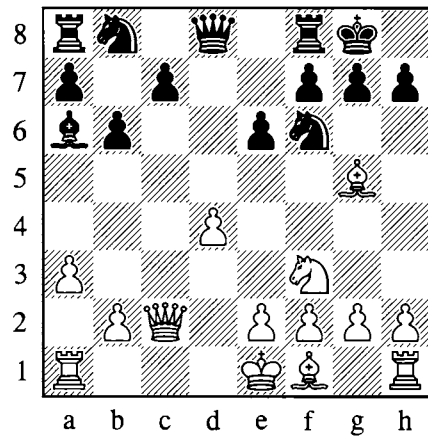
This is the most common and logical continuation – White pins the opponent's knight and starts to fight over the e4-square.

**9...♙a6**

Now White is at a crossroads, with C1) 10.♗c2, C2) 10.♗c3 and C3) 10.♗a4 all requiring attention.

**C1) 10.♗c2**

This is White's second choice in terms of popularity, but it's the easiest move for Black to meet.

**10...h6**

There is nothing wrong with the immediate 10...c5 11.dxc5 bxc5, but I see no drawback in prodding the bishop first.

**11.♙h4**

Completely toothless is:

**11.♙xf6 ♗xf6 12.e3**

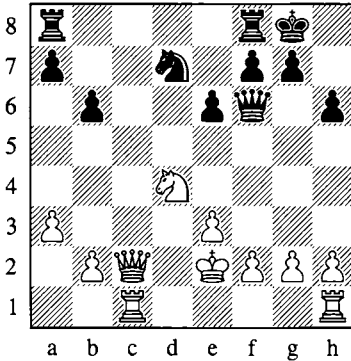
White's position lacks development, so grabbing the pawn with 12.♗xc7? ♞c8 is extremely dangerous: 13.♗e5 ♗g6 14.g3 ♗c2 ♞Uwahodo – Saitou, corr. 2011.

**12...♙xf1 13.♙xf1 c5 14.♙e2 cxd4 15.♘xd4 ♘d7**

Black doesn't face any problems, and may seize the initiative after:

16. ♖ac1?!

16. ♖hc1N e5 17. ♘f3 e4 18. ♗xe4 ♗xb2† = looks like White's best.



16...e5!

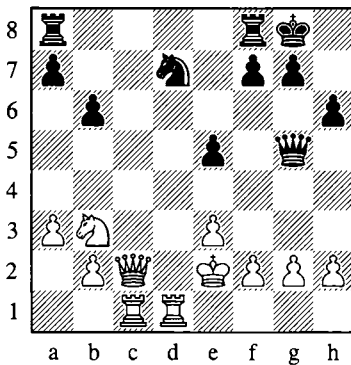
16... ♗g5 was only equal in Ivanchuk – Karjakin, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2011.

17. ♘b3

After 17. ♘f5 ♖ac8 18. ♗xc8 ♖xc8 19. ♖xc8† ♗h7 20. ♘g3 ♘c5† White's king is in danger.

17... ♗g5 18. ♖hd1

In Eichner – Moreira, email 2014, Black could have safely played:



18... ♗xg2!N 19. ♗f5

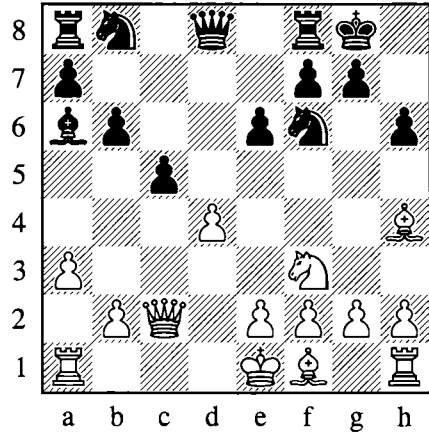
19. ♖xd7?? ♗g4† is the simple tactical point.

19... ♖ad8!

Black wins a pawn for insufficient compensation, as 20. ♖xd7? still loses the exchange after 20...g6.

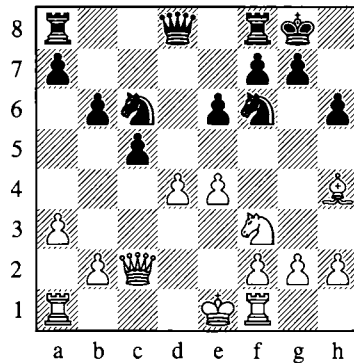
11...c5

Challenging the opponent's centre before he completes development is Black's main objective in this variation. The d4-pawn is under attack, and White can choose between several ways of dealing with it.



12. dxc5

The over-optimistic 12.e4?! ♗xf1 13. ♖xf1, as seen in Morozevich – Topalov, Nice (rapid) 2009, is strongly met by: 13... ♘c6!N



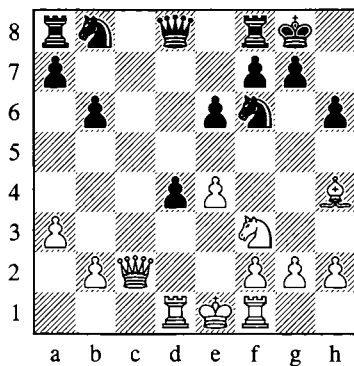
14. dxc5 (14.e5? ♘xd4 15. ♘xd4 ♗xd4+ is one line that illustrates the benefit of including ...h6 and ♗h4) 14...bxc5 15. ♗xc5 ♖c8 The lack of development puts White in a critical situation: 16. ♖d1 ♘xe4 17. ♖xd8 ♘xc5 18. ♖xf8† ♗xf8†

I also considered:

12.♞d1 cxd4 13.e4N

After 13.♟xd4 ♟bd7 14.e3 ♞c8 15.♞b1  
♟xf1 16.♟xf1 ♞c7 White was suffering  
from unconnected rooks in Socko – Azarov,  
Warsaw (rapid) 2013.

13...♟xf1 14.♞xf1

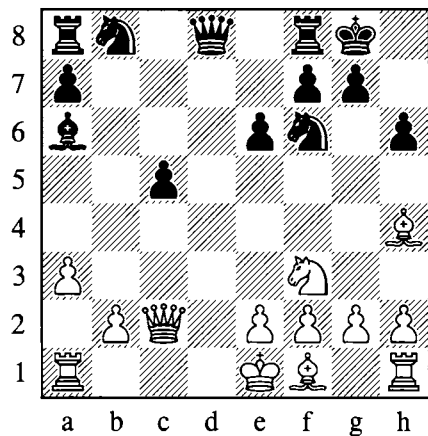


14...♞c8!

14...g5?! 15.♟xg5! hxg5 16.♟xg5 ♟bd7  
17.♞xd4 ♞c8 18.♞d2 offers White  
promising compensation for the piece.

15.♞xc8 ♞xc8 16.♟xf6 gxf6 17.♟xd4 ♟c6=

12...bxc5

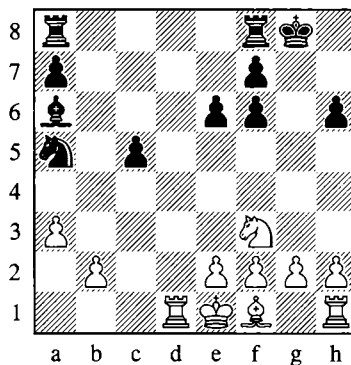


13.e3

Black's development advantage tells also in  
the following examples:

13.♞xc5 ♟bd7 14.♞c6 ♟b6 15.♞d1 ♞c8  
16.♞xd8 ♞xc6 17.♞xf8† ♟xf8† Despite the  
simplifications, White was under strong  
pressure in Zhu Chen – Pelletier, Cap d'Agde  
2010.

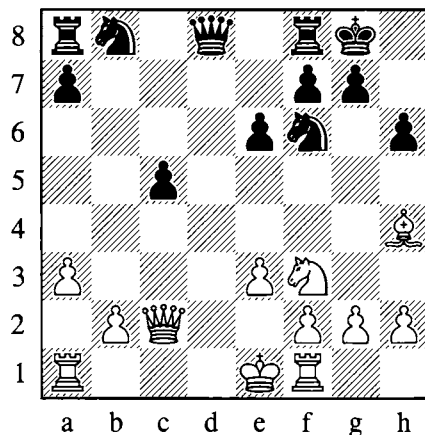
After 13.♞d1 ♞a5† 14.♞d2 ♟c6 15.♟xf6 gxf6  
16.♞xa5 ♟xa5 Black's development  
advantage matters more than his imperfect pawn  
structure:



17.e3 ♟xf1 18.♞xf1 ♞ab8† Laznicka – Hracek,  
Ostrava 2009.

13...♟xf1 14.♞xf1

We have been following the game Ma  
Zhonghan – Morylev, Ningbo 2011. Black  
should have continued:



14...♟bd7!N

With the following idea:

**15.0-0-0 ♖c7 16. ♘b1 ♜ac8**

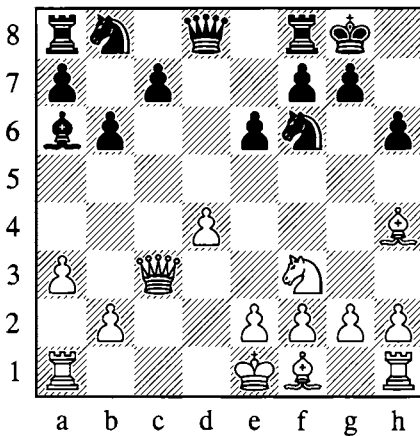
The subsequent advance of the c-pawn will put pressure on White's monarch.

**C2) 10. ♖c3**

This comparatively rare retreat received some attention after being successfully employed by Hikaru Nakamura against one of the great experts in this variation, Vladimir Kramnik.

**10...h6**

We will analyse **C21) 11. ♘h4** followed by the more popular **C22) 11. ♘f6**.

**C21) 11. ♘h4****11... ♖bd7N**

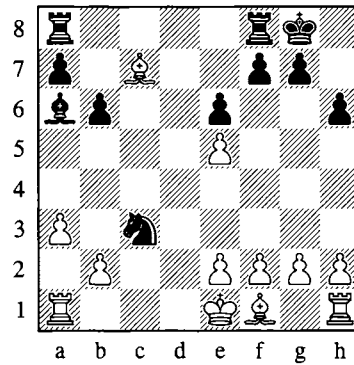
A natural novelty.

The previously played 11...g5 12. ♘g3 ♖e4, from Maiorov – Lekic, Anogia 2013, seems a bit risky in view of 13. ♖e3!N ♖d5 14. h4 ♖xg3 15. fxg3 g4 16. ♖e5 ♖d7 17. ♜d1, when the king on g8 is becoming rather exposed.

**12. ♖c6**

A somewhat artificial attempt to prevent the ...c5 break. However, it looks like the best way of handling the position!

12. ♖e5 ♖xe5! 13. dxe5 ♖e4 gives Black fine prospects after: 14. ♘xd8 ♖xc3 15. ♘xc7



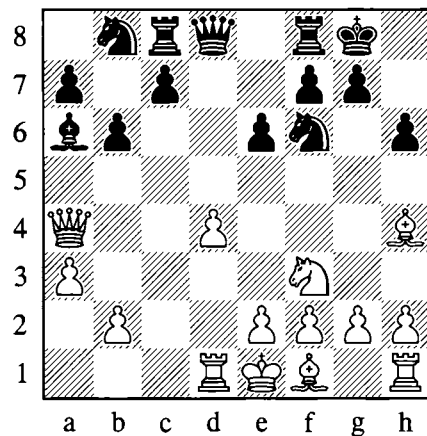
15... ♜fc8! 16. ♘d6 ♖e4 17. f3 ♖xd6 18. exd6 ♜c2 The activity of Black's rook forces White to fight for equality.

**12... ♜c8 13. ♜d1**

Harmless is: 13. ♘xf6 ♖xf6 14. e3 ♘xf1 15. ♘xf1 ♖d5 16. ♖xd5 exd5 17. ♘e2 c5=

**13... ♖b8 14. ♖a4**

After 14. ♖c1 c5 15. dxc5 ♖e7 Black's lead in development is becoming threatening.

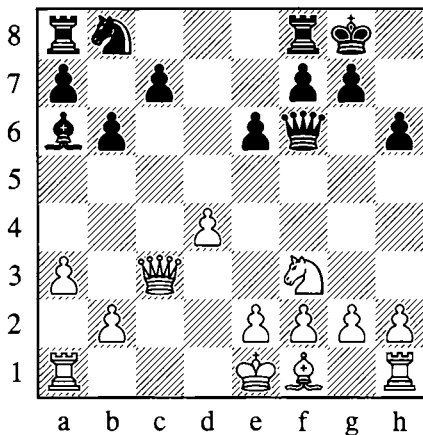
**14... ♖d7**

A typical idea to break free from the unpleasant pin.

**15. ♖xd7 ♖bxd7 16. e3 ♘xf1 17. ♜xf1 c5=**

Black has no problems at all.

## C22) 11.♗xf6 ♖xf6



## 12.g3

This was Nakamura's choice.

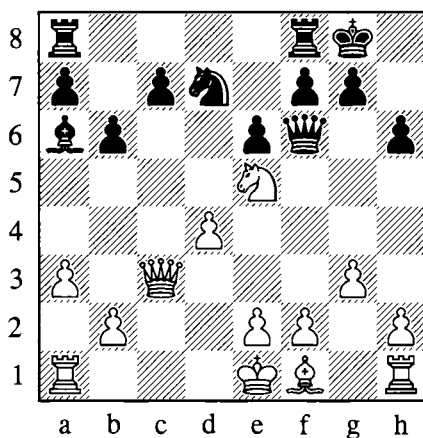
12.♖xc7?! has already been covered under the 11.♗xf6 line in the notes to variation C1.

Also toothless is 12.e3 ♗xf1 13.♖xf1 ♖c8 14.♕e2 c5= as seen in Loeschner – Flitsch, corr. 2010.

## 12...♖d7!

This improves over 12...♗b7, when 13.♗g2 ♖a6 14.0-0 c5 15.♖a1 was better for White in the aforementioned game Nakamura – Kramnik, Antalya 2013.

## 13.♖e5



This position was reached in Le Quang Liem – Aronian, Tromso (ol) 2014. I've managed to find an interesting new way of handling the position:

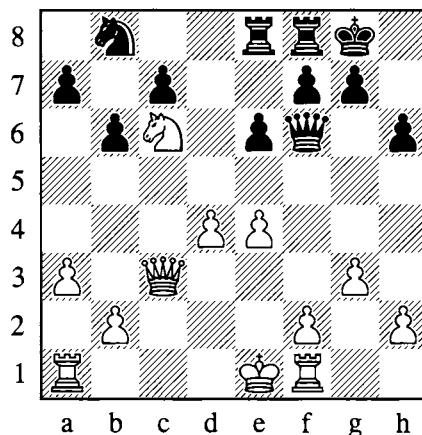
## 13...♖ad8! N 14.♖c6

14.♖xc7?! ♖xe5 15.♖xe5 (the greedy 15.dxe5? ♖g5 16.f4 ♖g6+ puts White in a difficult situation – the extra pawn has little value, as White's king is stuck in the centre) 15...♗b7 16.♖xf6 gxf6 17.f3 ♖xd4 reaches a simplified position where Black is in no danger at all, and it is White who has to be a bit careful to maintain the balance.

## 14...♖de8 15.e4

15.f4?! is an ambitious attempt by White to maintain his space advantage, but after 15...♗b7 16.♗g2 ♖b8 17.0-0 ♖d8! he is unable to stabilize his position.

## 15...♗xf1 16.♖xf1 ♖b8!



## 17.♖xb8

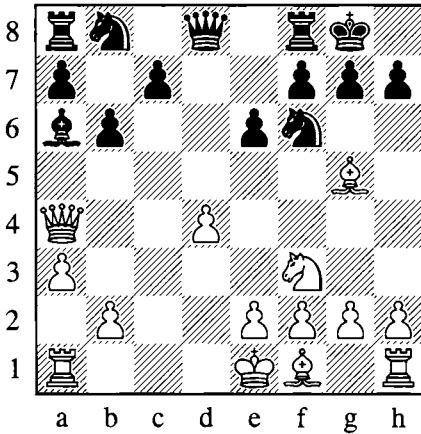
17.♖xa7?! ♖d8 only invites trouble, as White's knight is almost trapped.

17.♖e5 c5 18.f4 cxd4 19.♖xd4 ♖c8= is fine for Black.

17... ♖xb8 18. 0-0 ♜fd8 19. f4 ♜d7 20. ♜d2 ♜bd8=

Black has strong pressure on the d4-pawn, and White's space advantage does not matter much with no minor pieces left on the board.

C3) 10. ♖a4



This is the most common choice by far. The queen is placed quite actively on a4, keeping an eye on the a6-bishop and aiming to transfer to the kingside via the fourth rank. The main drawback of this move is that the b2-pawn is now unprotected.

10...c5

White's two main options are C31) 11. ♜d1 and C32) 11. dxc5.

Black was absolutely fine after 11. e3 ♜xf1 12. ♜xf1 ♜bd7 13. ♜e2 cxd4 14. ♖xd4 ♖c8 in Rychagov – Sargissian, Rethymnon 2010.

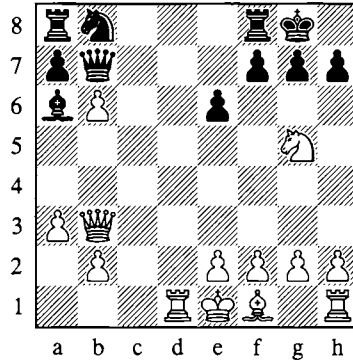
C31) 11. ♜d1 ♖d7 12. ♖c2

The most ambitious try – the queen on d7 is placed somewhat awkwardly, so White doesn't mind wasting another tempo in order to avoid the exchange and slow down the development of Black's queenside pieces.

Harmless is 12. ♖xd7 ♜bxd7 13. e3 ♜xf1 14. ♖xf1 ♜e4 15. dxc5 ♜dxc5 16. ♜e7 ♜fc8 and

White was fighting for equality in Carow – Y. Vovk, Berlin 2015.

12. ♖b3, as played in Bareev – Bu Xiangzhi, Moscow 2010, can be met well by: 12... ♜e4!N 13. dxc5 ♖b7 14. cxb6 ♜xg5 15. ♜xg5

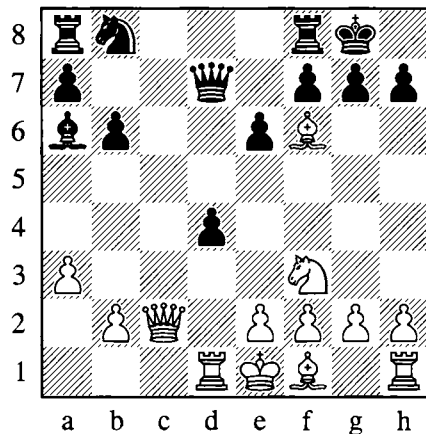


15... ♜d7 16. e3 ♜xf1 17. ♜xf1 ♜fd8 The lack of harmony in White's camp offers Black, at the very least, full compensation for the pawn.

12...cxd4 13. ♜xf6

After 13. ♖xd4 ♖c6 14. ♖xc6 ♜xc6 15. ♜xf6 gxf6 only White may experience problems – there are still a few more moves needed to complete his development.

This position has occurred in several high-level games, such as Khenkin – Bacrot, Geneva 2010. I've managed to find an interesting new idea:



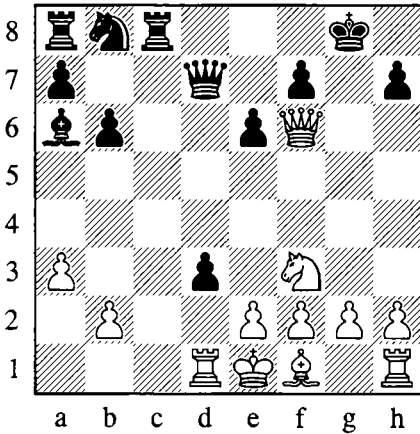
**13...d3!N**

Since the d4-pawn will fall anyway, it makes sense to give it up in a better situation!

**14.♞c3**

14.exd3 gxf6 15.♙e2 ♖g7 16.0-0 ♜c8  
17.♞d2 ♜c6 is at least equal for Black.

**14...♜c8 15.♞d4 gxf6 16.♞xf6**



**16...♞d5! 17.exd3**

17.h4 ♞a5† 18.♜d2 ♜d7 19.♞g5† ♞xg5  
20.hxg5 ♜c2♯

**17...♜d7 18.♞f4**

18.♞g5† ♞xg5 19.♜xg5 ♜c2 20.♞d2 ♜ac8  
also holds no danger for Black.

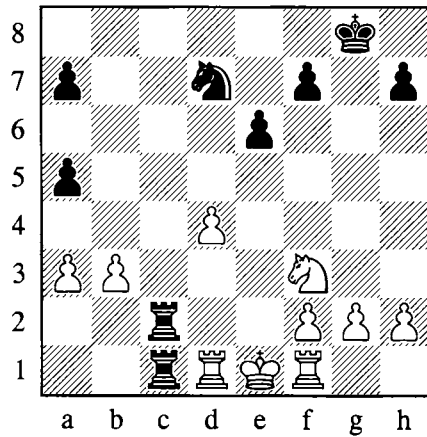
**18...♜c2 19.♞a4 ♞a5† 20.♞xa5 bxa5**

Black has at least enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

**21.♞d2 ♜ac8!?**

If a draw is an acceptable result, then 21...♜c1† 22.♞d1 ♜c2= leaves White with no other option than to take it.

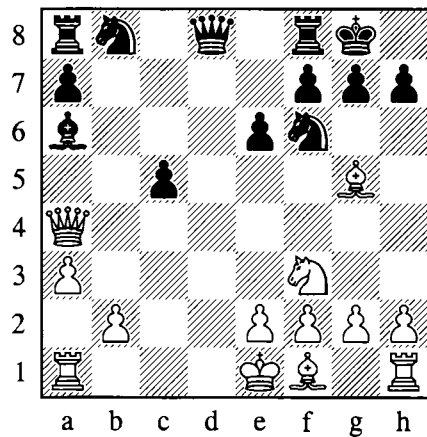
**22.d4 ♜c1† 23.♞d1 ♙xf1 24.♞xf1 ♜8c2 25.b3**



**25...♞d1† 26.♞xd1 ♜a2 27.a4 ♜f6 28.♜d2 ♜d5**

Black has full compensation for the pawn.

**C32) 11.dxc5 bxc5**



Now **C321) 12.h4!?** is a tricky idea, but the two main options are **C322) 12.♞d1** and **C323) 12.♜c1**.

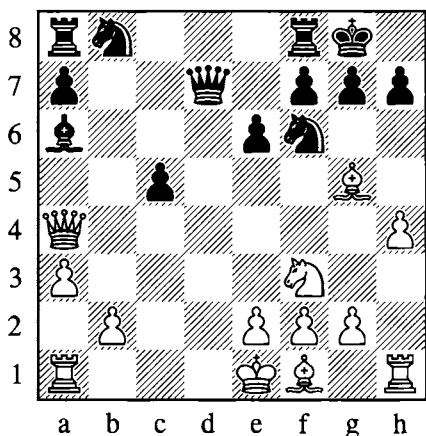
**C321) 12.h4!?**

This tricky move has only been played in a few over-the-board encounters, but it has been more popular among correspondence players, which is quite telling. In any case, it requires careful handling, and I recommend deviating from most of the games by playing:

12... ♖d7!

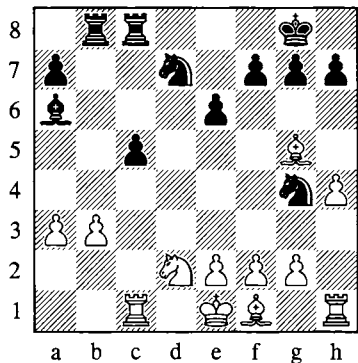
This almost-new move stays true to our general strategy in this variation: Black is ready to give up material in order to maximize his lead in development.

12... ♖b6?! has been Black's usual response, but then 13. ♗xf6 gxf6 14. ♖b1! shows why White was happy to postpone moving his rook. He has saved a tempo for protecting the b2-pawn, and after 14...c4 15. ♘d2 ♗b5 16. ♖c2 ♘c6 17. ♖c3 Black's king was under strong pressure in Krysa – Tristan, Resistance/Saenz Pena 2013.

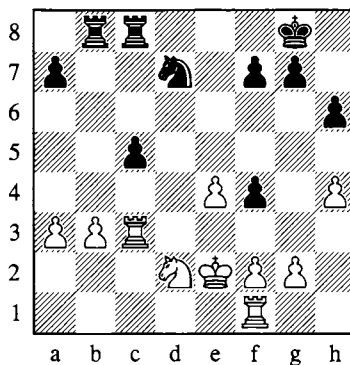


13. ♖c2

After 13. ♖xd7 ♘bxd7 14. ♘d2 ♖ab8 15. b3 ♖fc8 16. ♖c1 ♘g4! Black's lead in development offers good counterplay, for instance:



17.e4 (17.f3 h6 18. ♗f4 e5 19. ♗g3 ♘e3?) 17... ♗xf1 18. ♖xf1 h6 19. ♗f4 e5 20. ♗g3 ♘gf6 21. ♖c3 ♘h5 22. ♗h2 ♘f4 23. ♗xf4 exf4 24. ♗e2



24... ♘f8! 25. ♖fc1 ♘e6= Black is fine, as 26. b4 ♖d8! 27. bxc5 ♖b2 may prove dangerous only for White.

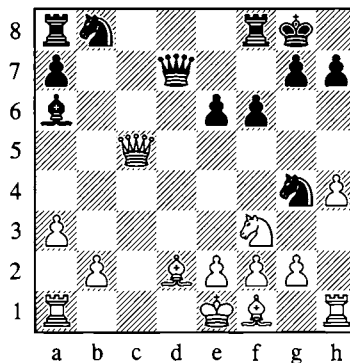
13... ♘g4!

Exploiting the main drawback of 12.h4 – now it's not easy for White to push the annoying knight away.

14. ♖d1

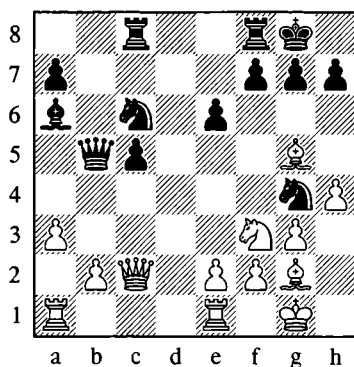
This brought White a victory in a correspondence game. I considered two other moves:

14. ♖xc5N can be met by: 14...f6 15. ♗d2 (15. ♖d1 ♖b7 16. ♗c1 ♘c6 17. ♘d4 ♖ac8 is unclear)



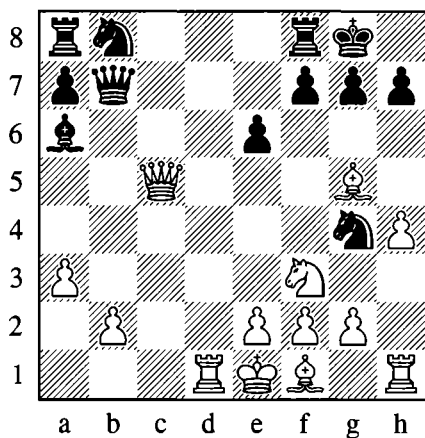
15...♟c6 16.♖c2 ♘ce5 17.♙c3 ♜ac8 18.♞d1 ♖b7 White has parried the immediate threats, but Black maintains long-lasting compensation due to his development advantage and pressure along the a6-f1 diagonal.

14.g3N ♖b5 15.♙g2 (15.♙h3 f5 16.0-0 ♟c6 17.e4 ♜ac8 offers Black excellent piece play) 15...♟c6 16.0-0 ♜ac8 17.♞fe1



17...f5 (17...e5!? 18.♞ac1 h5 could also be considered) 18.♞ac1 h6 19.♙d2 ♞fd8 The activity of Black's pieces fully compensates for the inferior pawn structure.

14...♖b7 15.♖xc5



15...f6!N

After 15...♞c8 16.♖xc8† ♖xc8 17.♞d8† ♖xd8 18.♙xd8± Black was unable to find

full compensation for the pawn in Holroyd – Sadzikowski, corr. 2014.

I briefly considered 15...♟c6 but was not satisfied with Black's chances after 16.♟d4!.

16.♙c1

White might also try:

16.♖d4!? h5

The inclusion of these moves takes the play in a different direction, but not in a bad way for Black.

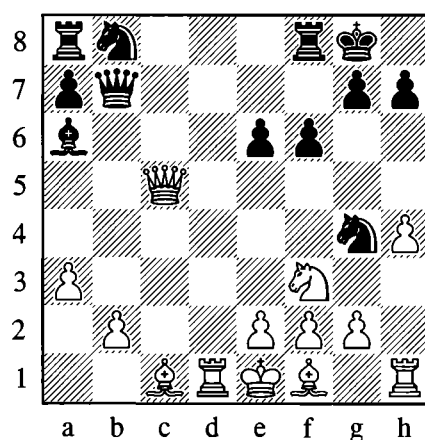
17.♙c1 ♟c6 18.♖d7 ♖b6 19.♖xe6† 19.e3? ♟ce5 20.♟xe5 ♞ad8! 21.♙xa6 fxe5 22.♖xd8 ♞xd8 23.♞xd8† ♖xd8 Material is approximately even, but White is very much on the defensive.

19...♟h8 20.♙e3

20.e3? is nicely refuted by: 20...♞ae8 21.♖d5 ♟xe3! 22.fxe3 ♞xe3† 23.♟d2 ♞d8 24.♖xd8† ♟xd8 25.♙xa6 ♞xf3 26.gxf3 ♖xa6 and White's king is still in trouble.

20...♟xe3 21.♖xe3 ♖xb2

The computer calls it equal, but practically the position is more dangerous for White, as Black has a huge lead in development in return for a mere pawn.

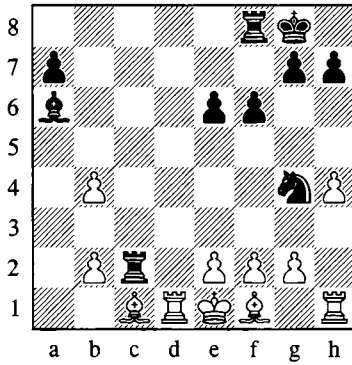


16...♟c6 17.♟d4

Black's enormous lead in development forces White to look for simplifications.

17... ♖xd4!?

Another good option is 17... ♖ac8 18. ♖xc6 ♖xc6 19. ♗b4 ♗xb4† 20. axb4 ♖c2, when best play continues:

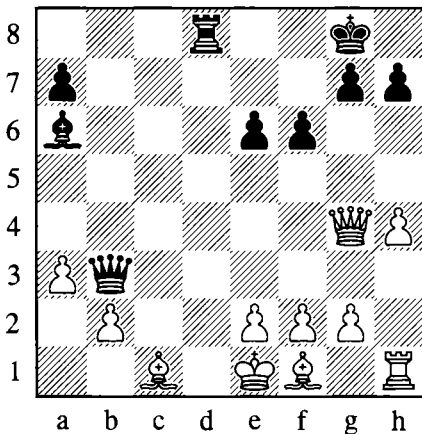


21. ♖h3! ♖fc8 22. ♖c3 ♖8xc3 23. bxc3 ♖h2!=  
White's extra pawn is meaningless.

18. ♗xd4 ♖fd8 19. ♗xg4

19. ♗xd8†? ♖xd8 20. ♖xd8† ♖f7 21. ♖d1 ♗b6 22. e3 ♖xf1 23. ♖xf1 ♗c7 reaches a position where Black's initiative outweighs White's small material advantage – the queen and knight make a perfect team!

19... ♖xd1† 20. ♖xd1 ♗b3† 21. ♖e1 ♖d8

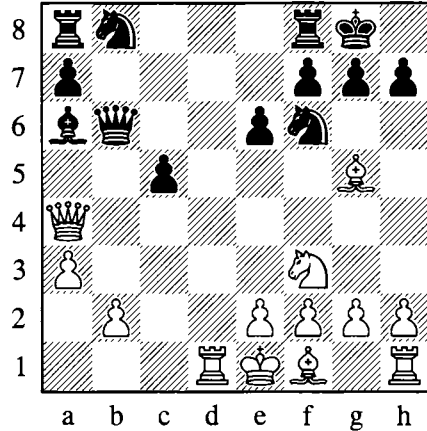


22. ♖d2 ♖xd2 23. ♖xd2 ♗xb2† 24. ♖d1 ♗b1†=

With perpetual checks.

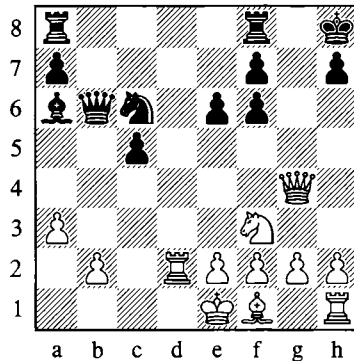
C322) 12. ♖d1 ♗b6

This is the right square for the queen; Black should aim for counterplay rather than worry too much about the ensuing damage to his kingside structure.



13. ♖xf6 gxf6 14. e3!?

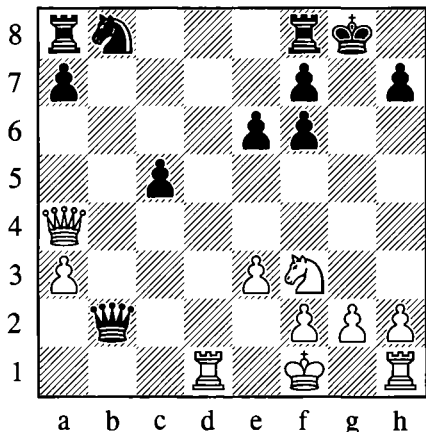
White has also tried: 14. ♖d2 (14. ♗g4† ♖h8 15. ♖d2 ♖c6 leads to the same thing) 14... ♖c6 15. ♗g4† ♖h8



This position has arisen in more than 60 games, all of which ended in a draw! Indeed, the lack of development leaves White with no other choice than to repeat moves: 16. ♗h4 ♖g7 17. ♗g4† ♖h8 18. ♗h4=

14... ♖xf1 15. ♖xf1 ♗xb2!

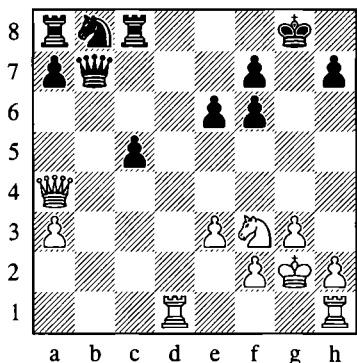
15... ♖c6 has been the usual choice, but I see no reason to deviate from the more principled option of grabbing the pawn.



**16.h4!?N**

This seems to me to be the most natural attempt to develop the initiative.

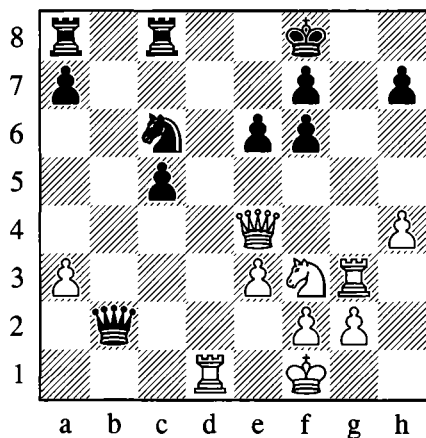
The quiet 16.g3 ♖b7 17.♔g2 ♜c8 offers no advantage, for instance:



18.♞d6N (18.♞d3 ♖c6= Pavlicek – Crapulli, Internet 2014) 18... ♖c6 19.♞g4† ♔f8 20.♞f4 ♔g7=

**16... ♜c8 17.♞h3 ♖c6 18.♞g3† ♔f8 19.♞e4**

It looks like White has succeeded in bringing all his pieces into the attack, but Black's defensive resources prove fully adequate after:



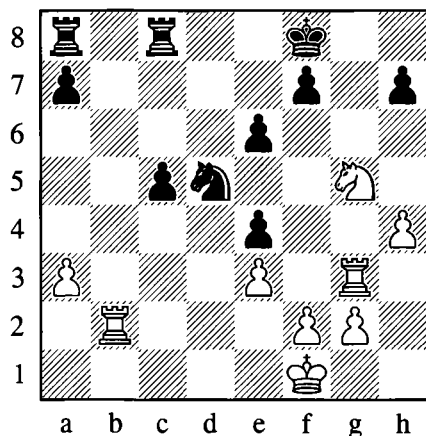
**19... ♖e7! 20.♞b1**

20.♞xh7? backfires after 20... ♖f5 21.♞g8† ♔e7 22.♞xc8 ♞xc8 23.e4 ♜c2 24.♞e1 ♖d4† when White's queen is completely out of play.

**20... f5!?**

20... ♞xa3 21.♞xh7 ♜a6† 22.♔g1 ♖f5 23.e4 ♖xg3 24.fxg3 also offers White no more than equality.

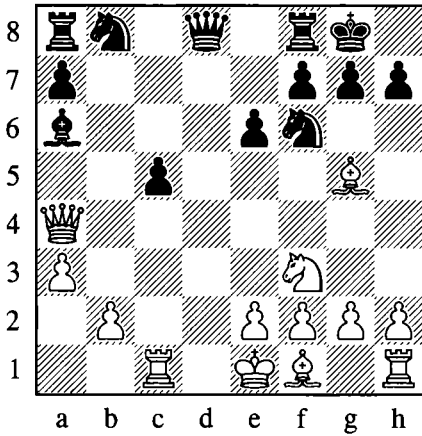
**21.♞xb2 fxe4 22.♖g5 ♖d5**



23.♞b7 ♞c7 24.♞xc7 ♖xc7 25.♖xe4 c4 26.♖c3 ♖e8 27.♞g5 f5=

The strong passed c4-pawn should secure Black an easy draw.

