



THE ALTERMAN GAMBIT GUIDE

by Boris Alterman

BLACK GAMBITS 1



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THE ALTERMAN GAMBIT GUIDE

BLACK GAMBITS 1

by Boris Alterman

The Alterman Gambit Guide:

Black Gambits 1 is both an opening book *and* an instructive manual. Sharpen your tactics and learn to play dynamic attacking chess while studying the most entertaining gambits.

BENKO GAMBIT

BLUMENFELD GAMBIT

VAGANIAN GAMBIT

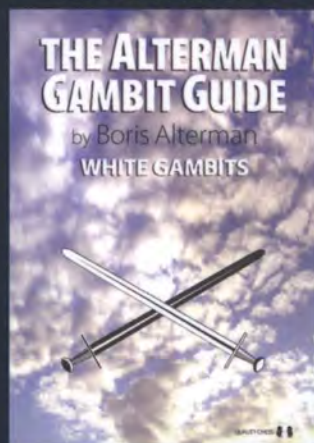
1.d4 ♘f6 – SIDELINES

ENGLISH DEFENCE GAMBIT

Boris Alterman is a strong grandmaster and founder of the Shevah-Mofet Chess Academy in Israel. Alterman is a product of the Botvinnik-Kasparov chess school. He helped to develop the Deep Junior program which famously drew a match with Kasparov and defeated both Radjabov and Deep Fritz.



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Gambit



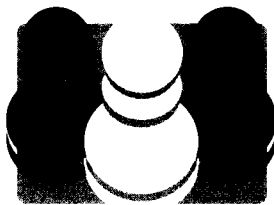
An opening in chess in which a minor piece, or pieces, usually a pawn, is offered in exchange for a favorable position.



The Alterman Gambit Guide

Black Gambits 1

By
Boris Alterman



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The Alterman Gambit Guide - Black Gambits 1

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Key to symbols used

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

Introduction

My relationship with the 64 squares began at an early stage in life. I first learned to play checkers at the age of three, and when I became quite good at it, my father decided to teach me a more complicated game. Chess was the most natural choice. The first lessons were very tough for me, but I eventually picked up the most important principles of the game.

At the age of ten I was going to join a football team until surgery on my appendix put an end to that idea. With no better option, I joined the “Avangard” chess club in my home town of Voroshilovgrad (which is called Lugansk nowadays) one of the largest towns in the east of Ukraine. Students in my group had to memorize the most brilliant tactical examples from the games of Morphy, Anderssen and other great players, and then show them in class to our coach, Master of Sport Vitaly Appolonovich Marchenko. This was a useful start to my life in chess, as to become successful we must develop our tactical skills. As the old saying has it: “Chess is 99% tactics!” You may come up with a deep strategic idea, but your opponent will punish you if you make just one tactical slip.

Our coach taught us to play aggressively and energetically, and not to fear sacrificing material for an attack. His lessons were so instructive and interesting that I did not want to miss a single session, even when I was sick with fever. It will be no surprise that as a young player I loved to play gambit systems.

A few years later, when I was quite a strong player, I started to play solid but rather passive lines as White. I was extremely lucky to be able to join the famous Botvinnik-Kasparov chess school when it started in 1986. After the very first session Kasparov wrote in my homework: “Improve your White opening repertoire; play aggressively.” This valuable judgment from a great player helped me a lot to improve my chess.

Later, while reading the great books of Grandmaster Richard Reti, I found the following expression which every chess player and instructor should note: “A knowledge of tactics is the foundation of positional play. This is a rule which has stood its test in chess history and one which we cannot impress forcibly enough upon the young chess player. A beginner should avoid the Queen’s Gambit and French Defense and play open games instead! While he may not win as many games at first, he will in the long run be amply compensated by acquiring a thorough knowledge of the game.”

When I started to give lessons I realized that there were few books which could help players to progress from Beginner to Intermediate and Advanced level. You could try studying the great books of Mark Dvoretzky, however these books target mostly Master-level players (2200 and up). Most of the books I looked at started with “How to” then continued “Win in chess”, “Trap your opponent”, “Beat the Sicilian” (or Ruy Lopez, French or whatever). However, these books never explained the basics of opening principles, which are critical for moving from Beginner/Intermediate level to Advanced.

As I gained more coaching experience I saw that, at the Beginner and Intermediate level, playing the opening correctly brings many dividends. Many of the games at that level are decided because one of the players (or both!) does not follow the basic opening principles, committing sins such as neglecting the center, making too many moves with the same piece, moving the

queen too early in the opening, leaving the king in the center, trying to win material instead of developing, and so on. This gave me the idea of developing a course of lectures on the Internet Chess Club called “Gambit Guide”.

After editing and combining a lot of material, the course has been transformed into this series of books, which I hope will help the readers become more familiar with the most important opening and positional principles, teach about tactics and typical combinations in the opening, as well as explain how to evaluate a position and how to study the principles of attack.

About the Black Gambits project

The Alterman Gambit Guide was originally conceived as a two-part work. After the White Gambits book was published, I felt like I had achieved what I set out to, by producing an introductory guide to several exciting gambits, which would also serve as an instructional manual for tactical motifs and fundamental principles of both opening play and chess in general. The plan had always been to produce a similar guide based on black gambits, but along the way the project evolved in a number of ways.

After thinking about how best to approach the work and discussing it with Jacob and John at Quality Chess, we decided for the second volume to put more emphasis on theoretical soundness, covering a smaller number of gambits in more detail than was typical for the first book, in order to provide the basis for a lasting repertoire while still offering plenty of tactical training and general guidance for improving players.

I started by covering 1.d4 and 1.c4, which was only intended to make up half of a single book on black gambits. However, when I submitted this work to the publisher it became clear that there would be far too much material for a single volume, and so the decision was made to divide the Black Gambits work into two parts.

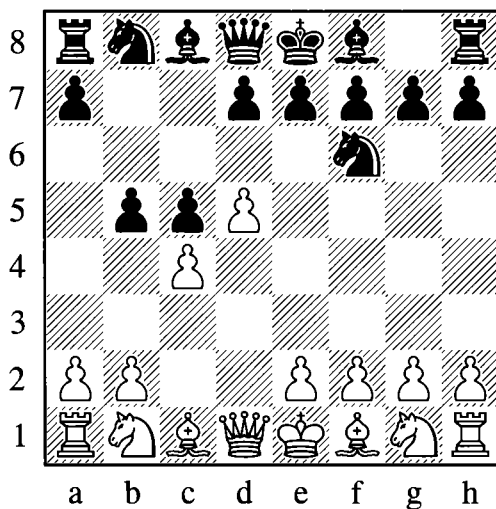
When playing with the black pieces, one has to be a bit more careful about offering gambits in the opening, as you cannot get away with as much when playing a tempo down from the starting position. The systems covered in these pages are highly regarded and have proven to be reliable even at the highest levels. As mentioned previously, the Black Gambits project emphasizes theoretical soundness, and in many places I have worked hard to find improvements over existing theory. At the same time, you can still find the same level of explanations and guidance as in the first volume.

I believe that the Alterman Gambit Guide has evolved into a better version of what it was previously, and I hope that after reading it, the same thing will be true of the reader.

Boris Alterman
Rishon Le Zion, September 2011

Chapter 1

The Benko Gambit



1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5

The Benko Gambit was one of my favorite openings as a junior. I loved to fianchetto my bishop on g7 (my favorite opening against 1.e4 was the Sicilian Dragon) and Black's middlegame strategy was easy to understand yet highly effective. Being a kid you almost never worry about a small material sacrifice – getting active play for your pieces is much more important! Fortunately the gambit is good enough for adults as well...

Game 1

NN – Alterman

Ukraine 1984

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5

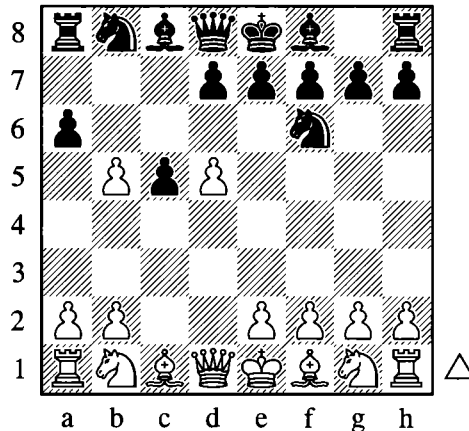
The present game was one of my first experiences with the Benko Gambit; prior to this event, I had mainly tested it in blitz games.

4.cxb5

This game was played in the first round of the National School Team Championship, where the level of the players on the top board was usually close to the first or second category level (approximately 1800-2000). Despite my opponent being at a decent level for his age, it soon became obvious that he had no clue about how to meet my chosen opening.

White can hardly contemplate 4.♘c3? as 4...b4 makes the knight look silly, for instance 5.♘b1 d6 6.♘f3 g6 7.g3 ♗g7 with a fine position for Black.

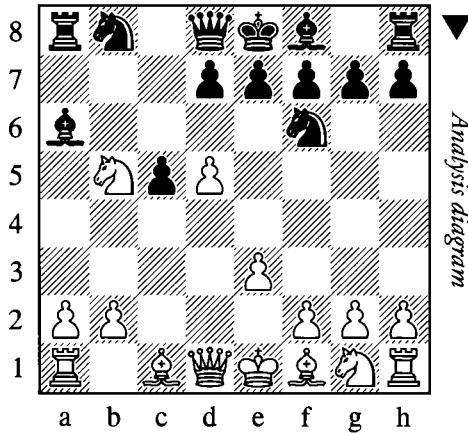
4...a6



5.e3

After a few minutes of thinking White decides to protect the pawn on b5. Instead 5.bxa6 is the main line, and White can also decline the gambit with 5.b6.

Here is an example of disastrous opening play from White: 5.♘c3 axb5 6.♘xb5 (The alternative 6.e4 will be considered in the final section of the chapter.) 6...♗a6 7.e3?? (White had to play 7.♘c3 transposing to the main line.)



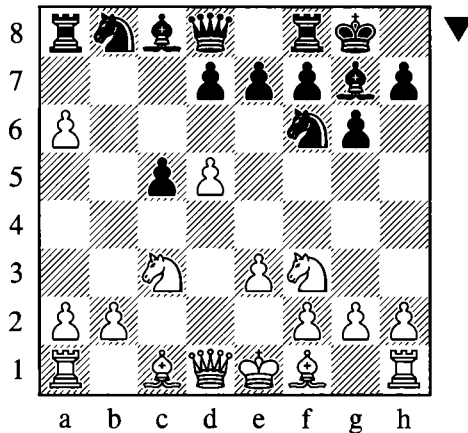
7...♙xb5! 0–1 Kirchhoff – Foldi, Dortmund 1986. White resigned as he will lose a piece due to the queen check on a5.

5...g6

I decided to continue with the normal development, waiting for White to capture on a6 one day...

6.♘f3 ♗g7 7.♘c3 0–0 8.bxa6?!

This came as a pleasant surprise. Later I discovered that the best response was 8.a4!, strengthening White’s position on the queenside and refusing to gift the opponent a tempo. See Game 9 for further details on this.



8...d6!

This accurate move saves valuable time. The immediate 8...♗xa6 would have allowed 9.♗xa6 when White has achieved a minor victory, having expended only a single tempo exchanging bishops.

9.♗e2

Allowing Black to justify his idea, but it was hard to suggest a more constructive move.

9...♙xa6

Perfect timing!

10.♙xa6?!

This loses additional time. White should have castled instead.

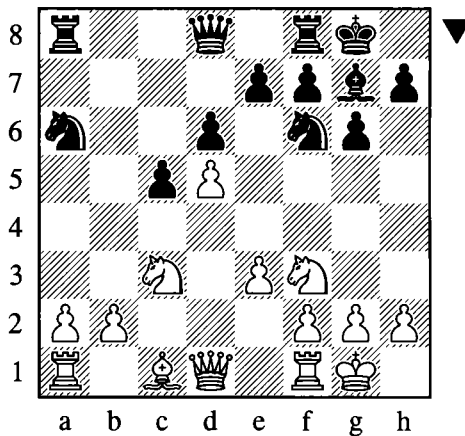
10...♘xa6!

It was also possible to capture on a6 with the rook and put the knight on d7. From there one possible plan involves ...♘g4 and ...♘ge5, intending to jump to c4 or d3 later. Alternatively the knight may go to b6 and later c4 or a4.

I knew about these plans, but correctly decided to accelerate my development by taking on a6 with the knight. Later this piece can head towards the d3-square via b4 or c5, while the other knight can go to d7 and later b6 or e5.

11.0-0

White finishes his kingside development. It seems like his position is okay, but Black's next move highlights his problems.

**11...♗b6!**

Now White will have a hard time developing his queenside pieces.

12.♗e2

Covering the b2-pawn and preparing to complete development with e4 and ♙f4.

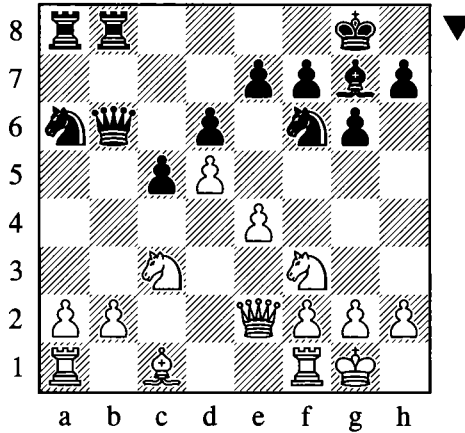
12.b3 could be met by 12...♘e4 13.♘a4 ♗b7 14.♙b2 ♙xb2 15.♘xb2 ♘b4! when Black wins the d5-pawn while keeping a huge positional advantage.

12...♖fb8

Another standard idea: the rook comes to the open file and increases the pressure on the b2-pawn.

13.e4

White's only chance for active play is in the center.



13...♖d7!

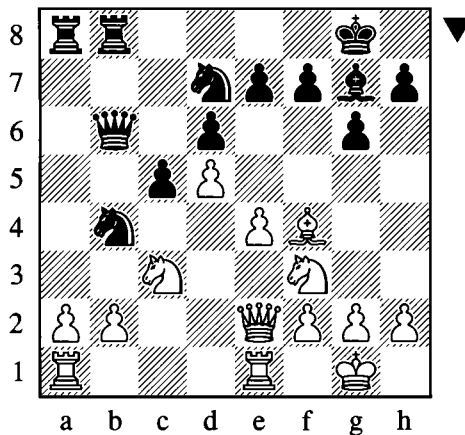
Another important move. Black prevents e5 and opens the long diagonal for his bishop.

14.♞e1

Since the bishop is unable to leave the c1-square, White develops his rook.

14...♖b4 15.♙f4?

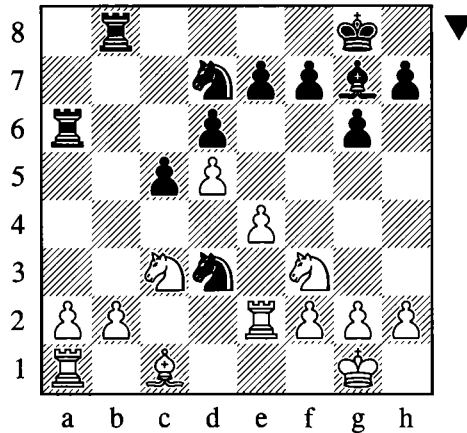
White totally overlooks the power of Black's next move. 15.♙g5!? was better, although even here Black can proceed in the same way as in the game, as capturing on e7 would lead to the loss of the white bishop after ...f6.



15...♞a6!

This came as a great surprise for my opponent. The idea of exchanging queens while a pawn down might seem counterintuitive, but in fact it makes perfect sense. After the queen trade White loses all hope of any meaningful counterplay in the center or on the kingside. Meanwhile Black's queenside assault is in no way diminished. The weakness of the d3-square only adds to White's troubles, especially in view of the unfortunate position of his bishop.

16.♞xa6 ♞xa6 17.♞c2 ♖d3 18.♙c1



18...c4!

White remains a pawn up, but his pieces are virtually paralyzed. With his last move Black cements the outpost on d3 and prepares to bring the other knight into the attack.

19.♔f1 ♖7c5

Black has achieved everything he could have wished for, and the game is almost over.

20.♝b1?

A blunder, but there was no good defense against ...♖b3.

20...♗xc3

0-1

I am glad to have won so thematically in one of my first serious games with the Benko Gambit. The above game illustrated several key maneuvers and ideas.

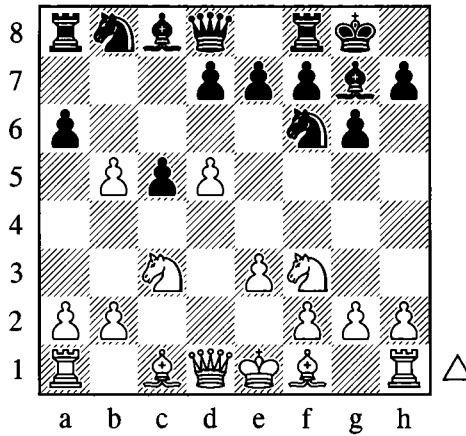
What we have learned:

- ❖ After the moves cxb5 and ...a6, tension may occur between the pawns on b5 and a6. This may continue for several moves as neither side wishes to facilitate the opponent's development by capturing prematurely.
- ❖ Usually the b8-knight will go to d7, but occasionally it does better to move to a6, as in the above game.
- ❖ In the standard Benko Gambit Accepted structure, Black can obtain ongoing queenside pressure with ...♝b6 (or ...♝a5) followed by ...♞fb8.
- ❖ A timely ...♞f6-d7 retreat can help to take control over the e5-square, while preparing to deploy the knight on the queenside.
- ❖ A queen maneuver to a6 can be useful for trading queens and/or attacking the light squares.
- ❖ Black's compensation often persists after – and may even be intensified by – a queen exchange.
- ❖ The ...c5-c4 advance can be used in conjunction with ...♞d7-c5 to activate the d7-knight while clamping down on the d3-square. (It is important that White cannot profitably use the d4-square for his pieces.)

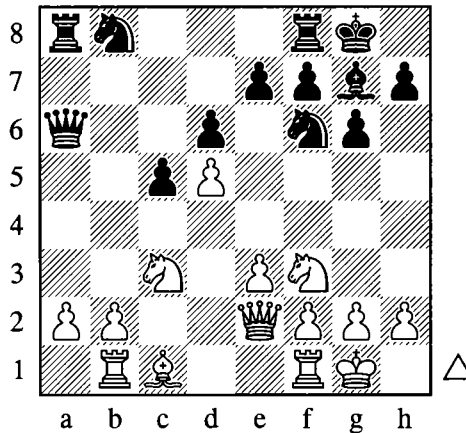
Game 2
lastdog – Alterman
 Internet (blitz) 2004

Of course an internet blitz game should not be taken too seriously, nevertheless the present encounter illustrates some important themes. In particular, it once again emphasizes Black's chances after a queen exchange.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.e3 g6 5.cxb5 a6 6.♗c3 ♕g7 7.♗f3 0-0



8.♕e2 d6 9.0-0 axb5 10.♗xb5 ♕a6 11.♗c3 ♖b6 12.♗b1 ♕xe2 13.♖xe2 ♖a6!



14.♖xa6 ♗xa6

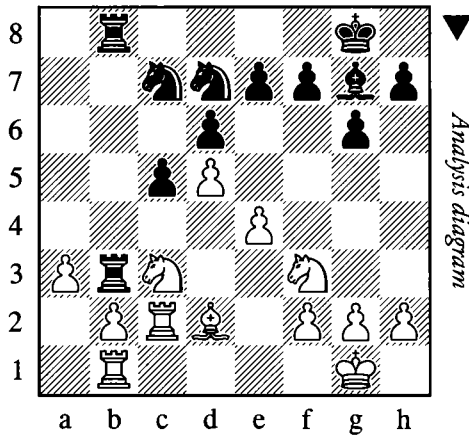
The situation is somewhat similar to the previous game. Black is a pawn down in a simplified position, and yet it is White who has considerable problems to solve!

15.a3 ♗fb8 16.♕d2?

White should have taken the opportunity to liquidate the queenside pawns with 16.b4 cxb4 17.axb4 ♖xb4 although even here he still has to work for a draw, for instance 18.e4 ♘d3 (or 18...♘d7 19.♗e2 ♗c5 20.♗g3 ♗bd3) 19.♙d2 ♖c8! and Black retains long-term pressure.

16...♖b3! 17.♖fe1?

White should have preferred 17.♖fc1 ♖ab8 18.♖c2 although here too Black can increase the pressure: 18...♘d7! 19.e4 ♗c7 (or 19...♗b6 20.♙c1 ♗c4)



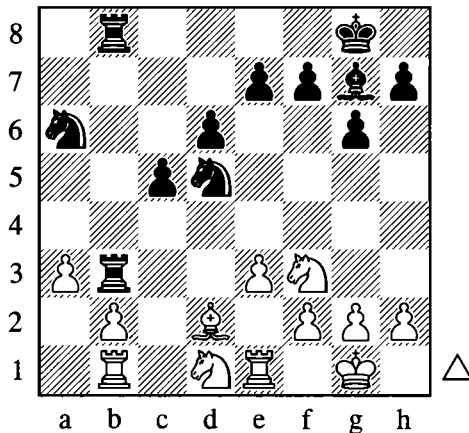
Black intends to undermine the enemy center with ...f5!. Meanwhile he maintains a powerful bind on the queenside.

17...♖ab8

Now White is unable to retain his extra pawn.

18.♗d1 ♗xd5

Black restores material equality and his positional advantage should be enough to decide the game. On the next move White collapses.



19. ♖c3??

A dreadful blunder, although we should remember that this was just a five-minute game played online.

19... ♗xc3

The rest is easy.

20. ♗xc3 ♖xc3 21. ♖e2 ♖xa3

Black can win in any way he chooses, but the text is the most accurate, and emphasizes the significance of the pin along the b-file.

22. h3 ♖f6 23. ♗d2 ♖a2 24. ♗c4 d5 25. ♗d2 ♖xb2 26. ♖xb2 ♖xb2 27. ♗f1 c4 28. ♗f3 ♖b1†
29. ♗e1 ♗b4 30. f4 ♗d3 31. g4 ♖h4
0–1

What we have learned:

- ❖ Once again, a queen exchange will tend to favor Black.
- ❖ If White defends his b2-pawn with ♖b1, he may be susceptible to tactics along the b-file. In the above game Black was able to exploit this to win a piece on c3 and a pawn on a3.

The above two games have illustrated most of the fundamental principles of the Benko Gambit. In the rest of the chapter we will delve into the gambit more deeply, examining each of the major variations, beginning with the most critical lines in which White captures the gambit pawn.

Accepting the Gambit

We will begin with a game in which everything goes perfectly for White.

Game 3

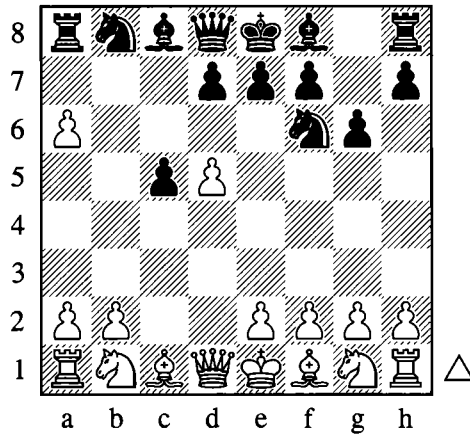
Boris Alterman – Handszar Odeev

Kapsukas 1987

This game took place in the final round of the Soviet Junior championship in January 1987. These tournaments were extremely strong – it was much more difficult to win a Soviet Junior Championship than a World Junior. The 1987 event had an amazing field including Cadet World Champion Vladimir Akopian, Alexei Shirov, Mikhail Ulitin, Konstantin Sakaev and Sergei Tiviakov, just to name a few of the many future grandmasters. Nevertheless after ten rounds your author was sitting on a splendid score of 8/10, in equal first place with the prodigious Gata Kamsky. In the final round I had the white pieces against Odeev, another future grandmaster – while Gata had the same color against the even more dangerous Tiviakov.

1. d4 ♗f6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 b5 4. cxb5 a6 5. bxa6 g6

This is generally considered slightly more accurate than 5... ♖xa6, for reasons that will be explained in the notes to Game 6.



6. ♖c3 ♗xa6

Black cannot afford to delay this move any longer, as he needs to be able to take on f1 to disrupt White's castling.

7. e4

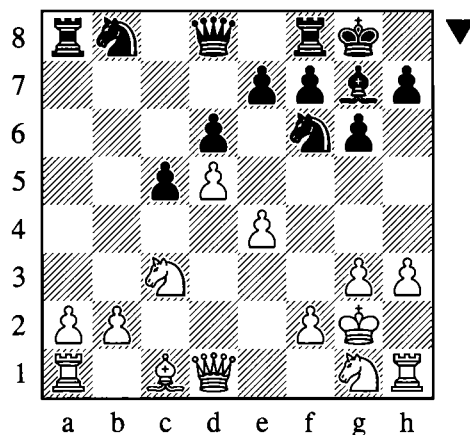
This is the most straightforward way to fight against the Benko. White accepts a temporary inconvenience on the kingside and intends to castle artificially. In return he benefits from good control over the center, and the possibility of breaking with e4-e5 in the middlegame.

7... ♗xf1 8. ♗xf1 d6 9. g3

Occasionally White tries the extravagant 9.g4?! to gain space on the kingside, but after 9...h5! 10.g5 ♗fd7 Black will obtain his standard queenside counterplay all the same. It is hard to believe that White will achieve much on the kingside, and the wide open space in front of his king might eventually cause problems for him.

9... ♗g7 10. ♗g2 0-0 11. h3

Taking control over the g4-square is useful, but there is no real need to play this move before developing the knight. In subsequent games I switched to the main line of 11. ♗f3, and after 11... ♗bd7 White can choose whether or not to play 12.h3, as discussed in the notes to Game 4.



11...♖a6?!

11...♖bd7 should have been preferred. The knight is less active on a6, and White soon manages to arrange his pieces optimally.

12.♟f3 ♜b6 13.♞e1 ♝d7

Another possible line is 13...♟b4 14.♞e2 ♜a6 15.a4 ♞fb8 16.♞a3! intending ♟b5 when White is in control.

14.♞e2!

It is useful to know this thematic maneuver. White defends the b-pawn laterally, avoiding any tactical trickery – a stark contrast to the previous game, in which the vulnerable rook on b1 proved to be White’s undoing.

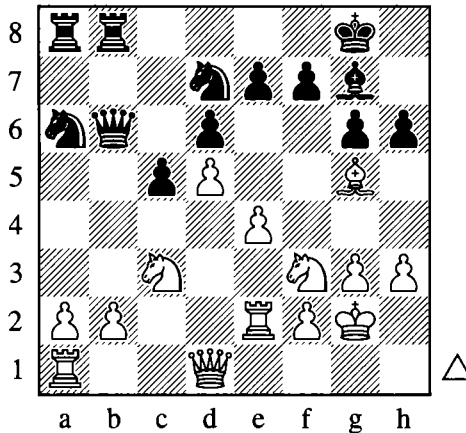
14...♞fb8

After 14...♟e5 15.♟xe5 ♞xe5 16.♞h6 ♞fb8 17.♞c1 ♟c7 18.b3! White is solid on the queenside and Black has a hard time demonstrating compensation.

15.♞g5!

Intending to provoke a weakness in the enemy kingside.

15...h6



16.♞e3!

Mission accomplished.

16.♞xe7? is a mistake. Following 16...♞e8 17.♞h4 g5 18.♞xg5 hxg5 19.♟xg5 White has four pawns for a piece, but after 19...c4! intending ...♟c5-d3 Black’s minor pieces spring to life.

16...♟c7 17.♞c1

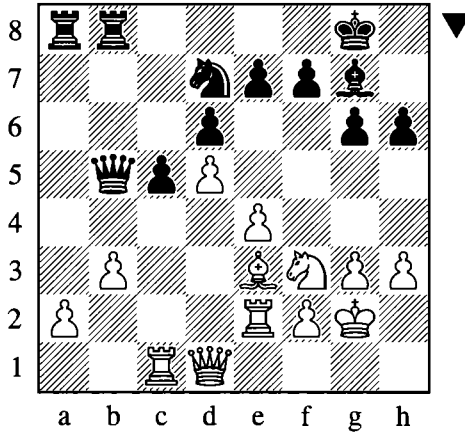
Now White improves the other rook.

17...♘b5

17...♖a6 18.♞cc2±

18.♘xb5 ♖xb5 19.b3!

Fixing the pawn structure and securing control over the c4-square. Black lacks any real counterplay, and White will slowly turn his attention to the kingside.

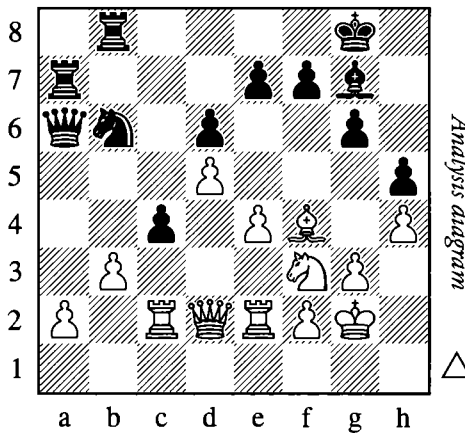


19...♖a6

After 19...♖a3 20.♞cc2 ♖ba8 21.h4± White is rock-solid on the queenside, and is ready to press forward on the other wing.

20.♞cc2 ♘b6 21.h4 ♖a7 22.♖d2 ♔h7

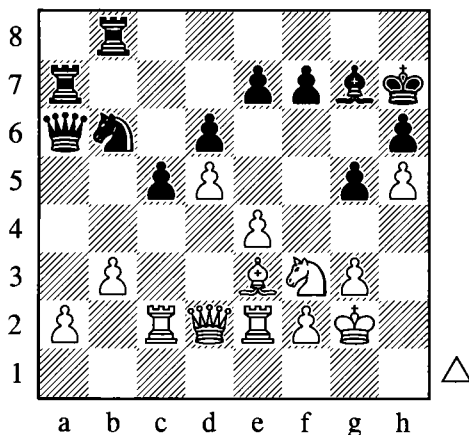
22...h5 would have prevented the game continuation, but Black is still in deep trouble: 23.♙f4! Preparing to smash through the center. 23...c4



24.e5! (24.♘d4!? ♙xd4 25.♖xd4 cxb3 26.axb3 is excellent for White, but the text is even better) Black's position will soon be destroyed, for instance: 24...cxb3 25.axb3 ♖b5 26.exd6 ♘xd5 27.dxe7+—

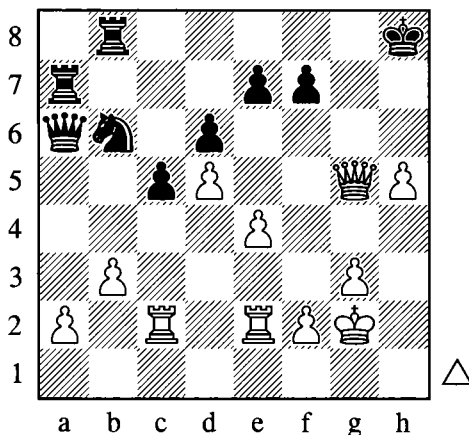
23.h5! g5

Of course I anticipated this move, and had prepared a strong counter.



24.♙xg5! hxg5 25.♘xg5† ♖g8 26.♗f4 ♙f6 27.♗f5 ♙xg5 28.♗xg5† ♖h8

Calculating up to this point was easy; the key to the combination is revealed on the next move. (White can of course force a perpetual check, but this would hardly be a satisfactory conclusion to the game.)



29.e5!

Bringing reinforcements into the attack.

29...♗d3!

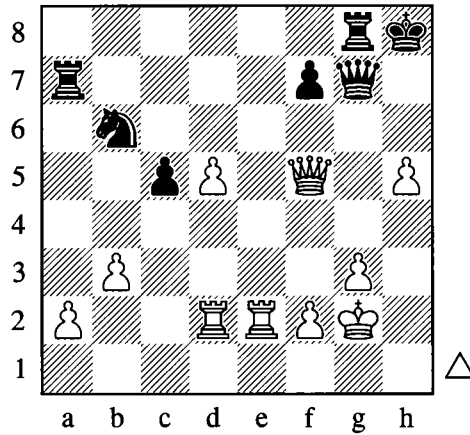
Transferring the queen to the kingside is the best chance, but ultimately it is not enough.

30.♙cd2 ♗h7 31.exd6 exd6 32.♗f6† ♗g7 33.♗xd6

With four pawns for a piece and a weak enemy king as a target, White's position is winning.

33...♗f8 34.♗f6† ♗g7 35.♗f5 ♙g8

How can White break the defense?



36.d6!

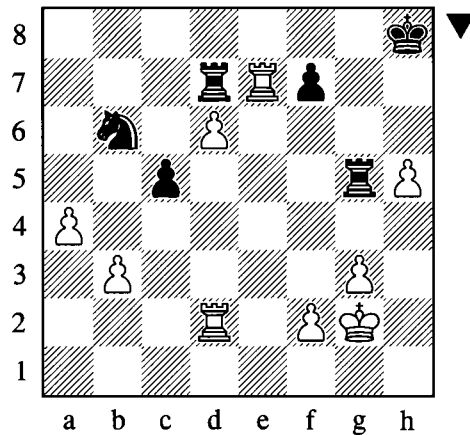
Passed pawns should be pushed!

36...♙g5 37.♚xg5

Simplest; White's numerous passed pawns will decide the game.

37...♜xg5 38.♝e7 ♜d7 39.a4!

Overloading the black pieces.



39...♜g8

The alternative is 39...c4 40.bxc4 ♜xh5, at which point the simplest win is 41.♜xd7 ♜xd7 42.♜d5! ♜xd5 43.cxd5 ♔g7 44.a5 ♔f8 45.a6 ♔e8 46.♔f3 ♜b6 47.♔e4 ♔d7 48.♔e5 when Black can resign.

40.a5 ♜xe7 41.dxe7 ♜c8 42.♜d7 ♔g7 43.a6

1-0

Black resigned. This put me in first place, but a few hours later the twelve-year-old Kamsky defeated Tiviakov to join me on 9/11. This was the first and the last time that the Soviet Junior Championship ended with co-winners on such a high score.

What we have learned:

- ❖ Generally the b8-knight should go to d7 instead of a6, unless there is a specific reason to favor the latter (such as in Game 1, when Black was able to accelerate his development).
- ❖ White's Re1-e2 maneuver is a hugely important resource. (This will become clear in subsequent games as well.)
- ❖ By putting his bishop on g5, White can often induce the ...h6 move which weakens the enemy kingside.
- ❖ One of the dangers of the Benko Gambit is that Black usually masses his heavy pieces on the queenside. If White manages to generate a kingside attack, the black king may find itself dangerously short of defenders.

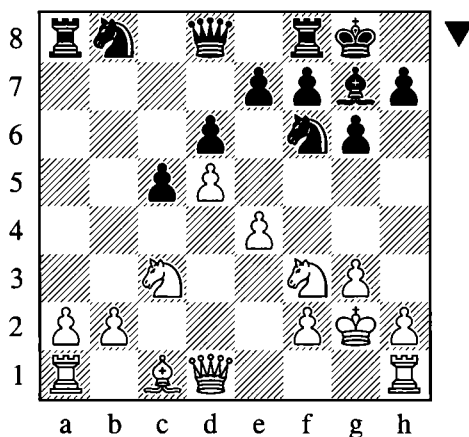
Game 4**Aleksandr Shneider – Irina Levitina**

Helsinki 1992

1.d4 f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6. c3 xa6 7. f3

White has chosen a different move order from that seen in the previous game, but the two paths quickly converge.

7...d6 8.e4 xf1 9. xf1 g7 10.g3 0-0 11. g2

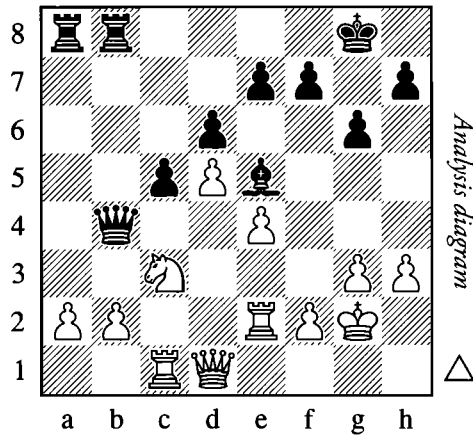


11... bd7

Alternatives are rarely seen:

11... a6 ?! 12.h3 transposes to the previous game, although White can even look to save time with 12. e1 !?

11... b6 has been played, but it seems illogical to commit the queen so early. 12. e1 White can do without h3 here. 12... bd7 13. e2 g4 14. f4 fb8 15. c1 b4 16.h3 ge5 17. xe5 xe5 18. xe5 xe5



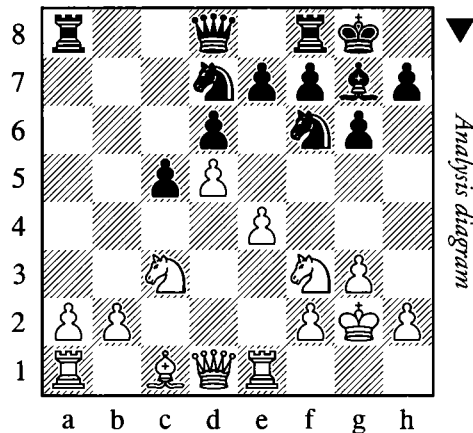
19.♚d3! (Much better than 19.♞cc2 ♟xc3 20.bxc3 ♚c4± Danner – Jung, Passau 1996.)
 19...c4 20.♚e3 ♜b7 21.♞cc2 ♚a5 22.h4 h5 23.f4! Black's pieces are too far away to help his king.
 23...♟xc3 24.bxc3 ♜b1 25.f5! White had a powerful attack while keeping his extra pawn as a bonus, Alterman – Sagalchik, Kramatorsk 1989.

12.h3!

I believe this prophylactic move to be the most accurate continuation at White's disposal, although many players prefer to do without it. Here is a summary of my findings on White's other main continuation:

12.♞e1

This has been slightly more popular than 12.h3, but I consider it less dangerous overall.



12...♘g4!

The most principled move, aiming to utilize the e5-square.

12...♚a5 is riskier due to 13.e5!? (White can also transpose to Game 5 with 13.h3) 13...♘g4
 14.exd6 exd6 15.♟f4 ♜fb8 16.♞e2 ♚a6 17.♞c1 ♘ge5 18.♘xe5 ♘xe5 19.♟xe5 ♟xe5 20.b3
 when Black faces a tough battle for a draw with little hope of achieving anything more, as demonstrated in several games.

After the text move White has a wide choice, but Black has sufficient resources in all variations.

a) 13.h3?!

A well-known mistake.

13...♗ge5 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.f4

Consistent, but White is leaving a lot of holes in his position.

15...♘d7

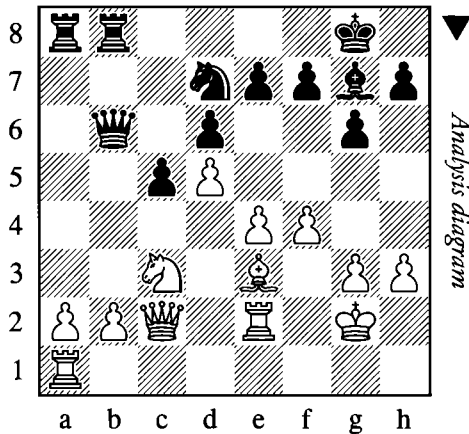
Black still controls the e5-square, and will soon intensify the pressure on the queenside. White will have serious problems completing his development.

16.♖c2 ♗b6

Another game continued 16...♖a6 17.a4 ♗a8 18.♘b5 ♖c8 19.♙d2 c4 20.♙c3 ♙xc3 21.♘c3 ♘c5 22.♖e2 ♖b8 23.♖a3 ♖b4 ♖ Neverov – Bologan, Nikolaev 1995.

17.♖e2 ♖fb8 18.♙e3?!

Overlooking a simple tactical shot.

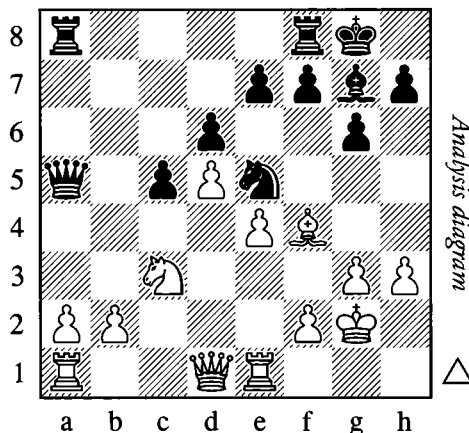


18...♗xb2!

A thematic combination for the Benko.

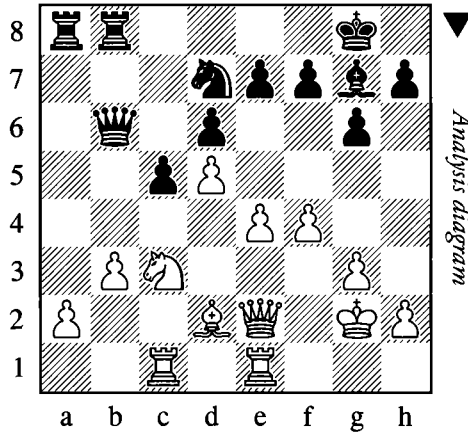
19.♗xb2 ♖xb2 20.♖xb2 ♙xc3 21.♙c1 f5! ♖ Przewoznik – Nun, Timisoara 1987.

b) 13.♙f4 is playable but nothing special for White: 13...♗a5 14.h3 ♗ge5 15.♘xe5 ♘xe5



16.♖e2 ♜fb8 17.♞ac1 ♞a6! 18.♙xe5 ♙xe5 19.♞c2 ♞xe2 20.♞exe2 ♞b4 21.a3 ♞b3 22.♘d1 ♙d4 (22...♞ab8 is fine as well) 23.♘e3 ♙xe3 24.♞xe3 ♞xe3 25.fxe3 ♞b8 26.♙f3 ♞b3♞ It was White who had to play accurately to draw this endgame in Karpov – Salov, Belgrade 1996.

c) 13.♞e2 ♘ge5 14.♘e5!?! (14.♘d2! transposes to line d below) 14...♘e5 15.f4 ♘d7 16.♙d2 ♞b6 17.b3 ♞fb8 18.♞ac1

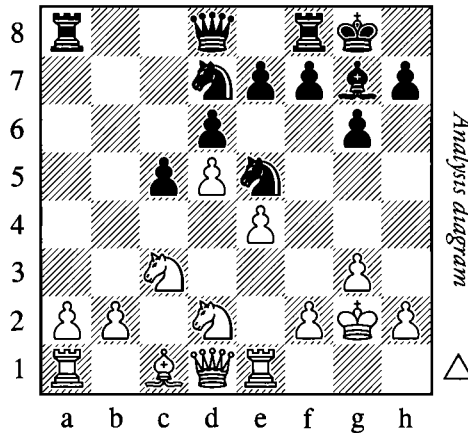


This position was reached in Hjartarson – Zueger, Winterthur 1996, and here Black should have played 18...♞a6! with promising counterplay.

d) 13.♘d2!?

Since White has more space, he sensibly decides to avoid exchanges and retreats his knight in anticipation of Black's next move.

13...♘ge5



14.♞e2!

Let me reiterate that the same position might arise from the move order 13.♞e2 ♘ge5 14.♘d2! 14...♘b6

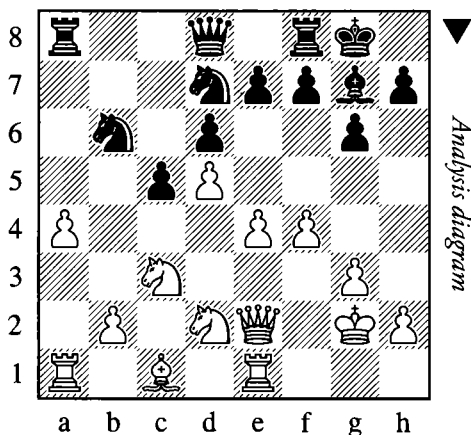
White was threatening to win the knight on e5, so Black provides it with an escape route.

15.f4 ♖ed7

Intending ...♖a4.

16.a4!

Less attractive is 16.♖f3 ♖a4! 17.e5 ♖db6 when Black has sufficient counterplay, Komljenovic – Collas, Paris 1996.



The database lists close to a hundred games from this position. The earliest reference is from 1990, but I had already encountered this position in a serious game as far back as 1983! My opponent, Vitaly Braslavsky, made all the right choices and the reference appears below.

16...♗xc3!

Others are inferior, for instance:

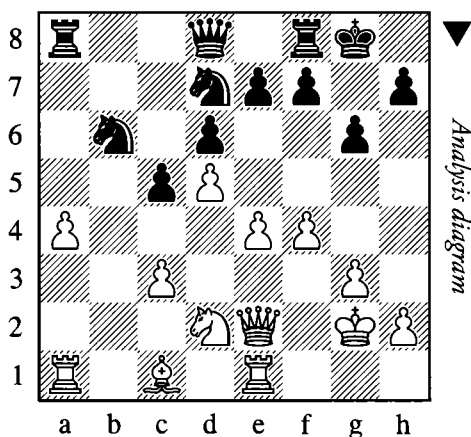
16...e6? 17.dxe6 fxe6 18.♖f3!± Chernin – Weindl, San Bernardino 1994.

16...♞e8?! 17.a5 e6 18.dxe6 ♞xe6 19.♞f3± Gavrikov – Gallagher, Switzerland 1994.

16...♞c8 17.a5 ♞a6 18.♞a3 ♞xe2† 19.♞xe2.♞fb8 20.e5± Iskusnyh – Sagalchik, Kemerovo 1995.

16...♞a7 has been the most popular move, but after 17.a5 ♞a8 18.♞b5 ♞b8 19.axb6 ♞xa1 20.♞xd7 Black is struggling and has scored poorly from this position.

17.bxc3

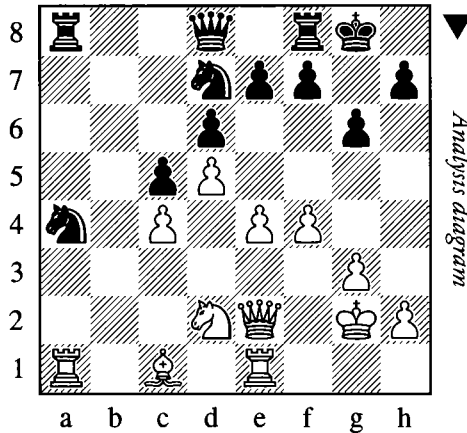


17...♟xa4!

I made the mistake of opting for 17...♞xa4?! but after 18.♞xa4 ♟xa4 19.c4 I failed to equalize and eventually went down in Braslavsky – Alterman, 1983. Later after analyzing the game I realized the strength of the immediate capture with the knight, but I never got a chance to test my improvement over the board.

The text move was first played in 1995. It is the correct continuation for sure, but it does not solve Black's problems by itself – it is necessary to follow up correctly.

18.c4



18...♟c3!

Amazingly this accurate move, which equalizes almost effortlessly, has so far never been tested! 18...e6 and 18...♟ab6 are both playable, but White can still fight for an advantage against both of them.

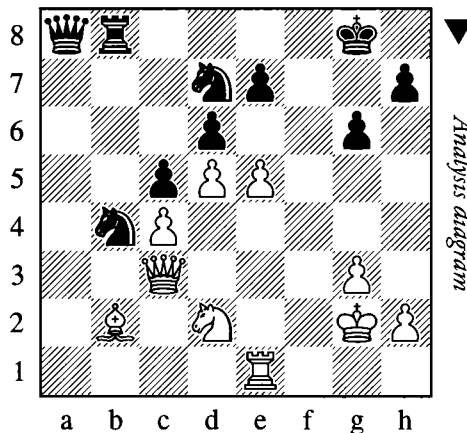
19.♞xa8 ♞xa8 20.♞d3 ♟a2!

The knight is doing great work! Black can cause just enough disruption to prevent his opponent from harnessing the power of his bishop.

21.♟b2 ♞b8 22.♞c2 ♟b4 23.♞c3 f6

Black is defending firmly, and the attempt to open the center meets with a strong rebuttal.

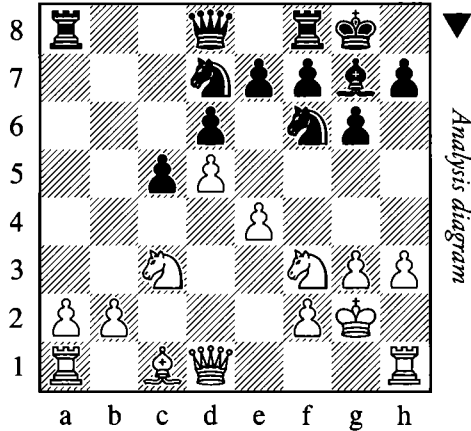
24.e5?! fxe5 25.fxe5



25...♖xd5! 26.cxd5 ♖xd5† 27.♔g1 ♜xe5 28.♞e2 ♞d3!♣

White will have to fight for a draw in a difficult endgame.

Let us now return to the position after 12.h3!, at which point Black must make an important decision.



12...♞c7

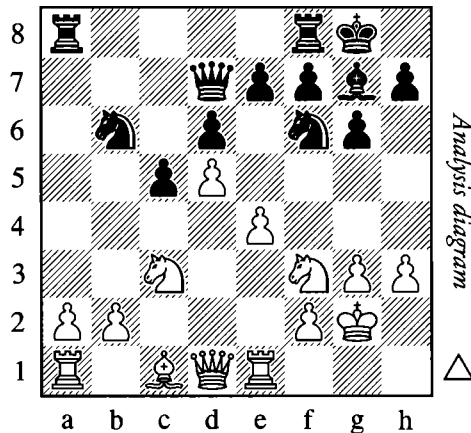
Not the most energetic move. The main line of 12...♞a5 will be considered in the following game. Several other ideas have been tried. Once again I will explore some of these alternatives in detail, as they help to illustrate many instructive and thematic ideas, and are worth studying even if you do not intend to play the exact same way over the board.

12...♞b8 13.♞e1 ♞b7 14.♞e2 transposes to the main game.

12...♜b6 13.♞e1 ♞d7!?

I used to favor this tricky move as a junior.

13...♜fd7?! is too slow: 14.♞c2 ♜c4 15.a4 ♞a5 16.♜b5 ♞b4 17.♞a2 ♜ce5 18.♜xe5 ♜xe5 19.♞e2 ♞fc8 20.f4 White kept the advantage in Kiss – Krutti, Zalakaros 1992.



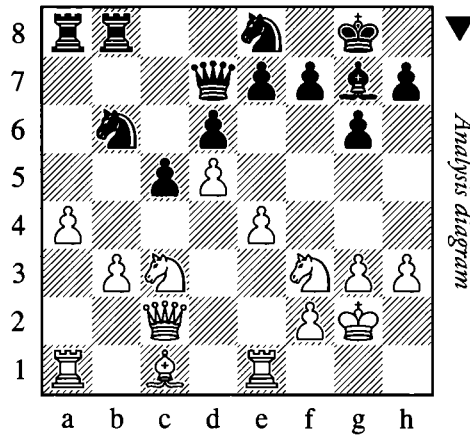
14. ♖c2!

Much better than the alternatives:

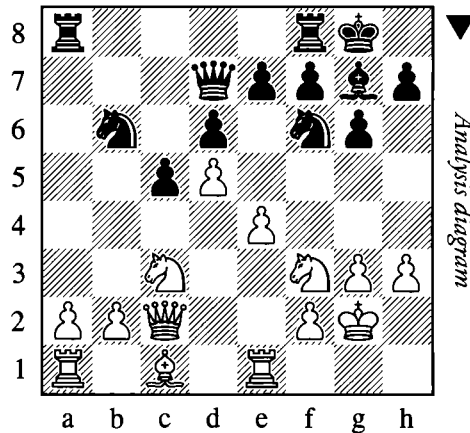
14.e5?! dxe5 15. ♘xe5 ♗b7! The d5-pawn falls.

Black's idea is to meet the thematic 14. ♗e2?! with 14... ♘a4! 15. ♖c2 ♘xc3 16.bxc3 ♗a4!=
Amidzic – Kalegin, Moscow 1991.

14.a4 ♗fb8 15. ♖c2 (Or 15. ♗a2 ♘e8 16.e5 ♘c7 17. ♙f4 ♘a6 18.b3 ♘b4 19. ♗ae2 ♗b7↗
Wessman – Ernst, Avesta 1993.) 15... ♘e8 16.b3



16...f5! This dynamic move leads to sharp complications. (It improves over 16... ♘c7 17. ♙b2 ♘a6 18. ♖e2 c4 19.a5 ♘c8 20.bxc4 when White was clearly better in Marin – Biriescu, Romania 1993.)



14...e6?!

Black must always consider the consequences of this committal move. In the present position it loosens Black's center too much.

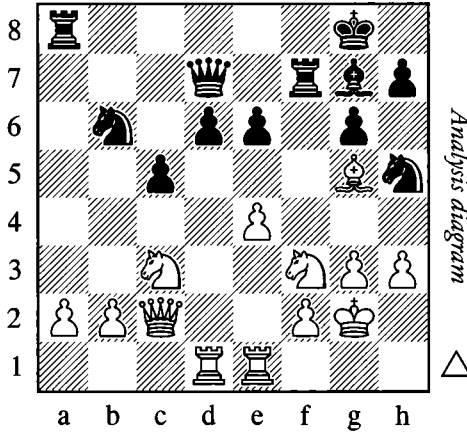
Better alternatives included 14... ♗fb8 and 14... ♗b7!?

15.dxe6! fxe6 16. ♙g5

Intending to develop piece pressure against Black's center.

16.e5!? should also be better for White, but is more complicated.
 16...♖h5 17.♗ad1 ♜f7

It was worth considering the disruptive 17...♝f7 18.♞e2 ♜c4!? although 19.♙c1! leaves White in control.



18.♜h2! d5 19.♜g4 d4 20.b3 ♞c6 21.♜e2 e5 22.♜c1

White had a strategically winning position in Korchnoi – Alterman, Dresden 1998.

12...♞b6

This is more logical than the previous line, but it is still not the most precise move in my opinion.

13.♞e1 ♜e8

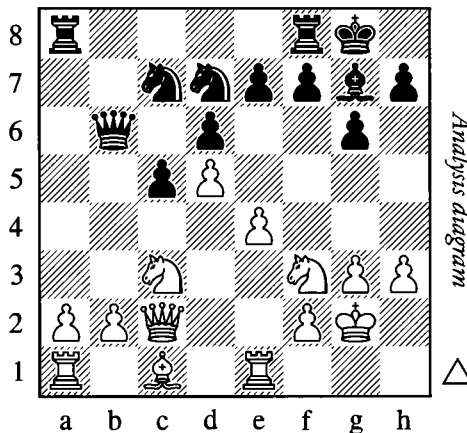
13...♞b7 transposes to the main game.

The other main line is 13...♞fb8. In this case the play resembles Game 5, but I prefer the position of the black queen on a5 instead of b6, for the reasons described in the notes to that game.

14.♞c2!?

14.♞e2 ♜c7 15.♙f4 is also possible.

14...♜c7



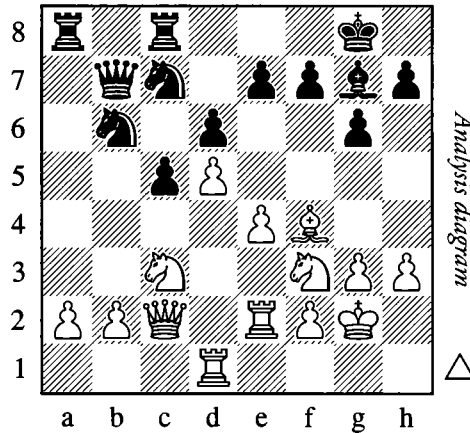
15. ♔f4!

Threatening to blast through in the center with e5.

15... ♖b7 16. ♖ad1 ♜b6

Black has concentrated enough firepower against the d5-pawn to stop his opponent's plan, but what has become of his queenside counterplay?

17. ♖e2 ♖fc8



18. h4

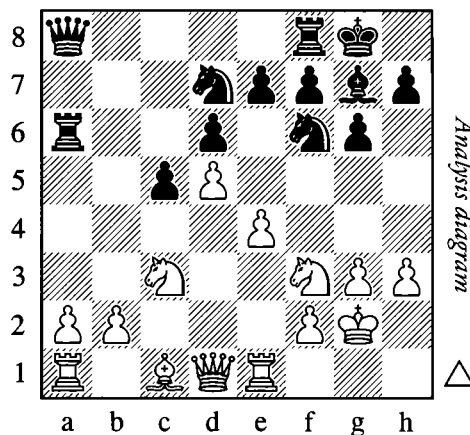
White was clearly better in Zhou Weiqi – Zvjaginsev, Moscow 2009.

12... ♖a6!?

This is one of the freshest and most interesting ways to handle the position, which only started to become popular during the last twenty or so years. Black intends to put his queen on a8 and rook on b8. The queen will not only intensify the pressure on the a-file, but also support central counterplay with ...e6 and/or ...f5 in many lines. Of course, we should not forget that the white king also finds itself on the long diagonal...

Despite these attractive points, White has developed some promising ways to fight against his opponent's setup.

13. ♖e1 ♔a8



14. ♗g5!

As in many of the above variations, it is important to provoke a weakening of Black's kingside.

14...h6

After 14...♖b8 both 15. ♖c2 and 15.b3 are good for White.

15. ♗d2

In this case 15. ♗xf6?! is inadvisable, as 15...♗xf6 16. ♖e2 ♖b8 gives Black full compensation.

Compared with the subsequent course of the main game, White is unable to arrange his ideal formation with b3, a4 and ♘b5.

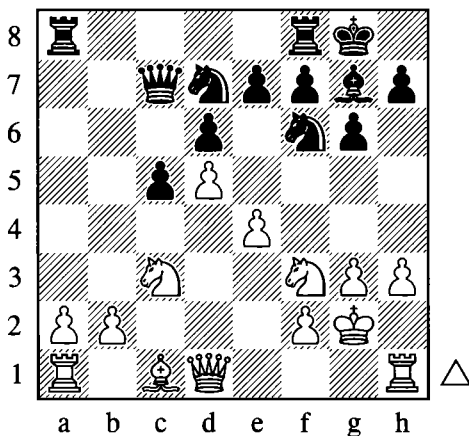
15...e6

Black tries to make something happen in the center.

16.dxe6 fxe6 17.a4!

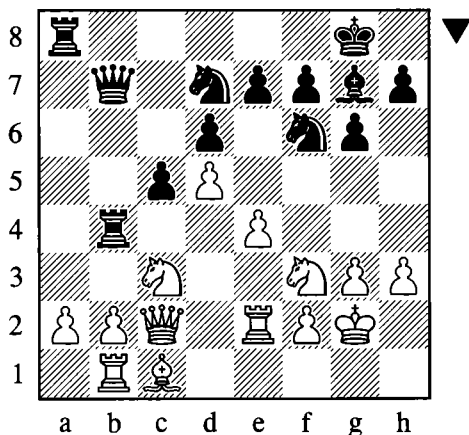
Intending ♖c2 and ♘b5 with the better chances for White, Korchnoi – Cramling, Marbella 1999.

Finally let us return to the game – with no more lengthy interruptions, I promise!



13. ♖e1 ♖b7

One of my games continued: 13...♖fb8 14. ♖e2 ♖b4 15. ♖c2 ♖b7 16. ♖b1 White has carried out his regrouping, and is ready to develop his bishop to d2 or g5.

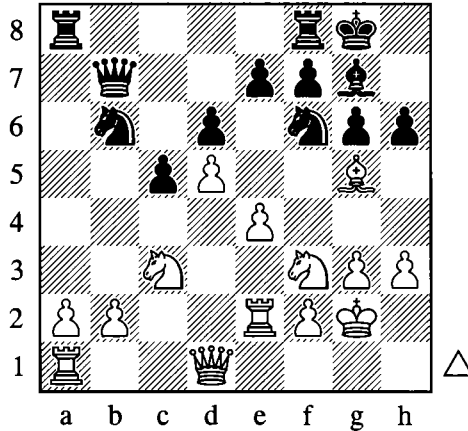


16...e6!? Black decides to open the center, hoping to change the character of the game. 17.dxe6 fxe6 18.♗g5!± Alterman – Kosikov, Voroshilovgrad 1989.

14.♞e2 ♘b6

Black prevents the e4-e5 break but loses all the momentum in his queenside attack.

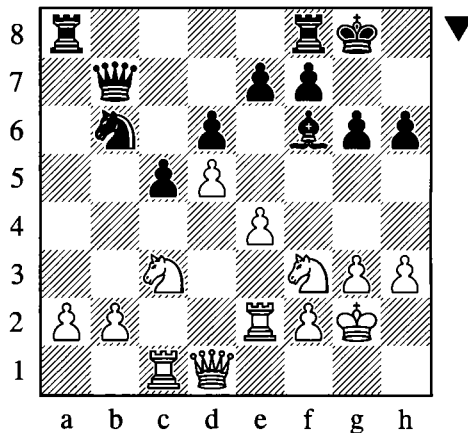
15.♕g5! h6



16.♗xf6!

Exchanging this bishop for a knight is not a decision to be taken lightly, but in this instance it works perfectly.

16...♗xf6 17.♞c1!



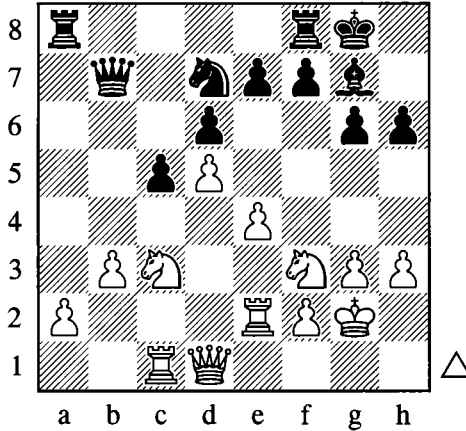
With this important move White prepares to solidify his queenside with b3, after which his a2-pawn will be defended by the rook on e2. If Black tries to regain his pawn by exchanging on c3 immediately, then White will recapture with the b-pawn, opening the second rank and ensuring the safety of the a2-pawn.

This method of development and consolidation was developed by Lev Polugaevsky. I learned about it in 1984 at a training session in my hometown Voroshilovgrad, hosted by Aleksandr

Shneider, the winner of the present game. (At the time he was an IM, but he subsequently became a GM.)-

My understanding of this setup enabled me to win many games with White, but it seemed more fitting in this instance to show you an example from the trainer who first gave me this knowledge.

17...♙g7 18.b3! ♖d7



19.a4!

Intending ♖b5 with a full blockade of the queenside. Note the complete ineffectiveness of the g7-bishop, which is mainly firing into thin air.

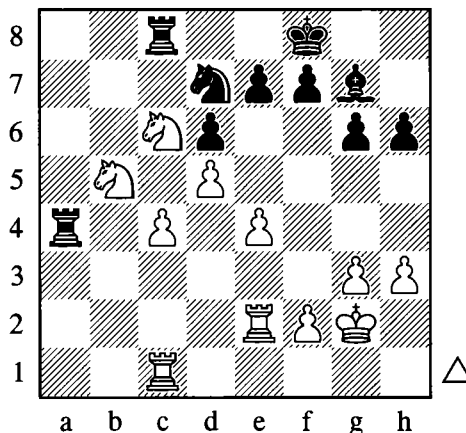
19...c4

This is Black's last chance to do anything active.

20.bxc4 ♗b4 21.♖b5 ♜fc8 22.♖fd4

The knight gets an ideal outpost on c6, after which Black is totally lost.

22...♗xa4 23.♗xa4 ♜xa4 24.♖c6 ♜f8



25.f4!

White has both a material and a positional advantage, and now he sets about mobilizing his pawns in order to swamp the opponent.

25...♞ca8 26.♞cc2 ♘b6?!

Black is trying to get active, but he only succeeds in forcing the following pawn exchange, which improves the quality of White's position.

27.c5 dxc5 28.♞xc5 ♞c8 29.e5

Shutting the bishop out of the game.

29...h5 30.h4 ♞c4 31.♞xc4 ♘xc4 32.♔f3!

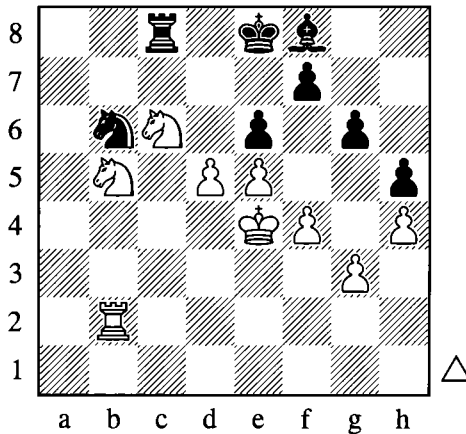
White follows the classical endgame principle of activating his king.

32...♘b6

The attempt to undermine the knight with 32...e6 can be met by 33.♘ba7 followed by d6, winning easily.

33.♞d2 ♔e8 34.♔e4 ♕f8 35.♞b2 e6

Allowing a neat refutation, but Black was totally lost in any case.

**36.dxe6! ♞xc6**

After 36...fxe6 37.♘cd4 White will soon win a second pawn.

37.♘d4 ♞c5 38.♞xb6 fxe6 39.♘xe6
1-0

What we have learned:

- ❖ According to my analysis 12.h3 is a more challenging move than 12.♞e1, but you should study both moves equally carefully if you intend to play the Benko.
- ❖ The plan of consolidation involving ♞e1-e2, ♞c1(-c2) and b3, is extremely important. White should strive to implement it, and Black should be ready to counter it.
- ❖ In certain positions White can benefit from swapping his bishop for a black knight, then clearing his pieces from the long diagonal so that the black bishop fires into thin air.

Game 5

Ashot Anastasian – Boris Alterman

Komotini 1992

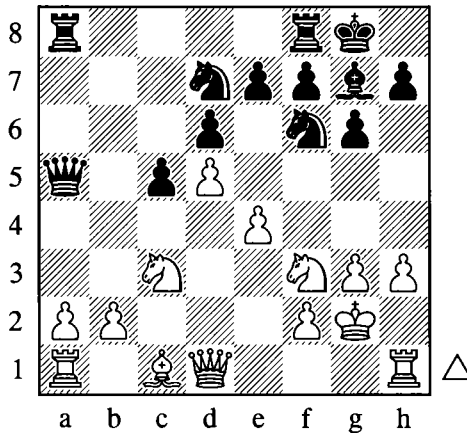
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6.♘c3 ♙xa6 7.e4 ♙xf1 8.♙xf1 d6 9.♘f3 ♙g7 10.g3 0–0 11.♙g2 ♘bd7 12.h3!

To recap quickly, I believe this move to be more challenging than 12.♞e1, due to the analysis presented in the notes to the previous game.

12...♞a5!

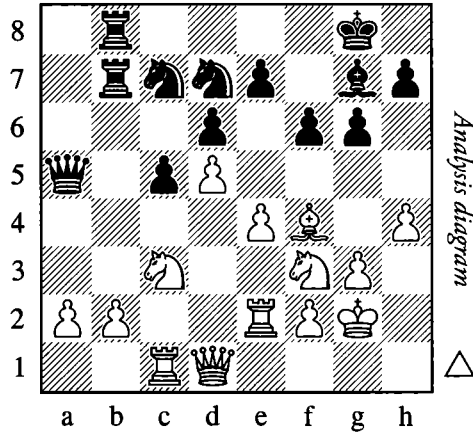
In the notes to the previous game we considered some of the plethora of alternatives available to Black in the present position; each of which resulted in White retaining the upper hand. The text move is the strongest, which is reflected in its popularity as the main line.

I remember one of my childhood coaches Alexander Serikov trying to explain the difference between ...♞a5 and ...♞b6. He said to me something along the lines of “In some ways I like ...♞b6 more because it attacks the b2-pawn, however my intuition always told me that a5 is the best square for queen, as it leaves the b-file clear for the rook and attacks the knight on c3.”



13.♞e1 ♞fb8

13...♘e8?! is premature: 14.♙g5! f6 (14...♙xc3 15.bxc3 f6 16.♙h6 ♞f7 17.c4!±) 15.♙f4 ♘c7 16.♞e2 ♞fb8 17.♞c1 ♞b7 18.h4 ♞ab8



19. ♖a4! An important move which kills Black's counterplay. 19... ♗b6 20. ♖xb6 ♜xb6 21. b3 ♝a8 22. ♞cc2 ♞ba7 23. h5 White obtained a strategically winning position in Alterman – Shevelev, Israel 1991.

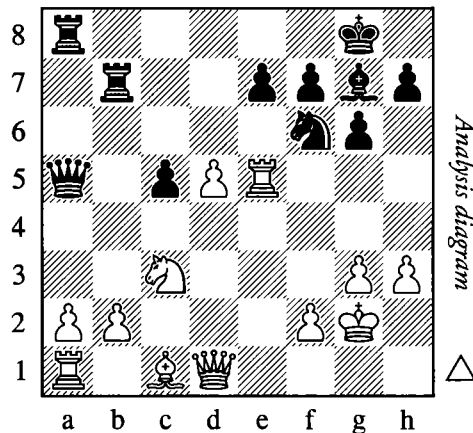
14. ♜c2?!

This move has been used by several strong players, but it is not the most accurate. The following alternatives are more challenging, and should both be studied carefully.

14. e5

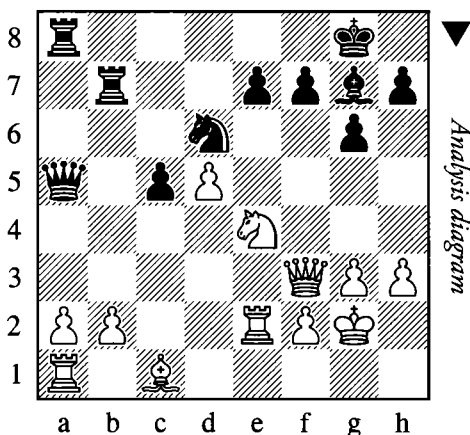
In terms of popularity this has been one of the two big main lines, but I do not believe it to be too dangerous.

14... dxe5 15. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 16. ♞xe5 ♞b7



17. d6

Probably the most challenging, Black maintains adequate compensation after other moves: 17. ♜e2 ♜d8 18. a4 ♗e8 19. ♞e3 was played in Shirov – Topalov, Linares 1995, and here Stohl's suggestion of 19... ♗d6 would have been logical, and can be compared with the next line below. 17. ♜f3 ♗e8 18. ♞e2 ♗d6 19. ♗e4



19...♖f5! Taking on e4 is also playable, but it looks more logical for the knight to continue its journey. 20.♗d2 ♜d8 21.♙c3 ♘d4 22.♗xd4 ♗xd4 Black will easily regain his pawn to reach an equal ending. 23.♘c3 ♞ab8 24.b3 ♗xc3 25.♜xc3 ♜xd5† 26.♜f3 ♞d8 27.♜xd5 ♞xd5 28.♞c1 e6 29.♞c4 ♘f8 30.♞ec2 ♞a7 31.♞xc5 ♞xc5 32.♞xc5 ♞xa2 A draw was soon agreed in Lauber – Tregubov, Katernberg 2008.

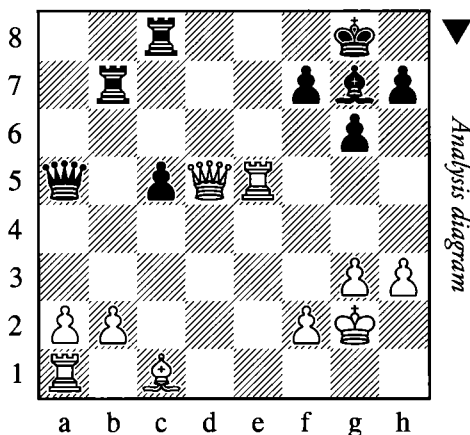
17...exd6

17...e6!? has achieved good results in a few games and could be a useful option for players who are willing to take a risk in order to play for a win, but I will concentrate my analysis on the move which I consider objectively soundest.

18.♜xd6 ♞c8

18...♘e8?! 19.♜c6 ♗xe5 20.♜xb7 makes Black's life more difficult.

19.♘d5 ♘xd5 20.♜xd5



20...♜a6

20...♜a8!? also looks playable, but the tried and tested method works fine.

21.♞e4 c4 22.♗f4

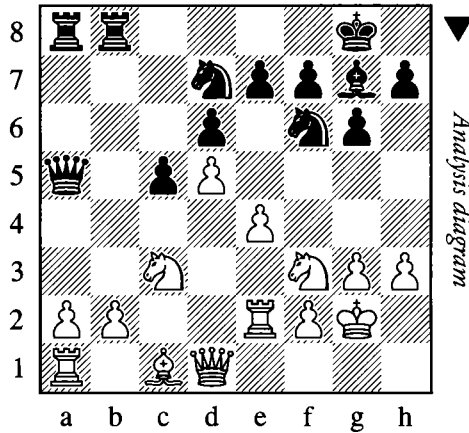
Another game concluded even more quickly: 22.a4 ♗xb2 23.♗xb2 ♞xb2 24.♞c1 ♞b4 25.♞f4 ♜c6 ½–½ Gavrikov – Shirov, Biel 1995.

22...♙xb2 23.♞ae1 ♜b5 24.♞e8† ♞xe8 25.♞xb5 ♞xb5 26.♞xe8† ♜g7 27.♞c8 ♞b4 28.♙d6 ♞a4=

The position was equal and a draw was shortly agreed in Piket – Topalov, Amsterdam 1995.

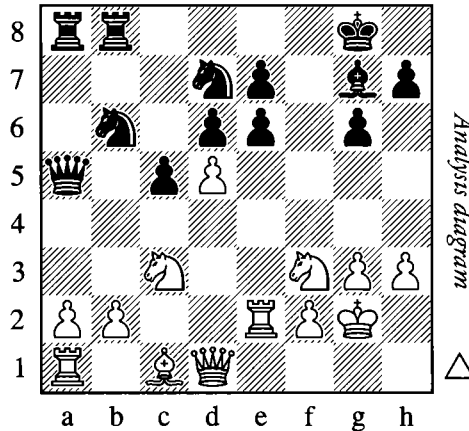
The most important line at White's disposal is:

14.♞e2!



With this thematic move White covers the second rank and prepares to develop the c1-bishop. Having played both sides of the Benko Gambit for many years, I conducted a great deal of analysis on this position, and I will share my findings here. We will consider three main replies.

a) 14...♘b6 15.e5 ♘fd7 16.e6 fxe6



17.♞xe6!

This novelty gives White a clear advantage in all variations.

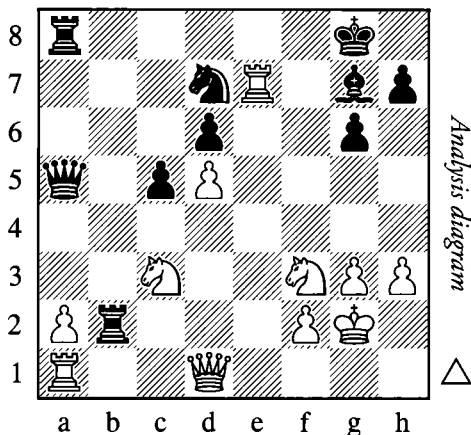
The less ambitious 17.dxe6 ♘f6 18.♙g5 was just a little better for White in Korchnoi – Adorjan, Frankfurt (rapid) 1998.

17...♙xc3

The most principled reply, but it allows White to launch a direct attack.

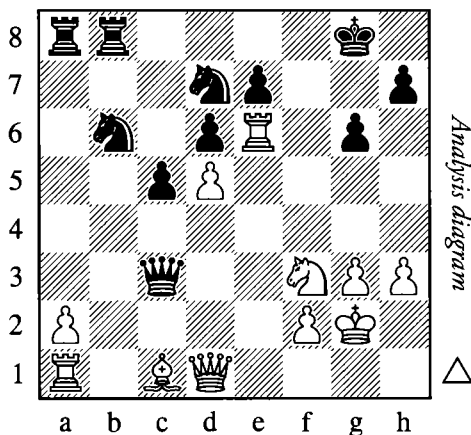
17...♙f6 18.♙g5±

17...♘c4 may be objectively best, but it still fails to solve Black's problems. 18.♞xe7 ♘xb2 19.♙xb2 (According to the computer 19.♞e1!? is also promising, but the text move is equally strong and easier to navigate.) 19...♞xb2



20.♞b1! Exchanging one of the opponent's most active pieces. (White must take care, for instance 20.♘e4 ♞d8! 21.♞e6 ♘f8 22.♞xd6 ♞e7± and suddenly the tables are turned!) 20...♞xb1 (20...♞xc3 21.♞xb2 ♞xb2 22.♞xd7 ♞xa2 23.♞e1±) 21.♞xb1 Black is in trouble, for instance: 21...♞xc3 (21...♞d8 22.♞b7!) 22.♞xd7 ♞f6 23.♞e4 ♞xa2 24.♞e8† ♙f8 25.♞e6† ♞xe6 26.dxe6 ♞e2 27.♘g5 h6 28.♙f1 ♞e5 29.f4+–

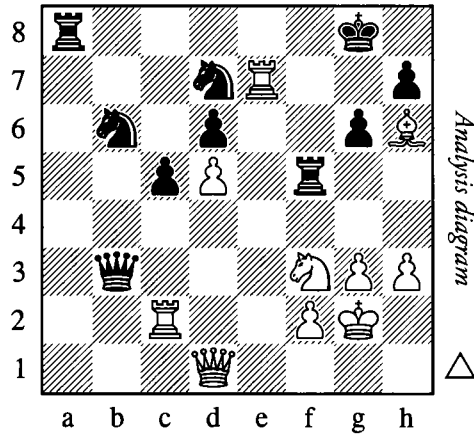
18.bxc3 ♞xc3



19.♙g5! ♞f8 20.♞xe7!

It is not too late to go astray, for instance: 20.♙xe7? ♞xf3 21.♞xf3 ♞xa1 22.♞xd6 ♞e5!–+ 20.♞c1!? is not so bad, but after 20...♞a3 21.♞xe7 ♞xa2 22.♞c2 ♞b3± White's advantage is much smaller than in the main line.

20...♞f5 21.♞c1 ♞a3 22.♙h6 ♞xa2 23.♞c2 ♞b3



24. ♖e2!

After the less accurate 24. ♘g5 ♖a2! 25. ♖ce2 (25. ♖e2 ♖xd5† 26. ♔h2 ♖xc2=) 25... ♖xd1 26. ♖g7† ♔h8 27. ♖e8† ♘f8 28. ♖xh7† ♔g8 29. ♖g7† ♔h8 White must take a perpetual.

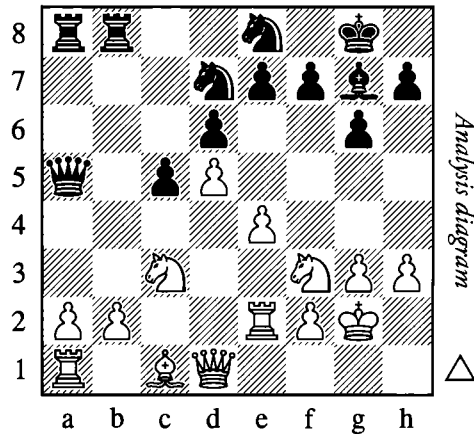
24... ♖f6

24... ♖xd5 25. ♖d2±

25. ♖g7† ♔h8 26. ♖e7! ♖xf3† 27. ♔h2

White is winning.

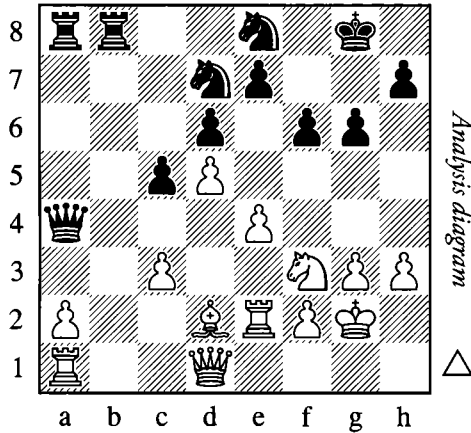
b) 14... ♘e8



Preventing any e4-e5 ideas while preparing the thematic ... ♘c7-b5 maneuver. This move is considered the number one choice by theory, but my analysis casts a shadow over this view. We will investigate three possible responses from White.

b1) 15. ♖c2 has been the most popular answer but I find it too passive, and I believe that after 15... ♘b6 16. ♖e2 ♖a6! Black should be fine.

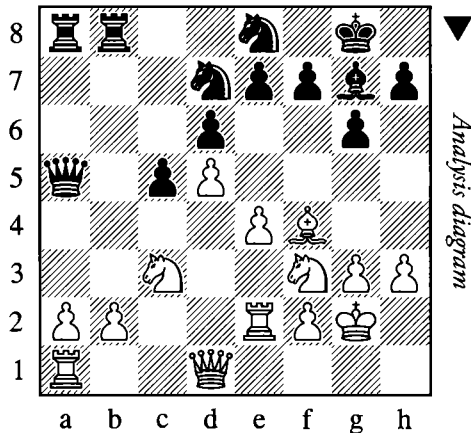
b2) 15. ♔g5 ♔xc3! 16. bxc3 f6 17. ♔d2 ♖a4! I found this promising idea in 1987, and later it was used by Alexander Khalifman and others.



18. ♖e1 (I even considered the remarkable 18. ♖h1?! intending to activate the queen with h4 and ♖h3, but concluded that after 18... ♖b2! 19. h4 ♖c4! Black has too much counterplay.) 18... ♖c4 19. ♗c1 ♘c7 20. a3 ♘b6 21. h4 ♘b5 ♞ Grabliauskas – Khalifman, Vilnius 1997.

b3) The strongest move is:

15. ♗f4!



Already in 1988 I considered this move to be the most dangerous for Black, and more than two decades later my opinion has not changed, despite the fact that it has only been played in a small number of games. White is ready to ‘sacrifice’ a pawn on c3 (although of course the resulting position will be one with level material, since White is already a pawn up at present) in order to put maximum power behind the e4-e5 break.

15... ♗xc3

Amazingly this critical move has not yet been tested in practice. If Black plays more timidly then White will easily consolidate his queenside, for instance:

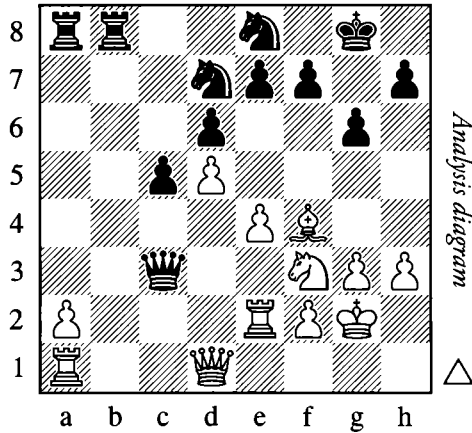
15... ♘c7 16. ♖c1 ♘b5 17. ♘xb5 ♖xb5 18. b3 left Black with scant compensation in Foerster – Olzem, Bundesliga 1985.

15... ♖a7 16. ♖c1 ♖ab7 17. ♖cc2! Securing the queenside. 17... ♘b6 18. e5 ♘a4 19. ♘xa4 ♖xa4 20. b3± Kiss – Turzo, Aggtelek 1997.

16.bxc3 ♖xc3

The most principled continuation, but it allows White to generate a strong initiative.

16...f6!? is safer, although after 17.♞c2 (or 17.♞c1 ♗a4 18.♗d3 ♗a3 19.♞cc2±) 17...♗a4 18.♔d2!± White keeps the upper hand, with ♞ac1 and ♗g4 on the agenda for the next few moves.



17.e5!

Obviously this was the idea behind the sacrifice. White's initiative is quite venomous, as shown by the following two illustrative branches of analysis:

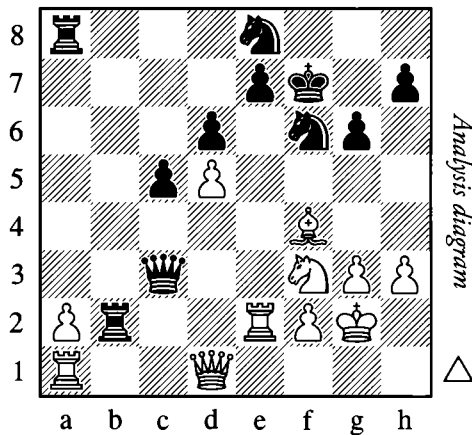
b31) 17...♞b2 18.e6!

Setting up some wonderful tactics.

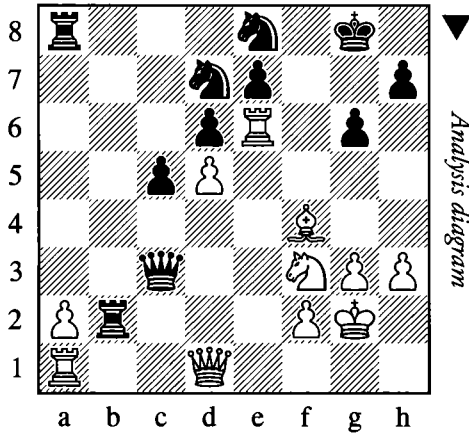
18...fxe6

18...♞xe2 19.♗xe2 ♗xa1 20.exd7 ♗f6 21.♗b5 ♔g7 22.♗c6 ♞f8 23.♗c8 e5 24.♔g5+-

18...♔d6 is refuted beautifully: 19.exf7† ♔xf7



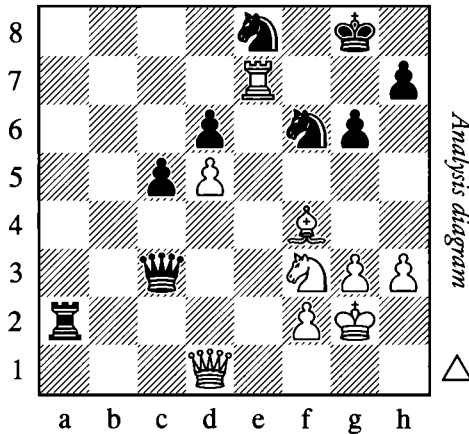
20.♔e5†!! ♔g8 (20... dxe5 21.♔xe5+-) 21.♞c1 ♗a3 22.♔c4+-
19.♞xc6



19... ♘df6

There is nothing better, for instance:

- 19... ♖g7 20. ♗e1! ♜f8 21. ♘g5 ♞axa2 22. ♞xa2 ♞xa2 23. ♞f6† ♗xf6 24. ♘h7†+-
- 19... ♖c2 20. ♗e1! ♘ef6 (20... ♘df6 21. ♞xe7 ♗f5 22. ♞d1±) 21. ♞xe7 ♗f5 22. ♗e6† ♗xe6 23. dxe6+-
- 20. ♞xe7 ♞axa2 21. ♞xa2 ♞xa2



22. ♙h6!+-

Black is busted, as there is no good defense against ♘g5 and ♞f7-f8 mate.

b32) 17... ♞a3

Counterattacking along the third rank.

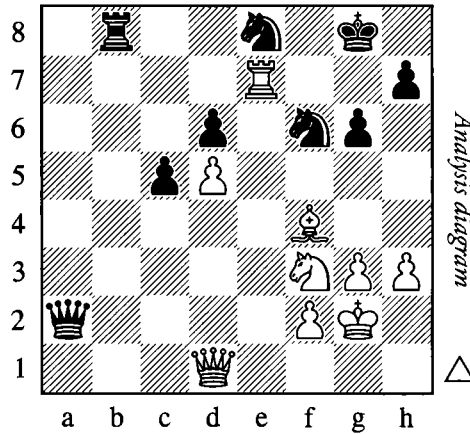
18. ♞e3 ♗a5

- 18... ♗b2 19. e6! fxe6 20. ♞xe6 ♞xa2 21. ♞xa2 ♗xa2 22. ♞xe7 transposes to the main line below.
- 19. e6! fxe6 20. ♞xe6 ♞xa2 21. ♞xa2

I also analyzed 21. ♞b1! and concluded that it was advantageous for White, but the text move is more straightforward.

21...♖xa2 22.♞xe7 ♘df6

Or 22...♘ef6 23.♙h6! with a decisive attack.



23.♞e1!! ♞xd5 24.g4!

Black has no good defense, for instance:

24...♘g7

24...♞b3 25.♞xe8† ♘xe8 26.♞xe8† ♖g7 27.♙h6†!+-

25.♙h6 ♘fe8 26.♙xg7 ♘xg7 27.♞c3 ♘e8

27...♘e6 28.♞f6 wins immediately.

28.♞e3 ♖f8

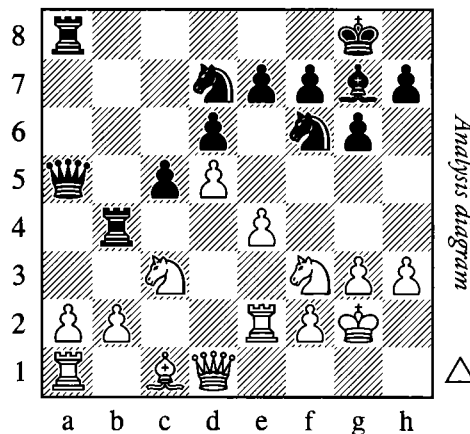
Knight moves would run into 29.♞h6.

29. ♞d7

The queen comes to e7, with carnage to follow.

c) In view of the troubles experienced by Black in the above variations, I propose a different solution:

14...♞b4!?



The idea of this interesting and provocative move is to prepare the doubling of rooks on the b-file, while also exerting pressure along the fourth rank. Black would be happy to provoke the move a2-a3, as White's queenside would be compromised. So far this idea has not been tested in many games, but perhaps it will catch on...

