Grandmaster Repertoire

Emanuel Berg

The French Defence

VOLUME ONE



Tired of bad positions? Try the main lines!

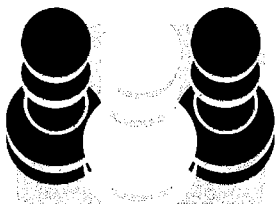
QUALITY CHESS

Grandmaster Repertoire 14

The French Defence 1

By

Emanuel Berg



Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

First edition 2013 by Quality Chess UK Ltd

Copyright © 2013 Emanuel Berg

Grandmaster Repertoire 14 – The French Defence 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-907982-40-8
Hardcover ISBN 978-1-907982-41-5

All sales or enquiries should be directed to Quality Chess UK Ltd,
Suite 247-248, Central Chambers, 11 Bothwell Street G2 2LY, UK
Phone +44 141 204 2073
email: info@qualitychess.co.uk
website: www.qualitychess.co.uk

Distributed in North America by Globe Pequot Press,
P.O. Box 480, 246 Goose Lane, Guilford, CT 06437-0480, US
www.globepequot.com

Distributed in Rest of the World by Quality Chess UK Ltd through
Sunrise Handicrafts, ul. Skromna 3, 20-704 Lublin, Poland

Typeset by Jacob Aagaard
Proofreading by John Shaw
Edited by Andrew Greet
Cover design by Barry Adamson; Cover photo by capture365.com
Printed in Estonia by Tallinna Raamatutriikikoja LLC

Preface

The idea of writing a chess book has been on my radar for many years. When I was first approached about a French repertoire project in 2008 I was keen on the idea, but a hectic tournament schedule meant having to put the plan on hold. When the question arose again in 2011, the timing was more favourable and I decided to go for it. Writing this book has been a lot of fun and even more hard work. In this short introduction I will tell you a bit about my background in chess and specifically with the French Defence.

I grew up in the countryside near the village of Kil in Sweden, and learned to play chess at kindergarten at the age of five. The leader of the chess group quickly saw that I had talent for the game and I soon started taking part in school events and local tournaments. As a youngster I was taught to play a number of gambits, which were objectively unsound but nevertheless brought me a lot of success. This 'education' also helped me to develop a tactical eye which remains one of my greatest strengths at the chessboard. However, as my opponents got stronger it became necessary to change my way of conducting the openings.

My adventures with the French started in 1990 at the age of eight, and since then I have been playing it almost exclusively against 1.e4. After more than two decades, hundreds of competitive games and countless hours analysing this opening, I have developed a deep understanding of the resulting positions. I would also like to mention my former coach, GM Stellan Brynell, who has had a profound influence on my French adventures.

Generally the French can be characterized as a solid opening, but it can be handled in many different ways. In many lines Black has the ability to choose between remaining solid or playing actively and dynamically. As an ambitious player, I tend to go for the latter type of positions with chances to play for a full point.

When working on this *Grandmaster Repertoire* series, my goal has been to share my own interpretation of the French Defence with the readers, not only in terms of moves and recommendations, but also of positional themes and plans. Personally, when reading a chess book I appreciate explanations much more than only long lines with an assessment at the end. While I cannot deny that my analysis is detailed in places, I have endeavoured to give enough explanatory prose to enable the reader to understand what is happening.

The present volume covers all notable lines after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4, with the exception of the main *7.*♕g4 variation. The latter is such an important topic that the Quality Chess team and I decided to afford it special coverage in Volume 2 of the series. The third and final volume will cover the Tarrasch, Advance and all other alternatives to 3.♘c3. For now though, the material presented in this book will offer a sound yet ambitious repertoire against all of White's other tries against the Winawer. I hope you will enjoy the book and I wish you every success.

Emanuel Berg
Arvika, September 2013

Contents

Preface		3
Key to Symbols used & Bibliography		6
	4th Move Options	
1	4.♗d2 and 4.♕d3	7
2	4.♕g4	21
3	4.♗d3	35
4	4.a3	49
	4.♘e2	
5	Introduction	69
6	6.e5	85
7	6.♗e3	99
	4.exd5	
8	Introduction and 8.♕f3	111
9	Main Line with 8.♕h5	123
	5th Move Options	
10	5.♘f3 and 5.dxc5	139
	5.♕g4	
11	Introduction	145
12	6.dxc5 – without 8.0–0–0 and 8.♘f3	159
13	Main Lines with 8.0–0–0 and 8.♘f3	173

5.♗d2

14 Introduction 185
15 6.♗xh6!? 197
16 6.♘b5 209

7th Move Options

17 7.♗d3 and 7.h4 221
18 7.♘f3 235

7.a4

19 Introduction 251
20 9.♕d2 261
21 9.♗d2 ♗d7 – Move 10 Alternatives 281
22 10.♗b5 291
23 10.♗e2 301

Variation Index 317

Key to symbols used

⩲	White is slightly better	?	a weak move
⩱	Black is slightly better	??	a blunder
±	White is better	!	a good move
∓	Black is better	!!	an excellent move
+–	White has a decisive advantage	!?	a move worth considering
–+	Black has a decisive advantage	?!	a move of doubtful value
=	equality	#	mate
⯹	with compensation	□	only move
⇄	with counterplay	N	novelty
∞	unclear		
→	with an attack		
↑	with an initiative		

Bibliography

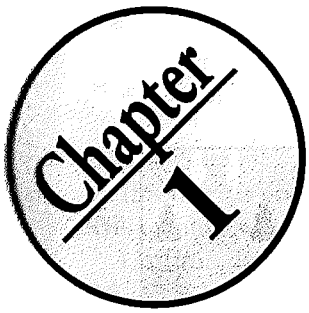
Moskalenko: *The Wonderful Winawer*, New in Chess 2010
Psakhis: *French Defence 3 Nc3 Bb4*, Batsford 2004
Vitiugov: *The French Defence Reloaded*, Chess Stars 2012
Watson: *Dangerous Weapons: The French*, Everyman Chess 2007
Watson: *Play the French 3rd Edition*, Everyman Chess 2003
Watson: *Play the French 4th Edition*, Everyman Chess 2012
Williams: *Attacking Chess: The French*, Everyman Chess 2011

Periodicals
Secrets of Opening Surprises
The Week in Chess

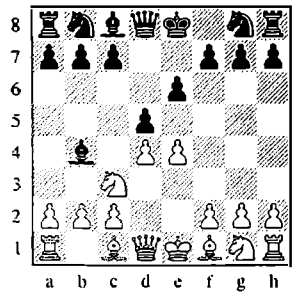
Electronic/Internet resources
Bojkov: Unorthodox against the French Winawer, ChessBase DVD
ChessBase Magazine
ChessPublishing.com

This bibliography simply lists the most significant sources. In view of the sheer number of books, periodicals, DVDs and websites covering the theory of the French Defence, the above list does not include every source we considered.

Some of the above sources belong to my personal collection, while others were checked by my editor using the Quality Chess library. In the text I have referenced other authors where I felt it was relevant to do so, while applying some common sense to avoid becoming obsessive.



4th Move Options



4.♗d2 and 4.♕d3

Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3

3...♗b4

A) 4.♗d2 dxe4 5.♕g4 ♘f6 6.♕xg7 ♖g8 7.♕h6 ♘c6 **8**

A1) 8.♘ge2 **8**

A2) 8.0–0–0 **10**

B) 4.♕d3 ♘e7 **12**

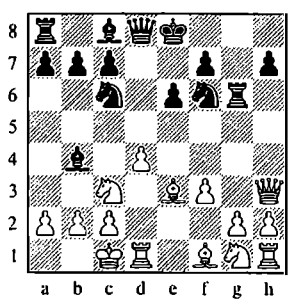
B1) 5.♕g3 **13**

B2) 5.♘f3 **14**

B3) 5.♘e2 **15**

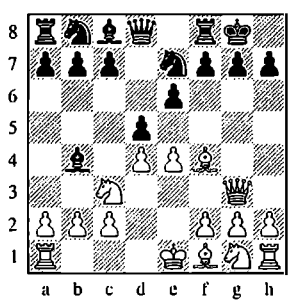
B4) 5.♗d2 **16**

A2) after 12.♗xe3



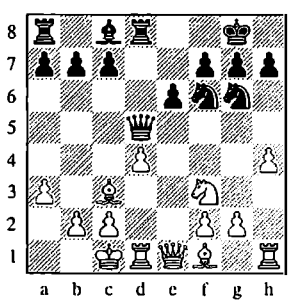
12...e5!N

B1) after 6.♗f4



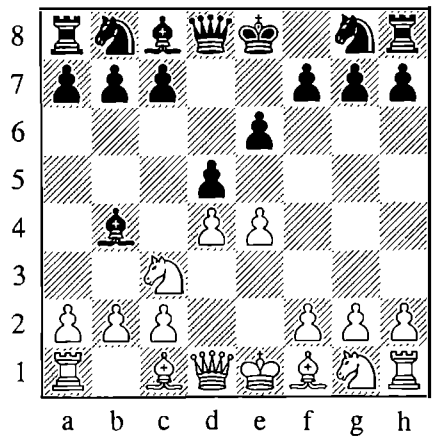
6...♘bc6!N

B4) after 13.♘f3



13...♗d7!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4



Our investigation begins with two sidelines, **A) 4.♗d2** and **B) 4.♕d3**.

A) 4.♗d2

This is a rare line, but it could be a tricky one for an unprepared player. White intends to sacrifice a pawn in return for active piece play.

4...dxe4

This is the most principled reply which somewhat forces the play. 4...♘e7 and 4...♘h6!? are decent alternatives.

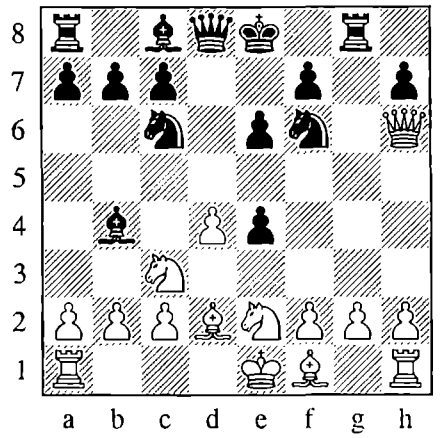
5.♕g4

White's play is based wholly upon this idea. Other moves would just lose a pawn without compensation.

5...♘f6 6.♕xg7 ♖g8 7.♕h6 ♘c6

Here **A1) 8.♘ge2** is one option that needs to be investigated, but White has mainly played **A2) 8.0–0–0**.

A1) 8.♘ge2



8...♘xd4

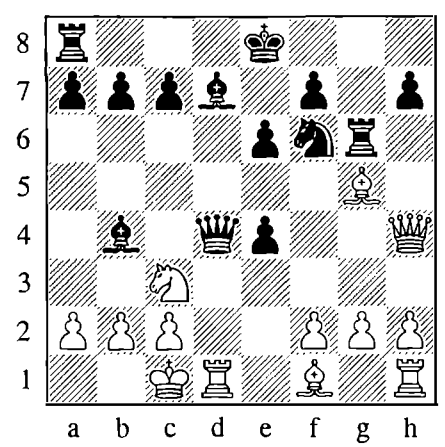
Simply grabbing the pawn is the most critical and best continuation.

9.♘xd4 ♕xd4 10.0–0–0 ♖g6 11.♕h4 ♗d7

Black threatens to consolidate with a healthy extra pawn and White need to play accurately to keep the balance.

12.♗g5!N

12.♗e3?! is not an ideal solution for White: 12...♕e5 13.♗d4 ♕f5 14.♗xf6 ♖xf6 15.♕xe4 (15.♘xe4N ♕f4† is a similar story.) 15...♕xe4 16.♘xe4 ♖g6 Budimir – Simonyi, Senta 2007. The exchange of queens has removed all hope of counterplay for White, so Black can rely on a small advantage thanks to the bishop pair and his generally more active pieces.

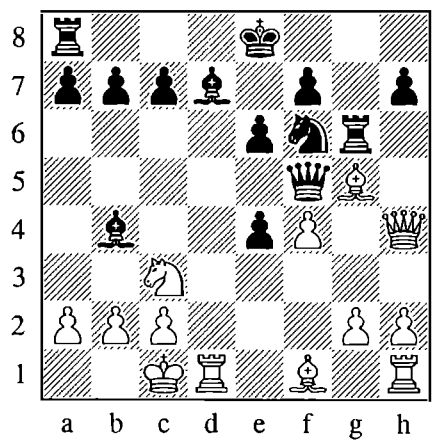


12...♕e5 13.f4!

This move is obligatory if White is to avoid falling into a worse position.

13.♗xf6? does not work here in view of 13...♖xf6 14.♕xe4 (14.♘xe4?? drops a piece to 14...♖f4) 14...♗xc3 15.♕xb7 ♗xb2† 16.♕xb2 ♕xb2† 17.♔xb2 ♖xf2∓ when Black has a clear extra pawn as well as the more active pieces.

13...♕f5

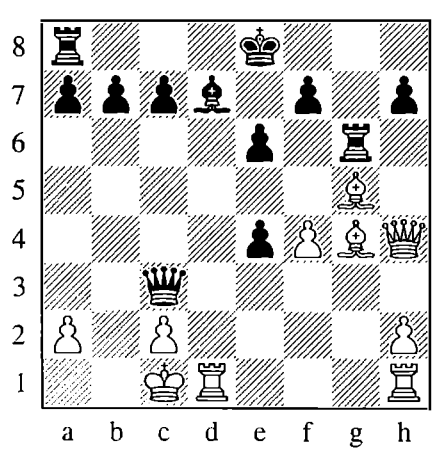


14.g4!

Once again White needs to keep playing energetically, since other moves would give Black enough time to consolidate.

14...♘xg4 15.♗h3 ♗xc3 16.♗xg4 ♕c5 17.bxc3 ♕xc3

A sharp position has arisen, but computer analysis shows it will lead to a forced draw.



18.♖xd7!?

This is the most interesting route, although from a practical perspective it is White who will have to find the more difficult moves to secure the half point from here.

18.♕e1 is simpler, when 18...♕a1† 19.♔d2 ♕d4† forces a simple perpetual, since 20.♔e2?? would be suicidal due to 20...♗b5†.

18...♔xd7 19.♖d1†

19.♕xh7?! ♕a1† 20.♔d2 ♕d4† followed by ...♖g7 only gives Black additional chances.

19...♔c6!

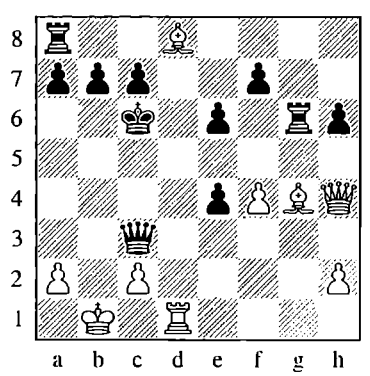
The c6-square makes for a safer home than e8 in this position.

20.♕xh7□

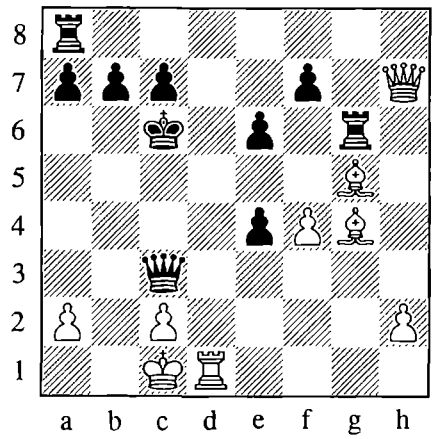
20.♕e1?? ♕xe1 21.♖xe1 h6 22.♗h5 hxg5 23.♗xg6 fxg6 24.♖xe4 gxf4 reaches a won rook ending for Black.

20.♕h3? keeps White in the game, but after 20...♕xh3 21.♗xh3 f6 22.♗g2 f5 Black's advantage is obvious with a rook plus three pawns for the pair of bishops.

20.♔b1? h6! also fails to impress for White: 21.♗d8 (21.♗e7?! loses to 21...♖ag8 22.h3 f5 23.♗e2 ♖g1 24.♕xh6 ♖8g6 when the pressure along the first rank will be more than White can bear.)



21...♖xd8! 22.♖xd8 ♕f6! Black will have excellent winning chances in the endgame with four extra pawns against White's bishop.

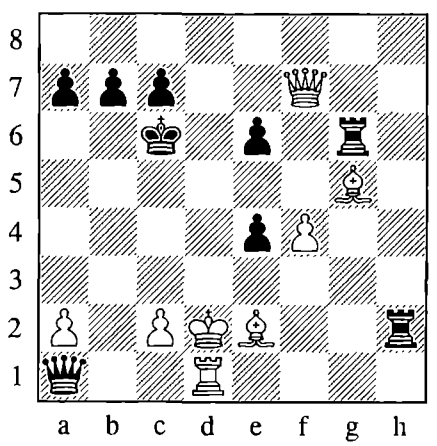


20...♖h8 21.♕xf7 ♕a1† 22.♔d2 ♖xh2†

Black can force an immediate perpetual with 22...♕d4†= should he wish it.

23.♗e2

23.♔e3 looks risky, but holds the balance after 23...♕c3† 24.♔xe4 ♕xc2† 25.♖d3 ♕c4† 26.♔e3 ♕c1† with a perpetual.

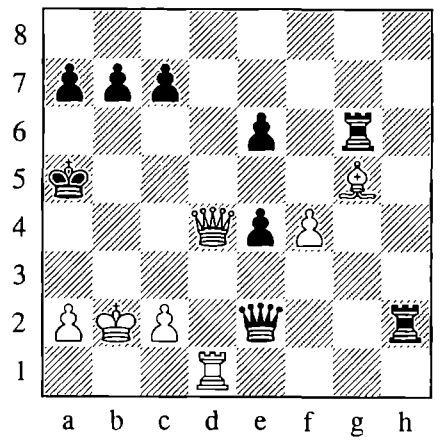


23...♕d4† 24.♔c1 ♕e3† 25.♔b2

25.♔b1? ♕xe2∓

25...♕xe2 26.♕d7† ♔b6 27.♕d4† ♔a5

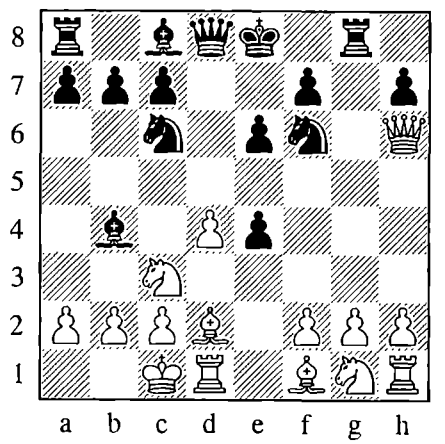
27...♔a6 28.♕a4†= is another draw.



28.♔a3□ ♕xc2 29.♕xa7† ♔b5 30.♕xb7† ♔a5 31.♕a7†=

The longest line has come to an end, and once again the outcome is perpetual check.

A2) 8.0–0–0



8...♖g6 9.♕h4 ♖g4

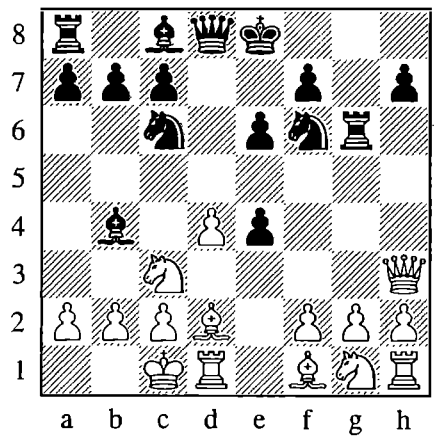
This is the simplest method for Black, although it does allow a repetition of moves. Naturally there are other playable options which will, in turn, open additional doors for White.

10.♕h3

10.♕h6 ♖g6= could be an instant draw.

10...♖g6

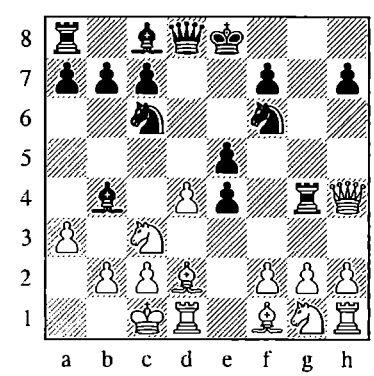
This introduces the threat of ...e5 which White cannot ignore. Now 11.♕h4 with a possible draw actually seems to be the best continuation, so from a theoretical perspective White has clearly failed to impress with his opening.



11.f3

If White wants to continue the battle then this is the most logical way to do it. It leads to a sharp game but it seems to me that White is risking more than Black.

11.a3? meets with a strong counter: 11...e5 12.♕h4 ♖g4! A clever intermediate move, forcing the white queen to an unfavourable square.



13.♕h3 (13.♕h6?? ♗f8 14.♕h3 exd4 is simply winning for Black.) 13...♗xc3 14.♗xc3 ♘xd4 15.f3 ♖g6 16.♕h4 ♕d5↑ Black has clearly won the opening battle – he has active pieces, strong central control and dangerous attacking chances against White's king with ideas such as ...♕a2 constantly lurking. The knight on d4 can be firmly protected by ...c5 if necessary.

11...e3!

I have chosen this as my main line, but it is not the only decent move.

The reader may also choose to investigate:

11...♗xc3!?N 12.♗xc3

12.bxc3 ♕d5∓ highlights the vulnerability of the white king.

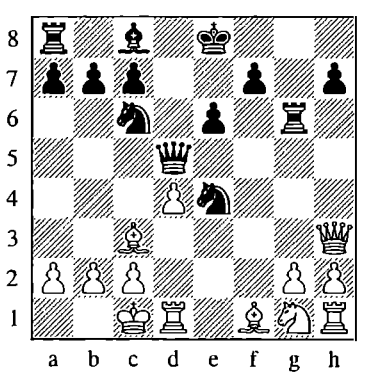
12...♕d5 13.fxe4

13.b3 is well met by 13...a5! launching an attack.

13.♔b1? is bad in view of 13...e5 14.♕h4 ♗f5! with strong pressure on White's position. Note that Black is now ready to complete development by castling.

13...♘xe4

Now White's options are limited by the need to deal with concrete threats.



14.♗d3

14.♕e3 ♘xc3 15.♕xc3 ♕xa2 is at least equal for Black.

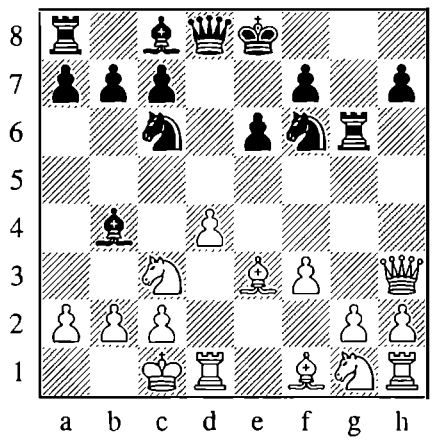
14...♘f2 15.♕xh7 ♖xg2 16.♖f1 ♕xa2

I analysed this position a good deal further, and found the overall assessment to be unclear/equal. Since this is not my main

recommendation I will cut the analysis off here and invite interested readers to conduct their own investigation.

12.♗xe3

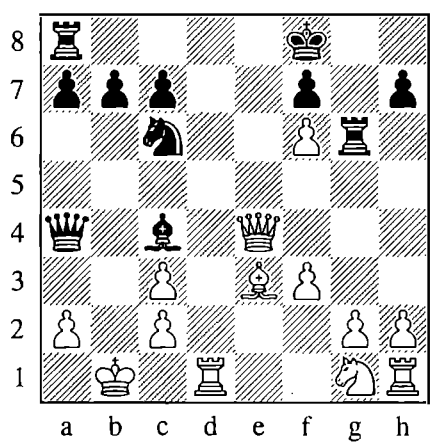
Here I was able to improve on the lone example in the database, Baatz – Schmitt, Berlin 2005.



12...e5!N 13.♕h4 ♗xc3 14.bxc3 ♕d6! 15.dxe5

15.♔b2 ♗e6 gives Black an active game and attacking chances against White's king, all of which adds up to full compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

15...♕a3† 16.♔b1 ♗e6 17.♗c4 ♕a4 18.exf6 ♗xc4 19.♕e4† ♔f8



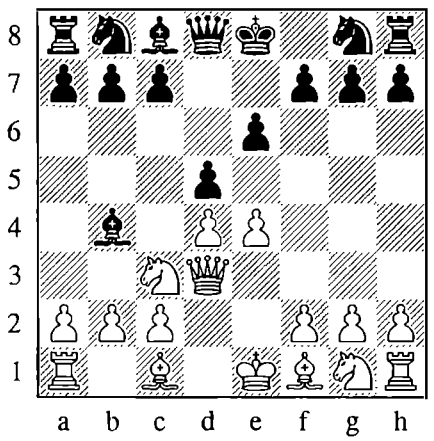
20.a3 ♕b5† 21.♔c1

21.♔a1 ♖e8 22.♕f4 ♕a5 gives Black a strong initiative and excellent attacking chances.

21...b6

Intending ...♖e8 with a dangerous attack.

B) 4.♕d3



This move is rarely seen at the top level, although it crops up now and then. At first this move looks pretty weird, moving the queen early and blocking the diagonal of the light-squared bishop. White's main ideas are to arrange queenside castling with ♗d2 and 0–0–0, and to transfer the queen to the kingside, either to g3 or – in the event that Black exchanges on e4 and plays ...♘f6 – to the h4-square. These manoeuvres could lead to genuine attacking chances, so it is important for Black to react precisely.

4...♘e7

4...dxe4 is more common, but I find the knight development to be more flexible and dynamic. By maintaining the tension in the centre, Black also hampers his opponent's intended queen manoeuvres. I might add that the text move scores excellently for Black and has been tested by such well-known French players as Short and Shulman.

We will analyse **B1) 5.♕g3**, **B2) 5.♘f3**, **B3) 5.♘e2** and **B4) 5.♗d2**, after first checking a few minor replies.

5.♗g5

Black should be able to get at least equal chances against this rare move.

5...0–0 6.♘f3

Here I would like to recommend the novelty:

6...b6!?N

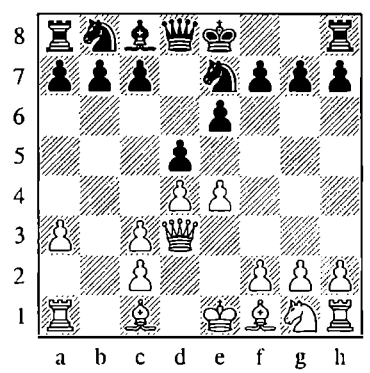
6...♗xc3† 7.bxc3 f6 8.♗d2 b6 also gave Black good prospects in Smirin – Vaganian, Nabereznye Chelny 1988. In both cases the plan of ...b6 and ...♗a6 works well; take note of this manoeuvre, as we will see many more instances of it in the remainder of the chapter.

5.a3

This move forces Black to give up his Winawer bishop, but it costs White a tempo and leads to a damaging of his queenside structure. As long as Black avoids opening the centre in a way that would allow the enemy bishops to become strong, his prospects will be at least equal.

5...♗xc3† 6.bxc3

White would like to play ♕g3 next, in order to reorganize his pieces and get an initiative on the kingside.

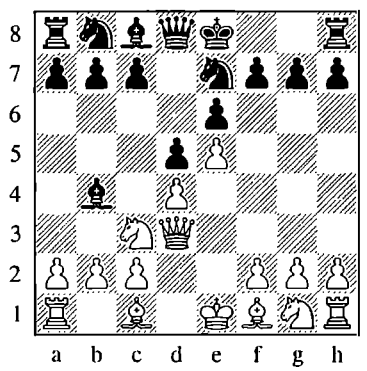


6...0–0!

This natural developing move protects the g7-pawn, thus preventing ♕g3. On the next move, the thematic plan of ...b6 followed by ...♗a6 can be executed almost irrespective of what White does. Once the light-squared bishops have been exchanged, Black can start thinking about manoeuvring a knight on the c4 outpost. I found a few games on the database but I actually don't think we need to look any further, as it is obvious that White's opening has not been a success.

5.e5

Compared with the main line with 4.e5, this looks like a clearly improved version for Black. The only advantage I can see for White is the ability to recapture with the queen on c3, but this can hardly justify the investment of a tempo.



5...b6!

Once again this thematic move works well. I found one example of this position on my database, which continued:

6.a3 ♗a6 7.♕h3 ♗xc3† 8.♕xc3 ♗xf1 9.♔xf1 ♘d7

Black has a comfortable position and a slight advantage, Muench – Behling, Germany 1999.

B1) 5.♕g3

This move appears in just three games on my database. White tries to create some direct threats, but they can be easily parried or – as we will see on the next turn – ignored altogether.

5...0–0

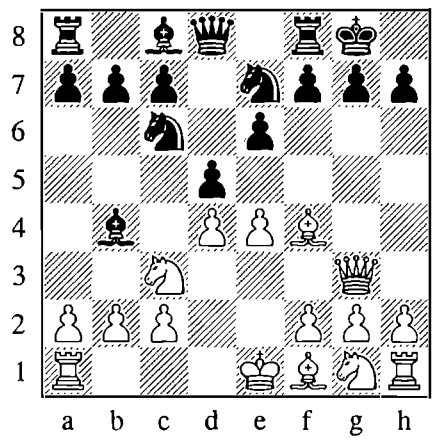
Black plays another useful developing move while waiting to see how White intends to justify his early queen excursion. Threatening mate with ♗h6 can always be met with ...♘g6, so his next move looks like the most logical try.

6.♗f4

Here I found an improvement for Black.

6...♘bc6!N

In Lickleder – Heilinger, Austria 2007, Black preferred ...dxe4 which is also not bad, but the text move is stronger.



7.0–0–0

7.♗xc7 ♕d7 only brings White more trouble. White has no chance of keeping his extra pawn and after 8.♗f4 dxe4∓ followed by ...♘f5 Black has a great position.

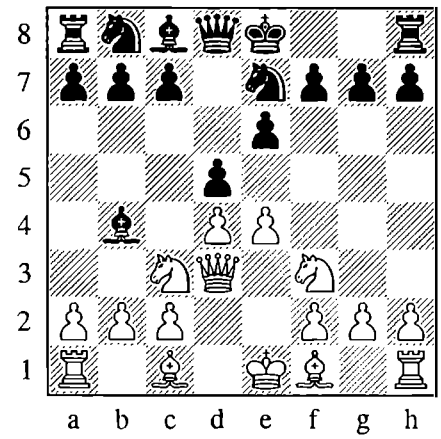
7...♗xc3 8.♕xc3

8.bxc3 dxe4 gives White a seriously weakened king position. At the same time Black should not underestimate his opponent's play, so after 9.f3 I would recommend 9...e3! as a strong reply which keeps the kingside closed.

8...dxe4∓

Black is slightly better thanks to his extra pawn.

B2) 5.♘f3



White develops naturally, but I don't think it combines well with his previous move. Now the queen's path to g3 is blocked, and Black can exploit this with a familiar device.

5...b6!

Preparing to exchange the bad "French bishop" while conveniently gaining time against the queen. There is not much White can do about it.

6.♗d2

This was played in both of the games I found in my database.

6.♕b5†N ♘bc6 is no problem whatsoever. (It makes sense to use this knight in order to speed up Black's development, although ...♘ec6!? is an interesting alternative which maintains the prospect of ...♗a6.) 7.♘e5 ♗b7 White cannot put any further pressure on Black's position. The second player will quickly castle and take over the initiative.

6.♕e3N makes ...♗a6 less attractive, but one has to question the value of those mystic queen moves from White. After 6...0–0 Black should be happy with the outcome of the opening. Soon he can open the centre with ...c5 while

the exchange of light-squared bishops remains an option.

6...♗a6 7.♕e3 ♗xf1

White has tried both recaptures, but in either case Black can look forward to a pleasant middlegame.

8.♔xf1

8.♖xf1

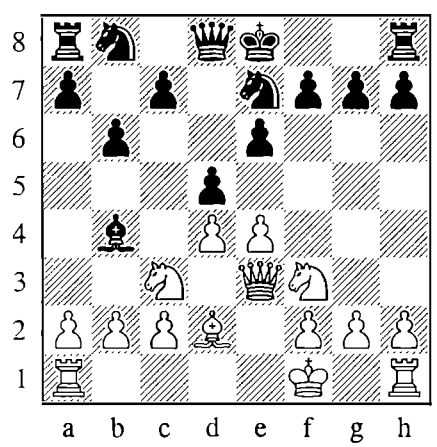
Here I found a small finesse for Black.

8...♘bc6!N

In the game Andreikin – Shtyrenkov, Alushta 2004, Black opted for castling, but the text move contains some poison as White must start thinking about the troublesome knight manoeuvre to c4 via a5.

9.a3 ♝xc3 10.♗xc3 dxe4 11.♕xe4 ♕d5

Black has a solid grip on the light squares and is at least equal.



8...0–0N

Black exchanged on c3 in Praznik – Praxmarer, St Veit 2008, but I see no reason to hurry with this exchange, and White may even spend a tempo on a2-a3 to provoke it if we are lucky.

9.g3

After 9.a3 ♗xc3 10.♗xc3 ♘d7 Black has a solid position while the odd placement of White's king may cause some problems for the first player.

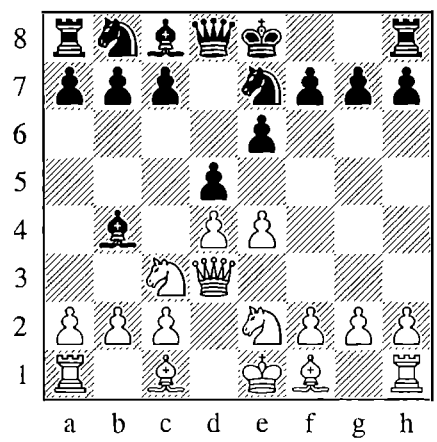
9...c5

Black opens up the centre and is no longer forced to trade his bishop for the knight on c3.

10.♔g2 ♘bc6

Black has a comfortable game with at least equal chances.

B3) 5.♘e2



This can of course be compared with Chapter 5. Here too, White's main idea is to play a2-a3 and recapture on c3 with his knight.

5...0–0

Black can also consider 5...♘bc6 6.a3 ♗a5, which can be compared to the lines in Chapter 5, though it does not directly transpose.

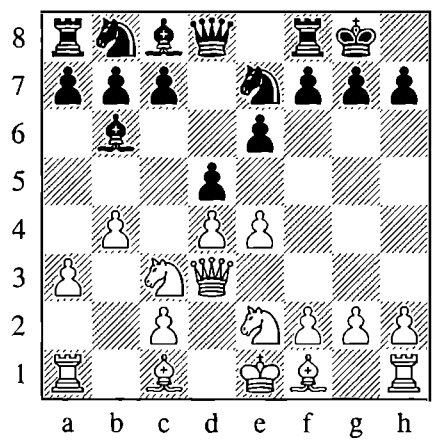
6.a3 ♗a5!

I prefer to keep the bishop, since ...♝xc3 would play into White's hands after 7.♘xc3. The database shows that Black has scored just half a point from seven games after the text move, which is almost unbelievable, as his position is objectively fine.

7.b4

7.♗d2 should be met by 7...♘bc6 when White must watch out for ideas of ...e5 opening the centre. Essentially Black should be fine as long as he demonstrates a bit of creativity when needed; for instance, if White opts for long castling then the pawn sacrifice ...b5 should always come into consideration. The position can be compared with variation C of Chapter 7, and if you familiarize yourself with the analysis beginning on page 103 you should have all the tools needed to handle the present position.

7...♗b6



8.g3

White has to develop his kingside pieces somehow, and 8.♘g3? dxe4 just won a pawn for Black in Oppici – Schanin, corr. 1990.

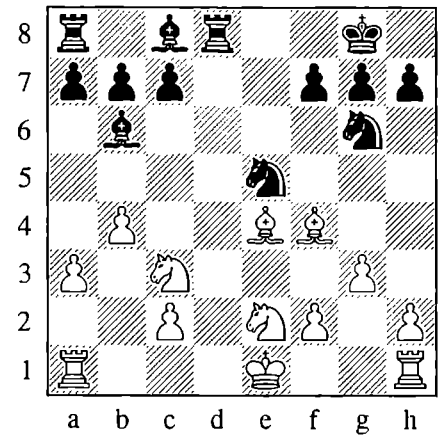
8...e5!

This central break is a typical counter to the rather slow g2-g3. White has weakened his light squares and is still two moves away from castling, so he should not be given time to consolidate.

9.dxe5 ♘bc6 10.♗f4 dxe4

This is a simple route to a slight advantage for Black, but the sharp 10...d4!?N followed by ...♘g6 would also have given him the better chances.

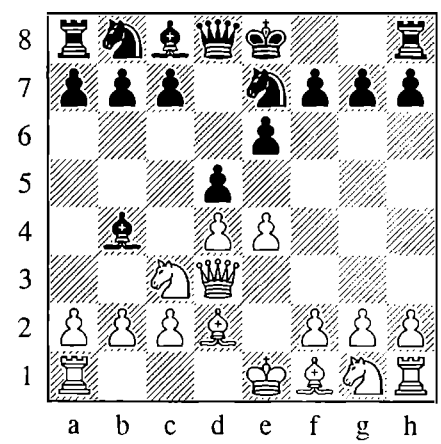
11.♕xd8 ♖xd8 12.♗g2 ♘g6 13.♗xe4 ♘cxe5



14.♘d5 ♗g4 15.♘xb6 axb6 16.♗xe5 ♘xe5∓

Black had an obvious edge in Hector – Lyrberg, Sweden 1999.

B4) 5.♗d2



This has been by far White's most common choice. Black has usually responded by castling, and there is certainly nothing wrong with that approach. However, I would instead like to focus on a rare but interesting move which I successfully employed against Jonny Hector in 2007.

5...♘d7!?

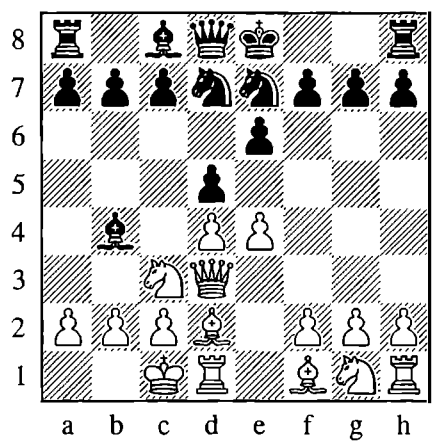
This has only occurred in three games out of more than seventy, so it should carry some surprise value. The knight development is highly flexible; in some positions this piece may go to f6, while in others it can be used to support either of the pawn breaks ...c5 or ...e5.

6.0–0–0

White will almost certainly play this in the next move or two, for instance:

6.♘ge2 0–0 7.0–0–0 transposes to 7.♘ge2 below, and was the move order seen in the quoted game reference.

6.a3 occurred in Sevillano – Rubsamen, Las Vegas 2008, and now 6...♗xc3N 7.♗xc3 0–0 8.0–0–0 transposes to the main line.

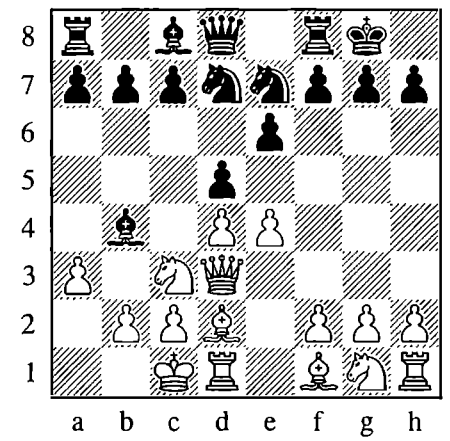


6...0–0 7.a3

I considered two knight developments as well.

7.♘f3 was played in Petschar – Herzog, Austria 1997. Here I like 7...a5!?N intending to follow up with either ...c5 or ...b6 followed by ...♗a6.

7.♘ge2N immediately transposes to the game Kupper – Dgebuadze, Leon 1996. One logical reply for Black is: 7...dxe4N (7...a5!?N can also be considered, by analogy with the above note.) 8.♘xe4 ♗xd2† 9.♖xd2 ♖b8⇄ Intending ...b5 and ...♗b7.

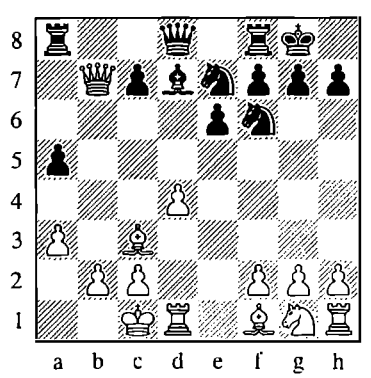


7...♗xc3 8.♗xc3 dxe4 9.♕xe4 ♘f6 10.♕e5!?

This was Hector's choice, which I had not anticipated before the game. White's idea is to lure the enemy knight to g6 and later play h4-h5 with tempo. In my preparation I had only considered the following two moves:

10.♕d3N can be met by the useful and multifunctional 10...a5!. Black may well continue with the pawn sacrifice ...b5 next, but can also settle for a more positional game with ...b6 followed by ...♗a6 to play for the light squares.

10.♕f3N meets with the pawn sacrifice 10...♗d7! 11.♕xb7 a5 when Black obtains the initiative and attacking prospects on the queenside.



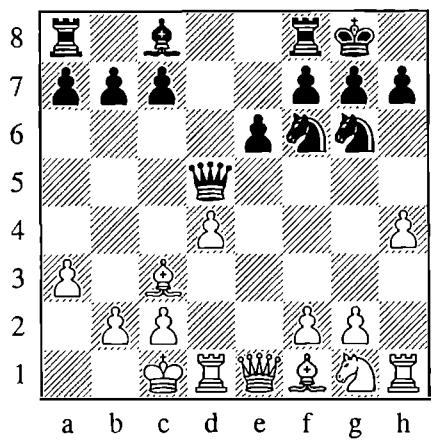
A possible continuation is 12.♕f3 ♗c6 when White remains far behind in development. Black has the initiative and excellent attacking prospects, while his pawn minus does not feel relevant at all.

10...♘g6 11.♕e1 ♕d5!

From her central vantage point the queen keeps an eye in all directions. White should already watch out for ...♕a2 ideas.

12.h4!?

This does not threaten anything immediately, but it does force Black's queen and knight to keep in contact with the h5-square. Moreover White has the idea to play ♗e2 next, when taking on g2 will allow ♗f3 trapping the queen.

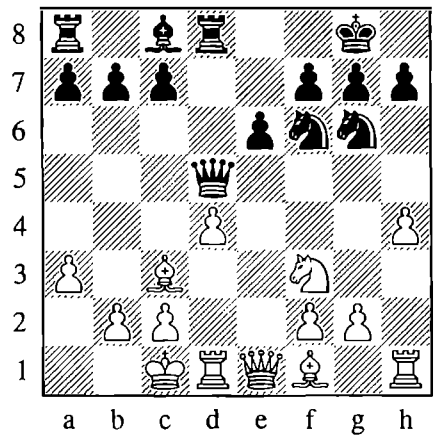


12...♖d8!

Another clever move, putting pressure on the d-file and thus making ...♕a2 a more significant prospect.

13.♘f3

13.♗e2? is well met by: 13...♕a2! 14.♗f3 (After 14.h5 ♘f4∓ Black has a strong initiative and a powerful attack.) 14...h5! This is the simplest route to an advantage. White's kingside play is blocked while Black is still on the run with his own attack on the queenside.



13...♗d7!N

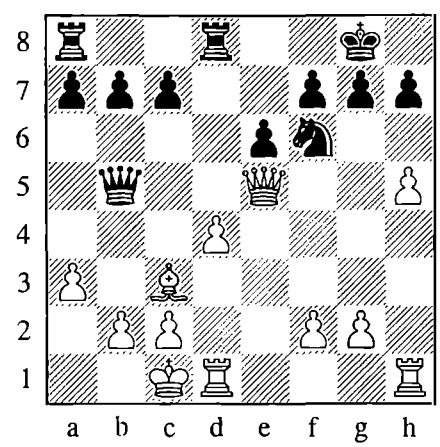
13...b6 brought me an eventual victory in Hector – Berg, Sigeman 2007, but I now consider the text move more accurate. Black simply intends to exchange bishops on b5 and play on the light squares.

14.♘e5!?

14.♔b1 ♗b5 15.♗xb5 ♕xb5 16.♘g5 ♘e7= intending ...♘f5 is fine for Black.

14...♗b5 15.♗xb5 ♕xb5 16.h5 ♘xe5 17.♕xe5

Here I found a strong idea for Black.



17...♖d5! 18.♕xc7 h6!=

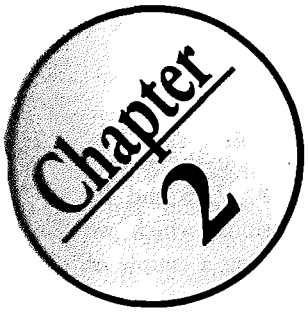
Black has full control over the light squares and White's bishop is blocked by its own pawn. Black can recapture the pawn on h5 at

any moment, but it could be more interesting to play the position a pawn down and develop an initiative on the queenside. Possible ideas include ...♘e8-d6 or ...♖d7 followed by ...♘d5.

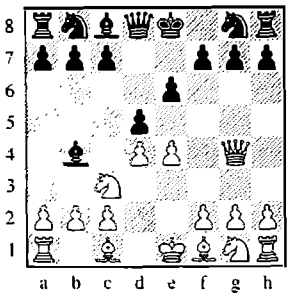
Conclusion

4.♗d2 is playable but somewhat artificial, and neither of the two main lines hold any hope for a white advantage. In variation A White had to play quite resourcefully to secure a draw, while variation B could result in a repetition as early as move 10 or 11. If White avoids it with 10.♕h3 ♖g6 11.f3, then 11...e3! gives Black a strong initiative for a mere pawn.

4.♕d3 is another unnatural way for White to conduct the opening. After the solid reply 4...♘e7, Black's plan will typically involve the standard move ...b6, which could be played before or after castling according to circumstance. I see no reason why Black's chances should be worse, and in many lines it is White who must work harder to maintain the balance.



4th Move Options



4.♕g4

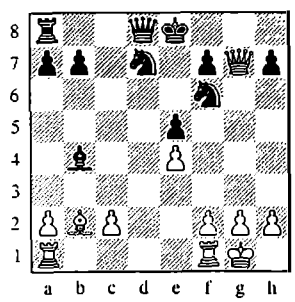
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕g4 ♘f6 5.♕xg7 ♖g8 6.♕h6

6...c5

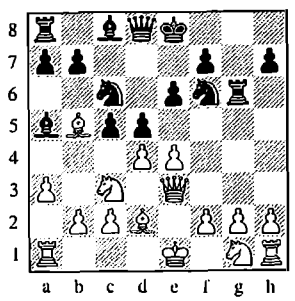
A) 7.e5 23
B) 7.a3 ♖g6! 25
B1) 8.♕h3 26
B2) 8.♕e3 27
B3) 8.♕h4!? ♕a5! 29
B31) 9.axb4?!N 30
B32) 9.♘e2 cxd4! 31
B321) 10.exd5?! 31
B322) 10.e5!N 32

Note to move 7



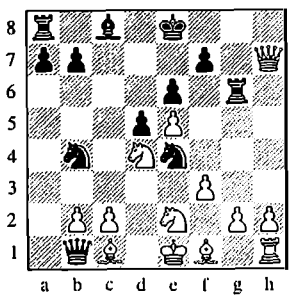
15...♕b6!N

B2) after 10.♗b5



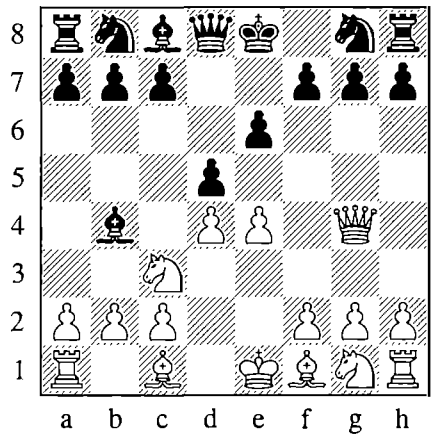
10...cxd4!N

B322) note to 13.♘c7†



15...♕xc2!!

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕g4



This is a direct attempt by White to target the unprotected pawn on g7. Unlike the 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.♕g4 main line, however, White's central pawns are vulnerable and the pin of the c3-knight may become a telling factor.

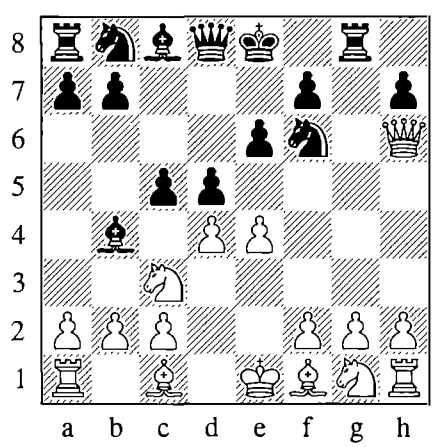
4...♘f6

Black simply gives up the pawn for active piece play; the sacrifice is only temporary.

5.♕xg7 ♖g8 6.♕h6

From here Black has several playable continuations but I have chosen to recommend the most active one.

6...c5



Putting maximum pressure on the enemy centre. From this position **A) 7.e5** and **B) 7.a3** are the two main options, which we will analyse after first dismissing a couple of inferior alternatives.

7.♗g5? ♖g6 8.♕h4 cxd4

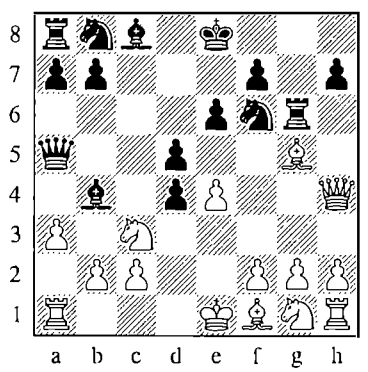
Black already has a crushing position.

9.a3

9.♗xf6?? loses on the spot: 9...dxc3 10.♗xd8 (10.cxd5 ♘c6! 11.♖d1 ♕xf6 12.♕xf6 ♖xf6 13.dxc6 cxb2† 14.♔e2 bxc6–+) 10...cxb2† 11.♔e2 bxa1=♕ 0–1 Fojtu – Vanek, Czech Republic 2008.

The text move is a better try but White is still in trouble after:

9...♕a5!



10.♗xf6N

10.♗b5†? ♗d7 10.♗xd7† ♘bxd7 was hopeless for White in Ong – Myers, email 2003.

10.♖d1N ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 ♘xe4 12.♗d2 ♘xd2 13.♖xd2 dxc3 14.♖d1 h6 leaves Black with two extra pawns plus a strong centre.

10...♗xc3† 11.♔d1 ♗xb2 12.♖b1 ♕xa3∓

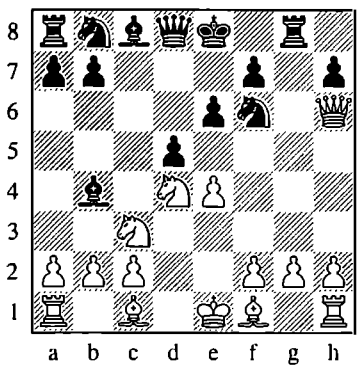
The threat of ...♕a2 will soon bring Black even more material.

Also poor for White is:

7.♘e2? cxd4 8.♘xd4?

The fact that 8.e5N was essential here tells you everything you need to know about

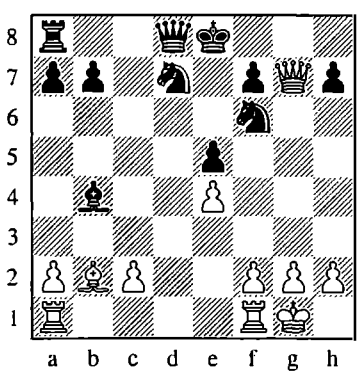
White's position. After 8...dxc3 9.bxc3 ♗f8 10.♕xf6 ♕xf6 11.exf6 ♘d7 the first player has managed to maintain the material balance, but his chances in the endgame are obviously inferior due to his pawn weaknesses.



8...e5 9.♗b5† ♗d7 10.♗xd7† ♘bxd7 11.♘f5 d4 12.♘g7†

12.a3? ♗f8 wins a piece for Black.

12...♖xg7 13.♕xg7 dxc3 14.0–0 cxb2 15.♗xb2



15...♕b6!N∓

Even stronger than 15...♕e7 as played in Bartel – Szelag, Brzeg Dolny 2001. The text move threatens ...♗f8, stops f2-f4 and sets up the possibility of ...♔e7 followed by ...♖g8.

A) 7.e5 cxd4 8.a3

8.exf6

This move has only occurred in one game according to my database.

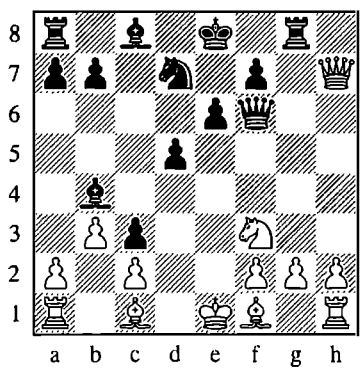
8...dxc3 9.b3 ♘d7 10.♘f3N

A better try than 10.♕xh7?! ♘xf6 11.♕d3 ♗d7 as played in Lanin – Sukhov, email 2000. Black is well developed and has a powerful centre.

10...♕xf6

10...♘xf6 gives White counterplay after 11.♗g5 with the idea of ♗b5†.

11.♕xh7



11...♕h8!

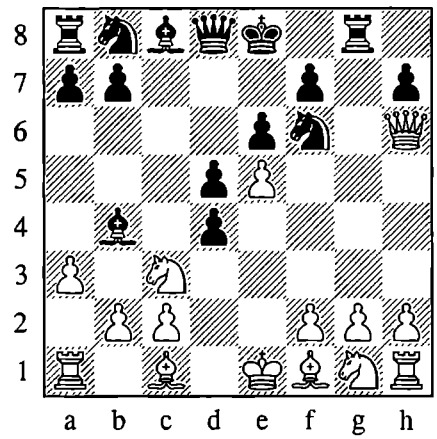
Forcing an exchange or retreat of the white queen. In either case, Black has good chances to wrest the initiative.

12.♕xh8

After 12.♕d3 there is an open battle where I'm sure Black is not worse. One interesting continuation is 12...a5!? with the idea of ...b6 and ...♗a6 later. Black's strong centre is an important asset, although he should be a little careful about pushing his e-pawn forward, at least until suitable arrangements have been made to keep the king safe.

12...♖xh8 13.h4 e5⇄

Having cleared the queens from the board, Black is now ready to mobilize his powerful central pawns, which are worth at least as much as White's passed h-pawn. Once ...f6 has been played Black can put his king on f7 and perhaps later e6.



8...♗f8!

This move forces an exchange of queens which gives Black somewhat better chances.

The tempting 8...♕a5? is a mistake in view of 9.axb4! ♕xa1 10.♘b5 when White takes over the advantage.

9.♕xf6

Attempting to keep the queens on with 9.♕h4?!N loses important time and will only benefit Black: 9...dxc3 10.exf6 cxb2 11.♗xb2 ♕a5† White has to make the awkward choice between blocking his bishop with 12.c3 or moving his king to d1. In both cases Black has an excellent game.

9...♕xf6 10.exf6 dxc3 11.♘e2

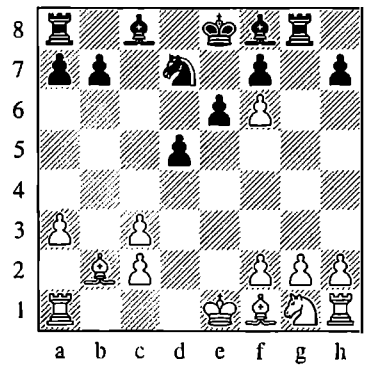
This is the best try for White, minimizing the damage to his pawn structure.

11.bxc3 ♘d7

The f6-pawn is about to fall, after which Black will have a small but long-lasting plus in view of his better pawn structure.

12.♗b2

12.c4 dxc4 13.g3 ♘xf6 14.♗b2 ♘e4 15.♗xc4 ♗d7∓ followed by ...♗c6 gives Black the edge.



12...b6!

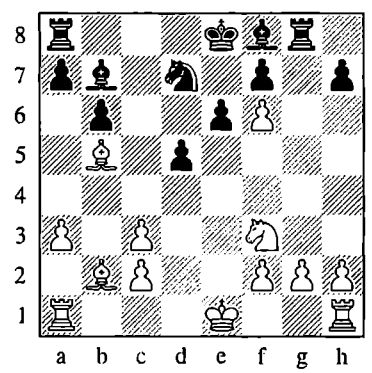
There is no hurry to recapture the f6-pawn. Black should instead prevent the c3-c4 break to restrict White's counterplay.

13.♘f3 ♗b7

Williams analyses this far, mentioning that Black intends ...♖c8. However, it is worth checking what happens if White prevents that idea.

14.♗b5

Threatening ♘e5. After 14.a4 I like the prophylactic 14...a6! which stops all possible counterplay. Now Black is ready to pick up the f6-pawn with a favourable position.

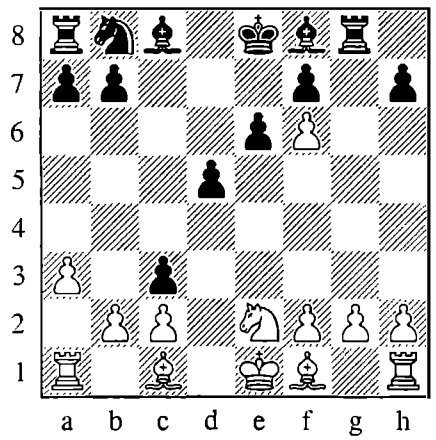


14...0–0–0 15.0–0

After 15.♗xd7† ♖xd7 White keeps his extra pawn for the moment, but in the long run Black's pair of bishops will be too strong.

15...♘xf6∓

White has no real compensation for his damaged pawn structure.



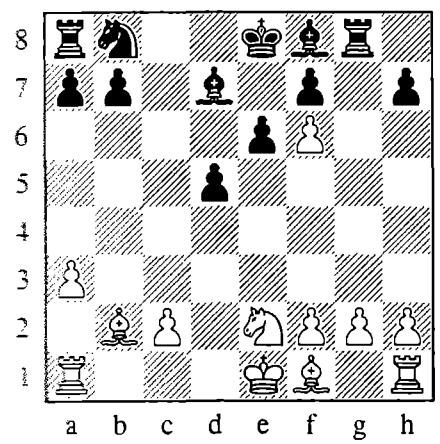
11...cxb2

This is Black's most ambitious move.

He has a pleasant choice, as the solid 11...♘d7 also leads to at least equality. This move is the main recommendation of Williams, and indeed after 12.♘xc3 a6 Black will win back the f6-pawn with a good game, Campora – Rustemov, Dos Hermanas 2003.

12.♗xb2 ♗d7

I like this flexible developing move, waiting to see what White is up to. Black has other interesting options such as 12...b6 as mentioned by Williams.



13.♘d4

After 13.g3 ♘c6 14.♘d4 ♘a5 Black will follow up with ...♘c4 with somewhat better chances.

13.♘g3 ♗c6 This development of the bishop makes sense when ♘d4 no longer is available. 14.♗d3 h6 15.0–0 ♘d7∓ Black has a small but clear advantage thanks to his strong pawn centre. White also needs to take care with the f6-pawn which could easily become weak.

13...♘a6!

This is an excellent square for the knight, which can look to jump to c5 later. It is also useful to keep the c-file open for the rook.

14.♘b5!?

Trying to cut across Black's plan, but we can keep everything under control.

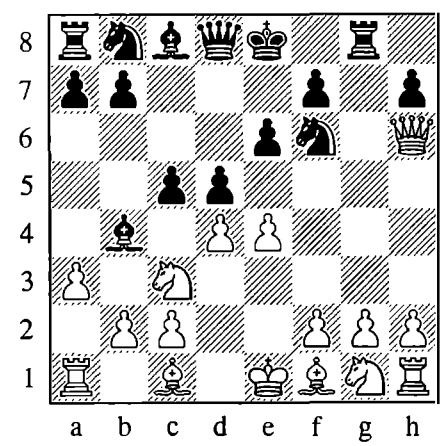
14...♖c8 15.♖c1 ♖c5! 16.♘d4

16.♘xa7? ♖a5 runs into trouble for White.

16...♗d6∓

Black has a comfortable advantage thanks to his strong pawn centre and superior piece coordination.

B) 7.a3

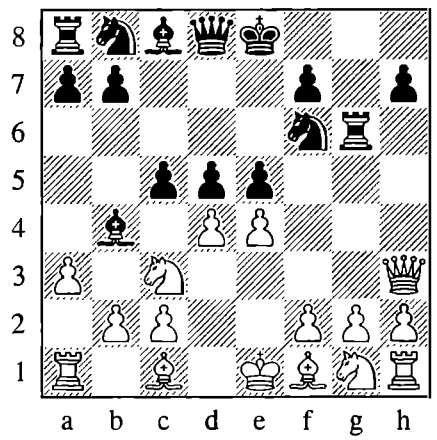


This is White's main try.

7...♖g6!

It is useful to force the white queen to reveal her intentions. Once she has done so, Black can choose an appropriate direction for the bishop on a5. There are three contenders: **B1) 8.♕h3**, **B2) 8.♕e3** and **B3) 8.♕h4!?**.

B1) 8.♕h3 e5



9.♕h4N

After this move Black has a minimum of a forced draw, but the alternative is worse.

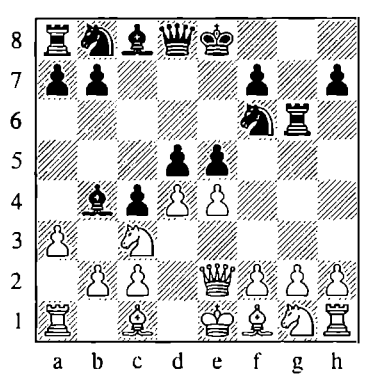
9.♕d3?! c4!

It is clear that the white queen's early sortie has backfired.

10.♕e2N

This seems to be the best defence, but Black will be at least slightly better in the end.

10.♕f3? ♗a5∓; 10.♕d1? ♗xc3† 11.bxc3 ♘xe4 gave Black a clear advantage in Wuts – Oberbarnscheidt, Ruhrgebiet 1999.



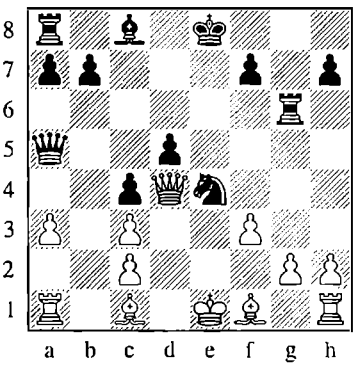
10...♗xc3† 11.bxc3 ♘xe4 12.♘f3

12.dxe5 ♘xc3 13.♕f3 ♘e4∓

12...♕a5 13.♕e3

13.♗d2 ♗g4∓

13...exd4 14.♘xd4 ♘c6 15.f3 ♘xd4 16.♕xd4

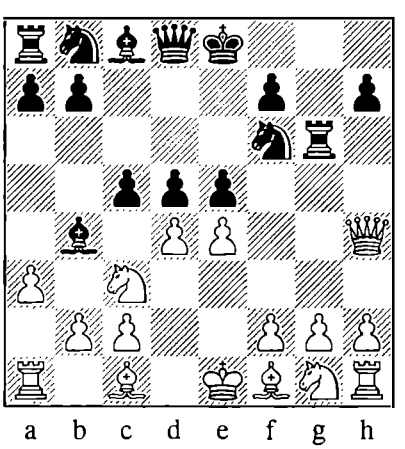


16...♖e6! 17.♗e3

17.♕h8†? only makes things worse: 17...♔e7 18.fxe4 ♖xe4† 19.♗e2 (19.♔d2 ♕b6–+) 19...♗g4 20.♕g7 ♗xe2 21.♗e3 (21.♗g5† ♔d6!–+ The black monarch will find safety on c6 while his white counterpart is about to get checkmated.) 21...d4! White can only survive the attack by simplifying to a depressing endgame.

17...♕xc3† 18.♕xc3 ♘xc3∓

Black is a solid pawn up. White has the bishop pair, but this is hardly enough for him to claim full compensation.



9...♗xc3†

If Black is happy with a draw then 9...♖g4 10.♕h6 ♖g6 leads to an instant repetition. (10...♖xe4†?! looks tempting, but should be avoided since the rook is in danger of being trapped. After 11.♘e2 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 exd4 13.f3 ♖e6 14.cxd4 ♘c6 15.dxc5± the game opens up, which favours White's bishop pair in the long run.)

The text move is the right choice if Black is searching for more than a forced draw.

10.bxc3 cxd4 11.cxd4 ♕c7 12.♘e2

12.♗d2 ♘xe4†

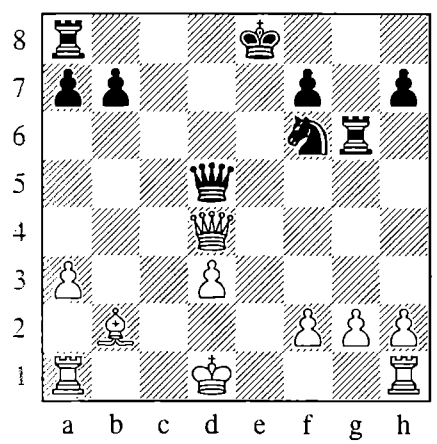
12...♘c6 13.♗b2 ♘xd4 14.♘xd4 ♕a5†!

An important finesse.

15.♔d1 exd4 16.exd5 ♗f5 17.♗d3

After 17.♕xd4 0–0–0 18.♗d3 ♖xd5 19.♕b4 ♕d8† Black has a dangerous initiative.

17...♗xd3 18.cxd3 ♕xd5 19.♕xd4



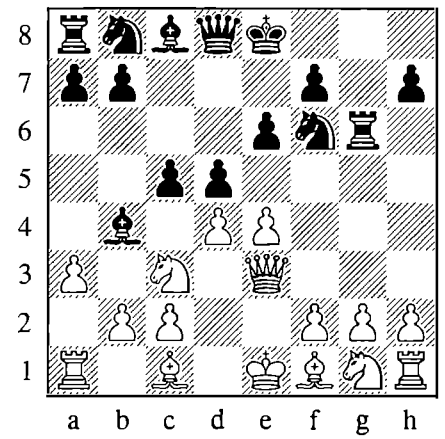
19...♖xg2! 20.♖e1†

20.♕xf6?? loses to 20...♕xd3† 21.♔e1 ♖g6!.

20...♔f8 21.♔e2 ♖d8 22.♕xd5 ♘xd5

The position is about equal, but I would prefer Black due to his somewhat better pawn structure and superb knight on d5.

B2) 8.♕e3



This is a better try, and has been White's most popular choice.

8...♗a5 9.♗d2

The inaccurate 9.♘h3? was played in Plasman – Steenbekkers, Dieren 1998, and now after 9...♘c6!N Black is simply better. (The game instead saw 9...♘xe4? 10.b4! with counterplay.)

A more interesting deviation is:

9.b4!?

This has only occurred in one game, but it may actually be White's best chance to maintain level prospects.

9...cxd4N

9...cxb4 is also worth investigating. After 10.axb4 ♗xb4 Black also has a fully playable position with mutual chances, Kuni – Kahl, email 2000.

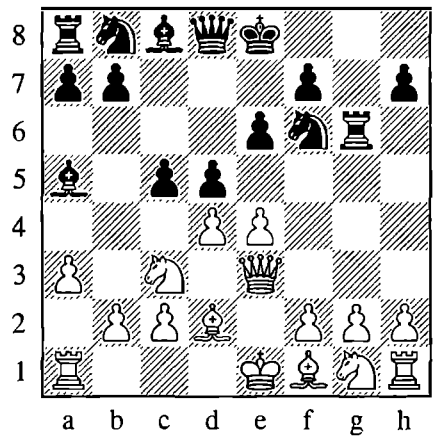
10.♕xd4 ♗b6 11.♕d3

11.♕d2 ♘xe4 leads to the same thing.

11...♘xe4 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♕xd8† ♗xd8

We have reach an unbalanced queenless middlegame. I would say the position is about equal, but clearly a long way from a draw. I would prefer Black, who is somewhat more active with the half-open g-file and the strong e4-pawn holding down White's activity.

A sensible plan for the second player is to continue with ...a5 next, in order to create further weaknesses on the white queenside.

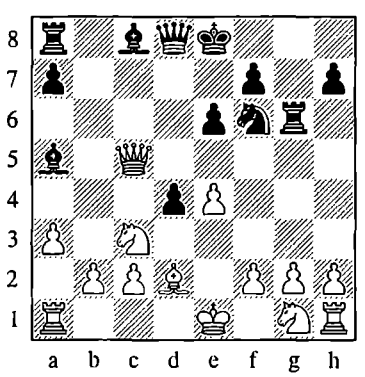


9...♘c6 10.♗b5 cxd4!N

10...♘g4 11.♕d3 was played in Miladinovic – Calandri, Assisi 2003, and now 11...cxd4 12.♕xd4 ♔f8 would have given Black a slight advantage. However, the proposed improvement is even stronger.

11.♕xd4

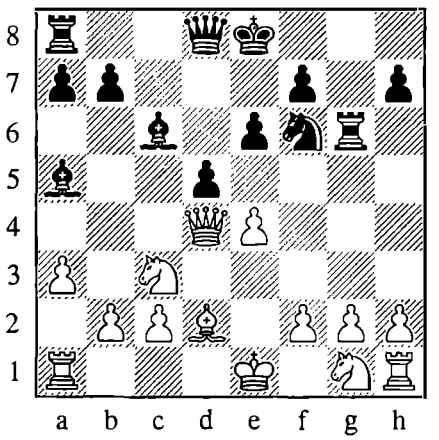
11.♗xc6† bxc6 12.♕xd4 c5! 13.♕xc5 d4 is also problematic for White, for instance:



14.♘b1 (14.0–0–0 ♗b6 wins a piece.) 14...♗b6 15.♕b5† (15.♕c4 ♗b7 16.♕b5† ♕d7 17.♕xd7† ♘xd7∓) 15...♗d7 16.♕d3 ♗c6 17.f3 ♖xg2∓

11...♗d7 12.♗xc6 ♗xc6

Black is still a pawn down, but this is outweighed by his strong pair of bishops and White's coordination problems.



13.0–0–0

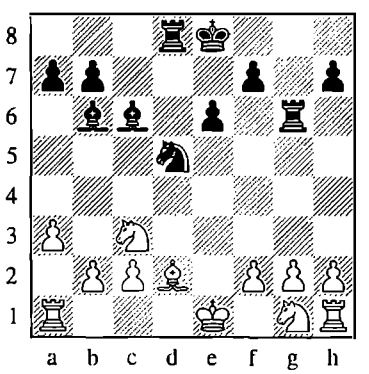
I also analysed:

13.exd5 ♗b6! 14.♕d3

a) 14.♕e5 ♗xf2†! 15.♔f1 ♘xd5∓

b) 14.♕c4 exd5 15.♕e2† ♔f8 leaves Black substantially better thanks to his bishop pair, development advantage and active piece play – not to mention the serious threat of ...d4.

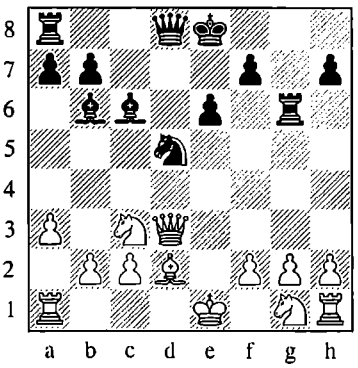
c) 14.♕h4? is worse still, as after 14...♘xd5 15.♕xd8† ♖xd8 the pressure against the g2-pawn is fatal for White, for instance:



16.♘xd5 (16.♘ge2 ♘xc3 17.♗xc3 ♖xg2 18.♖f1 ♖xh2–+) 16...♗xd5 17.♘e2 ♗xg2 18.♖g1 ♗xf2† 19.♔xf2 ♖xd2 The endgame is winning for Black.

14...♘xd5

Despite the temporary pawn minus, Black has a clear advantage. One important principle to keep in mind is that a queen exchange will help to accentuate the power of Black's bishops. An illustrative line is:



15.0–0–0 ♘c7! 16.♕xd8† ♖xd8

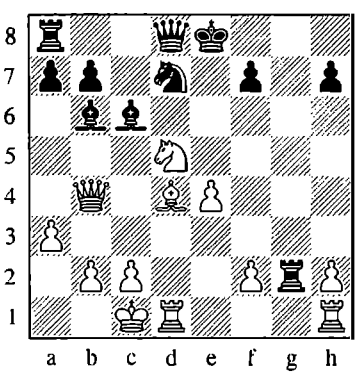
The g2-pawn falls and the White position is on the verge of collapse.

13...♗b6 14.♕b4

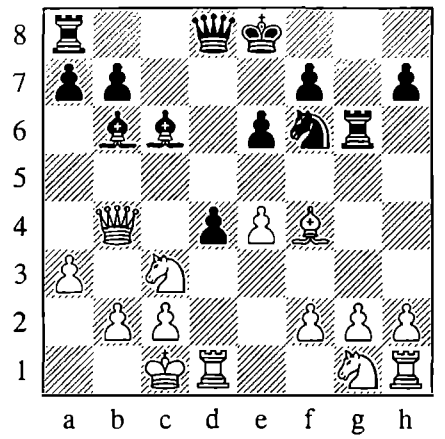
14.♕e5? is a serious mistake in view of 14...♗c7 15.♕d4 e5 16.♕d3 d4 17.♘b5 ♗b8! when the following ...a6 will win a piece.

14...d4 15.♗f4

15.♗e3 e5! wins a piece, but it is worth analysing for a few more moves as White can obtain some compensation. 16.♘f3 ♘d7 17.♘xd4 exd4 18.♗xd4 ♖xg2 19.♘d5



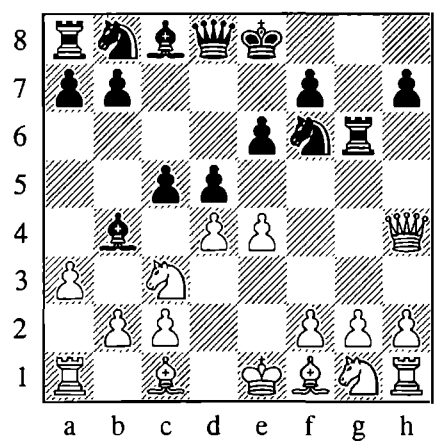
19...♗xd5 20.exd5 ♕g5† 21.♔b1 0–0–0 22.♖he1 ♕f5 The worst is over, and Black's extra material should decide.



15...♗a5! 16.♕xd4 ♕xd4 17.♖xd4 ♗xc3 18.bxc3 ♘xe4 19.♘h3 ♘xc3 20.♖e1 ♗xg2∓

White's apparent activity is not too serious, and Black has good chances to convert his extra pawn in the endgame.

B3) 8.♕h4!?



This seems to be the most interesting and critical try for White, so I was surprised to see it was not mentioned by Williams.

8...♕a5!

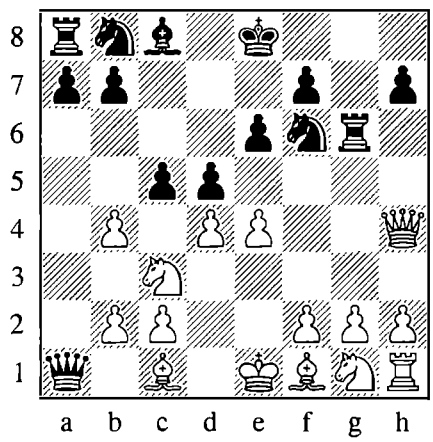
The most principled reply. I considered two alternatives which I will mention briefly:

Trying to repeat with 8...♖g4 can be met by 9.♕h3 when ...e5 is no longer possible.

8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♕a5 10.♘e2 ♘c6 might lead to an interesting exchange sacrifice: 11.♗b2 ♘xd4 12.0–0–0 ♘xe2† 13.♗xe2 ♘xe4 14.♗h5 ♕d8 15.♕xd8† ♔xd8 16.♗xg6 hxg6 Black has reasonable compensation, but overall I consider the main line to be the most trustworthy option.

From here I analysed two main branches: **B31) 9.axb4?!N** and **B32) 9.♘e2.**

B31) 9.axb4?!N ♕xa1



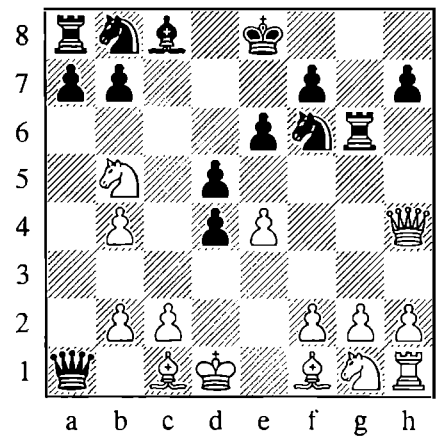
This is a critical option for us to consider, but with accurate play Black will emerge on top.

10.♔d1

10.♘ge2? cxd4 transposes to 10.axb4? in the note to White's 10th move in line B32 below.

10.♕f4? cxd4 11.♘b5 ♘c6 12.♘c7† (12.e5 ♘xe5!∓) 12...♔d8 13.♘xa8 e5 14.♕d2 ♘xe4 15.♕d1 ♕a4 leaves White in a horrible position. Black has a significant lead in development and the knight on a8 is doomed.

10...cxd4 11.♘b5

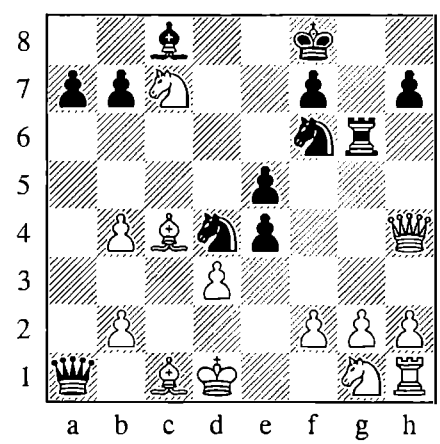


11...dxe4! 12.♘c7† ♔f8 13.♘xa8 ♘c6 14.♘c7 e5

Although White is still a piece up, Black is already winning due to White's lack of coordination and development problems.

15.♗c4 d3! 16.cxd3 ♘d4

There are too many threats, for instance:



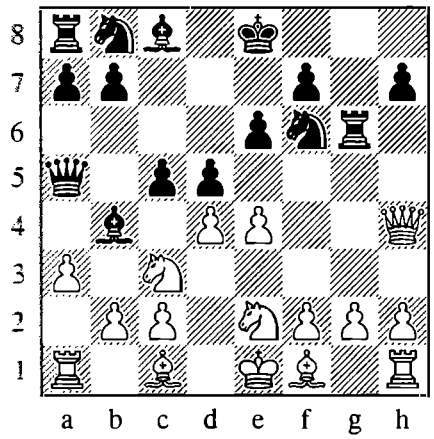
17.♘b5

17.dxe4? ♕b1 threatens a deadly invasion on c2, while 17.♘e2 ♗g4 is also hopeless for White.

17...♘f5! 18.♕h3 ♖h6!–+

In a surprising twist, the white queen is lost.

B32) 9.♘e2

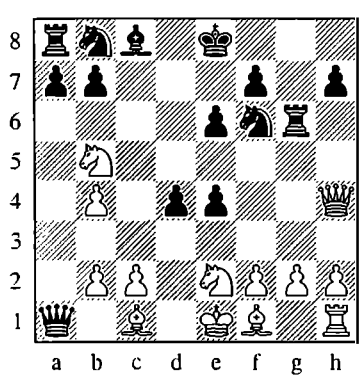


9...cxd4!

9...♘xe4? should be avoided due to 10.axb4! ♕xa1 11.♘xe4 dxe4 and here 12.bxc5!N gives White a clear advantage. (In the game Varga – Petrik, Hungary 2007, White played 12.dxc5? when 12...♘a6!N would have been strong.)

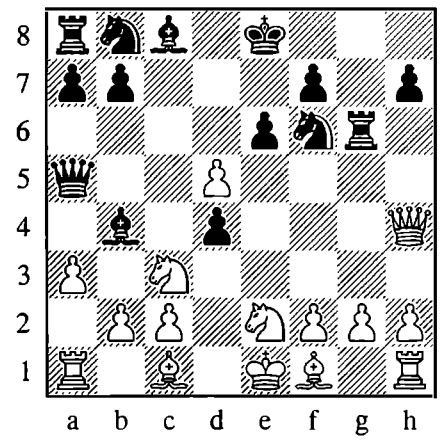
We now reach a final split between **B321) 10.exd5?!N** and **B322) 10.e5!N**.

10.axb4? is a seemingly interesting exchange sacrifice which, however, leads to an advantage for Black. 10...♕xa1 11.♘b5 dxe4



12.♕f4 (No better is: 12.♘c7† ♔f8 13.♘xa8 e5 Threatening ...♗g4. 14.g3 ♕b1 15.♗g2 ♕xc2 16.♗g5 ♘bd7 17.0–0 ♕xe2 18.♖c1 ♔g7 19.♖xc8 ♘g4–+) 12...♘d5 13.♕xe4 ♘c6∓ Black kept his extra material with a clear plus in Misailovic – Mihic, Valjevo 2010.

B321) 10.exd5?!

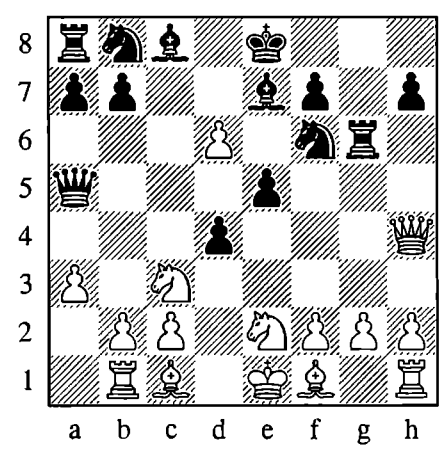


10...e5! 11.♖b1

11.axb4? ♕xa1 12.♘b5 ♔f8 13.♘c7 ♘a6! 14.♘xa8 ♘xb4 15.f3 ♕b1! 16.♔f2 ♕xc2∓ White is under pressure and the extra knight on a8 can basically be recaptured at any time.

11...♗e7 12.d6

12.b4 ♕d8∓ Black has better development and a powerful pawn centre.



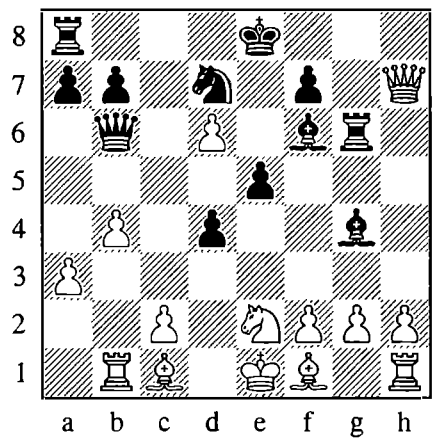
12...♗d8!

This is, surprisingly, an excellent square for the bishop, as it creates tactical possibilities in

connection with a knight jump from f6. The pawn on d6 can be collected later.

13.b4 ♕b6 14.♘e4
14.♘d1 ♕xd6∓

14...♗g4! 15.♘xf6† ♗xf6 16.♕xh7 ♘d7
Black has a significant lead in development and threatens to trap the queen with ...♘f8.



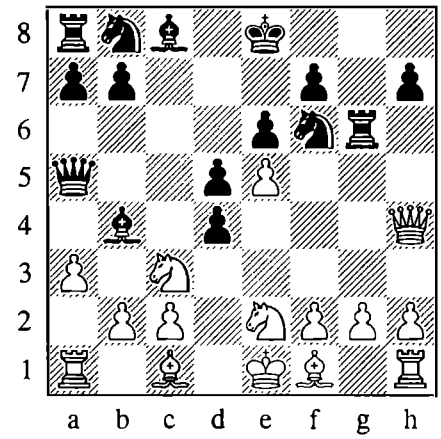
17.♗h6
This is the only move that keeps the material balance, but it doesn't solve White's other problems.

17.h3 ♘f8 18.d7† ♔e7 19.♕xg6 ♘xg6 20.hxg4 ♕c6∓

17...0–0–0
Now the threat of ...♖h8 forces White to retreat the bishop.

18.♗d2 ♗e6 19.♕h5 ♕xd6
Black is dominating the position and can claim at least a slight advantage, despite being a pawn down.

B322) 10.e5!N

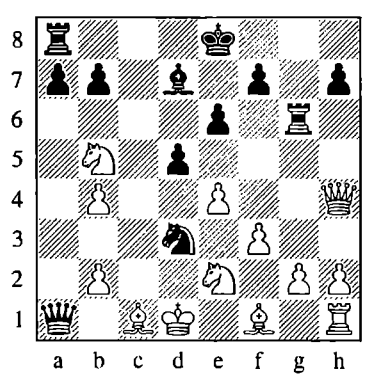


The critical test, leading to massive complications.

10...♘e4!
After serious investigation I have concluded that this is the most accurate continuation.

11.axb4 ♕xa1 12.♘b5 ♘c6 13.♘c7†
White has a couple of playable alternatives, but the final verdict seems to be perpetual check everywhere.

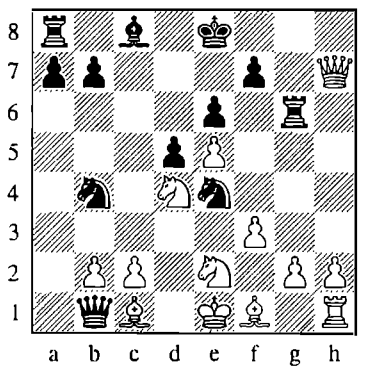
13.f3 d3 14.cxd3 ♘xe5 15.dxe4 ♘d3† 16.♔d1 ♗d7 From here both knight checks lead to forced draws:



17.♘c7† (17.♘d6† ♔f8 18.♕xh7 ♗e8 19.e5 ♘xc1 20.♕h8† ♔e7 21.♕h4† ♔f8 22.♕h8†=)

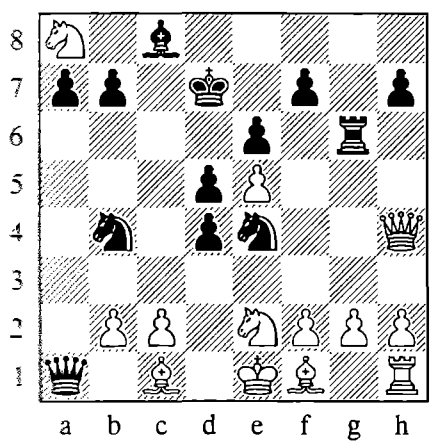
17...♔f8 18.♘xa8 ♗a4† 19.b3 ♗xb3† 20.♔d2 ♘xc1 21.♘c7 ♘xe2 22.♕d8† ♔g7 23.♘e8† ♔h8 24.♘f6† ♔g7 25.♘e8†=

13.♕xh7 ♘xb4 14.♘bxd4 ♕b1 (14...♕a5?! 15.♘c3 a6 16.♗e2±) 15.f3 (15.♕h8† ♔e7 16.f3 ♘a2 17.fxe4 ♘xc1 18.♕h4† ♔f8□ 19.♕h8† ♔e7 20.♕h4†=)



15...♕xc2!! 16.♕h8† ♔d7□ 17.♘xc2□ ♘d3† 18.♔d1 ♘df2†= This is undoubtedly the most aesthetically pleasing perpetual of them all!

13...♔d7 14.♘xa8 ♘xb4

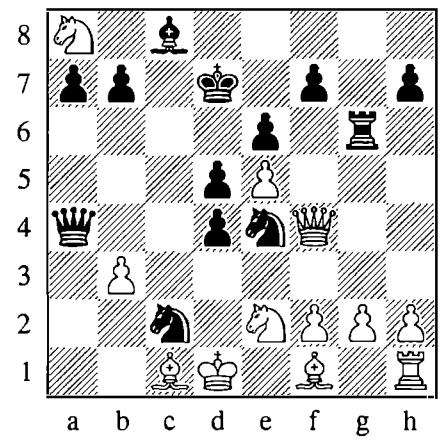


15.♕f4□ ♘xc2† 16.♔d1 ♕a4

16...♖g7 17.♔xc2 ♕a4† could be playable, but the text move is the more clear-cut route to equality.

17.b3

17.♕xf7† ♔d8 18.♕c7† ♔e8 19.♕xc8† ♔f7 20.♕xb7† ♔g8 21.b3 ♕a2 22.♕c8† ♔g7 23.♕xc2 ♘xf2† 24.♔d2 ♘e4†= reaches yet another perpetual check.

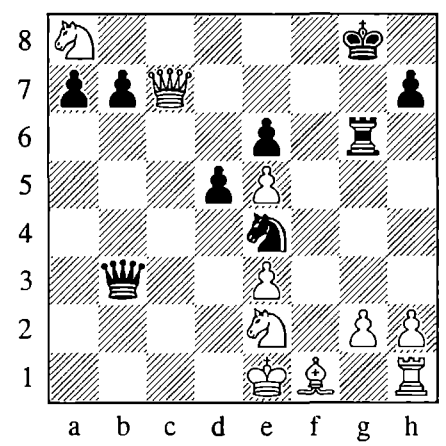


17...♘e3† 18.♗xe3 ♕xb3† 19.♔e1 dxe3 20.♕xf7† ♔d8 21.♕c7†!?

White can also take an immediate draw with 21.♕f8†.

21...♔e8 22.♕xc8† ♔f7 23.♕c7† ♔g8 24.fxe3

White has emerged with two extra pieces, but he will never get a chance to use them.



24...♕b1† 25.♕c1 ♕b4† 26.♔d1 ♕a4† 27.♔e1

27.♕c2?! ♘f2† is only dangerous for White, for instance: 28.♔c1 ♕a1† 29.♔d2? ♘e4†–+

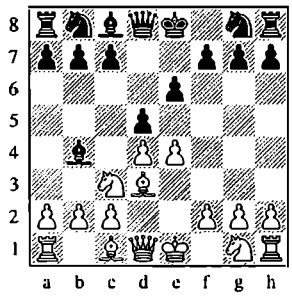
27...♕b4†=

Conclusion

White's early queen foray is strategically risky, and Black obtains excellent chances by giving up the g7-pawn and assaulting the enemy pawn centre. The only really critical line seems to be the final variation B322, which is equally dangerous for both sides and should ultimately lead to a draw.



4th Move Options



4.♗d3

Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♗d3

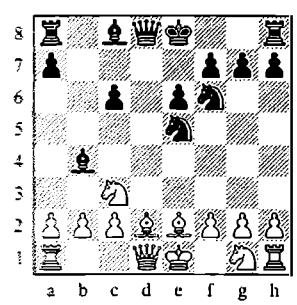
4...dxe4 5.♗xe4 ♘f6

A) 6.♗d3 c5 36
- **A1) 7.♘f3** 36
- **A2) 7.dxc5 ♘bd7** 37
  - **A21) 8.c6!?** 37
  - **A22) 8.♗d2** 38
- **A3) 7.a3** 40

B) 6.♗g5 ♘bd7 41
- **B1) 7.♘e2** 41
- **B2) 7.♗f3** 42

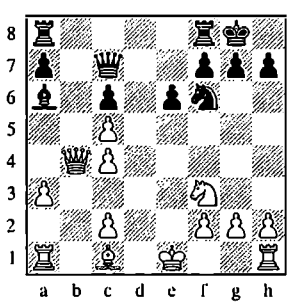
C) 6.♗f3 c5 44
- **C1) 7.a3** 44
- **C2) 7.♘e2 ♘c6** 46
  - **C21) 8.0–0!?** 46
  - **C22) 8.a3** 47
  - **C23) 8.♗e3** 47

A21) after 10.♗e2



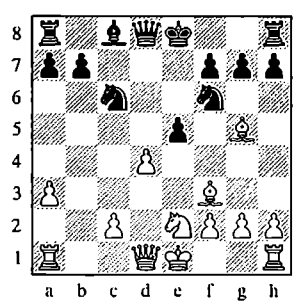
10...♖b8!N

C1) after 14.c4



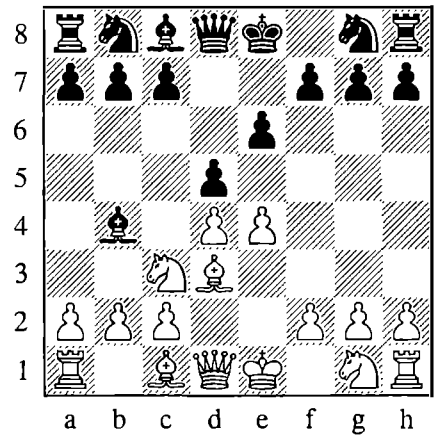
14...♖fb8N

C22) after 11.cxd4



11...h6!?N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♗d3



This move is rather seldom played, but it can be a tricky one depending on how Black continues. There are a number of playable replies, but I have decided to recommend the main option.

4...dxe4

It is worth knowing that the tempting 4...c5 might lead to sharp play after 5.exd5 ♕xd5 6.♗d2 when White sacrifices the g2-pawn and sometimes even the rook on h1 in order to accelerate his development. This is exactly what White is looking for and Black should avoid grabbing the material unless he is extremely well prepared.

It is, however, worth adding that Black can play it calmly with 6...♗xc3 7.♗xc3 cxd4 8.♗xd4 e5 9.♗c3 ♘f6 when the position is approximately equal; White has the pair of bishops but Black enjoys good control of the centre.

5.♗xe4 ♘f6

Here we have come to a crossroads. White has three replies worth looking at: **A) 6.♗d3**, **B) 6.♗g5** and the main line **C) 6.♗f3**.

A) 6.♗d3

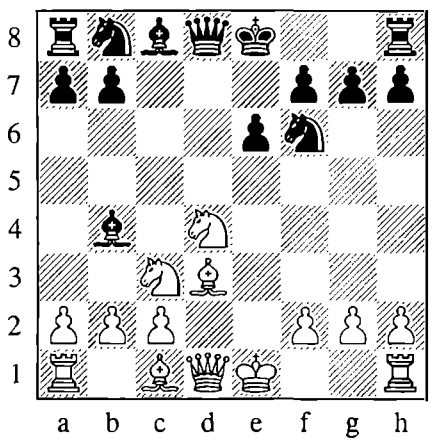
This move is hardly critical, as it loses time and does not restrict Black's development in any way.

6...c5

Black should strike in the centre before White can consolidate his space advantage. We will consider three options for White: **A1) 7.♘f3**, **A2) 7.dxc5** and **A3) 7.a3**.

7.♘e2 cxd4 8.♘xd4 transposes immediately to the first line.

A1) 7.♘f3 cxd4 8.♘xd4



8...0–0

8...e5 has been a more popular choice and may transpose, but I think it makes sense to secure the position of the king first.

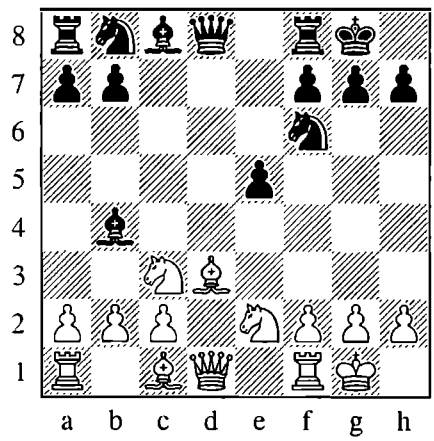
9.0–0

9.♘f3N doesn't stop Black's plans either. In view of the exposed position of White's king, we can still continue 9...e5! and after 10.♘xe5 ♕a5 11.♘c4 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♕xc3† 13.♗d2 ♖e8† 14.♘e3 ♕c7 15.0–0 ♘c6 Black's active piece play and better pawn structure at least equals White's pair of bishops.

By transposition of moves we have now reached a familiar position from the few games played in this line.

9...e5 10.♘de2

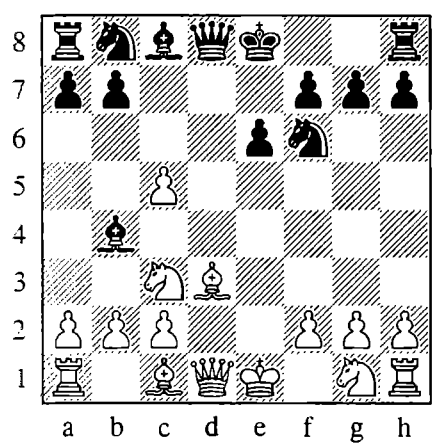
As played in Djuric – Dolmatov, New York 1989, and a few subsequent games. Surprisingly, nobody chose the most natural developing move:



10...♘c6N

Black is at least equal, as he has an extra central pawn while White's pieces are not very well coordinated.

A2) 7.dxc5



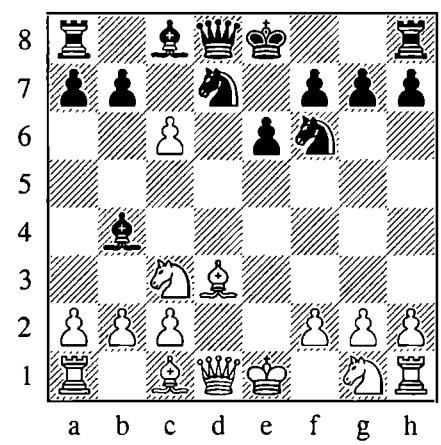
7...♘bd7

A purposeful move, aiming to recapture on c5 with the knight rather than the bishop which is already well placed on b4. White can choose between **A21) 8.c6!?** and **A22) 8.♗d2.**

8.♘f3N has not been tested, for good reason. After 8...♘xc5 White faces the loss of the bishop pair, and in the event of 9.♗b5† ♗d7 10.♗xd7† ♘cxd7 Black has solved the problem of the "French bishop" and is already slightly better.

8.♘e2 0–0 9.0–0 transposes to an old game Tartakower – G. Nagy, Debrecen 1925. In this position, considering that the white king has castled and the knight on c3 is well protected, it makes sense for Black to switch plans with: 9...♗xc5!N= Black has fine prospects and can develop his other bishop to b7 to exert pressure against the enemy kingside.

A21) 8.c6!?



This is a rare yet quite logical way to weaken Black's pawn structure before the pawn on c5 is lost anyway.

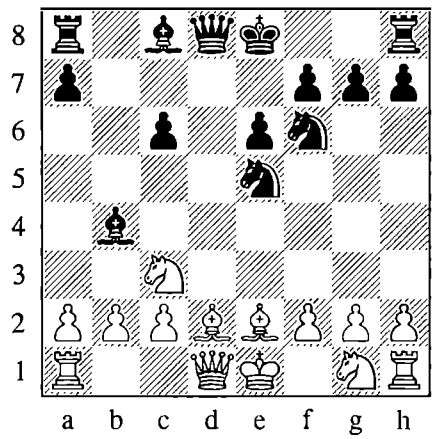
8...bxc6

I would also like to mention 8...♘e5!?N as an interesting way to sacrifice a pawn in return for the bishop pair and active piece play. The text move works well though, as Black's active pieces and open b-file are more relevant than the slight damage to his structure.

9.♗d2

9.♘f3 ♘c5 gives Black the pair of bishops and an easy game.

9...♘e5 10.♗e2



10...♖b8!N

More ambitious than 10...♘d5 11.♘xd5 ♗xd2† 12.♕xd2 exd5 with a level position, Zecevic – Bukal, Velika Gorica 2004.

11.♘f3 ♘xf3† 12.♗xf3 0–0 13.0–0

White is still undeveloped and it is not yet time to grab pawns, so 13.♗xc6? is just asking for trouble. After 13...♗a5 Black will, at the very least, regain the pawn on b2 with a favourable position since 14.♖b1?? ♕c7 15.♗f3 (15.♕f3 ♖d8!–+ does not save White either) 15...♖d8 is simply lost for White, who is defenceless against the simple threat of ...♗xc3.

13...♗a6 14.♗e2

After 14.♖e1 ♕c7∓ White will struggle with the development of his queen.

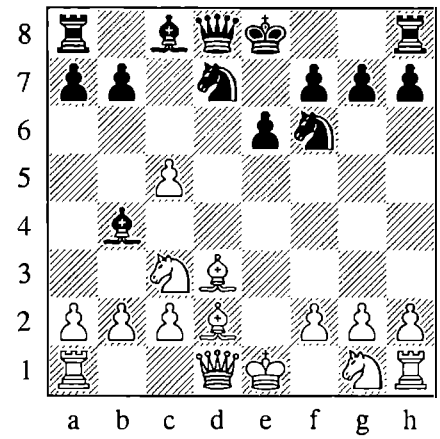
14...♗xc3 15.bxc3

White has no choice as 15.♗xc3? loses an exchange to 15...♕xd1.

15...♗xe2 16.♕xe2 ♕d5

Black has an active position and his better structure gives him a slight advantage.

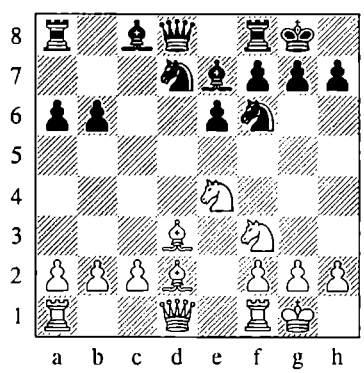
A22) 8.♗d2



The most common move, but it is hardly likely to threaten us.

8...♘xc5 9.♗c4

After 9.♗b5† Black can obtain instant equality by blocking with the bishop, but it also looks interesting to try 9...♘cd7!? intending to continue with ...a6 and a subsequent queenside fianchetto. 10.♘f3 a6 11.♗d3 0–0 12.0–0 b6 13.♘e4 ♗e7

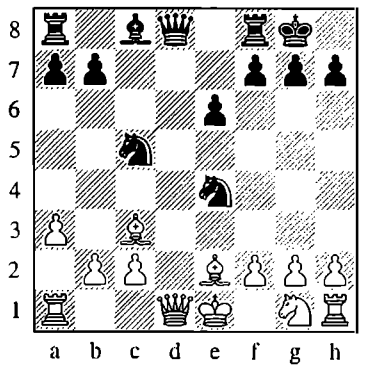


14.♕e2 ♗b7 15.♖ad1 ♕c7 16.♗g5 ♖fe8 Black was absolutely fine in Averbakh – Botvinnik, Moscow 1955. Objectively the position is equal, but the extra central pawn gives Black good long-term prospects and Botvinnik eventually prevailed.

It is also worth considering:

9.♗e2N 0–0 10.a3 ♗xc3 11.♗xc3 ♘fe4

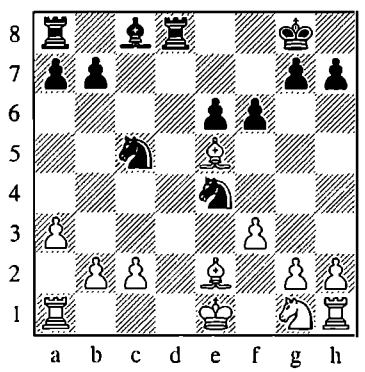
Black has given away the bishop pair in return for rapid development and active piece play. If White wishes to preserve his dark-squared bishop it will cost him valuable time.



12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.♗e5 f6 14.f3

After 14.♗f4?! b6 Black's active piece play and extra central pawn give him the advantage. White is still struggling with development and is unable to make good use of the bishop pair.

The first player can slightly improve this scenario by inserting 14.♗c7!? ♖d7 before playing 15.♗f4, and now after 15...e5 16.♗e3 b6 the position is balanced. Black's active piece play and central control fully compensate for White's bishop pair.

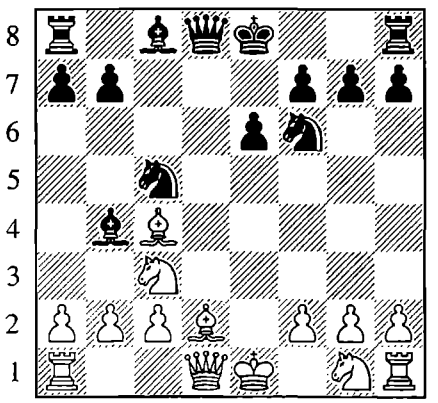


14...fxe5

14...♘d6!? 15.♗d4 b6 is also perfectly playable. White keeps the pair of bishops, but the weakening move of the f-pawn causes problems with his piece development.

15.fxe4 b6 16.♘f3 ♗b7

Black's active piece play is at least as relevant as his slightly inferior pawn structure.



9...0–0 10.♘f3

10.a3 ♗xc3 11.♗xc3 ♘a4 (11...♘ce4!?N is another interesting option) 12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.b3 ♘c5 was equal in Mallahi – Bellini, Bled 2002.

10...♗d7!?

This is the most ambitious move, and probably just the strongest all round.

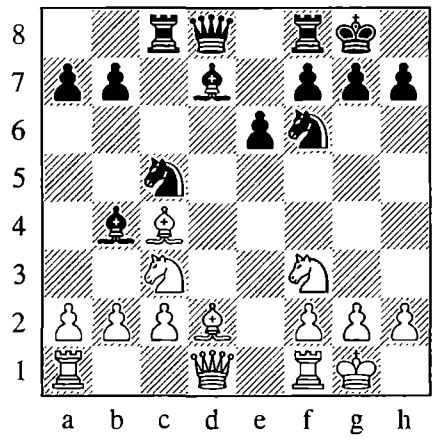
10...♘ce4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♗xb4 ♕b6 13.0–0 ♕xb4 14.♕d4 ♘d6 was soon agreed drawn in Dolmatov – Zilberman, Frunze 1983, but White missed an opportunity to fight for the advantage with: 15.c3!N ♕xc4 (15...♕b6 16.♕xb6 axb6 17.♗b3±) 16.♕xd6↑

11.0–0

Or 11.a3N ♗xc3 12.♗xc3 ♖c8 13.♗e2 ♘fe4 14.♗d4 f6 15.0–0 e5 16.♗e3 ♕e7 when, as usual, White's bishop pair is fully counter-balanced by Black's other positional trumps.

11...♖c8N

11...♗c6 was absolutely fine for Black in Schmelz – Kirwald, Germany 1999, but I prefer to utilize the open c-file.



12.♕e2

12.♘e5?! ♗e8! preserves the bishop while maintaining tactical possibilities such as ...♘a4 and ...b5.

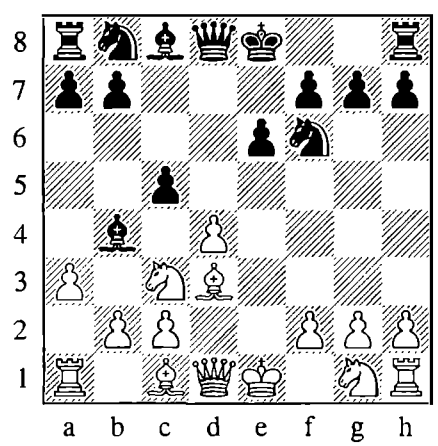
12...♕c7

12...♘a4!? is a promising alternative.

13.♘b5 ♗xb5 14.♗xb4 ♗xc4 15.♕xc4 ♖fe8=

The position is in balance. Black's activity in the centre compensates for White's advantage of having a bishop on the board.

A3) 7.a3



7...♗xc3†

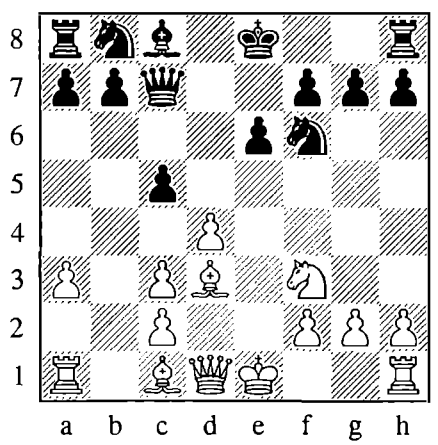
Also worth investigating is 7...♗a5!? 8.dxc5 ♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♘bd7 as played quite some years ago in W. Watson – Adams, Southampton 1986. Black has the better pawn structure and the inclusion of a2-a3 from White takes away the useful option of ♗a3.

8.bxc3 ♕c7

In the third edition of *Play the French*, John Watson gives this position as equal and mentions the idea of ...c4. I would like to present a brief practical example where this plan was executed to good effect.

9.♘f3

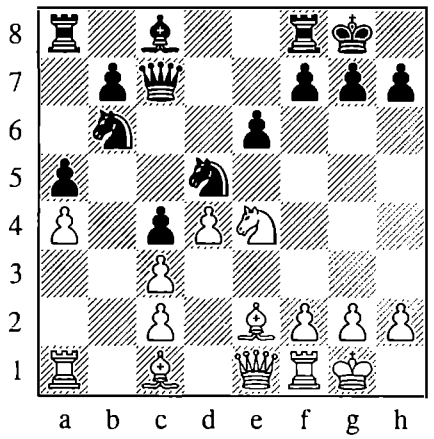
9.dxc5 prevents the aforementioned plan while clearing some space for White's bishops. The obvious drawback is that it seriously weakens White's pawn structure while also abandoning the centre. My choice would be the flexible 9...0–0!?N with the idea of ...e5-e4. However, I should mention that the simple 9...♘bd7 10.♘f3 ♘xc5∓ also gave Black the upper hand in Dueckstein – Skalkotas, Nice 1974.



9...0–0 10.0–0

Now we will see Sergey Ivanov, a well-known advocate of the French, implementing the plan outlined earlier.

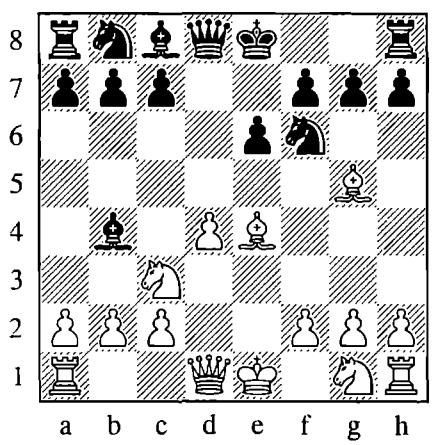
10...c4! 11.♗e2 ♘d5 12.♕e1 ♘d7 13.a4 a5 14.♘d2 ♘7b6 15.♘e4



15...♗d7 16.♘c5 ♗c6 17.f3 ♖fe8

With ...e5 coming soon, Black was already somewhat better in Djuric – S. Ivanov, Stockholm 2009.

B) 6.♗g5



6...♘bd7

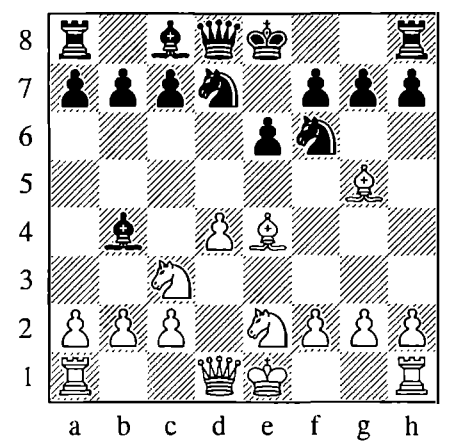
6...c5 is a reliable alternative, but I prefer to hold this pawn back for the time being.

The point of the text move is, of course, to play ...h6 and recapture on f6 with his knight. White's two main responses are **B1) 7.♘e2** and **B2) 7.♗f3**.

7.♘f3?! h6 8.♗xf6 ♘xf6 is, as Watson pointed out in the second edition of *Play the French*, at least equal for Black, who has the bishop pair and is ready to break in the centre. 9.♗d3 occurred in Honfi – Gulko, Moscow 1971, and now after 9...c5N it is already White who is struggling to maintain the balance.

7.♕f3?! is an attempt from White to develop and attack at the same time, but after the counter strike 7...c5! White's position begins to look rather shaky, since his king is still unsafe and his piece coordination is rather poor. 8.♘e2 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♘e5 10.♕d1 ♕a5 11.♗xf6 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♕xc3† 13.♔f1 gxf6∓ gave the second play some advantage in Zaitsev – Hauchard, Bucharest 1993.

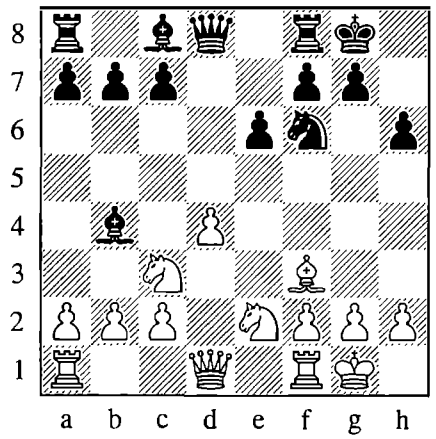
B1) 7.♘e2



7...h6 8.♗xf6

8.♗d2 has been played a couple of times; I would suggest 8...0–0!N, delaying the exchange on e4 since this way White will have more difficulties in coordinating his pieces. 9.0–0 e5! Black strikes in the centre and has a slight initiative.

8...♘xf6 9.♗f3 0–0 10.0–0



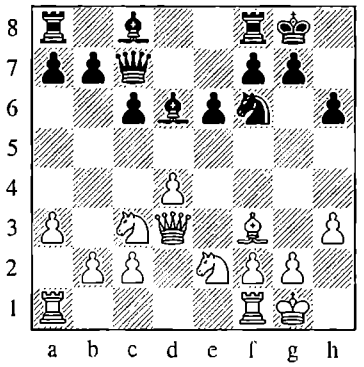
10...c6!

I like this method of neutralizing the bishop on f3 and preparing to push with ...e5, after which the "French bishop" on c8 will finally see daylight.

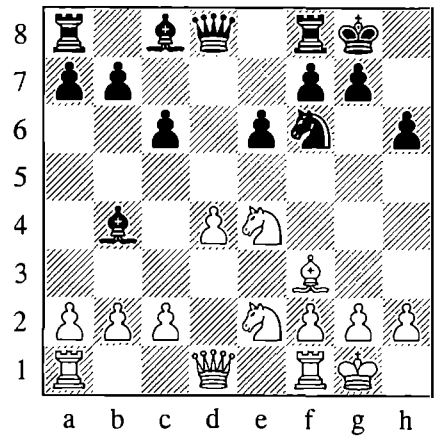
11.♘e4

After 11.♕d3 ♕c7 Black continues the preparation of ...e5. (11...a5!?N is an interesting waiting move, grabbing some space on the queenside.)

11.a3 ♗d6 only helps Black with his plans. After 12.♕d3 ♕c7 13.h3 I found a simple improvement:



13...♗d7N Black should not hurry to play ...e5, but rather complete his development and then decide whether ...e5 or ...c5 is the right way forward. Black has a comfortable position and is at least equal. (Instead 13...b6? is a tactical oversight and 14.♘b5 gave White somewhat better prospects in Hellman – Kollberg, Krakow 1964.)

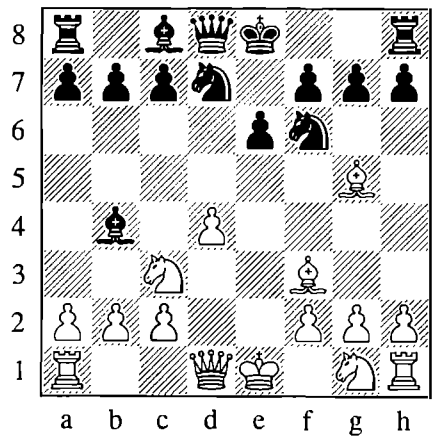


11...♘xe4 12.♗xe4 ♕c7N

The position can be assessed as approximately equal. Black has the pair of bishops and can aim to open the game with either ...e5 or ...c5 at an appropriate moment, with chances to play for an advantage.

It is worth mentioning that 12...♗d6!? also gave Black a decent position in Romanishin – Beliavsky, Belgrade 1993. This time White has to watch out for the immediate threat of ...♗xh2† as well as the usual ...e5 break, which may even be preceded by ...f5.

B2) 7.♗f3



This seems to be White's best option. Now the situation resembles variation C below, and the question is who is more likely to benefit from the inclusion of the moves ♗g5 and ...♘bd7.

7...h6

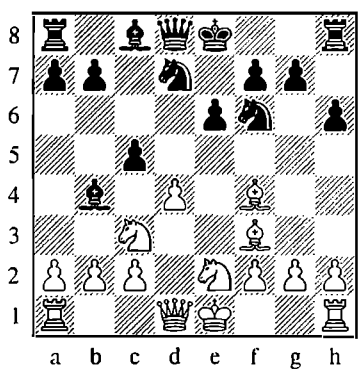
In most games Black has delayed this move, but it makes sense to force White's bishop to make a decision.

8.♗xf6

This is the only move I found played in my database. We will take a brief look at the other options:

8.♗e3 looks far too passive, and after 8...♕e7 followed by ...e5 Black has an easy game.

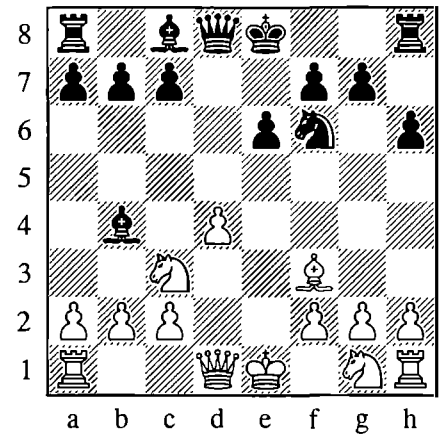
8.♗f4 c5 sees Black exerting pressure against the centre and at the same time preparing to develop the queen to b6 or a5. Note that the natural-looking 9.♘e2?? is a terrible mistake due to:



9...g5! White's bishops are embarrassed, and 10.♗d2 does not help since after 10...g4 11.♗e4 ♗xc3 12.♘xc3 cxd4 White still loses a piece.

Finally, 8.♗h4 c5 gives Black good counterplay in the centre and on the queenside. The bishop on h4 is cut off from the defence, and once again 9.♘e2?? loses material to 9...g5!.

8...♘xf6



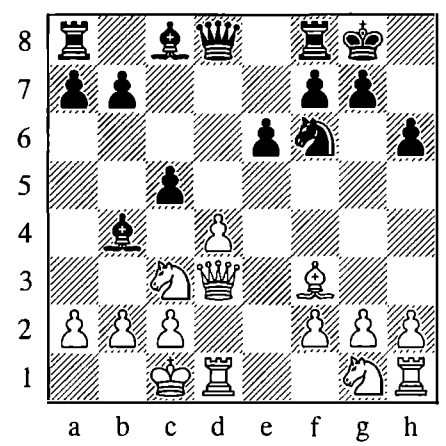
9.♕d3!?N

It looks interesting for White to go for long castling before developing the kingside pieces.

9.♘e2 has been played a few times, and leads back to variation B1 above.

9...0–0 10.0–0–0 c5

It is essential for Black to generate counterplay in the centre before White completes development and consolidates his space advantage.

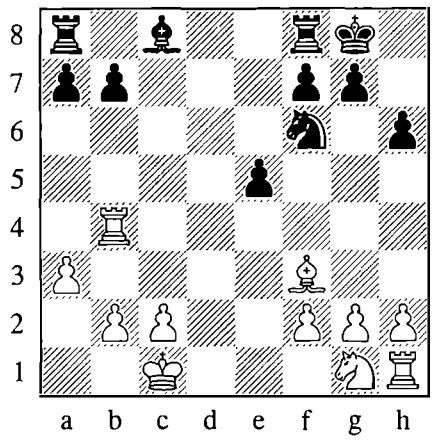


11.a3 ♗xc3 12.♕xc3 cxd4 13.♕xd4

13.♖xd4 is well met by 13...♕e7 with the idea of ...e5 and perhaps ...e4 afterwards.

13...♕xd4 14.♖xd4 e5 15.♖b4

15.♖c4 ♖b8 prepares to develop the bishop, with a comfortable game for Black.



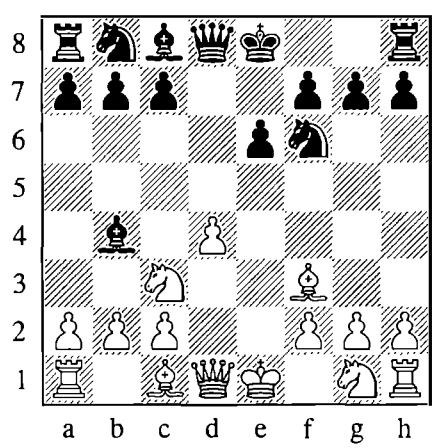
15...♖b8 16.♗e2

16.♞e2 a5! 17.♖b6 e4 18.♖xf6 gxf6 19.♗xe4 ♖d8∓ leaves White an exchange down although he has some compensation.