C323) 12. ♖c1



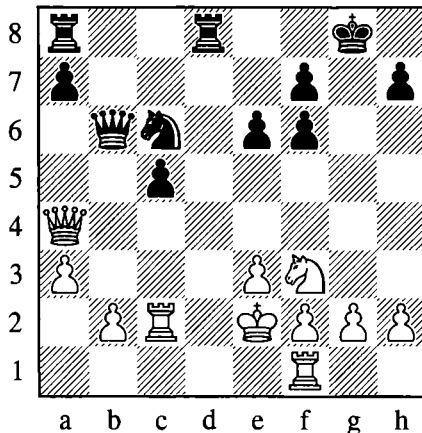
The main idea behind this move is not to attack the isolated c5-pawn, but to prepare a safe way of protecting the b2-pawn.

12... ♗b6 13. ♘xf6 ♗xf6 14. ♖c2 ♖d8

Since the rook is not on d1, it makes sense to take control of the only open file.

15. e3 ♘xf1 16. ♖xf1 ♖c6 17. ♔e2

Even though White's king is in the centre, Black still needs to take care to avoid falling into a passive position where he is stuck defending the c5-pawn.



17... ♖a5 18. ♖d2

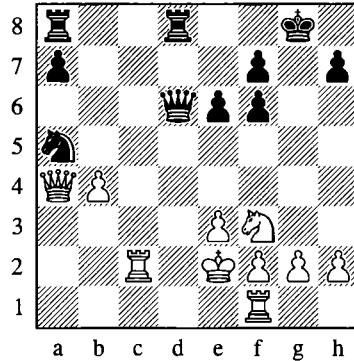
White has also tried:

18. b4 cxb4 19. axb4

White has swapped off the weak c-pawn in an attempt to create concrete problems, but Black is fine after:

19... ♗d6!

But not 19... ♖b7?? 20. ♖c6+— and the queen is trapped.

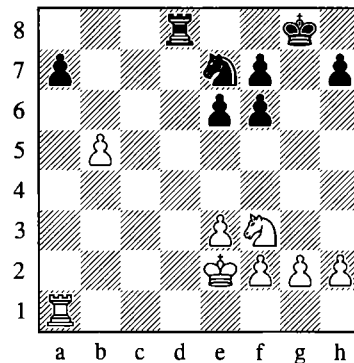


20. ♖d2

20. ♖c3 ♖c4 21. ♖d1 ♗xd1† 22. ♗xd1 ♖xd1 23. ♔xd1 ♖d6 24. ♖d4 ♖b8= also leads nowhere for White.

20... ♗c6! 21. ♗xc6 ♖xc6 22. b5 ♖e7 23. ♖xd8† ♖xd8 24. ♖a1

Now in Dreev – Bacrot, Mulhouse 2011, Black's most accurate continuation would have been:



24... ♖b8!N

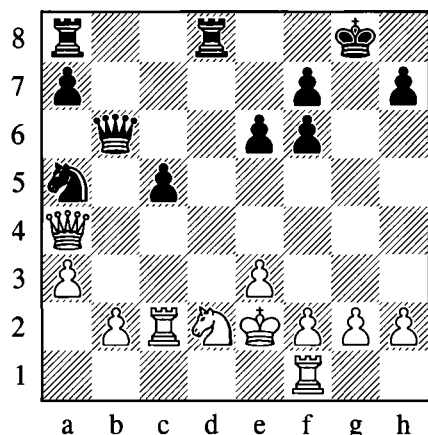
24... ♖c8!N, followed by ... ♖d5 and ... ♖d6, achieves the same purpose.

25.♞xa7

25.♘d4 ♘c8 26.♞a5 ♘d6= does not change anything; Black can follow up with ...♞b7 and ...e5 if needed.

25...♘d5=

Liquidating the last queenside pawn.



18...♞d5!N

This seems like the perfect place for the rook, as it covers both the c5-pawn and the kingside while vacating the d8-square for the other rook.

After 18...♞ab8 19.♞fc1 ♞xd2† 20.♞xd2 ♘b3 21.♞cd1 ♘xd2 22.♞xd2 White kept a small edge in Ivanchuk – Duda, Tromso 2013, although Black remains well within the drawing margin and he held it without too many problems.

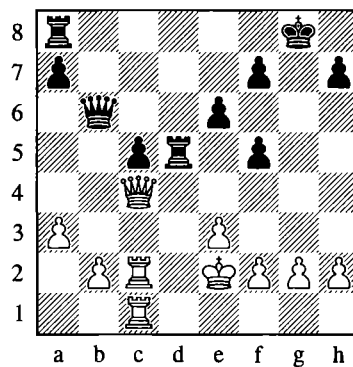
19.♞fc1 f5

Restricting the mobility of White's knight.

20.b4!?

White has to try this if he is to make any headway.

Exchanging the knights cannot bother Black here: 20.♘c4 ♘xc4 21.♞xc4



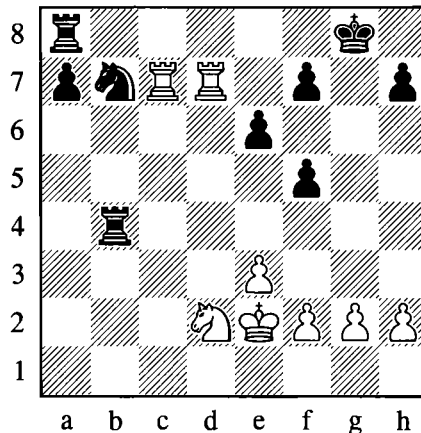
21...h6! Covering the g5-square, so the king will feel much safer. 22.h3 ♞ad8 23.♙f1 ♞b8=

20...cxb4 21.axb4 ♘b7 22.♞c7

22.♞c8† ♞xc8 23.♞xc8† ♙g7 24.♞a1+ e5= is no problem for Black.

22...♞b5† 23.♞xb5 ♞xb5 24.♞d7 ♞xb4 25.♞cc7

The last try – White manages to get full control over the seventh rank, but it doesn't bother Black:



25...♘d8 26.♘c4 a5 27.♘xa5 ♞xa5 28.♞xd8† ♙g7 29.♞dd7 ♞a2† 30.♙f3 ♞bb2 31.♞xf7† ♙g6=

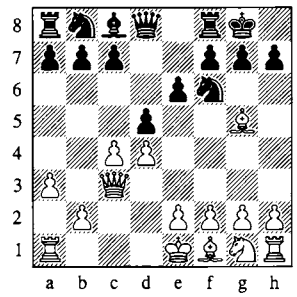
Black is obviously out of danger.

### Conclusion

7. ♘f3 dxc4 8. ♗xc4 b6 is undoubtedly one of the most topical and complex variations in the Classical System. As usual, Black is aiming to attack the opponent's centre as soon as possible, making use of his lead in development. The line which best illustrates this advantage is 9. ♘f4 ♗a6! 10. ♗xc7 ♖d5, when 11. ♗c2 may be White's only way to avoid being worse. 9. ♘g5 makes Black's task tougher, but 9... ♗a6 followed by a quick ...c5 offers Black good counterplay. There are a few critical lines where White has the bishop pair and/or a better pawn structure, but Black always gets enough play with his active pieces and pressure against the b2-pawn.

# Chapter 20

## 4. ♔c2



## 7. ♖g5

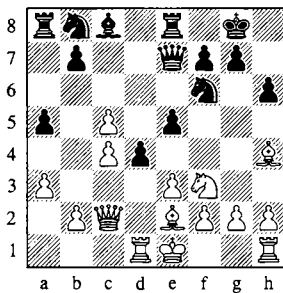
### Variation Index

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♙b4 4. ♔c2 d5 5. a3 ♙xc3† 6. ♔xc3 0-0 7. ♖g5

7...h6

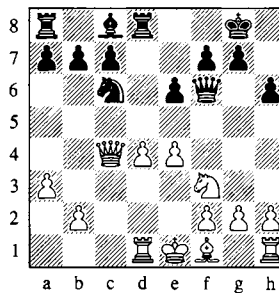
A) 8. ♙h4 c5! 9. dxc5 d4	298
A1) 10. ♔g3	299
A2) 10. ♔c2	299
B) 8. ♙xf6 ♗xf6	302
B1) 9. ♘f3	302
B2) 9. cxd5 exd5 10. e3 ♙f5	305
B21) 11. ♘f3	305
B22) 11. ♘e2 ♘d7	306
B221) 12. ♘g3	306
B222) 12. ♘f4	308

A2) after 14. ♘f3



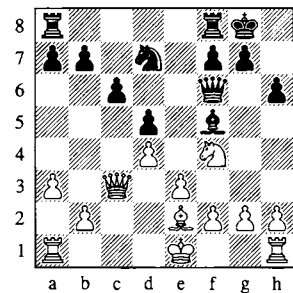
14...d3!N

B1) note to 11. ♔c3!?



12...e5!N

B222) after 13. ♙e2



13...a5!N

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♖c2 d5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.♗xc3 0-0 7.♗g5

What could be more natural than pinning the f6-knight? It is certainly an annoying motif for Black to deal with, especially when his own dark-squared bishop has left the board.

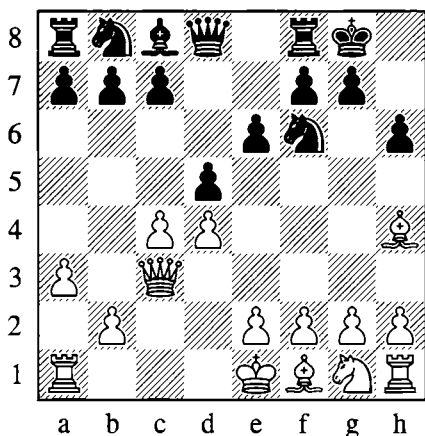
Interestingly, in his 2007 book *Challenging the Nimzo-Indian*, IM Vigorito only considers 6...0-0 in an extremely brief note, mentioning that 7.♗g5 ♘bd7 8.e3 gives White a good version of a Queen's Gambit Declined. I would rather put the question to the bishop immediately with:

7...h6

I was quite surprised to discover that this natural move is only Black's fourth most popular choice according to the database.

White may react with A) 8.♗h4 or B) 8.♗xf6.

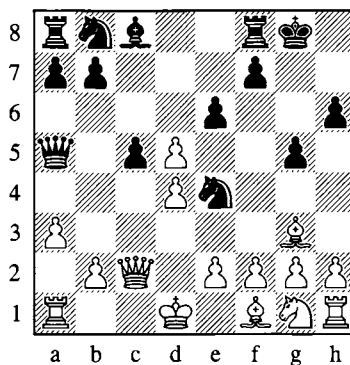
A) 8.♗h4



Now Black has a choice between several attractive possibilities, but I prefer the following aggressive concept:

8...c5! 9.dxc5

9.cxd5?, as played in Kadimova – Pecorelli Garcia, Port of Spain 2009, can lead to fatal consequences after: 9...g5!N 10.♗g3 ♘e4 11.♖c2 ♗a5† 12.♔d1



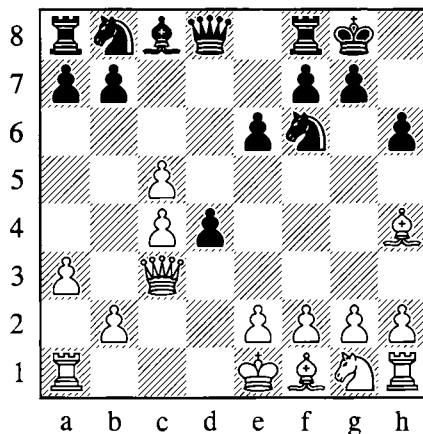
12...♗d7! With a decisive attack – a pleasing finish would be 13.♖xe4? ♗a4† 14.♔c1 ♗e1 mate! Quite an amusing final position, with most of White's pieces still on their original squares!

9...d4

Black has an improved version of two better-known theoretical lines:

7...c5 8.dxc5 d4 has occurred in quite a lot of games. In our version, the insertion of the moves ...h6 and ♗h4 benefits Black, for two reasons: the bishop on h4 is cut off from the centre and queenside, and Black has the extra option of throwing in ...g5 if needed.

6...c5 7.dxc5 d4 is a famous gambit. The critical reply is 8.♗g3, with counter-chances on the kingside. Here the queen move is less troublesome as the g7-pawn is not en prise.



White is at a crossroads, with A1) 10.♙g3 and A2) 10.♙c2 being the two most logical options.

### A1) 10.♙g3 ♖c6N

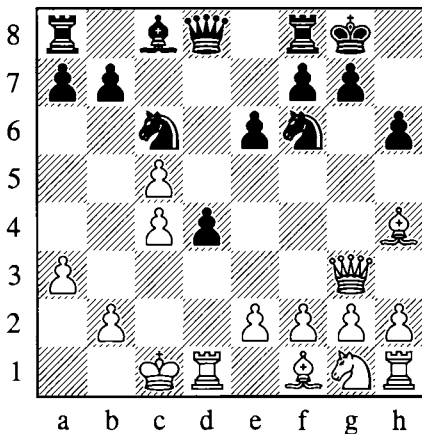
10...♗bd7?! led to success for Black in Schwenk – Kermer, corr. 2007. This could certainly be investigated in more detail, but I prefer the more active development of the knight on c6.

#### 11.0–0–0

There are no adequate alternatives:

11.♗f3? ♙a5† 12.♗d2 ♗e4† puts White in serious trouble.

11.b4?! e5 12.♗f3 ♖e8 is also excellent for Black.



#### 11...g5!

The threat of 12...♗e4 is hard to meet, so White's next move is forced.

12.♙xg5 hxg5 13.♙xg5† ♖h8 14.♗f3 ♗h7 15.♙h5 ♙f6

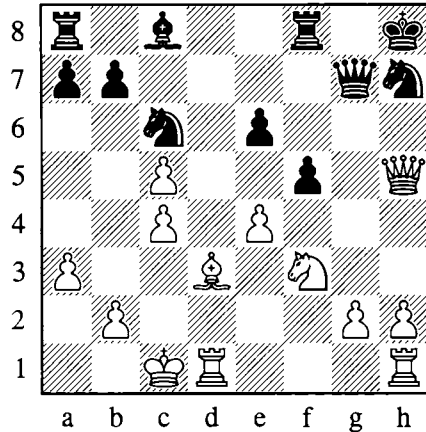
White has three pawns for the piece, but Black should be doing well as long as he takes care over the next few moves.

16.e3 dxe3 17.♙d3 ♙g7 18.fxe3 f5!

I prefer Black in this wild-looking position: his king is reasonably safe, while White's pawns might fall in the long run. For instance:

#### 19.e4

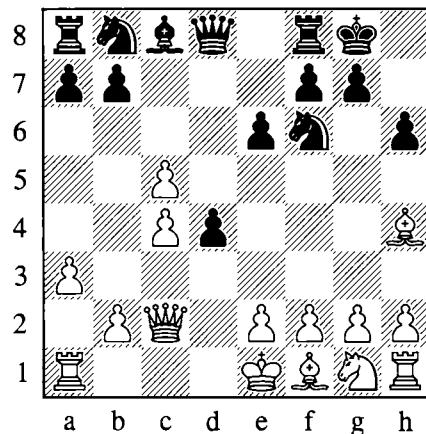
19.♙hg1 ♙g4 20.♙h6 e5 21.h3 ♙g7† also favours Black.



19...♙f6 20.exf5 exf5 21.♗h4 ♙g4 22.♙xg4 fxg4 23.♙e4 ♙e6†

Black is out of danger, and the only real question is whether or not White will be able to salvage a draw in the endgame.

### A2) 10.♙c2



This retreat looks more modest, but the queen can be used for defensive tasks.

**10...e5**

Black's compensation is based on a clear development advantage and superiority in the centre.

**11.e3**

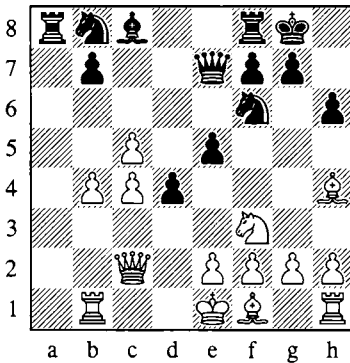
No better is:

11. ♖f3 ♜e7 12.b4

After 12.0-0-0N ♖bd7♞ Black is ready to take on c5, unless White tries 13.b4 a5, which looks more than a little risky for him. 12.e3N dxe3 13.fxe3 ♜xc5 offers Black excellent chances due to White's damaged pawn structure.

12...a5 13.♞b1 axb4 14.axb4

We have been following the game Volkov – Satyapragyan, Livigno 2012. I suggest the following natural innovation:



14...♖c6N 15.e4 dxe3 16.fxe3 g5 17.♙f2 ♖g4♠

White's extra pawn has little value while his king is stuck in the centre.

The text move transposes to a theoretical position which usually arises via the 7...c5 move order, as referred to in the note to move 9.

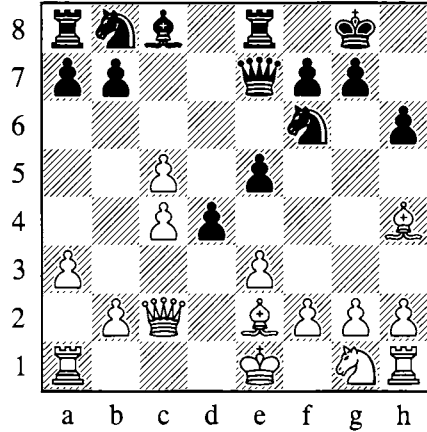
**11...♜e7 12.♙e2**

12.♙xf6 ♜xf6 13.♖f3 ♖d7 14.b4 a5 is dangerous for White, since the king is trapped in the centre.

12.exd4 exd4♠ 13.♙e2 occurred in Krush – Azarov, Baku 2013, and here Black missed a chance to take the initiative by means of 13...♜e8!N 14.0-0-0 ♖bd7.

**12...♜e8!**

This move looks a bit mysterious, but there is a concrete idea behind it: supporting the ...e5-e4 advance to prevent White from developing the knight.



**13.♙d1**

I also examined:

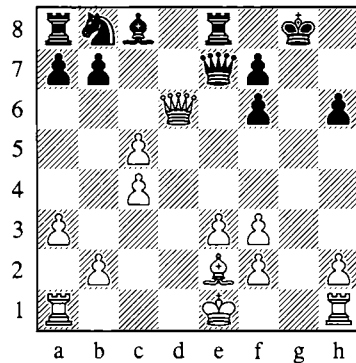
13.♖f3N d3!

13...♖c6 14.0-0-0 g5 15.♙g3 dxe3 16.fxe3 ♖g4 17.♜c3 ♜xc5 18.♙d2 ♙e6 is playable, but the text move is stronger.

14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.♜xd3 e4 16.♜d6

16.♜c3 exf3 17.gxf3 ♜e5♞ gives White nothing.

16...exf3 17.gxf3



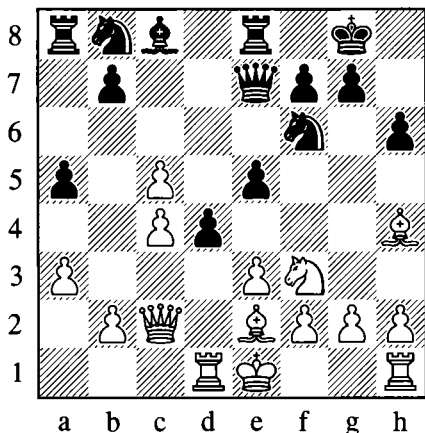
White has three pawns for the piece, but it's not enough after:

17...♙xd6 18.cxd6 a5! 19.0–0–0 ♔e6  
20.♞hg1† ♕h7

Black's king is safe and he has a solid blockade of the pawns.

### 13...a5 14.♖f3

This position occurred in the top-level encounter Nepomniachtchi – Karjakin, Moscow 2011. I believe Black should have gone for the same plan as in the above note:



### 14...d3!N

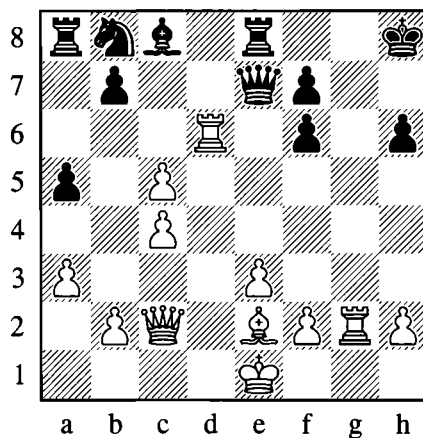
GM Krasenkow evaluates this as risky in his annotations, but I believe it yields Black some advantage.

### 15.♞xd3 e4 16.♞d6 exf3 17.♙xf6

17.gxf3?! ♔e6 18.♞g1 ♖bd7 doesn't yield White much for the piece.

### 17...fxg2 18.♞g1 gxf6 19.♞xg2† ♕h8

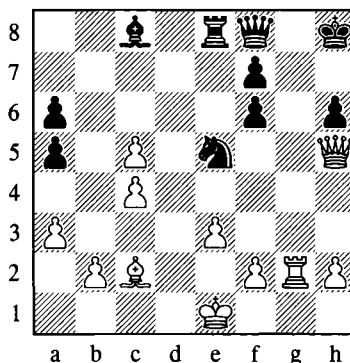
At first glance, this position looks scary for Black – the king is exposed, while almost all of White's pieces are taking part in the attack. However, it turns out that White's attacking potential is limited, so Black should be able to parry the threats and keep the extra piece.



### 20.♞d3

After 20.♞c3 ♞a6! 21.♞d5 ♞g8 22.♞xg8† ♕xg8 White does not have enough compensation for the material deficit.

20.♞d1 is given by Krasenkow, but Black is doing well after: 20...♖c6 21.♙d3 ♖e5 22.♙c2 ♞a6 23.♞h5 ♞f8 24.♞xa6 bxa6



25.♞g3 f5 26.♙xf5 ♙xf5 27.♞xf5 ♞e6 The attack has faded, leaving Black with some winning chances.

### 20...♞a6!

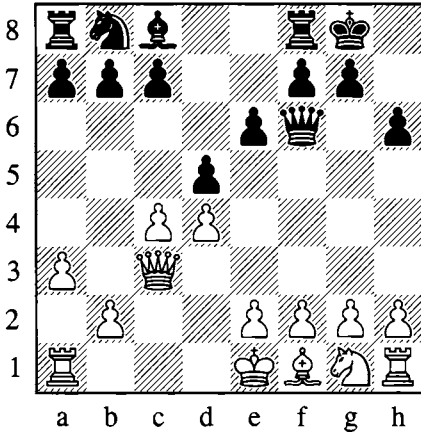
A key defensive resource, preparing to exchange the opponent's most active piece.

21.♞d5 ♞xd6 22.cxd6 ♞e6 23.♞xa5  
23.♞h5 f5

23... ♖xd6 24. ♖h5 ♖f8

White has had his fun, and now it's Black's turn to press with the extra material.

B) 8. ♗xf6 ♖xf6



This leads to a different type of game, with White aiming for positional pressure. However, compared to a normal Queen's Gambit Declined, the removal of two minor pieces on each side makes it easier for Black to organize his pieces.

We will consider B1) 9. ♖f3 and B2) 9. cxd5.

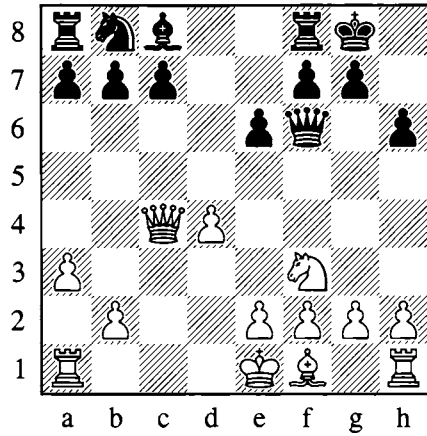
9. e3 is harmless in view of 9...c5 10. ♖f3 dxc4 11. ♗xc4 ♖c6, with easy equality.

B1) 9. ♖f3 dxc4

In comparison to the above-mentioned line, 9...c5?! is less effective now and leads to an inferior position with an isolated pawn after: 10. cxd5 cxd4 11. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 12. ♖xd4 exd5 13. e3±

10. ♖xc4

10. e3?! b5 11. ♖c4 c6 12. ♗e2 ♗b7 13. 0-0 ♖e7 leaves White with insufficient compensation for the pawn.



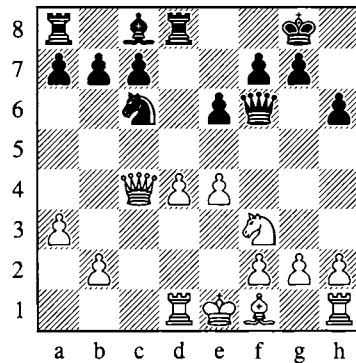
10... ♖c6

Black is preparing ...e5, hoping to open the position and make use of the lead in development.

11. ♖c3!?

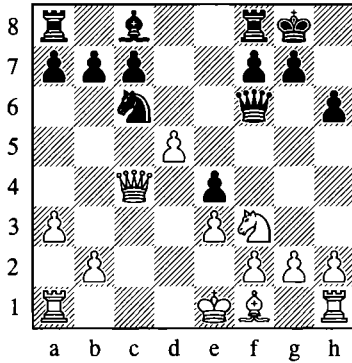
Two other possibilities have been checked in practice:

After 11. e4?! White's pieces are not ready to support the centre, so this pseudo-active move only invites trouble. 11...♗d8 12. ♗d1 Now in Galojan – Franciskovic, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010, Black should have played:

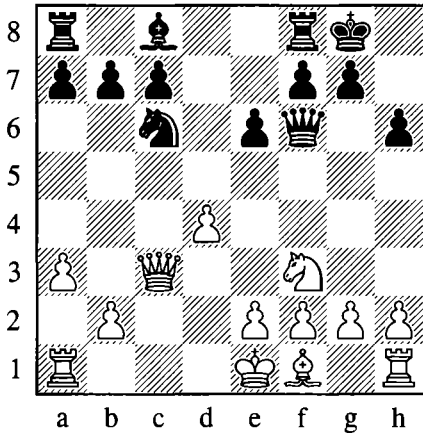


12...e5!N 13. d5 ♗g4! 14. ♗d3 ♖e7 15. ♖xc7 ♖g6 The open c-file and development advantage offer Black more than enough compensation for the pawn.

11.e3 e5 12.d5 e4! is an important little detail:



13.♖d2?! (White should have settled for 13.♙xe4 ♜xb2 14.♞d1 ♛c3† 15.♞d2=) 13...♗e7 14.♗xe4 ♜xb2 Black was already better in Niederwieser – Neubauer, Linz 2011.



11...♞e8!

Supporting the ...e6-e5 advance is a crucial measure.

12.♞d1

In my opinion this is White's most flexible way of handling the position.

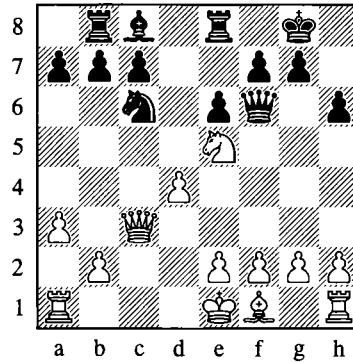
12.e3 e5 is harmless, and if 13.d5?! then 13...♗d4! 14.♗d2 ♙f5 15.♙d3 ♜g6 yields Black a powerful initiative.

I also examined another principled reaction:

12.♗e5!? ♞b8!

The most precise.

12...♗xe5 13.dxe5 ♛e7 14.g3 b6 15.♙g2 ♞b8 16.♙c6 ♙d7 17.♞c1± leaves Black in a somewhat passive position.

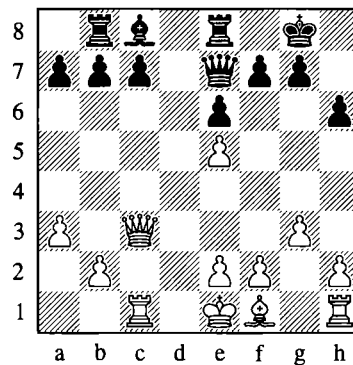


13.♞c1

13.♗xc6?! bxc6 leaves White with undeveloped pieces.

13.e3 ♗xe5 14.dxe5 ♛e7 15.♞c1 ♙d7 16.♙e2 ♙c6 17.0-0 ♞ed8 18.b4 ♞bc8 19.b5 ♙d5 20.f3 b6 21.e4 ♙b7 is equal.

13...♗xe5 14.dxe5 ♛e7 15.g3



15...b6! 16.♙xc7 ♛xc7 17.♞xc7 ♙b7 18.f3 ♞ec8 19.♞xc8† ♞xc8

White has no good way to avoid a draw by perpetual:  
20.♗d2 ♞d8† 21.♗c3 ♞c8†=

12...e5 13.d5 ♗b8 14.e3!?!N

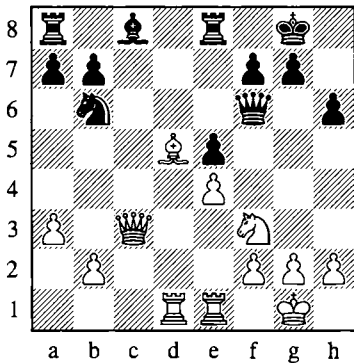
This seems like a logical attempt to improve White's play – this way he keeps the d4-square under control, and places the central pawn on the opposite-coloured square to his bishop.

Too risky is 14. ♖xc7?! ♘a6 15. ♖c3 ♙f5, giving Black the initiative.

A correspondence game saw:

14.e4 c6 15. ♙c4 cxd5 16. ♙xd5 ♘d7 17.0–0 ♘b6 18. ♙fe1

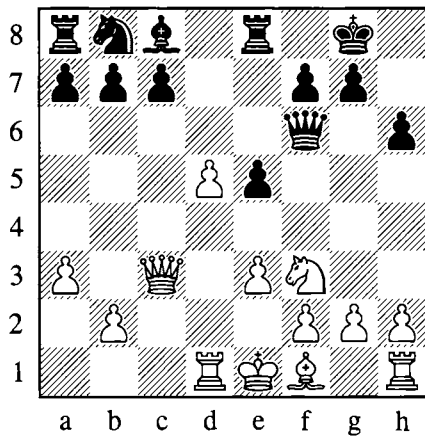
18.h3N ♘xd5 19. ♙xd5 (19.exd5 ♙d7 20. ♙fe1 ♙ac8 is also fine for Black) 19... ♙e6 20. ♙xe5 ♙ac8 offers Black full compensation for the pawn.



18... ♙g4 19. ♙xb7 ♙ab8 20. ♙d5 ♙xf3 21. ♖xf3

A draw was agreed in Galanov – Lennartz, email 2013, in view of:

21... ♖xf3 22.gxf3 ♘xd5 23. ♙xd5 ♙xb2= With an obviously equal endgame.



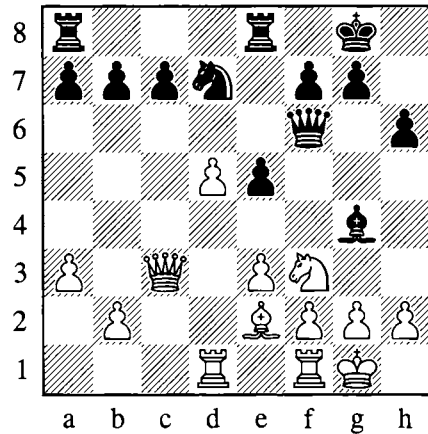
**14... ♙g4!**

After 14...c6 15. ♙e2 cxd5 16. ♙xd5 ♘c6 17.0–0 ♙e6 18. ♙c5 White's play seems somewhat easier, even though it's still close to equal.

The text move seems like a better way to solve the problem of development and connect the rooks as soon as possible.

**15. ♙e2 ♘d7 16.0–0**

The greedy 16. ♖xc7? can be refuted by 16... ♙ac8 17. ♖xb7 e4 18. ♘d4 ♘c5 19. ♖xa7 ♙xe2 20. ♖xe2 ♘d3 ♚.



**16... ♖b6!**

Protecting the c7-pawn and freeing the f6-square for the knight.

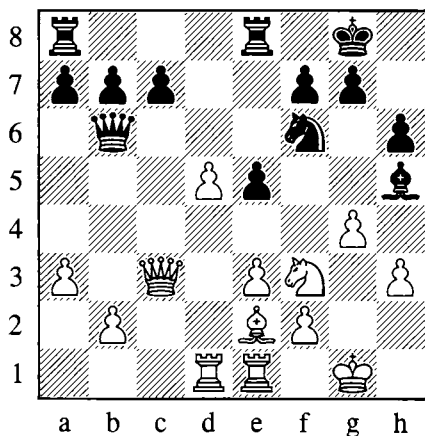
I also examined 16... ♙xf3 17. ♙xf3 e4, but I didn't like 18. ♖xc7 exf3 19. ♖xd7 fxg2 20. ♙fe1! (20. ♖xg2? ♙e5 yields Black a powerful attack) 20... ♖xb2 21. ♖a4. The resulting position might be acceptable for Black, but the strong passed d-pawn makes White's position very safe.

**17.h3 ♙h5**

Less precise is: 17... ♙xf3 18. ♙xf3 e4 19. ♙e2 ♘f6 20. ♙d4±

**18.♞f1 ♘f6 19.g4**

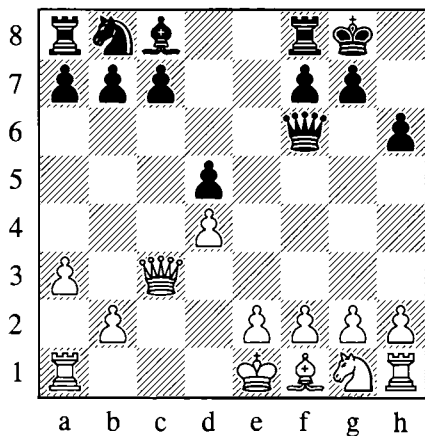
19.♘xe5?! would be a mistake due to 19...♙xe2 20.♞xe2 ♘e4 21.♙d4 ♚xd4 22.exd4 ♘f6 and White will suffer from the isolated pawn.

**19...♘e4!**

The knight is heading to its ideal spot on d6.

**20.♙b4 ♚xb4 21.axb4 ♙g6 22.♞c1 ♞e7**

Black has comfortable play.

**B2) 9.cxd5 exd5****10.e3**

10.♘f3 ♙f5 11.e3 transposes to variation B21 below.

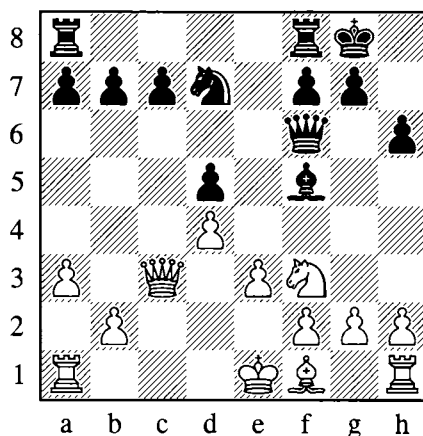
The text move leads to a well-known theoretical position that most commonly arises after 4...d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♙g5 h6 7.♙xf6 ♙xf6 8.e3 0-0.

**10...♙f5**

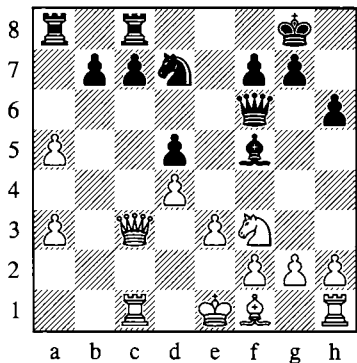
From White's perspective, the drawback of the early exchange on d5 is that our bishop can quickly develop to an active square.

White may develop with **B21) 11.♘f3** or **B22) 11.♘e2**.

11.♙xc7?! is too risky; in Meenakshi – Ramaswamy, Calicut 2003, Black should have responded with 11...♞c8!N 12.♙e5 ♙xe5 13.dxe5 ♞c2 14.b4 a5 15.b5 ♘d7, with some initiative.

**B21) 11.♘f3 ♘d7****12.♙e2**

Delaying development by means of 12.♞c1 ♞fc8 13.b4?! cannot be recommended. The following game is an excellent demonstration of Black's chances: 13...a5! 14.bxa5?! (14.♙d3 is not an attractive alternative in view of 14...♙xd3 15.♙xd3 c6 16.0-0 b5! followed by transferring the knight to c4. Still, it was the lesser evil!)



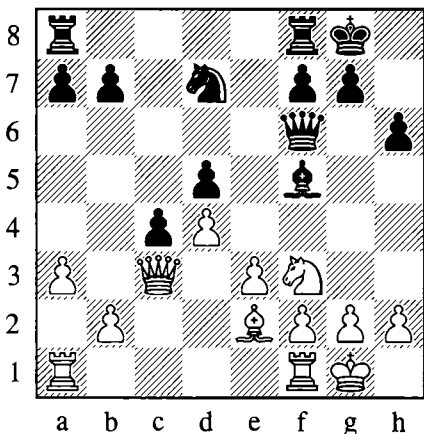
14...c5! 15. ♗b5 cxd4 16. ♖xc8† ♗xc8 17. ♗xc8† ♗f8 18. ♗e8 dxe3 19. 0-0 exf2† 20. ♗xf2 ♖a1† 21. ♗f1 ♖xa3† Nogueiras Santiago – A. Sokolov, Leningrad 1987.

**12...c5 13.0-0**

After 13.dxc5 ♖xc3† 14.bxc3 ♗xc5= White was obviously unable to claim any advantage in Markos – Lupulescu, Germany 2011.

**13...c4!?**

I like this ambitious way of handling the position.



**14.a4**

14.b3?! b5 15.a4?! does not help White at all after 15...b4! 16. ♖xb4 ♗ab8†.

**14...a6 15.a5**

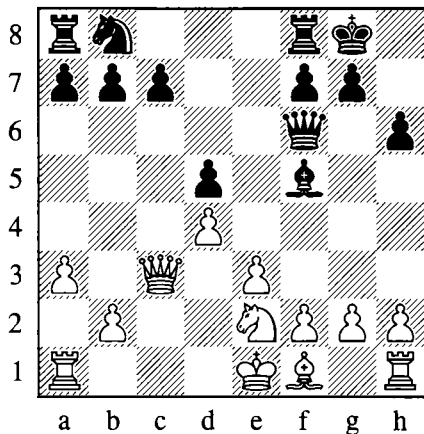
15. ♗e5 b5 16.axb5 axb5 17. ♗xd7 (17. ♗f3 ♖d6†) 17... ♗xd7 18. ♖b4 ♖b6 19. ♗f3 ♗e6†

is pleasant for Black, who can start to take over the a-file with ...♗a6 next.