Here are some illustrative lines:

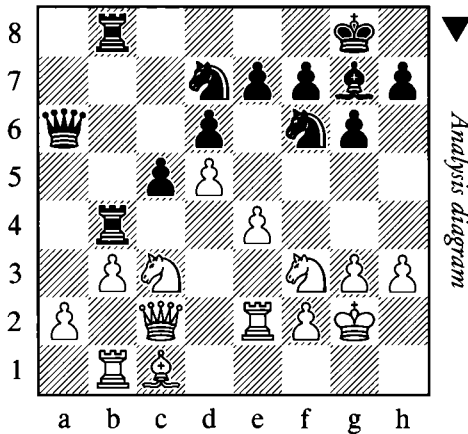
15. ♖g5

This was the choice of GM Akesson, the highest-rated player to have encountered this position over the board. Three other moves have been tried:

15... ♖b7! 16. ♖g5 ♖ab8 with full compensation, as White's queenside has been compromised.

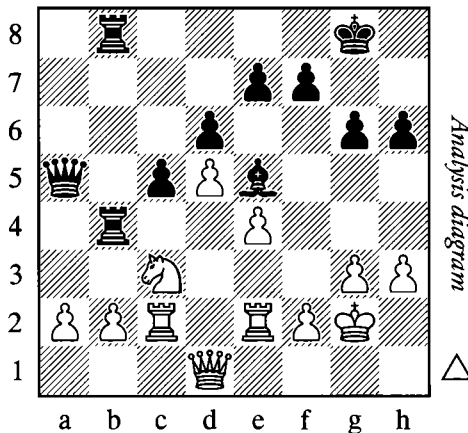
15. ♖b1 was played in Wl. Schmidt – Staniszewski, Wroslaw 1987, and here 15... ♖ab8! would be my preference, when Black has strong pressure on the queenside.

15. ♖c2 should be met by 15... ♖ab8 16. ♖b1 ♖a6 when it is not so easy for White to get properly coordinated. From this position one game continued: 17. b3 (17. ♖d2! would have been more challenging; 17... ♖e8 looks like a logical answer.)



Analysis diagram

17...c4! 18. ♖d2 cxb3 (18... ♖c5 deserved serious attention, keeping the tension) 19. axb3 ♖c5 20. e5 ♖fd7 21. exd6 exd6 The position was level in Majorau – Zarezenko, Cannes 1997.
15...h6 16. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 17. ♖c1 ♖ab8 18. ♖cc2 ♖e5 19. ♖xe5 ♖xe5



Analysis diagram

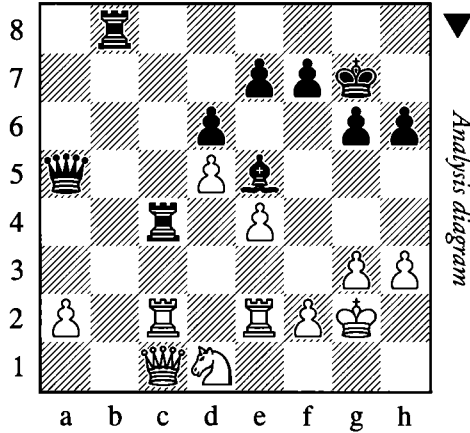
It is interesting to compare the present position with the Shneider – Levitina game, which also featured a white knight versus a black bishop, with all the heavy pieces remaining on both sides. In that game White obtained a firm grip on the light squares, but here Black's extensive queenside firepower prevents him from consolidating in the same way.

20. ♖c1 ♔g7 21. b3 c4!

Demonstrating the significance of the rook's position on the fourth rank.

22. bxc4 ♜xc4 23. ♕d1

Akesson – T. Johansson, Stockholm 1996.

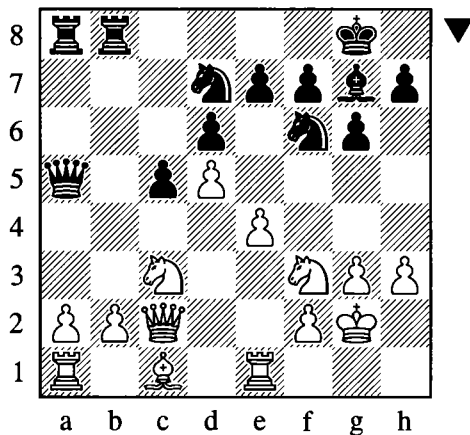


23... ♜cb4! =

In the game Black faltered with 23... ♖xa2? allowing 24. ♖xh6†! ♔xh6 25. ♜xa2 when he was left a pawn down in the endgame, although he managed to draw eventually.

After the superior text move, White's pieces remain tied to the defense of his vulnerable pawns, and the chances of him exploiting his extra pawn are almost non-existent.

Let us finally return to the game!

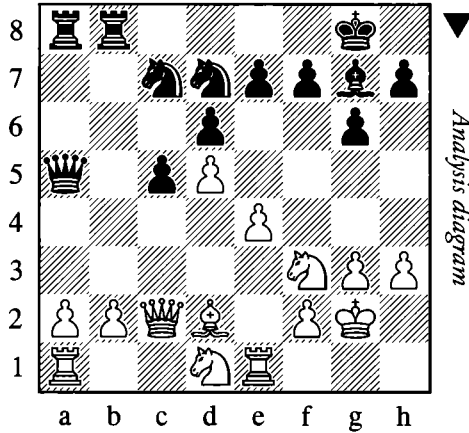


14... ♕b6

A logical move, although a few others have also been tried:

14...♞a7?! is inadvisable: 15.♙d2 ♘e8 16.a4 ♞ab7 17.♘b5 ♞a6 18.♙c3± Valls Casas – Gomez Jurado, Calvia 2009.

14...♘e8 is a decent alternative though. 15.♙d2 (15.♙g5 deserves attention) 15...♘c7 16.♘d1



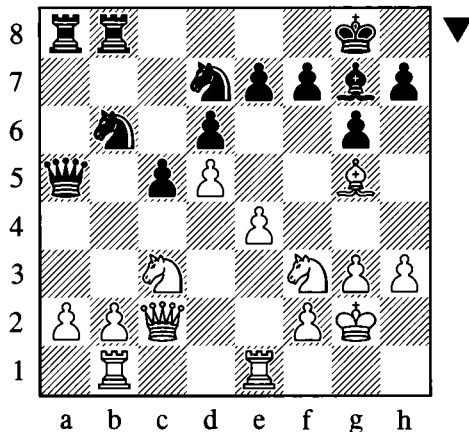
16...♞a4! A thematic idea; exchanging queens is often helpful to Black. 17.♞xa4 ♞xa4 18.♙c3 ♘f6! 19.♘d2 ♘b5= Van Wely – Leko, Groningen 1996.

15.♞b1

15.♙d2 ♘c4 16.b3 ♘xd2 17.♘xd2 ♘d7 gives Black comfortable play.

15.♞e2 is also nothing special: 15...♘a4 (15...♘fd7!?) 16.♘d1 ♘d7 17.♞b1 c4 18.♙e3 (18.♞xc4 ♘ab6 19.♞c2 ♞xa2=) 18...♘ac5= M. Gurevich – Benjamin, Cap d'Agde 2000.

15...♘fd7 16.♙g5



16...♙xc3!

A Benko player should always be on the lookout for a favorable opportunity to execute this minor piece trade. In openings such as the King's Indian or Dragon such an exchange is almost never a good idea, but the Benko is a different animal.

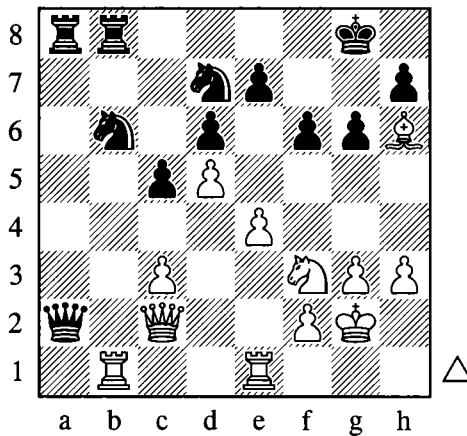
16...♘c4 is a playable alternative, albeit not as strong as the text move, and after 17.♙xe7 ♖e8! (but not 17...♖xb2?! 18.♖xb2 ♘xb2 19.e5!±) 18.♙g5 ♘xb2 Black was doing okay in Akobian – D. Gurevich, San Diego 2004.

17.bxc3 f6! 18.♙h6

In the event of 18.♙e3 ♗xa2 19.♖b2 ♗a4 20.♗xa4 ♘xa4 21.♖xb8† ♖xb8 White faces a difficult endgame.

18...♗xa2‡

White's bishop is not making its presence felt at all, and White's c-pawn is a permanent weakness.

**19.♖b2 ♗a4 20.♗e2 ♘c4 21.♖bb1**

21.♖xb8† ♖xb8 22.♘d2 was possible, but would not have changed the general evaluation.

21...♘ce5 22.♘xe5 ♘xe5 23.♙f4

It was time to retreat the bishop as ...g5 was beginning to look tempting.

23...♖xb1 24.♖xb1 ♗c4! 25.♗xc4 ♘xc4

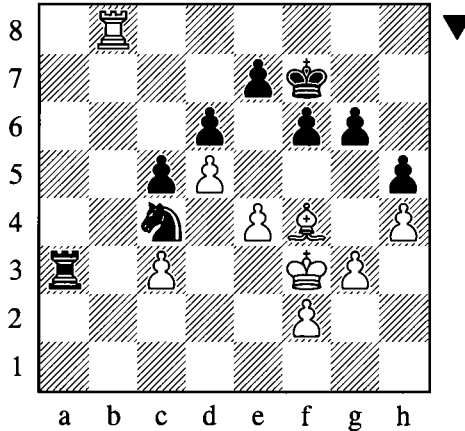
White has defended well so far, but he still has some problems in the endgame, as he has some pawn weaknesses and both his pieces are inferior to their black counterparts.

26.h4 h5 27.♖b7 ♘f7 28.♘f3?!

A slight inaccuracy. The superior 28.♖b3‡ would have kept White's disadvantage to a minimum.

28...♖a3 29.♖b8!

Despite White's previous mistake, he is still threatening to create mating threats with the bishop coming to h6! This may have unnerved me as I failed to find the right reply.



29...♖xc3?

Missing a golden opportunity.

After the correct 29...♘e5†! 30.♔g2 (or 30.♙xe5 fxe5 31.♔e2 ♖xc3†) 30...♘g4! Black would have won a pawn, securing excellent winning chances. The attempt to go after the king with 31.f3?! ♖a2† 32.♔g1 ♘h2! 33.♙h6 is nothing to worry about in view of 33...♘xf3† 34.♔f1 g5 when Black is winning comfortably.

30.♔g2 ♔g7

30...e5 31.♙h6 gives White enough counterplay for a draw.

31.♖b7 ♔f8 32.♙h6† ♔e8 33.♖b8† ♔d7 34.♖b7† ♔e8 35.♖b8† ♔d7 36.♖b7†
½–½

What we have learned:

- ❖ In the notes to White's 14th move, we once again saw how important it is for Black to find a good plan against the ♖e1-e2 maneuver.
- ❖ It is not only White who can exchange his bishop for an enemy knight advantageously!
- ❖ Again we saw Black maintaining the upper hand following a queen exchange, thanks to his active pieces and compact pawn structure.
- ❖ Just because a position is simplified, it does not necessarily mean that the kings will be completely safe; sometimes just two or three pieces can be enough to generate mating threats.

That concludes our study of the old main line with an early ♘c3 and e4. We will now move onto a different – and presently rather fashionable – way for White to arrange his pieces after accepting the gambit.

The Fianchetto System

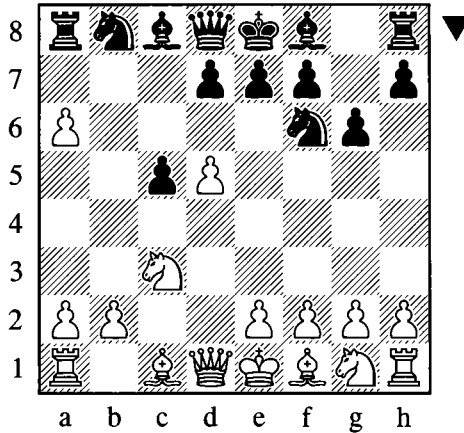
It is not to everyone's taste to occupy the center with e4 at an early stage, especially when it involves forfeiting one's castling rights, so it is hardly surprising that the Fianchetto System has always attracted followers.

Game 6

Ho Van Huynh – Boris Alterman

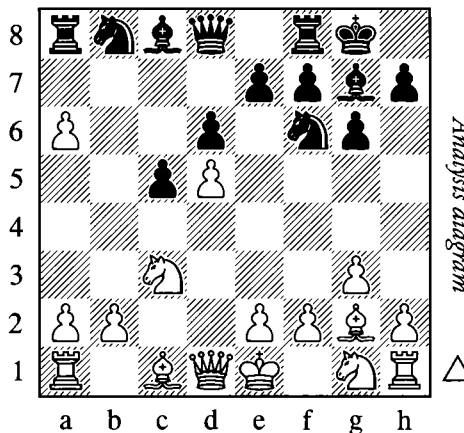
Manila (ol) 1992

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6.♘c3!

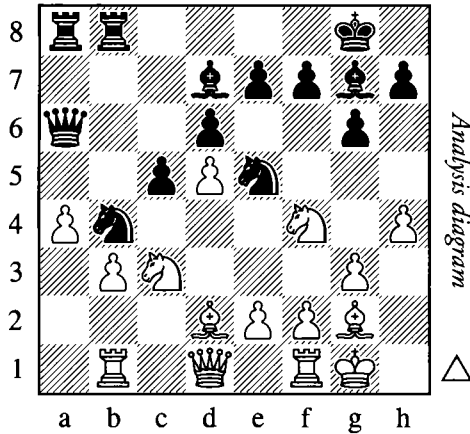


Even if White intends a kingside fianchetto, it is worth playing the text move immediately in order to force Black to recapture on a6 immediately with his bishop.

Let us examine a few illustrative lines where Black is given the opportunity to take on a6 with the knight: 6.g3 d6 7.♙g2 ♙g7 8.♘c3 0-0 From here White may choose to develop his king's knight on either available square. In both cases Black can look to take advantage of the fact that he has not yet been obliged to play ...♙xa6.



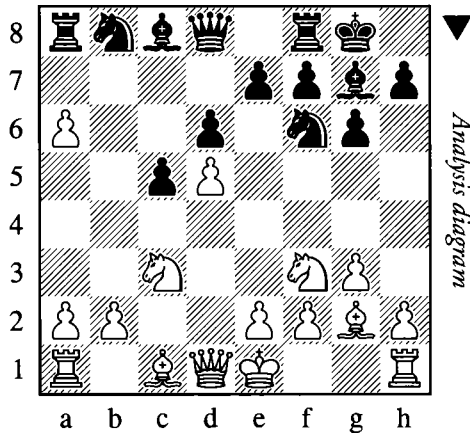
a) 9. ♖h3 The knight is going to f4, where it supports the d5-pawn. On the other hand, White cannot control the c4-square anymore. 9... ♗xa6!? (taking with the bishop is also fine) 10. ♗f4 ♙d7 11. h4 ♖b6 12. 0-0 ♜f8 13. ♝b1 ♗g4 14. ♙d2 ♗e5 15. b3 ♗b4 16. a4 ♖a6



Black had fine compensation in Zilberman – Alterman, Rishon Le Zion 1991.

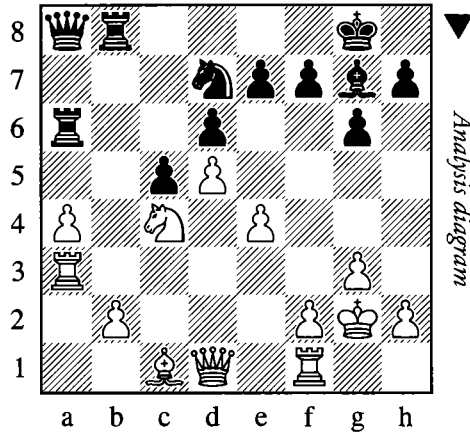
b) 9. ♗f3

From here Black has two interesting ideas:



a) 9... ♗xa6!? 10. 0-0 ♙f5!? (10... ♖b6!? is also interesting) 11. ♗h4 (11. ♗d2!? is probably better) 11... ♙d7 12. h3 ♖c7 13. e4 ♗b4 14. ♙e3 c4 15. ♖d2 ♜f8 16. ♝fd1 ♖c8 17. ♗h2 ♙a4! with some initiative for Black, Foldi – Tseitlin, Budapest 1990.

b) 9... ♙f5! is even more convincing; compared with the main lines examined later, the opportunity to develop the bishop on such an active diagonal makes a real difference. 10. 0-0 ♗e4 11. ♗xe4 ♙xe4 12. ♗d2 ♙xg2 13. ♗xg2 ♝xa6 14. ♗c4 ♗d7 15. e4 ♖a8 16. a4 ♜b8 17. ♝a3



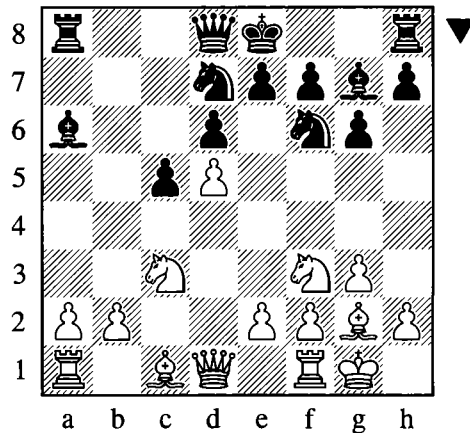
17...♖b6! It is important to exchange the well placed knight. 18.♗xb6 ♜axb6 19.b3 ♜b4 20.♞e1 ♜b7 Black equalized and eventually went on to win in Nikolic – Kasparov, Paris 1994.

6...♙xa6

6...♙g7?! 7.e4 just gives White an improved version of the main line examined previously.

7.g3 d6 8.♙g2 ♙g7 9.♗f3 ♗bd7 10.0-0

10.♞b1! is the most fashionable line nowadays. See the next two games for coverage of this important move.



10...♗b6!

An important nuance. By attacking the d5-pawn Black prevents his opponent from establishing the classical setup with ♜c2 and ♞d1, the effectiveness of which was well illustrated in the following game: 10...0-0 11.♜c2 ♜c7 12.♞d1 ♞fb8 13.h3 ♙c4 14.♗d2 ♙a6 15.♞b1 ♗b6 16.b3 ♗e8 17.♙b2 ♜a7 18.e4 Black failed to organize any counterplay in Sakaev – Martinovic, Novi Sad 2000.

11.♞b1

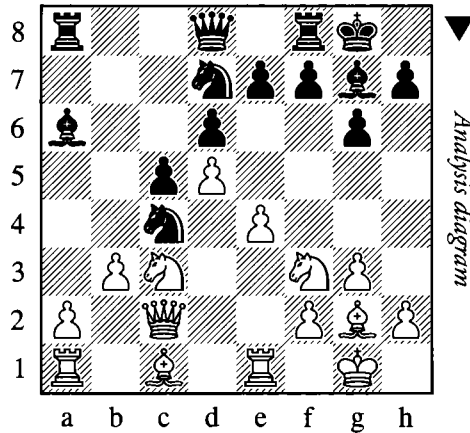
This move cannot be recommended as it gives Black a chance to equalize immediately. The main line is:

11.♞e1 0-0

White has tried a great variety of moves here, but I will focus on the most popular two.

12.♟f4

12.e4?! is well met by 12...♜fd7 13.♞c2 ♝c4 and now the obvious 14.b3? runs into an unpleasant reply:



14...♞a5!♠

12...♜h5!

Better than 12...♜c4 13.♞c1 ♞a5 14.♜d2! with the better game for White.

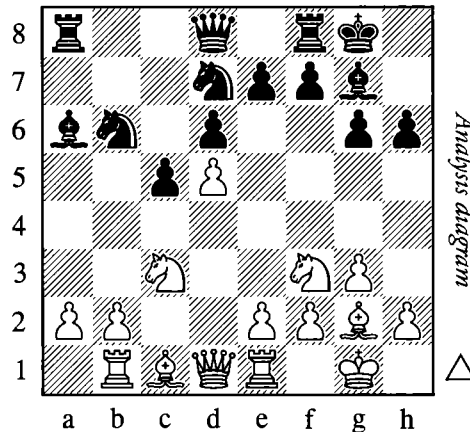
13.♟g5 h6 14.♟c1 ♜f6!

It is hard for White to improve his position as he has to keep the d5-pawn protected, and if he plays e4 then the d3-square will become weak.

15.♞b1

15.e4 should be met by 15...♜fd7! 16.♞c2 ♝c4 17.♞b1 ♞a5!♠ preventing b3 and maintaining unpleasant pressure.

15...♜fd7



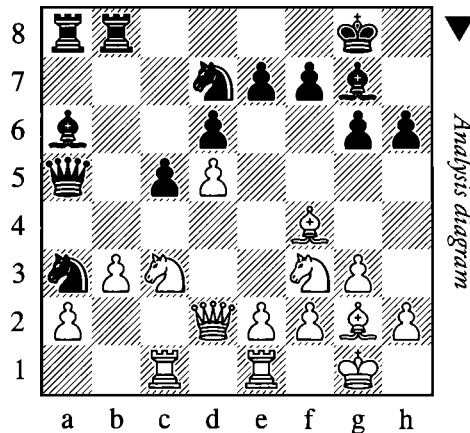
16.♔f4

One of my later opponents tried to improve with 16.♞c2, but after 16...♙c4 17.a3 ♙xd5 18.♗xd5 ♗xd5 19.♗h4 e6 20.♞d1 ♗7b6 Black was at least equal, Van der Sterren – Alterman, Munich 1992.

16...♗c4 17.♞c2 ♞a5 18.♞bc1 ♞fb8

Black has completed development and obtained significant counterplay, while White is a long way from developing an attack in the center.

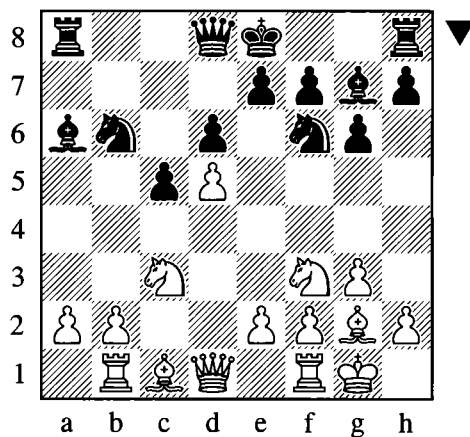
19.b3 ♗a3 20.♞d2



At this point the players agreed to a draw in Greenfeld – Alterman, Be'ersheva 1991. The continuation might have been:

20...♗b5 21.♗xb5 ♞xd2 22.♗xd2 ♙xb5 23.a4 ♙a6

As usual, Black's Benko structure continues to provide full compensation following the queen exchange.



11...0-0

After a long think I decided to keep the game complex and rejected the following equalizing line:

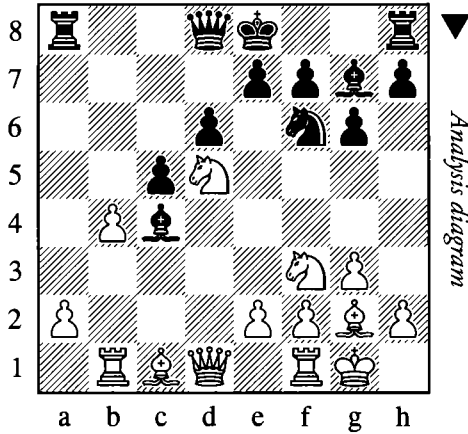
11...♙c4!

I can recall this move being played by Kasparov against Iashvili in a training game at the Botvinnik-Kasparov school. During the game I knew that it was technically the most accurate move, but I was in a fighting mood and did not wish to simplify the position yet.

12.b4!

As long as White understands that he needs to play for a draw, this move should not be difficult for him to find. It brings the game close to equality, although Black remains a bit more comfortable.

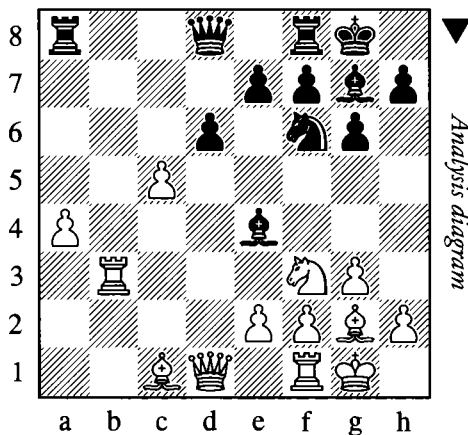
12...♘bx5 13.♗xd5



13...♗xd5!

Better than 13...♗xd5?! 14.♙b2! ♙xb2 15.♞xb2 ♘xb4 16.♞xb4 cxb4 17.♚d4!± Poliakov – Obodchuk, Orsk 2000.

14.a4 ♙e4 15.♞b3 0–0 16.bxc5



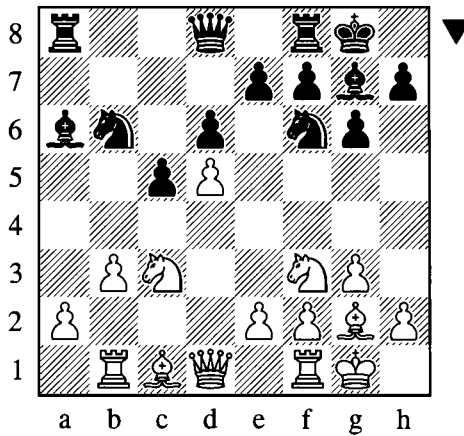
At this point a draw was agreed in Sosonko – Ree, Eindhoven 1993. There is a good deal of play left in the position, and after 16...dxc5 Black's passed c-pawn is more valuable than White's a-pawn, as it helps to control some central squares and can be more readily supported by the

black pieces. There is a temptation to think of distant passed pawns as more valuable, but this is usually only true in certain types of endgames.

Despite my eventual success in the main game, I would advise the reader to play 11...♙c4! if the opportunity presents itself. Even if White plays all the right moves, you will still get a position with chances to play for a win.

That being said, the present game featured some interesting positional and tactical motifs which should be part of every Benko player's arsenal of ideas.

12.b3



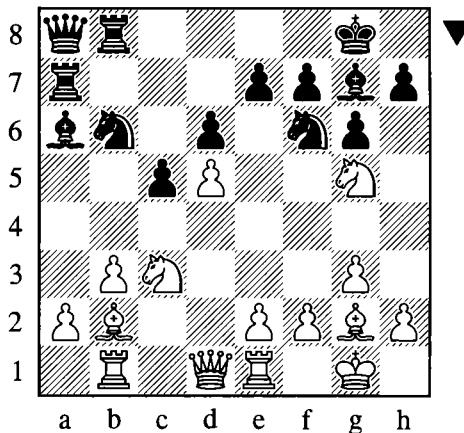
12...♜a7!

Preparing to slide the queen to a8 and rook to b8; the most effective way to get Black's heavy pieces working in the present position.

13.♙b2 ♚a8

Incidentally attacking the d5-pawn, which gave my opponent something else to worry about.

14.♘g5 ♝b8 15.♞e1



15...♗c8!

A typical maneuver; the bishop abandons the a6-f1 diagonal and looks for a more active outpost, while also opening the a-file.

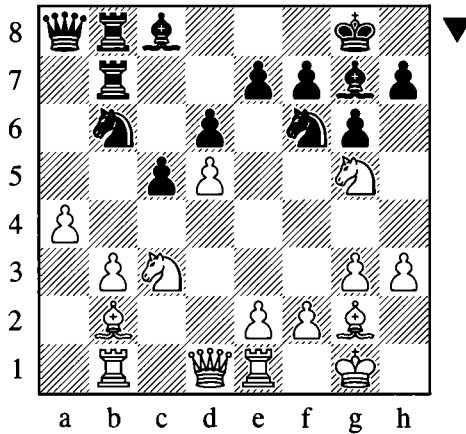
16.a4 ♖ab7!

Now b3 is the target.

17.h3?!

17.♞c2! was better, but my opponent was afraid of losing the d5-pawn. However, it soon transpires that after 17...h6? 18.♗ge4 ♜fxd5? (18...♗xe4±) 19.♗xd5 ♗xd5 20.♗xg7 ♜xg7 21.♗xd6! White is clearly better.

Instead I was planning to respond with 17...♗d7!, improving the bishop and planning to break with ...c4 at an opportune moment.



17...♗c4!

Now White's queenside comes under intolerable pressure.

18.♗c1 ♗d7 19.♞c2 ♗a5

The b3-pawn is doomed, and the a4-pawn must have been starting to feel like a turkey in December.

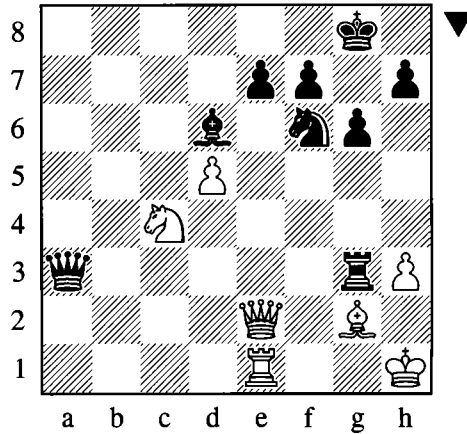
20.♗b5 ♗xb5 21.axb5 ♖xb5 22.e4 ♗xb3 23.♗e3 ♗d7 24.f4

White tries to launch a counterattack, but by loosening his kingside he only hastens the end.

24...♗d4! 25.♞d3 ♖b3 26.♖xb3 ♖xb3 27.♞d1 ♞a3!

Exploiting the weakness of the third rank which was caused by the advancing f-pawn. Black will soon increase his material advantage while keeping the better position.

28.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 29.♜h1 ♖xg3 30.♗f3 ♗e3 31.e5 ♗xf4 32.exd6 ♗xd6 33.♞e2 ♗f6 34.♗e5 c4 35.♗xc4



35...♖a6

In time trouble I overlooked the stylish 35...♖xh3†! 36.♔g1 ♕c5† 37.♔f1 ♖g3! with a simple win, but the text move does not spoil anything and White soon had to give up the fight.

36.♖g1 ♕c5 37.♖f1 ♗b5 38.♖f4

0–1

White resigned without waiting for 38...♘h5.

What we have learned:

- ❖ If White fails to use the most accurate move order (6.♘c3!), then Black will obtain the useful option of taking on a6 with the knight instead of the bishop.
- ❖ Since White is neglecting to play e4 early on, the d5-pawn is short of defenders. Hence the disruptive power of 10...♘b6! as played in the game, and 11...♕c4! as noted on the next turn.
- ❖ Just as in the old main line, Black has various ways of deploying his pieces on the queenside. For example, his queen might go to a5 or a8, depending on circumstances and personal taste.
- ❖ A timely ...♕a6-c8 can be a useful resource, clearing the a-file and preparing to deploy the bishop on the c8-h3 diagonal. Such retreating moves are easily overlooked, so be sure to make a mental note of it.

Two Recent Games against the Fianchetto System

After most of the writing and editing work had been done on the present chapter, I had the opportunity to test the Benko twice in Israeli team events against high-level opposition.

The first of the two games occurred in the National Israeli League. This event takes place annually and features more than 30 grandmasters, some of them rated 2650 and above. Facing such players can be a daunting task, especially with the black pieces. I wondered if I should try to equalize with the Grünfeld or Queen's Indian, which have been my main weapons against 1.d4 over the past

decade. In the end however, I could not resist the urge to return to my old favorite the Benko. While writing this chapter I got up to date with a lot of theory I had missed over the past ten years, and formulated some new ideas which I wanted to put to the test.

My opponent for this game was Michael Roiz, one of the leading Israeli grandmasters. When preparing for him I noticed he had only seldom encountered the Benko, which made the choice of opening all the more appealing.

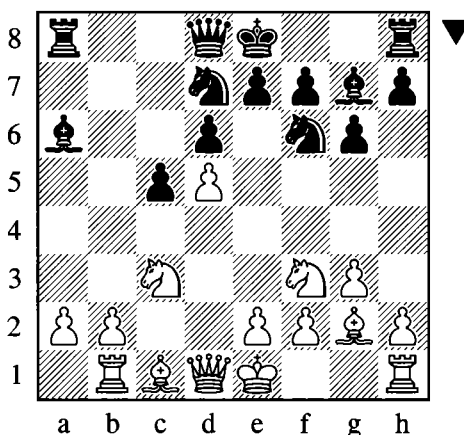
Game 7

Michael Roiz – Boris Alterman

Israel 2011

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6.♘c3 ♙xa6 7.g3 d6 8.♘f3 ♙g7 9.♙g2 ♘bd7 10.♞b1!

One of the presently most fashionable lines. By moving the rook off the long diagonal, White prepares to meet ...♘b6 with b3.



10...0-0

Black can start with 10...♞a5 but after 11.0-0 he hardly has anything better than 11...0-0 transposing to the game.

11.0-0 ♞a5

Preventing any ideas of a queenside fianchetto, and effectively forcing White to develop his bishop on d2. I knew Bologan had played this way in 2010 (see the note to Black's 15th move later in the game) and decided before the game that I would do the same thing if this position arose.

12.♙d2!

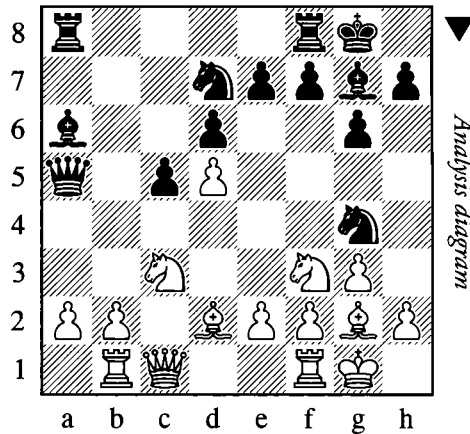
12.♞c2 is slightly less accurate: 12...♘b6! (12...♞fb8 13.♙d2 ♞c7 transposes to the game, but Black can take advantage of his opponent's move order in this instance.) 13.♞d1 ♘c4 14.♘d2 ♘d7 15.♘xc4 ♙xc4 Black had healthy compensation in Bacrot – Tregubov, Paris 2006.

12...♟f8

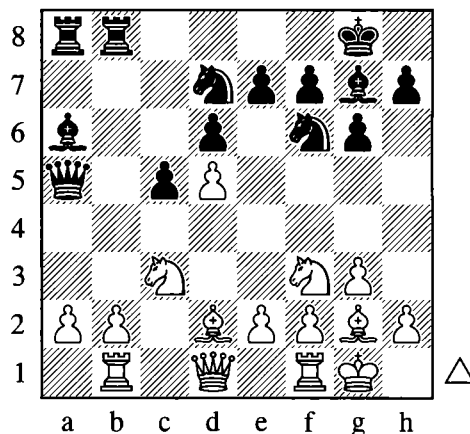
12...♞g4!? is a tricky option which deserves some attention:

a) 13.♞c2 looks like a natural reply, but Black can obtain good counterplay as demonstrated in the following recent game: 13...♞ge5 A thematic maneuver. By establishing a knight on e5, Black prepares the ...c4 break. 14.b3 ♞xf3† 15.♙xf3 ♞a3! 16.♙c1 ♞b4 17.♙d2 (17.♙b2 can be met by 17...c4!) 17...♞e5 18.♙g2 c4! Black equalized easily in Erdogdu – Caruana, Aix-les-Bains 2011.

b) However, White can improve with a recommendation of Avrukh: 13.♞c1!



The idea is that 13...♞ge5 can be met by 14.♞xe5 ♞xe5 15.b3 when the black queen cannot come to the a3-square. White will follow up with a4, achieving his optimal formation while Black faces a difficult defense with little to show for his missing pawn. Avrukh analyzes a few alternatives for Black on move 13, and the general conclusion is that Black is struggling everywhere.



13.♞c2

By this stage Roiz had already consumed about half an hour, which I took as a good sign as the game is nowhere near the end of the theoretical pathways.

13.b3 is considered in the next game.

13...♚c7

The queen was not particularly comfortable standing in the firing line of the white bishop, so she retreats in order to prepare Black's next move. The queen may have lost a tempo, but she has done her duty as White's queenside fianchetto has been prevented.

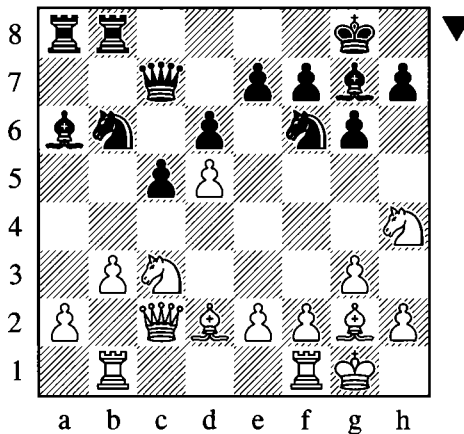
14.b3 ♖b6

Attacking the d5-pawn; a typical policy against the Fianchetto System.

15.♗h4

15.♗g5 h6 16.♗h3 ♘b7 17.e4 ♙a6 18.♞fe1 ♗g4! gave Black good counterplay in Perez Pardo – Bermejo Martinez, Malaga 2009.

Up to this point I had been playing in blitz mode, but now it was time to stop and think. From this position Black has tried a number of ideas, but the most challenging plan is to attack the d5-pawn. There are two ways of doing this.



15...♙b7!

This is the reliable option, which leads to a marginally worse but still quite playable position for Black.

15...♚b7?!

This has been the most popular move, but placing the queen opposite the enemy bishop carries certain risks. I was partially tempted to play this move as it was clear that Roiz was 'out of book' by now, but it would obviously not have been beyond the capabilities of such a strong grandmaster to find the right response at the board.

16.♞fd1!

Definitely the most challenging move.

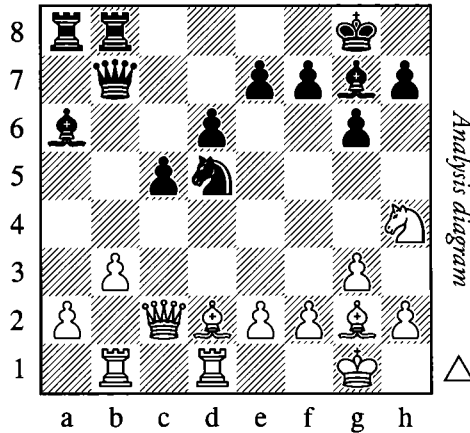
Instead after 16.b4?! cxb4 17.♞xb4 ♚c7 18.♞c1 ♗c4 19.♗d1 ♞xb4 20.♙xb4 ♚a7 21.e3 ♗e5 22.a3 ♗d3 23.♞b1 ♗g4 Black had a strong initiative in Sumets – Bologan, Mulhouse 2010.

One wonders exactly how Bologan, who is rated close to 2700, was planning to improve on the main line below...

16...♟fxd5

Taking the pawn is risky, but how else can Black justify his previous move?

17.♟xd5 ♟xd5



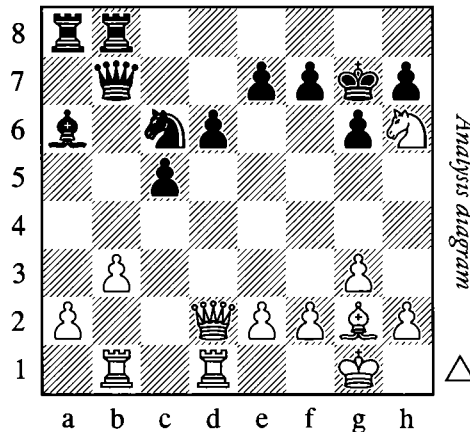
18.♞h6! ♟b4

18...♞xh6 and 18...e6 have both been tried, but I do not consider either of them fully satisfactory.

19.♞d2 ♟c6 20.♟f5!

In his book Avrukh recommends 20...♞xg7 ♜xg7 21.b4!. Here too, Black is in trouble.

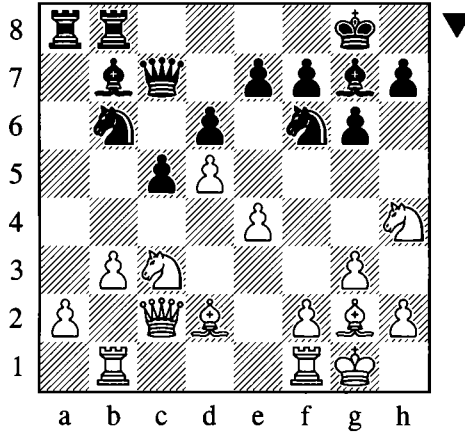
20...♞xh6 21.♟xh6† ♜g7



22.b4!

Black was under serious pressure in C. Cruz – Martin Gonzalez, Barcelona 2011, and I certainly would not advise the reader to follow this path – unless playing with White!

16.e4



16...♙a6!

Having enticed the e-pawn forwards, the bishop returns to a6 from where it eyes the d3-square.

17.♞fd1 ♜g4

17...♜bd7 is a reasonable alternative.

18.♜f3

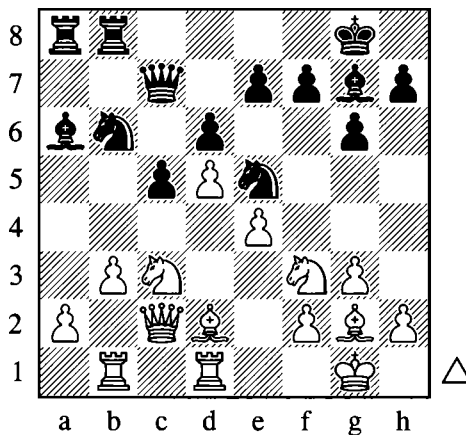
Avrukh's suggestion of 18.h3!? ♜e5 19.♙e3 might be the way forward for White.

18...♜e5!?

A new idea. 18...♜d7 had been played previously, but White got some advantage in both of the following games:

a) 19.a4 ♞f8 20.h3 ♜ge5 21.♜e1 c4 22.b4 ♜d3 23.b5 ♜xe1 24.♞xe1 Black's counterplay had failed in Jaime Montalvan – Valero Fuertes, Malaga 2002.

b) 19.♙e1 ♜ge5 20.a4 ♞b7 21.h3 ♞ab8 22.♜xe5 ♜xe5 23.f4 ♜d7 24.♞h2 (24.♙f1!?) White had the upper hand in Barsov – S. Kasparov, Cairo 2001.



19. ♖xe5

19. ♖e1! is an interesting alternative, which leads to unclear play.

19... ♗xe5 20. a4!

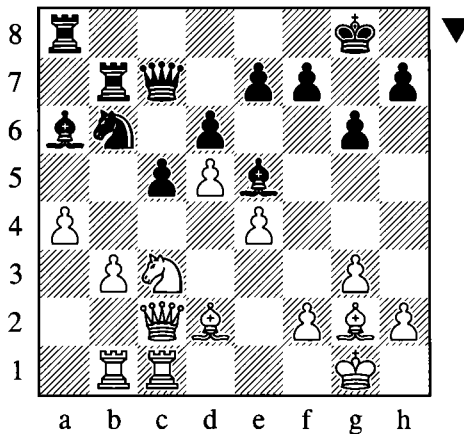
This move is an important part of White's plan. His intention is to trade the light-squared bishops and then install a knight on b5 to plug the queenside.

20... ♖b7!

It is always useful to have the option of doubling the rooks.

21. ♖dc1

21. ♗f1 ♗xf1 22. ♖xf1 is well met by the disruptive 22...c4!



21... ♗d7?!

Slightly careless. I wanted to prepare ...c4, but missed a tactical trick.

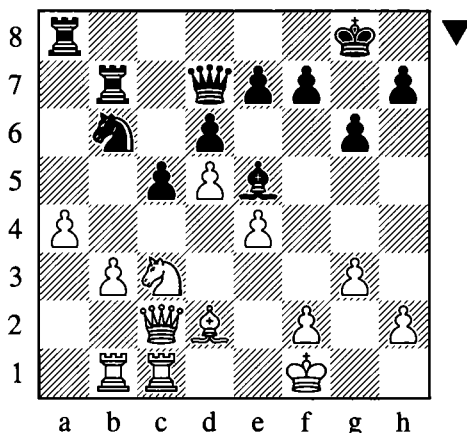
Better ideas included 21... ♗b8 and 21... ♖d7, planning to transfer the knight to e5 in the near future. The waiting move 21...h5! is also interesting, after which 22. ♗f1 ♗xf1 23. ♖xf1 ♗d7 24. ♖g2 c4! resembles the game, but without permitting the improvement noted on the next move.

22. ♗f1?

White was short of time and understandably continued with his plan.

Fortunately for your author, he missed a great opportunity: 22.a5! We both considered this but overlooked the follow-up. 22... ♖c8 23.b4! (23. ♖a2 ♖a7 24.b4 ♖b5! is less convincing.) 23...cxb4 24. ♖a2! White has a large advantage.

22... ♗xf1 23. ♖xf1



23...c4!

It is important to get this move in before White plays ♖b5.

24.b4?!

24.♔g2! was the last chance to fight for the advantage. After the text move Black regains his pawn and the game finishes peacefully.

24...♙xc3 25.♗xc3 ♝xa4 26.♞a1 ♞ba7 27.♞xa4

1/2-1/2

Several improvements have been noted for both sides, but my overall evaluation is that Black had reasonable play in a complex position. I was happy enough with this result, although the outcome of the match was not so pleasant as my five team-mates all lost!

What we have learned:

- ❖ The Fianchetto System is one of the most theoretically intensive branches of the Benko, in which both sides must play close attention to move order finesses and other fine details.
- ❖ An early ...♗a5 can prevent White from establishing a double fianchetto.
- ❖ The d5-pawn can often become a target, although taking it can sometimes be a risky business; see the note to Black's 15th move.
- ❖ The black bishop can retreat from a6, but it might return there after provoking e2-e4, which weakens the d3-square.
- ❖ One of White's main strategic goals is to play b3, a4 and ♖b5, sealing up the queenside.
- ❖ Black has two main ways of preventing this: he can move his queen to a3, or he can prepare a timely ...c4.
- ❖ Always look out for tactics!

A few weeks later I took part in the Israeli Cup, a team event contested under a rapid time control of 20 minutes plus a ten-second increment. My opponent in the following Benko encounter was Boris Avrukh, a brilliant grandmaster originally from Kazakhstan who has been based in Israel since 1995. Avrukh is one of the top theoreticians in modern-day chess, and his 1.d4

Grandmaster Repertoire books have become a kind of ‘opening tablebase’ for many titled players. Preparing for such a player is never easy, but I felt that the Benko would be a logical choice to depart from mainstream theory. I also know Avrukh to be a player with an aggressive style and formidable tactical ability, and the Benko seemed like a promising way to neutralize this aspect of his game.

Game 8

Boris Avrukh – Boris Alterman

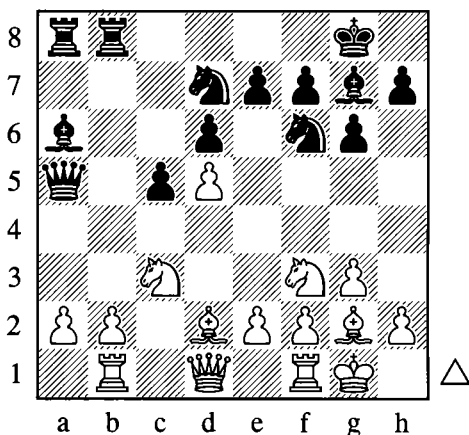
Israeli (rapid) 2011

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.bxa6 g6 6.♘c3 ♙xa6 7.g3 d6 8.♙g2 ♙g7 9.♘f3 ♘bd7 10.♙b1!

This move came as no surprise, as it was Avrukh’s recommendation in the second volume of his *Grandmaster Repertoire* work, which one might jokingly refer to as “1.d4 and White wins!” I am tempted to paraphrase Andras Adorjan and propose the solution: “1.d4 ♘f6 and Black is OK!”

10...0–0 11.0–0 ♖a5 12.♙d2 ♗fb8

So far everything has been the same as in the previous game. Some players might consider it risky to venture a gambit against one of the best theoreticians of the modern era, but I was happy to rely on my knowledge and experience of this opening. Of course, when you are playing with a rapid time control, it is not so easy to keep control of Black’s initiative and tactical possibilities.



13.b3!?

Boris played this move quickly. In his book he gives 13.♖c2 as played in the previous game. I don’t know if he found some problem with one of his recommendations, or if he just wanted to surprise me.

13...♘g4

It is worth pointing out that 13...♖a3? is a bad idea, both now and in virtually any position

in which the white queen has not moved to c2, for that matter. The point is that White can play 14.♖e1! followed by ♖c2 when Black achieves nothing and is forced to waste time retreating.

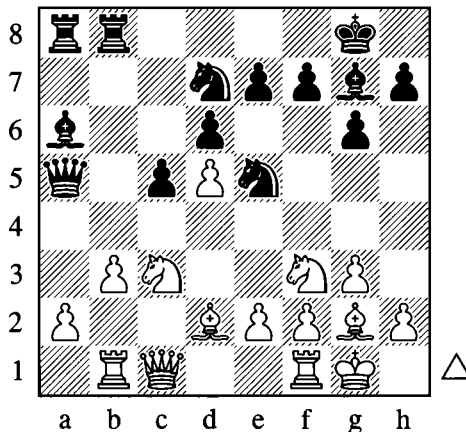
In his book Avrukh recommends 13...♗e8 as a good option for Black, but presumably he found a convincing reply for White. Indeed, a few games have continued 14.♙c2 ♚a3 15.♘c1 ♙a5 16.♙b2 c4 17.♗a4 ♙xb2 18.♚xb2, when it seems like the most Black can ever hope for is to regain his pawn and equalize, and even this is far from guaranteed.

White's next move was a novelty, although it is not clear if it was preparation or merely an idea conceived over the board.

14.♙c1!?

Almost everyone else has put the queen on c2 instead, but Avrukh wants to prevent ...♙a3. In the note to Black's 12th move in the previous game, we saw the exact same idea except that the moves ...♚fb8 and b3 had not yet been played.

14...♗g5



15.♗g5!?

Avoiding exchanges. By this stage we were both out of preparation, and were starting to eat into our allotted time. My main objective was to maintain the tension in the position and look for a suitable opportunity to sharpen the play.

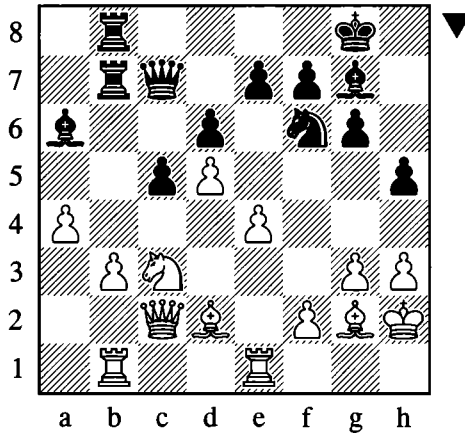
15...♗f6 16.♙c2 ♚c7 17.a4 h6 18.♗ge4 ♗ed7 19.♗xf6† ♗xf6

White has kept a slightly better position, but as I mentioned before, it is not easy to continue finding accurate moves with the clock running down.

20.h3 ♚a7!

Doubling on the b-file is a useful way to improve Black's position.

21.♕h2 ♚ab7 22.♚fe1 h5 23.e4



23...♖e8!?

Anticipating the plan of ♕f1 and ♖b5, while preparing to enter complications.

23...♖d7?! is worse, and after 24.♕f1 c4 25.bxc4 ♖e5 26.♕e2 White is clearly better.

23...h4! is another idea, intending 24.gxh4 ♖h5 with some compensation, although White could always respond with 24.g4 and ask Black what his idea is.

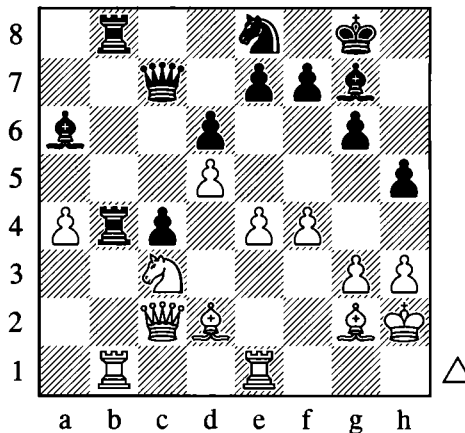
24.f4 c4!

The point behind the previous move. Now the position starts to become messy.

25.b4!

White reacts in the correct way, at least for the moment...

25...♗xb4



26.♖b5?

In a complex position and with little time remaining, White commits a game-changing error.

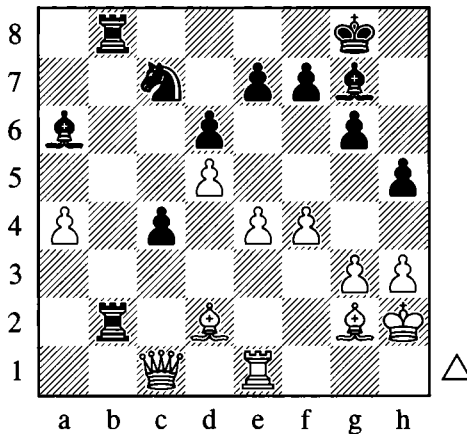
He should have preferred 26.♖xb4! ♖xb4 and only now 27.♘b5! when Black has problems: 27...♖xb5 (I had been planning 27...♗c5? 28.♙xb4 ♗xb4 29.♖c1 ♙xb5 30.axb5 c3, but failed to consider 31.♖b1! when White is just winning. Another idea is 27...♖b2 28.♗xb2 ♙xb2 29.♘xc7 ♘xc7 but after 30.♙a5! White should win the endgame.) 28.axb5 ♙xb5 29.♖b1 Black can fight on, but he does not really have enough for the exchange.

26...♖xb1!

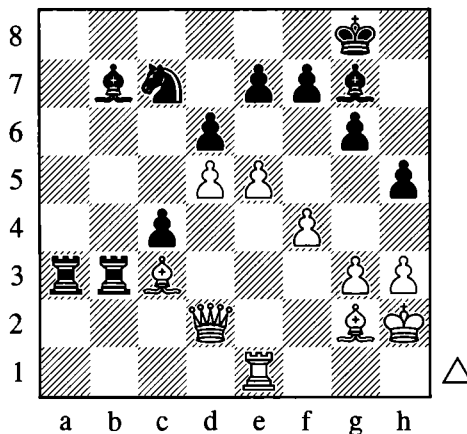
A cold shower for my opponent! Now Black obtains excellent compensation for the sacrificed queen.

27.♘xc7 ♖1b2 28.♗c1 ♘xc7

Black has almost full material compensation for the queen, and his passed c-pawn, combined with the weakness of White's second rank, gives him the upper hand. Both players were in time trouble, but I was able to stay in control.



29.♙c3 ♖b1 30.♗e3 ♖1b3 31.e5 ♙b7 32.♖d1 ♖a8 33.♗d2 ♖xa4 34.♖e1 ♖aa3



Unfortunately Boris and I failed to remember exactly how the game continued from here. (The entire game up to this point was reconstructed, as neither of us was keeping score. By this stage Black has a clear advantage and I eventually managed to win. Happily my team-mates fared better than before, and we were crowned champions!

0–1

What we have learned:

- ❖ The Fianchetto Variation tends to lead to more complex positions than the traditional old main line. This probably has something to do with the fact that the light-squared bishops remain on the board.
- ❖ The ...♘g4-e5 maneuver is a useful resource, but remember that White might move his knight away from f3 to avoid exchanges.
- ❖ Even when Black objectively stands worse in the Benko, he often keeps good practical chances due to his queenside pressure and dynamic potential.
- ❖ A timely ...c4 break can be a good way to disrupt the opponent.
- ❖ Queen sacrifices are often easy to miss, so keep your eyes open!

That concludes our coverage of the Fianchetto System. We will now turn our attention to the last of the three main ways in which White may strive to keep his extra pawn.

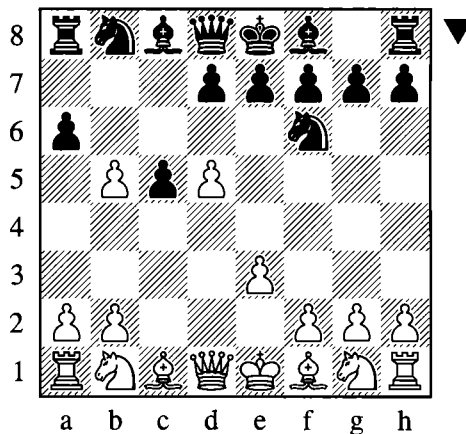
The e3 System

Game 9

Jeroen Piket – Veselin Topalov

Madrid 1997

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.e3



This continuation is not so popular nowadays, but it is quite logical and used to be one of the main lines. White avoids a situation where his king loses castling rights, preferring to develop his

pieces and perhaps advance in the center with e4 later, even at the expense of a tempo. Another possible plan is to block the queenside with a4 and ♖a3, after which it will not be easy for Black to organize his typical counterplay.

5...g6

Black follows the standard Benko setup. 5...axb5 is a sound alternative, although it should be noted that White can bypass this line by using the move order 4.♘f3 g6 5.cxb5 a6 and now 6.e3!?. The variation employed by Black in the present game avoids the risk of being 'move ordered'.

6.♘c3 ♗g7 7.a4!

This move is a key component of White's setup. The main idea is to strengthen his position on the queenside and avoid exchanging on a6, which would help Black to develop his pieces.

7...0-0

7...axb5?! only facilitates White's development, and after 8.♗xb5 0-0 9.♘f3 d6 10.0-0 the first player stands clearly better.

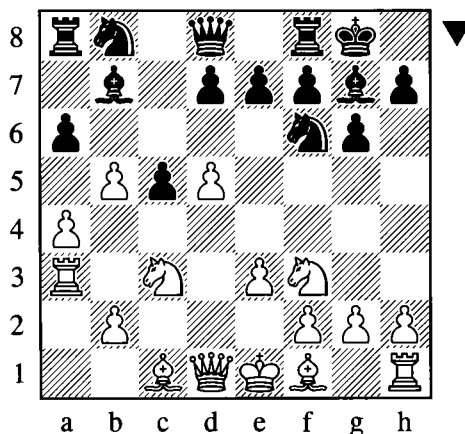
8.♖a3

Protecting the c3-knight, while also giving White the option of recapturing on b5 with the a-pawn.

8...♗b7

Black is clearly in no position to carry out his traditional queenside counterplay, so he focuses on the center instead.

9.♘f3



9...e6!

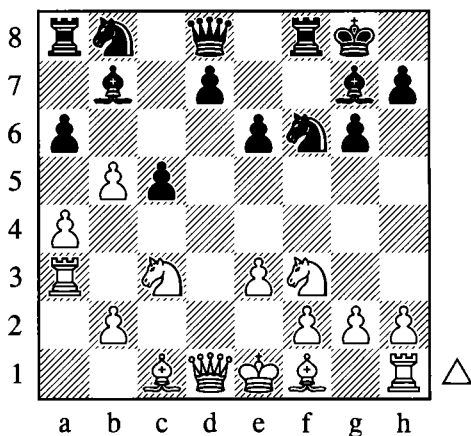
Listen and you will hear the distant echo of the Blumenfeld Gambit! The sound becomes louder as the game progresses...

10.dxe6

Alternatives are harmless:

10.e4 exd5 11.exd5 ♖e8† 12.♗e2 axb5 13.♘xb5 (13.axb5? ♖xa3 14.bxa3 ♜a5 15.♗d2 ♜xa3) 13...♗xd5= Varelle – Koch, Val Thorens 1988.

10.d6 should be met by 10...♘d5 with promising play for Black. Here is one cute line: 11.♘e4?! (White should prefer something like 11.♜b3 axb5 12.axb5 ♖xa3 13.♜xa3 ♜b6 with balanced play.) 11...axb5 12.♘xc5 bxa4! 13.♘xb7 ♜c8 Black regains the piece with at least equal chances.

10...fxe6**11.♗e2**

This move is playable, but not particularly challenging for Black.

11.♜d6

This has long been established as the critical continuation. Even though the queen will soon be evicted from d6, she creates enough disruption to stall Black's initiative. Here is a summary of the different responses which have been tested over the years.

a) 11...♘e4? 12.♘xe4 ♗xe4 13.♗d3 ♗b7 14.♜xc5 gave Black no real compensation in Flear – Fedorowicz, Brussels 1987.

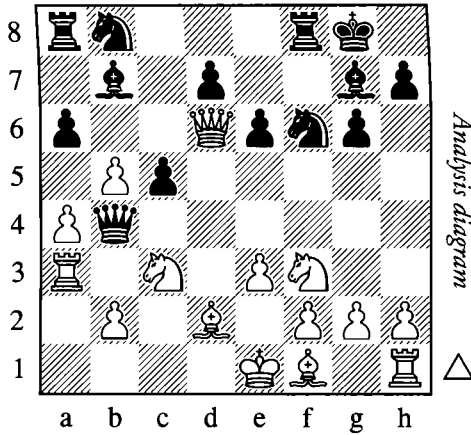
b) 11...♗xf3 is slightly premature, and after 12.gxf3 ♜c8 13.f4 ♘e8 14.♜d1 axb5 15.♗xb5 ♘c7 16.♗e2 d5 17.h4! ♘c6 18.h5 White was clearly better in Thorsteins – Meinsohn, Lyon 1990.

c) 11...♜a5?

Initially I thought that this rare move might be a serious alternative to the main line, but a closer inspection soon revealed a gaping hole.

12.♗d2 ♜b4

Black hopes to make a nuisance out of his queen.



13. ♖b6!

Initially I was seduced by lines such as 13. ♘d4 ♜xb2 14. ♞b3 cxd4! 15. ♞xb2 dxc3 16. ♙xc3 ♘e4 17. ♙xg7 ♘xd6 18. ♙xf8 ♙xf8 when Black is doing well.

Another substandard continuation is 13. ♘d1 ♜g4 14. ♜g3 ♜f5 15. ♜g5 ♘e4 16. ♜xf5 gxf5 17. ♙a5 d5 18. ♙e2 ♘d7 19. 0-0 ♞fc8 20. ♙e1 c4 when Black had a fine position in Marszalek – K. Berg, Pernik 1984.

13... ♙xf3

The computer opines that retreating to c8 is the lesser evil, but such a move is too depressing to contemplate!

14. gxf3 axb5 15. ♘d1! ♜h4 16. axb5 ♞xa3 17. bxa3

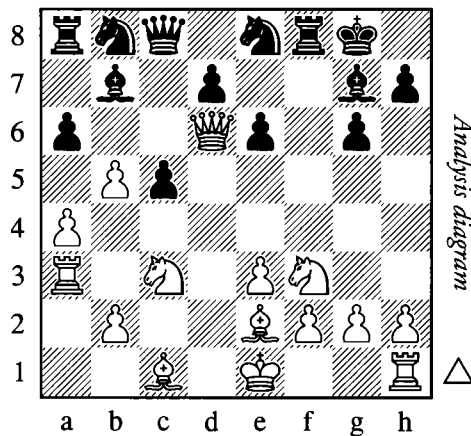
The queenside pawns were too much for Black to handle in Lara Ruiz – Oren, e-mail 2005.

d) 11... ♜c8

This natural move has been the most popular continuation, but it would not be my first choice. The critical line is:

12. ♙e2 ♘e8!?

12...axb5 13.axb5! keeps the b8-knight imprisoned, and after 13... ♘e8 14. ♜d2 d5 15. ♞xa8 ♙xa8 16. 0-0 White is better.



13. ♖g3

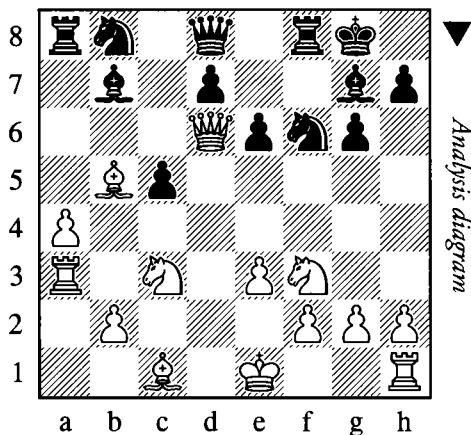
Now both 13...d5 14.0-0 and 13...axb5 14. ♖xb5! lead to complex play, with somewhat better chances for White.

e) 11...axb5!

Analysis eventually convinced me that this move was the best.

12. ♗xb5

Previously the bishop had not moved from f1, so it is logical for White to develop it with gain of tempo.



12... ♗xf3

Black has tried a number of other moves here, but it is hard to ignore the fact that the text has scored around 75% in practice.

One interesting and as yet untested continuation is 12... ♖e8!? 13. ♖xc5 (13. ♖g3 d5 14.0-0 ♖c6) 13... ♗xf3 14.gxf3 ♖xf3 with enormous complications.

13.gxf3 ♖c8

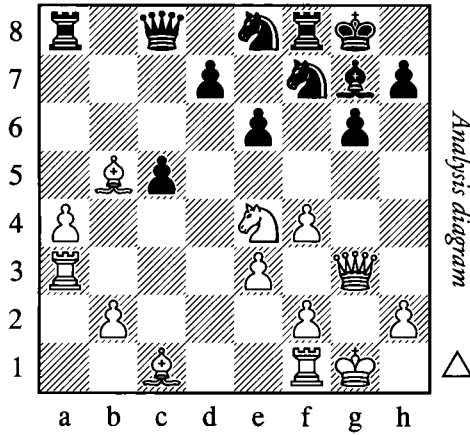
Preparing ... ♖e8 and ...d5. The position is double-edged and hard to evaluate. The computer likes White's extra pawn and bishop pair, but in a practical game Black's central pawn majority and White's weakened kingside are likely to matter just as much. Here are a few examples:

14.0-0

14.h4 is risky. 14... ♖f7 15. ♖g1 c4 16. ♖e4?! ♖xe4 17.fxe4 ♖c6 18.h5 ♖e5 19.hxg6 hxg6 20. ♖e2 This position occurred in R. Markus – B. Vuckovic, Zlatibor 2006, and here 20... ♖b7! would have created an awkward attack on the e4-pawn, as pointed out by Flear.

14... ♖e8 15. ♖g3 ♖c6 16. ♖e4 ♖e5 17.f4 ♖f7

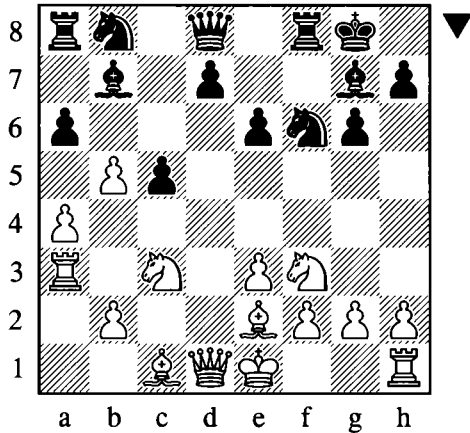
The position at this point looks decidedly unclear, but over the next few moves Black gains the upper hand.



Analysis diagram

18. ♖g5 d5 19. e4 ♜ed6 20. exd5 exd5 21. ♗d3 ♜xg5 22. fxg5 ♔d4!

Black was in control and eventually won, Petursson – Fedorowicz, Reykjavik 1990.



11...d5

Now the position bears a strong resemblance to the Blumenfeld Gambit Accepted, the only major difference being the position of Black's dark-squared bishop, which normally goes to d6 in the Blumenfeld.

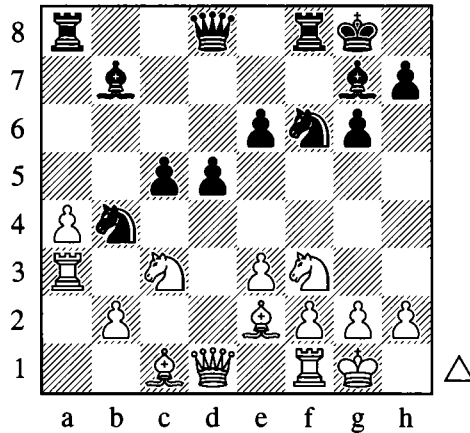
12.bxa6?!

A slight inaccuracy. There was no real need for White to release the tension and help to develop his opponent's queenside.

12.0-0 is better, and after 12... ♗e7 13. ♗c2 ♜bd7 14. bxa6 ♘xa6 15. ♘xa6 ♞xa6 Black had fair compensation in Karasek – Folk Gilsanz, corr. 2009.

12... ♜xa6 13.0-0 ♜b4

The opening has been a success for Black, who has more than enough compensation for a pawn.



14. ♕d2 ♖e7 15. ♖b5 ♘c6!

Topalov correctly avoids simplifications, since Black has more space.

15...e5?! would have been met by 16. ♕xb4!, not only exchanging a pair of pieces but also drawing one of Black's strong pawns away from the center.

16. ♗b1

White has no way to prevent his opponent's next move, so Piket attempts to arrange his pieces in a defensive formation.

16...e5! 17. h3 ♔h8!?

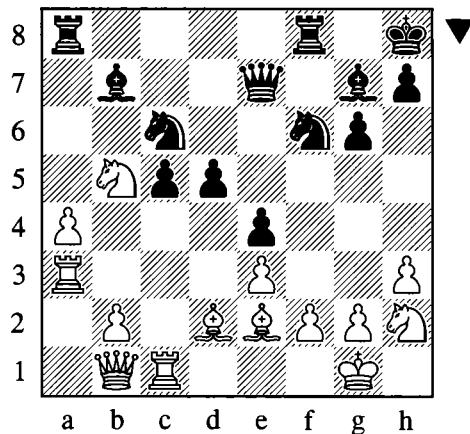
Topalov makes a sensible prophylactic move before deciding which pawn(s) to advance.

18. ♝c1 e4!

The time has come for concrete actions.

19. ♘h2

19. ♘e1 d4 also gives Black a strong initiative.



19...d4!

With Black's central pawns steamrolling up the board, the position has become highly reminiscent of Tarrasch – Alekhine, Bad Pistyan 1922 (Game 21 in the Blumenfeld chapter).

20.exd4

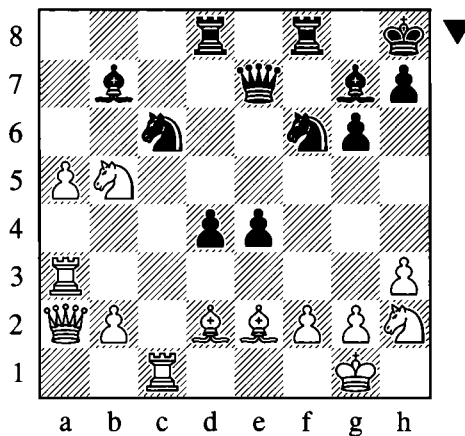
20.♘g4? allows Black to clear the f-file, with lethal consequences: 20...d3 21.♙d1 ♘xg4 22.♙xg4 h5 23.♙d1 ♗h4–+

20.♘f1 is a better try, although even here after 20...d3 21.♙d1 ♘e5 White is in trouble.

20...cxd4 21.♗a2?!

Too slow. 21.b4 was also poor, as after 21...d3 22.♙f1 ♘d5! White's position is critical, for instance: 23.♞c5 ♞xf2! 24.♙xf2 e3† 25.♙g1 exd2 26.♞xd5 ♘xb4–+

The best practical chance may well have been 21.♞xc6!? ♙xc6 22.♘xd4 when White has a certain amount of compensation for the exchange, and is no longer in danger of being murdered by the rampaging pawns.

21...♞ad8 22.a5**22...d3!**

The parallel with the Tarrasch – Alekhine game continues.

23.♙g4

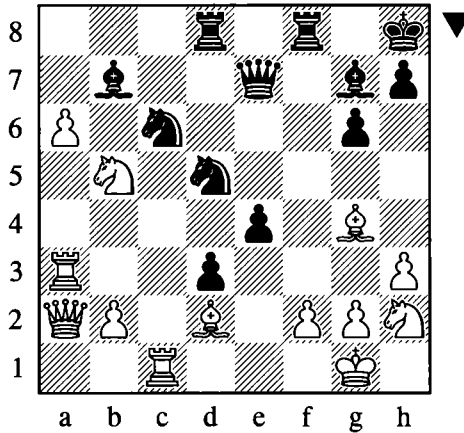
23.♙d1 and 23.♙f1 would also have been met by 23...♘d5, with a serious initiative to Black in either case.

23...♘d5

Now White will have to worry about sacrifices on f2 in some lines.

24.a6

Attempting to distract the black pieces from the kingside.



24...♟c4! 25.♖b3

25.♗a1 is no better in view of 25...♙c6 26.♟c3 (26.♙xb4 ♟xb4 27.♞xc6 ♟xc6 28.a7 ♞a8--+) 26...♟c2 27.♞xc2 dxc2 when Black has a material advantage to go with his initiative in the center.

25...♟xa6

Black has restored material equality without dampening his initiative in any serious way.

26.♟c7

26.♟c3 allows Black a choice of wins, with 26...♞xf2! being the most attractive.

26...♟axc7 27.♗xb7 ♞b8

0-1

White saw no reason to prolong his suffering, and indeed after 28.♗a7 (28.♗c6 ♞xb2--+) 28...h5 29.♙d1 ♞xb2 30.♟f1 ♞a8 his position is hopeless.

What we have learned:

- ❖ The 5.e3 system enables White to stifle Black's queenside play quite effectively, so the second player should fight back in the center with a timely ...e6.
- ❖ Following the pawn exchange on e6 the game strongly resembled the Blumenfeld Gambit, which can be considered the first cousin of the Benko.
- ❖ I would advise the reader to familiarize himself with the Blumenfeld chapter (beginning on page 141) even if he does not plan to play it, as some of its themes are also applicable to the Benko.
- ❖ A mobile pawn center can be a devastating force when it receives the full support of the pieces.

That concludes our coverage of the Benko Gambit Accepted. It seems to me that Black has good reason to feel optimistic in all the major branches, but he should not forget that White is under no obligation to take the pawn...

Declining the Gambit

Considering the effectiveness and longevity of Black's compensation in the Benko Gambit Accepted, it is hardly surprising that many players prefer to decline the offered pawn. There are several ways in which White might do this, although some of them may lead him into even greater difficulties. The first game of this section features one of his weaker attempts.

Game 10

Umberto Masera – Pal Benko

Reggio Emilia 1970

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.b3?

This 'solid' move creates more problems than it solves. Black will develop powerful threats on the b-file and the long diagonal, at no material cost.

4...bxc4 5.bxc4 d6

The following encounter also ended in a quick disaster for White:

5...♘a6!?

Preparing to occupy the b-file at a moment's notice.

6.g3?

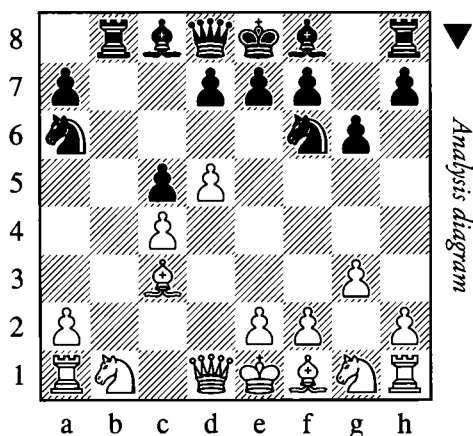
Too slow. Now Black's initiative on the queenside becomes too dangerous.

6...g6

Preparing ♔g7 and ...♘e4, not to mention a possible queen check on a5.

7.♙b2 ♖b8 8.♙c3

White seems to have everything covered, but a terrible surprise awaits him. Can you find the winning continuation?



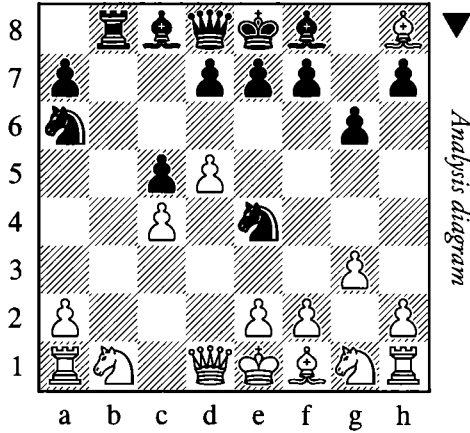
Black to play and win!

8...♘e4!!

0–1 Baikovsky – Aveskulov, Alushta 2005. White resigned as his position is about to collapse.

9.♙xh8

Or 9.♖c2 ♘xc3 10.♘xc3 ♗a5 11.♞c1 ♙g7 and with ...♘b4 coming next, White is doomed.



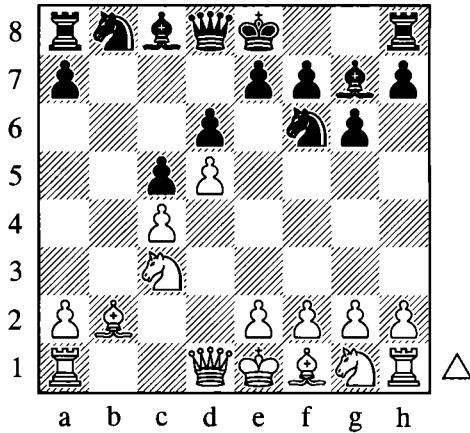
9...♞xb1! 10.♗xb1 ♗a5+

With mate to follow.

6.♘c3 g6

The fianchetto bishop will be especially powerful due to the weakening of the h8-a1 diagonal.

7.♙b2 ♙g7



8.f3?

Too slow. 8.♘f3 should have been preferred, as ...♘e4 is not yet a lethal threat.

8...♘bd7 9.e4 ♞b8!

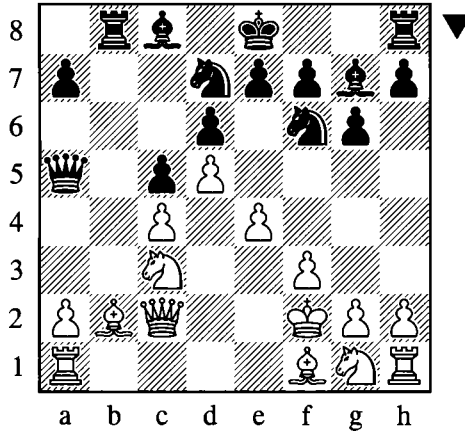
Attacking the key defender of the dark squares. Now exchange sacrifices will constantly be in the air.

10. ♖c2 ♜a5

Just ten moves have been played, and already White's position is highly unpleasant.

11. ♘f2?

Losing on the spot. The only way to prolong the game would have been 11. ♖c1, although White's position remains difficult.



11... ♖xe4†!

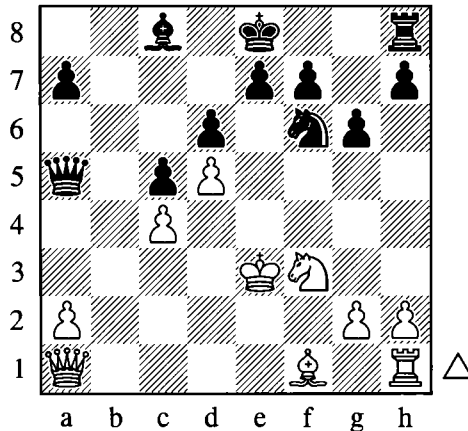
This thematic combination yields a decisive material advantage for Black.

12. fxe4 ♜xb2! 13. ♜xb2 ♙xc3 14. ♜c1 ♘f6 15. ♘f3

15... ♙d3 does not help due to 15... ♙xa1 16. ♜xa1 ♜d2† and Black wins.

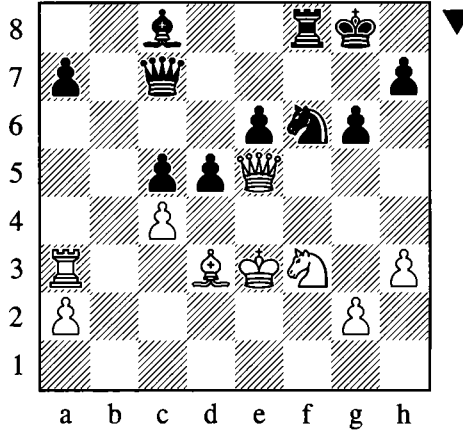
15... ♖xe4† 16. ♘e3 ♙xa1 17. ♜xa1 ♘f6

Black is winning easily thanks to his two extra pawns, not to mention the position of the white king. The rest is easy.



18. ♙d3 0–0 19. h3 ♙a6 20. ♜b1 e5 21. dxe6 fxe6 22. ♜b3 ♜c7 23. ♜a3 ♙c8 24. ♜b2 d5 25. ♜e5?

Allowing Black to end the game with a flourish. Can you find the coup de grace?



25...♠g4!

Winning the queen, so White resigned.

0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ Declining the Benko Gambit with 4.b3? is exceedingly risky.
- ❖ Watch out for geometrical motifs based on the b-file and the a5-e1 and h8-a1 diagonals.

Returning the Pawn with 5.b6

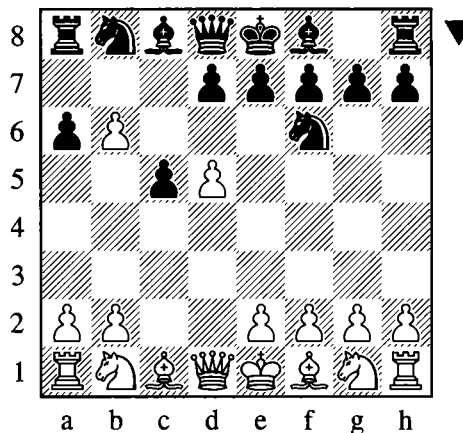
It is time to move on to a more serious way for White to decline the gambit.

Game 11

Igor Divljan – Surya Shekhar Ganguly

Guelph 2005

1.d4 ♠f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6



White reasons that he would be better off leaving the black a-pawn on the board, where it blocks the rook on a8 and also obstructs Black's minor pieces. Black usually just takes the pawn, but I want to explore a couple of other options, beginning with an odd-looking pawn move...

5...a5?!

It makes a certain amount of sense to vacate the a6-square for the bishop, thus ensuring that the natural plan of c3 and e4 will cost White his right to castle. On the other hand Black is expending a tempo on a non-developing move, while also weakening the b5-square.

Overall I do not fully trust the text move, but I decided to devote a couple of games to it regardless, as it can give rise to some interesting plans and ideas.

6. c3 a6 7. f4 !?

A sharp and ambitious reaction. Before developing his knight on f3, White advances his f-pawn in the hope of smashing through the center with e4-e5.

7... xb6

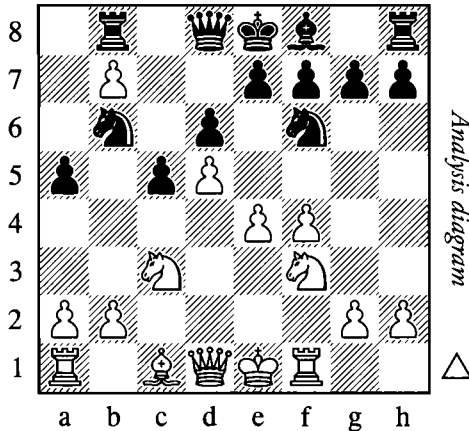
Already Black has to be accurate.

7...d6?

This natural move is a serious mistake.

8. f3 xb6

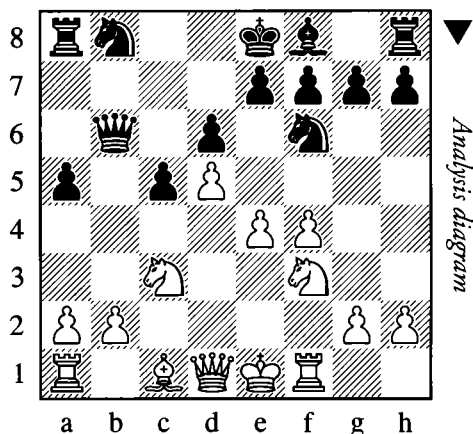
8... bd7 ?! is even worse: 9. b7 ! b8 10. e4 xf1 11. xf1 b6



12. e5 ! This energetic move ruins Black's defense. 12... dxe5 13. fxe5 fxd5 14. d5 ! d7 15. dxf7 White was already winning in Seirawan – Z. Polgar, Monte Carlo 1994.

9. e4 xf1 10. xf1

The threat of e5 is hard to meet, furthermore Black must constantly worry about a troublesome check on a4.

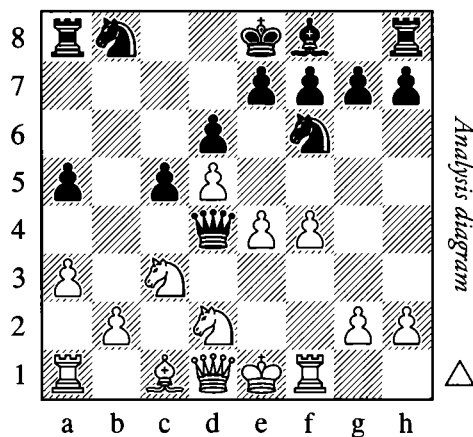


10...♙b4 11.a3!

Much stronger than 11.♙e2 g6 12.♖f2 ♔g7 13.♖g1 0–0 14.e5 ♘e8 when White was only slightly better in Botsari – Ristic, Athens 1993.

11...♙c4 12.♘d2 ♙d4?

The lesser evil was 12...♙a6 although after 13.e5 dxe5 14.fxe5 ♘fd7 15.♙a4 it is doubtful that Black will survive for long.



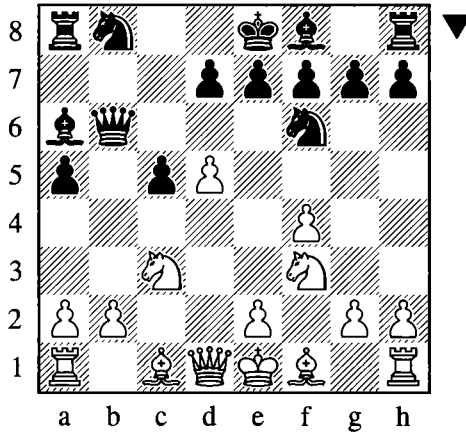
13.♙e2!

On top of Black's other worries, his queen is now trapped and he must jettison a pawn to save her.

13...c4 14.♘xc4 ♙a7 15.e5

1–0 A pawn down with a wretched position, Black could stand no more of the suffering and so he resigned in V. Mikhalevski – G. Jones, Queenstown 2009.

8.♘f3

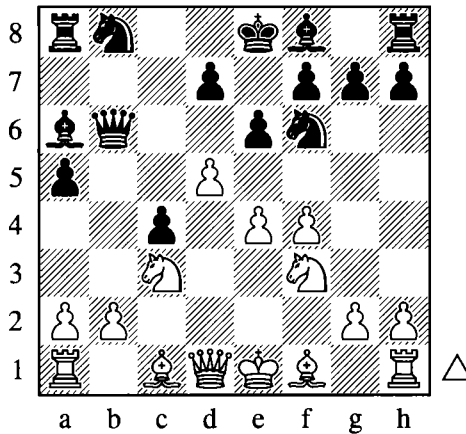


8...e6!

If Black wants to escape the opening unscathed then he must fight back courageously in the center.

9.e4 c4!

Exchanging on f1 would only help to activate the white rook. Instead Black keeps the bishops on the board while opening two important diagonals for his queen and dark-squared bishop.



10.e5

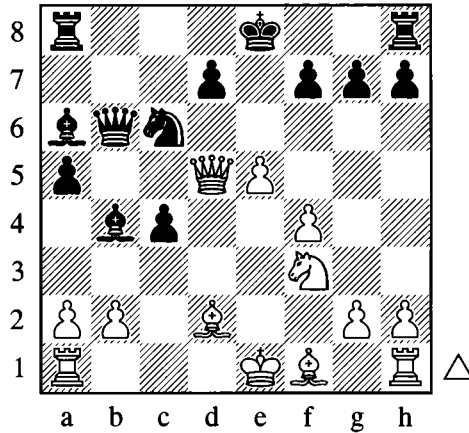
White should have considered the untested 10.d6!?, for instance: 10...g4 This must be critical. Obviously the pawn cannot be captured immediately due to e4-e5 winning a piece. 11.d4 cxd6 12.cxd6 e6xd6 13.h3 d6h6 14.e3 White will castle next, obtaining promising compensation for the pawn.

10...dxd5

10...g4? is well met by 11.d4! exd5 12.e2 d6c6 13.exg4 cxd4 14.dxd5 cxe4? 15.e3 when White is much better, Lytchak – Vigus, Scotland 1995.

11. ♖xd5 exd5 12. ♗xd5 ♙b4† 13. ♙d2 ♘c6

Black has emerged from the opening with a promising position.

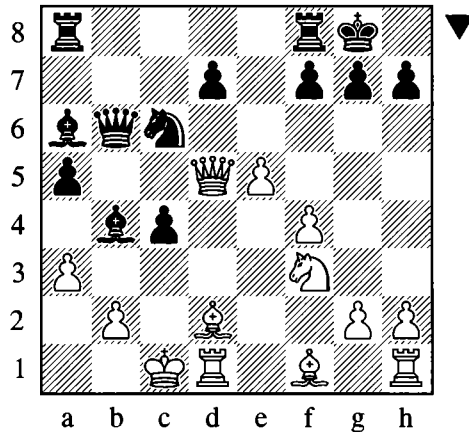


14. 0-0-0?

Playing with fire. White should have preferred 14. ♙xc4 ♙xd2† 15. ♖xd2 ♗e3† 16. ♔d1 0-0 17. ♙xa6 ♖xa6 18. ♖f1 Black has a strong initiative for a mere pawn, although the position is extremely complicated.

14...0-0 15. a3?

Allowing a neat refutation, but White already lacked a good defense against the impending threats along the b-file.



15... ♙xa3!

This simple sacrifice wrecks White's position within a few short moves.

16. bxa3 ♗b3 17. ♖d4

Losing without a fight, although even after the superior 17. ♖e1 Black wins easily enough: 17... ♗xa3† 18. ♔d1 ♗b3† 19. ♔c1 ♖fb8 20. ♗e4 c3-+

17...♙xa3†

0–1

White resigned in view of 18.♖c2 ♗a4† 19.♖c1 ♗a1† 20.♖c2 ♜xd4† winning the queen.