16...♗f5

Black has an active game and is at least equal.

C) 6.♗f3

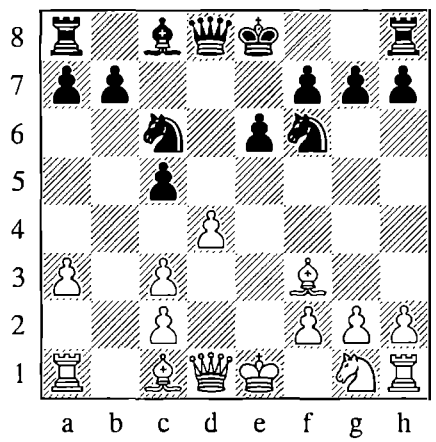


This is the most principled way to play for White, exerting pressure against Black's queenside in order to restrict the development of his c8-bishop.

6...c5

This is the most logical way to create counterplay, striking in the centre before White gets time to finish development. White's two main replies are **C1) 7.a3** and **C2) 7.♘e2**.

C1) 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3 ♘c6



9.dxc5!?

9.♘e2 leads to variation C21 below. The text move is interesting but carries obvious strategic risks.

9...♕a5 10.♗xc6†

White plays to keep his extra pawn.

The alternative is:

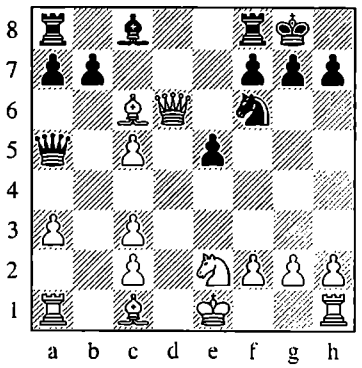
10.♘e2 0–0

Black should not be in a great hurry to restore material equality. It is more important to get the king to safety and complete development; the c5-pawn will not run away.

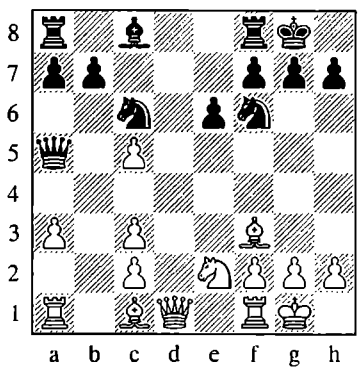
11.0–0

The novelty 11.♝g5N can be met by 11...♖d8 12.♕c1 ♘d4!∓ exploiting the fact that White has not yet castled.

11.♕d6? is a mistake: 11...e5 12.♗xc6 This occurred in Berger – Ribic, Germany 2003, and here Black's strongest continuation would have been:



12...♖d8!N 13.♕xe5 bxc6 White is unable to castle due to the skewer along the e-file. Meanwhile the rook is coming to e8 anyway, and with ...♗a6 on the agenda as well, White will have a hard time surviving the middlegame.



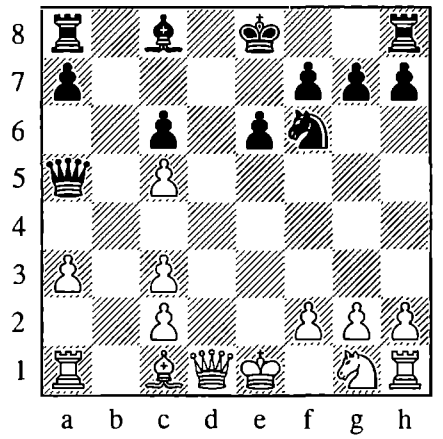
11...♖d8N

A modest improvement over 11...♘e5 as played in Petkovic – Maksimovic, Tivat 1995.

12.♕e1 ♕xc5∓

Black has regained his pawn with a positional advantage thanks to his better pawn structure and harmonious coordination between the pieces.

10...bxc6



11.♕d4

White clings to his extra pawn, but development and initiative are just as important here.

11...0–0 12.♘f3 ♗a6

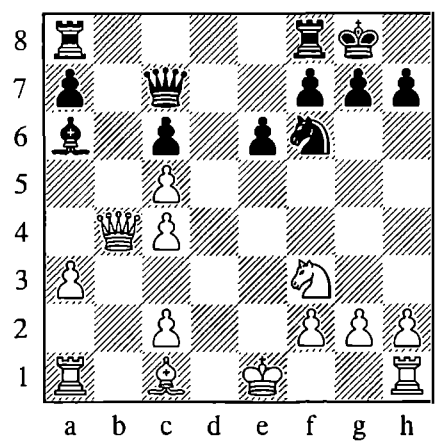
Now White only has one convenient way to prepare castling.

13.♕b4

Getting ready to block the bishop's diagonal.

13...♕c7 14.c4

We have been following the game Novoselski – Dimitrov, Jagodina 1998. My suggestion for Black is:



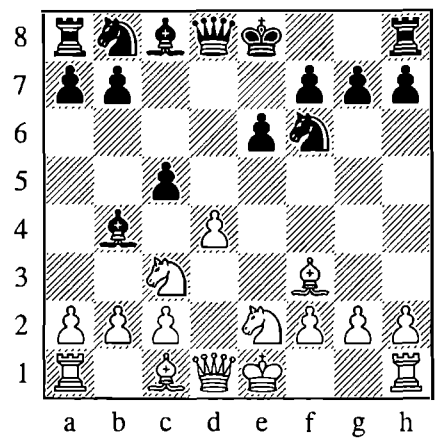
14...♖fb8N

Taking the opportunity to drive the white queen to an unfavourable square.

15.♕a4 ♗c8

The position is roughly equal with everything to play for. White has an extra pawn and his tripled c-pawns control some important squares. On the other hand White's queen is passively placed, while Black has a healthy extra pawn on the kingside and his bishop is poised to become active after ...e5.

C2) 7.♘e2

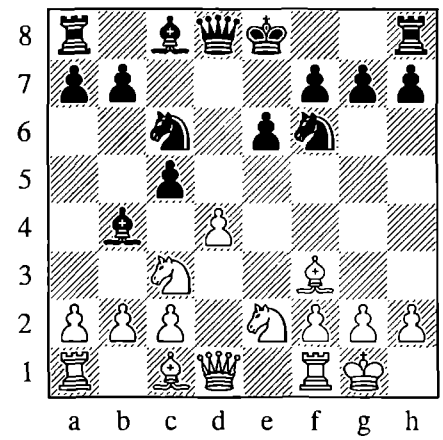


7...♘c6

After this natural developing move we reach a final division, with **C21) 8.0–0!?**, **C22) 8.a3** and **C23) 8.♗e3** being the most important options.

8.♗xc6† bxc6 gives White a slightly better pawn structure for the moment, but this small plus is outweighed by other factors. Black will always be able to exchange one of his doubled pawns, but more important is his pair of bishops – especially the unopposed light-squared one. White can force matters with 9.a3N but then after 9...♗xc3† 10.bxc3 White no longer has a structural edge, and after 10...♗a6∓ Black has the upper hand.

C21) 8.0–0!?



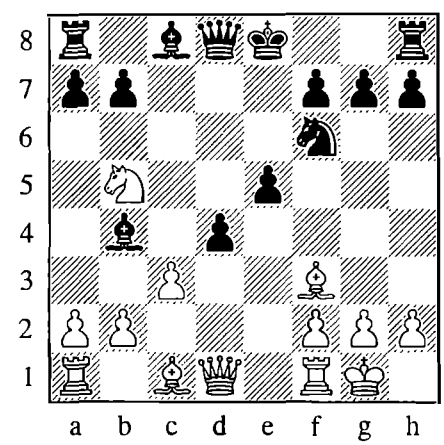
This surprising move is not bad.

8...♘xd4 9.♘xd4 cxd4 10.♘b5

The position is tricky. White has made a plus score in practice. With correct play, however, Black should have nothing to worry about.

10...e5 11.c3

11.♕e2N gets nowhere after 11...♕e7, and indeed it is White who needs to take care about the prospects of ...e4 and perhaps ...a6.



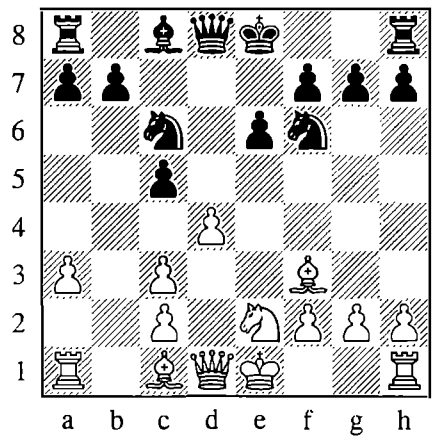
11...♗e7!

Black should return the pawn in order to be able to castle safely. White will also be stuck with an isolated pawn in the centre.

12.cxd4 e4 13.♗e2 0–0

With a roughly equal position, Delemarre – Uhlmann, Dresden 1999.

C22) 8.a3 ♗xc3† 9.bxc3



9...e5!

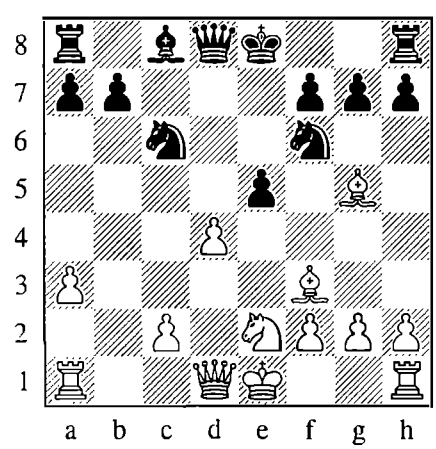
Once Black has given away his dark-squared bishop it is important to utilize the pawns to keep control over the dark squares. This move also establishes a threat of ...e4.

10.♗g5

After 10.♗xc6† bxc6 the position is about equal, but nothing like a dead draw.

10...cxd4 11.cxd4

This position was reached in Jaros–Bertholdt, Budapest 1959, and several subsequent games. Black has a few playable moves, but I like the following new idea which forces the play:



11...h6!?N 12.dxe5

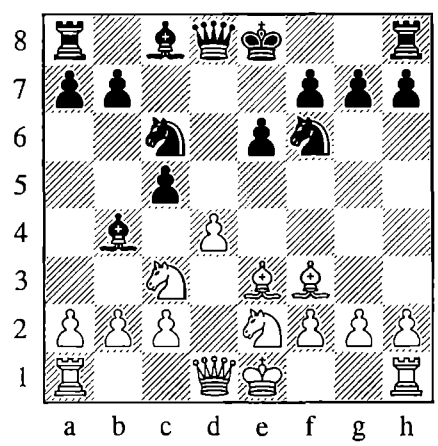
12.♗xc6† bxc6 13.dxe5 hxg5 14.♕xd8† ♔xd8 15.exf6 gxf6=

12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 is rated by the computer as slightly better for White, but I do not see a problem and assess the position as equal.

12...♕xd1† 13.♖xd1 ♘xe5 14.♗xf6 ♘xf3† 15.gxf3 gxf6=

The endgame is balanced. White is slightly more active at the moment, but Black has a bishop against a knight as well as a better pawn formation on the queenside. There is not much White can do with his activity before Black has consolidated.

C23) 8.♗e3



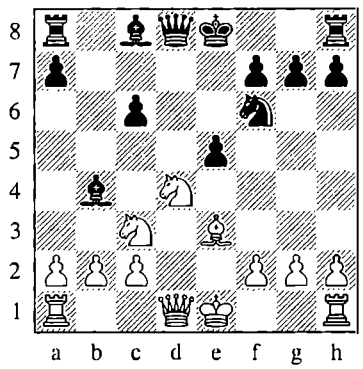
This final option has been tried by a few strong players but it is not dangerous.

8...cxd4 9.♘xd4

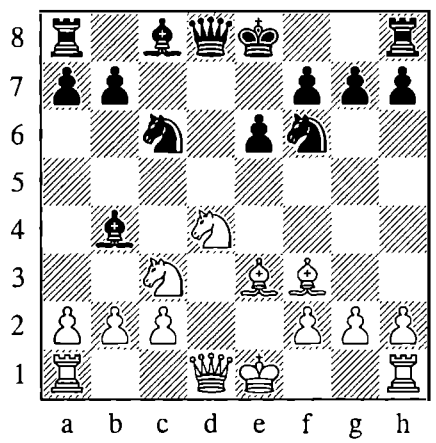
9.♗xc6† bxc6 is pleasant for Black after either of the following options:

a) 10.♕xd4 was played in Czerniakow – Matkowski, Sopot 1946, and now after 10...♕a5N Black's bishops are worth at least as much as White's slightly better pawn structure.

b) 10.♘xd4N allows Black to showcase a nice trick: 10...e5!



11.♘xc6 Retreating the knight also leaves White with an inferior position. 11...♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♕c7 13.♘b4 ♕xc3† 14.♗d2 ♕d4 Material is equal and Black has an obvious positional advantage.



9...♘e5! 10.♗e2

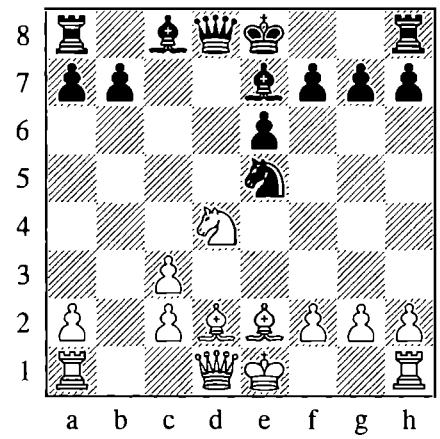
This is not forced, and in some games White has simply castled, but it seems to me that he cannot hope to create problems without keeping this bishop.

10...♘d5 11.♗d2 ♘xc3

11...♗xc3N 12.bxc3 looks at least okay for Black too, but I would prefer not to give up the bishop pair without a good reason.

12.bxc3 ♗e7

White will find it difficult to justify the weakening of his queenside pawns, as shown in the following practical example.

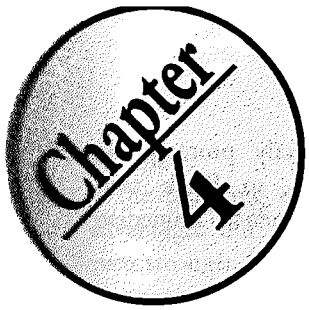


13.0–0 0–0 14.f4 ♘d7 15.♗d3 ♘c5 16.♕f3 ♗d7 17.♖ae1 ♘xd3!? 18.cxd3 ♕c7∓

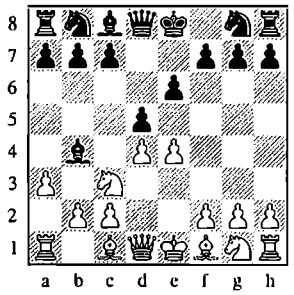
Fichtl – Uhlmann, Zinnowitz 1966. Black chose to trade his advantage in pawn structure for that of the bishop pair, and his chances have remained somewhat higher.

Conclusion

4.♗d3 is not a bad move, but it carries one obvious disadvantage: White allows his bishop to be drawn to the exposed e4-square. To deal with the subsequent attack from a knight on f6, the first player must either move the bishop for a third time, or exchange at least one of his bishops for an enemy knight. Either option can be regarded as a concession, and Black encounters no real problems in any of the lines examined in this chapter.



4th Move Options



4.a3

Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.a3

4...♗xc3† 5.bxc3 dxe4

A) 6.f3? 50

B) 6.♕g4 ♘f6 7.♕xg7 ♖g8 8.♕h6 ♖g6 51

B1) 9.♕f4 51

B2) 9.♕h4 52

B3) 9.♕e3 ♘c6 53

B31) 10.f3? 53

B32) 10.♗b2 54

B33) 10.♘e2 ♕d6!?N 56

B331) 11.c4 57

B332) 11.a4 59

B333) 11.♘g3 60

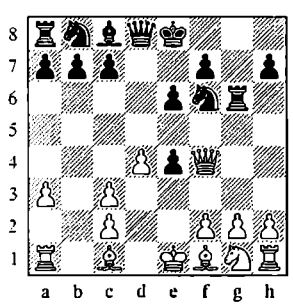
B4) 9.♕d2 b6 62

B41) 10.♘e2 62

B42) 10.♘h3 63

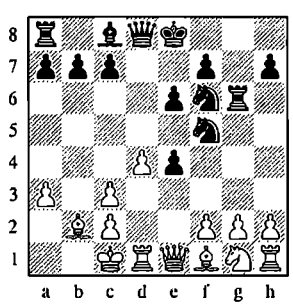
B43) 10.a4 65

B1) after 9.♕f4



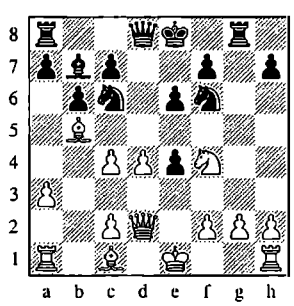
9...♘c6!N

B32) after 12.♕e1



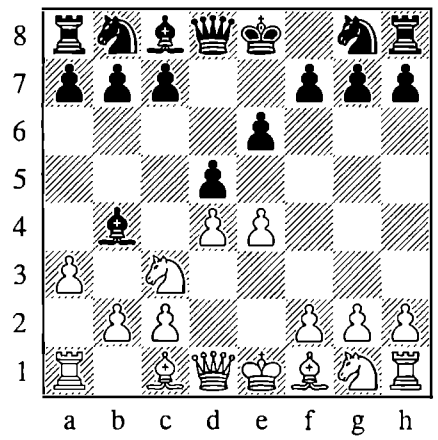
12...b6!N

B42) after 13.c4



13...♕e7!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.a3



With this rather aggressive move White puts his faith in the bishop pair, without regard for the damage to his queenside structure or the loss of the e4-pawn, the latter of which should only be temporary. This half-forgotten line has, in recent years, been tested by a few top players, so we should take it seriously.

4...♗xc3† 5.bxc3 dxe4

From this point White has tried almost every legal move at some point, but it only really makes sense to consider the two most popular ones: **A) 6.f3?** and **B) 6.♕g4**.

A) 6.f3?

This has been White's most popular choice and has, even more surprisingly, achieved a positive score. This is mostly due to low-level practice where Black has failed to respond correctly. In fact, a database search shows that hardly any titled players have followed this route for White is the past decade; a sure sign of its dubiousness.

White is aiming to open lines for attacking purposes, especially the f-file, but we can ensure that this dream never becomes a reality.

6...c5!

The e4-pawn is indirectly protected by the prospect of ...♕h4†, so Black takes the opportunity to commence immediate counterplay.

7.♘h3

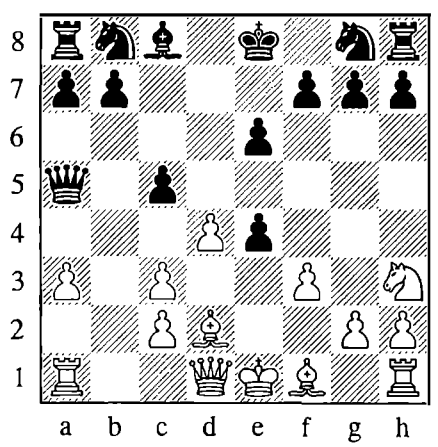
White has tried several other moves, with the total game count approaching a thousand. On this occasion, since White's entire scheme is mistaken, I do not consider it worthwhile to conduct a thorough survey of the available material. Black is better everywhere, and in most cases sensible development will suffice for an advantage. In this short section I will mention a few of the most relevant examples before moving swiftly on to the 6.♕g4 line, which is the only serious way for White to handle the 4.a3 variation.

7.♗e2 was once tried by the ever-creative Jonny Hector back in 1997. Black has several decent ways to continue, but my choice would be 7...♕a5!N 8.♗d2 ♘f6∓ by analogy with the main line below.

7...♕a5!

This rare continuation works perfectly to expose the frailty of White's queenside structure.

8.♗d2



8...♘f6!

The tempting 8...e3 should also yield an advantage, but maintaining the tension is even stronger. White not only lacks sufficient compensation for the pawn, but also faces serious problems completing development. The one practical example continued:

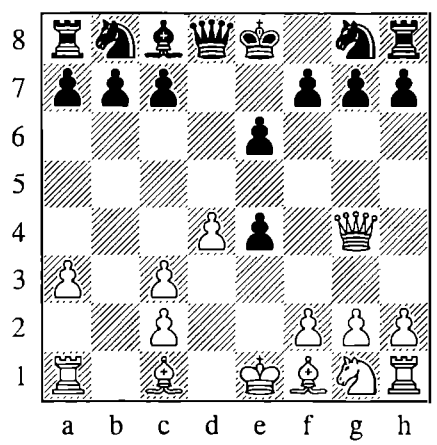
9.♕e2 exf3 10.♕xf3

Hanison – Von Zitzewitz, email 2001. Here Black's most accurate continuation is:

10...♘c6N

Intending ...cxd4 followed by ...♕d5, forcing a queen exchange, after which Black's extra pawn will provide excellent winning chances.

B) 6.♕g4



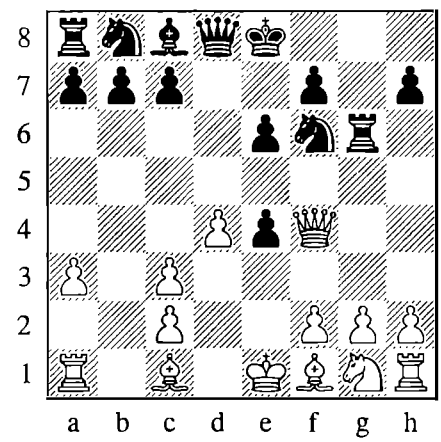
Compared with Chapter 2, White has a better chance to justify his early queen foray having already provoked an exchange on c3, removing the pin on the knight and fortifying the d4-pawn.

6...♘f6 7.♕xg7 ♖g8 8.♕h6 ♖g6

Several other options have been tested here, but I favour the rook move as it stabilizes Black's position while also forcing a decision from the white queen. We will analyse four options, of which the most important are the third and especially the fourth: **B1) ♕f4**, **B2) ♕h4**, **B3) ♕e3** and **B4) ♕d2**.

9.♕h3?N is unplayed for good reason as 9...e5 wins a crucial tempo. 10.♕e3 ♘c6 Compared with line B3 below, Black has the extra move ...e5, which is something he normally aims for anyway within the next few moves.

B1) 9.♕f4



This move is illogical, as in many lines White would prefer to place his knight on this square. Here I propose an immediate deviation from the one example in my database, Fortunato – Duben, email 1999.

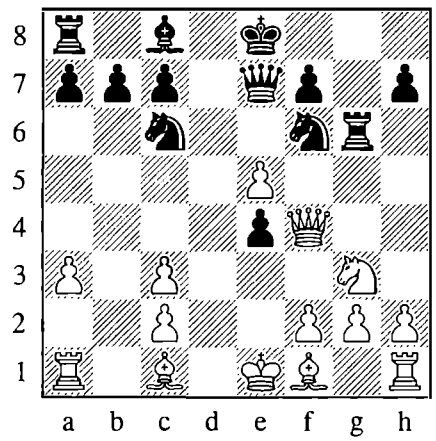
9...♘c6!N

Creating a threat of ...♘d5, while also preparing a central strike with ...♕e7 and ...e5.

10.♘e2

10.a4? is a mistake in view of 10...♘d5 11.♕d2 (11.♕xe4 ♘xc3 12.♕d3 ♕xd4∓ gives Black a solid extra pawn) 11...e5 with a strong initiative for Black, for instance: 12.dxe5 (12.c4 creates too many weaknesses: 12...♘f4 13.d5 ♘d4∓) 12...♗e6!∓ Black overprotects the knight, planning ...♕h4 next.

10...♕e7 11.♘g3 e5 12.dxe5

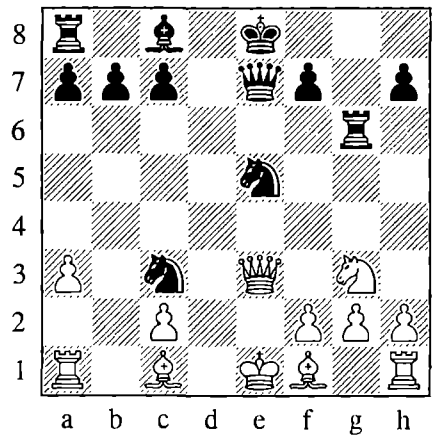


12...♘d5!

This tactical strike leads to complications favouring Black thanks to the exposed white king.

13.♕xe4 ♘xc3 14.♕e3 ♘xe5

Black is at least slightly better in view of the concrete threats along the e-file. If White is not careful, he could lose the game immediately.



15.♘e2

After 15.♗e2? ♘xe2 16.♕xc2 ♗g4 17.f3 ♖c6! Black crashes through.

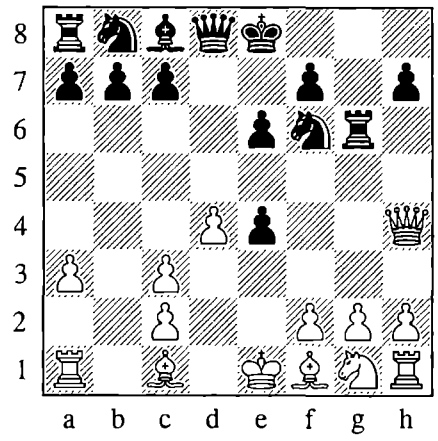
15...♘xe2

15...♘d5!? is also worth considering, with a strong and ongoing initiative for Black.

16.♗xe2 ♖xg2

Black is a pawn up and still has plenty of activity.

B2) 9.♕h4



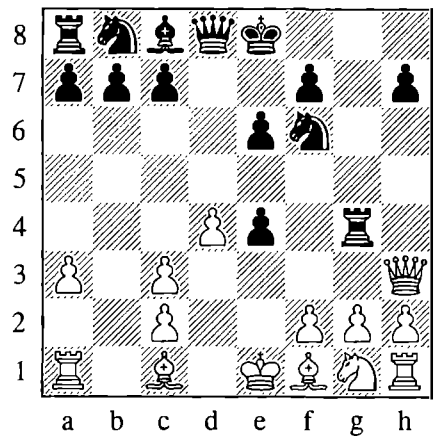
This move is less than ambitious, as Black can immediately invite a repetition.

9...♖g4

If Black is determined to strive for a full point, he may wish to investigate 9...c5 10.♘e2 ♘c6, leading to an active position with everything to play for.

10.♕h3?!

Objectively White should acquiesce to the repetition with 10.♕h6, as seen in several games.



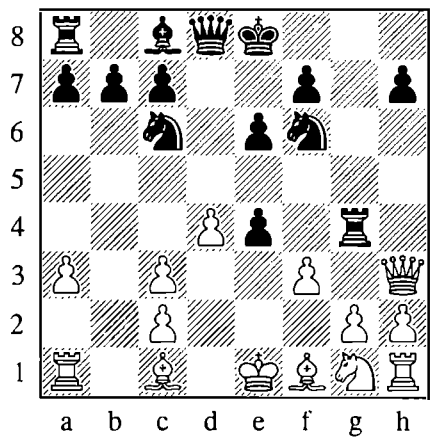
10...♘c6!N

Better than 10...c5 as seen in Stelting – Schulze, Hamburg 1990.

11.f3

11.♗b5 ♕d5 12.♖b1 ♗d7∓ is good for Black.

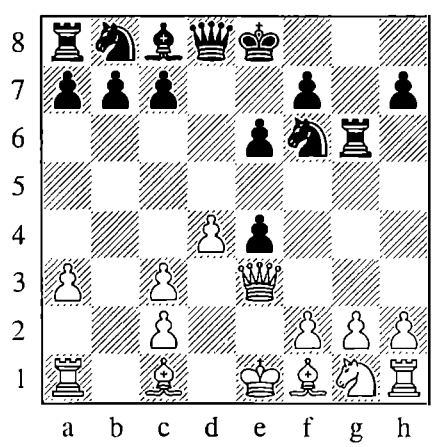
11.♘e2 blocks the f1-bishop and gives Black an excellent opportunity to strike in the centre: 11...e5! 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.♕e3 ♕e7 Black's better pawn structure and development advantage guarantee an edge.



11...♖g6! 12.fxe4 e5 13.♕d3 exd4 14.♘e2 dxc3

Black is slightly better thanks to the numerous weaknesses in White's pawn structure.

B3) 9.♕e3



This move was used successfully by GMs Li Chao and Bartel in 2012, albeit against considerably lower-rated opposition.

9...♘c6

This move has several functions. The knight attacks the centre, stopping White from playing c3-c4 for the moment. Other ideas are to support the ...e5 break or to transfer the knight to f5 via e7.

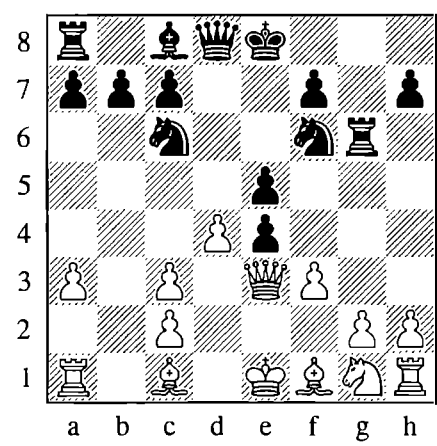
I considered three main replies: the incorrect **B31) 10.f3?** and the more respectable **B32) 10.♗b2** and **B33) 10.♘e2**.

B31) 10.f3?

This rare move was once played successfully by Hector, but with correct play Black can obtain an advantage by force.

10...e5!

10...♘d5?! allowed White unnecessary counterplay after 11.♕xe4 ♘xc3 12.♕d3 in Hector – Jimenez Villena, Zaragoza 1991.



11.♗b2N

White needs to improve on the one existing example, in which he was swiftly destroyed: 11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♗b2 ♗e6 13.♖d1 ♕e7∓ 14.♖d4? c5 15.♗b5† ♔f8 16.♖d2 ♘d5

17.♕xe4 ♗f5 0–1 Zoebisch – Giesemann, corr. 1969.

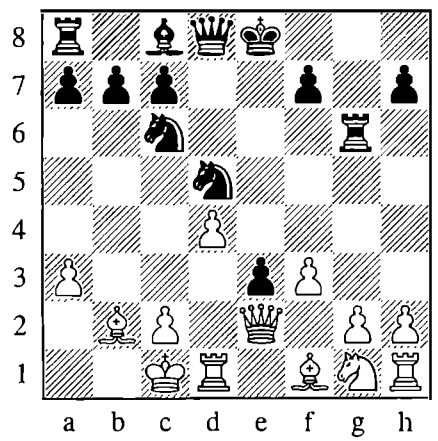
11.fxe4N is not much of an improvement due to 11...cxd4 12.cxd4 ♕xd4∓ when White's poor development and pawn structure will be his undoing.

11...exd4 12.cxd4 ♘d5! 13.♕e2 e3

White is in serious trouble, as the following lines demonstrate.

14.0–0–0

14.c4?? ♘f4 is crushing.



14...b5!

It is worth remembering this method of securing the knight's position on d5.

15.♕xb5

This allows Black to obtain a winning attack, but it is hard to suggest a decent alternative.

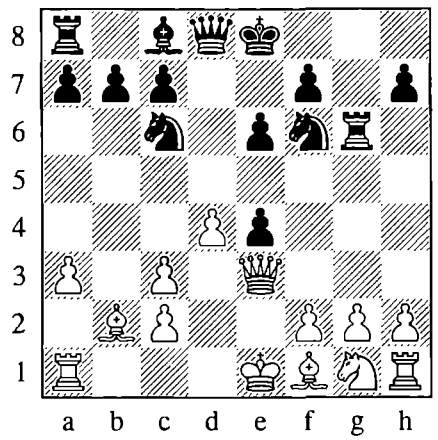
15...♖b8 16.♕c5

16.♕a4 ♗d7 followed by ...♘ce7 and ...♖gb6 wins for Black.

16...♘ce7!–+

Once again the plan is ...♖gb6. White can struggle on for a few moves but he is fighting a lost cause.

B32) 10.♗b2



This has been the most popular move, aiming for quick long castling.

10...♘e7

Compared with the previous variation, White is well placed to deal with an opening of the centre, so we should refrain from any ...e5 ideas and instead transfer the knight to f5.

11.0–0–0

11.c4?

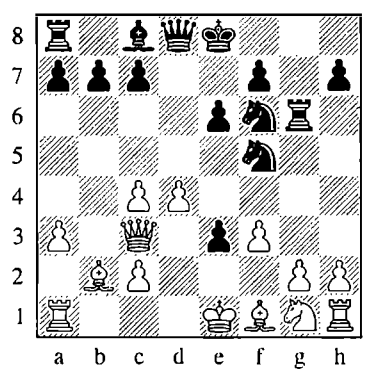
This overambitious move meets with a strong reply.

11...♘f5 12.♕c3 e3!

12...♕d6 gave Black a slight plus in Bronstein – L. Hansen, Tastrup 1990, but the second player can and should be more ambitious.

13.f3

13.fxe3? is refuted by 13...♘e4 followed by a check on h4.

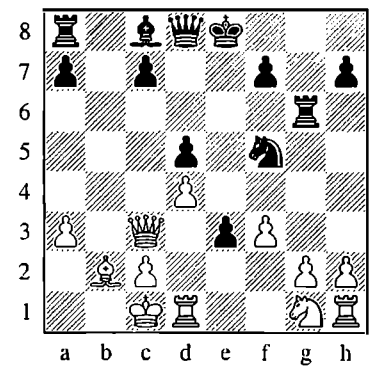


13...b5!

This strong follow-up gives Black access to the crucial d5-square.

14.0–0–0 bxc4 15.♗xc4 ♘d5 16.♗xd5 exd5!N

16...♕xd5 led to a quick victory for Black in Mayr – Ambrosewicz, corr. 1985, but the position would have been rather unclear had White responded correctly with 17.♘e2N.



17.g4

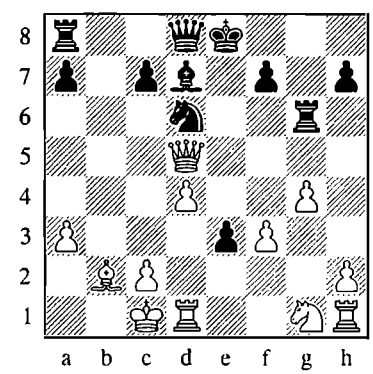
If White does not do something quickly he will be smashed along the b-file.

17...♘d6 18.♕c6†

Taking the d-pawn is the only chance.

18.♕xe3†? ♖e6 19.♕f4 ♘c4 20.♗c3 ♖b8 is hopeless for White.

18...♗d7 19.♕xd5



19...♖g5!

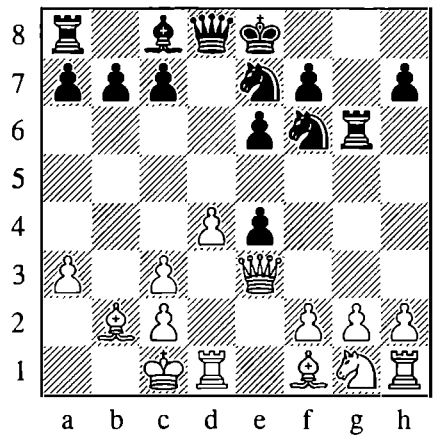
Forcing the queen to an unfavourable square while preparing to switch the rook to the queenside.

20.♕a2

20.♕b3 ♖b8 21.♕xe3† ♗e6 22.d5 ♘c4 turns out badly for White.

20...♖b5∓

The game is likely to be decided by Black's attack.



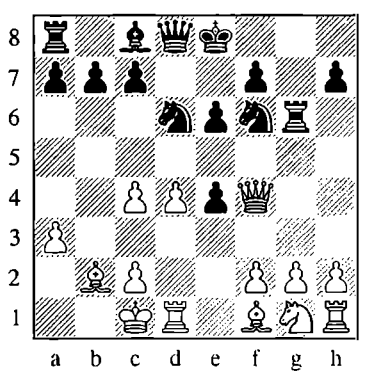
11...♘f5

Amazingly, I only found a single game in which this natural move was played.

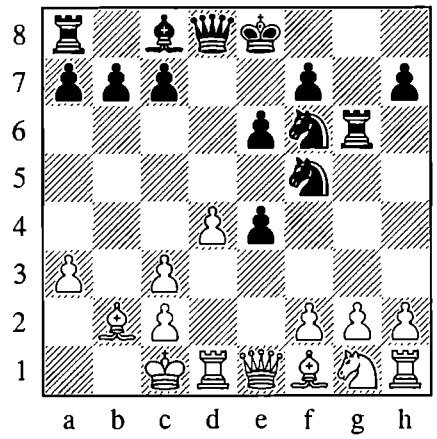
The spectacular 11...b5!? has been the most popular choice. In this case Black either gets attacking chances on the open b-file or a positional advantage in view of his control over the light squares on the queenside. Despite these factors, I find the straightforward text move even more appealing.

12.♕e1

12.♕f4?! ♘d6 13.c4 allows us to employ a familiar device:



13...b5! 14.cxb5 a6∓ Black has the makings of a powerful attack.

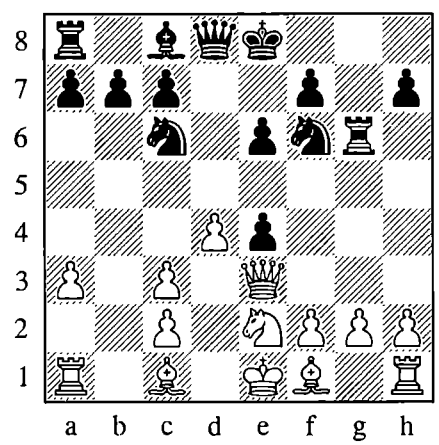


12...b6!N∓

12...♕d6 was played in Foguelman – Amado, Mar del Plata 1964, when White could have obtained counterplay with 13.f3!N⇄.

The proposed novelty is a clear improvement, and secures Black a comfortable position with a small advantage. His piece coordination is better and the strong e4-pawn cramps White's position and restrains the activity of his pieces.

B33) 10.♘e2



With this move White prepares either to play c3-c4 next, or to transfer the knight to g3 or f4. At this point I found a completely original approach which has not been tested in any of the thirty-plus existing games.

10...♕d6!?N

Most players have preferred to retreat the knight to e7, but I prefer to keep the option of ...e5. The queen move also brings Black one step closer to long castling.

10...♘e7

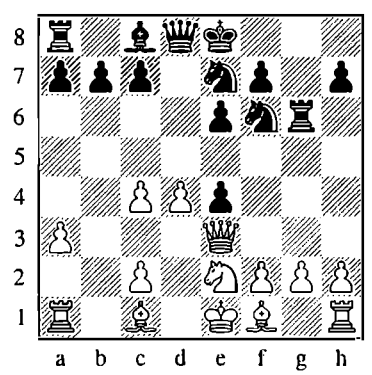
We will take a quick look at the theoretical line, which also seems fine for Black.

11.c4

11.a4N ♘f5 12.♕f4 ♕d6 13.♕xd6 cxd6 gives Black good chances.

11.♘f4 ♘f5!?N 12.♕e2 (12.♕h3? ♖h6 13.♘xe6 ♗xe6 14.♗xh6 ♘xd4–+) 12...♖g8 looks roughly level.

11.♘g3 has been the most popular move, after which Black can bring the e7-knight to d5 or f5. Interested readers can carry out their own investigations from here, but I will not discuss it any further as it is not my main recommendation anyway.



11...♘f5 12.♕c3 b6

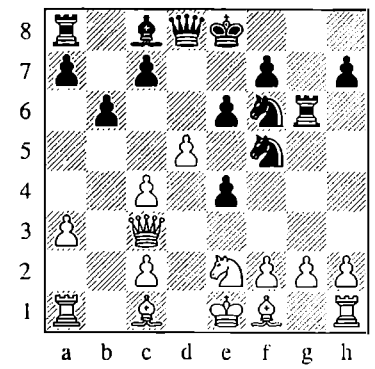
On this occasion Black should refrain from the tempting 12...b5. The intentions are good, but after 13.cxb5 ♘d5 14.♕b3± Black was unable to generate sufficient compensation in Li Chao – Drummond, Queenstown 2012.

13.d5!?N

An interesting try, sacrificing a pawn to open the long diagonal.

13.♗f4 ♗b7 14.♖d1 ♕e7 15.♘g3 ♘h4 was fine for Black in Faber – Ratzmann, email 2001.

13.a4!?N is another idea.



13...exd5 14.cxd5 ♘xd5!

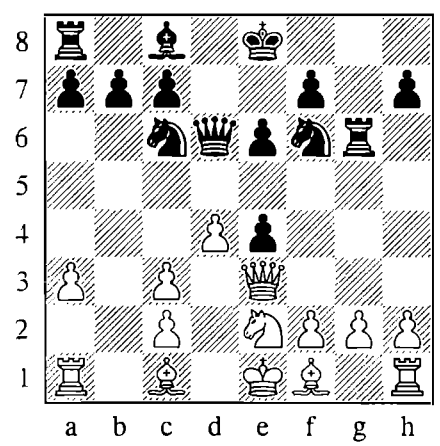
14...♕xd5 15.♗b2 gives White real compensation.

15.♕e5†

15.♕h8† ♔e7 16.♕e5† ♔f8∓

15...♗e6

Black is at least equal.



Let's return to my recommendation of 10...♕d6!?N. Obviously this is a fresh position so the following analysis is all my own. I considered three main options: **B331) 11.c4**, **B332) 11.a4** and **B333) 11.♘g3**.

11.♘f4 ♖g8 doesn't cause Black any trouble as now a4 is always met by ...e5. 12.♗e2 (12.a4 e5 13.dxe5 ♕xe5∓ Black has the better pawn structure.) 12...♘e7! followed by ...♘f5 is favourable for Black.

11.♗b2 e5 12.h3

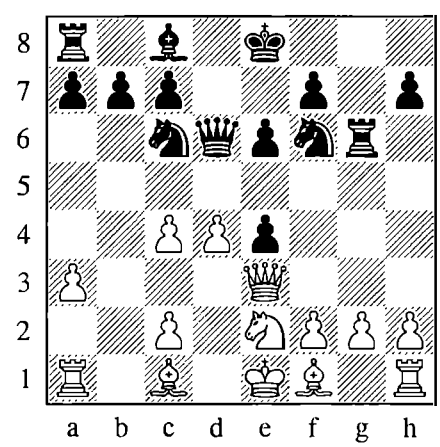
12.♘g3 reaches the 12.♗b2 line in the notes to variation B333 – see page 60.

12.0–0–0? ♘g4 13.♕g3 exd4 14.♘f4 ♖f6 15.♘h3 ♕xg3 16.hxg3 ♘xf2 17.♘xf2 ♖xf2 18.cxd4 (18.♖xh7?? loses to 18...♗g4!–+) 18...♗g4 19.♖d2 ♖xd2 20.♔xd2 h5∓ Black has a solid extra pawn.

12...♗e6 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♖d1 ♕b6

Black has a comfortable position, having a lead in development and a better pawn structure.

B331) 11.c4



This move is playable, but it seems slightly risky as White has yet to complete his development.

11...b6

Simple development works well; there is no need for Black to go for anything fancy.

Having said that, Black can also play for complications with the following aggressive try:

11...e5!? 12.dxe5

After 12.d5 ♘e7 13.♘c3 c6 White has problems maintaining his centre, as 14.c5 ♕d8 15.d6 ♘f5 16.♕d2 ♘d4!∓ gives Black far too much activity. (The simple 16...b6∓ is also good enough.)

12...♕xe5 13.♖b1 ♗e6

Black should hurry to complete development instead of counting pawns.

14.♖xb7?!

Objectively this seems to be just about playable, but it is too risky for most human players to contemplate.

14.♗b2 keeps the position roughly equal.

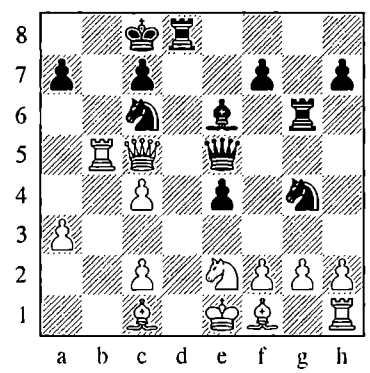
14...0–0–0

14...♗xc4 leads to roughly level play, but the text move is clearly the most challenging continuation.

15.♖b5 ♘g4!?

If Black is content with a move repetition or a balanced endgame, he can achieve either of them with: 15...♕d6 16.♕d2 ♕e7 (16...♕xd2† 17.♗xd2 ♗xc4=) 17.♕c3 ♕d7 18.♕d2=

16.♕c5

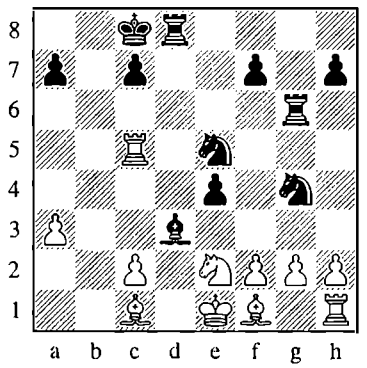


16...♗xc4! 17.♕xe5

17.♕xc4?? ♕f6 18.♕c5 ♘d4–+ is winning for Black.

17...♘cxe5 18.♖c5 ♗d3!

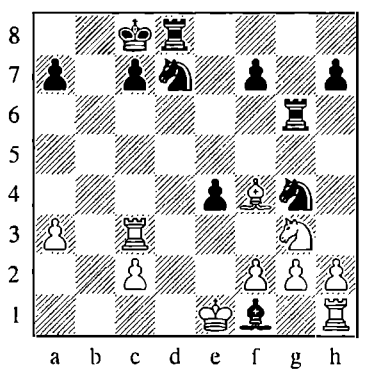
A spectacular move which tells a lot about the position and White's lack of development. Now ...♗xc2 is a serious threat, so White needs to defend accurately to keep himself in the game.



19.♘g3!

Weaker is 19.♘f4, when 19...♗xf1 20.♖xf1 ♖gd6 21.♔e2 ♘c6∓ gives Black a strong initiative in the endgame.

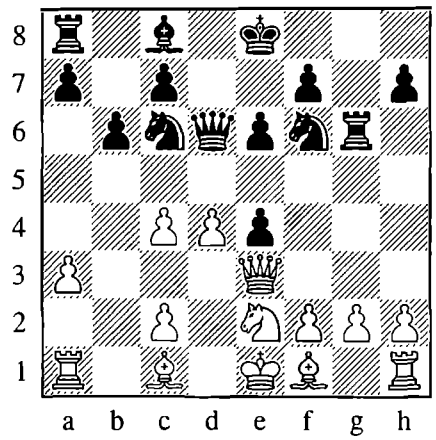
19...♘d7 20.♖c3 ♗xf1 21.♗f4!?



21...♗xg2 22.♖xc7† ♔b8 23.♖xd7† ♔c8 24.♖c7† ♔b8 25.♖g1 ♗f3

White has nothing better than taking the perpetual check.

Let's return to the straightforward 11...b6. This move lacks the fireworks of the above line, but should offer Black at least equal prospects by simple means.



12.♗b2 ♗b7

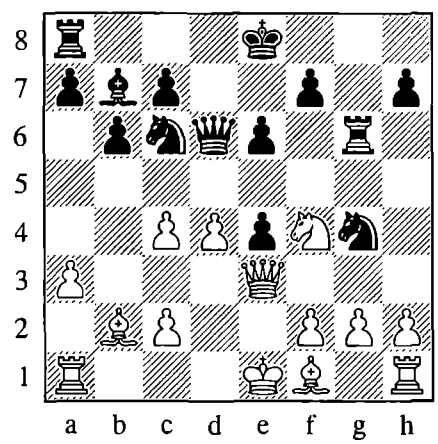
12...♘e7 is playable, but I find it more logical to develop the last minor piece before deciding on a plan.

13.♘f4

13.h3 prevents the idea seen on Black's next move, but even so, after 13...0–0–0 14.0–0–0 ♘e7∓ Black's opening has been a success. He controls the centre and enjoys both a lead in development and harmonious coordination between the pieces.

13...♘g4!

13...♖g4 14.g3 0–0–0 is not bad, but the text move poses concrete problems which are not easy for White to handle.



14.♕d2

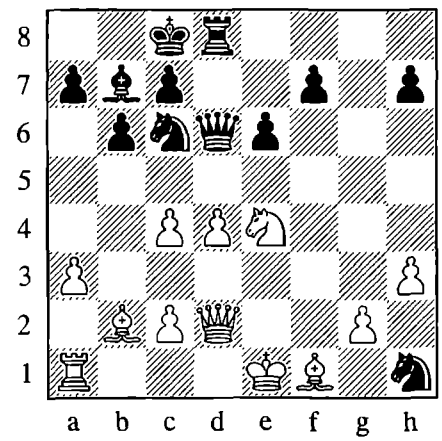
14.♕xe4? is refuted by 14...f5–+.

I also considered 14.♕g3 ♖g8! 15.d5 (15.♗e2 ♘h6∓) 15...0–0–0 16.♗e2 ♘e7 17.♘h5 e3! with a strong initiative for Black.

14...♖f6 15.h3

15.g3 e5! looks dangerous.

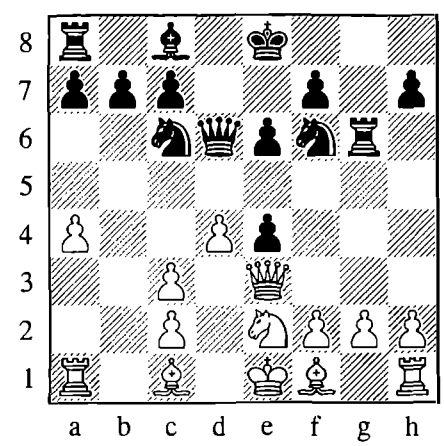
15...♘xf2 16.♘h5 0–0–0 17.♘xf6 ♘xh1 18.♘xe4



18...♕h2!∓

Black has the advantage, despite the unusual placement of his knight and queen in the corner of the board.

B332) 11.a4



Quite a thematic move, but it costs an important tempo and invites Black to open the centre.

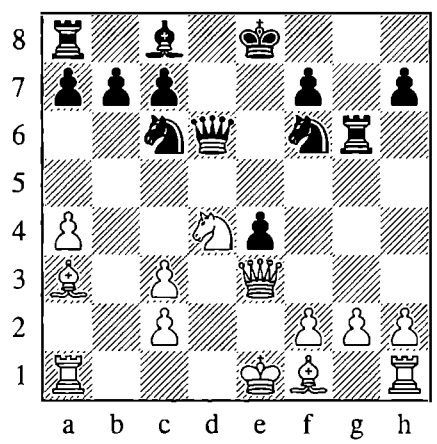
11...e5 12.♗a3 exd4

This looks like the simplest solution.

Black can also keep the tension with 12...♕d5!?, reaching a dynamically equal position. Black has a strong centre and is slightly ahead in development, while White has the bishop pair as his trump card.

13.♘xd4

13.cxd4?! ♘b4 grants Black a powerful initiative, for instance: 14.0–0–0 ♘fd5 15.♕xe4† (Trying to win a piece with 15.♕b3 a5 16.c3 does not work as cxb4 is not even a threat. Black simply continues 16...♖f6 17.cxb4 axb4 18.♗b2 ♗d7 with a crushing position.) 15...♗e6∓ For the small cost of a pawn, Black has an active position with excellent attacking chances against White's king.



13...♘xd4!

A small finesse, relying on the prospect of a fork on c2.

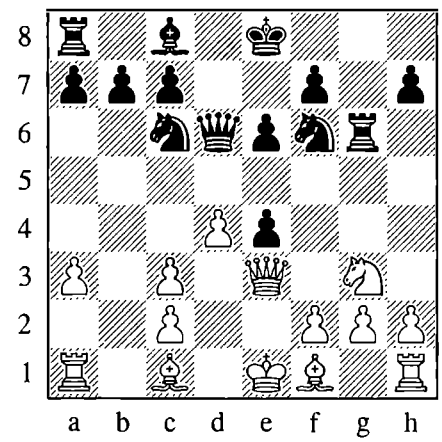
14.♕xd4

14.cxd4 ♕e6 leads to a similar position with queens on the board. Taking into account the relative safety of the kings, I would expect this to favour Black.

14...♕xd4 15.cxd4 a5!

Fixing the a4-pawn as a potential weakness. I believe the chances to be about equal, but either side could have chances to outplay the other.

B333) 11.♘g3

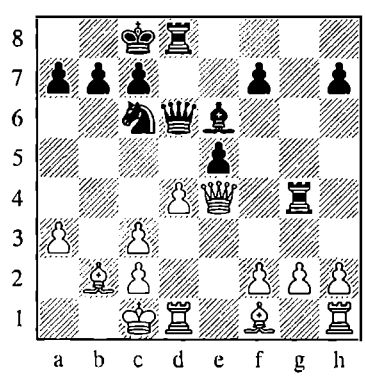


Going after the e4-pawn appears to be the most critical continuation.

11...e5 12.♘xe4

White can also delay the capture with: 12.♗b2 ♗e6 13.0–0–0 0–0–0 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♕xe4 ♖g4

15...exd4 16.cxd4 ♖g4 could transpose.



16.♕e3 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♘xd4

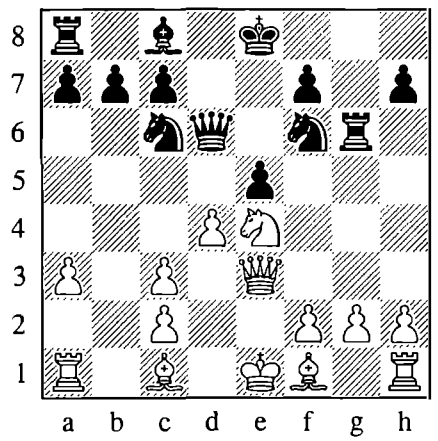
Now Black threatens ...♘b3†, while another idea is just to stabilize the position of the knight with ...c5.

18.♖xd4

18.♗d3 c5 gives Black a lot of activity.

18...♖xd4 19.♗xd4 ♕xd4 20.♕xd4 ♖xd4

The endgame should be drawn, although Black is a bit more active at this point.



12...♘xe4 13.♕xe4 ♗e6 14.dxe5 ♘xe5

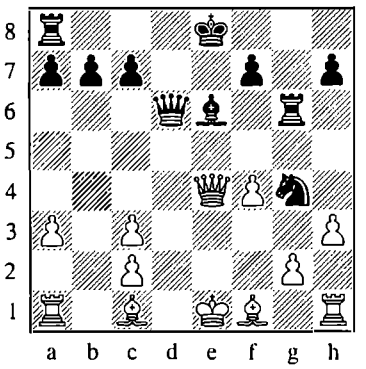
Black is a pawn down and another one is hanging on b7, but his lead in development more than makes up for it, and it is actually White who must act carefully to maintain the balance.

15.♕xb7?

This is certainly not the best move, but I decided to analyse it mainly for illustrative purposes to show how Black can exploit his advantage in mobility. Here are three other options:

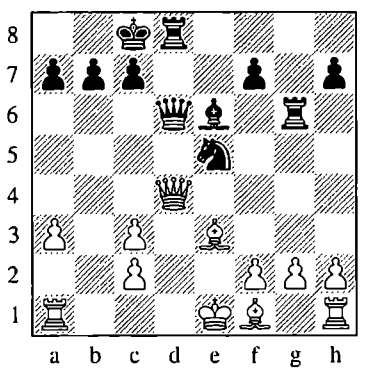
After 15.♗f4 ♗d5! 16.♗xe5 (16.♕d4 ♖e6†) 16...♗xe4 17.♗xd6 ♖xd6 18.♖d1 0–0–0 19.♖xd6 ♖xd6∓ White has to defend an unpleasant endgame.

15.f4 ♘g4 (15...♘d7 16.f5) 16.h3 (16.f5? 0–0–0)

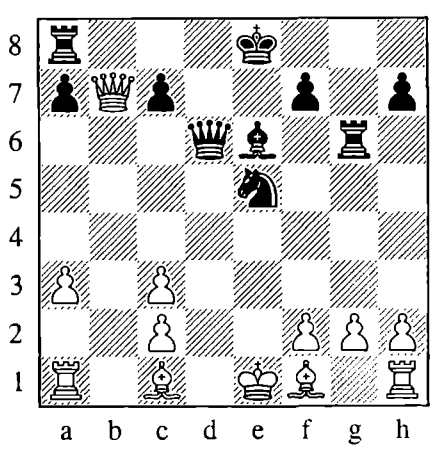


16...♘h6 17.♕e5 ♕e7 18.♗e3 0–0–0 19.♗c5 ♕e8∞ Black has fair compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

15.♗e3! is safest, and should lead to a draw after: 15...0–0–0 16.♕d4

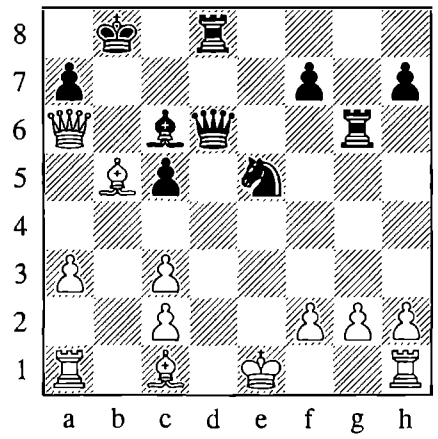


16...♕c6 17.♕xe5 ♖d5 18.♕h8† ♖d8 19.♕e5 ♖d5= Forcing a repetition of moves.

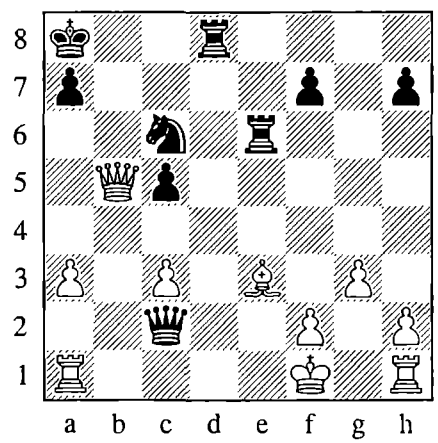


15...♗d5 16.♕b4 c5 17.♕a4† ♗c6 18.♗b5 0–0–0 19.♕a6† ♔b8

The checks have run out and White must think about defending.



20.♗f4 ♖e6 21.♗xc6 ♘xc6† 22.♗e3 ♕d2† 23.♔f1 ♕xc2 24.♕b5† ♔a8 25.g3



25...♕e4!

25...♘e5 only leads to a perpetual check after: 26.♕xc5 ♖d1† 27.♖xd1 ♕xd1† 28.♔g2 ♕f3† 29.♔h3 ♕h5†=

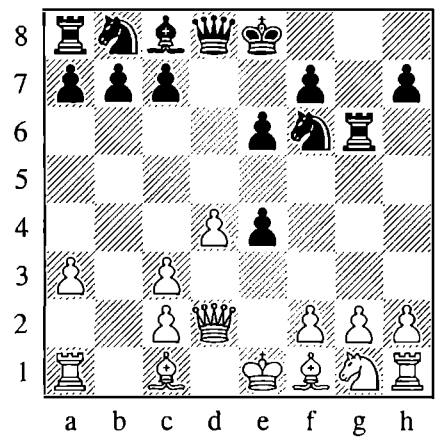
26.♖g1

After 26.♔g1 ♖ed6 White is unable to defend himself against both the check on d1 and the knight invasion to f3.

26...♘e5 27.♕xc5 ♖b6!–+

White has no way to extricate himself and will soon succumb to the threats.

B4) 9.♕d2



This is the most common queen retreat and can be considered the main line.

9...b6

Black prepares the development of his bishop. Although b7 might seem like the obvious home for this piece, I would like to point out that in some cases the a6-square can make an attractive alternative, with ideas to exchange the light-squared bishops and fight for control over the c4-square.

White's three main replies are **B41) 10.♘e2**, **B42) 10.♘h3** and **B43) 10.a4**.

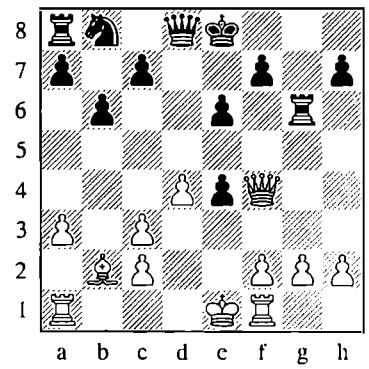
10.♗b2 is well met by 10...♗a6 11.c4 (11.♗xa6 ♘xa6 12.g3 ♕d6=) 11...c5! when White's centre was already under pressure in Paneque – Arencibia Rodriguez, Havana 1990.

B41) 10.♘e2

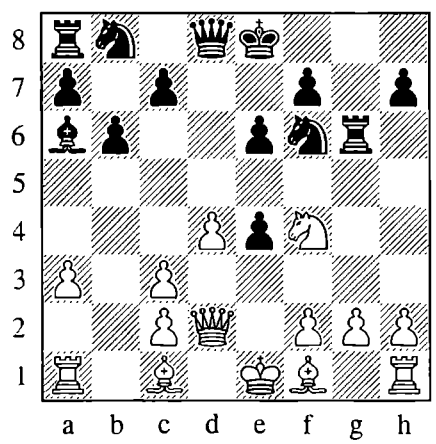
This has been the most popular choice, but Black has quite a convincing answer to it.

10...♗a6! 11.♘f4

11.♗b2 ♘d5! 12.♘f4 ♘xf4 13.♕xf4 ♗xf1 14.♖xf1 occurred in Eslon – Garcia Gonzales, Biel 1984, and here I would like to suggest:



14...♖xg2N 15.♕xc4 ♕d5 16.♕xh7 ♘d7 17.0–0–0 0–0–0 Black is at least equal in view of his superior piece coordination. In the event of 18.♕xf7 ♖f8 19.♕h7 Black should not hurry to restore the material balance but simply keep the pressure with 19...♖f3!∓ intending ...♘f6-e4 with a strong initiative.



11...♗xf1!

Black sacrifices an exchange in order to gain control over the light squares.

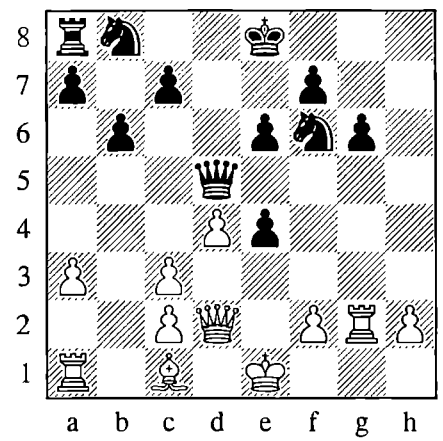
12.♘xg6N

I have not seen this move played, but it is obviously the critical test, as otherwise Black will have achieved the favourable exchange of light-squared bishops for no cost at all.

12.♔xf1?! ♖g8 13.♕e2 occurred in Kuzmin – Petrosian, Moscow 1981, and now after the simple 13...♘c6N∓ Black has the upper hand thanks to his safer king and better piece coordination.

12...♗xg2 13.♖g1 hxg6 14.♖xg2 ♕d5

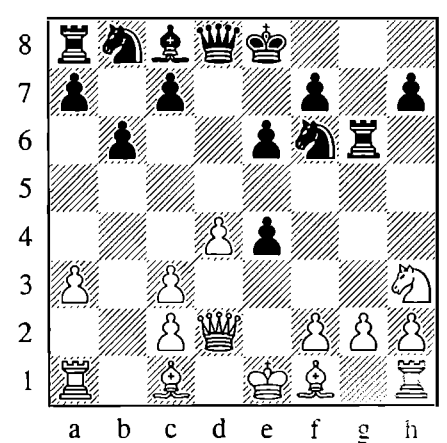
Black has promising play for a small material investment. A possible continuation is:



15.♕g5 ♘bd7 16.♕xd5 exd5

In return for the exchange Black has an extra pawn, a better structure and solid control over the c4-square, which should amount to sufficient compensation.

B42) 10.♘h3



Compared to the more common 10.♘e2, this move avoids the ...♗a6xf1 exchange sacrifice that we saw in the previous line.

10...♘c6!?N

10...♗b7 has been the usual choice, but I slightly prefer the knight development. My idea is to prevent the c3-c4 advance as well as to support a later break with ...e5. The text move is technically a novelty, but it soon transposes to a few known games.

11.♗b5

This seems like the most logical try for White.

11.♘f4 ♖g8 12.♗b5 ♗b7 leads to the same position.

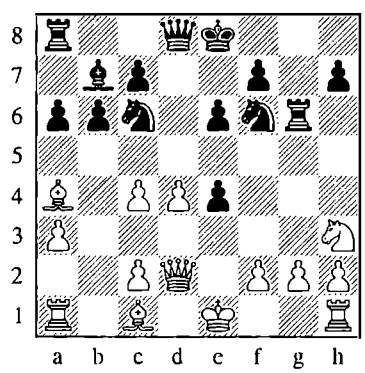
11...♗b7 12.♘f4

I also considered:

12.c4 a6!?

12...♕e7 13.♘f4 (13.♕b4 ♘d7=) 13...♖g8 transposes to the main line – see 12.♘f4 ♖g8 13.c4 ♕e7N below.

13.♗a4



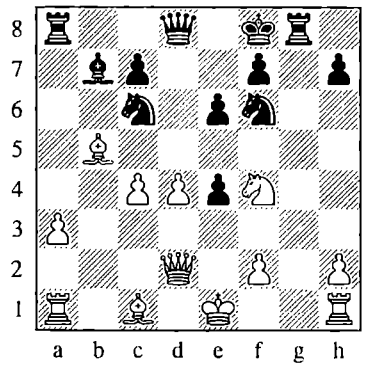
13...b5!

A promising sacrifice.

14.cxb5 axb5 15.♗xb5 ♖xg2 16.♘f4 ♖g8 17.c4 ♔f8!

White must take care.

A possible continuation is:



18.♗b2 e3 19.♕xe3 ♘a7 20.♖f1 c6 21.♕f3 ♘xb5 22.cxb5 ♖b8

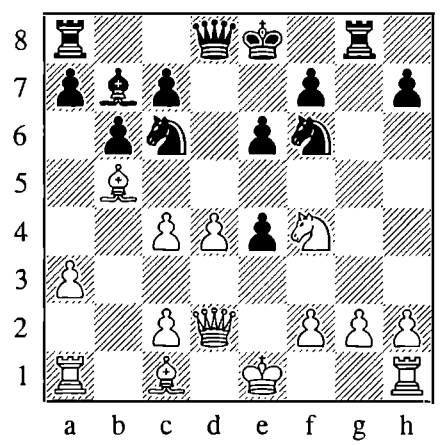
Black keeps some initiative, although White should be okay with careful defence.

12...♖g8

We have now transposed back to a few existing games.

13.c4

White would like to preserve the pin, so he prepares to drop his bishop back to a4 in case it is attacked.



13...♕e7!N

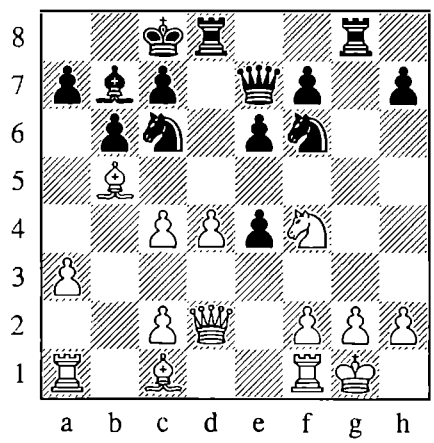
Black preferred 13...a6 in Chiburdanidze – Levitina, Volgograd 1984, and one subsequent game, but I do not see any value in weakening Black's structure unless a quick ...b5 is on the cards. The text move is more solid.

14.0–0

14.♕b4 ♘d7 is equal.

14.d5? wins material for White, but after 14...0–0–0 15.dxc6 ♖xd2 16.cxb7† ♔xb7 17.♗xd2 c6 18.♗a4 e5 White loses the important g2-pawn. In the ensuing position Black has a clear advantage thanks to his powerful pawn centre and better piece coordination.

14...0–0–0



15.♗xc6

Now this is necessary as Black was threatening ...e5.

15...♗xc6 16.♕b4

16.♕c3 e5! 17.dxe5 ♘g4∓ gives Black a strong initiative on the kingside.

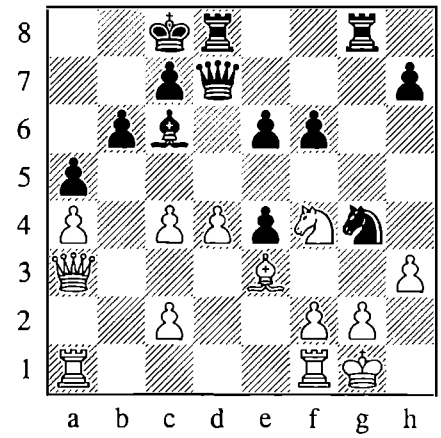
16...♕d7

We have reached an unbalanced position with approximately equal chances. The following line is pure fantasy, and is merely intended to show how Black may react to inaccurate yet plausible play from his opponent.

17.♗e3 ♘g4 18.a4 a5 19.♕a3?!

19.♕c3 would keep the game unclear.

19...f6 20.h3?



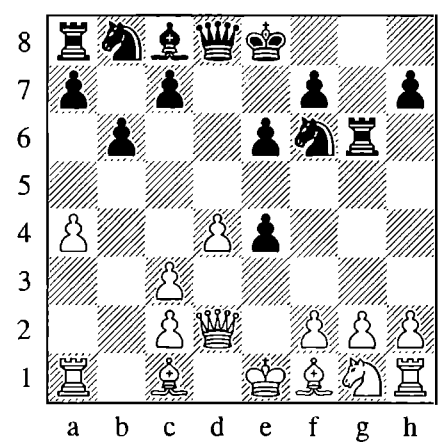
20...e5! 21.dxe5 fxe5 22.♘e2

22.hxg4? ♕xg4 wins immediately.

22...♘xe3 23.♕xe3 ♕f7 24.c5 ♕f3 25.g3 ♖d2–+

White is forced to accept a lost endgame.

B43) 10.a4



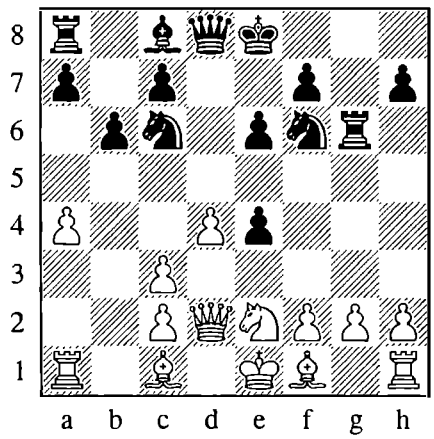
This is far from the most common move in the position, but the plan of pushing the pawn to a5 is logical and thematic. White also vacates the a3-square for his bishop.

10...♘c6

Black restrains the a-pawn for the moment while continuing his development.

11.♘e2

Here I would like to propose a novelty for Black.



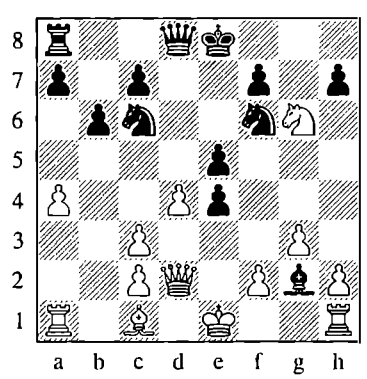
11...♗a6!?N

11...♗b7 led to an interesting fight and an eventual draw in Hector – Berg, Sweden 2012. I believe in Black's chances in this line, but I recommend the text move as a more straightforward solution. We are essentially borrowing an idea from the earlier variation B41, except that the inclusion of the moves a3-a4 and ...♘c6 is likely to favour Black.

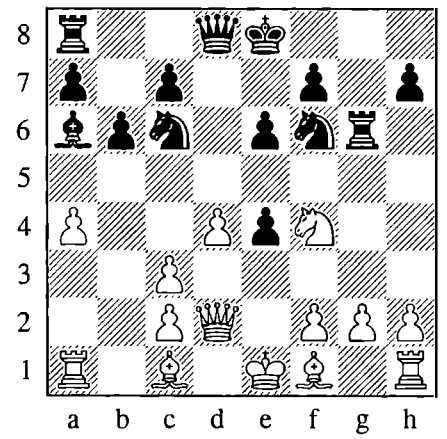
12.♘f4

12.h4 ♘d5 13.h5 ♖g4 does not achieve much for White.

12.g3 e5!? 13.♘f4 ♗xf1 14.♘xg6 ♗g2 also turns out fine for Black, for instance:

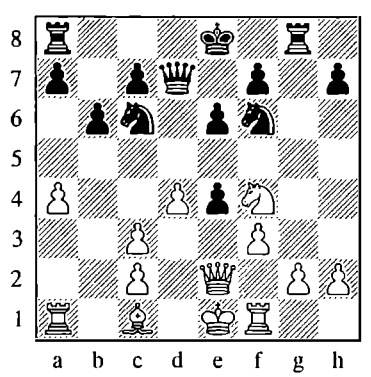


15.♘xe5 (15.♖g1 hxg6 16.♖xg2 exd4) 15...♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♗xh1 17.♕xd8† ♖xd8 18.exf6 ♗f3 19.♗f4 ♔d7 20.a5 ♔c6 21.axb6 axb6 The endgame should probably be a draw, but it is White who has to be a bit more careful due to the potential mating threats.



12...♗xf1 13.♘xg6

Declining the offer gets White nowhere: 13.♖xf1 ♖g8 14.♕e2 (14.f3 ♕d7 15.♕e3 e5) 14...♕d7 15.f3



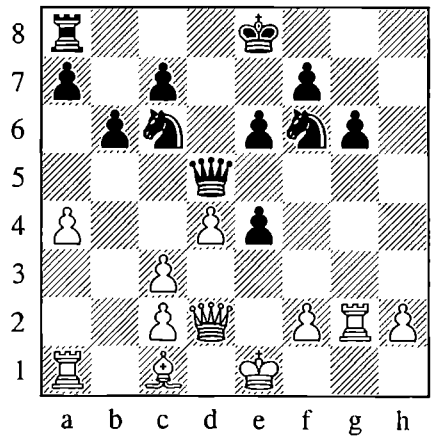
15...♘a5! 16.fxe4 ♕c6 Black is better.

13...♗xg2 14.♖g1 hxg6

14...fxg6!? 15.♖xg2 e5 is another way to handle the position, but the text move is more solid and reliable.

15.♖xg2 ♕d5⩱

Black has full compensation for the sacrificed exchange, much as in the earlier line B41. A possible continuation is:



16.♕e2 ♘a5 17.♖g5 ♕c6 18.♕b5 0–0–0 19.♕xc6 ♘xc6 20.♔e2 ♖h8

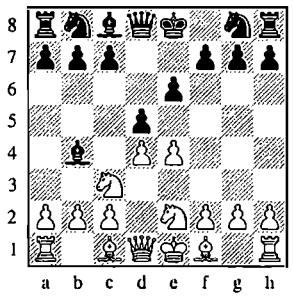
White will have to suffer to hold this endgame.

Conclusion

4.a3 leads to a strategically unbalanced game and should not be underestimated. It is important for Black to pay attention to nuances, such as where the white queen retreats to, and react accordingly. The main question is whether to open the centre with ...♘c6 and e5, or aim for active piece play by developing the light-squared bishop and rerouting the queen's knight to f5 via e7. Another important resource is the development of the bishop to a6, particularly in conjunction with a positional exchange sacrifice. As long as Black chooses the appropriate plan against the particular set-up chosen by his opponent, he should have no problem obtaining a sound position with at least equal prospects.



4.♘e2



Introduction

Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘e2

4...♘c6 5.a3 ♗a5

A) 6.exd5 **70**

B) 6.♕d3 dxe4 **73**

B1) 7.♕g3?! **73**

B2) 7.♕xe4 **75**

C) 6.b4 ♗b6 **76**

C1) 7.♘a4 **77**

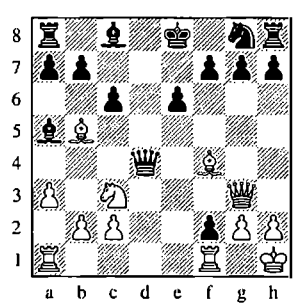
C2) 7.♗b2 ♘ge7 **78**

C21) 8.♘a4 **79**

C22) 8.g3 **80**

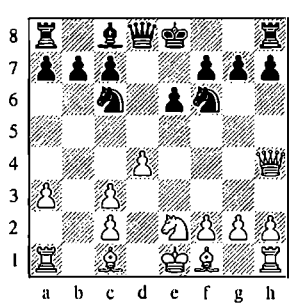
C23) 8.♕d3 **81**

B1) after 12.♔h1



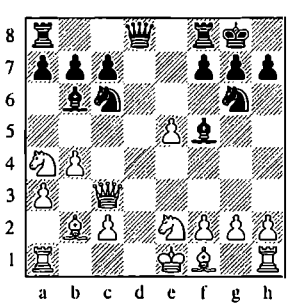
12...♘c7!N

B2) after 9.bxc3



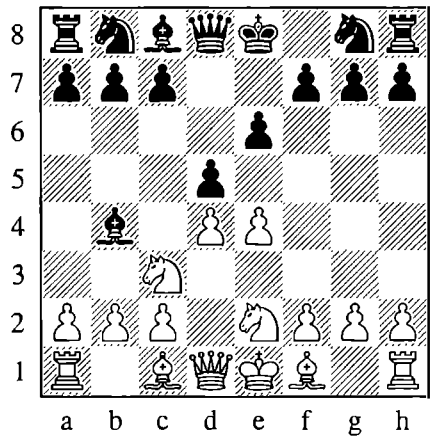
9...♕d5!N

C23) note to 11.♘xb6



13...♖c8!!

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘e2



The obvious intention behind this move is to remove the pin by playing a2-a3 on the next turn, avoiding the doubled c-pawns that characterize the main lines of the Winawer. A clear drawback for White is that if Black avoids exchanging on c3, the knights on c3 and e2 will be in each other's way, while the e2-knight will also block the development of the bishop on f1.

4...♘c6

This is the move I have relied on since 2003, after having lost to it on White's side against Nigel Short in the Sigeman Tournament of 2002. There is nothing wrong with the more popular options of 4...dxe4 and 4...♘f6, but I believe my recommendation offers more chances to reach an unbalanced position and play for the win.

5.a3

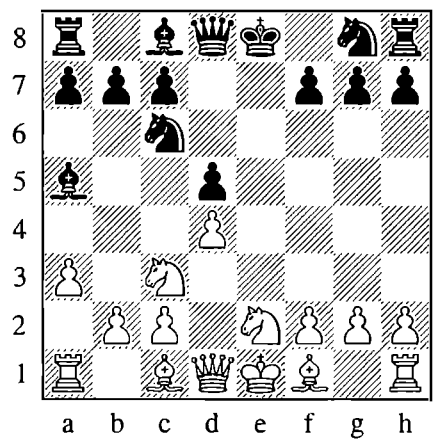
I do not see any point in trying to do without this move for White, although it is worth mentioning that 5.exd5 exd5 6.a3 ♗a5 transposes to variation A below, while 5.e5 ♘ge7 6.a3 ♗a5 leads to Chapter 6.

5...♗a5

From this position White's two most important options are 6.e5 and 6.♗e3, each of which forms the subject of a dedicated chapter, beginning on pages 85 and 99 respectively.

In the present chapter we will deal with three significant sidelines: **A) 6.exd5**, **B) 6.♕d3** and **C) 6.b4**.

A) 6.exd5 exd5

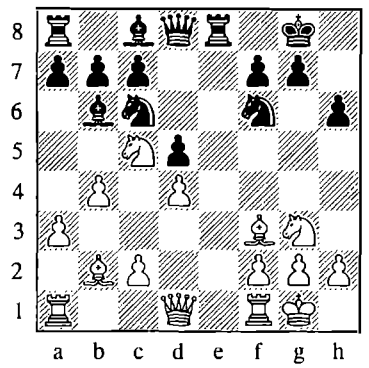


This line has not been a popular choice for White, although it has been tested by the Lithuanian GM Sulskis. It seems to me that Black enjoys a good version of the Exchange Variation, as he has played natural developing moves while White's development is slightly hampered because the knight on e2 blocks the king's bishop for the moment.

7.g3

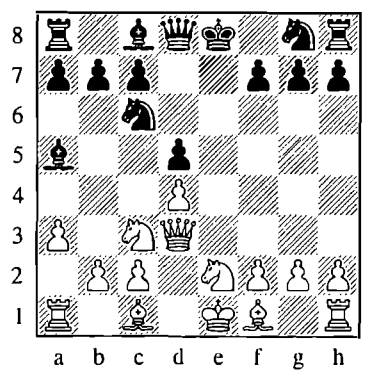
This is the most popular move, but I am not sure if it is such a good one, as it seriously weakens the kingside light squares. I also considered two alternatives.

7.♘g3 ♘f6 gives Black a pleasant position, and the following game provides an excellent illustration of how he may develop and improve it. 8.♗e2 0–0 9.0–0 ♖e8 10.♗f3 ♗e6 11.♘a4 h6 12.♘c5 ♗c8 13.b4 ♗b6 14.♗b2



14...♘e7! This is an important manoeuvre to keep in mind in the exchange structure. The knight was no longer doing anything useful on c6, so Black intends either to exchange it, or to reroute it to d6, where it will eye the c4- and e4-squares. 15.♖e1 c6 16.♘d3 ♘f5 17.♘e5 ♘xg3 18.hxg3 ♗f5 19.c4 dxc4 20.♘xc4 ♗e4 21.♗xe4 ♘xe4 22.♕f3 ♕d5 Black had a stable advantage in Galazewski – Grigorian, Sibenik 2007.

White can also hint at long castling with:
7.♕d3



7...♘f6!?N

7...♘ge7 is the only move to have been tested, but I prefer the more active development which leaves the e7-square free for the other knight. This is a fresh position so I will just give a few sample lines as possible continuations.

8.♗g5 0–0

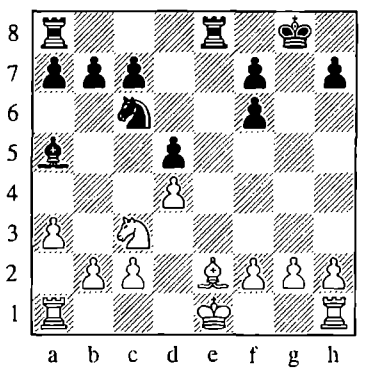
Black should not be afraid of complications here, as he is well developed and ready to sacrifice the d5-pawn if necessary. That being said, there is of course nothing wrong with 8...♗e6=.

9.b4!?

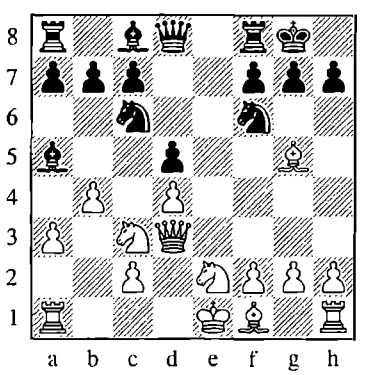
Principled, but perhaps too risky.

The more prudent 9.0–0–0 h6 10.♗h4 ♖e8 seems about equal.

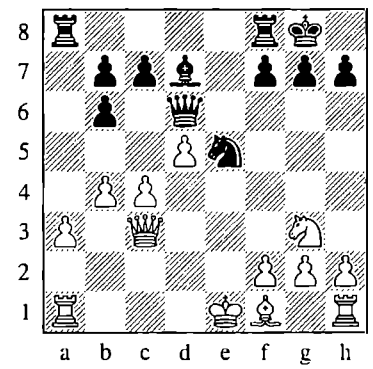
After 9.♕f3 ♗g4! 10.♕f4 (10.♗xf6 ♗xf3 11.♗xd8 ♗xe2 12.♗xe2 ♖axd8 can only bring White trouble) 10...♗xe2 11.♗xe2 ♖e8 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.♕xf6 gxf6 Black's development advantage is more relevant than his doubled pawns, for instance:



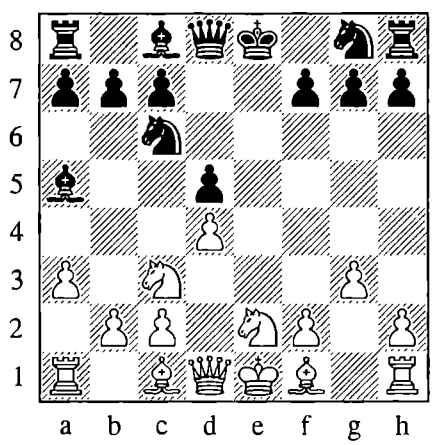
14.♖d1 ♖e6 15.♔f1 (15.b4? ♘xb4 16.axb4 ♗xb4 17.♖d3 ♖ae8 18.0–0 ♗xc3 19.♗g4 ♖e4 20.♗f3 ♗xd4 21.♗xe4 ♖xe4 22.♖fd1 ♗c5 23.♖xd5 ♖c4 Black's two extra pawn are worth more than the exchange.) 15...♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♘a5↑



9...♗b6 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.♘xd5 ♕d6 12.c4
After 12.♘xb6 axb6 White's extra pawn is not much of a consolation for being so far behind in development.
12...♗e6 13.♘xb6 axb6 14.♕c3
14.d5 ♘e5 15.♕c3 ♗d7 transposes.
14.♖d1 ♖fe8↑
14...♗d7 15.d5 ♘e5 16.♘g3



16...b5! 17.cxb5 ♖fc8 18.♗e2 ♘g4↑



7...♗g4!?

With this active move Black immediately targets the light squares.

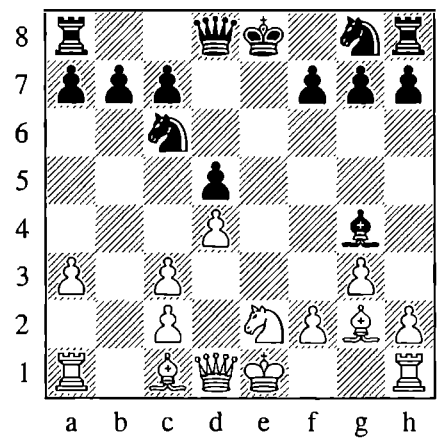
8.♗g2

8.♕d3 avoids the doubling of White's pawns but after 8...♕d7 followed by ...♗f5 the white queen is not well placed, while Black's pieces enjoy fine coordination.

8...♗xc3†

8...♘ge7 has been played a few times with excellent results. The idea is simply to postpone the exchange on c3 until after White has castled, but after the correct 9.b4 ♗b6 10.♗e3N Black has missed his opportunity, which is why I prefer to exchange immediately.

9.bxc3



9...♕d7

I like this continuation with the idea of playing on the light squares, not only on the kingside but also with the ...♘a5-c4 manoeuvre.

After 9...♘ge7 Sulskis tried out a rather bold idea with 10.f3 (10.h3 followed by 0–0 looks more normal to me) 10...♗f5 11.♔f2!? 0–0 12.g4 in Sulskis – Potkin, St Petersburg 2000. The plan is interesting although it doesn't look completely sound to me.

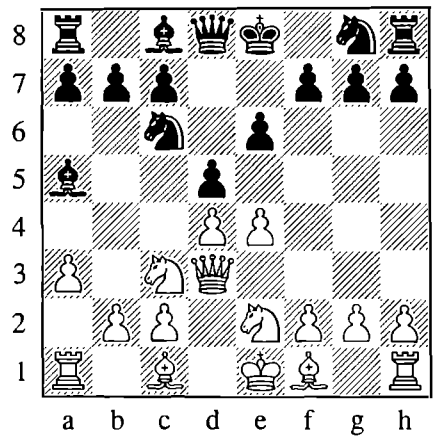
10.h3 ♗e6N

Black placed the bishop on f5 in Westerinen – Kristjansson, Gausdal 2003, but I prefer a less exposed square for this piece.

11.♘f4 ♘f6 12.0–0 0–0=

The position is balanced and an interesting strategic battle will follow.

B) 6.♕d3



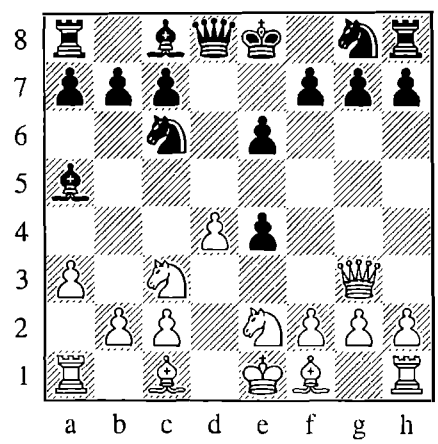
This move has been tried by Nisipeanu amongst others. White maintains the tension in the centre and prepares for long castling.

6...dxe4

6...♘ge7 is a decent alternative and could transpose to a line considered elsewhere, one example being 7.♗e3 which leads to variation C of Chapter 7. I decided to focus on the pawn exchange as it provides a clear-cut route to equality, but if Black wishes to keep more complexity in the position I see nothing wrong with the knight development.

After the text move it is worth considering both **B1) 7.♕g3?!** and **B2) 7.♕xe4**.

B1) 7.♕g3?!

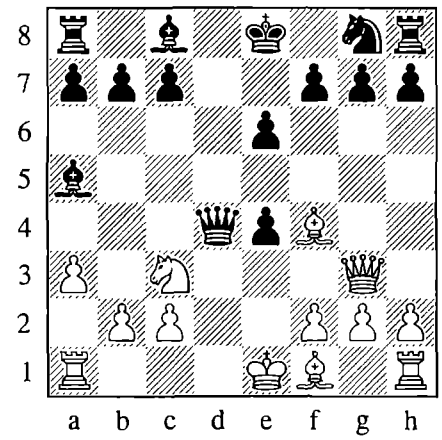


This was Nisipeanu's choice but it is not fully correct.

7...♘xd4!

7...♘f6 8.♗g5 h6 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 reached a sharp position with balanced chances in Nisipeanu – Williams, Dresden 2007.

8.♘xd4 ♕xd4 9.♗f4

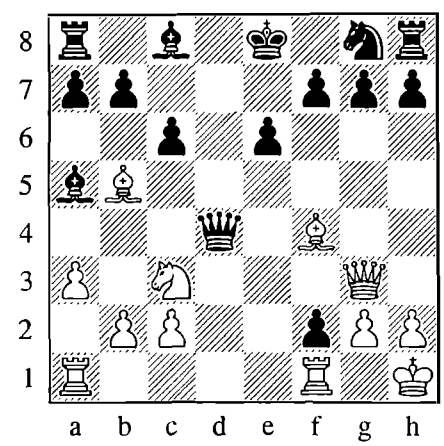


9...e3! 10.♗b5†

10.♕xe3 ♕xe3† 11.♗xe3 ♘f6 leaves Black a pawn up for no compensation.

10...c6 11.0–0 exf2† 12.♔h1

12.♖xf2? ♗b6∓



12...♘e7!N

An important improvement over the only existing game.

After 12...♘f6?! 13.♗e2 ♗xc3 14.bxc3 ♕d8? (14...♕e4 is a better defence) 15.♖ad1 ♗d7 White was already much better, but surprisingly decided to force a draw by perpetual: 16.♗c7 (16.♗e5!N±) 16...♕e7 17.♗d6 ♕d8 18.♗c7 ♕e7 19.♗d6 ♕d8 ½–½ Polasek – Cifka, Czech Republic 2007.

13.♗d3

White is struggling after other moves too:

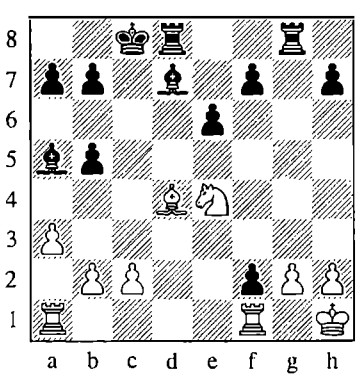
13.♖ad1 ♘f5! 14.♕f3 ♕b6 15.♗d3 ♗xc3 16.bxc3 0–0∓

Black's main point is:

13.♗e5 ♘f5! 14.♕xg7

14.♗xd4 ♘xg3† 15.hxg3 cxb5 16.b4 (16.♘xb5 0–0∓; 16.♗xg7 ♖g8 17.♗f6 ♗d7 18.♖xf2 ♗b6∓) 16...♗c7 17.♘xb5 ♗xg3 18.♗xf2 ♗d7!–+ Black is two clear pawns up and not even the opposite-coloured bishops can save White, as the kingside majority will be overwhelming.

14...♘xg7 15.♗xd4 cxb5 16.♗xg7 ♖g8 17.♗d4 ♗d7 18.♘e4 0–0–0



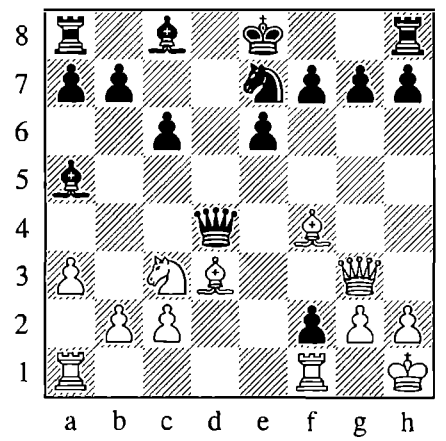
19.♘f6

19.♘d6†?! ♔b8 20.♘xf7 ♗c6! 21.♗e5† (21.♘xd8?? ♗xg2#) 21...♔a8 22.♖xf2 ♖df8∓

The strong pair of bishops combined with the threats on the f- and g-files gives Black a serious advantage.

19...♖g5 20.♘xd7 ♖xd7∓

Black is a clear pawn up and has excellent winning chances.



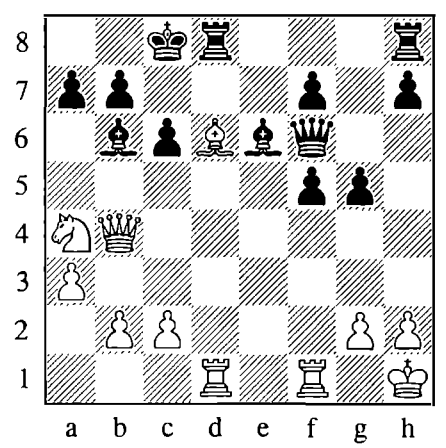
13...♘f5 14.♗xf5 exf5 15.♖ad1 ♕f6 16.♗d6

Preventing short castling, but Black can easily prepare to go the other way.

16...♗e6 17.♕xf2

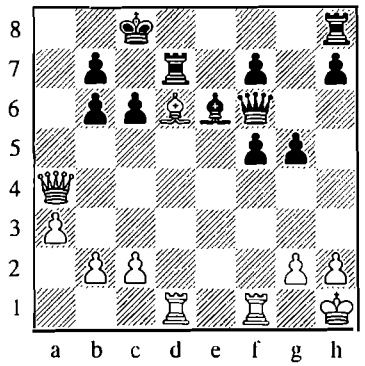
17.♗c5?! ♗xc3 18.bxc3 b6 19.♗d4 ♕g6 20.♗xg7 (20.♕d6 ♗d5–+) 20...♖g8 21.♗c5 ♗d5∓

17...♗b6 18.♕f4 g5 19.♕b4 0–0–0 20.♘a4



20...♖d7! 21.♘c5

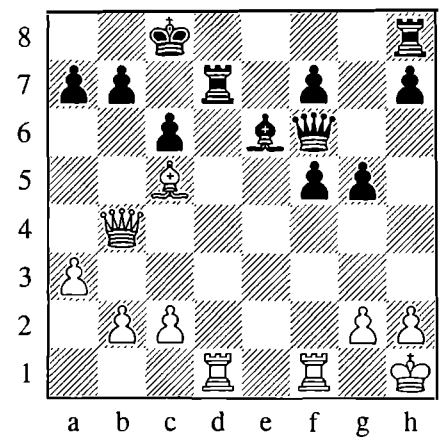
21.♘xb6† axb6 22.♕a4 (22.♕xb6 ♖hd8 23.♗g3 f4∓)



22...♖xd6□ 23.♖xd6 ♕xb2∓ A rather messy line, but it all works out well for Black, who keeps a significant material plus after correct defence.

21...♗xc5 22.♗xc5

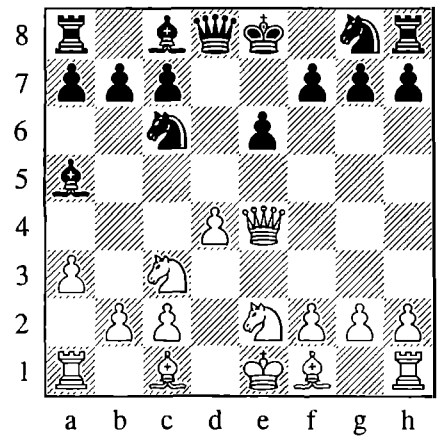
22.♕xc5 ♖hd8 23.♖d4 ♗c4! 24.♗e5 ♕e6 25.♖xc4 ♖d5 26.♕xa7 ♕xe5∓



22...♖hd8 23.♖xd7 ♖xd7 24.♗xa7 ♕d8 25.♗b6 ♖d1!∓

Black's extra pawn gives him the advantage, although the existence of opposite-coloured bishops offers White realistic drawing chances.

B2) 7.♕xe4



7...♘f6 8.♕h4 ♗xc3† 9.bxc3

This gives White a compromised pawn structure, which Black can aim to exploit by playing on the weakened light squares.

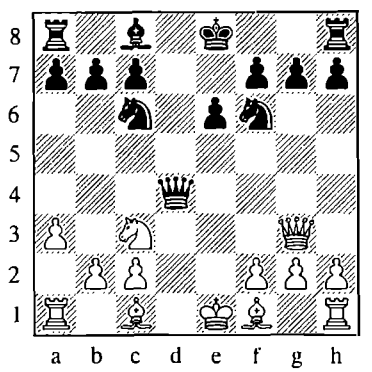
9.♘xc3!?N

The pawn sacrifice has never been tried but it is worth mentioning, as it offers White open piece play and prospects for long-term compensation with the pair of bishops.

9...♕xd4

After 9...♘xd4?! 10.♗d3 White benefits from fast development and attacking chances on the kingside. Instead we should threaten to swap queens to reduce his initiative.

10.♕g3



10...♘e4!?

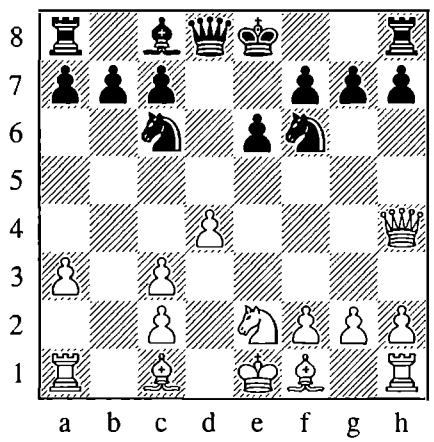
10...0–0 and 10...♘d5 are decent alternatives. I do not intend to subject this position to excessive analysis so I will just offer a few sample lines.

11.♘xe4 ♕xe4† 12.♗e3 ♕g6

12...0–0 13.♗d3 ♕e5 14.0–0–0 ♕xg3 15.hxg3 h6 16.g4 f6 is another possibility; White has about enough compensation for a pawn.

13.♕xc7 ♕xc2 14.♖c1 ♕e4 15.♖c4 ♕b1† 16.♖c1 ♕e4=

The game fizzles out to a move repetition.



9...♕d5!N

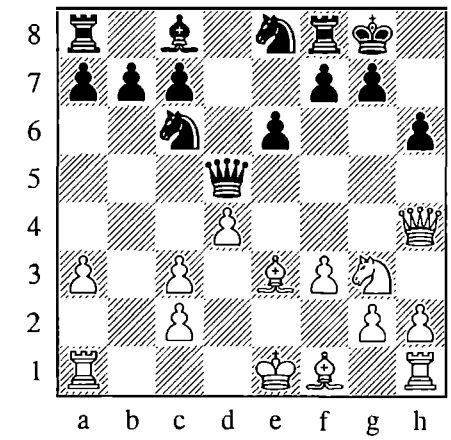
Moving the queen early is an important commitment, but on this particular occasion I find it rather useful, not least if Black wants to develop his bishop on d7.

All four games have continued 9...♘e7, but just because White has spent time moving the same piece several times in the opening, it doesn't mean we should do the same.

10.f3

10.♗h6 is harmless: 10...0–0 11.♘g3 ♘e7 12.♕g5 ♘g6 13.♕xd5 exd5 14.♗d2 ♖e8† 15.♗e2 ♘h4! 16.0–0 ♘f5 17.♗d3 ♘xg3 18.fxg3 ♘e4 19.♖ae1 ♗d7 Black is at least equal.

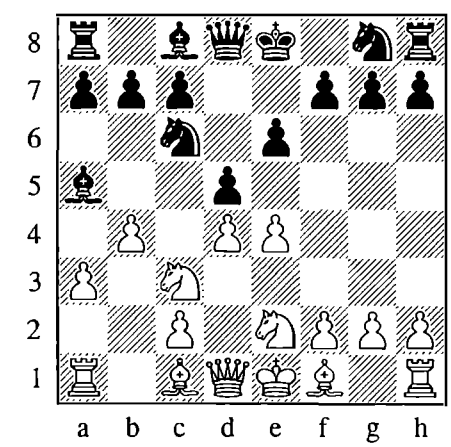
10...0–0 11.♗g5 ♘e8 12.♘g3 h6 13.♗e3



13...e5! 14.♗d3 f5! 15.♘e2 ♘d6 16.0–0 ♖e8

Black has a powerful centre and strong control over the light squares, giving him excellent prospects.

C) 6.b4

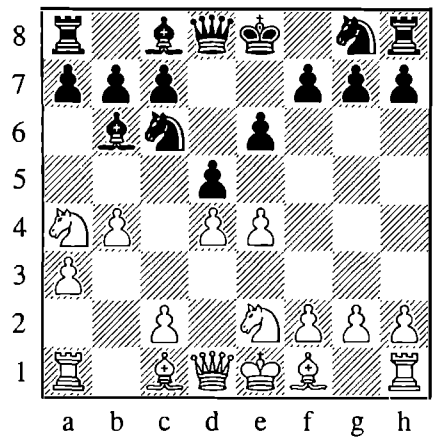


I have only faced this move in a single rapid game. However, it is one of the top choices among the engines and has also been tested by some strong players in recent practice.

6...♗b6

Here White's two main options are **C1) 7.♘a4** and **C2) 7.♗b2**. The only significant alternatives are 7.e5 ♘ge7 and 7.♗e3 ♘ge7, transposing to lines covered in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively.

C1) 7.♘a4

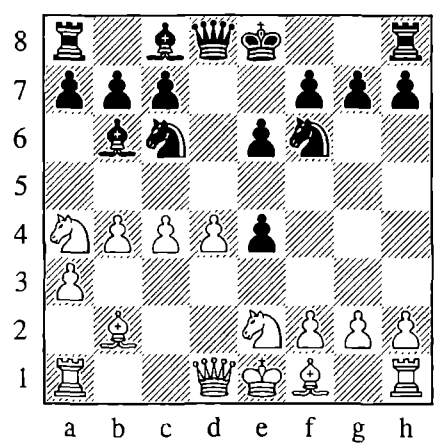


This move was introduced by GM Guseinov in 2007. At first glance it looks a bit odd, but it has a deep strategic idea to suffocate Black on the queenside, which should not be underestimated.

7...dxe4

7...♘ge7 is playable but I prefer to grab the pawn.

8.♗b2 ♘f6 9.c4



9...a5!?N

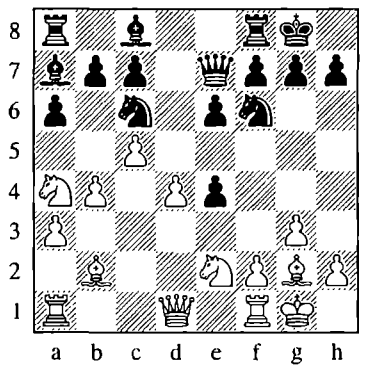
This novelty leads to unbalanced and dynamic positions.

9...a6 10.g3 0–0 11.♗g2 ♗a7 12.0–0 ♕e7

Guseinov – Bauer, Heraklio 2007. At this point White's most ambitious try is:

13.c5!?N

Locking the a7-bishop out of the game but giving away the d5-square. Here are a few lines I analysed.



13...e5!

Black should break in the centre at once in order to liberate the bishop on c8.

14.♘ac3

It is important to note that 14.d5? is unplayable due to 14...♖d8 15.♘ac3 ♗e6! winning the important d5-pawn.

14...♖d8

14...exd4 15.♘xd4 ♘xd4 16.♕xd4 ♖d8 17.♕e3 ♖d3 18.♕f4 e3 19.fxe3 c6 20.♘e4 ♞d5 21.♕f2 ♗e6 22.♖fc1 ♘c7±

15.♘xe4 exd4 16.♘xf6† ♕xf6 17.♖c1 ♗g4 18.♗xc6 ♕xc6 19.♘xd4 ♕g6 20.♕c1

Black still has to solve the problem of the misplaced bishop.

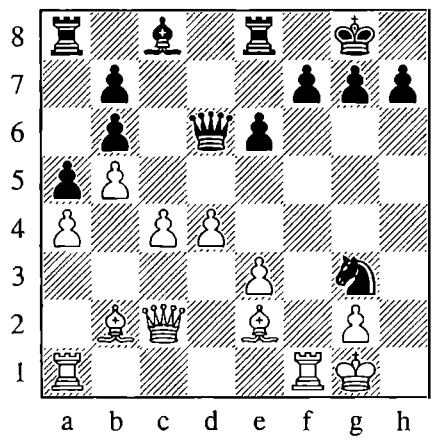
10.b5 ♘e7 11.♘xb6 cxb6 12.♘g3 0–0 13.♗e2 ♘f5 14.0–0

14.♘xf5 exf5 15.d5 ♕d6 16.♕d4 ♖e8 17.0–0 f4 18.a4 ♗f5 19.♗a3 ♕d8 looks unclear and playable for both sides. White's bishop pair is an important asset while Black has an extra pawn and a powerful majority on the kingside.

14...♕d6 15.a4 ♖e8 16.♕d2

16.♘xf5 exf5 17.♗a3 ♕c7 18.d5 ♕e5 19.♕d2 f4 20.♗b2 ♕d6 reaches a balanced position.

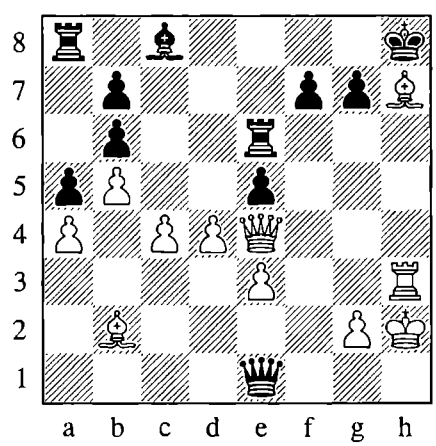
16...e3! 17.fxe3 ♘xg3 18.hxg3 ♘e4 19.♕c2 ♘xg3



20.♗d3!?

This is the best I could find for White, but it leads to no more than equality.

20...♘xf1 21.♗xh7† ♔h8 22.♖xf1 ♕g3 23.♖f3 ♕e1† 24.♔h2 e5 25.♕e4 ♖e6 26.♖h3



26...♖g6! 27.♗xg6† ♗xh3 28.♕xb7

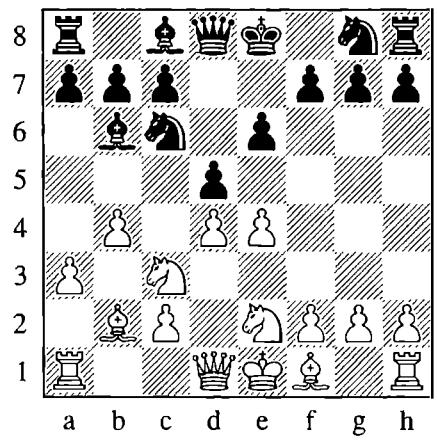
28.♕xc5 ♗g4 29.d5 ♕h4† 30.♔g1 ♕e1†=

28...♗xg2!

A final finesse to seal the draw.

29.♕xg2 ♕h4† 30.♔g1 ♕e1†=

C2) 7.♗b2



This is the most popular move on the database and a logical follow-up to White's previous move.

7...♘ge7

At this point it is worth considering **C21) 8.♘a4**, **C22) 8.g3** and **C23) 8.♕d3**.

8.e5

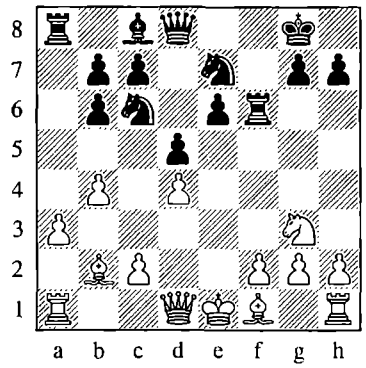
This move has been played a few times but has scored poorly for White, and indeed it seems strange to block the centre straight after putting the bishop on b2.

8...0–0 9.♘a4 f6

9...♗d7 has been played by Predojevic and could be worth investigating, but I think it makes sense to play the pawn break at once in order to prevent ♘f4.

10.♘xb6 axb6 11.exf6 ♖xf6 12.♘g3

Brenjo – Sedlak, Herceg Novi 2008. Here I propose a natural novelty:



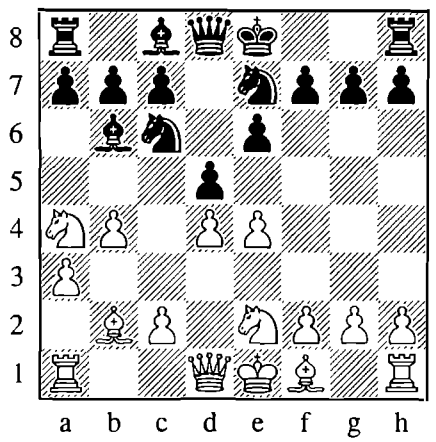
12...♗d7N

Planning ...♘c8-d6 or ...♗e8-g6. A possible continuation is:

13.♗d3 ♗e8 14.0–0 ♗g6 15.♘h5 ♖f7=

Black has good control over the light squares and the b2-bishop is bad.

C21) 8.♘a4



This can be compared with line C1 above. With the black knight already committed to the e7-square, I prefer not to take the e4-pawn, but rather to maintain the central tension and go for quick development.

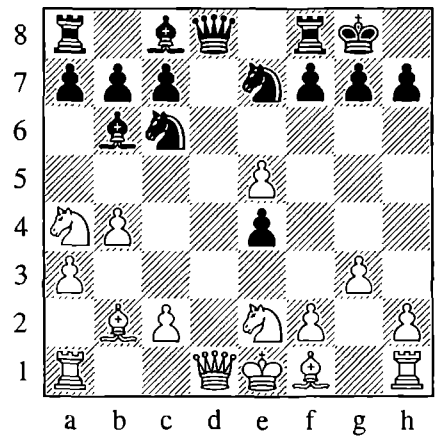
8...0–0

8...dxe4 9.c4 a6 10.g3 may also be playable for Black, but I cannot get away from the feeling that the knight belongs on f6 rather than e7.

9.g3 e5!?

An energetic way to try and exploit White's slow development.

10.dxe5 dxe4



11.c4!?

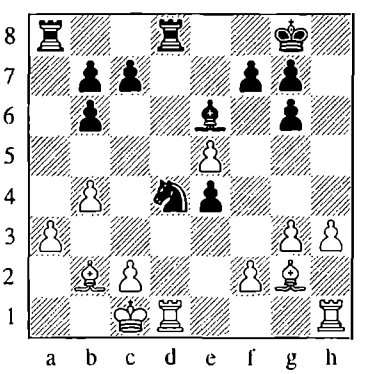
The most ambitious move, but Black has a good reply in store.

The alternative is:

11.♘xb6 axb6 12.♘f4 ♘g6 13.♕xd8 ♖xd8 14.♘xg6 hxg6 15.h3

It is important to restrict the enemy bishop. After 15.♗g2 Black continues 15...♗f5 16.h3 g5 and maintains his defence of the important e4-pawn. On the other hand, the e5-pawn is ripe to be picked up by ...♖e8 and ...♘xe5.

15...♗e6 16.♗g2 ♘d4 17.0–0–0

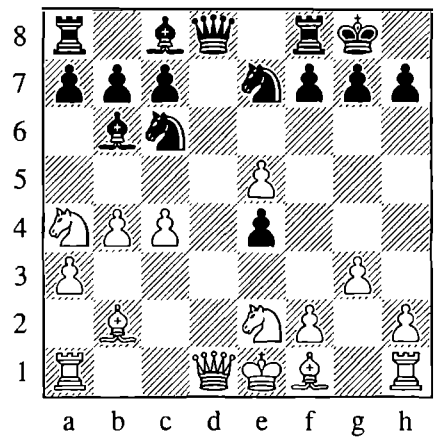


17...♘f3!

White is unable to make much use of his bishop pair. A possible continuation is:

18.♖xd8† ♖xd8 19.♖d1 ♖xd1† 20.♔xd1 ♗c4=

Black is well coordinated and has little to worry about.



11...♘g6!

This entails a piece sacrifice from Black's side, but the benefits are many. In return he will obtain two extra pawns and active piece play, as well as robbing his opponent of castling rights. This adds up to at least enough compensation, notwithstanding the following queen exchange.

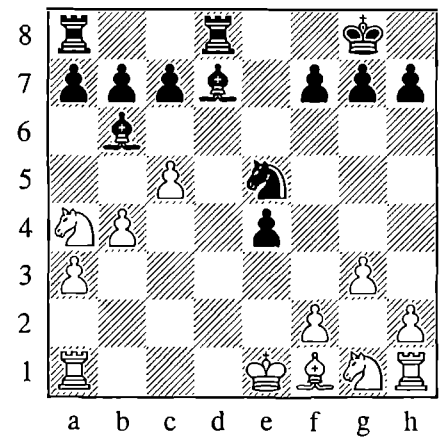
12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.c5 ♘cxe5 14.♘g1

14.♗xe5 ♘xe5 15.♗g2 ♘d3† 16.♔f1 f5 offers Black full compensation based on the factors already outlined.

14...♗d7 15.♗xe5

15.♘c3?! ♗xc5! 16.bxc5 ♗c6∓ gives Black more than enough compensation in view of White's lack of development, exposed king and vulnerable pawns. The first player must also worry about the concrete possibilities of ...e3 or ...♘d3† on the next move.

15...♘xe5



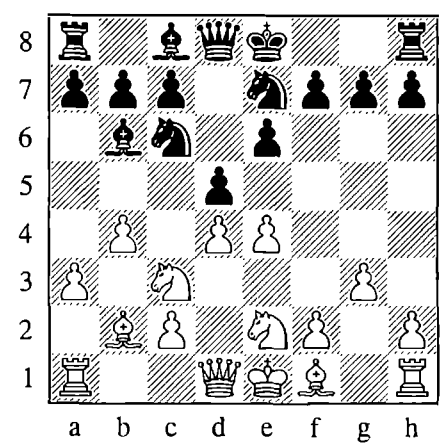
16.♘b2

16.♘c3 ♗xc5!? (16...♗c6⩱) 17.bxc5 ♗c6 is at least equal for Black, and can be compared with the previous note.

16...a5 17.cxb6 axb4 18.bxc7 ♖dc8 19.♘c4 ♘xc4 20.♗xc4 ♖xc7 21.♗d5 ♖a5!

Black will soon claim a third pawn for the piece, with excellent prospects in the endgame.

C22) 8.g3



This move was mentioned in Bojkov's CB DVD *Unorthodox against the French Winawer*. Given time to fianchetto and castle, White might have chances for a better position, but we will have something to say about that.

8...e5!

Opening the centre while preparing to activate the light-squared bishop.

9.dxe5!N

This computer suggestion looks like White's best shot. Others are harmless:

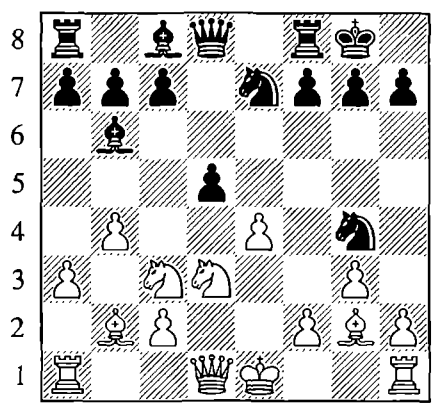
9.♘a4 was played in Yu – Beltran Medina, Moscow 2006, and now after 9...♗g4!N Black is perfectly fine and has an active position.

9.exd5 ♘xd4 10.♗g2 (10.♘xd4N ♗xd4 11.♗g2 0–0 12.0–0 c6 13.dxc6 ♘xc6=) 10...♗g4↑ Volokitin – Stellwagen, Groningen 1999.

9...♘xe5 10.♘f4 ♘g4!?

Also possible is 10...♗g4 11.♗e2 ♗xe2 12.♕xe2 ♘c4= when Black is fine. The text move is more interesting.

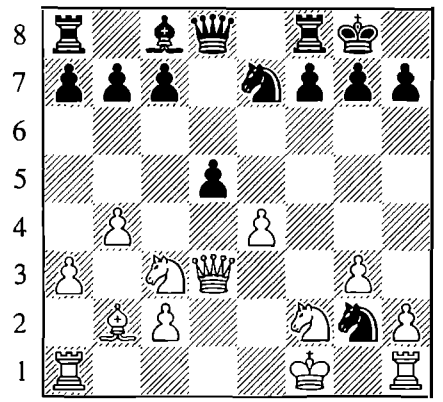
11.♘d3 0–0 12.♗g2



12...♗xf2†!

A fascinating move which works out well for Black.

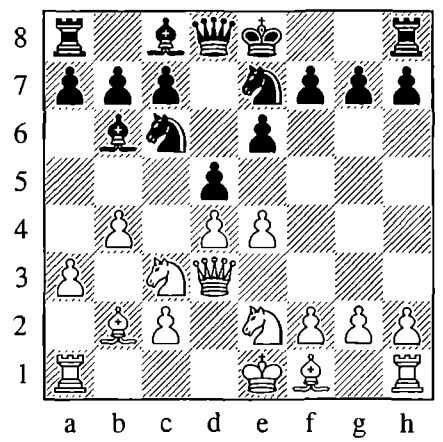
13.♘xf2 ♘e3 14.♕d3 ♘xg2† 15.♔f1



15...♘e3†! 16.♕xe3 d4 17.♕e1 dxc3 18.♕xc3 f6

The position is close to equal, but Black's situation appears slightly healthier with a sound pawn structure and castled king.

C23) 8.♕d3



8...0–0

Now Black is ready to open the centre with ...e5 any moment, so White must be careful as he is behind in development.

9.♘a4 dxe4

Another possible move order is 9...e5!? 10.♘xb6 dxe4 11.♕xe4 transposing to the main line, and this was the actual sequence

seen in the Bernard – Kuljasevic game quoted below.

10.♕xe4 e5! 11.♘xb6

Technically this is a novelty but it immediately takes us to the aforementioned game.

The alternative is:

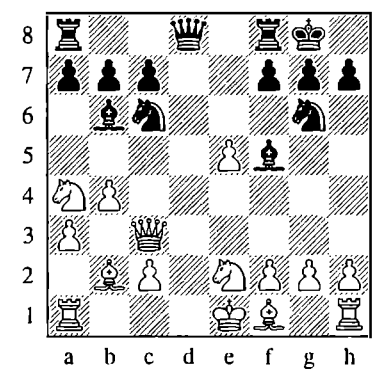
11.dxe5 ♗f5 12.♕c4 ♘g6

Black has plenty of compensation for the sacrificed pawn and White has serious problems getting his king into safety.

13.♕c3N

13.f4?! ♗e3 14.♕c3 ♗xf4 15.♘xf4 ♘xf4∓ Steenbekkers – Maier, Pula 2012.

The text move is a better try, but Black still obtains fine prospects with an excellent prophylactic move:



13...♖c8!!

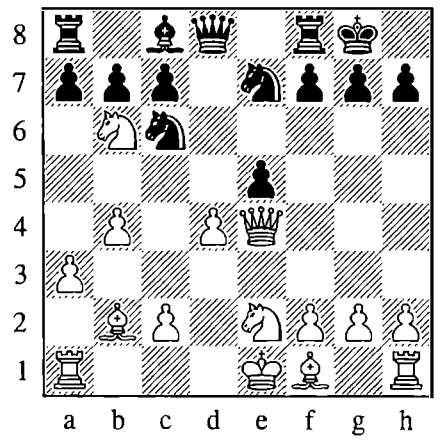
Preparing to recapture on b6 with the c-pawn. It is difficult to find a suitable continuation for White now, as illustrated by the following brief lines.