**15...b5 16.axb6 ♖xb6**

The pressure along the b-file gave Black excellent counterplay in Martirosyan – Bluebaum, Moscow 2016.

**B22) 11. ♗e2**



This has been the most popular choice. The knight is heading to either f4 or g3.

**11...♗d7**

11...c6 is fully playable as well, but I prefer to keep the option of ...c7-c5 in mind.

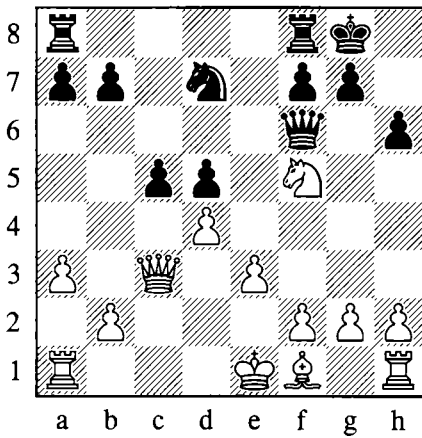
We have a final split between **B221) 12. ♗g3** and **B222) 12. ♗f4**.

**B221) 12. ♗g3 c5**

In my opinion, this way of handling the position is the most natural – there is no special reason to preserve the bishop.

**13. ♗xf5**

13. ♗e2 should be met by 13... ♗ac8!N (the less precise 13...cxd4 14. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 15.exd4 ♗e6 16. ♗c1 gave White a slight edge in Acs – Balogh, Zalaegerszeg 2004) 14.0-0 ♗g6 15. ♗g4 ♗fd8 with equal play.



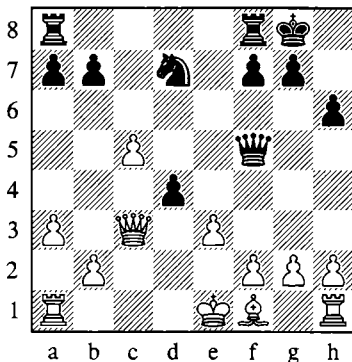
13...♙xf5 14.♙d3

After 14.♙b5?! c4 15.♙a4 ♖f6 16.f3 ♘e8 17.0-0 ♘d6 18.♙ae1 ♙e6 ♞ Black was better due to his strong pawn majority on the queenside in Atalik – Bromberger, Augsburg 2007.

Another important line to consider is:

14.dxc5 d4!

Black's lead in development offers plenty of play for the sacrificed material.



15.♙xd4?!

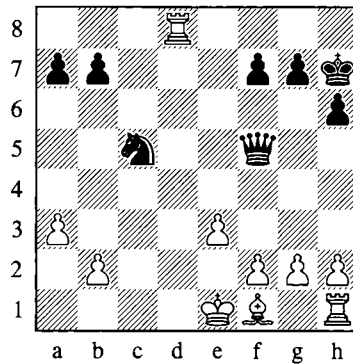
This has been played a few times but it is too risky.

White should prefer 15.exd4N ♙fe8† 16.♙e2 when he is two pawns up, but the pin on the e2-bishop allows Black to regain the missing material: 16...♙e4 17.♙f3 ♙c2 18.♙f1 ♙xb2 19.♙d1 ♘f6 20.g3 ♙ad8=

15...♘xc5 16.♙d1?!

Perhaps better was 16.♙b4 ♙fd8 17.♙e2 ♘d3† 18.♙xd3 ♙xd3, but even then White's position looks quite shaky.

16...♙ad8 17.♙xd8 ♙xd8 18.♙xd8† ♙h7

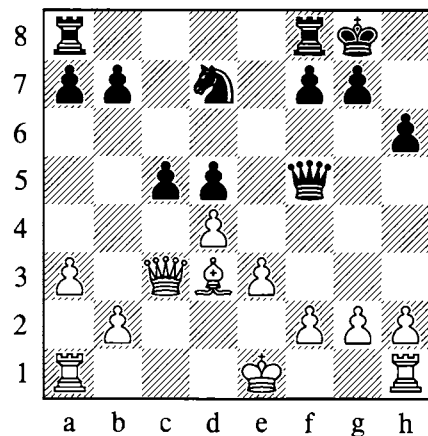


19.b4

19.♙e2 ♙g5! exploits White's lack of coordination. 20.♙d4 ♙xg2 21.♙f1 ♙xh2 ♞

19...♙f6 ♞

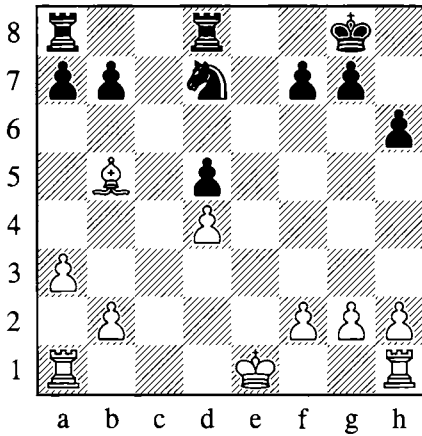
Despite the limited material, White's king was in big danger in Pataki – S. Porat, Budapest 2005.



14...♙f6 15.♙b5

The position after 15.0-0 ♙fc8 16.♙ac1 c4 17.♙b1 b5 was more comfortable for Black, who made serious progress on the queenside in S. Ivanov – Yemelin, St Petersburg 1998.

15...cxd4 16. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 17. exd4 ♜fd8

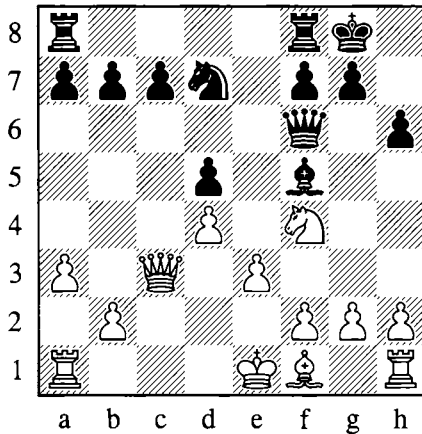


18. ♘xd7

White also gets no advantage with 18. ♖c1 ♘f8 19. ♕e2 ♘e6 20. ♕e3 ♜d6.

18...♜xd7 19. ♕d2 ♜c8 20. ♜he1 ♕f8=  
Finegold – Akobian, Saint Louis 2010.

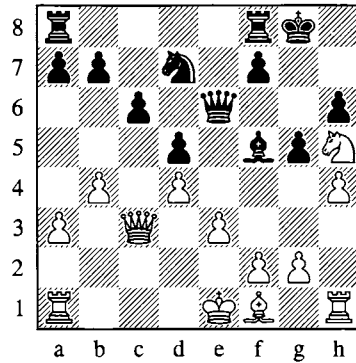
B222) 12. ♘f4



This continuation seems more ambitious. By provoking ...c7-c6, White keeps the ...c5 break off the table and thus prevents further simplifications.

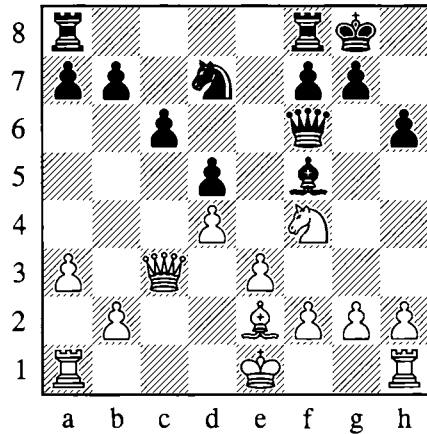
12...c6 13. ♘e2

I also examined: 13. b4N g5!? Black can get away with exposing his king in this way, as White does not have many pieces in that vicinity. 14. ♘h5 ♖e6 15. h4



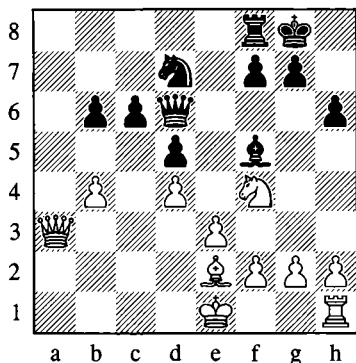
15...♘f6 16. ♘xf6† ♖xf6 17. hxg5 hxg5 18. ♘d3 ♕g7=

This position has been tested in a few high-level games, including Reshevsky – Geller, Zürich 1953. Since White's main plan is connected with a minority attack, I recommend the following new way of handling the position.



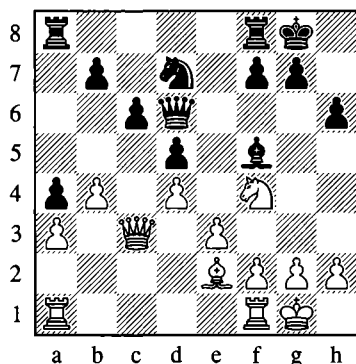
13...a5!?N 14.0-0

Black's plan also works well after: 14. b4 axb4 15. axb4 ♜xa1† 16. ♖xa1 ♖d6 17. ♖a5 b6 18. ♖a3



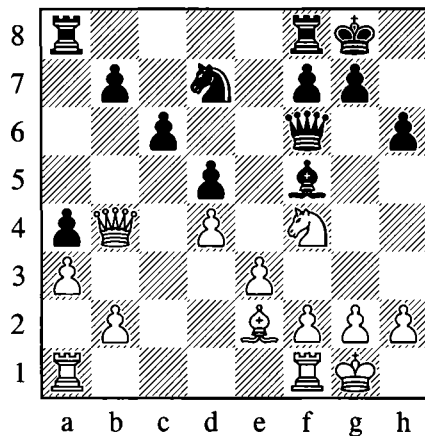
18...b5! 19.0-0 ♖b6 Intending ...♙a8 and ...♜c4, when only Black can be better.

I also considered: 14.b3 a4 15.b4 ♛d6 16.0-0 (White's set-up is not ready for aggressive measures like 16.g4?! ♙e4 17.f3 ♙h7 18.h4 ♙ae8 19.♔f2 ♙e7 20.♙ae1 ♙fe8)



16...b5! 17.♙ac1 ♙ac8 18.♛d2 ♜b6 19.♙c5 If White does not play this, he risks becoming worse after the knight gets to c4. 19...♜d7 20.♙c3 ♜b6=

14...a4 15.♛b4



15...b5!

A typical approach. The dual weaknesses of the c6-pawn and c5-square are only aesthetic, as the knight is heading to c4, where it will greatly limit White's active possibilities.

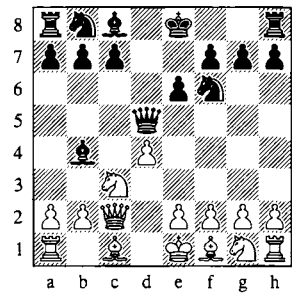
16.♙ac1 ♜b6 17.♜d3 ♙xd3 18.♙xd3 ♜c4=

### Conclusion

7.♙g5 is White's most aggressive choice, when I suggest the surprisingly uncommon 7...h6, asking White what he intends to do with the bishop. 8.♙h4 is an ambitious try, but then 8...c5! 9.dxc5 d4 offers Black dynamic counterplay; his chances in the ensuing complications are not worse, to say the least. 8.♙xf6 ♛xf6 is safer from White's perspective, but Black remains slightly ahead in development while his position contains no weaknesses. White can choose between maintaining the tension with 9.♜f3 and releasing it with 9.cxd5, but my analysis shows that Black is well equipped to meet either approach.

# Chapter 21

## 4. ♖c2



## 5.cxd5

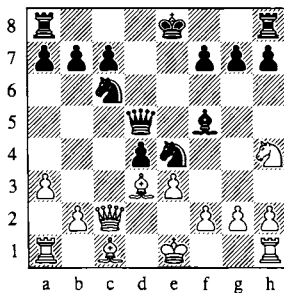
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♖c2 d5 5.cxd5

5...♗xd5

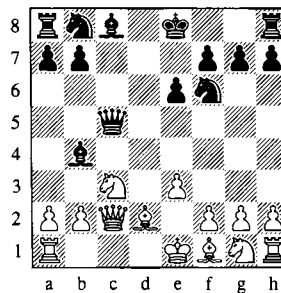
A) 6.a3 ♙xc3†	311
A1) 7.bxc3 c5	311
A11) 8.♘f3	311
A12) 8.f3!?!N	312
A13) 8.♙b2	313
A2) 7.♗xc3 ♘c6 8.♘f3 ♘e4	313
A21) 9.♗c2N	314
A22) 9.♗d3 0-0N	315
A221) 10.♙f4	316
A222) 10.e3	317
B) 6.e3 c5 7.a3 ♙xc3†	318
B1) 8.♗xc3	318
B2) 8.bxc3 0-0 9.♘f3 b6	320
B21) 10.♙b2	321
B22) 10.c4	322

A21) note to 11.♙c4



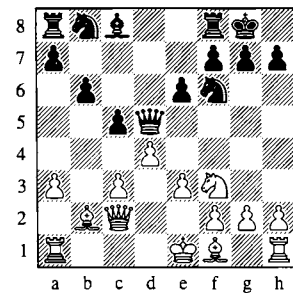
12...♘e5!N

B) note to 7.a3



8...♘bd7!N

B21) after 10.♙b2



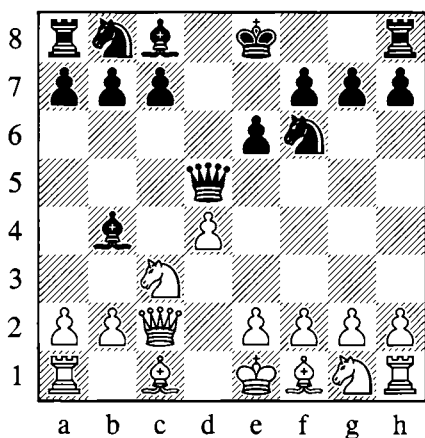
10...cxd4!N

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♠b4 4.♞c2 d5  
5.cxd5

This is the most popular reply to Black's last move, and is widely regarded as the most theoretically critical.

5...♞xd5

In comparison to 5...exd5, where Black must be ready to play with an isolated d5-pawn in many lines, this continuation keeps the pawn structure rather flexible, so Black may challenge the opponent's pawn centre by means of ...c7-c5 or ...e6-e5. The drawback of this recapture is obvious: the c8-bishop remains passive for a while, but it will not be easy for White to exploit this.



Here White has to make a major choice. In this chapter we will consider **A) 6.a3** before turning to **B) 6.e3**. The latter move is a major option, coverage of which will span the latter part of this chapter plus all of Chapter 22.

6.♗f3 is the most popular move of all, and it will be covered in Chapters 23 and 24.

### A) 6.a3

I was quite surprised to see that this natural-looking move has barely been tested at Grandmaster level. Indeed, forcing an exchange of Black's dark-squared bishop is one of White's main goals in the Classical System.

6...♠xc3†

Both recaptures are equally valid: we will analyse **A1) 7.bxc3** before moving on to **A2) 7.♞xc3**.

### A1) 7.bxc3

This may easily transpose to variation B2 after a subsequent e2-e3, but there are some lines with independent value.

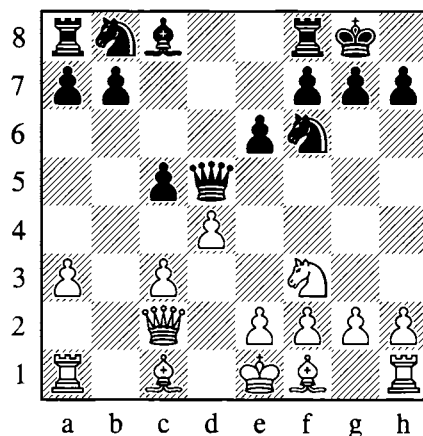
7...c5

I do not see any reason to postpone this standard move – it is necessary to challenge the opponent's centre.

White's three most interesting moves are **A11) 8.♗f3**, **A12) 8.f3!?** and **A13) 8.♠b2**.

8.e3 leads straight to variation B2.

### A11) 8.♗f3 0-0



9.♠g5

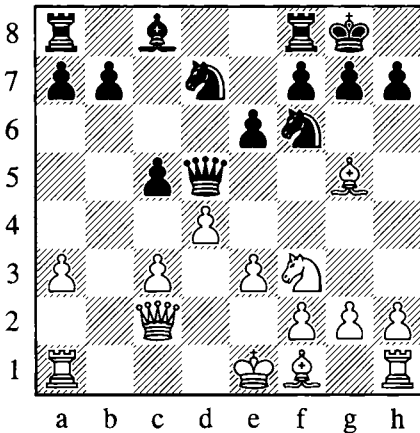
Once again, 9.e3 transposes to variation B2.

9.c4, as played in Dietmayer – Ganaus, Tweng 2007, can be met by: 9...♞e4N 10.♞xe4 ♗xe4 11.e3 b6 12.♠d3 ♠b7 13.♠b2 cxd4 14.exd4 ♗f6= In the arising position, Black has comfortable play against White's hanging pawns.

Putting the bishop on g5 looks like a logical step before playing e2-e3, but the bishop is actually not so well placed on that square; compared to some other variations, the knight on f6 is not pinned.

### 9... ♖bd7 10.e3N

Officially a novelty, but it's the only move that makes sense. In the one preceding game 10. ♖d2?! was played, but obviously this bizarre move doesn't deserve any attention.



### 10...b6 11.c4 ♖e4!?

I like this aggressive move, though 11... ♖c6 is a perfectly decent alternative.

### 12. ♖d3 ♖g4 13. ♖e2 cxd4 14. exd4 ♖b7

The arising hanging-pawns position suits Black, who has a very active set-up.

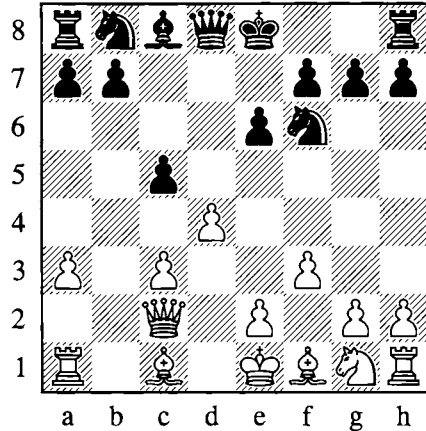
### A12) 8.f3!N

For some reason, this ambitious move has not yet been seen in practice. It demands a precise reaction:

### 8... ♖d8!

The natural-looking 8... cxd4 9. cxd4 ♖c6 (9... 0-0 10. ♖b2 ♖c6 11. e4 ♖d8 12. ♖d2 ♖a5 13. ♖b1±) 10. e3 offers White a small but lasting edge, for instance: 10... e5 (10... 0-0 11. ♖c4

♖d6 12. ♖e2 e5 13. 0-0 exd4 14. ♖d1±) 11. ♖c4 ♖d8 12. dxex5 ♖xe5 13. ♖e2 0-0 14. 0-0 ♖xc4 15. ♖xc4 ♖e6 16. ♖b4 ♖d7 17. e4± Black's minor pieces are restricted, while the dark-squared bishop may exert unpleasant pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal.



### 9.e4!?

This aggressive move is connected with a pawn sacrifice.

9.e3 defends the d-pawn but provoking this advance counts as an achievement for Black, as White's dark-squared bishop is blocked and his active possibilities on the kingside are limited. 9... 0-0 10. ♖d3 ♖c6 11. ♖e2 e5 12. 0-0 ♖e6 13. ♖d1 ♖c7± Black has reached a harmonious set-up, putting strong pressure on White's pawn centre.

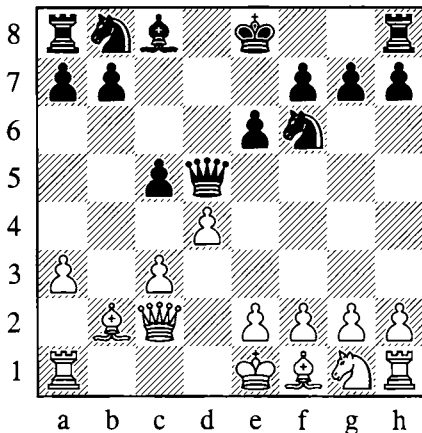
### 9...cxd4 10.cxd4 ♖c6 11. ♖e2 ♖xd4 12. ♖xd4

12. ♖d3 ♖c6 13. ♖xd8† ♖xd8 also gives White enough compensation for equality, but not for an advantage.

### 12... ♖xd4 13. ♖b2 ♖e3† 14. ♖e2 ♖d7=

White has lasting positional compensation for the pawn, but Black remains extremely solid and I see no reason why he should be worse.

## A13) 8.♙b2



This move has been played a few times by the Armenian Grandmaster Tigran Kotanjian. The idea behind it is similar to the variation above: White intends to build a mobile pawn centre and make use of the powerful dark-squared bishop.

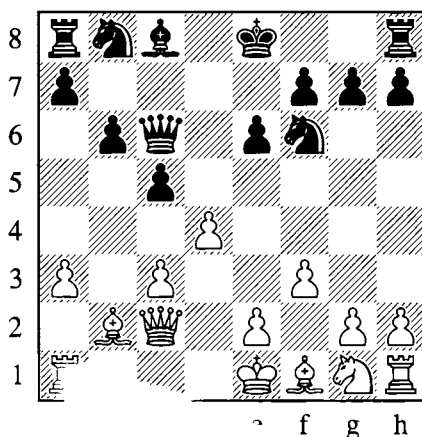
## 8...b6!

A natural reaction – White's decision to delay developing the f1-bishop encourages Black to take control over the light squares.

## 9.f3

The less ambitious 9.e3 ♘b7 10.c4 ♖d6 offers Black a comfortable set-up with opportunities to put pressure on White's hanging central pawns.

## 9...♖c6!



Since Black's queen would be forced to move anyway after e2-e4, it makes sense to do it right away, creating a concrete threat of ...cxd4.

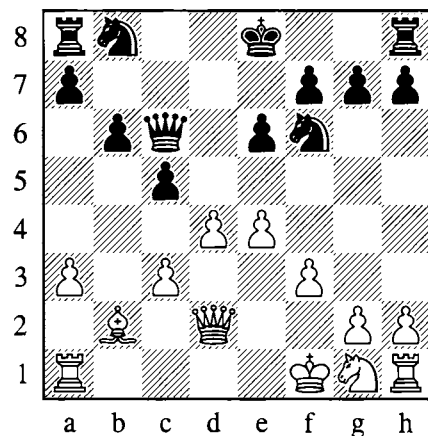
## 10.♙d2?!

This was Kotanjian's choice, but it is not the best.

10.e4?! cxd4 11.♖c1 is strongly met by 11...d3! 12.♙xd3 ♘bd7, when Black has an excellent position playing against White's damaged pawn structure.

10.♙b3N was better; still, after 10...♙a6 11.e4 ♙xf1 12.♖xf1 0–0 13.♗e2 we reach a complicated position where Black's chances are certainly not worse.

## 10...♙a6 11.e4 ♙xf1 12.♖xf1

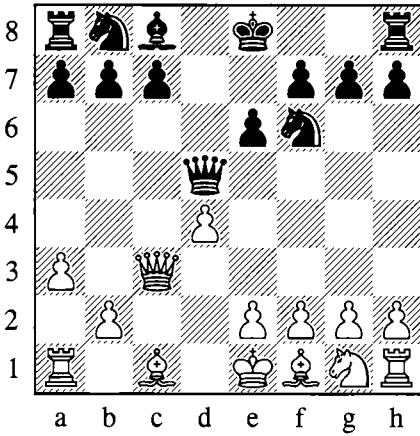


## 12...0–0 13.♗e2 ♙a4!

Black takes full control over the c4-square, making the b2-bishop a sorry sight. Black was better in Kotanjian – Sievers, Kemer 2007.

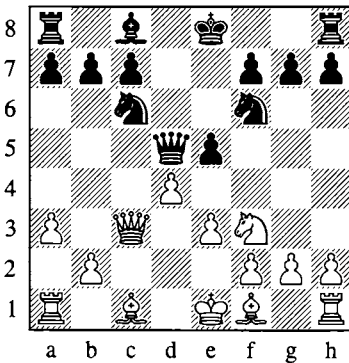
## A2) 7.♙xc3

This way White keeps the c-file open, but he gives Black the opportunity to gain even more time by attacking the queen again in the near future.



7...dxc6 8. dxf3

8.e3 has been played a couple of times but is completely harmless after: 8...e5!N 9. dxf3 (9.dxe5?! dxe5 10. e2 e5 11. dxf3 d3† 12. exd3 exd3† is even worse for White)



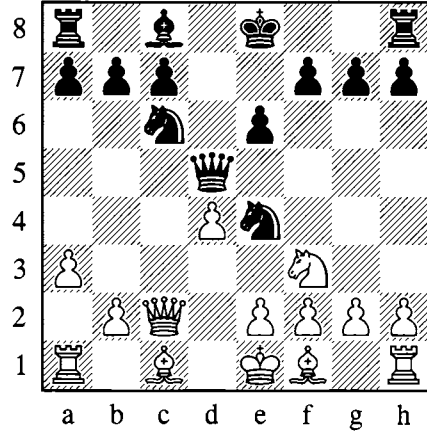
9...exd4 10. dxd4 dxd4 11. Wxd4 Wxd4 12. exd4 0-0 Black has a risk-free edge playing against the isolated pawn, while White's two bishops are quite irrelevant.

8...d4

As in many lines of the Classical System, Black is happy to occupy this central square with tempo. It is worth considering two queen moves: **A21) 9. ♖c2N** and **A22) 9. ♖d3**.

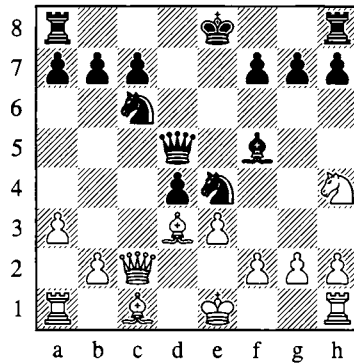
**A21) 9. ♖c2N**

This has not yet been played, but Black's next move immediately transposes to some existing games.



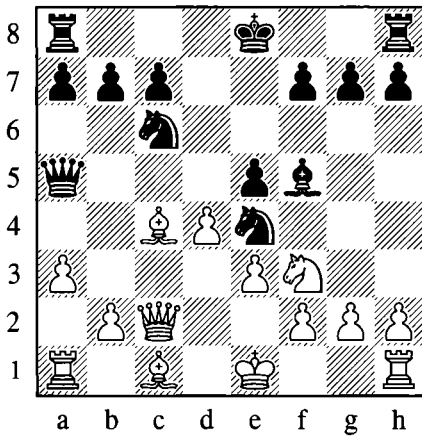
9...e5 10. e3 e5 11. exd4

11. exd3?! exd4 12. d4h4 (12.0-0 d6† was better for Black in Strathmann – Schenk, Boeblingen 1999) This position was reached in Appl – Pinkus, Berliner Sommer 1994, when Black missed a strong retort:



12...d4e5!N 13. dxf5 dxd3† 14. Wxd3 Wxf5 15.0-0 Wd5 16. exd4 0-0† Black emerges with a stable positional advantage due to his superior minor piece and the solid blockade of the IQP.

11...Wd5†

**12.b4?!**

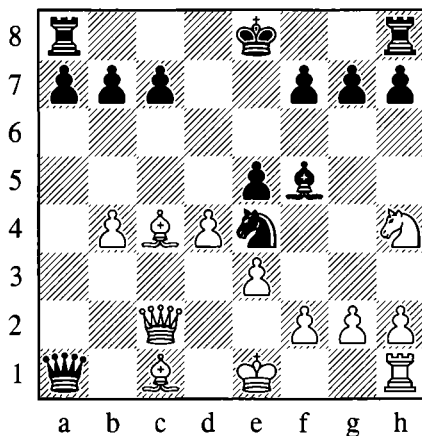
This is the critical move to consider, but the ensuing exchange sacrifice is unsound.

White should settle for 12.♔d2, but after 12...♗xd2 13.♖xd2 ♗xd2† 14.♕xd2 exd4 15.♗xd4 ♗xd4 16.exd4 0–0–0 Black obviously had no problems in Koblenz – Estrin, Leningrad 1949.

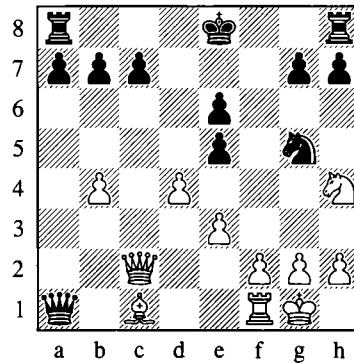
**12...♗xb4 13.axb4 ♖xa1 14.♗h4**

This is the most forcing move, and it has been played in both of the existing games.

14.0–0N is the lesser evil for White. 14...♗d6 15.♗xf7† is an attractive idea, but after 15...♗xf7! 16.♖xf5 ♖a2 17.dxe5 0–0 Black remains on top.

**14...♗e6 15.d5?!**

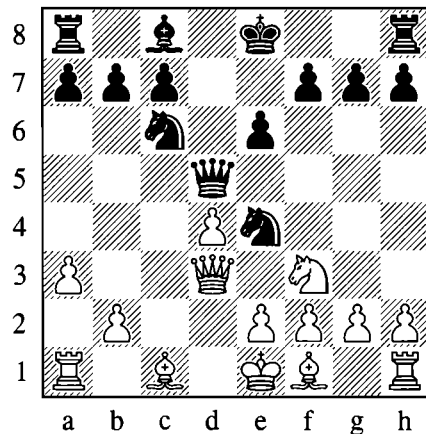
15.♗xe6 fxe6 16.0–0 was more stubborn but it's not enough for White after: 16...♗g5!



17.dxe5 (17.e4?! ♗f7 18.♗e3 ♖a6–+) 17...♖xe5 18.♗b2 ♖e4 19.♖xc7 ♖xh4 20.♖xb7 ♗d8 21.f4 ♗f7 22.♗xg7 ♗d7 23.♖a8† ♖d8 Black has good chances to convert his extra material into a full point.

**15...♗d7 16.0–0 ♗d6 17.♗b3 ♖a6–+**

White had no compensation for the material losses in Issakainen – Kokkila, Finland 2011.

**A22) 9.♖d3****9...0–0N**

I find this new move the most logical and attractive.

9...e5?! is thematic but premature. 10.dxe5 ♖a5† 11.♔d2 ♗xd2 12.♗xd2 ♗xd2† occurred in Rubinstein – Colle, Budapest 1929, and now 13.♗xd2!N ♔g4 14.♗e3! would have made it hard for Black to find full equality. For instance: 14...♔f3 15.exf3 0–0–0 (15...♗xe5 16.f4 ♗d7 17.♔c4±) 16.f4 f6 17.g3 fxe5 18.fxe5 ♗xe5 19.f4 ♗g4† 20.♗f3 h5 21.h3 ♗f6 22.♔c4± The superiority of the bishop over Black's knight becomes obvious.

It seems to me that White's two main candidates are **A221) 10.♔f4** and **A222) 10.e3**.

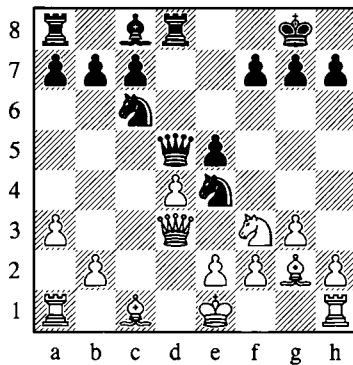
10.g3?!

This looks like a natural way to highlight the instability of Black's pieces on e4 and d5, but it takes too much time.

10...♗d8!

Instead, 10...♖a5† 11.♔d2 ♗xd2 12.♗xd2 ♗xd2† 13.♗xd2 ♗d8 14.♗c3 ♗e7 15.♔g2= leads to a solid but rather dry position.

11.♔g2 e5!



Since 12.dxe5?? is no longer possible due to 12...♖a5†, this thematic advance offers Black more than equality:

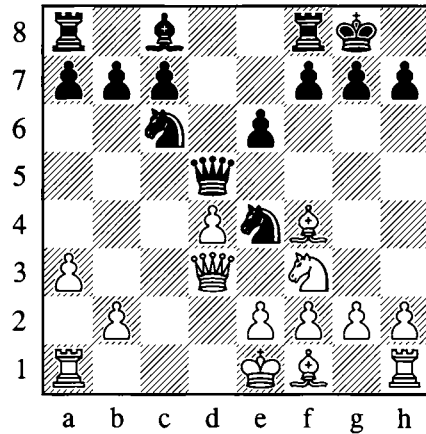
12.♗xe5

12.0–0 ♗xf2! 13.♗xf2 e4 14.♖c3 exf3 15.♔xf3 ♗xd4† is also problematic for White.

12...♗xd4 13.♔xe4 ♖xe5 14.♔f4 ♖f6†

White has some problems getting coordinated.

### A221) 10.♔f4



Developing the bishop before playing e2–e3 is a tempting idea, but Black can utilize his development advantage as follows.

**10...♔d7 11.♗c1**

The natural-looking 11.e3? is bad in view of: 11...e5! 12.♔xe5 ♖a5† 13.♗d2 ♔f5 14.♔xc7 ♖xc7 15.♗xe4 ♖a5† 16.♗d1 ♔xe4 17.♖xe4 ♗fe8 18.♖h4 ♗xd4 and White is in trouble.

**11...♗a5! 12.b4**

This forcing move is critical.

The 'greedy' 12.♗xc7 ♔b5 13.♖c2 ♗c6 14.g3 ♗ac8 offers Black superb compensation for the pawn.

Also inferior is 12.e3 ♔a4! when Black takes full control over the light squares on the queenside: 13.♔e2 ♗b3 14.♗d1 c5 15.0–0 ♗fd8†

**12...♔b5! 13.♗c5!**

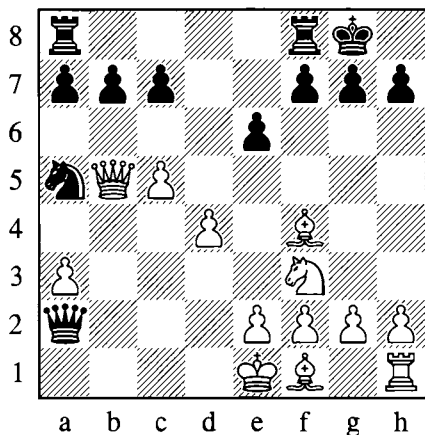
A nice tactical resource.

**13...♗xc5 14.♖xb5**

White will pick up one of the knights to establish a material advantage, but he is still behind in development while his king is in danger.

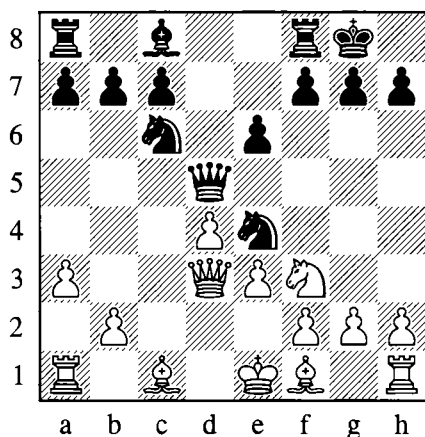
## 14...♖a2 15.bxc5

There are a few ways of continuing from here. I will just mention, for the sake of theoretical soundness, that Black can at least force a draw by means of:



15...♗c4 16.e3 ♖a1† 17.♙e2 ♖a2†=

A222) 10.e3



This solid move looks like the most principled. The d4-pawn is securely protected now, and White has a clear plan of developing his kingside pieces.

## 10...♗d8!

Threatening ...e5 and highlighting the awkward placement of the enemy queen.

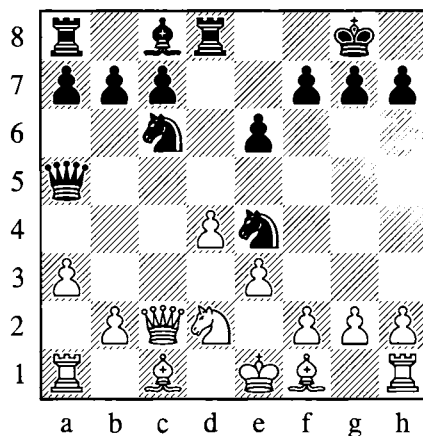
## 11.♖c2

11.♖b5 is harmless in view of 11...♗a5 12.♖xd5 exd5 13.b4 ♗c4. Having such a stable square for the knight, Black can be fully satisfied with his position.

The text move prepares to push Black's pieces away by means of ♗d3 or ♗c4, so the next move is practically forced.

## 11...♖a5† 12.♗d2

12.♗d2 ♗xd2 13.♖xd2 ♖xd2† 14.♗xd2 e5 gives Black easy equality.



## 12...♗f6!

It is necessary to avoid the exchange of knights in order to keep the initiative.

## 13.♗e2

13.b3 e5 14.dxe5 ♗xe5 15.♗e2 ♗g4⇝ also gives Black promising play.

## 13...e5 14.dxe5

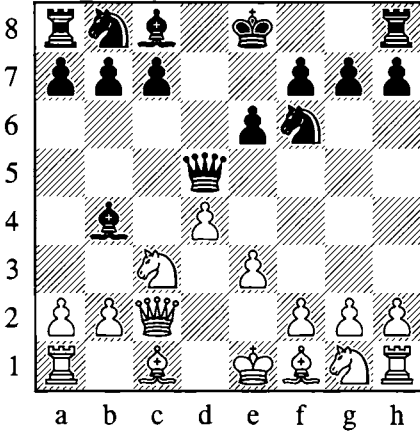
After 14.b4 ♗xb4 15.♖c3 ♗c6 16.♖xa5 ♗xa5 17.dxe5 ♗d7 18.♗b2 ♗c5 Black has the better pawn structure, which fully compensates for White's pair of bishops.