What we have learned:

- ❖ The Benko Gambit is usually associated with a kingside fianchetto, but occasionally Black can develop his bishop along the f8-a3 diagonal.
- ❖ 9...c4! was one of the keys to Black's success, unleashing the power of the dark-squared bishop.
- ❖ Castling into a raging attack is normally a bad idea, and this game was no exception...

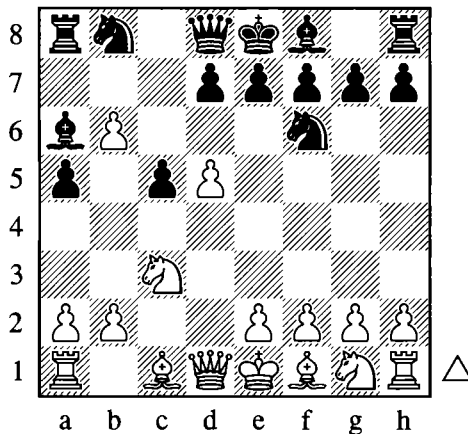
This was an impressive performance by Ganguly, but the next game improves White's play dramatically.

Game 12

Yuriy Kuzubov – Aleksej Pliasunov

St Petersburg 2004

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6 a5 6.♘c3 ♗a6



7.e4!

The most accurate move. White loses the option of recapturing on f1 with the rook, but benefits in other ways.

7...♗xf1 8.♖xf1 d6

In the previous game this move was undesirable for Black, but here it is practically forced as e4-e5 was a threat.

9.f4!?

The most ambitious move, although White is already somewhat spoiled for choice as the following alternatives also look promising.

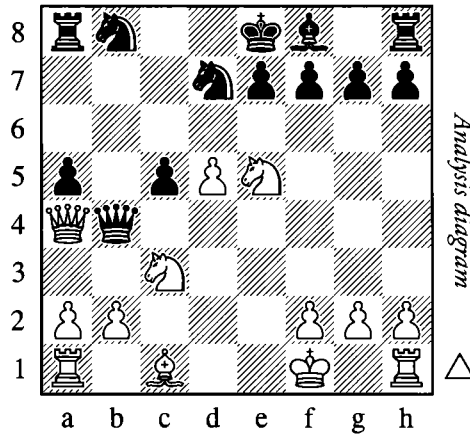
9.b7 ♖a7 10.f4 e6 11.dxe6 fxe6 12.♟f3 ♞d7 13.♞e2 ♞xb7 14.e5! White was better in Brenninkmeijer – Kaidanov, New York 1993.

9.♟f3!?

Classical development also works well.

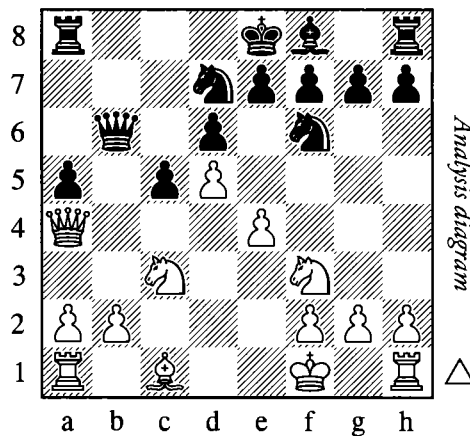
9...♟bd7

9...♞xb6 is no better: 10.♞a4! ♟fd7 (10...♟bd7 11.e5! transposes to the main line below.) 11.e5! dxe5 (11...♞b4 was played in Dimitrov – Mensch, Paris 2000, and now 12.♞b5!± would have been excellent for White.) 12.♟xe5 ♞b4



13.♟c4! g6 (13...♟a6 14.♟g5± L. B. Hansen – Martynov, Copenhagen 1991) 14.a3 ♞xa4 15.♟xa4 ♟g7 16.♟e3 0-0 17.♟e2 ♟a6 18.♞hd1 ♟e5 19.♞ac1 ♟xc4 20.♞xc4± Lukacs – Medvegy, Budapest 1999.

10.♞a4 ♞xb6



11.e5!

White follows the same recipe.

11...dxe5 12.♘xe5

We have reached a critical position, where White keeps some advantage in all variations.

12...♞b8

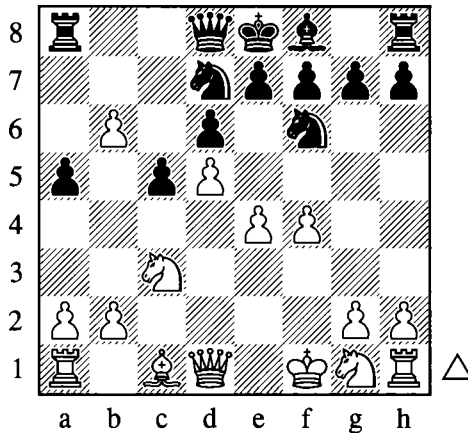
12...♞b4? 13.♞c6!±

12...g6 13.♙g5 ♞a7 14.♙xf6 ♞xf6 15.♘c6 ♞a8 16.♞e1 ♙h6 17.♞xe7† ♘f8 18.♞xd7+–
Moracchini – Vachier Lagrave, Clichy 2000.

13.♘xd7 ♘xd7 14.g3 ♞a6† 15.♘g2 ♞b4 16.♞c2 g6 17.a3 ♞b7 18.♞e1

White was clearly better in Zagorskis – Ansell, Kallithea 2008.

9...♘bd7



10.e5!

I would not be surprised if this move was prepared before the game. It fits in perfectly with the spirit of my *Gambit Guide*, as White sacrifices a pawn in order to open the position and accelerate his development, even though the winner is on the ‘wrong’ side of the board for the present volume...

In a previous game White was also successful with 10.♞a4!? e6 11.dxe6 fxe6 12.e5!+–
A. Rodriguez – P. Gonzalez, Costa Rica 1996.

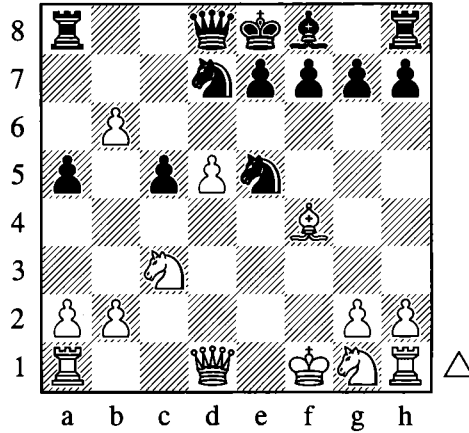
A month after the present game White preferred 10.♘f3?! but after 10...♘xb6 11.♞e2 he barely had any advantage and eventually went down, D. Gonzalez – Garcia Gata, Benidorm 2004.

10...dxe5 11.fxe5 ♘xe5 12.♙f4

Developing with gain of tempo.

12...♘fd7

Forced, as Black can hardly allow the bishop to come to c7.



13. ♖a4!

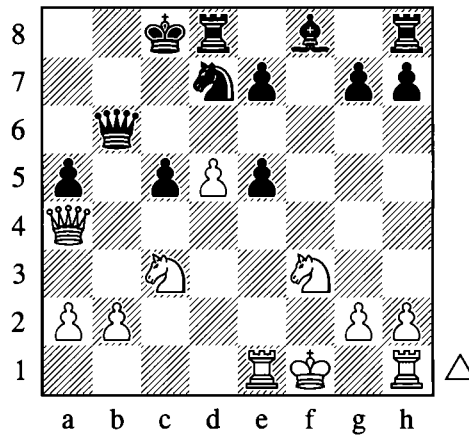
Renewing the threat to the knight, thus forcing Black to weaken his light squares.

13...f6 14. ♗xe5 fxe5 15. ♘f3 ♜xb6 16. ♖e1

Black's position looks terrible. His king is stuck in the center, his pieces are not mobilized and he has several weak pawns.

16...0-0-0

How can White increase his advantage?



17. ♘g5! g6

17...♜f6? does not work due to 18. ♔g1 ♜xg5 19. ♜c6† ♔b8 20. ♘b5 ♗c8 21. ♜xd7 winning.

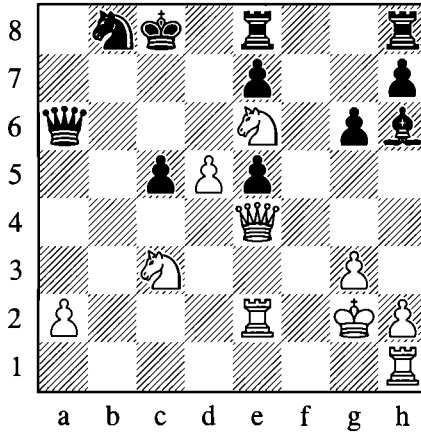
18. ♘e6 ♗e8 19. ♜c4 ♗h6 20. g3!

With this final precise move, White prepares to move his king to a safe square.

20...♜xb2?!

Opening the b-file only makes the situation worse, but in any case there was not much Black could do about the threat of ♘a4 followed by ♘xc5.

21.♞e2 ♖b4 22.♜a6† ♜b7 23.♜xa5 ♜b6 24.♜a4 ♘b8 25.♚g2 ♜a6 26.♜e4



1-0

Black resigned, as he has no good defense against the forthcoming ♜b1, ♜eb2 and so on. Considering the course of this game, not to mention White's promising alternatives noted at move 9, I do not consider 5...a5 to be a fully correct move. In the next section I would like to draw your attention to a more reliable method for Black.

The Straightforward 5...♜xb6

Game 13

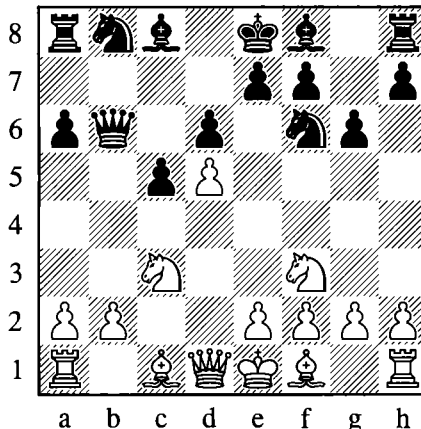
Alexander Mikhalevski – Boris Alterman

Israel 1995

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6 ♜xb6

This is a much sounder move than 5...a5. Black develops unpretentiously and is more or less guaranteed to make it through the opening with a sound position, although we will see that plenty of challenges lie ahead.

6.♘c3 d6 7.♘f3 g6



8.♟d2!

This move order seems to be the best. The reason is simple: White has more space and should avoid early minor piece exchanges, as in the following line:

8.e4 ♞g4!

Black gets rid of his passive light-squared bishop.

9.♞e2 ♞xf3!

9...♞g7 is well met by: 10.♟d2! White would prefer to keep his knight which will find an ideal home on c4. 10...♞xe2 11.♚xe2 0-0 12.0-0 ♜bd7 13.♟c4 White is slightly better.

10.♞xf3 ♜bd7

Black has a good position, for instance:

11.0-0 ♞g7 12.♞e2 0-0 13.♚c2 ♜e8!

The knight is heading for b5.

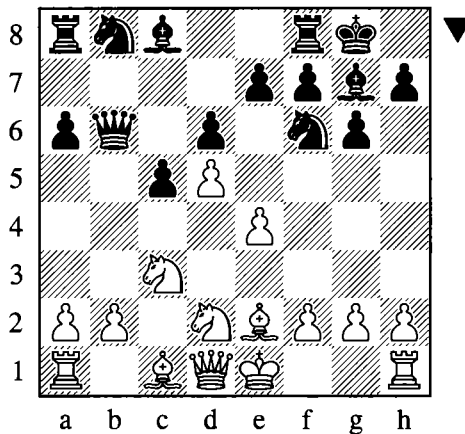
14.♞f4 ♟c7 15.a4

Otherwise the knight comes to b5 and d4, when Black's chances will be somewhat higher.

15...♞ab8 16.♞ab1 ♚b3

Black is doing fine.

Another popular move order is 8.a4 ♞g7 9.a5 ♚c7 which could easily transpose to the main line, for instance: 10.♟d2! 0-0 11.e4 ♜bd7 12.♞e2 ♞b8 13.0-0 ♜e8 We are back in Mikhalevski – Alterman.

8...♞g7 9.e4 0-0 10.♞e2**10...♜bd7**

10...a5? is a positional error which enables White to secure control over the queenside. 11.a4! (After 11.♟c4 ♚c7 12.a4! the evaluation is similar.) 11...♞a6 12.♞b5 ♜e8 13.♟c4 ♚d8 14.0-0 ♜d7 15.♞f4 ♜e5 16.♞xe5 ♞xe5 17.♞xa6 ♞xa6 18.♟b5 Black had a depressing position in Alterman – Ki. Georgiev, Groningen (2.3) 1997.

11.0-0

White can also go for 11.♟c4!? ♚c7 12.♞f4 ♜b6 13.♟e3, keeping the knights on the board and avoiding obstructing his bishop. This setup is considered in the next game.

11...♖c7!

It is useful to anticipate ♖c4, which can now be met conveniently by ...♖b6!.

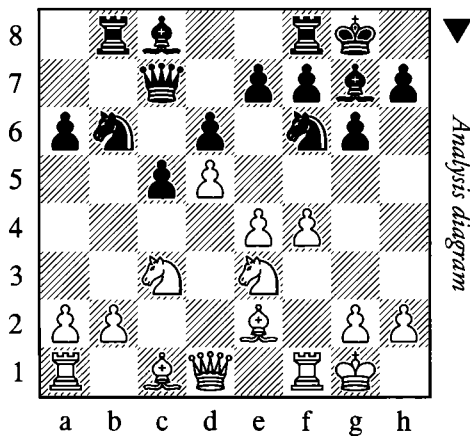
Compare the line 11...♖b8 12.♖c4 ♖c7 13.♙f4 ♖b6 14.♖e3! ♖e8 15.♗d2 when White keeps some advantage, as demonstrated in Hase – Verdier, corr. 1997, and several other games.

12.a4

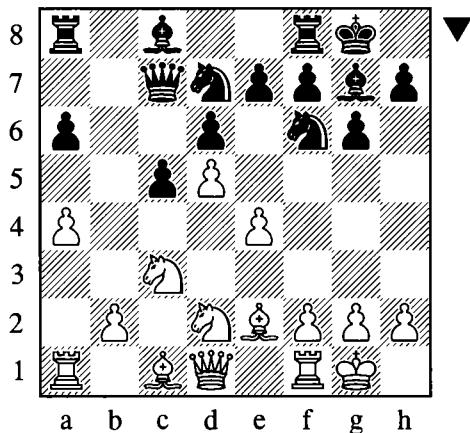
White intends to gain space on the queenside while preventing the ...♖b6 idea.

The value of Black's last move is revealed after: 12.♖c4 ♖b6! 13.♖e3 (or 13.♖a3 e6! with promising counterplay) White has avoided the knight exchange, but his dark-squared bishop has been restricted. 13...e6! 14.a4 ♙b7 The position is unclear but not unfavorable to Black.

12.f4 ♖b8! 13.♖c4 ♖b6 14.♖e3 (14.♗c2 is inconsistent, and allows Black to obtain excellent counterplay with 14...♖xc4 15.♙xc4 ♖b4 16.♗d3 ♖g4!, not only threatening ...♙d4†, but also preparing to attack White's center with ...f5!.)



14...e6! 15.a4 (15.dxe6 fxe6 16.a4 ♙b7=) 15...exd5 16.exd5 ♖e8 Black was doing fine in Singer – Prochaska, Oberwart 2000.



12...♟e8!?

Black continues his plan of limiting White's aggression on the queenside. After a4-a5 the ...♟b6 resource will no longer be available, so instead Black prepares to answer ♟c4 with ...♟e5.

Several other moves have been tried, the following two being the most popular:

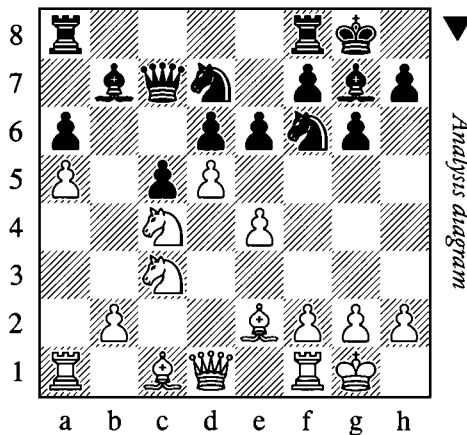
12...♞b8?! has been the most frequently played move, but it seems a bit slow, and White keeps an edge as follows: 13.♟c4 ♞b4 (or 13...♟b6 14.♟a3) 14.a5! ♟e8 15.♞d2 ♞a7 16.♟a4 ♞b7 17.♟ab6 White has succeeded in plugging the b-file and Black is in an unpleasant bind, Seirawan – Shirov, Amsterdam 1995.

12...♞b7

This move deserves serious attention, and enables Black to take effective countermeasures in the center.

13.a5

Here 13.♟c4 can be met by 13...♟b6 14.♟a3 e6! 15.a5 ♟c8! 16.♟c4 ♟xe4! ♞ Quinn – D. Robinson, Sunningdale 2006.

13...e6 14.♟c4**14...♟xe4!**

After 14...♟xe4! 15.exd5 ♞fe8 16.♞f4 ♞f8 17.♞f3 White remained in control, T. Paetz – J. Oswald, Germany 1994.

15.♟xe4 exd5 16.♟exd6 ♞c6!

This calm move enables Black to restore material equality.

17.♟f5?!

This is too optimistic, but Black was doing fine in any case:

17.♞e3 dxc4 18.♟xc4 ♞ab8=

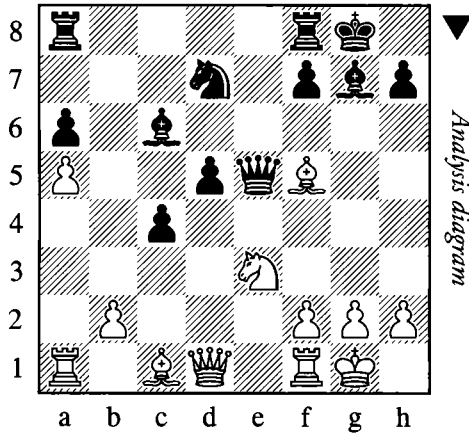
17.♞f4 dxc4 18.♞c1 c3!? 19.bxc3 ♟e5 20.♟c4 ♞fe8=

17...gxf5 18.♟e3 ♞e5 19.♞d3

19.♞f3? ♟f6 20.♞c2 ♟e4+ Jimenez Martinez – Minzer, La Roda 2007.

19...c4 20.♞xf5

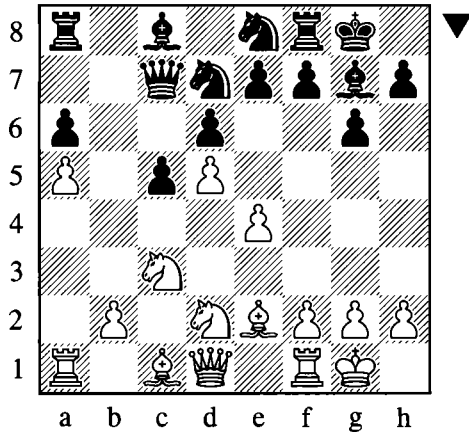
This position was reached in Jakubowski – Jedryczka, Warsaw 2005. Here Black should have played:



20...d4! 21. ♖xd7 dxe3 22. ♗xc6
 22...♗g4 exf2† 23. ♞xf2 ♞c5↑
 22...e2 23. ♞e1 ♞ab8

White will find himself the exchange down for insufficient compensation.

13.a5



13...♞b8!

Not only bringing the rook to open file, but also emphasizing the fact that White lacks a useful waiting move and must commit his pieces one way or another. Other moves are less promising, for instance:

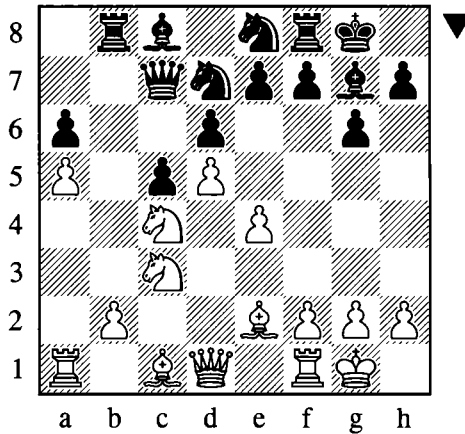
13...♗d4 14. ♘c4 ♘g7 15. ♗h6 ♞b8 16. ♘a4 White had the upper hand in Gleizerov – Paul, Loosdorf 1993.

Also after 13...♖d8 14.♗c4 ♘c7 15.♗a4 Black is under pressure.

Finally, 13...♗df6 14.♗c4 ♖b8 15.f3 ♗d7 16.♗b6 maintains White's advantage on the queenside. As a general rule, if White can plug the b-file by installing a knight on b6, then Black will struggle to generate counterplay.

14.♗c4

White can hardly delay this move anymore, as after 14.f4 ♗d4† 15.♖h1 ♗df6! 16.♗f3 e6! Black has promising play.



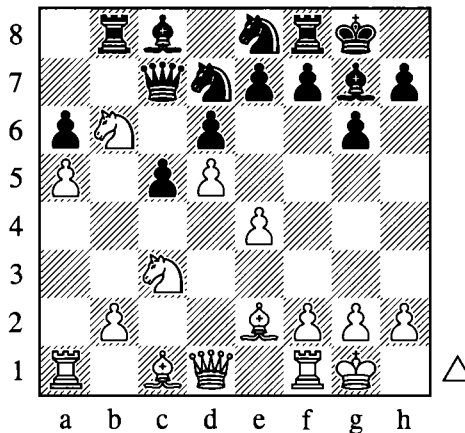
14...♗e5!

This move is a key part of Black's plan; having less space, it is useful for him to exchange some pieces.

15.♗b6

After 15.f4?! ♗xc4 16.♗xc4 ♗d4†! 17.♖h1 ♗f6= White's center is under pressure.

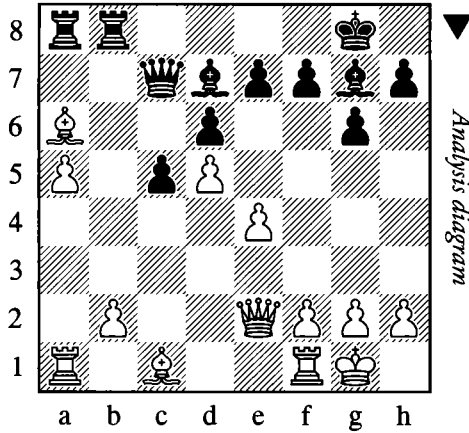
15...♗d7



16. ♖c4

White has nothing better than retreating.

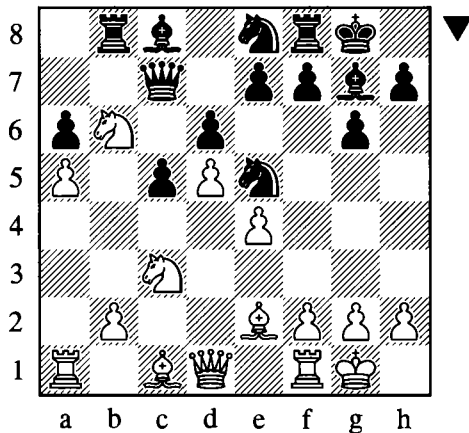
16. ♖ca4 leads nowhere: 16... ♗xb6 17. ♖xb6 (17. axb6 ♖b7 leaves the b6-pawn too weak: 18. ♕d2 ♗f6 19. ♖c2 ♕d7 20. ♖a3 ♖b5!+ intending ... ♖d7) 17... ♗f6! 18. ♖c2 ♖d7 Forcing a further exchange. 19. ♖xd7 ♕xd7 20. ♕xa6 ♖a8 21. ♖e2 ♖fb8!



White must return his extra pawn and fight for equality. Attempting to retain his material advantage with 22. ♖a2?? meets with a severe punishment: 22... ♖xa6! 23. ♖xa6 ♕b5—+

16... ♗e5 17. ♖b6

My opponent was ready to accept a move repetition, but after much consideration I decided to continue fighting.

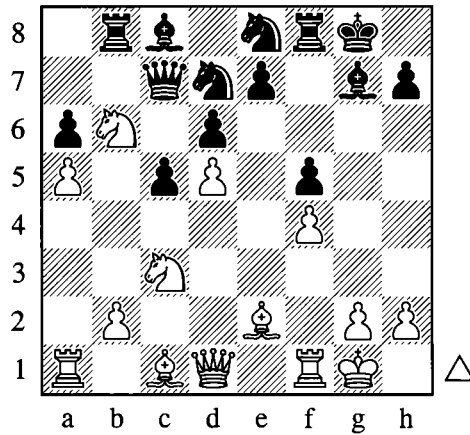


17... ♕f5!?

Now the position becomes extremely sharp. Strictly speaking Black should accept the draw with 17... ♖d7= as after the text move White can obtain some advantage with precise play.

18.f4 ♖d7 19.exf5 gx5

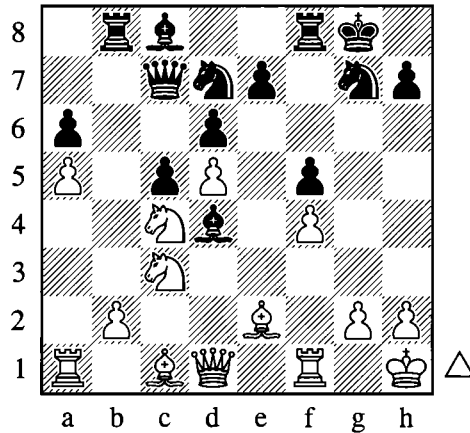
After 19...♗xb6?! 20.axb6 ♜xb6 21.fxg6 hxg6 22.♖h1± Black suffers from the weakness of the pawns on a6, e7 and g6.

**20.♗c4**

20.♗xc8 ♜xc8 21.♙c4 ♗d4† 22.♖h1 is unclear.

20...♗d4† 21.♖h1 ♗g7

Covering the hole on e6.

**22.♙d3**

White could have obtained a pleasant advantage with 22.♙f3 ♗b7 23.♙e3, or 22.♗a4 ♗f6 23.♙e3.

22...♗b7 23.♙e2?

White changes his mind, but he cannot afford such a flagrant waste of time.

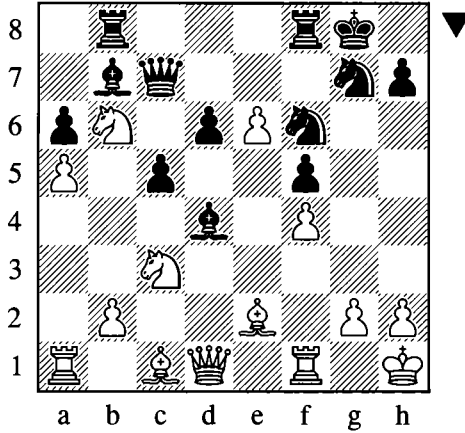
He could have maintained a slight plus by means of 23.♗e3! ♖h8 24.♜e2 ♜c8 25.♙d2, maintaining control and intending to press on the kingside.

23... ♖f6! 24. ♖b6 e6!

Destroying White's center and taking full advantage of the two free tempos.

25. dxe6

Here I found a nice idea.



25... ♗h8!

There is no need to recapture the e6-pawn just yet, so instead Black prepares to launch a decisive kingside attack.

26. ♗c4

26. ♗f3 ♖xe6

26... ♖gh5!

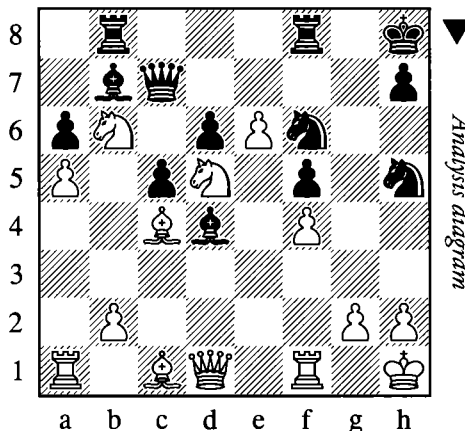
Black abandons the e6-pawn altogether in order to pursue a much juicier target – the white king!

27. ♖d7?

Allowing a beautiful finish. The last chance was:

27. ♖cd5!

Now Black has to be careful:



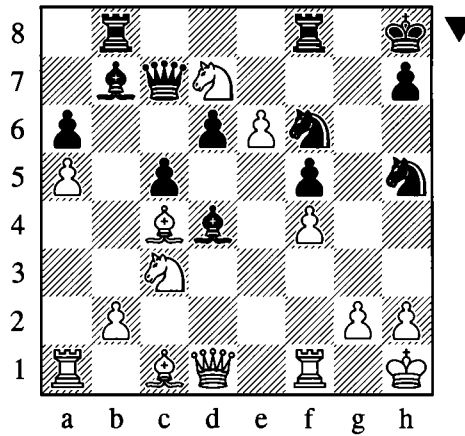
27...♙g7!

27...♙xd5? 28.♘d5 ♖g3† 29.hxg3 ♘xd5 runs into 30.g4! when White succeeds in defending himself.

27...♙xd5 28.♘d5 (28.♙xh5 ♘xb6 29.axb6 ♖g8! 30.♖f3 ♙xb6 31.♖g3 ♖xg3 32.hxg3 ♙c6 33.♙f1 ♖g8干) 28...♙xd5 29.♙xd5 ♖g3†! A strong idea, but it is not quite decisive. 30.hxg3 ♖f6 31.♙f3 ♖xe6 32.♙h5! ♖h6 33.♖a4! ♙f7 34.♖xd4 ♙xh5† 35.♙g1 cxd4 36.♙xd4† ♙g8 37.♖e1 White has enough compensation for the exchange.

28.♖a3 ♖g8 29.♙c2 ♖be8

Black's initiative is extremely dangerous.

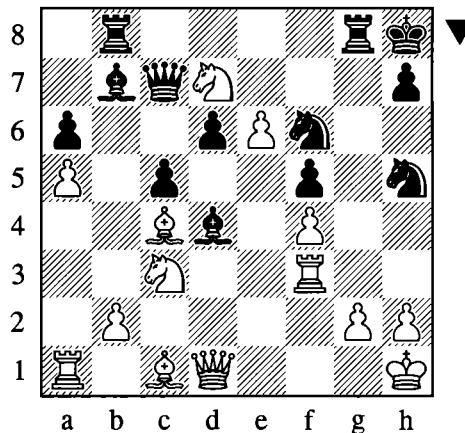


27...♖g8

Another piece joins the attack, and White has no good reply.

28.♖f3

Naturally I was not tempted by this meager material offering. Can you find the winning continuation?



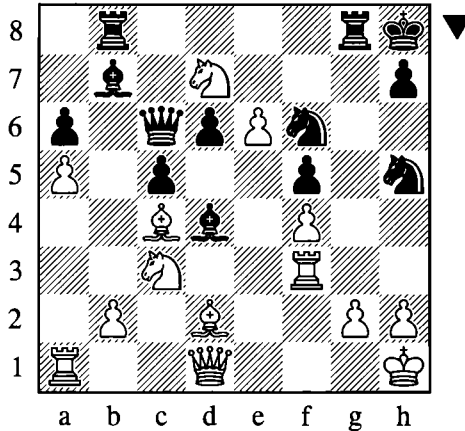
28...♙c6!!

The rook on b8 contributes nothing to the attack, so in the present position there is no point in defending it.

29.♙d2

29.♘xb8 fails to prevent the threat: 29...♗xf3! 30.♖xf3 ♕xf3 31.♙f1 ♜g6-+

29.♘xf6 suffers a similar fate: 29...♗xf3 30.♖xf3 ♕xf3 31.♘xg8 ♜xg8 32.♙f1 ♜g6 There is no good defense against ...♘g3† mating.

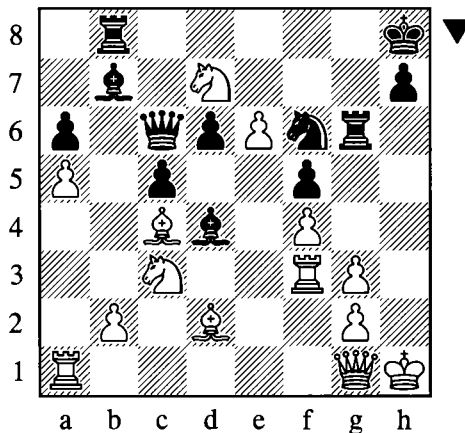


29...♘g3† 30.hxg3

30.♜xg3 ♗xg2† 31.♜xg2 ♕xg2 is mate.

30...♜g6 31.♖g1

Black can win the enemy queen in one of two ways, but there is something even better.



31...♗xf3!

White resigned, as mate is inevitable after 32.gxf3 ♕xf3† and 33...♜h6#.

0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ Minor piece exchanges will tend to ease Black's position, whether by ...g4xf3 in the opening or meeting dxc4 with ...b6 or ...e5 a bit later.
- ❖ Fortune favors the brave... sometimes! In this game I spurned a repetition and was eventually rewarded, although White could have obtained some advantage as shown in the notes to move 22.
- ❖ When attacking the enemy king, it is sometimes necessary to burn your bridges! In this game I left my opponent's pawn on e6 and offered plenty of additional material in order to intensify the threats against my opponent's king.

Game 14

Anatoly Karpov – Bruno Belotti

France 1993

1.d4 f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5

White can also introduce the b6 system via a different move order:

4.f3

White's idea is to bypass the 5.b6 e6 line which will be examined shortly after the present game.

4... g6

Keeping the game in Benko territory.

Of course, if White wishes to use this move order he must also factor in the possibility of 4...e6, transposing to the Blumenfeld.

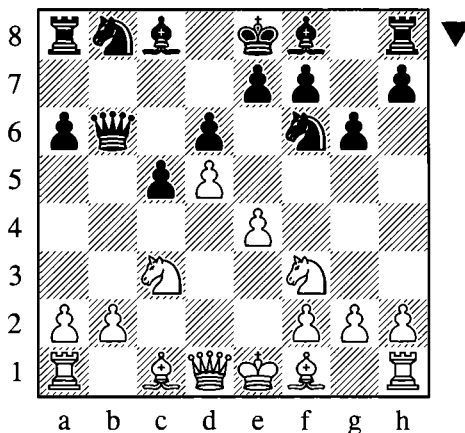
5.cxb5 a6 6.b6

The transposition has occurred. The rather double-edged alternative of 6.c2? is the subject of Game 17.

4...a6 5.b6 d6 6.f3 c3 7.e4

7.f3 followed by d2 would have been a slightly more accurate move order, as explained in the notes to the previous game.

7...g6 8.f3

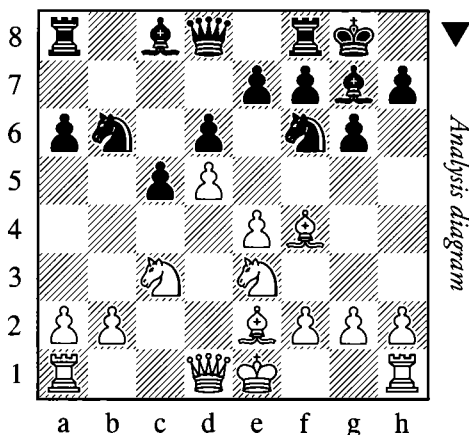


8...♙g7

8...♙g4! would have ensured Black of a desirable minor piece exchange; see the notes to the previous game for supplementary analysis.

9.♘d2 0-0 10.♘c4 ♚c7

In some games Black has preferred to return the queen to her original square:
10...♚d8 11.♙e2 ♘bd7 12.♙f4 ♘b6 13.♘e3



13...a5

Another idea is 13...♘e8!? 14.0-0 ♘c7 when 15.a4! prevented the knight from coming to b5 and maintained an edge for White in Gelfand – Ivanchuk, Belgrade 1995.

14.h4?

Much too aggressive. Clearly the right move was 14.a4!.

14...a4!

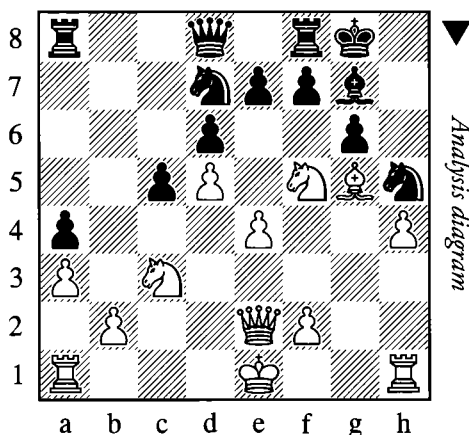
Threatening to undermine the queenside with ...a3.

15.a3 h5 16.g4

White continues his policy of aggression, but his position is not strong enough to justify it.

16...♙a6 17.♙g5 ♘bd7 18.gxh5 ♙xe2 19.♚xe2 ♘xh5 20.♘f5

White seems to have developed a strong attack, but now he gets a cold shower:



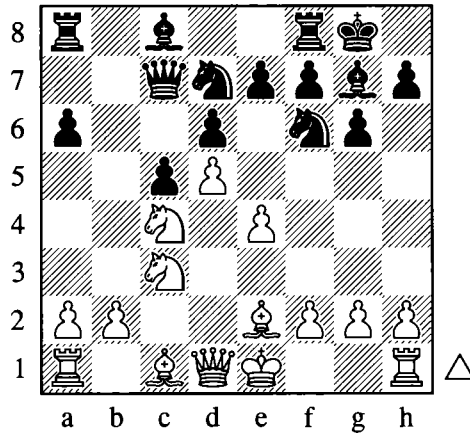
20...♙xc3+!! 21.bxc3 ♖df6 22.♖g1 ♗h7

It turns out that Black's monarch is quite safe.

23.♖g3 ♖xg3 24.♖xg3 ♖h5 25.♖g1 ♗d7+

White is finally paying the price for his cavalier strategy as his own king is unable to find a safe home, Zoler – Alterman, Israel 1992.

11.♙e2 ♖bd7



12.♙f4!

White takes the opportunity to develop his bishop, so that it will not be blocked after his next move.

12...♖b6 13.♖e3!

Avoiding exchanges.

13...♖fd7

This natural move may be a bit too slow. The b6 variation is actually rather tricky to face; Black may not have to worry about an early checkmate, but if he proceeds too cautiously he could easily find himself in a prospectless position with no counterplay. (Just look at Karpov's handling of the white position in the main game for a great illustration of this scenario...)

Black should look for a way to create problems for his opponent, and it seems to me that the best way to accomplish this is:

13...a5!?

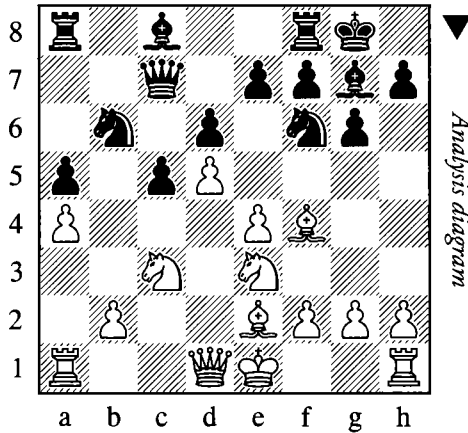
Black must time this move correctly, as in certain positions it will merely create weaknesses in his position. Presently it seems he can get away with it.

14.a4!

As usual this is the critical reply.

After the lame 14.♗c2?! a4 15.0–0 ♙a6 Black is already better.

14.0–0 was played in Chernin – Honos, Hungary 1996, and now once again Black should have played 14...a4! 15.♖c1 ♙a6 with good chances.



14...♙a6

Perhaps Black should investigate 14...c4!?, which was the move I feared during my game with Adams (referenced below). Play might continue 15.0-0 ♙a6 intending ...♘d7-c5 when Black obtains some counterplay. Obviously White has certain trumps as well; the c4-pawn might become weak, and the d4-square is a good outpost for his pieces. Practical tests are needed...

15.♙xa6

White can also consider 15.♙b5!? or 15.0-0, with a slight plus in either case.

15...♗xa6 16.0-0

Another critical position.

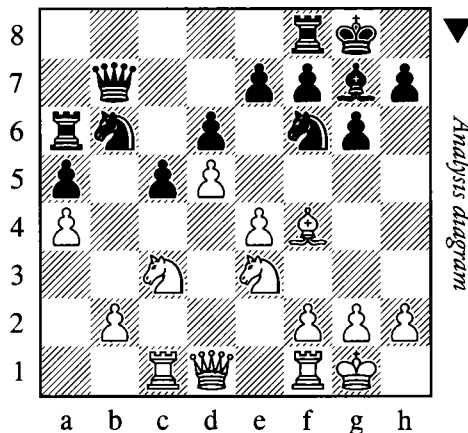
16...♗b7!

The best chance.

16...♗aa8 and 16...♗b8 have both been played, but Black is struggling for counterplay in either case.

17.♗c1

It is too early for White to take control over the c4-square with 17.b3? in view of 17...♘h5!.

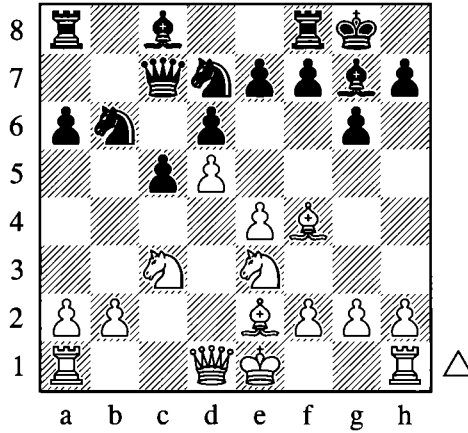


17...♗aa8?

Once again Black should have tried 17...c4! 18.♙g5 ♗c8 with reasonable counterplay.

18.b3!

Having successfully set up his bind on the light squares White stood clearly better in Alterman – Adams, Cap d’Agde (rapid) 1994.



14.♞c1

When I first saw this game of Karpov, it made a strong impression on me and I incorporated the b6 system into my own repertoire. I scored numerous victories with it, including the Adams game noted above. The following encounter was a mere internet blitz game, but still it provides a good example of how Black easily can drift into trouble:

14.0–0 ♖b7

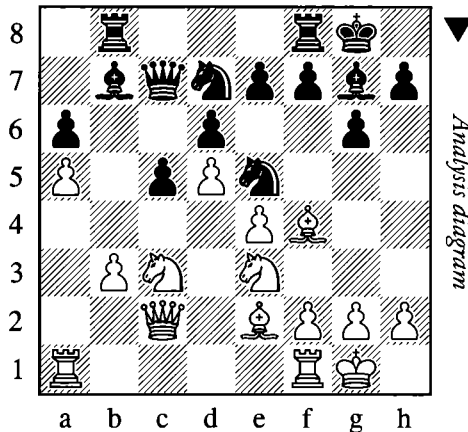
A strange choice, as Black is hardly in a position to prepare ...e6.

15.a4 ♘e5 16.a5!

Increasing White’s space advantage, and taking more squares away from Black’s knights.

16...♘bd7 17.♝c2 ♞ab8 18.b3

Preventing ...c4.



18...♙a8?! 19.♙g3

19.♙xa6! was good enough, but I wanted to keep my opponent restricted.

19...♞b4?

A blunder. Black's best chance would have been 19...c4! 20.bxc4 ♖c5 with a degree of compensation.

20.f4

Black's knight was trapped and he soon lost in B-Alterman – Edrosian, Internet (blitz) 2003.

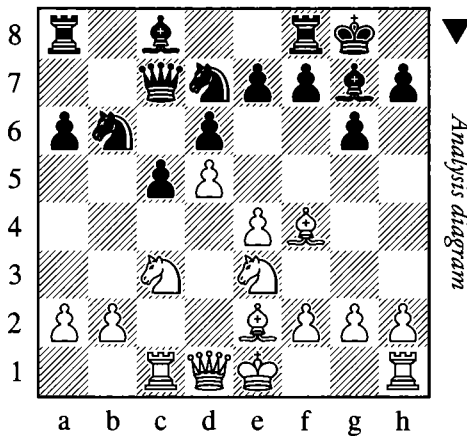
Interestingly he missed one last-gasp attempt to keep himself in the game:

20...c4! 21.bxc4

21.fxex5 cxb3 22.♞d2 ♖xe5 gives Black quite real compensation.

21...♖xc4 22.♖xc4 ♞xc4 23.♙xc4 ♞xc4 24.♞ac1 ♙xc3 25.♞xc3 ♞xe4

White keeps the advantage, but the game goes on.



14...a5 15.a4!

We have already seen that White should virtually always meet ...a5 with this blocking move, which secures b5 as an outpost and a5 as a potential target. Karpov is arguably the greatest positional player of all time, and such a decision would have been second nature to him.

15...♖b8

15...c4? is too risky with the white rook already on c1. 16.♖b5 ♞d8 17.♖xc4 ♖xc4 18.♞xc4 Black can restore material equality with 18...♙xb2, but after 19.0-0 he has problems on the queenside.

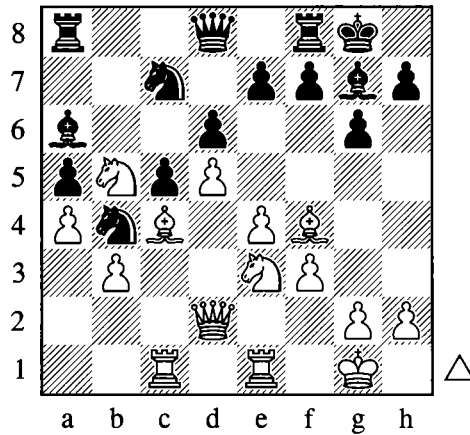
16.♖b5 ♞d8 17.b3 ♖a6 18.0-0 ♖b4

The black knight seems to have found a nice outpost, but is it really doing anything on b4?

19.♞d2 ♙a6 20.♞fd1

Karpov takes his time and brings all his pieces into play.

20...♖d7 21.f3 ♖f6 22.♙c4 ♖e8 23.♞e1 ♖c7



24. $\text{d}3!$

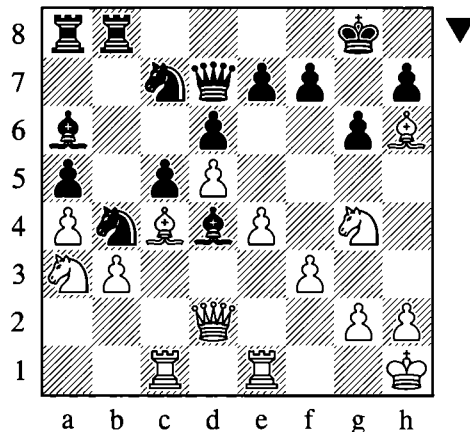
Karpov refuses to allow too many piece exchanges. White has achieved exactly what he was aiming for: a solid blockade on the queenside light squares, and no real prospects of counterplay for Black.

24... $\text{c}4$

After 24... $\text{c}4$ either knight recapture maintains White's advantage, and 25. $\text{bxc}4!$? also has a certain appeal.

25. $\text{c}3$ $\text{d}4$ 26. $\text{c}4$ $\text{f}b8$ 27. $\text{d}g4$

Black is not facing any direct threats, but it is always a bit unpleasant to have pieces floating around in front of one's king.



27... $\text{c}4$ 28. $\text{c}4$ $\text{e}8$ 29. $\text{c}3!$ $\text{c}xe3$

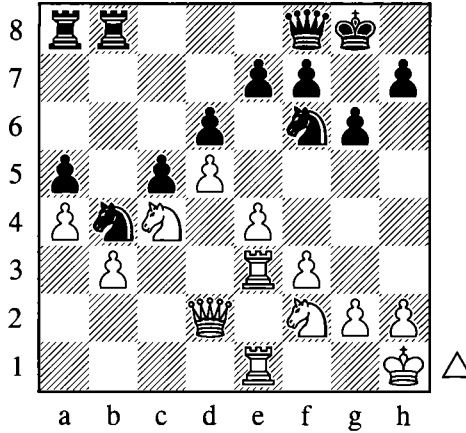
Black would prefer to avoid this exchange, but 29... $\text{c}g7$ 30. $\text{c}h6+$ is a bit unpleasant.

30. $\text{c}xe3$ $\text{c}f6$ 31. $\text{c}f2!?$

31. $\text{c}xf6+$ $\text{exf}6$ is also advantageous for White, but Karpov prefers to avoid exchanging pieces.

31. ♖h6† ♘g7 32. ♖xf7? ♘xf7 33. e5 looks tempting, but after 33... ♗f5! Black is more or less out of danger.

31... ♗d8 32. ♗ce1 ♗f8



33. f4!

The time has come for White to push forwards on the kingside.

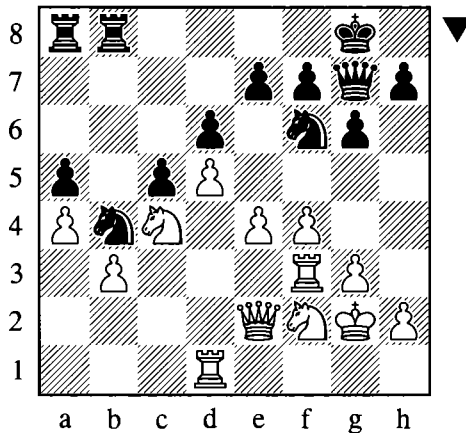
33... ♗g7 34. ♗d1 ♖h5 35. ♖h3 ♖f6 36. ♗e2 ♗h6

Black is trying to make a nuisance of his kingside pieces, but Karpov easily repels them.

37. ♗f3 ♗h5 38. ♖f2 ♗h6 39. g3

39. g4! was possible, but Karpov prefers to creep forwards in his characteristic style.

39... ♗g7 40. ♖g2



40... h5?!

Weakening the kingside. Black should have sat tight, although it is easier to recommend such a course of action than to follow it.

41. ♖h3! ♜d8 42. ♖g5 ♖h7

Exchanging the strong knight, but Black's king loses an important defender.

43. ♖xh7

43.e5 dxe5 44. ♖xe5 ♖xg5 45. fxe5 f5 is less clear.

43... ♜xh7 44. f5! f6

44...g5? is refuted by 45. f6 exf6 46. ♜df1 with a crushing attack.

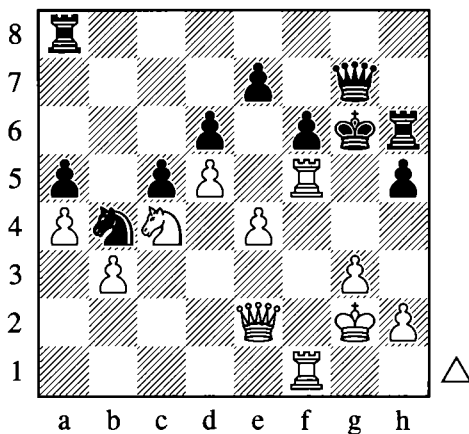
Also after 44... ♜g8 45. ♜df1 it is doubtful that Black will survive.

45. fxe6 ♜xg6

After 45... ♜xg6 46. ♜f5 ♖h6 47. ♜df1 the evaluation is similar.

46. ♜f5 ♜h8 47. ♜df1 ♜h6

Black is on his last legs, and Karpov finishes the game in style.



48. e5! dxe5 49. ♜xe5

There was an even flashier win in 49. ♜g5†! ♜xg5 (49... fxe5 50. ♜e4#) 50. ♖xe5! with mate in a few moves, but Karpov's move is more than good enough.

49... ♜a7 50. d6!

1-0

What we have learned:

- ❖ Black must consider the consequences of the move ...a5 with great care. If White can block the pawn with a4 and then stabilize the queenside (for instance by establishing his minor pieces on b5 and/or c4) he will almost always stand better.

- ❖ If White succeeds in stifling his opponent's queenside play, he should strive to maintain control over the position and gradually turn his attention to the kingside. Karpov's execution of this strategy was exemplary.
- ❖ The difference between an apparently well-placed piece, and a genuinely strong one. The black knight on b4 seemed to be well placed, but it never did anything. By contrast, the white knight on c4 was tying a black rook to the defense of the a5-pawn, while also exerting an influence over the important central squares of d6 and e5.
- ❖ Do not advance pawns in front of your king (40...h5?!) unless there is a genuinely good reason to do so – especially if your opponent is preparing to attack there!

5...e6!? – A Dynamic Reply

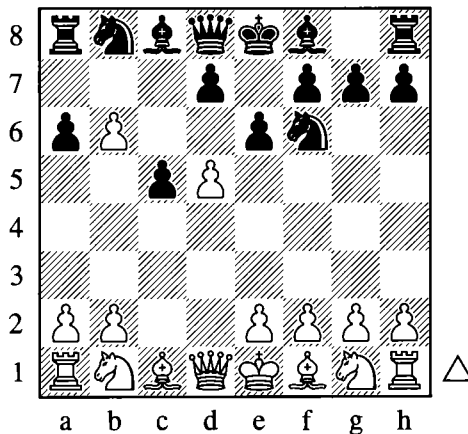
Game 15

Victor Mikhalevski – Boris Alterman

Rapid 1991

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6 e6!?

It almost looks as though Black is confused – is he trying to play a Benko or a Blumenfeld? Actually this hybrid works quite well, and is one of the most principled ways of meeting the 5.b6 line.



6.♘c3 ♘xd5

6...♗xb6 is less attractive as after 7.e4! White keeps control over the d5-square.

7.♘xd5 exd5 8.♗xd5 ♘c6 9.e3?!

My opponent was not prepared for this line and as a result he allowed me to seize the initiative over the next few moves. The more precise 9.♘f3! will be examined in the next game.

9...♙e7 10.♙c4

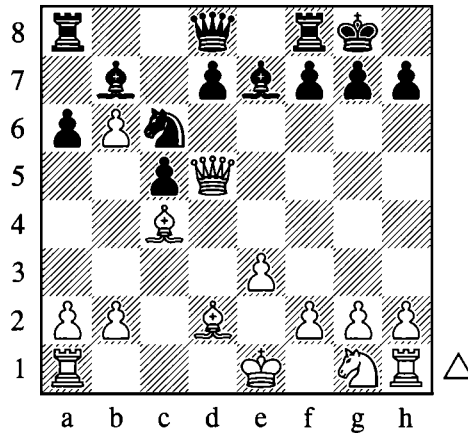
After 10.♘f3 0–0 11.♙e2 ♖b8 12.0–0 ♖xb6 13.♖d1 ♘b4 14.♗e4 d5♣ Black has the better game.

10...0-0 11.♙d2

11.♘f3 is safer, although after 11...♙b7 Black is at least equal.

11...♙b7!

Now White faces unpleasant problems on the a8-h1 diagonal.



12.♙e4

Preparing to block with the bishop on d5. Alternatives are no better:

12.♘f3 ♘a5 13.♙d3 (The queen sacrifice 13.♙xa5!? ♙xd5 14.♙xd5 is interesting, but objectively it can hardly be sound.) 13...♘xc4 14.♙xc4 ♙xb6

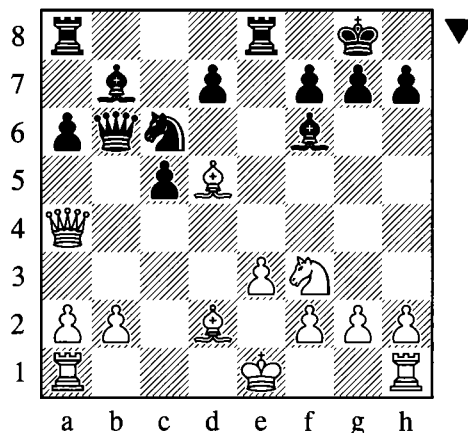
12.♙f3 ♙f6 13.♙d5 ♙xb6 Weser – G. Berg, Mineola 2006.

12.♙f5 g6 13.♙f4 d5 14.♙b3 c4 15.♙d1 ♙xb6 16.♙c3 d4 M. Horvath – Bagonyai, Balatonbereny 1993.

12...♙f6 13.♙d5 ♗e8 14.♙a4 ♙xb6

White is in trouble on the queenside... and the rest of the board as well!

15.♘f3



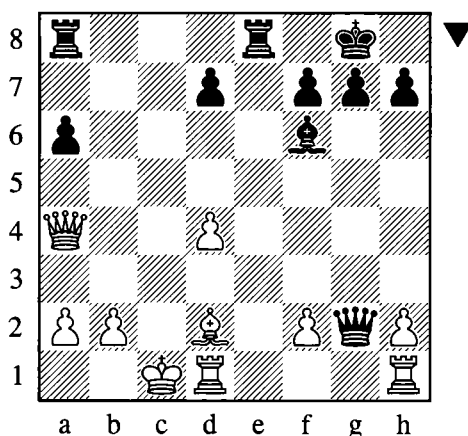
15...♗d4!

White has no good defense, and he soon goes down.

16.♙xb7 ♖xb7 17.♗xd4 ♖xg2!

A decisive intermediate move. The rest is clear.

18.0-0-0 cxd4 19.exd4



19...♖e4! 20.♙c3

Or 20.♖c2 ♖ac8 21.♙c3 ♖xc3! 22.bxc3 ♙g5† winning.

20...♙g5†

0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ White's pawn moves to b6 on move 5, but Black did not capture it until move 14! So remember: if you have the ability to capture an enemy pawn or piece (such as a loose pawn, or a knight trapped in the corner) at any moment of your choosing, you might do well to delay it in order to seize the initiative in another part of the board.
- ❖ The combination of an exposed queen and uncastled king proved catastrophic for White. Try not to ignore these and other fundamental principles; and if your opponent violates them, look for a way to punish him!

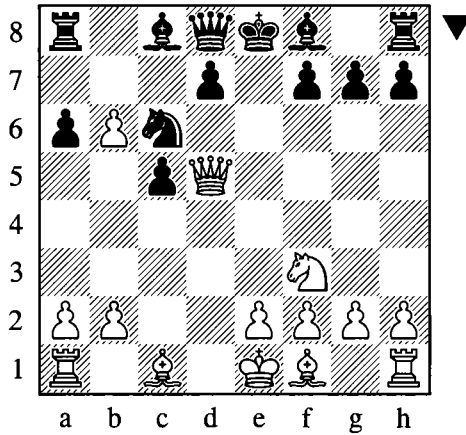
Game 16

Javier Campos Moreno – Ruben Felgaer

Andorra 2004

1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.b6 e6 6.♗c3 ♗xd5 7.♗xd5 exd5 8.♖xd5 ♗c6 9.♗f3!

Much more challenging than the slow 9.e3 of the previous game. White keeps the c1-h6 diagonal open for his bishop, and sets up the awkward threat of ♗f3-e5.

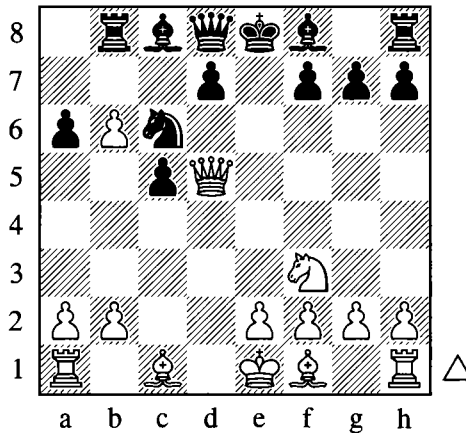


9...Bb8!

I am proud to say I was the first to play this move in 1988, having analyzed it earlier that same year. It was probably my first serious contribution to opening theory.

After the slow 9...Qe7? 10.Ne5 0-0 11.Nxc6 dxc6 12.Wxd8 Bxd8 Black does not have enough counterplay for his ruined pawn structure. One high-level game continued 13.Qf4 Qf6 14.Bd1 (14.Qc7!? Qxb2 15.Qxd8 Qxa1 16.Qc7+-) 14...Bd4 15.e3 Bb4 16.b3 with a serious advantage for White, Karpov – Christiansen, Wijk aan Zee 1993.

9...Wxb6?! is also dubious in view of 10.Ne5 Nxe5 11.Wxa8 Qd8 12.Wd5 when Black has insufficient compensation for the exchange.



10.e4!

Several other moves have been tested, but nowadays the text has emerged as the front runner.

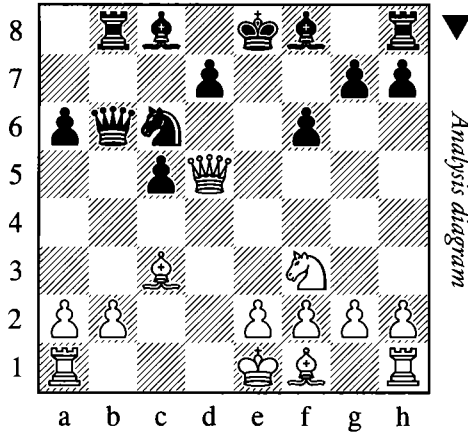
10.Qd2 might lead to a transposition to the main line after 10... Bxb6 11.e4 Qe7 12.Qc3 0-0 13.Qc4 d6 14.Wh5 Qf6. Other moves might lead to trouble for White.

10. ♗g5?! f6!

10... ♜xb6 is well met by 11. ♘e5!

10... ♗e7 11. ♘e5 0-0 leads to simplifications: 12. ♘xc6 dxc6 13. ♜xd8 ♗xd8 14. ♗xd8 ♜xd8 15. e3 ♜xb6 16. b3 ♗e6 17. ♜c1 a5 18. ♜xc5 a4 The ending was drawn in Ramma – Alterman, Dimitrovgrad 1988.

11. ♗d2 ♜xb6 12. ♗c3



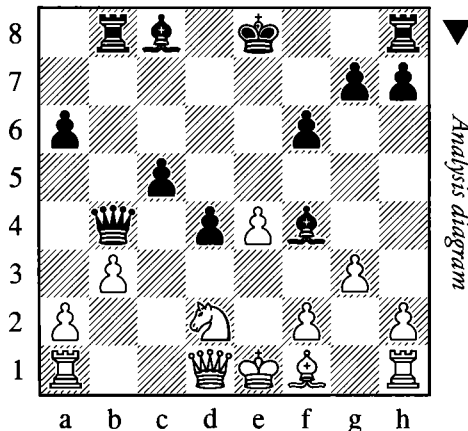
12... ♘b4!

I missed this strong move in the game V. Mikhalevski – Alterman, Israel 1991.

13. ♜d1

Also after 13. ♜d2 d5 14. a3 d4! Black has the advantage.

13... d5 14. e4 d4 15. ♗xb4 ♜xb4† 16. ♘d2 ♗d6 17. b3 ♗f4 18. g3

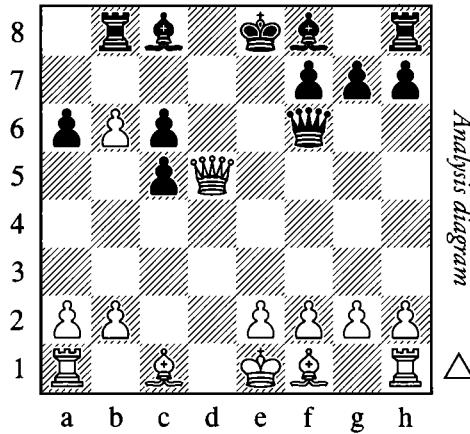


18... ♗g4! 19. ♗e2 ♗xe2 20. ♜xe2 d3! 21. ♜xd3 ♜d8 22. ♜xd8† ♗xd8 23. gxf4 ♗e7
Black soon won in Ivanisevic – Degraeve, Bled 2002.

10. ♘e5

This principled move forces complications which are by no means unfavorable for Black...

10...♖f6 11.♘xc6 dxc6



12.♖e4†

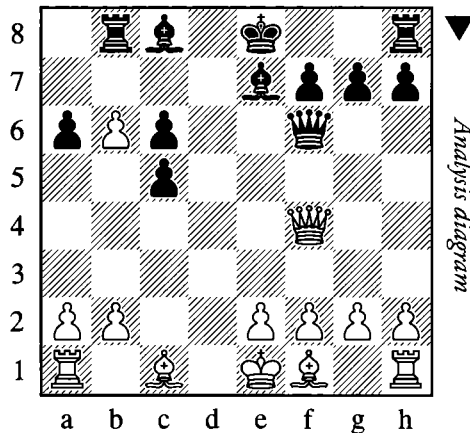
12.♖f3!? deserves some attention, but Black is doing fine after 12...♙e7 13.♙d2 ♖xb2 14.♙c3 ♖xb6 15.♙xg7 ♗g8 16.♙c3 c4 with active play, Deiller – Degraeve, Metz 2000.

The text move is the main line which I analyzed in 1988. At first it looked like quite promising, but at the end I concluded that White's slow development was at least as significant as Black's damaged queenside structure.

12...♙e7 13.♖f4

13.♙d2 is no better: 13...♖xb2 14.♗b1 ♖xa2 15.e3?? f5 16.♙c4 ♖xd2† 17.♙xd2 fxe4 18.♗b3 ♗f8 0–1 Levin – Ellers, Schwerin 1999.

When I first analyzed the text move I thought that Black would be forced to exchange queens, but later a vastly superior alternative was found.



13...♗xb6!

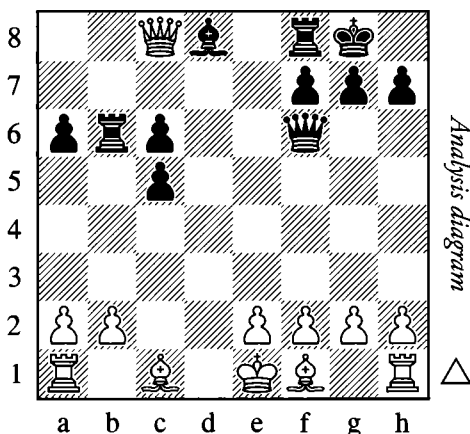
Offering a piece sacrifice.

14.♖c7?

This only leads to further trouble. White should try something else, although his position is already difficult and he will almost certainly have to shed the b-pawn.

14...♔d8! 15.♖xc8 0-0!

White is a piece up... and practically losing by force!



16.f3

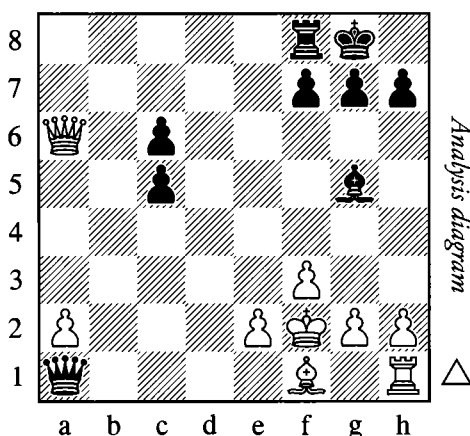
Other moves are even worse:

16.♖b1? fails to achieve its objective: 16...♗xb2! Threatening a lethal check on a5. 17.♖xd8 ♖c3† 18.♖d2 ♖xd2† 0-1 Klima – Hudecek, Czech Republic 2009.

16.♔d2 ♗xb2 17.♗d1 ♗xd2 18.♖xa6 ♗xd1† 19.♔xd1 ♖a1† 20.♔c2 ♔f6 21.e3 ♗d8 22.♔c4 ♖c3† 0-1 Sevian – Averjanov, Voronezh 2000.

16.♖h3 ♗xb2 17.♖a3 ♗b5 18.e3 ♔a5† 19.♔e2 ♖xa1 0-1 Svenninggaard – Mellado Trivino, Calvia 2005.

16...♗xb2 17.♔xb2 ♖xb2 18.♖xa6 ♖xa1† 19.♔f2 ♔g5!



20.g3?!

The best chance was 20.♖c4 as in Djurhuus – K. Berg, Oslo 1992, although after 20...♗e8 White is still in deep trouble.

20...♙e3†! 21.♗g2 ♖d4 22.♗d3 ♜d8

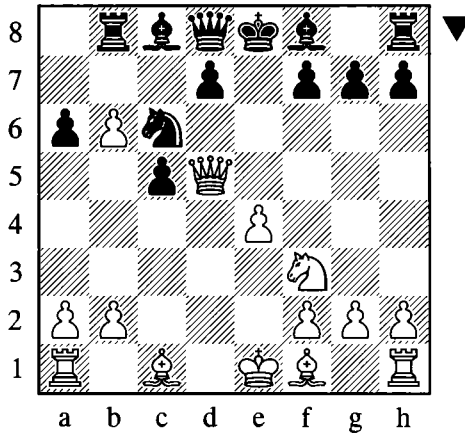
White is tied up in knots on the kingside, and the passed c-pawn will decide the game.

23.h4

Another game ended 23.f4 c4 24.♗xd4 ♜xd4 25.♗f3 c3 26.♗xe3 ♜d1 0–1 Choroszej – Malec, Warsaw 2008.

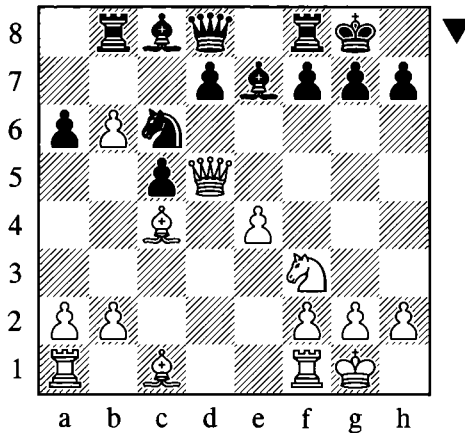
23...c4 24.♗f5 c3 25.h5 ♗d5 26.♗b1 ♗d2

White resigned in Kozakov – Rodriguez Guerrero, Granada 2006.



10...♙e7 11.♙c4 0–0 12.0–0

12.♘g5 led nowhere after 12...♗e8 13.0–0 ♜xb6 14.b3 ♘b4 with a fine position for Black, Leuw – Nikolaidis, Heraklio 1996.



12...♜xb6 13.♗h5

13.♜d1?! runs into a strong reply: 13...♘a5! 14.♗d3 ♘xc4 15.♗xc4 ♙b7 16.♗d3 ♜d6 17.♗e2 ♜xd1† 18.♗xd1 ♙xe4 19.♘e5 ♙f6 20.♙f4 d6 0–1 Lada – Averjanov, Polanica Zdroj 2001.

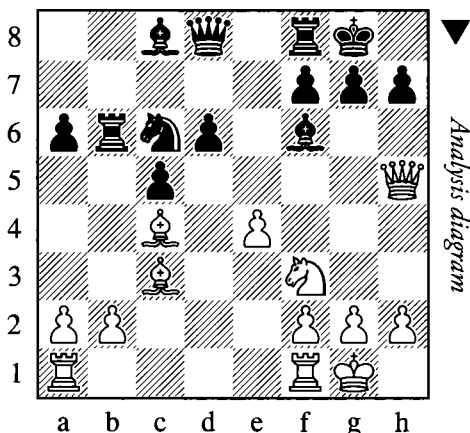
13.♙d2

Black can equalize against this move, but he has to be precise.

13...d6 14.♔c3 ♕f6!

14...♕g4 15.♞ad1 ♜b4 16.♕xb4 ♞xb4 17.b3 gave White a slight pull in Dreev – Cramling, Gibraltar 2005.

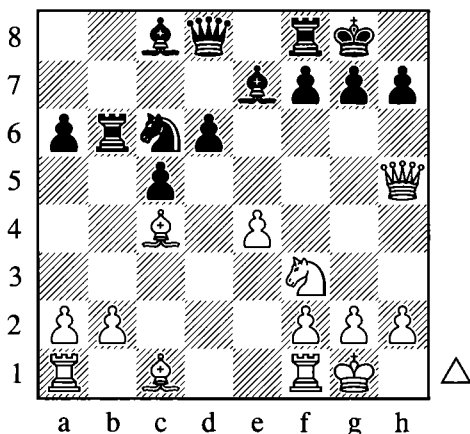
15.♞h5



15...♕e6! 16.♕xe6 fxe6 17.♞ad1 ♞e7

With a balanced position, Erdos – Balogh, Dresden 2007.

13...d6



Just as in the previous note, Black's main objective is to neutralize the bishop on c4 by positioning his own bishop on e6.

14.b3

Or 14.♞d1 ♕e6! 15.♕xe6 fxe6 16.♞g4 ♞c8= Knaak – Hertneck, Baden-Baden 1992.

14...♕e6! 15.♕xe6 fxe6 16.♞g4 ♞c8 17.♕b2 ♕f6

There is also 17... e5 18.♞xc8 ♞xc8 19.♜d2 ♜d4 20.♜c4 ♞b5 21.♞ae1 a5 22.♕c3 ♞a8 23.♜b2

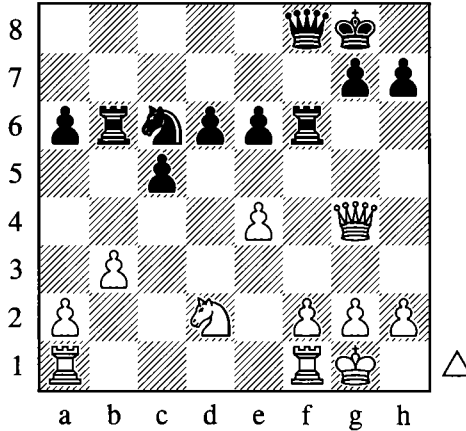
♙g5 24.♜h1 ♖b7 when Black obtained promising counterplay on the queenside and in the center, Shabalov – Bartholomew, Philadelphia 2007.

18.♙xf6 ♖xf6 19.♘d2

Or 19.♗ad1 ♜f8 with an equal game, Smirnov – Chuprov, Alushta 2008.

19...♜f8!

From this square the queen carries out both active and defensive duties.



20.f4

20.♘c4 ♖b7 21.f4 ♖bf7 22.g3 d5 23.♘d2 ♘d4 was also balanced in Gleizerov – Tregubov, Krasnoyarsk 2003.

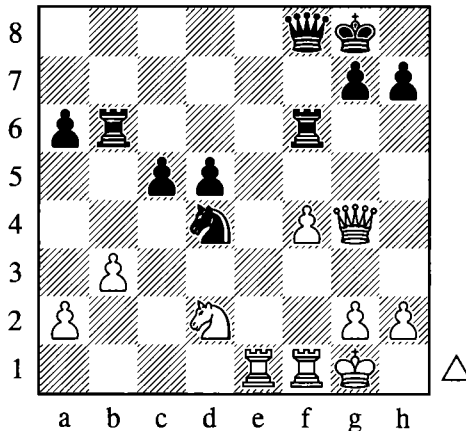
20...d5!

Black's pawn center is strong enough to begin advancing cautiously.

21.♗ae1 ♘d4 22.exd5

Opening the e-file for the white rook... but also the third rank for the black ones!

22...exd5

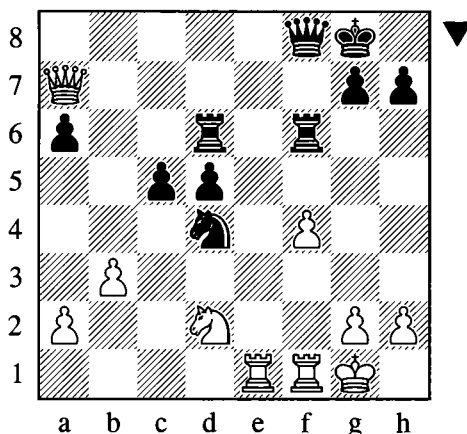


23. ♖d7?!

The start of a mistaken plan. White should have preferred 23.g3 ♜be6 with equality.

23... ♞bd6 24. ♖a7??

Continuing on the same unfortunate path. White should have either admitted his mistake by retreating to g4 or tried 24. ♖e8 when he should be able to hold the endgame.

**24... ♘e6!**

White must have overlooked this retreat. Now his queen is trapped, and there is nothing he can do.

25.f5 ♜f7 26. ♖xf7† ♖xf7 27.fxe6 ♖e7
0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ The analysis of 10. ♘e5 revealed a fascinating battle between White's superior pawn structure and Black's dynamic play based on his lead in development. Such situations are often difficult to evaluate, and may demand extensive home analysis.
- ❖ Retreating moves (24... ♘e6!) are often the easiest to overlook. Doing so cost Campos Moreno his queen in the above game – make sure the same thing does not happen to you!
- ❖ Think very carefully before sending a piece alone into enemy territory – especially the queen.

Sidelines

In this final part of the chapter we will address a few setups which have fallen out of fashion, yet still must not be ignored.

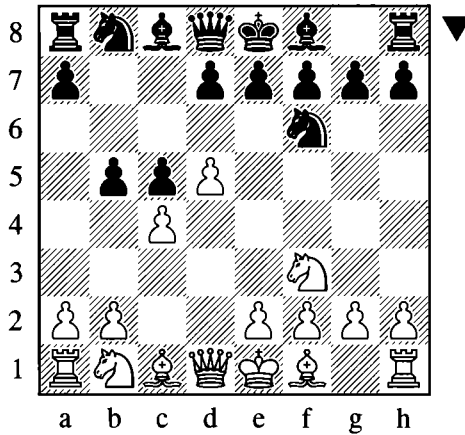
Game 17

Matthew Sadler – Zvonimir Mestrovic

Cannes 1995

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.♖f3

With this move White declines the gambit pawn for the moment, although he may still decide to capture it later.



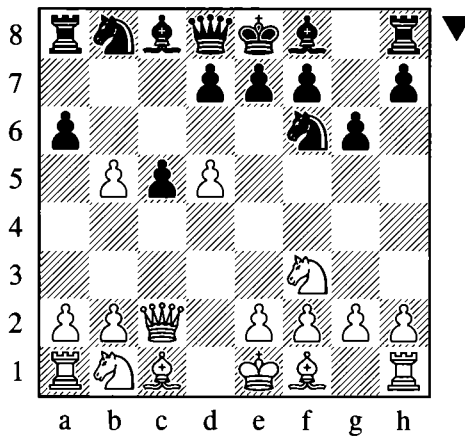
4...g6

4...bxc4 is a bit too cooperative, and after 5.♖c3 intending e4 (or ♖d2 first) White obtains easy development.

Black has a serious alternative in 4...e6 transposing to the Blumenfeld Gambit, for which see Chapter 2.

5.cxb5 a6 6.♞c2!?

This move has some tricky points. Alternatives include 6.b6 transposing to the 5.b6 line, and 6.bxa6 accepting the gambit.

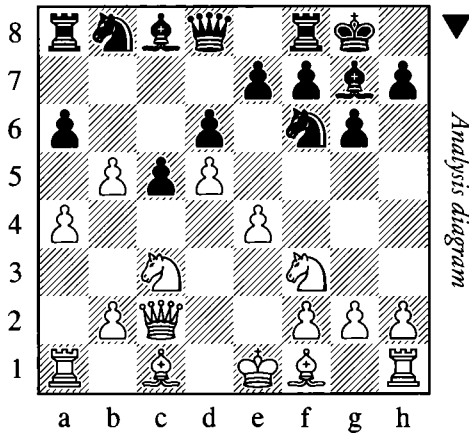


6...♙g7!

6...axb5 is possible, but after 7.e4 ♖a5† 8.♙d2 ♚a4 (8...b4 9.♘a3!) 9.♚xa4 bxa4 10.♘c3 White has a promising lead in development, Bareev – Topalov, Sarajevo 2000.

6...d6?!

This move is too slow, and allows White to arrange his pieces in the optimal fashion.
7.e4 ♙g7 8.♘c3 0–0 9.a4!



9...e6!?

Aiming for central counterplay, but it proves insufficient.

9...axb5 10.♙xb5 ♙a6 11.0–0 ♙xb5 12.♘xb5 ♘a6 13.♙d2 ♚b6 14.♙c3 ♜fb8 15.♘d2 ♚d8 16.♘c4 Black had a nightmare position with no compensation in Alterman – Kovtun, Voroshilovgrad 1986.

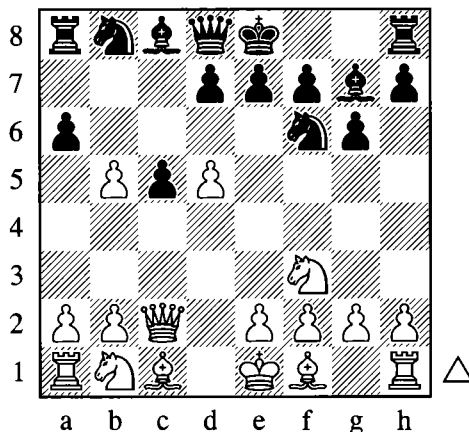
10.dxe6 ♙xe6 11.♙e2 axb5 12.♙xb5 ♘a6

12...d5!?

13.0–0 ♘b4 14.♚e2 ♜a7 15.♙c3 ♚e7 16.♜ac1 ♙b3?!

The bishop soon gets into trouble...

17.♙g5 ♚e6 18.♘d2 ♙c2 19.♙c4 ♚e8 20.b3 ♜e7 21.♙xf6 ♙xf6 22.♘d5 ♘xd5 23.♙xd5 1–0 Alterman – Ater, Israel 1991.



7. ♖xc5?

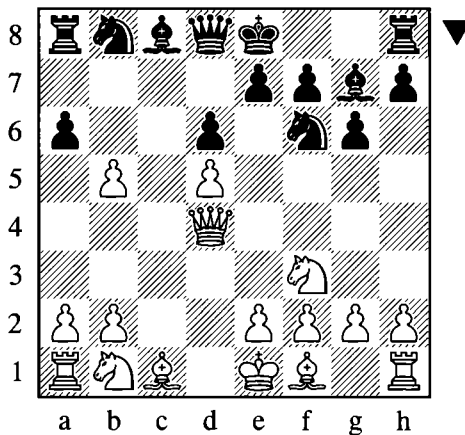
It is risky to give Black such a big development advantage. Correct was 7. e4 0–0 8. ♖c3 and now Black can play either 8...e6 immediately, or 8...♗b7 intending ...e6 on the next turn, with mutual chances.

7...d6

Another game continued 7...0–0 8. ♖c3 d6 9. ♖c4 axb5 10. ♖xb5 ♖bd7 11. e3 ♗b7 12. ♖c2 ♖xd5 13. ♗d2 ♖b6 14. ♗e2 ♖fc8 15. ♖b1 ♖c5 16. 0–0 ♗a6 17. a4 ♖xa4 with equality, I. Sokolov – Khalifman, Wijk aan Zee 1995.

8. ♖d4

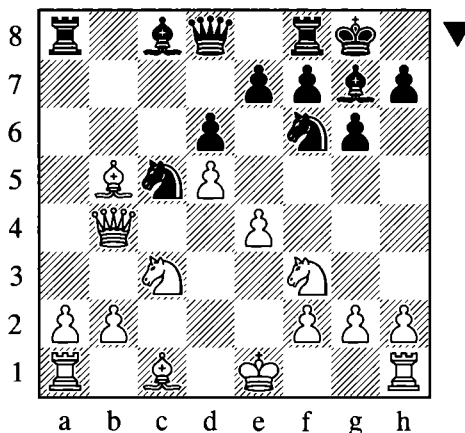
After 8. ♖c4 axb5 9. ♖xb5† ♗d7 10. ♖b3 ♖a6 11. e3 ♖c5 Black had great counterplay in Hauschild – Degterev, e-mail 2005.

**8...0–0 9. e4 ♖bd7**

Another game continued 9...♗b7 10. ♖b4 axb5 11. ♖c3 ♖a6 12. ♖xb5 ♖c5 with a powerful initiative for Black, Braun – Mainka, Hoeckendorf 2004.

10. ♖c3 ♖c5 11. ♖b4 axb5 12. ♗xb5?

Sadler must have overlooked the stunning combination that follows. Can you find it?



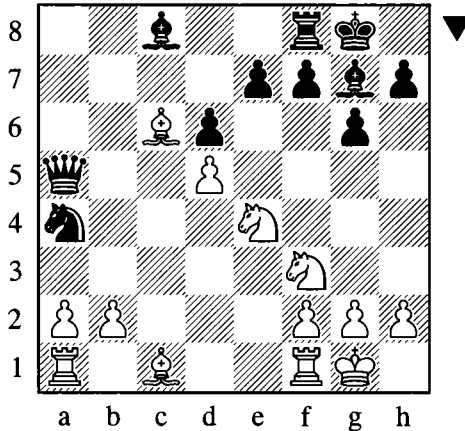
12...♖fxe4!! 13.♗xe4

Other moves would leave Black with massive compensation for a pawn, but the text allows Black to reveal the point of his combination.

13...♞a4!

Brilliant! Now White must give up his queen.

14.♞xa4 ♗xa4 15.0-0 ♞a5 16.♙c6



Up to this point Mestrovic has played magnificently, and from here either capture on b2 would have given him a comfortably winning position. Unfortunately he went astray and Sadler gradually managed to turn the game around – a testament to his tenacity. The rest of the game is not so important for us, but the opening phase contained some great moments.

What we have learned:

- ❖ Pawn-grabbing is a risky strategy in the opening, especially when it involves exposing one's queen.
- ❖ White's uncastled king was also a factor, which helped to facilitate Black's tactical combination.
- ❖ Despite White's errors, Black had to show tremendous ingenuity with moves like 12...♖fxe4!! and 13...♞a4!. So if you are going to play the Benko or any other gambit, you need to have your brain switched on at all times!
- ❖ Grandmasters and other strong players will never stop fighting, even in seemingly hopeless positions. If you ever obtain a winning position against one, be sure to take nothing for granted and remain focused until the end of the game.

The next game sees a change of strategy for White, who opts for a double-edged policy of advancing his pawns in the center.

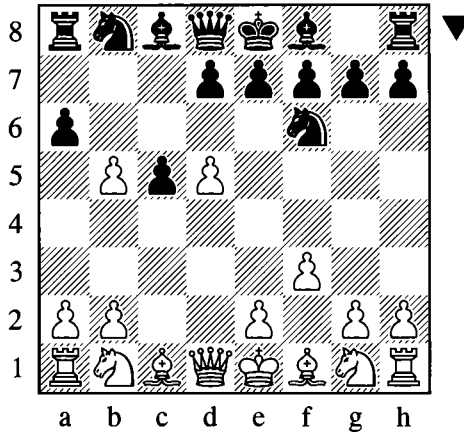
Game 18

Jyrki Lehtosaari – Johan Ehrnrooth

Correspondence 1993

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.f3!?

This move is rare nowadays, but it is quite playable.



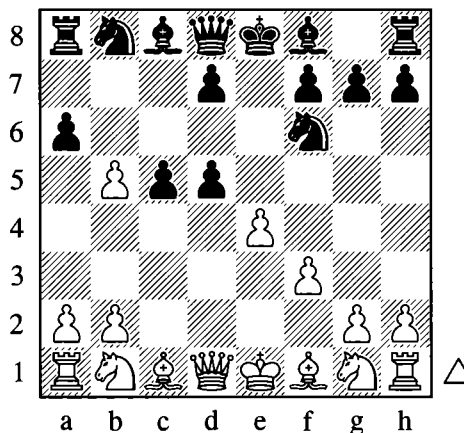
5...e6!

The strongest response, attacking the center and fighting for a development advantage. The alternatives are less attractive:

5...axb5 is another main line, but after 6.e4 ♖a5† 7.♙d2 b4 8.♘a3! d6 9.♘c4 I believe White's chances are slightly higher.

5...g6 6.e4 d6 7.♘c3 (7.♘a3!? is another idea, intending ♘e2-c3) 7...♙g7 8.♙g5!? 0-0 9.a4 h6 10.♙e3 e6 (10...axb5 11.♙xb5 ♙a6 12.♘ge2±) 11.dxe6 ♙xe6 (11...fxe6 12.e5 dxe5 13.♙xc5±) 12.♘ge2 Korchnoi – Alterman, Be'ersheva 1992. White intends to improve his position with ♘f4 and ♙c4, and Black faces a difficult battle to demonstrate compensation.

6.e4 exd5



7.e5!

This aggressive option is the main line. Now the position becomes sharp and dangerous for both players.

A playable, though less ambitious alternative is:

7.exd5 ♗d6!

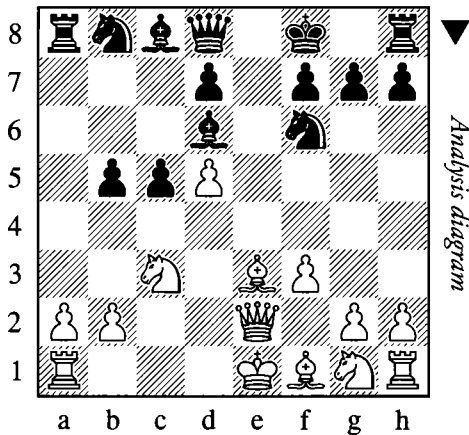
The earliest database reference with this move is from 1991, but I was able to find it over the board three years prior, in a game against Odeev in the 1988 Soviet Youth Team Championship.

8.♖e2†

White should take the opportunity to disrupt his opponent's castling.

8...♔f8 9.♖c3 axb5 10.♗e3

Black is fine after 10.♖xb5 ♖a6! or 10.♖xb5 ♗a6 11.♖d2 ♖e7† 12.♔f2 ♗e5!.



10...c4!

Khalifman improves on his own play! Earlier in the same year he preferred 10...♗a6, but after 11.♖d2 c4 12.a3 ♖a5 13.♗d1 b4 14.axb4 ♗xb4 15.♖h3 d6 16.♗e2 ♖bd7 17.0–0 White achieved decent coordination and stood slightly better in I. Sokolov – Khalifman, Linares 1995. Ironically Khalifman drew this game and lost the later one, despite improving in the opening.

11.♔f2

11.♖xb5 seems risky, and after 11...♖a5† 12.♖c3 ♖xd5 13.♖xc4 (13.♗d2 ♖b4 is good for Black) 13...♖xc3 14.bxc3 ♖c6 15.♔f2 ♗a6 16.♖b3 ♗b8 Black had fine compensation in Pahlen – Van der Ploeg, e-mail 2001.

11...♗a5!

Excellent use of the rook!