14.f4

In the event of 14.h4?! Black simply replies 14...♖e8! posing new questions to the white king. The X-ray attack along the e-file will soon be a serious issue.

14...♘ce7!

The knight is heading for d5 which will force White to give up his c2-pawn, while the problem of the king on e1 remains unsolved.



11...♗f5!

A useful zwischenzug.

12.♕e3!?N

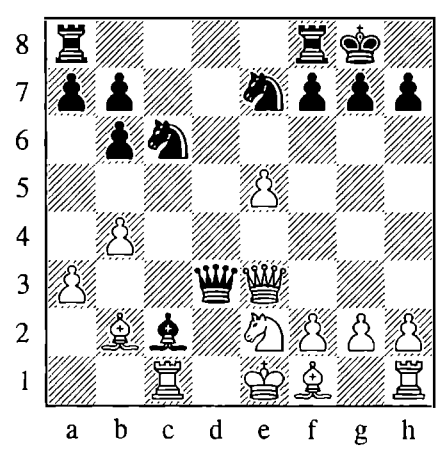
This is perhaps White's best try.

After 12.♕h4 cxb6 13.dxe5 ♗xc2 Black was doing fine in Bernard – Kuljasevic, Split 2011.

12.♕f3N cxb6 13.♖d1 (13.dxe5 ♗xc2 looks fine for Black) 13...♗xc2 14.♖d2 ♗g6 15.dxe5 ♕c7 gives Black nothing much to worry about, while White still struggles to arrange castling.

12...cxb6 13.dxe5 ♗xc2 14.♖c1 ♕d3!

An important moment. A queen exchange will render the e5-pawn vulnerable, while Black's lead in development will grant him quick access to the d-file in the endgame.



15.♘f4

15.♕xd3 ♗xd3 16.♘f4 ♗xf1 17.♔xf1 ♖fd8= reaches a pretty level position.

15...♕xe3† 16.fxe3 ♗b3=

White has the pair of bishops, but with his doubled e-pawns he cannot claim an advantage.

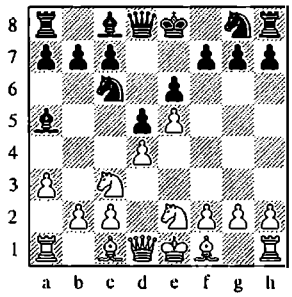
Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the complexities of the 4.♘e2 ♘c6 variation. It is hard to offer any general conclusions based on thematic pawn structures and piece manoeuvres, as the range of potential position types is so diverse. The first branch involved a pawn exchange on d5 and a symmetrical structure. The second involved an early ...dxe4, after which White can either recapture or sacrifice both his central pawns.

The third and final branch involved the moves 6.b4 ♗b6. Here too the range of possible pawn structures is varied, so the best advice I can give is to be flexible in your thinking and be ready to adapt to whichever direction the game may take.



4.♘e2



6.e5

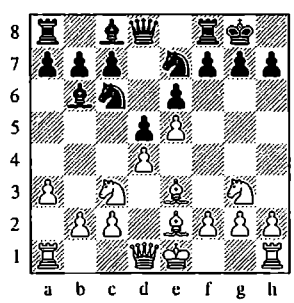
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘e2 ♘c6 5.a3 ♗a5 6.e5

6...♘ge7

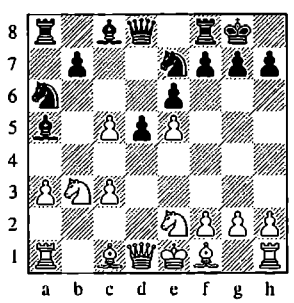
A) 7.g3 86
B) 7.♘g3 0–0 87
B1) 8.♗e2?! 87
B2) 8.♕g4?!N 88
B3) 8.♗g5 89
C) 7.b4 ♗b6 8.♘a4 0–0 92
C1) 9.b5?! 92
C2) 9.c3 f6 93
C21) 10.f4 94
C22) 10.exf6 96

B1) after 9.♗e3



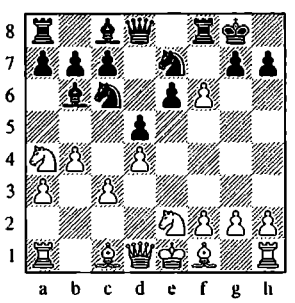
9...♘xd4!N

C1) after 14.dxc5



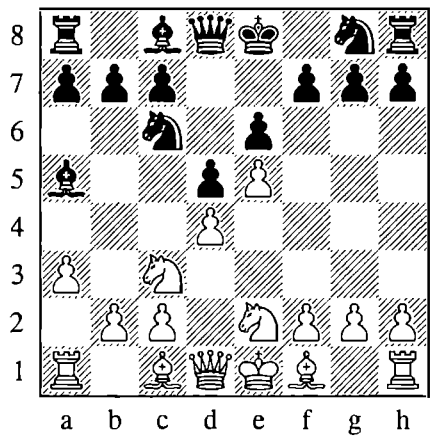
14...♕c7!N

C22) after 10.exf6



10...♖xf6N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘e2 ♘c6 5.a3 ♗a5 6.e5



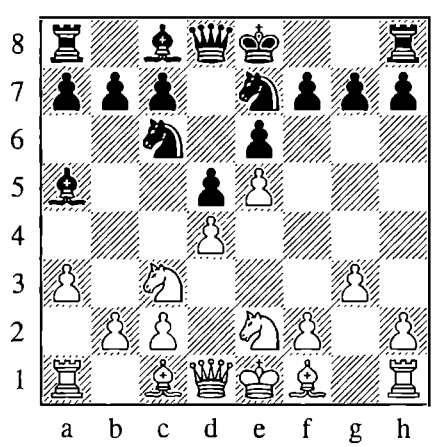
Fixing the pawn structure in the centre gives White a notable space advantage. Black's general strategy will be to develop quickly and challenge his opponent's pawn wedge with a timely ...f6, which should provide counterplay both in the centre and on the light squares.

6...♘ge7

We begin with a standard developing move. From this position we will analyse three main paths: **A) 7.g3**, **B) 7.♘g3** and **C) 7.b4**.

7.♗e3 transposes to variation D of the next chapter – see page 105.

A) 7.g3



The kingside fianchetto is not uncommon in the 4.♘e2 variation. Here I would like to propose a new path for Black.

7...0–0N

7...♘f5

This has been played in a few games, but in the following short analysis I will show why I was not altogether happy with it.

8.♗h3

White should be ready to capture on f5 if necessary, for instance after ...♗b6.

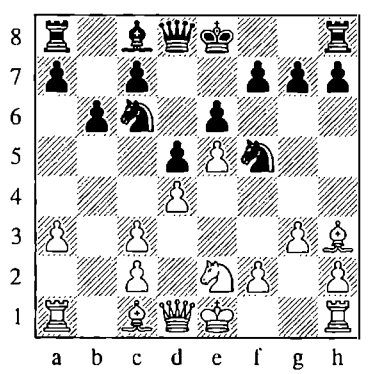
8.♗g2? gives Black a pleasant choice between 8...♗b6!? and the even stronger 8...f6!. In both cases it will be difficult for White to hold his centre together since the d4-pawn cannot be protected by another pawn.

8...♗xc3†N

This was my attempt to improve over 8...0–0, as played in Novak – L. Toth, Szombathely 2003. In this position the novelty 9.♗xf5N exf5 10.♗e3 slightly favours White.

9.bxc3 b6

9...0–0 10.♘f4 b6 transposes.



10.♘f4 0–0 11.0–0 ♘a5 12.a4±

At first I thought Black had sufficient play on the light squares, but the more I looked at the position the less happy I was. Black is controlling the c4-square but what can he do with it? Similarly the bishop can find a nice home on a6 but there is no concrete plan of counterplay apart from the ...c5 break,

which seems too slow. Overall it seems to me that White has good chances to develop his kingside initiative into something dangerous.

Let's return to my recommendation. By castling immediately, Black keeps his position more flexible and can subsequently choose whether to put the knight on f5 or go for an immediate ...f6 break.

8.♗h3

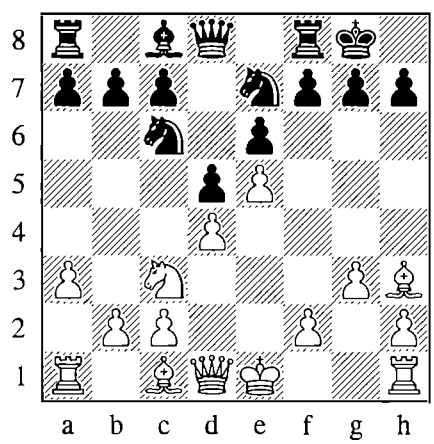
8.b4 ♗b6 9.♗h3 enables Black to create counterplay with 9...f6! 10.exf6 ♖xf6 intending ...e5.

8...♗xc3†!

Now is the time to exchange this bishop before it risks getting blocked by b2-b4.

9.♘xc3

9.bxc3 makes less sense when Black has not committed his knight to the f5-square. Play may continue 9...b6 10.0–0 ♗a6 11.♖e1 ♘g6= intending to exchange knights, when Black is doing fine.



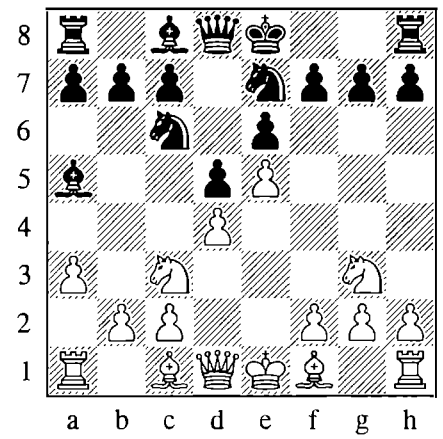
9...a5!

Black grabs some space on the queenside and prevents b2-b4.

10.0–0 b6

Followed by ...♗a6, with an approximately level game. White has the bishop pair but his pieces are on slightly odd squares, and Black will obtain decent play on the light squares.

B) 7.♘g3



This move opens the path for the bishop as well as for the queen which may come to g4 at any moment. Another move to watch out for is ♘h5.

7...0–0

Black should not be afraid to castle. It is useful to defend the g7-pawn in advance, and Black is now ready to push with ...f6 or ...f5 at an appropriate moment. This position is still rather unknown and I was able to find some nice ideas for Black.

I considered three main tries for White: **B1) 8.♗e2?!**, **B2) 8.♕g4?!N** and **B3) 8.♗g5**.

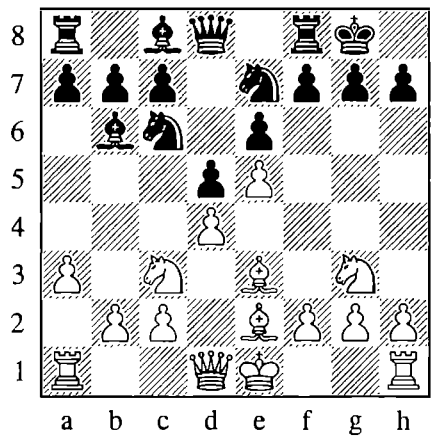
8.♗c3 is covered via the move order 6.♗e3 ♘ge7 7.e5 0–0 8.♘g3 – see variation D2 in the next chapter on page 106.

B1) 8.♗e2?!

This simple developing move is a mistake.

8...♗b6 9.♗e3

Here I found a striking improvement over Schramm – Kindermann, Dresden 1999.



9...♘xd4!N 10.♗xd4 c5

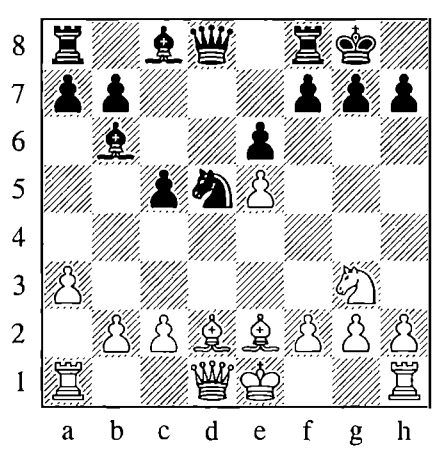
Black will swiftly regain the material with a positional advantage, as shown in the following analysis.

11.♗e3 d4 12.♗d2

12.♗g5 dxc3 13.♕xd8 ♗xd8 14.0–0–0 cxb2† 15.♔xb2 h6 16.♖xd8 hxg5∓ also gives Black the upper hand.

12...dxc3 13.♗xc3 ♘d5 14.♗d2

14.♕d3 ♘xc3 15.♕xc3 ♗a5 16.b4 ♗b6 17.♖d1 ♕c7∓ Black can claim a small advantage thanks to his pair of bishops, not to mention the concrete threat of ...cxb4 winning a pawn.



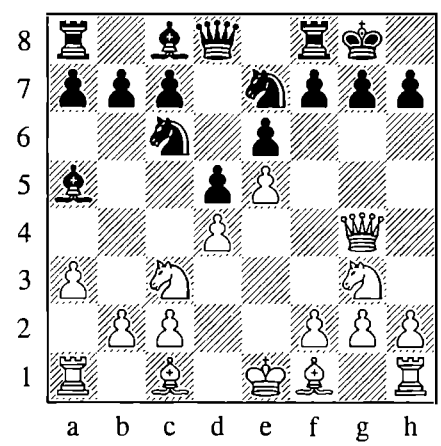
14...c4!

A strong temporary pawn sacrifice, opening the diagonal for the bishop on b6.

15.♗xc4 ♗d4 16.c3 ♗xe5

Black has slightly better chances thanks to his extra central pawn and well-placed minor pieces.

B2) 8.♕g4?!N



This move has not been tried so far, but it is an obvious candidate for us to consider.

8...f6!

Black's lead in development promises him excellent chances in the battle ahead.

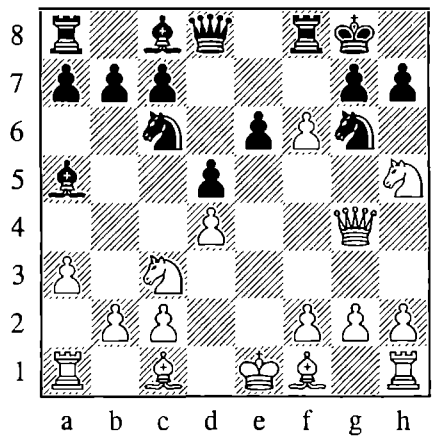
9.♘h5

Objectively White should prefer 9.exf6, but after 9...♖xf6 it is obvious that Black has won the opening battle. The text move is clearly the one White would like to play, but concrete analysis shows it is insufficient.

9...♘g6 10.exf6

White continues down the principled but ultimately doomed path.

10.♗d3 is a lesser evil, but after 10...f5 11.♕g3 ♘xd4 Black has an extra pawn with a solid advantage.

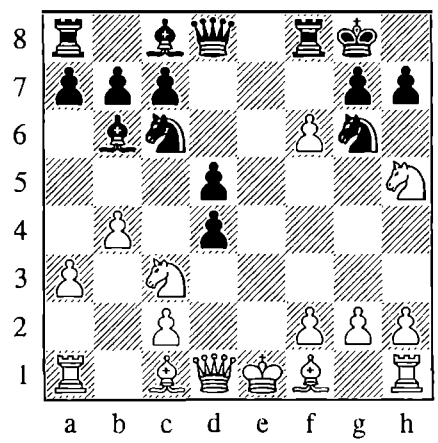


10...e5! 11.♕d1

11.♕g5 exd4 12.b4 dxc3 13.bxa5 gxf6 is winning for Black, who has an extra pawn and a crushing attack along the open e-file.

11.♕f3 exd4 12.b4 ♘xb4 13.axb4 ♗xb4∓ also gives Black a big advantage.

11...exd4 12.b4 ♗b6!



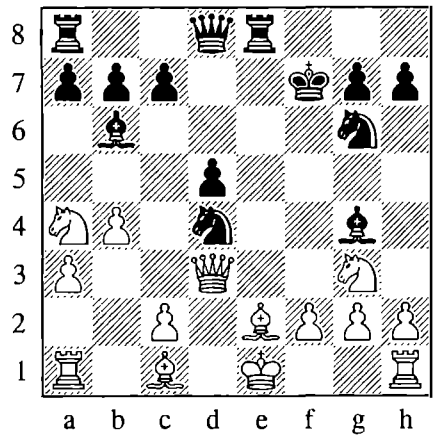
13.♘a4

13.fxg7 ♖f5! will cost White a full piece at least, for instance: 14.♘a4 ♕e7†–+

13...♖e8† 14.♗e2

14.♔d2 ♘ge5 threatens ...♗g4, and after 15.h3 g6–+ White will not last long.

14...♗g4 15.♘g3 d3 16.f7† ♔xf7 17.♕xd3 ♘d4



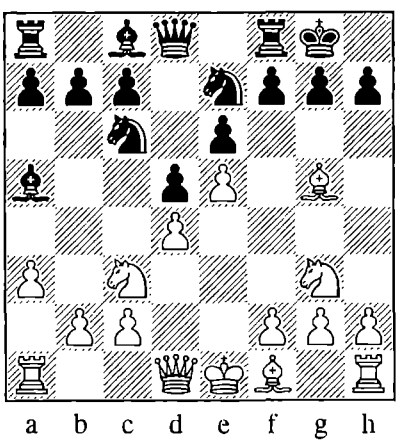
18.♘c3

18.f3 ♖xe2†! 19.♘xe2 ♗f5–+

18...♕f6! 19.♘xd5 ♗xe2 20.♘xe2 ♖xe2† 21.♕xe2 ♕c6–+

White can resign.

B3) 8.♗g5



Here I would like to propose a new approach.

8...h6N

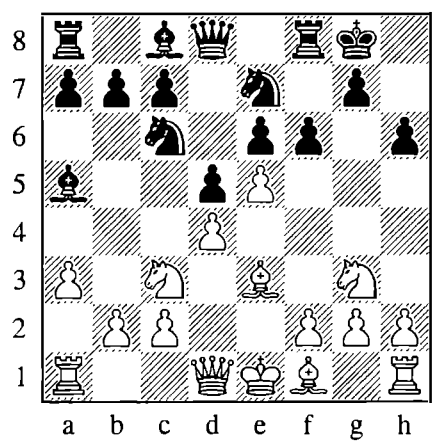
8...f6 has been played a few times, a logical continuation being 9.exf6 gxf6 10.♗h6 ♖f7 11.♗e2 as in Sardy – Rudolf, Budapest 2006.

The white bishop is coming to h5 next, and while Black's position should be playable, I prefer his prospects in the new line I am recommending.

By the way, 8...♗b6?N does not work as White can ignore the attack on the d-pawn: 9.♕g4! ♗xd4 10.♗f6 g6 11.♕f4 ♗xe5 12.♗xe5 ♘xe5 13.♕xe5 ♘c6 14.♕f4 e5 15.♕h6±

9.♗e3 f6

Compared with 8...f6 on the previous move, we will now get the chance to recapture with the rook, keeping the kingside more secure. The present position is almost identical to variation D2 of the next chapter, the only difference being the position of the black pawn on h6 instead of h7. In general this 'free move' should at least not harm Black's chances, and I have made a few comparisons in the annotations that follow.



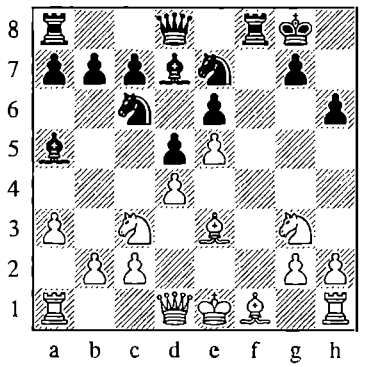
10.exf6

10.f4

Holding on to the centre is generally not such a good idea in these positions.

10...fxe5 11.fxe5 ♗d7

White is behind in development and unable to castle short in the next few moves. A similar position, without the inclusion of ...h6 for Black, is covered in variation D21 of the next chapter on page 106. I doubt that this extra move for Black can be to his disadvantage, although there are some nuances highlighted below.



12.♕d2

With the pawn on h6 White would like to arrange the piece sacrifice ♗xh6 at an appropriate moment. On the other hand, Black can also utilize the extra move as follows.

12...♘g6!

The idea is to prepare ...♕h4 now that White no longer has the option of ♗g5.

13.0–0–0

13.♗d3?! is well met by 13...♘gxe5! 14.dxe5 d4 15.♗xd4 ♘xd4 16.0–0–0 ♗c6 with somewhat better prospects for Black.

13...♕h4

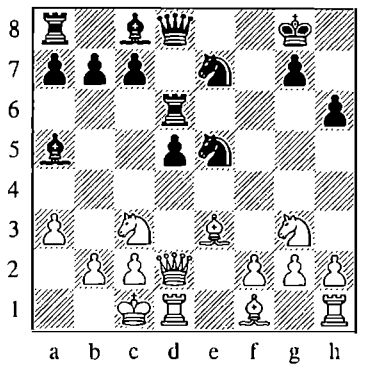
Black has an easy game and is at least equal.

10...♖xf6

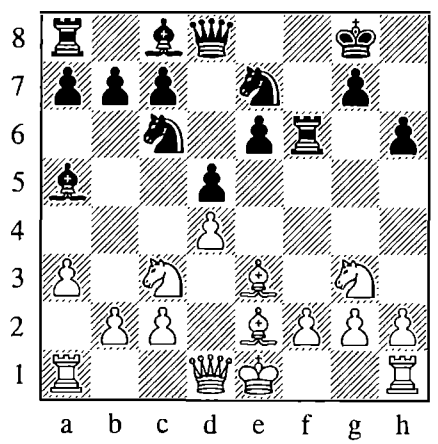
Now ...e5 has become a realistic option, so White should aim to castle quickly before the centre opens up.

11.♗e2

11.♕d2 is another option to prepare long castling. Now Black should strike immediately to obtain quick counterplay in the centre. 11...e5 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.0–0–0 ♖d6!? A concrete move with a clear message. Now ...d4 is a serious threat.



14.f4 (14.♗c5? d4 15.♗xd6 dxc3∓ loses material for White.) 14...♘5c6 15.b4 d4 16.♗c4† (16.bxa5 ♗e6†) 16...♔h8 17.bxa5 ♗g4 The position is sharp and unbalanced, but Black has the safer king and should be happy with the outcome of the opening.



11...♖f8!

A clever move, preparing ...e5 when dxe5 will allow ...d4 winning a piece.

12.b4!?

Another option leading to a more static position is: 12.f4 ♘f5 13.♘xf5 ♗xc3† 14.bxc3 exf5 Black has excellent chances in the forthcoming strategic battle. One idea is to follow up with ...♘a5 and later ...♘c4 at an appropriate moment, when an exchange on c4 would open up the a8-h1 diagonal for the bishop. Even better would be to exchange off the light-squared bishops, but that seems a bit too optimistic at the moment. A final idea is to transfer the knight via e7-c8-d6 to e4 in order to block the open e-file. Objectively the position is about equal, but in my opinion Black has the easier game to play.

12...♗b6

Now White has an ugly pawn set-up on the queenside while the threat of ...e5 has been postponed just for a move.

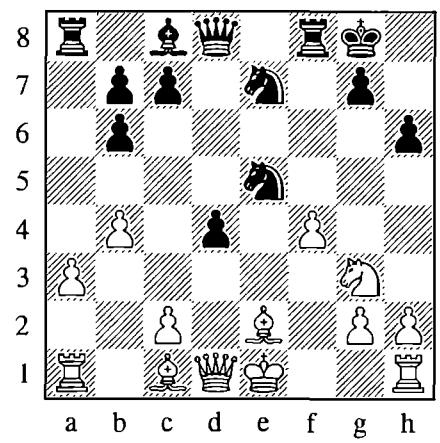
13.♘a4

This is the best attempt to make sense of White's last move, but Black is well placed to meet it.

13...e5 14.♘xb6 axb6 15.dxe5

15.c3 ♘f5 16.♘xf5 ♗xf5 is pleasant enough for Black.

15...d4! 16.♗c1 ♘xe5 17.f4



17...d3! 18.cxd3

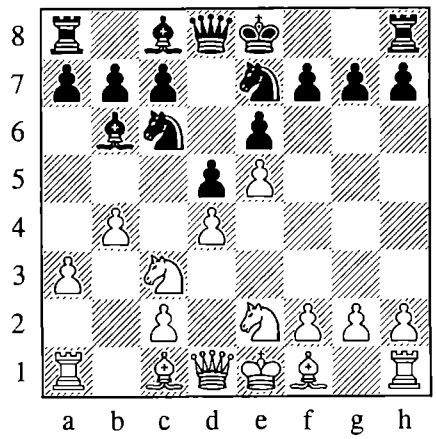
18.♗xd3?! ♘xd3† 19.♕xd3 ♕xd3 20.cxd3 ♘d5∓ regains the pawn with some advantage in the endgame.

18...♘5g6 19.♗f3 ♘xf4 20.♗xf4 ♖xf4 21.0–0 ♕d6

The position is roughly equal, as White

has about enough activity to make up for his slightly inferior pawn structure.

C) 7.b4 ♗b6



8.♘a4

This is almost always played, and I do not see another way for White to make sense of his previous move.

8...0–0

This can perhaps be named the Hector-Berg Variation, since from the total of seven games in the database Hector has played four games on the white side, of which three were against me.

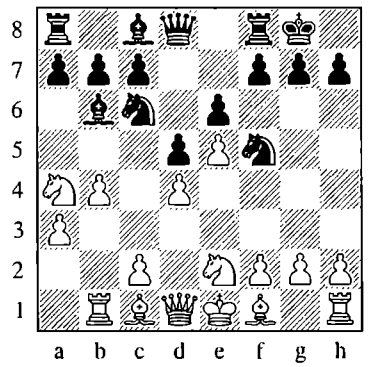
There are two main moves to analyse: **C1) 9.b5?!** and **C2) 9.c3**.

9.♖b1

Hector won against me with this move in the 2004 Excelsior Cup, but White got nothing out of the opening and I doubt that it will attract many followers.

9...♘f5

9...♗d7N was an interesting alternative, threatening to win a pawn with ...♗xd4 as the knight on a4 will be hanging.



10.♘xb6

10.c3 f6 is good for Black.

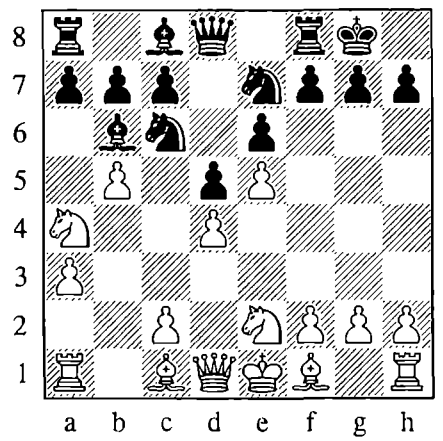
10...axb6 11.b5 ♘a5 12.♘g3 c5 13.♘xf5 exf5 14.♗e2

14.♗e3 f6! is good for Black.

14...♗c6=

Black was fine in Hector – Berg, Gothenburg 2004, although I lost the game due to a blunder.

C1) 9.b5?!



This move has been played twice by Hector.

9...♗a5†!

This was my prepared novelty, improving over the game Hector – Conquest, Pulvermuehle 2004, in which 9...♘a5 was played.

The main point of the text move is to save the bishop from being exchanged, which in

turn makes the knight redundant on a4. It will take quite some time for this piece to get back in business.

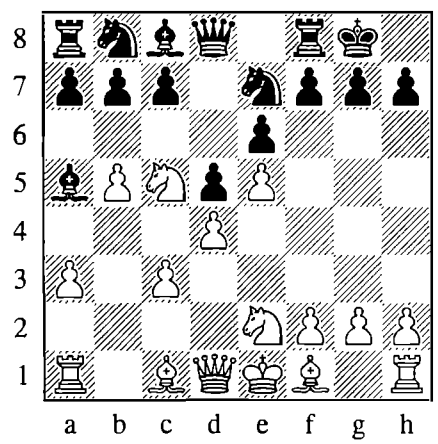
10.c3

White tries to shut the bishop out of the game.

Black also does well after 10.♗d2N ♗xd2† 11.♕xd2 ♘b8 followed by ...a6, forcing a favourable queenside exchange.

10...♘b8 11.♘c5

The knight is heading for b3 to attack the bishop.



11...a6!

Black is in time and can force a favourable exchange of pawns that leaves White with several weaknesses.

12.bxa6 ♘xa6 13.♘b3 c5!

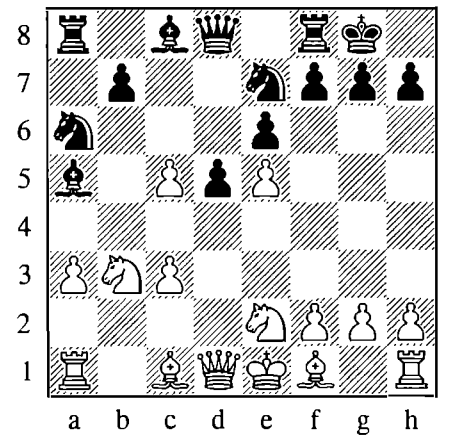
This is a key move for Black. It is important to seize the initiative while White is still in a cramped position and behind in development.

14.dxc5

A sad move for White to have to make, but it is not easy to suggest a better way to deal with the threat of ...cxd4.

After 14.♘xa5 ♕xa5 15.♗d2 ♗d7∓ White will struggle to complete his development.

14.♗d2 ♗d7∓ also favours the second player.



14...♕c7!N

14...♘c6 was enough for me to claim some advantage in Hector – Berg, Sweden 2004, but the text move is even stronger.

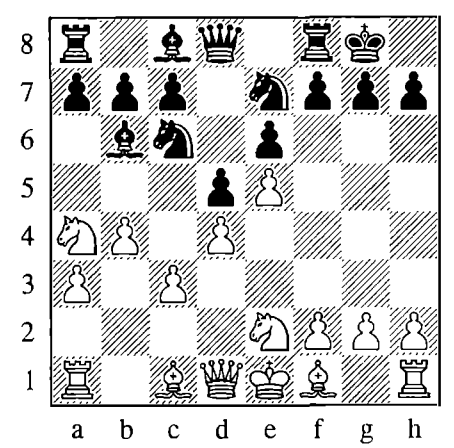
15.♘xa5

15.♗e3 ♗d7 16.♕d2 ♘f5∓

15...♕xa5∓

Black has a clear and stable advantage thanks to White's numerous pawn weaknesses.

C2) 9.c3

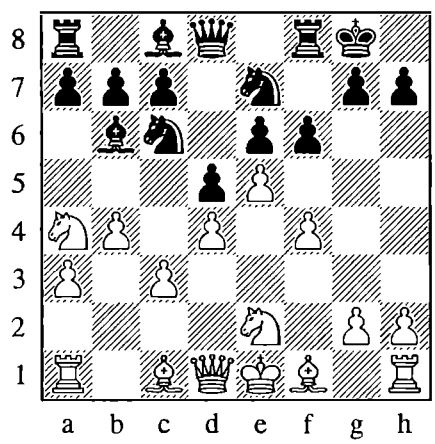


This is the first choice of my engine, and the move I find most logical. White wants to overprotect the d4-pawn in order to free his knight on e2. The knight on a4 may take on b6 at an appropriate moment, but White should not be in a hurry to make this exchange, as in some cases the alternative route ♘b2-d3 or even ♘c5 might become interesting.

9...f6

A typical move, challenging the enemy pawn centre before White catches up on development. Now White must make an important choice between **C21) 10.f4** and **C22) 10.exf6**.

C21) 10.f4



This move was introduced in one of my many encounters with Hector, and has not yet been repeated. White is playing extremely ambitiously, aiming for nothing less than total control. However, such a strategy can easily backfire. The following comments are based on my own ChessBase annotations.

10...♗d7

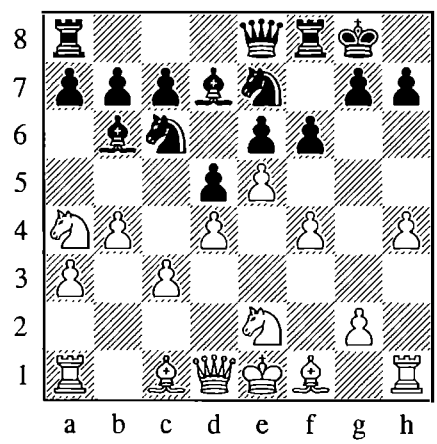
A multi-purpose developing move, eyeing the knight on a4 while also setting the option of manoeuvring the bishop to h5 or g6. Note that Black should delay exchanging on e5 for a while, as this would give the white pieces the use of the f4-square.

11.h4

This is mainly directed against the aforementioned bishop manoeuvre, but it costs time and weakens the white camp further.

11...♕e8

Black exerts diagonal pressure against the a4-knight while at the same time preparing to deploy the queen on h5 or g6.



12.h5

Hector prevents the queen activation, having seen that Black has no way to exploit the loose knight for the moment.

12...♘d8

Forcing White to decide whether or not to exchange on b6.

13.♘b2

13.♘xb6 axb6∓ gives Black a pleasant game, with a half-open a-file and easy play on the light squares.

The text move is the principled choice, hoping to consolidate with ♘d3 and complete development. If White can achieve this he may end up with a dominant position, but for the

time being his development is a major concern. The 'big pawn' on b6 is not doing much at the moment, but that could easily change if Black finds a good way to open the centre.

13...♘f7

Now White will constantly have to watch out for sacrifices on e5. A secondary point behind Black's last move is to put the knight on h6 and later g4 or f5.

14.g4!?

Another highly ambitious move from white, but he remains underdeveloped and his bubble will burst sooner rather than later.

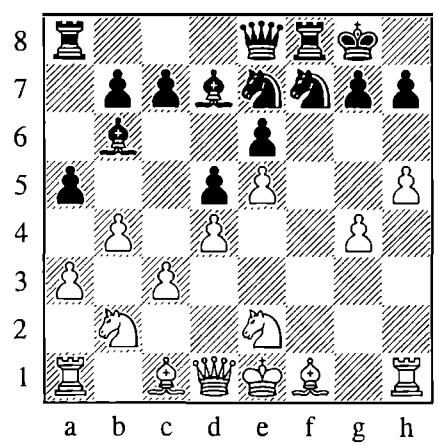
14...fxe5

White was intending to meet 14...♘h6 with 15.♘g3.

It is worth mentioning that 14...a5? should be avoided as 15.h6! is awkward.

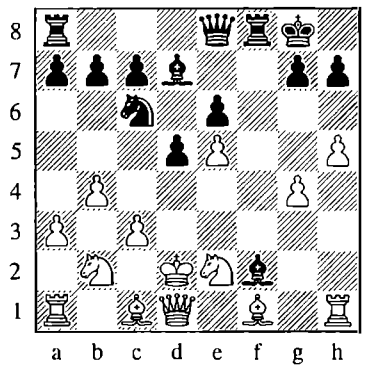
15.fxe5

It is remarkable that White has played exclusively with knights and pawns for the first fifteen moves.



15...a5!

The tempting 15...♘xe5!? is interesting but at the same time unnecessary. After 16.dxe5 the continuation might be: 16...♗f2† 17.♔d2 ♘c6



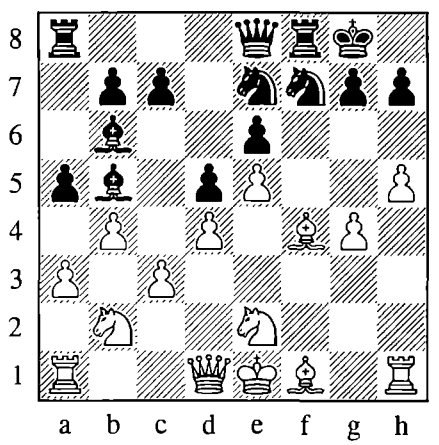
18.♔c2! (18.♘d3 does not work on account of 18...♘xe5! 19.♘xe5 ♗a4 and the white queen is trapped.) 18...♘xe5 Black has excellent compensation for the sacrificed piece, with two central pawns and a dangerous initiative.

16.♗f4!

White protects himself against the sacrifice while at the same time making it possible to answer ...axb4 with axb4.

16...♗b5

White is under pressure and must take care not to lose at once.



17.♖g1??

The decisive mistake, placing the rook on the same diagonal as the enemy bishop.

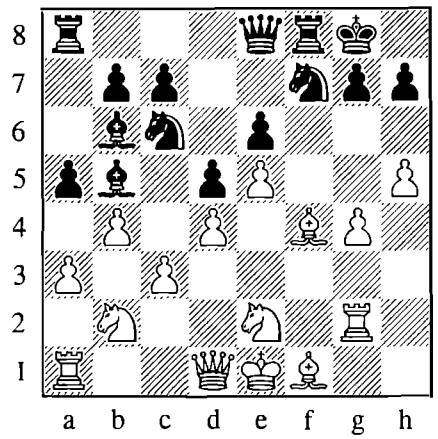
17.♘g3! was necessary, when Black has a promising position but no clear way through.

17...♘c6!

Activating the knight and threatening ...♘fxe5.

18.♖g2

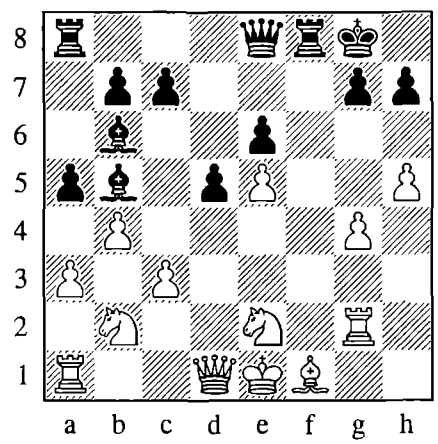
The rook escapes the pin, but Black can execute the desired combination all the same.



18...♘fxe5! 19.♗xe5

19.dxe5 is met by 19...♗xe2 followed by ...♖xf4, with an extra pawn and a winning position for Black.

19...♘xe5 20.dxe5



20...♖xf1†! 21.♔xf1 ♕f7† 22.♔e1 ♕f3 23.c4

A desperate try to avoid getting mated.

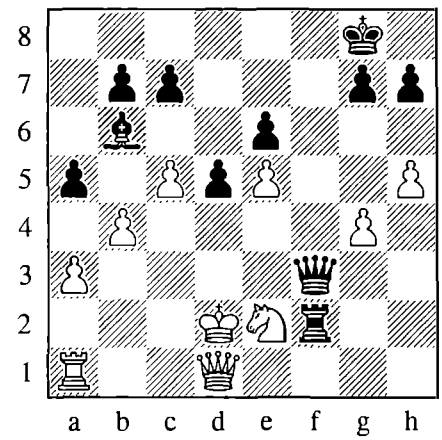
23.♖h2 is refuted by 23...♗e3! with mate to follow shortly.

23.♖g1 is not much better, as after 23...♗f2† 24.♔d2 ♗c3† 25.♔c2 ♗xe2 26.♕e1 ♕e4† Black has won back the material with a crushing position.

23...♕xg2 24.c5

24.cxb5 ♗e3 is terminal.

24...♖f8 25.♔d2 ♖f2 26.♘d3 ♗xd3 27.♔xd3 ♕f3† 28.♔d2



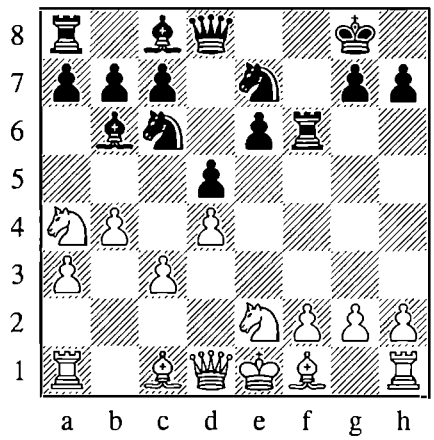
28...d4!

0–1

White resigned in Hector – Berg, Sweden 2005, as 29.cxb6 ♕c3 is mate.

C22) 10.exf6 ♖xf6N

I prefer this over 10...gxf6, when Black has a strong pawn centre but his kingside is a bit weak. One game continued: 11.♘g3 e5 12.♗e2 (12.b5!?N ♘a5 13.♗e2 might be even stronger, as pointed out by Houdini.) 12...♘f5 13.0–0 ♘xg3 14.hxg3± Ekstroem – Berezovsky, Graechen 1999.



11.♘g3

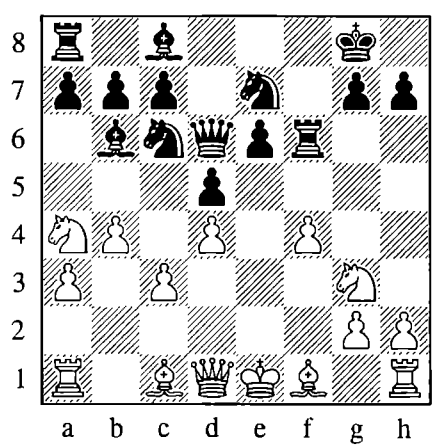
There are no practical examples from this position, but this knight move seems like the normal way to develop White's kingside.

11...♕d6

If Black can carry out ...e5 he should generally be fine.

12.f4

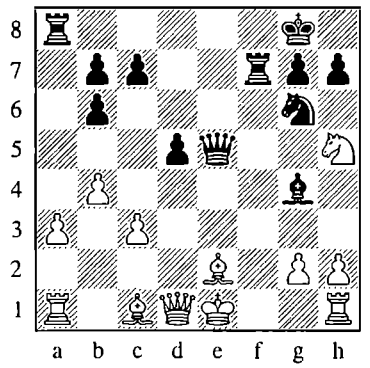
Preventing the pawn break, but this move slows White's development, weakens the light squares and restricts the bishop on c1.



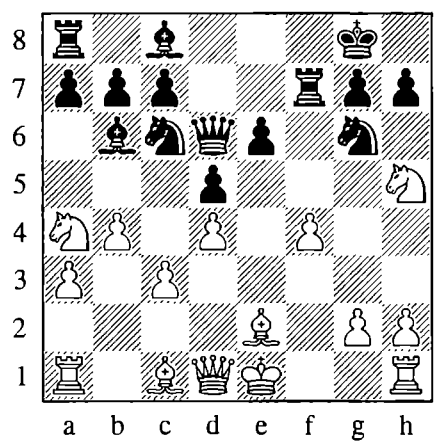
12...♘g6 13.♘h5 ♖f7 14.♗e2

The natural-looking 14.♗d3?! is an inaccuracy in view of the tactical blow: 14...e5!

15.♘xb6 axb6 16.fxe5 ♘cxe5 17.dxe5 ♕xe5† 18.♗e2 ♗g4



19.♘g3 ♕xc3† 20.♕d2 (20.♗d2 ♕d4–+) 20...♕xa1 21.♗xg4 ♖e8† 22.♔d1 ♖f4 23.♕xd5† ♔h8∓



14...♗d7 15.♘c5

Once again White has to watch out for hidden tactics, as after 15.0–0? ♘xd4! Black wins a pawn.

15...♗xc5 16.bxc5 ♕f8 17.0–0 b6 18.a4 ♘ge7=

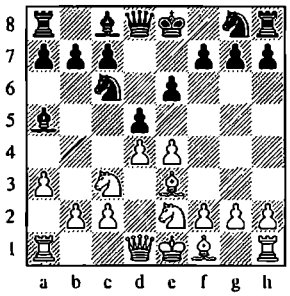
We have reached an unbalanced position with roughly equal chances. White has the bishop pair while Black has the more solid pawn structure and good piece coordination.

Conclusion

6.e5 establishes a space advantage for White, but by developing his king's knight on e7 and castling quickly, Black prepares to challenge the enemy centre with a timely ...f6. White has a playable position but he is slightly behind in development, and we have seen several instances where overambitious play enabled Black to break open the centre with powerful effect.



4.♘e2



6.♗e3

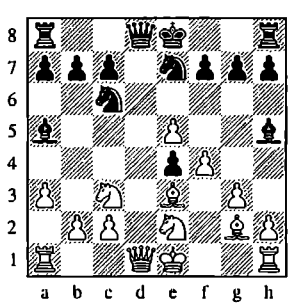
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘e2 ♘c6 5.a3 ♗a5 6.♗e3

6...♘ge7

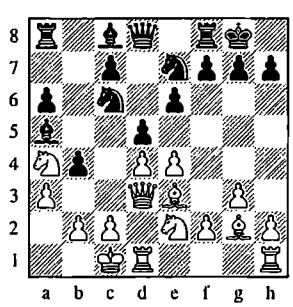
A) 7.b4 **100**
B) 7.f3 **101**
C) 7.♕d3 **103**
D) 7.e5 0–0 **105**
D1) 8.g3 **105**
D2) 8.♘g3 f6 **106**
D21) 9.f4 **106**
D22) 9.exf6 **107**

Note to move 7



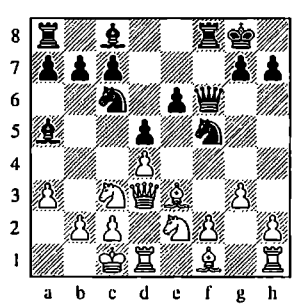
11...♘d5!N

C) note to 9.b4!?N



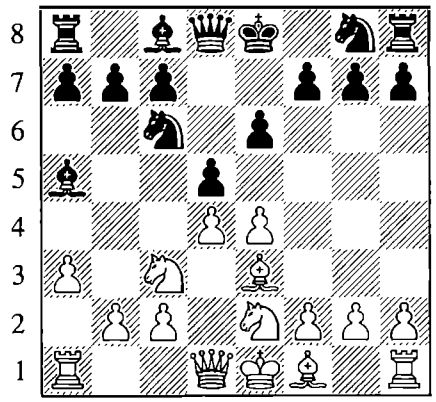
11...♖b8!N

D1) after 11.0–0–0



11...♖b8!?N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘e2 ♘c6 5.a3 ♗a5 6.♗e3



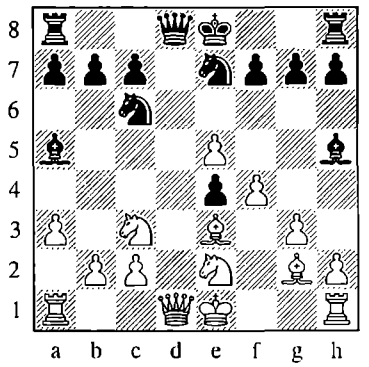
This is White's most flexible developing move, setting up the possibility of long castling. Over the next move or two White can decide whether to close the centre with e4-e5 or proceed in some other way.

6...♘ge7

I prefer this over 6...♘f6 7.e5 ♘g4 (7...♘e4 8.b4 ♘xc3 9.♘xc3 ♗b6 10.♕g4±) 8.♘f4 when White has fine prospects; see, for example, the game Berg – Kindermann, Bundesliga 2002, which I won in good style. Based on my understanding and practical experience playing both sides of the 4.♘e2 ♘c6 variation, I would suggest that the e7-square is the best home for the black knight in the majority of cases.

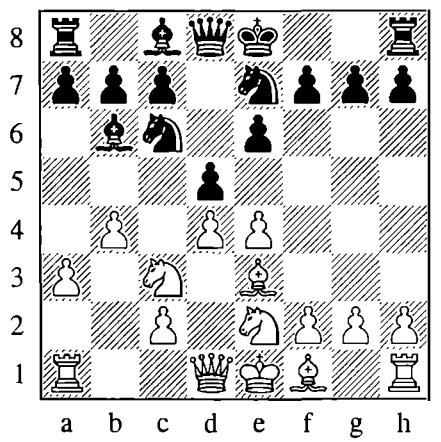
At this point White has four main continuations: **A) 7.b4, B) 7.f3, C) 7.♕d3** and **D) 7.e5**.

7.g3 is hardly critical, and Black obtains a fine position by opening the centre in thematic style: 7...e5! 8.♗g2 ♗g4 9.f3 ♗h5 10.dxe5 dxe4 11.f4 Here I propose an improvement over the game Miladinovic – Atalik, Elista 1998:



11...♘d5!N 12.♕d2 ♗f3 with a dangerous initiative for Black.

A) 7.b4 ♗b6



This position can also be reached via the move order 6.b4 ♗b6 7.♗e3 ♘ge7, as noted earlier on page 76-77.

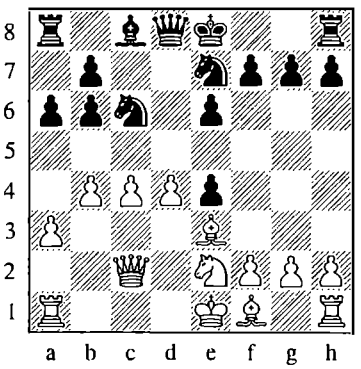
8.exd5

The most popular move, although the exchange structure is unlikely to threaten us. The following two alternatives are also nothing special for White.

8.e5? is an accuracy which has only occurred in a single game, Van Randen – Gibson, Grand Havre Bay 2010. If White wishes to play this move he should do it without the inclusion of b2-b4 and ...♗b6, since here Black has

the additional option of 8...♘f5!N exerting pressure on the d4-pawn, which hampers White's development. In view of the looming ...f6 break, White's best try seems to be 9.b5 although after 9...♘xe3 10.fxe3 ♘e7 White's position is seriously weakened and Black is at least slightly better.

The enterprising pawn sacrifice 8.♘a4!? was used successfully by the Brazilian GM Alexander Fier, but Black was doing fine in the opening. 8...dxe4 9.c4 a6 10.♘xb6 cxb6 11.♕c2

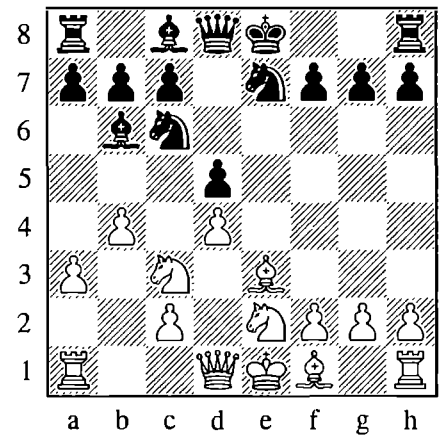


a) At this point Black went completely wrong with the overly materialistic 11...f5? and lost badly in Fier – Jatoba de Oliveira Reis, Brazil 2010. This approach doesn't suit the Black position at all, and merely gives White targets and a great initiative which is worth at least as much as the extra pawn.

b) Instead Black should search for counterplay with 11...b5!N when he will obtain excellent control over the light squares, especially d5 which could become a great outpost for his knights. In this case his chances are at least equal.

8...exd5

It is logical to recapture with the pawn, so as not to allow the exchange of the badly placed knight on c3.



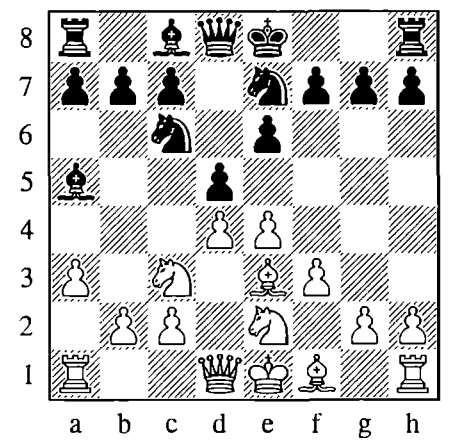
9.♘g3

White tried 9.♘f4 in Lopez Silva – Rojas, Santiago de Chile 2005. Here I would recommend 9...0–0N intending 10.♗e2 ♘f5 11.♘fxd5 ♗xd4 12.0–0 ♗e6 with a slight pull for Black.

9...0–0 10.♗b5 a6 11.♗xc6 ♘xc6 12.0–0 ♘e7=

Handoko – Johansen, Bali 1999. The position is equal, although if anyone has chances to press, it could be Black with his bishop pair.

B) 7.f3



This has been played in a few games, and is reminiscent of the 3.f3 variation against the

Caro-Kann. White's simple plan of ♕d2 and 0–0–0 can prove dangerous if Black is not careful, but I was pleased to discover a rather spectacular counter-surprise to deal with White's set-up.

7...0–0

I would also like to mention a second option.

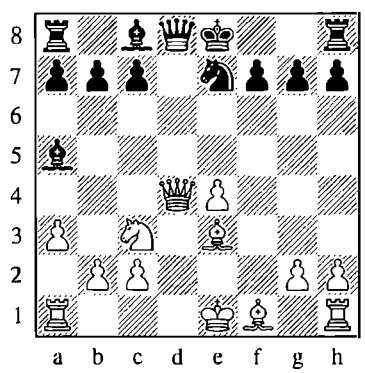
7...e5!?

This is also perfectly sound for Black.

8.♕d2

After 8.dxe5 ♗xc3† 9.bxc3 0–0 Black is about to complete development, while White is struggling to castle and has numerous pawn weaknesses.

8...dxe4 9.fxe4 cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♘xd4 11.♕xd4 11.♗xd4 0–0 12.0–0–0 ♘c6 13.♗c5 ♕xd2† 14.♖xd2 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♖e8 16.♗b5 is likely to result in a drawish endgame with opposite-coloured bishops.



11...0–0 12.0–0–0

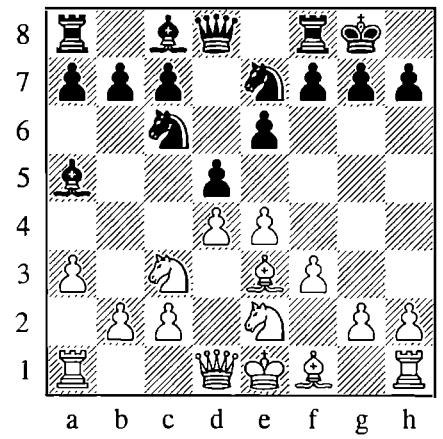
The position is about equal and occurred (via a slightly different move order) in the game Bojkov – Crut, Germany 2006, which we will follow for a few more moves.

12...♕xd4 13.♗xd4 ♗g4 14.♖d2 ♘c6 15.♗c5

Here Black should have continued with:

15...♗xc3N 16.bxc3 ♖fe8

By now Black even has somewhat better chances.



8.♕d2 b5!?N

A startling move, but the message behind it is clear. I found four practical examples of 8...e5, including the game mentioned in the previous note, but I believe the text move to be fully playable, not to mention dangerous for an unprepared opponent to face over the board.

9.b4

This seems like the most logical way to question Black's last move.

My engine considers 9.0–0–0? as an option, but I doubt that any human players would contemplate this, and indeed after 9...b4 10.axb4 ♗xb4! the machine soon begins to regret the decision. White has no counterplay whatsoever, while Black can quickly launch an attack along the a- and b-files.

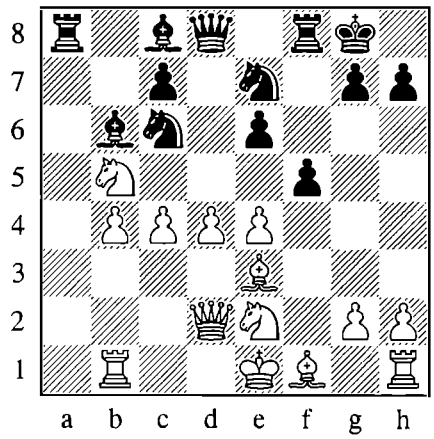
9...♗b6 10.♘xb5

Trying to close the centre in order to gain time for development backfires: 10.e5? ♘f5 Threatening to take on e5. 11.♗f2 a5 12.♖b1 axb4 13.axb4 f6 With a dangerous initiative for Black.

10...a5 11.♖b1 axb4 12.axb4 dxe4 13.fxe4 f5!

With this strong move the position opens up further. White is already in serious trouble, as shown by the following possible continuation.

14.c4



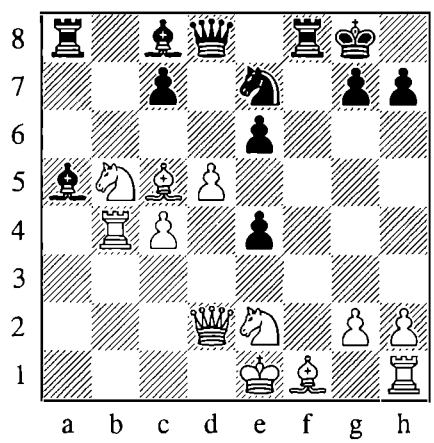
14...♘xb4!

An important tactic.

15.♖xb4 ♗a5 16.d5

Necessary to prevent ...♘c6.

16...fxe4 17.♗c5



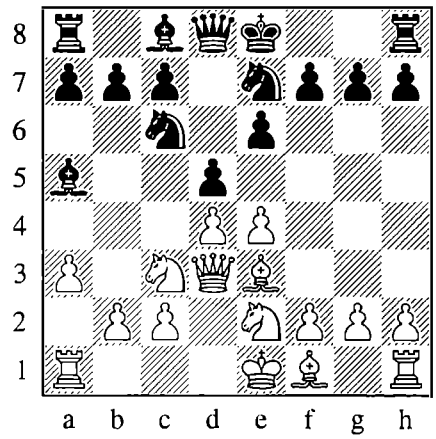
17...e3! 18.♕c3

18.♕xe3? falls victim to 18...♗xb4† 19.♗xb4 ♘xd5! 20.cxd5 ♕h4†–+ and the game will soon be over.

18...exd5 19.♘ed4 ♖f2∓

Though the outcome is not yet fully decided, Black is having all the fun.

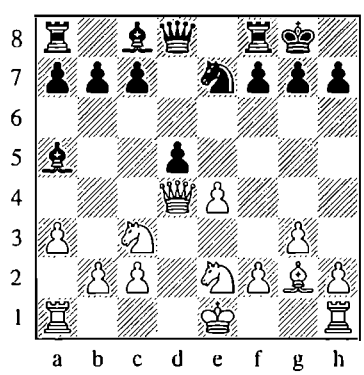
C) 7.♕d3



This has been quite a common choice for White in recent years.

7...0–0 8.0–0–0

8.g3?! does not seem appropriate, and Black obtains a good game with a familiar device: 8...e5! 9.♗g2 exd4 10.♗xd4 (10.♘xd4 ♘e5∓) 10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 Here I suggest an improvement over my game against Sheila Sahl:



11...♗b6N (Best, although 11...dxe4 was also quite pleasant for Black in Sahl – Berg, Tromso 2010.) 12.♕d3 dxe4 13.♕xe4 c6 14.♖d1 ♕c7∓ Black is somewhat better thanks to his bishop pair and development advantage.

8...a6

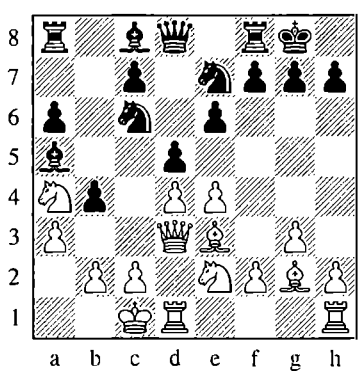
After checking some different possibilities for Black, I found this to be the most appropriate way to continue. The most tempting alternative is 8...b5, which forces White into sharp complications. Unfortunately, after analysing it with a computer I concluded that it was not completely sound, so instead I am recommending a slower approach with the same idea in mind.

Apart from the obvious plan of ...b5 to start an attack on the queenside, Black should also keep in mind the possibility of ...e5 to open the centre at an appropriate moment.

9.b4!?N

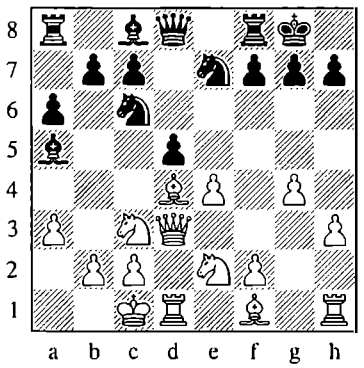
This creates some weaknesses on the queenside, but the consequences of not playing it could turn out to be even worse. I found two practical examples in which White pushed the g-pawn:

9.g3 b5 10.♗g2 b4 11.♘a4 Zelic – Brumen, Zagreb 2011. Here I would prefer:



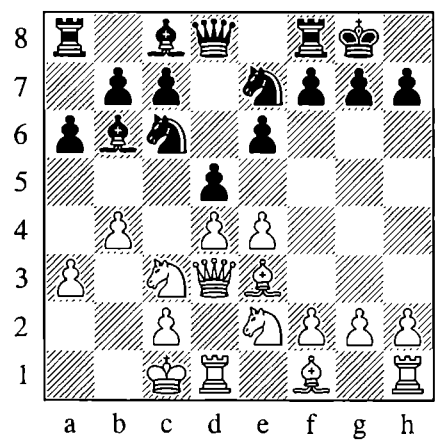
11...♖b8!N In the game Black took on a3 immediately, but I would prefer to maintain the tension for at least one more move. 12.♘c5 bxa3 13.♕xa3 ♖b5 Black has some initiative and attacking chances on the queenside.

9.g4 was played in Rajkovic – E. Toth, Senta 2007. Here it looks promising for Black to switch plans and execute the central break, especially now that the g4-pawn is hanging. 9...e5!N (The game continuation of 9...b5 also leads to interesting and double-edged play.) 10.h3 exd4 11.♗xd4 (11.♘xd4 ♘e5 12.♕d2 c5 is good for Black.)



11...♘xd4 12.♕xd4 ♗b6 13.♕d2 c6 14.exd5 ♘xd5 15.♘xd5 ♕xd5 16.♕xd5 cxd5= The endgame is level, as Black's bishop pair compensates for the isolated d-pawn.

9...♗b6



10.h4

White needs to start a pawn storm on the kingside before Black opens up the queenside.

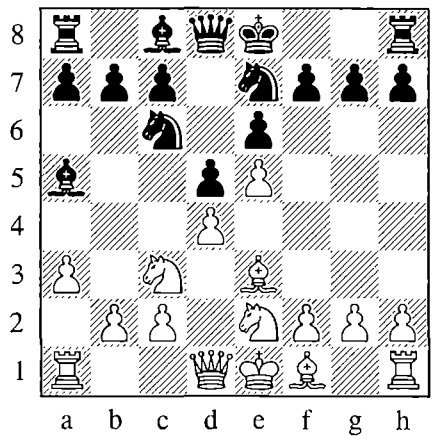
10...♗a7!

This move is necessary to prepare ...a5 in a way that stops White from blocking the queenside with b4-b5.

11.h5 b5 12.h6 g6 13.♘f4 a5

Black has good attacking prospects.

D) 7.e5



This has been White's most popular choice.

7...0–0

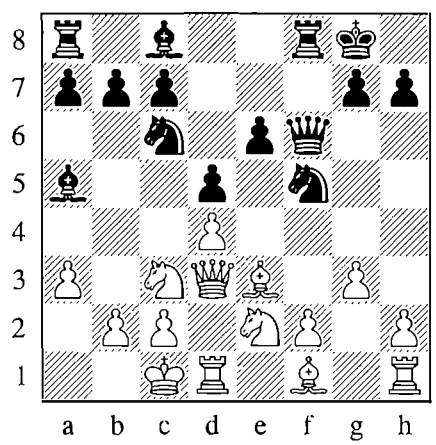
Here White has two main ways to develop his kingside: **D1) 8.g3** and **D2) 8.♘g3**.

D1) 8.g3

This was once played by Andrei Sokolov but has never been repeated.

8...♘f5 9.♕d3 f6 10.exf6 ♕xf6 11.0–0–0

I would already prefer Black, who has excellent chances to create an attack on the queenside. With this in mind, I would like to introduce a sharp novelty.



11...♖b8!?N

11...♗d7 was the perfectly reasonable continuation seen in A. Sokolov – Curien, Lenk 2011, but I would prefer to push the b-pawn as quickly as possible. The a2-a3 move could prove to be a serious concession, whereas the black kingside contains no such weaknesses.

12.♗h3

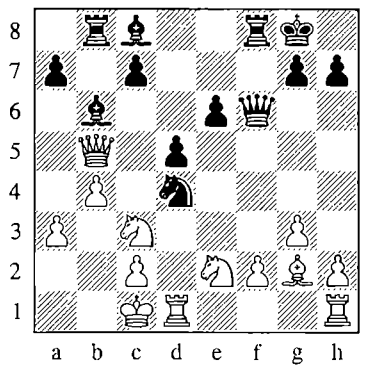
This seems like the most challenging try.

Simple development allows Black to carry out his plan, as shown in the following line:

12.♗g2 b5! 13.b4 ♗b6 14.♕xb5

14.♘xb5? ♗a6∓

14...♘cxd4 15.♗xd4 ♘xd4



16.♘xd4?

16.♖xd4 is better, although 16...♗xd4 17.♕xb8 ♗xc3→ leaves White facing a serious attack.

16...♗xd4 17.♕xb8 ♗xc3

White is unable to save his exposed king, for instance:

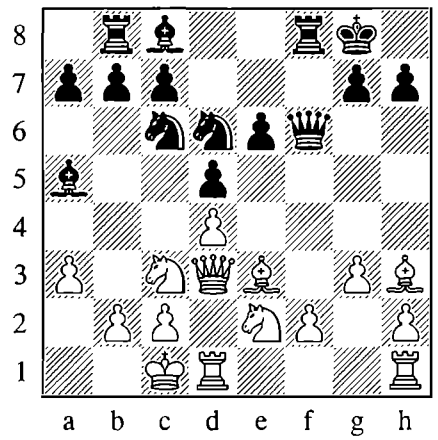
18.♕xa7

18.♖d3 ♗b2† 19.♔d1 ♗a6–+ regains the material with a decisive attack to follow.

18...♗b2† 19.♔b1 ♗a1! 20.♔c1 ♕b2† 21.♔d2 ♕c3† 22.♔c1 ♗a6! 23.♕xa6 ♗b2† 24.♔b1 ♗xa3–+

12...♘d6!

12...b5 needlessly allows 13.♗xf5 ♕xf5 14.♕xf5 ♖xf5= when Black is still fine, but White has escaped with an exchange of queens.

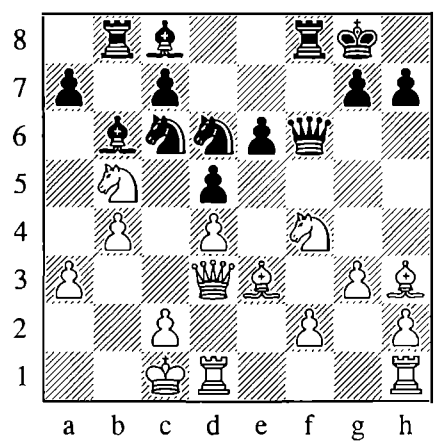


13.♘f4 b5

Now ...b4 is a serious threat which forces White's hand.

14.b4 ♗b6 15.♘xb5

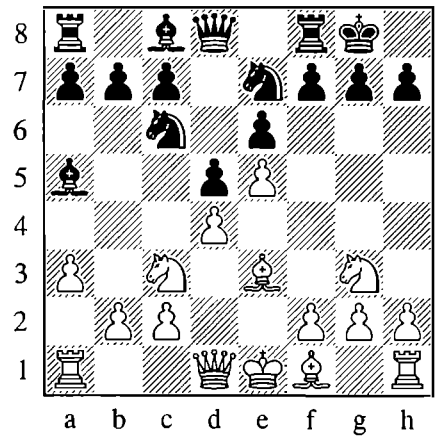
The critical try. Without it White would have weakened his position for nothing, and Black can continue the attack with ...a5 regardless.



15...♘c4!

Black has excellent compensation for the sacrificed pawn. The knight has taken up a great outpost on c4 and Black's attacking possibilities are considerable.

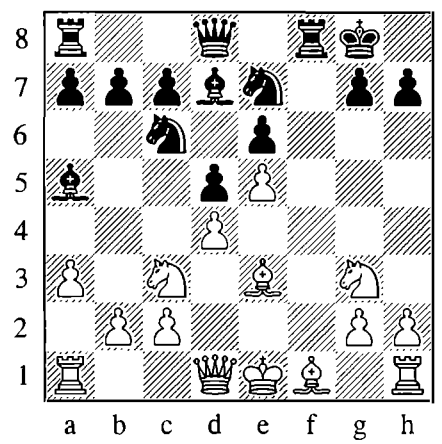
D2) 8.♘g3



8...f6!

Challenging the centre. White can react with either **D21) 9.f4** or **D22) 9.exf6**.

D21) 9.f4 fxe5 10.fxe5 ♗d7



Black should be at least equal here. The open f-file prevents White's short castling and the 'French bishop' is headed via e8 to g6, where it will have a bright future.

11.♕d2N

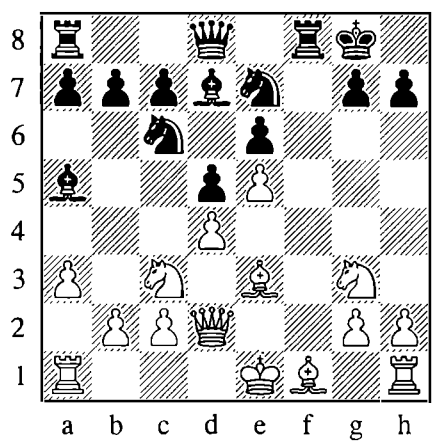
White needs to improve on 11.♕g4?! as I played in Berg – Short, Malmo 2002. Here instead of 11...♘f5 Black missed an even stronger move in 11...♗b6!N when the

tactical threat of ...♘xe5 causes White serious problems.

11.♗d3?!N is also inadvisable due to 11...♗b6 12.♘a4 ♗xd4 13.♗xd4 ♘xd4 14.♗xh7† ♔xh7 15.♕xd4 ♗xa4 16.♕xa4 ♘g6∓ as pointed out by Finkel. The e5-pawn is about to drop and Black is at least slightly better.

11.♗e2!?N is suggested by Finkel without further comment. My suggestion for Black would be 11...♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♘a5, playing on the light squares and intending ...♘c4. In the event that White exchanges on c4 with his bishop, Black will obtain the d5-square for the other knight in addition to a great diagonal for his bishop.

The text move is a suggestion from my silicon friend, but it also fails to solve White's problems.



11...a6!

This move has two purposes. The first and most obvious one is to emphasize that 0–0–0 might not be such a good idea for White due to ...b5 with an attack.

12.♗e2

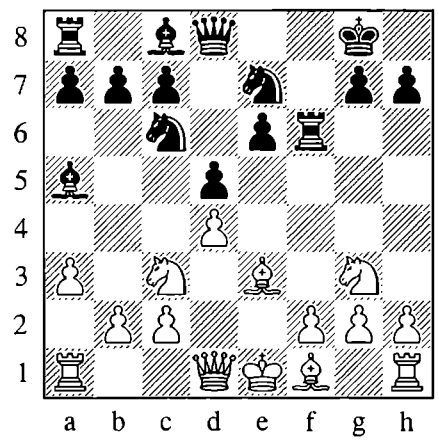
This is more sensible, but now Black reveals his second idea.

12...♘a7!

Intending to continue the light-square strategy with ...♘b5 or possibly ...♗b5 in the next few moves. Black has promising play and White has yet to solve the problem of castling.

D22) 9.exf6 ♖xf6

Playing for a strong centre with 9...gxf6? is too ambitious here. After 10.♗d3 e5 11.dxe5 fxe5 12.♕h5 White's initiative proved stronger than Black's centre in Zelic – Kovacevic, Zadar 2007.



10.♗e2

White settles for modest development and castling. Attempts to play more actively lead nowhere, as the following line shows.

10.♗g5 ♖f8 11.♗b5

Here I found a modest improvement for Black.

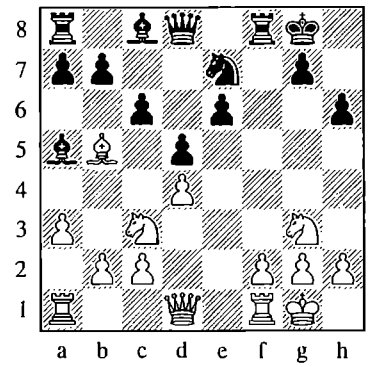
11...h6N

This is my preference, although the game continuation of 11...♕d6 also gave Black somewhat better chances in Hermann – Behlert, Bad Wiessee 2002.

12.♗xe7

Retreating the bishop would be inconsistent with White's 10th move, and after 12.♗e3 e5∓ Black has a strong centre and an open diagonal for the bishop on c8.

12...♘xe7 13.0–0 c6

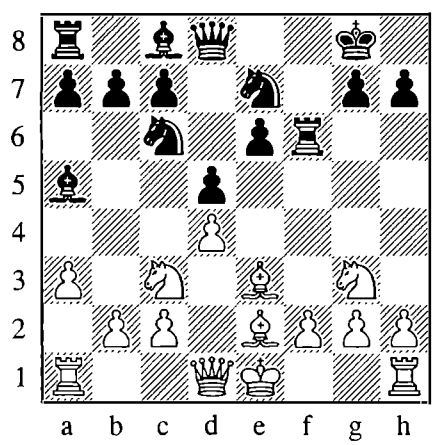


14.♗d3

14.♗e2 is well met by 14...♗c7∓ followed by ...e5 when Black has solved all his problems and can rely on a small edge thanks to his pair of bishops.

14...♗b6 15.♘ce2 e5! 16.dxe5 ♕c7∓

Black will soon recapture the e5-pawn with a favourable position.



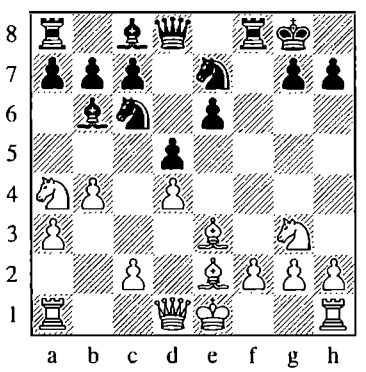
10...♖f8!

Black gets the rook out of trouble and prepares the ...e5 break. We saw exactly the same idea in variation B3 of the previous chapter. In most cases the position of the black pawn on h7 instead of h6 makes little difference to the evaluation, although we will see one exception in the note to White's next move.

11.0–0

11.f4 prevents the ...e5 break but renders the bishop on e3 a sorry sight. Black should continue 11...♗xc3† 12.bxc3 ♘f5 13.♘xf5 exf5 reaching an almost identical position as in the note to White's 12th move in line B3 of the previous chapter. Here too Black's chances are at least equal, and the position of the pawn on h7 instead of h6 may even help slightly by making Black's kingside more secure.

Here is a key line where Black cannot follow the exact same path as we saw with the pawn on h6. 11.b4!?N ♗b6 12.♘a4 Here I would like to mention two possible continuations.



a) Firstly, let us see what happens if Black proceeds as we saw in the previous chapter: 12...e5 13.♘xb6 axb6 14.dxe5 ♘xe5 (Black must deviate from the path seen in line B3 of the previous chapter, as here 14...d4?! can be met by 15.♗g5! exploiting the absence of a pawn on h6.) 15.0–0 ♘f5 Black has just enough piece activity to balance White's pair of bishops.

b) 12...♘f5!? 13.♘xf5 exf5 14.♘xb6 axb6 looks like a viable alternative, leading to a roughly equal position where the bishop pair is not too significant.

11...e5

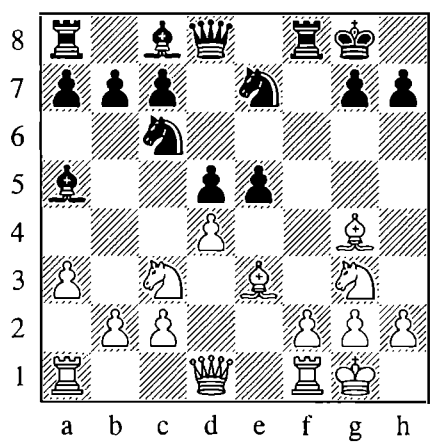
Having achieved this move without giving up the bishop pair, Black is at least equal and

is poised to take over the initiative. We will follow the one game on the database for a short while.

12.♗g4?!

12.dxe5? d4 is bad for White. He can avoid the loss of a piece with 13.b4 ♗b6 14.b5, but after 14...dxe3 15.bxc6 exf2† 16.♔h1 ♘xc6 Black has a healthy extra pawn and an overwhelming position.

The machine recommends the quirky 12.♗g5!?N exd4 13.♘a4 but after the straightforward 13...h6 14.♗xe7 ♕xe7 15.b4 ♗b6 16.♘xb6 axb6 17.b5 ♘d8 18.♕xd4 ♕c5 White is equal at best.



12...exd4 13.♗xc8

13.♗xd4 ♘xd4 14.♕xd4 (14.♗xc8 ♘f3†! 15.gxf3 ♖xc8∓) 14...♗b6 15.♕d1 a6!∓ Black now has the square a7 for his bishop in case of ♘a4. This bishop and the pressure against f2 makes the difference.

13...dxc3

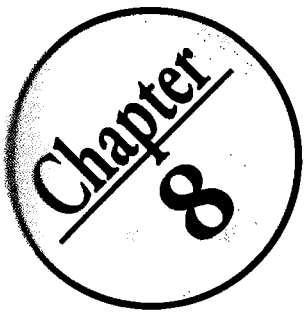
13...dxe3N may be slightly stronger, and even the simple 13...♘xc8N 14.♗xd4 ♘xd4 15.♕xd4 c6 gives Black an obvious positional advantage. In the game White made some further errors and quickly got a losing position, but eventually salvaged a draw after Black failed to capitalize.

14.♗xb7?! ♖b8 15.♗xc6?! cxb2 16.♖b1? ♘xc6 17.♕g4 ♕f6–+

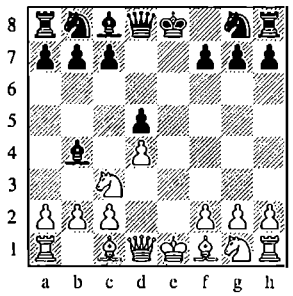
Danilenko – Borsuk, Bila Tserkva 2006.

Conclusion

6.♗e3 is a flexible move which can lead to a variety of different position types. In the early part of the chapter we saw some instances of long castling from White, after which Black should gratefully accept the invitation to ram his b-pawn up the board at the earliest convenience. The last part of the chapter dealt with 7.e5, leading to positions resembling those from the previous chapter. Here too Black can count on good chances, his primary tool for counterplay being a timely ...f6 break.



4.exd5



Introduction and 8.♕f3

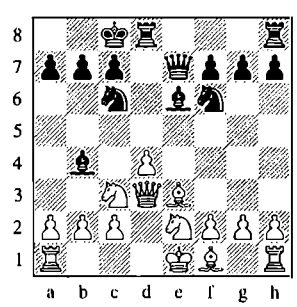
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.exd5

4...exd5

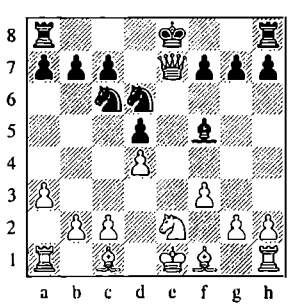
A) 5.♗d2 112
B) 5.♕f3 ♕e7†! 6.♘e2 ♘c6 7.♕d3 ♘f6 113
B1) 8.a3 114
B2) 8.f3 115
C) 5.♗d3 ♘c6 116
C1) 6.♘e2 116
C2) 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 ♘ge7 8.♕f3 ♗e6 117
C21) 9.♘e2 118
C22) 9.♖b1 b6 119
C221) 10.♘h3 119
C222) 10.♘e2 ♕d7 120
C2221) 11.♘g3 120
C2222) 11.♘f4 120
C2223) 11.0–0 121

B) note to 7.♕d3



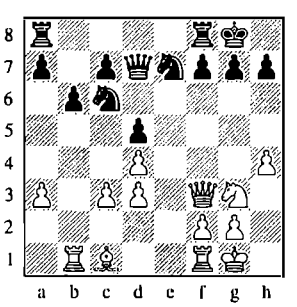
10...♖hc8!N

B1) after 12.♕xe7†



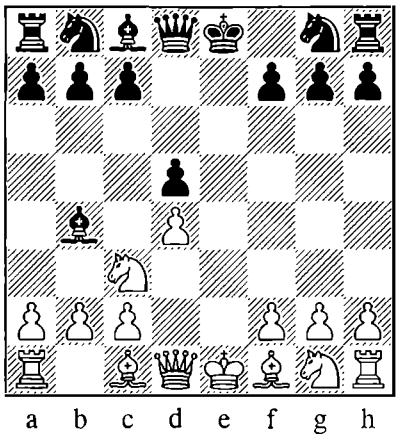
12...♔xe7!N

C2223) after 14.h4



14...♘d8!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.exd5 exd5



Comparing this position to the Exchange Variation with 3.exd5 exd5, there are some players who believe White can benefit from the inclusion of the moves ♘c3 and ...♗b4. White will generally aim to provoke an exchange on c3 and play actively on the kingside, in the hope that Black's dark-squared bishop will be missed. Black, on the other hand, will have a superior pawn structure without incurring a space disadvantage as he does in the main lines of the Winawer.

We will begin by analysing the sidelines **A) 5.♗d2** and **B) 5.♕f3** before moving on the main line of **C) 5.♗d3**.

5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘c6 leaves White with nothing better than 7.♗d3 leading directly to variation C2.

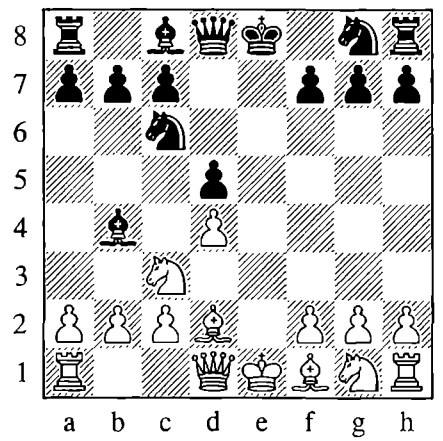
5.♘f3 should be met by 5...♘e7 in order to exchange the light-squared bishops with ...♗f5 later. Many games have occurred but the play is pretty straightforward so I will just give one example: 6.♗d3 (6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 ♘bc6 8.♗d3 reaches 8.♘f3 in the notes to variation C2 – see page 118) 6...♘bc6 7.0–0 0–0 8.♖e1 ♗f5= L. Schneider – Bareev, Stockholm 1987.

A) 5.♗d2

This move is rarely seen and in general Black scores well. White avoids doubled pawns on the queenside, but Black doesn't want to exchange on c3 anyway unless a2-a3 is played.

5...♘c6

Any sensible move is playable, but I have chosen to recommend this active developer which attacks the d-pawn. The position is close to symmetrical, but Black may benefit from keeping the c8-bishop flexible in comparison to its counterpart on d2.



6.a3

6.♗b5 ♘ge7 doesn't cause Black any problems. An important point is that the bishop on b4 can safely retreat to d6 when necessary, without having to worry about ♘b5 anymore.

6.♘f3 is harmless at best: 6...♘f6 7.♗b5 (7.a3?! is too slow, and after 7...♗xc3 8.♗xc3 0–0 9.♗e2 ♘e4 Black is slightly better.) 7...0–0 8.0–0 ♗g4 Already it is White who must fight to equalize. The bishop is passive on d2 and blocks the queen's defence of the d-pawn.

6...♗e7

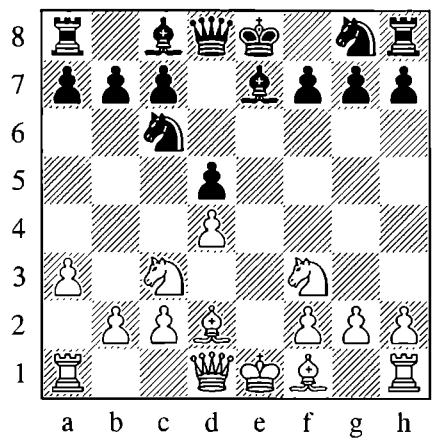
Intending ...♗f6 to put further pressure on

the d4-pawn. White will soon have to move the bishop from d2, which indicates that his opening strategy has not been successful.

7.♘f3

After 7.♗b5 ♗f6 8.♗xc6† bxc6 9.♗e3 ♘e7 10.h3 0–0 11.♘f3 ♘f5 Black was significantly better in Lebo – Medic, Sibenik 2009.

Here Black can improve on the game Orzikulova – Verbova, Tashkent 2012, by proceeding with the plan outlined above.



7...♗f6N 8.♗e3

8.♗f4 is met by 8...♗g4 putting further pressure on the d-pawn.

8...♘ge7=

The knight is coming to f5, and Black is absolutely fine.

B) 5.♕f3

This move is analysed by Watson in his *Dangerous Weapons* book on the French. White prepares long castling, but his main positional idea is to play a2-a3, to obtain the advantage of the bishop pair without incurring doubled c-pawns.

5...♕e7†!

This strong move disrupts White's development.

6.♘e2

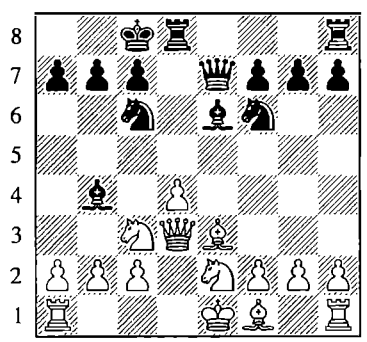
6.♗e3?! has been played several times, but after 6...♘f6∓ Black is already better. His pieces are more harmonious and the mission with ♕f3 has failed.

6.♕e3 is not a serious attempt to get an advantage. After 6...♘c6 Black is ahead in development and has at least equalized.

6...♘c6 7.♕d3

This is Watson's recommendation, and probably White's best try. Black certainly has nothing to fear from the following alternatives:

7.♕xd5?! is too risky: 7...♘f6 8.♕c4 (8.♕b5 0–0↑) 8...♗e6 9.♕d3 0–0–0 10.♗e3 This position occurred in K. Larsen – Vester, Denmark 1972, and here Black has a simple improvement:

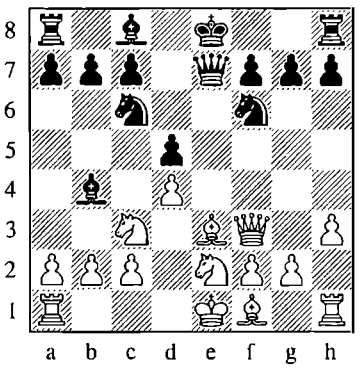


10...♖he8!N 11.0–0–0 ♘e5! 12.♕b5 ♘c4 White is in trouble.

7.♗e3?! ♘f6 8.h3

8.♕g3 ♗xc3† 9.♘xc3 (9.bxc3? is too passive, and after 9...♗f5 Black has a clear advantage thanks to his superior development.) 9...♘xd4 Black wins a pawn with at least a slight advantage.

8.a3 ♗xc3† 9.bxc3 (9.♘xc3 ♘xd4∓) 9...♗g4 Black is evidently better thanks to his superior pawn structure and lead in development.



8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♘e4 10.g3

10.♘f4 ♘xc3 11.♘xd5 ♘xd5 12.♕xd5 ♕b4† was awkward for White in Herrero – Robledo, Argentina 1997.

10...0–0 11.♗g2 ♘a5 12.0–0 ♘c4∓

Black had an obvious positional advantage in Marcinkevicius – Klovas, Lithuania 1995.

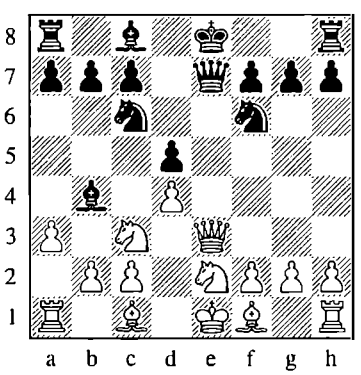
A final alternative is:

7.♕e3

This move has been played successfully by Jobava, but I would not attribute his eventual victory to his opening play.

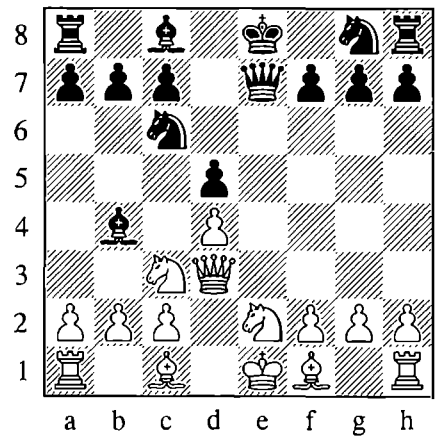
7...♘f6 8.a3

At this point Black retreated his bishop to a5 in Jobava – Bukal, Plovdiv 2012, but a better idea was:



8...♗xc3†N 9.♕xc3

9.♘xc3? loses a pawn to 9...♘xd4∓ while 9.bxc3 ♗f5∓ gives Black a structural plus. The text move, on the other hand, transposes to the line 7.♕d3 ♘f6 8.a3 ♗xc3†N 9.♕xc3 – see variation B1 below.



7...♘f6

This natural developing move prepares short castling and protects the d5-pawn, which gives Black the useful option of retreating his bishop to d6 in some lines. In other cases, he may react to a2-a3 by exchanging on c3 and jumping with the knight to e4. It is worth mentioning that Black's last move is not considered at all by Watson, who focuses primarily on 7...♗g4.

We will consider two paths for White: **B1) 8.a3** and **B2) 8.f3**.

B1) 8.a3 ♗xc3† 9.♕xc3 ♘e4

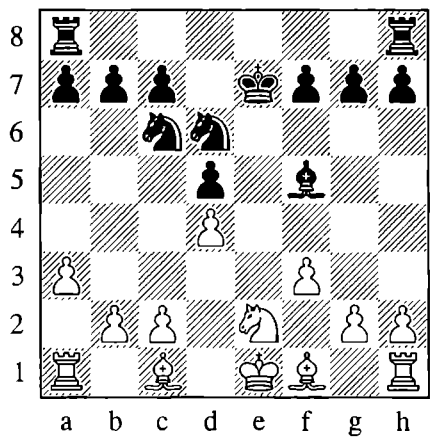
White's stubborn play has netted him the two-bishop advantage, but he has fallen well behind in development.

10.♕e3

I believe White does best to exchange queens, since otherwise his lack of development may prove catastrophic.

10...♗f5 11.f3 ♘d6 12.♕xe7† ♔xe7!N

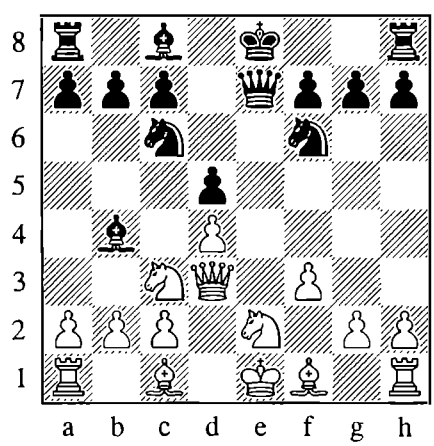
A clear improvement over 12...♘xe7 as occurred in Richter – Fober, Maastricht 2009, for reasons that will become obvious on the next turn.



13.c3 ♘a5∓

Black has a lead in development and powerful play on the light squares.

B2) 8.f3



This is the more prudent option, covering the e4-square before nudging the bishop with a2-a3.

8...a6!

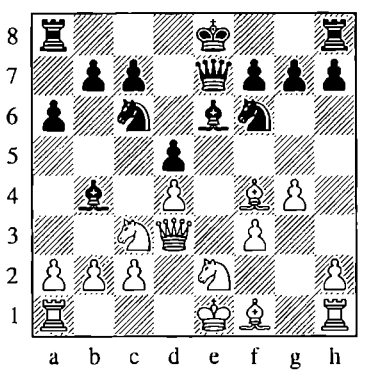
Black uses the spare tempo to ensure the survival of his dark-squared bishop. The point of the text move is to retreat the bishop to d6 without allowing ♘b5. Black is ahead in development and can be happy with the opening.

9.a3N

White may as well play this move at some point.

9.♗g5 occurred in Buehrmann – Ehrlich, Pinneberg 2010, and here for some reason Black exchanged on c3 voluntarily. A more logical continuation is 9...h6N 10.♗h4 ♗e6 11.0–0–0 ♗d6 (or 11...g5!?) with equal play.

I also considered the ambitious 9.g4!?N which takes some space but might prove weakening later in the game. Play may continue: 9...♗e6 10.♗f4 (or 10.♗d2 ♘d7 intending ...♘b6)



10...0–0–0 11.0–0–0 ♔b8 12.♔b1 ♘d7 Black is perfectly fine, and his last move prepares to place the knight on b6.

9...♗d6

There are no examples of this position on the database, so I offer an illustrative line which looks logical to me.

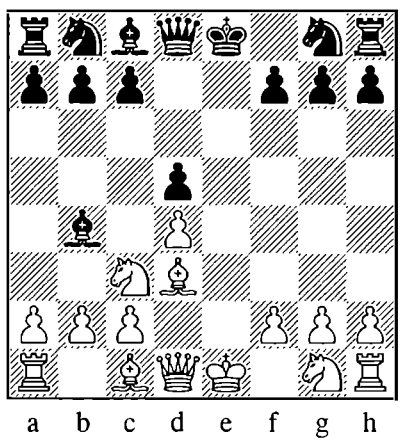
10.♗g5 ♗e6 11.0–0–0 h6 12.♗d2 0–0–0

It is also worth considering 12...b5!? playing for a queenside attack.

13.♔b1 ♔b8 14.♘f4 ♕d7 15.g4 g5 16.♘xe6 fxe6 17.h4 ♕g7=

The position is about equal. Black has a harmonious set-up with good central control, and White's bishop pair is not making its presence felt.

C) 5.♗d3



This natural move is overwhelmingly the most popular choice.

5...♘c6

At this point **C1) 6.♘e2** is White's most significant sideline, but the main line by far is **C2) 6.a3**.

6.♘f3 is unlikely to threaten us, although it is important for Black not to become too ambitious. Compare the following two options:

a) 6...♗g4 is well met by 7.0–0! (7.♗e3 is too passive) 7...♘xd4 8.♕e1† ♘e6 9.♘g5 with a promising initiative for the sacrificed pawn.

b) Instead Black should prefer the simple 6...♘ge7 7.0–0 0–0 followed by ...♗f5 with equal play.

C1) 6.♘e2 ♘ge7

White's set-up is hardly the most threatening, and perhaps Black's biggest problem is how to generate winning chances against a lower-rated opponent. There is not much concrete theory from here, so I have merely outlined some of the main paths and ideas.

7.0–0

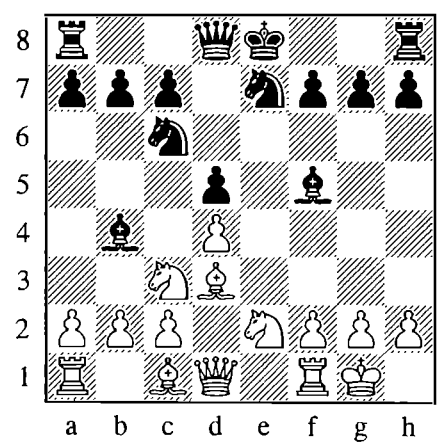
7.♗g5 f6 8.♗f4 ♗f5 is fine for Black, as pointed out by Watson in the third edition of *Play the French*.

7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3 reaches the 8.♘e2 line given in the notes to variation C2 below, while 8.♘xc3? drops a pawn after 8...♘xd4.

7...♗f5

By exchanging the light-squared bishops Black solves his opening problems.

By the way, Black can also equalize by playing 7...0–0 followed by ...♗f5 next, but I would prefer to retain the option of long castling.

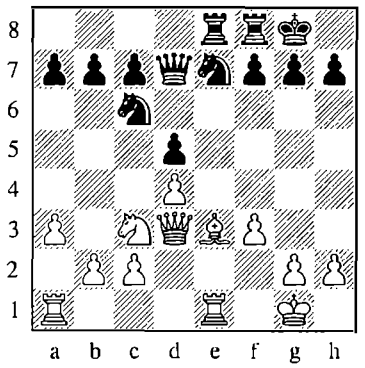


8.♘g3

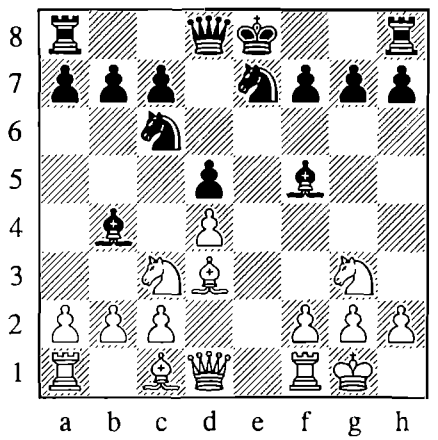
8.a3 ♗xc3 9.bxc3 is similar to 7.a3 in the note to the previous move.

8.♗f4 0–0 leads to pretty dry equality.

The following grandmaster encounter is worth a brief mention: 8.♗e3 ♕d7 9.a3 ♗xc3 10.♘xc3 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 0–0 12.f3 ♖ae8 13.♖fe1



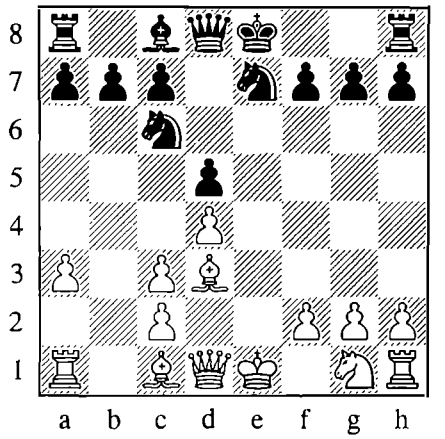
13...♘d8!= This knight manoeuvre is worth remembering. Black prepares to fortify his central pawn with ...c6, and the knight will come to e6 later. The position is equal and a draw was soon agreed in Alekseev – Socko, Lublin 2011.



8...♗xd3 9.♕xd3 ♕d7=

This position first occurred in Spielmann – Sämisch, Wiesbaden 1925, and has been repeated many times since. The chances are balanced, but Black has the practical advantage of being able to choose between a quiet game with short castling and a double-edged affair with ...h5 and ...0–0–0.

C2) 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 ♘ge7



This can be regarded as the main tabiya for the 4.exd5 variation. From here the main move is 8.♕h5, which will form the subject of the next chapter beginning on page 123. In the present chapter we will consider another important queen move, along with some minor alternatives.

8.♕f3

This has not been as popular as 8.♕h5, but it has been used by some strong players and should be taken seriously. White is aiming to restrict the development of the c8-bishop. The queen might also create attacking possibilities against the king, in the event that Black opts for short castling.

Alternatives are mostly harmless and can be dealt with quickly:

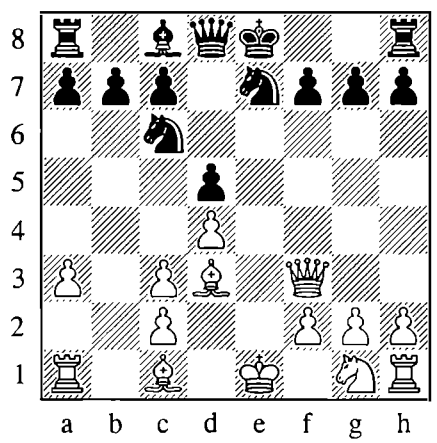
8.♖b1 b6 will most likely transpose to other lines after either 9.♕h5 or 9.♕f3. 9.♘e2 is an independent option when Black continues 9...♗f5 10.0–0 0–0 with a balanced position.

8.♗g5 f6 9.♗f4 ♗f5 gave Black a good position in Hausmann – Stolz, Germany 1999. The position is pretty closed, so there is no significant advantage in having a bishop

instead of a knight. Black has a potentially strong outpost for a knight on c4 and White has long-term pawn weaknesses on the queenside.

8.♘f3 0–0 9.0–0 ♗f5 is a similar story; Black's structural superiority is worth at least as much as White's pair of bishops, one of which is about to be exchanged off.

8.♘e2 should be met by 8...♗f5 (instead 8...0–0 9.♘g3 forces the bishop to take up a more passive position) 9.♘g3 ♗xd3 10.cxd3 0–0 11.0–0 ♕d7 when Black is well developed and has a solid position.

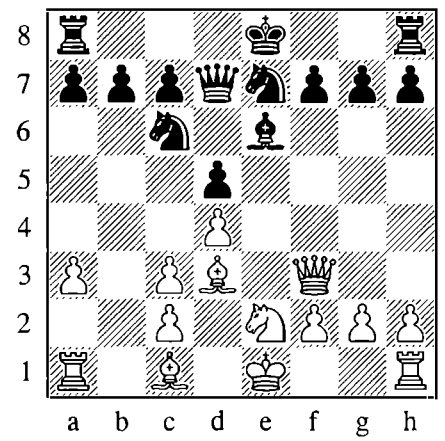


8...♗e6

This is the best available square for the bishop. Black's plan from here involves ...♕d7 and later ...♗f5, keeping the option of castling on either wing. From here we will briefly consider **C21) 9.♘e2**, but the main line is **C22) 9.♖b1**.

9.♘h3 ♕d7 10.♘g5 (10.♘f4 reaches the note to White's 10th move in line C21 below) 10...♗f5 Black is doing fine; the position can be compared with line C221 below, where the moves 9.♖b1 b6 have been inserted.

C21) 9.♘e2 ♕d7



10.0–0

10.♘g3 0–0 can be compared with variation C2221 below, with the moves 9.♖b1 b6 included. It is hard to imagine that this can be an inferior version for Black.

10.♘f4 allows Black to choose between two good options:

a) 10...0–0!? 11.♘xe6 ♕xe6† 12.♔d1 ♖fe8 13.♖e1 ♕d7 Black is ready to regroup, either with ...♘g6 or with ...♖ad8 followed by ...♘c8. A possible continuation is 14.♗f4 ♘g6 15.♖xe8† ♖xe8 16.♗g3 ♘a5 with decent play for Black.

b) 10...♗f5 11.0–0 0–0–0 has been seen in a few games, including Short – Timman, Tilburg 1990. The position with opposite-sided castling offers chances to both sides. Black is ready to start pushing his kingside pawns and may be able to drive back both White's knight and queen with gain of tempo.

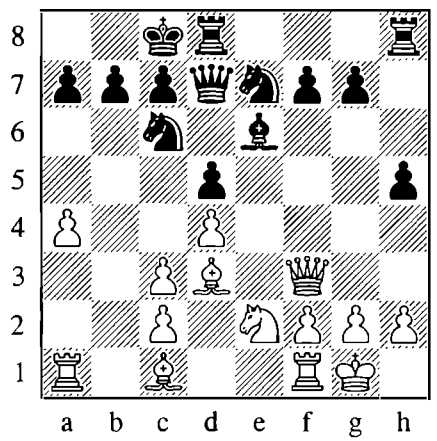
10...h5!?

Contrary to the similar position from the later variation C2223 with 9.♖b1 b6 included, it looks quite appealing for Black to go for opposite-sided castling as his queenside has not been weakened.

11.a4

This position occurred in Ohlzon – Bartel, Stockholm 2000, and now I will suggest an obvious novelty:

11...0–0–0N



12.a5 a6!

Black should prevent the further advance of the a-pawn, which would weaken his light squares and invite the annoying ♗b5 with a dangerous pin.

Now that White's immediate threats are prevented, Black can proceed with his kingside attack. He would like to push ...h4-h3 to weaken the light squares. If White prevents that plan by playing h2-h3 himself, Black can play ...♖dg8 followed by ...g5-g4 when the kingside will open up. It seems to me that Black is well coordinated for the kingside attack and the white queen can be used as a target. White, on the other hand, has no pawn breaks, which will make his attack harder to carry out.

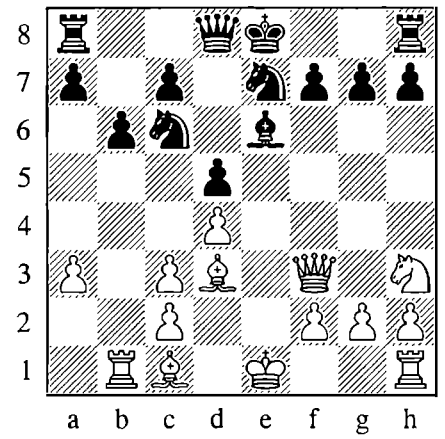
C22) 9.♖b1

If White wants to play this move it's better to do it at this point. If he waits until Black has played ...♕d7, the second player can simply respond with ...0–0–0.

9...b6

Now we will consider **C221) 10.♘h3** followed by the more common **C222) 10.♘e2**.

C221) 10.♘h3



White aims to bring the knight to g5, but this idea is nothing to worry about for Black.

10...♕d7 11.♘g5

11.♘f4 is analysed under 10.♘e2 ♕d7 11.♘f4 – see variation C2222 below.

11...♗f5

As a general rule, Black should avoid allowing his second bishop to be exchanged for the enemy knight, unless there is a particularly good reason.

12.g4

After 12.0–0 0–0 Black is solid and White's '♘g5 mission' has failed.

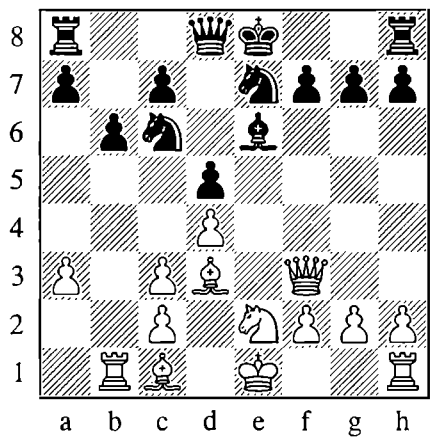
12...♗g6

Black has everything well protected and White's last move could prove to be just another weakness. The following game is an instructive example of how Black may take over the advantage.

13.♗e3 0–0–0 14.♗xg6 ♘xg6 15.♕xf7 ♕xg4 16.♔d2 ♖d7 17.♖bg1 ♖xf7 18.♖xg4 ♖f6

Black was clearly better in Lau – Yusupov, Austria 1998.

C222) 10.♘e2



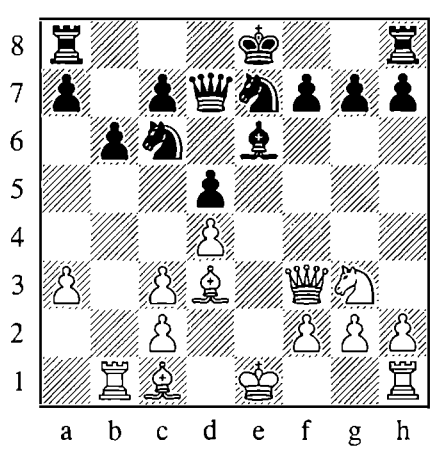
This is the main line, for good reason as the knight has more flexibility on e2.

10...♕d7

Black prepares ...♗f5. He will usually opt for short castling, but in a few cases he may park the king on the other wing, especially if the light-squared bishops have been exchanged.

There are three main options for us to consider: **C2221) 11.♘g3**, **C2222) 11.♘f4** and **C2223) 11.0–0**.

C2221) 11.♘g3



This move prevents ...♗f5, but apart from that one objective, the knight is rather passive and contributes little to White's position.

11...0–0 12.0–0N

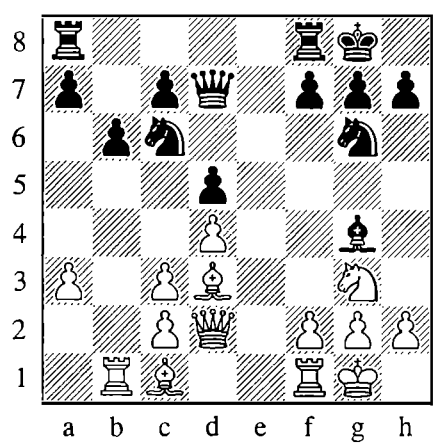
This seems like White's best attempt to justify his last move.

12.h3 occurred in Holzhaeuer – Graf, Dresden 2004. White continues the prophylactic thinking and prevents ...♗g4. However, he is losing additional time and eventually the bishop will get out anyway. My suggestion is: 12...♖ae8N 13.0–0 ♘a5 Black has a good position and a firm grip on the c4-square. If necessary, the bishop can always find a way out after ...f6 followed by ...♗f7-g6.

12...♗g4 13.♕f4

13.♕e3 ♘f5 14.♕f4 ♘xg3 15.♕xg3 ♗f5 is equal.

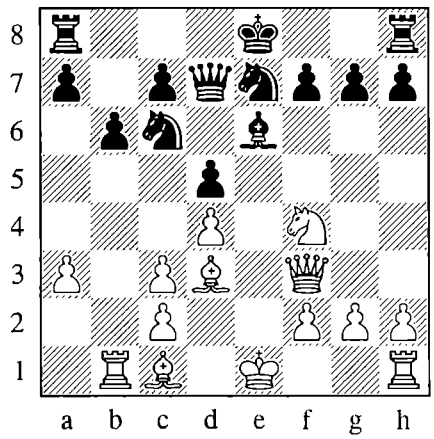
13...♘g6 14.♕d2



14...♗e6!=

This move is necessary in order to meet f2-f4 with ...f5. Now Black has a safe position and is ready to continue his queenside play with ...♘a5-c4.

C2222) 11.♘f4



Statistically this move has scored well for White, but there is nothing at all wrong with Black's position.

11...♗f5

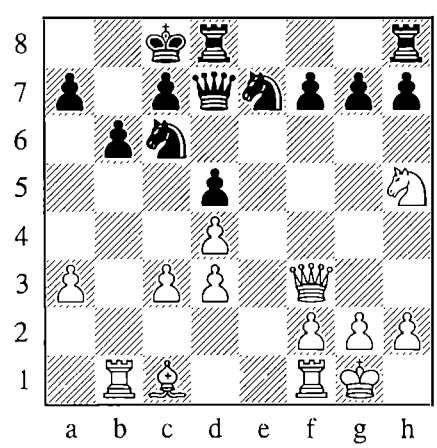
Black avoids being left with two knights against two bishops, and prepares to exchange the more active of the enemy bishops.

12.0–0 ♗xd3 13.cxd3 0–0–0

The black king is pretty safe on the queenside now that the light-squared bishops have been exchanged. Black is ready to create some activity on the kingside, while White still has to think about how to develop his remaining bishop.

14.♘h5

Here I would like to deviate from the game Reinaldo Castineira – Barsov, Zaragoza 2008.



14...♘f5N

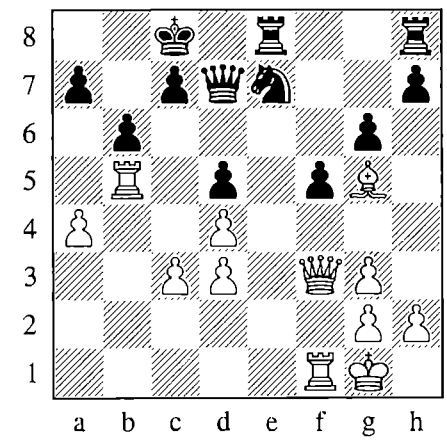
This seems like the obvious choice.

15.a4 g6 16.♘g3 ♘xg3 17.fxg3!?

17.♕xg3 h6= is pretty uneventful, but it is worth checking if White can benefit from opening the f-file.

17...f5 18.♗g5 ♖de8 19.♖b5 ♘e7

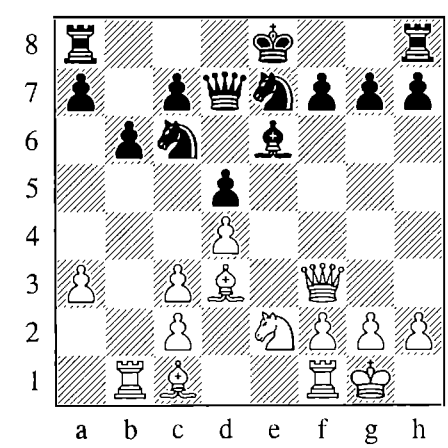
Black is fine due to the following point:



20.♗xe7 c6! 21.♗f6 ♖hf8

By now it is White who must take care to hold the balance.

C2223) 11.0–0



This has been White's most popular choice.

11...♗f5 12.♘g3

12.♘f4 leads to the previous variation C2222.

12...♗xd3 13.cxd3

In comparison to the position from the previous main variation with the knight on f4, we may note the following differences. Firstly, Black is unable to castle long since his pawn on f7 requires protection. On the other hand, the white knight is less active on g3 than on f4.

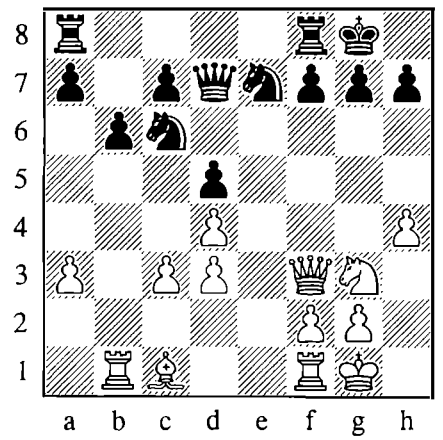
13...0–0

From this position the chances should be approximately equal. Since Black no longer has the c4-square available as an outpost, the knight manoeuvre ...♘d8-e6 makes a lot of sense. The knight will be excellently placed on e6, for both attacking and defensive purposes. Once it has arrived there, the pawn push ...c5 will be a logical follow-up. Finally, as a general rule, Black should be happy to exchange a pair of knights if the opportunity arises.

14.h4

14.a4 occurred in the game E. Paehtz – M. Socko, Leon 2001. Here I like the reply 14...♘g6!N in order to prevent the h2-h4 advance. Black still needs to be a little careful, since after 15.♘h5 White has tactical threats such as ♗h6 and even ♕f6. The correct way to handle the situation is: 15...f6 16.♗a3 ♖fd8! It is important to keep the queen protected so as not to allow ♕xf6. White's position might look attractive for the moment, but it is hard to make further progress, while White's structural weaknesses will remain for a long time.

After the text move I found an important improvement.



14...♘d8!N

Better than 14...♖ae8 15.h5 h6 16.a4 ♘d8 17.♗a3 ♘e6 18.♗xe7 as played in Hickl – Uhlmann, Potsdam 1988. In this instance the black pawn did not reach c5 in time and White was somewhat better.

15.h5 h6=

Now everything is in order for Black; the knight will come to e6 next, and he will be ready to play ...c5 at any moment, especially if the white bishop arrives on a3.

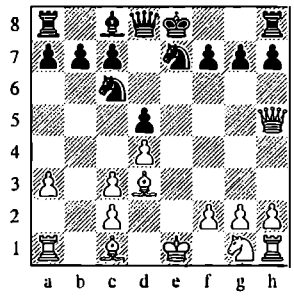
Conclusion

Of the early sidelines, 5.♗d2 is harmless. 5.♕f3 is more interesting and might cause problems for an unprepared player, but with correct play Black's prospects are at least equal.

Moving on to the main lines of the chapter, 8.♕f3 leads to interesting play. Black's general plan will be ...♗e6 and ...♕d7 with the intention of activating and/or exchanging his bishop. As long as Black pays attention to his opponent's set-up and reacts accordingly – for instance, in selecting the side of the board on which to castle – he should have no problems.



4.exd5



Main Line with 8.♕h5

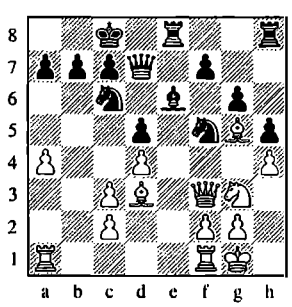
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗d3 ♘c6 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 ♘ge7 8.♕h5

8...♗e6

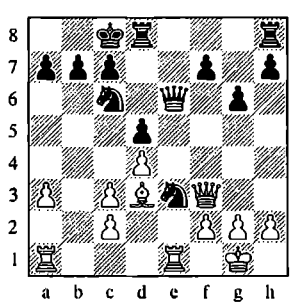
A) 9.♘e2 124
B) 9.♘f3 ♕d7 10.♘g5 0–0–0 126
B1) 11.♘xe6 126
B2) 11.0–0 127
C) 9.♖b1 b6! 130
C1) 10.♘e2 ♕d7 11.♘g3 ♗g4!N 130
C11) 12.♕g5 132
C12) 12.♕h4 132
C2) 10.♘f3 ♕d7 11.♘g5 0–0–0 133
C21) 12.h3 134
C22) 12.♘xe6 135
C23) 12.0–0 136

A) after 15.♗g5



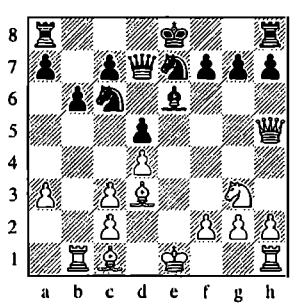
15...♘xg3!N

B1) after 15.♖fe1



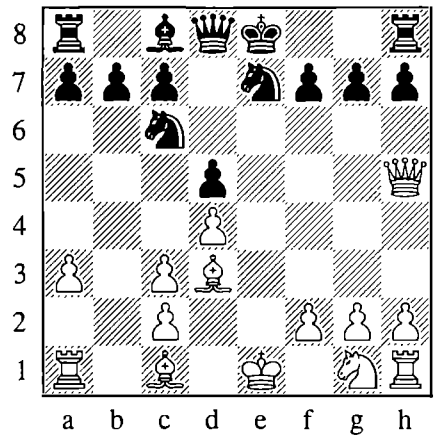
15...♘e5!N

C1) after 11.♘g3



11...♗g4!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗d3 ♘c6 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 ♘ge7 8.♕h5



This can be considered the main line of the 4.exd5 system. White deploys the queen on an active square and prevents Black from castling on the kingside for the time being.

8...♗e6

Just as in the previous chapter, we begin with this standard developing move, intending ...♕d7 with ideas of activating the bishop on f5 or g4. There are three main paths: **A) 9.♘e2, B) 9.♘f3** and **C) 9.♖b1**.

9.♘h3 ♕d7 has little independent value: 10.♘f4 reaches the note to White's 10th move in variation A below; 10.♘g5 transposes to variation B.

A) 9.♘e2 ♕d7 10.♘g3

This seems like a logical follow-up, preventing the exchange of light-squared bishops. Here is a selection of alternatives.

10.♖b1 b6 is covered under the 9.♖b1 move order in variation C1. Black could also consider the more adventurous 10...0–0–0!?.

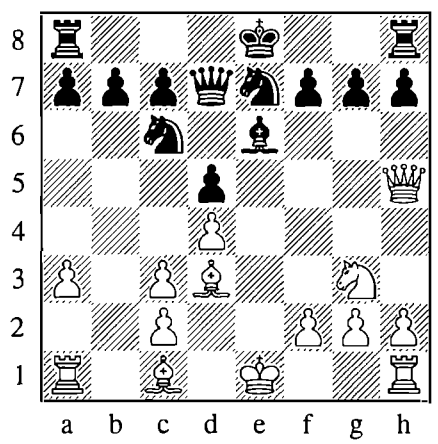
10.h3 is a somewhat useful move which prevents ...♗g4, but it is rather slow. After 10...♗f5= followed by ...0–0 Black has a good position.

10.♘f4 ♗g4 gives White a choice of queen moves, neither of which is much of a threat:

a) 11.♕h4 occurred in Pfreundtner – R. Rechel, Germany 1994, and now after 11...♗f5N 12.0–0 0–0= Black has a solid game.

b) 11.♕g5N 0–0 12.h3 ♗f5 13.0–0 f6 14.♕g3 (14.♕h5 ♖fe8=) 14...♘g6 Black is poised to exchange a pair of knights as well as the light-squared bishops. With this achieved, he will have at least equal chances due to his better pawn structure.

10.0–0 ♗g4 11.♕g5 (11.♕h4N ♗f5=) 11...0–0 occurred in S. Jensen – Kendall, email 2001. Here a logical continuation looks to be: 12.♘g3!?N Preventing the bishop from coming to f5. (12.h3N ♗f5=) 12...f6 13.♕f4 ♘g6 14.♕d2 ♗e6= Black has not yet managed to exchange the light-squared bishops, but White's efforts to prevent this plan have affected his development and coordination.



10...0–0–0!?

So far this move has scored three wins out of three for Black. It makes perfect sense, considering that White has deployed all his

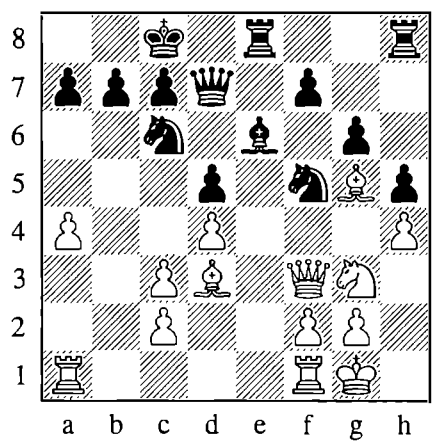
forces on the kingside. Now Black is ready to push his pawns forward with ...g6 and ...h5.