## 14...♖xe5 15.♗f3 ♖e4 16.♖xe4 ♗xe4=

Black's active development prevents White from exploiting his bishop pair.

## B) 6.e3

This is the first of the two major options. White defends the d-pawn and will usually break the pin with ♕d2 in the near future.



## 6...c5

A few other moves have been tested by strong players, but I favour the text move. White's choices are limited, as there are only so many ways to deal with the pressure on d4.

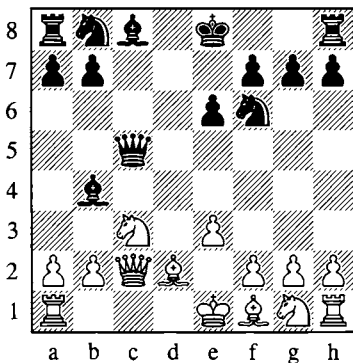
## 7.a3

7. ♕d2 is the main line, and will be covered in the next chapter.

## 7.dxc5

This may appear harmless, but it has been tried by such great players as Karpov and Bareev.

7... ♖xc5 8. ♕d2



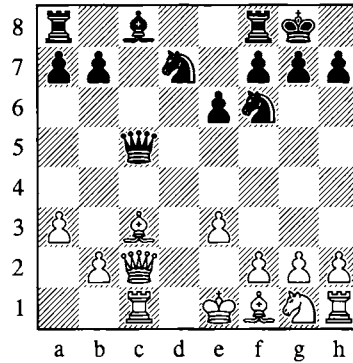
8... ♖bd7!N

I find this to be the most accurate and flexible way to develop. 8... ♖c6 9. ♖c1 0-0 10.a3 ♕xc3 11. ♕xc3 ♖d5 12. ♖f3 ♖xc3 was seen in Karpov – Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2003. In my opinion, if White had played 13.b4!N ♖e7 14. ♖xc3, it would not have been easy for Black to solve the problem of the passive c8-bishop.

9. ♖c1

9.a3 ♕xc3 10. ♕xc3 ♖d5 11. ♖c1 ♖xc3 12. ♖xc3 ♖xc3† 13. ♖xc3 ♖b6 14. ♖f3 ♕d7 15. ♖e5 ♖c8 is equal.

9...0-0 10.a3 ♕xc3 11. ♕xc3



11...b6!

Now we see the value of the knight on d7!

With the c-file open, Black's play is easier.

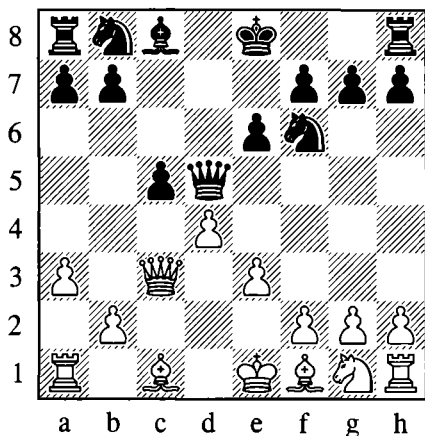
12. ♖f3 ♕b7 13.b4 ♖e7 14. ♖b2 ♖ac8 15. ♕e2 ♖e4=

7... ♕xc3†

As usual, White has a choice between two possible pawn structures after B1) 8. ♖xc3 or B2) 8.bxc3.

## B1) 8. ♖xc3

This has been the less popular of the two, but it's fully playable. White relies on the hanging c8-bishop to provide indirect protection of his central pawn.



8...♖bd7 9.♗f3

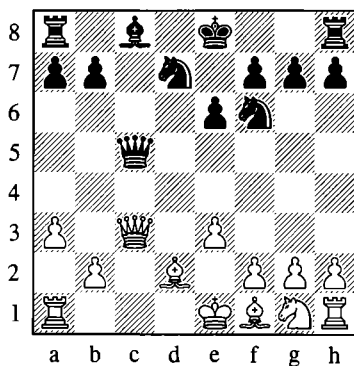
A harmless alternative is:

9.dxc5 ♜xc5

White's bishop pair will be easily neutralized by Black's development advantage, as the following game illustrates.

10.♙d2

White also gets nothing after 10.♞xc5N ♘xc5, and if 11.♙c4?! (the only way to keep the bishop pair) then 11...♙d7 12.♗f3 ♘fe4 13.0–0 ♜c8♯, and the activity of Black's pieces causes White serious problems.

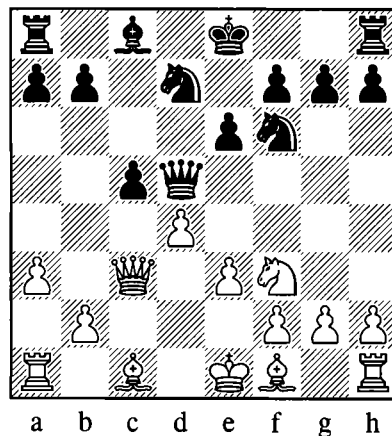


10...0–0 11.♜c1

11.♗f3N b6 12.♙e2 ♙b7 13.0–0 ♞h5 is also comfortable for Black.

11...b6 12.♞xc5 ♘xc5 13.♙b4 ♘fe4

Black was completely fine in Jacimovic – Brunello, Turin (ol) 2006.

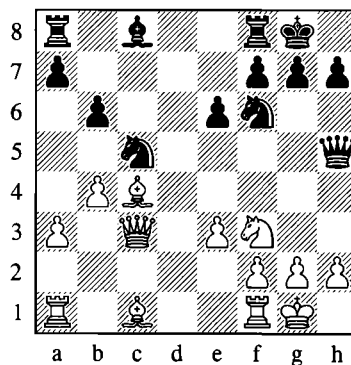


9...0–0 10.♙c4 cxd4

If you prefer to keep the queens on, I can suggest the following alternative: 10...♞h5!?

11.dxc5 (11.♙e2 b6 12.b4 ♙b7 13.dxc5 ♘e4 14.♞c2 bxc5 gives Black decent counterplay)

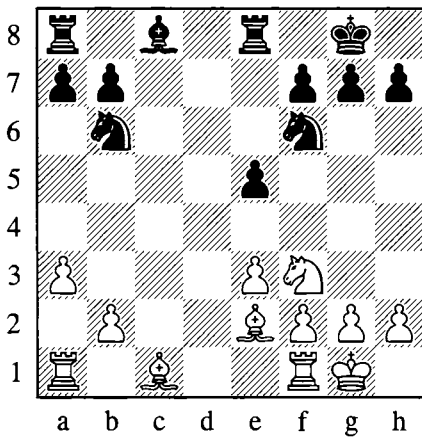
11...♘xc5 12.0–0 b6 13.b4



13...♙b7! White was forced to accept a draw by perpetual after 14.bxc5 ♙xf3 15.gxf3 ♘g4 in Soltau – Gongora Reyes, corr. 2001.

11.♞xd4 ♞xd4 12.♘xd4 ♘b6 13.♙e2 e5 14.♗f3 ♜e8 15.0–0N

This is better than 15.b3?! ♘e4! 16.♘d2 ♘xd2 17.♙xd2 ♙e6, when Black had a somewhat more pleasant position in I. Sokolov – Adams, Reykjavik 2003.

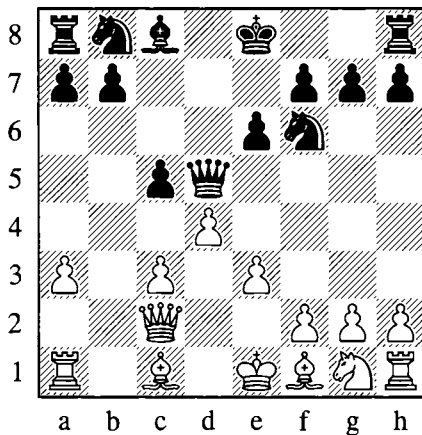


15... ♖a4!

Once again, the activity of Black's pieces prevents White from benefiting from the bishop pair.

16. ♖d2 e4 17. ♖b5 ♖d7 18. ♖xa4 ♖xa4  
19. ♖d4 ♖d7 20. ♖ac1 ♖ac8=

### B2) 8.bxc3



This is the more popular choice. This recapture makes White's centre much more stable, but closing the c-file also helps Black to get active piece play.

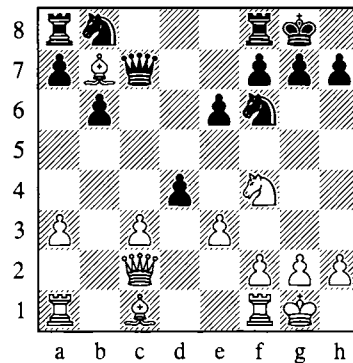
8...0-0

This theoretical position has been known since the World Championship match between Alekhine and Euwe in 1937. In this complex position White hopes to make use of the bishop pair and mobile pawn centre. Black's counterplay is based on creating some pressure on the long diagonal (after fianchettoing the c8-bishop) and utilizing the tension in the centre. For instance, in some cases Black may benefit from seizing the c-file.

9. ♖f3

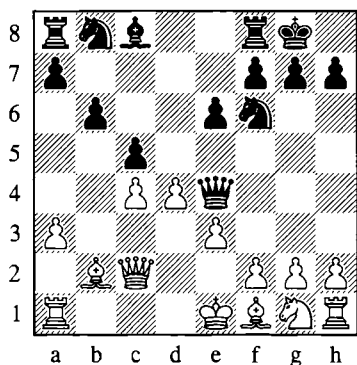
This is the most common and consistent way to develop.

The somewhat artificial 9. ♖e2?! was tried in Krush – Romanishin, Reykjavik 2004, but it turns out to be a waste of time after: 9...b6!N 10. ♖f4 ♖c6 11. ♖e2 ♖b7 12. 0-0 cxd4 13. ♖f3 ♖c7 14. ♖xb7



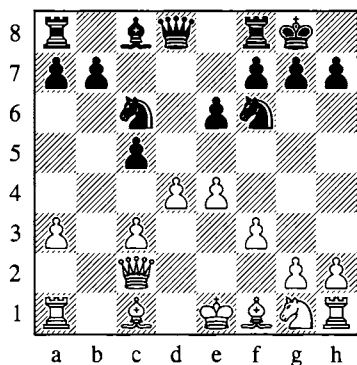
14...d3! 15. ♖xd3 ♖xb7= Black gets a stable positional advantage due to the better pawn structure.

9. ♖b2, as played in Agdestein – Motwani, Isle of Lewis 1995, can also be met with 9...b6N, for instance: 10.c4 (10. ♖f3 transposes to variation B21) 10...♖c4! White has no real choice but to liquidate into an equal endgame:

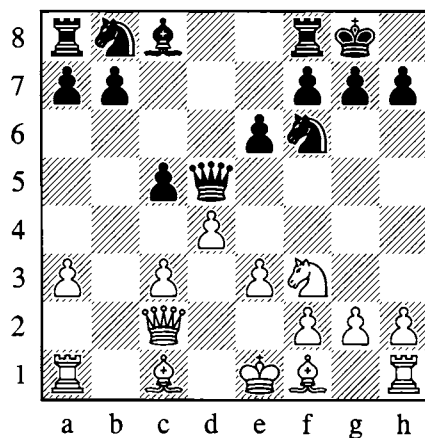


11. ♖xe4 ♜xe4 12. ♗d3 ♜b7 13. f3 ♜d6  
 14. dxc5 bxc5 15. ♗e5 ♜f5 16. ♕f2 ♞d8= The activity of Black's pieces fully compensates for White's bishop pair.

Finally, the renewed attempt to create a strong pawn centre by means of 9.f3 significantly delays White's development. As a result, after 9...♜c6 10.e4 ♞d8 there is no way to support the d4-pawn.



11. dxc5 (11. ♜e2!? is a playable pawn sac, but Black has a better version of variation A12, as he has gained the extra move ...0-0, so he has nothing to worry about to say the least.) 11...♞a5 12. ♗e3 ♜d7 Black had excellent counterplay against the weak queenside pawns in Saric – Bogosavljevic, Vrbas 2015.



### 9...b6

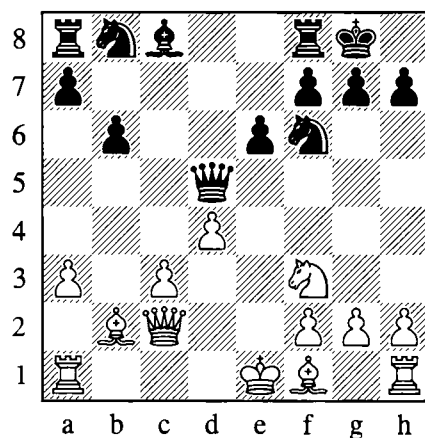
Once again, this is the preferred way to develop the bishop. We have a final split between **B21)** 10. ♗b2 and **B22)** 10. c4.

#### **B21) 10. ♗b2**

This move led to success for White in Ivanisevic – Djukic, Kragujevac 2013, and one subsequent game. However, it seems slightly inaccurate in view of:

#### **10...cxd4!N 11. exd4**

11. cxd4 is well met by 11...♗a6! 12. ♗xa6 ♞a5†! 13. ♕e2 ♞xa6† 14. ♞d3 ♞b7 15. ♞ac1 ♜bd7= and Black is comfortable.



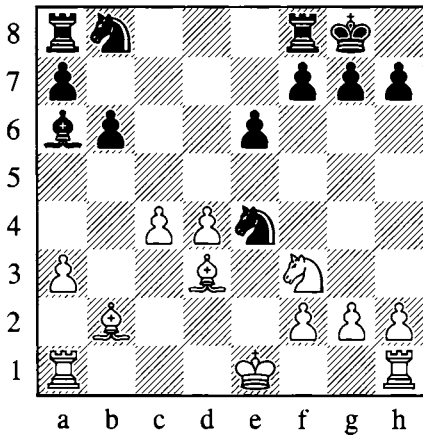
**11... ♖a6!**

There is nothing wrong with 11... ♖b7, but the text move poses more problems to White.

**12.c4**

After 12. ♖xa6 ♗xa6 13.0-0 ♖ac8 14. ♖ac1 b5 Black sets up a light-square blockade and obtains the more pleasant position.

**12... ♖e4† 13. ♖xe4 ♗xe4 14. ♖d3**

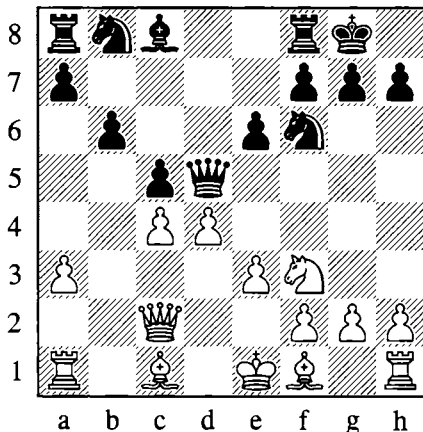


**14... ♗d6 15. ♖c1 ♖c8 16. ♗d2 ♗c6**

The pressure on White's hanging pawns is becoming unpleasant for him.

**B22) 10.c4**

This avoids the problems experienced by White in the previous line. There is no reason for him to delay this natural advance – there is no other way to activate the c1-bishop.



**10... ♖h5!**

I like this aggressive way of handling the position. The placing of the queen on h5 is somewhat annoying for White's monarch.

Compared with the note on 9. ♖b2 at the bottom of page 320, White is now ready to meet 10... ♖e4?! with 11. ♖d3 ♖g4 12. ♖b2 cxd4 13. ♗e5!, when he obtained a powerful initiative in Eljanov – Onischuk, Montreal 2006.

The most popular continuation is 10... ♖c6, but I find the queen to be somewhat misplaced there.

**11. ♖e2**

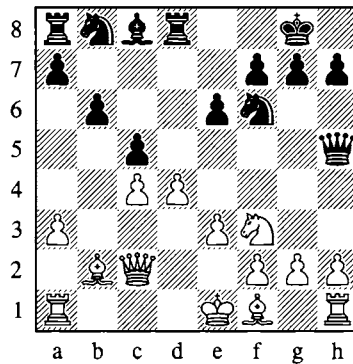
The other natural move is:

**11. ♖b2N**

Black's most precise reaction is:

**11... ♖d8!**

After 11... ♖b7 White gets an interesting opportunity to fight for the initiative by means of 12.d5!? exd5 13. ♖xf6 gxf6 14.cxd5 ♖xd5 15. ♖d1, when he has full compensation for the pawn, at the very least.



**12. ♗e5**

12. ♖e2 ♖b7 transposes to the note to White's next move in the main line below.

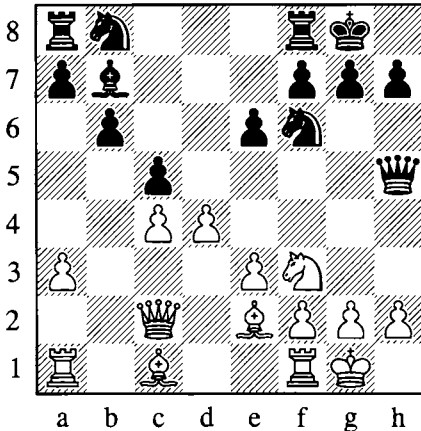
**12... cxd4 13. exd4 ♖b7 14. ♖e2 ♖g5 15. ♗f3 ♖g6**

With comfortable play for Black.

**11...♙b7 12.0–0**

12.♙b2 has no independent value, since after 12...♞d8 White hardly has anything better than 13.0–0.

Here I found a new way to handle the position:

**12...♞d8!N**

This flexible move is an improvement over a previous high-level game.

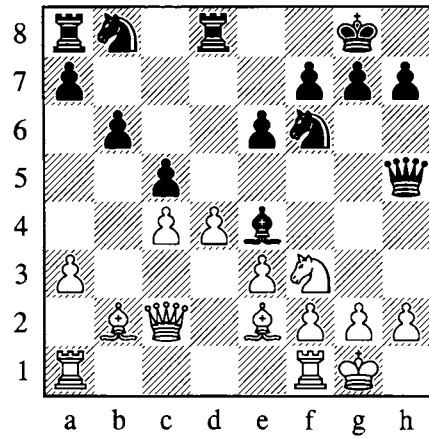
12...♘bd7 seems premature: 13.a4! ♞g6 14.♙xg6 hxg6 15.♙b2 and White was better in Van Wely – Short, London 2009.

**13.♙b2**

I also considered 13.♘e5 ♞h4 14.♙b2 cxd4 15.♞ad1 (or 15.exd4 ♘bd7♞) 15...♘c6 16.♘f3 ♞h6 17.exd4 ♞ac8 when Black has plenty of counterplay.

**13...♙e4!**

Compared to the Van Wely – Short game, Black benefits from having kept the b8-knight on its initial square, as now it can take a more active and harmonious route into the game.

**14.♙c3 ♘c6 15.♞fd1 ♞ac8♞**

The knight on c6 helps to put pressure on White's central pawns, and it is not so easy for White to find a constructive plan.

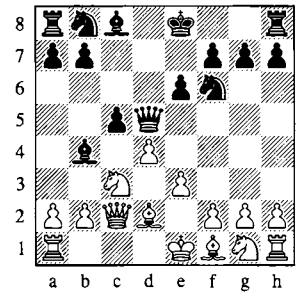
**Conclusion**

6.a3 is a rare but respectable move, forcing the exchange of the dark-squared bishop. The drawback is that it loses time, and Black's lead in development offers him good chances, whichever way White recaptures on c3.

6.e3 is a popular and respectable way of handling the position, as White offers the d4-pawn solid protection. However, the decision to restrict the dark-squared bishop also gives Black the freedom to develop active piece play, beginning with 6...c5. We have seen that Black has fine prospects after 7.a3 and other sidelines, so it's time to move on to the next chapter to see how to handle the more popular 7.♙d2.

# Chapter 22

## 4. ♖c2



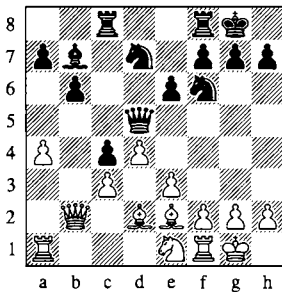
## 6.e3 c5 7. ♘d2

### Variation Index

1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟c3 ♘b4 4.♖c2 d5 5.cxd5 ♖xd5 6.e3 c5 7.♘d2  
7...♘xc3

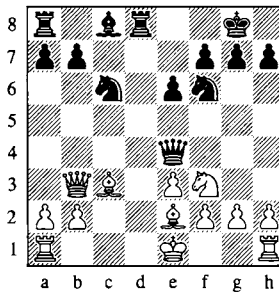
A) 8.bxc3 0-0	325
A1) 9.f3	325
A2) 9.♟f3	326
B) 8.♘xc3 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♟c6	328
B1) 10.♘xf6 gxf6 11.♟e2 ♘d7 12.a3 ♖e5	328
B11) 13.♞d1	330
B12) 13.♟c3	330
B2) 10.♘c3 0-0 11.♟f3 ♞d8 12.♘e2	332
B21) 12...♖e4	332
B22) 12...♖c5!	334
B221) 13.♖a4	334
B222) 13.♞c1	335
B223) 13.0-0N	335

A2) note to 10.c4



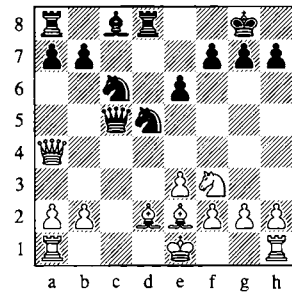
14...♟e4!N

B21) note to 13.♞c1



13...e5!N

B221) after 14.♘d2



14...e5!N

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 ♘b4 4.♖c2 d5  
5.cxd5 ♗xd5 6.e3 c5 7.♙d2

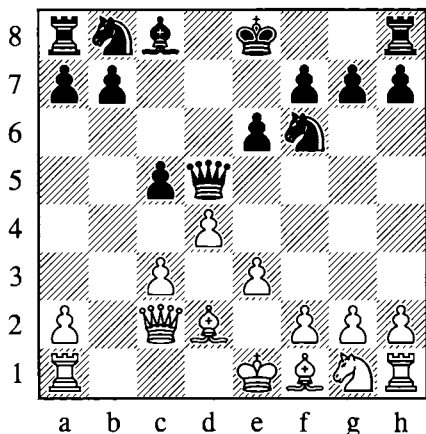
This is the main line. White virtually forces the exchange of our dark-squared bishop, while activating his own bishop in the process.

7...♙xc3

We will consider A) 8.bxc3 followed by the more usual B) 8.♙xc3.

### A) 8.bxc3

Just as in variations A1 and B2 of the previous chapter, White's plan is based on creating a mobile pawn centre.



8...0-0

White's next move will indicate whether he intends to advance his e- or his c-pawn. We will analyse A1) 9.f3 and A2) 9.♗f3.

### A1) 9.f3

I was quite surprised to discover that this natural-looking move is almost untested.

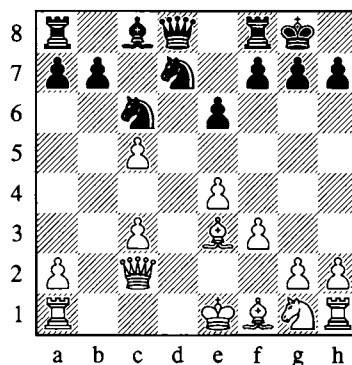
9...♗c6 10.♖b1

I also examined the natural alternative:  
10.e4N ♗d8 11.dxc5

The position resembles one of the main lines of the 4.f3 system, but in this case White

finds it more difficult to hang on to his extra pawn.

11...♗d7 12.♙e3



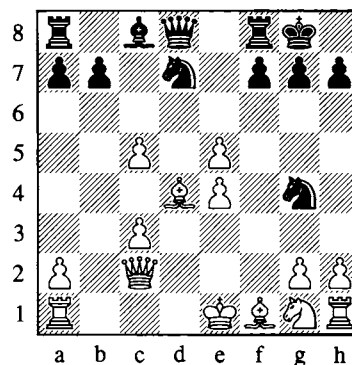
12...♗ce5!

Black should not get too fixated on the c5-pawn. After 12...♗a5 13.♖b1 a6 14.♗e2 ♗xc5 15.♗c1! ♗a4 16.♙d2 ♗d8 17.c4 ♗d4 18.♙xa5 ♗xc2† 19.♗f2± Black still has to work to find full equality.

13.f4

After 13.♗d2 ♗c7 14.♗d4 ♗c6 15.♗a4 Black may try to exploit his lead in development with: 15...f5!? (if a draw by repetition is acceptable then Black can just play 15...♗ce5=) 16.♗h3 fxe4 17.♗xe4 ♗f6=

13...♗g4 14.♙d4 e5 15.fxe5

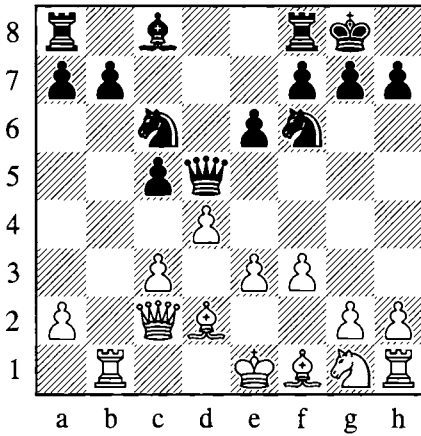


15...♗h4†!

Taking the opportunity to weaken the light squares on the kingside.

16.g3 ♖e7 17.♟f3 ♟gxe5 18.♟xe5 ♟xe5  
19.♙g2 f6 20.0-0 ♙e6

Black has full compensation for the missing pawn.

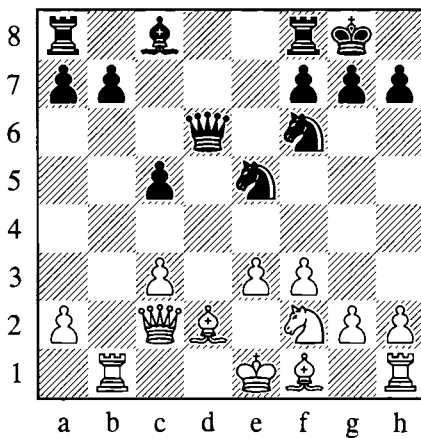


10... ♖d6!

An excellent prophylactic move. With the queen no longer vulnerable, Black is now ready to attack the enemy centre by means of ...e6-e5.

11. ♟h3 e5 12.dxe5 ♟xe5 13. ♟f2

We have been following the game Dao Thien Hao – Yu Shaoteng, Shenyang 1999. Now I like the following way of handling the position:



13... ♖d8N 14. ♙e2 ♙e6 15.e4

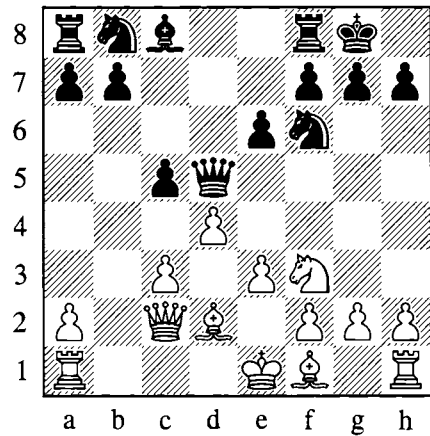
15. ♖xb7?! would be risky for White:  
15... ♟c4 16. ♙c1 ♟b6 17.0-0 ♙c8 18. ♖d1  
♖f8 19. ♖c7 ♖xd1† 20. ♟xd1 ♖d6

15... ♙c4 16. ♙f4 ♙xe2 17. ♖xe2 b6 18.0-0  
♖e6

Black's pieces are well coordinated, and White may suffer from his queenside weaknesses as the game goes on.

A2) 9. ♟f3

This move is connected to the c3-c4 advance.

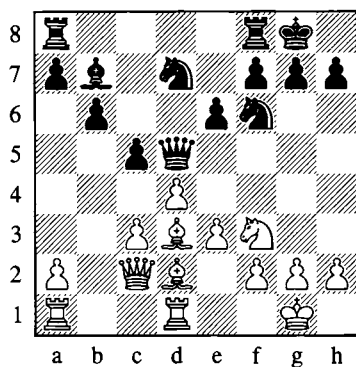


9...b6 10.c4

White can hardly benefit from delaying this move.

For instance, 10. ♟e5?!, as played in Saric – Petrik, Pula 2008, could be met by 10... ♟c6N 11. ♟xc6 ♖xc6. The positional threat of ...cxd4 forces White to waste another tempo and yields Black a serious development advantage.

Black is also doing well after: 10. ♙d3 ♙b7 11.0-0 (11.e4!?N is interesting, but after 11... ♖h5! 12.e5 ♙xf3 13.exf6 ♙b7 14.fxg7 ♖c8 ♖ Black is not worse; if White castles, than Black can, at the very least, force a perpetual with ...♙xg2) 11... ♟bd7 12. ♖fd1



We have been following the game Panno – Morovic Fernandez, Santiago de Chile 1989. Black now can choose between several good-looking options, my favourite being 12...♗d6!N, intending to meet 13.e4 with 13...c4! 14.♔xc4 ♕xe4.

10.♔e2 ♕b7 11.0-0 ♖bd7 12.a4

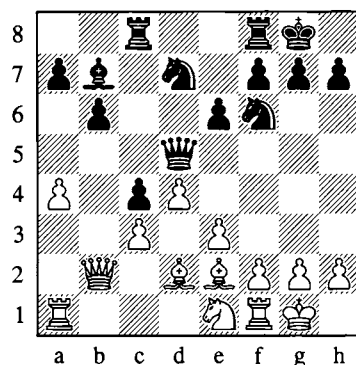
12.c4 ♗c6 would just transpose to our main line covered under 10.c4.

12...♗ac8 13.♗b2 c4!?

Since White has delayed putting his pawn on c4, Black does so himself, aiming to dominate the light squares in the centre.

14.♖e1

This position was reached in Dao Thien Hao – Mascarinas, Vung Tau 2000. Obviously, White's idea is based on creating a strong pawn centre by means of f2-f3 and e3-e4. That's why I like the following plan:



14...♖e4!N 15.♔c1

After 15.f3 ♖xd2 16.♗xd2 ♖c5! the knight is heading to b3, where it will block the b-file and neutralize White's play on the queenside.

15...♗a5 16.♗a3 f5 17.f3 ♖d6

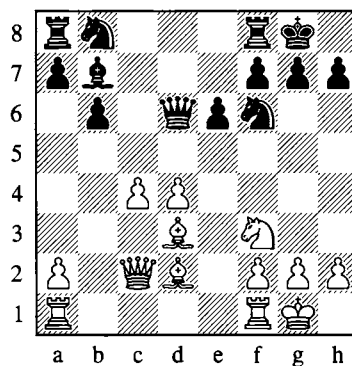
In this complex position I prefer Black due to his space advantage in the centre. White will have a hard time activating his bishops.

10...♗c6

I also considered the flexible 10...♗d6, as played in Botvinnik – Lilienthal, Hastings 1935. However, I rejected it on account of 11.e4!N ♖fd7 12.♔d3, when White gets a chance to develop some initiative.

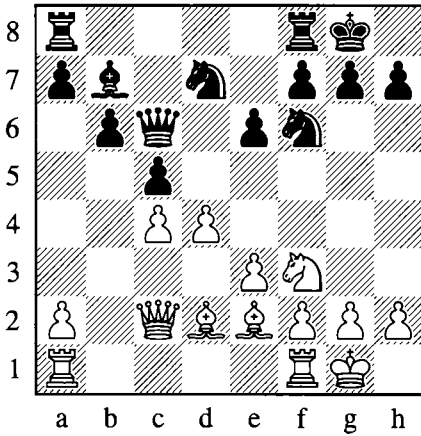
11.♔e2

The seemingly more active 11.♔d3 has a drawback: the d-pawn becomes more vulnerable. 11...♔b7 12.0-0 cxd4 13.exd4 ♗d6! I like this approach – the active c6-square is now free for the knight, so the d4-pawn will come under strong pressure.



14.♔e2 ♖c6 15.♗fd1 ♗fd8 16.♔c3 (16.♔g5 is another natural move, but after 16...♗e7 17.♗ac1 h6 18.♔h4 g5! 19.♔g3 ♖h5 Black eliminates the important dark-squared bishop, and the weakening of his kingside doesn't seem critical) 16...♗ac8 17.♗ac1 ♗f4 Black has an active, flexible set-up, and it will not be easy for White to find a constructive plan.

11... ♖b7 12.0-0 ♖bd7



13. ♖c3

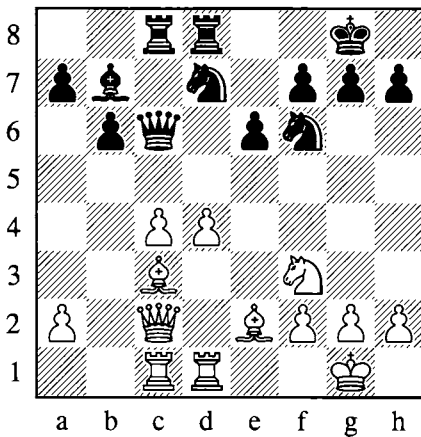
I also examined the following logical continuation: 13.a4!? cxd4 14.exd4 e5! It makes sense to meet White's queenside activity with typical counterattacking measures 15.a5 (15.dxe5 ♖xe5 16.a5 may lead to the same thing) 15... ♖ad8 16.axb6 axb6 17.dxe5 ♖xe5 18.♖a7 ♖fe8= With such active pieces, Black faces no difficulties.

13... ♖ac8 14.♖ac1 ♖fd8 15.♖fd1

Both sides' forces are fully mobilized.

15... cxd4 16.exd4

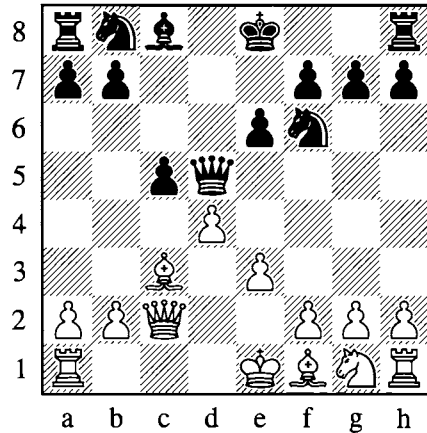
We have been following the high-level game Lysyj – Karjakin, Chita 2015. I suggest the following way of handling the position:



16... ♖f8!?N 17. ♖b2 ♖g6

Transferring the knight to g6 intensifies the pressure along the a8-h1 diagonal, as the knight threatens to hop to f4 at any moment.

B) 8. ♖xc3



The most common continuation. In comparison to 8.bxc3, the ensuing symmetrical pawn structure offers White more chances to profit from the bishop pair.

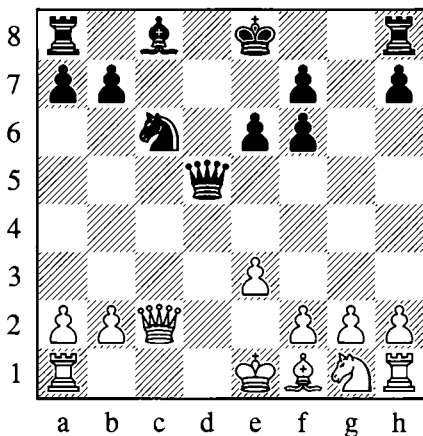
8... cxd4 9. ♖xd4 ♖c6

The drawback of White's scheme is that the vulnerable placement of his dark-squared bishop yields Black an extra tempo for development.

We will analyse B1) 10. ♖xf6 followed by the more popular B2) 10. ♖c3.

B1) 10. ♖xf6 gxf6

Exchanging on f6 is a double-edged decision. White wins an important tempo for developing his pieces, while Black's pawn structure is somewhat damaged. On the other hand, giving up the bishop pair is a definite concession, and White is still slightly behind in development.



### 11. ♙e2

Black's task seems easier in the event of 11. ♘f3 ♗a5† 12. ♗d2 (White can hardly hope for an advantage after 12. ♘d2 ♙d7 13. ♙e2 ♗c8 14. ♗d1 ♗d8, when the activity of Black's pieces causes him some problems) 12... ♗xd2† 13. ♘xd2 ♗e7 14. ♙d3 ♙d7 and Black faced no problems in Melikhov – Romanov, Serpukhov 2004.

### 11... ♙d7 12.a3

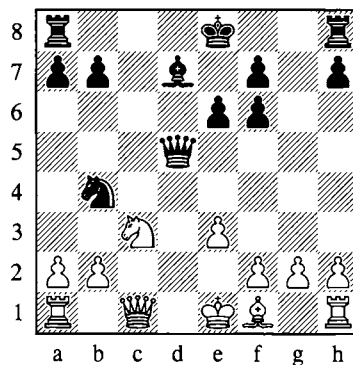
This prophylactic move, which restricts Black's active possibilities on the queenside, was introduced by Kasparov against Anand in their World Championship match in 1995.

The reason for covering the b4-square is illustrated after:

### 12. ♘c3 ♘b4! 13. ♗c1

I also examined: 13. ♗d1 ♗f5 It makes sense to provoke the e3-e4 advance in order to weaken the d4-square. 14.e4 (14. ♗c1 ♙c6 also offers Black an excellent position) 14... ♗e5 15. ♙e2 0–0–0 With good prospects for Black.

After the text move, Black should be absolutely fine – provided he chooses the right square for his queen! The correct option is:



### 13... ♗e5!

Instead, 13... ♗g5?! 14.a3 ♘c6 15. ♘e4 ♗e5 16. ♙d3 put Black under strong pressure in Bareev – Anand, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 2003.

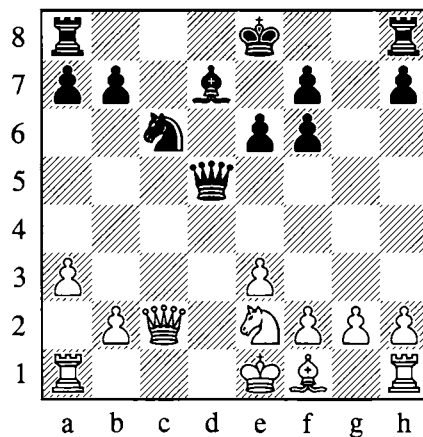
### 14.f4

14. ♙e2 ♙c6 15.0–0 0–0 is equal.