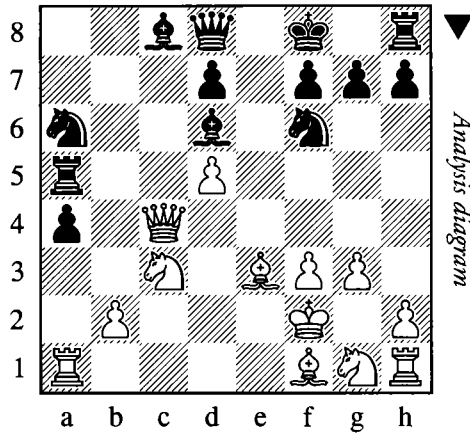
Bareev points out that 11...b4? 12.♖b5 is good for White while 11...♗a6 12.a3 is unclear.

12.g3 ♖a6 13.a4 bxa4

13...♖c7!? was recommended by Bareev. Black is indeed doing fine here, but the text move is also good; it was only later that Black went wrong.

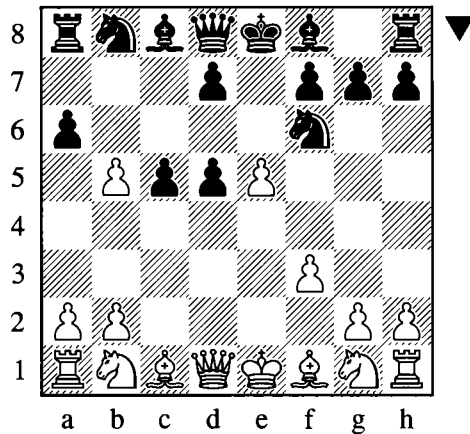
14.♖xc4

We have been following the game Bareev – Khalifman, Kazan 1995. Khalifman developed his bishop on b7, but a much better option was:



14...♖b4!

Intending ...♙a6, with excellent play for Black.



7...♙e7!

It is essential to insert this move, otherwise White would simply take on d5 with the queen.

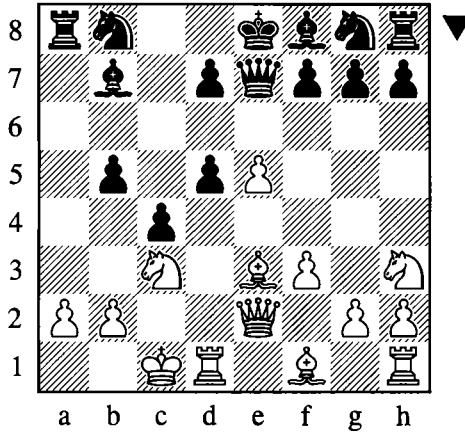
8.♙e2 ♖g8 9.♖c3 ♙b7 10.♖h3 c4 11.♙e3

The main line, at least in terms of popularity.

11.♖f4!? has been tried in a few high-level games recently. The critical continuation is: 11...♙c5 12.♖fxd5!? Sacrificing a piece. 12...♙xd5 13.♙e3 ♙b4 14.a3 ♙a5 15.♙d2 ♙e6 16.♖d5 ♙d8 17.♙xc4 ♙a7 18.♙c1 This position was reached in Nakamura – Vachier Lagrave, Cap d'Agde 2008. Here Black should have removed the strong knight with 18...♙xd5 as recommended by Golubev, and after 19.♙xd5 axb5 20.♙xb5 ♖e7 it is not clear if White has enough compensation for the piece.

11...axb5 12.0–0–0

This position has been tested in numerous grandmaster games, but so far the strongest move has hardly ever been played.



12...♠a6!

Kudos to Ehrnrooth for being the only player (at least according to my database) ever to have found this strong move.

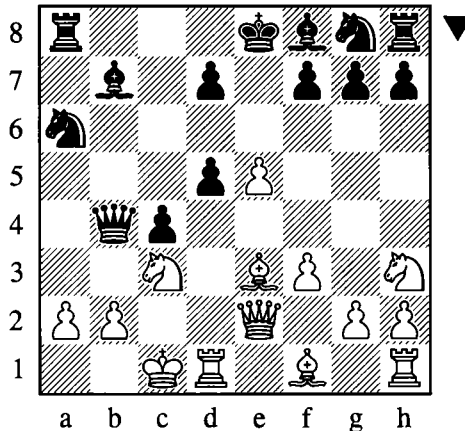
The most popular continuation has been 12...♞b4, although in Lalic – Alterman, Pula 1997, I was under pressure and was happy to escape with a draw. Other moves are inferior, for instance:

12...♞xe5? 13.f4 ♞e7 14.♞xd5! d6 15.♞xb5 ♠f6 16.♞d2± Dlugy – Alburtt, Los Angeles 1991.

12...b4?! 13.♠b5 (13.♠xd5↑) 13...♞xe5 14.♞e1 (14.♠c7†!±) 14...d6 15.♠c7† ♠d7 16.♠xa8 ♠xa8 17.♞d1! ♠c6 18.♠g5 (18.♠a7+-) 18...♞f5 19.g4 ♞g6 20.♞d4 Black was in trouble and soon went down in Lobron – Kuntz, Cannes 1992.

13.♠xb5 ♞b4 14.♠c3

In the event of 14.♠d6† ♠xd6 15.exd6 Black can get away with 15...♞xd6!?



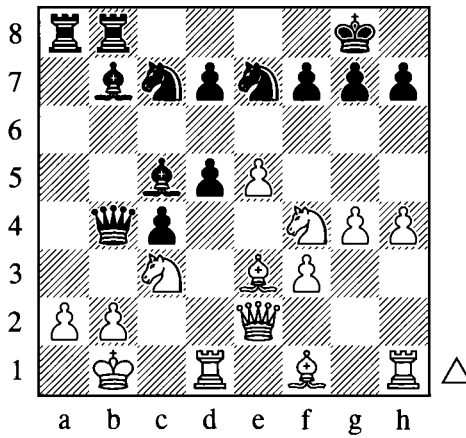
14...♙c5! 15.♘f4 ♘c7 16.♖b1?

Much too slow.

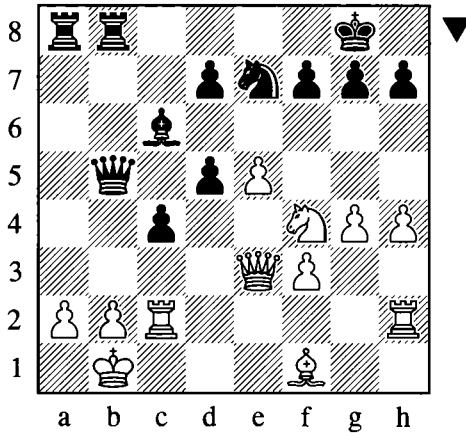
The best continuation was 16.♘fxd5! ♙xd5 17.♞xd5! ♙xe3† 18.♞xe3 ♘xd5 19.♘xd5 ♞a5 with unclear play.

16...♘e7 17.g4 0-0 18.h4 ♞fb8

From here Black systematically exchanges a few defensive pieces and simply bludgeons his way through on the queenside.



19.♞h2 ♘b5! 20.♘xb5 ♞xb5 21.♞d2 ♙c6 22.♞c2 ♙xe3 23.♞xe3



23...♞a5!

And just like that, White's queenside collapses.

24.a3 ♞b3 25.♞c1 ♞xa3

0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ The 5.f3 variation is sharp and dangerous – for both sides!
- ❖ In a razor-sharp position just one mistake (16.♖b1?) can be fatal.
- ❖ Attacking does not always have to involve flashy sacrifices. In this game Black simply positioned his heavy pieces on the open files, exchanged off a few of White's defensive pieces, and broke through almost effortlessly.

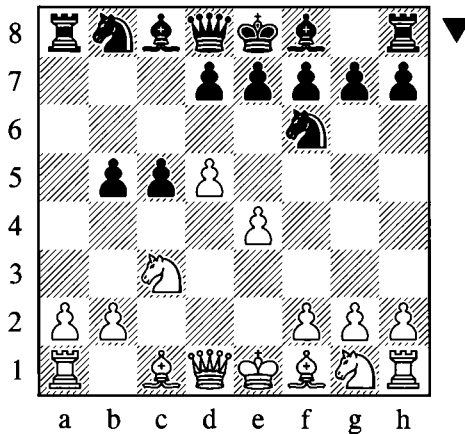
The next game features an even more aggressive system from White.

Game 19**Michael Hochstrasser – Dejan Pikula**

Pontresina 2000

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 b5 4.cxb5 a6 5.♘c3 axb5 6.e4

This is one of White's most direct attacking systems against the Benko. Black must navigate the opening carefully, but if he succeeds in doing so he can expect to obtain a fine position.

**6...b4**

6...♗a5 is less reliable: 7.e5 b4 8.♘b5 ♘e4 9.♙c4 ♙a6 10.♗d3 b3† 11.♖e2! ♙xb5 12.♙xb5 ♗xa2 13.♗xa2 bxa2 14.♗xe4 a1=♗ 15.♘f3 White had a huge initiative for the exchange in Timoscenko – Adams, London 1992.

7.♘b5 d6

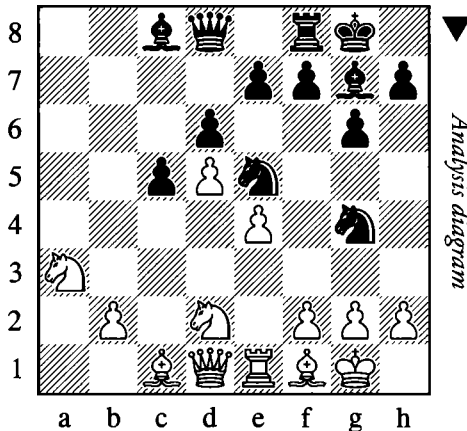
Obviously Black should not even think about touching the e4-pawn.

8.♙f4

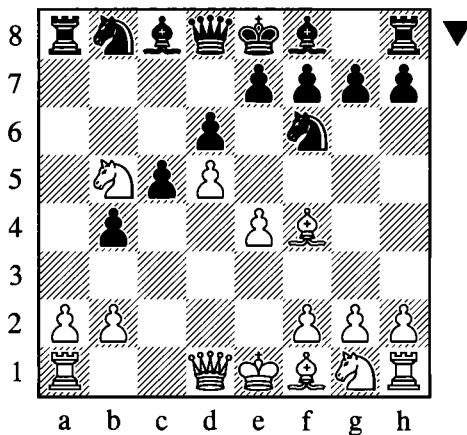
This is White's traditional continuation, although nowadays it is widely acknowledged that Black's next move is a more than adequate counter. White should probably prefer one of the alternatives, not that they promise him anything special...

8.♙c4 ♖bd7 9.♗f3 ♖b6 10.♙d3 g6 Black will soon complete his development to reach a comfortable middlegame.

8.♗f3 g6 9.♙c4 ♙g7 10.0-0 0-0 11.♞e1 ♖bd7 is also fine for Black. The following game provides an interesting example of his chances: 12.a4 bxa3 13.♞xa3 ♞xa3 14.♗xa3 ♗g4!? 15.♙f1 ♗de5 16.♗d2



16...♗xf2! 17.♙xf2 ♗g4† 18.♙e2 e6! 19.♞b3 exd5 20.h3?! (White should have preferred 20.♞xd5 although 20...♙e6 gives Black plenty of play.) 20...dxe4 21.♗xe4? ♞e8 22.♙d2 ♞a5† 23.♙c2 ♞xe1 0-1 Bacrot – Nisipeanu, Balatonbereny 1996.



8...g5!

This is the key move which takes the sting out of White's opening setup.

9.♙xg5?!

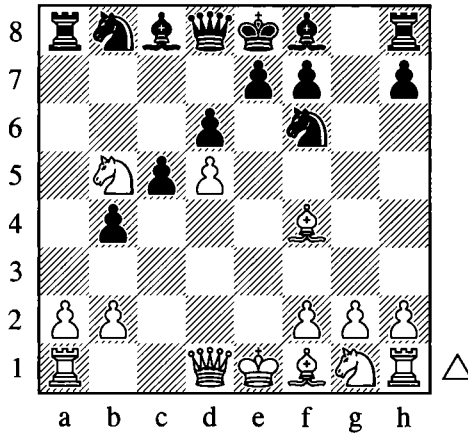
This seems like the principled move, but objectively White should probably retreat the bishop.

9.e5?! does not really work, and after 9...gx4 10.exf6 ♗d7 11.fxg7 ♞xe7† 12.♙e2 ♗e5 Black had an excellent position in S. From – Bjerring, Aarhus 1976.

9.♙e3 ♘g7 (9...♜xe4?! is risky, and after 10.♙d3 White can fight for the initiative.) 10.f3 h6 11.♜e2 ♜h5 12.♚d2 ♙a6 13.♜c1 ♜d7 Black had no reason to complain in Milov – Belotti, Switzerland 1996.

9...♜xe4 10.♙f4 ♜f6!

Removing the knight from its vulnerable position on the e-file while preparing to target the weak d5-pawn.



11.♙c4

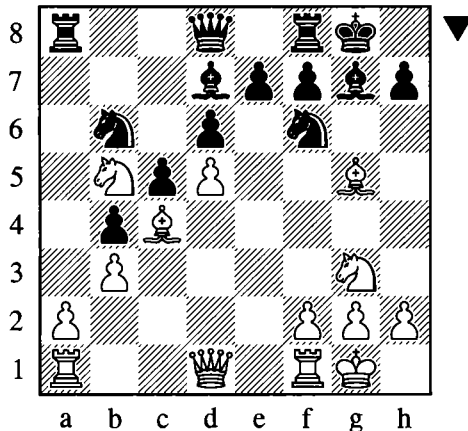
11.♚e2 ♙a6! defends d6 conveniently.

11...♙g7 12.♜e2 ♜bd7 13.♜g3 ♜b6

The d5-pawn is a serious weakness which is likely to drop off at some point.

14.b3 0-0 15.0-0 ♙d7 16.♙g5

Another game continued 16.♚d2 ♜fxd5 17.♙h6 ♙xh6 18.♚xh6 f6 19.♙d3 ♜f7 20.a4 bxa3 21.♜xa3 ♚f8 22.♚h4 ♜b4 23.♙e2 d5 and White had scant compensation for the pawn in Arencibia – Ivanchuk, Cap d'Agde 1998.



16...♞a5!

16...♟fxd5 17.♞c1 might offer White some compensation, so Black targets the vulnerable knight instead.

17.a4 bxa3 18.♟c3

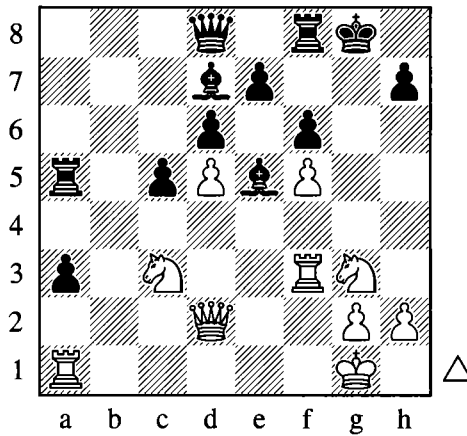
This pawn sacrifice is unconvincing, but 18.♟xa3 ♞a8! would also have been highly unpleasant for White.

18...♟g4 19.♞d2 ♟xc4 20.bxc4 ♟e5 21.f4?

White was already struggling, but this only worsens his situation.

21...♟xc4 22.f5 ♟xd2 23.♞xd2 ♞e5 24.♞f3 f6

White has no real attack and the game is soon over.



25.♟h5 ♞f7 26.g4 ♟h8 27.♟f4 ♞g7 28.♟h1 ♞a8 29.♞h3 ♞xf4 30.♞xf4 ♞b6 31.♟e4 a2 0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ Black's key idea against this particular system is the 8...g5! thrust. Once this move has been played, it is White who must worry about equalizing!
- ❖ When your opponent has a weak pawn, you don't necessarily have to rush to take it. Sometimes it can be better to keep the enemy pieces tied up and improve your own pieces (16...♞a5!)

The next and final game will deal with a few setups with the white knight on d2 instead of c3.

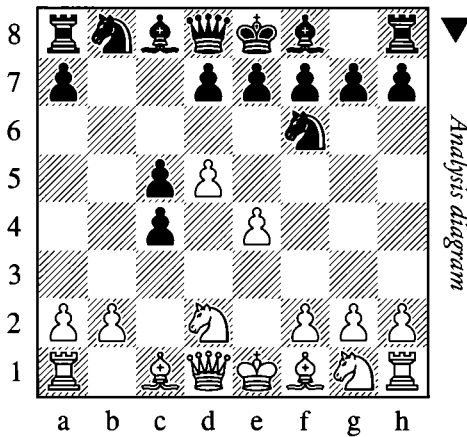
Game 20
Dorian Rogozenko – Boris Alterman
 Debrecen 1992

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4

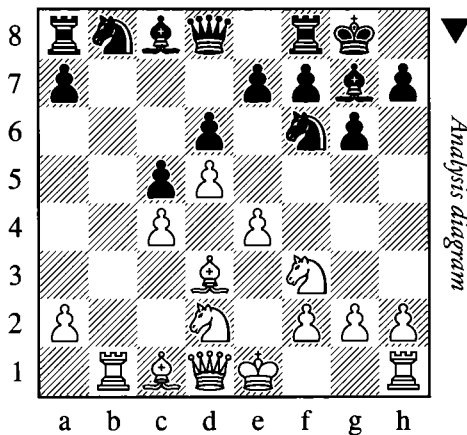
The game actually began with the move order 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 g6 4.c4 b5 5.♘bd2, but I have switched to the traditional Benko move order in order to cover a few other options which are available to White.

2...c5 3.d5 b5 4.♘f3

White can also try the immediate 4.♘d2. Black has several decent replies, but the following is one of the most interesting: 4...bxc4 5.e4



5...c3! (After 5...d6 White can try 6.♘e2! intending ♖c3 and ♖xc4, when his knights reach their ideal formation.) 6.bxc3 g6 Black should be fine here, for instance: 7.c4 (7.♘c4 should be met by 7...d6, as taking on e4 would be much too risky.) 7...d6 8.♗d3 ♗g7 9.♞b1 0-0 10.♘g3



10...e5! Compared with a normal King's Indian White has opened the b-file quicker than he would normally, but on the other hand his minor pieces are not well placed at all. One interesting example continued 11.♖b3 ♖h5 12.0-0 ♜f4 13.♙xf4 exf4 14.♚d2 g5 with promising play for Black, Korchnoi – Khalifman, Yalta 1995.

4...g6

Another quick reminder that 4...e6 would take us into the Blumenfeld Gambit.

5.♘bd2

We have now transposed back to Rogozenko – Alterman. White's last move prepares to build a pawn center, but the drawback is that his knights are less than ideally placed.

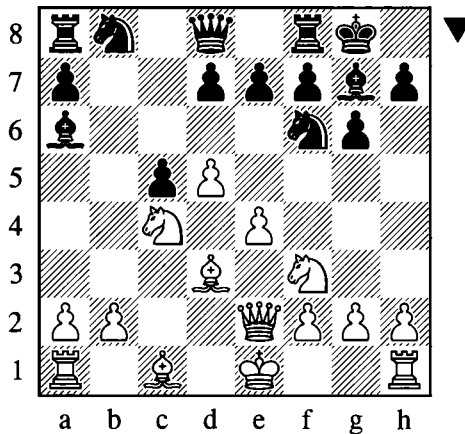
5...♙g7 6.e4 0-0!

Black does not want to spend a tempo on an early ...d6, but will instead strive to attack the enemy center with ...e6.

7.♙d3

7.e5 ♜g4 leaves White overextended, while 7.cxb5 can be met by 7...a6 intending 8.bxa6 ♚a5!? with promising counterplay.

7...bxc4 8.♜xc4 ♙a6 9.♚e2



9...e6!

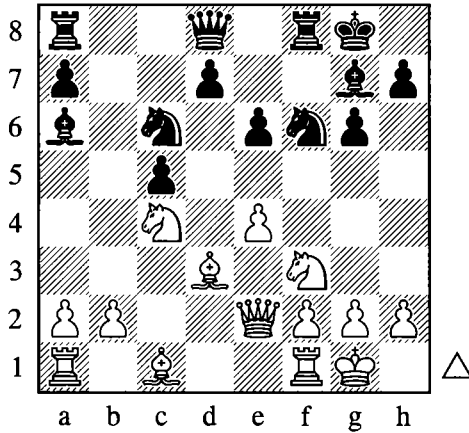
Black has scored an important 'moral victory' by playing this move without spending time on the slow ...d6. Already it is White who has to be more careful.

10.dxe6

10.d6 would have been met by 10...♜c6 11.0-0 ♜g4 12.h3 ♙xc4 13.♙xc4 ♜ge5 with promising counterplay.

10...fxc6 11.0-0 ♜c6

11...d5?! is premature: 12.exd5 exd5 13.♚e6† ♖h8 14.♜ce5 ♙xd3 15.♜g5! ♚e8 16.♜xd3±

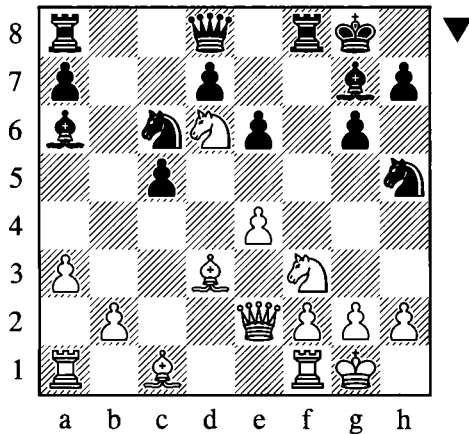


12.a3?

A waste of time; instead White should have tried 12.♙f4!? ♖h5 13.♙d6 ♜f4 14.♙xf4 ♝xf4 15.♞ad1.

12...♜h5! 13.♜d6?

Overlooking a crushing blow.



13...♞xf3!

Leading to a deadly kingside attack.

14.♙xa6

Recapturing with the queen loses material, and 14.gxf3 loses by force: 14...♜d4 15.♞d1 ♙e5 16.♔g2 (16.♙xa6 ♞h4 17.f4 ♜xf4 18.♙xf4 ♞xf4+) 16...♞h4 17.♞h1 ♙xd3 18.♞xd3 ♙xd6+

14...♜d4 15.♞d1

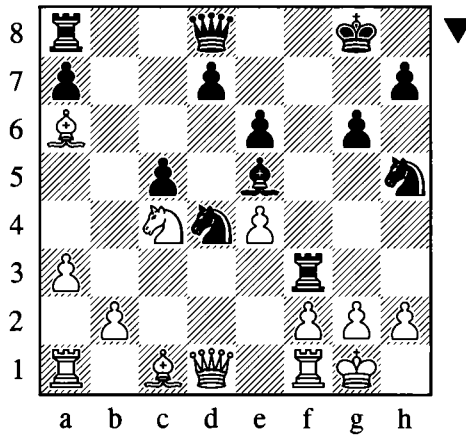
Perhaps 15.♞c4!? was a better chance, although White is still in trouble after 15... ♞f8 16.♙e3 ♞b6!.

In the game Black had several wins available, but it seems that on every turn I was determined to find the most complicated one...

15...♙e5!?

This does not spoil Black's advantage, but there was a simpler win available with 15...♚h4 16.g3 (16.gxf3 ♙e5-+; 16.♘c4 ♜af8-+) 16...♚h3 intending ...♜af8 when Black has too much firepower on the kingside.

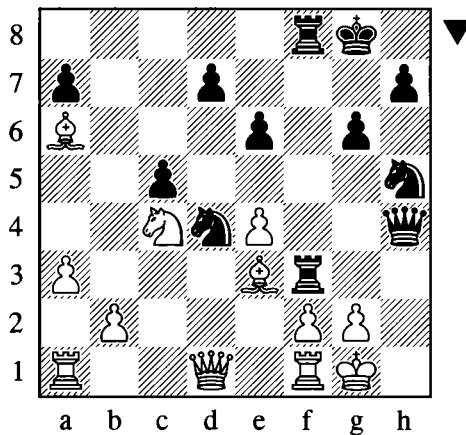
16.♘c4



16...♙xh2†! 17.♔xh2 ♚h4† 18.♔g1 ♜af8

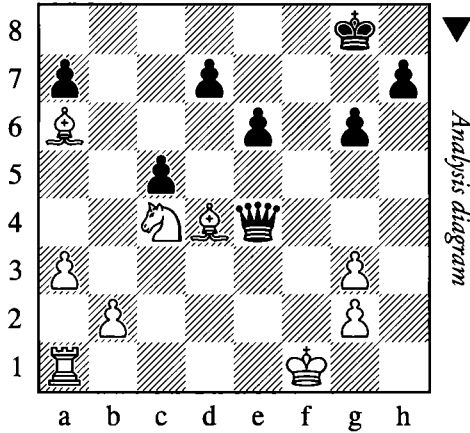
This keeps a winning position, but Black could have killed the game immediately with 18...♜xf2! 19.♜xf2 ♘g3-+.

19.♙e3



19...♜h3?

19...♠g3! I considered this move for a while, but at the last minute I rejected it in favor of a more “brilliant” winning line. 20.fxg3 ♖xf1† 21.♗xf1 ♖xf1† 22.♕xf1 (22.♖xf1 ♜e2† 23.♕f2 ♜xg3→) 22...♗xe4! 23.♙xd4

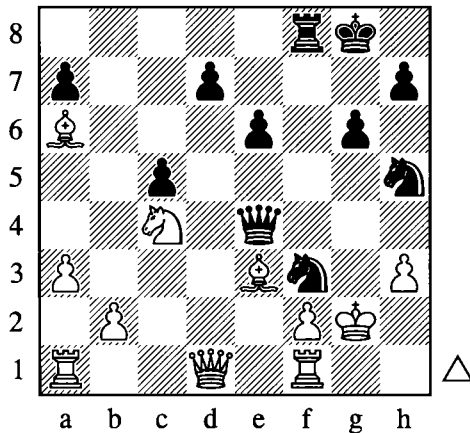


23...♗d3†! (I missed this in my calculations, although the simpler 23...cxd4 also wins; material is roughly balanced, but White’s coordination is terrible.) 24.♕e1 (24.♕g1 cxd4 25.♙b5 a6→) 24...cxd4 25.♖d1 ♗e4† 26.♕f1 ♗c6→ Black wins a bishop and the game.

20.gxh3 ♜f3† 21.♕g2 ♗xe4

Here I was ready to accept my opponent’s resignation, having seen that the tempting 22.♕h1?? would succumb to 22...♠g3†! 23.fxg3 ♜h4† with mate to follow.

Unfortunately my opponent had other ideas...



22.♖g1!

This move came as a cold shower, and after 15 minutes’ thought I could find nothing better than forcing a draw.

22...♖d2†

In fact after 22...♖f4†! 23.♗xf4 ♜xf4 24.♕f1 ♖xg1 25.♞d2 ♜h2! Black still has a decisive advantage, but by this stage I had lost all calculating ability.

23.♕h2 ♖f3† 24.♕g2 ♖d2† 25.♕h2

½–½

A rather anticlimactic finish, but the game contained plenty of instructive moments.

What we have learned:

- ❖ Black should not always play an early ...d6 as a matter of habit, as in certain positions he can save time by going for a quick ...e6.
- ❖ After the moves dxе6 and ...fxе6, the open f-file is an important feature of the position, which should have brought Black a decisive attack (13...♞xf3!).
- ❖ When you have several wins available, go for the most certain one rather than the most flashy!

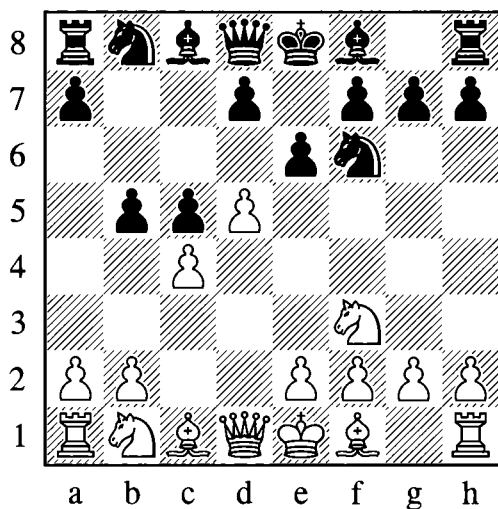
Conclusion

In this chapter we have covered one of the most popular and enduring gambit openings. Black's pawn sacrifice is justified by his smooth development, sound pawn structure and prospects for long-term pressure along the open a- and b-files. It is not easy for White to arrange his pieces in active positions, although Black must always be on the lookout for the e4-e5 break.

One of the most intriguing features of the Benko is the fact that a queen exchange will frequently favor Black. The long-term nature of Black's compensation helps to explain the enduring popularity of the Benko Gambit. With modern opening preparation becoming increasingly demanding for players at all levels, there are stronger reasons than ever for adopting openings based on long-term positional features rather than excessive variations.

Chapter 2

The Blumenfeld Gambit



1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.d5 b5

Introduction

This gambit was the invention of Benjamin Blumenfeld, a fairly well-known master from the Soviet Union. He developed it between the approximate years of 1918-1920, although the database does not contain any of Blumenfeld's own games with his creation. It was not until Alekhine's crushing victory against Tarrasch in 1922 (see Game 21 later in the chapter) that the gambit really came into the limelight.

The Blumenfeld Gambit is optically similar to Benko Gambit as featured in Chapter 1, but strategically the two gambits are quite different (although occasionally the Benko can lead to Blumenfeld-like play; see for example Game 18, beginning on page 126).

The Blumenfeld is not particularly popular in modern grandmaster practice, although some strong players have been known to use it. Grandmasters such as Nisipeanu and Volokitin have been its most prominent exponents in recent times, although looking further back we can see that strong players such as Alburt, Ljubojevic and Ivan Sokolov have all employed this dynamic system in their games.

The Blumenfeld Gambit can arise from a variety of move orders, depending on which opening systems each side is aiming to reach or avoid. A typical sequence would be the following.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6

Also possible is:

2...c5

Black immediately challenges the d4-pawn.

3.d5

The most principled continuation, grabbing more space.

3...b5

The Benko Gambit, as featured in Chapter 1.

3...e6 4.♘f3 b5 is another route into Blumenfeld territory, although Black should be aware that 4.♘c3 leads to a Modern Benoni.

4.♘f3

Declining the gambit.

4...e6

We have reached the starting position for the Blumenfeld.

3.♘f3

This is a popular choice amongst players who wish to avoid the popular and respected Nimzo-Indian Defense which occurs after 3.♘c3 ♗b4.

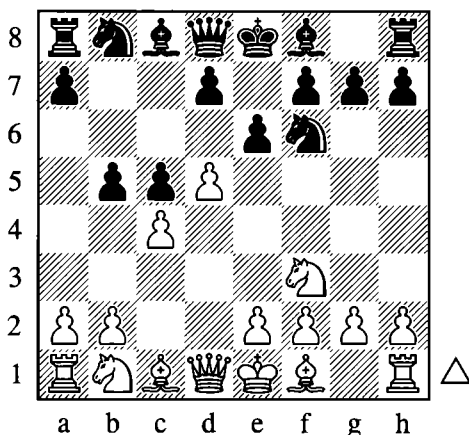
3...c5

Black elects to challenge the d4-pawn. Alternatives include 3...b6 (the Queen's Indian Defense), 3...♗b4† (the Bogo-Indian Defense) and 3...d5 (the Queen's Gambit Declined).

4.d5

This is White's most challenging approach, preserving his important pawn and gaining more space.

4...b5!?



We have reached the starting position of the Blumenfeld Gambit (Instead 4...exd5 5.cxd5 would have led to the Modern Benoni.)

What is the purpose of Black's sacrifice? His main objective is to bombard the opponent's central pawns from all sides, in an effort to take over the center with his own pawns. After developing his pieces on active squares, he will aim to unleash the dynamic potential contained within his position. We will now explore some of these themes with the help of some analysis and illustrative games.

Attacking White's Center

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.d5 b5

From this position White's strongest move is 5.♗g5!, which will be discussed later. For the time being we will check some of the other ways in which White can decline the gambit. The idea of keeping his center together seems like a logical one, but as we will see, it is easier said than done...

5.b3?!

Supporting the base of the central pawn chain. Here are some other ideas:

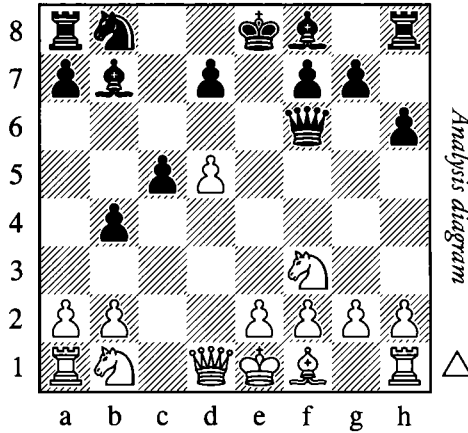
5.a4 is occasionally played; White is hoping for 5...bxc4?! 6.♘c3 when he retains control over d5. Instead Black should play 5...b4! when the knight does not have the c3-square available, and White will struggle to maintain his center with ...♗b7 on the way.

5.♘c3?!

This move makes little sense as Black can immediately kick the steed away:

5...b4 6.♘b1

- 6. ♖b5?? a6 traps the knight, while
- 6. ♖a4 leaves it badly placed at the edge of the board.
- 6...exd5 7.cxd5 ♗b7
- The d5-pawn is under fire.
- 8. ♗g5 h6 9. ♗xf6 ♜xf6



10.e4!?

White offers a gambit of his own.

10. ♜d2 has been played, but it looks terribly ugly and the knight on b1 definitely does not approve!

10...g5!?

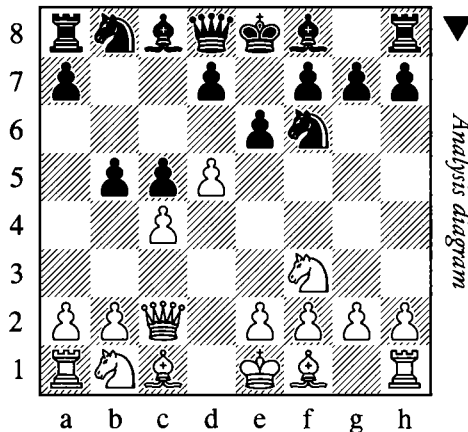
10... ♜xb2 11. ♖bd2 gave White some compensation in Sexauer – Ster, e-mail 2001.

11. ♖bd2 g4!

Black had the initiative in Castelli – Guimard, Remedios de Escalada 1949.

5. ♜c2

Intending to support the center with e2-e4, while also setting a small trap.



5...bxc4!

5...exd5 6.cxd5 ♖xd5?? loses to 7.♚e4† as 7...♜e7 would leave the rook on a8 en prise.

The problem for White is that Black is not forced to capture on d5 immediately.

6.e4 exd5 7.exd5 ♜xd5!

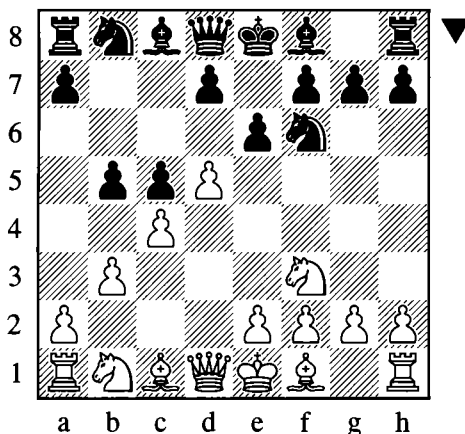
Now 8.♚e4†? can be met by 8...♚e7 with a pin along the e-file, so White must try something else.

8.♙xc4

White has a slight lead in development, but it is hardly enough to make up for the missing pawn.

8...♜f6 9.0-0 ♙e7 10.♙g5 0-0 11.♜c3 ♙b7

Black remained a healthy pawn up in Guichard – Milliet, Pau 2008.

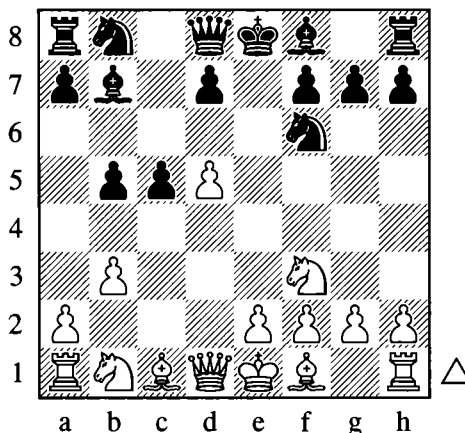


5...exd5

The c4-pawn has been fortified, so Black focuses his attack against d5 instead.

6.cxd5 ♙b7

After isolating the d5-pawn, Black immediately attacks it. It is obvious that ...b7-b5 was more useful for Black than b2-b3 was for White.



7.e4

This is White's best attempt to maintain material equality, although even this proves insufficient.

7.♘g5?! White hopes that the pin will help to reduce the pressure against d5, and to support a central push with e2-e4. Unfortunately for him, 7...♚a5†! spoils the plan by breaking the pin with a tempo-gaining check. (The modest 7...h6 also wins material.) 8.♙d2 ♚b6 The d5-pawn is doomed.

7.d6?! The further the pawn marches, the easier its execution. 7...♘e4! Not only attacking the d6-pawn, but also preparing a possible queen excursion to f6 or a5. 8.♙f4 ♚b6! Once again the d-pawn perishes.

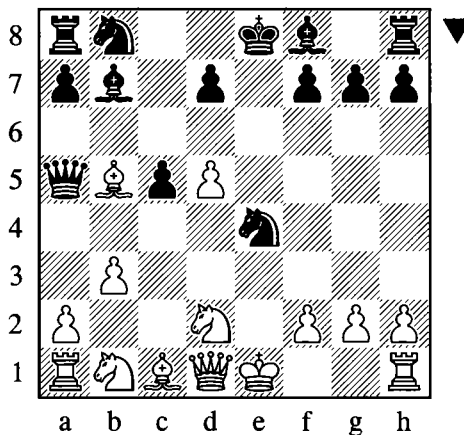
7...♘xe4 8.♙xb5!

White must take this pawn without being afraid of ghosts.

After the feeble 8.♙b2? ♚a5† 9.♘bd2 ♙xd5 Black was two pawns up for no compensation, and soon won in Murzin – Maksimenko, Dos Hermanas (blitz) 2004.

8...♚a5† 9.♘fd2

9.♘bd2? ♘c3! wins for Black.

**9...♙e7!**

White's idea was 9...♘xd2? 10.♚e2†! when he gets out of trouble. After the more accurate text move he will soon lose the d5-pawn for minimal compensation.

Let us now turn our attention to the acceptance of the gambit pawn.

Central Domination

The following classic game is probably the most famous Blumenfeld Gambit encounter of all time. It is also a model demonstration of how Black's central domination can facilitate a devastating kingside attack.

Game 21

Tarrasch – Alekhine

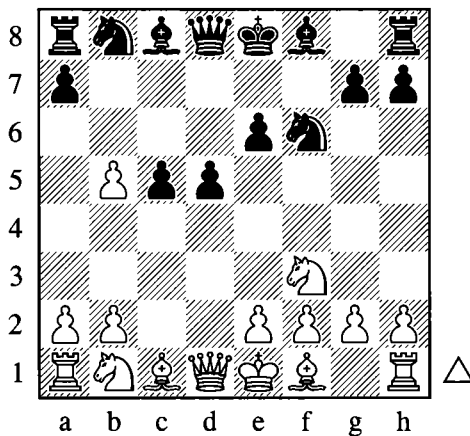
Bad Pistyan 1922

Playing through this game, I am reminded of a brilliant Kasparov win over Karpov, in Game 16 of their second World Championship match in 1985. In that encounter Kasparov sacrificed a pawn in the Sicilian Defense. His compensation was not immediately apparent, but before long Karpov fell into a difficult position with virtually no useful moves available. Something similar happened in the present game, although the specific situation on the board was altogether different.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.d5 b5

I can imagine that Tarrasch – who was, according to many sources, the conceptual father of the new generation of positional players including Akiba Rubinstein and Geza Maroczy – would have been rather surprised when Alekhine decided to sacrifice a pawn for seemingly little compensation.

5.dxe6 fxe6 6.cxb5 d5



The first step of Black's plan is complete. He has taken over the center in impressive fashion, although his pawn triad will have little chance of steamrolling down the board unless it receives the full support of the pieces. Usually Black's plan will involve placing his bishops on d6 and b7, and the queen's knight on d7 – as well as castling of course. Once all that has been accomplished, he can start thinking about advancing with ...e5, followed by...d4 or ...e4 (or even both!) depending on circumstances.

It is not immediately obvious how White should attempt to derail his opponent's smooth development. Moreover, his extra pawn is unlikely to make its presence felt until the endgame. Before that time, even if he succeeds in playing a4-a5, it will be tough to create a dangerous passed pawn or generate any other significant threats on the queenside.

7.e3

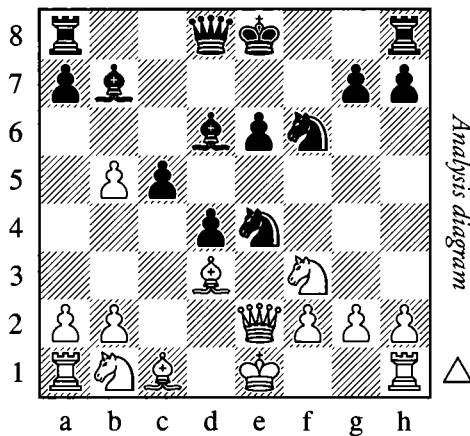
This looks like the most natural developing move, but there are two other important plans to consider:

- a) White can opt for a fianchetto development with 7.g3 to bolster his kingside.
- b) He can also try to fight back in the center with a timely e4-strike.

Both of these ideas will be examined later in the chapter.

7...♘d6 8.♗c3 0-0

In some games Black has tried a different move order: 8...♗bd7 9.♘d3 ♘b7 (Note that with the knight already on d7, 9...c4? is not possible in view of 10.♘xc4! exploiting the undefended bishop on d6.) 10.e4!? White immediately starts attacking his opponent's center. We will examine this plan more closely later in the chapter. 10...d4 11.♗b1 ♗xe4 12.♞e2 ♗df6



13.♗bd2 ♗xd2 14.♘xd2 (White may have been worried by 14.♞xe6† ♗f8!?) 14...♘d5 15.0-0
 0-0 The position was extremely sharp but not worse for Black, Ligterink – Van der Wiel, Hilversum 1985.

9.♘e2 ♘b7

Black's bishops are firing from afar, through the center and all the way to the kingside where a future attack could be launched.

10.b3

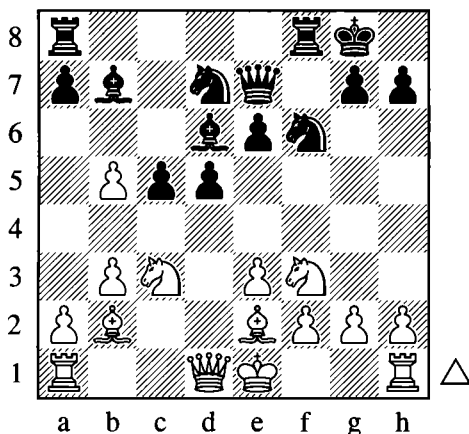
The bishop is currently restricted by the e3-pawn, so White switches it to the long diagonal.

10...♗bd7

The knight is forced to come here, as the c6-square is out of bounds. In any case, it is best to avoid blocking the beautiful b7-bishop.

11. ♖b2 ♜e7

This useful move not only connects the rooks, but also prepares to activate the queen by means of either ...♜f7 targeting f2, or ...e5-e4 and ...♜e5 to attack h2.



12. 0-0 ♝ad8

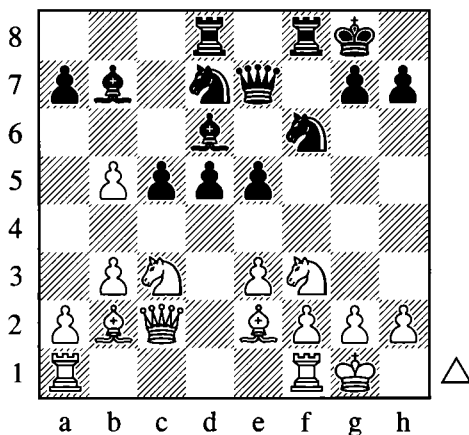
Alekhine develops his last piece.

13. ♜c2

Both sides have developed their pieces in a logical way, but Black's position contains much more dynamic potential under the surface. How can he make use of this? Alekhine will show us the way...

13...e5!

Black's pawn center starts rolling; note that Alekhine waited until his pieces were fully mobilized before taking this step.



14. ♖fe1

GM Valery Beim pointed out that it was dangerous but probably necessary for White to fight back in the center with: 14.e4! d4 15.♙c4† Activating the bishop with check. 15...♖h8 16.♘d5 ♘xd5 17.♙xd5! A further piece exchange will help White, who has less space. 17...♙xd5 18.exd5 At this point Black can maintain his initiative with 18...e4 or even the exchange sacrifice 18...♙xf3!?. Nevertheless White's chances would have been higher than in the game.

14...e4

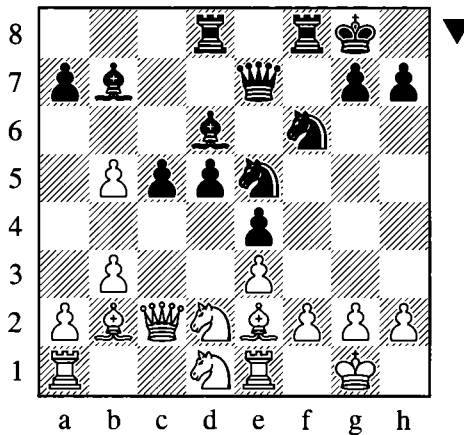
Not only gaining space, but also evicting the f3-knight, a key defender of White's kingside. The advanced e-pawn serves to split White's forces in two, preventing his queenside pieces from coming to the aid of their monarch.

15. ♘d2 ♘e5

Black uses the newly-acquired space to bring another piece closer to the kingside.

16. ♘d1

Another retreat; it becomes clear that White is unable to utilize his extra pawn on the queenside. Meanwhile Black is dominating in the center and on the kingside, the important areas where the battle is taking place.

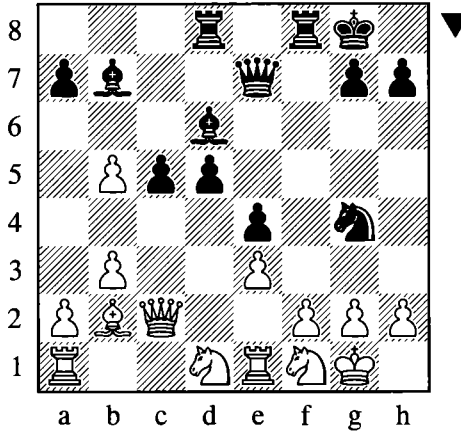
**16...♘fg4**

Targeting the weaknesses on f2 and h2; in some variations, Black might be able to break through with a sacrifice on one of those squares. By moving his knight, Alekhine also opens the way for his queen to join the attack.

17. ♙xg4 ♘xg4 18. ♘f1

The knight retreats to defend the h2-pawn, revealing the defensive idea behind White's 14th move. Meanwhile the other knight defends the sensitive f2-pawn.

Despite this apparent solidity, White's position is a sorry sight. Almost all of his pieces occupy the first rank, while Black has the bishop pair, a strong center, a huge space advantage and great attacking chances on the kingside.



18...♙g5!

The queen eyes the vulnerable g2-pawn and prepares a rook lift via f5. It is worth pointing out that the immediate 18...♜f5? can be met by 19.f4! when the undefended rook on f5 allows White to gain valuable space, greatly increasing his chances to defend.

After the text move the rook lift to f5 becomes a strong idea. Apart from the simple plan of doubling on the f-file, Black sets up a sacrifice on the h2-square, intending to meet ♖xh2 with ...♙h4† followed by ...♞h5 with a mating attack.

19.h3

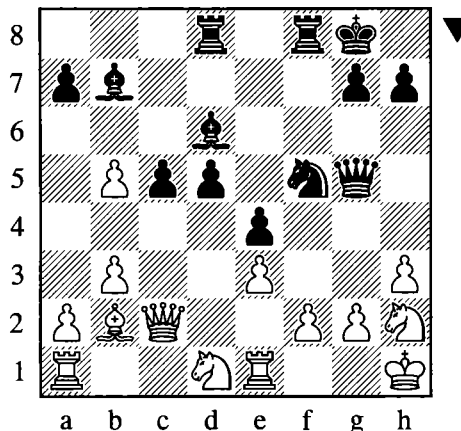
In light of the aforementioned threats, White feels compelled to weaken his kingside.

19...♘h6!

The correct retreat. Black intends to step up the pressure against g2 with ...♘f5-h4. The alternative 19...♘e5 would have allowed White to simplify the position and eliminate a powerful attacker with 20.♙xe5.

20.♙h1 ♘f5 21.♘h2

White is ready to meet his opponent's plan, but Alekhine shows that he is one step ahead.



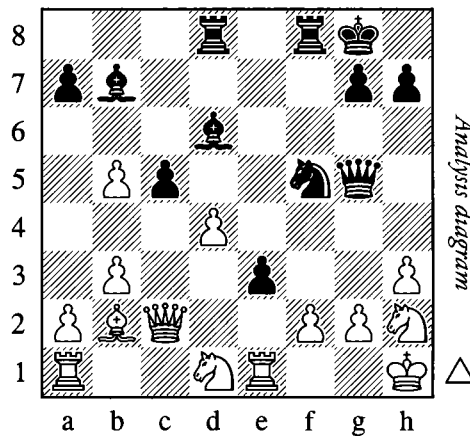
21...d4!

White was intending to meet 21...d4 with 22.♖g1 when everything is covered, so Alekhine switches his attention back to the center, which provided the positional justification for the Blumenfeld Gambit in the first place.

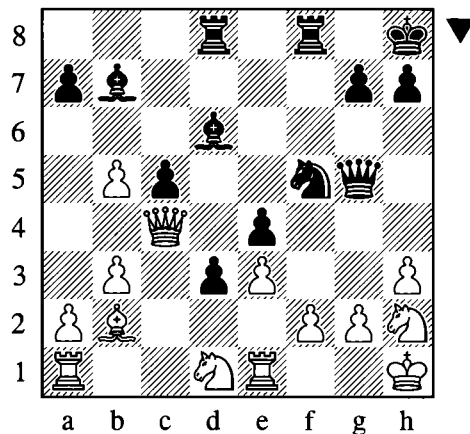
When attacking, it can often be beneficial to open a second front, especially if the enemy forces are coping with the defense on the besieged front. With the text move Black not only forces his opponent to deal with the advancing central pawns, but also increases the scope of the previously dormant bishop on b7.

22.♗c1

White can hardly contemplate 22.exd4? e3! when the power of the b7-bishop is unleashed. There is no defense, for instance:



23.♗xe3 ♗xe3 Removing the defender of g2. 24.fxe3 ♖g3 25.♗g4 (25.♗f1 ♖xf1† 26.♖xf1 ♖h2 is mate) 25...♗xh3†! The bishop proves its worth, as the g2-pawn is pinned! 26.♗g1 ♖xg4 Black is completely winning, with an extra piece and a crushing attack.

22...d3 23.♖c4† ♗h8 24.♗b2

White hurries to reactivate his pieces, but Alekhine is ready to turn his overwhelming position into direct and decisive threats.

24...♖g3† 25.♗g1

Forced, as after 25.fxg3? ♜xg3 White can resign.

25...♗d5!

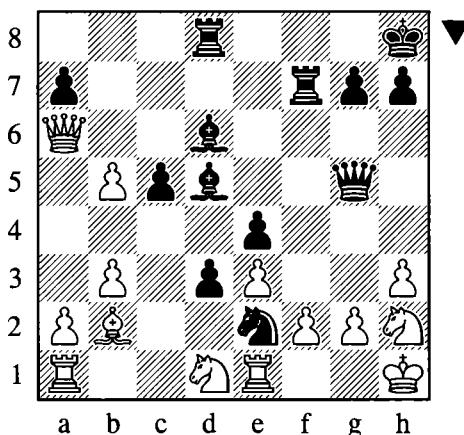
The long diagonal is blocked, so Alekhine finds another way for the bishop to participate in the attack.

26.♞a4 ♜e2† 27.♗h1 ♞f7

Black has full control over the position, so there is no need for him to rush. With his last move he plans to double his rooks and sacrifice on f2.

28.♞a6

White tries his last chance.



28...h5

Taking the g4-square away from White's knight, while at the same time making room for the king. White is virtually paralyzed so Black can take his time.

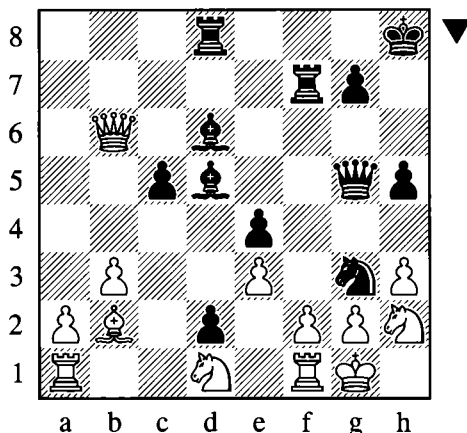
29.b6 ♖g3†!

Alekhine repeats the same tactical trick from five moves ago.

30.♗g1

Once again 30.fxg3? ♜xg3 loses immediately for White.

30...axb6 31.♞xb6 d2 32.♞f1



32...♖xf1

With this move Black obtains a token material advantage, but this is merely incidental, and is certainly not enough to distract Alekhine from his goal of delivering mate on the kingside.

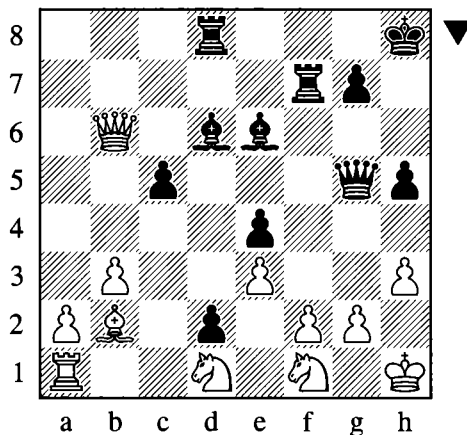
33.♖xf1 ♔e6!

Threatening ...♔xh3.

34.♔h1

Another possible finish is 34.♖c6 ♖f3 35.♖xe4 ♔d5 36.♖a4 ♖xg2†! 37.♔xg2 ♖g3† 38.♔h2 ♖g2† 39.♔h1 ♖h2† 40.♔g1 ♖h1# as shown by Alekhine.

Black to move! Can you find Alekhine's winning continuation, which forced White to resign just a few moves later?



34...♔xh3!

For most of the game this bishop played a supporting role, and Alekhine worked hard to improve its prospects. Now his efforts pay dividends, as the bishop forces a fatal fracturing of White's defenses.

35.gxh3 ƒf3

White has no good way to protect the h3-pawn.

36.ƒg3 h4 37.♙f6 ♗xf6 38.ƒxe4 ƒxh3†

0–1

White resigned in view of 39.♔g1 (or 39.♔g2 ♗f3† and mate) 39...♙h2† winning the queen.

What we have learned:

This brilliant example has showcased numerous ideas, including:

- ❖ Rapid development in the opening.
- ❖ The importance of the center, which provided the foundation for Black's lethal attack.
- ❖ When there is a pawn on e3, the dark-squared bishop can be developed via b3 and ♙b2.
- ❖ Black quickly moved his pieces to their most active squares with ...♙d6, ...♙b7, ...ƒbd7 and ...♗e7.
- ❖ A promising way to start an attack: push the e-pawn to e4, and shift your pieces to the kingside.
- ❖ How to identify targets in your opponent's position.
- ❖ Demolishing h2 with the ...ƒf5 and ...ƒxh2 idea.
- ❖ Attacking g2 with ...♗g5 and the knight maneuver ...ƒh6-f5-h4.
- ❖ The rook lift.
- ❖ Opening a second front to distract the defenders.
- ❖ If you are in complete control, there is no need to rush!
- ❖ Various sacrificial ideas to break down the defenses.

Unsurprisingly, the Blumenfeld Gambit became quite popular after Alekhine's masterpiece, although Alekhine himself never played it again. Marco beat Sämisch in the same Bad Pistyan 1922 tournament, and later the same year Maroczy won a fine game against Kostic.

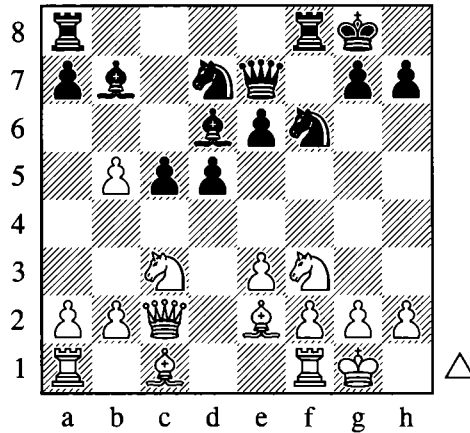
Game 22**Kostic – Maroczy**

Weston 1922

It pays to examine our histories; in one of the first few games with the Blumenfeld Gambit, Maroczy gave a great demonstration of how to handle Black's position.

1.d4 ƒf6 2.ƒf3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.d5 b5 5.cxb5 ♙b7 6.dxe6 fxe6 7.ƒc3 d5 8.e3 ♙d6 9.♙e2 0–0 10.0–0 ♗e7 11.♗c2 ƒbd7

Both sides have developed in a similar way as in the previous game. As you can recall, the threats of ...e5-e4 and possibly ...d4 are rather unpleasant. At this point White hit upon the right plan, but at the wrong time...



12.♔d3

Hoping to activate his position with e4, but Black can prevent this idea.

12...c4! 13.♕e2 ♖c5

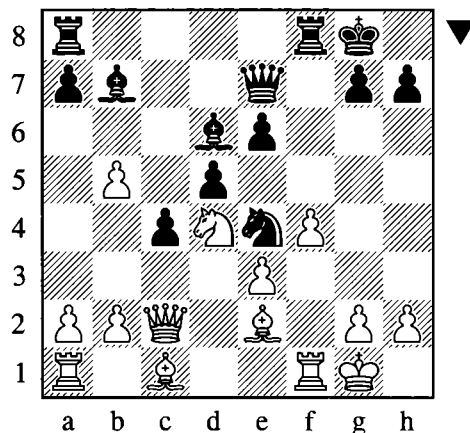
Black has taken full control over the e4-square, nipping his opponent's counterattack in the bud. At the same time, Black's central advance with ...e5-e4 remains a threat which would create a monstrous knight outpost on d3. White's position is still not so bad, but Kostic fails to offer much resistance.

14.♘d4

It was worth considering 14.b3, exchanging one of the opponent's powerful pawns.

14...♗fe4 15.♗xe4 ♗xe4 16.f4?

This is a serious mistake which allows Black to rip open the position. White had good reason to be worried about the deadly threat of 16...♞xf2! intending to meet 17.♞xf2 with 17...♔xh2†!, but he could have defended himself more securely with 16.g3, after which any result would have been possible.



16...e5!

Black's attack develops violently.

17.♘c6

The only chance, as 17.fxe5? ♚xe5 leaves White with no defense.

17...♙xc6 18.bxc6 exf4 19.♙f3

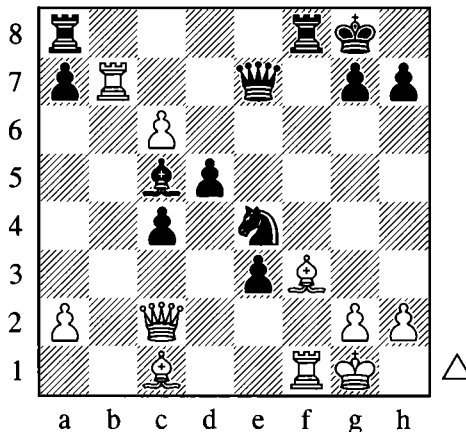
19.exf4 ♙c5† is winning.

19...♙c5 20.b4!? ♙xb4 21.♖b1

21.♙xe4 may have been a better try, although the endgame after 21...♚xe4 22.♚xe4 dxe4 should be winning for Black.

21...♙c5 22.♖b7 fxe3!

With this simple combination Black obtains a decisive material and positional advantage.



23.♚e2

23.♖xe7 is met by 23...e2† followed by mate.

23...♚e6

Black has an overwhelming advantage and the rest is easy:

24.♙b2 c3 25.♙xe4 cxb2 26.♙f3 ♚xc6 27.♖xb2 ♙b6 28.g3 ♖f5 29.♔g2 ♖af8 30.♖c2 ♚e6
31.♚d3 ♚f7 32.♚e2 h5 33.h4 d4 34.♚c4 d3
0-1

The Fight for e4

In the Blumenfeld Gambit Accepted, White does not have to suffer the same fate as Tarrasch and Kostic in the above two games, both of whom were annihilated in brutal fashion. As was mentioned in the annotations, White should try to fight back in the center by means of a well-

timed pawn push to e4. We will look at the ways in which White can prepare this move, as well as Black's methods of fighting against it. Let us first begin with two short examples where White succeeds in carrying out his plan.

Game 23

M. Muller – Rosiek

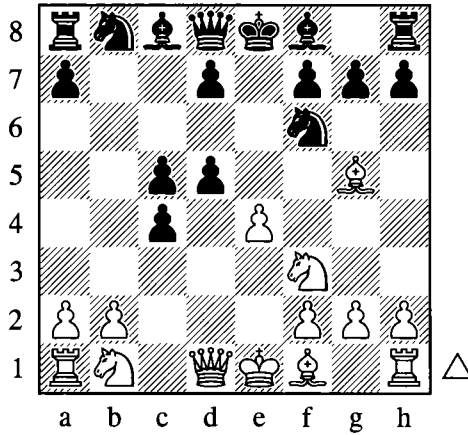
Correspondence 1989

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.d5 b5 5.♙g5! bxc4?!

As we will see later, 5...exd5 and 5...h6 are better moves.

6.e4! exd5?

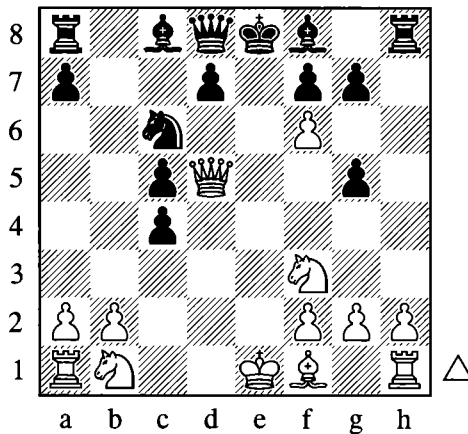
This is already a decisive mistake!



7.e5! h6 8.exf6 hxg5 9.♙xd5

Black suffers a fatal loss of material.

9...♘c6



10. ♖e4†

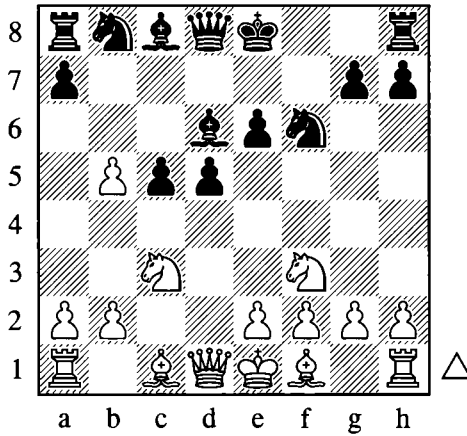
1-0

White can also aim to carry out the e4-advance after accepting the gambit.

Game 24
Garcia Paolicchi – Ibanez
 Catalonia 1995

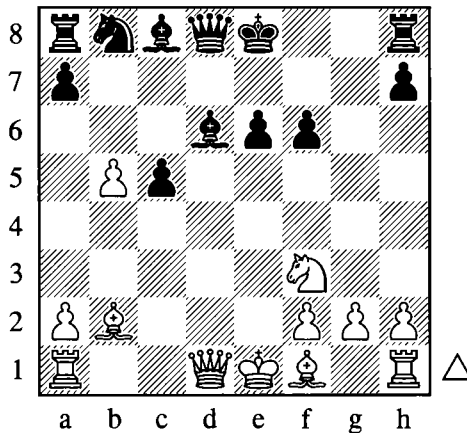
1. d4 e6 2. ♘f3 ♘f6 3. c4 c5 4. d5 b5 5. dxe6 fxe6 6. cxb5 d5 7. ♘c3 ♙d6?!

Black should prefer 7... ♖bd7 or 7... ♙b7 to prevent the following sequence.



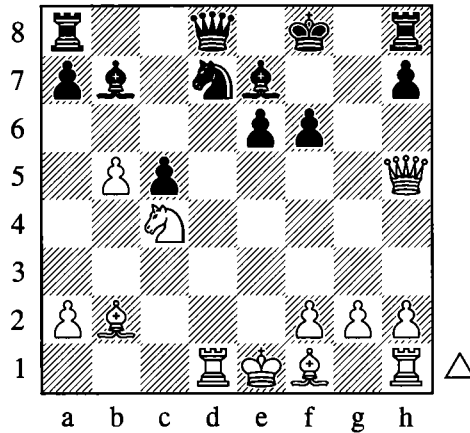
8. e4! d4 9. e5 dxc3 10. exf6 cxb2 11. ♙xb2 gxf6

Black's kingside is demolished, and the rook on a8 is tactically vulnerable. White capitalizes on these advantages with a series of accurate moves which give his opponent no chance.



12. ♘d2! ♙b7 13. ♘c4 ♙e7 14. ♖h5† ♖f8 15. ♙d1 ♘d7

The end is close, and White finishes the game impressively.



16. ♖c1! ♔g8 17. ♝d3 ♕e4 18. ♞g4†

1-0

Black resigned as 18... ♗g6 19. ♞xe6† kills him.

The idea of fighting back in the center with e2-e4 has been around for a long time, and actually dates back to the second historical game played in the Blumenfeld Gambit, which took place just a few days after the Tarrasch – Alekhine game, at the very same tournament.

Game 25

Sämisch – Marco

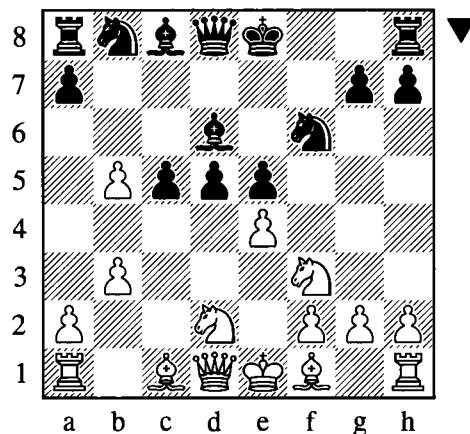
Bad Pistyan 1922

1. d4 e6 2. c4 ♘f6 3. ♘f3 c5 4. d5 b5 5. dxe6 fxe6 6. cxb5 d5 7. ♘bd2 ♕d6 8. b3 e5

This ambitious move is a bit premature. Instead the more accurate 8... ♗b7! would have made it harder for White to justify the position of the knight on d2, which looks rather passive.

9. e4!

With this move White secures control over some light squares in the center.

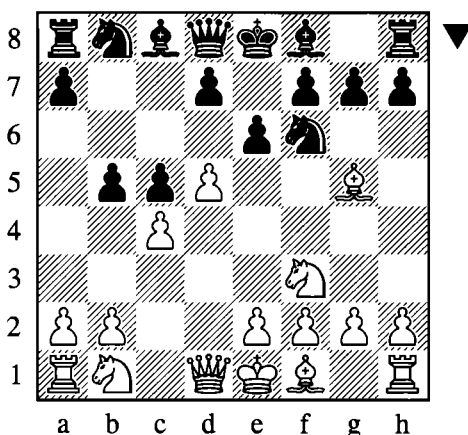


9...♖c7 10.♙d3 ♘b7

The position is extremely complicated. Black eventually prevailed, but at this stage White's chances are higher.

White's Best Response to the Blumenfeld

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.d5 b5 5.♙g5!



This non-materialistic approach became popular in the early years of the Blumenfeld Gambit. It is hardly surprising that most White players chose to decline the gambit pawn, rather than risk suffering the kind of mauling that Tarrasch experienced at the hands of Alekhine. Indeed, a database search reveals that between the years 1923 and 1930, the text move was virtually the only one that was ever tried.

What are the ideas behind the early bishop development? Rather than spending time pawn-grabbing, White develops a piece and reduces the pressure on his center indirectly, by pinning the enemy knight. The pin may also enable him to gain space in the center with e2-e4, as we saw in the Muller – Rosiek game above.

Black has more than one reply, but we will pay particular attention to the early exchange on d5.

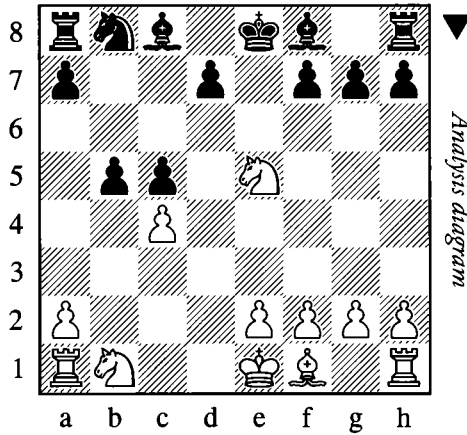
Transitioning to a Benoni Structure

5...exd5

This is Black's most popular reply, and certainly one of the best. By easing the central tension, Black gets the chance to develop his pieces. 5...♖a5† is one main line which I will not be covering in these pages. 5...h6 has also been quite popular, but we will see in Games 27 and 28 that this approach is rather risky for Black.

6.cxd5

6.♙xf6? ♖xf6 7.♖xd5? actually loses by force: 7...♖xb2 8.♖e5† (8.♖xa8?? ♖c1 is mate!) 8...♖xe5 9.♘xe5 Now Black can virtually kill the game with one accurate move:



9...g5! White will suffer a fatal loss of material on the long diagonal. It was important to advance the pawn two squares in order to prevent White from supporting his knight with f4. 10.♘c3 ♕g7 11.♘xb5 ♕xe5—+ Tomovska Polendakova – Maksimovic, Sunny Beach 2009.

6...d6

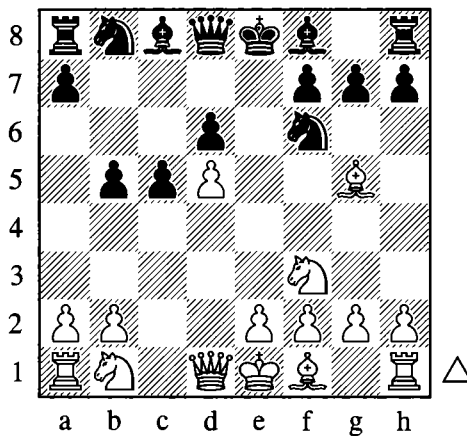
Black should not hurry to put his bishop on b7, as after e2-e4 it would be biting on granite. In this Benoni structure, Black has executed the thematic space-gaining move ...b5 at an early stage. This gives him good chances of developing queenside counterplay, by means of either ...c4 and ...♘bd7-c5, or a general pawn advance with the aim of creating a passed pawn. On the other hand, the potential drawback is that White can aim for a quick a2-a4 in order to fight for the c4-square. The following games will illustrate this idea and the different ways in which Black might counter it.

Game 26

Hoeningler – Spielmann

Vienna (9) 1929

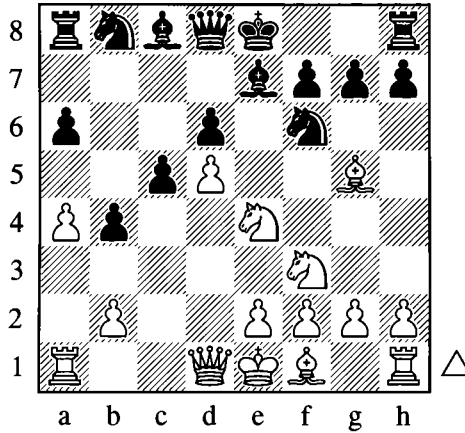
1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4 ♘f6 4.d5 b5 5.♕g5 exd5 6.cxd5 d6



7. ♖c3 a6 8. a4 b4 9. ♗e4

White utilizes the pin to centralize his knight, instead of retreating it.

9... ♗e7



10. ♗xf6

Hoeninger is willing to relinquish the bishop pair in order to avoid losing time.

10... ♗xf6 11. ♖c2 0-0 12. e3 ♗f5 13. ♗d3

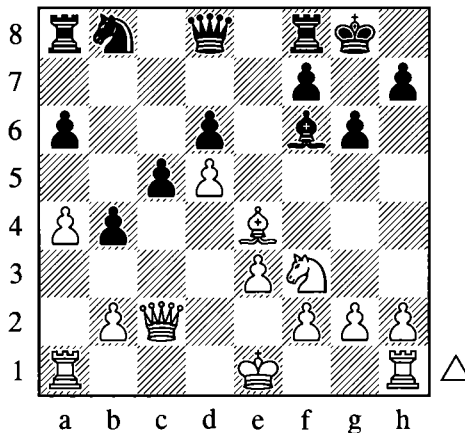
Developing the bishop to its most active square. The threat is 14. ♗xf6† ♖xf6 15. ♗xf5.

13... ♗xe4

Black decides to steer the game into channels with opposite-colored bishops. 13... ♗g6 was more solid, keeping the kingside defended.

14. ♗xe4 g6

Blunting White's light-squared bishop, while also arranging the pawns in a way that complements Black's own bishop.



15.h4!?

Black's last move created a target, so White starts an attack.

15...♖e8

Black develops a piece and targets the white bishop, making his opponent worry about the capture on b2 or even an exchange sacrifice on e4.

16.♘d3

White refuses to allow any such tricks.

16...♘d7

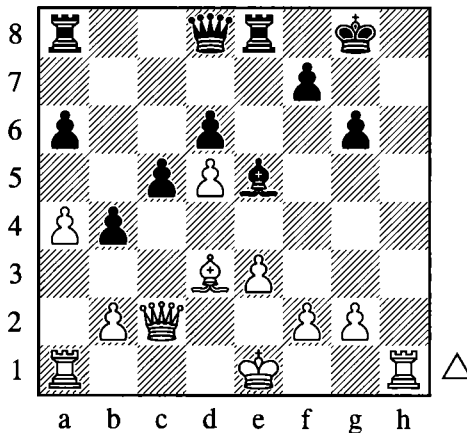
16...h5? runs into 17.♙xg6 fxe6 18.♚xg6† with a powerful attack. Black might be able to survive with 18...♜f8! intending ...♞a7, but his position is precarious and White should have at least a draw available.

17.h5 ♘e5?!

Black could have obtained promising counterplay with 17...b3!.

18.♘xe5 ♙xe5?!

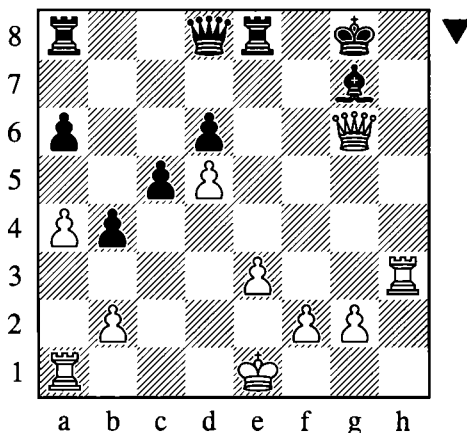
After the correct 18...♞e5 the position would have remained dynamically balanced. Compared with the game continuation, the rook's mobility along the fifth rank gives Black some extra defensive resources.

19.hxg6 hxg6**20.♙xg6!**

Sacrificing a piece to destroy the enemy kingside.

20...fxg6 21.♚xg6† ♙g7 22.♞h3

Preparing to use the rook on the third rank, as well as a possible doubling of rooks along the h-file.



22...♔e7?

Losing instantly. 22...♖e7! was the only move. According to the computer Black could still have maintained the balance with accurate defense, although his position would have been difficult to play over the board.

23.♗h7† ♕f8 24.♞f3† ♜f6 25.♞g6

1-0

The bishop on f6 drops, and Black will soon either be mated or suffer catastrophic material losses.

Game 27

Alekhine – NN

Santiago de Chile (simul) 1927

The following game is an apotheosis of the light-squared strategy, and can be viewed as a supplement to Chernin's crushing victory over Miles which we will see next.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.d5 b5 5.♙g5 h6

Pins are almost always annoying, and Black decides to eradicate this one at the first opportunity.

6.♙xf6

White does not mind giving up the bishop pair in order to win time for development.

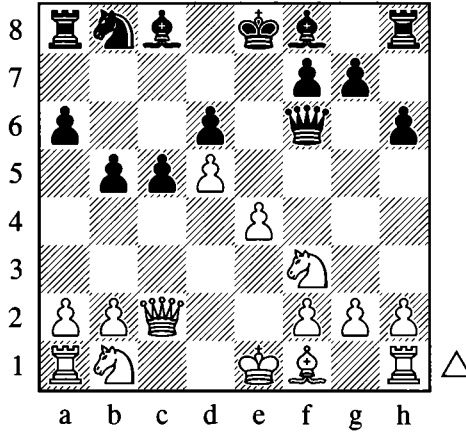
6...♗xf6 7.♞c2

This is the normal theoretical move, which leads to a slightly better position for White.

7...exd5 8.cxd5 d6

We have reached our Benoni structure.

9.e4 a6



10.a4!

The main purpose of this move is to obtain the ideal c4-square for a knight. From this super-strong outpost, it will pressure Black's d6-pawn and support the e4-e5 break, while also keeping an eye on the queenside in general.

10...b4 11.♘bd2

White's plan involves moves like ♕d3, 0-0, ♖c4 and ♖fd2, followed by f4 and e5 with a powerful attack in the center. It is not easy for Black to get his bishop pair working effectively, as the position is rather closed.

11...g5

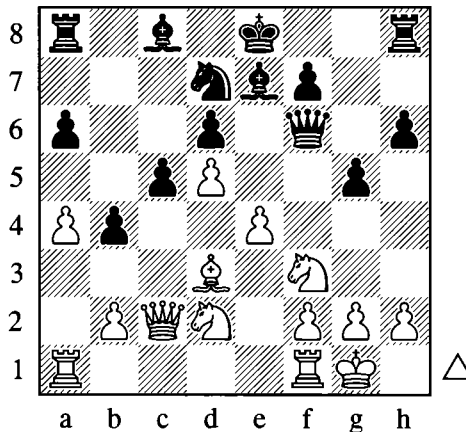
Just as in the Benoni, Black aims to deploy the bishop actively on the long diagonal, where it also keeps an eye on e5.

12.♙d3 ♜d7

12...g4 can be met by the familiar 13.e5! dx5 14.♜e4 and followed by ♜fd2-c4.

13.0-0 ♙e7

13...♙g7 looks more logical, although White can still get a fine position by using the same idea as in the game.



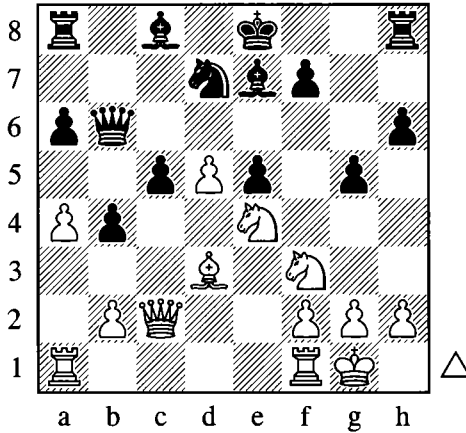
14.e5!

This positional pawn sacrifice unlocks the potential of White's pieces.

14...dxe5

14...dxe5 15.♘xe5 dxe5 (15...♙xe5 16.♝fe1) 16.♘e4 also gives White a strong initiative.

15.♘e4 ♙b6

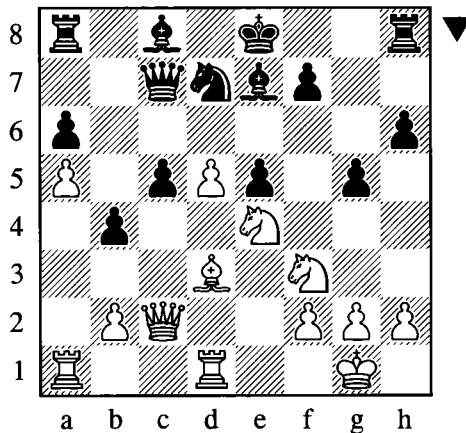


16.a5!

With this move White seizes space on the queenside, fixes the potentially weak a6-pawn, and most importantly, takes the b6-square away from Black's knight. White's rook will be tied to the defense of the a-pawn, but the benefits outweigh this minor inconvenience.

16...♙c7 17.♝fd1

By supporting the d-pawn indirectly, White creates the threat of 18.d6! ♙xd6 19.♘xd6† ♙xd6 20.♙e4 when the discovered attack wins material.



17...♔d6

Blocking the pawn, but the bishop looks rather clumsy here.

18.♘fd2!

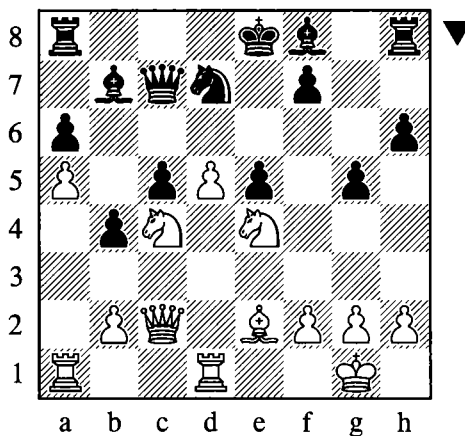
Heading for the dream outpost on c4.

18...♙b7 19.♘c4

White's pieces are beautifully placed on the light squares.

19...♙f8 20.♙e2!

Opening the d-file for the rook, while planning to relocate the bishop to the kingside, where it will help to control even more light squares.



20...f5 21.♘g3 0-0-0

21...f4? saves the f-pawn but allows a decisive invasion with 22.♖g6† ♜d8 23.d6, when Black is getting crushed.

22.♖xf5

White has restored material equality while maintaining a clear positional advantage. He has a bind on the light squares, while Black has problems finding useful roles for his pieces. Alekhine went on to convert his positional advantage into a win.

Our next game is another powerful demonstration of the e4-e5 break.

Game 28

Chernin – Miles

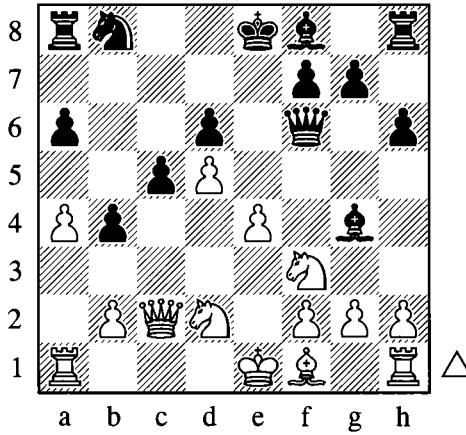
Tunis 1985

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.d5 b5 5.♙g5 h6 6.♙xf6 ♖xf6 7.♖c2 exd5 8.cxd5 d6 9.e4 a6 10.a4 b4 11.♘bd2

So far the players have repeated the previous game, but now Miles tries a different approach.

11...♗g4

A logical move, trying to exchange off the passive bishop which lacks a decent outpost.



12.e5!

The same positional sacrifice as in the previous game. Once again White clears the e4-square for his knight and removes the barrier in front of his d-pawn. It is important that Black's dark-squared bishop is likely to remain restricted for a long time by his cluster of pawns.

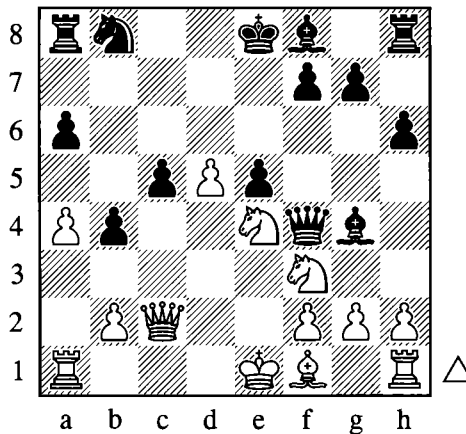
12...dxe5

12...♙e7 is uninspiring for Black. According to the computer the best response is 13.♘c4!, although 13.0-0-0!? also looks tempting.

13.♘e4

Occupying a light square. We can see White's strategy starting to take shape.

13...♙f4



14. ♖f2!

Once again the knight aims for the outpost on c4 while preventing Black from getting rid of his poor bishop, for the moment at least.

14... ♗f5

Black insists on exchanging this piece, while at the same time preventing ♖xc5.

15. ♗d3

White brings another piece into play on the light squares.

15... ♗xe4 16. ♖xe4!

The knight had been heading for c4, but changes its course due to the opponent's response.

16... ♖d7

Black has to catch up on development before he can think about chasing the strong knight away. Instead the impatient 16...f5? loses to 17. ♖xc5 when Black is helpless against the threats of ♖e6-c7† and ♗xf5.

17.g3

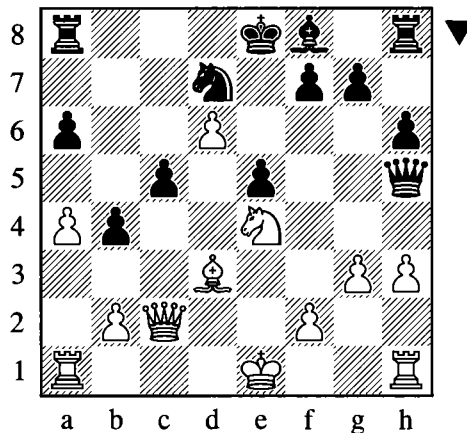
It is useful to send Black's queen towards the edge of the board.

17... ♖g4 18.h3 ♖h5

18...♖f3 is met by 19.0-0 when Black's queen is in danger.

19.d6!

A strong move, highlighting White's domination. By daringly advancing into hostile territory, the passed pawn sets Black awkward problems. How should the c5-pawn be defended, and how can the f8-bishop be developed? Contrary to all appearances, the lowly pawn is actually rather safe.



19... ♖g6

23.♙b1 fxg4 24.♖xc4

Finally White is ready for the decisive invasion.

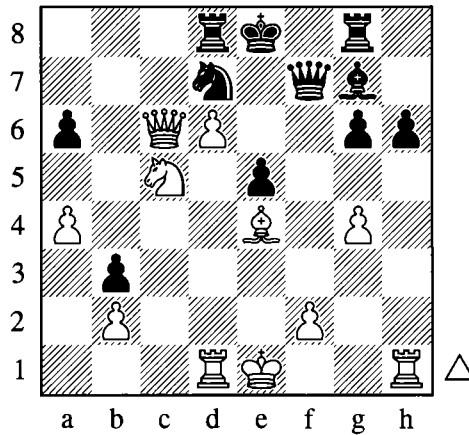
24...♗f7 25.♗c6 ♝d8 26.hxg4 g6 27.♘c5

The knight participates in the attack.

27...♞g8 28.♙c4

And the bishop too!

28...♙g7



29.♘xa6

The knight is aiming for c7, which is often a good target in positions where Black's king has not yet castled. 29.♙d5 was also good enough.

29...♗f4 30.♘c7† ♜f7 31.♗c4† ♜f6 32.♘d5†

32.♗e6† ♜g5 33.♗xg6# would have crowned White's light-squared strategy, but the text move wins material and was good enough to force resignation.

1-0

These last two games make a convincing argument against the early ...h7-h6 in positions where ♙xf6 must be met by ...♗xf6. Instead I believe Black should go for a different plan with an early ...♙e7 as shown in the next section.

Recent Theoretical Developments

The Blumenfeld has attracted considerable attention in recent years, thanks largely to the efforts of the creative Romanian grandmaster Liviu Dieter Nisipeanu, who has used it repeatedly against high-level opposition, and not without success! Let us investigate some of his games in order to see how Black may avoid suffering the same unpleasant fate as in the previous two games.

Game 29
Sargissian – Nisipeanu
 Bundesliga 2006

Nisipeanu started using the Blumenfeld in January 2006, as referenced in the note to move 6 below. The present game took place three weeks later.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.d5 b5 5.♙g5 exd5 6.cxd5 d6

Nisipeanu deviates from his previous game, which continued as follows:

6...h6

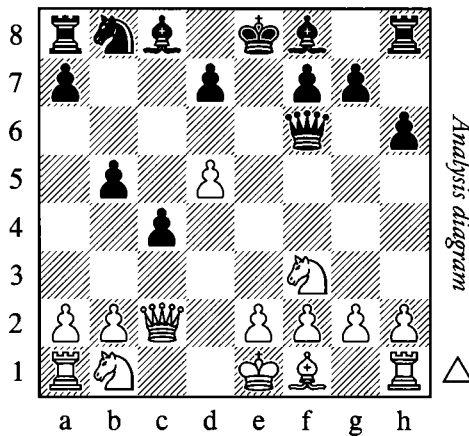
As a general rule it is risky for Black to allow his queen to be drawn into an exposed position, but the Romanian grandmaster has an unusual idea in mind.

7.♙xf6 ♗xf6 8.♖c2

So far we are following the same path as in Games 27 and 28.

8...c4!?

Nisipeanu eschews the passive 8...d6 and strives to activate his dark-squared bishop, even if it means sacrificing a pawn.



9.a4!

Undermining the queenside pawns is obviously the critical test.

9...♙b4† 10.♘c3 bxa4 11.♗xa4 a5 12.e3 0-0 13.♙xc4±

Postny – Nisipeanu, Germany 2006. Black has some compensation for the pawn, but I am not convinced that it is fully adequate, and indeed the Romanian grandmaster has never repeated this experiment.