11.0–0 ♖de8!?

Black makes a useful prophylactic move before going into action. The main idea is to avoid a future attack from a white bishop coming to g5.

12.a4 g6 13.♕f3 h5 14.h4 ♘f5! 15.♗g5

15.♘xf5 ♗xf5 16.♗g5 (16.♗xf5?! ♕xf5 17.♕xf5† gxf5∓ gives Black good control over the light squares and activity along the e-file.) 16...♗e4= Black has managed to activate the bishop and has a good game. There is no need to exchange on d3 yet, so Black should delay it for a few moves and perhaps try to provoke f2-f3.



15...♘xg3!N

This seems to be the most precise.

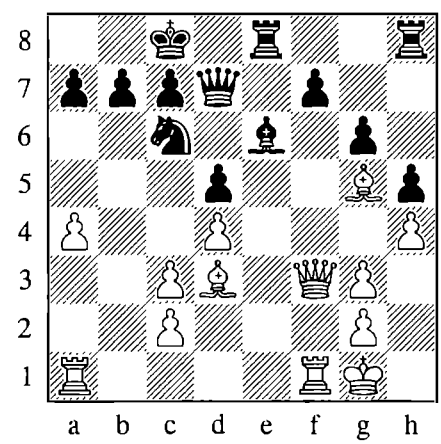
15...♖hf8 led to an eventual success for Black in Caspar – Uhlmann, Liepzig 1982. The problem with this approach is seen after 16.♖fe1!N when Black has the following options:

a) The move Black would like to play is 16...f6, but after 17.♗xf5 ♗xf5 18.♖xe8† ♖xe8 19.♘xf5 ♕xf5 20.♕xf5† gxf5 21.♗xf6 the endgame is quite dangerous for him. At first it looks as though Black's activity and light-square control offer compensation for the pawn, but after investigating a bit further I found White's counterplay with f2-f3 and g2-g4 to be dangerous, as a passed rook's pawn is known to be a knight's worst enemy.

b) For this reason Black should settle for 16...♘xg3 17.♕xg3 ♗f5 when the position is close to equal, but by comparison with the note to White's next move below, the first player already has his rook on e1 here, which must help him slightly.

16.fxg3!?

16.♕xg3 should of course be met by 16...♗f5. As usual when Black has achieved the goal of exchanging the light-squared bishops, he can claim equality although there is still plenty of play left in the position.



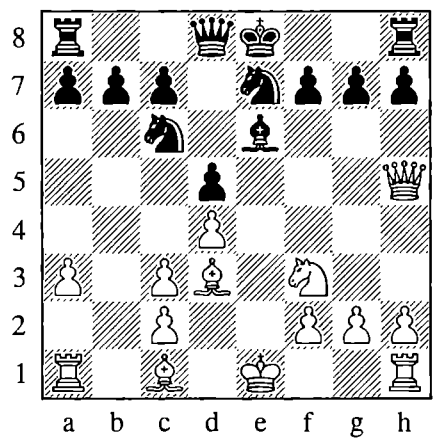
The text move is more ambitious but carries certain risks. White has prevented ...♗f5 for the time being, but in doing so he has permanently weakened his pawn structure on the kingside.

16...♔b8!=

Black must take care of his king, otherwise an attack on the b-file might be dangerous.

Therefore Black should hide the king on a8 while planning to meet a4-a5 with ...a6. The ensuing position is roughly equal, as White's activity is balanced out by Black's superior pawn structure.

B) 9.♘f3



9...♕d7 10.♘g5

10.h3N has not been tried so far. This prevents ...♗g4, but after 10...♗f5= Black has no problems as he can exchange off his problem bishop at any moment.

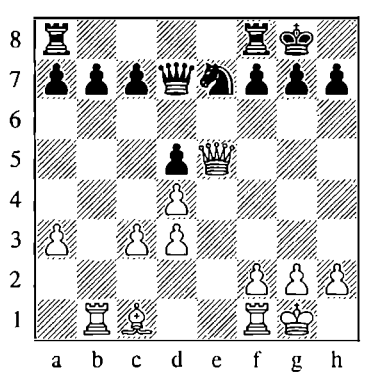
10.♘e5

This simplifying move should not worry Black.

10...♘xe5 11.♕xe5 0–0 12.0–0 ♗f5

Exchanging the light-squared bishops is usually the best way forward for Black.

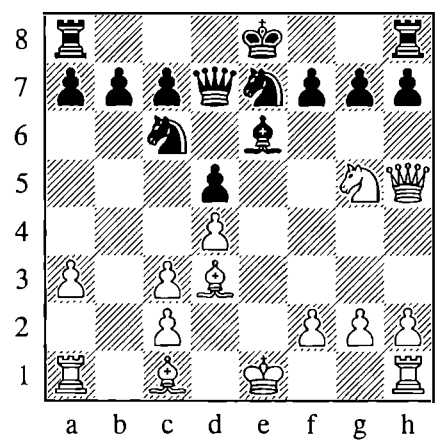
13.♖b1 ♗xd3 14.cxd3



Here Black chose 14...c6 in the game Archangelsky – Rozentalis, Hoogeveen 2005, but I would prefer a different pawn move.

14...b6!N

I find this move more logical, as now the b-pawn will not require constant protection by the queen. Black's plan from here will be to take control over the e-file and later try to exploit White's pawn weaknesses on the queenside. The position is close to equal, but I think White has the slightly harder task, as the alleged advantage of bishop over knight is not so important with a blocked centre, while the queenside pawn weaknesses are real and long-lasting.



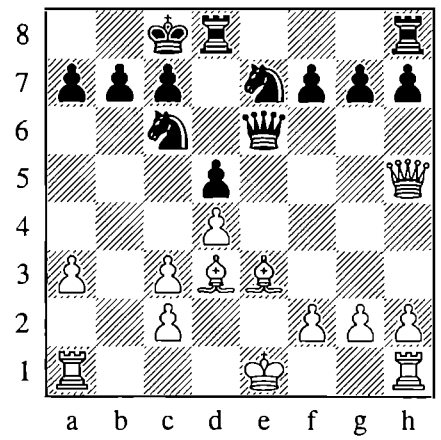
10...0–0–0

This typical reply can be compared with the later variation C2, which is identical except for the inclusion of the moves ♖b1 and ...b6. White's two main options are **B1) 11.♘xe6** and **B2) 11.0–0**.

B1) 11.♘xe6 ♕xe6† 12.♗e3

The endgame arising after 12.♕e2 ♕xe2† 13.♔xe2, as seen in Bae – Bern, Bergen 2000, is about equal. White's bishop pair is compensated by Black's better pawn structure and control of the light squares, especially c4.

A good way to emphasize this point would be with the immediate 13...♘a5N.



12...g6 13.♕f3 ♘f5

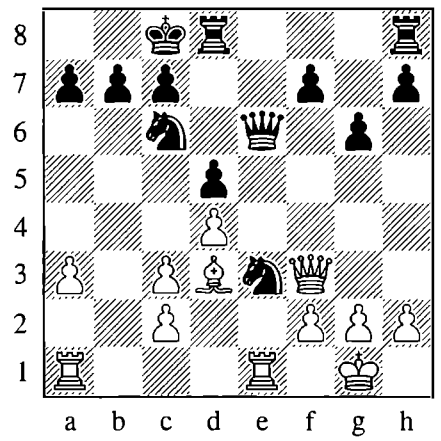
Black would ideally like to exchange one of the enemy bishops, as the pair of them together might eventually become powerful.

14.0–0

14.♗xf5?! was an instructive error seen in Lutz – Kindermann, Garmisch (rapid) 1994. This exchange damages the black pawn structure, but it comes at a high price as now Black's other knight will have free access to the c4-square. 14...♕xf5!N In the game Black took with the pawn, but a queen exchange will make his advantage even more significant. 15.♕xf5† gxf5∓ The weakness of the f5-pawn is of no importance at the moment, since White has no way to attack it. Black is in full control and will continue to improve his position by bringing the knight to c4 and rooks to the e- and/or g-files according to circumstance.

14...♘xe3 15.♖fe1

White wants to avoid getting a backward pawn on e3. This position occurred in Bromann – Kovacevic, Budapest 1999, and a couple of subsequent games. Now we reach an important moment, where Black can derive a clear benefit from the fact that the moves ♖b1 and ...b6 have not been played.



15...♘e5!N

This clever tactic would not work if the bishop could check on a6.

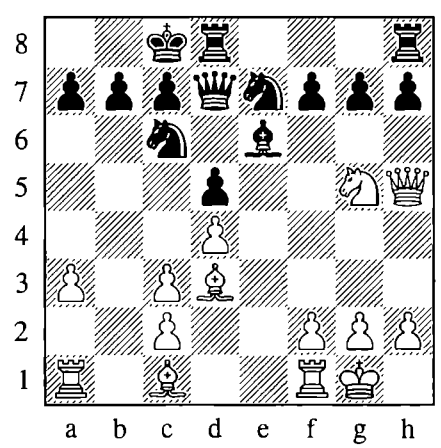
16.♕xe3

16.dxe5 ♘c4 gives Black slightly the more comfortable side of a roughly equal position.

16...♘xd3 17.♕xe6† fxe6 18.cxd3 ♖d6

The rook endgame is roughly equal, but Black has the more comfortable game due to the queenside pawn weaknesses.

B2) 11.0–0



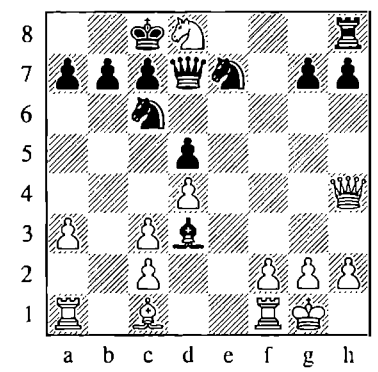
11...♗g4

This typical sacrifice will also be seen later in variation C23.

12.♕xf7

This move enters a rather forcing and risky line for White, who could lose outright after a single mistake. Even if he plays perfectly, Black will still have strong counterplay for the material.

The calmer 12.♕h4 ♗f5 leads to an equal game, but it is worth paying attention to the following line: 13.♘xf7 ♗xd3 14.♘xd8



14...♘g6!N (14...♗xf1 15.♘xc6 ♘xc6 16.♔xf1 ♕f5 gave Black full compensation for the pawn in Kovalev – Borsuk, Alushta 2009, but the text move leads to a more favourable version of that scenario.) 15.♕g3 ♗xf1 16.♘xc6 ♗xg2 17.♘xa7† ♔b8 18.♔xg2 ♔xa7⩲ Black has excellent compensation for the missing pawn, both positionally and in terms of attacking chances against White's vulnerable king.

12...h6! 13.f3□

Now Black has a pleasant choice between two promising moves.

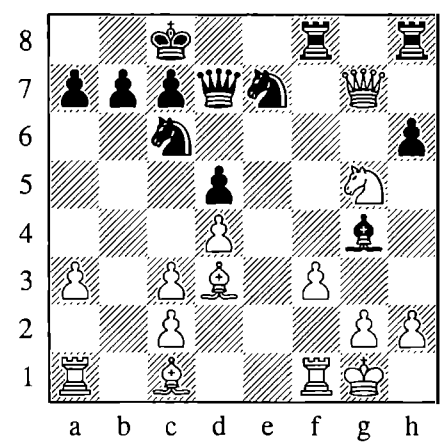
13...♖df8!?

If you turn ahead to page 137 you will see that in the analogous position with the rook on b1 and pawn on b6, I suggest retreating the bishop to f5. The same move works perfectly well here too, so if you wish to play that way there is no reason not to. However, the text move is slightly more appealing here than in the analogous position from variation C23, as the queen sacrifice mentioned in the next note does not carry quite the same force.

14.♕xg7

Despite the above comment, 14.fxg4!? may well be the best continuation here. After 14...♖xf7 15.♘xf7 ♖e8 16.g5 hxg5 17.♗xg5 ♔b8 White had sufficient compensation but no advantage in Brendel – Yusupov, Stockholm 2002. In the equivalent position with 9.♖b1 b6 inserted, White would be able to establish a troublesome pin by placing his bishop on b5, but with the pawn on b7 this idea does not trouble Black.

Nevertheless, some players may prefer the relative simplicity of 13...♗f5 as noted above, so I will let the reader make his own decision as to which line he ultimately wishes to play.



14...♗f5!

Another important move, after which White must play accurately to maintain the balance.

15.♘f7

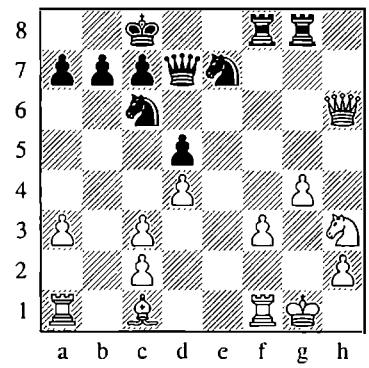
A serious error is:

15.♗xf5? ♕xf5 16.g4

16.♘h3? ♖fg8 traps the queen.

16...♕d7 17.♘f7

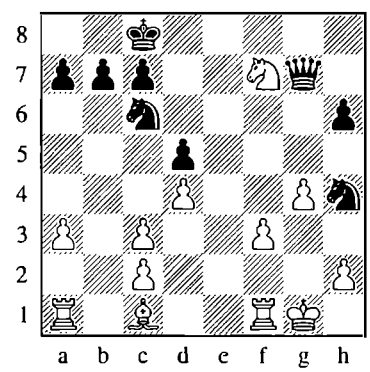
17.♘h3? allows a nice finish: 17...♖hg8 18.♕xh6



18...♕xg4†! 19.fxg4 ♖xg4† and mate in two.

17...♘f5! 18.♕xh8 ♖xh8 19.♘xh8 ♕g7 20.♘f7 ♘h4

White is in trouble, as attempts to save the knight lead to disaster:



21.♘e5

21.♘xh6 ♘xd4! is winning for Black.

21...♘xe5 22.dxe5 h5!

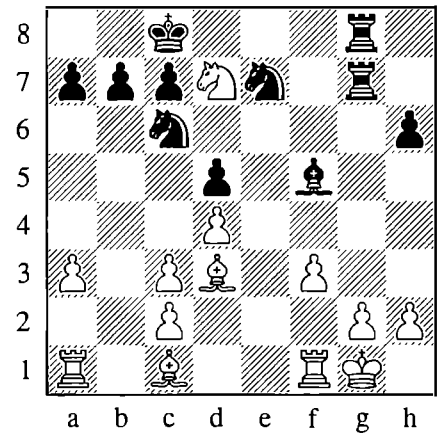
Black has an overwhelming attack.

15...♖hg8 16.♘e5!

This move enables White to escape the worst and liquidate to an ending. However, the fight is not over yet.

16...♖xg7 17.♘xd7 ♖fg8!

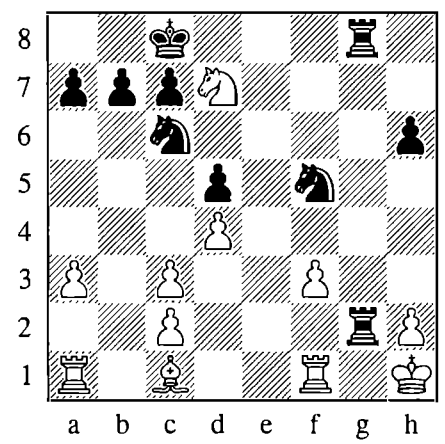
17...♔xd7? 18.♗xh6 would give White the advantage in view of the powerful passed pawns on the kingside.



18.♗xf5

18.♘e5 ♗xd3 19.cxd3 ♖xg2† 20.♔h1 ♖c2∓ gives Black an advantage in view of his superior piece activity as well as White's many pawn weaknesses.

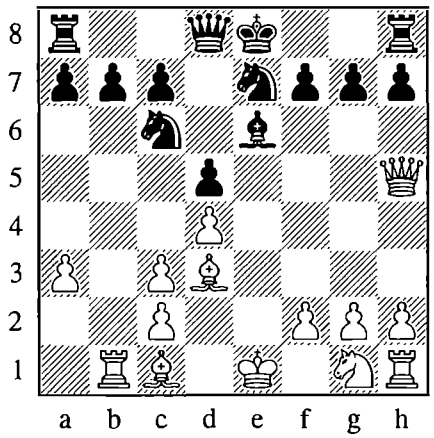
18...♖xg2† 19.♔h1 ♘xf5



20.♘f6 ♖8g6 21.♘xd5 ♖xc2 22.♗f4 ♘ce7

Black's superior piece activity more than makes up for missing pawn, and he went on to win in Brendel – Rueetschi, Switzerland 2007.

C) 9.♖b1



Finally we come to the main line.

9...b6!

This move blunts the attack on the b-file and avoids misplacing any of Black's pieces. From here the play will proceed in broadly the same way as in the previous variations A and B. It is true that the weakening of Black's light squares on the queenside will alter the evaluation of certain variations (there is, after all, a reason why 9.♖b1 is the main line) but the move ...b6 also has some positive attributes. I have paid close attention to the nuances of the following variations, and will highlight those instances where the inclusion of ♖b1 and ...b6 necessitates a different approach.

From this position White normally chooses either **C1) 10.♘e2** or **C2) 10.♘f3**.

10.♘h3 ♕d7 will transpose to one of the main lines after 11.♘g5 or 11.♘f4.

10.♗g5

This has been played on a single occasion. White was successful in that game, but Black's play can easily and immediately be improved.

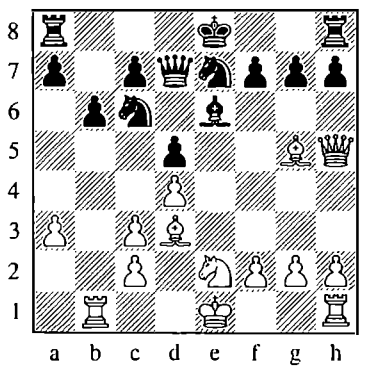
10...♕d7N

Better than 10...♕d6?! as played in Belic – Petraki, Pula 1990. The queen belongs on d7 where she supports the ideas of either ...♗g4 or ...♗f5.

11.♘e2

11.♗b5?! is well met by 11...♗g4 12.♕h4 f6∓ followed by ...0–0 when Black is already somewhat better thanks to his rapid development.

11.h3 prevents ...♗g4, but after 11...♗f5 Black is already more than happy. White has wasted some time, while Black has played useful moves and is ready for short castling.



11...♗g4 12.♕h4 f6 13.♗d2 h5

White's queen is starting to feel uncomfortable. There is also a positional threat of ...♘f5, forcing the exchange of White's better bishop.

14.f3 ♗f5∓

White has lost time with ♗g5-d2 as well as the weakening f2-f3. Black's kingside play is well underway and his king can park itself on the queenside in the near future.

C1) 10.♘e2 ♕d7 11.♘g3

This is the most popular option, preventing the black bishop from coming to f5. Three other moves have been tried:

11.0–0 ♗g4 12.♕g5 (12.♕h4 ♗f5=) 12...0–0 13.♘g3 (13.h3 ♗f5=) 13...f6 14.♕f4N

(14.♕d2 ♖fe8= Preziuso – Hirsch, corr. 1994) 14...♘g6 15.♕d2 ♗e6= Black has not yet managed to exchange the bishops, but White has lost time and sacrificed some coordination, so the chances are equal.

11.h3 prevents ...♗g4 but allows 11...♗f5. (11...0–0–0?! has been played a few times, but on this occasion I would regard long castling as slightly too risky in view of the light-square weaknesses.) 12.0–0 (12.♘f4 0–0=) Now in Etmans – Harley, London 1994, the simple 12...0–0N= would have seen Black complete his development and reach a solid position.

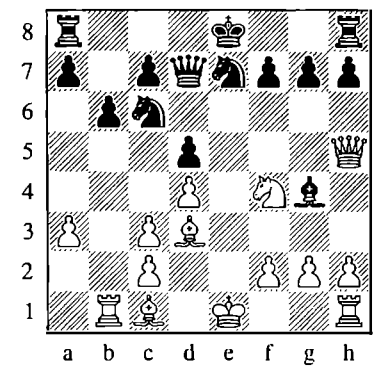
11.♘f4

This has only been played on a single occasion, but it is a natural move which challenges the bishop on e6 and puts pressure to the d5-pawn.

11...♗g4!N

A small refinement.

The immediate 11...♗f5 was played in Jahnz – B. Schneider, Berlin 2001, but before exchanging bishops it is useful to force the white queen to a less attractive square.



12.♕g5

12.♕h4 ♗f5 13.0–0 0–0= gives Black a solid game.

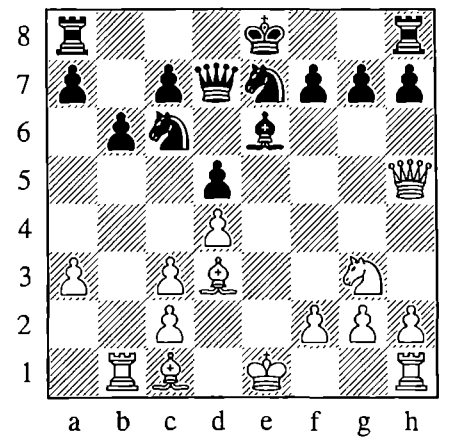
12...0–0 13.h3 ♗f5 14.0–0 f6 15.♕g3

15.♕h5 ♘a5=

15...♘g6=

The situation is identical to the line with 10.♘f4 examined in the notes on page 124, except for the inclusion of the moves ♖b1 and ...b6. I can see no drawback for Black in having those moves included here. Once again, after exchanging the light-squared bishops plus a pair of knights, Black will have a solid position with good long-term chances due to his better pawn structure.

Let's return now to the more common 11.♘g3, which prevents Black's plan of exchanging the light-squared bishops. At this point I would like to propose a novelty.



11...♗g4!N

Preparing short castling. This may not be the most exciting way to continue, but I think it is the most precise.

11...0–0–0 has been the most popular choice and leads to mutual attacking chances. Statistically Black has scored well, but according to my analysis White holds an advantage with correct play.

11...h6!? is an interesting move. The point is that after 12.0–0? ♗g4 13.♕h4, as played in Prokopchuk – S. Ivanov, Maikop 1998, Black can put the enemy queen under serious pressure with 13...f5!N∓.

Unfortunately White can improve with 12.h3!± when his chances should be slightly higher in the ensuing sharp position with opposite-side castling.

Against my new suggestion White has two possible replies: **C11) 12.♕g5** and **C12) 12.♕h4**.

C11) 12.♕g5

This allows Black to castle without delay.

12...0–0 13.h3

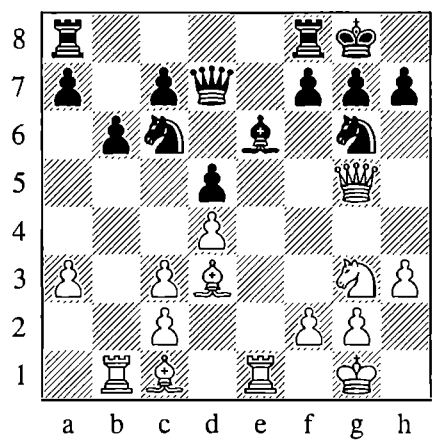
13.0–0 f6! is equal.

13...♗e6 14.0–0 ♘g6

White keeps some trace of an initiative on the kingside, but Black is solid and has enough defensive resources. In the long run his better pawn structure may come into play.

15.♖e1

15.f4 will be met by 15...f6 16.♕h5 f5 when White's attack is blocked and the bishop on c1 looks rather sad.



15...f6 16.♕h5 ♖ae8 17.♗d2 ♘a5!

Black is fine. It is worth noting that his last move offered a pawn sacrifice that White had better ignore. Taking on g6 would be a major mistake, as Black would seize full control over the light squares and his knight would dominate the game from c4.

C12) 12.♕h4

This move prevents short castling for the moment, but allows Black to make a troublesome check.

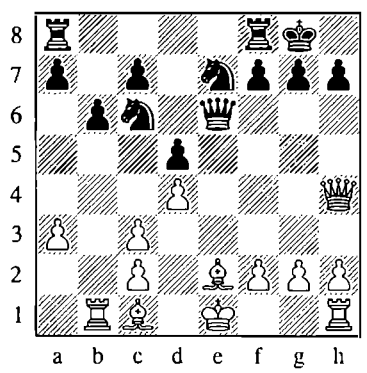
12...♕e6†!

White has some temporary coordination problems. In fact he does best to move his king, as other moves make things even worse.

13.♔f1

13.♗e3? ♘g6 14.♗xg6 (14.♕g5?? h6 drops material for White) 14...♕xg6 gives Black a solid advantage thanks to White's chronic light-square and structural weaknesses.

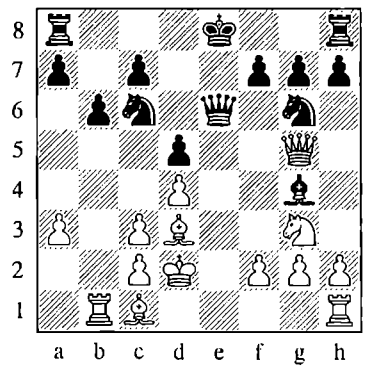
13.♘e2?! is met by 13...♗xe2! 14.♗xe2 0–0∓ when White suffers from the pressure along the e-file.



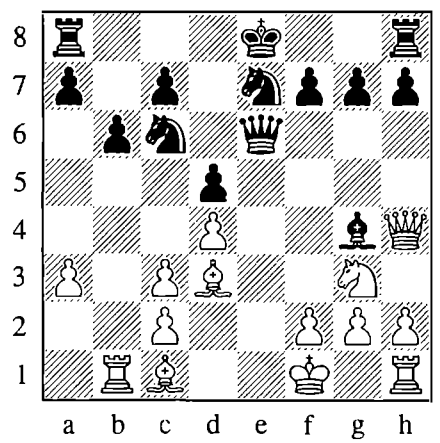
An important point is that after 15.♕g4 ♘f5 16.0–0 Black has the tactical resource 16...♘fxd4! 17.cxd4 f5 when he wins back the bishop on e2 while keeping a healthy extra pawn.

13.♔d2!? looks risky but might be playable. Black should continue 13...♘g6 in order to

get the maximum out of the position. 14.♕g5 (14.♗xg6 ♕xg6∓ leaves White seriously weak on the light squares.)



14...h6 15.♕e3 ♘h4 Black a comfortable game with pressure against the g2-pawn, while White is struggling to coordinate his pieces.



13...♘g6

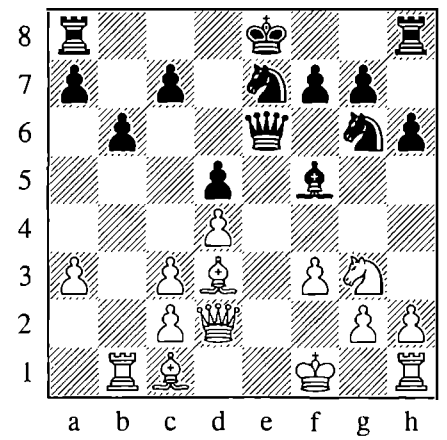
13...0–0–0 14.f3 ♗f5 15.♘xf5 ♘xf5 16.♕g4 g6 17.♔f2 gives White a safe position with chances to press for an edge with his bishop pair.

14.♕g5 h6 15.♕d2

15.♕e3 ♕xe3 16.♗xe3 ♘a5=

15...♘ce7 16.f3 ♗f5

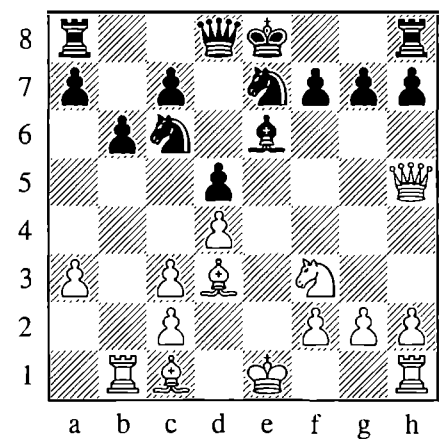
Exchanging the second bishop for a knight does not harm Black's chances too much.



17.♘xf5 ♘xf5 18.♕e1 ♕xe1† 19.♔xe1 ♘d6 20.♔f2 ♔d7=

The position is level. The knight on d6 is excellent, while White's bishops lack the open diagonals they need to make themselves heard.

C2) 10.♘f3



This is the main line of the 4.exd5 variation. The knight is heading for g5, where it will exert immediate pressure against f7 in order to provoke weaknesses on the black kingside and force long castling.

10...♕d7 11.♘g5

This is almost always played. Here are a few rare alternatives:

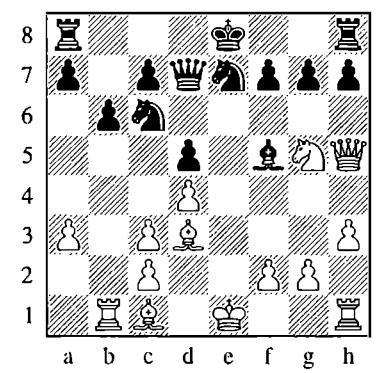
11.♘e5?! simplifies the position which can only be to Black's advantage. 11...♘xe5 12.♕xe5 (12.dxe5N ♗g4 13.♕h4 [13.♕g5 0–0=] 13...♘g6= Black is ready to castle and his chances are at least equal.) 12...0–0= Kett – Olsson, Gothenburg 2005. The position is close to equal but Black has the easier game. The next steps are to challenge White's bishop with ...♗f5 and then take control over the e-file.

11.h3

This has been played in two games with a perfect score for White, but neither game was contested at a very high level. Instead of long castling, which was played on both occasions, I suggest:

11...♗f5N 12.♘g5

12.0–0 0–0 13.♗f4 should be met by 13...f6!= controlling the e5-square.



12...♗g6

12...g6 13.♕e2 0–0 is also possible, but it feels wrong to weaken the kingside unnecessarily.

13.♕g4

13.♕h4 ♗xd3 14.cxd3 f6 15.♘f3 ♘f5 16.♕h5† g6 17.♕g4 ♕e6†∓

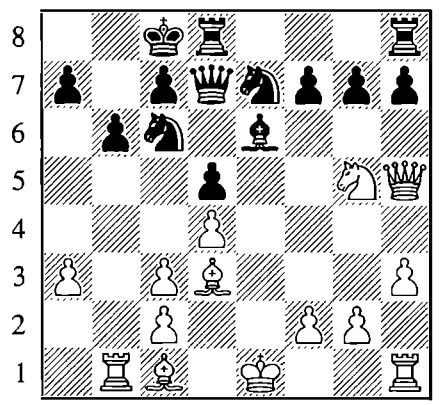
13...h6 14.♘f3 0–0–0

With a level game.

11...0–0–0

In recent years 11...g6 has become fashionable, but after analysing both moves I prefer to recommend castling immediately, which has been Black's main choice over the years. I considered three options for White: **C21) 12.h3**, **C22) 12.♘xe6** and **C23) 12.0–0**.

C21) 12.h3



This has hardly ever been played, but preventing ...♗g4 is a sensible idea that should not be ignored. I believe I have found a convincing response though.

12...♗f5!N

Offering a pawn sacrifice. White's only critical response is to accept, otherwise h2-h3 will have been a waste of time.

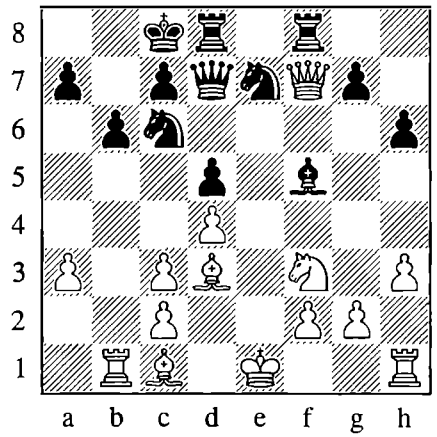
13.♕xf7

13.0–0 ♗g6= is fine for Black.

13...h6 14.♘f3

14.♗xf5 ♘xf5 15.♕xd7† ♖xd7 16.♘f3 ♖e8† gives Black more than enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn, in view of the light-square control and active prospects on the e-file.

14...♖hf8



15.♗xf5

After 15.♕xg7 ♕e6† 16.♔d1 ♗xd3 17.cxd3 ♘f5 18.♕g4 ♖g8 19.♕f4 ♖xg2∞ Black's initiative fully compensates for the sacrificed pawn.

15...♘xf5 16.♕xd7† ♔xd7∓

Black has fine positional compensation, notwithstanding the queen exchange.

C22) 12.♘xe6

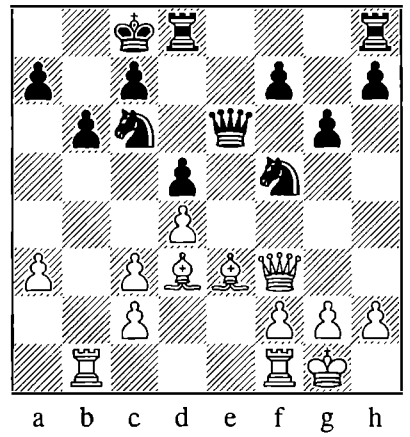
Eliminating the bishop has been White's most popular choice.

12...♕xe6† 13.♗e3

13.♕e2 ♕xe2† 14.♔xe2 ♘a5 was about equal in Bromann – Brinck Claussen, Aalborg 2000. A tense battle lies ahead, where Black's light-square control and structural superiority should balance out White's bishop pair.

13...g6 14.♕f3 ♘f5 15.0–0

We already saw in the earlier variation B1 that exchanging on f5 would be a serious positional error from White. The same is true here, as the inclusion of the moves ♖b1 and ...b6 makes no real difference.



15...♘d6!

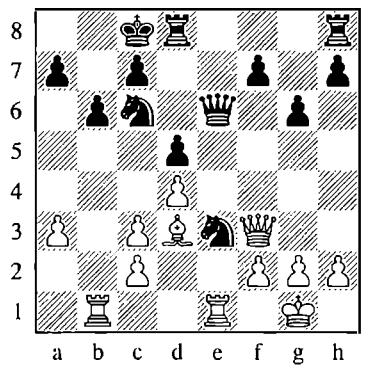
This move has only been played in a single game out of more than twenty in total, but I believe it is best. The knight is perfectly placed on d6, where it controls both e4 and c4 and stops any annoying ♗b5 ideas.

Before proceeding any further, I would like to show you the problem I found in the main line.

15...♘xe3 16.♖fe1!

16.fxe3 f5!= is what Black is hoping for. Objectively the position is about equal, but I think White has the slightly tougher task due to the weak pawns on c3 and e3 and outpost squares on c4 and e4.

The rook move is more of a problem. White obtains active play along the e-file and his bishop could prove troublesome on the queenside.



16...♕d6

After 16...♖he8 17.♖xe3 ♕d7 18.♖be1± White controls the e-file and has somewhat better prospects.

16...♕g4 17.♕xe3↑ intending ♗b5 gives White a pleasant game.

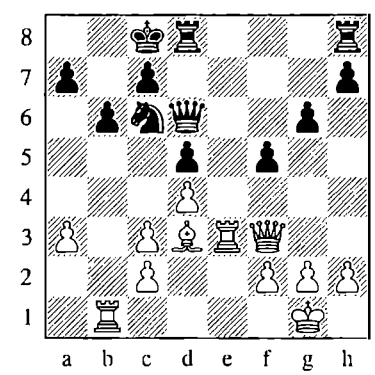
16...f5 17.♖xe3 ♕d6 transposes to the main line below.

17.♖xe3

17.fxe3!? is a second option giving White chances for an edge: 17...f5 (17...♕xa3? 18.e4↑ gives White a strong initiative.) 18.c4 dxc4 19.♗xc4 ♔b8 20.♗b5 ♘a5 21.c4↑ White had a promising position in Glek – Djurhuus, Copenhagen 1996. The bishop is stronger than the knight and there are some attacking prospects on the queenside.

17...f5

This is the critical position where I found an important new idea for White:



18.♖be1!N

A promising pawn sacrifice.

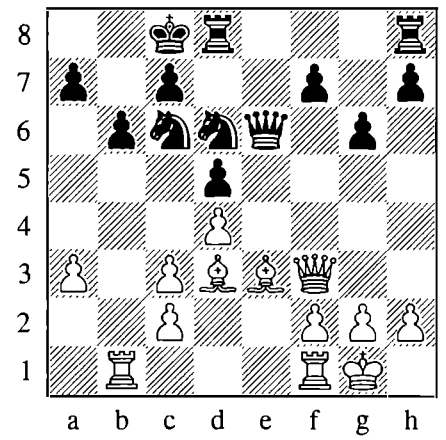
18...♕xa3 19.♗b5 ♘a5 20.c4!

White has a serious initiative and is at least slightly better. A possible continuation is:

20...♕b2 21.c3 ♔b8 22.♖e7 ♘xc4 23.♗xc4 dxc4 24.♕c6 ♖c8 25.♕xc4±

White is a pawn down but totally dominates the position.

After seeing the problem with the main line, let's now return to my recommended solution of 15...♘d6!. I found a single game in the database, which continued logically for a few more moves.



16.♖fe1 ♖he8 17.♗d2 ♘e4 18.♗a6† ♔b8 19.♕d3

Here I propose a slight improvement on the game Osmanodja – Gloor, Zürich 2010.

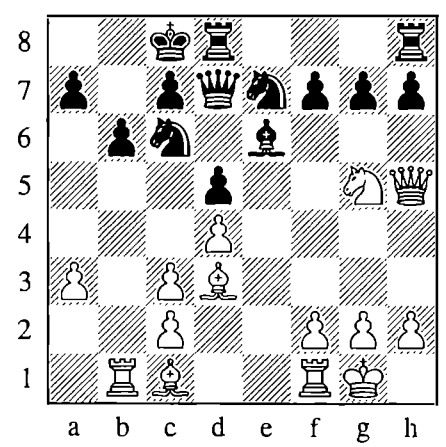
19...♕f6N

Keeping the d6-square free for the knight.

20.f3 ♘d6=

With ...♘a5-c4 coming next, Black is doing absolutely fine.

C23) 12.0–0



12...♗g4

Black's entire set-up is based of this move, sacrificing the pawn on f7.

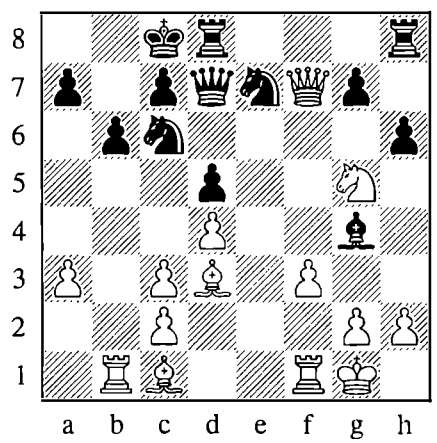
13.♕xf7

13.♕h4 is playable but not very critical, as Black has managed to keep his bishop without any concessions. Several moves are possible from here, the simplest being 13...♖df8= followed by ...♗f5.

13...h6

I considered 13...♖df8!?N as an interesting novelty, but after 14.♕xg7 h6 15.♘h7! ♖fg8 16.♕f7 we arrive at a critical position where I was unable to find anything suitable for Black.

14.f3



14...♗f5!N

This is a sound and simple way to play for Black.

After the tempting 14...♖df8!? White can make an interesting queen sacrifice: 15.fxg4!N (So far White has only tried 15.♕xg7 which gives Black good counterplay after 15...♗f5.) 15...♖xf7 16.♘xf7 ♖e8 17.g5⩱ White has excellent compensation for the sacrificed queen. We encountered the same idea in the earlier variation B2 on page 128, but in the present position the earlier ...b6 makes its presence felt by weakening Black's queenside.

15.♗xf5 ♘xf5 16.♕xd7† ♖xd7

Black's activity and light-square control offer full compensation for the pawn. A possible follow-up is:

17.♘e6

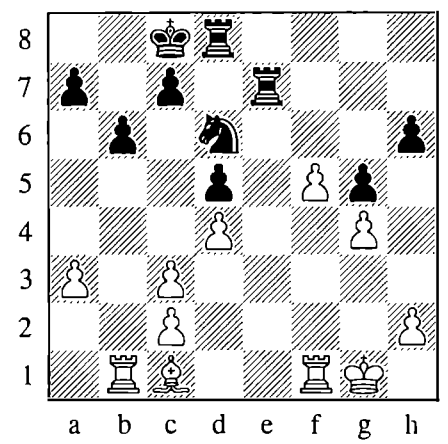
17.♘h3 ♖e8⩲ gives Black counterplay along the e-file.

17...g5!

This move temporarily traps the knight, which forces some action from White.

18.g4 ♘d6 19.f4 ♖e7 20.f5 ♘d8 21.♘xd8 ♖xd8⩱

White is a pawn up and has a passer on f5. However, taking into account the placement of the pieces, Black has more than enough compensation. The superb knight on d6 and the active counterplay on the e-file make White's position quite unpleasant.



22.a4

Trying to get the bishop into play.

22...♖e4 23.h3 ♘c4↑

Black keeps the bishop boxed in. The only counterplay to watch out for is h3-h4 (which

has to be prepared by a king march to g3), but then the g4-pawn will become vulnerable. Given time, Black may try to get his king over to f6, which would put White in a totally passive position.

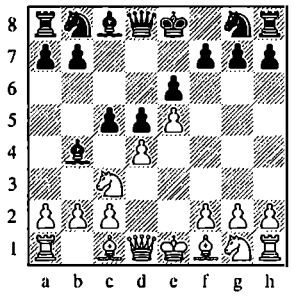
Conclusion

After 8.♕h5 ♗e6 White has good reason to play 9.♖b1 before deciding how to develop his king's knight. Indeed, in variations B1 and B2 we saw two clear instances where Black was able to make use of the fact that he had not been obliged to weaken his light squares with ...b6.

In the main line after 9.♖b1 b6, White can choose between developing his knight on e2 or f3. Both options bring their own challenges, and while I believe in the fundamental soundness of Black's set-up, I also found it necessary to devise new paths in several key positions, and look forward to seeing these ideas tested in practice.



5th Move Options



5.♘f3 and 5.dxc5

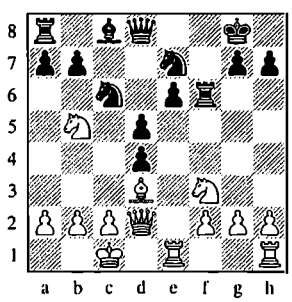
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5

4...c5

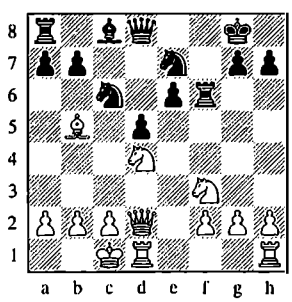
A) 5.♘f3 **140**
B) 5.dxc5 ♘e7 6.♘f3 ♘d7! **141**
B1) 7.♕d4!? **142**
B2) 7.♗d3 **143**

A) note to 9.♘bxd4



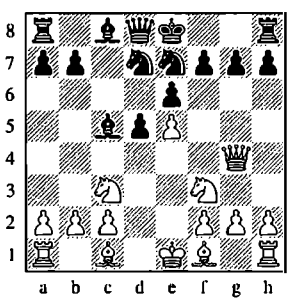
12...c5!N

A) after 12.♗b5



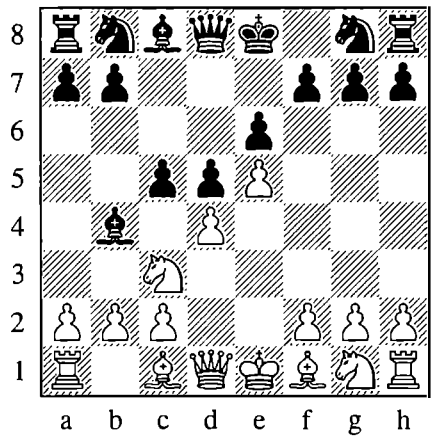
12...♕b6N

B1) after 8.♕g4



8...0–0 or 8...♕b6!?N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5



The present section of the book is devoted to the various ways in which White may deviate from the main line of 5.a3.

The two most significant sidelines are 5.♕g4 and 5.♗d2. Coverage of these moves begins in Chapters 11 and 14 respectively, leaving **A) 5.♘f3** and **B) 5.dxc5** as two remaining minor lines to be considered in the present chapter.

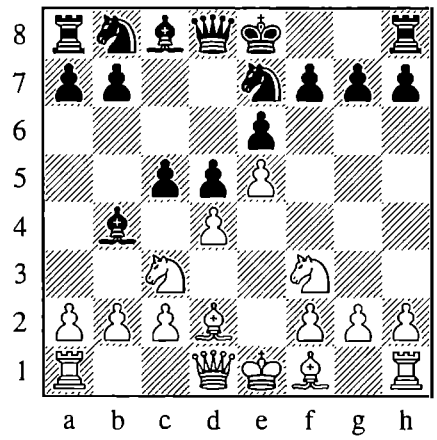
A) 5.♘f3 ♘e7 6.♗d2

This position has more commonly been reached via the move order 5.♗d2 ♘e7 6.♘f3, but since I have chosen to meet 5.♗d2 with 5...♘h6 instead of ...♘e7 (see Chapters 14-16 for more details), we should consider the line under the present move order.

Other moves are almost certain to transpose to a line considered elsewhere, as any attempt to deviate would give Black easy equality at the bare minimum. The two main transpositions are:

6.dxc5 ♘bc6 is covered under 5.dxc5 ♘e7 6.♘f3 – see the next page

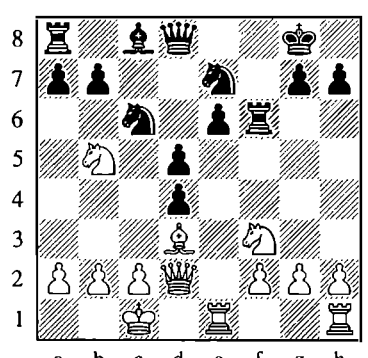
6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 reaches the main line Winawer with 7.♘f3, as covered in Chapter 18 on page 235.



6...cxd4 7.♘b5 ♗xd2† 8.♕xd2 0–0 9.♘bxd4

9.0–0–0 ♘bc6 will transpose to one of the lines given below after 10.♘bxd4 or 10.♗d3?!.

9.♗d3 ♘bc6 10.0–0–0?! (the more sensible 10.♘bxd4 f6 reaches the note to White's 10th move in the main line below) 10...f6! 11.exf6 ♖xf6 gives Black a strong centre and comfortable play. White continued 12.♖de1 in Soderborg – Kennedy, Budapest 1959, and here a powerful reply would have been:



12...e5!N 13.♘xe5 a6 14.♘a3 b5∓ Black is better due to the awkwardly-placed knight on a3.

9...♘bc6 10.0–0–0

I also considered: 10.♗d3 f6 11.exf6 gxf6!?N An ambitious move playing for the centre. (11...♖xf6 has been tested and leads to equality.) 12.0–0 e5 13.♘xc6 bxc6 Black has a strong pawn centre and promising play.

10...f6 11.exf6 ♖xf6

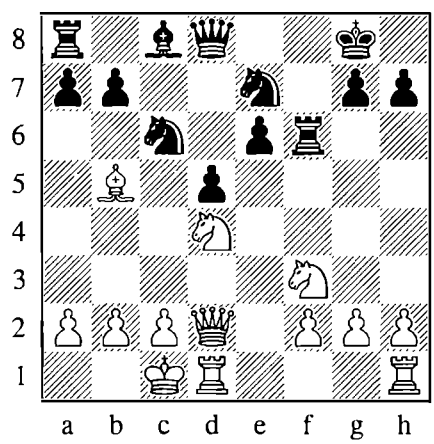
Black has a solid position with prospects for counterplay along the f-file and possibly on the queenside.

11...gxf6!?N is worth considering here as well.

12.♗b5

12.♘xc6 bxc6 was about equal in Graef – Tobies, Germany 1995. White has some control over the dark squares in the centre but Black has sufficient counterplay along the b-file. His plan for the next few moves will involve...♖b8 followed by ...♕b6 and possibly ...c5.

We have been following the game Druckenthaner – Baumegger, Vienna 2010. Here I suggest:



12...♕b6N

This seems like the most logical and active choice.

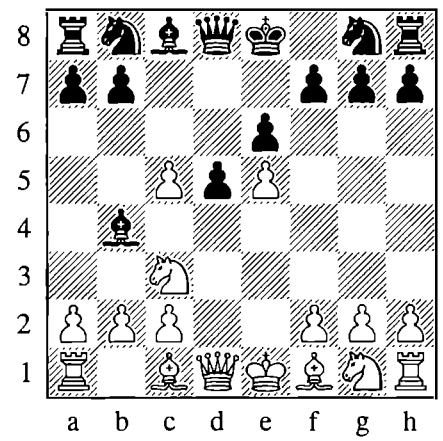
13.♗a4

13.♖he1 can be met by 13...♘xd4 14.♘xd4 ♘c6 15.♗xc6 bxc6 intending ...♖b8 and ...c5 with good counterplay on the queenside.

13...♗d7 14.♖he1 ♘xd4 15.♕xd4 ♗xa4 16.♕xa4 ♘c6=

The position remains balanced.

B) 5.dxc5



This move should not be too dangerous, but is has some interesting points and I would advise the reader to pay attention to what follows.

5...♘e7 6.♘f3

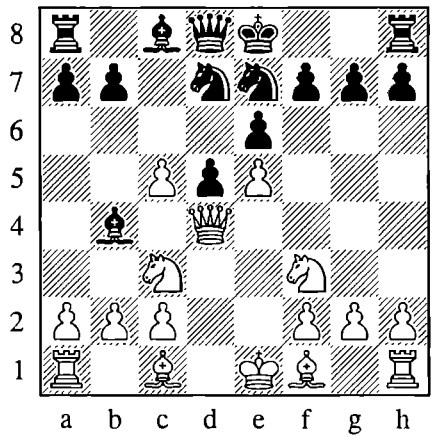
6.♕g4 has only rarely been seen, but it immediately transposes to Chapter 12.

6...♘d7!

The more common 6...♘bc6 is fully playable but I prefer the text move, having used it to inflict two defeats on Robert Zelcic, a specialist in this line for White, when I qualified for the World Cup in 2006. Black's idea is to capture on c5 with the knight, thus providing the useful option of eliminating the enemy bishop should it go to d3.

From this position **B1) 7.♕d4!?** is an interesting sideline, but by far the most common continuation is **B2) 7.♗d3**.

B1) 7.♕d4!?



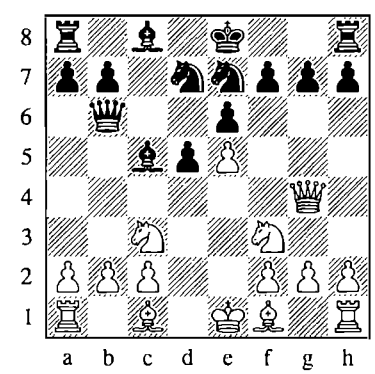
White's idea is to transfer the queen to g4 for attacking purposes, while also disrupting Black's plan of taking on c5 with the knight.

7...♗xc5 8.♕g4 0–0

This is a solid choice and it works fine, but if Black is looking to complicate the game he can consider the following ambitious try.

8...♕b6!?N

Targeting the f2-pawn.



9.♘a4?!

By attempting to keep the game under control, White lands himself in a worse endgame.

9.♗d3?! ♗xf2† 10.♔e2 ♘c5 seems to work out fine for Black, for instance 11.♖f1 ♘xd3 12.cxd3 ♗c5 and the bishop makes a clean getaway.

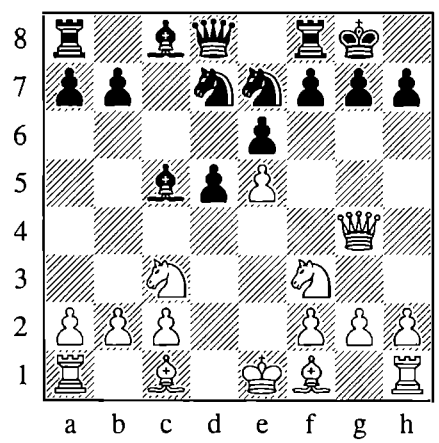
9.♕xg7 is critical. 9...♖g8 10.♕xh7 ♗xf2† 11.♔d1 ♘f8 12.♕h5 ♗d7⩲ Black has compensation for the sacrificed pawn due to his speedy development and White's vulnerable king.

9...♕b4† 10.♕xb4 ♗xb4† 11.♗d2

11.c3 ♗a5∓ also favours Black. White will have difficulties defending e5 and the knight on a4 is offside.

11...♗xd2† 12.♔xd2 a6∓

The position favours Black, who has the better pawn structure and intends ...♘c6 with pressure against e5. White's knight on f3 will be stuck defending for quite some time, while Black can develop and later think about breaking with ...f6.



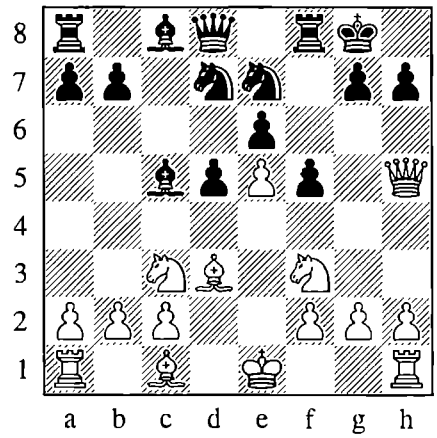
9.♗d3 f5

It is essential to prevent ♗xh7† when Black is likely to get mated.

10.♕h5N

White needs to find something better than 10.♕g3?! ♘g6 11.0–0 ♗e7 12.♖e1 ♘c5∓ when everything is in order for Black, T. Horvath – Jurek, Pontresina 2000.

The text move is better and carries the threat of ♘g5.



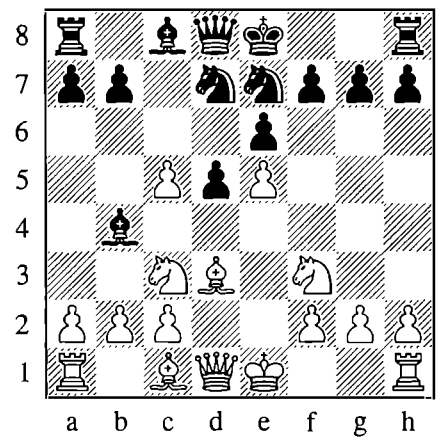
10...h6

This seems like the safest option.

11.0–0 a6=

Followed by ...♕e8 to ward off White's kingside initiative.

B2) 7.♗d3



7...♘xc5

This is more precise and flexible than 7...♕c7, since after 8.0–0 Black cannot capture on e5 anyway. The second player still has a reasonable position after 8...♗xc3 9.bxc3 ♘xc5, as occurred in both my games against Zelcic. Nevertheless, if Black intends to go for this structure, there is no need to put the queen on c7 so early.

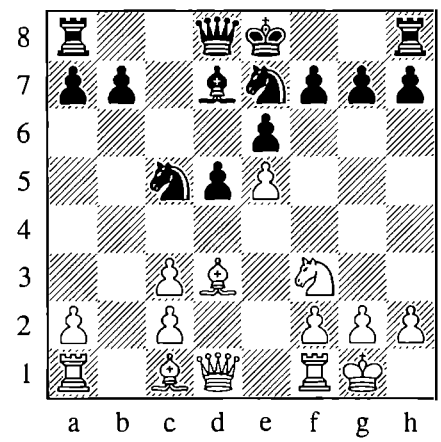
8.0–0 ♗xc3

Black takes the opportunity to damage his opponent's queenside. Now he can count on a better pawn structure and pressure along the c-file, but we must not forget about White's bishops.

8...♗d7 is a decent alternative which leads to approximately equal chances.

9.bxc3 ♗d7

This looks to me like the most logical continuation. According to the database this position has only seen daylight in a single game, which we will now follow.



10.♗e3 ♖c8 11.♕b1

11.♖b1N b6=

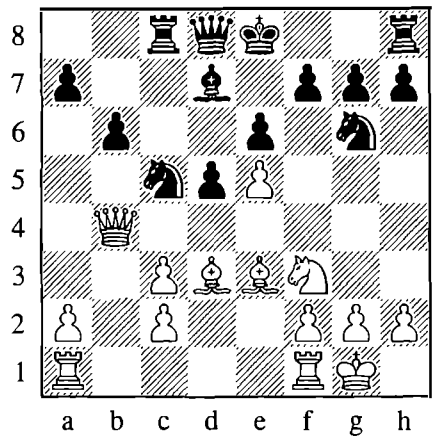
11...b6 12.♕b4

White prepares to swing his queen over to the kingside.

12...♘g6

12...0–0?? loses to 13.♗xh7†+–.

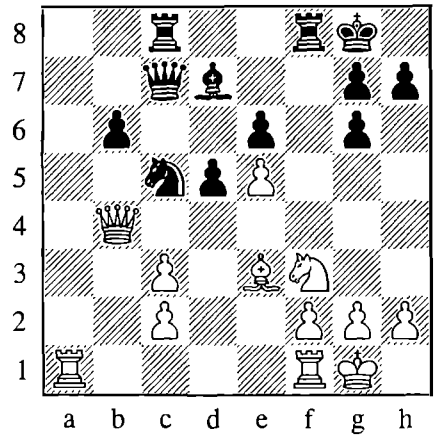
12...♕c7!?N deserves attention, remaining flexible and forcing White to think about the c-file.



13.a4 0–0

13...a5N 14.♕g4 ♕c7= appears slightly more accurate, although the text move does not harm Black's chances too much.

14.a5 ♕c7 15.axb6 axb6 16.♗xg6 fxg6



17.c4?!

This move makes life easier for Black.

17.♖a3N gives White minimal pressure, although after 17...♖a8 18.♖fa1 ♖xa3 19.♖xa3 h6 Black has a solid position and the draw is not far off.

17...dxc4 18.♕xc4 ♗c6

½–½

This was the rather dull end to the game Zelcic – Drasko, Bosnjaci 2005. I have already noted a couple of earlier improvements for both sides, and will briefly mention that in the final position Black's strong bishop makes his position slightly the more pleasant.

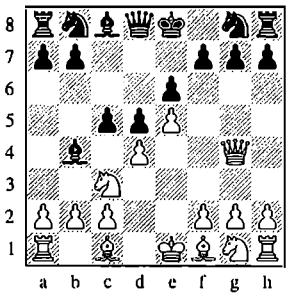
Conclusion

5.♘f3 usually transposes to a harmless sideline of the 5.♗d2 variation. Chances are balanced and there is not much for Black to fear.

5.dxc5 is rare but it is not a bad move by any means. After the standard moves 5...♘e7 6.♘f3, the reply 6...♘d7! is a clever idea which gives Black some useful extra options compared with the more common knight development to c6. We analysed two main branches for White, but Black can secure equal chances against both of them without much difficulty.



5.♕g4



Introduction

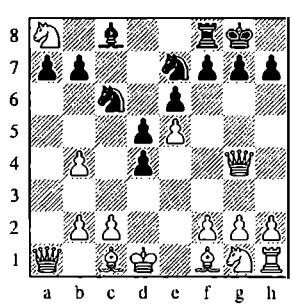
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♕g4

5...♘e7

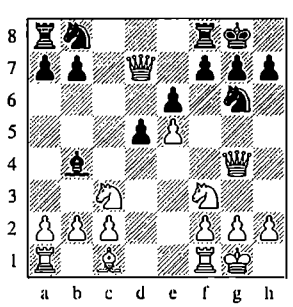
A) 6.a3? ♕a5! **146**
A1) 7.♗d2 **146**
A2) 7.axb4 **147**
A3) 7.♘e2 **148**
B) 6.♕xg7 ♖g8 **149**
B1) 7.♕xh7? **150**
B2) 7.♕h6 **151**
C) 6.♘f3 cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♘g6 **152**
C1) 8.♘f3?! **152**
C2) 8.♗b5† **152**
C3) 8.♗d2 **153**
C4) 8.♗d3 **154**

A2) after 11.♘xa8



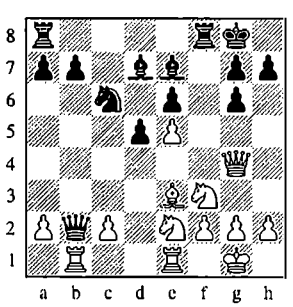
11...♕b1!N

C2) after 11.♘f3?!



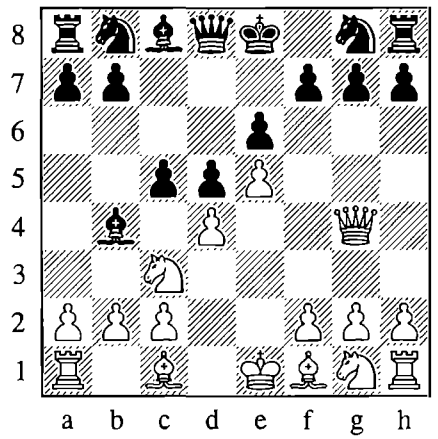
11...♗xc3!N

C4) note to 11.♗c3



15...♕xa2!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♕g4



White goes after the g7-pawn. Compared with Chapter 2, his e-pawn is safe and the black knight does not have the f6-square available. On the negative side for White, his d4-pawn is under fire and the c3-knight remains pinned.

5...♘e7

Black begins by safeguarding his rook. In this position the most important move by far is 6.dxc5, and we will analyse it separately in Chapters 12 and 13. In the present chapter we will deal with the rare alternatives **A) 6.a3?**, **B) 6.♕xg7** and **C) 6.♘f3**.

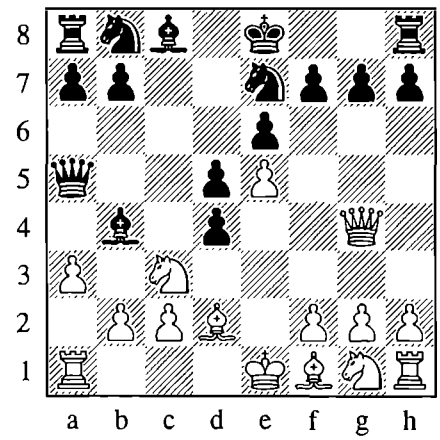
A) 6.a3?

Attempting to transpose to the main lines, but Black can exploit the errant move order.

6...♕a5!

This leads to a forced advantage for Black against each of the three replies: **A1) 7.♗d2**, **A2) 7.axb4** and **A3) 7.♘e2**.

A1) 7.♗d2 cxd4



8.♕xd4

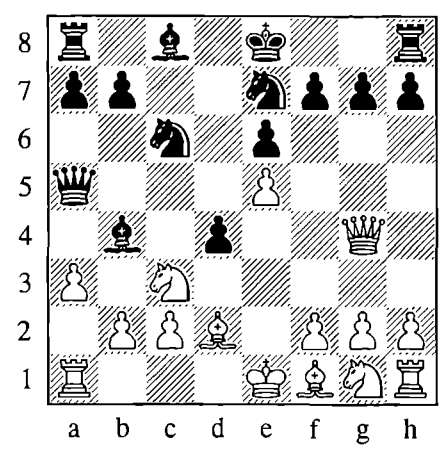
8.axb4 ♕xa1† 9.♘d1 ♘g6 clearly favours Black.

8.♘b1 also fails to solve White's problems: 8...♗xd2† 9.♘xd2 0–0 10.♗d3 ♘bc6 11.♘gf3 ♘g6∓ Sipila – S. Ivanov, Stockholm 2011.

8...♘bc6 9.♕g4

9.♗b5?! 0–0 10.♗xc6 ♘xc6 hardly helps White.

9...d4



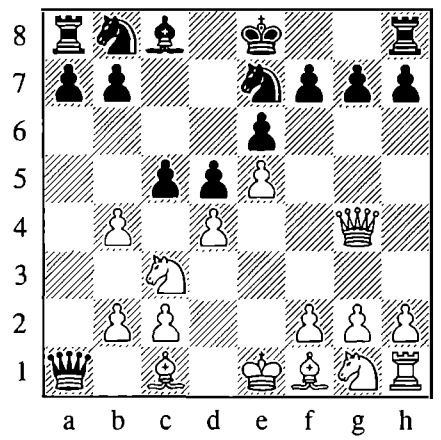
10.axb4

10.♘e4 ♗xd2† 11.♘xd2 ♕xe5†∓ saw Black win a pawn for absolutely nothing in Pan – Rivera, Concord 1993.

10...♕xa1† 11.♘d1 ♘f5 12.♘f3 ♕a4

White does not have enough for the exchange, Oparaugo – Mokosch, Wuerttemberg 1994.

A2) 7.axb4 ♕xa1



White's exchange sacrifice is unsound, although it is interesting to see that in the main line Black returns the material with interest in order to develop an attack against the enemy king.

8.♔d1 cxd4 9.♘b5 0–0!

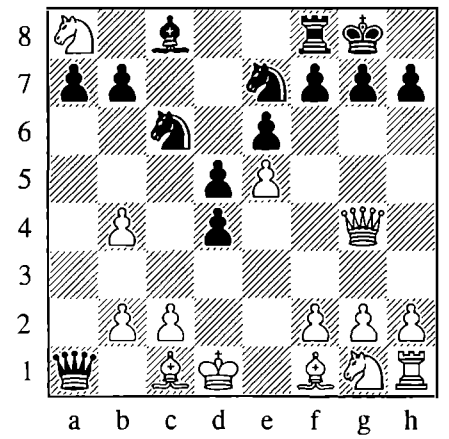
Black offers the rook on a8 in order to hunt for a bigger prize.

10.♘c7

After 10.♘f3 ♘bc6 11.♗d3 ♘g6∓ White's compensation was insufficient in Jansa – Korchnoi, Luhacovice 1969.

10...♘bc6 11.♘xa8

This position occurred in Nilsson – Scholler Larsen, Copenhagen 1990. At this point Black captured on b4, which was enough to claim some advantage and an eventual victory. However, there was a considerably stronger move available.



11...♕b1!N

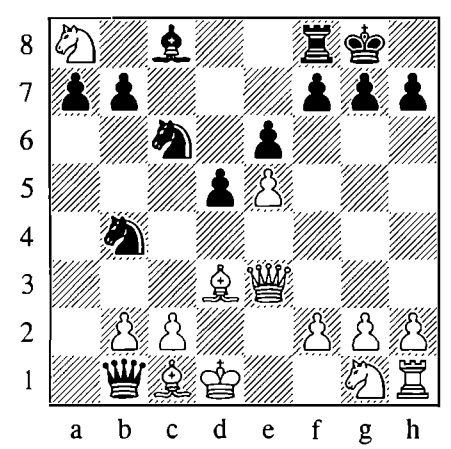
The b4-pawn will not run away, and by nudging the queen in this way, Black ensures that a subsequent ...♘xb4 will deliver a lethal threat to the c2-pawn, thereby preventing the reply ♕xd4. Black is a piece down for the time being, but he is close to winning the game due to White's lack of development and the concrete threats against his king.

12.♗d3

Defending the c2-pawn in advance, but the inclusion of the last two moves clearly favours Black.

12.♘f3 ♘xb4 is hopeless for White, for instance: 13.♘e1 (13.♘xd4 ♘ec6–+) 13...♗d7 14.♕xd4 ♘a2 15.♕d2 ♖xa8–+

12...♘xb4 13.♕xd4 ♘ec6 14.♕e3

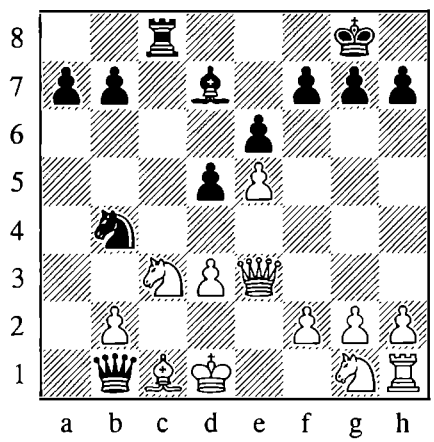


14...♗d7

White has managed to defend himself for the moment, so it is time to bring in reinforcements.

15.♘c7 ♖c8 16.♘b5 ♘xd3 17.cxd3 ♘b4 18.♘c3

18.♘a3 ♗a4†–+

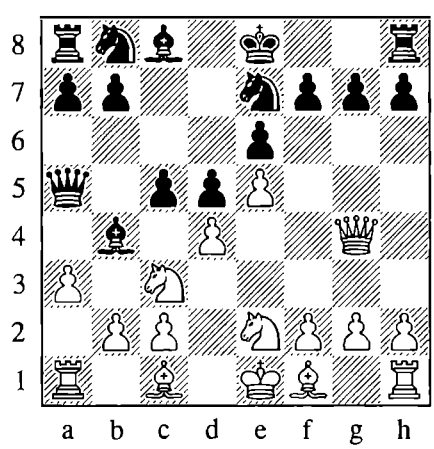


18...♖xc3!

A simple combination to end the game.

19.bxc3 ♕c2† 20.♔e1 ♘xd3†–+

A3) 7.♘e2



7...cxd4 8.axb4!?

Objectively this move should lose against precise play, but one could argue that it would be the best chance to complicate the game over the board. Other moves are easy for Black to deal with:

8.♕xd4 ♘bc6 9.♕g4 ♗xc3† 10.bxc3 0–0∓ gives Black an excellent position, as mentioned by Williams.

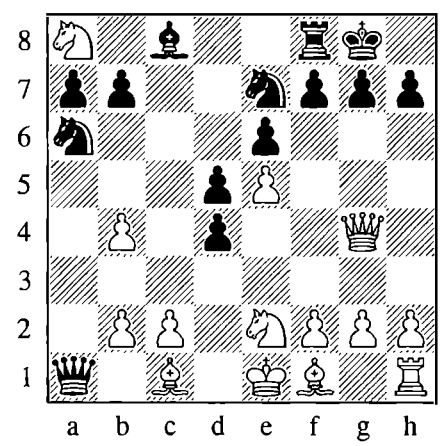
8.♖b1 may be best, but after 8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 0–0∓ (9...♘f5N∓ is also good) Black has a considerably improved version of the Winawer main line, Converset – Robledo, Buenos Aires 1994.

8...♕xa1 9.♘b5 0–0 10.♘c7 ♘a6

10...♘bc6 could lead to the same thing.

11.♘xa8

Here Black has several ways to obtain an advantage, but in my opinion there is one clear favourite.



11...♘xb4!

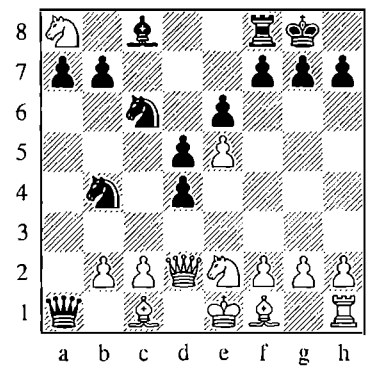
It makes sense to harass the king immediately before White can consolidate.

Both Williams and Watson give 11...♗d7 which is good enough for an advantage, but not necessarily winning. After 12.♕xd4 ♖xa8 13.b3 ♕xd4 14.♘xd4 ♘xb4 Black is obviously better thanks to his extra pawn, but White's bishop pair gives him chances to resist.

12.♔d2N

12.♔d1? ♘ec6 gave Black a crushing initiative in Martin Gonzalez – Narciso Dublan, Spain 1999.

12.♕g5N ♘ec6 13.♕d2 does not help White either, in view of:



13...d3! 14.cxd3 (14.♘f4 ♘xc2† 15.♔d1 ♗d7 16.♗xd3 ♘2b4 17.♘c7 ♖c8 18.♘b5 ♘xd3 19.♘xd3 ♕a4†–+) 14...♗d7 15.♘c7 ♖c8 16.♘b5 ♘xe5–+

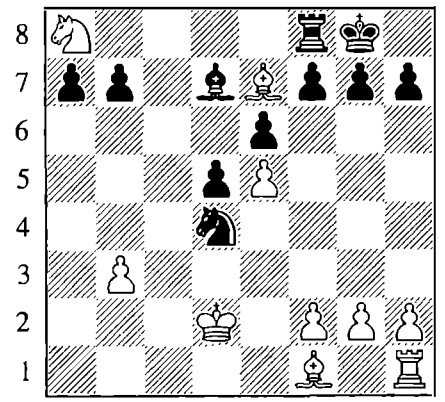
12...♕a4 13.♘xd4

After 13.b3 ♕a2 14.♘xd4 ♗d7 15.♗d3 ♘xd3 16.♔xd3 ♖xa8–+ Black is a pawn up while keeping a serious attack against White's king.

13...♘xc2 14.b3

14.♕d1 ♕xd4† 15.♔xc2 ♕xe5 is hopeless for White; the knight on a8 is trapped, so he will soon be at least two pawns down with an exposed king.

14...♕xd4† 15.♕xd4 ♘xd4 16.♗a3 ♗d7 17.♗xe7



17...♖c8!

Even stronger than ...♖xa8. Black now controls the c-file and thus threatens to grab the b3-pawn with check. The knight on a8 is not going anywhere.

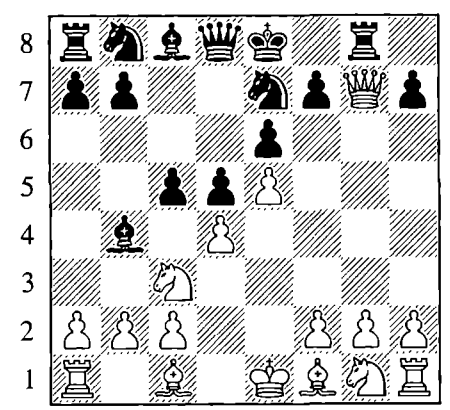
18.♗d3

18.b4 ♘b3† 19.♔e3 (19.♔d3 ♖c1!–+) 19...♖xa8 20.♗d3 ♖c8–+

18...♘xb3† 19.♔e3 ♖xa8–+

Black is three pawns up and has a clearly won endgame.

B) 6.♕xg7 ♖g8



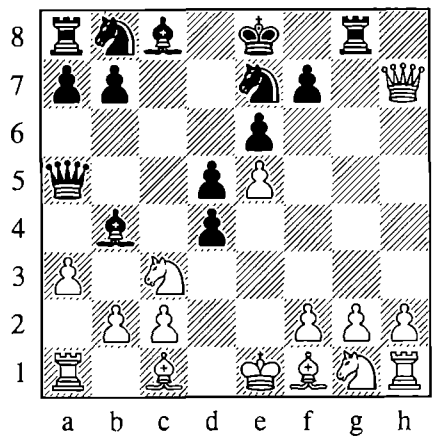
White can choose between **B1) 7.♕xh7?** and **B2) 7.♕h6**.

B1) 7.♕xh7?

White cannot afford the luxury of taking this pawn.

7...cxd4 8.a3 ♕a5!

This is a typical reaction to a2-a3 in positions where White's queen has already wandered off to the kingside.



9.axb4

White has no choice, as 9.♖b1? dxc3 10.axb4 ♕a2 wins immediately.

9...♕xa1 10.♘ce2 ♘bc6 11.♘f3 ♗d7

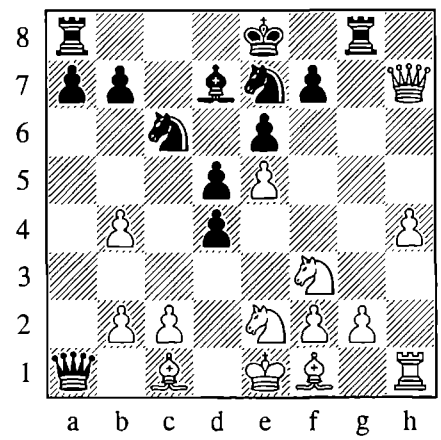
White lacks sufficient compensation for the sacrificed exchange, although there is still a fight going.

12.h4

12.b5 is well met by 12...d3!N (12...♕a5† has been played a few times and should also be good for Black, but the text move is simpler) 13.♕xd3 ♘b4 14.♕d1 ♗xb5 with a clear advantage to Black.

12.♔d1N might well be White's best try, but Black can respond in familiar fashion: 12...d3! This thematic move forces White into passivity while Black gains time. 13.♕xd3 ♘xb4∓ White has not managed to create any counterplay, so Black's material advantage gives him the upper hand.

Pushing the h-pawn is a typical plan for White, but it doesn't seem to work in view of the following strong reaction.



12...♖c8!

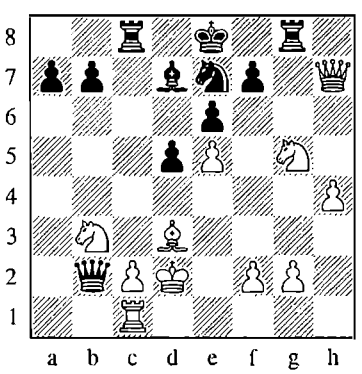
Black is poised to develop a serious attack along the c-file.

13.♔d2

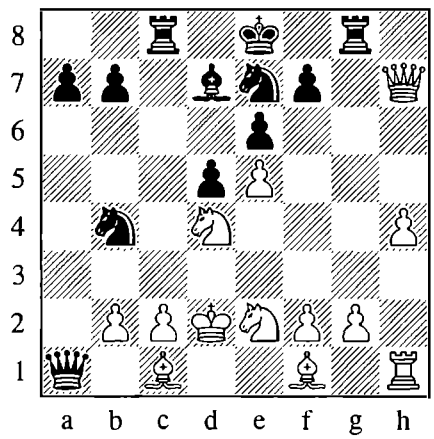
13.b5 falls victim to a familiar device: 13...d3! 14.bxc6 dxe2 15.cxd7† ♔xd7 16.♔d2 exf1=♕ 17.♖xf1 ♖xg2–+

13...♘xb4 14.♘fxd4

14.♘exd4 ♘a2 15.♘b3 ♕b1 16.♗d3 ♘xc1 17.♖xc1 ♕xb2 18.♘g5



18...♖xg5! After Black returns the exchange White has a hopeless position. 19.hxg5 ♗a4! (even better than 19...♕xe5∓) 20.♕h3 a6!–+ Renewing the threat of ...♗xb3.



14...♗a4! 15.♘c3

15.c3? ♘a2 wins immediately.

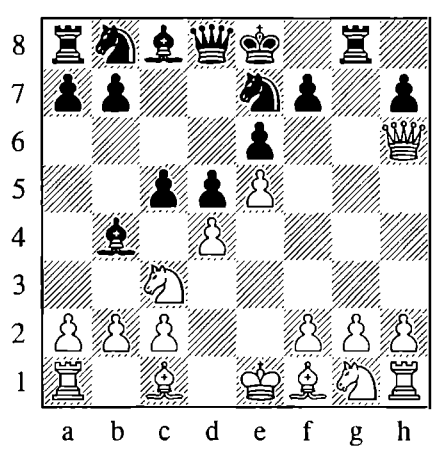
15...♖g4! 16.♗b5†

16.♘db5 d4 17.♘d6† ♔d8–+

16...♗xb5 17.♘dxb5 ♔d7∓

White is in trouble.

B2) 7.♕h6



It is more important for the queen to protect the c1-bishop than to grab the h7-pawn. Even here though, Black enjoys excellent prospects.

7...cxd4 8.a3 ♗xc3†

Now 8...♕a5?! is a different story as after 9.axb4 ♕xa1 10.♘b5! White gets active counterplay.

9.bxc3 ♕c7

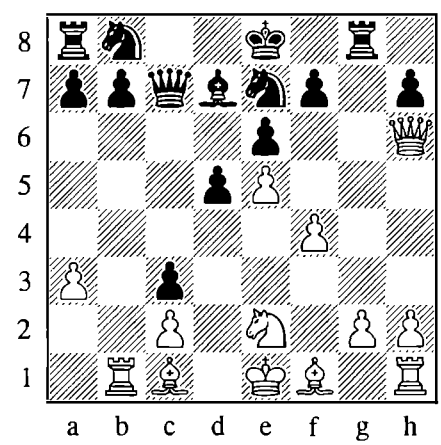
As Watson points out, Black has reached a favourable version of the Poisoned Pawn Winawer, where White has neglected to take the pawn on h7.

10.♘e2

10.♔d1 ♘d7∓ also favoured Black in Cvicela – Huba, Topolcianky 1993.

10...dxc3 11.f4 ♗d7 12.♖b1

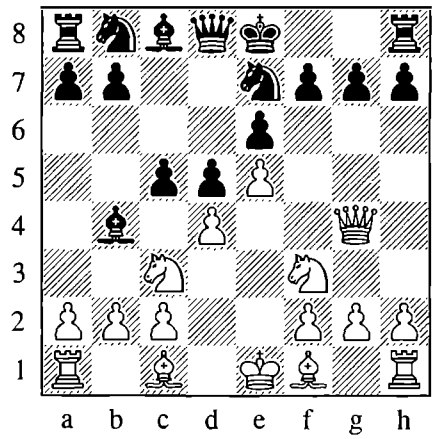
12.♕xh7 ♘bc6 leaves Black a full tempo up compared to the Poisoned Pawn Winawer. A detailed analysis would hardly be appropriate here; suffice it to say that this is clearly a significant difference and I believe that Black has the better prospects.



12...♘bc6 13.♘g3 0–0–0 14.♗d3 ♘d4∓

Black has an active game and was somewhat better in Sigurjonsson – Uhlmann, Hastings 1976.

C) 6.♘f3



This time White protects his centre before going for any concrete action.

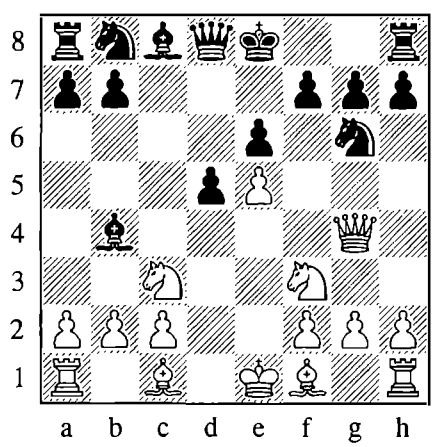
6...cxd4

This is my preference, although 6...♘bc6 is a worthy alternative.

7.♘xd4 ♘g6

Black covers the threat against g7 and sets up a future attack on e5. We will consider four responses: **C1) 8.♘f3?!**, **C2) 8.♗b5†**, **C3) 8.♗d2** and **C4) 8.♗d3**.

C1) 8.♘f3?!



This is too passive and allows Black to obtain the better prospects.

8...♘c6

8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♕c7 also looks good, although White might get some counterplay on the dark squares.

9.♗d2

9.♝b5 ♕a5∓

9.♗d3 d4 10.♗e4 (10.a3 ♕a5 11.axb4 ♕xa1 12.♘e2 ♘xb4∓) 10...♗d7 11.♘xd4 ♘cxe5 12.♕e2 ♕c8∓

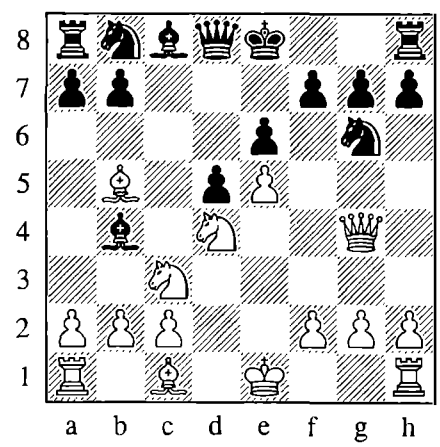
9...d4 10.♘e4 ♗xd2†

10...h5!?N with the idea of ...♕d5 may well be even stronger.

11.♘exd2 ♕a5∓

Kuzmin – Dolmatov, Minsk 1982.

C2) 8.♗b5†



With this move White strives for quick development, but from a strategic point of view Black will be happy to exchange the light-squared bishops.

8...♗d7 9.0–0 0–0 10.♗xd7

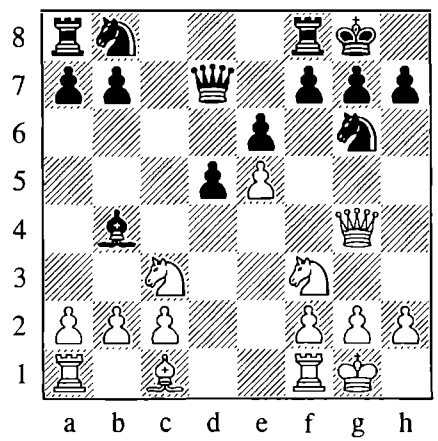
10.♘xe6?? ♗xc3 was embarrassing for White, who resigned immediately in Tobor – Van Buskirk, corr. 1988.

10.♗g5? ♘xe5 11.♕h5 f6∓ gave White no compensation for the pawn in Angskog – Nilsson, Linkoping 1996.

Finally, 10.♗d3 ♘xe5 11.♗xh7† ♔xh7 12.♕h5† ♔g8 13.♕xe5 ♘c6∓ gave Black a positional plus in Murey – Sigurjonsson, Brighton 1982.

10...♕xd7 11.♘f3?!

11.f4N seems like the lesser evil, although 11...♗xc3 12.bxc3 ♘c6 still favours Black.



11...♗xc3!N

This improvement has already been pointed out by Watson.

11...♘c6 favoured Black in Fernandez Garcia – Matamoros Franco, Seville 1992, but we can and should be more ambitious.

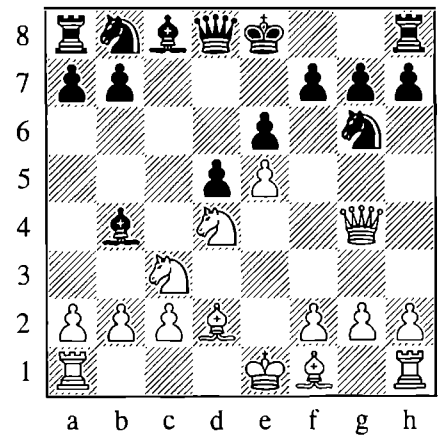
12.bxc3 ♖c8 13.h4

White's only chance is to aim for kingside counterplay, but it is too slow.

13...♖xc3 14.h5 ♖c4∓

Followed by ...♘e7. Black is in time to parry the threats, and his extra pawn should eventually decide the contest.

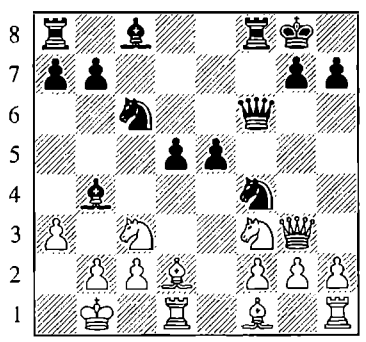
C3) 8.♗d2



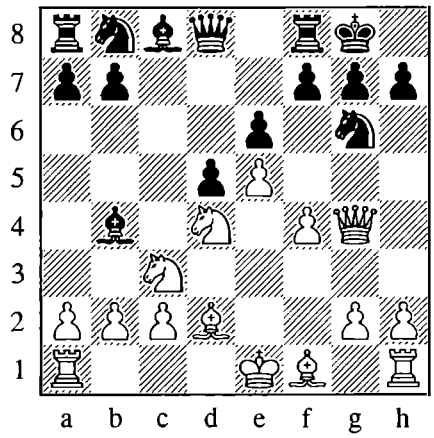
White avoids any damage to his queenside structure and prepares long castling.

8...0–0 9.f4

9.♘f3 can hardly threaten Black: 9...♘c6 10.0–0–0 f5 This move forces a pawn exchange which makes Black's life comfortable and straightforward. (However, it is quite possible that Watson's suggestions of 10...♕c7!? and 10...♗c5!? are objectively stronger, so we are rather spoiled for choice.) 11.exf6 ♕xf6 12.♔b1 e5 13.♕g3 ♘f4 14.a3



Here a draw was agreed in Movsesian – Shaked, Zagan 1997, but Black could easily have played on with 14...♗xc3 15.♗xc3 ♗f5 when his strong centre and piece activity secure an advantage.



9...♕b6

Once again there is a pleasant choice, as 9...♘c6 10.♘xc6 bxc6 was also slightly better for Black in Short – Farago, Banja Luka 1985.

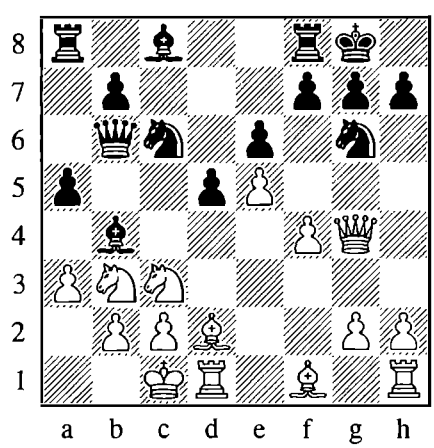
10.♘b3 ♘c6 11.0–0–0?!

A risky choice since Black gets to launch his attack first.

11.♗d3N seems preferable, although after 11...a5 12.a4 ♘d4 13.♘xd4 ♕xd4 Black has somewhat better prospects.

11...a5 12.a3?

12.a4 was necessary, although after 12...♘d4 13.♘xd4 ♕xd4 White has a tough time as he faces the dual threats of ...♘xe5 and ...♗xc3 followed by ...♕xa4.

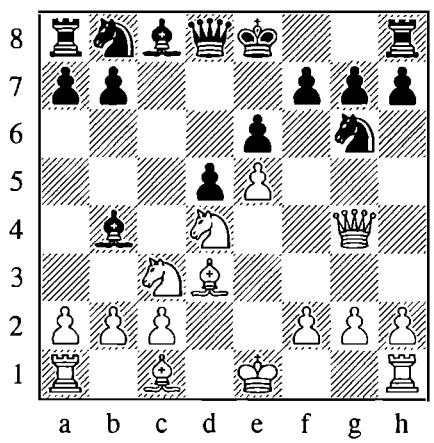


12...a4! 13.♘a1 ♗c5N∓

13...♗xc3 14.♗xc3∓ was less convincing in V. Georgiev – Dimitrov, Bulgaria 1995, although Black was also somewhat better here.

After the text move White's knight is destined to remain on a1 for a long time, so Black can enjoy the game practically playing a piece up. A logical plan from this position would be ...♘ge7 followed by ...f5 or ...f6 to reduce White's pressure on the kingside.

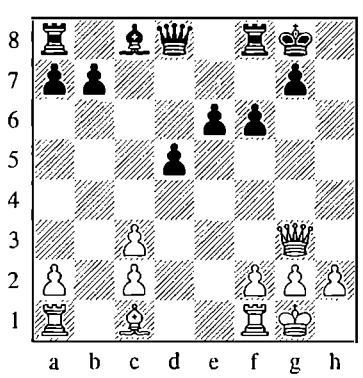
C4) 8.♗d3



This has been White's most common choice.

8...0–0 9.♗xg6

Another game continued: 9.♘f3 ♘c6 10.0–0 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 ♘cxe5 12.♘xe5 ♘xe5 13.♗xh7† ♔xh7 14.♕h5† ♔g8 15.♕xe5 f6 16.♕g3 Dragojlovic – Naumkin, Padova 2006.



At this point 16...e5N∓ looks like a good improvement, when Black has a strong centre and the better pawn structure. (The game went 16...♗d7?! 17.♖b1 when White obtained unnecessary counterplay.)

9...fxg6!

This is the more positionally desirable capture, and Black can get away with it because the e6-pawn is poisoned.

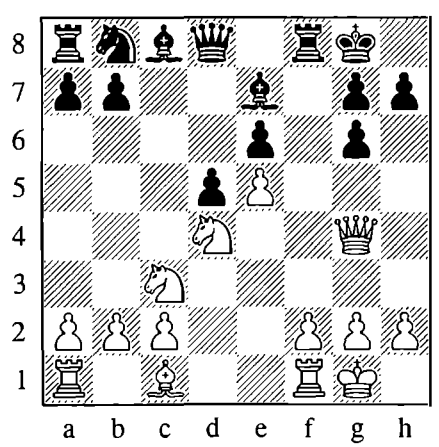
10.0–0

Obviously 10.♘xe6?? is no good due to 10...♕e7 winning a piece.

10.♗d2 should be met by 10...♗e7, avoiding danger along the fourth rank and preparing to develop the knight. After 11.0–0 ♘c6 12.♘f3 ♕b6∓ Black had an active game and a slight advantage in Murey – Kinsman, Paris 1996.

10...♗e7

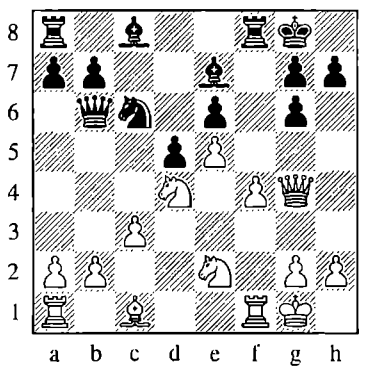
Black should resist the temptation to exchange on c3. Here is a relevant example: 10...♗xc3?! This exchange gives Black a better pawn structure, but gives up the bishop pair and allows White's bishop to become active. 11.bxc3 ♕a5 12.a4 ♗d7?! (Black should settle for 12...♘c6N 13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.♕b4 ♕xb4 15.cxb4 with a drawish endgame.) 13.♗a3 ♖f7 14.♘b5 ♗xb5 15.axb5 ♖f5 16.c4 ♕a4 This was Fressinet – David, Paris 2005, and here 17.♖fd1!N ♘d7 18.♕d4± would have kept a clear advantage for White.



11.♗e3

This seems best, and has been used three times by GM Jacob Murey. White has tried a few different set-ups, but Black has at least equal chances in all cases. Here are a couple of relevant examples showing how the game may develop.

11.♘ce2 ♘c6 12.f4 ♕b6 13.c3 was played in S. Lalic – Matamoros Franco, Ceuta 1993. Here I found a nice idea:

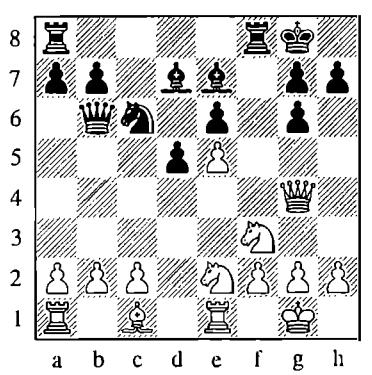


13...g5!∓ With a slight edge to Black.

In the following game White left his f-pawn at home and attempted to establish a dark-square blockade using his pieces:

11.♘f3 ♘c6 12.♖e1 ♗d7 13.♘e2 ♕b6

This moves creates the threat of ...♘xe5 as well as keeping an eye on the b2-pawn.



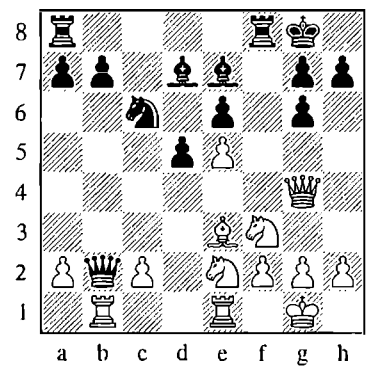
14.♗e3?!

A practical attempt to complicate the game, but it gives Black an advantage.

14.♘f4N is better although Black maintains an initiative after 14...♗c5. (14...♖f5 should be about equal.)

14...♕xb2 15.♖ab1

Hebden – Matamoros Franco, London 1987. Here instead of 15...♕xc2 Black can improve with:



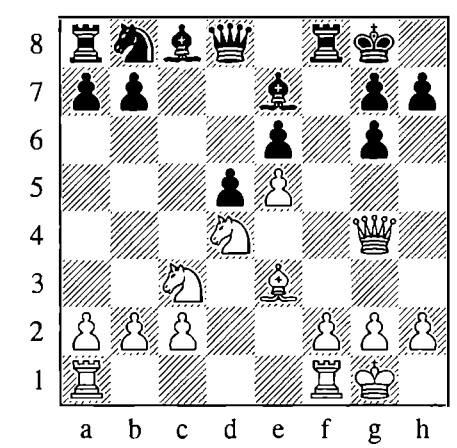
15...♕xa2!N 16.♖xb7 ♗c8 17.♖bb1

17.♖c7? is met by 17...♕a6∓ intending ...♗d8.

17.♖b3 ♘a5∓ also favours Black.

17...a5∓

White has some activity, but Black is a solid pawn up and can use the c4-square to get the queen out of danger.



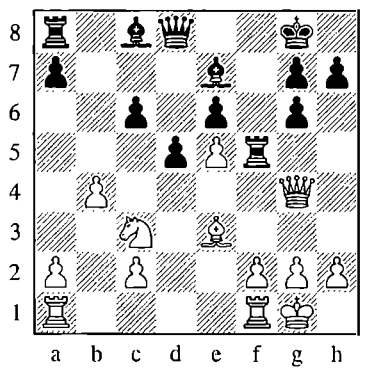
11...♘c6 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♘a4

White aims for control over the dark squares. His dream would of course be to exchange the dark-squared bishops and establish a dominant knight on c5, but with accurate play Black can prevent it.

13.b4?!

This move occurred in Murey – Marciniak, Condom 2004. White eventually prevailed, but Murey's 'improvement' over two of his previous games allows Black to obtain a forced advantage with:

13...♖f5!N



14.♕d4

14.♘e2 ♖xe5 15.♘g3 might win an exchange for White, but Black stands better nevertheless. The most straightforward and probably best continuation is 15...♖xe3! 16.fxe3 e5 17.♕f3 ♗a6 18.♕f7† ♔h8 19.♖f2 ♗xb4∓ when Black has two pawns for the exchange plus a strong pair of bishops. His next move is likely to be ...♕e8, as a queen exchange would accentuate the power of the bishops.

14...a5 15.a3

15.g4 ♖f3∓

15...axb4 16.axb4 ♖b8 17.♖fb1

17.♘a2?! is too passive and after 17...♕c7 18.f4 ♗a6∓ followed by ...♗c4 Black holds a strong initiative.

17...♖xb4! 18.♖xb4 c5

Black's small combination has netted a pawn and the better chances, although White has

a degree of compensation and some drawing chances.

13...♖b8

As recommended by both Williams and Watson. I also found 13...♖f5!?N to be playable, but would not go so far as to call it an improvement over the text move.

14.a3

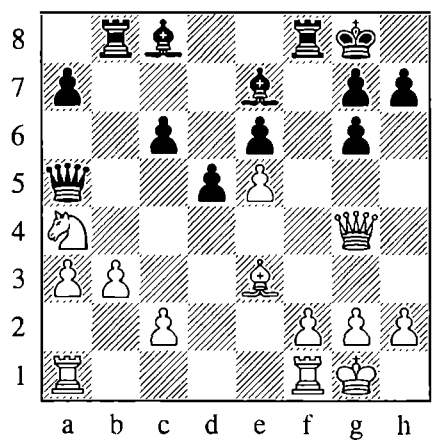
After 14.♗c5 ♗xc5 15.♘xc5 ♖xb2∓ the knight has reached c5, but the b2-pawn was a high price to pay.

14...♕a5

Black continues to inhibit the plan of b2-b4.

15.b3

15.♕d4 ♖b5 is fine for Black.



15...♖b5N

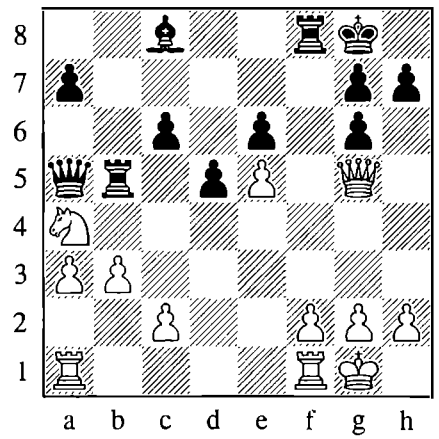
15...c5 is inaccurate in view of 16.♘xc5!± as played in Murey – Cebalo, Pula 2002.

The text move has already been recommended by Watson, who thinks Black is better. I decided to examine a likely follow-up.

16.♗g5

The obvious try, forcing an exchange of the dark-squared bishops.

16...♗xg5 17.♕xg5



17...d4!

An important move, not only preventing White from establishing a grip on the dark squares, but also opening a path for Black's bishop. There might follow:

18.♕g4 ♖d5 19.♘b2 ♕c3 20.♘d3 c5 21.♖ac1 a5

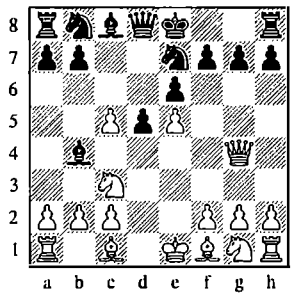
With some initiative for Black.

Conclusion

There is not much that should concern us in this chapter. Both 6.a3? and 6.♕xg7 lead to Black's advantage by force, and most of the variations after 6.♘f3 are pretty innocuous as well. The only challenging line is variation C4 where Black must be careful not to allow his opponent to dominate the dark squares. With precise play, however, Black's chances are at least equal here as well.



5.♕g4



6.dxc5 – without 8.0–0–0 and 8.♘f3

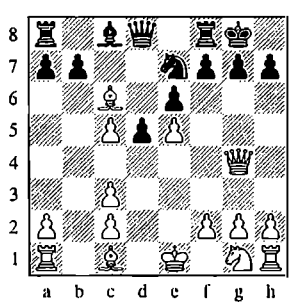
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♕g4 ♘e7 6.dxc5

6...♘bc6

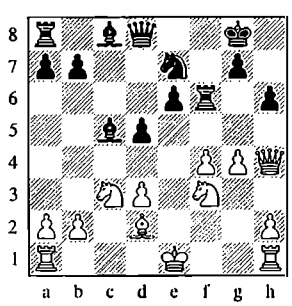
A) 7.♕xg7? 160
B) 7.a3 162
C) 7.♗b5 162
D) 7.♘f3 163
E) 7.♗d2 0–0 165
E1) 8.f4? 165
E2) 8.♗d3!? f5! 9.exf6 ♖xf6 166
E21) 10.♕h4 168
E22) 10.0–0–0 170

C) after 9.♗xc6



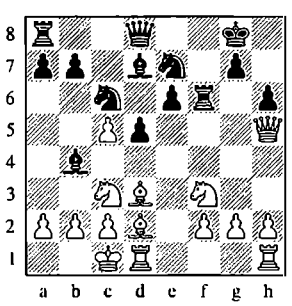
9...♕a5!N

B1) after 14.cxd3



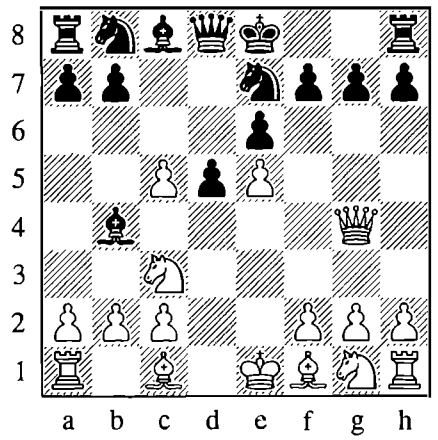
14...♗d6!N

E22) after 12.♘f3



12...♗xc5N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♕g4 ♘e7 6.dxc5



This is the main line and the most direct way of dealing with the pressure against the d4-pawn. By the way, please do not forget that White's last move also unveiled an attack against the bishop on b4.

6...♘bc6

I favour this developing move. From here we will deal with five main options: **A) 7.♕xg7?**, **B) 7.a3**, **C) 7.♗b5**, **D) 7.♘f3** and **E) 7.♗d2**.

A) 7.♕xg7?

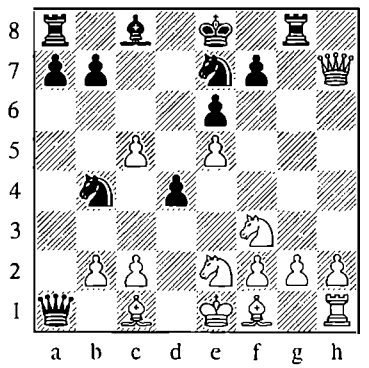
This move is ill-advised, as Black is well placed to exploit the pin on the c3-knight.

7...♖g8 8.♕xh7

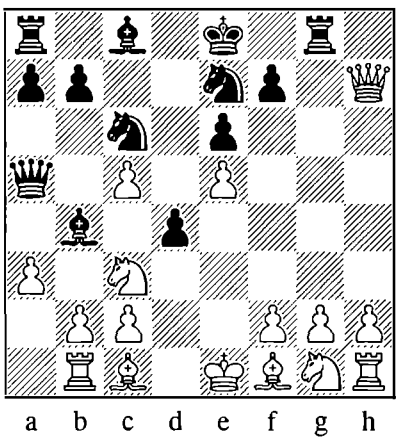
8.♕h6 d4 9.a3 ♖g6 10.♕xh7?! ♕a5 only led to worse problems for White in Hass – Klawitter, email 2006.

8...d4 9.a3 ♕a5 10.♖b1

10.axb4? gives Black a big advantage after: 10...♕xa1 11.♘ce2 ♘xb4 12.♘f3



12...d3! By cutting off the queen Black obtains a serious initiative. 13.cxd3 ♕b1∓ Schutz – Clementsson, Sweden 1994.



10...dxc3 11.♗e3□

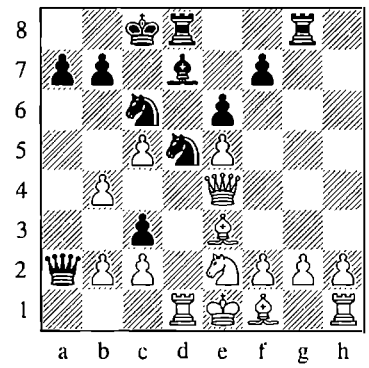
The only move that keeps White in the game.

11...♗d7!

The most convincing continuation, as pointed out by Watson.

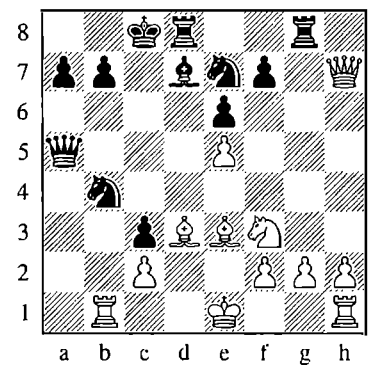
12.♘e2N

The only game I have found in the database continued 12.♕e4?? when 12...♘d5! is already decisive. The remaining moves were as follows: 13.♘e2 0–0–0 14.axb4 ♕a2 15.♖d1

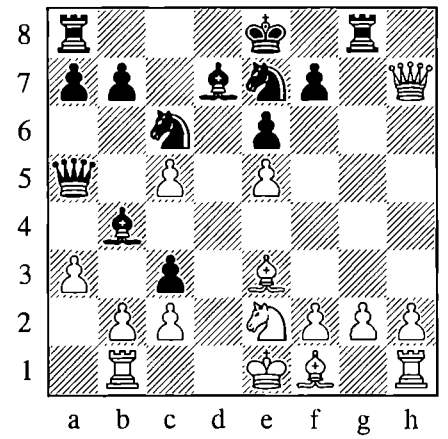


15...♘cxb4 (15...cxb2N–+ is more precise but the game continuation is more than good enough.) 16.♘c1 ♕xb2 17.♗d3 ♗c6 18.♗d4 ♘xc2† 0–1 Ivekovic – Pourramezanali, Vung Tau 2008.

It is worth pointing out that 12.♘f3?N does not save the day either: 12...0–0–0 13.♗d3 ♗xc5 14.b4 ♗xb4 15.axb4 ♘xb4∓ Black has a serious advantage as White has no good place to hide his king. The following lines are given by Watson:



16.♘d4 (16.0–0 ♘xd3 17.♕xd3 [17.cxd3 ♗c6 18.♕h3 ♕d5–+] 17...♗c6 18.♕c4 ♕c7 19.♘e1 ♕xe5 Black is close to winning.) 16...♘xd3† 17.♕xd3 ♖xg2 18.♕e4 ♕d5 19.♕xd5 ♘xd5 20.h4 ♘xe3 21.fxe3 ♗a4 22.h5 ♖h8 White faces a difficult endgame.

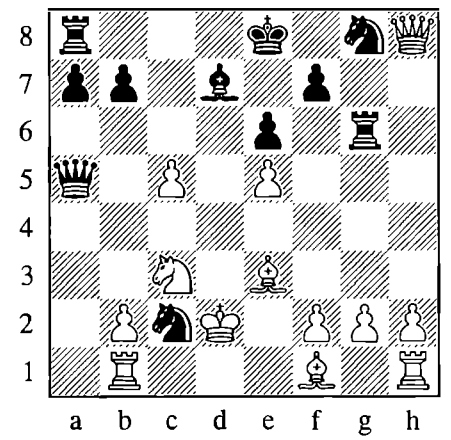


12...♖g6!

12...♗xc5 13.b4 ♗xb4 14.axb4 ♘xb4∓ is given by Watson, but the text move is even stronger. Black is interfering with the queen's defence of the c2-pawn.

13.axb4 ♘xb4 14.♕h8† ♘g8 15.♘xc3 ♘xc2† 16.♔d2

16.♔e2 ♕b4–+



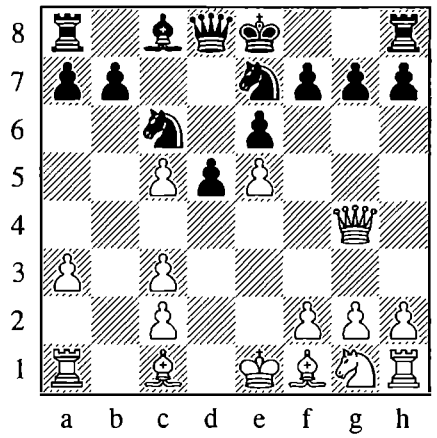
16...♘xe3 17.fxe3

17.♔xe3? ♕xc5† 18.♔e2 ♖d8 does not help White.

17...0–0–0∓

White faces a huge attack.

B) 7.a3 ♗xc3† 8.bxc3



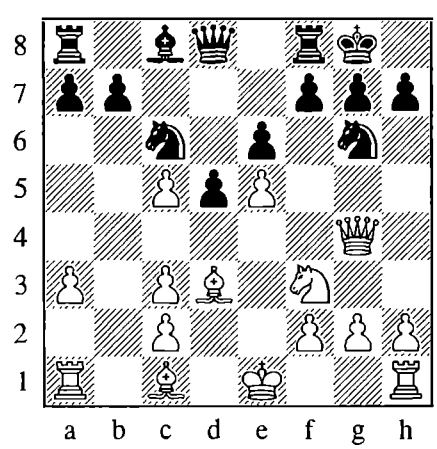
This is rather an unusual choice from White, whose pawn structure is now a mess although he does at least have the bishop pair.

8...0–0 9.♘f3

9.f4? has been played in a few games, but this non-developing move loses valuable time. After 9...♕a5 10.♗d2 ♕xc5∓ Black was better in Weindl – Valenti, Reggio Emilia 1988.

9...♘g6 10.♗d3

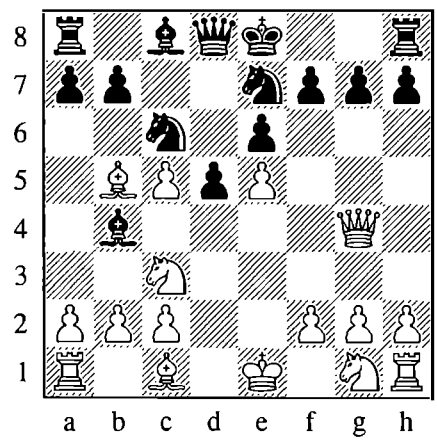
10.♕h5N remains untried, but White will not be able to keep the e5-pawn in any case. After 10...♕c7 11.♗d3 ♘cxe5 12.♘xe5 ♕xe5† 13.♕xe5 ♘xe5= Black should at least be able to achieve a drawish opposite-coloured bishop ending if he wishes it.



10...♘cxe5 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♗xh7† ♔xh7 13.♕h5† ♔g8 14.♕xe5 f6 15.♕g3 e5⩲

Bashchak – Taran, Illichevsk 2006. Black is a pawn down, but this is fully compensated by his strong centre and White's weakened queenside. The chances are about equal, but I would evaluate Black's position as slightly more pleasant to play.

C) 7.♗b5



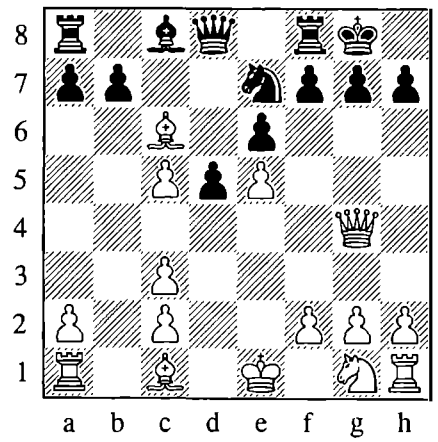
This move does not look at all convincing, despite having a positive score in the database.

7...♗xc3†!?

This unusual move works well, although 7...♕a5 and 7...0–0 are also fully adequate for equality.

8.bxc3 0–0 9.♗xc6

This exchange is pretty much forced since otherwise White cannot protect both the e5-pawn and the threat ...♕a5 hitting b5 and c3. At this point I found a striking improvement on Black's play in Renner – Strangmueller, Bavaria 2010.



9...♕a5!N

A strong intermediate move, putting immediate pressure on White's weaknesses.

10.♕b4

Entering a slightly inferior ending seems to be White's best.

10.♘e2 should be met by 10...bxc6, opening a path for the bishop while keeping the knight near the kingside to deal with ♗h6 ideas. 11.0–0 (11.♕b4 ♕c7∓) 11...♗a6∓ Black has a fine game, with a better pawn structure and good control over the light squares. There is no hurry to win back the pawn, and the next priority should be to seize the open b-file.

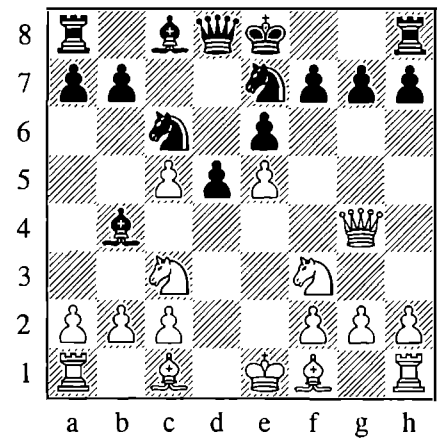
10...♘xc6!

10...♕xb4 11.cxb4 ♘xc6 wins back the pawn with an equal position, but I prefer not to straighten out White's pawns.

11.♕xa5 ♘xa5⩱

Black is a pawn down but White's tripled c-pawns do not count for much, and the second player has chances to play for more than a draw. The next few moves are likely to be ...♗d7, ...♖fc8 and later ...b6 to open up the queenside.

D) 7.♘f3



7...d4

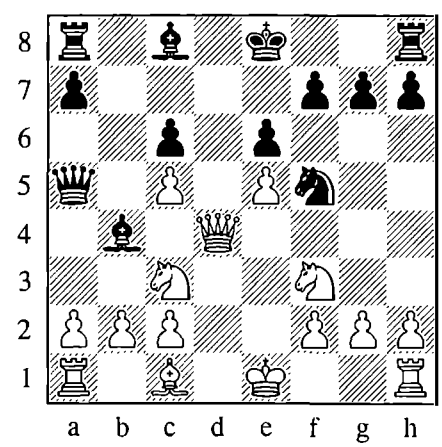
This move looks promising for Black, but the situation is slightly more complicated that it may first appear. Play will now follow a forced path for several moves.

8.♗b5

8.a3? ♕a5 is good for Black.

8...♕a5 9.♗xc6† bxc6 10.♕xd4 ♘f5

Black seems to have the makings of a strong initiative for minimal material investment, but White is not without chances.



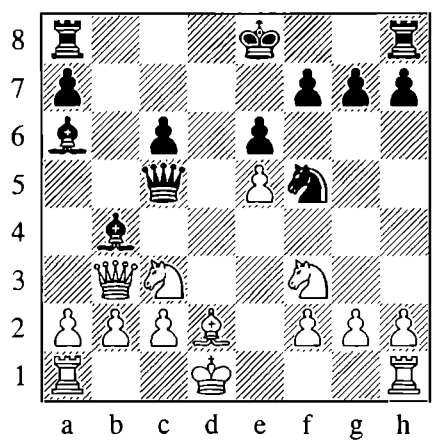
11.♕c4

A few other moves have been tried, but a brief analysis shows them to be clearly inferior. We will concentrate on the text move, which is the only way for White to make sense of his opening play.

11...♗a6 12.♕b3 ♕b5 13.♔d1 ♕xc5 14.♗d2

14.♘e4? is countered by 14...♘d4 threatening ...♗e2 mate.

After the text move Black seems to have good chances in view of the placement of White's king. Nevertheless, the complexity of the position makes it difficult to make a clear judgement.



14...♘d4!?N

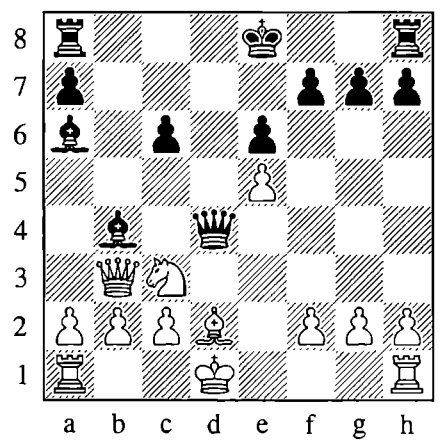
This has been recommended by Watson and seems like a decent move, although it is hard to say if it is best. I would advise the reader to check the following alternatives and then choose whichever of the three options he likes the most.

14...♗c4 occurred in Banas – Prandstetter, Marianske Lazne 1978, when instead of 15.♕a4?, White should have played 15.♘e4!N ♗xb3 16.♘xc5 ♗xc2† 17.♔xc2 ♗xc5 18.♖hf1 with a level endgame.

14...♕xf2!?N leads to sharp play: 15.♕xb4 ♕xg2 16.♖e1 ♕xf3† 17.♔c1∞ Black is a pawn up, but his king is less than safe. White has been deprived of castling rights, but he has a plan to activate the queen's rook with a2-a4 and ♖a3. The position is unclear and roughly balanced.

15.♘xd4 ♕xd4

Watson concludes that Black's chances may be marginally higher. I decided to analyse a few moves further.



16.♔c1□

It is essential to play this before a black rook arrives on d8.

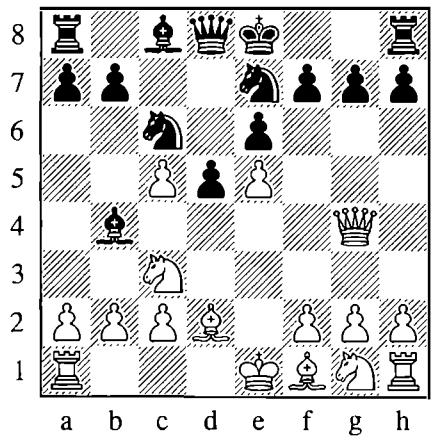
16...0–0 17.♗e3

This move is also pretty much forced.

17...♕g4 18.♖d1 ♖d8

Black has about enough compensation for the pawn in this double-edged position. White still has to find a way to bring his rook into play, but Black is also taking some risks, being a pawn down with two further weak pawns on the queenside.

E) 7.♗d2



This is the main line by far.

7...0–0

After this standard reply, the two major options for White are 8.♘f3 and 8.0–0–0, which will be analysed in the next chapter. In the remaining part of the present chapter we will deal with the sidelines **E1) 8.f4?** and **E2) 8.♗d3!?**.

8.a3?! is deservedly rare and after 8...♗xc5 Black is already better. White has helped Black to get his bishop out of danger and now Black threatens the e5-pawn. 9.♘f3 ♘g6 10.♕g3 This was Nygren – A. Spielmann, Stockholm 2003, and here 10...♕c7N∓ would have preserved Black's advantage.

E1) 8.f4?

Supporting the centre in this way is not to be recommended for White in this line. Instead the first player should keep the lines a supropen for his pieces, and even be ready to sacrifice the e5-pawn for active play. The text move weakens the light squares without helping White's development. Black has several routes to a favourable position, but the following is my favourite.

8...b6!N

Now White faces a difficult choice between a further opening of the position, or allowing Black to obtain an ideal pawn centre. Black's last move also prepares the development of the c8-bishop, the only problem piece in his position.

8...d4N looks tempting, but after 9.♘e4 ♗xd2† 10.♘xd2 the situation is not entirely clear. Black has an objectively good position, but the problem of the c8-bishop remains.