14.a3 ♘d5 15. ♘xd5 ♗xd5 16. ♗c3 ♗e5 Black faces no problems in the endgame.

14... ♗c5 15. ♙e2 ♗c8 16.0–0 0–0 17. ♗d1 ♙c6 18.a3 ♘d5 19. ♘xd5 ♙xd5 20. ♗xc5 ♗xc5

The endgame was level in Tirabassi – Novak, corr. 2009.



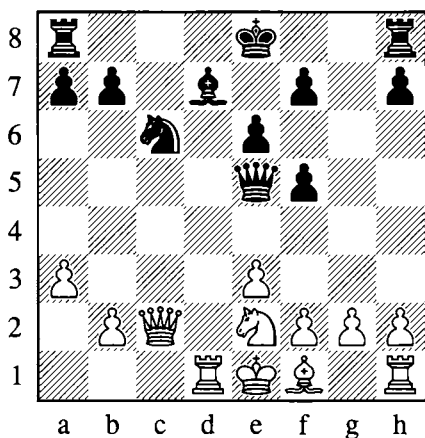
### 12... ♗e5

White has two options, **B11)** 13. ♗d1 or **B12)** 13. ♘c3.

**B11) 13. ♖d1 f5**

I find this move the most flexible and appealing.

13... ♖e7 has been tested by some top players, with solid results. However, 14. ♖d4 ♗a5† 15. ♗d2 ♗xd2† 16. ♖xd2 was slightly better for White in Bu Xiangzhi – Kramnik, Turin (ol) 2006.

**14. ♖c3N**

The harmless 14. ♗c3 ♖g8 15. g3 was played in Savchenko – Sadvakasov, Baku 2007, when 15... ♗xc3†N 16. ♖xc3 ♖e5= would have been fine for Black.

14. g3 ♗e4 15. ♗xe4 fxe4 16. ♖c3 f5= also promises White nothing.

The text move seems like the most ambitious try. However, White's knight is now far away from the important d4-square, so it makes sense for Black to continue:

**14... ♖e7!**

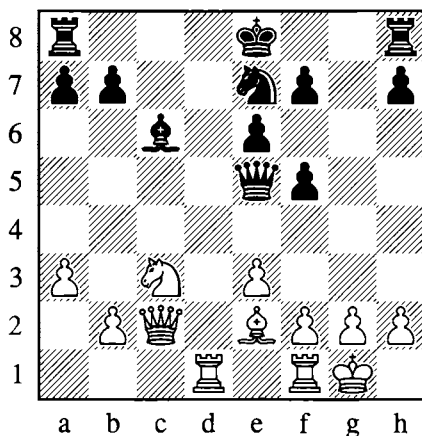
This typical manoeuvre allows Black to solve the problem of the d7-bishop once again.

**15. ♖e2**

15. ♖c4 0-0-0 16. 0-0 ♖c6= is no cause for concern.

**15... ♖c6 16. 0-0**

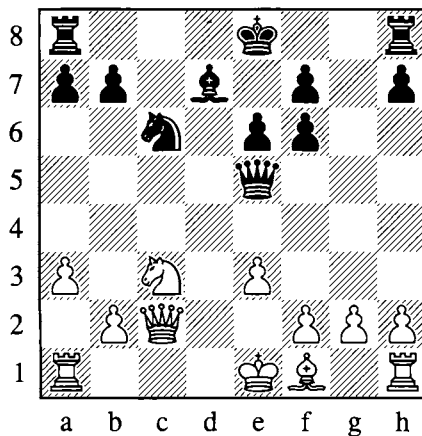
16. ♖f3!? changes White's pawn structure, but after 16... ♖xf3 17. gxf3 ♖g8 the position remains balanced.

**16... 0-0 17. ♖d4 ♖ad8**

It makes sense to exchange one pair of rooks before White can double or triple on the d-file.

**18. ♖fd1 ♖xd4 19. ♖xd4 ♖c8=**

White has no squares on which to penetrate along the d-file, and the damage to the kingside pawn chain isn't especially serious. The pawn on f5 exerts more influence over the centre than it would have done on g7, so the chances remain about equal.

**B12) 13. ♖c3**

**13...♗e7!**

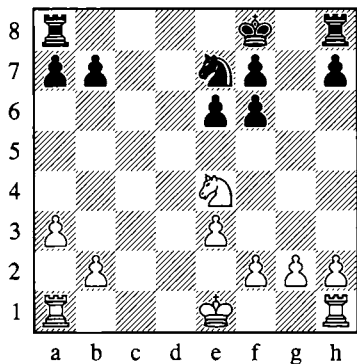
This move prepares to solve Black's main problem – the passive placement of the d7-bishop.

13...f5 was played in Kasparov – Anand, New York (2) 1995, but it seems to me that 14.♙e2!N 0–0 (14...0–0 15.0–0 ♜hg8 16.♞fd1±) 15.0–0 ♞fd8 16.♞a4± would leave Black in a passive and slightly inferior position.

**14.♙c2**

I also checked 14.♙d3N ♙c6 15.0–0 f5 (now 15...♞g8?! can be met by 16.♙e4±) 16.♞fd1 0–0= when Black is fine.

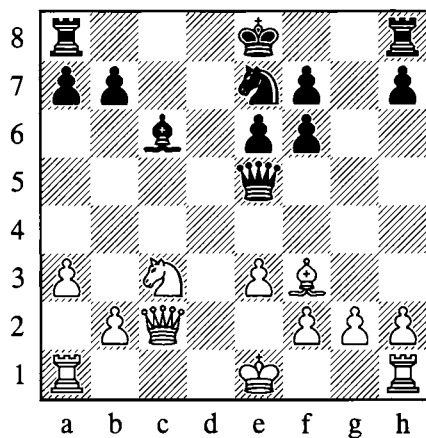
14.♞e4 has been played a few times, but liquidating into an endgame is hardly White's most ambitious way to handle the position. 14...♙c6 15.♙b5 ♞xb5 (also possible is 15...♞xe4 16.♗xe4 ♙xb5 17.♗d6† ♗d7 18.♗xb5 ♗c6=) 16.♗xb5 ♙xe4 17.♗d6† ♗f8 18.♗xe4



18...♗d5 19.♞c1 ♗e7 Black was completely fine in Zhou Jianchao – Zhao Jun, China 2013.

**14...♙c6 15.♙f3**

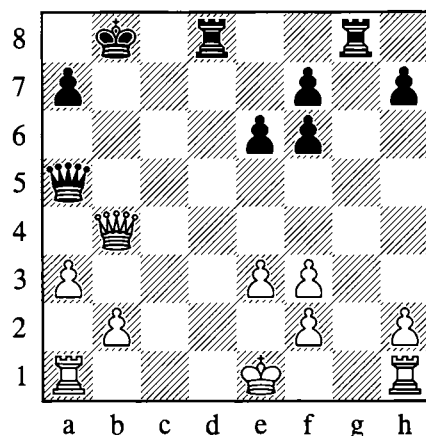
In the event of 15.0–0?! Black would benefit from keeping the king in the centre and can develop a powerful initiative by means of 15...♞g8 16.g3 ♗f5.

**15...♙c6 16.gxf3 0–0–0!**

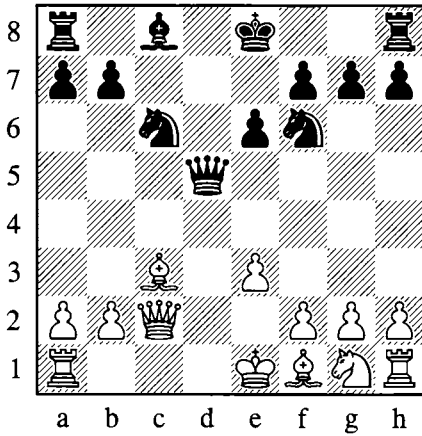
This is the easiest way to ensure full equality, since White has no harmful discovered checks available.

**17.♗d5† ♗c6 18.♗e7† ♗b8 19.♗xc6† bxc6 20.♞xc6 ♞hg8 21.♞e4 ♞a5† 22.♞b4†**

A rare instance of responding to a check with a check of one's own. White has no choice, as 22.b4?? ♞c7 would leave him defenceless.

**22...♞b4† 23.axb4 ♞c8 24.♞d1 ♞c2 25.♞d2 ♞c1†=**

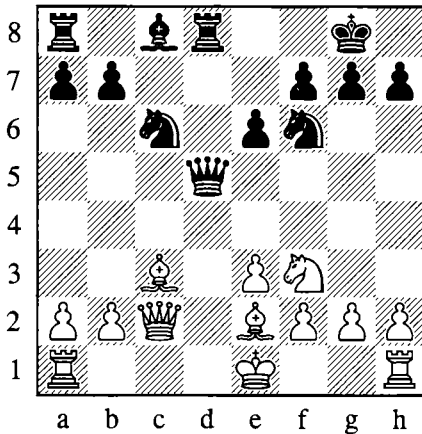
After repeating moves a few more times, the players agreed a draw in Nisipeanu – Eljanov, Baku (ol) 2016.

**B2) 10. ♖c3**

This is the more ambitious way for White to handle the position: he is willing to lose another tempo in order to keep his valuable bishop pair on the board.

**10...0-0 11. ♖f3 ♜d8**

Seizing the open d-file and restricting White's active possibilities. In particular, the d3-square is now denied to the f1-bishop.

**12. ♖c2**

We have reached a crossroads. **B21) 12... ♖e4** has been the overwhelmingly most popular choice, and it seems reliable enough, so I feel I should include it for background

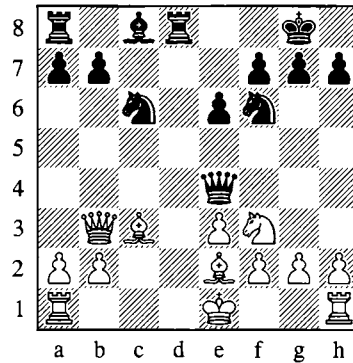
information if nothing else. However, my main recommendation is the rare but promising **B22) 12... ♖c5!**.

**B21) 12... ♖e4 13. ♜c1**

A more popular but less critical continuation is:

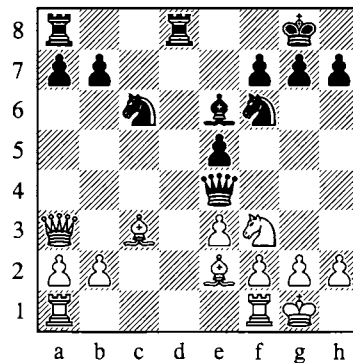
**13. ♖b3**

For some reason, almost all games have continued with 13... ♖d5. Instead, I found a more powerful and active continuation:

**13...e5!N 14.0-0 ♖e6 15. ♖a3**

The b7-pawn is poisoned: 15. ♖xb7? ♖d4 16. ♖a6 ♖xe2† 17. ♖xe2 ♖c4 and White loses material.

15. ♖g5! is an interesting tactical resource which leads to major simplifications: 15... ♖xb3 16. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 17. axb3 ♖d2 18. ♜fd1 ♖xb3 19. ♜a3 ♜xd1† 20. ♖xd1 ♖c5 21. b4 ♖e4 White has sufficient compensation for the pawn, but definitely no more.



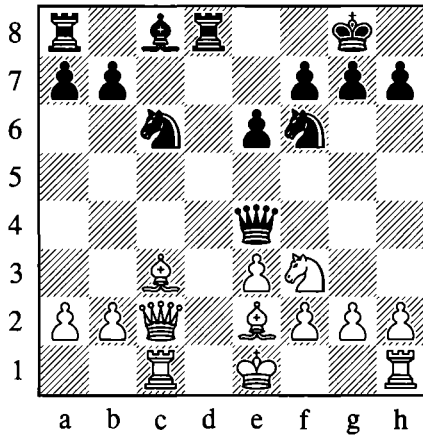
15...h6

A useful prophylactic move. The f3-knight is restricted, so Black's pieces are secure.

16.♞fd1 ♞xd1† 17.♞xd1 ♚c2

The queen on a3 is rather misplaced, so White has no reason to deviate from the following repetition:

18.♞d2 ♚c1† 19.♞d1 ♚c2=



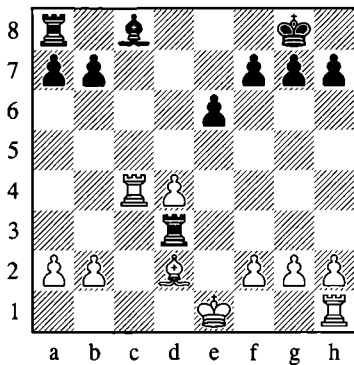
13...♞xc2 14.♞xc2 ♘d5

It's important to neutralize White's bishop pair.

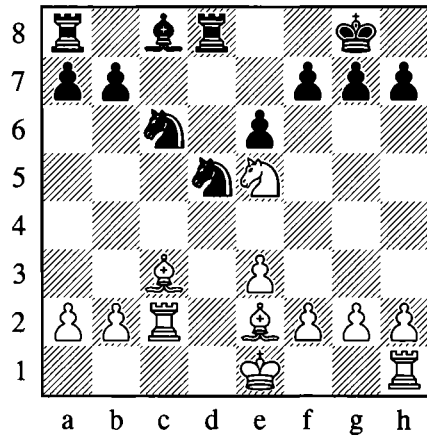
15.♘e5

15.0-0 ♘xc3 16.♞xc3 can be met by 16...f6N 17.♙c4 (White also gets absolutely nothing after 17.♙b5 ♙d7 18.♞d1 e5=) 17...♙d7 18.♞fc1 ♞ac8 19.a3 ♘f8 with equality.

Also insufficient is: 15.♙d2 ♘db4 16.♞c4 ♘d3† 17.♙xd3 ♞xd3 18.♘d4 ♘xd4 19.exd4



19...e5! Liberating the rook. 20.dxe5 ♙e6 21.♞c3 ♞xc3 22.♙xc3 ♙xa2=



15...♘xe5N

A natural improvement over a previous game.

15...♘db4 16.♞d2 ♞xd2 17.♘xd2 ♘xa2 18.♘xc6 ♘xc3 19.♘xc3 bxc6 20.♞a1± favoured White in Prohaszka – Rozentalis, Koge 2014.

Also insufficient for equality is 15...♙d7 16.♘xc6 ♙xc6 17.♙a5 ♞dc8 18.0-0±.

16.♙xe5 f6 17.♙c7

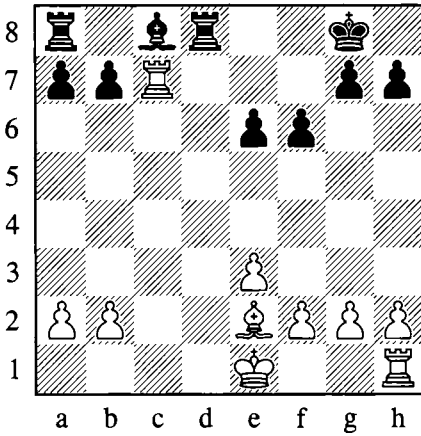
After 17.♙g3 e5 18.e4 ♘b4= White's bishop pair has little value, since the g3-bishop is rather passive.

17...♘xc7

After 17...♞d7?! 18.♙g3± Black would suffer from a lack of harmony.

18.♞xc7

Obviously White's hopes for an advantage are connected with the active rook on c7, but Black is able to neutralize it by means of:



18...♞d7

In his Chess 24 video repertoire, GM Jan Gustafsson analyses up to this position and concludes that White has some chances to press, but the position should be a draw, which seems a reasonable assessment. I will add a few more moves to show that Black only needs a minimal amount of accuracy to ensure absolute safety.

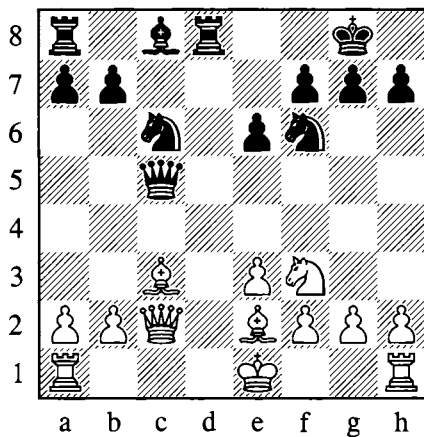
19.♞c3 e5 20.♞c4†

20.0-0 ♞d2=

20...♖f8 21.♖e2 ♞d6 22.e4 ♖e7 23.♞d5  
♞e6=

White's small advantage has evaporated.

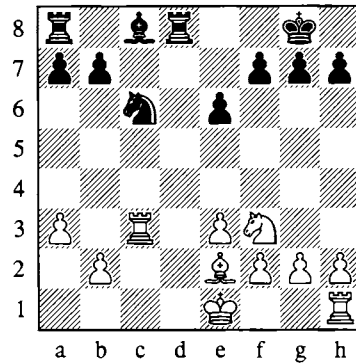
B22) 12...♞c5!



Although the previous variation seems theoretically fine, I see no reason why Black should go out of his way to exchange queens. Pinning the c3-bishop and freeing the d5-square for the knight seems more logical. Gustafsson does not mention this move in his video lecture.

We will consider B221) 13.♞a4, B222) 13.♞c1 and the natural yet untested B223) 13.0-0N.

13.a3 proves harmless after: 13...♞d5 14.♞c1  
♞xc3 15.♞xc3 ♞xc3† 16.♞xc3



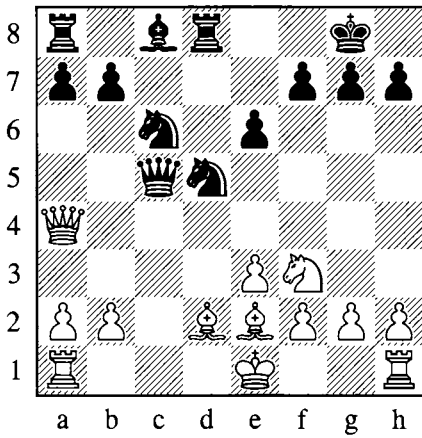
16...e5! Black is fine, as 17.♞b5 ♞d7 18.♞xc6  
♞xc6 19.♞xe5 ♞xg2 20.♞g1 ♞d5= leads  
nowhere for White.

B221) 13.♞a4

We will start with this ambitious move, as it seems like the only serious attempt to preserve White's dark-squared bishop.

13...♞d5 14.♞d2

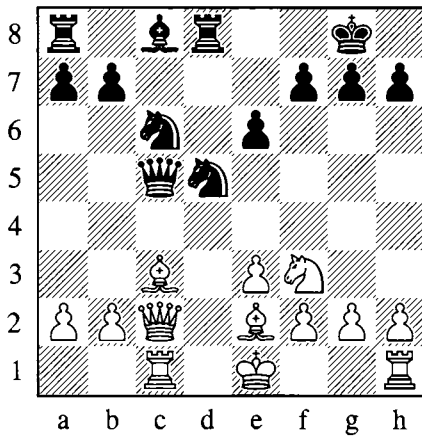
This position occurred in Bareev – Sakaev, Moscow 2001. I propose the following natural improvement:



14...e5!N 15.0-0 ♙e6 16.♞ac1 ♚e7

With a comfortable position. White's set-up is rather passive now, and it will difficult for him to activate the d2-bishop.

B222) 13.♞c1 ♘d5



14.♘g5!PN

We will focus on this aggressive choice.

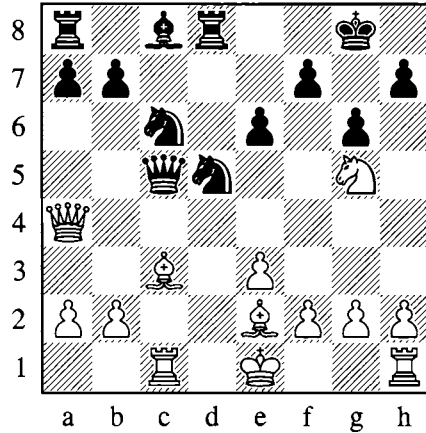
14.0-0 is covered under variation B223 below.

14.♚e4 ♘xc3 15.♞xc3 ♚e7 16.0-0 ♙d7= gives White nothing.

14...g6 15.♚a4

After 15.♙d2 ♚xc2 16.♞xc2 ♘db4= Black will force the exchange of one of White's bishops, thus solving all his problems.

The text move has the idea to transfer the queen to h4, so it demands an accurate response.



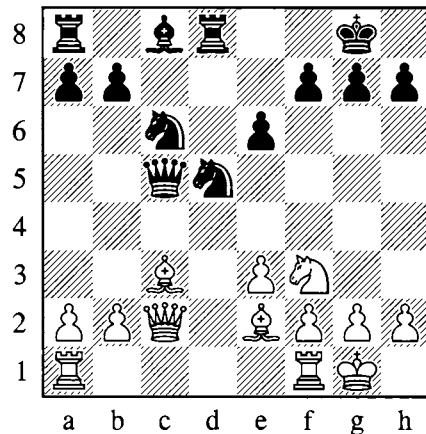
15...♚e7!

Less precise is 15...♘xc3 16.♚h4! h5 17.♞xc3 ♚b4 18.♚xb4 ♘xb4 19.0-0, which offers White some initiative in the endgame.

16.♚h4 f6 17.♘e4 e5 18.0-0 ♙f5 19.♙f3 ♘g7=

Black has successfully completed development and neutralized the power of White's bishops.

B223) 13.0-0N ♘d5

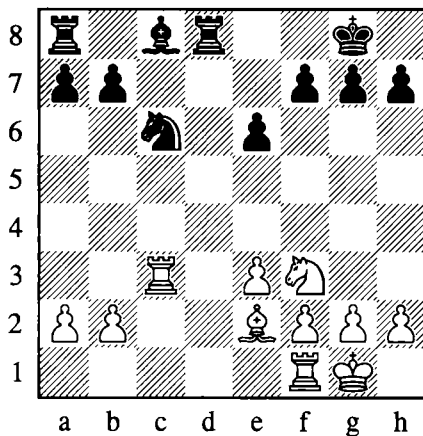


**14. ♖ac1**

This transposes to an existing game.

14. ♖fd1 is strategically risky: 14... ♗xc3  
15. ♖xd8† ♗xd8 16. bxc3 ♔d7 17. ♖d1 ♔e8  
White may soon find himself in a worse  
position due to his damaged pawn structure.

I also examined 14. ♔d3!?, which may change  
the quiet nature of the battle: 14... ♗xc3!  
(14...g6 15. ♔d2 ♖xc2 16. ♔xc2 leads to a  
slightly inferior endgame for Black) 15. ♔xh7†  
♗h8 16. bxc3 g6 17. ♔xg6 f×g6 18. ♖xg6  
White has three pawns for a piece, while the  
king on h8 is rather exposed. However, White's  
attacking potential isn't significant here, so  
after 18... ♖f5 19. ♖h6† ♖h7 20. ♖f6† ♗g8  
Black is doing well. For instance: 21. ♖ad1?!  
♖f8 22. ♖g5† ♖g7 23. ♖h5 ♔d7=

**14... ♗xc3 15. ♖xc3 ♖xc3 16. ♖xc3**

Even though White's 13th move was  
technically a novelty, a number of games have  
reached the present position via different  
move orders. Black's most convincing route to  
equality is:

**16... ♖f6!**

16... ♔d7 was less accurate, although Black  
still went on to hold the draw in Karpov –  
Ki. Georgiev, Puhajarve (rapid) 2013.

The text move prepares to restrict the f3-knight  
by means of ...e6-e5, and there is not much  
that White can do about it.

**17. ♔c4**

17. ♔b5 ♔d7 18. ♖d1 e5= also leaves White  
with absolutely no advantage.

**17... ♔d7!?!N**

17... ♗a5 18. ♔d3 e5 19. ♖fc1 ♔e6 enabled  
Black to equalize without much trouble in  
Weber – Moreno, corr. 2006. The text move  
seems even more convincing though.

**18. ♖fc1 ♖ac8 19. a3 ♗f8=**

With full equality.

**Conclusion**

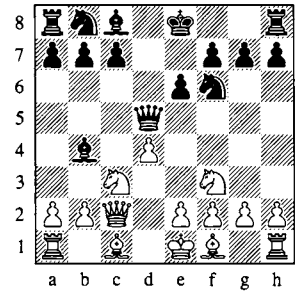
After 7. ♔d2 ♔xc3 we looked at two possibilities.  
8. bxc3 is not dangerous, as Black's active pieces  
are well placed to fight against White's large  
but somewhat unwieldy pawn centre. Black  
generally gets control over the light squares,  
whereas it's hard for White to do much with  
his bishop pair.

That's why 8. ♔xc3 is the main line by far,  
and after 8...cxd4 9. ♔xd4 ♗c6 White must  
make an important decision. 10. ♔xf6 gxf6  
sees White forfeit the bishop pair in order to  
weaken Black's structure. The kingside pawns  
are not really weak though, and after ...f6-f5  
Black will control the centre quite nicely. My  
analysis shows that Black should be able to  
activate his remaining bishop, thereby solving  
all his problems.

10. ♔c3 is a more ambitious attempt to  
make use of the bishop pair. I don't see many  
problems for Black though, especially after the  
rare but promising 12... ♖c5!. Black will follow  
up with ...♗d5, after which he will either  
liquidate the opponent's bishop or develop  
further activity in the centre with ...e5.

# Chapter 23

## 4. ♖c2



## 6. ♘f3

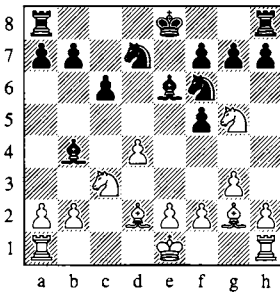
### Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♖c2 d5 5.cxd5 ♖xd5 6.♘f3

6...♖f5

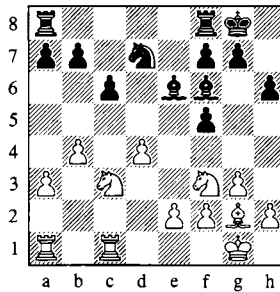
A) 7.♖d1 e5!?	338
A1) 8.e3	338
A2) 8.dxe5	340
B) 7.♖xf5 exf5	341
B1) 8.♗f4	342
B2) 8.♗d2	343
B3) 8.a3 ♗e7	345
B31) 9.e3	346
B32) 9.g3	346
B33) 9.♗g5	348
B34) 9.♗f4	349

B2) note to 9.e3



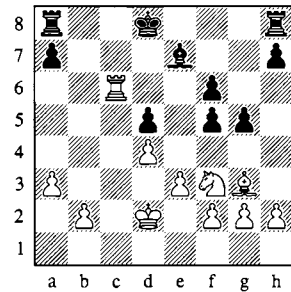
11...♗c4!N

B32) after 15.b4



15...g5!N

B34) after 21.♙xc6



21...a5!N

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♖c2 d5  
5.cxd5 ♖xd5 6.♘f3

This is White's most popular move, defending the d4-pawn while developing a piece. Unlike the 6.e3 variation, White avoids blocking in his dark-squared bishop.

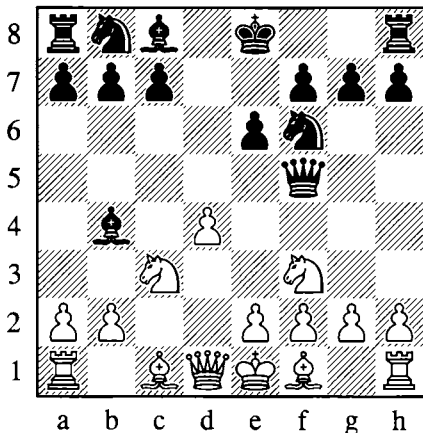
6... ♖f5

This move caused a stir when it was introduced by Oleg Romanishin in 1993. Since then, it has developed into a highly respectable main line.

White must decide whether to trade queens or move his own queen away. In this chapter we will deal with A) 7.♖d1 and B) 7.♖xf5.

7.♖b3 is the most theoretically critical move, and will be covered in the next and final chapter.

A) 7.♖d1



Returning the queen to its initial location looks like a concession. However, there is a clear idea behind it: on d1 the queen supports the developing move ♗d3, which will enable White to regain some of the time he has lost. This idea has been employed successfully by such strong players as Gelfand, Aronian and Sasikiran, among others.

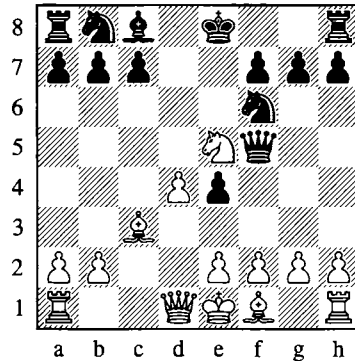
7...e5!?

7...c5 is a more popular alternative, but I prefer the more dynamic text move. Black sacrifices a pawn in order to improve the activity of his pieces, especially the c8-bishop.

We will analyse the calm A1) 8.e3 followed by the more critical A2) 8.dxe5.

The greedy 8.♘xe5?! is inadvisable for White: 8...♘e4 9.♘d3 ♘xc3 10.♖b3 ♘xe2† 11.♘xb4 ♘xc1 12.♗xc1 0-0

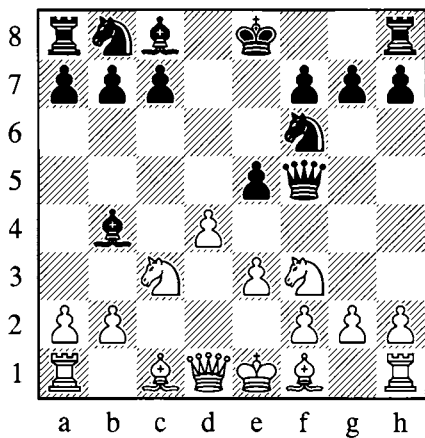
After 8.♗d2 ♗xc3 9.♗xc3 e4 10.♘e5 White had the bishop pair but was suffering from a lack of space in S. Ivanov – Khalifman, Sochi 2004. Black should have continued:



10...♘bd7!N 11.♘c4 (11.e3 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♘g4 13.♖c2 ♘xe5‡ does not give White enough for the pawn) 11...♘b6 12.e3 0-0 13.♗c1 ♗e6‡ Black's space advantage and control over the d5-square offer him the better chances.

A1) 8.e3

This has been played four times. For some reason, nobody chose the natural move:

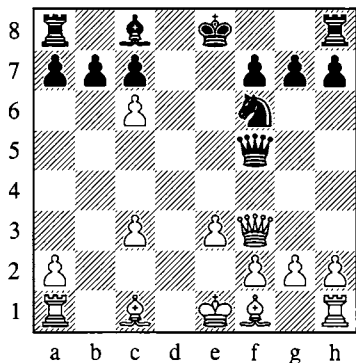


### 8...♘c6!?N

I do not like 8...exd4 9.♘xd4, since in this case Black has to waste time moving the queen again. For instance, after 9...♙xc3† 10.bxc3 ♖a5, in Dreev – Adams, Las Vegas (rapid) 1999, the simple 11.♙e2!N 0–0 12.0–0 c5 13.♘b3 ♗c7 14.c4± would have given White the better chances.

### 9.dxe5

9.d5 is another principled reaction, which might lead to a draw after: 9...e4 10.dxc6 exf3 11.♗xf3 ♙xc3† 12.bxc3

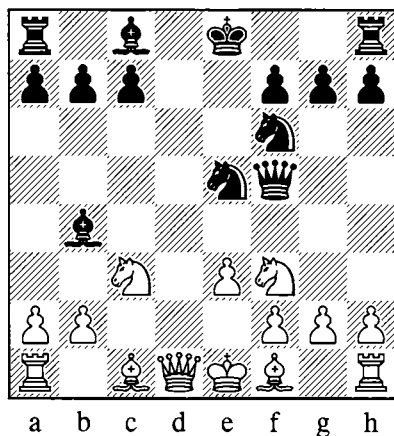


12...♗c5! 13.cxb7 ♙xb7 14.♗xb7 ♗xc3† 15.♙e2 ♗c4† 16.♙e1 ♗c3†= With a perpetual.

I also considered 9.a3 ♙xc3† 10.bxc3 0–0 11.♙e2 e4 12.♘d2 ♗g6± when White is behind in development and is forced to make

a concession on the kingside, since castling would lose the exchange.

### 9...♘xe5

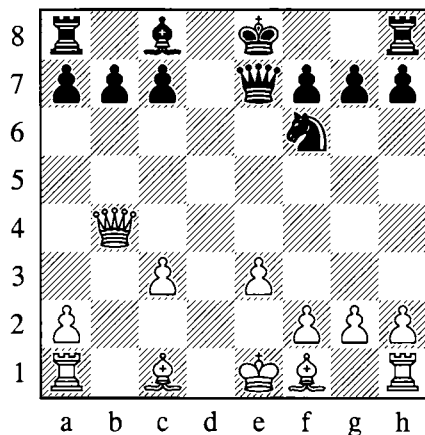


### 10.♘xe5

10.♗a4† ♘c6 11.♘d4 ♗c5 12.♙d2 ♙d7= is also harmless for Black.

### 10...♙xc3† 11.bxc3 ♗xe5 12.♗d4 ♗e7 13.♗b4

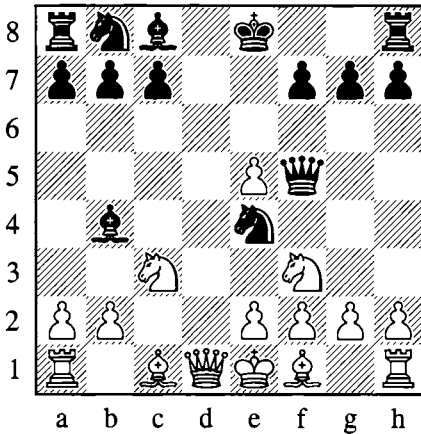
13.a4N can also be met by 13...b6, when Black's better pawn structure fully compensates for White's bishop pair.



### 13...b6 14.♙e2 c5 15.♗b3 0–0=

Black was fine in Balta – Packroff, corr. 2013.

A2) 8.dxe5 ♘e4



White is forced to defend c3, while Black intends to continue developing his pieces as quickly as possible.

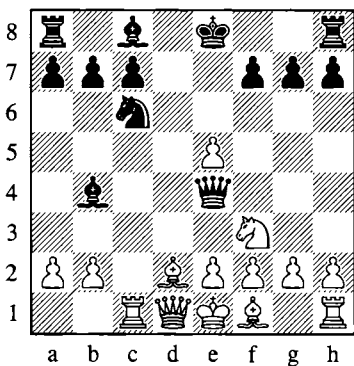
9. ♕d2 ♘c6 10.e3

Nothing is promised by:

10. ♘xe4 ♗xe4 11. ♖c1

11. ♕xb4? ♘xb4 12. ♖c1 ♕f5 is simply bad for White.

11.a3 ♕xd2† 12. ♗xd2, as played in Sumets – Schneider, Pardubice 2006, should be met by 12... ♕g4!N 13.h3 ♕xf3 14.gxf3 ♗xe5 15.f4 ♗e4 16. ♖g1 0–0 17. ♕g2 ♗f5, with excellent play for Black.



A draw was agreed in this position in G.A. Szabo – Parligras, Golden Sands 2012. A likely continuation is:

11... ♘xe5 12. ♘xe5 ♕xd2† 13. ♗xd2 ♗xe5 14.e3 0–0 15. ♕c4 ♗f6 16.0–0 ♖d8=

Black has no problems.

The text move is the most ambitious – White is trying to keep the extra pawn or convert it into something else.

10... ♕xc3!

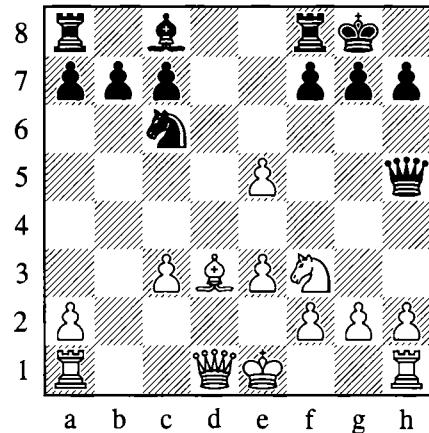
The tempting 10... ♘xd2 11. ♗xd2 ♘xe5 is inferior due to 12. ♘d4 ♗f6 13.a3 ♕xc3 14. ♗xc3 0–0 15. ♕e2 and White was somewhat better in Narciso Dublan – Lopez Martinez, Barcelona 2013.

11. ♕xc3 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 0–0!

Black is in no hurry to collect the missing pawn.

I do not like 12... ♘xe5 13. ♘xe5 ♗xe5 14. ♗d4, when White is likely to obtain a better pawn structure.

13. ♕d3 ♗h5



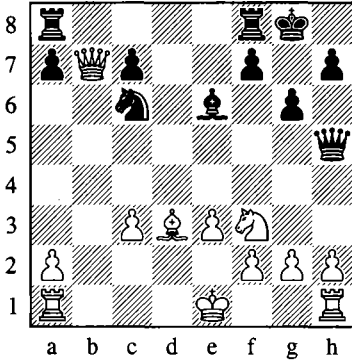
14. ♗b1!N

This seems like the critical continuation, eyeing the pawns on h7 and b7.

After 14. ♗c2 g6! Black easily solves his problems: 15.0–0 ♘xe5 16. ♘xe5 ♗xe5= Penkin – Hens, corr. 2009.

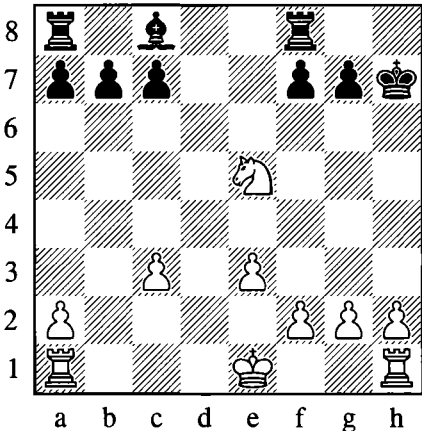
14... ♘xe5!?