7.e4

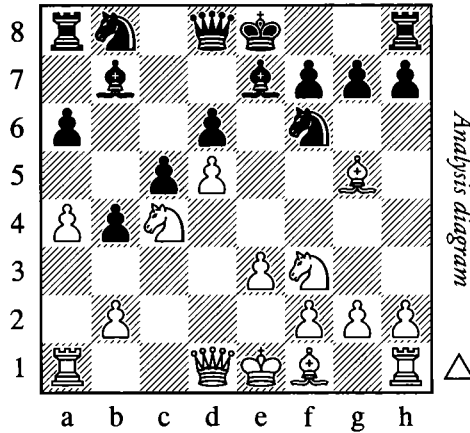
In addition to 7.♘c3 as examined in Game 26, White has two worthwhile alternatives:

7.e3

The e-pawn is safer here than on e4, but on the other hand the d5-pawn is more vulnerable.

7...a6 8.a4 b4 9.♘bd2 ♙e7 10.♘c4 ♙b7!?

10...a5 has been more popular, but the text move seems logical. Black renews the attack on the d5-pawn, thus highlighting the drawback of White's seventh move.



11. ♖xf6

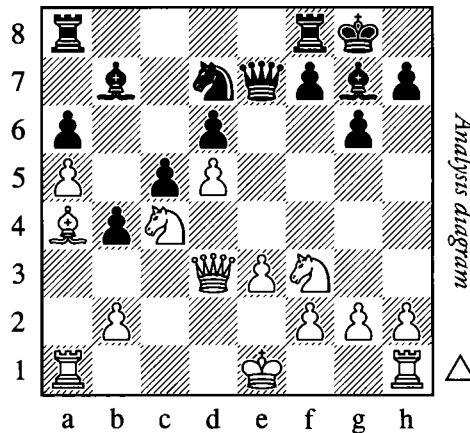
The quirky 11.h4 was played in Williams – J. Hanley, Liverpool 2008, and here 11...♗bd7 would have been the most logical and flexible reply.

11...♖xf6 12.a5 ♖e7 13.♖e2

13.g4!? h6 14.♖g2 ♗d7 led to double-edged play in Ding – Milliet, Villandry 2009.

13...♗d7 14.♖d3 g6 15.♖d1 0-0 16.♖a4 ♖g7!

Black can afford to offer a small sacrifice.



17.0-0

White correctly avoids 17.♖xd7? ♖xd7 18.♗b6 ♖b5 19.♖xb5 axb5 20.♗xa8 ♖xa8 when Black has more than enough compensation for the exchange.

17...♗f6 18.♗b6 ♖ad8

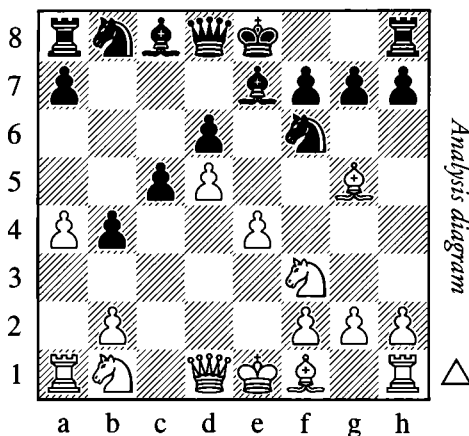
The middlegame is unclear and holds chances for both sides, Gupta – Iturrizaga Bonelli, Wijk aan Zee 2009.

White's other main option is:

7.a4

Wasting no time fighting for the c4-square. On the negative side, White fails to win a tempo by provoking ...a6.

7...b4 8.e4 ♖e7



9.♖b5†

Hoping to take advantage of the absence of ...a7-a6.

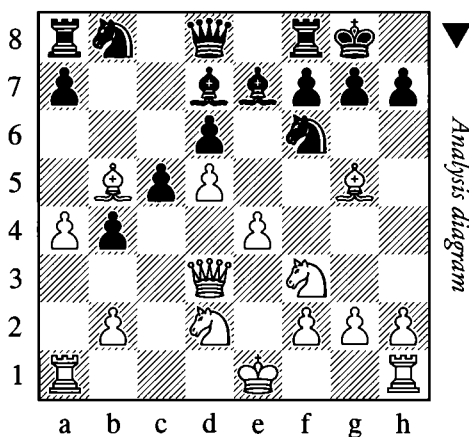
9.♖d3 0-0 10.♖f4 gives Black the interesting option of 10...♖a6!?

9...♖d7 10.♣d3

From this square the queen supports both e4 and b5.

After 10.0-0 0-0 11.♞e1 ♖xb5 12.axb5 ♘bd7 13.♘bd2 ♘b6 14.♖f4 ♣d7 Black had enough counterplay in Avrukh – Volokitin, Ermioni Argolidas 2005.

10...0-0 11.♘bd2



11...♘g4!?

This looks like an improvement over 11...h6 12.♖f4 ♘h5 13.♖e3 f5 as played in Neverov – Ghaem Maghami, Dubai 2009. At this point Georgiev points out the spectacular 14.♖xd7

♞xd7 15.e5!! f4 16.♙xc5 dxc5 17.♘e4 when White has fantastic compensation for the sacrificed piece.

12.♙xe7

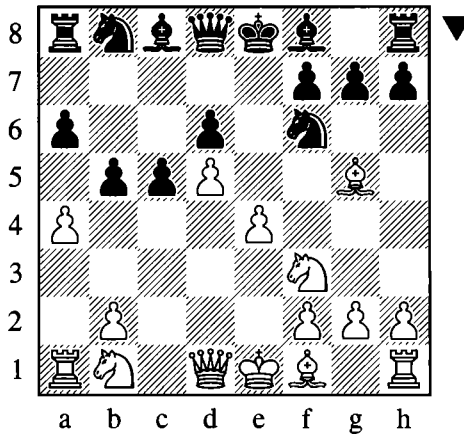
Or 12.♙f4 f5 with counterplay.

12...♞xe7 13.h3 ♘f6 14.0-0 ♙xb5 15.axb5 ♘bd7

Black has a reasonable position.

7...a6 8.a4

Attacking Black's extended structure on the queenside immediately. 8.♘bd2 leads to Game 30.



8...♙e7!

This is a key concept, and much more challenging than the passive 8...b4 which gives White full control over the key c4-square. Black can afford to leave his queenside to its own fate, since his counterattack in the center is more important.

9.♘bd2

White needs to safeguard the e4-pawn, and 9.♘c3? is inadvisable due to 9...b4.

The only way for White to keep his pawn center together is by giving up his dark-squared bishop:

9.♙xf6 ♙xf6

White can try to fight for an advantage by playing on the light squares, but Black should be all right.

10.axb5 ♙xb2 11.♞a2 ♙f6 12.♘bd2

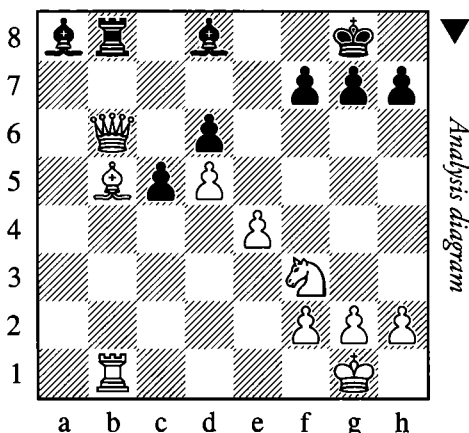
12.bxa6 White's win of a pawn is only temporary since the a6-pawn is deeply entrenched in hostile territory, and Black will have no trouble capturing it, just as in the Benko Gambit:

12...♞b6 13.♘bd2 ♙xa6 14.♞a4† ♖e7 Black is fine.

12...0-0 13.♙d3 ♙b7 14.0-0 axb5 15.♞xa8 ♙xa8 16.♙xb5 ♘d7

The position is close to equal. One all-grandmaster encounter continued:

17.♞a4 ♘b6 18.♞a5 ♞c7 19.♘c4 ♞b8 20.♞b1 ♙d8 21.♘xb6 ♞xb6 22.♞xb6



Van Wely – Feygin, Netherlands 2009. Here Black should have played:

22...♙xb6

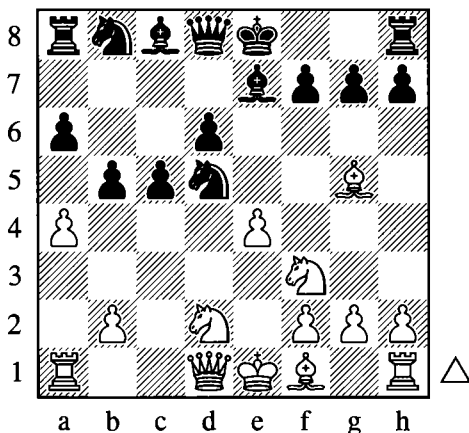
In the game Black opted for 22...♞xb6? but after 23.♘d2! he was in trouble and failed to save the game.

23.♙c6 ♙xc6 24.dxc6 ♞a8 25.♗f1 ♞a6 26.♗e2 ♙c7 27.♗d3 ♞xc6 28.♗c4 ♗f8 29.♗d5 ♞a6 30.♞b7 ♙d8=

Black succeeds in keeping his opponent at bay, as demonstrated by the above analysis of Kiril Georgiev.

9...♘xd5!

Again we see this familiar tactical stroke.



10.♙xc7

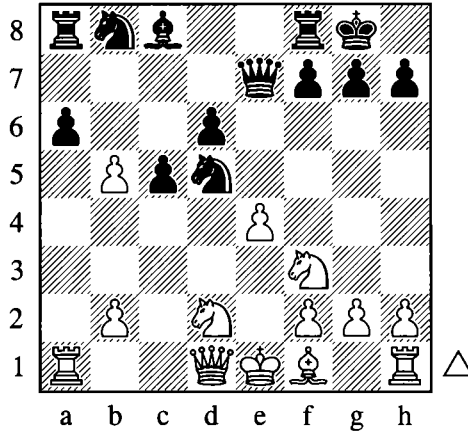
10.exd5?! is less logical; the d5-pawn shields Black's backward d-pawn from attack and may become weak in the future, as occurred in the following game: 10...♙xg5 11.axb5 0-0 12.♙e2 ♙b7 The d5-pawn is already in danger! 13.0-0 axb5 14.♞xa8 ♙xa8 15.♙xb5 ♙xd5 16.♗c4 ♙xc4 17.♙xc4 ♙f6 Tishin – Ovetchkin, Alushta 2004.

10...♖xe7

By pinning the e4-pawn Black avoids having to retreat his knight from the center.

11.axb5 0-0

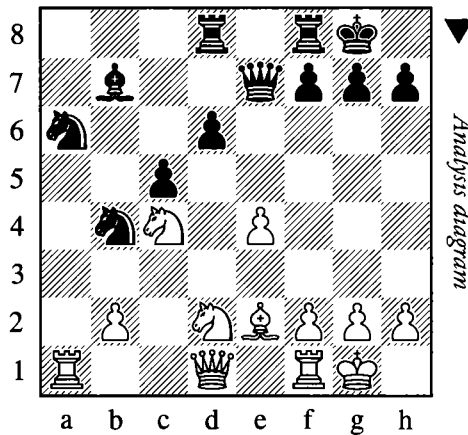
Completing kingside development is the most promising plan. Less convincing, but also playable is 11...♗f6 12.♗d3 0-0 13.0-0 ♗b7 14.♞e1 axb5 15.♞xa8 ♗xa8 16.♗xb5 and now not 16...♗xe4?? 17.♞a4+- as in Kirusha – Ivanov, Gatchina 2001, but rather 16...♗c6! with an almost equal game.



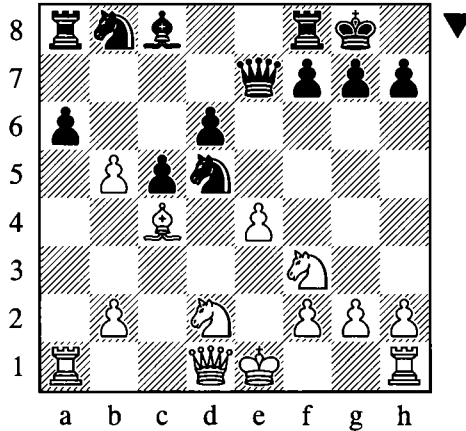
12.♗c4

The bishop develops actively and with tempo, while assisting in the fight for the d5-square.

The alternative is: 12.♗e2 ♗b4 Taking the outpost on the queenside. 13.0-0 ♗b7 14.bxa6 ♗8xa6 15.♗c4 ♞ad8 16.♗fd2



16...f5! Destroying White's center in classical style. Now Black's pieces come to life and his central pawn duo gains some potential. 17.exf5 ♞xf5 18.♗e3 ♞f4 19.♗f3 d5 20.g3 This was Bernal – Sanz, Villa Martelli 2004, and here Black could have maintained a slight plus with 20...♞ff8.



12...♠f4!?

The knight cannot resist occupying a menacing post on the kingside. It was also possible to take up residence on the queenside:

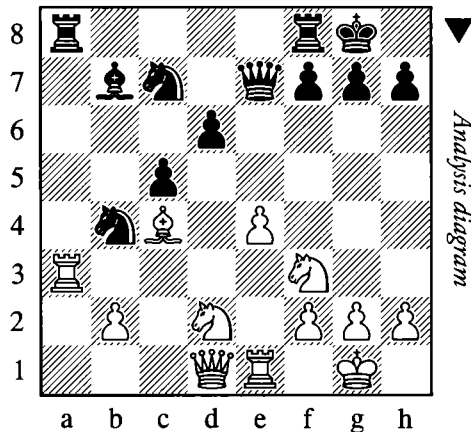
12...♠b4

In the event of 12...♠b6 White should simply play 13.0-0, when it is not clear what the knight is doing on b6.

13.0-0 ♙b7 14.bxa6

Another game continued 14.♞e1 axb5 15.♞xa8 ♙xa8 16.♙xb5 ♠8c6 and the players agreed a draw in Beliavsky – Cvitan, Celje 2004.

14...♠8xa6 15.♞e1 ♠c7 16.♞a3



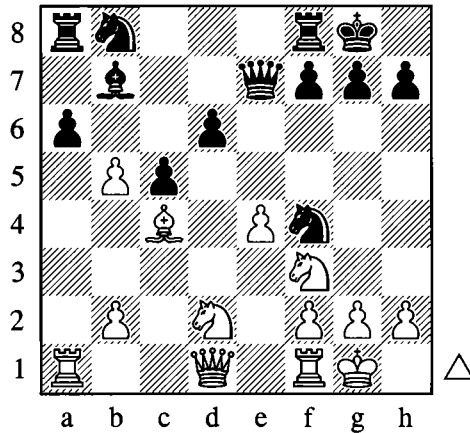
16...♠e6

16...♞f6 17.♞b3 ♠e6 18.♞c3 ♞xc3 19.♞xc3 d5 was equal in Dautov – Volokitin, Baden Oos 2004.

17.♞b3 ♠g5 18.♠xg5 ♞xg5 19.♞xa8 ♙xa8 20.♠f3 ♞e7 21.♞e3 ♠h8 22.♠d2 f5!

Black had some initiative and went on to win in Malyshev – Ghaem Maghami, Abu Dhabi 2003.

13.0-0 ♖b7



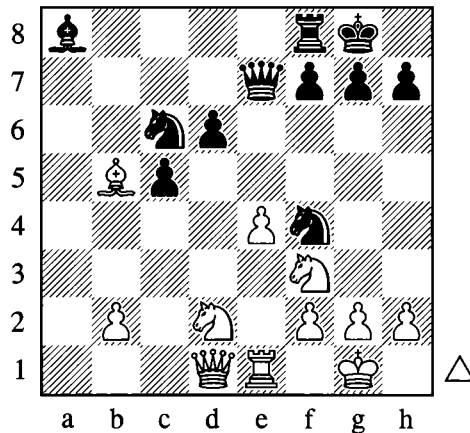
The bishop is perfectly placed on this square, defending the rook on a8 and bearing down on the important d5- and e4-squares.

14.♞e1 axb5

Black finally decides to release the tension on the queenside.

15.♞xa8 ♖xa8 16.♞xb5 ♖c6

The exchange on b5 has enabled the knight to come to its most natural square.



17.♞f1

Prophylaxis – the bishop scurries back to shore up the kingside.

17...♞f6 18.♖c4 ♞d8 19.♞d2?

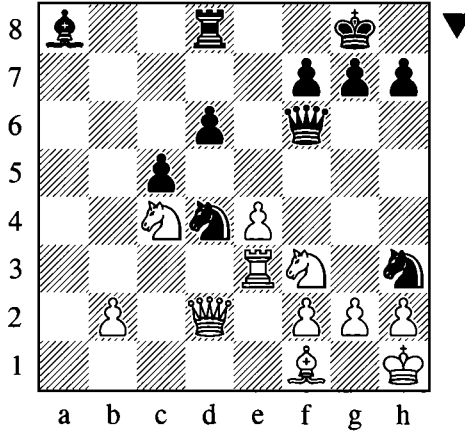
This careless move allows Nisipeanu to demonstrate the main point of his strategy. It was better to kick the knight away with 19.g3 ♖e6 20.♞g2 when White should be safe.

19...♖h3† 20.♖h1 ♖d4

The knight hops into the central outpost with impunity:

21.♖e3

21.♖xd4 ♖xf2† 22.♔g1 ♖xe4 23.♞xe4 ♙xe4 24.♖b5 d5 25.♖e3 d4†



21...d5!†

This thematic central break does more than just equalize. In one fell swoop Black liberates all his pieces, which spring to life with surprising energy. His rook produces an X-ray attack against White's queen, and his bishop exerts strong pressure on the long diagonal.

22.exd5 ♙xd5 23.♖ce5

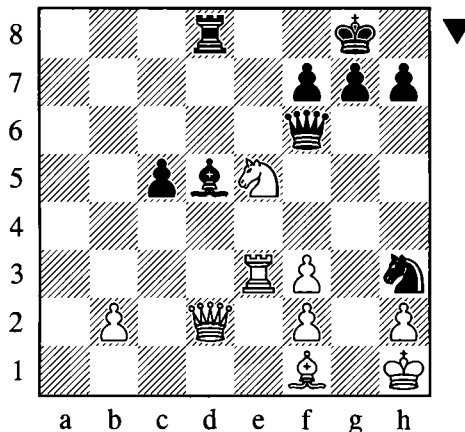
Centralization is a good defensive strategy, but it is not enough to solve White's problems here.

23...♖xf3

Black transforms his superior piece activity into a structural advantage. The alternative was: 23...h5!? 24.♖xd4 ♞xf2 (24...♖xf2† 25.♔g1 ♖e4) 25.♞xf2 ♖xf2† 26.♔g1 cxd4 27.♞e1†

24.gxf3

It would have been more prudent to exchange another pair of pieces with 24.♖xf3 ♙xf3 25.gxf3 ♖f4† although Black holds an unquestionable advantage here too.



24...♞f4

The knight returns to the f4-square, which has become a fantastic and stable outpost thanks to the doubling of White's pawns. Meanwhile Black's light-squared bishop continues to exert unpleasant pressure on the long diagonal.

25.♟c3

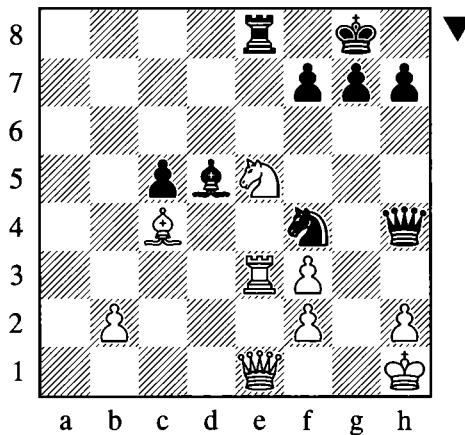
25.♟e1 can be met by 25...h6, safeguarding the king against back-rank tricks and maintaining a clear advantage.

25...♟h4 26.♟e1 ♖e8+

Threatening both 26...♞xe5, exploiting the overloading of the enemy rook, and a nasty rook lift with 26...♞e6.

27.♙c4

27.♙g1 ♞e6 wins. Instead White tries desperately to exchange Black's attacking pieces, but he has allowed a tactical solution. Can you find it?

**27...♞xe5! 28.♙xd5**

28.♞xe5 ♙xf3† leads to a quick mate.

28...♟g5

28...♟h3 was also good enough.

29.♟g1 ♟xg1†

0-1

White resigned as he is losing a piece.

What we have learned:

- ❖ The refinement of the Blumenfeld Gambit with 8...♙e7! offers Black healthy prospects. With this move he develops naturally, attacks the enemy center and threatens a combination – all in one go!

- ❖ In certain positions Black can ignore the a2-a4 thrust and focus on central counterplay. If White devours the queenside pawns then Black can strive for active piece play in the style of the Benko Gambit.
- ❖ In the absence of White's a- and c- pawns, b4 may prove an effective outpost square for a black knight.
- ❖ Always be careful of an enemy knight hovering near your king! Nisipeanu's knight on f4, combined with the rest of his pieces, caused White a great deal of trouble.
- ❖ The importance of centralization, whether in attack (20...♟d4) or in defense.
- ❖ Despite the game starting with 1.d4, the middlegame structure was somewhat reminiscent of a king's pawn opening, and Black's central breakthrough strategy to destroy White's e4-pawn proved highly effective.
- ❖ A rook lift can be a dangerous attacking tool.
- ❖ Always be on the lookout for tactics!

Game 30

Ivanchuk – Nisipeanu

Khanty-Mansiysk 2007

If an opening is good enough to play against Ivanchuk in the World Cup, then the rest of us should have no qualms about using it in our competitive games.

1.d4 ♟f6 2.♟f3 c5

Here we see another slightly different move order from which the Blumenfeld may be reached.

3.d5 e6 4.c4

White is happy to play against the Benoni, but Nisipeanu has other ideas. If you are thinking of using this move order in your own games, then please be aware that 4.♟c3 is a serious alternative.

4...b5

We are back at the starting position of the Blumenfeld Gambit, which has become a serious part of Nisipeanu's opening repertoire.

5.♙g5 exd5 6.cxd5 d6

Nisipeanu sensibly refrains from the early ...h6, after which the exchange on f6 would see his queen get drawn into an exposed position.

7.e4

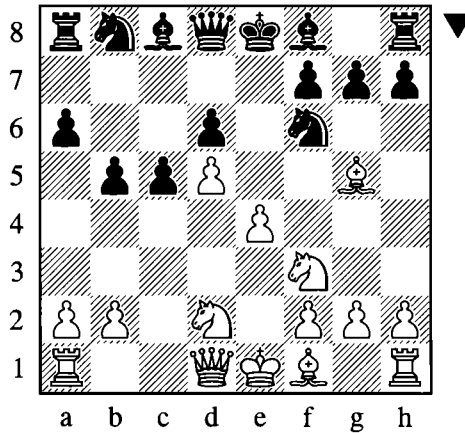
The pin on Black's knight makes this move possible. Now the b5-pawn is also under attack.

7...a6

Maintaining the b5-c5 pawn duo. Having spent the past few moves pushing pawns, Black must now focus his efforts on catching up in development.

8.♟bd2

Ivanchuk chooses this square, as 8.♘c3?! would only invite 8...b4. The knight might appear less active on d2, but White is hoping to strike at the enemy queenside with a4, with the aim of securing the c4-square.

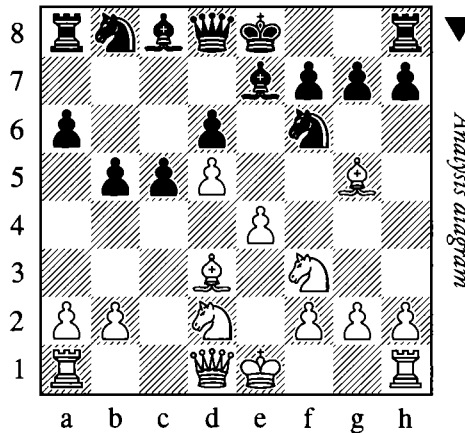


8...♗e7!

This natural developing move, which carries a tactical threat, has played a key role in changing the overall assessment of the Blumenfeld Gambit. It is one of the main reasons why a number of strong grandmasters have incorporated the gambit into their opening repertoires.

9.♗f4

The natural 9.♗d3? allows a thematic combination.



Can you find it?

9...♘xd5! Exploiting the loose bishop on g5. Black wins a pawn after 10.exd5 ♗xg5 or 10.♗xe7 ♘xe7 – or 10...♙xe7 with a pin on e4.

Against 9.a4, Black can still reply 9...♘xd5! 10.♗xe7 ♘xe7 11.axb5 0–0 with a good position.

Exchanging the loose bishop with 9.♗xf6 would hand the initiative to Black, whose own bishop will reign supreme over the dark squares: 9...♗xf6 10.♖c2 ♘d7 Black's pieces are fantastically placed. The e5-square is under his control, and the pawns on b5 and c5 could march forward and damage White's queenside later. To top it all, he has the bishop pair. Should White decide to attack the queenside with the thematic 11.a4, Black can preserve the fluidity of his pawn structure with 11...♞b8!

Ivanchuk chooses to preserve his important bishop, but the retreat loses time and allows Nisipeanu to solve his opening problems instructively.

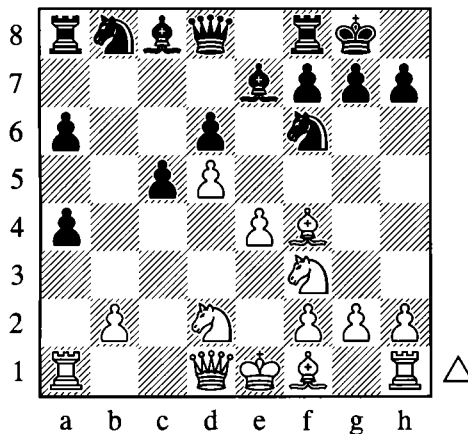
9...0-0 10.a4

Jabbing at Black's expanded pawn structure once again.

10...bxa4!

It is important to avoid 10...b4? 11.♗d3 when White obtains a classical positional advantage with a splendid knight outpost on c4.

In the game White also obtains the c4-square for his pieces, but the difference is that Black can utilize the open queenside to create counterplay. Apart from the open b-file, the unusual ...♗d7-b5 maneuver is also a key resource for him.



11.♗d3

Against 11.♞a4 Black employs a non-classical method of developing, which is justified by the concrete features of the position: 11...♗d7 12.♞a2 a5! Black's knight is coming to b4 via a6. It will be difficult for White to push with e4-e5 because the pawn on d5 will be hanging.

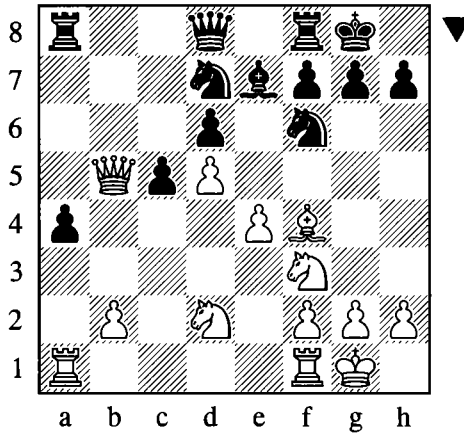
11...♗d7!

Intending to activate the bishop with...♗b5.

12.0-0 ♗b5 13.♞e2 ♘bd7!

Black continues to play in gambit style. He is happy to give up a pawn in order to finish developing and harmonize his forces.

14. ♖xb5 axb5 15. ♗xb5

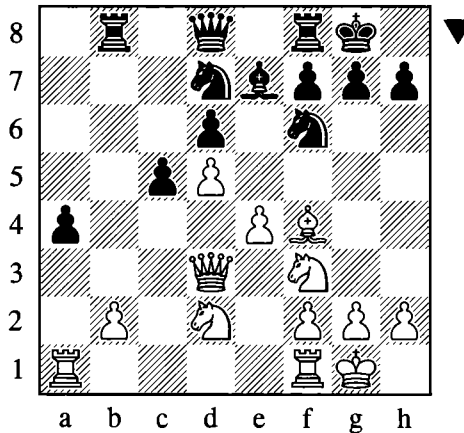


15... ♗b8

Another interesting idea is 15... ♗b8!? when 16. ♗xb8 ♗fxb8 gives Black typical Benko-style pressure against White's queenside. (See Chapter 1 for more details.)

However, White can improve with 16. ♗d3!, exploiting the fact that 16... ♗xb2?? is impossible due to 17. ♗fb1 when the queen is trapped.

16. ♗d3



16... ♗b4?!

Instead of this slightly inaccurate move, Black should have preferred 16... ♗xb2! 17. ♗xa4 ♖b6 when he has only a tiny disadvantage.

17. ♖c4 ♖b6

Hoping to trade the strong knight, but White can easily reinforce it.

18. ♖fd2!

White has the better game, although Nisipeanu eventually managed to hold a draw after defending an unpleasant endgame a pawn down.

What we have learned:

- ❖ An early ...♗e7 creates the tactical threat of ...♜xd5, forcing a concession from White.
- ❖ Another way of meeting the thrust a2-a4 is to capture on a4, with the aim of generating active play on the queenside.
- ❖ After exchanging on a4, the ...♗d7-b5 maneuver is a key resource.

I have saved the best for last. The following game took place a year before the above encounter with Ivanchuk, and must rank as Nisipeanu's greatest achievement with the Blumenfeld Gambit.

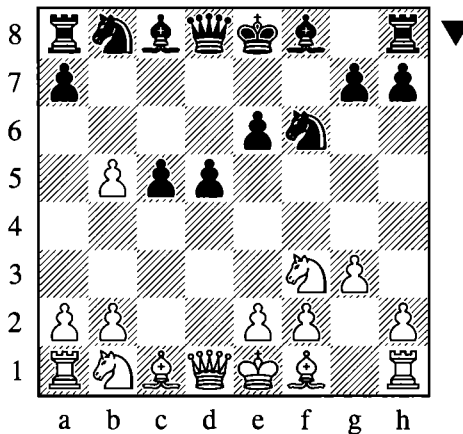
Game 31

Ki. Georgiev – Nisipeanu

Fuegen 2006

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f3 e6 3.c4 c5 4.d5 b5 5.dxe6 fxe6 6.cxb5 d5 7.g3

Nowadays it has been established that the kingside fianchetto is the most effective barrier against Black's kingside attack. Georgiev certainly has no intention of suffering the same fate as that of Tarrasch against Alekhine.

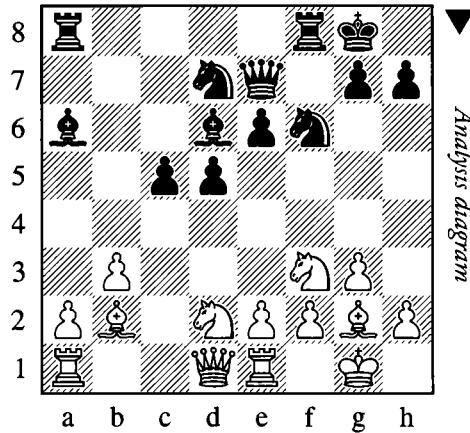


7...a6!

Played in the style of the Benko Gambit! Given that White is fortifying his kingside, it makes total sense for Black to shift his attention towards other areas of the board. After exchanging the b5-pawn he will be able to develop his knight to c6 and bishop to a6, where it will create annoying pressure along the a6-f1 diagonal. Black will not be able to generate the same level of queenside pressure as in the Benko Gambit, but on the other hand he still has his Blumenfeld pawn center and open f-file.

In a previous Georgiev game Black continued differently, before resorting to the same ...a6 idea:

7...♙d6 8.♙g2 0-0 9.0-0 ♗b7 10.♘bd2 ♘bd7 11.b3 ♚e7 12.♙b2 a6 Black was unable to find a better way of developing his pieces. 13.bxa6 ♙xa6 14.♞e1 White is aiming to play the standard e2-e4 pawn thrust against the Blumenfeld pawn center.



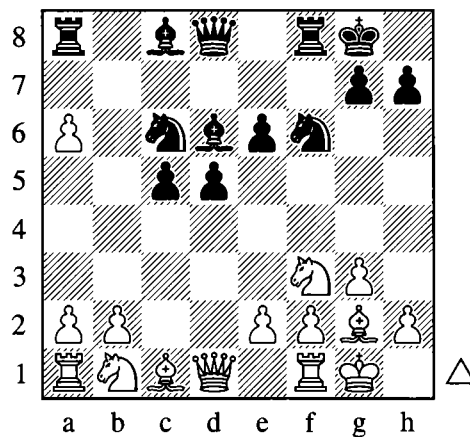
14...♘g4! This leads to great complications. 15.♚c2 e5 16.e4 c4 17.exd5 ♘xf2 18.bxc4 ♙c5 19.♙d4 ♙xd4 20.♘xd4 ♚c5 21.♘2b3 ♚a7 22.♘c6 ½-½ Georgiev – Volokitin, Budva 2004. The players agreed a draw in view of 22...♘h3† with an immediate perpetual.

In the main game we see Nisipeanu succeeding with a similar ...♘g4 idea, and there is a good chance that he was influenced by the above game.

8.bxa6 ♙d6

Black should not hurry to recapture the pawn, as 8...♙xa6?! is strongly met by 9.♙h3!.

9.♙g2 0-0 10.0-0 ♘c6



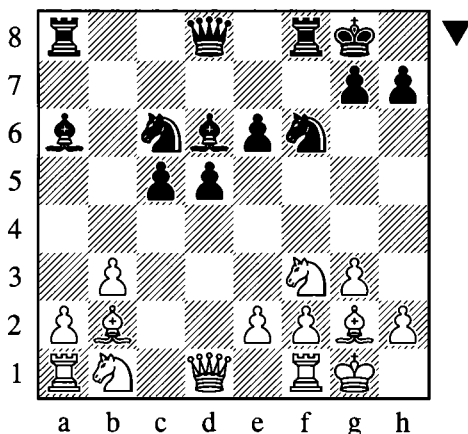
11.b3

Georgiev opts for a double-fianchetto in hypermodern style. The alternative is 11.♘c3 ♙xa6 when White has tried a few ideas:

a) 12.a4 ♖b4 13.♞a3 ♚e8 14.♜b5 ♙xb5 15.axb5 ♞b8 16.♜g5 h6 17.♜e4 ♜xe4 18.♙xe4 This was Nikolic – Volokitin, Germany 2004, and here 18...♚xb5 would have given Black the upper hand.

b) Nisipeanu faced a different approach earlier in the same year before the main game: 12...♙g5 h6 13.♙xf6 ♚xf6 14.♞c1 ♔h8 15.b3 ♞ac8 Black had good compensation in Bologan – Nisipeanu, Foros 2006.

11...♙xa6 12.♙b2

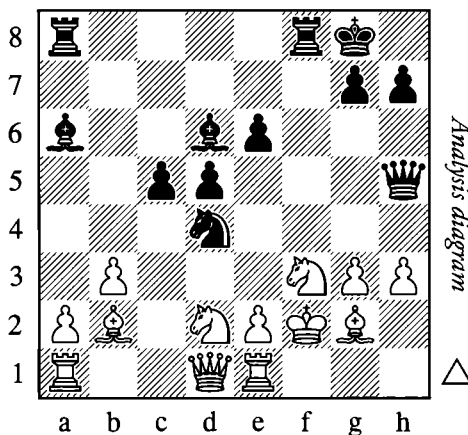


12...♚e8!?

12...♚e7 is also possible, as played in Harikrishna – Chandler, Gibraltar 2006. Instead Nisipeanu wants to deploy his queen more aggressively on the kingside.

13.♜bd2 ♞d8

Black could also have started his attack at once with 13...♚h5, after which play might continue: 14.♞e1 As we already know, White's most promising plan is to play for e2-e4. 14...♜g4!? The same idea as in the game. 15.h3 ♜xf2 16.♔xf2 ♜d4! The position is complex and dangerous for both sides. The main line of my analysis continues as follows:



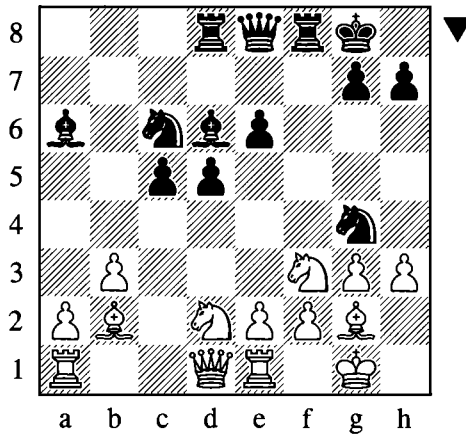
17.♞c1 ♜g6 18.♟f1 ♟f5 19.g4 ♟h4 20.♙g1 ♟xg2 21.♙xg2 ♜b7! Threatening to take on a2 while also preparing ...d4 to open the long diagonal. According to the computer White can obtain slightly the better chances with 22.b4!± although from a practical perspective it would seem realistic to call the whole line unclear.

14.♞e1 ♟g4!?

Nisipeanu employs the same idea as in the Georgiev – Volokitin game mentioned in the note to move 7. It leads to fascinating complications with decent practical chances for Black.

15.h3

The thematic 15.e4 d4 16.♟c4? runs into 16...♞h5 17.h3 ♟xf2! 18.♙xf2 ♜xc4 19.bxc4 ♟e5 with a strong attack, as pointed out by Notkin.

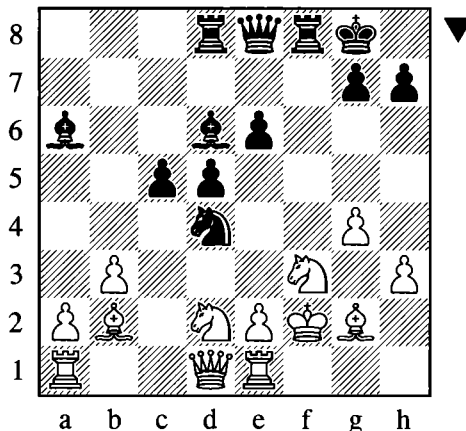


15...♟xf2!

There is no turning back!

16.♙xf2 ♟d4 17.g4

White wants to retreat his king without losing the g3-pawn. Another idea was 17.♟f1 when the most logical reply looks to be 17...♟f5 intending ...♞g6, as mentioned by Notkin.

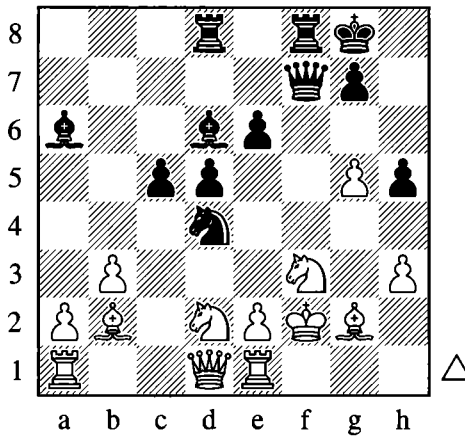


17...h5!

Nisipeanu does not allow his opponent a moment's respite.

18.g5 ♖f7?!

This was Black's only significant error in an otherwise masterful performance. The correct continuation was pointed out by Notkin: 18...♘f5! 19.e4 (Black can be happy with both 19.♘f1 ♘h4 and 19.♔g1 ♘e3) 19...dxe4 20.♘xe4 (20.♖xe4 ♙d3 Black has ongoing compensation in this messy position.) 20...♙g3† 21.♘xg3 ♖xd1 22.♖xd1 ♘h4∞ In material terms White has more than enough for the queen, but he is caught in a troublesome pin so the position remains unclear.

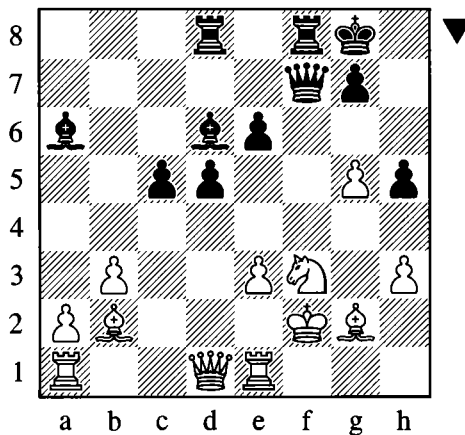


19.e3?

A serious mistake. Correct was 19.♔g1 when Notkin mentions the following plausible continuation: 19...♗f4 20.♙xd4 (20.♘f1!?) 20...cxd4 21.♘f1 e5 22.♗d2 ♗f7 Black keeps some compensation although objectively he does not really have enough for a piece.

19...♘xf3 20.♘xf3

20.♙xf3? runs into 20...♗f5 when Black picks up one of the pawns on g5 or h3, while maintaining a powerful attack.



20...♙h2!

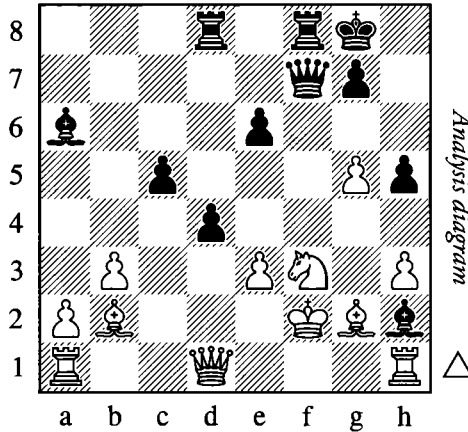
Preventing the white king from retreating, while setting up the deadly threat of ...♚c7.

21.♙f1

Alternatives would also have failed to save the game:

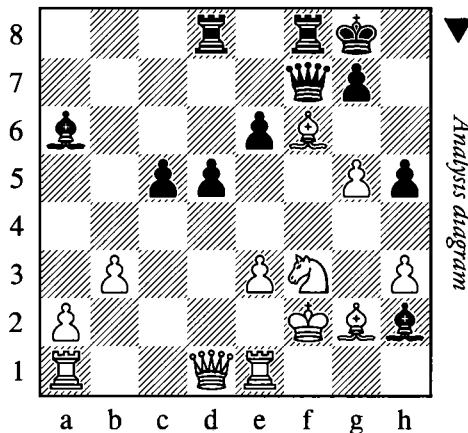
21.♞h1 sets a nice trap, as 21...♚c7? is refuted by 22.♞xh2 ♚xh2 23.♙f6!.

Instead Black can press home his advantage with the energetic 21...d4!, for instance:

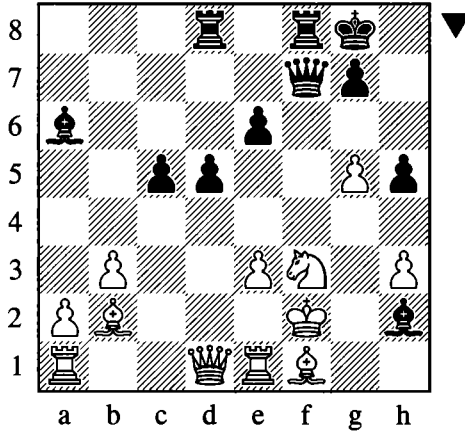


22.exd4 (22.♞xh2 dxe3† 23.♙xe3 ♞xd1 24.♞xd1 ♚f4† 25.♙f2 ♚xh2–+; 22.e4 ♚f4 23.♞xh2 ♚e3† 24.♙g3 h4†! 25.♙xh4 ♚f4† 26.♙h5 g6†–+ with mate to follow shortly.) 22...♚f4 23.♞xh2 ♚xh2 White has no defense against the threats which include ...♙b7 and ...e5-e4 (analysis by Notkin).

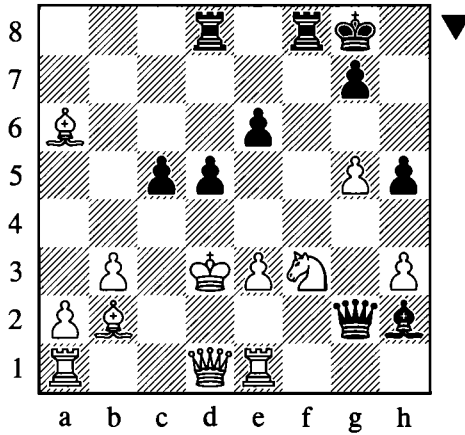
21.♙f6!? is a nice try but also fails to save the game:



21...♚c7! (but not 21...gxf6? 22.♙xh2 fxg5† 23.♙g1 when the white king escapes) 22.♙xh2 ♚xh2 23.♚xh5 ♞xf6†! 24.gxf6 ♞f8 White will have to give up his queen, as pointed out by Notkin.



21...♞c7! 22.♔xa6 ♞g3† 23.♕e2 ♞g2† 24.♕d3

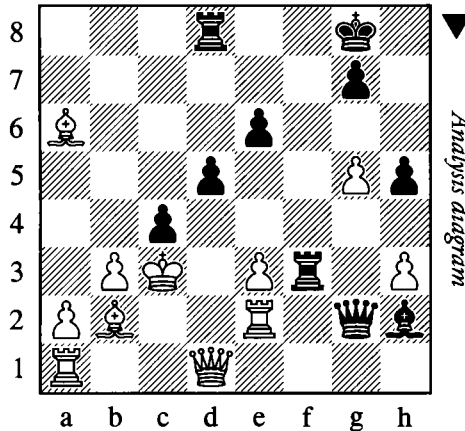


24...c4†!

24...♞xb2? 25.♞d2 enables White to defend.

25.♕c3 ♞xf3 26.♞d4

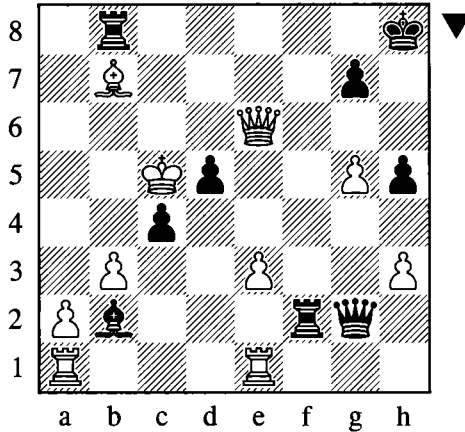
26.♞e2 meets with a pretty refutation. Can you find it?



Analysis diagram

26...♖xe3†! 27.♔d2 (27.♞xe3 d4† 28.♗b4 ♕d6† 29.♗xc4 dxe3→) 27...♞xg5! 28.♞xe3 d4 Black is winning, as pointed out by Notkin.

26...♞f2! 27.♞b6 ♕e5† 28.♗b4 ♞b8 29.♕b7 ♕xb2 30.♞xe6† ♔h8 31.♗c5



31...♕xa1

It was not too late to throw the game away with 31...♞xb7?? 32.♞e8† ♔h7 33.♞g1! when Black loses.

32.♕xd5 ♞xg5 33.♞xa1 c3

Black may not be able to checkmate his opponent's king, but there are other paths to victory. The simplest one is to promote the c-pawn.

34.h4 ♞xh4 35.e4 c2 36.♞c1 ♞g5 37.♞h3 ♞xc1

0-1

White 'almost' has a checkmate with 38.♞xh5†, but after 38...♞h6 there is nothing left for him to do.

What we have learned:

- ❖ After accepting the gambit pawn, White can fortify his kingside with g3 and ♕g2.
- ❖ When this happens, Black should play ...a6 to obtain some space on the queenside and bring his bishop to the excellent a6-square.
- ❖ A timely ...♗g4 can be an important attacking resource, especially when combined with a sacrifice on f2.
- ❖ A material sacrifice does not have to lead to an immediate checkmate! In this game we saw Nisipeanu obtain ongoing compensation against White's disorganized position, and the practical problems were too much for Georgiev to handle.

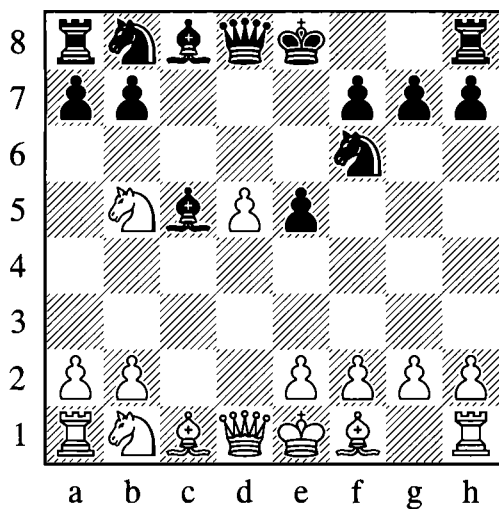
Conclusion

The Blumenfeld Gambit enables Black to put his opponent under pressure from the early stages of the opening. If White accepts the pawn then Black generally obtains promising compensation, as demonstrated by the games Tarrasch – Alekhine and Georgiev – Nisipeanu. Despite Steinitz’s old motto “the only way to refute a gambit is to accept it”, White’s most promising and popular reply involves declining the gambit pawn with 5.♗g5! in order to build a lead in development. We saw that an early ...h6 is asking for trouble, so Black does best to play 5...exd5 6.cxd5 d6 intending a quick ...♗e7, as demonstrated in Games 29 and 30. The tactical threat of ...♗xd5 is annoying for White, and overall the second player seems to have good chances to reach a satisfactory position.

A final word of warning: remember that the Blumenfeld Gambit is not a universal weapon against 1.d4, and can only be played after a particular sequence of opening moves involving an early ♗f3 from White! If you intend to incorporate it into your repertoire, be sure to decide on your preferred move order and consider the ways in which White may steer the game away from Blumenfeld territory.

Chapter 3

The Vaganian Gambit



1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. ♘f3 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 e5 5. ♘b5 d5 6. cxd5 ♙c5

Introduction

The Vaganian Gambit occurs after the following opening moves.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5

Black hopes to play a Benko or Blumenfeld Gambit, or some type of Benoni.

3.♗f3

With this quiet move White hopes to avoid an early conflict. It should be mentioned that the same position could be reached from the English Opening via the move order of 1.c4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗f6 3.d4.

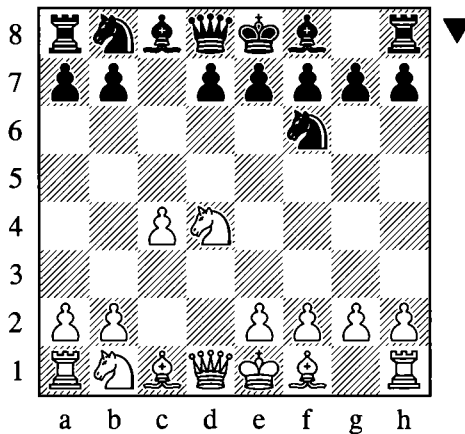
Gaining space with 3.d5 is the principled way for White to fight for the advantage. Then 3...b5 leads to the Benko Gambit, as covered in Chapter 1.

3.dxc5 e6 and 3.e3 g6 are occasionally seen, but I do not consider either of these to be serious options requiring theoretical coverage.

3...cxd4

Black begins by eliminating a central pawn while he has the chance.

4.♗xd4



4...e5!?

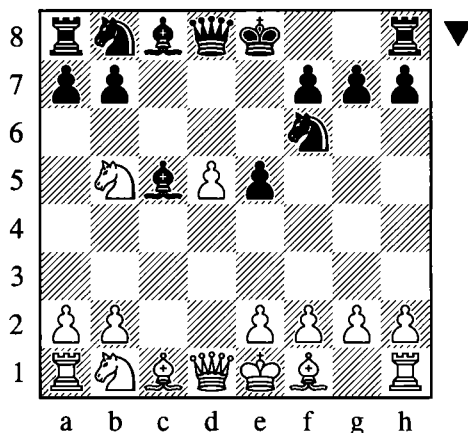
Black thrusts his pawn into the center, kicking the enemy knight away in the process. This aggressive move virtually commits Black to a pawn sacrifice, otherwise the gaping hole on d5 will cause him a lot of discomfort.

Of course it is possible to play more calmly, but calmness is not the topic of this book!

5.♗b5!

White has won a pawn, as 6...♖xd5?? would drop a piece to 7.♙xd5! ♜xd5 8.♗c7†. But Black's last move was not a blunder; by luring the enemy pawn to d5 he has taken away White's central outpost, while freeing his pieces for quick and active development.

6...♗c5!



This is the move which gives this line its true gambit flavor. It was first played by the Armenian Grandmaster Rafael Vaganian in 1977. (In a few previous games Black had tried 6...♙a5† and 6...♗b4†, without much success.) Vaganian is an aggressive player who has always been fond of gambits and other sharp openings. One of his favorites was the Benko, which looked absolutely ferocious in his hands. Because of this many of his opponents played 3.♗f3 hoping for a quieter life, which prompted Vaganian to invent another gambit!

Several other strong players followed Vaganian's lead, including the young Garry Kasparov who took up the gambit in the early eighties. Kasparov was not a big fan of the Benko, but he played the Benoni and thus had to face 3.♗f3 from time to time. The Vaganian Gambit is still considered playable today and has been used by such distinguished grandmasters as Topalov, Polgar and Sutovsky.

Let us now turn our attention to some games which illustrate some of the key themes of the position.

The Weakness of f2

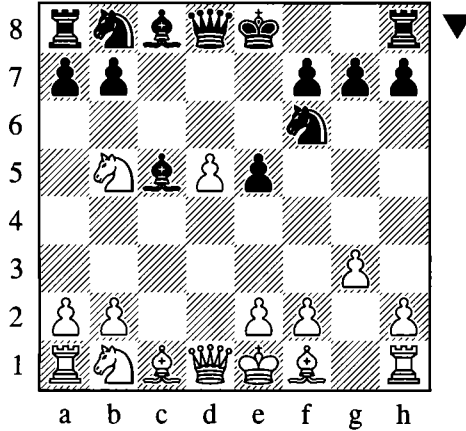
With the bishop on c5 and the white king a full three moves away from castling, it is hardly surprising that the Vaganian Gambit offers plenty of tactical motifs involving moves like ...♗xf2† and/or ...♗e4. Such ideas can occur in both simple and more advanced settings. We will begin at the basic end of the scale, although later in the chapter we will see examples in which even strong grandmasters have fallen into trouble connected with the f2-square.

Game 32

Jose Luis Garcia Abrante – Ernesto Solana Suarez

Ponferrada 1991

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.♗f3 cxd4 4.♗xd4 e5 5.♗b5! d5! 6.cxd5 ♕c5 7.g3



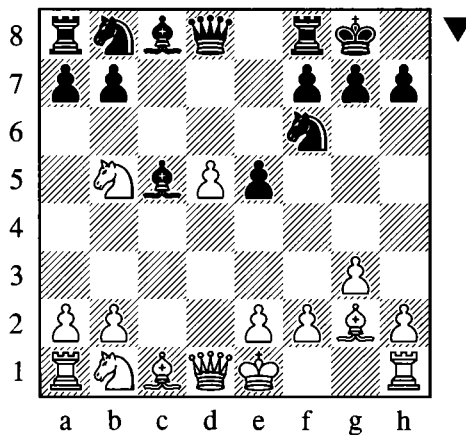
The fianchetto option is strategically logical. From g2 the bishop will not only protect White's d5-pawn, but also provide additional shelter for the barren kingside.

7...0-0

The immediate 7...♖b6? is premature due to 8.e3.

8..♕g2?

A blunder. The right move was 8.♗5c3, transposing to Game 48.

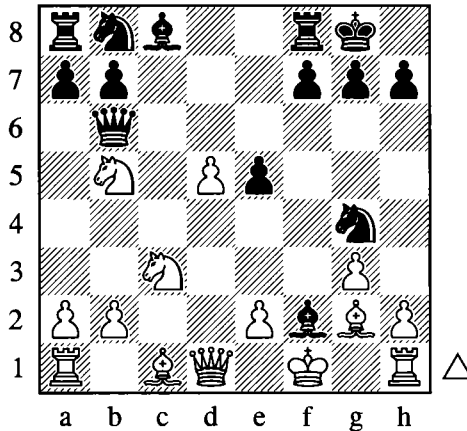


8...♖b6!

After this simple fork both f2 and b5 are hanging, and White is already heading towards the grave.

Using the same theme Black could also have regained the sacrificed pawn with 8...♙xf2† 9.♖xf2 ♜b6†, but the text is much stronger. Black's bishop is a valuable attacking piece and should not be exchanged for White's misplaced knight.

9.♖1c3 ♙xf2† 10.♖f1 ♘g4!



White's king is already in dire trouble, despite the fact that Black is attacking with just three pieces! The threats are plentiful: 11...♘h2† 12.♞xh2 ♙xg3 with the dual threats of ...♜f2# and ...♙xh2, or simply ...♙xg3, clearing f2 for the queen. Even ...♙g1, attacking h2 while freeing f2 for the queen, looks highly unpleasant.

11.♘a3?

Blissfully ignorant of the danger, White gives his opponent complete freedom to decide.

11...♙xg3

0–1

What we have learned:

- ❖ The f2-square was the source of White's demise, both in the initial fork (8...♜b6!) and the final mating threat (11...♙xg3).
- ❖ Watch out for double attacks involving loose pieces in the opening – and at all other times, for that matter!

In the next game White allows his position to be wrecked by playing a single careless move in the opening, and once again the f2-square was the key.

Game 33

Francisco Caramé Gonzalez – Dan Cruz Álvarez de Ron

Los Barrios 1995

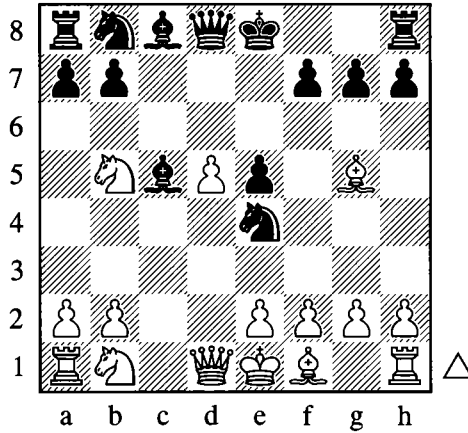
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♘f3 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5! d5! 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.♙g5?

10...♔e7

Or 10...♔d8 11.♖xa8 ♜h4† 12.g3 ♖xg3 13.hxg3 ♜xh1 14.♞c1! ♖d7 15.♞g5† f6 16.♞xg7 with a winning position for White.

11.♖c3! ♜h4† 12.g3 ♖xg3 13.hxg3 ♜xh1 14.d6† ♔d8 15.♖xa8

Black has no compensation for the missing material.



8...♙e3

An ugly move to have to play, but the choices are few.

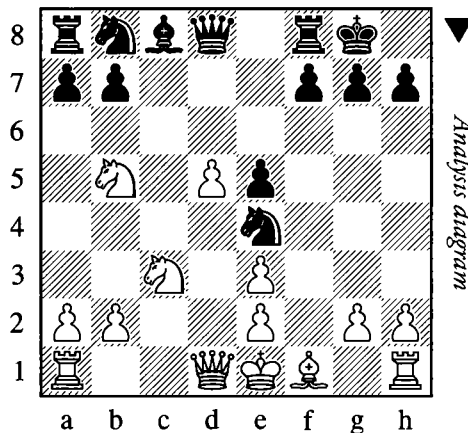
8.♖d6†? looks like a fantastic resource. One of the ideas behind this move is that although 8...♙xd6? 9.♙xd8 ♙b4† looks like a tempting tactic, 10.♖c3! ♖xc3 11.♞b3 would refute Black's play.

However, Black can improve with 8...♞xd6!. White's idea is to regain the knight with 9.♞a4†, but after 9...♖d7 10.♞xe4 ♞b6! he is unable to defend all of his weakened dark squares.

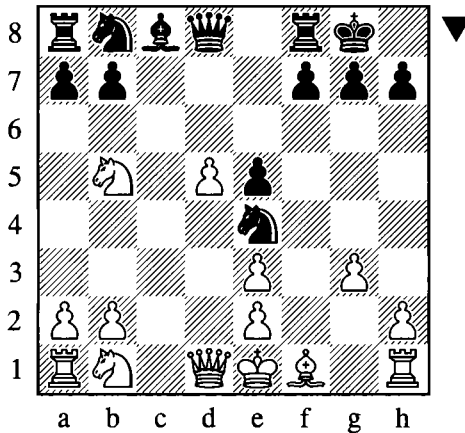
8...♙xe3 9.fxe3 0-0 10.g3?

White covers the exposed e1-h4 diagonal and prepares to develop the light-squared bishop. The intentions are good, but the move suffers from a fatal flaw.

It was imperative to remove the strong centralized knight with 10.♖1c3!:



when the critical continuation is 10...♖h4† 11.g3 ♜xg3 12.hxg3 ♜xh1 13.♞c7 regaining the rook in the corner. However, after the accurate 13...♞a6 14.♞xa8 ♜g1 15.♞d2 ♙f5! the complications still favor Black.



10...♜f6!

After this simple move White is unable to prevent the invasion on f2. His queen and king are both forced to go on the run, and the game is soon over.

11.♜c2 ♜f2† 12.♞d1 ♙f5 13.♜b3 ♞a6 14.♞1a3 ♞ac5 15.♜c4 ♜xe3
0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ A pin can be a double-edged weapon, especially if the pinning bishop is undefended.
- ❖ If you have a choice between two different ways to exploit a tactical motif, take your time to calculate and assess both of them. The difference between 7...♙xf2? and 7...♞e4! was huge.
- ❖ Time is of the essence, especially in sharp positions. The slow 10.g3? was a fatal error and White soon paid the price.

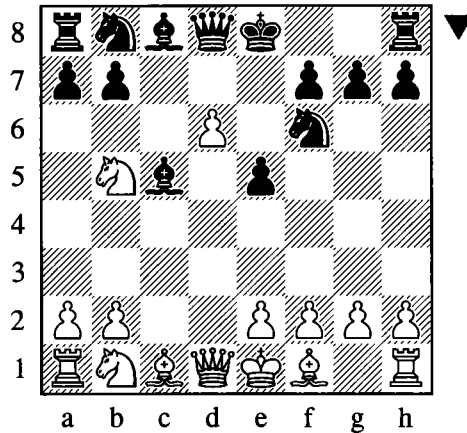
In the next game White is fixated on winning the rook on a8, but he pays the price in terms of a chronic lag in development. As a result he suffers an assault based on the weakness of both the f2-square and the b4-e1 diagonal.

Game 34

Vadim Alekseev – Pavel Kolmakov

Korolev 2002

1.d4 ♞f6 2.c4 c5 3.♞f3 cxd4 4.♞xd4 e5 5.♞b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.d6?!



This move looks exceedingly tempting. White tries to exploit his extra pawn by threatening to win the rook in the corner. If Black was forced to play 7...♘a6 to defend the c7-square, White's idea would make a lot of sense, as it would not be easy to remove the knight from b5. However, Black is able to react much more energetically, in true gambit style.

7...0-0!

This developing move is the best reaction.

7...♘e4!? is also possible, and indeed one game ended tragically after 8.♘c7?? ♚xc7! 9.♚a4† ♚c6! 0-1 Huque – Hodgson, London 1987.

Although it looks tempting to try and steer the game along the same short path, we should not expect our opponents to be so cooperative. One way for White to improve is 8.♚d5!?, reaching a wild position in which it is hard to determine who stands better or why.

However, the simplest and probably best move is 8.e3!. In that case White returns his extra pawn but obtains some chances for a positional edge; not the outcome we should have in mind when playing an aggressive gambit.

8.♘c7?

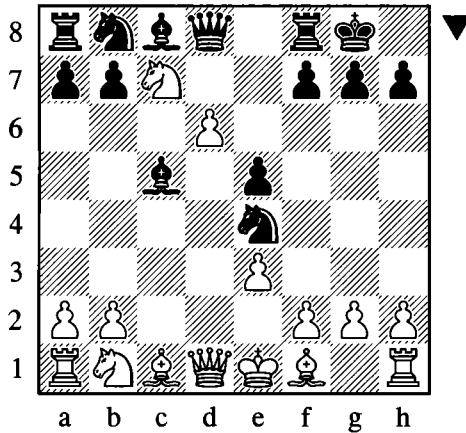
White takes up the challenge, daring Black to prove that he has an attack. Unfortunately for the first player, he does!

8.e3 was the lesser evil, although Black is still doing well. The best continuation is 8...a6! and after the knight retreats, Black will play ...b5 and ...♗b7 with a comfortable and active game. It should be noted that 9.♘c7?! ♚a7 is not an improvement for White, as his knight might soon fall into danger.

8...♘e4!

With this key move Black uses the attack on f2 to create momentum for something else...

9.e3



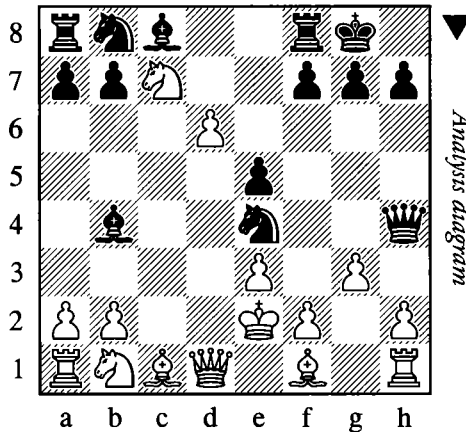
9...♙b4†!

Switching the focus of the attack. Kolmakov chooses the most accurate continuation, which later eluded a top grandmaster rated over 400 points higher! See Game 37 on page 219, where Emil Sutovsky chooses the inferior, though still interesting 9...♙xd6?!

10.♙d2

A difficult move to make, but the alternatives were hardly inspiring. The other legal moves (assuming White prefers not to give away his queen) are:

10.♙e2? is, not surprisingly, entirely suicidal: 10...♚h4 11.g3 (11.f3 ♚f2† led to a quick victory for Black in Tungalag – Alekhina, Sochi 1981)



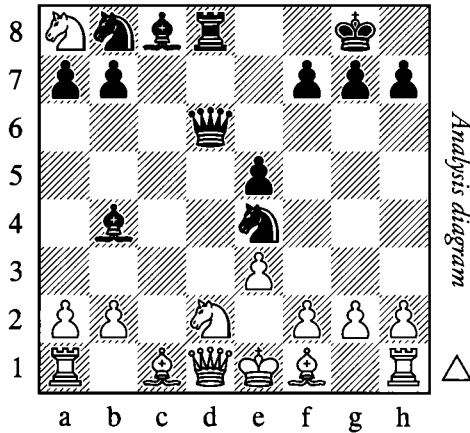
11...♜xg3†!! 12.hxg3 (12.fxg3 is met by 12...♚h5†! winning the queen) 12...♚xh1 Black is winning; the lethal threat is ...♙g4†.

10.♜d2?!

This is as bad as the game for White, without giving him a chance to repent along the way.

10...♚xd6 11.♜xa8 ♜d8

The pressure against the d2-knight is intolerable.



12. ♖e2 ♜xd2 13. ♗xd2 ♗xd2† 14. ♜f1 ♜c6

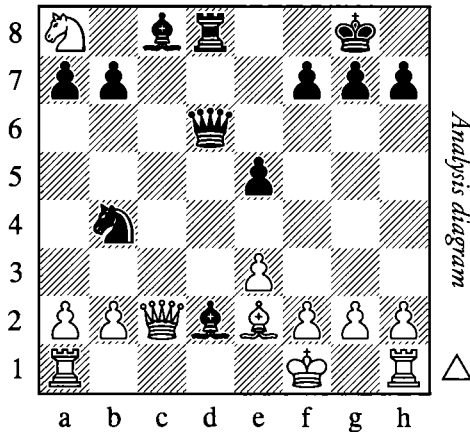
Black continues with development. White is temporarily the exchange up, but he has lost the right to castle and his knight is trapped on a8.

15. ♗c2

This position was reached in Teske – Salmensuu, Koszalin 1999. At this point the most precise continuation would have been:

15... ♜b4!

Even better than 15... ♗b8† which was still good enough to bring Black victory in the game. From here the main line runs as follows:

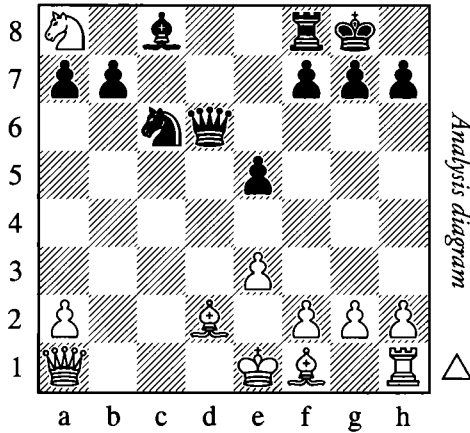


16. ♗c7 ♗f6 17. ♗f3 e4! 18. ♗xe4 ♗xe3 19. ♗f3 ♜a6 20. ♗c2 ♗f5

Black's rampant pieces quickly decide the game.

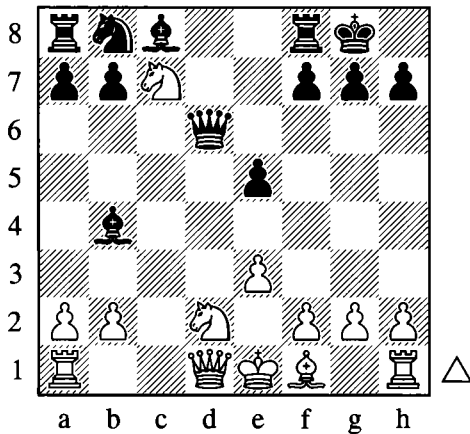
21. ♗b3 ♗xf2 22. ♜xf2 ♞d2† 23. ♜e1 ♗d4 24. ♞f1 ♜b4–+

However, it is worth mentioning 10. ♜c3!, which is probably the best practical attempt to minimize White's disadvantage. Play continues 10... ♜xc3 11. bxc3 ♗xc3† 12. ♗d2 ♗xa1 13. ♗xa1 ♗xd6 14. ♜xa8 ♜c6 as in Strand – Lanka, corr. 1986.



White is likely to end up a pawn down after the knight on a8 perishes, but his bishop pair will offer him some hopes of saving the game. In any case, at least he is not about to be checkmated here!

10... ♖xd2 11. ♗xd2 ♔xd6



12. ♖c1?

This wildly optimistic move is just a blunder. The only chance was 12. ♗b5! with the idea of ♗c3 to shield the knight on d2. However, after 12... ♔g6! White is still struggling; it is not easy for him to complete his development and Black has the bishop pair 'in the bank' for use later in the game.

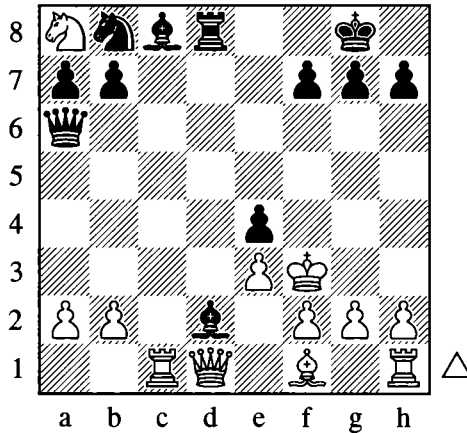
12... ♖d8

Black turns up the heat. White cannot escape the pin and his king will soon be hunted down.

13. ♗xa8

13... ♖c2 does not help on account of 13... ♗f5!.

13...♙xd2† 14.♙e2 ♖a6† 15.♙f3 e4†!



Drawing the white king further into the center, where he will suffer a brutal and humiliating end.

16.♙xe4 ♖e6† 17.♙f4 ♖f5† 18.♙g3 ♖g5†

And finally White resigned as it is mate next move.

0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ Grabbing material is a risky policy in the opening. The moves 7.d6?! and 8.♘c7? led to a gain of material, but White built up a heavy development debt and was unable to pay the interest.
- ❖ When your opponent is attacking, it may be worth investing some material to dampen his initiative. In this game 10.♘c3! would have given White a somewhat worse position a pawn down, but he would have had far better survival chances than in the game.

In the final game in this section, White unwisely decides to combine the two time-wasting ideas of d5-d6 and g2-g3, making it possible for Black to blow the center open at an early stage.

Game 35

Christian Seel – Surya Shekhar Ganguly

Gibraltar 2004

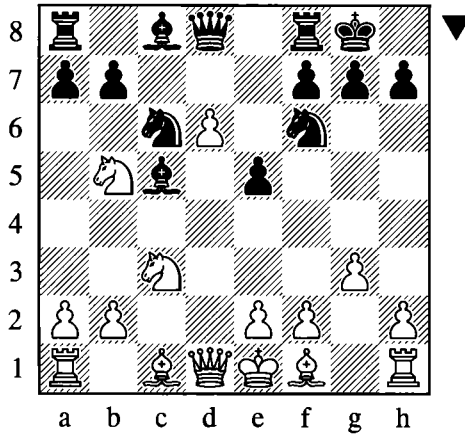
Although Black won this game in just 23 moves, he actually overlooked the most effective and spectacular attacking idea, so I would urge the reader to pay close attention.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♘f3 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.d6?! 0-0! 8.♘1c3

This is better than the lunge to c7, but Black can still fight for the initiative with forceful play.

8...♘c6 9.g3?

White cannot afford the time for this. 9.e3 was better, although after 9...♔f5 Black still enjoys a pleasant and active game.



9...♖b6!

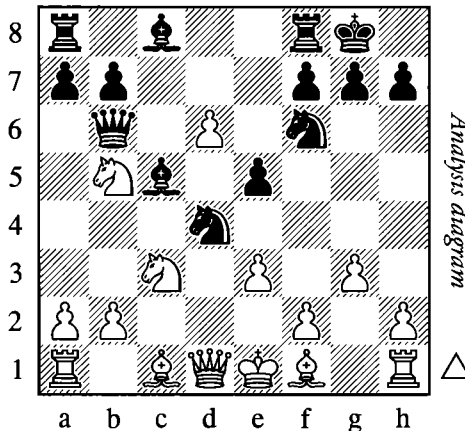
Once again the direct attack on f2 forces White to weaken his position.

10.e3 ♜d8

This natural move maintains the better chances for Black, but there was an even stronger continuation available.

10...♘d4!!

Blasting the center open.



11.exd4

The threats included ...♖c6 and ...♔g4. White can of course play something like 11.f3, but then he will have a rotten position with a multitude of weaknesses. Instead we will concentrate on the critical continuation.

11...exd4

Now the threat of ...♞e8† is devastating.

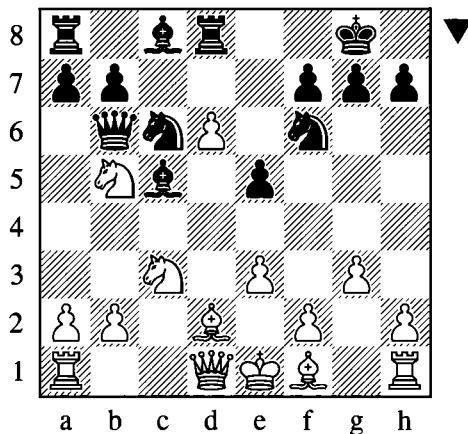
12.♙e2

If White tries to hold onto the piece with 12.♘a4? then 12...♞e8† is decisive, for instance 13.♙e2 ♜xb5→, or 13.♘d2 ♙b4† 14.♘c2 ♜c6† when Black wins too much material.

12...dxc3

Black intends ...♙h3 to trouble his opponent further.

11.♙d2

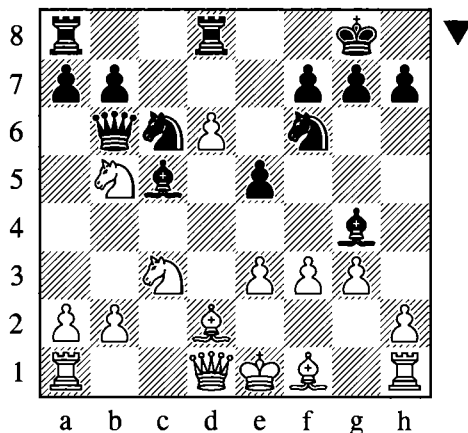


11...♙g4?

This looks tempting, but Black has overlooked a stunning resource. He should have preferred 11...♘d4!, with similar consequences as on the previous move.

12.f3?!

White misses his chance to survive with the fantastic 12.♜xg4!! ♘xg4 13.♘a4 when the black queen is in trouble, and after 13...♜a6 14.♘xc5 ♜b6 15.♘a4 the game ends in the unlikeliest of repetitions.



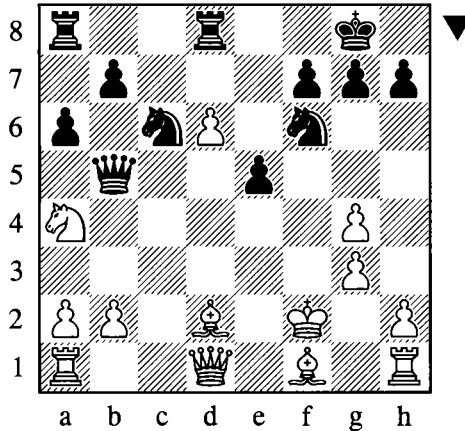
12...♙xe3!

Now White's center is blown to bits and his king's position ripped wide open.

13.f×g4 a6! 14.♖a4?

White should have bailed out with 14.♙xe3 ♜xe3† 15.♞e2, leading to a somewhat inferior, but still defensible ending.

14...♙f2† 15.♙e2 ♞xb5† 16.♙xf2



16...♞d5!

An important move. White has to do something about the threat to the h1-rook...

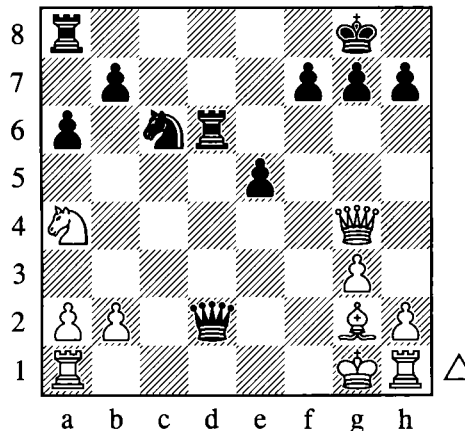
17.♙g2 ♖xg4†!

This deflecting device was the point behind the previous move.

18.♞xg4 ♞xd2† 19.♙g1

19.♞e2 ♞d4†! picks up the knight on a4.

19...♞xd6



The smoke has cleared. White has managed to hold onto an extra piece, but his king is wide open and his scattered pieces are a picture of disharmony. Nevertheless he still had some chances to defend, at least until he played his next move.

20. ♖xc6?

The right way was 20. ♖f1 ♘d4 21. ♗d1 ♗e3† 22. ♖f2 when White is suffering, but the game goes on.

20... ♗e3†!

Leading to a decisive attack.

21. ♘g2 ♖d2† 22. ♘h3 ♗h6† 23. ♗h4 ♗xc6

White resigned as he has no defense against the numerous threats, which include ... ♗g2†, ... ♗d7† and ... ♖d4.

0–1

What we have learned:

- ❖ An attack on the f2-square can help to build momentum for an attack.
- ❖ The ... ♘d4 sacrifice can be used to open the e-file.
- ❖ Watch out for geometrical motifs of the chessboard for unexpected combinations.
- ❖ The importance of tactics. Almost every move in this game involved a threat, a capture, a sacrifice or a combination.

Development Issues – ♘5c3, not ♘1c3

One of White's problems in this opening is that both of his knights will want to occupy the c3-square. Though it would seem tempting to move the undeveloped knight from b1, this will generally result in the other knight being kicked back to the a3-square where it has few prospects. Therefore White should generally retreat his knight from b5 to c3, with a view to developing the other knight to d2.

Here we will examine a game where White gets it the wrong way around and is punished in striking fashion.

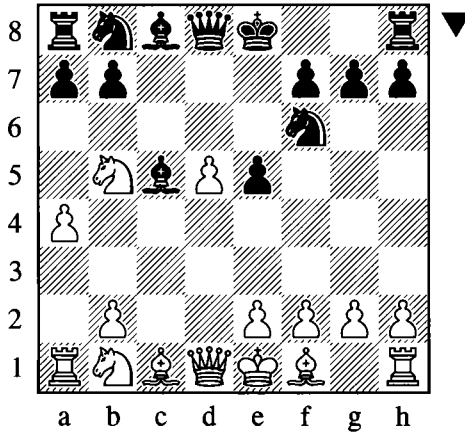
Game 36

Peter Pal – Tibor Fogarasi

Hungary 1996

1. d4 ♘f6 2. ♘f3 c5 3. c4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 e5 5. ♘b5 d5 6. cxd5 ♗c5 7. a4?!

Protecting the hanging knight on b5, while preventing Black from expanding on the queenside with ...a6 and ...b5. However, this pawn move in no way controls the center, nor is it developing, hence it is a waste of time in the opening.



7...0-0

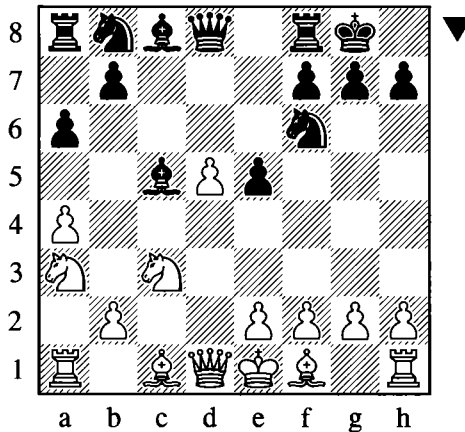
Black continues with development. Obviously 7...♘xd5?? still loses to 8.♙xd5!.

8.♘1c3?

8.d6 is well met by 8...♘e4 with a double attack on f2 and d6, and after 9.e3 ♘xd6 Black is at least equal.

The best choice was 8.♘5c3 although even here we reach a normal-looking position in which a2-a4 has been a complete waste of time.

8...a6 9.♘a3



9...b5!!

This fantastic shot must have come as a horrible surprise for White!

Black could have obtained a good position with 9...♙f5 10.e3 e4 followed by ...♘bd7-e5 and so on, but thanks to his opponent's inept opening play, he has every right to be more ambitious.

10.axb5

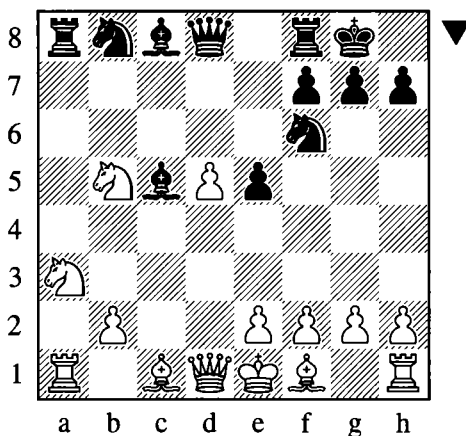
The threat was ...b4 winning a piece, and 10.♘c2 b4 11.♘b1 is hardly appetizing for White.

10...axb5

Another Black piece, the dormant rook on a8, has been activated.

11.♘cxb5

White has been playing only with his knights, both of which are poorly positioned at the edge of the board. Meanwhile Black has castled and built up a solid development advantage. How is he to use it?

**11...♘e4!**

As usual, the absence of the enemy counterpart on c3 invites the knight forward. In this instance it threatens mate on f2, prepares a nasty check on b4 and also opens the d8-h4 diagonal for the queen.

12.e3

Avoiding the worst of the threats.

12...♙b4! 13.♙e2

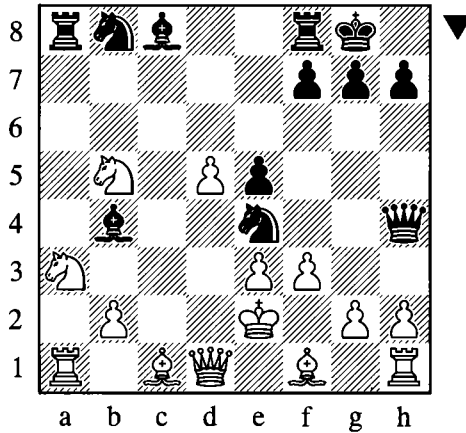
White is forced to displace his king, since 13.♘c3? ♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♙xc3† would have been hopeless for him.

13...♙h4

The enemy is given no respite; with each move, Black creates a new threat.

14.f3

14.g3 is refuted by 14...♘xg3† (14...♙g4† is also good enough) 15.fxg3 (15.hxg3 ♙xh1-+) 15...♙g4† 16.♙d3 (16.♙f2 ♙f6†) 16...♙f5† 17.♙e2 ♙h5† and Black wins the queen.



14...♔f5!

14...♗f2† 15.♕d3 ♖c5† 16.♕c4 ♜ba6! gives Black a winning attack, but it is even deadlier to bring the bishop into play first.

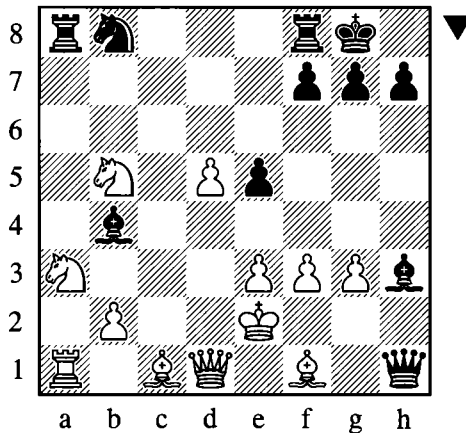
15.g3

Suicide, but White was lost anyway. The knight is taboo since 15.fxe4 ♔g4† skewers the king and queen.

15...♜xg3† 16.hxg3 ♗xh1 17.♕f2 ♔h3

Attacking the pinned bishop on f1, while also threatening ...♗h2† and mate.

18.♕e2



18...e4!

0-1

Even the pawn was able to join in the fun! This was the most stylish and effective of many possible wins. White resigned, as mate is threatened on both f3 and h2, and 19.fxe4 loses the queen.

What we have learned:

- ❖ The move $\text{♞}1\text{c3}$ is generally inadvisable as the other knight will soon find itself passively sidelined on a3.
- ❖ The uncastled king makes a perfect target to attack.
- ❖ Combining attacking moves across the board (11... $\text{♞}e4$ in the center, 12... $\text{♝}b4$ † on the queenside and 13... $\text{♞}h4$ on the kingside) can be a great way to unlock the opponent's defenses.

Black's Development Advantage

A development advantage is a typical feature of most gambits, and the Vaganian is no exception. The following high-level game did not feature model opening play, but it still resulted in a rich battle which illustrated plenty of important themes for our gambit.

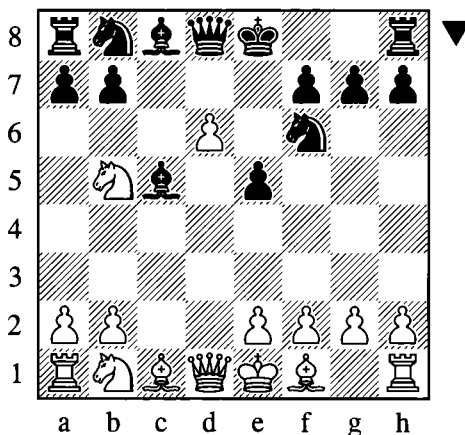
Game 37

Penteala Harikrishna – Emil Sutovsky

Hoogeveen 2005

1. $\text{♞}f3$ $\text{♞}f6$ 2. $c4$ $c5$ 3. $d4$ $cx\text{d}4$ 4. $\text{♞}xd4$ $e5$ 5. $\text{♞}b5!$ $d5!$ 6. $cx\text{d}5$ $\text{♝}c5$ 7. $d6?$!

Was this poor preparation, or misguided improvisation? White should not be playing such moves while behind in development.



7...0-0!

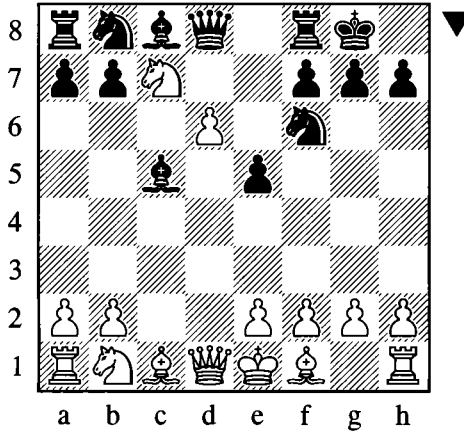
Sutovsky simply castles and dares White to trap his rook on a8. If White declines then he would be a tempo down compared to normal lines, having spent a tempo pushing the pawn to d6.

7... $\text{♞}e4$ is less accurate, as discussed in Game 34 above.

8. $\text{♞}c7?$

With this move White flouts several opening principles, as he chases material at the expense of development, while continuing to play with only one piece. Harikrishna is an extremely strong player, so he must have considered all this but still believed he could get away with it.

Black is about to lose a rook, so he must waste no time in launching his attack.



8...Qe4!

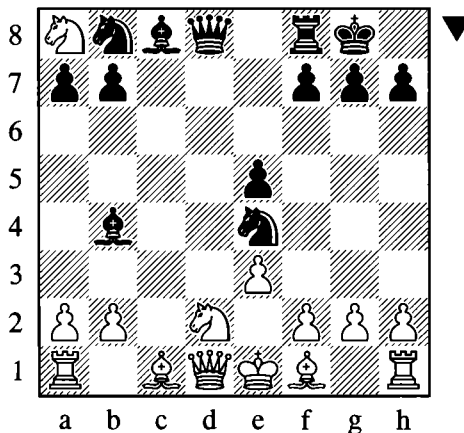
We saw the same powerful move in Game 34.

9.e3 Qxd6?!

In Game 34 we saw that 9...Qb4! was the right path, which would have given White serious problems. The text move is slightly inaccurate, but it still leads to a fascinating battle.

10.Qxa8 Qb4! 11.Qd2

Here we see the difference. In the analogous variation beginning with 9...Qb4!, Black would have been able to bring his rook to d8 here. In the present position it is not possible, so Sutovsky develops his queen in a different direction.

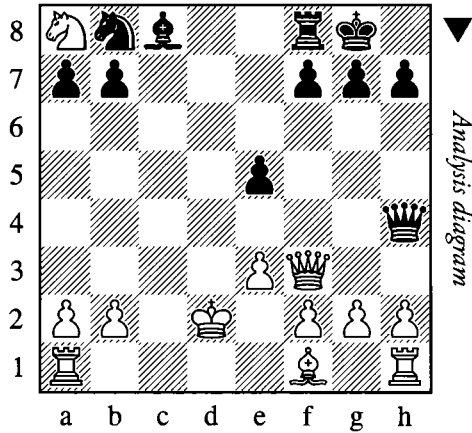


11...♖h4! 12.g3

The only move! Defending with the queen is inferior:

12.♖f3? ♜xd2 13.♙xd2 ♙xd2†

Trading off the opponent's developed piece and forcing the enemy king into the center.
14.♙xd2



14...♖b4†!