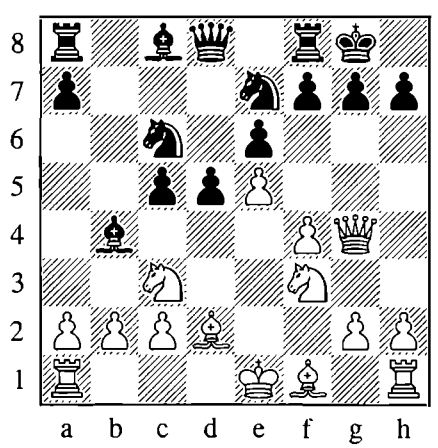
9.♘f3

9.cxb6 ♕xb6† gives Black tremendous activity for the pawn, and White will struggle to complete development and get his king to safety. Any attempt to obtain counterplay with ♗d3 can be dismissed by ...♗a6 exchanging the bishop.

9.a3 can be met by 9...♗xc3 10.♗xc3 bxc5∓ when Black has a powerful pawn centre and better development.

9...bxc5

Black has the makings of an excellent game, with a strong centre and future play along the b-file. White's only real chance is to attempt an attack on the kingside.



10.♗d3 f5!

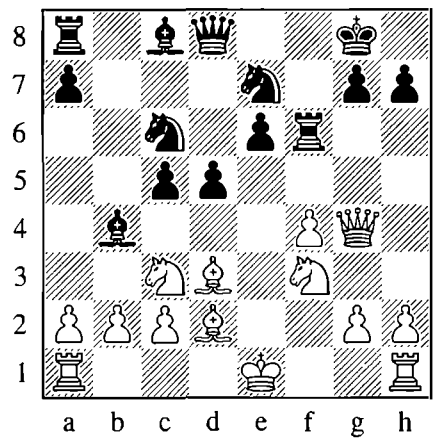
Preventing the obvious threat to take on h7.

11.exf6

11.♕h3 c4∓

11...♖xf6

Black has sufficient resources to defend, and White must worry about both ...e5 and ...c4.

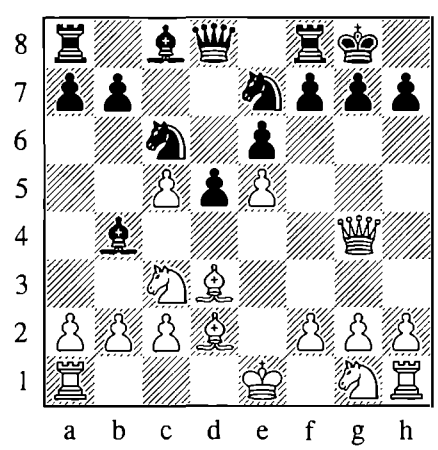


12.♕h4

12.a3 e5 13.♕h5 ♖h6 14.♕g5 e4∓

12...♖h6 13.♕f2 c4 14.♗e2 ♕a5∓

E2) 8.♗d3!?



A tricky move. White aims for a quick attack on the kingside and is ready to sacrifice a piece as shown in the next note.

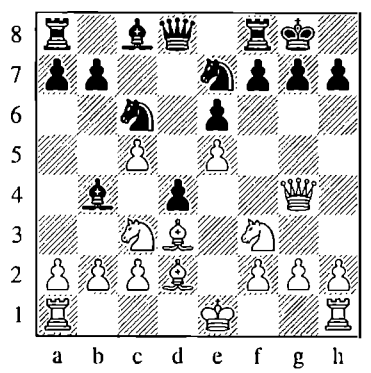
8...f5!

This has not been the highest-scoring move, but I believe it is the strongest. I would like to present some analysis of the two main alternatives, to enable the reader to get an understanding of White's ideas.

8...d4?

This sharp and interesting continuation has scored four wins and a draw out of five games. I once played it myself (in the one drawn game!) but after investigating it more deeply afterwards I discovered that White is better.

9.♘f3!



This piece sacrifice is the point of White's play, and the only move not to give Black an easy advantage.

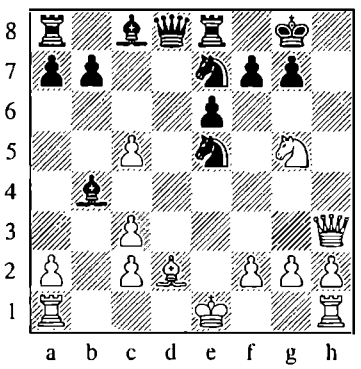
9...dxc3 10.bxc3

Now if Black wants to save his bishop he must give up his queen for three minor pieces. In material terms this is not bad at all, but White also gets the initiative and a clear advantage.

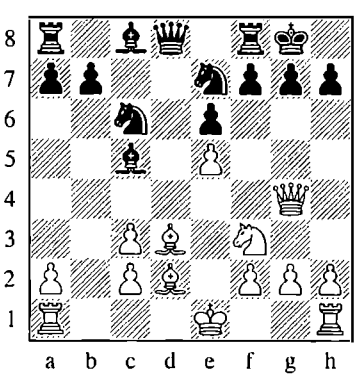
10...♗xc5

This was a novelty when I played it in 2002. It seemed to offer quite promising chances, but the computers show that White is better.

10...♘xe5? is bad in view of 11.♗xh7† ♔xh7 Couso – Solak, Chalkidiki 2002. Now 12.♕h3†!N would be a significant improvement. 12...♔g8 13.♘g5 ♖e8 (After 13...♕xd2† 14.♔xd2 ♖d8† 15.♔e2 the c3-pawn is protected by the queen, which makes a huge difference. White is already winning.)



14.♕h7† ♔f8 15.♕h8† ♘g8 16.♘h7† ♔e7 17.♗g5† ♘f6 (17...f6? 18.♕xg7† ♘f7 19.♗xf6† ♘xf6 20.♕xf6† ♔d7 21.♖d1†+–) 18.♗xf6† ♔d7 19.♖d1† ♔c6 20.♕xg7 ♗xc3† 21.♔e2 ♕a5 22.♖d6† ♔xc5 23.♗xe5 After a long forced line White emerges with a won position.



11.♗xh7† ♔xh7 12.♕h5† ♔g8 13.♘g5 ♕xd2†

13...♖e8?? loses to 14.♕h7† ♔f8 15.♕h8† ♘g8 16.♘h7† ♔e7 17.♗g5† ♘f6 18.♕xg7! when Black's position collapses.

14.♔xd2 ♖d8† 15.♔e1!N

15.♔e2 was better for White in Couso – Berg, Stockholm 2002, but the text move is even stronger.

15...♘g6 16.h4±

The point of moving the king to e1 is revealed, as there is no fork on f4. 16.♖d1± is also excellent for White; either way, Black is too slow in creating active counterplay with his minor pieces.

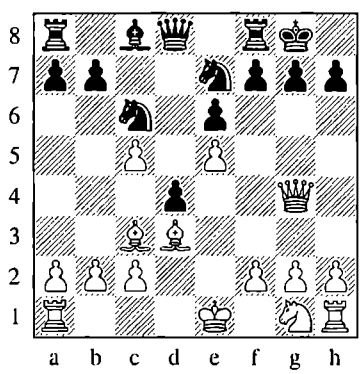
8...♗xc3?!

This is the main recommendation of Watson, and another move that I have tried in my own praxis. At first I thought it was a simple way for Black to get a small advantage, but further analysis convinced me it is actually White who is better.

9.♗xc3

9.bxc3? ♘xe5 10.♗xh7† ♔xh7 11.♕h5† ♔g8 12.♕xe5 f6 13.♕h5 ♕c7∓ was advantageous for Black in Couso – Berg, Gothenburg 2004. Black has the better pawn structure and a strong centre.

9...d4



10.0–0–0!N

10.♗d2?! ♘xe5 11.♗xh7† ♔xh7 12.♕h5† ♔g8 13.♕xe5 occurred in Van der Veen – Wempe, Hoogeveen 2004, and here 13...f6N∓ followed by ...e5 would have given Black a stable plus thanks to his strong pawn centre.

The text move is a powerful novelty. Black gets a material advantage by trading his queen for a rook and two minor pieces, but White obtains an initiative and attacking possibilities on the kingside.

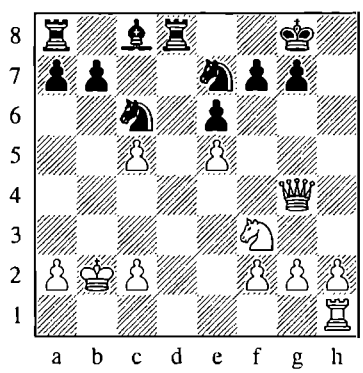
10...dxc3

The only critical try. Other moves will just leave Black worse.

11.♗xh7† ♔xh7 12.♖xd8

White can also play the speculative 12.♘f3!? when the queen still doesn't run away. 12...♘d5 (12...♔g8 13.♘g5†) 13.♕h5† ♔g8 14.♘g5 cxb2† 15.♔b1 (15.♔xb2? ♘f6!–+) 15...♘c3† 16.♔xb2 ♘xd1† 17.♖xd1 ♕xg5 18.♕xg5 f6 19.exf6 ♖xf6 Materially speaking the position is pretty equal. However, Black's lack of development might well give White time to create an attack.

12...cxb2† 13.♔xb2 ♖xd8 14.♘f3 ♔g8



15.h4!

By pushing the h-pawn forward White will get all his pieces in the attack, and according to my analyses White is better. At first glance everything seems okay for Black, but as you look deeper it tends to get worse and worse. Watson only gives 15.♕h5 followed by a sharp line that ends up in an equal endgame.

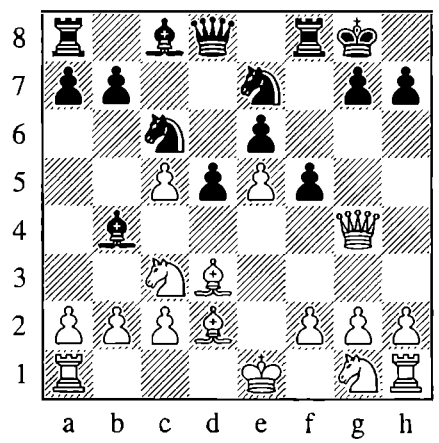
15...♘f5 16.h5 ♘h6 17.♕e4 ♘e7

17...♖d5 18.c4 ♖xc5 19.♖d1 gives White full control over the d-file and Black is in serious trouble. A simple yet instructive line that highlights his lack of coordination is: 19...b6?? 20.♕xc6!! ♖xc6 21.♖d8† ♔h7 22.♘g5#

18.g4

Planning ♘g5 with a strong attack.

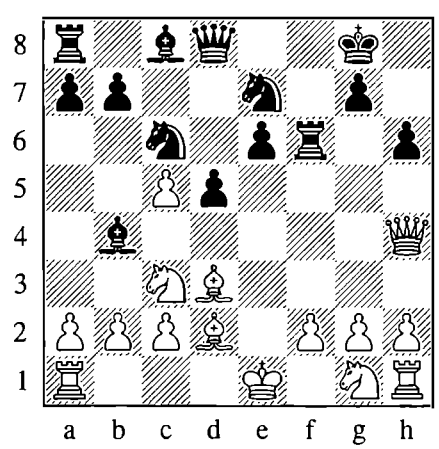
Having discussed the inferior options, let us return to the correct 8...f5!.



9.exf6 ♖xf6

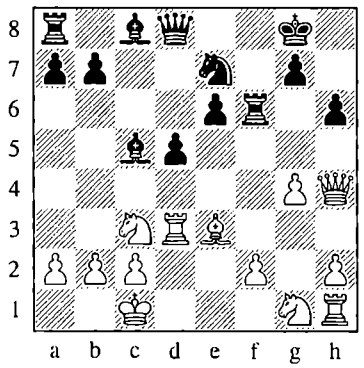
From this position **E21) 10.♕h4** is occasionally played, but the main move is **E22) 10.0–0–0**.

E21) 10.♕h4 h6



11.f4

11.g4 is ambitious but not good: 11...♗xc5 12.0–0–0 ♘e5 13.♗e3 ♘xd3† 14.♖xd3 This position occurred in Meister – Machelett, Germany 2008, and here I found a way to improve Black's play:



14...♘g6N 15.♕h5 (15.♕g3?! ♗d6 16.♕g2 ♘e5∓; 15.♕h3? d4! 16.♘e4 e5∓) 15...♗xe3† 16.fxe3 ♗d7 17.♘ge2 ♗e8 Black is slightly better.

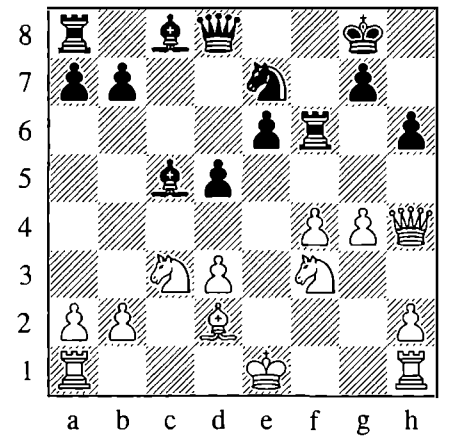
11...♗xc5 12.♘f3 ♘b4 13.g4?!

This aggressive move looks critical, and it led to an eventual victory for White in the one practical encounter. Black certainly has to be careful and defend well, but if he succeeds he will stand better.

13.♘e5N is more prudent, although after 13...♘xd3† 14.♘xd3 b6 15.0–0–0 ♗b7 I slightly prefer Black thanks to his better piece coordination. The white bishop is stuck behind the f4-pawn and the c3-knight still needs to find a suitable outpost. Black's unopposed light-squared bishop might also become strong as the game unfolds.

13...♘xd3† 14.cxd3

Now in Findlay – Short, Ayr 1978, Black elected to put his queen on f8, but I would like to propose another idea:



14...♗d6!N 15.g5

15.♕g3 ♖f8!

Retreating the rook avoids g4-g5 coming with tempo.

15...g5!? might also be good, but involves a lot of risk in a practical game.

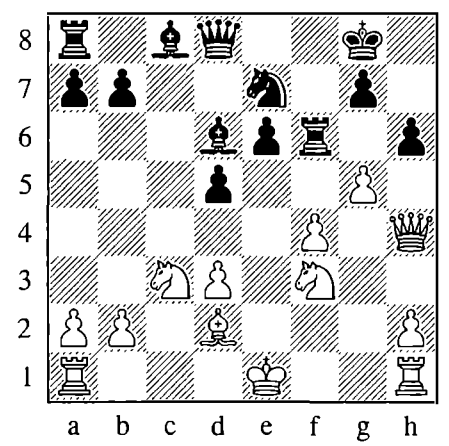
16.♘e5

16.0–0–0 ♕c7∓

16.g5 ♘f5∓ gives Black good control.

16...♗xe5 17.fxe5 ♕c7∓

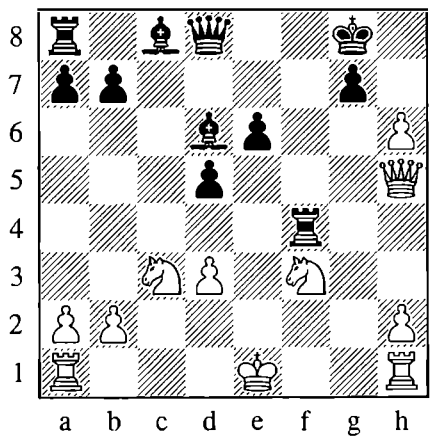
Now White's long castling is prevented and his king will be stuck in the centre for a while. At the same time the e5-pawn becomes a target.



15...♘g6! 16.♕h5

16.♕g4 hxg5 17.fxg5 e5 18.♕h5 ♖f8 19.♘h4 (19.0–0–0 ♗f5∓) 19...♘xh4 20.♕xh4 ♗f5 21.♕h5 g6 22.♕e2 ♗c5∓

16...♘xf4 17.♗xf4 ♖xf4 18.gxh6



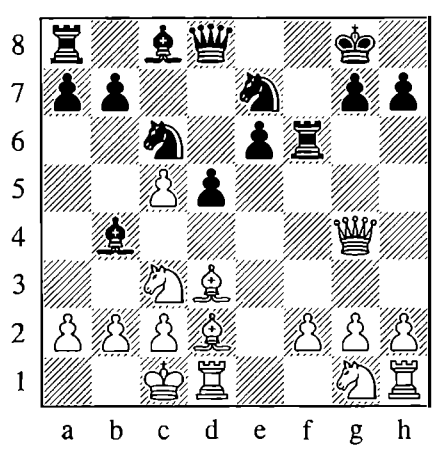
18...♖f5!

Leading by force to a favourable endgame.

19.♕g6 ♕f6 20.♕e8† ♕f8 21.♕xf8† ♖xf8 22.♘b5 ♗b8 23.♖c1 ♗f4 24.hxg7 ♖f7 25.♖c2 ♗d7 26.♘c3 ♖xg7

With two bishops against two knights on a largely open board, Black has decent winning chances in this endgame.

E22) 10.0–0–0



10...h6!

A useful prophylactic move.

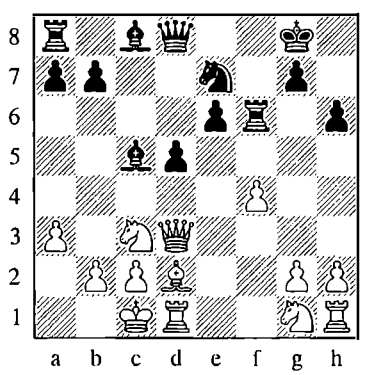
The more popular 10...e5 gives White concrete counterplay after 11.♕h5 when 11...h6 can be met by 12.g4 (or 12.f4).

11.♕h5

Moving the queen out of the bishop's firing line is certainly logical. I considered two other moves:

11.♘f3 occurred in Forsaa – Grover, Reykjavik 2011, and here I favour the simple 11...♗xc5N when it is hard to find much dynamic counterplay for White. Apart from the obvious plan of ...e5, Black is also ready to play ...♘b4 to exchange off the strong bishop and take the sting out of White's attack.

11.f4N is an untested but quite logical move. Play may continue as follows: 11...♗xc5 12.♕g3 ♘b4 13.a3 ♘xd3† 14.♕xd3



14...e5!? An active move making good use of Black's development advantage. (The simple 14...♗d7= is also perfectly fine.) 15.fxe5 ♗f5 16.♕b5 (16.♕e2 ♖c6⩱) 16...♖c6↑ Black has full compensation for the sacrificed pawn in view of his bishop pair and piece activity.

11...♗d7

11...e5 transposes to 10...e5 as noted above, which I prefer to avoid.

A more interesting alternative is:

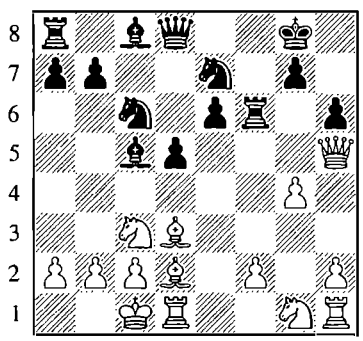
11...♗xc5!?N

This has not yet been played, but it seems like a worthy alternative to the main line.

12.g4!?

After 12.f4 ♘b4∓ White will not reach e5 with the knight in time to recapture with the knight on d3. Moving the bishop would also be a concession from White, so Black can already claim some advantage.

The text move is perhaps most critical, but Black has a convincing counter.



12...♘b4! 13.♗e2

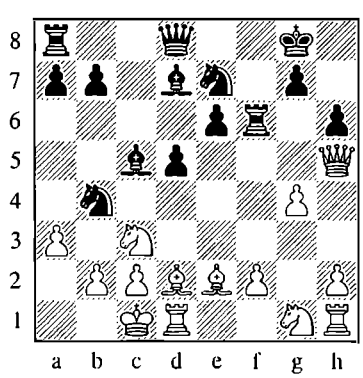
White needs to preserve his light-squared bishop in order to have any real hope of success on the kingside. However, this move loses time and Black gets a favourable position.

13...♗d7

Intending ...♗e8. It is worth pointing out the following line.

14.a3

14.g5 hxg5∓



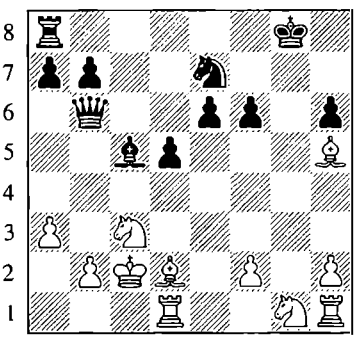
14...♘xc2! 15.♔xc2 ♕b6

Black has sacrificed a knight for a pawn, but the white king is in serious trouble. The primary threat is ...♗e8-g6†, but also the simple ...♖c8 followed by ...d4 causes trouble.

16.g5 ♗e8 17.gxf6

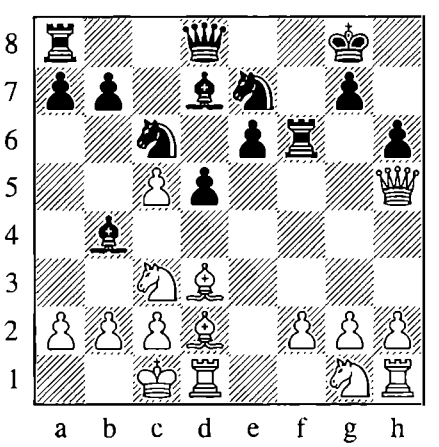
17.♕h3 ♖xf2-+ gives Black a serious attack.

17...♗xh5 18.♗xh5 gxf6



19.♘a4 ♕c6 20.♘xc5 ♕xc5† 21.♔b1 d4

The material balance is rather irregular, but Black has the initiative and the better chances overall. Therefore I can recommend 11...♗xc5!?N as a promising new path, and will leave it to the reader to decide if he prefers it over the main line, which is, by the way, also quite pleasant for Black.



12.♘f3

The other knight development does not impress:

12.♘h3?!

Strenzwilk – Ritvin, Washington DC 1999. The only logic behind this move is that, contrary to having the knight on f3, White can still push his kingside pawns. However, Black does well after the simple improvement:

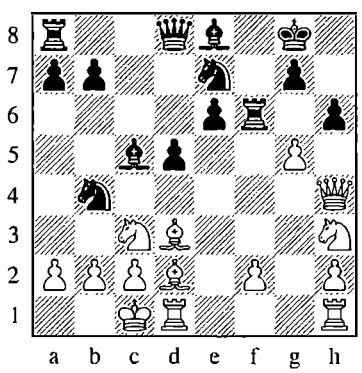
12...♗xc5N 13.g4?

Consistent, but not good.

The lesser evil is: 13.♘f4N ♘b4 14.♔b1 ♖c8∓

13...♗e8 14.♕h4 ♘b4 15.g5

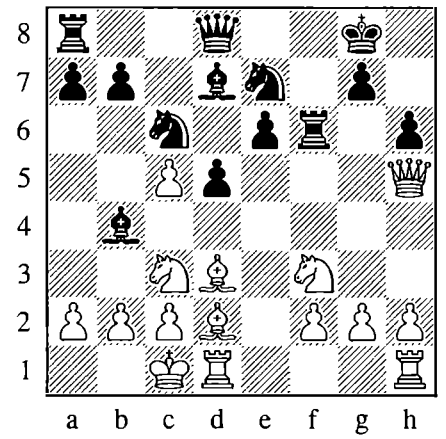
15.♗e2 ♕b6∓



15...♘xd3† 16.cxd3 ♘f5 17.♕g4 h5∓

White is positionally worse and has no attack whatsoever.

12.f4!?N also comes into consideration, although it loses some of its force when Black has not committed himself with ...e5. A possible continuation is: 12...♗xc5 13.♘f3 ♘b4 14.♘e5 ♘xd3† (14...♖c8!?) 15.♘xd3 ♗d6= (15...♖f5!?) A balanced position has arisen. I believe Black should be fine as White's attack is not dangerous following the elimination of the light-squared bishop.



12...♗xc5N

This simple move improves over Black's play in Bengtsson – Renman, Linkoping 1984, in which 12...♕f8 occurred.

13.♔b1 ♕e8!

Black will benefit from exchanging queens, since White's whole set-up is based on creating a kingside attack.

14.♕h4 a6!

A useful move that takes the b5-square away from White's knight. Now the bishop can be securely placed on d6 to support the centre when necessary. Black is slightly better, as White lacks good squares for his pieces and he is unable to create meaningful threats on the kingside.

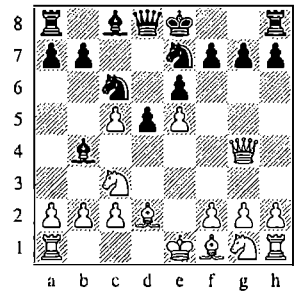
Conclusion

Variations A, B and C are harmless at best, and Black obtains at least equal play without much difficulty. The fourth sideline is more interesting although we saw that Black has a choice of acceptable lines.

We finished by looking at the most common continuation, 7.♗d2 0–0. Then 8.f4 is just bad for White, but 8.♗d3!? is quite a respectable sideline that demands an accurate response. My analysis has demonstrated that 8...f5! is the correct way, and should lead to at least an equal position for Black.



5.♕g4



Main Lines with 8.0–0–0 and 8.♘f3

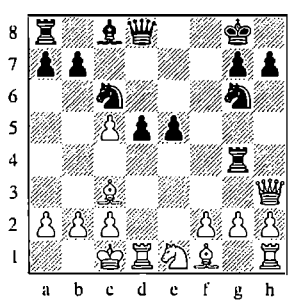
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♕g4 ♘e7 6.dxc5 ♘bc6 7.♗d2

7...0–0

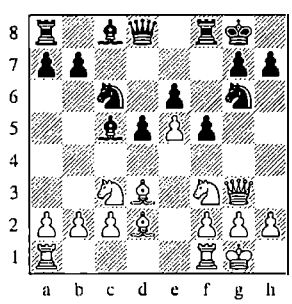
A) 8.0–0–0 174
A1) 8...b6!? 175
A2) 8...f5! 177
B) 8.♘f3 f5 179
B1) 9.♕g3 179
B2) 9.♕h5 180
B3) 9.♕h4 181
B4) 9.exf6 182

A2) after 16.♘e1



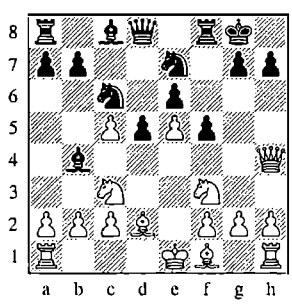
16...♖d4!?N

B1) after 11.0–0



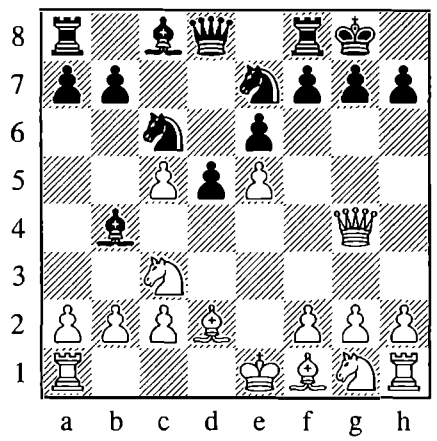
11...♘d4!N

B3) after 9.♕h4



9...♕c7!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♕g4 ♘e7 6.dxc5 ♘bc6 7.♗d2 0–0



In this, the third and final chapter on 5.♕g4 lines, we will deal with White's two most important moves in the present position, namely **A) 8.0–0–0** and **B) 8.♘f3**.

A) 8.0–0–0

From this position I considered three main continuations for Black. Initially I thought they all seemed promising, but a deeper investigation revealed some strong ideas for White. I will discuss both **A1) 8...b6!?** and **A2) 8...f5!**, while making it clear that the latter is my recommendation.

The other candidate is:

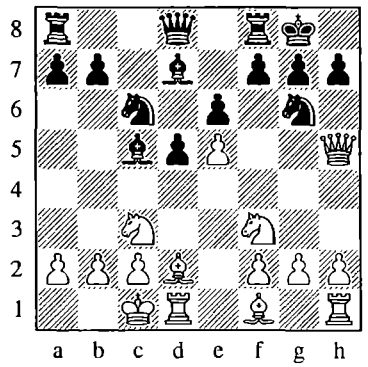
8...♗xc5

Not only regaining the pawn but also removing the bishop from the fourth rank, thereby making ...♘xe5 a threat. Unfortunately I found that White has quite dangerous attacking prospects, and will present a short summary of my analysis.

9.♘f3 ♘g6

9...f5!? 10.exf6 ♖xf6 is possible, and may actually be Black's best bet. However, if we are heading for this type of position I would prefer 8...f5! a move earlier, in order to keep some flexibility for the bishop on b4.

10.♕h5 ♗d7



11.♔b1!

This move has the concrete idea of playing ♗d3 next without allowing ...♘b4xd3 with check. White has quite a few dangerous attacking ideas while Black is forced to grab material and defend.

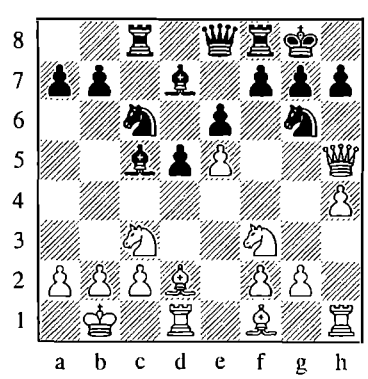
11...♕e8

Intending to defend with ...f5.

I analysed 11...♘ce7 in some depth, but the short version is that I could not fully solve Black's problems after 12.♗d3 (or 12.h4!?N). 11...♗xf2N is a principled decision, but one entailing obvious risks. 12.♗d3 ♗e8 Preparing for ...f5. 13.♖hf1 (13.♕h3!?) 13...♗c5 14.♘e2 h6 15.g4 White has excellent attacking prospects.

12.h4 ♖c8

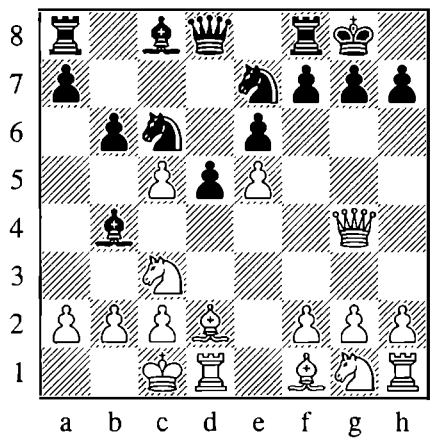
12...♗xf2N is the critical test, but again it looks risky after 13.♘b5 ♕b8 14.♗c3 when White has a strong initiative for the small price of a pawn.



13.♗e3!N

Improving on 13.♘g5?! h6 14.♘f3 f5 15.exf6 ♖xf6 when Black was better in Movsesian – Bukal, Medulin 1997. The text move preserves some initiative for White. Black is not without chances, but ultimately this position is not one I would recommend.

A1) 8...b6!?



This is a thematic move which we have come across quite a few times, and it is especially attractive after White has committed himself to long castling. At this particular moment, however, we should be aware of a sharp tactical possibility by White.

9.♗g5!

This move has only been played twice, but it contains a lot of poison. White's crude but effective threat is to put the bishop on f6.

Since this line is not my main recommendation for Black, I will not discuss White's less critical moves, other than to say that Black is doing well against all of them.

9...♕d7

I considered three other moves for Black.

9...♗xc3? is an error due to: 10.♗f6! ♗xb2† (After 10...g6? 11.bxc3+– the dark-square weaknesses are fatal.) 11.♔xb2 g6 12.♕h4 bxc5 13.♖d3 Threatening to give up the queen on h7. 13...♘f5 (13...♕b6† 14.♖b3 ♘f5 15.♖xb6 ♘xh4 16.♖xc6+–) 14.♗xd8 ♘xh4 15.♗xh4 ♗a6 16.♖d1 ♗xf1 17.♖xf1 ♘xe5 18.♗g3± Black has some compensation, but far from enough.

9...♕c7!?N 10.♘b5

10.♗xe7?! ♕xe7 11.♗b5 ♗xc3 12.♗xc6 wins a piece for White, but after 12...♗xb2† 13.♔xb2 ♖b8 Black has more than full compensation in view of White's lack of coordination and weakened king. A possible line is: 14.♖b1 ♕c7 15.♗a4 bxc5† 16.♔c1 ♖xb1† 17.♔xb1 ♗a6∓ Black has a great initiative. It should also be mentioned that the bishop on a4 can be caught at any moment for the price of the c-pawn.

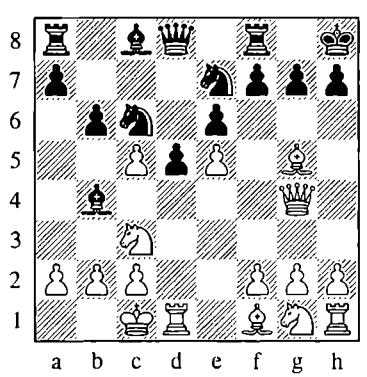
10...♕d7

Now the b5-square is blocked by the knight, avoiding ♗b5. Nevertheless, White can fight for the initiative in other ways.

11.cxb6 ♗c5 12.♘f3 axb6 13.♔b1 ♗xf2 14.h4!↑

9...♔h8

This prevents the immediate threat, but White can cause problems with:



10.♖d3!N

The rook will quickly swing to the kingside, creating nasty threats.

10.♗d3 was also quite promising for White in Pavlovic – Sadorra, Richardson 2011. At this point, instead of 10...♕e8 allowing 11.♘b5 with tempo, Black should have gone for 10...♕d7N although the position still looks pretty dangerous for him.

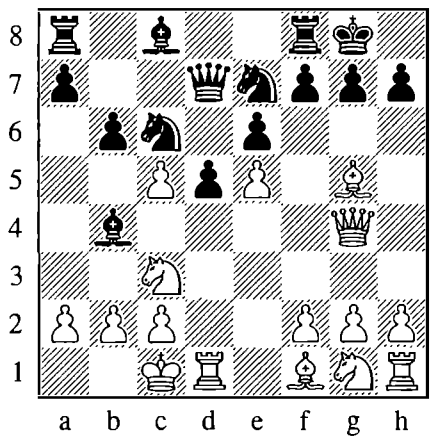
10...f6

After 10...♗xc3?! 11.♖xc3 f6 (11...♘xe5? 12.♕h5 followed by ♖h3 is killing) 12.exf6 gxf6 13.♖h3! White has a dangerous attack and is also a pawn up.

11.exf6 gxf6 12.♕h5↑

White has a strong initiative.

Let's return to 9...♕d7. The queen steps out of one pin but immediately enters a new one.



10.♗b5!

Attempting to exploit the loose knights.

10...♗xc5N

It is essential for Black to improve on the following game:

10...♗xc3? 11.♗xc6 ♕xc6 12.♗xe7 ♗xe5 13.♘f3 ♗c7

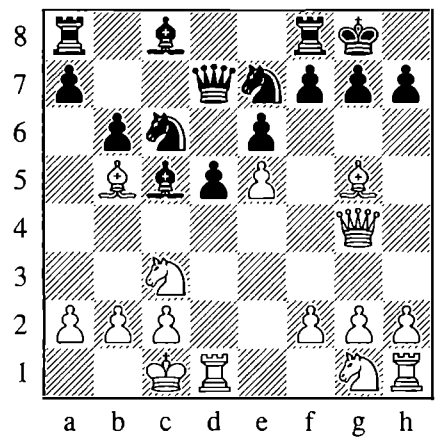
Recuero Guerra – Nabaty, Fermo 2009. Now instead of taking on f8 immediately, White could have prevented unnecessary counterplay with:

14.♘d4!N ♕e8 15.♗xf8

Also interesting is 15.♗f6!? g6 16.♕g5 ♗d8 17.c6 ♗xf6 18.♕xf6 ♕d8 19.♕xd8 ♖xd8 20.♖he1± when White is dominating the bishop in the endgame.

15...♕xf8 16.c6 e5 17.♕g3±

With a significant material plus for White.



11.♘f3

Black is behind in development with his bishop still on c8, and will have to watch out for numerous tactics after ♗d3.

11.♘e4 may seem tempting, but after 11...♘g6! Black is doing fine.

11.b4!?

This is the top choice of my Houdini 3 engine, but I would not fear it. Black is forced to give up material, but he has two ways of ensuring adequate compensation.

11...♘xe5!?

11...♗xb4 is also sufficient: 12.♕xb4 f6 13.exf6 gxf6 14.♗h6 (14.♕h4 fxg5 15.♕xg5† ♔h8 is also fine for Black.) 14...♘xb4 15.♗xd7 ♗xd7 16.♗xf8 ♔xf8∞ Black has a pawn for the exchange as well as a strong centre. The position is about equal.

12.♕g3 ♕c7 13.♗f6 ♘f5! 14.♗xe5 ♕e7 15.♕d3 ♗xb4∓

Black has compensation in view of two extra central pawns and attacking chances against White's vulnerable king.

11...a6

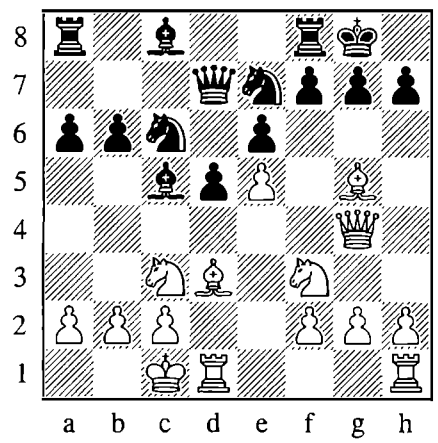
This seems best.

11...♗b7?? is a serious error. Black is simply too slow after 12.♗f6 ♘g6 13.h4! with the point 13...gxf6 14.♘xd5! ♘cxe5 15.♘xe5 ♕xb5 16.h5+– and the attack crushes through.

11...♕c7 looks playable, but White has some initiative and attacking chances after 12.♗xc6 (12.♖he1!?) 12...♕xc6 13.♗xe7 ♗xe7 14.♘d4 ♕c4 15.♖d3† swinging the rook over to the kingside.

12.♗d3

White's kingside build-up looks quite intimidating, but Black may still be okay.



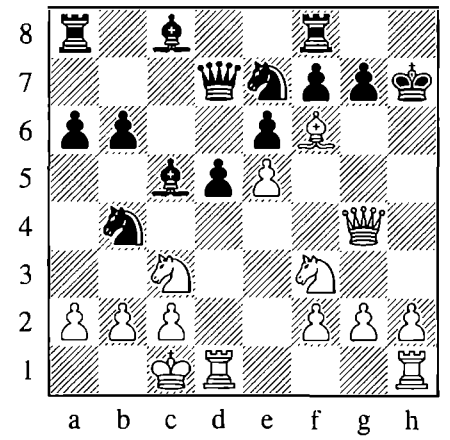
12...♘b4??

I mention this move purely for illustrative purposes to highlight the dangers.

Instead 12...♘g6! should be played, intending 13.♕g3 ♘gxe5! which turns out okay for Black.

13.♗xh7†! ♔xh7 14.♗f6!

After this key move Black's defences swiftly collapse.



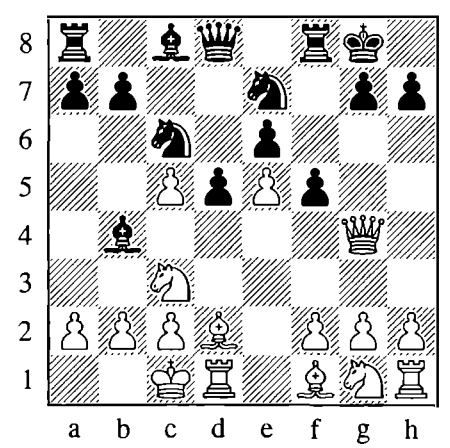
14...♘g6

14...♘f5 15.♕h5† ♔g8 16.g4! also wins.

15.♕h5† ♔g8 16.♘g5 ♖d8 17.♕h7† ♔f8 18.♕xg7† ♔e8 19.♗xd8 ♗f8 20.♕g8+–

Overall I have mixed feelings about 8...b6!?. Strictly speaking it may well be fine, as long as Black plays the improvement given in the note to move 12 above. Nevertheless, I do not feel altogether comfortable allowing the white pieces to congregate on the kingside. For this reason I have focused most of my attention on the following alternative, which I believe to be safer and easier to handle.

A2) 8...f5!



9.exf6 ♖xf6 10.♘f3

10.♗d3 takes us back to line E22 of the previous chapter on page 170.

The present position can also be reached via the 8.♘f3 move order, as pointed out later on page 182.

10...e5 11.♕h5

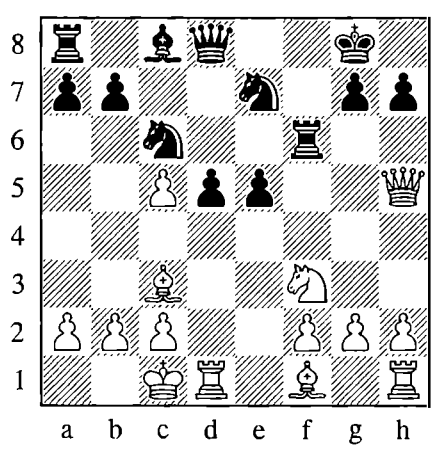
11.♕g3?! occurred in Unglaub – Schloegel, corr. 1994, and here the natural 11...♘f5N should lead to an edge for Black, for instance: 12.♕g5 ♗e6 13.g4 h6 14.♕h5 ♗f7 15.♕h3 ♘fd4 16.♘xd4 exd4 17.♘b1 ♖xf2∓

11...♗xc3

Watson recommends 11...♖f5 and, after analysing it in some detail, I would agree that it is fully playable and gives Black good chances. The text move is also quite healthy though, and does not involve as many complicated variations.

12.♗xc3

12.bxc3?? ♕a5 gives White a horrible pawn structure and his position is actually already lost. The one practical example was over quickly: 13.♘xe5 (13.♔b2 ♗f5–+ would not have survived for long either.) 13...♕xa2 14.♗g5 ♖xf2 15.♕e8† ♖f8 16.♕h5 ♘xe5 17.♗xe7 ♗f5 0–1 Van der Veen – Barsov, Haarlem 1999.



12...♖f5 13.♕g4

13.♕h4 ♖f4 14.♕g3 transposes, as does 13.♕h3 ♖f4 14.♕g3.

13...♖f4 14.♕g3

14.♕g5 only helps Black after 14...h6, which is a useful move to have played.

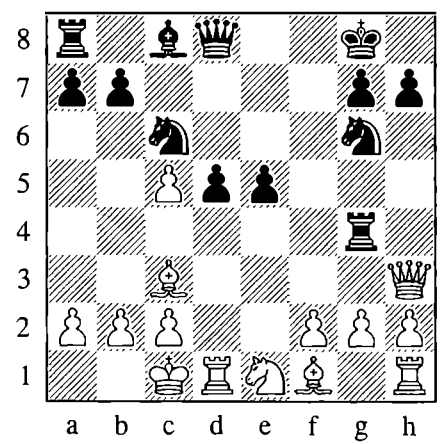
14...♖g4 15.♕h3 ♘g6!?

15...♖f4 is possible, forcing a repetition of moves.

16.♘e1

16.g3? ♖d4 17.♕g2 ♖xd1† 18.♔xd1 ♗e6∓ was Van Kemenade – Spence, Great Yarmouth 2007.

Here Black has tried both ...♕e7 and ...♕f8 but instead I would like to propose a novelty:



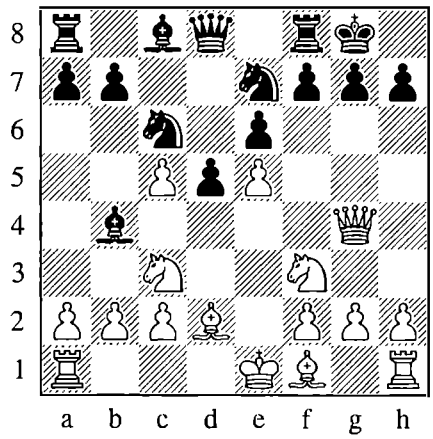
16...♖d4!?N

Luring the white king to a strange square.

17.♕g3 ♖xd1† 18.♔xd1 ♗e6

Black has an active game while White is behind in development and has a vulnerable king in the centre.

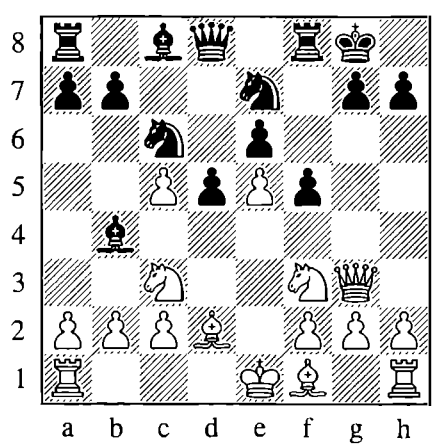
B) 8.♘f3



8...f5

8...♘g6 is a decent alternative, but I have chosen to recommend the pawn advance, partly for thematic consistency but mainly because it is simply a good move. This time White is not forced to capture en passant, and can consider **B1) 9.♕g3**, **B2) 9.♕h5**, **B3) 9.♕h4** as well as **B4) 9.exf6**.

B1) 9.♕g3



This has been the second most popular choice, but it is harmless.

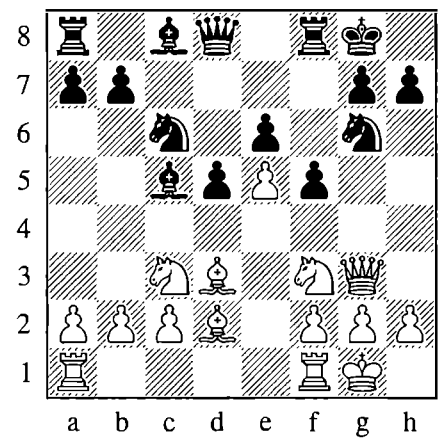
9...♘g6 10.♗d3 ♗xc5

10...d4 seems playable but is not my first choice.

11.0–0

11.♘e2N ♕c7 12.♗c3 ♖d8! gives Black an edge; the idea is ...d4 and ...♘cxe5.

Here I found an improvement over the game Rosenhahn – Peglau, corr. 1979.



11...♘d4!N

By exchanging the knight on f3, Black makes the d4-square available for his bishop.

12.♘e2

This rather ugly move is the computer's top choice.

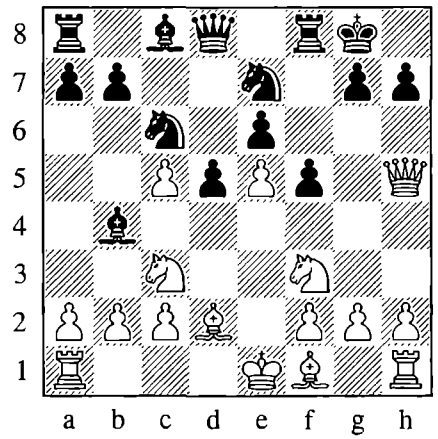
After 12.♘xd4 ♗xd4 13.♖ae1 ♗d7∓ the pressure against the e5-pawn is quite unpleasant.

12.♖ae1 ♘xf3† 13.♕xf3 ♗d7∓ is a similar story, and may transpose after 14.♕g4 ♗d4.

12...♘xf3† 13.gxf3 ♗d7∓

White has solved the problem of the e5-pawn as he has the f3-f4 move available, but his kingside structure has been damaged and Black's chances are higher.

B2) 9.♕h5



9...d4!

9...♗d7 10.a3 ♗xc5 11.♗d3 ♕e8 12.♕xe8 ♖axe8 was equal in Roth – Chin, Dubai 1986, but Black can aim for more.

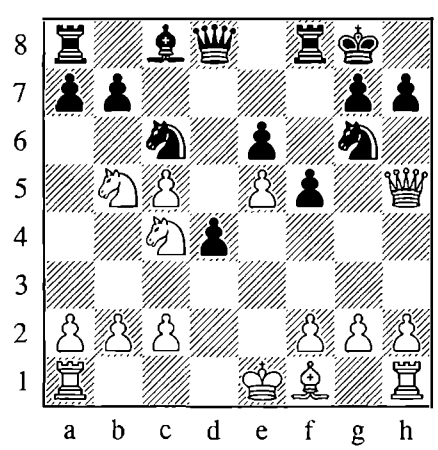
10.♘b5 ♗xd2† 11.♘xd2 ♘g6

This works well, but the interesting novelty 11...b6!?N may be just as promising, so Black is already spoiled for choice.

12.♘c4N

The only challenging move, but Black has a strong counter.

12.♘b3?! b6! 13.cxb6 (13.0–0–0 bxc5 14.♘xc5 ♕b6 15.♘b3 ♖d8 transposes) 13...♕xb6 14.0–0–0 ♖d8∓ gave Black excellent play in Scribner – Thompson, corr. 1988.

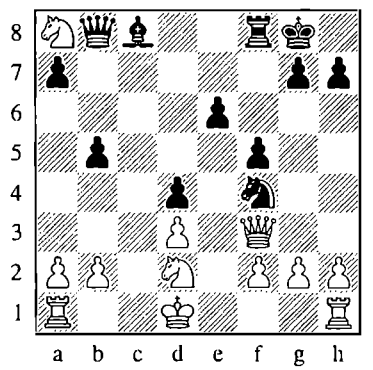


12...♕d5! 13.♘c7 ♕xc5 14.♘xa8 b5 15.♘d2 ♘b4

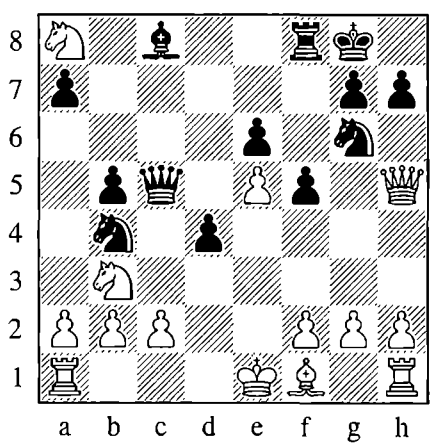
Black is temporarily a rook down, but the knight on a8 is doomed and there are many other threats.

16.♘b3

The alternative is: 16.♗d3 ♘f4 17.♕f3 ♕xe5† 18.♔d1 (18.♔f1 ♕b8!∓) 18...♘bxd3 19.cxd3 ♕b8

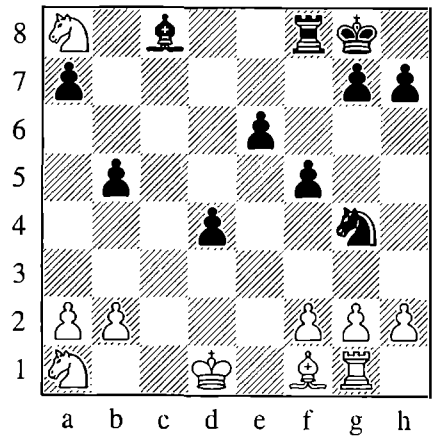


20.♖c1 (20.g3 ♗b7! 21.♕xf4 c5 22.♕g5 ♗xh1∓) 20...♗b7 21.♕g3 ♗xa8∓ Black has more than enough compensation for the exchange in view of his strong minor pieces and White's vulnerable king.



16...♕xe5† 17.♕e2 ♘xc2† 18.♔d1 ♘xa1 19.♕xe5 ♘xe5 20.♘xa1 ♘g4 21.♖g1

21.♔e1?? ♗d7 22.♘c7 ♖c8–+



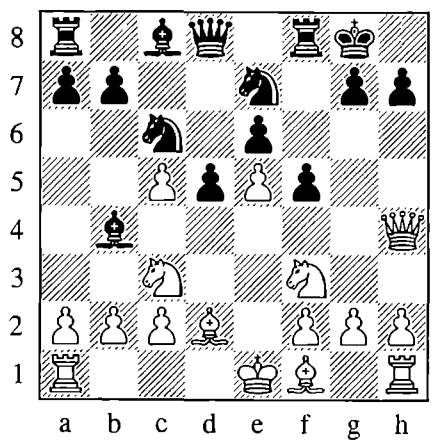
21...♘xf2† 22.♔e1 ♘e4 23.♘b3

23.♘c7 a6∓

23...e5 24.♘c7 a6

Black has three pawns for a piece so the material situation is about equal. However, the fact that we are close to an endgame leads me to favour Black slightly, as the passed pawns are more relevant.

B3) 9.♕h4



Black has a few ways to reach an advantage against this move, but the most convincing one has not yet been tested.

9...♕c7!N

Black puts immediate pressure on the e5-pawn and threatens to win it immediately with ...♘g6. According to my analysis Black will achieve at least a slight advantage without taking risks.

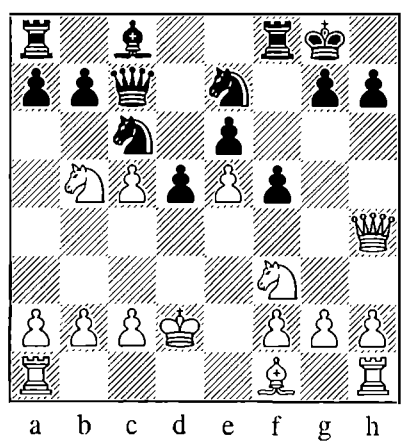
9...♘g6 and 9...d4 both give Black a good game, although the latter invites heavy complications, quite needlessly in my view. It should also be noted that 9...♗xc5?! should be avoided due to 10.♘a4!.

10.♘b5

10.0–0–0 is simply met by 10...♗xc5∓, with the point that 11.♘a4? is met by 11...♘g6 when the exchange of queens is no longer possible.

10...♗xd2† 11.♔xd2

Now this seemingly risky move is necessary. White hopes that his dark-square control will make up for the inconvenience to his king, but Black can obtain an edge by acting correctly and decisively.

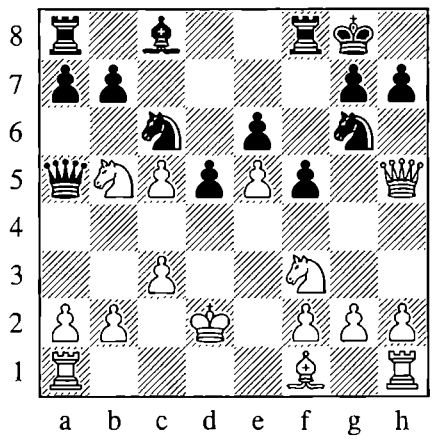


11...♕a5† 12.c3 ♘g6 13.♕h5

13.♕g3 b6!∓ is excellent for Black.

13.b4? ♕a4! 14.♕h5 a5 15.♘g5 h6 16.♘xe6 ♗xe6 17.♕xg6 ♗f7 18.♕xf5 (18.♕g3 f4!–+) 18...axb4–+ gives Black a crushing attack.

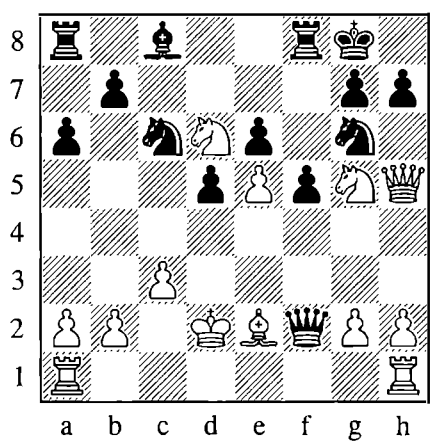
13.♕g5 may be best, but after 13...♘cxe5 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5∓ Black's chances are higher.



13...a6! 14.♘d6

14.♘bd4 ♘xd4 15.♘xd4 ♘xe5∓

14...♕xc5 15.♘g5 ♕xf2† 16.♗e2



16...h6

The only move but good enough.

17.♕xg6

17.♖hf1 ♕b6–+

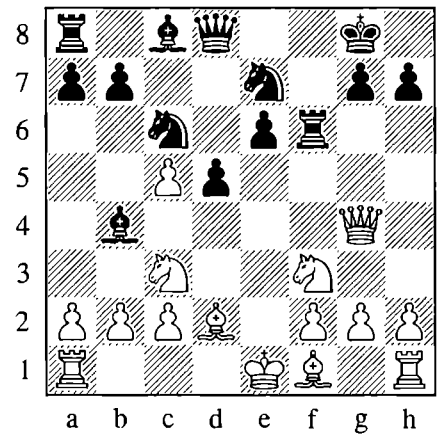
17...♕f4†

Simplest, although 17...hxg5 is also excellent for Black as 18.♕xg5? ♕b6! is nasty.

18.♔d1 ♕xg5∓

White faces a demoralizing endgame.

B4) 9.exf6 ♖xf6

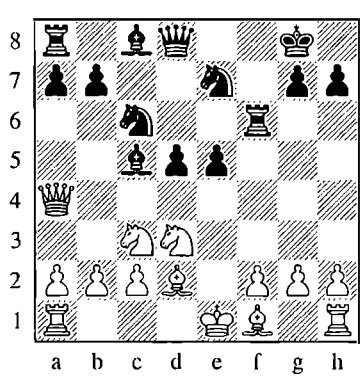


10.♗g5?

This move is worth analysing, but ultimately it is a mistake.

White can and should take the opportunity to transpose to the earlier variation A2; he can do this either with the immediate 10.0–0–0, or with 10.♕h5 e5 11.0–0–0.

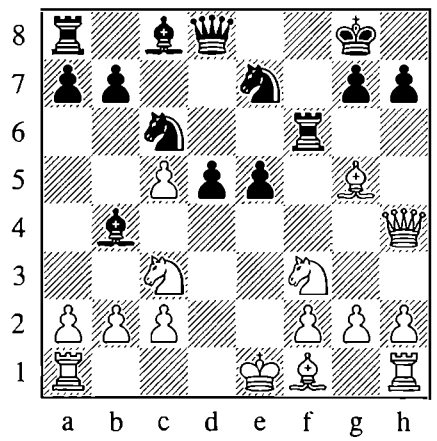
10.♘e5? led to success for White in one game but Black's play can easily be improved. 10...♗xc5 11.♘d3 e5 12.♕a4? (12.♕h4N would have been better, but Black still has a serious advantage after 12...♗d4∓.)



This was Al Modiahki – Prakken, Benasque 1999, and here 12...♗d6!N would already have been winning, for instance 13.♗g5 ♘d4! 14.♗xf6 ♗d7–+ winning the queen.

10...e5 11.♕h4?

11.♕g3N is essential, but after 11...♖e6∓ Black is doing well.



11...♗xc3†!

This move decides the game.

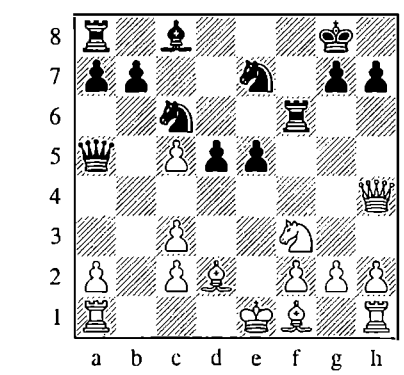
12.bxc3 ♕a5

Not too surprisingly, White is already lost.

13.♗xf6

Nothing is changed by:

13.♗d2

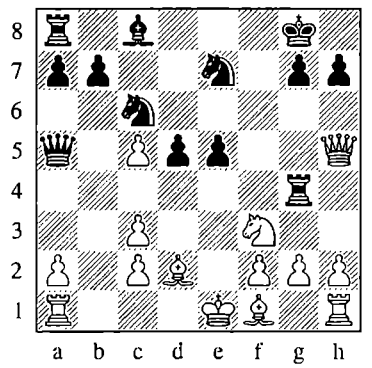


13...♖f4! 14.♕g5

Black also wins after 14.♕g3 ♖g4 15.♕h3 ♖e4† and 14.♕h5 ♗g4 15.♕g5 ♖e4† 16.♗e2 h6.

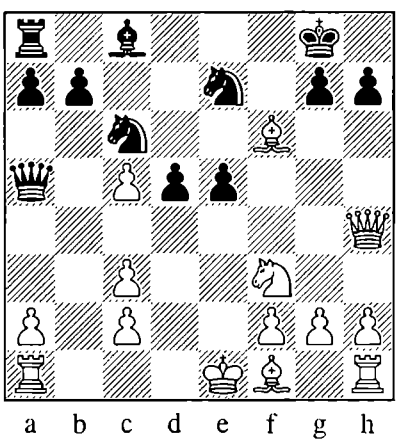
14...♖g4 15.♕h5

This was Kravtsiv – Yaremko, Rodatychi 2006, and here the most straightforward win would have been:



15...♖e4†N 16.♗e2 ♗g4 17.♕g5 h6–+

The queen has nowhere left to go.

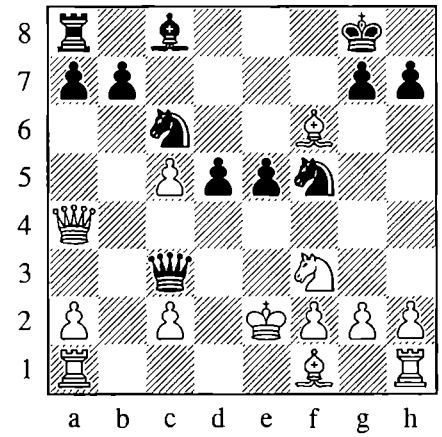


13...♕xc3† 14.♔e2

14.♔d1 ♕xa1† 15.♔d2 ♘g6 16.♕h5 ♕b2 and Black wins.

14...♘f5 15.♕a4

After 15.♕g5 ♘fd4† 16.♘xd4 ♘xd4† 17.♔d1 ♕xc2† 18.♔e1 ♕c3† White can resign.



15...♘fd4† 16.♘xd4 ♘xd4† 17.♔d1 ♗d7 18.♕xd7 ♕xc2†
0–1

Al Sayed – Filippov, Dubai 2002.

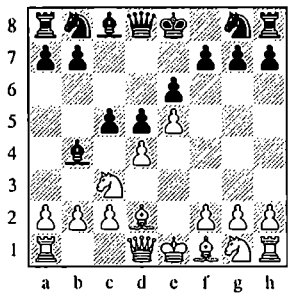
Conclusion

8.0–0–0 is quite a common move which presents Black with an interesting choice. 8...b6!? has some appealing points but the rare 9.♗g5! is dangerous and could well become the main line. Objectively Black may be fine, but I find 8...f5! to be a more prudent choice, leading to a satisfactory position with little risk.

8.♘f3 is a significant alternative, when once again 8...f5 leads to a good position for Black, regardless of whether White takes en passant or moves his queen away.



5.♗d2



Introduction

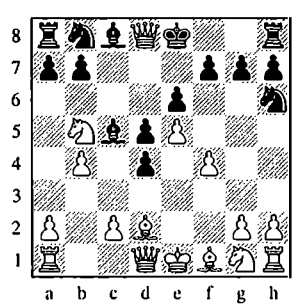
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2

5...♘h6

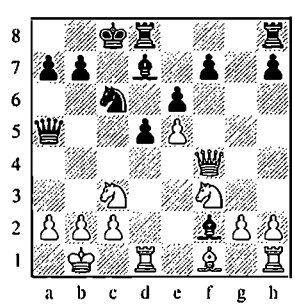
A) 6.f4?! 186
B) 6.♗d3!? 186
C) 6.dxc5 187
D) 6.♘ce2 189
E) 6.♘f3 191
F) 6.a3 ♗xc3 192
F1) 7.bxc3 192
F2) 7.♗xc3 b6 193
F21) 8.b4!? 193
F22) 8.♗b5† 194

A) after 8.b4



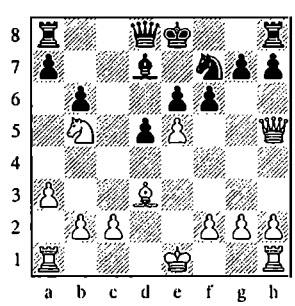
8...a6!N

C) after 13.♕f4



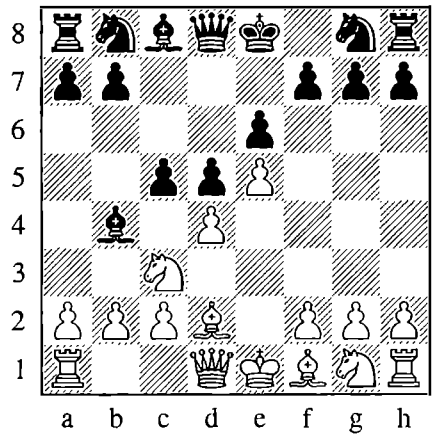
13...a6!?N

F22) after 14.♘b5



14...g6!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2



This is White's most significant deviation from 5.a3, and it has two main ideas. One obvious point is that White can avoid doubled pawns in the event of an exchange on c3. Perhaps more importantly, White unpins the knight and makes ♘b5 into quite a serious threat.

5...♘h6

This move may not be objectively better than 5...♘e7, but it is less well known and provides more room for creativity. White has tried many different responses, and the present chapter will deal with the following six: **A) 6.f4?!**, **B) 6.♗d3!?**, **C) 6.dxc5**, **D) 6.♘ce2**, **E) 6.♘f3** and **F) 6.a3**.

6.♗xh6!? is an interesting move which will receive dedicated coverage in Chapter 15.

6.♘b5 is the main line and will be analysed in Chapter 16.

A) 6.f4?!

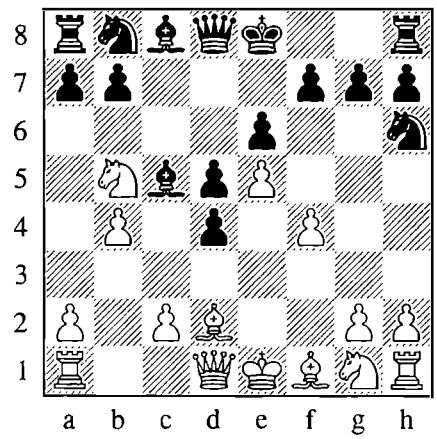
White tries to support his centre before developing his kingside pieces, but the plan is rather slow.

6...cxd4

6...♘f5!? also looks good.

7.♘b5 ♗c5 8.b4

This position occurred in Willemze – Barsov, Vlissingen 2000. Instead of retreating the bishop to e7 I suggest the improvement:



8...a6!N

This gives Black at least a slight edge, for instance:

9.bxc5 axb5 10.♘f3

10.♗xb5† ♗d7 11.♗d3 ♘a6 gives Black a plus in view of White's weakened pawn structure.

10...♗d7 11.♗d3 ♘a6 12.♘xd4 ♘xc5∓

Black is a pawn up and has somewhat better chances.

B) 6.♗d3!?

This is quite an interesting move which has been played by Leko.

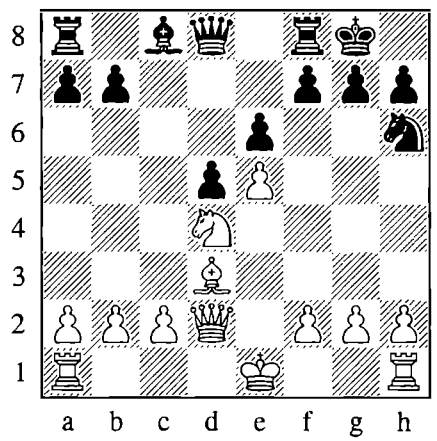
6...cxd4

This is my first choice although 6...♘c6 is also playable.

7.♘b5 ♗xd2† 8.♕xd2 0–0 9.♘xd4

White gains nothing by delaying this capture: 9.♘f3 ♘c6 10.0–0 f6 11.exf6 ♖xf6 (The spectacular 11...e5!?N is also interesting, when the game gets pretty sharp.) 12.♘bxd4 ♘xd4 13.♘xd4 e5 Black was at least equal in Sacher – Schwertel, Germany 2001.

9...♘c6 10.♘gf3 ♘xd4 11.♘xd4



11...f6!

This typical undermining move solves all Black's problems.

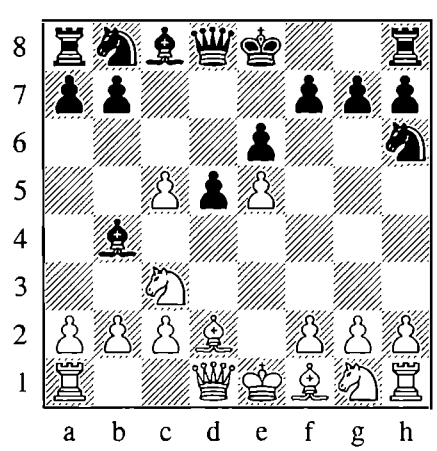
12.exf6

12.♘f3 ♘f7=

12...♕xf6 13.0–0 e5

Black was fine in Sapundjiev – Makowski, corr. 2010.

C) 6.dxc5



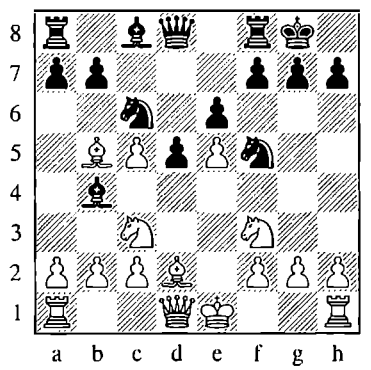
6...♘c6

I spent some time looking at 6...♘d7 but eventually decided I preferred the text move.

7.♘f3

I doubt that White has anything better than this simple move.

7.♗b5N has not yet been tried, and indeed Black seems to be fine. 7...♘f5 8.♘f3 0–0



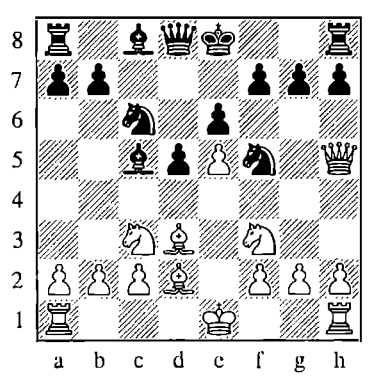
9.♘a4?! This attempt to defend c5 only leads to trouble for White. (9.0–0 ♗xc5= should be preferred.) 9...♗xd2† 10.♕xd2 ♗d7 Threatening to take on c5. 11.♘c3 d4 12.♘e2 ♘xe5∓

7.♕h5

This has been tried a few times. The queen move is quite aggressive but the position is at least as risky for White as for Black.

7...♘f5 8.♘f3 ♗xc5 9.♗d3

Here I found a promising new idea.



9...♘fd4!N

Simplifying the position and removing a defender of the e5-pawn.

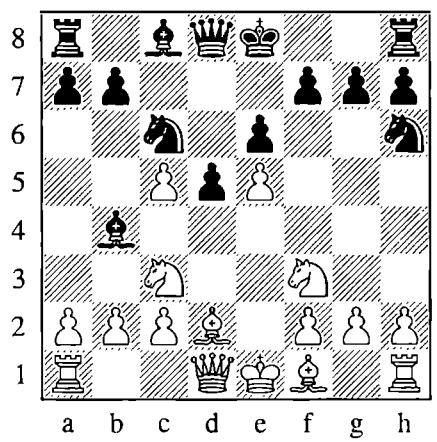
10.♘xd4

10.♕g4 ♘xf3† 11.gxf3 g6 gives Black a better pawn structure and excellent long-term chances. The dark-square weaknesses can be addressed by retreating the bishop from c5 if necessary.

10.0–0–0 ♘xf3 11.gxf3 g6 12.♕h6 ♗f8 13.♕g5 ♗e7 14.♕f4 a6 also looks comfortable for Black.

10...♗xd4 11.f4 a6=

11...♘b4!? also looks interesting. Either way, Black is doing fine.



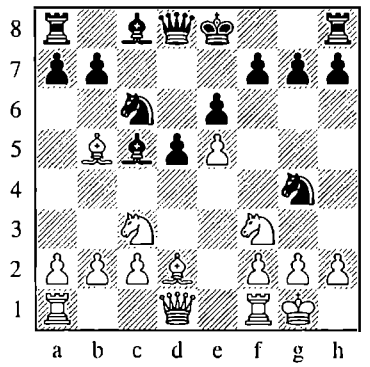
7...♗xc5!

It took quite a lot of analysis to establish the correctness of this move.

7...♘g4!?

Initially this move seems to have all the ingredients for success. It is aggressive, thematic (making use of the knight's placement on h6) and has scored 2½/3 for Black in practice. Unfortunately, when I analysed it I found some nice ideas for White. I will share the most important parts of my analysis below.

8.♗b5 ♗xc5 9.0–0



9...f6!?N

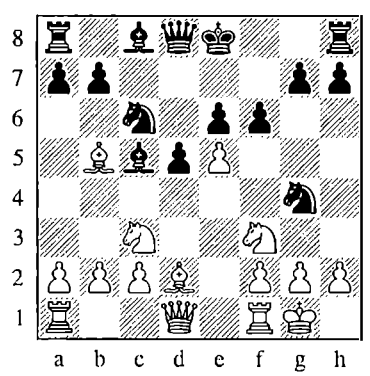
This was my best attempt, but it still falls short of equality.

9...♗d7 10.♕e2 ♕c7 occurred in Taeger – Ploehn, Bavaria 2005, and here 11.♗xc6!N would have been promising for White:

a) 11...bxc6 12.h3 ♘h6 13.♗xh6 gxh6 14.b3±

b) 11...♗xc6 12.h3 ♘h6 13.♗xh6 gxh6 14.♘b5±

c) 11...♕xc6 12.h3 ♘h6 13.♗xh6 gxh6 14.a4± White is slightly better. True enough, Black has the pair of bishops, but the one on d7 is not doing much and White is close to achieving a blockade with a knight on d4. Black also has doubled h-pawns and problems finding a safe home for his king.



10.♘a4!

10.exf6 ♘xf6 leads to dynamic equality.

10...♗e7

10...♗xf2†?! might seem tempting, but after 11.♖xf2 ♘xf2 12.♗xc6† bxc6 13.♔xf2 fxe5 14.♗b4!± White dominates on the dark squares. A further continuation might be: 14...e4 15.♘d4 ♕f6† 16.♔g1 e5 17.♕h5† g6 18.♕h6 exd4 19.♖f1 ♗f5 20.♖xf5 ♕xf5 21.♕g7 0–0–0 22.♕xa7+–

11.exf6

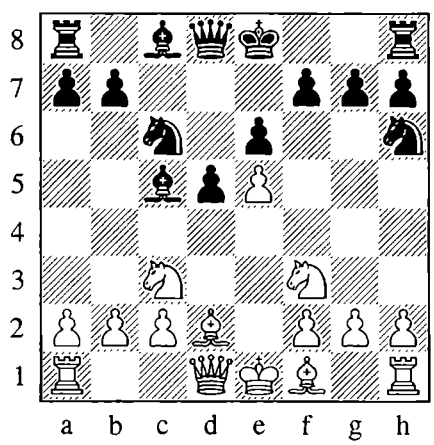
11.c4 0–0 12.exf6 ♗xf6 13.cxd5 exd5 is fine for Black.

11...♘xf6 12.c4

This is the main idea behind the knight move to a4.

12...0–0 13.♖c1!↑

White keeps a slight initiative.



8.♗xh6

After 8.♗b5 Black should not play ...♘g4, but rather 8...♘f5 with a comfortable position.

It is logical for White to take the opportunity to weaken Black's pawn structure. Nevertheless, I believe that Black's activity and bishop pair compensates for the doubled h-pawns.

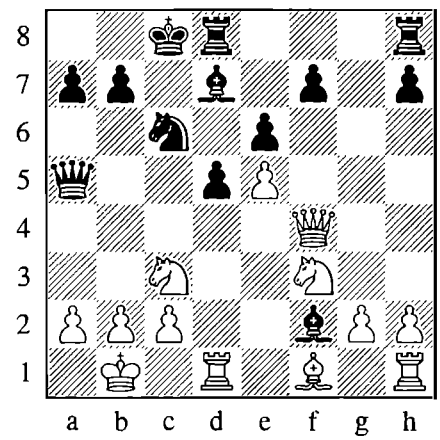
8...gxh6 9.♕d2 ♗d7 10.0–0–0

10.♗e2 can be met by 10...♕b6 11.0–0 ♘d4! with good counterplay.

10...♕a5 11.♕xh6 0–0–0 12.♔b1 ♗xf2 13.♕f4

13.♘b5 ♔b8 is safe enough for Black.

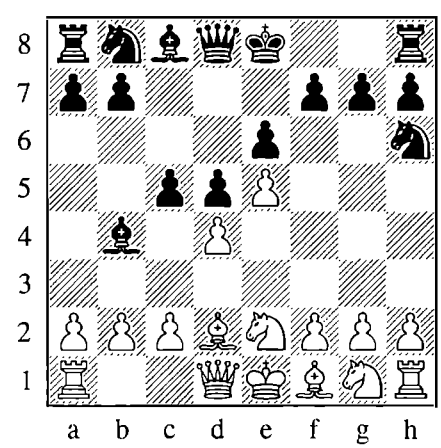
We have been following the game Petrelli – Efremov, corr. 2008. Here I propose the improvement:



13...a6!?N∞

It is useful to prevent the knight from coming to b5. On the next turn White will have to decide whether or not to snatch the f7-pawn. In either case, Black has fair chances thanks to his bishop pair and active prospects on the queenside.

D) 6.♘ce2



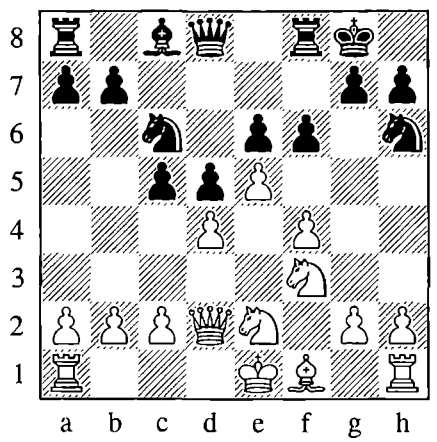
This move is solid, but does not bring any problems for Black.

6...♗xd2† 7.♕xd2 ♘c6 8.f4

White tries to stabilize the centre and hopes to make use of the fact that Black's bishop is restricted. However, as we will soon see, Black has dynamic play and the slightly passive bishop is just a temporary problem.

8...0–0 9.♘f3 f6

This is the standard method of creating counterplay. Apart from hitting White's pawn centre, Black also opens a path for the bishop to emerge on g6 or h5. If anything it is White who has more of a problem with his bishop, which is currently blocked by the knight on e2.



10.exf6

10.g3 fxe5 11.dxe5 (11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♘f5 is also slightly better for Black) 11...♘f5 gives Black a slight edge.

10.c3

This move is ambitious, but also rather time-consuming.

10...fxe5 11.fxe5

This is consistent at least.

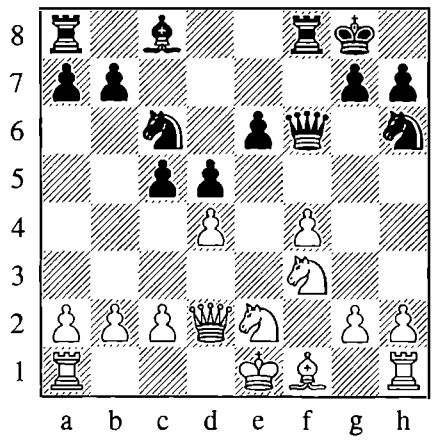
After 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 b6∓ the bishop will find a way out via b7 or a6.

11.dxe5 ♘f5∓ also leaves Black with the more active position, while White struggles to complete development.

11...♗d7 12.♘f4 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♘f5∓

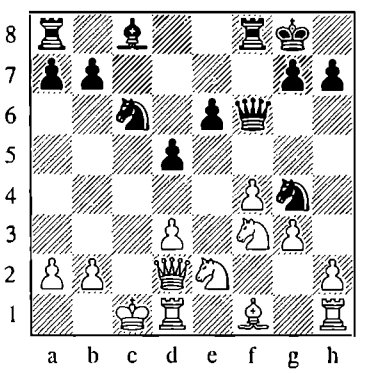
Black is ahead in development and can exert heavy pressure against the central pawns as well as along the f-file.

10...♕xf6

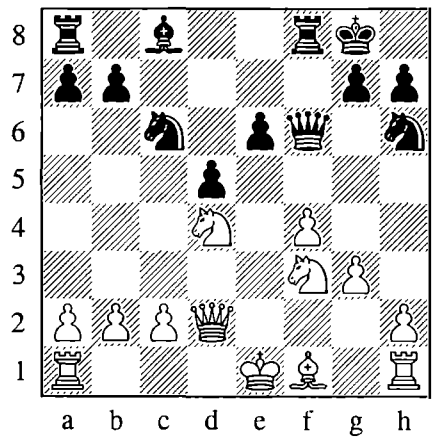


11.g3 cxd4 12.♘exd4

The slightly inaccurate 12.0–0–0?! was seen in Recuero Guerra – Santana Montero, Linares 2007. Here the improvement 12...d3!N would have forced a concession, for instance: 13.cxd3 (13.♕xd3 ♘g4 14.♘g5 ♕h6! 15.♘h3 ♘ce5 16.♕b3 a5∓ is hardly an improvement for White.) 13...♘g4



14.♖e1 (14.♘c3 is met by 14...d4 15.♘e4 ♕e7∓ intending ...e5 or ...♘e3.) 14...d4↑ Black keeps some initiative.



12...e5!

This frees Black's game completely.

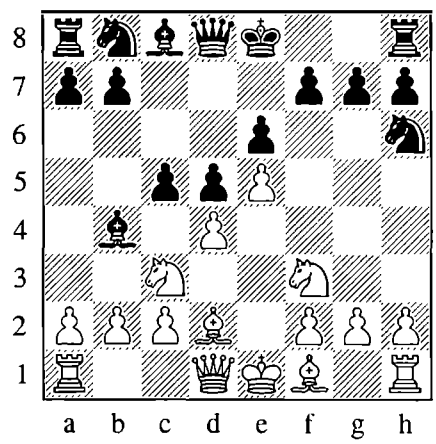
13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.♘xe5 ♘g4 15.0–0–0

Perhaps the safest continuation is 15.♕c3 ♘xe5 16.♕xe5 ♕xe5† 17.fxe5 ♗f5 18.♗d3 ♖ae8= leading to a drawn rook endgame.

15...♘xe5 16.fxe5 ♕xe5

Black had equalized comfortably in Espinosa Aranda – Valmana Canto, Burguillos 2009.

E) 6.♘f3



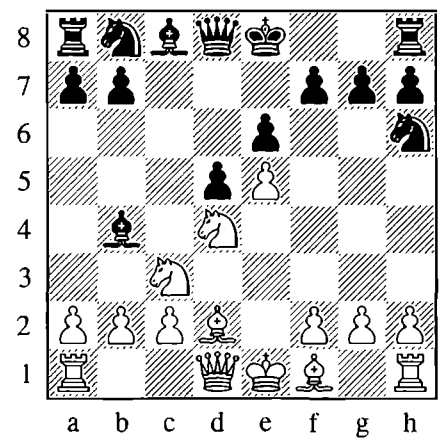
6...cxd4!

After careful consideration I decided to recommend this move instead of 6...♘c6, when Black should take the following line into account: 7.♗xh6! (7.a3 ♗xc3 8.♗xc3 cxd4 should be satisfactory for Black.) 7...gxh6 8.♗b5! ♕a5 (8...cxd4 9.♕xd4 favours White.) 9.0–0!? (9.♕d2 is also playable.) 9...♗xc3 10.♗xc6† bxc6 11.bxc3 ♕xc3 12.♖e1⩲ White's initiative fully compensates for the pawn deficit.

I also briefly considered 6...♘f5, but after 7.a3 ♗xc3 8.♗xc3± White's chances are slightly higher.

7.♘xd4

7.♘b5 ♗xd2† 8.♕xd2 0–0 is equal, as mentioned by Watson.

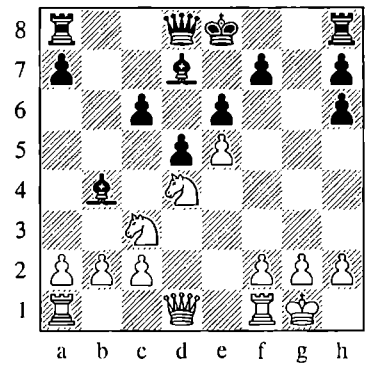


7...♘c6 8.a3

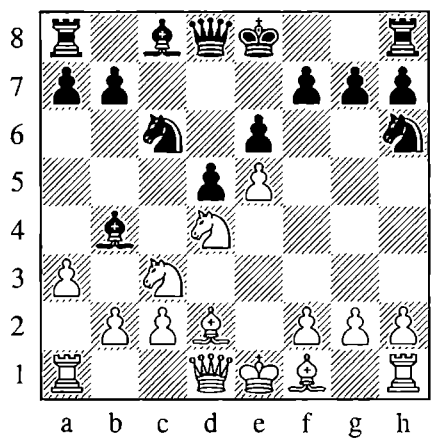
8.♘xc6 bxc6 9.a3 was Rahne – Sivic, corr. 2005. Now instead of giving up the bishop on c3 I would prefer 9...♗e7= when Black is doing fine.

8.♗xh6N gxh6 9.♗b5 ♗d7 transposes to 8.♗b5 below.

8.♗b5N has not yet been played but deserves some attention. White intends to exchange his bishops for the enemy knights, relying on his development advantage and pawn structure. 8...♗d7 9.♗xh6 gxh6 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.0–0



11...♗f8! An important move, intending to deploy the bishop on the kingside where it is needed most. Black now intends ...♗g7 and ...0–0 or ...♕b6 followed by ...c5.



8...♗c5

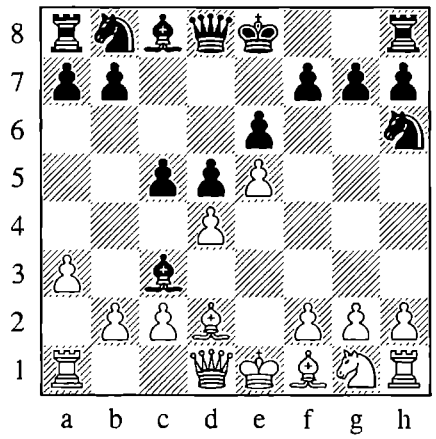
8...♗xc3 9.♗xc3 ♘xe5 is also quite playable.

9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♗xh6

At this point a draw was agreed in Socko – Barsov, Hastings 2005. I believe Black is at least not worse after recapturing on h6; he has a strong pawn centre and a useful open b-file, while the dark-squared bishop has great potential.

F) 6.a3 ♗xc3

Now White has tried both **F1) 7.bxc3** and **F2) 7.♗xc3**.



F1) 7.bxc3

Taking back this way looks rather strange in combination with ♗d2, but it is not a bad option.

7...♘f5

It makes sense to move the knight before White gets a chance to capture it.

7...b6? has been played, but after the simple 8.♗xh6!N gxh6 9.♘f3± White has a structural plus as well as better development. Black is far too slow to make use of the weaknesses on the c-file and the c4-square.

7...♘c6 has been the most common move, but here too the novelty 8.♗xh6!?N can be considered. After 8...gxh6 9.♕d2 ♕a5 10.♘f3 cxd4 11.cxd4 ♕xd2† 12.♔xd2 we reach an endgame that is about equal, but perhaps slightly more pleasant for White, who has a somewhat better pawn structure and the stronger bishop. Black should rely on his counterplay on the c-file with ...♗d7 followed by ...♖c8 and later ...♘a5.

8.♗d3

8.♘f3 should be met in the same way, as White does not seem to have anything better than transposing with ♗d3 next.

8...0–0!N

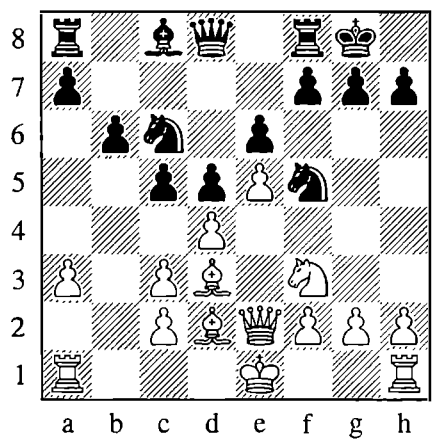
Instead of playing the standard developing move ...♘c6 Black first castles in order to get ready for ...b6 and ...♗a6. For this reason the knight should stay on b8 for the time being.

9.♘f3 b6 10.♕e2

Against other moves Black will carry out his strategic plan of ...♗a6 with counterplay on the light squares.

10...♘c6

Here I suggest reverting to normal development, as the plan involving ...a5 to force the bishop exchange looks too weakening and time-consuming.



11.0–0 ♕c7 12.a4 ♘a5=

Black intends ...♘c4 with counterplay on the light squares. It is worth mentioning that we should be more than happy to allow the exchange of bishop for knight on c4. Giving up a pawn is a small price to pay for the opening of the a8-h1 diagonal and the weakening of White's light squares.

F2) 7.♗xc3

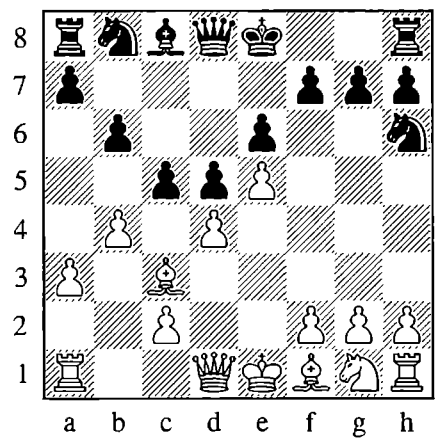
This seems more consistent with the development of the bishop to d2, and has been the most popular choice.

7...b6

Black supports his centre and prepares ...♗a6. White has two main options: **F21) 8.b4!?** and **F22) 8.♗b5†**.

8.♘f3 has achieved a perfect score for White from three games, but does nothing to oppose Black's plan. 8...♗a6 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6 10.♕e2 occurred in Anderson – Young, Dallas 2000, and here Black should have played 10...♘b8N with a balanced position.

F21) 8.b4!?



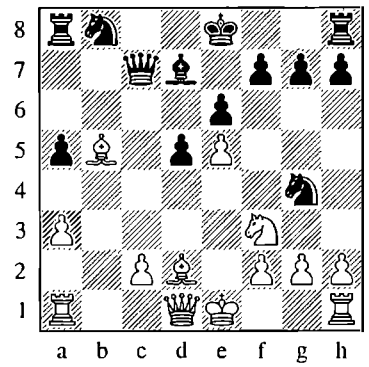
With this interesting move White grabs space on the queenside and prepares to meet ...♗a6 with b4-b5.

8...♕c7

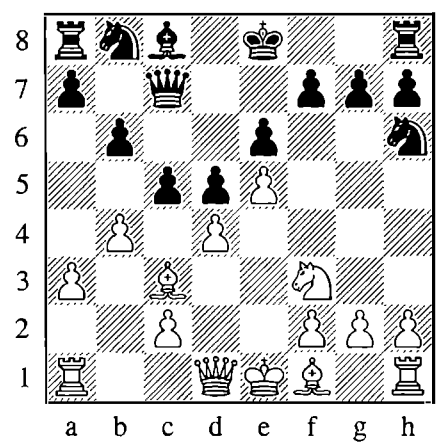
According to the database this is the only move to have been tried so far. I find it to be the most logical continuation as it defends c5 while exerting pressure along the c-file and attacking the centre.

9.♘f3

Opening the queenside is risky, as shown in the following example: 9.dxc5 bxc5 10.♘f3 cxb4 11.♗xb4 a5 12.♗d2 (12.♗d6? ♕c3† 13.♘d2 ♘f5 14.♗b5† ♗d7∓) 12...♘g4 13.♗b5† ♗d7



14.♕e2? (14.a4N is White's best chance. After 14...♘xe5 15.0–0 ♗xb5 16.axb5 ♘c4 17.♗c3 0–0 18.♖e1 White's strong bishop gives him some compensation for the pawn, although Black must still be at least equal.) 14...♗xb5 15.♕xb5† ♘d7 16.0–0 0–0 Black was clearly better in Martin – Shaked, Schwarzach 1997.



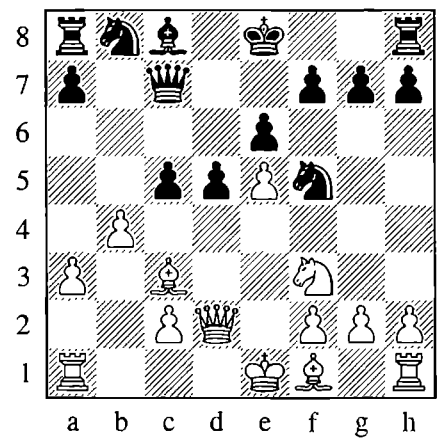
9...♘f5

Watson proposes 9...cxb4 intending 10.♗xb4 ♗a6. Unfortunately White can obtain some advantage with 10.♗d2! for instance: 10...♗a6 (10...bxa3 11.♗xh6 gxh6 12.♖xa3 leaves Black with a damaged pawn structure and a worse position despite being a pawn up for the moment.) 11.♗xa6 ♘xa6 12.♕e2 ♘b8 13.0–0 White has a strong bishop and a serious initiative.

10.dxc5 bxc5 11.♕d2?!

11.bxc5N was better, and after 11...♘d7 12.♗d3 0–0 13.0–0 ♘xc5 the position is about equal.

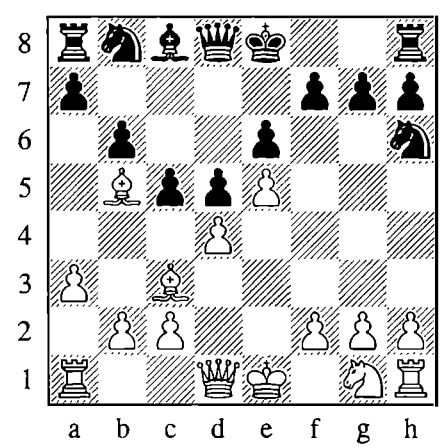
We have been following the game Leviczki – Sebestyen, Budapest 2004. Now Black could have seized the advantage as follows:



11...d4!N 12.♗b2 ♗b7 13.♗e2 ♘d7 14.0–0 ♖c8 15.bxc5 ♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♘xe5∓

Black's strong knights and central pawns are more than a match for White's bishop pair.

F22) 8.♗b5†



This check is a typical response to ...b6 in the French. White wants to lure the black bishop to d7 in order to avoid the exchange on a6.

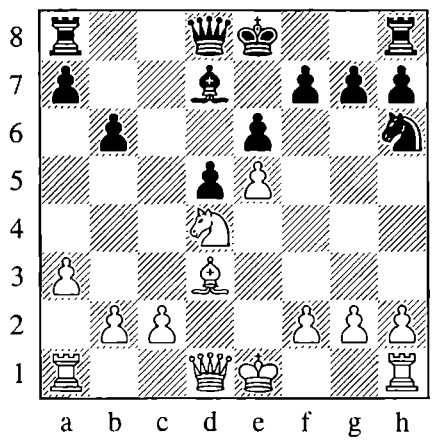
8...♗d7

Black has nothing better.

9.♗d3

9.♗e2 ♘c6 10.♘f3 ♕c7 11.0–0 ♘f5= is not dangerous. The bishop is needed on d3, where it discourages the black knight from coming to f5.

9...♘c6 10.♘f3 cxd4 11.♗xd4 ♘xd4 12.♘xd4



12...f6!

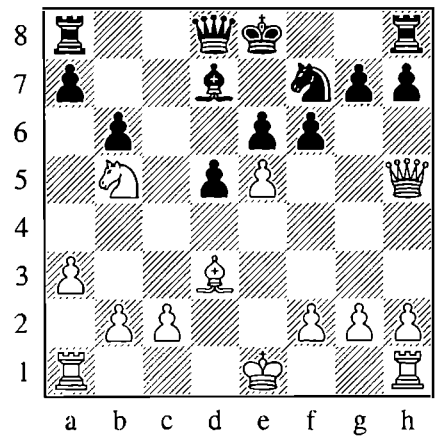
Black should break in the centre before White gets a chance to castle and overprotect e5.

13.♕h5†

13.♕e2!?N is playable, and after 13...fxe5 14.♕xe5 ♕f6! (14...0–0 15.0–0–0 makes it hard for Black to lift the blockade) 15.♕xf6 gxf6 we reach a pretty balanced endgame.

13...♘f7 14.♘b5

Here I found an improvement over the game Melia – M. Bensdorp, Kusadasi 2006.



14...g6!N

The following sequence is now forced.

15.♘d6† ♔e7 16.♘xf7 ♔xf7

16...gxh5 17.♘xd8 fxe5 18.♘xe6 ♗xe6 is another option leading to an approximately equal ending. White has a somewhat better pawn structure but Black controls the centre.

17.♕e2

17.♕f3 ♖f8 intending ...♔g7 is equal.

17...fxe5 18.♕xe5 ♕f6=

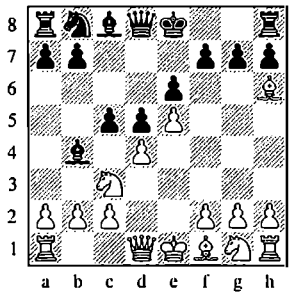
White will either have to place his queen on a less favourable square, or simplify to an endgame where Black has no problems.

Conclusion

5.♗d2 is a logical move and the most significant alternative to 5.a3. After my recommendation of 5...♘h6 White has tried a number of different moves, and in this chapter we have seen six of the relatively uncommon ones. It is hard to offer up any general rules to fit such a variety of pawn structures and position types, but we have seen many cases where Black was able to obtain promising play with the typical French scheme of attacking d4 and e5, especially through timely use of the ...f6 pawn lever.



5.♗d2



6.♗xh6!?

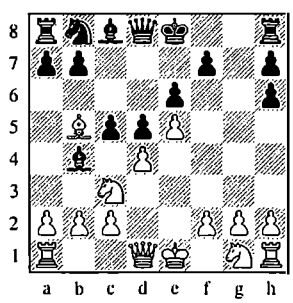
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2 ♘h6 6.♗xh6!?

6...gxh6

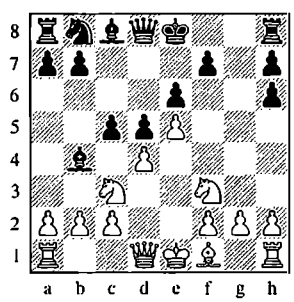
A) 7.♗b5† 198
B) 7.♘f3 199
C) 7.a3 ♗a5 201
C1) 8.♗b5† 202
C2) 8.♘f3 202
C3) 8.dxc5 d4 9.b4 dxc3 10.bxa5 ♕xa5 203
C31) 11.♘e2 204
C32) 11.♕h5 205
C33) 11.♘f3 206

A) after 7.♗b5†



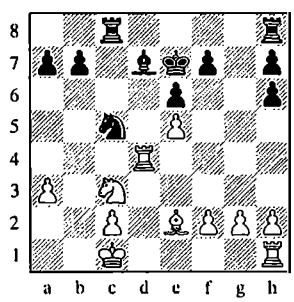
7...♗d7!N

B) after 7.♘f3



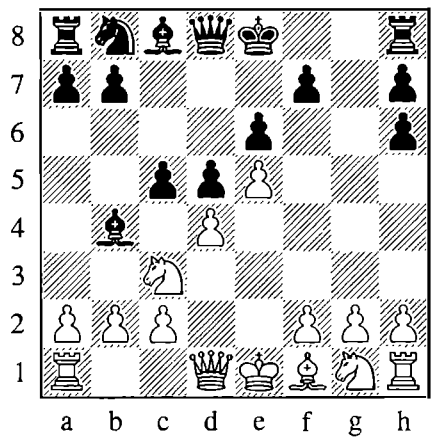
7...♕a5!N

C31) after 17.♖d4?!



17...♗c6!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2 ♘h6 6.♗xh6!? gxh6



This line has only occurred in about twenty games, but it proved to be quite a challenge and I decided a dedicated chapter was needed. White has taken a principled decision, inflicting permanent structural weaknesses on Black's kingside. However, giving away a bishop is a concession in itself, especially since White had previously invested a tempo developing it on d2.

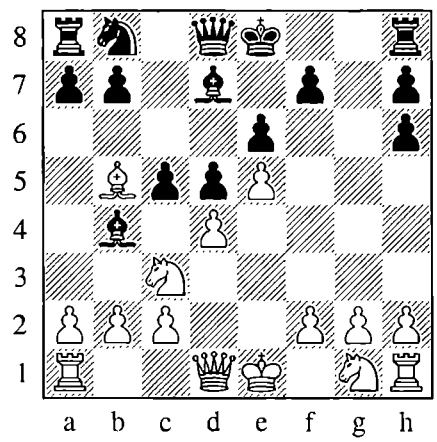
From our starting position there are three main continuations: **A) 7.♗b5†**, **B) 7.♘f3** and **C) 7.a3**.

A) 7.♗b5†

This offers White quick development, although in my opinion it looks rather illogical to exchange off Black's "weak French bishop".

7...♗d7!N

I found one practical example in which Black tried 7...♔f8. Now in Nuber – Speck, Germany 1996, White should have played 8.♕d2!N when my main line continues as follows: 8...cxd4 9.a3 ♗d7! (9...dxc3? gives White at least a perpetual, but probably more after 10.♕xh6† ♔g8 11.axb4 cxb2 12.♖b1 ♕c7 13.♘f3! [13.♕g5†=] 13...♕xc2 14.0–0 with a strong initiative.) 10.♕xd4 ♗xc3† 11.♕xc3 ♗xb5 12.♕b4† ♔g7 13.♕xb5 ♘c6 14.♘f3 ♕b6 15.♕xb6 axb6 The position is approximately equal, but this whole line is unnecessarily risky for Black and the text move just seems to be stronger all round.

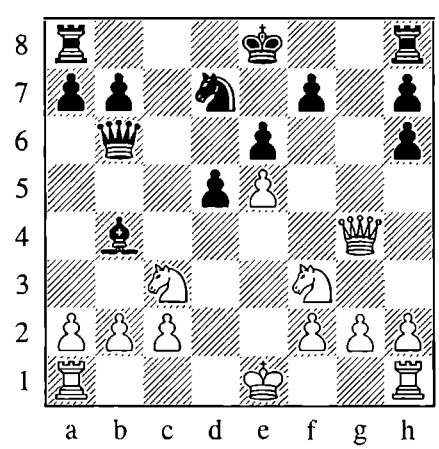


8.♗xd7† ♘xd7 9.♘f3 cxd4 10.♕xd4 ♕b6

Black develops with tempo. An exchange of queens would suit the second player as his bishop will be strong in the endgame.

11.♕g4

11.♕d2 is well met by 11...♕a6!∓ preventing White from castling and intending ...♖c8.



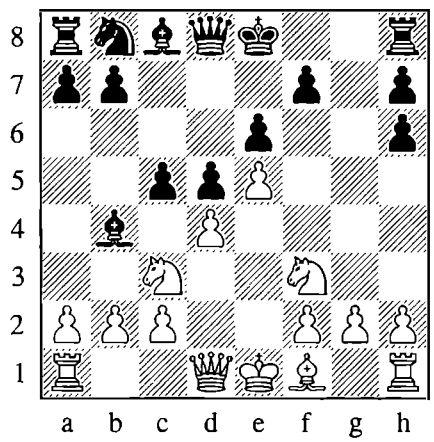
11...d4! 12.♕xd4

12.♘xd4 ♘xe5 13.♕e4 ♘c4↑

12...♕xd4 13.♘xd4 ♘xe5

Black has somewhat better prospects in the endgame, as his strong bishop is more important than the doubled h-pawns.

B) 7.♘f3



7...♕a5!N

This move has not yet been played, but it has already been recommended by Watson and is also the top suggestion of Houdini, so it might well pop up in the databases pretty soon.

8.♕d2 ♖g8

Black uses the doubled h-pawns in a constructive way. White is temporarily prevented from developing his bishop, and the rook may be able to exert pressure along the fourth rank via the g4-square.

9.g3

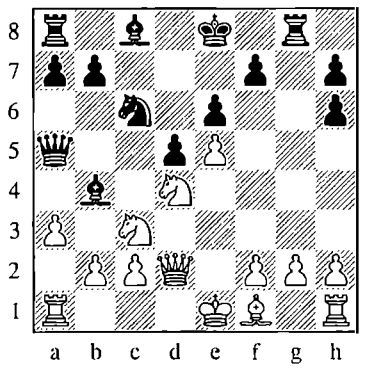
This seems like an obvious reply. I also analysed two other possibilities:

9.a3

This move does not create any immediate threat, but simply plans ♖b1 in order to force Black to take on c3.

9...cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♘c6

Black seems to be doing fine here. I'll give a few sample lines.



11.♗b5

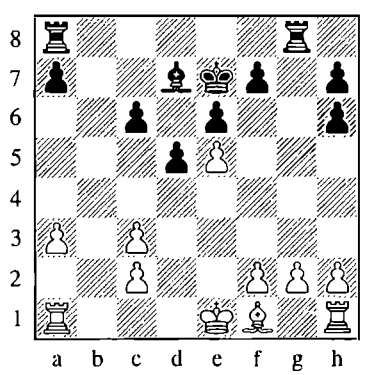
11.♘b3 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 ♕a4 13.♘d4 (13.♘c5 ♕a5=) 13...a6 14.f4 ♗d7 is equal.

11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.g3 ♖b8 13.♗e2 ♗a6 also looks fine for Black.

11...♗xc3 12.♕xc3 ♕xc3† 13.bxc3 ♗d7 14.♘xc6

14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.g3 c5 16.♘b3 ♖c8= is mentioned by Watson.

14...bxc6 15.♗f1 ♔e7



This line is given by Watson without a final assessment. I would say that the mutual weaknesses should balance out to approximate equality, but personally I have more sympathy for the Black position. An easy plan is to break with ...f6 to obtain a central majority. The bishop can be improved via e8-g6 and Black can also use the open b-file for his rooks.

9.♖b1!?

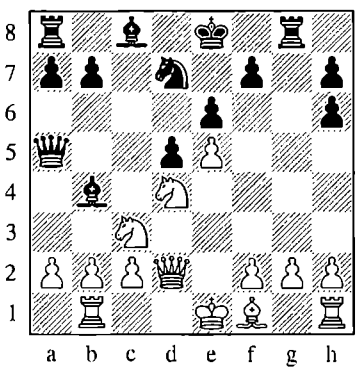
White could also play this move with similar ideas in mind. This time an unprovoked exchange on c3 will offer White an open file without having wasted time with a2-a3.

9...cxd4

This seems to be the best reply, as it gives Black the option to keep his bishop instead of exchanging on c3.

10.♘xd4 ♘d7

This looks like the best way to develop, although 10...♘c6!? can also be considered. There might follow 11.♗b5 ♗d7 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.0–0 ♖g6 with a rather messy position.

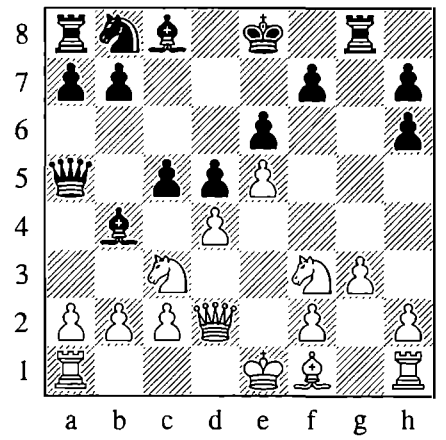


11.f4

White can also play the sharper 11.a3 when 11...♗xc3 12.bxc3 ♘xe5 13.♗b5† ♗d7 14.♗xd7† ♘xd7 15.0–0 leads to an unbalanced position with mutual chances. Black should continue with 15...♘c5, putting the knight on an active square and defending b7. Black's king will most likely head for the queenside, although in some scenarios ...♖g6 followed by ...♔f8 can be a better way to find safety.

11...♘c5 12.a3 ♗xc3 13.♕xc3 ♕xc3† 14.bxc3 h5!=

The position is about equal although a lot of play remains. Black intends to use his front h-pawn to put pressure on White's g-pawn. Another plan is ...♗d7 followed by ...♖c8 to attack White's pawn weaknesses.



9...cxd4

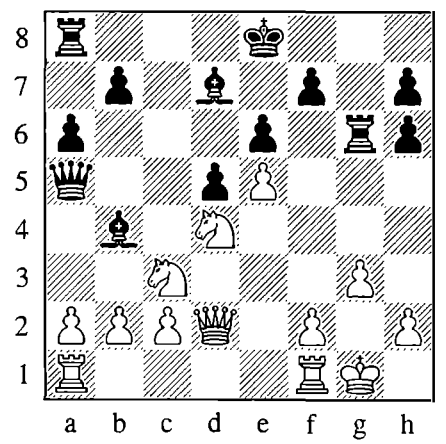
Black could also play the entertaining 9...♖g4!? as proposed by Watson. I analysed this move and concluded that it should lead to approximate equality, but decided to focus on the text move which seems like a more straightforward route to a balanced position.

10.♘xd4 ♘d7 11.♗b5

11.f4 ♘c5 gives roughly equal chances.

11...a6 12.♗xd7† ♗xd7 13.0–0 ♖g6

This passive move is a necessity. Despite the inconvenience caused by the weak kingside pawns, Black has strong counterplay on the other flank. The pair of bishops and pressure against c3 are enough to compensate for the structural damage on the kingside.



14.♘de2

Attempting to consolidate on the queenside. Here are a few other sample lines:

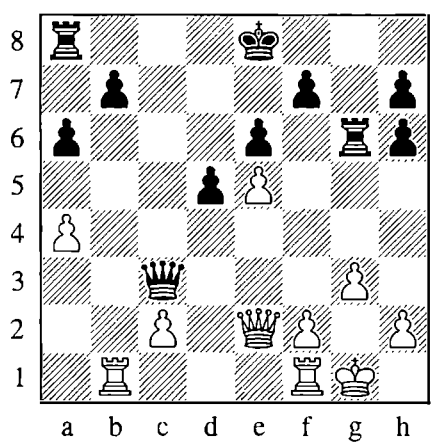
14.a3 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♖c8 16.♖ab1 ♖xc3! It is important that White does not have time to take the b7-pawn, as Black is threatening to win the queen. 17.♖fd1 ♕c7 (17...b5?? 18.♖b3+–) 18.♖xb7 ♖cxg3† 19.hxg3 ♕xb7= White has sufficient compensation for the pawn, but nothing more.

14.♖fe1 can be met by 14...h5⇄ with an interesting position offering chances for both sides. Apart from advancing the pawn to h4, a second idea behind Black's last move is the possible transfer of the bishop via f8 to h6.

14...♗b5 15.a4 ♗xe2

According to my analysis, this forcing continuation should lead to a draw with best play. If Black wishes to keep more tension in the position, then 15...♗c4!? seems like a good option.

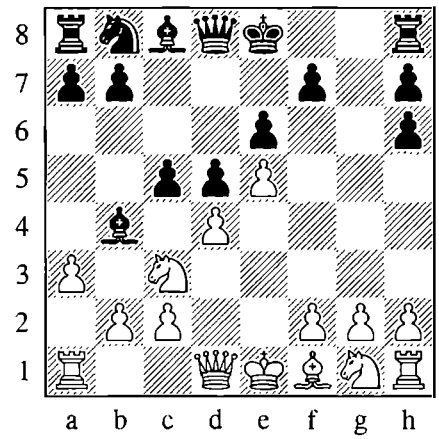
16.♕xe2 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♕xc3 18.♖ab1



18...♖b8! 19.♖b3 ♕d4 20.♖fb1 ♖g5 21.♖xb7 ♖xb7 22.♖xb7 ♖xe5 23.♕xa6 ♖e1† 24.♔g2 ♕e4† 25.♔h3 ♕f5† 26.♔g2 ♕e4†=

The game ends in perpetual check.

C) 7.a3



This is the main continuation.

7...♗a5

I think it is more important to preserve the strong dark-squared bishop than to damage White's queenside structure. Besides, exchanging on c3 would help to reinforce White's pawn centre. From this position there are three main moves: **C1) 8.♗b5†**, **C2) 8.♘f3** and **C3) 8.dxc5**.

8.b4? occurred in a single game, Rieling – M. Knaak, Hamburg 2011. At this point the simple 8...cxb4N would have been strong, for instance: 9.♘b1 (9.♘b5? b3† 10.c3 0–0∓ intending ...f6 is clearly better for Black.) 9...♕c7 Black has a healthy extra pawn and a solid advantage.

8.f4?!

This slow move was played in In't Veld – Willemze, Vlissingen 2012. Now instead of exchanging on d4 Black could have caused problems with:

8...♕b6!N 9.♔f2!?

I found nothing better for White.

9.b4 cxb4 10.♘b5 b3† 11.♔f2 bxc2 12.♕xc2 0–0 followed by ...♘c6 gives Black a clear advantage. Not only is White a pawn

down, his king might also be exposed after a timely ...f6 break.

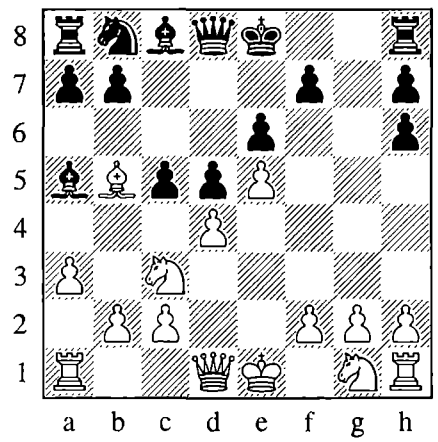
9.♖b1 cxd4 10.b4 dxc3 11.bxa5 ♕e3† 12.♘e2 ♘c6 also favours Black due to his extra pawn.

9...cxd4 10.♘a4 ♕c6 11.b3

11.b4 ♕xa4 12.bxa5 ♘c6∓

11...♗d7 12.♗d3 ♕c7∓

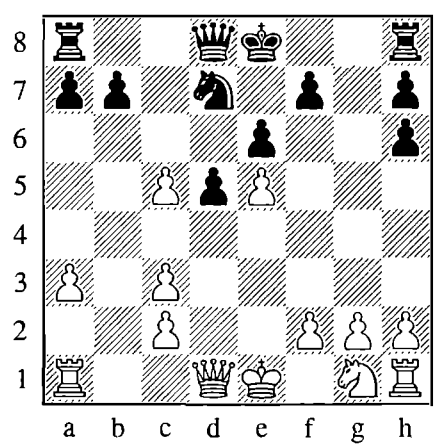
C1) 8.♗b5†



This is hardly dangerous, and Black should be happy to exchange off the weaker of his two bishops.

8...♗d7 9.♗xd7† ♘xd7 10.dxc5 ♗xc3† 11.bxc3

Here Black can improve on the game Houska – Cumbers, West Bromwich 2005.



11...♖g8!N

As pointed out by Williams. I checked a few lines, all of them leading to Black's advantage.

12.g3

After 12.♘e2 Black should continue 12...♕g5! (not to complicate matters with 12...♖xg2? 13.♘g3⇄) 13.g3 ♕xe5 keeping the upper hand.

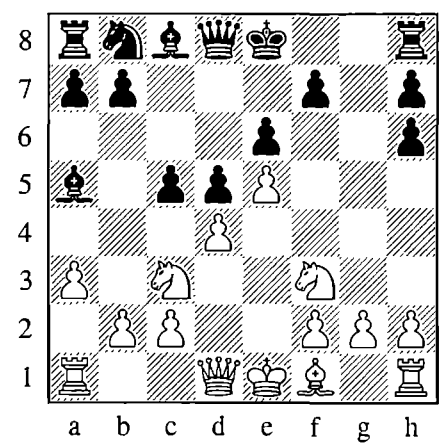
12...♕a5 13.♕d4 ♖c8 14.♘e2

14.♖b1 b6! 15.cxb6 ♖c4 16.♕d2 axb6∓

14...♕xc5 15.0–0 ♕xd4 16.cxd4 ♖xc2 17.♖ac1 ♖xc1 18.♖xc1 ♔e7

Black's extra pawn gives him excellent winning chances in the endgame. The plan for the next few moves will be ...♖b8 and ...♔d8.

C2) 8.♘f3



8...♕b6N

I favour this improvement as given by Watson.

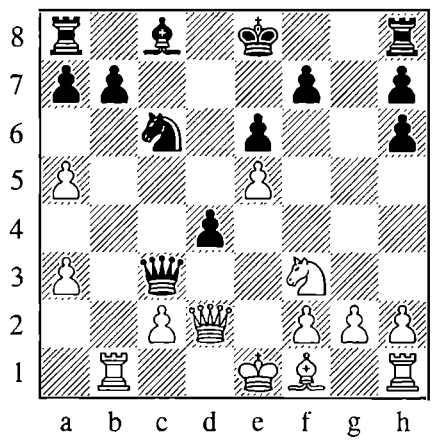
Less convincing is 8...cxd4 9.♕xd4 ♕b6 as played in Cardenas – Emrich, corr. 2009, when 10.0–0–0N ♕xd4 11.♘xd4 would have given White a tiny endgame advantage. The continuation might be 11...♘c6 12.♗b5 ♗d7 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♘a4 ♗b6 15.b4 when White

has firm control over the dark squares and the light-squared bishop has become passive.

9.♖b1 ♘c6 10.dxc5

Watson points out that 10.b4?! cxb4 11.♘b5 bxa3† 12.c3 a2!∓ is no good for White.

10...♕xc5 11.♕d2 d4 12.b4 ♕xc3 13.bxa5



13...♖g8!

This move is a frequent guest after the exchange on h6. It is logical to post the rook on the half-open g-file, especially when it restricts the development of White's bishop.

14.♕xc3 dxc3 15.a6 bxa6 16.♗d3

Watson gives 16.♖b3 ♖g4 17.♖xc3 ♗b7!= which indeed looks fine for Black.

The text move is a bit more challenging, as White develops actively while protecting the g2-pawn by tactical means.

16...♖g4!

Swinging the rook across the fourth rank is an idea worth remembering.

16...♖xg2?! should be avoided due to 17.♗e4 ♗d7 18.♘d4 ♘xd4 19.♗xg2 ♖c8 20.♗e4 when White is an exchange up and has somewhat better chances.

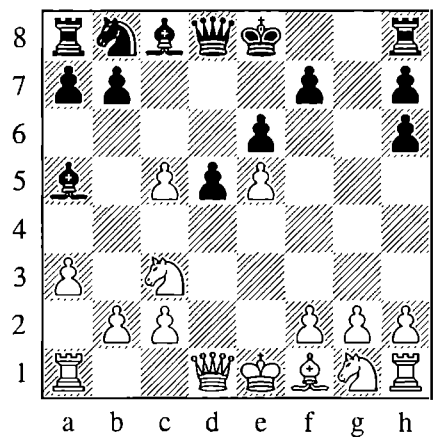
17.0–0

17.♖b3 ♖b8 is fine for Black too.

17...♘a5

Preventing ♖b3 while preparing ...♗b7. Black's chances are not worse.

C3) 8.dxc5



This is the main continuation, which gives Black a choice between pushing the d-pawn and exchanging on c3.

8...d4

8...♗xc3† 9.bxc3 ♕a5 10.♕d2 ♘d7 is a playable alternative but after analysing both options I have chosen to concentrate on the text move.

9.b4

9.♗b5†N

This has not yet been played, but was suggested by the computer.

9...♗d7 10.♗xd7† ♕xd7 11.b4 dxc3 12.bxa5

White has managed to lure the queen to d7 so that the pawn on a5 doesn't hang, but Black still has nothing to worry about after:

12...♖g8!

Black's quick development generates a lot of counterplay and he will soon recapture the temporarily lost pawn. It is worth noting

the influence of the rook along the g-file in many of the following lines.

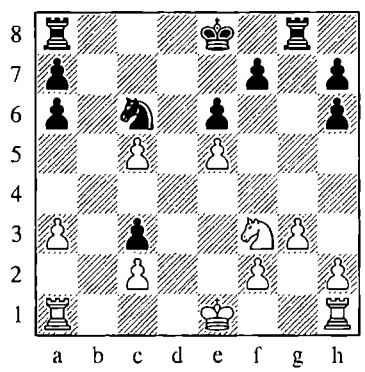
13.g3

13.♘e2 ♖g5! 14.f4 (14.0–0 ♕xd1 15.♖fxd1 ♖xe5 16.♘xc3 ♘c6 is about equal) 14...♖xg2 15.♘xc3 ♕c6 16.♕d3 ♘d7 17.0–0–0 ♘xc5 18.♕c4 ♖c8 is fine for Black, whose ideas may include ...♘d3†.

13...♕c6 14.♕f3

14.♘f3 ♕e4† 15.♕e2 should be met by 15...♖g4 16.h3 ♕xe2† 17.♔xe2 ♖e4† 18.♔d3 ♖a4= intending ...♘c6 and ...0–0–0 with a balanced game.