The idea behind White's last move is to meet 14...g6 with 15.e6!?. However, it turns out that Black is doing fine here too after: 15...♗xe6 16.♖xb7



16...♗h3! 17.♖b5 ♖xb5 18.♗xb5 ♗xg2 19.♗xc6 ♗xh1 20.♗xa8 ♖xa8=

15.♗xh7† ♖xh7 16.♖xh7† ♗xh7 17.♘xe5



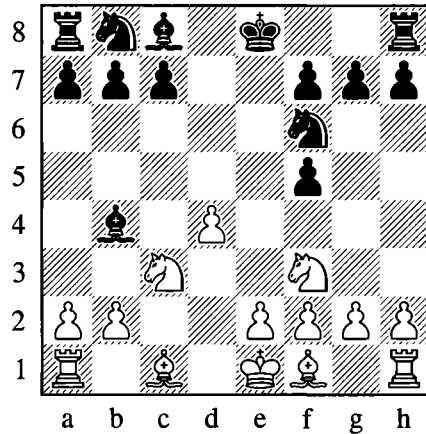
17...♗e6 18.0-0 f6 19.♘f3 ♖fd8

Black's control over the d-file and superior minor piece add up to full compensation for the missing pawn.

B) 7.♖xf5

This has been the most popular continuation. Indeed, why should White waste a tempo by moving the queen again if there is a chance to double the opponent's pawns?

7...exf5



Before delving into any variations, I would like to pause and share some of my thoughts about the newly modified pawn structure. White has a pawn majority in the centre plus an open c-file, and he may look to gain space on the queenside after completing development. On the other hand, Black's doubled pawns are not weak at all, and shifting the e6-pawn to f5 has given him control over the e4-square, as well as improving the scope of the light-squared bishop.

One of the nice things about this variation is that Black generally follows a familiar scheme of development. The c7-pawn will move to c6, covering the b5-square and securing control over d5. The queen's knight will go via d7 to b6, and the light-squared bishop will go to e6 – possibly after a prophylactic ...h6, if Black deems it necessary to prevent ♘g5. No matter what White does, Black almost always put his pieces on these squares – the only thing he

seriously needs to think about is choosing the optimal move order against whichever set-up White chooses. White, on the other hand, has many more decisions to make. Will he develop his bishop on f4, or will he put it on d2 or b2 to assist with queenside operations? Will his other bishop go to e2, d3 or g2? Will he leave his knight on f3 or transfer it to the queenside? And so on.

Finally, let me quash any fears you might have about this being a boring line where Black exchanges queens with the sole ambition of drawing a slightly worse endgame. With the exception of the queens and one pawn of each colour, we still have an entire set of pieces on the board, and the asymmetric pawn structure enables a strong player to play for a win from either side.

Now, let's move on to some specific variations. We will start by checking **B1) 8. ♖f4** and **B2) 8. ♖d2**, before moving on to the most popular **B3) 8.a3**.

It is worth briefly considering the modest-looking alternative:

8.e3!?

Interestingly, Black's most precise reply has yet to be tested.

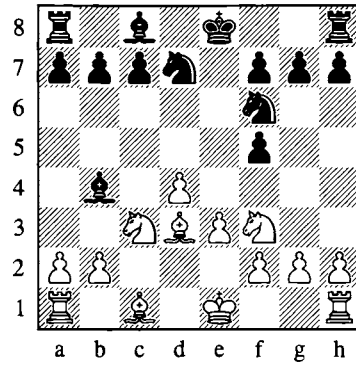
8... ♖bd7!N

8...c6 is a typical move but I found 9. ♖d3! to be an annoying reply, as Black will have to make sure the f5-pawn is defended before carrying out the ... ♖d7-b6 manoeuvre.

8... ♖e4 9. ♖d2 ♖xd2 10. ♖xd2 c6 has been played a few times, and is also suggested by Vigorito as a good option for Black. However, I am not convinced that it is such a great achievement to swap off White's dark-squared bishop, and the knight on d2 will find an excellent home on c4.

9. ♖d3

9.a3 ♖e7 would transpose to variation B31.



9... ♖b6

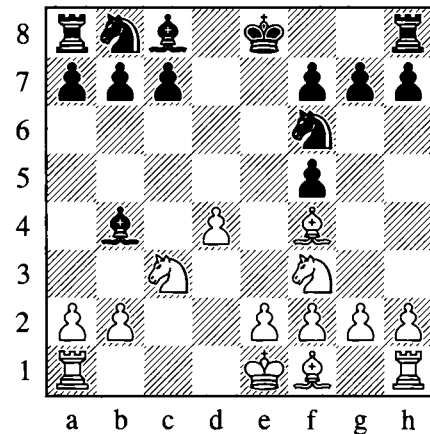
Perfect timing! The knight comes to its ideal square and Black's next few moves flow smoothly.

10. 0-0 c6 11.a3

11. ♖d2 transposes to variation B2.

11... ♖d6 12.b4 a6=

### B1) 8. ♖f4



8...c6

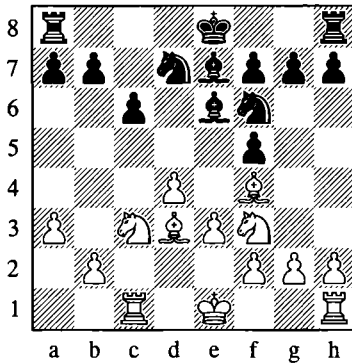
Black safeguards the attacked pawn by playing a move he was intending to make anyway.

8... ♖d5?! 9. ♖d2 ♖xc3 10.bxc3 ♖d6 11.e3± only improved White's central control in Trevis – Soreghy, email 2012.

9.e3

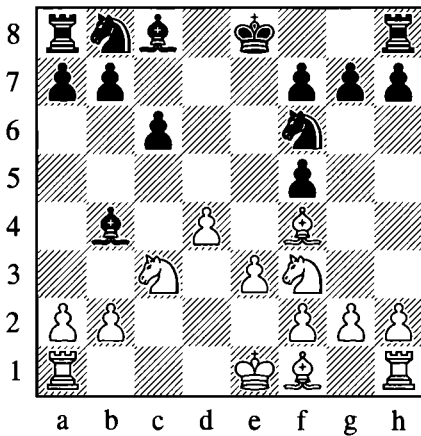
9.a3 ♖e7 transposes to variation B34.

9. ♖c1 ♗e6 10. a3 ♗e7 11. e3 ♘bd7 12. ♗d3,  
as played in Kociscak – Navara, Prague (blitz)  
2012, should be met by:



12... ♘b6N 13. ♘g5 ♗d7 14. 0–0 0–0=  
Reaching a typical set-up where Black is fine.

This position occurred in Dragomarezkij –  
Lysyj, Internet (blitz) 2004. Black should have  
carried out the thematic knight manoeuvre:

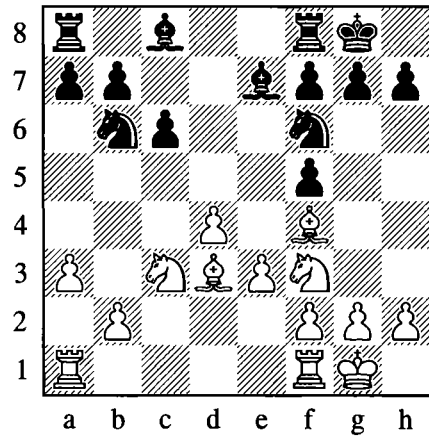


9... ♘bd7N 10. ♗d3

10. a3 ♗e7 would once again transpose to  
variation B34.

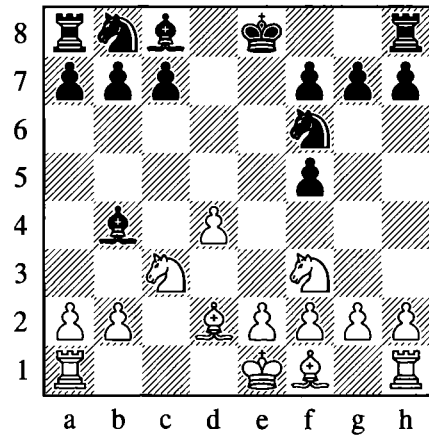
10... ♘b6 11. 0–0 0–0 12. a3 ♗e7

Black has reached a harmonious set-up  
and it will not be easy for White to find a  
constructive plan. Play might continue:



13. ♘g5 ♗d7 14. ♗d3 ♘bd7 15. ♗g3 a5=

B2) 8. ♗d2



This plan of development is rather passive  
and cannot pose Black any problems.

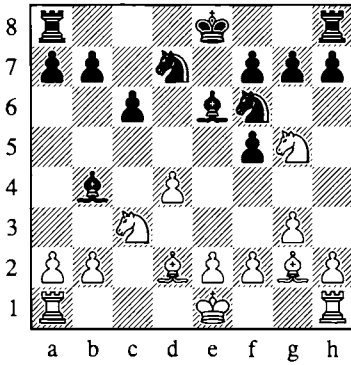
8... c6

A multi-tasking move. Black strengthens his  
control over the light squares and limits the  
movements of the c3-knight, thereby securing  
the d6-square for the bishop's retreat.

9. e3

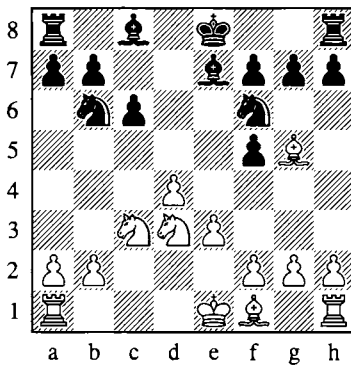
Black didn't face any problems after 9. a3 ♗d6  
10. b4 ♘e4 11. e3 ♗e6 12. ♗d3 ♘xd2 13. ♘xd2  
♘d7= in Grachev – Maletin, Cheboksary  
2006.

Black is also fine after 9.g3 ♗e6 10.♗g2 ♖bd7, and now, if 11.♖g5, as played in Amonatov – Kurnosov, Tashkent 2008, Black can cause problems with:



11...♗c4!N 12.a3 ♗xc3 13.♗xc3 0-0= White will experience some problems connecting his rooks.

An original regrouping of the pieces – 9.♖e5 ♖bd7 10.♖d3 ♗e7 11.♗g5 ♖b6 12.e3 – was tried in Najer – Lastin, Moscow 2005. I think Black should have continued:



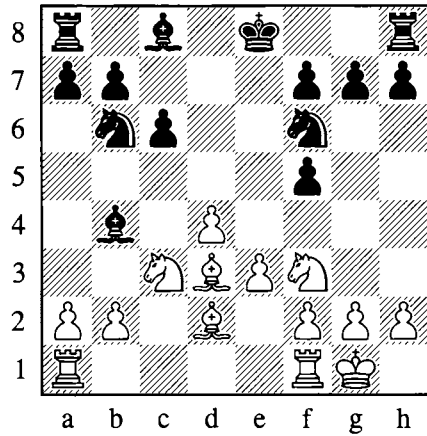
12...h6N 13.♗h4 ♗e6 14.♖f4 g5 15.♖xe6 fxe6 16.♗g3 ♖f7 With comfortable play.

**9...♖bd7 10.♗d3**

10.♗c4 ♖b6 11.♗b3 ♗e6! 12.♗xe6 fxe6 13.♖e2 ♗d6 was already slightly better for Black due to his control over the light squares in Olausson – Tikkanen, Sweden 2003.

**10...♖b6 11.0-0**

After 11.♖e2 ♗d6 (obviously there is no reason to exchange the passive d2-bishop) 12.0-0 ♖e4 13.♗a5 0-0 14.♗fc1 ♗e8 15.♖d2 ♖xd2 16.♗xd2 a5 Black was able to solve all his problems and outplay his strong opponent in Beliavsky – Romanishin, Groningen 1993 – which was, by the way, the original game where 6...♗f5 was introduced.

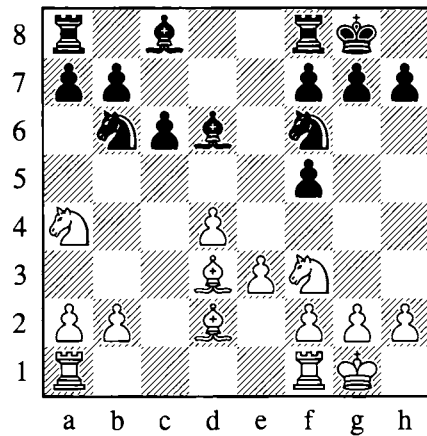


**11...0-0 12.♖a4**

White achieves nothing with 12.a3 ♗d6 13.b4 a6 14.♗fc1 ♗e6, when Black was taking aim at the weak c4-square in Collas – Macieja, Legnica 1994.

**12...♗d6**

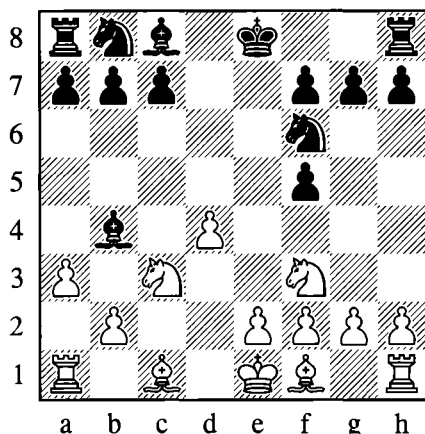
12...♗xd2 13.♖xb6 axb6 14.♖xd2 ♗e6= also looks absolutely fine for Black.



13.♖c5 ♖bd5 14.♗ac1 a5 15.♗fd1 ♗e8=

The knight on c5 didn't really bother Black in Azmaiparashvili – Yusupov, Pula 1997.

### B3) 8.a3



This is the most logical and popular move, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it breaks the pin on the knight without committing the dark-squared bishop to d2. Secondly, it forces Black to make a decision regarding where to put his bishop.

### 8...♗e7

8...♗d6 has been tested many times by strong players, but I would prefer not to allow White to force the exchange of the bishop by means of 9.♖b5. If the ...c6 move had already been played, then the d6-square would have been slightly preferable for the bishop.

Now there are four main options: **B31) 9.e3**, **B32) 9.g3**, **B33) 9.♗g5** and **B34) 9.♗f4**.

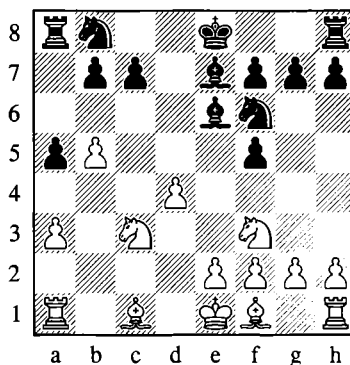
9.♖e5, transferring the knight to d3, is not particularly challenging, since Black is rarely in a hurry to play ...c5 in this line. After 9...♖bd7 10.♖d3 ♖b6 11.g3 c6 12.♗g2 h6 13.0-0 ♗e6 Black had a comfortable position in Flear – Cheparinov, Elgoibar 2004.

### 9.b4

This move has been seen in a couple of grandmaster games. In my opinion, the most principled reaction is:

### 9...a5!N 10.b5 ♗e6

keeping an eye on some weak spots in White's camp. The following line demonstrates that it won't be easy for White to exert meaningful pressure on the c7-pawn.



### 11.♗f4

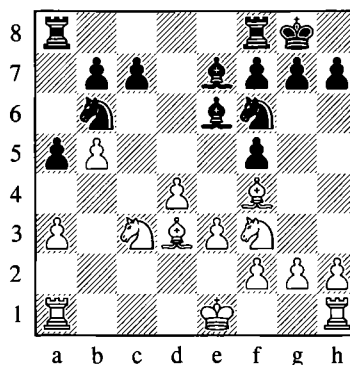
After 11.e3 ♖bd7 12.♗d3 h6 (a standard way to secure the e6-bishop) 13.0-0 ♖b6 14.♗b2 0-0 15.♗fc1 ♗d6 Black has promising play.

The text move is a more active plan of development but the f4-bishop is somewhat vulnerable.

### 11...♖bd7 12.e3 0-0 13.♗d3

13.♖g5 is pointless in view of 13...♗b3!

### 13...♖b6

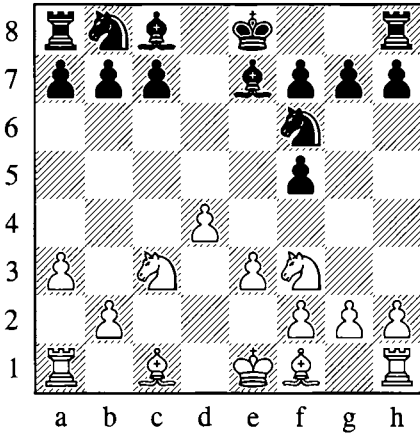


14.0-0

The greedy 14. ♗xc7?! runs into 14... ♖bd5 15. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 16. ♗e5 ♗fc8, and Black has the initiative.

14... ♖bd5 15. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 16. ♗g3 g5 17. h4 h6 With counterplay.

**B31) 9.e3**



This move looks somewhat modest, but White intends to advance the queenside pawns and gain space on that side of the board. The bishop could be useful in supporting such a plan from the d2-square.

**9... ♖bd7**

As usual, Black is going to put the knight on b6, where it is placed rather harmoniously: it controls the d5-square and doesn't block the c-pawn.

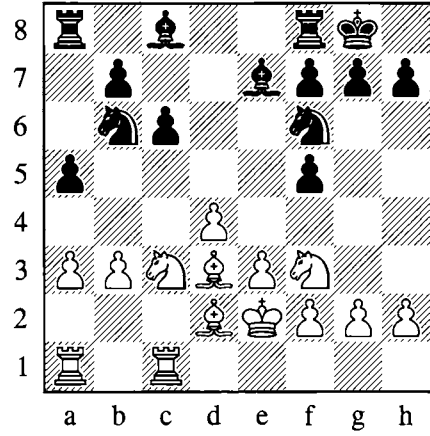
**10. ♗d3 ♖b6 11. ♗d2**

The ambitious 11. b4N can be met by 11... ♗e6!?, intending 12. ♖g5 ♗c4!. The justification of Black's play is: 13. ♗xf5 a5! 14. b5 ♖fd5 15. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 Black regains the pawn and reaches a comfortable position.

**11... a5 12. ♗e2 0-0 13. ♗hc1 c6 14. b3**

We have been following the game Van Wely – Adams, Wijk aan Zee 2004. In my opinion,

Black has no reason to deviate from the natural developing move:



**14... ♗e6!N 15. ♖e5!?**

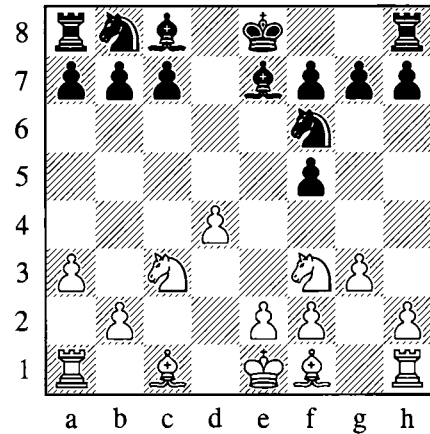
15. ♗c2 ♗d6 gives Black comfortable equality.

After the text move the b3-pawn should not be touched, but instead Black can neutralize the centralized knight:

**15... ♖fd7! 16. ♖xd7 ♖xd7**

With comfortable play.

**B32) 9.g3**

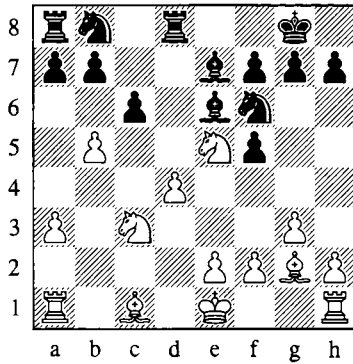


This fianchetto has been tried by some strong players, but Black is well placed to counteract the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal.

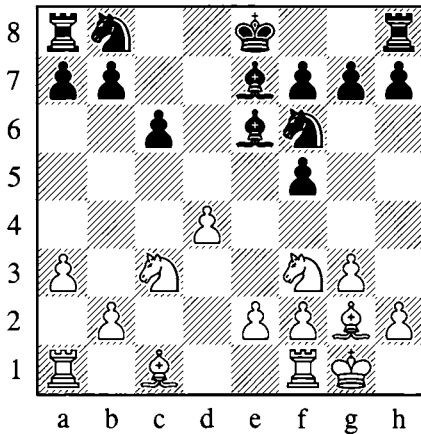
**9...c6 10.♟g2 ♟e6 11.0–0**

11.♟g5 ♟bd7 gives White nothing better than 12.0–0, transposing to our main line.

11.♟e5 0–0 12.b4 ♞d8 13.b5 is an over-optimistic attempt to apply pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal. The following game shows the correct response:

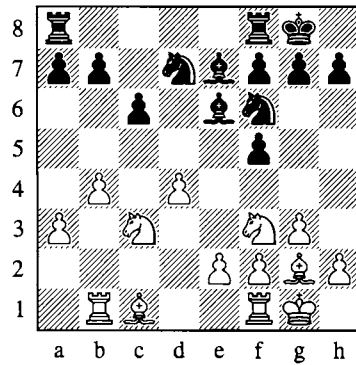


13...♟d5! 14.♟b2 cxb5 15.♟xb5 a6 16.♟c3 ♟c6 Black was already slightly better in Wells – Timman, London 2009.

**11...♟bd7 12.♟g5**

The most popular plan – White can't find a useful role for the dark-squared bishop, so he intends to exchange it before consolidating the centre by means of e2-e3.

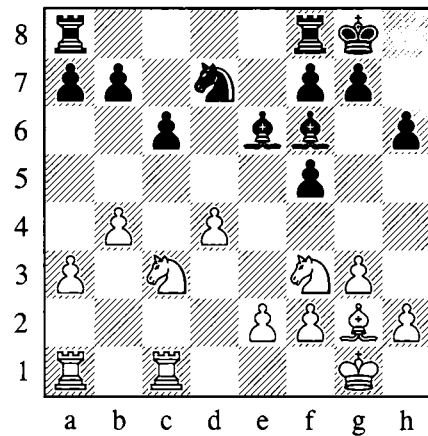
12.b4 0–0 13.♞b1, as played in Gagunashvili – Sethuraman, Hyderabad 2013, is well met by:



13...♟b6!N 14.♟e5 ♟fd5 and White suffers from weak light squares in his camp.

**12...h6 13.♟xf6 ♟xf6 14.♞fc1 0–0 15.b4**

We have been following the game Van Wely – Khalifman, Neum 2000. In this position I am attracted by the following aggressive approach:

**15...g5!N**

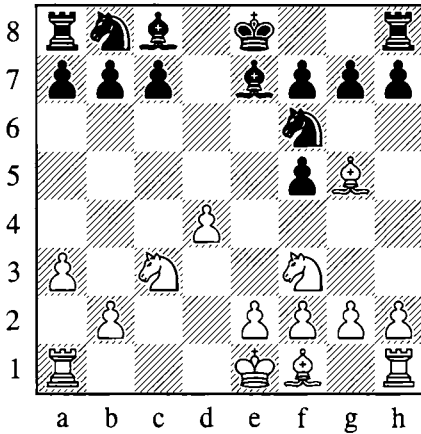
This advance looks somewhat risky, but it's impossible for White to apply meaningful pressure on the f5-pawn. At the same time, gaining space on the kingside yields Black promising counterplay, while starting the process of opening the position for his bishops.

**16.e3 ♞fd8 17.♞ab1**

Also after 17.♟e1 f4♞ Black succeeds in getting rid of the doubled pawns and creating some targets in White's camp.

17...f4 18.gxf4 gxf4 19.e4 ♗g4 20.♖e2 ♖f8  
 Black has promising counterplay against White's central pawns.

B33) 9. ♗g5



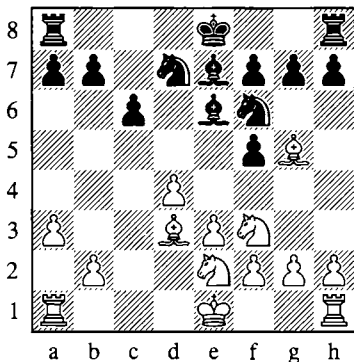
An ambitious move. However, the g5-bishop is not going to be very mobile, so in many cases White will be forced to exchange it.

9... ♗e6 10.e3 c6 11. ♖d2

Transferring the knight to a5 looks tempting, but it takes a lot of time.

11. ♖e2N ♖d5 12. ♗xe7 ♖xe7 13.g3 ♖d7 reaches an interesting position where Black shouldn't experience any problems.

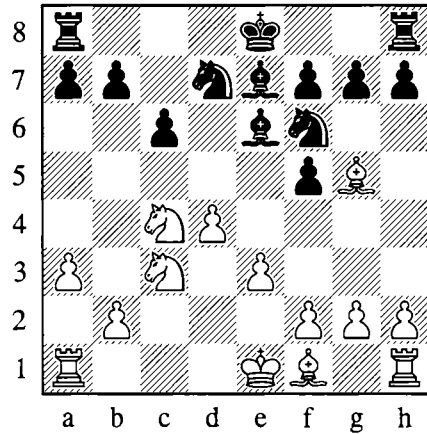
I also examined: 11. ♗d3 ♖bd7 12. ♖e2!N (12.0-0 h6 13. ♗h4 a5 14. ♖ac1 0-0 15. ♖e2 g5 16. ♗g3 ♖e4 and Black was completely okay in Kasparov – Kramnik, Linares 1999)



12...h6 13. ♗xf6 (White also gets nowhere after 13. ♗h4 g5 14. ♗g3 ♖e4=) 13... ♗xf6 14. ♖f4 g5 15. ♖xe6 fxe6=

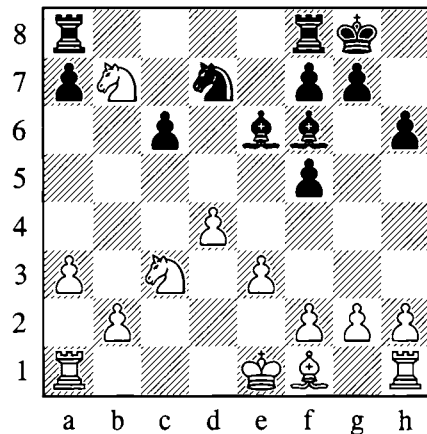
11... ♖bd7 12. ♖c4

We have been following the game Kharlov – Olafsson, Cappelle-la-Grande 1999. Here Black missed an opportunity to utilize his lead in development by means of:



12...0-0!N 13. ♖a5 h6! 14. ♗xf6 14. ♗h4 c5

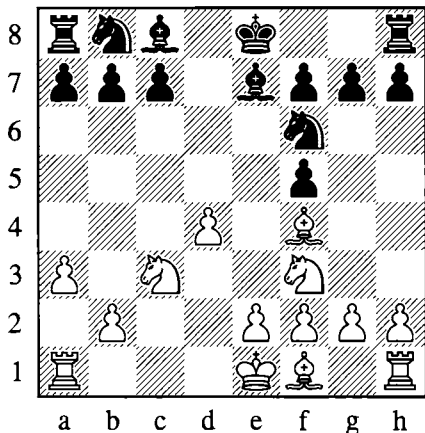
14... ♗xf6 15. ♖xb7



15...c5! 16. ♖xc5 ♖xc5 17. dxc5 ♖fc8

With a powerful initiative. Despite his temporary material advantage, White will have to work hard to achieve a draw.

B34) 9.♟f4



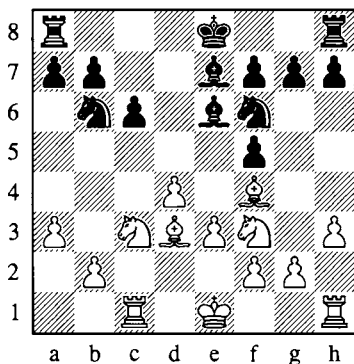
9...c6 10.e3 ♟bd7

The knight is heading to b6, as usual.

11.♟c4

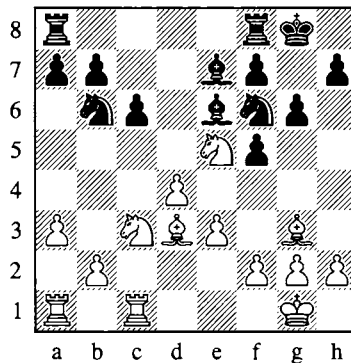
The most ambitious continuation – the bishop is placed rather actively, taking aim at the key d5-square. The following alternatives seem less challenging:

11.h3 ♟b6 12.♟d3 ♟e6 13.♟c1



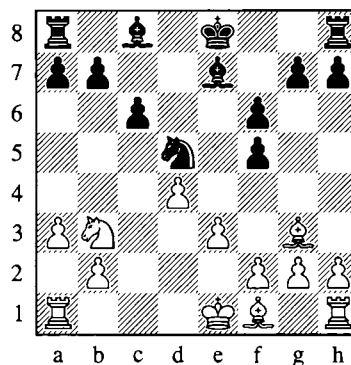
13...a5! It makes sense to seize some space on the queenside and neutralize the potential minority attack. (That being said, there is also nothing wrong with 13...0–0 14.0–0 ♟fd5=.) 14.♟c7 ♟bd5 15.♟xd5 ♟xd5= S. Zhigalko – Wojtaszek, Wrocław 2011.

11.♟d3 ♟b6 12.0–0 ♟e6 13.♟g3 0–0 14.♟fc1 g6 15.♟e5?! (White should have preferred 15.h3 ♟bd5 16.♟g5 ♟d7=) Now in Gagunashvili – Anand, Rishon Le Zion 2006, Black should have played:



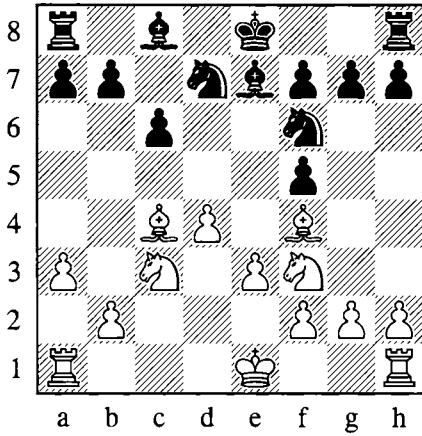
15...♟h5!N Black obtains the better position after eliminating the strong dark-squared bishop: 16.b4 ♟fd8 17.♟e2 f4 18.exf4 ♟xg3 19.hxg3 ♟xd4=

The following knight transfer does not seem effective: 11.♟d2 ♟b6 12.♟b3 ♟fd5 13.♟xd5 ♟xd5 14.♟e5 f6 15.♟g3



15...f4! This pawn sacrifice, which Vigorito does not mention in *Challenging the Nimzo-Indian*, allows Black to destroy the opponent's pawn structure and obtain the advantage of the bishop pair. (Vigorito does mention 15...g5!?, which would also warrant serious attention, if it were not for the even stronger text move.)

16. ♖xf4 ♜xf4 17. exf4 ♙e6 18. ♜a5 0-0-0  
 19. 0-0-0 ♙d6 20. g3 ♙c7 21. ♜c4 ♜d7  
 Michalik – Wojtaszek, Czech Republic 2012.



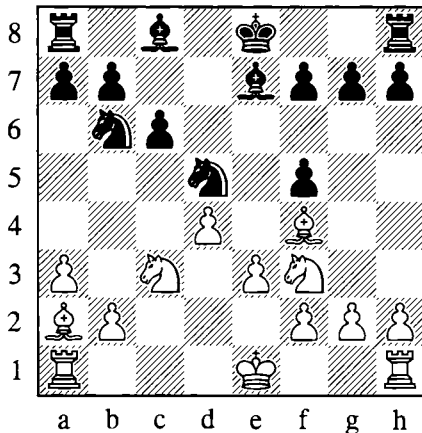
11... ♜b6 12. ♙a2

12. ♙b3 ♜fd5 13. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 14. ♙xd5 cxd5  
 leads to the same thing.

12... ♜fd5!?

I like this somewhat provocative concept.

12... ♙e6 13. ♙xe6 fxe6 14. ♜c1 ♜fd5 also led to acceptable play for Black in I. Sokolov – Adams, Wijk aan Zee 2004. However, in this case White's position seems much safer.



13. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 14. ♙xd5

This is the most principled move, and probably the best.

14. ♙e5 f6 15. ♙g3 ♙e6 16. 0-0 ♜f7 looks roughly equal, but Black's position is easier to handle. The g3-bishop faces an uncertain future, since Black will soon be ready to push the kingside pawns.

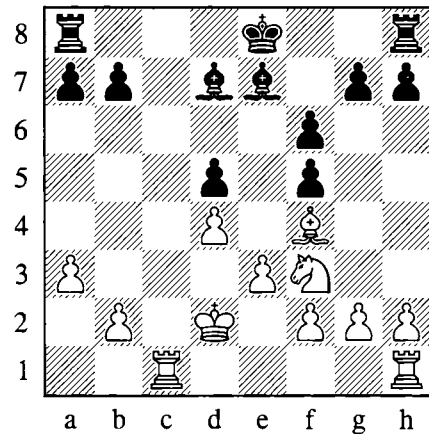
14... cxd5

We have reached a rather unusual pawn structure. At first glance, Black's bishops are not powerful, while his pawn structure is seriously compromised. However, this is an illusion. The d5-pawn is hard to attack and therefore isn't really weak. Furthermore, both of White's minor pieces are well restricted, and have worse prospects than Black's bishops.

15. ♜c1

After 15. 0-0 f6 16. ♜d2 ♙d7 17. ♜fc1 b6 18. ♜b1 ♜f7 19. ♜c3 ♜e6 Black was better in Richter – Naiditsch, Germany 2012.

15... f6 16. ♜d2 ♙d7



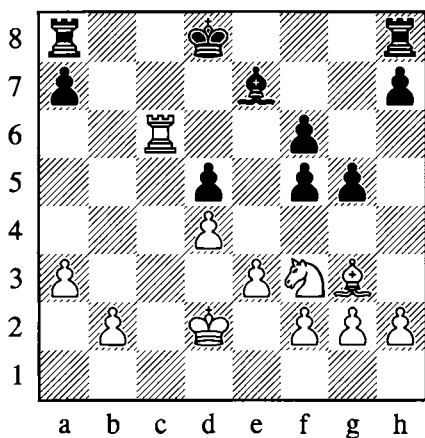
17. ♜c7?!

This ambitious move is wrong, since the rook is now in danger.

A better continuation would have been 17.h4N ♗c6 18.♟e1 ♜f7 19.♟d3 g6, maintaining the balance.

17...g5 18.♟g3 ♗c6 19.♞c1 ♜d8 20.♞1xc6 bxc6 21.♞xc6

Now in Topalov – Anand, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 2005, Black's strongest continuation would have been:



21...a5!N 22.♞b6 ♜d7 23.♞b7† ♜e6 24.♞b6† ♜f7

White would have to work hard to save half a point from here.

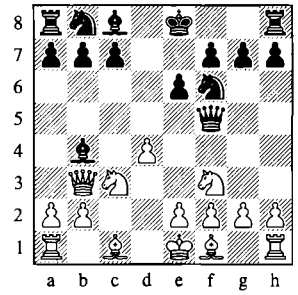
## Conclusion

6.♟f3 is White's most ambitious way of protecting the d4-pawn, but it offers Black a golden opportunity to remove the queen from the centre with 6...♞f5. If White responds by retreating his queen to its initial square, Black can solve all his problems with the energetic pawn sacrifice 7...e5!?. The majority of the chapter was devoted to the queenless middlegame arising after 7.♞xf5 exf5. Black benefits from a sound and reliable position, with an easy plan of development and good control over the central light squares.

# Chapter 24

## 4. ♖c2

## 7. ♗b3



## Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♖c2 d5 5.cxd5 ♗xd5 6.♘f3 ♗f5 7.♗b3

7...♘c6!

A) 8.g3	353
B) 8.e3	355
C) 8.a3 ♗a5	356
C1) 9.g3	356
C2) 9.e3	357
C3) 9.♗d2	358
D) 8.♗d2 0-0	361
D1) 9.♞c1	361
D2) 9.e3	362
D3) 9.h3 a5! 10.g4 ♗g6	363
D31) 11.♗g2	365
D32) 11.a3 a4!	366
D321) 12.♖d1	366
D322) 12.♖a2	368
D323) 12.♖c4 ♗xc3	370
D3231) 13.bxc3	370
D3232) 13.♗xc3	372

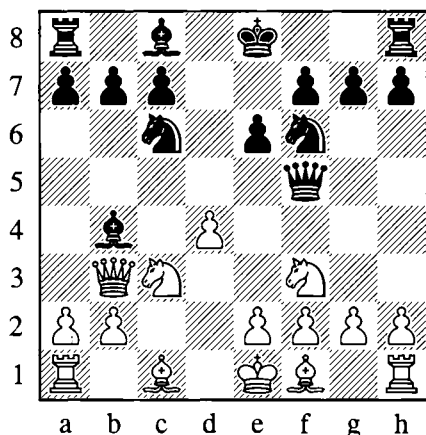
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♞c2 d5  
5.cxd5 ♞xd5 6.♗f3 ♞f5 7.♖b3

This is White's most ambitious choice, avoiding the queen exchange while keeping the queen on a more active square than d1. However, the placement of the queen on b3 has its drawbacks, as we shall see.

7...♗c6!

This move looks somewhat artificial, as the knight blocks the path of the c-pawn. On the other hand, Black develops as quickly as possible while preparing ...e5. The ensuing opening battle will revolve around White's attempts to prevent or counteract this central break.

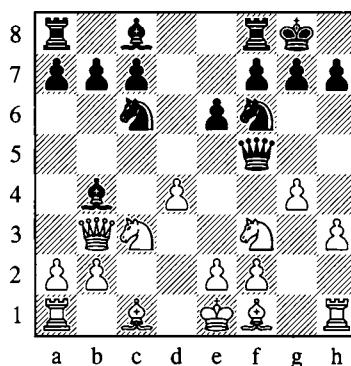
In general, it would make sense to challenge the opponent's centre right away by means of 7...c5. Alas, it turns out that after 8.a3 ♗a5 (8...♗xc3† 9.♞xc3 ♗bd7 10.g4! also offers White some initiative) 9.♞c4! ♗bd7 10.b4 White gets a stable positional advantage due to his superiority in the centre.