The queen demonstrates her mobility and switches to the opposite flank.

15.♙c2

Other moves lose quickly, as the reader can easily determine.

15...♙g4!

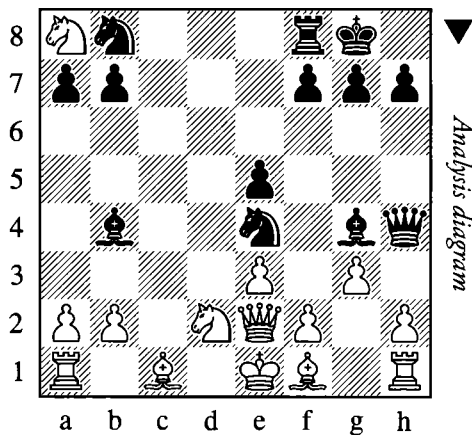
Developing with tempo and clearing the c8-square for a devastating rook check. White could resign here.

12.♖e2?

This is hardly any better.

12...♙g4 13.g3

This move turns out to be forced anyway.



13... ♖f6!

Black is happy to sacrifice further material in order to break through to the f2-square.

14. ♖xg4 ♙xd2†!

A lethal intermediate capture.

15. ♘e2

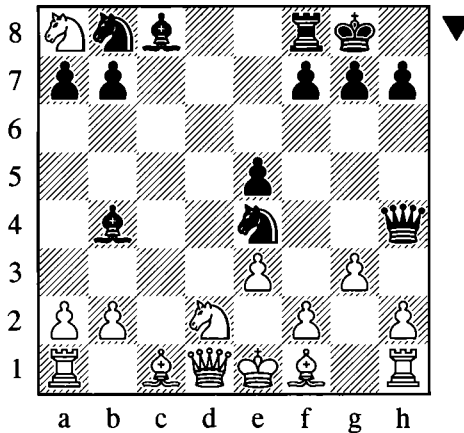
15. ♙xd2? allows mate in two, and 15. ♘d1? ♜xf2† wins the queen.

15... ♖xf2† 16. ♘d3

Equally hopeless is 16. ♘d1 ♖xe3, threatening a family fork on f2.

16... ♖xe3† 17. ♘c2 ♖c5†

White will either be mated or suffer catastrophic material losses.



12... ♖f6

Renewing the attack on f2. Despite the small inaccuracy on move 9, Black has still obtained a powerful attack in return for the lowly rook on a8, a piece which generally does not take part in the game in the early stages. By contrast, Black's swarming pieces are causing White plenty of problems, and his remaining pieces will soon spring into action as well. The open d-file will become a particular headache for White.

13. f3

13. ♖e2? ♙g4 leads to the 12. ♖e2 variation analyzed above.

13... ♜xd2 14. ♙xd2 ♞d8

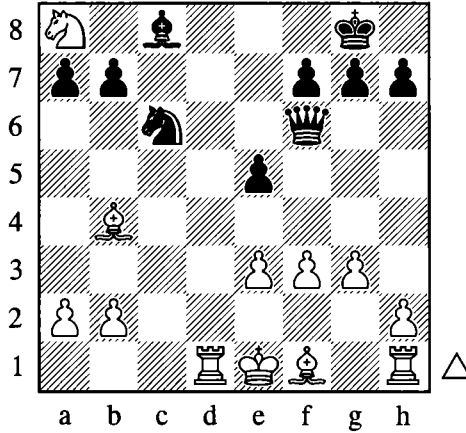
A nasty pin.

15. ♙xb4

White has no choice but to sacrifice his queen.

15... ♞xd1† 16. ♞xd1 ♜c6

White has two rooks and a bishop for queen, which – temporarily at least – adds up to a considerable material advantage. Nevertheless he is still in trouble due to his poor coordination and vulnerable pieces.



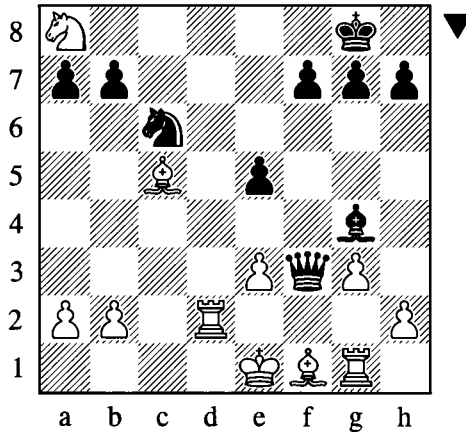
17. ♖c5

17. ♖d2? loses by force: 17... ♗xf3 18. ♖g1 ♙g4 19. ♗c1 It looks as though White will start converting his material advantage, but a nasty surprise awaits him. 19... ♗b4! Threatening a deadly check on c2. Note that this idea only works because Black is covering the invasion square on the eighth rank! 20. a3 (20. ♗c8†? ♙xc8 20. ♙xb4 ♗xe3† wins easily) 20... ♗c2† 21. ♗xc2 ♗d1† 22. ♗f2 ♗xc2 Black will capture the bishop on d2, and most likely the knight on a8 as well.

17... ♗xf3 18. ♖g1 ♙g4

Black continues to create a new threat on every turn.

19. ♗d2



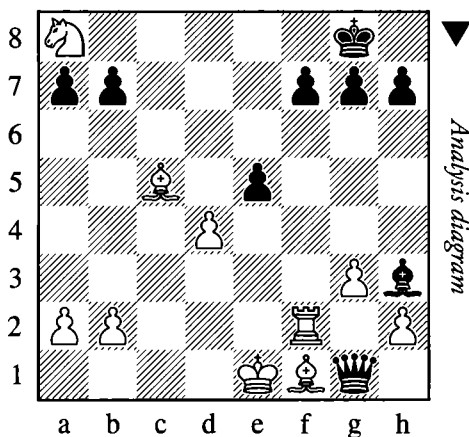
19... ♗d4!

A lovely move to break through to the e3-square.

20. ♙xd4!

Harikrishna continues to find the best defensive moves.

20.exd4? is no good: 20...♖e3† 21.♙e2 ♜xg1† 22.♙f1 ♙h3 23.♞f2



23...b6! 24.♙b4 ♙xf1 25.♞xf1 ♖e3† 26.♙d1 ♜xd4† 27.♙d2 ♖a4† Next will come ...♜c6, winning the knight and obtaining a decisive material advantage.

20...exd4 21.♞d3 ♜c6!

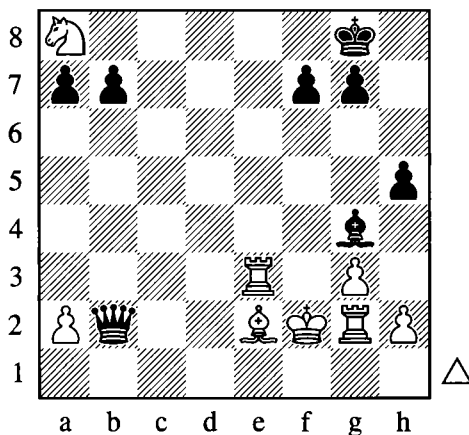
Threatening to invade on c1.

22.♞g2!

White's only chance is to coordinate his rooks as quickly as possible.

22...♜c1† 23.♙f2 dxex3† 24.♞xe3 ♜xb2† 25.♙e2 h5

Black is playing for a win. White has a slight material advantage but his pieces lack harmony.



26.♞e8† ♙h7 27.♙g1 ♖c1† 28.♙f1 ♙h3 29.♞f2

Thanks to his accurate defensive play, White has escaped from danger and by now Black has nothing better than settling for a draw.

29...♙xf1 30.♖xf1 ♖c5† 31.♗f2

But not 31.♖g2? ♖c6†.

31...♖c1† 32.♗f1 ♖c5†

½–½

This game showcased numerous tactical ideas, demonstrating the rich potential of the Vaganian Gambit. Sutovsky's brilliant attacking flair shone through, but Harikrishna defended magnificently after getting into trouble early, and in the end a draw was a fair result.

What we have learned:

- ❖ Once again, the uncastled king was the primary justification for Black's early material sacrifice, which enables him to launch a dangerous attack.
- ❖ A centralized knight on e4 combined with a bishop attack along the open a5-e1 diagonal can be a dangerous combination against the uncastled White king – especially when the black rook can quickly come to the open d-file.
- ❖ Such an attack can lead to a severe pin, which can cause White to forgo his castling rights and/or lose material.
- ❖ A queen can be monstrously powerful in certain types of position. Consider the note to White's 12th move, where the black queen utilized her great mobility and switched from one side of the board to the other with 14...♚h4-b4†!, and wreaked devastation on the enemy position. And later on the game, the queen was easily the match of the opponent's two rooks and bishop.
- ❖ Apart from the primary target of f2, the c2-square can also be a key invasion point (see 19...♗b4! in the note to White's 17th move).
- ❖ White was unable to make use of his material advantage, since all his pieces were uncoordinated and his king was vulnerable.
- ❖ Tactics, tactics, tactics!

Playing for Solidity with e3

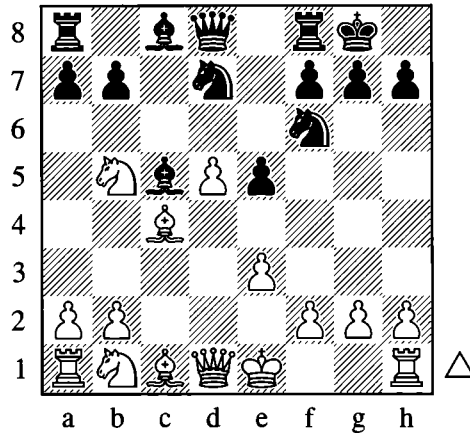
1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 c5 3.♗f3 cxd4 4.♗xd4 e5 5.♗b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.♗5c3 0–0 8.e3

With this move White blunts the enemy bishop's activity along the g1-a7 diagonal and safeguards the crucial f2-square. On the negative side he blocks his dark-squared bishop, but this piece can always be developed on b2 later, or perhaps tucked away on e1 after castling and ♗f1-d1.

Black has come to the end of his 'automatic' developing moves, and he needs to decide what to do next. One possible plan is to develop his pieces with a view to regaining the pawn on d5 and restoring material equality. Another is to exploit the lack of enemy forces on the kingside by developing an initiative on that part of the board.

For the moment Black does not have to make a firm commitment to either plan, as there is one move which is integral to both of them.

8...e4!



9. ♖5c3 e4

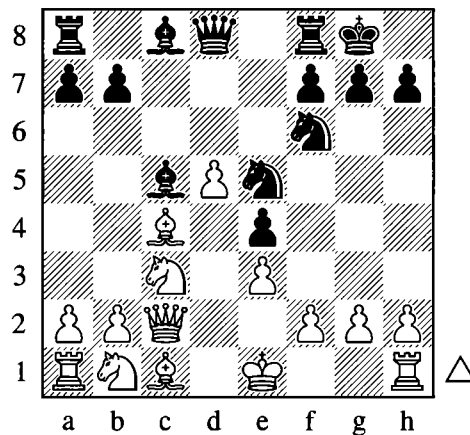
White was threatening 10.e4, cementing his extra pawn on d5 and freeing his dark-squared bishop. Black nips this idea in the bud, while also creating the preconditions for an attack.

10. ♗c2?!

White is trying to exploit the inability of the enemy bishop to move to f5, but he should have been more concerned about bringing his other pieces into play.

10... ♞e5!

Development is more important than material! Black ignores the threat and brings his knight to its ideal square.



11. ♞xe4?

White will pay a heavy price for this gluttonous display of pawn-munching in the opening.

11... ♔f5

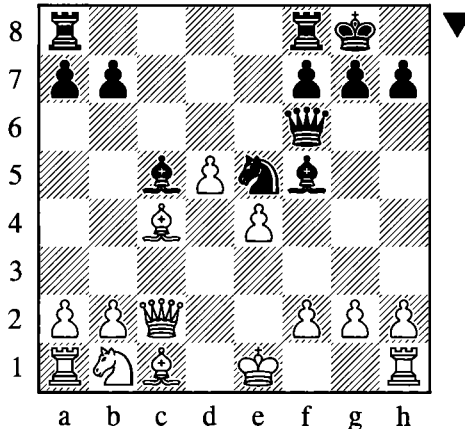
Developing with gain of tempo.

12. ♞xf6†

White escapes the pin with check, but in doing so he exchanges one of his few developed pieces. It is doubtful that White has anything better; for instance 12. ♖bd2?! ♜xe4 13. ♜xe4 transposes to the next game, where his position was dismantled even more brutally.

12... ♖xf6 13.e4

White is two pawns ahead; he seems to have everything covered, and is just one move away from castling. Nevertheless Black's development advantage is the most significant feature of the position.



13... ♗b4†!

In an echo of Games 34 and 37, Black switches to the a5-e1 diagonal, since the attack on f2 does not seem to bring tangible profits. This time the main purpose of the bishop check is to clear the c-file in preparation for a devastating pin.

The tempting 13... ♗xe4 14. ♖xe4 ♖xf2† is not altogether conclusive. Usually the arrival of the black queen on this square would signal the end of the game, but this position is a rare exception to the rule. 15. ♜d1 ♜xc4 Exchanging the opponent's only developed piece. 16. ♖xc4 White's king is exposed and one can practically hear the snoring of his pieces on the first rank, nevertheless Black lacks a killer punch.

However, it is worth pointing out that Black had a second strong continuation in 13... ♖g6!, which would also have posed insurmountable problems for White.

14. ♜c3

Bringing the knight to its most natural square, but leaving the c4-bishop to its fate.

In the event of 14. ♜d2 ♖ac8 it transpires that pins do lead to wins! 15. exf5 ♜xc4 16. 0-0 ♜xd2 Black picks up an extra piece thanks to the discovered attack.

With 14. ♗d2 White tries to exchange some attacking pieces, but Black simply brings up the reinforcements: 14... ♖ac8! (But not 14... ♗xd2? 15. ♜xd2 ♖ac8 16. 0-0 and White is out of the woods.) 15. ♗xb4 ♖xc4 16. ♗c3 (or 16. ♜c3 ♖xb4 17. exf5 ♖xb2!) 16... ♖xe4† 17. ♜d1 ♖d4† White loses his queen.

14...♖xc4 15.exf5

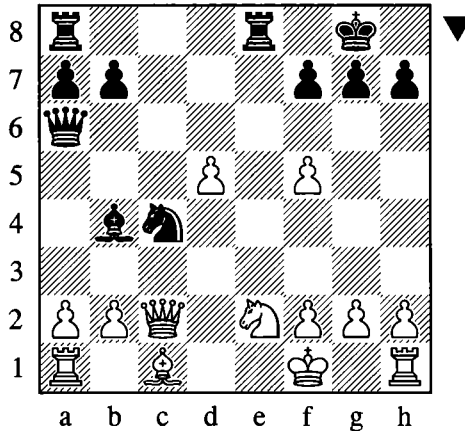
Restoring the material balance but opening the e-file, which Black immediately exploits.

15...♖fe8† 16.♔f1 ♖a6!

Lining up for a nasty discovered check.

17.♘e2

Black to play! Can you find the move which forced White's immediate resignation?



17...♘d2†!

Cutting the connections between the queen and knight. After 18.♙xd2 ♖xe2† 19.♔g1 ♙xd2 White is a piece down with a miserable position, so he resigned instead.

0–1

What we have learned:

- ❖ The bishop is misplaced on c4, as it will be targeted by ...♘bd7 followed by ...♘e5 or ...♘b6.
- ❖ It was exceedingly risky for White to gobble a second pawn when he was already well behind in development with his king still in the center.

Game 39

Alexander Everet – Willy Hendriks

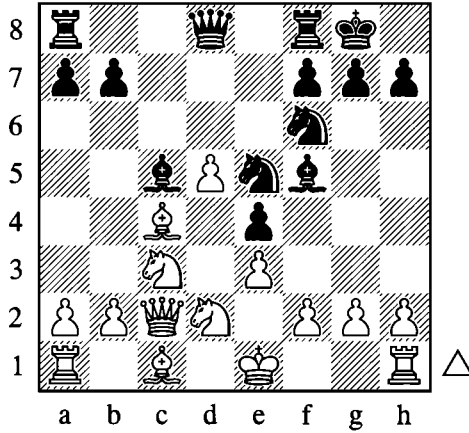
Groningen 1999

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♘f3 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5! d5! 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.e3 0–0 8.♘5c3 e4 9.♙c4?! ♘bd7 10.♖c2?! ♘e5! 11.♘d2

White deviates from the previous game by bringing another piece into play. His best option was to admit his earlier mistake and retreat with 11.♙e2, although 11...♙f5 intending ...♘xd5 or ...♘d3† still gives Black excellent play.

11...♙f5

Protecting the e4-pawn.



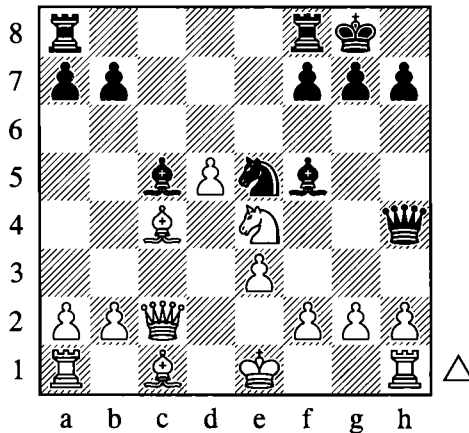
12. ♖cxe4?

Just as in the previous game, White thinks he can gobble pawns in the opening. Once again, he is gravely mistaken.

12... ♖xe4 13. ♖xe4

White's king has yet to castle, and his knight is stuck in an awkward pin. Meanwhile Black has already brought his king to safety and deployed all his minor pieces on good squares. His next move highlights White's difficulties.

13... ♖h4!



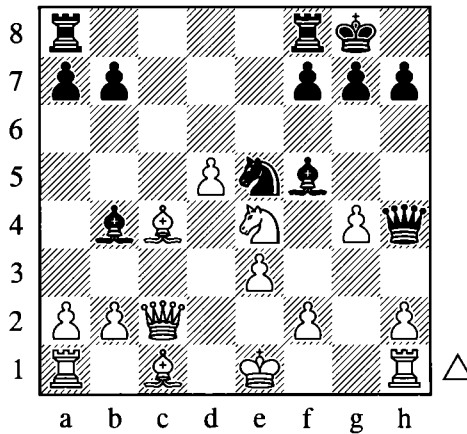
Forcing a catastrophic weakening of White's kingside.

14.g4

A horrible move to make, but there was no other choice. Supporting the knight with f3 is impossible due to the position of the king on e1, and 14. ♖d3? ♖xd3† just wins a piece.

14... ♖b4†

Again we see this bishop check playing a role! Black is utilizing every available avenue to harass the king, although by this stage 14...♙xg4 or virtually any other sensible move would have been winning too.



15.♙d2 ♜f3†

The knight makes itself comfortable on the hole on f3.

16.♜d1 ♜xd2 17.gxf5 ♜xe4

The game is virtually over. White is a piece down, and his king is in a perilous state.

18.♞f1 ♞ac8 19.♞c1 ♜d2

With both c4 and f1 under fire, White is losing even more material so he threw in the towel.
0–1

What we have learned:

- ❖ A massive development advantage will often trump material in the opening.
- ❖ The uncastled king is a great target for your developed pieces to attack. Go after it using whatever files and diagonals are available, be it on the kingside, queenside, center or all three!

Game 40

Nicolo Guglielmi – Folco Castaldo

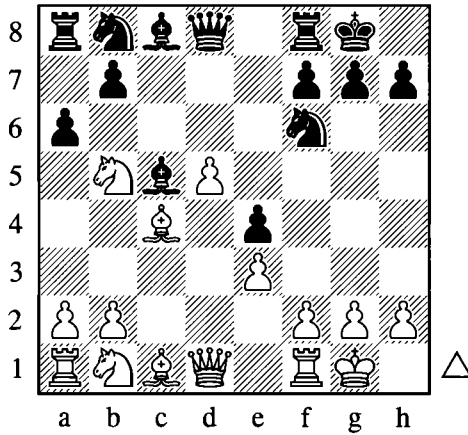
Eporediese 2001

1.c4 c5 2.♜f3 ♜f6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♜xd4 e5 5.♜b5! d5! 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.e3 0–0 8.♙c4?! e4 9.0–0

This time White makes no attempt to win the e4-pawn. Instead he develops sensibly, but the misplaced bishop on c4 still gives him problems.

9...a6

Black could also have considered 9...♜bd7, as the knight is not terribly useful on b5 and White may wish to retreat it voluntarily. On the other hand ...a7-a6 is far from a useless move for Black.



10. ♖5c3 ♙f5

Overprotecting the pawn on e4. It is worth noting that Castaldo refrains from playing ...b5 at any point over the next few moves. Instead he recognizes that the bishop is misplaced on c4, and has no interest in driving it to a better square.

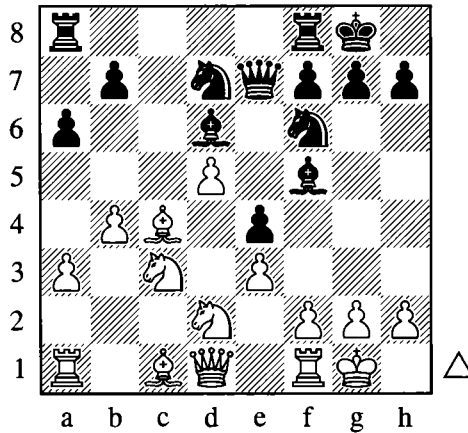
11. a3

White intends to develop his queenside with b4, ♙b2 and ♖d2.

11... ♖bd7 12. ♖d2 ♙e7

Connecting the rooks and preparing a potential queen and bishop battery down the h2-b8 diagonal, which is why Black avoids the centralizing 12... ♖e5 for the moment.

13. b4 ♙d6



14. ♗e1??

An unfortunate blunder.

14. ♙b2?

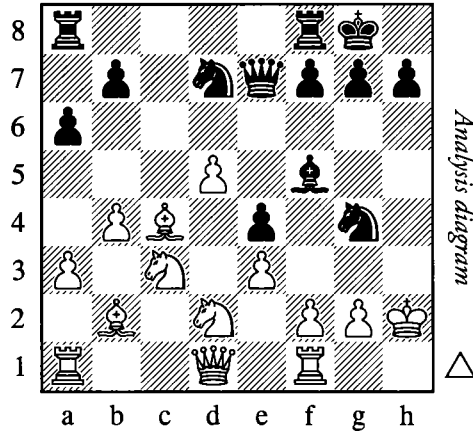
This move is also a mistake, as White fails to appreciate the dangers associated with Black's concentration of pieces on the kingside.

14...♙xh2†!

Prying open the king's shelter with the well-known "Greek gift" sacrifice.

15.♙xh2 ♖g4†

The knight joins the attack with tempo, while clearing the h4-d8 diagonal for the queen.



16.♙g3!?

16.♙g1 ♜h4 threatens mate on h2, and after 17.♞e1 ♜xf2† 18.♙h1 ♜h4† 19.♙g1 ♜h2† 20.♙f1 ♜h1† 21.♙e2 ♜xg2 it is mate.

16...♜e5†!

The most precise, although 16...♜d6† should also get the job done.

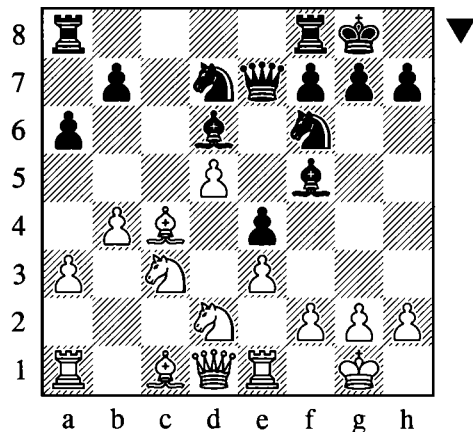
17.f4

17.♙h4 loses to 17...♜h2† 18.♙g5 g6 and mate next move.

17...exf3† 18.♙xf3 ♜xe3#

This is why e5 was the best square for the queen on move 16!

White's best chance was 14.g3 to block the attack against h2, although the weakening of the light squares is hardly ideal for White.



By moving his rook to e1, White was hoping to follow the advice of the late, great Bent Larsen: “With a knight on f1 I cannot be checkmated!” But after the very next move he was forced to resign. Can you find the winning continuation?

14...♖e5!

0–1

Both c3 and h2 are hanging and White has no defense, for instance 15.♘b2 ♜xh2† 16.♔f1 ♜h1† 17.♕e2 ♙g4† with total carnage.

What we have learned:

- ❖ White’s king is not guaranteed an easy life after castling.
- ❖ When White castles, his bishop is needed on e2 to guard the g4-square; see 14.♘b2? ♙xh2†! in the note to move 14.

Game 41

Pater Minich – Ladislav Dobrovolsky

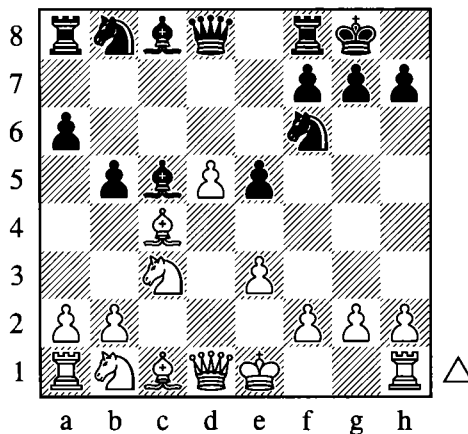
Trnava 1979

1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 e5 5.♗b5! d5! 6.cxd5 ♘c5 7.e3 0–0 8.♘c4?!

In this game Black reacts in a slightly different way. His opening play is not as accurate as it could have been, but the way he conducts the final attack is exemplary.

8...a6 9.♗5c3 b5

Black expands on the queenside with gain of tempo. Since the bishop is misplaced on c4, it would have been more logical for Black to avoid driving it away yet, as we saw in the previous game.



10.♘b3?!

White should have admitted his mistake and retreated to e2. Now his queenside resembles a giant traffic jam.

10...♙f5

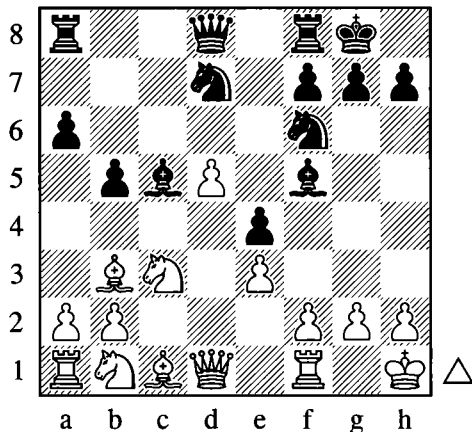
Obviously White must not be allowed to play e4 unchallenged.

11.0-0 ♖bd7 12.♙h1?

Wasting time. White should have taken measures to develop his queenside.

12...e4!

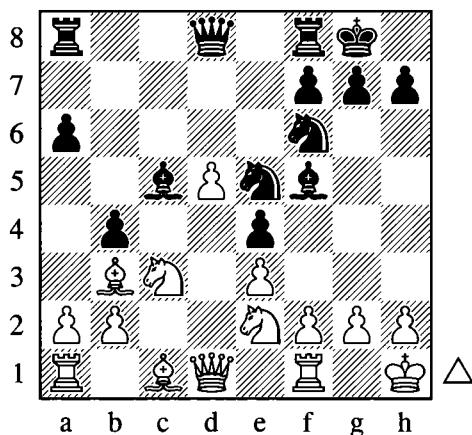
Finally! Black has not forgotten about his kingside attack after all...

**13.♙e2**

The knight vacates the c3-square for its brother, while perhaps eyeing the d4- and g3-squares for itself.

13...♙e5 14.♙bc3 b4!

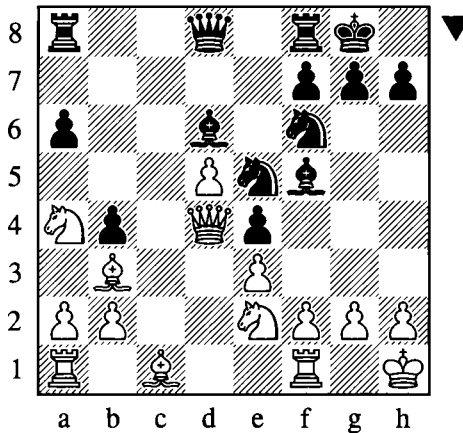
Kicking the knight away to the edge of the board, where it will remain sidelined for the rest of the game – what's left of it!



15. ♖a4 ♗d6

Repositioning the bishop to attack the kingside. Black's initiative is becoming more dangerous with every move; by now all his pieces are centralized and ready to pounce. The knight on e5 might jump to d3 at any moment, and the one on f6 could come to g4, opening the way for the queen to get to h4. Meanwhile White's extra pawn exerts no influence whatsoever, other than to block both the bishop on b3 and the heavy pieces along the d-file.

16. ♖d4



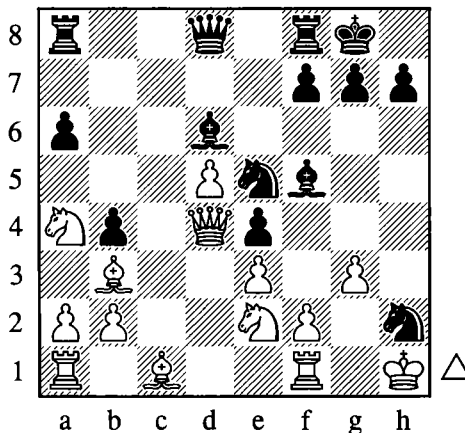
16... ♗fg4!

Launching the kingside attack. The knight hits both h2 and f2, while opening the queen's route to the kingside.

17.g3

Covering the dark squares, but weakening the light squares. In the event of 17.h3, the finish might have been 17...♖h4 18.♗g3 ♗xf2† 19.♞xf2 ♖xg3 20.♞xf5 ♖e1† 21.♜h2 ♗f3 mate!

17... ♗xh2!



Striking while the iron is hot!

18. ♖d2

18. ♖xh2 loses the queen.

18... ♖hf3

White resigned; if he is lucky he will lose a whole piece, otherwise he will be mated.

0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ On the a2-g8 diagonal, White's bishop was a target for the expansion of Dobrovolsky's queenside pawns. More importantly, the bishop was needed on e2 to keep an eye on the g4-square.
- ❖ On c4, the bishop is protecting an extra pawn of questionable value, which can only be utilized in the endgame.
- ❖ Given that the endgame was such a long way off, the d5-pawn was actually a serious liability, since it obstructed White's knight, light-squared bishop, and his heavy pieces on the d-file.

Playing against the Bishop on e2

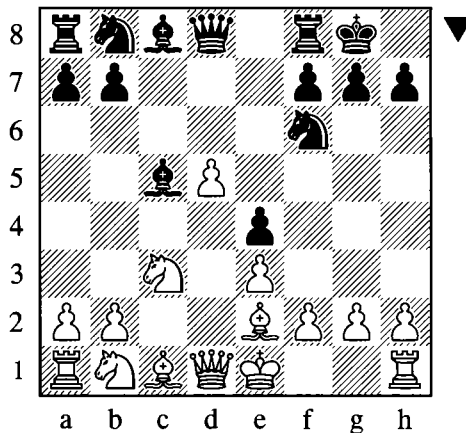
By now it should have become clear that the white bishop does not belong on c4. White does better to put it on e2, but even then Black has good chances to launch a kingside attack, as shown in the next few games.

Game 42

Yong Hoon De Rover – Eric De Haan

Netherlands 1995

1. d4 ♖f6 2. c4 c5 3. ♖f3 cxd4 4. ♖xd4 e5 5. ♖b5! d5! 6. cxd5 ♖c5 7. ♖5c3 0-0 8. e3 e4 9. ♖e2

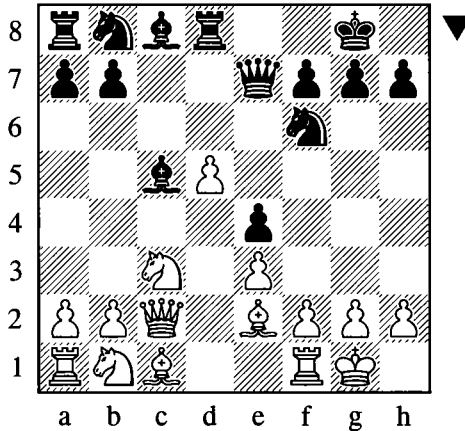


9... ♖e7

The main line. From this square the queen not only overprotects the important e4-pawn, but also prepares to come to e5 in some variations. Later Black might create a battery with ...♙d6 to threaten mate; alternatively, the queen might switch to the g5-square to threaten g2. Finally, the queen also vacates the d8-square which might be useful for one of the black rooks.

10.0-0 ♖d8 11. ♚c2

A queen will often feel uncomfortable standing opposite an enemy rook, even when the file is not fully open.



11... ♗f5

Black continues developing and overprotects the key e4-pawn. 11... ♘xd5?? would be disastrous in view of 12. ♘xd5! (White can win a pawn with 12. ♚xe4, but he can do even better) 12... ♖xd5 13. b4! and White wins a piece due to the pin.

12. ♖d1

Safeguarding the d5-pawn. Black should not be overly concerned about regaining his pawn at this stage, so he simply continues to improve his pieces.

12... ♘bd7 13. a3

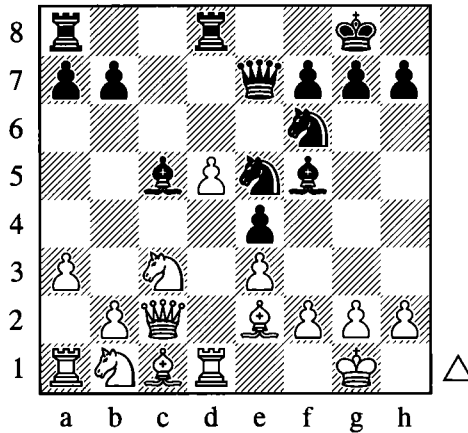
White hopes to develop with b4, ♗b2 and ♘d2.

13... ♘e5

From its centralized post the knight dreams of occupying the hole on d3, while the kingside also makes an inviting target.

13... ♙d6 was possible, but with the white bishop on e2, the caveman ...♙xh2† sacrifice is unlikely to succeed, as the bishop can eliminate the knight when it arrives on g4.

There was a worthy alternative in 13... ♖ac8, mobilizing Black's last undeveloped piece. Nevertheless the text move is the most incisive as it brings Black a step closer to creating real threats on the kingside.

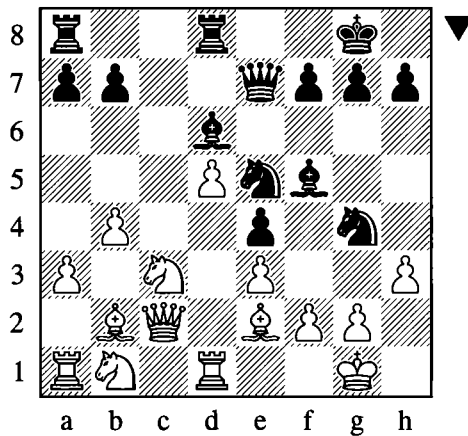


14.b4 ♔d6 15.♙b2 ♜fg4!

With all the important pieces in play, Black launches his attack.

16.h3

White seems to have everything defended, so what was Black's idea?



16...♙h4!

There is no need to sound the horns of retreat. From her new vantage point on the kingside, the queen attacks both f2 and h2, thanks to the X-ray attack down the h-file.

17.hxg4?

Missing Black's crushing reply.

17.g3? ♙xh3 loses, and 17.♙f1 ♜h2! is not much better.

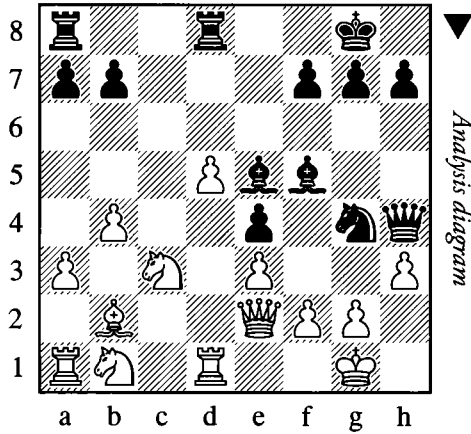
White's best and indeed only chance was to exchange one of the strong attacking pieces:

17.♙xg4 ♜xg4

Only now can he consider accepting the sacrifice.

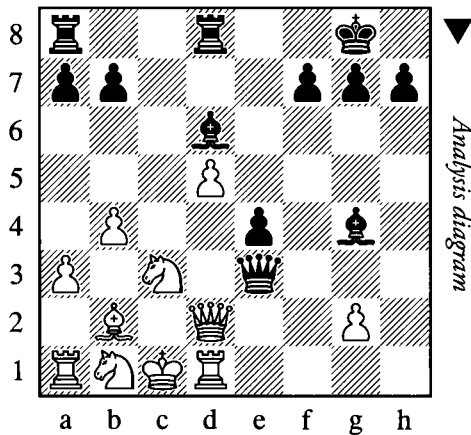
18.hxg4

18.♖e2 is well met by 18...♗h2†! 19.♔h1 (19.♔f1 ♕e5) 19...♗e5 20.♔g1



20...♗d6! Bringing yet another piece into the attack. 21.♕d2 ♗h2†! 22.♔f1 ♕e5 The kingside threats are too strong.

18...♗h2† 19.♔f1 ♗xg4 20.♔e1 ♗g1† 21.♔d2 ♗xf2† 22.♔c1 ♗xe3† 23.♗d2



23...♗xd2!?

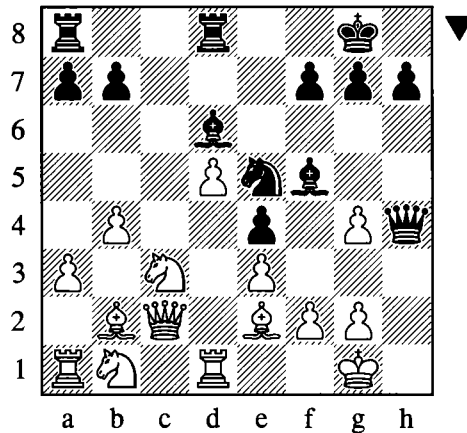
Demonstrating that by now Black has recouped enough material to enter an endgame.

Naturally he can also keep the queens on the board; 23...♗b6 is one good option, and 23...♗f4! is perhaps the strongest move of all, offering a queen exchange on more favorable terms while threatening ...e3.

24.♕xd2 ♗xd1 25.♔xd1 f5

Black has excellent winning chances in the endgame.

Let us now return to the game. Can you see the point behind Black's sacrifice?



17...♘f3!!

A second sacrifice, clearing the h2-b8 diagonal for the bishop to lend its weight to the attack on h2. Instead 17...♘xg4 18.♙xg4 ♖h2† transposes into 17.♙xg4 as analyzed above.

18.♙xf3

18.gxf3 ♖h2† 19.♙f1 ♖h1 is mate.

18...exf3

In joining the attack, the pawn helps weave a mating net around White's king (g2 and e2 are under its watch). At the same time, a deadly discovered attack on White's queen is unveiled. With no way of meeting both threats, White resigned.

0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ If White castles early, Black will have good chances to launch a kingside attack. There are few defenders there, especially if the rook on f1 moves to d1.
- ❖ In the above game Black had less material in the absolute sense, but he had a huge material advantage on the kingside, the only area that really mattered.

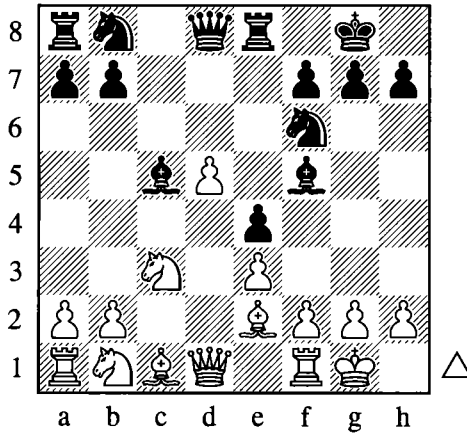
Game 43

Mercelo Cukier – Khurelbaatar Temovjin

Golden Sands 2000

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♘f3 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.e3 0-0 8.♘5c3 e4 9.♙e2 ♙f5 10.0-0 ♞e8

This is a slightly less popular method of overprotecting the e4-pawn; most players put the queen on e7 as in the previous game. Both have certain advantages. The queen move prepares the ...♞e5 idea, and vacates the d8-square for the rook. On the other hand the rook move leaves the more powerful queen free for other duties, for instance, if the f6-knight moves away then the queen could move to g5 or h4 in one move instead of two.



11.b3

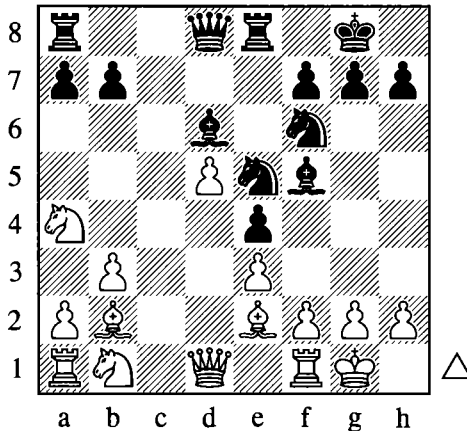
Intending to bring the bishop to its most active post on the long diagonal.

11...♖bd7 12.♗a4?!

White embarks on a risky policy of preventing his opponent from recapturing on d5. Thus he avoids 12.♗b2 ♖b6 when his extra pawn falls. The downside is that his knight becomes sidelined and he forces the enemy bishop back to its ideal attacking square.

12...♗d6 13.♗b2 ♗e5

Centralizing the knight as usual.



14.f4?

White is frightened by Black's concentration of forces in the center, and he tries to fight back by gaining space on the kingside. However, he violates a well-known principle which states that one should refrain from pushing pawns on the side where one is weaker, since it is likely to help the opponent to open lines of attack there.

14...exf3

Obviously Black should not allow the kingside to become blocked. From here his active pieces will swarm like hornets into his opponent's tender position.

15.♔xf3?!

This quickly leads to a hopeless situation.

15.gxf3

Recapturing with the pawn would have been slightly more resilient, without changing the final outcome.

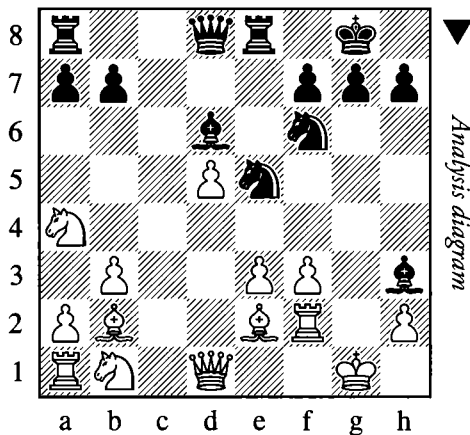
15...♗h3!

The attack on the rook is incidental; the main point of this move is to get closer to the white king!

It is worth pointing out that 15...♖g6! is a good alternative, attacking both the d5- and e3-pawns.

16.♞f2

16.♞e1 ♖e4! will soon lead to mate.

**16...♖xd5!**

This piece sacrifice opens the path of queen and sets up a devastating attack.

17.♞xd5

17.f4!? is a desperate attempt to confuse the issue, but 17...♞e6! leaves the result in little doubt.

17...♞g5† 18.♗h1 ♞h4! 19.♞f1

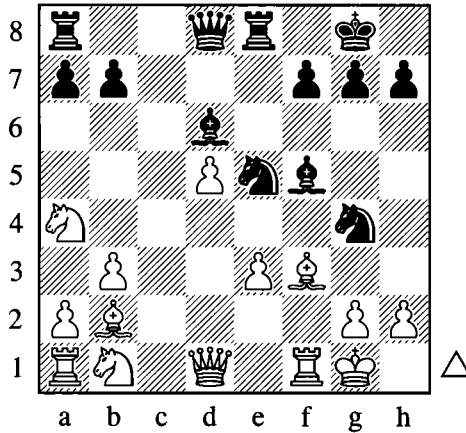
19.♗g1 ♞e6! is fatal.

19...♔xf1 20.♔xf1 ♖xf3

Mate will follow shortly.

15...♖fg4

A simple and deadly move. The knight eyes the weak pawns on e3 and h2, while opening a path for the queen to join in the fun.



16. ♖xe5

16.e4 ♜xf3† (even stronger than 16...♞e3) 17.♞xf3 ♖xh2† 18.♔f1 ♖xe4 is crushing.

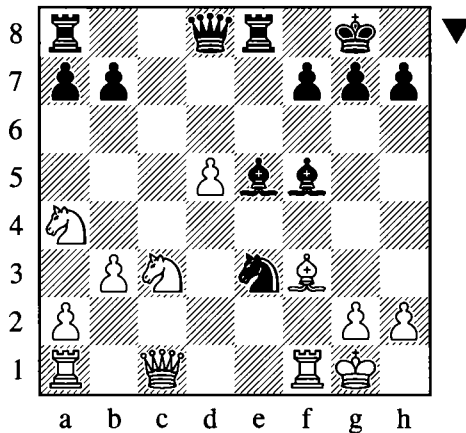
Exchanging with 16.♖xg4 does not help, as 16...♞xg4 replaces the strong knight while also opening the e-file. White can take a bishop with 17.♞xf5, but 17...♖xh2† 18.♔h1 (18.♔f1 ♞xe3†) 18...♞h4 just kills him.

16...♞xe3!

This intermediate capture leads to a swift victory.

17.♞c1 ♖xe5 18.♞bc3

18.♞xe3 ♖xh2† wins the queen.



18...♞h4

After this simple move White had seen enough.

0-1

It almost seems wrong that Black should have been able to force resignation with such a lethal attack after just eighteen moves, without even being behind in material!

White's resignation was not premature; 19.h3 ♖xf1 wins easily, while 19.g3 is met by the simple sacrifice: 19...♗xg3! 20.hxg3 ♜xg3† 21.♖h1 At this point the most efficient route to victory is 21...♗g4! removing the defender of the g2-square, although the rook lift 21... ♞e5 is also more than good enough.

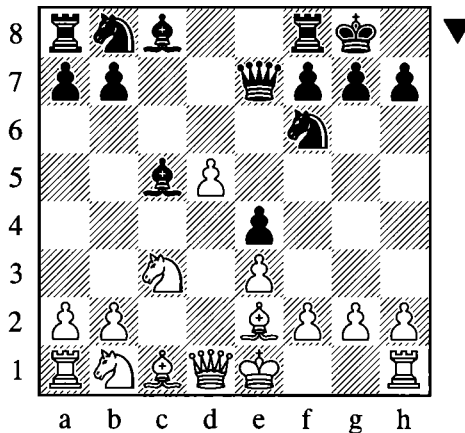
What we have learned:

- ❖ Once again, by castling early White presented his opponent with a clear target.
- ❖ By attempting to hold onto his extra pawn (12.♖a4!?) White sacrificed the overall quality of his position and paid the price.
- ❖ Attempting to fight back on the kingside with f2-f4 is practically suicidal.

It is time to move on to White's most challenging strategy, where he avoids committing his king at an early stage of the game.

White Delays Castling

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 c5 3.♖f3 cxd4 4.♖xd4 e5 5.♖b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♗c5 7.♖5c3 0-0 8.e3 e4 9.♗e2 ♞e7



From this position White has two main plans at his disposal. Since he is already a pawn up, the most natural and obvious strategy is to hold onto his extra pawn with a view to exchanging pieces and eventually winning the endgame. Nevertheless, the games up to this point have demonstrated that Black has powerful attacking resources, which provide him with ongoing compensation.

An altogether different strategy for White involves returning the pawn in order to accelerate his development and fight for the initiative. This is a popular approach to fighting against gambits in the 21st century, and it can be used against Vaganian's Gambit just like the Benko, Blumenfeld and others.

The remaining games will showcase each of these ideas in various forms. The common denominator is that White will delay castling, and occasionally forgo it altogether.

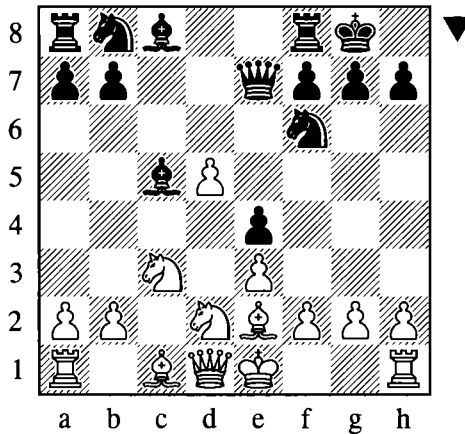
Game 44

Evgeny Postny – Ilya Smirin

Israel 1999

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♗f3 cxd4 4.♗xd4 e5 5.♗b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.e3 0-0 8.♗5c3 e4 9.♙e2 ♜e7 10.♗d2

The previous games have shown that early castling will give Black promising attacking chances, so it makes sense for White to delay it. For the time being the center is closed, so White is not risking much. Therefore Postny decides to focus on activating his queenside pieces.



10...♙d8 11.a3 ♗xd5

Since the plan of a kingside attack is baseless when the enemy monarch has yet to make his residence there, it makes sense for Black to regain his sacrificed pawn and continue with the development of his pieces.

12.♗cxe4?!

Grabbing the e-pawn is risky. It is almost as if Postny has mixed up the two main strategies, and cannot decide whether to return his extra pawn or keep it. Black's e4-pawn certainly has the potential to become weak in positions with this structure, but this only usually becomes a factor later in the middlegame. As a general rule, White should not be trying to take the pawn at such an early stage in the game, especially when he is still underdeveloped.

The main theoretical move is 12.♗xd5, which will be considered in Game 46.

12...♙b6

Safeguarding the bishop from being exchanged. The move is not bad, but there were a couple of tempting sacrifices available:

12...♗xe3!? 13.fxex3 ♙xe3 14.♜b3 ♙xd2† 15.♗xd2 ♗c6 16.♗f3 ♙e8 17.♜d1 (After 17.♜c4?! ♗a5 18.♜b5 ♙d7 19.♜d3 ♙f5 20.♜e3 ♜xe3 21.♙xe3 ♙xe3 Black regained his piece and eventually converted his extra pawn in the endgame, Barkovsky – Tseitlin, Leningrad 1981.)

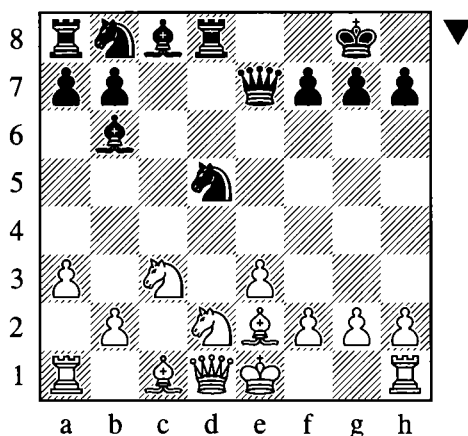
17...♙g4 18.♕f2 ♖c5† 19.♕g3 ♜ad8 Black had an ongoing initiative for the piece in Shredder – Critter, Trier 2010. White eventually prevailed in this battle of the machines, but I doubt that many humans would relish playing his position.

12...♙xe3!? is perhaps even more tempting: 13.fxe3 (13.0–0 ♙b6 gave Black the initiative at no material cost, Havlicek – Castiglione, Slovakia 2009.) 13...♗xe3 14.♖b3 ♘g2† 15.♕f2 ♘f4 16.♙f1 ♗c6 Black had excellent compensation in Junior – Critter, Trier 2010.

13.♗c3?

13.0–0 should have been preferred. Following 13...♗c6 Black has fair compensation, but it is hard to say who is better.

By postponing castling for another move, White allows his opponent to seize the initiative.



13...♗xe3!

As Tal once remarked, one of the best ways to attack the e3-f2-g2-h2 pawn structure is with a sacrifice on e3! Smirin's goal is to open files and diagonals, while crucially preventing White from castling. Compared with the first of the sacrificial options noted on the previous move, Black has ended up with an improved version, as the white knight is worse on c3 than e4.

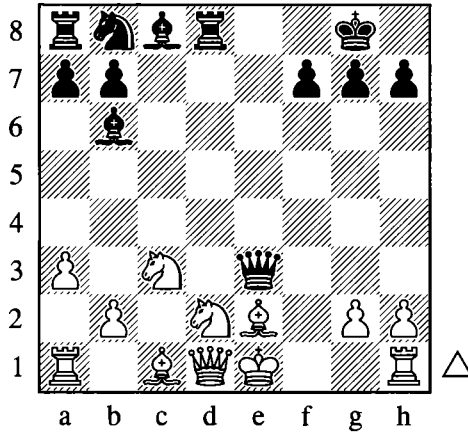
14.fxe3

Clearly the sacrifice has to be accepted.

14...♖xe3

Let us take stock of the position. There is no forced winning sequence, so Smirin had to trust his intuition when sacrificing. Black has given up a piece for just a single pawn, but his compensation is terrific. The center has been blasted open, and White's king is forced to linger in the danger zone with little hope of finding a safe haven in the foreseeable future.

Compounding White's problems are his developmental woes; with the knight d2 pinned and immobilized, his remaining queenside pieces are shut out of the game, thus negating the value of his extra piece. After all, of what value is a piece if it cannot be put to use?



15. ♖f1

Preventing mate.

15... ♘c6

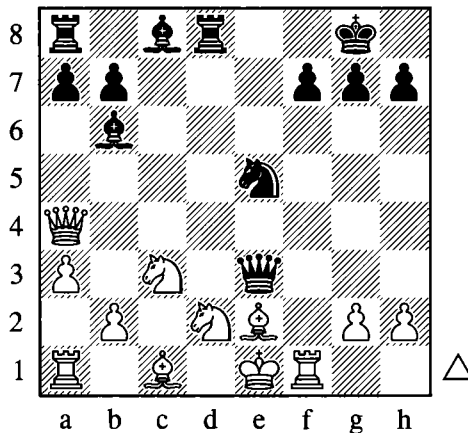
Another piece enters the game. The knight threatens to hop to d4, or even more dangerously, to d3 via e5.

16. ♙a4

The queen must vacate the d-file in order to allow the d2-knight to move.

16... ♘e5!

Black refuses to give his opponent time to get organized. Now White must do something about the threatened check on d3.



17. ♔d1

This sad-looking move is forced, as 17. ♘de4? ♘d3† 18. ♔d1 ♘xc1† regains the piece while maintaining a crushing initiative.

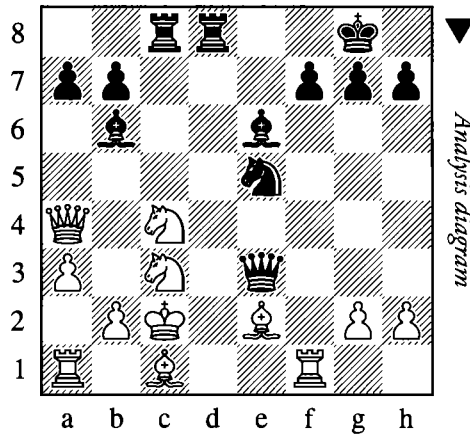
17...♙e6

Black brings another piece into play.

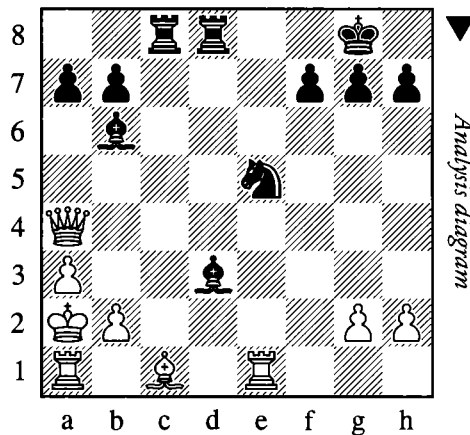
18.♞e1?

White is taking too many liberties with the safety of his king.

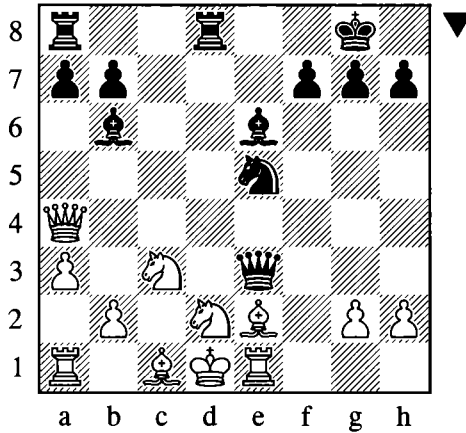
18.♜c2 was the only chance, although Black still has a beautiful winning line: 18...♞ac8 Pinning the knight and threatening to take on e2. 19.♘c4 (19.♞e1 ♘d3!→) With his last move White simultaneously interferes with the pin along the c-file and uncovers the bishop c1. It looks like he might be able to escape, but Black has another trick in store...



19...♞xe2†! 20.♘xe2 ♙xc4! Black could have won back the queen, but it is even more effective to keep his rook for attacking purposes. 21.♜b1 ♙xe2 22.♞e1 ♙d3† 23.♜a2



23...♞d4! Black is winning, for instance 24.b4 ♞d5 25.♙b2 ♙c4† 26.♜b1 ♙b5 27.♞b3 ♞d3 28.♞a2 ♞d2! and White can resign.



18...Rd4!

Black has several strong continuations, but this seems like the strongest and most logical. Black gains a tempo while preparing to double rooks.

19. Qf3!?

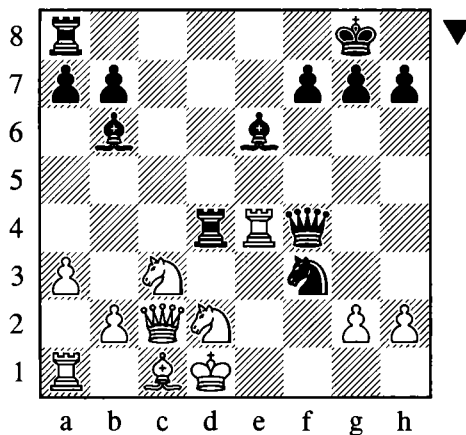
White's only chance is to try and counterattack.

19...Wf4 20. Wc2

Defending d2 but boxing in his king. There was no real choice, as after 20. Wb5 Qc4 disaster is about to strike on d2.

20...Qxf3 21. Re4

Hoping to initiate exchanges to relieve the pressure. 21. gxf3 loses quickly: 21... Wxf3† 22. Re2 (22. Qe2 Qb3-+) 22... Wf1† 23. Re1 Qg4† 24. Qe2 Qxe2#



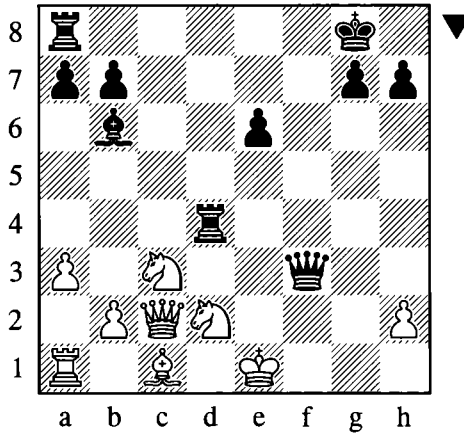
21...Wf6

Calmly maintaining all the threats. 21... Re4 22. Wxe4 Wxe4 with a winning endgame was also good enough.

22. ♖xe6

Desperation, but 22.gxf3 ♖xf3† wins as shown above.

22...fxe6 23.gxf3 ♖xf3† 24.♔e1



24...♖f2!

0-1

Smirin's last move may not be the computer's top choice, but for a human it is the most straightforward route to victory, and it was enough to force Postny's immediate resignation. After 25.♔xf2 ♖xd2† the white king finds itself in double check, and after the subsequent 26...♖xc2 Black will have a trivial endgame win.

This fantastic game was a perfect demonstration of an intuitive sacrifice to exploit a lead in development and the opponent's uncastled king, supported by strong tactical play when it was needed.

What we have learned:

- ❖ If the center is closed, then feel free to castle – but only because you *should*, not merely because you *can*! By postponing castling in the early stages, White avoided giving his opponent a clear plan of attack on the kingside.
- ❖ However, once the center has been opened – which was certainly the case after move 12 – White's refusal to castle proved his undoing.
- ❖ A piece sacrifice on e3 (or e6, if the colors are reversed) is a typical way to launch an attack against an uncastled king. (You can find countless examples of this theme in the Sicilian Sozin and 4...♘d7 Caro-Kann.)
- ❖ Every move must have a purpose. This is true for chess in general, but it is especially relevant when you have sacrificed material. In this game every single one of Smirin's moves fulfilled a specific purpose: either to improve a piece, or to threaten something.
- ❖ Extra material is a good thing, but if the side with the extra piece(s) is unable to put it to use, then the value of the extra material must be questioned. In this game White's bishop

on c1 and rook on a1 never moved for the entire game and his remaining pieces lacked any sense of harmony, so it is hardly surprising that he suffered a painful defeat.

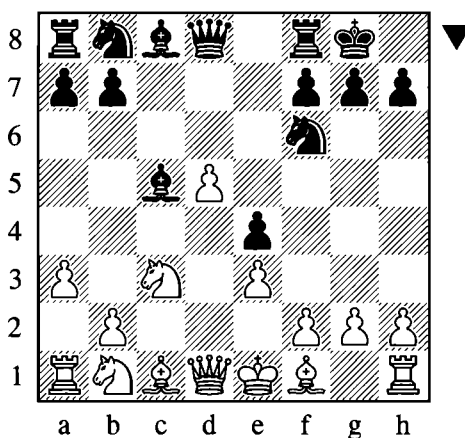
Game 45

Curt Hansen – Mads Reinert

Naestved 1985

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.c4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.e3 0–0 8.♘5c3 e4 9.a3

This time White hurries to prepare b4 in order to put his dark-squared bishop on its most active post. For the time being he delays the development of the other bishop, having something quite different in mind for this piece...



9...a5

Preventing White from expanding on the queenside. Obviously this entails a weakening of the b5-square, but Reinert must have decided it was worth paying this price. (I am not so sure he was correct, but the decision works out well in the game...)

10.♘d2 ♚e7 11.h3!?

11.♙e2 ♜d8 leads to normal play, although compared with some of the earlier games Black has spent a tempo on ...a7-a5.

Upon first glance the text move seems strange, and one might be tempted to label it “pointless”, “time-wasting” or something similar. Before jumping to that conclusion, it is worth remembering that the player behind the white pieces is Curt Hansen, a strong grandmaster who became the World Junior Champion a year before this game, and went on to play on the top board for Denmark at several Olympiads. Players of this caliber are not in the habit of making aimless moves, so what was Hansen’s idea?

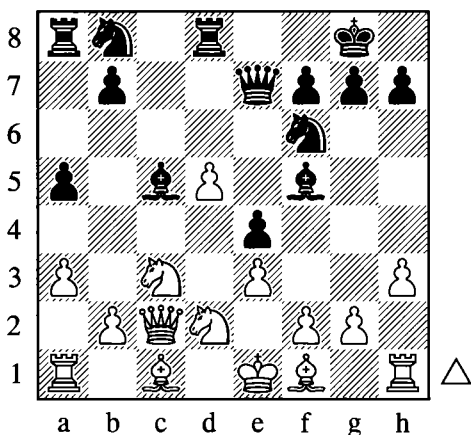
We have already seen a number of games in which Black was able to use the g4-square to launch a deadly attack, so could he be trying to pre-empt any such activity? The answer will become apparent in a few moves’ time...

11...♖d8 12.♔c2

Maintaining pressure on e4, and thus preventing Black from capturing on d5 for the moment.

12...♕f5

By contrast to the previous game, here 12...♖xd5 13.♔xe4 leaves Black a pawn down for insufficient compensation.

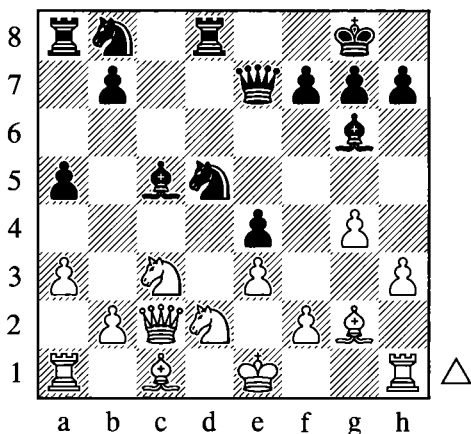


13.g4!?

So this was White's idea! The 'extended fianchetto' is an unusual plan, and also reveals why White was in no hurry to develop his light-squared bishop. From the g2-square it will intensify the pressure against the e4-pawn, and a future pawn advance to g5 will drive the defensive knight away. Furthermore, White might even try to flip the script entirely, and go all-out for a kingside attack!

Despite all these nice ideas, White's creative plan also carries great risk, as he is creating a lot of weaknesses in his position.

13...♗g6 14.♗g2 ♖xd5



15.h4?

White simply cannot afford the time for such a move, and should have gone for something different.

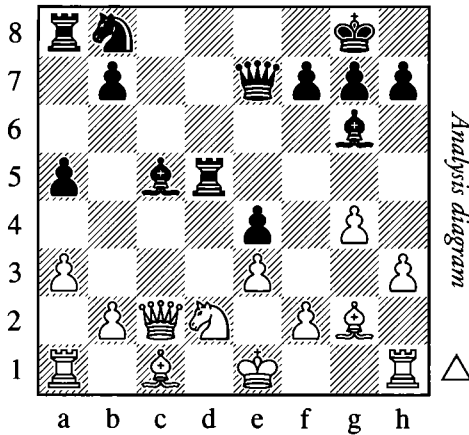
15. ♖xc4?! ♗xe3! is certainly not what White wants.

15. ♗xe4?! is also risky: 15... ♖xc3 (the immediate 15... ♗xe3! is also good) 16. ♗xg6 (16.bxc3 ♗xd2!) 16... ♗xe3! White is in trouble.

White should have inserted the knight exchange:

15. ♖xd5! ♗xd5

Now at least the chances of a successful sacrifice on e3 are diminished.



16. h4!

This seems to be best.

16. ♗xe4? is refuted by 16... ♗xd2!.

16. ♖xe4 allows 16... ♗e5 or 16... ♖c6 with excellent play for Black as the knight is stuck in an awkward pin.

16... h6 17. h5 ♗h7

Now White can at least contemplate the capture:

18. ♗xe4

But even here Black has a more than adequate reply.

18... ♗xe4

18... ♗xd2?? does not work here since White can take on h7 with check.

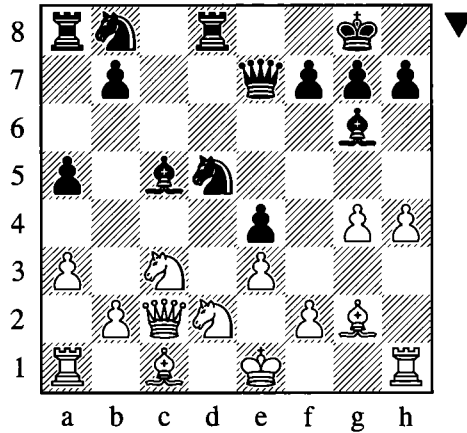
19. ♖xe4

19. ♗xe4 ♗d7 is no better.

19... ♖d7

Black has more than enough compensation for a pawn, as White's position is extremely loose.

After the move played in the game, White received an unpleasant surprise. Can you find Black's crushing reply?



15...Qxe3!

When I saw this sacrifice it reminded me of the Sozin-Velimirovic setup in the Sicilian Defense. Here it occurs with reversed colors, but several key features are the same: the e3-square is insufficiently protected, the white queen is vulnerable and the g2-bishop is hanging. (In the Sicilian it would normally be a pawn on g7.)

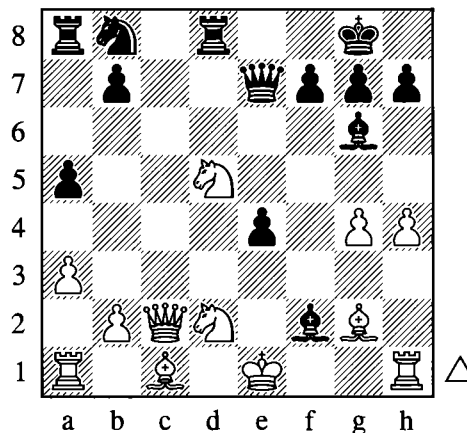
Before moving on, let us briefly note that the tempting 15...Nf4? does not work due to 16.exf4 e3 17.Nde4! when Black lacks a decent follow-up.

16.Nxd5

16.fxe3? Nxe3 is disastrous for White, as Black recoups a cartful of wood (enough for a two-pawn advantage) while keeping a raging attack.

16...Qxf2!

A further sacrifice! Note that 16...Qxd2?? would have thrown away all of Black's advantage due to 17.Qxd2!.

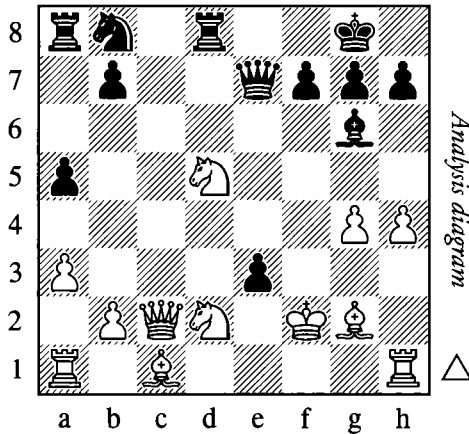


17.♔e2?

The king is poorly well-placed here, and White should have preferred one of the following alternatives:

17.♔f1 ♖xd5 18.h5 is a reasonable try, although after 18...♗b6! White is still in trouble as the check on f6 will be unpleasant.

17.♔xf2 e3† (But not 17...♖xd5?? 18.♗xe4 ♗c6 when 19.h5 and 19.♗g5 are both winning for White.)

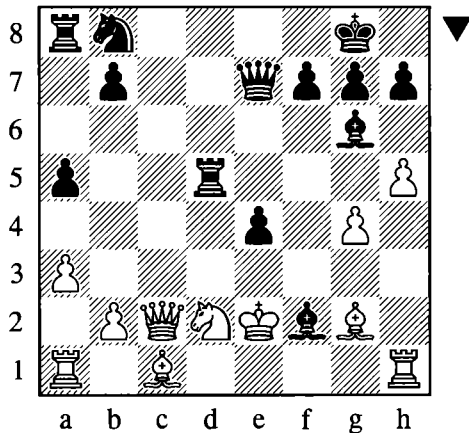


Analysis diagram

18.♔g1 (After 18.♗xe3 ♗xc2 19.♗xc2 ♗d7 White's king is too exposed and he will soon lose material.) 18...♖xd5 White remains in serious trouble.

17...♖xd5 18.h5

Trapping the bishop, but Black's attacking resources are by no means exhausted.



18...♗c6!

Threatening a fork on d4.

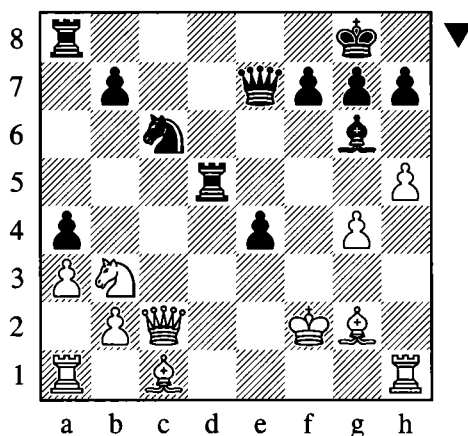
Hansen may have been pinning his hopes on 18...e3? 19.hxg6 exd2† 20.♔xf2 dxc1=♚ 21.♞axc1 when the tables have been turned, as Black has a weak back rank and the g6-pawn is banging on the walls of his king's fortress.

19.♘b3 a4

Calmly removing the defender. Reinert could never have imagined how useful his ninth move would turn out to be!

20.♔xf2?

Losing instantly, but 20.hxg6 axb3 21.gxh7† ♔h8 22.♚xb3 (22.♚xe4 ♞e5) 22...♘d4† was not much of an improvement.



20...e3†

0-1

The discovered attack nabs the queen. A fantastic performance from Reinert, who demolished his grandmaster opponent in just 20 moves.

What we have learned:

- ❖ Once again, as soon as the knight arrives on d5 Black can start looking out for sacrifices on e3.
- ❖ Although the Danish Grandmaster received a walloping in this game, the h3/g4 setup is a serious idea which should not be underestimated.
- ❖ The X-ray attack from the bishop on g6 against the queen on c2 gave White all kinds of trouble, and eventually decided the game. (The same theme frequently occurs with reversed colors in certain variations of the King's Indian Attack.)

Game 46

Adrian Mikhalchishin – Garry Kasparov

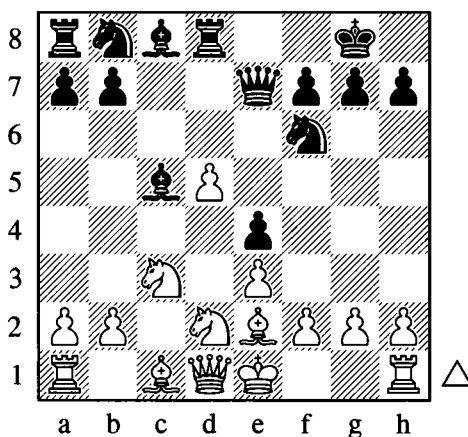
Frunze 1981

At the time of this game Kasparov was not yet a challenger for the World Championship title, but he had already achieved some remarkable successes in high-level tournaments, both in the Soviet Union and overseas, despite being the youngest player virtually everywhere he went.

Mikhalchishin was one of the strongest Ukrainian players, and for a while he was the leading grandmaster of his age, amongst such distinguished contemporaries as Beliavsky and Tukmakov. Today he plays for Slovenia and had made a name for himself as a trainer.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♘f3 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.♘5c3 0-0 8.e3 e4 9.♙e2 ♚e7 10.♘d2 ♞d8

Kasparov follows the mainline theory.



11.a3

Castling would take us back into familiar territory. 11.♞c2 is another idea, when Black should play 11...♙f5.

11...♘xd5 12.♘xd5

More reliable than 12.♘cxe4?! which was covered in Game 44.

12...♞xd5 13.♞c2

Understandably, the queen feels uncomfortable standing on the same file as the enemy rook. From c2 she eyes the e4-pawn and hopes to make an impact on the c-file.

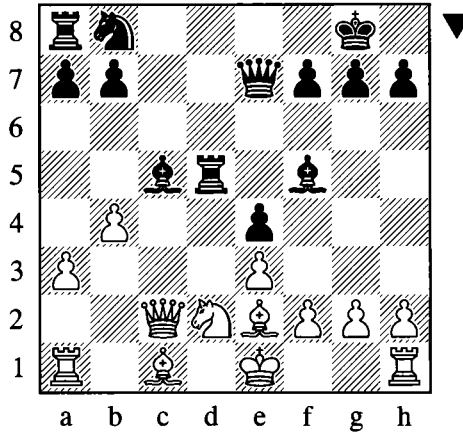
13...♙f5

The bishop vacates its exposed position on c8, while protecting the e4-pawn and setting up potential threats against the white queen.

13...f5?? is not only a gross positional error, but also enables White to gain material in two different ways, by 14.♙c4 or 14.b4.

14.b4

To which square should the bishop retreat?



14...♔b6

The otherwise desirable 14...♔d6? leaves the rook short of squares, and after 15.♕c4 ♖e5 16.♘b2 White nabs the exchange.

15.♘b2 ♘c6

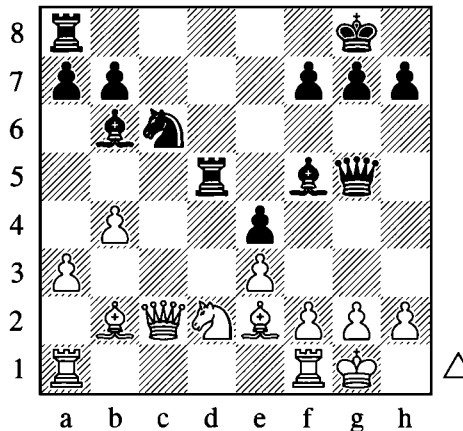
After regaining the sacrificed pawn, it is clear that Black does not face serious problems. The position reminds one of an Alapin Sicilian with colors reversed. The e4-pawn could become weak in the endgame, but in the middlegame it provides Black with additional space and a potential outpost on d3.

16.0-0

Having developed most of his pieces, White finally castles to bring his rooks into the game.

16...♙g5

Shifting the queen to the kingside, a sign that Kasparov has a storm brewing for the enemy monarch residing there. The immediate threats include ...♗h3 winning the exchange, and the tactical shot ...♗xe3. Despite the appeal of these ideas, White does have a route to an advantage, and so I would suggest 16...♞ac8, 16...♞ad8 and 16...♗c7!? as improvements.



17.♔h1

Prophylaxis against ...♙h3. Note that White avoids moving his rook from f1, as he will need it to defend the kingside, especially the f2-square.

A few other moves deserve a mention:

17.♜xe4?? is impossible due to 17...♚g6 18.f3 (18.♙f3 ♜e8→) 18...♙xe3† 19.♔h1 ♞d2 winning.

However, White had a stronger continuation available: 17.♙c4! ♞d6 18.♜xe4 (18.♞fd1 ♜h6!) 18...♚g6 19.♜xd6! Not such a difficult combination, and after 19...♙xc2 20.♙xf7† ♚xf7 21.♜xf7 ♔xf7 22.♞ac1 White has the slightly better endgame.

17...♞d6

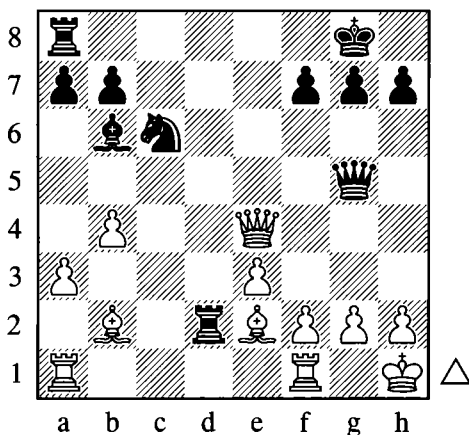
Kasparov prepares to swing the rook to g6 or h6, while inviting his opponent to capture the 'forgotten' e4-pawn:

18.♜xe4 ♙xe4?

Obvious but wrong. Instead 18...♚g6 19.f3 ♙xe3 does not come with check, and White can use the spare tempo to bring his last piece into play with 20.♞ad1. Nevertheless Black is not worse and objectively he should have gone for this.

19.♚xe4 ♞d2

Forking the two bishops, but White has a strong rebuttal available. Can you find it?



20.b5?

The right solution was 20.♙a6! bxa6 21.♚xc6 ♞ad8 22.♙c3 with an extra pawn and some advantage for White. (If you did not manage to find it then do not despair; Kasparov and Mikhalechishin both missed it, so it could not have been an easy move!)

20...♞xe2?

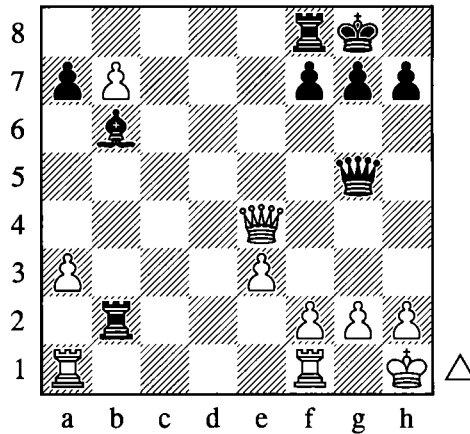
20...♜a5! was better, after which Black wins a piece for not much compensation. Now White gets a dangerous passed pawn.

21. bxc6 ♖xb2 22. cxb7

Kasparov must have believed that the ideal placement of his rook behind the passed pawn would allow him to contain its energy. He was partially correct, but it turns out that with correct play the position is balanced, and so he should have preferred the improvement noted above.

22... ♜f8!

Black is weak on the eighth rank, so he sensibly covers his king against any nasty checks. 22... ♜b8? 23. ♖ac1 creates an unpleasant threat of invading on c8, and 23... ♔d8?? is impossible due to 24. ♜e8 mate.

**23. ♖ac1 ♔a5**

Uncovering the attack from the rook on b2, and setting the scene for some tactics which subsequently decide the game.

24. ♜c8?

The decisive error. With the rook on f8 this invasion does not come with a killer check, so its effectiveness is greatly diminished.

White should have relaxed and taken a moment for the calm 24. a4! in order to prevent Black's next move. In that case his strong passed pawn would have given him full compensation for the piece.

24... ♜b5!

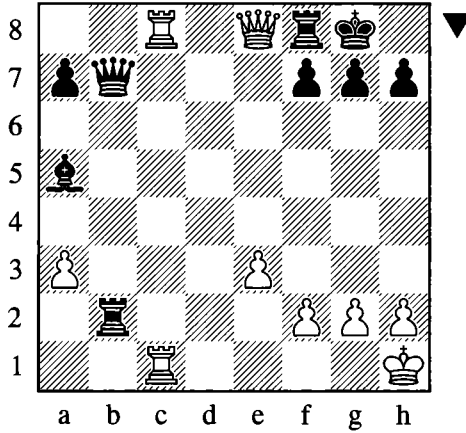
Mikhailchishin may have overlooked this key move, which combines restraint of the b-pawn with a counterattack against the rook on f1.

25. ♖fc1 ♜xb7

The pawn has perished, and White's only chance is to hit his opponent on his weak back rank.

26. ♜e8!

How can Black defend?



26...♙xc8!!

Kasparov is up to the task. 26...♗b4 27.axb4 ♙xb4 would only have been equal.

27.♙xc8

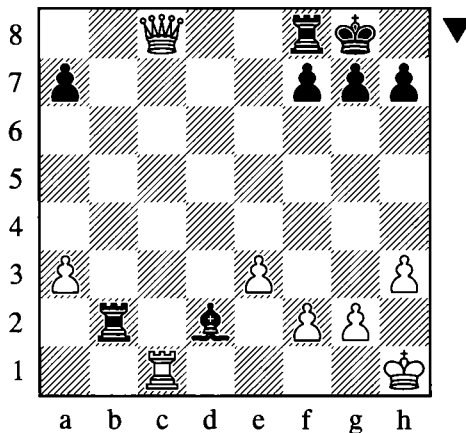
It is at this point that White receives a sharp reminder of the vulnerability of his own back rank, which prevents him from recapturing with the rook.

27...♔d2!

The point behind the queen sacrifice. Black has neatly turned the tables by exploiting the weakness of the first rank, which prevents White's rook from moving.

28.h3

White has to create an escape square, otherwise an exchange on c1 followed by ...♗fb8 would win the queen.



28...h6!

The most accurate. Black could have taken on c1 immediately and reached the same type of

winning endgame, but the text move threatens to take the queen on c8, thus gaining a tempo for Black and making the process even more straightforward.

29. ♖c4 ♗xc1 30. ♖xc1 ♜xf2

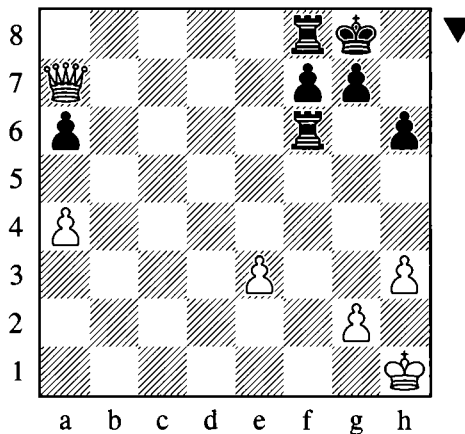
The demise of this pawn is crucial to Black's success in the endgame. Now the pawns on e3 and g2 will be weak, in addition to the one on a3. Meanwhile the white queen has no real targets and the first player can do little but await his fate.

31. ♖c7 a6

The pawn is absolutely safe here as it will be guarded along the third rank.

32. ♖a7 ♜f6 33. a4

The pawn vacates the second rank, where it would make an additional target for the black rooks.



33... ♜d8 34. a5 ♜d1† 35. ♗h2 ♜d2 36. ♖b8† ♗h7 37. ♖b4 ♜ff2

It did not take long for Kasparov to home in on White's most vulnerable weakness – the g2-pawn.

38. ♖e4† f5

0–1

Mikhailchishin resigned, since 39. ♖c6 ♜xg2 will result in a pawn endgame which is hopeless for him.

What we have learned:

- ❖ Once again the e4-pawn was the foundation from which Black attempted to start a kingside attack (although the attack never really materialized in this particular game).
- ❖ The rook lift (17... ♜d6) is an important attacking resource.
- ❖ The d2-square hardly ever provides a stable home for a white minor piece.
- ❖ Once again White had to watch the e3-square, as 16... ♖g5 threatened 17... ♗xe3 to exploit

the hanging position of the knight on d2.

- ❖ Rooks are ideally placed behind passed pawns.
- ❖ A weak back rank can be a result-changing feature of a position, especially when limited material remains on the board.
- ❖ It is always useful to create luft for your king, as long as you can spare a tempo for it.
- ❖ This game is a perfect advert for the saying that chess is 99% tactics, as it included: tactics to exploit the hanging knight on d2, tactics to attack and protect (sometimes indirectly) the advanced e4-pawn, tactics which helped to create White's passed b-pawn, tactics preventing the passed pawn from promoting, tactics based on back rank motifs, and finally Kasparov's queen sacrifice!

The next game shows another example of delayed castling. Once again the position becomes highly unclear and difficult for both players.

Game 47

Vladimir Malakhov – Arte Smirnov

Dagomys 2009

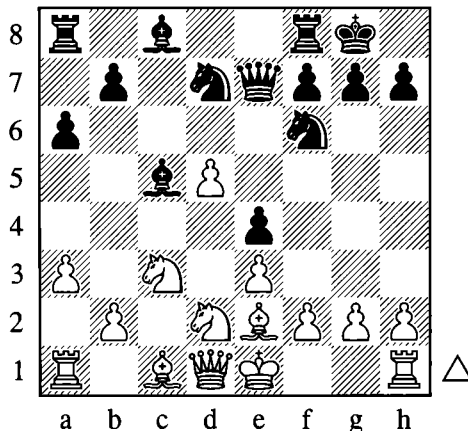
Malakhov is a formidable Grandmaster who is rated above 2700 and has been ranked amongst the top 20 to 50 players in the world for many years. He represented Russia in several Olympiads and is a former European Champion. His opponent is also a product of the Russian chess school, but is younger and was rated 2454 (but rising fast) at the time of the game.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♗f3 cxd4 4.♗xd4 e5 5.♗b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.e3 0-0 8.♗5c3 e4 9.♙e2 ♜e7 10.a3 a6?

At this stage of the game Black has better things to do with a tempo. The main theoretical moves are 10...♞d8 and 10...♙f5, with good prospects for Black in both cases.

11.♗d2 ♗bd7

Smirnov deviates from the plan of ...♞d8 intending ...♗xd5 which we encountered in the previous game, and intends to build his position with ...♗e5 and ...♙f5.



12. ♖c2

Attacking e4.

12... ♜e8 13. b4 ♞a7 14. ♞b2

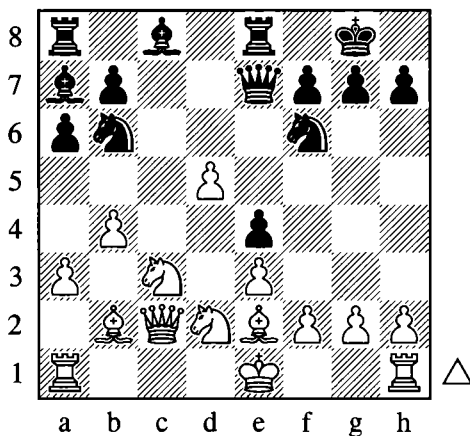
Thanks to Black's inaccuracy on move 10, White has the advantage. Black does not have a kingside attack, nor is there a clear way for him to regain the pawn on d5. Moreover, the pressure on the e4-pawn prevents Black from developing his pieces easily.

14... ♘b6

Finally Black hits upon the right plan, to regain the d5 pawn. The problem is that his pieces are stepping on each others' toes. The rook would prefer to be on d8 rather than e8, but it had to choose the latter square in order to defend the e4-pawn. The light-squared bishop could have done this job more effectively from f5, but Black wasted time on ...a7-a6 instead.

The outcome is that the bishop was blocked on c8, so the knight had to move from d7 to release it. The knight could not go to e5 as the e4-pawn was hanging, so it had to go to b6 instead. But here it blocks the other bishop on a7! The whole chain reaction can be traced back to Black's mistake on move 10!

Sensing the lack of harmony in the enemy ranks, Malakhov immediately pounces.

**15. d6!**

Played not with the expectation of promoting the passed pawn, but rather to disrupt the opponent's coordination.

15... ♜e6

The pawn cannot be taken since Black would lose the e4-pawn for no compensation whatsoever. The text move is forced, but now Black has miserable development, with both his bishops blocked by their own team-mates!

16. g4!?

Malakhov continues to play with maximum ambition; it is not often that one can justify such a pawn thrust. Thanks to Black's poor coordination, White can afford to lunge forwards with the

g-pawn in order to drive the knight away from the defense of the e4-pawn. Supported by the bishop on b2, White's kingside activity might also prove a menace to the black king.

It should be mentioned that 16.♖d1 would have been a calmer route to a clear advantage.

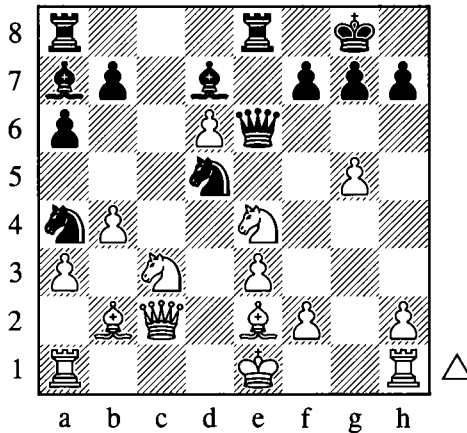
16...♗d7

There is no chance of stopping g4-g5, so Black develops all his pieces and hopes his activity will bring him some dividends.