14...♕xf3 15.♘xf3 ♘c6 16.a6 bxa6



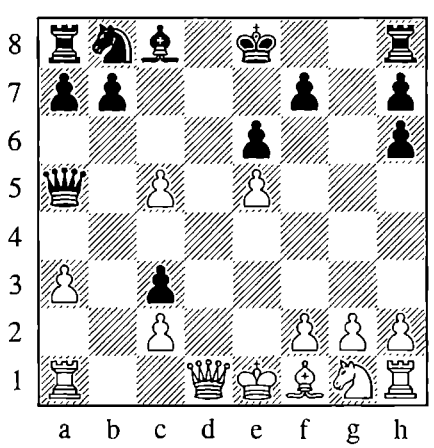
17.♔e2

17.h3 0–0–0=

17...♖g4! 18.♖hd1 ♖c4=

Once again the active rook enables Black to maintain the balance.

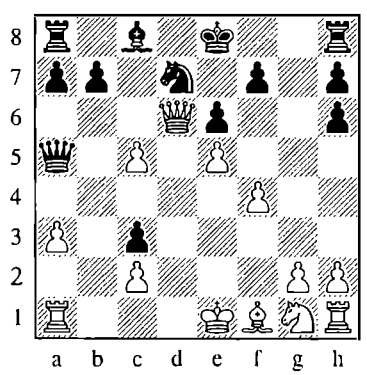
9...dxc3 10.bxa5 ♕xa5



From here White has tried several moves. This will be our final branching point, the main options being **C31) 11.♘e2**, **C32) 11.♕h5** and **C33) 11.♘f3**. Let us briefly check a few minor options:

11.♕g4 ♕xc5 12.♕g7? (12.♘f3N looks better when 12...♗d7 13.♗d3 ♗c6 14.0–0 ♘d7 leads to mutual chances. Black will castle long with attacking chances on the g-file. The e5-pawn is also a potential target.) 12...♖f8 13.♗d3 ♗d7 14.♘f3 ♗c6 15.0–0 ♘d7 By now it has become clear that the queen excursion to g7 has brought White nothing but trouble. Black was clearly better in Plasman – Van Haastert, Dieren 1997.

11.♕d6 ♘d7 12.f4 occurred in Aristotelous – Rodgaard, Andorra la Vella 2009. At this point the correct way to capture the c-pawn would have been:



12...♘xc5!N Black will soon be able to drive the queen away from d6, so there is no need to try and exchange queens. 13.♘e2 ♗d7 intending ...0–0–0. 14.♕d4 ♘a4∓ Black keeps a safe position with a healthy extra pawn.

C31) 11.♘e2

With this move White makes no attempt to save the c5-pawn, and instead focuses on picking up the enemy pawn on c3.

11...♕xc5 12.♕d6

12.f4 ♗d7 13.♕d3 ♗c6 14.♕xc3 ♘d7= looks fine for Black.

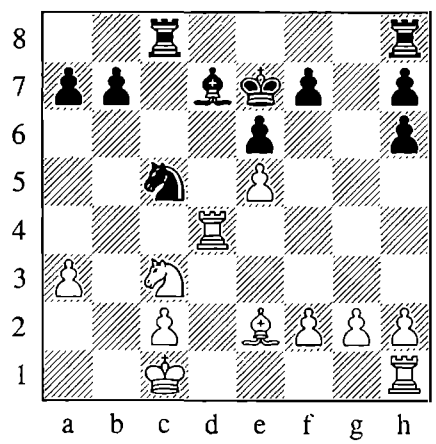
12...♘d7 13.♕xc5 ♘xc5 14.♘xc3

Williams claims a white advantage in this position based on the superior pawn structure. This may be true on the kingside, but on the queenside it's the other way round. Black also benefits from easy development and I think the chances are about equal.

14...♗d7 15.♗e2 ♖c8 16.0–0–0 ♔e7 17.♖d4?!

17.♔b2N would have kept the game balanced.

The text move was played in Leniart – Socko, Tromso 2009. At this point Black has an interesting tactical opportunity based on the undefended knight on c3.



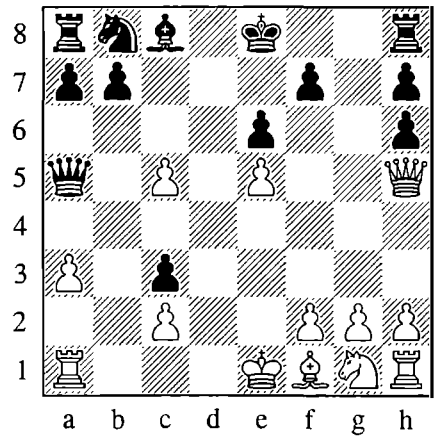
17...♗c6!N

Ironically, the first step involves blocking the c-file!

18.♖g1 ♘d7! 19.f4 ♗xg2

Black has at least temporarily won a pawn. Just as importantly, he has permanently weakened White's kingside structure so the first player will be struggling to equalize.

C32) 11.♕h5



This time White ignores the queenside pawns and goes after his opponent's weakened kingside.

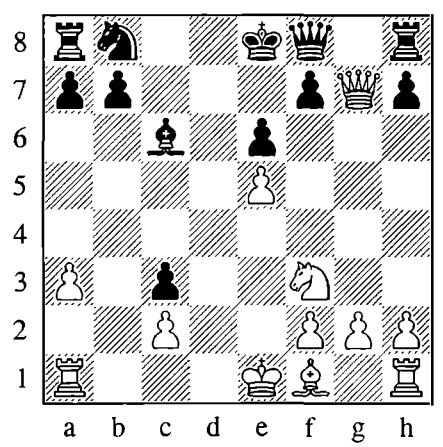
11...♕xc5 12.♘f3 ♗d7 13.♕xh6

Here I would like to deviate from the game Bartel – Socko, Krakow 2006.

13...♗c6N

Socko developed his knight on the same square, but I like the bishop move more. The same improvement was proposed by Williams.

14.♕g7 ♕f8

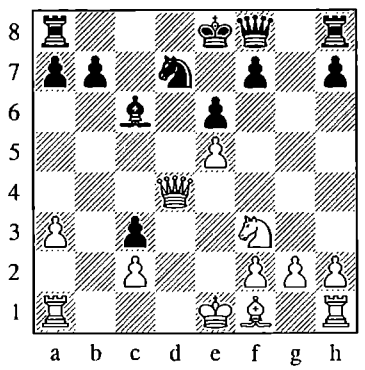


15.♕xf8†

Retreating the queen only leads to problems for White:

15.♕g4?! ♘d7 16.♕d4

16.♕f4 could be a slight improvement, but after 16...♕g7 17.♗e2 ♖g8 18.g3 ♕g4 19.♕e3 ♖c8 Black will force a queen exchange with ...♕e4 and enjoy a superior endgame.



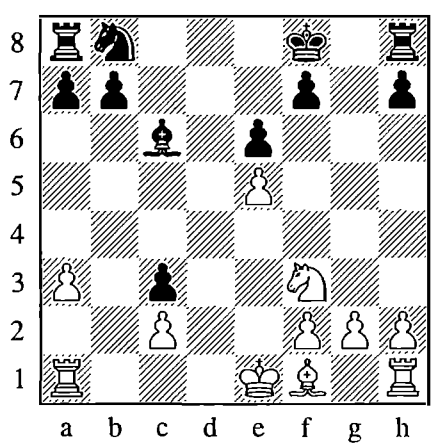
16...♗xf3!

Also interesting is 16...♕c5!? 17.♕xc5 (17.♖b1 ♕xa3∓) 17...♘xc5 18.♘d4 0–0–0 19.♘xc6 bxc6 followed by ...♖d2 with an initiative for Black, but the text move is simple and strong.

17.gxf3 ♕c5 18.♕xc5 ♘xc5∓

Williams evaluates the position as better for Black, and I agree.

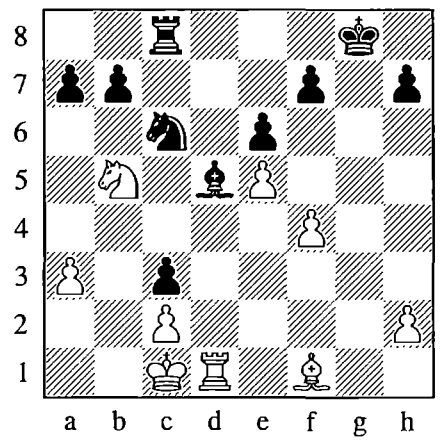
15...♔xf8



16.♘d4 ♖g8 17.0–0–0!?

17.f3 ♗d5 18.♔f2 ♘c6 19.♘xc6 ♗xc6 20.♗d3 ♖d8 is also about equal.

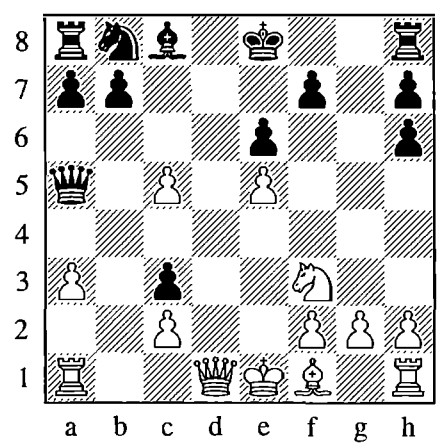
17...♗xg2 18.♖g1 ♗d5 19.♖xg8† ♔xg8 20.♘b5 ♘c6 21.f4 ♖c8



22.♘xc3 ♘e7 23.♘xd5 ♘xd5 24.♖d4 ♖c7

The endgame is balanced.

C33) 11.♘f3



11...♕xc5 12.♖b1

12.♗d3 ♗d7 13.0–0 ♗c6 followed by ...♘d7 and ...0–0–0 gives Black a comfortable game.

The main move was played in Melnikov –

Arslanov, St Petersburg 2011. Here I would like to suggest the novelty:

12...♘d7N

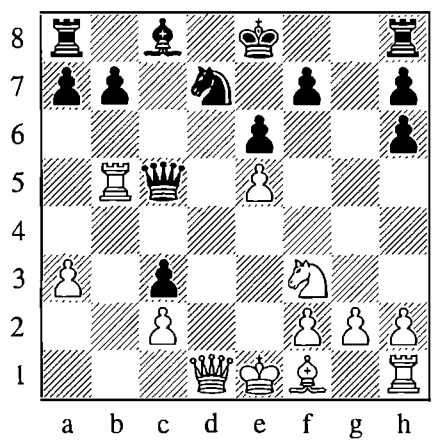
Forcing White to respond to the attack on the e5-pawn.

13.♖b5

I also considered two bishop moves:

13.♗b5?! a6 14.♗xd7† ♗xd7 favours Black, whose bishop will become powerful on c6, especially in conjunction with a rook on the g-file. White might prevent this temporarily by 15.♕d4, but after 15...♕xd4 16.♘xd4 b5 17.0–0 ♔e7 18.♖fd1 ♖hc8 intending ...♖c4 Black keeps the advantage.

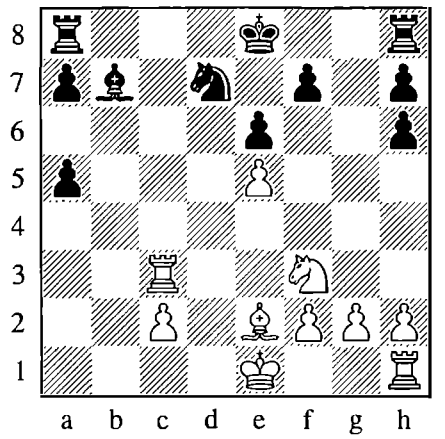
13.♗d3!? is an interesting sacrifice: 13...♘xe5 14.0–0 ♘xd3 15.♕xd3 0–0 Black is two pawns up for the moment, but his weakened kingside gives White reasonable compensation. A sensible plan for Black would be to place the central pawns on f6 and e5, offering space for the bishop and a shelter for the king on h8.



13...♕xa3 14.♗e2

14.♗d3?! ♘c5∓

14...b6 15.♖b3 ♕c5 16.♕a1 ♗b7 17.♖xc3 ♕a5 18.♕xa5 bxa5



19.0–0

19.♖c7?! ♖b8 20.0–0 ♚d8 21.♖c3 ♚e7 is somewhat better for Black.

19...♔e7

White has just enough activity to make up for the missing pawn. A logical conclusion might be:

20.♖c7 ♗xf3 21.♗xf3 ♖hc8 22.♖b7 ♖cb8 23.♖c7 ♖c8=

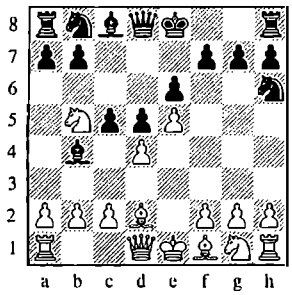
With a repetition.

Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, the main theme of this chapter has been the significance of Black's weak kingside structure balanced against his strong dark-squared bishop and pressure against White's pawn centre. Such strategically unbalanced positions can be tense and hard to evaluate, but at the end of our investigation I am confident in Black's chances.



5.♗d2



6.♘b5

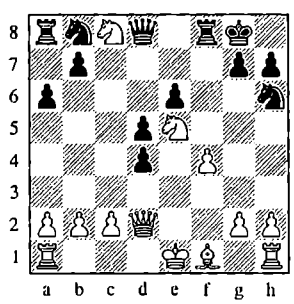
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2 ♘h6 6.♘b5 ♗xd2† 7.♕xd2

7...0–0

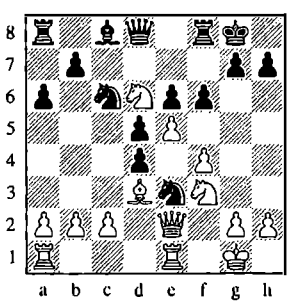
A) 8.♘f3 **210**
B) 8.c3 **211**
C) 8.f4 a6! 9.♘d6 cxd4 10.♘f3 f6 **212**
C1) 11.♘xc8 **212**
C2) 11.♗d3 **213**
D) 8.dxc5 ♘d7!? **217**
D1) 9.f4?! **217**
D2) 9.♘f3 **218**
D3) 9.♕c3 **219**

C1) after 12.♘xc5



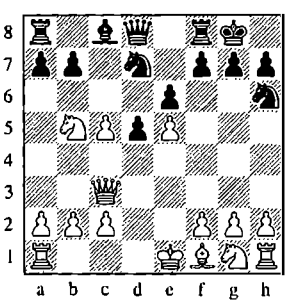
12...♕xc8N

C2) after 14.♖fe1!



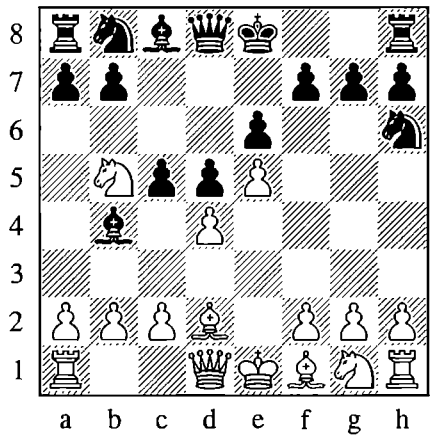
14...g5!N

D3) after 9.♕c3



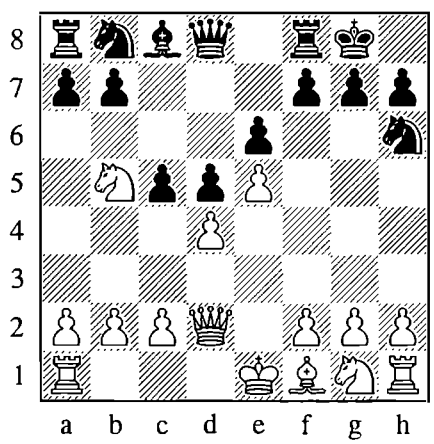
9...f6!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2 ♘h6 6.♘b5



One of the main purposes of 5.♗d2 was to unpin the knight, and this logical follow-up has been White's most popular choice.

6...♗xd2† 7.♕xd2 0–0



After a few forced moves we arrive at a crossroads where White can choose between **A) 8.♘f3**, **B) 8.c3**, **C) 8.f4** and **D) 8.dxc5**.

8.0–0–0? has only been played in a single game and is unlikely to be repeated. After the simple 8...♘c6 9.dxc5 ♘xe5 Black was at least slightly better in Hilverda – Lupor, Dortmund 2005. An important idea for Black is to play ...♘d7 next in order to put pressure on the weak pawn on c5, which will not be easy for White to defend.

A) 8.♘f3

White aims for fluid development and piece play, but relinquishes the possibility of strengthening his centre with f2-f4.

8...a6

Black drives the knight away before exchanging on d4.

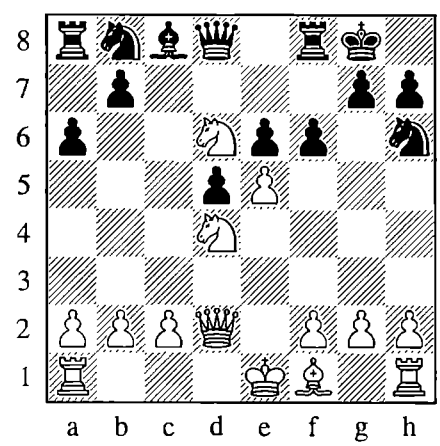
8...♘d7!?N is a fresh idea that could be considered.

9.♘d6 cxd4 10.♘xd4

10.♗d3? is much too optimistic and after 10...♘c6 11.♘xc8 ♖xc8 12.0–0 f6 13.♖ae1 ♘f7 14.exf6 ♕xf6 Black was a healthy pawn up in Leiber – Shaked, Berlin 1997.

10...f6

10...♘c6 has been played, and also looks fully viable.



11.♘xc8

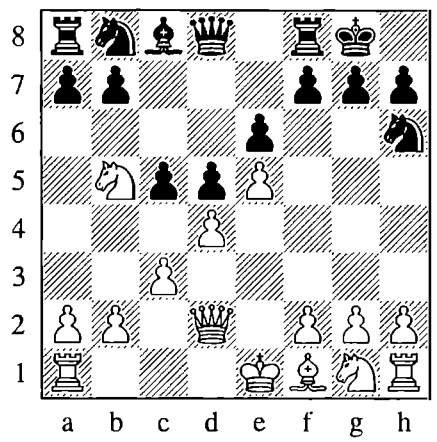
White is unable to maintain his central position with 11.f4? fxe5 12.fxe5. In Todeschini – Simoncini, Lugano 2012, Black missed the

opportunity to play 12...♘g4! when White is unable to defend the pawn on e5.

11...♕xc8 12.exf6 ♖xf6

The position is fairly balanced, although I slightly prefer Black's better development and central control.

B) 8.c3



8...♘c6

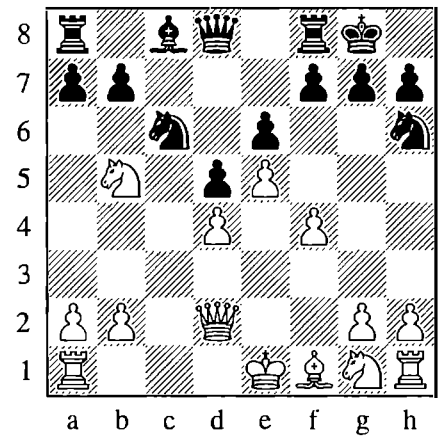
The immediate 8...cxd4 is also fine, but there is something to be said for keeping the tension.

9.f4

9.♘f3?! works out well for Black after: 9...a6 10.♘a3 (10.♘d6? cxd4 11.cxd4 f6 creates the tactical threat of ...fxe5 followed by ...♘xe5 winning a pawn. In order to keep the material balance White is now forced to play 12.♘xc8 ♖xc8 but the troubles remain and Black has a significant plus.) 10...cxd4 11.cxd4 f6∓ Ahlberg – Hintze, Goch 2005. White is behind in development and will struggle to support his centre.

9...cxd4 10.cxd4

10.♘xd4N has yet to be tested. I suggest 10...f6 11.♘gf3 fxe5 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♘xe5 ♕b6 14.0–0–0 ♘f7 15.♖e1 c5 with interesting play and good chances for Black.

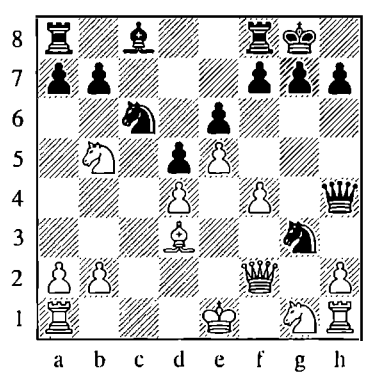


10...♘f5!

An active move with several purposes. Black creates the threat of ...♕h4† and at the same time protects the d6-square, thus preparing to kick the enemy knight away with ...a6.

11.♘f3

This seems like an automatic choice and is indeed the only move to have been tested. Nevertheless, White could consider the following alternative: 11.♗d3!?N ♕h4† (11...♘fxd4 12.♘xd4 ♘xd4 13.♗xh7† ♔xh7 14.♕xd4 ♗d7 is equal according to the computer, but White has some potential for a positional bind as well as attacking chances on the kingside.) 12.g3 ♘xg3 13.♕f2

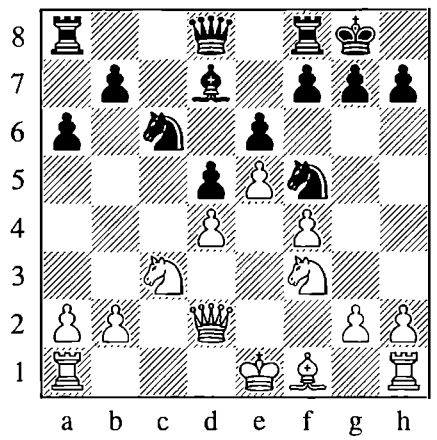


13...♘b4! A strong intermediate move. 14.♗b1 ♘f5 15.♗xf5 ♕xf2† 16.♔xf2 exf5 Black's extra pawn secures a plus in the endgame, although

White does have some compensation in the form of a better pawn structure and the d6-outpost for his knight.

11...a6 12.♘c3 ♗d7

12...♘h4!? looks interesting but the text move works fine.



13.g3!?N

13.♗d3 ♘cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♘xd4 15.♗xh7† ♔xh7 16.♕xd4 ♕h4† 17.g3 ♕h3 favoured Black slightly in Bliznyuk – De Reu, email 1997. I decided to check the text move as an attempt to prepare the bishop's development.

13...♕b6 14.♖d1 h5!

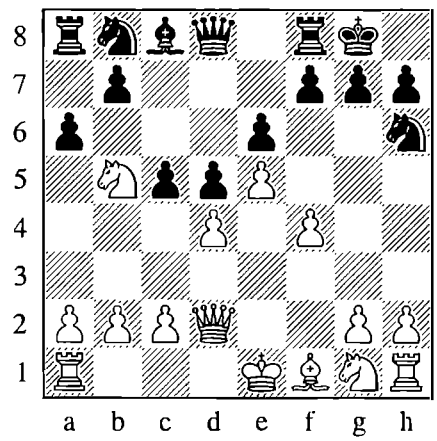
Securing the position of the knight on f5. I prefer Black as he is ahead in development, with pressure against White's centre and counterplay on the queenside.

C) 8.f4

This has been a relatively popular choice in recent years, but it turns out to be slightly risky for White.

8...a6!

8...♘c6 is playable, but has the disadvantage of allowing 9.dxc5. This transposes to a position more commonly reached via the move order 8.dxc5 ♘c6 9.f4 which falls outside our repertoire; on page 217 you can see I have instead recommended 8...♘d7 in response to 8.dxc5.



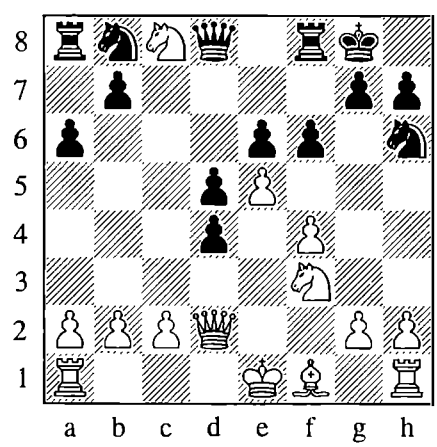
9.♘d6 cxd4

Having driven the knight away, Black hacks away at the enemy centre.

10.♘f3 f6

Black continues with the same policy. White can react with either **C1) 11.♘xc8** or **C2) 11.♗d3**.

C1) 11.♘xc8



At this point Black can fight for the advantage, as long as he stops and thinks before automatically reaching for the queen.

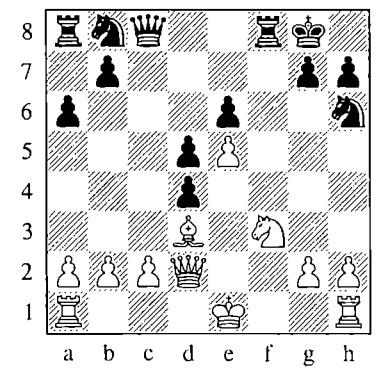
11...fxe5!

11...♕xc8 12.exf6 ♖xf6 13.0–0–0 is equal.

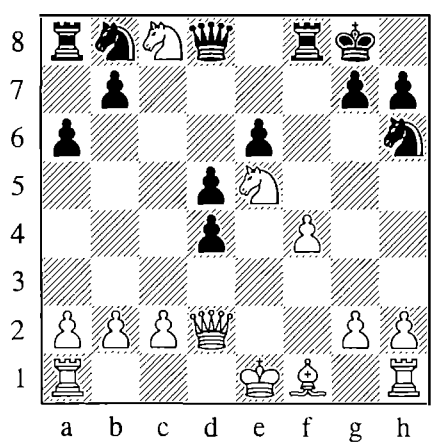
12.♘xe5

This was White's choice in the one game I found.

White has problems after the other capture too: 12.fxe5N ♕xc8 13.♗d3 (13.♘xd4 ♘c6 14.0–0–0 ♘g4 15.♖e1 ♘f2 16.♖g1 ♘e4 17.♘xc6 ♕xc6 18.♕e3 ♖f2 19.♗d3 ♘c5 gives Black a strong initiative and attacking chances.)



13...♘c6 14.0–0 (14.0–0–0 ♘f5∓) 14...♕d7 15.♖ae1 ♖ae8∓ Black remains a pawn up and has a slight advantage. Subsequent ideas include ...♕e7 and ...♘f5. Sometimes ...♘f7 should also be kept in mind, both to attack e5 and to defend against ♘g5.



12...♕xc8N

There is no reason to refrain from the simple capture. Black preferred 12...♘f5 in Marjusaari – Franssila, Jyvaskyla 2012, but his advantage would have evaporated had White played 13.♗d3 intending to exchange on f5.

13.g3 ♘c6 14.♘f3 e5! 15.♘xe5

15.0–0–0 exf4 16.gxf4 (16.♘xd4 f3!∓) 16...♘f5 Black is somewhat better being a pawn up for the moment and controlling a lot of important squares.

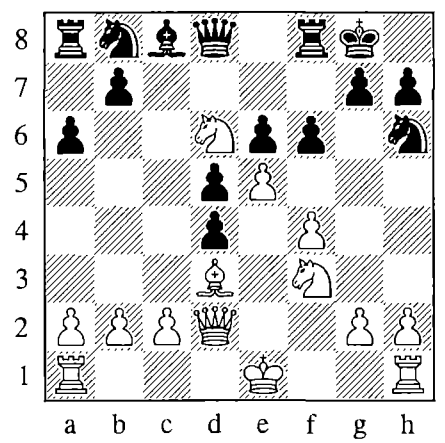
15...♘xe5 16.fxe5 ♕c7 17.♕xd4

17.0–0–0 ♘f5 18.♖e1 ♕b6∓

17...♕xc2 18.♗d3 ♕c6

White can probably hold this position but he is not completely out of the woods.

C2) 11.♗d3



This seems like a better try, although according to my analysis White is equal at best.

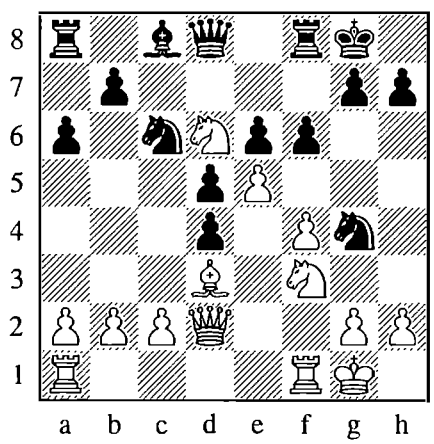
11...♘c6 12.0–0 ♘g4

I favour this ambitious approach.

I also checked: 12...fxe5 13.fxe5 ♘xe5 (13...♖xf3!? should be just good enough to maintain the balance, but nothing more.)

14.♘xe5 ♖xf1† (14...♕xd6N is another option which may transpose but also offers some independent options for both sides: 15.♖xf8† ♕xf8 16.♖f1 [16.♕g5!?] 16...♕e7 [16...♕d6 transposes to 14...♖xf1†] 17.♕a5! White has a strong initiative for the two pawns.) 15.♖xf1 ♕xd6 16.♕g5 White is two pawns down at the moment, but he has adequate compensation in view of his development advantage, better piece coordination and control over the important e5-square.

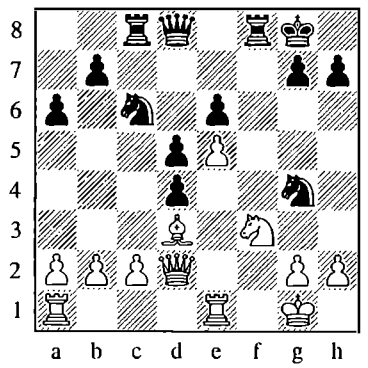
After the text move both Williams and Watson claim an advantage for Black without showing any further moves. While I also believe in the soundness of Black's position, I found this to be the point where things really start to get critical.



13.♕e2!

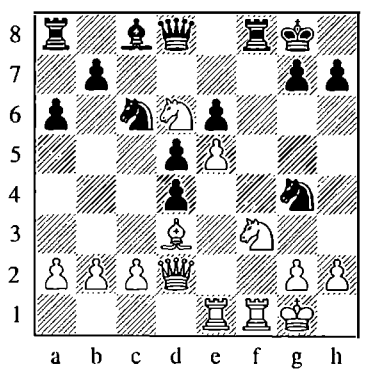
Black needs to be careful here as White has some strong tactical resources. The following alternatives are inferior:

13.♘xc8?! ♖xc8 14.♖fe1? White was already in trouble and this only makes things worse. 14...fxe5 15.fxe5 Now in Pohjosmaki – Saharinen, corr. 2006, Black's simplest route to a big advantage would have been:

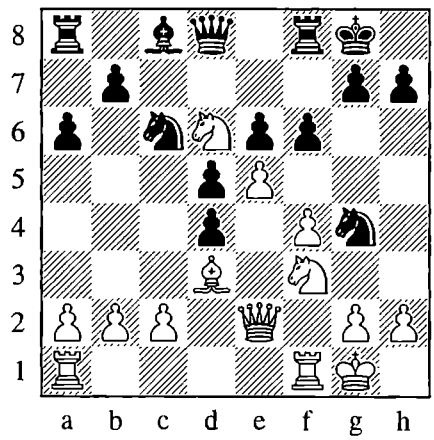


15...g6!N In the game Black sacrificed the exchange of f3 and eventually won, but the text move is more convincing. Black defends against ♘g5 ideas and remains a pawn up with a better position and an additional target on e5.

13.♖ae1?! fxe5 14.fxe5 occurred in Clawitter – Lu, Los Angeles 2011. Here Black can borrow the same idea as above:



14...g6!N (The game continuation of 14...♘gxe5 is less convincing due to 15.♘xe5 ♖xf1† 16.♖xf1!N, for instance 16...♘xe5 17.♕e2 ♘xd3 18.♘f7 ♕h4! 19.cxd3 ♗d7 20.♕c5⩲ when White has real compensation and Black's extra pawns are not having much of an effect on the game.) 15.♘xc8 ♖xc8 16.h3 ♘e3 17.♖f2 ♕b6 18.c3 ♘c4 19.♗xc4 dxc3 20.bxc3 dxc4 21.♕d6 ♖ce8 Black keeps an extra pawn and the advantage.



13...♘e3

13...fxe5?? 14.♗xh7† leads to a quick disaster for Black.

14.♖fe1!

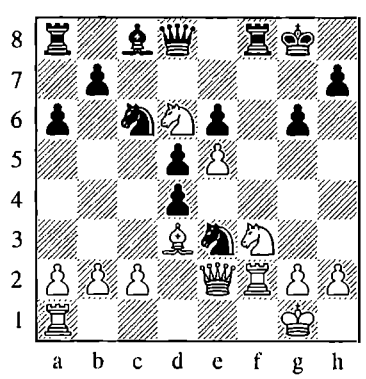
The most accurate, for reasons that will become clear when we compare the other rook move.

14.♖f2

Here I was able to improve on the game Bapple – Siegfried, corr. 2011, by using a now familiar device:

14...fxe5N 15.fxe5 g6!

Black's chances are higher, as shown by the following lines.



16.♘xd4

16.♖e1 ♖xf3! 17.gxf3 (17.♕xf3 ♘xe5 18.♕g3 ♕xd6 19.c3 ♘3c4∓) 17...♘xe5 18.♘xc8 ♖xc8 19.f4 ♘5g4 20.♖g2 (20.♖f3 ♕h4 21.h3 e5! 22.hxg4 ♕xg4† 23.♔h2 ♕h4† 24.♔g1 e4∓) 20...♘xg2 21.♕xe6† ♔g7 22.♔xg2 ♘c3† 23.♔g3 ♖c6 24.♕e5† ♕f6∓ intending ...♖e6.

16...♖xf2 17.♕xf2

17.♕xe3 ♖f8∓

17...♘xe5 18.♕xe3

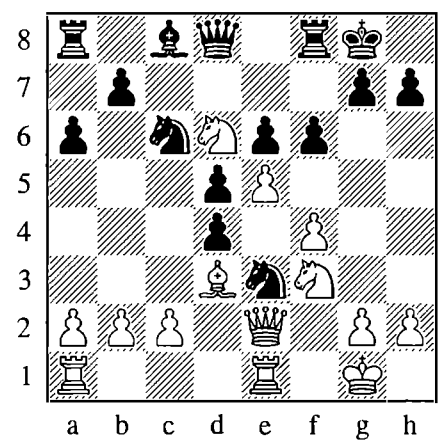
18.♘xc8 ♘5g4 19.♕g3 ♖xc8 (There is also 19...e5!? 20.♘b3 ♖xc8 21.h3 ♕b6 22.♔h1 e4 23.hxg4 exd3 24.cxd3 ♖f8 when Black is somewhat better thanks to his superior pawn structure and safer king.) 20.♗e2 ♕b6 21.♗xg4 ♘f5 22.♗xf5 ♕xd4† 23.♔h1 exf5 Black keeps an extra pawn although White has chances to hold.

18...♕xd6 19.♕g3 ♘c4

19...♘f7 20.♗xg6 ♕xg3 21.♗xf7† ♔xf7 22.hxg3 h5 intending ..♔e7 and ...♗d7-e8 is also favourable for Black.

20.♗xc4 ♕xg3 21.hxg3 dxc4∓

White remains a pawn down in the endgame although he has some chances for counterplay on the dark squares.



14...g5!N

A typically French move, giving everything for the centre. From here my main line leads to a forced draw.

I considered a few other possibilities but found nothing better for Black. Here is a

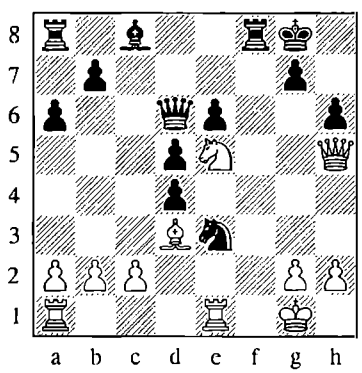
fragment of my analysis showing a few relevant ideas:

14...fxe5 15.fxe5 ♘xe5N

15...g6? does not work here on account of 16.♘xd4±. This is one of the main reasons why White should move the rook to e1 instead of f2 in this line.

15...♕b6 was Black's choice in Kuosa – Saharinen, corr. 2007. This move seems playable, but generally I would not recommend leaving the kingside unprotected in this kind of position. 16.♘g5!?N is one interesting idea while the game continuation of 16.♔h1 also offers interesting play for White.

16.♘xe5 ♕xd6 17.♕h5 h6



18.c3! ♗d7 19.♘xd7

19.cxd4?! ♘f5 favours Black slightly, although White's control over e5 gives him a degree of compensation for the pawn.

19...♕xd7 20.♕g6 e5 21.♕h7† ♔f7 22.♖xe3

22.♕g6† ♔g8= could be an immediate draw.

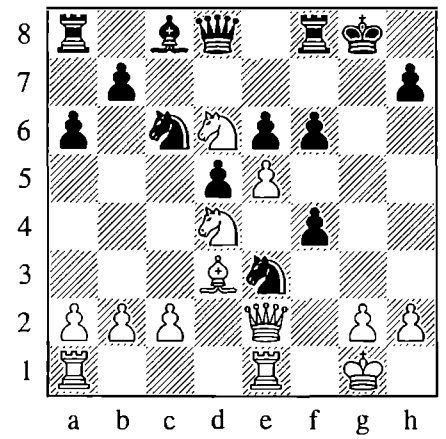
22...dxe3 23.♖f1†

From here both 23...♔e7 and 23...♔e6 may lead to any number of perpetual checks. This is all fine in theory, but I prefer the route seen in the main line.

15.♘xd4

15.♗xh7† ♔xh7 16.♘xd4 gxf4 just transposes.

15...gxf4

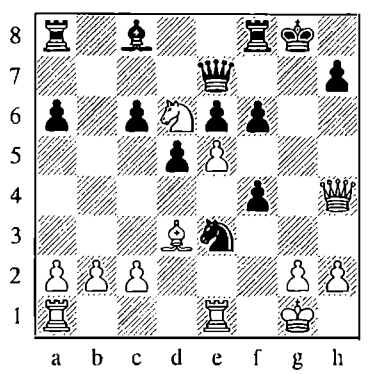


16.♗xh7†!

Less accurate is:

16.♕h5?! ♕e7 17.♘xc6 bxc6 18.♕h4

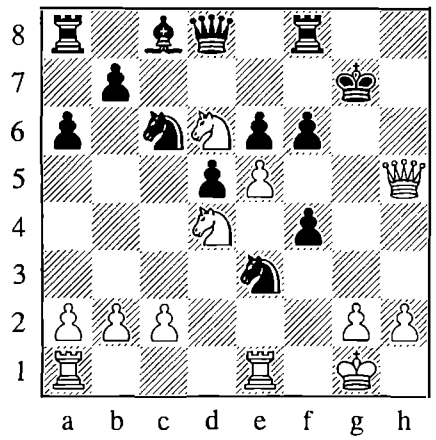
18.♘e8!? looks nice but Black can defuse the attack: 18...f5 19.♘f6† ♔h8 20.♕h6 ♘g4 21.♘xg4 fxg4 22.♗xh7 ♕a7† 23.♔h1 ♕g7 24.♕xg7† ♔xg7 25.♗d3 ♔h6!∓ Black has a positional advantage in the endgame.



18...♕g7 19.♖xe3 fxe3 20.exf6 ♖xf6 21.♘e8 ♖h6 22.♕d8 ♗b7 23.♕xa8 ♗xa8 24.♘xg7 ♔xg7 25.♗xa6 e5∓

Black's position is to be preferred. The bishop on a8 is blocking the passed a-pawn and after ...c5 and ...d4 it will exert a strong influence on the long diagonal.

16...♔xh7 17.♕h5† ♔g7



18.♘xc6

The immediate 18.♖xe3 also leads to a draw.

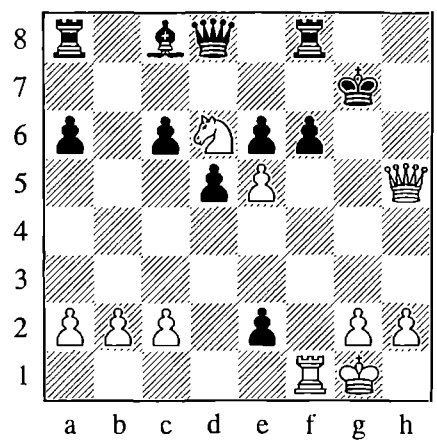
18...bxc6 19.♖xe3 fxe3 20.♖f1!?

A final attempt to play for a win.

20.♕g4† ♔h8 21.♕h5† is an immediate draw; but note that White cannot play 21.♖f1?? here as 21...♖a7! repels the attack.

20...e2!

The only move, but good enough.



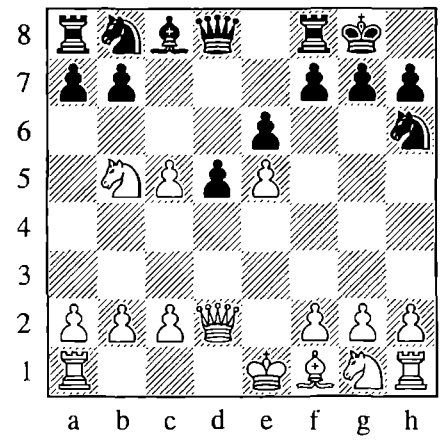
21.♕g4†

There is little point in going for 21.♕xe2 f5 22.♕h5 ♕b6† 23.♔h1 ♕e3 24.♘e8† ♖xe8 25.♕xe8 ♕xe5 26.♕e7† when White has a draw at best.

21...♔h8 22.♕h5†=

Once again 22.♕xe2?? ♖a7! wins for Black, but after the text move it is just a draw.

D) 8.dxc5

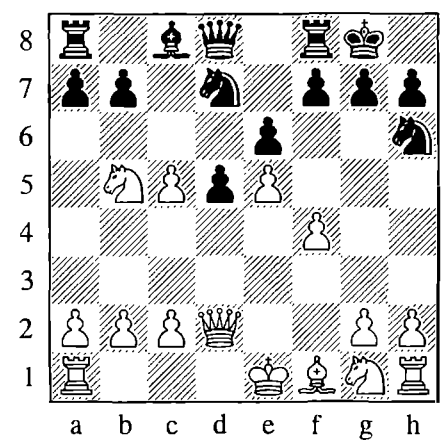


This is the main move. White opens the position at once and receives an outpost for his knights on d4. The drawback, of course, is that the e5-pawn loses its protection.

8...♘d7!?

This move has not been as common as 8...♘c6, but it has scored well and seems to be an excellent choice. White has three main replies: **D1) 9.f4?!**, **D2) 9.♘f3** and **D3) 9.♕c3**.

D1) 9.f4?!



This has been White's most frequent reply but it weakens White's position, especially the e4-square.

9...♘xc5

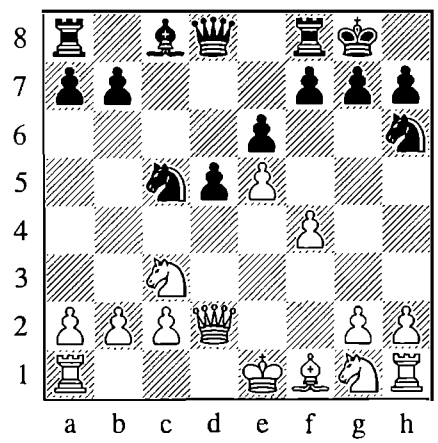
Most games have continued with 9...f6, but it is more promising for Black to take back the c-pawn while bringing the knight closer to e4.

10.♘c3N

This seems like White's best try.

After 10.0–0–0 ♘e4 11.♕e1 ♕b6 Black already had a significant advantage in Real – Lagaert, Houffalize 2011.

White is also not helped by 10.♘d6N ♕b6 11.0–0–0 f6 12.♘f3 ♘g4!∓ when Black already threatens ...♘f2.



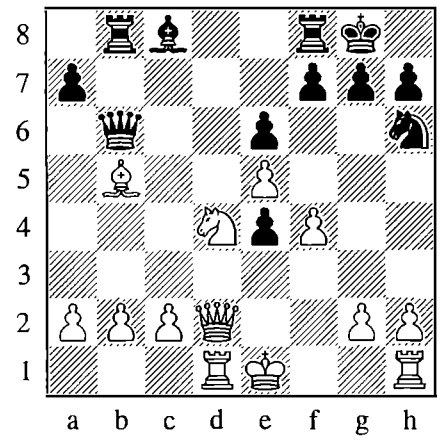
10...b5!

A strong sacrifice, intending ...b4 to get control of the e4-square. Black is ahead in development and should be happy to give up a pawn to open lines.

11.♗xb5 ♖b8 12.♘f3 ♘e4 13.♘xe4

13.♕d3? ♕b6–+

13...dxe4 14.♘d4 ♕b6 15.♖d1



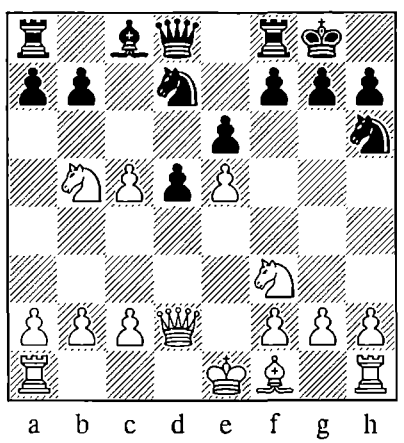
15...♘f5!

Black continues to play dynamically.

16.♘xf5 exf5 17.a4 a6 18.♗e2 ♕xb2 19.0–0 ♗e6

Black has a significant structural advantage; the protected passed pawn on e4 is an important asset, while the weaknesses on c2 and a4 could drop at any moment.

D2) 9.♘f3



This is much safer but it fails to put the black position under pressure.

9...♘xc5 10.♗d3 ♗d7 11.♘bd4

Here I have an improvement over Black's play in Gozzoli – Hintze, Internet 2003.

11...♕b6N 12.0–0–0

After 12.0–0?! ♕xb2∓ White simply lacks the necessary compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

12.♘b3 can be met by 12...♘e4! 13.♕e2 a5 with active play for Black.

12...♖ac8

The opposite-sided castling has resulted in a sharp battle with mutual chances.

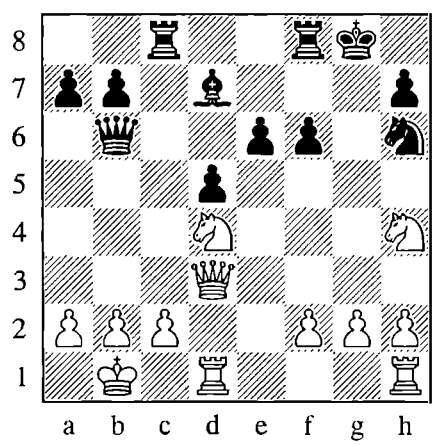
13.♔b1 f5

In such positions it is important for Black to remember this method (along with ...f6) of obtaining breathing space on the kingside.

14.exf6 ♘xd3

14...♖xf6!? is worth considering. This keeps Black's kingside more secure at the expense of some central control.

15.♕xd3 gxf6 16.♘h4



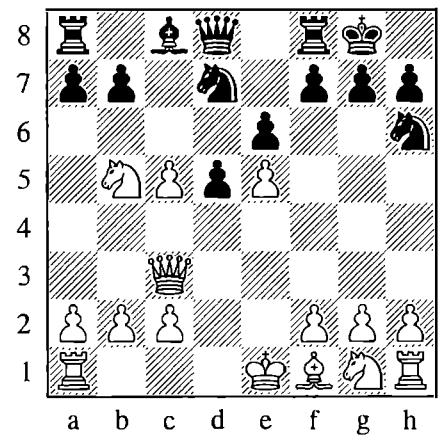
16...♖c4!

An important move, eyeing both of the enemy knights. The following line is by no means forced, but the position is balanced and a forced draw would be one logical conclusion to the game.

17.♕g3† ♔h8 18.♘g6† hxg6 19.♕xg6 ♖xd4 20.♖xd4 ♕xd4 21.♕xh6† ♔g8 22.♕g6†=

With perpetual check.

D3) 9.♕c3



This time White tries to hang on to the c5- and e5-pawns. On the other hand, this costs valuable time and allows Black to make a gambit out of it.

9...f6!N

This reveals one of the points behind putting the knight on d7 instead of c6. Now the knight will find a way out on f6 and become active on the kingside.

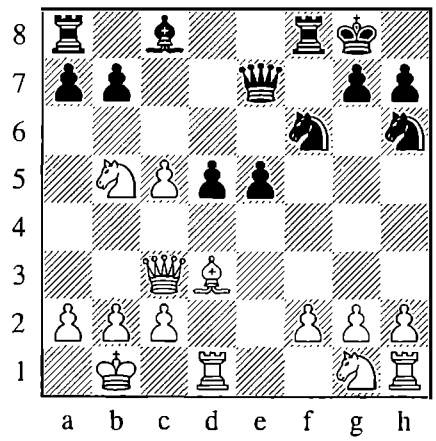
I once lost with 9...a6 in a blitz game against Landa, but the text move is a significant improvement.

10.exf6 ♘xf6 11.♗d3 e5 12.0–0–0 ♕e7!

12...♘f7?! looks natural, but the computer's suggestion 13.f4! is problematic. My main line continues 13...e4 14.♗e2 ♕e7 (14...♗d7 15.g4!) 15.♘h3 ♗d7 16.g4! and White grabs the initiative.

13.♔b1

13.♘d6 b6! is good for Black.

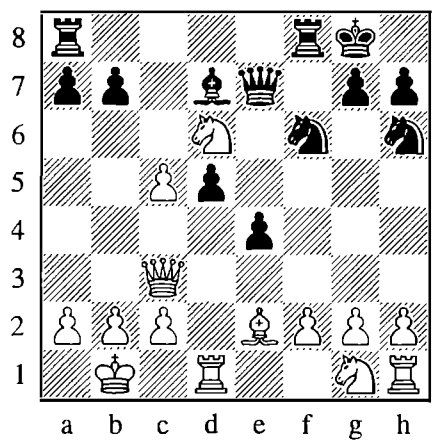


13...♗d7 14.♘d6

14.f3 ♗xb5 15.♗xb5 ♖ac8=

14...e4 15.♗e2

15.♗b5?! b6!∓



15...b6! 16.c6! ♕xd6 17.cxd7 ♕xd7=

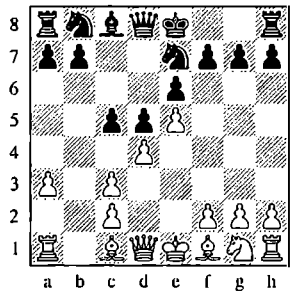
Black's position is more active at the moment, but this is compensated by the fact that White has a bishop versus a knight, so the chances should be roughly balanced.

Conclusion

We have reached the end of our discussion of the 5.♗d2 ♘h6 variation, with the present chapter concentrating on the most popular option of 6.♘b5. It is noteworthy that Black is first to castle in this variation, and we have seen several lines where he was able to open the position and utilize his lead in development to good effect. I found no major problems for Black in any of the lines examined here; the general pattern seems to be that a timely ...f6 will offer the second player good counterplay in the centre.



7th Move Options



7.♗d3 and 7.h4

Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3

6...♘e7

A) 7.♗d3 **222**

B) 7.h4 ♕a5 8.♗d2 ♕a4 **225**

B1) 9.♖b1 **226**

B2) 9.♕b1 **228**

B3) 9.h5 b6 **229**

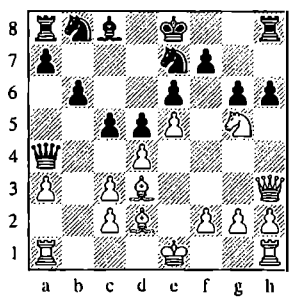
B31) 10.♖h4 **229**

B32) 10.h6 gxh6!N 11.♗xh6 ♗a6 12.♗xa6 ♘xa6 **230**

B321) 13.♘f3 **231**

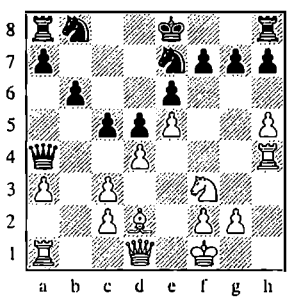
B322) 13.♗g5 **232**

A) after 12.♕h3



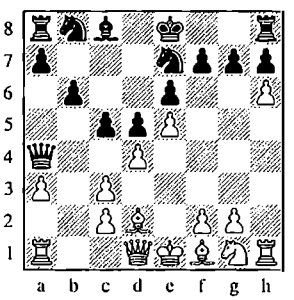
12...cxd4N

B31) after 12.♔xf1



12...♕c4†!?N

B32) after 10.h6



10...gxh6!N

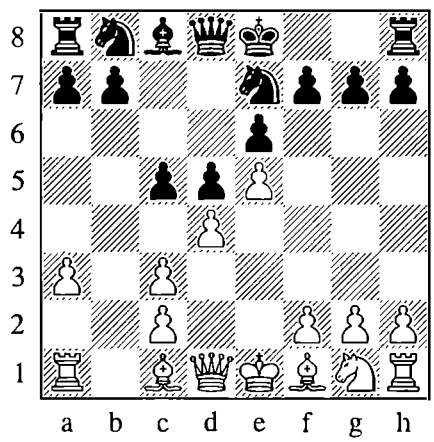
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3

Finally we come to the move that leads us to the most important lines of the Winawer.

5...♗xc3†

This is the main line. 5...♗a5 is the most important alternative but I will say no more about it here.

6.bxc3 ♘e7



This will be the starting position for the present chapter and indeed the rest of the book. In this chapter we will analyse a couple of sidelines in **A) 7.♗d3** and **B) 7.h4**, but before doing so, I will summarize White's other options.

7.♘f3 is an important move which can be found in Chapter 18 beginning on page 235.

7.a4 is closely related to 7.♘f3 and the two moves often transpose. However, due to some move order technicalities, my coverage of 7.a4 ended up spanning five chapters. Coverage of this move begins on page 251.

Finally, the big main line is of course 7.♕g4. This move requires special attention and will be covered in Volume 2.

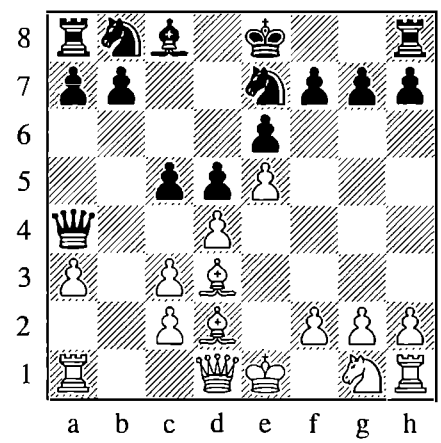
A) 7.♗d3

This move is unusual though fully playable. White develops a piece and keeps the option of moving queen out to g4 on the next move.

7...♕a5

Initiating a thematic queen manoeuvre. The plan works nicely, although there are several playable alternatives including 7...♘bc6, 7...♕c7 and 7...h6!?N.

8.♗d2 ♕a4



This is the typical follow-up. The queen blockades the a3-pawn while stepping away from the gaze of the bishop on d2. Another point is that the d4-pawn comes under fire.

I would like to make a few comments about the blocked structure that arises after 8...c4. Most of the time I would not recommend entering such a position unless the white a-pawn is securely blocked on a3. After 9.♗e2 ♕a4 the pawn does indeed seem to be blocked, but the queen tends to be the wrong piece in the right place for this mission. It's also worth pointing out that in the distant future White may even be able to break this blockade by the ingenious knight manoeuvre via d1-b2, after which the a-pawn can be pushed. Achieving

a3-a4 is often a key plan for White in Winawer lines where ...c4 is played. The main purpose is to make the a3-square available for the dark-squared bishop, and sometimes the a4-a5 lever can be used to open the queenside.

9.♘f3

This has been the most common move but it is pretty harmless.

One other idea is:

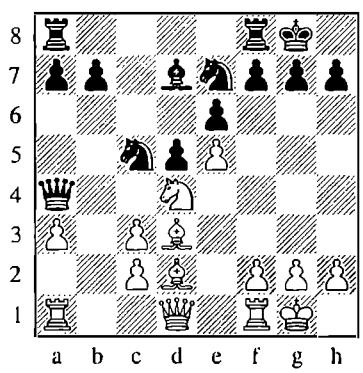
9.dxc5

This method of opening the position is not uncommon in the Winawer. White improves the scope of his bishops but weakens his pawn structure.

9...♘d7 10.♘f3

10.♖b1!?N should be met by 10...a6! to defend the b5-square, followed by similar play as in the line below.

10...♘xc5 11.♘d4 0–0 12.0–0 ♗d7



13.♕h5!?N

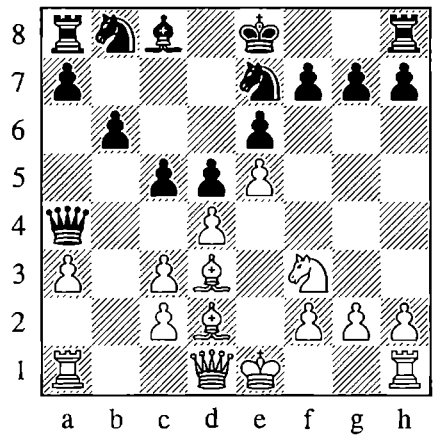
The strange-looking 13.♕b1 was played in Rocha – Socko, Batumi 1999. Here I suggest 13...♖ac8N 14.♕b4 b6 preparing ...♘c6 when Black is fine.

13...♘xd3 14.cxd3 ♘c6=

The ensuing position with opposite-coloured bishops is equal. Black should be slightly careful on the kingside, but a timely ...f6 or ...f5 should enable him to defend.

9...b6

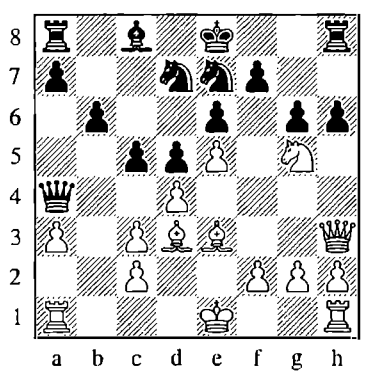
Exchanging the 'French bishop' on a6 is the most logical plan, especially as White has already spent a tempo moving his bishop to d3.



10.♘g5!?

This seems like the only challenging idea, but Black's resources are more than adequate.

10.♗e3 ♘d7 11.♘g5 h6 12.♕h5 g6 13.♕h3 occurred in Romanishin – Uhlmann, Tallinn 1977. Here a logical improvement is:



13...♗a6N 14.0–0 ♗xd3 15.cxd3 ♖c8 I prefer Black, who has a strategically fine position with good control over the light squares. Having the king in the centre is not really a problem here, since there is no way for White to attack it. If allowed, Black might play ...c4 next in order to create an outpost on c4 and apply pressure

against the pawn on c3. 16.dxc5 is a logical way to avoid this idea while attempting to open the position, but after 16...♘xc5 Black's position remains slightly more comfortable.

10...h6 11.♕h5

11.♘f3? is simply a loss of time since ...h6 is a useful move for Black. 11...♗a6 12.0–0 occurred in Duda – Cheng, Kemer 2009, and now after the simple 12...0–0N Black is slightly better, with a solid position and good control over the light squares.

11...g6 12.♕h3

I found a nice illustrative game where Black convincingly refuted an unsound attack:

12.♕h4 ♘d7!

Guarding against ♘xf7 followed by ♕f6†.

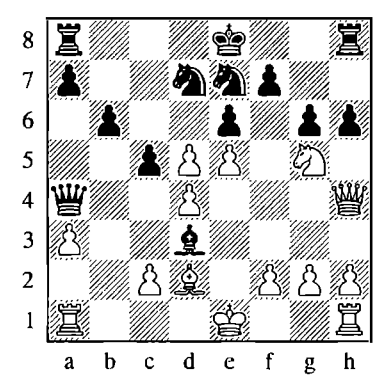
13.c4?!

Only Black benefits from the opening of the centre here. White should try a quieter approach, although in that case Black will just play ...♗a6 with a comfortable edge thanks to his light-square control.

13...♗a6 14.cxd5

14.dxc5 ♗xc4 15.♘e4! is a better try, but after 15...dxe4 16.♕xe4 ♖c8 17.♕xc4 ♕xc4 18.♗xc4 ♖xc5 Black wins the e5-pawn and keeps some advantage.

14...♗xd3



15.cxd3

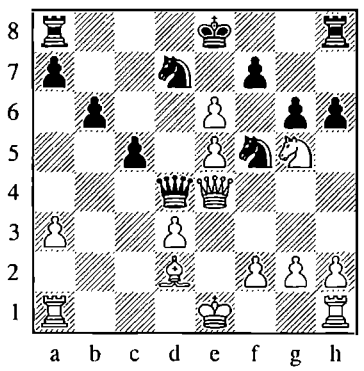
15.♘xf7!? is tricky but Black can keep things under control with: 15...♘f5! 16.♘d6† ♔f8 17.♘xf5 ♗xf5 18.dxe6 ♗xe6 19.♗xh6† ♔e8!∓ Now that things have calmed down, White's counterplay turns out to be insufficient.

15...♘f5 16.♕e4

Or 16.♕h3 ♕xd4 17.0–0 ♕xe5∓ intending ...hxg5.

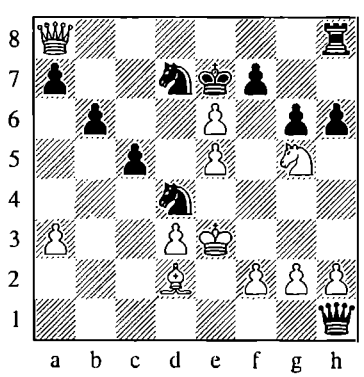
16...♕xd4 17.dxe6

17.0–0 exd5–+ is hopeless, so White goes for broke.



17...♕xa1† 18.♔e2 ♘d4† 19.♔e3 ♕xh1 20.♕xa8† ♔e7

Both sides have made double rook sacrifices, but White's king is the one that ends up in the fire.



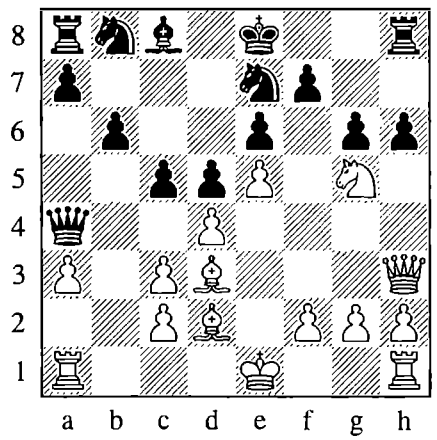
21.♕xh8

21.♕d5 fxe6 22.♘xe6 ♘xe6 23.♕d6† ♔d8 24.♕xe6 ♕xg2–+

21...♕xg2 22.exd7 ♕xg5† 23.f4 ♕g1†

0–1 Redolfi – Eliskases, San Nicolas 1957.

Let us return to the main line, as played in Lee – Manvelyan, San Francisco 2008. Here Black could have obtained the better chances with:



12...cxd4N

Also promising is 12...♗a6N with the usual play on the light squares.

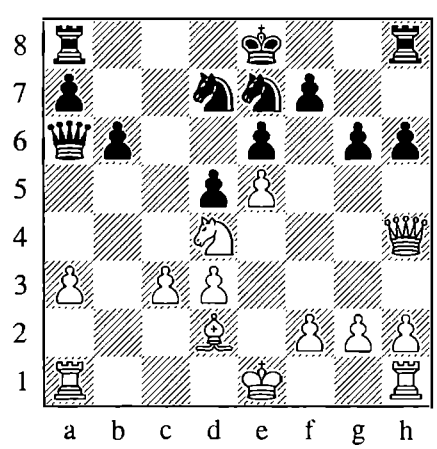
13.♕h4

13.cxd4 ♗a6∓ gives Black firm control on the light squares. The plan is to exchange bishops and play ...♘bc6, while White must worry about his queenside weaknesses.

13...♘d7!

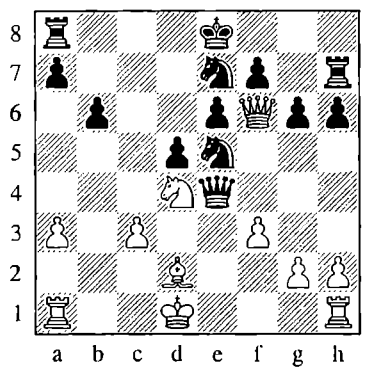
Once again we should not forget about the threat of ♘xf7 followed by ♕f6†.

14.♘f3 ♗a6 15.♘xd4 ♗xd3 16.cxd3 ♕a6



17.♕g3

In the event of 17.♔e2?! the tactics resulting from 17...♘xe5! work out well for Black: 18.♕f6 ♕xd3† 19.♔e1 (19.♔d1? ♘c4–+) 19...♕e4† 20.♔d1 ♖h7 21.f3

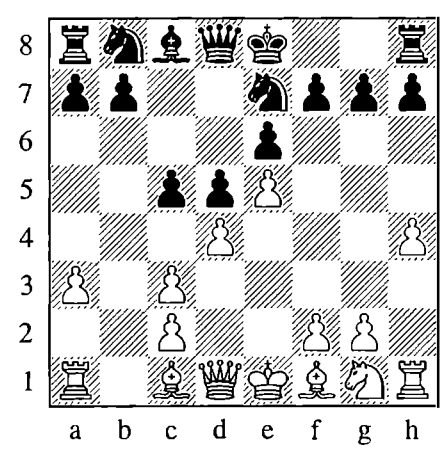


21...♘g8! 22.♕xe6† fxe6 23.fxe4 ♘f6 24.exd5 exd5∓

17...♘c5 18.♔e2 ♘f5 19.♘xf5 exf5!∓

Securing a fine blockading square on e6 for the knight. Black holds an obvious positional advantage.

B) 7.h4



Though my own experience on this move is limited, it is an important option whose ideas are well known. I have only had the present position over the board twice, once from each

side, resulting in two draws. However, the popularity of this particular move has increased rapidly in recent years. After having studied and defended against it in the 2012 Olympiad in Istanbul, I am aware of how dangerous it can be.

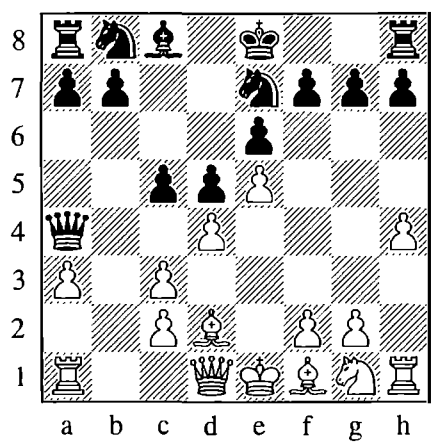
White has a simple but efficient plan of advancing the h-pawn to h5 and later h6 if allowed, in order to create weaknesses on Black's kingside. Another important point is that White will now be able to develop his king's rook via h3 or h4 in order to support the centre and later attack along the g-file.

7...♕a5

Many other moves have been tried, but I have decided to recommend a straightforward and familiar plan involving putting the queen on a4 followed by ...b6 and ...♗a6, quickly exchanging the light-squared bishops. This exchange is one of the most central ideas in the entire Winawer system and gives Black a long-term strategic advantage on the light squares.

8.♗d2 ♕a4

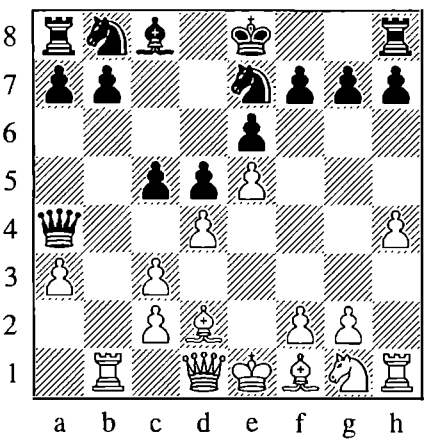
It is worth mentioning that 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 ♕a4 can be met by 10.h5! ♕xd4?! (10...♘bc6!?) 11.♘f3 ♕e4† 12.♗c2 ♘f5 Almasi – Vallejo Pons, Beijing 2011, and now 13.♔f1!N b6 14.♗b5† ♗d7 15.♗d3⩲ would have been promising for White.



From this position White has three main tries: **B1) 9.♖b1**, **B2) 9.♕b1** and **B3) 9.h5**.

9.♘f3 will almost certainly reach a position discussed under the move order 9.h5 b6 10.♘f3 ♗a6. See variation B3 on page 229.

B1) 9.♖b1



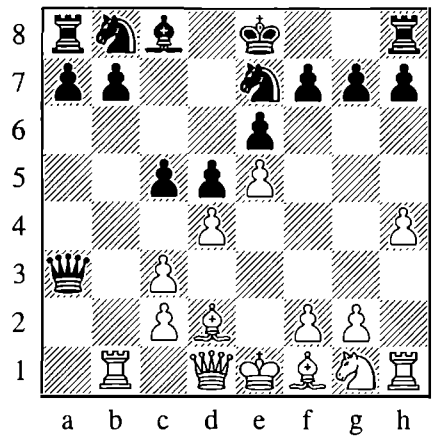
This is a typical attempt to disturb Black's plans of playing ...b6 and ...♗a6. The drawback is of course that it leaves the a3-pawn unprotected.

9...♕xa3

Taking the pawn immediately seems like the simplest solution, although it does give White the option of forcing a repetition with ♖a1 and ♖b1 during the next few moves.

If Black is determined not to allow a quick draw he may consider 9...♘bc6, but after 10.♘f3 White's position seems slightly favourable. Now 10...c4N looks best (10...♕xa3?! is a bit too greedy), when Black is solid but lacks counterplay with the centre closed. White should eventually be able to build up an initiative on the kingside. It's also worth repeating an earlier point that the queen on a4 does not guarantee a permanent blockade on the queenside, because White has the long-

term possibility of transferring his knight via d1 to b2. Later White can play f2-f4 and activate his bishop using the a3-square.



10.♖h3

This was White's choice in the one game I found on the database. I checked a few other possibilities as well:

10.♖a1N ♕b2 11.dxc5 ♘d7 12.♘f3 ♘xc5 is fine for Black, and White should start thinking about forcing a draw with 13.♖b1 and ♖a1 before it's too late.

10.h5N h6 11.♘f3

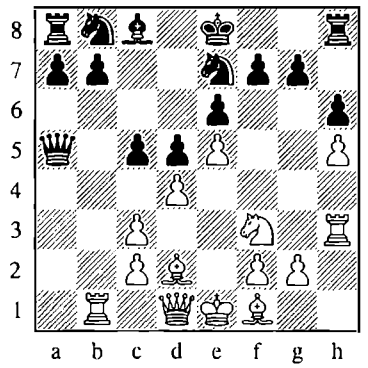
11.♖a1 can still force a draw.

11...♕a5

Black gets away with an extra pawn, although White has compensation. A logical continuation is:

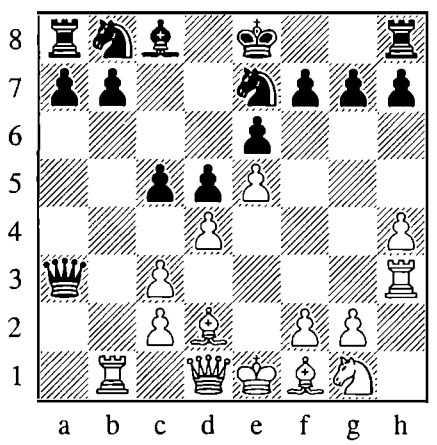
12.♖h3

12.♖b5?! only complicates matters for White: 12...♕d8 13.dxc5 (After 13.♖xc5? ♗d7 followed by ...b6 the rook is getting trapped.) 13...♘d7 Black obtains good counterplay against the vulnerable pawns on c5 and e5.



12...♘bc6 13.♘h4 ♕c7 14.♕g4 ♖g8

The position offers mutual chances. Black remains with an extra pawn, although White's activity assures him of some compensation. Black's plan for the next few moves will be ...♗d7 and ...0–0–0 if possible. An important resource is ...f5 or ...f6 to create counterplay on the kingside.



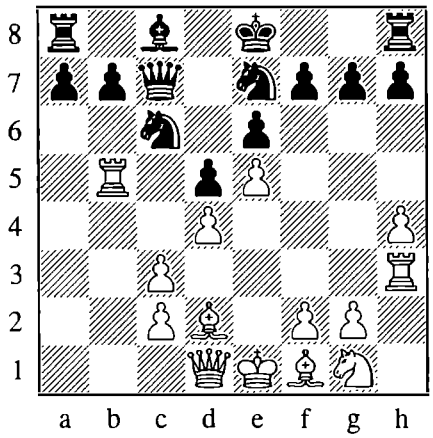
10...♕a5 11.♖b5

This wins back the pawn on c5, but loses some coordination.

11.h5N h6 12.♘f3 ♕c7 13.♘h4 ♘bc6 transposes to 10.h5 above.

11...♕c7 12.♖xc5 ♘bc6 13.♖b5

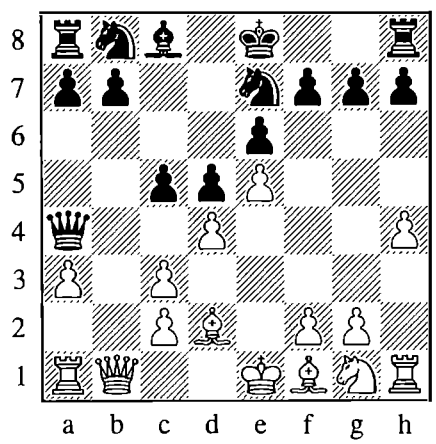
Here I found an interesting way to improve on the game Evertsson – Mueller Fernandez, Dos Hermanas 2004.



13...a5!?N

Bringing the passed pawn into play, while also preparing ...b6 and ...♗a6 to exchange the light-squared bishops. Later Black may obtain a useful outpost for a knight on c4.

B2) 9.♕b1



This move has achieved an outstanding score of nearly 80%, so we should pay close attention to it. The general idea is the same as in the previous line, but this time White avoids leaving the a3-pawn unprotected. The drawback is that the queen commits herself to a strange square, thus limiting White's attacking possibilities on the kingside.

9...♘bc6!

9...c4 has been by far the most common choice, but for the same reasons as given in the previous variation, I prefer to avoid or at least delay blocking the centre for as long as possible.

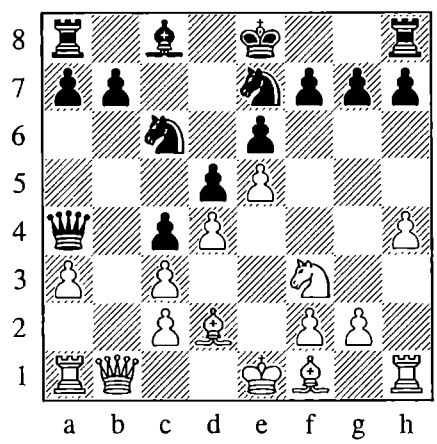
10.♘f3

10.h5 h6 11.♘f3 c4 transposes to the main line below.

Black has no need to fear 10.♗b5N ♕a5, as the queen can happily drop back to c7 while White's queen and light-squared bishop are misplaced.

10...c4

By now Black does not seem to have anything better than blocking the centre, but the situation has changed from the previous move, as White has lost some flexibility by committing his knight to the f3-square. Black's counterplay now depends on the ...f6 break, and it will be important to carry it out before White can achieve full coordination on the kingside.



11.h5 h6 12.g3

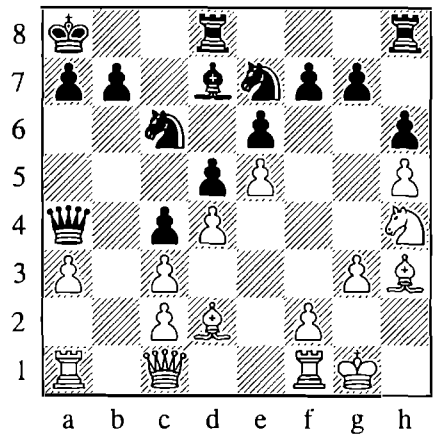
After 12.♗e2 ♗d7 13.0–0 0–0–0 Black will obtain kingside counterplay with ...f6 or perhaps ...g6.

12...♗d7 13.♗h3 0–0–0 14.♕c1 ♔b8

Hiding the king on b8 or in the corner is

often a sensible precaution before going into action on the other flank.

15.♘h4 ♔a8 16.0–0



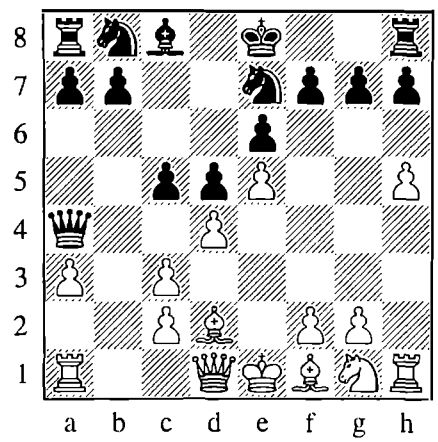
16...f6! 17.exf6 gxf6 18.♖e1 e5 19.♗xd7 ♖xd7 20.dxe5?!

The correct continuation is 20.♗e3N ♖dd8 with interesting play. Black has a safe king and attacking potential on the kingside as well as a strong pawn centre.

20...fxe5

Van Haastert – Visser, Hilversum 2008. Black is already slightly better, with firm central control and attacking prospects against White's king.

B3) 9.h5



9...b6

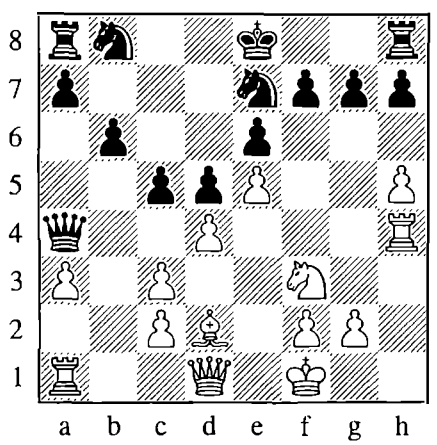
9...cxd4 10.cxd4 transposes to 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 ♕a4 10.h5! as discussed earlier on page 226.

At this point White can either bring his rook into play with **B31) 10.♖h4** or press ahead on the kingside with **B32) 10.h6**.

Before discussing those moves in detail, I would like to offer some guidance about how to respond to the h4-h5-h6 plan. The most natural reaction may seem to be to meet h5-h6 with ...g6, keeping the kingside closed and the pawn chain intact. However, my lifelong experience as a French player has taught me that such positions should generally be avoided. Instead Black should usually either prevent the pawn from arriving on h6 by playing ...h6 himself, or accept a slightly damaged pawn structure and aim for active counterplay on the g-file as well as the light squares.

10.♘f3 ♗a6 will almost certainly transpose to one of the two main lines after 11.♖h4 or 11.h6 respectively.

B31) 10.♖h4 ♗a6 11.♘f3 ♗xf1 12.♔xf1



12...♕c4†!?N

12...♘bc6?! gave White the upper hand after 13.h6 (13.dxc5!?N is also interesting) in Grischuk – Kamsky, Beijing 2011.

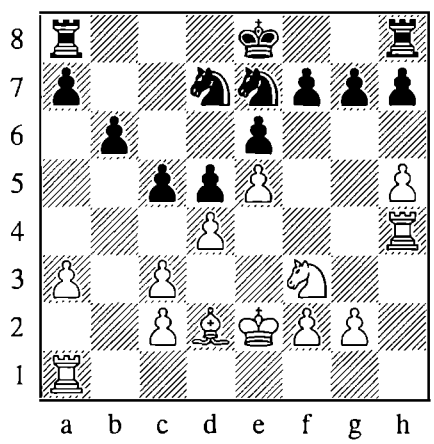
12...♘f5 is quite playable and after 13.♖f4 ♘c6 Black was fine in Sasikiran – Sutovsky, Antwerp 2009. Nevertheless I believe the text move to be a marginal improvement.

13.♕e2

13.♔g1 ♘bc6 doesn't trouble Black, who has a perfectly sound position with counterplay on the c-file and the light squares. The difference between this and the aforementioned Grischuk – Kamsky game is that here dxc5 can safely be met by ...♕xc5.

13...♕xe2† 14.♔xe2 ♘d7!

It is useful for the knight to be ready to recapture on c5 to avoid an opening of the b-file.

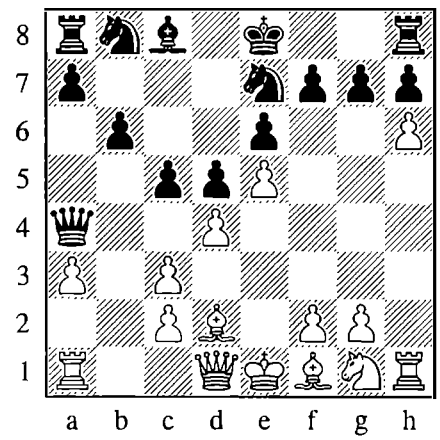


15.h6 g6!

This position is an exception to my general rule outlined on the previous page. Here Black's prospects for counterplay along the g-file would not be so great, while the blocking of the kingside does not harm his position too much. There are still some weaknesses, but with the queens off the board Black can better control matters, especially with the knight placed on d7 where it guards f6. The main long-term issue for Black is the weakness of the pawn on h7. In view of this Black should castle short in order to protect it and obtain counterplay along the c-file. Note that short castling would have been highly dangerous if the queens were still on the board.

Black is doing fine.

B32) 10.h6



10...gxh6!N

I believe this to be the best move objectively, but even more so from a practical point of view.

10...g6 has been played in a couple of games and is also the computer's preference. However, for the reasons discussed earlier, I would consider it a strategic mistake.

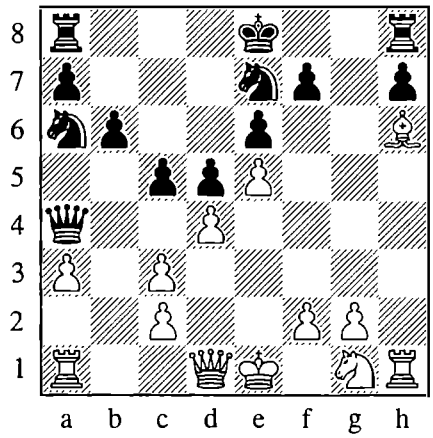
11.♗xh6 ♗a6 12.♗xa6

I considered two other options:

12.♗g5 ♗xf1 13.♔xf1 ♘d7 14.♘e2 ♖c8 15.♖a2 A strange defensive move, but quite a typical one for the Winawer. 15...♕c4 16.♖b2 ♕a6 Black is doing fine and 17.♖a2 might lead to a repetition of moves.

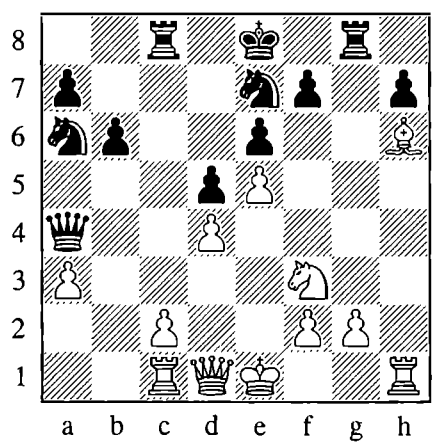
12.♘f3 ♗xf1 13.♔xf1 ♘d7 gives a balanced position where Black's counterplay on the queenside and along the c-file compensates for the weaknesses on the kingside. Black's general plan should be to keep his king in the centre and play with the rooks along the c- and g-files.

12...♘xa6



This position has yet to be tested, but it is quite thematic for this line and the moves on both sides have so far been extremely logical and principled. I decided to explore two paths in detail, in order to show some relevant ideas and illustrate how the play may develop. Thus we will consider **B321) 13.♘f3** and **B322) 13.♗g5** in turn.

B321) 13.♘f3 cxd4 14.cxd4 ♖c8 15.♖c1 ♖g8



16.♘g5

16.♗g5 transposes directly to line B322 below.

16...♘f5

Another idea is 16...♘b8 17.♘xh7 ♘d7 defending f6. There might follow 18.g3 ♖c3 19.♗d2 ♖xa3 20.c3 ♕xd1† 21.♔xd1 ♖a2 with roughly equal chances.

17.♘xh7 ♖xg2 18.♗g5 ♕c4!

It is useful to prevent ♔f1.

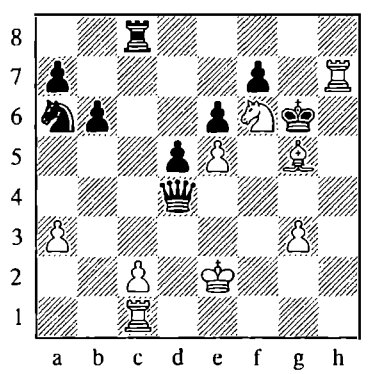
19.c3

19.♘f6†? ♔d8∓ only helps Black to get his king into safety.

19.♕h5 forces a draw after 19...♕xd4□ 20.♘f6† ♔f8□ 21.♘d7† ♔e8 22.♘f6†= with perpetual checks.

19.♕d3 leads to a similar draw by perpetual: 19...♕xd3 20.♘f6† ♔d8 21.♖h8† ♔e7 22.♘xd5† ♔d7 23.♘f6† ♔e7 24.♘d5†=

19.♕e2 also leads to a draw, albeit by slightly more complicated means: 19...♕c3† 20.♔f1 ♘g3† 21.fxg3 ♖xe2 22.♘f6† ♔f8 23.♖h8† ♔g7 24.♖h7† ♔g6 25.♔xe2 ♕xd4

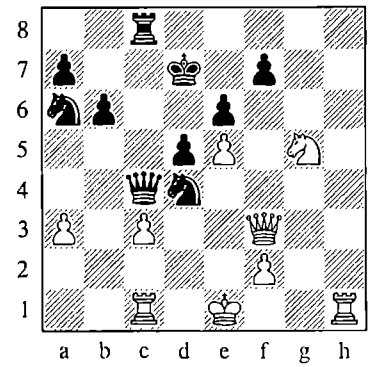


26.♗f4 ♘c5 27.♖ch1 ♘e4 28.♖1h6† ♔f5 29.♖h5† ♔g6 30.♖5h6†=

19...♔d7! 20.♕e2

20.♕f3 wins an exchange, but at too high a price. After 20...♖xg5 21.♘xg5 ♘xd4 Black has more than enough compensation, as his

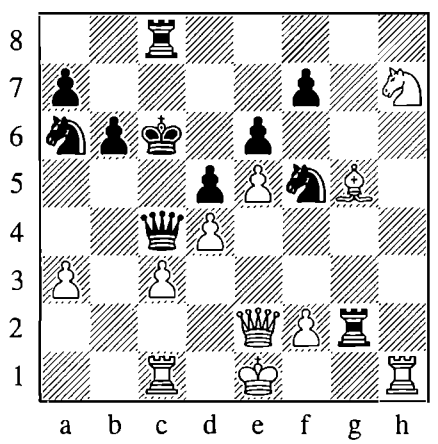
knights have excellent outposts available and White's pawn structure is weak.



It is worth pointing out that 22.♕xf7†?? is a losing blunder. (The lesser evil is 22.♕e3 ♘f5 23.♕e2 ♕f4 24.♖d1 ♘c5∓ with excellent piece coordination for Black.) 22...♔c6 23.♕h5 ♘c5 24.cxd4 ♕xc1† 25.♕d1 ♕xg5 26.dxc5 ♕xc5† 27.♔f1 ♕e4! and Black should take the full point.

20...♔c6!

The king is getting ready for the endgame.



21.♕xc4†

Once again, 21.♕f3 ♖xg5 22.♘xg5 ♘xd4 23.♕e3 ♘f5 gives Black fine compensation.

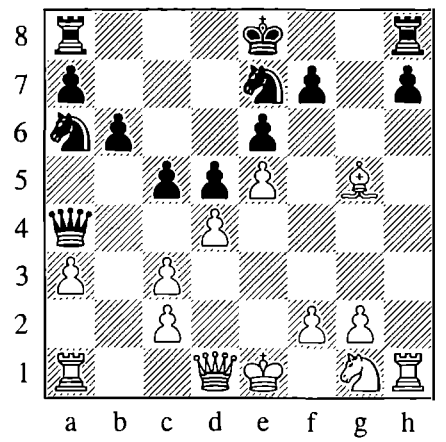
21...dxc4 22.♔f1 ♖g4 23.♔e2 ♖g8 24.♗d2

24.♖h5 might lead to a repetition: 24...♘g7 25.♖hh1 ♘e8 The knight retreats to protect the f6-square. 26.♖h5 ♘g7=

24...♖e4† 25.♔f3 ♖h4

The position is evenly balanced. White has the advantage of having a bishop on the board, but Black has active pieces (including his king!) and good control over the light squares.

B322) 13.♗g5



This time White plans to capture the h7-pawn with his rook instead of his knight.

13...♖c8 14.♖c1 ♖g8

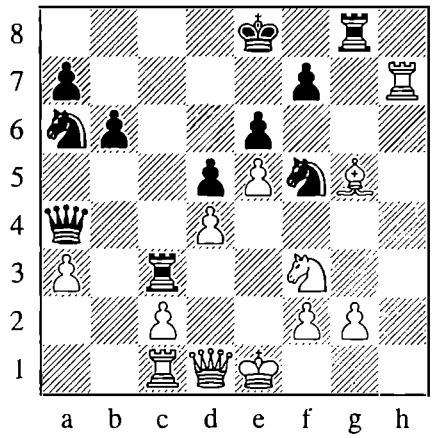
Black abandons the h-pawn to its fate, as activating the rook is a higher priority.

15.♘f3 cxd4 16.cxd4 ♖c3!

16...♘f5 is slightly inaccurate in view of: 17.c3 (17.♖xh7 ♖c3!↑ leads to the main line below.) 17...♕xd1† 18.♔xd1 h6! 19.g4! hxg5 20.gxf5↑ White has the easier task in the endgame although I believe Black should hold it with accurate defence.

17.♖xh7 ♘f5

Black has active piece play and a promising initiative.

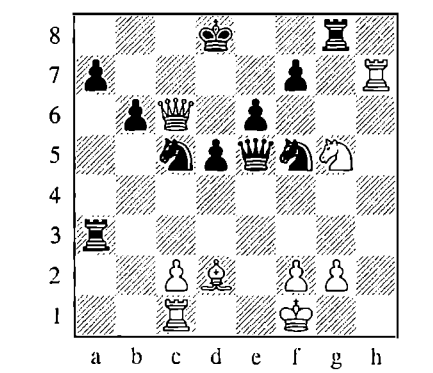


18.g3!?

This strange-looking move leads to interesting complications and eventual equality.

I also analysed the following line where White gives up a pawn in pursuit of the initiative:
18.♗d2 ♖xa3 19.♘g5 ♕xd4 20.♕e2 ♘c5 21.♕b5† ♔d8 22.♕c6

22.♘xf7†?! ♔c8 23.♘d6† ♔b8∓
22...♕xe5† 23.♔f1

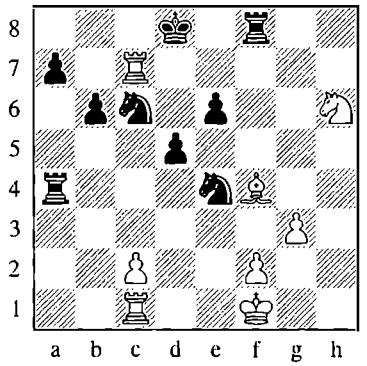


23...♕e2†! 24.♔xe2

24.♔g1?? loses to 24...♕xd2 25.♘xf7† ♔e7 26.♕c7† ♔f6 27.♕e5† ♔g6–+ and the black king escapes.

24...♘d4† 25.♔f1 ♘xc6 26.♘xf7† ♔c8 27.♗f4 ♖a4 28.g3 ♘e4

White has compensation for the pawn but not more than that. A likely continuation is:
29.♘h6 ♖f8! 30.♖c7† ♔d8

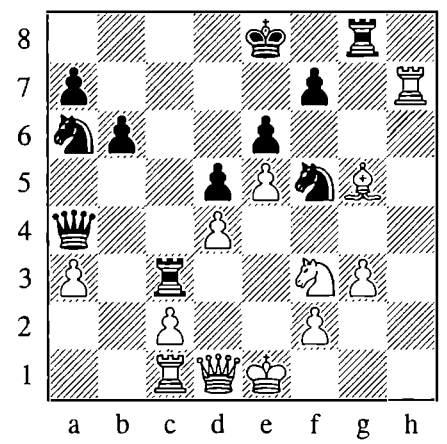


31.♘f7†

31.♖xc6 ♖xf4 32.gxf4 ♔d7 33.f3 ♔xc6 34.fxe4 ♖xe4 gives Black slightly the easier side of a drawn endgame.

31...♔e8 32.♘d6† ♘xd6 33.♗xd6 ♖f5=

The position remains equal as the knight on c6 is indirectly protected by the ...♔d7 resource.



18...♖xf3 19.♕xf3 ♖xg5 20.c4!

20.g4?? ♕xd4! is hopeless for White, but the text move forces Black to be careful.

20...♕a5†!

Other moves would give White the advantage, one example being 20...♘c7? 21.g4!± and it is difficult for Black to defend his weaknesses.

21.♖c3!?

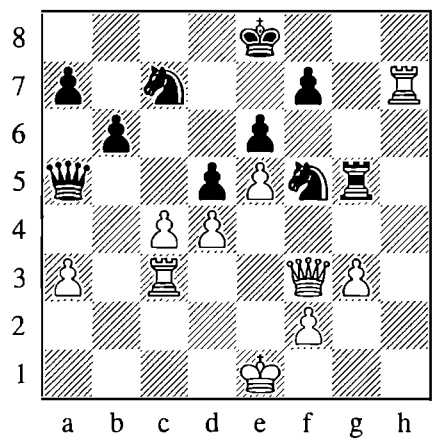
21.♔f1?? is neatly refuted by 21...♘xg3†! 22.♔g2 ♘e4† 23.♔h1 ♖f5–+.

21.♔d1 ♕a4† 22.♔e1 leads to an unexpected perpetual check.

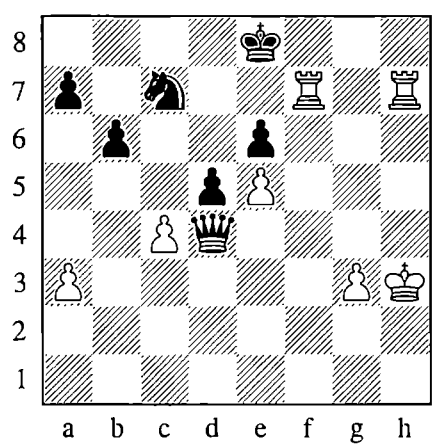
The text move looks like a risky winning attempt, but also ends up in a draw.

21...♘c7

Another route is 21...♘b4!? 22.axb4 ♕a1† 23.♔d2 ♕a2† 24.♔e1 ♕a1†= with perpetual checks.



22.♔f1! ♘xg3† 23.fxg3! ♖f5 24.♔g2 ♖xf3 25.♖xf3 ♕d2† 26.♔h3 ♕xd4 27.♖fxf7



27...♕e4

There is no sense in trying to save the knight, so Black forces a perpetual. 27...♕g1 is also good enough.

28.♖xc7 ♕h1† 29.♔g4 ♕e4† 30.♔g5 ♕xe5† 31.♔g6 ♕f5† 32.♔g7 ♕f8†=

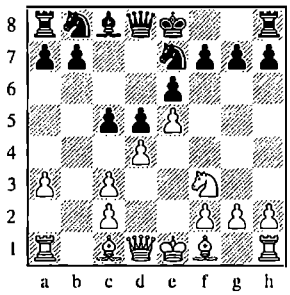
There is no escaping the checks.

Conclusion

7.♗d3 is a playable sideline but not something Black should fear. 7.h4 is a different matter, although the thematic queen manoeuvre to a4 seems to yield sufficient counterplay. The most critical line is B32 where White advances his h-pawn all the way to h6, but with the novelty 10...gxh6!N Black obtains adequate play on the light squares and along the newly-opened g-file.



7th Move Options



7.♘f3

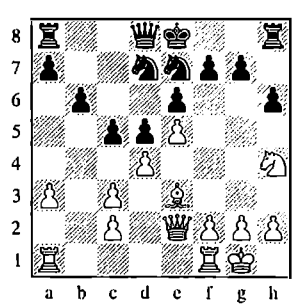
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.♘f3

7...h6!?

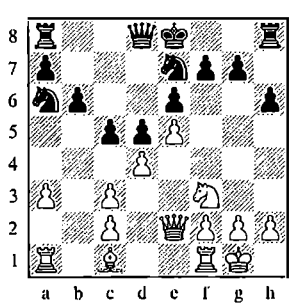
A) 8.♗e2 **238**
B) 8.♗d3 **239**
C) 8.h4 b6 **243**
C1) 9.h5 **243**
C2) 9.♗b5† **244**
D) 8.a4 0–0N **247**
D1) 9.♗d3 **247**
D2) 9.♗a3 **248**

A) after 12.♘h4



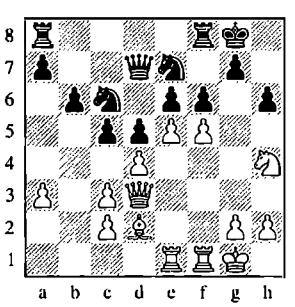
12...♖c8!N

B) note to 10.♘h4!?



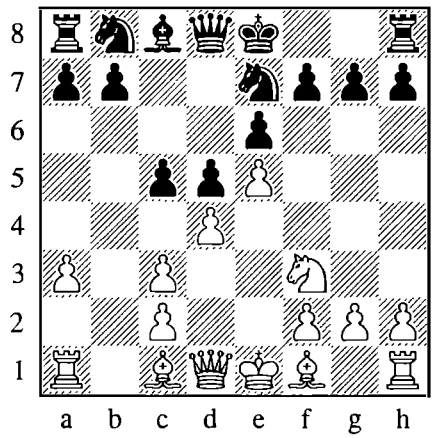
11...♕c8!N

B) after 15.♖ae1



15...fxe5N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.♘f3



This is an extremely important branch of Winawer theory, second only to 7.♕g4 in terms of popularity. Instead of lunging with the queen, White develops a piece and steers the game towards a more positional battle where he hopes his space advantage and bishop pair will prove more significant than the doubled c-pawns.

7...h6!?

An important moment. This is far from the most popular option, and the reader may be forgiven for wondering why we should play such a move. I will answer this question in two parts: firstly by explaining the useful aspects of the move ...h6 itself, and secondly by mentioning some of the drawbacks of Black's more obvious moves.

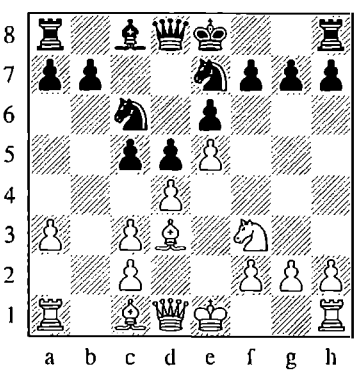
Starting at the most basic level, Black's last move guards the g5-square, preventing any attacking ideas based on ♘g5 followed by ♕h5. This plan caused considerable problems even for Magnus Carlsen in a game against Caruana at the 2012 Grand Slam Final, which you can find referenced shortly.

The move ...h6 also has some more subtle prophylactic uses. In positions where Black opts for short castling, he often has to worry about ♗d3 creating the immediate threat of ♗xh7†, so playing the move ...h6 in advance creates a cushion against this plan. There are other variations where White pushes his h-pawn up the board; once again, the move ...h6 blocks this idea before it has even started.

Despite these virtues, it is still reasonable to ask why Black should commit himself to ...h6 so soon. To answer this point, I would argue that 7...h6 is a high-class waiting move, which actually leads to a mild form of zugzwang, whereby Black intends to choose a specific scheme of development against whichever move his opponent might play.

To illustrate this point more fully, I will present a brief summary of Black's major alternatives, showing how White should react to each one of them. The following moves are arranged in descending order of popularity according to the database.

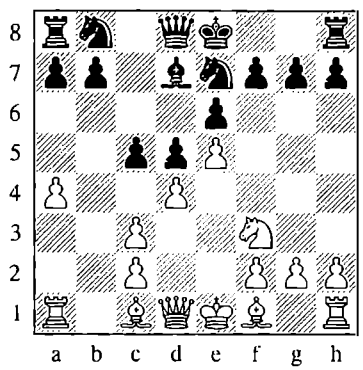
i) 7...♘bc6 can be answered by 8.♗d3.



As a rule, I like to be able to respond to this active developing move with ...b6 and ...♗a6, but with the knight committed to c6 this option is no longer available. Moreover, short castling is prevented due to the thematic sacrifice on h7. One high-profile game continued 8...♗d7 9.0–0 ♕c7 10.♖e1 ♘a5? 11.♘g5± and Black

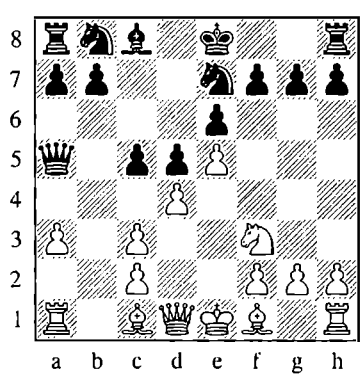
had some problems in Caruana – Carlsen, Sao Paulo/Bilbao 2012. As mentioned previously, this example also highlights the prophylactic value of the move ...h6.

ii) 7...♗d7 is a popular choice but it feels wrong to me, as it completely abandons the idea of exchanging bishops with ...b6 and ...♗a6. White replies with 8.a4!.



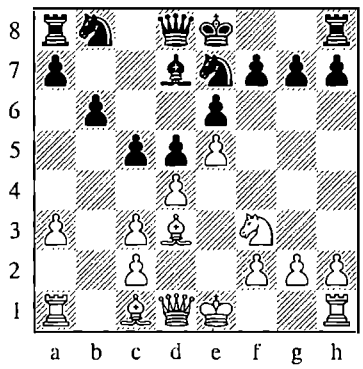
This move secures the a3-square for his bishop while also preventing the black bishop from coming to a4. In my opinion White has a good game.

iii) 7...♕a5 has also been tested extensively, but it is slightly early to commit the queen.



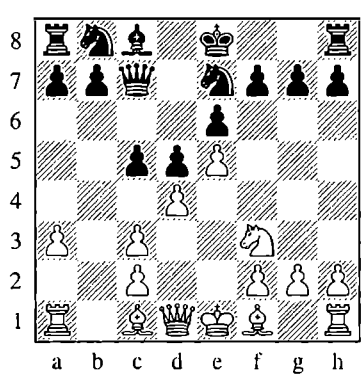
White has achieved a modest plus score with 8.♗d2, and 8.♕d2!? is also interesting, keeping the possibility of developing the bishop on a3 later.

iv) If Black plays 7...b6 intending ...♗a6, then White can play 8.♗b5† ♗d7 9.♗d3 avoiding the exchange of bishops.



We will encounter a similar situation in the main part of the chapter in variation C2, where the moves 7...h6 and 8.h4 have been included. I believe that the inclusion of the pawn moves favours Black slightly, for reasons that will be explained on page 244.

v) 7...♕c7 has occurred in a huge number of games, many of them via a slightly different move order involving 6...♕c7. This move also has the idea of being flexible, but I believe 7...h6 to be a more useful waiting move.



From this position White has achieved a healthy plus score with both 8.a4 and 8.h4.

vi) Finally, 7...0–0 is a sideline which has not been seen in many games. Though it cannot be

refuted directly, Black presents his opponent with a target for a possible kingside attack, and loses the option of long castling, which can be especially useful in blocked positions involving a later ...c4.

Summary

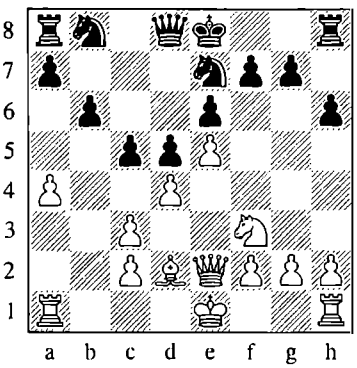
Although the theoretical debate will surely continue, I believe I have demonstrated that Black's natural developing moves all come at a price. They are all playable, but each of them reveals information about Black's set-up that enables White to choose an appropriate plan of action.

This background information helps to put the move 7...h6 into its proper context. We have touched on its various uses, and over the course of the chapter we will see how Black can choose a scheme of development to counter whichever set-up White may choose, rather than the other way around.

Without further ado, we will start looking at some options for White. There are four main candidates: **A) 8.♗e2**, **B) 8.♗d3**, **C) 8.h4** and **D) 8.a4**. A few other rare moves have been tried, but they all carry obvious drawbacks as shown below.

8.♗b5†? is pointless before Black has committed himself to ...b6. Now after 8...♗d7 Black will either get the light-squared bishops exchanged or, in the event that White retreats the bishop, utilize the free tempo to post his bishop on the a4-square.

8.♗d2 has been played on a single occasion, but is not likely to be repeated. The c3-pawn is not yet under threat and White loses the option of developing the bishop on a3. 8...b6 Black proceeds with his standard plan. 9.a4 (9.♗b5†N is met by 9...♗d7 intending either an exchange of bishops or ...♗a4 if White retreats his own bishop.) 9...♗a6 10.♗e2 ♗xe2 11.♕xe2



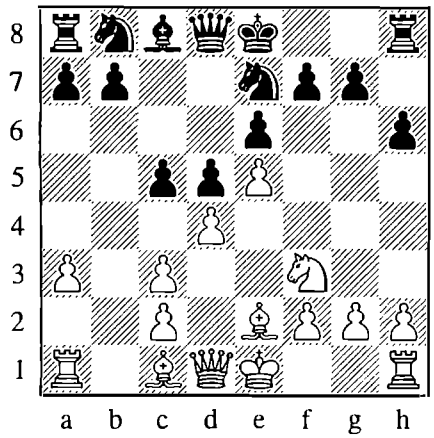
Black already had a comfortable position in Lopez Escobar – Matamoros Franco, Coria del Rio 2002. At this point my suggestion would be 11...0–0N 12.0–0 ♘bc6∓ intending ...♕c7 and ...♘a5-c4 with excellent play on the light squares.

8.dxc5 gives White the d4-square for his knight, but his pawn structure becomes much worse. 8...0–0 Black develops normally; the weak pawn on c5 can be collected at any time. Now White's best seems to be 9.c4 when 9...♘d7 10.cxd5 exd5 transposes to a position analysed under 8.c4 below.

8.c4 opens the position for White's bishop pair, but White will be stuck with several pawn weaknesses. I propose: 8...0–0N 9.cxd5 (9.dxc5 ♘d7 10.cxd5 exd5 transposes) 9...exd5 10.dxc5 ♘d7 11.♗d3 (11.♗e3 ♘f5!) 11...♘xc5 12.0–0 ♗f5= with good prospects for Black.

A) 8.♗e2

This move has only been seen a few times, and Black gets a comfortable position with the typical plan of exchanging light-squared bishops.



8...b6! 9.0–0

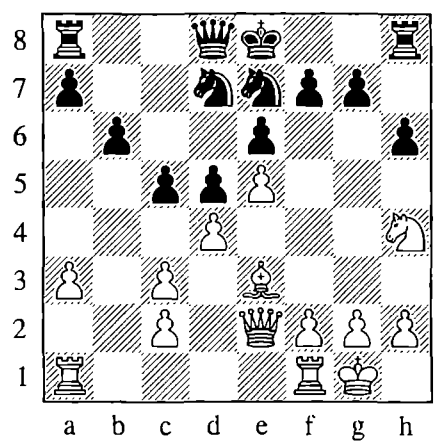
9.♗b5†?! loses too much time for White. 9...♗d7 10.♗e2?! (10.a4N is a more logical try but after 10...♕c7 Black is fine as he has gained the useful move ...h6 compared with other similar lines.) Now in Schoene – Moor, Dresden 2003, the standard 10...♗a4!N would have given Black the more comfortable game as White has sacrificed two tempos with his bishop.

9...♗a6 10.♗e3 ♗xe2 11.♕xe2 ♘d7

Black has exchanged his bad bishop without a hitch and should be happy with the outcome of the opening.

12.♘h4

White would like to advance his f-pawn. In the game Bellaiche – Shakhmurzova, Prague 2012, Black reacted with the risky 12...g5!?, but I suggest a calmer approach.



12...♖c8!N 13.f4 g6∓

White is unlikely to create any serious problems on the kingside, while Black has excellent long-term chances on the queenside.

B) 8.♗d3

With this move White aims for rapid development and short castling.

8...b6

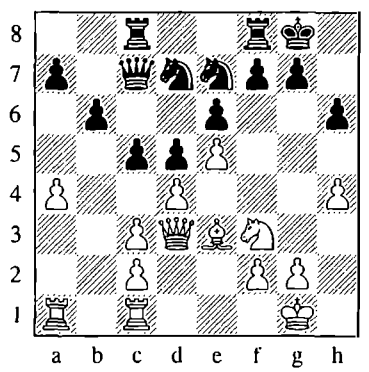
Once again exchanging light-squared bishops is an attractive plan, especially when White has already spent a tempo moving his bishop.

9.0–0

This is the usual choice.

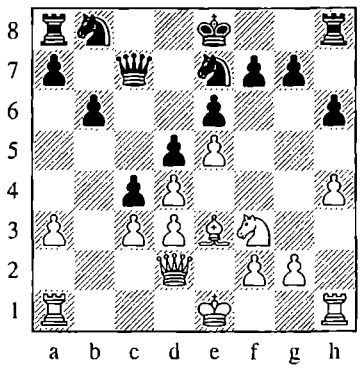
One other example continued 9.♗e3 ♕c7 10.♕d2 ♗a6 11.h4 ♗xd3 with a choice of recaptures for White:

a) 12.♕xd3 ♘d7 13.a4 ♖c8 14.0–0 0–0 15.♖fc1



15...f6!? (Perhaps Black was tempted to open the kingside after the white rook moved away. Still, 15...♘f5N would have been a simpler way to maintain at least equal prospects.) 16.♗f4?! (16.exf6N ♖xf6=) 16...fxe5 17.♗xe5 ♘xe5 18.♘xe5 ♘f5∓ Astengo – Drasko, Bratto 2005. Black has a better pawn structure and ongoing pressure along the c-file.

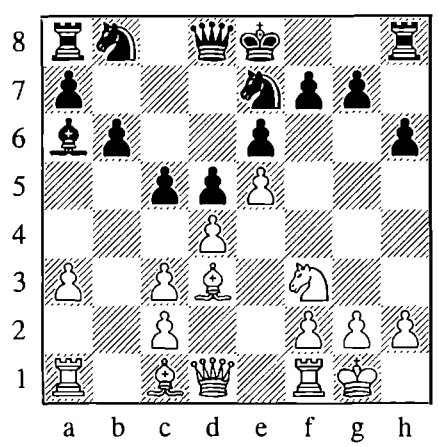
b) 12.cxd3N is well met by 12...c4!:



13.0–0 (13.a4 ♘bc6 14.dxc4 ♘a5! 15.cxd5 ♘xd5∓) 13...cxd3 14.♕xd3 ♘bc6 15.c4 dxc4 16.♕xc4 ♖c8∓ Black has a slight edge in view of his better pawn structure and control over the d5-square.

9...♗a6

Black is now about to achieve one of his main goals in the Winawer, exchanging off the light-squared bishops which will give excellent counterplay on the light squares.



10.♘h4!?

This move has been played by Anand. The idea is simply to push the f-pawn and attack on the kingside. Several other moves have been tried, and I have presented a selection of alternatives to show how the game may develop.

10.a4 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 (11.cxd3 Chumfwa – A. L'Ami, Dar es Salaam 2013. 11...0–0N 12.♗a3 ♘d7=) 11...0–0 12.♗a3 Zeltner – Nickmann, Germany 1995. 12...♘d7N= Black has a solid position with activity on the c-file and light-square control.

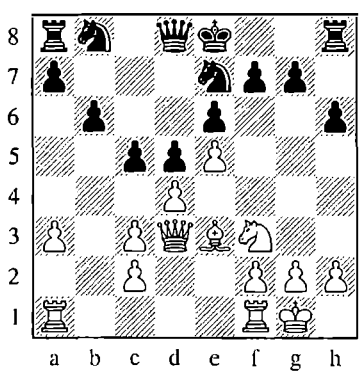
10.♘e1 ♕c8 A useful move, activating the queen along the c-file as well as protecting the bishop on a6. 11.♗e3 Alvarado Rodriguez – Drasko, Dos Hermanas 2004. Here I suggest 11...♗xd3N 12.cxd3 cxd4 13.cxd4 (13.♗xd4 ♘bc6∓) 13...♘bc6∓ when Black's favourable pawn structure gives him an edge.

10.♗e3 ♗xd3

Also possible is 10...♘f5!? intending 11.dxc5 ♘xe3 12.fxe3 bxc5=.

11.♕xd3

11.cxd3N can be met by 11...cxd4 12.♘xd4 (12.cxd4 0–0=) 12...0–0 13.♕g4 ♔h7= intending ...♘bc6.



11...♕c7N

I found three practical examples with 11...♘d7 in the database, but I would prefer to keep the knight more flexible for the moment. A possible line is:

12.dxc5 bxc5 13.c4 d4

13...0–0=

14.♗d2 ♘d7 15.♖fe1 0–0 16.c3 dxc3 17.♗xc3 ♖fd8

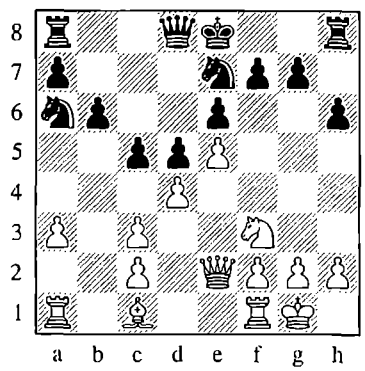
I slightly prefer Black due to his better piece coordination.

A final option is:

10.♗xa6 ♘xa6 11.♕e2

11.♘e1?! is slow, and after 11...0–0N White's kingside counterplay comes a bit too late. Black has firm control over the light squares and good prospects on the c-file. If necessary the move ...f5 can be used to hold up White's kingside play.

11.a4 0–0 12.♗a3 ♕c7N Black keeps the bishop out of the game and is doing fine. The knight can jump out from a6 via b8 when needed.

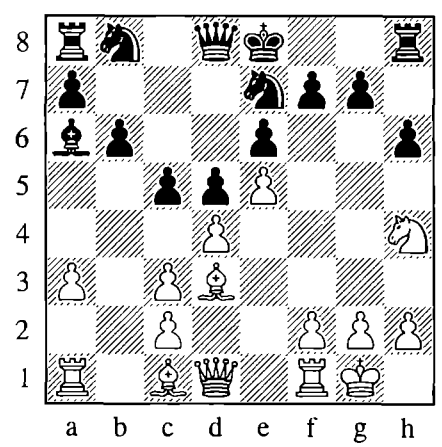


11...♕c8!N

11...♘b8 has been played three times, but I prefer the text move which better anticipates the c3-c4 plan.

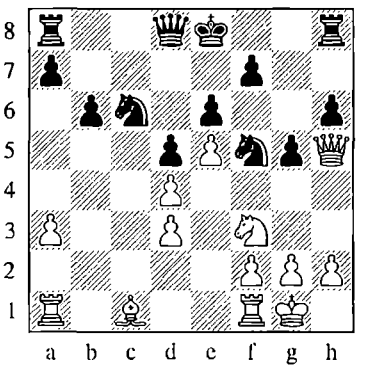
12.c4 0–0 13.cxd5 exd5 14.a4 ♘c7=

Black gets a nice outpost for his knight on e6.

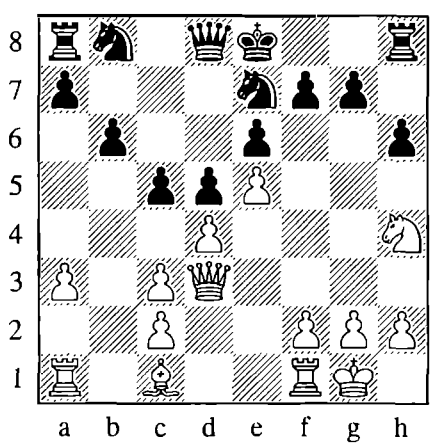


10...♗xd3 11.♕xd3

After 11.cxd3N Black can continue 11...cxd4 12.cxd4 ♘bc6 13.♕g4 g5!? 14.♞f3 ♞f5 with interesting prospects. A possible continuation is: 15.♕h5 Avoiding ...h5.



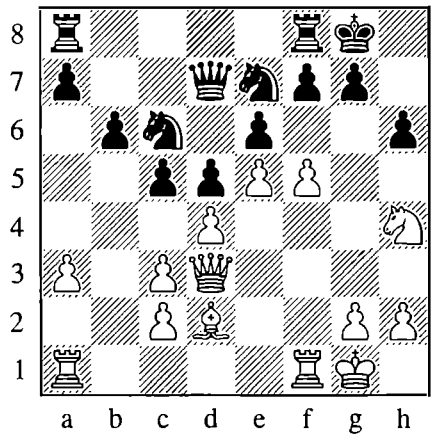
15...♔d7!? (The simple alternative is 15...♖g8 when 16.♕g4 ♖h8= repeats the position.) 16.♕xf7† ♕e7 17.♕h5 (After 17.♕xc7†?! ♔xe7 Black will regain the d4-pawn with good play.) 17...♖ag8 Black has an active position with at least equal prospects.



11...♘bc6 12.f4 ♕d7 13.♗d2 0–0

I slightly prefer this over 13...c4 as played in Anand – Ivanchuk, Dortmund 1997. In that case Black remains solid but loses some prospects on the queenside, such as utilizing the open c-file and the c4-outpost for a knight.

14.f5

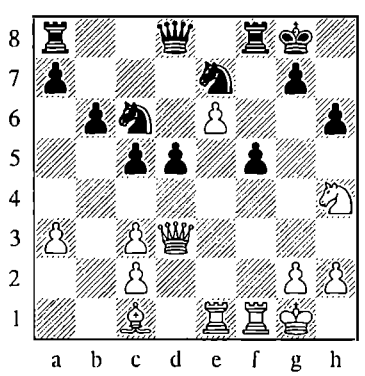


14...f6! 15.♖ae1 fxe5N

Instead after 15...exf5 16.e6 ♕e8 17.♘xf5 ♘xf5 18.♖xf5 ♘e7 19.♖f3 Black had some problems in Badev – Drasko, Plovdiv 2008, due to the strong passed pawn on e6.

16.f6!

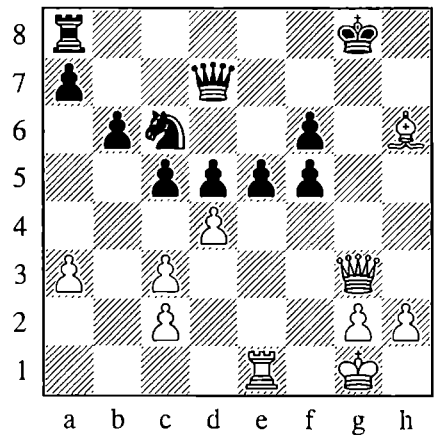
The position calls for this move. 16.dxe5 exf5 17.e6 ♕d6 does not trouble Black: 18.♗f4 (After 18.♘xf5 ♖xf5 19.♖xf5 c4 20.♕f1 ♘xf5 21.♕xf5 ♖f8∓ Black keeps the passed e-pawn well under control.) 18...♕d8 19.♗c1



Now Black can choose to repeat moves with 19...♕d6 20.♗f4, but it looks more promising to play 19...♕e8! 20.♘xf5 ♕g6 when White's passed e-pawn is outweighed by his many pawn weaknesses.

16...♖xf6 17.♖xf6 gxf6 18.♗xh6 ♘f5 19.♘xf5 exf5 20.♕g3†

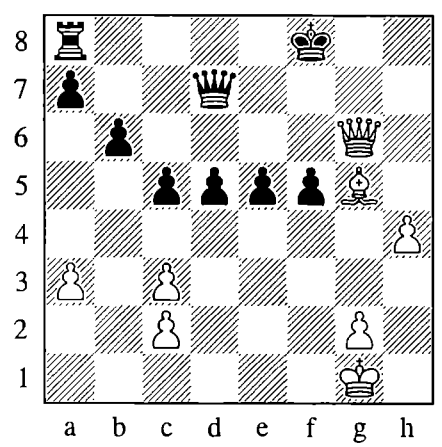
20.dxe5 ♘xe5 21.♕g3† ♔f7 merely transposes.