We will analyse four main options:  
A) 8.g3, B) 8.e3, C) 8.a3 and the most popular D) 8.♗d2.

8.h3 0–0 9.g4 is an attempt to play actively on the kingside while saving time by ignoring the pin on the c3-knight. (9.♗d2 would transpose

to variation D3.) In Nikolov – Ninov, Bankia 2011, Black should have played:



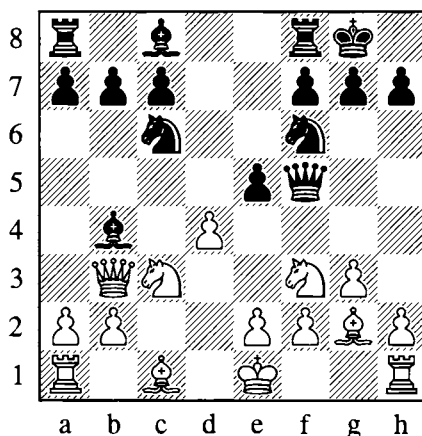
9...♞a5!N 10.♗d2 (10.♗g2 ♘e4 11.0–0 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗xc3 13.♗b2 ♗xb2 14.♞xb2 ♘e7 offers some compensation for the pawn, but I still prefer Black) 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♗e6 12.♞c2 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♞xe5 and Black gets an excellent position.

### A) 8.g3

This looks like a natural plan of development, but it allows Black to solve the problem of the c8-bishop quite easily.

8...0–0 9.♗g2 e5

Once again, this important advance allows Black to eliminate White's space advantage and free the c8-bishop.



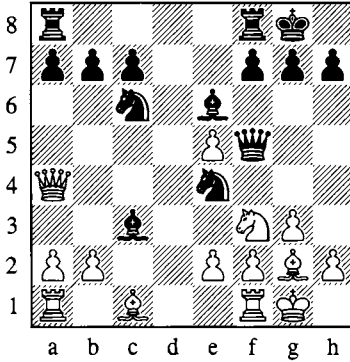
10.d5

I also examined:

10.dxe5 N ♗e6

The vulnerability of White's queen enables Black to develop with gain of tempo – a recurring theme in this chapter.

11. ♖a4 ♗e4 12.0-0 ♗xc3

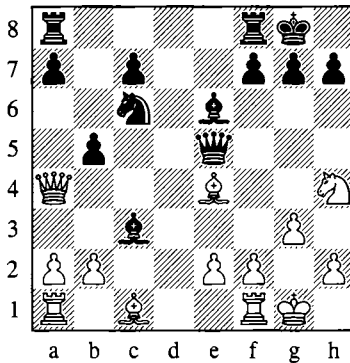


13. ♗h4!

This intermediate move allows White to keep the material balance.

13.bxc3? ♗xc3-+ leads to the loss of another pawn.

13... ♖xe5 14. ♗xe4 b5



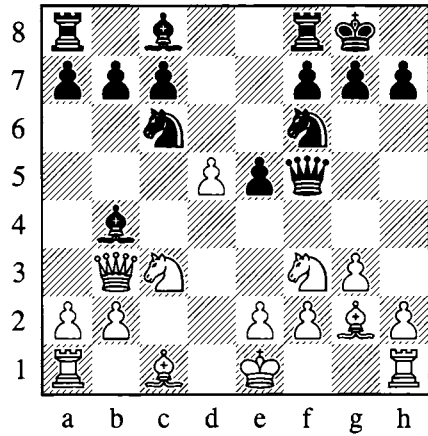
15. ♗xh7†

15. ♖c2? ♗d4†

15... ♗xh7 16. ♖c2† ♗g8 17.bxc3 ♗b4

18. ♖b2 ♗d5

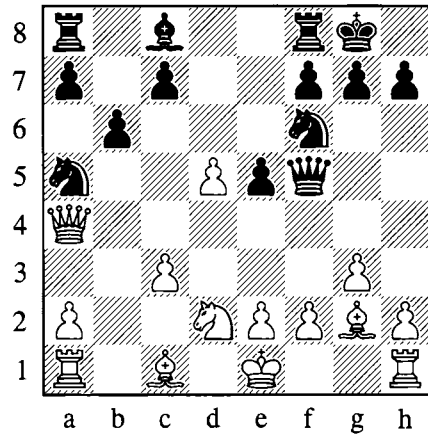
As a result of some interesting tactical complications, Black gets rich counterplay.



10... ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 ♗a5 12. ♖a4 b6 13. ♗d2

13.0-0 was seen in Gerber – Adler, Switzerland 1994. Now Black should have opted for 13...e4N 14. ♗d2 ♗xd5 15. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 16. ♗xe4 ♗b7†, getting a better endgame.

So far we have been following the high-level game Dreev – Bareev, Elista 1998. Black should have played:

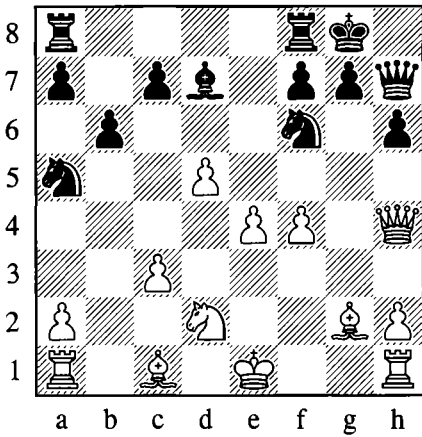


13... ♗d7N 14. ♖h4 h6 15.e4 ♖h7!

The threat of ...g5 leaves White no real choice but to weaken himself with:

16.f4 exf4 17.gxf4

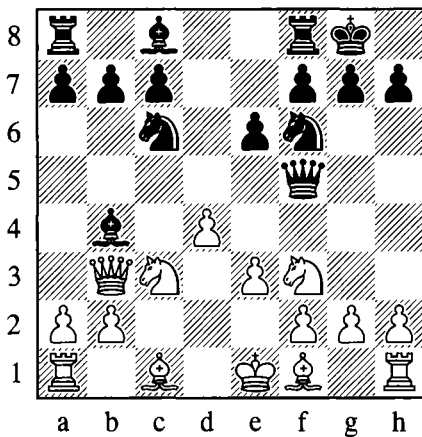
White's pawn centre looks impressive but the reality is that Black has a strong initiative after:



17...♙b5! 18.♙f2 ♞fe8

White's lack of harmony and the vulnerability of the king on f2 cause him serious problems.

**B) 8.e3 0–0**



9.♙e2

An interesting concept: White intends to avoid the pin on the c3-knight by means of castling. However, it would be strange if such a modest plan of development could pose Black serious problems.

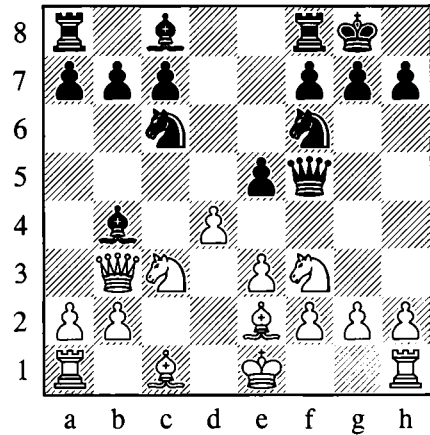
9.♙d2 transposes to variation D2.

9.a3 only helps Black to push ...e6-e5, as the bishop will no longer require protection after

the following retreat: 9...♙a5 This position will be considered under variation C2.

9...e5

Black has no reason not to challenge the opponent's centre.

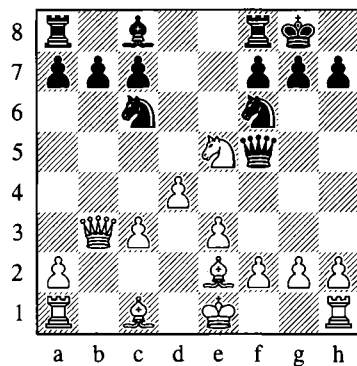


10.d5

This looks like the critical move, but it turns out to be too risky.

After 10.0-0 exd4 11.♙xd4 ♖xd4 12.exd4 ♙a5 Black was fine in Hoang – Turov, Budapest 2003.

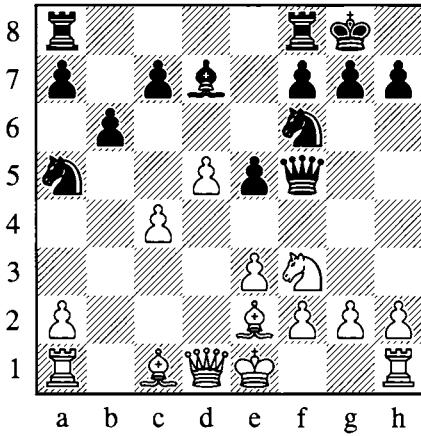
I also examined: 10.♙xe5N ♙xc3† 11.bxc3 (11.♞xc3?? loses on the spot to 11...♙e4, hitting c3 and f2)



11...♙xe5 12.dxe5 ♞xe5 13.0-0 ♙e4 14.♙a3 c5= Black's active piece play fully compensates for White's bishop pair.

10...♙xc3† 11.bxc3 ♘a5 12.♗a4 b6 13.c4 ♙d7 14.♖d1

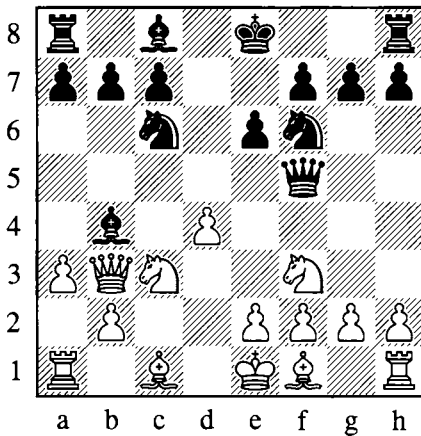
Now in Nakamura – Tkachiev, Santo Domingo 2002, Black should have played:



14...e4N 15.♘d4 ♗g6 16.♙f1 ♙g4 17.h3 ♙xe2† 18.♗xe2 c6 19.dxc6 ♖fc8

Black regains the pawn and obtains a distinct positional advantage.

C) 8.a3



This is the first of White's two most natural and principled moves.

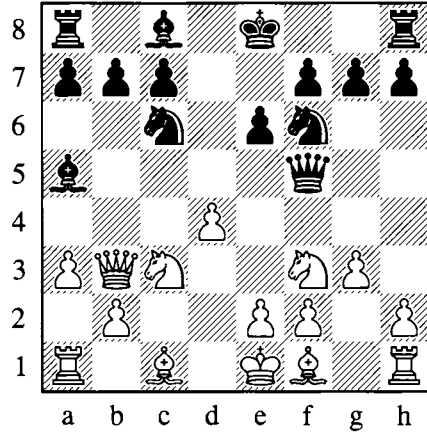
8...♙a5

This is clearly the most challenging reply – I do not see any reason to exchange such a strong bishop.

White may proceed with C1) 9.g3, C2) 9.e3 or C3) 9.♙d2.

C1) 9.g3

This is completely harmless.

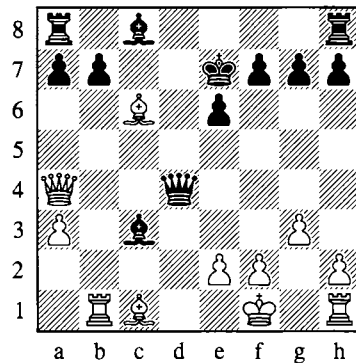


9...♘e4

Another decent way of handling the position is 9...0-0!N 10.♙g2 ♙b6 11.e3 e5 12.d5 ♘e7, with double-edged play.

10.♙e3

10.♙g2?, as played in Gunina – Mkrтчian, Tromso (ol) 2014, should be met by: 10...♘xc3N 11.bxc3 ♗d5! 12.♖b1 ♘xd4 13.♗a4† c6 14.♙f1 ♙xc3 15.♘xd4 ♗xd4 16.♙xc6† ♙e7

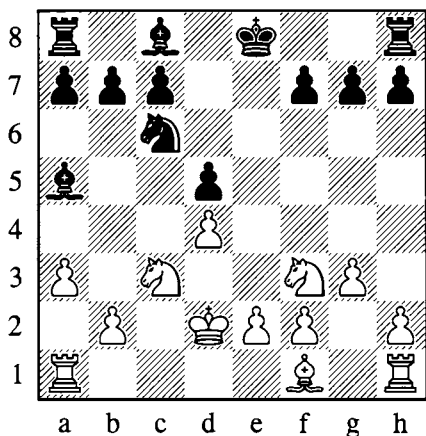


Black has a sound extra pawn, and the attempt to regain it leads White to a difficult position:

17.♖xd4 ♗xd4 18.♗xb7 ♖b8 19.♗e4 ♗xb1  
20.♗xb1 ♗a6

10...♗d5 11.♖xd5 exd5 12.♗d2 ♖xd2  
13.♗xd2

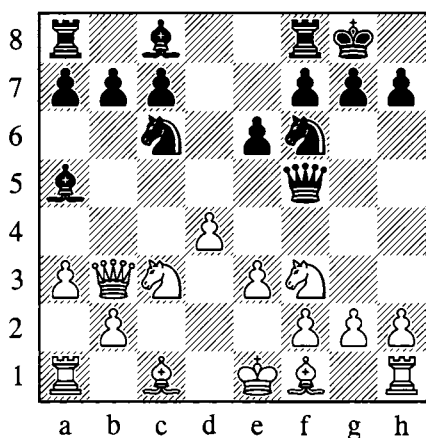
This position was seen in Gagunashvili – El Arousy, Dubai 2005. Now I like the following plan of regrouping the pieces:



13...♖e7 14.b4 ♗b6 15.♖a4 c6

Black has a comfortable position. The subsequent transfer of the knight to d6 will expose the weakness of the light squares in the opponent's camp.

C2) 9.e3 0-0



10.♗e2

I considered three other moves:

10.♖b5?!

This attempt to prevent Black from freeing himself invites serious trouble:

10...e5!

This becomes even more potent after White's last move.

11.♗d3

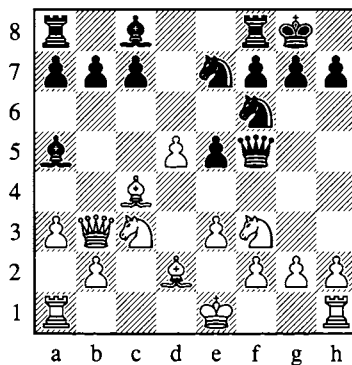
The main tactical point is that 11.dxe5 ♖e4! 12.♗d3 a6! gives Black the better chances in the complications: 13.♗xe4 ♗xc3† 14.bxc3 ♖xe4 15.♖b1 ♖c4

11...♖g4 12.0-0 a6 13.♖b3 ♗xc3 14.♖xc3 e4  
15.♖e5 ♖xe5 16.dxe5 ♖d5

Black clearly had the initiative in Beliavsky – Short, Las Vegas (3.1) 1999.

Vigorito mentions 10.♗b5N to delay ...e6-e5, when I agree with him that 10...♗d7 is about equal.

Finally, I also examined 10.♗d2N, intending to meet 10...e5 with 11.d5, but it doesn't look attractive for White: 11...♖e7 12.♗c4

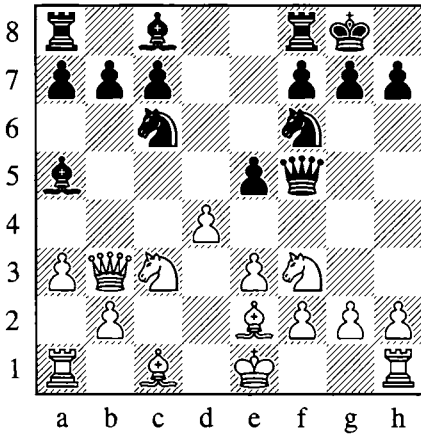


12...b6! 13.0-0 e4 14.♖d4 ♖g5 15.f4 ♖h5 and the d5-pawn will be lost.

10...e5

As often happens in this variation, the ...e6-e5 advance is the key which enables Black

to activate all his pieces and obtain an excellent position.



**11.dxe5?!**

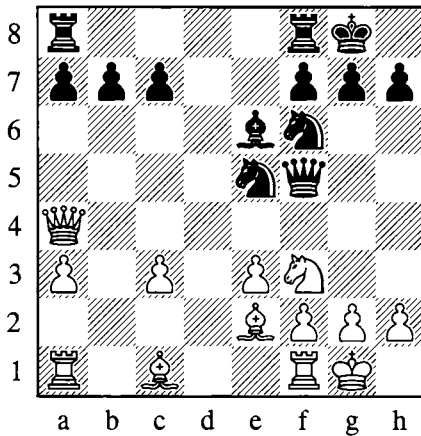
11.0-0N is better; still, after 11...exd4 12.exd4 ♖d8 13.♙e3 ♙b6 14.♞ac1 ♙e6 15.♚d1 h6= Black has comfortable play against White's isolated pawn.

**12...♗xe5 12.0-0 ♙e6 13.♚a4**

13.♚xb7?! leads White to a difficult endgame after 13...♙xc3 14.bxc3 ♙d5 15.♗h4 ♚xf2† 16.♞xf2 ♙xb7=.

**13...♙xc3 14.bxc3**

Black has more than one good continuation; my preference is:



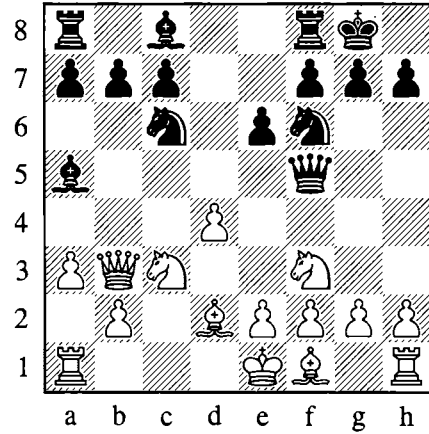
**14...♗xf3†N**

14...♗e4 15.♚d4 ♗c6 16.♚d3 ♞ad8 17.♗d4 ♚g6 was more than okay for Black in Ippolito – Friedman, Boston 2001, but the text move seems simpler.

**15.♙f3 ♙d5=**

With a positional advantage.

**C3) 9.♙d2 0-0**



**10.h3**

This is essentially the same approach as in variation D3 – White hopes to develop some initiative on the kingside, exploiting the restricted movement of the opponent's queen. However, the inclusion of the moves a2-a3 and ...♙a5 makes Black's task slightly easier.

10.e3 would transpose to the note on 10.♙d2N in variation C2 above.

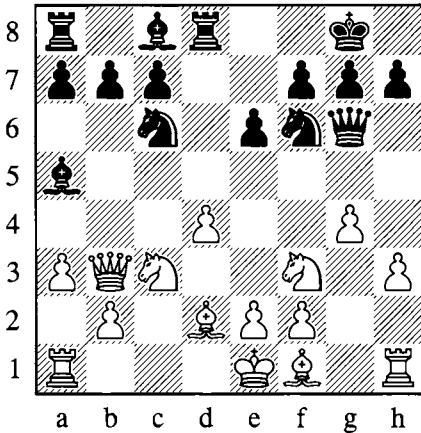
**10...♞d8**

Immediately exploiting the main drawback of including 8.a3 ♙a5 – Black's bishop is no longer hanging, so there is serious pressure on the d4-pawn.

**11.g4 ♚g6**

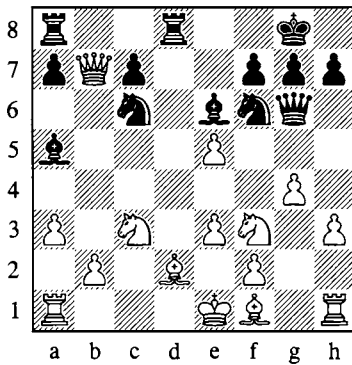
White has achieved his objective of driving the queen to a square from which she has

no safe moves. However, it is not easy to benefit from this; the immediate 12.♘h4?? is impossible due to 12...♘d4, so White must strengthen his position in the centre before he can truly threaten the queen.



### 12.♖c4

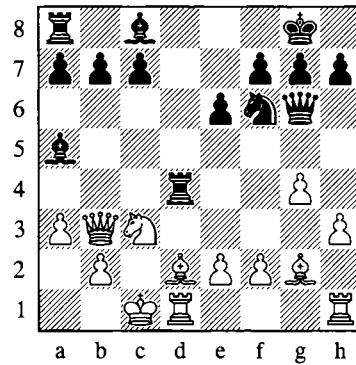
12.e3 looks like a more consistent way of protecting the d4-pawn, but it can also be strongly met by: 12...e5! 13.dxe5 ♕e6! 14.♖xb7 (the exchange of light-squared bishops is unacceptable for White here: 14.♕c4? ♘d7 15.♕xe6 fxe6→ with a decisive attack)



14...♕xc3 15.♕xc3 ♕d5 16.♕g2 ♘d4! 17.♘xd4 ♕xb7 18.♕xb7 ♘d5= White does not have sufficient compensation for the lost queen.

I also considered an interesting novelty for White: 12.♕g2!?N ♘d4 13.♘d4 ♖xd4

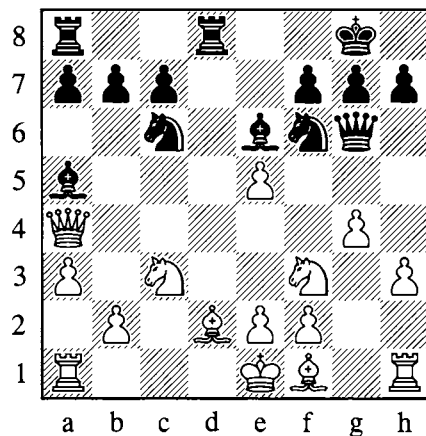
14.0–0–0 Now the awkward placement of Black's pieces and the vulnerability of the back rank force Black to play precisely, but he can solve his problems with:



14...♕b6 15.♕e3 ♖d7! 16.♕xb6 axb6 17.♖xd7 (17.f4 ♖a5! sees Black's second rook join the game via an unusual route, while White still has to justify his pawn sacrifice) Now Black has a choice between returning his extra pawn to reach an equal game with 17...♕xd7 18.♕xb7, or keeping it with 17...♘d7!?, when White has full compensation but not more.

### 12...e5 13.dxe5 ♕e6 14.♖a4

We have been following the game Dreev – Wang Hao, Tromso 2013. Now it was possible to make use of Black's lead in development by means of:

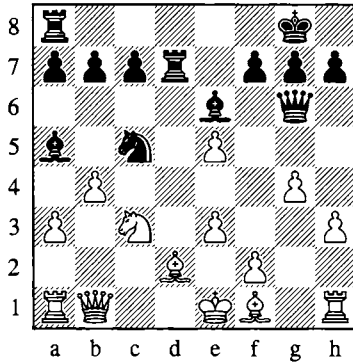


14... ♖d7!N

The game continuation of 14... ♖d5 was not bad, but the text move is more forceful.

15. ♖f4

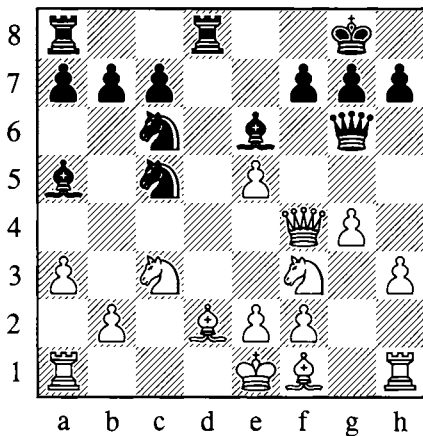
15.b4 runs into a beautiful counter: 15... ♖c5! 16. ♖d1 (even worse is 16.bxc5 ♖xd2! 17. ♖xd2 ♖d8† 18. ♖c1 ♖xc3 19. ♖b1 ♖d4→) 16... ♖d4! 17. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 18.e3 ♖d7 19. ♖b1



19... ♖h6! Of course, Black's initiative is much more effective when the queens are on the board. 20.bxa5 ♖ad8 With a promising attack.

15... ♖c5

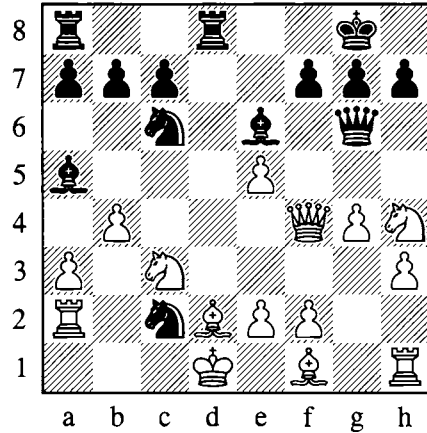
The transfer of the knight to b3 will cause White a lot of problems.



16.b4 ♖b3 17. ♖a2

17. ♖h4 ♖h6 18.g5 ♖h5 19. ♖d1 ♖xd2 20. ♖xd2 ♖xd2 21. ♖xd2 ♖d8† 22. ♖c2 ♖b6 gives Black the initiative.

17... ♖bd4 18. ♖h4 ♖c2† 19. ♖d1

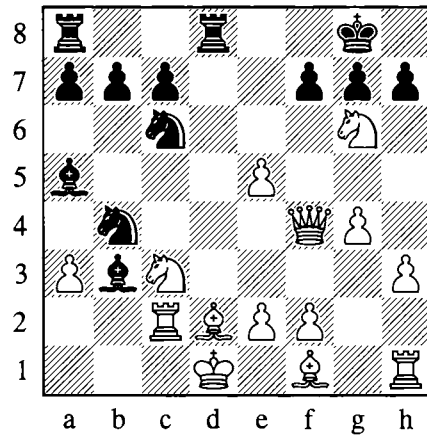


19... ♖b3!

This queen sacrifice enables Black to develop an enormous attack.

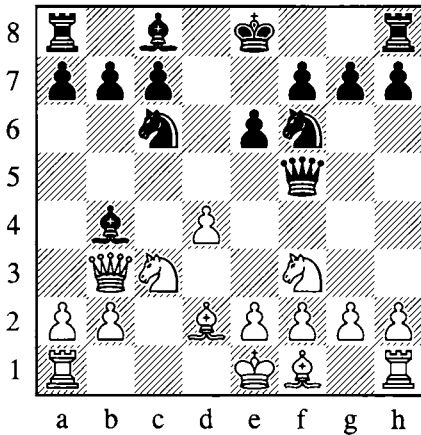
20. ♖xg6 ♖xb4† 21. ♖c2

21. ♖e1 ♖xa2 22. ♖e4 ♖xd2 23. ♖xd2 hxg6 24. ♖g2 ♖d8†



21... ♖xc2 22. ♖c1 ♖xa3 23. ♖g2 hxg6 Black maintains some initiative.

## D) 8.♔d2



This is the most popular continuation. Unpinning the knight gives White more control over the central squares.

## 8...0-0

We will consider **D1) 9.♖c1**, **D2) 9.e3** and the most challenging **D3) 9.h3**.

**D1) 9.♖c1**

This flexible move has been tested a few times at the top level. White makes a standard, useful move and delays the development of the kingside pieces.

## 9...♔d6

As in most of the lines in this chapter, Black's counterplay is mainly based on the ...e6-e5 advance.

## 10.h3

White goes for a modified version of Anand's aggressive approach (see variation D3 for more about this).

## 10...e5

I also examined an interesting novelty:

10...♗g6!?N 11.g4

After 11.♕b5 e5 12.dxe5 ♕xe5 13.♕xd6 cxd6 14.♕xe5 dxe5= Black's development

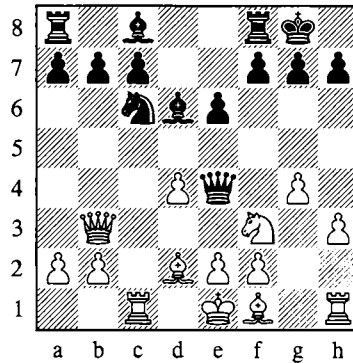
advantage prevents White from benefiting from the bishop pair.

11...♕e4

Exchanging the knights will give Black's queen much more space.

12.♕xe4 ♗xe4

There are several threats, so White is forced to liquidate into an equal endgame:



13.♗c2 ♗xc2 14.♖xc2 ♔d7 15.♔g2

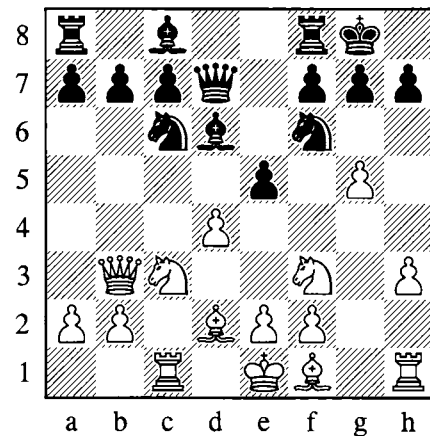
15.a3 e5 16.dxe5 ♕xe5 17.♕xe5 ♗xe5

18.♔g2 c6=

15...♕b4 16.♔xb4 ♔xb4† 17.♕d2 c6 18.0-0 ♔e7=

## 11.g4 ♗d7 12.g5

We have been following the game Mamedyarov – Karjakin, Beijing 2013. I suggest the following new way of handling Black's position:



**12... ♖h5!N 13.dxe5**

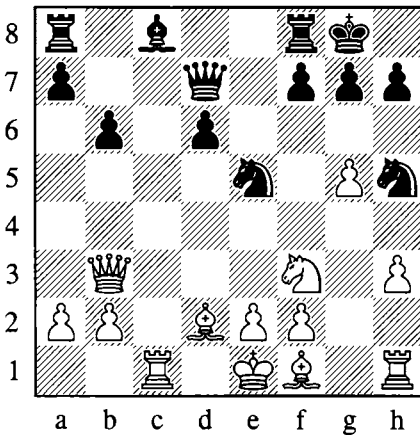
13.d5 ♖d4 14.♖xd4 exd4 15.♖e4 ♗f4 16.♖c4 ♖f5 17.♖xd4 ♖d8 offers Black rich counterplay against the king on e1.

**13... ♖xe5 14.♖e4**

14.♗g2 is inferior in view of 14...♖f4! 15.♗xf4 ♖xf3† 16.♗xf3 ♗xf4 17.♖d1 ♖f5.

**14...b6 15.♖xd6 cxd6**

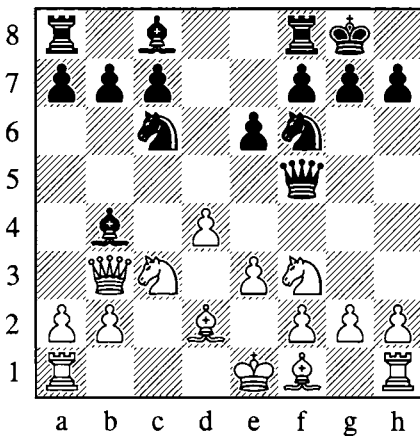
Liquidating the strong dark-squared bishop is a definite achievement for White. However, Black still has good prospects after:



**16.♗g2 ♗b7 17.0-0 ♖ae8 18.♖fe1 ♖g6**

White's kingside pawn structure is rather exposed, so Black gets excellent compensation for the isolated d6-pawn.

**D2) 9.e3**



This modest plan of development significantly reduces White's active possibilities – the d2-bishop is now quite passive.

**9...♗d6**

The bishop steps back to support the crucial ...e6-e5 advance.

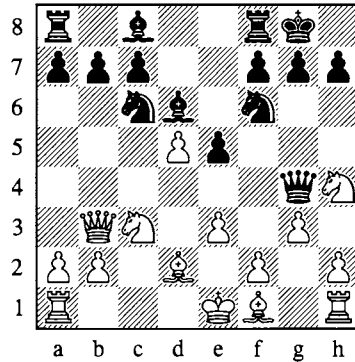
**10.♖b5**

White's hopes are connected with the potential power of the bishop pair, but in this position it doesn't guarantee any superiority.

As a possible improvement over White's play, I also examined:

**10.♖h4!?N ♖g4 11.g3 e5 12.d5**

Releasing the tension in the centre with 12.h3 ♖d7 13.d5 ♖e7 14.e4 doesn't look attractive for White: 14...c6 15.♗g5 cxd5 16.♗xf6 gxf6 17.exd5 f5 Despite the doubled f-pawns, Black's king is still safer than its counterpart on e1.

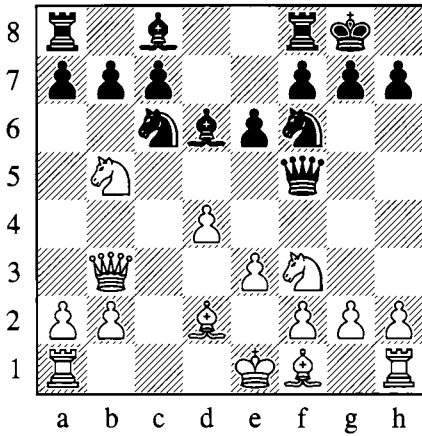


**12...♖e7 13.♗g2 c6 14.e4**

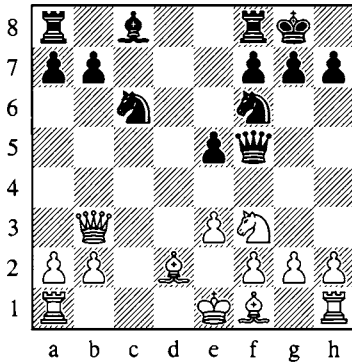
14.dxc6 ♖xc6 15.0-0 ♗e7 reaches a position with a symmetrical pawn structure where Black's set-up is more harmonious.

**14...cxd5 15.exd5 ♖f5 16.♖xf5 ♗xf5 17.0-0**

In this complex position, Black's active piece play fully compensates for the strong passed pawn on d5.

**10...e5 11.dxe5**

After 11.♗xd6?! cxd6 12.dxe5 dxe5 Black's lead in development is well illustrated in the following line:



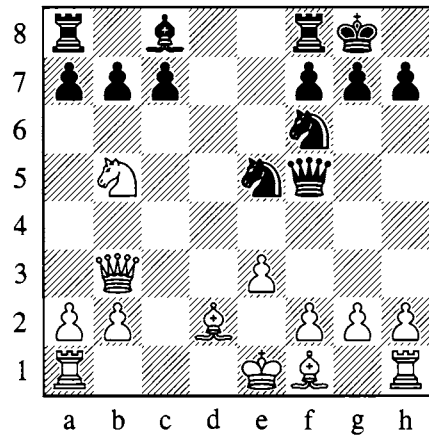
13.♗c3 ♗e6 14.♖xb7 ♗d5 15.♖a6 ♗xf3 16.gxf3 ♖xf3 17.♖g1 ♗e4 With a powerful initiative.

**11...♗xe5!**

11...♗xe5, as played in Dao Thien Hai – Romanishin, Balatonbereny 1996, seems less precise in view of: 12.♗xd6N cxd6 (12...♗xf3† 13.gxf3 ♖xf3 14.♖g1 ♗g4 15.♖g2 cxd6 16.♗c3 also looks quite promising for White) 13.♗d4 ♖g6 14.♖c2 ♗e4 15.f3 ♗xd2 16.♖xd2 I am not convinced that Black has enough activity to offset the isolated d-pawn.

**12.♗xe5 ♗xe5**

White suffers from a lack of development.

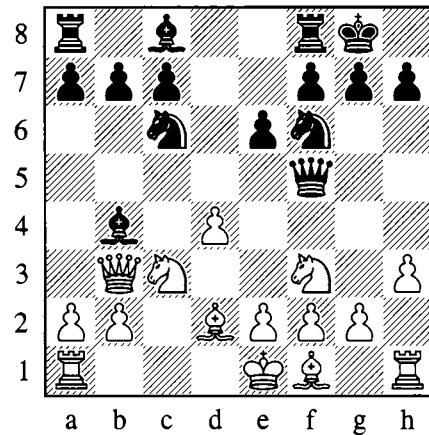
**13.f3?**

A careless move which leads to disaster.

13.f4N was better, although even here 13...♗c6 14.♗xc7 ♖b8 offers Black more than sufficient compensation for the pawn.

**13...♗xf3! 14.gxf3 ♖xf3 15.♖g1 ♗e4+**

Black was totally winning in Dreev – Gajewski, Warsaw (rapid) 2011.

**D3) 9.h3**

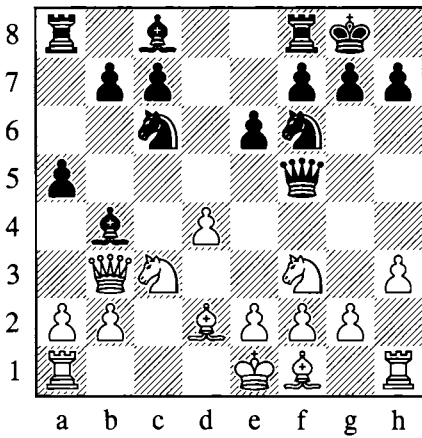
This interesting idea was successfully introduced by Vishy Anand in his World Championship match against Vladimir Kramnik. White's ambitious concept is based on seizing a lot of space and causing Black

concrete difficulties in finding a stable home for the queen.

**9...a5!**

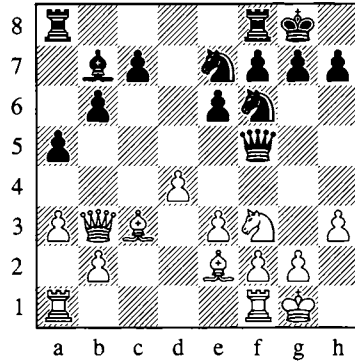
A multi-purpose move. Apart from overprotecting the bishop, Black also has the idea of pushing the a-pawn further forward.