16...♗xg4?! is too dangerous. 17.♖g1 ♖f6 18.♗cxe4 The combined pressure down the long diagonal and open g-file spells trouble for the black king, for example: 18...♗xe4 19.♖xg7† ♖f8 20.♗xe4 ♗xe4 21.♗c3 Black has a hard time coping with the threats of ♖xf7† and ♖g8†, both of which clear the g7-square for the queen to deliver checkmate. Note that the innocent-looking pawn on d6 is also playing its part by taking away an escape square for the black king on e7.

17.g5 ♗fd5 18.♗dxe4 ♗a4!

In a worse position Black seizes the opportunity to complicate the game. White has two extra pawns, but his king is still in the center and the advance of the g-pawn has left him with some holes on the kingside. Black's queen and rook would like to do something meaningful on the e-file, but for the moment their aspirations are being thwarted by the pawn on e3 and the knight on e4. The former can be demolished by a timely sacrifice, as we have already seen in Game 45. The text move is designed to undermine the knight on e4, after which Black's threats may assume menacing proportions.

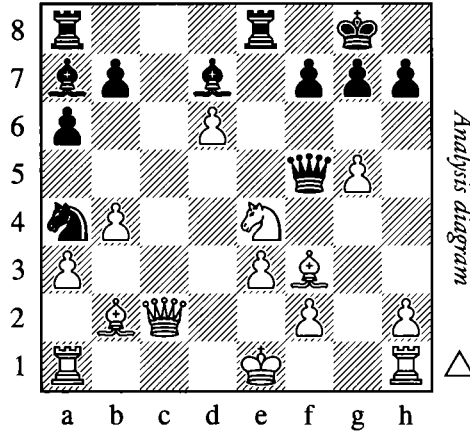


19.0-0-0?

A serious error; Malakhov must have overlooked some detail in the ensuing complications.

He was right to avoid 19.♗xa4? ♗xa4 20.♗xa4 ♗xe4 when the rook on h1 is under attack, and Black is ready to launch a vicious assault by sacrificing a piece on e3.

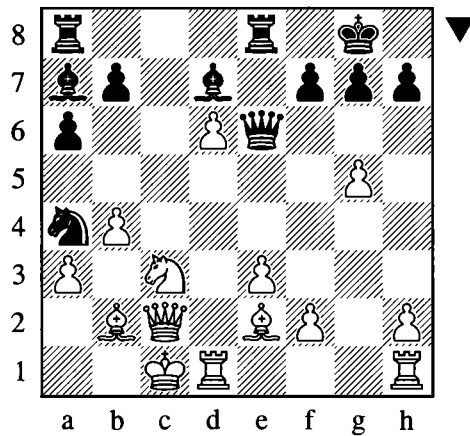
However, the correct path was: 19.♗xd5! ♗xd5 20.♗f3 ♗f5



Analysis diagram

21. ♖f6†! Perhaps this is what the Russian super-GM overlooked. 21...gxf6 22. ♜xf5 ♙xf5 23. ♙xf6 ♜ab8 24. ♝c1 With three healthy pawns for the piece and superior coordination, White has a clear advantage.

19... ♗dxc3 20. ♗xc3



20... ♜ac8

Maintaining the tension with a pin.

20... ♗xc3? would have been met by 21. ♙xc3 when Black is out of tricks; but not, of course, 21. ♜xc3?? ♜ac8 when the queen will perish without having a chance to deliver the threatened checkmate.

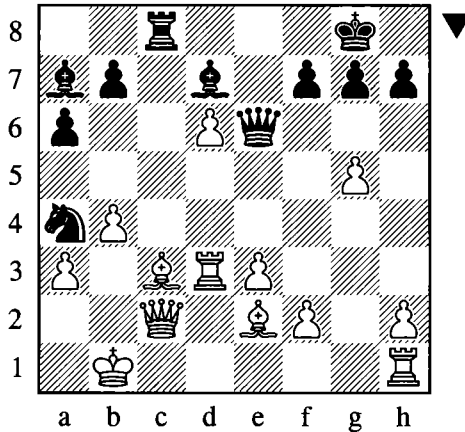
21. ♙b1

White has too much wood on the c-file, so he begins the evacuation.

21... ♜xc3!

Raising the stakes by throwing in more material.

22. ♖xc3 ♜c8 23. ♝d3



23... ♗d4??

After clawing his way back into the game, Black commits a fatal error.

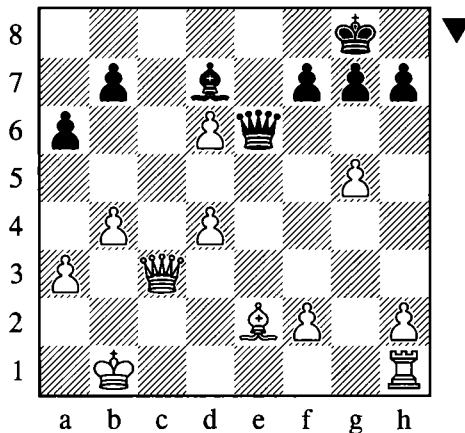
23... ♗b5?? was also a mistake due to the distracting resource of 24.d7! ♗xd7 25. ♝hd1 when White is winning.

But Black could have crowned his resurgence with 23... ♜f5! setting up another wicked pin. White has nothing better than 24. ♖c1, after which 24... ♜xf2 25. ♝f1 ♗xc3† 26. ♖b1 ♘xc3† gives Black a decisive advantage.

24. exd4 ♝xc3 25. ♝xc3 ♘xc3†

Presumably Black had been planning 25... ♜xc2, but then noticed that 26. ♝c8†! would refute his idea.

26. ♜xc3



26...♖xe2

26...♖e4† would have lasted slightly longer, although after 27.♘b2 ♖xh1 28.♖c7 ♖e4 29.♖d8† ♕e8 30.♖e7 ♖xd4† 31.♘b1 Black's days are numbered.

27.♖e1**1-0**

Black resigned as 27...♖xf2 28.♖c8†! forces mate.

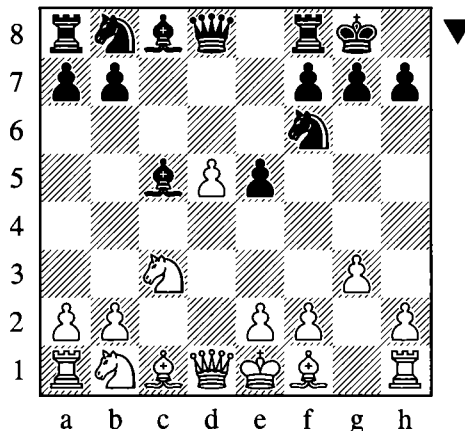
What we have learned:

- ❖ The opening stages highlighted a key component of chess: the coordination and harmony between the pieces.
- ❖ Both sides should keep in mind the possibility of the energetic pawn thrust g2-g4.
- ❖ Smirnov displayed an important principle of defending a worse position: to activate all the pieces in search of counterplay, without fearing the loss of a pawn or two.
- ❖ Once again the game was decided by tactics: Malakhov either overlooked or miscalculated the consequences of 21...♖xc3!; and a few moves later, Smirnov returned the favor by opting for 23...♕d4?? instead of 23...♖f5! which would have won.

In the final section of the chapter we will turn our attention to a different scheme of development for White.

The Fianchetto Setup

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♘f3 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♕c5 7.♘5c3 0-0 8.g3



White tries to build the “King’s House” as it was referred to by the great David Bronstein in his book *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*. The great maestro goes on to say that the opponent “will now need to display a great deal more sharpness, resourcefulness, will-to-win, imagination etc., than after the very popular but very risky (for novices) ‘King’s Pawn Opening’ (e2-e4).”

Bronstein's comments are largely true of queen's pawn openings as well. Take Rubinstein's setup against the Tarrasch Defense (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4. cxd5 exd5 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.g3), and the Fianchetto systems against the King's Indian Defense and the Blumenfeld Gambit (the latter featuring in pages 187-194 of this book). In all these openings, Black's chances for a full scale kingside onslaught are reduced by comparison with the more classical methods of development.

Fortunately for Black, things are not all bad! Bronstein was referring to a kingside fianchetto with a knight on f3 (or f6 for Black), and indeed the knight on f3 plays an important role in all the aforementioned openings. Without this key defender, Black has some additional attacking possibilities.

Game 48

Jean Luc Costa – Judit Polgar

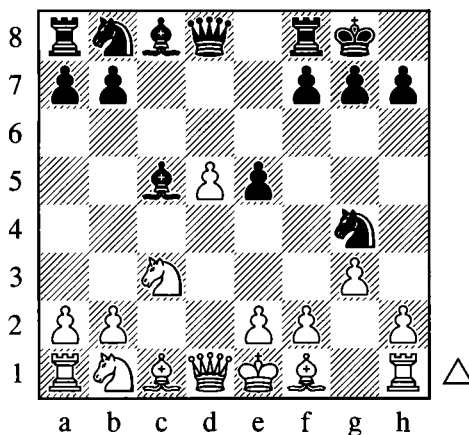
Biel 1987

Polgar was just eleven years old at the time of this game, but she already had a rating of 2355!

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.♘f3 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d5 6.cxd5 ♙c5 7.♘5c3 0-0 8.g3 ♘g4!

This was recommended many years ago by the guru of this line, Rafael Vaganian. By attacking f2, Black gains time to advance his f-pawn.

The other method of attacking f2 is inadequate: 8...♞b6?! 9.e3 ♙g4 10.♙e2 ♙xe2 (10...♙h3 is well met by 11.g4!, threatening to win the bishop with ♖g1-g3, as pointed out by Aronian.) 11.♞xe2 Threatening e4, thus forcing Black's next move. 11...e4 12.a3! Prophylaxis against ...♙b4 and...♘d5. Black's initiative was soon extinguished and he went on to lose in Aronian – Sutovsky, Heraklio 2007.



9.e3 f5

For the time being Black should not worry about developing her queenside pieces. The top priority is to push through with ...f4, which will create powerful threats.

10. ♖g2?

This automatic move fails to meet the demands of the position.

10.h3 has been played in a few games, but after 10...♟f6 Black obtains fine play with the simple plan of ...e4 and ...♟bd7-e5, when the knight eyes the weak d3- and f3-squares.

The most challenging continuation is:

10. ♖e2!

Abandoning the fianchetto plan in order to prevent ...f4.

10...♟f6 11.a3

White sensibly delays castling, preferring to develop his queenside pieces first.

11...♟bd7 12.b4 ♕d6 13.♟d2 ♟b6 14.e4!

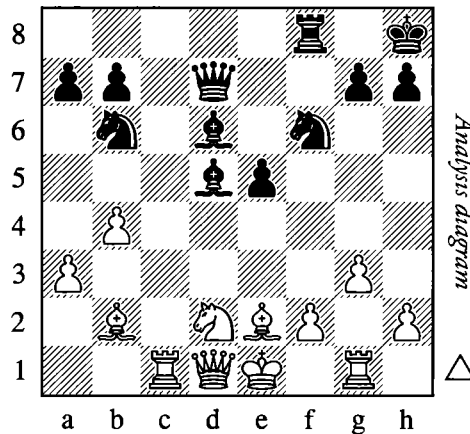
After 14.♟b3 ♖h8 15.♞a2 ♕d7 16.♟c5 ♖xc5 17.bxc5 ♟bxd5 18.♟xd5 ♕a4 19.♞d3 ♟xd5 20.0-0 ♕c6 Black's position was quite acceptable in Piesina – Vaganian, Moscow 1979.

14...♖h8 15.♖b2 fxe4 16.♟cxe4 ♕h3!

Sacrificing an exchange in order to prevent White from castling.

17.♟g5 ♕g2 18.♟e6 ♞d7 19.♞g1 ♕xd5 20.♟xf8 ♞xf8 21.♞c1

This position was reached in Korchnoi – G. Hernandez, Merida 1996. In the game Black failed to generate much of an initiative and suffered an unpleasant defeat. In this position he could have posed some interesting problems by striking in an unexpected area:

**21...a5!**

Play might continue as follows:

22.bxa5 ♟a4 23.♕a1 ♕xa3 24.♞b1 ♕c5 25.♞f1 ♕c6

Black has enough activity to maintain the balance.

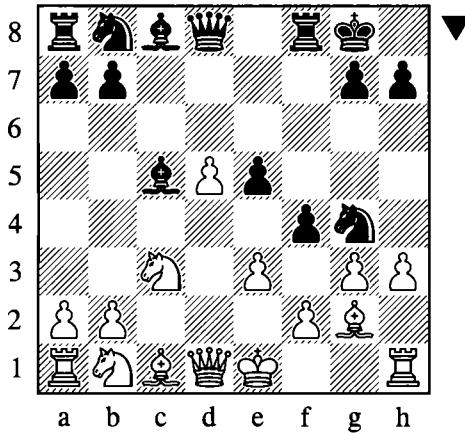
10...f4

Polgar needs no further invitation to continue her attack.

11.h3?!

Incredibly provocative.

11.♔f3 was a slight improvement, although Black can employ a similar sacrifice as seen in the game: 11...fxe3! 12.♙xg4 exf2† 13.♕f1 (obviously not 13.♕e2?? ♙xg4†) 13...♘d7 (13...♙d4! is also possible) 14.♕g2 ♖f6 15.♙xc8 ♗xc8 Black's threat is ...♙d4 and then to capture on d5. White's king is rather exposed and overall Black has nice compensation, Nordstrom – Herrstrom, Haninge 1997.



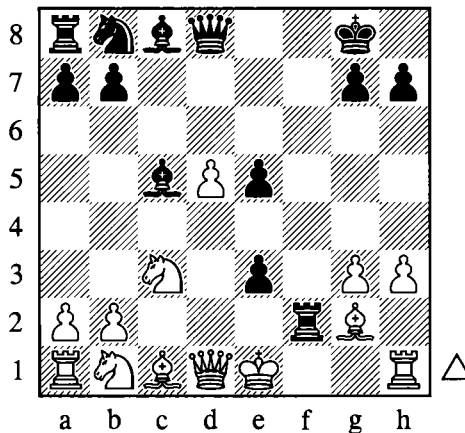
11...♖xf2!

Such a move should be played almost automatically. The thought of retreating the knight should not even enter one's head in a position like this; the only reason for hesitation should be to check whether a different version of the sacrifice, such as 11...fxe3 or 11...fxg3, might work better. (They do not.)

12.♕xf2 fxe3† 13.♕e1

The only move, as the reader can easily verify.

13...♗f2



Black is a piece down, but in return she has demolished the enemy king's pawn shelter and established her rook on a most intimidating outpost. White is faced with the unpleasant reality that his king will be stuck in the center for a long time to come. His pieces are also uncoordinated and will have problems developing.

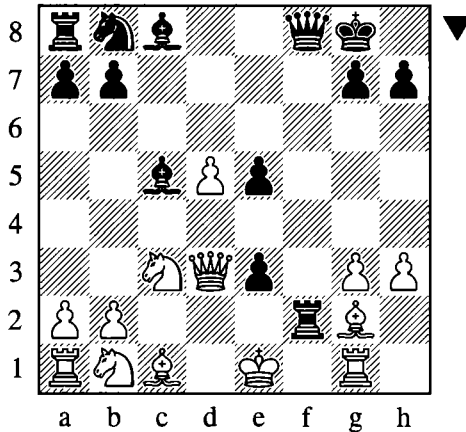
14. ♖g1 ♜f8!

Threatening ...♞xg2 followed by ...♙xh3, and setting up mating motifs based on the queen coming to f2.

15. ♞d3

The otherwise strong centralizing move 15. ♞e4 enables Black to exploit the full power of her advanced pawn with 15...e2! when the threat of 16...♞xg2 is too much to bear.

The text move has several positive points: White vacates the d1-square for his king, while also guarding f1 and preparing to capture the crucial e3-pawn. How can Black continue her attack?



15... ♖a6!

It is time to bring reinforcements into play, and this excellent move does just that while creating a powerful threat of invading on b4. There is an old adage stating that “a knight on the rim is dim”, but it would be ridiculous to let such general principles cloud our judgment of the move which best meets the concrete demands of the position.

16. a3

White has no time to take the e3-pawn, and he clearly cannot afford to allow the knight invasion.

16... ♙f5

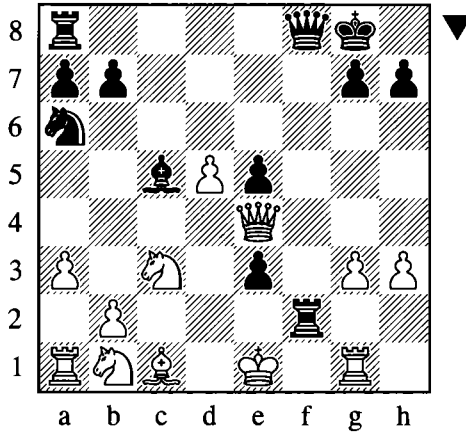
Developing another piece with gain of tempo. This works fine, although 16...♙d4! threatening ...♙c5 was even stronger. White is virtually forced to respond with 17. b4, after which 17...♙f5 18. ♙e4 ♙xe4 19. ♜xe4 ♞c8 leaves him in serious trouble – see the note to White's 19th move below. This would have been a more precise move order from Black's point of view, as White is denied the slight improvement noted at move 18 below.

17. ♖e4 ♗xe4

Trading off one of White's few developed pieces.

18. ♛xe4?!

18. ♘e4 was a better chance, although Black remains on top after 19...e2 19. ♘bd2 ♖h2!.



18... ♗d4!

Improving the bishop and threatening ... ♘c5, once again defending the e3-pawn indirectly by tactical means.

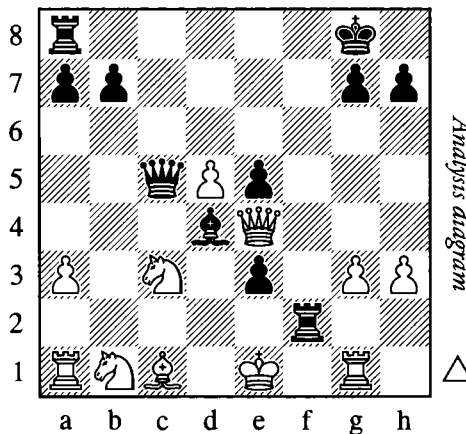
19. ♗xe3?

After this feeble move White's position collapses. The last chance to resist was: 19.b4

Now Black must react energetically as the e3-pawn is about to drop.

19... ♖c8

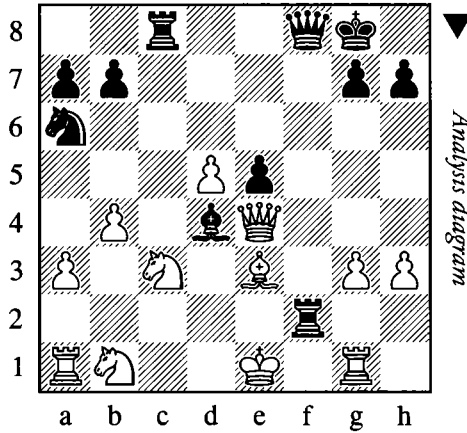
Black can even try the outrageous-looking 19... ♘c5!? 20.bxc5 ♛xc5.



In this position Black has invested two pieces, but she still enjoys fine compensation; the e3-pawn still lives and White's entire queenside is sleeping while his king remains exposed. Although this would be fun to play and analyze, the main line is stronger and more straightforward.

20. ♕xe3

There is nothing better.



20... ♖xc3!

Obviously not 20... ♕xc3?? 21. ♖xc3 ♖xc3 22. ♕xf2 when White wins.

21. ♖xc3

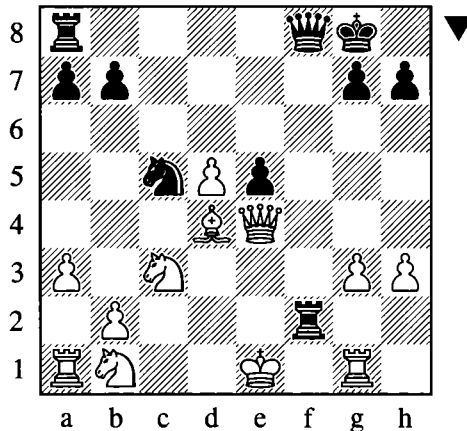
21. ♕xd4 is impossible, as 21... ♖c1 is mate! It is extremely unusual to see this 'lawnmower mate' pattern with so many pieces on the board!

21... ♕xc3† 22. ♖d1 ♕xa1 23. ♕xf2 ♖xf2

With two minor pieces for a rook and the safer king, Black should be winning with careful play.

19... ♖c5 20. ♕xd4

White's idea was to sacrifice his queen for some material in order to nullify the attack, but Polgar has other ideas...



20...exd4!

20...♟xe4 21.♞xe4 should be winning for Black as well, but opening the e-file leads to a much quicker kill.

21.♞xd4 ♜e8† 22.♞d1 ♞f3†

0–1

White resigned, since after 23.♞c1 ♞b3 is mate. A great performance by the strongest female player in history.

What we have learned:

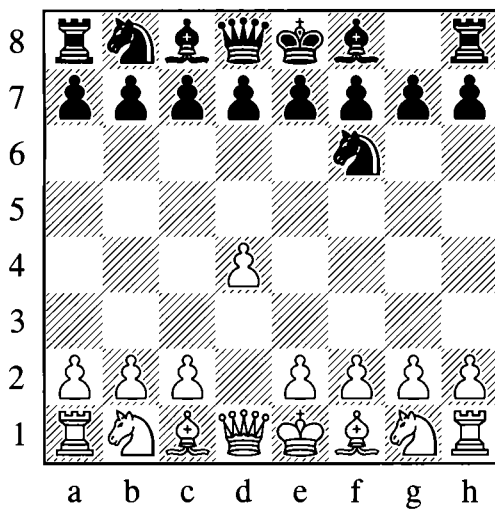
- ❖ The early ...♞g4 cleared the way for the march of the f-pawn.
- ❖ By executing the ...f5-f4 advance, Black was able to open the f-file for the rook and the a7-g1 diagonal for the bishop.
- ❖ The knight sacrifice on f2 demolished the pawn shelter surrounding the white king, and led to an ongoing attack.
- ❖ General principles are a useful guide, but one should not become bounded by them. 15...♞a6! was an extremely important and powerful move, without which the final result may well have been different.
- ❖ Once again we saw a material advantage being trumped by development and king safety.

Conclusion

There will always be players who prefer to sidestep the Benko Gambit after 1.d4 ♞f6 2.c4 c5, by means of 3.♞f3. By playing this move White hopes to obtain a slight edge in a calm position, but by following in Vaganian's footsteps Black can take the opponent out of his comfort zone and fight for the initiative. We have seen that the first player faces plenty of early pitfalls, and even if he plays correctly, Black still has every chance of obtaining decent counterplay. The Vaganian Gambit is regarded as sound all the way up to grandmaster level, and a glance at the database reveals that it has made a total score in excess of 50% for Black.

Chapter 4

1.d4 f6 – Sidelines



Trompowsky

Veresov

Colle

London

Torre

Introduction

There are many players who prefer to avoid main lines, instead preferring to do battle on the familiar territory of their own pet system. Attempting to take the opponent out of his comfort zone is a sensible policy; indeed, it is one of the main benefits of playing gambits.

In the present chapter I propose that we turn the tables, by choosing sound but slightly offbeat counterattacking systems. In doing so we can take the opponent away from his familiar battleground, and force him to make difficult decisions early in the opening.

The Trompowsky

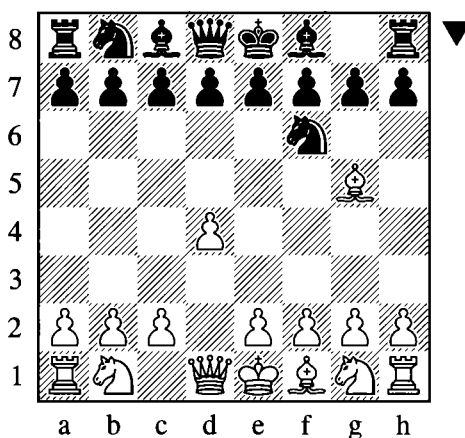
We will begin with what is arguably the most interesting of White's sidelines after 1.d4 ♘f6.

Game 49

Marc Narciso Dublan – Josep Manuel Lopez Martinez

Badalona 2006

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗g5



With this early bishop development White creates the possibility of doubling his opponent's pawns, while tempting the enemy knight to lunge forwards to the e4-square.

2...e6

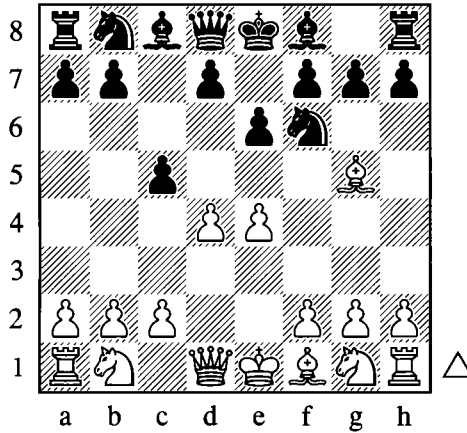
Black has a few decent alternatives, but I have chosen to recommend this one which can lead to lively play.

3.e4

The main line, and the most principled move. Alternatives such as 3.e3 and 3.♘d2 should be met by 3...c5.

3...c5!?

The main line is 3...h6 4.♗xf6 ♜xf6 when the players will debate the relative importance of White's pawn center and Black's bishop pair. The text move is tricky and slightly unusual, and aims for a more immediate confrontation.



4.e5

Arguably the most critical reply.

4.d5

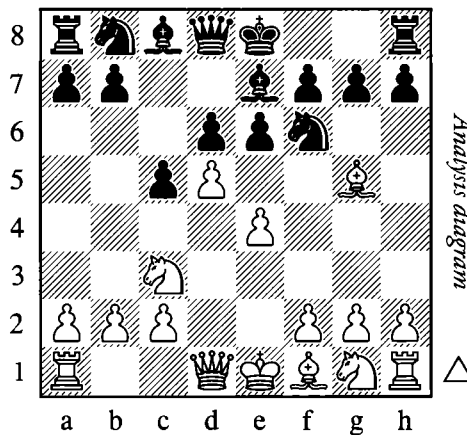
This is the main alternative.

4...d6

4...♗b6 is possible, but then 5.♘c3! ♗xb2 6.♗d2 is a good pawn sacrifice which gives White full compensation.

5.♘c3 ♗e7

White has tried a few different ideas here.



6.♗b5†

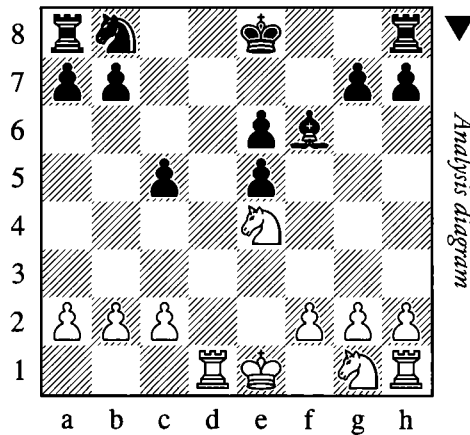
6.dxe6 ♗xe6 is nothing for White.

6. ♖f3 0–0 (6... ♖xd5?! is too risky: 7. exd5 ♙xg5 Gorfinkel – Verkasalo, Oulainen 2002, and now after 8. ♗b5† ♕f8 9. dxe6 ♙xe6 10. ♖xg5 ♗xg5 11. ♗xd6† ♗e7 12. ♗g3 White is clearly better.) 7. ♗d2 (7. ♙e2 ♖xd5 8. ♖xd5 ♙xg5 9. ♖xg5 exd5 10. ♗xd5 ♖c6 was fine for Black in Lindam – Rogozenko, Internet 2001.) 7... exd5 8. exd5 ♖a6 9. ♙e2 ♖c7 10. 0–0 ♗b8 11. a4 b6 12. ♗ad1 a6 The position was roughly balanced in Holving – Livner, Salongernas 1999.

6... ♙d7 7. dxe6 fxe6 8. ♙xd7†

8. ♙xf6 ♙xf6 is nothing for White.

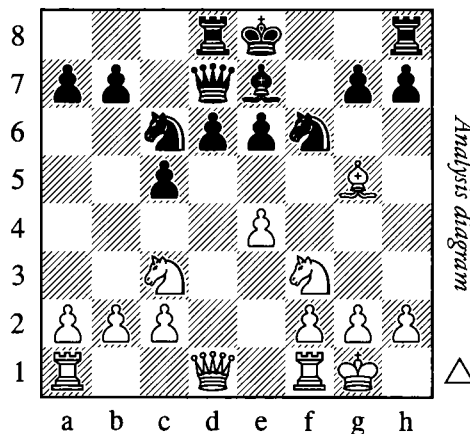
White can try a positional pawn sacrifice: 8. e5 dxe5 9. ♙xf6 ♙xf6 10. ♙xd7† ♗xd7 11. ♖e4 ♗xd1† 12. ♗xd1 Optically it looks like White has good compensation here, but in the following game Black easily held his own:



12... ♙e7 13. ♖f3 ♖c6 14. c3 ♗d8 15. ♗xd8† ♕xd8 16. ♕e2 h6 17. ♗d1† ♕c7 18. ♗d3 c4! Improving the scope of the bishop. 19. ♗e3 b5 Black was at least equal in Moiseenko – Kruppa, Alushta 2004.

8... ♗xd7 9. ♖f3 ♖c6 10. 0–0 ♗d8

With a central pawn majority and an open f-file, Black has healthy prospects.

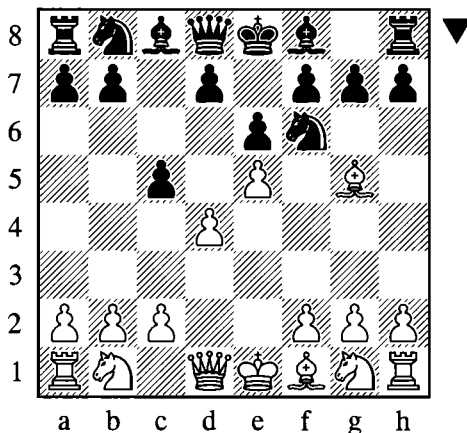


11.♞e1 ♖g4!

Preventing e5.

12.h3 ♜ge5 13.♜xe5 ♜xe5 14.♞h5† g6 15.♞h4 ♙xg5 16.♞xg5 h6 17.♞g3

In this balanced position the players agreed a draw in Marcelin – B. Lalic, Ubeda 2001.

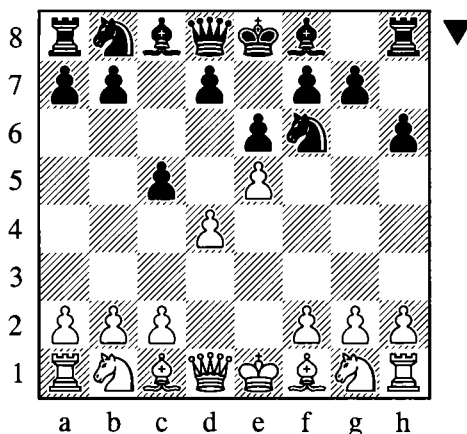


4...h6

The only move, clearly.

5.♙c1

5.♙h4?! is harmless: 5...g5 6.♙g3 ♜e4 7.♜f3 ♞a5†! A powerful resource. 8.c3 cxd4 9.♞xd4 ♜xg3 10.hxg3 ♜c6 11.♞e4 ♙g7 White was dropping a pawn in Passchyn – Van den Berg, Gent 2008.



5...♜h7!?

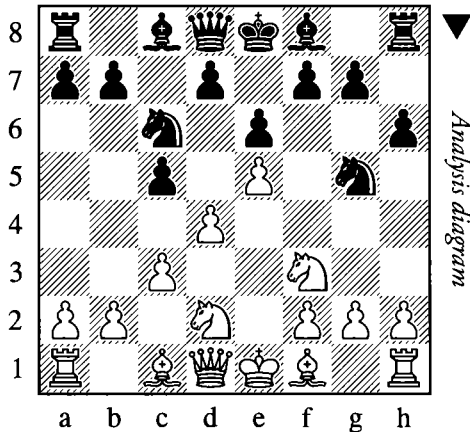
This quirky retreat might well come as a shock to your opponents. The knight looks misplaced, but appearances can be deceptive.

6.c3

White opts for a strange version of the Alapin Sicilian, reasoning that the black knight will prove worse on h7 than d5. Despite the apparent logic behind this belief, its validity is by no means certain.

6...♘c6 7.♙e3

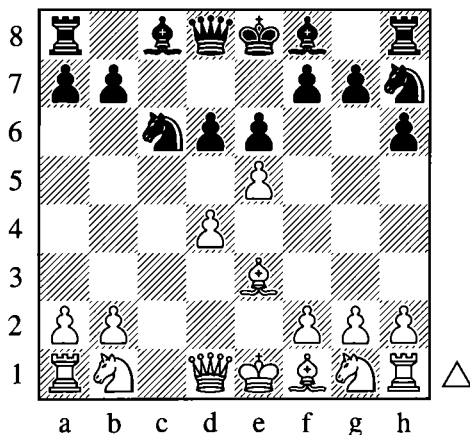
The natural 7.♘f3 allows Black to justify his play easily with 7...♘g5!, exchanging off the misplaced knight for the opponent's only developed piece. 8.♘bd2 (Or 8.♘xg5 hxg5 9.♙e3 cxd4 10.cxd4 d6 11.exd6 ♙xd6 with a fine position for Black, Freeman – R. Jones, Birmingham 2001.)



This position was reached in Fomani – Fernandez Garcia, Malaga 2010, and here the simplest solution would have been: 8...♘xf3† 9.♘xf3 Here Black can choose between the solid 9...cxd4 10.cxd4 d6 with full equality, and the more adventurous 9...g5! which leads to more complicated play.

7...cxd4 8.cxd4 d6

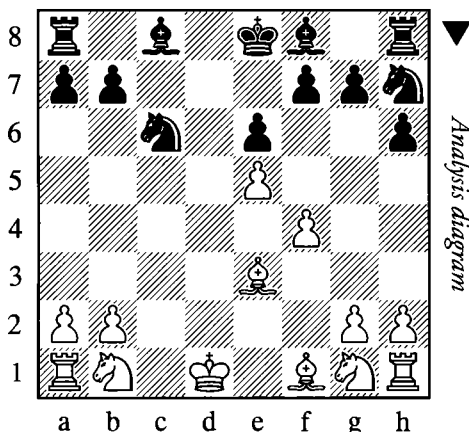
Compared with the Alapin Sicilian positions with the knight on d5, another advantage becomes apparent for Black. (Obviously we are leaving aside the possibility of ...♘xe3, which White would never allow in the early stages of that opening.) The point is that since the d-file is not blocked, Black has the positional threat of ...dxe5 followed by ...♙xd1 †, forcing the opponent to misplace his king.



9.exd6

Following on from the last point, 9.♖f3 dxe5 10.dxe5 is hardly very inspiring for White due to 10...♗xd1† 11.♕xd1 ♖g5! with promising play for Black.

One other game continued: 9.f4 dxe5 (9...g5! looks interesting) 10.dxe5 (After 10.fxe5 ♙e7 11.♖c3 0–0 Black has a solid position and can consider breaking with ...f6 next.) 10...♗xd1† 11.♕xd1 This was A. Walton – C. Majer, Port Erin 2006. At this point it would have been logical for Black to undermine the enemy pawn chain:

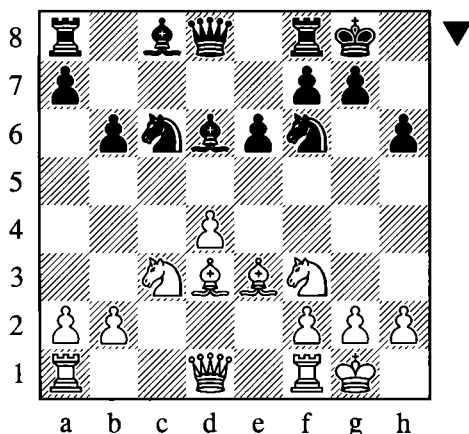


11...g5! 12.g3 (12.g3 is well met by 12...f6! with excellent counterplay) 12...gxf4 13.♙xf4 ♙g7 Later Black will play either ...♖g5 or ...♖f8-g6 with excellent play against the weak e5-pawn.

9...♙xd6 10.♖c3 0–0 11.♖f3 ♖f6

The following game saw White post his bishop more aggressively:
11...b6 12.♙d3 ♖f6 13.0–0

In the event of 13.a3 Black might have considered 13...e5!.



13...♖b4! 14.♗b1

White keeps his bishop pointed towards the kingside, but his rook is shut out of the game.

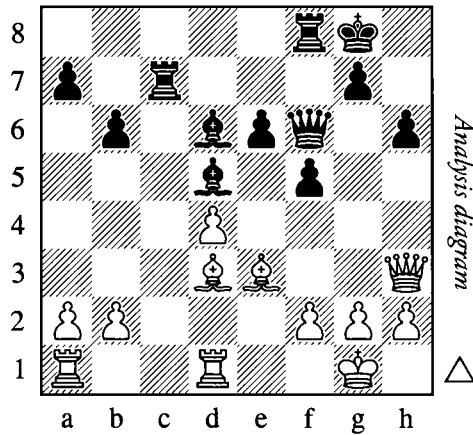
14...♗b7 15.♖e5 ♜c8 16.♖g4

Trying to launch an attack, but Black is ready for it.

16...♖xg4 17.♝xg4 f5!

Not the only playable move, but the simplest way to repel the attack and take over the initiative.

18.♝h3 ♖d5 19.♖xd5 ♗xd5 20.♗d3 ♝f6 21.♞fd1 ♜c7!



22.f4?

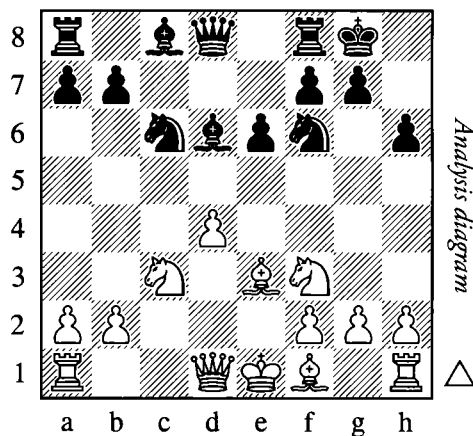
White already had problems as his queen was sidelined, but this move leads to even greater difficulties.

22...g5! 23.♝g3

We have been following the game Demaria – Perdomo, Buenos Aires 2006. So far Black has played excellently, and here he could have obtained a near-decisive advantage with

23...♝g6!

Preventing fxe5 and planning a deadly attack along the g-file.



12.♔e2

12.♔d3 b6-transposes to the previous note, and Black could also consider the immediate 12...♖b4!?

12...b6 13.0–0 ♔b7 14.♖c1 ♜c8 15.♞e1 ♔b8!?

Usually in an IQP position, Black would have his bishop on e7, queen on d6, and rooks on d8 and e8 (or c8 and d8). But since the dark-squared bishop found itself on d6 in the early stages, Lopez Martinez comes up with a more interesting way to activate his pieces.

16.♞a4 ♖e7!

Preparing to deploy the knight on the kingside, while also clearing the a8-h1 diagonal for the bishop.

17.♖e5

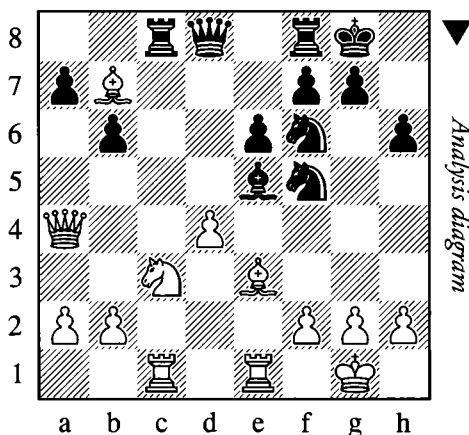
White has no time for 17.♔a6?! in view of 17...♔xf3 18.gxf3 (18.♔xc8?? ♔c6→) 18...♞c7 when White's shattered kingside is more significant than his bishop pair.

17...♖f5 18.♔f3?!

White should have played defensively with 18.♔f1, when he has the worse position but his problems are not too severe.

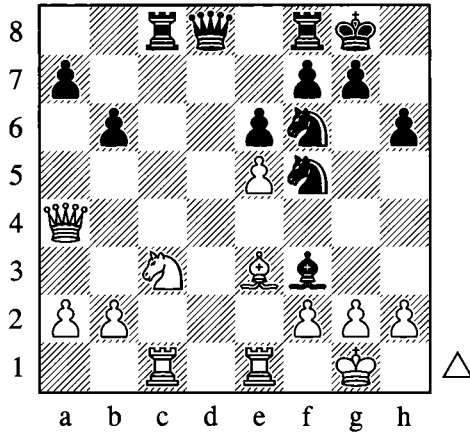
18...♔xe5 19.dxe5

19.♔xb7 was also unsatisfactory. Can you see why?



19...♔xh2†! 20.♔xh2 (20.♔f1 ♖xe3† 21.fxe3 ♞c7†) 20...♞c7†! Black emerges with an extra pawn plus a positional advantage. (However, it should be noted that 20...♖g4†? 21.♔g1 ♞h4 is only good enough for a draw at best, and even that is not guaranteed...)

19...♔xf3

**20.gxf3**

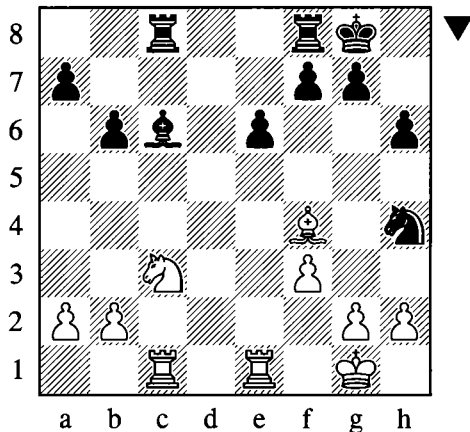
After 20.gxf3 ♖d5 material is equal, but White's position is a sorry sight.

20...♙c6 21.♚g4

21.♚g4 is met by 21...♗xf6 with the deadly threat of ...♖h4, destroying White's kingside.

21...♗xf6 22.♙f4 ♗h4!

Having won a pawn, exchanging queens is the simplest way for Black to convert his advantage.

23.♗xh4 ♖xh4 24.f3**24...♙xf3!**

There was nothing much wrong with 24...♗fd8 when Black has every chance of converting his extra pawn, but the text move is even more conclusive.

25.gxf3 ♖xf3† 26.♙f2 ♖xe1 27.♗xe1 ♗fd8→

White's two minor pieces are easily outmatched by Black's rook and three extra pawns.

What we have learned:

- ❖ A knight on the rim is not always dim! See for example the note to move 7, where the knight on h7 sprang forwards to exchange its well-placed counterpart on f3.
- ❖ When the opponent advances his central pawns in the opening, you should always look for an opportunity to undermine them.
- ❖ Sometimes the side playing against the IQP can take over the initiative on the kingside. The plan of ...♖b8 and ...♗e7-f5 made a powerful impression.
- ❖ Just because you have an extra pawn and a safe position, it does not mean you should stop looking for opportunities to play dynamically. In this game 24...♗xf3! rendered Black's task of winning the game much more straightforward.

Game 50**Marcin Szymanski – Viktor Bologan**

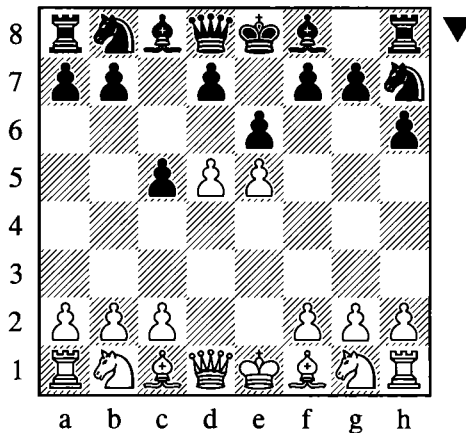
Warsaw (rapid) 2005

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗g5 e6 3.e4 c5 4.e5 h6 5.♗c1 ♗h7

So far the moves have been the same as in the previous game. (By the way, if a grandmaster rated close to 2700 is willing to put his knight on h7, that it can't be all bad!)

6.d5

Rather more ambitious than 6.c3, which the previous game demonstrated to be harmless.

**6...d6!**

Black has to undermine his opponent's strong center.

7.♗c3

The other main line is:

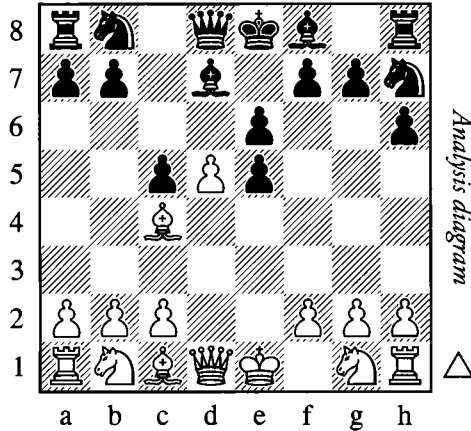
7.♗b5† ♗d7 8.♗c4

8.♗e2?! ♗xb5 9.♗xb5† ♗d7 10.♗xd7† ♗xd7 11.dxe6 ♗xe5 12.exf7† ♗xf7 was already a bit more comfortable for Black in Breahna – Iordachescu, Sovata 1999.

8.♗c3 is reasonable, although after 8...♙xb5 9.♗xb5 a6 10.♗xd6† ♙xd6 11.exd6 ♖xd6 12.dxe6 ♗xe6† Black had no real problems in Bui Vinh – Nguyen Van Huy, Ho Chi Minh City 2009.

8...dxe5

Black should not hesitate to gobble a pawn.



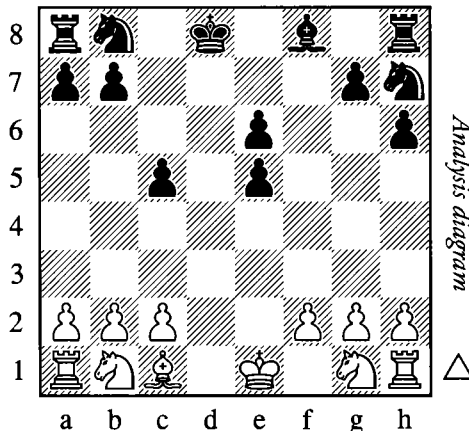
9.dxe6

Hoping for positional compensation in a simplified position.

The suspicious-looking 9.♗h5?! was played in Fowler – Savage, West Bromwich 2004. Here the best reply looks to be 9...♗e7! 10.♗xe5 exd5 11.♗xe7 ♙xe7 12.♙xd5 ♗c6† with a serious development advantage for Black.

9.♗f3 ♗f6!? (9...♙d6 is a good alternative) 10.0–0 was seen in Demuth – Saadjian, Reims 2004, and here the simple 10...exd5 11.♙xd5 ♗c6 intending long castling would have left White struggling.

9...♙xe6 10.♗xd8† ♗xd8 11.♙xe6 fxe6



We have reached an interesting and rather deceptive position. It is clear that White has a certain amount of compensation for the missing pawn, due to Black's doubled, isolated e-pawns and

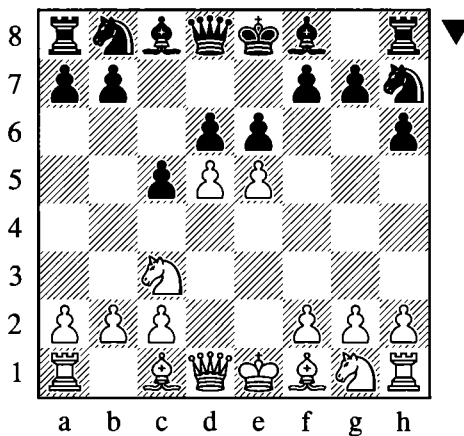
the possibility of establishing a strong knight on the e4-square. Nevertheless the e-pawns are far from dead wood, as they control numerous important central squares. This combined with Black's swift and fluid development make his position quite acceptable, although White should be fine as long as he accepts that he is not better and plays accordingly. Here is one illustrative game:

12.♘f3 ♘c6 13.0-0 ♙d6 14.♘a3 ♚e7 15.♞e1 ♞ad8 16.c3 ♘f6 17.♘c4 ♙c7 18.a4 b6 19.h3 ♞d5!

The rook is quite happy here, where it is supported by the e6-pawn. Note that this effectively stops White from challenging for the d-file, as he can hardly contemplate exchanging on d5.

20.♙e3 ♞hd8

Black had the more pleasant position in Hoang Thanh Trang – Calzetta Ruiz, Dresden (ol) 2008.



7...exd5

7...a6!? is an interesting try. Then 8.a4 exd5 gives Black a slightly improved version of the game, as the b5-square is not available for a white bishop.

However, the developing move 8.♙f4! is more sensible, and after 8...dxe5 9.♙xe5 ♘d7 10.♙g3 White's position was a bit more pleasant in Mooij – Fremiotti, corr. 1999.

8.♞xd5 ♘c6 9.♙b5 ♞c7!

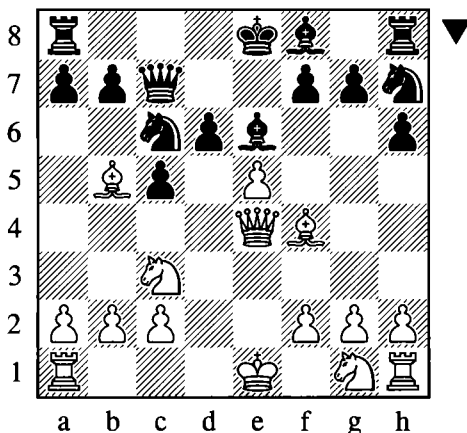
Defending c6 while preparing to improve the quality of the position with the help of some simple tactics.

9...dxe5 10.♞xe5† has been played in a few games, but Black is struggling after both 10...♞e7 11.♙xc6† bxc6 12.♙f4, and 10...♙e6 11.♙xh6!.

10.♙f4

Another game developed along similar lines: 10.♘f3 ♙e6 11.♞e4 d5 12.♞e2 ♙e7 13.0-0 Kalinichev – Sepp, Tallinn 2006. Here the most flexible continuation would have been 13...a6! 14.♙xc6† ♞xc6, maintaining the option of castling on either side and keeping an excellent position.

10...♙e6 11.♚e4



11...d5! 12.♚e2

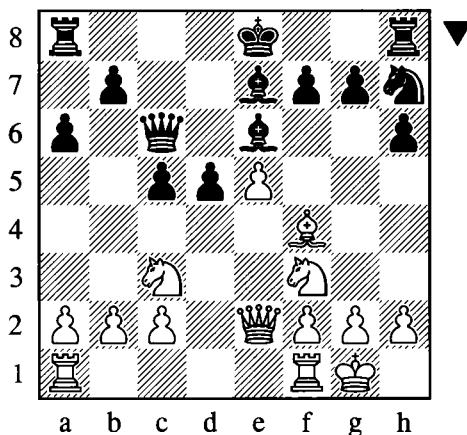
The point of Black's last move is that 12.♖xd5?? is impossible due to 12...♙xd5 13.♚xd5 ♚a5† winning a piece.

12...a6

The immediate 12...0-0-0!? was also possible, when White may be tempted to take on c6 anyway in order to meet the threat of ...♖d4.

13.♙xc6† ♚xc6 14.♖f3 ♙e7 15.0-0

Interestingly, after 15.0-0-0 Black's best reply looks to be 15...0-0!. Black is well placed to win a race between mutual attacks, regardless of the sides of the board on which the respective kings find themselves.



15...g5!

The calmer alternatives of 15...♖g5 and 15...♖f8 both give Black a nice position, but Bologan's choice is the most energetic.

16.♔d2 g4 17.♗e1 ♖g5 18.f4

White decides to fight back on the kingside, otherwise he will be subjected to all kinds of threats after ...d4, with possible knight sacrifices on f3 lurking at every turn.

18...d4!?

Opting for favorable complications. Black could also have kept it simple with 18...gxf3 19.♗xf3 0–0–0, maintaining some advantage.

19.fxg5

White's position is also difficult after 19.♗d1 ♗e4 20.f5 ♔d7, or 19.♗b1 ♗e4 20.f5 ♔d5 21.♞xg4 c4.

19...dxc3 20.♔xc3 hxg5

Material is equal, but Black has a big advantage due to his bishop pair and easy attacking chances along the h-file.

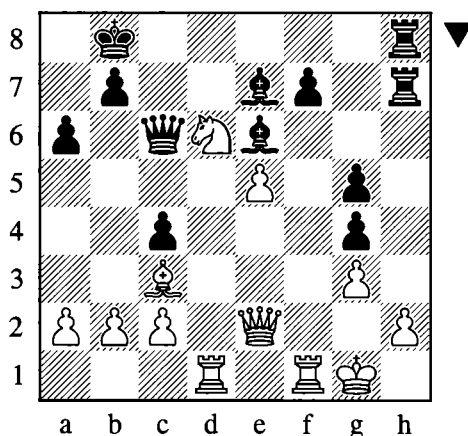
21.♗d3 0–0–0 22.♗f2 c4!

A nice move, preparing to activate the bishop via the c5-square.

23.♗e4

23.♗xg4? would have led to a swift disaster after 23...♔c5† when the three possible replies of 24.♗f2, 24.♗h1 and 24.♗e3 are all met by 24...♞h4! intending ...♞dh8, with terrible threats on the kingside.

23...♞h7 24.♞ad1 ♞dh8 25.♗d6† ♗b8 26.g3



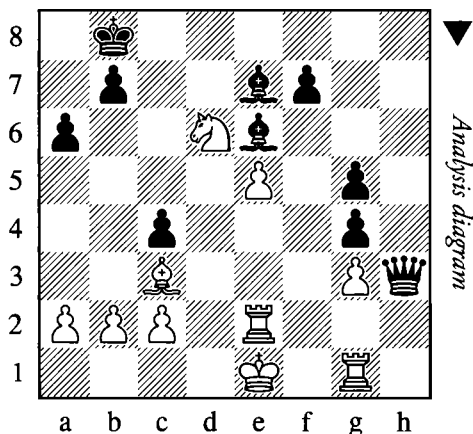
26...♞h3!

Threatening to take on g3.

27.♞f2

The need to cover the g3-square is illustrated by the following line: 27.♞d2 ♞xg3† 28.hxg3

♞h1† 29.♜f2 ♜h2† 30.♝e1 ♞xe2† 31.♞xe2 ♞h3 32.♞g1 White seems to be holding his position together, but the painful reality becomes clear after Black's next move...



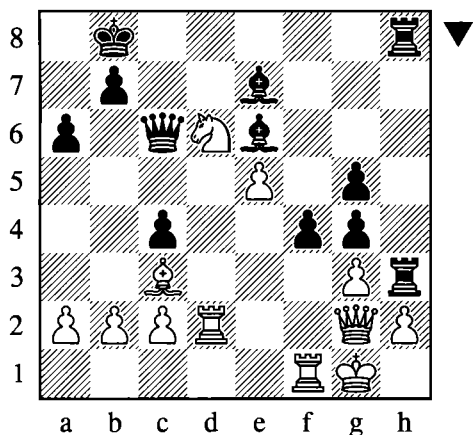
32...f5! 33.exf6 Otherwise ...f4 will stretch the defense to its breaking point. 33...♙xd6 34.♞xe6 ♙xg3† 35.♝d1 ♙f2! Black is winning.

27...f5!

Bringing another attacking unit into play by exploiting the position of the knight on d6.

28.♞d2 f4 29.♞g2

29.gxf4? g3 is hopeless for White.



29...♞c7!?

Objectively this move is fine, as long as Black follows up correctly. Nevertheless the unpretentious 29...♞xg2† 30.♞xg2 f×g3 leads to a winning endgame, and might have been the better practical choice.

30.♙d4 ♜a8?!

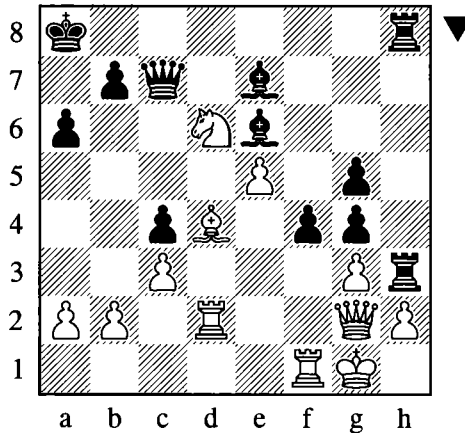
This does not throw away Black's advantage, although it would seem to suggest that he was struggling to find the right plan.

30...f3 31.♖f2 ♜xh2 32.♗xh2 ♜xh2 33.♙xh2 is better for Black, but not absolutely conclusive.

The right way was 30...fxg3! 31.hxg3 ♙d7!, switching the bishop to the a8-h1 diagonal, when White has no good defense.

31.c3

There is not much White can do to rescue his position, but supporting the bishop helps him slightly. 31.gxf4? gxf4 32.♞xf4 ♙g5 is no good.



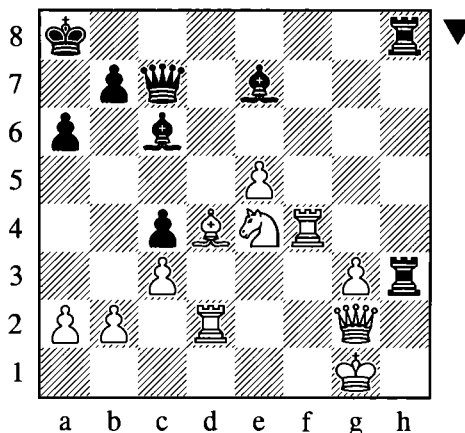
31...♙d7!

Finally Bologan hits upon the correct plan of transferring the bishop to c6. He could also have played it after exchanging on g3.

32.gxf4 gxf4 33.♞xf4 g3?

33...♙g5 was winning, for instance 34.♞df2 ♙xf4 35.♞xf4 ♙c6 36.♖f2 g3 37.♞f8† ♙e8! and White can resign.

34.hxg3 ♙c6 35.♘e4



35...♙g5?

Another error, which might have had severe consequences. Two improvements include:

35...♙d8! is an interesting try, which clears the second rank for the queen. 36.e6 (36.♖e2 ♗h7) 36...♗h1† 37.♗xh1 ♗xh1† 38.♗xh1 ♙xe4† 39.♖xe4 ♗h7† 40.♖h4 ♙xh4 41.gxh4 ♗xh4† 42.♖h2 ♗e4† 43.♗g1 ♗b8 Black will pick up the e6-pawn, but White has good chances to build a fortress.

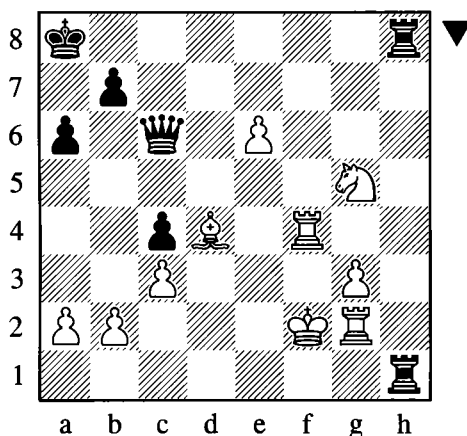
Another idea was 35...♗c8!?, maintaining the tension and preparing to transfer the queen to e6 and perhaps later h6. In this case Black has more than enough compensation for two pawns, and in practice his chances would be higher.

36.♖xg5?

Now it is White's turn to go astray, by choosing the wrong way to sacrifice his queen. Correct was 36.♗xh3! ♗xh3 37.♖f8† ♙d8 38.♙e3! b6 (38...♙d7 is met by 39.♖d6 intending to push the e-pawn: 38...♖h1† 39.♗xh1 ♙xe4† 40.♗g1 ♙d3 41.♖df2 Black is in trouble.) 39.♖dxd8† ♗a7 40.♖d6 Black will have to fight for a draw.

36...♙xg2 37.♖xg2 ♗h1† 38.♗f2 ♗c6 39.e6

White has two minor pieces and two pawns for the queen. In material terms he is only slightly behind, but his exposed king should be the deciding factor.

**39...♖e8 40.♖e4 ♗h5**

40...♖b1! was more precise.

41.♖e5 ♗a4

Black should have inserted 41...♖f8† 42.♗g1 and only now played 42...♗a4, with good winning chances.

42.g4!

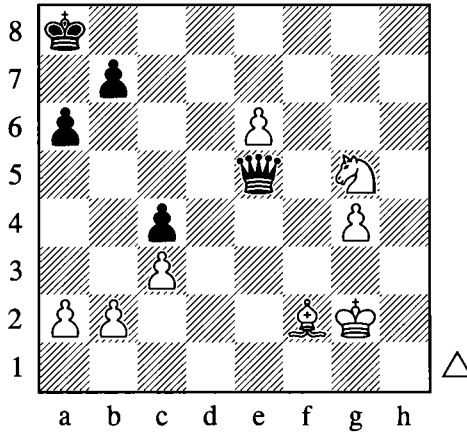
Now White is right back in the game.

42...♖h1 43.♔g3 ♚d1

43...♜xa2 44.e7 gives White strong counterplay.

44.♞e3 ♞e1 45.♞xe1 ♜xe1† 46.♞f2 ♞f8 47.♔g2 ♞xf2† 48.♙xf2 ♞e5

Black keeps a slight edge in this endgame, but White has good chances to hold it.



49.♙h4 b5?!

It was more accurate to insert 49...♞e2† 50.♔g3 ♞e3† 51.♔g2 (51.♘f3 ♞xe6) and only now play 51...b5, having improved the queen.

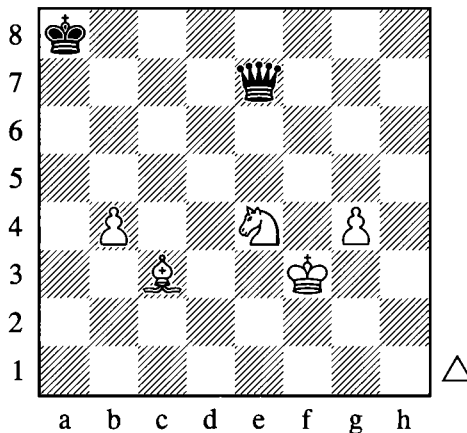
50.♔f3! a5 51.a3 b4 52.axb4 axb4 53.cxb4 ♜xb2 54.♘e4 ♞e5

54...c3?? loses to 55.e7.

55.e7 c3 56.♙f6 ♞e6 57.♙xc3 ♞xe7

This endgame should be a draw. It is worth mentioning that there is a drawing method with just a bishop and knight against a queen: the fortress consists of a knight on d4, bishop on b2, and king in the corner somewhere behind the bishop.

In the game White eventually succumbs; it looks like he was trying to win by forcing his g-pawn through.



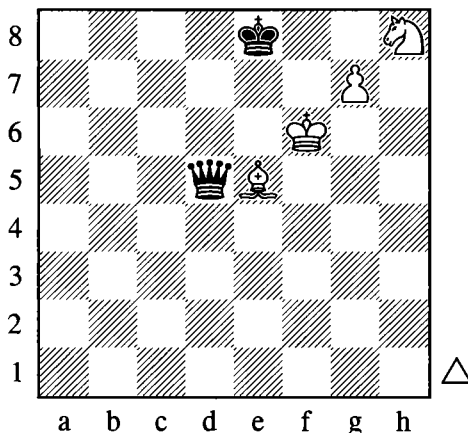
58.g5 ♖e6 59.♗f4 ♗b8 60.♙f6 ♖f7 61.♗f5 ♖d7† 62.♗f4 ♖f7 63.b5

Spurning the move repetition.

63...♗a7 64.♗f5 ♖h5 65.♙d4† ♗b7 66.b6 ♗c6 67.♙e5

67.♙f2 was okay, but White decides to jettison the b-pawn, presumably hoping to force the g-pawn through.

67...♗xb6 68.♗f6 ♖f3† 69.♗e6 ♖b3† 70.♗f5 ♖d3† 71.♗g4 ♖g6 72.♗d5† ♗c5 73.♗f4 ♖e4 74.g6 ♗c6 75.g7 ♖h7 76.♗g5 ♗d7 77.♗f6 ♗e8 78.♗g6 ♖g8 79.♗h8 ♖d5



80.♗g6

80.♗g6 or 80.♙b2 were both fine, as Black does not have time to take the bishop with the g-pawn ready to promote. Could White still have been playing for a win?

80...♖f7† 81.♗g5 ♖e6 82.♗f4??

A dreadful blunder. 82.♙f6 and 82.♙d4 were both drawing.

82...♖xe5† 83.♗g6 ♖e4† 84.♗h6 ♗f7

0–1

What we have learned:

- ❖ It was important to meet 6.d5 with 6...d6!, undermining White's strong center as quickly as possible.
- ❖ Once again the knight on h7 proved its worth, this time by hopping to g5. The resulting tactical skirmish led to the opening of the h-file, which brought Black a decisive attack.
- ❖ In sharp positions, just one or two inaccuracies can be enough to cause a major shift in the evaluation of the position.
- ❖ If you ever have to defend an endgame with bishop and knight against a queen, remember the following pattern: bishop on b2, knight on d4 and king in the corner behind the bishop (or the equivalent in one of the other corners of the board).

1.d4 ♘f6 – Other Systems

There are several other options available to White; some aggressive, some dull and some in between. We will take a look at each of the main ones, beginning with the quick development of White's queenside pieces.

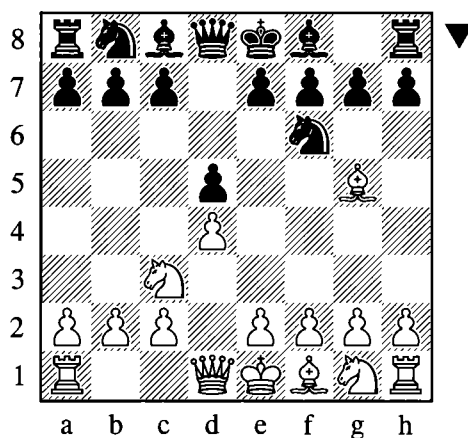
1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗c3

Threatening to build an ideal pawn structure, hence Black's reply.

2...d5 3.♙g5

This opening is called the Veresov. It does not have the best reputation but is not bad either, so Black should have some idea of what to do against it.

3.e4 is the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit. It is not fully sound, and Black should be able to obtain the better game by snatching the pawn. One lesser-known but quite attractive continuation is: 3...♗xe4 (the main line is 3...dxe4 4.f3 4.♗xe4 dxe4 5.♙c4 (5.f3 e5!) 5...♗c6 6.c3 e5 7.d5 ♗e7 8.f3 ♗g6 9.♚e2 (9.fxe4? ♚h4†) 9...exf3 10.♗xf3 ♙d6 White did not have much to show for his pawn in Norberg – Meincke, e-mail 2006.



3...c6

Black has several good replies, but this is one of the most attractive. The pawn supports the center and makes way for the queen to come to b6, hitting the sensitive b2-pawn.

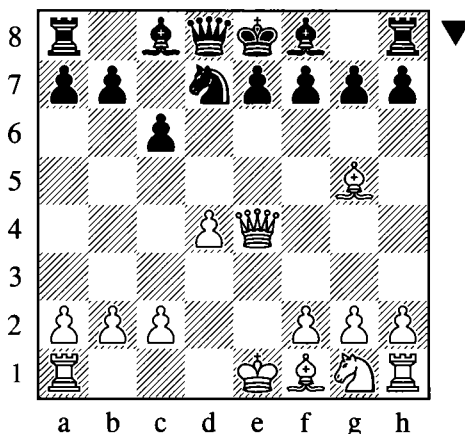
4.♚d3!?

A thematic reply, preparing long castling as well as a central expansion with e4.

4.♙xf6?! exf6 is pleasant for Black. His dark-squared bishop is ready to develop, and the doubled pawns are not hurting him in the slightest.

4.♗f3 is possible, but then 4...♚b6! sets up an annoying attack on the b2-pawn and effectively prevents long castling by White.

4... ♗bd7 5.e4 dxe4 6. ♗xe4 ♗xe4 7. ♖xe4



7...h6!

Setting a devious trap. 7... ♖a5† 8. ♗d2 ♖d5 is a solid alternative.

8. ♗h4?

8. ♗d2 is better, although after 8... ♗f6 Black has no cause for complaints.

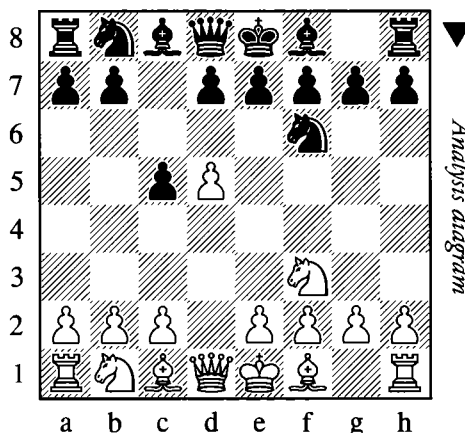
8...g5 9. ♗g3 ♖a5† 10.c3 f5

Black was winning a piece in Zabala Bilbao – Campos Moreno, Oropesa del Mar 1996.

Systems with 2. ♗f3

1.d4 ♗f6 2. ♗f3 e6

This is one way for Black to attempt to steer the game towards the Blumenfeld Gambit. 2...c5 is also possible, although after 3.d5 (alternatives such as 3.e3 are also playable of course) there is no guarantee that Black will reach one of the gambits featured in the present book:



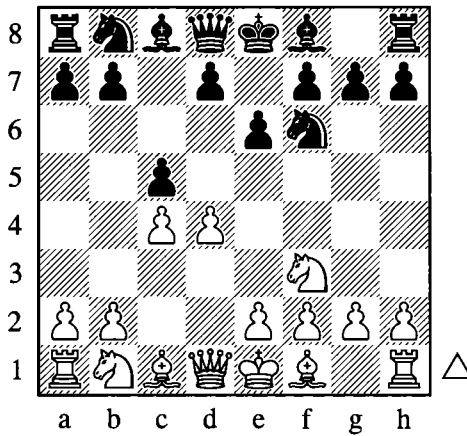
- **3...e6** invites **4.c4 b5** with a Blumenfeld, but White can avoid this with **4.♘c3**, obtaining reasonable chances for an advantage.
- **3...b5** is a decent alternative. Then **4.c4** could lead to a Benko after **4...g6** or a Blumenfeld after **4...e6**, but **4.♗g5** is a significant independent option.

3.c4!?

With this move White reverts back towards a main line approach.

3...c5

This is the most consistent move for Gambit fans, although **3...d5**, **3...b6** and **3...♗b4†** are all serious openings. After the text move the game might develop in a number of ways:



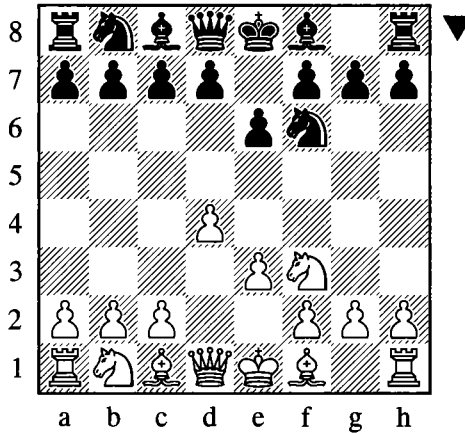
- **4.d5 b5** reaches a Blumenfeld Gambit, but...
- **4.e3**, **4.♘c3** and **4.g3** are all sensible alternatives.

The last three moves all demand careful consideration. This is not a comprehensive repertoire book so it would not be appropriate to analyze each of these continuations in detail, as they would all demand a good deal of space and attention. There are many possible replies, and the reader will have to determine the right choice depending on his playing style and individual tastes. For those who value consistency, it would be worth considering **4...d5** in each case. This is a principled reaction, taking a share of space in the center and in a sense punishing the opponent for declining the invitation to advance his d-pawn there.

In each of the three scenarios, the move **4...d5** will lead to a variation of the Tarrasch Defense, a somewhat underrated system which lends itself to active piece-play, and hence would be a good fit for fans of gambit openings. For in-depth coverage of the Tarrasch Defense, the reader should refer to *Grandmaster Repertoire 10* by Aagaard and Ntirlis.

The Colle System

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.e3



With this move White introduces the Colle System. He plans to put his bishop on d3, where he hopes it will assist with a kingside attack. The other bishop can either go to b2, or remain on the c1-h6 diagonal in the hope of finding an active role later in the game.

I'm afraid there is not a great deal Black can do to sharpen the game, so I will just mention a few sensible routes to a playable position.

3...c5

By the way, here is one alternative suggestion which might be of use against certain opponents. Especially at club level, there are many players who like to use their pet opening system against virtually anything the opponent might try. If your opponent happens to be a Colle fanatic, you might consider a King's Indian setup: 2...g6 3.e3 ♗g7 4.♗d3?! (the bishop should go to e2 instead) 4...d6 5.0-0 ♘bd7 The point is that the bishop on d3 is misplaced here, and after the inevitable ...e7-e5 Black will threaten to win a piece with ...e4. This will force White to lose a tempo, either by moving his bishop again, or advancing his e-pawn for a second time with e3-e4.

4.♗d3 cxd4

Black can also play 4...d5 and ...♘c6, with a perfectly decent position.

5.exd4 ♗e7

5...g6!? is an interesting alternative. In the main line Black often regroups with ...♞e8, ...♞f8, ...g6 and ...♞g7, so the immediate fianchetto might save time in the long run.

6.0-0 0-0 7.c3 b6 8.♞e1 ♗b7

Black intends ...d6 and ...♘bd7, with a solid and reliable position.

Early Dark-Squared Bishop Developments

In this, the final section of the chapter, we will consider those lines where White puts his knight on f3 and bishop on either f4 or g5. As a general rule, we will try to arrange an early ...♖b6 in order to strike at the b2-pawn, thus highlighting the downside of the early bishop development.

Game 51

Slobodan Kovacevic – Sergei Tiviakov

Calvia 2004

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.♗f4

The London System. White puts his bishop on f4, pawn on e3 and develops cautiously.

3.♗g5

This move signals the so-called Torre “Attack”, although the appropriateness of the latter word is open to debate. Black has a few good replies, but perhaps the most challenging is:

3...c5

Intending a quick ...♖b6. White can support his d-pawn in one of two ways.

4.e3

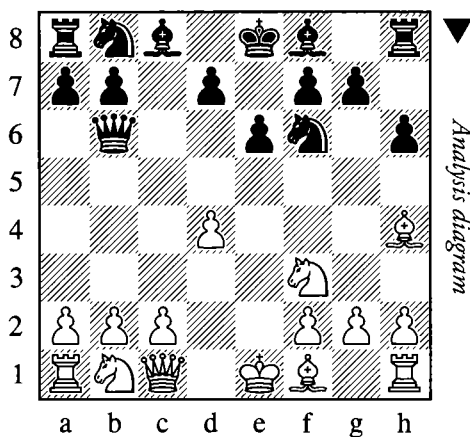
4.c3 ♖b6 5.♖b3 (5.♗bd2 leads to interesting complications: 5...♖xb2 6.♗c4!? ♖xc3† 7.♗d2 ♖xc4 8.e4 ♖xf1† 9.♗xf1 ♗xe4 Black had quite an attractive position with two minor pieces and three pawns for a queen, I. Andersen – Hutters, Copenhagen 1993.) 5...♗e4 6.♗f4 ♗c6 7.e3 d5 8.♗bd2 ♗xd2 9.♗xd2 ♗e7 Black equalized comfortably in Olbrich – Tornai, Budapest 1994.

4...h6!

The timing of this move is important, for reasons that will soon become clear.

5.♗h4 cxd4 6.exd4 ♖b6!? 7.♖c1

Perhaps White should consider sacrificing the b-pawn, although his compensation is by no means certain.



7...g5! 8.♙g3 g4

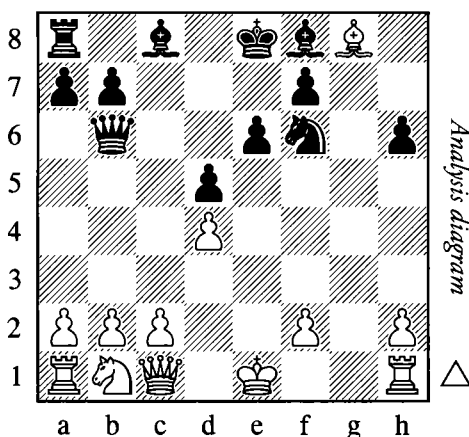
Here we see why Black inserted the early ...h7-h6. With the help of some energetic play he targets the d4-pawn.

9.♙e5

Saving the pawn, but the ensuing complications turn out nicely for Black.

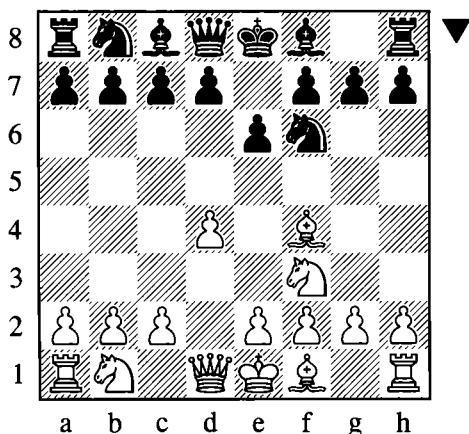
9...gxf3 10.♙xf6 fxg2 11.♙xg2 ♜g8 12.♙e4 d5! 13.♙h7 ♞d7! 14.♙xg8 ♜xf6

White is the exchange up but his bishop is in a dreadful position and will soon be lost.



15.♜g1 ♜xd4 16.♞c3 ♙d7

Black was already winning in V. Sherbakov – Sakaev, St Petersburg 1995.

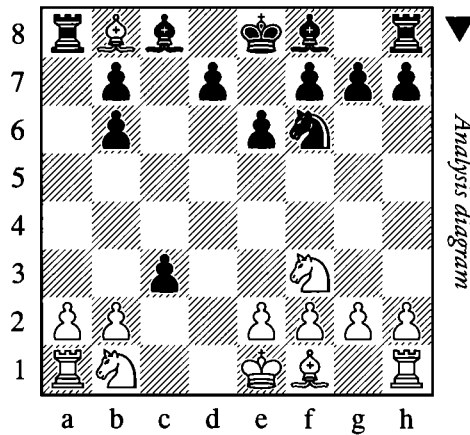


3...c5

Once again we play this move at an early stage in order to let the queen out.

4.e3

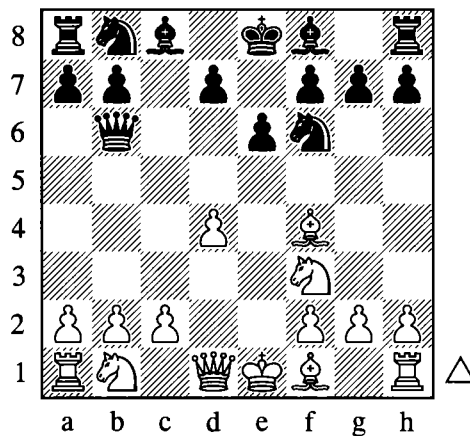
4.c3 ♜b6 prepares a nice trap: 5.♜b3 cxd4 (5...♞c6 is also fine) 6.♜xb6 axb6 7.♙xb8? (7.♞xd4 d5 8.♞b5 ♞a6 was roughly balanced in Lang – Arjun, Budapest 2007.) 7...dxc3!



This strong move wins a pawn, as the attempt to hang onto the extra piece with 8.♔e5? meets with a bone-crunching refutation: 8...♖xa2!!-+

4...cxd4 5.exd4 ♖b6!?

Once again the early attack on b2 forces White to make an important decision.



6.♘c3!?

The most principled reaction. If White tries to keep things solid with 6.♖c1 ♘c6 7.c3, Black can still stir up trouble: 7...♘d5!? 8.♔g3 f5! From here play the game might continue 9.♘bd2 f4 10.♔h4 h6 11.c4 ♘de7 when the position is complicated and not unfavorable to Black.

6...a6!

6...♖xb2?! 7.♘b5 ♔b4† 8.♔d2 is too risky for Black, but by covering the b5-square he renews the threat.

7.a3!?

White finds another way to defend the b2-pawn indirectly, as 7...♖xb2?? 8.♘a4 would leave the queen trapped.

Another game continued 7.♞b1 d6 8.♙e2 ♙e7 9.0–0 0–0 10.♞d3 ♖bd7 11.♜e4 ♜xe4 12.♞xe4 ♜f6 13.♞d3 ♙d7 with a nice position for Black, Lindholt Nielsen – Rau, Kolobrzeg 2005.

7...d5

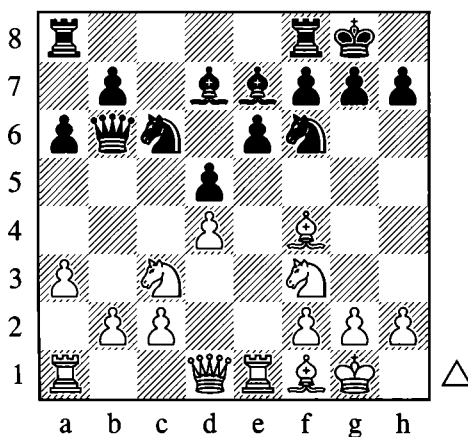
Tiviakov opts to steer the game towards a kind of reversed Queen's Gambit. Black is slightly behind in development, but this is balanced by the poor placement of the knight on c3. Another idea was 7...♙e7, keeping a more fluid pawn structure.

8.♙d3 ♜c6 9.0–0 ♙d7 10.♞e1 ♙e7

10...♜xd4? would have been a mistake due to 11.♜xd4 ♞xd4 12.♞xe6†! when either capture allows White to win the queen with a bishop check.

11.♙f1 0–0=

Black can feel happy with the outcome of the opening. His pieces are all on reasonable squares, and later he can aim for a thematic minority attack on the queenside.



12.b4?!

A questionable decision. White wants to become active on the queenside, but this move leads to a permanent weakening of both the c-pawn and the c4-square.

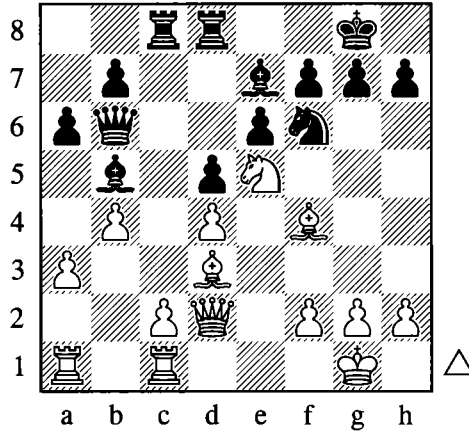
12...♜a7!

Preventing ♜a4(-c5) and preparing to swap some pieces.

13.♜e5 ♙e8

Tiviakov wisely hangs on to both bishops for the time being. Over the next phase of the game he focuses on exchanging certain minor pieces, in order to free the rook on f8 and harmonize his position.

14.♙d3 ♞c8 15.♞d2 ♜b5 16.♜xb5 ♙xb5 17.♞ec1 ♞fd8



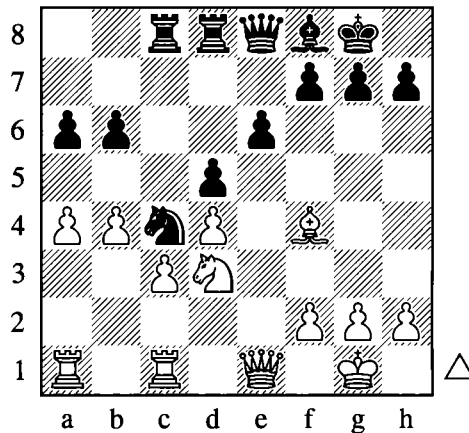
18. c3 ♗xd3

It is wise to make this exchange before the bishop gets a chance to retreat to b1.

19. ♖xd3 ♜e4 20. ♖e1 ♖c6 21. ♜e5 ♖b6 22. ♜d3 ♜d6 23. ♜a1 ♖c6 24. ♜a1 ♜c4 25. a4 b6
 Otherwise White could plug the queenside with a5 and later ♜c5.

26. ♜e5 ♖e8 27. ♜d3 ♗f8

It is not easy for Black to exploit the backward c-pawn, nevertheless his position remains slightly more comfortable. Tiviakov continues to maneuver patiently.



28. ♖e2 ♖d7 29. ♜e5 ♜xe5 30. ♗xe5 ♜c4 31. ♗f4 ♜dc8 32. ♗d2 ♗e7 33. ♜e1 ♗f6 34. a5

It must have been annoying for White to have to keep the pawn defended on a4, so blocking the queenside takes a load off his mind.

34...b5

On the other hand the c-pawn is now under complete lockdown, and posting all the pawns on dark squares might cause White problems in the endgame.

41...♙xa5

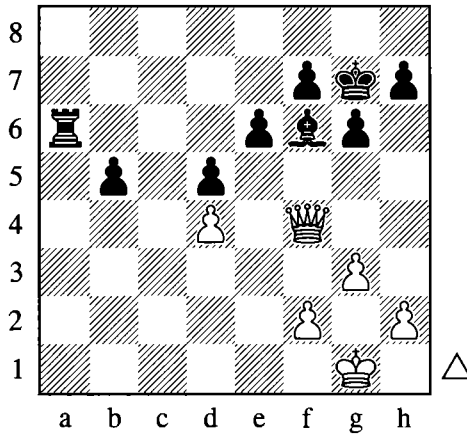
Tiviakov has determined that he has just enough time to bank another pawn before bringing his queen to assist on the kingside.

42.♞f3 ♞d8 43.♞a1 ♞c6 44.♞fa3 ♞b6! 45.♞xa6

45.♞f3 ♞xd4 is hopeless for White.

45...♞xa6 46.♞xa6 ♞xa6

When it comes to the material balance of queen versus rook and minor piece, this is about as bad as it gets for the queen. White has no targets to attack, and Black can easily pick off a few more weak pawns.



47.♞b8 ♞xd4 48.♞xb5 ♞a1† 49.♔g2 ♞a2

Winning the f2-pawn as well. The rest is easy.

50.♞d3 ♞xf2† 51.♔h1 ♞f6 52.♔g1 ♞b2 53.♔h1 ♞b8 54.♔g2 ♞d8 55.♔f1 e5 56.♔e2 e4
57.♞e3 ♞e8 58.♞c5 d4 59.h4 d3† 60.♔e3 h5 61.♞c6 ♞d8 62.♞c1 d2 63.♞d1 ♞c3 64.♔f4
e3 65.♔xe3 ♞e8† 66.♔f2 ♞e1 67.♞c2 ♞d4†

0-1

What we have learned:

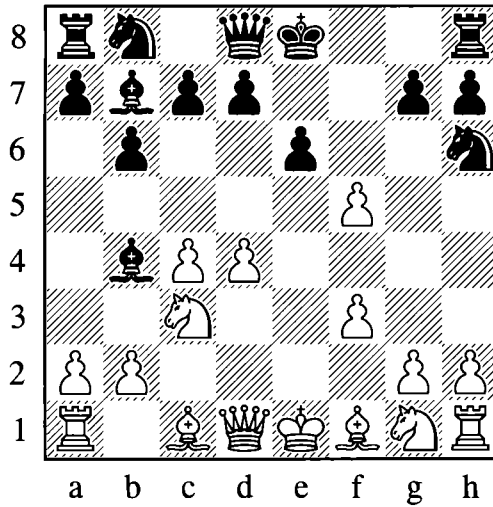
- ❖ If the bishop on c1 moves at an early stage, a quick ...♞b6 may give White problems defending the b2-pawn.
- ❖ Having said that, you should always think carefully before grabbing a pawn on b2 – or anywhere else!
- ❖ A backward pawn can often become a long-term liability, so you should avoid them unless you can obtain something in return.
- ❖ A well-executed positional exchange sacrifice can be a deadly weapon.

Conclusion

The systems examined in the present chapter all have their fair share of devotees. Each of them brings a certain practical benefit in avoiding the array of gambits covered elsewhere in the book. However, that does not necessarily mean that we have to play the opponent at his own game. We have seen that it is possible to answer each of these sidelines in a combative manner, forcing the opponent to make difficult decisions at an early stage of the game. The lines examined here may not strictly be gambits, but if we can obtain a dynamic, counterattacking position at no material cost, we will have every reason to feel optimistic.

Chapter 5

The English Defense Gambit



1.c4 b6 2.d4 ♖b7 3.♘c3 e6 4.e4 ♗b4 5.f3 f5! 6.exf5 ♘h6!

Introduction

1.c4

The English Opening is named after the great English player Howard Staunton, who employed it in his 1843 match against Saint Amand, as well as the London 1851 tournament. Staunton was the unofficial world champion at that time, but even this lofty status was not enough to inspire many of his contemporaries to take up the opening. Later it caught on, and such legendary players as Botvinnik, Petrosian, Fischer, Karpov, and Kasparov all employed the English in World Championship matches.

Since White has not committed his d- or e-pawns forward, it is hard for Black to initiate an early confrontation in the center. As a result, the English is considered a solid opening choice for White.

Gambits against the English do exist (for instance, the Vaganian Gambit can be reached via a 1.c4 c5 move order) but they tend to rely on White playing in a particular way. Since White's opening is solid, flexible and fundamentally sound, it is not easy to base a black repertoire around a particular gambit. Instead I decided to examine a slightly offbeat system which tends to lead to dynamic and unbalanced positions, including gambit opportunities in certain variations.

1...b6!?

This is known as the English Defense – what better way to counter the English Opening? This system was taken up and developed by several leading English players in the 1970s, including Miles, Speelman and Keene.