20...♔f7! 21.dxe5 ♘xe5 22.♕g7† ♔e6 23.♖xe5†! fxe5 24.♕g6† ♔e7 25.♗g5† ♔f8 26.h4!?

26.♗h6†= leads to an immediate perpetual.

Trying to advance the passed h-pawn is the only logical winning attempt, but Black can force a draw all the same.

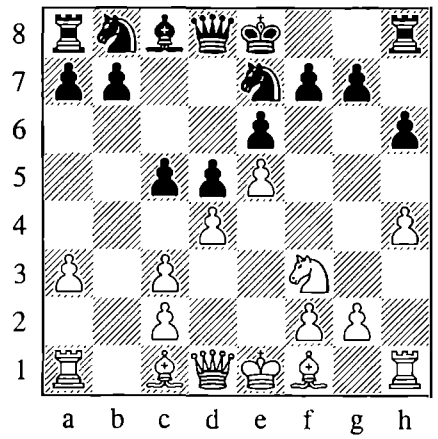


26...♕f7!

Not the only move, but the safest. Now White really is forced to take the perpetual check.

27.♗h6† ♔e7 28.♗g5† ♔f8=

C) 8.h4

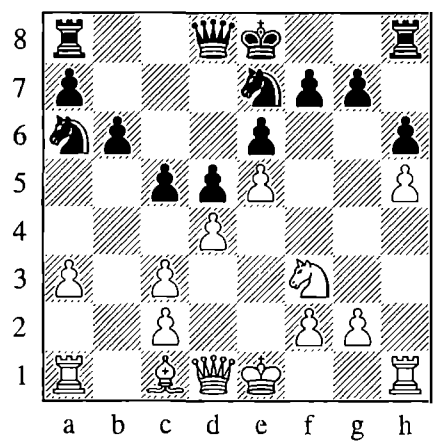


White makes a useful waiting move to see what Black is up to.

8...b6

We proceed with the typical plan. Now White can press ahead on the kingside with **C1) 9.h5** or disrupt our planned bishop exchange with **C2) 9.♗b5†**.

C1) 9.h5 ♗a6 10.♗xa6 ♘xa6



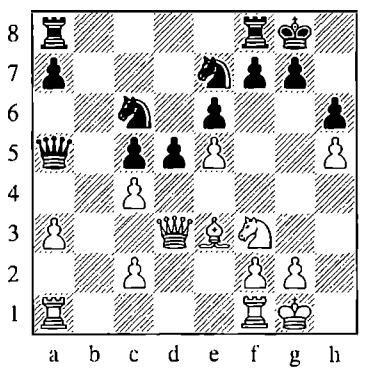
11.♘h4

A typical move, making way for the queen to come to g4 while preventing ...♘f5.

11.♖h4?! was an optimistic idea seen in Khruschiov – Rychagov, Dos Hermanas 2003. Here Black would do well to play 11...cxd4N 12.cxd4 ♖c8∓ intending ...♖c4 with lots of activity on the c-file.

11.♕e2 ♘b8 (11...♕c8N seems like a valid alternative) 12.c4!?N dxc4 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♕xc4 ♕c7 is equal.

11.♕d3 ♘b8 (11...♕c8N looks fine here too) 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.c4 ♘bc6 14.0–0 0–0 15.♗e3 ♕a5



16.♖ab1 ♖fd8 17.♖b5 dxc4 18.♕xc4 ♕xa3 19.♖xc5 ♖ac8 20.♖b1 ♖d5 21.♔h2 ♖xc5 22.♗xc5 ♕a5 23.♖b5 ♕d8= Benjamin – Gulko, Saint John 1988.

Returning to the main line, Black should go for a counterattack along the c-file.

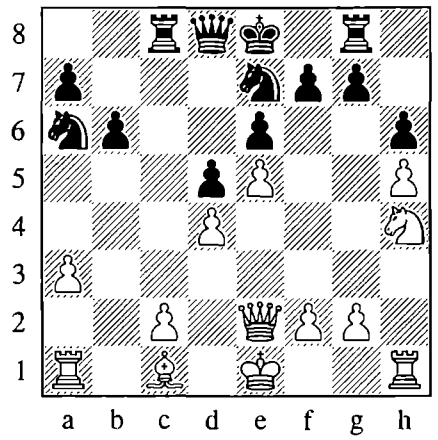
11...♖c8! 12.♕g4 cxd4 13.cxd4

13.♕xg7? ♖g8 14.♕xh6 ♖xc3∓ favours Black.

13...♖g8!

This slightly awkward move is necessary in order to protect the kingside. Black forfeits the right to castle but in return he will obtain promising counterplay on the queenside.

14.♕e2



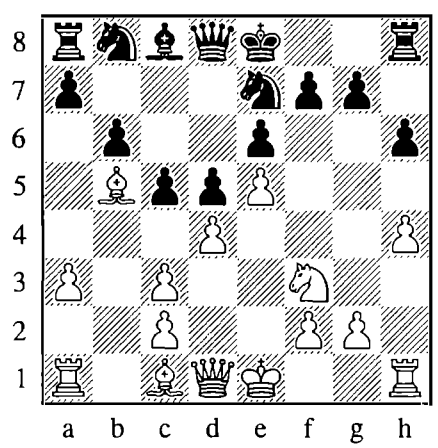
14...♕c7

14...♖c4!? 15.♗e3 ♘c7 is another interesting way to play the position.

15.♖h3 ♕c4 16.c3 ♕xe2† 17.♔xe2 ♘b8 18.a4 ♘bc6=

Black has a comfortable endgame and intends ...♘a5-c4 next.

C2) 9.♗b5†

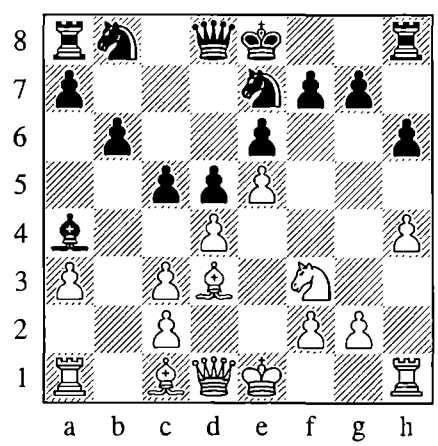


This is a standard reply to ...b6, by which White seeks to disrupt Black's plan of exchanging the light-squared bishops.

9...♗d7 10.♗d3 ♗a4

I also spent some time examining 10...♘bc6, but found the text move to be more in keeping with Black's strategic plan. By blocking the pawn on a3, Black restricts the options for the bishop on c1. From a4 the bishop also exerts some pressure against c2.

I mentioned in the chapter introduction that a similar position often occurs in the 7...b6 variation, without the moves h2-h4 and ...h6 being included. Sometimes these moves are played anyway in the 7...b6 line, but even so, I believe there a couple of reasons why Black should be happier to reach the present version with the h-pawns already having moved. For one thing, there is no chance whatsoever of White launching an attack with ♘g5 followed by moving his queen to g4 or h5. Another more subtle point is that Black can consider a remarkable plan involving ...c4 followed by putting the king on d7 and switching the queen to the h7-square, as shown in some of the lines that follow.



11.h5

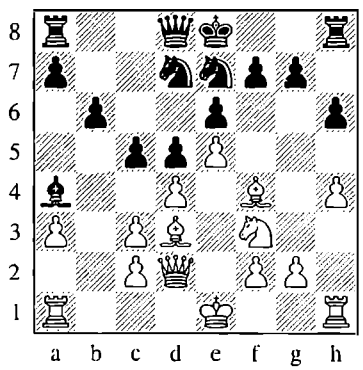
White intends to play ♖h4 to attack the bishop along the fourth rank.

Here is another example showing some important ideas:

11.♗f4 ♘d7

Black can also consider 11...c4 12.♗e2 ♔d7! as seen in Inarkiev – Kristjansson, Pardubice 2002, and after the further 13.h5 we transpose to the note to move 13 in the main line below, as reached after 11.h5 c4 12.♗e2 ♔d7! 13.♗f4. An important resource for Black is the ...♕g8-h7 manoeuvre with pressure against c2. This reveals another deep idea connected with the move 7...h6.

12.♕d2



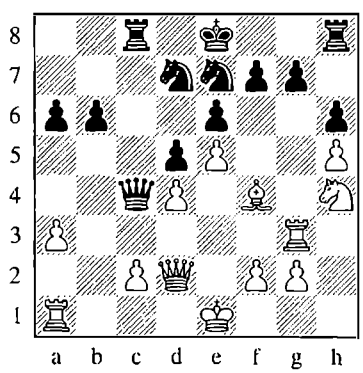
12...a6!

Preparing to exchange the light-squared bishops with ...♗b5.

13.h5 ♗b5 14.♖h3 ♗xd3 15.♕xd3 ♕c7 16.♘h4 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♕c4

17...♖c8N∓ might be slightly stronger, but the game continuation nevertheless illustrates Black's chances quite well.

18.♕d2 ♖c8 19.♖g3



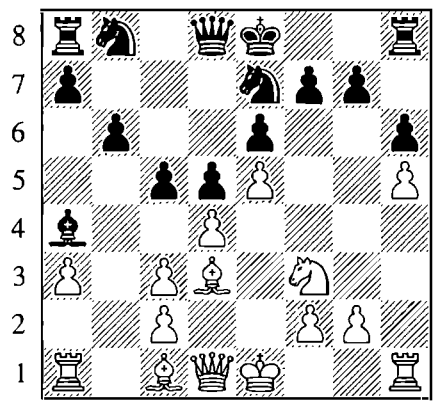
19...♔f8

This temporary misplacement of the king can often be a good solution against the immediate kingside threats.

19...♕xc2!?N also comes into consideration: 20.♕xc2 (20.♖xg7 ♕a4∓) 20...♖xc2 21.♖xg7 ♖c4 22.♖d1 ♖a4 23.♖g3 b5∓

20.♖c1 ♘c6 21.c3 ♘a5 22.♕d1 ♖g8 23.♖b1 ♔e7 24.a4 ♕a2 25.♗c1 ♘c4 26.♘f3 f6!∓

Black had the initiative and went on to win in Socko – Rustemov, Warsaw 2005.



11...c4

This move introduces a rather aesthetic plan for Black, where the geometry among the pieces makes a good impression.

Black can also choose a more dynamic approach with 11...♕c7!?, creating a positional threat that is revealed after 12.♖h4?! (12.0–0 is better) 12...cxd4 13.cxd4 ♕c3† 14.♗d2 ♕xd3 15.cxd3 ♗xd1 16.♔xd1 ♘bc6 as seen in Weichhold – M. Socko, Lazy 2010. Black has the better pawn structure and excellent chances in the endgame.

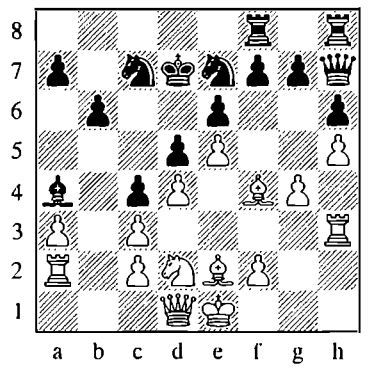
12.♗e2 ♔d7!

We have already touched on this idea in the note to White's 11th move above. Black opens the way for the queen to get via g8 to h7 putting pressure against c2. Such blocked positions do not lend themselves to forced

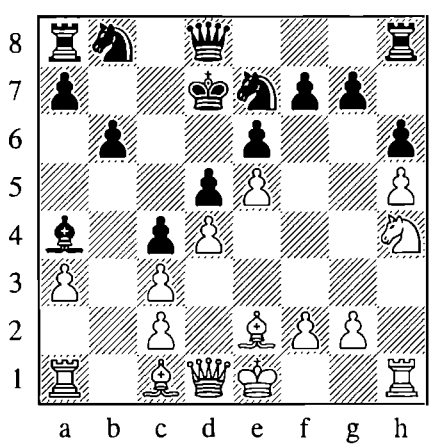
analysis, so I have chosen a couple of instructive examples to show some important themes and manoeuvres.

13.♘h4

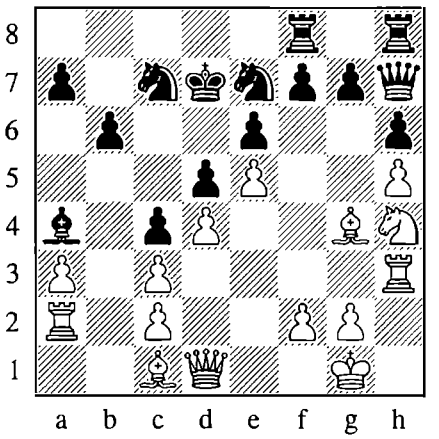
13.♗f4 ♕g8 14.♘d2 ♕h7 15.♖a2 ♘a6 16.g4 ♘c7 17.♖h3 ♖af8



18.♖e3 ♔c8 19.♗g3 ♘c6 20.♘f3 ♖hg8 21.♔d2 ♔b7 22.♕h1 ♘b5∓ Bologan – Vitiugov, Dagomys 2010. Black has achieved a perfect starting point for further action. A kingside break with ...g6 or ...g5 is one idea to consider. Sacrifices in the centre are also something to watch out for, especially if White moves away his knight away from f3.



13...♕g8 14.♗g4 ♕h7 15.♖a2 ♘a6 16.♖h3 ♘c7 17.♔f1 ♖af8 18.♔g1



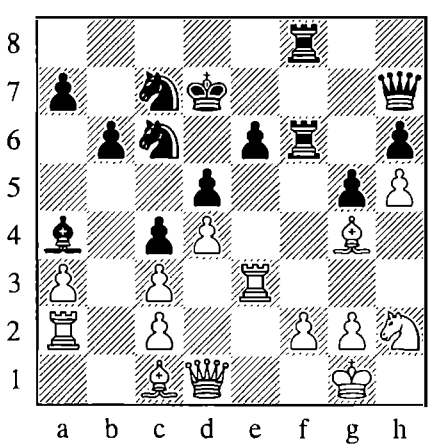
18...g5!?

Black could also continue manoeuvring in similar fashion to the aforementioned Bologan – Vitiugov game, with moves such as 18...♔c8 and ...♔b7. Playing actively on the kingside also has its appeal though.

19.♘f3

19.hxg6N was perhaps a better decision to keep some diagonals open for the bishops. However, after 19...fxg6 20.♘f3 ♕g7= Black's position looks comfortable.

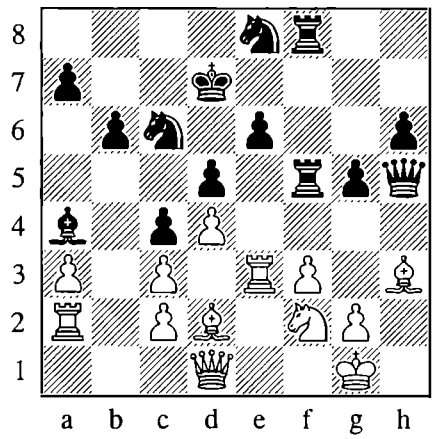
19...♘c6 20.♘h2 f5 21.exf6 ♖xf6 22.♖e3 ♖hf8



23.f3?!

A subtle inaccuracy, reducing the protection of the pawn on h5.

23...♕f7 24.♗d2 ♘e8 25.♗h3 ♕xh5 26.♘g4 ♖f5 27.♘f2



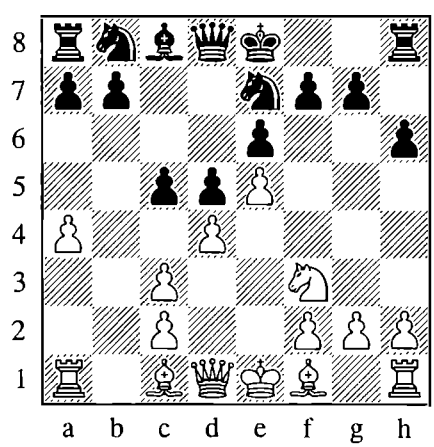
27...♕g6!

Black has much better piece coordination and the white rooks cannot do much in this relatively closed position.

28.♗xf5 exf5∓

Black was on top and went on to win in Ki. Georgiev – Yusupov, Las Palmas 1993.

D) 8.a4



This is White's most popular option and clearly a logical attempt. White does not want to commit his bishop on f1 too early, and moving the a-pawn is always a useful idea in order to obtain the desirable a3-f8 diagonal for the dark-squared bishop. White's last move also discourages ...b6 which can now be met by a4-a5.

8...0–0N

Amazingly this move appears to be a novelty, although it still could easily transpose back to well-known theory. It is sensible to castle at once in order to avoid ♗b5† in certain lines; with the white pawn already standing on a4, Black no longer has the option to meet this check with the ...♗d7-a4 manoeuvre.

I will briefly mention that 8...♕c7 is a natural developing move which also has the idea to prevent ♗a3. It seems playable enough, but I like the flexibility of castling first.

At this point I considered two bishop moves for White: **D1) 9.♗d3** and **D2) 9.♗a3**.

D1) 9.♗d3 b6

With this move we transpose to a theoretical position, with Black having avoided a critical line involving an earlier ♗b5†.

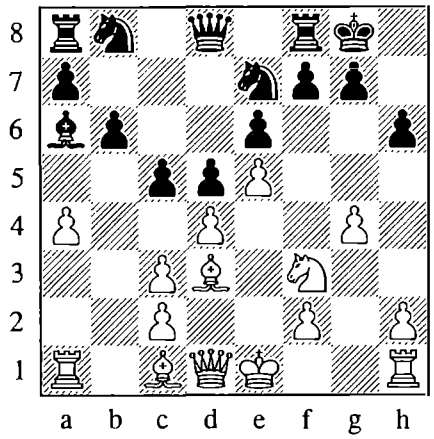
10.g4!?

After the simple 10.0–0 ♗a6= Black has little to fear, having successfully carried out his main positional goal.

The text move is an important idea to consider, since White is trying to exploit the weakening aspect of the earlier ...h6.

10...♗a6

This is not only a strong positional idea, it also exchanges one of White's most important attacking pieces.



11.♗xa6?!

This was White's choice in the only example I found on the database, but it turned out badly for him.

11.♗b5!? looks like a better try, but after 11...♕c7 Black should be fine.

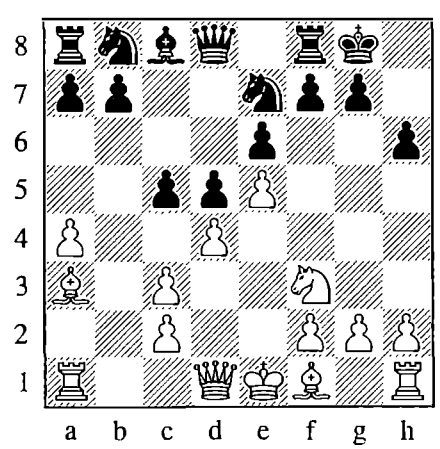
11...♘xa6 12.g5 h5 13.g6?!

This sacrifice is clearly unsound, but without it White will just be positionally worse with no attacking prospects whatsoever.

13...fxg6 14.♗g5 ♕e8∓

White's compensation was clearly insufficient in Neumeier – Havlicek, Vienna 1998. There is no real attack on the kingside, and indeed it is Black who is poised to create threats along the f-file.

D2) 9.♗a3



9...b6!

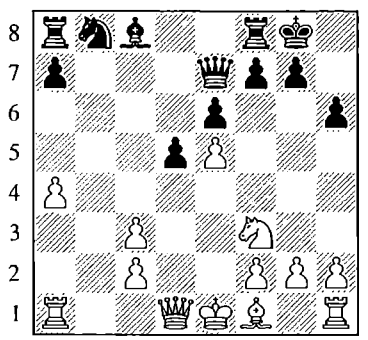
Black stubbornly refuses to open the a3-f8 diagonal and instead offers a pawn sacrifice to weaken White's structure.

10.dxc5

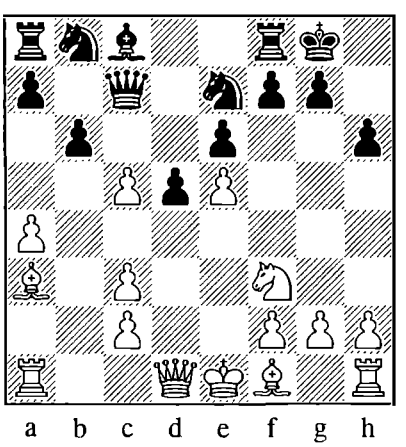
White could decline the offer, but then what would be the purpose of the bishop on a3?

10...♕c7

Black can also consider the simple 10...bxc5!? as after 11.♗xc5 ♕c7 12.♗xe7 ♕xe7 the pressure along the c-file will bring fair compensation. A possible continuation is:



13.♗b5 ♕c7 14.♕d4 ♗d7 15.0–0 ♖c8 16.c4 ♗c6! 17.cxd5 ♗xd5⩲ when Black's active play compensates for the pawn deficit.



11.c6!

This is White's only real attempt to cause problems.

11...♘bxc6!

This simple move is the most reliable option.

I also considered:

11...♖d8!?

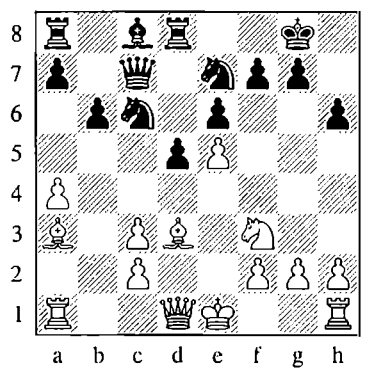
Preparing a possible exchange sacrifice for a bishop on d6. Black's last move also gives him the option of taking on c6 with the e7-knight. The idea is interesting but I found a narrow path to a white advantage.

12.♗d3!

Black would be more than happy to see 12.♗d6 ♖xd6 13.exd6 ♕xd6∞ when his pawn centre and White's weakened structure fully compensate for the exchange.

12...♘bxc6

12...♘exc6 13.♗d6 ♖xd6 14.exd6 ♕xd6 does not work quite so well here. After 15.c4 Black is left behind in development and will not get quite enough counterplay for the exchange.



13.0–0!

Once again 13.♗d6 ♖xd6 14.exd6 ♕xd6∞ would suit Black fine.

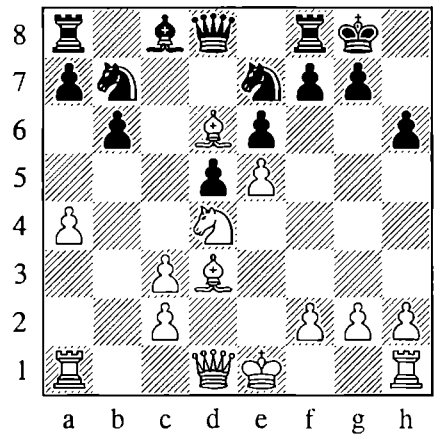
13...♗b7 14.♖e1±

12.♗d6 ♕d8 13.♘d4

13.♗d3 should be met by 13...f6! with equal play.

13...♘a5! 14.♗d3 ♘b7

Driving the annoying bishop away. The knight looks slightly odd but it will soon emerge on the excellent c5-square.



15.♗a3 ♗d7 16.0–0 ♖e8 17.f4 ♘c5=

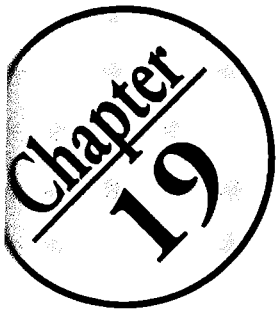
The position remains dynamically balanced.

Conclusion

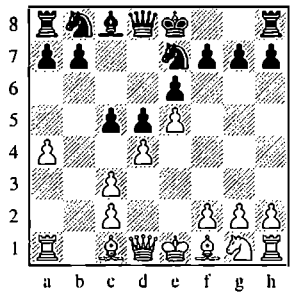
7.♘f3 remains a popular choice at all levels, but 7...h6!? presents a fresh challenge and has so far proven quite reliable for Black. Both 8.♗e2 and 8.♗d3 are well met by the typical plan of 8...b6 followed by exchanging the light-squared bishops.

8.h4 is a sensible move, but here too 8...b6 is a good answer. Especially interesting is variation C2 where Black can employ the remarkable strategy of blocking the position with ...c4, followed by parking the king on d7 and manoeuvring the queen to h7.

Finally, 8.a4 is always a serious option to consider, but here the flexible 8...0–0N works well, as White has no chance of landing a Greek Gift sacrifice on h7. Overall Black seems to be doing fine everywhere, and I predict a bright future for 7...h6.



7.a4



Introduction

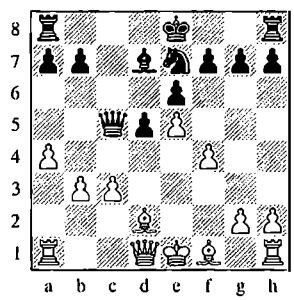
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4

7...♘bc6

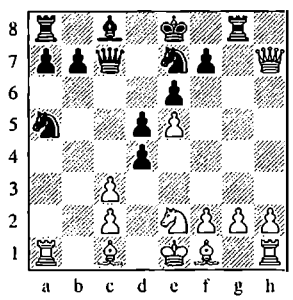
A) 8.♕g4?! **253**
B) 8.f4 **253**
C) 8.a5!? **255**
D) 8.h4 **256**
E) 8.♗b5 **257**
F) 8.♘f3 **259**

B) after 14.cxb3



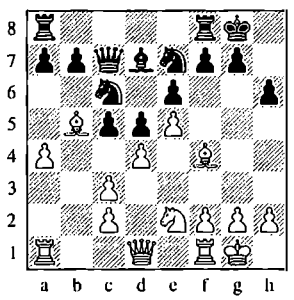
14...d4!N

C) after 12.♘e2



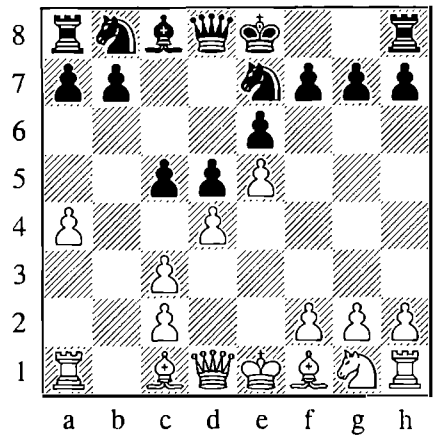
12...♘ac6!N

E) after 13.♗f4



13...♘a5!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4



This positional move has quite a few purposes. Firstly it frees an important square for the dark-squared bishop, which may exert a considerable influence along the a3-f8 diagonal later in the game. It is also useful for White to prevent the typical blockading strategy involving a bishop or queen on a4. Finally, White may be able to use the a-pawn as a battering ram on the queenside at some point, especially if Black attempts to exchange the light-squared bishops with ...b6 and ...♗a6. The drawbacks of 7.a4 are that it does not develop a piece and weakens the b4-square, which can sometimes be exploited by a timely exchange on d4 followed by a knight jump to b4.

7...♘bc6

This is the main line. 7...♕a5 is also popular and the two moves often transpose to one another.

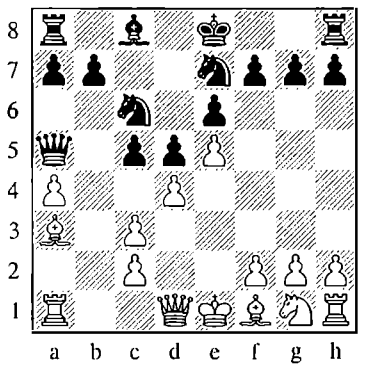
It is worth mentioning briefly that the 7...h6 idea from the previous chapter loses some of its point when the white knight has yet to commit itself to the f3-square, not least because 8.♕g4 is still an option.

We will analyse **A) 8.♕g4?!**, **B) 8.f4**, **C) 8.a5!?**, **D) 8.h4**, **E) 8.♗b5** and **F) 8.♘f3**, after first checking one clearly inferior sideline.

8.♗a3?

This is far too early and loses at least a pawn for White.

8...♕a5



9.♕d2N

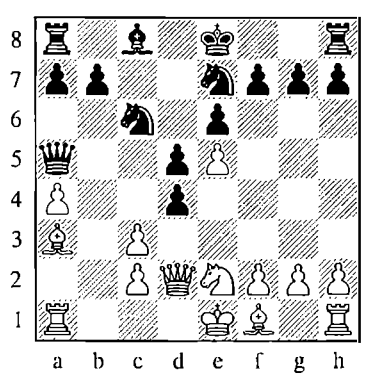
This is White's only chance to make a game of it.

9.♗xc5?? loses on the spot after 9...♕xc3† 10.♔e2 ♘f5 (or 10...b6–+) 11.♘f3 b6 12.g4 bxc5 13.gxf5 ♗a6† 0–1 Malan – Baragano Campa, Aviles 2004.

9.♗b5?! ♕xc3† 10.♔f1 ♕xd4 11.♕xd4 cxd4 12.♘f3 ♗d7∓ Newton – Regimbald, Edmonton 2005.

9...cxd4 10.♘e2

After 10.cxd4 ♕xd2† 11.♔xd2 ♘xd4∓ White does not have enough compensation for a pawn.



10...dxc3 11.♘xc3
11.♕xc3 ♘g6!∓
11...♘xe5 12.♘b5 ♕xd2† 13.♔xd2 ♔d7∓
White has good compensation for one pawn, but he is down by two!

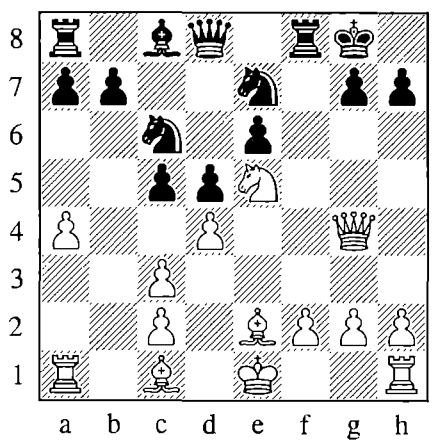
A) 8.♕g4?!

This move does not make much sense in conjunction with a3-a4. Compared with the main 7.♕g4 line White is almost a tempo down, and it is hardly surprising that Black has more than one good reply.

8...0–0
Another tempting idea is 8...♕c7, intending to enter the Poisoned Pawn Variation with the extra tempo ...♘bc6 included. Black has excellent chances here too, but I decided to focus on the more straightforward option.

9.♘f3 f6 10.♗e2
10.exf6 ♖xf6∓

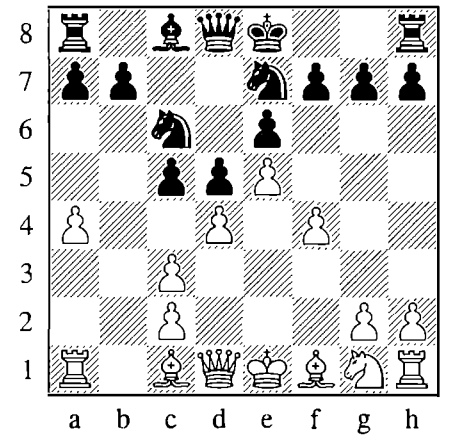
10...fxe5 11.♘xe5
11.dxe5 ♘g6∓



11...cxd4 12.cxd4 ♘xe5
12...♕b6!?N 13.♘xc6 ♘xc6 14.c3 e5↑ also looks promising for Black.

13.dxe5 ♕c7∓
Black was poised to pick up a pawn in Stachanczyk – Pichugin, Warsaw 1999.

B) 8.f4



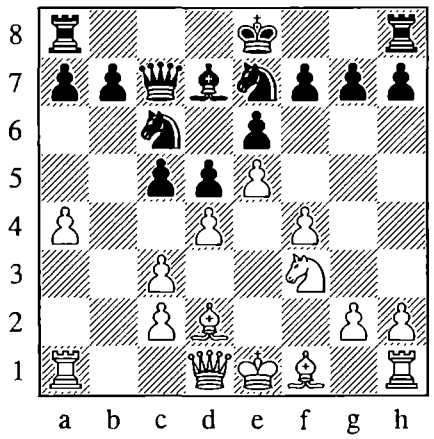
This move is rare and somewhat anti-positional, but not completely without merit. White blocks the path of the c1-bishop and creates some holes in his camp which Black may be able to exploit in the future. On the other hand White's centre is well protected and he has a significant space advantage. To counter this Black should rely on his superior development, light-square control and activity along the c-file.

8...♕a5
This is a natural start, luring White's dark-squared bishop away from the a3-f8 diagonal.

9.♗d2 ♗d7 10.♘f3 ♕c7
Black intends ...♘a5 with play along the c-file as well as the c4-square.

10...c4 has been played a few times, and offers Black a couple of interesting plans. One idea is to target the weak a4-pawn with ...♘c8-b6. Another is ...0–0 followed by ...f6 and ...♗e8-g6. Overall this looks like a playable alternative, but closing the centre also makes it easier for White to make plans for the middlegame, so

in the end I prefer to keep the queenside more fluid.



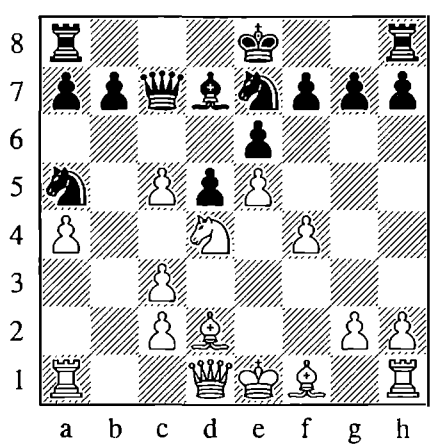
11.dxc5!?

White weakens his pawn structure in order to create some space for his minor pieces.

11.♗d3 ♘a5 12.0–0 ♘c4 gives Black promising counterplay on the light squares. In the event of an exchange on c4, Black's bishop will find a great home on c6 while the knight may benefit from the d5-square.

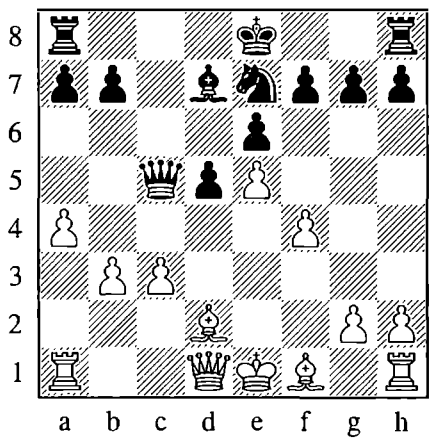
11...♘a5 12.♘d4

12.♗e3 can be met by 12...b6!∞ when Black's counterplay along the c-file and control over the c4-square compensate for the pawn deficit.



12...♕xc5 13.♘b3 ♘xb3 14.cxb3

We have been following the game Van Gils – Hofman, Hengelo 1994. White has straightened out his pawn structure and would love to achieve a harmonious set-up with bishops on d3 and d4, but for the time being he is underdeveloped and I found a promising way for Black to fight for the initiative.



14...d4!N

Ensuring an active diagonal for the bishop.

15.b4

15.c4 a5! blocks White's activity on the queenside, while Black intends ...♘f5 and ...♗c6 with a nice position.

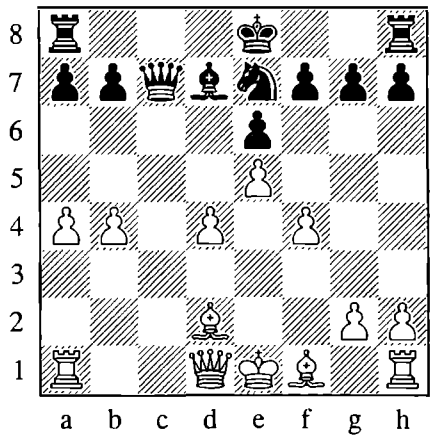
15...♕c7!

15...♕d5?! does not turn out so well after 16.c4 ♕e4† 17.♔f2±. Black's activity has come to an end and White's bishop pair secures a slight edge.

16.cxd4

16.♖c1 dxc3 17.♖xc3 ♕b6 is fine for Black, whose pieces will find good homes on the light squares.

After 16.c4 Black should continue 16...♗c6! 17.♕c2 (or 17.b5?! ♗e4 18.♕e2 ♗g6∓) 17...b6 securing the long diagonal for the bishop with good chances.



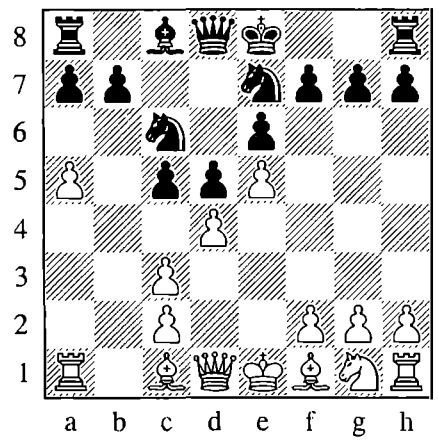
16...♕b6 17.♗c3 ♖c8 18.♖a3

18.♖c1 is met by 18...♕c6! intending ...♕e4 with counterplay.

18...♗c6⩱

Black's excellent control over the light squares combined with his development advantage and superior piece coordination guarantees full compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

C) 8.a5!?



This remarkable move has scored an impressive 6½/7 games according to my database. For this reason it should be taken seriously, although I don't think Black needs to be overly worried about it. White gives up his a-pawn in order to avoid any ...♕a5 ideas. This way he will get active counterplay on the a-file as well as better piece coordination.

8...♘xa5

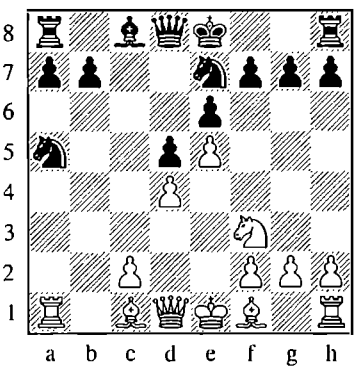
The most principled decision, after which it is up to White to prove his compensation.

9.♕g4

White has also tried:

9.♘f3 cxd4 10.cxd4

At this point Black elected to castle in Viola – Monopoli, Italy 1969, but I would prefer to improve Black's position on the queenside before giving White a clear target.



10...♘c4N 11.♗d3

11.♗xc4?! dxc4 12.♘g5 ♘f5 13.c3 h6 14.♘e4 (14.♕h5 0–0 15.♘e4 b5∓) 14...b5 gives Black somewhat better play.

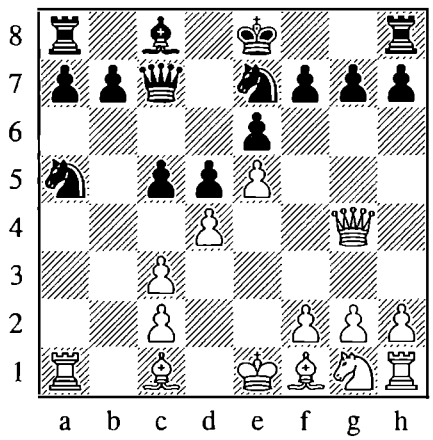
11...b5 12.0–0 ♕b6

White's activity and bishop pair give him about enough compensation for the pawn deficit. Black should be careful not to castle prematurely, which could allow a mating attack with ♗xh7†. Instead he should either prepare castling with ...h6 or keep the king in the centre for a while longer.

9...♕c7!N

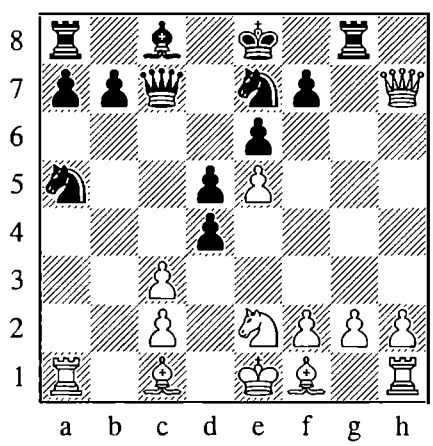
This soon transposes to a known game, but it is a more accurate move order that reduces White's options.

9...cxd4 10.♕xg7 ♖g8 11.♕xh7 ♕c7 has occurred in practice, but this move order allows White the additional possibility of 10.cxd4.



10.♕xg7 ♖g8 11.♕xh7 cxd4 12.♘e2

This position occurred in Pernuli – Janse, corr. 1992, and here I found an improvement for Black.



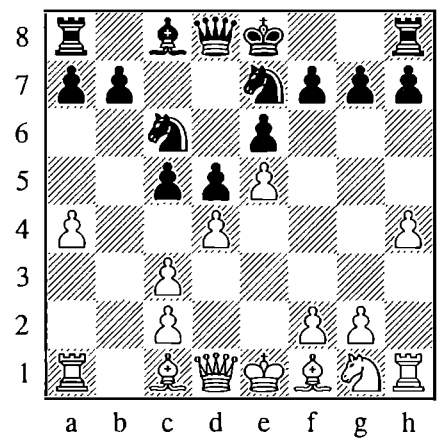
12...♘ac6!N

We have reached an interesting and rather funny position. Compared with the Poisoned Pawn Variation one might wonder if the a3-pawn has fallen off the board! This difference is not as advantageous for Black as it sounds, since the route to a3 is open for the bishop and the rook on a1 has considerably more freedom than usual. A possible continuation is:

13.f4 ♗d7 14.♕d3 dxc3 15.♕xc3 ♖c8

The game is roughly balanced and can be compared with the positions arising from the Poisoned Pawn variation, covered in Volume 2. I do not believe Black's chances are harmed by the absence of a pawn on a3 here.

D) 8.h4



This has some similarities to 7.h4, although one important difference is that here Black does not have the option of the queen manoeuvre to a4. Therefore we should look for another set-up trying to make use of the lead in development.

8...♕a5

Even with the a4-square unavailable, there are other reasons to favour this move.

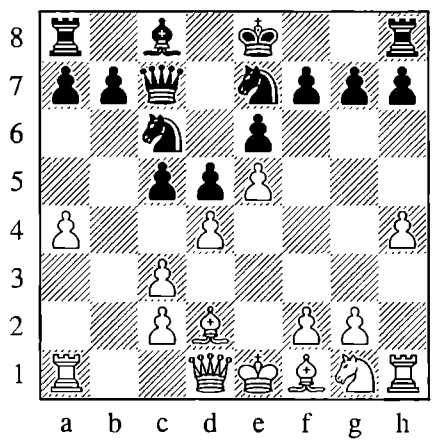
9.♗d2 ♕c7!

I only found a single practical example of this move, but I like the idea a lot. From the c7-square the queen guards the queenside and eyes the e5-pawn, lending greater force to a future ...f6 break. But why go to a5 first and lose a tempo? Actually Black should be quite happy to have lured the enemy bishop to d2 here. For one thing, it is further away from the a3-f8 diagonal. It also interferes with the queen's defence of the d4-pawn. Finally, a

future ...♘a5-c4 manoeuvre will carry greater weight when hitting the bishop on d2.

9...0–0?! is not advisable as after 10.h5 h6 11.♕g4 (or 11.g4) White has a dangerous attack.

The usual move has been 9...♗d7 as played by Ganguly and others. Most games have continued 10.h5 h6 11.♘f3 when Black can choose between 11...c4 and 11...0–0–0 with mutual chances in both cases. However, having studied a few games I am more sympathetic to White's side of the position.



10.♘f3

10.♕g4N ♘f5 11.♘f3 0–0 looks fine for Black, who intends ...f6 either with or without a preliminary pawn exchange on d4.

10.♗b5N a6 11.♗xc6† ♘xc6 12.♕g4 f6! 13.exf6 gxf6 is comfortable for Black, who has a strong pawn centre. Apart from the obvious idea of ...e5, Black can also aim for kingside activity with ...♕f7 and ...♖g8.

10...0–0!N

Now that White has committed himself to ♘f3 his queen is slightly off the road for an attack. Black can thus castle securely, although he should still be careful.

10...f6 11.exf6 gxf6 occurred in Rantanen – Farago, Helsinki 1983, and here 12.dxc5!N e5 13.♘h2 intending ♘g4 would have given White some activity and perhaps a slight advantage.

11.♗d3

Threatening a standard sacrifice on h7.

11...h6!

A move worth remembering. This eliminates most of White's tactical threats on the kingside and is a common idea in many Winawer positions.

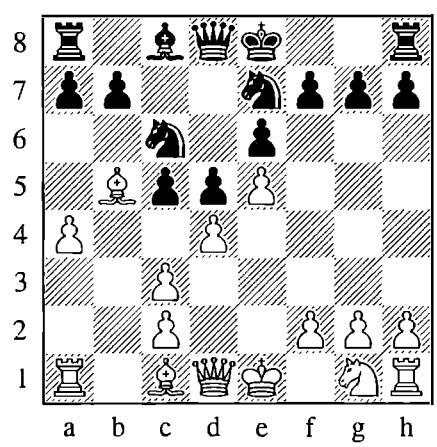
12.0–0

12.h5 f6 13.exf6 ♖xf6=

12...c4 13.♗e2 f6 14.exf6 ♖xf6=

Black is doing fine, as he has a decent amount of activity while White's bishops are restricted to a minimum. For a deeper study of positions featuring this pawn structure I refer the reader to the 7.♕g4 0–0 8.♗d3 f5 variation, analysed in Volume 2.

E) 8.♗b5



In this somewhat unusual line White prepares to exchange his light-squared bishop for an enemy knight, perhaps in the hope of attacking on the dark squares in the future.

8...♕a5

8...a6N 9.♗xc6† ♘xc6 seems playable, but I would prefer to exchange the bishop off slightly later, ideally in a way that does not involve weakening the queenside structure.

9.♗d2 ♗d7

9...0–0 also looks sensible.

10.♘e2

10.♘f3 is covered under the move order 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♗d2 ♗d7 10.♗b5 – see Chapter 22, beginning on page 291.

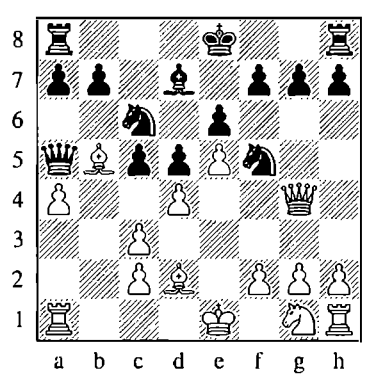
10.♕g4!?N

This is an interesting novelty for White, attempting to make use of the delayed development of the king's knight.

10...♘f5

This looks like the safest continuation.

Castling should generally be avoided in such positions, unless Black is in a position to hit back with ...f6 or ...f5 in the near future. Here is an illustrative line showing the dangers: 10...0–0?! 11.♘f3 c4 12.h4! ♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♗xb5 14.h5 ♗c6 15.h6 g6 16.♕f4 ♕d8 17.0–0† Black has chronic dark-square weaknesses and his extra pawn only restricts his pieces, especially his bishop.



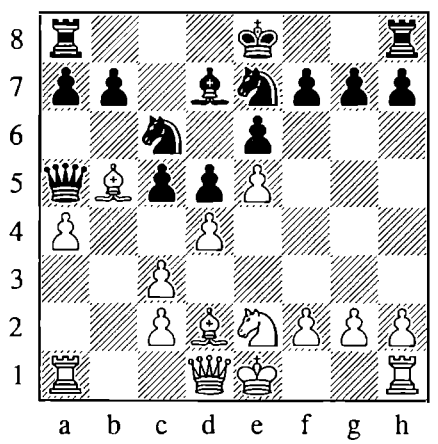
11.♘f3

11.♗d3 h5 12.♕g5 ♕d8 forces a queen exchange and is fine for Black.

11...c4 12.0–0 0–0=

Black is still under some pressure on the kingside, but his position is solid and he has the better pawn structure. It is important to remember to break with ...f6 or ...f5 before White's kingside initiative becomes too threatening. This will also give the d7-bishop a route to freedom via e8 and g6.

Returning to the main line, White is preparing a future attack with the knight on h5. Another idea is to overprotect the c3-pawn, thus enabling the bishop to move after White has castled. On the other hand the knight does not support the e5-point, which suggests that playing for a quick ...f6 break might be a good idea for Black.

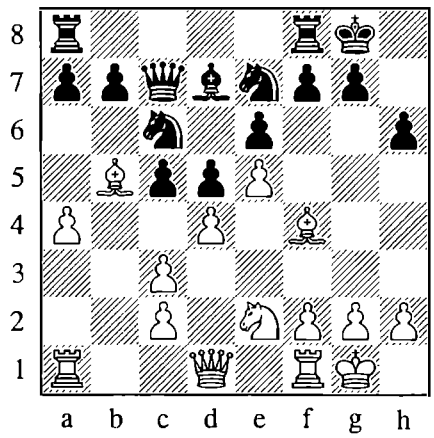


10...0–0 11.0–0 ♕c7!

The queen has served her purpose on a5, and the time has come for her to return to base to support the ...f6 break in the centre. By protecting the d7-bishop, Black also sets up the idea of ...♘a5 to get control over the c4-square.

12.♗g5 h6 13.♗f4

So far we have been following the game Schlick – Von Herman, Germany 1990, and here I found a strong idea for Black.



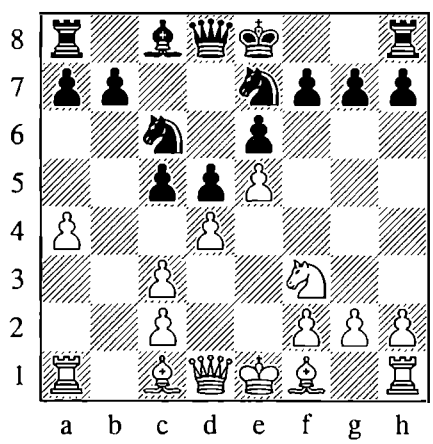
13...♘a5!N

Now White is unable to avoid the exchange of bishops, and Black will gain an excellent outpost on c4 for his knight.

14.♕c1 ♗xb5 15.axb5 ♔h7

Black has the more comfortable game and intends ...♘c4 next.

F) 8.♘f3



This is the main line by far. The same position has also been reached many times via the move order 7.♘f3 ♘bc6 8.a4 although, as we have already seen, my own recommendation is to meet 7.♘f3 with 7...h6. The following short section is intended to introduce the main options and quickly deal with a couple of rare lines. The meatier parts of this rich variation will come in the following chapters.

8...♕a5

Once again I favour this square for the queen. We will conclude the present chapter by considering a rare sideline for White, before moving on to the two main moves in later chapters.

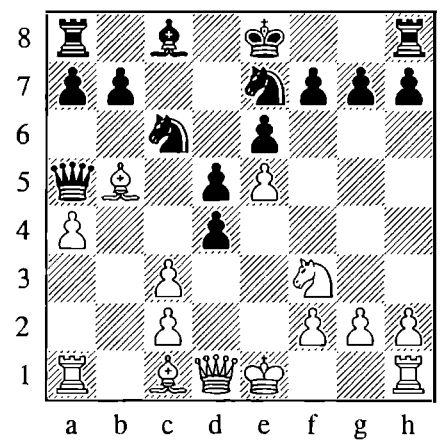
9.♗b5

9.♕d2 is an important line which can be found in the next chapter beginning in two pages.

9.♗d2 is the main line and is analysed extensively in Chapters 21-23.

Finally, let us briefly note that 9.♗e2? is an error in view of 9...♘xd4!∓.

9...cxd4



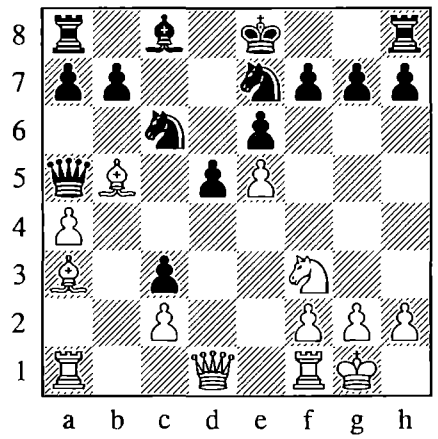
10.0–0!?N

This seems like the most interesting way of handling the position, sacrificing two pawns for the initiative.

10.♕xd4 ♗d7 11.♕d3 was played in Brandstaetter – Konrad, Austria 2000, and now after 11...a6N 12.♗xc6 ♗xc6 13.♘d4 ♕c7 14.f4 0–0= Black has no problems.

10...dxc3 11.♗a3

The bishop is extremely powerful and White's initiative should not be underestimated. Black needs to find a way to consolidate and catch up in development before he can make his extra material count.

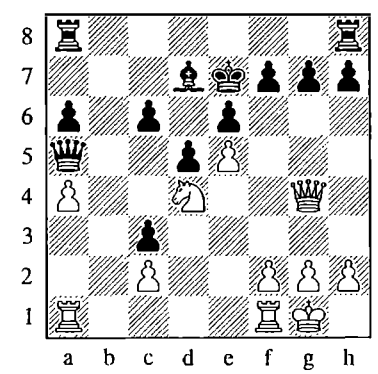


11...a6! 12.♗xc6† bxc6

Black now intends to play ...c5 followed by ...0–0.

13.♘d4

13.♗xe7?! ♔xe7 14.♘d4 gives White some initiative, but Black should not worry too much as the troublesome bishop has departed. 14...♗d7 15.♕g4

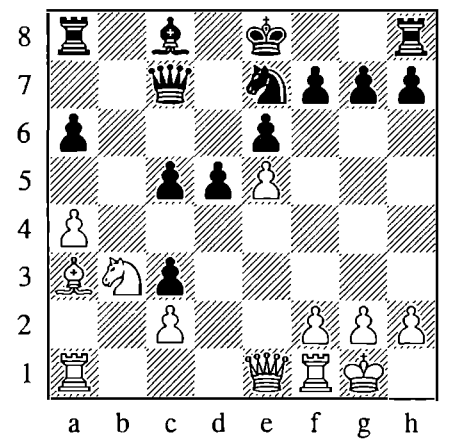


15...c5! 16.♕xg7 ♖hg8 17.♕f6† ♔f8 18.♕h6† ♖g7 19.♘e2 ♕d8 20.♘xc3 ♗c6 21.♘e2 ♕g5 22.♕xg5 ♖xg5 23.f4 ♖g8∓ Material is level but Black enjoys a positional advantage in the endgame.

13...c5 14.♘b3 ♕c7 15.♕e1

15.♕e2 a5! is good for Black.

Another nice line continues: 15.♗xc5 ♕xe5 16.♗d4 ♕c7 17.♗xg7 ♖g8 18.♗f6 ♕f4 19.♗xc3 d4! With some initiative for Black, who intends ...♗b7 next.



15...d4 16.♗xc5 ♗b7 17.♖d1

17.♗xd4 0–0 gives Black a pleasant game with counterplay along the a8-h1 diagonal.

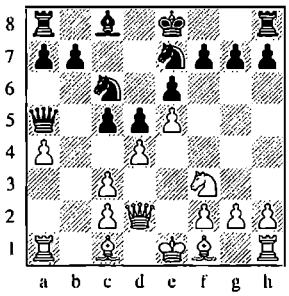
17...♘f5=

Black is still unable to castle, but he keeps a solid position and an extra pawn for the time being. As soon as White captures on d4 Black will be able to castle, so he has little to fear.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have dealt with an assortment of sidelines that can occur after 7.a4 ♘bc6. In most cases Black will begin by developing his queen to a5 and then strive for counterplay, relying on thematic factors such as control over the light squares and a timely ...f6-break.





7.a4

9.♕d2

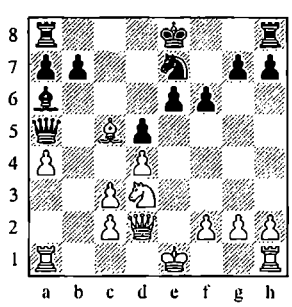
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♕d2

9...♗d7

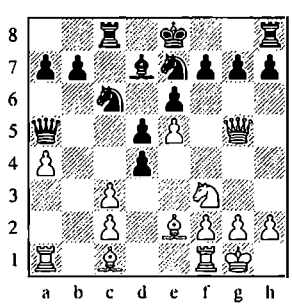
A) 10.♖b1!? 263
B) 10.h4!? 264
C) 10.dxc5 264
D) 10.♗b5 265
E) 10.♗a3 266
F) 10.♗e2 ♖c8 268
F1) 11.dxc5 268
F2) 11.0–0 269
G) 10.♗d3 f6! 272
G1) 11.exf6 gxf6 272
G11) 12.0–0 273
G12) 12.dxc5 275
G2) 11.0–0 fxe5 276
G21) 12.♘xe5 276
G22) 12.dxe5 277

D) after 14.♘d3



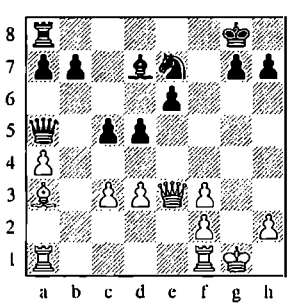
14...♔f7!N

F2) after 12.♕g5!



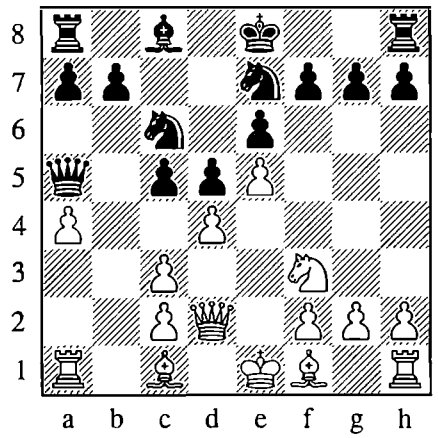
12...♘f5!N

G22) note to 13.♖e1



16...♘f5!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♕d2



9.♗d2 can be found in the next three chapters. The queen move has not been played as frequently but is, in a sense, more principled, as White is intending to develop his bishop on the more active a3-square.

9...♗d7

This is my preferred move, and it has been by far the most popular choice in the position.

I checked a few other approaches, including the following line:

9...b6

As we already know, exchanging light-squared bishops is a strong plan which has the potential to solve most of Black's opening problems. However, with the a4-square unavailable the black queen may find herself short of space.

10.♗b5!

The critical move, playing against the queen.

10...♗a6 11.♖b1 0–0

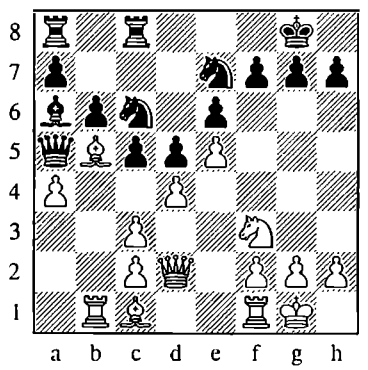
11...♗xb5 12.axb5 ♘b8 13.0–0± Alkkiomaki – Saharinen, Mantta 2008.

12.0–0 ♖fc8

This is a logical continuation, preparing to open the c-file.

12...cxd4? is poor: 13.♕d3! ♗xb5? (13...dxc3 is better, but after 14.♗xa6 ♘b4 15.♖xb4 ♕xb4 16.♘g5± White has a material advantage plus excellent piece activity.) 14.axb5 ♘b8 15.cxd4 White has an overwhelming position which frankly speaking is actually already winning, Shishkin – Zilber, Baku 1958.

12...♗xb5!?N might be playable, but after 13.axb5 ♘b8 14.♕d3 (the aggressive 14.♕g5!? might also prove unpleasant) 14...c4 15.♕d2± White's advantage is indisputable. One nice point is that 15...a6 can be met by 16.♗a3!.



13.♕d3!

A strong move with the purpose of luring the black pawn to c4.

13...h6!?N

13...♗b7?! 14.♘g5 ♘g6 15.f4 gave White a powerful attack in Korneev – Lutz, Basel 2011.

13...c4 14.♕e2↑ favours White, who is now free to attack on the kingside.

The text move is a clever defence, but ultimately White still keeps the advantage.

14.♘h4!

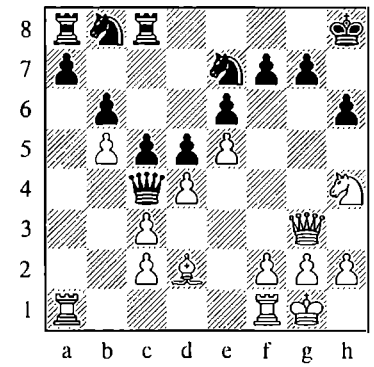
Stronger than 14.♗xa6 c4 15.♗xc4 dxc4 16.♕e4 ♕xa4 when Black seems to be doing fine.

14...♘b8

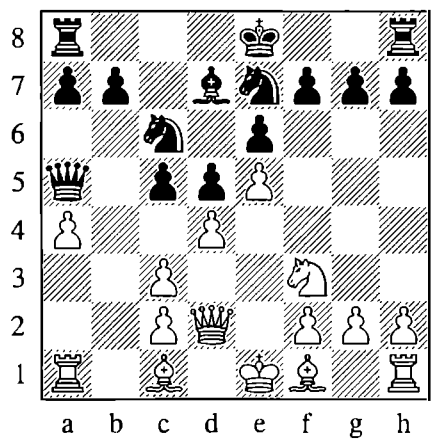
This seems to be the best move, defending the bishop on a6 in order to create counterplay

along the c-file. However, White can still pose problems on the kingside.

15.♗d2 ♗xb5 16.axb5 ♕a4 17.♖a1 ♕c4 18.♕g3 ♔h8



19.f4! ♘f5 20.♘xf5 exf5 21.♕h3±



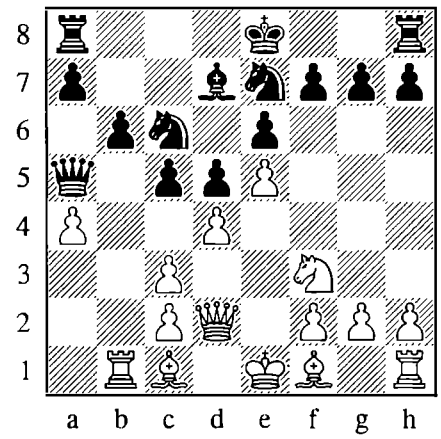
Returning to the position after 9...♗d7, I analysed seven moves: **A) 10.♖b1!?**, **B) 10.h4!?**, **C) 10.dxc5**, **D) 10.♗b5**, **E) 10.♗a3**, **F) 10.♗e2** and **G) 10.♗d3**. The first four are extremely rare (though by no means bad), the fifth is somewhat more common and the last two can be considered main lines.

A) 10.♖b1!?

This is quite a logical move, although it has only been tried once according to my database.

10...b6N

10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♕xd2† 12.♗xd2↑ was a bit unpleasant for Black in Estrin – Khasin, Moscow 1955, especially as ...♘a5 is not possible.



11.♗b5 a6 12.♗e2

12.♗xc6 ♗xc6 13.0–0 0–0=

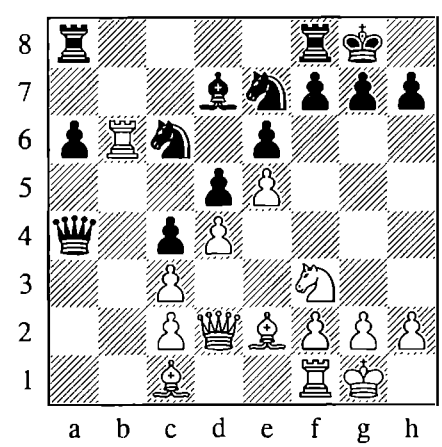
12...0–0 13.0–0

13.♖a1 can be met by 13...b5! 14.dxc5 ♕c7 15.axb5 axb5 with equality.

13.♗a3 ♕xa4 14.♖a1 ♘a5 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.0–0 ♕c6 is also about level.

13...♕xa4 14.♖xb6 c4

If White could conveniently get a rook to a1 and bishop to a3 he would be doing well, but as things stand I like Black's chances. I have included a few illustrative lines below.



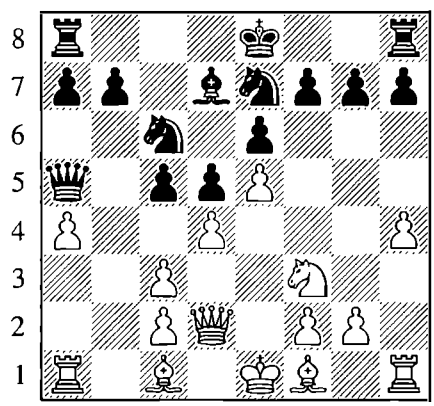
15.♗b2 ♕a5 16.♖b7 ♗c8 17.♖a1 ♕xa1†

17...♕d8 18.♖b5 ♗d7 might be playable, but gaining two rooks for a queen is a good trade here.

18.♗xa1 ♗xb7

With a slight material advantage and a strong passed pawn, Black is more than okay.

B) 10.h4!?



Here is another extremely rare move which nonetheless deserves some attention. Advancing the h-pawn is useful in many situations, and White is waiting to decide how to develop the light-squared bishop depending on Black's reaction.

10...♖c8

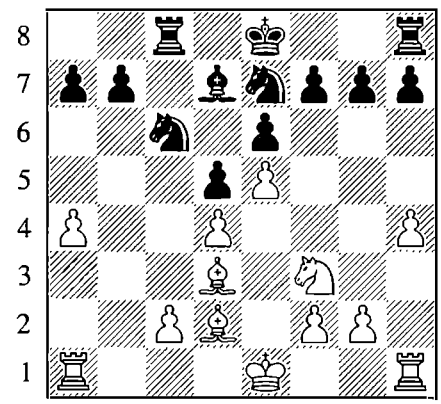
10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♕xd2† 12.♗xd2 ♘f5 13.♗c3 ♖c8 14.♔d2 was slightly better for White in Mainka – Hoefker, Recklinghausen 1995.

11.♗d3

F. Petersen – Kjeldsen, Randers 1991. With the rook already on c8, this would have been a more suitable time for Black to initiate exchanges:

11...cxd4N 12.cxd4 ♕xd2† 13.♗xd2

13.♔xd2 ♘b4 14.♗a3 ♘xd3 15.cxd3 ♘c6=



13...♘f5

Played at a time when the bishop cannot go to c3 for tactical reasons.

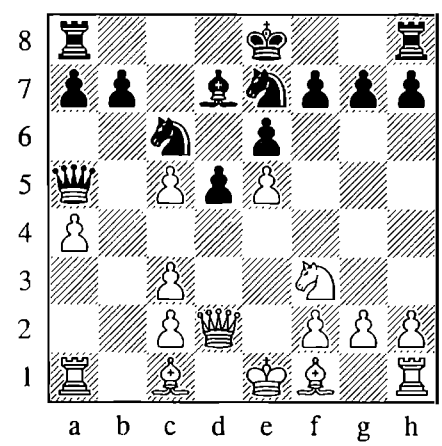
14.♗xf5

14.c3 should of course be met by 14...♘a5 with nice prospects for Black on the queenside.

14...exf5 15.0–0 ♘d8!=

Intending ...♖c4 with sufficient counterplay.

C) 10.dxc5



This time White wrecks his own pawn structure in an attempt to open the position for his bishops.

10...♘g6

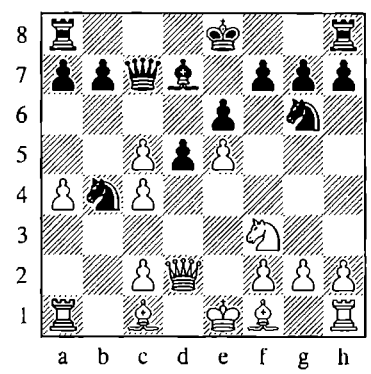
Black can also consider 10...♕c7!? as played in Massoni – Moskalenko, Barbera del Valles 2009.

11.♕e3

11.c4 ♘gxe5 12.♘xe5 ♕xd2† 13.♗xd2 ♘xe5 14.cxd5 exd5 15.♗c3 (15.a5 a6=) 15...f6 16.♗b5 0–0–0 17.0–0–0 ♗c6 was equal in Kovacs – Molnar, Hungary 2005.

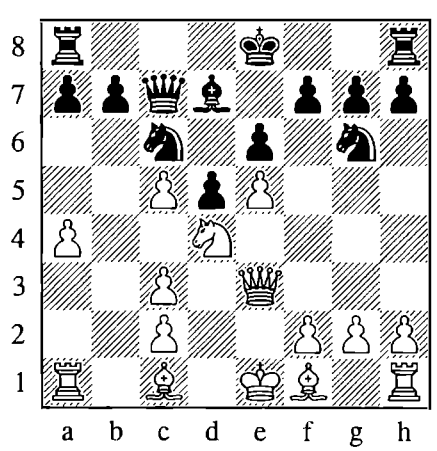
11...♕c7 12.♘d4

12.c4 ♘b4! works well for Black, for instance: 13.♕d2?! (13.♕c3 a5↑; 13.♗d3 ♗c6 14.0–0 dxc4 15.♗e4 0–0=)



13...♘xe5! 14.♗b2 ♘xf3† 15.gxf3 a5! 16.♗xg7 (16.♖g1 0–0–0 17.♖xg7 ♗c6∓) 16...♖g8 17.♗f6 ♗c6 18.c3 dxc4!∓

Returning to the main line, I would like to improve on Black's play in Todorovic – Dragicevic, Serbia 2006.



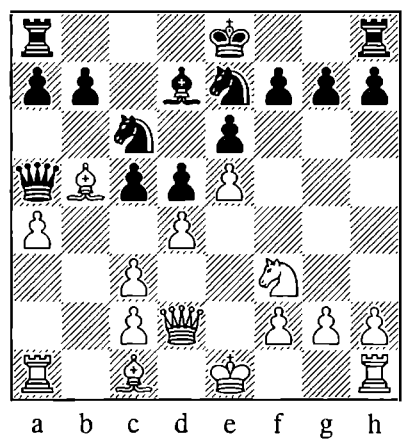
12...♘cxe5N 13.♘b5 ♗xb5 14.♗xb5†

14.axb5?! 0–0 favours Black.

14...♘c6 15.0–0 0–0

Black is at least equal. He has by far the superior pawn structure and White's bishops do not look too threatening.

D) 10.♗b5



This move allows a tactical blow in the centre.

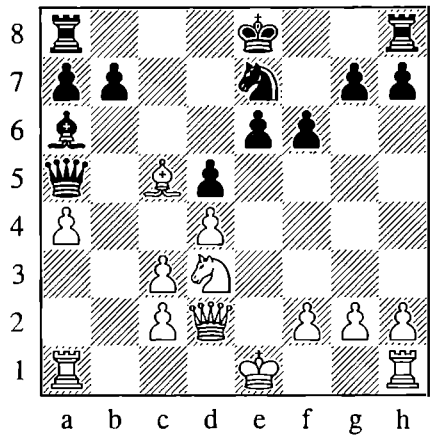
10...♘xe5! 11.♘xe5 ♗xb5 12.♗a3 ♗a6!

It is important to keep the bishop on the a6-f1 diagonal in order to prevent the white king from escaping to g1.

13.♗xc5 f6

I also considered 13...♕c7!?N planning short castling and perhaps ...b6. Play continues: 14.♕g5 This looks like the only critical test. (Black is fine after 14.♘d3 b6 15.♗b4 ♗xd3 16.cxd3 0–0 intending ...♖fe8 or ...♖fc8.) 14...♘g6 15.♘xg6 hxg6 16.♔d2! This appears to be an excellent square for the king. The position should be fine for Black, but doesn't entirely appeal to me in view of White's activity with the queen and bishop.

14.♘d3



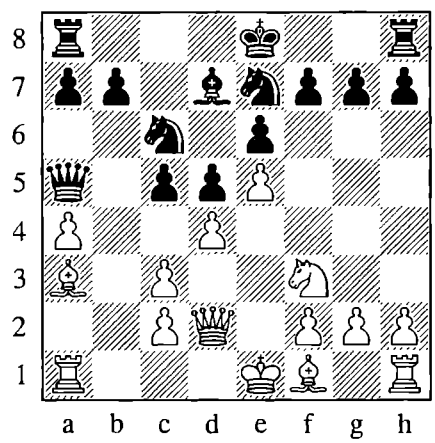
14...♔f7!N

This move is more flexible than 14...♘c6 15.0–0 ♔f7 16.♖fe1 ♖he8 as played in Mnatsakanian – Korchnoi, Yerevan 1965, after which 17.♖e3!N gives White a slight initiative.

15.0–0 ♖he8 16.♖fe1 ♕c7=

Black has no problems and intends ...♘g6 next.

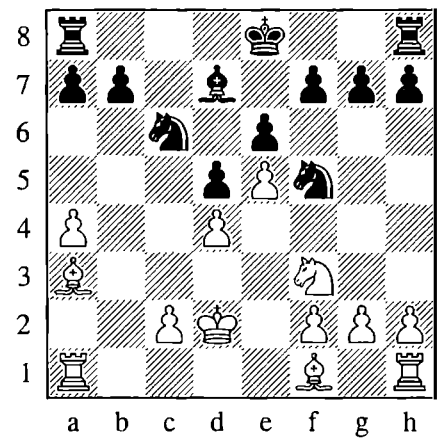
E) 10.♗a3



With this move White occupies the a3-f8 diagonal but allows Black to exchange queens in relatively favourable circumstances.

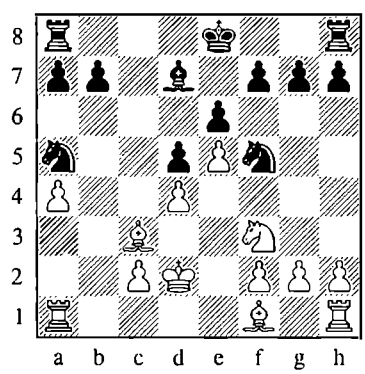
10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♕xd2† 12.♔xd2 ♘f5

12...♖c8 13.♗d3 ♘a5 14.♖hb1 f6 15.♔e2 ♔f7 was equal in Anand – Levitt, London 1987. Nevertheless, I think it is useful to attack d4 in order to provoke a slight weakening of White's queenside.



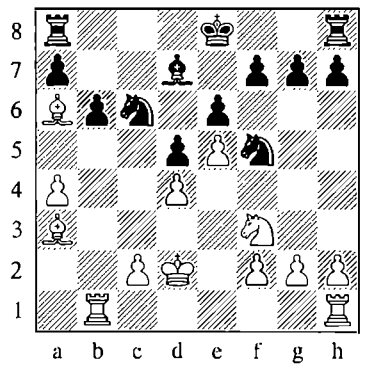
13.c3

White can also avoid the weakening pawn move with 13.♗b2. It looks rather passive, although Black should take care not to allow a4-a5 on the next move. 13...♘a5 14.♗c3 The most logical continuation. (14.♗a3N might lead to a repetition of moves, but Black can also play on in an equal position with 14...♖c8.)

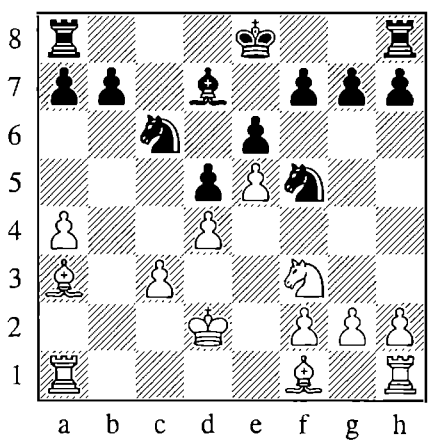


14...♘c4† 15.♗xc4 dxc4 16.♗b4 ♗c6 Having opened up a nice diagonal for his bishop, Black has no problems. The opposite-coloured bishops bring drawish tendencies, but there is still a long fight ahead.

13.♖b1 b6 14.♗a6!?N is an interesting new idea I considered. (14.c3 ♘a5 15.♗b4 ♘c4† 16.♗xc4 dxc4 17.a5 ♗c6 was equal in Morovic Fernandez – Shaked, Groningen 1997.)



14...♘a5!= This positional move is safest. (Instead after 14...♘fxd4 15.♘xd4 ♘xd4 16.a5! White has a promising initiative, for instance 16...♘c6 [16...bxa5 17.♖b7↑] 17.axb6 axb6 18.♖xb6 ♘xe5 19.♖hb1↑ with plenty of counterplay for the sacrificed pawn.)



13...♘a5 14.♖a2

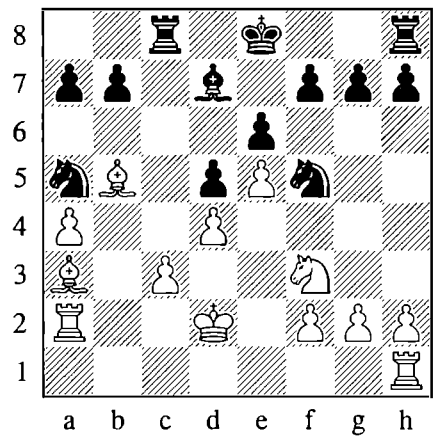
14.♖b1? ♗xa4∓

14...♖c8

14...f6!? 15.♗d3N ♘c4† 16.♗xc4 dxc4 17.a5= is also possible.

15.♗b5

15.♗b4 was punished by 15...♘b3†! 16.♔d1 a5 17.♗a3 ♗xa4∓ in Curi – Filguth, San Jose 1989.



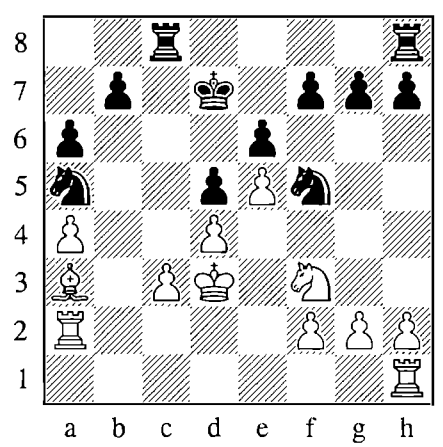
15...a6 16.♗xd7† ♔xd7

Black has achieved one of his primary goals in exchanging the light-squared bishops, so he should be optimistic about his chances.

17.♔d3

17.♖b1 occurred in Reyes – De la Villa, corr. 1990, and here 17...b6!N is a good improvement as pointed out by Watson.

The main move was played in Schmittdiel – Vanheste, Ostend 1991. Here I suggest the novelty:



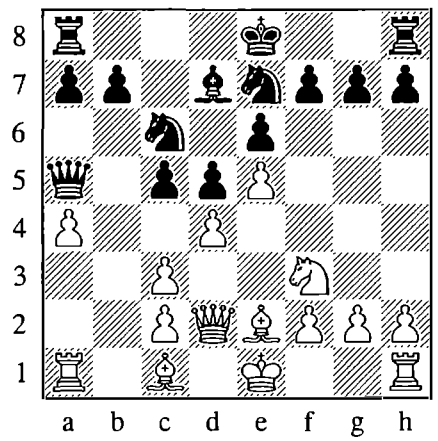
17...b6N

Preventing White from establishing an outpost on b6. The continuation might be:

18.♖b1 ♖c6 19.g4 ♘e7

Black has somewhat better prospects in view of his compact pawn structure, outpost on c4 and pressure along the half-open c-file.

F) 10.♗e2

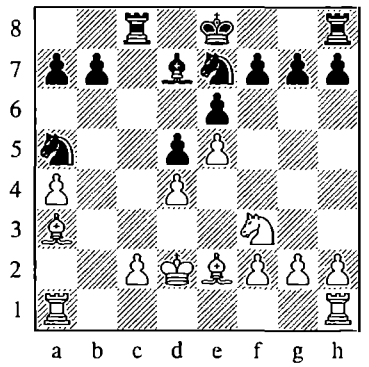


10...♖c8

Preparing to open the c-file. The value of having the rook already in place is revealed if we compare the immediate exchange: 10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♕xd2† 12.♗xd2 ♘f5 The important nuance is that White can play 13.♗c3! avoiding weakening himself with c2-c3 while preventing the black knight from coming to a5. White has the more pleasant game and should be able to press for a long time.

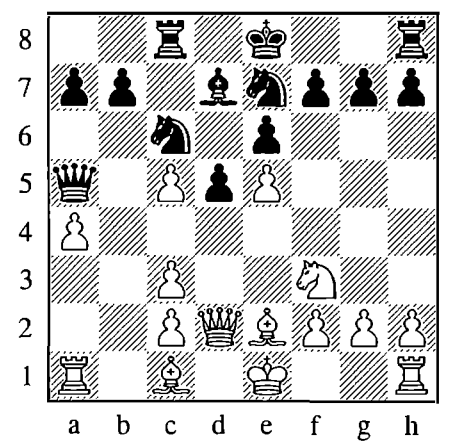
After the rook move White's two main replies are **F1) 11.dxc5** and **F2) 11.0–0**.

11.♗a3 has scored highly but seems relatively harmless after: 11...cxd4 12.cxd4 ♕xd2† 13.♔xd2 ♘a5



Black gets his typical queenside play, with an open c-file and outpost on c4. After the logical 14.♖hb1 Black should continue with 14...f6!= intending ...♔f7 with a solid position, as seen in Abramovic – Maksimovic, Vrnjacka Banja 1983, and several subsequent games. (It should, however, be noted that the 'automatic' 14...b6 unnecessarily weakens Black's queenside and gives White some activity after 15.♗a6↑.)

F1) 11.dxc5



This is a logical way to prevent Black's plan. The downside is of course that White's pawn structure is damaged and the e5-pawn becomes especially weak. It is worth emphasizing that the pawn on c5 should be left standing for a while, as capturing it would allow White's dark-squared bishop to become active on a3.

11...♕c7!?

11...♘g6 has been more popular, but against that move White has scored quite well after sacrificing the e5-pawn.

12.0–0

This was White's choice in the one game I found. Here are a few other sample lines:

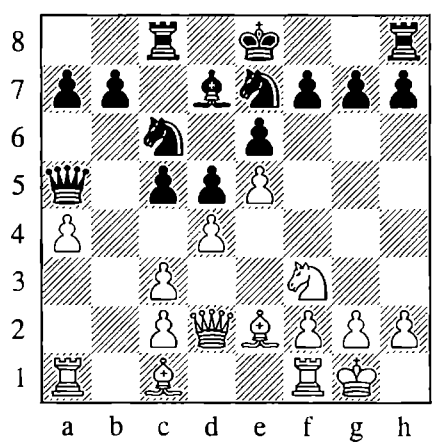
12.♘d4N ♘xe5 13.♘b5 ♗xb5 14.axb5 ♕xc5 15.♕d4 ♘c4=

12.♕e3N ♘f5 (12...♘g6 13.♘d4!) 13.♕f4 ♘ce7= Intending ...♘g6, winning the e5-pawn after all.

12...♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♕xe5 14.♖b1 ♕c7

The position remained balanced in Peterson – Seidel, corr. 2008. White has the pair of bishops while Black has a clearly better pawn structure.

F2) 11.0–0



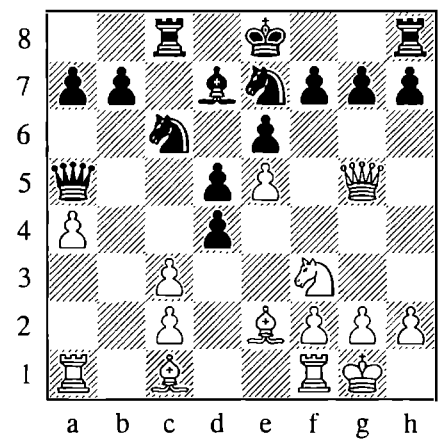
11...cxd4

Black proceeds with his plan, but he should be aware of the following idea.

12.♕g5!

White is ready to sacrifice a few pawns for active piece play. So far the idea has netted him four wins out of four, but fortunately Black's play can be improved.

12.cxd4 is solid but harmless: 12...♕xd2 13.♗xd2 ♘f5 Now White is committed to the undesirable defensive pawn move on the queenside. 14.c3 ♘a5= Black has a sound position with his usual counterplay, Ragozin – Botvinnik, Moscow 1944.

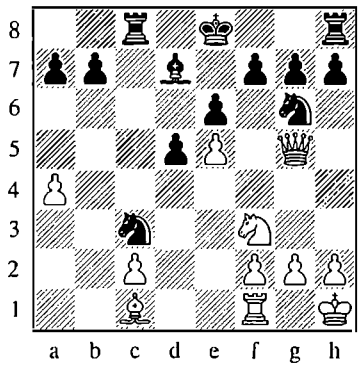


12...♘f5!N

This new move is the only one to meet the demands of the position. Now both g7 and d4 are defended. Black's other ideas include exchanging queens by playing ...♕d8 or kicking the queen away from g5 with ...h6. Before going any further, I would like to present a summary of the alternatives to enable the reader to appreciate White's attacking resources.

12...0–0 13.♗d3!↑ Pernishki – Bukal, Pernik 1977.

12...♘g6 13.cxd4 ♕c3 14.♖a3! forces Black to give up his queen: 14...♘xd4 15.♖xc3 ♘xe2† 16.♔h1 ♘xc3 Black has some compensation, but my feeling is that White should be able to prove an advantage, and indeed the following correspondence game resulted in a quick victory for him:



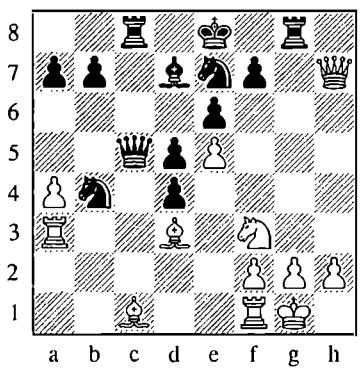
17.h4! ♖c4 18.h5 ♗c6 19.h6 ♘e7?? This move loses the game, but in any case Black had a difficult task. 20.♕xg7 ♖g8 21.♕xh7 ♖cg4 22.♗g5 ♔f8 23.♕d3 ♘e4 24.♗f6 ♖8g6 25.♗g7† Butze – Klewe, corr. 1985.

12...♕xc3

Grabbing a few pawns on the queenside is a critical test, but unfortunately White's compensation appears to be more than sufficient.

13.♖a3! ♕xc2 14.♗d3 ♕c5 15.♕xg7 ♖g8 16.♕xh7 ♘b4

Skokov – Kurbasov, USSR 1976. Here I found a strong novelty for White:



17.h4!N

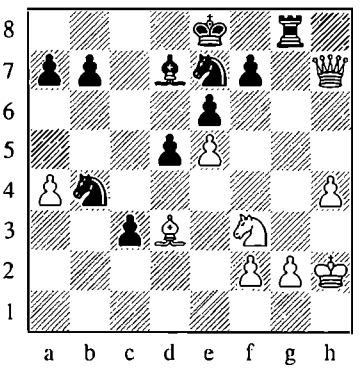
The game continuation of 17.♗g5?! is rather messy but ultimately good for Black. The analysis is interesting but not really relevant to the theory so I will focus on the stronger move.

17...♕xc1!

The best try, but ultimately not quite enough.

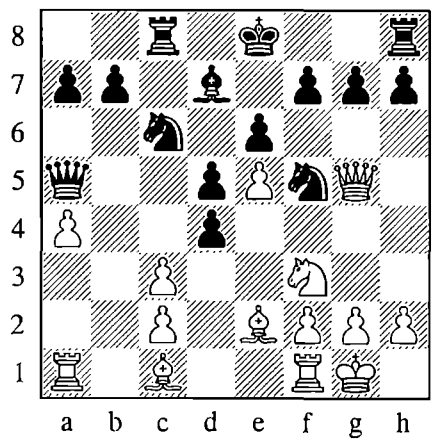
18.♖xc1 ♖xc1† 19.♔h2 ♖c3 20.♖xc3 dxc3

Black has two dangerous passed pawns and threatens ...♗xa4.



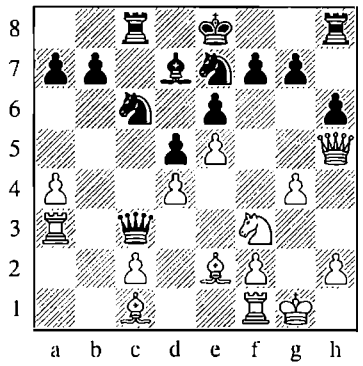
21.♗c2!±

This move seems to promise an advantage for White. If Black cannot create counterplay with his passed queenside pawns, White's h-pawn is likely to decide the game. (The text move is stronger than 21.♘g5 ♖xg5! 22.hxg5 ♗xa4 23.♕h4 a5 24.♕h8† ♔d7 25.♕a8 ♘xd3 26.♕xb7† ♔e8 27.♕a8† ♔d7= when White should settle for a perpetual.)



13.♗d3

13.g4? does not work in view of the following line: 13...h6 14.♕h5 (14.♕f4 g5! 15.♕d2 dxc3∓) 14...♘fe7 15.cxd4 ♕c3 16.♖a3

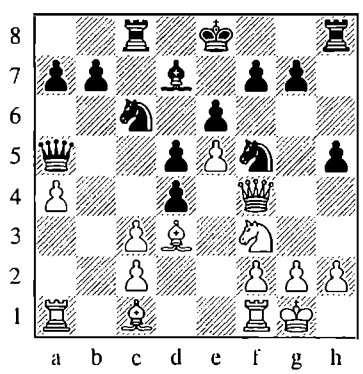


16...♘xd4! 17.♖xc3 ♘xe2† 18.♔h1 (18.♔g2? ♖xc3 is even worse as there are forking motifs on f4.) 18...♖xc3 White's queen is now offside and his king's defences have been weakened by the g2-g4 move. Black has excellent piece coordination and his position is close to winning.

13...♕d8!

Another instructive moment.

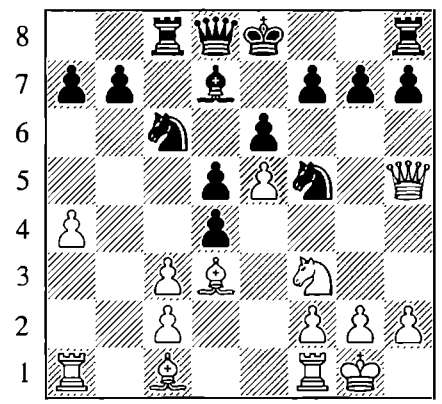
13...h6 14.♕g4 h5 is strongly met by: 15.♕f4! (15.♕g5 ♕d8 16.♕xd8† ♖xd8 17.♗xf5 exf5 18.cxd4 ♖c8 19.♗d2 ♘d8=)



Keeping the queens on gives White excellent compensation even for two pawns. 15...dxc3 16.♗xf5 exf5 17.♗a3 ♕d8 18.♘d4↑ White has a dangerous initiative. The opposite-coloured bishops are helpful for White's attack, while also providing a degree of insurance in terms of drawing tendencies in the event that Black survives to reach an endgame. Thus from a practical perspective Black has a lot to lose and little to gain by venturing this line.

14.♕h5

Naturally White should keep the queens on if he wishes to cause problems.



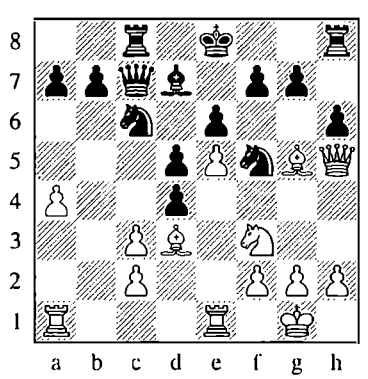
14...h6!

A good defensive move that strengthens the dark squares on the kingside in anticipation of an exchange on f5.

15.♘xd4

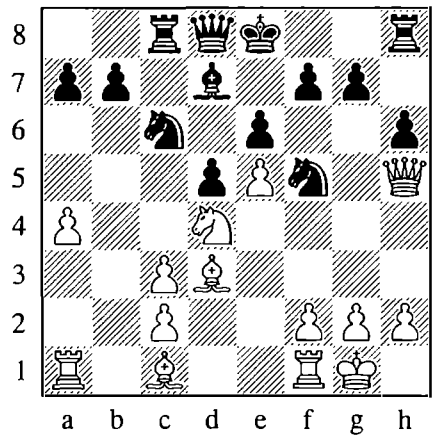
15.cxd4 ♘b4! is fine for Black.

15.♗g5 ♕c7 16.♖fe1 should be met by:



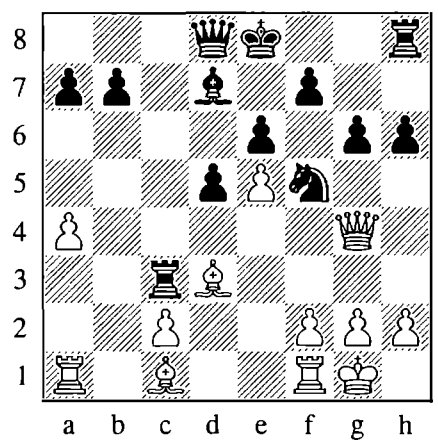
16...♔f8! White was threatening to exchange on f5 and push the e-pawn. (16...0–0?? would

run into serious trouble after 17.g4! with a winning attack for White.) 17.♗d2 dxc3 18.♗xc3 ♘a5 Chances are roughly balanced; White obviously has some compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but Black is solid.



15...g6 16.♘xc6 ♖xc6 17.♕g4 ♖xc3

The chances are approximately equal. Black is a pawn up but White has full compensation thanks to his bishop pair, especially the dark-squared one.



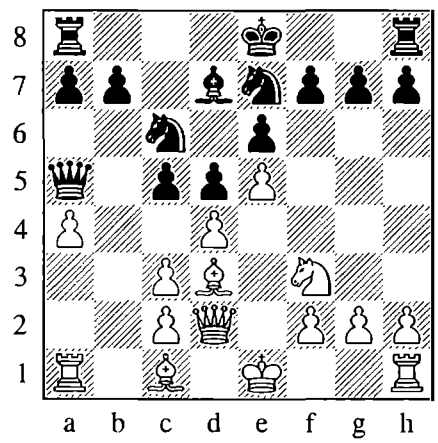
18.♗a3

Preventing castling. There are no immediate threats, but Black is under a certain amount of pressure. On the other hand he still has an extra pawn and the king may well be able to seek refuge on the queenside. A plausible continuation is:

18...♕g5 19.♕b4 ♖c7 20.a5 ♗c6 21.f4 ♕d8

With mutual chances. It is worth pointing out that Black is not only playing in defensive mode; he is now ready for ...d4 when the bishop on c6 comes to life.

G) 10.♗d3



This is White's most active move and has also been the most popular.

10...f6!

Since White's pieces are a bit clumsily placed, this is a good moment for the central break. There are two main options for us to consider: **G1) 11.exf6** and **G2) 11.0–0**.

11.♗a3 has been played quite a few times, but it doesn't trouble Black. 11...fxe5 12.♘xe5 (12.dxe5?! 0–0 13.0–0 transposes to 13.♗a3?! in the note to White's 13th move in variation G22 below – see page 277) 12...♘xe5 13.dxe5 0–0 14.0–0 ♖f7= L. Toth – T. Kononenko, Paks 2010.

G1) 11.exf6 gxf6

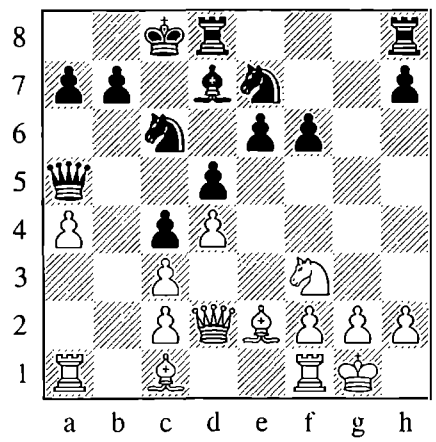
By exchanging pawns White hopes to open the game for his bishops, but in doing so he

gives Black a strong pawn centre. From this position he can either bring his king to safety with **G11) 12.0–0** or continue the exchanging policy with **G12) 12.dxc5**.

12.♗a3 has been played a few times, but after 12...c4 13.♗e2 0–0–0 (13...♘f5!?) 14.0–0 we have transposed to line G11 below.

G11) 12.0–0 c4 13.♗e2 0–0–0

13...♘f5!? is also worth considering, in order to restrict the movement of White's knight. Then 14.♗a3 0–0–0 transposes to the main line below, having eliminated the possibility given in the next note.



14.♗a3

This move is the main line by far, but it has scored badly for White.

14.♘h4!?

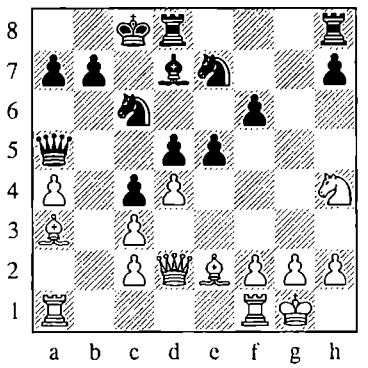
This move has only been tried once. It deserves attention, although Black can avoid it by switching move orders as mentioned in the note to move 13.

14...e5!?N

An ambitious move, playing for control in the centre. 14...♘g6 15.♘xg6 hxg6 16.♗a3 ♕c7 17.f4 ♖h7 was equal in Donchev – Lalic, Varna 1985.

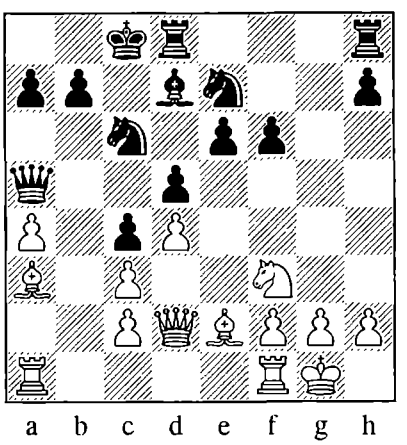
15.♗a3

15.dxe5 fxe5 16.♗a3 ♖hg8 17.♖fb1 ♘f5 18.♘xf5 ♗xf5 reaches the same position.



15...♘f5 16.♘xf5 ♗xf5 17.dxe5 fxe5 18.♖fb1 ♖hg8

The position is sharp and offers mutual chances.



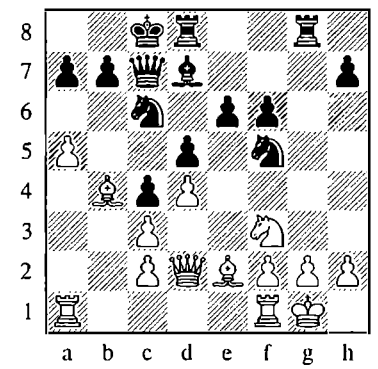
14...♘f5

Black has a promising position and his practical score has been huge. I will mention some illustrative lines.

15.♖fb1

15.♖fe1 has been played a couple of times. A good response is 15...♖dg8 16.♗f1 h5 17.♔h1 ♖g6 with kingside pressure and promising play for Black, Reeh – Arkhipov, Kecskemet 1990.

15.♗b4 ♕c7 16.a5 was seen in Iwaniuk – Szymanski, Koszalin 1999, and here 16...♖hg8!N would have been logical.



Black holds a slight advantage thanks to his attacking chances on the kingside, as well as solid control over the position in general. It's hard for White to find an active plan. Obviously a5-a6 will be met by ...b6, and the attempt to attack by doubling rooks on the b-file can be parried by ...♔b8 and ...♗c8.

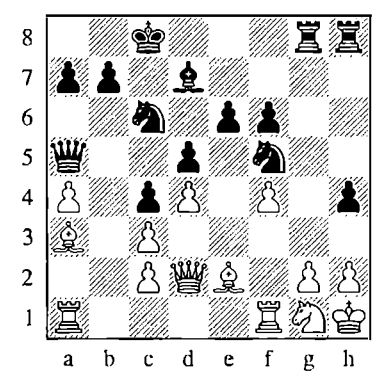
Another game continued:

15.♔h1 h5 16.♘g1 ♖dg8 17.f4?

17.♖fb1N would have been better, keeping the kingside pawns intact. Now Black can apply further pressure by means of 17...♘h4 18.♗f1 ♕c7 with some kingside initiative.

17...h4

Velicka – Levitt, Maidstone 1994. Here it was necessary for White to play:



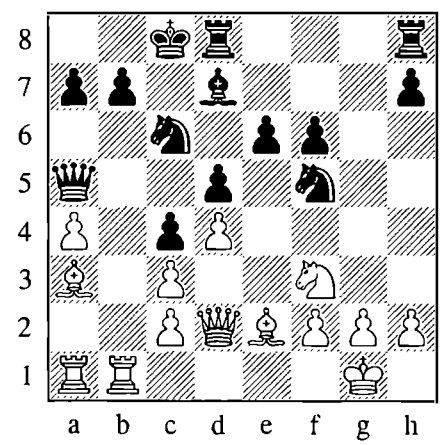
18.♘h3N

The game continued 18.♗c5?? ♘g3† (this works well, but in fact 18...e5!N would have been even stronger) 19.hxg3 hxg3† 20.♘h3 ♖xh3† 21.gxh3 g2† 22.♔h2 gxf1=♘† 23.♗xf1 and here 23...♕c7N looks best. Black has a big advantage in view of his safer king and better pawn structure.

18...♘fxd4! 19.♗b4 ♕b6 20.a5 ♕b5 21.♗c7 ♘xe7 22.♕xd4 ♘c6 23.♕xf6 ♕b2∓

Black keeps an edge here too.

Returning to the main line, Black has several good moves at his disposal but my preference is:



15...♖hg8!?N

15...♖dg8 has been the most popular choice, but I would prefer to leave that rook in the centre where it may become useful in supporting a future ...e5 break.

16.♔h1

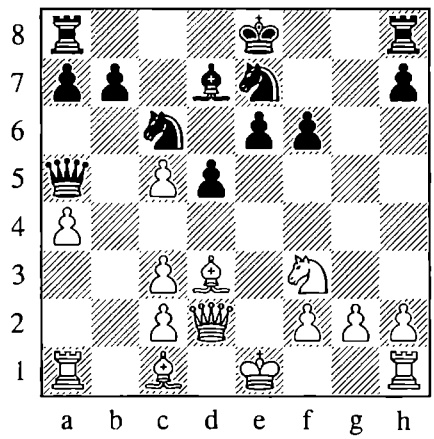
16.♖b5 ♕c7 17.♖ab1 b6 does not trouble Black in the least.

16...♕c7

The position is pretty balanced, but in my opinion Black has the easier game with counterplay along the g-file and a strong pawn centre. White's only real plan is to create active

counterplay along the b-file, but Black can defend easily enough, either with ...b6 or with ...♔b8 followed by ...♗c8 when necessary.

G12) 12.dxc5

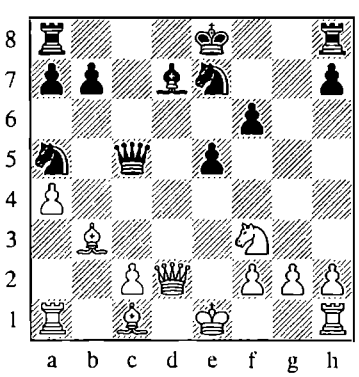


This time White opens the game before Black gets the opportunity to block things up with ...c4.

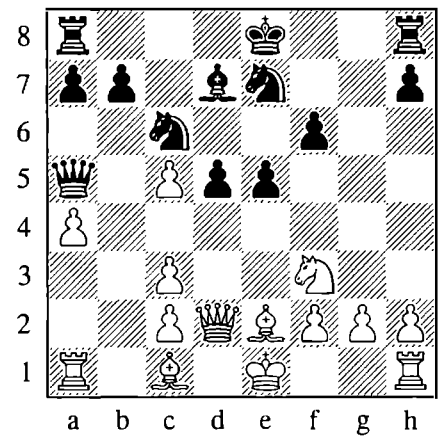
12...e5 13.♗e2

13.♘h4 is an old move that might warrant further investigation, although after 13...0–0–0 14.0–0 ♖hg8 Black had a strong centre and a fair amount of activity in Helmreich – Girard, corr. 2011.

13.c4 dxc4 14.♗xc4 ♕xc5 15.♗b3 (15.♗b5 0–0–0 16.♗a3 ♕b6= Zalys – Filipovich, Montreal 1980) 15...♘a5

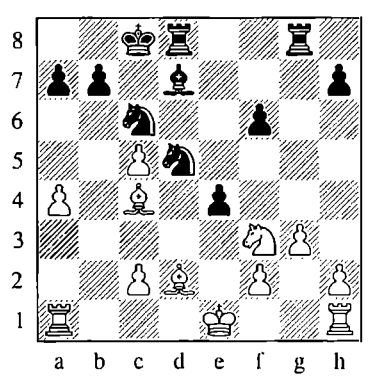


16.♗a3 (16.♗a2 0–0–0= is mentioned by Watson) 16...♘xb3 17.cxb3 ♕d5= Gallagher – Hawksworth, London 1985.

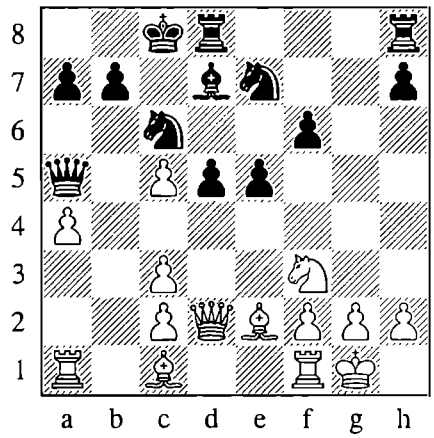


13...0–0–0 14.0–0

14.c4N has not yet been played, although the same position has arisen a few times with White to move! The explanation is that in the present line White's bishop has used two moves to get to e2. 14...♕xd2† 15.♗xd2 ♖hg8 Black is fine, as shown in the following illustrative lines: 16.cxd5 (16.0–0? ♗g4∓; 16.g3 e4 17.cxd5 ♘xd5 transposes to 16.cxd5) 16...♘xd5 17.g3 e4 18.♗c4 (18.♘h4 ♞d4=)



18...♘db4! 19.♗xb4 ♘xb4 20.♗xg8 ♘xc2† 21.♔d2 ♘xa1 22.♘d4 ♖xg8 23.♖xa1 ♖g5 Black has slightly the easier side of a probable draw.



14...♖hg8 15.♔h1

15.g3N is well met by 15...♗g4!= improving Black's pieces and increasing his central influence.

15...♘g6

It's also worth paying attention to the waiting move 15...♔b8!?N. Black keeps the tension while putting his king in a more secure place. It is hard for White to find a plan here; his bishops lack power at the moment and Black can use the pawn on c5 as a shield against any counterplay along the a3-f8 diagonal. A useful resource worth remembering is ...♖g4 attacking the a4-pawn and perhaps preparing to double on the g-file.

16.c4

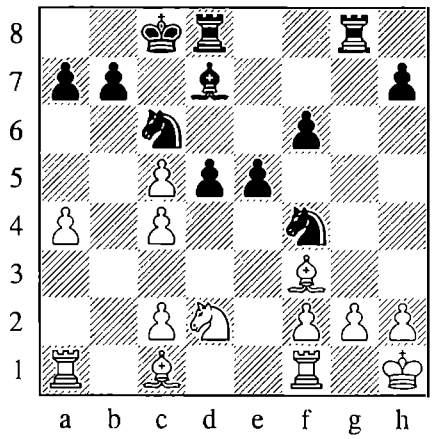
16.♕xd5? is an obvious mistake in view of 16...♘f4 17.♗xf4 (17.♕e4 or 17...f5 18.♕e3 ♘xg2→) 17...♗h3∓ as pointed out by Watson.

16...♕xd2 17.♘xd2N

After 17.♗xd2?! e4 18.♘g1 d4∓ Black had a very nice initiative in Tringov – Vaganian, Vrnjacka Banja 1971.

The text move is a better try, but Black is still at least equal.

17...♘f4 18.♗f3



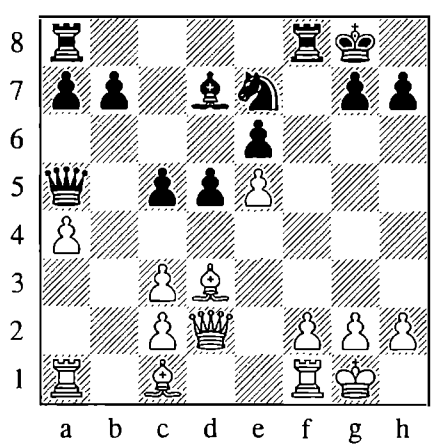
18...♘d4!? 19.♗xd5 ♘xd5 20.cxd5 ♘xc2 21.♖b1 ♗f5 22.d6 ♖g4!

The rook manoeuvre to the queenside guarantees the necessary counterplay for Black.

G2) 11.0–0 fxe5

After this natural reply White must decide whether or not to exchange a pair of knights. We will thus consider **G21) 12.♘xe5** and **G22) 12.dxe5** in turn.

G21) 12.♘xe5 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 0–0

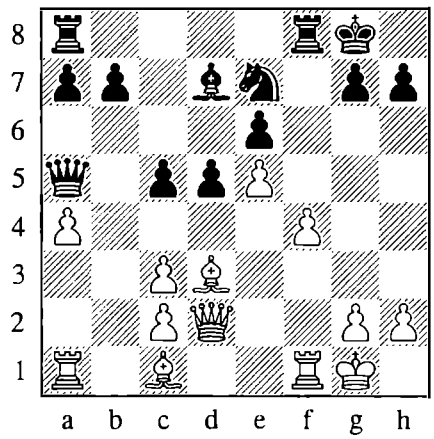


14.f4!?

The most popular continuation has been 14.c4, but after 14...♕xd2 15.♗xd2 d4 followed by ...♗c6 the position is level, as White's bishop

pair advantage is balanced out by his inferior pawn structure. (15...♗c6 has been seen, and this also looks quite reasonable for Black.)

The text move has scored highly for White, but I see no reason for Black to worry.

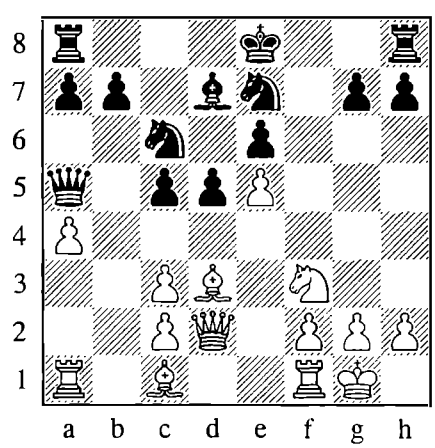


14...♗e8!?N

This would be my choice, intending ...♗g6 when the bishop becomes active. Black's position is easy to play and his chances are by no means worse.

I also checked 14...b5!? but found 15.♗a3!?N bxa4 16.f5! to be slightly tricky for Black. According to my analysis the second player should be able to reach a tenable endgame, but I like the main move better.

G22) 12.dxe5



12...0–0

Now ...♖xf3 becomes a positional threat.

13.♖e1

White needs to guard the e5-pawn in anticipation of the exchange sacrifice.

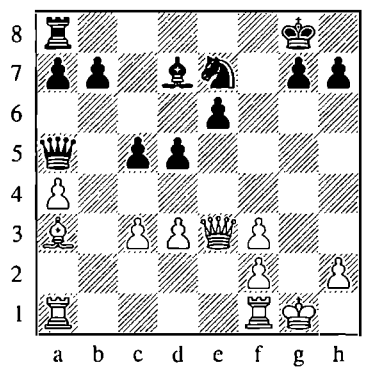
13.♕g5? ♖xf3 14.gxf3 c4 15.♗e2 ♕xc3 16.♖a2 occurred in Lengyel – Renman, Prague 1979, and now after 16...♘f5N Black has total control and a clear advantage.

13.♗a3?! ♖xf3! 14.gxf3 ♘xe5 15.♕e3

15.♗e2N ♘5g6∓

15...♘xd3 16.cxd3

Kravtsiv – Vernay, Sibenik 2007. Here I found a strong novelty:



16...♘f5!N 17.♕xc5

This must be the critical move, but it places the queen offside and allows Black to generate dangerous attacking chances.

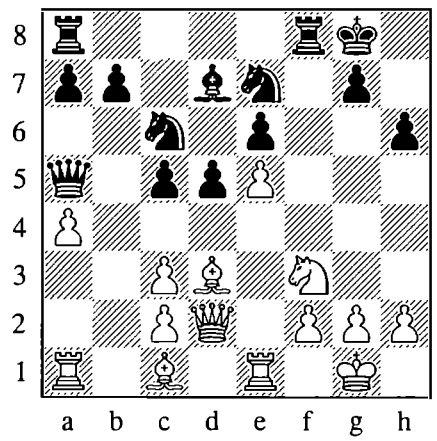
The alternative is 17.♕e5 ♕a6! 18.♖fd1 ♕c6∓ when Black has a pawn for the exchange, a much better pawn structure and an excellent outpost for his knight on f5.

17...♕d8! 18.f4 b6! 19.♕b4 ♕e8!∓

Black has more than enough compensation in view of White's lack of coordination, weak pawn structure and vulnerable king.

13...h6

A good prophylactic move, stopping White's possible actions on the kingside. Now White will struggle to find suitable squares for his pieces.



14.♘h4

14.♗a3 ♗e8 activating the bishop was fine for Black in Smyslov – Uhlmann, Havana 1964.

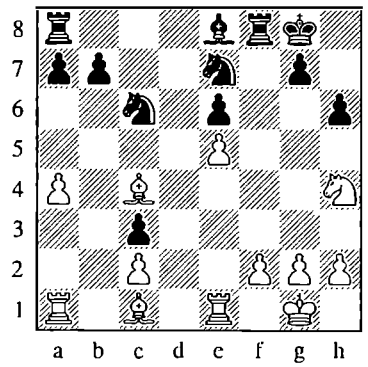
14.c4 ♕xd2 15.♗xd2 ♘b4 16.♗xb4 cxb4 17.cxd5 ♘xd5 gave Black at least equal prospects in Manca – Menoni, Montecatini Terme 1998.

14...♗e8 15.♗a3!?N

This untested move is the most interesting attempt I could find for White.

15.c4?! ♕xd2 16.♗xd2 ♖d8 17.cxd5 ♘xd5∓ was slightly better for Black in Mariano – Wang Hao, Kuala Lumpur 2005, thanks to his better piece coordination and pawn structure. True, White has the pair of bishops, but they lack effective diagonals on which to operate.

Another instructive line is:
15.♕e3N c4 16.♗e2 d4 17.♕h3 ♕xc3 18.♕xc3 dxc3 19.♗xc4



19...♘d4!

Watson mentions 19...♘d5= which indeed looks fine for Black, but the text move enables the second player to fight for an advantage.

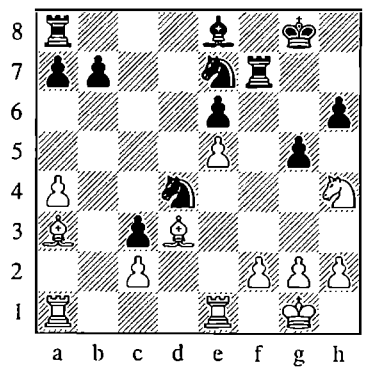
20.♗d3

20.♗a3 ♖f7 21.♖ed1 (21.♗d3 g5 transposes to 20.♗d3) 21...♘ec6 is also pleasant for Black.

20...g5 21.♗a3

21.♗e3 ♖d8 22.♗xd4 ♖xd4 23.♘f3 ♖xa4∓

21...♖f7

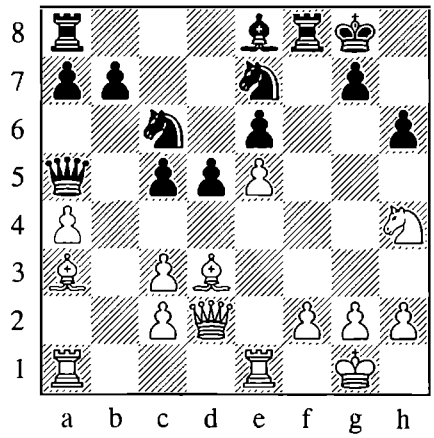


22.♖e4!?

22.♗xe7 ♖xe7 23.♘f3 ♘xf3† 24.gxf3 ♖c8∓ gives Black a clear-cut positional edge.

22...♘ec6 23.♘f3 ♘xf3† 24.gxf3 ♖xf3∓

The position is a bit messy, but it is White who is fighting for equality.



15...♗h5

Activating the bishop and planning ...g5 at an appropriate moment.

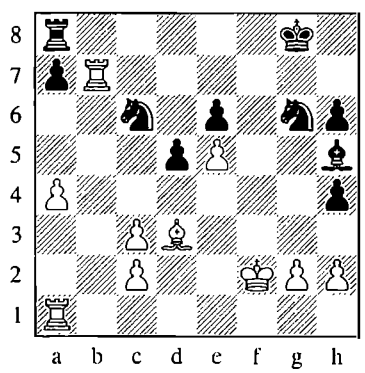
16.♖eb1

16.f4 ♖ad8 17.♖eb1 b6 leads to the same thing.

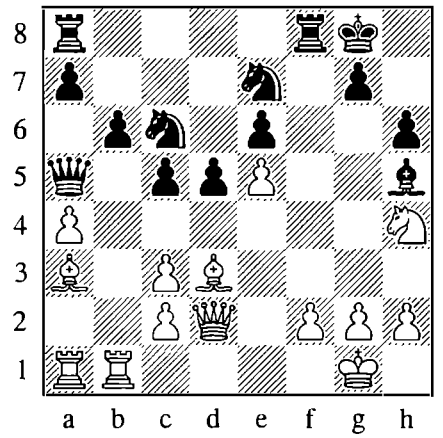
16...b6

This keeps things safe and solid, as White has no way to exploit the black queen's shortage of squares.

16...g5!? is a riskier alternative which leads to an immensely complicated endgame: 17.♗xc5 ♕xc5 18.♖b5 ♖xf2 19.♕xf2 ♕xf2† 20.♔xf2 gxh4 21.♖xb7 ♘g6



It is hard to say who stands better. Black has some material advantage, but White's potential passed a-pawn might well count for more.



17.f4 ♖ad8!=

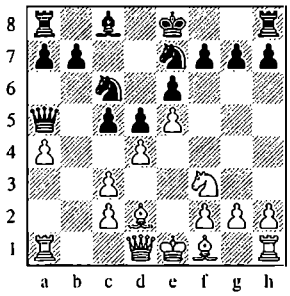
The position is rather complex, but Black seems to be doing fine. The queen can always escape from a5 by means of ...c4 or ...d4 when needed.

Conclusion

White has many ways of handling the position after 9.♕d2 ♗d7, and Black's strategy will depend on his opponent's set-up. The simplifying operation with ...cxd4 and ...♕xd2 followed by ...♘f5 can work well, but should generally only be used when White is obliged to meet the threat to the d4-pawn with the weakening c2-c3. In some cases Black can improve his prospects with a preliminary ...♖c8, while against the main 10.♗d3 line an immediate central counter with 10...f6 is called for. Generally Black's chances appear fine, as long as he takes care not to allow White's dark-squared bishop to become too active.



7.a4



9.♗d2 ♗d7 – Move 10 Alternatives

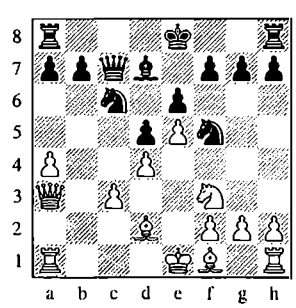
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♗d2

9...♗d7

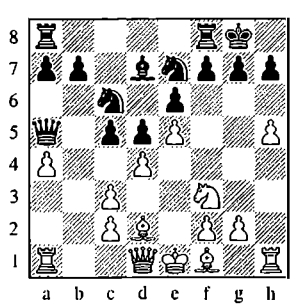
A) 10.♘g5?! 282
B) 10.c4?! 283
C) 10.g3 283
D) 10.♕c1 285
E) 10.♖b1 285
F) 10.h4!? 286
G) 10.♗d3 c4 287
G1) 11.♗f1 287
G2) 11.♗e2 f6 288
G21) 12.exf6 288
G22) 12.0–0 289

D) after 13.c3



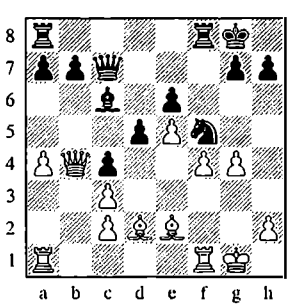
13...♘a5!N

F) after 11.h5



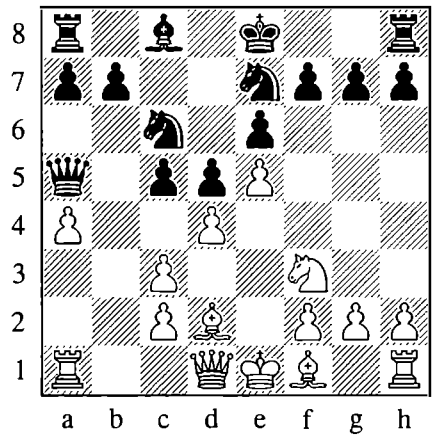
11...h6!N

G22) after 18.g4



18...a5!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♗d2



This is the most common response to Black's last move. White allows his bishop to be drawn away from the a3-square in order to speed up his development and maintain harmony amongst his pieces. It is worth emphasizing that, in many of the lines that follow, Black will happily retreat his queen to c7 knowing that the 'free' ♗d2 move will generally prove less than helpful for White; the ideal square for the dark-squared bishop is a3, and on d2 it also obstructs the queen's defence of the d4-pawn.