In the aforementioned game, Vladimir was unable to solve his problems: 9...b6 10.g4 ♖a5 11.♞c1 ♘b7 12.a3 ♙xc3 13.♙xc3 ♚d5 14.♚xd5 ♜xd5 15.♙d2± Anand – Kramnik, Bonn (6) 2008.



gives Black some initiative) 13...e5 14.♞xe5 ♙e6 15.g4 ♚xe5 16.dxe5 ♙xc4 17.exf6 ♙d5 18.♞g1 gxf6±

I also analysed: 10.a3 ♙xc3 11.♙xc3 b6! 12.e3 ♞e7 13.♙e2 ♘b7 14.0-0



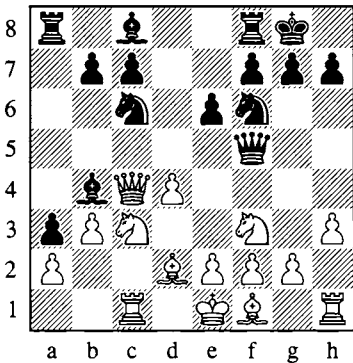
14...a4!?N (14...♙d5 15.♚d1 ♞fd8= was also quite acceptable for Black in Achermann – Corbat, corr. 2011) 15.♚d1 ♞fd8 Black's control over the light squares fully compensates for White's bishop pair.

**10...♚g6**

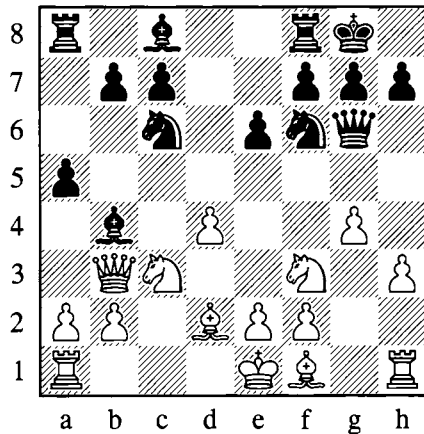
This position is complex and double-edged. The queen is in danger on g6, as it currently has no safe moves available. On the other hand, White's g2-g4 advance exposes his king to potential danger, so Black's main task will be to open up the position.

**10.g4**

10.♞c1?! allows 10...a4! 11.♚c4 a3 12.b3, when the stability of the b4-bishop enables Black to seize the initiative:

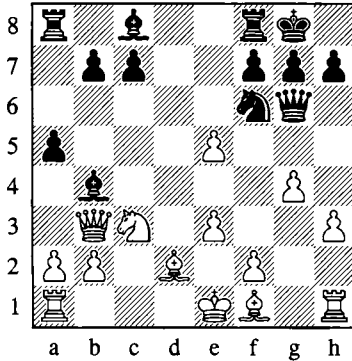


12...♞d8 13.e3 (13.g4 ♚a5 14.♙g2 e5! also



White's two main possibilities here are **D31) 11.♗g2** and **D32) 11.a3**.

The inaccurate 11.e3?! is not in the spirit of the position and can be effectively refuted by: 11...e5! 12.♖xe5 (12.dxe5 ♜e4♠; 12.d5 e4 13.♖h4 ♖g5 14.dxc6 ♖xh4 15.a3 ♗e6 16.♖c2 ♗xc3 17.♗xc3 bxc6♠) 12...♖xe5 13.dxe5

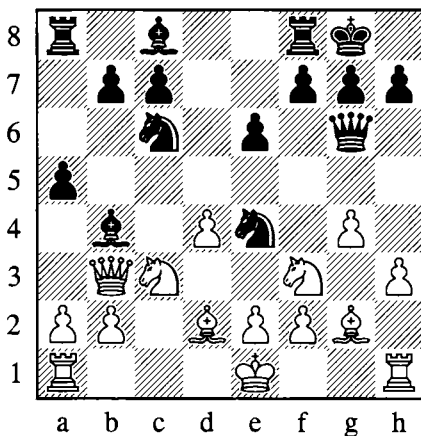


13...♗e6 14.♖a4 ♖d7 15.a3 ♖c5 16.♖b5 ♗fd8! 17.axb4 ♖c2 18.♗d1 axb4 19.♖b1 ♗a1♠

### D31) 11.♗g2

This move gives Black the opportunity to trade a pair of knights in order to give his queen some space.

11...♖e4!



### 12.e3

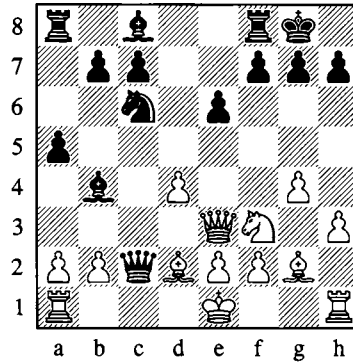
I also examined:

12.♖xe4 ♖xc4 13.♖e3

There is no other way to protect the hanging pawns and prepare for castling.

13...♖c2!

Removing the queen from the danger zone.



14.♗xb4

After 14.0-0 ♖xb2 15.♗fb1 ♗xd2 16.♗xb2 ♗xe3 17.fxe3 ♖e7 White has compensation for the missing pawn, but Black is certainly not worse in the endgame.

14...axb4 15.♖d2 ♖xd2† 16.♗xd2 ♗d8 17.♗e3 ♗a5

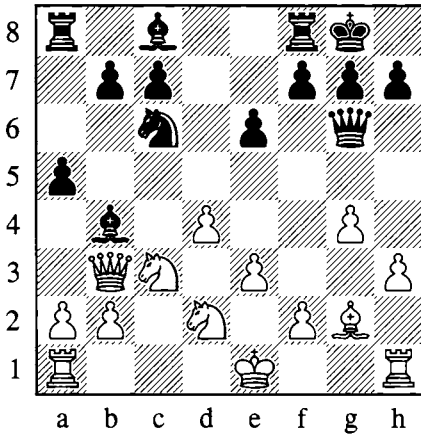
Despite White's space advantage, the pressure along the a-file and the vulnerability of the white king offer Black excellent counterplay.

### 12...♖xd2

Another attractive possibility is 12...f5!? 13.♖c2 ♗d7 14.a3 ♗d6 15.♗g1 ♖h8, reaching a complex position where Black's chances are by no means worse.

### 13.♖xd2

We have been following the game Erdos – Wojtaszek, Warsaw (rapid) 2011. Now I suggest the following natural way of handling the position:



13...e5N 14.d5 ♘e7 15.♘c4

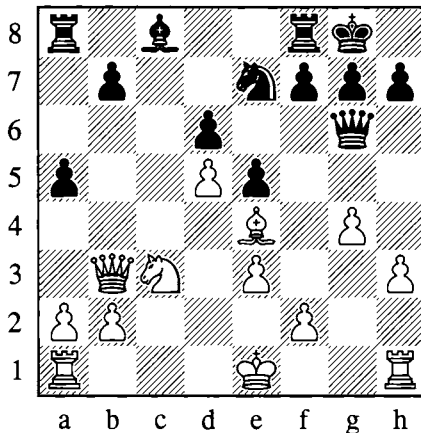
15.a3 ♙d6 16.♙e4 f5 17.gxf5 ♖h5 18.♖d1 ♗h6 19.♖e2 ♘xf5 20.0-0-0 ♙d7♗ offers Black plenty of activity.

15...♙d6 16.♘xd6

16.♘b5 can be met by 16...f5! (of course, if a draw is an acceptable result then 16...♙b4† 17.♘c3 ♙d6= is possible) 17.♘xc7 ♙xc7 18.d6 ♙xd6 19.♘xd6† ♙e6 20.♖xb7 ♗f6 with some initiative for Black.

16...cxd6 17.♙e4

17.♖b6 f5 18.♖c7 ♗f6 offers Black good counterplay.



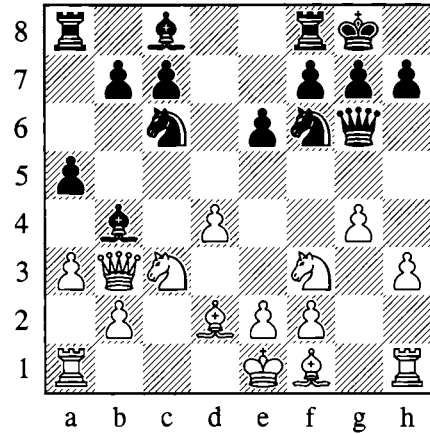
17...f5 18.♙c2 ♗e8

The queen is no longer useful on g6, so Black transfers it to d8 in order to cover the vulnerable dark squares on the queenside.

19.0-0-0 ♖d8♗

With mutual chances.

D32) 11.a3



This is the main line, forcing Black to make a decision on the queenside.

11...a4!

This intermediate move yields Black more control over the light squares, while forcing White to decide between a number of possible queen moves. We will consider the conservative D321) 12.♖d1, the double-edged D322) 12.♖a2 and the most active D323) 12.♖c4.

D321) 12.♖d1

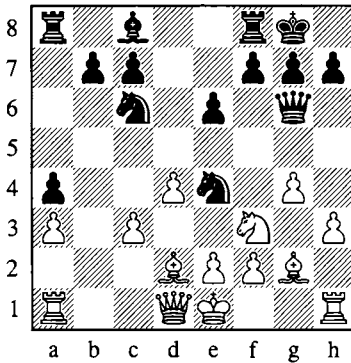
This original retreat was employed by no less an expert in the Classical System than Alexander Morozevich.

12...♙xc3 13.♙xc3

13.bxc3 ♘e4 14.♙g2

This was played in Arun Prasad – Kjartansson, Edinburgh 2009. I see no

reason to deviate from the usual way of developing counterplay with:



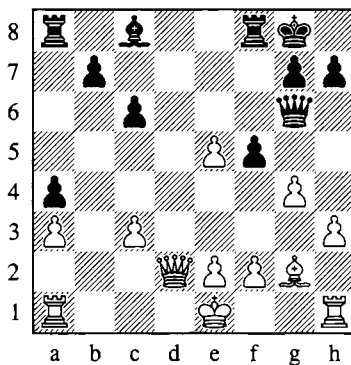
14...f5N 15.♖c2 ♟xd2 16.♖xd2 e5!

The most aggressive choice – instead of grabbing an enemy pawn, Black is ready to sacrifice one of his own!

16...fxg4 17.hxg4 ♖xg4 18.♖g5 ♖xg5 19.♟xg5 h6 20.♙xc6 bxc6 21.♞e4 offers White reasonable compensation for the pawn.

17.♟xe5 ♟xe5 18.dxe5 c6

Black has full compensation for the pawn due to his safer king. For instance:



19.g5?!

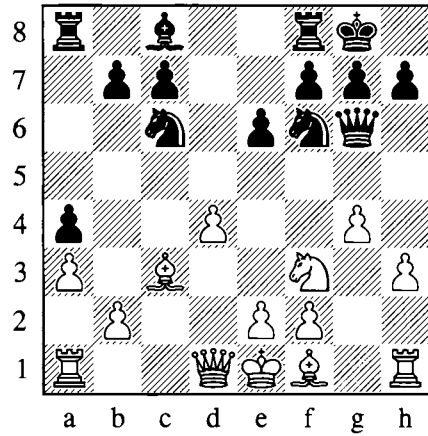
This attempt to block the kingside runs into:

19...f4 20.h4 ♙g4

With a strong initiative.

The text move was tried in Morozevich – Lysyj, Taganrog 2011. Now it makes sense to exploit

the drawback of White's chosen queen retreat by means of:



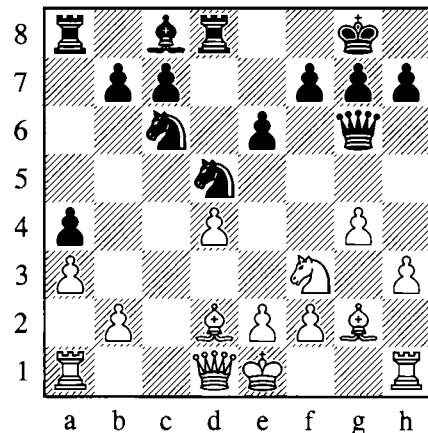
13...♙d8!N 14.♙g2

14.♖b1 ♞e4 15.♙g2 f5 16.♖c2 e5! 17.♟xe5 ♟xe5 18.dxe5 ♙e6 offers Black excellent compensation for the pawn.

14...♞d5 15.♙d2

Covering the exposed f4-square and keeping the bishop pair.

Obviously, 15.e3 e5 cannot be promising for White.



15...f6!

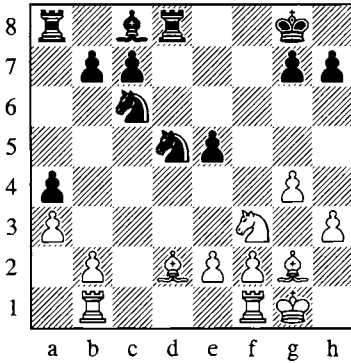
Securing the queen's safety and preparing the key freeing advance in the centre.

**16.0-0 e5**

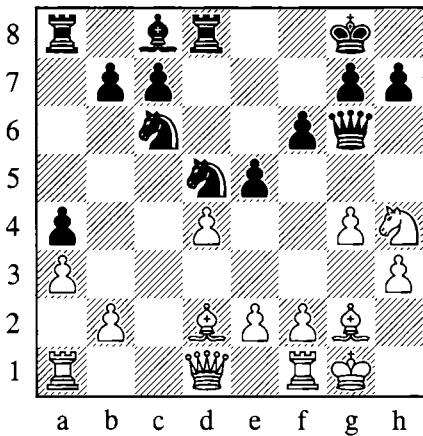
The arising complications are interesting and full of tactical nuances.

**17. ♘h4**

Another logical continuation is: 17.dxe5 fxe5 (I also looked at 17... ♘f4, but I don't like the character of the play after 18. ♔xf4 ♚xd1 19. ♚fxd1) 18. ♖b1 ♖xb1 19. ♚axb1



19... ♘f4 20. ♔xf4 exf4 21. ♚bc1 ♔e6 22. ♘g5 ♔b3 ♞ Black has good chances thanks to the activity of his pieces.

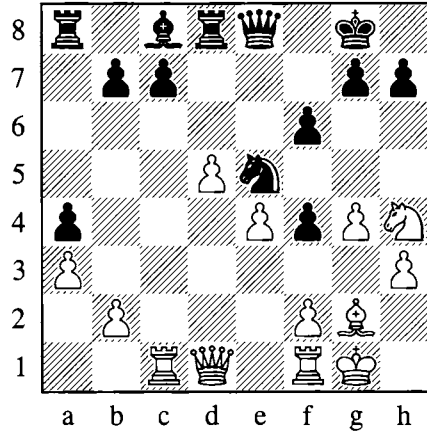


**17... ♖e8 18. e4 ♘f4 19. ♔xf4 exf4 20. d5**

White has been able to seize a lot of space, but Black has established an ideal outpost for his knight in the centre.

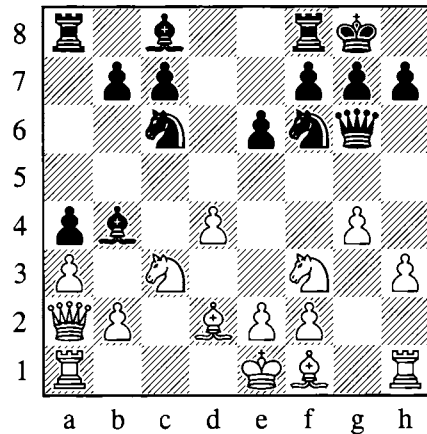
**20... ♘e5 21. ♚c1**

After 21. ♖c1 ♔d7 22. ♖xc7 h5 Black develops a dangerous attack, since most of White's pieces are far away from the kingside.



21...c6 22. ♘f3 h5 23. ♘xe5 ♖xe5 ♞ Black's position is by no means worse.

**D322) 12. ♖a2**

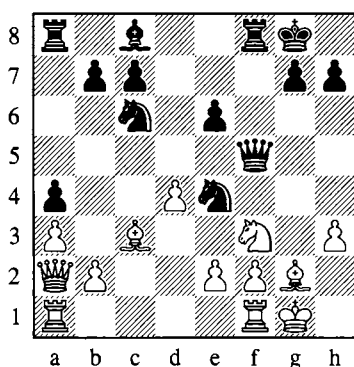


The queen is placed rather passively on a2, but White's justification is that Black cannot gain a tempo by attacking it.

**12... ♔xc3 13. bxc3**

13. ♔xc3N is less effective with the queen on a2: 13... ♘e4 14. ♔g2 f5 15. gxf5 ♖xf5 16.0-0 (after 16. ♖c4 ♔d7 17.0-0 ♖h5 ♞ the

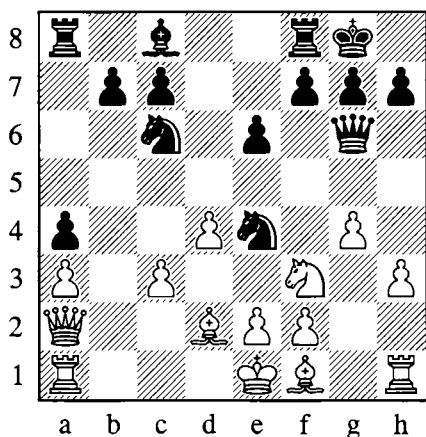
vulnerability of White's king seems significant, while the dark-squared bishop is rather passive)



16...b6! 17.♖d2 ♖xd2 18.♗xd2 ♗b7 19.♖ac1 ♖a5 The exchange of bishops places White's king under fire; for instance, 20.♗xb7 ♖xb7 21.♖xc7? ♖xh3 leaves him facing a decisive attack.

### 13...♖e4!

The centralized knight is annoying for White, while the f-pawn is also ready to advance.



### 14.♗g2 f5!

This advance looks strategically risky, but such considerations are of minimal importance in such dynamic situations. What is more relevant is that the opening of the f-file yields Black real attacking chances.

### 15.♖b1

The following natural continuation hasn't yet been tried:

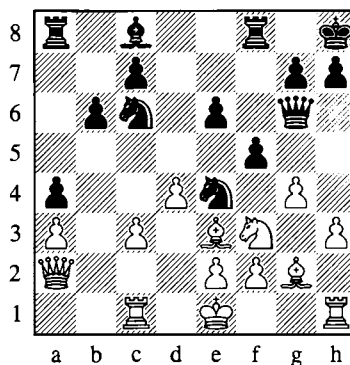
#### 15.♖c1!?!N

Overprotecting the c3-pawn makes the bishop mobile.

#### 15...♖h8 16.♗e3 b6!

The fianchetto will consolidate Black's position.

The tempting 16...f4?! 17.♗d2 e5 18.d5 ♖xd2 19.♖xd2± yields White some positional advantage due to his control over the e4-square.



#### 17.♖d2

17.♗f4 can be met by 17...♗b7 (also possible is 17...♖xf2!? 18.0-0 ♖e4 19.♖h4 ♖e8 20.♗xe4 fxe4 21.♗xc7 ♖a5) and now the greedy 18.♗xc7? ♖a5! yields Black a dangerous initiative.

#### 17...♗b7 18.♖xe4 ♖a5 19.0-0 ♗xe4 20.♗xe4 fxe4

In this unbalanced position Black's chances are, at the very least, not worse.

### 15...♖h8

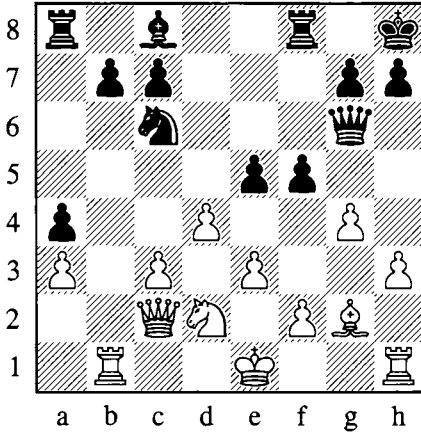
This purposeful prophylactic move makes the key ...e6-e5 advance possible.

### 16.♖c2

16.♖e5N may be a slight improvement, although 16...♖xe5 17.dxe5 b6 18.♗xe4 fxe4 19.♗e3 ♗b7= is still okay for Black.

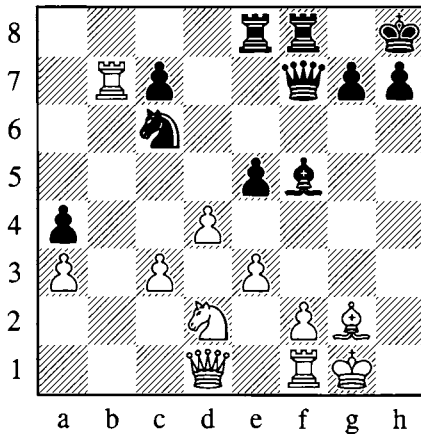
16... ♖xd2 17. ♖xd2 e5! 18.e3

This interesting position was seen in Laznicka – Wojtaszek, Istanbul (ol) 2012. Now Black missed an excellent opportunity to develop an initiative with:



18... ♖f7! N 19.0–0 fxe4 20.hxe4 ♗xe4  
21. ♖xb7 ♗f5 22. ♖d1 ♖ae8!

All the pieces are joining the attack!



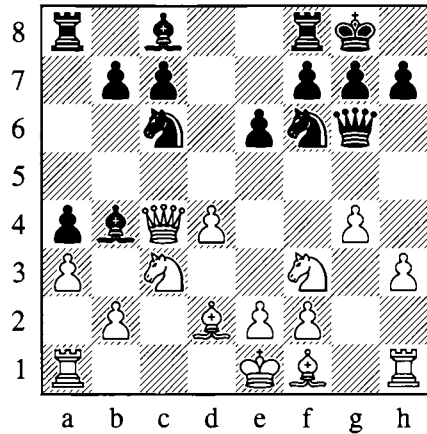
23. ♖b2

23. ♗xc6? runs into 23... ♖g6† 24. ♗g2 ♗h3 and Black wins.

23... exd4 24. cxd4 ♖e6 25. ♖xa4 ♖h5

Black has a dangerous initiative.

D323) 12. ♖c4



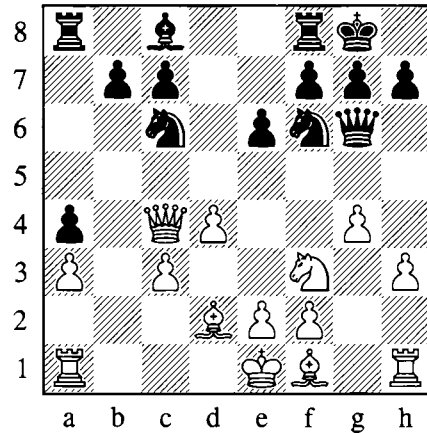
Here the queen has more influence on the centre, but it is also more prone to harassment from Black's minor pieces.

12... ♗xc3

We have a final split between two options: D3231) 13.bxc3 and D3232) 13. ♗xc3.

D3231) 13.bxc3

This is well met by:



13... e5! 14. ♗g2

Of course, we should also check whether White can accept the pawn sac:

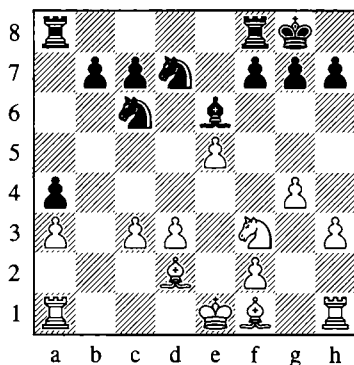
14.dxe5 ♙e6 15.♖d3

15.♖b5 ♖a5! 16.♖b1 (16.♖xb7? ♖b8→ would snare the queen) 16...♗xe5 17.♖xg6 ♗xg6 feels comfortable for Black.

15...♖xd3

15...♗d7 16.♖xg6 fxg6 17.♙g2 ♙d5 is less convincing due to 18.c4! ♙xc4 19.♖c1 ♙d5 20.0–0, when I slightly prefer White due to the pressure along the c-file.

16.exd3 ♗d7

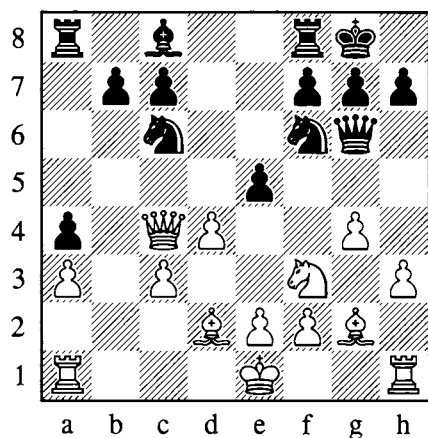


17.c4

The attempt to keep the extra pawn with 17.d4 runs into 17...f6! 18.exf6 ♙d5 19.♙g2 ♖ae8† 20.♙e3 ♖xf6 21.♗h4 ♙xg2 22.♗xg2 ♗b6† when Black gets more than enough compensation.

17...♗dxe5 18.♗xe5 ♗xe5 19.0–0–0 ♖ad8 20.♙c3 ♗g6 21.d4 c6

The weak spots in White's camp offer Black good counterplay. In particular, the ...f7–f5 advance might pose White concrete problems.



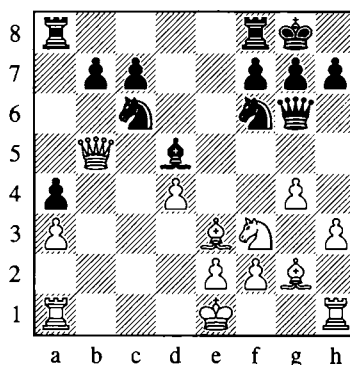
14...♙e6 15.♖b5

White is just one step from completing his development. If that were to happen, then the strong bishops would offer him a clear positional advantage. However, chess is a concrete game, so every move counts!

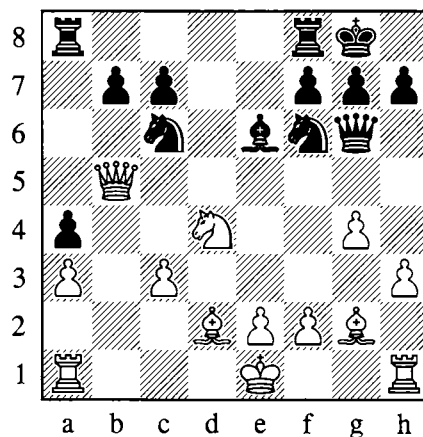
15...exd4 16.♗xd4N

This novelty is a clear improvement over a previous game.

16.cxd4? ♙d5 17.♙e3, as played in Dreev – Gustafsson, Eilat 2012, could be met by:



17...♗a5!N 18.0–0 c6 19.♖b4 ♗b3 20.♖ad1 b5† Black's domination over the light squares gives him a big advantage.



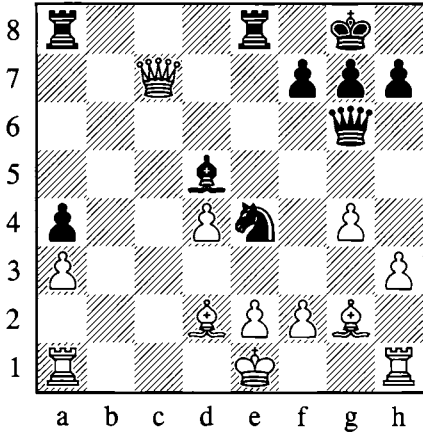
16...♗e4

16...♗xd4!? 17.cxd4 ♖ad8 seems perfectly

playable, but I prefer the text move. Once again, the centralized knight causes White serious problems!

17. ♖xb7 ♕d5 18. ♖xc7 ♜xd4 19. cxd4 ♜fe8

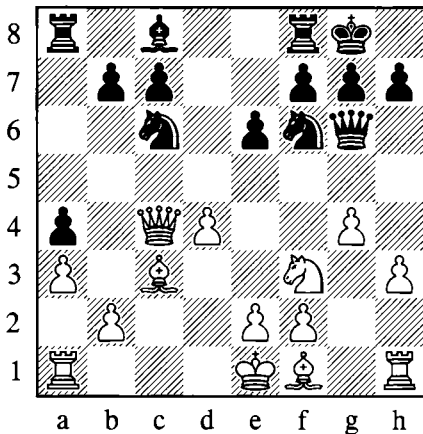
The activity of Black's pieces and the vulnerability of the white king mean that White has no better choice than liquidating into an equal endgame.



20. ♕e3 ♜ac8 21. ♖f4 ♜c3 22. ♕xd5 ♜xd5  
23. ♖f5 ♖xf5 24. gxf5 ♜xe3 25. fxex3 ♜xe3=

D3232) 13. ♕xc3

This has been tested in a couple of high-level games. I believe Black should not delay his counterplay any longer, and therefore recommend:



13...e5!N

This is clearly the critical move, and it leads to wild complications.

The less energetic 13... ♜d5 14. ♕d2 ♕d7 was played in Morozevich – Karjakin, Moscow 2013, and now 15. ♜c1N ♜a5 16. ♜e5! ♜xc4 17. ♜xg6 hxg6 18. ♜xc4 ♕c6 19. f3± would have given White a pleasant edge thanks to his bishop pair and extra space.

14.d5

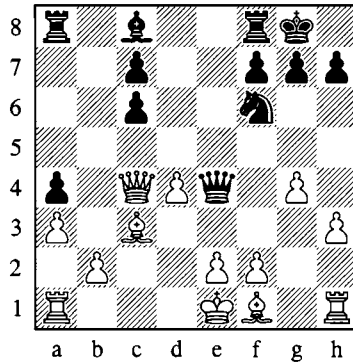
The tactical justification for Black's previous move is based on:

14. ♜xe5 ♖e4! 15. ♜xc6

15. ♜f3 runs into 15... ♜e5! 16. ♜xe5 ♖xh1±.

15...bxc6

The materialistic approach should be rejected: 15... ♖xh1?! 16. ♜e7† ♖h8 17. ♖xc7 and White gets too much for the exchange.



16.f3

16. ♜g1 ♜e8 enables Black to exchange the light-squared bishops, and after 17.e3 ♕a6 18. ♖c5 ♕xf1 19. ♜xf1 ♖d3 he keeps some initiative.

16... ♖f4 17. ♜g1 ♜e8

White's king is stuck in the centre, and White has nothing better than giving the pawn back:

18. ♕d2 ♖xf3 19. 0-0-0 ♖d5 20. ♖xd5 cxd5±

Black's middlegame initiative has been converted to a positional advantage in the endgame.

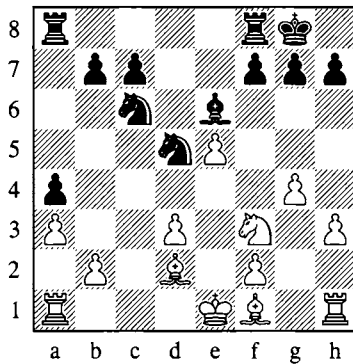
A more modest attempt is:

14.dxe5 ♗e6 15.♖d3

15.♖b5 ♘d5 16.♗d2 ♜e4 leaves White nothing better than 17.♖d3 ♜xd3 18.exd3, transposing to the line below, but with one extra move having been played.

The text move enables White to liquidate into an endgame, but Black is still not worse after:

15...♜xd3 16.exd3 ♘d5 17.♗d2

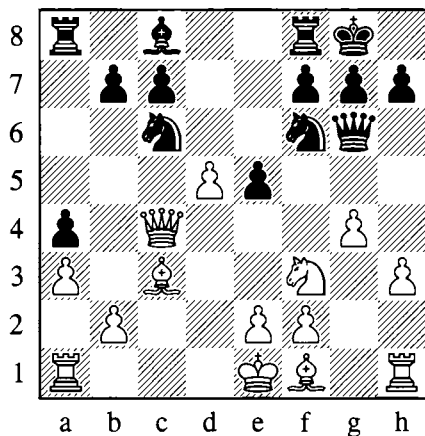


17...♘de7!

An effective regrouping. Play might continue:

18.♗e2 ♗d5 19.0-0 ♘g6 20.d4 f5! 21.g5 ♜fd8

Black keeps some initiative.



14...e4!

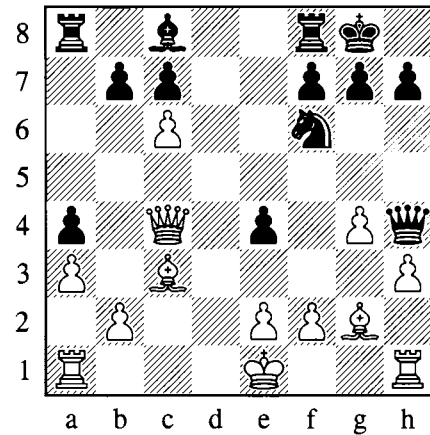
This was the idea of course.

15.♘h4

15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.♗xe5 ♜e8 17.♗xc7 e3 also offers Black rich compensation for the pawn.

15...♖g5 16.dxc6 ♜xh4 17.♗g2

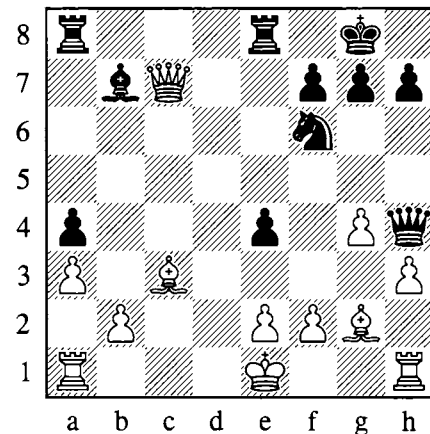
After 17.cxb7 ♗xb7 the c7-pawn is poisoned: 18.♖xc7? e3 19.♖xb7 exf2† 20.♗d1 ♜fd8† 21.♗c2 ♘d5-+



17...♜e8 18.cxb7 ♗xb7

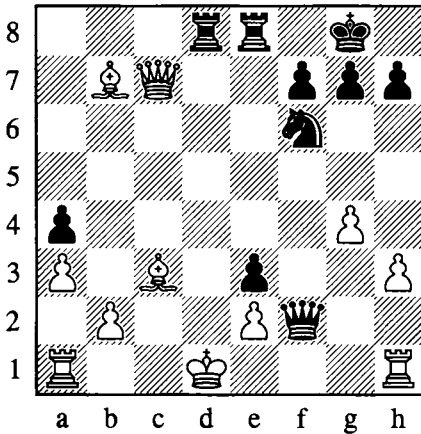
Black has a lot of dynamic play, which fully compensates for his positional deficiencies. For instance:

19.♖xc7



**19...e3! 20. ♗xb7?!**

White should settle for 20.0-0, and after 20... ♗xg2 21. ♖xg2 ♘d5 22. ♖c4 ♘xc3 23. ♖xc3 exf2 24. ♖xf2 ♖ab8 Black is out of danger. The text move is the critical one to consider, but Black gets more than enough play for the piece after:

**20... ♖xf2† 21. ♖d1 ♖ad8†****22. ♖c1 ♖xc2 23. ♖e1 ♖b5**

With a powerful attack.

**Conclusion**

7. ♖b3 has been White's main try for an opening advantage in recent years. After my recommended 7... ♘c6! White can choose between several ways of developing, but in most cases Black obtains plenty of activity after carrying out the ...e6-e5 break. That's why the set-up with 8. ♗d2 0-0 9. h3 is the most challenging: the potentially dangerous idea of g2-g4, along with the vulnerability of the bishop on d6, makes Black's task more complicated than in the other lines. However, 9...a5! 10. g4 ♖g6 allows Black to shine the spotlight on the drawbacks of White's ambitious play: the weakening of White's kingside and lack of connection between the rooks will be telling factors in the dynamic battle that ensues. In many cases Black can afford to give up a pawn – and when the ...e6-e5 advance finally arrives on the board, it will usually come with considerable force.

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B2) 9.cxd5 exd5 10.e3 ♙f5 305

B21) 11.♘f3 305

B22) 11.♘e2 ♘d7 306

B221) 12.♘g3 306

B222) 12.♘f4 308

**Chapter 21**

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♗c2 d5 5.cxd5 ♗xd5

A) 6.a3 ♙xc3† 311

A1) 7.bxc3 c5 311

A11) 8.♘f3 311

A12) 8.f3!N 312

A13) 8.♙b2 313

A2) 7.♗xc3 ♘c6 8.♘f3 ♘e4 313

A21) 9.♗c2N 314

A22) 9.♗d3 0–0N 315

A221) 10.♙f4 316

A222) 10.e3 317

B) 6.e3 c5 7.a3 ♙xc3† 318

B1) 8.♗xc3 318

B2) 8.bxc3 0–0 9.♘f3 b6 320

B21) 10.♙b2 321

B22) 10.c4 322

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1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♗c2 d5 5.cxd5 ♗xd5 6.e3 c5 7.♙d2 ♙xc3

A) 8.bxc3 0–0 325

A1) 9.f3 325

A2) 9.♘f3 326

B) 8.♙xc3 cxd4 9.♙xd4 ♘c6 328

B1) 10.♙xf6 gxf6 11.♘e2 ♙d7 12.a3 ♗e5 328

B11) 13.♙d1 330

B12) 13.♘c3 330

B2) 10.♙c3 0–0 11.♘f3 ♙d8 12.♙e2 332

B21) 12...♗e4 332

B22) 12...♗c5! 334

B221) 13.♗a4 334

B222) 13.♙c1 335

B223) 13.0–0N 335

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1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♗c2 d5 5.cxd5 ♗xd5 6.♘f3 ♗f5

A) 7.♗d1 e5! 338

A1) 8.e3 338

A2) 8.dxe5 340

B) 7.♗xf5 exf5 341

B1) 8.♙f4 342

B2) 8.♙d2 343

B3) 8.a3 ♙e7 345

B31) 9.e3 346

B32) 9.g3 346

B33) 9.♙g5 348

B34) 9.♙f4 349

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1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.♗c2 d5 5.cxd5 ♗xd5 6.♘f3 ♗f5 7.♗b3 ♘c6!

A) 8.g3 353

B) 8.e3 355

C) 8.a3 ♙a5 356

C1) 9.g3 356

C2) 9.e3 357

C3) 9.♙d2 358

D) 8.♙d2 0-0 361

D1) 9.♗c1 361

D2) 9.e3 362

D3) 9.h3 a5! 10.g4 ♗g6 363

D31) 11.♙g2 365

D32) 11.a3 a4! 366

D321) 12.♗d1 366

D322) 12.♗a2 368

D323) 12.♗c4 ♙xc3 370

D3231) 13.bxc3 370

D3232) 13.♙xc3 372



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