Black's opening is a bit provocative, and skirts along the border of conventional opening principles. Black does not immediately occupy the center, and usually develops his bishops before his knights. Sometimes he will bring his queen out early, and he often strives to counterattack with ...f7-f5 before having completed development. Fortunately we will see that Black's seemingly risky strategy can be justified by concrete variations.

Let us start by admiring an early victory from one of the trailblazers of Black's opening system.

Game 52

Ivan Farago – Anthony Miles

Hastings 1976

1.d4 b6 2.c4

I would consider 2.e4! a good reason not to follow this particular move order with Black.

2...g6 b7

Now we are back in the English Defense.

3. Nc3

The knight comes to its most natural square.

3...e6

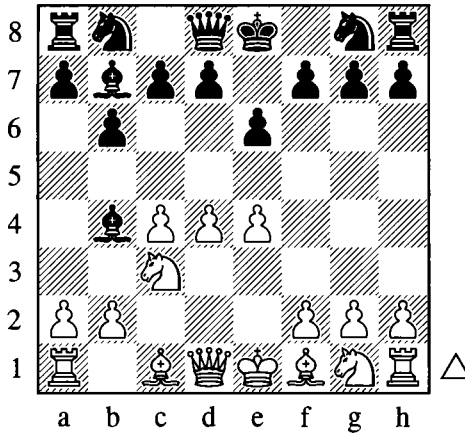
Making room for the bishop... and also the queen!

4.e4

White occupies the center in classical style. The more reserved 4.a3 is considered in Game 58 at the end of the chapter.

4...♞b4!

Pinning the knight in the spirit of the Nimzo-Indian. The English Defense has certain similarities, as it is primarily a light-squared opening, and Black will generally not mind exchanging his dark-squared bishop for the knight on c3. However, the fact that the black knight has not yet come to f6 leads to some major differences as we will shortly see.



5.♖c2

White plays cautiously, defending the e4-pawn without weakening his kingside. 5.♞d3 can be found in Game 53, and 5.f3 in Games 54-57.

5...♖h4!

There are not many serious openings in which Black can get away with such an audacious queen development so early in the game.

6.♞d3 f5!

Bringing yet more firepower to bear on the e4-pawn.

7.g3?!

White insists on playing f2-f3 and kicks the troublesome queen away. However, the weakening on the kingside and the long diagonal is not something to be taken lightly.

The correct move was:

7.♘f3! ♞xc3†

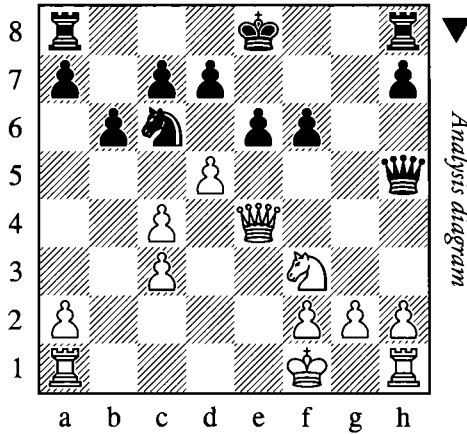
Here White must make an important choice.

8.♖xc3!?

8.bxc3? ♖g4 is bad for White, who must lose a pawn for no real compensation.

8.♘f1 is possibly the strongest move: 8...♖h5 9.bxc3 fxe4 (Black can also consider 9...♘f6!?)

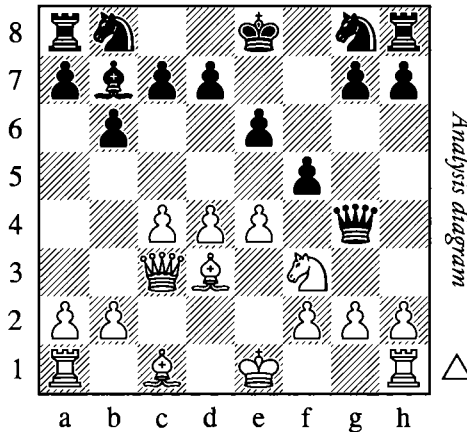
10.e5 ♕xf3 11.exf6 ♕b7 12.fxg7 ♖g8 with an unbalanced situation, Radulski – Spiric, Belgrade 2006.) 10.♕xe4 ♕xe4 11.♗xe4 ♖c6 12.♕g5! Without this White would risk becoming worse. 12...♖f6! 13.♕xf6 gxf6 14.d5



Black's position looks precarious, but a couple of accurate moves are enough to solve his problems: 14...f5! 15.♗e2 ♖a5! 16.dxe6 0-0-0 17.c5 dxe6 The position is equal and the players agreed a draw in Brunner – Mateuta, Germany 2007.

8...♗g4

Now White must sacrifice a pawn for unclear compensation.



9.0-0 fxe4 10.♖e5 ♗h4!

10...♗h5 11.♕c2 gives White reasonable compensation, and if Black continues 11...d6 12.♕a4† c6 as in Briant – Theon, France 2008, White has the powerful option of 13.♗g3!.

11.♕e2

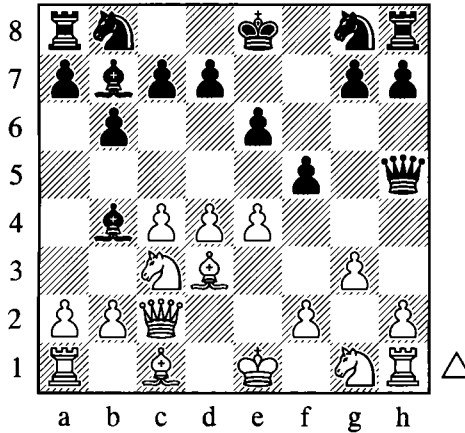
If 11.♕c2 d6 12.♕a4† c6 the black queen covers the g3-square, and after 13.d5 dxe5 14.♗xe5 ♗e7 White die not have enough compensation for a piece in Rohleder – Herges, corr. 1991.

11...d6 12.♖g4 ♖f6 13.g3 ♗h3 14.♖xf6† gxf6 15.d5 ♖d7

Black was doing fine in Cornacchini – Laine, e-mail 2007.

7...♞h5

The queen refuses to retreat too far, and keeps an eye on the weakened f3- and h3-squares.



8.♙e2

With this move White finally forces the queen back, but his bishop now occupies an inferior square where it fails to defend the e4-pawn.

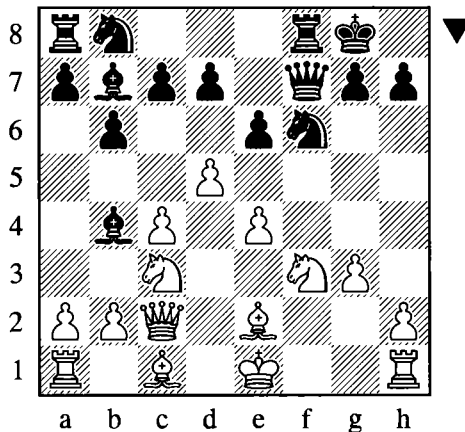
The alternative was: 8.♜c6 (8...fxe4 9.fxe4 ♘f6 is also good) 9.♙e3 (9.♘ge2 ♞xf3 10.♞f1 was D. Thomson – Wallis, Whitby 1962, and here 10...♞h5 11.exf5 e5!? looks promising) 9...fxe4 10.fxe4 ♘f6 11.♞e2 ♞a5 12.♞c1 e5 13.♘f3 exd4 14.♘xd4 ♘e5 Black had an excellent position in Nasri – Meier, Yerevan 2006.

8...♞f7 9.♜f3 fxe4 10.fxe4 ♘f6 11.d5

11.♙d3 was possible, but it is understandable that White wanted to avoid any more bishop moves and shore up the long diagonal.

11...0-0 12.♘f3

Now Miles found an excellent idea.



12...♖g6! 13.♙d3 ♗h5!

Since move 7 the bishop and queen have partaken in an amusing little dance, but now the lady makes her triumphal return to the kingside, where she takes aim at White's various weaknesses.

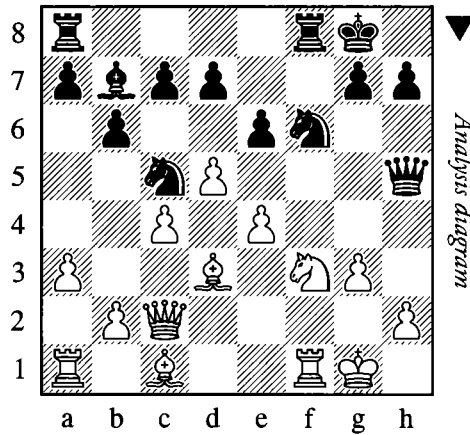
14.0-0 ♘a6!

White's 11th move opened up an inviting hole on c5.

15.a3 ♙xc3 16.bxc3

White accepts the damage to his pawn structure in order to keep his queen on a better square.

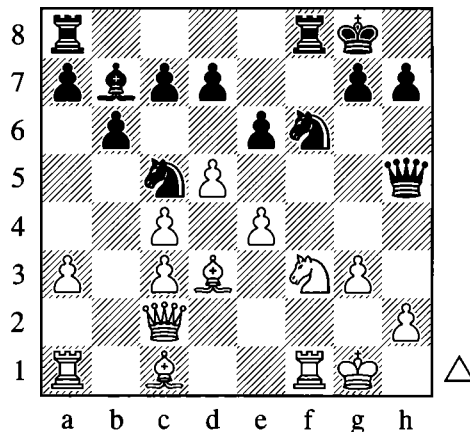
After 16.♖xc3 ♘c5 Black threatens both ...♘fxe4 destroying White's center, and ...♘g4 with a huge attack on the kingside. 17.♗c2



17...♘g4 (Black can even play 17...♘fxe4!? 18.♙xe4 exd5 regaining the piece with at least one extra pawn and a serious advantage.) The threat is 18...♘xd3 19.♗xd3 ♗xf3 when Black reaches the target on h2, and if White defends with 18.h4 then 18...♘e3! forces favorable simplifications, as White's overextended center and exposed king will become the telling factors.

16...♘c5

The knight comes to its ideal outpost, where it places White's center under intolerable pressure.



17.♙e3 ♘xd3!

Although the d3-bishop was technically 'bad', it served an important duty as the main defender of the light squares. With this piece out of the way, White's position quickly crumbles.

18.♞xd3 exd5

Even stronger was 18...♘g4! 19.♞e2 (19.♞d2 ♙a6!) 19...♘e5 20.♘d4 (20.♙g2 ♙a6) 20...♞xe2 21.♘xe2 ♘xc4 with an easily winning endgame.

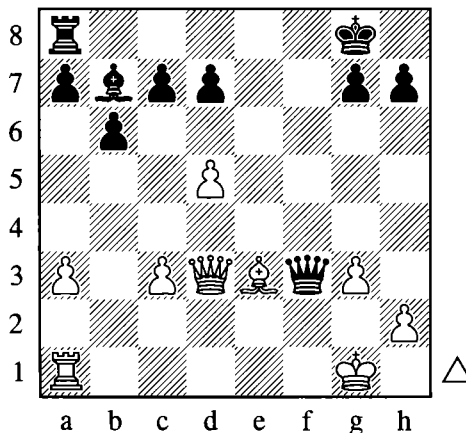
19.exd5

19.cxd5 allows Black to choose between two winning knight moves, 19...♘g4 and 19...♘xe4!?

19...♘xd5!

Emphasizing the frailty of White's overextended pawn center and the looseness of the knight on f3, which can be directly attributed to Black's early queen activation.

20.cxd5 ♜xf3 21.♞xf3 ♞xf3



22.♞d1

Attempting to hold onto the d5-pawn is a futile endeavor. White's last chance was 22.♞f1 ♞xd5 23.♞xd5† ♙xd5, with some faint hopes of holding the opposite-colored bishop endgame two pawns down.

22...♙a6 23.♞d2 ♙c4 24.♙f4 d6

Black's queenside pawns are all on dark squares, but their compact formation prevents the white bishop from doing any kind of damage. The rest is easy.

25.h4 ♜f8 26.♙h2 ♙e2 27.♞g1 ♜e8 28.♞g2 ♙c4 29.♞f2 ♞e4 30.♞d4 ♙xd5 31.♞xe4 ♜xe4 32.h5 h6 33.g4 ♜c4

0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ Black's early queen foray provoked long-term weaknesses in White's kingside.
- ❖ The ...f5 thrust is an important source of counterplay.
- ❖ White's pawn center became overextended and was subsequently destroyed.

Game 53**Karl Burger – Jaan Ehlevest**

St Martin 1993

1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e4 ♗b7 5.♗d3

Instead of 5.♞c2 from the previous game, White develops a piece, but allows a strong counterattack.

5...f5!

The opening can be considered a Nimzo-Larsen Attack (1.b3 e5 etc) with reversed colors, with White having used his extra tempo on the move c2-c4 – which actually harms his position in certain variations, as shown later in this game.

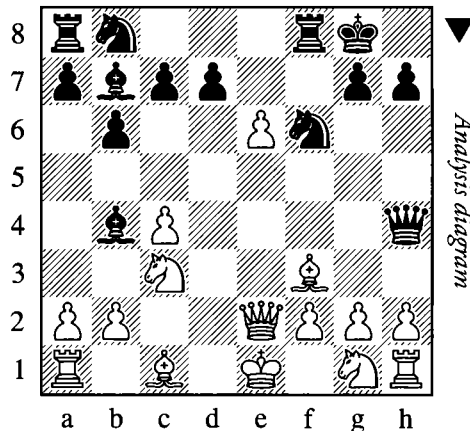
6.♞h5†

White sensibly decides to provoke a slight weakening of his opponent's kingside. Alternatives are no better:

6.exf5? is completely unsound, and after 6...♗xg2 7.♞h5† ♔f8 Black's king is in relative safety while White is about to drop a rook.

6.♞e2 ♘f6 is similar to the game, but Black is happier with his pawn on g7 rather than g6.

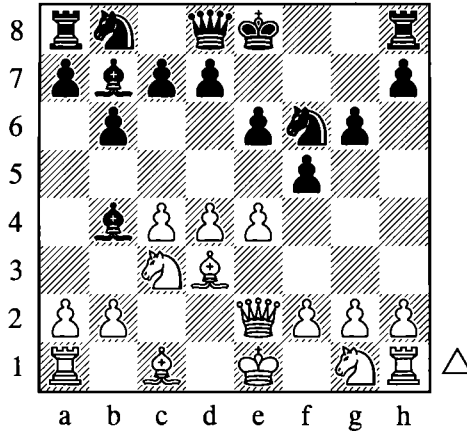
6.d5 fxe4 7.♗xe4 ♞h4! Just as in the previous game, it is important for the black queen to join the action early. (After 7...♘f6 8.♗f3! White's chances were higher in Beliavsky – Gulko, Polanica Zdroj 1996.) 8.♞e2 ♘f6 9.♗f3 0-0 10.dxe6



10...♖c6! Played in true gambit style. 11.♙e3 (11.g3?! ♜d4 12.♙d2 ♙a6+ Marchand – Gulko, Geneva 1997) 11...♗e4! 12.0–0–0 ♗xc3 13.bxc3 ♙a3+ 14.♗b1 dxe6 Black was better in Kaplan – Miles, Sao Paulo 1977.

6...g6 7.♞e2 ♗f6

Stepping up the pressure against the e4-pawn.



8.f3

After 8.exf5? ♙xg2 White loses the rook in the corner without getting much of an attack in return.

8.♙g5

With this move White protects the e4-pawn indirectly, by pinning one of its attackers. The downside is that the e4-pawn will be eliminated and the bishop will almost certainly have to be exchanged for the black knight.

8...fxe4

8...h6!? is also interesting, Gaertner – King, Switzerland 2000.

9.♙xe4

It is hard to believe that 9.♙c2?! can be a good move, and after 9...♞e7 10.0–0–0 ♙xc3 11.bxc3 ♗c6 12.f3 ♞a3+ 13.♗b1 0–0 Black was clearly better in Rodriguez Vargas – Keene, Alicante 1977.

Even worse is: 9.♙xf6? exd3! 10.♞e5 The only chance. 10...♗c6! 11.♞g5 (11.♙xd8 ♗xe5 12.dxe5 ♙xg2→) 11...♙e7 12.♙e7 ♞xe7 13.♞xe7 ♗xe7 14.♗f3 ♗a5! 15.♗d2 ♙xg2 16.♙g1 ♙h3 17.♙g3 ♙f5 White's position was hopeless in Tazhieva – Chiburdanidze, Moscow 1994.

9...♙xe4!

Black correctly forces exchanges which will diminish the significance of White's space advantage. 9...♗xe4? is too extravagant, and after 10.♙xd8 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 ♙xc3+ 12.♗f1 ♙xa1 13.♙xc7 ♙xd4 14.♗f3 Black did not have enough for the queen in Gruenfeld – Prie, Paris 1990.

10.♙xf6

Removing the defender of e4, otherwise White will not be able to recapture the bishop.

10...♞xf6 11.♞xe4

8...fxe4?

Beginning with this move, Black has a seemingly clever way to win a pawn – but he should resist the temptation to do it!

9.fxe4 ♙xc3†

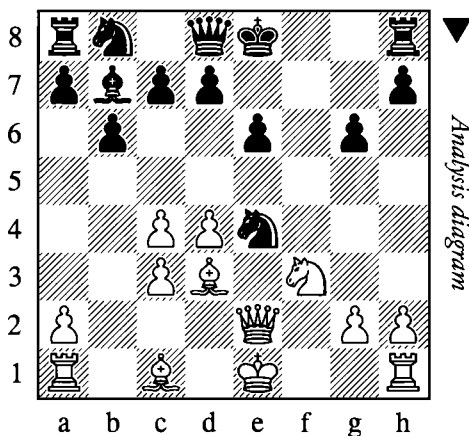
Changing the move-order with 9...♘e4 10.♙xe4 ♙xc3† allows 11.♗d1!

It is too late to back out with 9...♘c6, as the white knight now has the f3-square available.

10.bxc3 ♘xe4 11.♘f3!

11.♙xe4? ♚h4† is the justification for Black's idea.

After the text move White has fantastic compensation for the pawn, thanks to his lead in development and Black's terrible dark-squared weaknesses on the kingside.



11...♘f6

No better are:

11...♘d6 12.0-0 0-0 13.♙h6± Cardoso – Chandler, Wellington 1978.

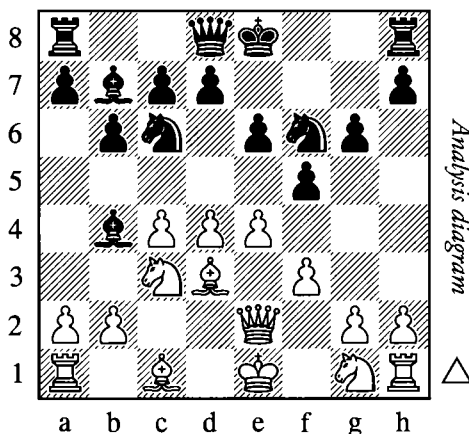
11...♘xc3 12.♚e5 0-0 13.♙h6 ♜f7 14.♘g5± Vorobiov – Orlinkov, Moscow 2000.

12.♙g5 ♚e7 13.0-0 d6

13...♜f8 14.♘e5± ♚g7 15.d5! was nasty for Black in Marinelli – Krajina, Vinkovci 1989.

14.♘e5 0-0 15.♘g4 ♘bd7 16.♜f2+-

Black has no good way to escape the pin, Botvinnik – Wallis, Leicester (simul) 1967.



9.♙c3

The otherwise desirable march of the central pawn is refuted tactically: 9.e5? ♘xd4 10.♗f2 ♘h5! 11.♗xd4 ♙c5 White found his queen trapped in Adorjan – Spassky, Toluca 1982.

9.d5 fxe4 10.fxe4 ♘d4 11.♗f2 0–0! ♚ Federau – Lorenz, Berlin 2000. Again Black found an effective way to protect his knight by indirect means.

9...fxe4

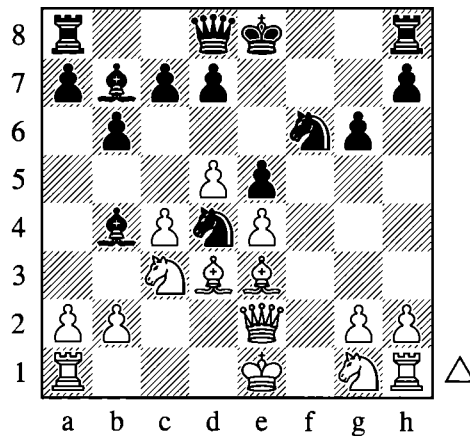
This exchange has a downside, as it makes the f3-square available for the white knight. Nevertheless it is worth doing it in order to prepare Black's next move.

10.fxe4 e5!

Following on from his eighth move, Black targets his opponent's weakest point in the center.

11.d5

Blocking the center and shutting the b7-bishop out of play. 11.♘f3 exd4 12.♘xd4 ♘e5! ♚ is pleasant for Black.

11...♘d4**12.♗d1?**

This natural move suffers from a fatal flaw, and White should have tried one of the following alternatives instead.

12.♙xd4 exd4 13.a3 The only move. 13...♙a5! Maintaining the pin and forcing White to weaken his structure further in order to maintain the material balance. 14.b4 dxc3 15.bxa5 0–0 White's pawn structure has been damaged and he is weak on the dark squares. Black will soon develop pressure along the e- and f-files, and the ...♘h5-f4 maneuver might also prove unpleasant.

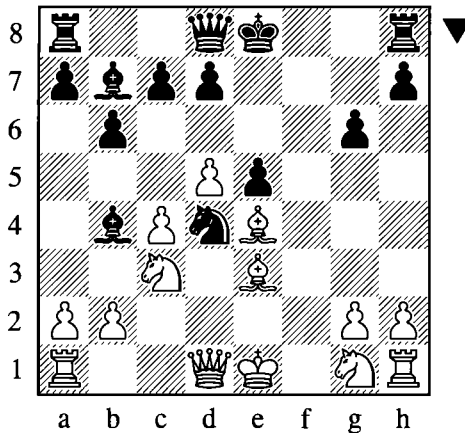
12.♗d2! was the best chance, although Black obtains nice play here too: 12...♘g4! 13.♙g5 White cannot afford to allow the bishop to be traded for the enemy knight. 13...♙e7 14.♙xe7 ♗xe7

Black has a magnificent knight on d4, and a queen check on h4 could prove troublesome in certain variations. Black might consider playing ...c5 in the near future to secure his knight in the center, and later he can bring his bishop into the game via the c8-square.

12... ♖xe4!

A spectacular shot, but not difficult to spot once you have seen the 8... fxe4? line examined earlier. Essentially Black is using the exact same tactical features, but in a much more favorable setting.

13. ♗xe4



13... ♗h4†!

Black must be wary of his move order. 13... ♗xc3? would be a mistake due to 14. bxc3 ♗h4† 15. ♖d2! ♗xe4 16. cxd4 when the would-be hanging bishop on e3 is protected and thus White wins a piece.

14. ♖f1

The only square to break the pin,

14... ♗xc3 15. bxc3 ♗xe4

Black's hanging knight is counterbalanced by White's loose bishop on e3. This is why it was so important to get the move order right.

16. ♗xd4 exd4 17. ♗xd4 0-0† 18. ♖f3 ♗ac8

White has just managed to maintain material equality in the short term, but his position is atrocious and it does not take long for Black to start picking off pawns.

19. ♖f2 ♗e2† 20. ♖g3 ♗e4 21. ♗he1 ♗xd4 22. ♗xe2 ♗xc4 23. ♗e7 ♗xd5 24. ♗xd7 ♗xf3 25. gxf3 ♗xc3 26. ♗f1 ♗f7 27. ♗d8† ♖g7 28. ♗f2 a5

0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ Once again the early ...f5 was an effective source of counterplay.
- ❖ In certain positions Black can leave the knight hanging on d4, where it is indirectly protected – see the note to White's ninth move for two examples.
- ❖ Sometimes Black can win a pawn with the pseudo-sacrifice ...♞xe4! intending ...♞h4†, but he must choose the right moment for it. In the note to Black's eighth move, the idea backfired completely.
- ❖ The plan of ...♞c6 and ...e5 helped to establish a powerful knight on d4, which supported the subsequent tactical sequence based on 12...♞xe4.

Game 54**Franz Hager – Igor Lempert**

Werfen 1992

1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 ♗b7 4.♞c3

We have reached the same position as in the previous game, via a different move order. The reader should be aware that if he plays into this position via the move order 1.c4 b6 2.d4 e6 (instead of 2...♗b7, which would be my recommendation) 3.e4 ♗b7, then White will have a serious alternative available.

4.♗d3

Avoiding the pin on the knight.

4...f5

This is the typical way of creating counterplay, although it is a bit risky here.

5.exf5!

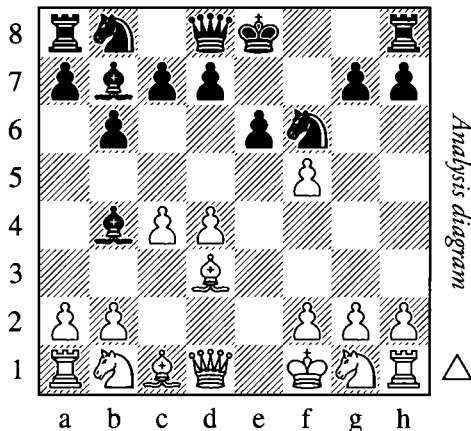
The most principled response, offering a rook sacrifice.

5.♞e2 is not very threatening, and Black should be okay after 5...fxe4 or 5...♗b4†.

5...♗b4†!

5...♗xg2 is risky: 6.♞h5† g6 (6...♞e7?? 7.♞g5†) 7.fxg6 ♗g7 8.gxh7† ♞f8 9.♞e2! ♗xh1 (9...♞f6 10.♞h4 ♗xh1 11.♗g5 transposes) 10.♗g5! ♞f6 (10...♞e7? 11.♞f4 and 10...♗f6? 11.h4! are no good for Black) 11.♞h4 White has a dangerous attack for the rook, and threatens to bring his knight to f4 followed by g6 or h5.

6.♞f1 ♞f6



Analysis diagram

7.♙e2!?

Played with the specific intention of chasing or trapping the bishop on b4.

The immediate 7.c5 does not work on account of 7...bxc5 8.a3 c4! when Black creates an escape route for his bishop on the a3-f8 diagonal. (That is why the bishop retreats to e2 in the main line.)

The pawn-grabbing approach cannot be recommended for White: 7.fxe6 0-0! 8.exd7 ♖xd7 Black will quickly finish developing with ...♘c6 and ...♞ae8, and White's king position will be a source of ongoing concern.

Another game continued 7.♘f3 0-0 8.a3 ♙d6 9.fxe6 (9.♙g5 and 9.♘c3 should both be met by 9...♞e8) 9...dxe6! It is important for Black to take this way in order to provide a counterweight to White's central pawns. The pawn on e6 is isolated, but White will have no time to attack it. 10.♘c3 ♞e8 (10...c5!?) 11.♞e2 ♙xf3 12.♞xf3 ♘c6 13.♙e3 e5 14.d5 e4! Black had full compensation in Krush – Christiansen, Saint Louis 2009.

7...0-0!

Intending to sacrifice the bishop for a couple of pawns and a huge development advantage.

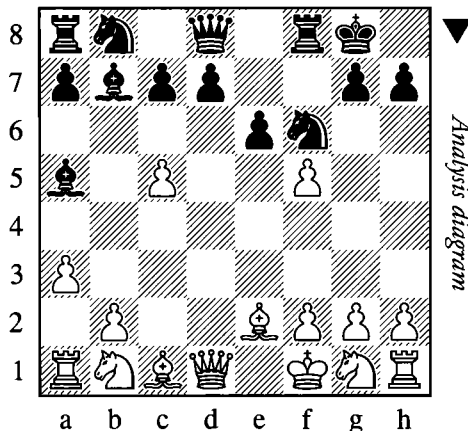
After 7...♙e7? 8.fxe6 White will develop quickly with ♘c3 and ♙e3, and it will not be easy for Black to develop threats. It is important that White can neutralize the dangerous bishop with ♙f3 at any moment.

8.c5 bxc5 9.a3 ♙a5

Thanks to White's seventh move, Black does not have the ...c4 trick available.

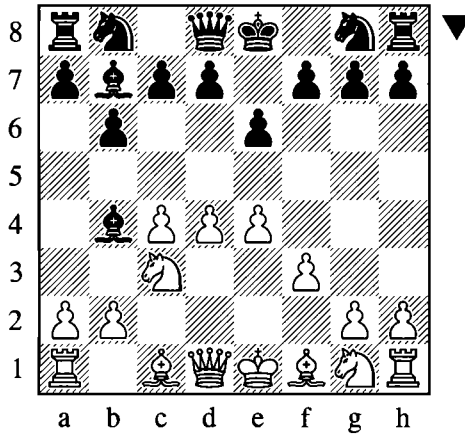
10.dxc5

We have reached one of the critical positions of this opening variation. The whole line is deeply complicated and I would encourage the reader to conduct his own further research if he is interested in playing it over the board. I will mention a few illustrative examples here.



10...♘d5

10...♘e4! is an interesting way of playing for direct threats against the king: 11.b4 (11.♘f3 ♙xf5 12.b4 ♞f6 13.♞a2 ♙d5 14.♞c2 ♘c6 15.♙b2 ♞g6 16.♘bd2 ♙xb4 17.axb4 ♘xb4 18.♞c1 ♙af8 Black kept strong pressure in Sakaev – Bauer, Kallithea 2008.) 11...♞f6 12.♞a2 ♙d5 13.♞b2 ♘c6 14.bxa5 ♞ab8 15.♞xb8 ♞xb8 16.♙d3 ♞a1 17.♘e2 ♙b3! Black was dominating in Ippolito – Shabalov, Linares 2000.



5...f5!

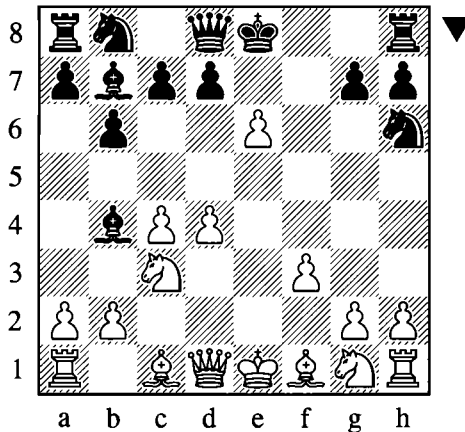
The key move of the variation. Even when there is no attack on the g2-pawn, Black hurls the f-pawn forwards anyway!

6.exf5 ♖h6!

6...exf5 is playable, but the text is more dynamic. Black is ready to sacrifice material in order to accelerate his development. He hopes to expose 5.f3 as a plodding, cumbersome move which exposed White's king and took away the most natural developing square from his knight.

7.fxe6

7.♔xh6?! is the subject of the next game, and 7.♕e3 is mentioned in the notes to Game 56.

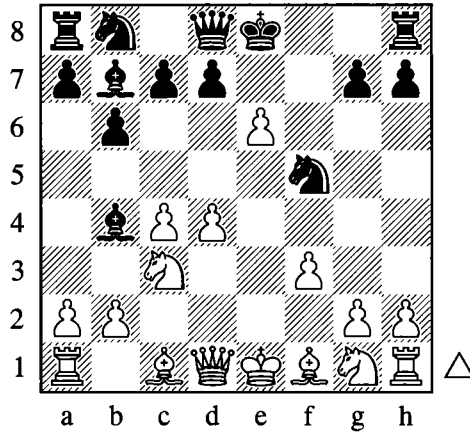


7...♖f5!

7...dxe6?! cannot be refuted by 8.♖a4† in view of 8...♖c6 9.d5 exd5 10.♕xh6? ♖h4† 11.♔d1 ♖xh6 12.cxd5 0-0-0 when White will not win any material due to the pin, M. Conner – Paschall, New Hampshire 2000.

However, this is something of a moot point as the simple 8.♕d3 secures some advantage for White.

The game continuation is much more in the spirit of the *Gambit Guide*. Black offers to raise the stakes, doubling his material investment in the hope of increasing his initiative by an even greater magnitude. Already White must worry about a nasty check on h4.



8...exd7†

It would have been safer to decline this gift, as now Black's development goes through the roof.

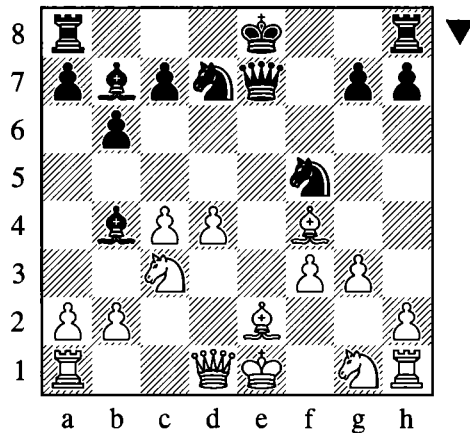
8...♘xd7 9.♙f4 ♚h4†!

Here we see an early parallel with the Miles game; the queen on h4 will provoke a weakening pawn move.

10.g3 ♚e7† 11.♙e2?

Too greedy. Of course White was unable to block with the knight, as the f3-pawn would hang, which demonstrates the value of Black's ninth move.

However, White should have returned one of his extra pawns in order to get the queens off: 11.♚e2 ♚xe2† 12.♘gxe2 ♙xf3 13.♙g1 0-0 Black had enough compensation in Wodniczak – Euler, e-mail 2000, but White's position was acceptable too.



11...g5!

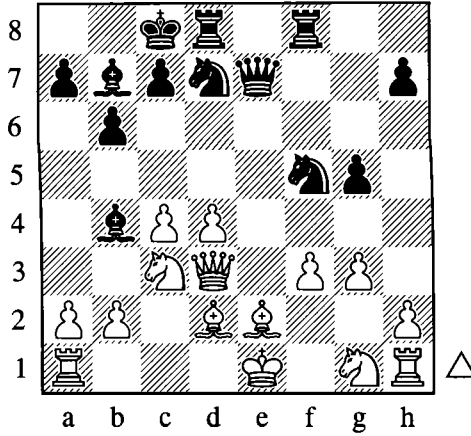
When you have a development advantage, you must put it to use before the opponent can catch up.

12.♖d3

White wants to put his bishop on d2 without leaving the d4-pawn en prise.

12...♜f8 13.♙d2 0-0-0

Completing development while setting up a nasty threat, which White helpfully overlooks.



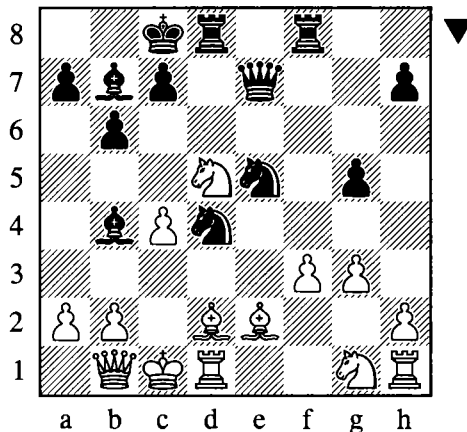
14.0-0-0?

When you are behind in development, just one mistake can be fatal. The only real chance to resist was 14.♘d5!, although 14...♙xd2† 14.♖xd2 ♙xd5 15.cxd5 ♖f6 still leaves Black with an excellent position.

14...♘e5! 15.♖b1 ♘xd4

Black has regained one of the sacrificed pawns, and more importantly his pieces dominate the board. The main threat is to capture on e2 then bring the knight to d3.

16.♘d5



16...♞xd5!

Not the only path to victory, but the most brutal. White could take no more of the suffering and so he resigned.

0-1

The end comes quickly after 17.♞xb4 (or 17.cxd5 ♞c5†) 17...♞xb4 18.cxd5 ♞c5† 19.♔d2 ♔xe2 20.♔xe2 ♙a6† and wins.

What we have learned:

- ❖ Once again the ...f5 advance was critical. Without it, the e4-f3 pawn wedge would have shut the b7-bishop out of play.
- ❖ The ...♔h6-f5 maneuver was a key part of Black's idea.
- ❖ The queen check on h4 was an important tool which disrupted White's development.
- ❖ When you have a huge lead in development, you often find that tactics (14...♔e5!; 16...♞xd5!) will readily appear.

Considering the impact of the knight maneuver from h6 to f5, and later d4, one might be tempted to ask what happens if White eliminates that piece. The next game provides the answer.

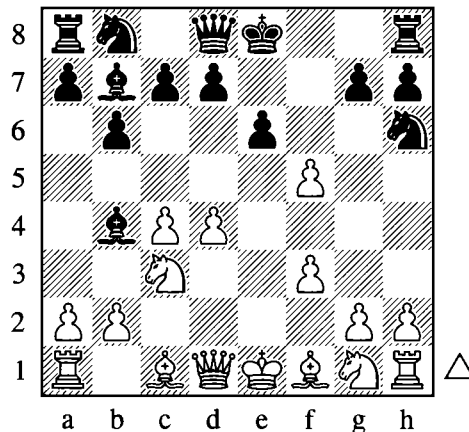
Game 55

Lars Venø Jakobsen – Edvins Kengis

Gistrup 1997

1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♔c3 ♙b4 4.e4 ♙b7 5.f3 f5! 6.exf5 ♔h6!

With White's pawn already on f3, there would be no point in Black putting his knight on f6. The f5-square, on the other hand, is much more inviting; the knight will keep an eye on the sensitive e3- and g3-squares, the latter of which might be exploited by a queen check on h4. The knight will also exert useful pressure against the d4-pawn.

**7.♙xh6?!**

Given the potential power of the knight on the f5-square, it seems logical for White to eliminate it before it can get there. However, giving up the dark-squared bishop is not something White should take lightly, especially as his fifth move weakened the dark squares.

7... ♖h4†

An important resource; if Black had been forced to play ...gxh6 then the entire game would have been a different story.

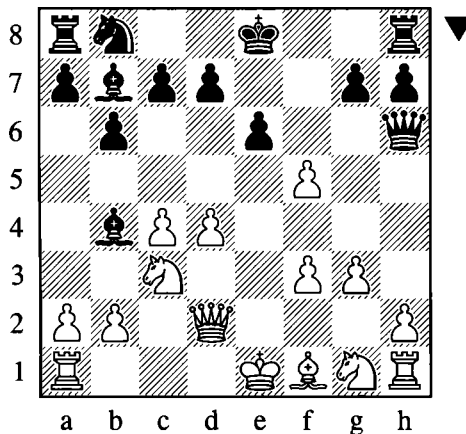
8.g3 ♗xh6

Interestingly White has some problems on both his light and dark squares. The former can be attributed to his last pawn move, which has rendered the f3-pawn more vulnerable, making the development of White's kingside pieces problematic. The latter are a consequence of the exchange of bishop for knight, as well as the move f2-f3.

9. ♕d2

Exchanging queens is a natural idea for White, although it does not solve his problems.

The greedy 9.fxe6 should simply be met by 9...0-0! when Black enjoys a commanding lead in development.



9... ♕xd2†!

Black is not afraid of a queen exchange – it is more important to accelerate his development.

9... ♕f6 is not a terrible move, but it allows White to bring his king to safety on the queenside: 10.fxe6 dxe6 11.a3 ♗xc3 12. ♗xc3 0-0 13.0-0-0 ♘c6 14. ♗g2 e5 15. ♘e2 exd4 16. ♘xd4 Here the players agreed a draw in F. Berkes – Bokros, Hungary 2001.

10. ♗xd2 ♘c6

Developing with tempo, and targeting the d4-pawn.

11.fxe6?!

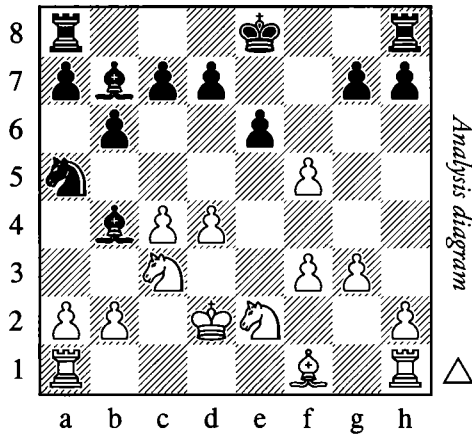
White should have left this pawn alone and continued developing in one of the following two ways:

11.♔d3 exf5 12.♘d5 ♙d6 13.♘e2 was played in Adok – Erdos, Hungary 2000, and now Black could have won a pawn with 13...♖b4†! 14.♘xb4 ♗xf3! 15.♞g1 ♗xb4.

11.♘ge2 ♖a5!

Attacking two pawns, on c4 and f3.

The slower 11...♞f8 12.♙h3 e5 13.♞he1 0–0–0 14.a3 was better for White in Heimberger – Teske, Linz 1995.



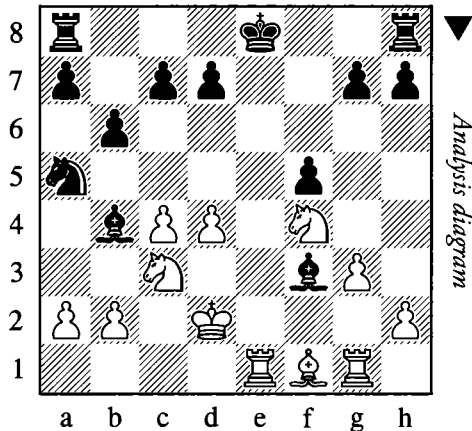
12.♘f4

12.♘g1!? would have defended both pawns, but after 12...exf5 Black is obviously comfortable. If White tries to shut out the bishop with 13.d5, then 13...c6! breaks up White's overextended center.

12...♗xf3 13.♞g1 exf5

13...c5!? was also strong.

14.♞e1†



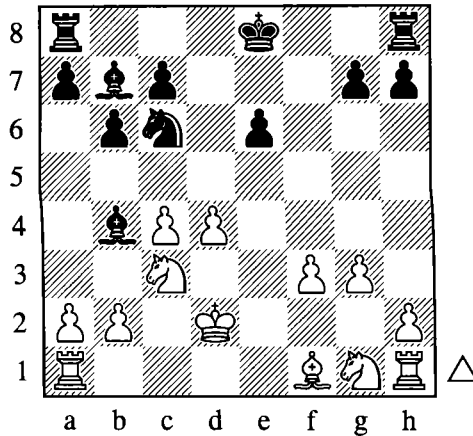
Now in Semkov – Bricard, Sofia 1990, Black should have played:

14...♙d8 -

With a safe extra pawn.

11...dxe6

The pawn exchange may have cemented White's one-pawn advantage, but the opening of the d-file could bring dire consequences for him.



12.d5?

White tries to play dynamically, but his position is not strong enough to justify it. The best chance was 12.♖ge2 0–0–0 when Black is better, but the game goes on.

12...exd5 13.♙e1†

White's idea was to molest the black king before it could castle. The problem is that Black can easily deal with the lone check, and White has no other pieces ready to take any action. As far as counterattacks go, this one is about as feeble as it gets.

13...♗e7

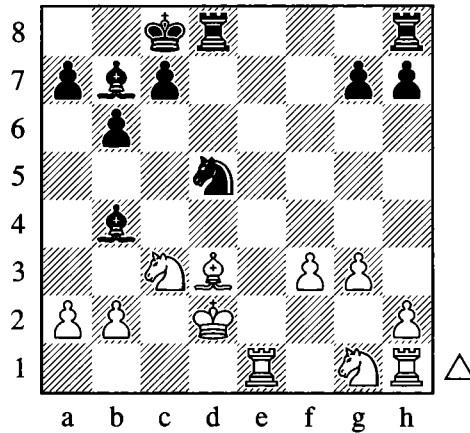
Blocking the check while unblocking the bishop.

14.cxd5 0–0–0

Naturally Black postpones the capture on d5 for a move, in order to do it with the piece of his choosing. Now the white king begins to feel the heat of the rook on d8.

15.♙d3 ♗xd5

Black has now restored material equality, and White is in serious trouble. His king is exposed in the center, and is barely shielded from attacks by two enemy pieces. The bishop on d3 is vulnerable, White's two other kingside pieces are still undeveloped, and his position contains numerous weak squares which will soon become apparent. It is hardly surprising that the game does not last much longer.



16. ♖ge2 ♗c5!?

A surprise retreat, but Black is aiming to make inroads into White's position by using the hole on e3.

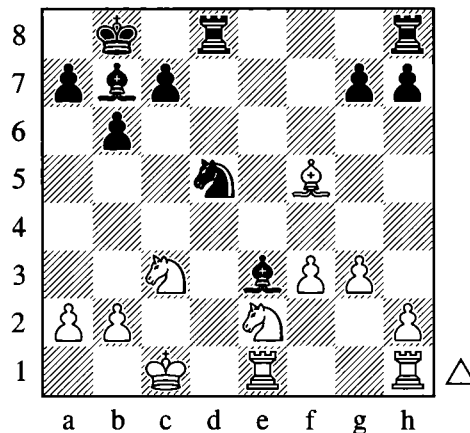
Although the text move works well, it was not the strongest continuation available. The most clinical route to victory would have been 16... ♖hf8! 17. ♖hf1 c5! when White has no good defense against ...c4 winning a piece.

17. ♗f5†

17. ♖xd5 ♗xd5 wins a pawn, although this would still have been White's best chance to survive.

17... ♗b8 18. ♗c1 ♗e3†

Black's bishops breath fire down the open diagonals.



19. ♗c2

After 19. ♗b1 ♖xc3† 20. ♖xc3 ♗xf3 21. ♖hf1 ♗g2 Black wins a pawn plus the exchange, and the game is over.

19...♗f2

Vacating the e3-square with tempo.

20.♖xd5

Rook moves would have been met by 20....♗e3†.

20...♗xe1

0–1

What we have learned:

- ❖ The early ♗xh6 only created bigger problems than the ones it was intended to solve.
- ❖ The queen exchange did nothing to dampen Black's initiative.
- ❖ Sometimes returning extra material can be a good way to improve one's position, but the situation has to be right. In this game the 12.d5? sacrifice only exacerbated White's difficulties.

It is clear that taking the knight on h6 is not the way for White to solve his problems. In the next game he tries a different approach but still winds up in difficulties.

Game 56

Hans Ree – Alexander Morozevich

Tilburg (rapid) 1994

1.c4 b6 2.d4 ♗b7 3.♖c3 e6 4.e4

With hindsight, perhaps the famous Dutch grandmaster should have played more solidly, but he may have wanted to show his young opponent that classical chess was still alive in these modern times.

4...♗b4 5.f3 f5! 6.exf5 ♖h6! 7.fxex6

Before moving on, we should briefly consider the following idea:

7.♗e3

Nothing about this move should worry Black.

7...♖xf5

The knight reaches a superb square with gain of tempo.

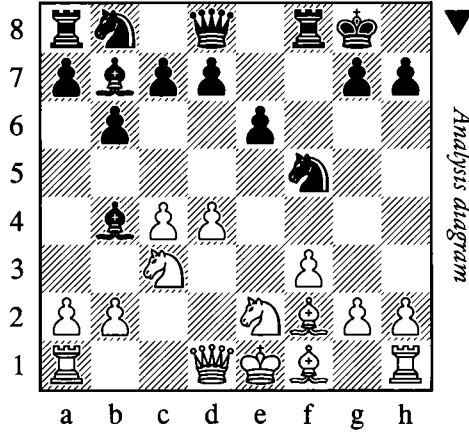
8.♗f2

The bishop does a decent job of neutralizing the powerful knight, while covering the sensitive h4-e1 diagonal. Still, it already seems like White is on the defensive.

8...0–0 9.♖ge2

9.♗d3 is well met by 9...♖h4 or 9...♗g5.

Another game continued 9.♗d3 c5 10.0–0–0 cxd4 11.♗xd4 ♖c6 12.♖ge2 ♗c8 13.a3 ♗d6 14.♖e4 ♖e5 15.♗xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗xd7 ♗xd7 17.♗xd7 ♗xe4 0–1 Skurygin – A. Ivanov, Nizhnij Tagil 2007.



9...c5!

Attacking the enemy center. White's king is still several moves away from castling.

9...d5!? is also interesting.

10.a3 ♙xc3† 11.♘xc3

Perhaps 11.bxc3 was necessary, although the doubled pawns are hardly ideal for White.

11...cxd4 12.♙xd4 ♘c6

Developing with tempo.

12...♗h4†? does not win the bishop due to 13.♙f2.

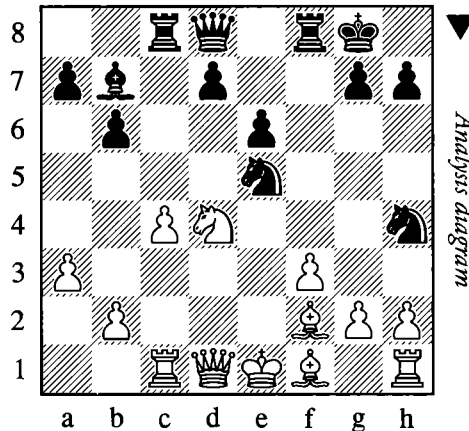
13.♙f2 ♖c8 14.♖c1 ♘e5 15.♘b5?

White will pay the price for moving the same piece so many times in the opening.

He had to play 15.b3 although 15...♘h4! keeps some initiative for Black, who threatens a sacrifice on f3. Despite White's bishop pair, his king is in the center and this is the most important factor. The attempt to attack both knights with 16.♗d4? fails dismally after 16...♘hx3† 17.gxf3 ♘xf3† winning the queen.

15...♘h4 16.♘d4

Black to play and win!



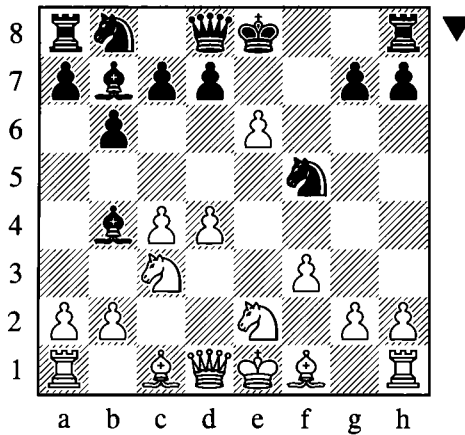
16...♘hx3†!

White resigned in J. Fischer – Sulava, Bad Woerishofen 2000. The continuation might have been:
 17.gxf3 ♖xf3† 18.♖xf3 ♙xf3

White loses the rook on h1, and will be the exchange and two pawns down with no compensation. Another convincing game where White failed to make it out of the opening.

7...♖f5! 8.♖ge2

Ree sensibly refuses the second pawn.



8...0-0!

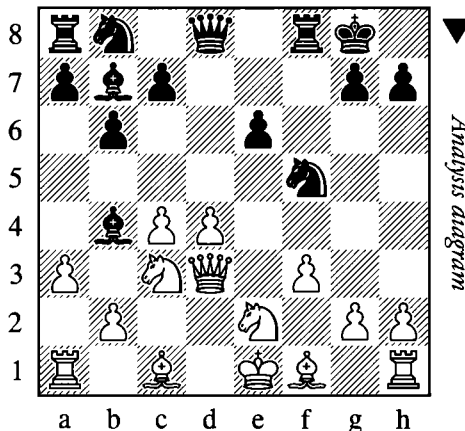
Morozevich was the first grandmaster to play this strong move, which improves over the first officially played game with the English Gambit: 8...dxe6 9.♙f4 (9.♙a4†! ♖c6 10.♙f4 0-0 11.0-0-0 was better) 9...0-0 Panno – Miles, Buenos Aires 1979. Already in 1994, Morozevich seemed well prepared in this opening.

9.♙b3?!

White's main problem concerns the development of the bishop on f1. How should he activate it? He certainly cannot contemplate 9.♖g3?? as 9...♙h4 is crushing.

Three years after the present game was played, another instructive encounter took place:

9.♙d3 dxe6 10.a3



10...♙c5!

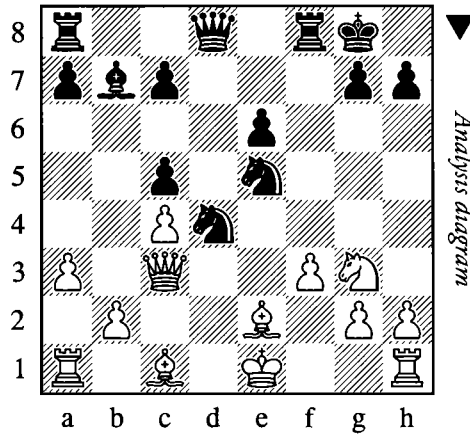
White's center is under strong pressure. The d4-pawn is hanging, and if White defends it then the knight will come to c6 next.

11.♘e4 ♜xd4 12.♘xc5?! bxc5 13.♘g3?

A serious mistake. White seems to be too preoccupied with positional factors to realize that his position is about to be blown to pieces. After 13.♘xd4 cxd4 Black will follow up with ...c5, ...e5 and ...e4, keeping a good position. Nevertheless this was White's best bet.

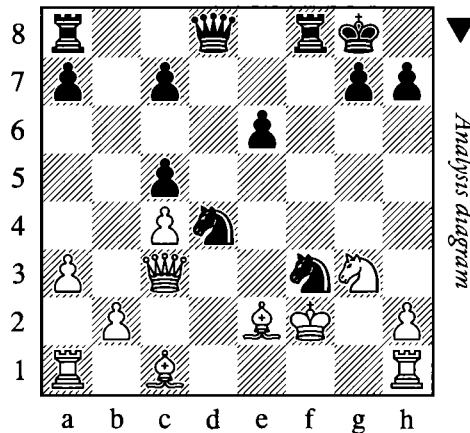
13...♜bc6 14.♙e2 ♜e5 15.♚c3

If White is given time to castle and complete development then he will be doing well, so how did Black stop him?



15...♙xf3! 16.gxf3 ♜xf3† 17.♔f2

It is not so easy to suggest a winning discovered check, but Black was up to the challenge and found a lovely way to clinch the game. Can you find it?



17...♘g1†!! 18.♔e1

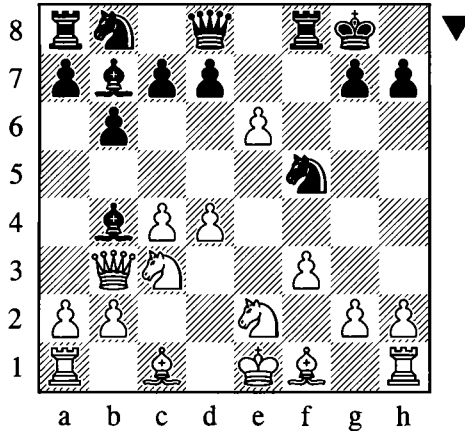
Also after 18.♔xg1 ♜xe2† 19.♜xe2 ♚d1† 20.♔g2 ♚xe2† 21.♔g3 ♚f2† 22.♔g4 (22.♔h3 ♚f3†) 22...♙ad8 Black wins.

18...♖gxe2 19.♗xe2 ♜f3 20.♞d2 ♞h4† 21.♗g3

After 21.♗d1 ♜d8 the white queen will soon meet her end, and then the king will join her.
21...♞xg3

0–1 K. Rasmussen – P. H. Nielsen, Denmark 1997.

With the move played in the game, White tries to nudge the bishop into exchanging itself or retreating from its active position.



9...c5!

Protecting the bishop and attacking White's center. 9...♗c6!? was an interesting alternative, and after 10.d5 ♗d4 11.♗xd4 ♗xd4 12.♞d1 ♞f6 Black has a huge lead in development, although White can temporarily take a three-pawn advantage after 13.exd7.

10.exd7

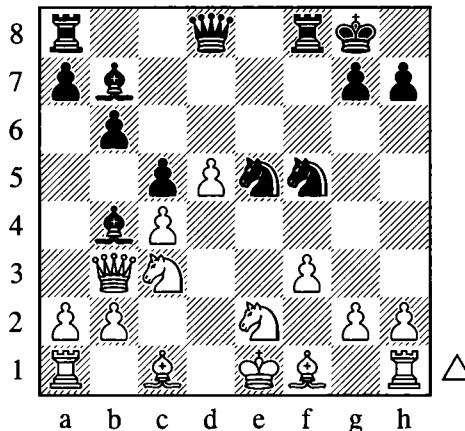
Picking up a second pawn. Unfortunately another black piece swiftly comes into play.

11...♗xd7 11.d5

Trying to keep the position closed and lock the b7-bishop out of play.

11...♗e5

Now White must worry about a number of ideas including ...♞h4†, ...♗d3† and ...♗a6.

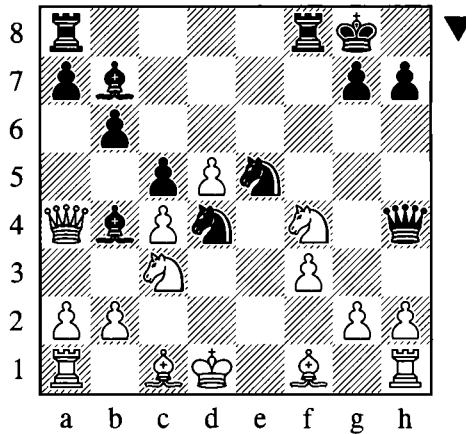


12. ♖f4?!

White's last chance was 12.a3 although Black then has a pleasant choice between the straightforward 12...♗a5, and the sacrificial options of 12...♗a6!? and 12...b5!?, both of which look promising.

12... ♗h4† 13. ♔d1

Having to move one's king like this is rarely a good sign...

13... ♖d4 14. ♗a4**14... ♗xf4**

A simple combination which wins material.

15. g3 ♗h5 16. ♗xf4 ♗xf3† 17. ♔d2 ♗xh1 18. ♗d1

18... ♗xe5 ♖f3† keeps an extra piece for Black.

18... ♗xh2† 19. ♔c1 ♖g6**0-1**

A piece down in a rancid position, Ree resigned. Even though Morozevich in 1994 was nowhere near as famous as he is today, his success with this gambit was enough to make other players pay attention and take Black's opening seriously.

What we have learned:

- ❖ White has difficulties developing his kingside pieces in this line.
- ❖ The queen on b3 failed to fulfill its objective.
- ❖ Black's knights on e5 and f5 were tremendous.
- ❖ The timely queen check on h4 proved devastating.

The next game will deal with the main line of the gambit.

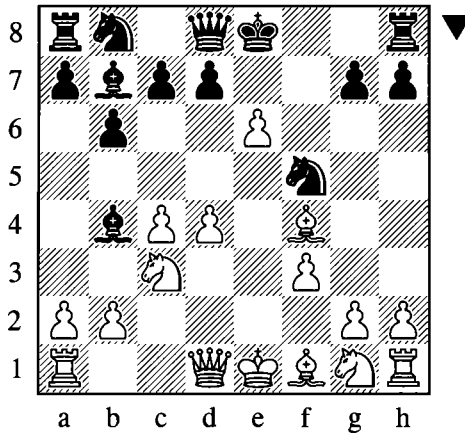
Game 57

Martin Mitchell – Viktor Erdos

Cappelle la Grande 2007

1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.♘c3 ♙b7 4.e4 ♙b4 5.f3 f5! 6.exf5 ♘h6! 7.fxg6 ♘f5! 8.♙f4

This has been White's most popular choice. The bishop develops actively while dealing with the threat of a check on h4.



8...dxe6

Recouping one of the sacrificed pawns while opening the d-file for the queen.

9.♘ge2

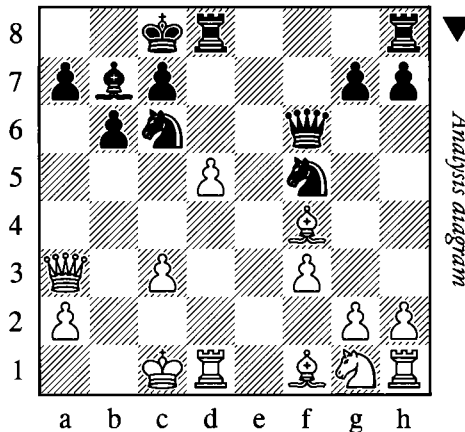
More aggressive is:

9.♗a4† ♘c6

Now the play becomes sharp but overall the position remains in balance.

10.0-0-0

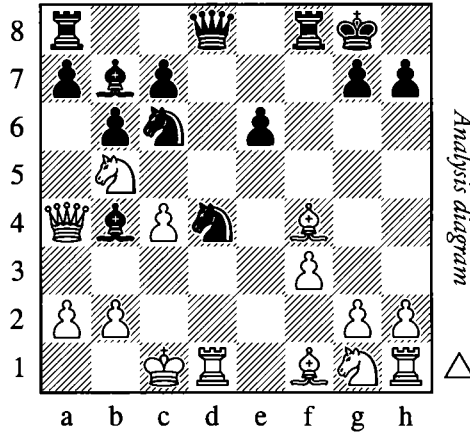
10.d5 is nothing to fear: 10...♙xc3†! 11.bxc3 exd5 12.0-0-0 (12.cxd5 ♗xd5 13.♞d1 ♗c5 was nice for Black in Kent – Dror, e-mail 2000) 12...♗f6 13.♗a3 0-0-0 14.cxd5



This position was reached in Voiska – Djingarova, Borovetz 2008, and now the clever 14...♘fe7! would have given Black excellent prospects.

10...♘fxd4 11.♘b5 0–0

We have reached an extremely complicated position with numerous hanging pieces.



12.♙xc7

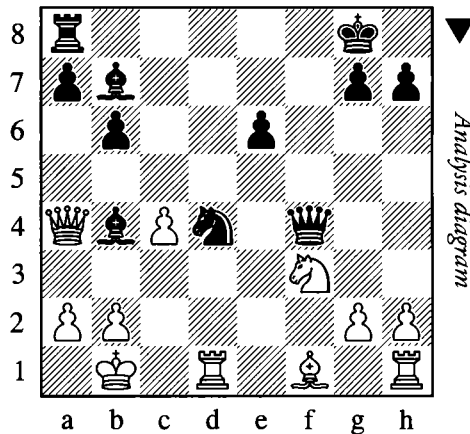
12.♘xd4 ♘xd4 13.♖xb4 ♗xf4 14.♘e2 c5 15.♗e1 ♘xe2† 16.♙xe2 was played in Szeberenyi – Gara, Hungary 2001, and now 16...♗f6 would have been slightly more pleasant for Black, who can either put his rooks on the d-file or prepare ...e5-e4 to improve his bishop.

12...♗g5† 13.f4 ♖h6! 14.♘xd4 ♗xf4!

Black has to rely on some clever tactics, but they work!

15.♙xf4 ♗xf4† 16.♗b1 ♘xd4 17.♘f3

We have been following the game Akhmetov – Babanov, Moscow 2007. Black is the exchange down but he has some initiative, and the best way to exploit it would have been:



17...♘f3 18.♖xb4 ♙e4†!

This either regains the material or forces a perpetual check.

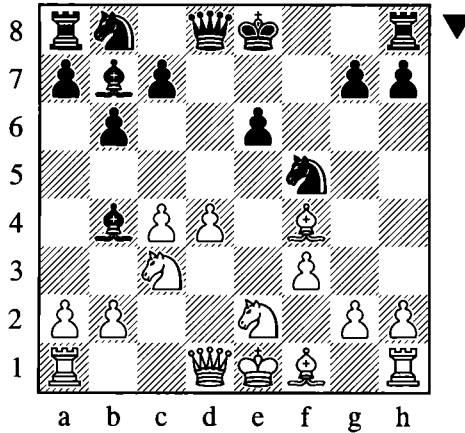
19.♙a1

19.♔d3 ♕xd3† 20.♞xd3 ♜f5! 21.♞hd1 ♖e5 regains the exchange with an equal position.
 19...♖d4! 20.♞d2!

Without this White would be in trouble.

20...♖c2† 21.♗b1 ♖b4† 22.♗a1=

Neither side can avoid the draw.



9...0-0 10.a3?

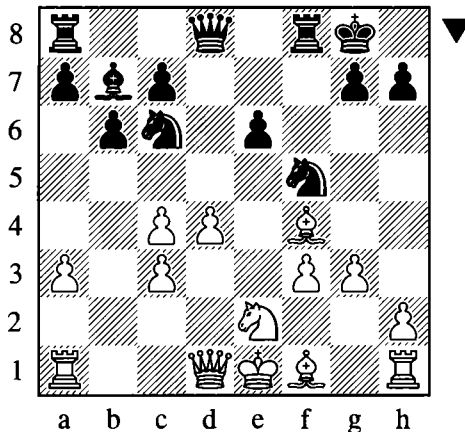
White cannot afford the time for this move.

Better was 10.♞d2 ♜h4† 11.g3 (11.♖g3 ♔d6 12.♕xd6 cxd6 13.♖ce2 ♖c6 14.0-0-0 ♖cxd4 15.♖xd4 ♖xg3 16.hxg3 ♜xh1 17.♖xe6 ♞f6 was unclear in Panno – Miles, Buenos Aires 1979)
 11...♜h5 12.♕g2 ♕xf3 13.♕xf3 ♜xf3 14.0-0-0 ♖d7 with doubled-edged play, Manion – Shabalov, Chicago 1994.

10...♕xc3† 11.bxc3 ♖c6

Black is almost fully developed, and White is still three moves away from castling.

12.g3



12...♞e7!

Preparing to blast open the center.

13.♙g2

Too slow, but it is hard to suggest a satisfactory improvement.

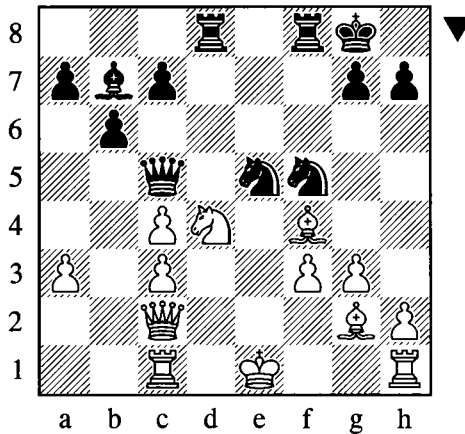
13...e5 14.dxe5 ♞ad8! 15.♞c2 ♞c5!

Preventing castling.

There was another winning continuation in 15...g5! 16.♙c1 ♟xe5 17.0-0 ♞c5† 18.♙h1 g4! When White has no defense. Still, the game continuation is more straightforward and easy to understand.

16.♞c1 ♟xe5 17.♟d4

17.♙xe5 loses to 17...♟e3.



17...♞xd4! 18.cxd4 ♟xd4

Here White resigned, as he is about to be destroyed by a knight coming to f3.

0-1

What we have learned:

- ❖ Time is of the essence, and White's 10.a3? was a fatal error which cost too much of it.
- ❖ Just as in some previous games, White's inability to develop his kingside pieces proved his undoing.
- ❖ The way Black opened the center and prevented his opponent from castling was exemplary.

In the next game we will consider the various ways in which White may sidestep the English Gambit.

Game 58
Miron Sher – Igor Lempert
 Yerevan 1996

1.c4 b6 2.d4

White may also try:

2.♘c3 ♗b7

Now 3.d4 e6 is our main line, but there are two important alternatives.

a) 3.♘f3 e6 4.g3

White plays for a traditional English setup, without going for a big pawn center.

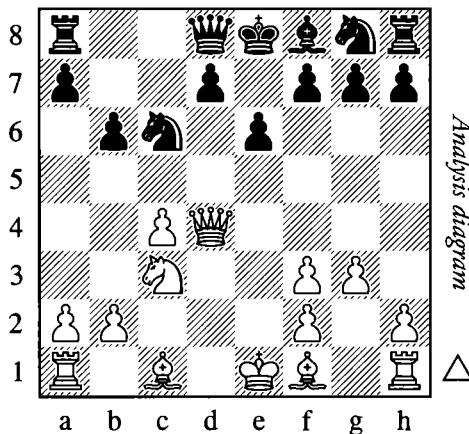
4...♗xf3!?

Leading to an unusual type of position.

5.exf3 c5 6.d4!

White should open the center while he has the chance. Other moves allow Black to clamp down on the d4-square, with good chances to stifle the white bishops. For instance: 6.f4 ♘c6! 7.♗g2 g6 (or 7...♘ge7 8.b3 ♘f5 9.♗b2 ♗e7 10.♘e2 ♗f6= Metz – Schebler, Sunny Beach 2006) 8.b3 ♗g7 9.♗b2 ♘ge7 10.♖b1 0–0 11.♘e2 ♗xb2 12.♗xb2 d5 Black equalized easily in Fracnik – Kengis, Germany 2001.

6...cxd4 7.♗xd4 ♘c6



8.♗d2

Two other examples:

8.♗d3 ♖c8 9.f4 ♗b4 10.♗d2 ♘f6 11.♗g2 ♘a5 12.b3 0–0 13.0–0 d5!= Seul – Kengis, Bonn 1995.

8.♗d1 ♖c8! 9.♗e2 ♗b4 10.0–0 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 ♗f6 12.♗e3 ♘ge7= Kosten – Bauer, Cap d'Agde 2008.

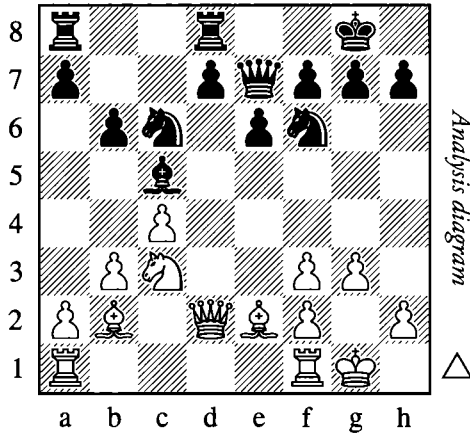
8...♘f6!?

This natural yet slightly unusual move deserves serious attention. Black develops his pieces rapidly and prepares to play ...d5 at the right moment.

8...♗f6 9.♗g2 ♗e5† (9...♗b4!?) 10.♗e2 ♖c8 was a bit better for White in Van Wely – Zvjaginsev, New York 1997.

9.♙e2 ♘c5 10.0-0 0-0 11.b3 ♚e7 12.♙b2 ♜fd8!

Now Black is ready for ...d5, so White changes the position.



13.♘e4 ♘xe4 14.fxe4 e5!

Now Black secures control over the d4-square, which assures him of at least equal chances.

15.♜ab1 a5 16.♙d1 ♜ac8 17.♔g2 ♙d4 18.♙c1 ♜f8 19.♚e2 ♙c5

Black was doing well in Safin – Chowdhury, Mumbai 2004.

b) 3.e4

This time White advances the e-pawn in a principled fashion, while leaving the d-pawn at home.

3...e6 4.♘f3

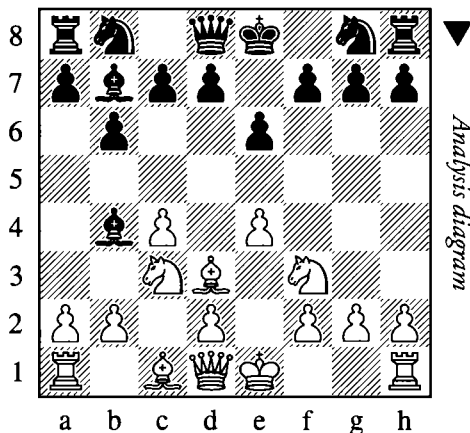
4.d4 ♙b4 is the main line which we dealt with previously.

4...♙b4

Once again Black develops his bishops before the knights. 4...♘f6 is possible, but the knight has a more promising route into the game.

5.♙d3

The blocking of the d-pawn is only temporary. White plans to retreat the bishop to c2, and later to play d4 with an ideal pawn center.



5...♟e7

Black can also go for a blocked center with 5...♟xc3!? 6.dxc3 d6. One game continued 7.0-0 ♞d7 8.♟g5 ♞gf6 9.♟e1 h6 10.♟h4 e5 11.b4 g5 12.♟g3 ♞h5 with good play for Black, Chi Fengtong – Wang Yue, Tianjing 2001.

6.♞e2 ♞g6

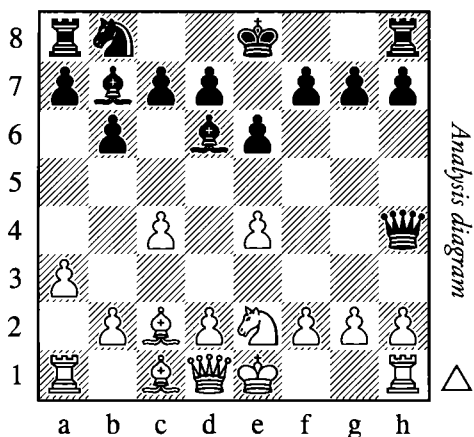
It is a little early for 6...f5, and White has scored well after both 7.♟c2 and 7.♞g3.

7.♟c2 ♞h4 8.a3 ♟d6

8...♞xf3? would be a mistake, as after 9.gxf3 intending d4 and ♟g1 White has a huge position.

9.♞xh4 ♟xh4

The position is rather irregular, but Black's active pieces give him good prospects.

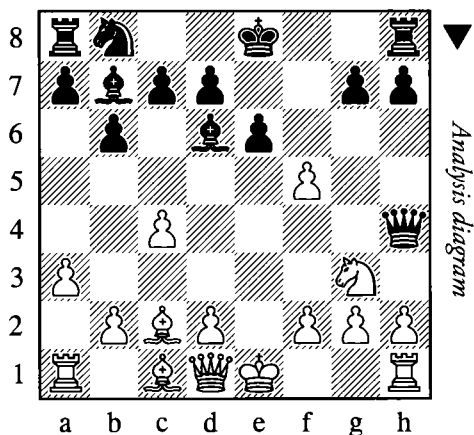


10.♞g3

The knight can also return to the queenside: 10.♞c3 0-0 11.d4 f5 12.♟e3 ♞c6 13.g3 ♟h3 14.f4 ♟g2 15.♟g1 ♟xh2 16.♟d3 fxe4 17.♞xe4 ♟b4+!? (or 17...♞e7 18.0-0-0 ♞f5 with double-edged play, Chorfi – Cornel, e-mail 2005) 18.♞d1 ♟e7 19.♟f1 ♟a6 Black was at least equal in this messy position, Chorfi – Bartos, Internet 2005.

10...f5! 11.exf5?!

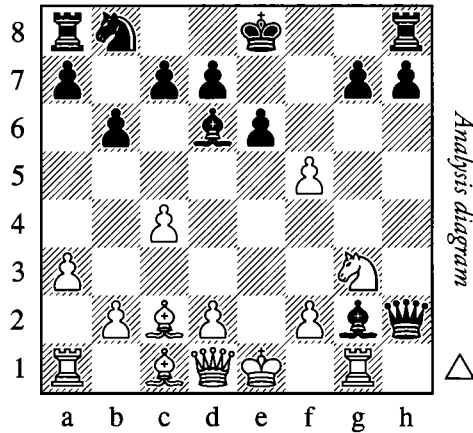
Critical, but objectively it is a mistake. Another game continued 11.d4 fxe4 12.d5, Hassim – M. Rudolf, Internet 2005, and now 12...exd5 13.cxd5 (13.♞f5 ♟f6) 13...0-0 (13...♟g3!? 14.fxg3 ♟f6 is also interesting) 14.♞xe4 ♟f5!? (14...h6) would have given Black good play.



11...♙xg2!

11...0-0 gave Black a decent position in Girard – Bodenez, Besancon 2006, but he can afford to be more ambitious.

12.♞g1 ♜xh2



13.♞xg2

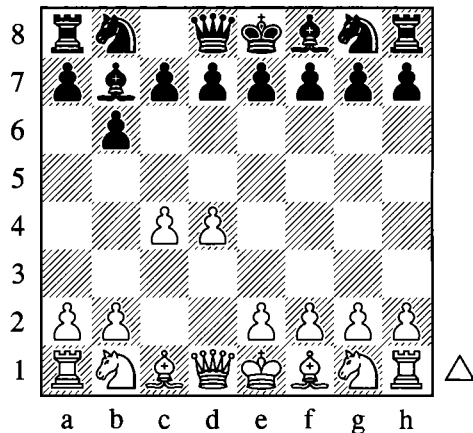
13.♜h5† ♜xh5 14.♘h5 ♙f3 15.♘xg7† ♜f7 is better for Black as the knight is short of squares.

13...♜xg2 14.♜h5† ♜d8

White does not have enough for the sacrificed exchange.

2...♙b7

The game actually proceeded with 2...e6 3.a3 ♙b7 4.♘c3, but I have changed the sequence in order to focus on the main move order I am recommending, which prevents the important option of 3.e4.



3.♘c3

If White tries to treat the position like a Queen's Indian with 3.♘f3 e6 4.g3, then Black can complicate the position with the following interesting line: 4...♙b4†!? 5.♙d2 ♙xf3! 6.exf3 ♙xd2†

7.♞xd2 d5∞ Black has exchanged one of his opponent's important bishops, and his superior pawn structure makes his position quite promising.

Sometimes White plays:

3.d5

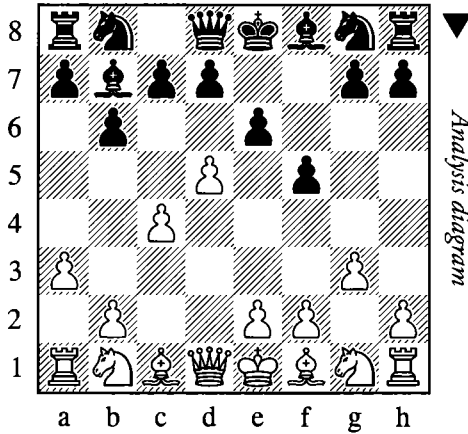
Blocking out the bishop without delay.

3...e6 4.a3

This is a typical prophylactic move to prepare ♖c3 without allowing ...♗b4.

4...f5! 5.g3

5.♖c3 ♖f6 transposes to the main game.



5...b5!?

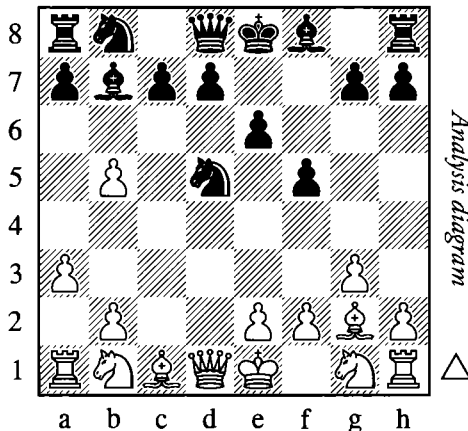
This nice undermining move leads to interesting play.

6.cxb5

6.b3 ♖f6 7.♗g2 bxc4 8.bxc4 ♖a6 9.♖h3 ♗d6 10.0-0 0-0 was roughly equal in Vallejo Pons – Krakops, Istanbul 2000. The pawn exchange on c4 has resulted in the creation of a stable outpost for the black pieces on c5.

6.♖f3 is more ambitious. 6...exd5!? (6...bxc4 7.dxe6 dxe6 [7...d5?? 8.♖e5+–] 8.♞a4† gives White some initiative) 7.cxd5 (7.cxb5 a6∞) 7...♖f6 8.♖c3 b4! Black has decent counterplay.

6...♖f6 7.♗g2 ♖xd5



This position was reached in Nikolic – Bunzmann, Germany 2001. Here the critical continuation looks to be:

8. ♖h3!?

The game continued 8. ♖b3 ♜c8 9. ♖h3 a6 10. 0–0 axb5 11. ♖xb5 ♙d6 12. ♖b3 ♘a6 13. ♖d2 0–0 with a satisfactory position for Black.

8...a6!

The tempting 8... ♖e3? turns out badly: 9. ♙xb7 ♖xd1 10. ♙xa8 ♖c6 11. bxc6 ♖xa8 12. cxd7† ♙xd7 13. 0–0 ♖d5 14. ♖d2±

9. ♖f4 axb5 10. ♖xd5 exd5 11. ♙xd5 c6 12. ♙f3 d5

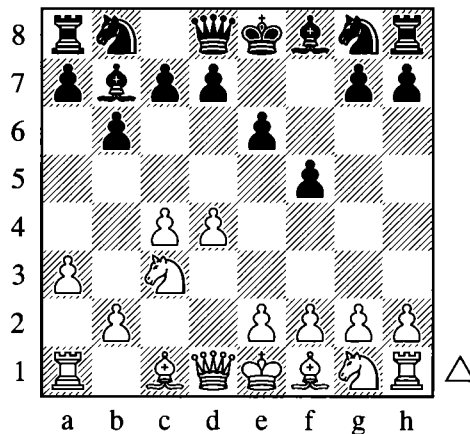
The position is roughly equal.

3...e6 4.a3

After a brief tweaking of the move order, we have now transposed back to Sher – Lempert. White's last move makes e2-e4 into a significant positional threat, as Black would not be able to develop the same kind of counterplay without the help of the pinning bishop on b4. White's setup is reminiscent of the Petrosian System against the Queen's Indian, but there are certain differences, as vividly highlighted by Black's next move.

4...f5!

Steering the game into a kind of Dutch in which the move a2-a3 is of limited usefulness.



5.d5!?

The most principled way for White to fight for an advantage. With this move he gains space in the center and attempts to shut the b7-bishop out of the game.

5...♖f6 6.g3 ♖a6!

Aiming for the c5-square, which was made available by the advance of White's enthusiastic d-pawn.

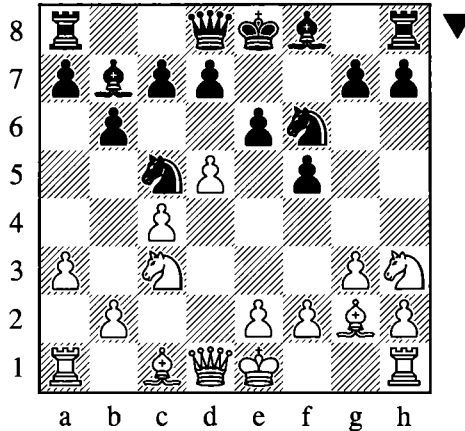
7. ♙g2

7.b4 is well met by 7...c5!.

7...♠c5

Now both knights are looking towards the e4-square. Black's next objective will be to develop his dark-squared bishop on the best available square.

8.♗h3



8...♙d6!

Intending to come to e5.

9.0–0

9.♙e3 brought White no advantage after 9...♙e5 10.♙xc5 bxc5 11.0–0 exd5 12.cxd5 ♖b8 13.♗d3 g6= in Karpov – Morozevich, Cannes 2002.

Another game continued 9.♙f4 e5 10.♙e3 a5 11.0–0 0–0 12.♗c2 ♗g4 13.♙g5 ♗e8 14.f3 ♗f6 15.♗b5 a4 16.♗xf5 ♗xd5 and a draw was agreed in Giorgadze – Vallejo Pons, Olite 2006.

9...♙e5 10.♗c2 0–0 11.♖d1

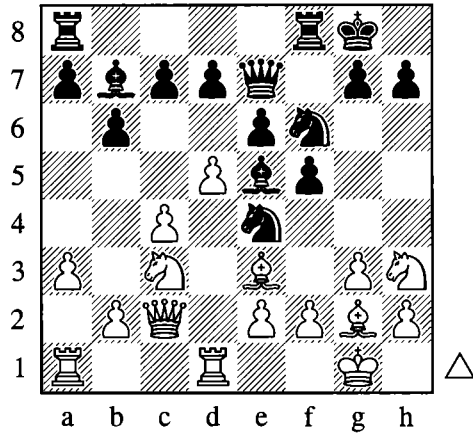
Later White tried to improve with 11.♗f4 but got nowhere: 11...♗e8!? (11...♗e7 is also reasonable) 12.♖b1 a5 13.b4 (13.dxe6 dxe6 14.♙xb7 ♗xb7=) 13...axb4 14.axb4 ♗ce4 Black was equalizing easily, and 15.♗xe4 ♗xe4 16.♙xe4 fxe4 17.♗xe4 ♙xf4 18.♙xf4 exd5 soon led to a draw in Miladinovic – Bauer, Nancy 2005.

11...♗e7 12.♙e3 ♗ce4

This simplifying move is logical, but it is not the only playable idea.

12...♖a8!? 13.♖a1 was a bit better for White in Kasparov – Morozevich, Frankfurt (rapid) 2000.

12...♖ae8!? looks risky but is just about playable: 13.♙xc5 ♗xc5! (of course not 13...bxc5? 14.d6+–) 14.♗a4 ♗a5! Black's queen is in a strange position, but White is unable to achieve anything concrete.



13. Qxe4 Qxe4 14. Bxc1

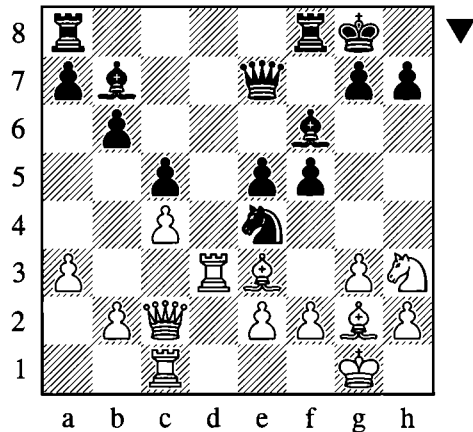
14. dxe6 dxe6 15. Qg5!? looks critical, but after 15... Qxg5 16. Qxb7 Bxb8 17. Qg2 f4! 18. Qd2 Bxf6! Black has promising counterplay.

14. Qf4 has also been played, and after 14... c5 15. dxc6 Qxc6 16. Bxc1 Bxc8 the position was balanced in J. Jensen – Da Rocha, corr. 2002.

14...c5!

This space-gaining move secures an equal game.

15. dxe6 dxe6 16. Qf4 Qf6 17. Bxd3 e5 18. Qe3



18...g5!?

Targeting White's misplaced kingside pieces, especially the knight on h3.

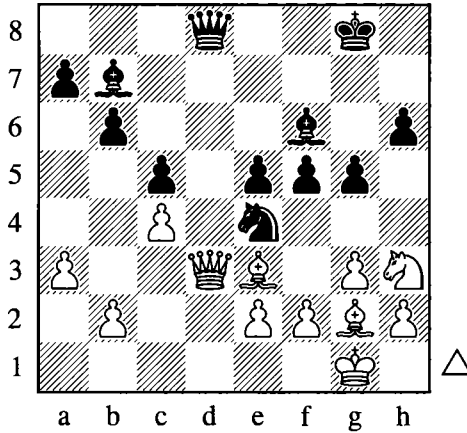
19. Bcd1 Bxd8 20. Bxd8

Another possible continuation is 20. f3 f4 21. fxe4 fxe3 22. Bxe3 Bxd1+ 23. Bxd1 Bxf7 24. Bc3 g4 25. Qf2 h5 with good compensation for Black.

20...♞xd8 21.♞xd8† ♞xd8 22.♞d3

22.g4 ♞a8! 23.f3 f4 24.♙c1 ♜d6 is pleasant for Black.

22...h6



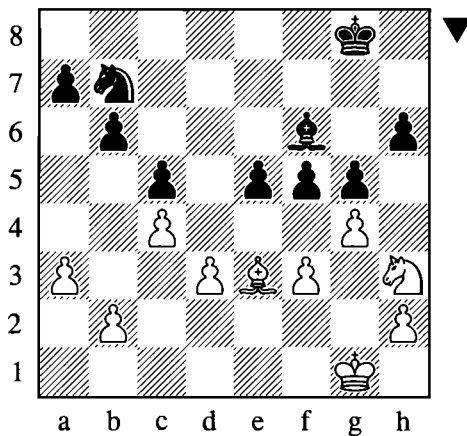
23.g4?

White's position is not strong enough to support this ambitious thrust. The right continuation was 23.♞f1 to centralize the king and provide a retreat square for the knight. In this case White would only have been a bit worse.

22...♞xd3 24.exd3 ♜d6 25.♙xb7 ♜xb7

And now the reality sinks in: White is unable to take on f5 as he would lose his knight.

26.f3



26...e4!

Black takes full advantage of his opportunity, and now White has no way to keep his position together.

27.gxf5

Neither 27.fxe4 fxe4 nor 27.♟f2 exd3 28.♟xd3 ♟a5 gave White much hope of salvation either.

27...exd3 28.♟f2 ♟xb2 29.♟xd3 ♟xa3

Black's material advantage ensures an easy endgame win.

**30.h4 ♟d6 31.hxg5 ♟xc4 32.♟f4 hxg5 33.♟xg5 ♟d6 34.f6 c4 35.♟e5 c3 36.♟f2 ♟f7
37.♟c4 ♟c5† 38.♟e3 c2
0-1**

What we have learned:

- ❖ The early d4-d5 is an effective way of shutting the b7-bishop out of the game, but Black can use both the c5- and e5-squares for his other pieces.
- ❖ The pawn on f5 is useful for controlling the e4-square. Later in the game Black was able to bring up his e- and g-pawns to gain additional space.
- ❖ A timely ...c5 can be used to secure space in the center and on the queenside.
- ❖ Developing the knight to h3 is certainly not a bad idea, although later in the game the knight became a real problem for White.

Conclusion

The English has a solid reputation, but the English Defense with 1...b6 is a promising counterattacking system which gives Black good chances to obtain dynamic counterplay. This is especially true in the main gambit variation occurring after 2.d4 ♟b7 3.♟c3 e6 4.e4 ♟b4 5.f3 f5! 6.exf5 ♟h6! where we have seen that White has tricky problems to solve. White has tried various attempts to keep the game more solid, but in the final game and accompanying notes we saw that even when no gambits are involved, Black still has plenty of ways to obtain an interesting fight.

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4.b3? 79

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4...a6 5.bxa6

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8.♗e2 13

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7...a6 8.a4 176 (8.♗bd2 183)

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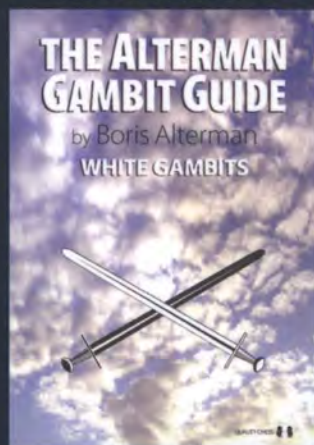
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