9...♗d7

Black continues with a standard developing move. We have reached a major branching point, and in the present chapter we will analyse seven main options: **A) 10.♘g5?!**, **B) 10.c4?!**, **C) 10.g3**, **D) 10.♕c1**, **E) 10.♖b1**, **F) 10.h4!?** and **G) 10.♗d3**.

10.♕b1 looks pretty strange to me, forcing a retreat that Black would like to make anyway. It's also hard to see any useful purpose for the queen on b1. Black is doing fine after 10...♕c7, for instance: 11.♗d3 0–0N 12.0–0 c4 13.♗e2 f6 14.exf6 ♖xf6=

The two most important continuations are 10.♗b5 and 10.♗e2. Both of these moves will receive coverage in dedicated chapters, beginning on pages 291 and 301 respectively.

A) 10.♘g5?!

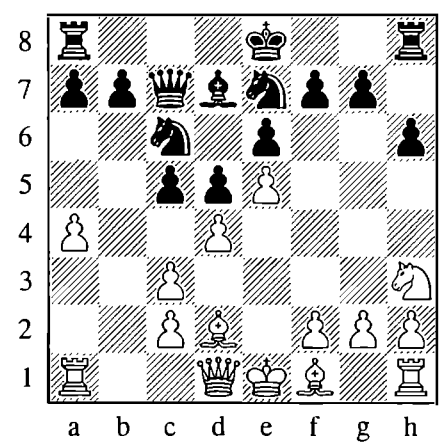
This aggressive move is just bad.

10...h6 11.♘h3?!

White's best option is to admit his mistake with 11.♘f3N which would obviously count as a success for Black.

11.♕h5?! g6 12.♕h3 occurred in Imbert – Schweisguth, Montigny le Bretonneux 2010. Now Black can improve with 12...cxd4N as pointed out by Watson, and after 13.cxd4 ♕b6 14.c3 ♕b2 followed by ...♘a5 Black has the advantage.

11...♕c7



12.♗d3N

Other moves are even worse:

12.♕g4? ♘f5 13.♗d3 cxd4 14.cxd4 ♘xe5–+ was already decisive for Black in Kallio – Hedlund, Sweden 1990.

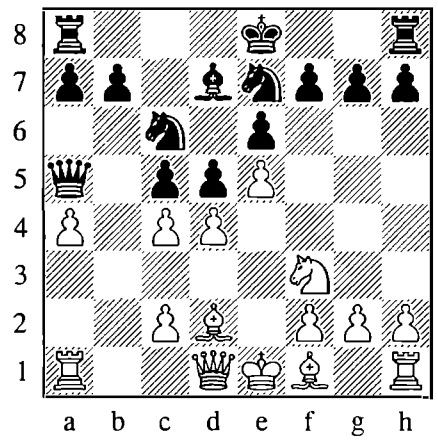
12.♗c1? cxd4 13.cxd4 ♘b4 14.♗d3 ♕c3†

15.♗d2 ♘xd3† 16.cxd3 ♕xd3–+ Korchagina – Ivkina, St Petersburg 2008.

12...cxd4 13.cxd4 ♘xd4∓

White has little to show for his missing pawn.

B) 10.c4?!



Only Black will benefit from this premature central break, as now White's pawn centre is seriously weakened.

10...♕c7 11.cxd5 exd5!

Opening the way for the bishop to head for g4, in order to put further pressure on White's centre.

12.c3

12.dxc5 0–0 13.♗e2 ♘xe5 14.0–0 ♘xf3† 15.♗xf3 ♕xc5 is somewhat better for Black, although the pair of bishops gave White reasonable drawing chances in Dubinin – Boleslavsky, Leningrad 1947.

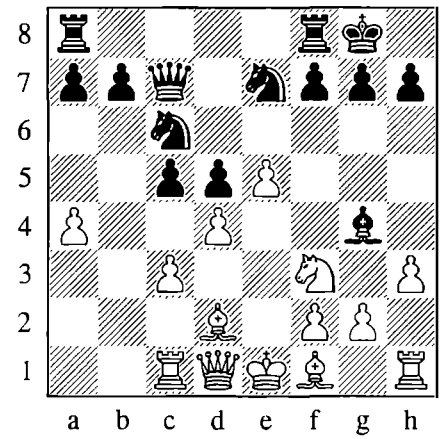
12...♗g4 13.♖c1

13.♗b5 0–0∓

13...0–0 14.h3

14.♗d3 f6! 15.exf6 ♖xf6 16.♗xh7† ♔h8 17.♗b1 ♖af8 18.♕c2 g6∓ Black has strong pressure along the f-file.

14.♗e2 ♘f5 also promises good play for Black.



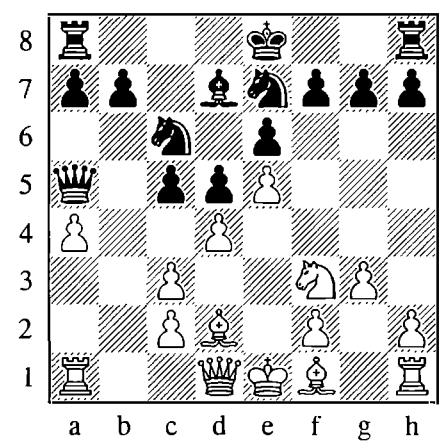
14...♗xf3 15.gxf3

15.♕xf3 f6!∓

15...f6 16.f4 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♕b6∓

Palffy – Sinka, Hungary 1998. (17...♘f5N∓ is also promising for Black.)

C) 10.g3



With this move White plans to develop his light-squared bishop to g2 or h3. This is a normal set-up in positions when Black has committed himself to...c4, but at the present moment the idea looks rather strange to me, as it loses time and also weakens the light squares.

10...0–0

Both Williams and Watson give long castling as the main recommendation, but the text move looks more logical to me. Black plans a quick ...f6 break in order to get counterplay along the f-file and possibly transfer the bishop via e8 to the kingside.

11.♗h3

11.♗g2 ♕c7N 12.0–0 ♘a5 is likely to transpose to the main line after 13.♖e1 ♘c4 14.♗f1.

11.♗d3!?

This might well be best, although one would then have to question the value of g2-g3 as a waiting move. Black should beware of the possible sacrifice on h7 though.

11...f6

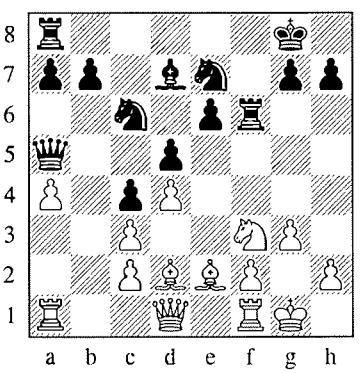
11...h6!? is another interesting option intending: 12.0–0 c4 13.♗e2 f6 14.exf6 ♖xf6=

12.exf6 ♖xf6 13.0–0

13.♖b1!?N ♕c7 14.0–0 h6=

13...c4 14.♗e2

We have been following the game Karpovich – Kurochkin, Lvov 1999. Here I suggest:



14...♖af8N

Intending ...♗e8 or ...♘c8-d6. A possible continuation is:

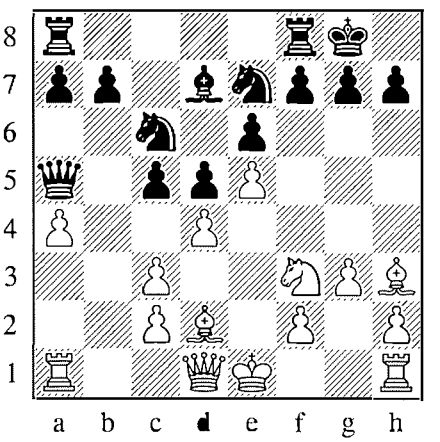
15.♘h4

15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♖6f7 17.♗h5 g6 18.♗g4 ♘f5=

15...♘c8 16.f4 ♘d6 17.♗f3 ♘e7 18.♘g2 ♘ef5=

With a solid position for Black.

Let's return to the main line, which seems most consistent with 10.g3. Now that the bishop has committed itself to the kingside, I would prefer to delay the ...f6 break and first concentrate on the queenside where White has left himself vulnerable on the light squares. One has to question the usefulness of the bishop on h3, as White is a long way from achieving f4-f5.



11...♕c7N

Black frees the a5-square for his knight, while putting additional pressure on White's centre and along the c-file.

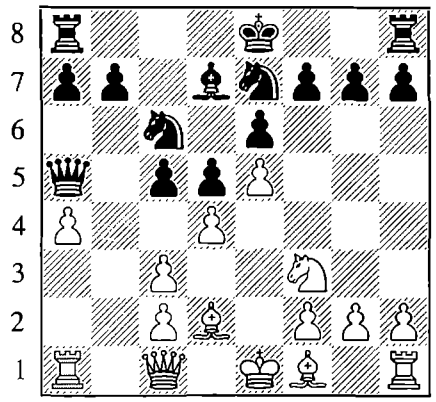
12.0–0 ♘a5 13.♖e1 ♘c4 14.♗f1

14.♗g5 ♖fe8 is no problem.

14...h6!?=

A useful waiting move, preventing the threats before they come. Black has an easy game with a strong knight on c4 and pressure along the c-file. An exchange on c4 would just turn the ugly French bishop on d7 into the master of the long diagonal.

D) 10.♕c1



This move scores pretty well for White and was once played by Victor Korchnoi. White intends to put his queen to a3 to stabilize the queenside and exert pressure along the a3-f8 diagonal.

10...♕c7!

Black has several playable options, but this one looks most appealing to me. Black retreats his queen towards the centre and frees the a5-square for the knight.

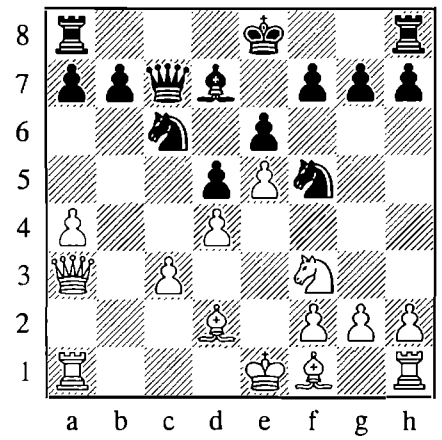
11.♕a3 cxd4

11...b6= has been played, and this too gives Black a solid game.

Another idea is 11...♖c8!?N with the point that 12.♕xc5? can be met by 12...♘xe5!.

12.cxd4 ♘f5 13.c3

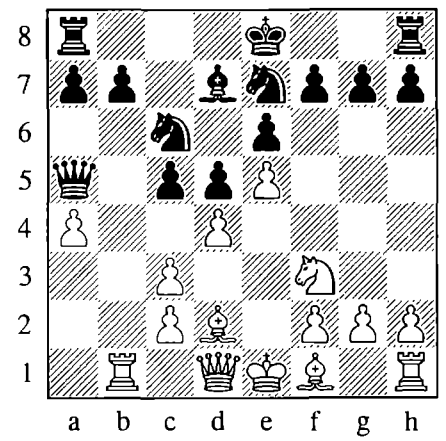
When Black succeeds in provoking this advance, he can generally be happy with his position. The bishop on d2 is passive at the moment and Black will obtain counterplay on the light squares. With that in mind, the purpose of the following novelty is quite obvious:



13...♘a5!N

Much more logical than 13...f6 as played in Kogeler – Romano, corr. 2011. Black has promising counterplay on the light squares and his chances are not worse.

E) 10.♖b1



This move has only rarely been played but it is not bad.

10...♕c7

Safeguarding the b-pawn and avoiding any ♖b5 attacks.

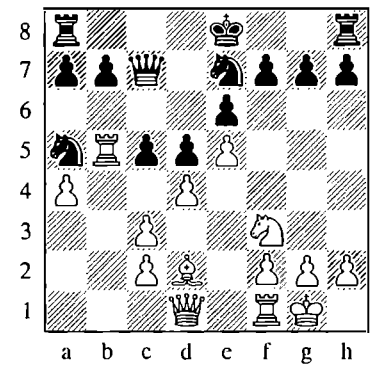
11.h4!?

The following alternatives are not dangerous:

11.♗e2 ♘a5N is fine for Black.

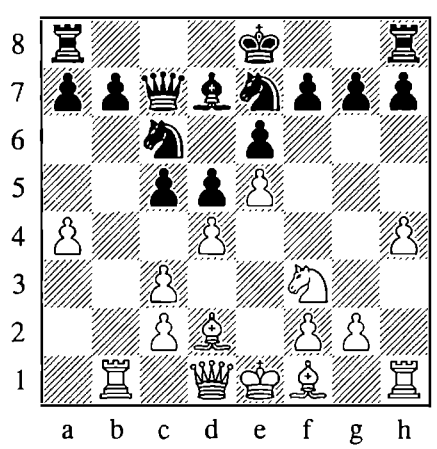
11.♗d3 b6N 12.0–0 h6! is an important prophylactic idea to prepare short castling.

11..♗b5?! ♘a5 12.0–0 ♗xb5 13.♖xb5 occurred in Tosoni – Proietti, Rome 2007.



Now instead of blocking the position with 13...c4? Black should have preferred 13...b6!N 14.dxc5 ♘c4 with somewhat better chances.

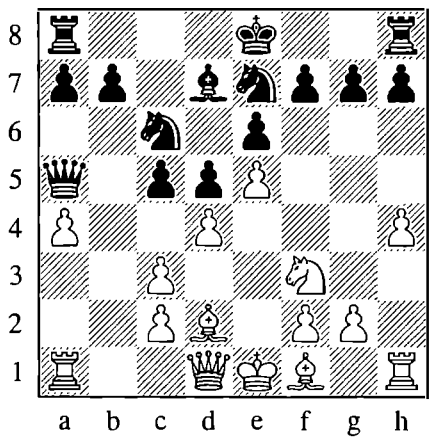
The text move is the most challenging idea, keeping various options open for the light-squared bishop. According to my database, White has achieved a perfect four wins from four by playing this way. However, this is mainly due to Black having failed to choose the right plan. Instead of committing to long castling or breaking prematurely with ...f6, I would like to propose a logical novelty:



11...♘a5!N=

Attacking a4 and keeping the king safely in the centre for the time being. Black's chances are by no means worse here.

F) 10.h4!?



An interesting waiting move to see how Black reacts. The two most popular replies have been 10...f6 and 10...0–0–0, but neither of them look very impressive to me. Instead I prefer the following solution:

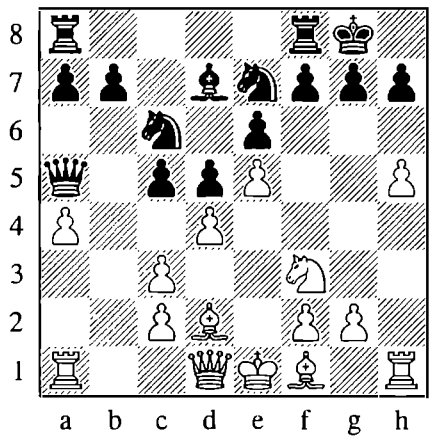
10...0–0!?

This may look like a risky decision against White's last move, but it is justified by Black's lead in development.

I would like to mention 10...♕c7!? as an interesting alternative. As has already been mentioned in similar situations, once White has committed his bishop to d2 the queen is better placed on c7 where it has multiple functions. Play may continue: 11.h5 (Or 11.♗d3N c4 12.♗e2 f6 13.exf6 gxf6 intending ...0–0–0 followed by ...e5 with counterplay in the centre.) 11...cxd4N 12.cxd4 ♘f5 13.c3 h6 Having forced the weakening c2-c3, Black can continue with ...♘a5-c4 with counterplay on the c-file and the light squares. The chances are about equal.

11.h5

11.♗d3 is well met by 11...h6 intending ...c4 followed by ...f6.



11...h6!N

It's necessary to prevent h5-h6 before going into action with the f-pawn. Watson gives this as the safest option for Black, with the assessment of equal. I would like to offer a few further lines showing the possible development of the position.

11...f5?! was played in Dzhumaev – Dimukhametov, Samara 2011. Now White could have played 12.h6!N g6 13.♗e2± with a long-term advantage in view of Black's weaknesses on the dark squares.

12.g4

This is the most straightforward move for White and should be taken seriously. Now Black really needs to open up the f-file to create counterplay.

12.♗d3 plays into Black's hands after 12...c4 13.♗e2 f6 14.exf6 ♖xf6= with a solid position and roughly equal chances.

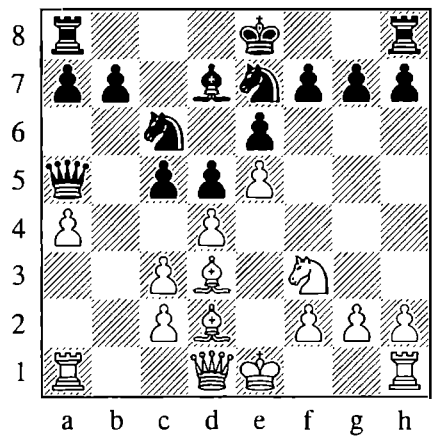
12...f6 13.exf6 ♖xf6 14.♗g2

14.g5?! hxg5∓ doesn't bring anything for White.

14...♖af8 15.0–0 ♕c7=

Black has achieved a solid position with good chances to make use of White's weaknesses. One idea is to continue with ...cxd4 followed by ...♘c8-d6.

G) 10.♗d3



10...c4

This is a logical reply, winning a tempo on the bishop and planning a quick ...f6 break. Both bishop retreats are possible, so we will check both **G1) 11.♗f1** and **G2) 11.♗e2**.

G1) 11.♗f1

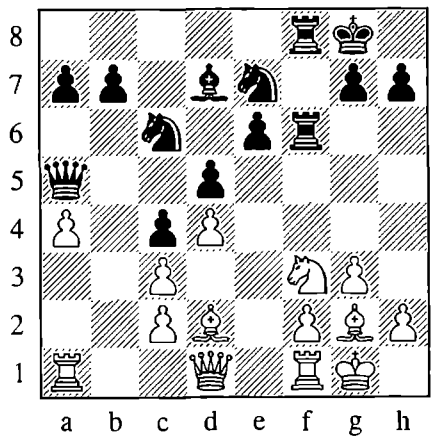
This has the rather ambitious idea of developing the bishop on g2 or h3, but it is rather time-consuming and Black can quickly create counterplay along the f-file.

11...0–0

This looks like a good and simple solution, although 11...0–0–0 followed by ...f6 also deserves attention.

12.g3 f6 13.exf6 ♖xf6 14.♗g2 ♖af8 15.0–0

The above moves are all self-explanatory, and were played in Veber – Varini, Kranj 2008. Here I suggest the following new idea:



15...h6!N

It is worth investing a tempo to take control over the g5-square.

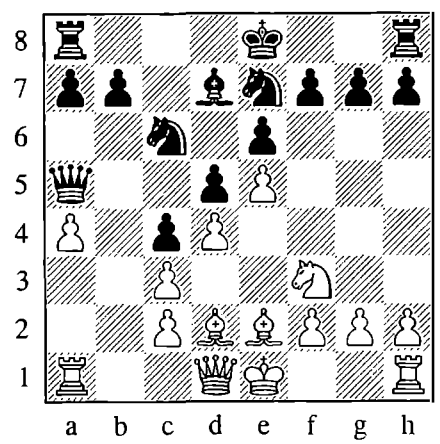
16.♘h4

16.♕e2 ♗e8= is fine for Black.

16...g5! 17.♘f3 ♗e8=

Black's activity fully compensates for the slight weakening of his kingside.

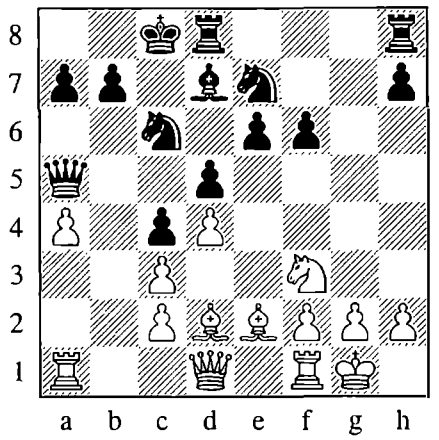
G2) 11.♗e2



11...f6

On this occasion I prefer the immediate central break in conjunction with long castling. Now White must make an important choice between **G21) 12.exf6** and **G22) 12.0–0**.

G21) 12.exf6 gxf6 13.0–0 0–0–0

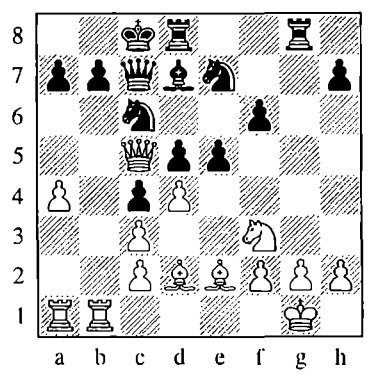


14.♖e1

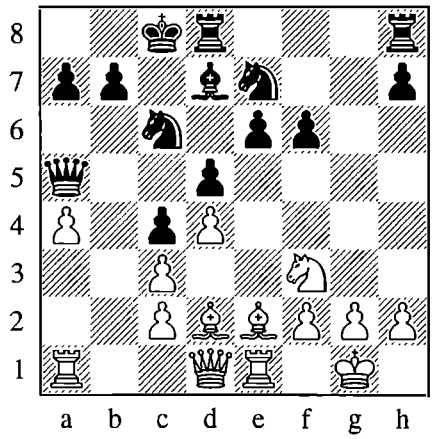
Here are a couple of other possibilities:

14.♕c1 e5N looks like a logical novelty, and after 15.dxe5 fxe5 Black has a strong pawn centre and attacking prospects on the kingside. A possible continuation is 16.♗g5 ♕c7 17.a5 ♖hg8 intending ...♖df8.

14.♕b1 e5 15.♕b5 ♕c7 16.♕c5 ♖hg8 17.♖fb1 was Rostalski – Webb, Hamburg 1977. Here it looks good for Black to play:



17...b6!N 18.♕a3 (18.♕b5 ♔b8 19.♕b2 ♔a8∓) And now after 18...♗g4∓ Black has a strong pawn centre and good attacking chances on the kingside. Meanwhile White is left with all his heavy pieces on the queenside, but lacks the means to break through.



14...♖hg8 15.♗f1 ♘g6

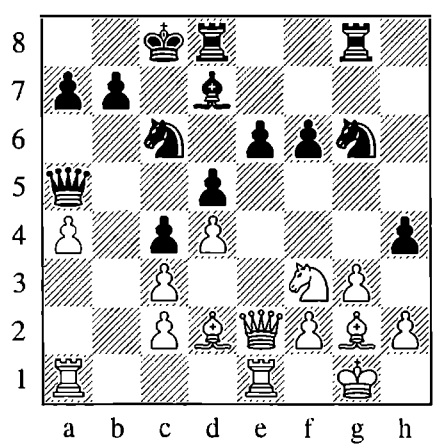
15...♘f5= is also decent.

16.g3

16.♕e2 e5 17.♖eb1 ♗g4 18.♕e3 occurred in Onisi – Bongiovanni, Rome 1996. Now instead of 18...♗xf3? Black should play 18...♕c7N when he keeps an initiative.

16...h5 17.♗g2 h4 18.♕e2

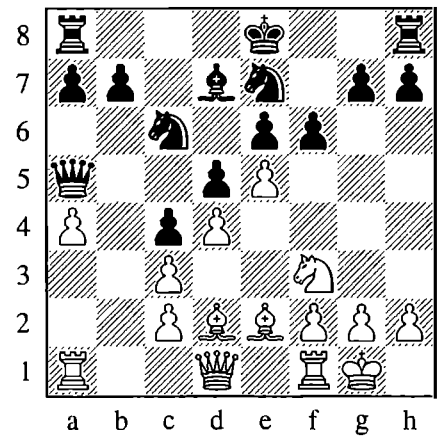
This was Wanzek – Namyslo, Schwaebisch Gmuend 1995. There Black took on g3, but I don't want to release the tension so quickly.



18...♔b8!?N↑

I like the idea of tidying up the king's position. Black can continue by manoeuvring his pieces and preparing a timely ...e5 push.

G22) 12.0–0



This time White maintains a pawn on e5, but Black obtains good chances here too.

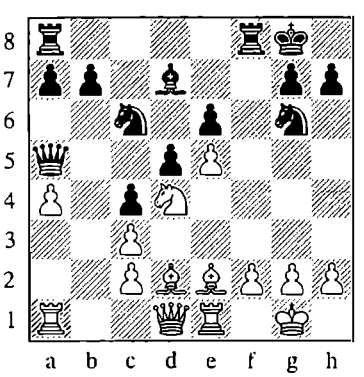
12...fxe5 13.♘xe5

If White avoids the knight exchange he is likely to lose the e5-pawn.

13.dxe5?! 0–0 14.♖e1 ♘g6 15.♘d4

15.♗f1 ♖f5∓

I also considered: 15.♖b1N b6 (15...♕c7 16.g3 b6 is equal but Black can play for more.) 16.♘d4 (16.♗f1 ♖f5∓) 16...♘gxe5 17.♗h5 ♘xd4 18.cxd4 c3 19.♗g5 ♘c6∓



15...♘gxe5 16.♗h5

Lamoureux – Kuemin, Switzerland 2006. Here I suggest the improvement:

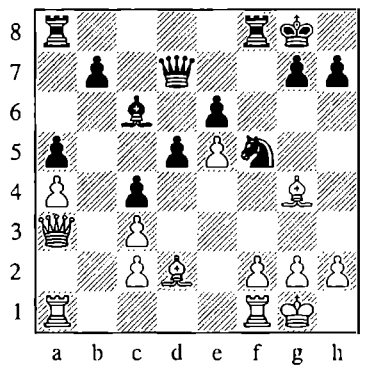
16...♕d8N∓

Black keeps an extra pawn and a slight edge.

13...♘xe5 14.dxe5 0–0 15.♕b1

15.f4 was met by 15...♗e8= in Nikolic – Ivkov, Sarajevo 1967, preparing to activate the bishop on the kingside with a good game for Black. Alternatively it was possible to grab the a-pawn with 15...♗xa4!?N.

Another game continued: 15.♗g4 ♘f5 16.♕b1 ♗c6 17.♕b4 ♕c7 18.♖ae1?! (18.f4N a5=) 18...a5! 19.♕a3 ♕d7 20.♖a1



This was Michalek – Hlavacek, Czech Republic 1999, and here Black could have seized the initiative and obtained the better chances with 20...d4!N.

The text move intends ♕b4, and has achieved a perfect score for White out of three games. Nevertheless, Black should be fine after correct play.

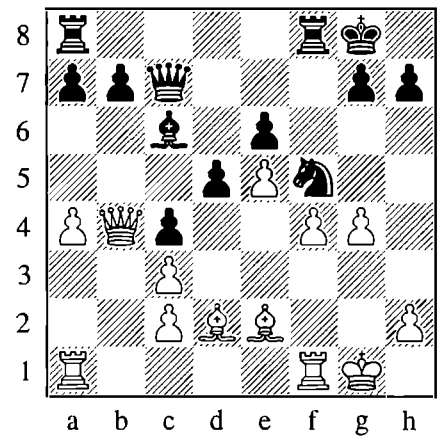
15...♗c6 16.♕b4 ♕c7 17.f4

17.♗e3N ♘f5 18.♗d4 a5! An important move, fixing the a4-pawn on a light square. That pawn can become a serious weakness later, and White's pieces may be kept busy protecting it. 19.♕a3 ♕f7= With active play for Black on the kingside.

17...♘f5 18.g4

More prudent is 18.a5N ♕f7 with equal chances.

The text move is ambitious, but it also creates serious weaknesses in White's camp. At this point I propose an improvement over the game Mueller – Gibis, Germany 1993.



18...a5!N

Again this thematic idea to fix the enemy a-pawn, which will be under attack from the bishop on c6 for a long time to come.

19.♕c5 ♘e7=

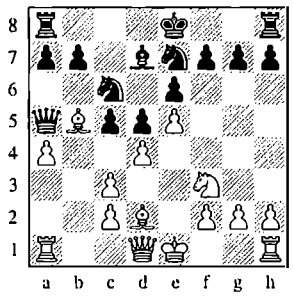
Intending ...♖f7 and ...♖af8 with counterplay on the half-open f-file.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the main branch of theory after 8...♕a5, namely the 9.♗d2 ♗d7 line. We saw a whole assortment of different tries from White, each with their own pros and cons. One of the best features of Black's position is flexibility. Depending on circumstances, he can castle on either side, or postpone the decision indefinitely. He can block the centre with ...c4 or exchange pawns on d4. Finally, a key resource in many lines is the thematic ...f6 break. The analysis given in the present chapter indicates that, by choosing the right plan at the right time, Black can achieve a healthy middlegame position with good chances.

Chapter 22

7.a4



9.♗d2 ♗d7 – 10.♗b5

Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♗d2 ♗d7 10.♗b5 ♕c7 11.0–0

11...b6!?

A) 12.♗c1 **293**

B) 12.♖e1 0–0 13.♗d3 h6 **294**

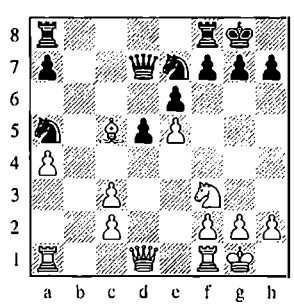
B1) 14.g4!? **295**

B2) 14.♕c1! c4 **297**

B21) 15.♗e2 **297**

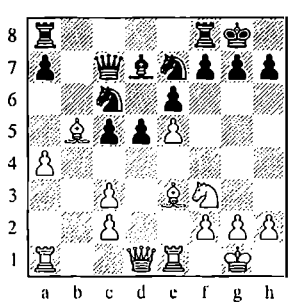
B22) 15.♗f1 **299**

A) after 16.♗xc5



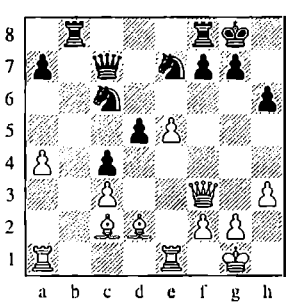
16...♖fc8!N

B) note to 13.♗d3



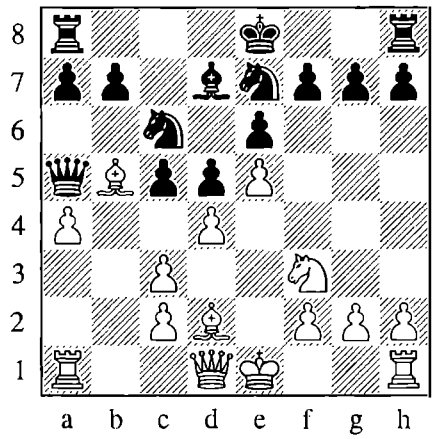
14...♘a5!N

B) note to 13...h6



20...♖b2N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♗d2 ♗d7 10.♗b5



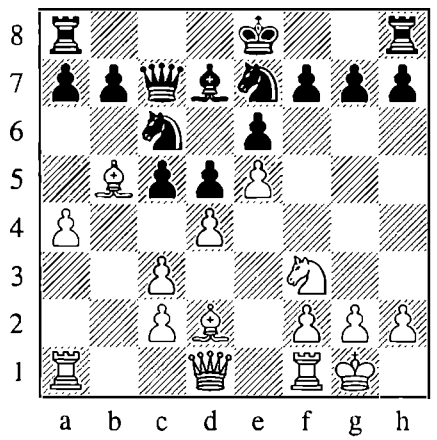
This is the first of the two big options, the other being 10.♗e2 as found in the next chapter. The latter has been played slightly more frequently, but the former has achieved a higher statistical score, so we should consider it carefully. By placing the bishop on b5, White hopes to provoke a slight weakening of his opponent's queenside.

10...♕c7

This move appears to me to be the most logical. The queen steps out of any c3-c4 attacks and prepares ...♘a5, aiming at the c4-square and offering an exchange of bishops, which would suit Black rather well. This way the placement of White's bishop on b5 looks rather questionable, as it will probably soon have to retreat to d3.

Despite the above comments, 10...a6 is a playable approach which has been recommended by both Williams and Watson. I have played this position myself twice, both times successfully but from different sides of the board. Now 11.♗xc6 is pretty solid for both sides, but the critical variation is 11.♗e2 f6!? 12.c4 ♕c7. The computer indicates a distinct advantage for White, but I do not believe things are so bad for Black. Having said that, I still prefer the continuation advocated in the main line, to which we will now return.

11.0–0



11...b6!?

In the great majority of games Black has preferred 11...0–0, when the most common continuations have been 12.♗c1 b6 and 12.♖e1 b6. Both of these positions will soon be reached by transposition in our respective main lines below, but the reason for the text move is to avoid the following slightly annoying possibility:

11...0–0 12.dxc5!?

Opening up the position gives White a poor pawn structure but, on the other hand, his bishops will work much better.

12...♘xe5

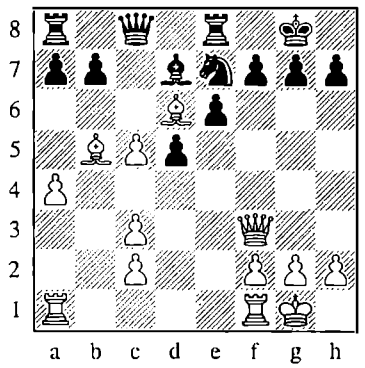
This is the only move to have been played so far, but 12...a6!?N could be considered.

13.♗f4 ♘xf3† 14.♕xf3 ♕c8

14...♕d8?! 15.c4!±

15.♗d6 ♖e8

White has some initiative, but it will be hard to achieve anything with such an awful pawn structure on the queenside. The best try looks to be:



16.c4!?N

16.♗d3 has been played in three out of three games. 16...♘f5 17.♗xf5 Zelcic – Psakhis, Bled 2002, was agreed drawn here, and indeed after 17...exf5 18.♕xd5 ♕c6 19.♕xc6 ♗xc6 20.a5 a6 the opposite-coloured bishops make a draw a virtual certainty.

16...dxc4

16...♗xb5 17.axb5 (17.cxb5 ♘f5 18.c4 ♘xd6 19.cxd6 ♕c5=) 17...dxc4 18.♖fd1↑ looks favourable for White.

17.♗xc4 ♗c6 18.♕g4 ♘f5 19.♖fd1

Black remains pretty solid, but White has an initiative and a grip on the position, which is why I chose 12...b6!? as my main move order. Black could also consider playing 11...0–0 with a view to meeting 12.dxc5 with the untested but playable-looking 12...a6!?N, as was briefly noted at move 12. I will leave it to the reader to decide which route he prefers.

After 11...b6 White's two main moves are **A) 12.♗c1** and **B) 12.♖e1**.

12.♗d3 should be met by 12...h6N followed by castling.

A) 12.♗c1

Transferring the bishop to a3 is a logical way to exert pressure on the dark squares.

12...0–0 13.♗a3 ♘a5!

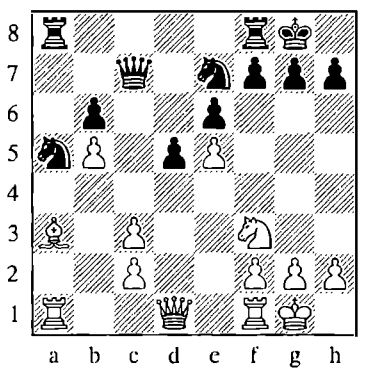
This move involves a pawn sacrifice, but Black will achieve enough counterplay on the light squares.

14.dxc5

14.♗d3 avoids the exchange of light-squared bishops and looks towards the kingside. Taking on h7 may not yet be a decisive threat, but my suggestion would be to play 14...h6 anyway, as seen in a few games. Black has a solid position and the chances are level.

14...bxc5

Also playable is: 14...♗xb5 15.cxb6 (15.axb5N bxc5 16.♗xc5 ♕xc5 17.♖xa5 ♘c6! is clearly better for Black according to Yusupov. Indeed Black wins back the pawn with a better pawn structure, but it seems that White can reach a balanced endgame with precise play: 18.♖a6! ♕xb5 19.♕d3 ♕xd3 [19...♕b7 20.♘g5 g6 21.f4 leaves Black with a serious weakness on the kingside.] 20.cxd3=) 15...axb6 16.axb5



16...♖fc8 17.♗b4 ♘c4= Nunn – Yusupov, Belgrade 1991.

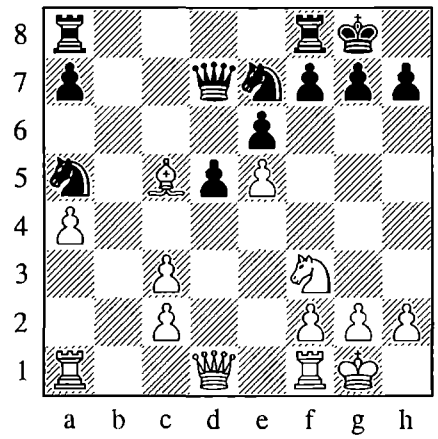
15.♗xd7

15.♗d3N should, as usual, be met by 15...h6 when the chances are equal.

15...♕xd7 16.♗xc5

This position was evaluated as slightly better for White by Yusupov, in his annotations to his

aforementioned game against Nunn. Indeed White is a pawn up, but I believe that Black's counterplay on the c-file and outpost on c4 provide at least enough compensation.



16...♖fc8!N

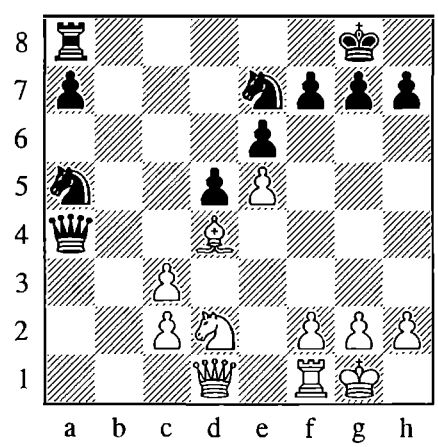
I prefer this over 16...♖fb8N as played in Quirini – Benussi, email 1999.

17.♗d4 ♖c4!

An ambitious move, simply grabbing the a4-pawn.

Another idea is 17...♘c4 18.♕d3 h6! followed by ...♖ab8. In this case the chances are about equal, but I think Black can play for more.

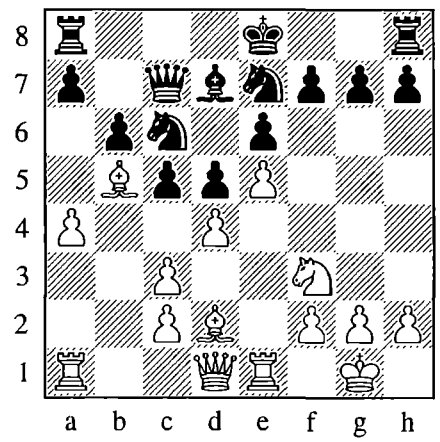
18.♘d2 ♖xa4 19.♖xa4 ♕xa4



20.♕a1 ♕xc2 21.♕xa5 ♕xd2∓

Black has an extra pawn and White must fight for a draw.

B) 12.♖e1



This is the main move, improving the rook in anticipation of a possible opening of the centre.

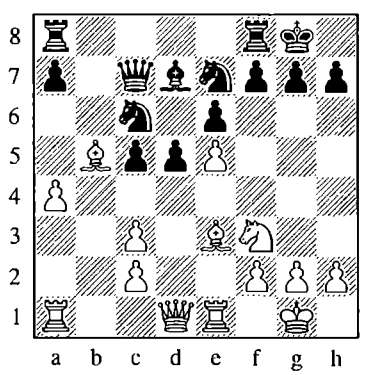
12...0–0 13.♗d3

This has been by far the most popular choice, and has been favoured by Nunn and other strong GMs.

13.dxc5!?

This rare but interesting alternative has been tested by a couple of strong players.

13...bxc5 14.♗e3

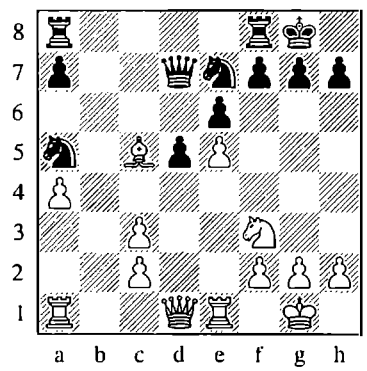


14...♘a5!N

14...♘xe5 was played in the stem game Christiansen – Gulko, Chandler 1997, and Black later deviated with 14...c4 in Zhang Zhong – Lputian, Beersheba 2005, but neither of these moves seems to be enough for equality.

15.♗xd7 ♕xd7 16.♗xc5

White has a slightly improved version of variation A, as he has saved time with his dark-squared bishop and achieved the ♖e1 move for free. However, that is not of major importance and Black is still at least equal.



16...♖fc8 17.♗d4

17.♗b4 ♘c4 is also good for Black.

17...♖c4

Black is perfectly fine, and can proceed just as in the earlier line A.

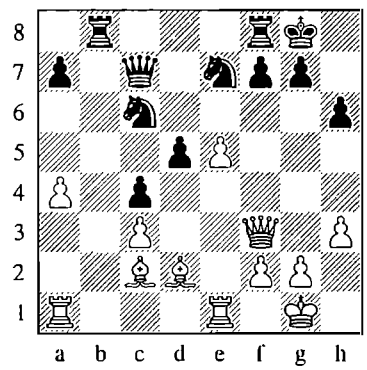
13...h6

Once again we see this standard response to an enemy bishop on d3. Let me mention in passing that 13...f6?! is inferior due to 14.exf6 gxf6 15.♘h4!±.

After the text move White's most logical plan is to attack on the kingside. His two main options are **B1) 14.g4!?** and **B2) 14.♕c1!**.

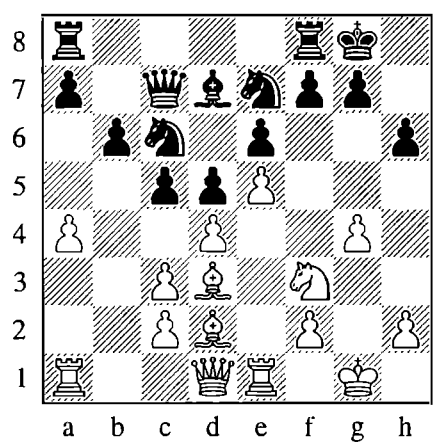
14.♗xh6? is a recurring theme in the later line B2, but here it is premature. 14...gxh6 15.♕d2 ♔g7 16.♕f4 ♘g8 White lacked sufficient compensation for the piece in Kalegin – Kobalia, Moscow 1996, although in fact the novelty 16...♖h8!N∓ would have been even stronger.

14.dxc5 bxc5 15.c4 ♖ab8! 16.cxd5 exd5 17.c3 c4 (or 17...♘a5=) 18.♗c2 ♗g4 19.h3 ♗xf3 20.♕xf3 occurred in Morais – Liebert, corr. 2008, and here I suggest:



20...♖b2N 21.♖ac1 d4 22.cxd4 ♖xc2 23.♖xc2 ♘xd4 24.♕e4 ♘xc2 25.♕xc2 ♕c6= With an equal position.

B1) 14.g4!?



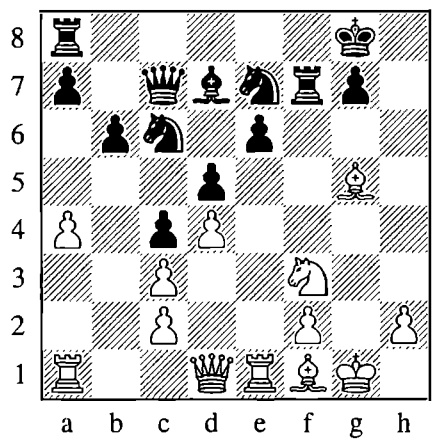
It could be easy to forget about such a move when White has already castled. Apart from the immediate g4-g5, another typical idea for White is ♔h1 followed by ♖g1 to lend extra force to the pawn push.

14...c4 15.♗f1 f6!

As always, the f-pawn comes to the rescue once White tries to attack on the kingside. After the opening of the f-file White's king will also become vulnerable.

16.exf6 ♖xf6 17.g5 hxg5 18.♗xg5 ♖f7!

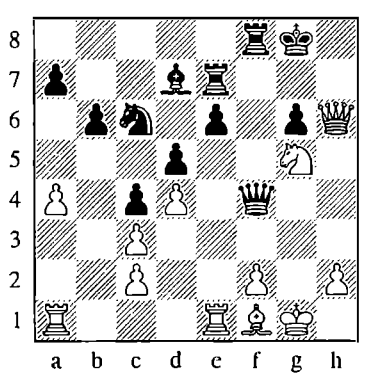
Keeping the rook on the f-file is to be recommended. After 18...♖g6?! 19.h4 ♘f5 20.♗g2± White had an edge in Rogers – Arizmendi Martinez, New York 1998.



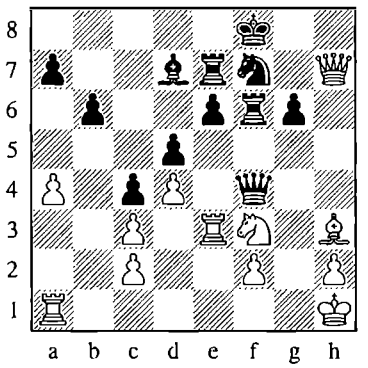
19.♗h3!?N

This seemed like an interesting attempt to improve White's play, but Black has enough resources to handle it.

A previous game continued: 19.♗xe7 ♖xe7 20.♘g5 ♕f4 21.♕h5 g6 22.♕h6 ♖f8



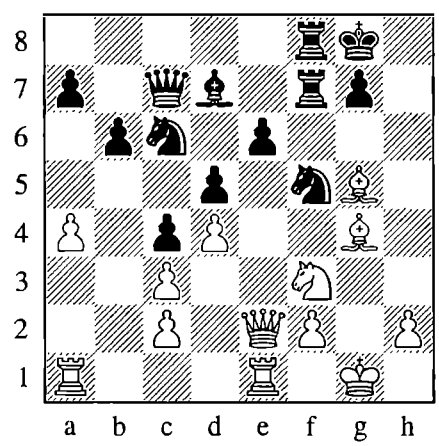
23.♗h3 (23.♖xe6!?N forces a draw by repetition after: 23...♗xe6 24.♕xg6† ♔h8 25.♕h6† ♔g8 26.♕g6†=) 23...♖f6 24.♔h1 ♘d8 25.♖e3 ♘f7 26.♕h7† ♔f8 27.♘f3



27...g5! 28.♘e5 ♘xe5 29.♕h8† ♔f7 30.♖xe5 ♕h4 31.♕xh4 gxh4= with a level endgame, Sedlacek – Bell, corr. 2009.

19...♖af8 20.♗g4 ♘f5 21.♕e2

21.♗h5 g6 22.♗g4 (22.♗xg6? ♖g7 23.♗xf5 ♖xf5 24.h4 ♕f4∓) 22...♘g7 is equal.

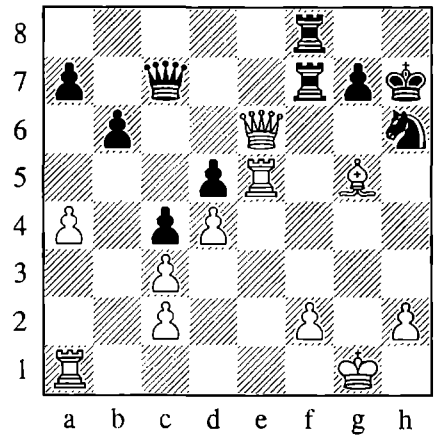


21...♘h6! 22.♗xe6

22.♗xh6 gxh6 23.♔h1 ♔h7↑ gives Black a pleasant game with active play along the f-file.

22...♗xe6 23.♕xe6 ♔h7 24.♘e5 ♘xe5 25.♖xe5

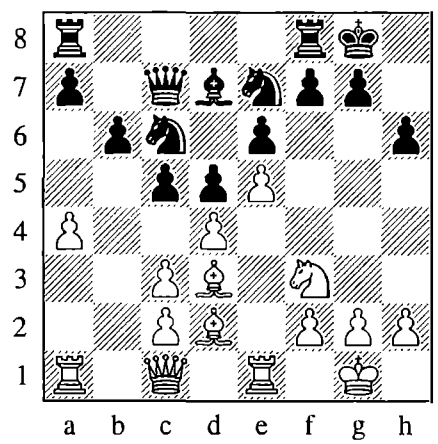
25.♕xe5 ♕d7⇄



25...♖xf2 26.♕xd5 ♕f7 27.♕xf7 ♖8xf7 28.♖c1 ♘g4⇄

Black is not worse in the endgame.

B2) 14.♕c1!



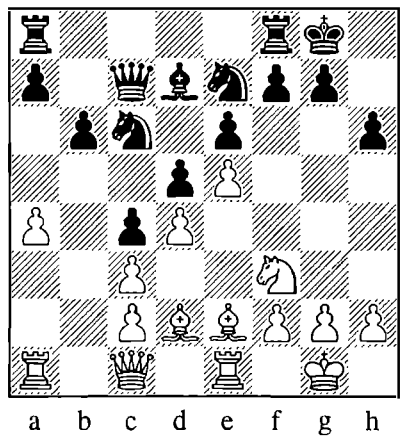
Another direct approach; this time White plans a sacrifice on h6. Black needs to be careful here.

14...c4

Here White can try either **B21) 15.♗e2** or **B22) 15.♗f1**.

15.♗xh6?? is premature and has never been tested. Black simply has to capture the right bishop to ensure victory: 15...cxd3! 16.cxd3 (16.♕g5 ♘g6–+) 16...gxh6 17.♕xh6 ♘f5 18.♕g5† ♔h7 19.♕h5† ♘h6–+

B21) 15.♗e2



15...f6 16.♗f4

16.♗xh6?!

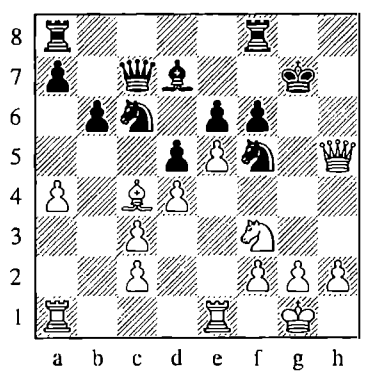
This sacrifice is not as disastrous as on the previous turn, but accurate defence sees Black emerge with slightly better chances:

16...gxh6 17.♕xh6 ♘f5! 18.♕g6† ♔h8 19.♕h5† ♔g7!

It is worth mentioning that Black has an easy draw with 19...♔g8 20.♕g6†= if he wants it.

20.♗xc4!

The only try to make something happen.



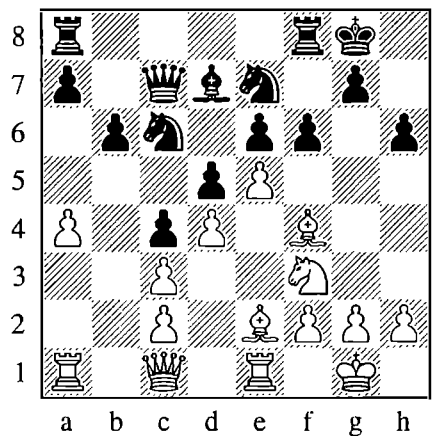
20...♖f7!

Intending ...♖h8.

20...dxc4? 21.♖e4 gives White a dangerous attack.

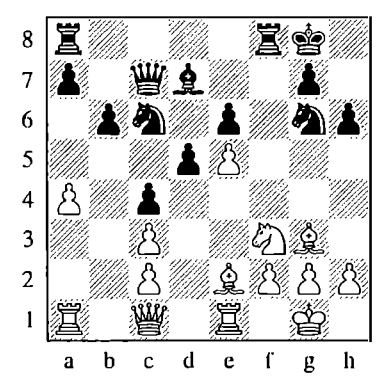
21.♗d3 ♖h8 22.♕g4† ♔f8 23.exf6 ♖xf6

The position is not entirely clear, but Black has managed to consolidate and get his pieces out. Although White has three pawns for the sacrificed piece, which is a fair amount of material, I believe that the extra piece will count for more in the long run.



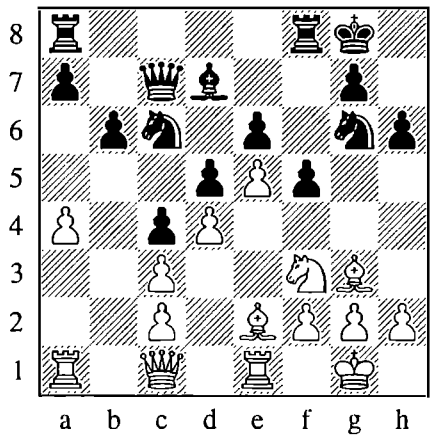
16...♘g6 17.♗g3 f5

A playable alternative is: 17...fxe5 18.dxe5 (18.h4!? ♖f5 19.h5 ♘f4 20.♘xe5 ♘xe2† 21.♖xe2 ♖xh5 gave Black an extra pawn in Nagley – Le Duigou, email 2001, but White's initiative gave him about enough compensation.)



18...♘ge7! It is time to regroup the knight and make room for the bishop manoeuvre to g6.

19.♘d4 ♘xd4 20.cxd4 ♘f5 21.c3 ♗e8= Byrne – Korchnoi, Nice 1974.

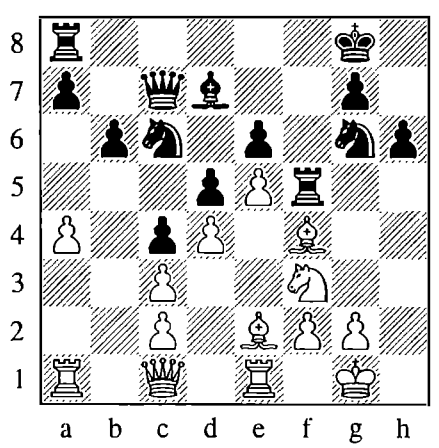


18.h4 f4 19.♗h2 ♖f5 20.h5!?N

This seems more challenging than 20.g4 fxg3 21.fxg3 ♖af8 22.♖f1 ♗e8 when Black had a solid position with at least equal chances in Nunn – Dolmatov, Pardubice 1993.

20...♖xh5 21.♗xf4 ♖f5

21...♘xf4 22.♕xf4 ♖f5 23.♕g3 ♘e7 24.♘h4 ♖ff8 25.♗g4† gives White a slight initiative.



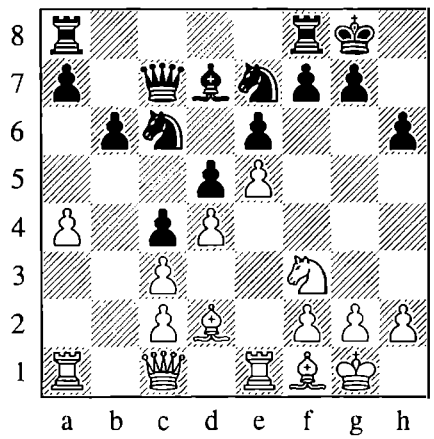
22.♗g3 ♖ff8!

It is worth retreating the exposed rook before it comes under attack.

23.♘h4 ♗e8 24.♗g4 ♕d7=

The chances are roughly level. Black has a solid position and will eventually be able to activate his bishop on the kingside.

B22) 15.♗f1



15...f6 16.g3

A logical follow-up to White's last move, intending to deploy the bishop on h3.

16.♗xh6?!N gxh6 17.♕xh6 ♘f5□ 18.♕g6† ♔h8 19.♕h5† ♔g7 20.♗xc4! transposes to the 16.♗xh6?! line given in the notes to the previous variation B21.

16...♘g6!

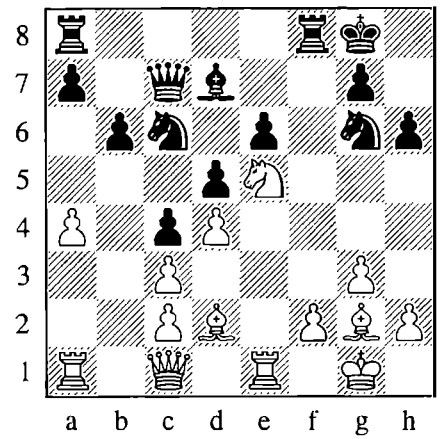
16...fxe5 has been played in the majority of games, but after 17.♘xe5 ♘xe5 18.♖xe5 ♘c6 19.♖e3 e5 I found that 20.♗g2! gives White the better prospects.

17.♗g2

17.exf6 ♖xf6 18.♗g2 ♖af8 19.♕d1 ♗e8 reached a balanced position in Giaccio – Fernandez Romero, Santa Clara 2005. Black has active play on the f-file and the bishop is on its way to the kingside.

17...fxe5 18.♘xe5

18.dxe5N is well met by 18...♖f5! attacking e5.



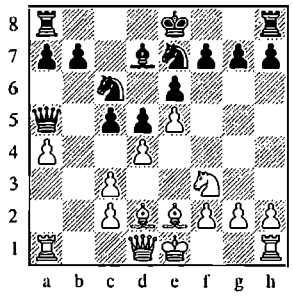
18...♘gxe5 19.dxe5 ♗e8=

Wedberg – Brynell, Gothenburg 2004. The position is approximately equal, although personally I prefer Black, as he has a better pawn structure and an easier game to play. One logical plan is ...♗g6 followed by the knight manoeuvre ...♘a5-b7-c5 controlling the e4-square. The only thing to watch out for is the f4-f5 break, but this should not be too serious.

Conclusion

10.♗b5 is intended to provoke the weakening ...a6 move, so I suggest that we refuse the invitation with 10...♕c7, calling into question the usefulness of the bishop on b5. Then after 11.0–0 I found 11...b6!? to be an interesting refinement of the move order, which is likely to lead back into mainstream territory after Black castles next. White's most interesting and challenging approach seems to be variation B2, where Black must constantly be on guard against ♗xh6 ideas. However, by blocking the centre with 14...c4 and following up with a quick ...f6, Black manages to defend his kingside while obtaining active prospects for the middlegame.





7.a4

9.♗d2 ♗d7 – 10.♗e2

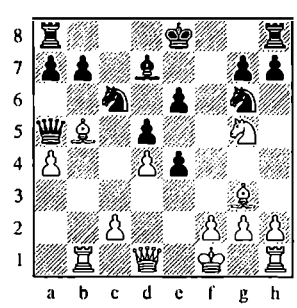
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♗d2 ♗d7 10.♗e2

10...f6

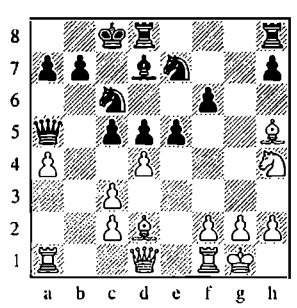
A) 11.♖b1!? 302
B) 11.exf6 gxf6 305
B1) 12.♘h4 305
B2) 12.0–0 306
C) 11.0–0 fxe5 306
C1) 12.♘xe5 307
C2) 12.dxe5 307
C3) 12.c4!? 308
D) 11.c4 ♕c7 309
D1) 12.exf6 309
D2) 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.c4 ♘de7 14.exf6 gxf6 311
D21) 15.d5!? 312
D22) 15.♗c3 313
D23) 15.dxc5 314

A) note to 14.0–0



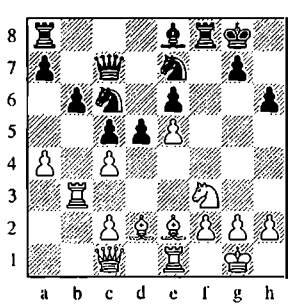
17...♘ge7!N

B1) after 14.0–0



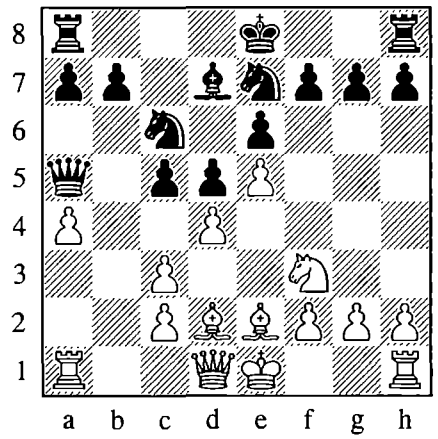
14...♘g6!N

C2) after 17.♖b3



17...♖d8!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♗d2 ♗d7 10.♗e2



This has been the most popular choice through the years, and the present chapter is devoted exclusively to it.

10...f6

This is the most straightforward approach and the most popular continuation. A similar position can be reached after 10.♗b5 a6 (in the previous chapter I instead recommended 10...♕c7 for Black) 11.♗e2 f6. The difference of having the pawn on a7 should constitute a slight improvement for Black as the b6-square is not weakened.

After the text move there are four main possibilities: **A) 11.♖b1!?**, **B) 11.exf6**, **C) 11.0–0** and **D) 11.c4**.

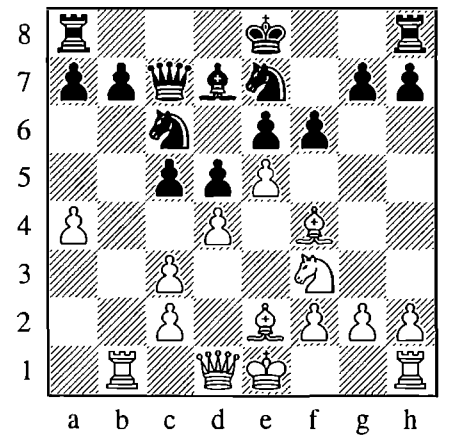
A) 11.♖b1!?

This tricky move was first played by Wedberg back in 1978.

11...♕c7!

Simply defending b7 is the best solution.

11...fxe5 might seem tempting, but after 12.♖xb7 e4 13.♘g5 White had a promising position in Wedberg – Ornstein, Degerfors 1978, and went on to score well in both that encounter and subsequent games.

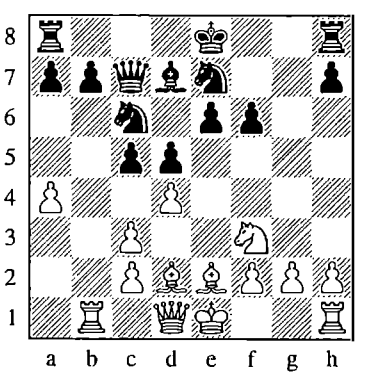


12.♗f4

The alternative is:

12.exf6 gxf6

Black has a strong pawn centre, but the position remains complex and dynamic. It is hard to give a firm judgement with only four games on the database, but based on the following examples Black seems at least okay.



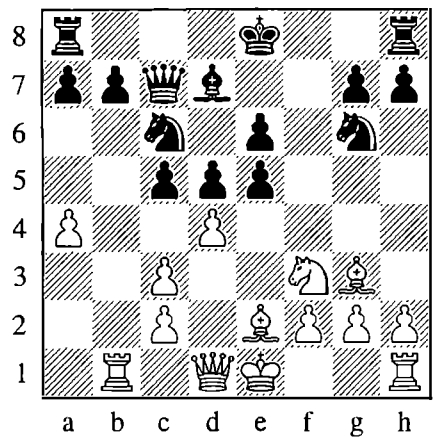
13.dxc5

13.0–0 0–0–0 14.♖e1 c4 15.♗f1 h5! 16.♕c1 ♘g6 17.♔h1 h4 18.h3 ♖dg8 19.♗e3 ♘ce7 20.♕a3 ♘f5 intending ...♘d6-e4 was also quite promising for Black in Tan – Herzog, Guernsey 1996.

13...e5 14.c4 ♗e6 15.cxd5 ♗xd5 16.0–0 0–0–0∓

Poretti – Weber, email 2000. Black has good central control and plenty of activity. White, on the other hand, is blocked from creating any counterplay on the queenside and has a difficult task defending. The bishop pair cannot realize its full strength in this position.

12...♘g6 13.♗g3 fxe5



14.0–0

14.♗b5?!

After this inaccurate move Black can exploit White's failure to castle.

14...cxd4 15.cxd4 ♕a5†

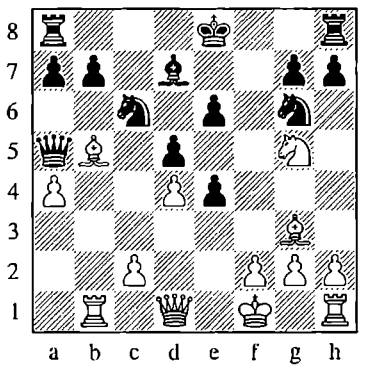
The queen escapes the problem diagonal with gain of tempo.

16.♔f1

16.♘d2 exd4 17.♗d6 ♕d8 18.h4?! (18.0–0 ♘ce7∓) 18...♕f6 (18...e5N∓) 19.♖b3? (19.h5 ♘h4∓) 19...e5 left Black with a decisive advantage in Hirsig – Jurek, Bad Ragaz 1993.

16...e4 17.♘g5

This position was reached in Loeffler – Namyslo, Deizisau 1999, and here I found a strong novelty.



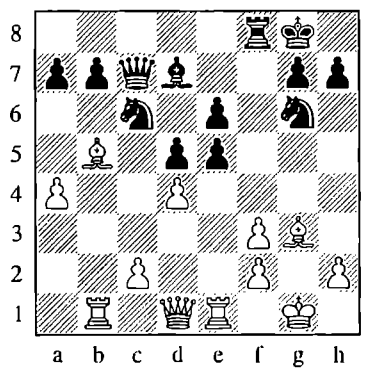
17...♘ge7!N

Black has a clear plus thanks to his extra pawn and White's misplaced king.

14...0–0 15.♗b5 cxd4 16.cxd4 ♘f4

Black has a few other ways to achieve an equal position. They are all of roughly the same value, so I will present the different options and allow the reader to decide which one suits his own tastes.

16...♖xf3!? is an active option which also involves more risk. 17.gxf3 ♖f8 18.♖e1 was played in Wedberg – Renman, Sweden 1979, and here Black can improve upon Renman's 18...♕d8?! with:

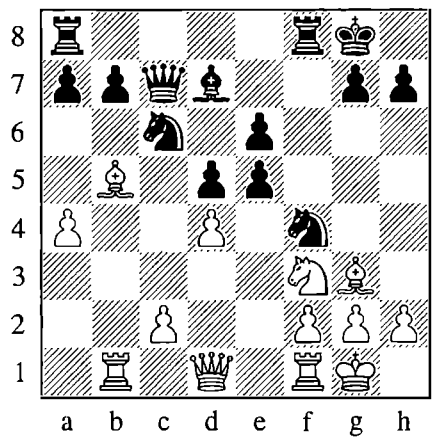


18...a6N 19.♗xc6 (19.♗f1 ♘f4⩲) 19...♗xc6⩱ With sufficient compensation for Black.

16...♕c8 17.♗xc6?! (17.dxe5N ♘ce7=) 17...♗xc6 18.♘xe5 ♘xe5 19.♗xe5 ♗xa4 was

somewhat better for Black in Schmenger – Kipper, Germany 1997. However the appearance of opposite-coloured bishops makes the position rather drawish, and White's strong bishop on e5 also provides some compensation and attacking potential.

Finally, 16...♖ac8 is another decent option: 17.c3 ♗e8! 18.♘g5? (18.♖e1N would keep the game balanced.) 18...♕e7 19.♕g4 ♖f5 20.h4 h6 21.♘h3 Black was better in Goldberg – Uhlmann, Nordhausen 1986, and could have increased his advantage with: 21...h5!N 22.♕e2 exd4 23.♗xc6 ♖xc6 24.cxd4 ♘xh4∓



17.♗xc6

17.dxe5N can be met by either 17...♗e8 or 17...a6, with equal chances in both cases.

17.♘xe5? ♘xe5 18.dxe5 ♗xb5 19.♖xb5 (19.axb5 ♖f5∓) This occurred in Karell – Myers, USA 1990, and here 19...♖f7!N∓ is good for Black, as pointed out by Watson.

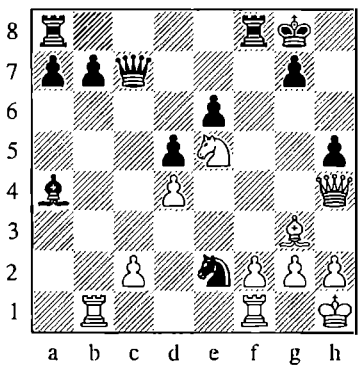
17...♗xc6 18.♘xe5 ♗xa4

White has established an excellent outpost for his knight on e5, but he will need to play well to prove his compensation for the missing pawn.

19.♖b4?!

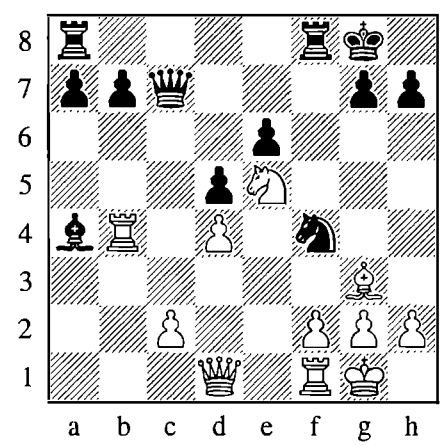
The most common move, but far from the best.

19.♕g4? is even worse: 19...h5! 20.♕h4 (20.♕d1 ♕xc2–+) 20...♘e2† 21.♔h1



This was Rittmueller – Rolle, corr. 1988, and here the improvement 21...♗xc2N 22.♖b2 ♖f5∓ gives Black a significant plus.

The best continuation looks to be 19.♕d2!? ♘h5 with approximate equality, as seen in Szyszka – Viberg, corr. 1986. Black is a pawn up, but White's strong knight on e5 offers fair compensation.



19...♕xc2! 20.♕xc2

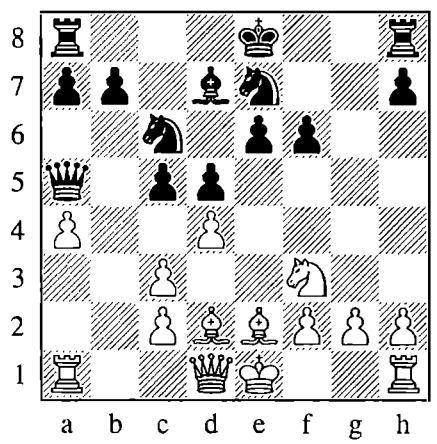
20.♖xa4? ♘e2† 21.♔h1 ♕xd1 22.♖xd1 ♘c3∓ turned out badly for White in Bickel – Hund, Germany 1983. Black's two connected passed pawns should bring him the full point.

20.♕g4?N is also an error: 20...h5 21.♕g5 ♘e2† 22.♔h1 b5 23.♕xh5 ♘xg3† 24.hxg3 ♖f5∓

20...♗xc2 21.♗xf4 ♖xf4 22.g3 ♖ff8 23.♖xb7 a5∓

White has the better minor piece, but Black's extra pawn tips the balance in his favour.

B) 11.exf6 gxf6



From this position White sometimes goes for immediate kingside play with **B1) 12.♘h4**, but the main line, unsurprisingly, is **B2) 12.0–0**.

12.♖b1N ♕c7 transposes to the note to move 12 in variation A above.

12.c4 ♕c7 is covered under the move order 11.c4 ♕c7 12.exf6 gxf6 – see variation D1 on page 309.

B1) 12.♘h4

This has been played a few times, but it looks like an odd move to me.

12...0–0–0

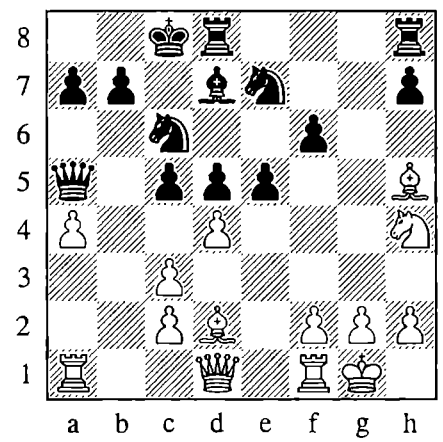
After this obvious reply it is hard to find a convincing continuation for White.

13.♗h5

13.g3 was played in Hartmann – Hertneck, Germany 1988. Now instead of 13...♘g6 I would prefer the more dynamic 13...♖hg8N 14.0–0 e5 with an active game for Black.

13...e5 14.0–0

Here I would like to improve on the game Christ – Von Herman, Altenkirchen 2001.



14...♘g6!N

Offering a sacrifice that White would do well to decline.

15.♘f3

15.♗xg6? hxg6 16.♘xg6 ♖hg8 17.♘h4 ♖g4 gives Black a crushing attack.

15...e4 16.♘e1 ♔b8

Transferring the king to safety on a8 is an important part of Black's general plan in order to avoid trouble later in the game.

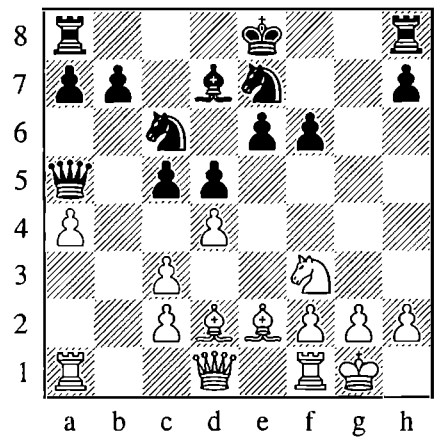
17.g3

17.c4 ♕c7 18.cxd5 ♘xd4∓

17...♔a8

It is hard to give a clear judgement of the position, but I would rather play Black who has the safer king and attacking chances on the kingside.

B2) 12.0–0



12...0–0–0

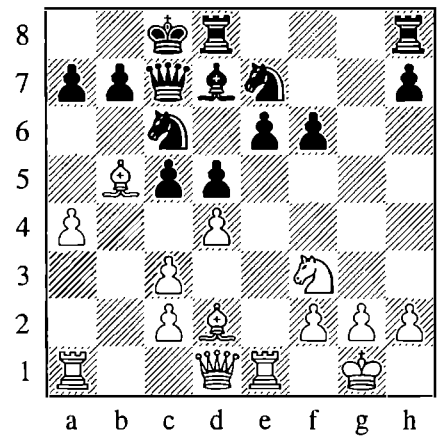
The main alternative 12...c4 is not very attractive to me, as it would enter the line arising after 10.♗d3 c4 11.♗e2 f6 12.exf6 gxf6 a tempo down for Black. Instead I have chosen to recommend a more dynamic way of handling the position, trying to make use of the slightly passive placement of the bishop on e2.

13.♖e1

13.c4 is the only way to try and punish Black for not playing ...c4 himself. Now after 13...♕c7 14.cxd5 ♘xd5 we have almost transposed to the later variation D1. The only difference is that in the present version both sides have castled, which usually happens anyway in the other line, and indeed after plausible moves such as 14.c3 and 14.dxc5 we immediately transpose to positions considered under that move order.

13...♕c7 14.♗b5

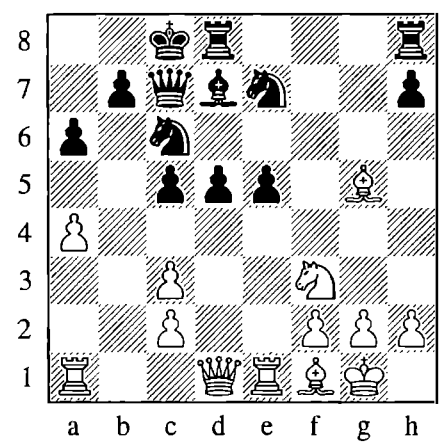
The alternative is: 14.♗f1 e5 15.dxe5 fxe5⇄ Tjensvoll – Moen, Stavanger 2005. Compared with the main line below, the difference of having the pawn on a7 instead of a6 should not be a disadvantage for Black.



14...a6 15.♗f1 e5 16.dxe5 fxe5 17.♗g5

17.♘g5!?N ♖hg8! 18.♘xh7 e4 gives Black a good deal of compensation for the sacrificed pawn in view of his strong pawn centre and attacking chances using the open files on the kingside.

The text move was played in Rorvall – Helmertz, Stockholm 1977, and here I suggest:



17...♗g4N 18.h3 ♗h5 19.♗e2 e4 20.♘d2 ♗xe2 21.♕xe2 ♖hg8=

Black is doing fine.

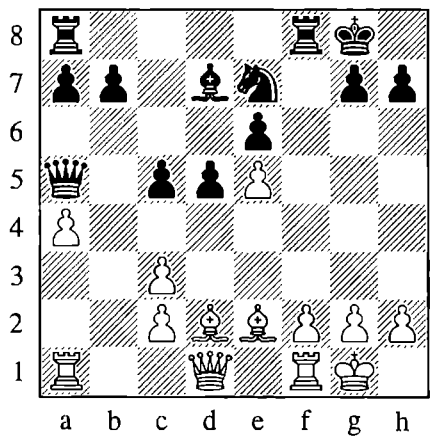
C) 11.0–0 fxe5

After this natural move White can choose between **C1) 12.♘xe5**, **C2) 12.dxe5** and **C3) 12.c4!?**.

C1) 12.♘xe5

This has been White's most common choice, but it does not pose many problems to Black.

12...♘xe5 13.dxe5 0–0



14.c4 ♕c7 15.cxd5N

This untested move may be best.

15.f4 has been played in a few games, but Black is at least equal after either 15...♗c6 or 15...d4.

15.♗g5 ♗c6 16.♖e1 was seen in Formanek – De Savornin Lohman, Amsterdam 1980. Now 16...h6N looks good, as 17.♗xe7 (or 17.♗g4 ♘f5∓) 17...♕xe7 18.cxd5 ♗xd5 is favourable for Black.

15...♘xd5 16.♖e1 ♗c6 17.♗c4 ♕f7=

Black is solid.

C2) 12.dxe5 ♕c7 13.♖e1

13.c4 transposes to 12.c4 ♕c7 13.dxe5, as covered in the note to White's 13th move in variation C3 below.

13.♗f4 0–0 14.♕d2 was played in Arkhangelsky – Hietala, corr. 1989. Here I suggest the improvement 14...h6!N to prevent any ♘g5 ideas. There may follow 15.h3 ♗e8∓ with a comfortable position for Black, whose 'French bishop' will soon find its way to freedom.

13...0–0 14.♖b1

14.♗d3 was seen in Jacob – Kleinewillinghoefer, Germany 1986, and now 14...h6!N= is a good improvement, planning the typical manoeuvre of the bishop to e8 followed by g6 or h5.

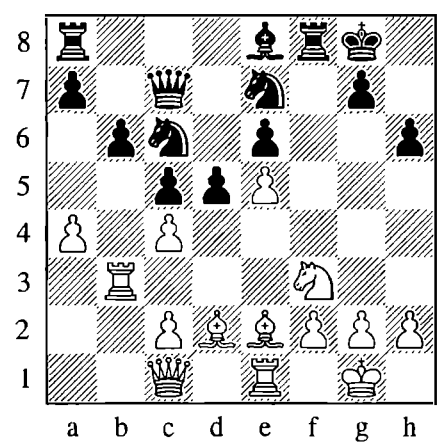
14...h6!

Again this move works well.

15.c4 ♗e8 16.♕c1 b6

16...d4!?N is a worthy alternative.

17.♖b3

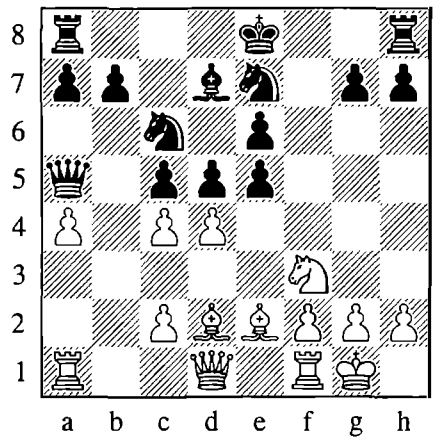


17...♖d8!N

Black brings his last piece into play and keeps some initiative.

It is worth emphasizing the important point that, after playing ...♗e8, Black should be ready to recapture on d5 with a piece. In the game Damjanovic – Renman, Prague 1979, Black erred with 17...♘f5?! and after 18.cxd5! exd5 Black no longer had a secure blockade of the e5-pawn.

C3) 12.c4!?



This has not been as popular as either of the previous options, but it seems logical to open some lines for the bishops.

12...♕c7 13.cxd5

This is the most consistent way to open the position.

Less challenging is:

13.dxe5

Dvorak – Vavra, Czechoslovakia 1988. Here I suggest:

13...0–0!N

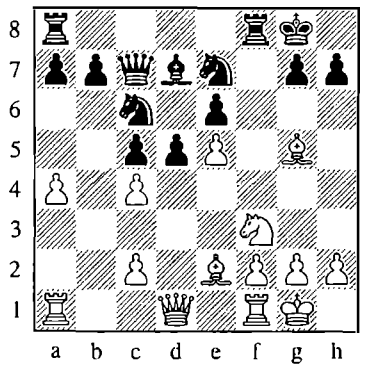
As a rule Black should always think carefully before capturing the pawn on e5, as it costs time and improves the scope of White's dark-squared bishop. On the other hand, by keeping the centre blocked and using the e5-pawn as a shield, Black makes it harder for his opponent to create active play.

Although the last move is a novelty, it immediately transposes to another game where White immediately erred.

14.♗g5?

14.cxd5N exd5 is about equal, but I definitely have more sympathy for the Black position which boasts a sound pawn formation and no weaknesses. One should never underestimate the pair of bishops, but at the moment they look rather harmless.

The text move was played in Ketchum – Griego, Boston 1988.

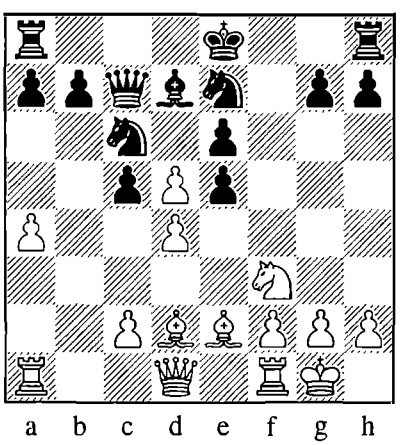


14...h6!N

The game continuation of 14...d4 was fine, but it seems even stronger to challenge the bishop and maintain the central tension.

15.♗xe7 ♘xe7

Intending ...♗c6 with advantage to Black. White has several weaknesses and lacks counterplay, while Black has a sound pawn structure and active piece play.



13...♘xd4

13...exd5 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♕xe5 opens up the position, which means playing into White's hands, who will now strive to make use of his powerful bishops. A possible follow-up is 16.♗h5† g6 as in Dvorak – Vavra,

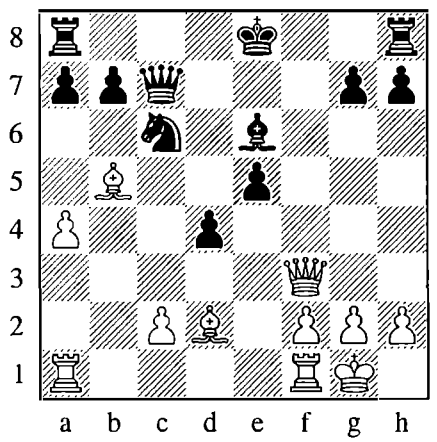
Czechoslovakia 1988, and now 17.♗f3N gives White sufficient play for a pawn. I analysed the position a bit more deeply and concluded that Black can hold the balance, but overall I prefer the continuation seen in the main line.

14.dxe6

Ude – Schumacher, Seefeld 1997. Here I propose a simple improvement.

14...♗xe6N 15.♘xd4 cxd4 16.♗b5† ♘c6 17.♕f3

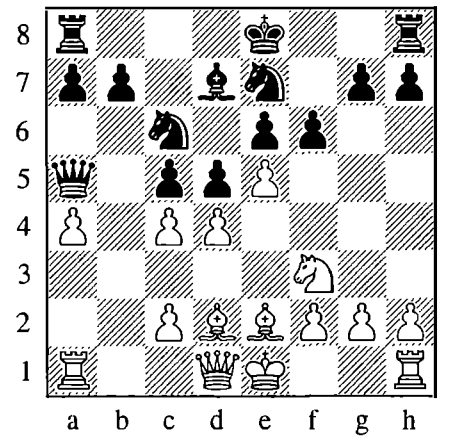
Preventing short castling, but the black king can still go the other way.



17...0–0–0=

The position is in balance. White certainly has compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but Black is solid. In the near future he should bring his king to safety on a8, while remembering that the pawn advance a4-a5 should always be met by ...a6. Sooner or later White will probably have to exchange off the knight on c6 to make progress, which will lead to a position with opposite-coloured bishops and a likely draw, assuming accurate play from both sides.

D) 11.c4



This is a logical reply to Black's ...f6 break. White intends to exchange some pawns to open the position for his bishops. However, Black's position is quite robust and White's centre also becomes weak.

Incidentally, a similar position has often occurred via the move order 10.♗b5 a6 11.♗e2 f6 12.c4, as mentioned in the notes in the previous chapter, where I instead gave 10...♕c7 as my main line. In many cases the two variations proceed in parallel, with the placement of Black's a-pawn not making much difference. As a general rule, however, Black should be slightly happier in the present variation with the pawn on a7, as it makes his queenside slightly more secure.

11...♕c7

From here White can begin with either **D1) 12.exf6** or **D2) 12.cxd5**.

D1) 12.exf6 gxf6 13.cxd5

This exchange has been overwhelmingly the most popular choice. If White delays it then Black should play pretty much as detailed below, with a probable transposition after a few moves.

13...♘xd5 14.c3

This solid set-up has the idea of preventing ...e5. However, it's rather passive and Black gets an active game after some straightforward developing moves. Here are a few other ideas:

14.c4 ♘de7 transposes to variation D2 below, but this move order gives Black the additional option 14...♘f4!? 15.♗xf4 ♕xf4 16.dxc5 0–0–0 with equal chances, as tested in several games.

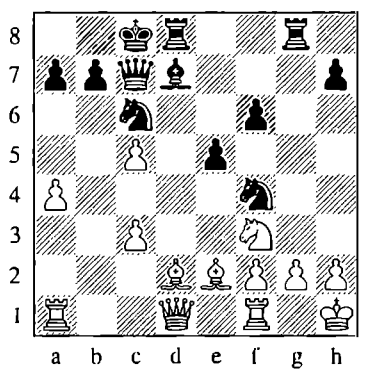
14.dxc5 0–0–0 15.0–0 e5

Black has a strong centre and promising play. As is typical for such positions, the extra pawn on c5 has little impact and might even hamper the activity of White's dark-squared bishop. If he could get his knight to d6 then it would be a different story, but it is hard to see that happening. One instructive example continued:

16.c3?

Too passive. White should try something else, but I believe in Black's chances in any case.

16...♖hg8 17.♔h1 ♘f4

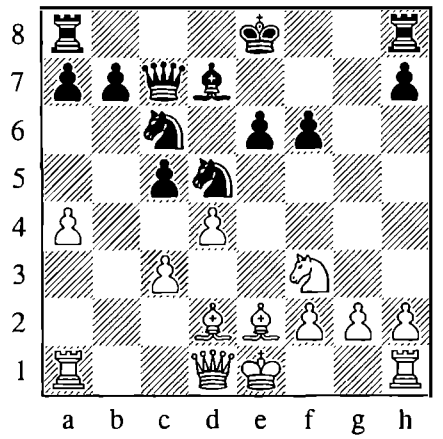


18.♗c4?

The lesser evil is: 18.♗xf4N ♗h3 19.♗g3 ♖xd1 20.♖fxd1 ♗g4∓

18...♖xg2! 19.♗xf4 ♖g4!∓

Lederman – Korchnoi, Beersheba 1978.

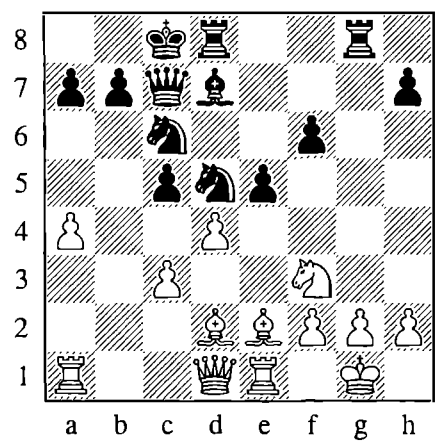


14...0–0–0 15.0–0 ♖hg8 16.♖e1

16.♔h1 was played in Suetin – Jahr, Bad Woerishofen 1991. Here 16...♗e8!N looks like a good novelty, activating the bishop and clearing the d-file.

16...e5!

A logical breakthrough, making use of the tactical possibilities in the position (...♗h3).

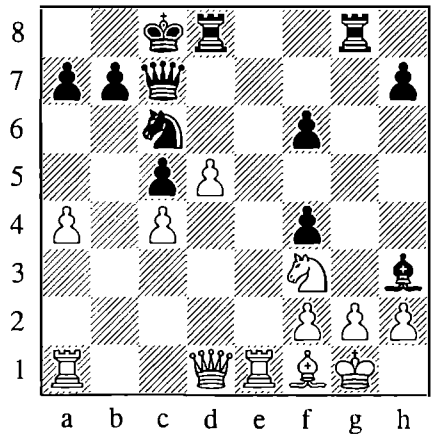


17.c4

17.dxe5? occurred in Chen – Ornstein, Buenos Aires 1978, and here Black missed a good opportunity: 17...♘xc3!N 18.♗xc3 ♗h3∓

17.♔h1?! was once tried in the game Rionegro – Moura, corr. 1991. Black has a few good moves here, but my preference is 17...♗g4!N with an obvious initiative.

17...♘f4 18.♗xf4 exf4 19.d5 ♗h3 20.♗f1



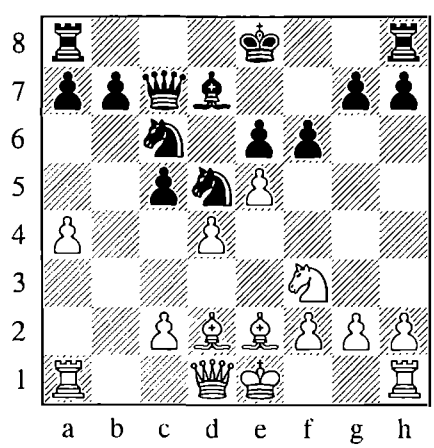
20...♗g4! 21.♕b3

After 21.♗e2 Black has at least a repetition, but can also play on with 21...♔b8!?N, bringing the king to safety and intending ...♗xf3 followed by ...♘d4 at an appropriate moment.

21...♗xf3 22.♕xf3 ♘d4⇄

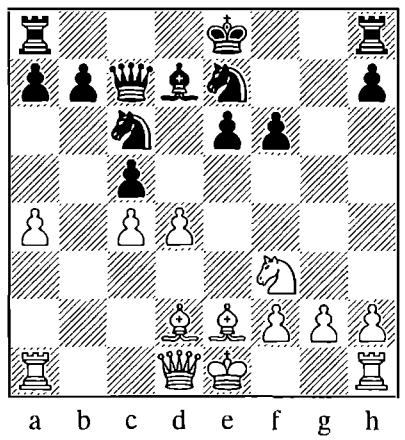
This position occurred in Vlugt – Raijmaekers, corr. 1982, and several subsequent games. Black has some weaknesses in his pawn structure, but the strong knight and active play along the g-file offer full compensation.

D2) 12.cxd5 ♘xd5



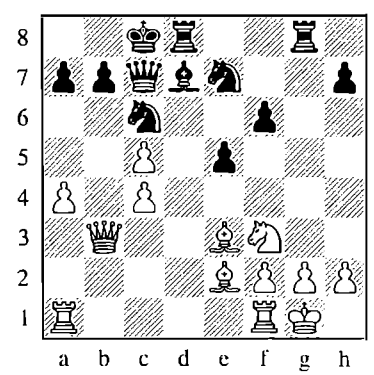
White exchanges off one of his doubled pawns, before driving the enemy knight back from its central outpost.

13.c4 ♘de7 14.exf6 gxf6



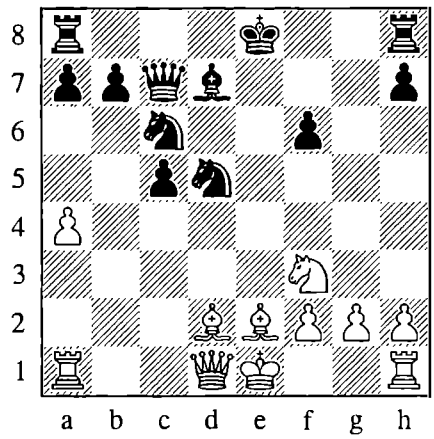
This position has been reached in over a hundred games, but not many of them are from recent years. I have analysed three main moves, arranged in ascending order of popularity: **D21) 15.d5!?**, **D22) 15.♗c3** and **D23) 15.dxc5**.

15.♗e3!? was a speciality of a Uruguayan player named Bernardon Roselli Mailhe. He played it three times in the 1980s, scoring two wins and a draw, but nobody has repeated it since. In any case, after 15...0–0–0 16.dxc5 ♖hg8 17.0–0 e5 18.♕b3 Black was doing fine in Roselli Mailhe – R. Hernandez, Uruguay 1985. At this point the right continuation looks to be:



18...f5!N 19.♖fb1 f4 20.♗d2 ♘f5→ With good attacking chances for Black.

D21) 15.d5!? exd5 16.cxd5 ♘xd5



White has sacrificed a pawn to improve the scope of his bishops. I have tested the White side of this plan in the analogous position with the black pawn on a6, in the line beginning 10.♗b5 a6 11.♗e2. I won the game, but the theoretical verdict was not clear. Besides, in the present position the absence of the move ...a6 makes the black king feel a bit safer on the queenside. The position offers an interesting starting point for deeper analyses, but so far Black has scored well.

17.♕c2

A logical move, threatening the c5-pawn as well as an annoying check on e4.

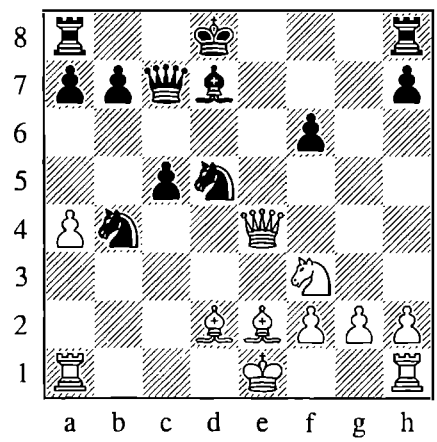
The less accurate 17.♕c1?! was played in Hammar – Ostberg, Boras 1979. Here Black can improve with 17...♘cb4!N 18.0–0 0–0–0 with the better chances.

17...♘cb4!N

This strong and concrete solution has already been recommended by Watson. However, White has an important deviation which we will need to consider closely.

17...♕d6 is a solid alternative, and Black can also consider giving back the pawn immediately with 17...0–0–0!?, as played in several games. The text move is the most critical though, as Black forces the play.

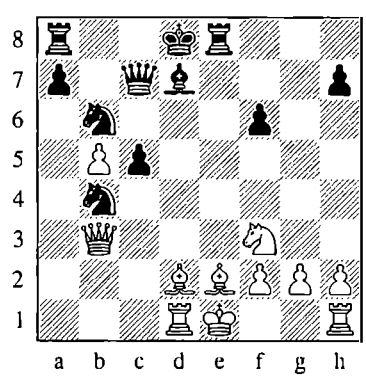
18.♕e4† ♔d8



19.0–0!

This piece sacrifice is not mentioned by Watson, but it presents Black with some tricky problems. It also seems to be White's only path to equality.

The inferior continuation is: 19.♖d1 ♖e8 20.♕c4 b5!? (Watson mentions 20...♔c8 which is also better for Black, but I like the forcing approach.) 21.axb5 ♘b6 22.♕b3



22...♖xe2†! 23.♔xe2 ♗xb5† 24.♔e1 ♘d3† 25.♔f1 ♗c4 26.♕c3 ♘b2† 27.♔e1 ♕e7†

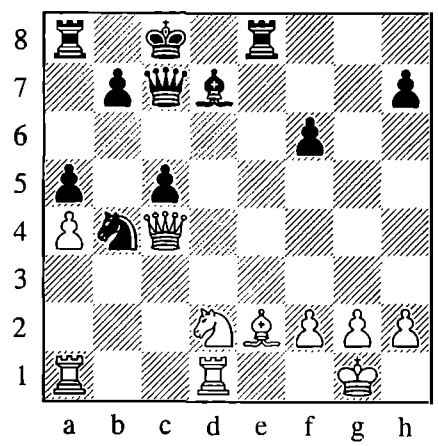
28.♗e3† (28.♕e3? ♘xd1 29.♔xd1 ♘d5∓) 28...♘xd1 29.♔xd1 ♖c8 30.♖e1 ♖c6∓ White has survived the attack, but Black still has an extra pawn.

19...♖e8 20.♕c4 a5!

Grabbing the piece with 20...♘b6?! is not to be recommended due to 21.♕h4 ♖xe2 22.♕xf6† ♔c8 23.♗xb4 cxb4 24.♘d4 when Black is in trouble.

The text move gives stability to Black's position and prepares ...♖a6 to bring the last piece into the game. The position is complicated and offers mutual chances. The following continuation is not forced, but it features logical and accurate play on both sides.

21.♖fd1 ♔c8 22.♗xb4 ♘xb4 23.♘d2



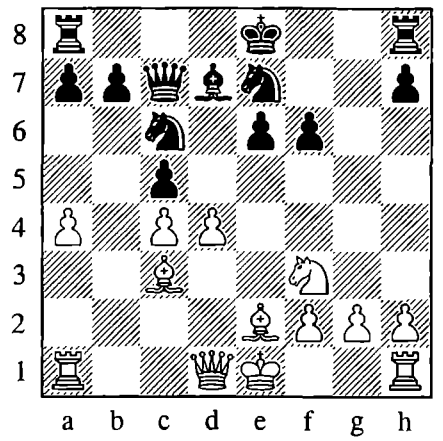
23...f5!

Preventing ♘e4.

24.♗h5 ♖e7 25.♕g8† ♕d8 26.♕c4 ♕c7 27.♕g8†=

White is not obliged to take the repetition, but I do not believe he has an advantage in any case.

D22) 15.♗c3



This time White brings his bishop to a more active square before taking action.

15...0–0–0 16.d5?!

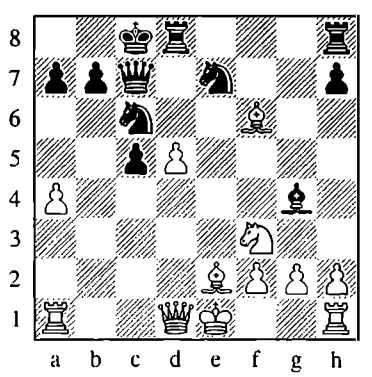
A logical try, but concrete analysis indicates that Black's chances are excellent.

16.dxc5 e5 leads directly to variation D23 below, and this may well be White's best bet.

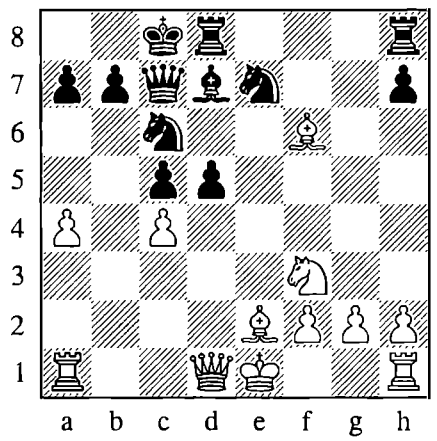
16.0–0? cxd4 17.♘xd4 ♗e8 left White in a troublesome pin in Durao – Eslon, Spain 1978. Here White's best seems to be 18.♗g4N but after 18...♘xd4 19.♗xd4 ♗f7 20.♖a2 ♔b8 21.♖d2 e5 22.♗b2 ♗xc4∓ Black is still better.

16...exd5 17.♗xf6

17.cxd5?! is unimpressive: 17...♗g4 18.♗xf6 Wessman – McDonald, Groningen 1986. Black has several interesting options, but best seems to be:



18...♖hf8!N 19.♗xe7 (19.♘d2 ♗xe2 20.♕xe2 ♖xf6 21.dxc6 ♘xc6 22.0–0 ♘d4∓) 19...♘xe7 20.0–0 ♘xd5∓ Black is much more active and has dangerous attacking chances on the kingside.



17...♖hf8!

This has led to two defeats out of two for Black, but these results were certainly not due to the merits of the opening.

Not that Black needs it, but I found another promising continuation giving good chances for an advantage.

17...♖hg8 18.cxd5 ♖g6!?N

The most interesting, although 18...♗e6 is fine as well.

19.dxc6?!

Not the best move, but it is the one we need to check to test the viability of Black's play.

19.♗h4 ♗e6∓

19.♗xe7 ♘xe7 20.0–0 ♔b8!↑ with a strong initiative for Black.

19...♗xc6 20.♕c2 ♖xf6 21.♕xc5 ♘d5 22.0–0

22.0–0–0 ♕g7!∓

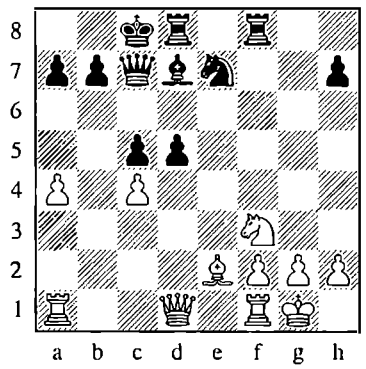
22...♖g8∓

With a crushing attack along the g-file and a8-h1 diagonal.

18.♗h4

Perhaps White could try 18.♗g5N although 18...d4 19.0–0 ♘g6 keeps an edge for Black.

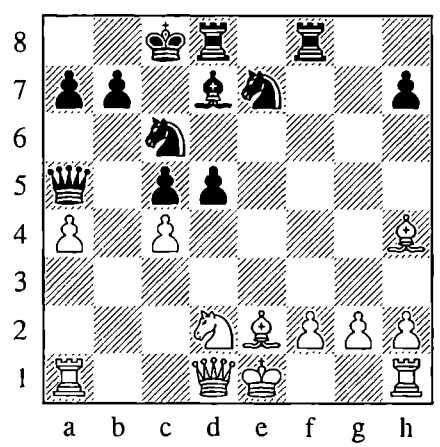
White should avoid 18.♗xe7? ♘xe7 19.0–0 as played in Schreuder – Naaktgeboren, Netherlands 1985.



Black has a few tempting continuations, but the best one looks to be 19...dxc4N intending ...♘g6-f4 and ...♗c6 with a dangerous attack on the kingside.

18...♕a5† 19.♘d2

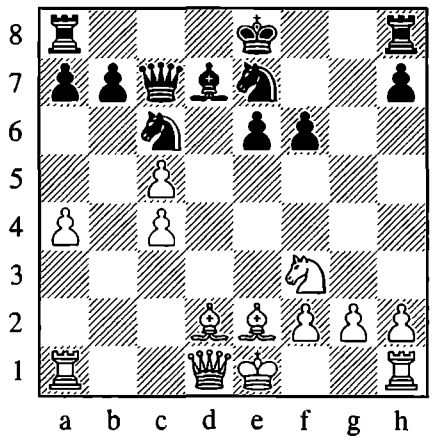
Here I found a way to improve on the game Embrey – Halldorsson, corr. 1986.



19...dxc4N 20.0–0 ♗f5 21.♗xe7 ♘xe7 22.♘xc4 ♕c7∓

Intending ...♘c6-d4 with better play for Black.

D23) 15.dxc5



15...0–0–0 16.♗c3

This has been White's highest-scoring move.

16.a5 a6

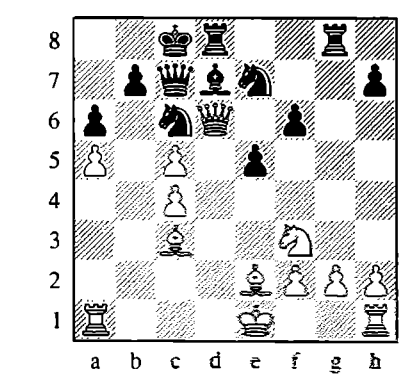
These moves have been inserted in several games, and it remains to be seen which side will benefit from the pawn moves. I will highlight one small difference in the notes below.

17.♗c3 e5 18.♕d6

After these typical moves I found a strong new idea for Black:

18...♖hg8!N

Here is where the placement of the pawns on a5 and a6 starts to affect the evaluation of certain lines. If Black plays by analogy with the main line below and chooses 18...♘f5, then after 19.♕xc7† ♔xc7 White may be tempted to try 20.0–0–0!?. In the main line the same idea would be less appealing as the pawn on a4 would be liable to come under attack at any moment.



19.g3

19.0–0? ♘g6! leads to trouble for White, for instance: 20.♗d2 ♗h3 21.♕xc7† ♔xc7 22.gxh3 ♘f4†∓

19...♗g4 20.♕xc7† ♔xc7

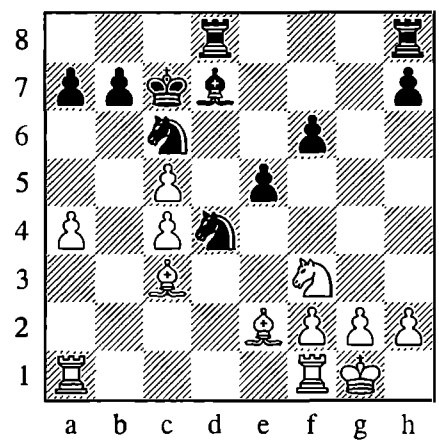
White is a pawn up and has the pair of bishops, but Black's central control, active piece play and better pawn structure add up to full compensation.

16...e5 17.♕d6 ♘f5

Here too 17...♖hg8!? is quite viable, and 18.g3 (18.♕xc7† leads to the same thing) 18...♗g4 19.♕xc7† ♔xc7 was equal in Tomorhuyag – Sobura, Gdynia 1986.

18.♕xc7† ♔xc7 19.0–0 ♘fd4

Black can also play in a more relaxed manner with 19...♖hg8!?N∞ so as not to force matters. Black has a harmonious position and full compensation for the pawn deficit.



20.♘xd4 ♘xd4 21.♗d1

21.♗xd4 exd4 22.♗d3 a5!= fixes White's a-pawn on a light square. Black has full compensation and in Lacey – Newman, email 1999, he eventually ground out a win.

21...♔c6!⇄

Black is by no means worse, and here too he eventually won the ending in Timman – Korchnoi, Leeuwarden 1976.

Conclusion

The position after 10.♗e2 f6 is one of the most important in the entire French Winawer, at least outside of the main 7.♕g4 lines. There is a great deal of tension in the centre, and a variety of different pawn formations may ensue, especially when we consider that c3-c4 may come at any moment. White's primary goal in most of these lines is to activate his dark-squared bishop, but in order to do so he will have to make a concession of some kind, whether it be damaging his structure or exchanging pawns in a way that strengthens Black's centre. This leads to a dynamic and finely balanced struggle, but my analysis indicates that Black's chances are fully satisfactory.

Variation Index

Chapter 1
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4

A) 4.♗d2 dxe4 5.♕g4 ♘f6 6.♕xg7 ♖g8 7.♕h6 ♘c6 *8*
A1) 8.♘ge2 *8*
A2) 8.0–0–0 *10*
B) 4.♕d3 ♘e7 *12*
B1) 5.♕g3 *13*
B2) 5.♘f3 *14*
B3) 5.♘e2 *15*
B4) 5.♗d2 *16*

Chapter 2
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♕g4 ♘f6 5.♕xg7 ♖g8 6.♕h6 c5

A) 7.e5 *23*
B) 7.a3 ♖g6! *25*
B1) 8.♕h3 *26*
B2) 8.♕e3 *27*
B3) 8.♕h4!? ♕a5! *29*
B31) 9.axb4?!N *30*
B32) 9.♘e2 cxd4! *31*
B321) 10.exd5?! *31*
B322) 10.e5!N *32*

Chapter 3
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♗d3 dxe4 5.♗xe4 ♘f6

A) 6.♗d3 c5 *36*
A1) 7.♘f3 *36*
A2) 7.dxc5 ♘bd7 *37*
A21) 8.c6!? *37*
A22) 8.♗d2 *38*
A3) 7.a3 *40*
B) 6.♗g5 ♘bd7 *41*
B1) 7.♘e2 *41*
B2) 7.♗f3 *42*
C) 6.♗f3 c5 *44*
C1) 7.a3 *44*
C2) 7.♘e2 ♘c6 *46*
C21) 8.0–0!? *46*
C22) 8.a3 *47*
C23) 8.♗e3 *47*

Chapter 4
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.a3 ♗xc3† 5.bxc3 dxe4

A) 6.f3? *50*
B) 6.♕g4 ♘f6 7.♕xg7 ♖g8 8.♕h6 ♖g6 *51*
B1) 9.♕f4 *51*
B2) 9.♕h4 *52*
B3) 9.♕e3 ♘c6 *53*
B31) 10.f3? *53*
B32) 10.♗b2 *54*
B33) 10.♘e2 ♕d6!?N *56*
B331) 11.c4 *57*
B332) 11.a4 *59*
B333) 11.♘g3 *60*
B4) 9.♕d2 b6 *62*
B41) 10.♘e2 *62*
B42) 10.♘h3 *63*
B43) 10.a4 *65*

Chapter 5
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘e2 ♘c6 5.a3 ♗a5

A) 6.exd5 *70*
B) 6.♕d3 dxe4 *73*
B1) 7.♕g3?! *73*
B2) 7.♕xe4 *75*
C) 6.b4 ♗b6 *76*
C1) 7.♘a4 *77*
C2) 7.♗b2 ♘ge7 *78*
C21) 8.♘a4 *79*
C22) 8.g3 *80*
C23) 8.♕d3 *81*

Chapter 6
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘e2 ♘c6 5.a3 ♗a5 6.e5 ♘ge7

A) 7.g3 *86*
B) 7.♘g3 0–0 *87*
B1) 8.♗e2?! *87*
B2) 8.♕g4?!N *88*
B3) 8.♗g5 *89*
C) 7.b4 ♗b6 8.♘a4 0–0 *92*
C1) 9.b5?! *92*
C2) 9.c3 f6 *93*
C21) 10.f4 *94*
C22) 10.exf6 *96*

Chapter 7
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘e2 ♘c6 5.a3 ♗a5 6.♗e3 ♘ge7

A) 7.b4 *100*
B) 7.f3 *101*
C) 7.♕d3 *103*
D) 7.e5 0–0 *105*
D1) 8.g3 *105*
D2) 8.♘g3 f6 *106*
D21) 9.f4 *106*
D22) 9.exf6 *107*

Chapter 8
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.exd5 exd5

A) 5.♗d2 *112*
B) 5.♕f3 ♕e7†! 6.♘e2 ♘c6 7.♕d3 ♘f6 *113*
B1) 8.a3 *114*
B2) 8.f3 *115*
C) 5.♗d3 ♘c6 *116*
C1) 6.♘e2 *116*
C2) 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 ♘ge7 8.♕f3 ♗e6 *117*
C21) 9.♘e2 *118*
C22) 9.♖b1 b6 *119*
C221) 10.♘h3 *119*
C222) 10.♘e2 ♕d7 *120*
C2221) 11.♘g3 *120*
C2222) 11.♘f4 *120*
C2223) 11.0–0 *121*

Chapter 9
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗d3 ♘c6 6.a3 ♗xc3† 7.bxc3 ♘ge7 8.♕h5 ♗e6

A) 9.♘e2 *124*
B) 9.♘f3 ♕d7 10.♘g5 0–0–0 *126*
B1) 11.♘xe6 *126*
B2) 11.0–0 *127*
C) 9.♖b1 b6! *130*
C1) 10.♘e2 ♕d7 11.♘g3 ♗g4!N *130*
C11) 12.♕g5 *132*
C12) 12.♕h4 *132*
C2) 10.♘f3 ♕d7 11.♘g5 0–0–0 *133*
C21) 12.h3 *134*
C22) 12.♘xe6 *135*
C23) 12.0–0 *136*

Chapter 10
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5

A) 5.♘f3 *140*
B) 5.dxc5 ♘e7 6.♘f3 ♘d7! *141*
B1) 7.♕d4!? *142*
B2) 7.♗d3 *143*

Chapter 11
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♕g4 ♘e7

A) 6.a3? ♕a5! *146*
A1) 7.♗d2 *146*
A2) 7.axb4 *147*
A3) 7.♘e2 *148*
B) 6.♕xg7 ♖g8 *149*
B1) 7.♕xh7? *150*
B2) 7.♕h6 *151*
C) 6.♘f3 cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♘g6 *152*
C1) 8.♘f3?! *152*
C2) 8.♗b5† *152*
C3) 8.♗d2 *153*
C4) 8.♗d3 *154*

Chapter 12
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♕g4 ♘e7 6.dxc5 ♘bc6

A) 7.♕xg7? *160*
B) 7.a3 *162*
C) 7.♗b5 *162*
D) 7.♘f3 *163*
E) 7.♗d2 0–0 *165*
E1) 8.f4? *165*
E2) 8.♗d3!? f5! 9.exf6 ♖xf6 *166*
E21) 10.♕h4 *168*
E22) 10.0–0–0 *170*

Chapter 13
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♕g4 ♘e7 6.dxc5 ♘bc6 7.♗d2 0–0

A) 8.0–0–0 *174*
A1) 8...b6!? *175*
A2) 8...f5! *177*
B) 8.♘f3 f5 *179*
B1) 9.♕g3 *179*
B2) 9.♕h5 *180*
B3) 9.♕h4 *181*
B4) 9.exf6 *182*

Chapter 14
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2 ♘h6

A) 6.f4?! *186*
B) 6.♗d3!? *186*
C) 6.dxc5 *187*
D) 6.♘ce2 *189*
E) 6.♘f3 *191*
F) 6.a3 ♗xc3 *192*
F1) 7.bxc3 *192*
F2) 7.♗xc3 b6 *193*
F21) 8.b4!? *193*
F22) 8.♗b5† *194*

Chapter 15
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2 ♘h6 6.♗xh6!? gxh6

A) 7.♗b5† *198*
B) 7.♘f3 *199*
C) 7.a3 ♗a5 *201*
C1) 8.♗b5† *202*
C2) 8.♘f3 *202*
C3) 8.dxc5 d4 9.b4 dxc3 10.bxa5 ♕xa5 *203*
C31) 11.♘e2 *204*
C32) 11.♕h5 *205*
C33) 11.♘f3 *206*

Chapter 16
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.♗d2 ♘h6 6.♘b5 ♗xd2† 7.♕xd2 0–0

A) 8.♘f3 *210*
B) 8.c3 *211*
C) 8.f4 a6! 9.♘d6 cxd4 10.♘f3 f6 *212*
C1) 11.♘xc8 *212*
C2) 11.♗d3 *213*
D) 8.dxc5 ♘d7!? *217*
D1) 9.f4?! *217*
D2) 9.♘f3 *218*
D3) 9.♕c3 *219*

Chapter 17
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7

A) 7.♗d3 *222*
B) 7.h4 ♕a5 8.♗d2 ♕a4 *225*
B1) 9.♖b1 *226*
B2) 9.♕b1 *228*
B3) 9.h5 b6 *229*
B31) 10.♖h4 *229*
B32) 10.h6 gxh6!N 11.♗xh6 ♗a6 12.♗xa6 ♘xa6 *230*
B321) 13.♘f3 *231*
B322) 13.♗g5 *232*

Chapter 18
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.♘f3 h6!?

A) 8.♗e2 *238*
B) 8.♗d3 *239*
C) 8.h4 b6 *243*
C1) 9.h5 *243*
C2) 9.♗b5† *244*
D) 8.a4 0–0N *247*
D1) 9.♗d3 *247*
D2) 9.♗a3 *248*

Chapter 19
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6

A) 8.♕g4?! *253*
B) 8.f4 *253*
C) 8.a5!? *255*
D) 8.h4 *256*
E) 8.♗b5 *257*
F) 8.♘f3 *259*

Chapter 20
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♕d2 ♗d7

A) 10.♖b1!? *263*
B) 10.h4!? *264*
C) 10.dxc5 *264*
D) 10.♗b5 *265*
E) 10.♗a3 *266*
F) 10.♗e2 ♖c8 *268*
F1) 11.dxc5 *268*
F2) 11.0–0 *269*
G) 10.♗d3 f6! *272*
G1) 11.exf6 gxf6 *272*
G11) 12.0–0 *273*
G12) 12.dxc5 *275*
G2) 11.0–0 fxe5 *276*
G21) 12.♘xe5 *276*
G22) 12.dxe5 *277*

Chapter 21
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♗d2 ♗d7

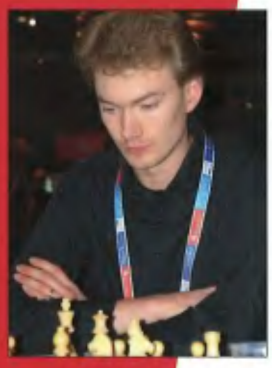
A) 10.♘g5?! *282*
B) 10.c4?! *283*
C) 10.g3 *283*
D) 10.♕c1 *285*
E) 10.♖b1 *285*
F) 10.h4!? *286*
G) 10.♗d3 c4 *287*
G1) 11.♗f1 *287*
G2) 11.♗e2 f6 *288*
G21) 12.exf6 *288*
G22) 12.0–0 *289*

Chapter 22
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♗d2 ♗d7 10.♗b5 ♕c7 11.0–0 b6!?

A) 12.♗c1 *293*
B) 12.♖e1 0–0 13.♗d3 h6 *294*
B1) 14.g4!? *295*
B2) 14.♕c1! c4 *297*
B21) 15.♗e2 *297*
B22) 15.♗f1 *299*

Chapter 23
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♗xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7 7.a4 ♘bc6 8.♘f3 ♕a5 9.♗d2 ♗d7 10.♗e2 f6

A) 11.♖b1!? *302*
B) 11.exf6 gxf6 *305*
B1) 12.♘h4 *305*
B2) 12.0–0 *306*
C) 11.0–0 fxe5 *306*
C1) 12.♘xe5 *307*
C2) 12.dxe5 *307*
C3) 12.c4!? *308*
D) 11.c4 ♕c7 *309*
D1) 12.exf6 *309*
D2) 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.c4 ♘de7 14.exf6 gxf6 *311*
D21) 15.d5!? *312*
D22) 15.♗c3 *313*
D23) 15.dxc5 *314*



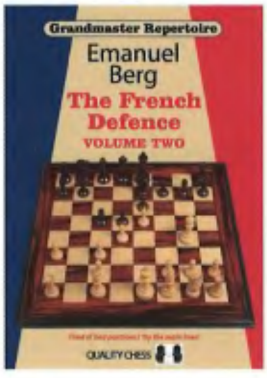
Grandmaster Repertoire

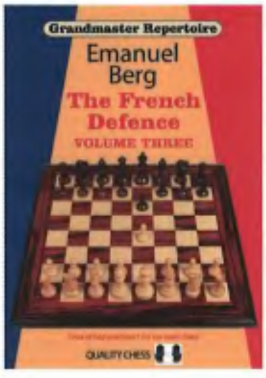
Emanuel Berg
The French Defence
VOLUME ONE

The French Defence is one of the most popular and reliable responses to 1.e4. **Grandmaster Repertoire 14 – The French Defence 1** introduces the Winawer Variation after the opening moves 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4, and provides expert recommendations against all of White's major possibilities, with the exception of the most critical 7.♕g4 line which will receive special coverage in Volume Two of the series. Volume Three will deal with the Tarrasch, Advance and all of White's other options.

- *Hundreds of novelties*
- *A sound yet ambitious repertoire designed to win with Black*
- *Covers all Winawer lines except 7.♕g4*

Emanuel Berg is a Swedish grandmaster with a peak rating of 2627. Twice Swedish Champion, he is known both for his aggressive playing style and for his thorough opening preparation. He is a lifelong devotee of the French Defence, having played it successfully for more than two decades.





€29.99

ISBN 978-1-907982-41-5

9 781907 982415

QUALITY CHESS

www.qualitychess.co.uk